

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



Adventus has fun for the whole family including fire jugglers, peppermint-scented snow, a train ride, food, games and more.

Photo courtesy of Majestic Caverns

‘Moving experience’

Adventus at Majestic Caverns tells Christmas story inside historic cave

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Joy Sorenson said it’s meaningful to her that a cave is so central to the redemption story.

“The nativity is often portrayed as a barn, but it’s much more likely Jesus was born in a cave,” she said. “So at Christmas, we’ve got the greatest gift being given in a cave, and then

later Jesus’ resurrection in one.”

So for Sorenson, Christmas is a marvelous time of year to visit a cave, and as president of Majestic Caverns in Childersburg, she’s inviting everyone to join her for Adventus, an event that takes place Dec. 9, 16 and 23 from 5 to 9 p.m.

There will be live family-friendly entertainment, caroling and an a capella group singing in the caverns, which at their largest space

are more than 10 stories high and bigger than a football field.

“There’s nothing like it; the acoustics are beautiful,” Sorenson shared with The Alabama Baptist.

‘Pilgrimage must’

From a Christian perspective, it’s a “pilgrimage must” to experience Christmas through the lens of a cave, she said.

At Adventus, there’s an oppor-

tunity for prayer, communion and hearing the Christmas story.

There’s also fun for the whole family — food, games, fire jugglers, peppermint-scented snow, a train ride and more.

The historic cave is 60 degrees year round, regardless of the weather outside, and the entrance is wide enough to drive a small vehicle into.

(See ‘God’s,’ page 10)

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SCAN ME

Opportunities to serve

Allow, encourage homebound members to stay involved

By Gail Morgan
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Sadly, we’ve become ‘that family.’ Never would I have thought throughout years of ministering to ‘shut-ins’ we would ever align with this category. It is not a group one would willingly choose but one that God has chosen for us for such a time as this.

One of the many things I am learning through our unsolicited experience is there is a purpose in God’s plan, inside and outside of the church building. We are all part of the same body, regardless of where we reside.

Our amazing body of believers, First Baptist Church Luverne, is steadfast in reaching out through calls, texts, visits, cards, worship service bulletins, prayer lists and happy day gifts — all of which help us feel loved and less isolated.

While nothing replaces human connection, the availability of online worship is a blessing when there are obstacles to prevent joining in person. Our church also provides The Alabama Baptist, which is a constant reminder we are part of a larger purpose.

Serving others

These thoughts are being shared with the utmost grace for myself and others. I am certainly not an authority and fall extremely short of God’s calling.

But when I think of what the church can do for homebound, my thoughts immediately turn to the phrase from John F. Kennedy’s 1961 inaugural address, “Ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country,” but on a spiritual and homebound level.

From my limited understanding of Scripture, our Christian pilgrimage is not about what the church can do for me, but what can I do to actively



Photo courtesy of Gail Morgan

participate in the ministry of my church and walk out my faith in my current situation. The Christian life is more about serving rather than being served, regardless of where we are in life.

While being confined to home presents challenges and can be excruciatingly lonely, as we are able, homebound Christians shoulder a sense of responsibility. We do not check our “call to service” at the church door.

I am incredibly grateful our church has open hearts and minds to allow others to serve and be an extension of the body from the location God, in His divine sovereignty, has currently placed them. Sadly, there are those who think if you are not in church every time the door is open, you are not worthy to serve.

A phrase read recently said, “Interruptions are God’s way of redirecting our lives.” God isn’t surprised we are in this season of life. Our role is to walk out His plan, with the immeasurable grace He has granted, and seize the chance to turn our challenges into opportunities.

As Proverbs 16:9 says, “We make our plans, but the Lord directs our steps.”

Although isolation may loom, there are countless opportunities for the homebound to be an extension of Christ.

- ▶ Pray daily for the church and its many ministries.
- ▶ Support monetarily with tithes and offerings.
- ▶ Send cards of encouragement to those inside and outside the fellowship. Coordinate with church leaders as necessary.
- ▶ Send encouraging texts to staff and members.
- ▶ Participate in missions projects by donating resources. Aren’t we thankful for Amazon and other on-line shopping options?
- ▶ Send cards to Baptist Men/Women members on behalf of the group, with the leadership’s approval. Who doesn’t like to get a personal letter in their mailbox?
- ▶ Use leadership skills as “behind the scenes” support. My pastor asked me to continue serving as Drop Off Leader for Crenshaw County’s Operation Christmas Child and recruited another person to be the hands and feet of this position. Due to our home situation, I am unable to commit to be on-site, but with available technology there are many ways to use my gifts, contribute behind the scenes and have a small part in sharing the gospel through this ministry.

Thank you

Thank you for breaching the homebound subject. 1 Samuel 12:24 says, “Only fear the Lord and serve Him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things He has done for you.”

There is no start and stop time for serving for any believer. Anything done in the name of Jesus will be used to bring Him glory.

May we all be found faithful in whatever place God has chosen for us in life.

The Alabama Baptist

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

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The crossword puzzle
can be found on page 15.

Rashional Thoughts

By Jennifer Davis Rash
President and Editor-in-Chief

 jrash@thealabamabaptist.org

 @RashionalThts

Our hearts are overwhelmed with gratitude for you

The response to our upcoming adjustment with the alternating schedule for our two print newspapers — The Alabama Baptist and The Baptist Paper — has been so encouraging and affirming.

We are grateful for your calls, emails, letters and in-person conversations. We've heard from a good number of you since the announcement was made in the Nov. 16 edition.

Thank you for helping us know how to best serve you and for your willingness to ask questions, make suggestions and clarify the information.

New opportunity

We are excited about the opportunity to adapt, expand and streamline the production of the newspapers while also increasing our digital footprint.

The new every-other-week mailing of each paper begins in January. The Baptist Paper will come out Jan. 4 followed by The Alabama Baptist on Jan. 11

— then they will alternate from there each week.

Signing up for The Baptist Paper is not mandatory nor expected, but receiving both papers will allow you to experience a deeper level of what God is doing through His people around the nation and world as well as continue with a weekly newspaper presence.

The annual subscription price for The Baptist Paper is reduced to \$10 for subscribers of The Alabama Baptist, even if your church pays for the TAB subscription.

We also are glad to give you an opportunity to review The Baptist Paper before deciding. Send Sarah a note at subscribe@thebaptistpaper.org or call Annette at 800-803-5201 to request previous copies. We'll be glad to send those to you. We also can email you a link to flip through the PDF versions of the previous editions if that's more helpful.

The Alabama Baptist will continue to focus on what God is doing through Alabama Baptists, keep important news and infor-

mation in front of you and provide the various elements you've come to love and appreciate.

Aging Well series

And with the new Aging Well series, we'll need your help knowing which topics to consider pursuing, so be sure to let us know what you are currently facing and/or have recently overcome.

You are family and by God's grace and your support and encouragement, our staff works

hard every day to serve you with excellence, high energy and deep compassion.

It's our hope that your engagement with us through the pages of The Alabama Baptist and The Baptist Paper not only reminds you of our ultimate Hope in Jesus Christ but also leaves you with a bit of positive energy to sparkle for those around you.

Keep us in your prayers and always remember that your voice matters. We love keeping the conversation going. Reach out any time.

To learn more about The Baptist Paper, visit tbponline.org.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

Your Voice



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

Caution: Don't let 'worship reimagined' become idol worship

By Franklin L. Kirksey
Robertsdale, Alabama

To reimagine something is “to have a new idea about the way something should be.”

The account recorded in Judges 17 and 18 about a man named Micah serves as a cautionary tale related to reimagining worship. This Micah is not the Old Testament prophet, but “a man from the mountains of Ephraim” (Judges 17:1). Notice the progression of his problem.

Micah stole 1,100 shekels of silver from his mother and returned it after hearing she pronounced a curse on the thief. She “dedicated” it to the Lord and used 200 shekels to commission a silversmith to make a

carved image and a molded image to be given to Micah (Judges 17:1–4). This reveals the evil in Micah’s background.

We read in Judges 17:5–6, “The man Micah had a shrine, and made an ephod and household idols; and he consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest. In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

‘Sinful synthesis’

This is the explanation for Micah’s behavior. His behavior was a sinful synthesis of truth and error.

One day Micah met a young Levite from Bethlehem in Judah looking for a place to stay and Micah invited

him to be “a father and a priest” to him with generous salary and benefits (Judges 17:7–12). This young Levite was Jonathan, the grandson of Moses (Judges 18:30).

Judges 17:13 reads, “Then Micah said, ‘Now I know that the Lord will be good to me, since I have a Levite as priest!’” Later in this account we read in Judges 18:24, “So he said [to the Danites], ‘You have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and you have gone away. Now what more do I have?’”

This demonstrates the error of Micah’s beliefs. A.W. Tozer explains, “Like every other power belonging to us, the imagination may be either a blessing or a curse, depending

altogether upon how it is used and how well it is disciplined.”

Martin Luther said, “Anything that one imagines of God apart from Christ is only useless thinking and vain idolatry.” In his book “Hearts of Iron Feet of Clay,” Gary Inrig adds, “Anything in our lives to which we attach the worth and importance that belongs only to God becomes an idol in our lives.

“Idolatry is not a relic of the past; it is a constant problem for every believer. That is why we need to pray with the hymn writer:

*“The dearest idol I have known
Whate’er that idol be
Help me to tear it from its throne
And worship only Thee.”*

Letters to the Editor

Thank you so much for the excellent article about Discovery Clubs in the Nov. 2 issue of The Alabama Baptist. It was incredibly encouraging to see the pictures of children and mentors discussing stories from the Bible.

As a mentor with Discovery Clubs, I know that many of these children are not able to attend church on Sundays, so this is a critical way for them to learn about God’s love for them. At least half of the children we are privileged to meet with each week do not even

have a Bible. Discovery Clubs not only teaches them directly from the Bible, but they give each child their very own Bible at the end of the year.

