

# The Alabama Baptist

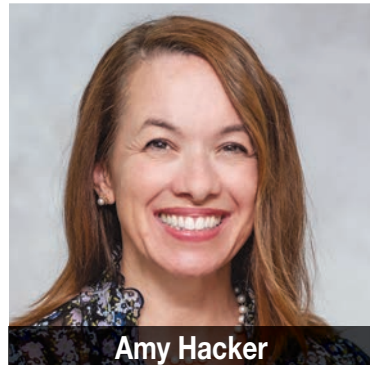
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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



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President and Editor-in-Chief



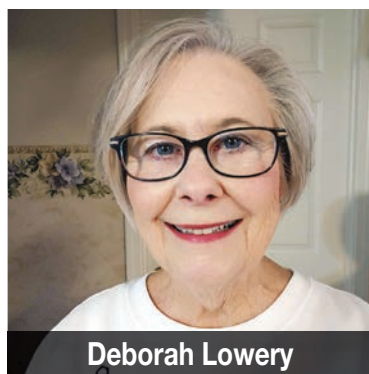
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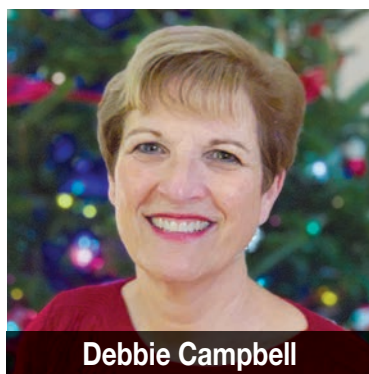
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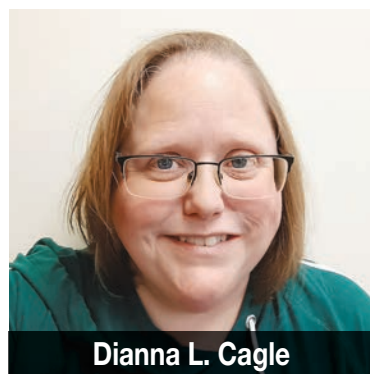
**Daniel Gilliland**



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**Debbie Campbell**



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**Grace Thornton**

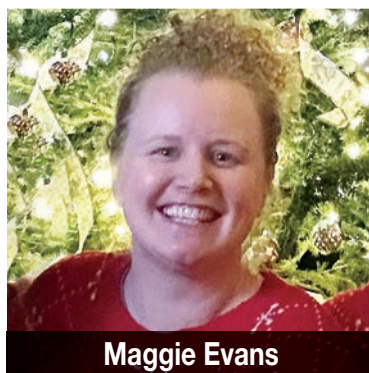
*Merry Christmas* FROM TAB MEDIA GROUP



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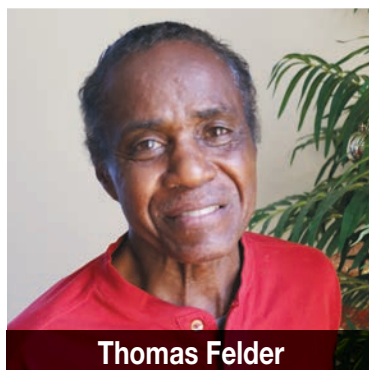
**Sarah Gill**



**Shawn Hendricks**



**Susan Stevens**



**Thomas Felder**



“THIS IS HOW GOD SHOWED HIS LOVE AMONG US:  
HE SENT HIS ONE AND ONLY SON INTO THE WORLD  
THAT WE MIGHT LIVE THROUGH HIM.” *1 John 4:9-10*

# ‘Consider it all joy’

## Alabama church planter in Montana grateful for prayers, ‘cancer free’ report

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

Chris Baker said this holiday season has been extra special for one main reason — he wasn’t sure he would live to see it.

Baker, who moved from Alabama to Montana with his family in 2014 to plant Summit Life Church in Whitefish, was diagnosed in December 2024 with pancreatic cancer. He underwent treatment, but the prognosis wasn’t good — the tumor was wrapped around his mesenteric artery, and that meant it wasn’t operable.

That is, until it was. In July, after a week of intense radiation, he learned that the cancer had shrunk enough for the surgery to happen at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore.

So his team went in to remove the tumor — and the operation was successful.

“I am four months past surgery, and all indications are cancer free,” Baker said. “What a year it has been watching God direct our steps and going from no chance of surgery with Stage 3 pancreatic cancer to a surgeon in Baltimore that only does pancreatic surgeries that involves arteries and veins. Not only was the surgery successful, but God has so knitted all the pieces back



Photo courtesy of Chris Baker

### CHRIS AND KIM BAKER

together that a new normal life is possible.”

He thanked Alabama Baptists for praying for him.

### ‘Praise be to God’

“It was a year ago today that I was laying in a hospital bed and the doctor came in and said, ‘We’re sorry to let you know that you have pancreatic cancer,’” Baker said in a Facebook video Dec. 5 alongside his wife, Kim. “We have seen the faithfulness of the Lord in such a

real way this past year. From inoperable to maybe six more months to live to here I am a year later. ... Last scans and bloodwork, no evidence of disease. Praise be to God.”

Throughout the past year, he has regularly shared videos on Facebook encouraging others to trust God’s love for them in the midst of hard times.

“This last year has been a dark valley, and we’d just like to come and encourage you. Maybe you’re walking through a season that is dark and heavy,” Baker said in his Dec. 5 post. “Keep walking, keep trusting. ... We know those long dark nights, we know the hopelessness of the moment on this side of eternity, but we just want to encourage you today to consider it all joy.”

Baker said on the nights when he thought he might not see the morning, he knew God was with him.

“I am not yet what I want to be, and certainly not all that God desires of me, but today I am better than I was before,” he said.

“Though my body bears the marks of a fallen creature, my soul bears the marks of the Master’s chisel.”

God might not change the circumstance, but He “changes us,” Baker said. “I know that He has changed us this year for His glory.”

## Churches highlight Lottie Moon in various ways



Photo by Sammy Taylor/Mountain View Baptist Church in Phil Campbell

Churches across the state have been celebrating Lottie Moon season in a variety of ways this month, and offerings for international missions are coming in alongside the promotions.

Some churches set up displays such as the one shown here from Mountain View Baptist Church in Phil Campbell, where Sammy Taylor is pastor.

Others work with their youth and children’s ministries to sell items to raise funds for the offering. Lottie’s tea cakes (as shown in the December Kids Edition of The Baptist Paper) or a “Latte Moon” coffee cart (see story, page 3) are two ideas.

For more information on Lottie Moon, visit [tinyurl.com/tab-lmco](http://tinyurl.com/tab-lmco). (The Alabama Baptist)

### 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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#### TAB Media Group among top in nation

The newspapers, online content and other media offerings produced by TAB Media Group continue to be honored among the top in the nation in the Christian market and in the state’s general market. Best in Class, Awards of Excellence and other top awards have been earned by team members every year for nearly 30 years.



The crossword puzzle  
can be found on page 17.

**OPINION**

**RASHIONAL  
THOUGHTS**

**Seasonal reminder  
to relax into the  
fullness of His grace**

**By Jennifer Davis Rash**  
President and Editor-in-Chief, The Alabama Baptist

**G**od loved us so much that He became one of us for a time (Jesus). He modeled how to live for Him and made sure we would never be alone. He left His spirit with us — for those who believe,

confess and relinquish control.

Believing is more than wishful or hopeful; it is absolute confidence

and trust that God is who He says He is, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that the Holy Spirit becomes part of us upon our belief.

Confessing means we acknowledge we have made decisions contrary to God’s perfect will and that we struggle to put Him and others before ourselves.

**Following God**

From there, relinquishing control falls right in line as we give our heart and lives to God so we can follow where He would have us go and what He would have us do. It’s grasping with complete understanding Jesus’ sacrifice — giving His life for us — on the cross, resurrection and ascension into Heaven.

As we mark the birth of our Savior through the Christmas season, let’s relax into the fullness of His grace through faith and allow His light to shine as we go — showcasing peace, love, joy and hope.



**Girls at FBC Selma use ‘Latte Moon’ coffee cart to raise money for missions offering**

**By Grace Thornton**  
The Alabama Baptist

**A** Girls in Action group at First Baptist Church Selma turned into tiny baristas recently to raise money for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering.

With their “Latte Moon” coffee cart, they served coffee and breakfast treats to Sunday School classes for three weeks in a row, accepting donations for the missions offering in return.

They were able to raise \$2,300.

Pastor Tim Mathis said their efforts fit right in with the church’s desire in recent years to get reengaged with missions work around the world.

“They worked hard and had a blast,” Mathis said. “It was a great opportunity for them to serve, and the classes loved seeing them come around. They’re hoping our girls will continue to have the opportunity to do something like this on a more regular basis.”



Photo courtesy of FBC Selma

GAs at FBC Selma found a great way to be a part of the church’s growing missions focus through their coffee cart fundraiser, according to pastor Tim Mathis. He said the church hopes the effort will continue.



Photo courtesy of FBC Selma



Photo courtesy of FBC Selma

EmmaLee-Tyler Mathis (left) and Mary Dunkin Allred (right) display some donations they received from the coffee cart. Together the group raised \$2,300 through their efforts for international missions.



