

SPECIAL EDITION

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

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The Alabama Baptist

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Rashional Thoughts

By Jennifer Davis Rash
President and Editor-in-Chief

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 @RashionalThts

As we navigate the years ahead, let's take needed steps to age well

When it's time to schedule and prepare for retirement, focus more on what you are retiring to rather than what you are retiring from."

We've routinely heard this type of guidance from experts who reference the importance of having a plan in place for the next season.

Those same experts and others also caution against taking on too much too fast, especially if it's out of fear of having nothing to do.

Take it slow when heading into retirement and attempting to determine what your days will look like. Ask yourself if you prefer developing a new structure to your days right away or if you would enjoy some unstructured time for a bit. Read more on page 8.

Pacing an important goal

Pacing is important, the experts say, as is taking some time to figure out who you are outside of the most recent role.

Much of the content in this edition of The Alabama Baptist offers resources related to planning ahead for and thriving in retirement. It's a time for exciting new opportunities and experiences, even with the adjustments that come with aging.

Mentoring, sharing life lessons through writing projects and volunteering to serve ministries and ef-

forts close to our heart are all great ways to spend our time, but only if we are truly inspired.

The cartoon below showcases what happens when someone gives the impression that he or she is willing to help but then becomes overly picky with what and when.

Getting a group's hopes up or

hesitating to decline when not interested costs time and energy for everyone involved.

Still, it's hard to feel like we are disappointing others. I've struggled in this area my entire life, and it's hard — but it's also vital that we monitor our responsibility level to ensure we are caring appropriately

for ourselves. Self-care allows us to give our best to the priorities in our lives and be of help to those who cross paths with us along the way.

As we navigate the years ahead, taking time to reflect on and improve the various aspects of wellness will provide the foundational pieces we need to age well.

HUGH'S VIEWS – HUGH KILPATRICK III



LET YOUR "YES" BE "YES" ...

JAMES 5:12

Your Voice



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

Importance of building emotional intelligence

By Gene Mason
Leadership Ministries Minute

Learning to “read the room” is a crucial facet of leadership (and it requires) emotional intelligence.

Known as your EQ, emotional intelligence is, according to VeryWellMind, “the ability to perceive, interpret ... and use emotions to communicate with and relate to others effectively and constructively.”

In other words, are you able to discern ... how others are perceiving or reacting to you?

VeryWellMind goes on to explain that those with emotional intelligence may possess:

- ▶ An ability to identify and describe what people are feeling.
- ▶ Self-confidence/self-acceptance.

- ▶ An awareness of personal strengths and limitations.
- ▶ The ability to let go of mistakes.
- ▶ An ability to embrace change.
- ▶ A strong sense of curiosity, particularly about other people.
- ▶ Feelings of empathy and concern for others.
- ▶ Showing sensitivity to the feelings of other people.
- ▶ Accepting responsibility for mistakes.
- ▶ The ability to manage emotions in difficult situations.

Emotional intelligence is a spiritual quality as well as a leadership quality. The Proverbs speak heavily on our speech and wisdom as important factors for leaders.

[Scripture points to] the importance of EQ in managing and building healthy relationships.

This is for all of life, but with respect to work and leadership, a healthy amount of emotional intelligence guides our actions and helps us to focus on wise words, wise choices and reserved and helpful actions.

How to develop your EQ:

1. Think carefully about your actions.

When you act, consider if what you are doing is helping or hindering the situation, and what your actions may be communicating to those around you. An emotionally intelligent leader’s demeanor should always be calm, collected, thoughtful and observant.

2. Harness and manage your emotions.

To have emotions is a part of being human. To act or react based on them, or to let them govern your actions, is a sign that you lack emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is ... responding with kindness, gentleness, self-control.

3. Under stress, consider the bigger picture.

An emotionally intelligent leader is observant not only of others, but of his ultimate goal in light of present — especially difficult — circumstances. If you are able to keep larger goals in mind through stressful moments, you’re also able to have empathy for others. ...

You cannot develop emotional intelligence if you are constantly thinking only of yourself. EQ takes an others-first mentality.

“A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back.”

—Proverbs 29:11

“There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”

—Proverbs 12:18

“Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit (better) than he who takes a city.”

—Proverbs 16:32

“Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.”

—Proverbs 3:27

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.”

—Proverbs 3:5

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

—James 1:22

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

—Ephesians 4:32

“Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.”

—Colossians 3:2

Joy is greater than happiness

Many people spend their entire working life reaching for what they want, only to find it is not enough.

It is only when we lay aside our chasing after what we think will bring success and happiness, that we can find joy, peace and a greater success than this earth can give.

Things to consider:

1. Am I chasing after my dreams or what God created me to be?

2. Am I living for one of those fleeting moments of happiness or for those awe-inspiring God moments?

3. How many of the items on my calendar this week are to help someone else rise above their apparent circumstances and not about me and my personal life?

4. Is accomplishing my goals as pleasing to God as it is to me?

George Yates
Church health strategist

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“I just thought I was busy when I worked full time — and then I retired.”

SAID ALMOST EVERY ACTIVE RETIREE EVERYWHERE

Life past 70 years old is a gift; don't complain. Your body comes with a lifetime warranty, guaranteed by your Creator God.

Be grateful for the time given us to work on sanctification. Don't resent growing old. Many are denied the privilege.

The aging process is part of God's beneficence, loosening our grip and focus on things of this world (idolatry), giving us fair warning that our end is coming, and thus providing the opportunity to prepare.

Which of the prophets and great men of God did He allow to continue in ministry indefinitely? Are you or your ministry greater than they or theirs?

We may be old, feel old and look old, but we don't have to think old or act old. Aging is not a time for retirement, slowing down or rest. Don't capitulate. There is much to be done. Find your God-supported niche, and work at it.

Bob Cosby, M.D.
Birmingham

The people to whom we minister and speak will not recall 99 percent of what we say to them. But they will never forget the kind of persons we are. ... The quality of our souls will indelibly touch others for good or for ill. So we must never forget that the most important thing happening at any moment, in the midst of all our ministry, is the kind of persons we are becoming.

Author Dallas Willard

Examine the nature and quality of your relationships. Are you more loving, more compassionate, more patient, more understanding, more caring, more giving, more forgiving than you were a year ago?

Author Robert Mullholland

For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things.

1 Timothy 4:8

“Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, today is a gift,” she'd chant to herself as she brushed her teeth. “It's not happy people who are grateful, it's grateful people who are happy,” she'd say as she brushed her hair. ... In a world where you can be anything, be kind. ... Then he'd discovered that routines were crucial. They created buoys he could cling to to keep himself afloat.

Author Clare Pooley
“The Authenticity Project”

I've read books promising hacks to kick my digital addiction. None helped. Then I picked up Samuel D. James' “Digital Liturgies.” It offered no hacks. Instead, it shows

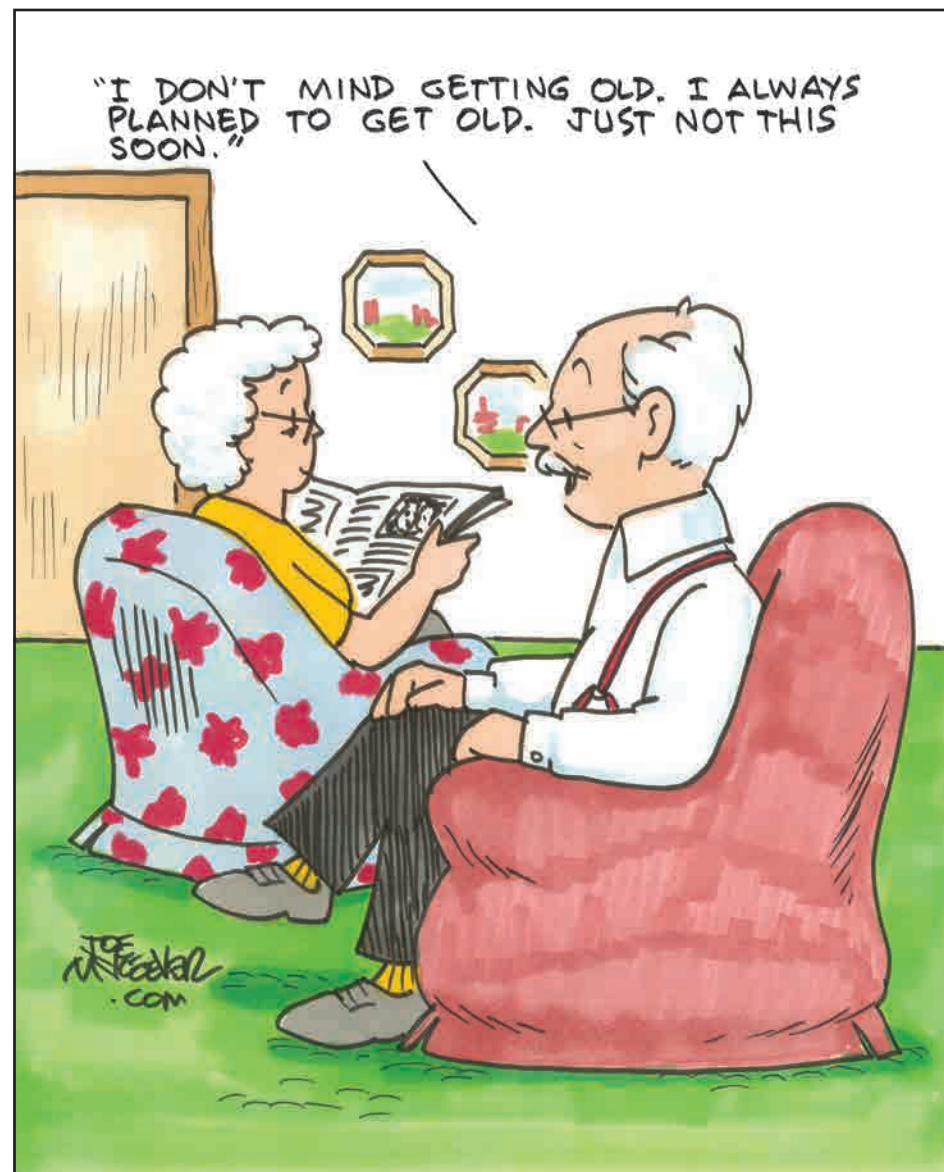
how the social internet habituates vice and emotivism. It made me sick of Twitter and hungry for God.

Without much effort I found myself on [social media] less. I discovered that Samuel's warnings re: how deeply digital tech shapes our pace, attention, presence and holiness ... were spot on.

If you're trying to move beyond tips and tricks and wrestle with the more profound ways digital liturgies shape what we love and who we are ... then I recommend picking it up.

@Patrick K. Miller
X (formerly Twitter)

Patrick Miller is a cultural commentator, author and pastor. He hosts the Truth Over Tribe podcast.



God bless all of us old people

By Pastor Michael J. Brooks
Siluria Baptist Church, Alabaster

I suppose it depends on who's defining “senior,” but AARP says 55+. Accordingly, some of us find ourselves in that category — even more sobering when we learn that we're a young nation with a median age of 38.

Some of us seniors are perpetually cranky, but most of us live with a good sense of humor. I found a list lately titled, “You might be old if”:

1. You gain 10 pounds overnight.
2. You'd rather sleep than go out.
3. Everything hurts.
4. Comfort comes before style.
5. You have a favorite spatula.
6. You also have a favorite burner on the stovetop.
7. Everything feels like a chore.
8. College students look like 12 year olds.
9. You're always annoyed.

Whether or not these items are accurate, most seniors do live with a sense of gratitude because we know life is fragile.

As the Bible says, “Your life is like the morning fog — it's here a little while, then it's gone,” (James 4:14). Thus, we're grateful for each day.

Seniors also have the wisdom of accumulated years. I often think of the old adage about how to make good decisions. The short answer is that you make good decisions after making so many bad decisions and learning from them. It's true: Seniors have wisdom garnered from mistakes, but also from life-long study.

Seniors are a valuable resource for our churches. Both the Old and New Testaments magnify the office of “elder.” These were the aged men who shared knowledge, helped in decision-making and decided court cases.

Seniors are a special group and a gift from the Lord.

Winton Patterson (second from right) retired Nov. 19 after 50 years as music minister at Circlewood Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa. His sons (from left), Paul and Mark; wife, Betty; and daughter Donna Cicero joined him for a photo at his 50th anniversary celebration Sept. 10.

Leaving a legacy

BY GRACE THORNTON • THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



Submitted photo

Faithful living week by week helped music minister reach 50 years at one church

In 1973, when the music minister of Circlewood Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa resigned, the church asked Winton Patterson to step in and lead worship until they found someone else. It made sense to him to say yes. He

was working with the Veterans Administration at the time, but he loved music, and he loved the church.

“I started singing in quartets at 14 years of age,” said Patterson, who had been at Circlewood since his family moved to Tuscaloosa when he was 6. “That’s where I fell in love with music.”

He hadn’t intended to be a music minister in addition to his full-time job, but after about six months, everyone started to believe the arrangement should be permanent.

And 50 years later, Patterson is retiring from leading the Circlewood choir and congregation in singing every Sunday.

“It’s been a good journey,” he said. “I love the people here. They’ve always been good to me.”

His wife, Betty, said even though she felt strongly that God was calling

her husband as minister of music in 1973, neither of them ever would’ve thought 50 years ahead.

“God used his talent from that young age. He had a plan for his life,” she said. “You don’t think in terms of longevity; it’s just a weekly ministry.”

Patterson said one of the keys to his 50 years at the church has been his time spent with God.

“I depend on my prayer life,” he said.

He said he also has “a really strong family that is supportive in everything I do.”

His son, Mark — who serves as worship pastor at North River Church in Tuscaloosa — said watching his dad love people well and faithfully

serve the Circlewood congregation has inspired him in his ministry.

“He has taught me that you must love before you can lead,” said Mark Patterson, who has been serving at North River Church for 16 years, and whose son, Brown, also now serves on the worship team at Valley View Baptist Church.

