

# NEW CHAPTER OF MINISTRY

## Lance announces upcoming retirement plans from Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

By Jennifer Davis Rash  
The Alabama Baptist

**A**fter nearly three decades of leadership by Rick Lance, Alabama Baptists are preparing for a time of transition.

Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, announced retirement plans for Jan. 31, 2027, during the Feb. 3 meeting of the SBOM board of trustees.

“Life is lived in chapters,” Lance said. “Some chapters are longer than others and some are more brief. Sensing the direction of the Lord, I have come to believe that a new chapter of ministry is needed in my life. I also believe the State Board of Missions and the Alabama Baptist family need a new chapter of ministry as well.

“For 28 years, I have had the privilege to serve alongside Alabama Baptists as a state missionary in the role of executive director,” Lance shared. “This has been the most meaningful time in my more than 55 years of gospel ministry. I am humbled that the Lord has chosen to use me in this capacity and grateful for the trust that Alabama Baptists have placed in me.”

### ‘Seamless transition’

“I plan to conclude my time of service on Jan. 31, 2027. During this next almost 12 months I will work with our leadership to ensure a smooth and seamless transition to new executive director leadership. This is my commitment to the State Board of Missions and the Alabama Baptist family.



Photo by Doug Rogers/Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions  
Rick Lance shares his decision to begin the transition process toward retirement during the Feb. 3 State Board of Missions board of trustees meeting in Prattville.

“I am sincerely thankful for the opportunity to serve the Lord with Alabama Baptists throughout all these years. I embrace the words of the Apostle Paul speaking to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:24, ‘I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me — the task of

testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.’”

### Next steps

Lance outlined a possible process timeline and explained the SBOM’s executive director is elected by the SBOM board of trustees. The goal is for a candidate to be presented before the board

in August and, if elected, then he could work alongside the staff and Lance for the remainder of 2026.

### Shadowing opportunity

It would be a shadowing opportunity with the state convention annual meeting in November as well. By nature of the office of the SBOM executive director, that person becomes treasurer of the state convention.

Jim Graham, chair of the SBOM board of trustees, also announced the transition search team members he appointed. The team will be chaired by Buddy Champion, pastor of First Baptist Church Trussville and a past president of the state convention.

Transition search team members serving along with Champion are Jim Cooley of FBC Birmingham, Ben Hayes of FBC Dadeville, Chad Hess of Woodmont Baptist in Florence, Neal Hughes of Montgomery Baptist Association, Allen Singley of Pilgrim Home Baptist in Newton, Ben Stubblefield of Spring Hill Baptist in Mobile, Derek Staples of FBC Jacksonville and James Watkins of West End Baptist in Clanton.

Serving as ex-officio members of the team are Graham; Jarman Leatherwood, president of the state convention; Craig Carlisle, immediate past president of the state convention; and Jamie McGlaughn, president of Alabama WMU.



LANCE

*“I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me — the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.”*

Acts 20:24

# The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

Alabama Baptist Stefana Dan Laing (in blue vest), associate professor at Beeson Divinity School, celebrates with about 50 friends Jan. 27 including (top photo, on stage) Dakota Rice and (center photo, l to r) Kathleen Bass and Anna Russell.



## Robust resource

### New study Bible focuses on discipling women

**S**tefana Dan Laing, associate professor at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, spent the evening of Jan. 27 celebrating the new CSB Women's Study Bible.

Laing, general editor, acknowledged plenty of study Bibles already exist. Why publish another one?

"Women's ministry — and the world — has changed in the past 20 to 30 years," she said. "We believe one of the best ways to equip Christian women ... is to draw them

back to basics, particularly the timelessness of the Scripture.

"We want to ... provide a robust Bible ... helpful to a woman as she studies and helpful to those [she is] discipling. Our study Bible treats the reader as a student of the Scripture first and as a woman second. It is not about women; it is about God."

Laing and her husband, John, are active in Alabama Baptist life and involved in a variety of ministry efforts. For more information, visit [bhpublishinggroup.com](http://bhpublishinggroup.com). (TAB)



Photos by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

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# Reach the nations

## Italian church members trained by IMB ahead of Winter Olympics

As the 2026 Milan-Cortina Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games get underway, International Mission Board missionaries will be watching those they've been coaching hit the streets to evangelize.

IMB missionaries have been training and mobilizing local church members in northern Italy for outreach before, during and after the events. They are working to ensure volunteers are equipped to seize every opportunity to share Christ, according to the projects section of [imb.org](http://imb.org).

### Outreach activities

IMB officials are raising money to help with the effort. "The nations are gathering for the 2026 Winter Olympic Games. Travelers from over 90 countries will be represented and many are coming from places that are closed to the gospel," the site reads.

"Nations of athletes and spectators from around the world will gather in one country, opening doors for great opportunities to proclaim the gospel boldly to many 'nations, tribes, peoples and languages' (Rev. 7:9).

"You can help share the good news of Christ's love with hundreds



TAB graphic with Unsplash.com

The 2026 Milan-Cortina Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games offer volunteers from local churches in northern Italy the chance to share the good news of Christ with travelers from more than 90 countries.

if not thousands of people during the games by praying for and giving to the 2026 Winter Olympics Outreach," the promotional material states. "Your gift will provide evangelism materials, including Bibles in multiple languages, translators, transportation and venues to host outreach activities for tourists who have come to watch the games.

**For more information, visit [imb.org/generosity/winter-olympics-2026](http://imb.org/generosity/winter-olympics-2026).**

"Many who hear the gospel and receive tracts and Bibles will take the gospel back to their home countries, so your generosity can create a ripple effect of evangelism that impacts the world. ... The Winter Games also offer tremendous opportunities to strengthen partnerships with local churches. Your gift will help host these critical training events, emboldening local believers to share the good news in their cities and towns long after the Games have ended."

## Deaflympics offers opportunity for global outreach

Hannah Walker didn't know sign language when her journey began to serve the Deaf community. As a former Journeyman

with the International Mission Board, she was drawn to the loss of the global Deaf and was led by the Lord to serve them in Thailand.

### Learning sign language

"I actually moved to the field and learned Thai sign language first, and then over time I learned ASL [American Sign Language]," Walker said.

She and her husband, Timothy, are part of the IMB Deaf Affinity in Thailand, and Walker currently serves as a next gen strategist, driven by a passion to mobilize students and young adults to serve globally.

This past fall, Walker was in To-

kyo experiencing another opportunity for global outreach.

Walker joined IMB teammates at the Deaflympics Nov. 15-26, 2025. This worldwide event brings Deaf athletes together to compete every four years.

IMB representatives attended previous Deaflympics, but this was the first time IMB mobilized volunteers, church partners and national partners.

### Partnering in Tokyo

More than 20 U.S. churches partnered with the IMB to be in Tokyo, and Walker reported national partners joined from Africa, Eastern Europe, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. (IMB)



IMB photo

Exchanging pins created unique opportunities for volunteers to share the gospel at the 2025 Deaflympics.

## The Alabama Baptist

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

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**JENNIFER DAVIS RASH**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 11.



# Rashional Thoughts

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

Email: [jrash@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:jrash@thealabamabaptist.org) / Social media: @RashionalThts

## Eye contact and a few smiles will be a win

**F**un note — I get to share with an assembly of students at my alma mater, Phil Campbell High School, in a few weeks.

As I started thinking about my presentation, I realized I'm more nervous about this opportunity than I am about giving my report to the crowd at the annual meeting of the Alabama Baptist State Convention each November.

All I can see in my mind is an auditorium full of high schoolers bored, distracted and totally ignoring me. Some are sleeping while others stare down at the floor. A few are whispering, and all of them wish the school allowed them to have access to their phones about now.

After all, what can I really share that might inspire them? Do I have any information of interest to them? Why would they care about my story?