Photo courtesy of FBC Selma

GAs said they felt like baristas as they took their “Latte Moon” coffee cart around to Sunday School classes.



Photo courtesy of FBC Selma

# Your Voice



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

## First person: I'll be home for Christmas

By **Brandon Bramlett**

Pastor, Bandana Baptist Church in Kentucky

"I'll Be Home for Christmas" is one of the most pleasant and beloved songs of the Christmas season. Although its popularity was revived in recent years by artist Michael Bublé, the holiday classic was born back in 1924 when it was composed by J. Kimball Gannon, a graduate of St. Lawrence University in New York. However, Bing Crosby is responsible for stirring Americans to fall in love with this enchanting oldie.

### Amid the 'nightmare of war'

During the 1940s, an unsettled and discouraged America heard his captivating voice sing the words:

*"Christmas Eve will find me/  
Where the love light gleams/ I'll be  
home for Christmas/ If only in my  
dreams."*

Americans resonated with these words because they were dreaming not of a white Christmas, but of the day when their husbands and sons would come home from war in Europe and Japan.

Our soldiers overseas wanted nothing more than to go home, and lonely mothers and wives hoped for this as well. Nevertheless, as the nightmare of war raged on, the Christmas miracle of going home for the holidays was an unfulfilled dream.

Home is a Christmas symbol — being with family, exchanging



Unsplash.com

gifts and eating 'round the table. As another classic says, "There's no place like home for the holidays."

However, many people cannot go home for Christmas, and maybe you can relate.

### Home in heaven

Perhaps you are too far away to go home for Christmas. Maybe you have been ostracized from your home for believing in Christ or for some other reason. It may be that your home is lonelier this year because you have lost family and friends in death. Maybe you have no home at all,

like Naomi and Ruth of the Old Testament (Ruth 1:1–22).

The good news of Christmas is that you can have a home — a home in heaven — because Christ the Lord left His home in heaven.

The Son of God came to earth, lived a righteous life and endured God's holy wrath to secure a place for you on Canaan's happy shore. When you trust wholly in His finished work for your eternal salvation, He promises that you will have, "a house not made with hands, (but one) eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1b).

And one day, your dream of going home to heaven will become a reality.

"No illustrations are better than Scripture, and your study of Scripture means Scripture should be 'dripping off' you," said **Robert Smith Jr.**, former professor of Christian preaching at Beeson Divinity School for more than 25 years, where he held the Charles T. Carter Baptist Chair of Divinity. "Use Scripture with excellence to tell the story of redemption."

"I think everyone loves going to the mailbox, and kids get excited when something is there for them," said **Matthew Jacobs**, senior pastor of Elkdale Baptist Church in Selma, Alabama, said of the Kids Edition. "It gives them something to work on that is God-based and opens gospel conversations."

Our help is in the name of the Lord, maker of Heaven and Earth. —Psalm 124:8

**Dan Darling**

@dandarling on X

What to do when your kids aren't walking with Jesus:

1. Pray without ceasing.
2. Remember that God loves them even more than you do.
3. Don't compromise your faith, but also don't argue about it.
4. Don't burn a bridge, so they have a path back.
5. Point to Jesus when possible.

**Shane Pruitt**

@shane\_pruitt78 on X



BRAMLETT

Share online or email [news@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:news@thealabamabaptist.org)

“We weren’t meant to be somebody.  
We were meant to know somebody.”

JOHN PIPER  
Author, Bible teacher

Why focus on “Calling Out the Called”?

▶ In 1992, the median age of pastors was 44; today, that number is 54, and the number of pastors under 40 is 15%. There are more full-time pastors over the age of 65 than under the age of 40.

▶ AP reported in a fall 2023 survey that 4 out of 10 pastors are seriously considering leaving their congregation, and more than 50% have considered leaving the ministry since the pandemic.

▶ About 60% of churches in Alabama have a bivocational pastor, and the average age is 51.

▶ 520 (17%) churches in Alabama are without a pastor. 480 of those have less than 100 in attendance.

Visit [callingoutthecalldal.org](http://callingoutthecalldal.org) for more information.

As we wrap up this year, the world may feel overwhelming, but with a few small steps we can remind one another that normalcy and neighborliness are not just possible but essential.

Values such as faith, family, community and patriotism used to unite Americans despite our many differences, and they can again.

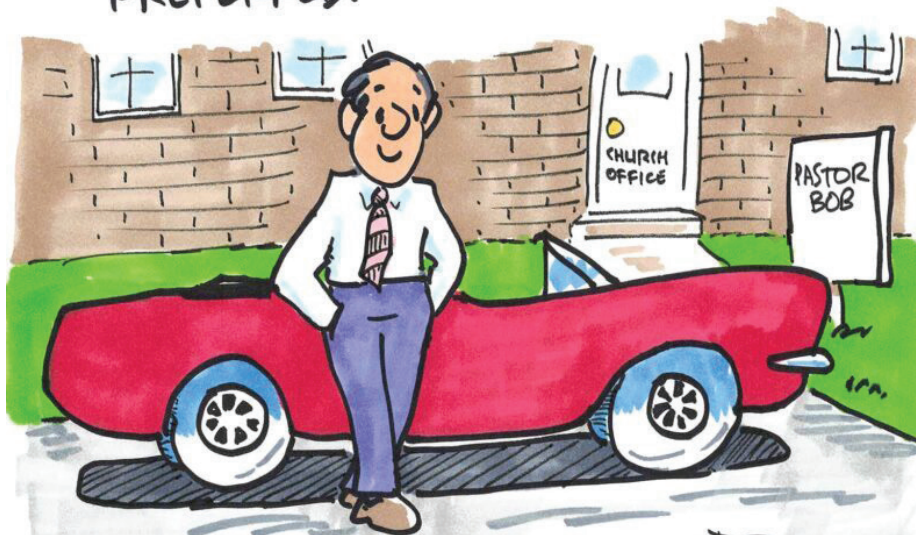
The timeless emblem of the myrtle wreath symbolizes fidelity, and with this post I pledge to pray for my neighbors, cherish my family and promote the truth in every situation.

I choose humility before God and love for my neighbor, because I want a better future for us all.

**Bryan LeSturgeon**

Senior pastor  
Hillside Baptist Church,  
Phoenix, Ariz., on Facebook

THE BIG ISSUE AT CHURCH THIS MONTH WAS WHAT TO GIVE THE PASTOR FOR CHRISTMAS. SOME SAID A HOLY LAND TRIP. OTHERS SUGGESTED BOOKS OR A STUDY LEAVE. FINALLY WHEN THEY COULD NOT AGREE, THEY DECIDED TO ASK HIM WHICH HE PREFERRED.



Merry Christmas, Pastor!

# Lass WORDS

BY KEN LASS  
The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

## What my grandson taught me while playing video games

I am sitting on the sofa next to my 4-year-old grandson. We are playing the Mario Kart video game. It’s a car-racing game featuring digital vehicles you get to design and operate. The course has many hazards and pitfalls, and the cars are armed with various weapons you can use to slow down your opponent.

My grandson is killing me. Even at his young age, he has a real feel for this technology. He toys with me. He lets me lead him until just before we get to the finish line. Then he unleashes a bomb or a lightning bolt that blows me off the track, while he cruises across the line in first place. This happens over and over.

### Determined to win

I started out letting him win because that’s what grampas do. But it soon became evident he didn’t need my help.

After losing several races, I became determined to beat this little rascal. I gripped the controller tightly, stared at the screen intensely, my thumbs pounding the buttons, my body swaying and ducking in tandem with my car on the screen.

It was no use. He was just too good. I couldn’t believe I was unable to defeat somebody who had not yet learned to read.

After yet another loss, I dropped the controller out of frustration and said, “I quit.”

I’ll never forget the expression on my grandson’s face. He flashed me a sympathetic smile, and in the sweetest tone of voice ever, he chirped, “Please play one more race with me Grampa. I’ll let you win.”

And he did.

### Grace from a 4-year-old

Imagine that. Grace from a 4-year-old. He saw that I was unhappy, and something inside of him wanted to make it right. Maybe it was just a ploy to get me to keep playing.

But I want to believe it was the Spirit of God deep inside, manifesting itself as spontaneous love and empathy.

I pray every day that as he grows up this gift will flourish through his personality.

We played several more times, and I won a few. I know he let me win. He knows it too.

### Christian love

He can’t tie his own shoes, but he can role model Christian love for me. I only hope I can learn it well.

## 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

### JEFF MEYERS

Jeff Meyers, pastor of First Baptist Church Opelika, died unexpectedly Dec. 4.

“As a church family, we grieve this tremendous loss together, even as we hold tightly to the hope and promise of eternal life in Christ that Pastor Jeff preached so faithfully,” the staff and deacons shared Dec. 5.

“Pastor Jeff served our church with unwavering devotion, compassion and humility. His love for God and for people was evident in every sermon he preached, every prayer he prayed and every conversation he shared. His absence will be deeply felt, yet his legacy of faithfulness and love will continue to shape our community for years to come.”



