

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

Holden Smith (right), pastor of Gilberttown Baptist Church, teaches during VBS. Smith said he focuses on foundational truths of the Christian faith, knowing VBS may be the only time some children attend church.



Photo by Katelyn Maten/The Alabama Baptist

‘Work worth doing’

VBS more about planting seeds than reaping a harvest, rural pastor says

By Katelyn Maten
The Alabama Baptist

Holden Smith, pastor of Gilberttown Baptist Church, is a fan of Vacation Bible School. “VBS is work, but it is a work worth doing,” Smith said, describing VBS as the church’s “largest outreach” each year and a way to reach families in the community by ministering to their children.

This year Gilberttown Baptist had around 75 kids enrolled, and 60 people volunteered to help.

Smith said he realized two things after doing VBS for a while. First, most curriculums have a moment where the gospel is presented. And second, many children who come to VBS are unfamiliar with the Bible and what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

“The background knowledge that

is typically used in a rural Southern Baptist church is getting less and less,” he said. “You may get a group of children in and many of them have very little understanding of any of those basic foundational principles for what it means to be a Christian.”

Core beliefs

Smith uses his VBS class to teach kids core beliefs — who God is, what sin is, the authority of Scrip-

ture and the work of God through Christ. He also explains what the Bible says is necessary for someone to receive the salvation Jesus offers. At the end of the class, rather than asking for a decision to be made right then, Smith takes the names of the kids who have more questions and seeks to connect with them through their parents or their pastor. If they do not have a pastor, he
(See ‘Importance,’ page 12)

SPOTLIGHT SPONSOR ...

2025 Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference — The Preeminence of Christ
Nov. 10 at Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville



Distinction

Children's Homes' Marshall named Samford's Humanitarian of the Year

Rod Marshall, president and CEO of Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries, was named Humanitarian of the Year by Samford University.

The award was announced in a press release from Samford on July 23. Marshall's award is one of four alumni awards that will be celebrated during Samford's homecoming weekend Nov. 7-8.

Marshall earned his bachelor of arts in religion from Samford's Howard College of Arts and Sciences.

Family healing

For the past 13 years, Marshall has served in his current role at ABCH, an organization he joined in 1995 to assist in launching a statewide counseling ministry. That grew into Pathways Professional Counseling, a crucial outreach of ABCH for which Marshall became director in 1999.

ABCH served 460 children in 2024 and aspires to grow to 1,000 children — representing around 20% of Alabama's foster children population — by 2031.

As a licensed professional coun-



ABCH photo
Rod Marshall (right) serves at Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries' Camp of Champions in 2024 alongside his wife, Leslie; son-in-law and daughter Kevon and Anna Leigh Moncrief; and two of his grandchildren.

selor, board-certified counseling supervisor, registered play therapist, national certified counselor and a board-certified professional Christian counselor, Marshall has devoted his career focus to child care and helping families seek contentment through God's healing.

The Humanitarian of the Year

award honors Samford University graduates of true distinction, wide respect and acknowledged leadership. Nominees embody the mission of Samford University and are recognized for giving selflessly and working tirelessly to better the lives of others and society at large. (Samford)

Baptist Health Brookwood, Princeton, Shelby among hospitals recently honored

Three of Central Alabama's Baptist Health hospitals were among the group of hospitals run by Orlando Health to be recognized in U.S. News & World Report's most recent hospital rankings as some of the best in the nation.

The health care system earned Best Hospitals, Best Regional Hospitals and High Performing Hospitals, while multiple service lines were honored as "high performing" at the national and regional levels.

Taking top honors were Orlando Health Orlando Regional Medical Center, Orlando Health Dr. P. Phillips Hospital and Orlando Health Lake Mary Hospital which were nationally ranked No. 50 in cardiology, heart and vascular surgery and No. 46 in diabetes and endocrinol-

ogy. They also received national high-performing recognition in six service areas, including gastroenterology and GI surgery, pulmonology and lung surgery and orthopedics.

In addition, the three hospitals, which were ranked No. 5 in the state, also were recognized as 2025-2026 Best Regional Hospital.

High-performing ratings

The system's Alabama facilities Baptist Health Brookwood Hospital, Baptist Health Princeton Hospital and Baptist Health Shelby Hospital earned high-performing ratings in several categories of cardiac and cancer care. Orlando Health acquired a majority interest in and began managing the Alabama facilities in 2024. (Orlando Health)

The Alabama Baptist

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

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JENNIFER DAVIS RASH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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SHOUT OUT



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

Shout out to The Alabama Baptist photojournalist correspondent **Tracy Riggs Frontz** on the publication of her first book — "Behind the Lens of a Storyteller" — which is available at Amazon.


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The crossword puzzle
can be found on page 11.



Rashional Thoughts

By Jennifer Davis Rash
President and Editor-in-Chief

 jrash@thealabamabaptist.org

 @RashionalThts

Freedom from commitments: both a blessing and a curse

Several friends have shared with me lately how relieved they are to be free of the relentless commitments that dictated their schedules throughout their full-time careers and while raising their families.

These friends are a decade or so older than me, are self-starters and stay as busy as they want to be each day. They have lots of energy and desire to still contribute positively to others but appreciate the opportunity to make decisions about their routines on a day-to-day basis.

Flexible schedule

The freedom comes in not having to keep a daily, weekly or monthly schedule that others depend on but rather picking and choosing the who, what, when and where based on how they are feeling that day — and even changing their minds at the last minute if something more appealing comes along.

They've worked hard for a lifetime already, so enjoying this type of freedom in the second half of their life seems more than fair.

However, a concern surfaces when the philosophy of avoiding commitments shifts to a younger generation who are new to the workforce rather than it being a reward for decades of hard work and sacrificial giving.

In fact, the commitment levels of those born during the 21st century time frame (since the late 1990s and into the 2000s) are being studied and researched. Some reports indicate the most difficult aspect of the incoming workforce is a lack of commitment.

The term “situationship” has surfaced as a reality among these digital natives who also seem to encounter more mental health crises than previous generations — potentially because of an overdose of digital access.

Short-term basis

The idea of situationship is to participate on a short-term basis

and only as long as the situation is beneficial to the person's personal needs.

But what about the business, organization, ministry or service

“Our culture functions best when everyone uses their gifts, talents and skills to contribute to the greater good — and when they invest in and mentor those coming behind them. Our churches are structured similarly.”

that needs trained people in various positions to fulfill its mission? What happens to its impact if the participants are continually turning over and the leaders spend most of their time training and motivating?

Our culture functions best when everyone uses their gifts, talents and skills to contribute to the greater good

— and when they invest in and mentor those coming behind them. Our churches are structured similarly.

While we already struggle to maintain relational connections among the six to seven generations represented in our congregations, what will it be like if more and more people choose “situationship” rather than long-term commitment?

Think about how hard it is now to schedule a time where every member of your family, friend circle, church group or community club can be present.

Importance of balance

We all have a variety of personal responsibilities, routines and needs as well as seasons of life that require additional attention. We may truly want to participate in several groups, events or opportunities but must balance those with our life in general.

If a large segment of the population on both ends of the age spectrum shift to a lifestyle of low or no commitment across the board, then that leaves those of us in the middle to determine how much we can shoulder. It also means determining how much spare energy we can give to continually reorganizing, recruiting, training, motivating, resetting, reworking and adapting.

It likely means a triage mentality will be needed, and it certainly means rethinking strategies, structures and situations more often.

Your Voice



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

First person: Where is God in our pain?

By **Tony Martin**
Mississippi's The Baptist Record

This isn't one of those posts that ties everything up in a neat spiritual bow. It's not filled with pat answers or hollow clichés. It's born out of pain, prayer and the unshakable truth that — even in the flood — God is still present.

The recent flooding in Texas has left so many of us reeling.

The loss of lives, especially the lives of children at Camp Mystic, is beyond comprehension. Our hearts crack open with sorrow, and the question rises like a tide:

Where was God?

How could He have allowed this?

It's not a new question.

It echoes through the ages, from the psalms of David to the suffering of Job, from the groans of the prophets to the cries of Jesus Himself: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46).

Sacred honesty

There is a sacred honesty in that cry. And it's OK to ask it.

Because here's the truth — God could have stopped the flood. He could have redirected the storm clouds, held back the rushing waters and saved every life.

With a word, He could have prevented every ounce of heartache.

So why didn't He?

We often ask, "Why didn't God act?" But maybe the deeper, more haunting question is: Why does He

sometimes choose restraint, even when it breaks His own heart?

That's not an easy question to answer. It brushes up against mystery, sovereignty and the aching limits of our human understanding. But I believe the cross gives us a glimpse — a lens through which to view suffering.

Jesus, the Son of God, faced the ultimate injustice. He was mocked, beaten and crucified. And yet, at any moment, He could have stopped it. As He told Peter in the garden, "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and He will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. 26:53).

