

The Alabama Baptist

Toll free 800-803-5201
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March 5, 2026

Vol. 191, No. 5
Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



ABDR photo

Cindy Tuten (left) and Barbara Garrett (right) of Pickens Baptist Association join Angie Fine of Birmingham Metro Baptist Association as part of the Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief feeding team recently preparing meals for volunteers in Greenville, Mississippi.

‘Not alone’

Disaster relief volunteer calls at perfect time to help woman ‘ready to end it’

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Cookie Baker said she didn’t know why, but it was like a magnet — she kept coming back to the same job request.

She and other Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers were a couple of weeks into their work in the Mississippi Delta, clearing trees for homeowners affected by

Winter Storm Fern in late January.

“I was going through some jobs, and I realized we had several on one street, all that had limbs in their yard,” said Baker, a white hat leader for ABDR.

They were all similar and not too urgent. But she said she “kept noticing the one, and I realize now it was God saying, ‘Call this person.’”

She called, and the homeowner

told her the limbs were gone — someone had already taken care of them. But then Baker asked her how she was doing.

‘A floodgate’

“That just opened a floodgate — she started talking and crying,” Baker said.

The woman told her she still didn’t have electricity. She had paid someone \$200 to try to reconnect it

for her, and he took her money and left. She had managed to scrape up enough cash after that to get a loaf of bread, but she was almost out of peanut butter — all she had left was mustard and ketchup.

“I talked to her about 10 or 15 minutes, just reassuring her that she was loved, she was not alone, that there was always hope in Jesus,” Baker said. “I wanted to give her

(See ‘Ready,’ page 9)

THE KIDS EDITION

An exciting faith-based monthly paper just for kids — activities, articles about God and more.
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‘Pain, cold and death’

Russia/Ukraine war enters 4th year as believers hold tight to faith

By Faith Pratt
Texas' Baptist Standard

February 24 marked the fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine. Valerii Antoniuk, president of the Ukrainian Baptist Union, marked the occasion in a video message.

“Dear brothers and sisters, for four years now, our country has lived under full-scale war, and for 12 years, we have endured armed aggression by Russia against Ukraine,” Antoniuk stated in the video.

The armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine began Feb. 20, 2014, when the Russian military entered Crimea, followed by the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in Eastern Ukraine. Ukrainians managed to stop the advance and liberate part of the territory.

The current full-scale conflict in Ukraine began Feb. 24, 2022, when Russian military forces entered the country from Belarus, Russia and Crimea. Much of the conflict is linked to Russia-backed separatists seeking to break away from Ukrainian control with the support of the Russian Federation.

Results of the war

The conflict has resulted in the mass displacement of over 20,000



Unsplash.com

The current war in Ukraine began when Russian military forces entered the country from Belarus, Russia and Crimea on Feb. 24, 2022. It has displaced more than 20,000 children, and nearly 700 churches have been damaged or destroyed.

children, deaths and torture of various priests, and nearly 700 churches damaged or destroyed.

‘Daily realities’

A study conducted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies indicates the number of Russian and Ukrainian troops killed, wounded or missing during the last four years of war is on track to reach 2 million by this spring.

“Every day, we hear air raid sirens,” Antoniuk said in the video. “Pain, cold and death have become daily realities. Yet, we live in a country where God continues to reveal His mercy and His power.”

Antoniuk explained how, in 2022, the world watched as Russia attempted to “swallow Ukraine whole.” And yet, Ukraine has persisted in fighting against Russia, he said. “We prayed, and we fought,” he added.

As the first days of invasion passed, turning into weeks and months of Ukrainian resilience, “across continents, people saw how God was defending Ukraine,” Antoniuk continued.

“Contrary to political forecasts, contrary to the enemy’s bloody ambitions, Ukraine has not been broken. The church has not fallen

silent, has not stopped, and we have not surrendered,” Antoniuk said.