MEYERS

Meyers, a native of Desoto, Texas, joined the FBC Opelika staff in 2016. Also an author, he served more than 30 years as a pastor and evangelist. He held degrees from Baylor University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Along with his role as pastor, Meyers spent time answering questions regarding the Bible, Christianity and faith at youth camps, on the radio and special live events. “Admittedly, his favorite time of the week was the weekly question and answer Bible study he hosted before a live audience titled ‘Ask Jeff,’” according to staff and deacons.

Meyers is survived by his wife, Traci, and three sons, Marshall, George and Jonathan.

### BARBOUR ASSOCIATION

► **Pine Level Baptist Church, Louisville**, celebrated its 150th anniversary Oct. 11–12. Saturday’s community-wide event featured music by the Griffith Family and David Ashley, fun activities, food and more.

Sunday’s worship was led by music minister Leamon Littlefield and the Griffith Family. Jim Campbell, a former member and current pastor of Bay West Church, Palm Bay, Florida, was the guest preacher. Pastor Russell Hagler (left) accepted a plaque on behalf of the church from Jane Hughes



Photo by Ellen Dewberry

(right), a commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. A fellowship meal was served following the service.

### COLBERT-LAUDERDALE ASSOCIATION

► **Central Baptist Church, Florence**, celebrated its 125th anniversary Nov. 23. Long-time members Richard and Shirley Thornton recounted the church’s history and its commitment to missions. Central, together with Florence First Baptist Church, launched Highland Baptist Church, Florence. Pastor Todd Wilson (right) accepted a plaque on behalf of the church presented by Jimmy Austin (left), a commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Austin expressed his gratitude for being a part of the service, noting his membership at Highland Baptist, and thanked Central for being a missions-minded congregation.



Photo by Amelia Wilson

### DALE ASSOCIATION

► **Camp Ground Baptist Church, Ozark**, celebrated its 175th anniversary Sept. 28. Al Sonanstone, a former pastor, was the guest preacher, and Chris Woodall, another former pastor, led in prayer and recounted the history of the church. Former music minister Johnny Anderson led the congregation in singing several hymns, and Jennifer Henry led in contemporary songs.



Photo by Ellen Dewberry

Annie Myrl Dansby, age 97, was recognized as the oldest member. The church received a resolution from Gov. Kay Ivey and a commemorative plaque from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented by commissioner Jane Hughes, with pastor Merril Henry and the 175th Committee accepting the plaque. Pictured are (l to r) Hughes, Henry, Nancy Leatherwood, Debbie Bolden, Carolyn Sue Johnson and Cindy Brasher. Photos and other historical memorabilia were on display including a 1957 Chevy and a 1928 Ford Roadster parked in front of the church.

### FAYETTE COUNTY ASSOCIATION

► **Bethel Baptist Church, Fayette**, celebrated its 175th anniversary Nov. 16. The Vaughn Family were the guest musicians leading in worship. Billy Carl Sullivan gave a testimony and John Killian, director of missions for Fayette County Baptist Association, shared the historical significance of Bethel. The church was honored with a presentation by David Nelson, a commissioner



Photo by David Nelson

with the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Pictured with pastor Bill Sullivan (center) are brothers Gary (left) and Jerry Trimm, who have attended the church their entire lives and currently are the longest tenured deacons in the church.

### LIMESTONE ASSOCIATION

► **Piney Grove Baptist Church, Ardmore**, celebrated its 175th anniversary Nov. 9. During the service video greetings were shown from three former pastors: Joe Plunkett, Ray Stonycpher and Aaron Armstrong, who also gave the closing prayer. Additional special guests included former interim pastor Joey Savell, who led the opening prayer of the service. Special music was provided by the choir. Sue McWhorter (left), a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented a commemorative plaque with pastor Adam Mikel (right) accepting on behalf of the church.



Photo by Allena Fogg

### MOBILE BAPTIST NETWORK

► **Smithtown Baptist Church, Eight Mile**, celebrated its 125th anniversary and homecoming Nov. 9. Special guests included former pastors Tom Boone; Dennis Singletary, who was the guest preacher; and Bobby Morton, who presented a certificate to the church on behalf of Mobile Baptist Network. Interim pastor Charles



Photo by Paul Rone

Brown (left) accepted a plaque on behalf of the church from Susan Walker (right), a commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. A video presentation and highlights of the church’s history were shared, and special music was provided by Mattelyn Neighbors, a guest violinist. Also participating in the

celebration were members of Holy Hill Church, Eight Mile, who share the facility, along with their pastor, Tim Steiner, and music leader, Will Edmonds.

### MORGAN ASSOCIATION

► **First Baptist Church Austinville, Decatur**, celebrated its 125th anniversary Oct. 19. Ron Manly, a former pastor, was the guest preacher. Special music was provided by Jan Byrd. Testimonies of remembrance were given by Marty Steelmon, a former pastor; Wayman Cheatham, a deacon; and Joel Snyder, pastor of Unity Baptist Church, Decatur, who was ordained into the ministry at FBC Austinville. The church’s Hispanic congregation also participated in the service. Pastor Selby de Leon gave his testimony and minister

NEWS

of music Dani Fernandez shared in worship. Ken Blackwood (left), a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, made a presentation to the church with Randy Berry (right), pastor for more than 15 years, accepting the plaque. A fellowship meal and displays of the church's heritage along with information about the Hispanic congregation followed the service.



Photo by Haley Allen

► **Vestavia Hills Baptist Church, Decatur**, celebrated its 50th anniversary Oct. 26. Danny Duncum, former music minister, sang a solo, and current music minister Steve Yarborough led the congregation in singing traditional hymns. Ken Blackwood (right), director of missions and ministries for Morgan Baptist Association, was the guest preacher. Pastor Joe Holmes (left) accepted a commemorative plaque from Blackwood, a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, on behalf of the church.



Photo by Alison Blackwood

**PICKENS ASSOCIATION**

► **Union Chapel Baptist Church, Ethelsville**, celebrated its 125th anniversary, Oct. 18, with an afternoon community-wide event that included games, hot dogs and chili. Pastor Alvin Holman (right) accepted special recognitions given to the church by Lyle Dease (left), director of missions for Pickens Baptist Association, and David Nelson, a commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Special music was provided by Jesse Reece, youth minister of Mineral Springs Baptist Church, Ethelsville, along with his son, Saylor.



Photo by Claren Dease

**RANDOLPH ASSOCIATION**

► **Big Springs Baptist Church, Roanoke**, celebrated its 175th anniversary Dec. 7. Scott Hannah, a former pastor, was the guest preacher. Deacon Wesley Gay shared a historical overview followed by a presentation to the church by Roger Willmore (left), a commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Blair Parker (right), deacon chairman, accepted the framed certificate on behalf of the church. Special music was provided by the adult choir and soloist Macy Hancock.



Photo by Vicki Parker

Several members dressed in costumes of the period when the church was established. Following the service everyone was invited to a covered dish lunch.

**TALLAPOOSA ASSOCIATION**

► **Chuck Stewart** is the new pastor of **Mount Zion Baptist Church, Alexander City**. He previously served at Jacksons Gap Baptist Church. He and his wife, Anita, have five sons, one daughter, four grandsons and eight granddaughters.



Submitted photo

► **First Baptist Church Dadeville's** senior adult ministries will host comedian/musician Bro. Billy Bob (aka Bill King) Jan. 8 at 11 a.m. Ben Hayes is pastor.

► **Mount Zion Baptist Church, Alexander City**, celebrated its 175th anniversary Oct. 19. Steve Lucy, a former youth minister, was the guest preacher, and special music was provided by Tru Faith Quartet. A commemorative plaque was presented to the church by Calvin Milford (right), a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, with O.C. Harrison (left), minister of music, accepting the honor on behalf of the church. A fellowship meal was served following the service.



Photo by Charlotte Mattox

**WALKER ASSOCIATION**

► **David Byrd**, who has served as pastor of **Northside Baptist Church, Jasper**, for more than 27 years, is retiring Dec. 31. His ministry of



Photo courtesy of Northside Baptist Church

over 46 years spans churches in Mississippi, Georgia and Alabama. He serves as a volunteer with Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief. Byrd and his wife, Marilyn, have two adult children, one granddaughter and one grandson.

► **Westside Baptist Church, Jasper**, celebrated its 100th anniversary Nov. 9.

Special music was provided by the choir. David Miller, director of missions for Walker Baptist Association, made presentations on behalf of the association and the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Pictured alongside Miller are members (left to right) Teddy Jones, Dianne Myers and Diana Jones. Chris Crain, a former member and the current executive director of Birmingham Metro Baptist Association, offered a tribute of praise and prayer of gratitude following Scripture reading by Charlee Overby, Asher Sherer, Laura Sherer and Jones. Pastor Chris Sherer gave the message followed by a fellowship lunch.



Photo by Chris Crain



Facebook photo

**OTHER**

► **Concord Baptist Church, Albertville**, recognized **Gerald Gardner** for his 40 years of service as a deacon Dec. 7. He is married to Peggy. Pastor Wiley Bailey made the presentation.

**Samford names new head football coach**

Samford University has named John Grass as the university's new head football coach.

Upon being introduced as the university's 37th head football coach Dec. 4, Grass vowed to construct championship-caliber teams that are tough and locally sourced.

Grass, 57, whose last name rhymes with moss, is a native of Ashville. He has more than three decades of college and high school coaching experience.