But He didn't call for angels.

Not because He was powerless. But because He saw the purpose. A redemptive plan was unfolding — not one that delighted in pain, but one that used suffering to defeat sin and death forever.

We want God to intervene the way we think He should. And sometimes He does. Miracles happen. Storms pass. Healing comes. But other times, He chooses the path that seems unbearably quiet.

Not absent. Not indifferent. Just restrained.

Why?

Maybe because there's more going on than we can see.

Maybe because eternity is longer than this life, and what breaks us

now will somehow, someday, be made right. Maybe because He's weaving a story we won't fully understand until heaven, when every tear is wiped away and every "why" is finally answered.

Still, that doesn't make today's pain any less real.

This flood did not take God by surprise. But let me be clear: Nor was it His delight.

God is not some cruel puppeteer orchestrating tragedy for fun. He is a Father. A Healer. A Savior. His heart breaks with ours. Scripture says He is "near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit" (Ps. 34:18).

So if you're asking today, "Where is God when it hurts?" — I believe He's closer than you think.

He's in the arms of the parents who are holding each other through the night, unsure how to keep breathing. He's in the prayers of a community that can't find the words. He's in the hands of rescue workers, the voice of a pastor offering comfort, the quiet faith of those who keep trusting even when nothing makes sense.

God is still good

He's present. Not always in the way we want, but always in the way we need.

God is still good. That hasn't changed. His goodness isn't based on our circumstances. It's rooted in His character. The same God who

walked with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fire walks with us through the flood. The same God who wept at Lazarus' tomb weeps with those who mourn today.

God is still sovereign. That means He is not out of control. We are not abandoned to chaos.

Though the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the sea, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1).

God is just

And yes — God is just. There will come a day when everything wrong will be made right. A day when death is swallowed up, and mourning turns to dancing. Injustice doesn't get the last word. Neither does grief. Jesus does.

If we could see the whole picture, we would understand. But we don't. Not yet.

So what do we do in the meantime?

We grieve. We cry. We hold one another. We stop pretending we have all the answers. And we trust — not blindly, but deeply — that God is still with us, still for us, and still working all things (even the awful things) together for good.

One day, we'll see the whole story. One day, what now feels like silence will make sense. Until then, we walk by faith. Not because it's easy, but because it's the only path that leads to peace.

If you're hurting today, know this: You're not alone.

God sees. God knows. And God stays.

Even in the flood.



MARTIN

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“Intercession is invoking divine intervention in the best interest of individuals.”

FRANKLIN L. KIRKSEY
Robertsdale, Alabama

God doesn't adjust or exempt His Word to accommodate our feelings. We must adjust our feelings to match His eternal Word.

Richard Blackaby

Internationally acclaimed author and Bible teacher

“We want to walk with people that are hurting and hurt with them,” said **John Wheat**, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Kerrville, Texas, which opened its doors for families with children who were unaccounted for after the July 4 flood. “I told these families, ‘I can’t understand what you’re going through, but I hurt with you. ... 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.”

This statement should be a strategic warning in the unfolding and outworking of the Christian faith: “We can be as straight as a gun barrel theologically and yet as empty as a gun barrel morally and spiritually” (Gaston Foote). Theology is our “thinking about God” (Fisher Humphreys) and provides the foundation of the Christian life. Ethics consists

of how we build upon that foundation. These two forces must support and supplement one another.

Morris Murray Jr.

Jasper, Alabama

If you are in a hurry, you cannot form an intimate relationship with God. It takes time. Time to read. Time to talk to Him. Time to listen to Him. Here is what will happen, the more you listen the more you hear, the more excited you are the more time you will want to spend with Him.

The late **Charles Stanley**

Excerpt from intouch.org/watch

Implementing the first step outlined in Matthew 18:15–17 resolves most issues. It facilitates direct communication, eliminating misunderstandings. It prevents embarrassment by allowing for private discussion. It fosters trust and prevents conflicts from escalating. Didn't Jesus Christ demonstrate profound wisdom by instructing us to address conflicts this way? When we follow step one, we rarely need to use steps two or three.

Chris Crain, BMBA

via Facebook



Lass WORDS

BY KEN LASS

The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

God's Word will prevail

It was a long drive deep into the woods of Talladega County. I had been invited to speak at an event at Selwood Farm, a gathering of fathers and sons for a fun day of target shooting, followed by dinner and a speaker with a spiritual message.

That speaker was me.

I had prepared a talk aimed at the young people, encouraging them to give their lives to Jesus and to resist the temptations to stray that they will face as they grow older.

But almost from the start, it was clear Satan did not want this to take place. As I struggled to find the rural location, storm clouds were gathering overhead. Just as I pulled into the parking lot, the skies cut loose and a thundering rain shower, accompanied by high winds, broke over the property.

Quite drenched, I was led to an open-air picnic type area with a metal roof. The dinner had just started and there was one speaker scheduled ahead of me, a man who gave a wonderful testimony and introduced his young son.

Shivering wildly

A bitter wind had accompanied the rain and blew through the facility. Cold and wet, an intense chill swept through my body, causing me to shiver. Then the microphone conked out. Fortunately, a musician who had entertained during dinner was able to hardwire another mic.

As I rose to speak, my hands and arms were shivering wildly, and I couldn't seem to stop them. I held the microphone in my hands, which emphasized the shaking. The rain pounding on the metal roof was so loud, I had to speak as loudly as I could, causing my voice to crack and squeak.

Hearing God's Word

But this was an incredible group of Christian men who were determined not to let Satan spoil the event.

They listened with politeness and encouragement as I croaked through my talk, ending with an invitation to the kids to accept Jesus. When it was over I felt a bit embarrassed — I must have looked and sounded like I was having some sort of attack.

But many of these godly men graciously offered sincere gratitude and appreciation for the message and their support lifted me up.

I drove away convicted that, no matter what adversity the devil puts in the way, God's Word will be heard. It just takes determined Christians to help it happen.

MEET THE AUTHOR

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

Alabama news

BARBOUR ASSOCIATION

► **Donna Harrison**, who serves as the administrative ministry assistant for **Barbour Baptist Association**, Clayton, is celebrating her 30th anniversary in this position. The association will host a reception in her honor Aug. 10, 2–4 p.m. at the association office. Harrison and her husband, Larry, are members of Clayton Baptist Church, and have two adult daughters, six grandchildren and three great-granddaughters. Don Hatcher is director of missions.



HARRISON



BALLARD

BIGBEE ASSOCIATION

► **York Baptist Church** is celebrating “Leon Ballard Day” Aug. 17 with a reception at 2 p.m. honoring Ballard for his 70 years in ministry and his 27 total years as pastor of York Baptist. Everyone is invited.

DEKALB ASSOCIATION

► **First Baptist Church Fort Payne**’s senior adult ministry will host comedian Bro. Billy Bob (aka Bill King) Aug. 19 at 10:30 a.m. A pot luck lunch will be served. Marshall Henderson is pastor.

FRANKLIN ASSOCIATION

► **Russellville First Baptist Church** will celebrate its 158th homecoming Aug. 10 at 10:30 a.m. Joel Samuels, pastor of Guntersville FBC,

will be the guest speaker. Garrett Booth, music and education minister of Russellville FBC, will be the worship leader. A fellowship lunch will be served. Chase Dowdy is pastor.

MOBILE NETWORK

► Mobile Baptist Association is rebranding as **Mobile Baptist Network**, according to Kevin Blackwell, executive director. The executive committee voted unanimously to change the name.

► Equipped Church Workshop, sponsored by **Mobile Baptist Network**, will be Aug. 16 at West Mobile Baptist Church. Randy Norris, senior pastor of The Station Church, Bessemer, is the plenary speaker. Breakout sessions will be offered on a variety of topics, including children’s and student ministry along with worship, deacons and pastoral help. Cost is \$10. Register by Aug. 7: mobilebaptists.org/register-for-training-opportunities. Kevin Blackwell is executive director.

MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION

► **John Halbrooks**, pastor of **Mixtec Church, Montgomery**, retired June 22. He was the church’s first pastor and served for 10 years. He was honored with prayers, gifts and words of encouragement by members of the church.

► **Luke Bond** is the new pastor of **Mixtec Church, Mont-**



HALBROOKS



BOND

gomery. Previously he served as a supply preacher and worship leader through Mount Baker Baptist Association, Sedro Woolley, Washington, and was a member of Calvary Baptist Church, Burlington, Washington. He and his wife, Rachel, have three children.

► Cloverdale Baptist

Church, Montgomery, is selling its building to Wesley Chapel and will hold the final service in the building Aug. 17 at 11 a.m. More news to come soon on the congregation’s future plans.

