

The Alabama Baptist

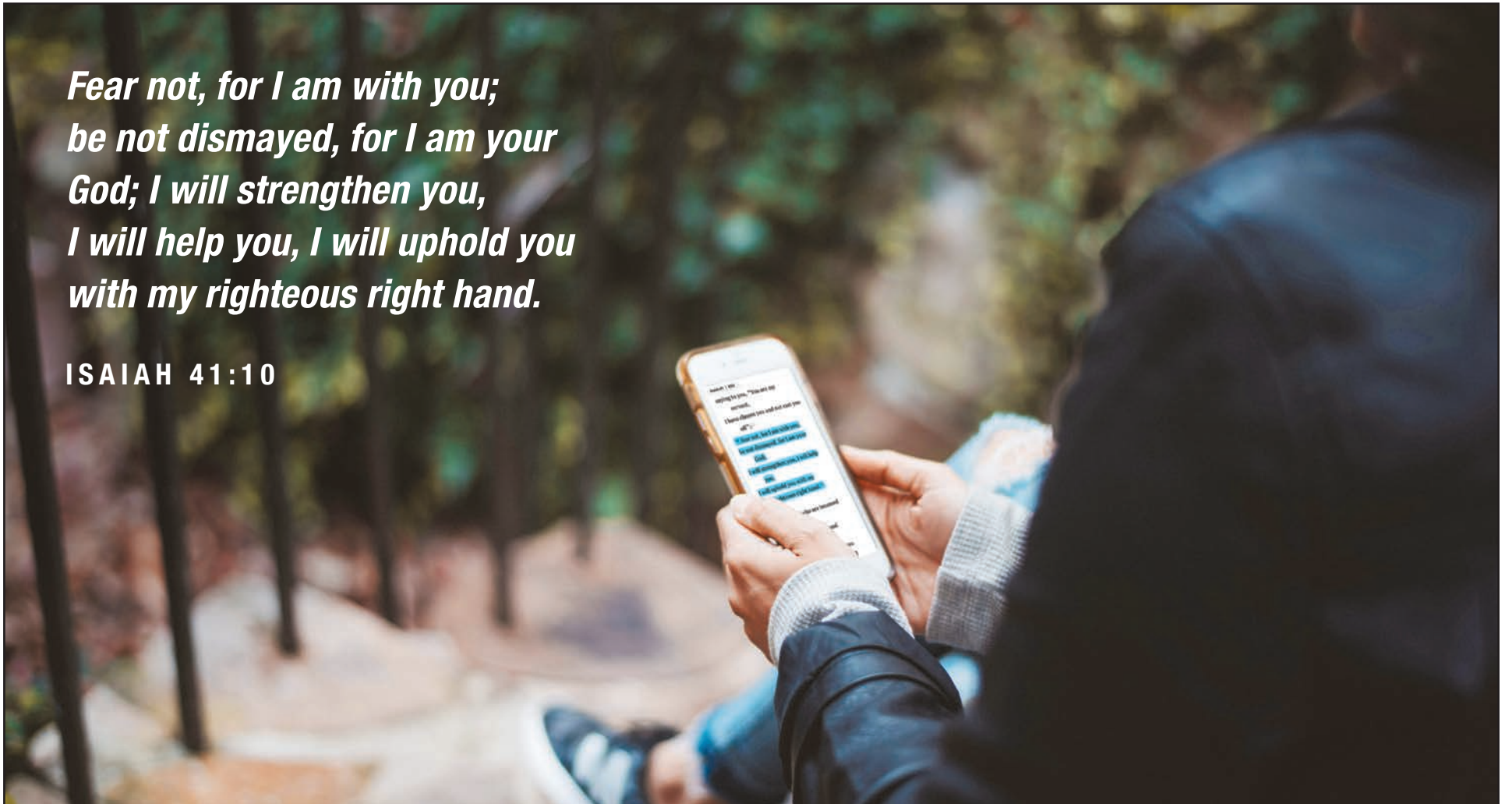
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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

*Fear not, for I am with you;
be not dismayed, for I am your
God; I will strengthen you,
I will help you, I will uphold you
with my righteous right hand.*

ISAIAH 41:10



TAB graphic with Unsplash

Verse of the year

A look at the most popular Scriptures viewed, downloaded from Bible apps in 2025

For the fourth time in the last six years, Isaiah 41:10 was the most downloaded Scripture of the year on the YouVersion family of Bible apps, which according to its founder has been installed on 1 billion devices nationwide.

“I think this verse keeps rising to the top because it addresses one of our deepest needs, the assurance that we’re not alone,” YouVersion found-

er and CEO Bobby Gruenewald said Dec. 4 in announcing the top Scripture. “In a world full of anxiety and uncertainty, people are drawn to God’s promise to be with us, to strengthen us and to help us. That message never gets old because the need for it is universal and timeless.”

Other top verses

The Scripture ranked 26th on Bible Gateway apps, where the 23rd and

91st psalms claimed all but one of the top 23 spots. At Bible Gateway, whose creators say was viewed hundreds of billions of times in the past year, Psalm 23:4 was the top Scripture, followed by the remaining verses of the psalm. Jeremiah 29:11 ranked 7th, followed by the 16 verses of the 91st Psalm, with Psalm 91:11 the most popular of that psalm.

“There were no huge surprises this year; most verses only shuffled

a few points in one direction or another,” according to a Dec. 1 press release from Bible Gateway. “Psalm 91 continued its ascent (pushing John 3:16 all the way down to No. 24), as did Psalm 121. Isaiah added a few verses this year, and Revelation (which did not appear at all last year) resurfaced with a few verses toward the bottom, knocking Ephesians’ ‘armor of God’ verse off the list altogether.” (BP)

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SCAN ME

International & national headline news

Retired missionary, minister Hunt dies at 92

Bob Hunt — an international missionary from Alabama who served for more than 30 years on the field — died Dec. 19. He was 92.

Hunt and his wife, Rosalie, served in eight countries including Taiwan, Hong Kong, China and Burma (now Myanmar) during their more than three decades as missionaries.

A graduate of Howard College (now Samford University) and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Hunt first saw his future bride, Rosalie Hall, when she was only 15 years old and Bob was on a summer missions event at the church in Oklahoma where Rosalie's father was then pastor. Bob and Rosalie met again a few years later at a Christmas missions conference and then were married in 1957.



HUNT

Together they served churches and were involved in student ministry in Mississippi until they were appointed as missionaries by the Foreign (now International) Mission Board in 1961. They served in Taiwan until 1972, when they returned to Alabama and Bob became associate pastor and youth minister at First Baptist Church Boaz. It was there Bob established a ministry center at The Lighthouse that had an indelible impact on the lives of many young people from across Sand Mountain.

In 1980, the Hunts were reappointed by the FMB and served in Hong Kong, which led to missions projects in China. They later served in the Philippines and in Australia and did itinerant work in India and Malaysia as well. Upon returning to Alabama after their final overseas assignment, Hunt served as associate pastor at First Baptist Church Guntersville and where they have since remained members.

Christians in India call for religious freedom protections amid violence

Two thousand Christians gathered in India in November to urge the government to protect religious freedoms as violence and legalized discrimination increase in the world's most populous country.

Representatives of more than 200 Christian denominations including evangelicals advocated for religious freedoms at the day-long National Christian Convention Nov. 29, spotlighting a 500% increase in targeted

attacks against Christians from 2014 to 2024, religious persecution watchdog CSW reported.

More than 830 attacks against Christians were recorded in 2024, based on a report from the United Christian Forum, representing an increase from 139 such cases in 2014.

Alabama Public Library Service Board votes on books 'inappropriate for children'

Following ongoing debate, the Alabama Public Library Service Board voted Nov. 21 to move all books discussing transgender topics from children's and teen sections to adult areas, the Associated Press reported.

The board reportedly called it a step to give parents more control on the content their children encounter. Critics described the decision as censorship targeting LGBTQ+ youth.

The rule affects 200 libraries and begins in 2026, according to board statements, AP noted.

'Christmas Alive' reaches Decatur and beyond

There's something about seeing the nativity story come to life in person, said Rita Bennett.

