

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



Volunteers at a serve day at Eastern Hills Baptist Church make sleeping mats for the homeless.

Photos courtesy of Karla Groves



God's leading

Eastern Hills Baptist sparks ministry to make sleeping mats for homeless

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Karla Groves says she has a heart for the homeless, so in 2017 when Greg Gosselin asked her to help make sleeping mats for people living on the streets of Montgomery, it was an easy yes.

But she realized quickly that the project needed an edit.

"He asked a bunch of us older women — I'm 81 — if we would like to crochet sleeping bags for the homeless," Groves said of Gosselin, who at the time served on staff at Eastern Hills Baptist Church in Montgomery, where Groves is a member. "We wanted to do that, and I felt a calling for it. But I started trying, and some of the other ladies did too, and we realized that with the arthritis in our

hands, it wasn't going to work."

Groves felt like it wasn't an accident that Gosselin had enlisted their help — she felt like God was leading them in that direction.

Answering the call

"I prayed about it and said, 'I want to do this and follow Your lead, but I can't crochet,'" she said. "The next day, someone told me about a YouTube video of someone

from Canada who made mats by weaving plastic bags."

From there, Groves didn't waste any time. Her 94-year-old husband, Lou, made three looms like the ones in the video, and eight women began coming to her house each week to weave sleeping mats from plastic shopping bags.

Then when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Groves kept making (See 'Volunteer,' page 13)

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I See Jesus

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

From the April 18 edition of The Alabama Baptist

Jackie Shumate shared lessons learned through the loss of her dad and his 25-year battle with heart disease in an article featured on page 6:

“God is good — even in the waiting, the silence and the tragedy,” Shumate explained in the first person column.

“During a therapy session with the team palliative care doctor, my dad opened up about how he was tired of fighting, yet he wanted to live to see his grandkids some more and see my husband’s ordination.

“His dying wish would be honored by God. ... It was a joyful day (at the ordination service),” she said.

“During his last two months, he had joy and peace with God. I’m not sure if it (was the new) medicine helping or just God providing some goodness for us, His already griev-

ing children,” Shumate shared. “A man who had battled his faith and control most of his life had what I can only call surrendered to the Almighty One. He had complete peace with God and was ready spiritually.”

From a personal testimony and life experience

Testimony from Jackie Champion, engagement specialist with the Alabama Baptist Children’s Homes & Family Ministries:

My husband (Jeff Champion) is pastor of Concord Highland Baptist Church in Hueytown.

We came to this sweet church in December 2022. They were without a pastor for two years. When we came, there were no children, however, there was one 13-year-old girl who began inviting her friends.

We now have around 15–20 teenagers on Wednesday nights. Because the Lord is moving in that direction, we are having VBS for teens only.

From a personal testimony and life experience

Testimony from TAB staff: In countless interviews and routine conversations through the years, staff members have heard story after story of how God showed up amid difficult circumstances. Other moments have been in simple, everyday situations but still powerful.

The stories always inspire us.

From a personal testimony and life experience

Testimony from Faye H. Harris of Armore, Tennessee:

“More and more I’m having interludes with the One we call God. “I believe our brain has an umbilical cord to our Master. ... During a recent morning walk, I was so saturated with God, I couldn’t separate myself from Him. ... It’s like I was walking in the dark, and I’m now walking in the light.”

Terry honored with second lifetime achievement award

Bobby S. “Bob” Terry’s contributions to the Christian publishing world continue to be noticed across the industry.

Evangelical Press Association honored him with its Terry White Lifetime Achievement award April 23 during its annual meeting, held this year in Lexington, Kentucky.

Terry, editor emeritus of The Alabama Baptist, received a similar honor from Associated Church Press (the William B. Lippard Award, for Distinguished Service to Religious Journalism) in 2019 and is the only person to date to be honored with both ACP and EPA’s lifetime achievement awards.

Lamar Keener, executive director of EPA, said during the presentation, “Dr. Terry led a storied career running state newspapers for ... 50 years with three publications.

“Under his leadership, The Alabama Baptist was consistently rec-



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist
PAT AND BOB TERRY

ognized as one of the top regional newspapers in the U.S.”

Terry, also the winner of countless individual awards throughout his career, has invested in young journalists, served in numerous leadership capacities and helped many groups navigate difficult circumstances. He became well known among his peers who were involved in EPA, ACP,

Baptist Communicators Association, the Association of State Baptist Publications and other national professional organizations.

He received a lifetime membership role in BCA in 2019 and was surprised in 2018 with the naming of a journalism scholarship at Samford University in his honor by ASBP and endowed by TAB’s board of directors. Terry served as ASBP’s executive secretary for more than 25 years. He also received TAB Media Group’s inaugural distinctive service award in 2022, four years after his retirement from the president and editor position, which he had held since 1995.

Terry, the author of two books, continues to research, write and share on a variety of topics with individuals, groups and churches.

Terry and his wife, Pat, are members of Dawson Memorial Baptist Church in Homewood. (TAB Media)

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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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 19.



GUEST EDITORIAL

for this week's issue of **The Alabama Baptist**

By Rob Jackson, director of evangelism and church revitalization, SBOM

12 signs of an authentic Christian found in Scripture

Have you ever questioned your salvation or had someone ask you how they can know for sure they are saved?

1 John 5:13 states, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.”

So, when people come to me with doubts, I take them through the book of 1 John. This Scripture was written to the early church (and to you and me) as an assurance of eternal life and a warning for those who were only going through the motions.

Here are 12 signs of an authentic Christian:

1st Sign (1 John 1:1–4) — You have encounters with Christ. This encounter is real, personal and life changing. Authentic Christianity is not a one-time occurrence in the past but a living, growing, genuine and authentic relationship with the Lord.

2nd Sign (1:5–6; 2:29–3:8) — You walk in righteousness. You are not perfect. However, your overall life is not one of sinfulness; you are striving to be like Christ. When you fall, you are broken over it and confess the sin. A false believer will be able to enjoy their sinful lifestyle.

3rd Sign (1:7) — You fellowship with other believers. Believers will desire fellowship (which includes corporate worship) with other believers. If you do not like being around Christians, then you have a spiritual problem and need to evaluate your relationship with Christ.

Confess our sins

4th Sign (1:8–10) — You acknowledge that you are a sinner and totally dependent upon Christ. True believers acknowledge they are sinners in the need of grace. As a result, believers regularly confess their sins and rejoice over His forgiveness.

5th Sign (2:9–10; 3:11–15) — You love others. You cannot be a Christian if you hate others. Christ, who lives in every believer, causes us to love others (especially those who belong to Him).

6th Sign (2:15–17) — You

love God instead of the things of this world. Love for the world and the Father cannot co-exist. The sinful world stands in opposition to the Lord.

7th Sign (2:18–19) — You persevere until the end. In the time of John, some professing believers left the faith during difficulty and persecution. They loved their jobs, money, family and their own lives more than they loved Christ. Believers will persevere until the end (see Phil. 1:6).

8th Sign (2:23–25; 5:1) — You will acknowledge that Christ is the only way. Believers have a new heart and realize Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. The only way a human can come to God is through Jesus Christ.

9th Sign (3:17–19) — You are generous. I am concerned for the multitude of professing Christians in rich America who claim to have a relationship with

Christ but are stingy with the money God has given them.

10th Sign (3:24) — You are Spirit-filled. A Christian has peace in times of difficulty. You have boldness in times of fear. You desire to be like Christ, and so forth. Even when your life is shaken, the fruit of the Spirit overflows from you (see Gal. 5:22–23). This does not mean you will not have normal emotions, but it does mean that fruit will be seen in you.

Reading God's Word

11th Sign (4:5–6) — You enjoy and listen to the Word of God. How can we listen to John and the apostles? By listening to the words God inspired them to write. A Christian wants to learn about God by reading and studying the Word.

12th Sign (4:7–10; 5:10) — You have repented and believed; you have a testimony. An authentic believer has repented from their sin, believed the gospel of Jesus Christ and accepted Christ as Savior and Lord. There will be a change in your life. You have a story, a story of how Christ is in the process of making you into the image of His only Son.

I have found these 12 signs to be helpful in my ministry. I hope they can help you assure some and warn others for the glory of Christ.

“I write these things to you
who believe in the name of the Son
of God that you may know that
you have eternal life.”

Your Voice



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

God wants us to see everything He is, can be

By Karen Moore

karenmooreauthor.com

Your opinion, your point of view, and what you see when you look out at the world, are unique aspects of who you are. Your view is colored by your own cognitive biases and perspectives built on years of shaping your experience of life. You and your neighbor may see the exact same scene but only vaguely touch on points of agreement.

Our own unique spin

So, the idea here is that if we each bring our own unique spin to what we see, how does that help or hinder us from seeing God? For some, seeing is believing. If you don't see God's hand at work in your life, it may be because you aren't sure He's even there. You imagine if you could see Him, well, then, you'd believe in Him. For others of us, believing is

seeing, and so the more we believe in God, the more we recognize His presence everywhere we go. What we see then, has a lot to do with the data we've collected through life.

Humans are temporary at best. We go from being an "I am" to an "I was" fairly quickly. We imagine our intellect and our opinions define reality. We may think we are on this planet by chance, brought here by biology, living for no real purpose at all and then returning to the dust. If that's true, then whether you live as a kind and loving person, or as an angry and jaded person, life is just a short ride and then it's over. You are not equipped for eternity.

When God told Moses His name was "I Am Who I Am," He was affirming He existed, and not only that, but He existed generations before

Moses and He would exist generations after Moses. God can't be a "was." He has neither beginning nor end. You and I have both a beginning and an end. When we were

born, God put a little part of Himself within us, in that place we call the soul, and He waits for us to discover He's there. When we do, we begin to see more clearly. We realize we are not just some carbon life forms, but we are intentional and special. We are more than we even imagine because

God breathed His Spirit into us and proved His love for us through Jesus.

God sees you clearly. He sees your doubt, your intellectual rejection, your emotional uncertainty and your great heart. He sends people to help you along the way, to strengthen you when you can't stand a moment longer on your own, so you can see His hand at work in your life. The fact is you are so important to God, He will keep sending love and hope and possibility into your life until the day you breathe your last. He sees you as good and beautiful.

When you make the slightest effort to see Him more clearly, a door will open, a light will shine and God's Spirit will guide you from that moment on.

God sees everything you are. In His love for you, He wants you to see everything He is, and everything He can be to you.

Keep looking!



MOORE

Letters to the Editor

I am 93 years old and enjoy The Alabama Baptist, especially the Sunday School lessons. Because of my health, I don't get to go to church very often and TAB makes a difference. Thank you for TAB.

Harold Meals, Athens

For seven years, I have been my wife Anita's sole caregiver.

Patricia Jumbo-Lucioni's article in your April 18 edition was most interesting. I know so little about Alzheimer's, so love, prayer and common sense is all I have to work with. We take long walks as she holds tight to my arm. Food, exercise, rest and prayer get us through day by day.

Don Jones, Indian Springs

Goal Mind

Weekly bits of wit and wisdom

By **Charles Ghigna**, who taught creative writing at Samford University and is the author of more than 100 books for children and adults. Below are a few samples of his poems from FatherGoose.com.

Heartful

Fill your heart with gratitude
For all you cherish and adore.
Let your smile warm the world —
Love is what we're living for.

Good Measure

Success is often measured best
Not by how high or far,
But what you had to sacrifice
To get to where you are.

Response Ability

Responsibility is our Most favored point of view.
Responding with ability
To what we say and do.

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“Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things.”

COLOSSIANS 3:2

It's baseball season.

I know. Some of you might not enjoy the game. Some of you might not understand the game. Some of you might not have time for the game.

I'm not writing this to explain or defend the game of baseball. I'm not writing this to confess my love of the sport. I'm not writing this to let you know some of my best writing happens with a baseball game beside me on the screen. I'm not writing this to admit some of my most fun experiences watching baseball games in person.

I'm writing this to remind us all that life is more like baseball than we realize. The slow, long game occurs in innings. But each pitch, each swing, each throw, each catch, each call matters. Small, passive events are actually big and active.

Like life. A swing changes an inning. A catch impacts a game. An error sways a series.

In life, a thought or a word or a decision has lasting consequences.

Welcome a season of realizing every inning counts. Every relationship counts. Every action counts.

How will we pitch today so that we're grateful tomorrow?

I pray this is a season of victory.

One pitch, one inning, one series at a time. One word, one conversation, one thought at a time.

I pray this is a season of victory.

Chris Maxwell

Blog post from ChrisMaxwell.me

Prayer is not so much about asking God for what we want, as it is about discovering what He wants for us.

When our prayers are meant to get to know God, find strength and do His will, they bring tremendous results — sometimes even supernatural results.

