

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



Photo courtesy of Josh Meadows

Mobilizing students

Youth ministries network organizing summer opportunities to serve with larger group

Josh Meadows said he gets excited about YM (youth ministries) Link on Mission each year because it's a chance to introduce students to missions. But this year there's double the reason to be excited — they're expanding to two sites.

Teams will serve in Huntsville June 17–22 helping homeowners with repairs. Students also will serve in Indianapolis June 4–9 helping

churches do outreach as part of the Crossover event leading up to the SBC annual meeting.

'Ready-made'

"We do these trips in a way where it is simple, it is ready-made and the bivocational church leader can bring their students if they can get off work for a week," said Meadows, student ministry strategist for the State Board of Missions.

In Huntsville, students will help put siding and roofs on houses and share the gospel with the people around them. In Indianapolis, "it's going to be more of Bible study and opportunities to share the gospel and help church plants," he noted.

Also part of the experience is a nightly group worship time.

Ben Edfeldt, director of the SBOM office of collegiate and student ministries, said the goal of YM

Link on Mission is to provide ready-made opportunities for students to serve together.

"We know the biblical mandate for all believers is to go to the nations with the gospel, and going as a middle or high school student will lay a strong biblical foundation for our Alabama students," he said.

For more information or to register, visit ymlink.org/onmission. (Grace Thornton)

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SCAN ME

‘Inestimable impact’

Alabama Baptist ‘treasure’ Smith retires from Beeson prof role

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

While Robert Smith Jr. has retired from his position as professor of Christian preaching and Charles T. Carter Baptist Chair of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School, he promises to still be around from time to time.

For the past 27 years, he not only taught preaching classes but also consistently mentored pastors and often spoke at churches and Alabama Baptist meetings as well as at events all over the nation.

Seeing God work

Smith said for him, preaching is a chance to “see what God can do with so little, how He can take the two small fish that I have and the five biscuits — which represent my sermon, my preparation, my content, my research — and how He’s able to take it and give more than I start with.” It has nothing to do with “me” but everything to do with God.

And for years, people have traveled miles and filled rooms to hear him preach.

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said Smith is “the living definition of a biblical preacher.”

“Every time I hear him deliver God’s Word, I have admired how the Lord has gifted him. He is one of a kind,” Lance said. “I would classify Dr. Robert Smith as a Baptist treasure. Alabama Baptists love and appreciate him immensely.”

He said Smith has had an “inestimable impact” on many students over the years and “therefore he has multiplied his influence across the country and beyond.”

Daven Watkins, pastor of FBC Pelham, is one of those students. Smith was Watkins’ preaching professor at Beeson, and in the 25 years since, Watkins has seen Smith grow from professor to

mentor to father in the ministry.

“I’ve always been told that we live life as debtors,” Watkins said. “We are indebted to those who have gone before us, and we’re indebted to those who have poured into us. I am

truly indebted to Dr. Robert Smith Jr.”

Not only is Smith a “tremendous preacher,” he is also a “gifted teacher of preaching,” Watkins said.

“His classes were systematically personal,” he said. “They were systematical in the sense that he had a process of going from text to sermon. And his approach was personal in that he is able to see with

uncanny accuracy the individual gifting of each student and pull the most out of each individual.”

Smith said he never wanted to make clones of himself, but he did value the “privilege of pouring into their lives” and preparing them to go all over the state, nation and world.

Reginald Calvert, pastor of New Jerusalem Missionary Baptist Church in Bessemer, said his life is different because of Smith’s impact.

He volunteered to drive Smith to his speaking engagements for about six years, and the car became a classroom for a young pastor.

“I watched Dr. Smith preach in ... ethnic settings, white, black, blended or mixed congregations,” Calvert said. “I learned through him modeling how to try to craft a sermon to reach people where they are.”

Calvert said Smith is the one who taught him how to preach an expository sermon but the ongoing conversations with his “father in ministry” also shaped him as a preacher.



Photo by Kaye Jones
Robert Smith Jr.’s wife, Wanda, joins in the April 29–30 events honoring Smith.



Photo by Kaye Jones

Part of the recent celebration events for Robert Smith Jr. (center) included panel discussions and presentations from some who have benefited from his mentorship such as pastors (l to r) Reginald Calvert, Daven Watkins, Tyshawn Gardner and Nic Seaborn.

The Alabama Baptist

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

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The crossword puzzle
can be found on page 19.

Rashional Thoughts

By Jennifer Davis Rash
President and Editor-in-Chief

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 @RashionalThts

The powerful impact of simply investing in others

The number of people available to share about the role Robert Smith Jr. has had on their lives could fill up this entire edition of The Alabama Baptist and likely several more editions.

You'll find a few of those noted on page 2 and even more in the video archive from Smith's recent retirement celebration posted on Beeson's YouTube channel.

We in Alabama Baptist life have known and loved Doc, as many call him, for nearly 30 years, and it was Beeson's founding dean Timothy George who recruited him away from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1997.

Well, actually it was the Holy Spirit along with Smith's wife, Wanda, who ultimately helped him make the decision to become Beeson's longtime preaching professor.

Found his burning bush

Initially, Smith wasn't interested in taking the role, he explains in an article by Neal Embry and Evan Musgraves at samford.edu/beeson-divinity/news. "I didn't want to be 500 miles away from (my) home, and I didn't want to leave my students at Southern Seminary."

Wanda sensed the Lord might be up to something, however, and insisted he at least meet with the search committee, so he went to "see if a bush was burning and if a voice was going to speak from the bush," Smith said.

As it so happened, Wanda was right. He found the bush and now can't imagine his life without Beeson and the relationships he has made through the years, including with current dean Doug Sweeney.

Flying back and forth between Birmingham and his home in Cincinnati, Ohio, every week during the school semesters has become a simple routine commute for these past 27 years.

Smith, who accepted the call to preach at 17 after years serving as a junior deacon, has been in ministry for nearly 58 years.

Reginald Calvert, pastor of New Jerusalem Baptist Church in Bessemer, describes Smith's preaching as "Christological; Christ is our redeemer, and there is a redemptive hermeneutic in all of his messages. He believes every sermon should point to Jesus Christ.

"The impact he has made is one of absolute commitment to preparation and presentation of that core

message," Calvert shared with Grace Thornton for The Alabama Baptist's recent article on Smith.

Smith never wearies of investing in the lives of those he encounters. He pours into us, prays for us, asks about our families, remembers our situations and allows us to be part of his support system too.

In fact, his willingness to be transparent, vulnerable and real with his own life — especially the painful parts — made a significant

impact on me. He has taught, and continues to teach me, how much we truly do need each other.

Dr. Smith also helped guide me as a young seminary student through a deeper understanding of searching our hearts for those hidden areas that need exposure.

Each time I inspect the icky crevices of my heart and shine the light to burn off the dark spots, I remember those conversations with Dr. Smith and am grateful.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist
Jennifer Rash (left) participates in Beeson Divinity School's December 2022 consecration service along with numerous Beeson faculty and staff members including (l to r) Robert Smith Jr., David Parks, Ronald Sterling and Doug Webster.

Your Voice



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

Which version of the Bible do you prefer?

By Gary Fisher

South Roebuck Baptist Church

Did you know that the first complete English Bible was not the King James Bible? It was John Wycliffe's translation in the late 1300s, based on the Latin Vulgate. It was the main English Bible until William Tyndale's version appeared around 1525. Tyndale translated the Old Testament directly from the Hebrew language. While Tyndale was working on his English translation, church officials felt their monopoly on Bible learning was being jeopardized, so Tyndale had his Bible printed in Germany. As a result Tyndale was arrested and burned at the stake along with thousands of copies of his Bible.

Another English Bible was produced in 1560 at Geneva, Switzerland. The unique feature of this translation was it printed each individual verse as its own paragraph. It also was the first to include italicized words to indicate that the word was

added by the translators to make the sentence make sense in the current language.

In 1611 King James I of England commissioned a unique Bible. It was written in the common English language of the day. This Bible achieved remarkable success, maintaining its place as the preeminent English Bible for over 400 years. Starting around 1885, major revisions began to be made to the King James Bible. Such revisions have continued until the present so that today the English speaking public has more than 70 versions of the Bible to choose from.

Variety of translations

Three approaches to Bible translating can be observed. Some English versions aim at word-for-word accuracy — a literal translation. Such versions as the King James Bible, the New King James, the American Standard Version and the Revised Standard Version are based on word-

for-word translations. Other versions aim at "dynamic equivalency." That means they are translated phrase-by-phrase or thought-by-thought. These Bibles make for smoother reading and are good for reading large portions of Scripture. These versions include the New International Version, The Revised English and American Bible, and the Jewish Publication Society's Tanakh. The third approach involves paraphrases rather than word by word translation. These translators have rewritten and paraphrased entire sentences or verses often making two or three sentences out of a short phrase or sentence in other versions. The Living Bible and Today's English Version (also known as Good News for Modern Man) are the most famous paraphrases.

The Bible is consistently the world's best-selling book. Since 1815, billions of Bibles have been printed in the English language.

In addition, portions of the Bible have been translated into more than 2,000 of the world's 6,000 known languages.

Since it is the Bible that contains the self-revelation of God, it is imperative that we not only own a copy; it is essential that we read it thoroughly. With all the choices there are, surely you can find one that you will consistently read and understand. Personally I have made a commitment to read the Bible through each year from a different translation each time. It offers keen insight and deeper knowledge of the One who remains the central Character in the Book.

So dust off that copy lying around your house and find out what God would show you about Himself!

Young people hear a lot of "do's and don'ts." They don't need your sermons [until you first build a rapport]; instead, they need a listening ear, a godly influence, love and a prayer warrior.

Rob Jackson, director of the office of evangelism and church revitalization at the State Board of Missions

When in doubt, report. If the child is not in danger, I recommend the parents be notified when a report has been made. Reporters have civil and criminal protections and can't be sued in good faith.

Kimberlee Norris
attorney and
co-founder of MinistrySafe

There are times when there is an eruption of praise in my life and your life. When you stop and consider who Jesus is and what He's done in your life, you just can't help but praise the Lord.

Daven Watkins, pastor
First Baptist Church Pelham

God has promised to supply all our needs.

What we don't have now, we don't need now.

The late **Elisabeth Elliot**
missionary, author, speaker

When to leave your ministry role

By Jeff Iorg

President, SBC Executive Committee

The key issue in determining whether you should leave a ministry role is answering why you were placed there in the first place. God called us and placed us for character development and mission accomplishment.

Reasons to leave:

▶ When the character-shaping work by God for you is complete in the current context.

▶ You sense your particular contribution to fulfilling God's mission there has concluded.

Reasons not to leave:

- ▶ When the work is hard
- ▶ You are discouraged
- ▶ People around you are in conflict
- ▶ Only for money, promotion.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Excerpt from the 4-15 Lead On Podcast.

“The thing to do right now is to prepare as best you can ... so you are ready.”

JASON A. DAVIS

Author of the newly released “Dad’s Notes”

The Saturday was normal just like any other. However, it was messy from stormy weather and heavy rains. I was visiting with family back in Alabama and was standing outside by the door to my mother’s home awaiting entrance, when my eyes glimpsed tall yellow flowers in the middle of a watery yard. I had never noticed such flowers in my mother’s lawn prior to this day. Yet amid a soggy yard, there they stood tall and lovely in the core of a wet and dreary day.

As I continued glaring at the beautiful flowers, a great truth tugged at my heart. If we will just take the time to notice, God brings beauty out of seemingly messy places. While we may find ourselves focusing on what appears to be a scrappy and hopeless situation, God is opening a flower bud of miracles and blessings, ordained before the beginning of time.

O’Shea Lowery

Entrusted Hope Ministries

“God said to tell it!” **Micah** told his dad Kevin Singerman, an International Mission Board missionary, after asking the Lord if he should share a Bible story with village children in Uganda. One of those kids ended up following Christ as his Savior.

“Jesus really has one main job for us to do ... make disciples,” said **Rondie Wilks**, who 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. “Disciple-making is our supreme purpose ... [and it] is a simple process to follow.”