Igor Bandura, vice president for international affairs with the Ukrainian Baptist Union, said Feb. 24 would be Ukraine’s National Day of Prayer, a time when “our churches will gather for special services of remembrance, lament, thanksgiving and fervent intercession.”

“We see collective prayer as a powerful act of faith, dependence on God and spiritual resistance, trusting him to bring justice, healing and restoration. ... Prayer is our most powerful resource and greatest comfort [during this season],” Bandura continued.

Profound devastation

“The devastation is profound — nearly 700 churches of all denominations, including Baptist ones, have been damaged or completely destroyed across Ukraine, with ... heavy losses in occupied territories where [Christians] face persecution, forced registration under Russian control or outright closure,” Bandura stated.

Even so, Bandura believes hope is found in Christ: “Resilience flows from our unwavering trust in Christ’s ultimate victory over evil.”

Preparing Our Hearts for Easter
By Denise George

Daily devotions for Individual, Family & Group Study
AVAILABLE ON AMAZON

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

(ISSN 0738-7741; USPS 011-080)
© The Alabama Baptist, Inc.

is published every other week by The Alabama Baptist, Inc., at 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209. Phone: 205-870-4720. Statewide phone: 800-803-5201.

Website: www.thealabamabaptist.org
Email: news@thealabamabaptist.org or subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org
Periodicals postage paid at Baton Rouge, La.

ANNUAL TAB SUBSCRIPTION RATES
Includes print, digital, app and full web access

Group Rate per subscriber per year — \$19.95

Individual — \$34.95 per year (26 issues)

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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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

30-for-30 challenge offers variety of options for healthier TAB and individuals

The 30-for-30 challenge continues to gain traction, and I'm so grateful for your efforts.

The first three 2026 editions of The Alabama Baptist outlined the 30 ways you can help me celebrate my 30th anniversary with TAB Media Group.

I'll summarize them here and provide a glimpse of how we are doing so far. Be sure to let us know which challenge you take by emailing me at jrash@tabmedia.group or calling us at 800-803-5201. Also, let me know if I've accidentally left you off the list.

1. Set up a bulk order of The Kids Edition — 12 people/churches so far.

David George, Tracy Robertson, Tracy Hanrahan, Bethel Baptist in Robertsedale, Elkdale Baptist in Selma, Hillcrest Baptist in Enterprise, Mount Gilead Baptist in Dothan, Providence Baptist in Opelika, Woodmont Baptist in Florence, The Baptist Church at McAdory, Springfield Baptist in Kentucky, and Sugar Creek Baptist in Texas. Several others are planning to sign up soon.

2. Recruit people to follow us on social media.

3. Donate to The Alabama Baptist for 30-for-30 — 3 so far.

Wayne Glasscock, Sam Peavler, Teddye Gandy

4. Recruit people to subscribe to our YouTube.com/tabmediagroup channel or The Weekly podcast.

5. Read full articles in a recent print edition.

Check out our websites

6. Review thealabamabaptist.org.

7. Review thebaptistpaper.org.

8. Help with quality control checks on all our websites. Start with tabmedia.group — 2 people so far.

Trennis Henderson, Julie Donovan

9. Tell others how they can subscribe to The Alabama Baptist.

10. Sign up for one of our email newsletters.

11. Check out our new feature groundlevelreports.com.

12. Share information from a recent edition with others — 2 so far.

Bob Little, David George

13. Take a 30-minute break from thinking about the most frustrating or discouraging item in front of you — 1 so far.

a. Philip Morris

14. Spend an extra 30 minutes reading God's Word this week.

15. Donate to The Baptist Paper for 30-for-30 — 1 so far.

Jason Rash

16. List 30 people connected to your church family and pray for them by name.

17. Add families to your church's group subscription list.

18. Send us a letter to the editor — 2 so far.

Morris Murray Jr., Mary King

19. Share story ideas — 13 so far.

Denise George, Richard Nations, Tracy Frontz, Leann Callaway, Art Toalston, Vickie Lee, Rick Klepper, Steve Stephens, Melanie Spencer, Mark Snowden, John Roland, David Parks, Justin Johnston

20. For the next 30 days, look to see where God is working around you.

21. Encourage kids to submit an entry to The Kids Edition by emailing thekidsedition@tabmedia.group — 4 so far.

Carrie McWhorter, Lauren Grim, Julie Donovan, Sarah Gill

22. Engage with us on social media.

23. Donate to the Hudson Baggett Student Internship fund held at The Baptist Foundation

of Alabama — 1 so far (anonymous).