“He has taught me that ministry is not about you and your talents but about your willingness to allow the

Lord to use you in always pointing people toward Christ.”

Betty Patterson recalled when their daughter, Donna Cicero, came to her and said, “Mama, I want to make a difference in people’s lives like Daddy does.”

After nine years of directing the second grade show choir at Taylorville Primary School, Cicero joined Circlewood’s staff in 2011 as children’s minister.

In that role, one of her ministry outlets is leading the children’s chorus programs.

She said she has been inspired and challenged by her father’s “steadfastness and love of music, and really Daddy taught us a servant’s heart growing up.”

Serving out of sacrifice

“I am grateful for Daddy’s example,” Cicero said. “Daddy always taught us that you serve out of commitment, not convenience. We always serve the Lord out of our sacrifice, not just when it’s convenient.”

Winton Patterson’s son, Paul, who serves as judge of the Northport Municipal Court and is a member of Circlewood, said he wishes every young person could grow up in a loving home like the one his parents provided.

“My dad has always been the rock

of our family and lived out his faith at home and church,” Paul Patterson said. “His ministry has been faithfully supported by my mom, and his legacy and ministry will continue to be felt for years to come.”

Cooperative spirit

Winton Patterson said in addition to his walk with God and his family’s support, something else that made it possible to stay at Circlewood for 50 years was his friendship with pastor Herb Thomas, who has been there almost as long as he has.

“We work so closely together — we’re very good friends and share things with each other,” Patterson said. “I think a close relationship with your pastor is one of the main keys of longevity as a music minister.”

Thomas agreed that the cooperative spirit of their friendship had been a bedrock of both of their long stays at the church.

“He’s also a great man of integrity and honesty; what he says, he does, and everyone loves him because of that,” he said, noting Patterson had adapted the music through the years as needed and grew a choir program that’s still strong today. “He’s very faithful and dependable and willing to work with everyone.”

**“God used his talent from that young age.
He had a plan for his life.”**

Betty Patterson
Winton Patterson’s wife



Photo by Donna Cicero

A love for music combined with a love for the church led Winton Patterson to his unexpected co-vocational role.

Living out life on purpose

BY GRACE THORNTON • THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

Endurance athlete says exercise, faith keeps him going physically, spiritually

Johnny Montgomery said doing the best he can to keep his body active is important to him — important because he knows his purpose.

“If I wasn’t in good shape, I wouldn’t have the stamina to hold up to do these things,” he said.

By “these things,” he means help the people God puts in his path as he goes about his life and his work as a realtor. That could mean helping a man who needs a friend to walk with him through rehab, or a woman who needs someone to help her load her furniture as she moves out of an abusive situation.

“It’s a humbling kind of adrenaline to be able to throw some dollies under a washer and dryer and get them in my truck if I have to,” Montgomery said. “I know my purpose here. I should’ve been dead a long time ago, but since I’m still here, my purpose is Luke 10:2 — ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.’”

Back when Montgomery was 44, he and his wife divorced, and he became a single parent — and a full-blown alcoholic. It wasn’t his first experience with using alcohol to cope — he’d done that also about 15 years before, after his mother had been murdered.

“I should’ve been dead — all recovering alcoholics should’ve been dead some way at some time,” he

said. But one day in 1990, Montgomery quit drinking. And not long after that, he walked into the office of Gary Fenton, then pastor of Dawson Memorial Baptist Church in Birmingham.

Finding Jesus

“There was still a lot of sin in my life, and I told him that there was stuff that’s eating on me that may draw me back to drinking, and if I go back, I may not come back,” Montgomery said.

Fenton led Montgomery to the Lord right then and there. And Montgomery set out on a journey to figure out how to live out the rest of his life on purpose — and be fit and ready for whatever that purpose was.

He had already finished one Ironman World Championship in Hawaii, a race that involves a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bike and a 26.2-mile run. He did eight more Ironman World Championships after that.

He started racing for Team USA in other countries and won his age group in a world championship in Canada.

“You’ve only got one body — take care of it,” Montgomery said. “But it’s more than running, biking and swimming that keeps me conditioned — Dawson Church keeps me conditioned too.”

He said as he’s aged, he’s tried



Photo courtesy of Johnny Montgomery
Johnny Montgomery has done nine Ironman World Championships and raced for Team USA.



Photo by Grace Thornton/The Alabama Baptist

Johnny Montgomery, a member of Dawson Memorial Baptist Church in Birmingham, says physical activity keeps him conditioned — but even more importantly, his faith does.

to keep both his body and his mind ready to serve the Lord. He and his wife, Liz, are active members of Dawson. When he experienced a second murder in his family (this time his daughter, Megan, in 2019), Montgomery said he turned to God instead of alcohol to help him weather the storm.

Helping those in his path

He also found that a new component of his purpose was helping women who are facing domestic violence. Part of that is through the Megan Montgomery Foundation started in his daughter’s name.

“God puts people in my path for a reason, and I help them all I can,” Montgomery said.

He remembers when Fenton was there for him, along with current

Dawson pastor David Eldridge. He said the pastors were the first two people to show up at his house after his daughter’s death, and he’ll never forget that.

“I want to be there for others too,” Montgomery said. “I want to share that God can give us the peace to get through our storms.”

Now 78, Montgomery said God is using his life’s journey to help others, and he wants to continue doing that for as long as possible.

“It’s not about me; it’s about how great and wonderful my God is,” Montgomery said.

Fenton said Montgomery is “an example of the transforming power of Christ. He is enthusiastic about his relationship with Christ and just as enthusiastic about the new life that follows.”

Retirement planning tips

COMPILED READER RESPONSES • THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

Alabama Baptists who have retired in recent years share insights from their experiences

At 83, I still live independently. I've been retired for 31 wonderful years now. My advice is to remember God has you here for a purpose, and it's important to figure out what it is. A few of my suggestions when preparing for retirement:

1. Consider what you are retiring to. I had a long bucket list, and it's still a long one.

2. Hopefully you are blessed enough that your finances aren't a problem. The big question is, what are you going to do with the life God has given you? For me, I had much more time volunteering for the church. While moving from Illinois

to Alabama, and now much older, there is still much satisfaction doing for the Lord what I can.

3. I wish I would have known much more about investments. All the options available today were not there for me. It is never too late or too early to open a mutual fund account. Save now for the future. If the Lord returns tomorrow, you will never miss it. If the Lord tarries, you'll need it.

4. The most practical thing you can do is become knowledgeable about retirement. There are many helps available. Don't retire ignorant of all the free advice available.

5. Your retirement will be

felt by all those around you. Include them in your plans, and tell them what you are thinking. Listen to what they have to say. As Christians, we are in this together.

6. It is never too soon to prepare for the next phase of your life. You spent 12 to 18 years preparing for adult life plus a career, job, profession. This is not a burden. For us, it was enjoyable, much like playing a table game — what if, best case, worst case, etc.

7. When I first retired, there was a feeling of relief from supervision for 25 years. What a great feeling knowing I was responsible for family and family alone.

A little about me — my

nearly 30 years as a police officer was a calling from the Lord. I had many opportunities to tell hurting people about God's love. Before serving the Peoria, Illinois, police department, I spent four years in the U.S. Navy. My wife, Paula, and I were married 47 years before she died from breast cancer. I have two daughters and one son, all willing and able to care for me.

Tony Berry
Foley

So you're retiring? Here are a few pointers based on been-there-done-that personal experience.

► **Get comfortable with your finances, the sooner**

the better. Before you retire, familiarize yourself with Social Security rules. You will need Part A and Part B. Learn how to file-and-suspend and what it can mean for you. Working an additional time after your official Social Security full retirement date can result in significant additional monthly payments.

Understand your employer's pension plan, 401(k), 403(b), IRAs and other funds, and how you can use them to your advantage (your bank or credit union may be able to help).

If you're retired military, learn about Tricare For Life and its benefits for you and your spouse.

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much too soon. It may be a year or two before you are comfortable with retirement. It's a new journey, so take your time and enjoy the ride.

Don Shipp
Birmingham

What are some practical do's and don'ts related to retirement?

You don't retire FROM something, you retire TO something. If you don't have anything to retire TO, don't retire.

Many retirees have said to me, "I'm so busy, I don't know how I had time to work all those years."

They haven't learned how to say "No." There is no limit to the demand for free labor.

Say "No" for the first year until you have adjusted to your new normal.

How far in advance should we think about and prepare for retirement?

When you start your first job. Like a good chess player, you must have an end game and a strategy to get there.

If you just "let it happen," you'll be disappointed with the result.

Along with thinking through and setting goals re-

lated to finances, you should also consider how you are going to spend your time.

Following your spouse around the house all day is not healthy for either one of you. Playing golf every day may seem like a life goal, but a month later you will be burned out.

You spent years chasing success and spent less time chasing significance; retirement gives you the opportunity to chase significance.

Put your efforts into those things that pay eternal dividends.

James D. Fisk
Doctor of Optometry
Birmingham

I've been retired a few years now after 38 years of teaching. I loved teaching. I am doing all the things I wanted to do. I went to Israel and did volunteer work with the Israeli Army.

I joined the Calhoun Baptist Disaster Relief team. I've been on several deployments. I work with the Calhoun Baptist Raceway Ministries team. I've been to Honduras with Golden Springs Baptist Church. There are so many good ministries to help with.

I often say I'm living my best life now, even though I thought I was when I was teaching.

Gina Hardman
Oxford

You asked us to share about retirement:

I love being retired. What a joy it has been to have so much freedom. I feel like every day is a holiday now. No setting alarms to get up. No hurrying anywhere anymore. No job responsibilities. I feel so relaxed and free. What a blessing.

I have more time now to take walks, study my Bible and most of all pray.

I love praising God as I walk. I have the time now. I have enjoyed every minute of it.

I have more time during the week to prepare to teach my dear little ladies in Sunday School. I love teaching the Word of God.

What wonderful joy it is celebrating my sunset years with the retirement I have worked to achieve.

God is so very good to me. He is to be praised and praised.

Sherra Claunch
Alexander City

► **Don't get in a hurry to do things.** This is a major transition. Chill out for a month or two or three before looking at what to do more long term, but keep in mind that boredom is your worst enemy.

Dig in the garden, make minor home repairs, wash the car and do other little things. A bored mind quickly ceases to be a nimble mind. Consider a part-time job.

► **Spend time with close family, but not too much at first.** They, as well as you, will be getting used to your change in work status. They, as well as you, will need an adjustment period.

► **Read a few books, and I don't mean heavy topics.** Reading should be fun. Hit the library. If you had some favorite writers from your past, read their works again and look for their newer products.

Rediscovering a favorite author is like going back to your childhood home and finding it exactly as you remember it. After that, find other authors. Kindle can be your friend.

► **Keep doing something you like doing now.** If you're in your church choir, stay there and volunteer for an ensemble.

Alabama Singing Men and Alabama Singing Women are always looking for new members.

Do part-time work around the church. Light bulbs always need to be changed. Wednesday night meals always need to be served. The Alabama Baptist might need your help, so ask them where they can use you.

► **Educate yourself.** Take courses, in person or online, at a local university or junior college.

Visiting the World War II Museum in New Orleans is one of our most fond memories. We have been there twice and plan to go again in June next year for the 80th Anniversary of Operation Overlord, riding Amtrak on the way to and from NOLA.

There are other such destinations within a day's drive of Alabama. Find them and just go.

► **Travel, locally at first, then farther afield.** Reunions of family, friends, military buddies and coworkers can be fun, especially when you realize you still laugh at the same silly jokes.

Our church sponsored a Reformation Tour of Great Britain last spring, which my wife and I joined. We consider it one of the major events of our lives not only because we saw the astoundingly beautiful country, but we learned much history of the Reformation our churches never taught us before.

► **Again, don't get in a hurry and try to do too**



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Having 'peace of mind'

BY DAVID ROACH • THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

Estate planning provokes many emotions but yields 'immediate peace' for families

Sam and Katie Fordham had discussed estate planning, including the care of their three children. They even told their families their decisions, but the plan had never been put on paper. That's where The Baptist Foundation of Alabama stepped in to help.

"Discussing one's estate and making decisions for end of life is not fun," the Fordhams told The Alabama Baptist. Sam is pastor of Oak Bowery Baptist Church in Ohatchee. "It is emotional to think about preparing a plan for your children in the event God takes you home."

However, they said, "once we were done, there was immediate peace knowing that we planned as best we could for our children."

Drafting a will

The Fordhams are one of many families that have been assisted by The Baptist Foundation of Alabama in drafting a will.

Rodney Bledsoe, the Foundation's director of ministry engagement, says a will ensures your assets are distributed to loved ones as God leads you rather than as the state determines.

"The state of Alabama has written a will for everyone regardless of whether or not you have written one," Bledsoe said.

"It may or may not be

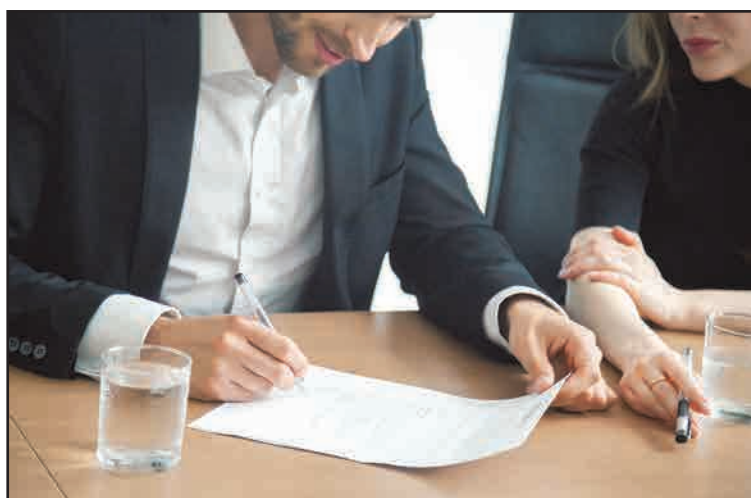


Photo by yanalya on Freepik

what you would want to accomplish if the Lord took you home before you're ready. A will lets you pass the things the Lord has blessed you with to the next generation in the way you have prayed about and feel led to do."