We currently have over 250 mentors serving in 24 schools in the greater Birmingham area. We could be in more schools if we had more mentors. It takes about two hours (counting driving time) one day a week, to be a mentor to children who are hungry to learn about God’s love for them. I hope others will join us soon.

David George
Bessemer

Just a note to say how much I enjoy reading Ken Lass’ column, Lass Words. He is a great addition to TAB.

What he shares is relative, practical, thought-provoking and an easy read.

I look forward to more of his comedic wisdom.

Sonya Edwards
Anniston

I am thrilled to read about the recent ministry modification of The Alabama Baptist and The Baptist Paper (as described in the Nov. 16 edition of TAB).

Whatever you have done and will do will surely be saturated with continued successful outreach and inreach because of your constantly displayed desire of special outreach.

Morris Murray Jr.
Jasper

I am a church librarian, and the first section of The Alabama Baptist paper that I read is the column on Media Reviews.

Many times I purchase reviewed items for the library.

Bev Colquett
Mexia Baptist Church

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior ...”

LUKE 1:46b-47

According to research, more than 3 billion people worldwide are considered unreached with the gospel. This means they have little to no chance of ever hearing about Jesus and the gift of salvation. They will live their entire lives never knowing the truth of the gospel.

This leads to a challenging question: What happens if someone never hears about Jesus? We cannot be satisfied with the status quo! The key to revival in our world is not the mega-church but the many churches of all sizes willing to rekindle the flames of the disciple-making movement of the first century church.

Pastor Bill Wilks

NorthPark Baptist Church
Trussville

“We have a community who cares for one another — we’re not in competition with one another,” **Buddy Champion**, immediate past president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention, told messengers during their 2023 annual meeting. He said Alabama Baptists have been a family of God with a common focus — the Great Commission. “We’re in this Kingdom work together. We are for each other, and we care about what God is doing in each other’s lives.”

“My priority at concerts is to share the reality of the gospel, the importance of the cross and about the excitement and the hope we have in heaven,” said singer-songwriter **Phil Wickham**. “By the end of the concert, I hope people are thinking about God’s grace, love and mercy, and I hope they are also thinking about the sacrifice that has been given to us through Christ.”

“Knowing your kids and knowing God’s Word and then praying His Word for them is one of the most powerful things we can ever do for our kids,” said **Kathy Steele**, former missionary, licensed profes-

sional counselor and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary counseling professor.

[Pastors] work at the most dangerous intersection on the planet — where the truth of what God has revealed collides with what fallen man worships.

Pastor Matt Mason

The Church at Brook Hills
Birmingham

Take everything off of your worry list ... and put it all on your prayer list. ... Every time you are tempted to worry, stop and take that matter to God in prayer.

Pastor H.B. Charles

Shiloh Metropolitan Baptist Church
Jacksonville, Florida.

A me-centered church knows nothing of sacrificial service, because it is mesmerized by the bedazzled jewels on the crown of consumer Christianity in a way that a crown of thorns and a cross

of wood cannot enthrall, unless you have experienced its power.

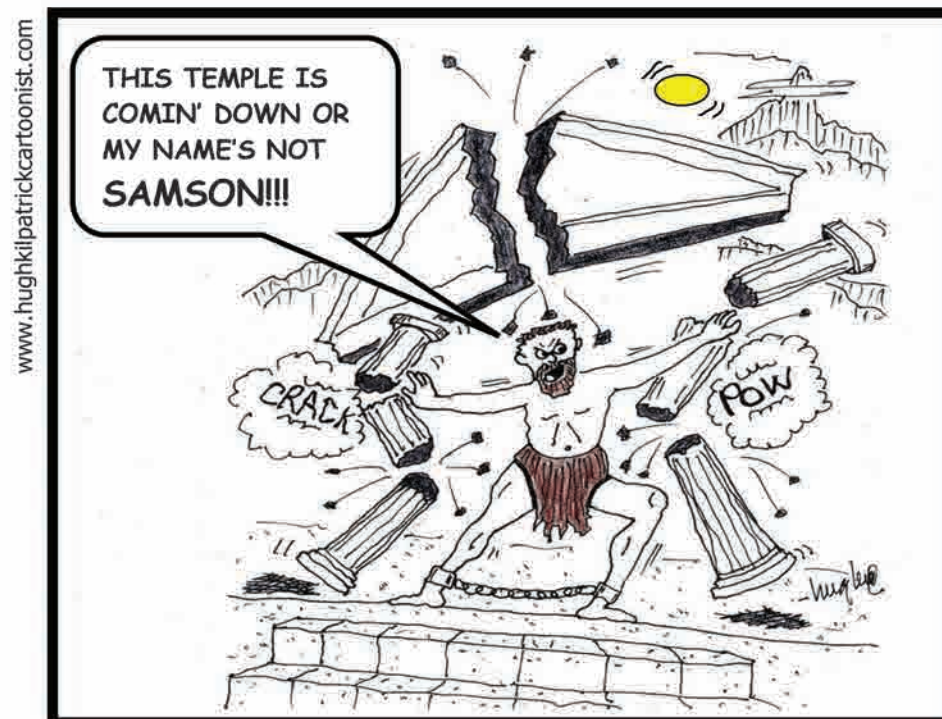
@DanielDickard

X (formerly Twitter)

“I’ll take whatever time the Lord gives me, and when He calls me, I’ll be ready to go home,” said 99-year-old **Alva “Al” Lyle**, who turns 100 years old in January. He continues to play an active role at Emmanuel Baptist Church in Overland Park, Kansas, by leading his Sunday School class in a song from the Baptist Hymnal each week.

“It’s such a natural question we carry all throughout our lives. When we go through hard times, you naturally think, ‘Where is God in this?’ ... I think it’s important for us to start teaching our kids right now that God is there alongside us when we’re sad,” said **Cameron Mason Vickrey**, who co-authored the children’s book, “My Love, God is Everywhere.”

HUGH’S VIEWS - HUGH KILPATRICK III



FROM PILLAR TO POST
JUDGES 16:23-30

My daddy and ‘Miss Lottie’

Thank you for sharing “LMCO memory: What took you so long to tell us about Jesus?” in the Nov. 16 edition. I am thrilled so many know this account about my daddy and “Miss Lottie” (the motorcycle).

As a missionary kid, I am grateful for the unwavering commitment and dedication of my parents and myriad other missionaries who have shared the love of Christ throughout the world.

Through the work of the Holy Spirit, they have pointed me to Jesus and reminded me to look to Him for everything.

The legacy of faith my parents left continues impacting and shaping my life as well as the lives of countless others throughout the world. The legacy of Jeannie (Thomason) and Ray Crowder is firmly rooted in an unwavering reliance upon God, dedication to follow His calling and perseverance in the midst of hardships.

“Miss Lottie” represents a tangible manifestation of God’s provision through the prayers, support and generosity of our Southern Baptist family whose cooperative efforts in praying for international missions and giving to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering decades ago still bears fruit for the Kingdom of God.

May the Lord ignite or reignite our passion for missions efforts that through the work of the Holy Spirit bring about transformed lives, not only for generations to come but for eternity.

I pray our Southern Baptist family will be diligent to actively participate in sharing the gospel throughout the world as they pray for missionaries and missions endeavors and prayerfully consider giving through the LMCO so the gospel message will continue spreading.

Shirley Crowder

Birmingham Metro WMU

3 stories you should know



Facebook photo

Medical professionals from across the U.S. celebrated 40 years of health care missions and ministry at Baptist Nursing Fellowship Summit 2023. The summit was held Nov. 3–5 at First Baptist Church Jackson, Mississippi. Sixty registered guests focused on being faithful, intentional, relentless and missional. A medical clinic, coordinated by BNF member and Alabama resident Charlotte Wyckoff, was held Nov. 5 at Soul City Church in Jackson. (TAB)

Former UM standout named Astros manager

Former University of Mobile Rams player Joe Espada is the new manager of the Houston Astros. Espada, 48, has been the Astros' bench coach for six seasons.

He replaces legendary manager Dusty Baker, who retired after leading the team to a World Series Championship in 2022.

Espada's coaching journey includes 10 seasons of minor league ball, followed by coaching stints with the Miami Marlins and the New York Yankees. Espada's previous managerial experience was in the Puerto Rican Winter League.

UM retired Espada's No. 6 jersey in 2019. (University of Mobile)



ESPADA

Georgia Baptists assist in Carter memorials

Georgia Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers, known for their expertise in feeding large crowds in disaster zones, provided hundreds of free meals to security personnel during three days of memorials for former first lady Rosalynn Carter.

Clad in trademark yellow shirts and caps, the volunteers served a variety of dishes, including roast beef, mashed potatoes, chicken fajitas and grits, all at no charge.

The volunteers aimed to support both the Carter family and the security personnel. Mrs. Carter died Nov. 19 at the age of 96.

"It's just a privilege for us to be able to do this," said David Reynolds, a Baxley, Georgia, resident who headed up the project. "We know that we're helping not only the Carter family but also these support people." (The Christian Index)

Persecuted church

Permit to build Christian school in Indonesia revoked after protests

PAREPARE, Indonesia — Officials of an Indonesian town verbally revoked permission for construction of a Christian school after Muslim groups marched in protest of the project.

The district council in Parepare in South Sulawesi province promised protesters that approval would be withdrawn from Gamaliel Christian School Foundation.

This action came even though the foundation had met all requirements and had been granted permission to build a school.

Morning Star, quoting a report from znews.com, said hundreds of residents had met Sept. 30 at Al Amin Mosque in Parepare to register their opposition to the planned school.

Indonesia is No. 33 on Open Doors' 2023

World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

Citing the World Watch List, Morning Star stated, "Indonesian society has adopted a more conservative Islamic character, and churches involved in evangelistic outreach are at risk of being targeted by Islamic extremist groups."

Church leader in Pakistan arrested for setting fire to his church

LAHORE, Pakistan — A church leader confessed to starting a blaze at his church in Pakistan and blaming it on Muslim extremists.

Police arrested Zubair Akhtar Khokhar for

the Nov. 16 fire that damaged Gulberg Presbyterian Church in Lahore, pastor Samuel Massey told Morning Star News.