Even beyond sensing an all-out audience

rejection, I'm more concerned about missing a pivotal moment, however.

Who is that one person in the crowd needing to hear something super specific only I can share? Will I be prayed up and appropriately prepared as to not miss the opportunity?

How can I pull them into the stories so they find themselves dreaming a little, maybe even developing a new level of courage for growth and development?

### Staying focused

What would pique their interest enough to keep them focused on striving for excellence and becoming productive, positive contributors to society? What would help bring others along who previously settled for mediocre?

As I ponder and prepare, I'm sending a shout out to all of you teachers, preachers and motivational speakers out there. Thank you for putting in the work to keep us moving forward.

## Who's Who among 30-for-30 challenge

**S**hout out to the following for their early participation in the 30-for-30 challenge:

- ▶ David George — bulk order of The Kids Edition
- ▶ Trennis Henderson — scanning websites for mistakes
- ▶ Morris Murray — letters to the editor
- ▶ Denise George — story ideas
- ▶ Jason Rash — donation

We'd love for the list to showcase at least 30 participants by the next edition, so be sure to let us know by emailing [jrash@tabmedia.group](mailto:jrash@tabmedia.group) or calling 800-803-5201.

I'm also grateful for the large number of kind messages coming my way regarding the 30th anniversary. It has been so much fun hearing from all of you.

Thank you for being such an incredible source of support and encouragement.

—*Jennifer Davis Rash*

## 30 for 30: Celebrating three decades of partnership, friendship

**H**elp 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](mailto:jrash@tabmedia.group) or call 800-803-5201 to let us know which item you covered.

Following up with the third 10

options (first 20 options appeared in previous editions and can be found online):

**1. Encourage** 10 kids to submit an entry to The Kids Edition and remind them up to three times to make sure they follow up. Email submissions to [thekidsedition@tabmedia.group](mailto:thekidsedition@tabmedia.group).

**2. Share** a comment on three social media posts and click on like or love for 10 other posts.

**3. Donate** \$3,000 to the Hudson Baggett Student Internship fund held at The Baptist Foundation of Alabama. Mail a check to TBFA with a note attached about the internship

fund for TAB: P.O. Box 241227, Montgomery, AL 36124-1227; or call TBFA at 334-394-2000 for more information.

**4. Spend** 30 minutes with a group on a Wednesday night (or other appropriate time) to discuss articles you've read in one of the TAB Media Group print publications or online since Jan. 1.

**5. Watch/listen** to one or more of the interviews featured at [youtube.com/tabmediagroup](http://youtube.com/tabmediagroup) for at least 30 minutes.

**6. Jot** down 10 different contributors to a recent print edition and pray for them over the next three days.

**7. Select** three negative items in your life and remove them for the next 10 weeks (or longer).

**8. Order** three books from Iron Stream Media (look for the one from TAB Media Group).

**9. Order** 10 or more copies of TAB Media Group's coming Easter devotional by Denise George or Soncoast's Easter book by TAB editor emeritus Bob Terry, both available from Amazon.

**10. Take** a 30-minute walk at least three times in the next 10 days.

—*Jennifer Davis Rash*

# Your Voice



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

## First person: The Shepherd's guiding staff

By Tara Dew

Author of "Overflowing Peace"

A shepherd's staff is used to rescue a lost or entangled sheep, but it is also the tool by which a shepherd affectionately guides his flock. He will place the tip of the crook along a sheep's side, guiding them to travel along a new path. This is why the Living Bible translates Psalm 23:4, "... You are close beside me ... guiding all the way."



DEW

God is often described in Scripture as a shepherd, guiding His people like sheep, with His staff in hand. Listen to Psalm 78:52-53 which speaks of God leading the Israelites out of Egypt: "He led his people out like sheep and guided them like a flock in the wilderness. He led them safely, and they were not afraid."

### God's presence

After they were freed from Egypt, God led them in the desert with a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day. His visible presence guided them in the wilderness in the same way that a shepherd's staff would guide the flock.

Once the people had crossed through the dry ground of the Red

Sea, Moses led the people in singing a song to God, praising Him for being their guide: "With Your faithful love, You will lead the people You have redeemed; You will guide them to Your holy dwelling with Your strength" (Ex. 15:13).

A few centuries later, God reminds the people again that He is their Shepherd who will not leave them. Through the prophet Isaiah, God reiterates that He will guide them: "I will

lead the blind by a way they did not know; I will guide them on paths they have not known. I will turn darkness to light in front of them and rough places into level ground. This is what I will do for them, and I will not abandon them" (Isa. 42:16).

What a wonderful promise! God will lead us and never abandon us, just as a shepherd would never abandon his sheep.

Friend, it gets better. As Christians, we now have the Holy Spirit as our Guide! Jesus told His dis-

ciples that it was better for Him to ascend to heaven so that the Holy Spirit would come to us (John 16:7). He promised that God will "give you another Counselor to be with you forever. He is the Spirit of truth ... [and] He remains with you and will be in you" (John 14:16-17).

### Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit of God dwells inside of each of us, to lead, guide and direct us. He is our Counselor, reminding us of Jesus' words (John 14:26) and teaching us. He is the one who "will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13).

And so perhaps this is why Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Don't let your heart be troubled or fearful" (John 14:27).

Jesus knew that if He left, the Holy Spirit would come. And He is our peace as He leads and guides us, just like a shepherd with his staff.

*EDITOR'S NOTE — This first-person piece is an excerpt from "Overflowing Peace: What God Says About a Peace-Filled Life" by author Tara Dew published by B&H Publishing. Tara is married to Jamie Dew, president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.*



**"The Holy Spirit of God dwells inside of each of us, to lead, guide and direct us."**

"We want people to find God and discover their purpose. Here in prison, our story is still being written. We want people to answer questions: What are your possibilities? What is His plan? We want every member of our church to serve," said **Christopher**, associate pastor of Koinonia Church, a church plant at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman.

Every life has unshakable worth, not because of what we've done but because of what Jesus did.

God's the one who defines value.

He made us in His image. He proved our worth on the cross.

That truth should change how we see ourselves and how we see every single person we meet.

**Tim Tebow**

@TimTebow on X

My favorite quote from VBS ... from a young man named Messiah:

"Hey Pastor Jay, I thought VBS was gonna be bad and full of a bunch of boring speeches ... but this has been awesome. I can't wait to come back tomorrow."

**Jay Adkins**

@\_JayAdkins on X

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

“We have to continue asking people and calling them to answer God’s call.”

RICK WRIGHT  
pastor, The Church at Chelsea Westover

“Only God can place His call upon a servant’s heart; however, there can be great joy in the life of the church as ministers and church members alike encourage and spur on those who are experiencing that individual call,” said **Bryan Blass**, director of the SBOM office of LeaderCare. “Our God is not limited, so do not be surprised when people of all ages begin that journey to follow God in service, wherever He leads. While some answer ‘yes’ from a call early in their life, others are asked to say ‘yes’ to His call even in their retirement years.”

“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,” said illustrator and author **Jane Lazenby**, who wrote “Chosen: An Intricate Weaving of Art, Scriptures and Memories.”

“As we get older, we sometimes tend to feel like our lives are behind us, or people don’t really care about us anymore,” said International Mission Board missionary **Sue Foster**, reflecting on her call to international missions after becoming a widow. “But when we have the opportunity to share our experiences and offer a little bit of wisdom or encouragement, we need to take it.”



# Lass WORDS

BY KEN LASS  
The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

## Technology and the ‘ultimate’ authentic source

They call my generation Baby Boomers, but when it comes to technology, we should be referred to as the ‘Tweener Generation.

I don’t recall my mom and dad ever using a computer or the internet for anything in their entire lives. By contrast, my children and grandchildren use internet technology for virtually everything, and their lives are intricately entwined within it.

