

# The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



Photo courtesy of John and Dana Gunter

John Gunter (back row, second from left) and his wife Dana (right) meet with their church plant Iglesia Bautista Esperanza Viva (Living Hope Baptist Church) in the Dominican Republic in 2004. They started meeting that year under a tarp in the yard of a rental house.

## Living hope

### Couple returns to Dominican Republic to celebrate church's 20th anniversary

**D**ana Gunter said it was a conversation she never could have expected.

In 2004, she and her husband, John — who at the time were International Mission Board missionaries — were going door to door in the Dominican Republic inviting people to a new Bible study. And they met Maria.

“Maria told us that she had been praying for a church in her neighbor-

hood for several years,” Dana Gunter said. “What a blessing to be a part of Dana’s prayer. In the summer of 2004, we had our first worship service on the lawn of a house that we rented in the neighborhood.”

#### ‘What a blessing’

And that church — Iglesia Bautista Esperanza Viva (Living Hope Baptist Church) — celebrated its 20th anniversary June 30. The

Gunters, who now serve among Hispanics in Alabama, returned to the Dominican Republic to celebrate with them.

“As I sat in the anniversary service, I became very emotional,” Dana Gunter said. “First of all, what a blessing to have been a part of the beginning of this church that now has its own building.”

She said she’s also grateful to see all the Dominicans that God has

raised up to lead the church, especially pastor Ruben Diaz, who has served there for the past eight years.

Visiting the church again was nothing but blessing after blessing, Dana Gunter said.

“I know that God could have used anyone to go to the Dominican Republic to serve Him as church planters, but He chose me and John — and I am so very thankful that He  
(See ‘Missionary,’ page 12)

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# Award-winning

## TAB Media Group ministry partners receive national awards

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- ▶ *Video: Event Coverage — Less than 1 minute* — 2nd place, Pursue Event Recap, Mitchell Bruce
- ▶ *Video: Event Coverage — More than 3 minutes* — 3rd Place, ServeTour Montgomery Recap, Mitchell Bruce and Doug Rogers
- ▶ *Video: Broadcast/Podcast — Overall Show* — 3rd place, One Mission the Podcast on Video, Mitchell Bruce
- ▶ *Audio: Broadcast/Podcast — Individual Episode* — 1st place, One Mission the Podcast — Paul Chitwood, Mitchell Bruce

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- ▶ *Scripts* — 3rd place, Unfinished: A Bicentennial Commemoration, Doug Rogers

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- ▶ *Video: Event — More than 3 minutes* — 2nd place, Rammy Rock Stars, Office for Marketing & Public Relations

### Photography Division

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- ▶ *Overall Publication* — 2nd place — University of Mobile TorchLight, Office for Marketing & Public Relations

### FBC Montgomery Design Division

- ▶ *Print Collateral — Annual Report* — 3rd place, To God Be The Glory 2022 State of the Church (First Baptist Church Montgomery), Amanda Smith

## University of Mobile announces its lineup of chapel speakers for Fall semester 2024

MORE THAN WE ASK OR THINK

EPH 3:20

UNIVERSITY of MOBILE

CHAPEL SPEAKERS

WEDNESDAYS | 2 PM | RAM HALL

The University of Mobile's Fall 2024 chapel schedule kicked off Aug. 21 with its new president Charles W. Smith Jr.

Other speakers scheduled for chapel, which takes place on Wednesdays at 2 p.m. in Ram Hall, are:

- ▶ **Aug. 28:** Shane Pruitt, national director of next-gen evangelism, North American Mission Board
- ▶ **Sept. 4:** Jared Baria, campus pastor, University of Mobile
- ▶ **Sept. 11:** Rick Lance, executive director, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions
- ▶ **Sept. 18:** Dewayne Rembert, lead pastor, Flatline Church; church

planting strategist, Montgomery Baptist Association

- ▶ **Sept. 25:** Ed Litton, senior pastor, Redemption Church
- ▶ **Oct. 2:** Elizabeth Graham, chief executive officer, Stand for Life
- ▶ **Oct. 16:** Matt Mason, senior pastor, The Church at Brook Hills
- ▶ **Oct. 23:** Dean Inserra, founding and lead pastor, City Church Tallahassee
- ▶ **Oct. 30:** Jason Dees, senior pastor, Christ Covenant Church
- ▶ **Nov. 6:** Ben Mandrell, president & CEO, Lifeway Christian Resources. (UM)

### The Alabama Baptist

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

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.



# Rashional Thoughts

*By Jennifer Davis Rash*

President and Editor-in-Chief

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🐦 [@RashionalThts](https://twitter.com/RashionalThts)

## Our school teachers need us, and even the smallest effort helps

**W**hen I saw the sign pop up in a neighbor's yard celebrating their new kindergartener, it startled me to realize she is stepping into her school journey as part of the Class of 2037.

While the date sounds far into the future, it's really only 13 school years away. What I hear so often from parents and teachers alike is "the days are long, but the years are short."

If that's truly the case, then what are some ways we all can fit into the picture to ensure our students are safe, healthy and given the best possible opportunities?

### Burnout rate

And for the best results, should we focus first on teachers, classrooms and the overall school culture?

The burnout rate among teachers continues to grow, according to numerous education-related reports.

The Schools That Lead team of educational professionals

describes the burnout situation among teachers at "crisis" level, which threatens school cultures and student outcomes.

"Prolonged work stress causes talented educators to emotionally withdraw, underperform or exit the profession entirely," writes Taqwanda Hailey, chief analytics officer for Schools That Lead.

"The associated costs of high teacher turnover negatively impact the quality of classroom instruction and, ultimately, student outcomes," she states in the blog post at [schoolsthatlead.org](https://schoolsthatlead.org). "Teaching is both a service and a call that demands passion and unrelenting grit. However, it can be one of the most time- and emotion-consuming professions."

Think about the teachers in your life. They may be part of your family, close friend group or community. You most likely can look around your church family and pick out a few as well.

When you think about them, what's one thing you have the ability and/or resources to do that could lighten their load

today? Even the smallest effort can make a difference.

For a few of the more involved opportunities, consider signing up to be a volunteer teacher's aide, offering to bring a different experience to detention hall or developing an after-school program for students.

### Discovery Clubs

In the Birmingham metro area, an after-school program called Discovery Clubs is already in place, so the development and organizational side is covered. The schools merely need volunteers who are willing to spend an hour a week with the children. Find out more at [discoveryclubs.org](https://discoveryclubs.org).

Another idea is to ride along on the bus to entertain the kids and let the bus driver focus solely on driving.

Or better yet, become a bus driver yourself or help someone you know take the classes, get the proper licenses and step into the role.

Schools across the state are in need of more drivers, and the opportunity to be a positive

presence in the lives of students getting on and off the bus each day is priceless.

Sometimes that one thing we can do to help make a teacher's day less exhausting isn't related to school at all.

It might be dropping off a meal one school night a week, helping with laundry or volunteering to tutor a teacher's child in your area of specialty.

While teachers are likely among the best tutors, I'm guessing it's hard to come home after teaching all day to settle in to help with homework, especially if more teaching is required.

The ideas are endless for what could be done. Teachers and school administrators have varying levels of responsibilities beyond the school campus, and we sometimes don't realize what could be weighing heavily on them each day.

I'm going to start by remembering to pray regularly for the teachers in my life and stay alert to ways I can help lighten the load for those the Lord allows my path to cross.



# Your Voice



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

## Bringing young adults back to the Church

By Mike Foreman  
Alabama Baptist pastor

**Y**oung adults are leaving the Church at an alarming rate. According to recent research by Lifeway, 66% of American young adults who attended a Protestant church regularly for at least a year as teenagers say they dropped out for at least a year between the ages of 18 and 22. This trend is a call to action for every church leader and member as the future of our churches and the spiritual health of future generations depend on how we address this issue.

One of the primary reasons young adults say they are leaving the Church is because they feel it doesn't address current, real-world issues that matter to them.

Also, instances of scandal, moral failure or even minor inconsistencies can lead to a sense of disillusionment. When young adults see leaders not living up to the standards they set for others, it breeds distrust.

As young adults encounter diverse worldviews and scientific advancements that challenge their beliefs, they need a space to explore questions thoughtfully and respectfully, which is not always comfortable in church settings.

Community and belonging is crucial for young adults. If the Church fails to provide a welcoming, supportive environment where young adults can form genuine relationships, they will look elsewhere. Authentic connections and a sense of

belonging are key to keeping young adults engaged in church life.

So, what can we do?

I'd like to suggest these ideas for re-engaging young adults:

### 1. Make faith relevant.

Address contemporary issues directly. Sermons and discussions should integrate real-life applications and relatable examples that resonate with young adult experiences. By showing how faith intersects with the issues they care about, the Church can become more relevant and meaningful.

### 2. Be authentic and transparent.

Church leaders need to model integrity and authenticity. This means being open about struggles, failures and the journey of faith. When leaders are transparent and genuine, it builds trust and shows young adults the Church is a place where they can be real and vulnerable too.

### 3. Embrace technology.

Technology is a powerful tool for connecting with young adults. Churches can leverage social media, online services and digital communities to reach young adults where they are.

### 4. Create community.

Creating a welcoming community for young adults is crucial. The Church needs to become a place where young adults feel welcomed, supported and heard. They need

older adults who will not look down on them but be willing to build meaningful and authentic relationships with them.

### 5. Address doubts and questions.

Open dialogue about faith, doubts and intellectual challenges is crucial. Hosting Q&A sessions, discussion groups or apologetics courses can provide young adults with the space they need to explore their questions and deepen their understanding of faith. Encouraging these conversations shows the Church values them.

### 6. Emphasize discipleship.

Discipleship plays a significant role in guiding young adults on their faith journey. By pairing young adults with older disciples who can offer support, wisdom and encouragement, the Church can help them navigate the challenges of life and faith and foster deep, meaningful relationships.

### Final thoughts

The trend of young adults leaving the Church offers an opportunity for growth and renewal.

By understanding the reasons for their departure and implementing strategies to re-engage them, we can create an environment that is relevant, authentic and welcoming.

Let us commit to taking proactive steps to show young adults the Church is a place where they can find community, purpose and a deeper connection to God.

"College students need to learn how to think critically and find what is truth and talk respectfully about ... crucial topics," said **Selin Philip**, associate professor at Colorado Christian University, regarding finding meaning beyond earning a degree. She also directs the Ph.D. in counselor education and supervision program.

