

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



Photo courtesy of The Carter Center

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter greets a Nepalese boy in Kathmandu. The Carter Center monitored Nepal's November 2013 constituent assembly election, sending 66 observers from 31 countries to visit 336 polling centers in 31 districts.

Life of service

President Jimmy Carter remembered as faithful teacher, global humanitarian

President Jimmy Carter, the peanut farmer turned politician who taught Sunday School for decades, died Dec. 29 at age 100 (the longest-lived American president).

After he entered hospice care in February 2023, Carter's church in his hometown of Plains, Georgia, prayed for him during a worship service and shared one of his most famous quotes:

"My faith demands that I do whatever I can, wherever I can, whenever I can, for as long as I can with whatever I have to try to make a difference."

White House to Habitat

Elected U.S. president in 1976, Carter's single term in office was marked by economic hardship and unrest, including the 1979 hostage crisis in Iran.

After their time in Washington, Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, dedicated more than 40 years to helping people in need.

They began volunteering with Habitat for Humanity in the mid-1980s, establishing the annual Carter Work Project to provide affordable housing in the U.S. and overseas.

In 1982, they launched The Carter Center to promote human rights causes around the world.

Carter also authored several faith-centered books, including his 1996 memoir "Living Faith" and the Bible-focused "Sources of Strength: Meditations on Scripture for a Living Faith." He was awarded the United Nations Human Rights Prize in 1998, the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1999 and the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002.

To read the full article on Carter, visit tabonline.org/carter. (TAB)

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Obituaries

LEE ALLEN

Lee Norcross Allen, longtime Alabama Baptist historian originally from Shawmut, died Dec. 16 at 98.

Allen served in the U.S. Army during World War II and earned a bachelor's and a master's degree from Auburn University. He was awarded a doctor of philosophy degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1955.

Allen became a professor of history at Samford University in 1961 and stayed in that role for 40 years. He was the founding dean of Samford's School of Graduate Studies in 1965 and dean of Howard College of Arts and Sciences (1975-1990).

From 1990 to 2001, Allen was university historian for Samford, creating the manuscript for "College to University: Samford on Lakeshore."

Allen served several years on the boards (and as chair) of the Southern Baptist Historical Society and Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. He was a prolific writer, especially concerning Baptist history.

He co-authored the history of Ruhama Baptist Church and wrote two histories each of FBC Montgomery, Mountain Brook Baptist and Birmingham (now Birmingham Metro) Baptist Association.

He also wrote histories of five other churches and taught Baptist history and missions for New Orleans Seminary's Birmingham extension from 1985 to 1988.

Allen is survived by his wife of 61 years, Catherine; son, Leland; daughter, Leslie; and two granddaughters.

DON JOHNSON

Don Johnson, longtime director of missions for Tuskegee Lee Baptist Association, died Dec. 17. He was 89.

A native of Citronelle, Johnson earned a bachelor's degree from Howard College (now Samford University) and master of divinity and religious education degrees from New Orleans Seminary.

His 71 years of ministry included

27 years at Tuskegee Lee Association — he retired as director of missions in 2006, as did his wife, Mary Alice, who had served as the association's secretary during that time as well.

Johnson also served as pastor of churches in Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi. He was active in Alabama Baptist life, serving for six years as the secretary/treasurer of the Alabama Baptist Conference of Associational Leaders.

Johnson is survived by his wife of 67 years; daughter, Lisa; son, Jim; four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

SID NICHOLS

Sid Nichols, retired Alabama Baptist pastor and director of missions, died Dec. 28. He was 72.

Nichols served as a pastor for 30 years in Alabama, Tennessee and Kentucky including at Ashby Baptist Church, Brierfield; Samaria Baptist Church, Clanton; Prattmont Baptist Church, Prattville; First Baptist Church Red Bay; Mount Hebron West Baptist Church, Elmore; Sage Avenue Baptist Church, Mobile; and Heritage Baptist Church, Dothan.

He then spent nearly 15 years as director of missions for Calhoun Baptist Association before retiring from full-time ministry in 2016. He

continued to serve in interim pastor roles after he retired.

After answering the call to preach just after high school, Nichols earned a bachelor's degree from Samford University in Birmingham; a master of divinity degree from Southern Seminary; and a doctor of ministry degree from Alabama Theological Seminary in Tuscaloosa.

Drawing on his years of experience, Nichols continually encouraged young pastors and fellow DOMs to remain faithful to the gospel and the mission of Jesus Christ.



JOHNSON



ALLEN



NICHOLS



SAMPLEY

"There is no substitute for true gospel preaching that points people to a relationship with Christ. ... Be intentional in teaching and supporting missions on all levels," he said.

Roger Willmore, current DOM for Calhoun Association, said Nichols will be remembered as a "preacher's preacher."

"He had a homespun style that appealed to people," Willmore said. "He was an evangelistic preacher; he loved to see people accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior."

Nichols was preceded in death by his first wife of 37 years, Barbara. He is survived by his wife, Pam; two children and two grandchildren.

JAMES SAMPLEY

James Sampley, who served in ministry for more than 50 years, died Dec. 22. He was 77.

Sampley served as pastor of First Baptist Church Ashville from 1996 to 2013 and as pastor of James Memorial Baptist Church in Gadsden from 1981 to 1987. He also served as pastor of Faith Baptist Church in West Blocton while he was a student at Samford University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in religion.

After Samford, he earned a master of divinity and doctorate in ministry from Southern Seminary.

During his years of pastoral ministry, Sampley also served churches in Indiana, Tennessee, Georgia and South Carolina.

He retired from full-time ministry in 2013, then served part time as minister of missions and senior adults at Crosspoint Church in Trussville until 2018.

Over the years, Sampley was involved in St. Clair Baptist Association and the Alabama Baptist State Convention, as well as missions in Guatemala.

He was trained as an Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief chaplain. He also served in the U.S. Navy for four years after graduating from Fort Payne High School.

Sampley is survived by his wife, Judy; son, Ross Dean; daughter, Robyn; and two grandchildren.

The Alabama Baptist

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

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JENNIFER DAVIS RASH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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among top in nation

The newspapers, online content and other media offerings produced by TAB Media Group continue to be honored among the top in the nation in the Christian market and in the state's general market. Best in Class, Awards of Excellence and other top awards have been earned by team members every year for nearly 30 years.


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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

 @RashionalThts

Seeking to follow ‘sabbath’ pattern for year seven

Year seven — the sabbath year — has been on my mind recently because when the calendar turned to 2025, it also started the clock on my seventh year in the editor’s chair.

In thinking through what it might look like to follow the pattern outlined in Leviticus 25 of six years of growth followed by one year of rest, reflection and resetting, I realized we would need to be creative to pull it off.

How do we implement a year of “rest” while still working to fulfill our ministry assignment of informing, inspiring and connecting Baptists?

Continued effectiveness

The concepts noted by ministry strategist George Bullard in *The Baptist Paper*, sister publication of *The Alabama Baptist*, helped me find the answer.

Bullard said a ministry organization or church can go through two or three seven-year cycles of growth and sabbath before it reaches the pinnacle of its effectiveness.

To continue building on increased effectiveness, the ministry leaders need to think through their strategies and develop new tools to understand what is happening around them and what needs to be done in the future, he explained.