Massey said footage from the church's security cameras showed that Khokhar, a church elder and treasurer, was the only person to enter and exit the building during the time frame of the fire.

Massey also said Khokhar confessed to having faked a letter, dated Oct. 16, that threatened Massey if he did not give up his position as pastor.

Church and community leaders said "involvement of a congregation member in the arson had put Pakistani Christians in an embarrassing situation," Morning Star reported.

Pakistan is No. 7 on Open Doors' 2023 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.



Unsplash.com

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

► **Robert Carson “Bob” Barnes** — who started and ended his pastoral career serving Alabama Baptist churches — died Nov. 10. He was 92.



BARNES

A Birmingham native, Barnes graduated from Howard College (now Samford University). He also earned master of divinity and master of theology degrees from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

Barnes was ordained in 1952 and served in several church leadership capacities before becoming pastor of Centreville Baptist Church in 1958. During his career, he also served as pastor of San Jose Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida, and Dutch Fork Church, Irmo, South Carolina, before answering the call to lead Raleigh Avenue Baptist Church in Birmingham. He finished his ministry career as minister to senior adults at First Baptist Church Birmingham.

Barnes is survived by his wife of 67 years, Judy; son, Robert; daughters, Jenny and Jan; five grandchildren; and one great-granddaughter.

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► **First Baptist Church Birmingham** will present Drawing Near to Bethlehem Dec. 10 at 6 p.m. featuring the worship ministry and orchestra. Kristie Stith, local artist, will create a chalk drawing during the presentation. Jeff Stith is minister of music, and Jim Cooley is pastor.



DeBORD

CHILTON ASSOCIATION

► **Matthew DeBord** is retiring as pastor of **First Baptist Church Clanton**. He and his wife, Kay, have served at FBC for 19 years.

CLAY ASSOCIATION

► **Clay Baptist Association** celebrated its 125th anniversary Oct. 21 during its annual meeting held at Bethel North Baptist Church, Delta. Reports from Baptist entities were shared by Debbie Campbell of The Alabama Baptist and Wendy Westerhouse, executive director-elect of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Westerhouse presented a commemorative plaque to Micah Harris,

moderator for the association. James Benefield, pastor of Bethel North, and Noel Vickers, pastor of New Prospect, were the guest preachers.

Photo by Debbie Campbell/
The Alabama Baptist

EAST CULLMAN ASSOCIATION

► East Cullman Association recently made the decision to dissolve **Plainview Baptist Church**; the church had not met for 18 months.

MARION ASSOCIATION

► **Zane Miles** (left) will become the new pastor of **First Baptist Church Guin** in January. He and current pastor, **Kenny Hatcher** (right), will “trade places,” as Hatcher switches to associate and senior adult pastor.

Miles holds a bachelor’s degree in religious studies from Liberty University and is working on his master’s degree. He began his ministry at FBC Guin in 2014 as student minister; a few years later, he became the associate pastor. He is also a volunteer coach in the community and has served in student ministry roles with the Marion County Baptist Association. He is a YMLink catalyst. He and his wife, Danielle, have two sons.



Photo by Kimberly Franks

Hatcher was recently honored for 50 years of ministry, most of which have

been in Alabama churches. He was ordained at Mount Carmel Baptist Church, West Blocton, and holds a doctor of ministry from International Seminary, Apopka, Florida. Hatcher is a NAMB-endorsed law enforcement chaplain and a vocal recording artist. He and his wife, Phyllis, have one daughter and two grandchildren.

MARSHALL ASSOCIATION

► **Clear Springs Baptist Church, Guntersville**, celebrated its 150th anniversary Oct 8. Don Paris (left), interim pastor, welcomed everyone to the service and recognized former pastors.

Reflections, testimonies and music were provided by Deedee Eller, Julie Burroughs, Gena Christopher, Leamon Martin and Susie Watkins. The church received a commemorative plaque from Joe Teal (right), a commissioner with the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Scotty Martin, church pianist for



Photo by Bonnie Teal

Guntersville First Baptist Church, was the guest musician. Melton Smith, former pastor, brought the message and Danny Hood, another former pastor, closed the service with prayer.

MOBILE ASSOCIATION

► The Sanctuary Choir and Orchestra of **Spring Hill Baptist Church, Mobile**, will present the 38th annual “This is Christmas,” Dec. 9 and 10 at 4 p.m. The Christmas worship experience features the sanctuary choir, orchestra, children’s choir, The Messengers, piano ensemble, Living Masterpieces and guest soloists Emily Herring and Chris Richie. Tickets are free, and are available online at shbc.cc or by calling 251-652-1037. Randy Grim is minister of music, and Ben Stubblefield is pastor.

WEST CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

► **Marion Junction Baptist Church** is observing its 75th anniversary this year. Lonette Berg (second from left), executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented a commemorative plaque to pastor Ed Byrom (second from right), Sunday School director Jimmy Holliman (left) and deacon chair John Westbrook (right).

► **Sister Springs Baptist Church, Tyler**, celebrated its bicentennial Sept. 17 with over 150 people in attendance. Tammy Deason Troha shared church memories that included the church receiving its name from two nearly identical springs that flowed just a few yards from the original church site. Sister Springs also was a charter member of Selma Baptist Association, now West Central Baptist Association.

Shelby Moore Grantham shared a poem written for the service, “If These Walls Could Talk.” Presentations were made by Anna Speir of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission and Mike Jackson, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions associate executive director, who was the guest speaker.

A new church steeple was given to the church by Ron and Holley Strickland. Music was provided by Gene McCormick, Melanie Nichols Ray and Beth Blackwell Brown. Additional special guests included Jonathan Jenkins, a former pastor, and Lee Tate, the association’s mission strategist. Pat Hatfield, the minister of music, coordinated the celebration. Robert Bayne is pastor.



Photo by Harold Speir

‘Live on mission’

Alabama Baptist associational leaders urged to see church as ‘body which is sent’

The Alabama Baptist Conference of Associational Leaders met Nov. 13 at Heritage Baptist Church in Montgomery prior to the Nov. 14–15 Alabama Baptist State Convention.

Associational leaders heard from Jamison Work, associational missions network associate with the International Mission Board, and Brad Brisco, director of bivocational church planting for the North American Mission Board.

Brisco told those gathered that “the grand narrative of the Bible is the mission of God.”

“In the gospels, we see the pattern of the Father sending the Son, the Father and the Son sending the Spirit, and the Spirit then sends the Church,” he said. “Rather than seeing ourselves primarily as a sending body, we must see ourselves as a body which is sent.”

Brisco shared insights on the benefits of bivocational and covocational ministry.

“Covocational ministry allows pastors and church staff to work in the marketplace where many of their church members spend most of their lives,” Brisco said.

‘Adjust to reality’

As more pastor, staff and leadership roles evolve toward part-time and bivocational ministry, leaders must adjust their approach, he added.

“The expectations of our churches must adjust to re-

ality. Our pastors and staff have to spend their time wisely and live on mission,” Brisco said.

All careers are to be used to bring glory to God, he noted, and future generations must take that message to heart.

The Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions provided associational leaders several resources related to the call to ministry.

Danny Courson, associational mission strategist for St. Clair Baptist Association, said the meeting was a “great time of fellowship, learning and networking for more effective ministry.”

ABCAL officers for 2024 are: Jeff Knight, lead mission strategist of Tuscaloosa County Baptist Association, president; Ric Camp, lead mission strategist of Shelby



Photo by Dianna Cagle/The Alabama Baptist

Alabama Baptist associational leaders and their wives enjoy breakfast together Nov. 13.



Facebook photo

Brad Brisco, director of bivocational church planting for NAMB, shares with the group.

Baptist Association, vice president; and Steve Dunn, associational missionary of Bethlehem and Pine Barren Baptist Association, treasurer.

Outgoing president Stan Albright, director of missions of Coosa River Baptist Association, led the meeting. (The Alabama Baptist)

Outstanding Music Ministry award



Photo courtesy of Steve Pace

Debbie Anderson receives this year’s Paul Stewart Award for Outstanding Music Ministry from Steve Pace (left) and Bill Carr of Alabama Singing Men. A charter member of Alabama Singing Women, Anderson has been the group’s accompanist for more than 18 years. She also accompanies the Alabama Baptist Children’s Honor Choir. (TAB)

Live Nativity

PRESENTED BY
THE BAPTIST CHURCH AT MCADORY

Experience an evening hayride as you explore scenes from Christ’s birth to His resurrection!
Afterward, enjoy Christmas treats & hot chocolate!

December 15, 16, & 17
6:00 - 8:00 PM

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QUALITY PHOTOS

Church photographs: Image resolution is key to better visuals in print, online

EDITOR'S NOTE — *The Alabama Baptist welcomes submissions of staff changes and news happening in your church and association. It's helpful if you also submit a high quality photograph (or several) to help us share your story. Often, the resolution of submitted photos is too small for print, which delays your news item being published. Generally, smartphone cameras will capture high resolution photos, but you might have to adjust your camera's settings. We asked communications expert Mark MacDonald to share some tips for image resolution.*

By Mark MacDonald
BeKnownforSomething.com

Photographs play a pivotal role in conveying your church's message. Whether for your website, social media or printed materials, getting the image resolution right is crucial.

Definition

Image resolution refers to the amount of detail an image holds. It is typically measured in dots per inch (DPI). Resolution is dependent on the device or channel you're producing for. Screen resolution requires the lowest DPI and professional printing requires the highest.

Your goal: clarity and sharpness. High-resolution images look crisp and clear. This is vital to make your church materials visually appealing and not pixelated (a choppy, blocky, or fuzzy appearance).

Format

Print and online/screen platforms have different requirements. While online images have a lower DPI (72

to 100 DPI is often sufficient), print materials demand higher DPI, usually 300 DPI, to ensure quality.

Avoid pixelation

Images will pixelate when enlarged, leading to a loss of quality. Never enlarge an image beyond its preferred DPI. Determine where the image will be used.

Online: 72 to 100 DPI.

