

The Alabama Baptist



Reginald Calvert, pastor of New Jerusalem Missionary Baptist Church in Bessemer, preaches Jan. 28 at FBC Pelham during the Sunday evening session of the 2024 Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference.

Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

‘Give it over to God’

Calvert urges evangelism conference attendees to trust God with the ‘unusual assignments’

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

God gives unusual assignments, but He is also trustworthy to provide what’s needed to get the job done.

“God, who moves in a mysterious way, always leaves us scratching our heads,” said Reginald Calvert, pastor of New Jerusalem Missionary Baptist Church in Bessemer,

preaching Jan. 28 at First Baptist Church Pelham during the Sunday evening session of the 2024 Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference.

Submission is first step

“God, when He calls us into ministry, never gives us a job description before we start. He calls us, and then He provides a job description because He knows if He

gives us the job description before we submit to His will, we will perhaps be like Jonah and try to ... get away.”

Speaking on Ezekiel 37, Calvert pointed to God’s question in verse 3 — “Son of man, can these bones live?” — and the faith evident in the prophet’s answer.

“Ezekiel is standing there, and at least he has enough sense to say, ‘I don’t know God, but I know that

You know. God helps us when we know that we don’t know.”

Pastors don’t have an answer for everything, Calvert said, which is why it’s important to place the work back into the hands of God.

“Somebody in here, you’re working too hard, you’re worrying too much, you’re trying to make it happen. Turn His business back to Himself. Give it over to God

(See ‘People,’ page 13)

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I See Jesus

Where God is Working, Christ is Shining and the Holy Spirit is Moving

From page 9 of this edition of The Alabama Baptist

In the feature on page 9, Pastor Thomas Hyche of Glory Baptist Church in Winfield says:

“Seeing God move is constant. We walk in the church doors asking what did the Lord do this week? It’s every Sunday.

“It’s been wild watching God. ... It’s one thing after another to where you look at it and go, ‘It doesn’t even faze us anymore to hear God stories coming out of all this,’” Hyche said.

In its one year of existence, Glory has seen nine salvations and six baptisms, including its VBS director.

More baptisms are planned in the coming days.

One of those saved, an 11-year-old girl, surprised the pastor one Sunday when he walked in with doughnuts to share.

Hyche thought the girl wanted a doughnut, but in fact she wanted to introduce him to her friend.

The friend explained that she had asked Jesus to be her Savior and

Lord because of the 11-year-old girl’s witness at their public school.

“There’s just something all the time, so that we know God is at work and we know God is going to do something with this church,” Hyche said, adding that he has been in ministry 40 years and has not seen anything like it.

“If you aren’t able to share what you saw the Lord do this week, then put yourself in the position to be used by God and you’ll have something to share soon.”

From page 12 of the Jan. 25 edition of TAB — SYSK

In the *Someone You Should Know* feature on page 9 of the Jan. 25 edition, retired pastor Charlie James of Muscle Shoals demonstrates how God moved through influential people in his faith life:

“The late Pastor C.D. ‘Charlie’ Thorn influenced me for the love of the Bible. He, along with two now-deceased deacons — Cecil Robinson and Elton Amos — influenced me to the Christian faith. North Rus-

sellville Baptist Church also made a difference (in my faith journey).”

From a personal testimony and recent encounter

TAB Media Group’s Jennifer Davis Rash shares this experience:

“It’s been almost two years since God placed it on my heart to write about serving through washing the clothes of those who aren’t privileged to have a washer and dryer at their home and have a difficult time getting to a laundry mat (and paying to use the machines).

“I wrote in that editorial: ‘As far as serving a family by washing their clothes, I can’t wait to see how God works and am praying for Him to show me exactly how to help while also drawing others to similar opportunities.’

“Last week, He placed the opportunity square in front of me, and I had to choose between convenience and obedience.

“As soon as I picked up the bag of clothes, the words from that editorial in 2022 popped back into my mind.”

TAB Media Group updates to keep you in the know

1. New resource

Church life, ministry and evangelism tips by Rob Jackson and others from the State Board of Missions (content similar to what you see in the guest editorial on page 3) will soon appear regularly in The Alabama Baptist.

You’ll find these tips in a specially designed half-page presentation, typically in the back half of the edition.

Let us know of topics you would like to see covered by emailing us at news@thealabamabaptist.org.

2. Staff changes

We send our best to Tim Childers who spent some time with us as a contract advertising representative.

He brought lots of laughter and a

big dose of encouragement for our team, and we know he’ll continue to cheer us on from the sidelines.

The Lord has called Tim back to the pastorate and we can’t wait to see what God has in store.

We appreciate you, Tim!

3. I See Jesus

The new column we announced in January is here (see above) and as we mentioned, we encourage you to share the God moments you see happening around you on any given day. Email news@tabmedia.group.

SHOUT OUT

Shout out to Pintlala Baptist Church in Hope Hull (part of Montgomery Baptist Association) for not only providing The Alabama Baptist for its members to receive in their homes but also for adding The Baptist Paper. Thank you, Gary and Jerrie

Burton, and all the leaders of Pintlala Baptist.

If your church, small group or other organization would like to do the same, contact Annette Brown or Debbie Campbell at 1-800-803-5201.

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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JENNIFER DAVIS RASH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.



GUEST EDITORIAL

for this week's issue of The Alabama Baptist

By Rob Jackson, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

7 ways to build a more loving church family in 2024

Serving as a pastor, I always prayed our congregation would be warm and friendly. A loving church builds up the body and often attracts new members.

We all can do our part in fostering a gracious and welcoming church. Consider these seven simple ways to cultivate an inviting and nurturing church family.

1. Sit with someone you don't know well. I get it; we all struggle to leave our "seat." Sitting by someone you don't know well, a guest or someone who often sits by themselves goes a long way in fostering a friendlier church environment.

2. Work on memorizing names. This task is more challenging for some of us than others. It doesn't matter how good (or bad) you are with names; God can and will help you. When someone hears you call them by name, he or she feels special.

3. Greet each other. Whether you are a staff member, church leader or layperson, try to greet everyone with Christ's love.

Romans 16:11 says, "Greet one another with a holy kiss."

While I don't advocate kissing each other, a friendly handshake, side hug and words of encouragement are paramount if you want a warm church.

Relationships

4. Include everyone. We must move beyond our "holy huddles" and allow others to join our "group."

People are not looking for "friendly churches." They are looking for friends. The difference between a friendly church and a church that fosters friends is in relationships.

5. Write notes. I occasionally receive encouraging cards and notes in the mail. These notes make me feel like a million bucks. A text message is good,



Unsplash.com

"Take time to write a few cards to church guests and members," Rob Jackson says. "A text message is good, but a personal letter is 1,000 times better."

but a personal letter is 1,000 times better. Take time to write a few cards to guests and members.

6. Smile and laugh with people. Being a Christian is fun. Sing. Joke. Laugh. People are

attracted to congregations that have fun together.

7. Plan fellowships. Invite people to eat with you. If you have guests, go out to eat after church. Regularly plan Sunday School/small group get-togethers and church-wide fellowships. You have heard it said, "A church that prays and plays together stays together."

These seven practices help build a warmer church. The heart of all these behaviors is the love of Christ Jesus through intentional Christian relationships.

"We must move beyond our 'holy huddles' and allow others to join our 'group.' People are not looking for 'friendly churches.' They are looking for friends."

Your Voice



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

Theology 101 — Life's greatest virtue

By Jerry Batson

The Alabama Baptist

With the dawning of February, we once again encounter the traditional symbols of Valentine's Day.

The verbal symbol we use is the word love. The visual symbol is a heart. We sometimes confess, "I love you with all my heart."

If we were to conduct a survey asking the question, "Are you a loving person," what answers would we get?

Some might simply declare, "Of course I am." Others might modify their answer by responding, "I am most of the time."

Honesty might compel some to say, "I am trying to be." Others might reply, "I am toward some people."

Other responses might include, "Not yet, but I want to be" or might reflect a cynical note, saying, "No,

but neither are others."

Sadly, absolute honesty might have to acknowledge, "I used to be."

Expectations

When we read our New Testament, we meet the reality that Jesus expects His followers to be loving persons.

In particular, He expects us to love Him. This was the issue when He probed Peter with the thrice repeated question, "Do you love Me?" (John 21:15-17)

What truths can we take away from that early morning probing of Peter?

One is that we can love Jesus in spite of past behavior. Peter had returned to his pre-discipleship occupation of fishing. That return had overtones of forsaking and denying attached to it.

As modern-day followers of Christ, we do well to face honestly the question:

Is there anything about us that would cause onlookers to doubt our love for Jesus?

If the answer is yes, that does not have to be the end of our story. We can renew our love for our Lord.

Declarations

Another realization we can take from Jesus' questioning of Peter is that we should love Christ in greater measure than other loves.

To Peter, Jesus posed the question, "Do you love Me more than these?" (John 21:15).

Imagine Jesus sweeping his arm toward the other disciples as He asks Peter this question. In that scenario, the question would be whether Peter loved Jesus more than the other disciples loved Him.

Considered another way, Jesus could have been questioning whether Peter loved Jesus more than he loved his friends. Still again, Jesus could have gestured toward the fishing nets and boats, thereby calling Peter to love Him more than he loved his former occupation of fishing.

Jesus' repeated questioning of Peter was to elicit from Peter a three-fold verbal declaration of his love.

Jesus' response to Peter's confession of love was to ask of the disciple a practical demonstration of his love for his Lord by ministering to others of the Lord's followers.

After all, life's greatest virtue is love. As Paul would later write, "Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13).

"As the saying goes, 'missions exist because worship does not.' So we do this because there are people in our cities, in our communities, in our neighborhoods who do not worship Jesus," said **Josh Warren**, BSU director of Mississippi Delta Community College, of a recent outreach effort in the Delta region.

"Adoniram [Judson's] son Edward once said, 'If you succeed without suffering, it's because others suffered before you. If you suffer without succeeding, it's so others may succeed after you,'" said **Sandy Wisdom-Martin**, executive director of national WMU.

"I believe that Jesus Christ did come down and die for my sins and rose again. He's living and sitting beside God on the throne, so I believe that. It's not just some story, fairy-tale thing, it's real.

"It allows me to stay level-headed and real with life and know what my purpose is, so that has allowed me to play my game, allowed me to play football at this level."

Brock Purdy

24-year-old quarterback San Francisco 49ers (excerpt from Jan. 29 Baptist Press article)

It's a relationship, not a check list

By Amy Hacker

the-scroll.com

Does your spiritual life consist of a series of check marks? Sunday School and worship, check. Bible reading and praying, check. Being nice to that "not so nice" person, check.

While those are all good things, do you find yourself wondering if "checking those boxes" is all

there is to the Christian life?

Doing the right things may make us look like a good Christian, but it's not the same thing as being in a relationship with Him.

Still, it's by sincerely praying, worshiping and studying God's Word that we invite Him into our every day and enjoy a deeper relationship with Him.

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

ROMANS 10:15

Don't miss today's blessings for worrying about problems tomorrow might bring.

Morgan Terry
Town Creek, Alabama

"I'm thankful my mom chose life, and it gave me a shot. You can make it as hard and spiritual as you want, but I'm thankful I'm here," said **Jason Lovins**, front man for the Jason Lovins Band, on how his mom decided against having an abortion after being raped at the age of 15.

"I strongly believe that it is essential for pastors to constantly seek creative methods to share the gospel with others," said Georgia pastor **David Wheeler**, who draws millions of people who watch him and his family restore a variety of rusted clunkers on their YouTube program Revstoration. "We all have things that we enjoy outside the ministry. I believe there are ways we can leverage those to share the gospel."

"We have gotten to a point that I personally believe that if the Church would just be the Church and live in holiness and reject the ways of the world ... I think we would see revival," said **John Cooper**, lead singer of the Christian rock band Skillet.

How should believers conduct themselves?

1. Joyfully — "Shout to God with joy" (Ps. 47:1).
2. Graciously — "Be kind to one another" (Eph. 4:32).
3. Wisely — "A wise man listens" (Prov. 12:15).
4. Steadfastly — "Your labor is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58).