“There’s no greater sound than hearing worshippers singing praises to God,” said Christian singer **Matt Maher**. “When a song engages an entire room of people, it has the ability to pull everybody together in a way that nothing else does. That is my favorite

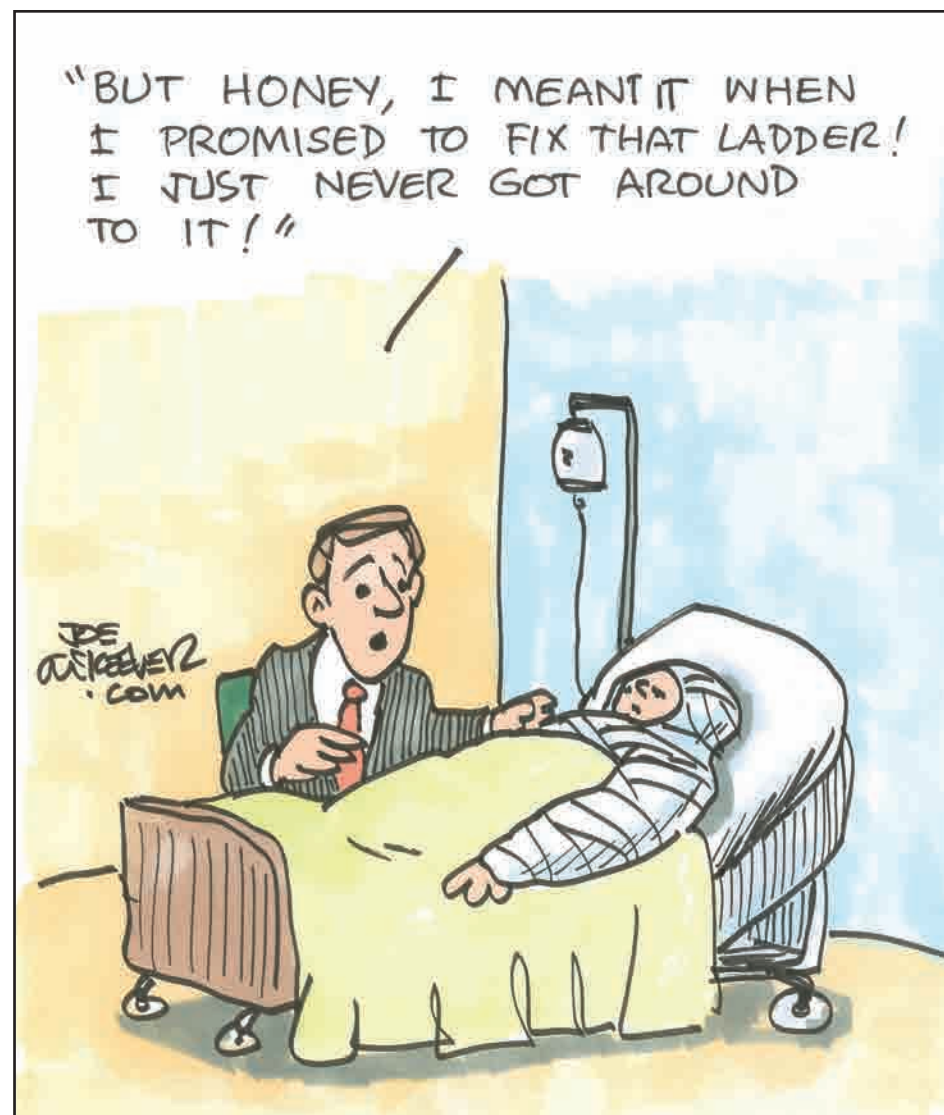
thing to experience, because God is in the midst of it all. My prayer is that these songs will be used to connect people to the message of the gospel.”

“When I found out they hadn’t had a director of missions since 2011, it just really burdened me,” said **Danny Courson** of St. Clair Baptist Association, on how he is partnering with a Baptist association in Alaska to help encourage pastors in their ministries. “I had a burden for those pastors ... they need someone to talk to, to confide in, to share prayer requests with.”

“Remaining socially engaged is important for both mental health and

life satisfaction. Sitting alone at home is a health-compromising habit, but a habit that we can all break with a little effort,” says University of Alabama at Birmingham biology professor **Steven N. Austad**, who studies healthy aging.

“I am never going back to my old life,” **Hannah** recently shared with FBC Jonesboro, Arkansas, in a video. “I will ... tell everyone that I am redeemed, a child of God. ... God revealed Himself to me through the love and kindness of (staff member) Pastor Richie and (his wife) Melissa,” she said. “They did not look at my appearance. They accepted me as their own and introduced me to Jesus Christ.”



Life, death and life after death

By **Bill King**

Veteran pastor

The older we get, the more we realize we are not going to live forever — at least not in this world.

The truth of that reality has not become realized reality to many young people. That was true of us older folks too when we were young. We just can’t remember that far back!

My first experience of someone I knew dying was my Grandma King. As far back as I can remember, she was sick and in bed. She had cancer.

We went to visit her quite often. She always had candy for me and sometimes a small toy. I was 5 years old the last time we went to visit her. In her last years, she lived with my Aunt Lula. Her bed was usually in the living room, but this time something was different.

She was still in the living room but asleep in a funny looking box. There were flowers all over the place. My uncles, aunts and cousins were there and a bunch of other people that I didn’t know. I don’t remember too much else about it, but Mama told me we wouldn’t be seeing Grandma King anymore. She said she had gone to live with Jesus.

Death rate is 100%

Fast forward many years and I now have more family in heaven than I do on earth. The most devastating death came when I was 15 years old when my dad suddenly died.

To my knowledge, everyone who has ever lived, with the exception of Enoch and Elijah, has died. Even Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, died.

Although He had done nothing wrong, He was executed like a criminal. The difference is that He didn’t stay dead.

Three days after Jesus died, and was even buried, He was alive again. We worship a risen Lord and can rejoice in that.

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3 stories you should know



Photo by Doug Rogers

More than 650 people filled the sanctuary and a large overflow room to attend the Revive Senior Adult Evangelism Conference at Glynwood Baptist Church in Prattville on May 6. The event included a mini-concert by GRAMMY and DOVE award-winning Christian recording artist Guy Penrod (pictured) and a message from retired evangelism director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions Sammy Gilbreath. (TAB)

Clergy sex abuse bill signed into law in AL

The Alabama legislation making it illegal for clergy to engage in sexual behavior with anyone under 19 years old was signed into law May 6. Violations will be considered a Class B felony, which could result in two to 20 years of imprisonment.

Representative Leigh Hulsey sponsored House Bill 125, which mirrors the protections of another Alabama bill that prohibits the same for public and private school teachers. Senator Roger Smitherman sponsored the Senate version.

"It's a shame that it has come to this point of evil but sadly it has," Greg Davis of Alabama Citizens Action Program said. "This sends a serious warning to any pastor or youth or children's minister that would groom a young person under their authority in church settings." (TAB)

Severe weather pummels South; DR teams ready

Severe weather — including tornadoes, torrential rain and flash flooding — has impacted parts of the South in recent days.

At least three deaths caused by storms on May 8 had been reported in the region by press time. Southern Baptist volunteer teams were assessing the damage after thousands were left without power in states including Alabama, Tennessee, North Carolina and Georgia. "It's hard to figure out where to start because the damage is so massive," said Wes Jones, disaster relief specialist for the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board. Disaster Relief teams were also busy helping residents impacted by storms in Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Texas, according to Coy Webb of Send Relief. (TAB, Baptist and Reflector)

Persecuted church

Pastor and his brother sustain severe injuries from attack in northern India

AMRITSAR DISTRICT, India — A brutal attack on a pastor and his brother in Punjab, India, has brought attention to growing religious violence. Pastor Gurjeet Singh and his younger brother Gurdeep Singh allegedly were attacked by four Nihang Sikhs, members of a traditional Sikh warrior order, during an April 18 church service in Sultanwind village, Amritsar District.

Eyewitness Daljit Kaur, the pastor's wife, reported the assailants, armed with swords and knives, targeted the brothers, using abusive language and accusing them of converting villagers. Despite earlier threats, the pastor continued to hold church services. Both brothers sustained severe cuts and were treated at Christian Medical College & Hospital in Ludhiana after other hospi-

tals refused due to the severity of their injuries.

India's ranking on the Open Doors' World Watch List has deteriorated under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, with increasing violence against non-Hindus. Local church leaders are disturbed by the attack and are calling for a fair police investigation. If justice is not served, protests are expected to demand accountability and action.

Three Christians detained, tortured in Sudan

EL DAEIN, Sudan — Conflict in Sudan continues to escalate in the year since three Sudanese Christians were detained, tortured and released after being found carrying a Bible.

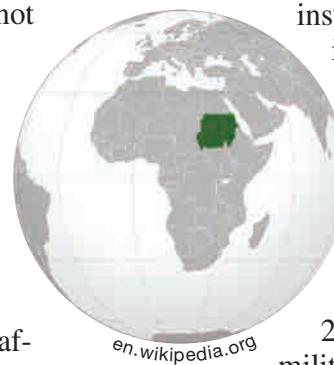
The Christians were discovered by Sudan Armed Forces soldiers at a checkpoint in El

Daein, East Darfur state, in early 2023 after one of them, Hamza Haroon Ahmed, was found carrying a Bible. The three men, who had returned from South Sudan to move their families away from ongoing warfare, faced brutal interrogation, resulting in Ahmed's broken hand and repeated insults and beatings. They were released

in March last year, but Sudan's conflict between the SAF and the Rapid Support Forces has only escalated, leading to widespread violence and displacement of 8 million people.

The country's previous religious freedom advances following the fall of dictator Omar al-Bashir in 2019 were undone by an October 2021 military coup.

Sudan ranks No. 8 on Open Doors' 2024 World Watch List for Christian persecution.



REACHING ONE LIFE AT A TIME

Montgomery pastor catches vision for revitalization, encourages perspective shift

By Blair Moore
The Alabama Baptist

The conditions were far from ideal when Russell Zwerner became pastor of Capitol Heights Baptist Church, Montgomery. He first stepped into the pulpit of this struggling congregation on March 23, 2020 — “COVID Sunday.”

Prior to taking the pastoral role Zwerner had been teaching seminary classes, holding multiple degrees including a master of divinity from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and a doctor of ministry. One day he came home from teaching and told his wife he sensed God was calling him back to the local church — the epicenter of ministry.

Rather than planting a church or stepping into one that already had a strong foundation, Zwerner was willing and ready to serve a church that needed God to breathe new life into it — and God opened the door to Capitol Heights.

The church had been dwindling for years.

Older congregation

“Unfortunately, the congregation has gotten older with time and the previous pastor had performed over 300 funerals before he quit counting,” noted Renée Dodson, a church member of more than 25 years. “We weren’t getting any new members and the young families all moved away for better school choices.”

Zwerner brought a vision for the revitalization of Capitol Heights and the city of Montgomery — one life at a time by the power of the gospel. He said one way to know a church



Photo courtesy of Russell Zwerner
Russell Zwerner is pictured with his wife, Anne, and their children (from left) Carson, Ryan and Bonnie. Zwerner became pastor of Capitol Heights Baptist Church in Montgomery on March 23, 2020 — “COVID Sunday.”

is dying is that it no longer looks like the community it is in. From the start, Zwerner encouraged a drastic perspective shift toward local outreach, and those who stayed at the church aligned with the vision.

“Pastor Zwerner has gotten everyone fired up and taught us to do ministry in a whole new way,” said Julie Burns, Zwerner’s administrative assistant.

“He has been an answer to prayers,” Dodson added. “He is young, brilliant, loving and has a heart for the community around CHBC.”

As a church, the people of Capitol Heights are reintroducing themselves to the community and asking God to move in peoples’ lives.

“We are meeting people where they are and showing them that we care about them,” Zwerner said.

On Wednesday nights members participate in a program they call, “Pray, Stay, Go.” Attendees divide into three groups and one goes on prayer-walks. Another stays in the church building and writes encouraging cards to visitors or members who haven’t attended in awhile. The third group hits the streets and goes door to door in the neighborhood to connect with the community. They ask questions like, “What do you think our community needs most right now?” to show those in the area they genuinely care.

Tutoring program

They also started an after-school tutoring program to meet an immediate need.

Zwerner said the strategy for having people encounter Jesus as Lord comes from John 17.

“We’re literally saying to God, ‘We believe You can transform this city — and You want to for Your glory.’” Zwerner said. “‘So use us to proclaim the never-changing truth of God to give hope to the ever-changing world.’”

Seeing God at work

“‘And as we see and transform these lives, people will come in and encounter You as Lord, be equipped to go and do the work of ministry, encourage others through service and engage a lost and dying world so that You can get all the glory.’”

Revitalizing a church doesn’t happen overnight, and the people of Capitol Heights are seeing God at work throughout the process. The congregation remains small, but there have been significant changes over the past few years.

“If you ask anybody in our church, they are different than they were four years ago,” Burns said. “They have a better understanding of how to read their Bible and what it means to be a Christian.”

Members share a passion for reaching the community and are united in their love for the lost.

“During my 19 years at CHBC many members have left, but today we have a small core group of motivated, faithful members worshipping differently,” noted Deacon Julian Strahan. “There is work ahead, and we want to make a difference in the church and our community.”

Zwerner and the congregation are committed to being the hands and feet of Jesus in Capitol Heights.

Zwerner said the prayer of the church body is, “Jesus, we are staying with it. We want to be the answer to Your prayers — so use us.”

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

STANLEY "STAN" WAYNE HENSON

Stanley "Stan" Wayne Henson, 69, of Northport, died April 20.

Henson served as a worship pastor for more than 50 years, nearly 30 of those at Mount Olive Baptist Church, Coker. He also served at First Baptist Church Jasper and churches in Mississippi and Arkansas.

He was a graduate of William Carey University, Hattiesburg, Mississippi; and New Orleans Seminary. He also completed additional studies at Denver College at the University of Denver, Colorado.

Henson is survived by his wife, Brenda; three children; six grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren.



