

# The Alabama Baptist



Women at PASCO receive long-term support coming out of rehab or prison to help them get a strong foundation for re-entering normal life.

Photo courtesy of PASCO

## Life transformations

### PASCO program sees God ‘change ashes’ into stories of restoration

**By Grace Thornton**  
The Alabama Baptist

**R**ocque Waites has a frame in his office that’s full of redemption. In 2024, he received pardons from the State of Alabama and the State of South Carolina for his broken past, and he has the printed letter on display. “About 15 years ago, I got charged with manufacturing meth-

amphetamine, and I went to prison for it,” he said. Waites had grown up as a pastor’s kid in South Carolina and gotten into drugs in college. It landed him in prison for four years, then he was sent to The PASCO Home near Mobile. PASCO — which stands for Physical And Spiritual Christian Outreach — serves as long-term support for people coming out of

rehab or prison to help them get a strong foundation for re-entering normal life. **God at work** The men’s program was started in 2008 by Phillip Stanford, a member of Moffett Road Baptist Church in Mobile, who also had a history of addiction. They’ve seen so many stories of redemption, including Waites,

who now serves as director of the PASCO men’s program. “I’ve gotten a full pardon, all rights restored,” he said. “It’s kind of cool having gone through that kind of road to have everything restored and forgiven — there’s much grace in that. It’s a picture of who God is and what He does for us.” The PASCO program has also (See ‘Lives,’ page 8)

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# ‘I hurt with you’

## SBDR volunteers continue to serve, minister in Texas

Southern Baptist Disaster Relief teams continue serving along the Guadalupe River in Kerr County, Texas, where the catastrophic July 4 flooding has claimed at least 107 lives and left 97 missing.

Teams from the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention and Texans on Mission, which also partners with the Baptist General Convention of Texas, continue to assess the area and send out chaplains and clean-up crews. A Quick Response Feeding Unit has been serving at First Baptist Church Kerrville, while Trinity Baptist Church in Kerrville hosts other ministry services for area residents. San Saba also received assistance Sunday as out-of-state Disaster

To donate to DR efforts in Kerrville, Texas, visit [sbdr.org](http://sbdr.org) — 100% of the gifts go to relief assistance taking place.

Relief teams remain on standby. Baptists continue providing physical help and spiritual care in this unfolding tragedy.

“We want to walk with people that are hurting and hurt with them,” said John Wheat, pastor of Trinity Baptist, which opened its doors for families with children who were unaccounted for after the flood.

The church continues to minister to these hurting families who have lost loved ones to flood waters. “I told these families, ‘I can’t understand what you’re going through, but I hurt with you,’” Wheat shared with Marc Hooks of The Alabama Baptist and The Baptist Paper. “We’re gonna walk alongside you so don’t think you are by yourself.

“We know that people are hurting, and we have an answer. And the answer is Jesus.” (The Alabama Baptist)



Photo by Gregg Brekke/TAB Media Group

**Above:** Southern Baptists of Texas Convention Disaster Relief chaplain Ray Rodriguez of Jasper, Texas, stands inside the food truck serving first responders and Disaster Relief personnel in the parking lot of First Baptist Church Kerrville, Texas. **Below:** Southern Baptists of Texas Convention Disaster Relief chaplain Debby Nichols speaks at a vigil in downtown Kerrville, held in front of a fence displaying photos and names of those lost in the flooding.



Photo by Gregg Brekke/TAB Media Group

Pastor Joey Tombrella of First Baptist Church Kerrville, Texas, stands next to the prayer booth in the church’s parking lot. The church is hosting FEMA workers in its gym, and members are available to pray with those coming to receive assistance.



Photo by Gregg Brekke/TAB Media Group

### — Correction —

In the July 10 edition of The Alabama Baptist, an incorrect stat related to veteran suicides was included in the article “Enterprise BRAVE ministry reaches out to vulnerable in time of need.” The correct information indicates the number remains around 140–150 per year.

### 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 Marc Hooks, photojournalist correspondent for The Alabama Baptist*

## Taking the opportunity to redeem myself in Kerrville, Texas

**T**wo things can be true at the same time. I never intended to become a fire chaplain. “It was never on my Bingo card,” as they say. For me, it came along with the job. I was going to be the pastor of the area church, so I became the chaplain for the volunteer fire department at the end of the street. Speaking of, “not on my bingo card,” how about being a pastor? That was never part of the plan either. I am a journalist.

### Everything changed

Not only am I a journalist, but also a Baptist journalist. And I have spent the better part of my career with people, hearing their stories and sharing what God is doing in the world around us.

Until early July, I was either a chaplain or a journalist and not at the same time. All that changed July 5 when we got the news about little girls being swept away by the water in central Texas, and I knew their stories had to be told. They needed a storyteller.

Along with the little girls were firefighters and other first responders fighting a raging river trying to save them. I knew their return would come with images and experiences people should not endure. They would need a fire chaplain.

It immediately became clear — both were my assignment, and I knew what I would be there for.

More than a decade prior, I found myself covering the Maid-

an Revolution in Kiev, Ukraine. More than 100 Ukrainian citizens were killed at the hands of their own government in the central square of the city. Soon after, numerous pop-up memorials were erected on the square to honor those known as the Heavenly Hundred. Constructed from the street's cobblestones, they were adorned with photos, candles and personal trinkets. And one-by-one, people would file by in the bitter cold to lay flowers.

I knew immediately. The second I saw her — the sad girl. I knew this was the shot I was looking for. I maneuvered my way in and around memorials until I was close enough. I raised my camera, zoomed in, focused and pushed the shutter. The

viewfinder confirmed it. This was the photo. And then I moved on.

### Missionary journalist

But I wasn't just a journalist. I was a missionary journalist. As such, it was my custom to carry in my backpack a handful of Gideon New Testaments in the language of the country I was in. I wanted to help get the Word of God in the hands of people who were hurting. However, having just captured “the one,” my thoughts were elsewhere.

It was not until the photo gained some recognition weeks later that I recalled the day it was taken. The girl was crestfallen. She was clearly hurting. She was alone.

Sitting comfortably in my home office looking at a framed print of the photo, I realized what I had done. I was so busy with and focused on my photography assignment that I had forgotten what I was actually there for.

Back in Kerr County, Texas, a few days ago, I had the opportunity to redeem myself.

*EDITOR'S NOTE — Marc Hooks serves as a photojournalist correspondent for The Alabama Baptist and The Baptist Paper. Follow his coverage of the flooding tragedy in Texas online at [thebaptistpaper.org](http://thebaptistpaper.org), [thealabamabaptist.org](http://thealabamabaptist.org) and on both publications' Facebook pages.*

## Three Alabamians among those who died in July 4 Texas flooding along the Guadalupe River

**E**ight-year-old Sarah Marsh of Birmingham and Mobile residents Ileana and Eddie Santana Sr. are among those who died in the deadly floods that struck Texas on July 4.

Marsh, a student at Cherokee Bend Elementary School in Mountain Brook, was attending Camp Mystic, a Christian camp located in Kerr County, along the banks of the Guadalupe River.

In Sarah's obituary, her parents, Samford assistant professor Patrick and Birmingham physician

Jill, described her as “the joy-filled, adventurous, snuggly light of our lives.”

“She made friends quickly, approached new experiences with courage and excitement, and had a way of quickly drawing in anyone she met,” they wrote.

The Santanas were visiting family in Texas and staying in a cabin along the river when it flooded. Eddie, 69, a U.S. Army veteran, and Ileana, 66, died, as did their 5-year-old granddaughter, Mila Rosa, and daughter-in-law Camille.

At a July 14 news conference, Texas officials said 131 deaths statewide have been attributed to the flooding, and 101 people remain missing, including 97 in the Kerrville area. The death toll includes 70 adults and 37 children in Kerr County.

### Long road ahead

Kerr County officials said it could take six months to recover the bodies of all those who died, and it could take years for the region to fully recover from the disaster. (The Alabama Baptist)

# Your Voice



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

## First person: The shared weight of tragedy

By Lindsay Allen

FBC Tillman's Corner

**T**he recent tragedy in central Texas has weighed heavy on my heart. Viewing the barrage of photographs that depicted joyful, beautiful young girls who were lost in the flood relentlessly drove the sinking weight of despair deeper into the pit of my stomach.

Why does it feel so heavy? As I reflected on this question, I identified five shared feelings this tragedy revealed. Each feeling points to a truth that reveals a hidden hope.

### 1. We all feel that it shouldn't be this way.

This kind of thing is never expected and never wanted, but sadly, it is repeated over and over again in human history. We see brokenness throughout history, across the globe and in our own homes and hearts.

In the book of Genesis, the account of creation is detailed and upon completion, it is described as good and very good. Then, just a few verses later, a new descriptor is used — “not good.” What was the first not good?

God declared it was “not good for man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18). God created humans for community with himself and one another.

Once Eve was created to solve the problem of Adam being alone, it didn't take long for brokenness to become reality. Adam and Eve chose to reject God's Word and eat the fruit God told them would bring death. Communion with one another



Photo by Marc Hooks/The Alabama Baptist

Remnants of Camp Mystic sit eerily silent July 7.

and with God had been broken. They immediately felt the need to cover and hide. Ever since then, we have felt the weight of the curse of generations after generations choosing death. After their first sin, God explained to Adam and Eve that men, women and even the earth would be cursed because of sin. We see evidence of that still today.

The truth is the world is, in fact, broken.

### 2. We all feel it could have been our little girl.

I have an 8-year-old daughter who loves church camp. She has a beautiful smile with a few missing teeth and adorable little freckles

on her nose and cheeks. I call them my kissing targets. She loves crafting and having her hair braided and playing with friends. Several of the pictures looked strikingly like my little girl.

### Lack of control

I'm sure I am not the only one who has hugged my kids tighter, especially my little girl. It wasn't my little girl, but I would have had no control if it were. That's what panics us. No control.

Each time I read a historical biography, I am reminded of how removed our culture is from destruction and death. For most of the

world during most of history, destruction and death are experienced on a regular basis. The real epiphany is that for whatever reason, God has extended tremendous common grace to us in that these things are not a part of our everyday lives.

Matthew 5:45 says, “He [God] makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”

### God's good graces

None of us is exempt from the reaches of sin's touch of death, but thank God, all of us also experience God's good graces in that we are not always experiencing death and destruction continually.

The truth is God intervenes in our brokenness more than we realize.

### 3. We all feel the need to ask “Why?”

We need a reason. We need to know what went wrong so we can fix it. We want to build better warning systems and stronger buildings.

While better warning systems and stronger buildings are worth building, they cannot ensure complete safety. We cannot outsmart and outwork the effects of sin.

The “why” question tells us an important truth. The very fact that we ask lends to our deep belief that there is a cause. Why do we believe that? We believe that because our experience teaches us that.

The truth is, effects have causes.

### 4. We all feel a desire to help.

One of the first responses we have after the shock wears off is to ask, “What can I do?” We want to do something to help. It is why money is raised, volunteers are commissioned and donations are sent.

To read this article in its entirety, visit [tabonline.org/Texas-tragedy](http://tabonline.org/Texas-tragedy).



# OPINION

As God's people, we are called to weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15). There is comfort in helping others through sorrow, both for the comforted and the comforter. When we are together, it just helps. Again, God created us to live in community with one another and bear one another's burdens.

I am so grateful for the Southern Baptist Disaster Relief teams. These teams are usually the first on the ground after a disaster like this, and they are equipped and ready to meet very tangible needs while sharing the hope of Christ to those hurting most.

The truth is helping helps.

## 5. We all feel helpless.

If you have ever experienced a tragedy, you know that the smallest things can actually help bring healing and comfort. Something as small as a meal or

a hug can be used by God to bring hope. Why? Why do these things help even if just a little? They help because they point to something greater. A greater Hope.

Our ultimate hope doesn't come from pretending it didn't happen or patching the pain with avoidance. Paul, in his letter to the Corinthian church, proclaimed the truth that changes everything.

"Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your vic-

tory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:55-57).

The only reason we can ever have hope is Christ. His sinless life, sacrificial death, victorious resurrection, glorious ascension and sure return is the proof that He has defeated death.

The truth is, follower of Christ, you are not helpless.

It is right to recognize that it shouldn't be this way, and that it could have been us. It's OK to ask "why?" and it is good to help because, Christian, you are not helpless. You have the same power in you that raised Christ from the dead (Rom. 8:11). Pray to Him. Obey His commands to serve others as you would want them to serve

you. Give generously. Hope in Christ.

As the old hymn says, "My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand. All other ground is sinking sand. All other ground is sinking sand."

Brothers and sisters, know that we do not carry the weight alone. In fact, Jesus carries it all.



Photo by Marc Hooks/The Alabama Baptist  
Debra Britt was the first on-site "white hat" leader for Southern Baptists of Texas Disaster Relief in Kerrville, Texas.

# LASS WORDS

BY KEN LASS  
The Alabama Baptist



## DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

## Culture changes. God's Word does not.

My wife and I are hooked on old television shows and movies. We love to watch black-and-white films from the 1940s and '50s. They are, for the most part, clean and not graphically violent. They are delightfully melodramatic and often predictable, but that's OK — there's nothing wrong with a good ole mushy happy ending.

We are also amused at how they illustrate the way culture has evolved. For example, in that era smoking was considered elegant and even attractive. All the larger-than-life stars such as Clark Gable, Humphrey Bogart, Jimmy Stewart and Cary Grant would light up and puff away during poignant scenes. Even the glamorous women like Bette Davis and Lauren Bacall were commonly depicted smoking.

In early television, tobacco companies were often the title sponsors for westerns and game shows. In reruns of "To Tell the Truth," host Gary Moore can be seen smoking like a chimney while doing the show. In fact, the consolation prize for contestants who lost was often a carton of cigarettes!

As a child, I remember it was considered perfectly acceptable to smoke in somebody else's house. Every end table had an ashtray. My parents even put out matchbooks near the ashtrays in case a visitor didn't have a lighter handy. I can still see (and smell)

clouds of cigarette smoke wafting through our living room as friends came to socialize.

Today, of course, our culture has a far different view of this habit. Smoking is banned in virtually all public places. Tobacco products bear a warning from the surgeon general. Even those who smoke admit it is a disgusting practice and wish they could quit. You would be hard pressed to find a modern movie or television character who lights up on screen. Things have changed. Culture is constantly evolving.

But some things shouldn't.

