

The Alabama Baptist

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The Alabama Baptist

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**The crossword puzzle
can be found on page 11.**

to your TAB subscription so you don't miss extra coverage like what appeared in the April 10 edition (shown here).

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**Coming to The Baptist Paper in May — “Families under fire,”
a special section written by Denise George about various
situations bearing down on families and how the Church can help.**

Bundle the two papers today for only \$10 extra per year by calling 800-803-5201 or emailing subscribe@thebaptistpaper.org.

**The crossword puzzle
can be found on page 11.**

GUEST EDITORIAL

Is Jesus satisfied with me?

By David Chancey
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

As I think of Calvary, a question comes to me — Is Jesus satisfied with my life?

Is Jesus satisfied with my priorities? (Matt. 6:33)

Is Jesus satisfied with my focus? (Ps. 25:15)

Is Jesus satisfied with my commitment? (Josh. 24:15)

Is Jesus satisfied with how I love Him? (Matt. 22:37)

Is Jesus satisfied with my prayer life? (Matt. 6:5–13)

My time

Is Jesus satisfied with my time spent in personal Bible study? (Ps. 119:97, 105)

Is Jesus satisfied with my Scripture memory? (Ps. 119:11)

Is Jesus satisfied with my thought life? Am I keeping my thoughts pure? (Phil. 4:8)

Is Jesus satisfied with how I manage my anger? (Eph. 4:26–27)

Is Jesus satisfied with my speech? (James 3:1–12)

My witness

Is Jesus satisfied with my witness? Does my life point people to Jesus or do I hinder people from coming to Jesus? (Matt. 5:16)

Is Jesus satisfied with my boldness to witness? (Acts 1:8)

Is Jesus satisfied with my forgiving others? (Matt. 5:23–24, 6:14–15)

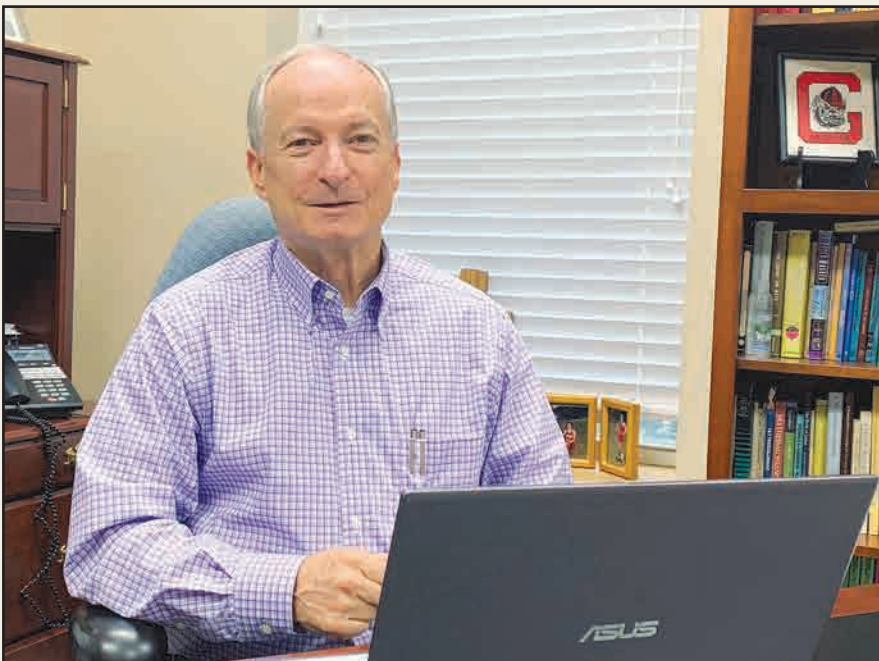
Is Jesus satisfied with my level of faith? (2 Cor. 5:7)

Is Jesus satisfied with my church involvement? (Heb. 10:25)

Is Jesus satisfied with how I treat my family members? (1 Cor. 13)

Is Jesus satisfied with my generosity? (2 Cor. 9:6–7)

Is Jesus satisfied with me?



DAVID CHANCEY

Photo courtesy of David Chancey

TAB Media Special Report



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

In this latest TAB Media Special Report, we are talking all things disciple-making, leading discipleship efforts and being a disciple. Joining host Jennifer Davis Rash and producer Hannah Pruitt are John McClendon, Joseph Brasher and Kim Harris from Disciple Leaders Network. Learn about their regional gatherings early in the conversation, about the network and what it offers midway through, and how to navigate the full scope of disciple-making in your specific church context toward the end. **Learn more at discipleleaders.com and find ongoing coverage related to disciple-making at thebaptistpaper.org.**

Houses of Worship Safety and Security Seminar set for May 8 in Birmingham

TAB Media Group is partnering with Counter Threat Group to provide a safety and security seminar for houses of worship May 8 from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. in Birmingham.

The presentation will be held in the fellowship hall of First Baptist Church Birmingham at 2209 Lakeshore Drive. Go to the southwest side of the building and enter the door closest to Lakeshore Parkway.

Experts in the field will provide information related to the latest in threat assessments, cyber security

and how local houses of worship can collaborate in real time to share security concerns.

Registration is required and the cost is \$20 per person with group rates for teams of five or more. Coffee, water and light snacks will be provided.

Visit thealabamabaptist.org/safety-and-security-workshop to register. For more information, contact Robin McCall by emailing rmcall@tabmedia.group or calling 800-803-5201, ext. 103. (TAB Media Group)

DR teams at work following tornadoes

Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief teams responded in Selmer, Tennessee, and in Alabama's Colbert and Lauderdale counties following a devastating set of storms that moved across the Midwest and South during the first week of April.

In Selmer, an EF-3 tornado killed five area residents and destroyed whole neighborhoods on April 3. Several ABDR teams responded

to the area the week of April 7.

A team from Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association responded to their neighbors in Sheffield and Muscle Shoals following storms that came through April 5. At least three EF-1 tornadoes were confirmed in the area, according to Huntsville's WHNT News 19.

For more information about Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief, visit sbdr.org. (Grace Thornton)

Your Voice



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

Letters to the Editor

I enjoyed reading John Young's article which appeared in the March 9 edition of TAB. I applaud him for writing this article. I am not the judge of Mr. Young nor President Carter. I think whatever we have done "good" or whatever we have done "bad" may stay with us forever.

And when someone leaves this Earth and a big funeral is planned, with many well-known speakers, and those speakers tell about all the good things the deceased has done, I wonder did anyone ever tell the deceased how good ... he or she

[was] before they left this land? The deceased person might have liked to [hear] "you are special" or "you have done something good."

I know I have missed saying this to people that I should have said ... and didn't.

One more thing — my mama who lived 100 years — told me something I hope I won't forget. I asked her, "Who do you want to preach your funeral if you die before me?" Mama said, "It don't matter 'cause I have already preached my funeral."

What a true, true statement. Ev-

ery second we are on this place we are preaching our funeral. If we have done good, people know; if we have done bad, people know. Sometimes it is very hard to erase the "bad" things.

Thanks for all who make up the "TAB." I enjoy my paper.

Anonymous
Clanton, Alabama

I enjoyed reading Iris L. Anderson's article which appeared in the March 20 issue of TAB. I pay my subscription to TAB, and I look forward to receiving (the) paper.

I am aware that some churches pay for their members to receive TAB. And, I know that some receiving the paper do not read the TAB. How do I know?

For example, I will ask them, "Did you read such and such article in TAB?" They will answer, "No." I may say, "Read it; it is good." They will say, "I have put it in the trash."

I know it is their choice to read or not to read the TAB. But, I would suggest that leaders of the church tell members who are not reading the TAB that they are wasting the church's (people's) money, money that could be used for other things.

But, as Ms. Anderson points out, TAB paper contains many articles that need to be told. I guess it just proves that we are a wasteful nation.

P.S. I have enjoyed Dr. Nathan Harris' Sunday School lessons.

Anonymous

"I was trained to think of evangelism as an event where I have one conversation and at the end of it I am hoping they come to Jesus," said **Mark Gainey**, Alabama Baptists' lead discipleship strategist and pastor of Fultondale First Baptist Church. "In the Bible, we see evangelism as a path to take."

"Believers wrestle against evil, and sometimes we want to cling to tradition and see change as evil," said associational mission strategist liaison **Walker Armstrong** with the North American Mission Board. "We should remind our fellow church members that we must always seek God's best and that Jesus has a plan for every church."

"The first step in renewal is repentance," Armstrong said. "We repent of our past sins and seek to restore right relationships in the local body of Christ. And we must renew our commitment to the Great Commission as we seek to win people to Christ."

Believer, when you feel like quitting, remember why you started. It really is that simple sometimes.

Chris Crain
Executive director
Birmingham Metro Baptist Association

How to love toxic people

One difficult situation church members might face is determining how to love the toxic people in their lives.

And sometimes we have to distance ourselves from those who have become toxic to our emotional, spiritual or even physical well-being.

You know the ones — those relationships that drain your joy, shake your peace and leave you questioning your own worth and sanity.

Tony Martin, editor of The Baptist Record in Mississippi, shares how we can separate from toxic relationships without compromising our love or shutting the door on redemption.

A few of his suggestions are:

1. Be clear, but gentle.
2. Affirm your unconditional love.
3. Establish clear and healthy boundaries.
4. Pray continually.
5. Leave the door open.

Redemption is always possible because we believe in a God who specializes in transformation and reconciliation.

6. Trust God's timing.

The hardest part might be waiting, not knowing if or when restoration will come. But God is always at work — even when we can't see it. Your responsibility is to trust Him with both your heart and theirs.

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“Christians are very often called to grieve. We’re called to endure hard things.”

TIM CHALLIES

pastor and author

“The nice thing about stained glass windows in a church is that you can walk into a church building any time of the day — even when there is not a church service going on — and you see imagery that tells the gospel story,” said **Andrew Young**, owner of Pearl River Glass Studio in Jackson, Mississippi.

“Each year Southern Baptist congregations share a few statistics about their church,” said **Scott McConnell**, executive director of Lifeway Research. “Some fear this will be used to judge their church, but the reality is real value lies in what we learn from churches together. Looking at combinations of those responses and looking across time reveals how the context of ministry varies across the country and how churches of different types have different challenges.”

“As we move forward into chapter (Jeremiah) 17, it seems to be saying to us that it is only by the utter collapse of all that men trust in that they will ever turn to God,” said **Craig Carlisle**, president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention and director of missions for Etowah Baptist Association. “We seem to be able to trust in almost anything, but when it comes to trusting in God, we sometimes seem to be a little hesitant and a little reluctant. Sometimes it seems like the only way that God can get our attention is to bring us to the end of ourselves. Why would God have to do that? The reason is we resist Him. We resist and we resist. We get ourselves in all kinds of trouble.”

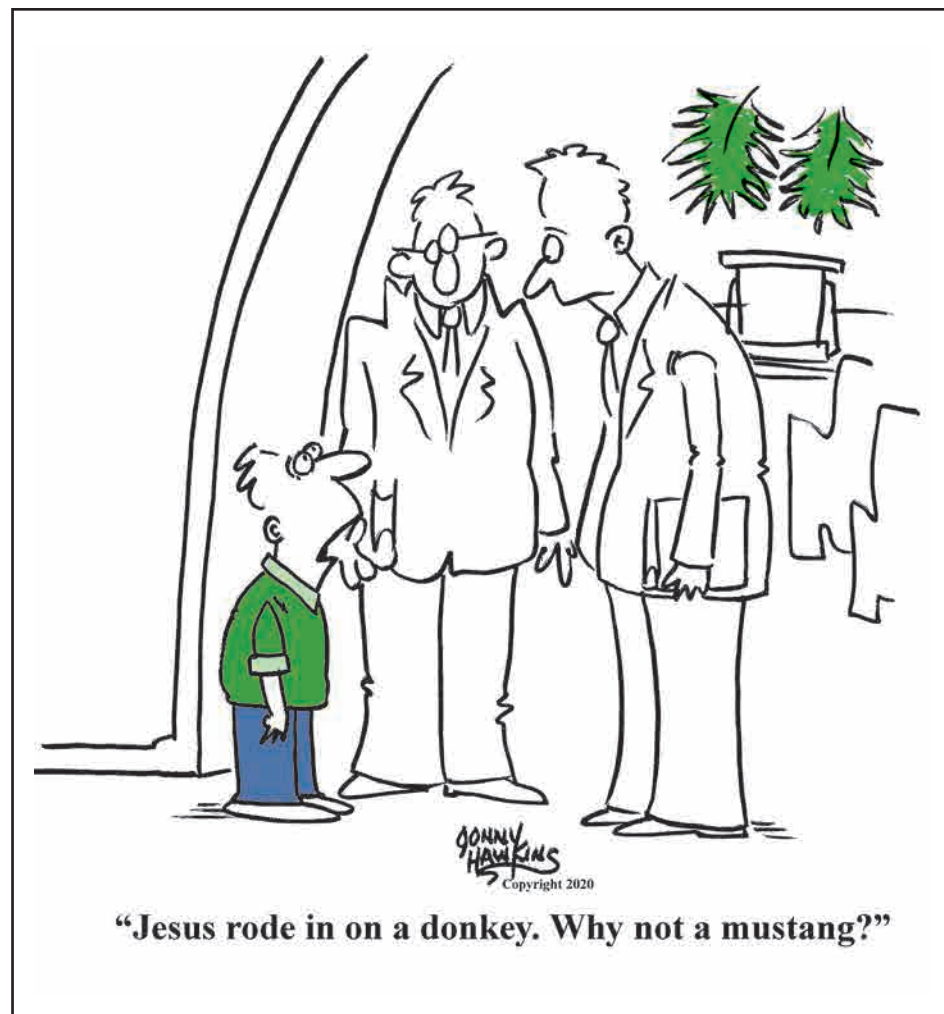
“It’s just been a great move of God, and it’s an area that was ripe for a harvest,” said evangelist **Rick Gage**, founder of Go Tell Ministries in Duluth, Georgia, following the Livingston Parish Go Tell America Crusade in Louisiana

on March 16–19. Following the four-day spiritual encounter, including all related outside events, 1,316 persons had made decisions for Christ, with 602 individuals stepping forward to accept Christ. “We’re seeing pockets of revival across the nation and a great move of God among the younger generation.”

“Some pastors have problems allowing their No. 2 guy to get any credit,” said **Bruce Raley**, senior associate pastor at First Baptist Church Hendersonville, Tennessee, who spoke during a special training event for executive pastors from 15 different states. “I don’t do what I do for credit, but it sure motivates me to keep on going. He is not jealous when people give me credit for stuff.” Raley broke it down to relationship, trust and

direction. “Unknown expectation always leads to frustration — always,” Raley said. “You want to go this way, great. Let’s go. But at least point me in the direction you want the church to go. I don’t feel like it’s my job to give the direction of the church. I believe that’s what God gifts the pastor to do, to give the vision and let me help you get there.”

“Both joining a church and leaving a church are serious business — business for which those involved will give an account before God. Even if it does become clear that leaving is best for us or our family, our attitude must be chastened and humble on the way out,” writes **Jeff Robinson**, editor of South Carolina’s Baptist Courier, on when someone should consider finding a new church.



Heart — the beginning of sin

By **Morris Murray Jr.**

Jasper, Alabama

In the Old Testament, the word “heart” is often used to refer to the totality of a person’s mental life.

It basically governs the intellectual, emotional, volitional and even the physical variables of a person’s inner life. Indeed, even imaginations originate in the heart. It may also be regarded as one’s “conscience.”

As the centerpiece of one’s will, emotions, intentions and even one’s decision-making concerns, the heart is more significant than simply the organ which pumps blood throughout the body.

Whether through inner impulses or external influences, the heart may be regarded as the source from which and the channel through which life is experienced and expressed.

Proverbs 23:7 says, “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.” That is, a person’s thinking produces what he/she is in terms of actions and emotions.

Human beings are F (Feeling), A (Acting) and T (Thinking) organisms. The seedbed for our feelings and actions originate in our thinking patterns.

One of the words for sin in the New Testament is “hamartia.” This word refers to “missing the mark of God’s design; a deviation from or distortion of thinking patterns which honor and make God’s presence a reality in one’s life.”

