

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



Photo courtesy of William Pless
William Pless (left)
meets with a young
father in the Wiregrass
Emergency Pregnancy
Service program.

Crash course

Young fathers mentored by Wiregrass Emergency Pregnancy Service

By Hannah Whitman
The Alabama Baptist

Being a father should be one of the greatest privileges a man could ever receive, and William Pless — co-pastor of Park Avenue Baptist Church in Enterprise — has taken on the role of showing young men how to be the type of father God wants them to be for their families.

Pless has served as fatherhood coordinator for Wiregrass Emergency Pregnancy Service for nearly three years and said his job is to meet and mentor young fathers who come into the center.

They do this, Pless noted, by going through a video-based learning curriculum with a discussion time built into the appointment.

Each father is given a Bible when they start the program, and after 10

lessons the father is given a “He Reads Truth” Study Bible to help with the lesson and application.

Learning to live for Christ

“I share the gospel with a Bible lesson or spiritual application based on the lesson being done with the father,” Pless said.

They also lead the fathers in prayer before and after each meeting and encourage them throughout

their time together in the program.

Pless noted the WEPS program uses Psalm 101 as a reference.

He breaks down the verses of the psalm in this way: “We encourage our fathers to become a Christian if they are not already one. Do everything with a clear conscience and clear heart — to not look at porn or anything that is unworthy to look at, not to engage in gossip or idle
(See ‘Influential,’ page 2)

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Influential

Pregnancy program in Enterprise improving family dynamics

(continued from page 1)
talk of other people and then to surround their family with good people that will only encourage and help, not with toxic people.”

Pless felt called to start the fatherhood program three years ago. “The statistics from 2022 revealed a generation of lost men, many of whom were neither employed nor engaged with a church,” he said.

“I wanted to start something that not only would support men who needed it but also share the gospel with them.”

During this time, Pless said, he was led to Acts 13:36, which says David “after serving God’s purpose in his own generation, fell asleep [and] was buried with his fathers.”

Leaning on Acts 13:36, Pless said he wanted to make sure he was doing everything in his generation for the Lord.

That decision led him to leave his job as accountant at Georgia-Pacific and start this ministry at WEPS.

Spiritual impact

“We know that when the father comes to Christ, 93% of the time the family will follow and come to Christ as well. One of the goals of WEPS is to get families plugged into a local body of believers,” he said.

Pless said another Scripture the Lord used to confirm his decision to change his job was Genesis 13. It spotlights Abraham and Lot going separate ways.

He noted a person often has to



Unsplash.com

leave something to go to something, and that was exactly what he needed to do.

“I was blessed to be raised in the Coffee County area where I had several men have a positive influence in my life, from men in my church who worked to teach me about the Bible and show what it is to be a Christian man to teachers and coaches who worked to instill a work ethic in me that I still cherish to this day,” Pless said.

“Most importantly, my father had a great influence in my life,” he added.

“He was the spiritual leader of our home, always making sure we were not only in church but engaged in our church, from the youth program to volunteering and

giving back to the community with local missions work and at church workdays, which gave back to a church that was pouring into us in youth and children’s ministries.”

Pless and his wife, Bonnie, have two sons, Xander, 25, and Austin, 19, and he has worked to keep the love and guidance he received from his childhood in his own home with Bonnie.

Better men and fathers

After the fathers have completed the WEPS program, Pless said, they will be invited to share their testimonies at their annual fundraising banquet.

The men share how the program impacted their lives — and how it helps them to become better men and fathers.

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 crossword puzzle can be found on page 11.



Rashional Thoughts

By Jennifer Davis Rash
President and Editor-in-Chief

 jrash@thealabamabaptist.org

 [@RashionalThts](https://twitter.com/RashionalThts)

Is adrenaline overload edging out our sensitivity to the Spirit?

We weren't made to absorb constant chaos and negativity. Our lives must exist in rhythms that provide for seasons of calmness in between the crises that will undoubtedly surface along the way.

Somehow, we've allowed countless uncomfortable and confusing situations to be prioritized as crises.

We also are labeling even the most routine items as "breaking news" and sharing them far and wide with intense urgency.

We truly can't move forward productively and positively if we are under relentless pressure from never-ending crises, trauma upon trauma and a lack of trustworthy communication.

Constantly in triage mode

Additionally, we quickly lose touch with how to respond effectively to a true crisis if everything becomes a crisis.

Could this be part of the reason so many people deal with high levels of debilitating anxiety? Could this also be the reason

it seems to be getting harder to pull people together to help solve truly critical situations?

Are people in general basically exhausted and overwhelmed?

In some ways, I can understand how we got here, but I'm sad it's taking so long for it to run its course.

How did we get here?

1. Think about how much access you have to limitless information and how you decide what to read and listen to versus what you don't pick up, click on or channel surf to find. Think about what you retain even after hearing or reading about it.

If someone has content they want you to know, then they will have to compete with all the other content providers to get your attention.

Thus, the age of leading with "breaking news" exists even if the story is merely about the bird sanctuary at the zoo receiving a fresh coat of paint.

I'm not telling you anything you don't know, but if you are like me, then it's still hard to

look away from the urgent labels because the next one might truly be "breaking news."

2. Many, many, many people somehow got the impression they must have an immediate opinion on all aspects of as many topics as possible and respond immediately to share it with all who will listen.

There's no time to fact check, no time to really even think about why the information actually matters in the larger scheme of life. Off we go with threads of people's opinions, which are often unkind and, in turn, draw out even more opinions.

3. While we as church people know Jesus is the answer, we sometimes still find ourselves spending more time venting our latest frustrations when we gather as a faith family rather than fully focusing on Him.

What if our time together as believers focused solely on worshipping the Lord, learning more about Him, praying for those who don't know Him yet and encouraging each other?

The smiles, hugs, fist bumps, silly moments and words of support serve a vital purpose in

keeping us fueled to shine in a dark world.

We'll face plenty of negativity and complaining the minute we leave the church, so why would we want to shortchange those precious moments of peace with the same banter found at any other location on any other day?

4. Finding time alone with God is difficult when we are fighting the world on our own terms.

Some years, we'll have more time than other years. Still, what if we protected whatever private time we have with the Lord as diligently as we allow ourselves to be frustrated about this or that? What if we truly cleared our minds and listened for His guidance as we read His Word and pray?

Adrenaline rush

5. Adrenaline drives our world. Urgency, emergency, deadline pressure — they always help us get the job done.

Is it possible we have adapted to a life built on adrenaline and use it for daily direction as well as a strategy for communicating in this chaotic culture?

Your Voice



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

'This is our time, don't waste it,' Wolfe says

By Shawn Hendricks
The Alabama Baptist

Memories of fishing the riverbanks and swamps in Louisiana left an impression on Tony Wolfe, executive director of the South Carolina Baptist Convention.

Wolfe fondly shared some of the lessons from fishing he learned during the convention sermon at the 2025 Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting held June 10–11 in Dallas. He specifically applied some of them to the challenges and decisions Baptists face today.

Pulling his message from Ecclesiastes 11:1–6, Wolfe urged messengers to not retreat from their global mission.

Amid celebrations focused on the centennial of Southern Baptist's giving channel for missions and ministry, Wolfe noted the Cooperative Program has helped the SBC become a "powerful force in advancing the Great Commission."

'Sacrificial'

"We send our bread on the surface of the waters, sacrificially and joyfully together, because when we do, wherever it is needed most, there we know after many days we may find it," he noted, referring to the Cooperative Program as an exercise in "sacrificial, forward faith."

While Wolfe acknowledged there are things that may frustrate him about "Southern Baptist's cooperative work," he remains enthusiastic about the effort.



Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist
Tony Wolfe, executive director of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, delivers the convention sermon at the 2025 Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting on June 11.

"It is my prerogative to stay joyfully, sacrificially and strategically engaged doing everything I can to move us toward greater clarity, greater missional effectiveness. ... I'm still casting lines in this flowing river."

'Unified effort'

The gospel message is too urgent, the mission too clear, and time is too short to waste a single day of "staring at the clouds or over-analyzing the winds," he said.

The Cooperative Program is the best strategy Southern Baptists have to make a difference with a "unified effort," Wolfe said.

"As a Southern Baptist people, never have we possessed more technology, more intelligence, more global access, more financial resources or more organizational strength than right now," Wolfe said.

"Yet still, the question persists: Will ours be the generation that sees the retrenchment of our global war on lostness? Today, let the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Hall in Dallas, Texas, resound with our unified, exclamatory, 'No.' — it must not be; it will not be."

Next generation

Baptists should consider what the next generation will see 100 years from now, he asked.

"May God be so pleased that multitudes among the nations would hear that Jesus Christ lived a perfect, sinless life they could not live, died the substitutionary death that they deserve, was buried in a borrowed tomb to take these consequences of their sins to the pits of the grave where they could never fully take it on their own," he said.

"And just as the Scriptures had predicted, three days later rose from the dead to seal victory over sin, death and hell. Not just for Himself, but for you and me and any person, anywhere down through the ages who would repent, believe in Him and call on His name.

"This is our message, this is our moment, this is our time, don't waste it."

If you ask most Christians about their spiritual pilgrimage, they will say that it is a day-by-day experience with its ups and downs, its victories and defeats, its successes and failures. In brief, it is a process.