Professionally printed materials (brochures, etc.): 300 DPI.

Office printers: Often 150 to 200 DPI.

Start with high-quality images: It's OK to downscale a high-res image but not to upscale a low-res one.

You can't "add" resolution to an image that's too low in resolution. You can only reduce its size.

Resolution adds file size, however. High-resolution images are bigger files so don't overdo resolution.

For websites, strive for an image file that is small but to be as small as possible so your file size remains small enough to deliver quickly over the internet.

Compress online images

You should optimize images that will be used online by compressing them without losing much quality.

Use formats like JPEG for photographs and PNG for images requiring

transparency. And reduce web images to 72 to 100 DPI.

When printing, ask the printer for the DPI requirement and maintain the resolution by sending photos through the printer's preferred method. Texting reduces the quality.

If you're showing an image on a big screen, check your equipment recommendations or do a trial run.

The key is to be aware and careful about image resolution.

Understanding and correctly implementing image resolution for print and online materials enhances your church's branding and ensures your message is conveyed with the professional impact it deserves.

Photograph file settings matter

Photo file formats affect the quality and size of images. Whether it's for website content, social media posts, email communication, your bulletin or submissions to publications, choosing the right photo format is crucial.

Let's define common formats, when to use them and how to easily change/convert them if needed.

1. JPEG or JPG: JPEG is one of the most widely used photo file formats. It's perfect for church websites and social media because of its small file size and compatibility. JPEGs are preferred for photographs and images with many colors, making them great for showing events, church members and vibrant im-

ages. If you crop a JPG, always keep an original copy if it might be used somewhere else.

2. PNG: PNG is the go-to format for images with transparency, like logos and icons for church branding. It's also favored for high-quality graphics. If you want your church's logo to look crisp and clear on your website, go for PNG.

3. RAW: Photography enthusiasts often work with RAW files. These files contain all the data captured by your camera sensor, allowing for extensive editing. They can be great for creating stunning visuals for church's print publications (bulletins, magazines, newspapers).

If you have one file format and need another, you may need to convert the format.

Here are some tips:

► Websites like convertio.co and online-converter.com allow you to upload a photo and select a desired format. They're user-friendly and require no software installation.

► Adobe Photoshop and online editors like Canva offer conversion options. They also provide control over quality and settings.

► Batch Conversion: If you have multiple photos to convert, consider using software that supports batch processing. This can save you a lot of time.

► Preserve Quality: When converting, always aim for the best quality possible. Always consider resolution and size requirements. (Mark MacDonald)

God's majestic works

Cave's new name provides distinct identity, nod to Creator

(continued from page 1)

"We always look forward to hosting a place where people can make memories and have an experience that honors God and where you would feel comfortable inviting a non-Christian family member or friend," Sorenson said.

For more information, visit majesticcaverns.com/adventus.

"We want to be a place that's warm and welcoming to people — and they

can enjoy and hopefully encounter Jesus."

Sorenson said her family's legacy of faith has been a part of the caverns for a long time.

Her great-great-grandmother, Ida Mathis, bought the cave more than a century ago, and in the 1970s, Sorenson's father, Allen Mathis III, turned it into what it is today.

For decades, it went by the name DeSoto Caverns, but Sorenson changed it to Majestic Caverns in 2022.



Photo courtesy of Majestic Caverns

Singing, dancing and festive characters are part of the Christmas celebration at Majestic Caverns, a family-friendly park near Childersburg. The park also offers a Christmas laser light show with every tour through Dec. 31.

The new name gives glory to God for His majestic works, Sorenson said, and it also helps visitors differentiate it from DeSoto State Park two hours north in Fort Payne.

The caverns welcome visitors year round.

"We love church groups to come and spend the night in the cave," Sorenson said, noting that there are bathrooms inside as well as electricity for lights, air mattresses and other needs.

Moving experience

She said singing worship songs in the caverns is a moving experience and it's a great place to "go deep with God quite literally."

"We want to tell stories inside the cave — a place of natural beauty — and blend faith and history," Sorenson said. "It's a majestic creation God has made for us to steward well."

Majestic Caverns, formerly DeSoto Caverns, welcomes groups and families for day trips and overnight experiences inside a cave.

Jasper churches share 'day of fun for families'

Fall festivals have become an annual outreach event for many churches, and in Jasper, 19 churches have taken it a step further for nearly a decade now by coming together as a whole to reach their community for Jesus.

Churches representing a variety of denominations hope to provide a "free day of fun for Jasper-area families" with the event, held this year Oct. 29.

Children are encouraged to wear costumes while they spend time collecting candy and enjoying the inflatables, carnival-type games, a hayride and more. Food trucks are also available during the event.

The idea for the combined festival was devised in 2015 by two ministers at Northside Baptist Church in Jasper.

John Jaye, Northside's student minister at the time, and Shawn Stinson, minister of music and outreach, realized offering a "bigger and better" event at a neutral site would bring advantages for both the churches and the families.

'What God can do'

Even though the first year was a bit "bonkers" as the leaders learned how to anticipate the crowds, "we knew we had 'proof of concept' and decided to improve and do better the next year," said Stinson, who serves as the event organizer.

Milo's Hamburgers has been the sole corporate sponsor since 2018.

"As I look around the festival every year, I'm reminded that while each church has their own beliefs and ways we interpret Scripture, we all have one main thing in common and that's Jesus," Stinson said. "Every church there loves Jesus and wants to share His love. ... If we can just look past the minor differences sometimes and focus on Jesus, it's amazing what God can do when we work together." (Tracy Frontz)



Photo courtesy of Majestic Caverns

AGING WELL



Photo courtesy of Melissa Cooper

Senior Placement Services consultant Melissa Cooper (left) stands with clients Rufus and Dora Bond.

GOD HAS A PLAN

Senior Placement Services consultant considers families in senior stage of life a ministry

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Choosing independent living housing for yourself or your loved ones can be daunting. Cost, level of care and other factors such as included meal plans and activities — all while dealing with downsizing — can make a decision overwhelming.

This is when a person like Melissa Cooper, a senior placement services consultant, comes in to help. She's able to help find the best fit based on budget, desired location and care needs.

Cooper advises that it's important to narrow options before this type of housing is needed.

"I've had so many residents say, 'This is one of the best decisions I've ever made. I just wish I had done it sooner.' Honestly, the younger you are, the easier it is. Change is hard anyway for most of us and the older you are, the harder it is."

Planning ahead

"I can't stress enough — make these decisions while you're capable and able to make them for yourself if you don't want someone else making them for you," Cooper said.

The process often starts with the children of the future resident contacting Cooper, though sometimes it only involves the person who needs to move. A time is set up to talk in person or on the phone.

Cooper then gets to know them better to assess the level of care needed and the resident's personality, preferred activities, dietary

preferences, best location and budget. She chooses three to four communities for the children to visit and fewer if it's the senior initiating the search.

She will arrange tours of the communities for them to see what living there would be like, including sampling a meal if desired.

Depends on readiness

The timetable for this process varies and depends on the readiness of the person who needs the care. There are times it is necessary to move quickly, such as following a hospital or rehabilitation stay.

In those cases, Cooper meets with the client quickly and narrows the options down to one or two in order to make a decision easier.

Even when a decision is made before it's necessary, there is often a big obstacle — the problem of perception.

"There are a lot of seniors who give pushback because they picture senior living like the old nursing homes that their grandmothers lived in.

"That's not the case anymore. It's definitely not your grandma's nursing home," said Cooper.

"Getting over misconceptions is half the battle," she continued.

Advantages of a senior living community are:

- They are open for younger ages than expected, with some taking 55-year-olds.

- Opportunities to socialize are plentiful, which is a priority.

- Healthy, balanced meals are available and sometimes included in the cost, but there are also kitchens in many of the apartments.

- There are often workout rooms and indoor swimming pools.

- The community might have movie theaters, church services and other types of entertainment provided.

- Many have full-sized or stackable washers and dryers.

- Areas for families to gather are available at many sites.

- Transportation to stores and appointments is provided.

If more care is needed, then assisted living could be the way to go.

Assisted living is for individuals who are mostly mobile, even if using a wheelchair or walker. They can't be bedridden or require more than one person to help them get out of a chair.

ing a wheelchair or walker. They can't be bedridden or require more than one person to help them get out of a chair.

In-home assessment

To determine whether someone needs memory care versus assisted living, a nurse will do a 30-minute in-home assessment.

Called the Mini-Mental State Examination, this measures physical capabilities and mental and cognitive skills.

Memory care units are locked to keep the residents from wandering and have much more support for

medications, meals and other tasks that could be an issue for someone with dementia.

One of the biggest questions Cooper gets asked pertains to cost, and the range is wide depending on the location, anywhere from a little more than \$1,000 per month to more than \$10,000 per month.

To help show how this new expense would impact the resident, Cooper has a checklist that compares current housing costs to a community's fees.

Though Cooper isn't the only one providing this kind of service, in her case, faith drives all she does. She considers this not just a job, but a ministry.

Praying for clients

"Every day I'm praying for my clients, that they have wisdom and find the right fit for them, where they'll be the most successful and the happiest."

Though there are several faith-based communities, Cooper tells believers other communities are "captive missions fields" and "there are people here who don't know the Lord and time is running out.

"I love working with seniors and trying to help them find that they still have purpose in this life. Your life isn't over until God calls you home. He has a plan for you no matter where you are — including senior living communities."

"I love this quote: 'You can't give your life more time, so you give the time you have more life.' I feel that's a really good summary of the way I try to approach [this journey] with people."

For more information about Melissa Cooper and what she can do for a family in this stage of life or questions about these communities, contact her at melissa@seniorplacementservicesllc.com or at 205-356-2476.

UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

MinistrySafe workshop Feb. 20 in Trussville

For several years now, MinistrySafe has been helping equip Alabama Baptist churches to protect their children from sexual abuse.