For the fourth year, Flint Baptist Church in Decatur presented "Christmas Alive" to its community with seven performances in 2025.

"It's an investment for our church but it's a great thing to see people who are stressed take a short amount of time to focus and get some peace," said Bennett, wife of bivocational pastor Wendell Bennett.

People's souls crave simplicity, she said, and coming to Flint's presentation helps participants slow down and witness a story that has been shared throughout time.

This year, Flint added the temple Simeon was in.

Each year Wendell Bennett also records the narration for the presentation. They stay with the story from Luke and make changes each year to accommodate volunteers and abilities.

Flint Baptist runs about 150 people attending its worship service each Sunday. The church relies on members and volunteers for its community outreach efforts, including Christmas Alive.

"[We] build everything from the marketplace," Rita said. The event is outdoors, so heaters and fire pits are set up to help on cooler evenings.

The presentation begins with the children singing. With music, the dramatization lasts about 45 minutes. About 200 chairs are set up in front of the structure they built. There is also a mini-concert at the end. In 2025, Ingram Franklin and De'Shaunna Parker blended their voices in worship.



Photo courtesy of Flint Baptist Church

Statehouse prayer rally — Jan. 21

Join other Christians in Montgomery to pray for our state's governmental leaders. Find out more at alcap.com.

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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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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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 11.



Rashional Thoughts

By Jennifer Davis Rash, President and Editor-in-Chief

Email: jrash@thealabamabaptist.org / Social media: @RashionalThts

Could calmness, intentionality and awareness be the key?

As I sat in a long line of traffic a few days before Christmas, I noticed the chaos around me. People were darting in and out of lanes to gain that coveted spot of one-car length ahead of where they previously sat.

Brake lights here, horns honking there, frustrated looks on drivers' faces — everyone seemed exasperated as they painfully inched forward toward their destinations.

Surreal moment

How could I be so calm and quiet amid all the commotion around me, I wondered. My schedule and pending deadlines could certainly rival any one of theirs.

And yet my breathing remained slow and steady, my mind flowed smoothly to what was next on the agenda, clicking through the mental list of “urgent” versus “important” versus “would be nice” versus “if time allows.”

I've certainly had my fair share of hectic and uptight moments through the years, but as the years continue to roll along, I'm noticing a newfound ability to take situations in stride, pivot as needed and manage expectations.

Maybe it's the investment of those ahead of me on the journey who continue to help me grow and learn. Maybe it's the seasoned experience that comes with time — 30 years of time to

be exact (and I'm not describing my age).

New Year's Day marked my 30th anniversary as a full-time staff member of The Alabama Baptist, Inc., and I'm as, if not more, excited about the work we do than during those first days in 1996.

Meeting needs

Our team has helped the ministry grow from one weekly newspaper to a comprehensive media group creating content across multiple platforms, all while maintaining quality print products.

Calmness, intentionality and awareness may indeed be the key to where we head next,

much like my recent traffic experience.

While many of the drivers around me that day remained absorbed in themselves, I noticed a distressed gentleman merely trying to turn left as a long line of vehicles piled up behind him.

Car after car refused to pull back enough to let him scoot through, so I decided to be the one — and with that simple act, about 15 drivers felt a little lighter and back on track.

How can we at TAB Media Group lighten your load and help keep you on track?

Give us a call at 800-803-5201 or email jrash@tabmedia.group.

30 for 30: Celebrating three decades of partnership, friendship

Help me celebrate my 30th anniversary as a full-time staff member of The Alabama Baptist, Inc.

It's easy. I'll list 30 suggestions, and you pick your favorite.

The goal is for each of the 30 items to be contributed by at least 30 individuals or groups. We'll keep you updated on how the 30

for 30 celebration is going throughout the year.

Email me at jrash@tabmedia.group or call 800-803-5201 to let us know which item you covered.

Ten options are on the table for now with more to come soon. Here's a starting point:

1. Set up a bulk order of 30 copies (or more) of our new Kids Edition.

2. Recruit 30 people to follow one of our social media channels — Facebook, Instagram, X or LinkedIn.

3. Donate \$30.

4. Recruit 30 people to subscribe to our YouTube.com/tabmediagroup channel.

5. Read 30 articles (every word) in the next few print editions.

6. Click on and read (skimming is OK) 30 articles on thealabamabaptist.org site.

7. Click on and read (skimming still OK) 30 articles on thebaptistpaper.org site.

8. Find 30 mistakes, outdated information or general problems with our websites (we know you'll find some). Start with tabmedia.group.

9. Tell 30 people what you like best about The Alabama Baptist and how they can subscribe.

10. Send us 30 people's email address (with their permission of course) to sign up for our Monday-Wednesday-Friday Highlights email newsletter.

—Jennifer Davis Rash

Your Voice



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

‘How to talk to God when life is really hard’

By **Leann Callaway**
The Alabama Baptist

Mark Vroegop spoke on the power of lament during a recent University of Mobile chapel service.

Vroegop is president of The Gospel Coalition and has served in pastoral ministry leadership for 30 years. He has written several books, including “Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament” and “Waiting Isn’t a Waste: The Surprising Comfort of Trusting God in the Uncertainties of Life.”

As Vroegop presented a message from Psalm 77 during the Oct. 29 chapel service, he opened up about a painful journey of lament that he and his wife, Sarah, experienced following multiple miscarriages and a false-positive pregnancy.

He went on to share with students about prayers of lament.

“I want you to understand how to talk to God when life is really hard,” Vroegop said. “Although I was a student in the church for many years, and I’d gone to seminary, somehow I had missed this important biblical language.

“For me, it became life-giving and helped me to process my pain and for my wife as well.

“You know what I’ve discovered after I think of my own journey and the churches that I’ve pastored and people that I’ve talked with? I’ve learned that crying is very natural and very familiar and very easy, but lamenting — the kind that is biblical and redeeming — is not quite as



UM photo

Mark Vroegop, president of The Gospel Coalition, speaks on the power of lament during a recent chapel service at the University of Mobile. Vroegop is an author and has served in pastoral ministry leadership for 30 years.

natural. I would suggest to you that we know how to cry, but we may not know how to lament.”

‘Prayer in pain’

Vroegop explained to students that lamenting is uniquely Christian as he defined lament as a “prayer in pain that leads to trust.” He also noted that one out of every three psalms is a lament.

“These are prayers that God’s people prayed when they didn’t know what to do,” Vroegop said. “You may not know it now, but three months from now, you could be walking through a difficult sea-

son, and this is going to give you a language for how to be able to process what you are dealing with.”

At some point, he noted, everyone is going to run into “a pain, a sorrow or difficulty that you’re not going to think your way out of or work your way out of.”

Brokenness of the world

“You’re going to come face to face with the fact that the world is broken, and sin has caused death in the world,” he said. “You will have to reckon with and make sense of the world. What you’re going to see in this psalm is a connection to the

gospel. The Lord Jesus when He hung on the cross prayed a lament prayer when He said, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’

“Lament is connected to the gospel in the sense that we mourn the brokenness of the world, and the ultimate hope that we have is in the person and work of Jesus Christ.”

Talk to God

He asked the students, “What does this mean if you’re a Christian?”

“Don’t give God the silent treatment. Don’t let your pain become your identity,” he added.

“Work it out with Him and talk to Him,” he said. “There’s nothing that’s rolling out in your heart that God isn’t fully aware of, nothing that you pray that He isn’t already aware of.

“Talk to Him, and take the bold step to pray through your pain.

“If you have a friend who is walking through grief, be careful not to hush their pain or silence their pain, walk with them and help them learn the pathway of lament.

“In all of our lives, you’re going to come to a moment when something hard is going to happen in your life. In that moment the question is, ‘Are you going to turn to Christ, who can deal with the ultimate need within your soul, which is a relationship with Him?’”

He added, “That helps you process everything because the trajectory of your life is now contained within the sovereign plan of a good God, and there’s grace for those who realize that a prayer in pain can actually lead to trust. That’s what it means to lament.”

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“Hang on to the vine and get ready for the greatest ride of your life if you live on mission with God.”