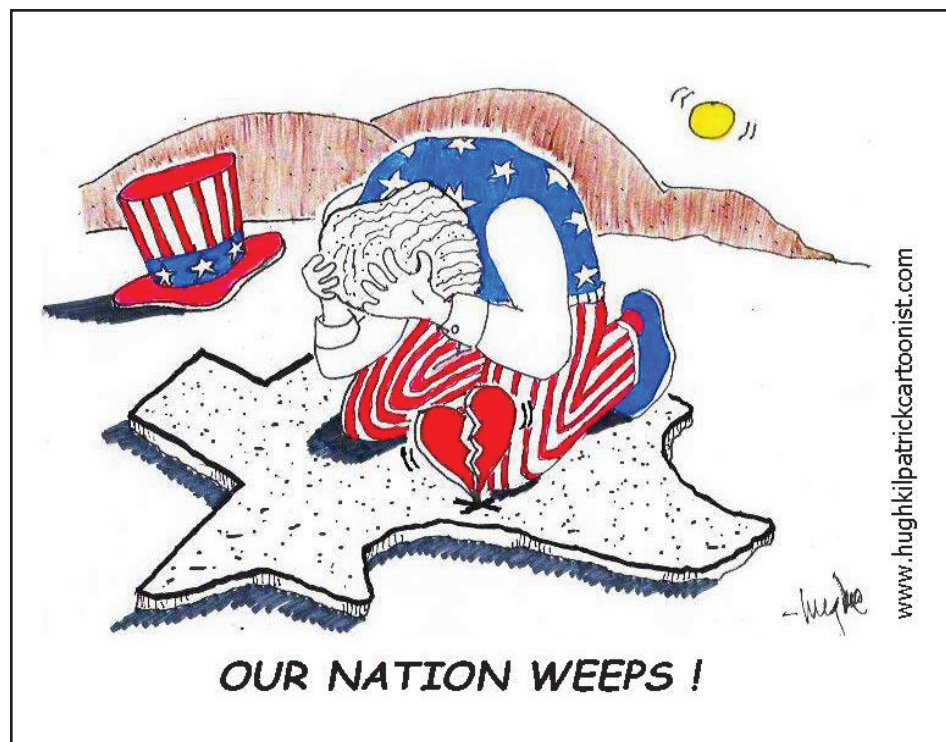
## Still right

Morality doesn't, and shouldn't, evolve. What was right is still right. What used to be wrong is still so. The Bible teaches this very clearly. In 2 Timothy Paul writes, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

Culture changes. God's Word does not. Don't let your Christian walk go up in smoke.

## MEET THE AUTHOR

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





# AI and missions

## Embracing innovation can help church leaders further the gospel

By Michael J. Brooks  
The Alabama Baptist

**T**he digital age is transforming how people connect — and the church must follow accordingly, noted Don Barger, director of innovation and artificial intelligence for the International Mission Board.

### Why is AI important for the Church?

At a conference held May 8 at Taylor Road Baptist Church in Montgomery, Barger spoke on “AI in Ministry: The What, Why and How of Artificial Intelligence,” seeking to help church leaders understand how AI can serve the mission of the Church — empowering, not replacing, human connection.

“Younger generations — especially Gen Z — are what we call ‘digital natives,’” Barger explained. “As much as 60% of their social interaction happens in digital spaces.

“As [they] increasingly shape our world, the Church has a unique opportunity to reach them through the very technologies they use every day.”

### Practical tools for ministry

A Hueytown native, Barger has emerged as a leading voice helping Christians navigate opportunities and challenges of AI.

He encouraged attendees not to fear it, but as with any technological advancement, to understand and steward it wisely.

“You probably used AI on the way here — Waze, Google Maps, Siri, Alexa,” he noted. “AI is not a threat to human connection. It’s a tool, and like every tool, it depends on how we use it.”

Barger reminded the audience that the Church has historically embraced



Photo by Doug Rogers/Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions  
Don Barger, director of innovation and artificial intelligence for the IMB, leads a conference session called “AI in Ministry: The What, Why and How of Artificial Intelligence,” at Taylor Road Baptist Church in Montgomery on May 8.

innovation — from the printing press to radio and beyond.

“God isn’t surprised by AI,” Barger said. “It’s just math. Complicated math — but still just a tool that predicts what comes next based on data.”

Barger drew a key distinction between AI and traditional software: While an app performs fixed functions, AI “bots” respond dynamically and are trained to provide contextually relevant responses.

By equipping missionaries and churches with AI tools, the IMB is helping Southern Baptists reach unreached peoples and places, fulfilling the Great Commission in the digital age.

### What’s FaithBot.io?

One such tool Barger created is FaithBot.io, a customizable AI chatbot churches can add to their websites to answer biblical or spiritual

questions. He also introduced Synthesia, a platform that creates text to video in more than 100 languages and syncs facial expressions with the new audio. AI media tools offer new approaches to video editing and even creation.

Barger gave a light-hearted demonstration of the technology, showing him speaking English, Spanish, Mandarin, French and Arabic — all using AI.

The presentation also highlighted AI tools like Polyglossia, which translates live events such as training and sermons. For example, Ukrainian refugees can now have sermon transcripts in real-time on their phones, automatically translated.

But it isn’t all optimism. Barger addressed AI’s limitations and risks, such as ethical concerns and bias.

“AI only reflects the data it’s trained on,” he asserted. “If the data is biased, the AI will be too.”

He noted that image generators still default to outdated stereotypes — for example, rendering all physicians as white men.

### Ethical, security cautions

Barger also cautioned pastors against relying on AI-generated sermons.

“There are subscription services advertising AI ready-made sermons complete with transcripts and slides in only five minutes,” Barger warned. “These tools bypass the Spirit-led preparation and study God calls us to.”

Security is another concern Barger noted, advising care when using open-source platforms like ChatGPT, especially when handling sensitive information.

“Don’t ever put sensitive information like passport numbers or hotel

room lists into ChatGPT,” he cautioned. “It learns from the data it’s fed — unless you specifically disable that. Closed-source options like Microsoft Copilot don’t have that same risk.”

Doug Rogers, who hosted the event for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said there

already is interest in a follow-up conference focused on digital engagement strategies.

“We’d encourage pastors and tech leaders alike to attend,” Rogers said.

**Resources from the conference, including a recording of the May 8 session, are available at [alsbom.org/ai](https://alsbom.org/ai).**

**Don Barger can be followed at [donbarger.substack.com](https://donbarger.substack.com), or contact the IMB innovation team at [innovation@imb.org](mailto:innovation@imb.org).**



# Alabama news

## OBITUARIES

### DAVID DYKES

David Dykes, former pastor of three Alabama Baptist churches, died July 2. He was 72.

Dykes most recently served for 30 years as pastor of Green Acres Baptist Church, Tyler, Texas, before retiring in 2021.

He served as the church's pastor emeritus after that.

Earlier in his ministry, he served as pastor of three Alabama Baptist churches — Gardendale First Baptist Church, FBC Oneonta and Tallaweka Baptist Church, Tallassee.

Dykes graduated from Samford University, then earned a master of divinity and doctor of ministry from Southern Seminary. In 2017, he received an honorary doctorate from East Texas Baptist University.

During his more than 50 years of pastoral ministry, Dykes led missions teams to more than 30 countries.

He and his wife, Cindy, led more than two dozen Israel tours. He also served on the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention.



DYKES

### ALABAMA-CRENSHAW ASSOCIATION

► **Wesley Hatcher**, pastor of **Brantley Baptist Church** for the past 10 years, was honored July 19 at a reception hosted by the church celebrating his 50 years in ministry. Throughout his ministry, he has served churches in Alabama and one in Florida. He and his wife, Cynthia, have three adult children and six grandchildren.

► **Patsy Thomas** is the new ministry assistant and financial secretary for **Alabama-Crenshaw Baptist Association**. She and her husband, Lamar, are members of New Ebenezer Baptist Church, LaPine, where she serves as organist, and he is a deacon. Thomas steps into the position left vacant by Isabelle Jarvis, who served as the ministry assistant for two years. Jarvis is pursuing her education in pediatric nursing at Lurleen B. Wallace Community College, Opp.



THOMAS



HILL

### BARBOUR ASSOCIATION

► **Jim Hill** is the new pastor of **Cross Baptist Church, Eufaula**. He has served in the role of transitional pastor for more than a year after retiring as the associational mission strategist of Dale Baptist Association. He and his wife, Robin, have two children, six grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

### CALHOUN ASSOCIATION

► **Dale Butler** recently retired as pastor of **Valley Baptist Church, Glencoe**, where he served for 13 years. The church honored Butler and his wife, Cheryl, with a reception.



BUTLER

### ELMORE ASSOCIATION

► **Bethlehem East Baptist Church, Tallassee**, will host a Paint and Praise night July 30, 6–7:30, ages: preschool–6th grade. A pizza dinner is provided. Visit the church Facebook page to RSVP.

### ESCAMBIA ASSOCIATION

► **Elim Baptist Church, Andalusia**, celebrated its bicentennial anniversary and homecoming June 22. The service began with a call to worship sung by the children's choir. Rick Lance, executive director of the State Board of Missions, was the guest speaker. Special



Photo courtesy of David Davis

music was provided by church member Adam Coale, who also led music for the afternoon singing following the meal. Two recognitions were made by Don Sales, director of Thomas E. McMillan Museum, Brewton, and Jim Lambert (right), a commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, with pastor Ron Headley (left) accepting on behalf of the church. Ronny Herrington shared the church history, and each person received a printed historical booklet.

### ETOWAH ASSOCIATION

► **Ryan Morris** recently celebrated 10 years as pastor of **First Baptist Church Hokes Bluff**.

### MOBILE ASSOCIATION

► **Lee Havens**, senior pastor of **Hill Spring Baptist Church, Mobile**, recently retired after 15 years of service. The church honored Havens and his wife, Susie, with a special celebration June 29. Havens previously served as a pastor in Canoe, Alabama, and Monroe County and also served in roles such as music and youth.



Submitted photo

He holds degrees from the University of Mobile and the University of South Alabama. Havens and his wife have five children.

### MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION

► **Brad Doss** is the new pastor of **Hayneville Baptist Church**. Previously he and his wife, Connie, served at Perdido Baptist Church and as church planters.



Facebook/Hayneville Baptist Church

### TUSKEGEE LEE ASSOCIATION

► **Shane Yancey** is the new associate pastor of students



YANCEY

for **Farmville Baptist Church, Auburn**. He previously served in student ministry at Calvary Baptist Church, Eufaula, for 12 years and Friendship Baptist Church, Paducah, Kentucky, for 13 years. He and his wife, Meredith, have two children. Daniel Bradshaw is pastor.

► **Pleasant Springs Baptist Church, Tuskegee**, will host a singing July 26 at 11 a.m. featuring Forgiven Heart and Cooper Creek Band. Lunch to follow. Ronald Sumner is pastor.

## FBC Columbiana students experience diverse culture

**Z**eke Byrne didn't know what his trip to Toronto would entail, but he definitely didn't expect it to involve cooking a hotdog at a stranger's hotdog stand (pictured here).

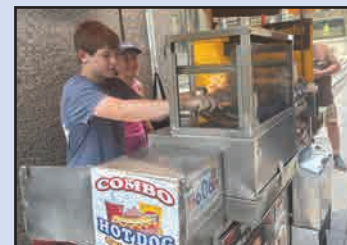


Photo courtesy of Scott Byrne

It was part of a scavenger hunt.

"This lady from Greece, we asked if she would let me cook," said, Zeke, a

13-year-old member of First Baptist Church Columbiana, who went with his dad, Scott, and 15-year-old brother, Nate, in late June as part of a student trip from FBC. (TAB)



Rocque Waites, PASCO assistant director, shows his framed pardons he received in 2024 from the State of Alabama and the State of South Carolina for his broken past.

# LIVES CHANGED



Photo courtesy of PASCO

## Ministry could use volunteers for renovations, donations for expanding needs

(continued from page 1) seen other things get new life, like a church building and gym that they recently purchased. Stanford and a team from the men's program worked for several months to convert the gym into four two-bedroom apartments for women and children.

Tasha Ridley, who serves as PASCO's women's program director, said it was desperately needed. She had helped start the women's program in 2016 in a small house, and in 2018

they moved into their first renovated church.

But after a while it was clear they needed a space big enough for some of the

women to be able to live with their children.

"We moved into the new facility last June, and we're already completely full," she said.

### Trusting God

The plan from the beginning was to finish out four more apartments upstairs in the former gym, but PASCO needs the funds to keep going, Ridley said, noting they need about \$150,000 in material supplies.

"But I know God has never let us down yet," she said.

They also plan to eventually renovate another church building to continue expanding the ministry.

Ridley said it's been a blessing to see the life transformations that have happened at PASCO over the years. She said they've seen many men's lives changed, and many women reunited with their children.

"Some clients never budgeted money or had a savings account or a checking

account. One mom didn't know what a balanced meal was," she said. "We

love coming alongside them to help them navigate life. That's the amazing thing — seeing God change ashes into beauty and restoration."

It's change that lasts, Ridley said.

"We hear a lot of testimonies from the ladies and men — they're still

doing well, they're still following the Lord and maintaining their sobriety."



Photo courtesy of PASCO

A PASCO client is pictured with her daughter the day a judge granted her custody.

### 'A Tale of Two Churches'



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

Cameron Spain shares about how two different churches responded to her when she was at a low point in her addiction crisis. Spain's life was changed through Unforsaken Ministry. She now works for The LoveLady Center based in Birmingham, which has thrift store locations in Irondale and Clay. **To view Cameron's video testimony called "A Tale of Two Churches," visit [tabonline.org/Cameron](http://tabonline.org/Cameron).** This video is a product of Unforsaken Ministry and was produced by Jason Rice. Find out more at [unforsakenministry.org](http://unforsakenministry.org).

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# Taking hold of a fresh spirit

## Anniston's Blue Mountain Baptist making a comeback, gives credit to God

By Sherry Kughn  
The Anniston Star

**B**eth Henderson remembers her childhood growing up attending Blue Mountain Baptist Church in Anniston. Henderson's grandfather, Gean Hinds, would gather all the children in the family and neighborhood and walk down Railroad Avenue to church on Sundays. When he died 24 years ago, Henderson's grief evoked such sadness that she didn't return to the church until recently.

As Henderson and her aunt, LaShea Bruce, sat in the fellowship hall May 27 during a covered-dish luncheon, they reminisced about a recent turn of events.

Bruce said she found her grandparents' photos on a wall at the church and is glad she and her family recently joined the church she considers home. Henderson said she, too, feels at home.

"I started seeing Nick's Facebook posts," Henderson said, referring to the new associate minister at the church, Nick Mickler, who made online posts about a renewal occurring at the church.

### 'But God ...'

For the past eight years, the church, which began in the early 1900s, had less than a dozen members, and that number stayed consistent until April. Now it seems a fresh new spirit has taken hold, and members are giving credit to God.

"I keep hearing in conversation and from Nick the phrase, 'But God ...,'" Henderson said. "I thought, 'I have to see this,' so here we are."

The group of faithful members has grown to an average of 50 attending the weekly Sunday morning worship service.



Facebook/Blue Mountain Baptist Church

Events like Preaching on the Porch have played a role in bringing new life to Blue Mountain Baptist Church in Anniston.

