

# The Alabama Baptist

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Cullman Christkindlmarkt Facebook photo

## Spirit of giving

### Take time to find balance between pouring out, caring for self at Christmas

By Denise George  
The Alabama Baptist

**S**elfless love, generosity and service to others are central to the life of a believer in Christ. Giving is a lifestyle of sacrificial love, modeled after Christ's own life and teachings. In John 13:34 Jesus commands: "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

This call to love reflects the deep, unconditional love God has for us, a love we are to mirror in our relationships with others.

He emphasizes caring for the poor, hungry, sick and imprisoned — those often overlooked by society. "Truly, I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matt. 25:40).

Jesus calls us to serve others with

humility: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

#### Focused on others

Moreover, Jesus instructs us to give without seeking recognition: "But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (Matt. 6:3).

The spirit of giving is quiet, selfless and purely focused on blessing others. God's love is abundant and unchanging, and it is from this wellspring that we are called to give to others.

Christmas in particular is a time when we are called to give intentionally, generously and cheerfully, but the act of giving can also lead to physical, emotional, mental and

(See 'Tips,' page 13)

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"I don't want to multiply people who look like me, talk like me, act like me if I'm not in the right relationship of obedience to God myself," said **Albert Williams**, who serves as pastor of St. James Baptist Church in Dothan. "I am the disciple-making tool that God has made me to be if I live the Word of God like I'm supposed to. There's nothing more important in discipleship than the relationship."

"I'm very thankful for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering because the funds allow [our] team to both live in and travel to places where unreached people live," Alabama Missionary **Nicole Gallwey** said. "Because we are so well supported, we can focus all our energy on the missions task, knowing that our financial, physical and medical needs are taken care of."

"For whatever I face today — He is enough."

**Daniel Ritchie**  
@DanielRitchie on X

"When I finished my seminary studies, I decided to take up golf again," said **Cody Hale**, pastor of Iron City Baptist Church in An-

niston. "This gives me the opportunity to meet people outside the church, and I've worked at this. I've had people come to me on the golf course and ask me to pray with them about something."

Idolatry is trusting anyone or anything to be and do what only God can be and do. It is among the gravest of sins and is forbidden by God's Word in the strongest terms (cf. Ex. 20:3–6; Lev. 19:4; 1 Cor. 10:14; 1 John 5:21).

**Jim Denison**  
Denison Ministries

A false balance is an abomination to the Lord (Prov. 11:1).

**Katie McCoy**  
@blondeorthodoxy on X

"We must get out and learn who is living around our community. We must get out and find out what the people in our community need," said **Craig Carlisle**, Alabama Baptist State Convention president, who also serves as director of missions for Etowah Baptist Association. "Don't presume to know what they need and offer them what you think they need. Ask them." It's time for churches to "surrender our

allegiance to the way things used to be and prioritize the way things are now and go and tell our communities that Jesus saves," he said.

"There are some hands only you can hold, some hearts that only you can mend. There are some situations and conversations that only you will have," said **Ben Bowden**, pastor of First Baptist Church Enterprise. "There are some lives that only you can touch." God intends to use your life to make a difference in the world for the glory of Christ, Bowden said.

"Individuals who are disabled, like myself, live in a world that wasn't designed for us. We understand sometimes those not affected by disability can be blind to us and our needs, but can I ask you, especially church leaders, to please ask God to open your eyes? Be the exception. We're all just searching for a place where we belong. After all, what better place to welcome the outcasts than the church?" said **Amber Stewart**, author of "Broken and Beautiful: The Greatest Beauty Comes from Our Deepest Pain" and the "Sassy Sally and Her Little Dog" series.

## Letters to the Editor

We are so grateful for Denise George's recent article "Find peace during holidays: how to rest in God's presence." We hope her inspiring words can motivate us to believe in transforming the way families experience a richer and more significant Christmas gathering.

**Connie Jenkins**  
FBC Paoli, Indiana

My wife and I found your article "Singer-songwriter releases children's book addressing God's help amid anxiety" about Jason Gray's children's book "Sparrows," which is based on his song of the same title, to be very uplifting.

The reason why people who stutter can sing fluently has never been definitively explained. Some experts posit that since speech is a left-brain function and singing is a right-brain function, there is no correlation between the two functions. However, nothing has ever been proven.

There are many famous singers who have used singing to break free from the bonds of stuttering. Jason Gray is on the list of "Famous People Who Stutter" on the website of The Stuttering Foundation (Stuttering-Help.org), as are people like Carly Simon, Bill Withers, B.B. King, Marc Anthony and many others.

**James White**  
Anniston

## The Alabama Baptist

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

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The crossword puzzle  
can be found on page 11.



# Rashional Thoughts

**By Jennifer Davis Rash**  
President and Editor-in-Chief

 [jrash@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:jrash@thealabamabaptist.org)

 @RashionalThts

## Christmas season perfect time to practice hopeful anticipation

**C**oming up with ideas isn't the issue — it's the corralling them into manageable groupings for potential implementation that creates the dilemma.

Basically, I tend to juggle too many ideas at the same time.

Narrowing them down requires a fair amount of assessment, which means purposefully stalling the start times of each of them to appropriately prioritize all of them.

As you might have imagined, I'm a quick start personality type, so intentionally holding back takes enormous discipline.

### Intentional down time

However, I'm determined to gift our team at TAB Media Group with a more routine and steady existence these next few weeks as we focus our minds, hearts and energy on Christmas.

Routine in our world means not only holding off on implementing new strategies or systems, but also avoiding planning for them, thinking about them and even hearing they exist.

My love and appreciation for our team makes it an easy decision to wait until 2025 to share the ever-expanding slate of ideas that have surfaced these past two and a half months as I've been recovering from the trimalleolar ankle fracture and dislocation.

Being restricted on activities definitely provides more space for the mind to be creative and think beyond the regimented daily routines.

One concept that keeps swirling in my mind is that of shortages, and I'm not alone.

Alabama Baptist State Convention President Craig Carlisle often references a deep concern over the shortage of ministers.

School systems consistently plead for more bus drivers.

The medical industry talks frequently about the need for more nurses.

You've likely run into situations influenced by shortages too, such as finding affordable child care, reliable help with aging family members, timely counseling appointments, and quality food service workers.

It seems, for the most part, the areas suffering the most revolve around caring for others, but I can't quite figure out why.

### Why so many shortages?

Is it the sheer volume of needs all around us? Or maybe the inability to focus because of the nonstop flow of discouraging news bombarding us from every angle?

Are we struggling to maintain hope for ourselves much less encourage, motivate and help others in the process?

Could we simply be exhausted mentally, emotionally, physically, relationally and spiritually?

If so, what if we all chose to pull back in as many areas as possible these next few weeks to rest and regulate?

What if we truly gave our schedules, interests, concerns and ideas to the Lord and asked Him to guide us regarding how to prioritize and organize?

With a calm spirit and courage to trust where the Lord leads, we can be part of the solution to the various shortages we face.

The Lord reminded me of this in such a sweet and simple way a few days ago.

Jason and I are like you in that we intentionally seek out ways to help others, especially during the Christmas season.

As the needs within the families on our radar grew beyond what we could handle, it easily could have discouraged us.

But the Lord has shown up in so many unexpected and incredible ways this year that my first instinct truly was to release it to Him. I didn't know how He would take care of it, but I chose to wait and see.

### Looking for His guidance

About a week later, a friend pulled me aside and said she couldn't stop thinking about the needs of one of the families we had mutually helped. She wanted me to know she had recruited others for the effort, and they were taking care of everything.

Her sensitivity to the Holy Spirit showcased the work of the Lord to all of us involved and expanded the effort beyond what we thought possible.



# Children's

Whether you are looking for the next step of growth in your church's children's ministry or are just now starting (or even relaunching) a children's ministry, you'll want to review this list of **20 resources** collected by The Alabama Baptist team. Now is a good time to start thinking about how to take your children's ministry to a new level in the coming year.

## BOOKS —

### **"Gospel-Centered Kids Ministry" by Bryan Dembowczyk**

Do you believe it is important to have a gospel-centered ministry? Why is it important to have a gospel-centered kids ministry? This book, while small, encourages children's ministries to have a gospel-centered ministry through Bible study, discipleship and more. As you read this book, you will see the importance of a gospel-centered children's ministry and how to fulfill this goal.

### **"Mama Bear Apologetics" by Hillary Morgan Ferrer and Nancy Pearcey**

"Mama Bear Apologetics" is not just for moms. It also can help leaders and teachers understand the importance of apologetics in children's ministry and in the home. Children are faced with many different worldviews, so as parents and teachers, we need to help them see the "why" behind what they believe. "Mama Bear Apologetics" allows teachers and parents to understand how to face those difficult questions through a biblical perspective. They also have a podcast you can listen to called "Mama Bear Apologetics."

### **"Flip the Script" by Chuck Peters and Jana Magruder**

The importance of church has decreased from one generation to the next, and this book shows the statistics of why people are leaving the church. "Flip the Script" will show ministers and leaders how to reach the next generation through ministry models. You will also see how people need to find their identity in the Lord and not the world.

### **"Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions" by George Barna and Bill Hybels**

Do you want to better equip your children in their faith with the Lord? This book is a wonderful tool that teaches you the why, how and what to do next as you help children on their spiritual journey. You will learn how to do this through the lens of Scripture. You will also learn how to walk alongside the parents, as they are their children's number one spiritual leader outside of the Holy Spirit.