VANCE PITMAN
president of NAMB's Send Network

Teachers have a sober assignment. ... Jesus commands, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:19–20).

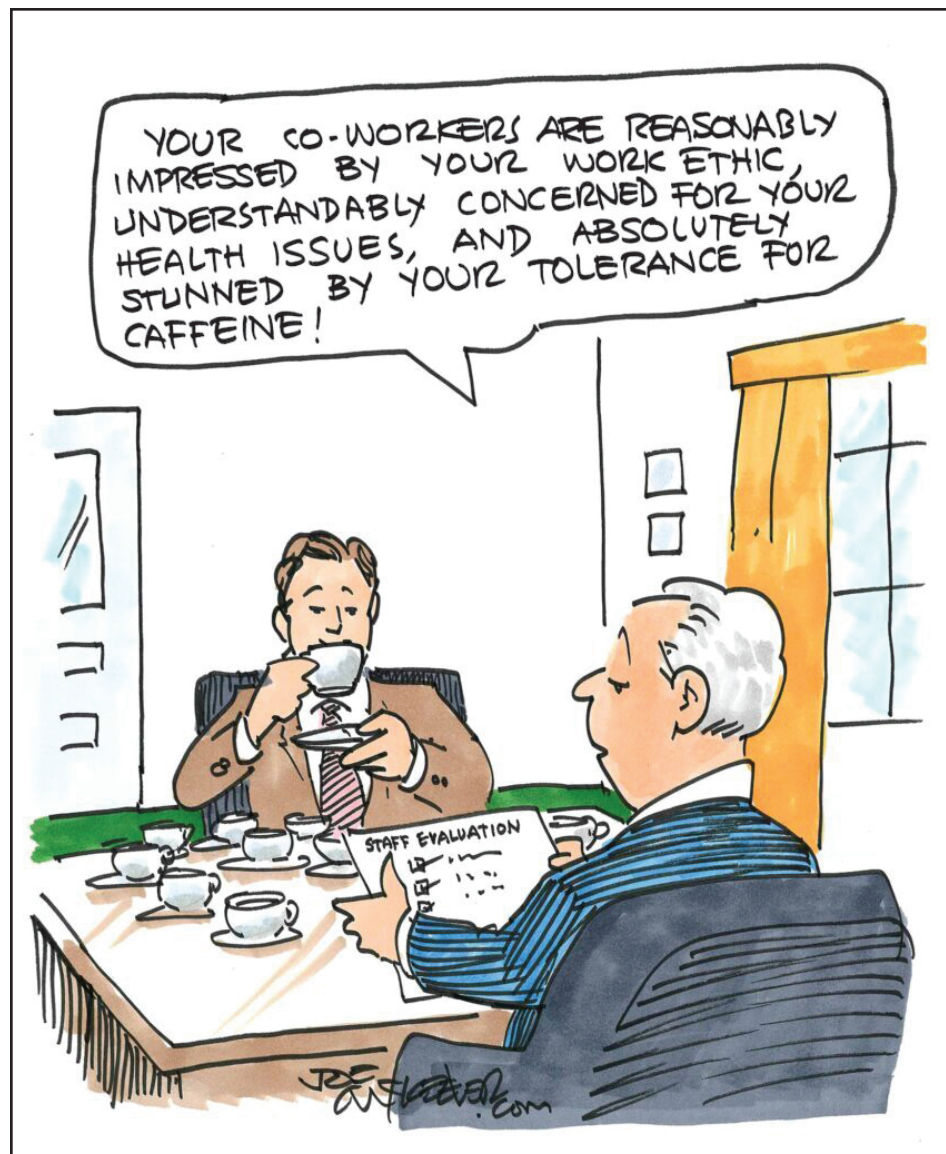
Teachers need a sharper discernment. Hebrews 5:12–14 reads, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs

to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

Teachers receive a stricter judgment. “For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:48b).

Franklin L. Kirksey
 Robertsdale, Alabama

“Many church members don’t start praying regularly for their pastor until they hear there’s a problem. Change that pattern by praying for your pastor with intentionality,” said church communication consultant **Mark MacDonald**.



LASS WORDS

BY KEN LASS
 The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Reflecting on the penny and a priceless gift

Say goodbye to the penny. The U.S. Mint has retired the 1 cent piece.

The government says it now costs 3 cents to make a penny, and that’s a losing proposition for taxpayers. So the penny, which has been around for 230 years, will soon be just a memory.

As you might expect, now that no new pennies are being made, the value of the rare ones is going to explode. I had a penny collection as a child, and I was curious as to which ones are currently the most valuable. It’s no contest. The most precious of all pennies is a 1943 D Lincoln Wheat Cent. It is worth — hold on to your seat — \$2.4 million!

Only one remains

The reason it is so valuable is because there is believed to be only one still in existence. In 1943, pennies were changed over to steel, but a few copper cents endured from that year. Now only one remains. Some collectors believe there must be others out there, but to date none has appeared.

There have been many forgeries over the years; scammers have coated their 1943 1 cent pieces with copper in an attempt to fool brokers and make a fortune. But the phonies are easy to

test and spot. The original stands alone, virtually worshipped by collectors all over the world. Occasionally it comes up at auctions, and the bidding is astronomical.

One of a kind

It reminds me of the way Jesus stands alone as Lord and Savior of humanity. He is one of a kind. There have been many forgeries and imitators over history, but all are exposed and discredited. The Son of God endures and is rightfully worshipped by His people.

In the second chapter of 1 Timothy it is written: “For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.”

The great news is that, unlike a rare penny, Jesus is available to everyone, and a relationship with Him doesn’t cost you a penny (pun intended). Walking with Him leads to eternal life.

You can’t put a price on that.

MEET THE AUTHOR

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

Latreo, a new band composed of University of Mobile students and alumni, has fully produced and released the EP “Take All of Me” now available on all major streaming platforms.

LIVING FOR CHRIST



UM photo

UM students turn senior project into worship ministry and debut album

A class requirement for University of Mobile’s Alabama School of the Arts degree programs has become a ministry, a band and a testimony to how God provides when His people step out in faith.

It started like many college projects do — with a deadline and a dream. In fall 2024, UM seniors, Joshua Trimble and Will Wayne, needed a capstone project to complete their worship leadership degrees. The two friends decided to combine their efforts.

The result is “Take All of Me,” an EP by Latreo, a new band composed of University of Mobile students and alumni. Now available on all major streaming platforms, the EP also is being shared with congregations through worship resource platforms.

“The Lord provided all that was needed,” Wayne explained.

It started with a group of songs Wayne had written over the years — words and notes he hoped one day could be used to encourage other believers and churches. That day arrived when their capstone project proposal was approved.

Meant to worship

Soon, Wayne, Trimble and a team of fellow students were rehearsing with the goal of one day recording the original songs.

The name, drawn from the Greek word “latreuo” — meaning “to serve, to worship” — perfectly captured both their purpose and their journey. The name also had a UM connection — many of Latreo’s current members had once played in a

UM campus ministry teams worship band of the same name.

There were alumni and students who already were making an impact beyond campus, including in local ministries and churches. Among the Baptist churches represented are Cottage Hill, Moffet Road, Spring Hill, Tillman’s Corner, Bay Family and Thomasville.

Students practiced and perfected the original songs throughout fall semester 2024.

When the band realized they lacked the funds and production support to bring their songs to life, provision came from unexpected places — and familiar faces.

Logan Lipke, a close friend and fellow student, needed a senior project for his degree in musical arranging and composing. He stepped in to record and produce three of the band’s songs, while Connor Duckett, Wayne’s suitemate, produced another.

And when one more song remained unproduced, UM instructor Chris Springer, who teaches in the production technologies program, joined the effort — with funds generously provided through supporters connected to Wayne.

Trimble said a desire to provide churches with a resource for worship remains the heart of the project.

“We wanted — and still want — to produce music that is edifying to the church and glorifying to Him,” Trimble said.

God’s provision

“When we finally got the band together to work on these songs, it was evident that the Lord’s hand was upon us. Not only were we able to write and produce music, but we were able to worship with some of our closest friends.

“It is an experience we will always cherish and glorify God for,” Trimble said.