Therefore, sin is a sort of mental illness. In fact, when this word and a host of other words in the New Testament for sin are explored and explained, it is clear that any and all manifestations of sin find their origin in the heart, or more specifically, the center of one’s thinking patterns.

No wonder the psalmist cried out, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10).

3 stories you should know



Samford University photo

Samford University men's basketball coach Bucky McMillan has been named the new head coach for the team at Texas A&M University. In his five years as Samford's head coach, McMillan led the team to four straight 20-win seasons as well as two regular-season Southern Conference championships, a SoCon Tournament Championship and an NCAA Tournament appearance in the 2023–2024 season. The Bulldogs are coming off a 22–11 season where they made the postseason for the second straight year and earned an invitation to the NIT. (TAB)

ALCAP head grateful gambling bill falters

Greg Davis, president and CEO of Alabama Citizens Action Program, was pleased to hear the April 3 news that a rumored gambling bill would not be filed during the current legislative session, which wraps up May 15.

"We are grateful for those senators who hold strong to a position of not legalizing gambling in Alabama," he told The Alabama Baptist. "We are also thankful to Senate leadership for not pressing this issue any further and hijacking the rest of the session with this distraction.

"Ultimately, there were not enough votes in the Alabama Senate to even file the bill officially," he explained.

"To every Alabama Baptist who has contacted their legislator on this issue, you made a difference," Davis said. (TAB Media Group)

Samford names Acuff new basketball coach

Alabama native Lennie Acuff has been named head coach for the Samford University men's basketball program following Bucky McMillan's departure for Texas A&M (see story, this page).

Acuff, who led Lipscomb University to this season's NCAA men's basketball tournament for only the second time in the university's history, has coached the Bisons for six seasons.

He previously coached at the University of Alabama–Huntsville from 1997 to 2019. He becomes the 30th head coach in Bulldogs program history. The announcement was made April 9. (Samford)



ACUFF

Persecuted church

Police rescue Pakistani girl who was abducted, forced to marry captor

LAHORE, Pakistan — Police rescued a 12-year-old Catholic girl who had been abducted two months prior by a neighbor and forced to convert to Islam and marry the captor.

Police on March 5 raided a structure in Shaheed Benazirabad city in Pakistan's Sindh province and rescued the girl.

The 35-year-old abductor was arrested, reported Christian Daily International and Morning Star News. The girl was kidnapped Jan. 5 from her home in Walton Model Colony No. 2 in Punjab province.

Her abductor falsified the girl's age and religious affiliation, a rights advocate told the news outlets. The girl said she was beaten and kept in a locked room during her captivity.

Another Catholic girl who was kidnapped in Pakistan, forced to convert to Islam and to marry her captor was able to escape, only to be abducted again. The 15-year-old initially was kidnapped March 11, 2024, in Karachi, her father said.

The girl got away Dec. 15. However, she was kidnapped again Feb. 18 from the home of one of her relatives in Tando Ghulam Ali in Sindh province, the news outlets reported. As of March 3, she had not been reunited with her family.

Pakistan is No. 8 on Open Doors' 2025 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.



MS photo

Cases of Christian persecution in India up more than fourfold

NEW DELHI, India — Persecution of India's Christians has risen exponentially in 10 years and continues to climb, a report revealed.

In 2024, India saw 640 documented cases of persecution toward Christians, according to the report "Faith at Risk: Examining Violence and Discrimination Against Christians in India (2024)," released by the Evangelical Fellowship of India's Religious Liberty Commission.

Morning Star News noted that number is up from 601 documented cases in 2023 and 147 in 2014. Christians represent 2.3% of India's populace, according to Morning Star.

The country is No. 11 on Open Doors' 2025 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

JAMES ALEXANDER SPICER SR.

James Alexander Spicer Sr., pastor of Freedom Baptist Church, Selma, for almost three decades, died March 2. He was 87.



SPICER

Spicer retired from Freedom in 2023, where he was one of the seven founding members. He was the first African American pastor and moderator in the Selma/West Central Baptist Association.

ISABEL SHAW ANDREWS TRIPLITT

Isabel Shaw Andrews Triplitt died March 23 at the age of 101 in Columbus, Georgia.

She was a lifelong Southern Baptist and devoted to missions. She served as Alabama's Woman's Missionary Union president for four years (1968–1973) when she was a member of Concord Baptist Church, Salem.

Triplitt was a graduate of Shorter College, Rome, Georgia, and was preceded in death by her first husband Francis Singer and second husband Joe Will Triplitt.

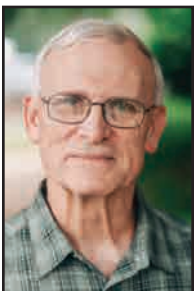
She is survived by her daughters, Bitsy and Gail; five granddaughters; and four great-grandchildren.



TRIPLITT

AUTAUGA ASSOCIATION

► **Mike Durham** recently retired as senior adult and congregational care pastor of **First Baptist Church Prattville**. His 45 years of pastoral care ministry included serving on staff of churches as a youth minister, senior pastor, an army chaplain of protestant congregations worldwide and director of missions of Mississippi Baptist Association, Sterling, Illinois. He is a graduate of Wake Forest University and New Orleans Seminary with training in grief recovery and post-traumatic stress counseling; personal, marriage and family counseling; and hospital ministry. Durham and his wife, Janice, have two adult children and one granddaughter. Rob Jackson is interim pastor.



DURHAM

► **Katie Popham** is the new discipleship ministry assistant for **First Baptist Church Prattville**. Previously, she served as the morning receptionist. She and her husband, Brody, have three children. Rob Jackson is interim pastor.



POPHAM

DEKALB ASSOCIATION

► **David Cofield** has retired as pastor of **Rainsville First Baptist Church**, serving more than nine years. He began 46 years of full-time pastoral ministry at the age of 18 as pastor of Sardis Baptist Church, Boaz, and has served churches in Alabama, Georgia and Louisiana. He served for over 20 years as a professor and director for New Orleans Seminary. He is a graduate of Snead State Junior College, Samford University and New Orleans Seminary. He and his wife, Roxanne, have two grown sons and seven grandchildren. The couple plans to remain in Rainsville. Cofield can be reached at Pastordavidcofield@gmail.com for interim ministry and pulpit supply.



COFIELD

► **Jed Richey** is the new pastor of **Union Grove Baptist Church, Crossville**. Previously, he served as pastor of Bethel Baptist Church, Geraldine, where he was ordained into the ministry. He and his wife, Katie, have two children.



Submitted photo

ELMORE ASSOCIATION

► **Bethlehem East Baptist Church, Tallassee**, will celebrate its 181st homecoming May 4. Worship begins at 10 a.m. with covered dish lunch to follow. Don Stephens is pastor.

► **Blue Ridge Baptist Church, Wetumpka**, will celebrate its 60th anniversary May 4. Service begins at 11 a.m. with lunch to follow. John Carney is pastor.

MARSHALL ASSOCIATION

► **Eric Taylor** is the new associational missionary strategist of **Marshall Baptist Association**. He has been in ministry for 35 years, serving in student ministry, church planting and as lead pastor of several churches in Alabama. Most recently, he served five years as pastor of Bethel Baptist



Submitted photo

Church, Pleasant Grove. Taylor has served or led over 40 missions projects in America and around the world. Currently, he serves on the Alabama Disciple-Making Ministries lead team and is a board member for Shocco Springs Retreat and Conference Center. Taylor earned a bachelor's degree in marketing from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, holds a master's degree in Christian education from Southeastern Seminary and a doctor of ministry with specialization in strategist leadership and church revitalization from New Orleans Seminary. He and his wife, Sonja, have two adult children and five grandchildren.

MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION

► **Joel Register** is the new student pastor for **Dalraida Baptist Church, Montgomery**. He has served as a volunteer and leader in the church's student ministry since 2018. He and his wife, Stephanie, have two children.



REGISTER

SAND MOUNTAIN ASSOCIATION

► **New Home Baptist Church, Pisgah**, will present an Easter play "The Cross: The Story of our Resurrected Savior" on April 19, 6:30 p.m., and April 20, 10:30 a.m. There will be a groundbreaking ceremony for the new worship center following the morning service. David Smith is pastor.

TUSCALOOSA COUNTY ASSOCIATION

► **Herbby Geer** is the new lead missions strategist of **Tuscaloosa County Baptist Association**. He has lived in Israel for 38 years, and the past 28 years he worked as a representative of the Southern Baptist Convention, serving as the director of Baptist Ministries in Israel. He founded The Tabernacle Project in Israel in 1999 in partnership with Timna Park and the Bible-Center in Germany. Geer also oversaw the work at the Baptist Village in Israel. In addition, he helped plant three different congregations and has served as pastor for them at different levels as needed. He has spoken in conferences and churches in North America, South America, Europe, Asia and the Middle East, and has served on the



Facebook photo

board of several ministries and educational institutions in Israel. Originally from Gordo, he holds a bachelor's degree in industrial engineering from the University of Alabama and a master's degree from Southeastern Seminary. He and his wife, Anne, have three children.

Pastor ministers through pancreatic cancer

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Pancreatic cancer has always sounded like a death sentence to Chris Baker.

So it hit him hard when he heard those words from his doctor in December 2024.

“The shock of that took us probably an hour to process and cry through, to know we’re not going to live 20 more years as a couple doing the things we love to do,” Baker said.

Rich time together

He and his wife, Kim, moved from Alabama to Montana with their two sons in 2014 to plant Summit Life Church in Whitefish.

“Our church is in our home,” he said. “We have about 35 or 40. When you have 12 to 15 kids running around it can be chaotic, but it’s just rich, that time together.”

It takes about an hour for everyone to break up after the service ends, Baker said. People stay around and fellowship and pray with each other. They’re also raising up new leaders — this year they were able to plant a second church.

“God’s just been good; I don’t know how to say anything different,” he said.

And now as he goes through chemo and wonders what the future will hold, those are the words Baker continues to say.

“Through this cancer diagnosis, we’ve learned lessons on peace, contentment and community,” he said.

Baker’s symptoms began in July 2024. He first thought it was food poisoning.

“I didn’t eat for a couple of weeks, and then I ended up in the emergency room with pancreatitis,” he said.

More illness, some surger-



Photo courtesy of Chris Baker

Chris and Kim Baker with (left to right) son Samuel, daughter-in-law Tahini, granddaughter Auburn, grandson Rhodes, mother Prisilla and son Andrew.

ies and lots of doctor visits followed.

In December, doctors found a tumor on his pancreas and told him the words he hadn’t wanted to hear — an inoperable pancreatic cancer.

Nearly four months later, he’s still taking chemo and continuing to lead his

church. Baker said he’s thankful.

More good days

He has more good days than bad days, and other than his first round of chemo, he hasn’t experienced any more pain or nausea.

In the midst of it all, people have asked Baker if he

is angry that doctors didn’t find it sooner, but he said he isn’t.

“We’re determined to lean into the Lord because we know He’s gracious,” he said. “We know it’s no surprise to Him — He’s sovereign over all of us. ... We have to rejoice in the midst of that that we get to learn these lessons, that we get to share this with others.”

Baker has regularly shared videos on Facebook encouraging others to trust God’s love for them in the midst of hard times, and he said his church community has been “incredible” in taking care of them, as have neighbors and fellow pastors in the area.

“We’ve got such an amazing church family around us; they’ve really leaned into this season,” he said. “I don’t know anybody who’s got it better than us; we’re well cared for,” he said.

Faith Moments

Walking the road to resurrection

As a pastor, I’ve often sought to guide my congregation through the biblical timeline leading to Resurrection Sunday. There is something profoundly moving about the final days of Jesus — each day is filled with purpose, love and glory. The Passion Week is the most holy of all weeks for the Church. Perhaps this brief outline will help you, as it has helped me to reflect on the Passion of our Savior.

► **Friday** — Arrival in Bethany (John 12:1). Jesus comes to Bethany to be with His dear friends — Lazarus, Mary and Martha. Mary anoints His feet with costly perfume, an act of worship and preparation for His burial. It is a profound moment of devotion.

► **Sunday** — The Triumphal Entry (Matt. 21, Mark 11, Luke 19, John 12). Jesus rides into Jeru-

salem on a donkey, fulfilling prophecy (Zech. 9:9). Crowds shout “Hosanna!” and wave palm branches. On the day when families chose their Passover lamb, Israel did not choose the spotless Lamb of God who presented Himself to them.

► **Monday** — Cleansing the Temple (Matt. 21, Mark 11, Luke 19). Jesus drives out the money changers, declaring that His Father’s house is a house of prayer. In doing so, He fulfills the prophecy of Malachi. This is no gentle Savior — it is the righteous Messiah purifying what belongs to God.

► **Tuesday** — A Day of Teaching (Matt. 21–25, Mark 11–13, Luke 20–21). Jesus teaches boldly in the temple — through parables, rebukes and prophecy. He warns of judgment, speaks of His return and exposes religious hypocrisy, every word filled with truth and urgency.

► **Wednesday** — A Day of Silence. The Gospels are silent about what Christ did on this day. Perhaps Jesus rested. Perhaps He prayed. Regardless of what He did, use this “silent Wednesday” to pause and ponder on the soon-coming cross.

► **Thursday** — The Last Supper and Gethsemane (Matt. 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, John 13). Jesus gathers with His disciples, washes their feet and eats one last meal with them. Later, in Gethsemane, He prays in agony — the weight of the world is upon Him. Even His close “friend” betrays Him.

► **Friday** — The Crucifixion (Matt. 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, John 18–19). Jesus is unjustly tried, mocked, beaten and crucified. At Golgotha, He dies between two thieves. The sky grows dark. The veil is torn. The Lamb of God willingly dies in your and my place. His body

is placed in a borrowed tomb before sundown.

This “Good Friday” leaves all Jesus’ followers devastated. It appears all hope is gone.

► **Sunday** — The Resurrection (Matt. 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20). Early on the third day, the stone is rolled away. The tomb is empty. Christ is risen! He appears to Mary Magdalene, His disciples and many more. Death is defeated. Hope is alive. Hallelujah — what a Savior!

May this journey through Holy Week stir your soul. May it deepen your gratitude, renew your love for Jesus and rekindle your anticipation of that glorious Resurrection morning. He is risen indeed!

By Rob Jackson
Director of evangelism and church revitalization, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions



Lass WORDS

BY KEN LASS

The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

The challenge of controlling your thoughts

It's one thing to try to control your behavior. It's a whole different ballgame trying to control your thoughts — especially when we have so many of them and they pop into our heads in rapid fire succession.

I read an article recently that reported the average person has about 60,000 thoughts every day. I'm really curious as to how exactly they arrived at this figure. How do you count your thoughts, much less somebody else's?

Methodology aside, the point is that our brains present us with a huge load of mental pictures every minute, every second perhaps. It's only natural that at least some of them are going to be negative, or scary, or resentful, or frustrating, or petty or maybe all of those things.

That doesn't make you an evil person. It makes you human. And you have plenty of company. We all battle dark thoughts now and then.

King David's struggle

Even King David of the Bible, whom God used in a glorious way, wrote of his struggle with malevolent ideas in Psalm 13: "How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?"

Clearly we need help with this. And of course the same Bible has a solution. The book of He-

brews states, "Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest."

Simple solution?

Sound too simple? Well really, it kind of is. But simple doesn't mean easy. You get cut off in traffic. Somebody steps in front of you at the checkout line. The ref makes a bad call that goes against your favorite team. You stub your toe on the bathroom door. Somebody posts an opinion on social media that sets you off. Suddenly, your mood darkens and your thoughts get salty.

Try this: Next time somebody does or says something that flips your angry switch, force yourself to ponder Jesus, salvation, heaven, unconditional love, everlasting life, peace, stuff like that.

You'll find it's pretty hard to stay in a funk when you're focusing on God's blessings. It might take a little time to master this, but that's OK.

You get 60,000 chances a day to succeed!

MEET THE AUTHOR

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

'Cooperation' is key for worship leaders, pastors

By Michael J. Brooks

The Alabama Baptist

The relationship between the senior pastor and the worship pastor is a critical relationship, according to Chip Colee, chief administrative officer of Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries, and a former worship pastor.

Colee served as panel host for "What Worship Pastors Wish Pastors Knew," a presentation held at Birmingham Metro Baptist Association on March 20.

Brad Jett, minister of worship arts at Hunter Street Baptist Church in Hoover, said the overriding mindset must be delight in the "privilege of sharing a platform" and leading worship.