### **"Every Age, Every Stage: Teaching God's Truth at Home and Church" by Ken Hindman, Landry Holmes and Jana Magruder**

Do you often ask yourself how you can prepare parents and teachers on how to teach age-appropriate biblical truth to their children? Sometimes church teachers feel discouraged when children do not comprehend the lesson or children feel confused because the lesson is beyond their reach. This book allows teachers and children's ministers to better understand what important biblical concepts children can grasp.

### **"Leading a Special Needs Ministry" by Amy Fenton Lee**

Whether you have a special needs ministry in your church or not, you will minister to children with special needs at some point in your ministry. This book is a helpful resource that will open your eyes on how to minister to the child and the family facing special needs. You will learn from other families in the book on how to use the proper terms and how to show God's love to each family in your church.

### **"How Do We Know that Christianity is Really True?" by Chris Morphew**

As a children's minister or teacher, you have children asking big questions that might be difficult to answer. School chaplain, teacher and author Chris Morphew answers some of those big questions in his "Big Questions series." "How Do We Know that Christianity is Really True?" helps equip you to answer some difficult questions with historical facts about the crucifixion, resurrection, the Bible and more. It is an easy read for teachers, ministers and older children.

## WEBSITES —

### **letthelittlechildrencome.org**

This website has gospel-centered tools that churches can use at events or in their classes to share the gospel. You will find tracks, bracelets and other hands-on tools to help children know how to become a Christian and take them home to share with their families. Children love these tracks because they are fun and interactive, but the fun does not take away from the message of salvation.

### **Kidzlinkal.org**

Kidzlinkal.org is a website produced through the Alabama State Board of Missions. It offers free resources to help churches and families prepare and plan for discipleship in their children's ministries. The site offers Bible drill, discipleship material, Sunday School resources, music tools, Vacation Bible School, volunteer training and other free resources and events to help churches and families with discipleship.

### **Sundayschoolzone.com**

This website offers free handouts, coloring sheets and activity sheets to reinforce what you taught in Sunday School. You can use these resources in class to review with your students, or you can send them home so the parents can review lessons with their children.

### **Celebrating-grace.com**

Celebrating Grace helps children's ministries introduce music while teaching biblical truth through Bible study and music. This curriculum is easy to follow and has age-appropriate curriculum for elementary students and preschoolers.

### **Ministryspark.com**

Ministry Spark offers resources through ministry hubs, free kid-friendly coloring sheets, articles, webinars, volunteer kit, curriculum and more. As Ministry Spark says, "If you want to fuel up for your mission this is the place to start." Their focus is for you, the children and the church.

### **Gatherandgrow.com**

Gather and Grow allows ministers to reenergize their children's ministry through fun and engaging curriculum. It helps ministers focus on the students rather than writing their curriculum. The curriculum is already written for you, it offers videos and activities. This allows children's ministers to focus on building a relationship with their students.

### **Lifeway.com (training articles and videos)**

Lifeway offers a large variety of articles about children's ministry in its online archives. Here are three articles to get you started: "Excuses and Regrets: One Man's Journey into Kid's Ministry," "A New Approach to Volunteers: 5 Tips for Getting a Y.E.S. in a Culture of N.O." and "Spring Clean Your Kids Ministry Area."

### **Group.com**

In 1974, Thom Schultz started Group Publishing Inc. as a magazine, and it has since grown into a large company full of various resources for children's ministers, parents and students. At Group.com you will find skits, vibrant children's books, children's ministry lessons, magazines, leader supplies and so much more. Group also provides useful tools such as quality and affordable background checks, mass texting, church security information and a digital download center.

# ministry resources

Compiled by Julie Donovan for The Alabama Baptist

## PODCASTS —

### “Better Children’s Ministry”

This is a weekly podcast hosted by Kelley Johnson and Daniel Watts through Every Generation Ministry. Kelley is EGM’s digital communications specialist, and Daniel is the institute director. The goal of this podcast is “seeing children transformed by the message of the love of God.” Listen to this podcast to see how you can improve your children’s ministry through biblical truth, training, preparing your heart and more. This is an international ministry that touches on topics that can help children’s ministers around the world.

### “Kids Ministry 101”

“Kids Ministry 101” is a Lifeway podcast hosted by Chuck Peters and Jana Magruder. This podcast covers numerous children’s ministry topics, such as “teaching kids gratitude” and “equipping volunteers.” There are more than 300 podcasts you can listen to while you are making children’s folders or washing the dishes. Some of the special guests on this podcast will introduce their books and ideas about children’s ministry. Scroll through the topics to find what you need, and you will have the opportunity to listen to someone who has dealt with a situation you are facing.



Photo by asier\_relampagoestudio on Freepik

## WEBINARS —

### Children and salvation

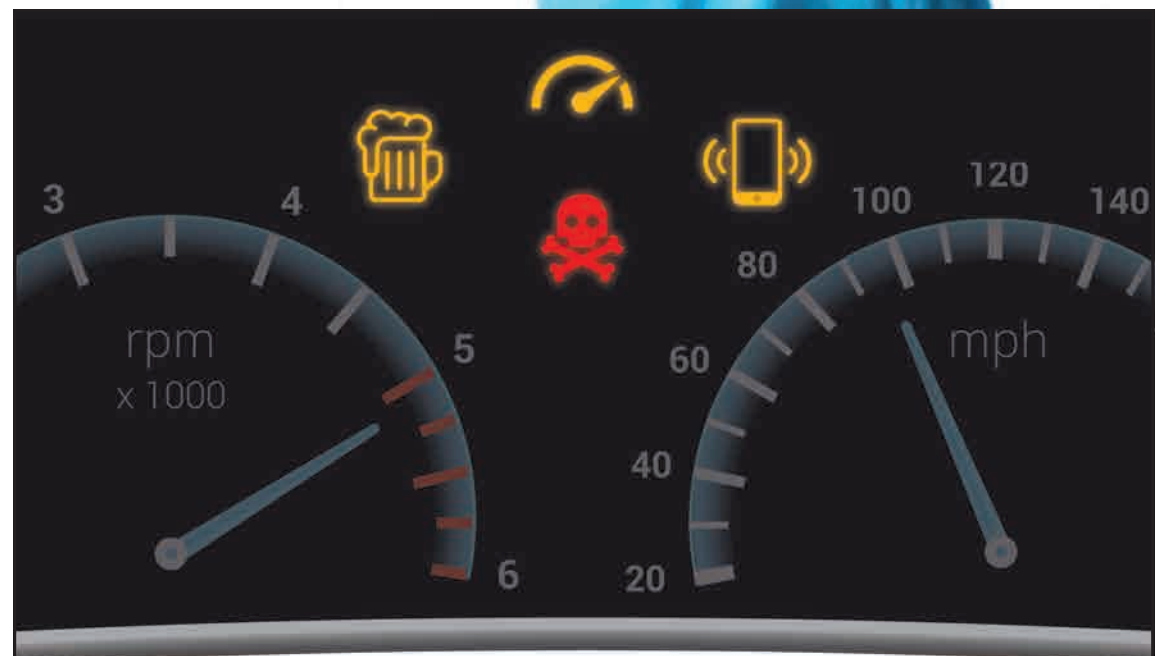
This webinar is led by Belinda Stroud and Cindy Thomas. Belinda Stroud is a state missionary at the Alabama State Board of Missions and oversees resources related to children’s ministry and Bible drill. Cindy Thomas is minister to children and preschool at First Baptist Church Dothan. You will learn how to lead children to a relationship with Christ through biblical truth and the work of the Holy Spirit and be introduced to tools and resources you can use while you share the gospel. **(Find this webinar and others at [kidzlinkal.org/resources](http://kidzlinkal.org/resources).)**

### Classroom management from chaos to calm in the preschool classroom

This webinar is hosted by Marie Harbison, a former children’s minister, and Patty Burns, a state missionary for the Alabama State Board of Missions in charge of preschool and Vacation Bible School. You will hear fun and effective ways to share the gospel with your preschool classroom that are age appropriate, learn about realistic hands-on activities and discover practical preparation tips. **(Find this webinar and others at [alsbom.org/pinnacle-webinars](http://alsbom.org/pinnacle-webinars).)**

### The why and how of creating biblical foundations in the lives of children and families

This webinar is hosted by Theresa Mayo, family and children’s minister at Gilliam Springs Baptist Church in Arab, and Patty Burns, state missionary for the Alabama State Board of Missions. You will learn about the power of Scripture in your children’s ministry and in your children’s lives. You also will discover resources that will guide your path as you build this biblical foundation in the church and your families. **([vimeo.com/596801942](https://vimeo.com/596801942))**



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## FBC Abbeville loses worship center, Sunday School space to fire

An overnight fire Dec. 3 at Dothan-area's First Baptist Church Abbeville consumed most of the church's facilities, according to Pastor Ricky Sowell. Church members gathered there the next morning on Dec. 4 to share memories and "trust God with what's next," he said.

"It's almost a total loss," Sowell noted.

The worship center and Sunday School spaces burned in the fire, the cause of which is undetermined so far. The only usable space left is the family life center, which Sowell said they're "very, very thankful for."

The church will hold services in there for the time being, he said.

Early Dec. 4, Sowell posted on

Facebook that church members "are all rightly heartbroken."

"The Lord has accomplished amazing things in this building. People have been saved, hearts revived, weddings celebrated and loved ones mourned.

"The memories and history of this building are something we all cherish," he wrote.