M. Robert Mulholland Jr. in "Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formations"

We are working ... with our state conventions to assist them ... to try to revitalize churches that we don't want to lose. Millions, if not billions of dollars have been poured into churches. It would be a tragic shame ... for those church buildings to be sold and to become restaurants, mosques, places for the Lions Club and other things when they still need to be locations for faithful gospel preaching.

Danny Akin, president Southeastern Seminary

Quick thought: I have had the privilege to get to know and engage with SBC pastors quite a bit in the last few years and what doesn't get said enough: we have some incredible pastors across the denomination. Great leaders who love the Lord, love the Bible and love their people.

Dan Darling
@dandarling on X

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“When you pray, you unite with almighty God to unleash His awesome power on behalf of people and situations around the world.”

RICHARD BLACKABY

Author, speaker and president of Blackaby Ministries International

“We hear the voices of those who have concerns,” said **Brent Leath-erwood**, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, recognizing those who planned to vote to abolish the ERLC in Dallas during the SBC Annual Meeting. “We are committed to listening well to pastors and lay leaders, both those who support and those who question as we work together to best serve Southern Baptists and advocate for their priorities.”

Remember — when it comes to preaching, teaching and writing, clarity has to be crafted.

David L. Allen

@DrDavidLAllen on X

When I was a young pastor, I believed my calling was to be a change agent — to shape the church and lead it. But over the years, the Lord has shown me something: the church was shaping me.

Today, I am who I am — along with my family we’ve become — because of the churches I’ve had the privilege to serve. Their investment in us, their grace and their faithfulness have left a lasting imprint on me. I’m grateful.

How pastors and the people treat each other is so important!

Chris Crain on Facebook
Birmingham Metro Baptist Association



Lass WORDS

BY KEN LASS

The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

The good old days

If you are of a certain age you have probably spent some time reminiscing about “the good old days.” You’ve taken note of the general decline of moral standards in our culture. You’ve grown weary of the constant political bickering. You feel as though the world has become a more dangerous and scary place.

Perhaps you long to go back to your childhood when life seemed simpler, more peaceful and more secure. You remember when people could be trusted, when courtesy and mutual respect were the norm, not the exception. Life seemed more hopeful. You were excited about what your future might hold.

Ah, those were the days, right? A kinder, gentler time.

Or was it?

Actually, those decades were quite turbulent and distressed. The 1960s saw race riots, the Cuban missile crisis, intense controversy over the Vietnam war leading to civil unrest on college campuses all over the country and the assassinations of a United States president, his brother and civil rights leader Martin Luther King.

The 1970s gave us Watergate, gas rationing, the Iran hostage crisis and the rise of drug abuse to epidemic proportions.

The world wasn’t safer or more peaceful. Back then I clearly remember my parents letting out deep sighs and longing for their own “good old days.”

Perhaps the innocence and naivete of childhood colors our

perception of the past. As children, we likely had little responsibility, didn’t have to work to make a living, received unconditional love from our parents and didn’t have reason to pay attention to the news and the disturbing vibe it conveyed. We could, by and large, focus on our own needs and desires.

As we grew into adulthood, we had to become more acutely aware of the dangers and risks out there and the tensions and stress that came with them.

‘Make the most’

The world has always been troubled. The truth is, the days are as good as you make them. Ephesians 5:16 says, “Make the most of every opportunity because the days are evil.” Psalm 90:12 states, “So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.”

The guidelines for life have been the same throughout biblical history: Love the Lord, obey His commands, love your neighbor as yourself. Such a life will endure whatever is going on out there in the chaos.

Make these your good old days!

MEET THE AUTHOR

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

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

CHARLES GODWIN

Charles Godwin, a longtime Alabama Baptist pastor and director of missions for West Cullman Baptist Association, died May 9. He was 94.



GODWIN

A native of Clanton, Godwin earned a bachelor's degree at Howard College (now Samford University) in Birmingham and a master of divinity degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He served as pastor of churches in Notasulga, Muscle Shoals, Huntsville and Cullman, as well as Kentucky and Ohio.

Godwin is survived by his wife of more than 70 years, Sue; sons, Mark and Scott; daughter, Tara; and one grandson.

about the church, published and compiled by David Hayes and Teri Easterling. Pastor Kyle Sullivan received two commemorative plaques on behalf of the church given by Chris Crain, executive director of Birmingham Metro Baptist Association, and Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. A third presentation was made by Sarah Walters (right), a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, with Paul Armstrong (left), worship minister, accepting the plaque. Special music included a solo by Michael Wallace, a former member; a recording of "How Great Thy Art," by former minister of music Jon Riddle, now deceased; a solo by Denise Kirby; and the adult and children's choirs. Following worship, a lunch was served, and people were encouraged to view the displays of the various ministries of the church.



Submitted photo

CHEROKEE ASSOCIATION

► **Eric Gargus** is the new student and education pastor of **Pine Grove Baptist Church, Centre**. He earned a master of divinity degree from West Coast Bible College and Seminary, Waco, Texas. During the past 29 years, Gargus has served churches in Alabama, Florida and Georgia. He and his wife, Penny, have one daughter. Zach Richards is pastor.



Photo courtesy of Phillip Hollingsworth

CHILTON ASSOCIATION

► **West End Baptist Church, Clanton**, honored **Eura Brewer**, director of weekday education ministry May 4 during the morning service for her 20 years of service for the church's day care program. Pictured (left to right): Eddie Lightsey, associate pastor; Eura Brewer, day care director; and James Watkins, senior pastor.



Photo courtesy of Jillian Green

COFFEE ASSOCIATION

► **William Pless** (right) is the new co-pastor/elder of **Park Avenue Baptist Church, Enterprise**. He is a graduate of Flagler College, St. Augustine, Florida, and is currently enrolled in Samford University's Ministry Training Institute. He



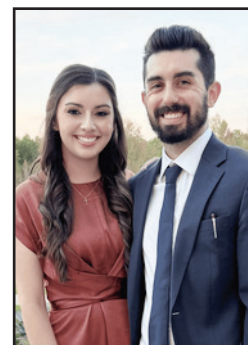
Photo courtesy of Michael Davis

serves as a volunteer chaplain for South Alabama Speedway, Kinston, and as the coordinator of church relations and fatherhood for Wiregrass Emergency Pregnancy Service,

Enterprise. Pless and his wife, Bonnie, have two sons. Greg Swim (not pictured) was affirmed as the first congregational elder for Park Avenue Baptist. He and his wife, Angie, have two sons. Michael Davis (left) is co-pastor.

EAST LIBERTY ASSOCIATION

► **Kevin James**, shown here with his wife Eden, is the new pastor of **First Baptist Church Shawmut, Valley**. He has served on staff of churches in Alabama and Texas. He earned a bachelor of music degree from Samford University and a master of divinity degree from Southern Seminary.



fbcschawmut.org

LIMESTONE ASSOCIATION

► **Kevin Ward**, director of missions for **Limestone Baptist Association**, has accepted a position as the new executive director of Madison-Chester & Crockett Baptist associations, Jackson, Tennessee. During his 10 years at Limestone, Ward helped revitalize Camp Helen, a 32-acre camp owned by the association. He will work through the July camp season before he and his wife, Ginger, and children transition to Tennessee.



WARD

MUD CREEK ASSOCIATION

► **Craig Little** is the new pastor of **Dogwood Grove Baptist Church, Adger**. He has served churches in Alabama and New Hampshire. Little and his wife, Allison, have three daughters.



Facebook photo

PICKENS ASSOCIATION

► **Cross Roads Baptist Church, Carrollton**, celebrated its 175th anniversary June 1. The church received two special recognitions from Lyle Dease, director of missions for Pickens Baptist Association, and David Nelson, a

AUTAUGA ASSOCIATION

► **Calvary Baptist Church, Prattville**, will host a community fair July 12, 10 a.m.–2 p.m. There will be games, arts and crafts, bounce houses, face painting, a claw crane and more. Hot dogs, popcorn and sno-cones will be available at this free event. Dave Burns is pastor.



WATSON

► **David Watson** is the new facilities director of **Prattville First Baptist Church**. He and his wife, Terri, have two children and five grandchildren.

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► **Daniel Stewart**, who served for more than four years as youth minister for **Lakeside Baptist Church, Birmingham**, has taken a position as connections pastor at the campus of Sugar Creek Baptist Church, Missouri City, Texas.

► **The Baptist Church at McAdory, McCalla**, will host VBS June 29–July 2, 6–8:30 p.m. The theme is Egypt: Joseph's Journey from Prison to Palace. Students will visit the market place of Cairo, Egypt, and the home of Joseph. Grade levels include preschool (starting at age 3) through fifth grade. Adults are invited to attend a special VBS Bible study. Supper will be served every night 5:30–6. Register online at bcam.info/vbs. Bill McCall is pastor.

► **Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church, Hueytown**, celebrated its 150th anniversary May 4. Every person received a commemorative book

NEWS

commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Four deacons and the pastor (from left), Jackie Ray, Dan O'Mary, pastor Joe Fonden (center), chair Mark McDaniel and Ricky Hill, accepted the commission's plaque on behalf of the church. Former member Kayla Junkin sang two solos during the service. A



Photo courtesy of David Nelson

slide show of the church's history was presented by Ashlie Myers. During the service the congregation sang "What Wondrous Love is This," the first song sung at Cross Roads Baptist in 1850. Shawn McDaniel, who grew up in the church and is now pastor of Highland Baptist Church, Gordo, was the guest preacher.