MORGAN ASSOCIATION

► **Westmeade Baptist Church, Decatur**, and Pursuing Hope Ministry will host Pursuing Hope Bible Workshop on Aug. 23, 9 a.m.–2 p.m. Participants will learn the art of active reading, discover helpful Bible study tools and resources and develop confidence to read the Bible better. Lunch is included in the \$20 conference cost. Justin McAlpin is pastor. Sign up at: form.jotform.com/251507818367161.

TUSKEGEE LEE ASSOCIATION

► **Pleasant Springs Baptist Church, Tuskegee**, will have a call to spiritual awakening and homecoming, Aug. 8–10. The event kicks off Friday at 7 p.m., featuring Rick Hagan; followed by Kevin Johnson on Saturday at 7 p.m.; and Carey Jinright speaking Sunday at 10 a.m. with lunch to follow. Ronald Sumner is pastor.

OBITUARIES

JOE WEIDEMAN ARMOUR JR.

Joe Weideman Armour Jr., who retired from First Baptist Church Tuscaloosa at the end of 2024, died July 4 following a brief illness. He was 72.

A native of Memphis, Tennessee, he was raised on a dairy farm in Cayce, Mississippi. He received bachelor’s and master’s degrees in agronomy from Mississippi State University, where he was also a cheerleader, school mascot and involved in Phi Kappa Tau and Baptist Student Union. He earned master of divinity and master of religious education degrees from Southwestern Seminary.

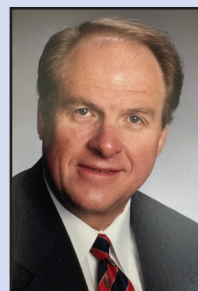
He served churches in Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee and Texas. At FBC Tuscaloosa, he served in a variety of roles from 2006 to



ARMOUR

2024 — minister for adult education, pastor to adults and connections pastor.

He is survived by his wife of 40 years, Lynn; two sons, Joseph and Harrison; one daughter, Jane; and one granddaughter.



HENLEY

WALLACE HENLEY

Wallace Henley, a former pastor in Alabama, died June 24 in Houston, Texas. He was 83.

Henley served several Alabama Baptist churches and was pastor of Old Spanish Fort Baptist Church and McElwain Baptist Church, Birmingham (now Hope Community). He most recently served 20 years on staff at a Houston church before retiring in 2019.

Henley graduated from Samford University and attended Southwestern Seminary.

During his more than 50 years of pastoral ministry, Henley and his wife, Irene, led teams doing leadership training internationally. He worked in the White House under President Richard Nixon

(1970–1973), authored more than 20 books and served as president of the Alabama Baptist Convention during the 1980s. While in Texas, he was chief of staff for Rep. John Culberson.

Henley is survived by his wife, Irene, two children and multiple grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

DONALD LAMAR VAUGHN

Donald Lamar Vaughn, who had just passed his 10th year as pastor of Shady Grove Baptist Church, Collinsville, died July 7. He was 78.

He spent 50 years in ministry, leading churches in Cherokee and DeKalb counties. He was an associational leader in Lookout Mountain Baptist Association, having served four terms as moderator.

Vaughn was preceded in death by his wife, Linda, and is survived by two daughters, Angela and Sharon, and two grandsons.



VAUGHN

Persecuted church

China's government seeks to control music

BEIJING, China — A plan called “Sacred Music Ministry Blueprint for 2025,” with the goal of aligning Christian music with the ideology of the Chinese Communist Party, was released May 7 during a meeting of the Two Associations of Christianity of Beijing City, according to rights group ChinaAid.

“Even hymns of praise to God are not exempt” from falling under control of China’s government, said ChinaAid. China is No. 15 on Open Doors’ 2025 World Watch List of the 50 places most difficult to be a Christian.

India puts 15 Christians out at sea

NEW DELHI, India — Fifteen ethnic Rohingya Christian refugees from Myanmar were put out to sea eight weeks ago by India’s navy and their fate remains unknown, according to Morning Star.

The Christians had fled persecution from Myanmar’s military. India is No. 11 and Myanmar ranks No. 13 on Open Doors’ 2025 World Watch List of the 50 places most difficult to be a Christian.

164 more Nigerian Christians killed

ABUJA, Nigeria — At least 164 Christians in Nigeria’s Benue State died in a June 13–14 attack that Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need called the “single worst atrocity in the region.”

Christian Daily-Morning Star said the communities attacked included Tse Asha, Ukange, Adeor, Udei, Dangwal and Jol. Nigeria has led the world in the number of Christians killed for their faith or kidnapped. The country is No. 7 on Open Doors’ 2025 World Watch List of the 50 places most difficult to be a Christian.

Governor takes action in retreat attack

SURABAYA, Indonesia — The provincial governor of West Java province in Indonesia says he will pursue legal action against Muslim extremists who stormed a Christian youth retreat June 27.

Morning Star News reported that Gov. Dedi Mulyadi instructed police to investigate the incident. Mulyadi vowed to oversee the prosecution and gave \$6,250 to cover damages.

Videos show more than 200 mob members vandalizing the retreat, which is actually a home

belonging to a 70-year-old woman. Police evacuated 36 youth from the retreat as stones were thrown at their vehicles, one source said. Eight suspects have been arrested in the incident.

Woman recovering after violent attack

LAHORE, Pakistan — A married Christian woman in Pakistan’s Punjab province was raped at gunpoint in her home June 11 after she refused a neighbor’s repeated demands for her to convert and to marry him, according to the woman’s husband.

The 36-year-old mother of five was taken to a hospital for treatment. Police later arrested her attacker, a Muslim man who lived across a field from them, according to the woman’s husband.

“Sexual violence against minority women (in Pakistan) is not rare. It’s a systemic human rights emergency that is often met with silence and inaction,” Joseph Janssen, field officer of the advocacy group Jubilee Campaign, told Christian Daily-Morning Star.

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

NEWS ITEMS COMPILED BY THE ALABAMA BAPTIST STAFF

EQUIP

What should I do with my doubts and questions?
How can I be a faithful witness to Jesus?

DR. JOSHUA CHATRAW
JAY BARBIER
DR. JUSTIN BARNARD

09.06.25

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Duo puts Scripture to music to reach youth

By Leann Callaway
The Alabama Baptist

The husband-and-wife worship team of Doorpost Songs, Dave and Jess Ray, has a passion for developing Scripture-based songs for a new generation of worshippers.

The name is based on Deuteronomy 6, and their primary desire is to help families become rooted in Scripture through the songs they sing together. As the parents of three elementary-age kids, it's especially close to their hearts.

"Hearing the words of Scripture in the voices of children will never get old," Dave Ray said. "What an incredible blessing to help create those moments."

"Doorpost Songs began almost by accident," he noted. "At the first church we served, our children's minister asked me to write a song for their fall memory verse."

I wrote it and actually liked it, and then I realized that we could do more. So I wrote enough Scripture songs for an album, and we pulled together a group of musicians at our church to record the tracks and a kids' choir to sing them."

'Sacred command'

"Once the album was complete, we needed something to call it. Because the focus was Scripture and family, we were immediately drawn to Deuteronomy 6. Ultimately, the purpose of these songs is to help God's Word become a part of our family life. It's a way of fulfilling this sacred command."

The couple has fond memories of growing up in church and crafting their musical skills at an early age. She played bluegrass and gospel music with her family, singing and play-



DAVE & JESS RAY

Submitted photo

ing the piano, mandolin and cello. He began learning to play the piano as a child, and started learning guitar when he was 13.

Inspiration

Today, the duo leads worship for conferences, camps and family worship events around the country.

"We love getting to partner with churches to create fun worship nights that bring

the whole family together," Ray said. "So often, each age group is separated on Sundays, and when we come together, not only can it be incredibly fun but also incredibly meaningful both for parents and kids."

"We also want kids and families to have a deeper love for God's Word. For many of us, God's Word is an afterthought when it should be our lifeblood. We

want to encourage parents in their role as spiritual leaders. It's not an easy role, but it's such an important calling. We can trust that as we seek to faithfully live out God's calling, He'll be with us every step of the way."

The inspiration for their songwriting comes directly from reading Scripture passages and putting them to music.

The ultimate goal is to create songs filled with rich, biblical truths that will help shape young hearts and minds with the gospel.

"Teaching our kids to be worshippers is one of our most important tasks," Ray said. "We spend so much time trying to get our kids to obey God and much less time teaching them to love God. But love for God is where true obedience comes from. If our kids are going to love God deeply, they must learn to be worshippers."



FREE

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State Board
of Missions

Get Acquainted Day

Thursday, September 4
9:30 am-3 pm
9-9:30 • Check-in and refreshments

Register by calling or emailing Amy Nelson, 1-800-264-1225, ext. 2231 or (334) 613-2231, anelson@alsbom.org, or go online to alsbom.org/gad.



alsbom.org/gad

MEETING A MINISTRY NEED

SBC Worship offers 'welcome mat' for music resources, training, community

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Karen Gosselin said there's a "for such a time as this" kind of need in music ministry.