"I know my pastor carries a heavy load, and my job is to be supportive," he said. "I don't want to be an extra burden. I respect his time, so when I ask to see him to talk about my plans, I have three or four ideas written to talk about and don't try to overwhelm him with a long list."

Michael Adler, dean of worship for the STS Institute in Homewood — a ministry of the Scott Dawson Evangelistic Association — noted that most pastors are in a "driven mode," and the task of the worship pastor is to support them whether there's a lot of collaboration or only a few minutes spent in coordinating worship ideas.

"I've heard pastors say they're challenged when they come to the pulpit after a moving hymn or choral piece, but I tell them, 'We're on a trajectory with you,' and we 'feel the room' together.

"The music and message blend together to honor the Lord. If the congregation sings a moving rendition of 'How Great Thou Art' before the message, the pastor might just say, 'Isn't God great?' and then turn to his Scripture. The music brought everyone to a good place, so he doesn't need to start with ... a joke."

'More than music'

Collin Clardy, engagement specialist for ABCH and former director of Voices of Mobile, the traveling vocal ensemble of the University of Mobile, said many young people had the idea that "worship" means "music."

"That's a false idea, and I taught them a different way," he said. "Worship is more than music. All the elements of worship must honor the Lord as we seek to work together."

Panelists also talked about music selections, hymn authorship questions and dealing with changes in worship order.

The schedule for future Birmingham Metro Baptist Association meetings is available at bmbaonline.org/ministers-conference.



Photo by Toni Wall/BMBA

Michael Adler, dean of worship for the STS Institute in Homewood — a ministry of the Scott Dawson Evangelistic Association — speaks from the panel of worship leaders during "What Worship Pastors Wish Pastors Knew," a presentation held at Birmingham Metro Baptist Association on March 20.



UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Senior adult events abound for remainder of year

Several more events planned especially for senior adults are still to come in 2025. Mark your calendars for these get-togethers and plan to attend! If you have specific questions about any event or would like more information about senior adult ministry in Alabama Baptist life, contact State Missionary Frank Jones, fjones@alsbom.org.

► ENCOURAGE

(Senior Adult Evangelism Conference)

• Monday, May 5 — First Baptist Church, Pelham

This exciting time of worship features the music of Guy Penrod and a message by Rick Lance. This FREE event takes place from 9–11:30 a.m. and is presented by the SBOM Office of Evangelism. *More info: alsbom.org/encourage*

► SALT CONFERENCES
(Senior Adult Leadership Training)

• Tuesday, August 19 — SALT North, Mount Calvary Baptist Church, Albertville
• Thursday, August 21

— SALT South, Heritage Baptist Church, Montgomery

These FREE one-day events start at 9:15 a.m. and conclude around 2:45–3 p.m. and includes lunch. SALT provides equipping for leaders to be more effective in senior adult ministry in the local church and community. It is planned especially for senior adult ministers/leaders and committee/council members.



SBOM photo
Guy Penrod sings at the 2024 senior adult evangelism conference.

Registration is required with names of those attending.

Our leaders will be State Missionary Rob Jackson speaking on “Senior Adults: Living Out the Gospel” and State Missionary Bryan Blass discussing “Senior Adults: Setting the Pace in Ministry and Life.”

More info: alsbom.org/salt

► SINGFEST
(previously Senior Adult Singin’)

• Tuesday, September 9 — Woodmont Baptist Church, Florence

• Tuesday, September 16 — First Baptist Church, Troy

Don’t miss this nearly two hours of great congre-

gational singing coupled with a sweet time of fellowship. We begin at 10 a.m. and conclude around 11:45 a.m. We will have guest senior adult choirs performing both days at 9:40 a.m. to get everybody ready to sing. The event is FREE, but registration is preferred, especially for church groups. *More info: alsbom.org/singfest*

► SAINTS ALIVE
(formerly Abundant Living)

• Thursday, October 23 — First Baptist Church, Prattville

This FREE one-day event for Alabama Baptist senior adults and their guests is designed as a day to worship together, sing together, laugh together and experience God’s presence! Headlining the event will be America’s Minister of Encouragement, Dennis Swanberg.

Alabama Baptists love this guy! Music will be led by Bob Smith from First Baptist, Trussville.

There is a morning session and afternoon session with Dennis and Bob at both sessions. A two-hour window is provided for groups to enjoy lunch at area restaurants. Registration is preferred, especially for groups. *More info: alsbom.org/saints-alive*



SWANBERG

WORD search

- | | |
|------------|-----------|
| ALTAR | JAPHETH |
| ANIMALS | JUDGED |
| ARARAT | MOUNT |
| ARK | NIGHTS |
| BLAMELESS | NOAH |
| CORRUPT | OBEYED |
| COVENANT | OLIVE |
| DOOR | PITCH |
| DOVE | PROMISE |
| DRY | RAINBOW |
| EARTH | RAVEN |
| FAMILY | RIGHTEOUS |
| FLOOD | SACRIFICE |
| FORTY | SHEM |
| GOPHERWOOD | VIOLENCE |
| HAM | WINDOW |

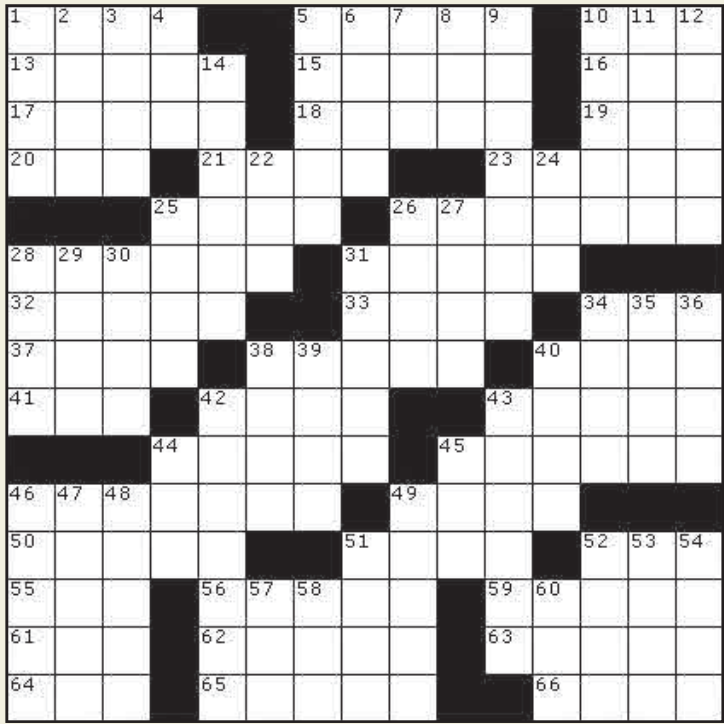
J M O U N T W O D N I W X O D
N P R R O M V R S A N L B C B
S F C V A H Q L B D R E W S Q
X H A T H J A N V Y Y K Q U E
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A L T T A J T K Y P O K B E F
S O T R W L E H X P D L G G B
F O K M B J H Q C Q N D N M L
Z D K R B L P L D T U Y K Y A
T H N V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

“And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.”
GENESIS 6:6

CHRISTIAN Crossword

ACROSS

- 1. Alack's partner
- 5. Workers
- 10. Possessive pronoun
- 13. Cavity
- 15. Eastern religion
- 16. Unused
- 17. Pace
- 18. Communion table
- 19. Stretch to make do
- 20. South southeast
- 21. Short NT book
- 23. Coaxed
- 25. Loathe
- 26. One of Jesus' 12
- 28. Split
- 31. Last words of prayers
- 32. Filthy __
- 33. Floating ice
- 34. Tribe of Israel
- 37. Above
- 38. Sermon on the __
- 40. Heredity component
- 41. Lair
- 42. House pets
- 43. Rhymers
- 44. Metric linear unit (Br.)
- 45. River of Mesopotamia
- 46. Person released on parole
- 49. Farm building
- 50. Defense
- 51. Asian bird
- 52. Sports assn.
- 55. Highs
- 56. Admit (2 words)
- 59. Woolen
- 61. That girl
- 62. Protein part, with 'acid'
- 63. World
- 64. Hearing part
- 65. Muggy
- 66. Spur



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DOWN

- 1. Book after Gospels
- 2. Dregs
- 3. Apex
- 4. Eat
- 5. Color
- 6. Roof covering
- 7. Picnic pest
- 8. Food and Drug Administration (abbr.)
- 9. Biblical unit of length
- 10. Inanimate
- 11. Word interpreted by Daniel
- 12. A Scandanavian
- 14. Californian desert
- 22. Southwestern Indian
- 24. Ship initials
- 25. David's musical instrument
- 26. Last word of a prayer
- 27. Fresh
- 28. Clothed
- 29. Pear shaped stringed instrument
- 30. Economics (abbr.)
- 31. Treat badly
- 34. Stag
- 35. Negative (prefix)
- 36. Loch __ Monster
- 38. Speck of wood, etc. (KJV)
- 39. Giant
- 40. __ gadget (Inspector Gadget catchphrase)
- 42. Samson's evil wife
- 43. Roman governor
- 44. Pack
- 45. Can metal
- 46. Hesitation
- 47. I am the __ and the Omega
- 48. Bleacher
- 49. Governing group
- 51. Short
- 52. A Roman emperor
- 53. Second Greek letter
- 54. Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (abbr.)
- 57. Flightless bird
- 58. Dickens' Tiny __
- 60. Tail movement



UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

'AI in Ministry: The What, Why and How of Artificial Intelligence' conference

Do you have questions about Artificial Intelligence? Do you wonder how it might impact ministry?

You can learn more about that at the "AI in Ministry: The What, Why and How of Artificial Intelligence" conference set for May 8, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., at Taylor Road Baptist Church in Montgomery.

Don Barger, director of innovation and artificial intelligence at the International Mission Board, will help you understand what AI is

and its impact and potential for ministry. Sessions throughout the day will include an overview of AI, how it can be used in ministry contexts and the local church, and best practices using AI.

This conference is designed to assist all church staff members at every level of ministry or ministry support.

Registration is required, and the \$10 cost includes lunch. To register, visit alsbom.org/AI.

New CP children's resource now available

Looking for a great way to teach children about the Cooperative Program? "God at Work" is a brand new 4-week Bible study for children in grades 1-6, designed to teach them about how God is at work through the Cooperative Program to reach people in Alabama, across America and around the world. Some of the ways these lessons can be used in your church might be as a 4-week discipleship/missions training for your children, a VBS missions emphasis, a children's sum-

To download this great resource, visit kidzlinkal.org/resources or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



mer emphasis on Wednesday or Sunday nights, or even as a camp missions feature.

Small Church Tax Conference

Do you need a W2 if the pastor is the only paid employee? Do you have to complete Form 941? Can a minister take 100% of his income as housing? How does a small church of 100 or fewer people differ from the large church in tax issues?

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

The conference will be held June 5, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., at the SBOM in Prattville.

The cost is \$15. To register, visit alsbom.org/sctc.

Auburn's Cardwell shares impact of missions trip

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

When Stan Nowell was telling the story of David and Goliath to the children at Forgotten Children Ministries in Honduras, he didn't have to look far for someone to act out the part of Goliath.

Enter Dylan Cardwell, a 6-foot-11 center on the Auburn University men's basketball team.

"I also got Sam Cunningham, the team's manager, to play David. The kids loved it," said Nowell, who co-founded FCM to help street children with basic needs like food, shelter and education and in the process teach them about the love God has for them.

Cardwell and 18 other Auburn players and coaches were also on that trip in fall 2024, a trip Cardwell called "the most impactful trip of my life."



Photo courtesy of Stan Nowell
(From left) Auburn University basketball players Dylan Cardwell, Chaney Johnson and Presley Patterson play with children at Forgotten Children Ministries in Honduras in fall 2024.

"I wouldn't be where I am just spiritually without that trip," he said in an interview with Sports Spectrum in March. "It's just exciting to see the Lord move in so many ways."

The team saw the children's faces light up when they received small gifts. "What it showed me

is that we just need to be content with what we have because, I mean, we live in America, we always want more, always want the next big thing," he said.

'God is all you need'

"But these people are so joyous with the minimal ... and it was just insane

to see how much joy they had when they had nothing. What that showed me was that when God is all you have, you realize that God is all you need."

Nowell said Cardwell is "a tremendous believer, follower of Christ."

FCM's offices are in Birmingham, and Nowell said the Auburn team's trip was organized as part of a trip that some men from the Birmingham area take to Honduras every fall.

"That missions team every year comes and takes the girls out to a special banquet," Nowell said.

"None of those girls have a father figure in their life."

The missions team also helps with other ongoing ministries, such as visiting a special needs children's home and taking food to

families living in the city's garbage dump.

Several FCM board members have Auburn connections, and after hearing about many of the Auburn players being baptized while on a trip to Israel in 2022, they reached out to the team to see if they would like to participate in the trip last fall.

Nowell said they're planning on returning in August. He's kept a connection with

the Auburn team, attending the last home game of the season March 8 and visiting with the players.

Cardwell completed his five-year Auburn career April 5 when the Tigers lost in the Final Four to the University of Florida. The Gators defeated the Houston Cougars April 7 to win the NCAA Tournament.

For more information about Forgotten Children Ministries, visit fcmhonduras.org.



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To place an online classified ad for \$9.99/month, visit thealabamabaptist.org/classifieds.

CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Lakeview Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama (size 50-100), seeks full-time pastor with creative vision, strong work ethic, contagious passion and Kingdom focus. Please send resumé to: amanda@lakeviewbaptist.cc.

PASTOR

First Baptist Church Center Star, located in Killen, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a senior pastor to lead our established, family-focused and vibrant congregation of 400 active members. Please submit resumé to: pscfbcs@gmail.com.

PASTOR

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

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Pleasant Springs Baptist Church, Huntsville, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor. Submit resumé to: 409 Winchester Rd., Huntsville, AL 35811.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Spirit-led bivocational pastor is prayerfully sought by Turnerville Baptist Church near Mobile for established congregation. Resumé and letter of application to Pulpit Committee at turnerville3610@bellsouth.net.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Southside Baptist Church (a small church) in Cullman, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor. Send resumé to: SSBC, P.O. Box 2637, Cullman, AL 35056.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

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

MINISTER OF MUSIC

First Baptist Church of Clanton, Alabama, is seeking a full-time minister of music. This position will lead and direct corporate worship, choir and oversee all aspects of music in the life of FBC. Resumés or inquiries may be emailed to: justin.nelson@clantonfirstbaptist.org.

FULL/PART-TIME MINISTER OF WORSHIP

Parkview Baptist Church of Decatur is seeking a servant of God to direct our choir/praise and worship team and structure a God-honoring worship set for Sunday morning worship. Email search committee@parkviewdecatur.org for more information or to submit resumé.

WORSHIP MINISTER

Mineral Springs Baptist Church in Clanton is seeking its next worship minister. The position is bivocational. The candidate should process a God-call to worship leadership, musical ability and a heart for blended worship. The candidate is expected to maintain a daily, growing relationship in Christ and excel in working as part of a Christ-centered leadership team. All resumé should be emailed to: pastorjasongreen@yahoo.com.

PART-TIME WORSHIP LEADER

Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, West Blocton, is looking for a part-time worship leader. Please email mcbwestblocton@gmail.com for details.

OTHER POSITIONS

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS/ ASSOCIATIONAL MISSION STRATEGIST

The Dale Baptist Association (Ozark, Alabama) is currently accepting resumé for a full-time director of missions/ associational mission strategist. Please submit resumé to: dbasearchcommittee26@gmail.com. Resumés will be accepted through July 7.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Etowah Baptist Missions Center of Gadsden, Alabama, seeks a full-time executive director. The executive director serves as the chief executive of the Etowah Baptist Mission Center, providing strategic leadership, operational oversight and spiritual guidance. This role is pivotal in advancing the mission, fostering community engagement and ensuring the center's programs align with its core values of faith, service and outreach. The executive director works with and under the direction of the Board of Directors. Resumés and inquiries can be submitted via email at: jobebmc@gmail.com. Visit our website for more information about the agency <http://www.etowahbaptistmissioncenter.com>. Please contact Todd Hindsman, Etowah Baptist Missions Center Board Chairman, 256-490-8391.

