

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



"We Gather Together" was written in 1597 to celebrate the Dutch victory over the Spanish in the Battle of Turnhout.

Edited photo with Unsplash.com

Songs of the season

Psalms, hymns of thanksgiving share common themes of gratitude, praise

By David W. Stowe
The Conversation

Thanksgiving hymns don't ring in the ear for months on end like Christmas songs do, yet you may remember some that roll around each November in church or around the dinner table.

Interestingly, for songs associated with a distinctly American holi-

day, none have American origins. "Come, Ye Thankful People" was written by Henry Alford, a 19th-century English cleric who ascended to become dean of Canterbury Cathedral and supposedly rose to his feet to give thanks after every meal and at the close of every day.

"We Gather Together" is much older, written in 1597 to celebrate the Dutch victory over the Spanish in the Battle of Turnhout.

"We Plough the Fields" was written by a German Lutheran in 1782.

As someone who studies American culture and religious music, I'm interested in the backstory of the songs that we have come to take for granted.

Difficult to categorize

Someone wandering into a church and picking up a hymnal will likely find a handful of hymns filed under

"thanksgiving," but many more express a general sense of gratitude, such as "Now Thank We All Our God" and "For the Beauty of the Earth."

Even more hymns fall under the related category of praise — after all, a common response to feeling blessed or rescued is to offer praise to the higher being thought to bestow those gifts.

(See 'Biblical,' page 13)

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The Alabama Baptist print edition to begin alternating weeks with The Baptist Paper

As Baptists across the state wrap up a time of commemorating and celebrating 200 years of partnering as a state convention (1823–2023), the staff and board of directors of The Alabama Baptist, Inc., are turning their attention to the future. They are seeking ways to not only continue the 180-year legacy of the state Baptist newspaper, but also position it to enhance its unique and strategic role in working for the Lord.

Current efforts to refine the most successful aspects of The Alabama Baptist — now known as TAB Media Group — led the board of directors to approve a new print schedule beginning January 2024 while maintaining the current subscription prices for the coming year. The unanimous decision was finalized Nov. 6.

The first edition of The Alabama Baptist — dated Feb. 4, 1843 — shared news about what God was doing through His people, and that foundational element remains the central focus of content published today, according to staff reports.

The Alabama Baptist is the only remaining weekly printed state Baptist newspaper in the nation and has expanded to form a full media group offering a second printed newspaper, an annual magazine and a wide range of digital offerings.

In fact, the total number of times content across the 13 digital platforms was viewed during this year’s third quarter tipped over 1 million.

The new format will allow The Alabama Baptist to continue its print products while also increasing its digital footprint. The number of articles published at tabonline.org is nearing the 50,000-mark, and more than 3,600 readers receive the digital PDF version of the paper.

Largest-circulated paper

As far as the print edition of The Alabama Baptist goes, the roughly 37,000 homes receiving a printed paper each week means the state Baptist paper is the largest-circulated newspaper of any kind in Alabama.

While more and more newspapers are shifting to online-only because of the excessive increases in printing and postage, The Alabama Baptist

is committed to continuing as both a print and digital product.

“We feel the schedule change will allow us to more effectively use the print edition and increase our on-line presence,” said Jennifer Davis Rash, president and editor-in-chief of The Alabama Baptist, Inc. “Whether it is through the print edition or the digital version, we want Baptists to be informed as to what God is doing among us.”

Gary Fenton, board chair for TAB Media Group, said the board appreciates the staff’s attention to detail and continuous efforts to streamline systems while staying focused on their ministry assignment.

“We are confident in Jennifer and the staff and their heart behind their service to our Lord and Alabama Baptists,” Fenton said. “The Alabama Baptist is poised for a strong future as it continues serving within the state convention family alongside its sister entities, the State Board of Missions, associations and churches, as well as individual Baptists across the state.”

Developing opportunities

Rash shared how those serving with TAB Media Group during the past 25-plus years have watched numerous changes take place related to covering and producing news stories, sharing inspirational features, providing helpful resources and adapting to a growing number of options for disseminating content.

“The past 10 years especially have challenged all media outlets in form and style,” she said. “Attempting to communicate with and serve more than five generations is hard, even on a good day, but with growing distrust among people in general and consistent confusion caused by agenda-driven online content, it’s becoming almost impossible.

“Still, we have an incredible base of subscribers and ministry partners in Alabama Baptist life and those relationships boost us above the fray,” Rash noted.

“Thank you, Alabama Baptists, for ensuring your state Baptist media staff can continue in the calling of ‘truth with compassion’ by delivering calm, fact-based reporting along-

side reports of where God is working and how we can join Him — and that we can continue providing the coverage in print.”

As part of the new printing schedule, The Alabama Baptist newspaper will begin alternating weeks with the TAB Media Group-produced Baptist Paper, which provides a broad array of content from across the nation and world as well as a variety of associational leadership and church life resources.

While the subscription prices for both publications remain the same, readers interested in receiving The Baptist Paper in their mailboxes do need to alert The Alabama Baptist staff to take advantage of the special \$10 per sub add-on bundle price.

Readers’ favorite sections

“The change takes place with the first edition in January and each publication will continue to provide Sunday School lesson commentaries, puzzles, the Your Voice spread and news about Christians undergoing persecution, along with state-specific news items and the various other sections you expect in each edition,” Rash explained.

She added that readers now have the option to decide if they prefer receiving only The Alabama Baptist every other week (no action needed for this option) or adding The Baptist Paper to continue with the weekly flow of newspaper delivery (call 1-800-803-5201 or email subscribe@thebaptistpaper.org).

Sunday School lessons

“Along with ensuring that Sunday School teachers and class members continue receiving the extremely popular Sunday School lesson commentaries, each edition of both papers will provide two weeks’ worth of commentaries, which also fulfills a request by readers through the years to receive the lessons a week in advance,” she added.

“We also are planning to debut some new sections soon. They come from conversations with our readers throughout this past year.

“The readers have been a tremendous help as we look to polish the work we do each day to keep Alabama Baptists informed, inspired and connected.” (TAB Media Group)



RASH

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

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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
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The crossword puzzle
can be found on page 15.



GUEST EDITORIAL

for this week's issue of The Alabama Baptist

By Gary Fenton, chair, board of directors, The Alabama Baptist

Spiritual hunger to hear about God's work remains as prevalent as ever

At 25 years old, I graduated seminary on a Friday and stepped into my first full-time church pastorate on Sunday. Until that moment, I had only served two years as a part-time pastor of a congregation that only expected me to be there on Sundays.

The church I was going to was deeply divided, as three months earlier the congregation had dismissed its pastor by a vote of 53% to 47%.

During my first week, several members stopped by to give me advice. I do not remember all the advice, but one nugget of wisdom stands out to me.

"Make sure the heating and air conditioning unit is always working, and keep the church informed about what God is doing in the life of the church," the gentleman said. "When we know what God is doing, we won't worry much about what each other is doing."

Understanding Baptists

Now half a century later, I realize that gentleman understood Baptists. We need to be physically comfortable, and we need to know what God is doing.

I have been in Alabama for more than 30 years, and for

much of that time I have served on the board of directors of The Alabama Baptist, Inc. (also known as TAB Media Group).

I have served under three editors, each with different skill sets and personalities.

► Hudson Baggett knew everyone in the state and made people feel like he was their best friend.

► Bob Terry was a scholar and an excellent wordsmith.

► Jennifer Rash has a contagious personality which is displayed through her writing and speaking style.

Each have led the state Baptist paper differently, but they all have played an invaluable role in keeping us informed as to what God is doing among His people.

While some state Baptist conventions are deeply divided — and a few even have two competing conventions — Alabama has a high degree of unity. I am convinced that our outstanding editors have contributed greatly to the unity in our state.

Through the dedicated and focused work of TAB Media Group's editors, we have avoided much of the dissension by keeping Baptists in Alabama informed as to what God is doing among His people.

We may think state Baptist publications are primarily reporting on what denominational entities and leaders are doing so Baptists can then hold them accountable. There is validity to that view of Baptist journalism.

TAB's broad coverage

However, Baptists in Alabama deserve and want to know more than what our leaders are doing. We want to know what God is doing in our state, nation and world among His people.

While we have countless forms of news and information sources to stay informed about many dimensions of life, it's only through The Alabama Baptist that we learn how God is working through Baptists.

Our hope is the result of knowing and hearing about what God is doing, and we in Alabama do that through the pages of The Alabama Baptist and from the online content.

Through the electronic and publishing arms of The Alabama Baptist, Inc., we can stay up with what is happening in the local churches and among Baptists in other states and countries.

With each online or print edition of The Alabama Baptist, we open our minds to the work of God.

Whether it is a testimony of a Sunday School teacher from a small church in our state, an article about international missionaries, reports from persecuted Christians around the world or an update about the way God is leading in denominational meetings, The Alabama Baptist is keeping us informed.

In a world filled with bad news, the good news of Jesus is changing lives and it is exciting to read and hear about it.

With so much depressing news, it is more important and encouraging than ever to know that God is still moving and working among His people.

While the way and frequency with which we receive this information may change over time, our spiritual hunger to hear about God's work among us remains the same.

Looking ahead

When we no longer need to know what God is doing among His people, then we won't need The Alabama Baptist, but that is not going to happen until our Lord returns.

Until then The Alabama Baptist will keep us informed about God's work among His people. At The Alabama Baptist, we not only have a wonderful heritage, but also a greater future.

Your Voice



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

LMCO memory: What took you so long to tell us about Jesus?

By Anne Crowder Lucas

Director of medical and short-term missions, e3 Partners

Many years ago, my parents, Ray and Jeannie Crowder of Alabama, and our family served as missionaries in the small town of Keffi, Nigeria.

Daddy spent a great deal of his time each week traveling with pastors deep into the bush country to share the story of Jesus and help start new churches. The average temperature was hot — 100 degrees and higher! We had six months of rainy season and six months of dry season.

The first few years we had no running water or electricity and no telephones either. Most of the roads were almost impassable during the rainy season. There were no paved highways. These villages were accessible only by foot, bicycle or motorcycle. It took hours, perhaps days, to reach the remote villages.

Daddy learned of a special village several days from Keffi that had not heard about Jesus. The village had very strong pagan leadership. It would require many hours to reach the village even if one could travel there by vehicle.

Our family began to pray for a way to reach the village. For several years, Daddy submitted his missions budget to include the purchase of a motorcycle. It could make the difference in getting to these very remote villages which were impassable by car.

The extra funds for a motorcycle were continually denied because



Photo courtesy of Anne Crowder Lucas

Ray Crowder sits atop “Miss Lottie.” The motorcycle was purchased using gifts to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, and Crowder used it to take the gospel to remote villages while serving as an SBC missionary in Nigeria.

the Southern Baptist funds through the annual Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for missions had not reached their goals. There were more important needs.