"But we must remember that this building was not the

church. This building was the place the church gathered. The people of God are still here and more importantly Jesus still reigns on His throne. So we are hurt because the place we loved to gather is gone, but we worship because God isn't done with us yet." (Grace Thornton)



Facebook photo/Alan Capps

# Alabama news

### BIRMINGHAM METRO

► **Bill Wilks** recently celebrated 25 years as pastor of **NorthPark Baptist Church**, Trussville. He and his wife, Rondie, were honored during the Nov. 17 worship services and with a special reception the same day.

### CALHOUN

► **Eulaton First Baptist Church, Anniston**, celebrated its 135th anniversary Aug. 11. The celebration



Photo by Rachel Bonnett

service began with the baptism of four new Christians and featured guest speaker **Chris Bass**. The congregation celebrated a season of God's blessings and

new life with pastor **T.J. Martin** also presenting a vision for the church's future. **Roger Willmore** (left), director of missions for Calhoun Baptist Association and commissioner

of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented **Martin** (right) with special commendations from both groups.

### CHEROKEE

► **Cedar Bluff First Baptist Church** celebrated its 175th anniversary Sept. 29. The church began as a log cabin church located near the center of Cedar

Bluff Cemetery. Special presentations were made by **Wendell**

**Dutton** (left), a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission and associational missionary for Cherokee Baptist Association. Pastor **Mark Cosby** (right) accepted the recognitions on behalf of the church. Minister of music **Tim Burgess** and the praise team led in worship. A special solo was sung by **Chelsea Kearns**.



Submitted photo



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[kgoldwire@alsbom.org](mailto:kgoldwire@alsbom.org), 334-613-2245.



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STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS

## NEWS

## CHILTON

► **West End Baptist Church, Clanton**, celebrated its 75th anniversary Sept. 29. Daniel Wilson, a former pastor and current pastor of FBC Jemison, was the guest preacher. Eddie Lightsey, associate pastor, welcomed everyone to the celebration and another former pastor, Bob Moon, gave the opening prayer. Paula Kornegay, director of worship ministries, organized the day's special music which included children, a ladies ensemble and the choir. Ralph Foster (left), a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented a plaque to pastor James Watkins (right), accepting on behalf of the church.



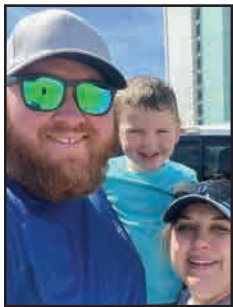
Photo courtesy of Lesley Foster

## COFFEE

► **Alborton Baptist Church, Kinston**, will present "The First Noel" Dec. 22, 6 p.m.

## DALE

► **Zackary O'Neal** is the new pastor of **Pinckard Baptist Church**. He previously served as youth minister at FBC Irvington. He holds a bachelor of science in civil and environmental engineering from Auburn University and a master of divinity in biblical languages from Midwestern Seminary. He and his wife, Hayley, have one son.



pinckardbaptist.com

## DEKALB

► **Sallie Howard Memorial Chapel**, near Mentone, recently celebrated 50 years as a mission of DeKalb Baptist Association. It was built by Milford Howard as a memorial to his first wife and dedicated in June 1937. Music was provided by a volunteer choir. Chris Murdock (center), pastor of the chapel, received plaques given by Lonette



Photo courtesy of Steve Berg

Berg (left), executive director emerita of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, and Darrell Haney (right), associate pastor of Minvale Baptist Church, Fort Payne, representing the association. It marked a special day for Haney who was saved 62 years ago during a service at the chapel. The celebration concluded with the Lord's Supper and a meal at the outdoor pavilion.

## SOUTHEAST ALABAMA

► **Memphis Baptist Church, Dothan**, celebrated its 150th anniversary Sept. 15. During the 9 a.m. service, the church was honored with two presentations — one from John Thomas, SABA associational mission strategist, and one from Jane Hughes (left), a commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Pastor Jim Tate (right) accepted on behalf of the church. A special video



Photo courtesy of Faye Best

by Drew Whitehead, minister of music, and Tyler Marchman highlighted the history of the church. Music was led by Shon Brackin, a former member and current minister of music in Florida. Former member Casey Williamson, pastor of Goodwood Community Church, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, was the guest speaker. A special dinner also took place that evening.

## TENNESSEE RIVER

► **Agape Baptist Church, Scottsboro**, celebrated its 25th anniversary Sept. 29. More than 25 charter members were present. Special presentations included a video of the church's history narrated by founding pastor Roger Mardis and a plaque given by Wendy Westhouse (right), executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Pastor Ryan Johnson (left) accepted it on behalf of the church. The service also included 17 baptisms. Following lunch everyone was encouraged to participate in a prayer walk for Freedom Forge, an addiction recovery center soon to be on the land adjacent to the church that was gifted to them.



Photo courtesy of Mandy Johnson

## Faith Moments

*"It's What You are Willing to Give"*

By Robert H. Jackson

Do you want to reach people for Jesus?  
To turn them from darkness to sin?  
Do you want to claim souls for the Master?  
To help them know peace within?  
If you do my friend please hear me,  
Remember as long as you live:  
"It's not what you've got that matters a lot,  
It's what you are willing to give!"

You may have riches, fame and position,  
Your name held in awe far and wide,  
You may have vast knowledge and great wisdom,  
And talents endlessly supplied,  
But if you want to win others to Jesus,  
Be mindful of this as you live:  
"It's not what you've got that matters a lot,  
It's what you are willing to give!"

You can have the finest of all churches—  
The dearest folks e'er to be found,  
You can have the greatest of preachers,  
And a choir that is known all around,  
But if you want to reach others for Jesus  
Forget not this as you live:  
"It's not what you've got that matters a lot,  
It's what you are willing to give!"

One day will you stand there empty-handed?  
No souls to claim at the throne?  
Will you wonder why God is unhappy?  
Why the joy you expected is gone?  
He'll tell you when you seek an answer  
And plead your good reasons to live:  
"It's not what you got that mattered a lot,  
It's what you were willing to give."

*Rob Jackson serves as director of the office of evangelism and church revitalization for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.*

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AGING WELL

# Healthy nutrition emphasized as important priority

By Tracy Riggs Frontz  
The Alabama Baptist

While an emphasis of health over weight loss continues to gain traction in the U.S., many still focus on losing weight at any cost. Because of this, experts are working to emphasize the importance of nutrition.

MedlinePlus, a service of the National Library of Medicine, defines nutrition as “eating a healthy and balanced diet,” which provides the “energy and nutrients you need to be healthy.” Healthy nutrition includes no blame or shame.

### Use caution with dieting

“Oftentimes a diet regimen has an agenda and end goal. ... Ask yourself, ‘Am I dieting or trying to connect more with my body and relationship with food?’” said Rebecca Taylor, assistant professor of counseling who specializes in eating disorders and body image at Colorado Christian University.

“Whenever there is an agenda on restricting the body or decreasing weight, we are normally looking at

a diet regimen that most likely will end up making the individual ‘fail’ and honestly blaming themselves,” she said.

Churches haven’t always helped. In the late 1980s, Gwen Shamblin

Lara, called the “pioneer of faith-based weight loss” on her website, developed a program that used “God-given internal hunger signals” to lose weight. She championed filling up with God’s love and not the love of food.

“The Weigh Down Workshop” began as small classes and exploded when Lara later wrote the bestseller “The Weigh Down Diet.” Over time, the focus became weight loss no matter what method. An integral part of the program became shaming those who didn’t lose or who had gained weight.

This mindset invaded churches. “It’s not a new thing for places of

worship to promote particular ways of eating,” said Leslie Schilling in her book “Feed Yourself: Step Away from the Lies of Diet Culture and into Your Divine Design.”

“You can find food rules, body shaming and diet plans wrapped up in an out-of-context Bible verse in almost every congregation in America,” she added. “I used to think of dietary purity as my Christian duty as well. It seemed like a legitimate way to depend on God more and even grow stronger in my faith.”

Schilling later recognized how harmful this attitude was and began to see that “dieting to gain worth and offering pretend grace for one another was nothing but lies.”

Taylor added, “Each individual person and their body is different. Therefore, to look at an individual’s body and assume they are unhealthy

and at medical risk would be an uneducated mistake due to the fact that body size alone tells us very little about an individual’s health and medical status.”

Another concern of losing weight without considering consequences involves weight loss drugs. In 2017, Ozempic was released to help Type 2 diabetics control blood sugar.

A side effect was soon shown to be weight loss due to its main ingredient, semaglutide. As word spread on social media, it began to be prescribed off-label for nondiabetics to shed extra pounds even though it was never approved for weight loss.

Baptist Health Diabetes Management Programs said using Ozempic for weight loss could result in:

- ▶ shortages of the drug.
- ▶ harmful drug interactions if there’s no medical supervision.
- ▶ serious side effects, including allergic reactions, low blood sugar, increased thyroid cancer risk, gallstones and swelling of the pancreas.
- ▶ regaining weight after stopping.
- ▶ side effects such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.



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# Lass WORDS

BY KEN LASS  
The Alabama Baptist

## DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

### The power of influence and how it can help the Church

I don't think we appreciate the power of influence these days. Maybe it's because it takes effect so gradually we don't notice. But human beings are creatures in flux. Our thoughts and opinions and actions are constantly being molded by the environment in which we choose to spend our time.

That's a long-winded way to say we are who we hang out with.

Growing up, profanity was never acceptable nor permitted in my family. But when my older brother returned from a hitch in the U.S. Navy, he let slip a bunch of no-nos that made my mother's hair stand on end — after which he profusely apologized.

"That's just the way they talk," he sheepishly said of his military brethren.

I grew up in Wisconsin. When I moved to Alabama in 1983, folks here told me I had a Yankee accent. Now, after living here 41 years, my Midwestern kin tell me I have a Southern accent.