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EVENTS

60TH ANNIVERSARY

You are cordially invited to the glorious 60th anniversary celebration of service and love for our Savior, Jesus Christ at Blue Ridge Baptist Church, 4471 Jasmine Hill Road, Wetumpka, AL on Sunday, May 4 at 11 in the morning. Special music and musicians, Sunday dinner at noon. Remembering the Past ... Rejoicing in the Present ... Anticipating the Future. Blueridgebaptistchurch.net

TAB EXTRAS

TAB HIGHLIGHTS EMAIL NEWSLETTER

TAB Highlights is an email newsletter delivered every Monday-Wednesday-Friday at noon with the day's top stories from the world of faith-based news. To sign up, email news@thealabamabaptist.org.

UM declares its mission, rebrands annual fund

The University of Mobile announced April 10 the rebranding of its fundraising mechanism with what leaders describe as a “bold initiative.”

The Great Commission Fund serves as a resource to provide scholarships, strengthen academic and spiritual programs and empower students to follow God's call in every profession, community and nation, according to a news release from UM.

“For Christ and His Kingdom — this is the heartbeat of everything we do at the University of Mobile,” said UM President Charles Smith.

“The Great Commission Fund is more than a re-branding of our annual

fund; it is a declaration of our mission. Through this initiative, we are calling on believers to join us in raising up a generation of Christ-centered leaders.”

Rooted in the university's long-standing Great Commission tradition, The Great Commission Fund reflects the commitment of UM students to pursue their education as a calling from God, UM officials explained.

From the moment they step onto campus, new students participate in this tradition by touching the Great Commission Globe during the president's com-

missioning ceremony, symbolizing their commitment to the intellectual and spiritual transformation they will experience in the college journey ahead.

A few years later at commencement, they return to the Great Commission Globe as new graduates — “men and women grounded in God's Word and armed with the knowledge and skills to pursue their professional callings with excellence.”

They touch the Great Commission Globe again, making a public commitment to pursue God's calling for their lives — to go out from UM

as missional leaders making an impact for Christ.

“We believe trans-

forming lives for Christ is not just an academic pursuit — it's a mission,” said Nathan Harris, vice president for institutional relations at UM.

“The Great Commission Fund makes that mission possible by ensuring that financial barriers do not hinder students from receiving a Christ-centered education that prepares them to lead with excellence.”

To learn more, visit umobile.edu/give.

(University of Mobile news release with additional reporting by The Alabama Baptist staff)



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EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Sunday School Lessons

By Nathan Harris, Ph.D.
Vice President for Strategic Initiatives, University of Mobile



For April 20

OUR SAVIOR Mark 15:33–39; 16:1–8

“He is risen! He is risen indeed!” This traditional congregational call and response has echoed throughout Church history as Christians have gathered on Easter Sunday to celebrate the resurrection of our King, Jesus Christ. That simple proclamation identifies Christ as our risen Savior and the One who defeated death, taking on our sin (2 Cor. 5:21) and giving us eternal life through faith in Him.

We celebrate His resurrection because without it our faith is in vain and we are hopeless (1 Cor. 15:14). As we come to Easter Sunday, let us consider how Christ’s suffering, death and resurrection not only give us strength for today but also bright hope for tomorrow.

Mocked (15:33–36)

Before Christ’s resurrection, there was His death. But before Christ’s death, we read of His suffering. Specifically, we read about Christ being mocked by those persecuting Him and leading Him to the cross.

Christ had been unfairly treated, beaten, mocked and scorned. He was condemned, stripped and belittled. Even upon the cross, the mockery of Jesus continued.

At noon darkness fell over the land and remained for three hours. At the third hour, Jesus cried out and quoted from Psalm 22. Those who were standing there assumed He was calling on Elijah to come take Him down from the cross, so someone took a sponge and soaked it in sour wine (vinegar) and gave it to Him.

While some say this was a sign of compassion, the context of the passage leans more toward continued mockery. Instead of providing something that would quench His thirst, they gave Him a sour drink “just to see” if Elijah would come back, furthering His humiliation on the cross.

Killed (37–39)

After that final act of mockery, Jesus let out a loud cry and breathed His last breath. Then the curtain in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

The curtain hung in the temple, representing the separation between the presence of God and the entirety of mankind. Because of man’s sin, we were not able to enter God’s presence.

Yet as Christ — our once-for-all sacrifice (Heb. 10) — died on the cross, the curtain was torn, showing us that Christ reconciled mankind back to God (Rom. 3:21–26). Seeing Jesus on the cross and taking His final breath, the centurion standing by recognized that Jesus is God’s Son.

Resurrected (16:1–8)

After Jesus died on the cross, His body was taken down and prepared for burial and placed in the tomb. A large stone was rolled to close the entrance.

Had Jesus not been the Son of God, this is where the story would end. But Jesus, fully God and fully man, did not remain in that tomb. “He is risen! He is risen indeed!”

On the third day, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome went to anoint Jesus’ body with spices. As they arrived, they noticed that the stone had already been rolled away. Met by a man dressed in white robes, they were told not to be afraid, for the crucified Jesus is now risen!

They were instructed to go back and tell the disciples and Peter of the Resurrection and that Jesus was going ahead of them to Galilee. This is a direct fulfillment of Christ’s words in Mark 14.

The women ran from the tomb, trembling and astonished by what they had just witnessed and heard.

This is such an encouragement for us as believers, not just because of the Resurrection — which is tantamount to our faith — but because of Christ’s word of grace fulfilling what He said He would do.

For April 27

BE PREPARED 1 Peter 4:12–19

Be Ready (12–14)

The call for Christians to be ready is not a foreign concept. Being ready to work with our hands to the plow is a common theme we find in the New Testament. In fact, Jesus Himself calls for us to be ready as we wait for His glorious return (Matt. 24:42).

As we come to our passage today, Peter lays out plainly for us another reason to be ready. We are to be ready for suffering and persecution as Christians. Yes, suffering and persecution may look different in our context, but this timeless call should still sober us to the reality of what we can and will face as believers.

Peter urges his fellow Christians not to be surprised by the fiery ordeals that come to test them. More so, he says that they should not consider the fiery ordeals as “unusual.”

This tells us something very important about suffering as believers — that it is normal. If something isn’t unusual, that means it happens often enough that it isn’t a surprise when it happens. Peter is calling for Christians to know suffering well and embrace it as it comes.

This is supported in the next verse as Peter shares with them the call to rejoice in their suffering, for they share in the sufferings of Christ.

Our inclination is to bemoan suffering, but because it is in Christ’s name that we suffer and face ridicule, we know that we are blessed as we live with the indwelling Spirit in our lives.

Be Righteous (15–16)

Beyond the call to be ready, these verses provide us with another set of instructions for the Christian life: Be righteous! Throughout the

entire letter, we have heard the refrain from Leviticus 19:2, to “be holy because I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:16).

Here it is explicitly taught to us as Peter tells believers to refrain from all ungodly behavior. Suffering for the sake of righteousness is a good thing, but suffering for the sake of worldly desires is vanity. Peter says that none of us should suffer as a murderer, thief, evildoer or meddler.

Suffering for those actions is not a godly endeavor but is the consequence of sinful actions. But the corollary stands that suffering for the sake of godliness is something we should not be ashamed of but something to be rejoiced in, for God is glorified in it. If we suffer for being Christians, we are pursuing righteousness unto the Lord.

Be Assured (17–19)

We are called to be ready, we are encouraged to be righteous and in the last few verses in this section, we are exhorted to be assured.

We are assured knowing that God will one day judge the living and the dead — the wicked and the righteous. Believers facing persecution for their faith ultimately rest in the saving work of Christ for their comfort and yet also know that God will execute His final judgment on those who disobey the gospel of God.

Both Christians and unbelievers will face God’s judgment, both experiencing different outcomes. The righteous are saved while the ungodly and sinner receive their just punishment.

Christians face their persecution with this confidence by placing their trust and lives in the goodness and mercy of God.

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

“Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.”

1 Peter 4:16

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sunday School Lessons

By James R. Strange, Ph.D.

Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies, Samford University



For April 20

THE ULTIMATE SIGN John 20:1-2, 11-18

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Today we celebrate John's ultimate sign: Jesus is God's Son, sent by the Father to reveal the Father to all. Those who believe receive eternal life.

Jesus' tomb was empty. (1-2)

John's account of the Resurrection is distinctive for several reasons. For example, in the four Gospels, Mary Magdalene is among the women who come to the tomb, but she comes alone in John, and her encounter with the risen Lord becomes a model for all who do not know Him until He calls them by name.

Moreover, in all four Gospels, the tomb is found empty early in the morning, but John is the only evangelist to say that Mary came "while it was still dark." John is reminding his readers of the Gospel's opening chapter: "That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it" (1:5). That echo of Genesis 1:1-3 praises Jesus as "the true Light," brought forth on Day 1, "that gives light to everyone" (1:9).

As we have been learning in this series, John often contrasts the light of faith with the darkness of ignorance and unbelief (8:12, 11:9-10, 12:46). Now, at the hour of His glorification, Jesus is fully revealed as the Light that no darkness can overcome.

Mary does not know this yet. When she sees that the stone has been rolled aside, she reacts just as we expect from someone who witnessed the whip, the thorns, the nails and the spear. She thinks, not that Jesus is alive, but that someone has moved His body.

Jesus is alive. (11-16)

The disciples look inside to find the tomb and the grave clothes empty. They then return "to the place where they were staying." They miss what Mary will see.

Mary has returned to the tomb, weeping, and when she finally peers inside it is no longer empty. Yes, Jesus is gone, but now two angels sit within.

In contrast to the other Gospels, rather than telling her of the Resurrection, they ask, "Woman, why are you crying?" The question is important, for with her answer, Mary reveals that she is ready for the joy of the Resurrection. The

tomb is empty because the One who was dead is alive.

But Mary doesn't recognize the risen Lord when He asks her the same question. Rather, she asks the Man she mistakes for the gardener where He has laid the body.

As the disciples in Emmaus know Jesus "in the break-

ing of the bread" (Luke 24:35), so Mary knows Him when He says her name.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who calls His sheep by name. They follow because they know His voice (10:3-5).

We must share the message of the resurrected Christ. (17-18)

As Jesus said during the Last Supper, He will leave to be with the Father (16:10) and to prepare a place for His followers (14:3). Jesus now calls them brothers, signaling a new, familial relationship. This means that we, His disciples in 2025, also call Him "Brother."

Mary proclaimed Him alive on that Easter. This morning, let us join our voices to that first proclamation of the gospel.

The tomb is empty! We have seen the Lord! Alleluia! Alleluia!

***"Mary Magdalene
went and announced
to the disciples, 'I
have seen the Lord' –
and that He had said
these things to her."***

John 20:18

For April 27

GOD'S HAND IN CALLING US TO SERVE 1 Kings 19:19-21; 2 Kings 2:7-15

Today we begin a five-week series on seeing the hand of God working in the ministry of Elisha, the ninth-century B.C. Israelite prophet who succeeded Elijah. We know little about Elisha. He is a farmer, his father's name is Shaphat (1 Kings 19:16) and he is from Gilgal near Jericho (2 Kings 4:38).

When we first meet Elisha, Elijah has received new instructions from God. The older prophet has been a worker of miracles, but now he is to anoint Hazael to be king of Aram (Syria) and Jehu to be king of Israel.

In the only biblical instance of one prophet appointing another, he is to anoint Elisha to replace himself. It turns out that Elisha will anoint the two kings.

Respond to God's leadership with all-in obedience. (1 Kings 19:19-21)

Twenty-four oxen ("12 teams") is an astounding number of animals to pull a plow. One implication is that Elisha is stupendously wealthy. This also symbolizes the 12 tribes of Israel, and these two prophets indeed traverse the territories of the tribes as if Judah and Israel are still united.

Elisha's response to receiving Elijah's mantle anticipates what four Galilean fishermen and one tax collector will do when Jesus calls them. He leaves everything to become Elijah's servant.

Elisha's request to turn back and kiss his parents anticipates Matthew 8:21-22 and Luke 9:59-60. Instead of doing what he asked, however, Elisha slaughters the oxen to feed "the people," burning the yokes to boil the flesh. The act is extravagant and signifies both his devotion to his new role and God's care for Israel.

Boldly ask for God's presence as you serve. (2 Kings 2:7-11)

As the pair meander from Gilgal to the Jordan River, three times Elijah tells Elisha to stay behind, and three times Elisha refuses with an oath. The references to Gilgal and Jericho and the miracle of parting the Jordan River recapitulate the miraculous crossing under Aaron's leadership (Josh. 3-4).

That event, of course, echoes the parting of the Red Sea and the deliverance from Egypt under Moses. These miracles signify that the One who separated the primordial waters on Day 2 of creation (Gen. 1:6-8) is still at work among His people.

Elisha's request for "two shares of your spirit" places him in the role of the eldest son (Deut. 21:17), but he receives a spiritual inheritance rather than property.

Fiery horses pulling a fiery chariot separate the two men, and a whirlwind bears Elijah into heaven. That Elijah did not die supports Israelite and Jewish expectations of his return (Mal. 4:5-6) and explains some opinions that Jesus was the prophet, sent to bring Israel to repentance before the great and terrible Day of the Lord (Matt. 16:14, Mark 8:28, Luke 9:19).

Rely on God's power to do God's work. (12-15)

The meaning of Elisha's cry is uncertain. Perhaps he exclaims that the heavenly cavalry fights on the side of God's people if they remain obedient to the Lord.

Elisha expresses his anguish that his spiritual father has left him, mourning like anyone who suffers loss, even those who know that death isn't the end.

By taking up Elijah's mantle, Elisha signals his acceptance of his role. By parting the Jordan as Elijah had, he demonstrates that he has received the prophetic spirit that he requested.

***"Then [Elisha] took the cloak of Elijah that had
fallen from him and struck the water ..."***

2 Kings 2:14

Reader-friendly options

Reading Bible without chapters, verses: What are the advantages and disadvantages?

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Chapter and verse notations make studying and sharing the Bible easier, but are there disadvantages to consider?

Modern-day Christians rely on having chapters and verses in their Bibles, never having known another option. But these divisions are a relatively new development.

Chapters were added in the 13th century by Stephen Langton, the archbishop of Canterbury, to help make a Bible commentary he was writing able to be more easily referenced.

Robert Estienne, a French scholar, developed the verse system for his 1551 edition of the Greek New Testament to make it easier for studying.

When religious persecution caused Protestant scholars to escape from England to Geneva, Switzerland, this group developed the first English translation with chapters and verses — the 1560 Geneva Bible.

For most purposes, these divisions work fine. But they can interrupt the flow of reading. It's human nature to automatically pause slightly at the end of a verse and stop at the end of a chapter, which can cause the reader to miss the overarching message.

Reading in context

The most important implication of these man-made divisions is that a portion of Scripture can be easily pulled from the rest. As a result, many false doctrines or teachings have been built around a verse or a few verses taken out of context.

However, there is a new generation of Bibles without typical chapters and verses. They are known as Reader's Bibles. These provide an

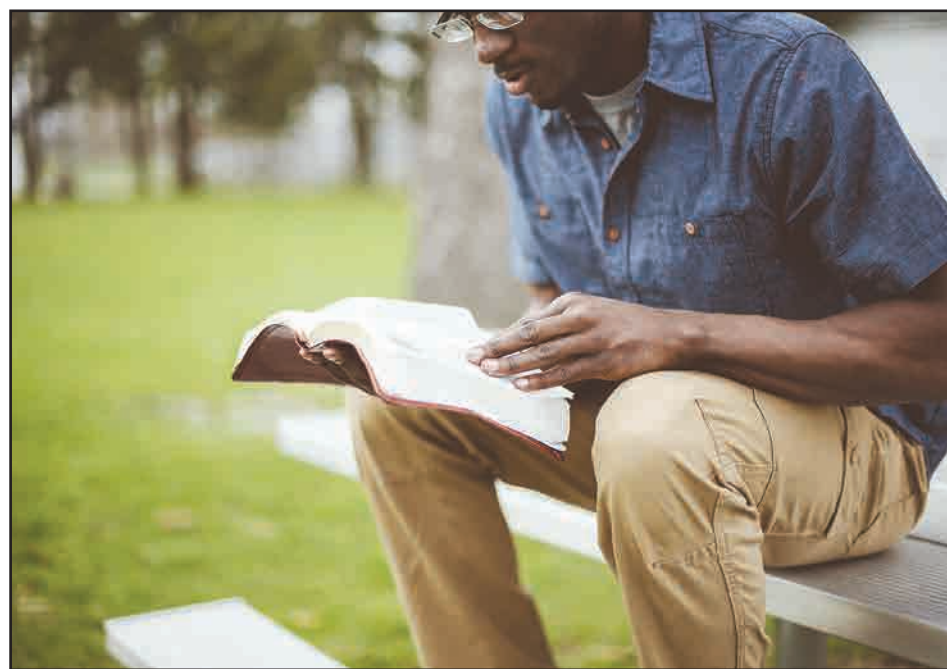


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effortless way to grasp the meaning of an entire passage or book.

