

The Alabama Baptist



Photo by Jim Veneman for the SBC Executive Committee



Photo by Doug Rogers/Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

Historic

Honoring 100 years of cooperative spirit for missions, ministry with CP

A group of Baptist leaders gathered in Memphis on May 13 to commemorate the centennial of the Cooperative Program through a time of prayer and signing of a Declaration of Cooperation. Three Alabama Baptists were among the 73 signees and “the hope is that every Southern Baptist can see themselves in a name on that sheet,” event organizer Tony Wolfe said.

The special event was held at the Renasant Convention Center downtown near the riverfront exactly 100 years to the date, time and nearby location of the launch of the CP in 1925.

(See ‘Alabama Baptists,’ page 9)

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Challenge accepted

FBC Foley Sunday School class donates TAB subscriptions

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Jerry Bedsole jokes that his Sunday School class at First Baptist Church Foley is the “last stop.”

“If you come here, you go ‘up,’ you don’t go out,” said Bedsole, who turned 85 in March.

But that doesn’t mean his class isn’t active — Bedsole said for the 30 years he’s taught the class, he’s challenged them to dig deep and do everything they can to serve God and help people.

And just recently, a new opportunity came across their path.

“I have a subscription to The Alabama Baptist,” he said. “I enjoy reading it.”

TAB recently sent out a letter to Bedsole and other subscribers asking for help funding subscriptions for retired missionaries, pastors and other senior adult readers who might have a hard time paying for the paper.

Bedsole feels one of those categories most personally — he and his late wife, Rosie, served as missionaries to Ethiopia for 25 years before retiring. He often shares stories in Sunday School of how God taught them there that holding onto comfort and possessions aren’t what following Jesus is about.

“We all need to be challenged,



Photo courtesy of Steve Quantz

Jerry Bedsole’s Sunday School class at First Baptist Church Foley proudly supports The Alabama Baptist by providing more than 16 yearly subscriptions for senior adults.

even when we’re in this stage of life, and we need more projects outside the walls of our class,” Bedsole said.

“I told our class about the request from The Alabama Baptist and asked, ‘What do you think we could do to help?’ And someone said we should pass around the basket and whatever we collect that day, we should send to help.”

‘Foot on the gas’

They did — and sent a check for \$256, which will cover more than 16 yearly subscriptions.

“When our class is challenged, they really respond,” Bedsole said. “It’s good for us. As older adults, we don’t need to stop helping, we need to put our foot on the gas and keep moving.”

Would you or your Sunday School class like to help out too? You can provide subscriptions for senior adults by sending any amount to The Alabama Baptist at 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209.

We’re grateful for the older adult Sunday School class at FBC Foley — and we’re grateful for you too!

Ram Fam

Melody Whittington (center, seated) is the most recent graduate of the University of Mobile from her family, which spans two generations and 10 diplomas. Pictured from left:

- ▶ Teresa Blakney (aunt), Mobile College 1986, undergraduate, and 1988, MBA
- ▶ Jennifer Bosarge Whittington (sister-in-law), UM 2020
- ▶ Noah Whittington (brother), UM 2020
- ▶ Michele Whittington (mom), MC 1992
- ▶ Melody Whittington, UM 2025
- ▶ Grace Blankenship (sister), UM 2022
- ▶ Mark Whittington (father), who serves as pastor of Evergreen Baptist Church in Conecuh County, MC 1992
- ▶ Braxton Blankenship (brother-in-law) UM 2022
- ▶ Ken Blakney (uncle-in-law) MC 1987 (not pictured).



Photo courtesy of Mark Whittington

The Alabama Baptist

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

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The crossword puzzle
can be found on page 11.



GUEST EDITORIAL

for this week's issue of **The Alabama Baptist**

By **Sandy Wisdom-Martin**, executive director, national WMU

Not just a declaration but a testimony of profound gratitude

It was a significant moment in history. Everyone in the room felt the gravitas of the gathering May 13. The program was hemmed in worship and prayer. Jeff Iorg, president of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, said, "We have come to a moment we must lean forward."

Lean forward I did. I was on the edge of my seat to watch the narrative of 100 years in the making unfold. The Centennial Celebration of the Cooperative Program took place exactly 100 years to the date in the city of Memphis, just yards away from where the CP was adopted by the SBC in 1925.

Let me return to Dr. Iorg's compelling words. He said, "We stand today in awe of what God

has done through a people who reject top-down control in favor of bottom-up cooperation. We will continue to see God do even more than we can ask or think as we choose cooperation as our operational strategy and the Cooperative Program as its logical expression."



Photo by Doug Rogers
Sandy Wisdom-Martin was one of 73 leaders selected to sign the Declaration of Cooperation document during the Cooperative Program's 100th anniversary celebration event May 13.

I am a product of the Cooperative Program. My life was influenced by missionaries I met as a teenager as well as participation in WMU camps, youth evangelism experiences, training opportunities, campus ministry

Entity leaders and others were invited to sign a Declaration of Cooperation after it was signed by Dr. Iorg and Clint Pressley, current SBC president. As I made my way to the stage, I was surprised by the emotion that emerged, and I fought to hold back tears.



Photo by Doug Rogers
National WMU's Sandy Wisdom-Martin visits with IMB's Michelle Chitwood during the celebration event in Memphis. Wisdom-Martin is a member of First Baptist Church Shelby in Alabama, where her husband, Frank, serves as pastor.

and more funded by CP dollars given to a state convention.

My receipts during seminary reminded me a portion of my tuition was funded through the CP. Service on state convention staffs and appointment as a missionary through the North American Mission Board were supported by this amazing, unified giving mechanism that enables Southern Baptists to share Christ near and far.

My signature was not just a Declaration of Cooperation, it was also a testimony of profound gratitude.

Let us continue to recognize the urgency and priority of the Great Commission. May we go forward boldly, dedicated to the unfinished task of proclaiming Christ to a broken world.

Happy 100th birthday, Cooperative Program!

"I am a product of the Cooperative Program. My life was influenced by missionaries I met as a teenager as well as participation in WMU camps, youth evangelism experiences ... and more funded by CP dollars given to a state convention."

Sandy Wisdom-Martin

Your Voice



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

—Letters to the Editor—

As we approach the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, there seems to be the usual uptick of debate, negativity and controversy.

Despite the infighting and division, there is no doubt that the Lord is still using the work of the SBC and its entities through the Cooperative Program in mighty ways.

Instead of debate, I want to offer a word of encouragement. And in the spirit of cooperation, I want to share how I have been shaped personally and professionally by two monumental institutions in our Convention.

I graduated with a master of divinity from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in May. I did not study on campus but opted for online learning instead. I am grateful for the dedication and caliber of my professors and others at SBTS who worked behind the scenes to make my education possible.

Most importantly, I am thankful for my family, friends and colleagues (both current and former) for their immense support.

Unique opportunity

Instead of working for a church during seminary, I had the unique opportunity to spend nearly the entire duration of my studies as part of the team and ministry at the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission.

Why do I share this? Because my seminary education and ERLC experience are inseparable.

From the very beginning of my education at SBTS, I was surrounded by faithful and exceptional men and women at the ERLC who demonstrated to me what it looks like to apply theological conviction and faith in Jesus to the public square.

Application of studies

In class, when we studied ethics, I saw my colleagues think through moral and ethical issues and advocate policy positions in a way that honored the Lord and upheld His Word.

When we studied Baptist heritage, I saw my colleagues pour their hearts into serving Southern Baptists and carrying on the legacy of our Baptist predecessors.

When we studied counseling, I saw my colleagues approach issues of abortion, immigration, addiction, abuse and more with grace and truth.