My 3-year-old grandson boldly tells me his favorite football team is Alabama. When I ask him why, he says because they are the best. But how do you know that, I inquire. Because Mommy and Daddy cheer for them on TV all the time, he reveals.

Influence.

It's a strong tool. It's why getting involved in a

Christian church fellowship is so vitally important and why your children and grandchildren should get involved as well.

I'm sure you've heard somebody say, "I can be a practicing Christian without going to church." Maybe, but the odds are against it. At the very least it's much more difficult.

Being around godly people who are studying God's Word and ministering to each other is infectious, in the best way.

Being isolated from those kinds of relationships will eventually take you away from God. It's just human nature.

If you've ever traveled on Interstate 65 North near the Autauga-Chilton county line, you have probably noticed a billboard next to an old water mill that reads, "Go to church, or the devil will get you."

The sign is a bit of a legend, having been there since 1988. I must have driven past it hundreds of times, and it always brings a smile. I wonder how many conversations it has started among car riders over the years?

Now that's what I call influence.

#### MEET THE AUTHOR

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



## 'Come Home for Christmas' points reader toward season's true meaning

By Tracy Riggs Frontz  
The Alabama Baptist

Matthew West, an award-winning singer and songwriter, is known for his love of holidays. He recently released a new book for Christmas, which he wrote with Matt Litton.

"Come Home for Christmas: Jesus is Calling You Back to the Greatest Story Ever Told" has chapter titles such as "Come Home to Wonder," "Come Home to Forgiveness" and "Come Home to Peace."

West shares personal stories and how Jesus is part of them all.

In each of the eight chapters, West recounts Christmas seasons past and present and ties each to a biblical account of Jesus.

All of the chapters are followed by a page of questions that could be used personally or as a springboard for a family or church group to discuss the true meaning of Christmas.

Even with the fun and joy



MATTHEW WEST

Facebook photo

addressed in "Come Home for Christmas," West doesn't forget about those having a hard time with the season.

He addresses grief and the "great promise of Christmas."

West recognizes that the joy of Christmas is often combined with the pain of missing a loved one. He shares how to focus on the knowledge that "a manger led to a cross, and a cross led to an empty tomb."

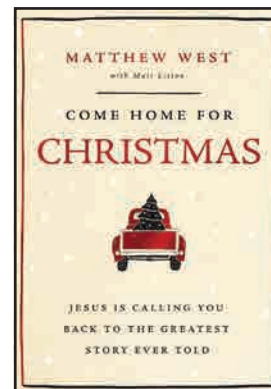
West's fans will especially appreciate the practical and

entertaining bonus chapter consisting of six of the West family's favorite Christmas recipes, which include noteworthy contributions like "World's Best Brussels Sprouts" and "Apple Pecan Cornbread Dressing."

West provides an invitation for those who venture within.

"I hope your journey through this book will open your heart to return to Him once again and embrace the greatest gift you could ever receive: 'Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you' (Luke 2:11)."

Order and get free bonuses at [ComeHomeforChristmas.com](http://ComeHomeforChristmas.com).



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## UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

# New Cooperative Program resources for 2025!

On May 13, 1925, the Cooperative Program was adopted during the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Memphis, Tenn. To help your church learn more about the Cooperative Program during this year of celebration, several new resources are now or will soon be available at [AlabamaCP.org/CP100](http://AlabamaCP.org/CP100).

### ► 100 Seconds for 100 Years Video Series

This series of 12 video clips, hosted by State Missionary Jay Stewart, is designed to introduce your church, one month at a time, to the many ministries made possible by giving through the Cooperative Program. They would be ideal to use monthly during your church's worship service or with various small group meetings.

### ► 2025 CP Desk Prayer Calendar

This weekly prayer calendar was created for you to place on your desk or around your home as a reminder of the life-changing ministries made possible by the gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program and specific ways you can pray for each ministry.

### ► Weekly CP Slides

These slides were created from the pages of the desk calendar as a way for you to promote the Cooperative Program each week in your church's announcement loop, offertory time or other designated service moment.

To download or order these resources, visit [AlabamaCP.org/CP100](http://AlabamaCP.org/CP100) or scan the code.



### ► Bulletin Inserts/Shells

As May 13 approaches, you might consider using a Sunday to specifically promote the Cooperative Program in a Sunday service around that date. A bulletin shell has been produced with the 100th CP Anniversary art on the front and some additional information on the back, with blank space on

the inside for you to put your order of service and other bulletin information. Or you might choose to order the bulletin inserts and slip them into your own Sunday bulletin on a special observance day.

### ► Better Together Podcast

A monthly podcast is being launched in January to help shine a light on the Cooperative Program in Alabama, focusing on telling stories of how we are better together when we combine our prayers, our going, and our giving through the Cooperative Program.

To download or order these and other resources in the weeks to come, visit [AlabamaCP.org/CP100](http://AlabamaCP.org/CP100).

Let's join together in 2025 to make this an anniversary year to remember!



## TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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For more information call 205-870-4720, ext. 200, or email [ads@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:ads@thealabamabaptist.org). To place an online classified ad for \$9.99/month, visit [thealabamabaptist.org/classifieds](http://thealabamabaptist.org/classifieds).

### CHURCH POSITIONS

#### PASTOR

Pisgah Baptist Church, Sipsey, Alabama, is searching for a full-time pastor. [pisgahbaptistal@gmail.com](mailto:pisgahbaptistal@gmail.com)

#### PASTOR

FBC McIntosh, located in McIntosh, Alabama, is a traditional church seeking a pastor who is a servant leader with vision and passion for people, God's work and Word. The pastor should have a heart for evangelism and seek to grow and guide a small congregation needing revitalization. Send resumé to: [FBCMcIntosh1953@outlook.com](mailto:FBCMcIntosh1953@outlook.com)

#### PASTOR

First Baptist Church of Uriah, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a full-time or bivocational pastor. Please email resumé to Larry Boles at [Wb4cva@yahoo.com](mailto:Wb4cva@yahoo.com) or mail via USPS to: FBC Uriah, P.O. Box 337, Uriah, AL 36480.

#### PASTOR

Pineview Baptist Church, Brent, Alabama, is seeking a full-time pastor. Send resumé to: Pineview Baptist Church, 10291 Highway 5, Brent, AL 35034 or email [pineviewbaptist@yahoo.com](mailto:pineviewbaptist@yahoo.com).

#### PASTOR

FBC Shawmut, located in Valley, Alabama, is a traditional church seeking a pastor who is a servant leader with vision, and passion for people, God's work and Word. The pastor should have a heart for evangelism and seek to grow and guide a small congregation needing revitalization. Send resumé to: [sfbc.psc@yahoo.com](mailto:sfbc.psc@yahoo.com).

#### BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

New Life Baptist Church located in Bay Minette, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor who unashamedly preaches the Word of God. We are prayerfully seeking the pastor God has chosen for our church to help lead our congregation into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. Please email resumé/profile to: [newlifebaptistch@att.net](mailto:newlifebaptistch@att.net) or mail to: Pastor Search Committee, 15011 Glasgow Lane, Bay Minette, AL 36507.

#### BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Enon Baptist Church, located in Wilcox County, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a bivocational pastor. Send inquires/resumés to: [enonbccamden@gmail.com](mailto:enonbccamden@gmail.com) or mail to: Enon Baptist Church, ATTN: Search Committee, P.O. Box 4, Camden, AL 36726.

#### BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

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

#### BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Paden Baptist Church, Gadsden, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a bivocational pastor. Mail resumé to: Paden Baptist Church, 900 Padenreich Ave., Gadsden, AL 35903, or Bruce Ragland, Chairman, Search Committee at [Padenbaptistchurch@yahoo.com](mailto:Padenbaptistchurch@yahoo.com).

#### ASSOCIATE PASTOR

Buhl Baptist is seeking an associate pastor with experience in all areas of pastoral responsibilities and some availability during the work week. Send resumé to: [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 Mexia, 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.

#### BIVOCATIONAL PART-TIME CHILDREN'S MINISTER

Pineview Baptist Church, Brent, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational part-time children's minister. Send resumé to: Pineview Baptist Church, 10291 Highway 5, Brent, AL 35034, or email: [pineviewbaptist@yahoo.com](mailto:pineviewbaptist@yahoo.com).

#### MUSIC MINISTER

Bell Lane Baptist Church, Clanton, Alabama, seeking music minister for blended services. For more information or to submit a resumé, email: [sheila.bolton@att.net](mailto:sheila.bolton@att.net).

#### BIVOCATIONAL WORSHIP LEADER/DIRECTOR OF MUSIC

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

#### PART-TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC

First Baptist Church Rogersville,

Alabama, is seeking a part-time minister of music responsible for overseeing the music ministries of the church, including planning and conducting blended worship services, directing the choir/praise and worship team and coordinating volunteer musicians. Request interested candidates submit resumé to Corwyn Tiede at [tiedeinal@aol.com](mailto:tiedeinal@aol.com).