"Having a Bible created for reading rather than reference will not only make reading the Bible more enjoyable; it'll uncover things you've never seen before and allow you to experience the Bible in a different way," the Institute for Bible Reading writes. "Many people report getting 'lost in the story' when they are able to just read without interruption."

For years there were only a few Reader's Bibles and a limited number of translations, but now one can be found in almost every major translation.

These include:

► **The Reader's Bible** — Christian Standard Bible (readersbible.cs bible.com), published by Holman Bible Publishers.

The pages are set in a paragraph layout with an easy-to-read font, but there aren't spaces between them. The bottom of each page lists its corresponding chapters in blue and

the page number in black. The text is black (no red) and has a relatively large 10-point font.

The only reference materials included are several full-color maps in the back. There are no commentaries or footnotes.

► **The Reader's Bible** — English Standard Version (crossway.org/bibles/esv-readers-bible-tru-4), published by Crossway.

More like a paperback

Although also containing single-column paragraphs, the Crossway edition indicates chapters with the number in red on the outer edge of each page and has a 9.5-point type.

It also has no footnotes or commentaries. However, the maps are two-toned instead of full-color.

► **Immerse: The Bible Reading Experience** — New Living Translation (immersebible.com), published by Tyndale House Publishers.

This one is the closest to being a Bible that can be read like a novel. Different from most Bibles — even

other Reading Bibles — it is a paperback with the same type of paper currently used in popular paperbacks.

Like the others, paragraphs don't have space between them. But with "Immerse," sections of text are separated. Although it seems like this could affect fluency the way that chapters do, this layout allows more white space on the page, making it very reader-friendly.

Each page's header states the chapter-and-verse citation range (for example, 5:3–6:2), making it feasible to use in a group. In fact, the publisher recommends "making this a community experience" but suggests likening it more to a book club than a Bible study.

The set includes six volumes: "Beginnings," "Kingdoms," "Prophets," "Poets," "Chronicles" and "Messiah" (the New Testament). There is also a separate "Luke and Acts" volume that describes the early Church. The six volumes can be bought as a set, or each of the seven can be purchased alone.

Each volume includes a card with a quick-start guide and an eight-week reading plan.

It differs from both traditional and Reading Bibles because the books of the Bible are sometimes reordered to make it a better "cover-to-cover reading experience."

Other Reading Bible options:

► **The Lectio Bible** — New International Version.

► **The Bible Without Chapters and Verses** — American Standard Bible.

► **The Holy Bible: King James Version** (without chapters, verses or footnotes).

► **Holy Bible, NASB 1995** (without chapter or verse numbers) — New American Standard Bible (Kindle only).

SPECIAL SECTION

Aging Well

April 17, 2025

Resources that encompass all aspects of growing older, including basic tips for staying healthy, coping with challenges and preparing for the future.



LIFE ON MISSION

Retired missionaries offer advice for next generation

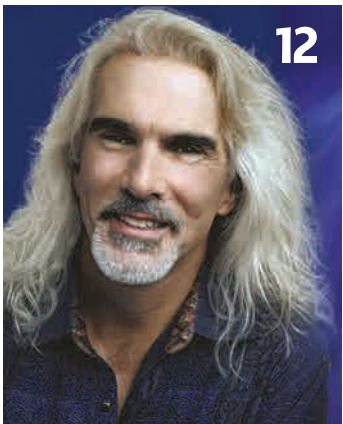
ACTIVE AGERS

5 fun ways seniors can stay healthy

WALKING WITH GOD

Guy Penrod encourages believers of all ages

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The Alabama Baptist

FROM THE EDITOR

The content in this issue is for informational purposes only and is not intended to be a substitute for professional advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always consult with your physician. Aging Well is an ongoing special section of The Alabama Baptist and is published by The Alabama Baptist, Inc. More content can be found online at tabonline.org. To subscribe, visit tabonline.org/subscribe or call 800-803-5201.

Well rested

BY STEPHEN LONG • SPECIAL TO THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

Good sleep is key for seniors to stay healthy

A good night's rest can be harder than it sounds, particularly when you reach your mid-60s.

But getting the right amount of sleep and making sure the quality of your rest is what it ought to be are key to avoiding serious medical conditions as you age.

Changing sleep patterns

As you get older, your need for sleep changes. Infants require 14 to 17 hours of sleep. Once you reach adulthood, your sleep needs are down to just seven to nine hours each night. At 65 or older, you only need seven to eight hours of sleep.

That's not as easy as it might sound.

Older Americans are more likely to have difficulty falling asleep. Once asleep, they're more likely to wake up during the night. Some of that is a natural part of aging. Other times it has to do with health conditions like sleep apnea, medication or bad sleeping habits.

The science of sleep

Sleep is much more involved than closing your eyes, nodding off and waking up.

It's a complex physiological activity in which the brain at times is just as active as during waking hours, furiously processing and breaking down the day's information.

This is especially true during the stage of sleep known as REM, an acronym for "rapid eye movement." During this period, the brain kicks into overdrive and dreams become more vivid. At the same time, the body enters a period of near paralysis, though the eyes, cardiovascular and breathing functions continue.

As people age, however, they experience diminished periods of REM sleep, which is essential not only for a good night's rest but to maintain memory, creativity and other cognitive functions.

Health consequences

Too little sleep — or too much — also can have potentially serious physical consequences. Older Americans who get too much sleep — more than nine hours — are at higher risk of having a heart attack or stroke.

Too little sleep — fewer than five hours each night — not only increases the risk of cardiovascular and pulmonary disease, it can lead to a hormonal imbalance that results in weight gain, even if you're sticking to a healthy diet.

Bad habits, good habits

Sleep changes with age, and there's little to be done about that. You can, however, get the most out of your rest by adopting healthy sleeping habits, such as:

- ▶ Make a sleep schedule and stick to it. That means going to bed and getting up about the same time each day.
- ▶ Keep your bedroom quiet and dark.
- ▶ Avoid eating two to three hours before bed.
- ▶ Avoid caffeinated drinks at night, which includes iced tea and many soft drinks.
- ▶ Restless pets might wake you up, so keep them out of the bedroom at night.

▶ Avoid electronic devices and TV in bed. Bright lights stimulate a gland behind the eye that keeps people awake.

▶ Don't nap too late in the day, and keep naps to 30 minutes or less.

▶ If you have acid reflux, sleep with your head in an elevated position.

▶ Go easy on alcohol. It may make you drowsy, but once the alcohol wears off you stand a better chance of waking up in the night.

▶ Avoid tanking up on water before bedtime to reduce the frequency of bathroom trips during the night.

If you have persistent trouble sleeping, consult your doctor. Tests are available that could help pinpoint a treatment.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Stephen Long is hospital marketing manager for Baptist Health Brookwood Hospital, a 595-bed comprehensive health care facility in Birmingham. Visit baptisthealthal.com or call 877-909-4233 for more resources.



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Make positive steps

BY TRACY RIGGS FRONTZ • THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



Photo by Freepik

Age-related bone loss may be helped with supplements, supervised therapy plans

By some estimates, 1 in 3 people over the age of 50 have either osteopenia, reduced bone density, or osteoporosis, a disorder characterized by significant bone deterioration leading to an increased risk of fractures.

Bryan Crutcher, assistant professor of kinesiology at Colorado Christian University, studies how bones grow, how they functionally provide movement and structure to the human body, and how movement and strength training affect bone density and strength.

The process

“Understanding all of the mechanics allows me to really understand how the bones react when we exercise and how that can be helpful in

preventing or treating osteoporosis,” Crutcher said.

One of the biggest issues with osteoporosis is that there aren’t always early warning symptoms, he said. Women are at a higher risk of osteoporosis due to the estrogen drop at menopause, he said, and genetics is another big factor.

“If you have no family history, that does not negate the possibility of still receiving a diagnosis of osteoporosis,” Crutcher said.

Your medical provider can advise you on a testing schedule based on your age and risk factors, especially for those age 65 and up.

Those with a family history may need to get a baseline bone density screening in their 40s or 50s to help monitor changes through the years, he said.

The most accurate way to diagnose osteopenia or osteoporosis is through dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry (DEXA or DXA) or a special CT scan. Regular screening can help individuals know their risk and what steps, like strength training or nutrition, might help slow bone loss.

Preventative treatments

Though osteoporosis is usually considered a concern for older individuals, that doesn’t mean that it should be ignored until reaching 50 years old. Many treatments for osteoporosis are also preventative.

Doctors may recommend an increase in calcium intake either through diet or supplements. Calcium citrate and calcium carbonate are commonly suggested to help reduce bone mineral density loss.

Vitamin D also plays a role.

“Vitamin D is also really important for bone health because vitamin D increases calcium’s absorption within the body. So if your vitamin D levels are low, your body may not be absorbing calcium at an effective rate,” Crutcher said.

There also are medications that help prevent bone loss or rebuild weak bones, though many are expensive and most have side effects.

Other important therapies for those at-risk or diagnosed with osteoporosis are balance and reaction-time training.

“People with osteoporosis want to be very careful walking on unstable surfaces, in places where they have a higher risk of falling. That’s why I usually do a lot of balance and reac-

tion-time work to help them improve in that area.

“I want them to be able to react a little bit quicker, maybe catch themselves so they don’t fall. I want them to be able to have a better and more reactive balance. Those are two areas I would really want to improve,” Crutcher said.

He warns that these activities should be done in a controlled environment with a trained professional, like a physical or occupational therapist, an exercise physiologist or a strength and conditioning coach, so the risk of falling is lessened or eliminated.

For those who are able, walking and other weight bearing exercises and strength training, even using hand weights or bands, can be positive steps, though there is no cure for bone loss, Crutcher said.

Battle of genetics

“There are people that can be very active, do all the right things and still be diagnosed with osteoporosis because sometimes genetics is very hard to battle against,” he said.

“Not to say it’s a cure-all, but we see so many benefits from physical activity.

“I never want people to think that they are automatically resigned to receiving the diagnosis if there is a family history. But if you work hard and do all the right lifestyle management behaviors, there is a very good possibility that even though your genetics presents a history of the disease, you can still overcome it with physical activity.”

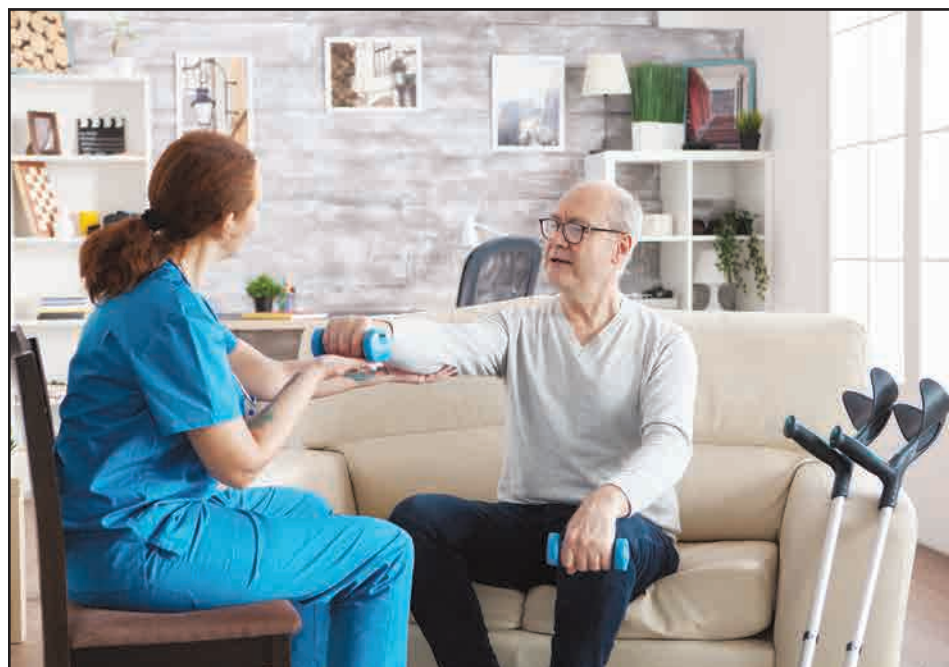


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9 tips

BY SUE SPRENKLE • INTERNATIONAL MISSION BOARD

Life on mission: Retired missionaries offer advice for next generation

The 20-something held up a fistful of letters, notes that reaffirmed words Zoe Hill heard countless times in person at First Baptist Church Columbia, Mississippi, from retired IMB missionaries Tom and Gloria Thurman:

1. The call of a believer is about abandoning everything the world offers to follow Jesus.

2. His Word is better and true.

Hill's favorite advice came when 91-year-old Tom pulled her aside before she left for missionary training.

She planned to serve in an area of the world where Christianity is not always welcome. He knew tough days were coming, so he advised:

3. When they hate you; tell you to reject Jesus; throw rocks and dirt in your face and don't want anything to do with you, remember, Jesus is better. You are there to sow the seeds of the gospel. Let the Holy Spirit work in His timing.

"Here's this man who was a missionary in [Bangladesh], a country with civil wars, sin and a lot of hate, giving me something to cling to," Hill said. "It means so much because he and Miss Gloria lived it, and they continue to hold so tightly to the fact that 'Jesus IS better.'"

Learning from experience

For Hill, it's important for her generation to learn from the missionaries who went before them.

She sat for hours picking the Thurmans' brains and absorbing information that might help down the road, like:

4. A missionary is never alone in their endeavor. The all-in support of Southern Baptist churches is paramount to the health and longevity of its missionaries.

"We realized along the way that this is a Southern Baptist effort," Gloria explained. "If a lot of people



Retired IMB missionary Gloria Thurman has pictures of missionaries on her refrigerator. Every person represented has some kind of connection to First Baptist Church Columbia, Mississippi, and Thurman prays for them as she works in the kitchen.

didn't do a lot of things, we wouldn't be where we were."

Churches give through the Cooperative Program and Lottie Moon Christmas Offering to send missionaries to the nations. But they also disciple and train potential missionaries and offer emotional and physical support to IMB missionaries.

The Thurmans' connection with FBC Columbia was so strong they retired across the street from their support system. Now this couple does whatever they can to support the next generation of missionaries.

Tom said that when a college student expresses to him some interest in missions, the first thing he asks is, "How many people did you tell about God today?" because:

5. Missions starts at home. Be involved where you are. The Great Commission starts from there.

The Thurmans keep up with their friends via text, Signal, WhatsApp, various social media outlets and email. Instant communication with

"home" wasn't possible for most of their time in Bangladesh. Gloria pointed out this has benefits.

6. Keep your church and prayer network informed. There's nothing comparable to thousands of Southern Baptists praying.

But at the same time, she warned new missionaries of being "too connected to home" and missing out on what's right in front of them.

7. Get involved in the local community. It will bring a sense of belonging and opportunities to share the gospel.

Find community

Living in community with those who have never heard Jesus' name is one of the best ways to share the gospel. This means being involved in a local church, whatever that might look like. It means sharing life and burdens with neighbors.

"One of the best things we did for our ministry and quality of life in Bangladesh was to be active in our

community," Tom said. Remembering what it took to live through a rough civil war, he added, "Your friends in that community will give you wise counsel. They want you to succeed."

And don't forget to:

8. Celebrate the highs! Remember why you are excited and write it down. You won't remember it later, but you will need it on the low days.

"Make it a habit to thank God for one positive thing for the day," Gloria added to her advice.

The Thurmans, still convinced that they "don't mentor," walked across the street to FBC Columbia. Gloria spotted a young mother who came to the church for help with food for her children. As the two women walked to where food vouchers were issued, they spoke quietly.