If your church staff hasn't had the opportunity to attend a MinistrySafe conference, please join us Feb. 20 at First Baptist Church Trussville. Kimberlee Norris, cofounder of MinistrySafe, will provide awareness training on topics including how sexual predators select and groom their victims, peer-to-peer child sexual abuse and setting up a safety system for your church.

The workshop will equip you with an awareness, understanding, tools and strategies needed to help protect children from sexual abuse in churches and protect churches through policy and procedure development and a session on responding to an allegation.

To register, visit alsbom.org/ministrysafe or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



Norris — along with her husband and MinistrySafe cofounder, Greg Love — has decades of experience addressing child sexual abuse issues along with decades of student ministry.

The cost for the event is \$20 per person. To register online for the event, visit alsbom.org/ministrysafe.

2024 State Evangelism Conference: Jan. 28-29

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

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

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

Other speakers include:

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

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

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

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

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

You Gotta' Hear This!



Finding humor in the everyday moments

A Crockpot Kind of Christmas

By Debbie Childers
The Alabama Baptist

When I was a child, I remember my mother cooking beans in a vessel called a pressure cooker.

If the cooker operated properly, it would release steam slowly as the liquid in the pot grew hotter and hotter. But I have vivid memories of a malfunction in the system when the steam was not released properly.

The pot shook like an overloaded washing machine and hissed like a snake. The gasket on top started jiggling like a hula girl, and the top exploded off the pot splattering beans on the stove, the walls and the ceiling!

Letting the pressure build

I must admit, that disastrous scene could describe some holidays in my past. It's easy to let the pressure of the holidays build in us, with no method of release, until suddenly we erupt on those we love most. Christmas can become far from a time of peace in our little corners of the world.

I'm pretty sure God never intended for the celebration of His Son's birth to include so much hectic activity, frustration and stress. If He had, He would have called Jesus the Agent of Activity instead of the Prince of Peace. Jesus would have made His entrance riding a whirlwind instead of sleeping like a baby. I'm thinking we need a Christmas that looks a lot more like the first Christmas.

Lately, I've been trying a lot of

crockpot recipes. Now that's the way to cook. You put all the ingredients in the pot, and let it cook slowly. All the seasoning and juices just melt together. The house smells delicious, and it starves you to death. I just relax while the crockpot does the work.

Slow down

Here's the best part. I've never once seen a crockpot shake. I've never had one blow its top. My crockpot has never spewed beans on my walls or ceiling.

I want to try a crockpot kind of Christmas instead of a pressure cooker Christmas this year. I want to slow down and enjoy the sights, sounds and smells of this beautiful holiday. I don't want to hurry through the events that seem to come one on top of the other.

This year, I want to really experience the special fellowship with my friends and family that only happens this time of the year.

And just maybe I can even have some peace on earth instead of beans on the ceiling this year.

MEET THE AUTHOR

Debbie Childers is a speaker, humorist and author based in Moody. She finds great humor in the fact that all through her school years, she got in trouble for talking and now she gets invited to do it!



Wilson urges pastors to persevere 'in faithfulness'

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Jared Wilson said the past few years “have taken the successful façade off of a lot of churches.”

It’s a reality that’s “bringing clarity to what we’re supposed to be doing,” said Wilson, assistant professor of pastoral ministry at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

But it has also brought a season of great trial for a lot of pastors, he said as he spoke at the Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference on Nov. 13 at Taylor Road Baptist Church in Montgomery.

“Pastors are feeling a kind of grief ... a series of little deaths that tempt us to doubt God’s grace for us,” he said.

But sharing from 2 Corinthians 4:16–18 — which talks about how “this light, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” — Wilson challenged pastors to cling to God’s grace in the midst of tough times.

‘Eternal faithfulness’

“What we have learned over a very difficult season is to have the vision Paul commands in this passage — God’s eternal faithfulness to us,” he said.

Wilson reminded pastors of three ways God’s grace sustains them in their life and ministry, especially when it’s tough.

1. God’s grace sustains us in life.

To tune your heart to how



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

During the Nov. 13 opening session of the Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference at Taylor Road Baptist Church in Montgomery, Jared Wilson spoke on the sustaining grace of God.

things are going temporarily is “a losing proposition,” Wilson said. “He might’ve disappointed you ... thwarted your ideas or plans for you or your church. ... He might’ve hijacked your agenda and replaced it with His own, but He has never failed you. His grace is the one steady, unchanging current you can rely on.”

Reality of eternity

Focus on the reality that eternity is weighty enough to make the present situa-

tion look light by comparison, he said.

Viewing life through that lens gives followers of Christ “an entirely new perspective not just on the afterlife but in daily life,” he said. “We’re united to Jesus by faith. ... Heaven in effect comes to us while we live.”

2. God’s grace sustains us in suffering.

In 2 Corinthians 4:16–18, Paul puts the normalcy of suffering in the context of God’s grace, Wilson

said. The Apostle Peter in his letters also treats hardship as normal for pastoral ministry.

“As we share in Christ’s sufferings, we become more like Him,” Wilson said. “This is a grace greater than if He took away our suffering or alleviated our pain.”

The greater grace “is not escaping suffering; it’s be-

coming more like Christ,” he said. “There’s something greater than comfort — it’s Christ. And Christ is everything.”

Followers of Christ have the hope that the mess here “will somehow get restored, redeemed, healed, and that every tear we cry is being stored up as a treasure awaiting us,” Wilson said.

3. God’s grace sustains us in death.

“God is gracious, and He will be gracious until the very end,” Wilson said. “We shouldn’t fear death because it’s just the reality of losing what we can’t keep anyway. Do you really want to keep this body?”

Being aware

While pastors shouldn’t be afraid of death, they should be aware of it, Wilson said

— they should live as though they aren’t promised tomorrow and keep pressing on until the finish line.

“Some of us will die young, some of us will die old, but precious in the sight

of the Lord is the death of all His saints,” Wilson said. “Don’t you want to finish well? ... Let’s live today with the aim of persevering in faithfulness to the finish line of old age ... with a gleam in our eye — ‘By Christ I finished it.’”

Because of God’s grace, pastors who persevere will hear “well done,” he said.

“As we share in Christ’s sufferings, we become more like Him.”

Jared Wilson
assistant professor of pastoral ministry
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary



In the little moments and major milestones of childhood, we are here for our patients and their families – helping, healing, teaching and discovering.



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of Alabama

ChildrensAL.org



To view more photos from Jared Wilson's session at the Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference, visit tabonline.org/Jared-Wilson.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Feb. 15 event offers help reaching Gen Z, Gen Alpha

Looking for ways to minister to Gen Z and Gen Alpha?

Our Next Generation Conference is for pastors, discipleship pastors, student pastors, children's ministers and preschool ministers who are looking for methods to aid in the ministering to the Gen Z and Gen Alpha population groups.

Shelly Melia, associate dean and program director for the master of arts in children's ministry and the master of arts in family ministry at Dallas Baptist University, will lead the conference.

Melia has spoken at

To register, visit alsbom.org/nextgen or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



national conferences such as ETCH Family Ministry Conferences, D6 Family Ministry Conference and the Children's Pastor's Conference. In addition,

she is a frequent speaker for local churches and state conventions in Oklahoma, Texas, Georgia, Louisiana and Missouri. She has led webinar presentations on topics ranging from international children's ministries, to gender identity and kids, to helping families in crisis and leadership trends and transitions.

The conference will be held Feb. 15, 10 a.m.–3 p.m., at the State Board of Missions in Prattville. The cost is \$20 per person, which includes lunch.

To register, visit alsbom.org/nextgen.

Use Logos more effectively

Have you been wanting to try Logos Bible Software or learn how to use it more effectively?

The next Intentional Leader Series: Preacher event will be held Jan. 23 and will focus on exactly that.

The series is designed to empower and equip busy pastors with enhanced

tools, enabling them to prepare and deliver God's Word more efficiently and with greater effectiveness.

This installment aims to help with proficiency using Logos, a sermon prep platform that allows you to study Scripture and consult commentaries, devotionals and Bible dictionaries.

The event will be held

Jan. 23, 9 a.m.–2 p.m. at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions in Prattville.

The cost is \$10. You MUST bring a laptop for this training event. The first 50 registrations will receive a discount on Logos Bible Software.

To register, visit leadercareal.org/ils.

Get your tax questions answered

Do you have questions about IRS deadlines and forms for your church? Are you a pastor wondering about special tax rules for you on topics like housing allowance and dual tax status? The Tax Conference will help answer questions

about those topics and more.

Join us Jan. 4 at the State Board of Missions, Prattville; Jan. 11 at the Birmingham Metro Baptist Association; or Jan. 18 at First Baptist, Scottsboro, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The cost of the event is \$15, which includes lunch and materials.

To register, visit alsbom.org/churchtaxconferences. Questions? Call Lee Wright at 334-613-2263 or email lwright@alsbom.org.

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 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.

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Dr. Romeo Penn is a licensed clinical pastoral counselor/therapist. Dr. Penn serves those in need of pre-marriage, marriage and relationship counseling, as well as those struggling with grief, depression, anxiety, fear and anger. Visit his website at pennpointcounseling.com to learn more. Dr. Penn also recently published his first workbook, "R.P.T. Therapy: Rejoice. Prayer. Thanksgiving." It is available for purchase through Amazon.

HOSTED CHURCH

Hosted Church is a premium one-stop shop for your church or nonprofit to quickly get your website up and running without sacrificing quality and functionality. Hosted Church is an extension of The Alabama Baptist and The Baptist Paper and is dedicated to helping small to medium churches. Contact us at hostedchurch.com.

