

# The Alabama Baptist

Toll free 800-803-5201  
www.thealabamabaptist.org

October 12, 2023

Vol. 188, No. 40  
Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



“Worship is acknowledging who God is and thanking Him for what He has done,” said Karen Gosselin, director of the SBOM office of worship resources.

Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

## Defining worship

### Annual conference encourages leaders in vital ministry

By Carrie B. McWhorter  
The Alabama Baptist

**P**astor Buddy Champion was joking, but his humor hinted at a truth worship leaders know all too well.

“We have people here who think every worship service ought to be the Bill Gaither Hour,” he said. “It’s too loud; it’s too quiet; too much bass; there’s not enough bass.”

“We even had a guy the other day complaining about learning new songs. He told the whole

Bible study, ‘I hate learning new songs.’ That was me, by the way,” he quipped, bringing laughter from those gathered at First Baptist Church Trussville on Sept. 28 for this year’s LIFT! Defining Worship Conference.

#### Tools and tips

The annual event organized by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions office of worship resources has the goal of helping leaders get tools and tips for building participation and teamwork

when it comes to church worship, while also giving participants an opportunity for personal worship — something they may seldom get to do wholeheartedly because they are so engaged in planning worship for others.

Personal worship is critical for leaders, however.

“When you are experiencing worship every day by yourself, then it’s going to show because the radiance of being in the presence of the Lord is contagious,” said Karen Gosselin, (See ‘LIFT!,’ page 13)

### LifewayWorship.com to continue for another year

**L**ifeway Christian Resources has announced plans to continue operating LifewayWorship.com for another year.

This latest news from Lifeway comes after receiving strong feedback in recent months from church leaders after they announced in July their plans to shut down the website.

#### ‘Invaluable feedback’

Within days of the initial announcement, Lifeway President Ben Mandrell reversed course and agreed to continue operating the site while the organization held “listening sessions” to determine the best move forward.

“Lifeway exists as a ministry partner for the local church,” Mandrell said in a Sept. 29 statement announcing the update on the site. “We are committed to churches and their leaders to support the ways God is using them.

“The listening sessions we held with worship leaders and music directors gave us invaluable feedback in understanding the benefit lifewayworship.com provides for their ministry,” he said. “As a result, we will continue updating the website for another year, including the production of new music through September of next year.”

Brian Brown, director of Lifeway Worship, said it is important for churches to (See ‘Lifeway,’ page 13)

### SPOTLIGHT SPONSOR ...

**Edward F. Hutton, Jr. Insurance —**

Trusted Medicare Healthplan Insurance Advisory Service for Alabama





CONNECT  
WITH  
US

  
alabamabaptist

  
alabamabaptist

  
thealabamabaptist

  
TABMediaGroup

  
TABMediaGroup

  
tabonline.org/  
podcasts

W	A	G	E	S		T	H	O	S	E
A	R	I	S	E		H	E	L	O	N
A	T		L	E	E	S	A	N	D	S
B	E		E	K	R	O	N	A		A
I	R	A		S	U	M		E	D	G
A	S	I	D	E		L	E	G	I	O
	L	I	A	R		N	O	T	A	
I	S	E	T	T	H	E		A	H	N
M	E	T	E		O	D	E		E	D
N	I	H		A	D	A	M	O	R	T
A	R		A	T	A	R	O	T	H	H
	B	E	G	A	T		T	E	A	R
E	R	E	T	O			E	N	D	O

The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.



Photo courtesy of Ron Lynch

A missions team from Madison Baptist Association traveled to north-central Romania Sept. 4–19. They spoke in churches, coordinated activities in nearby villages and hosted a three-day retreat for 50 local pastors and their families.

# Romanian pastors encouraged by Alabama missions team

By David Roach  
The Alabama Baptist

In Romania, encouragement can be hard to come by for evangelical Christians.

When Baptists plant a church in a village there, they also try to buy property for a cemetery. That’s because those who profess faith in Christ and join a Baptist church will lose the right to be buried in the local Eastern Orthodox cemetery. They may also face other types of harassment from Orthodox priests.

Couple that with the atrocities of war spilling into Romania from neighboring Ukraine, and it’s a recipe for discouragement.

That’s one reason a team from Madison Baptist Association in Huntsville was welcomed with open arms when they traveled to north-central Romania Sept. 4–19 to deliver encouragement and assistance.

Romanian Baptists don’t need expertise or training from Americans, so “the trip was to be able to encourage them and just share with them and spend time with them,” said Ron Lynch, associational mission strategist for Madison Association.

## Decade-long partnership

The trip was part of a decade-long partnership between Madison Association and Subiu Baptist Association in Romania. The team included seven people who centered their work around the city of Sighisoara.

Among their ministries, the team spoke in churches and did other activities in nearby villages and also hosted a three-day retreat for 50 local pastors and their families.

For a pastor named Relu, the retreat made a special impact.

## Spiritual refreshment

“Thank you for this wonderful ministry you did for us,” Relu said in a video through a translator. “Through it we have been refreshed spiritually. It was also a great time where we refreshed our physical bodies and relaxed.”

The retreat included ministry training, sessions on pastors’ families and plenty of free time for pastors to network and encourage each other. Best of all for the Romanian pastors, it was free of charge thanks to money given by Madison Association churches.

The Alabama team’s work impacted Romanians of all ages. The team served at a crisis pregnancy center and a family ministry center.

One team member used a portable Hot Wheels racetrack to draw the interest of children and share the gospel with them.

Lynch said the Romanians can count on a return trip, and Relu said he looks forward to it.

“My prayer and my hope is that the Lord will bring another retreat like this in the future. It was a blessed time for us,” he said. The team from Alabama “has given me more energy to continue the ministry I started here.”

## The Alabama Baptist

“If ye continue in My word, then ... ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” John 8:31–32

(ISSN 0738-7741; USPS 011-080)  
© The Alabama Baptist, Inc.  
is published weekly except for one week in July and December by The Alabama Baptist, Inc., at 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209. Phone: 205-870-4720. Statewide phone: 800-803-5201.  
Website: www.thealabamabaptist.org  
Email: news@thealabamabaptist.org or subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org  
Periodicals postage paid at Hattiesburg, Miss.

ANNUAL TAB SUBSCRIPTION RATES  
Includes print, digital, app and full web access  
Group Rate per subscriber per year — \$16.25  
Individual — \$34.95 per year (50 issues)

JENNIFER DAVIS RASH  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Carrie Brown McWhorter  
Content Editor

Content, design and production  
Lauren C. Grim  
Daniel Gilliland  
Malinda McGill, Holly Smith  
Grace Thornton

Digital products  
Shawn Hendricks  
Hannah Muñoz

Digital services  
James Hammack

Marketing and subscriptions  
Debbie Campbell  
Sarah Gill

Advertising  
Susan Stevens  
Amy Hacker  
Pam Holt  
Tim Childers

Operations  
Maggie Evans  
Jessica Ingram, Robin McCall, Dianna Cagle  
Annette Brown, Deb Lowery

NEWS SERVICES  
Baptist Press (BP)  
Religion News Service (RNS)  
Morning Star News (MS)

POSTMASTER  
Send address changes to:  
The Alabama Baptist  
3310 Independence Drive  
Birmingham, AL 35209

ADDRESS CHANGE  
Send old and new addresses, and name of church to:  
Subscription Department  
3310 Independence Drive  
Birmingham, AL 35209  
Allow two weeks.

To the best of our knowledge, all of the ads in The Alabama Baptist represent legitimate companies and offerings. However, one should always exercise normal business caution in responding to ads.

Full member of Alabama Press Association

Accredited member of Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability

‘Nation’s Top Regional Christian Newspaper’  
1999, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2022 as judged by Associated Church Press, Baptist Communicators Association, Evangelical Press Association or Religion Communicators Council



## OPINION



# RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

By Jennifer Davis Rash, President and Editor-in-Chief



jrash@thealabamabaptist.org



@RashionalThts

## Church life have you down? Let us be part of the solution

**F**irst Baptist Church McCalla turned 77 earlier this year. Membership has ebbed and flowed through the decades and currently sits at a critical point.

Their 70-year-old building also is a point of concern. It cost members around \$13,000 to build in 1953 — the equivalent of nearly \$150,000 in today's dollars. Its current repair needs are floating around \$50,000, an amount not currently within reach, said pastor Dale Jones.

Jones and the core membership want to fight for the church's survival, and they need our help to know exactly how God would have them proceed.

The members are putting it all on the line with the upcoming "Three Nights of Victory" event (see page 17 for details) and the following Sunday's "Victory Offering."

"We are praying, primarily, that this will be life changing for those who attend and that lost souls would be saved," Jones shared with me last week. "We are also praying that this will spark rejuvenation and life back into our congregation."

Will you pray for the members as they seek the Lord's guidance on next steps? Pray for encouragement for their hearts and energy for their efforts.

If you live in the area, would you be open to attending the event to show your support and encourage this faith family?

If you know of other congregations facing similar situations near you, would you consider praying for healthy renewal opportunities for them?

Would you be available to reach out to help them work through decisions that need to be made and invite them to partner in ministry opportunities?

Associational office teams play a vital part in working with struggling congregations.

Resources are available, but they typically only work if

members of the struggling congregation are:

**1. Open to seeking** the Lord's leading even if it means making changes.

**2. Open to serving** the community in which they have been placed.

**3. Open to partnering** with liked-minded churches and groups who can fill in the gaps.

Sometimes it's easy to forget we are more than a building, programs and Sunday School classes. All of these are good and provide an important part of the work of churches, but they should be resources that allow us to move the Kingdom

forward. They should never be worshipped more than our Lord.

I love to hear from our church families who are passionate about finding a path forward, and we want to assist in the fight to survive.

It might be like what FBC McCalla is facing with a need for rejuvenation and funding. It could be conflict stemming from a poor fit related to leadership. In some cases it is basic discouragement and apathy.

Whatever has you down, know we are here to help connect you with resources and people who might have the answer. We also want to pray for and with you on the journey.

## It's almost time for Alabama Baptists to commemorate 200 years of serving together — come celebrate with us

**F**or the fifth year in a row, our team at TAB Media Group has partnered with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions and our sister entities to produce the annual Fruitful magazine.

Fruitful showcases the work your Cooperative Program dollars and volunteer efforts make happen in the state through various missions and ministries.