‘Movement of God’

“It’s about letting the movement of God pull them forward instead of pushing themselves forward,” Bullard said.

So, our team at TAB Media Group plans to use this year to continue the work that has been a vital part of Alabama Baptist life for 182 years but with a few slight variations.

Rather than spending enormous amounts of energy attempting to implement the latest trends of the industry, we will diligently focus on seeking where God is working and then shift our energy to join Him.

Instead of doing the same routines over and over each day, we will thoroughly review all the systems and platforms to determine what to keep, what to retire, what to keep but polish and what to add.

We have a lot of moving parts through the ministry of TAB Media Group, so it will definitely take the full year to assess each one carefully.

As we do this, we will need your help.

First, we need your prayers.

Pray for our team members to experience a time of calmness and peace in their personal lives, so we can have the full mental capacity to work through all the professional steps needed for the process ahead.

Also, pray for discernment as we do the evaluations and figure out next steps.

Second, we need your continued support.

Continue reading and engaging with us while also sharing our content with those who aren’t yet fully engaged with *The Alabama Baptist* in print and/or online.

Third, we need to hear from you.

Where would you like us to prioritize our time and resources going forward? Why are those areas most important to you?

You are a valued reader and supporter, and your opinion matters to us.

We’ve worked hard to grow our media group to have a little bit of everything available, and we are excited to see what all the pieces look like a year from now after an intense time of praying, seeking, studying, evaluating and polishing.

“For six years you may plant your fields and prune your vineyards and harvest your crops, but during the seventh year the land must have a Sabbath year of complete rest.”

Your Voice



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

12 'surprising' goals to set for 2025

By Chuck Lawless
chucklawless.com

You might already have set goals for the new year, and I assume that some are related to your spiritual walk. Whatever your goals are, though, I encourage you to think about adding these goals to your list as well.

They may surprise you, but they reflect challenges I've seen too many believers face.

1. I will never make my spouse or children feel like they have to schedule an appointment to get time with me. They notice it when everyone else gets our time.

2. I will speak to someone every day about God's goodness. Someone. Every day. If we get there, we'll also do more evangelism.

3. I will take every step necessary

to avoid pornography. The stuff's potent. And destructive. To think we're immune to its lure is to be foolish.

4. I will pray daily with my Christian spouse. It doesn't need to be a long prayer — even a quick prayer is better than none — but we should be praying with our spouse.

Stay informed

5. I will read or listen to the news every day. I'm amazed by how ill-informed church leaders are about the world God loves. We miss prayer and missions opportunities when we know nothing except our own little world.

6. I will say "thank you" to a faithful church member at least once a week. Write a card. Send an email. Make a phone call. Most of

our churches have many faithful, sacrificial members who never get a thank you.

7. I will fast once a month. I realize believers differ on the necessity of fasting, but Jesus seemed to assume His followers would fast (Matt. 6). This won't happen unless we prioritize and schedule it.

8. I will finish that project I've been working on far too long. You know what that project is. If you believe God has wanted you to do it, get it done.

9. I will read at least one book per month. One book may not sound like much, but it's more than many church leaders read. Enlist a reading partner, and keep learning as you lead others.

10. I will always be praying for at least (a) one nonbeliever, (b) one wayward believer and (c) one faithful believer. Pray with intentionality this next year.

11. I will view my physical well-being as a spiritual matter and a gospel witness. For many of us, that means we will exercise more, eat better and get more rest.

12. I will study about the needs of missions at least once a quarter. I would prefer you do it at least monthly, but let's start somewhere. Great sites for studying missions needs are imb.org, peoplegroups.org, namb.net and joshuaproject.net.

EDITOR'S NOTE — We would add thebaptistpaper.org to #12.

"We are a small church, but we want to have a big impact in the lives of the children and in our community," said pastor **Marlin Kimball** of West Point Baptist Church in Kentucky, reflecting on the church's winter VBS. "They come to VBS, and we sow the seeds of the gospel, work on crafts, and do all of the normal VBS activities. It's something we all look forward to every year."

"I went through brief periods of anger, especially when I watched other families in the trauma unit rejoice when their loved ones improved," writes **Becky Kirby** on the challenges widows face after losing a spouse. Kirby lost her husband in a tragic car accident.

"During those 15 days, I read the book of Philippians several times and realized God's divine peace really is inexplicable. I decided to stand firm on those promises in the Word ... He IS in control and in that I could rest."

"We were looking for an outreach opportunity that could bring people from our community inside the church who wouldn't normally visit," said **Matt Mueller**, a member of FBC Shelbyville, Kentucky. "Mini-golf works because it appeals to anyone. A 3-year-old and 90-year-old can both play."

Letters to the Editor

Iam writing regarding your Oct. 13 issue titled "Aging Well." This issue was very enjoyable to read and informative as well. I specifically enjoyed the articles about genetic testing for Alzheimer's and about the new drug approved by the FDA.

My biochemistry class has been discussing Alzheimer's, so I was excited (and slightly traumatized) to see it in The Alabama Baptist. Your article summarized the mechanism of action

for Kisunla well, and also the creation of Alzheimer's through amyloid plaque. However, according to research I've done, some of the medications may not be as effective as the manufacturers are claiming.

I also enjoyed the "Aging Well" issue because my own parents are getting older. I found the story of Mrs. Kyles to be delightful, and it reminded me a lot of them.

John Ali Hedayat
Tuscaloosa

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“Your life as a Christian should make nonbelievers question their disbelief in God.”

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

pastor/author/martyr

“We can be so busy in doing the Lord’s work that we neglect to spend time with the Lord,” said **David Eldridge**, pastor of Dawson Memorial Baptist Church in Birmingham, noting an essential thing for pastors is the “care of the soul.”

He also noted, “We live in a society of contempt fueled by cable news and social media. So many are condescending and critical of others. I think pastors must work hard to avoid negative statements such as, ‘They’re never going to change,’ or ‘Nothing can be done.’ We must never conclude that a person or circumstance is irredeemable; we must pay attention to opportunities for redemption.”

Mere legalism can never accomplish our call to sanctified living. Outward expressions of faith must be born out of inward commitment to the Lord. The psalmist encourages, “Give the Lord the glory due His name; Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness (Ps. 29:2).”

In fact, our best efforts to worship God apart from repentance over sin will inevitably fall flat. We must lift up holy hands, without wrath and doubting (1 Tim. 2:8). Even prayer is impossible if we refuse to reckon with the iniquities in our hearts (Ps. 66:18).

Adam B. Dooley, pastor
Englewood Baptist Church
Jackson, Tennessee

Contentment

Contentment and thankfulness are antitheses of anger.

Be content where you are without being complacent.

Be thankful for the good and bad. Both add to your interesting life story.

Be patient.

God will provide what is needed for you, when you need it to fulfill your responsibilities.

Acceptance of God’s perfect will is the answer to all our problems.

Unless we accept life completely

on God’s terms, we cannot be happy.

First Thessalonians 5:18 “in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

Ultimately, you must have Jesus in your heart to be content.

Pray this way: “Lord Jesus, I need You. I open the door of my heart and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Take control of my life. Forgive my sins; I turn away from them now. Make me the kind of person you want me to be. As an expression of my faith, I now thank You for hearing my prayer and coming into my life. I pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

If you prayed this way, tell someone what you have done, and be baptized by a Bible-believing church. This will solidify your commitment to Jesus, and you will be

taking the first important steps in your journey to Christian maturity.