After several years of praying about how to best get to that village, Daddy received the notice: Southern Baptists in the USA exceeded the Lottie Moon Christmas goal for missions! Funds are available for a motorcycle!

‘Miss Lottie’

With great excitement, we were able to purchase a small motorcycle. She was immediately named: “Miss Lottie” in honor of

those who gave to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering.

Shortly after the purchase, Daddy and a local pastor loaded some supplies and headed out to this special remote village.

After many hours of travel in the jungle, Daddy and Pastor arrived in the village. Children and dogs ran screaming and barking as they arrived. No one had ever before seen a motorcycle or a white man. As villagers peeked out from their huts and from behind the trees, Pastor found someone who could speak a dialect similar to what he knew.

Pastor explained they had an

exciting story to share. Daddy and Pastor began clapping their hands and singing. Those who knew my Daddy remember he always took his accordion with him. He began to play lively music, and villagers started cautiously gathering around. More than likely, he began with his usual selection: the lively music of “The Beer Barrel Polka.”

After some music, Daddy began telling the simple, powerful story of God’s love and Jesus. Pastor and the villager who spoke the local language each translated what he said. As they spoke, Daddy noticed what he described as a very old, wrinkled, skinny, dusty woman sitting on the ground. Her facial expressions and body language showed she was not happy with what he was telling them.

As he finished sharing, he told the people he and Pastor would be glad to tell them more. This little lady had men pull her up. She dusted off her threadbare skirt, and slowly came toward Daddy. She got very close to his face and pointed her finger at him, obviously angry! Her words were something like this:

‘A God who loves us’

“I have been the priestess of this village most of my life. My family has been priests and priestesses for many generations. I go from village to village searching for any new god to be sure my family and village are worshipping the right gods. I have always known in my heart there had to be a God who loves us. Look at these beautiful flowers and the birth of a baby. They have to be from something

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“A saving belief in Jesus is an intentional decision evident by a rejection of the ways of the world.”

BOBBY MCKAY

Pastor of New Liberty Baptist Church in Morton, Mississippi

beautiful. We are afraid of our gods. We sacrifice goats, chickens and fruit to make them happy so they will give us what we need. It doesn't work!”

With her finger wagging in Daddy's face, she said: “What took you so long to come tell us about this man you call Jesus? Why haven't you come before now to tell us about this God who really loves us? We are very angry that you were slow to come!”

An entire village saved

The priestess grabbed Daddy by the arm and pulled him with her toward a little thatched roof hut. He had to bend over to enter the tiny doorway. As he did, he was overwhelmed with the stench of dead animals and rotten food used to sacrifice to hundreds of idols made from all kinds of materials. The idols were stacked all around.

The priestess said in an angry voice: “You see these gods? They do nothing but sit here! We pray, we beg, we plead, we sacrifice what we have. They don't love. They don't care for us. You tell us about a God of love who has existed since the beginning of time. What took you so long to come tell us this wonderful news?”

Once again, the priestess grabbed Daddy's arm and pulled him through the doorway outside. She grabbed a piece of burning wood from the fire just outside the door. Daddy was truly not sure what she had in mind.

She set the idol house on fire and said, “Sit and tell me about this God and His Son, Jesus.”

The priestess became a follower of Jesus and an avid learner even though she was illiterate. Others in that village became believers that day too.

A couple of months later, Daddy and Pastor returned to the village on “Miss Lottie.” The people came out

laughing and happily inviting them into their homes. The whole village had become believers. The priestess excitedly told Daddy and Pastor: “I have visited all the surrounding villages and told them this amazing story of a God who loves and His Son Jesus. They have burned their idol houses and are now following Jesus. Thank you for coming!”

The summary of this story is simple. One year in the late 1950s:

► The mission's goal for Southern Baptists went above and beyond.

► A missionary in the bush of northern Nigeria was able to get a small motorcycle that took him and a Nigerian pastor far into the jungle.

► A very influential villager heard about Jesus for the first time.

► An idol house was destroyed.

► A village became followers of Christ.

► Surrounding villages became followers of Christ.

Your gifts to missions make a difference. This is one of hundreds of stories about individuals and churches impacting whole villages for the Lord because people gave sacrificially.

Financial support

The Lottie Moon Christmas Offering is a primary way in which Southern Baptists financially support their missionaries. It was started in 1888 in memory of Miss Lottie Moon who served as a missionary in China from 1873 to 1912.

As a teacher and evangelist, she laid a foundation for traditionally solid support for missions among Baptists in America.

Today, some 70 years later, someone is still asking: What took you so long to tell us about this man named Jesus?

“If you think about how many people you get to share Christ with each week, most people would probably say zero, but here, guaranteed, you're able to share Christ with a roomful of kids,” said **Bobby Talmadge**, a member of CrossPoint Church in Trussville. He has volunteered with Discovery Clubs — a faith-based after-school program — for more than 10 years, and noted he can see the difference it makes in the children spiritually.

Does it make sense to pray for guidance about the future if we are not obeying in the thing that lies before us today?

How many momentous events in Scripture depended on one person's seemingly small act of obedience!

Rest assured: Do what God tells you to do now, and depend upon it — you will be shown what to do next.

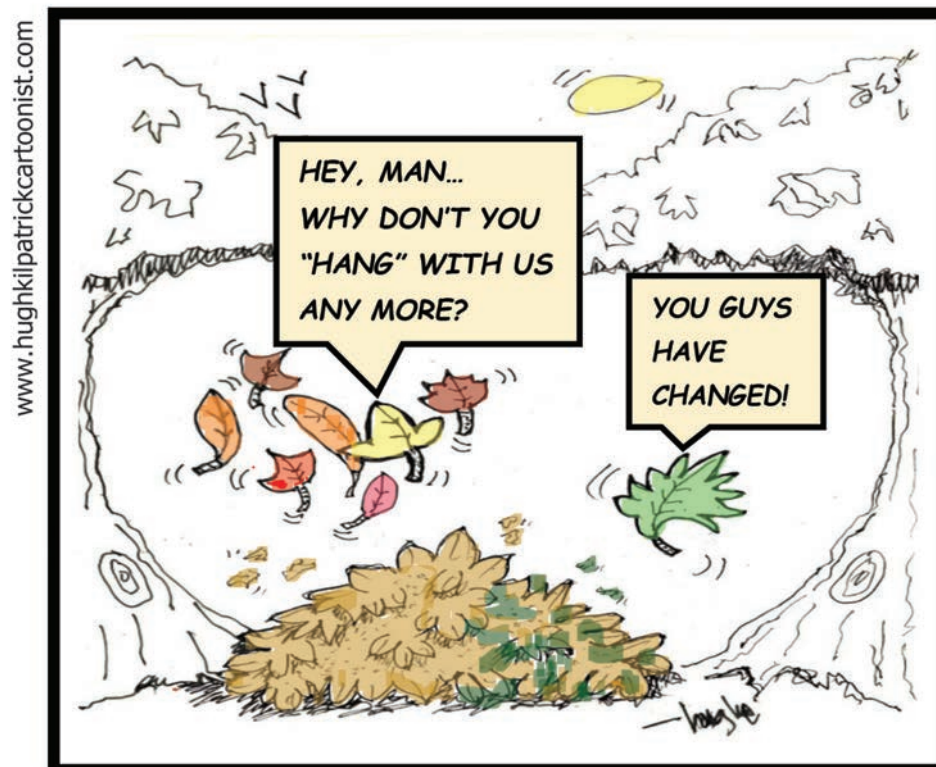
Elisabeth Elliot

“Quest for Love: True Stories of Passion and Purity”

“First responders deal with things most of us don't have to think about. I just wanted to find a way to introduce them to the love of the Lord. Wouldn't it be great if we could get them to our church?” said **Vernon Barnett**, longtime member of Second Baptist Church, La-Fayette, Georgia. The church converted an unused bridal room off its front foyer into a hangout for first responders.

“We see it as an opportunity to share the hope, the love and the promise that is in Jesus Christ, the Messiah,” said **Bucky Kennedy**, pastor North Hall Church, Gainesville, Georgia, after vandals defaced their church's sign that declared, “We stand with Israel.”

HUGH'S VIEWS – HUGH KILPATRICK III



THIS HAPPENS EVERY FALL!

3 stories you should know



Photo courtesy of Snead State Community College

Snead State Community College recently opened the Parson Closet, designed to provide needed clothing free to students for daily wear, interviews or special events. Thanks to local businesses and individual donations, the Closet has been stocked full of men's and women's clothes ranging in style and size. Pictured are SSCC organizers (l to r) Brittany Goble, director of student engagement; Janet Whitmore, first lady; and Caitlin Dickerson, math instructor. (SSCC)

McCoy addresses gender issues on radio show

Author Katie McCoy addressed sex, gender and identity issues and how Christians can respond on a recent episode of Priority Talk.

McCoy, author of "To Be a Woman: The Confusion Over Female Identity and How Christians Can Respond," spoke with Priority Talk host Greg Davis, who is also president and CEO of ALCAP.

McCoy, director of women's ministry for the Baptist General Convention of Texas, explained that she wrote the book because, as she was teaching in seminary, her students were increasingly encountering questions about LGBTQ and transgender issues.

Now dominant on social media, these issues have "pervaded all of society," McCoy said.

To hear the full interview, go to alcap.com. (TAB)

Church switching not the norm, Lifeway survey says

The majority of churchgoers have been at the same church throughout their adults lives, and among those who switch churches, a residential move is usually the reason.

The findings from a new Lifeway Research survey show 60% of church switches are necessitated by geography, specifically a move.

Among the other 40% of church switchers, changes made that they didn't agree with or feeling as though their needs were not being met at the church were among the reasons given for making the switch.

Also, nearly 4 in 5 (79%) of those who have switched churches agree that how their new church welcomed visitors positively impacted their decisions to attend regularly, with 49% strongly agreeing and 30% somewhat agreeing. (Lifeway)

Persecuted church

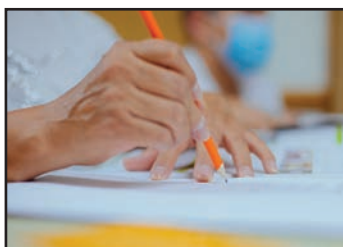
Husband in China reports Christian wife's tutoring activities to authorities

LULIANG, China — Chinese authorities sentenced a Christian woman to 10 days of detention after her non-Christian husband reported her for tutoring children.

The husband of Lishi Christian Church member Liu Cui reported her for tutoring six children Oct. 11 at a co-op group of Lishi Church Academy, stated the human rights group ChinaAid. After her husband informed the Education Bureau, Religion Bureau and Public Security Bureau, authorities raided the academy, confiscating Bibles and other materials. Authorities also gathered information on all parents present at the time at the academy.