This kind of praying is powerful because you get plugged into the ultimate power source — the God of the universe.

How is your prayer life? Is it fulfilling or disappointing? Remember to check your motives, for your heart is the key.

Bryant Wright

Devotional excerpt from rightfromtheheart.org

We've baptized new believers and celebrated new members almost every week for 6–7 months at FBC Prattville, and it never gets old. Jesus will build His church. “So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth” (1 Corinthians 3:7).

Peyton Hill

@sPeytonHill on X

I often hear from folks asking what it'd take to make their church or org abuse-proof. They're looking

for strategies and behaviors, and that makes sense.

But it all begins with the cultivation of safety — not just interpersonally, but within. So, I'll often say, “Start with your nervous system.”

Chuck Degroat

@chuckdegroat on X

All the answers to life's questions can be found in God's Word. Read it. Study it. Search it. God will speak to you when you do.

Jack Anderson, DOM

Alabama Crenshaw Association

“This is a gospel issue to me. It affects people's lives in a negative way, and it must be a matter of prayer,” said **Greg Davis**, president and CEO of Alabama Citizens Action Program, on the gambling issue.

In case you missed these nuggets

Excerpts from the April 25 edition of *The Baptist Paper*:

“Yet through these dark times, we see strength. In spite of the hopelessness and darkness, we see a glimmer of light. Churches are being planted because of the need for hope. With bombs and danger in their face, they want to hold onto their faith,” said **Yaroslav “Slavik” Pyzh**, president of Ukrainian Baptist Theological Seminary in Lviv, of the ongoing war in Ukraine.

“I think that's what defines me the most is my faith. I believe in one Creator, that I've been called to come out here, do my best, compete and glorify God, and that's pretty much it,” said **Scottie Scheffler**, two-time Masters champion.

“Sports ministry is so crucial ... an opportunity to bring people into your church who likely have not heard of Christ or heard very little. His ways are always better. That is the exciting part to me,” said **Brent McFadden**, the sports and recreation minister at First Baptist Church Dallas.

“I'm going to tell you my great strategy: I never say no,” said **Garry Eudy**, president of Volunteer Baptists International, with a laugh. “If someone calls us and says, ‘We have two or three people who want to go on a missions trip. Can you take us?’ we say yes. If someone calls and says, ‘We have over 100 people in our group. Can you take us?’ we say yes.”

To read these articles and find out more about *The Baptist Paper*, visit tbponline.org. Call 800-803-5201 to add the paper to your TAB subscription.



3 stories you should know



Facebook photo by Rick Patrick/FBC Sylacauga

Jeff Iorg, outgoing president of Gateway Seminary and president-elect of the SBC Executive Committee, shares “core disciplines” with church leaders April 23 during a training event organized by Coosa River Baptist Association and hosted by First Baptist Church Sylacauga. The event also was made available via live stream. Rick Patrick serves as pastor of FBC Sylacauga, and Stan Albright, who planned the leadership event, serves as director of missions for Coosa River Association. (Dianna L. Cagle/TAB)

Report has ‘best global data’ on state of Great Commission

A group of 150 contributors helped produce the newly released robust State of the Great Commission report. It can be downloaded at lausanne.org/report.

Director Matthew Niermann said the report “brings together the best global data and key strategic thinkers to understand where the greatest gaps and opportunities are for the Great Commission’s fulfillment.”

Working from the concept that a successful collaborative action of the Christian global church must be built on a foundation of knowledge, Niermann’s team address 10 key questions.

“A key aspect of catalysing collaboration for this intentional, strategic Great Commission endeavour lies in truly understanding its current status within our ever-changing world,” Niermann said. (The Baptist Paper)

Groza elected as Gateway Seminary’s next president

Gateway Seminary trustees unanimously elected Adam Groza as the seminary’s eighth president April 15 during their spring meeting. His role begins May 13.



GROZA

Groza has been serving as Gateway’s vice president for enrollment and student service since 2010.

“I believe raising ministry leaders in the western United States is a necessity

for Southern Baptists,” Groza said. “I am humbled to be entrusted with this responsibility.”

Current Gateway president Jeff Iorg will shift into his new position as president/CEO of the SBC Executive Committee on May 13. (TAB)

Persecuted church

Two Pakistani Christians die on job; one shot, beaten over pay

PUNJAB PROVINCE, Pakistan — Two Christians workers in Pakistan died from unsafe working conditions, and another was shot and beaten for requesting his wages.

Asif Masih and his cousin Shan Masih were dispatched March 17 to unclog a sewer in Faisalabad. The news services Christian Daily International and Morning Star News report that the two men died from toxic gasses present in the sewer where they were working.

“Over 50 Christian sanitation workers have perished in Faisalabad alone due to the absence of adequate safety gear,” said attorney Akmal Bhatti, who is chair of Minorities Alliance Pakistan.

In an unrelated incident, farm laborer Waqas Masih was shot and beaten with iron rods for re-

questing his pay March 23 from his employers.

A police report was filed against the two suspects, but they had been granted prearrest bail.

Masih and his wife had also been attacked around Christmas after Masih had requested wages due him.

Pakistan is No. 7 on Open Doors’ 2024 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

Seven Christians allegedly slain for sharing the gospel

NAIROBI, Kenya — Seven Christians recently were killed for their faith, apparently because they were evangelizing among other religious groups.

A Kenyan evangelist and three Ugandans on a missions team were ambushed March 8 near Busia, Kenya. The attackers “were not happy

about the conversion of their fellow Muslims, especially their relatives,” said survivor Rooney Masaba, a Ugandan evangelist.

Evangelist Ismail Wafula sustained fatal knife wounds in the attack, Masaba said. The other team members were wounded.

In an unrelated case, six Kenyan merchants were killed March 29, allegedly for spreading Christianity.

“Our brothers had been doing business to support their families but also sharing the love of Jesus Christ ... in Dhobley (Somalia),” said a Kenyan

Christian leader. The six were shot at close range where they sold their wares.

Somalia is No. 2 on Open Doors’ 2024 World Watch List of places where it is most difficult to be a Christian.



en.wikipedia.org

'MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE COMMUNITY'

Cropwell Baptist adopts local school, pays off church's debt so they can do more

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

A few years ago, Jon Glass got a phone call from the principal of the intermediate school just down the road from his church.

"She reached out to me and said, 'I'd like for your church to adopt us,'" said Glass, pastor of Cropwell Baptist Church in Pell City.

He didn't even really have to think about his response — he said, "Consider yourself adopted."

Right away, the church got busy. Within a week, a dozen church members put together a care team and began gathering items to stock a clothes closet for the students, many of whom were "in very difficult financial situations," Glass said. About a third of the students there don't live with their biological parents.

Then as the weather got cooler, the care team talked with the school to identify some students who might have need for fall and winter clothes.

Growing 'sixfold'

"They identified some students, and our team leader, Barbara Goodwin, got in touch with their guardians and got their sizes and their siblings' sizes," Glass said. "In the

end, our church got together new clothes for about 11 families — 19 kids."

From there, the partnership grew "sixfold," he said, to include helping more and more students, helping families at Christmas and providing a coffee bar for the teachers. And the opportunities kept expanding.

More involved

At the same time, Cropwell Baptist had been getting more involved in missions outside the city limits also, and all that together got Glass thinking about how they could do more.

"The church had had some kind of debt since the 1980s from growing and building new buildings," he said. "When I came five years ago, our debt was right at \$1.5 million."

Glass knew it was going to take a movement of God to get the debt paid off, but he also knew if they could do it, they could invest more in missions and outreach.

In March 2022, the debt was down to around \$700,000, and Glass said God gave him the vision for a new slogan — "Debt free in 2023 so we can do more in 2024." Each time the church paid off \$100,000, they celebrated with a "candy bar Sunday" where everyone got a 100 Grand bar.



Photo courtesy of Cropwell Baptist Church
Cropwell Baptist filled bags with Christmas gifts for kids in December 2023.



Photo courtesy of Melissa McClain

Jon Glass (left), pastor of Cropwell Baptist Church, lights a bank note on fire Feb. 4 in celebration of the church retiring its debt. Mike Bline (center) and Randall Stewart served as trustees who signed the church's most recent note seven years ago.

"In 22 months, our church folks got behind it, and through small gifts and larger gifts, we were able to make that last payment around Christmas," Glass said.

When they paid the debt off, everyone got Zero bars. They also celebrated with a note-burning ceremony during their service Feb. 4.

Future-focused

That day, Glass talked about the history of the church and how the buildings are just the tool for them to do the Kingdom work God has called them to do. And he asked them, "What does God have in front of us?"

In the past 12 months, they have sent teams to New Hampshire, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala and several other places, including a closed country in Southeast Asia.

In the coming months, they plan to do even more, and they plan to continue to expand their ministry to the local community. Right now, they're working on food boxes to provide for students during spring break while they're not getting meals at school.

"So many folks have become part of our church family because they hear about the school ministry and say, 'We want to be a part of a church that's making a difference in the community,'" Glass said. "We've had families join our church who were recipients of the ministry too."

All in all, Cropwell sees this new season as an opportunity to "be a church that makes a difference and is a light for the gospel in the community," he said. "It's been really amazing to see the Lord work."

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

GEORGE HAMILTON

George Hamilton, a World War II veteran who faithfully served his church and went on missions trips until he was 95, died April 21. He was 102.

At age 19, Hamilton joined the Navy and was sent to the North Pacific to serve during WWII. He committed his life to Christ five years after the war ended. For decades he served faithfully as a deacon and Royal Ambassadors director and in other roles.

His wife, Lynda, died in 2000, and in 2004 when he was in his early 80s, he heard a sermon that changed his life. The sermon talked about relinquishing control to God, the truth that Jesus can't be Savior of someone's life and not also be Lord of his or her whole life. Upon hearing that, he knew his whole life needed to be about Jesus, wherever he went and whatever he did.

Hamilton dove in even more at his church — Bethel Baptist in Pleasant Grove — and began going on missions trips to Nicaragua, which he continued until he was 95. He rotated off as an active deacon at age 99.

"The last 18 years have been the most productive years of my life," Hamilton said in 2022. "I have been so blessed, double blessed since then (2004)."



HAMILTON

AUTAUGA ASSOCIATION

► **Calvary Baptist Church, Prattville**, will host Vacation Bible School for preschool through 6th grade and special needs, May 31, 6–8 p.m.; June 1, 9 a.m.–2 p.m.; and June 2, 9:45 a.m.–noon. The theme is Breaker Rock Beach: God's rock-solid truth in a world of shifting sands, which is based on Romans 12:2.

Dave Burns is pastor.

BETHEL ASSOCIATION

► **Will Yates** is the new interim youth director of **Linden Baptist Church**, where he grew up. Yates has a bachelor's degree in biological and agricultural technology management and is pursuing a master's degree in crop, soil and environmental sciences, both from Auburn University. Chris Kynard is pastor.

CALHOUN ASSOCIATION

► **Sammy Gilbreath**, retired director of the office of evangelism for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, is the new transitional pastor of **Hill Crest Baptist Church, Anniston**.

CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

► **Bill Morris** retired as pastor of **Central Coosa Cowboy Church, Hanover**. After serving in the U.S. Army as a corporal and veteran of the Korean War, Morris had a successful career as an industrial maintenance person. During that time, he was licensed to ministry and served as a lay leader in his church and a chaplain for the Shelby County jail. He attended the Billy Graham School of Evangelism.

Upon his retirement in 1997, he and his wife, Jan, started going on short-term missions trips to Mexico, Canada, Nicaragua and China. They went for a four-month appointment to Cody, Wyoming, and stayed 20 years doing church planting. Morris spent five years as pastor of Mount Moriah Baptist Church, Weogufka, Alabama, before returning to Wyoming for a second time. Upon his return to Alabama, Morris felt called to plant the Central Coosa Cowboy Church six years ago.

He was honored Feb. 25 with a retirement reception hosted by the Central Baptist Association, Central Coosa Cowboy Church

and Rockford Baptist Church. He and Jan have four children, 10 grandchildren, 14 great grandchildren and two great-great grandchildren.

► **Reuben Prater** is the new pastor of **Bethesda Baptist Church, Equality**. Prater holds two bachelor's degrees from Auburn University, Montgomery, in psychology and in criminal justice. He also attended Beeson Divinity School at Samford University.

He was minister of music and youth at Brown's Chapel Baptist Church, Sylacauga, and Eagle Creek Baptist Church, Dadeville; was ordained at Weogufka Second Baptist Church; was minister of music at Hackneyville Baptist Church, Alexander City; and pastor of Antioch Baptist Church, Camp Hill; Horseshoe Bend Baptist Church, Dadeville; and Concord Baptist Church, Rockford. He then became music and youth pastor of North Phenix Baptist Church, Phenix City, and media/audio minister at First Baptist Church Alexander City.