"As a worship pastor, you need to study and perfect your skill in worship planning to help the church offer praises up to God in an excellent way," said Gosselin, coordinator of worship resources for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

But there's been a gap in resources to help worship pastors do that, Gosselin noted. That's why she's excited about The Worship Initiative, which is offering

those resources at a new digital hub called SBC Worship.

The Worship Initiative was started just over a decade ago by worship band Shane & Shane and provides music ministers with access to more than 1,000 resources, including song tutorials, devotionals, leadership training and a community for worship leaders and volunteers.

Robbie Seay, executive vice president of leader development and content at The Worship

Initiative, announced in June that the new SBC Worship hub would now take those resources from The Worship Initiative and hone them for Southern Baptist churches.



Photo by Marc Hooks/The Alabama Baptist
Shane & Shane lead worship during this year's SBC Pastors Conference in Dallas. The popular worship band started The Worship Initiative just over a decade ago.

"We're able to offer a free kind of welcome mat to SBC churches who are in need of training and resourcing," Seay told The

Alabama Baptist in an interview.

The SBC Worship community is free to join and includes curated training,

resources and events. As worship ministers go deeper into the platform, premium training options and features are available for an additional cost.

'More than songs'

SBC Worship is designed to build a trusted home for community and development across the convention using resources from The Worship Initiative, Seay said.

There is "every resource you can imagine" related to songs and hymns, he added, but it doesn't stop there.

"It's not less than songs, but it is more than songs," he noted. "It's pastoral ministry, it's theology and it's leadership."

For more
information, visit
sbcworship.com.

TWO UPCOMING LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES



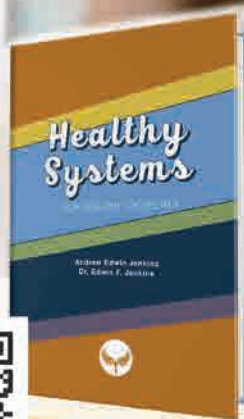
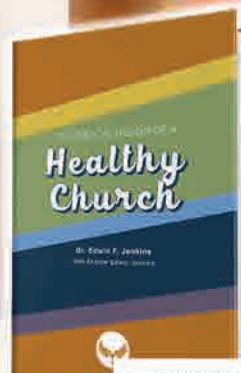
EMPOWER

Tuesday, September 9, 9 am-4 pm
SBOM, Prattville

Edwin and Andrew Jenkins will present a reproducible process for moving any church into a position of greater health.

Healthy Church and Healthy Systems are a 2-part resource, reproducible in any ministry environment, to empower pastors and their teams to reach their God-given potential.

COST: \$10 (includes lunch and materials)



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Bryan Blass, Rob Jackson and Ken Allen

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- How to know when to stay and when to move on
- Keys to helping people discover gifts and equipping them to serve

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UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Week of Prayer for State Missions is Sept. 7-14

Be sure to mark your calendar for the 2025 Week of Prayer for State Missions, Sept. 7-14. Please make plans to observe this significant time together as a church family. As the date approaches, spend some time setting your church's giving goal, making a plan for promotion and lining up a special speaker if desired. Also, begin prayerfully considering your annual gift to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering. This year marks the 10th anniversary of our observance of the Week of Prayer for State Missions and the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering.

For more information or to order resources, visit Myers-Mallory.org or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



During these years, the faithful prayers and gifts of Alabama Baptists have significantly undergirded and extended the Great

Commission Ministries of Alabama WMU, Disaster Relief, Church Planting, Partnership Missions and Church Revitalization. Now is the time for you to order bulk quantities of materials, including missions studies, prayer guides, offering envelopes and bookmarks. To order, visit Myers-Mallory.org. While there, you'll also find other downloadable resources. In weeks to come, feature videos will be added to the website for your use during the Week of Prayer for State Missions. Thank you for your faithful and prayerful support of missions and ministry in Alabama and beyond!

Healthy Church Live: Sept. 8

To help you develop a more healthy church, Edwin and Andrew Jenkins will present a reproducible process for moving any church into a position of greater health on Tuesday, Sept. 9, from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. at the State Board of Missions in Prattville. The cost is only \$10, which includes materials and lunch. Healthy Church and Healthy Systems are a 2-part resource, reproducible in any ministry environment, to empower pastors and their teams to reach their God-given potential. You won't want to miss this excellent training. Register today at alsbom.org/hcl.

2025-26 Resource Directories now available — order today

It's time to order your 2025-26 Resource Directory! This 16-month calendar has State Board of Missions events and emphases already printed with plenty of room for you to add your church's events. It also includes an alphabetical listing of ministries and services along with directories of associational, state and SBC contacts. Order yours by visiting alsbom.org/rd or contacting Melissa Tolar at 334-613-2249 or mtolar@alsbom.org. Please limit to 20 copies per church.

WORD search

- | | |
|-----------|---------------|
| ACCUSE | LAMENT |
| ADVOCATE | LAW |
| ANSWER | OMNIPOTENT |
| BROKEN | OPPRESSED |
| CRY | PEACE |
| DEFENDER | PLEA |
| DESPAIR | POWER |
| EVIL | REDEEMER |
| FAIRNESS | RIGHTEOUSNESS |
| FAITH | SILENCE |
| FEAR | SUFFERING |
| HOPE | TRIAL |
| INNOCENT | TRUST |
| INTEGRITY | TRUTH |
| JUDGMENT | VINDICATE |
| JUSTICE | WICKED |

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

I said to myself, "God will judge the righteous and the wicked, since there is a time for every activity and every work."
ECCLESIASTES 3:17

CHRISTIAN Crossword



UPCOMING EVENTS
sponsored by the State Board of Missions

It's Annual Church Profile season!

The Annual Church Profile (ACP) is one of the most practical ways churches partner each year with the local Baptist association, the State Board of Missions and the Southern Baptist Convention to prepare for the future.

As churches take stock of where they are in key statistical categories, it enables the SBOM to provide resources and offer training to meet specific needs.

"The ACP allows us to focus on collecting information that will give us a true picture of what's going on in Southern Baptist

churches and helps us to be able to share that in ways that will advance the Kingdom of God," said Rick Lance, state missionary and executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Now is the time for churches to begin working on their ACPs. They may be turned in through your association or online at adx.alsbom.org.

If you need help completing the ACP, please contact your local association or Sandy Harmann at the SBOM, 334-613-2266 or sharmann@alsbom.org.

Calling Out the Called Sunday set for Aug. 10

One of our most urgent tasks is to help equip those God 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

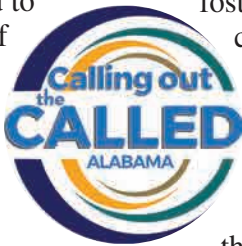
of Missions desires to come alongside your church and foster those He has called through the Calling Out the Called initiative. Sunday, Aug. 10, has been designated as Calling Out the Called Sunday.

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.

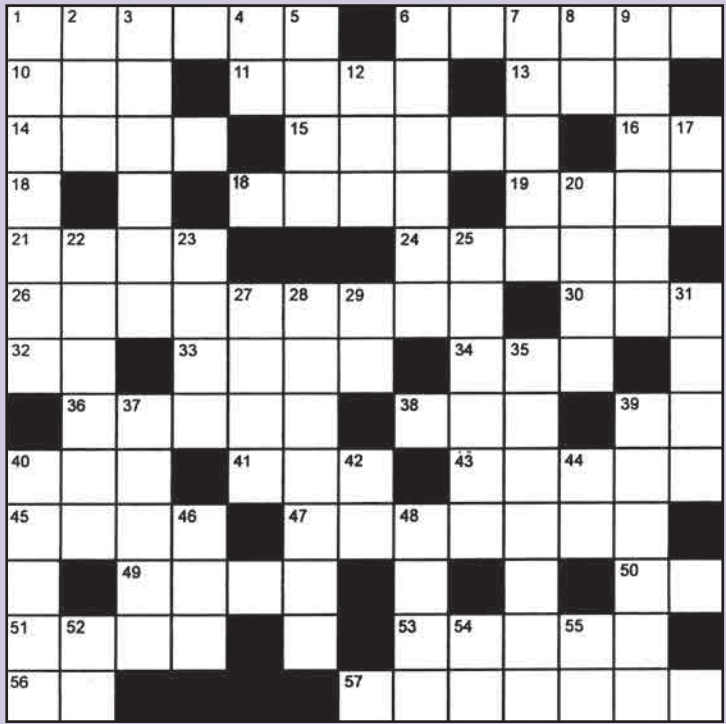


For information, visit callingoutthecalled.org or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



ACROSS

1. ___ them that are rich in this world. (1 Tim. 6:17)
6. Gurgle.
10. Electrically charged atom.
11. Pungent scent.
13. Expend.
14. Temporary dwelling.
15. Happily.
16. Transit Authority. (abbr.)
18. They went into the ___ of swine. (Matt. 8:32)
19. What Eve does to the fruit. (Gen. 3:13)
21. Earnest enthusiasm.
24. Ye see how ___ a letter I have written unto you. (Gal. 6:11)
26. The Lord my God will ___ my darkness. (Ps. 18:28)
30. Do not ___, my beloved brethren. (James 1:16)
32. Thou shalt have ___ other gods before Me. (Ex. 20:3)
33. Spoke.
34. Leah's relationship to Rachel.
36. Whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day ___ the seventh day. (Ex. 12:15)
38. Nocturnal bird of prey.
39. Bachelor of arts. (abbr.)
40. Long ___ and far away.
41. Tender loving care. (abbr.)
43. Rebuke not an ___, but intreat him as a father. (1 Tim. 5:1)
45. Unfreeze.
47. And the world passeth away, and the lust ___. (1 John 2:17)
49. Heavenly headpiece.