When we studied the imago Dei, I saw my colleagues recognize the dignity of vulnerable women targeted by the abortion industry, refugees, people who have bought into the lies of the sexual revolution and many more. They recognized them as image bearers of God.

When we studied personal spiritual disciplines, I saw my colleagues pray for Southern Baptists, elected officials, the marginalized and even for their loudest critics.

When we studied missiology and evangelism, I saw my colleagues boldly share the gospel with members of Congress, police officers,

event security, airline passengers and many others.

The list could go on for quite a while.

What have I learned?

I've learned that education means more than merely gaining knowledge; it is about being equipped to use the knowledge gained to point people to Jesus.

I consider it a privilege to have been shaped and formed by these two faithful institutions that are committed to Christ and His mission.

What's next?

I know my education is far from over. It doesn't end with a diploma — it continues through a lifetime of experiences and relationships.

For now, my plan is to take what I learned at SBTS and ERLC to do what the heart of the SBC is ultimately about: continue serving my faith family at First Baptist Church Opelika and use these experiences to point people to Jesus.

Kadin Christian
Opelika

EDITOR'S NOTE — Kadin Christian serves as the pastoral care associate at First Baptist Church Opelika, where he focuses on connections and assimilation. He is an Alabama native and holds a degree in finance from Auburn University along with an M.Div. from SBTS. He previously served in the office of the president at ERLC.

SBC President **Clint Pressley** told Religion News Service that he has spoken to a number of Southern Baptists about the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission.

Some like what the agency is doing, he said. Others don't.

While he suspects there will be a motion to close ERLC at the SBC annual meeting in June, Pressley said the future of the ERLC is not up to him.

A motion in support of ERLC with some changes to its function also is anticipated to be proposed by Texas pastor **Andrew Hébert**.

According to reporting by RNS from information at the-baptistreview.com, Hébert said he'd like to see ERLC limit itself to speaking only about issues that are directly addressed in the Baptist Faith & Message — or in recent resolutions passed at the SBC's annual meetings.

Those boundaries, he said, could help ERLC focus on speaking only on issues where Southern Baptists have a "broad consensus."

Randy Davis, executive director of the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board, told RNS he doesn't think the convention floor is the best place to decide ERLC's future. Instead, he'd rather a commission be set up to discuss where and how ERLC fits into SBC life.

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“Champions never complain.
They are too busy getting better.”

THE LATE JOHN WOODEN
Beloved NCAA basketball coach revered for his leadership legacy

Following the May 13 event celebrating Southern Baptists' giving channel to missions and ministry (see story, page 1), **Tony Wolfe**, executive director of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, said, “We (Southern Baptists) really do want the same things and work for the same things.”

“We also have a deep affection for one another across every divide you can name in the SBC,” said Wolfe, who served as event organizer. “Moments like this really bring this out.”

Literally none of us are “good” enough to stand in our own strength. We are going to let people down, but doing our best not to let that happen is a worthwhile goal.

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

“I kept thinking about how the next generation doesn’t understand the Cooperative Program,” said **Belinda 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 reaches people in Alabama, in America and around the world.

Anytime we are serving the Lord with our whole heart, we find fulfillment and satisfaction regardless of the challenges going on around us. Life is good because God is good.

Terry Dorsett, executive director Baptist Churches of New England

UNTIL SHE BEGAN READING
HER BIBLE, ELOISE HAD NO
IDEA HOW SPECIAL SHE WAS
TO HER CREATOR AND SAVIOR.
A REAL DESIGNER ORIGINAL.



Lass WORDS

BY **KEN LASS**
The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Be somebody's sidekick

I grew up in the country and there weren't a lot of other kids around to play with. So I spent much of my childhood watching television. Lots and lots of television.

I couldn't help but notice that pretty much every main character had a sidekick, a loyal, trusted companion, who would share their adventures. Batman had Robin, The Lone Ranger had Tonto, Lucy Ricardo had Ethel Mertz, Wild Bill Hickok had Jingles, bus driver Ralph Kramden had Ed Norton and Sheriff Andy Taylor had Deputy Barney Fife. Even Fred Flintstone had faithful neighbor Barney Rubble.

I always had a soft spot in my heart for these second bananas.

Never the big stars

They often did most of the work, took the risks and made excuses covering for the hero, often pulling them out of a jam. Yet they seldom received credit and admiration for their efforts. They were never the big stars. The shows were not named after them.

But they didn't seem to mind. They just seemed to get joy out of helping someone else look good, be successful and receive attention.

Modern TV heroes don't seem to have loyal sidekicks anymore.

Maybe it's just a reflection of the self-gratifying culture that has gradually become prevalent in our world. We're the worse for

it. In their own unique way, they taught us to place the happiness of others ahead of our own.

Love and dedication

Barney Fife may have been a bumbling, mistake-prone helper, but no one could doubt his love and dedication to his best friend Andy. Often he would put himself in harm's way, but he always meant well — and his faith was unwavering even though, in the end, Andy came out looking like the wise and superior partner.

We would do well to be somebody's sidekick.

In Luke 18:14, Jesus compares the Pharisee, who thought of himself as the main character, to the tax collector, who humbly offered to submit himself to God.

Jesus said, “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

So be the Robin to somebody's Batman today. God knows who the real heroes are.

MEET THE AUTHOR

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

3 stories you should know



Photo courtesy of Carlos Lemus

First Hispanic Baptist Church of Autauga dedicated the future site of its new building May 18. The church's previous building was destroyed by a tornado two years ago, and the congregation has now secured enough funding to start rebuilding. Carpenters for Christ will begin work June 4. Once the building is complete, the church will be officially organized and is part of the vision of Autauga Baptist Association to plant a new church with support from the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. Carlos Lemus (far right) is pastor of FHBCA, and Mel Johnson (sixth from right) is lead mission strategist for Autauga Association.

SBC Annual Meeting set for Dallas in June

Southern Baptists will gather June 10–11 in Dallas for this year's Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting, which is expected to draw well over 10,000 people.

The theme is "Hold Fast: Confession and Cooperation," inspired by Hebrews 10:23–24.

North Carolina pastor (and former Alabama pastor) Clint Pressley appears to be running unchallenged for a second term as SBC president.

The role of women in ministry, sexual abuse prevention, ongoing financial challenges and the future of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission are some of the issues messengers can expect to address.

A full preview of the meeting appeared in the May 22 edition of The Baptist Paper (tbponline.org), the sister publication to The Alabama Baptist. (The Baptist Paper)

AL's Carlisle a nominee for SBC's 2nd VP role

Alabama's Craig Carlisle will be nominated for second vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention in June.

Carlisle, director of missions for Etowah Baptist Association, is currently serving his second one-year term as Alabama Baptist State Convention president.

"Craig Carlisle is a pastor to pastors," said Jared Cornutt, pastor of North Shelby Baptist Church in Birmingham, who announced that he would be nominating Carlisle.

Carlisle chaired the state convention's Sexual Abuse Task Force and was instrumental in founding the Alabama Young Pastors Network.

So far, one other nominee for second vice president has been announced — Tommy Mann, pastor of Highland Terrace Baptist Church in Greenville, Texas. (TAB)

Persecuted church

Somali woman who put faith in Jesus beaten and driven away by her father

MOGADISHU, Somalia — A Somali woman was sent back to her family after she put her faith in Jesus Christ, only to be beaten and driven away by her father for telling her sister about Jesus.

On March 17, Fatuma Hussein — mother of three children younger than 8 — heard about Jesus from a Christian team visiting Tabta village, and she put her faith in Him, reports Morning Star News. This was during the Muslim observance of Ramadan.

Hussein said she told her Muslim husband March 19 and she was returned, without her children, to her father. There, Hussein told her sister about Jesus and was chased away by her father with a sword, Hussein said.