Tom beckoned Brett Frazier, the church's lead pastor, to come join the discussion about advice. Frazier remembered that when he was a summer missionary in college, Tom and Gloria taught a class on spiritual warfare.

"I've never forgotten the advice and mentoring they gave us," Frazier said with a smile. "It's what they do."

The pastor explained the Thurmans, along with another retired IMB couple and missionaries staying in the church's missionary home, mentor their community about missions in an organic way. They sit at the dinner table talking to youth. They teach Bible classes and participate in activities. They keep the Great Commission task at the forefront.

Frazier glanced at Tom and offered one final tip.

9. Churches, host missionaries and partner with them. That missions DNA rubs off. It opens a biblical worldview with a heart for the nations. It won't be long until you are a church that sends.

Growth

BY GRACE THORNTON • THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

Whitesburg Baptist Church sees eternal fruit from Women’s Mentoring Ministry

Pam Brassart said she remembers seeing the young woman come in and sit down at a table, not looking comfortable at all.

“She kind of looked down, and I began a conversation with her, and she was giving mostly short answers,” she said.

Shortly after that, an older woman came in and sat down beside her.

“That woman was going to be her mentor,” Brassart said. “As they began to talk,

a commonality came out — the young woman had an autistic child, and the older woman had been a special ed teacher for many years.”

Small groups

The relationship was put together by the Women’s Mentoring Ministry of Whitesburg Baptist Church in Huntsville, which pairs mentors and mentees, then puts three sets of them together in a group of six, along with a teacher and a prayer warrior.

Brassart serves in the prayer warrior role and said that before their closing brunch that year, the young woman sent her a text and asked her to pray because she was sharing her testimony.

“By then, she looked like a different person — her countenance was different,” Brassart said. “When we had the discussions around the table, she talked more than anybody.”

That’s the kind of impact that Vicki Craft, leader of

the ministry and wife of pastor Darryl Craft, said they pray for.

“We spend a whole day praying over who to match up,” she said.

For each eight-week rotation, a host home prepares a meal for a small group’s weekly meeting, and they all discuss the book “Growing Together” by Melissa B. Kruger.

“We’ve done it since 2022, and it’s amazing to see the relationships that have grown out of the pro-

gram and the testimonies the women have shared,” Craft said, noting that during their last eight-week run, two of the women were baptized.

‘So grateful’

Another one of the young women who is getting married soon has also asked her 66-year-old mentor to be her matron of honor.

“God has used this ministry in amazing ways at our church, and we are so grateful,” she said.



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THE BAPTIST FOUNDATION OF ALABAMA

Lasting legacy

BY NATHAN EALY • THE BAPTIST FOUNDATION OF ALABAMA

Endowments offer tax advantages, charitable giving opportunities

Endowed scholarships help many college students pay for school. They also establish a lasting legacy for the donors who contribute the seed funds.

Setting up a memorial endowment fund to help students or to fuel Great Commission work for generations to come is easier than most people think and can be part of a Kingdom-minded estate plan.

The Baptist Foundation of Alabama helps individuals plan for generous giving in the short and long term.

For example, memorial endowments create a permanent fund to leave a dependable stream of income to provide an annual scholarship or contribute regularly to a favorite ministry or missions effort.

When considering giving to ministry in your estate plan while also aiming to minimize taxes, it is important to approach the process prayerfully, thoughtfully and with the advice of various professionals.

Here are some steps you should consider taking:

1. Consult with professionals.

Seek the guidance of experienced professionals, including an estate planning attorney, an accountant and a financial adviser who specialize in charitable giving. They can help you navigate the legal and financial complexities to ensure your wishes are executed properly.

2. Set up a charitable gift.

Consider setting up a charitable gift in your will or during your life through a trust or a specific bequest.

Charitable trusts, such as a charitable remainder trust or a charitable lead trust, can provide benefits like income tax deductions, potential income for beneficiaries and reduction of estate taxes.

A specific bequest designates a

certain amount or percentage of your assets to the ministry of your choice.

3. Choose tax-advantaged accounts.

If you have tax-advantaged accounts such as a pre-tax IRA, 403(b) or 401(k), you can designate a ministry as a beneficiary. This can have tax benefits, especially if these accounts are passed to any beneficiary other than a spouse, when at such time the next beneficiary might realize only 60–65% of the value of the account due to income taxes.

Tax-free donation

4. Consider qualified charitable distributions.

If you're over 72 years old, you can use any required minimum distribution you receive to make tax-free charitable donations directly from those accounts to any charitable organization. This reduces your taxable income and supports the ministry you love.

5. Create a donor-advised fund.

Establishing a DAF allows you

to make a charitable contribution to the fund you created and receive an immediate tax deduction. You can then recommend grants from the fund to the ministry over time. This approach provides flexibility and potential tax benefits.

6. Leverage the annual gift exclusion.

Consider gifting smaller amounts annually to the ministry during your lifetime. This can help reduce your estate while also utilizing the annual gift exclusion, which allows you to gift up to a certain amount per person per year without triggering gift taxes.

7. Research tax deduction limits.

Understand the limits on charitable deductions that apply to your specific situation.

Tax laws may change, so staying informed about the latest regulations is essential.

8. Explore testamentary charitable remainder trusts.

These trusts are established through your will or during your

lifetime and provide income to a beneficiary (like a family member) for a specified period, with the remainder going to the ministry. This can offer both income for loved ones and support for the ministry.

Specific laws

9. Review state laws.

Be aware of your specific state law regarding estate taxes and charitable giving. Some states offer additional incentives or deductions for charitable donations.

10. Plan for long-term impact.

Consider how your giving will impact the ministry in the long term. Engage in conversations with the ministry to understand their needs and how your gift can best support their mission.

Remember that tax laws can be complex and subject to change, so it is vital to work closely with professionals who can provide up-to-date advice tailored to your circumstances. While tax benefits can be a motivating factor, the primary focus should remain on your desire to support the ministries and missions you love and make a positive impact for the Kingdom.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Nathan Ealy serves as a ministry engagement officer with The Baptist Foundation of Alabama. TBFA helps Alabama Baptists and their churches maximize the money the Lord has entrusted to them so they can do more ministry. Alabama Baptists who need help with their estate plans, or churches considering a legacy ministry for their members, can get more information at tbfa.org.



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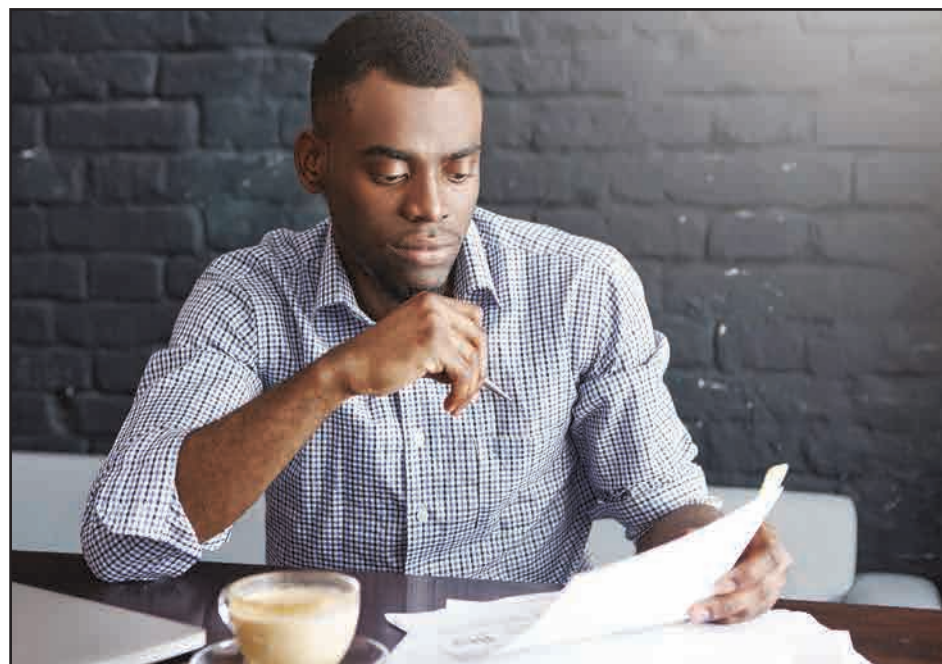


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Active agers

5 fun ways seniors can stay healthy

Staying active and maintaining a healthy lifestyle as an active ager is better with variety. The YMCA offers a variety of programs tailored to older adults, so you can maintain healthy habits, manage chronic health conditions and stay connected.

Here are five key ways seniors can stay healthy at the YMCA.

1. Water aerobics

Water aerobics is one of the most popular activities for seniors at the YMCA.

This form of exercise is easy on the joints while providing a full-body workout. The buoyancy of water reduces stress on bones and muscles, making it an excellent option for those with arthritis, osteoporosis or mobility challenges.

Fun in the water

Kayla Buckner, director of member marketing and communications at the YMCA of Greater Birmingham, said water classes are popular because they are a blast.

"I've been working for the YMCA more than 5 years and I can say that nobody is having more fun at the Y than the folks in the water aerobics classes. They are having a ball!"

Many seniors find a sense of camaraderie in these classes, making it a fun way to stay accountable to their fitness goals.

"We see a lot of friend groups that started as classmates in water aerobics. They go out to lunch, host potlucks and volunteer together too," Buckner said.

2. Pickleball

Pickleball has become



Photo by Kayla Buckner/YMCA of Greater Birmingham
Pickleball has become one of the fastest-growing sports in the U.S., especially among seniors.

one of the fastest-growing sports in the U.S., especially among seniors.

This paddle sport is often touted as a sport that most anybody can learn. It improves coordination and cardiovascular health, and you won't even notice you're working out because you're too busy having fun.

Many YMCA locations offer pickleball leagues, open play sessions and beginner-friendly clinics.

3. Swimming

Maybe water aerobics isn't your thing. But the pool can still be a great source of physical activity that's easy on the joints.

"A lot of our active agers who swim are in great shape. They also love to come splash around with their grandkids. That's a great reason to stay healthy," Buckner said.

4. Senior fitness classes

The YMCA offers a variety of specialized fitness classes designed for seniors. These classes cater to different fitness levels and focus on strength, balance, flexibility and endurance.

Some popular options include SilverSneakers, Y Silver, chair yoga and small group training classes.

5. Socialization

Staying socially active is just as important as staying physically active.

The YMCA fosters a strong sense of community, offering seniors a place to connect with others, make friends and avoid social isolation.

Many YMCAs have programs beyond fitness that encourage social engagement, such as coffee clubs, pool parties and potlucks. The Y also has had success engaging with seniors as volunteers.

"At the Y, volunteers are at the core of many of our community outreach programs like our free summer lunch program. Many of our active agers generously give their time to help prepare meals and distribute to kids throughout the community. It not only helps us, but it further connects them to our mission," said Buckner.

Engaging in social activities reduces the risk of depression, cognitive decline and loneliness, all of which can impact overall health.

Wellness matters

By taking advantage of these opportunities, active agers can live healthier, happier and more fulfilling lives. If you or a loved one are looking for ways to stay active, check out your local YMCA and explore the many ways it can support senior health and wellness.

Learn more about programs and volunteer opportunities for people of all ages at ymcabham.org.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This article was provided by the YMCA of Greater Birmingham.



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Simple habit of walking builds stronger bones, muscles, cardiovascular health

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
 The Alabama Baptist

Whether you are 5 or 95, physical activity is beneficial to your health, and it's never too late for most of us to add some movement into our daily routine. A walk is a good way to get started.

Physical movement in general has many benefits — physical, psychological, emotional and hormonal — and humans were created to be active, said Bryan Crutcher, assistant professor of kinesiology at Colorado Christian University.

Many older adults begin to see a decrease in bone mineral density, known as osteopenia, which puts them at risk for osteoporosis or fractures. Walking is a good way to not only build cardiovascular endurance but to strengthen bones and muscles too.

“Start with a walk; start with something simple. It doesn't have to be anything intense,” Crutcher said. “You can slowly progress over time, but just start moving and let it be a regular part of your daily routine.”

Crutcher is continuously amazed at God's design of the human body.

“Look at how God created our bodies. Look at what we're able to do. Look at how we're able to move,” Crutcher said. “God did not mean for us to just sit and sit. Yes, rest is important, absolutely. But He meant us to be up and moving around. He created us to move and be active.”

“We live in an imperfect world, but God's design is perfect,” Crutcher added. “The way our human body is designed to operate is so perfect — every cell, every neuron, every beat of your heart.”

“Unfortunately, we live in an imperfect world where those things can malfunction, but physical activity is so important

to help try to mitigate these factors.”

Crutcher said he has one piece of advice he tells his students and patients all the time: To whatever extent your health allows, there is no age limit on physical activity.

“If you're not currently moving, just start moving,” he said. “Get moving and have fun with it.”



Photo by Freepik



Strengthening bones and muscles is important since many older adults begin to see a decrease in bone mineral density, known as osteopenia.

Photo by Kayla Buckner/YMCA of Greater Birmingham

Ways your church can honor senior adults on May 4

By Debbie Campbell
The Alabama Baptist

In most congregations, there are those whose many years of faithful service have enabled our churches to reach out and minister in our communities. This year, May 4 is the day designated by the Southern Baptist Convention to celebrate and recognize the contributions of older adults in our congregations.

A Scripture verse that highlights the value and wisdom of older people is Job 12:12, which asks, "Is not wisdom found among the aged: Does not long life bring understanding?" This verse emphasizes the respect and value we should place on senior adults in our churches because of their years of faithful service.

Expressing gratitude

How can we honor and express our gratitude to the senior adults in our churches for all they do in providing leadership, wisdom and consistent support to the Lord's work in our churches?

Several ministers shared ways

to recognize and honor our senior saints. Here are some ideas you may want to implement for a Senior Adult Day emphasis in your church.

Joe Wingard, music and worship pastor and senior adults of Piedmont First Baptist Church, said that for the past several years, the church has selected and recognized a senior adult of the year. The honoree's photo is displayed in a church hallway for that year.

Ken Patterson, minister of music of First Baptist Church Guntersville, suggested showing a short video featuring seniors expressing the importance of their faith or sharing their involvement in ministry and missions.



TAB graphic with Freepik

Additional ideas he shared:

- ▶ Recognize senior adults in worship and express appreciation for their service.
- ▶ Have a special prayer for them in their continued ministries.
- ▶ Plan a special worship service and let them suggest the songs.

▶ Host a luncheon following the service to honor senior adults with younger members of the church preparing and serving the food.

Don Campbell, minister of worship of The Baptist Church at McAdory in McCalla, suggests planning a worship service with testimonies, Scripture and prayer led by senior adults.

Barry Daniel, minister of senior adults at Hunter Street Baptist Church in Hoover, spoke of putting together packets with senior adults

in mind that include prayer cards, a book on praying for your family, devotional booklets, candy, a pen and other gifts. Youth and children could be stationed with the bags at a table or an entrance and give them out as senior adults arrive that morning.

Providence Baptist Church in Opelika hosted a senior adult celebration sponsored by Tuskegee Lee Baptist Association, featuring the Providence Golden Notes senior adult choir with a guest speaker, followed by lunch.