@DustinBenge
X (formerly Twitter)

"Serving as an Acteen panelist would give me a platform to share the importance of music as a way to worship God," said **Sarah**

Elizabeth Shelton of First Baptist Church Columbiana, who is among three teenagers named to the 2024 National Acteens panel.

"By writing blog posts and participating in various Acteens events, I can share how God has used music to reach the most intimate parts of my heart. Music is the purest form of praise for me."

Never lose sight of your destination. You may currently be at a rest stop or caught in traffic, but you have farther to go.

@richardblackaby
X (formerly Twitter)

I have been called to waiting rooms many times throughout my journey. God's waiting rooms, I

might add. Yet during those periods, the flashing red exit sign was calling my name.

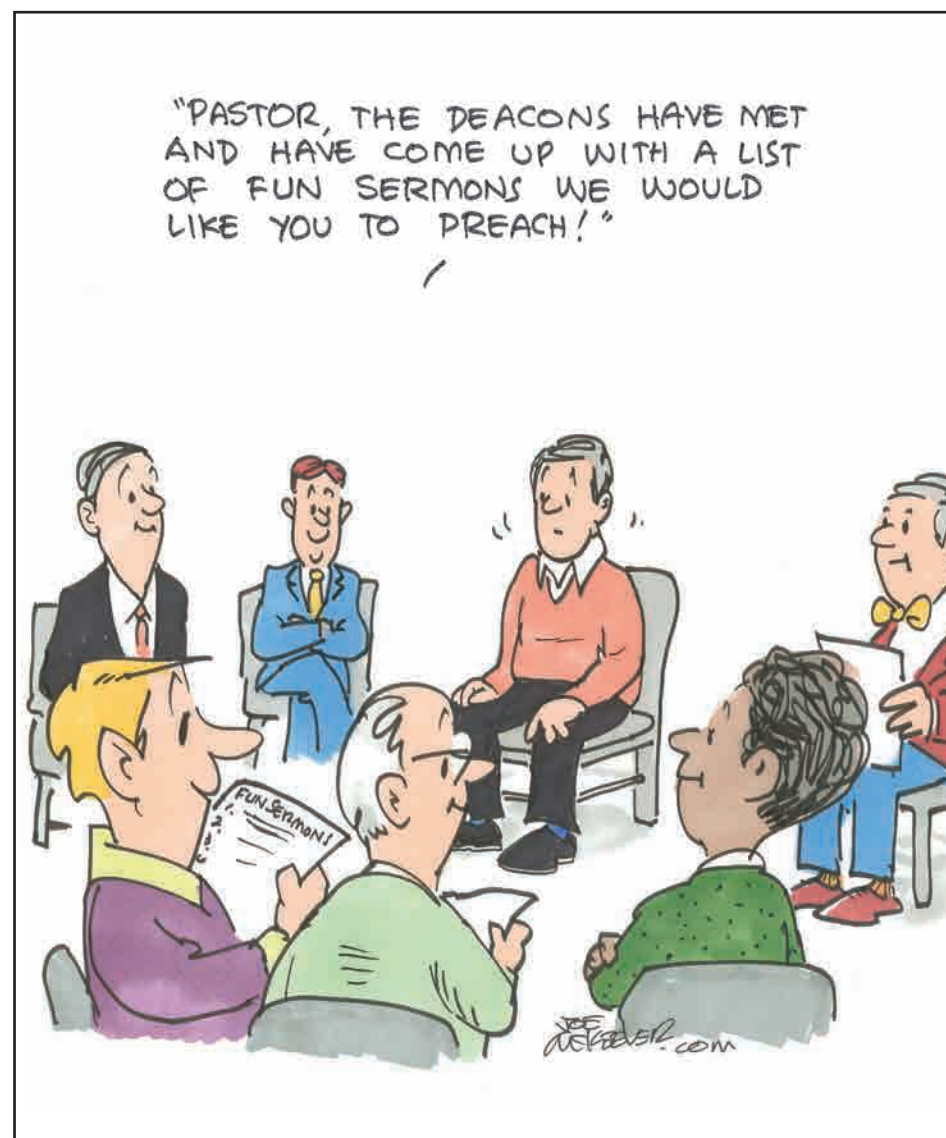
At times, I had grown tired and weary in the waiting, and regretfully, I exited the waiting period way too soon.

Wait on God. Do not exit the waiting period until He tells you to. For waiting on God's best will always profit numerous blessings, whereas jumping ahead will produce countless consequences.

O'Shea Lowery
Entrusted Hope Ministries

Never let your yesterdays keep you from your tomorrow. Learn from yesterday, just don't live in it.

@drtonyevans
X (formerly Twitter)



In case you missed these nuggets

Excerpts from the Feb. 1 edition of The Baptist Paper:

"To get through this (next election) year graciously, I need to first make the decision to address the issues at hand with humility.

"I will aim to tell my children that neither I nor the group I identify most closely with have all the answers.

"I will remind them and myself that most positions, most deeply held beliefs, have a story behind them.

"There are reasons people feel the way they do, and understanding the reasons may be the first step in walking through a contentious season like Jesus would."

Meredith Flynn
Illinois Baptist

"We want to help [students] understand what [a call to ministry] means, what all that entails," said **Ken Hall**, student ministry consultant in the Discipleship/Sunday School department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board. "How do they know if God is really calling them to full-time vocational ministry? What are different ways that God calls? What does He call us to? What does that look like down the road?"

"If you have a church of 15 or 18 and you reach one family for Jesus, that's a huge change in the culture of that church," said **Mark Clifton**, executive director of church replanting and rural strategy for the North American Mission Board, who recently encouraged Hawaii Pacific Baptist Church pastors via Zoom. "Why? Because almost everybody [that family] knows is likely not a Christian. They can share their faith with those folks."

Read more at tbponline.org.

3 stories you should know



Photo by Hannah Pruitt/The Alabama Baptist

Nelutu "John" Iubas (left), president of the Romanian-American Mission and senior pastor of Holy Trinity Baptist Church in Bucharest, and his wife, Maria, join Jennifer Davis Rash (right) Jan. 24 to discuss ministry efforts in Eastern Europe. Iubas shared about the enduring hope present amid the Russian-Ukraine war. New churches are emerging near the front lines, where believers in the small congregations are demonstrating a strengthened faith. They are resilient despite the challenges they face, Iubas shared. He asked for continued prayers and assistance in the face of ongoing warfare. For the full interview, visit tabonline.org/iubas.

Pakistani Christians struggle for justice

Police intimidation and flawed investigations into Islamist rioting in Jaranwala, Pakistan, have reportedly hindered justice for Christian victims. Following the destruction of Christian homes and businesses in August, sources report police harassment of complainants and witnesses, arrests of innocent bystanders, and Christian leaders' failure to ensure proper investigations.

Identified suspects with video evidence against them reportedly remain unarrested, and some suspects have been released on bail. Despite 600–800 implicated suspects, only 283 were arrested, and most gained bail allegedly due to defective investigations. The police deny the investigations' shortcomings, but Christian leaders are also criticized for focusing on relief funds rather than ensuring justice. (MS)

Beeson hosting discussion with SBC president Barber

Bar Barber, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, will visit Beeson Divinity School at Samford University on Feb. 12 as part of the school's Thriving Pastors Initiative.



BARBER

During his visit, Barber will host a discussion on the ministry of promoting unity amid diversity at 3 p.m. in Hodges Chapel followed by a time

of Q&A. The public is welcome to attend.

He also will speak with Beeson students in a private lunch session about future opportunities and challenges for ministry in Southern Baptist churches. (The Alabama Baptist)

Persecuted church

Christians freed from jail, told to worship in private

SELIBABY, Mauritania — As many as 18 Christians arrested after a video of a baptism service was posted on social media have been released and told to practice their beliefs "discreetly." The Christians were reportedly arrested after Muslims demanded they be punished, according to Christian Daily International and EFE news service. Muslim protesters said Christians should be killed, EFE reported.

None of the Christians detained seem to have been charged with a crime and all have been released, a regional Christian leader told Christian Daily International. "They have been asked to go home and believe what they want, but in private and discreetly," the source said.

Only foreigners may publicly practice a religion other than Islam. In a 2022 report, the U.S. Department of State notes that Mauritania's government generally does not prohibit non-Muslim groups from meeting privately.

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SECRETARY OF STATE WES ALLEN

BLAZING THE TRAIL FOR OTHERS TO FOLLOW

Worship pastors unite in Marshall County, support each other in ministry

By Michael Smith
The Alabama Baptist

While in many ways the COVID-19 pandemic forced people to be apart, it also brought together a group of worship leaders in Marshall County.

What is now known as the Marshall County Worship Leader Collective traces its roots back to 2016 when Don Blakeney lost his job as a worship pastor. Blakeney started working at a Lifeway Christian Store and got to know many covocational pastors.

“This period in my life opened my eyes to all that covocational pastors go through in ministry,” said Blakeney, who was working on his doctorate at Liberty University. “It became an issue I couldn’t get out of my head.”

Blakeney decided to title his doctoral dissertation “The Rise of the Part-time Worship Leader in the Midsize Southern Baptist Church.”

“What came out of that was a lot of research and a pretty in-depth survey from covocational worship pastors about the lack of training and resources available to them,” he said.

“It appeared as though the convention and the leading theological schools had dropped the ball on supporting covocational pastors in general, but specifically worship pastors. I found that the majority of worship pastors who qualified for my survey felt abandoned and disheartened. It became clear that the solution to this issue lies in the local churches. Sharing resources, knowledge and support was key.”

In April 2018, Blakeney became the full-time worship pastor of First Baptist Church Albertville.



Photo courtesy of Don Blakeney

The Marshall County Worship Leader Collective meets weekly at JaMoka's Coffee Company. Pictured are (l to r) Ryan Hitchcock, Brad Johnson, Don Blakeney, Ken Patterson and Jason McCullars.

“I have been incredibly blessed with education and training that allows me to do my job effectively,” he said. “Many worship pastors in smaller churches haven’t been given the same opportunities, so as a full-time worship pastor and with the support of my church, I have built mentoring into my ministry.”

For the last three-plus years, Blakeney and other worship pastors from Marshall County have met weekly on Thursday mornings to build relationships and share resources.

“Members of the group know that they can reach out to any one of us, and we will jump in as needed, whether with resources, ideas, prayer or a listening ear,” he said.

Relying on each other

When the pandemic hit in 2020, the worship leaders relied on each other even more to adapt and change as the situation demanded.

“During COVID, we all needed

to collectively come together for the greater good of the gospel,” Blakeney said. “If we were going to see the gospel change and transform our community, then we had to work together ... and see what each of us was going to do in services.”

The group has grown from three full-time worship pastors to seven full-time worship pastors. They are Blakeney, Brad Johnson from Gilliam Springs Baptist Church in Arab, Jason McCullars from Beulah Baptist Church in Boaz, Joshua Malone from Creek Path Baptist Church in Guntersville, Ken Patterson from First Baptist Church Guntersville, Lee Fleming from Solitude Baptist Church in Albertville and Ryan Hitchcock from First Baptist Church Boaz.

“I feel like we’re all on the same staff, just got different offices,” said Fleming. “This group is not about our individual churches; it’s about the Kingdom.”

An example of the spirit of cooperation among the worship pastors is how they will recommend that someone who is looking for a church home visit one of the other churches if they think it would be a better fit.

There’s a wide range of experience and backgrounds in the group, and 21-year-old Malone appreciates the wisdom of his fellow pastors with more experience.

“I get to hear years of experience throughout their marriage, their church life, their family life — all of it before I even get there and while I’m doing it now,” he said. “It’s been a real treat and a blessing to be under such wise care and beautiful-hearted men who care about the Lord, care about their churches and care about their families.”

The pastors spend the bulk of their time together on Thursdays working through various book studies, praying over needs or sharing ideas.

Strengthening churches

Mike Foreman, associational mission strategist for Marshall Baptist Association, commends the group for what they are doing.

“When God called me to the Marshall Baptist Association in September 2021, I had the dream of strengthening the association through the collaborative efforts of our churches,” he said. “The worship pastors who are meeting weekly are blazing that trail for other ministry leaders to follow.”