Be on the lookout for the magazine in your mailbox in a few weeks, and let us know if you would like additional copies.

We also hope you will plan to attend or watch online the Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting, taking place this year Nov. 14–15 at FBC Montgomery.

The full schedule for the meeting will be available in Fruitful, and

details for other related meetings and events will appear near the puzzle pages of The Alabama Baptist each week between now and then.

It's our 200th anniversary of serving together. Rick Lance and the team at the State Board, along with several of us in partnering roles, have been working hard on the opportunity to commemorate and celebrate. We hope you will join us in Montgomery.

—Jennifer Davis Rash

# Your Voice



Share your comments, letters to the editor, blog excerpts, social media posts

## Being easy to work with helps everyone

By Gene Mason  
Leadership Ministries Minute

What would you put on your résumé to impress a future employer? Maybe your experience as a leader or gross sales goals you met? How about your educational background or a list of prestigious roles you've had over the years? All of these might catch the eye of the hiring team.

Recently, though, I saw a résumé with an interesting sentence that piqued my curiosity. Under the heading "Skills," the applicant had written, "I am easy to work with."

In a culture where we are often concerned exclusively about ourselves — looking to our own advantage, well-being, pleasure or profit without regard for others, this was a refreshingly selfless sentence.

It reflects the New Testament command for Christians, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to their own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:34).

"I am easy to work with" caused me to think about some ways this might be lived out practically in life and work. How can we be easy to work with?

### ► Be flexible.

Recent research found that nearly three-fourths of all businesses have faced restructuring in the last five years. Change is often hard to adapt to, but it is everywhere. Flexibility is the ability to bend without breaking.

It means you are able to accommodate others without sacrificing important values or responsibilities.

Flexible people find ways to make a given situation or scenario work. Instead of complaining about change, they adapt to it.

Flexible people step in to help when others are overloaded. They suggest ways to get something done instead of reasons it can't be done. And they focus on accomplishing objectives versus comfort in their own feelings or emotions.

### ► Be timely.

Timely people start tasks early and tackle the most difficult items on their list first. They set limits for what they will say yes to and prioritize the day to meet deadlines and stay productive. ... Timely people are on time — from traveling to meetings to work demands, they don't show up late.

Timely people also value the time of others. They stick to a schedule, minimize meetings and delegate tasks that others can do. Realizing their responsibilities also impact others, they strive to maximize their time so that others are not waiting on them or forced to work extra hours because of their delays or missed deadlines.

Scientists say we have a tendency to overestimate what can be completed in a given timeframe. This is called "planning fallacy." Most people over promise. Timely people

are more realistic. They under promise and over deliver.

### ► Be generous.

Generosity is more than giving money to charity or those in need.

It is a mindset that puts others first and tends to share resources. Generous people give time to others. They readily share knowledge and information.

Generous people are also confident, knowing that being willing and able to share benefits the whole organization. Generous people encourage and empower. They want others to take pride in their work. They share credit, think of next steps and suggest ways for everyone to benefit on the way to the goal.

They will take on the role of mentor in order to pass along experience and insight. They'll also assume responsibility for failure and look for ways to push the team forward.

### ► Be hospitable.

People who are easy to work with aim to be friendly, congenial and sociable. They enjoy introducing people and building relational connections. They treat others with grace and kindness and offer help when needed. Hospitable people are warmhearted — they genuinely desire friendship and good relations with all those around them.

The hospitable person looks for the best traits in each person and focuses on positive interaction. They avoid drama in life and work.



MASON

## October is Pastor Appreciation Month

Honoring your pastor and his family in special ways provides encouragement for the journey ahead. The tips below are from Denise George.

► **Work** with the pastor to redecorate or renovate the pastor's office or part of the home.

► **Offer** services like babysitting, pet care or household chores, giving the pastor more personal or family time.

► **Set up** a scholarship or fund for the pastor's children's education or extracurricular activities.

► **Gift** the pastor and spouse with tickets to a romantic dinner, the theatre or other activity they would enjoy as a couple, and offer babysitting services.

► **Commission** a writer or artist to document the pastor's family journey in an illustrated book or digital format.

► **Organize** a sabbatical or weekend getaway — a retreat or simple vacation, giving him time to rejuvenate.

► **Create** themed gift baskets — a "Day Off" basket could include books, snacks and relaxation items, while a "Family Night" basket might feature board games or movie tickets.

► **Plan** a special day out for the pastor's family — a trip to a theme park, a movie marathon or a special meal at a popular restaurant. Better yet, give them a vacation package to enjoy quality time together.

Share online or email [news@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:news@thealabamabaptist.org)



“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”

ROMANS 12:18

The central theme that permeates all of Paul's letter to the Philippians is God's glory, which is “the manifestation of His presence among people.”

God's glory is mentioned in all 4 chapters (1:11; 2:11, 3:19, 21; 4:19, 20) and this is what makes the other themes (joy, love, thanksgiving, prayer, principles of unity) possible and acceptable to Him.

These timely truths written to a first century church are timeless truths for all churches in all centuries.

**Morris Murray Jr.**  
Jasper, Ala.

“I realized that, as a Christian, I had no choice but to surrender. It was hard to do but I will say that after I did surrender, God gave me a peace that I had not had. I knew that we would get through it, said **Karen Williams** of Blue Blue Feather Candle Company on her husband Mark's health battles.

“Women all over the world, honestly, are the same. We feel the same; we love the same; we need the same; we come together the same,” said **Karen Wilson**, president of Baptist World Alliance Women.

Why practice spiritual disciplines? For muscle memory. What we repeat in times of ease we will recall in times of hardship.

**@jenniferwilkin**  
X (formerly Twitter)

Outside of Daniel 12, the Old Testament barely refers to eternal life or resurrection after death for God's followers. Those concepts remained underdeveloped before the New Testament.

Daniel received prophecies in instructions directly from an angel who came from God. “Go forth,” the angel Michael said in verse 13, repeating an instruction from verse 9. He was telling Daniel to live for

God until he dies. The Hebrew word spoken here as a command communicates three ideas: 1. Do not stay or pause in your current location or state. 2. Take initiative and take action. 3. Act with a purpose or destination.

Daniel's purpose or destination was to live for God until the moment of his death. Stopping early was not an option. With Michael's command, the only option was actively and intentionally living for God.

**Kevin Parker**  
“Keep Living for the Lord”  
gobnm.com

“Annie Armstrong once said, ‘God never issues a command without making obedience possible.’ People are moving across the planet in unprecedented ways, gaining access to the gospel being proclaimed in North America. ... We celebrate gifts to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering and are grateful to Southern Baptists for their generosity,”

said **Sandy Wisdom-Martin** in response to the report that over the past year, Southern Baptists gave an all-time record \$70.2 million to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American missions.

Parents, it is absolutely critical that your children live in community in your local church. For that to happen, parents must live in community as well. Sanctification is a community project.

**@pastorjaycbc**  
X (formerly Twitter)

The four sweeping movements of salvation:

- Creation.
- Fall.
- Redemption.
- Consummation.

The world we have is not the world we had, nor is it the world we will have. God will make all things new!

**@claysmith79**  
X (formerly Twitter)

## True comfort comes from God

On a slow news weekend, except for football, an article popped up about the National Funeral Director's Association annual convention.

Some refer to it as the “death convention.” No intent to make light of death here. It's serious stuff.

The article held information aplenty. Did you know that 65% of people prefer cremation over a casket burial?

Affordability is a good argument for it. The death business gets expensive.

Diverse methods can be found to dispose of cremains.

Companies exist that can transform the ashes into a glass bird or angel, make diamonds from the carbon left in the ashes or manufacture rings for your finger.

You can even hang your loved one on the Christmas tree as an ornament.

Parting with the dead is traumatic for family members. People find all sorts of ways to keep the memories alive. And that's okay.

God gave the gift of memory. Use it. But the people that handle the loss best happen to be Christians. Especially if the deceased was a believer.

The psalmist knew the sting of death.

He said, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me” (Ps. 23:4).

Go the nontraditional route to memorialize someone if you wish.

But the God of comfort offers the best alternative for grief recovery.

That's neither strange nor fiction. Just truth.

**Darryl Wood**  
“Art from Ashes”

A personal word from a retreat pastor, Sept. 27, 2023

### HUGH'S VIEWS - HUGH KILPATRICK III



**GIVE PETER A HAND**  
**MATTHEW 14: 29-31**

# 3 stories you should know



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Tony Evans, pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas and founder of The Urban Alternative, speaks in Birmingham at “There Is a Balm in Gilead: Healing from the Events of 1963.” The event was held Sept. 12–14 during the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the bombing of 16th Street Baptist Church. Evans spoke on the need for healing from the “wounds of division” that continue to plague the U.S. Read more at [tabonline.org/balm-in-gilead](http://tabonline.org/balm-in-gilead). (TAB)

## ***Giving to AAEO exceeds \$70 million in 2023***

Southern Baptists gave an all-time record \$70.2 million to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American missions in 2023, according to Kevin Ezell, president of the North American Mission Board.

Ezell shared the news Oct. 2 during the annual fall meeting of NAMB’s board of trustees in Denver. For six of the last seven years, Southern Baptists have set records in their giving to the AAEO.

The offering provides more than half of NAMB’s overall budget each year, and the total is counted based on giving during each fiscal year, from October through September.

Since 2010, Southern Baptists have increased their giving to the AAEO by 29%, a sign, Ezell told trustees and church planters, that “Southern Baptists do believe in what you are doing.” (BP)

## ***Efforts underway to add hotels for SBC in Indy***

Efforts are underway to provide additional hotel space in Indianapolis for Southern Baptist Convention attendees next summer after demand outpaced that of last year.

More than 16,000 room nights, a new first-day record, have been reserved since reservations came open Oct. 2. That figure a year ago for New Orleans was at approximately 15,700.

Jonathan Howe, interim Executive Committee president and CEO, said the current demand for rooms “exceeds the hotels’ ability to provide large blocks at discounted rates.”

Attendees are encouraged to continuously check back at [sbcannual-meeting.net/hotels](http://sbcannual-meeting.net/hotels) for availability or to be added to a wait list. EC staff members will use the wait list to add attendees to rooms as those become available. (BP)

# Persecuted church

## ***Officials in Belarus threaten pastor with prosecution for evangelizing***

MALORITA, Belarus — The prosecutor in Belarus’ Malorita District threatened a Baptist pastor with criminal prosecution if he continues to evangelize publicly.