Thanksgiving to God for loving us enough to send Jesus!

Bob Cosby, M.D.
Birmingham

Few things are as important as taking time for boys and girls and teaching them how to be Christians.

Pastors have many demands every day. Sometimes evangelizing and discipling others get swept into lesser priority because of these many tasks.

One day, opportunities will flee and influence will be gone. The most important legacy pastors and congregations can leave behind is a new generation who serve the Lord.

Michael J. Brooks
Siluria Baptist Church
Alabaster



10 ways to pray for Syria

As Syria has faced ongoing crisis, Open Doors calls on the global community to uphold the people of Syria — especially the Christian minority — in prayer, and to advocate for peace and stability in the region.

Ways to pray:

1. Pray for unity among leaders, that they keep the Syrian people’s interest as a first priority.

2. Urgently pray for peace in Syria, that the cycle of violence would cease, that there would be no spirit of vengeance against anyone, and that God’s justice and mercy would prevail in this land that has been troubled for more than a decade.

3. Pray for the leaders of all factions to be moved toward reconciliation and for the protection of innocent civilians.

4. Lift up Christian communities in prayer, asking for strength and courage.

5. Pray for the church to remain a beacon of hope and love, even as it faces immense challenges.

6. Pray for church leaders, that they (re)commit to their calling to serve the church and their society at large.

7. Ask God to grant wisdom to church leaders as they guide their communities.

8. Pray for safety and resilience for families forced to make impossible choices about whether to stay or to leave.

9. Pray for the other minorities (Alawites and others), that they will be protected to avoid more bloodshed.

10. Pray for healing for Syria as a nation, that broken relationships would be restored and that the hope of Christ would shine, bringing comfort to the weary and a future to those who feel forgotten. May the global Church stand in unity, interceding for our brothers and sisters in Syria and for all those longing for peace and justice. (Open Doors)

Alabama news

FRANKLIN ASSOCIATION

► **Janice Dover** recently retired from her role as ministry assistant of **Franklin Association**. She served alongside her husband, Larry, who retired from the associational missionary role in mid-2024.

LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN

► **Mount Vernon Baptist Church, Collinsville**, celebrated its 150th anniversary Dec. 8. Sharon Burke, the pastor's wife, sang a song of praise to begin the service. Wendell Dutton, a commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission and associational missionary for Cherokee Association, presented the church with a commemorative plaque followed by special music by David and Kim Trail, Eloise Norris and Todd Ozment. Terry Burke, the pastor, brought the message. Several historical displays were set up in the family life center for people to enjoy during lunch. Pictured are (standing, l to r) Mark Parker, Claude Robertson, Todd Ozment, Wendell Dutton, Terry Clanton, pastor Terry Burke, John Yarborough, Davis Norris, Toby Clanton (seated, l to r) Connie Clanton and Jimmy Dan Clanton.



Photo courtesy of Sharon Burke

MOBILE ASSOCIATION

► **Thomas Wright** recently retired as executive director of missions for **Mobile Baptist Association** after serving 20 years in this position. He began his ministry serving with IMB and NAMB as a journeyman and church planter. Fluent in Laotian and Thai, Wright was founding pastor of First Laotian Baptist Church, Fort Worth, Texas; and Saginaw Laotian Mission, in Texas, during his time at Southwestern Seminary where he earned his master of divinity and doctor of philosophy degrees. He is a graduate of Shorter College, Rome, Georgia, with additional studies at Baylor University and Fuller Theological Seminary, Houston, Texas. He also served as an adjunct professor of missions/evangelism at Liberty Baptist College, Southeastern and New Orleans Baptist seminaries. He is the author of three books and numerous articles for training and spiritual growth. He and his wife, Donna, have two adult children. He is currently teaching classes for Samford's MTI extension in Mobile. When asked about his future plans, Wright said he and Donna will be working as a team with IMB to teach internationally as openings arise. Their first assignment in the fall of



WRIGHT

2025 will be teaching at the seminary in Uganda. James Mercer is serving as interim DOM for Mobile Association.



HANRAHAN

SHELBY ASSOCIATION

► **Tracy Hanrahan** is the new worship minister for **Beulah Baptist Church, Sterrett**. She holds a bachelor of arts degree in communications from the University of Alabama, studied church music at Samford University, holds a worship leader certificate from the Samford Center for Worship and the Arts and is pursuing a master of arts in theological studies from Beeson Divinity School. Hanrahan and her husband, Tom, have three children. John Roland is pastor.

TALLAPOOSA ASSOCIATION

► **Charlotte Mattox** is the new secretary-treasurer of **Tallapoosa Baptist Association**. She and her husband, Dru, are members of Mount Zion Baptist Church, Alexander City.

► **James Smith** has retired as director of missions for **Tallapoosa Baptist Association**, effective Dec. 31 but is continuing in the role temporarily as interim. A native of Huntsville, Smith was called into ministry in 1974 and has served as a youth minister, pastor, international missionary, church planting catalyst and hospice chaplain. He received his bachelor's degree from Samford University and his master's from Southeastern Seminary. Smith and his wife, Jerilyn, served Tallapoosa Association for 10 years.



Submitted photo

Jerilyn, a graduate of Baylor University, also wrapped up her role as the association's ministry assistant, clerk and treasurer Dec. 31. The Smiths have two adult children and four grandchildren. They plan to move to West Virginia.

TUSKEGEE LEE ASSOCIATION

► **Wayne Ivey** recently retired as associational mission strategist for **Tuskegee Lee Baptist Association**. Prior to his two years with the association, Ivey served as pastor of churches for almost 40 years including Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, Abbeville; Midway Baptist Church, Smiths Station; and Northside Baptist Church, Opelika. He has a bachelor of theol-



MATTOX

ogy from Florida Baptist University. His wife, Jean, has served as the association's ministry assistant since 2013. They have two adult children and two grandchildren.

► **Russell Dean** is the new associational mission strategist for **Tuskegee Lee Baptist Association**. Dean grew up in Jackson and served as a high school football and baseball coach for seven years at Jackson High School. He graduated from Auburn University with a bachelor of arts degree in mass communications and a bachelor of science degree in speech education. He earned a master's from the University of South Alabama and a master's from New Orleans Seminary. He served at Midway Baptist Church, Thomasville; First Baptist Church Lanett; Excel Baptist Church; and FBC Lake Charles, Louisiana, before becoming general manager of Faith Broadcasting where he served for 18 years. He and his wife, Amy, have three grown children and seven grandchildren.



Submitted photo

WEST CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

► **Caleb Newsom** is the new minister of students and sending for **First Baptist Church Selma**. Newsom holds a master of divinity degree from Southern Seminary. He and his wife, Julianne, have one daughter. Timothy Mathis is pastor.



fbcselma.org

WINSTON ASSOCIATION

► **Bob Cooper** is the new director of missions for **Winston Baptist Association** after serving a stint as interim DOM.

He previously served First Baptist Church Arley as well as churches in California, New Mexico, Texas, Colorado and Florida. He has served in Disaster Relief ministry since 2013 and currently is a chaplain



COOPER

instructor for the State Board of Missions. A retired U.S. Air Force lieutenant colonel, Cooper holds a bachelor of science degree from the Air Force Academy and a master of business administration in aviation management from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. He served at March Air Reserve Base, California, and participated in a variety of other military studies as well as DR and chaplaincy training. Cooper and his wife, Cathy, have two children and eight grandchildren.