“As a result, we are having talks about how we can come alongside covocational and lay worship leaders to encourage and equip them as they serve their churches,” Foreman noted. “I am grateful to serve alongside such Kingdom-minded leaders.”

Treating hearing loss may slow dementia

By **Carrie B. McWhorter**
The Alabama Baptist

I'm sorry, I didn't hear you. Could you please say that again?"

Regardless of your age, you've probably had to ask someone to repeat their words. But as we get older, it may seem we are making that request more frequently. When should you be worried?

Most audiologists agree that the time to be most concerned about hearing loss is while you're young.

Though often associated with aging, most hearing loss is caused by the cumulative effects of daily noise exposure — and it's not just those who work in factories or at airports who suffer. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that almost 25% of American adults age 20–69 have noise-induced hearing loss. More than half (53%) have no significant occupational exposure to loud noises.

Sources of noise

So where is the noise coming from? Sources of excess noise exposure in everyday life include home appliances, power tools, personal audio devices, movies, restaurants, concerts, sports events, and yes, even church services.

Repeated exposure to loud noises can overwork the cells and nerves in the ear, causing temporary damage in the short term (e.g., the way sounds seem muffled after a loud concert) that contributes to permanent damage (i.e., hearing loss) in the long term.

Along with the other senses, hearing helps us communicate with others and process stimuli from the world around us. Consequently, a decline in hearing acuity can lead to significant lifestyle and health impacts, including:

► Balance issues and

increased risk of falls resulting from damage to nerves in the inner ear.

► Social isolation and depression resulting from avoiding group activities (such as worship services) where it might be hard to hear what is being said.

► Cognitive decline (dementia) resulting from withdrawal from social and physical activities that promote overall mental and physical health.

Risk of decline

Though every person's situation is different, a study published last year in *The Lancet* suggests older adults at greater risk of dementia may be able to decrease their rate of cognitive decline by nearly half by utilizing hearing aids and other hearing interventions. Lead researcher Dr. Frank Lin said those results could be attributed to improved communication and increased social engagement. (Read more details about this study at tbponline.org/hearing-aids.)

"The clinical takeaway is that almost anyone with hearing loss as an older adult should get their hearing checked and address hearing issues if there are any," Lin said. "There's really no downside to it. Hearing intervention comes at no risk."

While hearing aids are the most common intervention, participants in the Johns Hopkins study also worked with audiologists who provided support and assistance with using their hearing aids correctly. That is important, Lin noted.

Over the counter

Hearing aids are now available over the counter at much lower costs than in the past. Still, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) reported in September that just a fraction (2%) of American adults age 40 and older who

Common loud sounds and noises

If you are repeatedly exposed to loud noise over time, it can cause hearing loss. Here are examples:

- Music from smartphones and personal listening devices, particularly when the volume is set close to the maximum
- Fitness classes
- Children's toys
- Concerts and restaurants
- Sporting events, such as football, hockey and soccer games
- Motorized sporting events, such as monster truck shows,
- stock car or road races and snowmobiling
- Movie theaters
- Power tools
- Gas-powered lawnmowers and leaf blowers
- Sirens
- Firearms
- Firecrackers

cdc.gov

have hearing difficulties report purchasing OTC hearing aids. Without proper instruction and support, many who try hearing aids may stop wearing them.

"This is why ASHA advises the public to promptly seek a comprehensive hearing evaluation from certified audiologists before they do anything, be that purchasing an OTC or taking some other step. Insurance providers cover these evaluations, which ensure that care is

appropriate and effective," said Janice R. Trent, doctor of audiology and ASHA vice president for audiology practice. "The longer one waits to act, the greater and more costly problems can become."

When to get screened

For most adults, a baseline hearing test is a good idea before the age of 60. Depending on your physical health, medical conditions, medications or lifestyle fac-

tors, this test may need to be repeated at regular intervals. Consult your primary care physician to determine a schedule that makes sense for you.

You may need an evaluation and/or hearing test conducted by an audiologist or otolaryngologist (ENT) if you have signs of hearing loss, such as:

► Having trouble hearing over the phone.

► Having trouble understanding conversations, especially in a noisy environment.

► Hearing a ringing or other unusual sound in your ears.

Most health insurance policies, including Medicare, will cover a comprehensive hearing exam (some may require a referral from your health care provider). Hearing tests require no special preparations and have no significant risks, but the results might lead to steps that help you maintain better physical, mental, social and spiritual health as you age.

3 Questions for Church Bus Buyers:

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Lacey sees 'awesome work of God' during 44-year ministry

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Of the many lessons Tim Lacey has learned in his more than four decades in ministry, one lesson stands out.

"None of us is good enough for His ministry," said Lacey, who recently retired as minister of music and senior adults at First Baptist Church Winfield. "Being in the right place in our hearts, though, to see where He wants us to go will open the door to His love and His power, and then we'll have a ringside seat to see the awesome work God will do through us."

Lacey served at FBC Winfield for 27 years, with a total of 44 years in music ministry.

At 7 years old, he felt God touch his heart during a church invitation and was saved. During elementary and high school, he continued to attend church, but choosing to play the trumpet at Robertsdale High School would later change the course of his life.

Selecting instrumental music at the University of South Alabama as his major, Lacey's goal was to teach high school band, but then he experienced the contemporary Christian music group Truth.

"I was blown away by the power of God's message put to contemporary music in this — at that time — brand-new format," Lacey said.

Touring with Truth

So when Roger Breland, Truth's founder and leader, announced the group needed replacements for the next year's tour, Lacey and a couple of his friends decided to audition in the spur of the moment.

Vocally it didn't work out, but instrumentally it did.

Lacey ended up playing trumpet for two Truth tours.

After that, Lacey transferred to the University of Mobile, graduated with his original major and got a job teaching high school band, his initial goal.

The summer after Lacey's first job teaching high school band, God once again changed Lacey's trajectory.

Called to music ministry

While attending church with his parents, Lacey felt God's call to become a church music minister.

In two weeks, he was offered the minister of music and youth position at Pleasant Grove Baptist Church in Pensacola, Florida, where he later met the love of his life, Debbie.



LACEY

Lacey attended seminary and served in a few other churches before being called to FBC Winfield.

He and Debbie adopted Kristi, an 8-year-old girl from Ukraine in 2004.

"When Russia invaded Crimea in 2014, [Kristi's older brother and his

wife] came with their two small children to live with us here in Winfield. They became independent and now have three children, and Sasha's mother, Natali. She was a refugee of the current Russia-Ukraine war," Lacey shared.

Throughout his life and ministry, Lacey has learned that God's ways are not his ways.

"When I was in college, if I knew then that God was going to lead me in this direction, I probably would have tried to manipulate or engineer my path to be the best minister of music — in my understanding — as I could," Lacey said. "However, God knew that I would need so much more than what I understood at the time to do what He was going to call me to do.

"Today, it's still the same. I have to remember to wait on the Lord, and I don't usually see what God is doing until I get on the other side and look back.

"I know that this story doesn't stop here, though. God doesn't put His tools on a shelf to get covered with dust and rust. It's just a time to rest a little and then change directions again, maybe?"



Submitted photo

Glory Baptist Church in Winfield, which recently celebrated its first birthday, is motivated by a passion for missions, pastor Thomas Hyche said.

'One thing after another' affirms Winfield church plant's path

By Erin Roach
The Alabama Baptist

Glory Baptist Church in Winfield, a church plant in northwest Alabama, has seen God affirm its path with "one thing after another" falling into place, said Thomas Hyche, the church's pastor.

Alan Goforth, who comes from a family of Alabama Baptist pastors, was attending Glory Fellowship Baptist Church in Jasper when a group there decided to start a Bible study closer to their homes in Winfield, about 40 minutes away.

They met on Sunday nights at a local restaurant, and before long it was clear they should explore planting a church. Glory Fellowship has a goal of planting a church every three years, and members had been praying about the next opportunity.

That next opportunity became Glory Baptist Church, which launched in January 2023 in the Winfield Community Center.

"The community center in Winfield is a big, nice building," Hyche said. "They have rooms for ... classes, and their own people believe so much in our church that they come and help fill ministry needs. They'll just show up and help."

Building plans

The church has plans to construct an all-purpose building next, and the building fund is growing, Hyche said. On the first Sunday, the congregation gave \$25,000. Later,

a visiting family gave \$2,000 and a church member matched it. A church that had closed its doors and sold land and a building had \$5,000 remaining and gave it to Glory.

Someone also donated five acres of land to the church a mile off the interstate on the main road to Winfield, Hyche noted, adding the owner of a logging company offered to clear the land.

Ministry partners

Walker Baptist Association, which Glory is in the process of joining, has offered the use of a double-wide trailer that another church had used, and the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions will soon move the trailer and set it up on Glory's property.

It will seat 75 to 100 people, a range not too far off for the congregation that averages in the 40s on routine days and more than 75 on the big Sundays (baby dedications, Easter, Mother's Day, etc.)

Glory members didn't hesitate to start right away giving 10% of its undesignated receipts through the Cooperative Program for state, national and international missions and ministries, and it gives 3% to the Walker Association, Hyche said.

In addition, they're setting aside \$10,000 per year for local missions, including feeding an area football team and partnering with the Weldy Home in Winfield, which provides emergency services for teenage girls.

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

► **Victor Bonner**, a longtime pastor and church planter, died Dec. 29. He was 85.

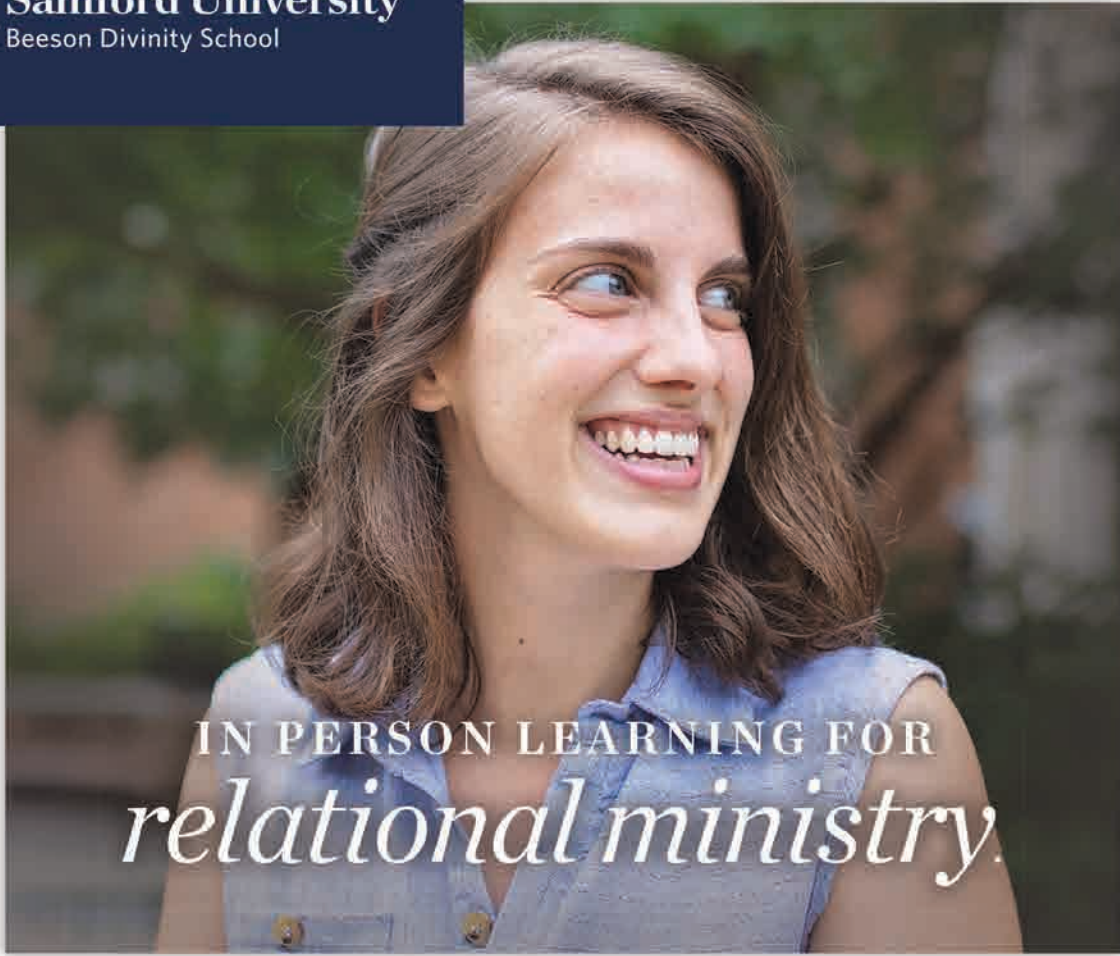

Bonner served as a pastor of churches in Alabama, including Corinth Baptist in Elrod, Upper Room Baptist in Vance and New Haven Baptist in Cottondale. He also served in Mississippi and North Carolina, planting four churches along the way.