Fyodor Mikhovich, the prosecutor for the district, issued the ultimatum to Vladimir Burshtyn on July 27, Forum 18 News Service reported.

Mikhovich threatened Burshtyn under a law that prohibits “incitement of racial, ethnic, religious or other social hatred or discord.” The maximum punishment is a five-year prison term.

Eight weeks prior, the Drogichin District Court fined Burshtyn more than an average month’s pension for an event in which he and other Baptists offered Christian literature and told passersby about Jesus Christ. The Baptist

Council of Churches, of which Burshtyn is a member, does not seek state permission for its existence or activities, Forum 18 reported.



Forum 18 photo

Burshtyn was fined in 2005 for leading an unregistered congregation in Malorita and again in 2008 for telling about Jesus outside a market in the town of Ushachi.

## ***Two Protestants in Kyrgyzstan fined; others try to keep low profile***

BISHKEK, Kyrgyzstan — In a country where some churches forego state registration to maintain a low profile, two Protestants in Kyrgyzstan have been fined for “illegal missionary activity.”

Following a raid earlier this year by Kyrgyzstan officials, two foreign Protestants — both associated with a registered church — were fined for “illegal missionary activity,” Forum 18 News Service stated in an August report.

Some officials involved in the raid were from the Department for the Struggle against Extremism and Illegal Migration.

“State registration does not remove many obstacles to exercising freedom of religion and belief,” said Forum 18, quoting a source. In 2019, this source told Forum 18, “[R]egistration only gives you permission to exist. Registration does not give you the freedoms one should expect.”

In another August article, Forum 18 said some smaller churches are not seeking state registration in an effort to avoid government interference in congregants’ lives.



# Alabama news

## BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION



COOPER

► **Sam Cooper** is the new ministry intern at **First Baptist Church Birmingham**. He will work in youth and college ministry. Cooper grew up at Northport Baptist Church, Northport, and is a student at Samford's Beeson Divinity School. Jim Cooley is pastor.

## CLARKE ASSOCIATION

► **Clarke Baptist Association** will celebrate its 140th annual meeting Oct. 17 at Coffeeville First Baptist Church, 6–8 p.m. Rick Barnhart, director of the office of associational missions and church planting, will be the State Board of Missions representative. Brent Fuller, pastor of Coffeeville First, will preach. Mark Presswood is the associational missionary.

## PLEASANT GROVE ASSOCIATION

► **Friendship Baptist Church, Brookwood**, celebrated its 150th anniversary Aug. 20 beginning with worship at 10 a.m. The church welcomed two special guests singers, David Williams, currently serving as a chaplain with the Florida Department of Corrections, and Hayden Sexton, music director at Taylorville United Methodist Church, Tuscaloosa. Both men are the great-great-grandsons of William Hannah, who was an early leader and pastor of the church. A commemorative plaque was presented by David Nelson, commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, to pastor Johnnie Williams (right) and the two oldest living members, Fay Gwin (left) and Ann Hannah. The worship service concluded with the benediction given by Nolan Stinett, a former pastor and association director of missions, followed by a reception.



Photo by David Nelson

## TALLAPOOSA ASSOCIATION

► **New Concord Baptist Church, Dadeville**, celebrated its 75th anniversary Aug. 20 with a special presentation by Calvin Milford (right), commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, to Katherine Adkins (left), age 93, who has been a member of the church for more than 50 years, and pastor Lenny Arnold (center). Special music was provided



Photo by Mary Lou Arnold

ed by country gospel artist Bruce Hedrick from Nashville. Also present were James Smith, the association's director of missions, and his wife, Jerilyn. The Harrelson family was recognized for having six generations of members. Several people shared historical highlights, and photos of older members and past events were prominently displayed. The morning service concluded with a luncheon.

## WALKER ASSOCIATION

► **Northside Baptist Church, Jasper**, honored Shawn Stinson for 10 years of faithful service. Stinson, minister of music and outreach, was recognized during the worship service and celebrated at a church fellowship Sept. 17. Shawn and his wife, Kristi, have two sons. David Byrd is pastor.



STINSON

## WEST CENTRAL

► **Faith Chapel Baptist Church, Marion**, will celebrate its 75th anniversary and homecoming Oct. 15. Worship begins at 10:30 a.m. Guest preacher will be Lee Tate, the association's mission strategist. There will be testimonies, singing and a fellowship meal following the service. Everyone is invited. Lloyd Stockman is pastor.

## WINSTON ASSOCIATION

► **Winston Baptist Association** celebrated its 150th annual meeting Oct. 1 held at Lynn Baptist Church. The guest preacher was Larry Hyche, state missionary with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. Lonette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented a plaque to Eddie Everett, director of missions. Other special guests included Nate Williams with ALCAP, Debbie Campbell with The Alabama Baptist and Allison Combs with The Baptist Foundation of Alabama.

Twelve messengers met at Rock Creek Baptist Church just north of Double Springs, Oct. 9, 1874, to form what is now Winston Association. "This church is special to me. Rock Creek Baptist Church was the first church I was called to pastor," Everett said.

Pastors present in the photo are (l to r, front row) Kim Byram, Lynn Baptist Church; Eddie Everett, associational mission strategist; Nathan Carroll, Haleyville First Baptist Church, and (back row) Ron Horton, pastor of New Prospect.



Photo by Debbie Campbell



Photo courtesy of Rick Freeman

Woodville Baptist Church celebrated its 92nd homecoming on Sept. 10 with a note burning in honor of Glenda (Bit) Hodges and in memory of Steve Hodges. Bit is the oldest living member of the church. Steve served as a deacon, song director, Disaster Relief team member and in many other positions. Pictured are (l to r) Ken Davis, deacon chair; Jimmy Bingham, trustee; Buddy Martin, deacon; Rick Freeman, pastor; Terry Cooper, deacon; Jimmy Garner, homecoming speaker; and Glenda (Bit) Hodges (seated).



# Committed to serving more children

## Changes in law force ABCH to shift ministry model for children in foster care

By Erin Roach  
The Alabama Baptist

**T**he Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries has had to shift its model for providing care to foster children in the past few years because of legislation passed by Congress. For the most part, the shift entailed moving from group care to community-based foster homes.

The Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018 reduced the number of children living in group care and emphasized placements with relatives, said Michael Smith, chief operations officer for ABCH.

"Part of that legislation changed the way that we do things because in a lot of our group care homes across the state, we were caring for larger sibling groups," Smith said. "When it might be hard to find a foster family who could take four or more siblings together, a lot of times we could place them in the same home."

### Drastic drop

In 2020, the Alabama Department of Human Resources largely stopped placing children under the age of 13 in group care, Smith said. "That drastically diminished the number of kids that would meet our age criteria and us be able to operate our campus-based group homes efficiently and effectively."

In fact, the number of children ABCH was able to care for under the new guidelines dropped to less than half of its capacity.

Over the next couple of years, ABCH considered various models and decided to recruit larger foster families to live in former group care homes and pay a small amount for rent and utilities.



Unsplash.com

"They became campus-based foster homes," Smith said. "Those families are just like regular foster families in the community, but they're living in the homes that we had already built for larger groups."

That option decreases the overall number of children in foster care because the law mandates no more than six children per community-based foster home, but it also allows ABCH to care for children from birth to seniors in high school, he said.

ABCH has seven such homes throughout Alabama.

"We also have about 278 families across the state that are licensed by ABCH to be foster families in their own homes. That is a far more cost-effective form of care," Smith said.

ABCH "did not choose to end our group care program," Smith said. "We were responding to the legislation that was put in place that made that form of care impossible for us to continue."

Even so, the ministry is committed to serving more children than ever in the years ahead.

By 2031, when ABCH will mark its 140th anniversary, leaders hope to have 600 foster care homes in Alabama serving 1,000 children.

Each year beginning at that time, they have goals of reunifying 250 children with their biological families, seeing 50 children in their care adopted and seeing 50 professions of faith.

"We may have to be more focused on community foster care going forward to meet those goals," Smith said.

### Need for social workers

ABCH also hopes to hire social workers who will focus on family reunification, Smith said, but more funding is needed for that effort.

The ministry receives a portion of support from the Cooperative Program, and while they are grateful for

that essential income, "it's not nearly enough to serve all of the children and families we work with."

"When churches purposefully put us in their budgets or do an annual offering to ABCH, that money is able to go to kids in the areas where the churches are located," Smith said.

### Churches can help

"For instance, if a church in Enterprise makes a donation out of their budget or an offering to ABCH, that money can go directly to providing homes and support for those children and families right there in their immediate area."

ABCH hosts an annual Camp of Champions for their foster families.

"This year we had almost 1,000 people together at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega for our camp weekend where we give our foster parents a break," Smith said. "They get a couple days of training, and the staff takes care of them."

For more information, particularly about providing care to children as a foster family, visit [alabamachild.org](http://alabamachild.org).

"There's a foster parent link on there about how to get involved, and you can put in your information and one of our social workers from your area will call you and help you get started with that process or answer any questions," Smith said.

"It's a big commitment to take another child into your home. However, if you do it with ABCH, you have a social worker who will be assigned to you and the children in your home and will walk with you through that entire journey, and all of the expertise and resources of ABCH will be behind you to make that journey as successful as possible."

For more  
information, visit  
[alabamachild.org](http://alabamachild.org).





Photo by Doug Rogers

Joe Godfrey, retired president and CEO of Alabama Citizens Action Program, leads prayer from the steps near the Alabama State House in March 2023.

# Biblical ethics

## Ireland-Godfrey ALCAP Sunday honors leaders, emphasizes political engagement

By Carrie Brown McWhorter  
The Alabama Baptist

**T**his year, ALCAP Sunday has a new name — Ireland-Godfrey ALCAP Sunday — in honor of two past leaders of the organization known as “Alabama’s moral advocate.”

Greg Davis, president and CEO of Alabama Citizens Action Program since May 2022, said the annual prayer and giving emphasis provides an opportunity to remind



DAVIS

Alabama Baptists that their voices matter in Montgomery.

“Unfortunately, the idea of being active in the public square and particularly in politics has become unpopular with many, and as

a result we have seen a slide away from biblical morality and citizenship,” Davis said.