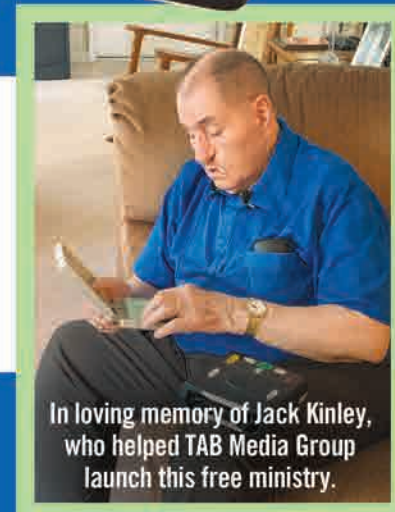
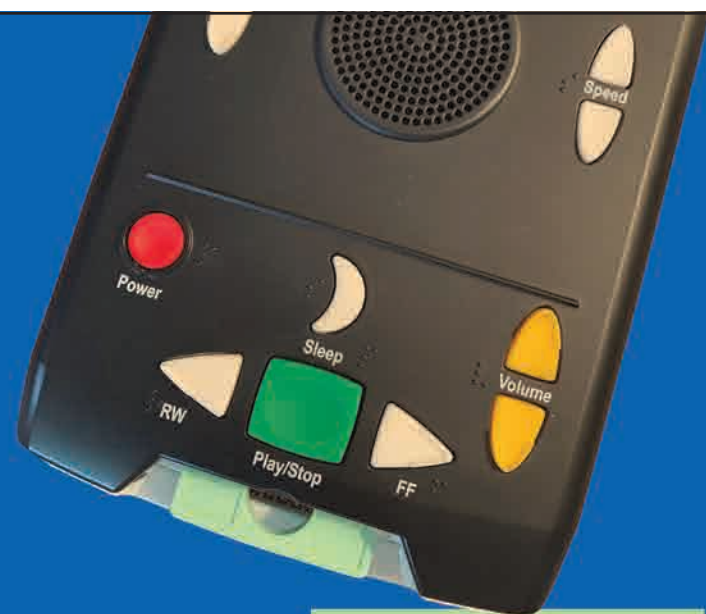
Honoring this special group in your congregation will encourage senior adults to continue to be a vital part of the church's life and ministry.

EDITOR'S NOTE — A great gift idea for the senior adults of your church is a one-year gift subscription to The Alabama Baptist newspaper, which costs just \$16.25 (26 issues) per home. Call TAB customer service, 800-803-5201, or go to thealabamabaptist.org/special-rate to subscribe.

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Lean into it

BY KARL VATERS • KARLVATERS.COM

5 principles for pastoring a vibrant older congregation

Everyone in church leadership seems to be talking about how to reach next gen individuals. But what do you do when your church is filled with seniors? Is there a way to build a strong church with them? Or does it always have to be about younger people?

I hear those questions a lot. And I'm learning some great lessons in the conversations that follow.

The answer is yes. You can build a strong church by focusing on seniors.

Here are five principles I've learned about building a strong, healthy church with a congregation whose hair is more gray than high on top.

1. Do it on purpose.

Senior ministry must be as intentional as every other ministry. A church that's filled with seniors because they're the only ones left from the bygone glory days is not healthy. But a church filled with seniors because it's intentionally ministering to their needs and utilizing their gifts can be very healthy, strong and a blessing to their community.

2. Train, don't just teach.

Most of today's seniors were raised in an era in which we outsourced ministry instead of doing it ourselves. Other than ushering, teaching Sunday School or singing in the choir, the average churchgoer in the 1950s to 1990s put their money in the offering so that others would do ministry for us.

Find a higher gear

We paid our pastor to visit the sick, we paid missionaries to go to foreign lands, and so on. And on Sunday, we paid to hear great teaching.

It's time to shift that into a higher gear. Great teaching isn't enough



Photo by tirachardz on Freepik

anymore — if it ever was. You can hear a fantastic sermon and go home impressed but unchanged by it.

Teaching and preaching churches need to become discipling and training churches. This applies as much to senior believers as it does to younger believers.

Older Christians have a lot to contribute — and not just financially. But they'll never step into their ministry gifting unless we expect it from them and equip them for it.

3. Send them, don't just tend them.

Seniors may not have the physical stamina to do some tasks any more. But they often have more time, finances and wisdom than their younger counterparts.

Yes, in a church filled with seniors, there will be more need for hands-on pastoral care. But that pastoral care should be distributed among the rest of the church body caring for each other, not expecting paid clergy to do it all.

Valuing senior believers doesn't just mean doing ministry for them,

it means doing ministry with them. So sure, the church can still take a bus trip to Branson. But when they get home, they can and should be activated into vibrant, life-giving ministry.

There's no excuse for a church filled with passive Christian seniors any more than there's an excuse for a church filled with passive Christian youth.

4. Keep a forward focus.

The seniors who have been the backbone of your church are different than the seniors who are coming next. Grandma went to Woodstock. She's more likely to have hidden a copy of Rolling Stone from her parents than to have displayed the Saturday Evening Post on the coffee table.

Look ahead

This upcoming era of seniors won't want the same things from church that my parents' era wanted. And we won't contribute to ministry in the same way either.

Look at least a decade ahead. Start asking how the 50-somethings

of today might want to participate in the life of the church differently as they start graying. The Jesus People of the '60s and '70s changed the way younger churches did ministry then, and they'll change the way older churches do ministry in the future.

5. Find new ways to reach and keep them.

Just because a church is predominantly ministering to and with senior adults doesn't exempt it from the Great Commission.

A vibrant older congregation needs to reach out to the older folks in their community, not just caring for the ones they've got (although that should certainly be done too).

But the next generation of seniors will have far less interest in church traditions than the current one.

Many of today's mature adults have never attended church. Some never had a praying parent or grandparent. So the tools we relied on to reach and keep previous generations of older adults won't work on the next ones. We're going to have to think differently.

Intentionally ministering to and with an older congregation does not have to mean the church is dying. It can be vital, valuable and make great contributions to the Kingdom of God. But it won't look like it

used to look. And it won't happen by mistake.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Karl Vaters is a minister, author and podcaster who produces and provides resources at



VATERS

KarlVaters.com for helping small churches thrive. This article is reprinted with permission.

Walking with God

BY LEANN CALLAWAY • THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

Guy Penrod encourages believers to thrive in their relationship with Christ, others

Passionate. Committed. Encouraging. These are just a few words used to describe Guy Penrod, the Grammy and Dove award-winning recording artist recognized for much more than his signature long white hair.

Penrod will lead the music celebration at Encourage 2025, a one-day conference designed to inspire senior adults in evangelism and Christian living.

The free event will be held May 5 at First Baptist Church Pelham.

“Guy is passionate about what he does,” said Frank Jones, senior adult ministry strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. “He wants to sing songs that touch the heart, and he wants his audiences to be encouraged and challenged to live out the gospel of Jesus Christ. I love his spirit, his commitment to excellence and that he is my friend.”

Family life

When Penrod isn’t traveling and performing concerts, he enjoys spending time at home. He and his wife, Angie, are adjusting to a new season of life as empty nesters, having watched their eight children grow up and now having children of their own.

“My goal with music is to lift up the good things, things like marriage, things like stopping and spending time with your wife and your kids,” Penrod said.

“I think we need to esteem those things and hold them up and not get caught

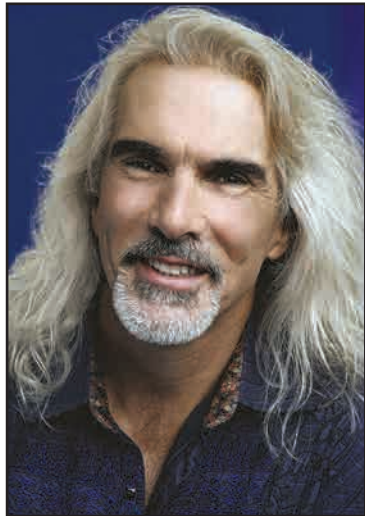


Photo courtesy of A to Z Entertainment Inc.

GUY PENROD

up in the downward spiral that exists in our culture.”

Penrod spent 14 years as the lead singer of the renowned Gaither Vocal Band before establishing a solo career — allowing him to adjust his touring schedule and to spend more time at home with his family. Throughout this musical journey, he and his wife homeschooled their eight children.

“I had a good example of a father,” Penrod said. “I know a lot of folks don’t, but I know a lot of folks do. Fatherhood is a heavy responsibility. It is interesting how God made things so organic really. His plan for you is to just trust Him day by day.”

“I think at the end of the day, if we trust Him and live openly for Him in front of those we love, that’s the best example of a father, mother, sister, brother, friend or whatever relationship you want to put on there.”

Penrod hopes to encourage other fathers to spend time investing in their

children’s lives and always pointing them to God’s Word for guidance, direction and truth to build their lives upon.

“I don’t know that it is a matter of any certain thing, one thing or the other, that as fathers we do,” Penrod said. “It’s a compilation of all of the small decisions, but the big one being to center your worldview in the Word of God and then acknowledge the Lord in all your ways and He will direct your path.”

“Then be transparent because we’re going to make good decisions and have wonderful successes as fathers, but we are also going to make bad decisions and have failures as well.”

“For the most part, it is

something we should do out in front of the family, so everyone sees how the Lord works through the ups and the downs.”

Through his music and message, Penrod hopes to encourage believers at any age to thrive in their relationship with Christ and others.

Pointing to Christ

“During concerts, I hope to encourage people and lead people to Christ and to encourage believers,” Penrod said.

“Music is a vehicle by which the Lord has blessed us with. I mean, like anyone, if you follow the Spirit of the Lord’s promptings and a new heart that He has given each one of us in

Christ, then you yield it to Him and acknowledge Him in all your ways and He will direct your paths.

“Therein lies the secret to happiness. It’s that right there — just resting and waiting on Him for doors is advice I would give.

“Don’t push. I have done that as a young man and as a middle-aged man probably, pushed on a few doors out of hard headedness, but usually it’s a matter of waiting on the Lord, who will open the doors. We walk through them.”

“The building of family, the relationships, the influence and all those things are gifts from the Lord. So, I just pray for His wisdom and strength to walk in that honorably.”

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Photo courtesy of Bill King

Beautiful treasures

BY BILL KING • PASTOR AND HUMORIST

First person: A trip back in time

My wife, Jean, and I recently spent three days on a magnificent mountain that has, or is near, beautiful bluffs, gorgeous gorges, carved canyons, cavernous caves, wonderful waterfalls, wide waters, babbling brooks, crooked creeks and at least one rambling river that runs on top of a mountain — all at the southern end of the Appalachians.

The area had enough antique stores to keep us busy when we weren't enjoying all that natural beauty that God spent so much time creating. Much of this is alongside the Tennessee River, but we never

left Alabama. All of these things can be found in Northeast Alabama, primarily in DeKalb and Jackson counties.

Middle of the 1940s

I have never actually believed in the phenomenon of time travel, but our amazing destination took us back in time. Our mode of transportation was not a time machine but a house. When we entered the front door of the bed-and-breakfast farmhouse located on top of Sand Mountain near the towns of Pisgah and Rosalie, we suddenly found ourselves in the middle of the 1940s.

The house was originally built by Buck and Ima McCormick, back in 1944, on their 40-acre farm. Their World War II-era house originally consisted of only four rooms. Since that humble beginning, more rooms, including an indoor bathroom, have been added. Out back is a beautiful open-air pavilion with period pieces, plus a wooden tower that overlooks the garden, cattle and donkeys.

Our hosts provided some of my favorite goodies from my childhood. There was a basket filled with RC Colas and Moon Pies, Grapico, Fanta Orange and Cracker Jacks. Each morning, we listened to the song-

birds chirping outside our window while we drank coffee and enjoyed a muffin (or Moon Pie).

With Fort Payne in the valley below, Mentone on neighboring Lookout Mountain and Scottsboro in the other valley, we had our pick of places to visit. Next time we will plan a longer stay.

If you have never visited this part of our great state, you have missed beautiful treasures just waiting for you to discover them. If this all sounds like the kind of places you would like to visit and explore, I certainly understand. I might even see you there!

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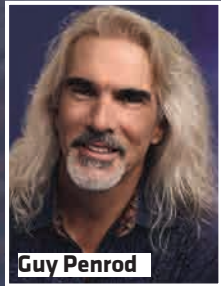
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Spiritual guidelines for living the life God intended

By Carolyn Tomlin
The Alabama Baptist

There are far, far better things ahead than any we leave behind," C.S. Lewis once wrote in a letter to a friend. And Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "Write it on your heart that every day is the best day in the year."

These two writers give us insight into what God intended our lives to be — new beginnings, new goals, new challenges. Those things we planned to do last month or last year are in the past.

Maybe we accomplished some, and certainly some we did not. But God is a God of second chances.

Discarded goals

Most people (80%) who make New Year's resolutions disregard those good intentions by February, according to Forbes. I've heard

this statement several times: "The only promise I ever make is to not make promises or vows!"

So often we set goals that focus on physical change, spending less money, losing weight and

other personal attributes.

But what about spiritual change? How can we set goals that help us become more spiritually minded? Consider these suggestions:

► Remember that God put us on this earth to serve, not to be served.

► In your daily prayers, ask how you can grow spiritually and become the person God intended you to be.

► Include daily exercise. God planned for us to live a life of service to others, and a healthy body allows you to serve both God and others. Start with a brief walk, and then increase the distance each day. Praise God for the beauty He created.

► Spend more time reading God's Word. Know the Bible stories and how you can apply them to your life.

► Share these Bible stories with your children or grandchildren.

► Maintain a positive attitude.

No one enjoys being around a negative person. God wants His children to live happy lives.

► Make a list of how God has blessed your life. Thank Him for His goodness.

Verses to apply

As you study the Scriptures and have a daily devotion, use these verses as special inspiration.

1. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jer. 29:11).

2. We are reminded that giving thanks and praise to

Him is important. "Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; give thanks to Him and praise His name" (Ps. 100:4).

3. God's love for His children never fails. He is there to comfort us when we make mistakes. He will always love us. "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail" (Lam. 3:22).

4. When we are stressed, the Bible reminds us to turn to prayer and thanksgiving instead of worry and fear. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Phil. 4:6).

5. Jesus commands His followers to love God and others. Regardless of past relationships, start the year off with loving others. "A new command I give you: Love

one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34).

6. Life changes, but we know we serve an unchanging God. He is always consistent. Remember this as you go forward in the new year. "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17).

7. Remember to give your anxiety over to God. "Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:7).

Rethinking success

As you think of new beginnings, focus on the plans He has for us even in the joys and sorrows and during successful times and times of struggle. Keep Christ in the center of all you do, and hold everything in the name of Jesus.

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Photo courtesy of Luke Ramey

'We need each other'

BY TRACY RIGGS FRONTZ • TO THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

Fathers of special needs children connect, find encouragement at Base Camp retreat

Rising Above Ministries, based in Tennessee, sponsors a variety of events, including Base Camp, which is focused on helping dads of children with special needs recharge.

"Most dads (of children with special needs) live with some very big emotions," said Steve Chatman, vice president of ministry advancement and pastoral care at Rising Above Ministries. "They grieve the loss of the life they thought they were going to have with this child.

They worry about being able to protect their child and provide for their care. They feel guilty for sometimes wishing their life was different. They have anxiety when thinking about what will happen to their child if [the dad is] no longer around or able to care for them."

Chatman knows the support Rising Above can provide, as three of his five children have special needs. He received support from the ministry for almost 20 years before joining the team as a staff member.

Base Camp is named for

the concept of a place where a mountain climber can rest and refuel physically and mentally before moving forward.

God has a 'big plan'

"These dads need to have a safe place to connect with other dads and know that they are not alone," Chatman said. "They need to be encouraged, prayed for and reminded that God sees them and has a big plan for their life that includes all the challenges that come with being a dad (of children with special needs)."

Men want community, Chatman said. They want authenticity and practical tools and tips. They want information that can empower them, Chatman said.

This is where the Base Camp retreat comes in. It's a weekend filled with times to share, opportunities to learn new tips and encouragement as well as eating, playing sports and watching football together.

"It's a low-key, laid-back environment," he said. "You will not be forced to bare your soul or participate in anything that you don't want to. We don't make you circle up and hold hands or sing.

"It's intentionally designed to be a time to rest, laugh, connect and be encouraged."

Shannon Blosser, a West Virginia pastor and faith-based special needs advocate with Autism Inclusion Mission, agreed that community is important for these dads.

"I have often felt alone as a special needs parent. It is

a lonely journey," Blosser writes in the online post "Do Not Forget Special Needs Fathers."

"You spend most of your life ensuring that your child has the accommodations they need to live in a world that is often unaccepting of them. You do not have time for friends, community or hobbies you once enjoyed."

Not alone

Blosser suggests many fathers are walking the journey alone, not knowing where to turn for help, and could find themselves facing job performance issues, divorce or mental health concerns.

"We cannot do this on our own. We need each other," he writes.

Base Camp is one option for finding community. To learn more about the retreat and other resources for dads of children with special needs, visit risingaboveministries.org/base-camp or contact schatman@rising-aboveministries.org.

Practical ways to support dads of kids with special needs

► **Get to know them.** Take time over coffee or lunch to learn more about their family.

► **Ask** how the church can better accommodate them and how they might like to get involved.