He has served the past four seasons as an offensive analyst at Clemson University. That followed eight years as head

coach at his alma mater, Jacksonville State University, where Grass compiled a 72-26

record, won six Ohio Valley Conference titles, earned six NCAA playoff berths and reached the 2015 FCS national championship game.

Grass described Samford as "one of the few Christian universities across the country that still has Jesus at the front door."

Viewing coaching as a ministry, Grass said aspirations of building a Kingdom-centered championship

program piqued his interest in the Bulldogs job. (Samford University)



Photo courtesy of Samford University

Samford's new football coach John Grass displays a Bulldogs jersey alongside president Beck A. Taylor (left) and athletics director Martin Newton.

# 2026

# EVANGELISM EVENTS

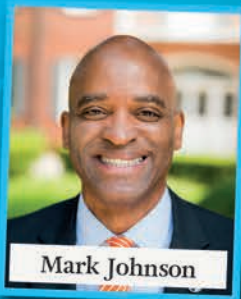
from the State Board  
of Missions



## STATE EVANGELISM CONFERENCE

Sunday-Monday, March 1-2  
Heritage Baptist Church  
Montgomery

**FREE EVENT**  
*(except for optional  
\$5 lunch on Monday)*



Mark Johnson



Parker Webb & Guilford



David Burton

### Questions?

Contact Kirstin Goldwire,  
kgoldwire@alsbom.org,  
334-613-2245.



Edwin Jenkins

## Senior Adult Evangelism Conference

# ENCOURAGE

Monday, May 4

9:30 a.m. - Noon

FBC Prattville



Greater Vision

# EvangelizeAL.org/events

*These events are made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through  
the Cooperative Program.*



# 'Santa Marc' points to real reason for the season

By **Shawn Hendricks**  
The Alabama Baptist

**M**arc Hooks wears a lot of hats these days — and one of them is a Santa hat. Every Christmas season for the past few years, Hooks has worked as a professional Santa Claus.

And as a storyteller for TAB Media's Ground Level Reports, a chaplain for firefighters and a former pastor of a Texas church, Hooks believes Santa is just one of the ways he's able to point "kids" of all ages to Jesus.

"The other day I met a

woman who was 99 who stopped to talk with Santa," said Hooks, noting he inherited his Santa suit from his grandfather who also was a Santa many years ago. While being a Santa at a mall can be especially "grueling" at times, Hooks said it's well worth the long hours and few breaks.

## Unique opportunity

"It's important for us Christian Santas to understand that we have an opportunity for both outreach and evangelism," he noted.

"It might be something su-

per simple like noticing that someone is wearing a 'Jesus is the reason for the season' shirt or a 'WWJD' (What would Jesus do) bracelet," he added, "and being able to say, 'Hey, I see you're wearing that. You know, Santa loves Jesus too.'"

As a storyteller, Hooks has set out to show real people tackling real issues through all types of ministry — and being a Christian Santa is one of those ministries. This Christmas season, TAB Media turned the camera on Hooks and his role as a professional Santa Claus, while also asking ministry leaders to share their thoughts on Santa and the Christmas season.

Bobby McKay, pastor of New Liberty Baptist Church in Morton, Mississippi — and a Sunday School writer for The Baptist Paper — shared his approach to Santa during the Christmas season.

"Teachers, church leaders,



Photo courtesy of Marc Hooks

## SANTA MARC

especially parents ... are the ones that set the focus and the priority (of Christmas), and what you set as the focus and the priority will be what they deem important later in life," said McKay, cautioning parents to "avoid the extremes" of going "all in on Santa Claus" and the other side of calling

Santa "evil," avoiding the historic perspective of Saint Nicholas and his positive impact on others.

"The best advice I can give is to make Jesus show. ... That's the key this holiday is to let Jesus show," he noted.

Hooks remembers one girl asking him if Santa really knew when she had been naughty. When Hooks played along saying, "Santa always knows," he said the girl became sad and said she hadn't been a very good girl that year. While Hooks

encouraged her, he later noted it was also a reminder of the opportunity Christians have to shine the light on Christ and share how "He

gives us the best Christmas present of all, and that's the forgiveness of our sins."

*To hear how other ministry leaders approach the Santa question in their churches and homes, visit [groundlevelreports.com](http://groundlevelreports.com).*

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# 2026 Senior Adult Events

Psalm 92:12-14

## SINGFEST

Tuesday, March 10  
FBC, Demopolis  
Tuesday, March 17  
FBC, Jasper  
Tuesday, September 8  
Parkway BC, Auburn  
Tuesday, September 15  
Gilliam Springs BC, Arab

## SALT CONFERENCES (Senior Adult Leadership Training)

Tuesday, August 18  
FBC, Fultondale  
Thursday, August 20  
FBC, Andalusia

## SAINTS ALIVE

Thursday, October 29  
Meadowbrook BC,  
Gadsden

[alsbom.org/senior-adults](http://alsbom.org/senior-adults)



These events are made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.

# Artist's empty nest inspires creative efforts

By Tracy Riggs Frontz  
The Alabama Baptist

Empty-nest syndrome can be tough for parents, but Birmingham-based artist, illustrator and author Jane Lazenby discovered her passion after her children were grown.

"I had to figure out my purpose ... so that's when I started diving more into [art] and figuring out what to do with that new chapter in my life," Lazenby said.

Building a community of kindred friends, Lazenby took classes and became part of social media groups with those also learning about illustrating, art and other creative interests.

Not only does Lazenby love to draw, but she's also a self-proclaimed "word collector and people watcher." She has journals all over her

house with sayings, and she writes both fiction and non-fiction stories, most with a related inspirational thought.

"It's important that my art relates to people so that they're hearing what they need for that day. That's always my goal, to reach somebody where they are, to inspire somebody who needs to hear it," Lazenby said.

When her mother was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, Lazenby began a blog on Caring-Bridge to share stories and keep friends and family informed of how her mother was doing. She continued this even after her mother's passing as she recalled more memories about her mother and her influence on Lazenby's life.

People started encouraging Lazenby to compile



LAZENBY



Janelazenbyart.com

these stories into a book. When her brother told her Samford University in Birmingham was offering an author's workshop, she attended and was inspired to take on the project.

## 'Woven with grace'

In 2010, she published "Expressions: Artwork and Stories Woven with Grace." The book explores 90 inspirational topics, each topic

consisting of a one-page story. Most include a related Scripture and an exquisite original drawing.

A similar book released in February is named "Chosen: An Intricate Weaving of Art, Scriptures and Memories."

"It is based on 1 Peter 2:9 about your chosen generation and a royal priesthood and a holy nation. This one was in memory of the women who went before me and

how much they meant and changed my life."

"Chosen" is targeted to young girls. Lazenby believes that a lot of the kinds of memories she has with her mother and grandmother are not being developed in this generation.

As she worked on "Chosen," she envisioned a young girl reading this with her mother or grandmother who would use it as a springboard to talk about their own family memories.

Lazenby also creates original Scripture cards with stories on the back, as well as coloring books for various ages.

"As long as I'm physically able to, I'll just spread His light as long as I can. I've learned He's always in control."

To learn more about Lazenby and to order her books and her art, go to [JaneLazenbyArt.com](http://JaneLazenbyArt.com).

SHINING A LIGHT ON WHO JESUS REALLY IS

# ILLUMINATION STATION

JOHN 8:12

# VBS LIVE 2026



**Montgomery**  
Saturday, February 28

**Enterprise**  
Saturday, March 7

**Huntsville**  
Saturday, March 14

Go to [kidzlinkal.org/VBS-live](http://kidzlinkal.org/VBS-live) for more information and registration. **Questions?** Contact State Missionary Patty Burns at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 2221 or (334) 467-0067, [pburns@alsbom.org](mailto:pburns@alsbom.org). **Cost:** \$10 per person and includes lunch

THESE EVENTS ARE MADE POSSIBLE BY GIFTS OF ALABAMA BAPTISTS THROUGH THE COOPERATIVE PROGRAM.

# ANNUAL TRADITION

## Bethel Baptist in Robertsdale hosts Walk Through Bethlehem

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

For the first couple of weeks of December, the members of Bethel Baptist Church in Robertsdale were of a single mind.

They could be seen building Bethlehem or feverishly baking thousands of cookies to greet the guests who come to their annual Walk Through Bethlehem event.

Pastor Harvey Earls called it “a pretty massive all-church affair.”

“Our church runs about 200, and we usually have 2 or 3,000 who come for Walk Through Bethlehem. Since we’ve been doing it for so many years, it’s become part of the local community’s Christmas traditions.”

For the event — held over the second weekend in December — Bethel Baptist “built the town of Bethlehem as much as it could possibly be recreated,” Earls said.

At Walk Through Bethlehem, groups of 15 to 30 are guided by a “shepherd”

through scenes set up around the church campus as they search for the newborn Jesus.

The church started the event in 2004 but took some time off after sustaining hurricane damage several years back. Earls said he thinks they’ve probably put Walk Through Bethlehem on 16 or 17 times, but in 2024, they reworked the “town” layout to better accommodate the growing crowds.

Earls also now puts on a piano concert in the sanctuary for those who are waiting for their entrance time.