Blue Mountain Baptist is located in an aging community, and the younger residents have not been in attendance. Some of the church's members left during the pandemic, and COVID-19 took the lives of some. The situation had the remaining members wondering what to do.

A series of events and new faces at the church seems to have ushered in a fresh spirit.

First, pastor Don Pilcher underwent heart surgery in December.

Filling in for him was Mickler, a member at Anniston's Hill Crest Baptist Church. In March, Mickler encouraged Blue Mountain leaders to host a Saturday morning event and call it Preaching on the Porch.

Gospel musicians from the area sang, and various members including Mickler gave testimony about what Jesus had done in their lives. Afterward, the crowd of 60 who gathered that day enjoyed a cookout. They repeated the event in April.

About 70 people attended. The following Sunday, nine people became members of the church, and seven were baptized.

Then a tornado that struck the Blue Mountain area gave church members an opportunity to minister to the community. They prepared food, including 275 hot dogs, for those in the area who had no power and got busy cleaning up after downed trees had blocked roads.

### 'Spread the word'

Seventy people were present for the worship service May 27 as two guest singers, Nashville's Kelli Johnson, who grew up in Calhoun and Talladega counties, and Chase Inman, led the music.

Several members wiped tears as they sang, and others knelt and prayed at the front of the sanctuary.

Sayyivion Griffin, 22, was at that service and shared his story about why he was there.

"I was walking down from my house because our power was out, and Pastor Nick called me over," Griffin said during the fellowship luncheon that day. "He asked me if I wanted some food. He then asked if I would spread the word. I went around to the neighbors in Blue Mountain and people from Norwood (community) heard. By the time I got back to the church, there was a line of people getting hot dogs."

Griffin said he was attending because Mickler had invited him, and now he was thinking about becoming a member.

Richard Sego, a new minister at Hill Crest, said he is delighted at the stories his members are telling him.

"Nick has been delivered from some things in his past, and he seems to have identified with the community, and they with him," Sego said. "The Hill Crest members have helped, but we can't take the credit. God seems to be doing the revitalization."

Mickler is just happy to be of service to God.

"I grew up here," he said. "I lived on Twine Street and rode my bike up and down these streets when I was a boy, and now these guys have brought me back full circle as an associate pastor."

Pilcher, who is healthier now, is mentoring Mickler.

Longtime member of Blue Mountain Baptist, Eddie Tannkersly, 83, is a deacon in the church. For years, he served on the grounds committee, and has worked in the kitchen with his wife, Barbara, to make meals for those in need.

"The church is on the upswing, I hope," he said.

*EDITOR'S NOTE — This article is reprinted with permission.*





# UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

## Youth leader weekly chat Unwind starts back Aug. 21


If you're a youth leader, there's a Zoom call you should be a part of on Thursday mornings at 9 during the school year.

This weekly chat, called Unwind, is a "great opportunity to connect with student leaders from all over the state," said Josh Meadows, student ministry strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. "The beauty of this is it's all different ministry sizes with a common goal of sharing what God is doing at their church and resourcing each other. It's my favorite thing I get to do."

Unwind resumes on Thursday mornings starting Aug. 21. Jump on the call and be a part of talking about what God is doing in youth ministries all around the state.

To register, visit [ymlink.org/unwind](http://ymlink.org/unwind).

To register, visit [ymlink.org/unwind](http://ymlink.org/unwind) or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



## 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](http://alabamamen.org/fortify).

## SPEAK Tour set for July 27 in Rainsville

Want to build up the students in your church and reach their friends with the gospel? Plan to bring them all to SPEAK Tour at Broadway Baptist Church in Rainsville on July 27.

"It's a night of worship, but it's more geared toward students bringing their friends so that they can hear the gospel and have an opportunity to respond to the gospel," said Josh Meadows, student ministry strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. "We also will challenge our followers of Jesus to take the next step and identify the person that they want to begin praying for and ultimately reach with the gospel message."

SPEAK Tour will also have fun outdoor games for students to play.

Admission is free, and no preregistration is required.

For more information, visit [ymlink.org/speaktour](http://ymlink.org/speaktour).

### Pray for Student Missionaries

Will you continue to pray for One Mission Students as they serve and wrap up their terms of service this summer? We are hearing many stories of life change from collegiate student missionaries — both the lives of those they have served and the students' lives. We are praying that the Lord would use this summer for Kingdom impact across the globe and on campuses across our state. Thanks for joining us in this prayer effort.

## WORD search

- |             |            |
|-------------|------------|
| ALL MY DAYS | PATH       |
| ANGER       | PRAISES    |
| BELIEVED    | ROCK       |
| CONFIDENT   | SACRIFICES |
| COURAGE     | SALVATION  |
| DESIRED     | SEEK       |
| DWELL       | SING       |
| ENEMIES     | SMOOTH     |
| FEAR        | STRENGTH   |
| FORSAKE     | STUMBLER   |
| GOODNESS    | TABERNACLE |
| HEART       | TEMPLE     |
| HELP        | TROUBLE    |
| LIGHT       | VIOLENCE   |
| LIVING      | WAIT       |
| MERCY       | WICKED     |

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

"I would have lost heart unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

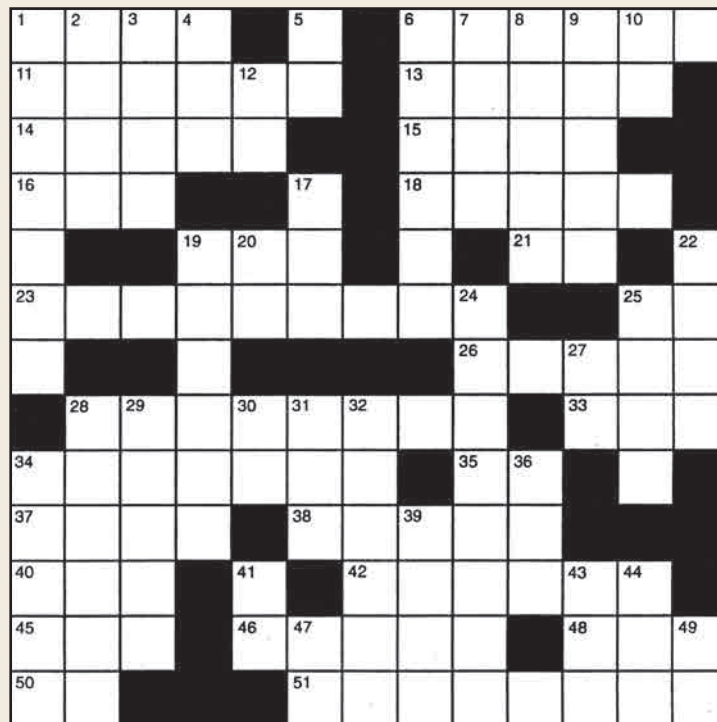
PSALM 27:13 (NKJV)



# CHRISTIAN Crossword

## ACROSS

1. To request earnestly.
6. Except ye \_\_\_\_, ye shall ... perish. (Luke 13:3)
11. What \_\_\_\_ thee, Hagar? (Gen. 21:17)
13. Daybreak.
14. To cook.
15. Talking horse.
16. Army Transport Service. (abbr.)
18. The \_\_\_\_ of Kish ... were lost. (1 Sam. 9:3)
19. Could.
21. Father of Jr. (abbr.)
23. As the \_\_\_\_ cometh out of the east. (Matt. 24:27)
25. Greeting.
26. Sackcloth and \_\_\_\_\_. (Luke 10:13)
28. Neither be \_\_\_\_ of other men's sins. (1 Tim. 5:22)
33. [Pilate] \_\_\_\_ the more afraid. (John 19:8)
34. Disturb.
35. Middle French. (abbr.)
37. Medicinal plant.
38. Person afflicted with sores.
40. The serpent beguiled me, and I did \_\_\_\_\_. (Gen. 3:13)
42. Avenge.
45. TV brand.
46. Ready for action.
48. But thine \_\_\_\_ and drink. (Luke 5:33)
50. Interject to express



By Joann Horn Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

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50. Interject to express

## DOWN

1. Moral story.
2. Children not accused of \_\_\_\_\_. (Titus 1:6)
3. Exclamation of sorrow.
4. Opposed to "no."
5. \_\_\_\_, thou that destroyest the temple. (Mark 15:29)
6. My joy might \_\_\_\_ in you. (John 15:11)
7. Having itching \_\_\_\_\_. (2 Tim. 4:3)
8. I \_\_\_\_ toward the mark. (Phil. 3:14)
9. The \_\_\_\_ shall serve the younger. (Rom. 9:12)
10. New York (abbr.).
12. Tea time. (abbr.)
17. No room ... in the \_\_\_\_\_. (Luke 2:7)
19. He rode upon a \_\_\_\_.
20. Yesterday \_\_\_\_ the seventh hour. (John 4:52)
22. Holy \_\_\_\_\_. (Rom. 16:16)
24. Robes.
25. Cure.
27. Housewife. (abbr.)
28. \_\_\_\_ the word. (2 Tim. 4:2)
29. Artery in the heart.
30. Lung disease. (abbr.)
31. Christ is \_\_\_\_\_. (Col. 3:11)
32. Guard.
34. Thither.
36. Day of the week. (abbr.)
39. Keep thyself \_\_\_\_\_. (1 Tim. 5:22)
41. Mom.
43. Red or Dead.
44. Whereas thou \_\_\_\_ been forsaken and hated. (Isa. 60:15)
47. Lieutenant. (abbr.)
49. Technical Sergeant. (abbr.)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.



## UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

## Called 2025

For a teenager or young adult, the call to ministry can seem like the most complex decision to wade through. That's why the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions created the Called conference.

The conference, which will be held Aug. 2 at Samford University, is a one-day event designed to help young men and women, high school through college, who are considering the life-changing call to ministry.

Called 2025 will feature powerful mainstage talks and breakout sessions led by people who've walked the ministry path themselves. Ben Baber, lead pastor of the Fields Church in State College, Pennsylvania, will

To register, visit [bcmlink.org/called](https://bcmlink.org/called) or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



be the featured speaker. Ministry leaders will share real stories, wisdom and tips to inspire and guide students as they step into their own journey.

The cost for the conference is \$30. Lunch will be provided. For more information, visit [bcmlink.org/called](https://bcmlink.org/called).

## Calling Out the Called Sunday set for Aug. 10

One of our most urgent tasks is to help equip those He has called to take up the mantle of leadership in our churches. Bivocational, co-vocational and full-time pastors, as well as other church ministerial staff, are needed throughout the state. Your

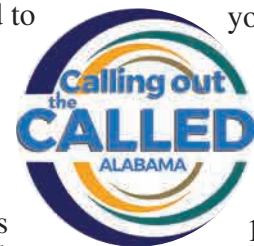
State Board of Missions desires to come alongside your church and foster those He has called through the Calling Out the Called initiative.

Sunday, Aug. 10, has been designated as Calling Out the Called Sunday. Would you consider setting aside that day to preach, sing and teach about the importance of the call to ministry?

Resources are available to help you with this Sunday emphasis as well as the larger Calling Out the Called effort.

Together we can be a part of encouraging and developing the next generation of church leaders.

For more information, visit [callingoutthecalled.org](https://callingoutthecalled.org).



To register, visit [callingoutthecalled.org](https://callingoutthecalled.org) or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.





# Persecuted church

**State of emergency requested in Nigeria**

ABUJA, Nigeria — Nigeria’s president has been urged to declare a military state of emergency as 86 more Christians have been killed.

Nigeria is No. 7 on Open Doors’ 2025 World Watch List of the 50 places most difficult to be a Christian and leads the world in the number of Christians killed annually. However, violence has intensified markedly in the past couple of months, leaving hundreds dead.

**Christian mom flees after death threats**

KISMAYO, Somalia — A 31-year-old Soma-  
lian woman accepted Jesus in January after see-  
ing “The Jesus Film” has been divorced by her  
husband, rejected by her parents and forced to  
flee with her three young children to another area.  
Muslim relatives and others have threatened her  
life, she told Morning Star News.

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

**Blasphemy laws used for persecution**

PUNJAB PROVINCE, Pakistan — In its re-  
port “A Conspiracy to Grab the Land: Exploiting

Pakistan’s Blasphemy Laws for Blackmail and  
Profit,” Human Rights Watch points to the sys-  
tematic misuse of blasphemy laws in Pakistan to  
incite violence, displace vulnerable communities  
and seize property, with Christians being frequent  
targets. The court system and law enforcement  
are enablers, the rights group says.

“In several cases, blasphemy accusations were  
used to target business rivals or coerce property  
transfers,” Christian Daily International-Morning  
Star News reported. “The law’s broad and vague  
provisions allow it to be exploited with minimal  
or no evidence, creating a climate of fear among  
vulnerable groups.”

Pakistan is No. 8 on Open Doors’ 2025 World  
Watch List of 50 places most difficult to be a  
Christian.

**10 accused in riots acquitted in Pakistan**

JARANWALA, Pakistan — Ten Muslims ac-  
cused of involvement in massive riots in Jaranwa-  
la, Pakistan, two years ago have been acquitted,  
according to an attorney.

Thousands of Muslim rioters attacked the vil-  
lage of Chak 651/2 GB in Punjab province on  
Aug. 16, 2023, after two Christian brothers were

falsely accused of producing blasphemous con-  
tent and desecrating the Quran. The brothers were  
acquitted after an anti-terrorism court found that  
they had been framed by another Christian fol-  
lowing a personal dispute.

More than 25 churches and 85 homes were dam-  
aged, according to Christian Daily International-  
Morning Star News.

Amnesty International said there were 5,213  
suspected rioters, of whom 380 were arrested.  
Most were released on bail, and the charges  
against many were dropped, according to a state-  
ment from Amnesty International.

**Child beaten for faith, dies week later**

SUMATRA, Indonesia — An 8-year-old boy  
from a Christian family in Sumatra, Indonesia,  
was severely beaten by fifth graders for his fam-  
ily’s faith and died May 26. The boy’s father said  
ethnicity and Christian faith were the reasons his  
son was bullied, according to news outlets.

“Indonesian society,” notes Morning Star  
News, “has adopted a more conservative Islamic  
character, and churches involved in evangelistic  
outreach are at risk of being targeted by Islamic  
extremist groups, according to Open Doors.”

NEWS ITEMS COMPILED BY THE ALABAMA BAPTIST STAFF

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Shelby Hospital | Walker Hospital

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## CHURCH POSITIONS

### SENIOR PASTOR

Cypress Shores Baptist Church in Mobile, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a full-time senior pastor. Please email resumé to: [cypress9631@comcast.net](mailto:cypress9631@comcast.net) or mail to: 4327 Higgins Rd., Mobile, AL 36619.

### SENIOR PASTOR

Shiloh Baptist Church in Hartford, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a full-time senior pastor. Submit resumé to: [admin@sbchartford.org](mailto:admin@sbchartford.org).