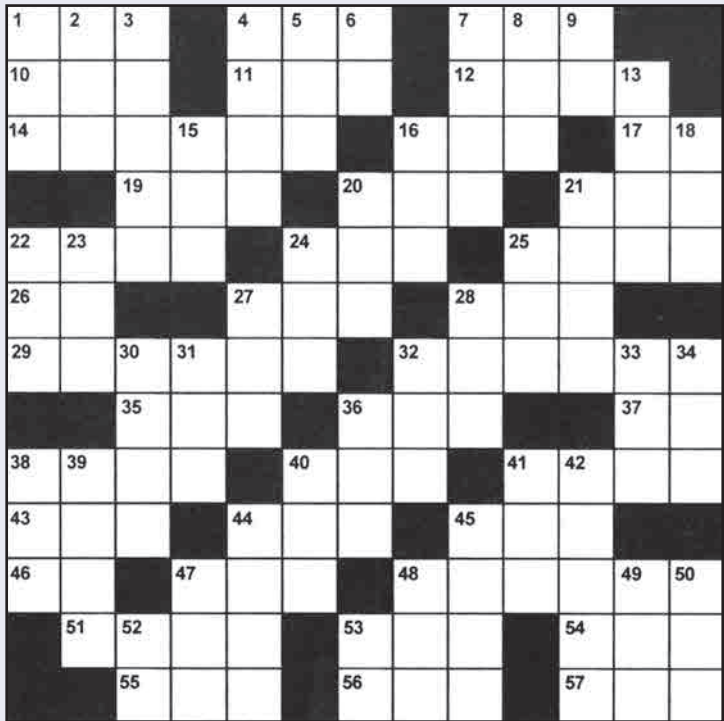
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Unforsaken Ministries walks alongside those in active addiction and their loved ones. Our mission is to offer hope. This is accomplished by guiding those in addiction and their loved ones through the recovery process. For more information, call 205-246-2030 or email glenn@unforsakenministry.org.

CHRISTIAN crossword

WORD search

- ACROSS**
- 1. But ____ unto you. (Matt. 23:13)
 - 4. A time to rend, a time to _____. (Eccles. 3:7)
 - 7. The name of his city was _____. (1 Chron. 1:50)
 - 10. The children of Aram; Uz and _____. (Gen. 10:23)
 - 11. Upon the great ____ of their right foot. (Ex. 29:20)
 - 12. God ... is ____ to deliver us. (Dan. 3:17)
 - 14. Source.
 - 16. You fathers, where ____ they? (Zech. 1:5)
 - 17. ____ no violence to the stranger. (Jer. 22:3)
 - 19. Eye hath not seen, nor ____ heard. (1 Cor. 2:9)
 - 20. Fear and the ____, and the snare, are upon thee. (Isa. 24:17)
 - 21. Ye have made it a ____ of thieves. (Mark 11:17)
 - 22. Thou didst ____ on the Lord. (2 Chron. 16:8)
 - 24. Golf score.
 - 25. She bound the scarlet ____ in the window. (Josh. 2:21)
 - 26. 4 in Roman numerals.
 - 27. All they are brass, and ____, and iron. (Ezek. 22:18)
 - 28. He ____ to meet him. (Gen. 29:13)
 - 29. Joseph was a goodly _____. (Gen. 39:6)
 - 32. ____ me, and be merciful unto me. (Ps. 26:11)
 - 35. Edible grain.
 - 36. Pronoun.
 - 37. Why are ____ so fearful? (Mark 4:40)
 - 38. My yoke is _____. (Matt. 11:30)
 - 40. His eyes shall be ____ with wine. (Gen. 49:12)
 - 41. Promises of God in him are yea, and in him _____. (2 Cor. 1:20)
 - 43. How long will it be ____ thou be quiet? (Jer. 47:6)
 - 44. ____ also, which went with Abram. (Gen. 13:5)
 - 45. He maketh me to ____ down in green pastures. (Ps. 23:2)
 - 46. Southern state. (abbr.)
 - 47. Their ____ calveth. (Job 21:10)
 - 48. ____ smote the donkey. (Num. 22:23)
 - 51. Early day.
 - 53. Were there not ____ cleansed? (Luke 17:17)



By Evelyn M. Boyington Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing

- 54. Article.
 - 55. Cereal grain.
 - 56. The ____ number of them. (Num. 3:48)
 - 57. Make us ____ together in heavenly places. (Eph. 2:6)
- DOWN**
- 1. ____ hath believed our report. (Isa. 53:1)
 - 2. ____ Father which art in heaven. (Matt. 6:9)
 - 3. ____ the Mahavite. (1 Chron. 11:46)
 - 4. ____ up the gift of God. (2 Tim. 1:6)
 - 5. Age.
 - 6. When ____ were children. (Gal. 4:3)
 - 7. The Lord taketh my ____ with them that help me. (Ps. 118:7)
 - 8. Lincoln's nickname.
 - 9. 49 in Roman numerals.
 - 13. God planted a garden eastward in _____. (Gen. 2:8)
 - 15. Respect to him that weareth the ____ clothing. (James 2:3)
 - 16. The birds of the ____ have nests. (Matt. 8:20)
 - 18. Not ____ thing hath failed. (Josh. 23:14)
 - 20. She took a ____, and poured them out. (2 Sam. 13:9)
 - 21. Come and _____. (John 21:12)
 - 22. Tear.
 - 23. Adam called his wife's name _____. (Gen. 3:20)
 - 24. She fastened it with the _____. (Judg. 16:14)
 - 25. There is a ____ here. (John 6:9)
 - 27. Young child.
 - 28. Peleg ... begat _____. (Gen. 11:18)
 - 30. I am the ____ of Sharon. (Song of Sol. 2:1)
 - 31. Consider what I _____. (2 Tim. 2:7)
 - 32. Thy ____ and thy staff they comfort me. (Ps. 23:4)
 - 33. ____ hath not seen. (1 Cor. 2:9)
 - 34. It is appointed unto ____ once to die. (Heb. 9:27)
 - 36. It doth not ____ appear what we shall be. (1 John 3:2)
 - 38. Lamprey.
 - 39. Balak ... hath brought me from _____. (Num. 23:7)
 - 40. Put pure frankincense upon each _____. (Lev. 24:7)
 - 41. To be troubled.
 - 42. Neither desire thou his dainty _____. (Prov. 23:6)
 - 44. Solitary.
 - 45. Let the dry ____ appear. (Gen. 1:9)
 - 47. Unto thee will I ____, O Lord. (Ps. 28:1)
 - 48. David arose from off his _____. (2 Sam. 11:2)
 - 49. ____ the son of Abdiel. (1 Chron. 5:15)
 - 50. The angels of God ____ him. (Gen. 32:1)
 - 52. Conjunction.
 - 53. It is not for you ____ know. (Acts 1:7)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

- ADAM
- ANIMALS
- BIRDS
- CREATION
- DARKNESS
- DAY
- DOMINION
- EARTH
- EDEN
- EVE
- FISH
- GARDEN
- GOD
- HELPER
- KNOWLEDGE
- LAND
- LIGHT
- LIVESTOCK
- MOON
- NIGHT
- PLANTS
- SABBATH
- SEAS
- SKY
- STARS
- SUN
- TREE OF LIFE
- TREES
- VEGETATION
- WATERS



"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."



Congratulations
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Alabama Baptist State
Board *of* Missions *on the*
Bicentennial Celebration *of the*
Alabama Baptist State Convention

1823-2023

Alabama collegiate leaders learn, celebrate at Unite

Alabama Baptist campus ministers, college pastors and collegiate church planters met Nov. 13 at Auburn University at Montgomery's Baptist Campus Ministries for Unite.

The annual gathering seeks to encourage and equip those who serve in "the most strategic" missions field in Alabama, pray for their ministries and celebrate lives changed by the gospel, said Ben Ed-

feldt, director of the office of collegiate and student ministries for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Along with hearing from guest speaker Gary Stidham, director of the Baptist Student Ministries at the University of Texas at Arlington, those attending Unite had an opportunity to network and hear what efforts are taking place on other campuses.

Edfeldt shared about a new participant at Unite, who recently began a Bible study at a small community college in central Alabama.

"I was struck by her bravery and heart to reach her campus even though she had never done anything like this before," Edfeldt said. "Reaching the campus takes all of us."

Learn more about BCM and collegiate ministries at bcmlink.org. (Dianna Cagle)



Photo by Dianna Cagle/The Alabama Baptist

Above: Blake and Julie Prater talk with Griffith Pearson (left) at Unite. Pearson serves with SUB25, the college and young adult ministry of Gardendale FBC. Blake Prater, pastor of New Prospect Baptist Church in Jasper, serves college students at Beville State Community College. **Left:** Gary Stidham, director of Baptist Student Ministries at the University of Texas at Arlington, speaks on how to build evangelistic momentum.



Photo by Dianna Cagle/The Alabama Baptist

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 10

Explore the Bible

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



THE FIRST COUPLE Genesis 2:7-9, 15-25

Placed (7-9)

Last week, we looked at the general account of God's creative activity in which He is called "Elohim," translated "God." Beginning in Genesis 2:4, the compound name "YHWH Elohim," using all capital letters and translated "LORD God," is used almost exclusively in chapters 2 and 3, emphasizing His personal interaction with humanity.

The name "Adam" is used both for humanity in general ("man") and for the individual man Adam. These verses record the unique creation of Adam from pre-existing material, in which the Lord God fashions Adam the way a potter shapes his clay.

Once the Creator breathes life into His creature, He places Adam in a garden filled with beautiful trees that have delicious fruit.

In the midst of that garden was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Let the reader note that Adam only knows good at this point because God's entire creation was very good (1:31). He has not yet experienced evil.

Employed (15-17)

Before Adam ever met his wife, he had a job. The Lord God did not place Adam in the garden to be fat and lazy but to steward the garden that he was entrusted to work and to watch over. The false assertion that work is a result of the fall ignores both God's work in creation and Adam's work as the gardener.

God was generous with compensation for Adam. He was allowed to eat from all but one of the beautiful and delicious trees in the garden. The only prohibition was fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Thus far Adam had only known good from God's creation, so gaining an intimate knowledge of evil would come from outright disobedience to God's rule. Obedience

resulted in certain access to bounty, whereas disobedience resulted in certain death.

As image bearers, humanity has innate dignity. Individuals are called to be active within creation, following God's pattern. Diligent work is expected from God's people (Ex. 20:9; 2 Thess. 3:10), whether land owner or sojourner (Lev. 19:9-10), free or enslaved (Eph. 6:5-9).

