

The Alabama Baptist



Photo courtesy of Chris Mills
Royal Ambassadors at FBC Montgomery engage in the God at Work curriculum. They served as a pilot program for the curriculum in fall 2024.

‘God at Work’

Four-week study for kids brings Cooperative Program to life for next generation

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Years ago, Belinda Stroud began to have a burden.

“I kept thinking about how the next generation doesn’t understand the Cooperative Program,” said Stroud, a children’s ministry specialist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. “I just wanted to educate

them, and I felt like by educating children we could also educate their parents.”

The result was God at Work, a four-week study for kids that brings the CP to life. It explores the way the CP — Southern Baptists’ giving channel to support missions efforts together — reaches people in Alabama, in America and around the world.

“We really wanted to show how

it does impact right where we are, but it’s impacting far away as well,” Stroud said.

CP’s 100th anniversary

The timing is perfect — the CP celebrated its 100th anniversary May 13.

“We really are better together,” she said. “We wanted to make sure we knew God called all of us to the Great Commission, to be missionar-

ies right where we are, all ages.”

The study can be plugged in and used in a number of ways.

Chris Mills, student missions mobilizer for SBOM and Royal Ambassadors leader at First Baptist Church Montgomery, said, “It’s adaptable and provides a big picture of the impact CP makes here in our state and across the globe.”

To learn more and download the study, visit kidzlinkal.org/resources.

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Beeson Divinity School — Who Will You Become?

Dauphin Way update

Historic Mobile-area church selling property, relocating

Staff members of Dauphin Way Baptist Church in Mobile announced May 6 the congregation’s decision to sell the current property and relocate.

“God is on the move, and so is Dauphin Way Baptist Church,” staff members shared in a press release to The Alabama Baptist.

While the historic church “continues to have an unprecedented ministry to the city of Mobile, the state of Alabama and with various missions [efforts] throughout the United States and the foreign missions field ... the church has experienced a decline in membership,” staff members explained.

The city of Mobile has experienced growth, however, and because the church desires to reach the community with the gospel ... “we needed to be able to do whatever it took to further the mission of Christ.”

Pastor Lee Merck, who came to Dauphin Way in February 2024 after serving as Montana’s lead church planting catalyst with the North American Mission Board, focused immediately on next steps.

“He immediately led the church to focus on prayer and began seeking God for revitalization,” church staff shared, adding that the renewed effort at growth “led to some surprising conclusions.”

Merck said, “As the Lord revealed Himself to our church, we became



TAB file photo

burdened about the potential of using our location and buildings as a Kingdom asset to further God’s work and bring Him glory.”

After months of prayer and walking through a discovery process, the decision to relocate was made even as church members and staff continue working through refining and discerning its next ministry focus.

‘Can’t wait to see’

“We have an amazing church,” Merck said. “I could not ask for a greater group of people to work with in relocating and replanting Dauphin Way Baptist Church.

“As a former church planter, I

can tell you that we are in for some amazing days. I can’t wait to see what God is going to do. I believe many others will desire to be a part of a work like this.”

Staff confirmed at press time no buyer nor a confirmed relocation spot has been determined yet, but that the processes are all about to get underway for next steps.

“We praise God for His blessings, for His faithful direction, and His provisions,” Merck said.

“It’s a new day at Dauphin Way. This is no longer just a hopeful expression. God is making it a reality, and it is evident that He has a great plan for our future.” (TAB Media)

Southern Christian Writers Conference slated for June 7

The annual Southern Christian Writers Conference will be held June 6–7 at The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham.

“Our primary goal is to provide quality information and encouragement for writers who feel called by God,” SCWC coordinator Cheryl Wray said. “Writers of all levels are welcome, and we pray they’ll feel equipped and inspired by the time the weekend is over to pursue their writing dreams.”

More than 20 workshops on a variety of writing genres and topics will be offered. Topics covered include everything from writing

romance to writing personal essays, from understanding AI to building an author platform.

Find a full list of workshop topics and leader bios at southernchristianwriters.blogspot.com.

Keynote speakers

This year’s keynote speakers are T.I. Lowe and Caris Snider.

Lowe is the author of more than 20 novels and won the Christy Award for contemporary romance and Book of the Year in 2024 for “Indigo Isle.”

Snider is the author of devotional books and guides for Christians of all ages. Her keynote presentation

is titled “Anxious for Nothing,” and she’ll also present a workshop on writing devotional books.

Wray said registration is easy and affordable; those interested in attending the SCWC may email Wray at scwritersconference@gmail.com with questions or to sign up. More than 150 participants are expected.

The Church at Brook Hills is located at 3145 Brook Highland Parkway just off Highway 280 in Birmingham. Doors open Fri., June 6 at 11:30 a.m.; the conference concludes Sat., June 7 at 4 p.m.

TAB Media Group is an SCWC partner. (The Alabama Baptist)

The Alabama Baptist

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

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JENNIFER DAVIS RASH EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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



The crossword puzzle
can be found on page 11.



GUEST EDITORIAL

for this week's issue of The Alabama Baptist

By Annette Brown, recently retired guest services coordinator

Always and forever close to this grateful Smother's heart

It was a God thing! I needed a job, and Jennifer needed a guest services coordinator. Just imagine a job where I would be able to greet and mingle with guests and make them feel at home. I was in heaven. This job had me written all over it.

I began this happy journey in September 2019. From the first day I walked into that house at TAB, it became a home. A loving, caring home. A home full of grace.

The people immediately became my family, and since I was old enough to be several of the young ladies' grandmother, I eventually became a "smother" to many of them. I'd tell them things like, "don't stay out too late," "call me when you get home" and "be safe driving home."

Oh, the fun we had while putting out two Baptist papers! I've played Beth Moore and been a Pac-Man character. Our retreats were legendary — from writing and singing jingles and rapping competitions to playing physi-

cal games like Nerf wars with legit Nerf guns, takeaway and pickleball. The competition was intense and always fun.

We also loved each other like a family. We prayed for each other and our individual families. And like real families, we lost people close to us and celebrated the birth of babies and grandbabies.

But a home like this only exists when you have a leader who loves and cares for her employees. And Jennifer Rash is the one who makes The Alabama Baptist such a loving home.

Jennifer is a servant-leader who relies on God's power and wisdom. She encourages those under her leadership to share their faith, and there were many a day we would have an impromptu Bible study or a time to share our life stories and how God had worked in our lives.

But just as God led me to TAB, He recently opened up a new opportunity for me to retire and start a new journey being

a full-time grandmother to our three grandchildren Liam, Millie and Walker.

I absolutely loved every minute and season of my time in that house and will hold this family close to my heart forever. I'm so grateful to our Lord for leading me and allowing me to attach my heart to The Alabama Baptist.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Annette is absolutely correct in describing how we found her — definitely all God, and He gave us the most amazing gift with her. She cared deeply, encouraged us continuously, kept us smiling and slung Jesus all over us. She is loved. —Jennifer Davis Rash



Photo courtesy of Annette Brown
Annette Brown (right) and Susan Stevens, director of advertising, dress up as Pac-Man characters for TAB's 2019 Fall Fun Day.

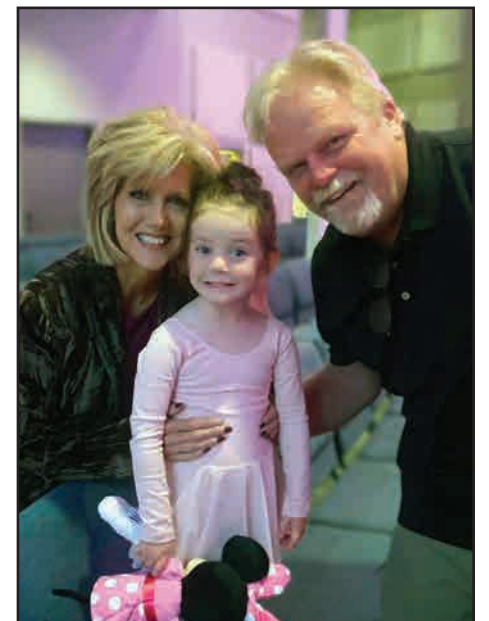


Photo courtesy of Annette Brown
Annette and her husband, Barry, plan to be at every dance recital for Millie (center), Little League game for Liam and all that is to come for Walker.



Photo courtesy of Annette Brown
Since her retirement from The Alabama Baptist and TAB Media Group as guest services coordinator, Annette Brown is living her best life (and keeping super busy) as a full-time grandmother to Liam (center), Millie (right) and Walker.

Your Voice



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

Biblical community, are you called to it?

By George Yates

Church health strategist

Biblical community, are you called to it? Where do you find it? If you consider yourself a Bible-believing, gospel-trusting follower of Jesus Christ, then you must consider yourself a Christian, right? If these things are true of you and you are a genuine Christian, then you are called to biblical community. But what is biblical community?