### LEAD PASTOR

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

### PASTOR

Bell Lane Baptist, Clanton, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking our next full-time pastor. The successful candidate will assume a range of responsibilities. You can view the full job description by visiting the link: [www.belllanebaptist.org/about](http://www.belllanebaptist.org/about).

### PASTOR

Indian Grave Baptist Church is seeking a full-time/bivocational pastor. Please send a resumé to: [mgracesmith83@gmail.com](mailto:mgracesmith83@gmail.com) or mail to: 2398 County Rd. 19 N, Prattville, AL 36067.

### 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

Odena Baptist Church in Sylacauga, Alabama, is seeking a full-time pastor. The person

should be excited to preach the Word of God, lead in outreach to the church/community and saving the lost. Odena Baptist Church is located in Talladega County about 50 miles south of Birmingham. We love God and others. We also provide a 4 bedroom pastorium (home) for our pastor. Please send your resumé to: [dbtouart@gmail.com](mailto:dbtouart@gmail.com) or mail it to: Odena Baptist Church, 115 Odena Road N., Sylacauga, AL 35150.

### 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 12 miles from Thomasville, Alabama. Send inquiries/resumés to: [elambaptist.ap@gmail.com](mailto:elambaptist.ap@gmail.com) or mail: 53 Elam Rd., Thomasville, AL 36784. ATTN: Search Committee.

### PASTOR OR BIVOCATIONAL

Snow Road First Baptist Church, Semmes, Alabama, seeking experienced, seminary trained man. Contact Douglas Kaul: 251-591-5525, or church office: 251-649-7722. Send resumé to: [drkaul7100@gmail.com](mailto:drkaul7100@gmail.com).

### BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Stowers Hill Baptist of Attalla, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a bivocational pastor. Please submit resumé to: [stowershillbaptist@gmail.com](mailto:stowershillbaptist@gmail.com).

### 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](mailto:justin.nelson@clantonfirstbaptist.org).

### 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](mailto:weems1969@aol.com).

## OTHER POSITIONS

### 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@fbcbhm.org](mailto:cjames@fbcbhm.org).

## BUSINESS

### CHURCH FURNISHINGS

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

### STEEPLES, ETC.

No job too big or too small. Call for free on-site consultation. Toll-free 1-888-699-9679 or Alabama local 205-699-9679. Ask for the owner, Terry Barnes. Visit gallery at [leedsstainedglass.com](http://leedsstainedglass.com).

## TRAVEL/VACATION

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### LOG CABIN

Lake Guntersville area, beautiful view and fully furnished. Discounts to ministers. Log on to <https://paradisvistatravel.com/2024/08/20/paradisvista-cabin> to see pictures. Email Karen for reservations at [kwlwdc@gmail.com](mailto:kwlwdc@gmail.com) or call 205-540-3600.



Photo courtesy of Bellevue Baptist Church

Outgoing senior pastor Steve Gaines (left) greets Ben and Lynley Mandrell at Bellevue Baptist Church on July 13. The church called Mandrell as its next senior pastor.

## Ben Mandrell called as Bellevue senior pastor

Ben Mandrell has been called to be the senior pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church. Mandrell has served as president and CEO of Lifeway Christian Resources since 2019.

"I cannot tell you how thankful we are for this moment," Mandrell, 48, said in a statement from the church. "This big hurricane of Bellevue love has just swallowed us up."

The vote came as the entire church met in an overflow worship service followed by a special-called business session. His first Sunday as pastor will be Aug. 10.

Bellevue has played a key role in the Memphis area and across the Southern Baptist Convention over the last century with pastoral leadership from R.G. Lee, Adrian Rogers and Steve Gaines, all former SBC presidents.

### Leadership transition

Gaines, 67, announced last September his desire for a pastoral transition process to begin at the church. He has served as Bellevue's senior pastor since 2005.

According to 2024 Annual Church Profile data, Bellevue reported 7,382 people for in-person and online worship attendance, 329 total baptisms and

\$26,276,186 in total undesignated receipts.

Meanwhile, Lifeway trustees have asked Joe Walker, executive vice president and chief operating officer, to serve as interim president and CEO until a new president is named.

Walker has overseen daily operations and helped provide strategic leadership of the organization since March.

### Search committee

Trustees also have named an eight-person search committee to find Lifeway's next leader. The trustees' presidential search committee will be led by Billy Stewart, who serves as executive pastor for administration at First Baptist Church Jackson, Mississippi.

Speaking to Lifeway staff about the call to Bellevue, Mandrell expressed gratitude to the organization.

"This ministry is filled with salt-of-the-earth people, and it's truly heart-breaking to think we won't see their faces as often in the years to come," he said. "Even so, the Lord has made it crystal clear that it's time for us to return to the pastorate and to join the Bellevue family."

Mandrell and his wife Lynley have four children. (BP)



# EXPLORE THE BIBLE

## Sunday School Lessons

By Jay T. Robertson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, University of Mobile



### For July 27

#### GOD'S CONVICTION Psalm 38:1-8, 18-22

Psalm 38 is a penitential psalm. It is an expression of brokenness and repentance in which David pleads to be restored to a right relationship with God. This psalm focuses on the themes of divine discipline, suffering, sin, guilt, confession and hope for restoration. Psalm 38 reminds us that God's relationship to His children is characterized by both justice and mercy.

##### Conviction (1-4)

Aware that he was suffering because of his sins, David cried out for relief. David never mentioned the specific sin that resulted in God's discipline, but whatever sin it was brought a great deal of suffering to David. He pleaded with God to discipline him like a son and not treat him as an enemy.

Overcome with God's displeasure for his sin, David metaphorically described his great pain and suffering under the Lord's hand of discipline. He felt as if he had been deeply wounded by the Lord's arrows and squashed by His hand coming down upon him. This divine discipline not only affected David spiritually; it also impacted him physically, mentally and emotionally.

His iniquities consumed him, and the burden of his sin was more than he could bear. We see that David being right with God was more important than anything else in his life.

##### Contrition (5-8)

David, convicted of his sin, proceeded to describe the anguish his sin caused him. We need to experience the deep conviction of sin in our lives and feel the contrition, sorrow and brokenness over our sin before the holy God.

David knew he was being punished for a serious transgression. He acknowledged the foolishness of disobeying God

and allowing sin to reign in his heart. These acknowledgments are essential steps in being reconciled to God.

David painted a word picture of unrelenting pain that left him without health and strength. He was mourning his loss of fellowship with God. David, a believer, still suffered great loss because of his sin. No one ever sins and gets away with it. Although nothing can sever a true believer's relationship with God, we will always suffer loss when we sin.

David was a very sick man. His body burned with pain and weakness. He felt weak and crushed. All he could do was groan because of the pain in his body and the anguish in his heart.

##### Confession (18-22)

In the concluding verses of Psalm 38, David obeyed God's instructions to confess his sins to the Lord. David agreed with God that what he had done was wrong, and he accepted responsibility for his sinful actions. He did not play the blame game and accuse others of his circumstances. He trusted God to forgive him for his sins.

Forsaken by his friends and attacked by his enemies, David felt completely isolated and alone. Although he had done nothing to provoke his enemies, they hated him. What hope was there for David to survive these circumstances? Every direction he looked seemed hopeless.

David looked to the Lord. He knew that God is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins if we confess them to Him. He also knew God will never forsake one of His children.

David did what we must do when we experience conviction and feel contrition because of our sin. He cast himself upon the mercy of the faithful, covenant-keeping God. God is good and gracious to everyone who will call on His name.

### For August 3

#### GOD'S FORGIVENESS PSALM 32:1-11

Psalm 32 is one of the seven penitential psalms in the Book of Psalms. In this psalm David spoke directly about the devastating power of unconfessed sin in the life of a believer. As observed in the life of David, sin committed against God leads to sorrow and loss of vitality. But as also witnessed in David's life, confession leads to restoration of joy as well as a passion for living for the glory of God. Confessing our sin is a vital part of abiding in Christ.

##### Joy (1-2)

The first stanza begins on a jubilant note, expressing the joy of the person whose sin has been forgiven.

David's joy in the Lord had been renewed when the Lord forgave his transgression and covered his sin. A transgression is a deliberate act of rebellion, and a sin is a failure to meet God's standard of holy behavior. "Forgiveness" means "to be lifted up, to be lifted off, to take away." God lifted and removed the heavy weight of David's guilt and its penalty from upon him and removed David's sin from out of His sight. Hallelujah!

God graciously chose not to count David's sin against him, meaning that the debt he owed and the punishment he deserved were no longer on God's ledger. By acknowledging and confessing his sin to the Lord, David no longer lived a life of deceit. Coming clean before God results in a life of blessedness.

##### Forgiveness (3-5)

The second stanza shifts from the present to the past. David referred to the time he had sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah and had kept silent and refused to confess his sin to God. While David's conscience was troubled by what he did, he still refused to confess his

sin, and his body became sick. His physical stamina and vitality were drained because the Lord's hand was heavy on him. God inflicted physical discipline upon David's body to lead him to repentance.

Verse 5 is the pivotal verse in the psalm. David agreed with God about his sin, with no more excuses and no more covering up what he had done. Confession of sin to God is acknowledging one's sin with contrition because of its offensiveness to God.

When David confessed his sin to God, God immediately forgave the guilt of his sin. David no longer had a guilty standing before God. David's fellowship with God was restored!

##### Instruction (6-11)

Having experienced God's forgiveness, David encouraged believers to go to God to confess their sins and seek His forgiveness. When believers keep short accounts with God by not allowing unconfessed sin to linger, they can avoid His discipline that can come suddenly, like floodwaters.

When believers trust in the Lord as their hiding place, He will protect them from the overwhelming guilt of sin. Believers who confess and repent of their sins are surrounded by songs of deliverance. From the depths of despair to the heights of praise, this psalm is a song of deliverance.

Verse 8 and the remainder of the stanza was written as if God were speaking directly to the restored individual, promising to "instruct," "show the way" and "counsel" him. In other words, God will continually watch over us. If we persist in sin, we will become like brute animals and experience many pains. But if we listen to God and obey Him, we will be able to rejoice in God.

***"Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts  
no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit."***



# 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 July 27

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF CHARACTER 2 Peter 1:1–11

Earlier this summer we observed two holidays in which we celebrate freedom — Juneteenth and Independence Day. When someone has freedom, they are freed from something and freed to something. For instance, Juneteenth celebrates freedom from slavery, and Independence Day celebrates freedom from tyranny. As a result, we are free to live as free men and women. It would be foolish for someone to have freedom and live as though they were still oppressed or enslaved.

When we are free in Christ, we are freed from sin and free to live a godly life — something we were not able to do before Christ. However, sometimes people view this freedom as permission to act in any way that feels best to them. The problem with this mindset is that we are flawed human beings; we do not always act in the best way.

The only way we can live rightly is to live the way God calls us to live — and that begins with embracing the character traits that reflect Christ.

#### God has empowered us to grow in Christlike character. (1–3)

When God calls us to do something, He equips us with whatever we need to accomplish the calling. God has called every Christian to live godly lives, and He has given us everything we need to grow in Christlike character.

Where do we find this “road-map” for godly living? Verse 3 tells us that it comes from God’s divine power through our knowledge of Him. Our knowledge of God comes from studying Scripture and the life of Jesus. If we are not studying God’s Word or trying to imitate the life of Christ in our own lives, it’s like we are navigating uncharted territory without a map or compass.

The power of the Holy Spirit and knowledge of God through His Word is everything we need to live in the freedom we have from Christ.

#### Diligence in our growth helps us to know God better. (4–8)

Verse 4 tells us we are allowed to “share in the divine nature.” Have you ever thought of that? When you are loving and kind and patient (displaying the fruit of the Spirit), you are showing the world God’s divine nature. On the contrary, when we act selfishly and are hateful, we show the world our sinful nature. God has freed us to know Him better and participate in His divine nature.

This passage tells us that there are divine actions we should add to our faith: goodness, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, brotherly affection and love. By practicing these disciplines, we grow closer to God and better understand what it means to live as Christ.

#### Christlike character points to our relationship with Christ. (9–11)

You might have heard the old saying, “Tell me who your friends are, and I’ll tell you who you are.” Who we spend time with and what we do with our time truly matters. As Christians, the world should know we spend time in God’s Word by the way we act. Our lives, as a result of the transforming power of Christ’s blood, should reflect the character of Christ.

Verse 9 calls Christians who are not acting in God’s divine nature “blind and shortsighted” because they have forgotten that they have received “cleansing from [their] past sins.” Christians whose lives don’t reflect Christ live as though they are still slaves to sin. Our actions reveal our relationship to God as we grow and live with godly character.

### For August 3

#### GODLINESS 1 Timothy 4:6–16

Over the next few weeks, we will explore different character traits Christians show because of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Godliness, humility, contentment, generosity and integrity are all marks of the presence of the Holy Spirit in someone’s life.

This lesson will focus on godliness. I fear that there are people who shy away from godliness because they see it as legalistic. Pursuing godliness is not legalism; it is a life well lived in response to the gospel. Godliness is something we should strive for, knowing that we are fully dependent upon God’s grace.

Will we be perfect? No. Will we stumble every now and then? Of course. God’s grace gives us the freedom to pursue godliness, but it also covers us when we miss the mark. The only godliness we can attain is found in Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Our response is to live our lives in accordance with the Spirit.

#### A godly life has eternal value. (6–8)

If you were to set a goal to climb a mountain or run a marathon, you would surely prepare accordingly and strictly follow the training schedule. Even if we don’t aspire to climb a mountain or run a marathon, we all want to be healthy and have a great quality of life. Recent scientific studies have shown that strength training is linked to length and quality of life.

In our passage for today, Paul recognizes the value of physical training. But what he says is more valuable is training in godliness. Physical strength will pass away, but godliness has eternal value.

Nourishing your soul with sound teaching, filling your mind with the things of God without distractions and focusing on truth will benefit us

now and in “the life to come.”

#### A godly life is grounded in our Christ-centered hope. (9–11)

Godliness is something we strive for after we have accepted the gift of salvation. We do not come to Jesus through godliness; rather, we come to Jesus as sinners and because of His saving grace, we are free to live godly lives. Striving for godliness is not the same as striving to do good works to earn salvation. As Paul teaches, we labor and strive “because” we have put our hope in the living God. Our only hope is Jesus, and our response to Him should be a life that pursues godliness.

#### A godly life points others to Christ. (12–16)

The book of 1 Timothy was written by Paul to Timothy to encourage him as he ministered to the church in Ephesus in Paul’s absence. While the message was specifically written to Timothy, there is much we can gain from Paul’s words about godly living. Paul urges Timothy to set an example in how to live. Ephesus was a young church and still influenced by Greek paganism. Paul wanted Timothy to live a life that exemplified the presence of the Holy Spirit, not a whitewashed version of the world in which he lived.