By Jennifer Breeding Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

50. For anger resteth in the bosom ___ fools. (Eccles. 7:9)
51. Snoopy.
53. Rocking ___.
56. Emergency Room. (abbr.)
57. Refrigeration system.

DOWN

1. And he went and joined himself to a ___ of that country. (Luke 15:15)
2. Weeder.
3. Yearly.
4. Let my people ___. (Ex. 5:1)
5. He do not whet the ___. (Eccles. 10:10)
6. Harness for guiding a horse.
7. Let not the ___ rejoice, nor the seller mourn. (Ezek. 7:12)
8. Bachelor of science. (abbr.)
9. Serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the ___. (Rom. 7:6)
12. Paddle.
17. But as many ___ received Him, to them gave He power. (John 1:12)
20. "Rock of ___, Cleft for Me."
22. Lest there be not ___ for us. (Matt. 25:9)
23. Itemize.
25. A soft ___ turneth away wrath. (Prov. 15:1)
27. The stride of a horse.
28. A small mountain peak.
29. Touchdown. (abbr.)
31. To raise a child.
35. Against the law.
37. Belonging to the world's most famous boat builder.
39. ___ the mountains were brought forth. (Ps. 90:2)
40. Pay the penalty.
42. Chapter. (abbr.)
44. Who by him ___ believe in God. (1 Pet. 1:21)
46. I am the ___, the truth, and the life. (John 14:6)
48. Every one.
52. ___ what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matt. 16:26)
54. Greeting.
55. Illinois. (abbr.)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Importance of gospel in life's tender moments

(continued from page 1)
connects with the families himself.
Laura Floyd, VBS coordinator at Gilbertown Baptist, said, “We are not real pushy about the decision itself. We more want the information and the invitation to be there, but there’s no pressure on the kiddos to make a decision in that moment.”
There are two times in life when people are most tender to the gospel, Floyd said — during childhood and after a catastrophic event.
“We try and make sure the community hears the gospel during childhood,” she said.
This also gives church members the opportunity to serve after VBS by doing follow-up. Smith gives church members the opportunity to go with him as he talks to families.
He also encourages them

to share the gospel with others.
“I would say reaching the children in their youth, that is my biggest hope for them,” Smith said. “God is seemingly well pleased to love and draw children to Himself. We are very moldable as children. What we learn as children sinks in, and it stays with us for a very long time.”
Proverbs 22:6
Smith points to Proverbs 22:6 for this approach: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he gets old, he won’t depart from it.”
“Vacation Bible School lets us do that in part,” he said. “It lets us sow a seed.”

EDITOR’S NOTE —
To read the story in its entirety, visit tabonline.org/Gilbertown.



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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 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.

LEAD PASTOR

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

PASTOR

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.

PASTOR

Indian Grave Baptist Church is seeking a full-time/bivocational pastor. Please send a resumé to: 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

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 inquires/resumés to: 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.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Stowers Hill Baptist of Attalla, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a bivocational pastor. Please submit resumés to: stowershillbaptist@gmail.com.

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TAB EXTRAS

TAB HIGHLIGHTS EMAIL NEWSLETTER

TAB Highlights is an email newsletter delivered every Monday-Wednesday-Friday at noon with the day's top stories from the world of faith-based news. The news items come from international, national, state and Baptist coverage. To sign up, email news@thealabamabaptist.org.



Photo by Eddie Torres

Bellevue Myanmar Baptist Church celebrates having a building of its own with a dedication and ribbon cutting July 13.

Burmese church celebrates new building as outreach tool

Having a church building to call its own was cause for celebration for Bellevue Myanmar Baptist Church in Owensboro, Kentucky.

The July 13 ribbon cutting and dedication of a building is significant for the ethnic culture that is not only Burmese but involves 17 different tribal groups.

Greg Faulls, senior pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church, noted the significance of the church being able to launch out on their own.

"The culture of that church, of those people, is that sacred space matters. This has been very important for the people they are trying to reach," Faulls said.

He recalled years ago when the ethnic congregation began at Bellevue and was meeting in the church's gym.

"The people they were trying to reach were saying 'you are in a gym, this isn't a holy space.' They struggled with that. Now

they have a place that is a dedicated sanctuary, so it has evangelistic significance," Faulls said.

Currently the church has about 120 people attending.

Kamlen Haokip, who became the Bellevue Myanmar pastor in early 2020, said the church will be focused on reaching the large percentage of unreached people in the community.

'Open to everyone'

Refugees from Burma (now called Myanmar) who arrived in Owensboro prompted Bellevue leadership to organize a church to minister to people from Burma and other countries, such as Thailand and Malasia.

Eddie Torres, multi-language evangelism strategist for the Kentucky Baptist Convention, was among those attending the dedication. "The church is open to everyone — that is the mentality of the church," Torres added. "I love that." (Kentucky Today)

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EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Sunday School Lessons

By Jay T. Robertson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, University of Mobile



For August 10

GOD'S CARE Psalm 23:1-6

Psalm 23 is the most beloved psalm of the Psalter. Charles Haddon Spurgeon called it “the pearl of the psalms.” Alexander MacLaren, the noted Scottish expositor, said, “It has dried many tears and supplied the mold into which many hearts have poured their peaceful faith.” James Montgomery Boice wrote: “Ministers have used it to comfort people who are going through severe personal trials, suffering illness or dying. For some, the words of this psalm have been the last they have ever uttered in life.” This psalm is a masterpiece of inspired praise that testifies of God’s abundant provision, protection and care for His people.

God's Provision (1-3)

This psalm is a masterpiece throughout, but if ever a psalm could stand on a single line, it is Psalm 23:1. The word “LORD” is an English translation of the Old Testament personal name for God, revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:14) and then repeated more than 6,000 times in the Old Testament.

The name literally means “I am who I am.” It refers to God’s timelessness and to His self-sufficiency. Timelessness means that God is always the same in His eternal attributes. His self-sufficiency means that God needs nothing. He is perfectly complete in Himself. He does not need anyone’s wisdom, power or help. He is not accountable to anyone.

David declared that the eternal, personal, faithful, covenant-keeping God was his Shepherd. The responsibilities of shepherds included their constant and undivided attention. Shepherds were responsible for providing every need of every sheep in their flock.

This first verse is breathtaking. David wrote that he would never lack anything because he was

personally cared for by the God who lacked nothing. If we belong to the One who is self-sufficient, inexhaustible and utterly unchanged by time, we will lack nothing. God is sufficient for all things and will provide for us.

Sometimes we are spiritually on our backs, quite helpless. Jesus our Shepherd comes to us and gets us back on our spiritual feet again. God sovereignly directs our steps through life for His glory.

God's Protection (4)

This verse is often used to comfort people who are dying or at funerals to comfort people who have lost a loved one. God is certainly a source of comfort at the time of death. But this verse primarily speaks of a shepherd’s ability to protect his sheep in moments of danger. Shepherds would lead their sheep from the lowlands, where they spent the winter, through the valleys to the high pastures, where they spent the summer.

The valleys not only were sources of rich pasture and water but were also places of danger. Wild animals, flash floods and thieves were commonly encountered in the valleys. David knew his Shepherd was always with him, protecting him in every circumstance.

God's Care (5-6)

David appears to have shifted from the imagery of a shepherd to the imagery of a host in the closing verses. He celebrated God as his gracious Host by describing how the Lord cared for him by providing food, oil and wine for him in spite of the enemies he faced. God’s goodness and steadfast love pursued him all the days of his life, and he was determined to spend the remainder of his days worshipping the Lord.

Can you declare as did David: “The LORD is my shepherd; I have what I need”? Are you one of God’s sheep?

For August 17

GOD'S GREATNESS Psalm 139:1-4, 7-16

While Psalm 139 contains lofty theology concerning God’s omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence, it is also wonderfully personal because it speaks of these attributes of God in ways that impact the psalmist and us as well. It concludes with two practical aims that become clear by the end of the psalm. First, the writer wants to separate himself from everyone who deliberately practices evil. Second, he wants God to search him thoroughly and cleanse him from anything offensive to God.