The concept of biblical community is predominant to the Christian life. Biblical community is foundational in the teachings of Jesus Christ and all the writers of the New Testament. In the book of Acts we see the early church — the first Christian believers — in biblical community.

In Acts 1, the believers are in the upper room together for days, praying, living in biblical community. In Acts 2, we read in verses 42–47 of biblical community. We see it in

chapters 3 and 4 and again in chapter 6, a need is met while living in biblical community.

But what is the reality of necessity of biblical community today? Biblical community provides a nurturing environment for spiritual growth — discipleship.

It is through shared worship, Bible study and fellowship that believers are encouraged in their own faith journey and edify others in theirs.

Strength and support

In addition to encouragement, through biblical community we find strength and support for living out our God-given purpose daily. God has built within us a desire for relationships. This is where we obtain support, through our relationships. For the believer, biblical community is the only place you will ever, in this life, find that needed support.

So where do you find biblical community? In the church? Yes, in

a sense, but no matter the size of a worship service, none can fill the innate desire God has placed in your heart. True fulfillment of biblical community is only found in relationships fostered in small groups. This is why small group Bible study classes are so imperative to biblical community.

Yet many churches, many Bible study classes, many Sunday Schools, have forgotten or strayed away from biblical community. We settle for an hour together, once a week, for Bible study. While Bible study is a huge, intricate part of growing as a disciple, it is not biblical community.

In Acts 2:42–47, we find that biblical community extended beyond Bible teaching. They encouraged, supported and cared for one another's needs. They were ministering to one another. Also, they were sharing with others, outsiders; therefore, their numbers were growing daily, which encouraged every believer even more. They were also praising God and worshipping together. Biblical community is a complete seven-days-a-week lifestyle.

How is your biblical community? Are you too busy? You need biblical community. As a believer, God has called you to biblical community. Biblical community is still as critical today as was the early church.

What will you do today to begin praying and studying about biblical community and engaging in a small group that truly promotes and lives in biblical community?

God is a very specific God. There is no “it doesn’t matter” in the Bible, rather very miniscule details are given repeatedly throughout Scripture. “It is a lie of the enemy that the little things don’t matter,” said author **Christy Wright**. “He knows the number of stars in the sky and the hairs on your head. This is a God who cares about the details, every detail.”

Rest is one of the most instructed and commanded actions in Scripture but often one of the most ignored. You are meant to burn brightly, not burn out.

Faith & Fandom:
“Finding God in Geek Culture” on Facebook

God’s provision (for the widow and her sons in 2 Kings 4) prevents the injustice of slavery, and it enables a family to show God’s care to its community. The blessings aren’t for the recipients to keep.

James Strange, Bible Studies for Life Sunday School lesson for May 4

Praise God that He wastes not a thing in our lives! Pain is the wrapping and ribbon that encompasses the package of joy, wisdom and contentment.

Nik Ripken Ministries
on Facebook

Letters to the Editor

I was excited to read the article in the March 20 edition about the WMU group at Lakewood Baptist Church in the Birmingham area.

My late mother loved her WMU at Lakewood (in the late 1990s and early 2000s).

I’m so happy to learn the ladies in the church started it up again.

Also, I love reading The Alabama Baptist.

Kay Birdwell, Trussville

Thank you for the article that shares the heart and soul of our desire to help churches through CASH (see page 13).

Chris Crain, BMBA

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

OPINION

“The deeper healing that comes from the Lord Jesus Christ is infinitely more valuable to me than physical healing.”

JONI EARECKSON TADA

on Facebook

“People ask me all the time, why am I a Southern Baptist?” said **Stan Jenkins**, a pastor from Henderson, North Carolina, who brought half a dozen church members to volunteer in Burnsville recently. “Here’s the reason I always give: I don’t know any other denomination that does missions work like we do. I mean, we take missions work seriously.”

“It offers the opportunity to just be able to show love to people who might not know Christ. ... I’ve seen a lot of people affected by this,” said **Luis Correa**, a sophomore criminal justice major, on the prayer tent at East Texas Baptist University. “I just pray that more people continue to come throughout the day and hopefully just be able to feel the sense ... that God wants your heart, and hopefully this prayer tent can help people come to know Christ or restore their relationship with Him.”

“We are called to trust in Jesus’ authority because of His identity,” said **Patrick Schreiner**, speaking from Mark 12:13–37. “We trust Him not only because He gives light but because He Himself is light.” Schreiner serves as the associate professor of New Testament and biblical theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri.

“Once we lose a possessional attitude and realize we are just servants for Christ, then where God leads us to next is where we

will be the church together,” said Deerfoot Baptist minister of music **Ricky Buckner** on letting go of the church’s old property and beginning again in a new location.

“Every church has its own personality and culture, and wise leaders respond to this culture in appropriate ways,” said **Buddy Champion**, pastor of First Baptist Church Trussville. “Our supreme example is Christ, the Good Shepherd, who cares for His sheep. We must love the people first — protect and nourish them — and then they will follow us.” Champion noted the pastor-shepherd has “four major jobs” — to provide, protect, guide and correct.

To make us His, He became one of us.

In Jesus, God does not stand far off, demanding that we bridge the gap — He Himself bridges it. The Son assumes our humanity,

bearing our frailty, standing in our place as both High Priest and Sacrifice (Heb. 8:6, 9:14). He mediates not from a distance, but from within our very existence, lifting us into His own life. Our salvation is not a transaction but a participation in the Son’s perfect communion with the Father.

Andy Brown

Pastor, FBC Starkville
on Facebook

“Faith believes in spite of the circumstances and acts in spite of the consequences.” — Adrian Rogers

Jason Keith Allen

@jasonkeithallen on X

“With a minority of Americans believing that the God of the Bible is real and reliable and an even smaller number reading the Bible during a typical month, it’s no wonder there is such moral turbulence in our culture,” said veteran researcher and author **George Bar-**

na. “Everyone becomes his or her own arbiter of truth, and without absolutes, there is little sense that there is a ‘right’ answer to discover, or to have ideas about how to figure it out if there were such a definitive reality.”

“Southern Baptists love to focus on evangelism, and these ACP numbers back that up,” said **Jeff Iorg**, president and CEO of the SBC Executive Committee, responding to the latest Annual Church Profile report, which featured a mixed bag of progress and challenges, including a decrease in membership for the 18th consecutive year. “We rejoice that God is using Southern Baptist churches to reach people with the gospel. We celebrate the upward trends in baptisms that we haven’t seen in the past 30 years. These ACP results help us see that God is at work among Southern Baptists.”

Without a trace

Have you ever heard about a person who disappeared without a trace?

This happened to a man named Enoch, found in the genealogy of Adam recorded in 1 Chronicles 1:3. There are three scenes from the life of Enoch recorded in Scripture.

First, there is the transformation of Enoch. After Methuselah was born, Enoch was transformed from sinner to saint at age 65 (Gen. 5:21). It was at that time he began to believe on the Lord.

Transmission

Second, there is the transmission of Enoch. Jude 1:14a reads, “Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also.” Hannah Hurnard explains, “In Christ Jesus we are called to be God’s transmitters, to be completely separated from all thoughts which are contrary to his thinking, so that we may transmit his thoughts to others.”

Third, there is the translation of Enoch. Hebrews 11:5a reads, “By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, and was not found, because God had taken him.” Note Enoch’s commendation by God in Hebrews 11:5b–6 as a man with a testimony.

Pagans often referred to appeasing the gods, but Enoch pleased God and you can too. Remember the only way to please God is to live by faith.

Franklin L. Kirksey
Robertsdale



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3 stories you should know



Deerfoot Baptist sells property, relocates

Photo by Chris Basinger/Trussville Tribune

A signature cross in Trussville remains on the property developed by Deerfoot Baptist Church, founded in 1994 as a merger between 85th Street Baptist Church in East Lake and Mount Olive Baptist Church in Trussville. The Deerfoot Baptist congregation met in this location from April 1998 to April 2025. Deerfoot Church of Christ purchased the building and property in March. Deerfoot Baptist relocated a few miles away to a rental property. Its first Sunday there was May 4. Read the full story at tabonline.org.

Former BSC students graduate at Samford

Sixty-three former Birmingham-Southern College students have graduated from Samford University after transferring last year due to BSC's closure in May 2024.

Samford made special accommodations, including credit transfers and matching financial aid, to support more than 150 BSC students.

On April 29, some of the soon-to-be graduates returned to their old campus for the traditional ringing of the senior bell. Samford President Beck A. Taylor praised their resilience and emphasized the university's commitment to helping them succeed.

The transfer initiative was part of a broader teach-out agreement aimed at ensuring academic continuity and support. (Samford University)

Gospel singer Squire Parsons dies at 77

Renowned southern gospel singer and songwriter Squire Parsons Jr. died May 5 at 77. Known for his rich baritone voice, his career spanned over five decades. He began singing professionally in 1969 with the Calvarymen Quartet and gained prominence as the baritone for The Kingsmen.