HENSON

GERALDINE RAGAN

Geraldine Ragan, a Christian ventriloquist, died April 23.

Ragan, who lived in Sterrett, became a Christian as a teenager at youth camp.

She and her companion, Ricky, traveled the world spreading Christ's Word and ministering to people from all walks of life and at a variety of events.

Ragan was well known, especially in southern gospel music circles, and appeared with the Gaithers as well as at the National Quartet Convention.

She was a member of North Shelby Baptist Church, Birmingham, and was preceded in death by her husband, David.



GERALDINE & RICKY

BIBB ASSOCIATION

► **Braehead Lucile Baptist Church, West Blocton**, will host gospel music's The Chuck Wagon Gang, June 1, 6 p.m. For more information, contact Ed Perry at 205-516-5134.

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► **Jeff Weathers** is the new pastor of **Valley Creek Baptist Church, Hueytown**. He became a Christian, was baptized, met his wife and married her at Valley Creek. Weathers studied at the University of Montevallo; William Carey University,



vcbchurch.com

Hattiesburg, Mississippi; and Southeastern Bible College, Birmingham (now Carolina University, Winston-Salem, North Carolina). He also plans to attend New Orleans Seminary soon. Weathers has served churches in a variety of ministry areas and most recently as discipleship pastor of North Highlands Baptist Church, Hueytown. He and his wife, Jennifer, have four children.

COFFEE ASSOCIATION

► **Michael Davis** is the new pastor of **Park Avenue Baptist Church, Enterprise**. He holds a bachelor of arts in biblical studies and church music from William Carey University, Hattiesburg, Mississippi; a master of arts in religion from Memphis Theological Seminary; a doctorate of educational ministry from New Orleans Seminary; and a doctorate of education from Southern Seminary.



DAVIS

Davis is an assistant professor at Regent University online, and previously served as associate pastor of First Baptist Church Dawes, Mobile; Southside Baptist Church, Dothan; Mount Zion Baptist Church, Huntsville; Valley View Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa; and Ozark Baptist Church. He also served churches in Louisiana, Georgia and Tennessee. Davis was ordained at 14 years old, and retired from full-time ministry after 50 years. He and his wife, DeNiece, have one daughter.

► **Dave Mason** is the new pastor of the **Church on Boll Weevil Circle, Enterprise**. Mason was licensed into ministry by Hillcrest Baptist Church, Enterprise, and ordained by Lee Street Baptist Church, Enterprise, while he was youth pastor. Mason served as youth pastor of Salem Baptist Church, now The Grace Place, Enterprise, and pastor of several United Methodist churches. He retired after 35 years with the U.S. Civil Service and now works for the Enterprise Police Department as a crossing guard. He and his wife, Melody, have five children and seven grandchildren.



Photo courtesy of William Pless

and worked as a business service specialist at Florida State University; co-managed a Lifeway bookstore in Dothan; and worked various other business jobs. He also previously served as the fatherhood coordinator at Wiregrass Emergency

Pregnancy Services, Enterprise. Pless and his wife, Bonnie, have two sons.



QUIMBY

COLBERT-LAUDERDALE ASSOCIATION

► **David Quimby** is the new camp director of **Earle Trent Assembly, Florence**. Quimby and his wife, Sara, have four children and are active members of Woodmont Baptist Church, Florence. Timmy Ray is associational missions strategist.

COOSA RIVER ASSOCIATION

► **John Whetstone** retired as senior adult minister of **Eastaboga Baptist Church** after 54 years of ministry (18 at Eastaboga). Whetstone holds an associate degree of divinity and pastoral ministry from New Orleans Seminary and a bachelor of science degree in ministry from Shorter College (now Shorter University), Rome, Georgia. He began his ministry as a volunteer youth leader at Chulafinnee Baptist Church, Heflin, where he was licensed and ordained. He then served as pastor of Good Hope Delta Baptist Church, Delta; Mount Olive Baptist Church, Talladega; Macedonia Baptist Church, Delta; Pleasant View Baptist Church and Harmony Baptist Church, both in Carrollton, Georgia; and Bemiston Baptist Church, Talladega. Whetstone also previously served as moderator for Coosa River Baptist Association and led missions trips to New York, Alaska and Brazil. Whetstone's wife of many years, Alice Faye, is deceased. They have two children, five grandchildren and one great-granddaughter. He is married to Patricia, who has one child and two grandchildren. Whetstone is available to supply preach. Jeremy Tuiolosega is pastor.



WHETSTONE

DEKALB ASSOCIATION

► Gold City Quartet will bring back its two-time album of the year with a special "Pillars of Faith Live" at **Rainsville First Baptist Church**, May 24, 7 p.m. Special guests include Garry Jones, former pianist and producer for Gold City, and Steve Lacey, former lead and baritone for the group. Tickets are available at www.pillarslive.com or call 256-638-3141. David Cofield is pastor.



WALLS

ELMORE ASSOCIATION

► **Jamey Walls** is the new pastor of **Good Hope Baptist Church, Eclectic**. Walls holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from Mississippi College and studied at New Orleans Seminary. He previously served as youth minister of Concord Baptist Church, Bessemer,

NEWS

and Mineral Springs Baptist Church, Clanton; and youth and children's minister of Wedowee First Baptist Church. Walls and his wife, Shelley, have two children.

ESCAMBIA ASSOCIATION

► **Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, Atmore**, will host a gospel singing May 25, 2–5 p.m. Featured musicians include The Chestangs, Not Forsaken (formerly Hillspring Drive) and The McPherson Family Band. Larry Beauchamp is pastor.

FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION

► **Benjamin Marazzi** is the new ministry assistant of **Friendship Baptist Association**. He holds a bachelor of arts degree in political science from Jacksonville State University and is currently pursuing a master of divinity degree from New Orleans Seminary. Marazzi previously served as the minister in residence at Union Hill Baptist Church, Oneonta. Dale Wood is associational mission strategist for Friendship.



MARAZZI

JUDSON ASSOCIATION

► **Bill Bond** is the new pastor of **Haleburg Baptist Church, Columbia**. Bond holds bachelor's and master's degrees in pastoral ministry from Bethany Divinity College and Seminary, Dothan. He previously served as the student minister at Haleburg. Bond and his wife, Melinda, have two children and one grandchild.



Photo courtesy of Bill Bond

MADISON ASSOCIATION

► **Mark Willard** is the new worship pastor of **Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville**. Willard holds a bachelor's degree in music, theory and composition from Samford University and a master's degree in worship leadership and theology from the University of Mobile. Willard, a third generation worship pastor, previously served as worship pastor of Sherwood Baptist Church, Albany, Georgia, and Englewood Baptist Church, Jackson, Tennessee. He was involved in scoring, recording and producing five films — “Flywheel,” “Facing the Giants,” “Fireproof,” “Courageous” and “New Life” — and nearly 20 albums, including Dove-nominated “Jesus, Hope of the World,” published by Lifeway Worship. Willard and his wife, Katy, have four children. Darryl Craft is pastor.



Photo courtesy of Mark Willard



GODWIN

GENEVA ASSOCIATION

► **Kate Godwin** is the new church secretary of **Maple Avenue Baptist Church, Geneva**. Ricky Hall is pastor.

SHELBY ASSOCIATION

► **Wesley Criswell** is the new pastor of **Bethel Baptist Church, Columbiana**. He moves into the position from his role as young adult pastor at Bethel. Criswell earned a certificate of pastoral ministry from the Ministry Training Institute at Samford University and is currently pursuing a bachelor of arts degree in biblical studies from Leavell College, New Orleans Seminary. He previously served as youth pastor at Underwood Baptist Church, Montevallo, and Fellowship of Faith Community Church, Columbiana. Criswell owns and operates Higher Call Heating and Air Conditioning. He and his wife, Kristy, have five children.

► **John Roland** is the new pastor of **Beulah Baptist Church, Sterrett**. Roland holds a bachelor of science degree in public administration from Samford University; a master of divinity degree from Southwestern Seminary; and a master of business administration degree from Kennesaw State University, Georgia. He previously worked as an executive in advancement, a senior pastor and a college instructor. He currently serves as the advancement officer for Samford's Howard College of Arts and Sciences. Roland and his wife, Amy, have three children.



Photo courtesy of John Roland

SOUTHEAST ALABAMA ASSOCIATION

► **Tommy Green**, pastor of **Bay Springs Baptist Church, Dothan**, will celebrate 50 years of ministry May 26. Green holds a bachelor of biblical studies degree from what is now the Baptist University of Florida in Graceville. He has served churches in Alabama, Georgia and Florida during his years in the ministry.

GREEN

“My number one goal in my life is to honor God,” Green said, “I’m just so blessed that He called me.”

He and his wife, Margaret, have three daughters and five grandchildren.

TUSKEGEE LEE ASSOCIATION

► **Chuck Adams** celebrated 20 years as associate pastor of youth and education at **Providence Baptist Church, Opelika**. He and his wife, Karesa, have two daughters and three grandchildren. Rusty Sowell is pastor.



ADAMS

WALKER ASSOCIATION

► **Walker Baptist Association** hosted a county-wide youth event March 9 with over 200 in attendance and 25 professions of faith. David Miller is director of missions.

WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION

► The annual homecoming gathering for the **Chapel Hill Baptist Church Cemetery** in Millry will take place at the church May 19 with singing at 10:30 a.m., the morning worship service at 11, a business meeting at 11:45 and lunch at noon. The Tibbie Praise Band will be singing, and Chapel Hill's pastor Scott Giles will preach.

Selma relief effort helps purchase DR equipment

While an EF2 tornado swept over their neighborhood in Selma, Lee Tate and his wife huddled in a closet.

“[The tornado] was pulling air out over our feet,” Tate recalled, just over a year later. After the storm, he walked outside to survey the damage.

“There wasn’t a stick in our yard, but you didn’t have to walk very far before there were trees in everybody else’s,” said Tate, who is the associational mission strategist for West Central Baptist Association and a disaster relief chaplain.

Although the January 2023 twister allegedly never touched the ground, Tate estimated it

came as close as 800 feet from their house.

Even though he’d lived in Selma almost all his life, some locations were unrecognizable due to destroyed landmarks. Disaster Relief volunteers sprang into action.

Donations started coming in, and the money was put in the association’s DR fund. The dream was to one day buy a new Bobcat to aid in the work, Tate said.

“Before we knew it, we had enough money to write a check for a brand-new Bobcat and the tilt trailer that it rides.”

Thanks to the generosity of others, the association has been able to multiply its DR work with new equipment. (Lizzy Haseltine)



Photo courtesy of Lee Tate

‘Just one of those God things’

Congregation in Montgomery becomes first known Mixtec Baptist church

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Every Sunday night, Lisa Rose meets with a small church. They’re precious to God and precious to her, but she said there’s something else about them that’s significant too — and she doesn’t think they even know it.

“I don’t think they realize in the big picture of eternity how historically important they are,” she said.

Mixtec Church, which meets in a building provided by Highland Gar-

dens Baptist Church in Montgomery, joined Montgomery Baptist Association in October 2023.

‘Historic moment’

Rose said to her knowledge, there’s no other official Mixtec Baptist church in the world. It’s a “historical moment” — and the answer to a lot of prayers.

Back in 2007 when Rose first learned about the Mixtec, she said the International Mission Board had identified them as the most unengaged unreached people group in all of the Americas.

At the time, she was serving as MBA’s director of compassion ministries, and when Mixtec people began arriving at area ministries, she and others thought they were Spanish speakers. But they weren’t.

The Mixtec people are indigenous to Mexico, but they have their own language. Roughly 800,000 Mixtec live in Mexico, with another 200,000 or so living in the U.S., mostly in California.

“We found out that what they spoke was called Mixteco,” Rose said. “I started doing a lot of research.”

And she and others started building relationships with the Mixtec. At the beginning, they only knew of one Mixtec believer — a young woman who had been introduced to Jesus while in foster care.

“But even though she had come to faith, she had not yet experienced Christianity in her own culture,” Rose said.

Long, hard work

Mixtec culture is deeply tied to ancestor worship and devotion to the saints, and it’s a very difficult culture to share the gospel in, Rose



Photo by Andy Ellis

Mixtec Church celebrates the ministry of Lisa Rose (back row, sixth from left) during their weekly gathering March 10. Rose is retiring from planting work March 15.



Photo by Andy Ellis

A child at Mixtec Church gives a card to Lisa Rose (left), who has served in ministry to the Mixtec people since 2007. Rose's last night at the church was March 10. She retired March 15 from her planting role with Mixtec Church.

said. "The work has been long and hard. But we've come a long way."

Over time, God opened doors for her and others to start Bible studies with some of the Mixtec families they'd befriended. That led to the first few believers, which led to the start of the church in 2017.

"I've known many of the adult believers since they were in elementary school and seen them grow up, become Christians and mature in their faith and in beginning leadership skills," Rose said. "They're learning to share their faith and learning not to fear their culture."

Amazing things

Rose said she and others have also seen God do other amazing things to draw the Mixtec people to Himself.