Prater took some time off from ministry due to several serious health battles and is the author of "From the Pits to Hallelujah."

Prater has spent 40 years in facilities management and led missions trips to build churches and orphanages in Brazil, Alaska, Georgia and Tennessee. He and his wife, Patsy, have three children and four grandchildren.



Photo by David Crowe



PRATER

CLEBURNE ASSOCIATION

► **Morgan Bailey**, pastor of **Macedonia Baptist Church, Ranburne**, recently announced his plan to transition from full-time pastoral ministry in the church to ministering to churches.

Bailey has served in pastoral ministry for 40 years, most of those in three Alabama Baptist churches: Santuck Baptist, Wetumpka (14 years), Canaan Baptist, Bessemer (13 years), and Macedonia, where he has served the past five years.



Photo by Lee Jackson

Bailey completed two years as first vice president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention in 2023 and previously served as ABSC second vice president.

He chose not to run for president of the convention due to health concerns. Bailey is a 16-year cancer survivor. He and his wife, Ritta, recently celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. They have two adult sons. His last Sunday at Macedonia will be May 19.

COOSA RIVER ASSOCIATION

► **Charles Kelly** is the new pastor of **Winterboro Baptist Church, now Winterboro Community Church, Alpine**. Kelly began his ministry later in life as the campus pastor for Church of the Highlands, Greystone Campus, Birmingham, then Sylacauga Campus. He graduated from Highlands College, earning a ministry leadership certificate, and holds a bachelor of arts degree in speech communication from Auburn University.

Kelly grew up on Kelly Ranch Road in the Winterboro community, and spent his adult life running Kelly Ranch, a commercial cattle and sheep operation. In addition, he is the executive director of HoneyWord, which produces a children's Bible designed to aid in retaining and memorizing God's Word.

He is married to Wendy Morris Kelly.



KELLY

EAST CULLMAN ASSOCIATION

► **David Westall** is the new administrative pastor at **New Hope No. 2 Baptist Church, Cullman**. Westall has attended New Hope No. 2 since 2020, was ordained to ministry and has been active in missionary work in the local community and in Mexico. Westall holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Troy University, a master's degree in criminal justice from the University of Alabama and attended the U.S. Naval War College. He served on active duty with the United States



WESTALL

Marine Corps infantry and then pursued a career in law enforcement. A Purple Heart recipient, Westall retired as a supervisory special agent from U.S. Homeland Security Investigations after 26 years of law enforcement experience.

He and his wife, Jennifer, have two sons.

ESCAMBIA ASSOCIATION

► **Brandie Roe** is the new student minister of **First Baptist Church East Brewton**. She previously served as student minister at Unity Baptist Church, Atmore, and FBC Flomaton. Roe and her husband, Ben, have two daughters.



ROE

MOBILE ASSOCIATION

► **Derrall Marshall** retired Feb. 27 from **Shadow Lawn Baptist Church, Eight Mile**.

Marshall grew up in Semmes, and accepted Jesus as his Savior Feb. 24, 1980, at Crawford Baptist Church, Mobile, where God called him to ministry July 26, 1988. He studied religion at the University of Mobile and graduated with honors from Florida Baptist Theological College, Graceville, Florida (now Baptist University of Florida), where he earned a bachelor of theology degree. He previously served as pastor of First Baptist Church Bayou La Batre and in Florida before that.



MARSHALL

Marshall was active in associational and state convention life in both Florida and Alabama, including serving as moderator for Mobile Baptist Association and two terms on the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. He also is trained in several areas of disaster relief.

Marshall was honored with a reception and during the service on his last Sunday in the pulpit, Feb. 25. He and his wife, Sheilah, have moved to Bethlehem, Florida, to live near their two children and six grandchildren, but he plans to continue preaching and teaching.

► **Randy Johnson** is the new transitional pastor of **Shadow Lawn Baptist Church, Eight Mile**. Johnson holds a master's degree from New Orleans Seminary and a doctoral degree from Covington Theological Seminary, Ringgold, Georgia.



JOHNSON

Through the years, Johnson has served as pastor of several churches in Alabama and Mississippi, adjunct professor at the University of Mobile, associational moderator for Mobile and Baldwin Baptist associations, and on the state and associational Vacation Bible School teams.

He also currently serves as chair of the Board of Aid for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. He and his wife, Janie, have four children and 10 grandchildren.

MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION

► **Capitol Heights Baptist Church, Montgomery**, will celebrate 90 years of ministry with an event at Louis Armstrong Park, May 18, 2–4 p.m., that includes games, music and snacks.

Russell Zwerner is pastor.

NORTH JEFFERSON ASSOCIATION

► **Mark Harrison** (shown here with his wife, Debbie) recently celebrated 30 years as executive pastor of ministries and missions of **First Baptist Church Garden-dale**.

Harrison holds a bachelor of biblical studies degree from Florida Bible Institute (now Florida Bible College of Tampa) in Florida, and a master of religious education degree from Southwestern Seminary. He previously served churches in Florida and Texas, and was the associate pastor of FBC Jasper.

Harrison served with pastor Steve Gaines, now at Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, Tennessee, for the first 14 years and then with current pastor Kevin Hamm. He served as interim between the two pastors.



Photo courtesy of Kevin Hamm

PICKENS ASSOCIATION

► **Charlie Wilson** is celebrating 20 years as pastor of **Aliceville First Baptist Church**.



GODFREY

SHELBY ASSOCIATION

► **Joe Godfrey** is the new interim pastor of **First Baptist Church Montevallo**. Godfrey served as a pastor for Alabama churches for more than 26 years and was the president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention for two terms (2003–2004).

He recently retired after 15 years as head of Alabama Citizens Action Program but continues to serve as a consultant for the ALCAP team.

TENNESSEE RIVER ASSOCIATION

► **Michael Crumbley** (shown here with his wife, Dana) is the new pastor of **New Life Baptist Church, Fackler (Crow Mountain)**.

Crumbley grew up in Huntsville and is a captain with the Huntsville Fire Department, where he has served for 35 years.

He previously served as associate pastor of Mount Nebo Baptist Church, Hollytree, and was ordained by the church in 2022.

He and Dana have one son.



Submitted photo

TUSKEGEE LEE ASSOCIATION

► The choir reunion concert for **Providence Baptist Church, Opelika**, will be held at the west campus, May 5, at 2 p.m.

The free concert is part of a weekend celebration honoring music minister Tom Smith for 50 years of ministry at Providence.

Former and current members will make up the choir. Rusty Sowell, who recently celebrated his 40th anniversary, is pastor.

WEST CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

► **Timothy Mathis** is the new pastor of **First Baptist Church Selma**.

Mathis holds a bachelor's degree in print journalism from Troy University; a master of divinity degree from Southern Seminary; and a doctor of ministry degree in spiritual formation and discipleship from New Orleans Seminary.

He previously served as student pastor at Mount Vernon Baptist Church, Jasper; pastor at Chappell Hill Baptist Church, Gilberttown; and pastor of Westwood Baptist Church, Selma. Mathis and his wife, MaeLee, have three children.

► **Kirk Smith** (shown here with his wife, Christy) is the new pastor of **Friendship Baptist Church, Lawley**.



Photo courtesy of Kirk Smith

He was previously pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church, Centreville; Shady Grove Baptist Church, Randolph; Hillcrest Baptist Church, Maples-

ville; interim pastor of Union Grove Baptist Church, Jemison; and pastor of Rehobeth Baptist Church, Lawley.

Smith also serves as the emergency management director for Bibb County. He and Christy have two sons, one of whom also is a pastor in Perry County along with Smith's father, Gervis.

► **Doug Vance** is the new pastor of **Faith Chapel, Marion**. Vance helps coordinate Disaster Relief for West Central Association and District 8.

He and his wife, Laura, have three children and five grandchildren.

OTHER

► **The Samaritan Counseling Center of Montgomery** will host Soul Shop for Leaders on May 14, 8:30 a.m.–4 p.m., at The MAP (Ministry About People) Center for Excellence.

Soul Shop is a free workshop designed to equip faith community leaders to minister to those impacted by suicide.

The conference includes training in suicide awareness, mastering basic conversation skills, including personal testimonies and creating worship resources.

Register at sslmontgomery.eventbrite.com and find more information at soulshopmovement.org.

Igniting a passion

Director of missions partnerships foster encouragement from Alabama to Alaska

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Every Saturday night or Sunday morning, Danny Courson sends the pastors in St. Clair Baptist Association a text to encourage them.

“I ask them how I can pray for them that week,” said Courson, St. Clair’s associational mission strategist. “It’s opened a lot of opportunities for them to share situations with me.”

Burdened heart

But a while back, he learned of a specific set of pastors who didn’t have that kind of support — the 21 pastors who serve in the Tanana Valley Baptist Association in Alaska.

“When I found out they hadn’t had a director of missions since 2011, it just really burdened me,” Courson said. “I had a burden for those pastors that they needed someone to talk to, to confide in,



Photo courtesy of Danny Courson

to share prayer requests with.”

He asked if there was a way he could volunteer as their associational missionary during Alabama Baptists’ partnership with Alaska Baptists.

Jae McKee, director of missions

and church planting for the Alaska Baptist Resource Network, told him he thought that was a great idea and encouraged him to reach out to the association to see if they would be interested.

When Courson did, the answer was a resounding yes.

“Before Christmas, I flew up there just to meet with the pastors and encourage them,” he said. “It was a great experience. We had guys who drove two-and-a-half hours just to be able to sit down for lunch, talk about ministry, share their needs and concerns and put a name and a face together.”

Spread out

In Alaska, everything is so spread out that there are not a lot of people close by for pastors to

(From left) Jeff Ling, pastor of FBC North Pole; David Joseph, pastor of Friendship Baptist Mission; Paul Byford, who serves in music and administration at FBC North Pole; and Kyle McGee, associate pastor of FBC North Pole and moderator for Tanana Valley Baptist Association, gather with other pastors and church leaders at a meal provided by Danny Courson, associational mission strategist for St. Clair Baptist Association, on a trip to Alaska in December 2023.

share their concerns with, he said.

But now they have Courson checking in on them. They get his weekly texts. He knows what’s going on in their churches.

“We have regular communication to encourage them, find out their needs and pray for them and line them up with partners who can meet their specific needs,” he said.

He’s planning to visit twice a year to have those conversations face to face, and he’s planning to take pastors up there too who could establish partnerships with the churches.

“Jae asked me if I could recruit more associational mission strategists to do the same thing,” Courson said. “It’s a tough context, with everything so spread out, but most of the pastors are long-term pastors up there. They know the context. They just need encouragement and help along the way.”

Ric Camp, associational mission strategist for Shelby Baptist As-

For more information about how to partner with Baptists in Alaska, visit tabonline.org/Alaska or email Jae McKee at jae@alaskabrn.com.



Photo courtesy of Danny Courson

Danny Courson, associational mission strategist for St. Clair Baptist Association, on a trip to Alaska in December 2023.



Photo courtesy of Ric Camp

Ric Camp (left), associational mission strategist for Shelby Baptist Association, and Michael Bunton, pastor of Greater Friendship Baptist Church in Anchorage, Alaska

sociation, has also been working to encourage pastors in Alaska for the past two years. He went there on a vision trip in February 2022 and realized how isolated the churches there were.

Since then, he's helped in a variety of ways, but most recently he took a group of pastors predominantly from Shelby Association to lead workshops on evangelism,

disciple making, deacon ministry, children's ministry and student ministry.

"We had a great turnout," Camp said. "It was basic training to get them together and encourage them, and they were just hungry for it."

He said the experience was also good for the church leaders he took with him from Shelby Baptist Association. It "really ignited in them" a passion to look for opportunities to serve there, and many of them are looking at partnerships individually, he said.

Not only that — their October 2023 training trip was the launchpad for something new. Kevin Blackwell, executive director of Samford University's Ministry Training Institute (MTI), went with them on the trip to lead some of the sessions.

Ongoing training

After talking with Jim Hamilton, pastor of Anchor of Hope Church in Kenai, Alaska, the two decided to start an MTI group there for ongoing theological training.

"There's a tremendous need up that way to train folks in Scrip-

ture," Blackwell said. "They started this term with a class on biblical interpretation, and Jim is doing a great job teaching it."

Looking ahead

Blackwell said he would love to see this expand in Alaska.

And McKee said he would love to see more associations in Ala-

bama get involved in efforts like those led by Courson and Camp.