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.

24. Discuss articles you've read recently with a group at church.

25. Check out interviews featured at youtube.com/tabmediagroup.

Pray for others

26. Pray for 10 contributors to a recent print edition.

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

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

29. Order copies of TAB Media Group's Easter devotional by Denise George or Soncoast's Easter book by TAB editor emeritus Bob Terry, both available from Amazon — 7 so far.

Dianna Cagle, Lauren Grim, Ellen Kolman, Adele Gill, Vicki Baggett, Connie Jenkins, Tracy Hanrahan

30. Take a 30-minute walk at least three times in the next 10 days — 2 so far.

JoAnn Strain, Steven Presley

Your Voice



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

Legacy churches and the need for young pastors

By **Jon Pope**

Pastor of Springhill Baptist Church in Paris, Tennessee

For many young pastors, planting new churches is the preferred avenue to ministry — and for good reason.

Church planting offers meaningful benefits: a fresh gospel presence in a community; an ideal context for shaping a church's identity, polity and governance; and a blank slate on which a congregation's culture can be formed around biblical patterns.

I find these things attractive as well. But consider this: thousands of Baptist churches will gather this Sunday without a pastor.

Many of these churches — perhaps most — are older, established congregations.

We certainly need church plants. But in many cities and small towns, what we may need most are healthier established churches with faithful, committed pastors.

Choosing where to serve

Here are three reasons why a young pastor should consider giving his life in service to an established church.

1. Established churches desire a future.

We have all heard stories of ambitious young men eager to serve in established congregations, only to become discouraged when they are met with suspicion or doubt. This can be especially true for a

passionate, recent seminary graduate. However, this has not been my experience, nor do I believe it is the norm among churches filled with genuine, born-again believers. Many established churches are hopeful about calling a young pastor and welcoming his family into the life of the church for the long haul. They want their church to thrive for years to come.



POPE

Seasoned saints often understand that the long-term fruit of a committed pastor far outweighs the growing pains they may endure as a young pastor learns — and occasionally fails — along the way.

2. Established churches have roots.

When I came to Springhill Baptist Church in 2023, I did not have to worry about where we would meet, who would help lead worship through song or how I would learn more about our neighborhood and community. Those structures were already in place.

The saints here have worshiped, served and evangelized faithfully, building a family-oriented culture in the community for nearly 200 years. That legacy is invaluable — both for the church's reputation in the community and for its sense of identity.

Older churches often have areas that need biblical reform, and such transitions require wisdom, patience and love. Still, their deep roots provide resources and relation-

ships that can help pave the way for meaningful growth. Young pastors can benefit greatly from this kind of foundation.

3. Established churches need shepherds.

I am in my third year of pastoral ministry at Springhill. The church had been without a pastor for nearly a year before I arrived.

Sadly, some churches have been pastor-less for years, not months. Many of these congregations are filled with older saints who love Christ deeply, hunger for the Word and humbly desire a pastor who will lead them through Scripture and prayer. These saints need loving, patient, self-sacrificing, Bible-loving shepherds.

I came intending to pour myself out for their needs, but they have done the same for me. They have loved my family, encouraged me generously and lifted me up faithfully in prayer.

What might God do through you if you committed to love, serve and shepherd an established church for the next 20 or 30 years? And what might He do in you?

My prayer is that God will raise up more young pastors with a biblical vision for pastoral ministry — and hearts willing to live it out among the churches that need it most.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was originally published by Tennessee's Baptist and Reflector.