"I'm a better minister because I can sit with a student and say, 'I've been where you are, and I'm here to help,'" said **Shannon Hughes**, campus minister for Jacksonville State University, on how her own struggles with mental health have strengthened her ministry.

"We need to expand [the Church] not just by evangelism but by discipling people to follow Jesus," said **Alex Kendrick**, who directs "The Forge." The film's goal, he added, is to "stir that focus back to discipleship" in churches.

"Detours, roadblocks, fires and storms happen every day," said **Mark Bethea**, pastor of FBC Montgomery. "We press onward and upward. We've got more gospel sharing and showing left to do!"

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“God is writing a beautiful story for you ... you can rest peacefully knowing He is doing [this].”

LYSA TERKEURST

Author and speaker

Words are powerful since they can make or break another person. Words can be gifts or weapons. Words can be bridges for understanding or barriers to relationships.

A college president frequently shared a quotation attributed to various authors: “Three things cannot come back: the spoken word, the spent arrow and the lost opportunity.”

Knowing that our words can be hurtful and irretrievable should motivate us to choose them with care.

King David had a model prayer: “Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips (Ps. 141:3).”

**Michael J. Brooks**, pastor  
Siluria Baptist Church  
Alabaster

What scene is currently holding your attention? Are you standing in a messy and sluggish place? Are you in a desert of desolation and hopelessness?

Arise, look up, and take God by the hand. For He is not finished with you, and He is not finished with your future.

Ask the Lord to open your eyes to see what you may not currently be seeing. Ask Him to let you see those yellow flowers of blessings.

Read in Genesis 21:14–19 about another who experienced a new chapter in life by trusting God’s guidance.

**O’Shea Lowery**  
Entrusted Hope Ministries

Preacher and author A.J. Gordon wrote, “We do not stand in this world bearing witness to Christ, but we stand in Christ bearing witness to this world.”

Jesus explains that as believers we have a divine partner to assist us (John 15:26–27). Jesus further encourages His followers with three statements about witnessing to a hostile world.

**First, there is the mission of the grace of God.**

John 16:1–4 reads, “... They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me. But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them. ‘And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you.’”

**Second, there is the manifestation of the glory of God.**

John 16:5–6 reads, “But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and ... sorrow has filled your heart.” Jesus knew they were more concerned about their grief than His glory. We must remember as witnesses to a

hostile world our focus is to be on His glory, not on our grief.

**Third, there is the message of the gospel of God.**

John 16:7–11 reads, “... the Helper ... will convict the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.” We see from this passage that the Holy Spirit deals with unbelief, unrighteousness and ungodliness. May we boldly declare Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world and rose again for the justification of all who will believe in Him.

**Franklin L. Kirksey**  
Robertsdale

## Tribulation promised but so is peace

By David Chancey  
davidchancey.com

We shouldn’t be surprised when our day goes sideways, for Jesus said, “In the world, you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world (John 16:33).”

The word “tribulation” means to press together, to compress. It’s the picture of crushing grapes.

Sometimes tribulations are merely aggravations and inconveniences rather than catastrophes. But other times, life ambushes us with affliction.

### Navigating chaos

How do we possess peace while enduring chaos?

In the first part of verse 33, Jesus said, “These things I have spoken to you that in Me you may have peace.”

Notice His contrast. In the world, tribulation. In Me, peace.

When our focus is on Jesus and we’re relying on Him, we find peace while enduring crises.

### What Jesus endured

Interestingly, as Jesus spoke these words in the Upper Room on the night before His crucifixion, Judas the betrayer slipped out of the room to meet with Jesus’ enemies to plot His arrest.

Soon, Jesus would be arrested, forsaken by His closest friends, denied, humiliated, tortured and executed.

Yet, He experienced peace. So can we. Jesus is the key to this deep, spiritual peace.

### ‘Overcome the world’

The old bumper sticker is still true:

“No Jesus, No Peace — Know Jesus, Know Peace.”

Tribulation is promised, but peace is possible in Jesus because, as Jesus proclaimed, “I have overcome the world.”





# 3 stories you should know



Photo courtesy of Cross Walk to Life

Cross Walk to Life, a Christian Women's Job Corps site in Las Cruces, New Mexico, used a recent grant from the WMU Foundation to purchase new curriculum for its ESL classes. The WMU Foundation also gave seven other grants to CWJC sites, which offer women the opportunity to reach their full potential and improve their situation through job and life skills training in a Christian context. Christian Women's and Men's Job Corps are compassion ministries of national WMU. (TBP)

## ABDR efforts wrap up in Texas after Beryl

Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers wrapped up their cleanup efforts in Huffman, Texas, following damage caused by Hurricane Beryl.

About 200 volunteers from Alabama served in Texas from July 11 to Aug. 5, completing around 200 chainsaw and cleanup jobs and spending time with people affected by the storm. Twenty-one people made professions of faith.

Mark Wakefield, state disaster relief strategist, said it was "extremely hot and rained a lot" in Huffman, but "the volunteers worked really hard and got as much work done as they could."

"I'm so thankful for the amazing volunteers and the way they responded," he said. "They worked hard and had a great spirit and attitude." (TAB)

## Brookwood Baptist Health gets new owners

Brookwood Baptist Health in Birmingham will "remain a faith-based organization" under new majority owner Orlando Health, Inc., according to an Aug. 5 statement announcing the sale.

David Strong, president/CEO of Orlando Health, a private, not-for-profit health care organization, said he is excited to "further Brookwood Baptist Health's mission of extending the healing ministry of Christ."

Amy Allen, president and CEO of Baptist Health System, agreed and said Orlando Health has a "proven track record" in health care services and community investment.

Brookwood Baptist Health is a network of hospitals, outpatient centers and clinics formed from a merger between Brookwood Medical Center and Baptist Health System. (Orlando Health/TAB)

# Persecuted church

## Officials halt wedding, ban church's worship services after complaints

SURABAYA, Indonesia — Local officials in Indonesia halted a wedding and banned future worship services at a church in Indonesia on claims of opposition from residents and no permit for the building.

The June 30 wedding at Pentecostal Church in Mergosari in Sidoarjo Regency of Java, an island in Indonesia, was reportedly halted after a village leader and five state officials told pastor Yoab Setiawan that area residents had complained about the church.

The pastor also was told that the church must have permission from the neighborhood for activities to be held.

At a meeting in July, church officials were told to get a permit for the building and to worship at

home until then, according to an article posted at the Indonesian news site celah.id.

The church had received a government registration certificate Dec. 7, 2023, reported Morning Star News, quoting the group International Christian Concern.

The majority of Indonesia's population is Muslim.

Indonesia is No. 42 on Open Doors' 2024 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

## Christian sentenced to death on blasphemy charges

LAHORE, Pakistan — Despite no direct evidence, a Christian man in Pakistan was sentenced to death June 29 on an accusation of blasphemy.

Arrested on Aug. 19, 2023, Ehsaan Masih is accused of sharing a blasphemous video of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, on TikTok, according to reports by Christian Daily International and Morning Star News. Under Pakistani law, such charges mandate the death penalty.

Masih's attorney said a forensic examination of Masih's phone and TikTok account found no blasphemous content.

Nonetheless, a Sahiwal District anti-terrorism judge deemed Masih guilty on that charge and added several other charges and penalties to his sentence.

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





# Alabama Singing Men leader Smith retires

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

For 50 years, music ministers and worship pastors from all over the state have been gathering regularly as the Alabama Singing Men — and for half of that time, Tom Smith has been their conductor.

“He has been the pastor, mentor, facilitator bringing those men together in the same room and on the same page for 25 years,” said Steve Pace, ASM president and music pastor at Summerville Baptist Church in Phenix City. “It’s just exceptional.”

As Smith retires from that role, ASM gathered Aug. 8 to celebrate the musical community he has fostered over the past quarter century. They honored him in a variety of ways, starting with an appreciation concert at Providence Baptist Church in Opelika, where he has been minister of music for the past 50 years.

## Special anthem

At the concert, they surprised him with a choral anthem commissioned in his honor. Heather Sorenson, an accomplished composer, had set the text of “Like a River Glorious,” one of Smith’s fa-



Photo by Debbie Campbell/The Alabama Baptist  
Steve Pace (right), president of Alabama Singing Men, presents Tom Smith with a framed copy of River Glorious, a choral anthem commissioned to honor Smith and celebrate his 25 years of service.

vorite hymns, to an original tune called “River Glorious.”

A number of speakers gave testimonies about Smith’s impact and presented him with gifts, including a book containing letters of gratitude collected for him.

Later that day at First Baptist Church Opelika, ASM held a joint concert with Sons of Jubal, Georgia Baptists’ men’s chorus —

the first time the two groups have ever sung together.

The 200-member combined chorus and orchestra sang to a packed house of more than 800 people from Alabama and Georgia.

At the concert, Smith was presented with a certificate for his 50 years of music ministry from the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions by Karen Gosselin,

SBOM coordinator of worship resources.

Pace said Smith’s was “a tenure of service worthy of celebrating.”

## ‘Servant-leader’

“Tom himself is just the preeminent example of Jesus-follower servant-leader,” he said. “He models it in and out daily across the board with everybody in the group. It’s authentic; he’s a gracious, loving, caring Christian gentleman, and that model is priceless and respected.”

Frank Jones, who has served as the ASM pianist since 1983, said when they were looking for a new conductor in the late 1990s, they wanted someone with strong choral skills and a pastoral heart. That search led them to Smith.

“We love Tom,” Jones said. “It’s been a great relationship between him and me ... and the rest of the Singing Men.”

Smith said for him it was the “right thing at the right time.”

“Getting to know these guys who are music or worship leaders in their own churches, that’s been such a highlight,” he said.

Another highlight has been encouraging others in ministry as they’ve come together for retreats, spring tours and to sing during the Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting.

“The Singing Men is more than a musical group,”

Smith said. “I’ve always been appreciative of that group and the heritage they have; to step in and be a part of that was a great experience. I’m thankful.”

His wife, Gayle, has been a big part of it too — in 2002, she began directing the brand-new Alabama Singing Women and continued in that role until September 2023. The two groups have sung together frequently over the years.

Jane Burdeshaw, a founding member of ASW and the group’s first president, said Gayle Smith has done a “beautiful job” as director.

“Gayle is very, very gifted in directing and has done a beautiful job of selecting music that has ministered to us as members as well

as to congregations that we have been able to visit and sing for,” Burdeshaw said. “She’s just been a delight to be with and sing with and praise the Lord with.”