► **Offer** marriage support as well as respite for

the parents. Next time you offer a marriage event, provide child care, especially for kids with disabilities.

► **Help** dads connect through a monthly gathering or other organized routine activity.

(Source: Steve Chapman)



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‘Churchianity’

By Rick Harrington
Baptist Churches of New England

First person: Jesus vs. the Church

There is a rumor going around that Jesus doesn’t much like the church. He is sort of annoyed with His bride, or outright disgusted by her. Some might even suggest a breakup. This perceived animosity has led people to the conclusion they can love Jesus and hate the church.

We have even come up with that new curse word, “churchianity.”

The idea is Christianity was about Christ, but churchianity has tainted it with the church. If you were really serious about Jesus, you wouldn’t be able to put up with church people.

Let’s let Jesus speak for himself on this topic.

Use of *ecclesia*

Before the Christian church even existed, Jesus spoke about it. He uses the word *ecclesia* (Gr. church) explicitly in two contexts: Matthew 16 and 18. Before we examine this, it is important to grasp how significant this is. This has even caused more liberal scholars to question whether these were later interpolations.

Matthew 16:13–20 is particularly important. At a key moment in His ministry, Jesus asks His disciples who people say He is. Some say a prophet, others Elijah, and still others John the Baptist back from the dead. Jesus turns the question on the disciples themselves: who do you say I am?

Simon Peter has a remarkable moment of clarity: “I say you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Jesus tells him that this insight was revealed by none other than God the Father.”

Jesus changed Simon’s name to Peter, and tells him upon this

“rock,” He will build his *ecclesia*. In context, this can mean nothing other than the people of God composed of His followers throughout the ages. He qualifies the church as that which the gates of hades will not prevail against. The church will advance throughout the world, opening wide hell’s gates everywhere it goes. Jesus gives the keys of the Kingdom to bind and loose on earth what has been bound or loosed in heaven. It is undoubtedly a climactic moment in the ministry of Jesus in which He reveals the whole purpose of His life, death and resurrection: for His church!

The second *ecclesia* passage is Matthew 18:15–20. Here Jesus spells out the responsibility of the church’s binding and loosing. If a brother sins against you, go show him his fault just between the two of you.

If there is no repentance, bring witnesses (the witnesses might also conclude that the accuser is mistaken). If there is still no repentance, bring it to the *ecclesia*. The church then acts as heaven’s emissary. If there is still no repentance, the individual is treated as a Gentile or tax collector, not meaning he or she is hated but rather not recognized as part of the Kingdom. Assumedly, if there is true repentance, the church declares his or her forgiveness.

It is in this context we get the familiar promise: “Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them” (Matt. 18:19–20). This unique presence of God with His people is reserved for the context of *ecclesia*.

Even this is too minimizing of



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Jesus’ love for and emphasis on the church.

Simply examining when Jesus uses the word *ecclesia* does not exhaust His teaching on the church. One could argue that His entire ministry was about the church: calling His disciples to be brothers, teaching them to love one another as servants, infusing passover with new eucharistic meaning, and commissioning His followers to baptize. These were all ways to prepare them for what was to come.

The Apostle Paul “persecuted the church of God” (1 Cor. 15:9) until one day the resurrected Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus and declared, “Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?” Paul likely never met Jesus before this. Yet, Jesus so identifies Himself with His church that to persecute the church is to persecute Jesus Himself. Jesus is united to His church.

The New Testament ends as it began, with Jesus building His *ec-*

clesia. The Book of Revelation as a whole is addressed to churches, “John, to the seven churches that are in Asia” (Rev. 1:4). These are not amorphous Christian gatherings, but local church assemblies in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. Local churches are not just the prelude to the Apocalypse, the entire Book is “for the churches” (Rev. 22:16).

Jesus loves His Bride

I love my wife. It is safe to say that if you don’t like my wife, we won’t be friends. I won’t hate you, but she is such a part of my life that I can’t imagine being close to someone who has no interest in her. Of course, you are much more likely to like her than me, but that is beside my point. The church is the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:32; Rev. 19:7). He loves her. He adores her in all her current imperfections. He would never abandon or forsake her.

The current trend of setting Jesus against the church says nothing about Jesus and a lot about the state of Christianity today.

It lacks biblical literacy.

It is theologically impoverished.

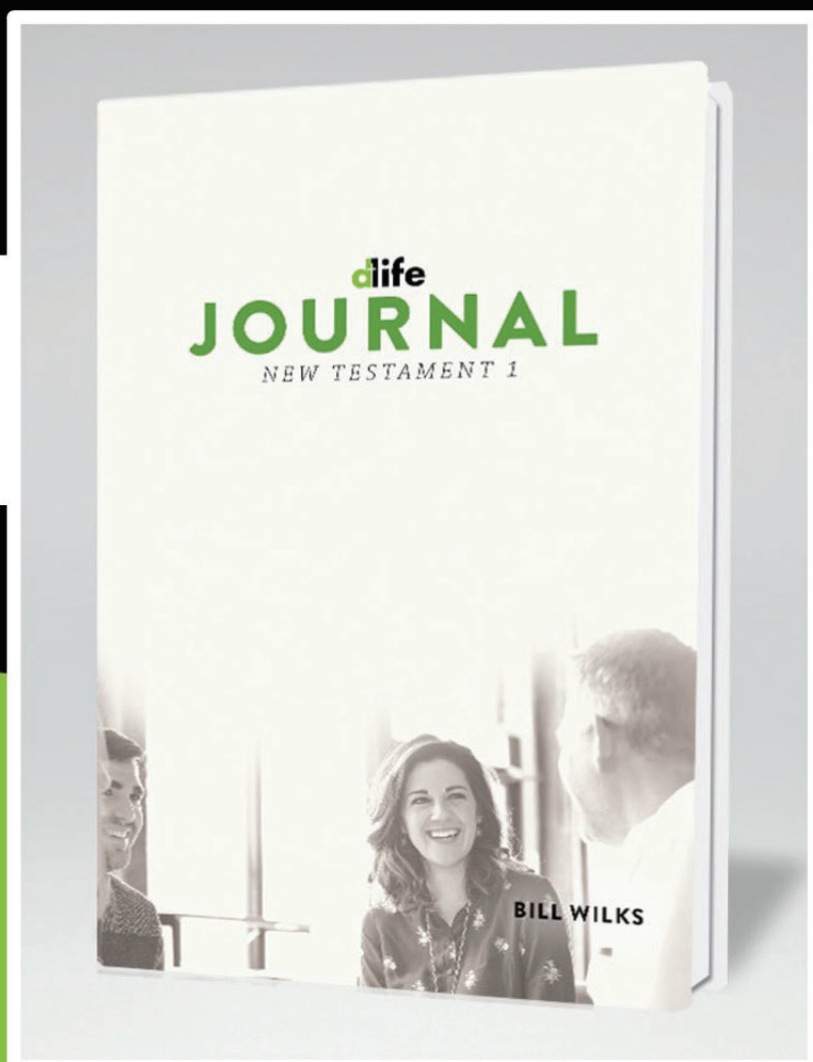
More than that, it lacks spiritual vitality and is devotionally impoverished.

There is no clear path to revival apart from Christ’s bride. Christian bestsellers, robust seminary enrollment, and megaconferences won’t get us there. The means of grace towards renewal runs through the church of Jesus.

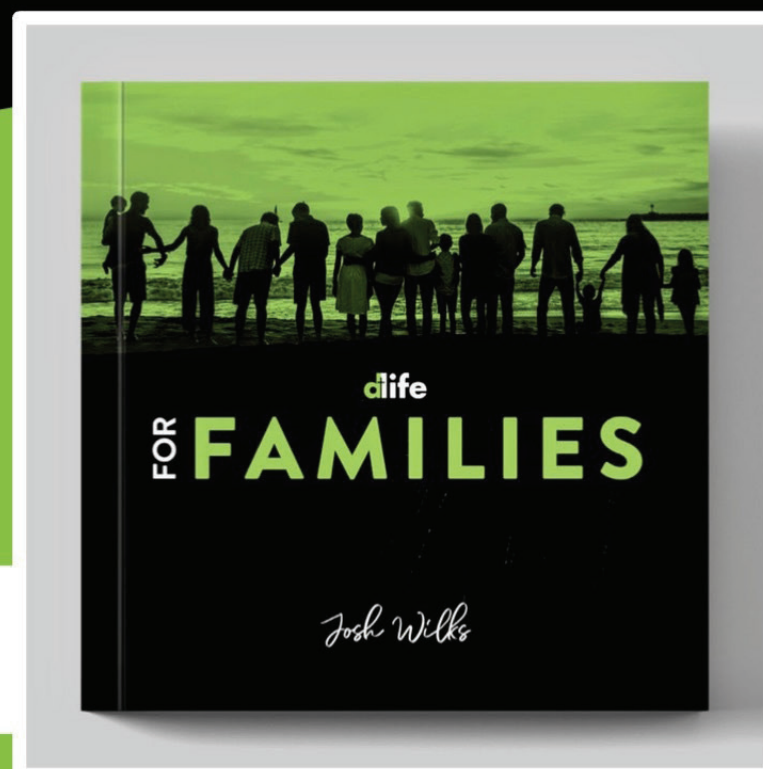
EDITOR’S NOTE — This story was written by Rick Harrington and originally published by Baptist Churches of New England.

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Driving message

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Motor Racing Outreach brings church, family ideals to the track

Founded by chaplain Max Helton in 1989, Motor Racing Outreach has been ministering to NASCAR drivers, teams and families for 35 years, providing community while sharing the message of Jesus Christ.

Completely donor supported, the ministry has become part of the heart and soul of the track and though it only involves four chaplains and four support staff people, what they have done over 35 years of ministry is well known and respected in the racing community.

MRO's mission is to "introduce people to Christ, to help them grow in their faith in Christlikeness and then to be a part of the body of Christ — to church, to get connected in Christian fellowship," said Billy Mauldin, who is currently serving his 25th year as MRO chaplain.

"We are constantly present and available and accessible to the communities that we serve," Mauldin continued. "We have the opportunity over time to build trust so that people are willing to open up and talk to us."

MRO arrives at tracks across the country on Thursdays or Fridays of each race weekend. Their first task is to set up the community center so drivers, families, crew chiefs and others have a place to go.

Availability

The chaplains then make themselves available. They plan times and content for the several chapel services conducted. They are present on the grid before each race to pray for drivers and their families. At the track, they also have men's



MRO Chaplain Nick Terry gives the message during chapel service on April 21, 2024, prior to the Geico 500 at Talladega Superspeedway

and women's Bible studies that continue in race shops offseason.

They baptize, officiate weddings, provide premarital counseling, do hospital visits and conduct memorial services.

Multiple opportunities

"Basically, anything that goes on in a local church, we're doing at the racetrack. We're doing it in the garage, media centers and one trailer and tent — just trying to do everything we can to provide opportunities for discipleship, mentoring and even evangelism to a degree.

"We just don't have a building. That's the only difference," Mauldin said.

Two of the ministries that Mauldin enjoys the most as an MRO chaplain are baptisms and weddings.

"One of the things we'll do at

Daytona for the summer/late fall race is baptisms for members of the community who would like to be baptized. It's sort of a culmination of the amount of time spent in the garages, preparing for the chapel services or Bible studies or whatever the case may be.

"There's just something special about baptizing somebody. And then when you do it in the ocean at Daytona at sunrise with the waves coming over you, it's one of the best moments," Mauldin said.

Anthony Alfredo, driver in NASCAR's Xfinity and Cup series, has been part of MRO's baptism services and a wedding ceremony, with both his wife and himself being baptized at Daytona and with an MRO chaplain officiating their recent wedding.

"So Motor Racing Outreach is actually super cool, just bringing

church to the track for us and doing services for the garage area. We all love what we do for a living, but at this level of competition on Sundays it makes it hard to go to church, especially if you have a family.

"They always make time for us in all the series for the teams, the drivers, the officials — whoever it is — to go to service and learn something and share the gospel. It's really important to me," Alfredo said.

Building community

Michael McDowell, a NASCAR driver since 2008, also loves MRO. He and his family participate in the Sunday chapel services, but what he loves most about MRO is how it gives his family community.

"Motor Racing Outreach is a way for me to stay plugged in but more importantly, it's for my family — hanging out, spending time and doing community together," he said.

Joking about those who say he has "like 400 kids," he continued, "I don't really have 400. I have five. But just them having a place to go and be at the racetrack is huge because our schedule is so intense and so tough."

Mauldin feels "fortunate and blessed" in what he does.

"That's why we go to the track each and every weekend — to help those who may not know Christ come to know Him and those who do know Christ to grow in their faith. Also, it's to create Christian community, whether it's at the track or back home at the race shops."

To learn more about MRO, go to motorracingoutreach.com.

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MEDIA REVIEWS

By Karen L. Willoughby
The Alabama Baptist

‘... to the Blessing Field’ a tale of 2 nations, their peoples

From the Killing Fields to the Blessing Field” taught me what I didn’t learn during the angst-driven years of that ugly war. The recently released book tells of the daily bombing runs to Cambodia by the U.S. from 1969 to 1973, with 115,000 bombing sites in all.

The American bombers were ferreting out the North Vietnamese hidey-holes.

I never knew that. I only vaguely knew years later that Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge massacred the more than 2 million Cambodian people who didn’t starve from 1975 through 1979, and I knew that because of a 1984 film called “The Killing Fields.”

The back pages of the book contain a chronology of Cambodia’s history from 1950 to 1999, developed by Yale University’s Genocide Studies Program.

See the front 271 pages for a recounting of the love story of Seang Yiv, Vijila Prom and God.

‘God made me fast’

Yiv’s was an idyllic childhood. He lived in a home filled with love, though not much else most Americans would find essential.

It was a quiet place that the Mekong River flooded each year,



VIJILA PROM (left) and SEANG YIV

Photo courtesy of Vijila Prom and Seang Yiv

delighting a boy who could safely swim with water at a chest-high-to-a-boy height while under his house.

“God made me fast,” Yiv writes. He was fast at math.

His skill with numbers led to a graduate school scholarship in France in 1972 and later to becoming an internationally known research scientist with expertise in both petroleum and pharmaceutical industries.

During that time, he also became a Christian, a pastor, a church planter and a leader of Cambodian Southern Baptists in the U.S. Yiv writes all this in his 302-page book, “From the Killing Fields to the Blessing Field.”

The book also includes the story of the woman who would become his wife, Vijila Irene Prom, the city-bred daughter of a judge.

She was three years away from high school graduation when Yiv left for France in 1972, but they didn’t know each other then.

Two months before she was to graduate, the capital city she lived

in was overthrown by Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge.

That very day — April 17, 1975 — all the nearly 2 million residents of Phnom Penh, which had a swollen population due to people who had left the countryside because of the American bombing, were forced to leave the city with little more than what they could carry on their backs or bicycles.

Finding rest

Prom writes in the book of the harrowing challenges she and her formerly wealthy family faced during the first 3½ months under the Khmer Rouge rule.

She and her sister devised a way to kill themselves if they caught the soldiers’ unwanted attention. The following 18 months were miserable as the 18-member family spent the time escaping to France via Vietnam, Laos and back to Vietnam.

The book also recounts the couple’s salvation stories and how their complementary skills helped them plant and grow churches in Pennsylvania, Minnesota and California.

Land in Georgia

Their cross-country travels included God-directed “buying low and selling high” their homes, which led in time to their \$100,000 purchase of a 75-acre parcel of land in Georgia, which they parlayed into a 7-acre “blessing field” worth \$3.5 million or more, today owned by the Cambodian Southern Baptist Fellowship of which Yiv is chair.

The Blessing Field — with its two spacious buildings, gazebos, water fountains and a figure-eight pond fed by a creek — provides a haven of rest and serenity for those who visit.

Future plans include a three-wing museum to showcase Cambodia, especially its Christian past, present and people.

“From the Killing Fields to the Blessing Field” is an easy though powerful read.

It is laced throughout with references to God’s activity among His people, such as the biblical meaning behind ancient Chinese lettering.

The book’s cover, which gives the sense of an ancient silk tapestry, is by Raksa Yin, an Asian Christian graphic artist.

The book was copyedited by JoEllen Claypool, a pastor’s wife in Idaho with a ministry as a book coach.

EDITOR’S NOTE

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