“We’ve had to be creative in how we use our facilities,” he said. “Our sanctuary seats about 175, and we



Photo courtesy of Bethel Baptist Church

Walk Through Bethlehem at Bethel Baptist Church in Robertsdale is an all-church affair. From making cookies and praying to doing outreach, it takes the whole church body.

have 600–800 people on campus on the nights we hold Walk Through Bethlehem.”

All the scenes are staffed with volunteer actors from Bethel Baptist, and the experience ends at the cross with a gospel presentation.

“It takes our whole church body, even if they can’t be a part of it on the weekend, they’ve made cookies or prayed or done outreach,” Earls said.



Photo courtesy of Bethel Baptist Church



Photo courtesy of Bethel Baptist Church

2026 Next Gen Events  
from the State Board of Missions

NEXT GEN

April 30 - Next Gen Conference

9 a.m.-2 p.m., SBOM, Prattville

With Dr. Jamie Dew

\$10 (includes lunch)

For more information, contact Julie Smith,  
334-613-2255, [jsmith@alsbom.org](mailto:jsmith@alsbom.org), or  
visit [alsbom.org/nextgen](http://alsbom.org/nextgen)

*This event is made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.*

# Faith Moments

## Dealing with difficult people

All of us deal with people who are like burrs under our saddles. Over the years, the Lord has shown me that I can give thanks for difficult people. Here are some ways I've learned to give thanks for them:

**1. I thank God that they drive me to my knees.** Nothing strengthens my prayer life like asking God to help me love those who oppose, misunderstand or frustrate me.

**2. I thank God that they help me understand grace more deeply.** When someone is hard to love, I'm reminded how lavishly God has loved me — despite my own stubbornness and failures.

**3. I thank God that they give me a small taste of what Christ**

**endured.** Jesus was rejected, misunderstood and even hated. When I experience the tiniest fraction of that, I'm reminded of His faithful endurance and sacrificial love.

**4. I thank God that I grow through adversity.** Spiritual muscles are strengthened under pressure. Patience, wisdom, discernment and humility rarely grow in comfort but flourish in difficulty.

**5. I thank God that my love is stretched and deepened.** It's easy to love those who love me. When I seek God's strength to love my "thorns," God begins to widen my heart.

**6. I thank God that they reveal blind spots in my own heart.** Sometimes the frustration

they stir in me exposes impatience, pride, insecurity or a need for approval. God often uses them to sanctify places I didn't realize needed work.

**7. I thank God that they deepen my dependence on the Holy Spirit.** They push me beyond my natural abilities. Loving difficult people requires supernatural fruit, patience, gentleness and self-control, which only the Spirit can produce.

**8. I thank God that they drive me back to Scripture.** Passages on forgiveness, patience, mercy and Christlike love come alive.

**9. I thank God that they teach me to separate the person from the problem.** Difficult relationships help me practice compas-

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



sion, seeing the person as someone broken and beloved, not just as a source of conflict.

**10. I thank God that they give me opportunities to model grace before others.** Difficult people give me a platform to demonstrate Christlike character to a "watching world."

Difficult people will always be part of our lives, but they don't have to steal our joy. The next time someone rubs you the wrong way, pause and give thanks.

God may be using that very person to refine and make you more like Jesus. After all, God specializes in turning even our "burrs" into blessings.

*Sponsored Content*

# 2026 ALABAMA DISCIPLE MAKING CONFERENCE

APRIL 20, 2026  
Fultondale First Baptist



Register for Free at [ALDMConference.com](http://ALDMConference.com)

*This event is made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.*

# George Bullard's new book released by TAB Media Group

Most congregations have not fully captured God's vision for them and too often settle for average rather than strive for exceptional, says George Bullard.

Bullard, an author and correspondent for The Baptist Paper who has spent 45 years in denominational ministry, shares how churches can capture that vision in his latest book, "Soaring

with Faith: The Difference Maker for Congregations," released by TAB Media Group in conjunction with Iron Stream Media.

"Most congregations fail to soar with faith," Bullard

noted in the book. "The majority of congregations focus on success in the hope of sustained long-term faithfulness.

"Others seek to be significant in Christian ministry by pushing forward to serve as faithful and effective

congregations. Only those who wholeheartedly surrender their ministry to the fulfillment of God's empowering vision for their congregation are faithful, effective and innovative."

He later shared with The Baptist Paper, "My life and ministry has been fully dedicated to helping congregations reach their full Kingdom potential in response to God's empowering vision for them."

"One key to this journey

is for each congregation to understand their beginning point of soaring, strong, stumbling, struggling or spiritless," he said.

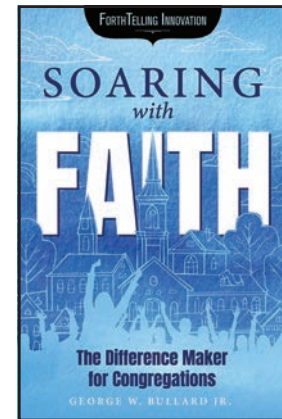
Bullard's book is TAB Media Group's first foray into book publishing, said Jennifer Davis Rash, presi-

dent and editor-in-chief of TAB Media Group.

"While TAB Media Group has been in the publishing business since 1843, we've not attempted book publishing until now," Rash noted. "It's an exciting venture

to explore." Bullard retired in 2022 as director of Columbia Metro Baptist Association in South Carolina.

Bullard's new book is available on Amazon.



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2 Timothy 1:7 (CSB)

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**BIBLE SKILLS AND DRILLS EVENT**  
◆ FOR CHILDREN (Grades 3-6) AND LEADERS ◆

Saturday, January 31, 2026  
Shades Crest Baptist Church, Hoover • 9 am-1 pm

This event is made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.

# Persecuted church

## *Pastor 'in grave danger' following his plea to save Christians*

Ezekiel Dachomo, a pastor and regional chairman of the Church of Christ in Nations in Barkin Ladi in Nigeria's Plateau State, told reporters in Jos that Islamic extremists seek his assassination, Christian Daily International-Morning Star News reported. Dachomo has denounced the killing of Christians in Nigeria and urged the government to protect believers.

## *Samaritan's Purse plane hijacked in South Sudan; suspect arrested*

A small plane belonging to Samaritan's Purse was hijacked by an armed man Dec. 2 in South Sudan. The plane was transporting medical supplies. Following a brief flight, the suspect was arrested when the plane landed.



Photo courtesy of Samaritan's Purse

## *Russian courts ban unregistered Baptist church services*

Russian courts have banned at least 10 unregistered congregations of the Council of Churches Baptist from meeting without state permission, reported Forum 18 news service. Six of the 10 lawsuits have been filed in the Krasnodar Region of Southern Russia. Unregistered congregations affiliated with the council often meet in private homes on private land.

## *Iran frees 61-year-old Christian convert after nearly 2 years in prison*

Mina Khajavi, a 61-year-old Iranian Christian convert, has been freed from Tehran's notorious Evin Prison after serving nearly two years for her involvement in a house church, Decision Magazine and International Christian Concern reported. Christian advocacy groups say her arrest was part of coordinated raids on house churches in Tehran and other cities. Despite Iran's Supreme Court ruling that house churches are not illegal, authorities continue to harass converts from Islam, who face charges of apostasy and national security threats.

## *Hundreds protest proposed Christian church in Indonesia*

The plan to build Huria Kristen Batak Protestant Church in Palembang in Indonesia's South Sumatra province drew opposition from hundreds of Muslims on Oct. 14, reported Morning Star News. Opponents of construction claim the government actually owns the proposed church site and say a Christian church is not needed because all local residents are Muslim.

## *Chinese police detain pastor's wife to pressure him*

ChinaAid reported that police in Beihai City in China's Guangxi province detained Su Ziming on Nov. 13. She is the wife of Wang Lin, pastor of Zion Church, one of China's largest unregistered house churches. Wang was arrested Oct. 9. Su is charged with "illegally using an information network," a charge authorities are lodging against individuals accused of sharing religious information online. Since Wang's arrest, 23 others associated with Zion Church have either been summoned by police or detained, reported ChinaAid.

## *Mob attacks church service in India; police jail pastor*

A Hindu extremist mob invaded the worship service at a church in Nohar city in India's Rajasthan State on Sept. 28 and demanded Pastor Wazir Singh teach about Hindu gods and read Hindu passages instead of the Bible. The mob summoned police after Singh responded, "My faith is in Jesus Christ, and my country gives me the right to choose whom I want to believe in and freedom to practice my faith."

## *Rights violations in Nigeria continue drawing attention*

Baptists in Africa and the United States are calling for peace in Nigeria. Leaders there have said they believe attacks on Christian communities in Nigeria's Middle Belt are inspired by the desire to forcefully take Christians' lands and impose Islam. Jihadist groups such as Boko Haram and Islamic State in West Africa Province are also active in the country's northern states, where federal government control is scant, and Christians and their communities continue to be the targets of raids, sexual violence, roadblock killings and kidnapping, according to reports.

## 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](mailto:ads@thealabamabaptist.org). To place an online classified ad for \$9.99/month, visit [thealabamabaptist.org/classifieds](http://thealabamabaptist.org/classifieds).