In late 2018, she and John Halbrooks, a member of First Baptist Church Montgomery who serves as pastor of Mixtec Church, went to Choctaw Baptist Association to share with them about the Mixtec people. Terry Long, the association's director of missions, had a heart for the people group but hadn't met any Mixtec yet.

Or at least that's what he thought — he took Rose and Halbrook out to lunch that day to introduce them to a man at a Mexican restaurant whom he had led to faith months ago, and as they talked, they found out he was Mixtec.

"It was just one of those God things," Rose said. "Terry's face was incredible when he realized

that he had led a Mixtec man to the Lord without knowing it."

The following year, Rose and Halbrooks saw another miracle — a way to help reach the Mixtec in Mexico in one particularly hard-to-reach area. Some IMB missionaries there had tried to make connections in the community and found the door slammed shut — that is, until some of the Montgomery Mixtec reached out to their family members there and asked if their friends from the U.S. could come visit.

They said yes. And over meals and shared stories, the doors were opened. Four years after that visit, IMB missionaries saw the first person in that area come to faith in Jesus.

Sharing Jesus

"By the time he got baptized, he had shared the gospel with several members of his family, and they are actually meeting as a Bible study with a meal on Sunday nights, very similar to what we do here in Montgomery," Rose said.

At the same time, God was at

work in another city in Mexico among the Mixtec. In summer 2022, two student missionaries from Alabama got to see the first baptisms there. A few months later, 15 more new believers were baptized all at one time.

More were baptized there as recently as January.

"The Mixtec are still unreached, but it's an engaged people group now," Rose said.

Rose retires

In addition to the church in Montgomery and the IMB's work in Mexico, believers are sharing with the Mixtec in other places in the United States, like Bakersfield, California and Richmond, Virginia.

And in Montgomery, Rose felt like it was time for her to pass the baton to the growing group of Mixtec believers. She retired March 15 from her planting role with Mixtec Church.

"I feel very at peace with the timing," she said. "I think sometimes we need to step back in order for our younger believers to

step up. I have begun to see that already over the past few months, and so I'm very, very excited about what the future holds for them."

In recent months, the church has been learning to "story" the Bible so that they can share the gospel in a natural way.

"Since then, our Mixtec believers have become more confident in their faith and are starting to take leadership," Rose said.

For now, Halbrooks will continue leading the group, but both he and Rose pray that it won't be long before God raises up a Mixtec pastor, or a Spanish-speaking pastor with a heart for the Mixtec.

Rose thought about that as she directed the volunteers who teach children's Sunday School at Mixtec Church. In all churches where kids and teens are being discipled, volunteers are shaping the next

generation of leaders, and that's important, Rose said. But it hits a little different with this first-generation group of believers, and she encourages volunteers to remember that.

"A pastor might come from them one day," Rose said. "And maybe one day they'll go to Mexico and be missionaries to their own people."

Neal Hughes, MBA director of missions, said there's been so many full circle moments in this ministry. He said "we won't know until heaven if this is true," but he's heard it's possible that one of the reasons some Mixtec moved to Montgomery in the first place is because of a ministry Heritage Baptist Church had in Oaxaca, Mexico, in the 1980s as part of an MBA partnership there.

"We believe, and others do as well, and the Mixtecs in Montgomery have given testimony to this as well, that when the door came open for them to come down out of the mountains and migrate to America, there were three places where people had touched their lives — Bakersfield, California; Richmond, Virginia; and Montgomery, Alabama," Hughes said.

Blessing and privilege

Whether it happened exactly that way or not, he said he knows this — it's been a blessing and a privilege to be at ground zero of what God is doing among the Mixtec people.

"The genesis of this from the very beginning has been Lisa — she went from an acquaintance to deep love and passion for the Mixtec unreached people group," Hughes said. "It shaped and molded her ministry."

Several Montgomery churches have been involved in ministry to the Mixtec in their local area for years, and Hughes said he attributes a lot of that to Rose.

"She and John have worked well as a team, but Lisa has really been at the heart from the very beginning and has led to multiply leaders to help this ministry," he said. "She's played a vital role in the core development of these disciples of Christ."

Rose said for her, it's been a joy.

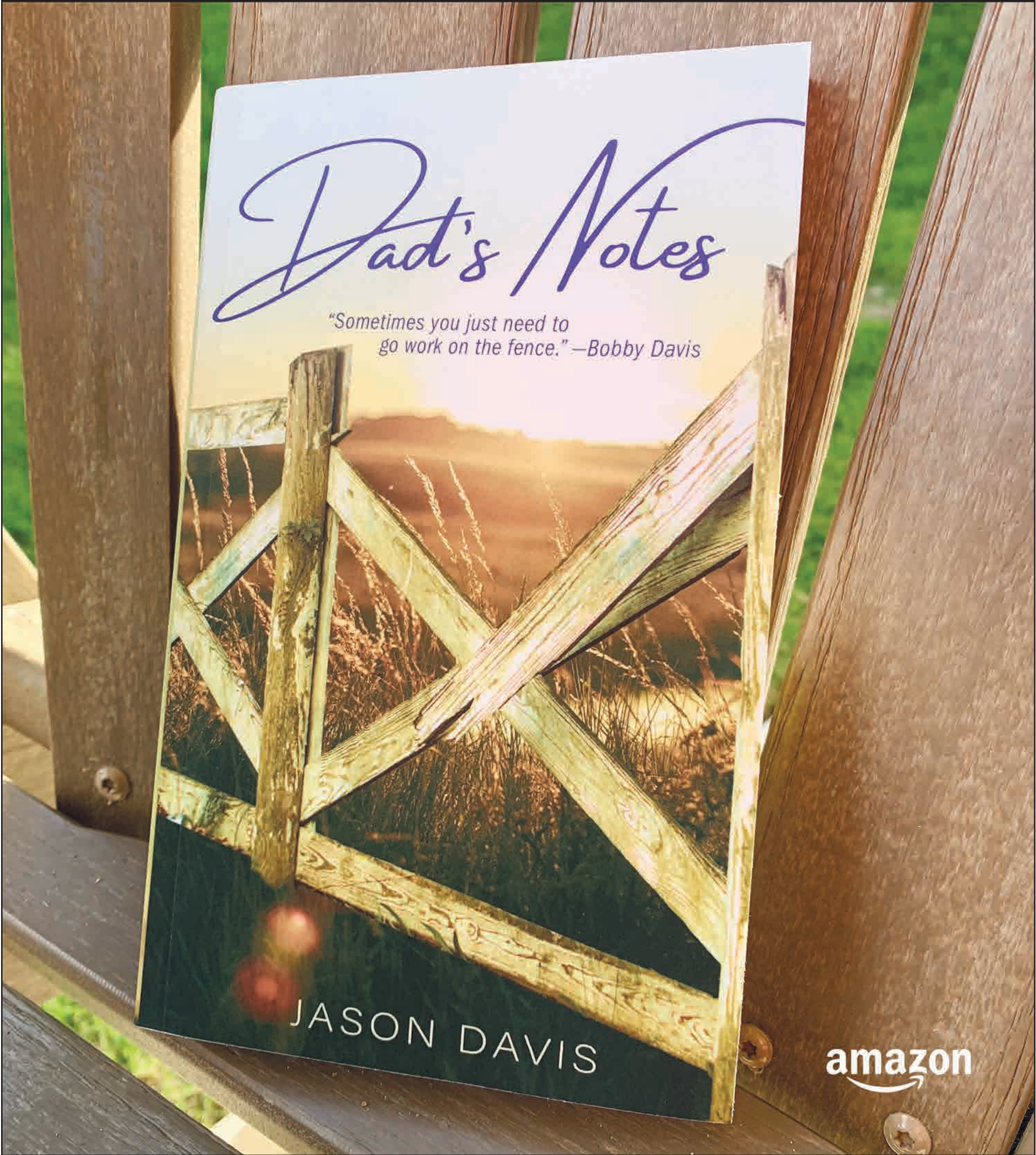
"I've gotten the privilege along with several others to be able to open up the door to the gospel both here and in Mexico," she said. "It makes my heart sing."



Photo by Andy Ellis

Lisa Rose pictured with two children from Mixtec Church.

FOR YOUR GRAD





UM photo

University of Mobile held its spring graduation ceremony May 4 on the Great Commission Lawn. New graduates participated in the UM tradition — touching the Great Commission Globe to signify being sent into the world to pursue God's calling for their lives.

FOLLOW GOD'S PURPOSE

UM Class of 2024 celebrates success; outgoing president delivers address

By Kathy Dean
University of Mobile

The University of Mobile Class of 2024 celebrated graduation May 4 on the Great Commission Lawn with fireworks, cheers from family and friends and a UM tradition — touching the Great Commission Globe to signify being sent into the world to pursue God's calling for their lives.

Many of the 300 members of the Class of 2024 graduated from high school during the pandemic and did not experience a traditional high school graduation ceremony. To make their UM graduation extra-special, each graduate received a brightly wrapped present to open at the ceremony's end. Each present — a University of Mobile Alumni picture frame — was wrapped by members of the 55+ life group at Cottage Hill Baptist Church as part of their "Love Where You Live" community service program.

Joe Espada honored

The doctor of humane letters was awarded to Joe Espada, manager of Major League Baseball's Houston

Astros and former UM Rams baseball standout. The presentation was announced via video, as the Astros were scheduled to host the Seattle Mariners later that afternoon at Minute Made Park in Houston, Texas.

Weaver Awards presented

The university presented its two top student awards, the William K. Weaver Jr. Excellence Award and the Annie Boyd Parker Weaver Excellence Award, to Randall Luke Killam of Semmes and Brinkley Madison Hearn of Mobile.

The commencement ceremony also marked Lonnie Burnett's last day as president of his alma mater, and he delivered the commencement address.

UM's 6th president, Charles W. Smith Jr., began his tenure on May 6.

Burnett spent 20 years of service

to the university as professor and administrator, including five years as president. Prior to joining UM, the 1979 graduate of then-Mobile College taught history at the high school level in Mobile County Public Schools for 25 years. He now serves as

vice president of Coastal Alabama Community College.

In his final address as UM president, Burnett urged graduates to dream big, love what they do and pursue God's purpose for their lives.

"I pray that you are persistent when the world says 'just give up.' I pray that you have passion when the world says 'just get by.' I pray you seek and follow God's purpose when the world says 'get in line,'" Burnett said.

The Class of 2024 includes the first 12 graduates of the university's new doctor of nurse anesthesia practice program, as well as the first associate degree in nursing graduates since that program was reinstated.



UM photo

UM presented its two top student awards, the William K. Weaver Jr. Excellence Award and the Annie Boyd Parker Weaver Excellence Award, to Randall Luke Killam of Semmes and Brinkley Madison Hearn of Mobile.



Screenshot

Outgoing UM president Lonnie Burnett (right) awards Major League Baseball's Houston Astros Manager Joe Espada the Doctor of Humane Letters a month earlier when he was on campus for his induction into the university's athletic Hall of Fame.



UM photo

Members of the 55+ life group at Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile wrap presents for the University of Mobile Class of 2024 as part of their "Love Where You Live" community service program.

‘To commemorate what God has done, is doing, will do’

Congregation of First Baptist Church Russellville celebrates historical marker

By María Camp
Franklin County Times

There’s a lot of history in Franklin County, including downtown Russellville, and now there’s one more historical marker pointing out that fact.

First Baptist Church Russellville, established in 1867, received its marker March 22.

The Alabama Historical Commission began its historical marker program in 1975 to assist Alabama historians and historic preservationists in educating the public about historically significant properties in the state.

FBC Russellville has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places since January 2019, and the process for acquiring the marker began in June 2021.

The historical commission requires accuracy of the proposed text for the marker. Information that can’t be verified by the commission isn’t included in the marker text.

Many resources, including the Encyclopedia of Alabama, The Ala-



A newly placed historical marker from the Alabama Historical Commission shares the history of FBC Russellville. Pictured are (l to r) Calvin Parmer, deacon and treasurer; pastor Chase Dowdy; and Susie Hovater Malone, who played a significant role in the process.

bama Review, The Alabama Baptist, The History of First Baptist Church 1867–1967, The History of Russellville Manuscript, Alabama Heritage Magazine, Alabama Department of Archives and History and Lambert

Ezell Durham Architecture, LLC, were consulted to confirm accuracy.

A list of these sources and photocopies of the materials were submitted along with the application to the commission.

Pastor Chase Dowdy expressed gratitude for the marker “to commemorate what God has done and what God is doing and what God will do.”

“[It’s] a great way to honor our history and still celebrate what God is doing in the life of our church here. And what He’s going to do in the years to come.”

More than 150 years old

Church member Susie Hovater Malone was instrumental in the process. “I’m a big history buff, and I just wanted us to have a memento to commemorate this milestone and bring recognition to our project to highlight the significance.

“The church will be 157 years old ... this year,” she explained. “We have been so blessed by God to have our church for this many decades.

“We also appreciate Shannon Wilson and his workers in getting the marker erected,” Malone added.

EDITOR’S NOTE — This story was reprinted with permission.

FBC Elba emphasizes service opportunities for all ages

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Kit Johnson said there’s no scriptural mandate on how old — or young — someone has to be to serve God.