The Communist Party of China has increased its effort to squelch Christian education. It has

instituted laws to force parents to send their children to public schools. In addition, the group has raided and outlawed house church schools and academies, as well as arresting academy founders and teachers, states ChinaAid.



Unsplash.com

Despite the scrutiny they suffer, many Chinese Christians still choose parochial or homeschool education for their children. ChinaAid says the majority of the approximately 50,000 homeschool families in China are Christian.

China is No. 16 on Open Doors' 2023 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

Christian student in Nigeria abducted, forced to convert to Islam

KADUNA, Nigeria — A chemistry student at Kaduna State University in Nigeria, Dorcas Ade-dayo Adekanola, 20, was abducted and forced to convert to Islam, according to the watchdog group Campus Mission Watch.

According to CMW leaders, Dorcas told her parents she had been taken to an imam's house, held against her will and threatened if she did not convert to Islam, Morning Star News reported.

As of Oct. 25, Dorcas was still a captive, according to CMW leaders, who said many students and staff members are being pressured to convert.

Nigeria is No. 6 on Open Doors' 2023 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

► **Ruford Burton Hodges Jr.** died Oct. 24. He was 91.

A graduate of Furman University with a bachelor's degree in history, Hodges also earned a master of divinity degree from Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

Hodges was a pastor for several years before he and his wife, Jo, were appointed in 1968 by the Foreign Mission Board (now International Mission Board) as missionaries to students and churches in Seoul, South Korea, where they worked until 1972.

When the couple returned to the United States, Hodges served campus ministries at UAB, UAH, Alabama A&M and the University of Alabama until 1981. He then worked at FMB as a missionary candidate consultant in Richmond, Virginia, and returned to Alabama in 1988 as director of Baptist collegiate ministries for the State Board of Missions.

He retired at the end of 1999 and became a hospital chaplain. He served several hospitals in the Birmingham area for many years.

Hodges was a member of Vestavia Hills Baptist Church.

He is survived by his wife of 65 years, Jo, of Birmingham; his three sons, David of St. Louis, Missouri; Stephen of Birmingham; and Philip of Homewood; seven grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.



HODGES

BLOUNT ASSOCIATION

► **Pleasant View Missionary Baptist Church, Holly Pond**, will host a singing Nov. 19, 5 p.m., with music by Refined. For more information, call 256-796-5986 or 256-338-9202. Everyone is invited. Earl Harper is pastor.

BUTLER ASSOCIATION

► **Spring Hill Baptist Church, Greenville**, observed its 150th anniversary Sept. 10 with a special celebration program at 3 p.m. The church began with 23 charter members and J.W. Fortune, who preached the first sermon from 1 Corinthians 3:16.



Photo by Erin Velo

Special music was provided by Danny Cheeks and Gary Ward. A recounting of the church

history was presented by member Bill Branum, and a certificate from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission was given to Claude Adams (left), deacon, and David Wood, pastor (right), by commissioner Dalton Campbell.

ELMORE ASSOCIATION

► **John Sparks**, pastor of **Bethlehem East Baptist Church, Tallassee**, recently retired. For 30 years, Sparks served at River Road Baptist Church, Tallassee; Center Baptist Church, La-Fayette; First Baptist Church Uriah; and churches in Georgia and Louisiana. He graduated from Louisiana Baptist University; Southern Christian University; Central Alabama Community College, Alexander City; and Light University. Sparks is a board certified Christian mental health coach. He is available for pulpit supply, interims, revivals and Bible studies. Contact him at 334-415-8330. He and his wife, Donna, have one child.

ESCAMBIA ASSOCIATION

► **Sherry Dunaway** retired as church custodian for **First Baptist Church East Brewton**, after 31 years of service. Macon Phillips, pastor of FBC East Brewton, presented Dunaway a gift and a love offering in honor of her many years of ministry.



DUNAWAY

MARSHALL ASSOCIATION

► **Fernando Vera** is the new Hispanic church planter at **First Baptist Church Albertville**. He will spend the next nine months in Birmingham in a Hispanic Church Planting Residency and will be on the field in Albertville by the start of next summer. Vera and his wife have two sons. Chris Johnson is pastor.

► **New Canaan Missionary Baptist Church, Arab**, celebrated its 150th anniversary Sept. 3. The display of historical photos, documents and a quilt from the 1950s was organized by Judy Miller. A special presentation was made by Joe Teal, commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, to Jerry Burgett, pastor. Many members wore old-fashioned



Photo by Joe Teal

clothes for the occasion. Dinner on the grounds and a special afternoon program concluded the celebration. Pictured are (l to r) Johnny Hallman, Reda Hallman, Patsy Dyson and Judy Burgett.

SULPHUR SPRINGS ASSOCIATION

► **Byron York** (left) was licensed to preach at **Bethel Baptist Church, Dora**. York was born in

Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil, while his parents, IMB missionaries Larry and Karen York, were in language school. He was baptized at Primeira Igreja Batista de Fortaleza shortly after. At 15 years old, York acknowledged God's call to the ministry while attending Bethel. After graduating from Carson Newman College, he moved back to Brazil and met his wife, Raquel. They have two sons. York will pursue his theological education at Conservative Theological Seminary. John Foles (right) is pastor of Bethel.



Photo by Deb Lowery

WALKER ASSOCIATION

► **Mount Zion Baptist Church, Jasper**, celebrated its 150th anniversary Sept. 16 with music, historical displays, activities for children and lunch. Former pastor Chris Pschirer spoke about the past; Patrick Benson, current pastor, and David Miller, Walker Baptist Association's director of missions, focused on the present; and Jeff Wiggins, pastor of Pisgah Baptist Church, Jasper, challenged the church to look to the future. David Nelson, a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, made



Photo by David Nelson

a special presentation. Pictured are (l to r) Teresa Benson, pastor's wife; Jeanie Clem, longtime church member; Patrick Benson, pastor; Shirley Rose Rigsby, longest and oldest church member; and Avis Ferguson, longtime Sunday School teacher.

WEST CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

► **Plantersville Baptist Church** celebrated its 175th anniversary Sept. 10. Church members David and Martha Wright, shared highlights and reflections of the church's past. Special music was provided by the Pullen Family trio, followed by a message from evangelist Chip Pullen. A plaque was given to Randy Tyus (left), deacon chair, and Jerry "Tater" Harrison (right), pastor, by Ralph Foster (center), a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Celebration items included printed copies of the church history, fans and traditional quilts made by Martha Wright and Treba Trotter in honor of this event.



Photo by Lesley Foster

DISPLAY OF LOVE AND COMPASSION

12 practical ways the Church can recognize and support caregivers

By Denise George

The Alabama Baptist

November is National Family Caregivers Month. Understanding the unique challenges caregivers face is the first step toward creating a more supportive church environment for caregivers.

Caregivers may sometimes feel like the “invisible” members of the church. Many attend church services infrequently due to their overwhelming duties, physical exhaustion and the emotional weight and stress of caregiving. As a result, they are less visible to regular attenders and often physically and spiritually isolated.

Caregivers often serve selflessly, playing a crucial role in assisting others and embodying a practical expression of love and kindness. The Church community should recognize and honor caregivers for several reasons.

Christlike attributes

Caregivers imitate the kind of love and compassion Christ displayed in Matthew 14:14. Recognizing caregivers affirms those who embody these Christlike attributes.

First Corinthians 12 admonishes the Church to uphold the dignity of all roles. By honoring caregivers, the Church upholds their significance in the body of Christ, ensuring no member feels undervalued.

Galatians 6:2 tells us to carry each other's burden, and that in this way, we will fulfill the law of Christ. Caregivers epitomize the act of burden-bearing by offering physical, emotional and spiritual support.

Here are some ways that churches can actively seek to involve, appreci-



Unsplash.com

ate and assist caregivers, ensuring they feel seen, valued and supported in their crucial roles.

1. Create a caregiver support group, establishing regular meetings for caregivers to get together and share their experiences, resources and encouragement. A support group fosters a sense of community for caregivers, providing a safe space for expressing their challenges and victories.

2. Providing respite care services, which provides short-term relief for caregivers, allows them to rest, recharge or attend to their own needs and appointments.

Show appreciation

3. Recognition and appreciation events organized for caregivers in your church demonstrate tangible appreciation and bring awareness to the congregation about their difficult roles.

4. Provide resources and training through workshops and materials on effective caregiving, dealing with stress and available community resources. This helps equip caregivers with practical skills and knowledge and demonstrates the church's investment in their role.

5. Provide pastoral care, prayer support and spiritual guidance specifically tailored for caregivers, addressing the unique spiritual and emotional challenges they may face.

6. Organize visits to caregivers by church members or ministry teams to offer social interaction, demonstrate care and provide an opportunity to identify future needs.

7. Assist with everyday tasks such as cooking, cleaning or transportation to give tangible support and to help alleviate the practical workload.

8. Facilitate ways for caregivers to participate in worship through

online services or recordings, ensuring they remain connected with the spiritual life of the church.

9. Provide financial support or assist in identifying and applying for available financial aid. This may help ease the financial burden, and it demonstrates tangible support for caregivers.

Communicate, connect

10. Ensure regular check-ins and communication with caregivers to better understand their ongoing challenges and needs. This demonstrates a sustained commitment to their well-being.

11. Provide access to professional counseling services or establish a fund to facilitate access to mental health resources, which will assist caregivers in managing the emotional and psychological stress that can come with their role.

12. Connect caregivers with legal professionals who can assist with wills, trusts, powers of attorney and other legal aspects related to caregiving. Help caregivers in navigating the complex legal landscape related to providing care, and ensure that they and their loved ones are protected.

When churches recognize the valuable and often demanding roles of caregivers and express love, admiration and support in tangible ways, they not only lighten the caregivers' loads but also communicate to them that they are seen, valued and loved by their churches.

Recognizing, appreciating and supporting caregivers is a testament to the church's commitment to loving and serving its members just as Christ loves and serves His Church.

November is
National Family
Caregivers
Month.

Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

Katharina von Bora, devoted wife of Luther

Katharina von Bora (1499–1552) was the devoted wife of Reformation leader Martin Luther.

She was born in Germany in January 1499. The “von” in her name indicates her parents were untitled and of a lesser nobility.

Katharina was sent to a Benedictine convent at age 5. At 16, she became a nun at the convent of Marienthron. She later embraced Martin Luther’s anti-monastic beliefs. In 1523, she and eight other nuns escaped the convent with Martin’s help by hiding in a covered wagon that was delivering fish. They fled to Wittenberg.

Admirable wife

Since no relatives would take the women in, Martin became responsible for them. He arranged marriages for almost everyone except for 24-year-old Katharina. She stayed with two other families until Martin proposed to her.

Martin and Katharina were married on June 13, 1525. Martin was 41, and Katharina was 26.

Katharina was an admirable wife, helpmate and nurse to Martin. He wrote to a friend, “I have a pious and faithful wife in whom the heart of her husband doth safely trust.”