PARSONS

In 1979, he launched a successful solo ministry. Parsons wrote several beloved gospel songs, including the award-winning "Sweet Beulah Land." He also was nominated for a Dove Award and was inducted into both the Southern Gospel Music and Gospel Music Association Halls of Fame. (The Baptist Paper)

Persecuted church

Many lives lost in targeted attacks against Christians in Nigeria

ABUJA, Nigeria — The relentless onslaught against Christians in Nigeria has claimed as many as 100 lives in the past few weeks.

Nigeria is No. 7 on Open Doors' 2025 World Watch List of the 50 places most difficult to be a Christian. For several years, Nigeria has led the world in the number of Christians killed for their faith or kidnapped.

The following are recent reports from Christian Daily International-Morning Star News:

► Dozens of Christians were slain in Nigeria's Benue state between March 28 and April 5 by Muslim Fulani herdsmen.

Among the targeted villages were Otobi and Otukpo town.

► Fifty-one Christians were killed in Nigeria's Plateau state between April 8 and April 14, when Muslim Fulani herdsmen raided the villages of Zikke, Zogu, Zashi of Kperie, Kwall and Twin Hill. More than 40 were slain in Zikke, a source said.

► Muslim Fulani herdsmen killed nine Christians in Plateau state between March 13 and April 7. The attacks occurred in the villages of Hwrra, Hukke, Dundu, Yhwiba and Twin Hill.

Co-worker alleges blasphemy, slashes believer's throat

LAHORE, Pakistan — A Christian accused of touching a "sacred" text with "unclean hands" was attacked by a co-worker, who slashed the Christian's throat.

Christian Daily International-Morning Star

News reports that Waqas Masih was attacked March 21 at Subhan Allah Paper Mills in the Sharaqpur area of Pakistan's Punjab province.

Members of management took the man to a hospital and detained the assailant until police arrived, according to Masih's father.

Masih and his father later alleged the blasphemy allegations and attack were motivated by his refusal to convert to Islam. Recently, Pakistan has seen a significant spike in the number of false accusations of blasphemy, the news outlet states.

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



commons.wikimedia.org

OBITUARIES

JOHN ELLIOTT MORGAN II

John Elliott Morgan II, pastor of Collinsville Baptist Church since 1977, died May 1. He was 77. Morgan grew up in Nashville, Tennessee, and served as president of the Baptist Student Union of Tennessee Technological University, Cookeville, while studying for his bachelor's degree in chemical engineering.

In 1970, he began his career as a foreman at U.S. Steel, Birmingham, and three years later began serving out his call to Christian ministry. He earned his master of divinity and his doctor of ministry degrees from Southern Seminary.

In addition to serving as pastor, Morgan was active in the community. He coached numerous youth sports teams and for more than 30 years served as Collinsville High School basketball and football bookkeeper and statistician. He also planned and led community events with the Collinsville Ministerial Association.

Morgan is survived by his high school sweetheart and wife of 54 years, Gloria; four sons; and seven grandchildren.



MORGAN

Alabama news

AUTAUGA ASSOCIATION

► **Calvary Baptist Church, Prattville**, is having a three-day VBS May 30, 6–8 p.m.; May 31, 9 a.m.–2 p.m.; and June 1, 9:45 a.m.–noon for preschool through sixth grade and special needs children. Preregistration is available at calvary-baptistprattville.org or call 334-365-5213 or 334-546-5755. Dave Burns is pastor.

BIBB ASSOCIATION

► **Braehead Lucile Baptist Church**, West Blocton, will host the Chuck Wagon Gang June 12 at 7 p.m. For more information call 205-516-5134. Ed Perry is music minister.

FRANKLIN ASSOCIATION

► **Ted Vafeas** is the new director of missions/AMS of **Franklin Baptist Association**. He has been serving as interim since last October and was recently elected by unanimous vote to become director. He earned a bachelor's degree from the University of North Alabama and attended New Orleans Seminary. Vafeas has served churches in Alabama and Mississippi throughout his ministry and also has served as a chaplain. Since retiring in 2010 as pastor of Highland Park Baptist Church, Muscle Shoals (now Redemption

Shoals), he has served as interim pastor of several churches. He and his wife, Judy, have been married 56 years and have two adult children and three grandchildren.

PICKENS ASSOCIATION

► **Cross Roads Baptist Church, Carrollton**, is celebrating its 175th anniversary June 1 at 10 a.m. with lunch to follow. Friends, former members and staff are invited. Joe Fondren is pastor.

TALLAPOOSA ASSOCIATION

► **Eric Long** is the new pastor of **Rock Springs Baptist Church, Jacksons Gap**. He earned a bachelor's degree in chemistry and a doctor of pharmacy degree from Auburn University. Currently, he is enrolled in theology classes at Luther Rice Seminary, Stonecrest, Georgia. Long and his wife, Katie, who also is a pharmacist, have two daughters.



Photo courtesy of Eric Long



VAFEAS

ALABAMA NEWS ITEMS COMPILED BY DIANNA L. CAGLE AND DEBBIE CAMPBELL

Faith Moments

Senior saints: Temptations seniors face

Gary Miller, who serves with me in the evangelism and church revitalization office at the State Board of Missions, recently shared wisdom from Bob Russell, former pastor of Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky.

Russell observed that as we grow older, we may no longer struggle as much with the obvious sins of the flesh — but Satan still targets us with more subtle sins of the spirit.

Here are five temptations (in descending order) senior adults often face:

5. Spiritual retirement

The temptation to step back from church involvement after retirement is real. Satan whispers, “You’ve done your part; you can relax.” There’s no retire-

ment from following Christ. The cure? Stay engaged. Keep serving.

4. Inflexibility

Change is occurring in our world at warp speed. I get it. We don’t want our church to change; we clamor for normalcy. We must seek God in prayer — all change is not bad.

Russell shared a story about a church member who refused to install indoor plumbing. “It’s just not appropriate to do that sort of thing in the house,” this man said.

I don’t know about you, but I think indoor plumbing is appropriate and good! Likewise, some of the changes in church are not bad.

Remember, Jesus said, “You can’t put new wine into old wineskins.” May God grant us flexible hearts that accept new methodologies while remaining true to our unchanging theology.

3. Regret

Looking back, we all wish we had done things differently. But regret can paralyze us and steal today’s joy. As my friend Dorsey McDonald says, “There’s no future in the past.” Turn your failures over to Christ and move forward in grace.

2. Critical spirit

It’s easy to become negative as we get older. We grow impatient and sometimes voice our frustrations. But Philippians 4:8 challenges us to dwell on what is noble, right and praiseworthy. If we can’t say something encouraging, maybe it’s time to “bite our tongue” and pray.

1. Worry

This temptation was the top struggle Russell heard from seniors — and I can relate. The older we

get, the more we tend to fret. Jesus

reminds us in Matthew 6:25–34 that the Father knows our needs and will care for us. If you are struggling with worry, read and meditate on Matthew 6. Admittedly, I read this passage frequently.

God’s not done with you. If you’re breathing, you’re still in the battle. Don’t let age become an excuse — let it become a platform.

My dad told me shortly before he passed away, “Son, your latter days can be your greatest days.” The same advice is true for you.

Let’s overcome these senior temptations and finish our race well for the glory of Christ!

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



‘FIRMLY COMMITTED’

Smith officially inaugurated as 6th president of UM, reaffirms vision ‘for Christ and His Kingdom’

Charles W. Smith Jr. was formally inaugurated May 1 as the 6th president of the University of Mobile during a ceremony at nearby Redemption Church.

Jason Allen, president of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, delivered the keynote address and spoke on Proverbs 9:10, the foundational Scripture for UM: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,

and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” The first half of the Scripture is on the university’s official seal, along with the phrase “For Christ & His Kingdom.”

Smith has served as president of UM since May 6, 2024. Previously, he served with Allen in a variety of senior leadership roles at Midwestern Seminary and Spurgeon College.

In his presidential address based on John 6, Smith warned of the dangers facing Christian institutions that drift from their spiritual foundations.

“There is no shortage of once-faithful Christian universities who have lost their way,” he said, noting UM remains firmly committed to Jesus Christ as the foundation of all true knowledge and the hope of every generation.

Under Smith’s leadership, the renewed vision of UM is to multiply Kingdom leaders who embrace their callings and live out the Great Commission for the glory of God and the good of the world.

“Our prayers and plans for the future are bold,” Smith said, pointing to a growing list of initiatives aimed at strengthening the university — expanding academic programs, enhancing student life, increasing online offerings, launching workforce development and many other strategies.

Initiatives build off identity

While these initiatives are important and inspiring, they are not the university’s identity, he said. Rather, they are the result of the university’s identity in Christ.

Ed Litton, pastor of Redemption Church in Saraland, prays for Charles Smith, his wife, Ashley, and three daughters — Ellie, Annie and Susie.