### CHURCH POSITIONS

#### SENIOR PASTOR

Central Baptist Church, North Little Rock, Arkansas, is seeking a senior pastor. Three years minimum senior pastor experience required; seminary experience preferred. Send resumé to: [cbcnlrpastorsearch@gmail.com](mailto:cbcnlrpastorsearch@gmail.com). Deadline to apply: Jan. 31, 2026.

#### PASTOR

Full-time pastor — Jasper, Alabama. Pastor retiring. Prayerfully seeking a pastor to preach the inerrant Word of God and shepherd our flock. (SBC) Resumé: [northsidebaptistchurchjasper@gmail.com](mailto:northsidebaptistchurchjasper@gmail.com)

#### BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Brent Baptist Church in Bibb County, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a part-time pastor (up to 20 hours a week) who has a heart for missions, outreach and growing disciples. Please email resumé to our church office at [brentbaptist.office@gmail.com](mailto:brentbaptist.office@gmail.com).

#### BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

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

#### MUSIC/WORSHIP LEADER

Cedar Bluff First Baptist Church in search of a music/worship leader, bivocational. Email resumé to: [CBFBC@tds.net](mailto:CBFBC@tds.net) or mail to: Cedar Bluff First Baptist Church, 3500 Old Hwy 9, Cedar Bluff, AL 35959.

#### WORSHIP LEADER

Seeking a full-time worship leader in dual services with praise band and choir. We are a growing congregation of 450 just 90 minutes from the beaches. View the job description at <https://sbcandalusia.com/worship-pastor>.

#### PASTOR OF WORSHIP & EQUIPPING MINISTRIES

First Baptist Church of Tallassee, Alabama, is searching for a full-time pastor of worship and equipping ministries. For more information and to send a resumé, please see [fbctallassee.com/jobs](http://fbctallassee.com/jobs).

#### YOUTH MINISTER

Seeking youth minister at The Baptist Church at McAdory (McCalla). Candidate must be SBC member with passion for discipling students and leading

Christ-centered ministry. Submit resumé: Personnel Committee, 4954 Eastern Valley Rd., McCalla, AL 35111, or [tbcam.bcm@gmail.com](mailto:tbcam.bcm@gmail.com).

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#### LARGE BEACH HOUSES

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#### LOG CABIN

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### TAB EXTRAS

#### MINISTRY VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

The Alabama Baptist serves as a drop-off location for Love Packages, which collects Bibles and used Christian literature to ship to developing, English-speaking countries. Volunteers are needed to deliver donations to the warehouse in Decatur and assist the Love Packages team with unloading and sorting.

#### VISUALLY IMPAIRED READERS

Know someone who's visually impaired and finds it difficult to read? The Alabama Baptist is now offering a way for that person to listen to stories and news in a format that comes in the mail for free. For more information call 205-870-4720 or email [ahacker@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:ahacker@thealabamabaptist.org).

#### TAB HIGHLIGHTS EMAIL NEWSLETTER

TAB Highlights is an email newsletter delivered every Monday-Wednesday-Friday with the day's top stories from the world of faith-based news. To sign up, email [news@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:news@thealabamabaptist.org).

# Merry Christmas

FROM THE  
STATE BOARD OF  
MISSIONS

*"... when the Fullness of the time was come,  
God sent forth his Son ..." (Galatians 4:4)*



May the joy and peace surrounding the celebration of Christ's birth fill your heart and your home throughout this season. Thank you for your generous support of missions and ministry in Alabama and around the world!



**INFORMATION ABOUT YEAR-END GIVING:** Please be sure that your Cooperative Program and Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering gifts are sent in time to be received at the State Board of Missions by Wednesday, December 31, if you would like for them to be counted in 2025.

# UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

## Encouraging students to consider God's call

If you're looking for a way to encourage your high school seniors and college students to consider God's call on their lives, Pursue should be on your February calendar.

This year's conference — set for Feb. 20–21 at First Baptist Church Montgomery — will follow the theme Pursue Everyone and focus on missions mobilization. Because the event will be in partnership with FBC's Global Missions Celebration, students will have the opportunity to hear from nearly 25 missionaries from around the

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



world and engage with them on unique and practical topics.

Ben Edfeldt, director of the office of collegiate

and student ministries for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said his prayer for this year's event "is that students will consider God's global call on all of their lives."

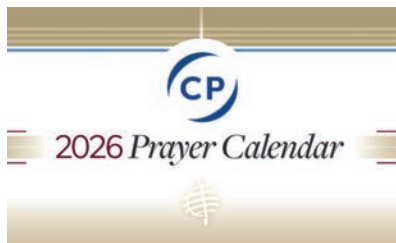
Speakers will be Jeff Iorg, president of the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, and Julius Tennial II, pastor of international missions for The Summit Church in Raleigh, North Carolina.

A collection of musicians from the Worship Initiative will lead music.

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

## 2026 CP calendars available

The 2026 Cooperative Program Desk Prayer Calendars are now available! Each page of this weekly calendar features a ministry supported by your gifts through the Cooperative Program and a specific prayer prompt for that week.



It's ideal to keep on your desk, in your study, on your nightstand or wherever you want to have a reminder of the many ministries Alabama Baptists support.

To order your 2026 CP calendar, scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



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



## Bivocational Minister and Spouse Retreat at Shocco

Bivocational ministers, bring your spouses and join us for this time of encouragement, fellowship, inspiration and prayer, including a Friday evening session with pastor and associational mis-

sionary Craig Carlisle.

This retreat will be held Feb. 6–7 at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center.

For more information or to register, visit [leadercareAL.org/bivo](http://leadercareAL.org/bivo).

# WORD search

- |           |           |
|-----------|-----------|
| BEGINNING | OBEDIENCE |
| BLESSING  | PATH      |
| CLEAN     | PEACE     |
| COURAGE   | PRAISE    |
| FAITH     | PROMISE   |
| FORGIVE   | PURE      |
| FREEDOM   | PURPOSE   |
| FUTURE    | REDEEM    |
| GLORY     | REJOICE   |
| GRACE     | RENEW     |
| GROWTH    | REPENT    |
| GUIDE     | RESTORE   |
| HOPE      | SPIRIT    |
| LEAD      | STRENGTH  |
| LIGHT     | TRANSFORM |
| MERCY     | TRUTH     |

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

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!

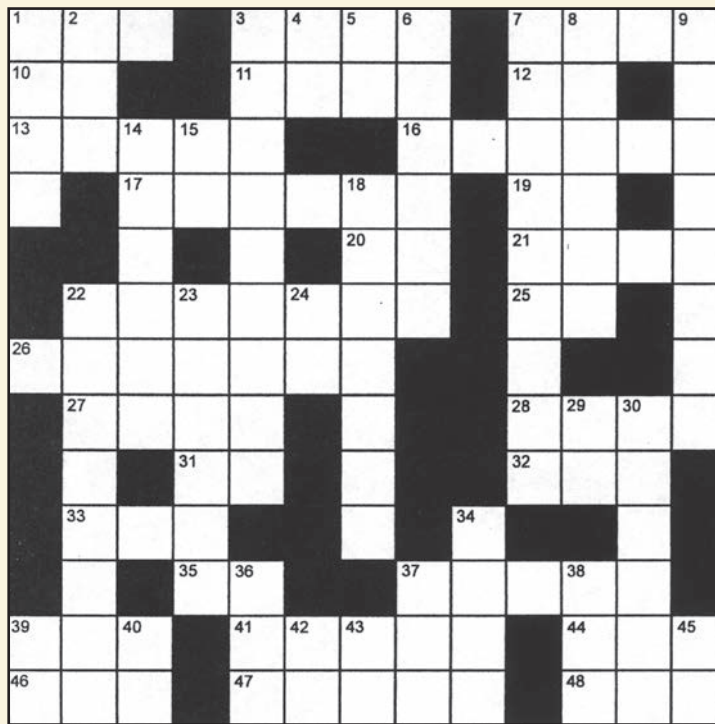
2 CORINTHIANS 5:17 (CSB)

# CHRISTIAN Crossword



**ACROSS**

1. The \_\_\_ that covereth the inwards. (Lev. 3:3)
3. Went to sojourn in the country of \_\_\_. (Ruth 1:1)
7. Jehu destroyed \_\_\_ out of Israel. (2 Kings 10:28)
10. He placed \_\_\_ the east of the garden. (Gen. 3:24)
11. \_\_\_ also to save them to the uttermost. (Heb. 7:25)
12. Associated Press. (abbr.)
13. Nor height, nor \_\_\_, nor any other. (Rom. 8:39)



By Pamela Jensen Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

16. The Lord sent \_\_\_ unto David. (2 Sam. 12:1)
17. Unto \_\_\_ the prophet, the son of Amoz. (Isa. 37:2)
19. Short for "hello."
20. Bureau. (abbr.)
21. Zimri, the son of \_\_\_, a prince. (Num. 25:14)
22. He shall send them a \_\_\_. (Isa. 19:20)
25. Her Highness. (abbr.)
26. In thee shall all \_\_\_ be blessed. (Gal. 3:8)
27. An eagle stirreth up her \_\_\_. (Deut. 32:11)
28. Ye shall find the \_\_\_. (Luke 2:12)
31. Hi in the mirror.
32. Of fowls also of the \_\_\_. (Gen. 7:3)
33. In addition, also.
35. New Jersey. (abbr.)
37. Nehemiah the son of \_\_\_. (Neh. 3:16)
39. Not on.
41. Being a wild \_\_\_ tree. (Rom. 11:17)
44. Though they be \_\_\_