PINE BARREN ASSOCIATION

► **Don Bell** is the new pastor of **Enon Baptist Church, Camden**. He previously served as pastor of Bethsaida Baptist Church, Furman, for more than seven years. Bell earned a bachelor's degree from Mobile College (now University of Mobile), attended Southern Seminary and received a master's degree in religion from Florida State University. He has taught and continues to teach New Testament classes at churches throughout the U.S. and Canada.



BELL

SAND MOUNTAIN ASSOCIATION

► Henagar Baptist Church will host the **Sand Mountain Baptist Association Women's Conference** Aug. 9. Doors open at 8 a.m. The theme, Rooted in His Love, is based on Ephesians 3:14-21. Guest speakers include Jo Carwile, Missy Lundy, Pam Atcheson, Candace McIntosh and Julie Boyd. To register, visit henagarbaptist.com. Roger Graham is pastor. Chris Guinn is director of missions.

SHELBY ASSOCIATION

► **Randy Atkinson** recently retired as senior adult pastor of **First Baptist Church Pelham**. He and his wife, Sharron, were honored at a reception



ATKINSON

May 30. Atkinson has been in ministry 56 years and has served as a full-time pastor for most of that time. Churches where he served as pastor include Hillview Baptist Church, Forestdale, and Hoover First Baptist Church. He is a graduate of Samford University and New Orleans Seminary. The couple have one adult son.

Atkinson is available for pulpit supply and interim positions, 205-482-4044 or ratkinson408@charter.net.

► **Macedonia North Baptist Church, Vincent**, celebrated its 175th anniversary May 18. Special music was provided by the praise team. Mark Wakefield, a state missionary with the State Board of Missions, was the guest preacher. He made a special presentation to the church with Adam



Photo courtesy of Rebekah Parr

Armstrong, the pastor, accepting the honor. The history of the church was shared by the church historian Margie Howard (left), one of the oldest living members, who received a plaque on behalf of the church from Debbie Campbell (right), a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Howard wore the "homecoming dress" that has been passed down for almost 60 years and worn by a lady in the church each homecoming celebration.

ST. CLAIR ASSOCIATION

► **Noah Bullock** is the new student pastor for **First Baptist Church Moody**. Bullock graduated from Mississippi State University, Starkville, with a degree in civil engineering. He and his wife, Rachel, have been married two years. Brad Moseley is pastor.



Photo courtesy of Noah Bullock

► Mount Moriah Baptist Church, Pell City, celebrated its centennial anniversary May 18. The celebration began with a concert by Crystal River gospel group from Oxford, Alabama, followed by congregational singing led by several choir members. Additional special music was provided by Kathy Aldredge who sang a solo, accompanying herself on the piano. Redena King, minister of music, introduced Bridgett Junkin, a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, who made a special presentation. Accepting the commemorative plaque on behalf of the church (pictured to the right of Junkin) were deacons Jim King, Carl Jones, Kyle Harris and interim pastor Danny Wyatt. Harris brought the message, followed by lunch and afternoon singing by Crystal River. Each person received an old fashioned fan, ink pen and a copy



Photo courtesy of Redena King

of a pencil drawing of the church done by Maisie Davis, a student at the University of Alabama, Birmingham.

TUSKEGEE LEE ASSOCIATION

► **Lakeview Baptist Church, Auburn**, is hosting a women's conference Aug. 1-2. Author Rosaria Butterfield will be the featured speaker, sharing her conversion experience to Christ and teaching from her book "Five Lies of our Anti-Christian Age." Friday doors open at 5:30 p.m.; event begins at 6:30. Saturday breakfast will be served at 8 a.m.; event begins at 9 and concludes at 11:30. Q&A and a book signing are part of the conference. General registration is open through July 27. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit tabonline.org/Lakeview or call 334-887-7094. Continental breakfast and snacks are included with the registration fee. Brian Payne is pastor.

Carlisle to serve SBC as 2nd VP

Craig Carlisle, current Alabama Baptist State Convention president and director of missions for Etowah Baptist Association, was elected second vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention during the 2025 SBC Annual Meeting in Dallas.



CARLISLE

North Carolina pastor Clint Pressley was elected to serve a second term as SBC president.

Daniel Ritchie, an author and evangelist from North Carolina, was elected first vice president.

Nathan Finn of North Greenville University in South Carolina was reelected recording secretary, and Don Currence, administrative pastor of FBC Ozark, Missouri, and a favorite among messengers, was reelected registration secretary.

Alabama Baptists elected to serve are:

Elected to serve

► Executive Committee — David H. Spencer, member of Circlewood Baptist in Tuscaloosa, term expiring in 2026; and Timothy M. (Tim) Cox, pastor of Liberty Baptist in Chelsea, was elected to a second term expiring in 2029

► Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary — Jeff Meyers, pastor of FBC Opelika, term expiring in 2030

► Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission — Joseph C. (Joe) Godfrey, member of Valleydale Church in Birmingham, term expiring in 2030

► 2025-2026 SBC Committee on Nominations — Melissa Bowen, member of FBC Prattville; and David Eldridge, pastor of Dawson Memorial in Birmingham

Serving in Dallas

► Whitney Alexander of FBC Gadsden on Committee on Resolutions

► Christopher Sanchez of Dauphin Way Baptist in Mobile, on Committee on Resolutions

► Bart Box of Christ Fellowship in Birmingham and Candace McIntosh of Eastern Hills Baptist in Montgomery on Committee on Committees

► Jim Graham of Coosada Baptist in Montgomery and Mark Brown of Southside Baptist in Fayette on Committee on Nominations

► Mark and Brittany Bethea of FBC Montgomery on the Tellers Committee (The Alabama Baptist)

Great Commission Resurgence Task Force files unsealed after 15 years, available for review

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

The voices on the Aug. 11, 2009, audio recording exhibit enthusiasm and excitement as well as intrigue and concern. The people behind the voices seemed to embrace the motivational messages that resulted in seven major components intended to turn Southern Baptists back into evangelistic power-houses.

In the end, only two of the items were completed, but the process to get to the

initial proposal of seven was no less intense.

The discussions highlighted the difficulties in helping autonomous churches co-operate within autonomous associations and autonomous state conventions — and how the national entities and seminaries fit into the mix.

Twenty of the 23 members serving on the 2009–2010 Great Commission Resurgence Task Force were present that opening day — a day task force chair and then-Arkansas

pastor Ronnie Floyd described as the start of “an unprecedented moment.”

“We’ve got to seize this moment,” he shared with the group. “This is a moment in our history that is powerful.”

10 months of work

The audio files from the GCRTF’s 10 months of work were sealed for 15 years, the agreed-upon time by the group.

Those files were unsealed and available to the public at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives beginning June 16, 2025, at 8 a.m.

The collection includes 57 compact disc recordings, one DVD recording, a few printed blog posts from the pray4gcr.com website (which is no longer functional) and the printed



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist
Audio files from the meetings in 2009 and 2010 are archived on 57 compact discs.

GCRTF progress report from February 2010.

Leaders of the task force did not transfer any other paper documents or notebooks, even though, on the audio file, Floyd refers to a comprehensive manual and directory each member had received.

“No minutes, agendas, programs, notes, outlines or correspondence are included in the collection,” according to the collection summary document provided by SBHLA.

Read the full article at thebaptistpaper.org/GCR-audio.

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Together

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'NEW REALITY'

War destroys the campus of Ukraine's Tavriski Christian Institute but not its mission

Based on his experience in Ukraine, Valentyn Syniy believes Christians cannot experience war and emerge unchanged.

"War burns out hypocrisy and formalism," said Syniy, president of Tavriski Christian Institute in Ukraine. "War reveals at the same time that we are stronger than we think and weaker than we think."

Conflict in Ukraine began in February 2014 with Russia's annexation of Crimea and intensified dramatically with the full-fledged invasion by Russia in February 2022.

Showing resilience

Throughout the ongoing war, Ukrainian Christians have demonstrated great resilience, but also have learned how lives are "easily broken," Syniy observed.

In the case of Tavriski Christian Institute, warfare devastated the school's campus in Kherson but could

not destroy its mission to prepare the next generation of the nation's Christian leaders.

Syniy journeyed to the United States in early June to let American Christians know about the institute's needs and its emerging opportunities. After a brief visit in Boston, he arrived in Dallas to attend events involving the International Mission Board and North American Mission Board during the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting.

Before Russia occupied Kherson on March 1, 2022, leaders of Tavriski Christian Institute already had plans in place to evacuate and relocate students to western Ukraine.

On March 10, Russian troops took over the institute's five buildings and 15-acre campus, repurposing its facilities as a military training base, barracks and hospital.

"A neighbor who lived near the campus told us the



Photo courtesy of Baptist Standard
Russian troops destroyed the library of Tavriski Christian Institute in Kherson, Ukraine. However, the school is committed to continuing its mission.

Russian Army brought in a mobile crematorium to dispose of the bodies of the dead," Syniy said.

Russian soldiers looted and ransacked the institute's buildings, destroying the contents of its 30,000-volume library.

Once the Ukrainian Army liberated Kherson in November, the campus was returned to the institute.

However, leaders and staff

found three of the buildings had been destroyed by shelling in late August — the institute's office, the library and one of the dormitories. In the months that followed, the remaining two building also were destroyed.

Providing relief

During the time the campus was occupied by Russian troops, Tavriski Christian Institute carried on its work in rented space in Ivano-Frankivsk, 540 miles to the northwest.

That work included providing relief and assisting in the relocation of internally displaced people. The institute gathered and distributed more than 180 tons of food and other humanitarian aid in nine months.

