

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

**October 3 is World Romance
Scam Prevention Day.**

An **online romance scam** is “a purposeful act of an online criminal with fake romantic intentions toward their prey with a goal of financial gain, oftentimes by creating a fake online identity to lure their target.”

— ADVOCATING AGAINST ROMANCE SCAMMERS



Photo by Freepik

Roses and red flags

Helpful tips for spotting common signs of online romance scams

By Rachel Seale
The Alabama Baptist

In today's digital age of social media and online dating, romance scams are becoming more prevalent. Many who prey on the vulnerable are using online platforms like Facebook to convince users to share money or financial information.

Advocating Against Romance Scammers is a nonprofit organiza-

tion that aims to help victims of online romance scams. AARS established Oct. 3 as World Romance Scam Prevention Day to help raise awareness.

According to its website, AARS defines an online romance scam as “a purposeful act of an online criminal with fake romantic intentions toward their prey with a goal of financial

gain, oftentimes by creating a fake online identity to lure their target.”

Kathy Waters, AARS co-founder and executive director, said scammers often try to lure victims in with their words and good looks to obtain money, bank account numbers or even pictures they

can use to make more fake accounts.

Waters said many victims are older adults who have experienced the loss of a spouse or child. She said most of these scams happen on Facebook or Instagram.

“They usually reach out first,” Waters said. “They’ll usually reach out on a social media platform and then they’ll want to move the conversation to a messenger site like WhatsApp.”

(See ‘Pulling,’ page 8)

To read about one Alabama family's experience, see pages 9–11.

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'Big treasure'

Birthplace of Adoniram Judson dedicated as museum, education center

By Grace Thornton

The Alabama Baptist

Rosalie Hunt said she had been in the house a few times before, but it was just because the owner invited her to see it.

Now anyone can visit the birthplace of Adoniram Judson, the first American missionary to Asia. The house, which was built in 1674 in Malden, Massachusetts, was dedicated as a historic museum and education center Aug. 9 by the Adoniram Judson Heritage Foundation.

'So significant'

"It's a treasure historically, and certainly for Baptist missions history it's a big treasure," said Rosalie Hunt, a retired missionary from Alabama who has written two books on the life of Judson and his three wives.

"That house is so significant because they are the beginning of modern missionaries," she said, referring to Judson and his first wife, Ann, who sailed from Salem, Massachusetts, in 1812 and gave their lives to take the gospel to Burma, now called Myanmar.

Hunt shared a presentation on the Judsons via Zoom during the dedication ceremony.

As part of the dedication week-



Photo courtesy of Judson Heritage Foundation

Fredrick Thetgyi (left), heritage preservation chair and trustee of Judson Heritage Center, and Cherry Waing, also a JHC trustee, cut the ribbon at the Judson Heritage Center in Malden, Massachusetts, on Aug. 9.

end, those present heard from a variety of other speakers as well, including a number of Burmese believers who trace their faith back to the Judsons' work.

Hunt said Judson spent nearly 40 years in Burma and during that time, "his influence on the Scriptures was phenomenal." Working with missionary William Carey, Judson added 5,000 words in the local language for use in translating the Bible.

"The Burmese say July 13, 1813 — the day the Judsons arrived in Burma — is their 'Christmas,'"

Hunt said. "It was the day the gospel came to their shores."

According to the AJHF website, the organization's key role is to "safeguard" Judson's birthplace "to ensure its cultural and educational value is shared with the present and preserved for future generations."

AJHF also supports initiatives that continue the Judsons' work in Myanmar and beyond, including humanitarian aid, education, woman empowerment, cultural preservation and Christian literature translation.

For more information, visit judsonheritage.org.

For more information, visit livethedlife.com.

NorthPark to host Central Alabama D-Life Boot Camp

D-Life — a model for starting a culture of making disciples at your church and in your personal life — continues to expand, both in Alabama and beyond.

"D-Life continues to spread internationally," said Bill Wilks, D-Life founder and pastor of NorthPark Baptist Church in Trussville. "A group of Italian churches will use D-Life to launch the disciple-making movement in Italy beginning Sept. 27. The D-Life

Journals NT1 have been printed in Italian, and translations for the other three journals are underway."

Wilks and his wife, Rondie, will travel to Italy with a missions team from NorthPark in January to do missions projects and D-Life training. It's a vast missions field, he said.

"Only 1% of the population of Italy is considered evangelical Christians," Wilks said.

The next opportunity to learn more

about how to start D-Life at your church is the D-Life Boot Camp for Central Alabama which will be held Oct. 19 at NorthPark Baptist from 3–7 p.m.

Jesus' six practices

D-Life equips believers by following Jesus' six practices of discipleship: fellowship, teaching, prayer, ministry, multiplication and accountability. The ultimate goal, Wilks said, is to see a global, grassroots, disciple-making movement. (TAB)

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 13.

Rashional Thoughts

By Jennifer Davis Rash
President and Editor-in-Chief

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 @RashionalThts

The draw of authentic joy shining from another's eyes and smiles is real

Alabama's representatives on this season of America's Got Talent were preparing for the semifinals at press time — and they were shining bright for Jesus.

The Birmingham Youth & Young Adult Fellowship Choir earned judge Simon Cowell's golden buzzer during its first performance early in the season, then earned the fans approval Sept. 9 at the quarterfinals. The 41-member vocal troupe learned they earned a spot in the semifinals Sept. 10. They were set to wow the crowd again for that semifinal showing Sept. 16.

Creative space

The acts making it to the finals of the talent show that airs on NBC were announced Sept. 17.

"Founded in June 2015, [the choir] is a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization that aims to provide a creative space for youth and young adults to share and develop their musical talents through proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ," according to the group's website, which can be found at bhamyyafc.org.

Cowell and the other judges lit up during the group's performances, which were directed by Ahkeem Lee as he sat on a stool out from the stage near the judges' booth.

Lee is assistant director in the UAB office of student engagement enrichment and advises students in UAB's mentorship program designed to increase retention and enhance the well-being and success of at-risk students.

According to an article posted at uab.edu/news, Lee says his work at UAB has directly influenced the choir's structure and mission.

More than half of the choir's members are under 18 and come from various congregations across the city. It's a community choir and rehearses twice weekly at Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church. Mentoring is a major emphasis beyond the music.

And while the talent is certainly top-notch, I think it's the light the singers exhibit when sharing on stage that draws the audience in to such a deep and mesmerized engagement.

"Community, mentorship, developing talent, providing hope and the opportunity to dream, all while growing in Christ and pointing others to Him — I can call that discipleship."

I even teared up watching the impression the choir made on those in the room with them during both initial performances.

The response of the judges as well as the audience showcases an immediate attachment to these young singers who give it their all. The beaming smiles coming from the stage kept me glued to them as well.

National scene

During the first performance, the choir did a mashup of the traditional hymn "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee" with Pharrell's modern gospel anthem, "JOY (Unspeakable)."

For the quarterfinals, the choir

offered vignettes of Fatboy Slim's "Praise You" and Kirk Franklin's "When I Think About Jesus."

It's always fun to see Alabamians competing on the national scene, especially when they are representing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Discipleship

Community, mentorship, developing talent, providing hope and the opportunity to dream, all while growing in Christ and pointing others to Him — I can call that discipleship.

I also love how beautifully the choir is exhibiting the fruit of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

It really doesn't have to be complicated, and it doesn't have to be controversial. We can all shine for Him no matter our talent or circumstances.

Leaning into Jesus, embracing Him, trusting Him and allowing Him to work through us — that's really all we need to do. He'll take care of the rest.

Your Voice



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

The importance of the right people in leadership

By George Yates

Organizational health strategist and coach

Having the right people in positions of leadership is crucial to getting started right and continuing on a quality course of ministry.

The right person for a particular position might not be the one with the highest qualifications or education and experience for the position. Organizations, churches and businesses are littered with people in positions with no passion or drive for accomplishing required tasks. Someone with passion will overcome inexperience with his/her drive to accomplish required tasks.

Having the right people in leadership positions begins with proper recruitment. Here are two tips to consider when recruiting for any position: 1) Do not recruit in the hall. 2) Look for the who, people with capacity for the role needed.

Filling a position

Steps to follow when your organization has a position to be filled:

► **Pray** for your eyes to be open to seeing as God sees so that you will realize when the Holy Spirit nudges you toward a person, not because you know the person has accepted before, but because this person has the capacity to undertake

the responsibility of the position and spiritual warfare that may follow.

► **Contact** the person asking for a meeting, not in the hallway, preferably in his/her home or at a restaurant for coffee.

► **Pray** before the meeting. Pray for the proper wording to use during the meeting. Pray for an open heart for both you and the other person.

During the meeting be cordial and remember his time is valuable. Begin with casual conversation. After a few minutes, move into the reason for the meeting. Choose your wording carefully. Statements like, "God told me ..." will kill the interview immediately and the likelihood of receiving a positive response.

Instead phrase your wording similar to, "I (We) have been praying about the right person to assist with our ____ ministry. After several weeks, we believe you have the right qualities to serve in this capacity. Would you agree to pray with me about accepting this as an act of service (to God) for our church?" Notice I did not use the terms position, job or responsibility in this initial approach. Those terms carry a negative allusion to a burdensome task.

From this point you can begin to answer any questions the candidate might have and explain the responsibilities. Set a time for follow-up, about a week.

This format works and honors God more than the way many are recruited in the church.