He was actively involved in associational and state ministries and served in many positions, including three years as leader of the Alabama Baptist Fellowship of Bivocational Pastors.

Bonner is survived by his wife of 65 years, Faye; sons Victor III, David and Randy; daughter, Lisa; six grandchildren; and 10 great-grandchildren.


► **Horace Thomas “Tom” Sutton**, who served as an International Mission Board missionary in Latin America for 25 years, died Jan. 13. He was 92.

A Mobile native, Sutton served in the U.S. Army and graduated from Mobile College (now the University of Mobile). While there, he received the H. Austin Pharr Award for Most Outstanding Student.



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IN PERSON LEARNING FOR
relational ministry.

Sutton and his wife, Peggy Jo Barlow, were appointed as IMB missionaries in 1969 and served in Costa Rica, Guatemala, Colombia, Bolivia and Venezuela. Sutton was also a member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local No. 505 in Mobile for more than 70 years.

Sutton was preceded in death by Peggy, who died in 2003. He is survived by his daughters, Kaye, Kristy and Laurie; four grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

► **Hayden Darwin Center Sr.**, 87, former Montgomery church pastor, died Jan. 17.

A Chattanooga, Tennessee, native, he graduated from Belmont University with a bachelor of arts degree in history. He also held a master of divinity degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and doctor of ministry degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Center led churches across Tennessee, Georgia and Alabama, including 16 years as pastor of Heritage Baptist Church in Montgomery, where he retired from church ministry in January 2000.

He also served on the board of trustees for Baptist Health and as president of the Center for Meta Church Missions, creating and building ministries across the United States, Europe, Mexico as well as Central and South America.

He is survived by his wife of 67 years, Joyce; children Hayden Jr., Carlton and Mark; six grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

BLOUNT ASSOCIATION

► **Pleasant View Missionary Baptist Church, Holly Pond**, will host “The Pylant Family” from Eva on its third Sunday night singing Feb. 18, 5 p.m. Earl Harper is pastor.

CALHOUN ASSOCIATION

► **Joey Hanner** is the new pastor of **First Baptist Church Saks in Anniston**. Hanner is a graduate of New Orleans Seminary and was the pastor of Union No. 3 Baptist Church, Gadsden, for almost 13 years. He and his wife, Connie (pictured), have two children and seven grandchildren.



Photo courtesy of Joey Hanner

CHILTON ASSOCIATION

► **Daniel Wilson** is the new pastor of **First Baptist Church Jemison**. He previously served as a state missionary with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions and as pastor of First Baptist Church Pleasant Grove; West End Baptist Church, Clanton; Dry Ridge Baptist Church, Dry Ridge, Kentucky; and Raleigh Avenue Baptist Church, Homewood. Wilson holds a bachelor’s degree in biblical studies and a master of theology degree from Campbellsville University, Campbellsville, Kentucky; a master of divinity from Luther Rice Seminary, Atlanta; a doctorate from Trinity Theological Seminary, Newburgh, Indiana; a master of theological studies from Southwestern Seminary; and a doctor of philosophy from University of the Cumberlands, Williamsburg, Kentucky. Wilson and his wife, Erin, have two sons.



WILSON

COVINGTON ASSOCIATION

► **Ben Praytor** is the new pastor of **Mount Gil-ead Baptist Church, Dozier**. He is an Alabama native, growing up in Birmingham and Opp. Praytor has a bachelor’s degree in environmental sciences from Troy University, and currently works as a civilian contractor at Fort Novosel and as a chaplain for the Opp Police Department. Praytor began serving in ministry in 2006. He earned a master of divinity from Liberty University and became a chaplain in the U.S. Air Force, retiring as a major. Praytor was the youth pastor at West County Line Baptist Church and Beulah Baptist Church, both in Opp. He became the senior pastor at Beulah Baptist in 2016. He and his wife, Gina, have two daughters (family pictured above).



Photo courtesy of Mary Powell

ESCAMBIA ASSOCIATION

► **Tommy Smith** is the new pastor of **Robinsonville Baptist Church, Atmore**. Smith holds a bachelor of arts degree in biblical studies from William Carey College (now University), Hattiesburg, Mississippi; a master of divinity and a master of arts in marriage and family therapy from New Orleans Seminary; and a doctorate of Christian counseling from Andersonville Theological Seminary, Camilla, Georgia. In addition, he did clinical internship training in Hammond, Louisiana; clinical education and health care ethics short-course at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Washington; postgraduate studies, Oxford University; and prevention and relationship enhancement program



SMITH

(PREP) instructor training, Auburn University. Smith is a licensed marriage and family therapist in private practice at Grace Counseling Center, Brewton, and a former professional counselor with Pathways Professional Counseling of the Alabama Baptist Children’s Homes & Family Ministries. He was a U.S. Army Reserve Chaplain from 1980 to 2005. This year, Smith will celebrate 58 years of marriage to his wife, Martha, and they have two grown daughters, five grandsons and two granddaughters.

ETOWAH ASSOCIATION

► **Kevin Wilson** is the new pastor of **Paden Baptist Church, Gadsden**. Previously, Wilson was bivocational pastor of Corona de Tucson Baptist Church, Vail, Arizona. He served in the United States Air Force for 21 years and worked for the Department of Homeland Security. He holds a bachelor’s degree in business from Southwestern College, Winfield, Kansas; a master’s degree in human resource management and leadership from National University, La Jolla, California; and a doctorate in education in leadership and biblical studies from Grand Canyon University, Phoenix, Arizona. He graduated from the Institute of Biblical Studies at Liberty University, and is currently pursuing a master’s degree in pastoral counseling at Liberty University. Wilson and his wife, Donna, have four children.



WILSON

COLBERT-LAUDERDALE ASSOCIATION

► **Pat Gallagher** finished out the year as director of Earle Trent Assembly, Florence, before moving to Georgia to work for the YMCA. Since his arrival in 2008, Gallagher served campers, made improvements, and oversaw operations. He built two ropes courses and an outdoor gymnasium. He was honored with cards and gifts at a reception. He and his wife, Emily, have two children.

SHELBY ASSOCIATION

► **Terry Sutton** retired Dec. 31 after 16 years as pastor of **Montevallo First Baptist Church** and many previous years of ministry.



SUTTON

He has been active in the Montevallo community, including serving as president of the Montevallo Rotary Club, a member of the board of directors for Shelby Emergency Assistance and a member of the board of directors for the Parnell Library Foundation. He received the Civic Leader of the Year Award, Rotarian of the Year Award and the Scholarship Award for Leadership Shelby County.

He recently received the “Shelby County Citizen of the Year” award.

Sutton and his wife, Kay, were honored by the church with a Dec. 17 reception. He is available for pulpit supply and interim pastoral ministry.

TUSKEGEE LEE ASSOCIATION

► **Jeff Redmond** celebrated his 10th anniversary Dec. 3 as pastor of **Parkway Baptist Church, Auburn**. Both services were packed with friends, family and current and former church members. Connor Donovan, Redmond’s son-in-law and also a pastor, preached the message.

Redmond and his wife, Kelley (pictured with their grandchildren), were honored with a plaque and gifts for their hard work and service.

“It is a wonderful testament to the church that you have three ministerial staff members who have been at the church for more than 10 years, and we are just getting started,” Redmond said. The couple has two daughters and two grandchildren. The service was followed by a lunch and reception.



Photo courtesy of Julie Donovan

Volunteers needed for effort in Mobile

This March, there are more than 20 opportunities for your church to get involved in missions close to home.

Making a Difference Mobile is asking for volunteers to come alongside churches in Mobile Baptist Association as they reach their community with events that vary from grilling out to hosting a dental clinic or an Easter egg hunt.

“It is a good short-term missions opportunity and also an opportunity for pastors to take their church members to see ministry in the community, to see opportunities that maybe they hadn’t thought of being able to do in their local area,” said Rick Barnhart, director of the office of associational missions and church planting for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Thomas Wright, executive director of missions for Mobile Association, said the events will be a major help to Mobile-area churches looking for opportunities to do pre-Easter outreach.

Rick Lance, SBOM executive director, said the outreach emphasis goes hand in hand with this year’s Alabama Baptist State Convention theme — DifferenceMakers.

“Making a Difference Mobile is a missional partnership between Mobile Baptists and the State Board of Missions,” he said.

A list of the events — planned throughout the month of March — is available at alsbom.org/making-a-difference, along with other online resources to help your church plan how to get involved. (Grace Thornton)

Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

Katherine Ferguson founded first documented Sunday School in U.S.

Katherine (Katy) Ferguson (1772–1854) was an African American educator who founded the first Sunday School in New York City. It also has been named the first documented Sunday School in America.

Katherine’s mother, Hannah Williams, was a slave on a Virginia plantation. Hannah married a man named Tom in 1771 and was soon pregnant. The two separately escaped the plantation but never saw each other again.

Hannah gave birth to Katherine in 1772 and was soon sold as a slave to the Bruce family in New York City. Mrs. Bruce changed Katherine’s name to “Katy,” saying “Katherine” was “too proper a name for a Negro.”

Attending church

Mr. Bruce sold Hannah in 1779 when Katy was 7. Katy stayed with the Bruce family, taking over her mother’s chores.

She worshipped with the family at the Scottish Presbyterian Church

where John Mason was pastor. In 1786, Katy talked with her pastor and trusted Jesus as her Savior. He then baptized her.

Gaining freedom

At around age 17, Katy was able to gain her freedom. She then started her own business as a baker of wedding and party cakes.



FERGUSON

Katy married John Ferguson in 1789. They had two daughters who died young. Her husband died around the same time.

Katy’s mother had taught her what she knew from the Bible. Katy continued to learn from her church pastor. Even though she never knew how to read and write, Katy knew many stories from the Bible and memorized numerous verses.

In her neighborhood, she saw many needy children. In 1793 she took 48 children, both Black and white, into her home each Sunday to teach them Bible lessons and practical skills. Her pastor, John Mason, offered her space in the church basement on Murray Street. He also provided teachers to assist her.

In addition to directing a Sunday School, she also held prayer meetings for children and adults twice a week for four decades.

Special honor

In her memory, the Katy Ferguson Home for unwed mothers was established in New York City in 1920.

In 2023 a petition was made to name 95th Street between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue in her name because her Sunday School was located there.

Lass WORDS

BY KEN LASS
The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Lost and Never Found

In the summer of 1971, I made a life-changing decision. I chose to drop out of college and attend radio-TV-film school in frigid Minneapolis. For the first time, I would be in a place where I knew absolutely no one, far away from family, friends and familiar surroundings.

At first I felt incredibly lonely and a bit scared. But shortly after school began, I met two classmates named Steve and Dan. Steve was from upstate Minnesota, and Dan was from Iowa. We hit it off immediately and quickly became best buddies. It wasn’t long before we shared an apartment together.

The school’s program was a one-year curriculum, and during that year we were the three musketeers, doing everything together, or at least as much as three broke young guys could afford to do.

Staying in touch

Upon graduation we vowed to stay in touch forever as we headed off to different parts of the country to begin our media careers. But in those days staying in touch required more effort than it does now. There was no internet, no smartphones, no text messaging and no email. We managed to pull it off for a couple years, but eventually we all got married, started raising kids, moved around. You know how it goes. Communication dwindled and eventually dried up.