I am the transition group. I know a little about computers, but in many ways I still cling to the past. I can send an email or a text message; I can surf the internet; I can order a pair of pants from an online store, I can order food from an app — but that’s about the extent of my cyber expertise.

### Lingering distrust

That’s just fine with me. Beyond those basic tasks, I have a lingering distrust of the cyber world. I’m hesitant to do any banking or bill paying online, and I put little credibility in anything I read on various social media platforms unless it comes from a friend. Even then, one can’t be sure if the message really is from a friend or a scammer pretending to be someone you know!

For me, the internet world lacks authenticity — it pretends to be a source for knowledge and guidance about everything.

And it’s right there at your fingertips, instant answers to all your questions. What could be more convenient?

The easy access and quick, definitive responses can seduce us into trusting it with personal information that was never meant to be public. Exactly who is providing these answers, and what is their agenda? Is their knowledge authentic or does it come with ulterior motives?

### ‘Ultimate example’

I worry about our younger folks. They have surrendered their privacy to computer services and enterprises with little or no verification of veracity.

Many would consider it old-fashioned to use the Bible to seek answers. Yet God’s Book endures as the ultimate example of authenticity. In Psalm 119, David writes, “Never take your Word of truth from my mouth, for I have put my hope in Your laws.”

When I recently explained my concerns to a young woman she told me I was just being afraid of what I don’t understand.

She’s right. We all should be.

## 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

## MOBILE NETWORK

► **Lafitte Baptist Church, Saraland**, celebrated its 50th anniversary Jan. 24–25. Saturday's event featured The Kendricks, a country gospel band. During Sunday's service, special guests were recognized including former ministers Bob Mahan and Myles and Holly Herrin, youth ministers; Joel Stevens, minister of music; David Atchison, pastor; and Grant Barber, interim pastor. Kevin Blackwell, executive director of Mobile Baptist Network, was the guest preacher. Worship leaders Trey Whit-



Photo by Mark McPherson

man and Justin Gibson led the praise team and congregation in favorite hymns and worship songs. Established in 1916 as Telegraph Road Baptist Church, Mobile, the church relocated in 1939 and was renamed First Baptist Church Plateau. In 1976 the congregation moved to Saraland and adopted its current name. To celebrate 50 years as Lafitte Baptist, a commemorative plaque was presented by Susan Walker, a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, with pastor Billy Kendrick accepting the honor on behalf

of the congregation. Following the service, a luncheon was served and items from the church's 50-year-old time capsule were displayed. Each family received a spiral booklet of the church's history as a gift.

## MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION

► **Mary Virginia Crum** recently retired as an administrative assistant with **First Baptist Church Montgomery**. During her almost 30 years of service, she filled a variety of roles and served the past 22 years as ministry assistant for Kenny



CRUM

Hoomes, associate pastor for spiritual maturity. Mark Bethea is pastor.

## ST. CLAIR ASSOCIATION

► **Riverside Baptist Church** held a ribbon-cutting ceremony Dec. 7 to celebrate the dedication of its new building. The previous structure was destroyed two years ago from a fiery car crash. Riverside's Mayor Rusty Jessup (left) and Danny Courson (right), St.



Submitted photo

Clair Baptist Association's missions strategist, had the honor of cutting the ribbon. Also pictured (l to r) are Billy Bedford, pastor of First Baptist Church Riverside; Ken Maddox, pastor of Riverside Baptist; councilman Sam Maddox; and Dale Foote, pastor of Seddon Baptist Church, Pell City.

## WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION

► **David "Dave" Delegal** recently retired as associate pastor of **First Baptist Church Leroy** where he served for more than 33 years. During that time he also served as minister of music and youth and later as senior adult minister. His 48 years of music, youth and education ministry include Vernant Park Baptist Church, Magnolia Springs; New Beulah Baptist Church, Hammond, Louisiana; Fairview Baptist Church, Selma; Creola First Baptist; and Fulton Road Baptist Church, Mobile.

He is a graduate of New Orleans Seminary. Members of FBC Leroy presented Delegal with a plaque, monetary gift and special supper reception. He and his wife, Laura, have one son. Delegal is available for part-time ministry and can be contacted at 251-454-7987 or dadelegal@yahoo.com.



Photo by Amanda McLain

## Got a New Orleans Seminary connection?

The Birmingham extension of New Orleans Seminary is hosting a connections lunch for alumni, current students and prospective students.

The free lunch is set for Feb. 23 from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Valleydale Church, 2324 Valleydale Road, Birmingham, AL 35244.

"We're looking forward to celebrating what the Lord has done through the Alabama extension centers over the years," said Birmingham extension director Stephen Hall. "Many pastors and ministry leaders have been trained and sent out, and we want to reconnect with alumni and friends of the Birmingham Center.

"This lunch will be a time for alumni to reconnect, for current students to be encouraged and for prospective students to learn more about seminary training through NOBTS and Leavell College — both through the Birmingham extension center and on-line pathways."

To register for the lunch, email shall@nobts.edu. (The Alabama Baptist)

## Fulton Bridge Baptist pastor says they're already filling up new building

By **Grace Thornton**  
The Alabama Baptist

**S**hane Stidham said his church has some good problems to deal with.

"The church is built, we're in it, and it's about 80% full," said Stidham, pastor of Fulton Bridge Baptist Church in Hamilton.

The congregation moved into its new building in November 2025, just five months after construction started. They started the project because they were growing at a rapid pace. When Stidham became pastor four years ago, they were running

about 60 in worship. By fall 2024, they were averaging between 250 and 300.

Now an average Sunday sees about 350 to 400 people walk through the doors, and the church is starting to look at adding a second service.

### 'Secret sauce'?

"I knew the church would grow, but I didn't know it would be like this," Stidham said. "Our outreach team is incredible; they love to go after lost people. There's no secret sauce. Anything we can do in the community that we think there's somebody there who's lost, we go there."



Photo courtesy of Fulton Bridge Baptist Church

Members of Fulton Bridge Baptist Church gather to pray in the church's new building on the Wednesday before their first Sunday service there.

He said it's all God, and his congregation is excited to jump in and work.

"They love each other, and

they're so willing to help," Stidham said.

In addition to a new worship center, the construction

project included doubling the size of the nursery and kitchen and renovating the old sanctuary. Construction teams from Texas, Baldwin Baptist Association and their local Marion Baptist Association came to help.

The church spent more than \$1 million on the project, but thanks to God's provision, by the time they moved in, they had the debt down to \$270,000 thanks to generous gifts that Stidham said affirmed that God is at work in their church.

"We're excited; we love to be there," he said.

# God's signposts

Alabama church planter: 'God is writing a story' through congregation's new location, name

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

**T**he news hit pastor Justin McKay like a ton of bricks — his church's landlord was tripling their rent.

He knew that meant The Local Church in Arvada, Colorado, would have to move. But soon they saw the door swing open to a new story — one he says only God could write.

McKay and his wife, Lacy, saw the beginnings of it when they went to Colorado on their honeymoon almost a decade ago.

"On our first day, we were driving around, and we're in awe of the Rocky Mountains," said McKay, who grew up at Bluff Park Baptist Church in Hoover (now the Church on the Bluff).

But a question rose to the surface — where were all the churches?

## A familiar area

Unable to shake that question, they moved to Colorado from Alabama five years later, sent out by Capstone Church in Tuscaloosa to start a church planting residency.

Five years later, sent out as an endorsed Send Network plant, they launched The Local Church, which grew to around 100 attending on Sundays.

They were in a great location. Then that letter came from their landlord, and they knew they couldn't stay.

A few days later, McKay was out with someone from the church scouting for possible new locations, and he ended up somewhere unexpected.

"I started to get nostalgic, because that was the same area where Lacy and I honeymooned almost 10 years prior," he said.