The leader of the Christian team said Hussein

has been placed with an underground Christian family.

Somalia is No. 2 on Open Doors' 2025 World Watch List of the 50 places most difficult to be a Christian.

Islam is reported as the state religion of Somalia. All other religions are prohibited.

Woman makes meal that poisons, kills her daughter and Christian couple

KAMPALA, Uganda — A woman angry with a Christian couple poisoned the two and inadvertently poisoned her own daughter as well.

Hanifa Hamiyat of Uganda's Nabiganda town used the common practice of sharing an evening



MS photo

meal during the Muslim observance of Ramadan to poison Doreen Nairuba and Nairuba's husband, Jackson Wampula. Morning Star News reports that Nairuba was six months pregnant.

On March 16, Hamiyat sent her 18-year-old daughter, Marriam Kapisa, to deliver the meal to the couple. Kapisa ate with the couple, not knowing that the food had been poisoned, a source told Morning Star. They all three died.

On the day of the poisoning, a neighbor saw Kapisa leaving a church service with Wampula and Nairuba, who had been telling Kapisa about Jesus Christ. The neighbor informed Kapisa's Muslim mother, who prepared the meal.

A source told Morning Star that Hamiyat confessed: "I never intended to kill my daughter, but my plan was to kill the neighbors because of taking my daughter to church during this holy month of Ramadan."

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

PRATT DEAN

Pratt Dean, a longtime International Mission Board missionary to Japan, died May 5. He was 91.

A native of Ozark, Dean dedicated his life to Christian service at age 13.

He earned a diploma from Moody Bible Institute and degrees from Wheaton College in Illinois and Southwestern Seminary. He also studied at Texas Christian University.



DEAN

While in seminary, Dean felt a call to missions. He served as pastor of First Baptist Church Cottondale, Florida, before being appointed as a missionary with the IMB (then called the Foreign Mission Board) to Japan in 1966.

In 1970 he married Rita, who had been serving in Taiwan, and they served together in Japan until their retirement in 1999.

While there, Dean designed a vase that could be used to share the story of the Trinity through

Chinese characters that are also used in the Japanese language.

Dean was a member of Church on the Bluff in Hoover. He is preceded in death by his wife.

JEFF BRICKHOUSE

Jeff Brickhouse, a longtime worship pastor in Alabama churches, died May 9. He was 60.

A native of Brunswick, Georgia, Brickhouse earned his bachelor's degree from Jacksonville State University. He served more than 40 years in Alabama churches including as worship pastor for the DeArmanville campus of Parker Memorial Baptist Church, Anniston, and for First Baptist Church Alabaster.

From 2000 to 2010 he also worked at Integrity Music, first as live events manager, then in marketing and digital content. During that time, he cofounded Seminars4Worship, a training ground for worship pastors.

Brickhouse is survived by his daughter, Melody; sons, Daniel and Jared; and nine grandchildren.



BRICKHOUSE

ESCAMBIA

► **Larry Patterson** is retiring June 30 as associational missionary for **Escambia Baptist Association**. He has served in this role for more than four years. His ministry includes serving as pastor of several churches in the state, including Little Escambia Baptist Church, Flomaton, and as director of missions for Baldwin Baptist Association. Little Escambia Baptist Church will host a retirement reception in his honor July 20 at 2 p.m. Patterson is available for pulpit supply and interim positions, 251-978-6067.



PATTERSON

► **Elim Baptist Church, Andalusia**, will celebrate its 200th anniversary June 22. Worship begins at 11 a.m. with guest preacher Rick Lance, executive director of the State Board of Missions. Lunch will follow the service, and an afternoon singing will feature Adam Coale. Ron Headley is pastor.

GENEVA

► **Melanie Brown** is serving as the interim children's minister of **First Baptist Church Geneva**. She has been involved in children's

ministry for 19 years. Brown earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Alabama and a master's degree in criminal justice administration from Troy University.

She and her husband, Seth, have three children. Ed Scott is pastor.



Submitted photo

WEST CENTRAL

► **Matthew Jacobs** is the new pastor of **Elkdale Baptist Church, Selma**. Previously, he served on staff at two churches in Mobile, most recently as the next generation pastor of Dauphin Way Baptist Church, and before that as the youth and college pastor of Luke 4:18 Fellowship. He earned a bachelor's degree in theology from the



Photo courtesy of Elkdale Baptist Church

University of Mobile, and is completing his master of divinity in preaching and pastoral ministry at Southeastern Seminary. He and his wife, Shelby, have three daughters.

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



Leading Through Sabotage: Managing Congregational Conflicts

Free Workshop - June 12 | Valley Hotel, Homewood | 9:00 AM-12:00 PM

Join the Samford Center for Congregational Resources for a powerful workshop designed to equip pastors and church leaders to navigate difficult seasons of congregational conflict. In *Leading Through Sabotage: Managing Congregational Conflicts*, Dr. Kent Michael and Rev. Immanuel Marsh, co-founders of the Alabama Center for Pastoral Resilience, will share practical, time-tested strategies for handling tension, division, and leadership challenges in ministry.

Attendance is free, but registration is required.

Valley Hotel, 2727 18th Street South, Homewood, AL
Thursday, June 12 | 9:00 AM-12:00 PM



Dr. Kent Michael



Rev. Immanuel Marsh

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NEW ORLEANS
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Alabama Baptists participate in Memphis gathering

(continued from page 1)

Every SBC entity and state convention were represented by at least one staff member, said Wolfe, executive director of South Carolina Baptists.

Also represented were the various ethnic groups, pastors, pastors' wives and other women serving in ministry positions as well as the current SBC officers.

"It's one thing to say we work together ... but it's something else when something like this brings you together," Wolfe said.

"You are reminded of the friendships. We really do want the same things and work for the same things. We also have a deep affection for one another across every divide you can name in the SBC.

"Moments like this really bring this out," he noted, adding that "the hope and prayer is for unity."

To read the full story, visit thebaptistpaper.org. (TAB)



Photo by David Dawson/Tennessee's Baptist & Reflector

Right: Mike Jackson, associate executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, represents executive director Rick Lance who could not be present for the event. Jackson and Jay Stewart, also of the State Board of Missions, were among the 73 signees.



Photo by Doug Rogers

Left: Representing Alabama Baptists were (l to r): SBOM's Doug Rogers, Jay Stewart and Mike Jackson; state convention president Craig Carlisle and TAB Media Group's Jennifer Davis Rash. **Below:** The Declaration of Cooperation resolution will be on display at the SBC Annual Meeting in Dallas.

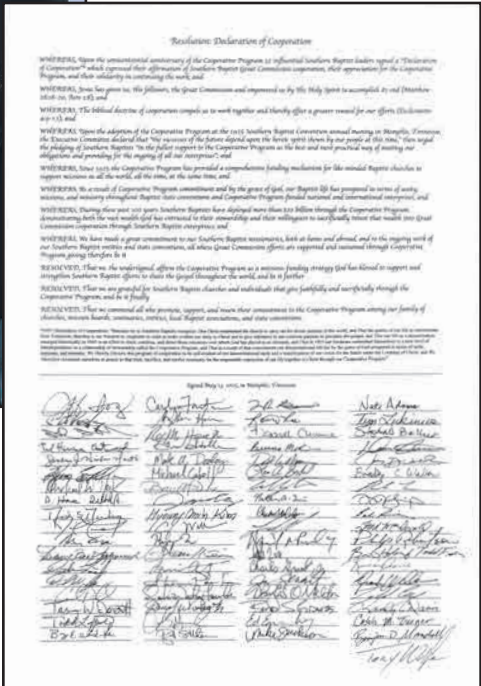


Photo by Doug Rogers

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UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Talon Brandon named new campus minister of Jacksonville State University

The Baptist Campus Ministries at Jacksonville State University will have a new face this fall — Talon Brandon has been called as the school’s new campus minister.