He’s seen how harnessing the gifts of all ages can make a difference. He saw it clearly for the first time on an overseas missions trip.

“I’ve been on missions trips where it’s a family affair; it’s not just one individual who goes,” Johnson said. “When

it happens, what I see is a unique blessing, and not just to those who are being ministered to. The family that serves together matures in their faith.”

Strengthens everyone

So when he became pastor of FBC Elba in 2020 after serving as the church’s student pastor, he wanted to bring that idea into the core of the church, strengthening not just families but also the whole church family.

“This year, a huge push — not just by me but by popu-

lar demand, others were desiring to see the same thing — they wanted us to be seen as a missions-minded church,” Johnson said. “The goal is that every individual who calls FBC Elba their home can reflect on 2024 and see how God used them in whatever unique way that He did.”

That goes for their young members, but it also goes for their older ones, he said.

“What I’ve found is that members who are 70 and older start feeling that their time is over — they don’t

have the stamina to chaperone a youth trip or do construction work,” Johnson said. “But just because they’re no longer capable of serving in that capacity, that doesn’t mean there isn’t a new way that God can use them for His glory to further edify the church.”

In recent months, members of all ages have found a variety of ways to serve. Older members have driven people to the doctor or to go grocery shopping. They’ve also given people who are out of work an opportunity

to make money by helping out with lawn care and other tasks around their homes.

Finding their niche

Three men have stepped up to mentor fatherless boys, Johnson said, and others are teaching the youth how to serve in different ways around the church, such as running the sound.

“People are responding and submitting to what God was wanting them to do,” Johnson said.



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Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

John Bradford was an English reformer and martyr

John Bradford (1510–1555) was an English reformer, scholar, royal chaplain, itinerant preacher and martyr for his faith.

Bradford was born in Manchester in 1510 and was probably educated at Manchester Grammar School, where he excelled in Latin and arithmetic.

Little is known about Bradford until he was around 34 years old. After Sir John Harington employed him as King Henry VIII's financial administrator, Bradford was deputy paymaster of the English forces at the siege of Montreuil in France.

When King Henry VIII died in 1547, he was succeeded by his son Edward VI, a Protestant king. During this time, Bradford studied law in London.

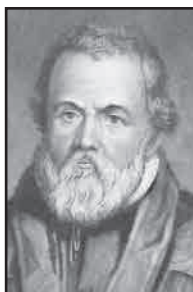
Conversion

Bradford experienced a life-changing conversion and became a Protestant. His life became one of daily repentance and deep prayer. He gave up his law studies to study theology at the University of Cambridge. In 1549, he received a master of arts and began a fellowship at Pembroke College at Cambridge.

In 1550, Bishop Nicholas Ridley ordained him as a deacon and gave him a license to preach. The next year Bradford became one of six chaplains to Edward VI. As an itinerant preacher, he covered Lan-

cashire and Cheshire in North West England.

Crowds thronged to hear him. In "Foxe's Christian Martyrs of the World," John Foxe writes, "He sharply reprov'd sin, sweetly preached Christ crucified, pithily spoke against heresies and errors and earnestly persuaded his people to live godly lives."



BRADFORD

After Edward VI's death, Mary I, later known as Bloody Mary by her Protestant opponents, became queen in July 1553. Within a month, Bradford was arrested for sedition and illegal preaching.

He was taken to the Tower of London. While there, he shared a cell with three great Reformers — Thomas Cranmer, Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley — who would all become martyrs.

Much of Bradford's time in prison was spent praying and studying, visiting and encouraging other prisoners and helping the sick. He was allowed to write letters and articles. Among his writings are "A Sermon Upon the Supper of the Lord," "A Supplication To Those in Authority" and "A Declaration Concerning Religion."

On June 30, 1555, 45-year-old John Bradford was taken to Newgate Prison to be burned at the stake the next day at nearby Smithfield. He and a 19-year-old man, John Leaf, were led to the stake and chained there on July 1.

While he could still speak, Bradford lifted up his hands and cried his last prayer: "O, England, England, repent thee of thy sins! Beware of idolatry. Beware of false anti-Christ. Take heed they do not deceive you."

Lass WORDS

BY KEN LASS
The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Jesus is 'where it's at'

It was taught in grade school and hammered home every time a book report, term paper or thesis was assigned. English teachers made it their cardinal rule.

For those of us who write professionally, it was an egregious error punishable by confiscation of our laptops. I'm talking about ending a sentence with a preposition. My fifth grade teacher, Miss Rosilia, would underline it in big red ink on my compositions, right next to her letter grade of "F."

In case you need a refresher course, a preposition is a small word that indicates a relationship between other words or phrases in the sentence. Examples include words such as "from," "about," "at," "of" and "with." Since childhood, we've been instructed that those words always belong in the middle of a sentence and never, ever at the end of one.

The problem is, we tend to write the way we talk. Our speech is loaded with violations: Where are you at? Where did this come from? That's what I'm thinking of. Here's what it's all about.

In fact, ending with a preposition has become so common that dictionary publisher Merriam-Webster, the self-appointed guardian of our lexicon, has raised up the white flag of surrender. They shocked the grammar world recently with a social media post stating that ending a sentence with a preposition is now okay.

Furthermore, they say there is

not — nor has there ever been — an actual rule against it. Everybody's doing it, so it has become acceptable in the same way new terms such as "selfie" and "staycation" became actual words because everybody was using them anyway.

Never changing

As a writer I find this comforting. As a Christian I'm not so sure. Aren't you glad the Bible doesn't bow to popular opinion and that God's rules don't change just because the culture deems it fashionable to disobey them? Surveys tell us more and more people are moving on from concepts such as Jesus, salvation, heaven, hell and prayer.

But that doesn't make them any less real. Hebrews 13:8 boldly declares, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever."

With Merriam-Webster's permission, I can fearlessly write that heaven is still where it's at. Hell is what I'm afraid of. Salvation is what it's all about. Jesus is the One I seek to be with. And sin is what I want to escape from.

Miss Rosilia must be rolling in her grave.

MEET THE AUTHOR

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

By Joanne Sloan

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

A sense of belonging

Through connection, intimacy of fellowship, churches can address loneliness epidemic

By Carolyn Tomlin
The Alabama Baptist

A well-known senator stated in a recent interview that loneliness is a public health crisis in America. If this is such a problem in our country, then it is also a problem in our churches.

Baptist pastors across the nation agree it is a problem.

'Front line of ministering'

"Loneliness is the human experience that drives many to live in isolation because they feel like no one understands what they are going through," said Randy Kellough, pastor of Woodland Baptist Church in Brownsville, Tennessee. "The Church is to be on the front line of ministering to those affected by it."

One of the basic functions of churches by design is fellowship — not just the provision of a meal but giving time and space to people to experience togetherness, "sharing life moments so that we can see we are not the only ones dealing with struggles," he noted.

Engaging the isolated

"Churches can actively minister by training members in this work of ministry (as described in) Ephesians 4:12 to engage those who are often isolated," he said. "Recreational activities such as sports or going places as a group are ways to provide connections. Small groups of Sunday School classes also provide a way for people to connect. The power of this aspect of ministry can impact people deeply, especially those who struggle with loneliness."

Greg Gilbreath, pastor of Madison Baptist Church in Jackson, said church members can share common traits of loneliness.



Unsplash.com

"Churches have members who experience broken homes, widows and widowers, divorces, unemployment, having to relocate due to a job and moving away from your family," he said. "The young generation is so much into social media, and they often count the number of friends on Facebook as real friends. These are names and numbers that teens and youth do not know except by a list on social media."

A family with two parents and five children ranging in age from about 10 to 18 was recently seen eating a meal in a nice restaurant. But instead of using this opportunity to be together and share their lives, each person had a cell phone and was checking phone texts and messages. They missed the purpose of just being together. This is too common.

Experiences, environment

Early studies estimated that loneliness may be between 37% and 55% heritable. However, the first genome-wide association study

analyses of loneliness conducted in 2016 found that the heredity of loneliness is much lower, between 14% and 27%. This study indicates that while genes do play a role in determining feelings of loneliness, they are less of a factor than a person's experiences and the environment.

As pastors, Kellough and Gilbreath want to know when members are suffering and experiencing loneliness. All people need help at one time or another in their lives. One of the missions of the Church is to help each other in times of need. Here are a few ways a church can make a difference:

1. Build a sense of community within the church. Small groups, social events, outreach in the community, volunteer opportunities and church counseling with trained counselors can provide guidance for the lonely people in your church.

2. Work with community resources in your area. Are professional counseling services available when needed?

3. Is your attendance down?

Since COVID-19, many churches are experiencing a drop in attendance. People can stay home and watch the services online. If this is happening, those who are lonely are alone and need the fellowship of other Christians. There is no substitute for being with people. Jesus talks about finding the lost sheep in Luke 15. We need to pursue those "lost sheep" people who have stopped attending our services.

4. Extend the fruit of the Spirit to lonely people. All people need love, joy, peace and patience. Let your congregation be one where all people feel the love of Christ when they worship in your church (adapted from churchtrac.com).

Galatians 5:22-23 says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

Alarming statistics

► Teens and youth are often some of our most lonely people, and the result can be tragic. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide was the second-leading cause of death for youth between the ages of 10 and 24 in 2021. This is often seen as the result of loneliness.

► More teenagers and young adults die from suicide than from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, stroke, pneumonia, influenza and chronic lung disease combined.

► Suicide resulted in more than 48,100 deaths of Americans in 2021.

► People younger than 25 who have been victims of cyberbullying are more than twice as likely to engage in self-harm and suicidal behaviors than their peers.

UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

MIX Worship Arts Camp at Shocco

Does your child or teenager love music? MIX Worship Arts Camp is the perfect place for them to spend a week this summer.

The camp, which is three camps in one — MIX for completed second through fifth graders, MIX6 for completed sixth graders and REMIX for students who have completed grades 7–12 — is set for July 8–12 at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega.

MIX Worship Arts Camp will build lasting friendships and focus on discipleship and worship. Lindsay Lyon, a former camper and now counselor, said the camp made a big impact on her and taught her it was “not

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



about the performance.”

“It’s not about what other people think about you. It’s about worshipping the Lord,” she said.

Register by May 19 to get the Next Best price of \$340.

For more information or to register, visit mixmusiccamp.org.

Children's Music Summit Aug. 10

At Children's Music Summit, discover exciting training for children's choir workers and day-care workers. Discover new ways to make music time a favorite for kids, and watch the love for worship come alive in your preschoolers and children!

You'll also learn to use

games and toys to add more fun to your music time.

The Children's Music Summit will be Aug. 10, 8:30 a.m.–3 p.m. at Hunter Street Baptist Church in Hoover.

For more information or to register, visit alabamaworship.org/events.

Super Summer signup

If you haven't already signed your church's students up for Super Summer, it's time! Sign up by June 7 to get the discounted price of \$300 per person.

Super Summer — which will be held July 8–12 at

the University of Mobile — is a leadership and discipleship camp for Alabama students who have completed the 8th–12th grades.

For more information, visit supersummer.ymlink.org.

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@mzblife.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 resúmes 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. Resúmes 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 resúmes to: mtzionpsc24@gmail.com or contact Reid House with questions at reid36862@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

New Life Baptist Church located in Bay Minette, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor who will unashamedly preach the Word of God. Resúmes will be received until May 31. Please email resumé/profile to: newlifebaptistch@att.net or mail to: Pastor Search Committee, 15011 Glasgow Lane, Bay Minette, AL 36507.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

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

BIVOCATIONAL 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 resúmes 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.

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 resúmes/inquiries to: gregoryk.compton@att.net.

MINISTER OF MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY

West End Baptist Church is seeking a leader with a desire to share the gospel through media. The minister of media and technology will manage all aspects

of the church's media, including all services in house and livestream, website and social media. This person needs to be creative, organized and have a heart that beats for people. He/she will help plan for services and events, create content for services and social media, promote WEBC in our community and unite our church across all ministries with current and future technology and social media platforms. If you feel God is calling you to this position, please email a resumé and a cover letter including your testimony to: media@webconline.org.

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.

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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AFFORDABLE BEACHSIDE VACATION CONDOS

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LOG CABIN RENTAL

Lake Guntersville area, beautiful view and fully furnished. Discounts to ministers. Log on to www.paradisevista.net to see pictures. Call for reservations at 205-540-3600.