The institute also replaced about 120 windows in homes where the glass had been blown out by blasts. In doing so, they helped depressed and despondent families who had been living for months in darkness behind boarded up windows move into the light, Syniy noted.

In partnership with the Baptist Union of Ukraine, the institute is launching a new degree program — the nation's first licensed master's degree in chaplaincy and conflict resolution.

"People have experienced trauma," Syniy said. "We want to prepare pastors for a new ministry. There are many new needs and many new challenges."

Ukraine needs theologically trained Christian leaders now more than ever, he added.

"In war, some people lose their faith," Syniy observed. "They ask, 'Where is God in all of this?'"

Syniy believes Christians in Ukraine will emerge from war with a faith strengthened by wrestling with hard questions — a faith shaped by new understandings about the kingdoms of this world and the Kingdom of God.

"We want to prepare pastors for the new reality in Ukraine," Syniy said. (Texas' Baptist Standard)

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UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Church finances and retirement workshops

Throughout July and August, you’ve got five opportunities to attend the Church Financial Issues Check-Up and the Preparing for Retirement workshop at locations around the state.

And if you want, you can attend both in the same day.

The Church Financial Issues Check-Up will be held at each location from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and will cover new tax and retirement legislation affecting the church, policies about designated giving, other financial policies needed and how a church could get in trouble with the IRS.

The Preparing for Retirement workshop will be held from 1 to 4 p.m.

It’s primarily for those ministers and employees in their 50s and 60s to begin to consider topics such as retirement income, Social Security income and Medicare basics.

Attend one or both at these locations:

- ▶ July 17 — State Board of Missions in Prattville
- ▶ July 24 — Birmingham Metro Baptist Association
- ▶ July 31 — Madison Baptist Association in Huntsville
- ▶ Aug. 5 — Mobile Baptist Association
- ▶ Aug. 6 — Southeast Alabama Baptist Association in Dothan

For more information or to register, visit alsbom.org/events.

Training opportunities and resources for church group leaders

Looking for some free, easily accessible, high-quality training for your Sunday School or group leaders? Look no farther than GroupLife Equipping Resources!

Your State Board of Missions has produced multiple video training sessions for leaders in every age group — preschool, children, student and adult plus general leadership — on a variety of topics.

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For GroupLife resources, visit makingdisciplesAL.org/grouplife or scan the code below with your smartphone’s camera.



Senior Adult Leadership Training

Want to be more effective involving senior adults in your church and reaching those in your community?

The Senior Adult Leadership Training can provide basic ways to expand the scope of your church’s senior adult ministry.

It’s a one-day event to equip senior adult ministers, leaders and leadership teams to provide effective and meaningful ministry to senior adults in Alabama Baptist churches.

SALT offers two dates and locations — Aug. 19 at Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Albertville and Aug. 21 at Heritage Baptist Church in Montgomery, both from 9:15 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Both events are free, but registration is required. Lunch will be provided.

To register, visit alsbom.org/salt.

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[Naaman] returned to the man of God, he and all his aides, and came and stood before him; and he said, “Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel.”
2 KINGS 5:15A

CHRISTIAN Crossword



UPCOMING EVENTS
sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Reaching teen guys at Fortify

The world can be tough on teen guys. But they can find help at Fortify, a one-day event aimed at shoring up their faith. Fortify, set for Aug. 30 at Green Valley Baptist Church in Hoover, seeks to strengthen guys in 7th–12th grades with hard-hitting biblical teaching. The goal is to reveal their Christ-centered identity in response to the confusing messages of today’s culture.

Featured speakers will be Dewayne Rembert, pastor of Flatline Church at Chisolm, and Chad Hess, pastor of

Woodmont Baptist Church in Florence. Breakouts include:
► Daily habits that are hijacking your brain
► How to make godly decisions
► One man’s story of new life in Christ
► How to study the Bible
► Key factors contributing to teen spiritual growth (for leaders).
The cost for Fortify is \$20 and includes a Chick-fil-A lunch
For more information or to register, visit alabamamen.org/fortify.



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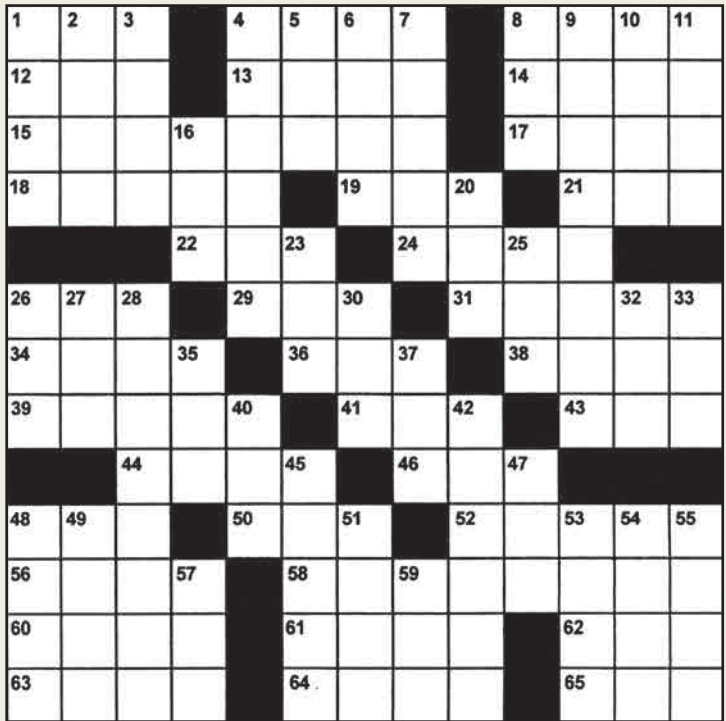
Leader Training July 15 with Robert Smith

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. Robert Smith, who served as professor of Christian preaching at Beeson Divinity School for more than

25 years, will guide you through preaching with intentionality with a goal as to where God wants to take His church. 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.

ACROSS

1. Thou ____ the Christ. (Matt. 16:16)
4. Ruler of old Russia.
8. He ____ unto his own. (John 1:11)
12. ____ Dolorosa, Jesus’ route to Golgotha.
13. A Midwest state.
14. His ears are ____ unto their prayers. (1 Pet. 3:12)
15. New Testament letters.
17. In the beginning was the _____. (John 1:1)
18. A word peculiar to the Book of Psalms.
19. Morning dampness.
21. A ship’s distress call.
22. Ye have made it a ____ of thieves. (Matt. 21:13)
24. Quench all the fiery ____s. (Eph. 6:16)
26. Opposite of on.
29. He that hath the ____ hath life. (1 John 5:12)
31. In the days when the judges _____. (Ruth 1:1)
34. A distinctive quality that characterizes a person.
36. Abraham caught one in the thicket. (Gen. 22:13)
38. ____ ye one another’s burdens. (Gal. 6:2)
39. ____, and it shall be opened. (Matt. 7:7)
41. Whether it be good or _____. (2 Cor. 5:10)
43. Pig pen.
44. ____ the Lord in the air. (1 Thess. 4:17)
46. Drew the ____ to the land full of great fishes. (John 21:11)
48. A form of “to be.”
50. Puppy’s bark.
52. The ____ of one crying in the wilderness. (John 1:23)
56. Rant.



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58. In that hour Jesus ____ in spirit. (Luke 10:21)
60. Similar.
61. Jacob’s brother. (Gen. 25:26)
62. Adam’s helpmeet.
63. Kept in one’s grasp.
64. Separate _____. systematically.
65. A tribe of Israel.

DOWN

1. Thoroughfares. (abbr.)
2. The harvest of the earth is _____. (Rev. 14:15)
3. Does the dog wag the ____, or does the ____ wag the dog?
4. A tenth part. (plural)
5. Sun. (Spanish)
6. Filled with reverence. (past tense)
7. Demolished.
8. Bovine.
9. The chosen 12.
10. Israel’s enemies converged at ____m. (Josh. 11:7)
11. All the ____ of the earth. (Isa. 45:22)
16. Sorrowful.
20. Battle.
23. Neither purse, ____

- scrip. (Luke 10:4)
25. “____ my back, please.”
26. King Saul was buried beneath one of these trees. (1 Chron. 10:12)
27. Enjoyment.
28. Deliver us _____. (Matt. 6:13)
30. Catch.
32. “____ your vegetables.”
33. Arid.
35. Expert.
37. ____ shall not live by bread alone. (Matt. 4:4)
40. Lock’s companion.
42. Dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, ____ men. (Acts 2:5)
45. The ____ are gathered and burned in the fire. (Matt. 13:40)
47. They ____I not. (Matt. 6:28)
48. Abraham’s wife, S_____.
49. Gather leaves.
51. Mexican coin.
53. Frozen over.
54. Seven sons of one S_____. (Acts 19:14)
55. Adam’s home.
57. Cease.
59. Glass container.

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

FBC Selma recommits to being on mission

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Tim Mathis said his church had experienced a long drought in missions engagement, and they wanted it to end, starting with their new pastor.

“A huge part of the interview process when I came was, ‘How missional are you as a pastor? We want to be a church on mission,’” he said.

Mathis said that was important to him too, so he started reading up on the church’s story. “The church has a rich history. ... They were faithful with everything. They went on a lot of missions trips, supported missions offerings and have had a very active WMU.”

That last one goes all the way back to Kathleen Mal-

lory, one of the early leaders of national Woman’s Missionary Union, who grew up at FBC Selma.