UM photo



UM photo

Charles W. Smith Jr. gives the presidential address at his inaugural celebration May 1. He was formally inaugurated as the 6th president of the University of Mobile at Redemption Church in Saraland. He has served as president of UM since May 6, 2024.

During the inaugural ceremony, Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, offered a prayer and Scripture reading of Colossians 1:15–18, affirming the strong partnership between UM and Alabama Baptists.

Also, the university’s third president Mark R. Foley and former first

lady Marilyn Foley, and UM’s fifth president Lonnie A. Burnett and former first lady Lynne Burnett, were honored during the ceremony.

Other participants included Samuel W. “Dub” Oliver, president of Union University in Jackson, Tennessee; Fred Wilson, chair of the UM presidential search committee that

selected Smith; Ben Stubblefield, pastor of Spring Hill Baptist Church in Mobile; Alan Floyd, pastor of Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile and a UM alumnus; Ed Litton, pastor of Redemption Church (with campuses in Saraland and Mobile); Kathy Litton, a UM trustee; Jamie Dew, president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary; Mary Van Brunt, president of Spring Hill College in Mobile; Charles Guest, vice provost of the University of South Alabama; and Mobile Mayor Sandy Stimpson.

Students Kenneth Brandon and Courtney Sides represented the student body and expressed hope and confidence in the university’s new chapter under Smith’s leadership.

The university choir and orchestra led the audience in hymns and songs of praise throughout the two-hour program.

Roger Breland, retiring executive director of UM’s Alabama School of the Arts and founder of TRUTH, one of the first successful contemporary Christian touring and recording groups, gave the benediction.

Smith formally accepted the charge of the presidency during the

investiture portion of the ceremony. Trustee Terry Harbin presented the Presidential Medallion, a symbol of leadership and responsibility, while board chair Ron Moore presented the Presidential Bible, underscoring UM’s foundation in Scripture. (UM)



UM photo

The inaugural celebration concludes later in the evening with fireworks and Spring Spectacular, an outdoor concert held on the University of Mobile’s Great Commission Lawn.

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Robert Smith Jr.



UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Happy 100th Birthday, Cooperative Program!

This is the week we celebrate the birth of the Cooperative Program! On May 13, 1925, the Cooperative Program was adopted during the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Memphis, Tennessee.

To help your church learn more about the Cooperative Program during this year of celebration, several new resources are now available at AlabamaCP.org/CP100, including

- ▶ Downloadable CP Bulletin Inserts you can print for your church.
- ▶ Link to the 2025 CP Desk Prayer Calendar.
- ▶ Weekly CP Slides for you to use in your church's announcement loop or offertory time.
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AlabamaCP.org/CP100

As we celebrate this milestone throughout the year, consider choosing a Sunday to specifically promote the Cooperative Program in a Sunday service. To download these and other resources, visit AlabamaCP.org/CP100. Let's join together to make this an anniversary year to remember!



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



Financial and retirement workshops

Mark your calendar now for a series of Church Financial Issues Check-Ups and Preparing for Retirement Workshops coming up in July!

Where and when:

- ▶ July 17 at the SBOM in Prattville.
- ▶ July 24 at Birmingham Metro Baptist Association.
- ▶ July 31 at Madison Baptist Association.

On each of these dates:

From 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., the Financial Issues Check-Up will focus on new tax and retirement legislation affecting the church; policies about designated giving and other financial policies needed; and how a church could get in trouble with the IRS, including the use of your church facilities.

Then from 1 to 4 p.m., the

Preparing for Retirement Workshop will help those ministers and employees in their 50s and 60s begin to consider topics such as retirement income, Social Security income and Medicare basics.

You can attend either or both on any of the dates. For more information, visit alsbom.org/events and search by the date.

WORD search

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

Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied."

1 SAMUEL 17:45

CHRISTIAN Crossword



UPCOMING EVENTS
sponsored by the State Board of Missions

ACROSS

1. Charity suffereth long, and is _____. (1 Cor. 13:4)
5. They have spread a _____ by the wayside. (Ps. 140:5)
7. Gather the wheat into my _____. (Matt. 13:30)
11. A thought or concept.
12. I will set him _____ high. (Ps. 91:14)
13. Having to do with life science. (prefix)
14. Compass direction.
15. Glory to God in _____ highest. (Lk. 2:14)
16. How long shall I _____ with you? (Mark 9:19)
18. British word for bathroom.
19. Some would even _____ to die. (Rom. 5:7)
21. _____, _____, C.
22. _____, and it shall be given you. (Matt. 7:7)
24. _____, Father. (Mark 14:36)
27. And did all _____ the same spiritual meat. (1 Cor. 10:3)
29. Behold, the _____ wept. (Ex. 2:6)
30. And his _____ went throughout all Syria. (Matt. 4:24)
33. Decimeter. (abbr.)
35. Calls for someone in a public place.
36. Far _____ all principality, and power. (Eph. 1:21)
38. The veil of the temple was _____ in twain. (Matt. 27:51)
40. Nancy. (abbr.)
41. Send _____ angel before thee. (Ex. 23:20)
42. _____ and walk? (Matt. 9:5)
44. Before Christ. (abbr.)
45. He is _____; yet is he clean. (Lev. 13:40)
49. Gets up in the morning.
50. All that handle the _____. (Ezek. 27:29)
52. Side away from the wind.
53. One of the Three



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- Stooges. _____ off, he ran. (Mark 5:6)
54. A type of deer.
 55. The father shall be divided against the _____. (Luke 12:53)
 56. Saint. (abbr.)
 57. But also _____ die at Jerusalem. (Acts 21:13)
 58. His _____ was cleansed. (Matt. 8:3)

DOWN

1. Boaz was of the _____ of Elimelech.
2. "I've got a great _____!"
3. Compass direction.
4. Sweet fruit grown on palm trees.
5. Christmas.
6. Inhabitants of _____ dor. (Josh. 17:11)
8. No man ... was _____ to open the book. (Rev. 5:3)
9. City in Brazil.
10. About _____ ... there shone ... great light round about me. (Acts 22:6)
16. Find the _____ wrapped in swaddling clothes. (Luke 2:12)
17. One type of tide.
20. A type of vermin.
23. Kilobytes. (abbr.)
24. He is _____ also to save. (Heb. 7:25)
25. When he saw Jesus
26. So be it.
28. _____ I my brother's keeper? (Gen. 4:9)
31. Die in the flower of their _____. (1 Sam. 2:33)
32. Eastern Standard Time. (abbr.)
34. And _____ him that is high. (Ezek. 21:26)
36. Pay tithe of mint and _____ and cummin. (Matt. 23:23)
37. I have commanded my sanctified _____. (Isa. 13:3)
39. They ... went their ways, one to his _____. (plural; Matt. 22:5)
41. If I knew you were coming, I'd have baked _____. (2 Pet. 2:13)
43. They that count it pleasure to _____. (Isa. 64:2)
46. Who loveth God love his brother _____. (1 John 4:21)
47. Several popes sharing one name.
48. Lest ye _____ your God. (Josh. 24:27)
51. To knock on a door; form of music.

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Mix Worship Arts Camp: July 7-11 at Shocco Springs

Mix Worship Arts Camp is different from perhaps any other camp your child has experienced because it combines all the fun and games you'd expect at a summer camp with the goal of shaping the next generation of worshippers and worship leaders.

Campers will learn how to worship God with their whole heart through art, music, drama and more, while discovering the truths of the Bible in creative and meaningful ways.

Another thing that sets it apart is that it's really three awesome camps in one as campers are grouped into grades 2-5 (called MIX), grade 6 (MIX6) and grades 7-12 (reMIX).

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



Don't wait until it's too late to sign up.

Get the next best price by May 22; regular price will be after May 22.

Register today by visiting mixworshipartscamp.org. Questions? Email April Brewer at abrewer@alsbom.org.

Super Summer Alabama: July 14-18

There's still time to sign up for Super Summer, July 14-18, at the University of Mobile.

Super Summer is a discipleship camp designed for Alabama students completing grades 7-12. Here, they'll explore God's Word, strengthen their faith, and learn what it means to be a Christian leader.

Students will be chal-

lenged to live out their faith and make a real impact.

Give your students the Super Summer experience and watch them thrive in an encouraging community of believers.

Camp pastor is Jamie Dew, president of New Orleans Baptist Theological

Seminary and Leavell College.

For more information, visit supersummer/ymlink.org.



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CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR

Bethel Baptist Church is prayerfully seeking a full-time senior pastor. Please forward resumé to: pastorsearch@bethelpgal.com or USPS to: P.O. Box 127, Pleasant Grove, AL 35127.

LEAD PASTOR

First Baptist Church of Decherd, Tennessee, is seeking a full-time lead pastor. Access our church website at fbcdecherd.com for further information and resumé submittal.