Katharina always called Martin “Herr Doctor,” which was the

custom of the time. He often addressed her as “Mrs. Doctor” and “my rib, Kate.” She was at his side while he worked and studied.

She often copied his manuscripts for the press.

Luther was often ill during their marriage. Katharina nursed him through attacks of rheumatism, vertigo, dysentery, headaches and pulmonary problems.

Katharina was a gentle, caring mother. She bore six children: Hans (1526–1575), Elisabeth (1527–1528), Magdalena (1529–1542), Martin (1531–1565), Paul (1533–1593) and Margarete (1534–1570). Elisabeth died within a year. Magdalena died at 13. Their deaths brought great sorrow to both parents. Katharina also raised four orphaned children.

Martin was very generous with money, helping his poor relatives and entertaining strangers. He took expensive journeys for the Reformation, charged no fees for his lectures and rejected all offers of money.

After Martin died in 1546, Katharina was destitute and had to ask friends for money. In 1552, when the plague broke out in Wittenberg, she fell out of her carriage into a ditch of water, breaking her hip and contracting an unknown disease.

Her weakened condition led to her death on Dec. 20. Since women could not be buried in the church, she is not buried next to her husband in the Castle Church in Wittenberg. Her tomb is at Saint Mary’s Church in Torgau, Germany.



KATHARINA

By Joanne Sloan

Joanne Sloan, a member of FBC Tuscaloosa, has been a published writer of articles and books for more than 30 years.

New tools help instill ‘culture of evangelism’

By Michael Brooks
The Alabama Baptist

Pastors must be intentional in creating a culture of evangelism in their churches, and a number of resources are available to help them lead in this vital area.

“Jesus taught us that He is the Light of the World in John 8, but [in the Sermon on the Mount] He also said we are lights in the world,” Tim Dowdy, vice president of evangelism for the North American Mission Board, told pastors during a recent workshop in Birmingham.

“God gives us family and friends and connections so that we can share His love and plan for them. Evangelism is not something we do for a season or a day. ... It must always be in process.”

“We have programs, and these are good, but it doesn’t matter which program we use. We select what works for us, and then we must do it intentionally,” Dowdy said.

Free resources

The North American Mission Board has released a new evangelism kit, which includes a flash drive with videos and resources, a prayer reminder keychain and printed encouragement cards. Churches can order one free kit and purchase others as needed.

The video content is also available as a course, “Creating a Culture of Evangelism,” at learn.namb.net.

The course is free and available in English and in Spanish.

Dowdy, along with J.J. Washington, NAMB’s national director of personal evangelism, and Catherine Renfro, NAMB’s national director of women’s evangelism, lead the online class.

The course seeks to help pastors and others better know and understand their communities so they can better serve them.

“Barriers abound. Sometimes these barriers include language, race and even the reputation of the church. But with God’s help we can build bridges to our communities,” Washington told those gathered in Birmingham.

“We need to know our communities, and we need to serve them,” he said, noting that churches can request a community demographics report at namb.net/demographics.

Renfro talked about the value of prayer, which she called “the first step.”

“We must seek Him in prayer as we try to build His Church,” she said.

Renfro said Christians can pray for the unsaved by name, for opportunities to share faith, for boldness and for the Holy Spirit to give the right words at the right time.

Open doors to gospel conversations are everywhere, she said, if we “slow down and see the opportunities before us to share our faith.”

Find new
evangelism
resources at
learn.namb.net.



Photo by wirestock on Freepik

LOTTIE MOON CHRISTMAS OFFERING PREVIEW

Seeing fruits of financial gifts

LMCO helps missionaries make disciples, multiply churches among unreached people groups

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

For the past 12 years, Peter and Anna — International Mission Board missionaries from Alabama — have served in a difficult place among hard-to-reach people groups. “Because of the difficulties our people groups live in, it has been slow work,” Anna said. “We have been working on learning our third language for several years now, but with a family and lots of responsibilities that has been slow work too.” Because the area is closed to people who want to come in to share their faith, they have also had to do professional work in the place they live in order to have visas to stay there.

Though they see that as “a blessing and an avenue for ministry,” it’s time-consuming too, Anna said. So they’re more grateful than they know how to say for the support of Alabama Baptists and other Southern Baptists through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions.

‘So grateful’
“We are so grateful for the LMCO because we are able to remain on the field with our people for long periods of time without worrying about returning to the States to raise support,” Anna said. “We can educate our daughters, rent a safe apartment and get the language training we need because of the generous gifts of Southern Baptists.” Not only that — she and Peter have seen the fruit of those financial gifts

over time. Long before they moved to the missions field, another IMB family serving there had shared the gospel with a young man and disciplined him. “Many years after the family had left that area, we were able to meet this young man,” Anna said. “Through his friends and connections, we began meeting nearly all the few believers in his people group. He would bring over people he was sharing with, people he was discipling, and connect us to opportunities.” Through him, they saw people believe, be disciplined and be trained as leaders. “We still see him being used among his people group today,” Anna said. “It is amazing to see how God used the faithfulness of Southern Baptists to meet this young man’s needs and to grow the Kingdom.”



IMB photo
More than 3,500 IMB missionaries around the world depend on the LMCO for support as they share the gospel with the unreached.

Peter and Anna are among 3,521 IMB missionaries around the world who are supported by the LMCO each year. One hundred percent of the LMCO goes straight to missionaries who

are making disciples and multiplying churches among unreached people groups. A number of those missionaries — like Peter and Anna — are also from Alabama.

Week of Prayer
This year’s Week of Prayer for International Missions, set for Dec. 3–10, kicks off the season of the LMCO, which this year has a national goal of \$200 million and a goal of \$12 million for Alabama. Paul Chitwood, IMB president, said missionaries “are addressing the world’s greatest problem with the only solution, God’s solution — the gospel. But they need your prayers, your support, your continued generosity and more workers in the harvest.” For more information or to download resources like videos, social media graphics, posters and bulletin inserts, visit lottiemoon.org.

EDITOR’S NOTE — Names have been changed for security reasons.

The Week of Prayer
for International
Missions is Dec. 3–10.

LOTTIE MOON
CHRISTMAS OFFERING



National goal: \$200 million
Alabama goal: \$12 million

IMB photo

Week of Prayer

for International Missions is Dec. 3–10

We will reach the lost through ...

Day 1 — Obedience

In Belgium, some benches have a big blue bear statue that lonely people can talk to. Don and Pam Lynch meet people there, listen and share the gospel.



IMB photo

A big blue bear sits on a park bench in Belgium. The writing on the bench invites those passing by to sit and talk because “Warme William listens.”

Day 2 — Innovation

Justin and Mikaela Knippers use virtual reality to connect with people in Japan who need the gospel, then disciple them in real life.

Day 3 — Research

Ray Henry Holiday and other missionary explorers with Project 3000 backpack into remote areas to connect with unengaged and unreached people groups.

Day 4 — Partnerships

Matt and Gretchen Clay say their partner churches back in Florida have made a difference in northern Africa by mentoring church leaders there.

Day 5 — Church Planting

Randy and Kimberly Windham are passionate about training local believers to plant churches. They’ve seen 17 new churches started in Lusaka, Zambia.



Submitted photo

A woman prepares a special meal for guests to their church. Three Jacksonville, Florida, churches are partnering with IMB missionaries and churches in northern Africa to share the gospel.

Day 6 — Relationships

Rose, a Global Missionary Partner from Mexico, has access to a people group in a high-security area that her American teammates have trouble reaching.

Day 7 — Discipleship

Paul Yount, a Deaf missionary, shares the gospel with other Deaf through a storying technique designed to help them understand the Bible better.

Day 8 — Commitment

Robert Botta and others serve the people of Central Asia through disaster relief. This type of work gives people hope in the midst of crises all over the world.



IMB photo

Disaster relief ministries offer opportunities to meet physical and spiritual needs.

For more information or for resources, visit lottiemoon.org.

UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Give sacrificially to help share gospel here, beyond

As we approach the end of 2023, remember that there is still time to give to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering. Those gifts are received through the end of the year and help make an eternal difference in our state and world.

The offering is designed to complement vital giving through the Cooperative Program and helps support the Great Commission Ministries of Alabama WMU, Disaster Relief, Church Planting,

Partnership Missions and Church Revitalization.

Please continue to pray for these five strategic ministries and to prayerfully consider giving sacrificially to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering if you haven't already.



Myers-Mallory
State Missions Offering

As we build off our 200-year-long past and step into our future, know that your gifts

provide resources to help Alabama Baptists carry the life-changing power of the gospel to our local communities and beyond.



For more information, visit myers-mallory.org, or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.

2024 State Evangelism Conference: Jan. 28-29

Mark your calendar now for the 2024 State Evangelism Conference, set for Jan. 28-29 at First Baptist Church Pelham.

This free event encourages and equips believers to make a difference through evangelism. It will feature a Monday luncheon with a keynote message by Herb Reavis, pastor of North Jacksonville Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Florida.

Matt Queen, professor of evangelism at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, also will teach a session on "Getting to the Gospel" in our conversations.

Other speakers include:

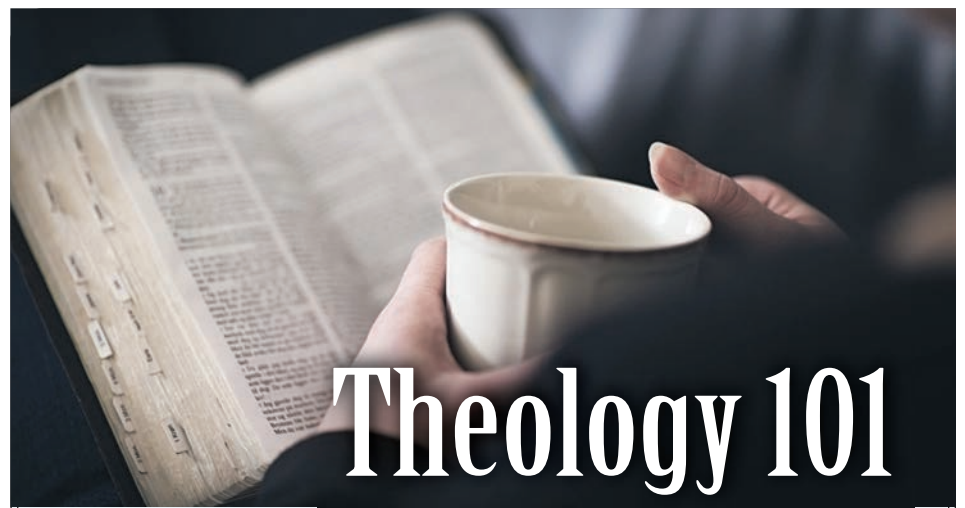
► Reginald Calvert, pastor of New Jerusalem Missionary Baptist Church in Bessemer.