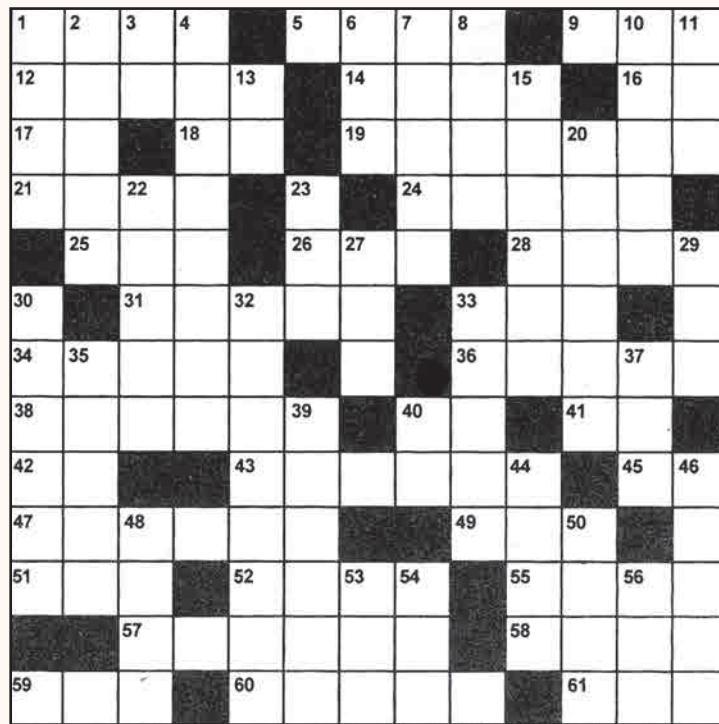
CHRISTIAN Crossword



UPCOMING EVENTS
sponsored by the State Board of Missions

ACROSS

1. Balaam's father. (Num. 22:5)
5. God the Father and in the ____ Jesus Christ. (1 Thess. 1:1)
9. ____ Lord bless thee. (Num. 6:24)
12. Mine ____ is kindled against them. (Hos. 8:5)
14. One of Caleb's sons. (1 Chron. 4:15)
16. A suffix used to form certain plurals.
17. I fell ____ his feet as dead. (Rev. 1:17)
18. Joshua sent men from Jericho to _____. (Josh. 7:2)
19. They removed from Jotbathah and encamped at _____. (Num. 33:34)
21. And ____ us not into temptation. (Matt. 6:13)
24. Hadad's father. (Gen. 36:35)
25. Nickname for Raymond.
26. King. (French)
28. Wise men come from the _____. (Matt. 2:1)
31. The Lord is ____ indeed. (Luke 24:34)
33. A suffix meaning "devotion to."
34. Joab saw that the ____ of the battle was against him. (2 Sam. 10:9)
36. ____ therefore, having your loins girt about with truth. (Eph. 6:14)
38. Jesus wrote on the ground with His _____. (John 8:6)
40. ____ let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end. (Ps. 7:9)
41. ____ man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6)
42. Identification. (abbr.)
43. Every man having his ____ in his hand. (2 Chron. 23:10)
45. ____ good to them that hate you. (Matt. 5:44)
47. Jesus' name for Simon meaning "stone." (John 1:42)
49. Nickname for Donald.
51. If any of you do ____ from the truth. (James 5:19)
52. And they put on Him a



By Teresa Zeek Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- purple _____. (John 19:2)
55. The unit of electromotive force.
57. Simon Peter's brother. (Matt. 4:18)
58. To express surprise. (alt. spelling)
59. The evening and the morning were the first _____. (Gen. 1:5)
60. The herd ran ... down a ____ place. (Luke 8:33)
61. Editors. (abbr.)
23. Blessed ____ the meek. (Matt. 5:5)
27. That no ____ of you be puffed up. (1 Cor. 4:6)
29. A little child. (esp. a boy)
30. The ____ of a midwife. (Ex. 1:16)
32. As good ____ of the manifold grace of God. (1 Pet. 4:10)
33. Hammoleketh's son. (1 Chron. 7:18)
35. I will break in pieces the chariot and his _____. (Jer. 51:21)
37. Cain dwelt in the land of _____. (Gen. 4:16)
39. ____ ye thither unto us. (Neh. 4:20)
40. A style of abstract painting creating optical illusions.
44. A star that brightens intensely and then gradually dims.
46. Perform unto the Lord thine _____. (Matt. 5:33)
48. He departed into a mountain to _____. (Mark 6:46)
50. For ____ of us liveth to himself. (Rom. 14:7)
53. The Lord shall hiss ... for the ____ that is in the land. (Isa. 7:18)
54. The poor man had nothing save one little ____ lamb. (2 Sam. 12:3)
56. There is a ____ here, which hath five barley loaves. (John 6:9)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Church finances, preparing for retirement workshops

Throughout July and August, you've got seven opportunities to attend the Church Financial Issues Check-Up and the Preparing for Retirement workshop at locations around the state.

And if you want, you can attend both in the same day.

The Church Financial Issues Check-Up will be held at each location from 9 a.m.–12 p.m. and cover new tax and retirement legislation affecting the church, policies about designated giving and other financial policies needed and how a church could get in trouble with the IRS including fundraising activities.

The Preparing for Retirement workshop will be held from 1–3:30 p.m. It's primarily for those ministers

and employees in their 50s and 60s to begin to consider topics such as retirement income, Social Security income and Medicare basics.

Attend one or both at these locations:

► July 9 — Birmingham Metro Baptist Association.

► July 11 — Calhoun Baptist Association.

► July 18 — State Board of Missions in Prattville.

► July 25 — Calvary Baptist Church in Scottsboro.

► Aug. 6 — Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association.

► Aug. 13 — Tuskegee-Lee Baptist Association.

► Aug. 20 — Northport Baptist Church.

To register, visit alsbom.org and search for "church financial issues" or "preparing for retirement."

Next Intentional Leader Series set for July 23

The next Intentional Leader Series, set for July 23, will focus on the Person aspect of the four Ps of leadership: Person, Pastor, Preacher and Pathfinder.

Ken Allen and Rob Jackson will guide you through a transformative journey. During this training, we'll place special emphasis on equipping you to lead not only yourself but also your family and your church with excellence.

The event will be 9 a.m.–2 p.m. at the State Board of

Missions in Prattville. The \$10 cost includes lunch.

To register, visit alsbom.org/ils.

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



EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Sunday School Lessons

By Ben Stubblefield, Ph.D.
Visiting assistant professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



For May 19

RECONCILE? Genesis 45:1–15

I knew church work would come with all kinds of triumphs and trials. But I did not expect to do the most counseling with folks on the issue of forgiveness. I was probably naive. Now that I'm older, I certainly understand why. Human relationships are combustible.

We are filled with potential for misunderstanding, stubbornness, vengeance and bitterness. We're prone to it and yet don't want it. We cause the dissolution of friendships but hate that we do. We feel justified in our bitterness but want to be at peace.

Why and how can we move past the turmoil that so often drives wedges among our friends and family?

As we get closer to the end of the Joseph narrative, the saga includes one of the most incredible moments of forgiveness and provides for us a preview of the way of forgiveness in the ministry of Jesus.

I am Joseph (1–3)

The famine in the land had brought Jacob's sons to Egypt and before Joseph in order to barter for grain. It's quite a shocking turn of events, and it reads almost like a Charles Dickens novel. Of course, the brothers do not recognize Joseph. He's older now, likely speaks Egyptian and is dressed like a foreign lord.

Joseph arranges a series of events that would force his brothers to come before him repeatedly. Perhaps Joseph is testing his brothers, or perhaps he is simply trying to understand what to do with his brothers — vengeance, justice or forgiveness.

In this moment, he can contain himself no longer. He weeps "so loudly that the Egyptians heard it" and reveals his identity, saying, "I am Joseph."

The brothers are stunned, silent and most likely terrified. What would Joseph do to them?

God sent me (4–8)

In an effort to console his brothers, Joseph invites them to take a closer look. And then he speaks words of comfort, reconciliation and hope.

He doesn't pronounce judgment. He doesn't accuse them. He doesn't even blame them. Approximately 20 years have passed — 20 years of prison, false accusation and living in a foreign land. Every day he may have thought about the trauma.

And now that his traitors are in his grasp, he lays the responsibility for his circumstances at the feet of God. He says three times, "God sent me" (vv. 5, 7, 8). Joseph understood that this moment was not God delivering the wicked into his hands but God using their folly so He could rescue this family.

Joseph could not see God working and yet he was faithful. He could have pursued revenge — and the world would have understood that pursuit of justice — yet he instead pursued redemption.

Settle in Goshen (9–15)

For Joseph the forgiveness was not just emotional, but it came with greater and lavish gifts. The land of Goshen was the best of Egypt.

In terms of the known world, we might even refer to it as a kind of Eden. Forgiveness came with gifts, and it came with an emotional reconciliation: "Joseph kissed each of his brothers as he wept, and afterward his brothers talked with him" (v. 15). The author presents for us quite a scene.

The speed and breadth of Joseph's mercy is astonishing, as is our Lord's. Our God does not simply overlook our sins. He receives us as His own, cleanses us from unrighteousness and makes us heirs to His eternal Kingdom. His mercy is like Joseph's but better.

His is a grace that we'll have no less days to sing about into the coming ages and beyond.

For May 26

REVENGE? Genesis 50:15–26

Message Sent (15–18)

Joseph's brothers worried that the primary reason he did not execute vengeance upon them was because of his love for his father, Jacob. When Jacob died, therefore, they got nervous that Joseph would feel unrestrained or, at best, demotivated to take care of them.

They reported to Joseph that Jacob left a dying will for him to forgive them fully and forever (16). The text is not clear about whether or not that is true, but it is clear about how deeply that news impacted Joseph (17).

It seemed to frustrate him, but I bet what hurt him more was the presumption that he would forget mercy and abandon grace. And that's a struggle to which I think we can all relate.

I'll admit I have a hard time understanding the depths of God's grace toward me. There are seasons in my life that I imagine God likes me less.

There are seasons when I imagine that God likes me because of what I have done to earn His favor. But neither are true, are they? He loves me and is pleased with me, in season and out of season, on the basis of what Christ has done for me, not on the basis of what I've done for Him.

His love toward His own flows to us as freely as it flows to His own Son. And that's a love that can't be measured or contained or calculated.

The brothers are normal in their suspicions that their favor has run out, and, if we're honest, we can also get that way with the Lord. But they've miscalculated the enormity of Joseph's love. And that's a miscalculation the Lord's people have no reason to ever make.

Truth Declared (19–21)

The brothers prostrate themselves before Joseph as an act of servitude and submission, but Joseph will have none of it. That's actually a repeated theme of God's choice agents through the Bible (cf. Rev. 22:9). Unsteady he offers a gracious and powerful theological perspective: "you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good."

Joseph sees God's guiding hand through his own personal tragedy, the heart of the Pharaoh, and the crushing famine that brought his brothers to Egypt. All his life, he recognizes, even it's trials, have been used to bring God's good and blessed plan for his people to fruition.

I remember a pastor once saying, "At some point, everybody is going to go through life's giant wood-chipper." And what he meant was that, sooner or later, we're all going to experience a challenge, a trial, a betrayal, a valley of some kind. And our brother, Joseph, shows us how to navigate such trials with a supernatural perspective. Because God is always faithful, and because God is always in control, He takes the trials and turns them into triumphs, crosses into crowns, our groaning into glory. That doesn't make any suffering any easier, but it does keep the Christian sure and steady — anchored through the storms.

Promises Assured (22–26)

One of the reasons I enjoy serving an intergenerational church is because my children get to hear Sunday School lessons, choir songs, and prayers from people who have a little more silver-haired wisdom than I do. It's not just daddy or teenagers or young professionals who love the Lord.

But people who have experienced the full range of life's good and bad, who have been in church for a long time and seen its good and bad, and who have testified their whole lives to the glory of God who are telling my little children, "Jesus is worthy."

That has a power that, if you'll excuse me for saying it, young people just don't have yet. It's a superpower that only comes with old age!

Joseph knows his time has come. And yet, even in his dying breaths, he testifies to the promise and power of God. For three generations, he models faithfulness to the Lord.

And he raises his children and his nephews and nieces, who'll raise their children, though foreign-born to a foreign land, to live faithfully to Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sunday School Lessons

By James R. Strange, Ph.D.
Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies, Samford University



For May 19

DOING LIFE TOGETHER IN CHRIST 1 Thessalonians 5:4–15

In Paul's day, Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia and sat on the Egnatian Way, an important Roman road that connected Italy to Greece and the eastern reaches of the Roman Empire via linked sea lanes.

While traveling part of this public road on his second journey, Paul convinced both Jewish and Greek Thessalonians that Jesus is the Messiah (Acts 17:1–9). He probably returned to encourage believers there on his third journey (Acts 20:1–2).

Doing life together means standing united in a world wrapped in darkness. (4–8)

In 4:12–5:11, Paul comforts church members who are worried about those who have died before Christ's return. How can they be saved? The answer is that the dead will rise and live with the Lord forever, together with those who are still alive (4:15–17; compare 1 Cor. 15).

Starting in 5:4, Paul's language echoes creation by referring to darkness, light and day. (Compare with Gen. 1:1–5.) Rather than being in darkness, the Thessalonians are "children of light and children of the day," an image also found in one of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

In 4:13–14, Paul had used sleep as a metaphor for death, but now he pairs sleep with darkness and drunkenness as images for ignorance and lack of spiritual preparation. Paul calls for sobriety using images for stability, wisdom and readiness for Christ's return.