Matters can get complex when someone dies without a will. Typically, the deceased person's spouse inherits \$50,000 to \$100,000 plus half of the remaining assets.

The other half is distributed among surviving family members. The distribution formula changes depending on the deceased individual's family situation.

"Nobody plans to die before they're ready," Bledsoe said, noting an affordable and simple way to create a will before it's too late.

The Foundation partners with a ministry called

PhilanthroCorp to help Alabama Baptists determine their estate plans.

That includes thinking through tax implications and the best ways to transfer funds to loved ones.

Once the plan is established, an informal network of attorneys around the state helps the foundation's clients by drafting their wills at an affordable rate.

Typically, a basic will with an accompanying power of attorney, enabling someone else to make financial decisions when the person can no longer act on their own behalf, costs \$500 to \$1,000.

Prioritizing

That may seem like a lot, Bledsoe said, but it's a matter of priorities.

"I know what people spend on cell phones (and family vacations)," he said.

"In the end, many people don't want to spend money

on a will because they don't think they need to."

After the will has been drafted, an advocate with either the Foundation or PhilanthroCorp will review it to make sure nothing has fallen through the cracks.

"We like to hold your hand and make sure everything is working the way it should," Bledsoe said.

James and Jerilyn Smith are among those who have benefitted from the Foundation's services.

Before moving overseas as International Mission Board representatives years ago, they had prepared a will.

More recently, they updated it with a computer program but lacked confidence their estate plan would stand

up in court if challenged.

They connected with the Foundation because of James' ministry as director of missions for Tallapoosa Baptist Association. Updating their will, they said, gave them "peace of mind."

'Supportive'

"There was no pressure on how we should leave our estate or feeling of judgment based on the size of our estate," they said in a written testimonial.

"Everyone was very supportive and dedicated to fulfilling our desire to leave an inheritance for each of our children and grandchildren, but also to give to Christian ministries dear to us to help extend God's Kingdom."



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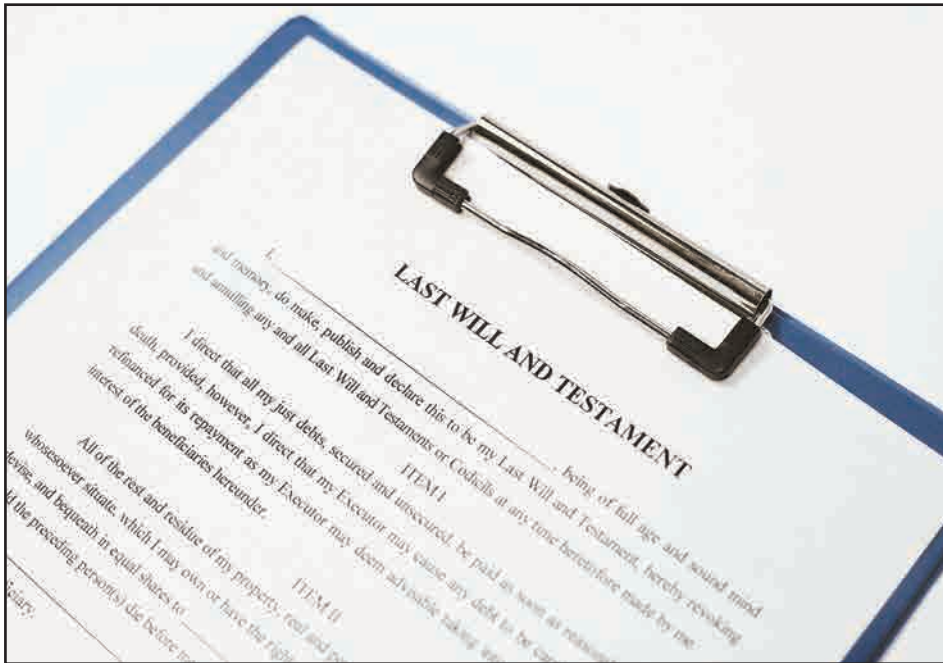


Photo by wirestock on Freepik

'It's all God's'

BY DAVID ROACH • THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

Estate giving fuels ministry beyond this life, passes on legacy of generosity

Rod Marshall, president of the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries, will never forget the day the executor of Herman and Janie Ensor's estate slid a folder across the desk to him. Inside the folder was notification that the entire estate of the Ensors was being given to ABCH.

"This represents the legacy of the Ensors, and they are

entrusting it to you. Be careful what you do with it," the executor told Marshall. Herman Ensor was a Cullman physician, and he and his wife had no children.

Serving children

The gift was utilized to build the Ensor Cottage and a multipurpose duplex on the ABCH Decatur campus to house children, with the remainder of the estate gift placed in the ministry's en-

dowment. The Ensors' only wish was that the amount of their gift never be disclosed.

"What an incredible legacy that is for them," Marshall said of the Ensors, "and it speaks volumes of their desire to continue the Kingdom work they began in their lifetimes. But it's also a huge responsibility on our part to use that money wisely in ways that will serve more children."

ABCH is among the many

Christian ministries that benefit from believers giving a portion of their assets upon death. Each year, more than 10% of the ABCH budget comes from estate giving.

ABCH leaders encourage every believer to bless one or more ministries by including the Lord's work in their wills. By doing so, followers of Christ can use their money to advance God's Kingdom beyond their lifetimes, says ABCH chief administrative officer Chip Colee.

"It's all God's," Colee said. "We're just little managers and want to make sure we pass the legacy of giving on to future generations because it's just not mine."

Believers of all ages should participate in estate giving, Colee said. Younger adults sometimes fall prey to the idea that they don't have an estate to give.

"It's never too early to think about that and act on it by making a plan," he said.

At least two factors should drive Christians to estate giving, said Rodney Bledsoe, director of ministry engagement at The Baptist Foundation of Alabama.

First, their assets can further ministry after they die.

"Those good stewards are really able to leverage what God's blessed them with

for Kingdom impact after they've gone to be with Jesus," he said.

Second, estate giving has tax benefits.

Most people won't achieve the multimillion-dollar estates required to owe estate taxes. But if a person's children take their inheritance in a lump sum, up to 40% of it could be due to the federal government in income taxes.

Estate giving to ministries "can reduce that amount that's going to the IRS," Bledsoe said.

As Marshall puts it, "If someone were to die with no estate plan, then they have chosen the federal government as their favorite charity, and they will pay pretty significant taxes on their estate, whereas if they have a ... well-constructed estate plan, then they have the potential for their legacy to be Kingdom work."

Simple process

The process for including ministries in a will is simple. Any Alabama Baptist can contact The Baptist Foundation of Alabama to receive guidance on tax implications and the best way to transfer assets to loved ones.

Then an informal network of attorneys around the state will help draft a will and accompanying legal documents for a reasonable fee.

5 Common Misconceptions

WHEN PLANNING YOUR ESTATE



1 I created a will when my kids were little. Now that they're grown, I'm not sure that there is a need to update it.

2 It's best to own all of my assets jointly with my spouse.

3 It's better to leave my children their inheritance outright vs over time.

4 I don't need to worry about estate/death taxes.

5 I don't own enough..... I don't need a will.

To learn more, contact The Baptist Foundation of Alabama at 334-394-2000 or TBFA.org.

Caring for loved ones

BY DAVID LEVY • THE FAMILY CAREGIVER'S MANUAL

10 caregiving concepts to keep in mind as you coordinate care for family members

It is hard to explain the challenges of family caregiving, the necessary and unending attention to details, and the frustrations when needed services cannot be found. Add to the burden the fact that [the person in desperate need of care] refuses to cooperate or family members are oblivious and uncaring about the sacrifices you make.

Can be consuming

If you are not careful, family caregiving can consume you. Almost unconsciously, you give up bits and pieces of your life until your life becomes only about family caregiving.

What can you do?

1. Before taking action, take a moment — and develop a plan to follow.
2. Be patient. If a life is not in immediate danger, a few hours or days will not matter.
3. Try to understand the underlying causes. Take time to think about the resistance you are encountering.
4. Ask direct questions in response to objections. Ask if the concern is about cost. If it is, discuss ways to alleviate the concern. It also could be about not being physically able to do something he or she has always done and the difficulty of giving it up.

5. Listen carefully. Do not interrupt. Do not judge. Do not dismiss. Do not always assume you are right.

Supportive language

6. Use supportive language. “I can imagine how tough this must be for you. I am just trying to make it easier for us to work this out. We will both be a lot happier if we think this through together.”
7. Show your belief in your loved one’s good judgment. Also, be reminded that key people need to be involved in decision-making because the care affects others.
8. Look for compromises and mutual ground. No one has to win;

everyone just needs to have input, so no one loses.

9. If the discussion becomes strained, take a break.

10. Set a firm time to meet. “We will talk again tomorrow night. Is 7 or 8 o’clock better for you?”

EDITOR’S NOTE — The information shared in this article is an excerpt from “The Family Caregiver’s Manual: A Practical Planning Guide to Managing the Care of Your Loved One” by gerontologist David Levy and was used with permission. The book was published by Central Recovery Press in Las Vegas in 2016 and can be purchased from most book distributors.

Diagnosing ‘invisible condition’ of dysautonomia offers opportunity for many to thrive again

A variety of health concerns arise as we age. One often overlooked health condition is dysautonomia — an umbrella term used to describe multiple conditions affecting the autonomic nervous system, which controls all involuntary bodily functions such as

heart rate, blood pressure and breathing. Dysautonomia, affecting more than 70 million people worldwide, is not rare but remains relatively unknown.

Dysautonomia symptoms can be widespread and vary in intensity from person to person. Symptoms can be present, disappear and then

return, and patients may appear healthy. “This leads to [dysautonomia] being considered an ‘invisible condition,’” according to the Dysautonomia Support Network.

Some common symptoms are:

- ▶ **Orthostatic intolerance.** Upon standing, individuals may experience dizziness or fainting due to fluctuating blood pressure and heart rate.
- ▶ **Heart rate irregularities.** Rapid or slow heart rate can lead to palpitations and chest pain.
- ▶ **Thermoregulation issues.** The body may lose its ability to regulate temperature, causing excessive sweating or an inability to sweat.
- ▶ **Fatigue.** Intense fatigue is common, often accom-

panied by brain fog, forgetfulness and an inability to focus.

To diagnose dysautonomia, a health care provider uses a tilt table test. The patient, connected to blood pressure, oxygen and heart monitors, lies on a table that lifts and lowers at different angles. As the table tilts, the patient’s ANS functions are measured. Other diagnostics include sweat tests, heart and breathing tests and bloodwork.

Managing symptoms

While dysautonomia is incurable, its symptoms can be managed. Treatment must be individualized and involves a combination of lifestyle modifications and medications, including:

- ▶ Increasing fluid and

salt intake to maintain blood pressure and hydration.

- ▶ Wearing compression garments.

- ▶ Exercise regimens and physical therapy to improve muscle tone, posture and overall well-being.

- ▶ Adopting a balanced diet and eating smaller, more frequent meals.

- ▶ Counseling and mental health support.

- ▶ Beta-blockers, vasoconstrictors and anti-nausea drugs, as needed.

Dysautonomia may be a hidden condition, but its impact is profound. If you or someone you know is experiencing these symptoms, please seek medical advice and support. (The Alabama Baptist)

Helpful resources

- ▶ **Dysautonomia Support Network**
dysautonomiasupport.org
- ▶ **Dysautonomia International**
dysautonomiainternational.org
- ▶ **Dysautonomia Information Network**
dinet.org
- ▶ **Dysautonomia–MVP Center in Birmingham**
mvpctr.com

LASS WORDS

BY KEN LASS

The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

The Best Medicine

The theme of this edition of The Alabama Baptist is Aging Well.

As a septuagenarian, I can relate to the topic. At a certain point in our journey it becomes more about quality of life than quantity.

We all want more days, but we want days without pain, without stress and concern about things like sickness, mental function, mobility and finances.

We can't help but notice our bodies are changing, becoming more vulnerable. Remember when you had to actually DO something to risk injury? Like trying to play basketball or tennis, or start jogging after being away from it for years?

These days I'm liable to pop something in my back or shoulder without even trying, just by doing things such as sitting up in bed or climbing stairs or reaching to get something out of a high cabinet or lifting a heavy garbage bag.

Positive attitude

My wife, Sharon, and I are always joking about our "ache of the day." Seems like something always hurts. There's an old saying that growing old is not for the faint of heart — you'd better have a good attitude, a healthy perspective and a sense of humor about aging.

You know what really helps? Going to church. No joke. It does make a difference. Several studies have been done to back this up, not by religious organizations

but by folks like the American Medical Association. They have found that regular churchgoers live longer and better. The Word of God and the promises of salvation bring people peace and hope.

But just being in the Christian church environment has its own rewards. A network of social support, optimistic attitudes, better role models and a sense of purpose in life may account for the long-life benefits seen in many studies.

Power of prayer

Then there is just the good ol' power of prayer. Doctors have observed that, when people are praying, it triggers a relaxation response, a state of mind/body rest that has been shown to decrease stress, heart rate and blood pressure.

It may go so far as to alleviate chronic disease symptoms. It's the kind of effect many search for when they get involved in practices such as meditation and yoga, but research suggests it also can be found through praying.

These revelations shouldn't surprise anyone. Why else would God often be described as the Great Physician?

MEET THE AUTHOR

Ken Lass is a retired Birmingham television news and sports anchor, and an award-winning columnist for numerous publications and websites.