She said over the years, Gayle Smith also encouraged the kind of relationships in the group that made it feel like a sisterhood.

“She has been right in there with us loving on us and guiding us through these years,” Burdeshaw said.

Together, Tom and Gayle Smith have been “a dynamic duo in leading choral music in Alabama,” she said. “We will miss them serving in this way.” (Debbie Campbell contributed)

**For more information about ASM and ASW, visit [alabamaworship.org/asm](http://alabamaworship.org/asm) and [alabamaworship.org/asw](http://alabamaworship.org/asw).**

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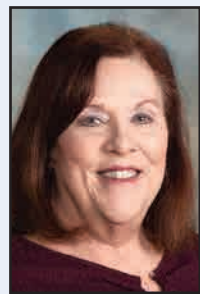
# Alabama news

## OBITUARIES

### PAULA STACEY

Paula Claire Vick Stacey, who previously served on The Alabama Baptist board, died July 28. She was 71.

Stacey was born in Demopolis and was a lifelong resident of Monroe County.



STACEY

A teacher at Monroe Academy for nearly 50 years, Stacey was known for serving her school well and sponsored the senior class; Anchor, Beta and Junior Belles Service clubs, as well as National Honor Society. She also was a varsity cheer coach for more than 30 years. The Alabama Independent School Association inducted her into the Hall of Fame in 2003 and named her secondary teacher of the year in 1998.

She was recognized for her community service and was named Judson College Outstanding Alumna in 1995.

Stacey was an active member of First Baptist Church Monroeville and directed 340 weddings over the years.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Alex Wayne Stacey, and is survived by her son, Marcus Stacey of Daphne; and two grandchildren.

### AUTAUGA ASSOCIATION

► **Rob Jackson** is interim pastor of **First Baptist Church Prattville**. He steps in following the recent departure of Peyton Hill, who had served as pastor for the past five years and recently joined the church planting team of City Church in Tallahassee, Florida, under Dean Inserra. Jackson serves as director of evangelism and church revitalization for the



JACKSON

State Board of Missions and is a member of FBC Prattville. He previously served as interim pastor of Eastern Hills Baptist Church in Montgomery.

► **Jerry Cleckler** is the new pastor of **Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, Prattville**. He previously served as pastor of Cane Creek



Photo courtesy of Jerry Cleckler

Baptist Church, Clanton; Prospect No. 2 Baptist Church, Columbiana; and associate pastor of Calvary Independent Baptist Church, Clanton. Cleckler is semi-retired. He and his wife, Kathie, have one child and two grandchildren.

### BIBB ASSOCIATION

► The WMU at **West Blocton First Baptist Church** will host its first-ever women's conference Aug. 24. Doors open at 8 a.m., and child care is provided. This free event will be a simulcast of Priscilla Shirer's "Going Beyond" followed by brunch. Registration is not required but more information is available at [westbloctonchurch.com/events](http://westbloctonchurch.com/events). Kyle Hodges is pastor.

### CAREY ASSOCIATION

► **Carey Baptist Association** recently purchased, remodeled and opened a new thrift store at 82030 Highway 9, Ashland. The original store, coordinated by Donna Farrow, has operated since 2009 as a way to bless the community and help support the ministries of the association. The new store is open Monday through Friday, 9 a.m.—4



Photo courtesy of Donna Farrow

p.m.; donations can be dropped off behind the building. More information is available at [careybaptistassociation.org](http://careybaptistassociation.org) and on the Carey Baptist Thrift Store Facebook page. Richie Farrow is associational missionary.

### CLARKE ASSOCIATION

► **Thomasville Baptist Church's** Senior Adult Fellowship Club will host a fall kickoff gathering Sept. 5, 5:30 p.m., featuring Alabama Baptist pastor and author Bill King as comedian Bro. Billy Bob (pictured). Ty Parten is pastor.



Submitted photo

► **Ulcanush Baptist Church, Coffeetown**, held revival services July 29–31 with speaker Justin Overstreet. The following Sunday, Aug. 4, was Homecoming, which included a fellowship lunch. Jessie Griffith is pastor.

### COOSA RIVER ASSOCIATION

► **Stan Albright** retired July 31 as director of missions for **Coosa River Baptist Association** after 47 years of ministry. Albright previously served as pastor of First Baptist Church Oxford. He also has served with the North American

Mission Board, the Baptist Convention of New Mexico, the Northwest Baptist Convention, as a church planter and on church staffs in Alabama and Texas. He and his wife, Joanie, serve as trainers for the discipleship ministry D-Life. They have two children and four grandchildren. Albright is available for supply and interim ministry: 770-686-1578; [salbright8@icloud.com](mailto:salbright8@icloud.com).



Photo courtesy of Stan Albright

### ETOWAH ASSOCIATION

► **Chris Haralson** is the new transitional pastor of **Coosa Valley Baptist Church, Rainbow City**. He previously served as pastor of Mount Hebron Baptist Church, Leeds, and in family ministry at churches in Alabama, South Carolina and Kentucky. Haralson holds a bachelor's degree in education from the University of Montevallo, a master of arts degree from Southern Seminary and certificates in church growth, community health care and life coaching. Haralson currently serves as a hospice chaplain, bereavement coordinator and podcaster. He and his wife, Debby, have two adult children.



HARALSON

### GENEVA ASSOCIATION

► **Bryan Klobe** celebrated 10 years as pastor of **New Hinson Baptist Church, Slocumb**. He and his wife, Dena, have two children.



Facebook photo

### MARSHALL ASSOCIATION

► **Ron Lynch** is serving as interim associational missions strategist for **Marshall Baptist Association**. He retired as church and community ministries director for Madison Baptist Association in February and previously served as pastor of education, administration and missions at Gilliam Springs Baptist Church, Arab. Lynch holds a bachelor's degree from Shorter College (now Shorter University), Rome, Georgia, and a master of religious education degree from Southwestern Seminary. He and his wife, Debbie, have three sons and five grandchildren.



LYNCH



## NEWS

## MORGAN ASSOCIATION

► **Walter “Wally” Blackman** has retired after 25 years as pastor of **East Highland Baptist Church, Hartselle**. During a special service (and other small group meetings) honoring him and his wife, Suzanne, church members showered them with a variety of gifts, including a few fun gag gifts. Blackman also shared a time of special music with two of his granddaughters during his final church service as pastor. Blackman previously served as pastor of First Baptist Church Marion and Southern Hills Baptist Church, Natchez, both in Mississippi, and taught adult training “10 Steps to Christian Maturity” at Southside



Photo courtesy of Wally Blackman

Baptist Church, Savannah, Georgia. Blackman holds a bachelor's degree in history/religion from the University of Alabama and a master of divinity degree in biblical studies from

New Orleans Seminary. He and Suzanne have four children and eight grandchildren.

## PICKENS ASSOCIATION

► **Scott Sullivan**, former Major League Baseball pitcher and recent inductee into the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame, will be the special guest speaker for Kickoff Sunday at **Carrollton Baptist Church**, Aug. 25. He will share in the regular worship service, 10:45 a.m., after bringing an inspirational message to the football teams, coaches and cheerleaders from the four high schools in

Pickens County: Pickens County High School, Gordo High School, Aliceville High School and Pickens Academy. Robert Heard is pastor.

► **Fellowship Baptist Church, Reform**, will hold revival services Sept. 1, 5 p.m.; Sept. 2-4, 7 p.m. Guest preacher is Yancy Windham. Supper will be served Sept. 4, 6 p.m. Clay Latham is pastor.

## SALEM-TROY ASSOCIATION

► **Jake Fowler** is the new pastor of **Goshen Baptist Church**. He previously served as youth pastor of Sandy Valley Baptist Church, Warner Robins, Georgia. Fowler holds a bachelor's degree in Christian studies from Truett McConnell University, Cleveland, Georgia, and is pursuing a master of divinity degree from Southern Seminary. He and his wife, Emily, have four children.



Photo courtesy of Tim Dowdy



Photo courtesy of Averyt Walker

► **Averyt Walker** is the new director of missions for **Salem-Troy Baptist Association**, where he previously served as DOM before becoming pastor of St. John Baptist Church, Brundidge. He also served as pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church, Banks. Walker holds a bachelor's degree in education

from Troy University. He and his wife, Brenda, have two children and five grandchildren.

## SHELBY ASSOCIATION

► **Terry Sutton** has been named pastor emeritus of **First Baptist Church Montevallo**. Sutton retired as pastor in December 2023, after he and his wife, Kay, served there for 16 years. Chair of the deacons Roy Smith (pictured) made the presentation. Joe Godfrey is interim pastor.



Photo courtesy of Kay Sutton

► **Oak Mountain Baptist Church, Pelham**, will celebrate its 57th anniversary homecoming Sept. 8 at 10:30 a.m. Worship service will be led by the Southern gospel trio Canaanland. A covered-dish lunch will follow at noon in the fellowship hall.

## SOUTHEAST ALABAMA ASSOCIATION

► **Memphis Baptist Church, Dothan**, will celebrate its 150th anniversary Sept. 15. Worship begins at 9 a.m. and will include a presentation from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Music will be led by Shon Brackin, former member and current minister of music at Westwood Baptist Church, Live Oak, Florida. The guest speaker will be Casey Williamson, former member and current pastor of Goodwood Community Church, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Jim Tate is pastor.

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# Focused on sharing good news

## Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering supports spiritual bases like WorldSong

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

In recent years, some church leaders have noticed a trend they're concerned about — not as many young people seem to be answering the call to ministry.

But that's not Tre Williams' experience. In recent years, he began wondering if God might be calling him to youth ministry. And then he went to serve for a summer at WorldSong Missions Place, the camp owned and operated by Alabama WMU.

"My now fiancé, then girlfriend, was a camper there when she was

growing up — this was her 10th year at WorldSong," Williams said. "She had already served on staff there, and when she realized I was interested in youth ministry, she encouraged me to apply."

### '100% confirmed'

So he did, and then went back to serve again this past summer as a cabin leader and lifeguard.

And he said it "100% confirmed that I was meant to be in youth ministry."

"Through that first summer, I saw a lot of growth in my ability to present the gospel and share biblical understanding," Williams said.

He saw even more growth this year.

"I saw myself step up in a lot of leadership ways that before camp I would've never expected," Williams said.

Suzanna Brothers said WorldSong did something similar for her. She grew up going to camp there, then worked there two summers as a staffer.