Alone (18-20)

Adam was free to do everything God had assigned to him, but he was also alone. He completed his task by naming the land creatures and birds. None of the animals was a suitable companion for the man, so God performed surgery. God worked as an anesthetist, surgeon and biomechanical engineer to build a woman, whom Adam later named "Eve." She would be his work partner and human companion.

United (21-25)

Work and companionship led to marriage and children. Adam and Eve followed the pattern that God designed for sustaining human life. They worked together, walked together and woke together as husband and wife.

In a time when Christians wonder how to respond to neighbors who deny biological gender and rage against heterosexual marriage, we turn to Scripture as our guide to faith and practice.

Not only does Genesis 1 affirm the special creation of two human genders (1:27), but Chapter 2 underscores God's plan for intimate, one-flesh union between a man and a woman.

Jesus clearly affirmed that God created biological gender and that God

designed marriage to be between a man and a woman. He quotes from Genesis 1 and 2 and then emphasizes the covenantal aspect ("God has joined together") of marriage. (See Matt. 19:4-9.)

"Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life."

Genesis 2:7

Bible Studies for Life

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



THE MAJESTY OF GOD'S NAME Psalm 138:1-8

How do you know when you are ready to worship? Is it when you arrive at the church campus at a designated time? Could it be that worship commences in your mind with the first sound of a note from an instrument or an invitation to stand and lift your voice in song?

While each of these is important, they speak primarily to the planned or outward expressions of a person. There is nothing wrong with corporate or planned worship.

It is biblical and beneficial, and it breeds unity within a church family. However, it should not be the only time we worship.

The psalms penned by David are filled with themes of God's majesty and glory. For David, worship was a lifestyle, not simply an event. David both understood and exhibited the fact that genuine worship is intentional.

Can the same be said of us? Outside of your church's worship times, are you making worship a daily priority in your life?

God's name is exalted because of His love and truth. (1-3)

David states in these verses that he will praise God, sing unto Him and worship Him. While many churches today wrestle with the content of their worship, David reminds us that the object of our worship is more significant than the style.

Worship can be expressed in a variety of ways, with music being one. Our worship should not be driven by our feelings, but rather by our intimate and growing love and thanksgiving to God.

Verse 2 is best translated, "I will bow down." One day all will bow to the name of Jesus and confess that He is Lord.

In our churches, some may not be physically able to easily bow or stand up, but we can all practice the posture of a humble, grateful and submissive heart. True worship is an encounter with the Sovereign, not just an experience with a song.

God's name is exalted because of His promises. (4-5)

Throughout the Old Testament, godly and ungodly kings alike recognized the power of the God of Israel. Pharaohs of Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and Darius of Persia each understood the magnitude of what God could do.

Consider as children of God how much more we can recognize the provisions and glory of our great God. As believers, He reveals Himself to us, redeems us, secures us for eternity and provides His

Word for us freely when we seek it. His promises alone should result in an eagerness to worship Him.

God's name is exalted because of His care for the humble. (6-8)

Our mighty, omnipotent Father is high and lifted up, yet His great love is shown to the lowly and the humble. His benevolent mercy for us underscores His greatness, not ours.

Everything God provides for His children is a result of His faithfulness and love. His love endures forever.

It is a liberating and powerful realization when we acknowledge we can never let God down. The reason we could never let Him down is that we were never holding Him up to begin with.

We may fail but our God cannot. That is why we worship and the reason we have a song to sing.

"The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands."

Psalm 138:8

MEDIA REVIEWS

By TAB Media Group correspondents and staff

Unique Christmas gift ideas for the reader in your family

Becoming Elisabeth Elliot and Being Elisabeth Elliot

By Ellen Vaughn

B&H Books, 2020 and 2023

respectively

Elisabeth Elliot became one of the most influential Christian women of the 20th century after her husband, fellow missionary Jim Elliot, was murdered in Ecuador in 1956. Author Ellen Vaughn has given readers unprecedented access to

understanding more about Elliot's life and spiritual journey in her two authorized biographies, "Becoming Elisabeth Elliot," published in 2020, and "Being Elisabeth Elliot," which was released Sept. 12.

In "Becoming Elisabeth Elliot," based on the first few decades of her life, readers have the privilege of witnessing that faith develop in the midst of the most challenging circumstances, including her life in the jungle with the Indigenous

people who murdered her husband. Vaughn continues this biographical journey with the recently published "Being Elisabeth Elliot."

The later part of Elliot's life concerned "understanding how much she did not understand," Vaughn writes. As in the first volume, Vaughn relied on personal journals — along with interviews with family and friends — to tell the story of Elliot's later years.

Elliot describes life as both a widow and wife, prolific writer and radio broadcaster in her thoughtful, detailed writings. The realities of her third marriage and the last years of her life may surprise some readers, but through it all is a woman who relentlessly pursued her Savior. (Lori White)

There's Beauty in Your Brokenness

By Brittany Maher and Cassandra Speer
Thomas Nelson, 2023

Her True Worth," a Facebook and Instagram community with more than 5 million followers, is led by Brittany Maher and Cassandra Speer. Their recent release, "There's Beauty in Your Brokenness: 90 Devotions to Surrender Striving, Live Unburdened and Find Your Worth in Christ," is a book form of what they share in the online group about one's worthiness in Christ.

With short chapters that are only about two or three pages and have

titles such as "Surviving the Storms in Life," "Our Secrets Make Us Sick" and "The Enemy Wants You to Agree with Him. Don't," the book provides support for real-life issues that come from the included Bible verses as well as personal experiences.

Not a journal or a Bible study, there are no questions at the end of each chapter that could lead to procrastination. This is edifying for the woman on the go, with the readings only taking about five minutes to complete.

Encouraging quotes are abundant throughout the devotional, both in the empty space at the end of many chapters as well as on full pages with a pastel watercolor background.

With the beautiful hardback edition opening up to a page where the name of the recipient, the giver and the date can be recorded, "There's Beauty in Your Brokenness" would be a great gift for the women in your life who might need a lift or for the teen who needs to learn where her true worth originates. (Tracy Riggs Frontz)

Stories of the First Christmas: A Family Experience Together

By Barbara Davis
2023

From gifting sweet treats to sending cards focused on the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, the Christmas season affords Christians many unique ways to share the gospel.

Mobile artist Barbara Davis created a series of oil paintings depicting the characters in the Christmas story.

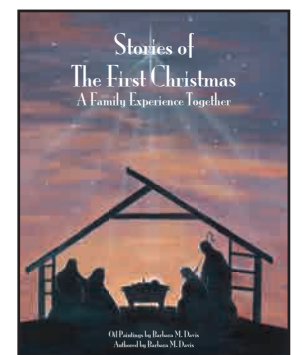
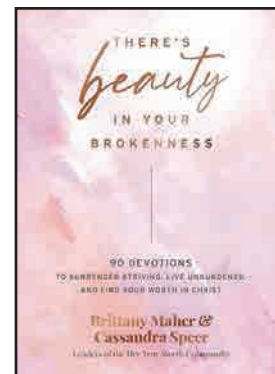
She began a collaboration with pastor Terry Ellis from Louisiana, to create a devotional book for adults with stories about the first Christmas, using the paintings as illustrations.

Wanting to reach her grandchildren with the stories, she sought the Lord's guidance and felt Him leading her to write an additional book families could use to meaningfully walk their children through the biblical accounts surrounding Jesus' birth — "Stories of the First Christmas: A Family Experience Together."

She began writing family devotions for each of her paintings. She wanted her book to be interactive, so in each devotion she designed questions inviting families into thought and conversation around how the characters responded to God and how those responses relate to the lives of believers today.

In "Stories of the First Christmas," families will find age-appropriate, biblically sound devotions designed to lead them away from the hustle and bustle of the commercial Christmas season all the way back to Bethlehem and the wonder and mystery of the arrival of God's Son.

To purchase "Stories of the First Christmas" and learn more about Davis, visit storiesofthefirstchristmas.com. (Robin McCall)



EDITOR'S NOTE

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DAILY BIBLE READING



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10 reasons why you should read your Bible every day

By Chuck Lawless

chucklawless.com

I have not always done so without struggle, but I believe in the importance of Christians reading their Bible every day.

Here's why, as my friend Bill Cook and I have said in our new book, "Victory over the Enemy":

1. We need nourishment every day. The Word of God is "sweeter than honey dripping from a honeycomb" (Ps. 19:10), and we need its nutrition every day (1 Pet. 2:2). Yesterday's reading is not always enough to carry us through another day.

2. The enemy attacks us every day. He doesn't say to us, "You know, you haven't read the Bible today, so I'll back off since you don't have the sword of the Spirit ready." We need to be wielding the sword (Eph. 6:17) every day.

3. We need to put ourselves under God's teachings every day. Every day will bring new challenges, new temptations and new threats to God's Word and His standards. It is

far too easy to listen to the clamor of the world when we've not put ourselves in a position to hear the Lord's voice that day.

4. Temptations return every day. Jesus spoke the Word when the devil tempted Him on the mountain, and the devil left Him — but only for a while (Luke 4:1–13). Temptation often hits us unexpectedly, and we're seldom thinking about reading the Bible at that moment. We should be daily reading to be ready for any temptation — as it's by knowing and obeying the Word that a young man keeps his way pure (Ps. 119:9).

5. Daily reading is an indication of our love and dependence on God. That's what spiritual disciplines are: a cry for relationship with God and a confession of our dependence on Him. When we read the Word, we're saying, "God, I love you enough that I want to hear from you, and I need you so much that I must hear from you." Our hearts ought to reverberate with those words every day.

6. We're different today than we were yesterday. You might question whether that's the case, but all of us change and grow in different ways each day. That means that a teaching of the Scripture that may not have caught our attention yesterday somehow drives us to our knees today. The Spirit of God knows when we have ears to hear.

7. The Word is our way to counter the ongoing, incessant voices of the world. Let's face it — it's hard to find a quiet place where we don't see and hear the world's ways. It is almost as if temptation stares us in the face the moment we wake up. The best way to counter those voices is to let the Word truly be "a lamp for my feet and a light on my path" (Ps. 119:105).