“God is still calling people of all ages to fulfill His mission all over the world,” said **Matt James**, vice president of enrollment at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and Leavell College. “At NOBTS, we are called to train the men and women that the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention send to us. Currently, more than 40% of our undergraduate enrollment at Leavell College is over the age of 40.”

“It may seem crazy, but I have never deleted one text thread from anyone I've prayed for in the past 11 years. One of the benefits of my prayer calendar is being able to look back at all the ways God has answered prayers. The answers have not always been what we asked for, but God has always answered,” said **Craig Carlisle**, who shared why and how he prays for 23 people a day. Carlisle is director of missions for Etowah Baptist Association.

“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,” **Rick Lance** shared while announcing his plans to retire as executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

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“As you prayerfully make decisions, you can rest in God’s sovereignty.”

@THE DAILY GRACE CO
on Instagram

“Don’t stop pursuing God. This is pretty simple. Don’t follow the crowd. Don’t live for this world. Keep your eyes on eternity because that’s your home. Spiritual maturity is not a rival. Spiritual maturity is pressing on toward the prize. It is living your life on this earth to that end, to be the example that others might see. Because heaven knows that on this earth we need godly examples. We need men and women and boys and girls to live up to it, to pursue God. We need churches that exude that out into their community. That is my challenge to you.”

Gordon Ogle

North Shelby Baptist Church
Birmingham, Alabama

“Everything happens for a reason, but I couldn’t figure it out until years later,” said **Hunter House**, soccer coach at Oneida Baptist Institute in Kentucky. “My story may be different from yours, but there will be times you will wonder why things are happening to you. There is a purpose and a reason for that. Those are times you have to keep going, and one day you can look back and see there is a reason for everything happening the way it did,” a principle from Romans 8:28: “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.”



LASS WORDS



BY KEN LASS
The Alabama Baptist

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

‘Never too far from home’

Our home is equipped with security cameras. They beep at us when they detect anything approaching our front or back doors or the garage area.

The movement is captured on video and saved, and over the years we’ve become accustomed to seeing videos of dogs and cats passing by. Sometimes even a bird or squirrel or a neighbor mowing his yard will trigger the camera.

Early one morning, just after dawn, we heard a notification alert from our garage monitor. We checked the video and were a bit stunned at what we saw: A young deer standing on the driveway. This was a very rare sight. We don’t live in the woods — we’ve lived in the middle of a suburban Birmingham subdivision for 36 years and had never before seen a deer on our property.

Carried away

There are woods in the distance, but a lot of new construction had caused much of that wildlife habitat to be cut down, cleared and carried away. We guessed the majestic-looking critter had been driven from home.

It looked lost and confused, staring at rows of houses and concrete, which resembled nothing of its home. The animal seemed understandably jittery

and afraid. When a school bus came rumbling down the street, the deer took off in a streak, clearly frightened. We never saw it again and wonder if it ever found its way to safety.

Dependable guide

Life can be like that. Most of us go through times when we feel lost, driven away from the values and culture we used to see as the standard.

The moral neighborhood is so different now. We feel far from home, scared of what we don’t understand, lonely in a crowd of people who don’t notice us, confused about what direction to take.

But the Christian needn’t despair. The Bible tells us, “For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands” (2 Cor. 5:1).

With Jesus you’re never really lost; never too far from home. His Word will guide your way. Live in His instruction.

Nobody can tear down that habitat!

MEET THE AUTHOR

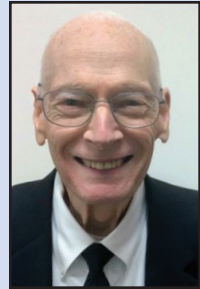
Ken Lass, an award-winning columnist for numerous publications and websites, is a retired Birmingham television news and sports anchor.

OBITUARIES

JOE LYNN JOYNER

Joe Lynn Joyner, a retired Alabama Baptist pastor, died Feb. 22. He was 81.