Through the years, as Brothers heard stories from the missionaries who came to camp, she was "in awe of the stuff God was doing."

She said that time of "seeing what the Lord can do through people who

give their life to Him" was what encouraged her to apply to go to Chile this past summer.

### Sharing Jesus

"The teaching they give to the campers at WorldSong is so missions centered and focused on the Great Commission," Brothers said. "Everything they teach in some form or fashion goes back to 'we have this good news, we need to go share it.' It's what Jesus told us to do, and we get the privilege and joy of sharing that with other people."

She said her time as a staffer also prepared her for her time in Chile. "Having that experience of two straight summers sharing the gospel constantly made me feel equipped in my boldness," Brothers said.

Candace McIntosh, executive director of Alabama WMU, said Missions Adventure Camp at WorldSong has always been intentional, not just for the camper but for the staff as well.

She said it's an "incubator for them to deepen their walk with the Lord and also explore a greater calling."

### Supporting ministries

The camp is supported by the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering. In addition to supporting Alabama WMU, the offering also assists disaster relief, church planting, church revitalization and partnership missions. These ministries are also undergirded by prayer support provided during the Week of Prayer for State Missions.

This year's Week of Prayer is Sept. 8–15, with an offering goal of \$1.2 million. WorldSong is featured on Day 8 through the story of Sonali Albus, who also felt a call to missions there.

Since the offering's inception in



Photo courtesy of Alabama WMU  
While serving at WorldSong Missions Place, Tre Williams said it 100% confirmed he was meant to be in youth ministry. He was able to step up in a lot of ways as a leader that before camp he would've never expected.

2016, giving has surpassed \$10 million. The two namesakes are spiritual giants from the state — Kathleen Mallory and Dr. Martha Myers.

### Humble lifestyle

Mallory — who served as leader of Alabama WMU from 1909 to 1912 and then head of national WMU for 36 years — lived a humble lifestyle so she could give as much money as possible to missions.

Myers, who grew up in an Alabama Baptist church, went on to serve 25 years as a medical missionary in Yemen before being killed by an extremist there in 2002.

"Martha Myers is the Great Commission literally lived out on two feet," said Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. "She personifies sacrificial giving. She took the gospel and her ministry to the people who were underserved and unreached, and in that way she is a sterling example of what it means to give sacrificially for the cause of Christ."

The offering honors their legacy by continuing to fund missions and ministry in the state and around the world, and Lance said Alabama Baptists have been "so faithful" to give.

"God has blessed the Great Commission ministry efforts supported by this important offering," he said. "We have seen outstanding progress in our church revitalization endeavors across the state. Also, our church planting ministries are stronger now than ever before."

These two Great Commission ministry efforts are vital to reaching people for Christ."

Global missions involvement also remains strong, disaster relief ministries continue to be pacesetters and

WMU continues to be "a mainstay in missions efforts across our state and beyond," Lance said.

"The Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering supports all of these valuable ministries among Alabama Baptists," he said. "Through this offering and the continued giving through the Cooperative Program, Alabama Baptists continue to be difference makers for Christ."

*"Through this offering and the continued giving through the Cooperative Program, Alabama Baptists continue to be difference makers for Christ."*

Rick Lance  
executive director, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions



Photo courtesy of Suzanna Brothers

Suzanna Brothers (second from left) served in Chile as a summer missionary this past summer after years at WorldSong Missions Place instilled in her a desire to play her part in the Great Commission.

## WEEK OF PRAYER for State Missions is Sept. 8–15

### DAY 1 — Making a difference

The Week of Prayer, coupled with the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering, provides Alabama Baptists with an opportunity to unite our hearts in a spirit of giving and prayer to reach a lost and dying world.

### DAY 2 — Ready, willing and able

When a tornado-devastated Mississippi city had an urgent need for a team to serve 3,200 meals a day, it highlighted the value of Alabama's trained and committed Disaster Relief volunteers.

### DAY 3 — Christmas Backpacks

Through the Christmas Backpacks project, Alabama Baptists packed 15,000 backpacks for children in high-need areas. This "tangible expression of the love of God" provides open doors to share the gospel.

### DAY 4 — The Church at Old Town

FBC Helena was nearing the point of closing its doors and made the choice to do whatever it took to turn things around. So the congregation partnered with Valleydale Church and the State Board of Missions to replant the church as The Church at Old Town. Now they're "a community church that is blessing the community."

### DAY 5 — A change in perspective

After a group of African-American pastors traveled to visit an African-American missionary in Central Asia, they said the experience impacted the way they encouraged their church toward international missions.

### DAY 6 — Camden Baptist Church

A group of women at Camden Baptist Church prayed for God to fill their nursery again. After going through a revitalization process, they saw that prayer answered.

### DAY 7 — Incident management trailer

As Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers deploy in the immediate aftermath of disasters, a new incident management trailer will make it easier for them to serve people well during times of great need.

### DAY 8 — Missions calling at WorldSong

After spending her summers at WorldSong Missions Place, Sonali Albus knew God was calling her to missions — and she knew He had given her everything she needed to do it.

Visit [Myers-Mallory.org](https://myers-mallory.org) for downloadable print and video resources.



# ‘MISSIONARY SPIRIT’

‘That’s what we were seeking, finding where God was working and joining Him there,’ John Gunter says

(continued from page 1) did,” she said. “God has blessed us beyond measure through the friendships that we have made with many Dominicans who are now like family to us.”

One of those is Maria. “Maria has been so faithful,” Dana Gunter said. “It was so great to see her and her family and see how she continues to be a great leader in the church today.”

Diaz said the church is “deeply grateful” for the Gunters. John Gunter’s “missionary spirit” and example of going door to door “has been an encouragement to our church to continue doing the work of sharing the gospel throughout the neighborhood,” he said.

### Ongoing support

Over the past 20 years, the Gunters have returned once or twice a year with missions teams to support the ministry of Esperanza Viva.

Diaz said many have

been reached thanks to the ministry of Christ through the Gunters and their IMB teammates who started the church in 2004.

### ‘Very grateful’

“We are very grateful to God for John’s life, for his ministry and his entire team,” Diaz said. “We have seen the result of God having used it as an instrument to evangelize and bring groups of missionaries to the Dominican Republic to win souls for Christ.”

John Gunter, who now serves as a missionary with the Southeast Alabama Baptist Hispanic Ministry Coalition, said it has been “encouraging to see our Dominican brothers and sisters so committed to sharing the gospel.”

As the church has grown, it has also planted another church, and John Gunter said that has been a joy to watch.

“As much pride as we have in being new grandpar-



Photo courtesy of John and Dana Gunter

Pastor Ruben Diaz preaches at the 20th anniversary celebration of Iglesia Bautista Esperanza Viva (Living Hope Baptist Church) on June 30.

ents, it kind of feels like that watching this church grow and multiply,” he said.

He said it started with what he, his wife and the others on their team saw as their “Henry Blackaby mo-

ment” — when they met Maria, they felt like God was already at work there in that neighborhood and they wanted to join Him, as Blackaby’s “Experiencing God” Bible study encour-

ages followers of Christ to do.

“That’s what we were seeking, finding where God was working and joining Him there,” John Gunter said. (Grace Thornton)

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# LASS WORDS

**BY KEN LASS**  
The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

## Lost people on the wall

**S**haron and I are at Cracker Barrel in Birmingham for lunch. I'm usually impatient waiting for my food to arrive. Not here.

I immediately grab the peg board game, knowing full well it will defeat me. I always leave four or five stranded pegs, whereupon the game informs me, accurately, that I am "just plain dumb." I have noticed the internet is loaded with videos showing how to win the peg board game, but that seems like defeating the purpose. The whole idea is to find out if you're getting any smarter from your failures. So far, I am not.

Eventually, I give up and start pondering the unique memorabilia that adorn the walls of every Cracker Barrel. I am most drawn to the large collection of old family photos. Countless frames of large reunions, young couples and individual folks. They all have that early 1900's look about them. The women with their hair tightly up, flowing white blouses with high collars, long black dresses. The men all wearing dark coats, white shirts with thin black ties, handlebar mustaches and hair parted down the middle. Nobody smiles. Why aren't they happy?

Mostly, I wonder how all these portraits wound up on a Cracker Barrel wall.

These people are somebody's great, great grandmother or grandfather. Why aren't their likenesses treasured in their

descendants' photo albums? Did these pictures get passed down so many times the future generations no longer recognized them and just discarded them?

### Christian footprint

I find that unsettling and ponder whether that's going to be my fate some day.

Maybe my great, great grandchildren will look at a photo of me and wonder who that weird guy wearing knee socks and shorts is. It makes me wonder if I am leaving the kind of Christian footprint my family will remember, value and pass on. Have I "brought them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" as Ephesians tells us?

A hundred years from now, will my picture be up on a Cracker Barrel wall, right next to other artifacts, like the silly smartphones people used before they learned to communicate telepathically and the antiquated 4K flat screen TV sets that had long ago been replaced by three dimensional holograms?

It's never too late to improve your Christian legacy. Don't wind up on the wall at Cracker Barrel.

### MEET THE AUTHOR

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

# Someone You Should Know

**JOY BREWER**

**By Leigh Pritchett**  
The Alabama Baptist

**I**love children and how they express their thoughts," said Joy Brewer, 76, of Athens. "One child asked me if I was living when the disciples were here. Another said, 'They took my mother's gallbladder out, and I am not sure if they will put it back in.' " Brewer taught in children's Sunday School for 25 years and now is co-director of her church's backpack ministry. She also worked for 15 years in lunchrooms in Limestone County. Her quilting and crafting skills produce items for babies and other people who need them and spur others to do the same. Married 56 years, she and her husband, Tony, have three daughters, seven grandsons and a great-granddaughter.

**Q: Describe where you focus your greatest ministry efforts.**

A: Secret Friends; backpack ministry; outreach of sending cards and delivering flowers to homebound individuals; providing quilts and other items for babies.

**Q: If there were one thing you could tell your younger self about faith, what would it be?**

A: Pray about who you will marry, remembering life is better when your spouse is a Christian and you work together to raise your family in a Christian environment.

**Q: What has God been teaching you lately?**

A: God has really been working

**MINISTRY:**  
Director of Secret Friends, an endeavor in which younger women in her church "adopt" older women



### CHURCH

**NAME:** Sardis Springs Baptist Church, Athens, in Limestone Baptist Association

**LIFE VERSE:** "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" (Prov. 3:5).

with me lately. One of my prayers I have been praying is being answered, not exactly in the time frame or how I wanted it answered, but I am so very thankful.