Those who are so prepared wear God's armor (compare Rom. 13:11–13 and Eph. 6:13–17), covering themselves in the Christian virtues of faith, love and the hope of salvation. (For other mentions of these virtues, see 1 Thess. 1:3, Rom. 5:1–5,

1 Cor. 13:13, Gal. 5:5–6, Eph. 1:15–18 and Col. 1:4–5.)

Doing life together means encouraging one another. (9–11)

The idea of being destined for salvation comes from Israel's chosen status. It is a collective reference to the Church rather than to any individual.

Paul returns to the idea of death as sleep and living as being awake. In whichever state we are, Christ died so that we might live with him.

In verse 11, Paul calls on the Thessalonians to encourage one another. This is the point of the brief discussion of the end times: Stand firm in faithfulness, continue to love God and one another and hope for God's salvation through Christ.

Doing life together means challenging one another to pursue what is good. (12–15)

Paul ends the letter in a typical fashion. Using a series of brief imperative statements, he exhorts the Thessalonians to moral behavior and then prays for them, asks for their prayers, sends final greetings and after instructions that the letter be read to all Thessalonian believers, ends with a final blessing of grace.

It's important to recognize that some issues in the early Church persist. Church leaders need respect and love, and the congregation should be at peace among its members.

Some allow other people to do the work of the Church, others are fainthearted and still others are weak. This is why life within the Church family requires patience.

Moreover, even within the family of God, people want to avenge wrongs.

Paul reminds the Thessalonians to do good to all who have committed offense, whether within the congregation or outside of it.

For May 26

THE JOY OF GIVING 2 Corinthians 9:6–15

Last week we completed the series "Being an Authentic Church," but this week's lesson on the joy of giving carries forward that theme, for we are still discussing a church that does what God wants it to do.

In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, Paul and Timothy solicit funds from believers in Corinth — who are mostly Gentiles — to support the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. (Compare Rom. 15:25–27, 1 Cor. 16:1–4 and Gal. 2:10). In Chapter 8, the Macedonian Christians were examples of generosity. In Chapter 9, Paul and Timothy say that they have also boasted to the Macedonians about the Corinthians' generosity.

Read chapters 8 and 9.

God gives freely and loves a cheerful giver. (6–9)

The word translated as "gift" twice in verse 5 is "eulogia," meaning "a good word." In some uses it comes to mean "a blessing" and therefore "a gift," and this is how it is often used in the Septuagint. In verse 6, Paul and Timothy use it twice in an adverbial construction ("generously").

This association of "gift" and "blessing" highlights an idea found in Jewish writings. By giving, the Church behaves like God, who is the source of all blessings.

Paul and Timothy continue to work with this idea in verse 8, but they use the word "grace." "God," they say, "is able to make every grace overflow to you."

There are three important implications of this idea.

First, God's generosity supplies the model. Because God makes grace abound to the Corinthians, they should in turn give generously to the Jerusalem Christians.

Second, it is God who makes the Corinthians' generosity possible,

for God gives them "all sufficiency in all things at all times" (ESV).

Finally, this isn't the well-known Stoic idea of self-sufficiency. Rather, the Corinthians' sufficiency comes from God. By giving to the collection, therefore, they take up God's work as their own.

God multiplies your gift. (10–11)

In verse 9, Paul and Timothy rework Psalm 112:9, in which the person who fears the Lord gives to the poor. In the letter, Paul and Timothy apply this Psalm to what God does. It is He who scatters abroad, and it is His righteousness that endures forever. How so? It is God who supplies both seed to the farmer (the Corinthians) and bread made from that seed to the hungry (the Jerusalemites).

Verse 10, therefore, refers not to God increasing the Corinthians' wealth, but to God increasing their gifts.

God is glorified when you are generous. (12–15)

The other benefit of the Corinthians' generosity is thanksgiving for God. Nowhere do Paul and Timothy say that the church in Jerusalem will thank the Corinthians. Rather, for their act of generosity, God will receive gratitude.

The Greek word "glorify" really means to "think" or "imagine," and thence to "form an opinion." When used of God in the Septuagint, it means to hold God in the highest esteem and to call others to do so.

For Paul and Timothy, when the Corinthians give to the collection for the Jerusalem church, they glorify God by obeying the gospel that they confess. If the Corinthians declare that Christ died, was buried and was raised to break the powers of sin and death, Paul and Timothy expect them to obey that confession, to do what God wants the Church to do.

*"Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly,
and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."*

2 Corinthians 9:6

WORD search

- APOSTLES

BODY

BOND

BUILDING

CHRIST

CRAFTINESS

DOCTRINE

EQUIPPING

EVANGELISTS

FAITH

FULLNESS
- GENTLENESS

GROW

HEAD

HUMILITY

JOINED

KNOWLEDGE

LOVE

MATURE

MEASURE

PATIENCE

PEACE
- PROPHETS

SCHEMES

SERVICE

SHEPHERDS

SPIRIT

SUPPLY

SUPPORT

TEACHERS

TOSSED

TRUTH

UNITY

T K K M B K E C I V R E S Y H
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B N O A E K E Y S M M K B B L
J W T W C S E N I R T C O D N
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“There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to one hope at your calling — one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.”
EPHESIANS 4:4-6



You Gotta’ Hear This!

Finding humor in the everyday moments

Dead people in the baptistry?

The pastor met the Vacation Bible School class of five year olds to take them on a tour of the church and to describe the functions of each place.

He took them to the kitchen and told them this was where the meals were prepared for the Wednesday night suppers. In the office, he introduced them to the secretarial staff and explained their duties.

‘Beautiful symbol’

On to the baptistry they went. The teacher overheard one boy telling his friend, “There are dead people in there.” She was momentarily puzzled by his remark, and then she remembered the phrase the pastor often used when baptizing someone — “Dead unto sin and buried with Christ in baptism.”

Baptism is a beautiful symbol. When we are baptized, we are saying that we die to ourselves as our Lord and are raised to give the lordship of our lives to Christ. Perhaps the child had it right. If we mean what our baptism represents, there are many “dead” people in there.

Although different denominations baptize in different ways — some sprinkle, some pour — Southern Baptists believe in baptism by immersion just as John baptized Jesus.

We also believe that through baptism, we are publicly proclaiming Christ as our Lord after we are saved.

The actual water doesn’t wash away our sins, but it reminds us that Christ died for them, and when we accept Him, we are as clean as a freshly washed baby. That’s when our new life truly begins.

Paul writes his philosophy of life and death in the book of Philippians: “For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21).

MEET THE AUTHOR

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



“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.”

Philippians 1:21-23

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Leann Callaway

The Alabama Baptist

Mark Lowry stays true to humble beginnings and gospel roots

Throughout his musical journey, Grammy Award-winning recording artist and comedian Mark Lowry has learned valuable lessons, including realizing that God's plans are far greater than he ever could imagine and that there is still a story to be told.

"If there's ever a time in our country when God's love is needed to be shown, it's now," Lowry told The Alabama Baptist. "I want people to leave the shows knowing that God is crazy about them and that He would rather die than live without them. It's mainly Christians who are attending these shows, and hopefully they are bringing friends who don't know the Lord. I want people to hear about the Lord in a way that is attractive and leads them to want a personal relationship with Him."

For more than 20 years Lowry sang baritone with the Gaither Vocal Band, and was the comedic sidekick on Bill Gaither's live concert tours and bestselling "Homecoming"

video and television series.

Along the way, Lowry gained national recognition as co-writer of the Christmas classic, "Mary, Did You Know?" recognized as one of the best-loved modern Christmas songs of the century and recorded more than 400 times by a variety of artists.

In spite of his success, Lowry focuses on shining the spotlight on Christ and staying true to his humble beginnings and gospel roots.

"I started singing in church when I was four," Lowry noted. "Back then my family went to Berean Baptist Church in Humble, Texas, and we started going there after the pastor led my grandfather to the

Lord. When I was 11, I recorded gospel music for a couple of years. Then my voice changed and ended all that for a while.

"When I went to college at Liberty University I thought that I was going to be focused on getting a business degree and getting a job, but the Lord called me to go into the music ministry," Lowry recalled. "I actually tried everything I could do to avoid going into this ministry, but it became so clear that the Lord was opening doors and calling me to pursue music.

"The humor came along by accident, really. I had to do something between the songs when people were staring at me. Back then, you needed a few seconds in between songs for the sound guy to change the soundtrack. Since those few seconds of silence can be nerve-racking, I would tell stories about

"I want people to hear about the Lord in a way that is attractive and leads them to want a personal relationship with Him."

**Mark Lowry
recording artist
and comedian**



MARK LOWRY

marklowry.com

my life. When I heard people start laughing I knew they were listening. I did that for eight years during the early 1980s, and I would sing in 200 churches a year.

Everything changed

"Then Bill Gaither came along, and that changed everything when I joined the Vocal Band. I also signed a solo recording contract, so the solo career and Vocal Band sort of took off about the same time and started gaining national coverage."

With a unique gift of communicating biblical truths through music and storytelling, Lowry desires to connect with audiences of all ages as he tours around the country this spring on the "Mark Lowry & Friends Tour."

"God has been reminding me not to worry about what comes next because He is taking care of the details, and that He created me for this purpose," Lowry said. "The plan is just to keep telling people that God is crazy about them."

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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Praying for the persecuted church

Christian acquitted in second blasphemy case, still on death row

A Christian sentenced to death in one blasphemy case in Pakistan was acquitted in February in another related to the same incident, with the judge citing double jeopardy, his attorney said.

Police illegally charged Noman Masih, 24, twice for the same incident, but he remains on death row for conviction in the first case, said attorney Lazar Allah Rakha.

Masih was charged by police in two cities within three days.

A judge in the Bahawalpur case handed Masih the death sentence in May 2023 after a four-year trial, though prosecutors failed to provide any evidence against him, Rakha said. (Morning Star News)

Young girl kidnapped, forced to become Muslim; possibly trafficked

A Christian father fears his young daughter, who was abducted and forced to convert to Islam, may become a sex trafficking victim.

Four non-Muslims kidnapped 10-year-old Laiba Suhail on Feb. 12 from her home in Punjab Province. Shaukat Shah, a Muslim known for taking custody of children and forcibly converting them to Islam, is behind Laiba's abduction, her father told the news services Christian



Photo courtesy of Morning Star News

Daily International and Morning Star News.

Suhail Masih, the girl's father, said his daughter filed a court document, claiming to have converted willingly to Islam.

A court sent her to a women's shelter, from which Shah then removed her.

"This is Shah's modus operandi," Masih told the news services. "No one knows what happens to his victims after they are handed to him."

Police have declined to assist. The family is impoverished and, as of March 11, had not found an attorney to help. (MSN)

Christian brothers acquitted; news reports say they were framed

Two Christian brothers have been acquitted on false allegations of blasphemy and the three Christians who framed the brothers have been charged.

On March 1, Umar and Umair Saleem were acquitted following a police investigation show-

ing the two had been framed, states the news services Christian Daily International and Morning Star News.

The brothers had been charged with committing "acts intended to outrage religious feelings," defiling the Quran and making derogatory comments about Muhammad. The last charge carries a death penalty. In addition, the brothers were charged under the Anti-Terrorism Act for "stir(ring) up sectarian hatred." (MSN)

Persecution of Christians intensifies in India, commission's report shows

India's Christians suffered an alarming escalation of violence, hatred and systematic oppression last year, according to the Religious Liberty Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of India.

The 601 cases of persecution against Christians in India in 2023 marked a 45% increase over the 413 instances recorded the previous year, the report said.

While no area of India was unaffected, several emerged as hotspots. Uttar Pradesh state remained the most hostile environment with 275 incidents, up from 147 the previous year.

India ranked 11th on Christian support organization Open Doors' 2024 World Watch List of the countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. (MSN)

Youth, women in Indonesia targeted by extremists for radicalization

The head of Indonesia's counterterrorism agency said officials are focusing on protecting teenaged children and women from Islamic radicalization as they have become the most targeted groups.

Citing a report by the Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace, Rycko Amelza Dahniel of the National Counter Terrorism Agency (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme) on Feb. 20 said from 2016 to 2023, the percentage of high school students in five cities who moved from "passive intolerant" to "active intolerant" doubled, from 2.4% to 5%.

While those categorized as "intolerant" intensified from passive to active, tolerance among teens overall increased during the period, with those in the "tolerant" category moving from 61.6% to 70.2%, he said, citing The Setara Institute's survey, "The Tolerance



IMB Photo

of Senior High School Students," of May 2023.

Along with the increase among teenagers from passive intolerant to active intolerant, "those who are active become exposed to radicalization," Rycko said at the BNPT 2024 National Working Meeting in Jakarta on Feb. 20. High school students exposed to radicalization groups increased from 0.3% to 0.6%, he said.

Indonesia ranked 42nd on Open Doors' 2024 World Watch List of the 50 countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. (MSN)

Coptic Christian kidnapped; police aiding captors, family says

The family of a kidnapped Coptic Christian medical student says authorities are helping the perpetrators to keep her captive.

Irene Ibrahim Shehata, 21, was abducted Jan. 22 during midterm exams at Asyut National University in Egypt and apparently was forced to convert to Islam, a source told Christian Daily International.