Aging and senior care RESOURCES

2-1-1 Connects Alabama

2-1-1 Connects Alabama benefits Alabama's most vulnerable populations, particularly the elderly, people with disabilities and those with low incomes. Dialing 211 connects callers to trained operators with access to a comprehensive database of services in their community. Operators are available 24/7.

► **Website:**

211connectsalabama.org

► **Phone:** 211

► **Text for help:** Text your zip code to 898-211

► **Assistance for the hearing impaired:** Call 711 and ask to be connected to 211 Connects Ala.

Alabama Caregiver Connect

The University of Alabama School of Social Work recently launched an online resource for Alabama caregivers.

► **Website:**

caregiverconnect.ua.edu

► **Phone:** 205-348-4654

Alabama Department of Public Health

The Alabama Department of Public Health offers programs to help seniors maintain optimal health and mobility, obtain consistent preventative health screenings and make lifestyle changes as needed.

► **Website:**

alabamapublichealth.gov/seniors

► **Phone:** 800-252-1818
(8 a.m.–5 p.m.)

Alabama Department of Senior Services

The Alabama Department of Senior Services has 13 Area Agencies on Aging, each with an Aging and Disability Resource Center that offers and implements senior services. Services include caregiver assistance, transportation, nutrition, prescription help, legal aid and long-term care advocacy.

► **Website:**

alabamaageline.gov/helpservices

► **Phone:** 800-AGELINE
(800-243-5463)

Alzheimer's Association

The Alabama chapter of the Alzheimer's Association has a statewide network of offices that offer virtual trainings, education and support services.

► **Website:** alz.org/al

► **24/7 Helpline:** 800-273-3900

CDC National Center for Injury Prevention and Control

The CDC provides free patient and caregiver resources to help prevent falls, including a checklist to help find and eliminate fall hazards in each room of an elderly person's home.

► **Website:**

cdc.gov/steady/patient.html

► **Phone:** 800-232-4636

Eldercare Locator

Eldercare Locator is a public service of the U.S. Administration on Aging that helps connect older adults and their families and caregivers with the services they need.

► **Website:** eldercare.acl.gov

► **Phone:** 800-677-1116

(Mon.–Fri., 8 a.m.–9 p.m. ET)

National Institute on Aging

The National Institute on Aging, a department of the National Institutes of Health, offers free comprehensive guides on healthy aging for both caregivers and senior adults.

► **Website:**

nia.nih.gov/health/topics

► **Phone:** 800-222-2225

► **TTY:** 800-222-4225

OASIS

(Older Alabamians System of Information and Services)

This program helps people aged 55 and older who are blind or visually impaired to live more independently in their homes and communities.

► **Website:** rehab.alabama.gov/services/vr-bd/vr-bd

► **Phone:** 800-441-7607

Caregiving is coming for us all

BY WILLIE BRUNETTI • SPECIAL TO THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



Photo by Freepik

Are you prepared? Do you have the resources you need to make decisions concerning care for loved ones?

Caregiving may be the most demanding and rewarding undertaking you will ever encounter. Caregiving can be exhausting, aggravating and, at times, completely overwhelming. But in the same way, no matter how frustrating the process can be, no one will love you quite the same way, and you will never love anyone else in the same way. A caregiver is anyone who provides basic assistance

Tips for caregivers

- ▶ Schedule and have consistent breaks from caregiving responsibilities.
- ▶ Let your doctor know you are a caregiver.
- ▶ When someone offers help, let them help.
- ▶ Make time to be social and do

some of the things you use to do prior to being a caregiver.

- ▶ Consider joining an online support group.
- ▶ Make sure you are getting enough sleep.

Source: Alabama Public Health

and care to someone who is frail, disabled or ill and in need of care. Those who need care can fall into any age group or category of relationship to us (child, spouse, sibling, friend, etc.), but for the purpose of this article we are focusing on children caring for aging parents. As medical technology improves our lifestyle, we all are living longer. While most of our parents are accustomed to applying caring skills to their children, many children will eventually become caregivers to their aging parents.

New roles

It means taking on new roles for both the children and their parent and, in a sense, children are beginning to parent their parent. For many, they never truly saw it coming. We remember our parents in their prime

and don't always look to the future for what might take them out of the mainstream of life into a life of dependency — dependency on you to provide care.

Four kinds of people

The Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregivers website quotes the late former first lady: "There are only four kinds of people in the world — those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers, those who will be caregivers and those who will need caregivers." Basically, we will all become caregivers in some fashion or the other. So do you want this responsibility? It seems like a silly question because for the most part we don't get to vote and say we don't want the job. Most of us start this journey because someone we love needs help.

Caregiving can be a multidimensional puzzle: For some it means providing 24-hour, around-the-clock care for someone who can't dress themselves, go to the bathroom or think for themselves. For others it is an emotional rollercoaster because the diagnosis has not exhibited debilitating symptoms yet.

Begin the conversation now

There will come a time when you realize your parents are getting older and no matter how independent they are, they're going to need help in some manner. The problem is that, in many cases, neither you nor your parents want to discuss these coming events. While planning ahead will keep the

trauma down, most of us find we are caregivers when we get the call at 3 a.m. that "mom is in the ER and has had a stroke, come now." It is more difficult to make decisions in a crisis, so rather than waiting for an unexpected event to happen, begin the conversation now. Staying ahead of the game will give you and your parents time to consider the options carefully. It will ensure your parents get the best possible care, and it will give you peace of mind. The mortality rate for all of us is 100% unless Jesus comes. The best time to talk about it all is now. Don't

Tips when assisting someone needing care

- ▶ Approach the patient slowly and calmly.
- ▶ Use a friendly tone of voice and facial expressions.
- ▶ Make eye contact when you speak to the patient.
- ▶ Face the patient when you speak to them.

- ▶ Do not touch the patient from behind.
- ▶ Speak slowly, clearly and distinctly (dementia patients do not understand complex speech).
- ▶ Use one-step commands.

Source: Alabama Public Health

wait until the situation has become volatile and reason and logic are no longer active. Within Alabama, family caregivers are the backbone of the long-term care workforce. Over one third of the adults in need of long-term care depend upon family as their only source of help. But despite the growing number of family caregivers and the huge contribution to the health-care economy, family caregivers face little advocacy from churches and our communities. One way churches can help is to provide settings for the "preparing ahead" discussions that can take place and to offer resources for families to explore. Congregations also are excellent places to provide support to families in the throes of caregiving situations. The ministry mindset is already in place for organizing meals, transportation, sitters, respite opportunities and a listening ear.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Willie Brunetti has a long history of being a family caregiver and leads seminars on the topic. He is a retired Air Force officer and holds a doctor of educational ministry from New Orleans Seminary. He is a member of First Baptist Church Meridianville, Alabama.



10 early signs and symptoms of Alzheimer's and dementia

- 1 Memory loss that disrupts daily life
- 2 Challenges in planning or solving problems
- 3 Difficulty completing familiar tasks
- 4 Confusion with time or place
- 5 Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships
- 6 New problems with words in speaking or writing
- 7 Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps
- 8 Decreased or poor judgment
- 9 Withdrawal from work or social activities
- 10 Changes in mood and personality

Source: Alzheimer's Association (help line 800-272-3900)

Nutrition essentials

BY PATRICIA H. TERRY, PH.D., RD, LD, FAND • THE WELLNESS KITCHEN

Simple ways to increase various nutrients needed as age lowers metabolism

A lifetime of healthy eating helps prevent chronic disease. However, it is never too late to make improvements.

Older adults are generally less active, have a lower metabolism and don't absorb some nutrients as well as before. In other words, seniors need fewer calories but more nutrients with every bite. Eating a variety of whole foods provides a variety of nutrients.

► **Eat more vegetables and fruits** — Vegetables and fruits should fill half of our plate.

Add them to snacks and meals. Vegetables and fruits provide much of our vitamin C as well as the extra dietary fiber, potassium, calcium, iron, magnesium, vitamin A (from beta carotene) and folic acid needed as we age. A rainbow of colorful vegetables and fruits adds powerful phytonutrients that fight chronic diseases.

► **Increase whole grains** — Whole grains should be the majority of the grains we eat. Look for the Whole Grain Stamp on the package.



Unsplash.com

They are excellent sources of dietary fiber that seniors need as well as B vitamins, vitamin E, iron, selenium and magnesium.

► **Calcium and vitamin D sources are necessary** — Lactose intolerance may develop as we age, so regular cow's milk may not be

for all. There are many lactose-free options like soy or nut milks with calcium and vitamin D added as well as fermented dairy and goat's milk. Hard cheeses are excellent calcium sources as are fish with edible bones and dark green leafy vegetables.

► **Proteins are important** — Proteins in lean meat, poultry, eggs, fish, beans, peas, nuts

and seeds give our bodies the ability to retain muscle mass, repair worn out tissue, heal wounds and protect bones from osteoporosis. Animal proteins also provide iron and vitamin B12. Fish and shellfish are rich in omega 3 fatty acids. Oysters and egg yolks have high amounts of vitamin D. Nuts and seeds are also rich in selenium.

► **Water** — Don't forget hydra-

tion. As we age, we may develop a decreased sense of thirst.

► **Add naturally fermented foods** — Naturally fermented foods with yeast or bacteria contain probiotics (healthy bacteria) that regulate the digestive tract and boost the immune system.

Examples include yogurt with active cultures, kefir, kombucha, fermented vegetables made in salt brine, miso, tempeh, natto, apple cider vin-

egar with the mother (unfiltered so still containing the culture of beneficial bacteria) and sourdough bread.



TERRY

EDITOR'S NOTE — Pat Terry shares the knowledge she's acquired over the 30 years she served as a professor of nutrition and dietetics at Samford University in Birmingham through thewellnesskitchenrd.com.



"I was thinking of filling the communion cups with green tea."

© 2012 Jonny Hawkins

Helpful resources related to nutrition

- dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2021-03/Dietary_Guidelines_for_Americans-2020-2025.pdf
- myplate.gov/life-stages/older-adults



Stock.adobe.com

Happy heart

BY VICKI HEATH • SPECIAL TO THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

5 'faith-full' ideas to keep a healthier emotional, physical perspective on Christmas

Worry, hurry, traffic, presents, shopping, tree, food, kids, money, food, family, party, food and more food. Are you getting freaked out? Well don't.

God does not want the celebration of the birth of His Son to be anything but joyful. The craziness of Christmas does not have to consume us. We can experience the true meaning of Christmas with a happy heart and attitude. Here's how:

Helpful tips

1. Set food boundaries. The average American will gain three to seven pounds over the holidays. This might be the average, but I think Christians shouldn't be average.

We don't have to participate in this statistic. Boundaries are merely fences or lines we decide we will not cross, for our own protection and well-being.

Some suggested boundaries for the holidays:

- a. I will enjoy my favorite foods, but I will keep my portions small.
- b. I will not go back for seconds.
- c. If I get off track, I will not allow the enemy to shame me into abandoning my boundaries.

2. Seek out the Wonderful Counselor. Jesus is the Wonderful Counselor and He said in Matthew 6 not to worry over money, clothes or your house.

If He can take care of the birds in the air and the flowers of the field, He can surely take care of us. Let's not allow guilt or shame or television commercials to dictate how

much we should spend on Christmas.

Instead, seek the guidance of the Wonderful Counselor and pray over each person. He will lead us to the perfect, meaningful and creative gift.

3. Ask for Peace from the Prince. Nobody does peace like Jesus, for He himself is our peace. If all you want for Christmas is some peace and quiet, then definitely ask for it. God's peace can reign over our homes during the season, if we seek the Prince.

4. Stop and smell the mistletoe. Take time to slow down and enjoy all the sights and smells of the season. It will be gone in the blink of an eye.



HEATH

Were you so busy last year that you cannot recall Christmas? Leave time to enjoy the music, decorations and the special shows. Make the decision now. No overscheduling this year.

5. Revisit the incarnation every day — The Bible foretells and tells the beautiful story of the Messiah's birth. It has been the inspiration of carols and poetry for centuries.

Read these six passages of Scripture starting Dec. 1. Take your time and spend five days on each passage.

You will finish on the last day of the year. Meditate and pray through and visit again, the miracle of the incarnation.

- a. The Prophecy — Isaiah 9:1-7
- b. The Fulfillment — John 1:1-14
- c. The Mom — Luke 1:26-56
- d. The Birth — Luke 2:1-4
- e. The Visitors — Luke 2:8-20, Matthew 2:1-12
- f. The Long Expected — Luke 2:22-35

These ideas should help us deal with the worry, hurry, traffic, presents, shopping, kids, money, family, party, food and more food.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Vicki Heath is national director of First Place for Health. Vicki is a certified fitness instructor, a certified life coach and wellness coordinator for her church in Edisto Beach, South Carolina. Her books include "Don't Quit Get Fit" and "My First Place."

Hack your way to healthy and simple holiday fun

By Vicki Heath
First Place for Health

Holiday time is fun but busy. With all the activities, grandkids coming and vacation travel, you might think it impossible to keep up your exercise habits.

Incorporating healthy living does not have to be time consuming or complicated. These simple exercise tips are fun and don't take much time.

With the kids

- ▶ Teach them hopscotch.
- ▶ Give a piggyback ride through the house.
- ▶ Play Twister.

▶ Visit holiday events that require walking.

- ▶ Play hide and go seek.
- ▶ Organize competition games that include who can stand on one leg the longest and who can jog in place the longest.

While traveling

- ▶ Skip the moving sidewalks in airports.
- ▶ Walk around the airport while waiting on your flight.

Around the house

- ▶ Take out the trash.
- ▶ Speed mop.
- ▶ Use the upstairs bathroom.

▶ Clean out a closet.

God's blessings are abundant. He has given us bodies to move, food to eat, families to enjoy, jobs with purpose, good company with people in our lives and the beautiful season of celebrating.

Enjoy every single day! You might feel more energetic and strong — and have more fun.

EDITOR'S NOTE — All activity should be appropriate to your individual situation and ability. Always check with your doctor before beginning any new exercise routine.