Along with serving in Alabama, Joyner served as a full-time pastor of churches in Mississippi, Louisiana and South Carolina. Following his retirement, he served as interim pastor of six churches in Alabama and interim director of missions for St. Clair Baptist Association. He also was a volunteer chaplain for the City of Moody, working closely with the Moody Police Department.



JOYNER

Joyner earned a bachelor's degree from Mississippi College in Clinton, Mississippi, and a master's degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Joyner is survived by his wife, Barbara Jo; daughter, Janna Lynn; son, Joseph Lee; stepson, Devin Lee Fisher; and three grandchildren.

JERRY SPENCER

Jerry Spencer, a Southern Baptist evangelist and former pastor of Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Dothan, died Feb. 14. He was 86.

Spencer, founder of Jerry Spencer Ministries, led more than 1,500 revival meetings and 100 area-wide crusades during a ministry career spanning nearly seven decades. He was active in missions and Southern Baptist Convention life.

He served on the SBC Executive Committee for nine years and was elected SBC second vice president in 1999. He served as president of both the SBC Pastors Conference and SBC Conference of Evangelists. He was inducted into the Southern Baptist Evangelists' Hall of Faith in 2008.

Spencer attended Union University, Jackson, Tennessee, for three years before graduating from the University of Tennessee in 1964. He then attended Southwestern Seminary.

Spencer was serving as staff evangelist for River-view Baptist Church, Savannah, Tennessee, at the time of his death.

Spencer was preceded in death by his first wife of more than 50 years, Sue.

He is survived by his wife, Shirley; his four children: Jan Hooper, Van Spencer, Dan Spencer (current president of the Tennessee Baptist Convention) and Dolly Ann Ezell; 10 grandchildren and a number of great-grandchildren.



SPENCER

Alabama news

BIGBEE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Mike McKee** recently retired as pastor of **Cuba Baptist Church** where he served for more than 13 years. He previously served four churches in Mississippi as part of his 26 years in ministry. During his time at Cuba Baptist, McKee served as moderator and representative on the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions for Bigbee Baptist Association. The church hosted a reception honoring McKee and his wife, Carolyn. The couple have two adult children and five grandchildren. He is available for pulpit supply: donmckee36@yahoo.com.



Submitted photo

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

▶ **Raleigh Avenue Baptist Church, Homewood**, will celebrate its 70th anniversary year April 26 with a special service starting at 10:30 a.m. and a fellowship lunch to follow. Open invitation to all.

CHEROKEE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Wendell Dutton** is retiring as director of missions for **Cherokee Baptist Association** effective March 31. He served more than 21 years in this position. He previously served five years as associational missionary for Lookout Mountain Baptist Association and also five years as a pastor of churches in DeKalb Baptist Association. His wife, Marcille, who served as the association's ministry assistant, clerk and treasurer for more than 19 years, also is retiring. They

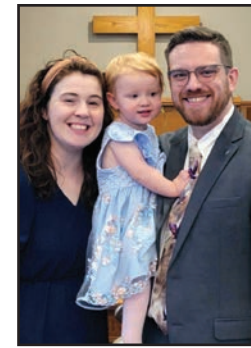


Photo courtesy of Marcille Dutton

have four adult children and five grandchildren. Dutton says he plans to remain active in ministry and can be contacted at wbdutton58@gmail.com or 256-484-7016.

CLARKE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Elam Baptist Church, Thomasville**, will host a jubilee singing March 14 at 5 p.m. featuring Glory Road and others. Glen Elmore is pastor.



Facebook photo

DEKALB ASSOCIATION

▶ **Adam Ward** is the new pastor of **Flat Rock Baptist Church, Dawson**. He had been serving as associate pastor under the previous pastor Nick Sharp. Ward and his wife, Beverly, have one daughter.