### BUSINESS

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### RESOURCES

#### "HELP I'M A PASTOR!"

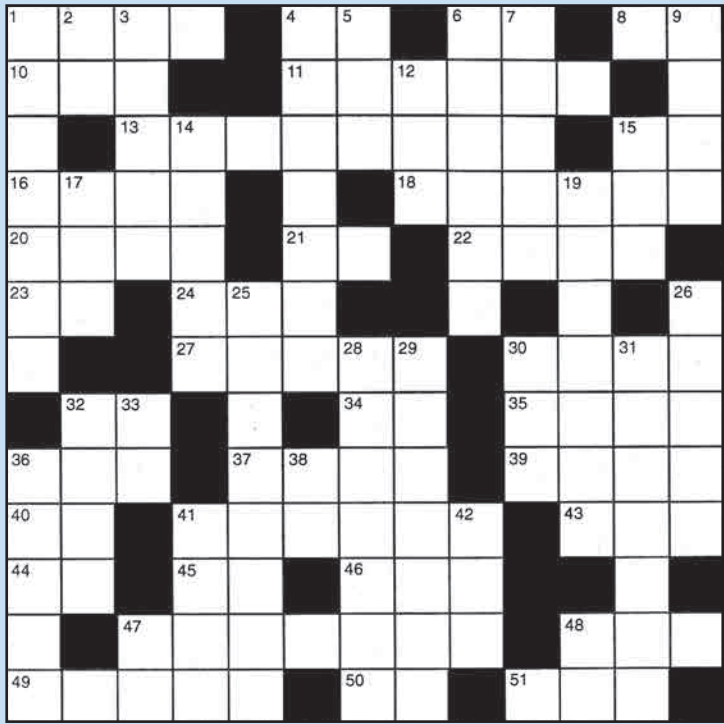
This new book by veteran Baptist pastor and cartoonist Joe McKeever is a resource pastors will want to keep on their shelf. And for those new to the pastorate, McKeever's insights will be a true gift. Order your copy straight from the author today for \$24.95. Email [joe@joemckeeper.com](mailto:joe@joemckeeper.com), Venmo @Joe-McKeever-7 or send a check and your mailing address to: 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209.



# CHRISTIAN Crossword

ACROSS

- 1. To crush.
- 4. The Spirit \_\_\_\_\_ truth. (1 John 5:6)
- 6. What all homes in the South have.
- 8. Wind direction
- 10. \_\_\_\_\_ did that which was right. (1 Kings 15:11)
- 11. If I be \_\_\_\_\_, then my strength will go. (Judg. 16:17)
- 13. A Protestant denomination.
- 15. Land from which the Lord brought Abram. (Gen. 15:7)
- 16. Verse or rhyme.
- 18. A developmental disorder.
- 20. Behold the \_\_\_\_\_ of God. (John 1:29)
- 21. \_\_\_\_\_ Moses lifted up the serpent. (John 3:14)
- 22. The days that Adam lived were \_\_\_\_\_ hundred and thirty years. (Gen. 5:5)
- 23. \_\_\_\_\_ else!
- 24. The mother of all living. (Gen. 3:20)
- 27. Fragrant shrub.
- 30. Location.
- 32. Seaman apprentice. (abbr.)
- 34. Thou shalt make \_\_\_\_\_ covenant with them. (Ex. 23:32)
- 35. The Lord smelled the pleasing \_\_\_\_\_. (Gen. 8:21; AMPC)
- 36. Male cat.
- 37. Judah is a \_\_\_\_\_'s whelp. (Gen. 49:9)
- 39. Curve.
- 40. And when he had spit \_\_\_\_\_ his eyes. (Mark 8:23)
- 41. He \_\_\_\_\_ meet them. (2 Sam. 10:5; 2 words)
- 43. A particular thing. (legal term)



By Udena McKee Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- 44. King of Bashan. (Num. 21:33)
- 45. Seth lived \_\_\_\_\_ hundred and five years. (Gen. 5:6)
- 46. Drone.
- 47. Thou shalt have good \_\_\_\_\_. (Josh. 1:8)
- 48. Consumed.
- 49. So Absalom \_\_\_\_\_ the hearts of the men of Israel. (2 Sam. 15:6)
- 50. With regard to.
- 51. Golf peg.

DOWN

- 1. One who endangers success by meddling.
- 2. Ye shall be \_\_\_\_\_ gods. (Gen. 3:5)
- 3. Melchizedek, king of \_\_\_\_\_. (Gen. 14:18)
- 4. Abraham's son. (Gen. 16:11)
- 5. But Sarai was barren; \_\_\_\_\_ had no child. (Gen. 11:30)
- 6. Away, hence. (archaic)
- 7. Prefix meaning one hundredth.
- 9. How much less man, that is a \_\_\_\_\_? (Job 25:6)
- 14. Flower cluster.

- 15. Even those who by reason of \_\_\_\_\_ have their senses exercised. (Heb. 5:14)
- 17. Paddle for canoe.
- 19. Person who has access to confidential information.
- 25. But \_\_\_\_\_ covereth the mount of the wicked. (Prov. 10:6)
- 26. Groups of animals.
- 28. Have ye \_\_\_\_\_ brother. (Gen. 43:7)
- 29. Bruise.
- 30. To weep with convulsive heaving.
- 31. An elementary child's flute.
- 32. This \_\_\_\_\_ unto the Lord. (Ex. 15:1)
- 33. Morning time.
- 36. Handyman's necessity.
- 38. And \_\_\_\_\_ the vine were three branches. (Gen. 40:10)
- 41. First king of Israelite nation. (1 Sam. 9:17)
- 42. Mantras.
- 47. \_\_\_\_\_ Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old. (Gen. 50:26)
- 48. One. (Scottish)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.



## UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

# Pray for revival in your community

Praying for revival in your area? Gather with others! Praying Alabama 2025 is designed to be an opportunity for your community to gather over the needs of your community and ask God to make a difference in them.

Each Praying Alabama 2025 event will be 6-7:30 p.m.

- Jan. 9 — FBC Russellville
- Jan. 16 — FBC Rainsville
- Jan. 23 — FBC Enterprise

- Jan. 30 — FBC Bay Minette
  - Feb. 6 — FBC Greenville
  - Feb. 13 — Greensboro Baptist
  - Feb. 20 — Parkway Baptist in Auburn
  - Feb. 27 — Meadow Brook Baptist in Birmingham
  - March 6 — Central Park Baptist in Decatur
  - March 13 — Iron City Baptist Church in Anniston
  - March 20 — Imago Dei Church in Lowndesboro
- For more information, visit [evangelizeAL.org/prayingalabama](http://evangelizeAL.org/prayingalabama).

# Give sacrificially

Thank you to all those who participated in the recent Week of Prayer for State Missions. Your prayers, along with your gifts to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering, are making an eternal difference in our state and world.

Remember that the offering is received through the end of the year, so there's still time for you to make

your gift. The offering is designed to complement vital giving through the Cooperative Program and helps support the Great Commission Ministries of Alabama WMU, Disaster Relief, Church Planting, Partnership Missions and Church Revitalization.

Please prayerfully consider giving if you haven't already. Visit [myers-mallory.org](http://myers-mallory.org).

# Church tax conferences

Do you have questions about IRS deadlines and forms for your church? The Church Tax Conference will cover several special emphases including IRS forms and deadlines, what is taxable, special tax rules about ministers and housing allowance and contribution rules. The cost of the event is \$15 per person and covers lunch and materials. All conferences are 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

- Jan. 9 — State Board of Missions in Prattville
  - Jan. 16 — Birmingham Metro Baptist Association
  - Jan. 21 — Madison Baptist Association
  - Jan. 27 — Southeast Alabama Baptist Association
  - Jan. 28 — Mobile Baptist Association
- Register at [alsbom.org/events](http://alsbom.org/events). For questions, contact Lee Wright at 334-613-2241 or [lwright@alsbom.org](mailto:lwright@alsbom.org).





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# Tips for taking care of yourself during the holidays

(continued from page 1)  
spiritual exhaustion. The following analogies show the potential dangers and importance of self-care:

As believers, we can be like a well that provides life-sustaining water. But if the well is continually drawn upon without being replenished, it will eventually run dry. A dry well can no longer offer what it does not have.

## Jesus' example

Jesus demonstrated the importance of retreating to a quiet place to rest and pray (Mark 6:31). After ministering to large crowds, He would often withdraw to reconnect with His Father and renew His strength.

Following His example, we must also replenish ourselves through solitude, prayer, rest and reflection to avoid burnout.

Self-care, far from being selfish, is a vital part of sustaining our ability to give generously and joyfully. Through time spent with God, we are reminded of His great love for us, which

refreshes our spirits and enables us to give to others.

Our Christian lives are like oil lamps, designed to provide Christ's light to others. But if we continually burn our oil without refilling, the flame will dim and eventually flicker out, leaving both ourselves and others in darkness. Self-care is the practice of refilling that oil, making sure our flames burn consistently and brightly, allowing us to serve others from a place of strength, not exhaustion.

Just as God's love shines upon us, we are called to let His love flow through us to illuminate others.

Believers are like trees designed to bear fruit. This fruit — love, kindness and service — nourishes those around us. However, if the tree is not watered and nurtured, it will wither and its ability to bear fruit will diminish.

Just as a tree needs sunlight, water and nutrients to grow, Christians need spiritual nourishment to continue bearing good fruit. Through



Photo by gpoinstudio on Freepik

prayer, reflection, rest and drawing closer to Christ, we remain healthy and strong, attached to the Vine and able to provide life-giving fruit to others (John 15:1–2). God's love is the nourishment that helps us grow, and by staying rooted in that love we can flourish and bless others.

## Managing stress

Christmas truly can become one of the most stressful and exhausting times of the year.

Consider these practical ways to take care of yourself during this season:

► **Recognize emotional and physical limits.** Learn to say “no” to activities and gatherings that drain you. Protect your emotional bandwidth by choosing activities that bring peace and fulfillment.

► **Spend time with God in prayer, Scripture study, meditation and spiritual reflection.** Focus on God's love and Jesus' birth, and reflect on what it means to you as a believer. Make space for both personal and communal worship.