Photo courtesy of Valor Church

The Local Church in Arvada, Colorado, gathers for a Christmas service just weeks before leaving its building and moving into a new temporary home at a local school. As it works toward building a new facility, the church has changed its name to Valor Church to reflect its new season.

So he went home and started doing some research on that area, a master-planned community called Candelas, and found out its history dated back to 1861 — when a couple had moved there on their honeymoon.

"It was founded by a couple, George and Sarah Church, and crazy enough they moved out to Colorado on their honeymoon and started to ranch," McKay said. "I was struck by their story, and their last name being Church, that's wild."

The Churches had been the first to bring winter wheat to the area, and just like that harvest, McKay felt like the fields were white for a spiritual harvest in Candelas.

He continued to do research and found the Churches' great-grandson living in the area — and that he

shared his same last name. They met, and Charlie Church McKay encouraged him to keep going in the pioneering spirit God had given him.

He remembered that when they went to look at land and found only two lots available. The church had its offer on one lot rejected, and the other was too small for a church.

"But I had this idea — I wonder if there's something around it that we could combine with that piece of property," McKay said.

"And while I was looking, right next to that property I found a plot of land of almost five acres, and it was under the name of Land of Revival, an LLC named that."

He met with the owner and shared the church's vision, and they told him they felt like God was in it.

**For more information, visit [valor.church](http://valor.church).**

"That was the beginning of a beautiful partnership," McKay said.

Not too long after, a third piece of adjoining land became available that was also owned by Christians. The church was able to purchase that too.

## Stepping out in faith

The church met for the first time Jan. 18 in its new temporary meeting place, a local school. But it did so with a new name — Valor Church. He said they made the change because often in the Bible, God gave people new names when He called them to a new vision. McKay said they're stepping into this next season with strength, courage and character.

"God is writing a story, and He wants us to trust Him," he said. "We're excited but also know this isn't going to be easy, practically or spiritually."

He said in the Denver area, they often encounter people who want nothing to do with Christ.

"We need people's prayers, and we need new partner churches to come out and pray for us," McKay said, noting that many of their strong partner churches are from Alabama. "There's not a church in an area of 30,000 people, and it's the future of our city — there's going to be rapid growth there. It's exciting to be on the forefront and lay the foundation of something we hope to see there in 80 years."

He said he remembers praying on The Local Church's launch Sunday in 2022 alongside partners who were visiting from Capstone Church and Mountain Brook Baptist Church, and he can see where God has been faithful to respond.

"God answers prayers, and we're excited to be a part of it," McKay said. "This is certainly of God."

# UM kicks off spring semester of chapel

The University of Mobile kicked off its first chapel of the spring semester 2026 by calling students to a year of gospel growth. Led by UM President Charles Smith, the Jan. 14 panel of faith leaders challenged students to envision “an amazing year of faithfulness, joy and gospel growth.”

Smith opened the panel by reminding students, faculty and staff that gospel growth is the reason the University of Mobile exists.

## Testimonies

Panelists presented the gospel message in a Q&A format and shared their personal testimonies. They encouraged students to look to Jesus, either for the first time or in a fresh way, and to prepare for a season of gospel growth by immersing themselves in God’s Word and joining a local church community that faithfully preaches the gospel.

Panelists included:

▶ Tim Adams, vice president for student development and collegiate athletics, University of Mobile

▶ Kathy Litton, former director of planting spouse development, North American Mission Board and UM board of trustees member

▶ Ashley Smith, first lady, University of Mobile

▶ Joe Lewis Stevens Jr., pastor of Redeemer Fellowship, hospice chaplain at Southern Care and UM adjunct instructor for theology

▶ Ben Stubblefield, pastor of Spring Hill Baptist Church in Mobile.

Adams spoke about the moment he made a decision for Christ.

“I was vaguely familiar with Bible stories and totally unaware of what the meaning of Jesus’ life meant. At youth camp, I heard a gospel presentation that my sin separated me from a holy God. It was like opening up the reality that Jesus was relational. It changed my life forever,” Adams said.

Ashley Smith said as she became a wife and mother, she began to ask identity questions, wondering who she was beyond those labels.

“The Lord began to unveil the depth of my need, and it changed my life,” she said.

“The right question is ‘who



UM photo

is Jesus?’ Jesus is the way, the truth and the light. For you to find the light, you must look to Jesus.”

Stevens pointed students to God as Creator, using his favorite passage, Revelation 21, that speaks of a new heaven and new earth.

“The gospel message is transforming repentant sinners, and it is creating creation again. God isn’t using the work of Christ to refurbish creation, He is recreating creation. Trust and believe in a cosmic Savior who is redeeming all creation.”

Litton said the power of the gospel carried her through the toughest of times, such as when her first husband died in a car crash.

“That seed of truth has shaped me and given me the power for the darkest days of my life,” she said.

## Putting down roots

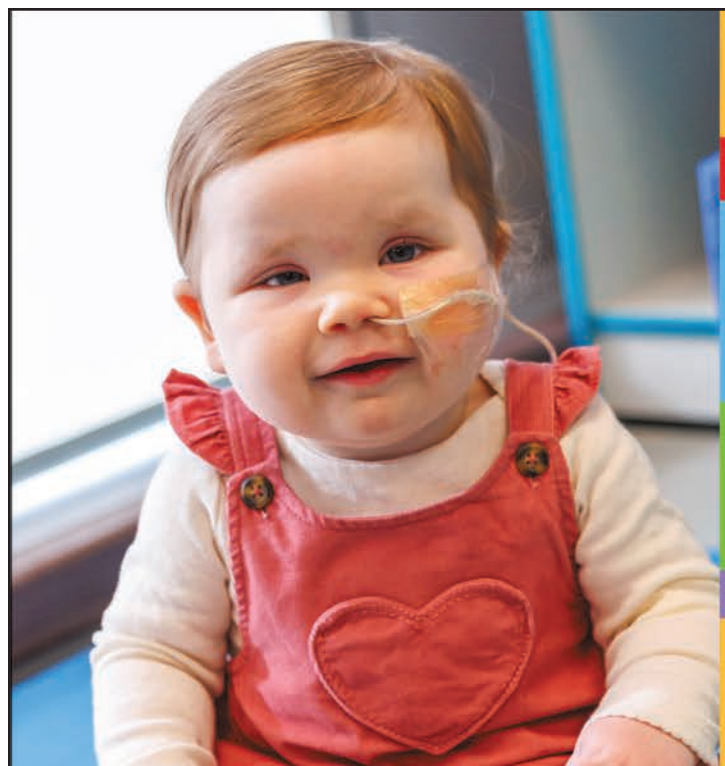
“You need the gospel, and the roots that you are putting down by being in a school like this is strengthening you.”

Stubblefield urged students to see yourself as God sees you. “Consider Christ.

There’s a testimony of people who have gone before you who will tell you they would rather have Jesus than anything,” Stubblefield said.

The public is invited to join UM students, faculty and staff for chapel, held Wednesdays at 2 p.m. in Ram Hall on campus.

Past chapel messages are available on the University of Mobile Chapel Podcast through Apple or Spotify, and videos are posted on UM’s YouTube channel and social media. Access podcasts and videos at [umobile.edu/chapel](http://umobile.edu/chapel). (UM)



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# CULTURAL CONTEXTS

## Author Christopher Watkin, panel address 'timeless gospel,' apologetics at Samford

Christopher Watkin recently spent time at Samford University's Beeson Divinity School to deliver a chapel message and join a discussion about his recent contributions to a new work, "The Gospel After Christendom."

Watkin, along with Joshua Chatraw, Beeson's Billy Graham chair of evangelism and cultural engagement,

contributed to "The Gospel After Christendom," a collection of essays by fellows from The Keller Center for Cultural Apologetics. Watkin, lecturer at Australia's Monash University, is also the author of the highly acclaimed book "Biblical Critical Theory."