His Knowledge (1-4)

David began this psalm by affirming that the Lord had “searched” him. The idea is that the faithful, eternal, personal, covenant-keeping God had diligently probed his innermost being. David used figurative language to declare that the Lord’s knowledge of him was similar to what was known after a purposeful, prolonged, extensive investigation into something. The Lord knew everything there was to know about him.

God knew all of David’s activities and all of his thoughts as well. God knew his deepest longings, failures, concerns and motivations. The transcendence of God did not hinder God from intimately knowing everything there was to know about David. Our God is both transcendent and immanent.

God even knew the exact distance David traveled each day and exactly how long David slept each night. God is aware of every detail of our lives. David’s declaration in verse 4 acknowledged the Lord’s omniscience. He knows our actions, thoughts, words and motivations.

His presence (7-12)

Not only does God know everything about us, but He is also everywhere. David considered the effect

of the Lord’s omnipresence on him. David posed two hypothetical questions in verse 7. The answer to both questions is “nowhere.” We may seek to hide from the Lord, but we never win when we play hide-and-seek with God. David was praising God that it was impossible for him to flee God’s presence. If he were to go high to heaven or low into Sheol, God was there. If he were to flee eastward or westward, God would be there.

God would not only be there, but He would also be there guiding and protecting David. He knew the Lord was faithfully watching over him in every place and circumstance. Even darkness could not keep the Lord from seeing him. David was comforted by the truth that the Lord sees

through the thickest darkness. God sees us even in times of utter darkness.

His Power (13-16)

David wrote this psalm with his heart as well as with his head. He was not thinking of God’s omnipotence abstractly but as it applied to him. He focused on the power of God in

forming him while he was in his mother’s womb. The language employed by David implied intricate care and precision.

These verses clearly teach the individuality of each child in the womb. No matter how small, a child is a person, not just a part of a woman’s body like a gallbladder or appendix that a mother can elect to have removed. The problem with trying to determine a point before which the developing child is fully human is that there isn’t one. When the two sets of chromosomes combine, not only does the development of life continue steadily unless interrupted, but the life that is developing is a unique life.

God created every human being for a purpose. No one is an accident. God’s power is demonstrated in His creative design and providential direction.

*“I praise you, for
I am fearfully and
wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your
works; my soul
knows it very well.”*

Psalm 139:14

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 August 10

HUMILITY Philippians 2:1–11

Humility is a foreign concept in today's culture. We are quick to tout our own accomplishments and seek our own gain long before we build up others. I believe this stems from a fear that our own desires will not be met or victories will not be recognized unless we do it ourselves. This type of self-reliance is dangerous because it places us as the focus of our lives.

When we focus on our own needs, we neglect to see the needs of others. In today's passage, Paul is teaching the church in Philippi to serve others with love and humility the same way Jesus did.

Love lays the groundwork for humility. (1–2)

In these verses, Paul was teaching the Philippians that they too could participate in the encouragement they received through being united with Christ. They weren't just to be the recipients of Christ's love, tenderness and compassion; they were also to be active participants in sharing these with others.

Paul urges them to be unified in the Spirit by showing the same love to others they received from Jesus. Paul's joy was not complete until they began to show others the same love he had shown them. The love of Christ was the starting point and foundation for being united to Christ and others. Love is the common thread that unites believers.

Love leads us to humbly serve others. (3–4)

When the love of Jesus permeates our hearts and we begin to see others the way Jesus does, our focus shifts from our own needs to the needs of others. When we love people with the love of Christ, the world slowly comes into focus and we see the needs that are all around us. We

notice the hungry, sick, scared, lonely and hurting who have been there all along. When we love others, we will serve them with humility.

Their needs become our responsibility, and we play an active role in how God meets their needs.

By serving others, we are trusting that God will provide for our own needs in the way we are helping to provide for the needs of those we serve. When we refuse to serve those around us, it shows our lack of faith that God will provide for us.

Serving others is one of the best ways to reveal our faith in Jesus because it shows we are trusting in Him for our own needs.

Jesus is the example for humility. (5–11)

If there was ever a person who deserved to not be humble, it was Jesus — God in the flesh. However, He set the example for us in how we should live lives of humility.

In verses 5–11, Paul gives the Philippians the blueprint for what it means to have the mindset of Christ. By understanding that Jesus had the right to treat people any way He wanted but still chose humility and love, we see how we should live.

Regardless of how important we think we are or what our status is in our community, we will never have the resumé of Jesus, the Son of God. If Jesus chose humility, how much more should we? Jesus chose to love and serve with humility and compassion.

Are we trusting that His way is best, or do we believe that we know better? Only our actions will tell. God desires that we love and serve others with humility and trust Him with our lives.

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

For August 17

CONTENTMENT Philippians 4:10–20

Contentment may be one of the most difficult traits to practice in the Christian life. There is always someone who makes more money than you or has a bigger house, a better vehicle or a shinier new toy. Perhaps it's not "stuff" but a way of life we see through social media posts that others are living that makes us discontent.

Whatever the cause, our sinful nature leads us away from being fulfilled by what we have and to desiring more beyond our needs. However, if God provides all of our needs, why are we not content?

Contentment is not based on our circumstances. (10–12a)

In these verses, Paul was thanking the Philippians for the care they showed him and the gifts he received from them.

Paul expressed that his contentment had nothing to do with his circumstances. Through his experiences, he learned that God would provide for him regardless of his circumstances.

Paul knew that whether he was in prison or safe and well-fed, God was his provider.

Two things stick out to me in this passage. The first is that we should trust that God will meet our needs in all circumstances. Secondly, just like the Philippians aided Paul, we can take part in helping to provide for the needs of others. Contentment is trusting that what we have is what God thinks is enough to meet our needs.

Contentment rests in Christ. (12b–14)

Philippians 4:13 is one of the most popular verses in the Bible — especially among athletes. I confess that I have also used this verse out of context before. I had it

written on a piece of paper and stuck in the liner of my football helmet in high school. While Christ certainly can give us strength to do difficult physical activities, this verse is addressing something very different.

Paul is teaching that the only way we can have contentment in all circumstances is through Christ. Perhaps a better way to use this verse is not in the liner of my football helmet but as the lens through which I view my finances or when I scroll social media or when I see my neighbor's new boat. Those are the times I need the strength of Christ to have contentment.

God provides what we need to be content. (15–20)

There is an adage that says, "You can't outgive God." This is true regarding any form of giving where God is the recipient.

Whether giving finances, time or other resources, God will provide for your needs whenever you are providing for the needs of others. Paul was thankful for the Philippians' generosity and knew that God would provide for them as well.

In verse 19, he says, "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

Whenever we realize that everything we've been given is a gift from God, it is easier for us to give it away.

Contentment comes when we see our earthly possessions as opportunities to be good caretakers until someone else needs them. If we live a life of hoarding riches and not sharing the gifts we've been given, our lives will be full of discontent and jealousy.

However, if we see that everything we have is not ours but God's, we are content and able to freely give to others because we know God will provide for us.

"In every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need."

Philippians 4:12

Gospel transformation

Persistence in discipleship: First two Zoque believers baptized in southern Mexico

International Mission Board missionary Tammy Richardson knelt beside the river with her phone.

Her husband, Clay, and their local pastor stood in the river, preparing to baptize Leana — the first Zoque believer to make a public confession of faith in more than a decade of ministry in southern Mexico.

As she got ready to capture the moment of Leana's immersion, her IMB teammate Serena Tail leaned down and said, "There's one more."

Richardson glanced up in surprise. A moment later, tears flowed unchecked down her face.

Over the last 12 years, in raw moments of prayer, Richardson has wrestled with questions like "Should we go somewhere else?" and "Is this ground just too hard?"

When they moved to Mexico in 2013, the Richardsons were not prepared for how long it would take to see gospel transformation among the Zoque people. Or that it would all begin with an unexpected relationship, right under their very own roof.

Beyond 'survival mode'

Soon after their arrival, Nancy, a 10-year-old Zoque girl, knocked on their door to play with their kids. She came every day. Richardson recalled weary days when she struggled to say yes.

At first, much of her family's time was spent in survival mode as they learned how to manage daily life in the village, homeschooled their four young children and studied the Zoque language.

"I was very much still in the mentality of 'my kingdom,'" said Richardson, explaining her struggle to establish boundaries between work and ministry. "Like, I will do ministry outside my home, but my home is my kingdom and it's where I rest."



The Richardson family (Clay, Tammy, Ryan, Ellie, Levi and Matthew) has spent more than a decade serving as IMB missionaries in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas.

The work has been slow and painstaking, and the Richardsons have wrestled with questions like "Should we go somewhere else?" and "Is this ground just too hard?"