**Q: Who was or is one of the most influential people in your faith life? Why?**

A: It had to be my parents, who raised seven of us to be faithful to God and to our family, to help our neighbor, to work for what we have and to love our country.

**Q: Have you ever read a book or heard a song that changed the way you think about God and faith? What was it, and what did you learn from it?**

A: Many songs speak to me.

**Q: Does your church have any special traditions that mean a lot to you? What are they?**

A: We started a program in the late '80s called Secret Friends. The younger ladies of the church take the older ladies' Sunday School class as "secret friends" for six months. The younger ladies send cards and gifts ... and remember their secret friend in prayer daily. At the end of six months, we have lunch for the older ladies and reveal our secret friends.

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

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



## UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

# Longing for revival in your area?

The Regional Prayer Summits are designed to draw pastors, church leaders and prayer warriors together for a time of worship and strategic prayer, focusing on the need for revival and spiritual awakening across the state of Alabama and the nation. These four events, held 10 a.m.–2 p.m., will be led by Bill Eliff of Little Rock, Arkansas:

- **Sept. 16** — Southeast Alabama Baptist Association
- **Sept. 17** — Dauphin Way Baptist Church in Mobile
- **Sept. 23** — Lakewood Baptist Church in Huntsville

To register, visit [alsbom.org/prayersummits](http://alsbom.org/prayersummits) or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



- **Sept. 24** — Bethlehem West Baptist Church in Vinemont

This is a free event and lunch is provided. Register at [alsbom.org/prayersummits](http://alsbom.org/prayersummits).

## Get Acquainted Day

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

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

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

Get Acquainted Day will be Sept. 5, 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., with lunch provided.

To register, visit [alsbom.org/gad](http://alsbom.org/gad).

## Personnel Management Conference: Sept. 11

Do you serve on a church personnel committee? The Personnel Management Conference — set for Sept. 11, 10 a.m.–3 p.m. — can give you some tools to help you serve more effectively.

You can attend in person at the SBOM in Prattville or

virtually. The conference will address staffing and compensation considerations, job descriptions, personnel policies and basic employment law.

The cost to attend in person is \$15 and includes lunch. Online is free. Register at [alsbom.org/personnel](http://alsbom.org/personnel).

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### CHURCH POSITIONS

#### SENIOR PASTOR

Hueytown Baptist Church has an opening for senior pastor. Contact us for additional information at [office@hueytownbaptist.com](mailto:office@hueytownbaptist.com).

#### PASTOR

Tates Chapel Baptist Church is seeking a full-time pastor. Send resumé to: [TatesChapelBaptistChurch@tateschapeloffice@gmail.com](mailto:TatesChapelBaptistChurch@tateschapeloffice@gmail.com).

#### PASTOR

Lakeview Baptist Church, Montgomery, is seeking a full-time pastor. Please send resumé to: [amanda@lakeviewbaptist.cc](mailto:amanda@lakeviewbaptist.cc) or 9225 Atlanta Hwy, Montgomery, AL 36117.

#### PASTOR

Pinckard Baptist Church, Pinckard, Alabama, seeking full-time or bivocational pastor. Send resumé to: [mark.b.ivey@gmail.com](mailto:mark.b.ivey@gmail.com).

#### BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Fairview Baptist in Samson, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor. Please email resumé to: [fairviewbaptist.samson.al@outlook.com](mailto:fairviewbaptist.samson.al@outlook.com) or via USPS to: 3159 N State Highway 87, Samson, AL 36477.

#### BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

New Beginnings Baptist Church, a small congregation in Hayden, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor. Send inquiries/resumé to: [sonyahumber@gmail.com](mailto:sonyahumber@gmail.com).

#### PART-TIME ASSOCIATE PASTOR

Buhl Baptist is prayerfully seeking a part-time associate pastor. Please contact us for more information by emailing [dmhicks630@gmail.com](mailto:dmhicks630@gmail.com) or [BuhlBaptistChurch@gmail.com](mailto:BuhlBaptistChurch@gmail.com)

#### ASSOCIATE PASTOR OF WORSHIP MINISTRY & SENIOR ADULTS

Mexia Baptist Church of Frisco City, Alabama, is seeking a full-time associate pastor of worship ministry and senior adults to lead all aspects of the church worship ministry, including children's choir. Applicants should have a

bachelor's degree in a related field, and a seminary degree is preferred. Please submit resumé to: [office@mexiabaptistchurch.com](mailto:office@mexiabaptistchurch.com) or call 251-575-4398.

#### MINISTER OF MUSIC

First Baptist Church in Selma, Alabama, is seeking a minister of music to be responsible to the church body and for working alongside the pastor, assisting the church in the preparation, conveyance and evaluation of a comprehensive music ministry. Contact Dr. Tim Mathis: [tmathis@fbcselma.org](mailto:tmathis@fbcselma.org).

#### BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC MINISTER

Pinckard Baptist Church is hiring for a bivocational music minister. If interested, please contact our committee chair for this search, Joni Smith, at [jonismith@yahoo.com](mailto:jonismith@yahoo.com).

#### PART-TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC

South Luverne Baptist Church, Luverne, AL 36049. [southluvernebc.com](http://southluvernebc.com). Provides overall direction and vision of the worship and music program and provides spiritual leadership to the music staff and volunteers. Submit resume to: [jnorsworthy1141@gmail.com](mailto:jnorsworthy1141@gmail.com). Call 334-335-6885 for detailed job description.

### OTHER POSITIONS

#### DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS

The Mobile Baptist Association is seeking a full-time director of missions. To view the full job description: <https://bit.ly/4cGsOqE>. Please send resumé before Aug. 30 to: [DOMsearchMACK@MobileBaptists.org](mailto:DOMsearchMACK@MobileBaptists.org).

#### ASSOCIATION MISSIONS STRATEGIST

Tallapoosa Baptist Association is prayerfully beginning the search for our next association missions strategist. We invite those who sense God calling them to serve in this capacity to send your resumé to our search team at [pstrchad79@gmail.com](mailto:pstrchad79@gmail.com). The expected start date for the position is January 2025 or thereafter. Resumes will be accepted until Oct. 1.

### SIGNS

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### BUSINESS

#### ADOPTION LEGAL SERVICES

Long-time lawyer and former deputy probate judge Eddie Vines offers legal services to families walking through the adoption process. He is an ordained Baptist minister and does ongoing missions work in India. Contact Eddie Vines: 205-586-0222 or [evinesattorney@yahoo.com](mailto:evinesattorney@yahoo.com). No representation is made that the quality of the legal services to be performed is greater than the quality of legal services performed by other lawyers.

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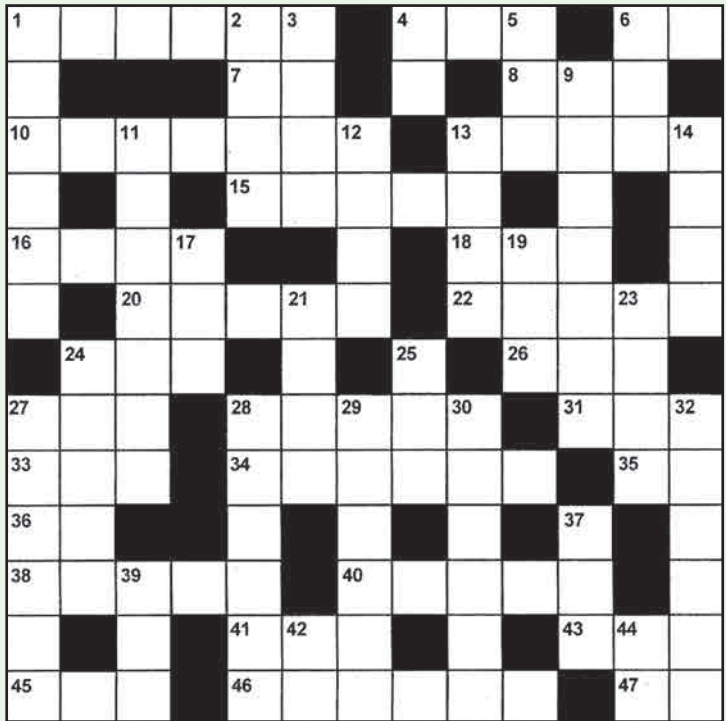
# CHRISTIAN Crossword



**UPCOMING EVENTS**  
*sponsored by the State Board of Missions*

ACROSS

- 1. Day of rest.
- 4. Adam was the first.
- 6. Southwest. (abbr.)
- 7. Another name for Mother.
- 8. Stand fast in \_\_\_\_\_ spirit. (Phil. 1:27)
- 10. The strength of an \_\_\_\_\_. (Num. 23:22)
- 13. Nighttime movie.
- 15. A sleeping noise.
- 16. Saul's father. (1 Sam. 10:21)



By Glenn G. Luscher Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- 18. Used for hearing.
- 20. Built rugged.
- 22. The \_\_\_\_\_ of wisdom is above rubies. (Job 27:18)
- 24. It \_\_\_\_\_ upon each of them. (Acts 2:3)
- 26. Automobile.
- 27. Cooling device.
- 28. Abraham's original name. (Gen. 17:5)
- 31. What rabbits do.
- 33. Uninvited picnic guest.
- 34. \_\_\_\_\_ the Arbiter. (2 Sam. 23:35)
- 35. Another name for Father.
- 36. Road. (abbr.)
- 38. Province of Asia Minor. (Acts 16:7)
- 40. With your \_\_\_\_\_ girded. (Ex. 12:11)
- 41. Frozen water.
- 43. Container used for

- cooking.
- 21. A city of Benjamin. (Josh. 21:17)
- 23. Collected agricultural product.
- 24. Little Orphan Annie's dog.
- 25. Opposite of near.

DOWN

- 1. Peanut coverings.
- 2. Native of Tekoa. (Amos 1:1)
- 3. Tale or heavy thread.
- 4. Another name I call myself.
- 5. A conjunction.
- 6. Galilee is one.
- 9. Name of a Simeonite captain. (1 Chron. 4:42)
- 11. Without delay.
- 12. Lamech's son. (Gen. 5:28, 29)
- 13. Extending far downward.
- 14. Unable to speak.
- 17. Exceedingly warm.
- 19. A bowl-like curved line.
- 27. One who raises livestock.
- 28. Son of Nadab. (1 Chron. 2:30)
- 29. One who speaks to cause injury. (1 Cor. 5:11)
- 30. A miry place. (Ezek. 47:11)
- 32. A mother or father.
- 37. A snake. (Job 20:16)
- 39. Male offspring.
- 42. California. (abbr.)
- 42. Alcoholics Anonymous. (abbr.)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

## Small church tax conference

Do you need a W-2 if the pastor is the only employee? Do you have to complete Form 941? Can the minister take 100% of his income as housing? How does a small church of 100 or fewer differ from the large church in tax issues? The Tax Conference will help answer questions about those topics and more.