For the past two years, Brandon served as associate campus minister at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia. Before that, he served as a pastoral resident at University Baptist Church in Fayetteville, Arkansas, and as campus minister of men’s discipleship at the Baptist Collegiate Ministry of the University of Arkansas.



TALON BRANDON

Brandon will begin in his role at Jacksonville State on June 1. He replaces Shannon Hughes, who recently married and is moving to Birmingham.

Ben Edfeldt, director of the office of collegiate and student ministries for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said he’s excited about the future of BCM at Jacksonville State.

“Talon comes to Alabama after serving well at the Virginia Tech BCM and the University of Arkansas before that,” Edfeldt said. “He

has a passion to reach and disciple students and will serve the students at Jax State well. He’s passionate about campus ministry and will bring a great perspective to our team.”

Rick Lance, SBOM executive director, said Brandon is “a bright young leader who will do an excellent job as campus minister at Jacksonville State University.”


“His passion for reaching and teaching college students is evident in his walk with Christ,” Lance said. “We at the State Board of Missions are overjoyed at having him as a vital part of our overall ministry efforts in Alabama and beyond.”

He asked for prayer for Brandon as he starts this new chapter of ministry.

“Also, remember to lift up in prayer the more than 300,000 collegiates in our state, many of them who need to know Christ as their Lord and Savior,” Lance said.

For more information about Jacksonville State’s BCM, visit jsubcm.org.

For more information about Jacksonville State’s BCM, visit jsubcm.org or scan the code below.



Connect graduating seniors to a Baptist Campus Ministry

What a student does during their first three weeks of college sets the pattern for their whole college career in the relationships they establish and the patterns they develop.

You can help lay the groundwork for Christlike college experiences by connecting yourself or your students with collegiate ministers around the state.

Visit bcm.link.org/ministries/transitioning or scan the QR code to provide contact information for your graduating seniors.

The Office of Collegiate & Student Ministries will pass that information along to campus ministers from each student’s college choice, giving them a way to contact your students.



WORD search

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| AWAKE | PATH |
| DARKNESS | PRAYER |
| DEPTHS | PRECIOUS |
| ENEMIES | REFUGE |
| EVERLASTING | REJOICE |
| FAVOR | RIGHTEOUS |
| FEARFULLY | SEARCH |
| FRAME | SECRET |
| HAND | SHEOL |
| HEAVEN | SHIELD |
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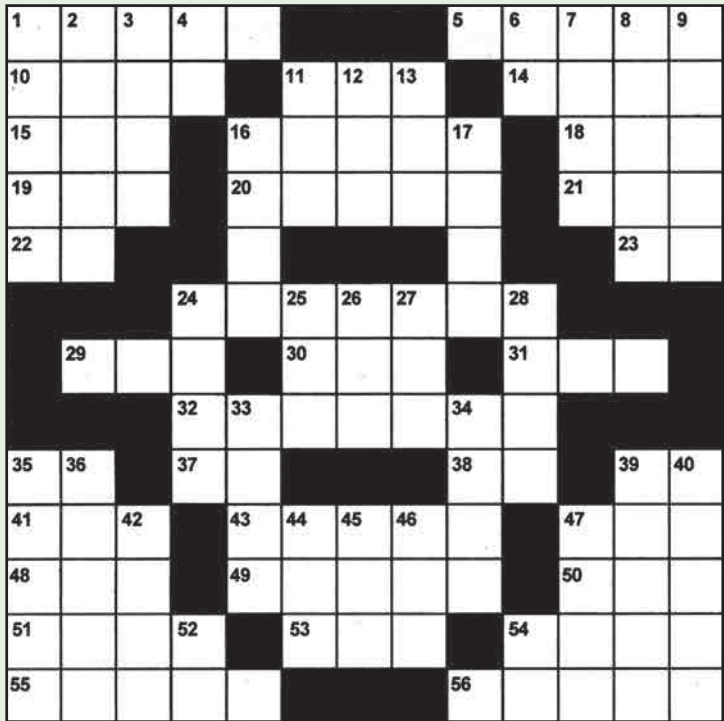
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J H C O H X A T K N I T K A K
S H I E L D K K T Y L F V K L
M C Y L L U F R A E F O F R K
E P T P R A Y E R F R L F F W

“For you, Lord, bless the righteous one;
you surround him with favor like a shield.”
PSALM 5:12

CHRISTIAN Crossword

ACROSS

- 1. Am I in God's ____? (Gen. 30:2)
- 5. They say, "He has a ____." (Matt. 11:18, HCSB)
- 10. Consumes.
- 11. By a mighty hand, and by a stretched out _____. (Deut. 4:34)
- 14. Lion's headdress.
- 15. By way of.
- 16. Alaskan native.
- 18. Department of Economic Affairs. (abbr.)
- 19. Building addition.
- 20. I will ____ him up at the last day. (John 6:40)
- 21. People that do ____ in their heart. (Ps. 95:10)
- 22. They follow "M"s.
- 23. Naval vessel designation.
- 24. Goes up.
- 29. Babylonian deity.
- 30. Sanballat invited Nehemiah to the plain of _____. (Neh. 6:2)
- 31. Thickness or layer.
- 32. ____ my statutes, and do them. (Ezek. 37:24)
- 35. And ____ shall judge the world. (Ps. 9:8)
- 37. Add ____ your faith virtue. (2 Pet. 1:5)
- 38. Commercial message.
- 39. News agency. (abbr.)
- 41. Spanish cheer.
- 43. I will make thee a ____ nation. (Gen. 12:2)
- 47. Much ____ About Nothing.
- 48. Cleaning tool.
- 49. Classifies.
- 50. To sift.



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- 51. Long, exciting adventure.
- 53. They compassed me about like ____s. (Ps. 118:12)
- 54. An atlas is a book of ____.
- 55. There remaineth ... a ____ (plural). (Heb. 4:9)
- 56. ____p__ Dumpty sat on a wall.
- 13. He heard ____ick and dancing. (Luke 15:25)
- 16. ____ of the Covenant. (plural)
- 17. Began the golf game.
- 24. Great amount. (2 words)
- 25. Type of lettuce.
- 26. Compass direction.
- 27. Neither/____.
- 28. Went rapidly.
- 33. Mires.
- 34. Large tubs.
- 35. Ancient author.
- 36. Run away to wed.
- 39. Able, skillful.
- 40. The art of poetry.
- 42. Mainline Protestant denomination: ____copal.
- 44. Will a man ____ God? (Mal. 3:8)
- 45. Before (poetic).
- 46. Did eat.
- 47. Kemuel the father of _____. (Gen. 22:21)
- 52. Court. (abbr.)
- 54. Invent to themselves instruments of ____sick. (Amos 6:5)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.



UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Upcoming leader training: July 15

The next Intentional Leader Series, set for July 15, will focus on the Preacher aspect of the four Ps of leadership: Person, Pastor, Preacher and Pathfinder. This training will be led by Robert Smith, who served as professor of Christian preaching at Samford University's Beeson Divinity School for more than 25 years.

During this training, you will learn about preaching with intentionality with a goal as to where God wants to take his church. Also, you'll receive training in a process for developing messages.

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

The event will be 9 a.m.–2 p.m. at the State Board of Missions in Prattville. The \$10 cost includes lunch. To register, visit alsbom.org/ils.

Going to the SBC Annual Meeting in Dallas?

If you're making plans to be at the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting June 8–11 in Dallas, be sure to stop by the State Board of Missions booth

in the exhibit hall, pick up a free gift and visit for a while! You'll find us in the front of the hall near IMB. Come see us!