In the blink of an eye, 44 years had gone by since I had seen them last. Once retired, I was determined to track them down. I scoured the internet, searching under every name, phrase and location I could think of. No luck. It was like they had disappeared.

Tough news

There didn’t seem to be any digital footprint of them anywhere. Then one day, I must have stumbled upon the right search phrase. A link on Dan popped up on my screen.

I went numb all over. It was an obituary. Dan died in 2003 of cancer. He had been working at a country radio station in Madison, South Dakota. He was just 47 years old. Even though we hadn’t spoken in more than four decades, I felt part of my life died with him.

I’ve never located any information on Steve. I pray he is still out there somewhere and that life has treated him kindly. Good friends are a special gift from God.

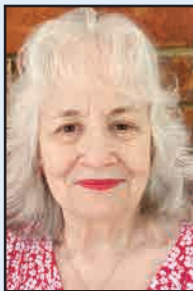
If you are blessed to have them, don’t ever let those relationships wither away. They make you who you are.

MEET THE AUTHOR

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

By Joanne Sloan

Joanne Sloan, a member of FBC Tuscaloosa, has been a published writer of articles and books for 30 years. She has a bachelor’s degree double majoring in history and



English from East Texas State University (now Texas A&M–Commerce) and a master’s degree specializing in English from the University of Arkansas (1978).

'People want real solutions to their real problems'

(continued from page 1)
because with God, all things are possible.”
Calvert said Sunday mornings are a speaking and listening experience: “oral preaching and aural listening.”
He encouraged pastors to consider their listeners as they craft a message.
“It’s one thing to exegete the text, but it’s another thing to exegete the audience,” he said.
Those in the congregation should have the expectation that God will speak to

them. “We must prepare ourselves to come and hear the Word of God,” he said.
There are “people who are in the audience and things are dried up in their lives. ... Some don’t know if they can make it until tomorrow. ... Some who are hoping God can bring about some kind of divine renewal.”
God “sees those bones. They need to be revived (v. 3). ... And that’s what I love

about Jesus. He meets us where we are.”
Christians have got to “be real,” he said, “because people want real solutions to their real problems. ... If you can’t find help in the church, where can you find it?”
Churches will grow when we let people see the love of God and the real Jesus, “this Jesus who knows everything I’m going through and everything I’m struggling with,” Calvert said.

To view a gallery of photos from the conference, visit tabonline.org/2024-SEC.



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist
Special music and congregational worship was led by FBC Pelham’s choir and praise team under the direction of Brett Fuller along with Frank Jones of Frank Jones Ministries on piano.

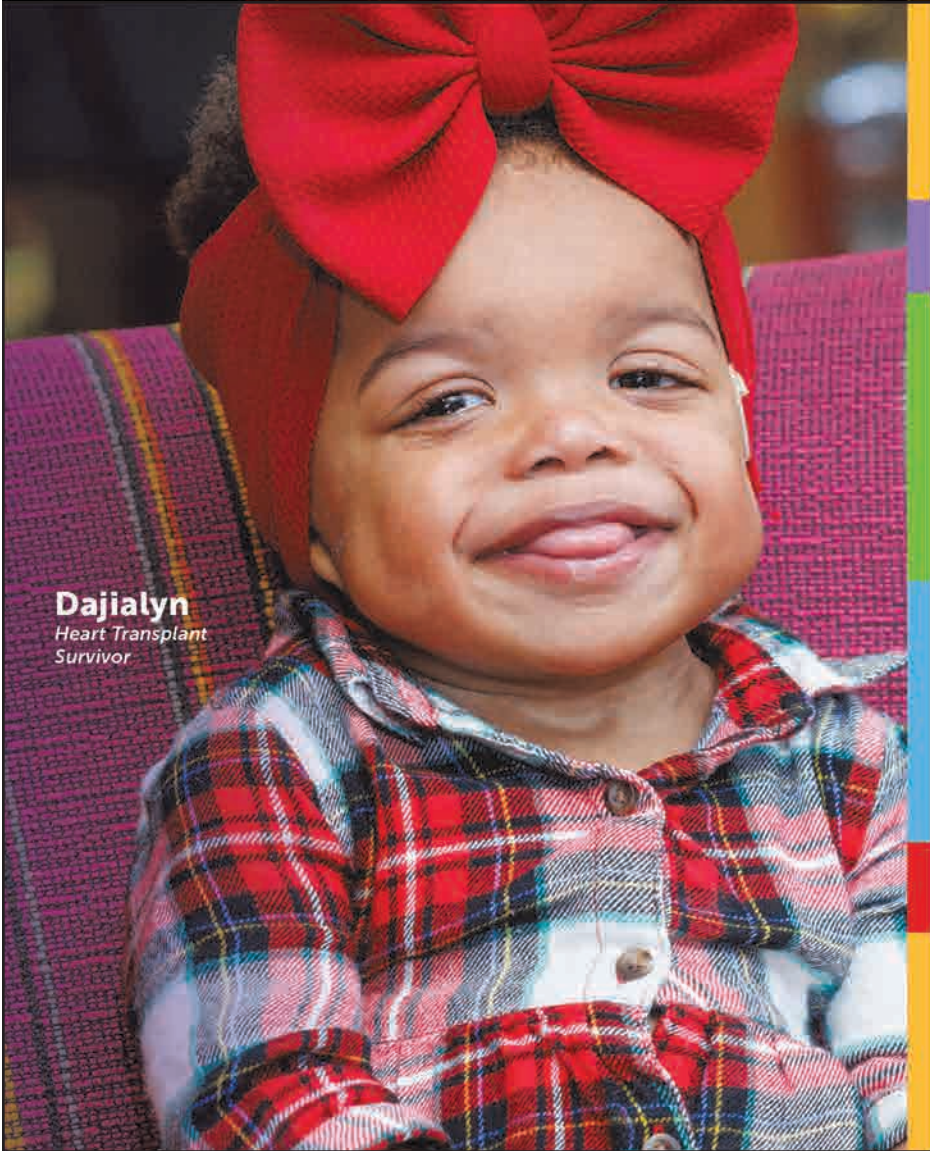
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People should not come to church hurting and leave hurting, he added.
They need a message that offers hope, “one that challenges [hearers] to make a change.”
“Keep preaching,” Calvert encouraged.
“God did not put the responsibility on you to save

souls but to preach salvation.”
“I’m not superhuman,” Calvert said. “I just want to trust God enough for the unusual assignment.”
Also preaching during the conference was Jamie Dew of New Orleans Seminary, Matt Queen of Southwestern Seminary, Rob Jackson

of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions and Daven Watkins, pastor of FBC Pelham.

EDITOR’S NOTE —
Video coverage from the 2024 Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference is available at facebook.com/alsbom.



The path to mending her heart began here.

Dajialyn was born with hypertrophic cardiomyopathy and at 3 months old was placed on the waiting list for a heart transplant. When her foster parents got the call to care for her, they never hesitated – and in July 2021, they received the call with the news she would get her new heart. Within hours she was at Children’s of Alabama in surgery. Her transplant was a success, and Dajialyn is walking, talking and doing all the things that keep parents of any toddler on their toes.

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ChildrensAL.org/heart

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 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.

Hunger Offering Sunday is Feb. 18; funds help needy in Alabama, world

God's Word is clear that we are to minister to the poor and needy as part of our Christian lifestyle. The hunger faced by the poor continues to be one of the greatest problems facing our world today.

The primary focus of the Hunger Offering — col-

lected this year on Feb. 18 — is to feed hungry people.

When a dollar is contributed to the Hunger Offering, the first 25% will be used to feed the hungry in Alabama by assisting associations and designated churches with food pan-

tries. The remaining 75% will be distributed through the Global Hunger Fund.

To order free Hunger Offering envelopes and other promotional resources for your church, contact Lynn Graham at lgraham@alsbom.org or 334-613-2383.

Central Alabama Library Conference

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

The conference will be held at Shoal Creek Baptist Church in Deatsville on

March 2, 8:30 a.m.–3:30 p.m. Sessions will cover many aspects of library work including administration, promotion, collection development, disciple making, space and furnishing, church history and automation with concourse and atrium.

There is a \$10 charge at the door which includes lunch.

To register, visit churchhealthal.org/event/central-alabama-library-conference. For questions, contact Marty Woodall at 334-296-1899 or martybooks1@gmail.com.

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

Seventh St. Baptist Church, Cullman, Alabama, seeking full-time pastor at our traditional church. Services Sunday and Wednesday. Cullman is a growing town with excellent schools, parks, shopping. Resumes to: pastorsearch7thst@gmail.com. For more information on the church: seventhstbaptist.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

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

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. Resumes may be sent to: P.O. Box 8, Seale, AL 36875, ATTN: Kenny Harris.

WORSHIP LEADER/CHOIR DIRECTOR

East Gadsden Baptist Church is seeking a bivocational worship leader/choir director. If interested, please email at eastgadsdenbaptist@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC MINISTER

New Center Baptist Church, Hartselle, Alabama, seeking music minister for blended services, directing choir and coordinating volunteer musicians. Email resume to: raykballew@gmail.com or contact 256-221-6880 and newcenterbaptist.org for more information.

STUDENT PASTOR

Maplesville Baptist Church seeks student pastor. Email Pastorb@maplesvillebc.org for job description, salary and application details.

YOUTH MINISTER

Montevallo First Baptist Church is seeking a part-time youth minister. Please email your resume for consideration to: mfbcbellsouth.net.

CHILDREN & FAMILY MINISTER/DIRECTOR

First Baptist, Dadeville, located in the heart of Dadeville, Alabama, is seeking God's person to fill the position of children and family minister/director. Full-time job with a competitive

salary. Interested individuals should contact John Wilcox at employment@fbcdadeville.com. Resumes may be sent to the same address.

DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES

First Baptist Church of Birmingham is seeking a director of children's ministries. This person should be a devoted believer, gifted in organization and leadership and most of all committed to loving children and their families. Resumes can be emailed to: cjames@fbcbbm.org or Children's Search Committee, 2209 Lakeshore Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209.

SIGNS

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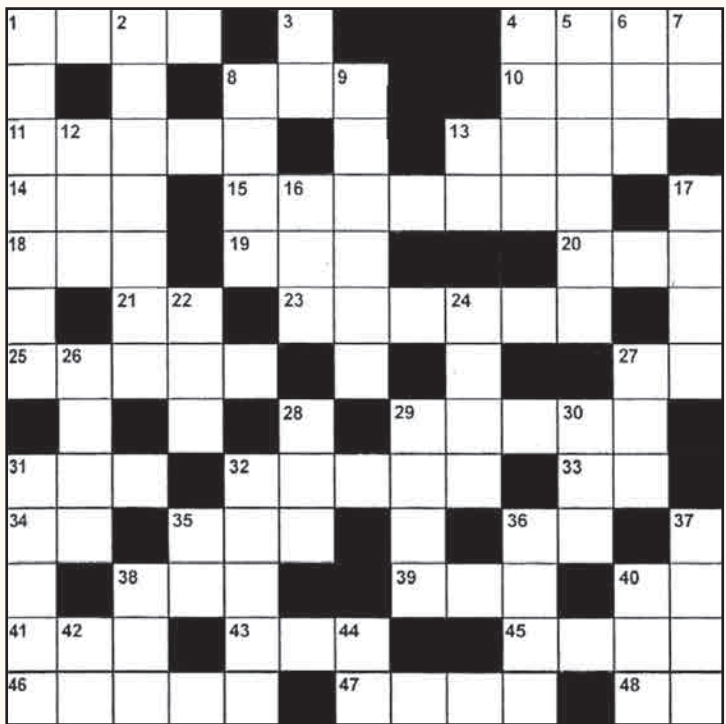
Freestanding studio apartment available in Alabaster. Located two blocks from Siluria Baptist Church. Military veteran preferred. Call 205-725-9513 for information.