Understanding levels of anxiety

BY LISA EDWARDS KEANE, MAMFC, LPC-S, NCC • SPECIAL TO THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

Most common anxiety symptoms

- ▶ Feeling nervous, restless or tense
- ▶ Having a sense of impending danger, panic or doom
- ▶ Having an increased heart rate
- ▶ Breathing rapidly (hyperventilation)
- ▶ Sweating
- ▶ Trembling
- ▶ Feeling weak or tired
- ▶ Trouble concentrating or thinking about anything other than the present worry
- ▶ Having trouble sleeping
- ▶ Experiencing gastrointestinal (GI) problems
- ▶ Having difficulty controlling worry
- ▶ Having the urge to avoid things that trigger anxiety

If you read through the list and see several of those signs or symptoms in your life that have been present for six months or longer, I would suggest talking to a professional about counseling for anxiety.

Source: Mayo Clinic's online resource at mayoclinic.org, researched by Lisa Edwards Keane, MAMFC, LPC-S, NCC, lisakeanecounseling.com

Anxiety enhanced by multiple factors, one of most treatable issues

Anxiety is a normal part of life and is often used synonymously with terms such as stress, worry or fear. At some point in our lives, we will all experience some form of anxiety. It may be fear for a moment, worry that seems to last or even fleeting worry.

Complaints about anxiety are what I hear each day in my therapy office. I hear sentiments coming from clients such as "I feel overwhelmed," "I cannot seem to find peace," "I am always on edge" or "I am anxious, and I really cannot pinpoint why."

Among top diagnoses

Anxiety is one of the most diagnosed mental health conditions.

Multiple factors have contributed to higher levels of anxiety including

overall stress, social pressures, family dysfunction and increased usage of technology.

In my office, I see anxiety ranging from mild and bothersome to extreme and life-altering.

Not everyone will develop clinical anxiety, but my job as a therapist is to help decipher, diagnose and develop a treatment plan based upon how severe someone is experiencing anxiety symptoms.

The good news: Of all the mental health conditions, anxiety is one of the most treatable.

Counseling and other mental health services can support those walking through anxiety regardless of the level of severity.

Current research by the National

Institute of Mental Health suggests that 19% of the adult population in the U.S. has been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder in the past year.

They also note that 31% of adults will experience an anxiety disorder at some point in their lifetime.

Research also shows women are twice as likely as men to be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder. The top five diagnosed anxiety disorders are Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Panic Disorder, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Phobia Disorders, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

While all these disorders have different causes, they typically will show similar symptoms and marked impairment in a person's life.



KEANE

How to find a counselor

1. Ask for referrals from friends or family. The best recommendations often come from those who know you best or have experience with a certain professional.

2. Reach out to your church for recommendations. Many churches keep lists of trusted counselors in their towns. They can sometimes make an introduction for you to that counselor.

3. Be willing to research and read about the therapists you want to contact. One counselor cannot meet everyone's specific

needs. God gifted different counselors for different issues and personalities. Read more about their credentials, specialties and trainings.

4. Ask about how spirituality and religion will play a role in the counseling room. Each person approaches their faith differently and has different comfort levels with spirituality in counseling. Let your counselor know how you would like to integrate your faith in counseling.

5. Don't wait too long to call. There could be a waiting list so call sooner rather than later if you are thinking about seeking help.

6. It is okay to say someone is not a good fit. It could take meeting with a few counselors until you find the right fit for you. Counselors expect this and honor this as part of the process.

7. Be willing to invest in counseling. There is a financial investment in the counseling process that you also must take into consideration. Look at your budget and insurance benefits, and make a plan for how you will invest in your mental health.

Source: Lisa Edwards Keane, lisakeanecounseling.com



Stock.adobe.com

Many people struggle with a high level of anxiety and are not seeking help or receiving a diagnosis. Some of the common reasons I hear for people not seeking anxiety treatment include the stigma of mental health, being unable to find a provider, lack of resources or simply being too busy to receive treatment.

All of this together leads to the importance of raising awareness of how to identify anxiety in ourselves and others. We need to be informed so we can get help to those who need it most.

To distinguish between typical anxiety everyone can experience and a diagnosable anxiety condition, I ask questions related to daily functioning and duration of symptoms.

If someone has been through a short-term stressful event but sees their anxiety return to a normal level after engaging in coping strategies and self-care, they are not typically dealing with an anxiety disorder.

Rather, they saw a normal stress response take place in their body and in their mind. This normal stress response is meant to keep them safe and help them manage the stress in front of them.

Clinical level of anxiety

However, in someone with a clinical level of anxiety, their anxiety will impact their functioning on a daily basis, causing constant feelings of being overwhelmed.

Their anxiety feels out of their control, symptoms have been persistently present for a while, and they

are not able to regulate back to a place of calm.

One way I help clients assess unhealthy levels of anxiety is to ask if anxiety feels like it is controlling their decisions, thoughts and actions. If they feel like it is, that typically means they could be experiencing clinical levels of anxiety.

Anxiety can affect many areas of a person's life including negative or racing thoughts, work impairment and sleep disturbances.

Often, anxiety can feel overwhelming and lead a person toward avoiding situations, people or places that are causing an increase in their feelings of anxiety.

Panic attacks also can be an overwhelming symptom those with anxiety experience.

Anyone can have a panic attack, but often those with an anxiety disorder will experience ongoing panic attacks.

Panic attack symptoms include rapid breathing, increased heart rate,

feeling light-headed and intense thoughts and feelings. Some people will even experience chest pain mimicking a heart attack.

Others will experience numbness or tingling in their hands and feet. They may also feel like they are not present in their body.

These symptoms often make someone feel like they are going crazy or that they might die.

Always seek out medical help if you are not sure what is happening to your body and if you are experiencing this high level of anxiety or panic attacks.

31%
of adults will
experience an
anxiety disorder
at some point
in their lifetime.

National Institute
of Mental Health

How to help someone I love with anxiety

By Lisa Edwards Keane

MAMFC, LPC-S, NCC

Special to The Alabama Baptist

Watching someone struggle with anxiety can actually be anxiety-provoking for yourself. We know anxiety can be a contagious emotion. Therefore, it is vital for those who want to support someone through anxiety to care for themselves first.

You do not want to allow your worry for the person to exacerbate their anxiety; rather, you want to be an anchor for them that is steady and strong. It is also okay to know your limits and know when to refer someone to professional help.

Someone struggling with anxiety does not need you to fix their feelings or minimize what they are experiencing. If you have not struggled with anxiety, it can be difficult to empathize with what someone is experiencing.

Anxiety affects their whole body and mind and even their spiritual walk. It is very real and difficult for them to talk about. The best thing you can do for someone struggling is to listen with curiosity, not judge their feelings or thoughts, and point them to helpful resources.

Most people need to know they are not a burden, you care about them and you will listen when they need to talk.

I often think about how God comforts me when I am experiencing sadness or affliction. Throughout Scripture, we see a picture of God who is patient, kind, compassionate and merciful.

Psalm 116:5 simply lays out these attributes of God: "Gracious is the Lord; and righteous; our God is merciful."

We want to approach those

who are suffering in their anxiety with the same heart and mind of Christ. What they do not need is our condemnation and our judgment.

They do need us and the church to embody these loving attributes so that they can feel known, heard and comforted.

Whether you or someone you know is struggling with anxiety, do not hesitate to reach out for help. Counseling is a wonderful resource to help someone identify the cause of their anxiety and develop tools to manage it.

If you know someone struggling with anxiety, reach out to them and let them know you are here for them. Because anxiety can be so isolating and lonely, those struggling with it will not often reach out on their own.

Be a source of comfort and hope for them by checking in and asking how they are doing. Everyone needs a good social support system full of people who love them and genuinely care about them.

Armed with new knowledge and understanding about anxiety, we can be that support and help guide them toward the resources that can bring hope and help.



Photo by Freepik

"We want to approach those who are suffering in their anxiety with the same heart and mind of Christ. What they do not need is our condemnation and our judgment."

Staying calm

BY THE ALABAMA BAPTIST STAFF

Pulled over? Review these important safety tips for law enforcement encounters

It might seem obvious to some, but not everyone understands the importance of the proper response when pulled over by a law enforcement officer. Making the wrong choice in this situation could result in an uncomfortable situation at best and a family's life being changed drastically at worst.

Following an alleged growing number of unnecessary deadly encounters with police officers across the nation in recent

years, The Alabama Baptist reached out to former officer Allen Farley, who served 37 years with the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department, for perspective. A former member of the Alabama House of Representatives, Farley has most recently been part of Hunter Street Baptist Church in Hoover.

'On heightened alert'

Police officers are trained to deal with acts of violence and that requires them to remain vigilant, Farley noted.

"If they stop you, they are on heightened alert."

To help ensure the safety of the citizens as well as the officers, remember these tips if you are pulled over:

- ▶ Put both hands on the steering wheel.
- ▶ Refrain from any sudden movements.
- ▶ Listen carefully to what he or she is saying.
- ▶ Treat the officer with respect and kindness.
- ▶ Thank them for their service whether they let you off with a warning or write you a ticket.

For believers in Jesus, the traffic stop is an opportunity to shine their light rather than show their dark side, Farley added.

Proper paperwork

Other experts in the field also note the importance of having the proper paperwork in an easily accessible location in the vehicle, and to disclose upfront if a weapon is in the vehicle.

Police officers will ask for a driver's license and the vehicle registration and will run the car tag to see if any

concerns surface. Car insurance information should also be kept in the car.

Alabama is now a hands-free state, so texting, calling and holding a phone for any other reason while driving is against the law.

Also, remember to buckle up and avoid running red lights.

Law enforcement and other experts across the nation agree: the more drivers who follow these few simple steps means more people who make it home safely each day.

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To learn more, visit [TBFA.org](https://tbfa.org) or contact The Baptist Foundation of Alabama at 334-394-2000.

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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

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

Silver Run Baptist Church in Seale, Alabama, located in rural Russell County, is seeking a bivocational pastor that the Lord would have to serve here. Resúmes may be sent to: P.O. Box 8, Seale, AL 36875, ATTN: Kenny Harris.

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

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► **Home Instead** homeinstead.com

► **Life Care Solutions** lcscaresolutions.com

► **Right at Home** — rightathome.net

► **Senior Placement Services** — with locations from Huntsville down to the coast.

Visit seniorplacement-servicesllc.com

—Sponsored content—

Reframe

BY KELLY S. ARANT, M.ED., NCC, LPC-S
SPECIAL TO THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

Focus on what you can control as aging slows you down

The emotions around aging are myriad. From a counselor's perspective, the following three steps will help those who get the privilege of growing old to do so gracefully.

1. Acceptance.
2. Mindset.
3. Do what is within your control.

Acceptance is defined by Merriam-Webster as, "a willingness to tolerate a difficult or unpleasant situation."

Aging often brings with it limitations that are difficult and unpleasant. Acceptance begins with acknowledging with neutrality that physical bodies change, stamina changes, relationships change — things just change. How one responds to change is based on his/her thoughts.

This leads to step two of mindset — managing thoughts. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is an evidence-based approach to counseling. It is rooted in the idea that

thoughts impact feelings and feelings impact behavior.

When clients learn how to identify negative thoughts and learn to reframe them, then more positive emotions emerge leading to better behavior outcomes.

Thinking differently

Reframing is not lying to oneself. It is choosing to think another thought about the situation that would lead



Photo by rawpixel.com on Freepik

to a better outcome. Instead of thinking of a limitation, the person would be encouraged to reframe that thought.

For example, say the words "I'm old" to yourself. Notice how that makes you feel. As a 60-year-old, it doesn't make me feel good about myself.

However, if I say, "I am experienced" or "I am a mature woman," I feel more positive about myself and what I can offer to the world.

This leads to a feeling of motivation which would then lead to doing some-

thing engaging instead of isolating oneself.

Many myths exist regarding aging. Some of these include thoughts like the elderly cannot learn new things, all elderly get dementia, the elderly should take it easy or the elderly should not drive.

These ideas as general statements and assumptions across the board could not be further from the truth.

The National Institute on

Aging identified actions you can take to help manage health, live independently as possible and maintain quality of life. All of the actions listed are within the control of most people.

These include eating a healthy diet, prioritizing sleep, staying hydrated and moving the body.

Others include staying connected to friends, focusing on hobbies and keeping consistent with physician appointments.

No reason to fear

By focusing on acceptance, minding our thoughts and taking control of the things we can, we can face aging with hope.

Need more assurance? Go to your Bible and read Isaiah 46:4.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Kelly Arant is a registered play therapist and clinical director for Pathways Professional Counseling, a nonprofit ministry of the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries.



ARANT

Medicare *notes*

BY JENNIFER DAVIS RASH • THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

Understanding the basics of Medicare and why an annual review is important

Medicare may be one of those life necessities individuals put off until they must deal with it, but once signed up it should be reviewed annually, according to experts in the field.

The opportunity to make changes is available now through Dec. 7, and any changes made are effective Jan. 1, 2024.

Three months prior to a person's 65th birthday is when eligibility begins, and he or she has until three months after the milestone birthday to make all the initial decisions. After that, the annual enrollment period (mid-October to early December each year) is the time for reviews.

Jordan Puskos, business manager for GuideStone Financial Resource's life and health team, emphasized how the Medicare journey is different for everyone.

"Start having the Medicare con-

versations about six months before your 65th birthday," she said, noting friends who have already signed up are helpful resources as well as small groups at church.

'Do your research'

"The main thing is to do your research and medicare.gov is a great starting point for anyone who is starting that journey," she said. "It's important to engage with qualified professionals and to realize every situation is different."

In fact, a service churches can provide their members — and be an outreach to the community as well — is to bring in a professional to share about the various aspects of Medicare and answer questions.