### Biblical and historical

The book was edited by Collin Hansen, who serves

as an adjunct professor at Beeson and sits on the advisory board. Hansen also serves as vice president for content and editor in chief of The Gospel Coalition.

The book aims to "define cultural apologetics, explain its biblical and historical grounding, and demonstrate its importance for the church today."

Watkin, Chatraw and Hansen's Nov. 11 conversation was released as the Dec. 2 episode of Hansen's podcast, Gospelbound.

The biblical record, Watkin noted, demonstrates the apostles and prophets commending God's "timeless gospel" to specific cultural contexts.

Chatraw added the best apologists in Christian history have been very aware of their context, communicating the gospel by understanding their culture's idols, fears and more, rather than an approach to apologetics that sees the defense for Christianity as an intellectual exercise in facts removed from historical contexts.

### 'Back-and-forth'

"The argumentation style of apologetics can devolve into a back-and-forth that more resembles Alabama and Auburn fans arguing which team is better," Chatraw said. "We yell for our



SU photo

team, and other fans of our team cheer as we call the others 'losers.' Is that working? I would say it isn't."

While there is room for different apologetic approaches, Watkin emphasized the need to remember that we aren't Jesus, who perfectly understood what to say to whom at certain times.

"We don't have 20/20 vision," Watkin said. "Jesus could get it right every time. The problem with us is we can treat Pharisees like the woman caught in adultery and treat the woman caught in adultery like the Pharisees. That's why we need each other in the church."

In his sermon, "Too many for their own good," Watkin walked through the text of

Judges 7:1-8, where God whittles down the army of Israel, led by Gideon, to 300 men to take on the large army of the Midianites. The passage showed a "wrong sort of victory and a right sort of worship," Watkin said.

### What God has done


"The concern for God was that if the Israelites won by their own strength, they would boast and forget that God is the one who saved them. If we aren't careful, we can fall into the same trap," he said.

"The way you think you're saved will shape the way you worship," Watkin said. "The concern is the kind of people the Israelites, and we, are becoming throughout our lives."

There are easy ways around problems such as using generative AI to write essays, Watkin noted. But taking those shortcuts means "robbing ourselves of that growth."

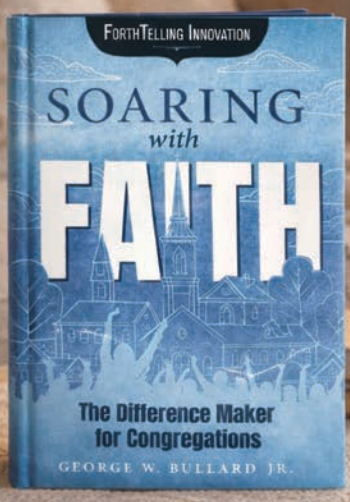
"The whole point is the resistance. That's how we grow," Watkin said. (Beeson Divinity School)

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 **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).

# 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, land-

scaping and hosting sports camps or block parties.

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](http://alsbom.org/servetour). Participant registration is now open!

# Alabama Association of Baptist Ministry Assistants annual conference

The Alabama Association of Baptist Ministry Assistants will hold its annual conference March 8–10 at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega.

The conference will center around the theme "God Did It with a Nail," based on Colossians 2:14, and will offer

times of corporate worship and fellowship as well as breakout sessions offering professional development, training and spiritual renewal.

The featured conference leader will be Melanie Hill, an author and member of FBC Dothan, where she

serves as a Bible study and Sunday School leader. Buddy Scales, worship pastor at FBC Remlap, will lead worship for the conference.

Feb. 15 is the last day to register and still get a T-shirt! For more information or to register, visit [myaabma.org](http://myaabma.org).

# WORD search

- |             |           |
|-------------|-----------|
| BELLY       | OVERBOARD |
| BILLOWS     | PREACH    |
| BREAKERS    | RELENT    |
| CALAMITY    | SACKCLOTH |
| CURRENTS    | SAILORS   |
| DELIVERANCE | SALVATION |
| DRIVEN      | SEA       |
| FISH        | SHADE     |
| FLEE        | SIGHT     |
| FLOOD       | SPARE     |
| FORSAKE     | SPEWED    |
| GREAT       | STORM     |
| IDOLS       | VOWED     |
| JONAH       | WATERS    |
| LOYALTY     | WAVES     |
| NINEVAH     | WORM      |

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"Now the Lord had appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah spent three days and three nights in the belly of the fish."

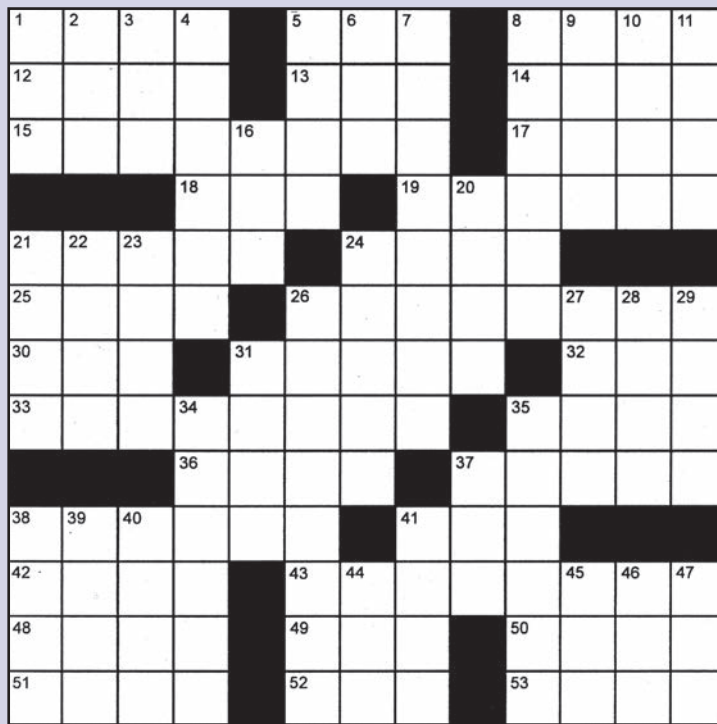
JONAH 1:17

# CHRISTIAN Crossword



**ACROSS**

- 1. In the beginning was the \_\_\_\_\_. (John 1:1)
- 5. I \_\_\_\_ rather be a doorkeeper. (Ps. 84:10)
- 8. Two of every \_\_\_\_ shalt thou bring into the ark. (Gen. 6:19)
- 12. One of the Great Lakes.
- 13. Come down \_\_\_\_ my child die. (John 4:49)
- 14. Between blood and blood, between \_\_\_\_ and plea. (Deut. 17:8)
- 15. God hath \_\_\_\_ the body together. (1 Cor. 12:24)
- 17. Thou shalt \_\_\_\_ this law before all Israel. (Deut. 31:11)
- 18. He loved them unto the \_\_\_\_\_. (John 13:1)
- 19. Figures of speech.
- 21. Signs, good or evil.
- 24. To glance at quickly.
- 25. Be ye \_\_\_\_ one to another. (Eph. 4:32)
- 26. He that sweareth to his own hurt and \_\_\_\_ not. (Ps. 15:4)
- 30. Last book of the Bible. (abbr.)
- 31. Blackboard or roofing tile.
- 32. Confederate commander.
- 33. In any place.
- 35. Russian emperor.
- 36. The very hairs of your \_\_\_\_ are all numbered. (Matt. 10:30)
- 37. Your fathers \_\_\_\_ are they? (Zech. 1:5)
- 38. Middle.
- 41. To hasten.
- 42. Entrance.
- 43. Twirling.
- 48. He loved also Rachel \_\_\_\_ than Leah. (Gen. 29:30)