"In the area of loving others, Lola is a great role model for us all," said **Cathy Bozeman**, a member of Harmony Baptist Church in Andalusia, of 98-year-old Lola Owens. The church honored Owens on Aug. 17 as part of its homecoming celebration. Owens gave her life to Christ in 1938 (87 years ago) and has been a member ever since. Over the years, Owens has served in a variety of ways — as a Sunday School teacher for preschool all the way to adults, a Vacation Bible School volunteer, church clerk, deacon's wife, choir member and more.

"Whether we like it or not, people will form a first impression about the church based on what they first see," said **Mark MacDonald**, church communication expert. "If the foyer is old and cluttered, that's what they'll first think about the church. That assessment may be inaccurate, but that's irrelevant when people form first impressions."

"The fact that I am a woman does not make me a different kind of Christian, but the fact that I am a Christian makes me a different kind of woman."

The late **Elisabeth Elliot** missionary, author, speaker

God's grace is sufficient

Second Corinthians 12:9–10 says, "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

There was a time when I thought I had to muster up patience on my own, that if I just tried hard enough, I'd stop lashing out at my family. But every day, I'd fail.

Then one day, I realized: I wasn't meant to do this alone. So I started a new habit — every time I lost my patience, I immediately confessed, repented and asked for forgiveness from those whom I hurt and let Jesus cover my sins. And slowly, things changed.

God was working it out, I just had to be still and let the work Jesus did on the cross be sufficient for my sins. Understanding, all the while, that the Lord was working it out — He was sanctifying me.

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“Learning to pray doesn’t offer us a less busy life; it offers us a less busy heart.”

PAUL MILLER

“A Praying Life: Connecting With God In A Distracting World”

“We don’t ask what their bank account is. We simply look at the need and the damages. We ask, ‘Is this an opportunity for us to get in and help them?’ We believe that rich or poor doesn’t matter. We are there to share the love of Christ, and if He opens a door for us, we are going to walk through it,” said **Robin Petticrew**, who has been leading rebuild efforts in East Flat Rock with North Carolina Baptists on Mission since the first of the year with her husband, Cal.

“God’s going to guide me to where he wants me in life, but as of right now, I’m just going to be obedient,” said **Cooper Roy**, a Missouri man who survived a horrific car crash last September. He’s been sharing his miraculous story ever since. “If God kept me alive through the hospital, the least I can do is glorify His name when opportunities come up. I’ve been grateful that I get to boast about the Lord that way, because I don’t deserve it.”

In the ancient church in Corinth, the most problem-ridden church in the New Testament, Paul wrote to

correct their theology and practice.

Paul said the “natural” man is one who does not have the Spirit of God. This person could be actively engaged in war with God or might be seeking God, though in the wrong way. Humanity sometimes seeks God by trying to do good things, believing eternal judgment is a balance scale with good works outweighing bad works. But Scripture is clear that good works do not earn salvation (Titus 3:5).

In each life there is a control center or “throne.” The natural man can be understood as a person with self on the throne of life.

But the Corinthians, whom Paul called “brothers and sisters,” were believers who did unspiritual things. He called them “carnal” or “worldly” and “babies in Christ” (1 Cor. 3:1). These can be understood as believers with Christ in their lives, but who have returned self to the throne.

The “spiritual” man can then be identified as the person who rightly enthrones Christ and subjugates self in humble service to Him.

Michael J. Brooks

Siluria Baptist Church, Alabaster

Lass WORDS

BY KEN LASS

The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

The winning team

Another football season is upon us. I love my football team. I watch all their games on television with intense excitement and razor focus. I live and die with each play. When they win, I am in a good mood for the entire week. When they lose, it takes days for me to come out of my funk.

I am fully aware that this is silly — it’s just a game. The outcome has no direct effect on my personal finances or well-being; it doesn’t help or hurt my family and loved ones; it’s not going to cause a global crisis.

Passion and emotion

It has often occurred to me that such passion and emotion over a football team are probably a waste of energy. So why do I feel this way? Why do millions of fans share the same fervor?

It must be about connection. Something in your life has attached you to this team; you are part of them. You may not wear the jersey and the pads, but you, and the thousands of screaming fans in the stadium, take the psychological hits right along with the team. You belong to this group. There is something that makes you feel secure being part of an effort greater than yourself. Your team represents the good guys, and the other team, the bad guys. They must be defeated. The common goal unites you, and that feels right.

Sound familiar? I’ve basically just described being part of the Body of Jesus Christ. It begins with something in your life establishing a connection to Jesus and His saving grace. Once you make this commitment, you are part of a greater good. You recognize more clearly the difference between good and evil. Evil must be defeated.

Part of the team

Seeing good in the world brings you joy. Observing tragedy and need makes you sad. You feel compelled to get involved, to help, to be part of the team. You enter the security of knowing God’s will for your eternity.

You belong with this group. It feels right, and it’s worth getting excited about.

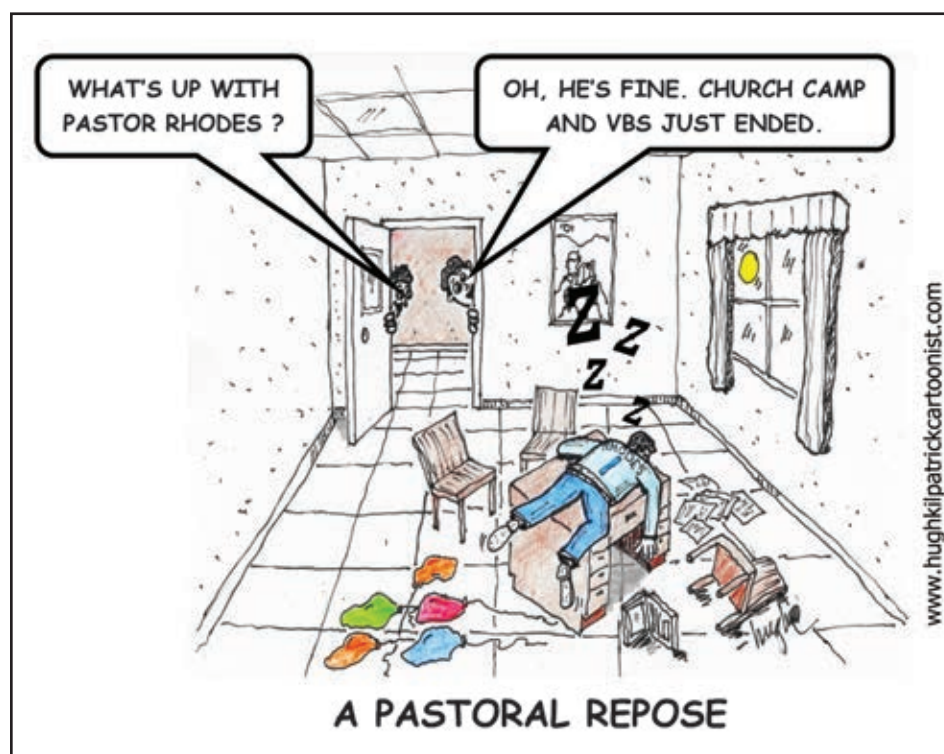
Victory in Jesus

Psalms 20:5 says, “May we shout for joy over Your victory and lift up our banners in the name of our God.” Yes, Scripture tells of “victory.” God’s team wins in the end!

That’s one game you don’t have to stress over.

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

OBITUARIES

STEPHEN DOUGLAS BROWN

Stephen Douglas Brown — a longtime state missionary and minister of education in Alabama Baptist churches — died Aug. 29. He was 77.

Brown attended Southern Seminary and began his ministry as a youth minister in that area. After that, he served as minister of education at North Johnson City Baptist Church in Tennessee.



BROWN

Over his 55 years of ministry, Brown served as minister of education at South Roebuck Baptist Church, Birmingham; First Baptist Church Andalusia; Roebuck Park Baptist Church, Birmingham; Taylor Road Baptist Church, Montgomery; and Northport Baptist Church. In retirement, he served at Creekside Fellowship, Castalian Springs, Tennessee.

Brown also served for more than 40 years with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions in the office of Sunday School and wrote materials for Lifeway.

He is survived by his wife of 56 years, Carol; daughter, Kathie; son, Stephen Douglas Jr.; seven grandchildren; and one great-granddaughter.

AUTAUGA ASSOCIATION

► **Michelle Blackmon** is the new children's ministry director for **Glynwood Baptist Church, Prattville**. She and her husband, Daniel, have one child. James Jackson is pastor.



BLACKMON

BARBOUR ASSOCIATION

► **Evergreen Baptist Church, Clayton**, celebrated its 150th anniversary July 27. Special guests included Britt Green, pastor of First Baptist Eccletic, who was the guest preacher, and former pastor Curtis Rich, currently transitional pastor of Liberty Baptist Church, Troy, who shared historical highlights of the church. Music was provided by Candy Finlayson, Christy Reg-



Photo by Dennis Westbrook

ister and Roman Acreman. Sen. Billy Beasley presented a commendation to the church, and Jane Hughes (left), a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, awarded a commemorative plaque to the church, with Wiley McWhorter (right), pastor, accepting the honor. A covered dish lunch was served following the service.

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► **The Baptist Church at McAdory, McCalla**, will host Celebrate 20, Sept. 20-21, marking the 20th anniversary of the unification of three congregations from the Bessemer area, First Baptist Church Bessemer, South Highlands and Westside. Saturday's event kicks off with a community-wide festival from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., featuring fun and fellowship for the entire family, including games, bounce houses, food trucks and Christian music. Admission is free. The celebration concludes Sunday with a special worship service at 10:30 a.m. Chris Crain, executive director of Birmingham Baptist Metro Association, will be the guest preacher. Bill McCall is pastor.