► Jamie Dew, president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and Leavell College.

► Charles Carter, pastor emeritus of Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham.

► Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Can't make it in person? Watch the Sunday evening session online at live.alsbom.org. For more information, visit evangelizeal.org/sec.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Thanksgiving

Expressing Gratitude

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
The Alabama Baptist

If we attempted to catalog our reasons for expressing gratitude, the list would be monumental. However, if we narrowed to our most important reason, we could do no better as Christians than to recall 2 Corinthians 9:15: "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift."

John 3:16 identifies that divine Gift in the familiar words, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." Various English versions seek to express the idea of "unspeakable" with such terms as "indescribable" and "inexpressible."

How does one speak of Him who is unspeakable, describe Him who is indescribable, express Him who is inexpressible, take the measure of Him who is immeasurable or mine the depths of Him who is inexhaustible?

An attempt to do so would have to include quite a number of biblical truths about Christ.

Eternal Son

Christ is the eternal Son of God. This divine Gift was fully divine as well as fully human. We term this His incarnation.

Christ is also the sinless Son of Man. Though born of human lineage according to Matthew 1:1-16, and although He fully experienced temptation, He was altogether without sin.

Christ became the crucified Savior of the world. Even before His birth, He was identified as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

He walked in human sandals and understood human temptations without ever succumbing to them so that He might take away our sins.

As the Lamb of God, Christ willingly became the divinely provided Sacrifice for the sins of the world. Amazingly, the sacrificial One became our caring Shepherd who seeks to minister to the suffering, the straying, the sinning and the sorrowing.

Perfect sacrifice

As our prime reason for thanksgiving, this perfect Sacrifice for sin experienced resurrection from a death that could not hold Him. He triumphed over death, hell and the devil.

As we give thanks to God for His Son during this Thanksgiving season, we remember that He will one day return as the triumphant King of kings and Lord of lords.

When the final trumpet sounds and the archangel shouts, this Lord of glory will appear the second time to gather those who are His into an eternal future while fitting us for the new heaven and new earth so that we might be at home with Him through endless ages.

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.



Biblical inspiration

Thanksgiving psalms ‘celebrate God’s actions to bestow blessings, alleviate affliction’

(continued from page 1)

None of these impulses are uniquely Christian, or even religious. But hymns of praise and gratitude have been central to Jewish and Christian worship for millennia. In fact, they go back to one of the best-known scenes in the Hebrew Bible.

The earliest musical performance mentioned in the Hebrew Bible is “The Song of the Sea,” referring to two songs Moses and his sister Miriam sing to celebrate the Israelites’ escape from Egypt.

As Pharaoh’s army pursues the fleeing slaves to the edge of the Red Sea, God opens a dry path for them before closing up the sea to swallow the soldiers, according to the Book of Exodus.

The Psalms originally were sung mainly during rituals at the temple in Jerusalem. Scholars have speculated for centuries over the composition and sequencing of these Hebrew poems that form one book of the Bible. The 150 psalms include a great many laments, expressions of praise and gratitude, and quite a few texts that combine both.

Classifying the texts

Hermann Gunkel, a pioneering Bible scholar at the turn of the 20th century, developed a system of classifying the texts in the Book of Psalms by genre, which experts still use today.

What Gunkel called “Thanksgiving” psalms are texts that celebrate God’s actions to bestow blessings and alleviate affliction in particular times and places: healing from a serious illness, for example.

Gunkel’s categories also include psalms that refer to gratitude for more general divine actions: creating the cosmos and the wonders of the natural world or protecting the

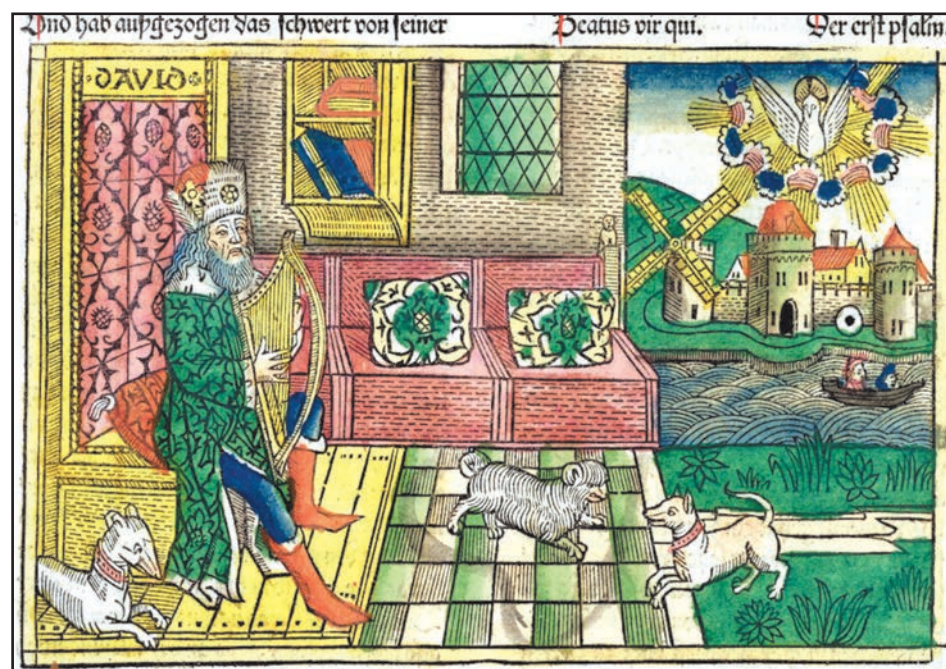


Photo by Historica Graphica Collection/Heritage Images/Getty Images

King David plays the lyre in a scene from a 15th-century manuscript of the Book of Psalms.

ancient Israelites from foreign enemies.

It’s hard to find a text more brimming with gratitude than Psalm 65, which includes verses very suitable for Thanksgiving Day:

The streams of God are filled with water

to provide the people with grain, for so you have ordained it.

You drench its furrows and level its ridges;

you soften it with showers and bless its crops.

You crown the year with your bounty,

and your carts overflow with abundance.

Though the original tunes of the psalms have been long lost, their words are still a mainstay of religious singing for both Jews and Christians.

Their key role in Protestant churches today owes partly to the

Reformation of the 16th century. Protestants decided that unadorned psalms, put into standard musical meters that matched existing tunes, were optimal for church.

Reformation leader Martin Luther loved music and wrote his own hymns with original words that are still popular today, such as “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.” John Calvin, however, insisted unharmonized a cappella psalm singing was plenty good for the sabbath.

Finding acceptance

Calvin’s judgment carried the day in New England, which was settled largely by Puritan Calvinists. In fact, the first book published in North America was “The Bay Psalm Book,” in 1640.

It took a century for hymns with new words to start finding acceptance in churches, and even longer for organs to make an appearance there.

Gradually these restrictions began to soften, even in New England. During the 1700s, hymns began to compete with psalms in popularity.

The key innovator was Isaac Watts, a talented poet who wondered why Christians couldn’t sing worship songs that referenced Jesus Christ — since the Book of Psalms, written before his birth, did not.

Yesterday and today

To modern ears, the difference between psalms and hymns is barely perceptible. Hymns often draw heavily on the psalms. Even a simple-sounding Thanksgiving hymn like “We Gather Together” contains no fewer than 11 allusions to particular psalms.

Watts, the Wesley brothers and several other hymn writers were part of movements that helped birth modern evangelical Christianity.

Some of the most famous hymns of thanksgiving and praise have been popularized by evangelical revivals over the centuries: “Amazing Grace,” by an 18th-century English curate, and “How Great Thou Art,” the theme song of world-famous preacher Billy Graham’s revivals.

Over the past 30 years, the booming genre of contemporary worship music, often referred to simply as praise music, has become the standard heard in megachurches and other evangelical congregations across the world.

Not surprisingly, praise and gratitude are inescapable themes in this genre — whether or not they evoke a Thanksgiving feast.

EDITOR’S NOTE — David W. Stowe is a professor of religious studies at Michigan State University. This article first appeared at *The Conversation*.

UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Alabama Association of Baptist Secretaries annual conference

The Alabama Association of Baptist Secretaries 61st Annual Conference will be held March 3–6, 2024, at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega.

This conference is designed for anyone who serves a Southern Baptist church, association or entity in an administrative capacity. Whether you are full time, part time, volunteer or even retired, you are welcome.

Classes are offered in a variety of topics including financial, technical and



computer, and other professional topics. The classes are geared to help whether you are new on the job or need additional training. There are also spiritual classes to help attendees grow in the Lord.

Enjoy times of learning, fellowship, networking, corporate worship and fun.

The General Conference Leader (Bible teacher) is Courtney Veasey, founder of Brunch Ministries. You can read more about her and her ministry at brunchministries.com.

We hope to see you in March.

Find out more about AABS and stay connected at alabamabaptistsecretaries.com and facebook.com/1AABS.

Registration is open at alsbom.org/aabs, and the deadline to register is Feb. 18, 2024.

There's still time to turn in your ACP

The Annual Church Profile (ACP) is one of the most practical ways churches partner each year with the local Baptist association, the State Board of Missions and the Southern Baptist Convention to prepare for the future. As churches take stock of where they are in key statistical categories, it enables the SBOM to provide re-

sources and offer training to meet needs.

"The ACP allows us to focus on collecting information that will give us a true picture of what's going on in Southern Baptist churches and helps us to be able to share that in ways that will advance the Kingdom of God," said Rick Lance, state missionary and executive

director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

ACPs can be turned in through your association or online at adx.alsbom.org.

If you need help completing the ACP, please contact your local association or contact Sandy Harmann at the SBOM, 334-613-2266 or sharmann@alsbom.org.

Get your tax questions answered at Early Bird Tax Conference Dec. 7

Do you have responsibilities involving your church's finances? Are you unsure about what is taxable and about forms W-2, 1099 and 941?

The Early Bird Tax Conference will help

answer questions to get you started out right.

The conference will be held Dec. 7 at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions in Prattville from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The cost of this event is

\$15, which includes lunch and materials.

To register, visit alsbom.org/event/early-bird-tax-conference-3. For questions, call Lee Wright at 334-613-2263 or email lwright@alsbom.org.

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

Place a classified ad below for \$1 per word. Call 205-870-4720, ext. 200, or email ads@thealabamabaptist.org.

CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Hepzibah Baptist Church in Talladega, Alabama, is seeking a pastor to fill a full-time position. We are an active, conservative rural church which believes and lives in the Lordship of Jesus Christ and follows God's Word. We are looking for a pastor who will lead and teach prayerfully and compassionately, meeting the spiritual needs of our community and surrounding area. See more about us on Facebook. Send two-page resumé and cover letter to: hepzibahpastorsearch@gmail.com. All resúmes will be held in confidence.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Mitts Chapel Baptist Church searching for a bivocational pastor. Please send resumé to: Mitts Chapel Baptist Church, 935 Cold Springs Rd., Deatsville, AL 36022.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

New Beginnings Baptist Church, a small congregation in Hayden, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor. Send inquiries/resúmes to: sonyahumber@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

New Life Baptist Church located in Bay Minette, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor who unashamedly preaches the Word of God. Please email resumé/profile to: newlifebaptistbmal@gmail.com or mail to: Pastor Search Committee, 15011 Glasgow Lane, Bay Minette, AL 36507.

WORSHIP LEADER/ MINISTER OF EDUCATION

First Baptist Red Bay, Alabama, seeking full-time worship leader/minister of education. Apply by resumé to: 602 4th St. SE, Red Bay, AL 35582.

MINISTER OF WORSHIP

Fairhaven Baptist Church, Demopolis, Alabama, seeks a called, gifted believer for leading and engaging members in worship services. Interested candidates may forward resúmes to: FBC, 1504 Cardinal Avenue, Demopolis, AL 36732 (ATTN: Worship Search Committee).

MUSIC MINISTER

Siluria Baptist Church seeks a part-time music director for traditional worship. Job description posted at siluriabaptist.com. Send resúmes to: siluriabaptist@gmail.com or 10696 Highway 119 South, Alabaster, AL 35007.

PART-TIME YOUTH MINISTER

Montevallo First Baptist Church is seeking a part-time youth minister. Please email your resumé for consideration to: mfbc@bellsouth.net.

DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Oak Bowery, Ohatchee, Alabama, is in search of a director of children's ministry. Part time. Contact Pastor Sam Fordham: DrSamFordham@gmail.com.

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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.reliablesigns.com

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DUPLEX

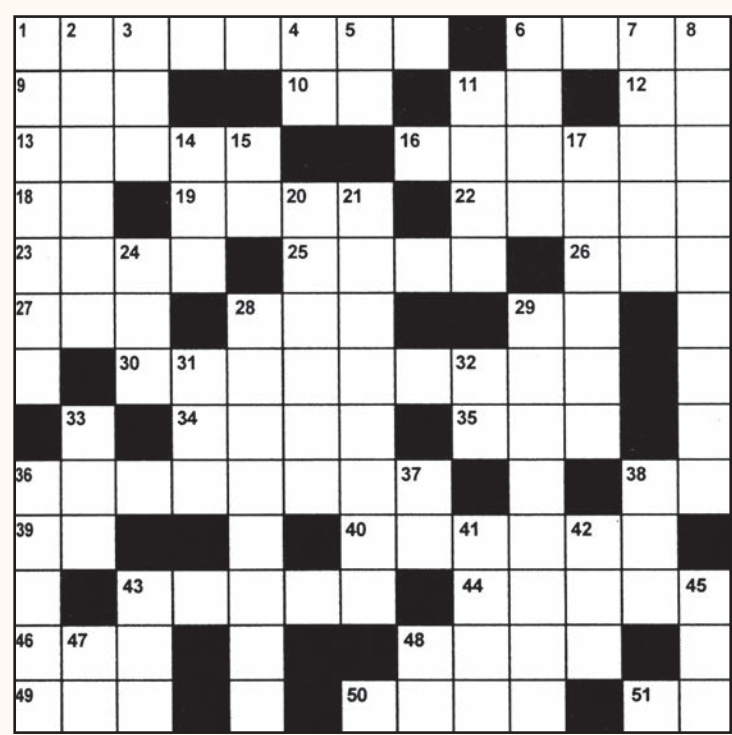
2501 Hawksbury Lane, Hoover. Duplex for rent. \$2,000 per month. 3 BRs, 2 BAs. Hoover schools. One-year lease. Credit and income verification. Contact Wayne Wheeler: 205-322-0627.

CHRISTIAN crossword

WORD search

ACROSS

- 1. With him on the sacred ____.
(2 Pet. 1:18 NIV)
- 6. And to brotherly kindness, ____.
(2 Pet. 1:7 NIV)
- 9. Absent. (abbr.)
- 10. Division of Scripture.
- 11. ____, I am with you always. (Matt. 28:20)
- 12. Biblical beast used in the fields.
- 13. Our Savior ____ Christ.
- 16. Combining form meaning "having fruit."
- 18. Hebrew combining form for "God."
- 19. Thy word is a ____ unto my feet.
(Ps. 119:105)
- 22. Draw out.
- 23. A more ____ word of prophecy.
(2 Pet. 1:19)
- 25. Spoken.
- 26. Religion. (abbr.)
- 27. Half of a kind of fly.
- 28. Not amateur.
- 29. A movie rating.
- 30. No prophecy of the ____ is of any private interpretation.
(2 Pet. 1:20)
- 34. Jacob's first wife.
- 35. Pea's home.
- 36. Noah ... a ____ of righteousness.
(2 Pet. 2:5)
- 38. Lieutenant (abbr.)
- 39. ____ else.
- 40. Our Lord Jesus ____.
- 43. Received from God ... honour and ____.
(2 Pet. 1:17)
- 44. They are all gone ____.
(Ps. 14:3)
- 46. Self.
- 48. Food regimen.
- 49. Thy ____ and thy staff.



By Rebecca Souder Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- (Ps. 23:4)
- 50. From his old ____.
(2 Pet. 1:9)
- 51. When ____ made known unto you.
(2 Pet. 1:16)
- DOWN
- 1. Were eyewitnesses of his ____.
(2 Pet. 1:16)
- 2. A mark used in old manuscripts.
- 3. United States Ship. (abbr.)
- 4. Indefinite article.
- 5. He, she and ____.
- 6. Our ____ Jesus Christ.
- 7. There came such a ____ to him.
(2 Pet. 1:17)
- 8. From the ____ glory.
(2 Pet. 1:17)
- 11. The father of Eliasaph.
(Num. 3:24)
- 14. Suffix meaning "small."
- 15. South America. (abbr.)
- 17. Cleaned totally.
- 20. Land where Abraham offered Isaac.
(Gen. 22:2)
- 21. For the ____ came not ... by the will of man.
- (2 Pet. 1:21)
- 24. Reserve. (abbr.)
- 28. Great and ____ promises.
(2 Pet. 1:4)
- 29. Through faith ... obtained ____.
(Heb. 11:33)
- 31. Quahog is another word for a ____m.
- 32. Direction.
- 33. If any of you do ____ from the truth.
(James 5:19)
- 36. The ____ and coming of our Lord.
(2 Pet. 1:16)
- 37. Blood factor.
- 38. Company (British abbr.)
- 41. He prayed ... that it might not ____.
(James 5:17)
- 42. Make all ____.
(Mark 6:39)
- 43. Holy men of ____ spake.
(2 Pet. 1:21)
- 45. Were ____ witnesses.
(2 Pet. 1:16)
- 47. ____ ye unto all the world.
(Mark 16:15)
- 48. Roman numeral 501.

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

- ABHOR
- BLESS
- BLESSINGS
- BLOODTHIRSTY
- BOASTFUL
- CONSIDER
- DECEITFUL
- DEFEND
- DWELLING
- ENEMIES
- EVER
- EVIL
- FAVOR
- GROANING
- JOY
- LEAD
- LISTEN
- LORD
- LOVE
- MAKE
- MEDITATE
- MERCY
- MORNING
- NAME
- PATH
- PROTECTION
- REFUGE
- REJOICE
- RIGHTEOUS
- SHIELD
- SHOUT
- SING
- TRUST
- UPRIGHT
- VOICE
- WAYS
- WICKED
- WORDS



Listen to my words, Lord; consider my sighing. Pay attention to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for I pray to you.

Someone You Should Know

GARY CURL

By Leigh Pritchett
The Alabama Baptist

Gary Curl, 76, of Tarrant, recently was recognized by his church for 50 years of teaching Sunday School. Curl, an Army veteran, is also a deacon and church treasurer. An engineer with a math degree from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Curl worked more than 50 years for what is now AT&T. Curl currently works part time in information technology. He and his wife, Donna, have two daughters and a grandson.

Q: Describe where you focus your greatest ministry efforts.

A: A few years back, I received a help request and used a flimsy excuse to turn it down. That haunted me. I made a promise to God that I would never let that happen again. If I received a request, I would do my best to help through the church. God began filling my bucket with people in need.

Q: Tell about a “turning point” in your life and how God was involved.

A: I was in the Army from 1968 to 1971. While I was in the Army, my church in West End disbanded, so when I got out of the Army, I had no home church to go to. The pastor who had been my pastor at the West End church, Jim Mixon, had moved to Springdale Baptist Church in Tarrant. Not having a church to fall back on, I decided to go to Springdale. Shortly after, I joined that

MINISTRY: Deacon, Sunday School teacher, church treasurer

CHURCH NAME: Springdale Baptist Church, Tarrant, in Birmingham Metro Baptist Association

LIFE VERSE: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)



church. Springdale is also where I met my wife, Donna. God arranging it so that I would come to Springdale was a major turning point in my life for many reasons.

Q: What has God been teaching you lately?

A: That He does recognize your good work. He does this through people recognizing your work. He also made me feel that any time someone asked me for help, even outside the church, that I was to help them. I am often disappointed by how the world and our country is turning from God, but God has shown me He is still in control, and the end to all this is still His alone. We as Christians must have faith and patience. Do not let discouragement win.

Q: If there were one thing you could tell your younger self about faith, what would it be?

A: Change your priorities in life very early on. I got away from God a bit while in the Army. I hated that I let that happen, and as soon as I was out of the Army, I set about to fix that. I wish I had been stronger in my

faith before I went into the Army. The change in priority should be that God comes first, period.

Q: Have you ever read a book or heard a song that changed the way you think about God and faith? What was it and what did you learn from it?

A: Very early in my life, the words to “How Great Thou Art” sunk in. That is my favorite of all.

Baptist volunteers return from Israel

The first two teams of Texas Baptist Men volunteers in Israel have returned home after providing more than 30,000 meals since the Israel-Hamas war began.

However, it isn't the war that dominates their conversation. They talk about the faith that motivated them and the people they encountered.

“Being a witness was the main focus for us going there,” said Genia Macon of First Baptist Church Lewisville. “Christians coming from halfway around the world is a huge witness for Jesus Christ. ... It's not our words. It's our actions. We feel like we're the hands and feet of Jesus Christ.”

Suzanne Shumock, a volunteer for TBM from Mississippi, said people in Israel were “encouraged because we were there ... that we were will-

ing to come and help.”

TBM has been feeding at least 2,000 people each day. In-country partner Emergency Volunteers Project now will focus on capacity building and making it possible for a field kitchen to increase the number of meals provided each day, TBM Executive Director Mickey Lenamon noted.