Join us Sept. 12 at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions in Prattville, or you can choose to attend virtually! The conference runs from

To register, visit [alsbom.org/sctc](https://alsbom.org/sctc) or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



10 a.m. to 3 p.m. and costs \$15, which includes lunch and materials. To register, visit [alsbom.org/sctc](https://alsbom.org/sctc).

## Roundtable discussions for kids ministers

Come join us for the Kidz Ministry Roundtables, offered on five dates in five locations. During the roundtable, we will spend some time having focused conversations for kids ministers. It will be a great opportunity to connect and encourage each other. This is a free event. Times are 11:30 a.m.–1 p.m. except as noted below. Lunch will be provided.

- **Sept. 5** — Calvary Baptist Church in Dothan
  - **Sept. 9** — First Baptist Church Montgomery
  - **Sept. 16** — Hunter Street Baptist Church in Hoover
  - **Sept. 24** — First Baptist Church Centre, 6–7:30 p.m.
  - **Sept. 26** — Mount Zion Baptist Church in Huntsville
- Register at [kidzlinkal.org/events](https://kidzlinkal.org/events).

## Worship conference

The LIFT! Defining Worship Conference aims to give you fresh tools to meet your church's needs. This event is created for worship leaders (including pastors) and worship teams to join together and redis-

cover the love and importance of leading worship. The conference will be held Sept. 26, 9:30–2 p.m., at Thorington Road Baptist Church in Montgomery. The cost is \$35. To register, visit [alabamaworship.org/lift](https://alabamaworship.org/lift).



# EXPLORE THE BIBLE

## Sunday School Lessons

By Robert Olsen, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



### For August 25

#### PRAYING Acts 12:6-18

Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great, was the ruler of Judea and Samaria. He was on shaky ground with the Romans, and he would do whatever it took to maintain the loyalty of his Jewish subjects.

One way to win favor with the Jewish authorities was to persecute the hated sect of Christianity, especially the apostles. Herod had James arrested and executed. That worked so well that he arrested Peter and planned to execute him too. The faith of the early church was being tested by the winds of persecution.

#### Led to Freedom (6-10)

As the church fervently prayed to God on behalf of Peter, God dispatched an angel to lead him to freedom. The word “fervent” means “to stretch or strain.” The word was used to describe a muscle stretched to its limits.

The early church was serious about prayer. They weren’t playing church; they were a praying church.

Most of the people of that day would have been wondering who could resist or defy the authority of King Herod. James had been martyred. And with Passover ending, no one could stop the king from executing Peter as well.

No one indeed but God, reigning on His throne in heaven, can do all that he pleases. And God was pleased to release Peter from Herod’s custody.

This was not Peter’s escape so much as it was his deliverance. This was not his plan. He was asleep. The angel woke him up and led him out of the prison and into the city.

#### Knocking at the Door (11-14)

It was such a surreal moment, but finally Peter realized this was not a vision but an actual deliverance in accordance with God’s plan. After comprehending that he had been led to freedom, he

went to Mary’s home where many believers had gathered to pray.

Mary, the mother of John Mark, was willing to risk retribution from Herod by hosting the prayer meeting in her home. A home large enough to accommodate this large of a gathering would have a courtyard surrounded by a wall. The outer gate led to the courtyard and then to the house.

As Peter knocked on the door of the outer gate, one of Mary’s servants, Rhoda, came to see who it was. She recognized Peter’s voice as he asked to be let in, but she was so overwhelmed with excitement that she ran back to the house to announce that Peter was at the gate knocking on the door.

#### Telling His Story (15-18)

These verses strengthen our belief in the inspiration of Scripture. If the Bible had been written by man, the writers would not have included the verses that reveal their faults. The people in the prayer meeting thought Rhoda was out of her mind.

It couldn’t be Peter; he was in prison. It was ironic that the people who were praying for Peter had difficulty believing the Lord had answered their prayers. God is so good to us even when we wobble in our faith.

Rhoda kept insisting that it was Peter at the gate. Finally, Peter’s persistence was rewarded and they opened the door for him. Although they had been praying for a miracle, they were amazed when they saw him freed from prison. Peter told them all that the Lord had done for him and instructed them to tell others to encourage their faith.



*This lesson was written by Jay T. Robertson, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, University of Mobile.*

### For September 1

#### SENT Acts 13:1-12

#### Listen (1-3)

The Book of Acts takes a turn at this point in the story, moving from the establishment of the Church to its expansion, focusing almost exclusively on Paul and his missionary journeys. Beginning in Chapter 13, while Paul was worshipping with a group of strong Christians in the church at Antioch, the Holy Spirit told them to set apart Saul (Paul) and Barnabas.

The same Holy Spirit is alive and well in believers today and still calls people to serve in missions. Often, people feel a call to be involved in missions but are met with shock from other believers who bring up issues such as, “How will you make money? Won’t it be dangerous? Why leave the comfort of home to go live in discomfort?”

These questions are human questions, showing concern for our immediate well-being. The gospel, however, is not of human design, and sharing it is not to be carried out by human means but by dependence on God. The Church should do what it can to facilitate missions and encourage and support those who are interested in serving in this way.

#### Share (4-8)

In the history of missions, some of the most vehement opponents of Christianity have been witch doctors, shamans, druids and sorcerers. The reason is obvious. These are the people who claim to speak for the gods or the spirits; they claim to understand the spiritual realm.

Since Christianity provides spiritual truths, these spiritists are correct in seeing a threat to their power. All people groups have an interest in getting answers from the spiritual realm. These “spiritual guides” are either frauds or they are

serving demons. The spiritual bondage that the followers of these false religions are bound in is powerful and burdensome. Jesus, however, brings a light yoke (Matt. 11:30). The light that the gospel brings often leads to conversions.

In this case with Paul, Bar-Jesus (which means “son of Joshua”) was the local sorcerer, and he could see that Paul’s God was a threat to his power as advisor to the proconsul.

#### Rely on the Spirit (9-12)

The proconsul of the Island, Sergius Paulus, wanted to hear the Word of God from Paul and Barnabas, but Bar-Jesus tried to dissuade the proconsul from accepting the gospel. Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, said that God was going to blind him, and Bar-Jesus was at once blinded! This wonderful act convinced Sergius Paulus of the truth of the gospel and he became a believer!

Throughout history, God has used signs and wonders to get people’s attention and make them open to the gospel. A quick study of missions history retells countless stories of miraculous events that missionaries have witnessed that have led to conversions.

Sometimes God decides to show His power this way. Other times it is God’s Word alone that is the miracle, revealing to people the love of God and how to be made right with God.

We should rely on God to convert people by whatever means He sees fit; we only need to be willing to be used by Him. This applies to people who are overseas doing missions work and also to every other Christian living out their lives on mission for the Lord.

We should be encouraged that each of us is called to serve God by the means He has given us in whatever setting He has placed us.

*“Immediately mist and darkness fell upon [Bar-Jesus]*

*... Then the proconsul believed.”*

Acts 13:11-12



# BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

## Sunday School Lessons

Adjunct Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

By Teman Knight



### For August 25

#### **BARUCH** **Jeremiah 36:4–8,** **16–18; 45:1–5**

Staying faithful amid difficult times can be a real challenge. Such was the case for both Jeremiah and Baruch. Jeremiah was a prophet in Judah during a spiritually tumultuous time for the nation.

King Jehoiakim led Judah away from God, and Jeremiah's role as prophet was to deliver messages of judgment to the king and the nation regarding the coming Babylonian exile. Jeremiah's scribe and servant was named Baruch.

Baruch played a prominent role in transcribing the prophetic messages of Judah's upcoming destruction with the nation and its leaders. In spite of the challenges of this assignment, Baruch was faithful in his obedience.

#### **Faithfully represent** **those you serve. (36:4–8)**

Baruch, whose name means "blessed," was chosen to record the prophecy of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was restricted from entering the temple — possibly due to past conflict — so he sent Baruch to read the prophecy of judgment.

God gave these words to Jeremiah as a warning to Judah. Baruch's public reading of the warning should have prompted the people to repent of their idolatry and return to Yahweh.

Though the message was eventually rejected, Baruch faithfully carried out a very difficult assignment. Like Baruch, we must be faithful to carry out the Lord's will despite the hardships that may come with it.

Baruch represented Jeremiah faithfully in his actions but more importantly, he served the Lord honorably.

#### **Give credit where** **credit is due. (16–18)**

One of King Jehoiakim's counselors heard the prophecy read by Baruch in the temple, and he immediately told the other officials

of the warnings. These officials requested that Baruch give them a private re-reading of Jeremiah's prophecy, which led them to tremble in fear. This response is unexpected when you consider that Jeremiah's prophecies had been reported for more than 20 years without effect.

These officials recognized Jeremiah's prophetic authority and decided to take the message to the king. Jehoiakim would eventually take the scroll of prophecy and throw it into the fire, thus sealing the fate of Judah.

Though Baruch impressed the royal officials with his message, he was quick not to take credit for it. It took great humility and courage for Baruch to admit his role in the production of the scroll.

#### **God rewards our** **service but in ways we** **may not expect. (45:1–5)**

The words from the Lord to Baruch give us insight into the emotional turmoil Baruch was in due to the prophecy of Judah's destruction. This could have been the result of physical threats he received after reading Jeremiah's prophecy in the temple.

God reminds Baruch through Jeremiah of His sovereign control of the future of Judah. He also speaks into Baruch's discouragement to remind him that blessings would come to him that would be far better than anything he might pursue through his own strength.

This passage reminds us that although we might suffer as we serve God, He will faithfully bless and sustain those who are committed to His purposes.