“I don’t think you can separate morality from the Bible. You cannot separate the Bible from the church, and you cannot separate the church from the gospel. These are all related.”

### Recognizing the impact

Chris Crain, executive director of Birmingham Metro Baptist Association and chair of the ALCAP board, said the new name recognizes the impact Davis’ immediate predecessors, Joe Godfrey and Dan Ireland, had in the state.

“Both men exemplify the very essence of ALCAP — a strong stand for biblical ethics in Alabama politics,” Crain said. “Throughout their tenures with ALCAP, both Dr. Ireland and Dr. Godfrey advocated for the principles of righteousness and truth within our state.

“They provided Bible-believing churches with a voice to champion these values at the state house, ensuring that our biblical worldview remained at the forefront.

“Their dedication to protecting religious liberties and freedom for all Alabamians was unrelenting,” Crain added. “The decision to rename the day is a tribute to Dr. Ireland and Dr. Godfrey, celebrating their lifelong commitment to our cause. It is our way of ensuring that their legacy lives on in the hearts and minds of Alabama Baptists and all of those who share our mission.”

Godfrey served 15 years at the helm of ALCAP, from June 2008 through April 2022. Ireland served 30 years, from 1978 until his retirement in 2008.

Ireland, who died Dec. 24, 2019, was known nationally for his fight against gambling and alcohol. Godfrey continued Ireland’s mission, lobbying against expansion of gambling and alcohol while also facing legislative efforts dealing with abortion, same-sex marriage, pornography, medical marijuana and transgender issues, among others.

“Dr. Ireland passed away in 2019, but his influence carries on all across Alabama,” Davis said.



IRELAND

“Everywhere I go, people remember Dan Ireland. His shadow of influence is very long, and I am very grateful for him and his wife, Mrs. Polly.

“Likewise, Dr. Godfrey has been a tremendous supporter for me as I have started in this new role and has remained active as a consultant with ALCAP and also continues speaking out on issues.

“I shudder to think how different our state would be without these two men and ALCAP.”

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, echoed Davis’ praise.

“Dan Ireland and Joe Godfrey were stellar leaders during their lengthy tenures,” Lance said. “They led us during some challenging times dealing with

moral and ethical issues.

“Alabama Baptists can be confident that ALCAP will be on the frontlines of the debate concerning these issues which are important to us,” Lance said.

Godfrey said he is honored Davis and the ALCAP board has chosen

to recognize the service he and Ireland provided to Alabama Baptists during their tenures.

“I hope every church in Alabama will take time on Nov. 12 to pray for the ALCAP ministry, Greg Davis and the entire staff,” he said.

“As always, I am grateful to all the churches and individuals who support ALCAP with their prayers and financial contributions.”

### Ways to help

Davis said there are many ways churches can recognize Ireland-Godfrey ALCAP Sunday.

Pastors can remind members of their congregations that it is important for Christian citizens to be engaged and involved in the political sphere. The day might include a time of prayer for their local legislators and ALCAP leaders.

In addition, a church could receive an offering, encouraging individuals to make a personal donation in support of ALCAP.

“As a 501(c)(4) organization, the work we do on behalf of our churches is totally dependent on those churches supporting the organization,” Davis said. “While ALCAP does receive a portion of its budget from Cooperative Program funds, most of the budget is provided by local churches all across the state.”



GODFREY

*For resources and information on ALCAP's priorities and ALCAP Education or to request a speaker, go to [ALCAP.com](http://ALCAP.com).*

**IRELAND-GODFREY ALCAP SUNDAY IS NOV. 12.**



# Reaching children & families

## Steps on how to start a fruitful children’s ministry at your church from scratch

By Julie Donavan  
The Alabama Baptist

Do you have a lot of children in your church? If not, have you been praying for your church to grow through a fruitful children’s ministry? These are some steps your church can follow to help on the journey toward building a children’s ministry in your church.

**First, pray.** In the Book of Nehemiah, Nehemiah felt a burden on his heart after his brother approached him about the walls of Jerusalem and the need for them to be rebuilt. The first step Nehemiah took was to pray to God. As you dive into this adventure, pray over this task you feel led to undertake. Pray over your church, your team, the children and their families.

**Second, put together a team.** A children’s team at your church will help you plan, prepare and get the word out to the community.

**Bringing people together**

“Get a team of people together who will walk alongside you, pray with you, work with you and commit to the children’s ministry.”

“They don’t all have to be teachers. Some can help with outreach, connecting with families, developing and maintaining a resource room, etc.,” suggested Marie Harbison, retired minister to children at Palmedale Cross Baptist Church in Pinson.

As you assemble your team, try to bring together people who are in different stages of life. From youth to senior adults, make sure you involve someone from each generation. Allow everyone in your church to be involved by including people from different stages of life.

**Third, set your schedule and theme.** Once you have formed your team, discuss your weekly schedule



Photo by Doug Rogers  
FBC Montgomery’s children’s ministry does a group activity together.

and the Bible studies you will focus on each week.

Sunday mornings will likely be small group classes and worship. Sunday or Wednesday evenings could include a missions class like Children In Action, GAs, RAs or Mission Friends, along with Bible Drill.

Make sure the children’s activities correlate with the rest of your church’s schedule.

After you have set up your weekly schedule, discuss a theme for your children’s ministry that goes along with a portion of Scripture. Two examples are “Aim for Jesus” from Psalm 127:3–4 or “Jesus is the Light” from John 8:12.

A theme for your children’s ministry allows a strong focal point. After you have set up your schedule and theme, make sure you print it out for your kids and families to see.

**Fourth, set a kick-off day.** Why should you have a kick-off date? A reasonable starting date for your children’s ministry allows you to aim for a goal. If you never write down a date then you might not really get started. Have your kickoff on a Sunday, and provide breakfast for the kids and their parents. Make sure you have your teachers in order and your schedule and curriculum prepared.



DONAVAN

**What to do before your kickoff**

**First, train your teachers.** Find online training or a professional children’s minister to train your teachers. This helps your teachers feel enthusiastic and better equipped to teach children the Bible. Make sure your teachers have background checks to protect students, teachers, the church and ultimately the Lord’s ministry. Taking security seriously lets parents

know you are taking children’s ministry seriously.

**Second, clean up your children’s area.** Follow this checklist to clean up your children’s area:

- ▶ Add a fresh coat of paint on the wall.
- ▶ Throw away old craft supplies and get new ones.
- ▶ Throw away old, outdated, dirty or broken toys.
- ▶ Place new posters and pictures on the wall.
- ▶ Organize your supplies so you are well prepared.
- ▶ Make sure you have enough supplies for the children.

**Third, advertise your starting date.** Advertisement is key because people can’t attend if they don’t hear about it. Make a fun logo to go along with your theme, and place that on Instagram and Facebook. Social media is inexpensive and easy. Send out emails and letters, and print fliers to hand out to people in your community.

If there’s a local radio station, send them information to announce. Put up signs in your church’s yard, and see if church members will put signs in their yards as well.

**What to do after your kickoff**

**First, be in constant communication with the parents.**

“Relationships with adults are key,” said Greg Gosselin, preschool and children’s pastor at Crossroads Community Church in Elmore.

Build relationships with the parents, and get to know them on a personal level. Jesus sat down and ate with the people He was ministering to, and you can follow His example.

Continue to have a social media presence through your church’s Facebook page or Instagram profile. You might even want to create a Facebook

page just for the children’s ministry and include the logo. Post several times a week and invite them to church and tell them what their child’s Bible study will be about each week. Don’t forget to text, write letters, private message and email the parents every chance you get. Sometimes just telling them you missed them can make a difference.

**The next event**

**Second, plan another event and start inviting.** Prepare a save-the-date invitation for the next event, and give it out. This event might be the fall festival, a Christmas party or a family day at the park.

Perhaps you are trying to improve the children’s ministry that is already established at your church. Maybe you have had a burden on your heart to start a children’s ministry at your church, and these ideas are what you needed as a kick-start. You can do it! It might start slowly, but as long as you are loyal to the Lord, that is all that matters.

## Additional resources

- Websites**
- For resources, discipleship training and free printouts:
- ▶ kidzlinkal.org
  - ▶ Sundayschoolzone.com
  - ▶ christianpreschoolprintables.com.
- Podcast**
- ▶ Kids Ministry 101
- Songs for kids**
- ▶ Seeds Family Worship
  - ▶ Listener Kids
  - ▶ KidSpring
  - ▶ Orange Kids
  - ▶ Lifeway Kids

## Helping children find their identity in Christ in a digital world

By Micah Gaston  
Campus pastor, 3Circle Church Midtown, Mobile

Every child is looking for a place to anchor his or her identity, whether that be in the search for a best friend on the preschool playground, trying to make the team or joining the right club in their teen years.

In Deuteronomy 6, God gave parents the task of forming their children’s spiritual identity. In those days, they spent time raising crops and herding flocks (Deut. 6:7–9). In our day, we spend time on social platforms and streaming platforms.

Our children are swimming in a sea of digital content that misinforms them about their identity. As parents, we have the opportunity to anchor our children’s identity in what God says about them.

My wife and I often remind our son to listen to the people who love him when he is deciding what he will believe about himself. Often, our children are listening to people who do not love them as we do or as God does.

Our job as parents is not to instill self-esteem in our children, but to guide them to the foundational truths about who God says they are.

The God who breathed everything into existence says that they have inherent dignity and worth and that they are irreplaceable (Luke 12:7, Jer. 1:5).

Once your child trusts in Christ, you can take them to even greater depth of identity through their adoption into God’s family, the indwelling in the Holy Spirit, the shepherding care of Jesus and so much more.

These realities will not shake with the wins and losses of the digital world because they are rooted in the character, nature and activity of God.

A few weeks ago, I was talk-



Freeepik photo

ing with one of our children’s ministry leaders. He asked our church’s elementary-aged kids to name a challenge they faced recently. Almost every tough scenario named was faced in a video game.

We have an opportunity to help call our kids to join God’s mission

**“Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.”**

Luke 12:7

and gain a sense of accomplishment outside of their digital world.

We often undervalue the influence that our children can have, but preteens and teenagers have made a big impact throughout history.

Think about young men and women like David, Daniel, Joseph, Samuel and Esther. Perhaps part of the problem is that we are not giving our teenagers any challenges to face in the real world, so they are fleeing to a digital world.