But over the past decade, FBC had not been involved in any missions trips. They wanted a change.

“I started trying to cast vision for us to use our people and resources to have a missional impact both in our city and around the world,” Mathis said. “But I got over-

whelmed with all the opportunity and the need, and I knew I couldn’t do it by myself. I wanted someone who could be co-missions pastor with me.”

So in October, the church called Caleb Newsom to be minister of students and sending. Mathis also would continue working on missions efforts as he served as senior pastor.

The next IMB Senders Summit is Sept. 15–17. For more information, visit imb.org/event/senders-summit-2025.



Photo courtesy of Tim Mathis
Pastor Tim Mathis (right) and volunteers from FBC Selma help with an English Café outreach through Send Relief in Toronto.

They were both excited and wanted to send students, senior adults and others — but they also recognized they needed guidance.

Then Lee Tate, associational mission strategist for the local West Central Baptist Association, told Mathis the association would pay for him to attend an Interna-

tional Mission Board event called Senders Summit that helps church leaders know how to equip and mobilize their churches.

Significant help

It was a significant help, Mathis said, and he and Newsom decided to plan three missions trips for 2025

— one to Vermont, one to Toronto and one to Budapest. All three were easy points of entry for them, he said.

Newsom said the Budapest trip — a Go Impact trip through the IMB — will help students share their faith cross-culturally and also shows them what missionary work looks like.

“We want them to see that God can use them and whatever they have for the Great Commission,” Newsom said.

Mathis said he and Newsom are happy to help other churches who might need help figuring out what their first step is toward being involved in missions.

“We want to be a resource to others,” Mathis said. “Where we lacked experience, we now have a little experience. If we could help someone at square one, we’re happy to do that.”

Faith Moments

When you are feeling the blues: Encouragement for faith journey

The Christian life is a sacred walk, filled with joy, yes, but also seasons of struggle. Most of us, at some point, feel the weight of discouragement, often without knowing exactly why. These “blue” days can come unexpectedly, even to the most faithful hearts. If you’re walking through one of those times, here are some biblical steps to help you process, persevere and find renewed strength in the Lord:

1. Be honest about your feelings. It’s not a sign of weakness to admit when you’re feeling low. In fact, it’s the first step toward healing. David, the man after God’s own heart, didn’t hide his emotions. He cried out,

“Why are you cast down, O my soul?” (Ps. 42:5). If he could bring his sorrow before God, so can you. Honesty opens the door to God’s comfort.

2. Step away and refocus. Step aside from the mundane and focus on Christ. Even Jesus withdrew to quiet places to pray (Luke 5:16). Whether it’s a quiet walk, a day of rest or a weekend to recharge, allow space for God to speak and restore.

3. Pray and praise through the pain. There’s power in praying and singing. Sing a favorite hymn or worship song. Read a psalm aloud. As you pray and praise the Lord, you replace the headdress of ashes with a glorious garment (Isa. 61:3).

4. Reflect on God’s faithfulness. Gratitude is a balm to the soul. Start a list of the ways God has been good to you — answered prayers, unexpected blessings, moments of peace. I have found that remembering God’s faithfulness realigns my heart with hope.

5. Revisit your purpose. Discouragement can make us forget our “why.” Every Christian has a calling — to love God, love others and share His gospel. Reflect on the times God has used you to bless someone else. Your life matters in His kingdom, and He’s still working through you.

6. Serve someone in need. One of the best ways to lift your spirit is to bless someone else. A phone call

to a friend, a handwritten note or a meal for a neighbor can redirect your focus and reignite joy. As Jesus taught, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

You are not alone

Even great heroes of faith, like Elijah, had moments of deep discouragement. After a great victory, he sat under a tree and asked God to take his life. But God wasn’t done with Elijah, and He’s not done with you either. Allow the Lord to meet you in this moment. He will restore your joy, renew your strength and lead you forward.

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



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CHURCH POSITIONS

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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

East Central Alabama (LaFayette) Southern Baptist congregation seeking the shepherd God has chosen to lead us — one who is bold in preaching the great gospel (even when it steps on toes!) We are currently in revitalization/refocus stage; a mostly older congregation with a heart to grow — especially in spiritual maturity and generational diversity. SBC theological preaching/teaching a must. Full time or bivocational. Are you the pastor that God wants to shepherd us, push us out of our comfort zones, lead by example and disciple us? Is God speaking to you? If so, please send resumé and short personal testimony to: LaFayette First Baptist Church, Pastor Search Committee, 201 S LaFayette St., LaFayette, AL 36862. 334-864-8545, lafayettefirstbaptistchurch@yahoo.com

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 inquiries/resumés to: elambaptist.ap@gmail.com or mail: 53 Elam Rd., Thomasville, AL 36784. ATTN: Search Committee.

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

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WORSHIP DIRECTOR/ MINISTER OF MUSIC

Clanton First Baptist Church is seeking a full-time worship director/minister of music. We are a growing church of around 300 in worship and enjoy a blended style of worship. Our vision for this position is to lead the worship team in our corporate worship services, direct our choir and provide insight for youth and children's music/band/choir. Inquires and resumé submissions may be directed to: justin.nelson@clantonfirstbaptist.org.

BIVOCATIONAL MINISTER OF MUSIC

Mt. Philadelphia is searching for a bivocational minister of music. Please send resumés to: P.O. Box 13, Cordova, AL 35550.

PART-TIME WORSHIP LEADER

Vincent First Baptist Church is seeking a part-time worship leader. Please contact Robbie Weems (pastor): 205-617-1277, email: weems1969@aol.com.

OTHER POSITIONS

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

North Shelby Baptist is seeking a full-time administrative assistant to provide general administrative and office support. Two to three years administrative experience required as well as proficiency in Microsoft Office Suite. In depth database entry and membership management experience preferred. Ability to be

accurate, detailed and multi-task are necessary. Website maintenance, social media knowledge and understanding of the Baptist Church a plus. Please email resumé to: office@northshelbybaptist.org.

RECEPTIONIST/ MINISTRY ASSISTANT

First Baptist Church of Birmingham has a job opening for a receptionist/ministry assistant. Responsibilities include answering the phone and door, weekly publications, assisting the ministerial staff and communication with members. Needs to be proficient in Microsoft with experience in Adobe or other graphic design software. The position is 29 hours a week. Please email resumé to Cyndy James: cjames@fbcbbm.org.

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS/ ASSOCIATIONAL MISSION STRATEGIST

The Dale Baptist Association (Ozark, Alabama) is currently accepting resumés for a full-time director of missions/associational mission strategist. Please submit resumés to: dbsearchcommittee26@gmail.com. Resumés will be accepted through July 7.

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UM photo

Prayer Room at the University of Mobile is a university-wide time of prayer and praise led by students. It started more than 20 years ago in the Alabama School of the Arts.

UM students recall God's faithfulness at Prayer Room

By Noelle Foster
University of Mobile

The lights dim as quiet music fills the room. Conversations silence, heads bow and hands lift as college students stand shoulder-to-shoulder and prepare their hearts and minds in readiness for what is to come.

Then, in unison, voices fill the space and lift in praise to the One who has brought them all here tonight — to a Prayer Room service at the University of Mobile.

What is now a university-wide time of prayer and praise led by students started over 20 years ago in the Alabama School of the Arts.

Students would gather for a special time of prayer and worship they called “Prayer Room” before they went on stage at an event.

“Prayer Room is the title that was given for the time that we would take to spend in the Lord's presence and align our hearts before leading worship,” said Emma Heathershaw, a graduating senior and music major. “It has always been a really special time for us, and it was something that we wanted to bring to the entire campus community.”

At the last Prayer Room of spring semester, students — along with faculty and staff — moved freely around

the room and prayed over friends and strangers.

Embraces were exchanged, tears fell in awe and wonder of the Lord's goodness.

The theme for this particular Prayer Room was remembrance and God's provision, based on Joshua 4. In this chapter, God mandates the Israelites, His chosen people, to build an altar of stones as a monument that future generations can look upon and remember the Lord's faithfulness in fulfilling His promises to them.

‘Provision of God’

Abbie Maggio, assistant professor of worship leadership in the Alabama School of the Arts, said she encouraged students to look around them and see how the Lord was working in the hearts of their generation.

“This idea of the provision of God is one that multiple students said they had been thinking and praying about,” Maggio said.

Heathershaw said her biggest take-away from the night was this question: Will we remember His Son?

“That's what it comes down to — that we remember the biggest way God has been faithful and provided for us is when He demonstrated His love by sending His Son, Jesus,” she said.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Sunday School Lessons

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



For June 29

GOD'S PROMISE Psalm 132:1-14, 17-18

The theme of this royal psalm is God's covenant with the house of David to establish the dynasty for the good of the people and eventually, of the world. It is the longest of the 15 Songs of Ascents, twice as long as any other psalm in this collection. The length of this psalm suggests that its subject matter was a primary focus for the Jewish pilgrims as they made their ascent to Jerusalem.

The first half of the psalm reveals David's resolve to make sure the Ark of the Covenant is relocated to Jerusalem. The second half expresses God's resolve to stand by David's dynasty and His own choosing of Zion.

God's Dwelling Place (1-10)

The writer of this psalm begins by asking God to "remember David and all the hardships he endured." David had endured attacks from his enemies as well as disappointments when he had attempted to move the Ark to Jerusalem.