► **Let go of the pursuit of a “perfect” Christmas.** Avoid the pressure to create a flawless holiday. Focus on what matters most: connection, celebration and the birth of Christ.

► **Practice mindful consumption and avoid indulgence** — whether in food, drink, activity or spending. Make intentional choices that nurture your body, mind and spirit.

► **Create moments of stillness and solitude.** Take time away from the hustle to pray, read Scripture and reconnect with God.

► **Rethink holiday traditions.** Let go of those that have become burdensome and no longer hold meaning. Create new, Christ-centered traditions that bring joy and purpose.

► **Guard financial well-being.** Refuse to risk financial stability for short-term gratification. Set clear financial boundaries and avoid overspending. Focus on meaningful giving rather than material excess.

► **Give yourself space to grieve.** The holidays can bring feelings of sadness or loss, so allow yourself to feel those emotions while drawing close to God for comfort.

► **Choose a slower pace.** Resist holiday frenzy and embrace simplicity. Find joy in the stillness.

► **Eat healthy and balanced meals.** Include vegetables, fruits, whole grains and protein, and avoid skipping meals. Nourish your body to maintain energy.

► **Take breaks from holiday preparations, scheduling downtime to relax** — watch a favorite Christmas movie, take a nap or go for a walk.

► **Stick to regular exercise routines.** According to the Mayo Clinic, exercise improves mood, energy and sleep, and helps combat stress.

► **Get enough sleep.** The CDC says one in three U.S. adults does not get sufficient sleep. Even losing one to two hours per night can hurt. Adequate rest is crucial for maintaining health and well-being during the holidays.

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# EXPLORE THE BIBLE

## Sunday School Lessons

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.  
Professor of Biblical Studies, University of Mobile



### For December 15

#### DELIVERED FROM EGYPT Exodus 12:21–32

One of the most momentous events in the history of ancient Israel was their deliverance from Egyptian bondage. God’s redemptive work was memorialized throughout the Old Testament in narrative, in song, in sermons and in the introduction to the Commandments.

Even today, the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Passover meal in the Jewish calendar keep hope alive for final deliverance through the promised Messiah.

#### Instruction (21–23)

The application of blood was a prescribed ritual. Every lamb sacrificed had to meet specific criteria. Every household had to have the lamb’s blood applied to the frame of the outer door. Every person was required to remain inside. Following every instruction was a matter of life and death.

Sons inquired of their fathers, and dads instructed their families why they followed this ritual year after year. A father’s responsibility to instruct his family in the ways of God and the history of Israel’s redemption continued to grow throughout the Exodus and into the Promised Land. Deuteronomy 6:6–9 and 6:20–25 prepared fathers to answer their sons’ questions regarding the law, and Joshua 4:1–7 anticipated children asking questions about the stone memorial in the Jordan Valley.

Christian parents are instructed to teach their children to follow Jesus through their words and their works (Eph. 6:4). In addition, Paul instructed mature followers of Christ to disciple less mature Christians. (See 2 Tim. 2:2.)

#### Celebration (24–28)

From the beginning, Passover was not intended to be a one-time event but a continual reminder of God’s work and a renewal of Israel’s covenant with Him.

As Christians, we confess that the Messiah — the Christ, the

Anointed One — has come to ransom believers among Israel and the Gentiles — indeed all who surrender to Him as Lord.

Since the days of the apostles, Christians have held that Jesus is our Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7). As our sacrifice and our deliverer, Jesus transformed the Passover meal from being a memorial of deliverance from Egyptian slavery to a proclamation of His death until He returns (1 Cor. 11:26).

#### Victory (29–32)

The actual event was a powerful rebuke and a precious rescue. Eighty years prior to the Exodus, Pharaoh’s family was responsible for the mass murder of newborn Israelite boys.

Pharaoh’s priests perpetuated the worship of the Egyptian pantheon even after Moses introduced Yahweh by name as the One true God (5:1) and communicated God’s purpose for allowing Pharaoh to remain alive (9:16).

The judgment of God struck every house unmarked by the blood of a lamb. Pharaoh was utterly broken by the death of his first-born son. The mighty hand and outstretched arm of God was compelling Pharaoh to release Israel and he did.

By contrast, the Passover night ended in victory both for the Israelites and for a multiethnic group (12:38) who marked their doors with the spotless lamb’s blood. God protected them from His wrath, and He released them from their bondage in Egypt.

God has always had a plan to redeem a people for Himself from among the nations. During the time of the patriarchs, He promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that their seed would bring blessing to all nations. Through Moses, God instructed Israel to love their neighbors and the strangers among them (Lev. 19:18, 33–34). Jesus accentuated this active blessing of the nations after the Resurrection, when He commissioned the Church to make disciples of all nations.

### For December 22

#### DELIVERED FROM SIN Luke 1:26–38

Two of the gospel accounts contain nativity narratives that record angelic visitations. Matthew writes of an unnamed angel speaking to Joseph in a dream. Luke records Gabriel’s announcement to Mary.

Both Mary and Joseph were instructed to name the baby Jesus. “Jesus” is the Greek version of the Hebrew name “Yeshua,” which means “salvation.” In Joseph’s dream, an explanation is given for calling Him Jesus: “You are to name Him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21).

#### Favor (1:26–30)

We live in a time when favor or privilege is considered a bad thing. The mantra is that one must treat everyone exactly the same, which is a literal impossibility. My wife and I have six children. Their birth order, our age and our stage of career have affected our interaction with them. We do not favor one over the others, although some have enjoyed more or fewer privileges than the others.

Coaches may have certain athletes who stand out over their coaching careers. Teachers may have one student who comes to their minds. Perhaps they weren’t the most gifted on the field or in the classroom, but that one person is favored. We are all equal at the foot of the cross, yet there are favored people in our lives. Why marry this woman? I asked her and she said yes! With more than 100 Baptist churches in Mobile, why join this one? We chose this congregation and they welcomed us.

God chose Mary. She was favored by God because she was chosen. Why this girl? Why this time? Why this village? Why this Israelite tribe? The answer to these is simply that God chose them. As Paul expressed, “When the time came to completion, God sent His Son, born of a woman,

born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4–5).

Gabriel greeted Mary, but she was troubled by this favored greeting.

#### Announcement (1:31–33)

Gabriel announced to Mary that she would bear a son who would be named Jesus. The content of this passage reminds readers of the covenant God made with David that his own son would succeed him on the throne. His son would build a temple for God, and the eternal King would descend from David (2 Sam. 7:12–16).

#### Virgin Birth (1:34–38)

The prophetic sign of a virgin conception is a point of contention for some, although this passage clearly states that Mary was a virgin. Hebrew scholars debate the intended meaning of Isaiah 7:14. The Greek is clear in both Matthew 1 and Luke 1, however. Neither the angelic messenger nor Mary had any doubt about her virginity.

Why was Zechariah muted for his inquiry about Elizabeth’s pregnancy, while Mary was not punished for expressing her concerns? The answer is that Zechariah should have known better, having been trained under the Torah.

While he may have been around 50 years of age (Num. 4:23), he should have been familiar with Parashat Vayera (Gen. 18–22), where Abraham fathered Isaac at the age of 100. Mary was likely not familiar with the prophecy of the virgin conception in Isaiah 7:14.

Only two of the gospels mention the virgin birth, so is it insignificant? Of course not. Matthew mentions Magi. Mark starts with John’s ministry. Luke records shepherds encountering angels. John begins with “in the beginning.” Every detail matters.

*“And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.’”*

Luke 1:30



# BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

## Sunday School Lessons

By Adam Winn, Ph.D.  
Chair and Professor, Department of Biblical and Religious Studies at Samford University



### For December 15

#### LOOKING FORWARD TO JOY Luke 2:4–14

#### Jesus, the Son of God, was born to bring us salvation. (4–7)

Joseph and Mary journeyed from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the latter city being “the city of David” because the great and ideal king of Israel, David, was from Bethlehem. Joseph was a descendant of David, meaning his child would also be David’s descendant.

These statements are closely related to Jewish messianic hope. Living under Roman occupation, the Jews looked to Scriptures that promised a glorious future age, one in which Israel would throw off its oppressors and rule over the nations in a righteous world.

Closely associated with this was the hope of a figure, a Messiah, whom God would use to accomplish this purpose. This figure would be a descendant of David and come from Bethlehem. Thus, this identification of Joseph has significant implications for his soon-to-be-born son, Jesus.

These verses take on even greater meaning when one considers the verses that precede them. This journey to Bethlehem comes because of the Emperor Augustus commanding a census. Augustus was the first emperor of Rome and was remembered as its greatest emperor.

Augustus saved Rome from collapse and ushered in the glorious Pax Romana (Roman Peace). Romans believed his reign was ordained by the gods. He was called the “prince of peace,” “savior of the world,” “lord” and “son of god.” Inscriptions throughout Rome spoke of the “gospel/good news” of Augustus.

Even at the time of Luke, cities in the Roman Empire would rejoice and celebrate the birthday of Augustus.

With this information, we see in these verses that Luke is contrasting two gospels, one of Rome’s ideal ruler and one of Israel’s.

#### The birth of Jesus is cause for great joy. (8–12)

At the birth of Jesus, an angel announces Jesus’ birth to shepherds. The angel declares he brings “gospel/good news” that will bring about joy for all the people. The reason for this news is the birth of a Savior, born in the city of David, who is both Messiah and Lord.

This announcement proclaims the Jewish hope described above. It is good news indeed!