In Spring 2025, they used the university’s professional Fisher-Brewer Recording Studio to lay down the tracks.

By the start of the 2025 school year in August, Latreo had fully produced and re-

leased five original worship songs: The EP “Take All of Me” includes:

- ▶ Beloved (Mephibosheth)
- ▶ There Is a God
- ▶ Take All of Me
- ▶ Grace Upon Us
- ▶ Hope in God (Psalm 43)

Each song reflects the band’s heart for authentic worship and biblical truth, blending thoughtful lyrics with fresh musical arrangements.

Every member involved contributed to the writing, arranging and recording process, making Latreo’s

debut a true campus-wide collaboration.

The album has now reached listeners far beyond campus. Latreo’s music is available on Spotify, Apple Music, iTunes, YouTube and Amazon Music, and the group is in the process of uploading worship materials for churches on SongSelect and MultiTracks.

But they aren’t finished yet.

Latreo is already writing new music and preparing for a second album — this time featuring songs from multiple writers, including Trimble and Stokes. Wayne now serves as a UM graduate assistant helping UM faculty and staff direct the type of Christ-centered campus programming that aims to nurture and disciple the next generation of leaders.

Making an impact

The mission of Latreo remains the same: to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ through songs grounded in Scripture and filled with hope.

Tim Adams, vice president for student development and collegiate athletics, said the story of Latreo is one of many that illustrates how God is using the University of Mobile to make an impact.

“The University of Mobile exists to multiply Kingdom leaders for the glory of God and the good of the world. Latreo is a perfect example of what that looks like — students using their gifts to serve the church, encourage believers and share the gospel through music,” Adams said.

To learn more, follow Latreo on Instagram: @latreo_official and on Facebook at Latreo. (UM)



UM photo

Heart of a worship leader

Retired music pastor leverages gifts to invest in others through new ministry

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Longtime ministry leader Charlie Martin was initially invested into by two people. One was a summer youth pastor who found out Martin was musical and convinced him to join the youth choir. Another was his uncle, who was the minister of music at his church around that time. He gave Martin the opportunity to lead a few hymns on Sunday nights.

Martin recently retired as associate pastor of worship for NorthPark Baptist Church in Trussville and is the founder of Worship Practice. He wants to use his talents, gifts and extensive training to continue what was done for him by investing in and helping others.

“Those [mentors] helped develop my calling and also the desire to continue and develop my talents by going to college and seminary,” Martin said. “I’ve been in ministry for 45 years.

“I’m very, very thankful. It’s been a great ride now, and I want to have the opportunity to give back a little bit to churches in the area by filling in for worship pastors and doing short-term interims to choir retreats to also investing in mentoring worship leaders, which I absolutely love doing,” he said.

Mentoring future leaders

When a high school student showed up at his church and asked to be mentored in this field and disciplined, Martin decided to work with him. Martin challenged him to lead student worship and encouraged him to help during the service on Sunday mornings.

He and Martin worked through issues — everything from how to hold the microphone to living life as



Photo courtesy of Standridge Photography

Charlie Martin, retired associate pastor of worship for NorthPark Baptist Church in Trussville, mentors and invests in others through his new Worship Practice.

a worshipper. For about four years, the student gradually took on more responsibilities until he became a primary worship leader with a large organization. Others followed, with Martin mentoring them in similar fashion.

“I can go back to when I started ministry where I was meeting kids in my home before school, where we read the Bible together,” Martin said.

“To see that they’re missionaries now or they married pastors or are pastors or worship pastors — that is discipling and mentoring that goes back to my early 20s. It’s been something I highly valued throughout my ministry because I was mentored and disciplined.”

He is so proud of who they’ve become and the ministries they are

now part of. Those he worked with are very grateful — and many are following in his footsteps.

Marshall Thrasher, a worship pastor, said he “moved more choir chairs than I can count” with Martin. Martin also gave him opportunities to serve, noticed his potential and calling and encouraged him to grow in his faith and his gifts. Plus, Martin was there for him.

“I’m not sure if he ever planned out the process, but I did the same and as a result, in churches across the world there are men and women — as well as my own son serving in ministry — because Charlie took time out of his busy life to mentor me,” Thrasher said.

Martin’s effectiveness stems from his extensive education and his varied experiences in leading music. He

has led with only a piano and organ and also with full orchestras, fully-robed traditional choirs and praise teams. He has led services with only hymns and in dark rooms with full bands.

His passion and experience led to founding Worship Practice.

Equipping to serve

Three avenues accomplish his goal, which is to “serve, equip and mentor leaders and teams”:

- ▶ Filling in as worship leader for churches in need

- ▶ Leading retreats about aspects of worship — from its biblical foundations to practical aspects of being part of a worship team to finding individual purpose

- ▶ Mentoring by spending four to six weeks meeting with a worship pastor face-to-face or on visual calls

Though the practical side is important, Martin is more concerned with a worship leader’s heart. Pride, arrogance, not being teachable and not valuing authority aren’t conducive to being an effective leader.

“How do you receive counsel, advice and direction? You need to learn how to be submissive and how to be humble, and that comes through a daily walk with Christ.

“It’s just practicing those disciplines of worship every day and making worship a lifestyle and implementing and putting into practice Romans 12:1, ... [to] present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”

“The word from the Greek means ‘worship.’ It’s to be what we do throughout the day. It’s so much more than a corporate event that we do on Sunday mornings; it’s something we do every day. It’s a lifestyle.”

For more information
or to contact
Charlie Martin, visit
TheWorshipPractice.org.

OPPORTUNITY TO BE SALT AND LIGHT

Biker pastor from Priceville reaching nonbelievers as a chaplain

By **Lonnie Wilkey**
The Alabama Baptist

Mahlon LeCroix believes pastors should practice what they preach. “I wanted to start hanging out with people who were not believers because that’s what I have been asking my church members to do,” said LeCroix, senior pastor of Shoal Creek Church in Priceville, Alabama.

“I’ve been in ministry for 10 years, and all my friends are saved,” he added.

So LeCroix began serving as a chaplain with a local motorcycle club and Priceville High School.

The school role was a natural fit as he is a former football coach at Priceville High and already knew the principal and other coaches and players. He gave up coaching as Shoal Creek began to grow.

When a new coach, Seth Parker, came in last year, he did not want LeCroix to leave the program and asked him to serve as a chaplain in a limited role.

‘A blessing’

This year LeCroix was there through the entire season.

As he prayed about how to reach the players, he felt God leading him to preach through the book of Joshua.

As the season progressed, LeCroix asked Parker — who is a believer — if he could give an invitation at the end of one of his final devotions. He reminded players that Joshua said, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Josh. 24:15).

“I asked them if anybody wanted



Submitted photo

Mahlon LeCroix, senior pastor of Shoal Creek Church in Priceville, has built relationships with motorcyclists in order to share the gospel, and he ministers to them when opportunities arise.

to choose Christ today,” LeCroix recalled, and seven team members stood up and made professions of faith.

“We baptized them right there in the team’s ice tub — without the ice,” LeCroix said with a laugh.

Parker observed that it has been “a blessing for our football program to have Mahlon LeCroix as our team chaplain this season. Not only does he motivate us as followers of Christ, but his messaging has been inspiring for us on the field as well.”

“Brother Mahlon has been a blessing for our team, and the day that he baptized seven of our players was probably my favorite day as a coach,” Parker said. “We are

so blessed by the relationship our program has with him and look forward to his fellowship and messages for our program for years to come.”

LeCroix noted that two of the players have attended Shoal Creek Church, and most are being disciplined at the school by Jonny Pool, youth pastor and a member of the coaching staff.

God is on the move

Pool said it’s a blessing to serve the kids and coaches of the football team and to have a pastor who “pours into the lives of the players and students in my youth ministry as well. God is good and is always on the move.”

LeCroix also enjoys riding motorcycles. His background enabled him to gain access to various motorcycle clubs, and he now is a member of Sin City Disciples in north Alabama.

“The door opened for me to be salt and light,” LeCroix said.