- like crimson. (Isa. 1:18)
46. Short for "goodbye."
47. The name of it called \_\_\_. (Gen. 11:9)
48. There was no room for them in the \_\_\_. (Luke 2:7)

**DOWN**

1. Shall the rich man \_\_\_ away. (James 1:11)
2. Men \_\_\_ of the bread of angels. (Ps. 78:25, ESV)
3. The three and 20th to \_\_\_. (1 Chron. 25:30)
4. Obadiah. (abbr.)
5. Alabama. (abbr.)
6. Means son of Hur in Hebrew.
7. David comforted \_\_\_ his wife. (2 Sam. 12:24)
8. The son of a Benjamite. (1 Sam. 9:1)
9. Heard them speak in his own \_\_\_. (Acts 2:6)
14. \_\_\_ then went out unto them. (John 18:29)
15. Tensile strength. (abbr.)
18. Proud, \_\_\_, \_\_\_, disobedient to their parents. (2 Tim. 3:2, ESV)
22. \_\_\_ them through thy truth. (John 17:17)
23. Seal up the \_\_\_ and prophecy. (Dan. 9:24)
24. To be upon.
29. Joshua had taken \_\_\_. (Josh. 10:1)
30. Because of unbelief they were \_\_\_ off. (Rom. 11:20)
34. \_\_\_ had six sons. (1 Chron. 9:44)
36. These three men, Noah, Daniel and \_\_\_ were in it. (Ezek. 14:14)
37. Avenue. (abbr.)
38. I have called by name Bezaleel, the son of \_\_\_. (Ex. 31:2)
39. Obstetrics. (abbr.)
40. Chemical symbol for Iron.
42. The sixth tone of the diatonic scale.
43. Ibidem. (abbr.)
45. Daniel. (abbr.)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

## Upcoming Tax Conferences

It's already time to start thinking about taxes, and your state missionaries have got you covered with a number of ways to learn more up-to-date information about taxes for churches and ministers.

► **Church Tax Conferences** — Numerous changes are expected for 2026. This conference will cover basic IRS forms such as the 941 and W-2, deadlines, what is taxable and more. There are three opportunities available for this event — Jan. 8 at the SBOM, Jan. 15 at Calhoun Baptist Association and Jan. 29 at Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association.

► **Ministers Tax Conferences** — Learn how to save money on your taxes, maximize the housing al-

For more information or to register, visit [alsbom.org/events](http://alsbom.org/events) or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



lowance and more. These conferences will be held Feb. 5 at the SBOM, Feb. 12 at Calhoun Baptist Association and Feb. 26 at Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association.

For more information or to register, visit [alsbom.org/events](http://alsbom.org/events) and search by date.

## Year-end giving

There's still time to give to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering. Every gift helps strengthen ministries including Alabama WMU, church planting, disaster relief, church revitalization and missions partnerships across our

state and beyond. Your support continues to fuel the Great Commission in Alabama well beyond the offering season. Will you prayerfully consider giving today and help us finish the year strong?

Also, remember that gifts through the Cooperative Program and to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering must be received by the State Board of Missions by Dec. 31 to be counted for this year. Please mail them in time to be received by that date. Thank you for your faithful giving to missions causes throughout 2025!

To give online, visit [myers-mallory.org/give](http://myers-mallory.org/give) or mail checks payable to: **Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions** P.O. Box 681970 Prattville, AL 36068-1970

Please note "Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering" on the check.

# EXPLORE THE BIBLE

## Sunday School Lessons

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.

Professor of Biblical Studies, University of Mobile



### For January 4

#### TREASURE Matthew 6:19–34

As we end one calendar year and begin another, it is time to take stock of our priorities relating to our relationship with Jesus, family, work and church.

In this week's portion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructs us to realign our lives to reflect Kingdom living. As we begin, let us consider how we may glorify God as Kingdom citizens.

#### Possessions (19–24)

Moths can ruin clothing, particularly garments kept in storage. Rust and tarnish corrode metal objects. And what good is it to collect belongings when thieves can steal in moments that which took years to accumulate? Instead, Jesus calls us to invest in eternity. Whether we have few or many possessions, we must remember that this life is temporary, and so are the materials we claim as our own.

Where are our eyes focused? Jesus' teachings often point back to God's special revelation in the Old Testament. The Torah instructed Israel to position the commandments between their eyes, focusing on God's words (Ex. 13:9; Deut. 6:8). Instead, eyes were focused elsewhere in the latter days of Judges: "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21:25, ESV). Qohelet, the title for the author of Ecclesiastes, warned against the empty nature of focusing on temporal pursuits: "Better what the eyes see than wandering desire" (Eccles. 6:9).

Whom do we serve? Everyone reading this article serves someone or something.

You may serve the interests of other people, yourself, other gods and their rituals or the One true God. Jesus warns against attempting to serve God along with the wealth you have accumulated.

#### Worry (25–30)

How would Jesus' teaching have been heard in the first cen-

tury? This sermon (Matt. 5–7) may be the same sermon recorded in Luke 6. If so, there were both poor (Luke 6:20) and rich (v. 24) among His audience. The endowed and the indigent had this in common: They worried about what they had and what they lacked.

Food, drink, clothing. Consider how significant context is to the way we perceive these words of Jesus. In an affluent culture, one might apply this teaching in terms of gourmet cuisine and designer clothing.

From a middle-class perspective, the focus may be whether there is enough money to go out to eat this week or purchase new school clothes. Those who live paycheck to paycheck might worry about whether to buy shoes or buy groceries.

The Father cares for the flora and fauna of this world, so the Father will certainly feed and clothe His own people who were created to reflect His image. He also confronts their lack of faith when they allow worry over temporal concerns to keep them from trusting Him.

#### Trust (31–34)

Worrying does not solve your dietary and fashion concerns. You're acting like a heathen when you worry about these things. That's what Jesus said! "For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things."

Instead, "seek first the Kingdom of God." Throughout the sermon, He taught us to live (5:5, 10), approach Scripture (5:19), pray (6:9) and obey (7:21) with a Kingdom mindset. We are Kingdom citizens, so we must trust the King and "seek ... His righteousness."

God is righteous. Those who trust the King and what He says are counted as righteous (Gen. 15:6). Apart from Jesus, there is none righteous (Ps. 14:3).

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

### For January 11

#### AUTHORITY ACKNOWLEDGED Matthew 7:15–29

Jesus distinguished His teachings from that of the scribes and Pharisees earlier in the Sermon on the Mount. The religious leaders quoted the oral law from the rabbis who cited rabbis who interpreted the Torah. "You have heard that it was said ... but I say to you." Jesus spoke directly to the people about the letter and the spirit of the law. By the end of His sermon, the listeners remarked about how Jesus taught with authority.

#### Fruit (15–20)

Jesus warned against false prophets. He built on the foundation of Deuteronomy, in which Moses recorded tests for discerning false prophets in Israel. (See Deut. 13:1–5; 18:9–22.) Forbidden actions were the fruit of false prophets.

Jesus previously described other people who would not receive His teaching: "Don't give what is holy to dogs or toss your pearls before pigs" (7:6). Here, Jesus adds to be on guard against "ravaging wolves" pretending to be sheep. Their actions betray their pretense.

"Ye shall know them by their fruits." This familiar passage from the King James Version summarizes this paragraph. Both in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere in Jesus' teachings in Matthew, the fruit borne by the tree indicates the quality of the tree (12:33–37).

Throughout Church history, false teachings — Christological heresies — have arisen concerning the nature of Jesus. "New information" about the deity or humanity or historicity of Jesus is usually rebranded ancient heresy. Beware of false teachings and bad fruit.

#### Obedience (21–23)

"Lord, Lord." Here, Jesus distinguishes between those who use this phrase from those who do God's will.

In Luke 6:46, Jesus asks, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and don't do the things I say?" Jesus expects obedience.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus taught that those who trusted Him, followed Him or loved Him must obey Him. Obedience is the fruit of faith.

When someone claims to be acting in the name of Jesus, the actions must be in alignment with the nature of Jesus to do God's will. It is not sufficient to simply claim the name. Instead, we must align our will with the Father's.

#### Wisdom (24–29)

Wisdom builds on the rock. There are lighthouses in the northeastern United States that are pummeled by winds and rains, yet they stand firm year after year. How do they stand the beating from the weather? They are built on solid stone. Their foundations are firm.

Jesus compares those who listen to His teachings and live according to them to wise men who build on stone. They will face difficulties, yet they will stand firm because of their foundations.

Folly builds on the beach. Living on the Gulf Coast for more than two decades, I have seen buildings go through the devastation caused by high winds, heavy rains, hurricanes and storm surge. Homes and condominiums overlooking the coast offer beautiful and serene vistas during calm weather. When the rains and the winds and the flash floods come, those buildings are ruined. To hear the words of Jesus and not heed them is spiritual folly.