*This lesson was written by Kevin Blackwell, Ph.D., Executive Director, Ministry Training Institute/Assistant to the President for Church Relations, Samford University.*

### For September 1

#### **PURPOSE QUESTIONED** **Ecclesiastes 1:1–14**

Ever since God created mankind, we have been on a pursuit of discovering purpose and meaning for our lives. The world claims that we can find purpose in many different ways. People search for happiness or contentment, security and safety or maybe community so they can feel like they belong. Many today are trying to find purpose in identity. They believe if they can just discover who they are, then life will have meaning. The author of the Book of Ecclesiastes shows us Solomon's pursuit of discovering meaning in his life. His life was filled with frustration at not being able to grasp hold of that for which he was searching. Solomon discovered that when he pursued God the story ended differently.

#### **Without God, what we do in** **life can feel pointless. (1–7)**

"Absolute futility. Everything is futile" (v. 2). The Hebrew word "hebel," translated here as "futile," literally means "breath, nothingness, meaningless and vapor." Have you ever walked outside on a cold morning and seen your breath? What if you reached out your hand and tried to catch it? You would catch nothing.

The vapor gives the appearance of something but nothing is really there. Therefore, it is worthless and futile to attempt to catch it. Everything in life that we pursue apart from God is worthless and pointless.

"What does a person gain for all his efforts that he labors at under the sun?" (v. 3). No matter how hard we work, no matter what we achieve without God, it is pointless. Success in this world will still leave us feeling unsatisfied.

Many people in our society spend all their efforts in life just to

accumulate stuff that will not last and will only bring momentary happiness.

#### **Without God, what we do in** **life does not satisfy. (8–10)**

"All things are wearisome, more than anyone can say" (v. 8). Many people today are tired and worn out from pursuing things that do not really matter.

Ecclesiastes reminds us that all of this has been tried before. Our efforts to please ourselves will always come up short. Only when we seek to please God with our lives will we find meaning and purpose. Instead of getting tired and worn out from chasing the things of the world, let us follow Paul's advice: "Let us not get tired of doing good" (Gal. 6:9).

#### **Without God, what we do in** **life is a miserable task. (11–14)**

The teacher tried everything he could think of to find purpose and meaning in life. Throughout the book, we see that he tried wisdom and knowledge (1:12–18), pleasure (2:1–3), success (2:4–11), religion (5:1–7), riches (6:1–2) and even a good reputation (7:1–2), yet they did not satisfy.

Solomon attempted these at a level we could never compete with. He was known as the wisest man in the world, yet his pursuit of knowledge was not enough to satisfy. He pursued pleasure at ungodly levels, but it did not give him fulfillment.

Solomon acquired more wealth than we could ever achieve, but it still was not enough. He concluded that the only way to find purpose in life was to "fear God and keep His commands" (12:13). If we want to find purpose in life, Jesus said, "But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you" (Matt. 6:33).

*"I have seen everything that is done under the sun,  
and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind."*

**Ecclesiastes 1:14**



# WORD search

- ASHES  
BARUCH  
BOOK  
BUILD  
CHAMBER  
COMMANDED  
DESTROY  
DICTATE  
DISASTER  
DISOBEDIENCE  
FASTING
- FIREPOT  
GREAT  
HIDE  
JEHOIAKIM  
JEREMIAH  
JUDAH  
LAMENT  
MESSAGE  
OFFICIALS  
PALACE  
PROCLAIM
- PROPHECY  
READ  
REWARD  
SCROLL  
SORROW  
TEMPLE  
THREAT  
WARNING  
WOE  
WORDS  
WRITING

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

“So Baruch son of Neriah did everything Jeremiah the prophet had commanded him. At the Lord’s temple, he read the Lord’s words from the scroll.”  
JEREMIAH 36:8



## You Gotta’ Hear This!

Glimpses of God in the everyday moments

### ‘Riding around’ memories

One of my favorite activities in high school was to go “riding around” with my best friend. We loved driving by our friends’ houses to blow the horn, stopping to get a snack for the road and screaming as we sped by the couples parked on the local “Lover’s Lane” at night.

#### Times have changed

A couple of weeks ago, my high school best friend and I took my husband’s new jeep out for a ride. We quickly realized that times have changed. There are lots of differences in “riding around” in the 70s and “riding around” when you are in your 70s.

1. We had to schedule it around our doctor’s appointments. She was preparing for an upcoming surgery, and I was wearing a heart monitor.
2. We made no effort to dress up in a cute outfit in case some boys chased us.
3. No boys chased us.
4. We didn’t have to stop for bathroom breaks back then.
5. When I got to her house, I blew the secret horn blow we used back then. It took her a while because she had fallen asleep in her recliner.
6. When she tried to get in the car, she had to start over and use her “good arm” to pull.

7. When she got in the car, I had to turn the radio down so I could “see” to drive. In the 70s, we turned it up as loud as it would go.
8. We dropped in on friends who had been working in their barn when we got there. I do not remember them being tired and sweaty in high school.
9. I had to drop her off at 8 p.m. because neither of us can see to drive in the dark.
10. Nobody goes parking anymore, so we couldn’t scream to scare anybody as we did way back when.

Without a doubt, time is passing, we are growing older and life is changing daily. But as I age, I become increasingly assured of the goodness and faithfulness of my God who never changes. He makes future dreams exciting and memories of the past enjoyable.

### MEET THE AUTHOR

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





# Cherished relatives

**Grandparents provide varying levels of care to grandchildren in today's modern world**

**T**he number of grandparents raising their grandchildren in Alabama has increased in recent years.

Nearly 160,000 children in Alabama live in homes where a relative is the head of the household, and about 59,000 grandparents are fully responsible for raising their grandchildren in Alabama, per data compiled by the nonprofit organization Grand Families.

## Across the nation

Nationally, there are more than 2.5 million grandparents who carry the primary responsibility of caring for their grandchildren, with about a third of grandchildren living with their grandparents being under six years old.

Alabama Senior Services Commissioner Jean Brown noted some of the unique challenges older Alabamians can face when being responsible for a child, particularly in the modern world.

“More living space, bigger food



Photo by Drazen Zigic on Freepik

and household budgets, becoming familiar with social media. ... Imagine what a challenge that can be and all the mental health issues that

presents,” Brown said last fall.

“My personal opinion is that these grandparents and family caregivers are saints; most of them never

thought in their golden years they would be caring for young children and everything that entails.” (Reporting by Alabama Daily News)

## Celebrating Grandparents Day on Sept. 8 is about showing appreciation and love

**B**y some estimates, there are more than 70 million grandparents in the U.S. alone. Grandparents Day is an annual celebration of these special individuals.

Commemorated the Sunday after Labor Day each year, this year Grandparents Day is Sept. 8. Many churches and families will make a special effort to recog-

nize the blessing of grandparents on this day.

### Gift options

An internet search of ideas will turn up a variety of gift options, including cards, flowers, desserts and scrapbooks. For most, the gift of time will be the most appreciated — a phone call, a visit or attending church together will be especially meaningful.

For churches planning a

recognition, keep in mind that many grandparents are parenting their grandchildren for a variety of reasons. Others may be estranged from their grandchildren or live far away from them. For grandparents coping with difficult situations, the recognition of this special day may be painful. Include them in your prayer time and look for ways to encourage them.

Consider recruiting students or children to help older adults with chores, gardening or other tasks around their homes. Even a short visit can lift the spirits of a person who feels alone or forgotten.

### Appreciation

Celebrating Grandparents Day is about showing appreciation and love for the wisdom, support and care that grandparents

provide, but the day and the honor is about much more than biological connections — love is the most important connection.

Whether through simple gestures or grand celebrations, the key is to let older adults feel valued and cherished for the role they play in the lives of you and your children. (Carrie B. McWhorter)





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# Remaining faithful

By Tracy Riggs Frontz

The Alabama Baptist

## Minister shares ‘Hurt and Healed by the Church’

**A**buse in churches has come to light more and more in recent years. Many of those who experienced this abuse have fallen away from the faith — or at least have left the Church.

Ryan George was one of these victims and has taken the past 25 years to reevaluate what he believes, but he never left his faith or the Church.

“I understand why so many others have utterly torn down their faith after experiences similar to mine,” said George, a ministry leader and author of “Hurt and Healed by the Church: Redemption and Reconstruction After Spiritual Abuse.”

“For me, Jesus is still the hope of the world, and His Church is how His grace gets distributed to all of humanity. This book is my answer to why I’m still here — how I left an abusive faith system but not Jesus.”

### Abusive family

George grew up in a sheltered environment, with his life totally revolving around the Independent Fundamental Baptist denomination. Though he knew what he was experiencing was wrong, he didn’t have a safe way to talk about it because it was his family doing the abuse.

His father, who was later discovered to be a serial sexual abuser, was also his pastor.

“I didn’t feel safe around my parents. I couldn’t tell you five times

while I was a kid that I heard ‘I love you’ from my mom. She never stepped in front of my dad to protect me, so I had an insecure attachment from the youngest, from 4 or 5 years old, when they told me horrible things, that I deserved to be beaten or whatever,” George said.

George lived with physical abuse but didn’t know about his father’s other side until he was much older.

The truth came out in stages, from 2002 to 2021. His dad confessed to him and his mom that he had an affair but didn’t reveal that it was not consensual and that

she was younger than 18 years old.

To this date, his father has only told family about what he called an affair and hasn’t admitted his other sexual abuse to anyone.

George hated keeping the secrets about his dad. But since the victims in each case weren’t ready to share, he held it in.

When it finally came out publicly, he had to find the courage and the way to talk about it. He highly recommends to others to write about their experiences but not share it with anyone but a therapist — an essential part of the healing team — or a very trusted family member or friend. Process it with them before sharing with a few others.

Only then should that person even consider sharing it with a wider audience.

Journaling is also very important

to George, having kept a daily journal since 2016. During the times he feels stagnant, he reviews old entries to see how far he has come.

“It’s crazy. Yesterday I was crying, looking at one from seven years ago and thinking, ‘Oh, my goodness! I remember that moment. It hurt so bad. But look how much freer I am now,’” he said.

Jesus redeemed so much from George’s childhood.

Because of his insecure attachment issues, the realization that the violence his father exhibited was generational and the sexual abuse his father had perpetrated, he decided he didn’t want to have children.

“I didn’t want to put myself in a situation where I might be tempted by something my dad was tempted by,” George said.

### ‘Heart of God’

But one day when he was out of the country and off the grid, his wife texted, “We now have a young girl placed in our care. She’ll be here when you get home.”

When George finally had phone service, he found out they had been tasked with providing protective care for a teenager who was in his wife’s Bible study, even though they hadn’t trained as foster parents.

Four years later, she became their legal daughter.