PASTOR

Pintlala Baptist Church is seeking a full-time pastor. The candidate should be a self-starter, enthusiastic about the Word of God and excited for opportunity to bring new members to the church. Pintlala Baptist Church, which is located in the southwestern portion of Montgomery County, has a loving church family that is here to share the good news of Jesus Christ to serve our community (and beyond) in His love. We are genuine in our atmosphere and enjoy supporting one another. For more information, please go to: <https://pintlalabaptist.com/ministry-position-open>.

PASTOR

Elam Baptist Church is prayerfully seeking a full-time pastor whose life aligns with 1 Timothy 3:1-7, a heart for seeking the lost, and helping believers grow in their faith. Located in rural Clarke County community twelve miles from Thomasville, Alabama. Send inquires/resumés to: elambaptist.ap@gmail.com or mail 53 Elam Rd Thomasville, AL 36784. ATTN: Search Committee.

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

Fairview Baptist in Samson, Ala-

bama, is seeking a bivocational pastor. Please email resumé to: fairviewbaptist.samson.al@outlook.com or via USPS to: 3159 N State Highway 87, Samson, AL 36477.

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

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

PART-TIME WORSHIP LEADER

Centreville Baptist Church is seeking a part-time worship leader. He or she must be prayerfully committed, biblically sound and morally faithful. As worship leader, you will be asked to lead a blended form of worship which will include choir/praise team on Sunday morning. The church provides good financial support for its staff. We are located at 74 Court Square East in Centreville, just 30 miles from Tuscaloosa and 60 miles from Birmingham. Please email resumé to: centrevillebc@bellsouth.net.

PART-TIME WORSHIP LEADER

Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, West Blocton, is looking for a part-time worship leader. Please email mcbcwesbtocton@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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Photo courtesy of Toni Wall

This team makes up Birmingham Metro Baptist Association's Church Administration Services Help ministry.

CASH ministry offers help with church bookkeeping

By Leann Callaway
The Alabama Baptist

Desiring to help churches become effective and excellent stewards, the Birmingham Metro Baptist Association has created Church Administration Services Help — CASH for short.

Executive director Chris Crain explains that this program was “designed to serve churches and ministry partners with excellence and integrity.”

Accountability

Currently serving 36 churches and ministries, CASH provides support for accounts payable and receivable, payroll, financial reporting, charitable contributions and year-end filings.

“Every church retains full control of its spending authority,” Crain said. “We come alongside them to streamline the process, ensure accuracy, provide a full turnkey service and free them to focus on ministry.”

The ministry was born out of listening to the needs of pastors and churches, Crain said. CASH staff members understand clergy compensation and church financial administration “from the inside out.”

BMBA's Michael Ethridge serves as director of operations for CASH.

“Our goal is to help churches. We do everything except count their money, direct their spending or sign their checks,” Ethridge said.

“Everything” includes handling deposits, invoices and payments; processing payrolls, including taxes and reports; providing annual contribution statements; and producing regular financial reports, Ethridge said.

The end result is that staff members have more time to focus on the mission of the church, not just the management of it, Crain said.

For more information, go to bmbaonline.org/church-administration-services-help-cash.

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EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Sunday School Lessons

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



For May 18

BE ALERT
2 Peter 2:1–3, 17–19;
Jude 17–23

False teachers
(2 Peter 2:1–3)

As we read through our passages in 2 Peter and Jude, we can't help but feel the weight and responsibility to be ready to face the false teachers and division that we are warned about.

Without hesitation or reservation, Peter cuts to the chase to tell his readers that just as there were false prophets in the Old Testament, there will be false teachers in the age of the Church.

These false prophets deny Christ and bring about destruction, both upon themselves and to those in their paths. These false teachers can be gauged by their motivation.

Instead of aiming to edify God's people, false teachers seek to exploit and tear down God's people by their greed and destruction. And unfortunately, as Peter so clearly notes, many people will follow the depraved ways of the false teachers and malign the way of truth.

Hence, our responsibility as God's children is to be alert, looking out for those who bring in destructive heresies, deny Christ and aim to destroy the Church through greed.

Empty promises (17–19)

Peter describes false teachers as those who are empty. These false teachers are like "springs without water, mists driven by a storm." Or to say it with a more modern analogy, they are like a pilot without a plane, a hunter without a gun or a preacher without a pulpit.

The false teachers don't offer substance to those who hear them; they only offer empty words and promises.

It is through their boastful words and empty promises that false teachers draw in their listeners. Peter uses an even stron-

ger term to describe this action when he says that false teachers "seduce" those who hear them by promising more than they can deliver.

False teachers offer worldly passions, masquerading corruption as promises of freedom and fulfillment. We find solace in this text, however, knowing that the false teachers will not go unpunished.

As Peter shows us, darkness is reserved for these false teachers — ultimately pointing us to their destruction.

Division (Jude 17–19)

Jude 17–23 is a perfect end note for these passages from 2 Peter because they are thematically tied together and also because of the appropriate application for being alert against false teachers.

We are to remember what we have been told — that in the end times there will be scoffers living according to their own will and desires. These people are not of the Spirit but of the world. The best way to see if someone is a false teacher is to hold their teachings up against Scripture and measure it against what the Bible says.

False teachers don't teach according to the Word as those indwelt by the Spirit but instead teach the passions, fame and fortune that can be gained in the world.

Respond (20–23)

To respond to the false teachers and their destructive ways, Jude exhorts his readers to build themselves up with prayer and obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. Christians can face and reject false teachers by prayer and faith.

What an incredible encouragement for us, that by prayer and faith in God we can spot the wolves among the sheep. As we pray and grow in our faith, we are to wait expectantly for Jesus Christ.

For May 25

BE ENCOURAGED
2 Peter 3:8–18

Christ's certain return (8–10)

Throughout 1 and 2 Peter, we have encountered words to exhort us and to spur us on in the faith. We've heard our call to holiness, we've been charged to be prepared for what is to come and we have especially come face-to-face with the reality of suffering, persecution and trials to come.

In all of this we find gospel hope that through the cross of Christ we can persevere in the faith, pressing on toward our hope — Christ's return and eternal glory. And it's here in 2 Peter that the certainty of Christ's return becomes the rallying cry for Christians living in a broken world.

Our hope when facing the troubles of this world rests in the reality that Jesus will return one day. Christ will return, and all of God's people said, "Amen!" Instead of getting stuck on when this will happen, Peter encourages his readers to be anchored in the truth of Christ's return.

The Lord's timing is not something we can fully comprehend, and any "delay" that we perceive in His return is more a sign of His great mercy and graciousness.

Instead of immediately returning, the Lord has not delayed His promise but desires to see all come to repentance, not wanting any to perish.

Here, Peter says that the Lord is patient in His return. It is an incredible thought to know that the Creator of all the universe is patient with His creation, wanting them to seek Him, repent of their sin and trust in Him.

God shows His great mercy through His patience, wanting all to know and love Him.

And at His return, all things will be made new.

Holy living
(11–14)

It is since all things will be made new ("all these things are to be dissolved") that Christians are to live in a specific manner.

Knowing that Christ's return is imminent and that at His return the elements will burn and be dissolved and the earth and works on it will be disclosed, Christians should live committed to holiness and godliness.

The assurance of Christ's future return fuels our holy living for today. As we wait on the Lord, we do so with hope and anticipation for the new heavens and the new earth where righteousness reigns. Peter encourages believers that waiting is active, not passive. We don't wait as those who sit idle but we wait with obedience, honoring the Lord in all that we do, serving Him faithfully.

Stand firm (15–18)

Peter brings up God's incredible patience again in the last few verses of this section. Here, instead of underscoring God's grace and mercy in being patient about His return, Peter brings up God's patience as a means to encourage believers to stand firm in the faith and reject false teachers.

Peter — echoing Paul's teachings on Christ's return — says that as we wait on the Lord, some may twist Scripture to their own destruction. Therefore, as those who love God and read His Word, we are to be on guard and led by the Word so that we are not led away in error.

And in our waiting each and every day, we are to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

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

"But according to His promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sunday School Lessons

By James R. Strange, Ph.D.

Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies, Samford University



For May 18

GOD'S HAND IN RESTORING LIVES 2 Kings 5:1-3, 10-19a

In today's story, Elisha ministers to a powerful Aramean whose kingdom lay east of the Jordan River. Through the miracle, we learn that Israel's God is also God of non-Israelite peoples (v. 1, 15).

God uses unlikely people for His purposes. (1-3)

"Naaman" is a masculine form of "Naomi" and means "pleasantness" or "handsomeness," which is ironic given that he suffers from a scaly skin condition, called "leprosy" in most translations (v. 1, 27). And he certainly doesn't behave pleasantly.

The enslavement of the young Israelite girl lets us know that Aram and Israel engage in skirmishes. Nevertheless (and oddly, given these clashes), Naaman's king sends a letter to the Israelite king on Naaman's behalf.

Naaman's gift is enormous — around 750 pounds of silver and 150 pounds of gold. The Aramean king's accompanying letter asks the Israelite king to cure Naaman's leprosy. Apparently, the request is understood as the first step in an escalation to all-out war.