GENEVA ASSOCIATION

▶ **Don Chancellor** is the new pastor of **El Bethel Baptist Church, Chancellor**. He previously served as the associational missions strategist for Pulaski Baptist Association, Little Rock, Arkansas. Chancellor also has served as pastor of churches in Arkansas, Mississippi and Florida as well as director of missions of Chipola Baptist Association, Marianna, Florida. He and his wife, Donna, have four children and two granddaughters.



Submitted photo

ST. CLAIR ASSOCIATION

▶ **CrossPoint Church, Trussville**, recently celebrated **Ryan Whitley's** 30 years of leadership as pastor of and visionary for the church.

West Central Association church holds baby/child dedication service for 9 families

New Bethel Baptist Church/Briggs Christian Church, Minter, in West Central Baptist Association, recently held a baby/child dedication service. Nine families and 14 children participated in the special service. Steve Stephens is the children's minister, and Jimmy Free is pastor.



Submitted photo

'A piece of heaven'

Ady's BiG Army helps those with disabilities make 'beautiful things'

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

For Chrissy Schubert, helping communities and churches recognize and accommodate children with disabilities was a result of desperation.

Schubert, founder and executive director of Ady's BiG Army, developed a program to address these issues because of her daughter Ady.

Ady was formally diagnosed with autism as a toddler. Her parents found a school that specialized in teaching students with autism. But Ady's autism worsened when she was 3 years old. She began having major sleeping problems and started self-injurious behaviors. She tried to escape her home.

"I was sleep deprived," Schubert said. "I was up all night holding her hands down so that she wouldn't hurt herself at 2 in the morning. It was a level of what I would call combat-type trauma because you're constantly hypervigilant trying to keep your child alive, and you're doing all of it with no sleep."

Cost of care

School tuition for Ady doubled, but friends held a fundraiser that paid the tuition, which was a huge relief. On the flip side, Schubert's marriage was "hanging on by a thread." Then her husband thought it would be a good idea to start a nonprofit.

"I remember being really angry and thinking, 'You want to save the world and our house is on fire?'" she said. "A few weeks later we were sitting in church, and our pastor at the time talked about turning pain into purpose. He talked about how hard it is to be depressed when



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist
Ady Schubert experiences a ride at Barber Motorsports Park during Ady's Racers, an annual fundraiser where those served by Ady's BiG Army get to experience the thrill of being driven around the main track.

you're actively helping someone else. ... Something in my heart resonated that day and I said, 'OK, let's do this.'"

In 2015, they started Ady's Army in Birmingham. Its mission was to serve God through serving families who have members with disabilities. Motivated and informed by their own struggles, they helped families by providing respite nights, swimming lessons for children and adults and fences for families who couldn't afford them so that their children could play safely in their yards.



SCHUBERT

Even with the outward focus, life with Ady was still a huge challenge — until 2017. God impressed Schubert to take Ady to as many worship experiences as possible to get her in the presence of God. She did a full reset with Ady's medications and therapy. She hired a

specially trained tutor to teach Ady age-appropriate academics, although she doubted the outcome.

"This is a kid who smeared poop on the walls, and you're talking to her about science and art and history," she said.

Then, during a history lesson the day before her 9th birthday, Ady spelled her first poem. Spelling was Ady's way to communicate.

"So, music really plays as the American eagle soars./ I can send new errors to air, never to have my soul care./ Me, God, open my mind, steady my heart, His need will call./ Are some still lost? I am autistic and free."

Breakthrough moment

Schubert was shocked by this progress and in awe of God's goodness.

"Ady saw my reaction, and she

looked at me — never broke eye contact — and spelled, 'It's OK, Mom. I'm in here.'"

At 10 years old, Ady spelled to her parents, "It's in God's will for you to build a place for my people."

Though circumstances didn't improve, God reassured Schubert that He was in this so she pressed on.

Ady's Army became Ady's BiG Army, based on an organization near Austin, Texas, called Brookwood in Georgetown (BiG). For four days a week, Ady's BiG Army serves clients who are 22 years old and older.