But if we read this text with first century eyes, we also see Luke challenging the gospel of Rome along with all its claims and promises. Luke proclaims the good news of the birth of God’s Messiah, Jesus, not Augustus. Luke declares Jesus to be both Savior and Lord, not Augustus. All the people will have joy and rejoice because of this birth, not that of Augustus.

To the reader who has eyes to see, Luke is at the very least minimizing the most famous ruler of the Roman world, one still worshipped across the empire, and elevating Jesus to His rightful place over the emperor. Implicit in Luke’s story is a call to hope and rejoice in the true ruler of the world Jesus and not Augustus.

#### We experience joy because Jesus brought peace to us. (13–14)

This announcement is followed by an eruption of celebration from the angels of heaven. The one angel is joined by a great crowd of angels, giving glory to the God of Israel and declaring his peace on earth. Again, we see the hopes of Israel clash with the hopes of Rome. While Rome promoted the Pax Romana as a gift from the gods, God’s angels declare a greater peace for the earth, one that will be for all of God’s people. It is this peace that brings true joy. This Christmas season, may we, with the angels of heaven, rejoice over the birth of the true king and ruler, who brings peace and joy to the world.

### For December 22

#### LOOKING FORWARD TO LOVE John 1:14–18; 3:14–18

#### The glory of God is seen in Jesus’ presence among us. (1:14–15)

We cannot understand the significance of these verses without the preceding verses. The gospel of John opens by making declarations about the Word (Logos in Greek), claiming that the Word was in the beginning, it was with God and it was God.

He even declares that all things came into being through the Word. But what is the Word, or Logos, John is talking about?

The Word of God was a prominent idea in the Jewish writings of the first century. One author claims the Word is the only Son of God and the very Name of God. It was widely believed that through this Word, God created all things.

In fact, Jews of this time understood the Word (Logos) to be the God of Israel that walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden, that appeared to Abraham, that wrestled with Jacob and that appeared to Moses at the burning bush and on Mount Sinai.

Thus, in a very real way, God’s Word was understood by many Jews as a distinct entity that is also very much understood to be the God that is present in Israel’s scriptures. In John 1:14, John declares that this Word of God took on human flesh and dwelt among those whom He created. Yet, the word “dwelt” is more correctly translated as “tabernacled.”

John is saying that the very God who dwelt with Israel in the Tabernacle of old is now incarnate in the person of Jesus.

#### The grace of God is extended to us through Jesus. (16–18)

John declares that from the fullness of this eternal Word, we have received what is best translated as “grace in place of grace.” John likely has in view two acts of God’s grace, one greater than the other.

The first grace is God’s gift of the law to Israel, which was understood by Israel as a gracious gift

from God. But the second grace, one that replaces the first grace, is the Word incarnate and the life that will come through his life, death and resurrection. This is made clear in the next verse, where it describes the law being given through Moses, but the greater grace and truth coming through Jesus the Messiah/Christ.

The contrast between the giving of the law and the work of Jesus continues in verse 18. The claim that no one has ever seen God evokes the story from Exodus 33–34 in which Moses is allowed to see a glimpse of God’s back. Yet, the reader knows what Moses saw was in fact the Word (Logos).

The text goes on to say that only the Son of God (also the Word) who is close to the Father’s bosom (chest) has truly made the Father known. Here, John is continuing an intentional contrast between Jesus and Moses. Moses was only able to catch a glimpse of the Word’s back, while Jesus, the Word itself, has seen God from the front, the bosom (chest).

It is because of this access to the Father that Jesus can truly and fully reveal the Father in a way that Moses and the Law could not.

#### The love of God is evident in the gift of His Son Jesus. (3:14–18)

While the entire book of John describes the way in which Jesus, the Word, fully reveals the Father, these verses in John 3 capture it well. It describes the great love of God the Father, love that is expressed in the sending of his Son, the Word, to us.

This Son is the means of salvation and eternal life for all who place their faith in him.

This Christmas, may we remember the great love that God the Father has for us, a love that was manifest in the eternal Word made flesh at the first Christmas.

And may our saving faith in that Son be renewed and refreshed.

*EDITOR’S NOTE — The Sunday School lesson outlines are provided by Lifeway.*





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# Seeing 'God at work'

By Tessa Sanchez  
International Mission Board

## Hispanic volunteers look beyond language barrier to share gospel

**W**e did not go to work. We went to see God at work, and praise God that He used us beyond what we could do for His glory," Annel Robayna said.

Robayna, who serves as IMB's Hispanic church mobilization strategist, recently traveled with church leaders and members of Hispanic churches in the U.S. to serve alongside Hispanic missionaries Adam and Janene Rios. The Rioses serve with the IMB in Southeast Asia.

During their two-week trip, 130 people heard the gospel, and 57 decided to follow Jesus.

In the Hispanic community, most people won't sign up for a volunteer trip simply because they see it listed on a website, Robayna said. Personal connection is what motivates people to serve.

Robayna connected over a phone call with one of the volunteers on the trip to Southeast Asia. He met two other volunteers at an event in Texas and already had a relationship with another.

The perspective Robayna seeks to instill in churches and church members is a mindset of "What can I do?" "What can I bring to the table?"

He tells leaders and church members they can bring their "yes" to the table and then "be ready to see God at work."

### Stories that change lives

"Let me tell you about a story that changed my life, and it's changing other people's lives too."

The Rioses, national pastors and other Spanish-speaking missionaries began conversations with this



A volunteer holds a picture illustrating one of the Bible stories the team shared during their mission trip to Southeast Asia. Hispanic Christians went to partner with Adam and Janene Rios, who serve as IMB missionaries.

invitation, and the volunteers followed suit. After hearing the story, listeners were given the chance to respond.

In addition to national believers who translated, several missionaries from Spanish-speaking countries translated directly from Spanish to the local language for the volunteers who only spoke Spanish.

An older Muslim man with a military background was one of the 57 people who made decisions of faith.

He had trouble understanding God's forgiveness because of his military background. He killed people under the orders of his superiors. Robayna shared about the forgiveness Jesus gives, no matter someone's history.

After Robayna finished shar-

ing, the older man rose from his chair and, with some effort, walked across the room and grabbed Robayna's hand in a posture of respect. As tears flowed, Robayna and Southeast Asian believers prayed for him. His daughter-in-law also decided to commit her life to Christ.

The trip to Southeast Asia was the first mission trip where Andrea, from Louisiana, didn't know the language and where she shared the gospel with mainly adults, many much older.

At one point on the trip, a flood of anxiety and fear poured over her, and negative thoughts swarmed in her mind. "Why would older and wiser people struggling with difficult things want to listen to me share the gospel?"

As she pondered that thought,

Andrea prayed for the Lord to use her according to His will. She soon realized God can use even the smallest things in life for His plan. It didn't matter how old she was to tell people what God did in her life and how He changed her.

"There's no age limit to go out and share the gospel," Andrea said. "All those people needed was for someone to come and plant a mustard seed, and God will handle the rest."

God used her testimony to lead someone to place their hope in Christ. Andrea said the Lord empowered her to share the gospel in ways she never could have without Him.

### Forming partnerships

Every time Robayna takes a volunteer team to places where IMB missionaries are working, the hope is for the volunteers to discover the needs, explore opportunities for partnership, learn about the IMB team's strategy and return to mobilize their churches to take trips individually.

The next step is partnerships. Robayna is there to help, but the idea is for them to work directly with the IMB missionaries once the churches have a connection. A relationship with a missionary overseas has the potential to improve the partnership. Robayna explained if there isn't a relationship, they will look elsewhere.

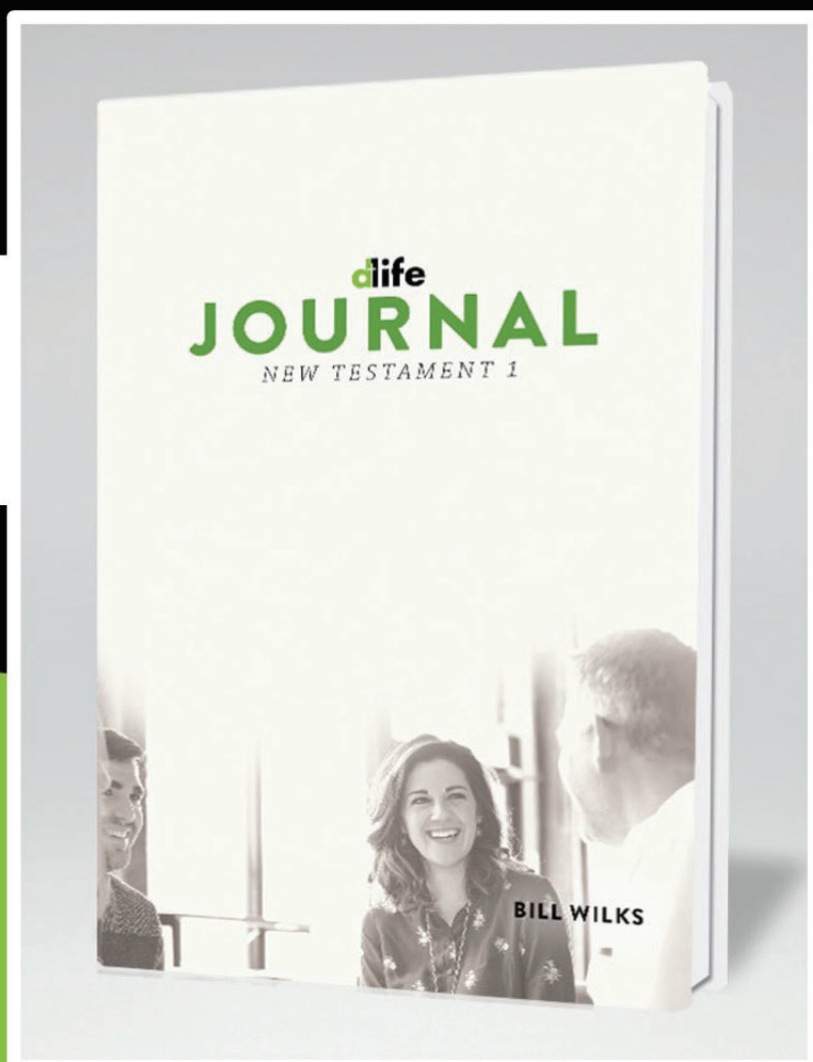
Some names have been changed for security.

*EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was written by Tessa Sanchez and originally published by the International Mission Board.*

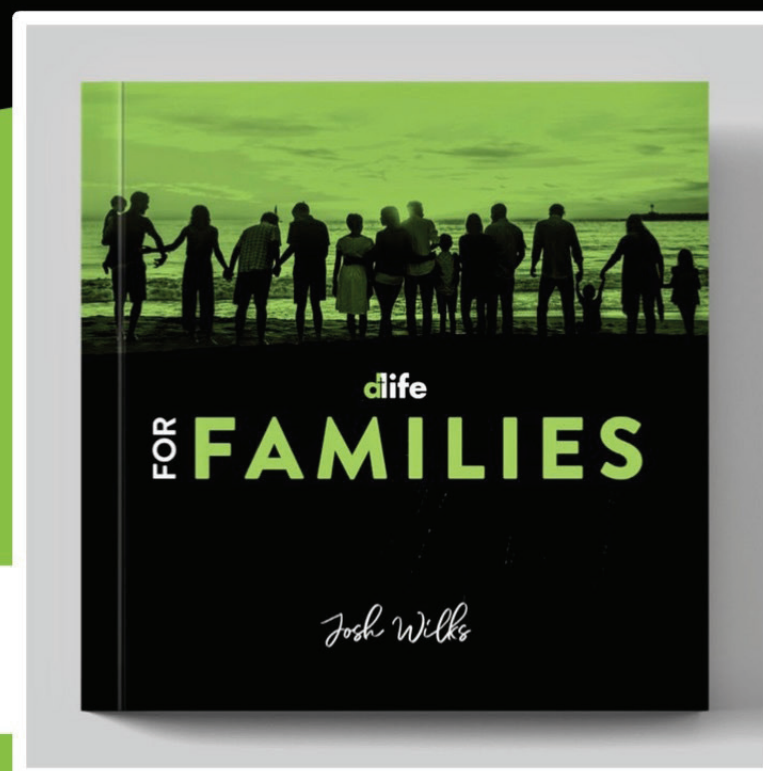


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# New resources

By Lauren Bearry  
Lifeway Christian Resources

## ‘CSB Grace Bible for Kids’ to help readers with dyslexia

**L**ifeway’s B&H Publishing Group partnered with 2K/DENMARK and Cambridge University to release the CSB Grace Bible for Kids, a first-of-its-kind Bible for readers with dyslexia, available this fall.

According to the International Dyslexia Association, 15–20% of the population has a language-based learning disability. Of the students with specific learning disabilities receiving special education services, 70–80% have deficits in reading. The Grace Bible seeks to help enhance readability for kids who suffer from visual stress as they read.

### Different typeface

“Kids who feel intimidated by reading can feel comfortable with this new typeface in a Bible that’s made specifically with them in mind,” said Lifeway President Ben Mandrell.

“Dyslexia shouldn’t keep kids from reading the Bible. At its core, the CSB Grace Bible for Kids is meeting the need of helping young readers interact and connect with God in a personal way through His Word.”

The CSB Grace Bible for Kids is designed for kids ages 7–12, offering an inclusive reading approach with improved visual processing. The Bible integrates academically tested typeface and design principles developed by 2K/DENMARK and Cambridge University’s research department.

The layout and design adds space between letters, words, lines and paragraphs along with distinct letter forms to help with readability.



Photo courtesy of Lifeway Christian Resources

“If you are dyslexic, sometimes you see letters as bouncing balloons because they don’t stay on the baseline,” explains Klaus Krogh, founder of 2K/DENMARK. “In designing the Grace typeface,

we made sure to fix the letters to the baseline by making them heavier towards the bottom.”

Krogh began developing the Grace typeface five years ago. Cambridge University heard about his work and asked if they could participate in developing and testing the typeface and design.

### Connecting to the message

In addition to the added weight to the baseline of letters, the Grace typeface helps readers differentiate between pairs of similar letters like m and n or p and q.

Readers will also notice special-colored page overlays that enhance visual processing and can reduce visual stress.

A version of the Grace Bible for

teens and adults will be available in February 2025.

“I am so looking forward to hearing the feedback. I hope and pray this will help someone connect with the content of the Bible,” Krogh said. “We know faith changes lives, and we’d like as many as possible to be given the chance to change their life by the message in the Bible.”

For more information about the Grace Bible, visit [gracebibleforkids.com](http://gracebibleforkids.com).

For information about other resources for special needs ministry, visit [Lifeway.com/specialneeds](http://Lifeway.com/specialneeds).

*EDITOR’S NOTE — This story was written by Lauren Bearry and originally published by Lifeway.*

## Holman Publishers releases CSB Oswald Chambers Bible

**H**olman Bible Publishers is partnering with Our Daily Bread Publishing — the authorized publishing partner for The Oswald Chambers Publications Association, Ltd. — to create a new Bible resource, The CSB Oswald Chambers Bible. This new volume features the full text of Oswald Chambers’ devotional My “Utmost for His Highest” (published in the easy-to-understand Modern Classic Edition) along with a reading plan, study helps, and the full text of the Christian Standard Bible.

“Oswald Chambers’ beloved devotional ‘Utmost for His Highest’ has inspired millions of readers since it was first published in 1924,” says Andy McLean, publisher, Holman Bible and Reference.

“Featuring Chambers’ timeless reflections on Scripture found throughout his collected works, alongside the highly reliable and readable CSB translation, the Oswald Chambers Bible is sure to point readers to Jesus — the One who deserves our very utmost!”

Chris cynethia Floyd, vice president and ODBP publisher, echoes that vision for this new Bible resource: “The CSB Oswald Chambers Bible is a powerful discipleship resource to help readers grow in their understanding of Scripture while exploring the timeless and thought-provoking insights of Oswald Chambers.”

The CSB Oswald Chambers Bible features unique study helps and devotional tools.

Available in hardcover, LeatherTouch and genuine leather editions.

Features include full-color design throughout; two-column text layout; 25-point easy-to-read type; Smyth-sewn durable binding; ribbon marker; concordance; multiple color options; indexed and non-indexed editions; presentation page for gift-giving; and full-color maps.

*EDITOR’S NOTE — This story was written by Lifeway staff and originally published by Lifeway.*



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# Learning words

By Tessa Sanchez  
International Mission Board

## Language a critical factor for IMB missionaries spreading gospel

Jane Hwang's eyes scanned the list of cities. The last job, for student ministry in Tokyo, caught her attention. In the job description, she noted the lack of hope and knowledge of eternal life among the Japanese — and she felt the Lord was leading her to serve in Japan.

After receiving training to serve as a Journeyman, Hwang moved to Tokyo and studied language.

When they first arrive on the mission field, Journeymen study the language full-time for several months, but they don't wait around for ministry opportunities. A train ride allowed Hwang and a teammate to practice their Japanese and share truth.

Hwang says that people typically have their heads down on commuter trains, looking at their phones. On one commute, however, her Journeyman teammate struck up a conversation with a young woman standing in front of them.

### Sharing testimonies

Hwang and her teammate shared their testimonies, and the woman, Shyanne, eagerly listened. Shyanne attended an Easter service with them, and Hwang later met Shyanne in a coffee shop and began sharing the resurrection story. She realized she only knew enough Japanese from her language study to say, "Jesus died."

"Wait, there's something else that's important too!" she communicated to her new friend urgently. She used Google Translate to look up "lived again."

Apart from bunnies and eggs, Shyanne didn't know much about Easter, so she was intrigued.

Hwang's language study prepared her for interactions like this



IMB Photo

IMB missionaries use game nights and visits over meals to share the gospel and their testimonies. (IMB Photo)

one.

Language learning is academic study and picking up social language and common phrases from friends.

One of the new phrases isn't on any language school curriculum.

A new friend said, "Here's how you say 'crazy head.'"

"Why do I need to know how to say that?" she asked him, laughing.

She still doesn't know why or how this word is important to her and her ministry, but the friend has since attended several events International Mission Board missionaries hosted, and Hwang hopes he will respond to the gospel message he hears at the events.

### Springing into ministry

In April, Hwang took a break from her full-time language study to get involved in campus outreach opportunities while students were on spring break.

for "bubble tea hangouts," where Hwang and her teammates played games while they enjoyed their drinks.

When Hwang finishes language school, she'll launch into full-time ministry to university students.

She asks for prayer for the Lord to soften the hearts of students so they will be open to hearing the gospel.

Pray Japanese students will find hope in their Creator, who calls them fearfully and wonderfully made.

Southern Baptist support of the IMB through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and the Co-operative Program allows Hwang and other Journeymen to study the language.

*EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was written by Tessa Sanchez and originally published by the International Mission Board.*



IMB Photo

When traffic stops at the famous Shibuya scramble crossing in front of a railway station in Tokyo, people flood the intersection.