IVEY

LeaderCARE

2025 EVENTS

**Intentional Leader Series
PERSON**

JANUARY 21, SBOM,
PRATTVILLE
Led by Mark Dance,
director of pastoral
wellness for Guidestone
Financial Resources
Cost: \$10 (includes lunch)

**Bivocational Minister and
Spouse Retreat**

FEBRUARY 21-22,
SHOCCO SPRINGS
Led by Mark Clifton,
revitalization specialist at
the North American Mission
Board
Cost: \$40/couple or \$30/
person (includes supper
and breakfast)

**Intentional Leader Series
PATHFINDER**

APRIL 8, SBOM, PRATTVILLE
Led by Buddy Champion,
pastor of FBC Trussville,
who will share a strategic
plan for revitalization
Cost: \$10 (includes lunch)

**Transitional Pastor
Training**

APRIL 21-22, SBOM,
PRATTVILLE
Led by Dan Garland and
Henry Webb
Cost: \$25 (includes supper
and lunch)

**Intentional Leader Series
PREACHER**

JULY 15, SBOM, PRATTVILLE
Led by Robert Smith, who
served as professor of
Christian preaching at
Beeson for more than
25 years
Cost: \$10 (includes lunch)

**Intentional Leader Series
PASTOR**

SEPTEMBER 16, SBOM,
PRATTVILLE
Led by state missionaries
Rob Jackson, Ken Allen
and Bryan Blass, who
will share strategies for
shepherding well
Cost: \$10 (includes lunch)

For more information, visit
leadercareal.org/events
or contact Ministry Assistant
Lori Lockett, llockett@alsbom.org, 334-613-2218

These events are made possible by
gifts of Alabama Baptists through
the Cooperative Program.



SCAN QR CODE
FOR MORE INFO



Persecuted church

**Two slain, one hurt, several
kidnapped in attacks**

ABUJA, Nigeria — In November and December, at least two Christians were slain, another was wounded and several were kidnapped in days of militant attacks upon villages in Nigeria.

The attacks occurred in Gwanje and Ntsakpe villages in Nasarawa state. Ningo and Goho communities also were targeted.

Nigeria, which is No. 6 on Open Doors' 2024 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian, has led the world in the number of Christians killed for their faith or kidnapped.

**Husband in Somalia beats
wife over her faith in Jesus**

MOGADISHU, Somalia — A Somali woman fled for her life, leaving behind her two young children, because her husband beat her for placing her faith in Jesus.

The woman, called Fatima in the news article, put her faith in Jesus on Oct. 15 during an underground church service in the Mudug region of Somalia. She fled from her husband after her mother-in-law rescued her from the beating. A Christian leader gave Fatima refuge.

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

**Faith groups must 'place the
state above God' to exist**

MINSK, Belarus — Only one of 3,500 previously approved faith groups in Belarus has been granted official status ahead of the July 5, 2025, re-registration deadline imposed by the country's new religion law. In order to re-register, "religions will have to support state ideology," a Protestant pastor told Forum 18. "This means they will have to place the state above God."

The new law also requires a faith group to have at least 20 local adults as members, which will exclude many churches in small villages.

**Young Christian women are
frequent targets in Pakistan**

LAHORE, Pakistan — Young Christian women in Pakistan are frequently targeted for sexual assault and kidnapping, according to numerous reports.

Sana Javed (center, pictured with her parents), 18, was kidnapped, held captive for five months and forced to convert to Islam and marry. She was recovered Nov. 14 through



Photo courtesy
of Morning Star News

the aid of a
schoolteacher
in a different
province.

A 14-year-old
girl, the daughter
of a pastor,
is in hiding
with her family
after a Muslim
neighbor raped
her and sought
to convert her

to Islam and marry her. Her father
said he filed a police report, but no
action was taken.

Other families report similar attacks on their daughters.

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

**Beginnings of new Baptist
buildings being demolished**

TASHKENT, Uzbekistan — A local government in Uzbekistan is demolishing buildings belonging to Urgench Council of Churches Baptists. Both buildings were under construction at the time destruction started last year.

Protests stopped the initial demolition, but the congregation was not allowed to repair damages. Then on Dec. 4, demolition began again.

The Baptist congregation purchased the plot of land in 2023. Owners who bought plots in the same general area have built structures without repercussions.

Uzbekistan is No. 25 on Open Doors' 2024 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

Someone You Should Know

PAULINE HALL

By Leigh Pritchett
The Alabama Baptist

Pauline Hall of Aliceville has many missions fields. Primarily, “my children, my family were my missions field,” said the 88 year old, who has 7 children, 25 grandchildren, 28 great-grandchildren and a great-great-grandchild.

But she also encountered missions opportunities while being fire chief of Sapps-Union Chapel Volunteer Fire Department for 17 years (retired recently), its treasurer (42 years), a Disaster Relief chaplain, a team member on seven missions trips, a pianist or organist for churches (73 years) and the former administrative assistant for Pickens Baptist Association.

“Wherever I am,” she said, “that’s my missions field.” She volunteers with a

prison ministry for women, has been her church’s pianist for 37 years and served as her church’s administrative assistant for 23 years.

Q: Describe where you focus your greatest ministry efforts.

A: Serve as church pianist and volunteer in our local prison ministry for women.

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

A: The first person to tell me about Jesus was my Sunday School teacher, Mary Ellen Williams, at Plateau Baptist Church in Plateau, Alabama. Because of her love for the Lord in her teaching and Christian example, at the age of 9, God touched my heart and I got saved.

Q: Tell about a “turning point” in your life and how God was involved.

A: After my husband died in 2007, I was deeply afraid to stay by myself. In searching the Scriptures, I found a verse that seemed to speak directly to me: “I sought the Lord, and He heard me and delivered me from all my fears” (Ps. 34:4).

I began reading and praying this verse each day.

When the time came for me to once again be at home by myself, I discovered that my fear was gone. He had taken it completely away, even to this very day. Praise the Lord!

Q: What has God been teaching you lately?

A: To keep my mind and focus on Him alone and not dwell on the evil and dark-

MINISTRY TITLE: Church pianist

CHURCH NAME: Carrollton Baptist Church, Carrollton, in Pickens Baptist Association

LIFE VERSE: “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).



ness, which seems to control our world today.

Q: Have you ever read a book or heard a song that changed the way you think about God and faith?

A: As a teenager, I read the book “In His Steps.” It caused me to be intentional about my choices, always asking the question, “What

would Jesus do?” Much later, as I grew in my faith and relationship with my Lord, the words in the latter part of Colossians 1:27 jumped out to me: “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” God revealed to me that God actually lives in me through His Holy Spirit and is the One who guides and helps me make the right choices.

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Phil Waldrep



Tim Dowdy



Charles Billingsley



Scott Dawson

Lass WORDS

BY KEN LASS
The Alabama Baptist



— DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS —

Finding the happy ending

I have always been a big fan of going to the movies. Even in this age of feature films coming into your home via streaming channels, there's still nothing quite like being engulfed by that big screen in the theater, surrounded by music and sound effects coming at you from all directions. And that movie theater popcorn — there's just nothing like it.