Clients are called Citizens because they are citizens of God's Kingdom as well as the vocational community. The Citizens make "beautiful things" — soap, dog treats and blueberry cream pies to name a few — that are sold at pop-up markets. However, their main goal is to build "Ady's people" — a community with housing.

"Today, when people meet Ady, they almost always use the same words — regulated, full of self-control, a joy, a delight. Every time I hear it, it still makes me want to cry. Looking back at where she once was, it is a living reminder to me that God is faithful and that He is still very much in the miracle-working business.

"Ady has friends. She loves deeply. She is an incredibly hard worker. She is the first one to jump in at Ady's BiG Army to create, bake and help wherever she is needed. I am so proud of her.

"And now, we are able to give each and every one of our Citizens that same spotlight. We ... gently push them into all they are capable of. We are watching them thrive in the very same way [Ady has].

"It's giving me a piece of heaven."

To find out more about Ady's BiG Army, visit adysbigarmy.org.

DNow weekend gives Thomasville Baptist kids glimpse into disaster relief ministry, ways to serve

Kids at Thomasville Baptist Church got an opportunity to learn what disaster relief ministry is all about during their Disciple Now event Feb. 7.

Volunteers from the Clarke Baptist Association Disaster Relief team shared with them about the different kinds of disaster relief work and gave them a tour of the association's laundry

trailer, which deploys when needed to help volunteers and community members wash clothes.

The kids also helped pack Blessing Bags for the Clarke DR team to take with them as they serve those affected by the recent winter storm in the Mississippi Delta.

Valerie Hill is the children's director at Thomasville Baptist. (Grace Thornton)

Kids at Thomasville Baptist pack Blessing Bags for Clarke Baptist Association Disaster Relief volunteers to take with them to help those affected by disasters.



Photo courtesy of Clarke Baptist Association



Photo courtesy of Clarke Baptist Association

Bill Graves, a volunteer with the Clarke Baptist Association Disaster Relief team, gives a tour of the association's laundry trailer during a DNow weekend at Thomasville Baptist Church.

CARING FOR YOU HOW WE'D CARE FOR OURSELVES.

You're never a number here. You're someone with a story, dignity, and purpose. And that's where our faith-focused care begins.

**BAPTIST
HEALTH™**

We Make It *personal*



'READY AND EAGER'

Volunteers spend weeks reaching out to those affected by winter storm

(continued from page 1) some reassurance that she would be OK and that she was loved."

She also wanted to send some food, so first thing the next morning, two chaplains went by with groceries and some gift cards.

A glimmer of hope

"They spent a couple of hours with her, and later

they said, 'What you don't realize is, you talked her off the ledge,'" Baker said.

The chaplains told her the woman had been sitting at her table the night before saying, "I can't do this anymore. I have nobody; I have no help. I'm ready to end it."

And then the phone rang, and it was Baker.

"Why out of all those papers — out of 700 work

orders — did I keep going back to that one? That was God taking me back," she said. "It's just one of those God things I can't explain."

God at work

Mark Wakefield, state disaster relief strategist, said it's a great example of how God is at work through ABDR volunteers.

"It makes a difference," he said, noting that at least 14 Mississippi residents professed new faith in Christ while teams were serving there.

ABDR teams started work in the Mississippi Delta on Feb. 2, and when they wrapped up Feb. 28, they had completed around 350 job requests in seven counties.

"Our volunteers have been ready and eager to go," Wakefield said.

Back in Alabama, he and other ABDR leaders have been training new disaster relief volunteers. Around 300 people have registered to participate.

DR trainings

Trainings are still open in the coming weeks for those interested in learning how to be ready to help the next time a disaster strikes.

To sign up or for more information, visit sbdr.org/events.



Photo courtesy of ABDR

Above: A disaster relief volunteer from Sand Mountain Baptist Association works in Greenville, Mississippi. **Below:** Disaster relief teams work in Geneva following a Jan. 25 tornado.



Facebook photo/Geneva Baptist Association

Upcoming Anniversary Workshops
presented by Alabama Baptist Historical Commission

Learn about anniversary celebrations and give your planning a kickstart!