Elisha learns of the king's response and offers to teach Naaman that "there is a prophet in Israel" (v. 8). The more subtle message is, "The prophet in Israel serves the true God. You, General Naaman, will learn where power truly lies."

God's commands always required obedience. (10-12)

Imagine the scene of Aramean war horses and chariots arriving at the humble home of Elisha. The residents of Samaria must have been terrified. The silver, gold and garments were to impress the king; the show of force was to intimidate the prophet. Elisha, however, casually delivers his instructions from inside the house via a messenger. Naaman should immerse seven times in the Jor-

dan, signifying the completeness of the miracle that will cure him.

An affronted Naaman complains and leaves. He simply can't imagine that Israel's prophet or its God will help him for any reason other than his wealth and power. For his part, Elisha receives none of the wealth and is unimpressed by earthly power. After all, he has seen the heavenly "chariots and horsemen of Israel" (2:12).

Obedience to God leads to restoration. (13-19a)

Unimpeded by ego, Naaman's servants encourage him to do the simple task. After all, the party will have to cross the Jordan on their way home.

Naaman is physically restored but still misunderstands what has happened. Perhaps in Aramean religion, one must pay people who offer miraculous healing. In his understanding, to pay the prophet is to make an offering to his God. Not so for Elisha. His compensation is Naaman's promise to worship none but the one, true God. This is significant because as a polytheist, Naaman could have vowed to worship Israel's God among the many he believed existed. He confesses, however, something close to the opening prayer of the Shema: "Listen, Israel. The Lord our God, the Lord is One" (Deut. 6:4). He becomes an Israelite.

His request to be pardoned for what he must do in the house of the god Rimmon will serve later rabbis. Naaman will enter this temple only to support his aging king physically, and he will have to bow when the king bows. Elisha's blessing — "Go in peace" — shows that God knows the difference between a sin committed willingly and one committed under duress.

As important as his cure is, let us not miss the transformation of Naaman's character from a powerful despiser to a humble servant of the Lord and from one who pays for a miracle to a person of true generosity (v. 22-23).

For May 25

GOD'S HAND IN FACING OPPOSITION 2 Kings 6:8-12, 15-23

Today marks the end of our series on seeing God's hand in the ministry of Elisha. This ninth-century B.C. prophet and his predecessor, Elijah, are remembered more for wondrous deeds than for prophetic oracles. Several of their miracles anticipate those of Jesus.

In many episodes, we see the anxiety and self-doubt of kings contrasted with Elisha's quiet confidence. We are reminded not only where power truly lies, but also that the correct object of our trust is not human might but God's lovingkindness.

After all, that is the lesson we learn from these prophets' names. To say "Elijah" is to confess, "My God is Yahweh." To intone "Elisha" is to proclaim to all who hear, "My God is Salvation."

Nothing is beyond God's knowledge. (8-12)

Aram (Syria) lay northeast of Israel. The Bible presents this kingdom as Israel's frequent enemy. In Elisha's day, Israel and Aram were engaging in border raids, but in the time of the prophet Isaiah, Israel and Aram will form an alliance against King Ahaz of Judah (2 Kings 16, Isa. 7:1-8:15).

When the Israelite army continues to avoid his ambushes, the Aramean king suspects treachery. But Elisha's reputation is such that an Aramean officer knows the truth: God reveals to Elisha what is spoken in the innermost part of the palace.

God opens our eyes to see His work. (15-17)

Elisha's Dothan is not the one in Alabama but was about 11 miles north of Samaria. The Aramean king plans to kidnap Elisha, no doubt to stop him from revealing

military secrets to the king of Israel.

Once again, the Aramean cavalry arrives at Elisha's doorstep. (See 5:9.) Elisha's attendant is terrified at the sight, but Elisha's vision when Elijah was assumed into heaven (2:11-12) now takes on meaning. In response to his prayer, the eyes of the attendant are opened to see a mountain filled with "horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."

Be kind and gracious to those who oppose you. (18-23)

The Aramean army is blinded when Elisha prays. They see neither the heavenly cavalry nor the man who is standing in front of them, the very one they seek. In this way, Elisha is able to lead them to a place where the Israelite army can destroy them.

But this is not the plan. When God opens the Arameans' eyes, they find themselves in the heart of the Israelite capital and at the mercy of Israelite troops, who no doubt have swords drawn and arrows nocked.

Notice that the king asks Elisha what he should do. The king's double question echoes Elisha's double cry in 2:12, and we are meant to see the contrast. Whereas Elisha had been in awe at the sight of the fiery chariots, the king panics even though it is his troops that surround the Arameans.

In the context of the Israelite wars, we are shown an astonishing act of mercy. Rather than slaughtering their enemies, the Israelites serve them a great feast and then send them home.

Based on verse 24, we know that this kindness had no effect on the next king, Ben-hadad. One story thus becomes two: God's extraordinary mercy and the next king's capacity to ignore that mercy because it did not happen to him.

May we be those who rejoice that God's grace extends to all.

"[Elisha] said, 'Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.'"

2 Kings 6:16

Have skills, will travel

Medical volunteers serving alongside missionaries help move the gospel forward

Short-term volunteer missions projects can make a long-term impact. The key, according to International Mission Board missionaries Cade and Ginny Wheeler, is for the local church to be fully invested and use volunteers within an already existing strategy.

After Armenian Baptists hosted a Serve Tour of mostly 50 medical volunteers from the United States and Greece, they reported their work advanced at a faster rate less than a year after the joint missions trip through Send Relief and IMB global health strategies.

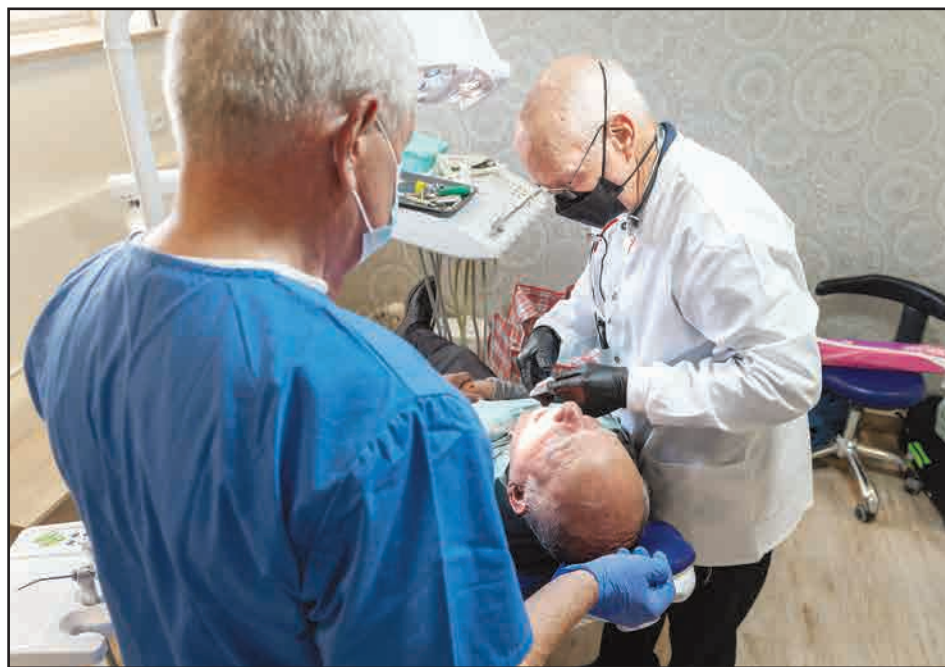
One Armenian pastor said his church's Russian-speaking ministry had been stagnant. He used a medical clinic as part of an overall strategy to reach out to the community. In the seven months after, the ministry doubled in size.

"We often ask if a medical team or compassion ministry can really make an impact," said Cade, who works with human needs and compassion ministries as a Send Relief associate area director.

Love and care

Volunteers staffing a free clinic might spend 15 minutes with someone before passing them to the next medical station. Patients are assured of excellent medical care despite the desire to fit in as many people as possible. Volunteer doctors often perform exams and procedures that people can't afford to have done.

"The impact came when people experienced love and care shown by the volunteers in conjunction with the Armenian believers," Cade said, noting that one pastor took a medical team to a remote village where they helped several families. "That's what got them down



IMB photo

A free dental clinic was one Armenian town's introduction to the gospel. After the Serve Tour medical team left, a local church planter followed up with patients and now has four families meeting for Bible study.

the road and how new works got started. Actions spoke louder than anything else."

When the Wheelers came to the Armenian pastors and church planters with the idea of using one of the largest medical teams IMB global health strategies has ever gathered, the couple stressed the need for the projects to align with their ministry strategy. The Wheelers began serving in Eastern Europe in 1998 and have either worked with or disciplined many of these pastors. That long-term relationship set the foundation for allowing these Armenian believers to lead.

"When we partner with local churches, we can have a long-term impact through things like health care strategies."