Paul also encouraged Timothy to read and teach the Scriptures. By being diligent in proclaiming God’s Word, Timothy would point the church to Christ. A life of legalism will point people to ourselves and our own works. But just as Jesus taught us in Matthew, a godly life will be a light that shines before others, and “they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (5:16).

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

**“If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus ...”**

1 Timothy 4:6



# Help out of the blue

## Disaster Relief feeding team 'saves summer' for Camp ASCCA after lightning strike

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

There's a blog post on Camp ASCCA's website called "How Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief saved our summer," and camp director Matt Rickman said they mean it.

"We're pretty resilient, and we would've tried to figure it out, but the Disaster Relief team has been a lifesaver," Rickman said.

### Special needs camp

Camp ASCCA — which stands for Alabama's Special Camp for Children and Adults — hosts camp sessions in Jacksons' Gap for those with intellectual, physical and developmental disabilities. And on June 29, just as they were checking in campers for their third session of the summer, a tree next to the dining hall got hit by lightning.

"The current went through and blew up the electrical and started a little fire," Rickman said.

Everyone was safe, but the damage was going to take a month or two to sort out and repair, he said. They started sending home the campers who had just arrived.

And then Rickman got a call out of the blue.

"He mentioned his daughter worked here like 20 years ago and she had seen about the damage and said, 'That's such an awesome place, I wish we could help them,'" Rickman said.

The "he" was David Hendon, a volunteer leader for Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief, and his daughter, Linnea Elliott, was the one who saw Camp ASCCA's Facebook post.

"I told him about the Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief mass feeding



Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers set up the mass feeding unit at Camp ASCCA on July 5. They began serving meals July 7.

ABDR photo

team and asked if he was interested, and he said he sure was," Hendon said.

Becky Noland, state mass feeding coordinator for ABDR, went to meet with Rickman along with Chad Middlebrooks, director of missions for the local Tallapoosa Baptist Association. All Rickman asked for was one week of help.

"We told him we could do three teams and go three weeks," Noland said. "But then we found out he had four weeks of camp left, so we said we can cook all four, there's no reason we can't do that."

She said relief washed over Rickman's face.

"He started crying," she said. "I told our crews this is something re-

ally special, to get to come alongside them like this."

The first crew started serving meals July 7. The week's session was for teenagers and featured a prom at the end of the week.

### 'A lifesaver'

"When we aren't helping after hurricanes and tornadoes, we love to have opportunities like this," Noland said, noting that in June they were also able to cook for a Carpenters for Christ group rebuilding a tornado-damaged church in Pine Level.

Rickman said he "can't say enough good things" about the ABDR feeding team.

"Their professionalism and kindness — everyone is so nice and sweet," he said. "It really has been a lifesaver."

To learn more about Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief, visit [sbdr.org](http://sbdr.org).



ABDR photo

An Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief feeding team volunteer helps prepare a meal at Camp ASCCA on July 7.



# The Alabama Baptist

July 24, 2025 | tabonline.org

SPECIAL SECTION

*Resources and stories to help soon-to-be college students, as well as their parents and grandparents*

# Back *to* Campus

## ACT OF SERVICE

Blessing Basket ministry supports college students away from families

## MAKING MEMORIES

Enjoy family time on campus by trying new activities

## CHOOSE ACT

Alabama families set to receive financial help for children's education



# Showing support and care

BY CARRIE B. McWHORTER • THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



Freepik photo

## New school year offers opportunities for church to 'lean in,' help foster families

**F**or children in foster care, a new school year can bring welcome predictability and some unique challenges — both of which churches can address in ministering to them and their families.

Children need consistency, and children in foster care have usually lacked that, said Herbie Newell, president and executive director of Lifeline Children's Services, a Birmingham-based ministry whose services include adoption, family restoration and counseling.

"Whether it's homeschool, private or public, school brings a stability of schedule," Newell said.

At the same time, transitions are often difficult for children in foster care, Newell said.

### Navigating transitions

"Every single transition reminds them, 'I'm living in a scenario that's not normal.' They may not be able to articulate those feelings, but in their young minds, they are reminded of the fluidness of the relationships they have," Newell said.

The thought of different classrooms and new teachers can make any child nervous, but that apprehension is "exponentially multiplied" for foster children, he said.

Churches can help children by helping their families, Newell said.

For example, the start of a new school year is a great time to provide a few days of meals for a foster family, he said.

"Providing a simple meal allows foster families to invest more in that child and the transition that's happening," he said.

If bonds have been built during the summer through VBS or camps, children's ministers and volunteers should "lean into those relationships," Newell said. Pray for the child, their foster parents and their biological family. Show them support and care as much as possible.

"Let the child know you're in their corner, just as their foster parents are," Newell suggested. "The more loving, trustworthy adults who are safe and who love the Lord that are in that child's corner, the easier it is for them to make these transitions."

Depending on the situation, seasoned adults in the church might serve as grandparent figures for children in foster care. When a child is taken into custody, they don't just lose a mom or a dad, Newell said — they lose relationships with grandparents, aunts, uncles and other extended family.

### Provide respite care

Becoming a respite care provider is another way to help. Many foster children aren't allowed to leave their state of residence or they have strict visitation schedules that are hard to change. It can bring foster parents great peace of mind to know they have help if needed, Newell said.

When in doubt, asking a foster parent what they most need can go a long way toward encouraging them in a difficult calling, Newell said.

"We don't have to sign up to be a foster family or to adopt to minister to vulnerable children," Newell said. "There's a role that each of us in the body of Christ can play."

## Welcoming new children to your church

By **Patty Burns**

Preschool specialist, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

**I**'ve visited a lot of church Vacation Bible Schools, and more times than I'd like to remember, my heart sank as I watched a guest walk in.

Usually it was a child who didn't come with a friend, and they were all alone. There was no excitement on their face — it was sheer fear!

What was worse, the adult who was "greeting" just pointed to where the child was to go — they didn't even walk the child to the teacher or other children and introduce them. It was even harder to watch the teacher not even acknowledge that the child sat down on her pew.

Every child is precious. Every

child deserves to be seen. But not all those who walk through the doors of our church look like us, dress like us or even talk like us.

What can we do to make them feel a sense of belonging?

### Three ways

Here are three ways to make everyone feel loved, welcomed and part of the family:

**1. Learn names.** Everyone likes to be called by their name, and it is easier to become friends when you know a person's name. Play a group name game or have everyone create an original name tag to express their personality.

**2. Let everyone know what to expect.** If a child has never been to your campus before, they don't know where anything is or what to expect.

Explain the schedule, where restrooms are and how to engage in the lessons — these can all help put a child, or any visitor, at ease.

**3. Don't assume visitors know the "rules."** Our "church kids" know the "church rules," but even they don't always follow them. Share what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior (e.g., We're quiet during prayer or when the Bible story is being told; we use kind words; we stay together as a group).

If we are intentional, pray for opportunities and see people with the eyes of Jesus, then maybe we will not have anyone who says, "What if nobody likes me?" because we have made them feel loved, welcomed and like they belong.



# Act of service

BY TRACY RIGGS FRONTZ • THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

## Blessing Basket ministry supports college students away from families

**M**any times a great idea is born out of a personal story, often a hard one. For Melissa Loudon, founder of the Blessing Basket ministry, this was the case.

After her three children left home at the same time, Loudon had a hole in her heart. She loved college-aged adults and missed her own. On the parent pages of Auburn University, she noticed some people selling baskets to students whose parents weren't nearby.

She quickly recognized that this type of service matched her gift-givings perfectly.

"One of my love languages is gift-giving. It doesn't have to be anything really big or expensive — just something intentional that lets somebody know that you see them, that you notice something about them, that they feel seen. So I started watching it and just kept praying about it," she said.

Loudon talked to her daughter, who said it would be perfect for her mother. Then her husband agreed. Finally, she shared it with a group of women who are using their passions for the Kingdom. Those who heard the idea thought it was wonderful.

She began trying ways to make it work — with no success. But she persevered.

"I was like, you know what? I'm just going to throw it out there. I'm just going to go for it — and that was what I did. I just gave up trying to have everything exactly the way that I thought it needed to be before I started and just decided to go ahead," Loudon said.

She told Julie Boyd, director of the office of parent and family engagement for Samford University,



Photo courtesy of Melissa Loudon

about her idea, and the Blessing Basket was put on their resource page. Word of mouth from her friends and those who started receiving the baskets let others know about the business.

The baskets range from monthly baskets with themes — such as Easter or Christmas — to baskets for special days like birthdays. Each is tailored to its recipient.

Though the idea for this service isn't new, Loudon stands out by also being a type of surrogate mom. With each basket delivery and visit, Loudon builds relationships with the students — and their parents.

### Personal touch

"[The parents] know that they can just call me and say, 'Hey, she's having a bad day today. I just would love somebody to just go lay eyes on her for me and maybe give her some flowers and give her a note of Scripture and encouragement.' Then I take a picture

ate receiving a photo of our daughter with her gift. It gave us a small window into her life away from home."

A big part of the Blessing Basket ministry is the spiritual aspect. Loudon prays every day for these young adults. She's willing to let them come to her home and have a meal with her and her husband. She invests in them. It's much more than simply delivering a basket of goodies.

### Bathed in prayer

Loudon occasionally also makes a basket with unused items for her daughter's roommates as a way of bonding with them. This relationship building led to one sharing some personal struggles with Loudon.

"It's just been very, very precious. I'm out here thinking about how that's just opened the door for her to know, 'Hey, you always have a place at the table at our house. You're seen.'"

"It isn't much of anything that I bring them once a month and give them a hug and put a Scripture card in and say, 'Guys, I'm praying for y'all.' But just that — doing it consistently — has kind of lowered some of her safeguards that she's had to be able to share and get to know her better," Loudon said.

Loudon is exploring partnerships with other local colleges and can be contacted individually in the Birmingham area. She will also help those in other areas who want to start a similar ministry because she believes there are students — and moms — everywhere who need this service.



LOUDON

More information can be found on Facebook under "The Blessing Basket."

To contact Melissa Loudon, email [MelissaBlessingBasket@gmail.com](mailto:MelissaBlessingBasket@gmail.com).





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# 4 questions

## with Samford President Beck A. Taylor

INTERVIEW BY TODD C. REAM • CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR'S REVIEW

**B**eck A. Taylor began his tenure as the 19th president of Samford University in July 2021. In October 2024, Taylor spoke with Todd C. Ream, publisher of Christian Scholar's Review, for an episode of "Saturdays at Seven," a conversation series about the academic vocation and the Church. The article below is adapted from that conversation, which can be viewed in its entirety at [tabonline.org/Taylor](http://tabonline.org/Taylor) or heard on most podcast platforms.

**Q: How would you describe Samford's culture?**

**A:** For all of its 183-year history, Samford has lived at the intersection of Christian faith and learning, and we continue to think about what it means to invite students to grow intellectually, to be more curious about the world around them, to be exposed to modern thinkers and also to think about what it means to be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ and how that identity as a Christ follower can shape and inform their person, their vocation and their place in the world.

**Q: What are the key characteristics of the academic vocation as you understand and exercise them at Samford?**

**A:** The Great Commandment is to love God with all of ourselves — mind, body, strength, spirit. God in His infinite wisdom imbued human beings with the ability to reason and to think and to explore and to discover and to co-create. These are virtues I think the academy is meant to shine a light on and to elevate.

The second part of that Great Commandment is to love your neighbor, so we're not just accruing these academic goods to ourselves.

We're thinking about how we can better serve the people around us.

At Samford, we also want to evaluate the lordship of Jesus Christ in all we do ... to meet students and community members where they are and introduce them to the gospel.

**Q: What virtues do you believe are most critical to exercising the academic vocation today and into the future?**

**A:** The Christian classical virtues of faith, hope and love are very important. Curiosity also comes to mind. So much of today's rhetoric

and discourse is about being certain about things, and there are some things we need to be certain about.

But so much of God's grace has been given to us in our ability to discover, to ask hard questions, to think critically about the issues of today. So going into conversations with a posture of learning and curiosity, but also with humility and conviction, is something that we want to instill.

**Q: Shortly after you began as Samford's president, the board adopted the strategic plan Fidelitas: Faith and Future. Describe some**

**critical components of that plan and how you anticipate it shaping the university's story and culture.**

**A:** Fidelitas, Latin for faithfulness, is a far-ranging strategic plan. As our vision statement says, we want to become the school of choice among national, comprehensive Christ-centered universities, particularly those that place a special emphasis on the residential experience for undergraduates.

We have a lot of aspirational goals about how to be a more faithful university and how to equip our students today for the professions, careers and callings they'll have in the modern world. I'm excited to see what Fidelitas and our ambitious campus master plan, Samford Horizons, will accomplish. It's a really exciting time to be at Samford.



BECK A. TAYLOR Samford photo

## New residence halls, more parking will open at Samford this fall

**T**wo new upper division Greek letter residence halls at Samford University will add a combined 140 beds on the west side of campus, moving the university one step closer to the administration's goal for 75% of students to reside on campus.

Allocated for Kappa Delta and Alpha Omicron Pi sororities, the new halls represent the latest achievement in the \$300 million investment comprising the first phase of Samford Horizons.

A new first-year student residential complex — scheduled to open in August — will feature two halls named for Audrey Lattimore Gaston and Marvin L. Mann. The halls will add a combined 513 beds.

The plaza between the new residence halls is being named the Bill and Kimeran Stevens Plaza.

Additionally, a 550-stall parking deck on the north boundary of campus will open for fall semester to help relieve parking congestion on campus.