“Motorcyclists need a pastor too, but unfortunately a lot of them are not welcome in churches or they don’t feel comfortable in church. I attend their meetings, and I am there to share the truth when I have the opportunity to do so,” he added.

‘They just accept me’

“Most motorcyclists have road names, and [t]hey call me Preacher because that’s who I am and I don’t hide it. Everybody knows it. They just accept me.”

Though none has accepted Christ as Savior, LeCroix has built relationships and gained the motorcyclists’ trust in order to share the gospel, and he ministers to them when opportunities arise.

LeCroix expressed appreciation to the members of Shoal Creek for allowing him to serve as a chaplain, especially with the motorcycle club.

“They know that I’m out with a bunch of nonbelievers at times and they are perfectly OK with it as long as I’m sharing the gospel and being salt and light,” he explained.

Some churches will not allow their pastor to serve because of the time involved, LeCroix acknowledged.

“I’m at the high school and the motorcycle club a lot and the church allows me to do it. Fruit is being produced because of it and that’s a blessing.”



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

Largest faith-based foster care provider in Alabama ready to expand

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Have you ever thought about what the “homes” in Alabama Baptist Children’s Homes & Family Ministries means?

Back when the ministry started in 1891, it meant group homes for orphans — and though few may recall their original location in Evergreen, many people will likely remember their longtime location in Troy.

These beginnings played an important role in the lives of thousands of children through the years. Now even more children can receive the love, care and stability provided by foster families who serve through ABCH.

New season of ‘homes’

“Homes” in the current season of ABCH refers to the nearly 300 individual foster homes spread across the state and provides a much broader opportunity to help care for

many more children. The ministry is an entity of the Alabama Baptist State Convention and receives support from Alabama Baptist churches, individual donors and businesses.

ABCH staff and advocates work to support and resource foster families as well as help biological families reunify where possible. They also assist in finding children’s forever homes through adoption efforts when reunification isn’t possible.

While nearly 600 children are currently served by ABCH foster families, the ABCH team seeks to increase that number since 6,000 children in the state are in the foster care system.

With nine regional locations throughout Alabama, ABCH team members provide the necessary training for foster families who will

then be connected to children in need through the Alabama Department of Human Resources.

Families who work through ABCH to foster children also receive ongoing support, complimentary professional counseling and a variety of resources not available through other avenues.

ABCH leaders state, “We believe God has called us to serve children and families. He will equip us for this ministry.”

They seek “hope and wholeness for children and families through knowing God.”

Not everyone is called to foster a child, but ABCH leaders believe everyone can play a part in helping nurture the children in the foster care system.

“Everyone can do something,” they emphasize.

For more information, visit alabamachild.org.



Photo by Freepik

“We believe God has called us to serve children and families. He will equip us for this ministry.”

ABCH leaders

UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Volunteers needed for Serve Tour Birmingham

March 20–21, 2026, volunteers like you will care for hurting communities in Birmingham by serving local churches, bivocational pastors, low-income schools and other organizations needing assistance. Projects may include light construction, painting, landscaping and hosting sports camps or block parties.



Facebook/Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

By partnering with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, Shelby Baptist Association and Birmingham Metro Association, Send Relief is making it easy for you

and your team to have a lasting impact on the lives of Birmingham's most vulnerable.

Register your team now to get started with

free access to resources like prayer guides, online training and more!

For more info or to register, visit alsbom.org/servetour.

Intentional Leader

The next Intentional Leader Series, set for Feb. 10, will focus on the Preacher aspect of the four Ps of leadership: Person, Pastor, Preacher and Pathfinder.

The next session in this ongoing series will be led by Herb Reavis, pastor of

North Jacksonville Baptist Church in Florida.

Join us as we focus on preaching with intentionality, with a goal of where God wants to take His church.

Cost is \$10, which includes lunch. Register at alsbom.org/ils.

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



Bible Skills and Drills Event at Shades Crest Baptist Church in Hoover

Don't miss a great opportunity for third through sixth graders to learn more about God's Word and how to use it in their lives.

The Faith Over Fear: Bible Skills and Drills Event will be Jan. 31 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Shades Crest

Baptist Church in Hoover.

This year's event will have two tracks from which to choose. The first track will include conferences for children and leaders preparing to participate in Bible Drill this year.

The second track will

include conferences for children who want to learn God's Word and develop great Bible skills.

The cost of the event is \$20 and includes lunch.

For more info or to register, visit kidzlinkal.org/event.

WORD search

- ABEL
- ADAM
- BANISHED
- BEGINNING
- BIRDS
- CAIN
- DARKNESS
- DIVIDE
- EDEN
- EVE
- EXPANSE
- FALL
- FARMER
- FIG LEAVES
- FIRST DAY
- FRUITFUL
- GARDEN
- HEAVEN
- HOVERING
- JEALOUSY
- LIGHT
- LIVESTOCK
- MULTIPLY
- MURDER
- OCEANS
- ORIGINAL SIN
- PARADISE
- PUNISHMENT
- RIVERS
- SACRIFICE
- SEASONS
- SERPENT
- SETH
- SHEPHERD
- TEMPTED
- WALKING

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

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.
 And God saw that the light was good.
 And God separated the light from the darkness."

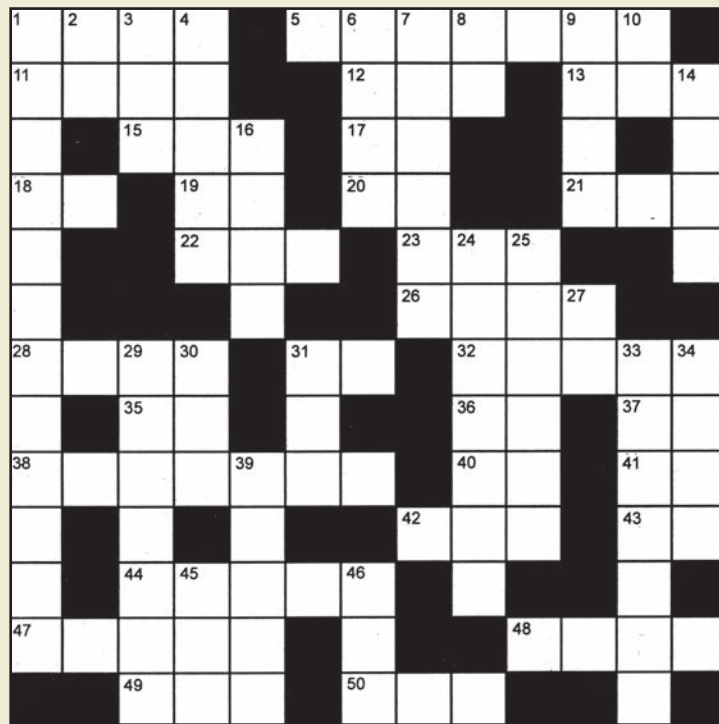
GENESIS 1:3-4

CHRISTIAN Crossword



ACROSS

- 1. I would thou wert ___ or hot. (Rev. 3:15)
- 5. Did not I ___ you from the Egyptians. (Judg. 10:11)
- 11. ___ my voice. (Ex. 19:5)
- 12. ___ thou at my right hand. (Ps. 110:1)
- 13. Behold, ___ is the accepted time. (2 Cor. 6:2)
- 15. To make a hole.
- 17. Audiovisual. (abbr.)
- 18. District Attorney. (abbr.)
- 19. There is none righteous, ___, not one. (Rom. 3:10)
- 20. Not A, E or O.
- 21. A sharp, shrill bark or yelp.
- 22. In the beginning ___. (Gen. 1:1)
- 23. He hath put a ___ song in my mouth. (Ps. 40:3)
- 26. Rejoice, and be exceeding ___. (Matt. 5:12)
- 28. The mountain of ___. (Deut. 34:1)
- 31. The ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter.
- 32. Whom Sarah bare to him, ___ (Gen. 21:3)
- 35. Prefix meaning "in."
- 36. Purple Heart. (abbr.)
- 37. Bachelor of arts. (abbr.)
- 38. Unto one he gave five ___. (Matt. 25:15)
- 40. Helium. (abbr.)
- 41. Alabama. (abbr.)
- 42. Not happy.
- 43. Football defensive