By Evelyn M. Boyington Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- 49. Give \_\_\_\_ to my words. (Ps. 5:1)
  - 50. Applaud.
  - 51. I am alive for evermore, \_\_\_\_\_. (Rev. 1:18)
  - 52. Tint.
  - 53. Electrocardiograms. (abbr.)
- DOWN**
- 1. They are \_\_\_\_ with the showers. (Job 24:8)
  - 2. Unrefined mineral.
  - 3. Edge.
  - 4. Rely.
  - 5. Thou shalt kill of thy \_\_\_\_\_. (Deut. 12:21)
  - 6. They \_\_\_\_ all plain to him. (Prov. 8:9)
  - 7. King David did \_\_\_\_ unto the Lord. (2 Sam. 8:11)
  - 8. \_\_\_\_ up, O well. (Num. 21:17)
  - 9. Butter substitute.
  - 10. A quantity of paper.
  - 11. Urchins.
  - 16. Dashes.
  - 20. Great \_\_\_\_.
  - 21. Vegetable.
  - 22. Manner.
  - 23. Let not thine heart \_\_\_\_ sinners.
  - 24. Broken pottery.
  - 26. His leprosy was \_\_\_\_\_. (Matt. 8:3)
  - 27. He is God; there is none \_\_\_\_ beside him. (Deut. 4:35)
  - 28. His anger did \_\_\_\_ perpetually. (Amos 1:11)
  - 29. \_\_\_\_ a little, and there a little. (Isa. 28:10)
  - 31. Karite tree.
  - 34. To bleach.
  - 35. Thou shalt by no means come out \_\_\_\_\_. (Matt. 5:26)
  - 37. That I may \_\_\_\_ Christ. (Phil. 3:8)
  - 38. Mother.
  - 39. Esau, who is \_\_\_\_\_. (Gen. 36:1)
  - 40. Dreadful.
  - 41. Weigh silver in the balance, and \_\_\_\_ a goldsmith. (Isa. 46:6)
  - 44. For this cause \_\_\_\_ ye tribute also. (Rom. 13:6)
  - 45. Kind, breed.
  - 46. Old horse.
  - 47. Gallons per second. (abbr.)

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, churches and believers will unite in prayer, preparation and proclamation, lifting high the name of Jesus across Alabama and beyond. Revival gatherings and other special events will be held throughout the year across the state. The

effort culminates with All-Church Alabama worship and prayer gatherings Sept. 30 and continuing with Celebration 250 Revivals in multiple locations on

Oct. 1. This initiative calls every church to join together in revival readiness, community outreach and sharing the message of salvation in Christ. For a list of events already planned, helpful resources about holding an event in your area or additional information, visit [celebration250AL.org](http://celebration250AL.org).

## Renew for women

Women of all ages are invited to take part in Renew, a one-day event that brings hope and refreshment. Gather a group of friends or come and make new friends as you experience outstanding Bible teaching, moving worship,



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a missions focus and an environment for spiritual renewal.

Renew will be held Feb. 21, 9 a.m.–3 p.m., at NorthPark Baptist Church in Trussville. Catherine

Renfro, national director of women's evangelism for the North American Mission Board, will be the Bible study leader.

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

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



# Nigeria tops 'Red List' for killings over past two years

Nigeria, Rwanda, China, Mozambique and Mexico were the most dangerous countries for Christians from 2023 to 2025 in five distinct categories of persecution, Global Christian Relief said in its second annual Red List released Jan. 8.

Nigeria leads in the category of killings, with 590 documented and verified killings from the study period of November 2023 to October 2025, GCR said, based on a total number of 1,972 killing in the top five countries in the category. Following are the Democratic Republic of the Congo (447), Ethiopia (177), Russia (167) and Mozambique (94).

Violence and intimidation against churches, arrests and detentions, forced displace-

ment and assaults or abductions complete the categories studied, with five top countries named in each category.

## Means and methods

Persecution today often “unfolds quietly” through laws, restrictions and systems that restrict worship and “steadily erode the ability of Christians to live openly as followers of Jesus,” said Brian Orme, GCR president and CEO. But it also manifests in personal or community violence that leaves “visible destruction in its wake.”

Numbers cited in the 2026 Red List, drawn from data collected by the International Institute for Religious Freedom, differ from numbers released by other watchdog groups that use additional data points.

To see the entire Red List, visit [tabonline.org/Red-List](http://tabonline.org/Red-List).



Men study the Bible during an adult education class led by IMB missionaries. The missionaries spend many of their Sundays partnering with local churches in Mexico City, Mexico, such as this one in the Barros Sierra neighborhood.

For instance, Open Doors, which releases the annual World Watch List, cited 3,100 Christians killed in Nigeria in the single reporting year ending in January 2025, among 4,476 Christians killed worldwide.

Rwanda leads the category of violence and intimidation against churches, as restric-

tive regulations in the country have led to thousands of church closures, GCR said.

## Intimidation

GCR counted 14,367 incidents of violence and intimidation in the top countries in the category: Rwanda, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nicaragua and Ukraine.

China tops the category of arrests and detentions with 709 incidents, followed by Russia (323), Iran (149), Vietnam (116) and Nicaragua (114).

Countries with the highest numbers of displaced Christians were Mozambique (13,298), Myanmar (2,285), Nigeria (2,001), India (1,134) and Mexico (875).

Mexico leads the category of assaults or abductions, followed by Nigeria, India, Ethiopia and Myanmar.

In countries with the highest levels of abductions, sexual assaults, forced marriages and other forms of physical abuse against Christians, a wide range of insecurity drivers are involved, including organized crime, civil conflict and authoritarian repression, GCR said.

The common factor is that “Christians become vulnerable.” (BP)

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Henry Webb



Dan Garland

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#### PASTOR

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#### BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Paden Baptist Church is prayerfully seeking a bivocational pastor. Currently meeting Sunday morning and Wednesday evening. Located within one mile of Gadsden State Community College. Send resumé to: bruceragland67@gmail.com.

#### 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.

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### BOOKS

#### SOARING WITH FAITH

Soaring with Faith offers both courage and direction for churches seeking renewal. Learn from George Bullard's more than 50 years of ministry experience. A respected consultant, futurist, and conflict-mediation expert, he has devoted his life to helping Christian leaders and their churches embrace faithful, strategic and effective ministry. Find this first-in-a-series book from ForthTelling Innovation through Amazon. Published by TAB Media Group in conjunction with Iron Stream Media.

Introducing our new column on congregational vitality ...

# Soaring congregations focus on growth of God's Kingdom

**A**t a wonderful gathering many years ago, I learned from Christian spiritual and strategic experts about how congregations can effectively fulfill the Great Commission.

The gathering highlighted the value of congregations forming heartfelt connections with their communities and embracing the diverse people groups among whom God called them to make a spiritual impact.

It encouraged them to bond with their surroundings and gain a deep understanding of the people's lives and spiritual needs.

One of the leaders declared, "The purpose of the Church is to make the community context and people groups served more loving and Christlike." One attendee verbally challenged this, saying, "What? I believe the Church is about reaching people for Christ and growing congregations!"

The response was, "Keep listening and learn more about this approach."

The gathering emphasized how congregations can truly thrive. It highlighted that if congregations lose touch with their community or the groups God has called them to serve, they risk stagnation, decline and eventual death.

## How does this relate to congregations who soar with faith?

Soaring congregations place more emphasis on the growth of God's Kingdom as external to their congregation.

They continually ask this question: Is the community context, including the people groups we serve, becoming more loving and Christlike?

Strong congregations emphasize the growth of the local congregation as the key sign of success. They ask: Do we annually engage more people in the Christ-centered ministry of our congregation, and is our attendance growing?

Clearly, these questions hold significant importance. Soaring and Strong congregations often assess their ministry through questions. But have you ever wondered what questions they ask most frequently? What questions bring them joy when the answer is yes? What saddens them when the answer is no?

Think about the questions your congregation uses to gauge the success and importance of your ministry. Which ques-

tions do your leaders encourage the congregation to ask more often? When the congregation finds wonderful answers to their questions, do they feel the joy of seeing God's empowering vision come alive in their fellowship?