I took in a film at least once a week, if not more, for most of my adult life. Now in my senior years, I don't go as often. The motion picture industry is clearly not targeting me — it is dominated by horror flicks, animated children's features and fantasy action heroes.

Profanity, graphic violence and sexual themes have been ratcheted up. It's difficult now to find a good story, told in a clean and engaging way.

A good movie

It's also getting more challenging to discern who the good guys and the bad guys are. Endings are not always happy, and some movies don't end at all. They just leave the plot wide open, requiring you to fill in your own conclusions. I find these frustrating and unsatisfying.

So you have to rely on performers and producers you trust. My favorite actor is Tom Hanks. If he is in a movie, I know it's going to be well done and reason-

ably clean. He has played such an incredible range of characters in films such as "Big," "Forrest Gump," "Castaway," "A League of Their Own," "Apollo 13," "Saving Private Ryan" and so many more.

Reliable resource

I also look for movies produced by the Erwin brothers. I can depend on them to bring me intriguing stories with a solid Christian message. I suppose it's much like finding a restaurant that always has good food, or a hair stylist who does your hair exactly the way you want it.

Or a book you can always go to for consistent answers to important questions. The Bible is the most reliable resource out there.

You want consistent? How about 2,000 years in print. The all-time best seller. Unlike restaurants and hairstyles, the Word of God never changes, is always in style and always right.

And unlike many of the movies of today, it will always take you to the ultimate happy ending.

MEET THE AUTHOR

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

UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Ring in 2025 with New Cooperative Program Resources

On May 13, 1925, the Cooperative Program was adopted during the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Memphis, Tennessee.

To help your church members learn more about the Cooperative Program during this special year of celebration, new resources are now, or will soon be, available online by visiting 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



AlabamaCP.org/CP100

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.

► Bulletin Inserts/ Shells

As May 13 approaches, consider using a Sunday to specifically promote the Cooperative Program in a 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 will launch 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 CP.

To download or order these and other resources, visit AlabamaCP.org/CP100. Let's join together to make this an anniversary year to remember!

To download or order these resources, visit AlabamaCP.org/CP100 or scan the code.



TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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

CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Pisgah Baptist Church, Sipsey, Alabama, is searching for a full-time pastor. 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.

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.

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 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 or mail to: Enon Baptist Church, ATTN: Search Committee, P.O. Box 4, Camden, AL 36726.

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 or BuhlBaptistchurch@gmail.com.

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.

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.

BUSINESS

CHURCH FURNISHINGS

Baptistries, portable baptistries with wheels, church steeples, pew cushions, new pews, church pew reupholstering and restoration, wall crosses, stained glass windows. Call 478-275-0235 or email: info@superiorchurch.com. Website: www.superiorchurch.com

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LOG CABIN

Lake Gunter'sville area, beautiful view and fully furnished. Discounts to ministers. Log on to <https://paradisevistatravel.com/2024/08/20/paradise-vista-cabin> to see pictures. Email Karen for reservations at kwldwc@gmail.com or call 205-540-3600.

RESOURCES

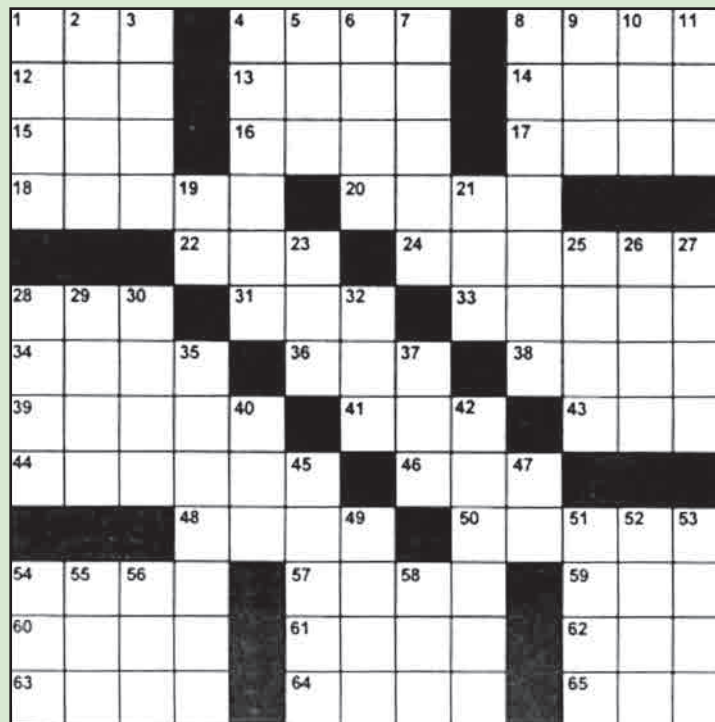
"HELP I'M A PASTOR!"

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, Venmo @Joe-McKeever-7 or send a check and your mailing address to: 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209.

CHRISTIAN Crossword

ACROSS

1. Touched the ____ (Matt. 9:20)
4. I know in ____ (1 Cor. 13:12)
8. Sendeth ____ on the just. (Matt. 5:45)
12. The serpent beguiled ____ (2 Cor. 11:3)
13. ____ despised his birthright. (Gen. 25:34)
14. Woe to them that are at ____ in Zion. (Amos 6:1)
15. ____ as a sheep to the slaughter. (Acts 8:32)
16. I will give you ____ (Matt. 11:28)
17. As the Lord ____ him. (Josh. 11:9)
18. I ____ toward the mark. (Phil. 3:14)
20. Now abideth faith, ____, charity. (1 Cor. 13:13)
22. Your life is ____ with Christ in God. (Col. 3:3)
24. This is the ____ of John. (John 1:19)
28. They called for Jesus' death.
31. All things ____ possible. (Mark 9:23)
33. Where Joshua and all Israel stoned Achan. (Josh. 7:24-25)
34. A tenth of an ephah. (Ex. 16:36)
36. Verily I say unto ____.
38. Say ye unto your brethren, ____ (Hos. 2:1)
39. Moses' brother. (Ex. 4:14)
41. National Security Council. (abbr.)
43. Labor Day month. (abbr.)
44. How Samuel's sons were influenced. (1 Sam. 8:3)
46. ____ hath not seen. (1 Cor. 2:9)
48. Ahab served ____ a little. (2 Kings 10:18)
50. If thy ____ eye offend thee. (Matt. 5:29)
54. Run with patience the ____ (Heb. 12:1)
57. I am the true ____ (John 15:1)
59. Japanese drama.