By Susan F. Weimer Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- lineman. (abbr.)
- 10. Roseanna's nickname.
- 14. Jesus ___. (John 11:35)
- 16. None is ___, save one. (Luke 18:19)
- 24. Adah bare to Esau ___. (Gen. 36:4)
- 25. Have ___ their robes. (Rev. 7:14)
- 27. Doctor of Arts. (abbr.)
- 29. Unto all and upon all them that ___. (Rom. 3:22)
- 30. That they all may be ___. (John 17:21)
- 31. Delivered it from the ___ of corruption. (Isa. 38:17)
- 33. Whose name in the Hebrew tongue is ___. (Rev. 9:11)
- 34. I will ___ on the name of the Lord. (1 Kings 18:24)
- 39. In His hands the print of the ___. (John 20:25)
- 45. Democrat. (abbr.)
- 46. Hew thee ___ tables of stone. (Deut. 10:1)
- 44. They were not afraid of the king's ___. (Heb. 11:23, NIV)
- 47. Belly button.
- 48. The ___ of all evil. (1 Tim. 6:10)
- 49. Emergency Medical Service. (abbr.)
- 50. The ___ of joy for mourning. (Isa. 61:3)

DOWN

- 1. There is therefore now no ___. (Rom. 8:1)
- 2. Obstetrician. (abbr.)
- 3. For as many as are ___ by the Spirit. (Rom. 8:14)
- 4. As ___, and behold, we live. (2 Cor. 6:9)
- 6. ___ said to Jacob, "Feed me." (Gen. 25:30)
- 7. Lead them unto ___ fountains of waters. (Rev. 7:17)
- 8. And ___ repented the Lord that He had made man. (Gen. 6:6)
- 9. ___ thou not the oppressor. (Prov. 3:31)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Celebration 250 Alabama

2026 marks our nation's 250th birthday, and we are praying for revival! Celebration 250 Alabama is a powerful movement with a vision to reach our country with the gospel. As part of this statewide effort, associations, churches and believers will unite in prayer, preparation and proclamation, lifting high the name of Jesus across Alabama and beyond. Beginning with All-Church Alabama worship



and prayer gatherings on Sept. 30, 2026, and continuing with Celebration 250 Revivals in 12 locations on Oct. 1, 2026, this initiative calls every church to join together in revival readiness, community outreach, and sharing the message of salvation in Christ. Other key events will also be held throughout the year. For more information and helpful resources about holding an event in your area, visit celebration250AL.org.

Hunger Sunday

God's Word is clear that we are to minister to the poor and needy as part of our Christian walk. The hunger faced by the poor continues to be one of the greatest problems facing our world today. The primary focus of the Hunger Offering — collected this year on Feb. 15 — is to feed hungry people. When a dollar is contributed to the Hunger Offering, the first 25% will be used to feed the hungry in Alabama by assisting associations and designated churches with food pantries. The remaining 75% will be distributed through the Global Hunger Fund. Hunger Sunday is a great time to let your church know about the hunger cri-

sis and how Alabama Baptists are responding. To get free Hunger Offering and other promotional resources for your church, visit alsbom.org/hunger or contact Lynn Graham at lgraham@alsbom.org or 334-613-2244.

For free promotional resources, visit alsbom.org/hunger or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



Alabama author shares story of tragedy, faith

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

When Lisa Stamps, author, former pastor's wife and retired educator, felt impressed by the Lord to tell her "whole story" — even the "thorny times" — she told the Lord, "No.

"I've spent my life hiding those so that my family would appear perfectly whole," she said.

But she obeyed God's prompting even though it wasn't easy.

"For anybody to be useful, you've got to lay down everything — your pride, everything," Stamps said.

Stamps recently retired from being one of the few female public school superintendents in Alabama. Having only finished the 10th grade, she had to overcome a lot to get the education needed for this profession.

After her father's death, the family lived off the land and barely made it financially. Isolated, Stamps didn't learn about the world outside her community until her late teenage years.

Tough and strong

"We just had to be tough, and we just had to be strong, and we just had to keep going," Stamps said.

In her recent release, "Anchors in My Sea," Stamps discloses the highs and the lows — and much more.

"I've sat here and listed the themes of the book and there are a million. It's a love story of the South. It's about the devotion between a husband and wife. It talks



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

LISA STAMPS

about ... the importance of family and roots.

"It's coming-of-age. It's that faith can see you through everything. It's about perseverance and determination, and it's about overcoming struggles and tragedy. It's about setting and reaching goals and going from a high school dropout to a doctorate, and it's talking about having hope of eternity through it all.

"But the biggest theme of the book is Hebrews 6:19 — that He is my Anchor, firm and secure," she said.

It also includes the battle over depression and addiction her first husband, Robert, faced while serving 20 plus years as a deacon, a Sunday School teacher and 10 years as a pastor. Eventually, he took his own life. Stamps now understands how important it is to share that part of her story.

"After Robert passed, so many preachers, it seemed like, took their lives. There

and physically. We should be ministering to them as well," she said.

Community is another vital component of Stamps' life. She may have grown up poor, but it was in a small, tightly knit community. Thus, she has always prioritized surrounding herself with others and staying connected in church.

Stamps began a grief ministry after her husband passed, having "felt the Lord call her to help others during their journey of loss." For years she reached out and shared resources with others in the same boat.

Through this ministry, she met a man who lost his wife to cancer — Jerry McDonald. Months of talking every day about their experiences with loss led to meeting for dinner. This led to dating.

Though Stamps recognizes that not all stories have happy endings, they were married in June 2025.

Active at Winfield Baptist Church, they feel they are "doubly blessed" and love serving each other and their families.

"The older you get in the faith as a Christian, you really see a lot. ... You know the Lord has walked with you through other hard times, and you know there is no other.

Depending on God

"You may feel angry — not necessarily at God but you do feel angry. You have all the emotions that a lost person has, but you know that the Lord has walked with you and proven Himself. And you just know

that's the only place to go.

"He is the Anchor — firm and secure through all the deep waters. ...

We just need to remind ourselves that He is our Father through the good times and the bad times."

"Anchors in My Sea" can be found at Amazon and other major book retailers.

For more information, visit lisastampsanchors.com.



Living with a chronic health condition doesn't mean childhood has to stop. At Children's of Alabama, we make sure kids can keep doing what they do best—laughing, playing, and simply being kids. With expert care, advanced treatments, and a team that never stops believing in brighter days, we help families navigate their healthcare journey with confidence, strength, and hope.



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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

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. 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

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Fairview Baptist in Samson, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor. Please email resumé to: 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 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>.

BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC MINISTER

New Center Baptist, Hartselle, Alabama, (newcenterbaptist.org) seeking bivocational music minister for blended services, leading choir and coordinating volunteer musicians. Email resumé to: raykballew@gmail.com or contact pastor at 256-221-6880 for more information.

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.

SIGNS

CHURCH SIGN

Signs are your first impression. What kind of impression is your church sign making? Call us to replace/update yours with either digital or traditional. Statewide since 1994. 1-800-729-6844 or 205-664-0955. reliablesigns.com

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Beachside and beachfront vacation condos in Orange Beach, Alabama. Rent direct from Christian family owners. Efficiencies, 1 bedroom, 2 bedrooms and 3 bedrooms are available. Call Don, 251-752-2366 or www.gulfshorescondos.com.

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.

TAB HIGHLIGHTS EMAIL NEWSLETTER

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

Introducing our new column on congregational health ...

13 pivots you should make in 2026

Less than 10% of all congregations are soaring with faith and are on a God-empowered spiritual strategic journey to live into their full Kingdom potential. Another 10% may be strong but not soaring.

Is your congregation one of these? Are you sure? Do not limit what God can do through your congregation even if you are not currently at least a strong congregation.

Ask God to empower your congregation to soar with faith by engaging in 13 pivots during 2026.

Pivoting takes more than just the pastor and staff making changes. It must also be embraced by lay leaders.

The willingness to make essential pivots must be the commitment of a minimum of 21% of the average number of adults gathered during a typical week for worship.

This group must proactively shift the culture of your congregation to one which embraces the new thing God wants to do in and through you.