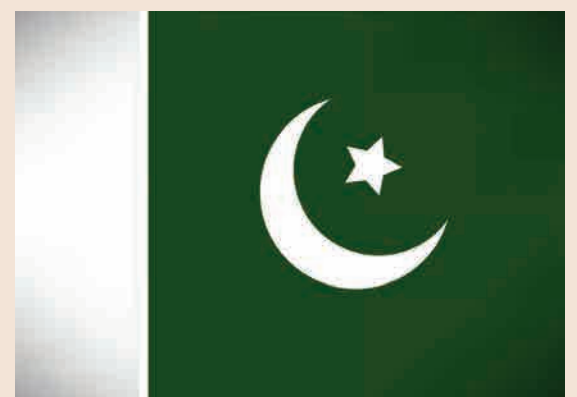
Secretly using her captor's phone, she called a family member in February, begged to be rescued and told her location, relatives say.

The family alerted police in the city of Sohaj.

Police did charge an unidentified male but claimed Irene had willingly gone with the person, a source said.

"The family ... has confirmed that a Muslim Brotherhood network — with a complicit State Security — is behind the abduction," said Raymond Ibrahim, an expert at Gatestone Institute.

Egypt is No. 38 on Open Doors' 2024 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian. (Leigh Pritchett, TAB)

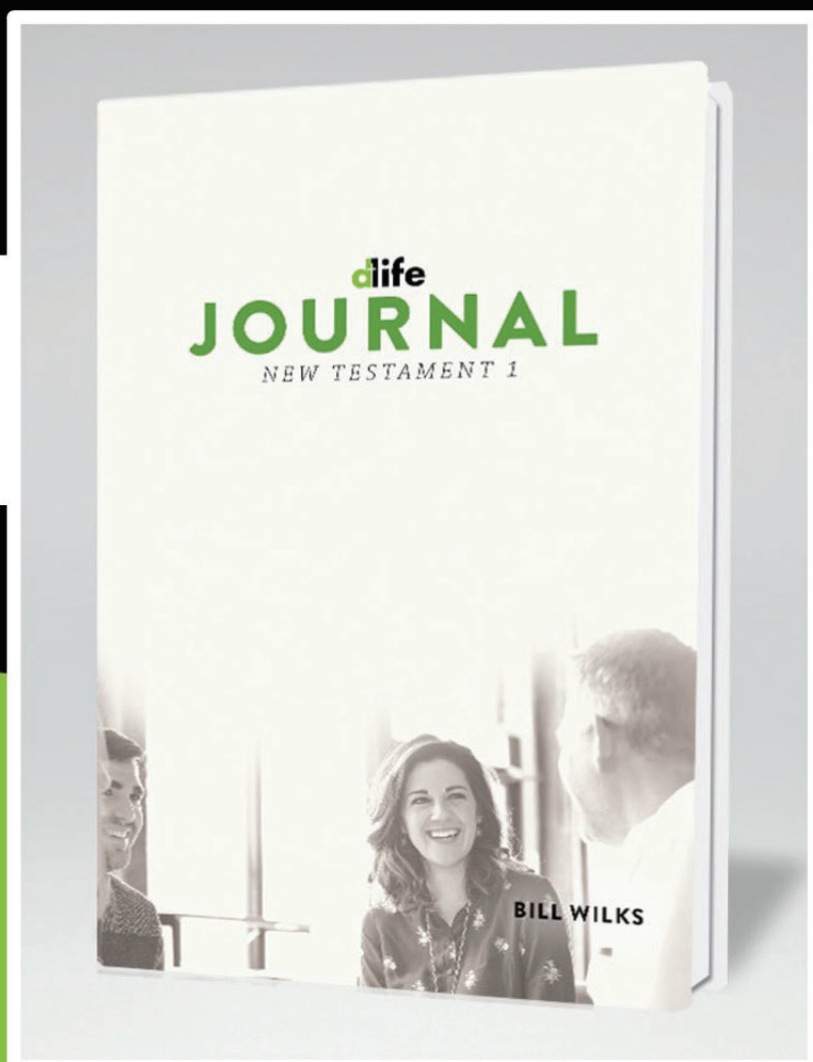


A note on Pakistan

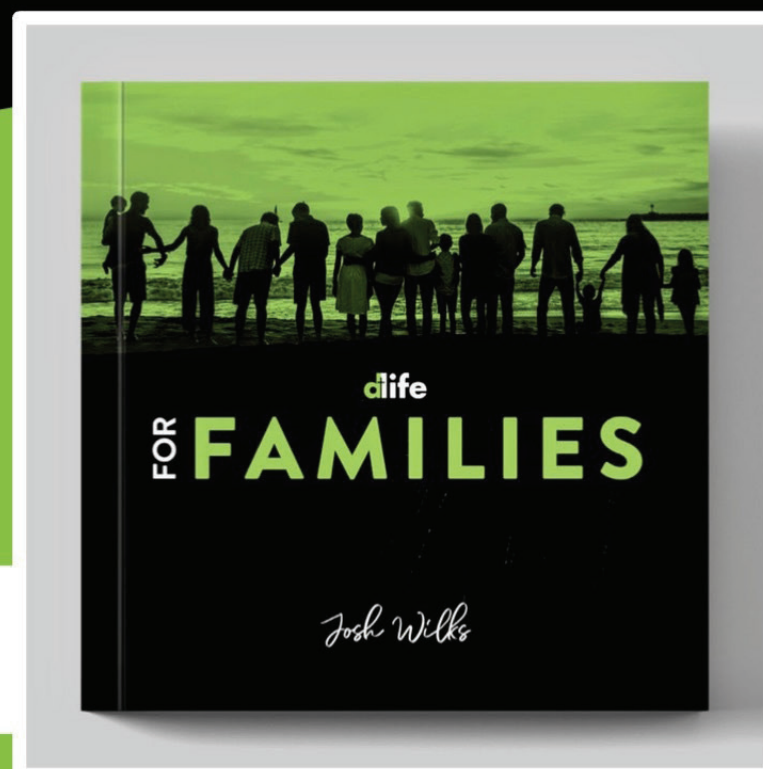
Pakistan ranked seventh on Open Doors' 2024 World Watch List of the most difficult places to be a Christian, as it was the previous year, and it is considered a Country of Particular Concern by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

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Avoiding burnout, depression

By Tobin Perry
Biblical Recorder

Churches should train lay leaders to support its pastors

In recent months, conversations about pastoral burnout have moved from lunch counters where pastors talk over a meal to the front pages of national news organizations.

While pastors have struggled through periods of burnout and depression for generations, recent surveys show those concerns may be growing. For example, an October 2021 Barna Research survey showed that 38% of Protestant clergy had seriously considered quitting that year. The percentage increased to 42% by March 2022.

Noting these concerns, several longtime North Carolina Baptist pastors say churches can help ensure their leaders have the emotional, mental and spiritual vitality to lead them into the future.

The group provides five specific recommendations to churches for strengthening their pastors.

► Acknowledge burnout and mental health issues are real for pastors.

Pastors have human limitations just like anyone else. Experiencing burnout and other challenges is a normal part of the life of pastors. It doesn't disqualify them from service.

"Pastors are people," said Jerry Lewis, pastor of Grace Community Church in Marion. "That should go without saying, but it doesn't because 98% of the time a pastor is a helper, an instructor who provides guidance. Most people assume he never needs help, instruction or guidance."

► Respect a pastor's time off.

Many pastors feel as if they are always on call.

Not only do churches need to



Photo courtesy of Biblical Recorder

"Most people assume (the pastor) never needs help, instruction or guidance," says Jerry Lewis, pastor of Grace Community Church in North Carolina.

provide regular time away from ministry for pastors, but they should refrain from contacting them during their time off.

"Just the slightest text or call can pull a pastor's mind into ministry mode," said Jordon Willard, pastor of First Baptist Church of Weddington. "Sometimes it can be hours or days before you're able to turn that ministry mindset back off. So the church as a whole can help pastors avoid burnout by respecting that time off, whether it be the weekly day off, or the vacation."

► Create a culture of care.

Chad Whitley, pastor of Poplar Springs Baptist Church in State Road, notes that many small churches can't provide a staff for pastors.

"I think it would be good for churches to invest in lay leadership training," Whitley said. "Whether it's in the deacons, or the elders or whatever their leadership structure accommodates. The pastor should have help managing caseloads and things like that when people are in

the hospital, or if the pastor needs a Sunday out of the pulpit, that there's somebody that can just step right into that role."

Lewis recommends churches build care of the pastor into regular reviews.

Many churches may already do performance reviews, which usually focus on ministry tasks like preaching and leadership. That rhythm should also include opportunities to ask the pastors about their mental, emotional and spiritual health.

"There has to be somebody in the local church whose responsibility it is to check in with the pastor, not in a sense to muzzle the ox, but to check in and say, 'How are you doing?'" Lewis said. "That ongoing cadence of checking in. It's like with a physical illness. If you catch it early, you diminish its potential effects. The same is true with mental health."

► Pray for your pastor.

Heath Lloyd, pastor of Fairview Baptist Church in Reidsville, en-

courages churches to make a habit of praying for their pastor and his family.

"It's vitally important that you pray for your pastor and his family, and let them know you're praying," Lloyd said. "It's edifying when you know that people are praying for you. It's strengthening."

Lloyd notes he has one congregant who lets him know every week that he is praying for the pastor. It's a powerful gift to give a pastor, he says.

► Consider providing sabbaticals.

Sabbaticals provide pastors with a specific amount of time away from the weekly demands of ministry for rest and rejuvenation.

Willard notes that sabbaticals can come in many forms. Churches can set their own schedules for how long and how frequent those sabbaticals are.

"I think they can be very helpful," he said. "It's another way for churches as a body to help a pastor build some good boundaries and avoid burnout."

Whitley notes that sabbaticals aren't simply vacations or time off.

"When churches do this, they aren't saying they want you to just sit in front of the TV and binge Netflix," Whitley said. "(Instead, they're saying) we don't want you to worry about preparing sermons or whatever. We want you to get alone with the Lord, read some quality books and just feed your soul."

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was written by Tobin Perry and originally published by the Biblical Recorder.

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Unique contacts

By Jenice Moore

California Southern Baptist Convention

Chaplains offer time, attention, presence to people in crisis

In August 2020 the state of California began housing evacuees from the Santa Cruz fires at the Asilomar Conference Grounds in Pacific Grove.

The pandemic brought about changes to every segment of life, and disaster relief was no exception.

Suddenly, congregate shelters — to house dozens of people under one roof — were no longer an option.

Asilomar was available because conferences and large group meetings had been canceled. It was a good solution to a difficult problem, but it created a new challenge for California Southern Baptist Convention Disaster Relief.

Prior to the pandemic, our chaplains had often been called on to provide spiritual and emotional care to people displaced during disasters and housed in congregate shelters.

At Asilomar, clients were housed in separate rooms and not allowed to gather indoors.

Even the meals DR provided were delivered directly to clients' rooms; no personal contact was allowed.

Opportunities to connect with those we were serving, and even with state employees and other relief organizations, were few.

Disturbance

On day two of this deployment, I went to check in with the shelter manager.

She told me I was needed in the parking lot. There was a disturbance, and she wanted me to speak with the woman causing the problem.

I was new to chaplaincy, and handling parking lot disturbances



Photo by California Southern Baptist Convention

Listening is one of the best things chaplains can do for people in crisis. Let people tell their story of what has happened.

was not something I had prepared for. Feeling inadequate and not knowing what I would do or say, I headed out.

The woman I met had been displaced from her home, had little money, no place to go and no idea what she would find when she was allowed to return to her property. She did have her dogs and her car. Because pets were not allowed inside the shelter, she was sleeping in the car with the dogs.

She was upset, scared, a bit disoriented and quite loud in her complaints.

Her erratic behavior was causing problems among others camping in the parking lot.

I introduced myself, and she agreed to sit and talk with me. We walked away from the others, found a bench and soaked up the sunshine for a few minutes.

She began to tell me her story, how she ended up in Santa Cruz, how she lived and what her dogs

meant to her. I realized what she needed at that moment was simply to talk.

She needed to untangle her scattered thoughts and know someone was listening and someone cared. There was nothing I could do to fix any of her problems — we both knew that.

Talk of faith

Because I was a chaplain she talked a bit about her experience with faith and her beliefs about God.

We had a sweet time of prayer and shed a few tears.

I walked her back to the parking lot and told her I would check on her tomorrow. I returned to the shelter and told the manager I thought she would be OK for the day. She was.

I looked for her the next day, but she and her dogs had moved on. I continued to pray for her and hoped they were well and that she

was on her way to recovering from the crisis.

It was my first experience in chaplaincy.

I was unsure of myself and more than a little intimidated.

The circumstances were certainly unique, but every chaplaincy contact is unique.

Each contact is as unique as the person in crisis.

I may have helped that woman just a little on that day.

Simply by listening to her, I was able to provide emotional and spiritual care she needed right at that moment.

She helped me too. She made me a better chaplain by reminding me of the significance of time, attention and presence.

I am grateful to her for that.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was written by Jenice Moore and originally published by California Southern Baptist Convention.