Ginny Wheeler
IMB missionary

The missionaries and pastors worked for nearly a year planning the best ways to use counselors, a dentist, physical therapists, nurses, doctors and CPR trainings. They leaned on Ginny to help them understand what they could do with the medical volunteers. Ginny helps IMB teams and their partners find ways to use health care strategies as part of church planting efforts. The Armenian churches saw this as a way to accelerate what they were already doing.

One church planter spent a year praying for an open door in a community that had been resistant to the gospel. Serve Tour provided access

for him when the mayor agreed to host the free medical clinic in the city's community building.

After one hour, the mayor gave the green light for the church planter to come back. Now, months later, four families meet in the community building for Bible study.

Making connections

One church hosted a clinic. Their church members worked alongside the medical volunteers and strengthened relationships within the community. A small Serve Tour construction team also began some remodeling for the church. An internally displaced family was so grateful for the care and love they received at the free clinic that the father came back with his sons to finish the construction on the church. They were nonbelievers who are now connected to this church and have opened access to other refugees.

Ginny pointed out because the Armenian churches were already working on these things, follow up was comprehensive and seamless.

"When we partner with local churches, we can have a long-term impact through things like health care strategies," Ginny said.

Cade added when needs have been met, lives will be changed. "The most important thing is the gospel has gone forward."

Those interested in health care missions are invited to attend MedAdvance 2025, Aug. 21–23, in Raleigh, North Carolina. The conference features opportunities to network with health care field workers and to hear about work and needs in every area of the world.

For more information and to register, visit imb.org/medadvance. (International Mission Board)

Wilderness

By **Tony Martin**
The Baptist Record

First person: Navigating the digital arena with discernment

With the rise of social media, it's easier than ever to share information with just a click. But as Christians, we have a responsibility to exercise wisdom and discernment, especially when it comes to the things we post and share online.

In full disclosure mode: there have been some posts concerning the Olympics that are blatantly false ... and I got suckered.

There was a photo of Israeli swimmers forming the words "bring them home" while in the water.

Seems that the photo was real, but it didn't happen at the Olympics. There are plenty of other examples I've seen floating about. As believers, especially, we don't need to be found guilty of spreading falsehoods, intentionally or not.

The temptation to share

The urge to hit the "share" button is strong. But before we do, let's pause and consider a few important questions:

1. Is it true? It's crucial to verify the accuracy of what we're sharing.

In an era of misinformation, it's easy to fall into the trap of spreading false information.

Proverbs 12:22 reminds us, "The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in people who are trustworthy."

As bearers of Christ's light, we should be committed to sharing the truth, even if it means holding back on a post that seems perfect for our narrative.

2. Is it kind? Ephesians 4:29 advises, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according

to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."

Before sharing, consider if the information will build others up or tear them down.

Our words have power, and we should use them to encourage and uplift, not to sow discord or harm.

3. Is It Necessary? Just because something is true doesn't mean it needs to be shared.

Philippians 4:8 gives us a good guideline: "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things."

Our focus should be on sharing content that enriches and edifies.

The danger of gossip

Spreading false information is not just a harmless mistake — it's a form of gossip.

The Bible is clear about the dangers of gossip. Proverbs 16:28

states, "A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends."

When we share unverified or misleading information, we contribute to a culture of mistrust and division. As Christians, we are called to be peacemakers, not troublemakers.



MARTIN

Developing skills

To navigate the sea of information on social media, we need to develop critical thinking skills. Here are a few practical tips:

► Check the source:

Before sharing, verify the credibility of the source. Is it a reputable news outlet or a random blog? Look for signs of bias and consider the author's intentions.

► Cross-reference: Don't rely on a single source for information. Cross-reference with other reputable sources to ensure accuracy.

► Fact-check: Utilize fact-checking websites to verify claims. Websites like Snopes (be a little wary of this one) and FactCheck.

org can help you discern truth from falsehood.

► Reflect on bias: Acknowledge your own biases and how they might influence your perception.

Are you more likely to believe and share information that aligns with your views, even if it's not fully accurate?

Exercising wisdom

James 1:5 tells us, "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."

Wisdom is a gift from God, and we should actively seek it in all aspects of our lives, including our online interactions.

Pray for discernment and wisdom to navigate social media responsibly.

Remember the goal

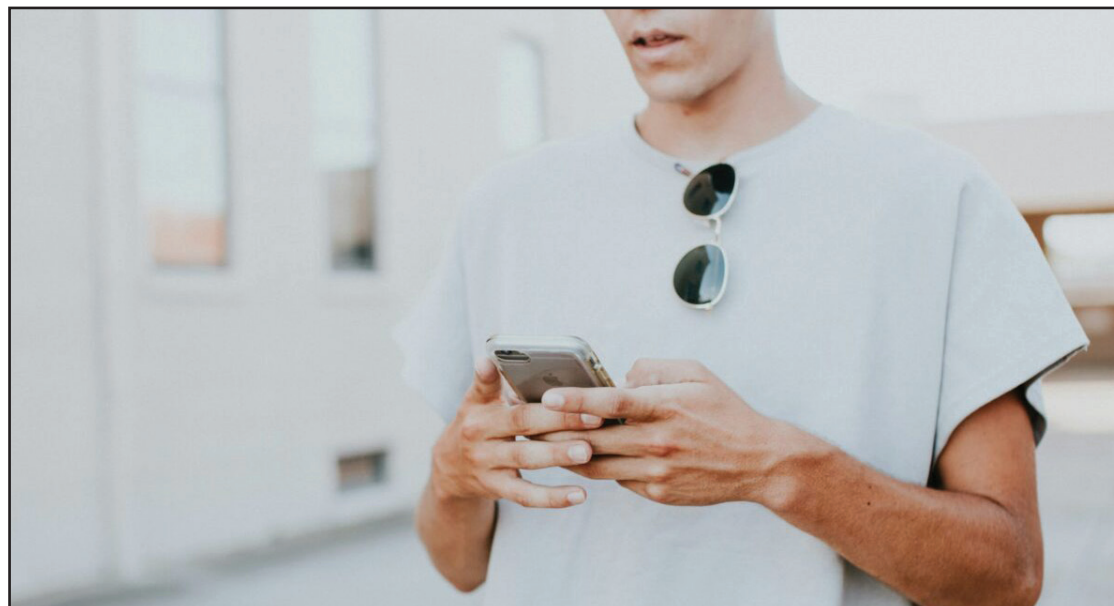
Let's strive to be Christians who show discernment in our online presence.

By verifying information, considering its impact, and exercising critical thinking, we can contribute to a more truthful and edifying online community.

Remember, our goal is to reflect Christ in all we do, including what we share on social media.

Let's be known for our integrity, kindness and wisdom, shining a light in the digital world.

EDITOR'S NOTE —
This story was written by Tony Martin and originally published by the Baptist Record.



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Life or death

By Jane Elliot

Baptist Resource Network of Pennsylvania/South Jersey

First person: Showing international students Jesus is worth the cost

International student ministry is incredibly difficult, due to the students we engage with having a variety of religious backgrounds. In addition to that, even people who seem similar are often not. For example, Indian students frequently flock to me, as they are eager to hangout and especially enjoy hiking.

However, there is a great diversity among the people of India, and many great differences between them. To share the gospel with someone in a way they will understand, it is helpful to really listen to their unique story as well as their ethnic and religious background.

There are so many barriers between many international students and the gospel. Because of this, there are often “levels of understanding or acceptance” that they need to go through to understand and accept the free gift of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I recently had a conversation that gave me a deeper connection with my international friend and showed these levels of understanding or acceptance. For months I have been spending time with her and building a friendship that has led to many conversations about faith and the gospel.

She has always shown intense anger toward religion, especially Islam because of the way her country enforces Sharia (Islamic Law). I have felt that same hatred, even toward Christianity, yet she has listened whenever I have shared.

Persecution

In our recent conversation, out of nowhere she told me that she was afraid that if she became a Christian and is forced back to her country that she would be execut-

ed. This surprised me ... she has thought about becoming a believer! She seemed so hostile!

Yet, she has not become a believer because she is scared ... and with good reason. For believers in many countries around the world, persecution is not something they read about in the book of Acts, it is something they experience daily. We often think of persecution as beatings, imprisonment and death, yet it is more commonly losing one's job, being shunned by family and never hearing from friends again.

For anyone interested in becoming a follower of Jesus, they must count the cost. It is not a faith you can “tack” on to your life, Christ

requires everything ... just as He gave up everything for us.

In sharing with those who might face extreme persecution, we must also count the cost. Can we live with the fact that by our witness someone might lose their life?

Is Christ worth it?

Something I have been chewing on recently is a similar question: is Christ worth it?

What I have concluded is that He is. Revelation 5:9 says, “... Worthy are you to take the book and to break its seals, for you were slain, and purchased for God with your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.”

The salvation God offers brings a

person from death to life, from lost to found, from broken to new, from darkness to light. This salvation is not limited to those from America, where we have freedom to believe how we want. This salvation is for all, even if they live in persecution.