Brokers are typically paid on the back end by the carrier if the plan they represent is selected, but there is no obligation to go with the brokers' firm. Also, brokers are not allowed to charge fees for their

presentations or for answering questions related to Medicare.

"Find someone you know and trust who can explain what all the plans mean," Puskos said.

"Everybody is going to enroll in A and B and have the option of supplemental or advantage, but how do you know which to select? You have to deep dive into what are your needs, your medical history, your family's medical history, your prescription history, what you will need robust prescription coverage for, your area and hospital networks," she explained. "There is no right or wrong answer. It's just what is best for me."

"One of the most common confusions is people think all of it is free," she added. "While that is true for part A (hospital coverage), you will owe a premium for part B (doctor services) and if you have a supplemental then there will be an additional premium. Part D (prescription coverage) also has a premium."

"It is government subsidized, but it's not free," Puskos explained. "(And the various options create) very different arrangements."

"There also are exceptions if you are older than 65 and still working."

Rebekah Elgin-Council, chief marketing officer for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, recently promoted BCBS' Medicare Advantage plans in a news release, noting "a zero-dollar premium in all 67 Alabama counties."

Elgin-Council also shared tips for the Medicare enrollment process:

1. Consider all your options by

comparing benefits, cost and services of each plan.

2. Make sure your doctors are covered in the provider network.

3. Confirm your prescriptions are covered in the formulary.

4. Know the lingo, including deductible, copay and premium.

5. Look at enhanced benefits including dental, vision, hearing, fitness and travel programs.

6. Consider your health care needs and any upcoming surgeries or doctor appointments in 2024.

Puskos said Medicare enrollees will receive an Annual Notice of Change letter each September leading into the fall open enrollment period to make changes.

"At a minimum,

review the letter ... and if on an Advantage plan, it's important to look at the plan because things can fall in and out of the network," she said. "Also, your medical status could have changed."

Puskos and her team at GuideStone are available for more information (see sidebar for details).

Counseling and assistance

The Alabama State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) also offers "personalized, unbiased counseling and assistance to Medicare recipients and their families," according to the SHIP website.

"The statewide program ... can help with questions or concerns about Medicare coverage, benefits, premiums and coinsurance (see sidebar for contact information).

"SHIP also ... can assist with complaints and appeals with regard to coverage."

"AT A MINIMUM, REVIEW THE ANNUAL NOTICE OF CHANGE LETTER."

JORDAN PUSKOS
GUIDESTONE

Time to sign up for Medicare? Talk to the experts about your options

Medicare.gov

- ▶ 800-MEDICARE (800-633-4227)
- ▶ TTY users can call 877-486-2048

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama

- ▶ bcbsalmedicare.com
- ▶ 888-372-3909

United Way Area Agency on Aging

- ▶ uwaaa.org/ship
- ▶ 800-AGE-LINE (800-243-5463)

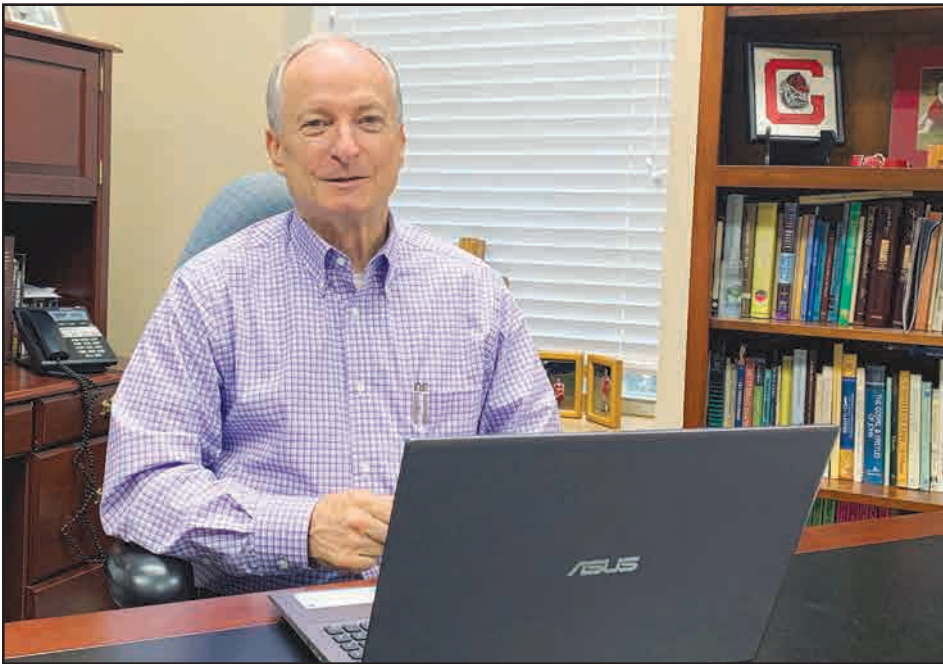
GuideStone Financial Resources

- ▶ help.guidestone.org/30242-medicare
- ▶ jordan.puskos@guidestone.org

Medicare brokers

Qualified professionals representing a variety of brokerage firms also can provide helpful information, and a conversation does not obligate you to purchase the plans they represent.

Source: *The Alabama Baptist*



DAVID L. CHANCEY

Photo by Lisa Fountain

A story to tell

BY DAVID L. CHANCEY • SPECIAL TO THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

Leave a written legacy: Author shares 10 reasons to consider writing a book

As I feel my way through the front end of this senior adult chapter of life, I have several “bucket list” items I want to accomplish, some of which I’ve checked off the list and others still to do. One of the items checked off is publishing a book (three to be exact).

Have you ever thought about writing a book? You may not realize it, but you have a story to tell. Every person has a story inside them.

Powerful

Stories are powerful. Moving. Sometimes humorous and inspiring. That’s why periodicals like Guideposts, Reader’s Digest and The Alabama Baptist are so popular. They are filled with interesting stories, practical ideas and inspiration.

That’s how writers like Ronda Rich and Sean Dietrich make their living, telling powerful stories.

First, you have wisdom to pass along. Maybe it’s life lessons for your children and grandchildren, or business practices and principles. Maybe the content is wisdom you picked up from your grandparents as you were growing up.

Second, you have stories to tell.

Third, you have a desire to help people. Your stories can inspire. Your wisdom can encourage. As you pass along what you’ve learned, you will help people in their struggles and as they walk their journey. Your help will be a tremendous blessing.

Fourth, you want to help people grow spiritually.

Fifth, you want to share your family’s history or a family member’s experience. I know of a lady named Clare Bryan who was rummaging through her father’s attic in the house in which she grew up. She and her brother spent many hours in this attic taking blankets and building forts, etc. These blankets and dress up clothes were piled on top of an old chest.

On this day, she decided to dig into the chest and at the very bottom she found a box of old letters written 1942–45. Her father had been captured and was a POW and many of these letters written by the parents to the son had been returned to sender, but they saved them. Many of his letters mailed to his parents before his capture were also in the box.

As Clare read through these letters, her father’s WWII experience, which he never shared much about, came to light. And so did the strength of her grandmother’s faith.

Future generations

Sixth, you want to pass down a legacy. Our written words live far longer than we do. For years, I’ve written a newspaper column as an expansion of my ministry. I always wanted to compile some of this material into a book. I selected some favorite columns, updated them, hired an editor to help me polish and organize, then added other personal stories. I approached this effort as a legacy project, writing up stuff that one day my grandchildren would

read and appreciate about their grandfather’s experiences and lessons for life.

Endurance

Seventh, writing a book will help you build endurance. It’s a process — a journey — and not everyone sticks with the task. It takes discipline, perseverance, a tough skin, dedication and hard work. Yet it’s worth it.

Eighth, writing a book will give you a sense of accomplishment. When you finish and see those books arrive and hold that “book baby” in your hands for the first time, there’s a real sense of satisfaction. You started something and saw it through to completion.

Ninth, writing a book is therapeutic. For some folks, woodworking, golf or some other leisure pur-

suit is their outlet. For me writing is therapeutic. I enjoy it and especially enjoy the finished product. There’s a great sense of satisfaction seeing your work published, and, as previously stated, a great sense of reward when someone benefits.

Tenth, God called you to write a book. I have writing in my blood. I must write. I love to write. I feel led to write. As one editor stated, “The printer’s ink must flow.”

So what story is inside you that you need to tell? What life experience do you need to pass down?

EDITOR’S NOTE — David L. Chancey is pastor of McDonough Road Baptist Church in Fayetteville, Georgia, and a frequent contributor to The Alabama Baptist.

Read more of David’s writings at davidchancey.com.

Getting started

► Pray for God’s direction as you begin this writing journey. Pray for God’s blessing.

► Take 30 minutes a day to write something. Just start writing. Respond to the devotional you read this morning. Journal thoughts about the Bible passage you read. Write down funny experiences you had before you forget it. Just start writing.

► Connect with other writers. Many are in the same boat you are in, trying to get direction, try-

ing to move from start to finish. Join Facebook groups such as Southern Christian Writers Conference, Christian Writers for Life or Blue Ridge Bible Study Writers. Start networking.

► Attend Christian writers conferences to learn basics and to meet other writers.

► Find a strong editor to help polish your manuscript and make suggestions for improvements.

Source: David L. Chancey

Q&A with Chuck Norris

BY THE ALABAMA BAPTIST STAFF

Popular actor shares about life at 83 and how he's aging well; find full interview at tabonline.org

Q: *Many of our readers are fans of your work as an actor and martial artist. What were some of your favorite opportunities through the years?*

A: I've been blessed over the years with many incredible opportunities in both acting and martial arts. One of my favorite projects was "Walker, Texas Ranger," where I was able to blend my passion for martial arts with acting. Many folks don't realize that I was actually in my early 50s when Walker started filming, and I loved being part of a story that featured action and excitement for any stage of life. Taking the journey with that character over the years was life-changing and it's proof that age is just a number!

When I look back on my film career, I have a particular fondness for "Way of the Dragon/Return of the Dragon." The fight with Bruce Lee is so iconic and at the time I was the World Champion, so thinking about that film always takes me back to what an exciting period of my life that was. The "Missing in Action" films are also very special to me.

Kickstart Kids charity

It is also amazing what incredible opportunities can come ... when you're not expecting it. For instance, when we were making "Sidekicks" I met Mattress Mac, who was one of the producers. Out of this relationship, we began Kickstart Kids, which is a charity that teaches martial arts and character development to students. We've reached over 100,000 kids and the breakthroughs that we've seen mean a great deal to my wife, Gena, and me.



CHUCK NORRIS

Photo courtesy of Roundhouse Provisions

Q: *How would you characterize this season of your life?*

A: I have to say, I don't feel 83! Staying active and fueling my body well has helped me feel younger than my age while enjoying everything that life has to offer. This season of my life is all about sharing my passion for health and wellness with others and giving back to the community. That's how Roundhouse Provisions was born — my lineup of powerhouse supplements designed to kick start every day.

Q: *How have you prioritized aging well and remained disciplined?*

A: I've maintained a healthy lifestyle by eating well, staying active and getting enough rest. Martial arts, of course, is a key part of my routine, helping me keep in shape both physically and mentally. Discipline and consistency have played a vital

role ... as well as finding joy in everyday moments. I also listen to my body. If I've been over-training and need to put less strain and impact on my joints, I switch it up and do my martial arts in the swimming pool. It's vital to stay very active because a body that keeps moving, moves, and one that stops, stops.

Q: *What motivates you to advocate for cultivating an active lifestyle at every age?*

A: I'm confident that an active lifestyle will influence every area of life: body, mind and spirit. My quality of life is better when I prioritize movement — my mind feels sharp and I feel more connected to those around me. As a man of faith, I'm also grateful for the chance to keep living out my purpose in the world, and I want to continue encouraging and equipping those around me.

Ultimately, I'm motivated by a desire to be a well-rounded person and to live well in each moment God has given me.

'Not just about me'

The other thing I always remember is that it's not just about me. I feel most disciplined and accountable when I share my daily wellness habits with others. Our youngest adult children are very talented martial artists, and I love that we can share one of my favorite pastimes. Just like a family that prays together stays together, a family that trains together stays together.

Q: *What have you learned about overcoming obstacles?*

A: Facing obstacles is an inevitable part of each day. It's not about avoiding challenges but confronting them with optimism and strength. Having people who believe in you, encourage you and stand by you during difficult times can provide the strength and motivation needed to overcome any obstacle. Take it from me, whether it's in an action movie or anywhere else: the things in life that are most worthwhile can't be done on your own.

Q: *What passions are you focusing on now?*

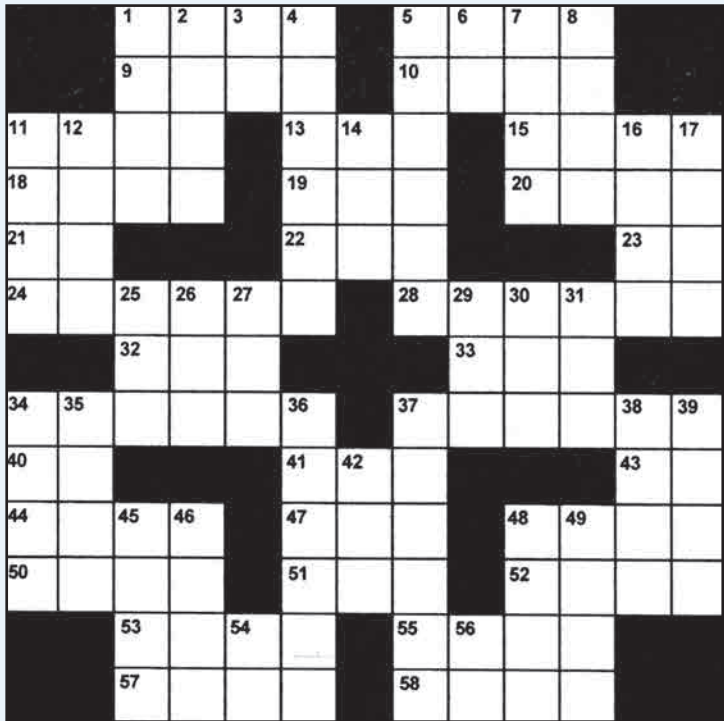
A: My values are freedom, family, fitness, faith and fight, and I try to focus on passions that reflect those values.