"Those two guys in those associations have taken up the gauntlet," he said. "They took the partnership seriously and have continued to come up. To have someone in that role who cares for our pastors and church planters at that level has been a big blessing."



Photo courtesy of Ric Camp

Jim Hamilton, pastor of Anchor of Hope Church in Kenai, Alaska, shares some opening remarks and introductions before a church leadership training led by Ric Camp and others from Shelby Baptist Association.

Oneonta church, Hispanic congregation sell homemade tamales to raise funds for Alaska

When First Baptist Church Oneonta was brainstorming some ways to raise money for an upcoming missions trip to Alaska, Jesus Navarro had an idea

that involved a lot of cooks in the kitchen.

"He brought up the idea that a good fundraiser would be to have a tamale sale," said Larry Gipson, pastor of FBC Oneonta.

Navarro, who serves as Hispanic church planter for Friendship Baptist Association, also serves as pastor of Primera Iglesia Bautista Amistad, which meets in FBC's building. Navarro and his daughter, Laura, will be joining 23 FBC members on the trip to Alaska this summer.

Working together

"We will be on the outskirts of Anchorage, and we will do some construction and evangelism, a combination of projects," Gipson said.

It's the church's first trip to Alaska, and it was their first time to make tamales, too. The members of Primera Iglesia Bautista Amistad taught the FBC members



Facebook photo

Together, members of Primera Iglesia Bautista Amistad and FBC Oneonta made 1,500 tamales for their Alaska fundraiser.

how to make them, and together they all worked in the church kitchen to make 1,500 beef and pork tamales.

"What an awesome experience to have our Hispanic friends work side by side

with us teaching us how to make tamales so that we can carry the gospel to Alaska in June," FBC Oneonta posted on Facebook on Jan. 28. (Grace Thornton)



Photo courtesy of Primera Iglesia Bautista Amistad

Members of Primera Iglesia Bautista Amistad came together with members of FBC Oneonta to teach them how to make tamales for an event to raise funds for a missions trip to Alaska.

Incorporating beauty with Scripture

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Artistic ministry edifies others by filling walls with the Word of God

As Christians, when we go through discouragement, depression, uncertainty, doubts, unbelief or hopelessness, we're forgetting God's Word. "But when we have something placed in front of us

during our everyday life, whether it be a coffee mug, a tote bag or wallpaper with Scripture written on it, it helps remind us of God's faithfulness," said Janie Robbins, who is the owner, creator and interior designer for Walls that Breathe: Scripture Designs 4 You.

Robbins has always had a love for all things beautiful. Prayer is also a priority for her.

Devotional time

It was one of her devotional times that led to a new venture that incorporates her love of beauty with her love

of Scripture. It started with wallpaper. One morning in 2013 during a devotional time, Robbins was praying for the United States when she said to the Lord, "We better be surrounding ourselves with the Word." Afterward, she went into her kitchen to get some coffee and could see in her mind's eye Scripture on the walls. Her hope was that if someone woke up discouraged, the first thing they would see would be

of Scripture. It started with wallpaper. One morning in 2013 during a devotional time, Robbins was praying for the United States when she said to the Lord, "We better be surrounding ourselves with the Word." Afterward, she went into her kitchen to get some coffee and could see in her mind's eye Scripture on the walls. Her hope was that if someone woke up discouraged, the first thing they would see would be

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bags, purses and hats as part of her collection.

Though Robbins loves the creative part of this ministry, it's not always easy. Not having the training or the skills to do the technological part, along

with the learning curve of how to run a business, took its toll during her early attempts.

"When I first had the idea, I'm so right-brained that even though I do technology, I had no idea how to do Photoshop or Adobe Illustrator. I was trying to do it by myself — to learn to use the technology part of it and create at the same time," Robbins said.

Even when she got discouraged and wanted to give up, she continued to fight. First, she prayed to make sure this was what God was calling her to do.

After receiving the confirmation that she felt in her



Photo courtesy of Janie Robbins
Janie Robbins displays some of the Scripture-filled items she created for Walls that Breathe: Scripture Designs 4 You. "When we have something placed in front of us during our everyday life ... it helps remind us of God's faithfulness," she says.

heart, Robbins made the choice to be committed. In fact, "the spiritual warfare fired my passion even more because the need was so great. If He called me to do this, He would be faithful whether it was in my timing or not."

However, she also knew she needed help.

Trusting God

Robbins started looking for a graphic designer who could transfer her ideas into the technology needed to produce them.

Furthermore, she knew she

needed a website. Robbins was thrilled when she found someone who could do both.

"I prayed and trusted God to provide the finances for me to hire [this] graphic designer — and God did," Robbins said.

Even with these frustrations that running a business can sometimes create, Robbins is reminded that it's worth it when she "observes the satisfaction of how much [clients] are enjoying seeing beauty and inspiration on their walls."

To come up with a new design, she usually starts

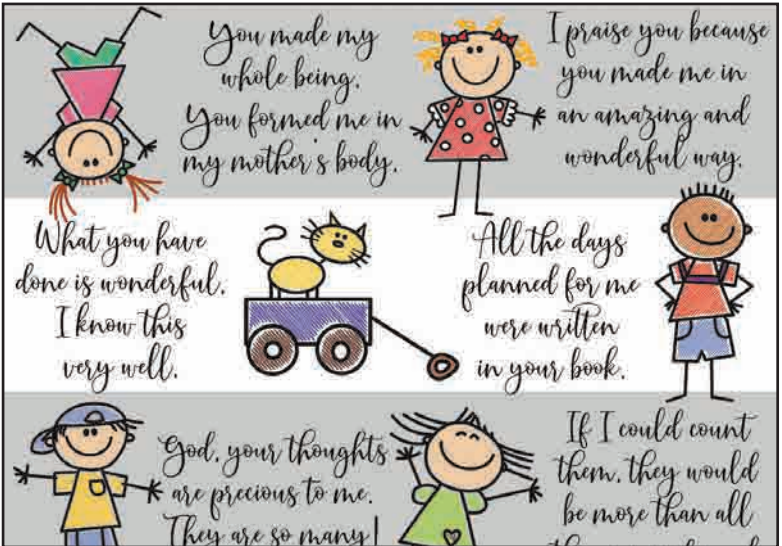


Photo courtesy of Janie Robbins
A children's design features drawings and phrases from Scripture like "You made my whole being. You formed me in my mother's body." "All the days planned for me were written in your book."

AGING WELL

see a picture in her mind of what she wants to create.

Robbins can still get frustrated with the noncreative aspects of running Walls that Breathe, such as marketing.

Some parts of the business can't be hired out or

delegated, and she doesn't

like how long it takes to accomplish those

tasks. She would much

rather use that time to create

than to keep everything on the business

side organized, although she knows how important it is.

"If I'm not organized, I'm

working in chaos and I can't

do that. It's having to do the

necessary things in order to

be effective and efficient," she said.

Not only has this ministry

been a way for Robbins to

express her creativity and

provide reminders of Scripture

for others, but she is also

reminded every day that

God is faithful.

"He provides what I need

with a verse that stands out

during a devotional time.

As a very visual person,

the idea for the accompanying

illustrations will often

come straight from the

Scripture, and Robbins will

and it's on His timetable, not

mine. I get caught up and

wound up. I have only so

many hours in the day, and

so I'm learning to rest in the

process.

"But when I mean 'rest,'

it's not just physical rest.

Though that's an element

of it, it's really resting in

God's sovereignty, resting

in the fact that He's got this,

and so I don't have to wring

my hands about 'when is

this going to get done and

why is it taking so long?'"

"His idea"

"It was His idea to start

with. This is definitely for

the edification of others

but ultimately for the glory

of God and how much He

wants me to enjoy — just

enjoy — the process and the

joy on other people's faces,

how gratifying it is. I know

that it's having an impact,"

she said.

"I've never regretted it."

Volunteer groups and churches help with sleeping mat ministry

(continued from page 1)

them by herself — at the rate of 48 a year. When the group could gather again, they began meeting at Dalraida Global Methodist Church in a space that is now stacked to the ceiling with plastic bags waiting to be woven.

"To date, we have finished 500 sleeping mats," Groves said.

It hasn't stopped there. In addition to pulling together several churches into a partnership, she has trained five other churches to start their own sleeping mat ministries.

And she's enlisted volunteer groups ranging from sororities to the Air Force. "It takes a village," Groves said.

Other groups donate bags that have been folded and cut in the way that Groves recommended in preparation for weaving.

When the mats are completed, she takes them to local ministries to be distributed as needed, along with a twin blanket, a pillow and a book about Jesus. They also sometimes include hygiene items, winter hats and gloves and rain ponchos.

'All God'

"It's been all God," Groves said. Groves is available to give a presentation to other churches interested in starting their own sleeping mat ministry. Contact her at karlasmilie626@gmail.com or through the group's Facebook page, Homeless Sleeping Mat Ministry.

"To date, we have finished 500 sleeping mats."

Karla Groves
Homeless Sleeping Mat Ministry

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A FRESH VISION — AGAIN

Two Birmingham-area churches partner with Valley View in Leeds for replant

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

About a year and a half ago, Shirley Crowder said her church — Valley View Baptist in Leeds — found itself “with very few of us hanging on.”

Membership had been declining for several years, and the congregation was skewing older.

“We began praying as a group that God would do something,” Crowder said. “We did not want this church to die.”

So they made a decision that set in motion something

she said everyone is excited about — a partnership with two other area churches and an upcoming replant.

It started with a call to Josh Cook — church revitalization specialist at Birmingham Metro Baptist Association (BMBA) — who then called Valleydale Church.

Another opportunity

Patrick Sawyer, Valleydale’s missional living pastor, said when they got the call they were coming off the heels of a successful replant at The Church at Old Town in Helena. In 2021, Valleydale had come alongside Helena’s First

Baptist Church and provided resources, a fresh vision, a new name, a new pastor and a team of other staff and volunteers.

“It really went well, and we started thinking maybe the Lord is giving us the opportunity to do more of this; maybe God will open the door for us to do this again,” Sawyer said.

And then Cook called to tell them about Valley View.

“He said he knew we were

only just beginning to think about another replant, but we met with them, saw the church and saw the area, and

that began the discussion,” Sawyer said.

As he and Jeff McGukin, Valleydale’s executive pastor, talked with the Valley View members, they made sure they

understood that replanting would make the church a totally new work. Much like The Church at Old Town,

they would get a new name, a new pastor, a new leadership structure and some renovations to the facilities.

“Honestly, we basically tried to talk them out of it,” Sawyer said. “Their response was, ‘If we’re baptizing and reaching people with the gospel, we’ll do whatever it takes.’ So we felt like, ‘OK, Lord, if this is something you want us to do, make that clear to us.’”

‘One door at a time’

They began to pray for a lot of things, and at the top of that list was for God to bring the right person to serve as pastor.

For more information about how your church can be involved in a revitalization process — either as an adopting church or as a replant — contact Rick Barnhart at 800-264-1225, ext. 2220, or visit plantalabama.org.



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“That’s when Josh Cook told me about Nate,” Sawyer said.

Nate Farrow, who had served on staff at The Church at Brook Hills for the past nine years, said he had been praying and felt like God was leading him to pastoral ministry. He just didn’t know what that would look like, and the idea of a replant was not on his radar.

But when he met with Sawyer and McGukin, they “talked about their heart and desire to see healthy churches in their city, and I left encouraged and excited,” Farrow said.

He came back and talked about it with his wife, Rachel, along with others who knew the journey he was on, including Chip Bugnar, global pastor at Brook Hills. And as Farrow had those conversations and prayed, he knew God was opening the doors for him to join the work at Valley View.

“We just kind of stepped through one door at a time,” he said.

The leadership of Brook Hills was excited about getting involved too, Bugnar said. They started meeting with the leadership team from Valleydale to pray, and everyone involved felt like Farrow was the one to lead the effort.

Continuing the work

Bugnar said Brook Hills would miss Farrow but was ready to be a part of “building on the legacy of the saints at Valley View.” He said replanting was only possible because the Lord had planted them there in the first place.

“That good work God began there decades ago,



Members of The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham gather around Nate Farrow and his wife, Rachel, and their children Feb. 11 to commission them as Farrow leaves to lead the replant at Valley View Baptist Church in Leeds.

Photo by Grace Thornton/The Alabama Baptist

we’re excited He will carry it to completion,” Bugnar said. “Gospel partnerships like we’ve entered into with those saints and with Valleydale running point seem to uniquely express God’s kingdom work, which transcends any one local church.”

And the partnership didn’t stop there either, with BMBA and the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions playing a role too.

Sacrificing together in a shared partnership “evidences the greatness of Jesus,” Bugnar said. “And the potential for gospel impact is huge, as current research shows only 40% of Leeds is church and brand-new neighborhoods are currently in the works.”