“God wanted me to know what

**“God wanted me to know what it’s like to pursue a child and their adoption in order to get a glimpse of His heart for me.”**

Ryan George

it’s like to pursue a child and their adoption in order to get a glimpse of His heart for me. He wanted me to unlearn my doubts, my assumptions and my self-imposed restrictions.

“Now I’m confident to be a dad. I feel I’m a pretty decent dad. Actually, my daughter loves me and likes me and jokes with me. I think I became comfortable with that the further and further I got away from my dad’s abuse and theology,” he said.

As hard as this entire experience has been for George, he is still grateful.

“The heart of God is a good Father, which was a foreign concept.

“I’ve learned that my pain wasn’t wasted. It’s not that everything’s OK because God redeemed the pain, but the pain finds meaning.

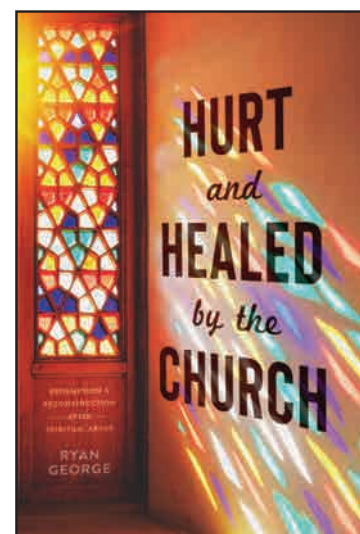
“If it can help one person, it’s worth all

that I’ve sacrificed to put this book out.”

To learn more about George and the book, go to [booksbyryan.com](http://booksbyryan.com).



RYAN GEORGE





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# ‘The nations are here’

By Myriah Snyder  
International Mission Board

## Central Asian refugees’ plight spurs IMB alumnus to keep serving

**B**efore former International Mission Board worker Allison moved back to the United States, she’d already developed a deep love for and passion to reach the Central Asian diaspora. Working with Central Asian refugees and asylum seekers in Europe opened her eyes to the felt needs of the people, as well as their spiritual condition. Her friend Aziza’s story often comes to mind.

Trapped in an abusive marriage in her home country, Aziza felt no other option but to flee. So, she began the dangerous journey to Europe. Eventually she needed to cross the waters from Turkey to Greece so she could enter the European Union and request asylum.

### Saved for a purpose

As she and 20 others boarded a boat, they realized they were way over capacity. The boat wouldn’t withstand the rough seas. Some passengers shouted at the captain to go back, but he pressed on. Heavy and off-balance, the boat flipped upside down in the choppy waters, dumping its passengers out. It looked like there would be no survivors.

As Aziza was losing her battle to stay afloat, she said she felt a hand pull her to safety, and she says she heard a voice telling her that her story wasn’t over. Aziza has no idea how long she was under the water or when her rescuers came. She regained consciousness when they revived her, coughing up large amounts of saltwater.

Instantly she understood that God had saved her for a purpose.

Of the 20 who boarded that day, there were only three survivors. On shore, she was met by Grecian au-

thorities who suspected her and the other survivors of murdering the others on the boat. Her next three months were spent in prison. When she was finally released, she had no money and no papers. All was lost in the boat wreck, and she was left with only the dirty clothes on her back.

Eventually, someone told her about a small church in the city. Though she was a Muslim, church members cared for her and gave her a Bible in her language. They also connected her with a local house church in her language. Over the next few months, she heard and read about a loving God and a Savior who had died to provide for her salvation. In time, she understood her purpose and gave her life to Christ.

Allison said, “Aziza’s life

changed because she met Christians who loved her and offered her Jesus.”

### Renewed commitment

Allison said she notices that Christians often discuss refugees and immigrants in political terms and not how believers can serve those already living close by. “What if God took them on a journey, just so they can meet the Savior through His Church? What if He wants us to be a part of it? We never know what God is doing in a person’s life until we engage them in meaningful ways,” Allison shared.

She has seen the difference genuine compassion and God’s truth can make in the lives of those far from home.

She poured nearly 15 years into

her Central Asian friends so they’d come to know Jesus.

When she made the decision to return to the United States to care for her aging parents, she wondered how she would serve the nations while living in the U.S.

God was working behind the scenes, opening doors before she even returned. After she left the field, the IMB formed the diaspora mobilization team. With a renewed commitment to assist churches in connecting with internationals close by, the International Mission Board, North American Mission Board, Send Relief and Woman’s Missionary Union are uniting to better serve churches focusing on the missionary task in every community. Allison is an integral part of the ministry, as one of the senior diaspora mobilization strategists on the newly formed team.

Allison said, “Leaving the field, I somewhat felt like I was leaving the nations behind. But I was reminded that God’s vision is much bigger than ours. He weaves our lives into the expansion of His Kingdom effortlessly, no matter where we find ourselves.

“The nations are here. God has placed them in communities across North America, many on the doorsteps of our churches. The question is how believers in these churches will respond.”

To learn more about the diaspora mobilization team, please visit [dmcollective.org](http://dmcollective.org). Or email [info@dmcollective.org](mailto:info@dmcollective.org).

\*Aziza’s name has been changed for security reasons.



IMB photo

Once Central Asian refugees flee their home country, they are typically housed in temporary camps like this one in Europe.

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



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# Praying for the persecuted church

## Attacks on villages, schools continue to plague Nigerian believers

Open Doors, which tracks persecution of Christians, says Nigeria is the world's deadliest place to be a believer. Between Oct. 1, 2022, and Sept. 30, 2023, 4,118 Christians were slain for their faith in Nigeria, which also leads the world in the number of Christians kidnapped.

The news services Christian Daily International and Morning Star News report these recent incidents of persecution:

► Muslim Fulani herdsmen raided three villages in Benue state, murdering 28 Christians.

► Six Christians were ambushed and abducted near Naka Highway in Benue state. Muslim

Fulani herdsmen demanded 50 million naira (US\$36,150) for one captive, who was released after a ransom payment.

► Six Christians were slain when Muslim Fulani herdsmen attacked



Unsplash.com photo

Ambe village in Kaduna state.

► Civil Defense personnel foiled the attempted abduction of students from a Catholic school in the suburb Adeke in Benue state. A security guard was shot.

► Dauda Dalyop, pastor of the Assemblies of God Church in Plateau state's Kwall District, was killed when armed raiders attacked his village. Also killed were his wife, Chummy Dauda, and three other Christians.

► Christian leaders said members of the terrorist group Boko Haram intercepted four Christians along Damaturu-Biu Highway in Yobe state, killing three. The fourth Christian was taken captive.

► Gabriel Ukeh, a priest at St. Thomas Catholic Parish in the Zaman Dabo village of Kaduna state, was abducted from parish property by "armed Muslim bandits," according to an area resident.

Nigeria is No. 6 on Open Doors' 2024 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian. (TAB)

## Pakistani woman gruesomely injured after her boss allegedly shoved her

Police in Pakistan refused to file a case against a landowner whose physical force toward a female employee resulted in gruesome injuries from a chaff cutter.

Saima Bibi suffered injuries in Ram Diwali Chak No. 6 village in Pakistan's Punjab prov-

ince, report the news outlets Christian Daily International and Morning Star News.

Bibi had taken a break from cutting cow fodder in order to serve tea to visiting relatives. Muhammad Mustafa, one of the Muslim landowners, told her to get back to cutting cow fodder. Mustafa grabbed her hair and pushed her toward the electric chaff cutter, said Shahzad Masih, Bibi's husband.

Bibi fell, hitting the cutter. Her ear was torn off, most of her scalp was cut and her right eye was injured, Masih told the news services.

The other Muslim landowner, Muhammad Imran, took Bibi to Government Allied Hospital for treatment, yet warned her to say her injuries were accidental, Masih said.

Masih, who is Catholic, said Nishatabad Police Station in Faisalabad would not file a case of the incident when he went to them, telling him instead to settle with the offender.

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

## Bail denied for Christian charged with 'hurting the religious sentiments'

A judge refused bail for a Christian woman jailed in Pakistan on charges of blasphemy. The woman's husband claims the charges are false.

Stella Khawar, 28-year-old mother of a 4 year old, was arrested May 12 in Kotli Loharan in Punjab Province on charges of "hurting the religious sentiments of Muslims,"

husband Khawar Shahzad told news services Christian Daily International and Morning Star News.

He explained that homes of Christians and churches in the Jaranwala area were attacked Aug. 16, 2023. Since then, materials that some consider blasphemous have periodically been found. Even though no one knows who is responsible, police charged Stella Khawar for one case in August 2023 and one on Jan. 7, 2024, her husband said. Her husband said the complainant and others are pressuring him not to mount a defense for Stella. (TAB)



Unsplash.com photo

## YouTube video gives hope that abducted pastor, wife still alive

A video uploaded to YouTube gives hope that a pastor and his wife abducted March 14, 2023, in Nigeria are still alive. The video shows Paul



Photo courtesy of Morning Star News

Musa, pastor of Church of Christ in Nations, and his wife, reports the news services Christian Daily International and Morning Star News. They were kidnapped in Gam-

boru Ngala in Nigeria's Borno State. The date the video was made is unknown.

No group has claimed responsibility for the abduction. However, the video shows the couple seated next to a Boko Haram flag. Boko Haram is an Islamist extremist group. (TAB)

## One Catholic worker tortured to death; 5 die from toxic gases

A Catholic factory worker was tortured to death in Pakistan, and five Christian sanitation workers died of noxious gases for lack of protective gear.

It is not uncommon in Pakistan for Christians to be employed as sanitation workers and sent into hazardous situations without protective gear, rights activists told Christian Daily International and Morning Star News.

Two Christians died in Sindh province and three the following day in Punjab province from exposure to toxic gases. Another who died in the Sindh tragedy was Hindu.

One Christian worker in Punjab province is in critical condition. (TAB)

## Death of Christian hailed in Pakistan; bail given to suspects

About 2,500 people attended a rally showing support for the lynching of a Christian and, just days later, a judge granted bail to 52 individuals suspected in the man's death.

The Islamic extremist Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan organized the June 9 rally in Sargodha in support of the slaying of Nazeer Masih Gill, report the news services Christian Daily International and Morning Star News.

After Gill, 74, was falsely accused of defiling the Quran, a Muslim mob severely beat, stoned and kicked him.

He died 10 days later.

The police report named 40 suspects and hundreds of unidentified participants.

On June 13, a Sargodha judge granted bail to about 52 accused in the killing, including three named in the police report, the news services state.

Attorney Asad Jamal said he believes police purposely conducted a shoddy investigation. (TAB)