First, pivot beyond just inviting people to accept Jesus as Savior to having them be embraced by a lifelong journey of walking with Jesus.

Second, pivot from focusing on growing your congregation to growing God's Kingdom by transforming your context or the people groups you serve.

Third, pivot from overworking and trying too hard to push your congregation forward to surrendering to God's leadership as He pulls you forward.

Fourth, pivot from strategic planning to engaging in a spiritual strategic journey through a future story of missional ministry empowered by God's leadership.

Fifth, pivot from a bounded focus on going a certain direction to a centered approach of allowing a continual discernment process to navigate your journey.

Sixth, pivot from a strategic focus on what Jesus did to a spiritual focus on who Jesus is as God's Son.

Seventh, pivot from the program of discipleship to the process of disciple-making.

Eighth, pivot from a focus on people being sent to the joy of people receiving the witness of Christians and the transformational difference Jesus makes in their lives.

Ninth, pivot from primarily counting how many people gather for worship to how many people scatter in missional engagement.

Tenth, pivot from a focus on building up the congregational organization to doing those things which empower the congregation as an ever-changing vibrant spiritual organism.

Eleventh, pivot from a memorized vision statement or motto to a visionary story of what God is up to in and through your congregation.

Twelfth, pivot from project-focused and directed steps in missional action to missional engagement that reflects how God is calling each believer to serve.

Thirteenth, pivot from multiplying through new campuses to multiplying through new congregations who may soar way past the journey of your congregation.

For associational leaders, plan to establish an annual goal to help 15% of your member congregations to pivot toward soaring with faith. Over the next seven years you could impact the effectiveness of the Kingdom service of 100% of your congregations. How many congregations will you encourage to pivot during the first year?

Each of the following 13 columns will provide a detailed explanation of a specific pivot.

Can't wait? Email me at BullardJournal@gmail.com and ask how to obtain the inventory you can use in your congregation to assess where you are right now.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

George Bullard spent five decades in Baptist congregational and denominational ministry. His ministry roles included three churches, three associations, three state conventions, and one national entity. He began as a columnist for TAB Media Group's publication *The Baptist Paper* in 2022. Bullard now serves as a strategic thinking mentor for Christian leaders through his *ForthTelling Innovation* ministry. TAB Media Group published his new book "Soaring with Faith: The Difference Maker for Congregations" — available on Amazon.

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EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Sunday School Lessons

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.

Professor of Biblical Studies, University of Mobile



For January 18

EVERY LIFE VALUED Matthew 8:1–4, 14–17; 9:1–8

Humanity is unique in God's created order because we bear the image of the Creator. As such, we have an innate dignity and worth based on who we are and Whose we are.

From the moment of conception until we breathe our last, human life is precious.

Some human beings forsake their inalienable right to life when they rob it from others who bear the image of God (Gen. 9:5–6). We memorialize the Sanctity of Human Life Sunday each January as a reminder of the Supreme Court decision in 1973 that legalized abortion, allowing for more than 60 million unborn babies to be put to death legally in the United States.

Leprosy (8:1–4)

Jesus is Lord over skin diseases. He demonstrates this during an encounter with a man with leprosy. This man knew Jesus had authority, and he believed Jesus could cleanse him. He surrendered his own will to the will of Jesus: "If you are willing, you can make me clean." As a result, Jesus heals him of his infirmity.

Leviticus 13–14 provides instructions for diagnosing leprosy and other related ailments, as well as priestly inspection of those diseases to determine when healing had occurred.

Jesus told the healed man to follow the Torah's teaching so his family and community would have an official notification from the priest that he had been healed.

Fever and Demon Possession (14–17)

Jesus is Lord over fever. Peter's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever. Jesus touched her and the fever left. Jesus didn't need drugs to heal her fever — no NyQuil, no aspirin and not ibuprofen. He simply healed her. Jesus is Lord over demons.

Several people with demons were brought to Jesus, and He drove the spirits out of each one.

Jesus also healed others who were sick with various diseases. Matthew once again points to the fulfillment of Scripture, citing Isaiah 53:4.

Paralysis (9:1–8)

Jesus is Lord over paralysis. In chapters 8–9, Jesus demonstrates His authority over paralysis.

Matthew 8:5–13 records Jesus healing the paralytic son of a Roman centurion after the soldier expressed his faith in Jesus. Another healing of paralysis takes place when men carry their friend on a stretcher to Jesus.

Jesus is Lord over sin. In this second encounter, Jesus tells the paralytic man that his sins are forgiven. Jesus addresses the man's spiritual needs first. This declaration is not received well by religious scribes who claim Jesus is blaspheming by offering forgiveness only God can offer.

Jesus is Lord over doubt. While the scribes did not trust in Jesus' words, the man trusted Him. When Jesus told him that his sins were forgiven, he believed it. When Jesus told him to take up his bed and walk, he got up and went home!

In response, the crowds were amazed by the words of Jesus, and they glorified God for giving such authority to a man.

How does this relate to the sanctity of human life? Each one of these individuals whom Jesus healed was someone who bore the image of God and had inherent worth. They were not without sin, but they needed the healing touch of Jesus.

There are people in your life in need of spiritual healing, mental healing and physical healing. Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth. Bring them to Jesus.

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

For January 25

MERCY EXTENDED Matthew 9:10–19, 23–26

Jesus' Mission (10–13)

Jesus invited Matthew to follow Him, just as He had called Simon and Andrew and James and John. But Matthew — other Gospels call him Levi (Mark 2:14, Luke 5:27) — was a tax collector in a community of tax collectors and sinners. For the religious elite, Matthew's connections were a detriment to Jesus being taken seriously. For Jesus, He was right where He needed to be — the Savior among sinners. After all, His mission was to call sinners to Himself, not the self-righteous.

In some Christian circles, the doctrine of secondary separation holds that born-again Christians should avoid close fellowship with the lost, with those who hold to conflicting doctrine and with those who don't separate from those false teachers. While the intent of this practice is holiness, unified doctrine and regenerate membership in the congregation, it can be used as an excuse to withdraw fellowship from anyone who does not agree with a certain group.

What if we looked forward to our daily interactions with lost people as opportunities to tell them about Jesus rather than as some sort of leper colony or minefield to be avoided at all costs? What if we approached lifestyle evangelism as an opportunity we get to have rather than as an obligation we have to do? Jesus has called us to be on mission so let's follow His lead.

Jesus' Work (14–17)

"Jesus, why don't your disciples fast? John's disciples fast and so do the Pharisees." Jesus addressed fasting in His Sermon on the Mount. His disciples were focused on the presence of the Master and learning from His work. Now was not the time for fasting. That time would

come after His work was done.

Jesus' Compassion (18–19)

Matthew does not mention the synagogue ruler's name, but Luke refers to him as Jairus. The leader's daughter needed Jesus to raise her up. While on the way to Jairus' house, they were interrupted by a crowd.

We cannot avoid this interruption (vv. 20–22). A woman in the crowd had suffered for 12 years, and she needed Jesus. She trusted that Jesus would heal her, and He did. While He was heading somewhere else, Jesus showed compassion to this woman of faith. What appears to be an interruption in the narrative was actually a God-ordained intervention.

Jesus' Power (23–26)

Neighbors were already mourning the death of Jairus' girl. When Jesus said that she was only sleeping, they laughed at Him. Jesus sent them away so only her mom and dad were in the room with Jesus and Peter, James and John. (See Luke 8:51.)

Once again, we learn more about the story by harmonizing Matthew 9 with Mark and Luke. "Talitha koum" — translated "little girl, I say to you, get up" — were the Aramaic words Jesus spoke to the daughter (Mark 5:41). Luke simply wrote in Greek, which is translated as "child, get up" (Luke 8:54). Matthew did not record the words of Jesus here, but His account corresponds with the others that Jesus manifested His power to return life to the dead.

Only a few returned from physical death by the power of Jesus (Lazarus, Jairus' daughter and the son of the widow of Nain). All who are saved by the grace of God through the crucified and risen Christ have been raised from spiritual death to life (Eph. 2:1–5). Thanks be to God for His grace that raises the dead!