Phase I of Samford Horizons also included the

redesign and renovation of Samford University's dining hall — the Caf. Recently, Samford Dining was awarded the silver medal for Dining Facility of the Year by the National Association of College and University Food Services. (Samford)



Bill and Kimeran Stevens Plaza

Samford photo



# Visually inspiring

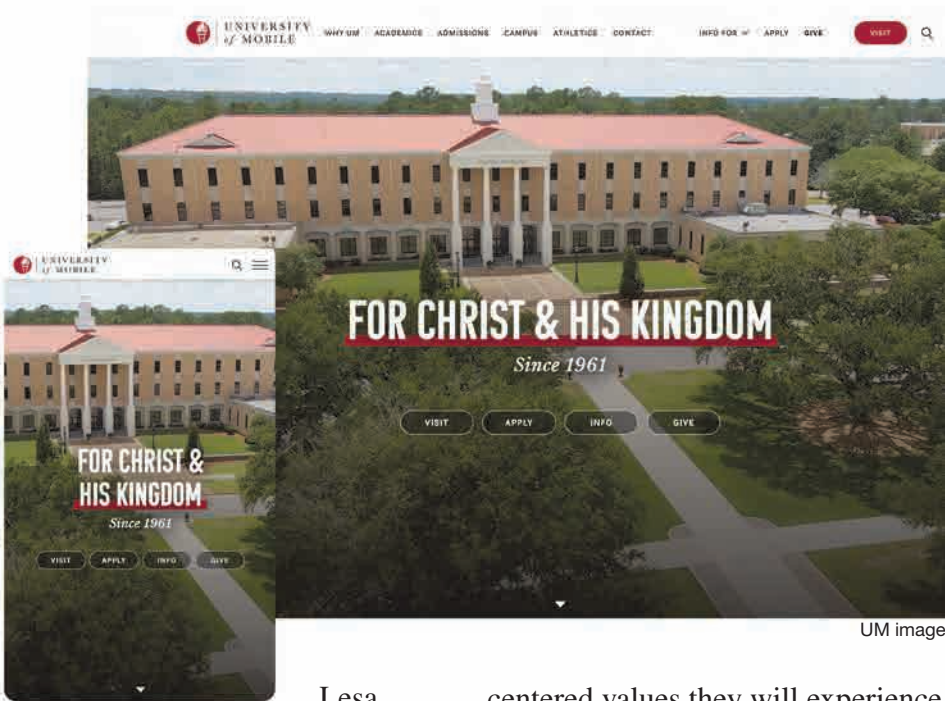
BY KATHY DEAN • UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

## University of Mobile launches new ‘digital front door to life, mission’

The University of Mobile has launched a new website at [umobile.edu](http://umobile.edu), giving visitors a welcoming and user-friendly digital experience. University of Mobile President Charles Smith described the new [umobile.edu](http://umobile.edu) website as “a digital front door into the life and mission of the University of Mobile.”

“Our new website offers a way prospective students can begin to experience the warmth, purpose and Christ-centered community that

make the University of Mobile so special,” Smith said. The recent launch follows nearly a year of strategic collaboration between the university’s Office for Marketing & Public Relations and agency partner Hummingbird Ideas. The result is a site that is visually inspiring and functionally powerful, providing a user-friendly approach to ensure each visitor has a more intuitive, personalized experience from the moment they land on the homepage.



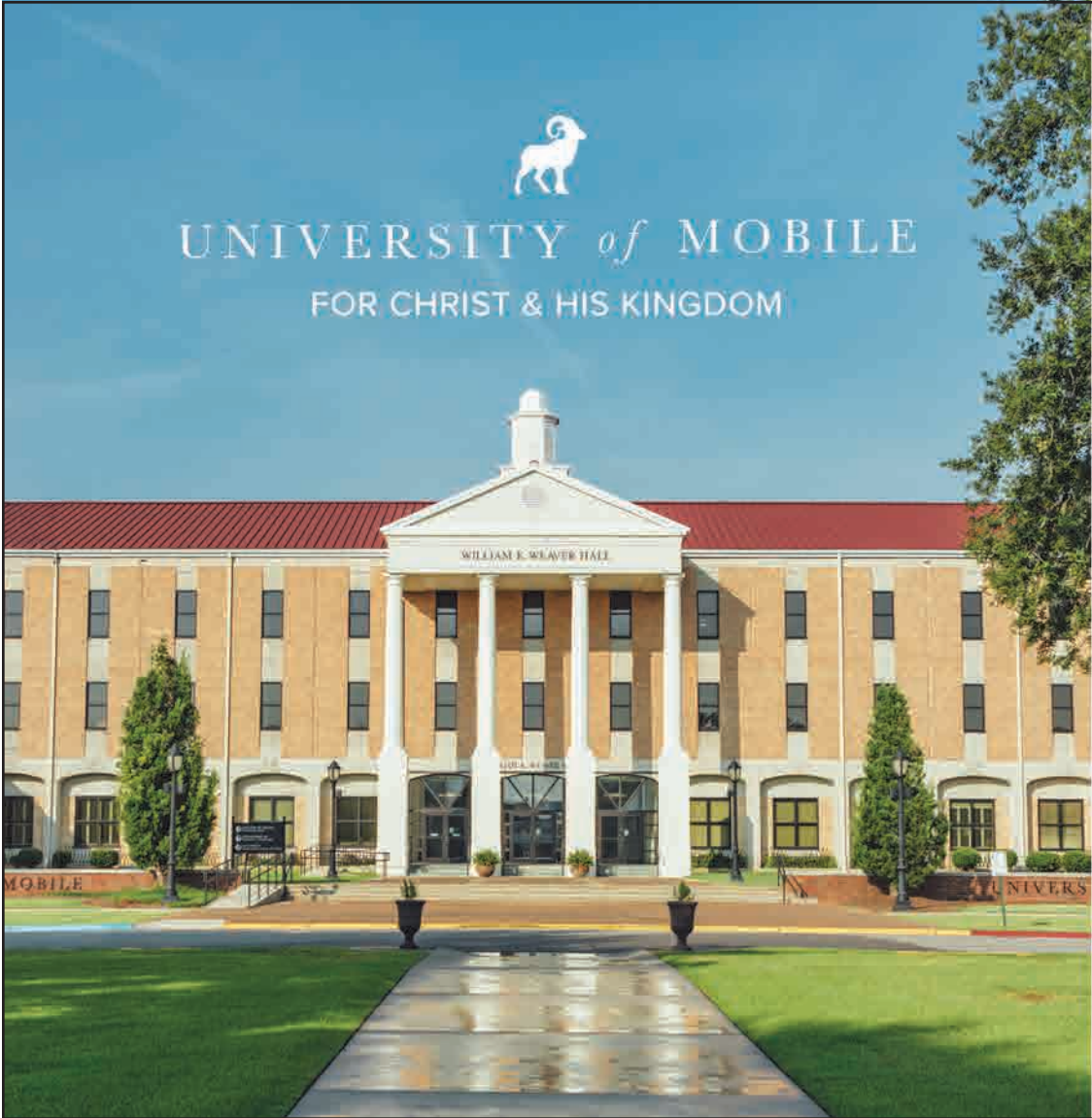
UM image

Lesa Moore, vice president for marketing and communication, said the website redesign is more than simply a fresh look — it captures the heart of the university in a digital space.

**‘Welcoming and intuitive’**

“Our primary focus was creating a welcoming and intuitive online experience for prospective students. We wanted the site to reflect the vibrant campus life and Christ-

centered values they will experience when they visit in person,” Moore said. Heath Vester, associate vice president for creative services, said the new design ensures the site performs well across smartphones and tablets, which are often the first point of contact for prospective students. The site makes it easy for users to take the next step — whether that’s scheduling a visit, starting an application or discovering campus life, he said.



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# 5 questions

## with UM President Charles Smith

BY KATHY DEAN • UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

**T**he University of Mobile began a new chapter on March 21, 2024, when the board of trustees elected Charles W. Smith Jr. as its sixth president.

In this interview originally published in UM's TorchLight magazine, Smith shares his observations about the university's unique culture and his vision for the future.

**Q. What have you observed about UM that those who have been part of the community for a long time might overlook?**

**A:** One of the first things I noticed about the University of Mobile is its stunningly beautiful campus.

Beyond the physical beauty, I've been struck by the depth of commitment and relationships here — students, alumni, faculty and staff genuinely care for UM and one another.

This isn't just a university; it's a community united by a shared commitment to multiplying Kingdom leaders for the glory of God and the good of the world.

**Q. What are your leadership priorities as president of UM?**

**A:** As a Christian, I believe leadership is fundamentally about stewardship and missional influence. It is about following God's call on our lives and being willing to take initiative for His glory and the good of the world. For me, that means leading with integrity and a commitment to be a good steward of all that God has entrusted to our care.

**Q. What is your vision for the University of Mobile?**

**A:** This institution exists to "Multiply Kingdom Leaders for the Glory of God and the Good of the World."

To do that, we must continue to invest in the head, hands and heart of every student at the University of Mobile.

We want to be a place where great minds are challenged, gifted hands are strengthened and all hearts are exposed to and inspired by God's wisdom and Word.

Not only would such an environment catalyze a new season of academic achievement and equip students for wherever God is calling them, it would also impact thousands for Christ. We are praying God would do even more than we ask or think.



CHARLES SMITH

**Q. What are the most significant opportunities you see for UM to expand its influence and deepen its impact?**

**A:** We are exploring ways to strengthen ties with key partners and stakeholders, expand online and graduate offerings, and invest in facilities that enhance the student experience.

Our goal is to equip students to make a Kingdom impact. By embracing these opportunities, we can solidify UM's reputation as a leader in Christian higher education and deepen our impact locally, nationally and globally.

**Q. How can the UM community — students, faculty, staff, alumni and donors — pray for and support you as you lead the university into this next chapter?**

**A:** I invite the UM community to pray for wisdom and discernment as our leadership team leads, for a unified vision and passion in this new season and for God's favor over our initiatives. Your prayers are invaluable as we seek to honor Him in all we do.

Additionally, your support through The Great Commission Fund can help us continue equipping students for lives of service and leadership.

Together, we can trust God to do immeasurably more than we could ever imagine and write a new chapter in UM's story for His glory.

## UMobile announces recruitment days, chapel speakers for 2025–26

**P**rospective University of Mobile students are invited to UM Day, a chance to explore majors, experience campus life and visit with students and faculty.

Registration is open for five dates during the 2025–26 academic year: Sept. 25, Oct. 13, Nov. 20, Feb. 5 and March 23. Registration and more information is available at [umobile.edu/visit](http://umobile.edu/visit).

UM's schedule of fall 2025 chapel speakers also has been announced. The UM community gathers weekly to fellowship, pray, sing and study God's Word, said President Charles Smith. "It is one of the most vital things we do," he said.

### Chapel speakers

Scheduled chapel speakers for fall semester 2025 are:

► **Aug. 20:** Nathan Harris, UM vice president for institutional relations

► **Aug. 27:** Chris Bell, UM alumnus and lead pastor, 3Circle Church, Mobile

► **Sept. 3:** Fred Luter, senior pastor, Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, New Orleans

► **Sept. 10:** Matt Smethurst, lead pastor, River City Baptist Church, Richmond, Virginia

► **Sept. 17:** George Wright, senior pastor, Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Birmingham

► **Sept. 24:** Vance Pitman, president, Send Network

► **Oct. 1:** C12, Christian business leaders panel

► **Oct. 15:** Paul Davis, president, Association of Baptists for World Evangelism

► **Oct. 22:** Jason Lee, UM alumnus and professor of theological studies, director of the Center for Biblical Integration, Cedarville University

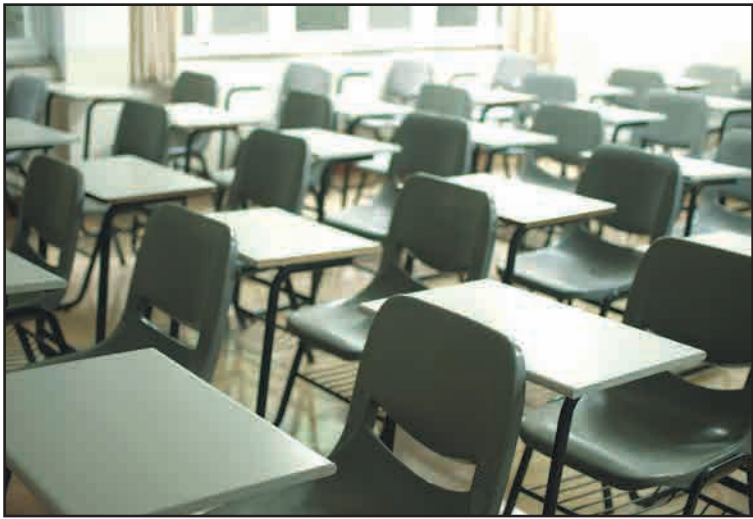
► **Oct. 28:** Mark Vroegop, president, The Gospel Coalition

► **Nov. 11:** Isaac Adams, lead pastor, Iron City Church, Birmingham



# Expanding options

BY CARRIE B. McWHORTER • THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



Unsplash.com

## Alabama families set to receive financial help for children’s education through CHOOSE Act

**B**eginning July 1, Alabama became the 11th state in the nation to enact a universal school choice bill — the CHOOSE Act, which proponents say will expand education options for Alabama children. “The CHOOSE Act is putting Alabama parents in the driver’s seat of their child’s education,” Gov. Kay Ivey said in a statement. Families who receive CHOOSE Act funds for the 2025–2026 school year must have a household income

below 300% of the federal poverty level for the 2024–2025 tax year — a threshold of \$93,600 for a family of four. More than 165 private schools and three public schools are already approved to participate in the program. The list includes schools with religious affiliations, like Coosa Christian School in Gadsden, Montgomery Catholic School and Islamic Academy of Alabama in Birmingham, as well as a number of Montessori schools, private academies

and online education providers. The Alabama Department of Revenue posts a list of participating schools and service providers at [datawrapper.dwcdn.net/mwmau/9](http://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/mwmau/9). **July 1 kickoff** According to the program’s parent guide, families must open an education savings account to receive funds. All payments and purchases must be made through an online platform; families do not receive direct reimbursements.

For each participating student enrolled in a participating school, \$7,000 will be deposited beginning July 1. Participating students in home education programs will receive \$2,000, with a cap of \$4,000 per family. The act provides \$100 million in ESAs for the upcoming school year, with the first 500 reserved for students with special needs, the guide states. Learn more about the CHOOSE Act at [classwallet.com/alchoose](http://classwallet.com/alchoose).

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# CAMPUS

## NEWS BRIEFS

### ***First master's students graduate from Southeastern's Persian program***

Southeastern Seminary recently celebrated the historic graduation of its first Persian Leadership Development master's students, 16 men and women graduating from the only accredited master of theological studies program offered entirely in Farsi.



SEBTS photo

The May 31 ceremony in Istanbul, Turkey, also celebrated the graduation of 12 undergraduate students, now only the second class in the world to have earned their ac-

credited bachelor of science in pastoral ministry in the Farsi language.

Represented among the 28 graduates were students from Greece, Sweden, Germany, Turkey, Iran, Malaysia, the United States, Canada and Georgia. The majority of those graduating with their master's degree did so through completing Southeastern's five-year bachelor's to master's Farsi program. (Southeastern)

### ***Beeson initiative aims to help divinity students think vocationally***

Samford University's Beeson Divinity School is working to ensure all students come into seminary thinking about their future.

The Vocational Guidance Initiative trains Beeson faculty to serve as facilitators to help students reflect on their future each year they're at Beeson.

The facilitators spend time talking with students about their vocation, calling and purpose. Facilitators are given five general questions to ask, but as they develop relationships with the students, those questions may take different directions. Subsequent questions focus on internships and life after Beeson. (Samford)

### ***Alabama School of Healthcare Sciences taps three leaders for administrative team***

The Alabama School of Healthcare Sciences, a specialized public school in Demopolis designed to train future health care workers, continues to progress toward its anticipated fall 2026 launch.

In June, the school's board of trustees hired an administrative team.