Not only have we raised our kids up in the ways of the Lord, our personal Christian walk with the Lord is one of the greatest reasons that our marriage is so strong and our lives are so full of happiness and joy.

CHRISTIAN crossword

WORD search

- ACROSS**
- 1. ___ him in a manger. (Luke 2:7)
 - 5. ___, the beloved physician. (Col. 4:14)
 - 9. Standing afar ___ ... to me ___ sinner. (Luke 18:13; 2 words)
 - 10. The name of the well ___. (Gen. 26:20)
 - 11. And sold a ___ for wine. (Joel 3:3)
 - 13. Will ___ rather say unto him. (Luke 17:8)
 - 15. Beautician's wave.
 - 18. The elder unto the elect ___. (2 John 1)
 - 19. I ___ me men singers. (Eccles. 2:8)
 - 20. For every ___ is known by his own fruit. (Luke 6:44)
 - 21. They marvelled ___ his answer. (Luke 20:26)
 - 22. Come down ___ my child die. (John 4:49)
 - 23. Many shall rejoice ___ his birth. (Luke 1:14)
 - 24. I am ___ both to the Greeks. (Rom. 1:14)
 - 28. ___ ye from him. (2 Sam. 11:15)
 - 32. On the east side of ___. (Num. 34:11)
 - 33. ___ the father of Abner. (1 Sam. 14:51)
 - 34. Shelemiah the son of ___. (Jer. 36:26)
 - 37. ___ the son of Jeroham. (1 Chron. 9:12)
 - 40. So shall it ___ also in the days. (Luke 17:26)
 - 41. His mother's name also was ___. (2 Kings 18:2)
 - 43. ___ is not here, but is risen. (Luke 24:6)
 - 44. Eloi, ___ lama sabachthani? (Mark 15:34)
 - 47. ___, I say unto you. (Luke 7:26)
 - 48. And Hushim, the sons of ___. (1 Chron. 7:12)
 - 50. Behold the ___ of God. (John 1:29)
 - 51. Love worketh no ___ to his neighbor. (Rom. 13:10)
 - 52. The wicked ___ their bow. (Ps. 11:2)
 - 53. Of ___, the family of the Eranites. (Num. 26:36)



- By Diana Rowland Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.
- 55. Kish the son of ___. (2 Chron. 29:12)
 - 57. Put a ___ on his hand. (Luke 15:22)
 - 58. Every ___ at the feast of the passover. (Luke 2:41)
 - neck. (Prov. 6:21)
 - 27. But ___ thing is needful. (Luke 10:42)
 - 29. Of his kingdom there shall be no ___. (Luke 1:33)
 - 30. Hot beverage.
 - 31. Jerimoth, and ___, five. (1 Chron. 7:7)
 - 34. From the blood of ___ unto the blood. (Luke 11:51)
 - 35. When ___ was dead. (1 Chron. 1:44)
 - 36. ___ wait for him. (Luke 11:54)
 - 37. Do to ___ and her king ... shall ye take for ___ prey ... thee an ambush. (Josh. 8:2; 3 words)
 - 38. Even as ___ gathereth her chickens. (Matt. 23:37; 2 words)
 - 39. There was there a ___ of many swine. (Luke 8:32)
 - 42. I will punish ___ in Babylon. (Jer. 51:44)
 - 45. Fill an ___ of it to be kept. (Ex. 16:32)
 - 46. Zaccur, and ___. (1 Chron. 24:27)
 - 48. The son of ___ was over the tribute. (1 Kings 4:6)
 - 49. This is the ___. (Luke 20:14)
 - 54. They might find ___ accusation. (Luke 6:7)
 - 56. All shall ___ thine. (Luke 4:7)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

- AGILITY
- APPLE
- ASPARAGUS
- AUTHENTICITY
- AVOCADO
- BANANA
- BLUEBERRIES
- BROCCOLI
- CALCIUM
- CHIA SEED
- COCONUT
- CUCUMBER
- EGGS
- EXERCISE
- GARLIC
- GRACE
- HEALING
- HEALTH
- HOLISTIC
- INTENTIONAL
- KALE
- LEAN BEEF
- MINDFUL
- OATS
- PRAYER
- QUINOA
- SELF-CARE
- SHRIMP
- TOMATOES
- TUNA
- WALKING
- WELLNESS




SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 3

Explore the Bible

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.
Executive Director of the Center for Christian Calling, University of Mobile



THE FIRST WEEK
Genesis 1:1–5, 26–2:3

The week is a measure of time without an astronomical foundation. Days are measured by the earth’s rotation. Lunar months are measured from new moon to new moon. Years are based on a single revolution of the earth around the sun. A week, however, is seven days because God established a pattern of work and rest.

The Beginning (1:1–5)

Genesis begins at the outset of material creation, the heavens and the earth. God (Elohim) is the generic term for the Creator. Elohim is plural, though the verb for “He created” is singular.

God is present and active in the creative process. He exists, creates, speaks, observes, separates, names and (later) blesses.

God speaks light into existence, overwhelming the previous darkness that had been upon the waters.

God separates light from darkness, a fact underscored within the Johannine writings of the New Testament.

In the Hebrew text, the paragraph about day one ends with, “There was an evening, and there was a morning: one day.”

While the remainder of the days in Genesis 1 use ordinal numbers (second, third, fourth, etc.), the first day is listed with a cardinal number, defining this usage of “day.” In fact, there are two definitions in Verse 5.

The first is the light time: “The light He called day.” The second usage is the unit of evening and morning, setting a seemingly liturgical or priestly pattern for describing the remaining days of creation week. In both uses within the verse, the word translated as “day” (“yom”) is defined by its context.

The Image Bearers (1:26–31)

The culmination of God’s material creation was humanity on the sixth day, for they bore God’s image (“imago Dei” in Latin). As image bearers of God, humans are special spiritual beings able

to communicate with God and mirror some of His attributes and creativity.

Like the remainder of the material created order, humanity has a corporeal existence, serving as earthly ambassadors for their Spirit-Creator. They (and we) reproduce by means of distinct physiology which delineates male humans from female humans.

All human beings have inherent dignity and value due to their God-given designation as image bearers. Likewise, as creatures bearing God’s image, humans have a unique accountability to God.

He entrusted humanity with responsibility both in the general description of creation in this passage and the more personal creation account recorded in Genesis 2:4–24.

Genesis 1:28 records the cultural mandate for humanity to steward God’s material creation. God also places them in the Garden of Eden to work and to watch over it (2:15, 22). Work was an activity of humanity prior to the Fall — activity which necessitated rest.

The Rest (2:1–3)

Following the completion of His very good material creation, God ceased His labors. The text does not indicate that God became tired, but He established the seventh day for rest and set it apart from other days.

Moses treated creation week as an actual week, a model for labor and rest for Israel: “For the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and everything in them in six days; then He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and declared it holy” (Ex. 20:11).

Our Lord Jesus explained that God initiated Sabbath rest for our benefit, not as a religious practice, but as an essential element in living for God. “The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). Sabbath is a gift from God and a foretaste of ultimate rest in Christ (Heb. 4:9–11).

Bible Studies for Life

By Bobby McKay
Pastor of New Liberty Baptist Church in Morton, Mississippi



THE IMPORTANCE
OF GOD’S NAME
Exodus 3:1–6, 9–15

One of the most celebrated events in our culture is the news of a pregnancy. When a young couple discovers a baby is on the way, an overabundance of emotions and thoughts rush through their minds. Everything from joy to fear will abound as plans for the new addition take place.

I recently received a call from an ecstatic friend with news of her firstborn baby who will arrive next summer. After a while, the conversation turned to prospective name choices. Family names, personal preferences and uniqueness were all discussed. A name can tell you a lot about someone.

When it comes to God, we are exceedingly blessed that He has chosen to reveal Himself to the world. Without Him choosing to do so, we would be hopeless and helpless in every situation.

The names of God throughout Scripture are more than just monikers; they reflect the nature and attributes of our heavenly Father. When we respond to Him in the varied situations of life, we are not only recalling who He is, but we are also acknowledging what He is.

God is a holy God
we are to approach
with reverential fear. (1–6)

It makes little difference what style of music or the demographic of the people in your church if we neglect the object of our worship. It is no casual thing to encounter God.

Whenever our humanity encounters the holiness of God, we will not be the same. Moses quickly realized that what he thought would be like any other day would quickly turn into an intersection with the Almighty. The fear and reverence Moses displayed should remind each of us of the majesty and pow-

er of God. Pay attention each day and be prepared for divine appointments.

We can trust God will do what
He says He will do. (9–12)

Every one of us has unintentionally disappointed others. We have also been on the receiving end of being let down. When God conveys a promise, we should have complete confidence that it will come to pass. Unlike you and me, God is not capable of lying or forgetting His words.

Of all the many promises these few verses contain, I am thankful for the theme of His presence. God takes pleasure in comforting believers who are abiding in Him. Everything in your world may crumble around you, but the promises and words of God are steady and secure.

God’s name reflects His
sovereign character that
draws us into a trusting
relationship with Him. (13–15)

Imagine having a relationship with someone who always tells the truth, wants what is best for you, protects you, loves you and will never leave you. If you are a Christian, look no further! We have all those blessings and more in God. As believers, when we choose to sin, there is a reason we sense a holy pull to return to Him.

We return because He has proven an infinite number of times He is able and worthy to meet each of our needs, forgive our sins and cleanse us from guilt we may endure.

The education of Moses was about to begin. In the plagues, wilderness and frustrations, Moses learned more about who God is than he could have ever known otherwise. Choose to love and trust God because of who He is and His unblemished record of faithfulness and holiness.

*“Do not come near;
take your sandals
off your feet, for
the place on which
you are standing is
holy ground.”*

Exodus 3:5

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs Frontz

The Alabama Baptist

Christian songwriter trusting God in transition to retirement, grandparenting

Scott Wesley Brown, a singer-songwriter who was part of the early beginnings of contemporary Christian music, has spent his career ministering both in the U.S. and on the missions field.

Brown began releasing albums in 1974 and was part of the Jesus music revolution. However, after retiring from touring last year, he has a new focus — his three granddaughters. Two live in California and one lives close to Brown in Alabama.

“For me, grandparenting has become my No. 1 missions field. Just seeing them come into a relationship with the Lord is the most precious thing I can imagine — just your own little grandkids.”

‘My No. 1 prayer’

“My daughters are both walking with the Lord and that excites me, but there’s something special about seeing that little grandkid get excited about Jesus. That’s my No. 1 prayer, No. 1 passion. We’ve done so much on the missions field but now the missions field is these sweet little granddaughters of ours,” Brown said.

Brown has seen a lot of changes in contemporary Christian music since he started. The technical end is of much higher quality. State-of-the-art

studios are readily available. There are a multitude of talented musicians in the field.

Some Christian artists today are rivals to those in secular music by playing in the same huge stadiums and having the same high numbers of records sold.

However, for Brown it was much simpler.

“For me, it was a little more grass-roots. It was playing in a little more intimate settings. I did play some of the big Jesus Festivals back in the ’70s and the early ’80s and that was really exciting but, for the most part, it was just putting your stuff in your car and taking off.

“I kept always thinking this is a great way to share the gospel. I’m not saying that kids today who are starting off don’t have that passion, but it seems today it’s become a whole lot more commercialized.

“It was a whole different world back then,” he said.

Though an exciting time, it wasn’t without stressors. Brown would often have to remind himself not to complain about the long hours, the layovers and not being able to see family and friends or go to church for long periods.

“When people see a Christian artist, they see them on the stage and

think, ‘Gee, that must be such a great life.’ Well, yes, for that hour, hour-and-a-half. They don’t see all of the in-between,” he explained.

Brown also has lived through some scary situations — like border crossings with guns in his face.

Once he went with American Leprosy Missions to India.

“To be able to lead people who are leprosy patients — who don’t have any arms or legs and their faces are sunken in — to be standing there in this chapel with my guitar and just singing worship songs ... seeing them worship was something that just dumbfounded me. It took my breath away. I was

starting to cry in the middle of all these songs because I thought these people have had so much taken away from them, barely surviving, but yet they want to worship so much,” Brown said.

A personal favorite from his songs is called “Things.” He’s proud of both its musicality and how it reflects a personal struggle, even though it was not a fan favorite.

“Seeing people just sleeping on the floors of their dirt homes, I realized how materialistic I was and really felt like I was the rich young ruler, so I wrote a song about my possessions,” he said.

Calling it a “glorious journey,” Brown said he wouldn’t change anything about his life.

Though he’s still learning, trusting God is what has gotten him through the tough days as well as his transition into retirement now.

‘Help me not to complain’

“For me, I’ve always been excited about grace and how God’s grace shows itself in different ways,” Brown said. “To know that everything that happens, we still receive grace to get us through, grace to heal us, grace to protect us, grace to encourage us.

“When I look to God, I still pray for God to ‘just let me realize Your grace. Help me not to complain but to see things in a different light — in the way You see them.’”

“For us (he and his wife) as grandparents, I think that’s what Larry Fowler of the Legacy Coalition meant when he came up with the phrase ‘intentional grandparenting.’

“I think we need to be intentional. We just can’t be la-de-da and take it easy. We need to focus on our grandkids.

“I love the idea that there’s 30 million Christian grandparents in America and if we all were to do intentional Christian grandparenting, we would raise a whole generation of some pretty solid people who love the Lord and walk with Him and have an impact.

“I really think that’s the hope we have for our country — by investing in their lives.”



Photo courtesy of Scott Wesley Brown

SCOTT WESLEY BROWN

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.