"Jesus said, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.'"

Matthew 9:12

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sunday School Lessons

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For January 18

COMPELLED TO ACT Job 31:13–23

When we hear the phrase “the fear of God,” our thoughts are likely to turn to ideas about God’s majesty. But rather than focusing on God’s power, writers of Scripture usually tease out the implications of fearing God in how we treat vulnerable people.

Leviticus commands the people not to “curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but you are to fear your God” (19:14).

Later, it urges, “Rise in the presence of the elderly and honor the old. Fear your God” (v. 32). The same book insists that when a relative falls into difficulty, we are not to “profit or take interest from him but fear your God” (25:36).

God punishes the Amalekites because they attacked the “tired and weary” among the Israelites and “did not fear God” (Deut. 25:18). By contrast, He rewards the Hebrew midwives who defied Pharaoh’s order to kill the Hebrew boys. They did so because they feared God (Ex. 1:17).

If we truly believe about God what we say we believe, that belief must translate into action, especially as it concerns the “least of these” among us.

We are all God’s handiwork from the womb. (13–15)

As Job’s complaints against his mistreatment reach their crescendo, he insists that the sufferings that have been heaped upon him outweigh any crimes he might have committed.

He goes so far as to invite punishment for any misdeeds he may have done. He acknowledges: “If I have dismissed the case of my male or female servants when they made a complaint against me, what could I do when God stands up to judge?” Though Job is the master and the servants are his slaves, Job

recognizes that his servants are every bit as valuable in God’s sight as he. He insists, “Did not the One who made me in the womb also make him?” Both have value because both are formed by God.

We are accountable for how we help those who can’t help themselves. (16–20)

As Job continues his defense, he turns to his treatment of vulnerable individuals. He rehearses a list of people whose needs would render him guilty if he failed to satisfy them. He mentions the poor, the widow, the fatherless, those who lack clothing and the needy.

Job insists that he would be guilty before God if he had not supplied those desperate individuals with food and clothing and shelter and care.

The principle Job outlines is as easy to identify as it is uncomfortable to apply to our own lives: The weakest among us have a claim on us before God. If we ignore the needs of the vulnerable, we are liable before God for our neglect.

We are accountable for how we seek justice for those who are unjustly treated. (21–23)

Job goes on to consider a specific case that would render him guilty before God — that of failing to defend those whose rights were in jeopardy.

As an elder, Job once sat at the gate and listened to the causes of the people who came there for justice. Job insists that if an orphan had come before him and Job had gone along with the crowd in denying justice to him, he would deserve whatever punishment God cared to send against him.

As he notes in the very next verse, one who fears God must stand up — even against the crowd — for those whose rights are in peril.

For January 25

TRUTH MATTERS Proverbs 16:20–25; 30:1–6

Somewhat surprisingly, most books of the Bible don’t actually inform readers about why they were written. A perceptive reader will figure out that Judges was written to narrate how bad things got when “there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever seemed right to him” (Judg. 17:6). But we have to wait until nearly the end of the book to hear this stated explicitly.

The same holds true for John’s Gospel, which tells us it was written “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31). But right from the outset, the sage in Proverbs tells us it was written to pass along learning, wisdom, instruction, understanding, insight, righteousness, justice, equity, shrewdness, knowledge and prudence.

Perhaps as important as what Proverbs intends to teach is to whom it intends to teach it. The book’s first target is entirely predictable; its wisdom is aimed squarely at “the inexperienced” and the “young man” (Prov. 1:4). Those still inexperienced in the challenges of life are sorely in need of its instruction. What is fascinating, though, is that Proverbs has a secondary audience. The sage adds, “A wise man will listen and increase his learning, and a discerning man will obtain guidance” (Prov. 1:5). Apparently, the wise need wisdom as much as the simple do.

We need wisdom because our own way of thinking is often deceptive — and deadly. (16:20–25)

Proverbs 16 picks up on the thread of the book’s first chapter and extols the virtues of wise liv-

ing. Fools wallow in their folly, but those with “insight” find that sensibility to be a veritable “fountain of life” (v. 22). They have wise hearts and show discernment. And they are a font of wisdom for others. They are possessed of “pleasant speech” (v. 21).

Their “pleasant words are a honeycomb;” their words are “sweet to the taste and health to the body” (v. 24). Importantly, the foundation for all of the wise person’s wisdom is God Himself. Those who trust in the Lord will be blessed, and the person who “understands a matter finds success” (v. 20).

We must acknowledge our own lack of understanding. (30:1–4)

The counter to the aphorism, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it,” is the equally true maxim, “The first step to solving a problem is recognizing that there is one.” The wise man of Proverbs 30 did not hesitate to admit his own lack of wisdom.

He insists, “I am more stupid than any other person, and I lack a human’s ability to understand” (v. 2). While we can see the hyperbole in the sage’s statements, these exaggerations are intended to convey an important truth. We do lack wisdom, and we have little hope of remedying this lack until we admit our own shortcomings in this area.

We can rely on the truth of God’s Word. (5–6)

Fortunately, there is a source prepared and ready to remedy our lack of wisdom: God’s Word. The wise author contends, “Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him” (v. 5). As we immerse ourselves in God’s Word — including, of course, the Book of Proverbs — we find deep wellsprings of wisdom that nourish our souls and prepare us for the challenges that lie before us.

“Good sense is a fountain of life to him who has it, but the instruction of fools is folly.”

Proverbs 16:22

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Brandon Heath's uniquely produced albums reaching Deaf community

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Inspired by a deaf fan and aided by a high school friend who interprets for the Deaf, Christian artist Brandon Heath has produced something unique — Christian music fully interpreted in American Sign Language.

Survivors

“It kind of blew my mind that there were deaf people out there who love music because my assumption is that they don’t listen to music because they can’t hear very well,” Heath said.

“What I’ve learned is the Deaf culture, they are survivors. They have learned how to live in this world — and it’s a world that does not really spend a lot of time accommodating them. We just don’t do enough.”

Several years ago, Heath began sharing interpreted videos of some of his songs. His 2024

release, “The Ache,” is fully interpreted, with 11 videos available free on YouTube (tinyurl.com/heath-asl).

Heath involved a high school friend, Araya Williams, an interpreter for the Deaf and founder of Sonshine Interpreting, which provides ASL interpreters who love Jesus for events, music and media.

“[Brandon] knew my heart and passion, and we just had some great conversations about accessibility and music. Once he could grasp the unmet needs — that the

Deaf community is an unreached people and have a lack of ac-

cess to a lot of things (like) church options, the Bible in their visual language and music — it has been so incredible to watch him take it and run with it in the space that God has given him and gifted him in,” Williams said.

Steve Dye, Deaf ministry catalyst for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, and Joshua

Huffman, support staff for the ministry, said out of about 3,200 Alabama Baptist

churches, only 30 provide access for the Deaf community to worship with them, and only 10 pastors focus on deaf people. State Missionary Kristy Kennedy, who works with language groups, estimates there are no more than 300 Deaf people attending churches affiliated with the Alabama Baptist State Convention.

Williams said a lot of deaf people think, “Jesus is for hearing people. I’m too expensive; I’m too distracting; I’m not worth your investment,” she said.

Not forgotten

Williams and Heath agree: The Church should be the leaders of accessibility.

Heath has already decided that every future album he releases will be fully interpreted. He hopes other Christian artists will follow suit.

To learn more about Heath and his music, go to brandonheathmusic.com.



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist
Songwriter, singer and musician Brandon Heath performs “The Ache” at the 2024 K-LOVE Fan Awards.

Alabama Baptist Conference of the Deaf holds ‘Hearts on Fire’ gathering



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

On Nov. 1, 2025, the Alabama Baptist Conference of the Deaf met at The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham for a “Hearts on Fire” gathering — an afternoon of worship, fellowship and reigniting a fire for the Lord among Deaf churches



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

in Alabama. Hosted by Alabama Deaf Church and led by pastor Tony Tiano, 74 deaf, hard of hearing and their families and friends joined together. Worship was led by a variety of people such as (l to r) Crystal, Venita and Joshua Huffman.