Helping your children cultivate an awareness of God and to desire submission and obedience to him is the biggest gift you can ever give them.

**Great privilege**

Calling them to see His glory and purpose while inviting them to embrace their unique personality, gifting and calling is the greatest privilege and joy of parenthood.

The Bible says our children are like arrows, so let us aim them to-

ward the bullseye of eternity (Ps. 127:3).

We need to model and prioritize biblical community for our children. When we do so, they will be able to distinguish deep connections from superficial digital interactions.

We set the example for our children when we spend more time engaging in deep relationships at our church and in our neighborhoods than in our online communities or on social media.

**Great Commandment**

When Jesus was asked to summarize the Old Testament, he responded, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:25–28).

Jesus took the same identity that God gave his people in Deuteronomy 6 and paired it with a missional imperative.

When we listen to these passages, we hear God beckoning our kids to find their identity in Christ, their relationships in biblical community and their purpose in their God-given calling.

**EDITOR’S NOTE** — This article was originally published at [erlc.com](http://erlc.com) and has been edited for space. Read the full article at [taborline.org/erlc-spiritual-identity](http://taborline.org/erlc-spiritual-identity).



# Kentucky pastor advocates for adoption on game show

By Chip Hutcheson  
Kentucky Today

**A** Kentucky pastor was a big winner on a national TV game show recently, not just monetarily but by having a platform to speak about the importance of adoption and foster care.

Steven Bell, pastor of worship and family ministry at Hindman First Baptist Church of Hindman, Kentucky, won more than \$61,000 on Wheel of Fortune on Sept. 20, winning the bonus round on Pat Sajak's sendoff season.

"It was a great experience, and I wouldn't trade anything in the world for it. It really opens up a lot of doors to talk to people about adoption and foster care and ultimately the gospel."

Bell had the opportunity to talk about his wife and their six children — including one adopted from the Congo and two adopted from the foster care system.

## Helping others

On the show he shared their names and added how "foster care and adoption" are a big part of their lives.

"My wife and I are just huge proponents to make sure we do everything we can to make adoption more affordable for families," he said.

Bell was victorious against two other contestants to win \$21,450 to advance to the bonus round, where he chose "event" as the category and HGPOF as his additional letters, which included him having an extra letter by virtue of a wild card.

## Big winner

When the letters were revealed, it showed "O\_T\_OOR FEST\_\_L" — and he instantly solved it by saying "Outdoor Festival." That won him an extra \$40,000, and he walked away with a trip to the Bahamas and \$52,000 in cash.

"There are some needs we have as a family — our girls are getting ready to start driving, so we'll look for a dependable vehicle they'll be safe on the roads with, and we have some who need braces that insurance doesn't want to pay for," Bell said. "(And) we are constantly involved in raising money to make adoption more affordable for families."

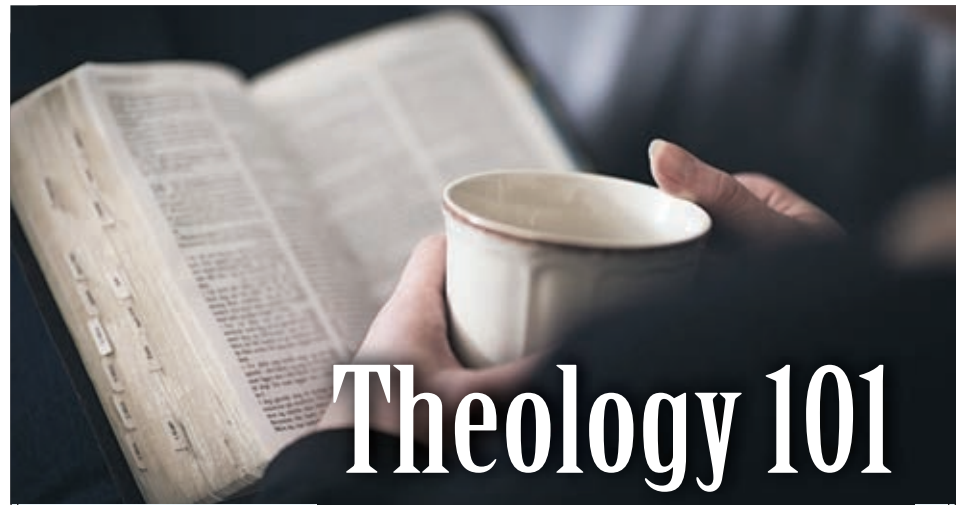
"Anything that we can do to help, we believe we should do it. That is where God's heart is — we've got to help the orphans and widows. We get to be a part of that."

*EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was originally published by Kentucky Today.*



Photo courtesy of Kentucky Today

Steven Bell, the worship and family ministry pastor at Hindman First Baptist Church, won more than \$61,000 on Wheel of Fortune.



# Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

## Sanctification

# Spiritual Disciplines

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.  
The Alabama Baptist

**S**anctification is the process by which believers cooperate with God's means of producing holiness or godliness in the life of a repentant sinner who has chosen to respond in faith to the saving work of Christ and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

This week we take a closer look at how God accomplishes this goal.

When we think about the means God uses to transform forgiven and justified sinners into godly persons, our thoughts begin with the Bible.

Holy Scripture is at the heart of God's provisions for transforming Christians into people of godliness or Christlikeness.

## Daily habit

Believers must value the Bible, choose to read and meditate on its words, and obey its mandates. Just as we take in food each day to maintain physical well-being, so we must partake of God's Word as a daily discipline of Christian living.

Prayer is also an essential ingredient in one's spiritual development. We must hear and heed God speaking to us through Scripture, and we must speak to Him through prayer.

Times of private prayer are times when the Spirit of God impresses conviction on those attitudes and behaviors that should be abandoned and those that should be cultivated as replacements.

In addition to Scripture and prayer, involvement in the church is an important part of the sanctifying process.

Our fellowship with other Christians can play an important role in our growing more like Christ. We need both the examples of others and their encouragement for our development into the people God wants us to be.

## Nurturing effect

Not only does God use Scripture, prayer and church involvement to aid our growth in holiness, but He also works through our regular devotional life to nurture our advance in holiness of life and effectiveness in ministry.

Christian meditation on God's truth is essential to its incorporation into our thinking and its manifestation in our manner of life. Loving God and loving our neighbor go hand in hand with rich, regular and meaningful private devotional times.

In the pace of life for many of us, the quiet practice of disciplined meditation tends to be a neglected aspect of our Christian lives.

*Jerry Batson is a retired Alabama Baptist pastor who also has served as associate dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University and professor of several schools of religion during his career.*





# Lifeway Worship to continue coming alongside churches

(continued from page 1) understand that the resources currently on the website will not go away. “Everything we’ve created for the past 15 years will remain available to churches,” he said.

In Lifeway’s July announcement, they shared they would be shutting down the website that provides arrangements, charts, sheet music and other music resources for church worship.

Churches were given until Aug. 31 to purchase new music and until Sept. 30 to download all their content. In response to concern from ministry leaders, however, Lifeway made the decision to postpone the shutdown.

“While we originally made the difficult decision to discontinue lifeway-worship.com with prayerful consideration, we should have invested more time to listen to church leaders, provide more notice of the impending change, and partner with those who rely on this tool every week,” Mandrell said at the time.

As part of that commitment, Lifeway hosted four listening sessions in Georgia, North Carolina, Kentucky and Texas.

## Open dialogue

In those meetings, Brown, Scott Arvay, senior vice president and chief revenue officer, and Carol Pipes, director of communications, heard from music ministers and worship leaders from those four states, as well as surrounding states.

“We were very pleased with the listening sessions as each one allowed for open and honest dialogue about the unique role Lifeway Worship plays in

serving worship leaders,” Arvay said.

“It was so encouraging to hear how important of a role it plays in many aspects of the leader’s responsibilities, including discipleship of those that serve on their teams,” he added.

After hearing from users of the website, Arvay said Lifeway recognized this is a ministry issue for worship leaders and not just a technology or tool challenge.

## ‘Their curriculum’

“Lifeway’s ability to compose worship music note by note in keys that are singable by the congregation allows the leader to involve more of the church in worship ministry, especially classically trained musicians,” he said. “Or simply put, Lifeway Worship is their curriculum.”

“Additionally, we left inspired as we heard stories of Lifeway Worship serving as the key resource that helped leaders find unity between those at odds over traditional versus modern worship styles.”

Arvay said the organization will continue discussing ways to come alongside churches in their worship and music ministry.

“Over the next year,” he noted, “Lifeway will work closely with worship leaders to develop a holistic strategy on how we can best serve their needs, including the place lifeway-worship.com plays.”

**EDITOR’S NOTE —**  
This story was written by Aaron Earls and originally published by Lifeway Christian Resources. The Baptist Paper contributed to this story.



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Worship leaders, pastors and others gather Sept. 28 at First Baptist Church Trussville for this year’s LIFT! Defining Worship Conference.

# LIFT! conference provides worship, networking opportunities

(continued from page 1) coordinator of the SBOM office of worship resources. “It’s kind of hard to replicate worship if you don’t do it.

The musical and technical components of planning a service can easily consume a worship leader’s time, Gosselin said.

“What I love about LIFT! is that we come together as worship leaders — pastors, music ministers, audiovisual leaders, youth ministers, children’s ministers, etc. — to worship as a team with no responsibilities and then breakout and learn logistical things,” she added.

## Greater benefit

“The greater benefit of this conference may be that you meet people with the same mindset, share ideas

and gain a support system around you. It is a tremendous renewal and networking experience.”

The office of worship resources can help leaders who need assistance with planning and implementing music ministry for children, high school and college students, adults and senior adults, as well as for praise band/team ministry, worship revitalization, using audiovisual technology and much more, Gosselin said.

“We want to walk with you as you navigate your worship ministry needs in your churches,” she said.

The office coordinates several ministries and programs to provide music-

focused opportunities in addition to those offered in the local church too, including statewide honors choirs for children and high school students, as well as Mix Music Camp in the summer.

Gosselin believes it’s important to involve young people in worship.

“There is nothing like watching students worship with all their mind, heart, soul, body and voice,” she said, adding that worship is a spiritual act that happens more

than just on Sunday and during special events.