Farrow said he’s excited about the prospect for ministry in Leeds too. As he starts a season of preparation toward the church’s relaunch

in August, he’s praying for God to open doors into the community.

‘Gospel impact’

“We want to see this church continue to have a gospel impact in Leeds,” he said, noting that “in the next several months, I’ll be focusing on pastoring the church, getting to know the people, preaching, teaching, pastoral

care — the things I really love and am excited to get to do.”

Crowder said Feb. 18 — Farrow’s first Sunday in the pulpit — “in God’s timing was a glorious and very sad day for us as a church” because two longtime church members had died that week.

“For Nate’s first week, in God’s providence, he had opportunity very quickly to

become our pastor, which normally takes a while,” Crowder said. “That Sunday morning, there was this glorious juxtaposition of grieving and rejoicing — grieving the loss of dear saints, rejoicing because we know they knew Jesus and rejoicing at what God has in store for us as a church moving forward. It was a sweet service.”

Families from Valleydale and Brook Hills also gathered in the pews there.

“The encouragement and prayerful consideration from both churches has just been unbelievable,” Crowder said. “It just shows you when God’s people put their minds to honoring Him and helping others and other churches, the focus is the spread of the gospel.”

Sawyer said he and the others involved feel the burden of churches dying in Birmingham and the surrounding areas and know God wants those churches to thrive again.

He said what’s happening at Valley View is a great story.

“It shows what God can do with three churches who lock arms and say, ‘We’re not going to let this church die.’”



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Someone You Should Know

ELEANOR BUSH

By Leigh Pritchett
The Alabama Baptist

Eleanor Bush's mission is this: Tell people about Jesus, pray for those who are sick or on mission and encourage everyone to understand Scripture and use it daily. The 86-year-old Tuscaloosa woman has been a Sunday School teacher for about 45 years. She also directs the women's missions group, serves as hospitality chair, teaches a quilting class and assists with other church programs. An alumna of the University of Alabama, Eleanor worked at UA's library and taught in a private school.

Q: Describe where you focus your greatest ministry efforts.
A: Teaching, praying, exhorting.

Q: Who was or is one of the most influential people in your faith life? Why?
A: It was my father, Elmo Riley. From the time I was very small, he taught us about God and took us to church. He was very faithful in leading us. He was a deacon and Sunday School teacher. He would go to visit members who were sick or in the hospital. That made an impression on me, and I try to do that too. I visit shut-ins too.

Q: Tell about a turning point in your life and how God was involved.
A: About 16 years ago, I decided that I was going to quit teaching Sunday School. I just thought it was time. One day, a minister came

MINISTRY:
Sunday School teacher, women's missions director



CHURCH NAME:
Taylorville Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, in Tuscaloosa Baptist Association

LIFE VERSE: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths" (Prov. 3:5-6).

and preached ... and God (was) speaking through him to me that I needed to go back to teaching Sunday School. I feel like that is what I was called to do.

Q: What has God been teaching you lately?
A: I need to be more aware of people around me who need Christ, who need a visit. I just need to be more aware of the world.

Q: If there were one thing you could tell your younger self about faith, what would it be?
A: Never doubt God. He is always true and faithful, through the good times and the bad times.

DO YOU KNOW A PERSON WHO SHOULD BE FEATURED AS
Someone You Should Know?

Send his or her name, a contact number and the reason you think he or she should be featured to Someone You Should Know, c/o The Alabama Baptist, 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209, or to news@thealabamabaptist.org.

Lass WORDS

BY KEN LASS
The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

What Might Have Been

Ever have second thoughts about decisions you've made? Regrets over missed opportunities? Risks you didn't take? Not to worry. Chances are God has led you to where you're supposed to be.

As a sophomore in high school I joined a rock band. I played guitar and sang. Over the next three years, we rehearsed hard and got better and better and more popular.

By senior year we were playing all the big dances at all of the area high schools. We even played some of the local bars despite being underage. The bar owners didn't ask, and we didn't tell. We must have been pretty good.

Big opportunity

Upon graduation we were approached by an agent who offered to put us on the club circuit. We'd be touring the region, playing five nights a week and then moving to the next town.

In that era, this was the path to stardom. The clubs were where the record executives would go to scout new talent. If they liked your band, they might sign you to a recording contract, and if your records became hits you were on your way to riches and fame. It's what we had always dreamed of.

Yet when the opportunity actually arrived, we had second thoughts. Performing as a full-time job didn't seem as much fun as doing it as a weekend

diversion. Plus, we all had girlfriends we wanted to go off to college with.

After agonizing over the decision, we chose to break up the band and head off to school. I would really come to miss the electricity and adrenaline of performing for an appreciative audience and the brotherhood of the guys.

Different path

But God led me on a different path. I would go on to meet and marry Sharon, the love of my life, and be blessed with a 46-year career in media work, the other passion of my life.

I have no complaints, only gratitude. But sometimes I can't help wondering what might have been if we had kept the band together and gone on that club circuit. Would we have been discovered? Would we have made it big? Become wealthy and famous?

Today I am a rock star only to my young grandkids, who squeal with excitement when I come to visit them. Surprisingly, I find that is enough. My greatest hits album is my family.

God knows what you need.

MEET THE AUTHOR

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

'SUPREME PURPOSE'

Renew participants encouraged to 'find their 5,' make discipleship a lifestyle

By **Dianna L. Cagle**
The Alabama Baptist

Around 400 women gathered April 13 at First Baptist Church Trussville for Renew, Alabama WMU's annual conference for women.

"Jesus really has one main job for us to do ... make disciples," said Rondie Wilks, who led the Bible study portions of the day. "Disciple-making is our supreme purpose ... [and it] is a simple process to follow."

Wilks has worked closely with her husband, Bill, pastor of NorthPark Church in Trussville and author and co-founder

of D-Life, a strategy that equips disciples of Christ to make more disciples of Christ. Together, the Wilks have traveled extensively to teach disciple-making using D-Life, and Rondie Wilks shared her heart for fulfilling the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20.

Making disciples involves fellowship, teaching, prayer, ministry, multiplication and accountability, Wilks said.

She encouraged participants to find five people to meet weekly and study Scripture.

"We're going to have to start spending time with some people," she said. "Pray for God to put those women in your life."



Photo by Dianna L. Cagle/The Alabama Baptist
Renew attendees take selfies at a photo booth in the lobby of FBC Trussville.



Photo by Dianna L. Cagle/The Alabama Baptist

Close to 400 women gathered April 13 for Renew, an event sponsored by Alabama WMU at FBC Trussville. Rondie Wilks of NorthPark Baptist Church in Trussville shared about discipleship.

Noting that disciples make disciples by talking to people, praying with them and serving alongside them, Wilks emphasized that "disciple-making has the spiritual power to change our lives."

During a panel discussion in the afternoon session, Wilks, along with Pat Ingram, missions and ministry consultant for Alabama Woman's Missionary Union; Trish Jackson, Alabama WMU's NextGen consultant; and Stephanie Newton, lead strategist for adult and multicultural audiences for national WMU, shared stories of women who had invested in them and changed their lives.

Wilks said Jesus makes it simple to keep the focus on disciple-making: "Come and follow Me."

All we have to do is obey, she said. "Teach them to read the

Bible," Wilks said, "It's a living Word."

SPACE questions

Wilks encouraged the women to ask SPACE questions as they study Scripture:

- ▶ Do I have a *Sin* to confess?
- ▶ Do I have a *Promise* to claim?
- ▶ Do I have an *Attitude* I need to change?
- ▶ Do I have a *Command* that I need to obey?
- ▶ Is there an *Example* I need to follow?

It's not a matter of self-confidence, but God-confidence, Wilks said.

"Remember Who you belong to," she noted.

As part of Renew, participants were able to shop in the WMU WorldCrafts store to help support fair

trade in the U.S. and around the globe.

Author and blogger Alicia Boyce also spoke about a new book, "Liturgies & Laments for the Sojourner," written by three women living overseas.

The book leads readers through prayers specific to concerns of people living overseas — for packing, for an international move, for traffic, for language learning, for cross-cultural neighbors, culture fatigue and more.

Nathan and Brooke Dodd, a singer-songwriter duo based in Decatur, led worship.

Next year's Renew conference is scheduled for Feb. 22 at Heritage Baptist Church in Montgomery.

Find more information on Alabama WMU and upcoming events at alabamawmu.org/events.

PUBLIC NOTICE

PUBLIC HEARING FOR CHILD CARE STATE PLAN

The Alabama Department of Human Resources will conduct a virtual public hearing on the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) State Plan for the period October 1, 2024 through September 30, 2027. The purpose of the hearing is to solicit public comment and input on the provisions of child care services under the proposed Plan. The hearing will be conducted via Zoom at 10 AM on May 29, 2024. Please use the link below to participate in the hearing. The draft plan will be available on the Department's web site at www.dhr.alabama.gov beginning April 29, 2024.

Written comments may be submitted to:

Alabama Dept. of Human Resources
Child Care Services Division
P. O. Box 304000
Montgomery, AL 36130-4000

Email comments to:
childcare.subsidy@dhr.alabama.gov

Submit written comments no later than June 7, 2024

Join Zoom Meeting:

Topic: CCDF State Plan Public Hearing
Time: May 29, 2024 10 AM Central Time (US & Canada)

<https://dhr-alabama-gov.zoom.us/j/4720458123?omn=87235440126>

Meeting ID: 472 045 8123

Dial by your location +1 470 250 9358 US (Atlanta)
Meeting ID: 472 045 8123

UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Youth leaders connect weekly

If you're a youth leader, there's a Zoom call you should be a part of on Thursday mornings at 9. This weekly chat, called Unwind, is a "great opportunity to connect with student leaders from all over the state," said Josh Meadows, student ministry strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. "The beauty of this is it's all different ministry sizes with a common goal of sharing what God is doing at their church and resourcing each other. It's my favorite thing I get to do."

From now until May 30, jump on the call Thursday mornings and be a part of talking about what God is

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



doing in youth ministries all around the state. We want to hear from you — be ready to answer a couple of questions about the ministry God has entrusted you to lead.

To register, visit ymlink.org/unwind.

Church admin

It's important for a church to know the need for and benefit of proper legal and operating documents. Church Administrative Guidelines covers the process for developing your church's articles of incorporation, bylaws,

policies and procedures.

This workshop will be held June 25, 10 a.m.–3 p.m., at the SBOM in Prattville.

It will be led by Jim Swedenburg.

To register, visit alsbom.org/legaldocs.

Reaching and Teaching the Next Generation

Reaching and Teaching the Next Generation is a great opportunity to equip your preschool and children's ministry leaders.

Jana Magruder from Life-way Kids will be the featured speaker at the event,

which is set for Aug. 19, 2:30–5:30 p.m., at Westwood Baptist Church in Alabaster. There will also be breakout conferences. There is no charge for this event.

To register, visit kidzlinkal.org/next-gen.

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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

CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR

Tharptown Baptist Church in Franklin County, Alabama, is seeking a full-time senior pastor. Job description can be found at tharptown.com along with a link to upload a resumé.

SENIOR PASTOR

Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Alexandria, Alabama, is seeking a full-time senior pastor. Interested candidates should send resumé and correspondence to: Pastorsearch@mzbcclife.net

PASTOR

Nolensville First Baptist Church, located just outside Nashville in fast growing Williamson County, is seeking a pastor. We are a traditional Baptist church. We are looking for a strong leader to shepherd our church family and lead us in an effective outreach effort in our community. For more information and responses, send letters and resumé with recent sermon links to: NFBC Search Committee, P.O. Box 635, Nolensville, TN 37135 or email to: psc.fbcnolensville@gmail.com.

PASTOR

FBC Shawmut, Valley, Alabama, seeking traditional pastor. Sunday and Wednesday services. Centrally located between Auburn, Alabama, LaGrange and Columbus, Georgia. Submit resumé to: sfbc.psc@yahoo.com.

PASTOR

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

PASTOR

Mt. Zion Baptist Church in northwest Chambers County, Alabama is seeking a bivocational or full-time pastor to guide a rural community with an eager variety of age groups. Email resumé to: mtzionpsc24@gmail.com or contact Reid House with questions at reid36862@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

New Market Southern Baptist Church located in northeast Madison County, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor. A man called by God, who will be a caring biblical shepherd for our church family. A man who holds to the full inspiration and authority of the Holy Scripture. Submit resumé to: scnmbc@yahoo.com or New Market Baptist Church, P.O. Box 128, New Market, AL 35761.