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.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Sunday School Lessons

By Jay T. Robertson, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, University of Mobile



For June 1

GOD'S WISDOM Psalm 1:1-6

Considered by many to be the most-loved portion of Scripture, the psalms have been a source of comfort and a tower of strength for believers in every experience of life. From the soul-stirring heights of praise to the heart-rending depths of despair, the full range of human emotion is captured in these songs. Written some 3,000 years ago, the psalms remain as vibrant and fresh today as when they were first written. The Book of Psalms leads God's people to seek Him more diligently, to love Him more deeply and to trust Him more fully.

This wisdom psalm functions as an introduction to the entire Book of Psalms. Its theme is as big as the whole Bible because it tells of people, paths and ultimate destinies. Psalm 1 separates all humanity into their respective spiritual categories.

The Righteous Person (1-2)

Psalm 1 begins with the word "happy" or "blessed." This word appears 23 times throughout the psalms. It means to be supremely happy and fulfilled. It's to have overflowing joy and full contentment in God.

The righteous person knows when to say no.

He will say no to walking with the wicked, standing with sinners and sitting with mockers. The Apostle Paul wrote, "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals'" (1 Cor. 15:33).

"When men are living in sin, they go from bad to worse," Charles Spurgeon wrote. "At first they merely walk in the counsel of the careless and ungodly, who forget God — the evil is rather practical than habitual — but after that, they become habituated to evil, and they stand in the way of open sinners who willfully violate God's commandments; and if left alone, they go one step further and become themselves pestilent teachers and tempters of others,

and thus they sit in the seat of the scornful."

The righteous person also knows when to say yes. He will say yes to God's Word and God's wisdom. The righteous person's "delight is in the Lord's instruction." To delight in God's Word means to rejoice in it and to be eager to spend time reading and studying it. He also "meditates on it day and night." He thinks deeply about God's Word. He considers the meaning, implications and applications of the Scripture. He is characterized by the consistent contemplation of God's Word.

Benefits of Righteousness (3-4)

The psalmist uses two images to show the results of these two different lifestyles. First, he uses a fruitful tree. The righteous person delights in the law of God and draws his spiritual nourishment from it as a tree that draws its nourishment from an abundantly flowing stream. The surrounding landscape may be dry and barren.

The winds might be hot. But if the tree is planted by the stream so that it can sink its roots down and draw nourishment, it will prosper and yield fruit. So it is for the believer who delights in God's Word and wisdom.

But the wicked are compared to chaff. This is an abrupt contrast. During harvest time, the chaff — the inedible, useless covering of the grain — would be discarded because it was worthless and had no value. Accordingly, the wicked are empty, worthless and in the end, to be burned in the fire.

Day of Judgment (5-6)

The wicked reject God's Word and live in rebellion against God. They forfeit God's blessings in this life and in eternity. In contrast, God "watches over the way of the righteous." This verb — literally, "knows" — refers to God's personal intimacy and involvement with His righteous ones. The righteous ones are believers who have repented of their sins and believed in the gospel.

For June 8

GOD'S TRUTH Psalm 119:1-16

Psalm 119 is a giant among the psalms that demonstrates the full flowering of the delight in the Lord's instruction described in Psalm 1.

Psalm 119 is an acrostic psalm, an alphabet of prayers and reflections on the Word of God that gives each Hebrew letter its turn to introduce eight successive verses on the qualities of the Bible. This longest of psalms and chapters in the Bible stands as the Mount Everest of the Psalter.

God's Instruction Given (1-4)

Psalm 119 begins by emphasizing the happiness of people who walk according to the Lord's instruction. In verse 1 the writer employs three terms that were used in Psalm 1. He uses "happy," "walk" and "instruction." God reveals in His Word how His people are to live a good and godly life by means of His instruction. True happiness is only achieved by ordering your life according to the Word of God.

To experience purpose, meaning and fulfillment, you need God in your life. You need to know who God is, who you are as a human being created in the image of God and what God expects of you.

The blameless not only do what is right before God, but they also avoid what is wrong. In this age that tells you to follow your own heart and do whatever makes you happy, it is vitally important to remember that God commands us to obey Him. God does not offer opinions or suggestions; He commands obedience to His Word.

Obedience to God's Word (5-8)

It is hard at times to distinguish where the psalmist's testimony ends and prayer begins. In verse 5 the psalmist confesses to the Lord

that his desire to obey God's Word is far from perfect. "Statutes" refer to the moral boundaries God has established. God has declared what is right and what is wrong, and we are all accountable to God for how we obey His statutes.

We too must confess our inconsistency in keeping God's statutes. Even as we are forgiven in Christ, we all still battle indwelling sin (Rom. 7:13-25).

The psalmist reveals his desire to honor God through faithful obedience to His Word. Obedience honors God and keeps us from shame. We are to seek God by rightly knowing His Word both intellectually as we study it and experientially as we obey it.

Verse 8 is a strong resolution, a sincere confession and an urgent plea. The psalmist pleads with God to stick by him in his determination to live according to God's instruction.

The Goal of God's Word (9-16)

A young man can keep his way pure with an ongoing commitment to know and obey God's Word. As sinful creatures living in a fallen world, there is nothing simple about this pursuit. If we are to keep our way pure, we must seek the Lord with all our hearts. We need renewed hearts in order to delight in God and live every aspect of life for His glory.

The psalmist is happy in the Lord because he memorizes and meditates on His precepts. He rejoices and delights in God's decrees and statutes.

The psalmist is determined not to forget God's instruction because he values it. He will be intentional about remembering what God has said so he will not lose his joy. May God strengthen our hearts so that we do not forget His instruction.

*"Blessed are those whose way is blameless,
who walk in the law of the Lord!"*

Psalm 119:1

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sunday School Lessons

By Bryan D. Gill, D.Min.

Director of the Office of Faith, Learning and Vocation, Samford University



For June 1

A FAITH THAT PLEASES GOD Genesis 6:5–9, 17–22; 8:20–22

Living by faith begins with a righteous relationship with God. When we submit to God as the Creator and we are the creation, we are in a right relationship with God. We are required to have faith and obedience. God is pleased with our faith and obedience because it leads us to praise Him.

When we swap roles and place ourselves in God's position, we become the object of our own praise and therefore commit idolatry. Psalm 22:3 tells us that God is holy, and He inhabits the praise of His people. Noah found favor in God's eyes because of his faith and obedience.

To live by faith means living in a right relationship with God. (6:5–9)

Honestly, I wish I knew more about Noah. What was he like? Why did God choose him? What did he do specifically that pleased God? I would love to know the dialogue between him and God. Was there doubt? Did Noah laugh? I need details!

All we know is that God found him to be a righteous man and asked him to build an ark and Noah obeyed. Genesis 6:9 tells us he walked with God. We know he revered God because this was no small task he agreed to do. And we can believe Noah talked with God regularly since he recognized His voice.

As much as I would like to know more, the details about Noah are intentionally left out of the Bible because this story is not about Noah; it is about God saving the world through one righteous man.

This is a foreshadowing of God saving the world through another righteous Man, Jesus.

To live by faith calls for obedience. (17–22)

If you read chapters 6–9 of Genesis, you see a pattern. God asks Noah to do some risky tasks and Noah obeys. In chapter 6, God tells Noah why He has chosen him and gives him detailed instructions on how to build the ark. In verse 22, we see that Noah "did everything that God had commanded him."

You can see this pattern repeated in Genesis 7:5, 8:18 and 9:19. God commands, and Noah obeys. No matter how wild the commands seemed or how risky the tasks were, Noah trusted and obeyed God.

The trust Noah had for God didn't just appear when God gave him instructions on how to build an ark. This trust was built by walking with God over time and seeing His faithfulness. When we walk with God, the risky things don't seem so risky because we trust Him.