CHRISTIAN Crossword



UPCOMING EVENTS
sponsored by the State Board of Missions

ACROSS
1. To carry something.
4. Call thy land ____ah.
(Isa. 62:4)
8. Shish__ob.
10. Seen his star in the _____. (Matt. 2:2)
11. Him only shalt thou _____. (Matt. 4:10)
13. To go on a _____.
14. Also.
15. Thy word ... I will ____ it. (Ps. 119:105-106)
18. Anna. (var.)
19. Just a little bit.
20. Samuel ran unto _____. (1 Sam. 3:5)
21. Printer's measure.
23. That my joy might ____ in you.
(John 15:11)
25. Gives medicine to.
27. In the country of _____. (1 Kings 4:19)
29. Praises.
31. A little while, and ye shall not ____ me.
(John 16:16)
32. To tie a rope off.
33. As he ____ pure.
(1 John 3:3)
34. Not B.C.
35. They ____ the ship aground. (Acts 27:41)
36. To exist.
38. Give ____, all ye inhabitants. (Joel 1:2)
39. Parent Teacher Association. (abbr.)
40. A two-year college degree.
41. Medical specialty. (abbr.)
43. To rest.
45. Better ... he were ____ into the sea. (Mark 9:42)
46. Or the ____, be not darkened. (Eccles. 12:2)
47. I have fed you with _____. (1 Cor. 3:2)
48. Professional engineer. (abbr.)



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DOWN
1. To sit or _____. (Two words)
2. For there are set ____ of judgment. (Ps. 122:5)
3. Mommy. (var.)
4. Thou shalt not ____ false witness. (Ex. 20:16)
5. What cannibals do.
6. Teach Judah the ____ of the bow. (2 Sam. 1:18)
7. Light. (abbr.)
8. When I ____ silence. (Ps. 32:3)
9. Or touch the _____. (Ex. 19:12)
12. Length of time.
13. To perform something.
16. Cut off his right _____. (Luke 22:50)
17. Lord of lords, and ____ of kings. (Rev. 17:14)
22. Cast the ____ on the right side of the ship.
(John 21:6)
24. When fowls came Abram drove them _____. (Gen. 15:11)
26. Ephlal begat _____. (1 Chron. 2:37)
27. Office of Strategic Services. (abbr.)
28. ____ men that were lepers. (Luke 17:12)
29. Thy word is a ____ unto my feet. (Ps. 119:105)
30. That we may ____ with him. (John 11:16)
31. Jesus _____.
32. So shall thy ____ be filled. (Prov. 3:10)
35. Egyptian sun god.
36. Rolled ____ the stone. (Matt. 28:2)
37. Jesus also suffered without the _____. (Heb. 13:12)
38. Estimated time of arrival. (abbr.)
40. Snake.
42. New Testament. (abbr.)
44. Not a.m.

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

MinistrySafe workshop: Feb. 20

For several years now, MinistrySafe has been helping equip Alabama Baptist churches to protect their children from sexual abuse. If your church staff and key volunteers haven't had an opportunity to attend a MinistrySafe conference, please join us Feb. 20 at FBC 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

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



procedure development and a session on responding to an allegation. 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 is \$20 per person. To register, visit alsbom.org/ministrysafe.

Secretaries conference

The Alabama Association of Baptist Secretaries 61st Annual Conference will be held March 3-6, at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega. This conference is designed for anyone who serves a Southern Baptist church, association or entity in an administrative capacity. Whether you are full time, part time, volunteer or even retired, you are welcome. Classes are offered in a variety of topics including financial, technical and computer, and other professional topics. The classes are geared to help whether you are new on

the job or need additional training. There are also spiritual classes to help attendees grow in the Lord. Enjoy times of learning, fellowship, networking, corporate worship and fun. The General Conference Leader (Bible teacher) is Courtney Veasey, founder of Brunch Ministries. You can read more about her and her ministry at brunchministries.com. Find out more about AABS at alabamabaptistsecretaries.com and facebook.com/1AABS. To register, visit alsbom.org/aabs by Feb. 18.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For February 11

Explore the Bible

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

IMPATIENCE

Genesis 15:1–6; 16:1–6

When God makes promises, He keeps them. God’s timing, however, does not always align with our timing or expectations. In this week’s study, we learn that faith includes both taking God at His Word and trusting that God will accomplish His purposes in His timing.

Abram was 75 years old when God sent him to an unfamiliar land where God would make of his seed a great nation (12:2–7). Sarai, his wife, was 65 and unable to bear children.

Believed (15:1–6)

As time passed and Abram considered this stark reality of their advanced years, he reasoned that God had plans to make his servant Eliezer of Damascus to be his heir since he was considered to be part of Abram’s extended household. Our passage begins with this consideration.

God responds to Abram while he wonders aloud about the promised seed that has not been given. First, Eliezer will not be the heir because he was not born in the land. Second, Abram’s heir will be from his seed, as God previously promised. Third, God specifically states that Abram’s heir will be from his own body. Abram was going to father a son, not adopt a son.

Abram takes God at His Word. He believes what God says, and God accounts him as righteous. Both Paul and James refer to Verse 6 as a demonstration of Abram’s saving faith (Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; James 2:23). The writer of Hebrews indicates like-minded faith in Sarah (11:11).

Impatient (16:1–4)

Though Sarah believes God eventually, she grows impatient and devises a shortcut. After 10 years of waiting, then-named Sarai offers her Egyptian handmaid, Hagar, to Abram as a sur-

rogate wife, one who would bear him a son. This practice was not uncommon in the ancient world and is recorded in the narratives regarding Rachel (Gen. 30:3), Leah (Gen. 30:9) and Hannah (1 Sam. 1:4–6).

As with the other women listed here, Sarai discovers that plans to speed up the fulfillment of God’s promise leads to jealousy and rivalry.

How often are we impatient with God? How presumptuous we must be when we assume that God needs our help to accomplish His purposes. And what heartache we must endure because of our presumptions. How often do we as congregations presume that our timing is God’s timing?

Impetuous (16:5–6)

Sarai’s impatience with God’s provision leads to unforeseen problems. Instead of family unity and celebration, the birth of Ishmael results in jealousy and aggravation. Once Hagar discovers she is pregnant, she treats Sarai with contempt. Sarai then blames Abram, calling on God to judge between them.

Abram demonstrates restraint and wisdom, having been married long enough to answer with an affirmative “yes, dear.”

Actually, he responds by saying that Sarai will have to determine the best course of action here. After all, this surrogate wife plan was her idea.

In Hebrews 11, both Abraham and Sarah are listed among the Old Testament saints who lived by faith, looking forward to the promised Redeemer. This passage in Genesis is a helpful reminder that their faith was incomplete. Like many of us, they failed to recognize that God is able to do the impossible.

In the fullness of time, God gives the promised seed in Isaac. Ultimately, that Seed is Christ (Gal. 3:16).



Bible Studies for Life

By Rony Kozman, Ph.D.
Assistant professor of Biblical Studies, Samford University

PRAYING FAITH

Luke 11:1–13

Jesus invites us to pray and trust Him with our needs. (1–4)

The disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray.” In the verses that follow, Jesus teaches the disciples what they should pray for (vv. 2–4), and He teaches them about God’s responsiveness to prayer (vv. 5–13). Jesus orients our prayers so that we seek first God’s Kingdom.

We address God as Father and ask that His name be sanctified. Related to this, we ask that God’s Kingdom would come.

These first two things are related. God’s name is revered as His Kingdom takes root and grows upon the earth.

In this prayer, we ask that God would reassert His good and just reign over the earth and that God’s Kingdom would flourish. Jesus teaches us to ask God to supply us with our necessities. Then, we ask God to forgive our sins as we forgive the debts that people owe to us.

This depicts our sins as a debt that we need forgiven, and as we remember that we are asking God to forgive us the debts that we cannot repay (i.e., our sins), we likewise should be ready and eager to forgive the monetary (and other debts) that people owe us and cannot repay.

Finally, we ask God to keep us from a trial that would destroy us and instead ask Him to rescue us from such evil and calamity. At the same time, we also recognize that God may find it necessary for us to pass through certain trials. And so we pray as Jesus did, that the Father’s will would be done.

We know that even if we must pass through trials, even the trial of

death, that ultimately God will rescue us from death as He did when He resurrected Jesus.

Keep asking because God will answer. (5–10)

After Jesus teaches His disciples what to pray, He also teaches them about the importance and necessity of prayer. God gives in response to our prayer.

To this effect, Jesus gives an analogy of a friend who gives you bread at an inconvenient hour of the night because of your persistence. Jesus continues and presses that if we ask, search and knock — if we persist in prayer — then we will receive these things.

Trust God to answer out of His goodness. (11–13)

But God does not relate to us as a friend whom we must pester so that He finally relents and gives us the things for which Jesus has taught us to ask. Rather, God is like a father — after all, we pray to him as “Father” — who willingly and longingly wants to give His children the things for which they ask. He does not give them less or worse than what they ask.

God’s gifts surpass what we ask of Him. Even if we fail to ask God for what is best, God is our good and loving father who always knows and gives what is best to us. And Luke stresses the unsurpassed gift of the Holy Spirit.

All who receive this gift of the Holy Spirit are in the Kingdom of God and have defeated evil spirits and the ruler of the demons since they are indwelt and ruled by the Holy Spirit (vv. 14–26). In the gift of the Holy Spirit, God’s Kingdom has come (v. 20).



“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”

Luke 11:13

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For February 18

Explore the Bible

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.

Executive Director of the Center for Christian Calling, University of Mobile



ESTABLISHED Genesis 17:1–10, 15–19

The silence is deafening. Abram's life narrative is full of details from age 75 until the birth of Ishmael when he is 86. And then, nothing.

Between Genesis 16:16 and 17:1 are 13 years of silence. Why the silence in Abram's narrative? Perhaps it is a stark reminder that God accomplishes His purposes according to His timetable, not ours.

More likely, it is to indicate that the covenant would be established through another son. God's promises made in 12:1–3 and the covenant initiated in 15:18 are more clearly revealed in Chapter 17.

Covenant (17:1–8)

God reveals His name. In Genesis 12, Abram calls on the name of YHWH (Lord, in all capital letters in the Bible). He calls God by the names YHWH, El Elyon (God Most High) and Qoneh (Creator) in 14:22. Abram calls God by the name Adonai YHWH (Lord God) in 15:2. God introduces Himself to Abram with yet another name, El Shaddai (God Almighty) in 17:1. He is the Almighty who accomplishes the impossible.

God reveals His covenant. In Genesis 15, God initiates a covenant with Abram.

Based on the timing of this reiteration in Chapter 17, the Lord indicates that the covenant will not be through Ishmael but through a promised seed yet to be born.

God changes Abram's name. In Genesis 11, readers are first introduced to the name "Abram." His name means "exalted father." As the father of Ishmael, he was to become an exalted father with 12 grandsons. God gives him a new name — Abraham — which means "father of a multitude." Twenty-four years after leaving Haran, Abraham has a new name and a promise from God of an

eternal covenant for his descendants. He would become the patriarch of nations and kings.

Sign (17:9–10)

The sign of the covenant is circumcision on the eighth day of a boy's life.

In both the Old and New Testaments, the Scriptures communicate directly about the removal of the male foreskin as the physical reminder of the Abrahamic covenant.

This ritual practice became established in Mosaic law (Lev. 12:3).

Mary and Joseph followed this covenant ritual when Jesus was 8 days old (Luke 2:21). The Apostle Paul includes this sign of the covenant on his résumé as an authentic Hebrew of Hebrews (Phil. 3:5).

Keep in mind that circumcision is not salvific; it does not place a man in right standing with God.

In his epistle to the Galatian churches, Paul indicates that this sign of the covenant is not a means of salvation (Gal. 5:6). Only Jesus saves.

Promise (17:15–19)

Sarai has a new identity — Sarah, meaning "princess." She will receive blessings from God, and she will become the mother of kings and nations. This 90-year-old barren woman is the recipient of an incredible promise.

Abraham expresses incredulity. "Right. ... Sarah and I are way too old to have a child. ... You have to be joking!" In our sanctified imaginations, we can envision how impossible this sounded to Abraham. So he laughed.

The meaning of Isaac's name actually ties back to laughter. What a name. It seems to be a silly name, but it expresses his parents' responses when they heard God's promise (18:12).

Bible Studies for Life

By Rony Kozman, Ph.D.