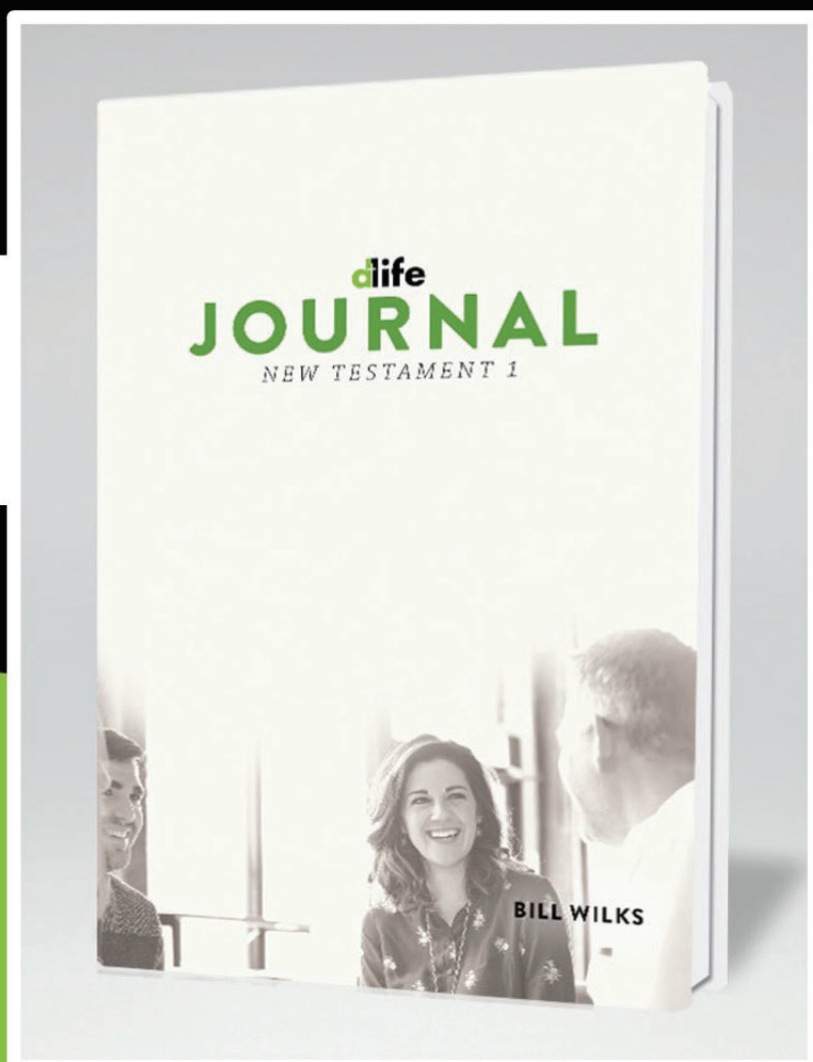
Stop right now and pray for the first lost friend who comes to mind. Now, for another friend that, if they believed, would face heavy persecution. Show them with your life that Jesus is worth it.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was written by Jane Elliot, associate director of BCM at Drexel University, and originally published by the Baptist Resource Network of Pennsylvania/South Jersey.

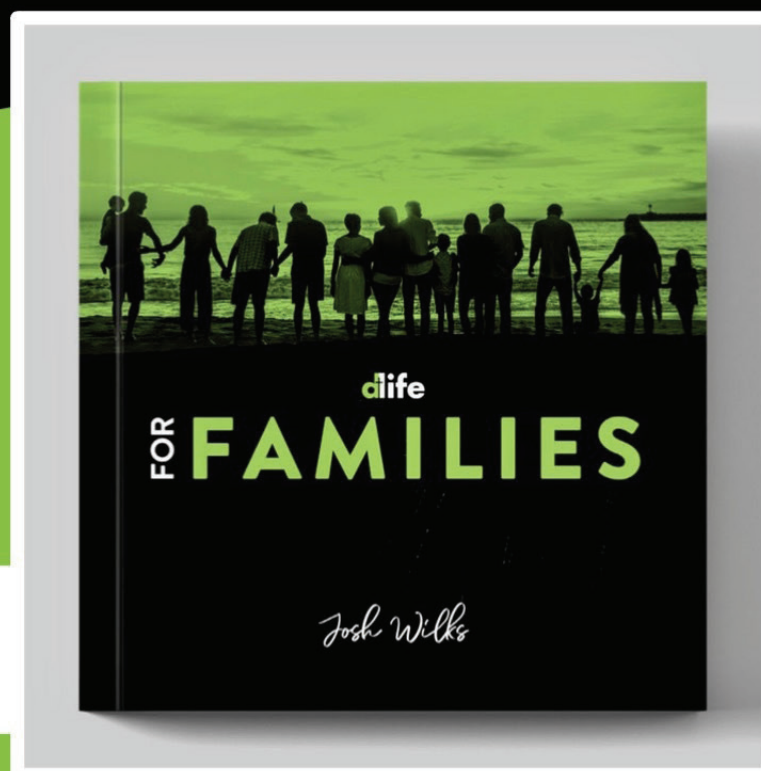


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By Liz Tablazon
North Carolina's Biblical Recorder

‘Coats for the City’ offers faith, warmth to those in need in NYC

North Carolina Baptists distributed 8,324 coats while sharing the gospel in New York City over the weekend. About 230 volunteers from 16 N.C. Baptist churches and six South Carolina churches participated in this year's Coats for the City outreach, held Dec. 5–7. The churches partnered with the Metropolitan New York Baptist Association and 26 New York City church plants to distribute the coats to people in need.

“Coats for the City is impacting more than just those who need the coats,” said Ava McLamb, a volunteer from Grace in Willow Spring Church.

McLamb, who plans to serve in full-time mission work, was observing the shop owners next door to the location where her team distributed coats. They showed more and more interest in what was taking place. Rodney Baker, lead pastor of Grace in Willow Spring, eventually approached them and asked if he could share something. “They listened attentively as he shared the gospel and [they] gave their lives to Christ,” McLamb said. “You never know who might be watching, listening and longing for Christ.”

McLamb recalled another encounter with a woman who was familiar with Christian principles but expressed confusion about Jesus and the Bible after hearing from other people of different religious backgrounds.

‘Clarify the gospel’

“The Lord faithfully provided patience and wisdom to clarify the gospel and help apply it to her life,”



Photo courtesy of Biblical Recorder

More than 200 volunteers from 16 North Carolina Baptist churches and six South Carolina churches participated in this year's Coats for the City outreach, held Dec. 5–7, 2024, in New York City.

McLamb said. “It was immensely inspiring to see how the Lord visibly worked in her heart during our time together and ultimately moved her to surrender her life to Him.”

N.C. Baptists collected the coats that were distributed throughout the year. They are also working with Baptists on Mission to distribute coats in western North Carolina, where residents continue to recover from the impact of Hurricane Helene in late September.

Eric Simmons, associate pastor of disciple-making at First Baptist Church Summerfield, returned to New York City for his second Coats trip this year. FBC Summerfield has participated as a church since Coats for the City began in 2011, and provides 800 to 1,000 coats every year. They partnered with Jackson Heights Community Church

for more than a decade and now partner with Evangelical Bengali Church.

Simmons and a team member from FBC Summerfield were on a train to FBC Manhattan when they started talking to a trial lawyer who was heading to the same stop, and they were able to share the gospel with him.

“This was the first time our team member has ever been to New York, and if it wasn't for Coats for the City, we wouldn't have been in New York and wouldn't have been going to First Baptist Manhattan, which means this interaction may never have happened,” Simmons said. “God is always working, and sometimes we have the privilege of seeing it firsthand. And today was one of those moments.”

This year marked Grace in Wil-

low Spring's second time participating in Coats for the City.

“Being the hands and feet of Jesus is what was ever so evident on this mission trip,” said Todd Neal, missions pastor at Grace. “People are hungry for truth. You can serve wherever God has placed you,” Neal said. “The requirement of the believer is to be a light in their home, in their community and on their job.”

Opportunity to engage

Coats for the City started 13 years ago, when one N.C. Baptist church distributed 600 coats across Queens. Since then, thousands have received coats and other winter gear — and the hope of the gospel. The initiative and trip offer pastors, ministry leaders and church members an opportunity to engage in cross-cultural mission work, as churches serve on mission together to meet physical and spiritual needs among communities in New York and New Jersey.

Simmons encouraged churches to recognize local opportunities to reach the nations with the gospel.

“You don't have to fly around the world,” Simmons said. “The nations are literally in our communities, especially in our urban areas. Sometimes all it takes to open a gospel conversation is to serve those in need in a practical way.”

While distribution takes place every December, Coats for the City is a year-round effort among North Carolina Baptists.

To get involved or for more information, visit ncbaptist.org/coats. To support projects that meet needs across the state, visit ServeNC.com/Give.