Changing opinions

People in Israel do not have much contact with Christians, and “most Israelis don't have the best opinion of Christians,” said Gary Finley, TBM's volunteer coordinator in Israel. The volunteers' presence in Israel is “breaking through the stereotypes,” he said.

EDITOR'S NOTE —
This story was written by Ferrell Foster and originally published by Baptist Standard.

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WALKING THROUGH DIFFICULT SEASONS OF LIFE

Pregnancy resource center in Jasper supports women in tough situations

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Jenny Odom said she loves all the ways she gets to invest in people at Pregnancy Test & Resource Center in Jasper. But one of her favorites is something that takes her staff out of the center every Tuesday and puts them behind bars.

“We call it our Second Chance program,” said Odom, PTRC’s executive director. “We have some of the best conversations ... at that program. The women are very honest; they have nothing to lose.”

In the Second Chance program, the incarcerated women who participate eat dinner together then take a class on a parenting or life skills topic.

Classes range from car seat safety and SIDS to addiction and resumé building.

“It helps us to give them a foundation of this is what a healthy relationship is supposed to look like, this is what a healthy lifestyle is supposed to look like,” Odom said.

The program got started about a year and a half ago when she and a friend at Walker County Jail served on a community action team

together and got to talking about ways their work might overlap.

“He had just mentioned that it’d be great to have somebody come in and talk to these moms who have experienced this or that, or who have a lot of risk factors present,” Odom said. “Many had lost custody of their children and were working to get into rehab.”

‘We can vouch for them’

She said when they first started the program, they found one woman in the classes that they knew because she had visited PTRC before.

“Since we had seen her, she had gotten on drugs and gotten arrested a couple of times,” Odom said.

The woman was able to get into rehab not too long after that.

“It helps when they want to go to rehab to say, ‘Hey, I’ve been doing these classes,’ and we can vouch for them,” Odom said.

PTRC staff also hopes to give them the skills to keep going when they get out in society, but sometimes it’s a winding road.

The woman they knew who went to rehab got pregnant afterward and found herself back at PTRC. The staff was able to help her navigate



Photo by wirestock on Freepik

all the changes happening in her life and stay on track.

“She had her baby and is doing wonderfully,” Odom said. “We’re trying to help her keep on the road she’s on, but she’s doing great — it’s like daylight and dark from the way she was before.”

For many women both inside the jail and out, PTRC is a support system to help them with resources and let them know they’re not forgotten as they walk through difficult seasons of life.

Resources available

“We do pregnancy testing and ultrasound, and we have prenatal and parenting education programs for expecting moms and dads,” Odom said. “We also have a variety of resources like a clothes closet and the opportunity for parents to get baby items and diapers.”

She said during the COVID-19 pandemic, the numbers of people

they served increased dramatically; in 2022, they nearly doubled from the previous year. So they began looking to move, and in September they were able to relocate to a space double the size of their previous building.

“We’ve got more room to grow and function,” Odom said.

Outside their walls, they’re growing too. In addition to their work in the jail, their mobile

unit allows them to provide services to people in Walker, Winston and Marion counties. That includes offering a one-day Baby Boot Camp at churches in different locations for expecting moms and dads who aren’t close enough to the center to make it to the regular parenting classes.

“We’re always trying to think of new ideas, new ways we can help our community,” Odom said. “Our ultimate goal is to share and guide them into having a relationship with Jesus if they don’t have that.”

Ashley Sims, nurse manager for Pregnancy Test & Resource Center in Jasper, presents at a Baby Boot Camp. The one-day event takes place at churches for expecting moms and dads who aren’t close enough to the center to make it to the regular parenting classes.



Photo courtesy of Jennifer Odom

For more information or to find ways to support the work of PTRC, visit ptrcjasper.com.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For November 19

Explore the Bible

By Robert Olsen, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



SACRIFICED Mark 15:24–39

Crucified (24–28)

Once Jesus is sentenced to be executed, the events that play out are fulfillments of Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22. For example, casting lots for Jesus' clothing is seen in Psalm 22:18, and Jesus being executed with sinners is in Isaiah 53:12.

Even the charge written over His head is affirming the truth that Jesus is the King of the Jews. In spite of their attempts at mockery, they were actually telling the truth. Jesus IS the King of the Jews.

All of these events are telling the reader that the events were foretold and that they should come as no surprise to us. For us today, it should not cause us to doubt but instead to be encouraged.

Mocked (29–32)

Even after Jesus was put on the cross, His torment did not end. Not only was He faced with the agonizing pain of being beaten and nailed to a cross but people mocked Him.

The sinless and perfect Son of God was mocked by the people He came to save.

This is a fulfillment of Psalm 22:7–8. Christ was taking the punishment we deserve by being shamed and scorned and mocked.

Because He was innocent, He could have come down from the cross and refused to have been humiliated in such a way. But for our sakes, He was bruised and beaten to pay our debt so we could be freed from sin and death.

Dead (33–39)

Once Jesus had suffered, He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" in accordance with Psalm 22. These words are often misunderstood to mean that

Jesus was confused as to why He was being punished by the Father, but this is not the case.

Jesus is showing the fulfillment of God's plan as laid out in Psalm 22, which ends with triumph.

The end of Psalm 22 shows God ruling in righteousness over the nations.

Without the crucifixion, this event would not come to pass. Jesus' cry is calling attention to the fact that the entirety of the Psalm is being fulfilled.

The crucifixion of Jesus was a necessary part of God's plan all along so that we could be made right with God. Since God is holy and perfect, He cannot be in the presence of sin.

As sinners, we deserve death and separation from God, but God loves us so much that He sent Christ to die on our behalf. (See Rom. 6:23, 3:23 and 5:8 and John 3:16.)

However, many modern non-Christian scholars say that Jesus was merely a regular Jewish man who stood up to the Romans in Israel and ended up getting killed as a rebel for His troubles. This is not the case.

Not only does the evidence point to Jesus' resurrection, but we can also see from these verses that the matching up of Isaiah and the Psalms to the crucifixion is uncanny.

What does this mean for us? It shows that God is sovereign over all the acts that play out in history, and when we can see the fulfilled prophecies in the Bible, it can bolster our faith to trust in the promises yet to come.

Knowing that God is faithful means that we can trust that our salvation is secure because the Bible, the Word of God, says so.

"And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed His last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom."

Mark 15:37–38

Bible Studies for Life

By Jeffery M. Leonard, Ph.D.

Professor of Biblical & Religious Studies, Samford University



IS HELL REAL? 2 Thessalonians 1:3–12

The opening chapter of the Book of 1 Samuel paints a very difficult scene. In the story, a man named Elkanah had taken two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. As is almost always the case in the Bible's stories involving polygamy, things in this story were complicated. Hannah was greatly loved by her husband, but she had never been able to bear him any children. Peninnah had produced children for Elkanah, but she remained unloved by him.

Those familiar with the Scriptures will know that Hannah did eventually give birth to a son, the boy who would grow up to be the famous judge Samuel. Of particular interest is Hannah's song of praise following Samuel's birth. This song in 1 Samuel 2 is one all about reversals. Warriors' bows are broken, but the weak are given strength.

The full go without food but the hungry are full. And in a not so subtle reply to Peninnah, "The woman who is childless gives birth to seven, but the woman with many sons pines away."

Words like those in Hannah's song are found all over the Scriptures. Psalm 113 sounds remarkably similar, as does the Magnificat, the song Mary sings in Luke 1 when she learns she will give birth to the Messiah.

At the heart of these passages is a longing for divine justice, a longing for God to "turn the tables" so that the weak will no longer be oppressed and the righteous will no longer be persecuted. We find this same sort of idea in the opening chapter of 2 Thessalonians.

God watches over His faithful followers. (3–7a)

Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians reaches a group of Christians suffering considerable persecution. Paul commends the believers there and taps into language from the Old

Testament as he directs the Thessalonian believers to remember that a time would come when God would make all things right.

The Day of Judgment would come, and these suffering believers could take comfort in the fact that on that day, when God "turns the tables" in an ultimate sense, they would be found worthy of God's Kingdom.

Those who do not follow God will face eternal destruction. (7b–10)

The day that would come as a comfort for those who suffer would come as judgment for those who caused that suffering.

Paul insists that God is just and will pay back those who afflicted them and give relief to the persecuted.

Paul's description here is not pretty. It is one that describes punishment with "eternal destruction from the Lord's presence and from His glorious strength."

We are called and equipped to do good and bring glory to God. (11–12)

A careful reader will note a nearly autobiographical element in Paul's words in the passage. As Paul describes the appearance of the Lord Jesus from heaven "with flaming fire," we are reminded of Paul's own encounter with the risen Jesus in Acts 9, when "a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him."

Those deserving punishment for not obeying "the gospel of our Lord Jesus" sound a great deal like Paul when he was traveling from town to town persecuting Christ's followers.

The sense of undeserved rescue from well-deserved punishment was what motivated much of Paul's ministry. It was what led him to pray constantly for the Thessalonians so that the very Messiah who rescued Paul could be glorified in them.

"To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of His calling."

2 Thessalonians 1:11

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Film adaptation of stage play brings ten Boom's story to new audiences

The Hiding Place,” a gut-wrenching 1971 book by Corrie ten Boom about her family’s experience hiding Jews during World War II, has taught millions about God’s faithfulness and forgiveness. A stage production of “The Hiding Place” has now been turned into a film and is reaching a new generation with ten Boom’s story.

“We had sold-out audiences, and I remember while I would be doing a monologue, I could sense the audience leaning forward. I have never had audiences be so quiet,” said actress Nan Gurley, who starred as Corrie ten Boom in the play-turned-film. “It felt amazing because I knew we were telling the most powerful story we could possibly tell.”

Gurley learned even more while playing ten Boom’s character.

‘Mysterious’ ways

“[God’s] ways are mysterious. We cannot figure Him out. We can’t base our faith on a satisfactory answer to the ‘Why?’ When you base your faith on getting a good answer for your ‘Why did this happen?’ your faith is going to be shipwrecked,” she said.

This version of “The Hiding Place” was written to honor Jean-



‘THE HIDING PLACE’

Photo courtesy of The Rabbit Room

nette Clift George after her death in 2017. George was best known for her portrayal of ten Boom in the 1975 film version of “The Hiding Place” and was nominated for a Golden Globe Award.

And years before the play was ever considered, God was engineering the circumstances for Gurley to take the lead. Growing up with her father working as a drama and music teacher and both parents as actors, Gurley landed her first role at 8 years old as Helen Keller in “The Miracle Worker” at a local college.

Throughout her life, she acted every chance she could and took master classes in acting.

For more than a decade before the play was even an idea, Gurley worked with Jake Speck, who was managing director for Studio Tenn Theater Company. During that time, A.S. “Pete” Peterson saw Gurley in

multiple Studio Tenn productions.