It wasn't long before the Lord gently changed her mind about welcoming Nancy into their home.

Nancy quickly integrated into the Richardson family, doing chores alongside their kids, tagging along on ministry outings and, by default, being exposed to the gospel message over and over.

One afternoon when she was in the 8th grade, Nancy was doing her homework at the Richardsons' kitchen table as she often did. She brought up a conversation she'd had with her classmates at the local Catholic school about the gospel.

"She was able to explain who Mary is biblically versus who Mary is in the Catholic church. And how we don't pray to the saints because Christ is our mediator," Richardson recalled. "When she got done talking, I said, 'Did you hear yourself?'"

While she expressed faith in Christ, Nancy told Richardson she wasn't ready to be baptized.

Later, in high school, Nancy started sharing the gospel with her Zoque friend, Leana. When Leana opened up to Nancy about her difficult home life, Nancy told her stories from the Bible and looked for verses from Scripture to comfort her.

After the Richardsons moved to San Cristobal, Nancy called one day with a question. Could her friend Leana live with them while attending college in the city? Instead, Richardson suggested Leana live with their IMB teammates, John and Serena Tail, who had an extra bedroom.

"It turned into daily, life-on-life discipleship," Richardson said. "Serena would be sitting at the kitchen table with her Bible in the evening, reading, doing her devotionals. And

Leana would come out and bring her Bible too, and they would talk about Scripture."

Then, on a Sunday morning about a year and a half ago, Nancy and Leana joined the Richardsons at a baptism service. It was the first baptism Leana had ever seen.

Sharing the gospel

After the service, Richardson and her husband felt led to share the gospel with Leana. Leana put her faith in Christ without hesitation. Since they were already at the river, Richardson asked if she wanted to be baptized, but Leana decided to wait.

The Richardsons and their teammates spent the next few months traveling to the village and discipling both Leana and Nancy. Still, the young women did not make a public confession of their faith.

Finally, last fall, Richardson brought it up again, and this time Leana was ready. They excitedly set the date for her baptism in November. Nancy chose not to join her, but she still came to the river to witness Leana's step of faith.

As Richardson knelt beside the river to capture Leana's immersion on her phone, she heard Serena say, "There's one more."

It was Nancy.

Richardson's voice was choked with emotion as she recalled the tender moment.

Recently, Richardson listened with gratefulness to God as Leana boldly shared her testimony with a small group of people gathered to worship.

She said Leana has begun joining them in their outreach to the Zoque community, where she tirelessly shares the gospel among her people. (International Mission Board)

EDITOR'S NOTE — Some names have been changed for security reasons.

To learn more about missions among South Americans, visit imb.org/americas.

Fans pick the winners

By Tracy Riggs Frontz

The Alabama Baptist

K-LOVE Fan Awards emphasizes ‘awe and wonder’ of God’s love

After TobyMac and Jon Reddick began the 2025 K-LOVE Fan Awards with “Nothing Sweeter,” the hosts came on stage. Mac Powell, formerly with contemporary Christian group Third Day, then shared the theme of this year’s show.

“The theme tonight is awe and wonder, a tribute to those sacred moments when God’s love takes our breath away, His presence leaves us speechless and we’re reminded that He is greater, nearer and more awesome than we ever imagined,” he noted.

The quartet of hosts also included Matthew West and Jeremy Camp, contemporary Christian solo artists, and Bart Millard, lead singer for Mercy Me.

For that first song, Powell, West and Camp were dressed in black tuxedos. However, Millard came out in a light blue tux with a ruffled shirt and matching shiny shoes.

Millard replied to Powell’s comment. ““That’s right, Mac. I mean I’m in awe that we made it through the whole stinkin’ song — and I wonder why you guys didn’t put forth a little effort and put more pizzazz into your outfits,” later joking that he thought the theme was “shock and awe.”

Throughout the evening well-known artists performed songs that pointed those watching to God, praise songs that worshipped Him, and shared insights into their lives and hearts.

But humor was also a major aspect of the show.

Though the four hosts were the leaders in ongoing gags throughout the night, some of the award pre-



Photo courtesy of Jason Davis

The K-LOVE Fan Awards were hosted by four musical artists this year (from left): Matthew West, Jeremy Camp, Mac Powell and Bart Millard. West and Camp are solo artists while Powell and Millard were formerly with bands.

senters were right behind.

Solo artist Lauren Daigle is famous for wearing colorful outfits complete with hats. When she and Dallas Jenkins, director for “The Chosen,” presented the award for Male Artist of the Year, Jenkins arrived at the podium wearing a frilly lavender hat complete with flowers.

‘Splashes of color’

Jenkins’ rationale was that Daigle was known for “splashes of color” and he “wanted to keep up.” After some teasing, Daigle finally admitted liking the “Kentucky Derby look.”

Another pair of presenters who literally have made history but have never been seen together were “TV Jesus” (Jonathan Roumie, who plays Jesus in “The Chosen”) and “TV David” (Michael Iskander,

David in “House of David”).

“It must be the crossover event literally no one asked for — but everyone got,” Roumie said.

“This is the Old Testament meets the New Testament. You [Jesus] brought salvation, and I brought a harp and trauma — and that’s a power duo if I’ve ever seen one,” Iskander replied.

However, the comedy didn’t keep anyone from recognizing the reason they were there.

“Seriously, playing Jesus did make me realize just how deep music ran in David’s life. Whether he was in a cave, in a castle or full on crying in the desert, he processed it all through song,” Roumie said.

“And Jesus sang too,” Iskander continued. “Before He went to the cross, He sang a hymn with His disciples — the Son of God leading

and worshipping. No lights. No fog machine. Just glory.”

“That’s what these songs do for us now. They carry our grief, our joy, our ugly cry prayers and they meet us with God’s presence ... no autotune required,” Roumie noted.

Winners

The 2025 K-Love Fan Award winners included the following:

- ▶ Artist of the Year — Brandon Lake
- ▶ Male Artist — Brandon Lake
- ▶ Female Artist — CeCe Winans
- ▶ Group of the Year — for King + Country
- ▶ Worship Song of the Year — “That’s Who I Praise” — Brandon Lake
- ▶ Song of the Year — “Hard Fought Hallelujah” — Brandon Lake and Jelly Roll
- ▶ Breakout Single — “Still Waters” — Leanna Crawford
- ▶ Film Impact — “The Chosen” — Season Five
- ▶ Book Impact — “My Story Your Glory” — Matthew West
- ▶ Podcast Impact — “Max Lucado — Encouraging Word Podcast”
- ▶ TV/Streaming Impact — “House of David”

▶ Sports Impact — Patty Gasso

Artists who performed included TobyMac; Jon Reddick; David Crowder; Leanna Crawford; West; Patrick Mayberry; Jamie MacDonald; Elevation Rhythm; Zach Williams; Megan Woods; We the Kingdom; Camp; Anne Wilson; Colton Dixon; for King + Country and Michael W Smith; MercyMe; and CeCe Winans.

The 2025 K-LOVE Fan Awards can be watched on TBN+.

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200 years

By J. Gerald Harris
Georgia's The Christian Index

Georgia's Flint River Baptist Association celebrates bicentennial

On Sunday evening, Sept. 15, the Flint River Baptist Association met at First Baptist Church in Zebulon for its annual associational meeting and bicentennial anniversary celebration. Associational Mission Strategist Frank Nuckolls announced that "What He's Done!" would be the theme for the meeting.

At the bicentennial celebration and 201st annual meeting of the Flint River Baptist Association at First Baptist Church Zebulon the gathered assembly had much to commemorate and celebrate.

Nuckolls addressed those in attendance, saying, "I am grateful for God's calling to serve this great network. Serving you has been one of the highlights of my 47 years of ministry. God is at work in our association. Let's follow His leadership and never look back."

Expansive work

Encouraging reports were given highlighting the expansive work being accomplished by the associational staff and its network of churches.

Ricky Thrasher, the Georgia Baptist Mission Board Associational Missions and Convention Planning/Chaplaincy representative, read a letter from W. Thomas Hammond Jr., executive director of the GBMB, acknowledging the association's historic meeting and Nuckolls's effective leadership.

Steve Foster, an evangelism consultant with the GBMB, preached an inspirational sermon in which he gave the biblical basis for associations. He declared, "Churches are autonomous, but they are not independent; they are interdependent." He then used the first 12 verses

of Acts 12 to illustrate that the book is the God-given manual for evangelism, and he concluded his message by stressing the importance and urgency of sharing the gospel now.

The Flint River Baptist Association, the 10th association to be constituted in Georgia, was organized at the Rocky Creek Baptist Church in Monroe County in the fall of 1824. The Flint River Association was formed by the Ocmulgee Baptist Association transferring 14 of their churches to the Flint River Association and six newly constituted churches. Those 20 churches were the original charter churches for the new association.