David had sworn an oath to the Lord that he would not rest until he had built a dwelling place for the Ark of the Covenant. David demonstrated his zeal for God's honor, and he pledged to see this matter through at all costs and with all diligence. David was more concerned about fulfilling his vow to God than he was about his own physical needs.

In verses 6-10 the psalmist records the response of David and the people in worship as the priests move the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem.

God's Commitment (11-14)

God's covenant with David that was made in 2 Samuel 7:12-16 is summarized in these verses. God had promised David that one of his Descendants would rule a Kingdom that would never end. This pledge to perpetuate the house of David included

other promises that would flower into the messianic hope (Ps. 89:19-37).

The covenant the Lord made with David required David's descendants to obey the covenantal stipulations. Although many disobeyed, there was a distant Descendant who would come and fulfill all the law of God perfectly.

There was hope because God had chosen Zion to be His home forever. David did not enthrone the Lord at Zion. The Lord placed David on the throne of Israel in Jerusalem. This choice was based on the Lord's sovereign pleasure. From Zion the Lord dwells (Ps. 135:21), and from Zion He gives blessing (Ps. 128:5; 134:3).

The Lord's choice of Zion preceded both the Davidic covenant and the building of the temple, and it will continue even if the Davidic dynasty fails — which it did — and the temple is destroyed — which it was.

The Coming Messiah (17-18)

In these verses the Lord employs two metaphors that describe the ultimate Descendant of David. First, He is described as a growing horn. "Horn" is used in the Bible as a symbol for strength, often referring to powerful kings. The psalmist is declaring that a powerful King would be born as a descendant of David. The Gospel of Matthew begins, "An account of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David" (Matt. 1:1).

Second, He is described as a lamp. He will be a light that cannot be extinguished. Jesus is described as "that light (that) shines in the darkness" (John 1:5). This growing horn and lamp that will never be extinguished will be honored in the eternal Kingdom while the wicked will be shamed and face God's righteous judgment.

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

For July 6

GOD'S MESSIAH Psalm 110:1-7

Psalm 110 is one of the most cited Old Testament texts in the New Testament. It is a royal psalm, meaning that its theme deals with the role of the house of David in the life of God's people. This psalm, like Psalms 2 and 72, goes beyond the achievements of any merely human heir of David and looks forward to the Messiah.

When the people of God would sing this psalm in faith, they would celebrate God's promises to David, long for the day when the Gentiles would receive the light and strive to be faithful to their calling until that great day. Christians sing this psalm to celebrate that Jesus has ascended to his Davidic kingship by His resurrection and that God is actively subduing the Gentiles into the Kingdom of God.

Jesus as King (1-3)

The word "declaration" is used for prophetic oracles in the Old Testament. In this psalm, "LORD" — literally "Yahweh" — refers to God the Father. He is making a declaration to David's "Lord," meaning someone who is greater than David. This is a reference to the divine Messiah.

In this intriguing verse, we see Yahweh declaring to the Messiah that He is to sit at God's right hand. The Messiah — the Son of David and the Son of God — will rule the universe with Yahweh with preeminence, power and authority.

Yahweh will also make the Messiah's enemies His footstool. God will subdue these enemies and make them subject to the authority of the Davidic king.

The idea that the risen Lord Jesus is the reigning Messiah King seated at God's right hand appears in many passages in the New Testament (Acts 2:32-35, 1 Cor. 15:25

and Eph. 1:20). This is good news, Church. No matter how bad things seem right now, Jesus will prevail.

Yahweh will extend the Messiah's rule and authority to defeat His enemies and establish His rule over all the nations.

Jesus as Priest (4)

If anything is stronger than a divine oracle, it is a divine oath. Not only will David's Descendant be a King forever, but He will also be a Priest forever "according to the pattern of Melchizedek." No greater guarantee could be made as Yahweh declares that nothing can thwart the certainty of His promise. This verse should strengthen our faith in God and our resolve to be busy fulfilling the Great Commission.

In ancient Israel, the kings were selected from the tribe of Judah and the priests from the tribe of Levi. No single individual could qualify as both king and priest. Melchizedek, however, was described as both a king and a priest in Genesis 14:18-20, making him a type of the One who was to come.

The silence surrounding Melchizedek in Genesis made him an appropriate symbol of One who had neither "beginning of days or end of life" (Heb. 7:3).

Jesus as Victor (5-7)

In these verses we see God the Father and the Messiah working together, actively fighting against the kings of the earth, resulting in complete victory.

The army of volunteers in verse 3 is out of the picture, and it is God Himself — Father and Son — who judges and destroys everyone who persists in rebellion to His reign. This psalm should strengthen our faith in the promises of God and fortify our resolve to be busy in fulfilling the Great Commission.

"The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'"

Psalm 110:1

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 29

JOHN THE BAPTIST: A FAITH THAT CHALLENGES OTHERS Matthew 3:1–12

At Samford University, I help faculty members see ways they can integrate faith into their roles as teacher and scholar. Each year, we take a group of faculty members through a process of defining their specific calling in Christian higher education. Seeing these faculty members deepen their understanding of how God wants to use them as educators is so rewarding.

People who know why God has put them on this earth and who are equipped to live out their calling are some of the most devoted and focused people I know. Mark Twain once said, “The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why.”

In our lesson for today, we are looking at John the Baptist. John knew his purpose and lived out his faith with that purpose at the forefront of his actions.

We can call others to the same faith in Christ we have. (1–6)

John had a specific calling that was foreshadowed in the book of Isaiah many years before he was born. John was the one Isaiah 40:3 was referring to as “a voice of one crying out, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord in the wilderness; make a straight highway for our God in the desert.’”

John’s main purpose in life was to go before Jesus and point people to Him by proclaiming He was the Christ. “Repent, because the Kingdom of heaven has come near” was his message, and Matthew 3 tells us that people came from all around to hear his message and be baptized.

You and I are not all that different from John (except for maybe his wardrobe and diet). While John’s purpose of calling people to Christ was unique and specific to the coming Christ, our

calling is to point people to the Christ who came and who will come again.

In 2 Corinthians 5:18–20, Paul challenges us with the same calling — to be ambassadors who point people to Christ so that they can be reconciled to God.

Calling others to faith often calls for addressing hard truths. (7–10)

These verses point out that Jewish religious leaders began showing up where John was baptizing. It’s safe to say this wasn’t John’s first encounter with them. He knew their attitudes toward his message of repentance as well as their views on the coming Messiah.

Our takeaway is not to start calling all religious leaders a “brood of vipers.” John was pointing out their pride and self-reliance for salvation. The Jewish leaders didn’t see the need for a savior since they were sons of Abraham.

Interestingly enough, Jesus also had the same problems with these leaders throughout His ministry. When we call others to faith in Christ, we must start by explaining our need for a savior.

The message of faith is never about us but solely about Jesus. (11–12)

John’s role was not to be the Christ but to point people to the Christ. He had many followers but never took any glory for his own. He was laser-focused on preparing the way for the Lord by calling people to repentance.

With every action, John pointed people to Jesus. He even made it clear that his purpose for baptizing was for repentance but that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

John is one of the best examples of living a life of purpose and humility that points people to Jesus. When we live true lives of faith, we will not bring glory upon ourselves but will glorify our Savior, Jesus.

For July 6

STEPHEN: A FAITH THAT ADVANCES GOD’S KINGDOM Acts 6:3–15

We are all too familiar with the word “contagious.” It’s a word that makes us keep a safe distance from others and reach for the disinfectant. However, not everything that is contagious is bad. Joy and happiness can be contagious. Resilience and toughness can be contagious as well. Proverbs 13 reminds us that the community we belong to can be contagious. Verse 20 says, “The one who walks with the wise will become wise, but a companion of fools will suffer harm.”

The Christian life is meant to be lived in community, not in isolation. We should bear each other’s burdens, we should share in each other’s joys and we should encourage one another in the faith.

When we are part of a faith community, we can be contagious to others in the faith. In our lesson for this week, we look at how Stephen’s contagious faith impacted others.

A life of faith impacts both the church and community. (3–7)

Our passage for today illuminates a significant piece of early Church history. In Acts 6, the number of Christians was growing so fast that they could not serve everyone sufficiently, specifically the widows.

The leaders gathered and chose seven servants to help in these matters. The Greek word for “to serve” or “to wait on” used in verse 2 is “diakoneo” and where we get the term “deacon.” These deacons were expected to be the chief servants to the congregation’s physical needs.

Stephen is traditionally viewed as the first deacon of the Church. He cared for the physical needs of the people. Like Stephen, we are called to love and serve others. Our faith should impact our churches and communities through the way we

serve others. We might not have the title “deacon,” but we have the responsibility to serve.

A life of faith invites God to work through us. (8–10)

Stephen’s faith was evident in how he served and also in the words he spoke. I love how Luke never describes Stephen apart from his relationship to God. All of Stephen’s attributes were the result of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Like Stephen, when the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts, our lives are used for God’s glory.

God will use our service to Him as well as the words of wisdom we speak to others. A faith that is dependent on the Holy Spirit will advance God’s Kingdom through actions as well as the verbal proclamation of the gospel.

In Romans 10:17, Paul says, “So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ.” Like Stephen, we should be servants who know God’s Word and speak it unashamedly in grace and love.

A life of faith often meets opposition. (11–15)

Stephen is not only considered the first deacon of the Church but the first Christian martyr as well. The truth Stephen spoke against Jewish leaders angered them so much that they stoned him to death. Saul — later called Paul — was one of them and approved of the killing. While Stephen’s death was horrific, Acts 8 shows how God used his death to scatter Christians and spread the gospel far and wide as a result.