To live by faith is to honor and worship God. (8:20–22)

When Noah and his family came out of the ark, the first thing he did was build an altar and offer a burnt offering to God.

This was an act of worship that pleased God. Everything worked! Noah's family survived, the animals were alive, the waters had receded and they were once again on dry land.

Noah could've puffed himself up and patted himself on the back for successfully executing a world-saving mission. But he didn't. He worshipped God instead.

When we have a righteous relationship with God, we are obedient to Him.

This right relationship minimizes our own ability and magnifies God's faithfulness. We praise God for the works He accomplishes through our obedience.

**"Noah was a
righteous man,
blameless in his
generation. Noah
walked with God."**

Genesis 6:9

For June 8

A FAITH ROOTED IN GOD'S WORD Joshua 1:1–9, 16–18

I live in an area where the soil in my garden is mostly clay. Clay soil is dense and holds too much water for most plants to thrive. I must amend the soil, adding nutrients, fertilizer and organic matter so the clay softens and the environment improves for the plants to take root. Most of the time this works well, and the plants grow big and healthy.

Our soul is the soil that is hardened and dense. We must amend our souls with God's Word, covering ourselves in prayer and Scripture daily so that our faith can be rooted in fertile ground.

Our faith benefits from the example of others. (1–5)

Every Christian should have a person or several people to look up to in the faith.

Mentors in the faith are essential for us to learn from so that our faith can be strengthened. I have several men in my life whom I call upon when life is difficult. These men aren't perfect, but they encourage my faith by always pointing me back to God.

Our lesson for today focuses on Joshua's faith. Joshua had the benefit of learning from Moses as Joshua observed Moses' leadership in the desert.

While Moses was not perfect, God was with Moses. Joshua 1:5 tells us, "No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. I will be with you, just as I was with Moses. I will not leave you or abandon you."

Joshua was not supposed to be a clone of Moses; God had a different mission for Joshua.

However, the faith that Moses showed by continually relying on God would be the same faith that

was passed down to Joshua.

Our faith should be centered in God's Word. (6–9)

While it is vital to have great mentors in the faith, people will always make mistakes. Some people are great but only Jesus was perfect. It is important that we hold our faith heroes up against the backdrop of God's Word so that if they stumble, our own faith isn't shaken.

There may be times when our faith mentors seem far away and it feels like we are all alone in our walk with God, but God's Word gives us courage to persevere. (See v. 7.) God knew the road Joshua would travel was going to be hard and scary. However, in verses 6–9, God encourages Joshua by repeating the phrase "be strong and courageous" three times and the phrase "do not be afraid" another time. The world was about to be fearsome for Joshua, but God's Word would be his strength.

Our faith should set an example for others. (16–18)

When we are obedient to God's Word, we strengthen the faith of others. Moses' faith strengthened Joshua's faith, and Joshua's faith strengthened the faith of a nation. Your faith mentors had faith mentors as well.

There is a long line of faithfulness you're a part of that can be traced back through history all the way back to Joshua. That's amazing to think about.

And it's even more amazing to think about the faithful generations to come because of your faithfulness. But we must "be strong and courageous," just as Joshua was.

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

**"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and
courageous. Do not be frightened nor dismayed."**

Joshua 1:9



Photo courtesy of Ex Nihilo Media

Craig Carlisle, Etowah Baptist Association director of missions and current president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention, leads the School of the Prophets conference.

Annual School of Prophets focuses on culture

By Michael Brooks
The Alabama Baptist

Chuck Lawless said when he began serving as a pastor 44 years ago, he felt overwhelmed by the task.

“I didn’t know how to preach, or how to manage a deacons’ meeting, nor did I know anything about Roberts or rules or order!” he quipped. “But I prayed, ‘Lord, just help me.’”

“Now I tell other ministers to trust the Lord for His power and do the work.”

Lawless was one of five presenters at the School of the Prophets, sponsored April 28 by Etowah Baptist Association and hosted by Meadowbrook Church in Gadsden.

Craig Carlisle, Etowah Baptist Association director of missions and current president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention, said this year’s conference was the seventh under his leadership, although the original event began in 1946.

Daily ‘battle’

“Our theme (this year) is ‘Christianity vs. Culture,’ and it’s a battle we have every day,” Carlisle said.

Lawless, dean of doctoral studies and vice president for spiritual formation at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, told

participants, “The Lord leads us into impossible battles so that He might be our warrior, and the nations might know His name.

‘Missional’ struggle

“Our struggle is missional because it shows the power of God to a needy world,” Lawless added. “A danger in ministry is that we can be educated and equipped beyond dependence on God.”

Dean Inserra, lead pastor of City Church in Tallahassee, Florida, asserted that the United States is filled with “cultural Christians” who live moral lives but are confused by culture “moving the goalposts” on absolutes.

“They don’t reject the Word of God, but give it a ‘shoulder shrug,’” Inserra said, noting church leaders should work with cultural believers and tell them “the rest of the story — cultural Christianity can’t save; only Jesus can.”

Other speakers were Jonathan Hayashi, founding and lead pastor of Sola Church in Kansas City; Brent Leatherwood, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission; and Brian Kennedy, associate professor of preaching at Gateway Seminary in Ontario, California, and senior pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church in Ontario.

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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

CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR

Southside Baptist Church in Fayette, Alabama, (Size 200–250) is prayerfully searching for our next senior pastor. Our current pastor is retiring after 26 years of faithfulness. Please submit your resumé to: Stephen Fulmer at Sfulmer@centurytel.net.

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 fbcdcherd.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, Alabama, 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.

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 mcbcwesblocton@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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GRADUATIONS

UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE



UM photo

Above: The University of Mobile presented its top two student awards, the William K. Weaver Jr. Excellence Award and the Annie Boyd Parker Weaver Excellence Award, to Logan Lipke (left) of Orange Beach, and Anna Olsen of Semmes. **Right:** President Charles Smith addresses more than 300 graduates during commencement.



UM photo



UM photo

The University of Mobile Class of 2025 celebrates graduation May 10 with a UM tradition — touching the Great Commission Globe to signify being sent into the world to pursue God’s calling for their lives.



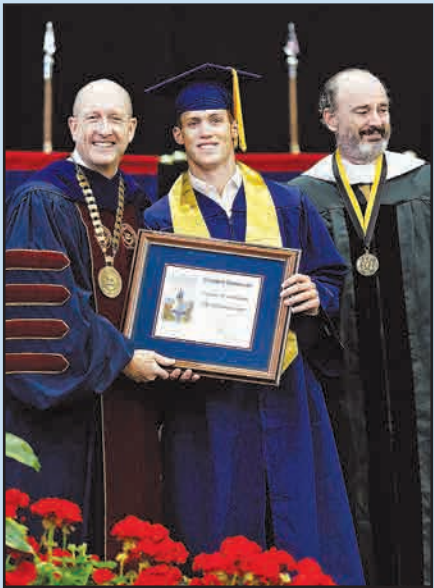
Samford photo

Left: Samford University held six commencement ceremonies May 2–3, where more than 1,400 students walked the stage and received their degrees. **Below:** Beeson Divinity School’s faculty prays over each graduate in a time of consecration during the May 2 service. Twenty-two graduates gathered in Beeson’s Hodges Chapel to receive their degrees.



Samford photo

SAMFORD UNIVERSITY



Samford photo

Right: The Samford Senior Walk brings a full-circle moment for the class of 2025 as the graduating seniors ring their class bell, just as they did at the end of their freshman gathering when they began their time at Samford.



Samford photo

Above: Law and history major Langston Strawbridge (center), a Birmingham-Southern transfer, became the first active student to receive the Bell Tower Award, which typically goes to a faculty member, staffer or alumni. Beck A. Taylor (left) and former BSC president Daniel Coleman are flanking Strawbridge.