BIVOCATIONAL WORSHIP LEADER/DIRECTOR OF MUSIC

New Market Baptist Church, NE, Madison County, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational worship leader/director of music. Request all interested candidates submit resumé to: newmarketbaptistchurch@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC MINISTER

Riddles Bend Baptist Church is located in Rainbow City, Etowah County, Alabama. We are praying for God's choice for a bivocational music minister. Please forward resumé to: Anita Bedwell, Bedwell3@aol.com, 256-312-3470.

BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC MINISTER

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

BIVOCATIONAL MINISTER OF MUSIC

Taylorville Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, Alabama. The minister of music plays a pivotal role in developing and promoting a highly vibrant music program. Responsible for planning, organizing and conducting a comprehensive music ministry, with a commitment to the church vision of "loving God, loving others, and reaching the lost." This position is responsible for leading theologically sound worship and creating an atmosphere where God is glorified. Interested applicants should email Krista Collins (kcollins@taylorvillebaptist.org) for a copy of the position description. Competitive salary. To be considered, please email a cover letter, resumé and three references by April 30.

PART-TIME MUSIC MINISTER

Vincent First Baptist Church is prayerfully seeking a part-time music minister. We have a choir of all ages and great attitudes. We need someone serious about the Lord and His Kingdom, not job hunting. Please call Pastor Robbie Weems 205-617-1277 or email resumé to: weems1969@aol.com.

TWO PART-TIME POSITIONS — MUSIC DIRECTOR & PIANIST

Mt. Nebo Baptist Church, Falkville, Alabama, (Massey Community) is seeking to fill two part-time positions: a music

director and a pianist. We are a small but growing, traditional congregation. Services Sunday morning, Sunday evening and Wednesday evening. Send resumé/inquiries to: gregoryk.compton@att.net.

BIVOCATIONAL WORSHIP LEADER/CHOIR DIRECTOR

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

STUDENT PASTOR

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

INTERNS

Oak Bowery Baptist Church in Ohatchee is seeking interns for youth ministry and children's ministry. 256-892-3711 or email: drsamfordham@gmail.com.

SIGNS

CHURCH SIGN

Signs are your first impression. What kind of impression is your church sign making? Call us to replace/update yours with either digital or traditional. Statewide since 1994. 1-800-729-6844 or 205-664-0955. www.reliablesigns.com

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No job too big or too small. Call for free on-site consultation. Toll-free 1-888-699-9679 or Alabama local 205-699-9679. Ask for the owner, Terry Barnes. Visit gallery at leedsstainedglass.com.

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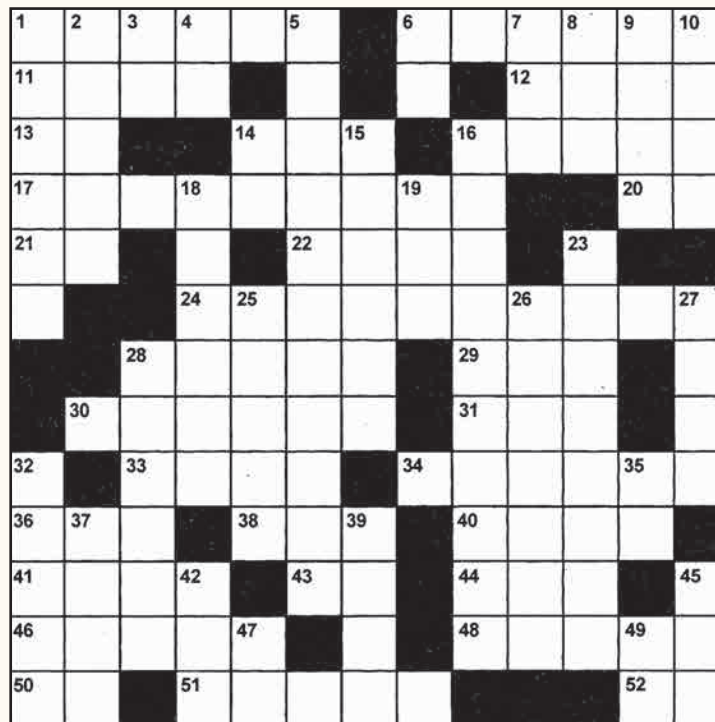
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CHRISTIAN Crossword



ACROSS

1. Your _____ shall be desolate. (Ezek. 6:4)
6. They had made themselves _____ to David. (1 Chron. 19:6)
11. Overshoe.
12. _____ and void.
13. Lose his life for my sake shall find _____.
14. Affectedly shy.
16. Thicker parts at ends of side walls.
17. Being _____ freely by his grace. (Rom. 3:24)
20. _____, ego, superego.
21. _____ for me and my house. (Josh. 24:15)
22. Hoax.
24. Being _____ by the Holy Ghost. (Rom. 15:16)
28. _____ the son of Nun. (Num. 13:8)
29. Behold, all things are become _____.
30. Pass through the fire to _____. (2 Kings 23:10)
31. Anger.
33. Crack in a container.
34. Behind a vessel.
36. _____ the son of Abdiel. (1 Chron. 5:15)
38. A _____ of dragons. (Jer. 9:11)
40. Child.
41. With the same measure that ye _____. (Luke 6:38)
43. I _____ set my bow in the cloud. (Gen. 9:13)
44. Wing of building.
46. Pimp.
48. _____ Syndrome.



By Connie Holman Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

50. For God _____ loved the world. (John 3:16)
51. Which is _____ in the Scripture. (Dan. 10:21)
52. _____ gave His only begotten Son. (John 3:16)

DOWN

1. _____ the son of Jeroboam. (1 Kings 14:1)
2. Aquatic plant.
3. Light _____ rule the day. (Gen. 1:16)
4. I stand _____ the door. (Rev. 3:20)
5. Behold, it is a _____ people. (Ex. 32:9)
6. Potipherah priest of _____. (Gen. 46:20)
7. No room for them in the _____. (Luke 2:7)
8. There went _____ a decree from Caesar Augustus. (Luke 2:1)
9. I was by the river of _____. (Dan. 8:2)
10. Winter coasting vehicle.
14. Third note of musical scale.

15. Nahor's wife. (Gen. 11:29)
16. Have charge of, manage.
18. Scuffle.
19. They did all _____, and were filled. (Matt. 14:20)
23. Every 14 days.
25. Yet to come.
26. Able to reproduce.
27. Mend a stocking.
28. Limestone.
32. There were seven _____ of fire. (Rev. 4:5)
35. Second note of musical scale.
37. Great man.
39. I will not put my hook in thy _____. (2 Kings 19:28)
42. Even (contraction).
45. When ye pray, _____ not vain repetitions. (Matt. 6:7)
47. Thy servants have _____ pasture. (Gen. 47:4)
49. What?

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Church Tax Conference for Small Churches

Do you need a W-2 if the pastor is the only paid employee?

Do you have to complete Form 941?

Can a minister take 100 percent of his income as housing?

How does a small church of 100 or fewer people differ from the large church in tax issues?

At the Church Tax Conference for Small Churches, you will hear the answer to these questions and more.

Lee Wright, who serves in church compensation services for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said it can be tough for small churches to have these procedures in place correctly, so a conference like this can help tremendously



WRIGHT

To register, visit alsbom.org/small-church-taxconf or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



in keeping them on track for ministry.

"Almost all churches have some financial practices that are incorrect," he said. "Some could result in an IRS fine or worse."

The conference will be held June 6, 10 a.m.–3 p.m., at the SBOM at 1404 Fairview Avenue in Prattville.

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

For more information or to register, visit alsbom.org/small-church-taxconf.

Get Acquainted Day

Are you new to Alabama or new to your church staff? Or would you just like to learn more about ways to partner together for ministry and missions?

Get Acquainted Day is the perfect opportunity to find out how the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions can partner with you to fulfill the Great Commission. Hear about all the

ministries, meet your state missionaries and tour the SBOM facility in Prattville. You'll also receive a report with information about the people who live within a five-mile radius of your church.

Get Acquainted Day will be May 7, 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., with lunch provided.

To register, visit alsbom.org/gad.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Sunday School Lessons

By Ben Stubblefield, Ph.D.

Visiting assistant professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



For May 5

ACCUSED? Genesis 39:7–21

Tempted (7–10)

Now sold to Potiphar, Joseph begins his servitude under an Egyptian lord. God is with Joseph and he begins to prosper, even in the most unlikely circumstances.

In fact, he does so well that his master entrusts him with everything in his estate. The narrative seems pleasant and perhaps Joseph thinks, “This isn’t what I’d imagined, but it’s not as bad as I thought” — until the temptation of Potiphar’s wife.

She commands Joseph, her slave, to sleep with her. When the first attempt doesn’t work, she attempts day after day to entice him, and yet Joseph remains loyal to his master and his God.

Joseph’s integrity is in sharp contrast to the nature of Judah’s sexual immorality described in Genesis 38. In fact, readers will note how out of place Chapter 38 is to the developing story of Joseph from Chapter 37.

It may be intended to highlight the devotion of Joseph to righteous living even when in all the wrong conditions, and especially in contrast to his brothers.

Joseph could have made every excuse to justify engaging in this sin. His family had abandoned him; he could further his career; no one would really know; his God had no interest in him; sexual sin was commonplace; he couldn’t disobey the lady of the house. But he could not escape the gaze of the Almighty who knows the thoughts, intentions, words and deeds of us all. What we think is done in secret will always be brought out to the light.

Trapped (11–16)

It’s not clear from the text, but it is likely that Potiphar’s wife sets a trap for Joseph. She seizes him while they are alone, but he escapes her grasp by leaving his garment in her hand. Unable to have Joseph, she decides to find a way to punish him and makes up

a false story of attempted abuse.

It seems like every time Joseph is getting into trouble, his clothes have something to do with it.

Here, Joseph’s garment serves as evidence of his crime to his master. When he was thrown into a hole by his brothers, his coat served as evidence of his death to his father.

In either case, Joseph exhibits remarkable resolve to do right even if it costs him the literal shirt off his back. And here we can imitate his courage and wisdom.

Our brother teaches us courage in that it is not simple to stand on conviction in a foreign land to a foreign authority when your life is on the line. And he teaches us wisdom in that it is never right to violate our consciences, even if it costs us dearly.

Trustworthy (17–21)

From these verses, you can sense the callousness of Potiphar and his wife. They don’t call Joseph by his name, there is not a chance for him to defend himself and there is anger and a rash decision to place Joseph in prison.

We don’t know all the details of Joseph’s relationship with his jailer, but just like in Verse 2, God is with Joseph, and he has the warden’s favor (v. 21).

As a pastor, I do a fair bit of counseling, and one of the recurring challenges folks have is trust — learning to trust someone again, learning to trust anyone and sometimes, trying to trust in God. Well, Joseph could have easily developed “trust issues.”

And while Joseph certainly may have had some dark nights of the soul, what the Bible gives us is the sense that he is remaining faithful whether in a slaver’s household or an Egyptian prison.

There are seasons when life is unfair and seems, frankly, unkind. But we have to be the kind of people who know the end from the beginning — that though there are moments of trial and testing, there is victory on the other side of every cross.

For May 12

REVEALED? Genesis 41:14–21, 33–37

Credit Given (14–16)

I’ve had some strange dreams in my life. I still have a vivid memory of a dream in which I had a long philosophical conversation with Charlie Brown. In case you’re wondering, he’s quite an existentialist.

Y’all know how it is: Dreams seem real at the time, but we often don’t read too much into them.

But Pharaoh’s dreams, Egypt believed, were given special priority. One Genesis commentator says, “Egyptian Pharaohs, supposedly gods themselves, were thought to live on the edge of the divine realms.” So their dreams were assumed to be more like visions and explanations of things to come.

Understandably, then, the violent dreams of chapter 41, ugly cows consuming fat cows and withered corn swallowing good corn, solicit a national emergency for Egypt. And all skilled in divination are called to give an account.

The rather forgetful cupbearer, who dodged execution with the help of Joseph in chapter 40, recalls Joseph’s giftedness in interpretation and has him summoned to court to work his magic (41:15).

But Joseph is quick to correct the mistake. He is not a soothsayer. This novel ability “is not in me.” Joseph credits God, appropriately, as the one who has ordained this unusual moment and insight.

It’s not always easy to deflect praise when it’s misdirected.

Believers, however, have a funny instinct toward humility of themselves and exaltation of the Lord, from Whom comes all good and perfect gifts. This isn’t just a noble virtue; it’s also a way to point others to the greatness and grandeur of our God, which Joseph is doing the instant he stands before the most powerful personage in his known world.