By Mary Ann Freeman Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

60. The 12th month. (Esther 3:7)
61. Seared with a hot ____ (1 Tim. 4:2)
62. Solomon's navy brought him this animal. (1 Kings 10:22)
63. The son of ____ (Mark 6:3)
64. ____ any of you. (1 Cor. 6:1)
65. Were there not ____ cleansed? (Luke 17:17)

DOWN

1. ____ thou mine unbelief. (Mark 9:24)
2. Sing of the mercies of the Lord for ____ (Ps. 89:1)
3. Darius' nationality. (Dan. 11:1)
4. Cyrus king of ____ (2 Chron. 36:23)
5. Indicates an enzyme.
6. Be not ____ with thy mouth. (Eccles. 5:2)
7. Private instructor.
8. Isaac's wife. (Rom. 9:10)
9. Auto club.
10. Independent School District. (abbr.)
11. Indicates maiden name.
19. Be quiet.
21. Green vegetable.
23. O ye ____ bones. (Ezek. 37:4)
25. Electrical units.
26. Bear witness also at ____ (Acts 23:11)
27. To shed drops.
28. Ruth left this country. (Ruth 1:22)
29. One of the sons of Eliphaz. (Gen. 36:11)
30. One of the sons of Zophah. (1 Chron. 7:36)
32. Long time.
35. Thought it not ____ to be equal with God. (Phil. 2:6)
37. Them which despitefully ____ you. (Matt. 5:44)
40. National Education Association. (abbr.)
42. They found a man of ____ (Matt. 27:32)
45. Jesse's youngest son. (1 Sam. 17:14)
47. East Indies. (abbr.)
49. Italian money.
51. Which strain at a ____ (Matt. 23:24)
52. The ____ of glory. (Col. 1:27)
53. ____ that which is in part shall be done away. (1 Cor. 13:10)
54. Abraham went and took the ____ (Gen. 22:13)
55. American Dental Association. (abbr.)
56. Automobile.
58. Neither cold ____ hot. (Rev. 3:16)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.



UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Intentional Leader Series

The next Intentional Leader Series, set for Jan. 21, will focus on the Person aspect of the four Ps of leadership: Person, Pastor, Preacher and Pathfinder.

Who you are is at the heart of what you do. As a pastor or church leader you are a Christian. Your first priority is relating to God well.

Intentionally relating to God and others and growing in an emotionally healthy way are vital to overall leadership.

Self-awareness is one of the keys to relating to others. Knowing who you are in Christ.

Mark Dance, director of pastoral wellness at Guidestone Financial Resources, will encourage you from his 28 years in pastoral ministry.

Your participation will allow you to gain much from his heart's desire to care well for pastors and other ministry leaders.

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



DANCE

"This conference will benefit not only those who attend, but will transfer to the many church members in whose lives you invest

your time and energy" said Bryan Blass, director of the Office of LeaderCare at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

The event will be 9 a.m.-2 p.m. at the State Board of Missions in Prattville. The \$10 cost includes lunch.

To register, visit alsbom.org/ils.

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. For questions, contact Lee Wright at 334-613-2241 or lwright@alsbom.org.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Sunday School Lessons

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



For January 12

GOD'S COMMANDS Exodus 20:1-17

Scholars have identified 613 laws within the Torah. This week's passage content was first called the Ten Commandments in Exodus 34:28, and this group was the first generation to witness God's deliverance. The commands were given to the second adult generation almost 40 years later. They are listed in Deuteronomy 5, along with the Shema (Deut 6:4-5) immediately afterward.

Jesus pointed to these commandment verses when asked to identify the greatest commandment (Mark 12:29-30). He summarized the commandments related to God with Deuteronomy 6:4-5, and then pointed to Leviticus 19:18 to summarize the commands relating to others.

God's Identity (1-2)

Four hundred years of bondage shaped the people's worldview. Moses rightfully asked God to identify Himself at the burning bush (3:13), since Israelites dwelt in a polytheistic culture.

His Name — from Abraham to Moses, God was known by many descriptive names, including God Most High (Gen. 14:18), God who sees me (Gen. 16:13), God Almighty (Gen. 17:1) and Everlasting God (Gen. 21:33). When God revealed Himself to Moses, He declared His divine Name to be Yahweh (Ex. 6:2). The first statement in the Ten Commandments is His Name: "I am the LORD your God."

His work — Yahweh delivered the Israelites from the land of Egypt. He punished Pharaoh and all the gods of Egypt (12:12). He protected them in the Passover. He parted the sea. He placed them at the base of a mountain where they could receive instructions that would identify them as His chosen people.

Relating to God (3-11)

No other gods — worshipping another god is a rejection of the

authority of the one true God.

No idols — representations of creatures for the sake of worship is exchanging the truth of God for the lie, worshipping created things rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25). In the plagues of Egypt, Yahweh demonstrated His power over the waters, the earth and the heavens. Israel was forbidden to worship such representations. To break this prohibition was to declare their hatred for God ("those who hate me").

No misusing the divine Name — does this mean using it as a curse? Probably not. Israel was called to live as people of the Name. Deuteronomy 18:20 records a death sentence for falsely invoking the Name. Jeremiah indicted contemporary prophets-for-profit who spoke in the Name without receiving revelation from God (Jer. 23:16-17).

Work six days — to work diligently for six days and rest on the seventh was to imitate God's work in creation. While we often highlight the Sabbath day in the commandment list, we regularly fail to honor the command. As such, it affects our relationship both with God and with other people.

Relating to Others (12-17)

Honor your parents. The child who does not honor father and mother will not likely learn to honor any authority. We never outlive this commandment. While Jesus was hanging on the cross, bearing our shame and our guilt, he demonstrated honor for his mother by entrusting her welfare to his closest friend.

No murder. No adultery. No stealing. No perjury. No coveting. Walking in covenant relationship with God is borne out in treatment of others. It is no wonder that Jesus summarized these commandments by this: "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31).

Our greatest takeaway from this is that we are absolutely dependent upon the grace of God. Only Jesus was capable to fulfill the commandments in our stead.

For January 19

PROTECTION Exodus 22:21-27; Leviticus 19:9-10

God's instructions to Israel revealed His concern for the most vulnerable among them. In various passages throughout the Torah, the Lord instructed Israel to care for the orphan, the widow, the poor and the stranger. As we consider this topic on the Sanctity of Human Life Sunday, we can also add the unborn, the helplessly infirmed and the aged. These were also addressed in the Pentateuch.

Exploitation (Ex. 22:21-24)

Without property — travelers and sojourners sought places to stay, either for rest or for temporary habitation. They were entirely dependent upon the hospitality of strangers. After the Israelites received their inheritance in the Promised Land, they were prohibited from exploiting temporary residents. Later, in Leviticus 19:33-34, Israel received instruction to love the stranger as they loved themselves. After all, they had been sojourners in Egypt.

Without parents — orphans were to be cared for and to be treated respectfully. The fatherless and orphans suffered from loneliness and were (and are) susceptible to exploitation. Without fathers or men in their extended families, boys were without male role models and girls were without protection. As a result, they were easy prey for roaming marauders and pagan worshippers. The Israelite community was to shield them from exploitation.

Without providers — widows are also vulnerable to abuse. For this reason, Christians were particularly sensitive to meet the needs of widows. In Acts 6, the Jerusalem church ministered to widows.

In 1 Timothy 5, Paul provided instructions for the Ephesian church about widow-care. He wrote that Christians who were unwilling to show compassion for fellow believers, especially their own families, denied their faith by their actions: "he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8).

Lending practices (25-27)

Cash — Israelites were instructed to loan money to fellow believers without charging interest. Those who have finances to lend have been entrusted with it for God's purposes. This includes providing personal loans without fees. Christians who read this to be an obsolete Old Testament instruction should consider Jesus' words in Luke 6:30-36.

Collateral — not only were loans to be tendered without interest, but personal belongings offered for collateral against the loan were to be returned to the person receiving the money. Once again, these instructions were intended to protect the vulnerable from financial abuse and exploitation.

Reaping crops (Lev. 19:9-10)

Wealth — once the land was settled and divisions were made, some Israelites would possess fields for crops, while others would not. A few would own property, more would have labor in the fields and the rest would be dependent on the generosity of others for their sustenance.