“Worship is acknowledging who God is and thanking Him for what He has done,” she said. “Worship is waking up in the morning with a special focus on Him, listening to Him as we read and study His Word and as we go through the day, remembering all that He has done for us. That’s when the overflow of worship happens around us!”

Contact Gosselin at kgosselin@alsbom.org or 334-613-2318. (Tracy Riggs Frontz contributed)

**For more resources about worship, go to [alabamaworship.org](http://alabamaworship.org).**

## LEEDS STAINED GLASS & CHURCH FURNITURE

SINCE 1995

Toll-free: 888.699.9679

AL local: 205.699.9679

Call for **FREE** on-site consultation

Ask for Terry Barnes, Owner

information@LeedsStainedGlass.com

Visit [www.LeedsStainedGlass.com](http://www.LeedsStainedGlass.com)

for an online gallery of windows and church furniture!







# UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

## Church Planter Network dinner, seminar planned for Nov. 12-13

Church planters and their wives and anyone else interested in Kingdom expansion are invited to a Church Planter Network dinner and seminar day Nov. 12-13. The dinner will be Nov. 12, 5-8 p.m., and the seminar day will be Nov. 13, 8 a.m.-12 p.m., at Strong Tower at Washington Park in Montgomery.

- Topics will include:
- Replanting, led by Brian Harper, state church planting strategist, and Josh Knierim, planter of The Church at Old Town in Helena.
  - Rural Church Planting, led by Darryl Brunson, church planter in Montana.



Unsplash.com

- Urban Church Planting, led by Terrence Jones, planter of Strong Tower at Washington Park in Montgomery.
  - Hispanic Church Planting, led by Ramón Vielza, planter of I-10 Church in Mobile, and Campo Londoño, retired Hispanic director of Union Baptist Association, Houston, Texas.
- To register for the dinner, the seminar day or both, visit [plantalabama.org/events](http://plantalabama.org/events).

## College ministry leaders 'Unite'

Unite — set for Nov. 13 — will offer a chance for campus ministers, college pastors and collegiate church planters to be encouraged and equipped and celebrate what God is doing. The speaker will be Gary Stidham, director



STIDHAM

of the Baptist Student Ministry at the University of Texas at Arlington, director of training for Texas Baptist Student Ministry and adjunct professor of collegiate ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth,

Texas. He will be talking about creating an evangelism culture in our ministries. The event will be held at the AUM Baptist Student Center in Montgomery from 4-8 p.m. Dinner will be provided from Taco Mama, and there will be free giveaways for those in attendance. To register, visit [bcmlink.org/unite](http://bcmlink.org/unite).

## Join us in 30 Days of Prayer leading up to bicentennial celebration

You're invited to take part in 30 Days of Prayer leading up to the Alabama Baptist State Convention's Bicentennial Celebration Nov. 14-15 at First Baptist Church,

Montgomery. Let's join our hearts in prayer beginning Oct. 15 as we express gratitude for all God has done these 200 years and boldly step into our next century of ministry.

To sign up for prayer prompts, visit [alsbom.org/convention](http://alsbom.org/convention) and click on the 30 Days of Prayer button or follow the SBOM's social media feeds.

## WORD search

AFFLICTED	KING	PRIDE	THRONE
BOASTFUL	LORD	PUT TO SHAME	TROUBLE
CRY	MERCY	REFUGE	TRUST
DELIVERANCE	NATIONS	REMEMBER	UPRIGHT
ENEMIES	NEEDY	RIGHTEOUS	VINDICATION
FOREVER	OPPRESSION	SEEKER	WICKED
HOPE	PERISH	SING	WORSHIP
HUMBLE	POOR	SINNER	WRATH
JUSTICE	PRaise	THANKFUL	ZION

M	B	G	N	I	S	X	D	N	O	I	S	S	E	R	P	P	O
H	E	T	H	A	N	K	F	U	L	F	E	P	O	H	Q	Q	M
H	T	R	P	K	M	D	R	L	Q	W	D	L	B	F	P	R	Z
X	S	F	C	U	T	R	E	D	H	T	Y	K	O	P	R	Y	K
C	E	I	F	Y	T	D	E	L	E	K	R	R	R	T	E	F	W
K	N	K	R	Y	H	T	T	N	I	L	E	U	X	L	F	L	O
H	E	Y	N	E	Q	T	O	L	N	V	B	K	S	U	U	R	R
L	M	O	N	X	P	N	A	S	E	I	E	M	P	T	G	E	S
Z	I	L	O	Z	E	D	D	R	H	L	S	R	U	M	E	B	H
Z	E	N	I	C	N	V	E	Y	W	A	I	L	A	H	R	M	I
Z	S	A	T	H	O	T	T	Q	E	G	M	L	D	N	L	E	P
V	R	T	A	R	R	X	C	S	H	K	W	E	R	Y	C	M	R
K	I	I	C	O	H	F	I	T	P	L	O	R	D	Q	L	E	Z
E	G	O	I	O	T	A	L	D	E	K	C	I	W	U	E	R	N
C	H	N	D	P	R	B	F	B	D	C	N	S	F	L	N	G	H
I	T	S	N	P	F	T	F	K	P	R	E	T	B	E	N	J	Q
T	E	T	I	F	B	Y	A	W	Z	E	S	U	E	I	Z	R	T
S	O	K	V	V	L	D	G	M	K	A	O	D	K	Y	M	Q	N
U	U	P	R	I	D	E	C	E	O	R	Y	P	C	R	Y	T	P
J	S	W	C	Y	T	T	R	B	T	M	L	M	X	T	Y	R	L

"But God will never forget the needy; the hope of the afflicted will never perish."

PSALM 9:18

## TAB CLASSIFIEDS

Place a classified ad below for \$1 per word. For more information call 205-870-4720, ext. 200, or email [ads@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:ads@thealabamabaptist.org). To place an online classified ad for \$9.99/month, visit [thealabamabaptist.org/classifieds](http://thealabamabaptist.org/classifieds).

### CHURCH POSITIONS

**DIRECTOR OF YOUTH MINISTRY**  
Oak Bowery, Ohatchee, Alabama, is in search of a director of youth ministry. Part time. Contact Pastor Sam Fordham: [DrSamFordham@gmail.com](mailto:DrSamFordham@gmail.com).

### SIGNS

**CHURCH SIGN**  
Signs are your first impression. What kind of impression is your church sign making? Call us to replace/update yours with either digital or traditional. Statewide since 1994. 1-800-

729-6844 or 205-664-0955. [www.reliable-signs.com](http://www.reliable-signs.com)

### BUSINESS

**FOR SALE NEW & USED STAIR LIFTS**  
Lift chairs, power wheelchairs, car lifts, scooters and walk-in tubs. We service Alabama. 1-800-682-0658

### TRAVEL/VACATION

**LOG CABIN RENTAL**  
Lake Guntersville area, beautiful view and fully furnished. Discounts to ministers. Log on to [www.paradisevista.net](http://www.paradisevista.net) to see pictures. Call for reservations at 205-540-3600.

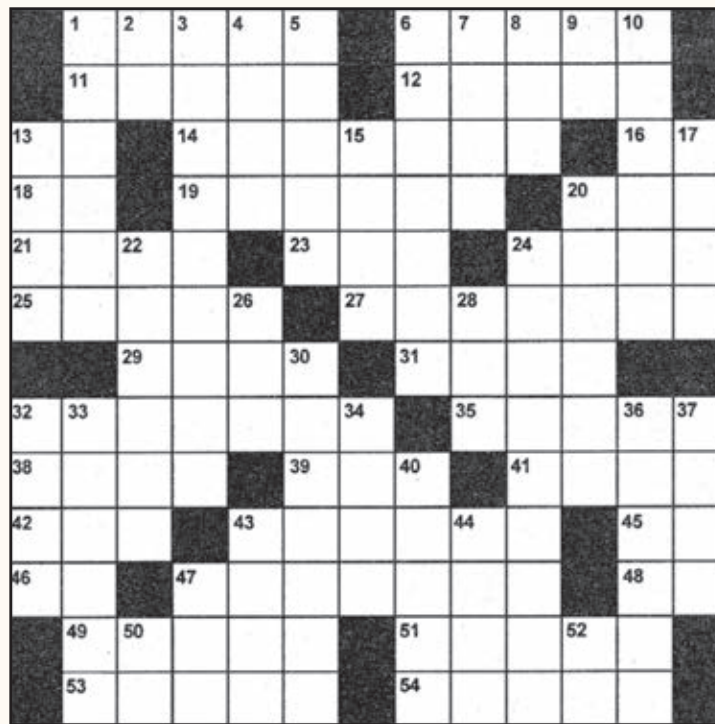


# CHRISTIAN Crossword



## ACROSS

1. He that earneth \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Hag. 1:6)
6. Let all \_\_\_\_\_ that seek thee  
rejoice. (Ps. 40:16)
11. Thou shalt \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Ps. 102:13)
12. Eliab the son of \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Num. 2:7)
13. And I will walk \_\_\_\_\_ liberty.  
(Ps. 119:45)
14. He hath settled on his  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ hath not.  
(Jer. 48:11; 2 words)
16. The ungodly are not \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Ps. 1:4)
18. Exist.
19. Ark of God came to \_\_\_\_\_  
... for there was \_\_\_\_\_  
deadly ... (1 Sam. 5:10,11;  
2 words)
20. On the east side of \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Num. 34:11)



By Diana Rowland Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

21. \_\_\_\_\_ also the Jairite was  
\_\_\_\_\_ chief ruler.  
(2 Sam. 20:26; 2 words)
23. How great is the \_\_\_\_\_ of  
them. (Ps. 139:17)
24. Thou hast also turned the  
\_\_\_\_\_. (Ps. 89:43)
25. As for such as turn \_\_\_\_\_  
unto. (Ps. 125:5)
27. More than twelve \_\_\_\_\_ of  
angels? (Matt. 26:53)
29. Who is a \_\_\_\_\_ but he that  
denieth. (1 John 2:22)
31. Thou art \_\_\_\_\_ God  
that ... (Ps. 5:4; 2 words)
32. \_\_\_\_\_ will \_\_\_\_\_ his hand  
also in \_\_\_\_\_ sea.  
(Ps. 89:25; 3 words)
35. \_\_\_\_\_, so would we ...  
them \_\_\_\_\_ say.  
(Ps. 35:25; 2 words)
38. And \_\_\_\_\_ out of the  
valley. (Ps. 60:6)
39. Lyric poem.
41. Beyond the tower of  
\_\_\_\_\_. (Gen. 35:21)
42. National Institutes of  
Health (abbr.).
43. Transgressions as \_\_\_\_\_  
... multitude, \_\_\_\_\_  
did ... (Job 31:33, 34;  
2 words)
45. Texas Instruments (abbr.).
46. I have given \_\_\_\_\_ unto  
the children. (Deut. 2:9)
47. Borders of Archi to \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Josh. 16:2)
48. Hewlett Packard (abbr.).
49. Unto thy father that \_\_\_\_\_  
thee. (Prov. 23:22)