To find out more about Brown’s ministry, go to his Facebook page. To learn more about intentional grandparenting, go to legacycoalition.com.



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‘Life well lived’

By Cliff Marion
Baptist and Reflector

When a church member unexpectedly dies on a missions trip

Our church sends missions teams to Ridgecrest Conference Center every year to serve students attending Fuge Camps. It’s a wonderful service opportunity, and one I recommend churches consider. Our missions teams perform a variety of tasks such as doing laundry, working in the kitchen, serving in the coffee shop, cleaning the cafeteria; you know, all the mundane tasks Jesus would do.

This year’s trip in June began like all the others. Our church staff received pictures and videos of the missions team laughing and showing us the “proper” way to fold a fitted sheet. I was away from the office and with my daughter for college orientation but enjoying the good natured humor from afar.

But around 5 p.m., all that stopped.

Heartbreaking

That’s when I received a call from one of the team members frantically crying that Nick was dying.

My emotions “red-lined.” I literally could not believe what I had



Unsplash.com

just heard. After composing myself and calming my friend, she explained that Nick had a heart attack, had no pulse, and people were doing CPR with no results.

I could hear the sirens wailing in the background the entire time we were talking, but the groans and breaking of my heart were even louder.

First responders took him to the

hospital where they officially pronounced him dead.

Nick’s wife, his daughter and granddaughter were all on the trip with him. Ridgecrest held a special place in this family’s life. Many precious family memories were made there over the years. When Nick had his heart attack, it was his daughter who began CPR. It’s very likely the last face he saw on this side of Heaven was hers.

Ridgecrest is eight hours from our church. Our staff immediately held a conference call and decided to send a group of men to bring the missions team home. This was a highly traumatic experience for everyone involved, and we needed to get them back ASAP.

We held a beautiful memorial service for Nick at our church about a week later. It was one of the most

personal services in which I’ve ever participated. Family and friends shared stories, and one of Nick’s grandsons played and sang a song that Nick wrote a few years ago. Nick was honored; God was glorified.

Later, while processing all that happened, God revealed to me that Nick’s loss was no tragedy.

Humble servant

Nick was 75 years old. He was a deacon, sang in the choir, filled in when our music minister was gone, taught a Sunday School class for decades, helped launch our Celebrate Recovery ministry, washed tables, popped popcorn for VBS; he did it all. Faithful husband. Loving father and grandfather. Loyal church member. Humble servant of Jesus Christ.

Nick’s life is a testimony to those of us who remain. It was a life well lived.

He showed us what a joy-filled disciple of Jesus looks like. I can only hope and pray that, like Nick, I finish well. I hope to cross that finish line with sweat on my brow and a smile on my face because I

had the honor to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

During one of his devotionals at Celebrate Recovery, Nick said he wanted to serve God until his final breath. God allowed him to do so.

That’s no tragedy. That’s grace.

EDITOR’S NOTE — This story was written by Cliff Marion, pastor of First Baptist Church Covington, Tennessee, and originally published by Baptist and Reflector.

“DURING ONE OF HIS DEVOTIONALS AT CELEBRATE RECOVERY, NICK SAID HE WANTED TO SERVE GOD UNTIL HIS FINAL BREATH. GOD ALLOWED HIM TO DO SO. THAT’S NO TRAGEDY. THAT’S GRACE.”

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‘Art to Heart’

By Todd Deaton
Baptist Courier

Chalk drawing ministry celebrating 50 years with 50 drawings

There are probably few people brave enough to step up to a canvas with a piece of chalk and start drawing in front of a room full of carefully watching eyes, especially having never done a chalk drawing before — but Bill Cox did.

He now is celebrating a half-century milestone of his “Art to Heart” ministry by doing 50 chalk drawings at churches and other venues.

But today Art to Heart is more than chalk drawings with special effects lighting, Cox said. The creative arts ministry also includes music by him and his wife, Kathy, and dramatic monologues.

Cox began doing chalk drawings as a substitute artist on a missions trip led by First Baptist Church Spartanburg, South Carolina. George Schrieffer, minister of education, was planning to do chalk drawings at each of the 12 churches in Bell County, Kentucky, where the missions volunteers were serving that year. When Schrieffer was called away by a death in the family, Cox stepped up.

‘Focus on Christ’

“We had been telling everybody about the chalk drawings as a special end-of-the-week highlight, and I suggested ... that I might could fill in for George to keep the kids we were working with from being disappointed,” Cox recalled.

He stayed up most of the night preparing a soundtrack and make-shift setup using a paper tablecloth, Crayola sidewalk chalk, a borrowed projector and color-tinted cellophane for “special effects.”

Although the drawings were “certainly nowhere near as good as what George had been doing,” the kids seemed to love them, and God used it, Cox recalled.



Photo courtesy of Baptist Courier

Bill Cox begins each chalk drawing with a blank canvas during his “Art to Heart” presentations. He now is celebrating a half-century milestone of his “Art to Heart” ministry by doing 50 chalk drawings at churches and other venues.

“I never could have dreamed at that point just how many places those chalk drawings would take us,” he added.

Cox has had lots of practice in the 49 years since, and made extensive improvements in lighting for his drawings, which appeal to both youth groups and senior adult ministries.

He has done them in churches of all sizes, as well as for Baptist Collegiate Ministries, on missions trips, during numerous state and national conferences, and in civic centers and arenas.

“It’s very much a worship experience,” Cox noted. “We focus on Christ, and it is a time to be still and to know that He is God, and to be led by what we see, what we hear, and to be led by His Spirit.”

“But the drawing that we do the

most — spoiler alert — is a drawing of the crucifixion and resurrection, and it’s a very powerful message.”

While some have asked if — after 50 years of drawing — Cox has grown used to it, he said not yet. “I honestly haven’t. ... It’s still a worship experience for me just to see, even though I’m drawing it, the pictures come alive and to hear the message of the music, and to just be praying that God would speak to us. He

has been obviously very faithful in doing that consistently over many, many years.”

Art to Heart is just one of the many aspects of Cox’s itinerant ministry, Concoctions. A former youth evangelism director for the South Carolina Baptist Convention, Cox may be remembered by many

who years ago attended youth events such as “Evangelympics” and “That Big Youth Thing.”

He is perhaps better known, however, for organizing Seesalt summer student conferences for 34 years; coordinating Chillipepper Conferences for 25 years in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee; producing 90 shows of “Peace of ’72” at Fantasy Harbour in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina; and directing numerous theatre productions at Cornerstone Theatre in Lyman, South Carolina.

Even so, when he shared with his wife about his goal of doing 50 art drawings in the coming year, she expressed astonishment.

“She’s convinced me that she did not use the word ‘crazy’ in her reaction,” Cox chuckled, adding she did believe his goal was “very ambitious.”

In recent weeks, Cox launched the celebration by returning to Kentucky for an evening service at New Heights Church of Middlesboro. Plans are set to conclude next year on June 23 at First Baptist Spartanburg.

In the meantime, there are still plenty of open dates, Cox said.

“It seriously doesn’t matter that much to us the size of the church,” he noted.

Continuing to minister

“We love being able to share Art to Heart with as many people as possible, and that’s really what the 50th anniversary is all about — just trying to continue to minister in this way as much as we possibly can.”

For more information, visit concoctions.com or email billcox@concoctions.com.

EDITOR’S NOTE — This story was originally published by Baptist Courier.

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Text with Jesus

By Fiona André
Religion News Service

New AI Jesus app draws mixed reviews, tries to find ‘right balance’

If you ever wondered how Jonah felt while he was trapped inside the whale’s stomach for three days, why Solomon had so many wives or why Judas betrayed Jesus, a new app called Text with Jesus is your chance to ask for yourself.

Launched in July, Text with Jesus is the latest creation from Cat Loaf software, an app-development company in Los Angeles. The app replicates an instant messaging platform, with biblical figures impersonated by the artificial intelligence program ChatGPT.

Characters

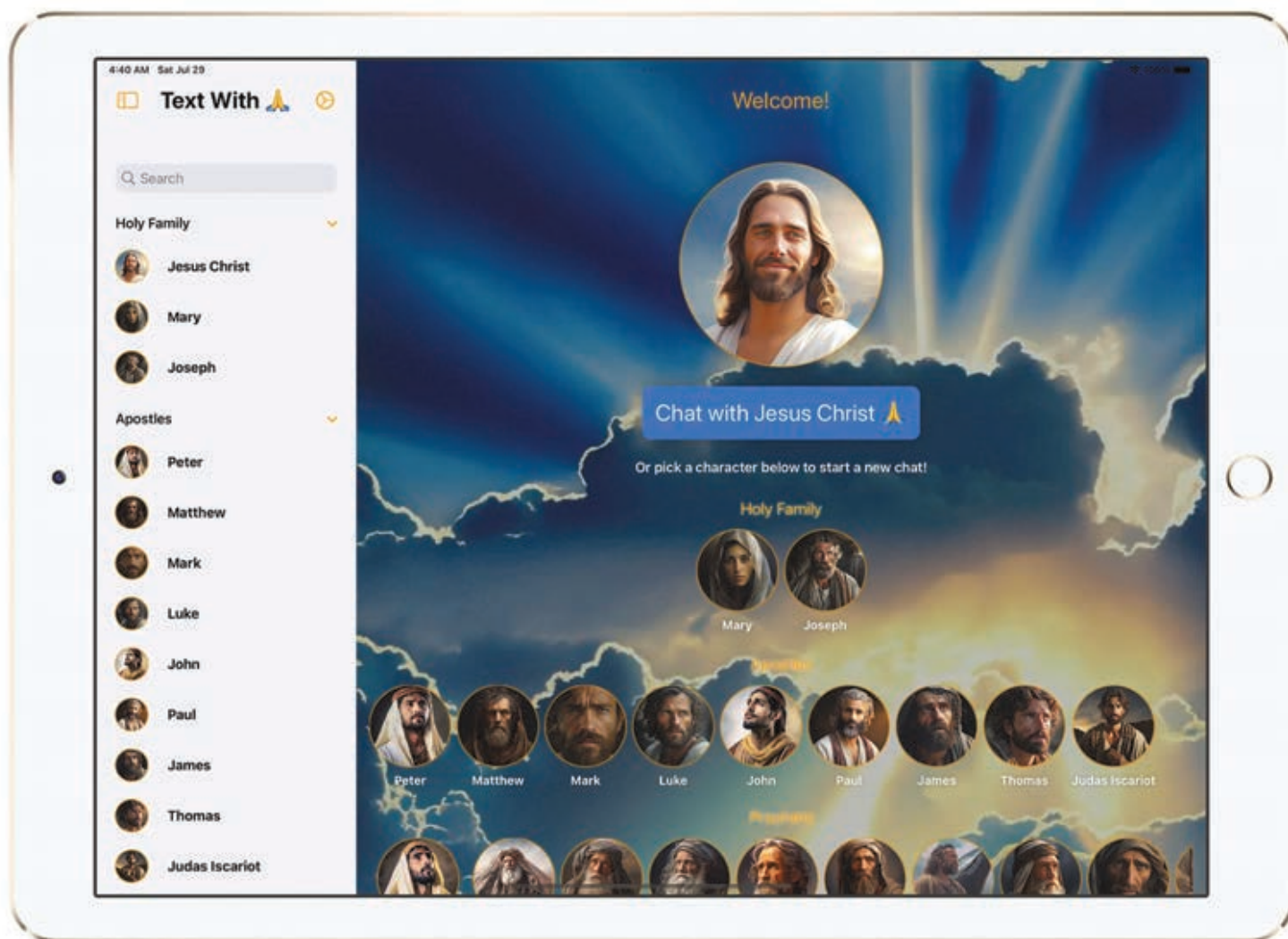
Characters available on the app include the Holy Family, the apostles, the prophets, Ruth, Job and Abraham’s nephew, Lot.

“We stir the AI and tell it: You are Jesus, or you are Moses, or whoever, and knowing what you already have in your database, you respond to the questions based on their characters,” said Stéphane Peter, the app’s developer and the company’s CEO.

Peter, who founded Cat Loaf software in 2011, has built numerous more static applications with historical figures — Text from the Founding Fathers, Text from Oscar Wilde, and more recently, Text from Jesus — in which users received quotes from the person in question, but couldn’t interact.

When ChatGPT was released last year, the 46-year-old developer, who came to the United States from France, wondered how to use AI to upgrade the Text from Jesus app. In February, he started digging into OpenAI, the artificial intelligence research laboratory that launched ChatGPT, and created a proper chat from a simple devotional app.

“Instead of just getting a daily Bible verse, now you get a chance through this app to chat with Jesus



RNS photo

or anybody else in the Bible,” he said.

There are few limits to what users can ask the app’s characters.

Whether the topic is personal relationship advice or complex theological matters, they formulate elaborate responses, incorporating at least one Bible verse.

Asked how he defined a good Christian, the app’s Jesus replied that such a person will “profess faith in me, but also follow my teachings and embody them in your life,” and quotes a passage in the Gospel of Matthew in which Jesus teaches that the greatest commandments are, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and

with all your mind” and “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Peter, who said he didn’t work with any theological advisers on this project, explained that he trained the AI to “try to stick to the biblical tradition as hard as possible.”

Getting feedback

But Peter did invite church leaders to try Text with Jesus once he had a beta version. Some pastors complained that some responses lacked Bible chapter and verse citations, or about the strange uptight tone in which Jesus talked, but on the final version, Peter said, he received “pretty good feedback” from the professionals.

“I updated it so it can speak more like a regular person and ensured it didn’t forget that it’s supposed to get stuff from the Bible. It’s a constant trick to find the right balance,” he said.

On X, previously known as Twitter, the launching of the app stirred reactions ranging from amusement to accusations of blasphemy and heresy. “That’s a hard NO for me,” tweeted one user.

Peter anticipated the app would draw blowback but called it “another way to explore Scripture.”

EDITOR’S NOTE — This story was originally published by Religion News Service.