Workfare — the intent of this instruction was not welfare, but workfare. Rather than being handed food to eat, those who had no personal resources could work the fields to provide for themselves. The edges of the field could be harvested by the poor, and they could pick up the grain that had fallen to the ground during the harvest.

Who? Ruth is an example of one in every category of need mentioned in the Law: poor, widow, fatherless and a resident alien. She did not presume upon someone else to provide her with food. Instead, she worked from daylight to dusk, gleaning in the fields to provide for herself and Naomi.

Why? Human beings are made in the image of God and bear His likeness, so there is inherent dignity in every human life. Our love for God is demonstrated by our love for His image-bearers.

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

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 January 12

THE FOCUS OF OUR WORSHIP Isaiah 40:21–31

We worship the One who is all-powerful. (21–24)

This passage is set in the context of Israel living under foreign oppression and growing weary doing so. Their faith in God to deliver them is apparently weak, and so this text is a message from God to both comfort them and to renew their faith.

It begins with rhetorical questions that challenge the readers' doubts by reminding them of what they have long known and what should be obvious to them, namely that their God is both the creator of the world and sovereign over that creation. This becomes clear in verses 22–24.

God is described as stretching out the heavens like a curtain, a vivid description of God's powerful creation of the sky above and the heavenly bodies that rest in it. He sits above the earth. He inhabits the heavens like a tent. All the inhabitants are like grasshoppers to Him, communicating that no other power in creation can rival Him.

The author then describes God's authority over all the rulers of the world, with those foreign rulers currently reigning over God's people particularly in focus. The people are reminded that it is God who establishes them, and it is God, who, after a short, time removes them.

The imagery of the text compares them to flowers that are planted, quickly grow, and then just as quickly blown away as stubble in the wind. Here Israel is reminded God is still sovereign and their oppression will soon come to an end.

We worship the One who is the Creator and sustainer of the universe. (25–28)

The theme of God's sovereignty over creation is again emphasized, as the reader is asked about who can compare to God or who is His equal.

The text draws the reader's attention to the heavens to illustrate the incomparability of Israel's God, as it is He who brings out the heavenly bodies, numbers them and calls them by name. Ancient people had great regard for the heavens and the bodies that dwelt in them, at times, even identifying them with supernatural beings. Thus, God's power over these bodies, communicates his tremendous and unsurpassed strength.

In light of this great strength and power of God, the prophet asks Israel why it would ever claim that God does not see their situation or that God has in some way disregarded them.

Again, in v. 28, the text uses rhetorical questions to address the people's lack of faith in the face of what should be obvious to them, namely that their God, YHWH is everlasting, that He created the world and their present suffering is not a sign of His weakness or weariness.

While Israel might not currently understand what is happening, they are reminded that the understanding of God is beyond their own comprehension.

We worship the One who strengthens us. (29–31)

Here the promises of God to those who are weary are given. They are reminded God gives power to the faint and powerless, both of which describe Israel's current condition. But this promise comes with an important caveat.

It is to those who "wait on the Lord" that will be given this power and strength. The strength is not given in the time frame demanded by those in need or those seeking it. The message to God's people living in this difficult time. They are called to wait on God's timing, trusting His strength and power will come to deliver them. When it does, they will rise up on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not grow faint.

For January 19

THE INSPIRATION FOR OUR WORSHIP EXODUS 1:16–17, 22–2:10

The fear of God leads us to treasure all human life. (1:16–17)

Here we find God's people living in the Land of Egypt. Since the time of Joseph two important developments have taken place.

First, a new Pharaoh has come to power who did not know Joseph.

Second, the Hebrew people had multiplied greatly, out numbering the local Egyptian population.

They became so numerous that the local people and their rulers

were felt threatened by their presence in the land. Because of this fear, the new Pharaoh makes life extremely hard on the Hebrews in an attempt diminish their population. The final step taken is to kill all male children upon their birth. This is the order found in these verses.

It is noteworthy that the primary motivation for this extreme devaluing and eliminating of human life is fear, fear of the loss of power, of livelihood, and perhaps ultimately even the loss of life itself. When we fear such things, we can go to extreme and evil lengths to protect ourselves.

This response is not only seen in this story of the Egyptians, but it can be seen in the story of all people. Our fear is often a catalyst for our evil behavior. Yet, the answer to that problem of fear is given in these very verses: "But the midwives feared God."

Here fear does not likely refer to being afraid of God, but rather reverence for the God of Israel, a reverence that brings obedience and trust.

Out of this fear of God, the midwives disobey the evil commands of Pharaoh and preserve the lives of those made in the image of the God they feared.

Treasuring human life leads us to protect others. (1:22–2:3)

Because of the midwives' disobe-

dience, Pharaoh commands all Egyptians to drown any Hebrew infant in the Nile River, thus, all of Egypt is brought under the evil of Pharaoh's fear.

This command leads the mother of Moses to hide her newborn son as long as she can.

Yet, when she can no longer hide him, she must take extreme measures and part with her son. She knows to keep him will mean his death, and so she devises a plan that is extremely risky. It might lead to the boy's death, but it also might save him.

She places him in a basket that is well sealed and places that basket in the Nile River. In this heart-breaking act of giving up her son, she ultimately trusts in God to save his life.

"But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them."

Exodus 1:17

Treasuring human life leads us to provide for others. (2:4–10)

In these verses, we learn that the plan to place the infant, Moses, in the basket might have been more intentional than it first seemed.

The basket was placed in a part of the Nile where the daughter of Pharaoh came to bathe.

It seems the hope of Moses' mother was that the very daughter of the man who had ordered the death of her son and others might defy him and be the means of her son's survival. As we see, the plan works, and Pharaoh's daughter takes the son and raises him as her own son.

We also see the special faithfulness of God, as the daughter of Pharaoh, guided by Moses' sister, brings Moses to his own mother and asks her to nurse the infant.

I propose that in this story we see two contrasting responses to real and perceived threats — one that fears and does not trust the creator God, resulting in great evil, and one trusting the creator God, which ultimately brings both life and salvation.

In this new year, may we trust God and not ourselves in the face of fear.

WORD search

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| BAPTIZE | GLORY | MESSIAH |
| BEGINNING | GRACE | MOSES |
| BELIEVE | HEAVEN | NAZARETH |
| CHRIST | ISRAEL | SALVATION |
| CREATION | JESUS | SON |
| DARKNESS | JOHN THE BAPTIST | SPIRIT |
| DISCIPLES | KING | TRUTH |
| DOVE | LAMB | WATER |
| FAITH | LAW | WITNESS |
| FATHER | LIFE | WORD |
| FLESH | LIGHT | WORLD |

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

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God."*

JOHN 1:1



You Gotta' Hear This!

Glimpses of God in the everyday moments

How does God speak?

How does God speak? It's a question that might have been asked by several Bible characters. God speaks in many languages, through some strange sources and in some strange ways.

When we were members of Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, while my husband Steve was attending seminary, some strange things and some humorous occurrences arose out of the church's massive bus ministry. The buses ran all over town, bringing both children and adults to church every Sunday morning. Many of the riders had never been inside a church before and didn't know "church-ese" nor did they adhere to the normal decorum.