BLOUNT ASSOCIATION

► **Pleasant View Missionary Baptist Church, Holly Pond**, will host a singing Sept. 21 at 5 p.m. featuring The Pylant Family. For more information, call 256-339-1862 or 256-590-1501. Earl Harper is pastor.

CALHOUN ASSOCIATION

► **Cody Hale**, pastor for 12 years of **Iron City Baptist Church, Anniston**, has been called as the pastor of The Orchard Church, Collierville, Tennessee. He and his wife, Megan, have three children.

CAREY ASSOCIATION

► **Lystra Baptist Church, Ashland**, celebrated its 150th anniversary July 13. Special music was provided by The Pylant Family. Brody Barkley, music and youth minister, shared highlights of the church's history and former pastor, Skip Cook, reflected on his time as pastor. Additional guests included, Richie Farrow, Carey Baptist Association's director of missions, and his wife, Donna, who grew up in the church. Farrow was baptized, licensed and ordained at Lystra. The church received a commemorative plaque from Wendy Westerhouse (center), executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Pictured with her are Pastor Josh Barkley (left) and Farrow (right).



Photo by Donna Farrow

CHEROKEE ASSOCIATION

► **George Moses**, pastor of **Enon Grove Baptist Church, Cedar Bluff**, retired July 27. He has been in ministry for more than 51 years and served as pastor of several Alabama Baptist churches including Liberty Hill, Black Creek and Shady Grove, all in Collinsville; Gravel Hill, Fort Payne; and twice at Enon Grove. During the worship service, Wendell Dutton, associational missionary for Cherokee Baptist Association, presented Moses with a letter of commendation from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. A retirement luncheon followed, honoring Moses and his wife, Kay. He is available for pulpit supply. Contact him at 0geomoses9@gmail.com.



Photo courtesy of George Moses

COOSA RIVER ASSOCIATION

► **Steve Heartsill** is the new pastor of **Talladega Creek Baptist Church, Talladega**. He has served churches in Alabama, Mississippi and Virginia. Heartsill also is the director of pastoral care at Coosa Valley Medical Center and Coosa Valley Hospice in Sylacauga. He and his wife, Tonya, have two children and two grandchildren.



HEARTSILL

COVINGTON ASSOCIATION

► **Southside Baptist Church, Andalusia**, celebrated its 75th anniversary Aug. 17. Larry Cummings, former director of missions for Covington Baptist Association, was the guest preacher with Ron Patterson, a former music minister, leading worship. Pastor Josh Wilson shared a video highlighting the church's history. Two special presentations were made by state missionary Mark Wakefield, director of Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief, and Jim Lambert (right), a commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, with Wilson (left) accepting both plaques on behalf of the church. A commemorative Christmas ornament, displaying the church's two locations, was available to all attendees, and two large display areas highlighted the history of the church from its humble beginnings at a small tent revival on Carlton Street to its current location with more than 400 members. A fellowship meal was shared after the service.



Photo by Holley Wingard

NEWS

ELMORE ASSOCIATION

► **Greg Gosselin** has retired as children's pastor for **Crossroads Community Church, Elmore**. More than 30 of his 43 years in children's ministry was spent in Alabama Baptist churches including Forest Park Church and Eastern Hills Church, both in Montgomery. He also served in Panama City, Florida; Fort Worth, Texas; and Paris, Texas. The church honored him with a celebration Aug. 2. Gosselin and his wife, Karen (who serves as worship resources coordinator for the



GOSSSELIN

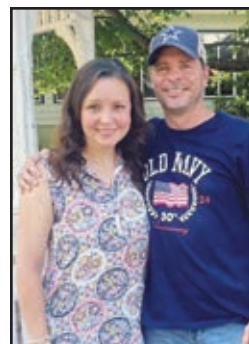
State Board of Missions), have three adult children.

ETOWAH ASSOCIATION

► **Nolan Clackley** is the new pastor of **Stowers Hill Baptist Church, Attalla**. He previously served as youth pastor of Bethsaida Baptist Church, Boaz. He and his wife, Brooke, have one child.



Photo courtesy of Nolan Clackley



Submitted photo

► **Craig Reynolds** is the new pastor of **North Glencoe Baptist Church, Gadsden**. He previously served 10 years as associate pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church, Alexandria. He and his wife, Shelby, have two children.

MOBILE NETWORK

► **Mark Griffin** is the new pastor of **Union Baptist Church, Grand Bay**. He previously served as associate pastor of First Baptist Church Tillman's Corner, Mobile. He and his wife, Diana, have three children.



GRIFFIN

MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION

► **Ken Wilson** is the new pastor of **Lakeview Baptist Church, Montgomery**. He



WILSON

previously served as senior pastor of Westside Baptist Church, Elba. He and his wife, Kim, have three sons and one daughter.

ST. CLAIR ASSOCIATION

► **Tim Deckard** is the new pastor of **Cook Springs Baptist Church, Pell City**. He also is director of the St. Clair County Alabama Sheriffs Boys Ranch, Pell City, and previously served in youth ministry for five years in various places. He was a pastor in Missouri and served 10 years in the U.S. Army. He and his wife, Cassie, have three children.



Photo courtesy of Tim Deckard

TALLAPOOSA ASSOCIATION

► **Mount Carmel Baptist Church, Dadeville**, celebrated its 125th anniversary and homecoming July 20. Randy Hagan, a former pastor and retired associational missionary for Coosa River Baptist Association, was the guest preacher. Special music was provided by church members and friends. Margaret Robinson was recognized as the oldest member, and deacon Lamar Hartley with the longest membership tenure. A commemorative plaque was presented to the church by Calvin Milford (right), a commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission with Hartley (left) and Pastor Freddie Senn (middle) accepting. A copy of The Alabama Baptist that featured the church's centennial celebration was displayed along with photos and other historical items. A fellowship lunch was served following the service.



Photo by Carolyn Senn

WEST CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

► **Pine Flat Baptist Church, Suttle** (near Selma), will celebrate its 190th anniversary and homecoming Oct. 12. Worship begins at 10:30 a.m. Former pastor Michael Brooks, now lead pastor of Siluria Baptist Church, Alabaster, will be the guest preacher. A potluck lunch will be served following the service. Lee Collins is pastor.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Please send news items to news@thealabamabaptist.org.

FBC Butler sees need to offer 'different' VBS

By **Katelyn Maten**
The Alabama Baptist

First Baptist Church Butler decided to change up their normal Vacation Bible School plan this year after pastor Jason Moyer had a burden to do something different.

"Most churches do the same theme around here, so kids were coming (to VBS at FBC) and they already knew the Bible studies and the songs," he said. "It just wasn't anything fresh for them."

After praying and searching for a different type of curriculum that would be unique to the church, Moyer said God led him to the song "Same God" by Elevation Wor-

ship. By using this song as a framework for the VBS theme, they covered the Bible narratives of Jacob, Moses, David, Mary and Jesus.

The theme verse was Malachi 3:6 — "I am the Lord; I do not change."

Biblically sound

Moyer said the fact that the song was biblically sound was key.

"We want to be excellent in what we do," he said. "It's not that we choose to do a VBS differently than everyone else because we are different — no, we wanted to do something unique to us because we have the resources available to do so and God led us to do so."

The VBS — held July



Photo by Katelyn Maten/The Alabama Baptist
Volunteers at First Baptist Church Butler act out scenes from the Bible during Vacation Bible School.

13–17 — included skits in which volunteers dressed up and acted out scenes from the Bible. It also included a mix of new songs and old favorites.

As part of the week, FBC

also added a new program for fifth and sixth graders called VBX (Vacation Bible Experience).

Scott Wheeler, FBC's associate and youth pastor, said the focus of VBX was

a little different from the rest of VBS in that he highlighted the human side of each person from the Bible. "I didn't want them to think that God only makes promises to those people who deserve it, because nobody deserves it," he said.

He said he "really focused on the fact that the grace of God changes people" and makes them a "new creation." Overall, FBC saw 160 students attend VBS and VBX, with more than 100 volunteers serving. Moyer said the biggest point of celebration for them was that 14 children professed faith in Jesus, nine of which were attending VBX.

PULLING HEARTSTRINGS

Scam victims not only suffer from financial abuse but emotional and psychological abuse too

(continued from page 1)

Waters said these messenger sites are often encrypted, meaning the messages can't be traced by law enforcement if deleted.

"Scammers like to use those because once they delete their [information], they'll never be found," Waters said.

Tamara Fetner knows how these scams can hurt loved ones. She said her own mother lost at least \$40,000 due to an online romance scam that started on the Words With Friends game through Facebook.

"It put her in a financial bind, and there was no way of recouping the money," Fetner said. "They just started romancing her and then having her set up different email accounts."

Fetner said she thinks the scammer targeted her mother since she was elderly and had her Facebook status set to "widow" on Facebook. She said her mother began wearing makeup every day, losing weight and staying glued to her iPad.

"The iPad became so important to her because that's where she was communicating with him," Fetner said.

Fetner discovered her mother's online relationship one day when she saw "I love you" messages pop up on her mother's iPad. Fetner went through the message history and discovered there had been discussion of wire transfers and cash payments.

Common stories used

Common stories scammers use include living in a foreign country, serving overseas or working on an offshore oil rig.

Waters said these lies provide scammers with believable excuses to ask for money so they can visit their new significant other in America.