## What are some exploratory questions?

Consider the difference between Soaring and Strong congregations with these questions. They might show the need to pivot toward Soaring.

**Strong Congregations:** When a congregation is growing numerically, does it also wonder if this growth is positively influencing the Christlike spiritual culture within its community and among the different people groups it reaches?

Or are the congregation's members living in spiritual isolation, primarily showing interest in numerical growth through a strong focus on evangelism and outreach?

Is the personal faith of congregational members deepening? Still, have they failed to figure out how to impact the context or people groups with the same love and compassion they are experiencing?

Do they spend the most time supporting, pondering, praying and engaging with what they hope will always be a vibrant, growing congregation?



## 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 February 15

#### REJECTING LEGALISM Matthew 12:1–14

The Sabbath was established by God in creation not because God needed rest but because He was setting a pattern for humanity.

When God established the Mosaic law at Mount Sinai, He wove the Sabbath day into the work schedule of His people. The first presentation of the Ten Commandments connects the Sabbath with creation (Ex. 20:11).

In the wilderness wanderings that were fraught with rebellion and complaints, God took the Sabbath so seriously that He required a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath to be stoned to death for his transgression (Num. 15:32–36).

As the later rabbinic oral law was compiled to form the Talmud, teachers developed specific penalties for breaches of the Sabbath commandment.

#### Religious Rules (1–2)

The Torah offers provision for the poor, the widow, the fatherless and the strangers dwelling among the Israelites. When grain is harvested, the edges of the field and the gleanings are left for those who have no property so they can gather food to eat (Lev. 19:9–10).

While the grain ripened, passersby were allowed to feed themselves from the field. They would pluck a few grains, rub them between their hands, pick out or blow away the husks and eat the grain.

“Your disciples are doing what is not lawful.” Only the legalistic Pharisees would consider such a practice to be the same as harvesting grain or preparing a meal. The Pharisees described in the Gospel accounts were legalists and professional faultfinders.

#### Something Greater (3–8)

“Haven’t you read what David did?” When Jesus says the words

“haven’t you read,” be prepared to receive instruction from the Old Testament that the elders, scribes and lawyers should have known.

According to the Torah, priests worked on the Sabbath. First Samuel 21:6 records that David ate bread intended only for the priests. Hosea 6:6 prioritizes mercy or love over sacrifice.

Jesus took these scholars back to the Scriptures. The oral law was not authoritative but Jesus’ words were — and are. Our Lord Jesus is the Promised One who is greater than the temple.

Song lyrics and Scripture both illustrate that believers need to be reminded of the Word. “I love to tell the story, for those who know it best seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest” (“I Love to Tell the Story” by Katherine Hankey).

Amos warned of a coming famine of hearing the words of the Lord (8:11). Peter makes a point that brothers and sisters in Christ need to be reminded of the Word (2 Pet. 1:12–15).

#### Compassionate Response (9–14)

“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” Evidently, they didn’t care about the man with a shriveled hand. The Pharisees asked this question to indict Jesus, but He responded by using an object familiar in the culture.

Perhaps He heard a lamb bleating before giving His answer. If one of your sheep were in a ditch on the Sabbath, would you wait until sundown to get it out? Of course not! A man is more valuable than a sheep, so it is certainly lawful to do good to the man.

Jesus showed compassion to the man and his hand was restored. The Pharisees plotted for Jesus’ death. Their indictment was ultimately recorded in the Babylonian Talmud in Sanhedrin 43a. The sentence was to be death by stoning, but “Yeshu” was hanged from a tree.

### For February 22

#### JUDGMENT COMING Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

Matthew collected items together. (Think of Matthew piling coins in the tax booth.) Readers take note of this immediately in chapter 1 with the three equal divisions in the genealogy of Jesus (vv. 1–17). In chapter 13, we find a collection of several Kingdom parables (13:24–50). Jesus told simple stories in familiar settings, usually intended to teach a single spiritual truth.

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7), Jesus taught that not everyone will enter heaven but only those who do the will of the Father (7:21) and act upon the words of the Son (7:24). Final judgment is coming, and the parables in Matthew 13 illustrate the Kingdom of our God.

#### Wheat or Weeds (24–30)

Following the parable of the four soils and its meaning explained to the disciples, the parable of the wheat and the tares (weeds) is recorded. A man sowed his field for wheat season. His competitor intended to ruin his crops by sowing rye grass into the field.

Early in development, the plants grew and looked similar. It became evident that the weeds would bear no grain. The plants pulled precious nutrients from the soil, but they would produce no harvest. The farmer determined that it would be better to wait until harvest to pull them up rather than potentially damaging the actual wheat while it matured.

The Scriptures are replete with references to agriculture. Readers often pass over the details, however, when they are unfamiliar with the terms or processes of planting and harvesting. Rains at the proper time are essential for grain fields without access to expensive irrigation systems. Sunlight, soil

nutrients, proper amounts of rainfall and timely harvesting are factors that can bring a bumper crop rather than a bust. If a farmer has plentiful stalks without an abundance of grain, he may ask himself if he has enough return on his investment to keep farming.

#### Jesus or the Devil (36–39)

Jesus explained this parable to His disciples after the crowds went away. Why? He was intentional in teaching spiritual truth to His followers who could receive it. These teachings were not given for the general public but only for His disciples (vv. 10–16).

In this passage, Jesus provides the list of cast members playing roles in the story. Jesus is the Master who sows His seeds, the children of the Kingdom. The devil intends to ruin the Master’s harvest by sowing devilish children among the King’s kids. Finally, God’s angels play the role of the harvesters.

#### Heaven or Hell (40–43)

Just as the weeds are gathered and burned in the fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The fire referenced for harvesting grain is not figurative; it is literal.

We served in a farming community several years ago. Driving home from seminary, I noticed the fields were on fire not long after big combines had harvested the wheat fields. They were burning the chaff. The smoke enveloped the community and darkened the sky, and its smell penetrated everything.

Jesus compared the burning grain stubble to the final judgment of unbelievers. The children of the devil will experience a blazing furnace, weeping and gnashing their teeth. We have the message of the gospel, the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16) that can transform those in darkness into children of the light (Eph. 5:8).

*“The Kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field ...”*

Matthew 13:24

# BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

## Sunday School Lessons

By Jeffery M. Leonard, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Biblical & Religious Studies, Samford University



### For February 15

#### JESUS DISPLAYED 1 Corinthians 9:16–27

In his book “Mortal Lessons: Notes on the Art of Surgery,” Yale surgeon Richard Selzer recounts a difficult scene following a facial operation he had performed.

The operation to remove a tumor from a young woman’s cheek had been a success, but there had been no way to avoid severing one particular nerve, which left the patient’s mouth permanently contorted.

As the woman’s young husband stood beside her hospital bed, Selzer had to give the difficult news that it would always be like that.

The woman fell silent, but the husband smiled and reassured her, “I like it. It’s kind of cute.” He then bent down to kiss her, twisting his own lips to match with hers, showing her that their kiss still “worked.”

We’ve seen adults who tower far above a small child stoop down to meet them at their own level. We’ve seen a stranger who has tried their very best to give directions even when English is not their first language. We’ve seen a person slow their pace to help an aging parent maneuver their way across a busy street or through a crowded store.

In each of these cases, we see examples of people leaving their comfort zones to adapt to the needs of someone else. In his first letter to the believers at Corinth, the Apostle Paul describes a similar process when it came to sharing the gospel with other people.

#### We have been given a commission to share Jesus. (16–18)

Few people have experienced a more intense call to share the gospel than Paul did. He saw his outreach not as the grounds for some sort of spiritual boasting but as a divine compulsion.