Responding in faith

One Sunday morning, a woman came forward responding to the invitation. It was evident she was not a normal churchgoer. The pastor asked, "How are you coming this morning?"

"I came on that big ol' bus out there."

Realizing he needed to address her in simpler terms, the pastor then asked, "Did you come to ask Christ into your heart today?"

"I shore did."

"Well, let's pray and ask the Lord to forgive you of your sins and to come live in your heart."

"I 'done done' that a while ago when you told us to bow our heads and pray that prayer and ask Him."

"What did the Lord say then?"

Without missing a smack of her gum, she boldly and loudly said, "He said 'okey dokey.'" Her smile and countenance confirmed her answer was true.

Never underestimate God

We never need to underestimate who God will speak through nor through what means He will get our attention. Here are a few interesting examples in the Bible:

► **Balaam and his donkey** (Num. 22:28).

► **Jacob wrestles with God** (Gen. 32:21).

► **Moses and the burning bush** (Ex. 3:1).

► **Saul struck blind** (Acts 26:12).

How does God speak to you? It probably isn't through an audible voice, but if you are sensitive to Him, you may hear Him through reading the Bible, through a sermon or circumstances. He cares about you and your needs. Talk to him daily and pray about everything. He hears you and will answer, but perhaps it won't be in the way you expect.

MEET THE AUTHOR

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



Ministry offers refuge, job training for vulnerable women

By **Barbara Eubanks**
The Alabama Baptist

Many families in the Dominican Republic face difficult challenges. Jobs are minimal, wages are poor, prostitution is legal and families are hungry. As a result, a family may surmise that their 13-year-old daughter is their way of survival.

A common scenario involves parents taking the girl to a resort area and telling her to “be nice to that man.” The girl’s introduction into a life of prostitution begins

with the promise of money or a trip to America.

In these cases, human trafficking begins with the family. Other young girls are victimized after being released from orphanages or other government institutions.

Safe haven

The Lily House in Juan Dolio, Dominican Republic, helps rescue women and girls from human trafficking. The ministry is a haven for the trafficked, abused and vulnerable. At Lily House, women are provided with

Christ-centered housing, counseling, education, job skills training and workforce experience, all in a healthy and safe environment.

Founded by missionary Erica Jude in 2009, Lily House began by bringing women off the streets and out of brothels. Many of the women already had children and wanted to protect them from a life of prostitution. Lily House provided day care for the children while their mothers were restored physically, emotionally, spiritually and financially.

In 2021, the outreach changed. Orphanages, government facilities and others started contacting Lily House about taking young girls who had reached the age — about 16 — when they would be released from institutional care.

Some of these girls had been abused or trafficked by

their families and taken to government institutions, but upon aging out of the system few opportunities were available to them.

In the Dominican Republic, prostitution is illegal for underage girls but legal for adults.

Without the help of Lily House, these girls would be turned out onto the street to whatever life they could find.

Instead, Lily House cares for them and teaches them life skills, helping them become productive citizens who can live independently.

Job skills classes vary, but usually the girls start out making jewelry. Some are taught baking skills and others learn cosmetology.

They all continue their education, and one will often help another with their

homework and studies.

A store and on-site bakery provide places for the women to sell their work and make money for themselves and the ministry.

The facility also has a center for skating, and church groups and schools rent it to have parties. This also helps support Lily House.

Near the end of their stay, girls at Lily House transition from the minor house to the transitional home where they are taught money management and other independent-living skills.

Lily House falls under the organization SCORE International, which is a gospel-centered ministry that partners with short-term missions teams. Learn more about Lily House at lilyhousemissions.org.

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Trafficking
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‘Walking by faith’

‘You Can See Him’ connects children with aspects of God’s character

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Christian children’s books are abundant. However, there aren’t many that break down some of the most important characteristics of God into language that children even as young as 2 years old can understand.

“You Can See Him: Little Eyes Looking at a Big God,” a 56-page book by Birmingham-based author Anna Nash and Birmingham-based illustrator Jane Lazenby, shares ways little ones can find those qualities of God in everyday life.

“My No. 1 goal was to help children connect with God at as early an age as possible because Jane and I believe that possibly children need Him more now than ever,” Nash said.

Nash based the book on the same 10 characteristics of God that she explores in her adult Bible study curriculum “wayMaker”: God’s pursuit, passion, place, promises, presence, purposes, provision, protection, peace and perfection.

One unique aspect of “You Can See Him” is the bumblebee found on every page. Nash had two reasons for including this illustration.

Finding the bee

The first, very practical purpose of the bee is to involve children by searching for it as they are being read to. On some pages, the bees are small and hard to find. On others, they are larger and more obvious. This was done so that various ages can participate.

But the main goal of the bumblebee is to explain the most critical point of Christianity — why Jesus died on a cross — in terms for little ones.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist
Anna Nash launches her book “You Can See Him: Little Eyes Looking at a Big God” sharing ways little ones can find those qualities of God in everyday life.

On a page titled “Can You Find the Bee?” Nash explains.

“Imagine a grumpy bee flying at you, ready to sting your hand! Ouch! But then someone who loves you grabs your hand, and the bee stings them instead of you. They take the sting for you. ... So whenever you find the bee on a page, remember: The best way to know God’s heart is to look at Jesus,” she writes.

The bumblebee idea didn’t come from Nash’s imagination. It was something God literally put in her path.

When she and Lazenby first met to discuss this venture, they sat on the patio at Barnes & Noble.

“At the time we were talking, there were some bumblebees on a holly bush beside us, and we were both

swatting away at them. I asked Jane if we should move inside.

“At some point, Jane said to me, ‘I wonder if the bumblebee has something to do with this book,’” Nash recalled.

She dismissed the thought, but God wouldn’t let her let it go.

When Nash got home, she saw that her beekeeper neighbor, Rachel, had left her a present. It wasn’t a birthday or anniversary;

it was simply a random day.

The note read, “I felt like you need this today.” Then Nash opened the gift. It was a mug with a huge bee on it.

“Okay, Lord. Yes. I’m listening,” Nash uttered as she started praying about how a bumblebee could tie into this book.

Nash’s rhyming text keeps older children engaged by what they hear; Lazenby’s visuals keep young children connected to the story.

Though Lazenby had been an artist for years, she had never done anything like this.

“Anna had faith that I could do it,” she said.

Saying yes was easy, but developing the illustrations was more difficult. Lazenby tried different styles before deciding how to proceed.

Saying they “made a good team,” Lazenby noted that it still took four years of working together before it was ready to be published.

Through it all, both women have felt God’s hand on this endeavor, even once through a very special fleeting moment caught on camera.

Gentle affirmations

During the first book launch, Novel Photos photographer Travis Frontz was taking photos. At the time, he didn’t know about the significance of the bee. When a bee landed on a pink flower, he decided to grab a shot of it.

The women named this as one of their favorite affirmations of God’s leading in the venture. However, both women were reassured throughout the entire undertaking that God would provide.

“Walking by faith according to what He’s called us to do isn’t always 100% sure. That’s why it’s called walking by faith,” Nash said.

“Ultimately, God’s in control, and He had this written out before we even got into the project together,” Lazenby said. “It was a huge blessing and relief to know that we weren’t on our own, that He was guiding us.”

Visit AnnaNash.net to order a book and find book-signing events in the Birmingham area. Learn more about Lazenby’s art at janelazenbyart.com.