There's more to it than a 'hello'

Lifeway Research study spotlights variety of ways churches welcome guests

Every church aims to welcome guests in some way. Those efforts may look different in different churches and may have changed over the last decade.

According to a Lifeway Research study of U.S. Protestant pastors, more than 99% of churches welcome visitors in at least one of 11 ways. Fewer than 1% say they don't use any of the options. Still, several methods are more popular among certain congregations.

"There is more to welcoming than saying 'Hello,'" said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research. "We see churches seeking to provide guests information, direct them where they need to go, obtain contact information to follow up ... as well as greeting them."

The most popular methods to make guests feel welcome at U.S. Protestant churches are having greeters at entrances (91%) and offering an opportunity to meet the pastor after the service (91%).

Four in 5 churches (80%) have printed cards guests are asked to complete to enable follow-up, while 38% have an online form and 28% have books in the pews for all attendees to indicate they were present that also collect visitor information.

'It takes effort'

Two in 3 (66%) have a central location where guests can learn about the church. Most pastors also say they periodically host an information session for new people to learn more about the church (58%) or set aside time during the service for regular attendees to welcome guests (52%).

Around 2 in 5 have gifts for guests (41%). Among the most popular gifts offered by churches are mugs



Unsplash.com

or cups (21%), pens (21%), gift bags or baskets (14%), food or drink items (10%), books (8%), welcome packets about the church (8%), Bibles (6%), gift cards (5%), bookmarks (2%) or another type of gift (6%).

Fewer churches have greeters or attendants in the parking lot (18%). The least popular manner of welcoming guests is by asking them to stand in the worship service (16%).

"Churches engage in a lot of different activities to welcome guests. Of the 11 specific activities we asked about, the typical church does five or six of them," said McConnell. "It takes effort to help someone new feel comfortable walking into an existing relational community like a church."

Church culture plays a part

Depending on the type of church, guests may be more likely to be greeted in a specific way.

White pastors are the most likely to say they have greeters at entranc-

es (92%). African American pastors are the most likely to set aside time during the service for regular attendees to welcome guests (82%) and to ask guests to stand (57%).

Attendance records

Pastors of other ethnicities are among the most likely to offer a gift (56%), have books in the pews for all attendees to indicate they were present that also collect visitor information (43%) and have greeters in the parking lot (28%).

Older pastors are also among the most likely to bring attention to visitors during the service. Those 65 and older are the most likely to ask guests to stand (24%). Pastors 45–54 (56%) and those 65 and older (55%) are more likely than those 18–44 (44%) to set aside time for regular attendees to welcome guests.

Church size also has a significant impact on the way congregations greet guests. Pastors at churches with 250 or more are the most likely to have greeters in the parking lot

(52%). Pastors at churches with fewer than 50 in attendance are the least likely to have greeters at entrances (80%) and provide printed cards for guests to fill out for follow-up (70%).

Challenge to communicate

Additionally, the larger the church, the more likely they are to have a central location where guests can learn about the church, offer periodic information sessions to learn about the church, have an online form for guests to provide information for follow-up and provide a gift to visitors.

"The larger the church, the more guests there are who need to be welcomed and communicated with. It is both a challenge to communicate well with each visitor and an opportunity to have a central location for this to occur and to have enough people for periodic information sessions," said McConnell.

Churches tend to change how they welcome guests as the effectiveness of those methods changes. Several methods have become less popular among churches since a 2017 Lifeway Research study.

Adapting to current needs

Today, fewer churches say they periodically host an information session for new people (down 7 points from 65% in 2017 to 58%), have a central location where guests can learn about the church (down 12 points to 66%), set aside time during the service for regular attendees to welcome guests (down 17 points to 52%), have greeters in the parking lot (down 6 points to 18%), have an opportunity to meet the pastor after the service (down 5 points to 91%) or have greeters at the entrances (down 4 points to 91%). (Lifeway)

Glory of God

By David Dawson
Tennessee Baptist Mission Board

Tennessee Baptist leaders invest in future with college students

Chad Mize and Jonathan Chapman are doing their part to ensure that the circle remains unbroken.

Mize, associate pastor of missions and mobilization at Forest Hills Baptist Church, and Chapman, collegiate ministry specialist at East Tennessee State University, are both passionate and committed to helping aspiring church leaders find reliable and godly “ministry mentors.”

Eventually, if all goes according to plan, those same students will then help others follow that path.

It’s a cycle of events that is crucial to the future of student ministry, said Chapman. With the pipeline of rising ministry leaders slowing almost to a trickle in recent years, this is a vital time for new leaders to emerge.

Chapman said Tennessee Baptists can aid the process, and infuse the cycle, by supporting the BCMs in Tennessee, both with prayer and financial resources.

“As Tennessee Baptists give through the Cooperative Program and the Golden Offering for Tennessee Missions, they make it possible for BCMs to disciple students and also to send them back out as leaders into the local churches here in Tennessee — and also around the world,” said Chapman.

‘Circle of ... life’

Mize and Chapman recently watched “the circle of (ministry) life” unfold in front of them.

The story starts when Cole Rogers, now the collegiate ministry specialist at Belmont, was serving on staff at Forest Hills.

“While I was interning in the student ministry at Forest Hills (Baptist Church), I began to have



Tennessee Baptist leaders, from left, Micah Stephens, Jonathan Chapman, Cole Rogers and Chad Mize discuss the importance of a ministry pipeline during a recent video shoot.

conversations with Chad about what would it look like for me to go into ministry,” said Rogers. “I felt like God was pulling me in that direction, but I didn’t really know what that would look like.”

Mize helped Rogers get connected with Chapman, who ultimately offered Rogers a job with the ETSU BCM.

“Cole came to our BCM at a pivotal time,” said Chapman. “We had been growing — literally doubling — in the last two years before he arrived. Cole becoming our campus minister was incredible because he was able to have so much impact on our students.”

In October 2021, shortly after

Rogers finished seminary, an opportunity came open at Belmont University, and Rogers took a position with the school in Nashville.

Meanwhile, back at ETSU, the Lord was working in the heart of Micah Stephens, an ETSU student was feeling a call to the ministry.

One day, Stephens was sitting in Chapman’s office — “pouring my heart out,” as he described it — about his desire to see what being in the ministry was really about. During this meeting, Chapman received an e-mail from Mize, asking if he had any students who were wanting to learn “how to do ministry.”

Chapman replied that, yes, as a

matter of fact, he did have just such a student. “And he’s sitting right in front of me,” he told Mize.

Stephens soon began a ministry residence at Forest Hills, and he started connecting with BCMs across Tennessee, including working with Rogers for various events at Belmont.

Weekly meeting

What makes this interesting is the fact that, several years earlier — when Rogers was at ETSU — he had disciplined Stephens, meeting with him each week and showing him “what it looked like to be a young man who had responded to the Lord’s call to ministry.”

From Mize to Chapman to Rogers to Stephens — the circle was unbroken.

“The investments from the people at BCM and other students around me altered the course of my life forever,” said Stephens. “(They) helped me respond positively to what the Lord was doing in my life.”

Mize said this exactly what he hopes to see happen over and over again.

“At Forest Hills, we’ve always believed in collaborative ministry through our local conventions, and the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board has really served as a catalyst for equipping those we’ve sent out and also discipling those we’ve sent to college campuses,” he said. “And with this story, we really see all sides of that equation work for the glory of God and the furthering of the gospel.”

EDITOR’S NOTE — This story was written by David Dawson and originally published by the Baptist & Reflector.

“The investments from the people at BCM ... altered the course of my life forever.”