51. They that sow in \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Ps. 126:5)
53. And \_\_\_\_\_ the lamp of  
God ... down \_\_\_\_\_ sleep.  
(1 Sam. 3:3; 2 words)
54. To \_\_\_\_\_ thee good at thy  
latter \_\_\_\_\_. (Deut. 8:16;  
2 words, reverse order)

## DOWN

1. Beside the still \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Ps. 23:2)
2. Given \_\_\_\_\_ unto the  
children. (Deut. 2:9)
3. Of Brazilai the \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Ezra 2:61)
4. He called the name of the  
well \_\_\_\_\_. (Gen. 26:20)
5. Then shall the \_\_\_\_\_ be  
ashamed. (Micah 3:7)
6. Obey God rather \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Acts 5:29; 2 words)
7. City of Sepharvaim, \_\_\_\_\_,  
and Ivah? (Is. 37:13)
8. God is my King of \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Ps. 74:12)
9. I am \_\_\_\_\_ troubled.  
(Ps. 77:4)
10. Lifted up as an \_\_\_\_\_ upon  
his land. (Zech. 9:16)
13. Of the course of \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Luke 1:5)
15. He restoreth my \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Ps. 23:3)
17. May fall by his strong \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Ps. 10:10)
20. Why make ye this \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_ weep?  
(Mark 5:39; 2 words)
22. What \_\_\_\_\_ thee now.  
(Is. 22:1)
24. And \_\_\_\_\_ taken ... not  
any, \_\_\_\_\_ great.  
(1 Sam. 30:2; 2 words,  
reverse order)
26. The meek shall \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Ps. 22:26)
28. Called to \_\_\_\_\_ out into  
\_\_\_\_\_ place. (Heb. 11:8;  
2 words)
30. A damsel came \_\_\_\_\_  
hearken, named \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Acts 12:13; 2 words,  
reverse order)
32. Zophah, and \_\_\_\_\_, and  
Shelesh. (1 Chron. 7:35)
33. \_\_\_\_\_ also shall \_\_\_\_\_ a  
possession.  
(Num. 24:18; 2 words)
34. Beyond the tower of  
\_\_\_\_\_. (Gen. 35:21)
36. Quit of thine \_\_\_\_\_ ...  
words, \_\_\_\_\_ be it.  
(Josh. 2:20, 21; 2 words)
37. Voyage, flight or drive.
40. To speak in a theatrical  
manner.
43. Discovered \_\_\_\_\_ thy  
rebuks, O Lord, \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Ps. 18:15; 2 words)
44. \_\_\_\_\_ God ... of \_\_\_\_\_  
strings. (Ps. 144:9;  
2 words)
47. Mine \_\_\_\_\_ is as nothing.  
(Ps. 39:5)
50. The sons of Judah were  
\_\_\_\_\_. (Num. 26:19)
52. Rural Delivery (abbr.).

**All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.**

## YM Link on the Road in October

YM Link is providing three opportunities in October for practical, intensive training that can greatly impact your youth ministry.

This year's speakers for YM Link on the Road are Ricky Smith, lead pastor at Calvary Baptist Church in Columbus, Georgia, and Josh Meadows, youth ministry strategist at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. Smith will be speaking about professionalism in youth ministry, and Meadows will talk about personal spiritual development.

This event will also be a great time of networking with other youth ministry workers.

It will be held:

- The Church at Eastern

To register, visit [ymlink.org/calendar](http://ymlink.org/calendar) or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



Oaks in Montgomery, Oct. 23, 6 p.m.–8 p.m.

► CrossPoint Church Trussville, Oct. 24, 10 a.m.–12 p.m.

► First Baptist Church Hartselle, Oct. 24, 6 p.m.–8 p.m.

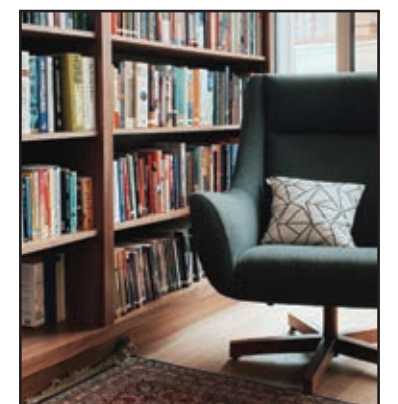
To register, visit [ymlink.org/calendar](http://ymlink.org/calendar).

## North Alabama Library Conference is Nov. 4

Do you serve in a library of any kind — church, public or school? If so, you're invited to the North Alabama Library Conference on Nov. 4.

The conference will be held at Central Baptist Church in Decatur on Nov. 4, 8:30 a.m.–3:30 p.m. Sessions include topics like classification, collection development, reading club ideas and Bible and book repair.

The event is free, and lunch is provided.



Unsplash.com

To register, contact Patty Easterling at 256-353-5912 or [cbclibrarypatty@gmail.com](mailto:cbclibrarypatty@gmail.com).



# WITH GOD’S HELP, CHURCHES CAN GROW

## Church Answers network leader offers strategies, encouragement for ‘smaller churches’

By Michael Brooks  
The Alabama Baptist

Though most North American churches have plateaued or are declining, Sam Rainer believes that with

God’s help, churches can grow.

“If God can save any person, He can save any church,” he said.

Rainer is president of the Church Answers network and pastor of West Braden-

ton Baptist Church in Bradenton, Florida. He spoke to Alabama ministers at a church revitalization workshop at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions’ facility in Prattville on Sept. 25.

Rainer said leaders are always optimists, but the pessimists sometimes say, “That church should die.”

### ‘Not a mistake’

“Some churches will die if they refuse to do the will of God,” he said. “But your church address is not a mistake. God placed you in your neighborhood for a purpose.”

Rainer said churches normally lose up to 30% of their worship attendance each year due to death, moves, transfers and declining attendance, but churches grow in four ways.

The first is by conversion. “The pastor must set the example in sharing the gospel,” he said. “At our church, we hold the staff ac-

countable. I don’t give them metrics, but I begin the staff meetings asking about their gospel conversations in the last week.”

The second area of growth is transfer growth, which is when existing residents come to a new church.

Rainer differentiated this from the third area of growth, “demographic growth,” which happens when new community residents decide to join churches in their new communities.

The fourth area of growth is biological — when babies are born into church families. Rainer, himself a foster parent, said he includes new foster children in this category and exhorts congregations to encourage foster parenting.

Rainer said Church Answers’ research found the average active church member is 60 years old.

“We love our seniors, but most growth comes from younger generations,” he said. “And since the white population is becoming a minority in our country, churches must grow in diversity. We teach that a church should mirror its

community, and many churches don’t because they don’t reach the Black or Hispanic or other ethnic groups at their doorstep.”

Rainer shared information from his newest book, “The Surprising Return of the Neighborhood Church,” pointing to the latest appeal of the median-sized church, which he described as having 65–70 in weekly worship.

### Fewer megachurches

“The megachurch has 2,000 or more on Sunday and is a baby-boomer phenomenon,” he said. “Growth of the megachurch was exponential for a time, but the number is waning. There were around 1,700 in 2020, but we think about 1,000 today.”

Rainer explained several reasons for this decline. One is “the reality of real estate.”

“In many areas, local churches own property that is almost unaffordable now, so imagine the cost of large tracts of land to build megachurches,” he said. “And there’s the issue of financial sustainability.

For information about other leadership events, visit [alsbom.org](http://alsbom.org).



Take the

# Smell

Test Challenge Today

**Ongoing smell loss may be one of the most important signals of risk to brain health as we age.**

A new study from The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson’s Research is exploring this link. We’re calling on everyone age 60 and older without Parkinson’s to request a simple scratch-and-sniff test. Contribute to important research.

Request your free test at  
[mysmelltest.org/alabama](http://mysmelltest.org/alabama)

## Christmas Village

An Alabama Tradition

[www.christmasvillagefestival.com](http://www.christmasvillagefestival.com)



BJCC  
Tickets on sale NOW!  
Adults: \$15

over 700 booths!  
arts, crafts & gifts

**CHRISTMAS VILLAGE FESTIVAL**  
NOVEMBER 1-5, 2023  
205.836.7173





Photo courtesy of Doug Rogers

Sam Rainer speaks to Alabama ministers Sept. 25 at a church revitalization workshop at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions' facility in Prattville.

influence can reach their neighborhoods and make a deep impact," he said. "Most churches won't ever be megachurches and that's OK. We can be healthy churches."

Rainer advised church leaders to manage their "digital real estate," including email, websites and Google search.

"Every church can own its Google search and add service information and pictures," he said. "The most frequent online church shopping is 'churches near me.'"

Rainer said America is seeing a decline in younger men committing to the pastorate, and the median age of American pastors has increased from 44 to 60 now.

### New generation

"There's nothing wrong with being an older pastor with years of accumulated wisdom, but we also need to encourage a new generation to take up the challenge of leading churches," he said.

"Our church has an internship for men called to ministry. We give opportunities for them to serve for one year before we consider

ordination. This is one way to bring along younger leaders who will serve the church in the days ahead."

Rainer's articles can be found at churchanswers.com and at West Bradenton's website, fortheneighborhood.com. He can be

heard on the "Church Answers" and "EST.church" podcasts.

State missionaries Ken Allen and Rob Jackson plan other leadership events in 2024, and these are listed at alsbom.org. Both can be reached at 800-264-1225.

"We believe 90% of the cost of a building is 'deferred maintenance.' Our church is dealing with this now with a \$2 million air-conditioning project. Large buildings become increasingly costly to maintain, and we counsel our clients not to build larger worship centers but to consider other options."

Other options include different times, different venues and different campuses.

"We've found a trend to Thursday night services," Rainer said. "Since 30-40% of the American workforce

works on Sunday, this is one way to provide worship and study times."