Laura Bailey will be ASHS dean of curriculum. She previously served as an education administrator for Career & Technical Education Workforce Development in the Alabama State Department of Education.

Antonio Cooper will be dean of students. Cooper is an adjunct professor of education at Samford University and has been the director of curriculum and instruction for Vestavia Hills City Schools since 2019.

Susanna Speegle will be admissions director. Speegle currently serves as assistant director of enrollment management at Marion Military Institute.

Like Alabama's current residential public high schools — Alabama School of Fine Arts in Birmingham, Alabama School of Math and Science in Mobile and Alabama School of Cyber Technology and Engineering in Huntsville — ASHS will be open to students from across Alabama. (The Alabama Baptist)

### ***Union University reduces tuition for adult degree programs***

Union University has lowered tuition for its adult undergraduate programs in the School of Adult and Professional Studies and the Memphis College of Urban and Theological Studies, beginning in the fall 2025 semester.

Tuition for bachelor of science in organizational leadership and bachelor of science in Christian leadership degrees in SOAPS and bachelor's degrees in MCUTS will decrease from \$504 to \$400 per credit hour, plus the general student fee. The new rate is designed to make the degrees more accessible and affordable for adult learners. Tuition in the registered nurse to bachelor of science in nursing program will also continue at \$400 per credit hour.

Brooke Emery, Union's dean for SOAPS, said the reduced tuition rates reflect the college's "commitment to supporting adult students and removing financial barriers to completing a college degree." (Union)

### ***NOBTS, Leavell College students serve in summer missions***

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and Leavell College students participating in summer missions work



NOBTS photo

were commissioned May 1 before being sent out.

After a message from Greg Wilton, dean of Leavell College, students participating in any form of missions work (either domestic or international) or camp ministry during the summer were asked to come to the front to be prayed over by faculty members. Many of

these students are serving with the International Mission Board or the North American Mission Board. Some students will be serving for an extended period of time beyond the summer months. (NOBTS)

### ***University of Mobile hosts 2,400 MFuge campers this summer***

The University of Mobile hosted more than 2,400 middle to high school students throughout the summer for MFuge, week-long camps centered on worship, spiritual growth and missions.

Youth groups and leaders from 103 churches across 13 states took part in the summer camp program at UM operated by Lifeway Christian Resources.

MFuge introduces students to real-world ministry opportunities throughout the Mobile area. Campers choose from four types of service: painting, construction and yard work; children's ministry; games and recreation; and social ministry sites such as soup kitchens, clothing closets and nursing home visits.

Last summer at UM, the impact was clear: 90 salvations, 66 commitments to faith and 41 calls to ministry were recorded, according to Melina Baird, event coordinator for MFuge.

UM is the longest-running MFuge location in the nation. (UM)

### ***Prayer in school: Americans split on issue as Texas law takes effect***

About half of Americans say they approve of Christian prayer in schools, and a new Texas law requiring schools to set a time for students to pray will likely be popular with many residents of the Lone Star State.

A new report from Pew Research Center found that 61% of adults in Texas say they approve of allowing teachers to lead Christian prayers in the classroom.


That makes Texas one of 22 states where at least half of the population approves of such prayers, and one of 14 states, mostly in the South, where 60% of the population agrees. Majorities in 12 states oppose teacher-led prayer.

Overall, 52% of Americans approve of Christian prayer in schools and 46% disapprove, according to an analysis of data from the most recent Pew Religious Landscape Study, published earlier this year. (Religion News Service)



UM photo





## Caden Greene


*Murfreesboro, TN  
PharmD Student*

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# 'Success sequence'

BY MARY SELL • ALABAMA DAILY NEWS

## Alabama public school students to learn best ways to avoid poverty

**A**labama public school students will soon be taught that their best chance to avoid poverty is a three-pronged formula: Obtain, at a minimum, a high school diploma, find full-time employment and delay parenthood until marriage.

Called the "success sequence," the idea has been around for a few decades and is now working its way into law in several states, most recently Alabama. Gov. Kay Ivey signed the legislation in May. It was sponsored by Sen. Arthur Orr, R-Decatur.

"I think it's incredibly important to make sure young people know that if they do these three things, the research shows — it's not somebody's opinion — the research shows that there's a 97% chance that they will not be in poverty 10 years later," Orr told Alabama Daily News.

### Certain environments

"Unfortunately, a lot of young people don't learn these things from parents or guardians or grow up in environments where some or all these things aren't taught and aren't modeled. And that's not to cast stones at a single mom or somebody rearing their children today, not at all. It's looking prospectively at that 16, 17 or 18 year old today."

The new law requires that beginning in the 2026–27 school year, all students will receive instruction in the success sequence at least twice before they graduate from high school.



Photo by prostooleh on Freepik

Rep. Danny Garrett, R-Trussville, carried the bill in the House.

"The success sequence bill is data driven and common sense bipartisan legislation that is sound policy," Garrett told ADN. "Many students who are currently in economically disadvantaged circumstances will benefit from awareness and exposure to success sequence principles."

The conservative Heritage Foundation has developed model success sequence language, and several other states this year considered similar bills. Alabama's law cleared the Senate and House unanimously and without opposition.

### 'This ... is big'

Sen. Rodger Smitherman, D-Birmingham, praised Orr for bringing the bill.

"This to me is big," Smitherman said in a Senate committee hearing.

Tennessee lawmakers approved a similar bill this year too, despite some who said the instruction could indoctrinate students about matters that should be personal choices while making students who have a single parent feel bad about themselves, The Associated Press reported.

### Account barriers

Other criticism of the plan says it doesn't take into account barriers, including poverty, already in some young people's lives.

About 15.6% of Alabamians live in poverty, according to 2023 data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

About 1 in 5 Alabama children live in poverty, and 1 in 10 live in extreme poverty, living with

families making 50% or less of the Federal Poverty Level, which in 2025 is \$15,650 annually for an individual and \$30,000 for a family of four.

Orr said that the success sequence steps could help all Alabama students.

"They are all attainable to a young person with a little self discipline and grit," Orr said. "Getting a job is attainable. Getting a high school diploma, even if you get a GED, is attainable. Delaying parenthood is attainable."

### Develop standards

The Alabama State Board of Education is to develop standards and model curriculum to be adopted by local school systems. The curriculum will need to pull from a few research publications on the sequence, including "The Millennial Success Sequence" by Wendy Wang and Brad Wilcox.

Wang and Wilcox have said the vast 96% of Black and 97% of Hispanic millennials who followed this sequence are not poor in their mid-30s. That's also the case for 94% of millennials who grew up in lower-income families and 95% of those who grew up in non-intact families.

In an April House Education Policy Committee, Rep. Van Smith, R-Billingsley, spoke of the importance of the success sequence message and said the instruction should focus on middle school and early high school.

"By the time they're seniors, they know everything and it's very difficult to tell them anything," Smith, a former high school principal, said.



# Faith Moments

*First impressions are everything*

By Ben Edfeldt  
Director of collegiate and  
student ministries, Alabama  
Baptist State Board of Missions



My family has moved several times, and with each move came the challenge of finding a new church home. I could tell you some horror stories about how unprepared churches were for first-time visitors! Once, it took five different people to get my kids to the right Sunday School room, and my wife and I were sent to a class clearly meant for a much older generation. No matter how great the preaching or worship music, those first impressions shaped our perception of the church.

In a similar way, the first two weeks of a student's college experience can shape the rest of their time on campus. The friends they make, the organizations they join, their decision to attend church and

their commitment to classwork — all are influenced by those crucial first days. First impressions really are everything.

## Powerful reminder

Several years ago, when I served as a campus minister, we hosted a welcome week event for new students. Elizabeth, a freshman looking to connect, came to our event and sat with me and Bella, a student leader in Baptist Campus Ministries.

As we talked, it became clear that Elizabeth didn't have much interest in faith. But as we shared the gospel with her that night and continued to follow up over the next few months, we saw God work in her life. Elizabeth eventually decided

to follow Jesus. Today, she serves on a BCM staff in Texas. Her story is a powerful reminder that those first two weeks can have an eternal impact.

As colleges and universities prepare to welcome thousands of new students, our BCMs and churches are getting ready to engage them through strategic activities designed to connect with as many students as possible and follow up with gospel appointments — opportunities to share Christ and invite students into ministry.

## How you can help

BCMs exist to see the lost saved, the saved disciplined and the disciplined sent out — and it all begins in those first two weeks of the school

year. Here's how you can help as an Alabama Baptist:

► **Pray** God will allow our ministries to reach as many students as possible, especially those who don't know Jesus.

► **Encourage** your church to support BCM events — by providing supplies, cooking for cookouts or giving financially. Much of the BCM budget is spent in August.

► **Encourage** students to get involved with BCM or church ministries, so they can grow in their faith and be equipped to make a difference on campus.

► **Promote** Cooperative Program giving in your church, knowing that your gifts help make BCM ministry possible.

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# Trust God's sovereignty

BY CHRIS TURNER • TENNESSEE BAPTIST MISSION BOARD

## First person: The 'ugly cry' of college goodbyes

I once heard a pastor tell a young couple with a newborn to make the most of every opportunity because “the days are long, but the years are short.” When my wife and I settled our daughter into her college home, I learned the magnitude of that colossal understatement.

As I coped with bouts of “ugly cry” syndrome during that season, I looked to Scripture for words of comfort. The Lord must have led me to Ecclesiastes because that is certainly not the book I’d normally choose when seeking a spiritual lift.

Ecclesiastes didn’t change the reality of our daughter being 2,000 miles away, but it offered biblical truth that steered my soul toward stable ground and made me think of other biblical truths that had strengthened me for the journey.

Here are my five takeaways from that period in my life. I hope they might help you if you’re in a similar stage of sending a child off to college.

### Different seasons

**1. The seasons change.** Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.” As surely as summer drifts into fall, it was inevitable that our child would drift from our home and into a new season of life. That’s the way God designed it. Ecclesiastes 7:13 affirms it. “Ac-



Freepik photo

cept the way God does things, for who can straighten what He has made crooked?” These two verses stabilized my shaky spirit. Since I couldn’t change the changing seasons, I endeavored to embrace them.

**2. Trust God’s sovereignty and not your parenting.** No matter how much you think you’ve invested in your child, when you send them into the world, you’ll likely still feel there is more you should have done. Scripture reminds us their future does not depend on us; it depends on Him. “In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps” (Prov. 16:9). God knows each of our children. He created

them and has a plan and a purpose for their present and future apart from parents, grandparents and others who have nurtured them to this point.

### Individual choice

**3. Wisdom is refined by the weight of individual choice.** Jeremiah 6:16 was the dedication verse we chose for our daughter when she was a baby: “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.” She heard this verse her entire life. Wisdom comes from seeking God and following

His direction. God promises there is a good ending to walking in His good way, but each of us must walk that path individually (with distant cheers of support and parental wisdom when sought).

**4. See your child for who he or she is becoming and not for who they were when they left home.**

People change as well as seasons. Pray and expect to see a more spiritually, mentally and emotionally mature person as the months pass. Don’t underestimate your child and God working in him or her “for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

**5. Continually celebrate God’s grace.** The Bible reminds us to “remember the Lord our God” and all His favorable actions extended to His people. In a season of transition, take time to reflect on specific instances of God’s grace in the life of your child. Recalling God’s grace in the past should give you confidence that God’s grace will certainly continue into the future.

Seeing your child turn and walk toward the future without you is one of the most difficult experiences you may have as a parent. But seeing your child turn and walk toward the future God has prepared for them is also a moment of pride and gratitude.

*EDITOR’S NOTE — Adapted from an article originally published by the Tennessee Baptist and Reflector.*

“For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven.”





# CONNECT

*your high school graduates with a Baptist campus minister!*

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

You can help lay the groundwork for Christlike college experiences by connecting your students

with collegiate ministers. Simply visit [bcm.link.org/connect](https://bcm.link.org/connect) and provide some basic information about your students and where they are attending college. Then campus ministers from each student's college choice will have a way to contact your students and encourage them to get connected.

*For a full list of campus ministry locations around the state, visit [bcm.link.org/bcm](https://bcm.link.org/bcm).*





Photo courtesy of Carrie B. McWhorter

Owen and Carrie McWhorter celebrate with their daughter Stella (left) at the end of the 2025 War Eagle Run Fest, which takes runners through the Auburn University campus and across the finish line at the 50-yard line of Jordan-Hare Stadium.

# Making memories

BY CARRIE BROWN McWHORTER • THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

Enjoy family time on campus by trying new activities

Attending a football game with your college student this fall will no doubt be a fun family day. But parents and grandparents will find opportunities throughout the year to share time on campus with their students.

## 20 ideas

Here are 20 ideas to jumpstart your plans for the upcoming year. And don't forget to take pictures to capture these brief but important moments.

1. Attend a sporting event of your choice — football, basketball, volleyball, golf, track and field, swimming, ice hockey and equestrian are just some of the collegiate sports offered at Ala-

bama colleges. Choose an event, wear your favorite T-shirt and head out to cheer on the athletes.

2. Visit art installations or galleries on campus.
3. Walk around campus, play tennis or pickleball or visit the campus wellness center.
4. Attend a performance by students in the college's music or theater programs.
5. Tour a historic or unique campus building.
6. Go to a science or history program.

## Eating together

7. Eat a meal together in the dining hall.
8. Run or walk in a 5K on campus.
9. Spread a blanket or set up lawn chairs on the quad and people watch.
10. Share a meal at a local eatery.

11. See fountains, statues and other monuments on campus.

12. Worship together at a local church.
13. Meander through a botanical garden or arboretum.
14. Attend a homecoming parade.
15. Enjoy a cup of coffee at a local shop popular with students and faculty.
16. Spend the day at a nearby state park or historic site.
17. Wander through a local farmer's market or fair.
18. Take a continuing education class.
19. Explore a historic neighborhood or take a home tour.
20. Attend a food festival.

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# 'Missions-minded'

BY ZOË WATKINS • TENNESSEE'S BAPTIST AND REFLECTOR

## 'High-five Fridays' build relationships with inner-city school

For the past six years, Belle Aire Baptist Church in Murfreesboro has built a strong connection with Hobgood Elementary, an inner-city school facing numerous low-income challenges.

The partnership, part of pastor Grant Gaines' initiative "Belle Aire Loves the 'Boro," has mobilized church members to serve both students and staff in meaningful ways every month through the school year — and even through summer break.

"We have always been a missions-minded church but wanted to do more locally," explained Carolyn Outland, who serves on the ministry team.

The program deploys 14 teams with as many as 200 people serving across Murfreesboro. Approximately 20 members regularly support Hobgood Elementary each month, adapting their approach to meet evolving needs.

### Meeting practical needs

While direct religious ministry to children during school hours isn't permitted, the church finds creative ways to support the community.

They've established a store where parents of children with perfect monthly attendance can obtain essential items like soap, laundry detergent and paper towels — simultaneously addressing practical needs while encouraging consistent school attendance.