What a sermon ending! Earlier, Jesus said that teachers of His day quote others who quote others. By contrast, Jesus says here that those who heed Him are wise, and those who ignore Him are fools. Jesus spoke with an authority beyond the scribes.

**"Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock."**

Matthew 7:24

# BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

## Sunday School Lessons

By **Jeffery M. Leonard, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor of Biblical & Religious Studies, Samford University



### For January 4

#### WHEN YOUR FINANCES FALL SHORT Luke 12:13–21; 21:1–4

Few topics in Scripture are as difficult to pin down as the relationship believers ought to have with their bank accounts. On one hand, the Bible has a great many positive things to say about money — or its equivalent in land, animals and produce.

Deuteronomy describes the abundance of grain, wine, oil and animals Israel produces as a sign of God's blessing (14:23–24; 28:1–14). Proverbs celebrates thrift and industry, noting that "diligent hands bring riches" (10:4), "the son who gathers during summer is prudent" (10:5), "a good man leaves an inheritance to his grandchildren" (13:22) and so on.

On the other hand, the Scriptures are also quick to warn that money can be the source of tremendous temptation. The same book of Proverbs that offers positive words concerning wealth also warns, "Anyone trusting in his riches will fall" (11:28). Money, it seems, can be a blessing, but it is a blessing that comes with certain inherent dangers.

#### Financial prosperity has no bearing on what truly matters. (12:13–15)

Jesus often addressed the topic of possessions, and no one was more keen on preserving Jesus' teaching in this area than Luke. Luke notes that on one occasion, a man approached Jesus and asked Him to intervene in a dispute the man was having with his brother over his inheritance.

Jesus sidestepped the question of which brother might be right in this circumstance and instead made a larger point. "Watch out," He urged, "and be on guard against all greed, for one's life is not in the abundance of his possessions" (v. 15).

It may be that this brotherly dispute over the inheritance was

creating dissension in the heirs' family.

We just don't have enough information to say for sure. Certainly, most of us know of situations in which these kinds of fights over money have caused families irreparable harm. Almost always, the source of the conflict lies in caring more about possessions than people.

#### True riches come from God as we store up treasures with Him. (16–21)

Jesus went on to tell the parable of the rich man and his bigger barns. In this parable, a rich man had prospered so greatly that he knew without a shadow of a doubt that years of eating, drinking and merrymaking were ahead. But he had left out of his calculations one important item: his own untimely death.

When God came to collect his soul, all the man's great wealth was left behind. In the end, a lifetime spent in pursuit of possessions came to nothing. Jesus concludes, "That's how it is with the one who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God" (v. 21).

#### God is honored when we trust Him in our giving. (21:1–4)

In Luke's Gospel, those who are commended when it comes to possessions are those who tend to give those possessions away. When the rich tax collector Zacchaeus promises to restore his ill-gotten gains and give half his wealth to the poor, Jesus declares, "Today, salvation has come to this house."

Even more touching is His praise for the poor widow who put two copper coins into the offering box. Though her gift paled in comparison to those made by wealthy individuals, Jesus insisted, "This poor widow has put in more than all of them" (v. 3). Why? Because unlike the rich, she gave all that she had.

### For January 11

#### WHEN YOUR CONFIDENCE FALLS SHORT 1 John 3:21–4:6

Few characters in the New Testament are more interesting (or more important) than John the Baptist. The Gospel writers' descriptions of John lend a sort of wildness to his character (see Matt. 3). He was, however, the first person to recognize Jesus as the Messiah.

Luke tells us that while John was still in Elizabeth's womb and Jesus still in Mary's, John "leaped inside her" when the unborn Jesus approached (Luke 1:41). John would remain faithful to Jesus all the way to his martyrdom at the hand of Herod (Mark 6:24).

Given John's indefatigable devotion to Jesus, it is fascinating to note one particular episode in the relationship between the two. On the heels of Jesus' raising the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:11–17), John sent a most curious message to Jesus: "Are you the One who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" The same John who had recognized Jesus in the womb, baptized Jesus and heralded His arrival as the long-awaited Messiah now seemed to suffer a crisis of confidence.

As Jesus' ministry lingered on with little sign of His kicking out the Romans, John began to wonder if he had pinned his messianic hopes on the right man.

#### We stand confidently as we remain in Christ and obey Him. (3:21–24)

If a figure as "larger than life" as John the Baptist could experience a crisis of confidence, it stands to reason that regular followers of Christ like ourselves could go through difficult seasons.

Fortunately, another John — this time the author of 1 John — gives us words of encouragement for these difficult moments.

John's first note of instruction is both exceedingly simple and manifestly sensible: Spiritual confidence comes from living lives that please Jesus. John clarifies that such a life involves keeping Jesus' commandments and loving one another. When we know we are living within the boundaries Jesus set for us, a certain confidence is bound to follow. And when we follow in Jesus' footsteps by loving our neighbors, that sense of confidence can only be bolstered.

#### Not everyone who claims to speak for God walks in the truth of Christ. (4:1–3)

Taking matters one step further, John (the author of 1 John), gives us a standard for evaluating the messages of those who claim to speak for God. John's standard is this: Those who confess that Jesus Christ "has come in the flesh" are worthy of a further hearing.

Those who do not are false teachers and are not to be believed. There may be 1,000 minor points of doctrinal disagreement that we can decide to accept in a spirit of charity. One bright line, however, dividing those with whom we can "agree to disagree" and those whom we should reject outright, is the incarnation.

#### We stand confidently because the One we stand in is victorious. (4–6)

If we hold fast to the truth of the incarnation, obey the Incarnate One's commands and follow in His footsteps by loving our neighbors, confidence in our beliefs and our spiritual destination will surely follow. By doing these things, though, we can also gain a measure of confidence concerning the reception of our message by others. We can only present the message of Jesus and seek to do as He commanded us. Whether others will respond — to Jesus, not to us — lies beyond our control.

*"He who is in you is greater than he who  
is in the world."*

1 John 4:4

# 'Just search your heart'

## 'You need to do this': Widow heeds God's call to missions after loss of husband

By Kristen Sosebee  
International Mission Board

Life doesn't end because of sorrow or because of tragedy or because of loss," said International Mission Board missionary Sue Foster, reflecting on her call to international missions after becoming a widow. "It doesn't end because of age."

When her husband Len died, Foster's world was upended. For 35 years, her life had been bound up with his. Suddenly he was gone, and with him, all sense of proportion. A deep depression enveloped her.

As she fought to regain her balance, Foster drew strength from God's Word. She treasured the story of Joshua.

"I kept reading the words where God tells Joshua to be strong and courageous, and I began to put my trust in God."

In the months following Len's death, she sold their large home in Louisville, Kentucky, and moved to Bardstown, about 40 miles south. Visiting church after church, Foster prayed God would show her where she belonged. On her second visit to Wickland Baptist Church, something in the bulletin caught her eye — an upcoming missions trip to Kenya. For the first time in months, she felt a flicker of hope.

"The Lord spoke to me," Foster

recalled. "This is where you belong, and you need to do this." When she returned from Kenya, Foster immediately started searching for opportunities to take another short-term missions trip.

### Sensing God's call

After her next trip, to a remote region of Panama working alongside IMB missionaries, Foster sensed God was calling her to long-term service in international missions. "By the time I got home from that trip, I knew what I wanted to do."

As a child, Foster had a missionary pen pal in Thailand and imagined one day becoming a missionary. After her marriage to Len, missions came up in conversation often.

"Anytime there was something at church about missions, he would always say to me, 'You would have been so good on the missions field working with children,'" Foster remembered.

"Maybe that sort of stayed with me and made me start thinking more about it after I lost him."

She contacted the IMB to see what programs were available for people her age. Within six months she had accepted a role in Nairobi as a logistics coordinator, utilizing her professional background and experience. Though it hasn't been without its challenges, Foster ex-



IMB photo  
Women proudly display the children's clothes they learned to sew. On her very first trip to Kenya, IMB missionary Sue Foster worked with a sewing ministry in Nairobi.



IMB photo  
IMB missionary Sue Foster is pictured with members of a local church where she is serving. The group led Vacation Bible school for a women's prison.

pressed there is a lot more joy than heartache on the missions field.

"It's a scary decision to give up comfort and [being apart from] the love of family, especially if you have children and grandchildren, but I would say just search your heart," Foster encouraged. "There is no greater reward than knowing you're serving the Lord and impacting other people to join the Kingdom. Even if I never know that one person accepted Christ because of me, I know that I did all I could while I was here."

### Serving with gusto

Like her husband once predicted, Foster has embraced her life on the missions field with gusto. Along with using her background in business to help other missionaries manage daily life in a foreign country, she is also deeply involved in her local community.

Among other opportunities, Foster teaches Bible study to elementary children at two different schools, participates in the sewing ministry from her very first visit to Kenya and has found herself especially drawn to the challenging, and rewarding, work of prison ministry.

Together with teammates and national partners, she makes regular visits to both men's and women's prisons, where they hold worship services and share the gospel. The main prison houses almost 5,000 inmates and Foster said they have experienced days where as many as 20 men make professions of faith.

"As we get older, we sometimes tend to feel like our lives are behind us, or people don't really care about us anymore," Foster said. "But when we have the opportunity to share our experiences and offer a little bit of wisdom or encouragement, we need to take it."