He described his calling as a necessity laid upon him and insisted, “Woe to me if I do not

preach the gospel!” As Paul would say in his second letter to the Corinthians, “the love of Christ compels us” to spread God’s message (2 Cor. 5:14).

#### Step into the shoes of others to share Jesus. (19–23)

To bring more people to Christ, Paul says he made himself “a slave to everyone.”

When reaching out to his fellow Jews, Paul became “like one under the law.” When he reached out to Gentiles, he became “like one without the law.”

Although Paul may no longer have felt he was obligated to keep the kosher laws or observe the Sabbath, he would have done both of these when he was among his Jewish audiences.

And although Paul would not have participated in sinful actions among his Gentile audiences — after all, he insists he is not “without God’s law but under the law of Christ” — he would not have hesitated to eat Gentile food and attend Gentile events when he was among these non-Jewish groups.

As the apostle sums it up, “I have become all things to all people, so that I may by every possible means save some.”

#### Sharing Jesus takes discipline and self-denial. (24–27)

Paul wants his Corinthian readers to understand that while this kind of servant outreach is necessary, it does not come without a cost. He compares the process to that of an athlete who “exercises self-control in everything” in order to win the prize.

His encouragement, though, is that the prize we gain through this self-control far exceeds that of a perishable wreath. Ours is a reward that is imperishable and eternal.

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

### For February 22

#### JESUS SHARED Acts 17:16–18, 22–23, 30–31

Paul’s second missionary journey was one that took him through the very heartland of Greece. Greece was not Paul’s original destination, however. His goal had been to head to Asia, but we read in Acts 16 first that he was “forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the Word in Asia” (v. 6), then that “the spirit of Jesus did not allow them” to go there (v. 7) and finally that a man from Macedonia appeared to Paul in a vision and pleaded, “Cross over to Macedonia and help us” (v. 9).

The apostle finally got the message and began a missionary campaign that led him through a roster of cities and regions familiar to every student of the Scriptures: Macedonia, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens and Corinth. It was in Athens that Paul had one of his most fascinating evangelistic moments.

#### Be sensitive to opportunities to share the gospel. (16–18)

Acts 17 tells us that Paul arrived in Athens ahead of his companions Silas and Timothy, and he immediately set about stirring up trouble in town. He debated with Jews in the synagogue and Epicureans and Stoics in the marketplace.

Anyone within earshot was bound to get an earful of Paul’s preaching. When word of Paul’s new message reached some of the leaders of the town, he was hauled in front of the Areopagus to give an account of his teaching.

The name “Areopagus” is Greek for “hill of Ares.” The King James Version translates the same place as “Mars Hill” because Mars was the Roman equivalent of the Greek deity Ares. The hill also lent its name to the council that met there — the very council that now demanded an appearance by Paul.

#### Find common ground for introducing the gospel. (22–23)

Paul’s response to the Athenian philosophers focused on the many idols Paul had seen in the city. Paul began, “People of Athens! I see that you are extremely religious in every respect.” What is interesting about this opening line is that it contains a bit of a double entendre. The Greek term for “religious” used here can also mean “superstitious.”

Thus, while Paul might have been commending these sages for their religiosity, he was subtly criticizing them at the same time. Paul continued in the same vein as he commented on the famous altar dedicated “to an unknown god.” Here, Paul announced, “What you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.” One can just imagine how these men who prided themselves on their intellects must have taken this kind of address.

#### Help others understand the truth of the gospel. (30–31)

As Paul continued his address, he worked to show that his own criticisms of worshipping idols were echoed in the works of certain Greek philosophers too.

These philosophers recognized that God doesn’t live in houses made by human hands, nor does He rely on human hands to supply His needs. As certain Greek poets had said, “We live and move and have our being” in God, “for we are also his offspring.” Paul argued that by worshipping idols, the Athenian scholars were thinking great thoughts but worshipping silly gods.

In verses 30–31, he goes on to insist that while God may have overlooked such ignorance in the past, He “now commands all people everywhere to repent” and embrace the truth. There is only one God, and that God has sent His divine Son as humanity’s Judge.

*“So Paul ... said, ‘Men of Athens,  
I perceive that in every way you are very religious.’”*

Acts 17:22

# ‘Prayer makes a difference’

## ALCAP ministry partners gather at Alabama State House in Montgomery

By Michael J. Brooks  
The Alabama Baptist

**H**istorian and author David Barton says that even though Americans pray for revival, there is a difference between revival and an awakening.

“An awakening means that not only does the Spirit of God bring people to Christ, but the culture is impacted,” Barton told a group with the Alabama Citizens Action Program. “I’m afraid our culture is yet to be impacted by a biblical worldview.”

Barton spoke to ALCAP family and friends Jan. 21 after the group’s prayer rally at the Alabama State House. Barton founded Specialty Research Associates in 1987, and the organization was renamed WallBuilders the following year based on the Old Testament story of Nehemiah.

Barton noted eight revivals in American history and suggested the last three brought mixed results.

### Influencing culture

“The 1870 revival brought the Sunday School movement, and this was good,” he recounted. “Sunday School was a literacy program for uneducated young people, but it became a great Bible teaching ministry.

“We had another national revival in 1900 [and] I was part of the ‘Jesus movement’ of the 1970s, and we witnessed everywhere and saw thousands come to Christ. But the Jesus movement seemed not to affect the sexual revolution in any way,” Barton continued. “Despite revivals in the past 110 years, America has seen the rise



Photo by Doug Rogers/Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

Rob Jackson of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions leads those attending the Jan. 21 prayer rally in Montgomery in one of the focused prayers that morning. ALCAP sponsors the annual event at the Alabama State House during the opening days of each year’s legislative session.

of Darwinian socialism, atheistic Marxism and eugenics. A secular website, [helpfulprofessor.com](http://helpfulprofessor.com), declares we have 81 types of genders and gender identities.”

Barton said genuine spiritual awakenings bring biblical discipleship.

“Take Matthew 19 for example,” he noted. “Jesus gave a definition of marriage, defined two genders and excoriated the Jewish ‘no fault’ divorce system. Today Christians have higher divorce rates than the unchurched.

“Jesus spoke about what we’d call today public policy issues in opposition to government and culture.”

A second aspect of genuine spiritual awakenings is application of Scripture to daily living.

“God established the family, government and the church,” Barton asserted. “It stands to reason that believers would seek to influence all three. I believe today the government influences culture more than the church does. And many

Christians refuse to get involved in government. I call these ‘two-thirds Christians.’

“If you change the heart and don’t change the culture, you lose both.”

Barton has written extensively about America’s spiritual roots.

*For more information about the WallBuilders, visit [wallbuilders.com](http://wallbuilders.com).*

*For more information about ALCAP, visit [alcap.com](http://alcap.com).*

“Our founding fathers quoted Englishman John Locke more often than any other philosopher,” he said. “Locke is a difficult read, but he used more than 1,500 biblical references.”

### ‘Duty to God’

“And the revivalist Charles Finney was converted in 1792 after studying law. In his book, ‘Hindrances to Revival,’ he wrote, ‘The Church must take right ground in regard to politics. ... Politics are a part of religion in such a country as this, and Christians must do their duty to the country as part of their duty to God.’”

Barton said he believes America is poised for another revival.

“Twenty-two American states have or are trying to post the Ten Commandments in classrooms,” he noted. “And the IRS has ‘stood down’ on enforcing the Johnson Amendment banning political involvement.

“Unions and Planned Parenthood do political endorsements as nonprofits, so I think it’s good now that churches are free to do this as well.”

### ‘In the trenches’

ALCAP Executive Director Greg Davis told the group at the steps of the Alabama State House that “prayer makes a difference, and politics, policy and people matter.”

“These pastors here today care about people. They see the consequences and results of bad policy when broken people come to them for help,” Davis said. “They’re in the trenches, and they also are here to pray God’s blessings and wisdom for all of you.”