Then in 2017, Speck left Studio Tenn to become the executive director for A.D. Players. Not long afterward, Peterson was commissioned to

write the play. Though he had Gurley’s voice in his head while writing, he didn’t tell Speck.

Each independently knew Gurley was the one to cast in that role, but it didn’t end there. There was one other who knew it was a role for her.

“So Jake called me, and I knew instantly that this was something I had to do. To tell this story would be the honor of a lifetime,” she remembered.

After Gurley’s husband came home that day, she told him, “You will not believe the phone call I got today.”

After hearing the news, he responded, “You were born to play this role.”



Gurley started researching ten Boom’s life. She had read “The Hiding Place” in her early 20s, but that alone wasn’t nearly enough.

She read every book written by ten Boom to learn more about her life and faith. She watched every video she could find to learn ten Boom’s voice — English with a Dutch accent. She studied the script, not only to memorize the words but to learn the nuances and motivations of every scene and figure out how best to say the line with the appropriate body language and emotion. It was physically and mentally taxing.

“As an actor, I’ve never felt so physically weak — with a combination of physical weakness and Holy Spirit power — the greatest power I’ve ever felt on stage. I felt everyone watching, every head turn, every gesture. I felt them hanging on it,” Gurley said.

‘Life changing’

“It was such a combination of, ‘When I am weak, then I am strong,’ and, ‘My power is made perfect in weakness.’ I felt it more intimately than I ever have on stage.”

Those who watched the stage adaptation of “The Hiding Place” have had nothing negative to say, she noted. Audience members frequently describe the production as “literally life changing.”

“People just keep saying how powerful it is, how it moved them — people sitting there in the theater weeping,” Gurley said. “This is a story that spells that out and calls evil what it is. ... [People] risk their lives to stand against it. Every generation needs to see and remember and read about people in the past who have done that.”

“The Hiding Place” 2023 film adaptation is available for rent or purchase at lambdflagstudios.com.

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.

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— The Alabama Baptist —

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Misuse of state power

By staff

Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

Couple denied foster care application over religious beliefs

A Massachusetts couple recently filed a complaint in federal court against the state's health secretary and multiple officials in the Department of Children and Families after their application to become foster parents was denied because of their religious beliefs about marriage and sexuality.

Mike and Kitty Burke are a Catholic couple from Massachusetts who applied to become foster parents in order to care for vulnerable children in need of a loving home. Mike is an Iraq war veteran, and Kitty is a former paraprofessional for special needs children. Unable to have biological children, they sought to become foster parents through the state's foster care program with the hope of caring for and eventually adopting children in need of a stable home.

According to Becket Law, the nonprofit legal firm representing the Burkes, the Massachusetts DCF currently does not have enough foster homes or facilities to meet the needs of the children in its care, leaving over 1,500 children without a family. The crisis has become so extreme that the state has resorted to housing children in hospitals for weeks on end — not because the children need medical attention, but because the Commonwealth



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has nowhere else to put them.

The couple went through 30 hours of training, lengthy interviews and assessments of their home, health and family life. Despite meeting all the requirements, the DCF denied the couple because they “would not be affirming to a child who identified as LGBTQIA.”

The Burkes believe that all children should be loved and supported, and they would never reject a child placed in their home. They also believe that children should not undergo procedures that attempt to change their God-given sex, and they uphold orthodox Christian be-

liefs about marriage and sexuality. As the author of their license study put it, while the Burkes are “lovely people,” “their faith is not supportive and neither are they.”

Religious discrimination

DCF regulation and policy, as well as the Massachusetts Foster Parent Bill of Rights, all prohibit religious discrimination against potential foster parents.

As Becket Laws points out, the “Supreme Court has already — unanimously — rejected the attempt to exclude Catholic foster care agencies from the child wel-

fare system (*Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*, 2021). And the Third Circuit held that the First Amendment prohibits retaliation against foster parents for sharing their religious beliefs on marriage.”

Why does this matter?

This is another instance of the state “overstepping its authority and failing in its duty,” according to the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission.

“The state has no authority to penalize individuals for their religious beliefs,” they noted. “This is a bedrock principle of our constitutional order, and one that has been affirmed repeatedly in court decisions at all levels.”

Instead, the state does have a duty to promote justice, they said. One way it does that is through the care of the most vulnerable.

“A loving husband and wife willing to care and provide for a vulnerable child should not be seen as dangerous because they will not support dangerous and medically unnecessary surgical interventions for children experiencing gender dysphoria,” they write.

“No government should use the state's power to cause children to suffer by advancing a progressive agenda out of step with the actual goal of caring for vulnerable children.”

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A conversation

By Sue Sprenkle
International Mission Board

Missionary kids share faith, encounter ‘real Dutch experience’

Music and laughter waft up the path long before the teenagers on reddish-orange rental bicycles make an appearance. The long, single file line of Americans meander through the Netherlands countryside while locals zip past on their own bikes. When the team comes to a traditional Dutch windmill that serves as a rest stop, they dismount, feeling a little stiff and saddle-sore from the two-hour ride. The discomfort isn’t enough, however, to keep the horseplay and teasing from happening.

The teens’ playful energy draws an elderly couple over to visit. The man smiles big as he listens to their account of riding bikes from town to town in the rain.

“You are getting the real Dutch experience,” he says, noting that most in his country ride bikes — rain or shine — as their chosen transportation. The high school juniors and seniors explain their trip isn’t as much about biking as it is talking about Jesus with people they meet. The man holds up a hand to stop the conversation, shakes his head “no” and walks away.

Lack of interest

For most evangelical Christians here, this is the real Dutch experience — a lack of interest in anything spiritual.

The Netherlands is like much of Europe where only about 1% claim Jesus as their Savior on the continent. The teens on this volunteer missions trip find the indifference almost normal. As children of International Mission Board missionaries serving in Europe, or third culture kids, they’ve grown up amid spiritual lostness — but it doesn’t mean they accept it.

“My heart breaks just to know I’m walking past so many people who



Jackson Gainor and Trent Livingston, IMB missionary, lead the volunteer team made up of teenagers of IMB missionaries to their next point of ministry.

IMB photo

TO SEE A VIDEO, VISIT
TBPONLINE.ORG/TCK.

don’t know Jesus,” Arin Hesskew, whose family serves in Poland, tells her fellow missionary kids at the nightly debrief. “I don’t even know how to begin to pray for everyone we pass. It’s overwhelming to think so many we talked to don’t know Jesus.”

Heads around the table nod in understanding. They’ve watched their parents and local partners intentionally share the gospel through the years.

Now, thanks to the help of some church connections from Florida, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Missouri and Tennessee who offered missions trip scholarships and served as prayer partners, it’s their turn to share that same message.

Trent and Courtney Livingston welcomed the group of high schoolers to work with their IMB team conducting surveys and inviting people to a local church for an Alpha course introducing the basics of Christian faith. The survey cards are

designed to lead all conversations to Christ.

It’s just one simple question: “What’s the most important thing in your life?” The multiple-choice answers include money, family, peace, purpose, freedom, hope and love.

The Livingstons encourage the teenagers to follow up the answers with, “Why?” and then share about the most important thing to them — their faith in Jesus. Courtney smiles at the small group of students working with her and encourages them to give it a try.

Stopping to chat

A man in his 20s walks past and Jackson Gainor, whose family serves in England, stops him to chat. The rest of Gainor’s team circles around to join the conversation. The teenagers’ energy, smiles and fun-loving spirit is contagious and opens this man to talk. He chooses money as the most important. But as the teenagers share their own answers to the question, the man changes his

answer a few times before finally telling the group that religion “just doesn’t feel like me.”

This answer is a common one for the week. One of the teenagers jokes about it being an emotional roller coaster — one minute someone laughs in your face but then the very next person shows interest in knowing more about Christ.

‘Broad seed sowing’

“It might have been awkward at first, but we still shared the gospel,” Jackson said, adding that he was definitely out of his comfort zone at the beginning of the week but by the end talking about Jesus felt natural. “This was a chance for me to see that evangelism isn’t really that hard — it’s just a conversation.”

As a former youth minister, this answer makes Trent smile. He believes evangelism is something people “catch” by going out and doing it. He points out this team shared with 250 people as part of a “broad seed sowing” project, something he could never do that quickly on his own. The survey results help his team know what areas might be open to the gospel, allowing the Livingstons and their local partners to pinpoint more effort there.

Trent and other organizers of this missions trip want to continue to build the confidence of the youth to live intentionally on mission.

The adults also wanted to give these missionary kids a “youth group” experience — a chance to hang out with other teens; a time to laugh and be silly. As many missionaries do not attend traditional churches, these teens don’t often experience the youth activities common in U.S. churches. More important than the experience of the trip, however, is the opportunity to grow in their faith and impact Europe by planting gospel seeds.

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When your pastor deals with depression

By Chuck Lawless

chucklawless.com

More and more pastors are dealing with the issue of depression. The pain is often deep, and few pastors have immediate places to turn for guidance and comfort.

If that's your church, here are some of suggestions on how you can help:

1. Don't be surprised. It happens. Sometimes we pastors, too, bear wounds from yesterday, and we often carry heavy burdens from today. As I've written before, "dark nights of the soul" are not uncommon. In fact, historical heroes of faith like Charles Spurgeon and Martin Luther faced these kinds of battles.

2. Don't assume it's a sign of a lack of faith. Depression may well become a faith struggle, but it's not

an immediate indication that a pastor lacks faith. The issues are often much more than that, and pastors have a tendency to keep silent about all of them.

3. Don't take it personally. Depression can be a long-term issue with multiple causes, and seldom is one tough church the cause. That's not to say, though, that a tough congregation doesn't make healing more difficult. Church members who act like non-believers don't help anybody.

Patient understanding

4. Do pray for patient understanding for your members and healing for your pastor. Members may not fully understand the issues of depression, and they may first be surprised that pastors deal with such things. Pastors simply want

God to strengthen them and grant them victory.

5. Do offer help with counseling time and costs. Insurance should help, but additional costs might add up. In my estimation, a church has some obligation to help their pastor find healing — both for the sake of their church and for the sake of his present and future ministry.

6. Do find your own role in the church and serve fully. Depression among pastors is often exacerbated by their belief — faulty though it is — that they must do everything nobody else will do. On the other hand, you likely cannot know the joy and peace a pastor gets when his members serve well and thus remove some of his stress.

7. Do pray daily for your pastor's family. The stresses on a fam-

ily are great, and many families bear that weight silently and quietly. Don't wait until you hear your pastor's family is in trouble to start praying; rather, start praying now that the enemy would not devour their home.

8. Do encourage your pastor for a job well done. Too many church members just assume that their pastor knows their love and support, but their silence often says something to a leader who's already battling internal strife. A little affirmation can be more powerful than you might imagine.

Pray for your pastor today, and let us know how we might pray for you if this post speaks to you.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was originally published by chucklawless.com.