Cows Consumed (17–21)

As Joseph interprets the dream for Pharaoh, notice how he is clear about who controls the seasons, the rains and the sun. He doesn’t suggest that Pharaoh or Ra or some

other deity can ordain events — only Elohim. It’s really remarkable that this newly minted, shaved prisoner has the audacity to preach at the King. He does not hide, cower or hesitate. Kings do not make history; he preaches that God makes history, and we all exist by the power of His hand. An amazing set of circumstances. And all because of a dream.

As I mentioned, I often do not make decisions on the basis of my dreams. Most of us don’t. I think God used Joseph to interpret dreams because Egypt valued the Pharaoh’s dreams. But it is wise to pay attention to all the clear means by which God is trying to get our attention.

And truly, the Lord can use many ways, but He fully and finally offers us a continual and reliable revelation through His Word.

While it is useful to listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and keep our spiritual antennae up, it is sure and certain that when we listen to the Holy Bible, we are hearing from our Holy God.

Plan Defined (33–37)

Once the dream was understood, Joseph quickly suggested a plan of action. His counsel was wise, decisive and God-given. Notice, too, how quickly the urgency cut through all the red tape that would normally confuse a matter like this: it didn’t matter that he was a Hebrew, yesterday a prisoner, an obscure nobody from nowhere.

The idea was to get it done. Pharaoh knew Joseph was the guy because Joseph knew what God was going to do.

A little knowledge about God’s future plan makes us all the more decisive in our day-to-day living. We know what God will do, so we can act today in the confidence we have about tomorrow.

That moves to Christian endurance, missions, discipleship and holiness.

We know the Lord will soon descend to judge the world and take us home. We can work, then, as Joseph did, with the confidence that today’s labor is righteous preparation for a certain future.

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sunday School Lessons

By James R. Strange, Ph.D.

Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies, Samford University



For May 5

WORSHIPING GOD Psalm 34:1-3; 8-10; 15-18

Despite its brevity, this individual psalm of praise has important features. For example, it is an acrostic, which means the first letter of every line follows the order of the Hebrew alphabet. The heading refers to 1 Samuel 21.

The psalm has two divisions. In verses 1-11, the psalmist uses an experience of divine deliverance to invite others to praise God's goodness, whereas in verses 12-23, the psalmist speaks like a sage of the Book of Proverbs. By reciting the psalm, therefore, worshipers both praise God and teach one another about God.

Synagogue congregations today recite verse 3 when the Torah scroll is removed from its cabinet.

Pay attention to the many references to parts of the body and associated actions: The psalmist's mouth praises God (v. 1); the faces of those who seek the Lord are radiant (v. 5), and their tongues and lips refrain from speaking evil (v. 13); God's eyes see the righteous, and His ears hear their cries (v. 15); God protects the bones of the righteous (v. 20).

We meet together to praise God. (1-3)

Even though the psalmist uses hyperbole, the call to bless the Lord "at all times" and to praise Him "always" encourages God's people in times of darkness and despair. Believers can praise God even when circumstances make it difficult to do so.

This point is emphasized in verse 2 where, against expectations, the humble (who depend on God for their survival) are called to "be glad" and to "exalt His name" together with the psalmist. The implication is that the psalmist also has learned how to praise God while suffering (v. 6).

Those who praise God at all times contrast with the "young lions" of verse 10. (See below.)

We meet together to thank God for the good things He has provided. (8-10)

To "taste and see that the Lord is good" might look like a mixed metaphor, but the psalmist is emphasizing the readers' varied experiences of God's goodness.

Fear of the Lord (vv. 7, 9, 11) is not terror that causes a person to flee God, but awe that leads a person to take refuge in God and to obey Him. Similarly, to take refuge is not to hide but to live righteously while surrounded by God's protection (vv. 7, 8, 22). We see this in the admonitions of verses 11-14: "Keep your tongue from evil," "do what is good" and "pursue [peace]."

"Young lions" symbolize the power and success of youth. Those who rely on their own strength go hungry (lacking God's support), while those who seek help from the Lord receive it. These ideas are repeated in the Gospels.

We meet together to pray and seek God's help. (15-18)

The evildoers of verse 16 should be understood in contrast to those who do good in verses 13 and 14. The "face of the Lord is set against" those who speak deceit, do evil and pursue discord and strife. This is a problem not only of actions but also of intent. Those who do these things are willful. They refuse the good they know to do and do the bad instead.

However, God hears the crises of the righteous and stands beside the brokenhearted and those who are crushed in spirit. Surely this is another reference to the destitute from verse 2.

Many Jewish texts talk about the poor as righteous by virtue of their poverty for, unlike the wealthy, they depend on God for everything.

For May 12

SERVING IN CHRIST Ephesians 4:1-7; 11-16

In our fifth lesson on being an authentic church, we explore a passage from Ephesians. Paul visited Ephesus at least twice (Acts 18). Priscilla, Aquila and Apollos were probably the founders of the city's congregations.

In this chapter, Paul addresses a critical aspect of an authentic church, which is the unity of the body of Christ. Read all of chapter 4 and also 1 Corinthians 12.

God makes us one but equips us with various gifts for His use. (1-7)

In verse 1, "therefore" refers to the doxology at the end of chapter 3. Paul can urge the Ephesians to live a life worthy of their calling, not because of their own abilities but because of God's power that is at work among them (3:20). Through this power, God can do for the Ephesians far more than they can imagine.

Not only can they live as God has called them, but they can also do so with humility, gentleness and patience, putting up with one another in love. Notice that the unity that Paul urges isn't based on human bonding alone, but is "the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

This is the basis for Paul's metaphor of the Church as Christ's body, an idea introduced in chapter 1. (Compare 1 Cor. 12:12-14; in Eph. 2:19-22, Paul uses the metaphor of the Church as God's temple.) The Church's concord reflects God's own unity and omnipresence, an idea that draws on the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4.

But this unity isn't assured, for the Church must consent to its calling into the shared realities of a common hope, the Lord Himself, a common faith in the Lord and a

common baptism into Him (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27).

In addition to those realities, Christ has given a gift to every individual believer.

God uses others to equip us in ministry. (11-13)

These gifts overlap with, but aren't the same as, the spiritual gifts of 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. Both kinds of gifts share a goal, however, which is the good of the Church.

The list of gifts isn't exhaustive, but from it we know that practices in the early Church resembled our own. Paul mentions apostles (missionaries), prophets (those who speak God's Word), evangelists (those who proclaim the gospel), pastors (shepherds) and teachers.

Like a tool or kitchen utensil, each gift is not for display but is to be used. The image is one of athletic or military drills. Paul expects all believers ("saints") to do the Church's ministry, and the purpose of each gift is to equip believers to do it so that Christ's body is built up.

Notice that Paul wants both "unity in the faith" and unity "in the knowledge of God's Son." Paul's language implies that faith and knowledge are two different things. Faith is the trust that one has in God's Son, and knowledge is the relationship that is based on trust.

We are to use the gifts God has given us to minister alongside others. (14-16)

"Maturity" or "completeness" is what Paul calls the unity that comes from this relationship. It isn't individual maturity alone, but also the maturity of the body of Christ. So Paul admonishes the Ephesians no longer to be susceptible to shifting doctrine, cunning, craftiness and schemes. Instead, they must themselves speak the truth.

*"But grace was given to each one of us according
to the measure of Christ's gift."*

Ephesians 4:7

WORD search

- BEAST

BLOOD

BOW

BROTHERS

CANAAN

CLOTHES

DECEIT

DREAMS

ENVY

FATHER

FAVOR
- FLOCK

GOAT

GRIEF

ISHMAELITES

JACOB

JOSEPH

LIE

LOVED

MOON

MOURNING

OBEDIENT
- ORNATE

PIT

REPORT

ROBE

SHEAVES

SOLD

SORROW

STARS

SUN

TORN

WILD

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



You Gotta' Hear This!

Finding humor in the everyday moments

A Free Gift

My 7-year-old granddaughter is adorable with her big eyes, engaging personality, beautiful smile and long blond hair. I can't say no to her.

Lately, she has been making bracelets with elastic and beads. They are really cute. At her brother's ballgame, she came up to me and put a pink and purple bracelet on my wrist and said, "I made this for you, Granna."

I thanked her and gushed over it. But she just stood in front of me staring at me like she was waiting for me to do something else, so I gushed some more. She still didn't move. Finally, she extended her open palm to me and said, "that will be two dollars."

Questionable tactics

So guess what I did? I paid her two dollars! And she went back to play with her friends. Later, she came back with six dollars. I asked where she had gotten that much money and of course she answered, "I sold some bracelets."

"Let me guess," I said. "You let them think it was a gift, and then you asked for two dollars?"

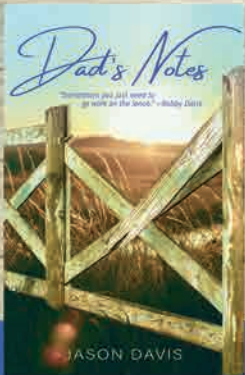
"Well, yeah ... that's the only way they will buy them," she answered.

Aren't you glad that when God tells us that His gift of salvation is free, He really means it? We don't have to earn it or pay for it. We just have to receive it!

Jesus paid the price for our salvation in full, but we get the salvation He purchased with all the blessings, mercies, fruitfulness and everything else that accompanies it. That truly is a free gift.

MEET THE AUTHOR

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



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"Now Israel loved Joseph more than his other sons because Joseph was a son born to him in his old age, and he made a long-sleeved robe for him."

GENESIS 37:3

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Steve Potts
The Alabama Baptist

Book reviews: Authors tackle tough questions, life's trials

Is Jesus Obsolete?

By Glenn Brewton

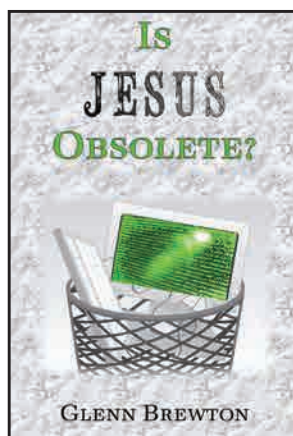
Independently Published, 2015

Several years ago Glenn Brewton was at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and saw a bumper sticker that read, "God is obsolete," which brought him to the idea for "Is Jesus Obsolete?"

Brewton is in the commercial construction business, and has English and journalism degrees from Samford University and a master of divinity degree from Beeson Divinity School. He also has a passion for apologetics. Brewton has written an intriguing exploration of the reality and relevance of the biblical God.

Though the volume is not long, it is packed with observations, explanations and applications of his study of Scripture, science and culture.

He is convinced that Jesus is not at all obsolete and the Bible is truly trustworthy.



Exploring why many today consider God, the Bible and religion false, Brewton zeroes in on how science can be far more ideological than many assume. He engages prominent atheists like Richard Dawkins and others, noting that some ideas from scientific inquiry can be challenging to traditional interpretations of Scripture. He also discusses various ways the scientific viewpoint can be reconciled with biblical interpretation.

While not everyone will agree with all his proposals, Brewton stresses that the biblical message can be trusted despite such tensions with science. He notes the fine-tuning of the universe and the uniqueness of earth as evidence of a Creator's design (p. 119 ff.), and stresses the importance of faith in Christ, giving fresh guidance on how to think through the challenges of science and skepticism that are so prominent today.

God Is for You: Learning To Trust God's Wisdom Through Life's Crises

By Mac Brunson

Invite Press, 2023

Times of crisis in our lives can shake our faith and bring despair, but God can use crises to deepen our trust, increase our faithfulness and stir our worship.

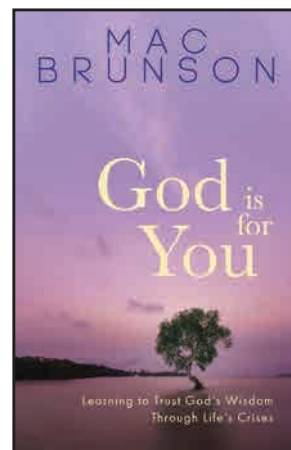
Mac Brunson has known such times personally, and he has written "God Is For You" to give comfort and wisdom to people who may be facing such difficulties in their lives.

"In my crisis, I had to slow down and decide that God was big enough to handle the situation and to handle me" (p. 16). Brunson is the pastor of Valleydale Church in Birmingham.

Previously, he was pastor of First Baptist Church Jacksonville, Flori-

da, and First Baptist Church Dallas.

Brunson brings deep pastoral experience and theological insight to bear on the way God uses difficult circumstances to refine His people.



This slim volume shimmers with hope and encouragement as Brunson walks through biblical examples that show how God helps us face each

challenge. Brunson reminds us that "the path God directs us on may not make sense to us, but it will always bring Him glory" (p. 65).