"Sometimes we find out needs they have, and we'll have prayer with them," said Outland. "There's often no system or plan because it changes. God always brings up needs we didn't plan on. But we try to meet them."

In one instance, when a student needed glasses but the family couldn't afford them, the church



Photo courtesy of the Baptist and Reflector  
Belle Aire Baptist Church volunteers greet students as they come off the bus during "High-Five Fridays," just one of the ways they encourage kids every month.

stepped in to purchase them.

The church also invites students and their families to events like Vacation Bible School, Trunk-or-Treat and Easter services.

"They bring their parents to these events, and the gospel is always shared," Outland said.

Ann Davenport, another volunteer, added, "A lot of these kids are not in church anywhere, so we just keep Belle Aire Baptist front and center as a place they can go."

But the church's greatest impact has been on the school's staff, according to Davenport and Outland. From custodians to cafeteria workers to teachers, they serve about 100 people.

"Whatever we do, we do for everyone because we feel like to run a school efficiently, everyone has a part in that," Outland emphasized.

Teachers receive handwritten

notes of encouragement with Scriptures, as well as gifts and treats throughout the school year. The church also hosts meals for the entire staff at least twice annually.

"The biggest thing is to encourage the teachers. It's a very difficult place to teach," Davenport said.

The impact of these simple gestures is profound. "I ran into a teacher recently and she said she has kept every one of those notes on her bulletin board. It just means so much," Davenport recalled.

Following state testing week, church members treated students to Kona Ice snow cones. Outland remembers one little girl exclaiming, "This is the best day ever!"

One of the church's most successful initiatives is "High-Five Fridays," held monthly throughout the school year. Church members,

wearing their Hobgood T-shirts, greet students as they arrive at school, offering high-fives and words of encouragement.

"It's such a simple thing," Davenport said, "but the teachers have said on days we do that, the students' attitudes are entirely different. Their behavior is better. They seem happier."

"When they get off the bus, most of them look so hopeless and forlorn, but by the time they go through 10 or 15 people, laughing and high-fiving, they come out smiling. It's just that little touch. It's amazing."

Someone from the church also prayer walks the campus every week, a practice deeply appreciated by staff members.

"We've had numerous staff members tell us they take such comfort that we're covering their school with prayer," said Outland. "That's something any size church can do."

### Community impact

For churches considering similar outreach, Davenport emphasizes the importance of leadership and organization. "There are so many people who will do local missions, but you have to inspire people and organize," she said.

Though they serve cups of Kona Ice rather than cups of cold water, the biblical principle of compassionate service remains at the heart of Belle Aire Baptist's mission.

From providing T-shirts that many students rarely receive new, to serving as classroom readers and test proctors, both Davenport and Outland say their church hopes to continue to demonstrate community impact through consistent, thoughtful engagement.

"It's made us extremely grateful," reflects Davenport. "It's made us a lot more prayerful about the school."

*"The teachers  
have said on days  
we do [high fives],  
the students'  
attitudes are entirely  
different."*

Ann Davenport  
"High-Five Fridays"  
volunteer



# ‘Make an impact’

By Kathy Dean  
University of Mobile

## UM announces schedule of chapel speakers for Fall Semester

The University of Mobile announces its schedule of chapel speakers for Fall Semester 2025, with a lineup including presidents of The Gospel Coalition, Send Network and Association of Baptists for World Evangelism.

Southern Baptist Convention leaders, pastors and seminarians, plus a panel discussion featuring Christian business leaders, round out the semester’s chapel program that starts Aug. 20.

### ‘See and Savor Jesus’

“At the University of Mobile, our greatest desire is to help students see and savor Jesus Christ — to invite them to study and trust His Word, and to challenge them to make an impact for Christ.

“Our weekly chapel services help us do exactly that,” said University of Mobile President Charles Smith.

Smith begins his second year as president of the Baptist-affiliated university that exists “For Christ & His Kingdom” with a mission of multiplying Kingdom leaders for the glory of God and the good of the world.

“Each week, the UM community gathers to fellowship, pray, sing and study God’s Word. It is one of the most vital things we do — not only because we hear the truth of God’s Word, but because we do so together, in Christian community, surrounded by like-minded students and colleagues who share a common faith and purpose,” he said.

“August can’t get here soon enough. There is no question about it. It’s the best part of my week,” he added.

### Schedule

Chapel is held Wednesdays at 2 p.m. in Ram Hall on campus.

Chapel speakers for Fall Semester 2025 are:

**Aug. 20:** Nathan Harris, vice president for institutional relations, University of Mobile

**Aug. 27:** Chris Bell, lead pastor, 3Circle Church — UM alumnus

**Sept. 3:** Fred Luter, senior pastor, Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, New Orleans — first African American president of the Southern Baptist Convention

**Sept. 10:** Matt Smethurst, lead pastor, River City Baptist Church, Richmond, Virginia

**Sept. 17:** George Wright, senior pastor, Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama

**Sept. 24:** Vance Pitman, president, Send Network

**Oct. 1:** C12, Christian business leaders panel

**Oct. 15:** Paul Davis, president, ABWE – Association of Baptists for World Evangelism

**Oct. 22:** Jason Lee, professor of theological studies, director of Center for Biblical Integration, Cedarville University – UM alumnus

**Oct. 28:** Mark Vroegop, president, The Gospel Coalition

**Nov. 11:** Isaac Adams, lead pastor, Iron City Church, Birmingham, Alabama

*EDITOR’S NOTE — This story was written by Kathy Dean and originally published by the University of Mobile.*



Photo courtesy of University of Mobile  
President Charles Smith will speak.

**MORE THAN WE ASK OR THINK**

EPH 3:20

**UNIVERSITY of MOBILE**

**CHAPEL SPEAKERS**

**WEDNESDAYS | 2 PM | RAM HALL**

**DR. CHARLES SMITH**  
President,  
University of Mobile

**CHRIS BELL**  
Lead Pastor,  
3Circle Church

**FRED LUTER**  
Senior Pastor, Franklin  
Avenue Baptist Church

**MATT SMETHURST**  
Lead Pastor,  
River City Baptist Church

**GEORGE WRIGHT**  
Senior Pastor, Shades  
Mountain Baptist Church

**VANCE PITMAN**  
President,  
Send Network

**C12**  
Business  
Leaders Panel

**PAUL DAVIS**  
President,  
ABWE

**DR. JASON LEE**  
Professor of Theological Studies,  
Director of Center for Biblical  
Integration, Cedarville University

**MARK VROEGOP**  
President,  
The Gospel Coalition

**ISAAC ADAMS**  
Lead Pastor,  
Iron City Church

Photo courtesy of University of Mobile

Chapel at the University of Mobile is held Wednesdays at 2 p.m. in Ram Hall. Speakers vary from pastors to ministry leaders and include some UM graduates.



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# 9 steps when your church needs more workers

By Chuck Lawless  
The Baptist Paper

I don't think I've ever met a church leader who said, "Our church has more than enough workers."

Every church I've worked with had at least some members who were uninvolved — and I suspect the COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated the problem. If that's where your church is, maybe one of these ideas will help you:

**1. Pray for more laborers.** Jesus taught us to pray this way (Luke 10:2). Frankly, if we're not at least praying like Jesus commanded, we don't have much right to complain about uninvolved members.

**2. Strengthen your church's membership process.** That is, use the front door to get people invested and keep them from slipping out the back door. Up front, let potential new members know your congregation expects them to get involved — and let them know how to do it (see #5 below).

**3. Don't assume that every uninvolved member doesn't care much about the Lord's work.** That might be the case, but not always. If you assume that everyone doesn't care, you'll approach every situation with a critical spirit. That's not helpful.

**4. Understand that every uninvolved mem-**



Unsplash.com photo

**ber has a story.** Some of these folks have home situations that make it difficult to serve much through the church. Some have served in the past but were wounded — and have not yet dealt with that pain. Some see themselves as unworthy of service. Others really are just lazy and unconcerned. In any case, you need to know their story to know best how to lead them.

**5. Create a clear process to get involved, and tell your congregation how to do it.** Then tell them again. And again. Regardless of how many times we tell people how to get involved, they don't always hear it the first time. And, they can't hear it well if our process is non-existent or unclear.

**6. Sponsor a one-time "Membership Restart Class."** Set up a "re-start" class that openly invites uninvolved members to re-engage,

discover their spiritual gifts and get busy in the church's work.

Make a big deal of the class so folks are actually excited about the possibility.

**7. Plant a new ongoing small group for uninvolved members.** Select the strongest leader you can find, and let him or her build the class. Again, I'd be upfront about the purpose when recruiting group members: "I'm building a class to get folks more involved. I'd love to have you join us so all of us can do the Lord's work more."

**8. Talk one-on-one with uninvolved members.** Pulpit or bulletin announcements seldom move these folks. Personal conversations can, though, especially if the church is ready to follow up. Even a phone call from a church leader can make a difference.

**9. Train all volunteers (perhaps even commissioning them) — and celebrate their willingness to serve.** The former step says to all potential volunteers, "We'll help you do your job," and the latter step says, "We want you to know we're grateful for you." Both steps help get more volunteers in place.

What's worked for your church?

*EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was written and originally published by chucklawless.com.*

## 7 reasons pastors need to listen to other preaching

When I first started preaching decades ago, the primary ways to listen to other preachers were to visit another church, watch someone on TV, listen to someone on the radio or order cassette tapes from a ministry. It took effort to listen to others. Because of the internet, though, that's not the case anymore — and that's a good thing.

We usually have access to solid, strong sermons from others. Here are some reasons it's good for us to listen to others' sermons regularly:

**1. We all need to be fed.** No matter how long we've been believers and preachers, we still need spiritual nourishment — and it can be arrogant to think we need only to self-feed. We need others to pour into us through the preached Word.

**2. We need to remember what it's like to be a listener.** Frankly, I struggle sometimes as I listen to preaching — but it's not because I don't enjoy the preaching. It's because I'm so accustomed to preaching that I get antsy when I'm sitting. I also, though, am re-

minded how hard it is to stay alert and attentive when you're weary, worried, focused on tomorrow or distracted by other things happening in the worship center.

**3. We can learn to preach better from other preachers.** I can think today of preachers who are much, much better than I am at things like introductions, illustrations, application and conclusions. I've been preaching for over 40 years, and I still need to listen and learn from other preachers who expound the text well.

**4. It's good for us to hear, meditate on and apply the Word in our own lives.** Our quiet times are critical, but there's just something different about hearing the Word delivered through preaching. Making the effort to hear others preaching says, "Others can teach and challenge me."

**5. Hearing preaching from others on a regular basis can become part of our own discipleship process.** I have a few preachers/pastors I listen to regularly, and I first started listening to them because I



Unsplash.com photo

trusted their walk with the Lord. As I learn the Word from them and apply it to my life, I trust I am growing as a disciple of Jesus.

**6. In general, a willingness to listen to others is an act of humility.** Pride leads us to think that others should hear from us; humility makes us willing to learn from others. Pride demands the preaching spotlight; humility gives someone the opportunity to preach. Pride speaks, but humility listens.

**7. Regular "feeding" from other preachers can help us avoid burnout.** The Word has the power

to renew us — "The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul" (Ps. 19:7). Hearing the Word from others who walk in the same shoes that we do can reignite our fire and renew our souls in dry and weary times.

At least weekly, listen to someone else's sermon. Find preachers you trust, and let them pour into you even from a distance. I think you'll find it profitable.

*EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was originally published by chucklawless.com.*



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**MAKE DISCIPLES**



# 'Pivotal' year

By Julia Bell

Tennessee's Baptist and Reflector

## 1,730 students, leaders receive jumpstart for campus ministry

**D**ays before the start of a new school year, more than 1,730 college students and leaders gathered at Falls Creek Conference Center in Davis, Oklahoma, to learn how to live on mission and become passionate followers of Jesus.

Groups from across North America — including Alaska, Hawaii and Canada — gathered with International Mission Board and North American Mission Board personnel for the five-day August event that included worship, teaching and fellowship.

State convention collegiate ministry leaders partnered to plan and produce the event, which saw its largest post-COVID attendance.

Pastor Arjay Gruspe, of Pawa'a Community Church in Honolulu, also serves as the state director of Next Generation Ministries for the Hawaii Pacific Baptist Convention and was a member of the event planning team.

### Challenge culture

This year, he brought eight others from Hawaii, including four students, to "challenge them to be countercultural in the way they live and approach life on their campuses."

He celebrated the report that more than 50 individuals prayed to receive Christ and that more than 200 responded to a call to ministry during Collegiate Week.

"It was great to see so many campus and church-based campus ministries interacting and planning ways to partner and pray for one another this fall.

"IMB always has a strong presence and did a great job in having students consider mission involve-



Photo courtesy of Baptist and Reflector

Approximately 100 Tennessee BCM students and leaders attended Collegiate Week in August 2024. Tennessee Baptist collegiate ministry specialists on the trip represented at least six different colleges.

ment," Gruspe said, adding that he was glad to see increased numbers of seminars engaging with students this year.

Collegiate Week partners with Southern Baptist seminaries, Woman's Missionary Union, NAMB and IMB to introduce students and leaders to the full spectrum of available missions, vocational, and educational opportunities.

According to registration coordinator Carissa Jones of the Oklahoma Baptist Convention, the event

also seeks to help participants take their next steps in ministry leadership.

### Good timing

Stacy Murphree, collegiate ministry specialist at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tennessee, said the timing of Collegiate Week — right before the beginning of fall semester — is a bonus.

This year she brought about 100 BCM students from six different campuses and appreciates that stu-

dent and leader participants benefited from networking and sharing ideas.

The experience also "jumpstarts" her leaders, who had about one week before campus ministries officially started, she observed.

"I love that our students can hear about campuses in emerging areas — maybe they could feel personally led to serve in those areas, but this also broadens their perspective of campus ministry that's not just about what we do on our campuses.

"It's about what God is doing throughout the United States," Murphree said.

"Nowhere else could they be with other students from other BCMs across the country and now be able to better pray for those campuses, too. This is such a valuable time."

H.B. Charles, Shane Pruitt and Tommy Woodard were featured speakers during the 2024 Collegiate Week, with worship sessions led by Cody Dunbar and Matt Roberson.

Participants shared decisions and requested follow-up contact through a QR code, and others responded during worship services, which saw hundreds gather throughout the altar area.

"The college years are pivotal. Students are often on their own for the first time and making decisions that will impact them for the rest of their lives. The world is there waiting for them, and the body of Christ needs to be as well," Jones said.

***"... this also broadens (our students) perspective of campus ministry that's not just about what we do on our campuses."***

Stacy Murphree  
collegiate ministry specialist  
Austin Peay State University, Clarksville Tennessee

**EDITOR'S NOTE** — This story was written by Julia Bell and originally published by Baptist and Reflector.