Rainer insisted there is a "diminishing stigma" for the smaller church and a return to "local preference."

"Churches used to advertise that the drive is worth it, but this generation — unlike the boomers — doesn't want to make a long drive to church," he said.

Rainer said it's a myth that "we can't compete with the larger church down the road."

"Smaller churches foster relationships, and their

## SUSTAINED

2023 ALABAMA PASTORS CONFERENCE

**TAYLOR ROAD BAPTIST CHURCH**  
Montgomery, Alabama

**NOVEMBER 13, 2023**

### GUEST SPEAKERS



**H.B. CHARLES**  
Pastor of Shiloh  
Metropolitan Baptist  
Church, Jacksonville,  
Florida



**MATT MASON**  
Pastor of The Church  
at Brook Hills,  
Birmingham



**ED LITTON**  
Pastor of  
Redemption Church,  
Saraland



**JARED WILSON**  
Pastor at Liberty  
Baptist Church,  
Kansas City, Missouri

Lunch and dinner will be provided.  
Registration is required by October 16.

Visit [albaptistpc.com](http://albaptistpc.com) to register  
or for more information.

### SPONSORED BY



FBC McCalla INVITES YOU TO JOIN US FOR  
**THREE NIGHTS OF VICTORY**  
OCTOBER 16-18 AT 7 PM

Dr. Ted  
Traylor  
(all three  
nights)



Alabama  
broadcaster  
Chris Stewart  
(Monday only)



6043 Moore Cemetery Road, McCalla  
Email: [FBCMCalla1@gmail.com](mailto:FBCMCalla1@gmail.com)



# SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For October 15

## Explore the Bible

By Robert Olsen, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



### STRENGTHENS Mark 9:17–29

#### The Challenge (17–20)

In Mark 9, Jesus is transfigured on the mountain in front of Peter, James and John. This is Jesus showing His true glory, affirming that He is the promised, divine Messiah. However, when the disciples come down from the mountain experience, they are thrust right back into the issues of the world.

A man brought his son to be healed by the disciples, but they couldn't do it. It must have been frustrating and humiliating for them to fail at a task in which they had previously succeeded.

This is a lesson to us not to become so confident that we begin to trust in our own abilities instead of remembering that it is God who works through us.

Often when we have a spiritually uplifting experience, we feel like we can take on the world. We have seen our faith in action and the power of God at work. These are the times when Satan tries to knock us down.

#### The Admission (21–24)

It is interesting to note that the father in this story claims to believe and yet recognizes his unbelief. How can one both believe and have unbelief?

All Christians believe the promises of God. We know God works all things for our good (Rom. 8:28), and yet we often fail to really live this out. Even though we do believe, we find that our faith is small. We should admire that the father can see his lack of faith, but we also should admire that he goes to Jesus for help.

***“[A spirit] has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.” “If you can?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.” Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”***

Mark 9:22–24

In times when we fail to live out our faith — when we doubt or worry — the correct response is to go to God and confess it and ask for God to increase our faith and trust in Him.

#### The Demonstration (25–29)

First, it is important to recognize that demon possession is a real phenomenon. Some modern readers think that when the Bible speaks of demon possession, it is really just a lack of understanding of things like epilepsy and sickness. The Bible writers knew the difference.

The important thing for Christians to understand is that we cannot be possessed because the Holy Spirit, who is God, lives within us (1 Cor. 6:19), and demons are not more powerful than God.

It is also important to recognize that there is spiritual warfare going on around us.

We need not fear it, however. The demons must do whatever Jesus tells them to because Jesus is God in human flesh. There is no hesitation. The demons respond at once because they have no other choice than to obey God.

How often do we try to do ministry in our own strength? A former professor I worked with often said, “Be careful that you don’t get so caught up in doing the work of the Kingdom that you forget the King.”

Jesus reminds His disciples that prayer is the key because prayer shows our dependence on God. We can never lose sight of our dependence on God, even in times of success.

## Bible Studies for Life

By Jeffery M. Leonard, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Biblical &amp; Religious Studies, Samford University



### DOES IT REALLY MATTER WHICH ‘TRUTH’ I BELIEVE? John 3:19–21; 8:31–36

The Gospel of John stands out from Matthew, Mark and Luke in a host of ways. Like Mark, John skips over the stories surrounding Jesus’ nativity, but John also leaves out quite a few other events from Jesus’ life.

John doesn’t write about Jesus’ baptism, his temptation in the wilderness, his revelation on the Mount of Transfiguration or the various stories about casting out unclean spirits. John includes lots of sermons, but he doesn’t include a single parable.

Matthew, Mark and Luke have a great deal to say about the coming Kingdom of God and refer to it more than 100 times; surprisingly, John only mentions the Kingdom five times. But if Jesus doesn’t say much about the Kingdom in John, He has a great deal more to say about Himself.

In Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus only uses the word “I” 36 times. In John, he says “I” a full 118 times. Many of these statements — 46 of them — take the form of Jesus’ famous “I am” statements — “I am the Bread of Life,” “I am the Light of the world” and “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.”

We don’t have to look far to define the logic behind what John includes and what he omits. In the last verse of the book, John says that if everything Jesus said and did were written down, “not even the world itself could contain the books that would be written” (21:25).

The things John did include, he says he included “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name” (20:31).

### Truth is revealed in the light of Jesus. (3:19–21)

John’s Gospel is not one for half measures. Even more starkly than the other Gospels, John makes a sharp distinction between those who are of the world and those who are not.

One of the key images John uses to mark this distinction is that of light and darkness. Nearly half of the uses of the Greek word for light are found in John and the related letter of 1 John. All but two of the uses of the Greek term for darkness in the New Testament are found in just these two books.

### The truth of Jesus sets us free to live. (8:31–32)

John’s description of the gospel is one in which the light of Christ has come into the world, and it remains to those who see that light to respond by either embracing the light or rejecting it.

Overwhelmingly, the word John uses to describe that response

of embracing the light is “believe.” Nearly 100 times in John’s Gospel — far more than in any other New Testament book — this word “believe” is used to describe our response to Jesus.

### The truth of Jesus sets us free from sin. (8:33–36)

Belief, according to John, is not merely a matter of assent to a set of facts or theological truths.

To believe is to embrace the light of Christ, to cast oneself upon Jesus in a relationship of dependence and trust. Belief here is also not a one-sided affair. With belief, John tells us, comes freedom. Where we were merely slaves to our own passions, belief in Christ sets us free from slavery and makes us “free indeed.”

***“So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’”***

John 8:31–32



# MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs Frontz  
The Alabama Baptist

## New children's book helps readers see God is here 'alongside us'

Sometimes an offhand comment can lead to something incredible. For Victoria Robb Powers and Cameron Mason Vickrey, it was a one-line text message that led to their debut children's book, "My Love, God is Everywhere."

Powers had asked Vickrey if she could recommend any resources to help parents raise children in the Christian faith.

Both had noticed there were many children's books about Bible stories but few that had a theological foundation and showed how to connect with God.

"No, unfortunately I really don't have that great of a list," Vickrey replied before mentioning a few that she recommended but didn't really love.

The next almost flippant statement would change their lives.

"I think we should write a book," Vickrey texted.

### A natural question

Powers and Vickrey, are both in ministry. They had known each other casually for a while before finding they had similar interests and becoming friends.

They share a joint Instagram account called Reverend Mamas, where they answer parents' ques-



VICTORIA ROBB POWERS (RIGHT) AND CAMERON MASON VICKREY CO-AUTHORED 'MY LOVE, GOD IS EVERYWHERE.' Photo courtesy of Dexter Evans

tions and give Scripture-based advice. When the idea for a book was conceived, Powers brought in an illustrator she knew from her college years. The three women worked together to create a beautiful book that meets a need.

"It's a really simple question that we seek to answer in the book: Where is God? We have found that children are really interested in knowing geographically where God's location is," Vickrey said.

Furthermore, the book includes a message that has meaning for any age.

"It's such a natural question we carry all throughout our lives," Vickrey continued. "When we go through hard times, you naturally think, 'Where is God in this?'"

Powers and Vickrey started asking parents what their children

most wanted to know about God. They also decided to write in a here/there style. "Is God here when I'm happy — or there when I'm sad?" is an example with cultural and emotional relevance.

"I think it's important for us to start teaching our kids right now that God is there alongside us when we're sad," Vickrey said. "God is also grieving when we grieve, and

God's heart breaks for us. That's when we can feel the very close presence of God — when we're sad.

"Honestly, I think that happy is a really important part too. God doesn't want to just be there to rescue us in the desperate times,"

she continued. "God wants a relationship with us, and that means all the parts of our lives — the good, the mundane, the everyday and the celebrations."

Once the text was finalized, the authors sent it to Joanna Carillo, a lifelong artist and the wife of Powers' best friend in college. Carillo was happy to take on the project even though she had never illustrated a book before.

The authors realized the visual aspect added more than beautiful images when their publisher sent them a final copy of the book without its text.

"It was really surreal for us," Powers said. "Naturally, when words are on a page, we gravitate to the words and we read them. We tend to lose a lot of what's communicated in the illustrations. It was so powerful for us to read the book through the pictures only.

"Later we thought, that's how those pre-readers — those early readers who can't read for themselves — this is how they will read the book."

Powers and Vickrey agreed they both learned through this experience that it's important to "pay attention to and follow the nudges."

### 'A gift'

"Listen to where God is whispering to us to go and to do. It's amazing to see what can happen," Vickrey said.

Powers said, "There have been so many moments where we looked at each other and said, 'Wow! What a gift!' God's been in all of this in ways we never anticipated or expected. I don't know that I'd change anything."



To connect with the authors, go to [instagram.com/reverendmamas](https://www.instagram.com/reverendmamas). "My Love, God is Everywhere" can be found at [ThomasNelson.com](https://www.ThomasNelson.com) or wherever books are sold.

### EDITOR'S NOTE

Reviews of films, books, music or other media that appear in TAB are intended to help readers evaluate current media for themselves, their children and grandchildren in order to decide whether to watch, read or listen. Reviews are not an endorsement by the writer or TAB Media.



# LARGEST-CIRCULATED PAPER IN THE STATE

Help keep Alabama's largest-circulated newspaper  
— **The Alabama Baptist** — strong and healthy.

**Spread the word.**