"It's a story they can use in order to get money from them," Waters said. "The stories can be outlandish, like they were getting on a



Photo by vecstock on Freepik

plane, they ended up getting arrested (and) they're now in jail."

Fetner said the scammer told her mother he was working on an offshore, military oil rig and asked her to send money to repair broken equipment. However, many of his messages consisted of broken English, which her mother failed to pick up on due to declining cognitive health.

"I had to put parental protection on her device so that she couldn't chat with people," Fetner said.

Lauren Peabody also knows people who have been scammed. She said her co-worker's mother sent money for a plane ticket to a man she met online so he could come visit her.

"She sent money for the plane ticket and then she was told they got held up in customs and had to pay an extra \$5,000 to clear customs, and she sent it," Peabody said. "She waited at the airport, you know, hours upon hours for this person who never showed up."

Peabody said scammers tend to create stories that pull at their victim's heartstrings so they will send money.

"You're going to feel like you're being a good steward of your money and your faith," Peabody said.

Scammers also tend to ask personal questions that could be potential security questions for bank accounts, including a victim's birthplace or pet's name.

"It's important to be very private about all of your vital information," Peabody said.

Waters said these predators were unable to talk to their victims in the past. However, with the rise of artificial intelligence, scammers can create fake voices and videos that allow them to do so.

"There was no such thing as AI or a way to fix video calls, but nowadays that's not the case," Waters said. "They can even make pictures look like they're talking."

Many scammers target people in their 60s or above since older adults tend to be less technologically savvy and more trusting. However, Waters said some are aiming for people in their 40s or 50s as a way to steal future retirement money, savings and cryptocurrency.

Waters said many people in West

Africa and Southeast Asia perform what's known as pig butchering scams, which involve building a slow connection to ensure a victim's trust before asking them to invest in cryptocurrency.

"They groom the victims with words and trying to build a relationship," Waters said. "With crypto, the money will go from wallet to wallet so it's very hard to track where each dollar is, and so it's incredibly difficult to be able to retract that money because it's long gone."

While fewer than 10% of victims report being conned, Waters said it's important to report these scams to the proper authorities. She said victims in the United States should report these crimes to the Internet Crime Complaint Center, Federal Trade Commission and FBI.

Waters said it's important to inform local law enforcement. However, victims should also report the crime to the FBI since it has jurisdiction that allows it to pull cases outside of the U.S. She said a network of cybercriminals in West Africa called the Yahoo Boys uses Facebook to conduct its scams.

Fake Facebook accounts

"Facebook is very much aware of this but is not taking them down," Waters said. "There's not a law in place that's making them take these fake accounts down or catching the criminal activity that's going on."

Waters said many victims claim they suffer more from emotional and psychological abuse due to these scams rather than financial abuse.

"I think that any victim of any online scam — especially a romance scam — should seek a licensed therapist," Waters said. "It's very similar to domestic violence."

Victims of online romance scams should never feel ashamed to seek help. Reports can also be made to the Fraud Watch Network Helpline of the American Association of Retired Persons at 877-908-3360.

To report an online romance scam, contact the Fraud Watch Network Helpline of the American Association of Retired Persons at 877-908-3360.

One family's 12-year journey through manipulation

By **Richard Bailey**
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Every phase of life presents unique challenges to individuals and families alike. This is especially true as one enters the twilight years of life. The body and mind are weakening, and roles are changing within the family.

Complications occur, leading to strained relationships and misunderstandings within the family unit. The passing of family members or other significant figures can add a layer of complexity. The situation is compounded with the onset of complicated grief where a family member or members are unable to process the loss of a loved one.

All these factors combined can make a family vulnerable to manipulation from outside influencers, bad actors and others.

One family found them-

selves in the situation described above, and it became a 12-year journey.

The beginning

The story begins at the passing of the family's elderly father and resulted in extreme financial loss and a season of broken relationships. Four areas were reviewed and assessed on the family's ability to respond to the different events.

1. Summary of players.
2. Planning — What steps occurred to prepare for the incident?
3. Response — How did the family respond to the incident?
4. Recovery — What lessons were learned? What are recommended courses of action for future consideration?

While individual elderly abuse cases cannot be compared to a regional or national disaster, each case



Photo by katemangostaron Freekpic

still has significant, possibly irreparable, consequences on the family involved.

Also, abuse and manipulation of the elderly — especially romance scams — are becoming more and more common (see story, page 1).

The cost is not tabulated in lives lost or damage to businesses and property as in a large storm, but certainly in stolen money and investments and retirement plans

reduced or even depleted.

Damage to — or even destruction of — a family's structure, cohesiveness, relationships, etc., are other aspects of the price paid. All things that make a family a family are shaken when elderly abuse occurs.

Timeline of events

- 1980s — Family trust was drawn up.
- March 2010 — father

passes and caregivers originally contracted for the father's care are extended at the mother's request.

- November 2010 — Mother hires a new attorney and makes changes in trust and will.

- May 2011 — Power of attorney revoked for surviving adult children (one sibling previously deceased).

- February 2014 — Second sibling passes.

- December 2015 — Surviving child ceases contact with mother because of strained relationship.

- January 2016 — Surviving child leaves for six-month military deployment.

- July 2016 — Surviving child returns from deployment and learns of his mother's fall and hospitalization.

- Fall 2016 — Surviving child and spouse re-engage with the mother. Power of attorney is reestablished.

(continued on page 10)

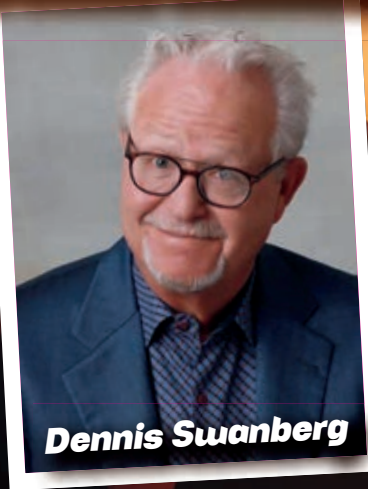
formerly abundant living

Saints Alive

Thursday, October 23 • 9:15am-2:45pm (lunch on your own 11am-1pm)

FBC, Prattville • with Dennis Swanberg and Bob Smith

an event for
senior adults



Dennis Swanberg



Bob Smith

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alsbom.org/saints-alive

(continued from page 9)

Daughter-in-law takes over management of mother’s affairs, including working with a new lawyer, and caregiver is confronted. He quits and is never heard from again.

- May 2021 — The mother moves to a memory care community.
- May 2022 — The mother moves to a skilled nursing care facility.
- June 2023 — The mother passes.

Summary of players

The family of five has a strong religious background and is upper middle class with all three adult children earning postgraduate degrees.

Shortly before the father died, his neurologist observed some potential concerns with the mother and suggested she be examined. While there was a history of undiagnosed neurosis on the mother’s side of the family, she pushed back on any conversations about her health. She seemed threat-

ened by those conversations.

Over time, she began acting out of character with excessive outbursts and was eventually diagnosed with dementia.

Outside players impacting any family are people or agencies such as hair stylists, house cleaning companies, contractors for maintenance, home care staff, longtime neighbors, new acquaintances, bankers, financial managers, lawyers and other service providers.

They all play significant roles and perform important duties, but in some cases the motive behind their actions could call into question if their actions are for the best interest of the elderly person or of themselves — something we don’t always think to assess.

Planning and response

During the 1980s, routine financial, legal, health care decisions were made with all family members included and

informed. The family had a culture of caregiving and an expectation to provide care as parents aged, but a variety of changes took place after the father died while the mother was grieving and adapting to life without her husband.

The mother made massive changes within the first two years after her husband died, and the family determined her decisions were impacted by her mental state along with manipulation by outside players.

- **Caregiver concerns**

The caregiver was a middle-aged male, and his father owned the company. The caregiver quickly established a rivalry with the adult children. Several years later, the extent of that caregiver’s criticism of the family (or anyone he considered a threat) and his manipulation of the mother’s emotions were revealed.

The mother was inconsistent in her behavior and sometimes exhibited outlandish behavior and spewed

unfounded accusations.

The caregiver scheduled himself for nights, which made the family uncomfortable.

Irregular behavior

There was no indication of any physical abuse, but it seemed irregular for a male caregiver to stay overnight with an elderly woman. What the children eventually deduced was that it gave him a private audience with their mother.

The caregiver also passed himself off as a member of the family. It was discovered when the youngest sibling received a phone call from his parents’ lawyer to discuss the recent meeting with “his mother and brother.” The sibling replied that his brother had died the previous year. Subsequent conversations revealed the caregiver was accompanying the elderly mother during visits to the lawyer’s office, banks, etc.

The son soon discovered

the mother was writing checks to the caregiver with his guidance. After that discovery, the mother told the son he no longer needed to look at her checking account.

The children then confronted the home care company that employed the caregiver and presented a long list of grievances against the employee. The operations manager assured the family a solution would be found.

However, instead of removing the caregiver, the company canceled the contract with the family and initiated a new contract with the elderly mother. The children then realized what the operations manager meant by “finding a solution.” They also realized that this was not the case of a wayward son with a sketchy reputation, but the entire company was suspect.

During this time, the children had ongoing discussions with the financial institution about the situation with their mother and caregiver, which



Photo by Freepik

created more friction between the mother and the children.

- **Housekeeper concerns**

The housekeeper, who was hired by the mother, was there for approximately one year and had to leave due to illness. About once a year after that, she would call the mother to ask for money.