Micah Stephens

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MAKE DISCIPLES

Life-long Journey

By Tessa Sanchez
International Mission Board

Central Asian believers break out of Christian bubble

Nazira is a second-generation Christian from Central Asia. Her mother was the first believer in their family and reminds Nazira of the apostle Paul.

Her mother is known for her faith, her deep study of the Bible and her passion for evangelism.

While Nazira was born into a Christian family and attended a Baptist church, she admits she was confused about her beliefs. Studying at university caused her to question what she had learned as a child.

It wasn't until she went to a Christian camp in college that she grew serious about her faith.

Further education

She later moved to Prague, Czechia, also known as the Czech Republic, to pursue further education.

She was surprised to find society in general, her coworkers and even Christians in churches being sexually promiscuous.

Prague's secular lifestyle left her disillusioned, and she didn't have a heart for sharing the gospel with Czechs.

Looking back, Nazira said that lifestyle probably also existed in her home country, but she realized she lived in a Christian bubble, so she wasn't exposed.

Nazira's story might sound like the experience of young adults in the U.S. who grew up in Christian communities and then entered the secular world for education or work.

Nazira eventually recognized her heart needed to be transformed. She wasn't showing grace and had



IMB photo

Nazira stands and sings during a worship service in Prague. Even though she was raised in a Christian family, she admits to being confused about her beliefs when she was younger.

become "a self-righteous Pharisee." The Lord eventually gave her a heart for Czechs, and she came to love the people and their culture.

She's found ways to love and serve through involvement in her local church.

She serves at the coffee station in the church alongside International Mission Board missionary Diane In.

Nazira translates for Diane and other Christians in ministry outreaches to refugees.

Welcoming attitude

Nazira is serious about following God and His commands, Diane said.

Her love for making newcomers

feel welcome at church is evident.

A Bible sermon series in their church highlighted how the church should be light in this world. She saw how she could be a light in a dark place. Nazira and her husband now lead a Bible study in their home.

Build relationships

Two non-Christians attend their study, and Nazira's approach to sharing with them is to build relationships and be transparent.

She doesn't want to give the appearance of trying to be a perfect Christian but to display genuineness and to live as a transformed person full of light and joy.

The Bible study attendees and

visitors to their church see this transparency in Nazira and her husband, and it's making a difference.

The joy Christians have is a stark contrast to non-Christians in Prague.

Nazira now understands God at a deeper level.

She sees Him as a Friend, Father, Comforter and Shepherd.

She describes her walk with the Lord as a life-long journey.

"We just don't stay the same, but rather the shining just grows in us," Nazira said.

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

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Standard sermon?

By Phil Cooke

??????

Why preaching still matters in a digital world — even on television

When I started working in television, preachers and preaching were about the only thing on Christian TV. My first boss in the business, Oral Roberts, was a pioneer because we were producing prime-time TV specials with major stars and celebrities of the day, and many of the programs were filmed in exotic locations like Alaska. But for most programming, Christian television focused on preaching so much that any creative person like me in the field was desperate to try something new.

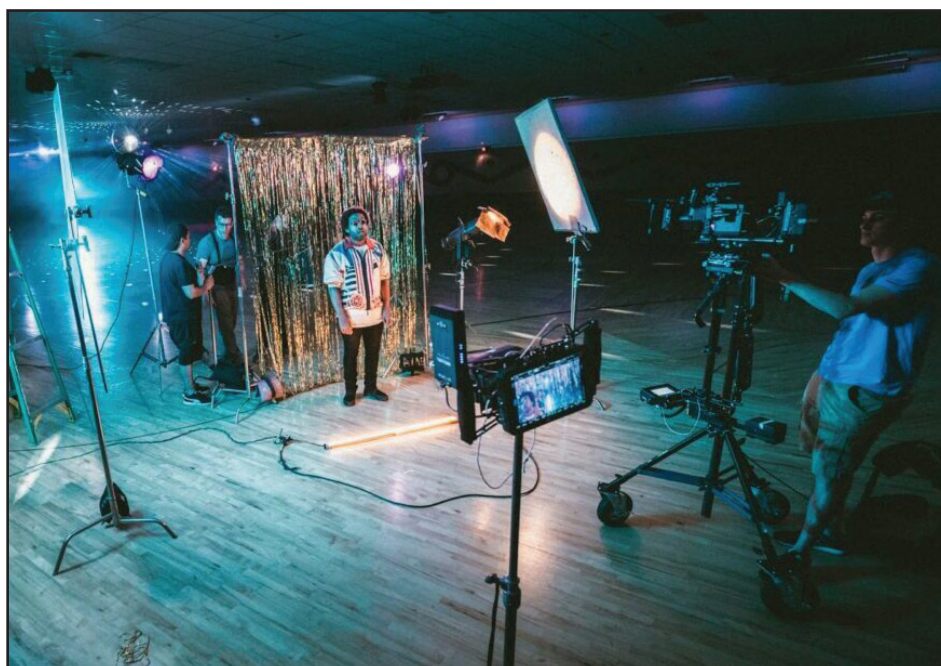
So, over the years, pioneering producers in Christian television expanded into interview programs, documentaries, concert specials and drama. CBN even flirted with a soap opera. But despite all those brave attempts, a curious thing happened.

Preaching on television endured.

Since then, even though media and culture have dramatically changed, and in today's digital world where the programming options are almost unlimited, guess what still gets the most response in Christian media?

Preaching on television.

Sure, some of the major Christian networks will confirm that movies generate the biggest audiences. Still, when it comes to viewers who are committed enough to support the media platform and who will show up week after week — those people are watching TV preachers. Don't forget that Billy Graham's preaching programs generated the financial response to pay for his more innovative ideas like feature films and international media outreaches. Similarly, Oral Roberts' preaching on television raised the



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money to build Oral Roberts University, which today is a thriving Christian university complete with virtual reality and augmented reality labs, helping push the envelope for the next generation of Christian-driven media.

'Celebrity preacher'

You might argue and say that it's a "celebrity preacher" thing, and to some small extent, that may be true, but I've been doing this long

enough to know that's not the honest answer. The truth is that people respond to great preaching on television similarly to great preaching in church or other live settings.

The bottom line is that if you're a pastor, preacher, or teacher, never take a backseat to anyone or anything when it comes to media. If you sincerely want to try other types of programs and formats, I'm all for it because that's a sweet spot for our team at Cooke Media

Group. But if preaching is your calling and passion, then don't let your creative team push you in a different direction.

Be creative

You may not even be involved in broadcast television, but whatever the digital format — short videos, live-streaming, podcasting, teaching videos and broadcasting — we all want to be creative, but we also need to understand that preaching is often the link that pulls in an audience and makes a strong connection. Plus, it has the potential to give the viewers an opportunity to fund those other projects.

I'll never stop exploring new styles and programming ideas, but criticizing Christian television because it's dominated by preaching is like criticizing network television because the NFL dominates ratings. Preaching is there because it's what people want to watch.

My only request? Film it well, make it interesting to watch and preach a message worth hearing.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was originally published by phil-cooke.com.

One church trend that isn't looking good

I attended a highly recommended church in a major city recently — a church that's grown into multiple campuses.

When the pastor began his message, he asked everyone to turn to a particular chapter in the Bible, so I opened my Bible and found the Scripture. Then I looked around, and to my surprise, out of about 400 people in that theater, I was the only one I could see holding a Bible. There may have been a few people using YouVersion or another digital Bible app. I'm

seeing it at churches of all sizes, theological perspectives and worship styles.

God has given us a revelation of who He is, who we are, our purpose, destiny and the key to salvation and eternal life, and we don't even think enough of it to read it.

I'm reminded of the classic quote from Charles Spurgeon: "A Bible that's falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn't."

Believe it. (Phil Cooke)