A history of the association written and compiled by Nuckolls reveals the association came into full cooperation with missionary associations in 1842. It was at this point in its history that the association became fully engaged in the total world missions program. Shortly thereafter, FRBA began cooperation with the Georgia Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention.

Early in the history of the association in 1836, the mission and the doctrine of the FRBA was challenged. William Mosley from Ephesus Baptist Church in Morgan County, made a divisive recommendation, namely that "all Bible Societies, Temperance, Missions, Tracts and Sunday School Societies are unscriptural and therefore irreligious."

The recommendation was tabled until the annual meeting in 1837 held at the Holly Grove Church in Monroe County.

After a heated debate, the recommendation was voted on and defeated by a majority of the messengers, but Moseley influenced 15 churches to withdraw from the Flint River Baptist Association and started the Towaliga Anti-Missionary Baptist Association.

Undeterred, the leaders of the FRBA embraced God's call to missions more fervently, affirmed their allegiance to the divine authority of the Holy Scriptures and renewed their determination to go forth in the advance of the gospel.

Through the years the Flint River

Baptist Association supported struggling churches, started new churches and supported mission endeavors around the world.

The association established the Flint River Baptist Camp and ministered to countless girls and boys.

Higher education

Four colleges and one institute were formed by the churches of the FRBA. The colleges were in Spalding County, including Griffin Collegiate Seminary/Griffin Female College, Griffin Synodical Female College, Griffin Medical College and Marshall College were all established in Griffin and in Henry County the Locust Grove Institute was founded as a preparatory school.

Other associations were birthed out of the Flint River Baptist Association including the Clayton County (now the Southside Baptist Network), Centennial, Fairburn, Kimball and Macon or Mid-State.

Currently, under Nuckolls's leadership, the FRBA has established the McIntosh Replanting Team to reestablish and continue the legacy of McIntosh Baptist Church on the McIntosh campus.

Thomas Hill, lead pastor of Crestview Baptist Church is the chairman of the Replant Team and has stated, "Our goal is to make His glory known and advance His Word in our region through the replanting of McIntosh and the faithfulness of all our churches."

However, Nuckolls is not only interested in fulfilling a mission in his "Jerusalem" but has extended the ministry of the association to his "Judea" (Augusta, Georgia), "Samaria" (South Central Pennsylvania) and "uttermost" (Dominican Republic).

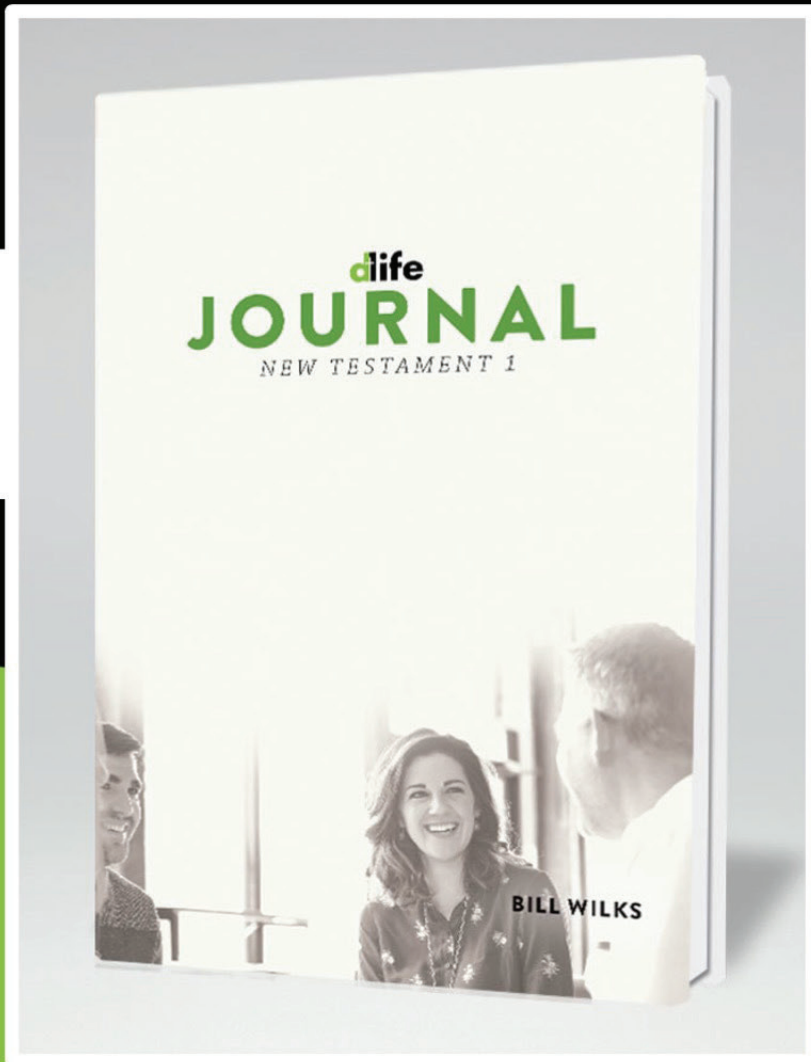


Photo courtesy of The Christian Index

Ricky Thrasher presents Frank Nuckolls, left, with a letter of appreciation at the 200th anniversary celebration of the Flint River Baptist Association.

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Leader in . training

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

Pastor leverages experience into program for future ministers

Soon after Steve Freeman accepted his first pastorate more than 20 years ago at Slayden Baptist Church in Cumberland Furnace, Tennessee, he realized after a few months that he was in over his head, he recalled.

"They taught me that I didn't know anything," Freeman said.

"I realized that even though I was in seminary and pursuing a degree, there's just some things you are not going to learn in the classroom," said Freeman, who has served as pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Springfield for the past 17 years.

"There was a lot that I did not know and I had to go figure it out," he said.

After 18 months at Slayden Baptist, he resigned and returned to his home church (Hilldale Baptist in Clarksville) and began serving as a pastoral intern.

Freeman noted that while his first pastorate didn't go quite the way he expected, he learned from it and today he has a good relationship with his first congregation. What's more, the seeds for a residency program that one day would help young pastors (before they took their first church) were planted in his mind.

In 2012 Freeman began working on his doctorate from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. During that process he wrote a project on a residency program based in part on what he learned as a pastoral intern when he returned to Hilldale Baptist Church.

The residency program is based on the same principle the medical profession uses to teach men and women how to become doctors.

"Could one imagine a scenario

where a surgeon was sent into an operating room to perform surgery with only his academic training without having first worked with a mentor who was an expert in that particular field?" he asked.

"If this kind of experience is important for the care of physical needs, how much more so is it needed for the spiritual needs," he continued.

The residency program allows a future pastor to get hands-on experience, Freeman said.

"Until you walk in as pastor of your first church, you really don't know that you don't know anything until you get there and then it is too late."

Initiation

Freeman initiated the Grace For You Ministries Pastoral Residency Program at Grace Baptist more than 10 years ago.

"My heart is to see young pastors receive what I had the opportunity to receive at Hilldale Baptist Church — field experience coupled with my academic experience."

The program began with pastoral internships, but soon grew into what it is today — a two-year program that allows future pastors to sharpen their leadership skills in the field, Freeman explained.

Grace's program is just for master of divinity degree graduate from New Orleans Seminary who plans to become a pastor, Freeman said. At Grace, a resident joins the staff as associate pastor in residence. It is a paid position, he added.

The resident is in charge of the day-to-day operation of the staff under the close advisement of the senior pastor, Freeman said.



Photo courtesy of Baptist and Reflector

Tennessee pastors Larry Robertson, left, and Steve Freeman engage in a conversation. The two men have helped each other walk through the challenges and the victories of their respective ministries.

The residents basically do what any pastor has to do — prepare a weekly sermon (they preach on Wednesday nights), they do pastoral care such as hospital visits and funerals, they conduct staff meetings, supervise ministerial and support staff and volunteers and more.

"They learn what a church operation looks like outside of Sunday. What's more, they get the opportunity to do it before they become a pastor," Freeman said.

Freeman acknowledged that he has been told that he might want to consider "easing" the residents into all those responsibilities. "I remind them that when they are called to their first church, there is no 'easing' into it. I want them to experience exactly what they're going to experience when they walk ... into their first pastorate."

So far, four men have graduated from the program and all did outstanding jobs, Freeman said. Grace Baptist now has its fifth as-

sociate pastor in residence. All of the graduates have gone on to other churches, with each of them serving as the senior pastor.

Staying in contact

Once the residents leave, Freeman stays in contact with them. While he mentors them, they in turn serve as his mentors as well, he said.

"These guys know our church because they have served here and know our people. Sometimes I lean on these former residents as much as they lean on me when they go to their first church," he said.

For more information about the residency program, visit graceforyouministries.org or contact freeman at sfreeman@graceforyouministries.org.

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