Recovery phase

Observation 1 — Early preparation

The parents checked off most, if not all, the boxes in planning for this phase of their lives. This included planning and preparation financially, legal (trust and will) and health care, including the expectations after one of the parents had passed.

However, the planning was incomplete. They did not consider mental health issues, the impact of a changing family dynamic and grief issues. The family did not identify resources within their respective churches, communities, etc., that could be a resource in dealing with elder care and mental health issues.

What are the lessons learned and future course of action suggestions?

Families should incorporate an “all-hazards” approach in planning how to take care of elderly parents. Every situation is unique; thus, each family has its own strengths and weaknesses, as well as special considerations for the parents and sometimes other family members.

Possible issues to consider include bad actors, physical threats, legal issues, medical care and mental health concerns.

Any existing threat or hazard not mitigated is a vulnerability that must be addressed in either a formal written document or an informal agreement between all parties concerned. The process should be a collaborative effort between all family members if possible, and the plan should be discussed, reviewed and updated periodically.

Observation 2 — Assessing in-house health care options

One sibling obtained a listing of providers from the hospital where their father was admitted. The siblings discussed the information but wrongly assumed a vetting process was in place for those companies to be on the list provided by hospital staff.

Wrong assumptions

The oversight led to more wrong assumptions, mainly about the integrity of a prospective home care provider and its employers. This was a single point of failure and was the root cause of most of the problems experienced by the family.

What are the lessons learned and future course of action suggestions?

Do adequate planning prior to a health emergency. The impact of this vulnerability cannot be overstated and is

validated by this family’s experience.

At a minimum, the following information on a prospective in-home health care provider should be reviewed:

- ▶ What services does the company offer?
- ▶ Is it home care or home health?
- ▶ What is the difference in what their sitters do versus what their aids do?
- ▶ What nursing services are available?
- ▶ Do they offer physical and mental therapy?
- ▶ Obtain and check references.
- ▶ Review information on the group’s liability insurance.
- ▶ Confirm background checks are run on employees.
- ▶ How many years have they been in business?
- ▶ How many employees do they have and what is the retention rate like?
- ▶ Are reviews available online or through the Better Business Bureau?

Observation 3 — Service providers such as housekeepers

The lesson learned is that the family must be the gatekeepers to adequately care for and protect the elderly family member/members, even if it means confronting anyone who might be attempting to manipulate the situation.

Observation 4 — Financial institutions’ role and

reaction to strife within the family

The parents, specifically the father, had an unusually close relationship that spanned decades with the company that managed their financial portfolio. It was marked by mutual respect between the client and the service provider.

What was taken for granted by the family was that the long-standing relationship with the financial services company would afford them some protection. They also forgot that despite a good relationship, they should not have had any expectation that the financial services company was nothing more than a reputable company and that “friendly” does not equal “friend.”

Shutting down

Once higher-ups in the company got wind of the family’s fractured situation, they decided to shut everything down, giving the son 30 days to find a new financial management company for his mother’s portfolio.

As far as a future course of action — whatever the situation, the less said to an outside interest, the better. Have a plan B if the current financial situation or the financial services provider is becoming untenable.

Observation 5 — Long-term care facilities

Future course of action is to do thorough research. Contact your state’s long-term care ombudsman for guidance and assess the staff’s experience at the facility. Review the contract carefully, understand daily care routines and ask how the staff responds to unusual situations.

Observation 6 — Safeguarding the mental and physical health of all family members

Maintaining healthy boundaries while caring for aging parents is important and contributed to the family’s resilience during the trying time with the mother.

The son practiced stepping away for a time, which helped ensure the wellbeing of him and his spouse.

He also contacted his church for pastoral care. The staff member he spoke to was knowledgeable and had both personal and professional experience dealing with older family members, grief counseling, the impact of age and the loss of a loved one.

Future courses of action include locating various resources ahead of time and committing to protect your own mental and physical health over the duration and know when to prioritize that over your parent’s care. Caregivers can’t provide quality care if they push themselves beyond their limits.



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UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

October is Cooperative Program Month

October is designated as Cooperative Program Month, the month that Southern Baptists consider the power of giving and working together to accomplish the Great Commission.

During October, encourage your church to:

- ▶ Pray for the ministries that the CP supports.
- ▶ Pray that gifts through the CP would continue to increase.
- ▶ Have a Sunday School lesson or sermon series focus on stewardship and the CP and how it impacts the

For free resources, visit AlabamaCP.org or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



lives of people in your community, your country and around the world.

- ▶ Show a video clip in

your service that highlights the CP.

- ▶ Have a state missionary come to your church to speak about the CP.
- ▶ Invite members to like or follow @alabamacp on Facebook and X.
- ▶ Host a 100th birthday party for CP.

For free CP resources such as bulletin inserts, video clips and posters or to invite a state missionary to speak at your church, contact Beth Edfeldt at eedfeldt@alsbom.org or 334-613-2304 or visit AlabamaCP.org.

Annual Church Profile

The Annual Church Profile 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. It also provides us the opportunity to celebrate as Alabama Baptists what God is doing across the state in a variety of ways.

Now is the time for churches to prepare their ACPs. They may be turned in

through your association or online at al.sbcworkspace.com. Although different associations may have different deadlines, a great goal to shoot for is Oct. 1.

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.

NextGen Lunch & Learn around the state

Join us for an upcoming NextGen Lunch & Learn for children and student ministers offered on three dates around the state — Sept. 22 at Spring Hill Baptist in Mobile, Sept. 23 at Eastmont Baptist in Montgomery and Sept. 29 at First Baptist Decatur.

It will be a time of fellowship and roundtable discussions with ministry leaders in your age group area.

You will also learn some practical applications of AI in everyday ministry.

To register, visit alsbom.org/nextgen.

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



WORD search

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| AARON | JOSHUA |
| ANGER | JOURNEY |
| ASSEMBLY | LAMB |
| BLOOD | LEVITES |
| BURDEN | MANNA |
| CALEB | MILK |
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| CLOUD | MOSES |
| COMPLAINT | PASSOVER |
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| ELDERS | QUAIL |
| FIRE | SIGNAL |
| GRAPES | SPIES |
| GRAVES | SPIRIT |
| HAZEROTH | TABERNACLE |
| HONEY | TRUMPET |

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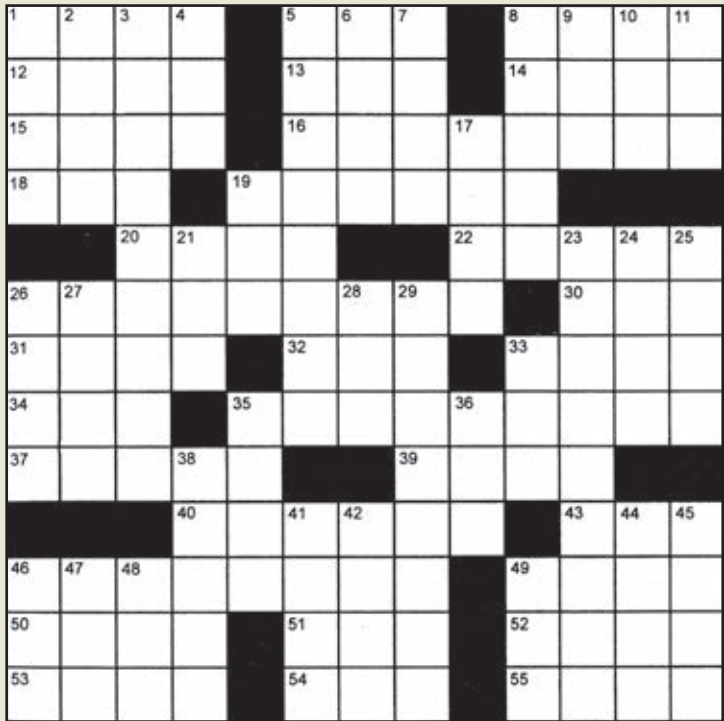
"At the command of the Lord, the children of Israel would journey, and at the command of the Lord they would camp; as long as the cloud stayed above the tabernacle, they remained encamped."

NUMBERS 9:18

CHRISTIAN Crossword

ACROSS

- 1. Mount ____; Moses died here. (Deut. 34:1)
- 5. He hath spread a ____ for my feet. (Lam. 1:13)
- 8. Mine entrance.
- 12. Above the top.
- 13. Boat paddle.
- 14. He ____ witness unto the truth. (John 5:33)
- 15. Gentle.
- 16. First one.
- 18. Samuel's mentor. (1 Sam. 3:1)
- 19. Still on the market.
- 20. We have seen His star in the _____. (Matt. 2:2)
- 22. Ancient Greek storyteller.
- 26. Returned to.
- 30. Time period.
- 31. Affirm.
- 32. Optimum. (for short)
- 33. There shall come a ____ out of Jacob. (Num. 24:17)
- 34. Company top dog. (abbr.)
- 35. Arguable.
- 37. ____ Oakley.
- 39. Why beholdest thou the ____ that is in thy brother's eye? (Matt. 7:3)
- 40. ____ yourselves therefore to God. (James 4:7)
- 43. When thou wast under the ____ tree, I saw thee. (John 1:48)
- 46. From the beginning of the ____ God made them male and female. (Mark 10:6)
- 49. I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a _____. (John 1:32)



By Lee Esch Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- 50. Gasoline.
- 51. Digit.
- 52. To stuff.
- 53. Jail unit.
- 54. For Christ is the ____ of the law. (Rom. 10:4)
- 55. Part of the eye.
- DOWN
- 1. Alaska city.
- 2. Why, what ____ hath he done? (Matt. 27:23)
- 3. ____ the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. (Acts 16:31; 2 words)
- 4. Fort ____; former California Army base.
- 5. Midday.
- 6. He that hath ____ to hear, let him hear. (Matt. 11:15)
- 7. Threesome.
- 8. ____ in Me, and I in you. (John 15:4)
- 9. One of the 12 tribes of Israel.
- 10. Private old age fund. (abbr.)
- 11. Telephone. (abbr.)
- 17. I will be ____ in the

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.



UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

State Convention Annual Meeting

Make plans now to attend our annual family reunion of Alabama Baptists! The State Convention Annual Meeting will be held on Tuesday and Wednesday, Nov. 11–12, at Whitesburg Baptist Church in Huntsville.

This year's theme will be Compelled, based on 2 Corinthians 5:14.

Highlighting the gathering will be A Celebration of Missions on Tuesday evening, featuring a message from Jeff Iorg, president of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, and music from the Whitesburg worship ministry.

Other messages throughout the two-day celebration include the President's Address by Craig Carlisle, director of missions at Etowah Association, on Tuesday morning, and the Convention Sermon by Andy John King, pastor of Lindsay Lane Baptist Church in Athens, on Wednesday morning.

For more information or to pre-register, visit alsbom.org/convention or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



In addition, three theme interpretation times will highlight various ways Alabama Baptists are compelled by Christ's love to reach and serve others.

Plan also to stop by the exhibit hall to visit with state missionaries, along with state and SBC entity leaders, and see firsthand how your Cooperative Program giving is making a difference around the world.

Messenger pre-registration is already open. For registration information, a complete schedule, hotel options and more, visit alsbom.org/convention.

Saints Alive for senior adults: Oct. 23

Saints Alive, a free event for senior adults, will be held Oct. 23 at First Baptist Church Prattville.

The event — formerly called Abundant Living — will feature great gospel music and messages from Dennis Swanberg and Bob Smith.

Frank Jones will provide

pre-service music and lead congregational singing.

The event will be held from 9:15 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. with a break for lunch on your own from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

The event is free. Registration is encouraged. Register at alsbom.org/saints-alive.

Faith Moments

8 encouraging trends in evangelism

Since stepping into the role as director of evangelism last year, I have devoted time to studying evangelistic trends. I am encouraged by developments that are emerging across our state and nation. After years of decline, there is a renewed emphasis on and excitement about evangelism.

Below are eight significant trends shaping the current landscape:

1. Evangelism is back in focus. For too long, evangelism has been on the “back burner” in many of our churches. Thankfully, the pendulum is swinging back. Evangelism is once again “in vogue,” especially among younger believers who are rediscovering the joy of boldly sharing Christ.

2. Digital evangelism is expanding. From text messages to TikTok, digital platforms are being used to share the gospel one-on-one in ways

unimaginable just a few years ago. Even artificial intelligence is being explored as a tool for personalized evangelism and discipleship. Digital spaces are no longer optional; they are becoming a frontline missions field.

3. Crusade-type evangelism is rising again. I once assumed that evangelistic “crusades” or “celebrations” had faded into history. I was wrong. Mass evangelistic movements are reemerging — not only in Africa and Asia but also across the U.S. and the Global North. From stadium gatherings to coordinated regional campaigns, large-scale proclamation is alive and growing.

4. “Cold-turkey” evangelism is returning. On college campuses and in public spaces, believers are again stepping out to engage strangers with the gospel. Ask our Alabama Baptist campus ministers and they’ll

tell you: students are boldly going into the highways and byways, initiating gospel conversations with those they have never met.

5. Relationships with intentionality are returning. For years, “building a relationship” was sometimes used as an excuse to avoid witnessing. Today’s young believers are reclaiming relational evangelism with purpose. They are building authentic friendships with the clear intent of sharing Christ with those they love.

6. Emphasis on the Holy Spirit is being renewed. The Spirit never left, but at times churches have treated Him as the “red-headed stepchild of the Trinity.” A new generation is seeking Him afresh ... through fasting, prayer and openness to His leading. Spirit-led evangelism is marked by boldness, authenticity and a hunger for revival.

7. Genuine repentance is being emphasized. Evangelism today is not about shallow decisions but about authentic transformation. The focus is shifting toward life-change that reflects genuine repentance and long-term discipleship.

8. God as Creator is the starting point. We live in a post-Christian culture where many lack a basic biblical framework. Effective evangelism increasingly requires starting at the very beginning — introducing God as Creator before proclaiming Him as Redeemer.

To say I am encouraged by the emerging evangelism trends is a vast understatement. I am thrilled! I hope you are excited as well. God is moving in Alabama. To God alone receive all the glory!

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



Sponsored Content

Simplifying Medicare — With Someone Who Cares

By Abigail Jackson Bradford

Medicare can feel overwhelming — so many choices, deadlines, and details. **The good news?** You don’t have to walk this path alone. My name is Abigail Jackson Bradford, and *I would love to help you navigate Medicare with confidence.*

Why I’m Here

Some of you know my father, Rob Jackson, who has served Alabama Baptists for decades. *Like him, I have a love for Alabama Baptists and want my work to reflect trust, integrity, and a servant’s heart.*

From a young age, he taught me the importance of finishing well, and I feel called to help you be taken care of, so you can finish this race without stress or worry. That is why I am grateful to be working with our former chairman of deacons at River Valley Senior Solutions.

My Commitment to You

- **Personal guidance.** You are not alone! I’ll walk with you step by step.
- **Someone you trust.** I specialize in making Medicare simple.
- **Protection from mistakes.** I’ll help you avoid costly missteps and missed deadlines.
- **Options tailored to you.** I represent multiple companies, allowing you to find the best plan for your needs.
- **Peace of mind.** Together, we’ll make decisions you feel good about.
- **Ongoing support.** I’ll be here this year — and in the years to come.



Let’s Get Started

The Medicare Annual Enrollment period is approaching (October 15–December 7). If you would like to set a time on my calendar now, please reach out to me.

I would love to get to know you. Let me walk with you, for you, always.

Call or text me today at 256-476-4211 or email Abigail@thervss.com

For official information about Medicare, visit [Medicare.gov](https://www.medicare.gov) or call 1-800-MEDICARE.

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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

CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR

Southside Baptist Church (Fayette, Alabama) is prayerfully searching for our next senior pastor. Our current pastor is retiring after 26 years of faithfulness. Please submit your resumé to: Stephen Fulmer at Sfulmer@centurytel.net or 1820 Cone Street NW, Fayette, AL 35555.

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.

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

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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 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 YOUTH MINISTER

The Hueytown Baptist Church is a mid-sized congregation located in the Birmingham metro area. We are in search of a bivocational youth minister to join our staff and work with our youth team and volunteers to help the youth of our church and community become, grow, and engage as dis-

ciples of Jesus Christ. Interested applicants may reply to: office@hueytownbaptist.com.

WORSHIP/MUSIC LEADER

Pine Grove Baptist Church, Bay Minette, Alabama, is seeking a full-time worship/music leader. Please send resumé to: pgbm-baptist@gmail.com or mail to: 42240 Pine Grove Road, Bay Minette, AL 36507.

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY DIRECTOR

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Persecuted church

Man puts faith in Jesus, kicks addiction — then, parents shun him

A drug addict whose life transformed when he recently put his faith in Jesus has been shunned by his parents and rendered homeless.

According to Christian Daily International-Morning Star News, the 20-year-old man put faith in Jesus on April 20 after an underground Somali pastor spent the day with him explaining about God and the love and sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The convert left his addiction and returned to his Muslim parents May 17.

After a couple of days, the parents inquired about his change. When the man gave credit to his faith in Jesus, his father told him to leave and never return, the man said.

Judges make surprise ruling in Indonesian church's case

A local government's forcible closure of a worship site earlier this year has been overturned in a surprising court decision in Indonesia. Administrative court judges overturned the March 19 decision of Jombang Regency Government that Good God Church vacate its space in Indonesia's East Java province, Morning Star News reports, quoting KBRN radio.

Abducted evangelist freed; another still captive

A Christian evangelist abducted in May in Nigeria has been released, while another remains captive.

Leaders of the Nigeria-based ministry Nupe Missions report that the captors of Ojo John, 33, released him May 26, states Christian Daily International-Morning Star News. Abducted along with John was Silvanus Abu, 26.

Hundreds in Indonesia protest church's construction

Even though an Indonesian church has been granted the appropriate construction permit, hundreds protested at the site, saying they were not allowed a voice in the planning process. Video clips from July 5 show hundreds of Muslims protesting construction of Studio Alam Batak Kato Protestant Church in Kalibaru village in Indonesia's West Java province, reported Morning Star News.

"Demonstrators claimed they were not religiously intolerant but upset that church leaders failed to communicate enough regarding construction plans, according to Tri-bunneesdepok.com.

Five Christians slain in attack upon Nigerian church

Five Christians were slain and three others wounded in an attack upon a Nigerian church.

Christian Daily International-Morning Star News reports that the deaths and injuries resulted from a raid at a Bible study and prayer service July 11 at a church in Nigeria's Kaduna state.

Officials raze church building without prior notice

Leaders of a church in Khartoum North, Sudan, received no prior notice before authorities razed the building, according to sources.

Morning Star News reported that bulldozers demolished a Pentecostal church in the



MS photo

This church building was demolished in Khartoum North, Sudan, on July 8.