The story of Stephen is encouraging to Christians across the globe who are persecuted for their faith. God has not forgotten them, and their pain and suffering is not wasted. God receives glory even when our faith faces opposition.

“And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people.”

Acts 6:8

‘This is a moment’

Southern Baptists unite to send 58 new IMB missionaries during SBC Annual Meeting

Southern Baptists united to celebrate 58 newly appointed International Mission Board missionaries during the June 10 opening session of the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting in Dallas.

Messengers watched as missionaries took the stage to share their calling and thank those who support their Great Commission task.

“This is a moment where we have the privilege to celebrate their going, commission them to join God in His mission and commit to support them in every way,” said IMB President Paul Chitwood.

Missionaries, he said, are sent and supported first and foremost by their local churches, “but make no mistake — they are also sent by us, here in Dallas, Texas.”

To illustrate the vital importance of Southern Baptist support of missionaries, Chitwood shared three recent examples. The first was a young missionary mother whose cancer treatments began recently in Houston. Her medical needs are covered by generous giving through the Cooperative Program and Lottie Moon Christmas Offering.

Prepared and protected

A missionary family recently wrote with thankfulness for training that protected them when 12 men with machetes entered and robbed their home. Thankfully, they remained calm and felt the presence of the Holy Spirit. Southern Baptists provided that vital security and safety training for the missionaries and their five children.

Earlier this year, a volunteer group was jailed in a restricted access country and detained for two days. Through God’s protection, the group was released and arrived home safely. Because of Southern Baptist support, the IMB has resources for a highly trained incident response



Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist
IMB President Paul Chitwood reminds SBC messengers that missionaries are “ordinary people doing extraordinary things for the glory of God,” as more than 12,000 joined together for the IMB Sending Celebration on June 10.

team ready to move on behalf of missionaries and volunteers at a moment’s notice.

“Southern Baptists, we’re not just sending missionaries but preparing them to endure the difficulties they face on the field,” Chitwood said.

The new appointees are joining more than 3,500 IMB missionaries and their families currently serving in 155 countries.

Those heading to regions hostile to the gospel or missionary presence appeared behind a screen for the public event to protect their identities.

Four couples spoke in their first languages of Italian and Korean, while English

translations ran on the screens. Missionaries were united in their gratefulness for the prayers and generosity of Southern Baptists.

Among the 58 missionaries participating in the Sending Celebration, 11 were former Journeyman. The IMB recently recognized the 60th anniversary of the program, which has become a strategic pipeline for career missionary service. The program was created for young Southern Baptists between the ages of 21 and 29 to serve two-year missionary terms. More than 6,500 young adults

have served in the Journeyman program in the past six decades.

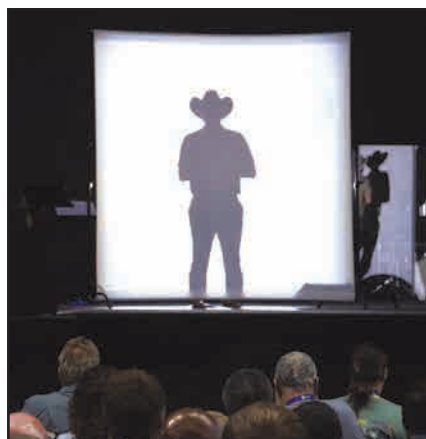


Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist
A newly appointed IMB missionary expresses his thanks to Baptists for their support as he heads to the missions field. Missionaries going to countries hostile to the gospel did not show their faces.

Lauren Ulmer was among those who served as a Journeyman. Ulmer knew she was called to missions after she went on a volunteer trip to Costa Rica with Southside Baptist Church in Live Oak, Florida, which is also her sending church.

She wasn’t sure where she would go until a semester position with IMB in Quebec opened for her the winter of 2019.

Vital church support

The Florida native didn’t have any winter clothing, but her Southside Baptist family came through for her.

“They rallied around me, gave me a winter coat and helped me raise funds for all the winter things that I would need,” Ulmer said. “Two months later in January 2019, I’m showing up to Quebec, in the midst of the coldest months, ready to do university ministry and hospitality ministry.”

After her short-term service, Ulmer returned to Quebec as a Journeyman, serving 2019–21. They were challenging years, she recalled, but she relied on the Lord, her ministry team in Quebec and the consistent support from Southside. In those hard days, Ulmer appreciated the emails and letters she received from Southside.

“Someone would send the verse I needed to read or a prayer voice message I needed to hear,” she said. “My church inspired me and reminded me I wasn’t serving alone.”

Chitwood closed the celebration by urging continued commitment to send more missionaries to the nations. The Sending Celebration ended with a time of prayer, during which Chitwood invited messengers to gather around missionaries.

The next Sending Celebration will be Oct. 27 at the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention in Lubbock, Texas. (International Mission Board)

Learning

By G. Allan Taylor
Samford University

82-year-old Vivian Cunningham earns master's degree from Samford

If a 78-year-old earning her bachelor's degree from Samford University made for an uplifting story, imagine the jubilation now that Vivian Cunningham added a master's at age 82.

Such was the scene in May when Cunningham, a three-time great-grandmother and self-labeled go-getter, received her master of studies in law from Samford's Cumberland School of Law.

"I felt like I was just as young as the other students," she joked.

Inspiring others

Samford President Beck A. Taylor heralded Cunningham for embodying the "emphasis on lifelong learning perhaps like no other person in the Samford family."

Upon completing her liberal studies undergraduate degree in 2021, Cunningham's story fueled appearances on national news shows.

This sparked an outpouring of cards and messages from people inspired by a then-septuagenarian finishing college after decades working as a seamstress, custodian and mail-room manager.

"I'm so glad I made an impact on somebody's life," she said. "This must have been my destiny to inspire people."

Along with establishing the Vivian Cunningham Leadership Scholarship four years ago, Samford offered to cover tuition and fees if she pursued a master's degree. Having some experience as a paralegal, Cunningham chose to attend law school for her graduate studies.

"I just wanted to keep learning. I'm not one who wants to just stay at home," she said. "Samford has been good to me."

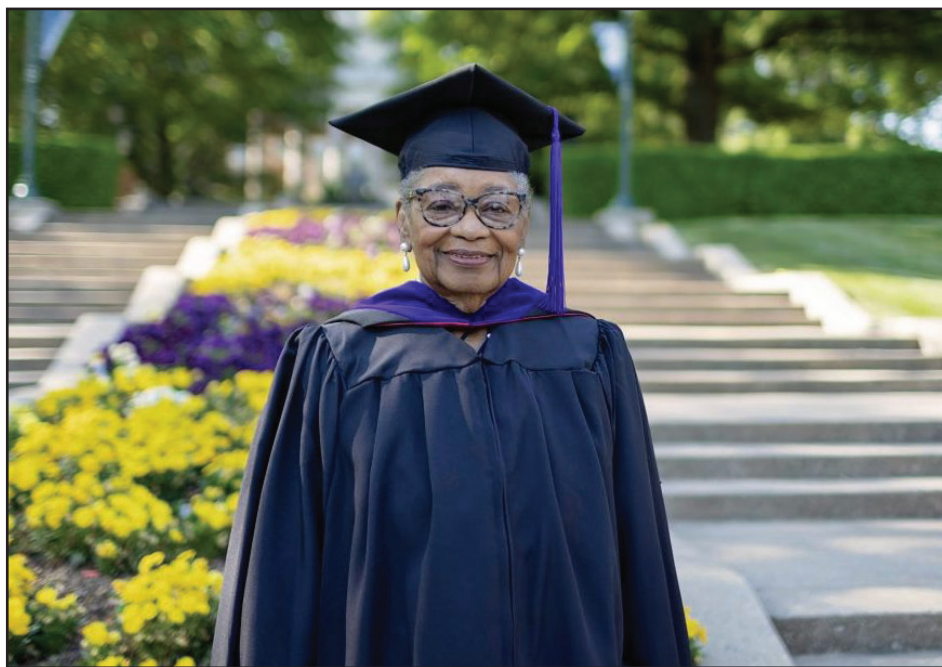


Photo courtesy of Samford University

Vivian Cunningham, who graduated in 2021 with her bachelor's degree at age 78 from Samford University, recently finished a master's degree at the same institution ... at age 82. She considers herself a lifelong learner.

Her son, Donald Cunningham, and daughter, Tarra Barnes, were among the large family contingent attending the law school graduation.

Also on hand was the woman credited with instilling Cunningham's work ethic, her 100-year-old mother.

"I feel a lot of pride," Cunningham said.

'Get back up'

Cunningham characterized the buzz around her 2021 graduation as something "from a movie."

During her May ceremony, she delivered the sequel.

"God has gotten me through this journey," Cunningham said.

"I prayed a lot of nights: 'Lord, let me please write this paper.' For something like this, you really must have faith for all these years. Whenever I thought I might quit

because it got a little hard, God would say, 'You better get back up and go do what you've got to do.'"

When Cunningham graduated in 2021, her story spread quickly. She was invited to be on NBC's Today Show. Hosts Jenna Bush Hager and Hoda Kotb along with Donna Farihan announced that Samford offered to pay for her tuition and fees if she pursued a master's degree. Cunningham also received her first laptop from Best Buy during that segment.

Early years

As a child, Cunningham thought she would be a seamstress. She was raised in Birmingham's Titusville neighborhood.