8. Reading the Word reminds us to keep our focus on God — not on the devil — every day. From "In the beginning God" (Gen. 1:1) to "Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20), the Bible's story is about God and the hero is Jesus.

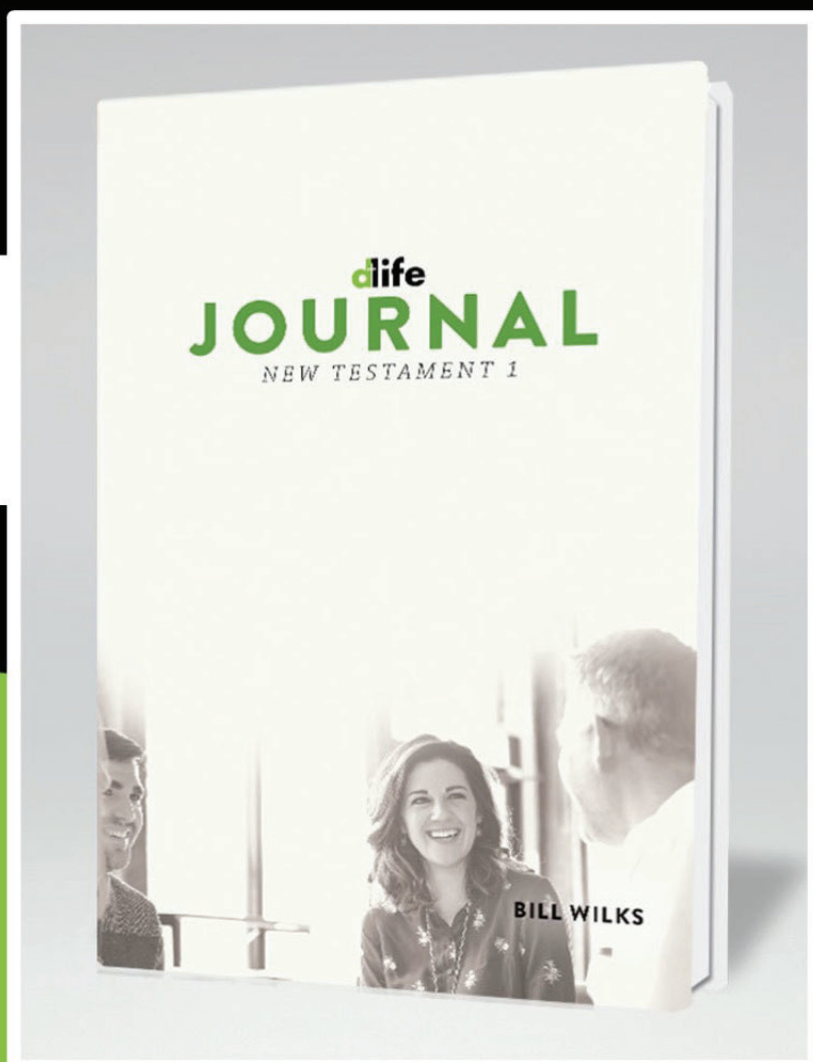
When it's easy to let evil around us overwhelm us and convince us the devil's winning, we need to turn our eyes again on God. The enemy is not winning — and daily Bible reading helps us keep our eyes on God, the victor.

9. The Bible directs us daily to the things that really matter. The older I get, the more I realize how much I've often worried about stuff that amounts to nothing. In fact, I have sometimes stepped into idolatry when I have focused more on the temporary than on the eternal — and I have needed God to redirect me to Him. He uses the Word to get me there.

10. If we truly love God, we will want to hear from Him each day. Just as I long to hear from my wife, Pam, each day, I want to long to hear from God daily. I want everything to feel a bit out of whack and incomplete any day I do not set aside time to be with Him. If we truly love Him, we will miss Him when we do not spend time together.

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MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Baptist Paper

Christy Nockels shares lessons learned through difficult season

It's easy to believe that certain people have it all together — especially those who are seen on stages, heard through podcasts or met by way of books. However, Christy Nockels, mother of three, worship leader, author and podcaster, admits that at times it's just the opposite.

“[During early motherhood] I couldn't do it all anymore, and I had to lay some things down. What He taught me — how to really trust Him with my career and trust Him with the dreams and plans — is He's better than all of that. Honestly, [it was a time of] learning to be seen and loved by Him in my kitchen when I'm not being productive other than doing dishes,” she revealed.

She was taught in church that everyone should steward their gifts well, so Nockels felt an expectation to keep serving at the same level through her music and encouragement ministry after having children as before.

‘Ministry of motherhood’

During that time, though, the Lord showed her she needed to rest, trust Him and stop striving, or she would miss the “ministry of motherhood.”

“The Lord asked me to lay down



CHRISTY NOCKELS

Photo courtesy of Meshali Mitchell

my career for about five years. Looking back on it, He allowed me to hit a wall and realize that I couldn't do it all,” she explained.

What she learned during this time — to rest, trust and surrender — resulted in the 2021 book “The Life You Long For: Learning to Live from a Heart of Rest.”

These concepts have become the overriding theme of all the aspects of her ministry.

In February, Nockels released her first full-length album in five years — “This Is the Hour.” The album continues with the idea of surrender, trust and rest, but it emphasizes communicating with God.

“Home” is the central song of the album, and it came out of another season of struggle.

During 2021, Nockels battled major physical issues while supporting her mother who had cancer. She

finally told her husband, Nathan, she was exhausted and wanted to quit. Even though they had already committed to the album, there were many days she couldn't even get up and do the basics.

One night she found herself alone on the porch with only her two dogs. Her husband and children were away for the evening. Though she hadn't stopped consistently reading her Bible and praying, she realized it had been a

few months since she had fully expressed her heart to God.

She remembered, “I realized that I had been self-protecting ... from total surrender [to God] in that season. I just started talking to Him on the porch, and it felt like David and the Psalms — the lowest of lows, highest of highs.”

“I was kind of like laying it all out there for the Lord — my frustra-

tions, my lament, my sadness, my fear, my anxiety,” Nockels continued. “It really was this homecoming moment that needed to happen, honestly, to rescue me as His daughter.”

She even told God she was glad they were “having this talk” because she thought she was dying and would see Him soon. She cried out to Him, asking what He wanted her to do.

And in that moment, He answered.

She elaborated, “In my spirit I heard Him say this, ‘This right here is what I want you to do. I want you to talk to Me and communicate with Me. Be My kid. Be My daughter. Come home to Me. Cry out to Me. Tell Me all about it. The singing and the podcast — all that stuff's great, but if we don't have this right here, if you can't open up to Me and trust Me and talk to Me, then you don't have anything.’”

The ‘God who sees’

“I came home to Him on the porch that night,” she continued. “The only way I know how to describe it is that I saw Him see me. The ‘God who sees’ saw me in that moment ... I really do think it rescued me.”

She then told God that even if He didn't heal the physical issues she was dealing with, she chose to love Him anyway and again surrendered to His will.

A few nights later, she woke up in the middle of the night singing the first line of “Home.” She wrote almost the entire song that night, saying, “This melody is making me want to sing again.”

Nockels summed up what she's learned so far through this difficult season of life — “It's more important that I'm doing what I'm doing from Him, rather than for Him.”

EDITOR'S NOTE

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MAKE DISCIPLES

Removing the barrier

By Meredith Flynn

The Baptist Paper

New scholarship opens doors for Mississippi students

Darby Renfro had mentally made a selfless decision about college. The Grenada, Mississippi, freshman was drawn to Mississippi College in Clinton and felt that, somehow, she would wind up there. But her brother, one year older, planned to pursue ministry, and she knew the Christian university would be a great preparatory environment for him.

“There was kind of no way financially that we could send both my brother and me here,” she said. Then the university announced its new Leland Speed Scholarship for Mississippi residents in 2022. The scholarship, made possible by a gift from MC’s longest-serving board member, offers free tuition to freshmen and transfer students from Mississippi that meet the university’s admissions requirements.

This fall, Renfro and her brother are both at MC as recipients of the new scholarship. At a time when college costs are increasing at an alarming rate, Speed was a futuristic thinker who had an answer to the challenge so many students face, said Michael Wright, MC’s dean of enrollment management.

‘Barrier of cost’

“The whole concept is really removing the barrier of cost of premium Christian higher education,” he said.

The university’s mission is to offer both academic excellence and a commitment to the cause of Christ, Wright said — values Speed also embraced.

“That’s really what he believed in too, and that’s why he wanted to



Photo courtesy of Mississippi College

remove that barrier to Mississippi residents,” Wright noted.

The name Leland Speed isn’t unfamiliar to MC students and alumni.

The library is named for Speed’s father, a one-time mayor of Jackson. The younger Speed, who died in 2021, served for decades as a trustee.

His scholarship has brought exponential growth and some dramatic shifts to life on campus. Whereas MC used to host around 300 people at its preview days, Wright said, the most recent events have seen more than 800.

In fact, many of the university’s statistics have seen increases of 100% or more. Applicants increased

from around 2,500 freshmen and transfers to just over 4,000 this year.

Dorms are full because living on campus is a requirement for recipients; Speed wanted students to have the full MC experience, Wright said. Before the scholarship, in-state students comprised 55–58% of the university’s incoming class.

This year, the split is decidedly more local: 75% of this year’s freshmen and transfer students are from Mississippi.

Stepping into God’s call

Transfer student Eli Cooper was playing football at a community college and planning a career as a football coach. But as he sought the

Lord, Cooper sensed a different call on his life.

MC felt like the right place to pursue his call to ministry, but he applied a month after the deadline and got on the university’s waiting list. Once he was accepted, the Forest, Mississippi, student received the Speed Scholarship and enrolled at MC this fall.

Currently, Cooper feels led toward pastoral ministry. His college experience has been a huge blessing in his life because he has no doubt God is calling him to ministry, he said. “The Leland Speed Scholarship is just making me stepping into God’s calling a whole lot easier.”