El-Haj Yousif area of Khartoum North on July 8. Police and members of the armed forces were on site during the destruction.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide

noted that the church, whose building dated to the early 1990s, is part of the Sudan Pentecostal Church denomination.

Efforts to study Pakistan's blasphemy laws suspended

A court order to form a government inquiry commission to investigate misuse of Pakistan's blasphemy laws was suspended less than two weeks after the order was issued. The effort had been hailed by attorneys for the accused as a "huge ray of hope."

Christian Daily International-Morning Star News says the July 15 court order mandated that the government establish the panel within 30 days and complete its work within four months.

Nigerians hold day of prayer for the persecuted

Nigerian Christians, who face escalating persecution in their country, devoted a special time in July for prayer.

Christian Daily International-Morning Star News reports that Christians in Bassa County in Nigeria's Plateau state gathered at worship centers July 9 and "prayed for relief and strength."



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W M U
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Oasis tour offers refreshment, renewal

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Each summer and fall, many senior adults in the Birmingham area as well as in other states in the Southeast look forward to spending an afternoon full of entertainment and inspiration, courtesy of Frank Jones, president of Frank Jones Ministries and senior adult ministry strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Through the years, Jones has been involved with regional and national senior adult Christian conferences with world-class entertainment.

"I wanted to create an event locally with that same caliber of talent — but just a one-afternoon event for senior adults who maybe can enjoy that level of talent but not have to go out of town [because] a lot of senior adults can't drive at night," Jones said.

Originally named "Glory," the event is now called "Oasis" because an oasis is a place to be refreshed and renewed.

"My goal is for everybody who attends to leave refreshed, renewed and with their spirits revived," Jones said.

Even the pandemic didn't stop Oasis. The Birmingham show that year featured Dennis Swanberg. When it had to be rescheduled due to COVID-19, Jones thought they should livestream the event. Swanberg disagreed.

"He said, 'Well, consider having people there.' I said OK and so we did, and we ended up having maybe 500 to 600 there. For some of us, it was really the first time out. We spread people all across the sanctuary, and we had a great day," Jones said.

This year's lineup

This year's Oasis lineup for the sold-out Birmingham event, held on July 31, featured Mark Lowry and Endless Highway. Some of the past artists for the Birmingham show were Allison Speer, Debbie Childers, Mickey Bell, Guy Penrod and Dennis Swanberg.

The Oasis schedule for the rest of 2025 includes:



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Frank Jones brings a young man onstage during his Oasis show July 31 at First Baptist Church Trussville. The Birmingham event featuring Mark Lowry and Endless Highway was sold out.

► Oasis Fort Worth, featuring Dennis Swanberg and Allison Speer on Oct. 5 at Wedgwood Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas.

► Oasis Olive Branch, featuring Karen Peck & New River and Debbie Childers on Oct. 20 at Longview Heights Baptist Church in Olive Branch, Mississippi.

Though Oasis is promoted mainly through Baptist churches, 150 churches on average are represented from many different denomina-

tions, spread by word of mouth through the years.

"For so long senior adults have been put on the back burner, and I want senior adults to feel like they're important. After serving as a senior adult minister for a few years in Tuscaloosa, I realize there

are just so many museums you can go to," Jones said.

Even though the afternoon is God-centered, it's "not a heavy day." Even the times that Oasis features a singer or musical group, Jones always includes humor. Nationally known comedian Dennis Swanberg and Birmingham-area locals Mickey Bell and Debbie Childers are some of the artists Jones invites to offer the attendees the gift of laughter.

Not only has Jones given this blessing to many older adults, but he has been blessed by Oasis as well.

One year they were scheduled to do an Oasis event at First Baptist Church Orange Beach. After a fire destroyed that sanctuary just two weeks before the event, Jones called a friend at Romar Beach Baptist Church in Orange Beach and asked if they could hold the event there.

When the day came, it was storming outside. This sanctuary was not only located on the beach, but across the back of the stage was a clear glass window. So while Squire Parsons was performing, a tumultuous but beautiful scene of the ocean in full force heightened the impact of his worship.

"He was singing one of his songs, 'Master of the Sea.' As he was singing that song and then seeing the huge waves, hearing the thunder and

seeing the lightning, I was moved to tears — for our Lord is truly the Master of the sea. Squire had no idea what was going on behind him. It was truly a special moment," Jones said.

Other events

For those who can't attend Oasis, Jones, an accomplished pianist and worship leader, also hosts SINGFEST and Saints Alive events throughout the year. Go to <https://alsbom.org/organizer/frank-jones/> for more information on those events.

For any church wanting to book an Oasis event for area senior adults, please contact Jones at fjm1117@gmail.com or call 205-393-7020.



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EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Sunday School Lessons

By Robert Olsen, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



For September 21

THE LAND Numbers 13:17–31

The Task Outlined (17–20)

The Israelites left Egypt and headed to the promised land. God spoke to Moses in the Tent of Meeting (Ex. 33:11) and instructed the Israelites to follow Moses. God told Moses to send out 12 spies — one from each tribe — into the land of Canaan to scout it out.

While we do not have the luxury of a modern Moses giving us instructions on how to carry out God’s will, we have God’s Word and also the Holy Spirit within us. The Bible clearly tells us how we ought to live our lives, and God also reveals His will to us in prayer. When we pray, God leads us through the Holy Spirit and often nudges us toward certain actions.

The Land Assessed (21–25)

Even though God had promised the land to the Israelites, He still told them to spy out the land. God could have easily just told them to go in and take the land, but instead they were required to scout the land. This shows us that when God tells us to do something, we need to listen and obey. It does not mean that He does not expect us to do our part.

God teaches us many lessons in being obedient. God may tell us to take a certain job or travel to a certain location for missions work or even to go across the street to our neighbors.

Sometimes, the Holy Spirit tells us to obey immediately. Other times, we need to be patient and do our part. It might mean we need to study more, work on our education or learn more about a family or people group before going.

God often teaches us through the process of obedience. Christians are sometimes prone to being lazy and wanting the easy way to sanctification. We might think God will make all the obstacles disappear.

While this is a possibility, we need to work on moving obstacles through the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

The history of missions is filled with Christians who obey God in going to other countries but then doing the work of

learning cultural differences and connections for the gospel.

“But Caleb quieted the people before

Moses and said,

‘Let us go up at once and occupy it.’”

Numbers 13:30

The Decision at Hand (26–31)

When the scouts returned from their journey, they relayed to the people what they saw — that the land

was indeed good and plentiful, but the people who lived in the land were giants, and it would be impossible to take the land from them. Only Joshua and Caleb had the faith to take the land because they trusted in God’s promises.

This is a good lesson for us today. God often asks us to do things that are not easy or simple. For example, being a pastor requires a lot of time and study. Being a Sunday School teacher requires research and patience. Yet in spite of this, we can trust God’s promises that He will work through us to accomplish His goals.

All Christians have a calling on our lives, whether it be a job or our position in our family as a grandparent, parent or child. God has duties for us and in the doing of these duties, we mature as Christians. We can be sure we will face trials in our lives, but we can be confident that God will give us the strength to accomplish what He has called us to do.

For September 28

REBELLION AND JUDGMENT Numbers 14:11–24

God’s Judgment (11–16)

As Christians, our attitudes should not be dictated by our circumstances. Throughout the Bible, we see episodes where God’s people overcome situations that on the surface look impossible. This is because all things are possible with God (Matt. 19:26).

In the Israelites’ case, they were told God would give them the promised land, but instead of believing God they believed the narrative of the spies and trusted in their own senses instead of God’s power.

This lack of trust in the promises of God led to severe consequences for the Israelites.

Even when it may not seem to be the case, God wants what is best for us. This is why we are to continually focus on God and His will for us and not trust our own perception.

Paul says it best when he says, “We do not focus on what is seen but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18).

God’s Glory (17–19)

Because of their sin, God planned on destroying all of the Israelites except for Moses and his family. However, Moses interceded on their behalf and pleaded with God to be merciful toward the Israelites.

In this way, Moses was functioning as a type of Christ, asking God to pardon their sin against a holy and righteous God just as Jesus asked the Father to forgive those who mocked Him at the crucifixion.

This teaches us that we are able to go to the Lord on behalf of others and even for entire nations and plead with God for mercy. It is ap-

propriate that we pray for our leaders and country (see 1 Tim. 2:1–2.) We pray for God to bring peace to nations and raise up godly leaders so that society would benefit from their guidance and not be hindered by it so that the gospel may spread throughout the nations.

Future Consequences (20–24)

God told Moses that the Israelites would not see the promised land because of their sin. It is important to note that even though God forgave them, there were still consequences for their bad attitudes.

This should remind us that even though we repent of sin, there are still repercussions. It is often said that all sin equally separates us from God and this is true, but it is often said with the intent to make all sins equal.

While all sin equally separates us from God, different sins have different consequences. Thinking ill of someone in your heart is a serious problem that Jesus addresses in the Sermon on the Mount, but it is not going to put you in jail.

However, murdering someone will send you to jail, and you may incur the death penalty.

Christians need to always call out sin because this is what separates us from God. It is only because of what Christ has done on the cross that our sins are washed away.

While the Israelites had to depend on Moses to go to God on their behalf and while they were required to bring sacrifices to God to show the severity of sin, we can go to Christ who died in our place, taking the punishment we deserve.

The only solution for sin is Christ, and this is what we need to preach to the people around us.