She inherited the sewing skills of her grandmothers, studied the trade in school and sewed for others. She even worked in a dress shop in Atlanta before returning to

Birmingham as a single mother of two children in the late 1960s. She traded that career for one in custodial service on the night shift at Alabama Power Company.

There was no easy path to her degree, but the online option through the school's professional studies program made the difference.

Professional studies, formerly known as evening college, offers Samford's only fully online bachelor of arts degrees: organizational leadership and liberal studies.

"Moving these online have helped so many students like Vivian who are returning years later to finish what they started," said Bryan Gill, who was director of professional studies during Cunningham's first degree. "I thought I was the one helping her but in reality, she was the one helping me see why I do what I do. She has been a such a joy to have in professional studies."

Cunningham worked her way up to a day shift in the company's mail room, eventually managing all of its external mail.

She also began to take advantage of the tuition reimbursement program, earning course credits at many of Birmingham's colleges. She retired in 1992 but carried on with her classes.

She earned her associate's degree in paralegal studies from Virginia College.

"I don't want to stop," she said. "I love to read, I love to sew, I love to watch movies. I don't want to just sit because I'm retired. I want the knowledge."

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was written by G. Allan Taylor and originally published by Samford University.

UNFORSAKEN MINISTRY



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Reaching in-country

By Tessa Sanchez
International Mission Board

Missionaries serve across borders, navigate challenges from afar

International Mission Board missionaries can't always live in the countries among the people they serve. While this can make ministry challenging, missionaries have navigated this in many ways, depending on the context and country.

Dean and Sybil Polk, who serve a Central Asian people group, are examples of IMB workers who cannot live in the country of their people.

That hasn't kept them from investing in national church planters.

The Polks meet with their national ministry partners who can travel to them for training and retreats. During a recent training, discussions centered on the nature of the church and what churches might look like in different communities. The retreats are more than training, they are rich times of community, fellowship and encouragement.

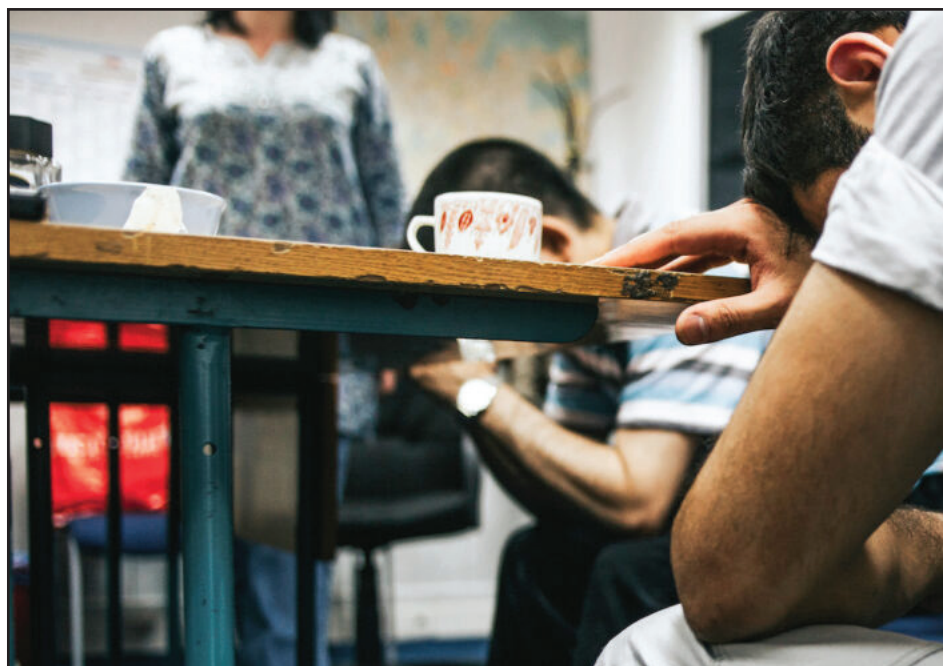
Shared responsibilities

Missionaries and their ministry partners share the responsibilities of the missionary task, which include entry, evangelism, discipleship, healthy church formation, leadership development and exit to partnership.

Each part of the task happens while abiding in Christ. Some steps, like entry, evangelism, discipleship and church development are easier for those who live in-country, Dean said.

But the Polks can focus on leadership development, as well as inspiration when the church planters travel to them.

The believers the Polks partner with serve in difficult places and in areas where the Polks may not



IMB Photo

Central Asian national church-planting partners meet with Dean and Sybil Polk for times of training and encouragement. Their efforts help spread the gospel to countries where a foreigner is not welcome.

be welcomed. Though scrutiny and hostility toward Christians is often suffocating in these areas, doors are opening instead of closing.

People are meeting in the homes of the church planters to study the Bible.

The Polks also lead the work with global missionary partners serving in Central Asia. Many of these GMPs can serve in places Westerners cannot. That's one of

the beauties of the program, Dean said.

The GMP program provides a team for missionaries sent from other countries. Someone from Eastern Europe or South America can connect with IMB missionaries reaching the same people groups. The missionaries then have a team, community, accountability, finances, training, logistical support and help finding language tutors.

Someone from Eastern Europe or South America can connect with (International Mission Board) missionaries reaching the same people groups. The missionaries then have a team, community, accountability, finances, training, logistical support and help finding language tutors.

One GMP family, who lives among a Central Asian people group, moved from an apartment into a single-family home, giving them more privacy and the ability to host people without as much scrutiny from neighbors who are hostile to Christianity.

A couple began attending a Bible study in their home. The wife is a Christian but has never been a part of a church. Her husband is not a Christian but is interested in learning more.

Dean is hopeful this couple will be the gateway for the GMPs to build relationships and share the gospel with the couple's family and networks.

Casting a vision

One of the most recent GMPs to Central Asia is from Eastern Europe. Dean recently made several trips to cast vision among churches and train leaders there. He preached at the commissioning service of this GMP couple, who are gearing up to begin their ministry.

IMB missionaries who reside in other countries invest themselves in local ministry as well as their long-distance ministry. Dean and Sybil invest in the lives of people in their community, their children's school and in their church.

Join Dean and Sybil in praying for missionary pipelines with like-minded churches and organizations. Pray for visa access for GMPs and the work of missionaries with a far reach into areas of lostness.

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

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MAKE DISCIPLES

Planning ahead

By **Lonnie Wilkey**
Tennessee's Baptist and Reflector

Is your church ready to handle a crisis?

The question is not what to do if a crisis strikes, it is being prepared when your church faces a crisis, said Chris Turner, director of communications for the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board.

"There are two types of organizations — those that have had a crisis and those whose crisis hasn't hit yet," Turner said.

Turner was featured recently on the "Tennessee Golden Hour," a podcast produced by the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board and hosted by TBMB staff members.

Turner noted there are two types of crises — those that are sudden and those that are smoldering. A sudden crisis is one that is totally unexpected such as a tornado destroying the church building, he said.

A smoldering crisis is one that possibly could have been avoided, such as an elderly church member tripping over a crack in the sidewalk that has been there for the last decade and falling and breaking a hip.

"That is a smoldering crisis because we should have fixed the crack in the sidewalk," he said.

Preparation

The key to dealing with a crisis is to be prepared, he stressed. The first step is to have a staff meeting that just talks about what the church would do if a crisis hits, who needs to be involved and assign responsibilities to those who would manage the crisis.

The first 15 minutes after a crisis happens is critical, Turner said. He used an example of a bus wreck involving kids from the church who were returning from a mission trip. "In today's social media environment, someone might actually be livestreaming the event. As soon as church leaders are notified of the accident there is not time to fumble around and ask, 'What are we going to do?'"

"... managing a crisis well is completely dependent upon a constant flow of accurate information."

Chris Turner, TBMB director of communications

"Immediate action is critical in managing a crisis well and managing a crisis well is completely dependent upon a constant flow of accurate information," he said.

Another key in managing a crisis well is to make sure the message communicated is consistent whether it is to the church members or the community at

large. "There may be things that you share internally but not externally, but it's not different information, he said.

A crisis normally involves three primary audiences — those in the church, those in the community and everyone else, Turner observed.

Regardless of the audience, church leaders need to "communicate accurate and truthful information," he added.

Church members are the first audience when a crisis occurs, especially if it is an incident that happened in the church such as embezzlement of funds or accusations of sexual abuse that have been made public, he said.

The community at large also needs to be informed, he continued.

"How a crisis is managed can completely and totally impact a community's perception of that church.

"If the church manages that crisis well, it gives a level of confidence to the community that the church cares, they're on it (the crisis), they're responding, and they are responding quickly."

Turner said it is important that the church communicates that it is responding promptly to a crisis. If the church does not handle the crisis well, it "loses effectiveness in that community. If that happens, the church has lost its reason for being in a large degree because the community is its first mission field," he added.

Seizing the opportunity

While crises can be devastating and stressful to a church, there are also benefits if they are managed

well, Turner noted.

"If the pastor and leadership in the church lead well during a crisis, members will recognize that they are ministering to us and protecting us," he said. In addition, the community gains a greater confidence in the church when a crisis is managed well, he added.

"Crises are always an opportunity to solidify leadership and strengthen an organization and to show the strength of who a church is and how they ministered to other people."

For more information on how your church can effectively deal with a crisis, contact Turner at cturner@tnbaptist.org.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was written by Lonnie Wilkey and originally published by Baptist and Reflector.



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