Assistant professor of Biblical Studies, Samford University



CONFIDENT FAITH Luke 12:22–34

Worry doesn't solve anything. (22–26)

In this passage Jesus sets the eyes and desires of His disciples on God's Kingdom. In Verse 13, someone asks Jesus to resolve his dispute with his brother over the family inheritance. But Jesus refuses to arbitrate and instead warns the crowd, "Watch out and be on guard against all greed, because one's life is not in the abundance of his possessions" (v. 15).

Then, Jesus tells a parable about a rich man who built larger barns to store up his crops and goods. This does not seem unreasonable. Why wouldn't you save wealth and store it up so that you can say to yourself, as the rich man does, "You have many goods stored up for many years. Take it easy; eat, drink and enjoy yourself"? What seems to be a wise venture of saving one's wealth is condemned by God.

As Jesus says, "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is demanded of you. And the things you have prepared — whose will they be?' That's how it is with the one who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God" (vv. 20–21).

What Jesus condemns is someone who focuses on making themselves materially wealthy but they are spiritually impoverished. It is in light of this that Jesus tells His disciples to not worry about what they need to live, whether food, health or clothing.

God knows what we need. (27–30)

Instead, Jesus corrects us and wants us to recalibrate our attention, desires and priorities. First, we do not need to be concerned

with our material needs because God knows what we need, and He will provide us with our necessities.

After all, God feeds the birds who do not save up grain, and they do not go hungry. And God clothes the flowers and the grass, and they don't even labor for their clothes. We are more valuable than birds and grass. Will God not clothe and feed us?

Not only do we not need to give our anxieties and excessive attention to these things since God knows what we need and will take care of these things for us, but we also should not worry about these things because worry itself is unproductive and does not add to our lives.

God will take care of us as we seek the Kingdom of God. (31–34)

Instead, Jesus instructs us to seek God's Kingdom, and God will seek the things we need on our behalf.

How do we seek and receive God's Kingdom? Jesus here tells us how. He tells us, "Sell your possessions and give to the poor."

So instead of being anxious about our material necessities or pursuing and saving wealth like the rich man, Jesus prescribes that we give up our wealth, that we sell our possessions and give charity to those in need. By giving to those in need, we paradoxically store up the imperishable possession of God's Kingdom.

We store up treasure in heaven, which can be neither destroyed nor stolen. Our hearts cannot be set both on gaining earthly treasure and heavenly treasure. We can pursue one. And in order to gain one, we give up the other.

"Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!"

Luke 12:24

WORD search

- ANXIETY

BLASPHEMY

BREAD

CONSIDER

COVETOUSNESS

DAILY

DISCIPLES

DIVISION

EYE

FAITHFUL

FATHER
- GENTILES

HIDDEN

HOLY SPIRIT

JUDGMENT

KINGDOM

LAMP

LIGHT

LILIES

MASTER

PARABLE

PRAYER
- QUEEN

RAVENS

REPENTANCE

REVEALED

RICHES

SERVANT

SIGN

SOUND

SPIRIT

TEMPTATION

TREASURE

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

[Jesus] was praying in a certain place, and when He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John also taught his disciples."

LUKE 11:1



You Gotta' Hear This!

Finding humor in the everyday moments

Let Me Count the Ways

When February arrives, our thoughts turn to love. My husband was the master of gifting. When Valentine's Day arrived, I not only received gorgeous roses, but a box of candies and jewelry or some item Steve knew I would enjoy, accompanied by a card with a handwritten romantic message.

I was blessed far more than I deserved. Many men, although they love their wives, just didn't get the romantic gene.

Variety of expressions

A friend of mine lived vicariously through me on Valentine's Day. "What did that romantic man do for you this year?" she would ask.

I was reluctant to share my blessings with her because I knew her sweet husband didn't have a thread of romance in him. If he thought to get her something, it usually came with a guarantee — a hand mixer from Dollar General, a battery for her lawn mower or maybe a pair of yard gloves.

She hinted for years how nice it would be to get flowers. He didn't get it. Finally, she just told him.

One Feb. 14, he was driving home from work empty-handed just as he passed a flower outlet that sold nothing but artificial flowers in loose stems. He quickly turned around and went in.

He walked through picking up one of every color he liked. So proud of himself, he walked in the door at home with a huge smile on his face, holding those

mismatched stems. My friend's heart sank when she saw his idea of a bouquet, but she couldn't let it show because he was so pleased he had remembered.

How do you say, "I love you" to your loved ones and to the Lord? Some people can pray eloquently, telling God how much they love Him, while others don't seem to have the right words.

There was a lady in a rural community who came to know the Lord. She heard different people testify in the little country church where she was saved.

With her heart full of gratitude for her salvation, she stood and testified, "I love the Lord. I love the Lord more than anything."

She paused, wanting to be truthful, and added, "unless it's about a half-grown fried rabbit."

Although it was an unorthodox expression, she was more truthful than many of us. How do you say, "I love you, Lord." May our hearts overflow with our love for Him, but may we be as truthful as this lady was.

MEET THE AUTHOR

Barbara Eubanks of Albertville is an author, conference speaker, Christian humorist and retired English teacher. She is the widow of Baptist pastor Steve Eubanks.



MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Worship leader Michael Bethany grateful for lives 'transformed' through music

Overflow," the worship album released in 2023 by singer-songwriter and worship leader Michael Bethany, came from his own prayer closet.

"As a matter of fact, that's what 'overflow' means. It's not an overflow of blessings; it's an overflow of intimacy. It's not overflow to us, but it's overflow coming out of us. It's being with God until it overflows into our everyday life," he said.

Two of the album's songs — "Fill the Room" and "He is Lord" — came right out of Bethany's personal worship time. He was praying and simply started singing each one. "Walk with You" arose from his daily meditation time.

"I journal daily about intimacy with God — just get up and pray and look for Scriptures in the Bible," he said. "Those lyrics were birthed out of that. That song concept came out of my journal, so when I started to write the song I had to open my journal. This was what I have been talking to God about."

Recorded live

Not only did many of the songs come directly from that place of worship, but the recording was also made live in a worship setting. It was recorded with a group of col-



MICHAEL BETHANY

Photo courtesy of Becky Siegrist and Cory Hale

lege students at the King's University at Gateway in Southlake, Texas.

The songs weren't performed; they were the heart of a worship service.

"Overflow" has had an incredible reception and with that comes new things to steward and constant judgments made about whether a certain opportunity is from God or not.

Bethany compared the album's creation and release to a harvest.

"Once you've prayed and you've watered and you've nurtured and you've prayed and there was a storm, and God miraculously preserved your crop — whatever that is for you — once it's fully mature, it's time to go harvest it. And that's work," Bethany said.

"Harvesting is sometimes more difficult than planting because what you planted were seeds. They were easy to manage. You just needed faith to believe that God was going to do something with this."

The harvest is so much bigger than the seeds that were planted, he said. So much has to be done — build storage bins, plan systems to take care of the harvest, obtain needed tools. It can't be done in a day.

Furthermore, the harvest might need processing.

"You've got to turn it into something useful for people so that it can become a blessing, not just to you but to your community and maybe even the world."

Harvest for Bethany means a lot of decisions. He is committed more to God and to his wife and two sons than to travel. He knows that if he's so exhausted from traveling, he's not good for anyone. He prays about every opportunity he has to minister and doesn't always say yes.

Bethany has already won two BMI Christian Awards, but he's working to be careful to keep perspective of who he is and who God is.

He likens it to Isaiah's vision of

being in God's presence in Isaiah 6.

"When you see God rightly, you see you rightly. There's no ... award ... that changes what I see in God's presence. I know the truth," he said. "I think to live in pride is to live outside the presence of God because you can't be in the presence of God and give yourself a pat on the back."

Keeping God as the focus

"As long as God is the focus of my worship, I'll never become the focus," he said, adding he's also grateful when he sees what God is doing with his music.

Not long after the release of "Overflow," Bethany was having a really bad day and even wondering if he was cut out to do this ministry.

About that time he received a message from a fellow worship leader who told Bethany his album was "like a personal revival" for her as she was going through her own rough season.

"I'm in the airport, and I'm crying," he said. "I'm like, someone's real life is being transformed at the very moment I feel like I need help."

"God just is showing me, 'I'm using you when you don't even know that I'm using you.' This album has

been released to be a part of people's lives in real time.

"By God's grace, we get to do all of these amazing things. Every

testimony represents some challenge we had to be faithful enough for that testimony to exist. It all works together.

"God's grace is sufficient, overflowing and abundant in our lives, so I'm so grateful for all of those things God is doing."

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 learn more about Michael Bethany and his music, go to michaelbethany.com.

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MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

‘God’s timing is perfect,’ says singer-songwriter Natalie Layne

Singer, songwriter and worship leader Natalie Layne mostly had a smooth musical journey. She started playing piano at 3 years old. Her family and friends supported her pursuit of music as a career. As a senior in college, she won a music contest that literally had record labels clamoring to talk to her.

“It’s kind of been a lifelong thing for me. I fell in love with music when I was really young. I think I just grew up saying I would do something in music,” she said.

All this has led to Layne’s debut EP, “Amen,” released July 2023.

Any negativity from others was countered by Layne’s belief that the Lord was “calling [her] to do — to try,” an attitude she learned from her family that told her, “Go for it. Let’s watch what the Lord can do.”

But as soon as it started, the momentum paused. The waiting began.

Though the record labels had quickly rushed to talk to her after winning the contest, there was no rush about a contract.

Questioning

In the meantime, Layne was invited to a writer’s retreat where art-



Photo courtesy of Natalie Layne

NATALIE LAYNE

ists were brought together to write songs for a week and even though that went well, it still took about three years before Layne finally signed a contract.

During that time, Layne tried to stay positive but still questioned God about what was going on. Everything finally came together. She had a team and was about to release a record. Her first tour was coming together. And then COVID-19 shut everything down.

“People tell you when you’re in the middle of the waiting part that God’s timing is perfect. But that almost hurt in the middle of it. I thought that this was where He was leading,” she said.

This experience was part of the inspiration for the joy emphasized throughout “Amen.”

Understanding that it’s easy to have joy when everything is coming together, she also knows finding joy is difficult when there are

roadblocks in the path or when you’re walking through pain or grief.

But Layne is adamant it’s still possible.

“We’re all learning that joy doesn’t just mean having a smile on our faces all the time,” she said. “It’s not the same as being happy all the time. Joy can exist at the same time as pain and grief and hard things because it’s rooted in Jesus, who doesn’t change.”

Another songwriting focus is for those who, like her, grew up in church.

Believing that “every artist has a story to share,” sometimes Layne would hear a radical testimony of someone delivered from a drug addiction or was miraculously healed and wondered how her testimony could compare.

She believes it’s important to recognize those who stayed.

“It’s really powerful when a church kid decides to stay. A lot of times it’s harder to stay in the church than to leave because there’s a lot of pain and hurt there.

“But I believe God’s doing a lot in the church these days, the global Church. I love the stories of believers who have made a commitment for themselves to just stay, to stick around. I think it’s just as powerful of a testimony,” she said.

Heart for ‘deep, dark places’

Even though Layne’s main message is geared to lifelong Christians, she also has a heart for those in the “deep, dark places.” She has gotten feedback from some who said that her songs put a smile on their faces or made them think

about God when they previously hadn’t.

Like these two very different listeners — lifelong Christians and the unsaved — there are also distinct sides to another part of her music. Layne writes, records and tours as a contemporary Christian artist and also leads worship. Though both use gifts God gave her and both are displayed on a stage, they are not the same.

“It feels like totally separate things in my brain,” she said. “Performing as an artist is sharing my artistry with people, my creativity, songs that I’ve written most of the time. Leading worship at church is like, we’re just all part of the same thing, doing it together.”

Strength source

In spite of starting music at such a young age, Layne still gets nervous.

“It reminds me I can’t do it on my own strength. I actually need strength from God every time. It doesn’t matter if I’ve done the same show 100 times. There’s still something in me that says, ‘OK, I can’t do this by myself.’

“It actually serves as an indicator and a reminder to me of those things, and so I’ve grown to be grateful for the nerves even though they’re still annoying at times.”

Through the success, the waiting, the joy, the struggles and the nerves, Layne is thankful for what God has done.