*“And now, please let the power of the LORD
be great as you have promised...”*

Numbers 14:17

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sunday School Lessons

Chair and Professor, Department of Biblical and Religious Studies at Samford University

By Adam Winn, Ph.D.



For September 21

THE GREATEST SIN Matthew 12:22–32

The work of Christ points to the power of God. (22–23)

This passage begins with unnamed people bringing to Jesus a man possessed by a demon. As a result of the demon possession, the man was both blind and mute. The reader is told that Jesus healed him. While a description of an exorcism is not given, the presumption that the healing takes place through the casting out of the demon is clear.

It is noteworthy that the exorcism of the man is accompanied by the restoration of sight and speaking because this provides greater physical evidence to the onlookers of the absence of the demon.

It should also be remembered from Lesson 1 that Jews at this time associated the healing of blindness as a messianic act. It is no wonder then that the people respond by saying, “Could this be the Son of David?” This name is a messianic reference.

The work of Christ points to the presence of God’s Spirit. (24–29)

This response is contrasted with the response of the Pharisees, who claim that Jesus casts out demons through the power of Beelzebub (Satan). In response, Jesus uses the example of a kingdom and claims that if it is fighting itself, it will surely fail. He then notes that if Satan is now driving out Satan — or the servants of Satan — his kingdom too would fall.

Jesus boldly states the implications that if the Pharisees are wrong — namely, that God’s Spirit is powerfully at work and the Kingdom of God has indeed come! (Again, see Lesson 1 on Isaiah 42 and Matthew’s citation of it in vv. 18–21.) “Kingdom of God” refers to God’s time of restoring both Israel and His creation, a reality that is started at Jesus’ first coming, continues

through God’s Spirit-empowered people and is only fully completed at the Second Coming.

The reference to the binding of the strong man is likely a reference to the total binding of demonic forces that comes with God’s Kingdom.

That Jesus is “binding” Satan and demonic emissaries and plundering that which they have long controlled demonstrates His messianic identity and the real presence of God’s Kingdom.

Willful and persistent unbelief means there will be no forgiveness. (30–32)

These verses are challenging, as Jesus describes an unforgivable sin — the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Because it is unforgivable, many Christians have argued that this must mean a continual rejection of Jesus and His work of salvation. While this is possible, it is unclear how such a reading emerges from the context of this passage.

In the context, the sin seems to be associated with what the Pharisees and scribes have done. Mark’s Gospel makes this clearer. It seems to be associated with falsely — and likely knowingly — attributing the work of the Spirit to demonic forces.

Such an action reveals a heart that refuses to be open to the work of the Spirit. Perhaps such a heart is one that would continue to reject the salvation offered by Jesus. Thus, the common reading noted above may be correct but indirectly so.

To some extent, the exact nature of this unforgivable sin will remain elusive this side of eternity. However, I am comforted by the notion that someone who is worried about having committed such a sin probably hasn’t, as the worry itself demonstrates a heart not yet so hardened.

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

For September 28

THE GREATEST GIFT Romans 5:6–11, 18–21

We receive the gift of God’s love, which is demonstrated by the death of Christ. (6–8)

This text picks up after Paul has discussed the benefits of God’s justification through Christ, which include peace with God and hope of one day sharing in the glory of God (v. 2). But in verse 6, Paul changes direction. He opens by declaring that even while we were weak, Christ died for the ungodly.

Paul emphasizes that humanity is out of line with God’s desire for it and is living according to its own will rather than His, a way of living that results in human frailty and ultimate death.

Yet despite our rebellion, Christ died for us. Paul notes how shocking this is, saying that dying for a righteous person is rare. But God does what no human would do. He sends His Son to die for the wicked, the rebellious, the sinner. Paul is emphasizing the radical nature of God’s love for His lost and broken creation — you and me.

We have the gift of reconciliation in Christ. (9–11)

However, Paul is not simply trying to make a point about how radical God’s love is. He appears to be addressing a concern that existed among his audience that can only be understood by articulating aspects of salvation Paul discusses.

The first aspect is justification, which in many ways refers to the starting point of salvation, including becoming part of God’s people, the forgiveness of one’s sins, the gift of God’s indwelling Spirit and peace with God (reconciliation).

The second aspect is glorification, referred to in verse 2. Glorification refers to the end goal of salvation, namely living as righteous, resurrected followers of God in a new

creation. The question Paul is addressing is this: As God’s justified people, how can we be confident that we will also make it to the state of being His glorified people? They are likely asking this because of the experience of Israel.

They too were God’s people but at this time, the majority of them had rejected God’s Messiah. How can God’s people in Christ have confidence in a better future?

To answer this question, Paul builds on verses 6–8. If while we were sinners God sent his Son to die for us, he asks, how much more now that we are justified by the death of Jesus will we be saved from the wrath of God? Here, “wrath” is likely related to God’s final process of bringing about the new creation, a process that must involve removing all wickedness.

Paul is saying that because we are justified by Christ’s death and have peace with God, we will not be recipients of this removal but instead will participate in the glorious new creation.

Paul then asserts that you who are justified in Christ can have complete confidence that you will also reach glorification in the new creation. God’s radical love for us while we were still sinners is Paul’s proof.

We have the gift of eternal life through Christ. (18–21)

In these verses — which are more complex than can be fully discussed here — Paul makes clear what Christ has brought about through His death and resurrection, particularly in contrast to the reality brought about through the disobedience of Adam.

Whereas Adam’s sin made many sinners and led to their condemnation, Jesus’ obedience and righteousness led to the justification of many. And as Paul argued above, it will lead to their glorification and eternal life.

“But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Romans 5:8

Meeting people 'where they are'

Marketplace chaplain Matt Bostic offers 'church that never sleeps'

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Many might think chaplains only work in hospitals or the military. But what is mostly unknown is a rapidly growing field — marketplace chaplains.

"A lot of people think a pastor is someone that works at a church, preaches on Sunday mornings and shepherds the flock of the local church community," noted Matt Bostic, chaplain and business life coach. "A chaplain is more of a pastor in the marketplace. Whereas maybe 50% of Christians in America go to church on Sunday, 100% go to work on Monday."

"So chaplains have an incredible opportunity to take the pastoral gift into the business marketplace and find their flock to lead in the workforce."

Bostic has been both a pastor and a chaplain. While leading a church he had "a drive, a fire that was lit" in him on Sunday nights. That was frustrating because he wouldn't see most congregants again until the next Sunday, if they even came then.

Building relationships

"So when the world of chaplaincy was opened up to my eyes, I saw the value in being able to be a church that never sleeps," Bostic related. "You get to go meet them where they're at, where they spend a majority of their life — whether it's behind the desk or underneath a truck or in the middle of a steel mill, Monday through Friday."

Building relationships is key, Bostic noted. He makes a point to interact with every employee at each business where he serves, through a simple handshake or really listening when he asks, "How are you?"



Photo courtesy of Matt Bostic
Matt Bostic (left) is a life coach for Sabel Steel in Montgomery, Alabama. He says building relationships is key and makes a point to interact with every employee at each business where he serves.

He said he continually seeking the Holy Spirit for the time and space to let God work is critical.

"You look for that moment when they might have a break in their day and you can tell they wanna talk and just say, 'Hey, Matt, let me tell you what's going on with my family,'" Bostic said.

Marketplace chaplaincy is a good way for a bivocational pastor to continue shepherding a flock while paying the bills by doing what he is already called and gifted to do. It's also an option for those with the heart of a pastor but not necessarily the gift of preaching or leading a church. One unique component of the ministry is learning the human resource aspect. It's necessary to understand how to do ministry without violating company policies or the law. Interactions must be "non-threatening and permission-based."

Chaplains also must know how to

conduct a funeral, officiate a wedding or visit employees who are hospitalized.

"A lot of employees don't have a local church and if someone dies, you're their pastor," Bostic noted. "I've done many, many, many hospital visits this year because the owner of the company said, 'We have a guy — he cut his leg open. He's in ICU, and he doesn't have a local church. Would you go there and pray for him and sit with the family?'"

"And so, you're literally pastoring a business. That's your flock, that's your congregation. You're just not preaching on Sunday morning," Bostic said.

Real care

Bostic recalled that for three months one man wouldn't interact with him, but in the fourth month he needed help. He couldn't find a plumber willing to work on a Saturday.

After contacting Bostic, "He saw that, 'Wow! Man, this guy isn't just walking around preaching at people — he really cares about me. It's Saturday afternoon; he found a plumber and now we're getting a leak fixed.'"

Valuing others

"Today, when I walk into that business it's a 'high five,' 'how you doing?' We're friends. It just goes to show you that people are looking for someone to say, 'You're valuable, you matter to me,'" Bostic said.

Many won't attend church because they aren't "cleaned up." Bostic recalled one employee who apologized for cussing in front of him. He assured him it was OK.

"Smoking, drinking, cussing, whatever — they all feel like, 'I'll get all that fixed up and then I'll go to church,'" Bostic said. "That's just the furthest thing from the truth. That's why church has declined over the years. We've made it feel like, 'You get cleaned up, then you can be around the pastor, then you can lead a small group, then you can sing in the choir. You've got to have a collared shirt and have your shirt tucked in to be able to come in.'"

"God said, 'I love you. I know exactly who you are inside now and I love every part of you that you hate, every part of you that's broken, that's wounded, that's sinful. I don't see that behavior. I see my Son crucified.'"

Bostic noted "that's the fun part of my job," meeting people "where they're at" and letting them know "how valuable they are. There's a real special blessing that comes when you give your life away to other people."