The crisis that led him to write this book was a conflict in ministry, which he alludes to with careful restraint. This book is not a defensive tell-all to settle scores. Rather, it is the mature reflection of a wise Christian leader who has learned hard lessons and bears some real battle scars. But God has given him grace and compassion to help others trust God rather than wallow in bitterness or depression. If you are hurting, this book could be beneficial to you. If you know someone walking through hard times, this book would make an excellent gift.

Surprised by Doubt: How Disillusionment Can Invite Us Into a Deeper Faith

By Joshua D. Chatraw and Jack Carson

Brazos Press, 2023

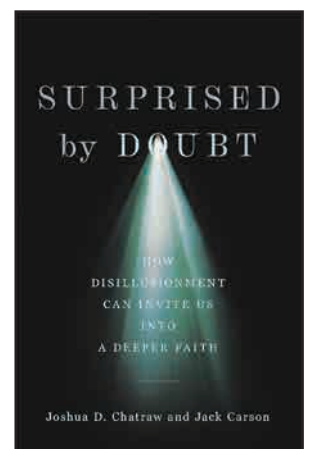
There is much talk today about people "deconstructing" their

faith. Even many committed Christians struggle with questions and doubts.

Joshua Chatraw and Jack Carson have written a wonderfully helpful book for those seeking to stabilize their Christian beliefs in times of anxiety, challenge and uncertainty. Chatraw formerly taught apologetics at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, along with Carson. Chatraw is now professor of evangelism and cultural engagement at Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in Birmingham. Carson continues teaching at Liberty.

Using C.S. Lewis' analogy of Christianity as a house, the two submit that many are struggling "in the attic" (p. 10). The attic may seem disconnected from the other rooms, and many evangelicals may not be fully aware of the heritage and diversity of the Christian Church through the centuries. Some of what leads to disillusionment — like "bumping your head on the rafters" (p. 24) — is being limited in your perspective and not knowing what answers and issues other believers have traced out before you.

The authors give a tour of the house by engaging the major ideas people often struggle to grasp, such as certainty about God's existence, how to respond to other challenges from "outside the house" like new atheists and the "optimistic skepticism" of scholars like Bart Ehrman.



EDITOR'S NOTE

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

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Teaching respect

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Christian goalie says hockey helped him with discipline, work ethic

Central Alabama is the home of a very unlikely professional sports franchise — the Birmingham Bulls ice hockey team, which is part of the Southern Professional Hockey League.

Hockey is not well understood in the South, where football is often the main topic of conversation. While hockey can also be known for violent hits and fights that break out during games, one of the Bulls' goalies, Austin Lotz, shared how faith is a top priority for many of the players.

Love of the game

Born in Canada, his passion for the sport started when he was about 3 years old; his bedroom had a hockey theme. Other than school, his world was hockey, and he spent his free time practicing, learning about players and playing hockey video games.



LOTZ

"In Canada, hockey is the first sport you try," he said. "In the States, it's football, basketball, baseball; in Canada, the first sport is hockey."

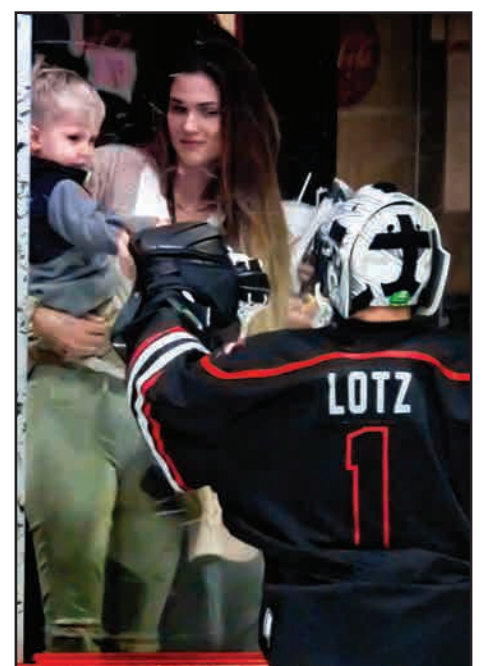
"When I first started, I was good at it," he noted. "From such a young age, that's all I did."

For Lotz, the idea of becoming a goalie developed early. Everyone he played with was older and bigger, so when a childhood friend, Cole, told him to play goalie, he did.

"[Being a goalie] became this thing that I liked; I was good at it, and it made the older kids happy,



Austin Lotz (above) guards the net for the Birmingham Bulls. Lotz (at right) said he loves church nights each season. Having grown up in a Christian home, he did not become a Christian until he met his wife and realized he was missing something. He is in his fifth season with the Bulls.



*"I believe that hockey is a game of discipline,
a game of hard work."*

Austin Lotz, Birmingham Bulls goalie

which made me feel good," Lotz said. "It slowly spiraled into me actually going into organized hockey to be a goalie."

Though some of his best memories during his years as a pro have been of bus rides that can last up to 10 hours, Lotz said the close contact also can cause conflict between the 20-plus people on board.

"Among players there can be [friction], but there's such a respect for one another and for the game that [if] you go at each other a little bit, when it's all said and done, you're hugging it out. You're loving each other more than you're not," Lotz said.

Because of the fighting and vio-

lence often associated with hockey — and the fact that there are far fewer evangelical churches in many hockey-loving areas in the North and countries like Canada — some may assume there aren't many Christians in the sport. But Lotz believes that assumption would be incorrect. "I would say that easily half [are Christian]," he stated.

Lotz grew up in a Christian family and was baptized at age 10, but his family wasn't very involved in church. It wasn't until he met his wife that something changed — she was a Christian, and Lotz decided he needed what she had.

Because it can be difficult for professional athletes to regularly

attend church, some teams have chaplains who provide spiritual encouragement and guidance. Lotz and his fellow teammates love having a chaplain who always has a listening ear.

"For the most part [the chaplain] is someone to talk to about life. Knowing he's a man of faith brings a lot of comfort," Lotz said.

Lotz said he loves the Bulls' "church nights."

"I believe that hockey is a game of discipline, a game of hard work," he said.

"It's a game that you don't have to have a respect or understanding for going into it — you just see the effort that the guys are putting into it. Anytime you can get youth or church groups to our games is awesome."

"Hockey has taught me respect," he noted. "It's taught me discipline. It's shaped who I am today."

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Discipleship

By Cole Rogers
Baptist & Reflector

Avoid common assumptions relating to faith of college students

Churches realize they need to reach young adults in their community, and a vision of winning and sending young adults out as disciple makers is paramount.

To execute fruitful discipleship, churches must be willing to develop flexible strategies that consider the lifestyle of college students. Assumptions often are made that can hinder effective discipleship.

Here are two assumptions that guarantee fruitless discipleship efforts:

1. Students know and live the basics of the faith.

Thousands varying in age, gender, ethnicity, religion and upbringing exist on a single college campus. If a church desires to engage in fruitful discipleship, it cannot afford to assume that anyone understands the gospel or knows how to live the Christian life.

Every college minister must know the spiritual climate of his or her students and be willing to adjust any and all efforts to better meet their needs.

Making these adjustments requires more time and effort than assuming discipleship is happening with current efforts.

However, in the end, these adjustments will produce fruit.



Photo courtesy of Nehemiah Teams
Nehemiah Teams includes young adults ages 18 to 29. They live together and train together before serving together alongside missionaries overseas.

2. Students are available for discipleship.

Discipleship plans made without understanding the life and schedule of a college student are bound to be fruitless. Many arrive on campus under considerable pressure from their parents.

Much of their schedule is determined by parents, classes and other commitments to help advance them professionally. Most feel exhausted by all that is scheduled for them,

so they find little desire to schedule much themselves.

Herein lies both a problem and a solution.

Open doors

Churches should not assume that students will partake in all discipleship efforts that may be good for them. Most students won't fit nicely into a discipleship strategy; however, a church that can coach students to manage their lives and

schedules well opens the door to discipleship.

Since young adults often have poorly developed faith foundations, aren't effectively living out what they do understand and are busy and overwhelmed, there must be a fresh understanding of disciple-making.

Fruitful young adult discipleship contains structure in vision but flexibility in execution. Most students can't (or won't) meet for coffee every week at 6 a.m., but they will call at 8 p.m. to ask about something they read in Scripture or a conversation they had with a friend.

Students may go home two weekends out of the month, but they will want to talk through the dissension in their family first thing Monday morning. These issues can either result in disappointment or discipleship.

Students will forget, slack off and even fail. But if they do all these things in the context of a church that understands them, discipleship can truly be fruitful.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was written by Cole Rogers and originally published by Baptist & Reflector.

Faithlife TV is for families who want to grow in their faith

For most streaming services, entertainment is the primary goal — think Netflix, Disney+ and Hulu.

Then there's Faithlife TV Plus, a relatively new streaming service that — yes — wants to entertain its audience but also wants subscribers to learn and grow in their Christian faith.

In fact, dramatic movies aren't even their

main attraction. Instead, "edifying" content is.

There's "Fragments of Truth," which examines the reliability of the New Testament manuscripts. There's "The Most Reluctant Convert," an onstage production about C.S. Lewis. And there's "Archaeology and Jesus," which follows scholars as they journey to Israel.

You'll find historical documentaries about

Martin Luther, Harriet Tubman and St. Patrick, as well as documentaries about science ("Incredible Creatures that Defy Evolution") and travel ("St. Paul in Greece").

The service has content for children, too, including "Torchlighters," "Bible Agent 7" and "Gigi: God's Little Princess."

Visit FaithlifeTV.com. (Michael Foust)

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By Myriah Snyder
International Mission Board

Bible story translators get gospel to least reached peoples

Bir Bahdur is a simple animal herder. Sometimes he works as a day-laborer. He's quiet and meek. He's uneducated and soft-spoken. He doesn't consider himself qualified to share the gospel, let alone teach it.

Many of his South Asian countrymen don't think so either.

But the beauty of the gospel is that it brings worth to those society considers not worthy.

Bir Bahdur became a believer by hearing Bible stories that were translated into his language by a coalition of International Mission Board workers, Omega Training Partnership translators and another international translation organization. Together, these three organizations form one Bible translation project.

Heart language

After hearing and believing the truth, he knew he wanted to share it. With the encouragement of fellow participants and the trainers from the project's workshops, he learned to craft and share Bible stories in his heart language.

He began sharing the Bible stories with people he encountered each day.

And people listened.

"He's not trained; he's not professional, but he knows the God that he serves," Royce Alyward, an IMB worker who helps lead the translation initiative, shared.

"And he knows how to tell these stories.

"It's by sharing those stories that God's Word has gone forth."

Bir Bahdur reported that several of his friends professed faith in



Nepali Christians gather to sing and pray during a service at a small church in Hokse, near Kathmandu, Nepal. Working together is key for organizations and believers to translate and disperse translations of the Bible.

Christ after hearing the stories.

His influence didn't stop at those friends simply believing, though. He intentionally discipled these believers, and now from Bir Bahdur's influence, two house churches began in his remote area.

Bir Bahdur's story doesn't stand alone.

Royce and his wife, Elsbeth, can tell story after story of churches being planted and lives changed because of this translation project.

The idea behind this massive Bible translation project is to engage least-reached places with the gospel.

Getting the Word of God into the heart language of remote people has fostered healthy church planting and multiplication.

The key to seeing a work of this magnitude accomplished has been

not only the partnership between the three organizations, but the strategic discipleship and deployment of national believers.

"This task is too big for anybody," Elsbeth said, "but it is certainly biblical to have this kind of collaboration between like-minded organizations."

As the groups partnered, they ensured they didn't duplicate each other's work.

'Huge need'

She continued, "We're working on seeing every tribe, every language be able to have an understandable and appropriate presentation of the gospel in their language. This is such a huge need in this area of South Asia where you have so many harder-to-reach languages in harder-to-reach areas."

Sharing the burden alleviates the burden on cross-cultural workers to learn each of the 100 plus languages spoken in their area.

Royce explained, "As a new worker is onboarding, learning the major language is a huge task. As we move forward, for a cross-cultural worker, that can be very intimidating.

Finding partners

"One of the things we're helping them understand is that language acquisition is important. But we, as the expatriates, don't need to learn every language from the area. We need to learn the main languages (such as Hindi)," Royce said.

"We work with national partners who are bilingual. Once we can communicate with them in the main language of their area, we share the load with other believers and those who can help guide us in the language even before they come to faith."

This intentionality in sharing the load, specifically with those who are not yet believers, not only gives the IMB worker some relief, but it sets the translator up to be saturated with the gospel.

"We can intentionally look into those relationships and see how God is working," Elsbeth shared. "We see how God's Word is so effective, especially when they hear it in the language that speaks to their heart."

Some names may have been changed for security reasons.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was originally written by Myriah Snyder and published by the International Mission Board.