“I just want to encourage people that it usually takes longer than we think or hope but when we know that God’s timing is perfect, it really is. What’s happening now is far beyond anything I ever could have imagined.”

To learn more about Layne, go to natalielayne.com.

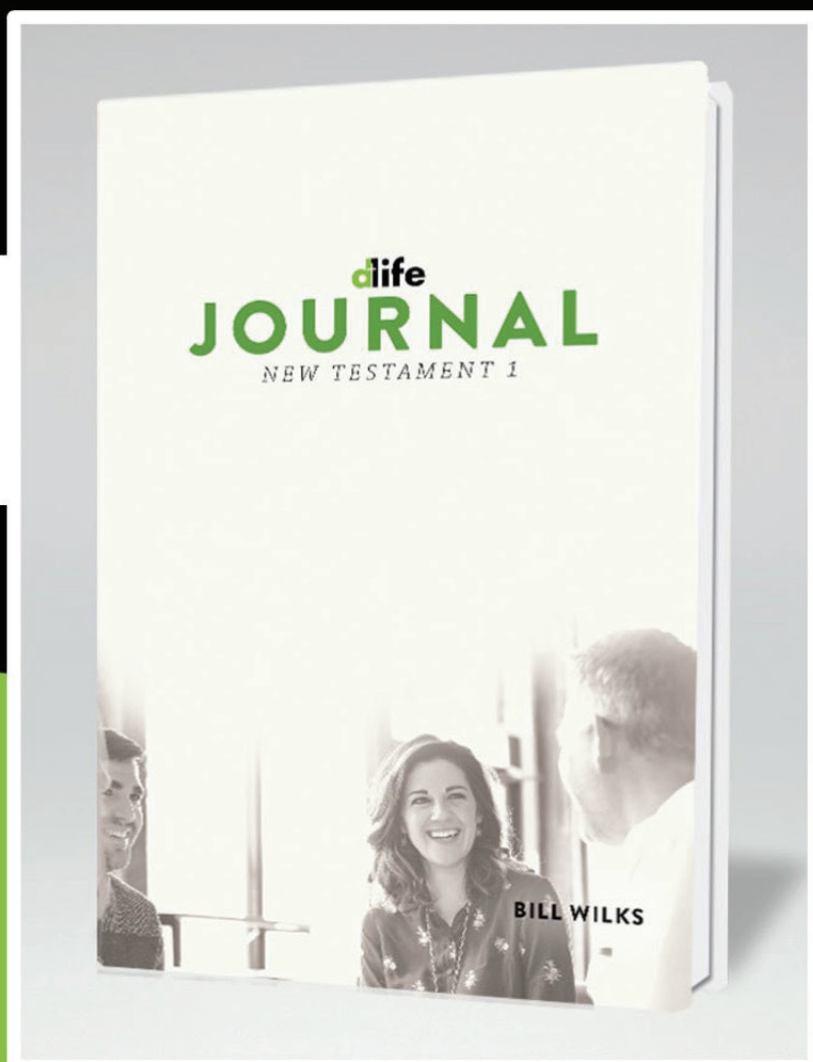


EDITOR’S NOTE

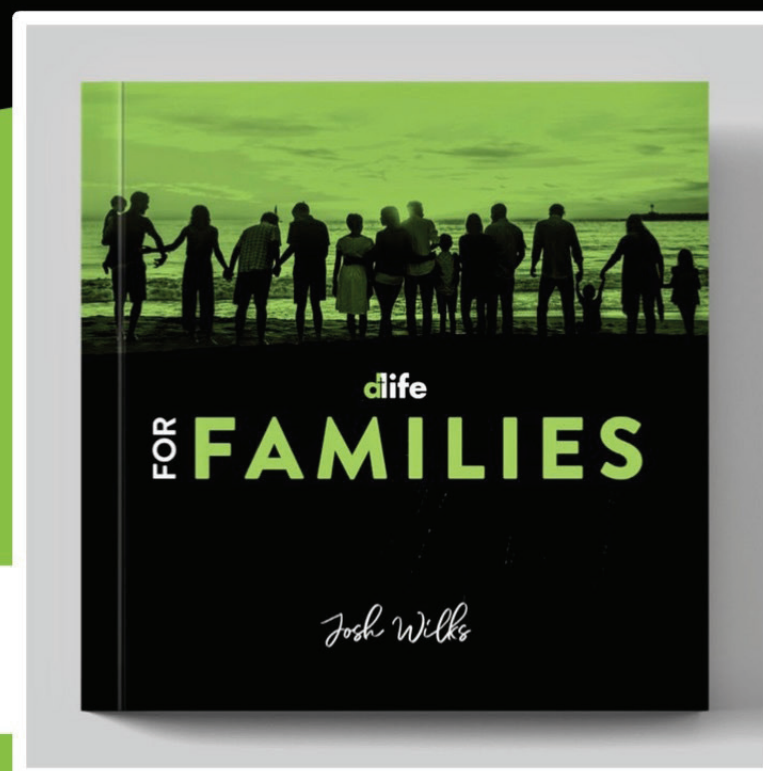
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‘A discipline’

By Laura Lee Leathers

The Baptist Paper

Mississippi woman’s commitment to God’s Word ‘speaks to my heart’

Reading the Word: A habit or a discipline? Ask Billie Lang of West Point, Mississippi, that question, and she will quickly tell you, “It is a discipline. But if it’s a habit, it’s a good habit. I desire to read the Bible because God speaks to my heart.”

This is from a woman in her 31st year of reading the Bible through from Genesis to Revelation.

I had the opportunity to visit with Billie in her home and hold the King James Version Bible she has used over the years.

It has her maiden name engraved in gold in the bottom right-hand corner. Her mother and father gave it to her on Dec. 24, 1956, when she was 18.

The white leather Bible with a taped spine is one of Billie’s prized possessions.

When asked what Bible reading plan she was following, Billie’s answer was simple: “None.”

“I start in Genesis and read. For example, today, I read 25 chapters in the book of Psalms.”

Reading the Bible through

She noted her mother, Frances Everett, had read the Bible through at least 66 times.

Billie Mae Everett grew up in Money, Mississippi, where her family was involved in Riverside Baptist Church and her father was a deacon.

At age 9 or 10, Billie and a friend attended a revival. The friend wanted to go forward to make a profession of faith in Christ, so Billie did too; they were baptized shortly afterward.

At 19 Billie married Wendall Rasdall, who died in 1996.



Photo by Laura Lee Leathers/The Baptist Paper

Billie Lang holds her prized King James Version Bible that her parents gave her nearly 67 years ago. She is currently in her 31st year of reading the Bible through from Genesis to Revelation.

Several years later she married Robert (Bobby) Lang, and they eventually settled near Cedarbluff and attended Hebron Baptist Church.

Sometime around age 65, in the middle of the night Billie was awakened by a terrible dream involving a character with horns, coming to take her to Hades.

The following day she shared

the dream with her husband and he told her she needed to be sure of her salvation.

Honest evaluation

She said she asked herself, “Did I get saved that night when my girlfriend and I went forward, or did I just join the church?” An honest evaluation told her she had gone forward because of her friend, so that day Billie genuinely

repented and placed her faith in Jesus. She was baptized again at Hebron Baptist.

Billie then showed me another Bible, which she uses nearly seven days a week. She keeps it next to her favorite chair and reads it after morning chores.

At the back of the Bible she has written, “Billie Mae Rasdall (Lang);” “Finished reading Bible through;” “1st time 11-12-84.” Following is a list of 29 more entries. Sometimes the finish date is February, April, June or October. Now she is trying to complete her reading in December.

Since 2011, even with significant health challenges, she has maintained reading the Word.

“As I read the Bible daily, it brings me comfort,” Billie said. “It is like a storybook — every time I read it I learn something new.”

When Mike Smith, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in West Point, heard about Billie’s commitment to read the Bible through and having done it consistently for so many years, he challenged the congregation to do the same.

Smith said one of the joys of seeing church members follow through with their commitment is to witness their increased knowledge of God’s Word. As he is preaching, they become more engaged because they know what he is talking about.

Billie noted some of the rewards she has experienced: “In my opinion, if you read your Bible He will bring you through many things, especially when you have no idea what’s going to happen next. But He’ll be there for you. Trust the Lord, put your faith in Him and believe what you read.”

“EVERY TIME I READ [THE BIBLE] I LEARN SOMETHING NEW.”

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Faith & community

By Britney Lyn Hamm
The Pathway

‘Fine arts Bible study’ group reaches atheist student with gospel

Payton Beucher didn’t expect to find himself back at Northwest Missouri State University in the spring of 2023 after a three-year gap that included multiple school transfers.

He also didn’t expect to find Jesus. But he did.

As Beucher was preparing to move back to Maryville to study clarinet at NWMSU, Brooklyn Ellis and Zach Ringo were feeling led to start a fine arts Bible study. The two close friends had been music education majors and shared the experience of being Christians in the time-consuming world of fine arts.

“We didn’t feel like we had the opportunity to have a lot of community,” Ellis recalled.

She and Ringo were both involved in The Lighthouse (a Baptist student group), but their complicated music schedules made it difficult to participate. They’d led an informal Bible study the previous year with two other classmates, but they knew there were other believers in their department who hadn’t found a source of Christian community on campus.

“We talked about the idea to create our own, working around the schedules of music people and making it accessible,” Ellis said.

‘Open-door policy’

After a defining moment discussing it with another music major friend, they decided to start a fine arts Bible study.

None of the three had much experience leading something like that, so they went to campus missionary Jason Yarnell for advice. He offered guidance and provided study materials on the Gospel of John.

They started meeting weekly in



Photo courtesy of The Pathway
Musicians in the fine arts Bible study at the BSU at Northwest Missouri State University have been faithful in sharing the gospel with their peers — even leading one atheist, by God’s grace, to faith in Christ.

The Lighthouse’s prayer room to pray, and began inviting people to the study — but they didn’t want it to just be a community for believers.

“We had an open-door policy for anyone who wasn’t a believer,” Ringo said. “These are the people we are around all day, every day. We see them in almost every class, in every ensemble, everywhere.”

Beucher was one of the friends they invited.

“My initial instinct was to say ‘thank you’ but decline,” he recalled. He was raised by agnostic parents and had virtually no spiritual upbringing.

Instead of declining the invitation, Beucher said yes.

“The general mindset I found myself in was one of openness,” he recalled. “I had already been reex-

amining my beliefs and knew deep down that I wanted to search for truth.”

Throughout the spring semester, the group studied John on Friday afternoons in the fine arts building with anywhere from six to 15 people.

As Beucher wrestled with the meaning of truth, Ellis and Ringo were realizing the profound but weighty opportunity in front of them.

Many of their peers had had negative experiences with church and Christians, but “they are people we already have built a rapport with,” Ringo said.

“If we can be that good example of Christ, then they might want to come check something out.”

College fine arts departments are notoriously tight-knit — students

eat, breathe, work and play together. That realization challenged them to hold themselves to a higher standard and represent Christ well to their peers.

“The Lord convicted me that the way I carry myself is important,” Ellis noted.

‘He would love first’

Beucher came to the Bible study week after week and also started attending the Baptist student group.

“He expressed pretty openly that he hadn’t had much exposure to Christianity. That was sort of baffling to me,” Ellis admitted.

Finally they came to the answer: the gospel. One group member, Ari, drew the “bridge” illustration and explained the gospel. Ellis and Ringo could see Beucher’s search for truth intensify after that.

Beucher finally accepted “that point, that specific moment when you’ve heard enough to make an informed decision, doesn’t really exist as I thought it did,” Beucher said.

“There will always be more questions, more reading, more listening and thinking to be done. And if that’s the case, that I’m not ‘filling up a progress bar to conversion,’ then what am I waiting for?”

Shortly after that realization, Ellis received a text from Beucher saying he’d pulled over on the side of the road and given his life to Christ.

Watching their friend come to faith was an unexpected joy for Ellis and Ringo.

“It’s our job to go out into the missions field and spread the Word of God,” Ringo said. “This is the missions field we’ve been placed in.”

EDITOR’S NOTE — This story was originally published by The Pathway.

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