Locations & Times

- **Chilton** Association office, March 12, 1–2:30 p.m.
- **Etowah** Association office, March 12, 6–7:30 p.m.
- **Calhoun** Association office, March 16, 1–2:30 p.m.
- **Morgan** Association office, March 19, 1–2:30 p.m.
- **Clarke** Association office, March 30, 1–2:30 p.m.
- **Mobile** Network office, March 31, 1–2:30 p.m.
- **Fayette** Association office, April 9, 10–11:30 a.m.
- **Madison** Association office, April 13, 10–12 noon with lunch
- **Colbert-Lauderdale** Association office, April 14, 11 a.m.–1 p.m. with lunch
- **Winston** Association office, April 15, 1–2:30 p.m.
- **Montgomery** Association office, April 16, 11 a.m.–1 p.m. with lunch
- **Tuscaloosa**, FBC Tuscaloosa, April 21, 10:30 a.m.–12 noon
- **Butler** Association office, April 23, 1–2:30 p.m.
- **Conecuh** Association office, April 27, 1–2:30 p.m.
- **Russell** Association office, April 28, 12 noon–2 p.m. with lunch
- **Dekalb** Association office, April 30, 1–2:30 p.m.

Other Locations Set, Dates TBD

- **Elmore** Association area
- **Randolph** Association area
- **Hale** Association area
- **Shelby** Association area

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For more information about Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief or to contribute to the efforts, visit sbdr.org.



Call to Prayer Initiative for Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions Executive Director Search

A call to prayer has been issued by the Transition and Search Team that will recommend a successor to Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, who announced his retirement recently after 28 years. Here are some prayer points that might guide you in your efforts.

1. Gratitude for faithful legacy

Scripture: Psalm 100:5

We thank God for the fruit, foundation and faithfulness of 28 years of leadership under Rick Lance. We pray blessings over him, Pam and their family, asking the Lord to preserve lasting impact.

2. Unity among leadership

Scripture: Psalm 133:1

Grant one heart and one mind among the search team, ALSBOM staff and churches across the state. Remove hidden agendas and guard every conversation with humility and grace.

3. Wisdom & discernment in the search

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5-6

Give wisdom beyond human reasoning. Lead us clearly. Close wrong doors quickly and confirm the right one unmistakably.

4. Clarity of vision for the next season

Scripture: Habakkuk 2:2

Reveal what must remain and what must evolve. Align mission, strategy and leadership with the future You have prepared.

5. Spiritual protection over the process

Scripture: Psalm 121:1-2
Guard this transition from fear, division, confusion or discouragement. Protect integrity, confidentiality and unity.

6. God's appointed leader

Scripture: 1 Samuel 16:7

Prepare the person You have chosen. Help us discern beyond appearances and recognize Your anointing and calling. We pray for the role he will be leaving as they too begin a transition.

7. Humility & courage for the transition team

Scripture: Philippians 2:3-4

Grant servant hearts, courage for difficult decisions and freedom from favoritism or nostalgia. Let integrity mark every step.

8. A healthy & orderly transition

Scripture: Proverbs 16:9

Establish timelines, communication and handoff with clarity and peace. Let nothing essential be lost in the shift.

9. Provision & organizational stability

Scripture: Psalm 37:23

Sustain financial resources, staff morale and church trust. Strengthen partnerships, and steady the ministry during this season.

10. A spiritually significant moment

Scripture: John 14:27

Let this transition be more than administrative — make it defining. Build faith, deepen dependence on You and position this ministry for continued and even greater Kingdom impact.

WORD search

- | | |
|--------------|-------------|
| ALMOND | GRAPE |
| ANISE | HONEY |
| BARLEY | LAMB |
| BEANS | LEEKs |
| BITTER HERBS | LENTILs |
| BREAD | MELONS |
| BUTTER | MILK |
| CINNAMON | MUSTARD |
| CORIANDER | NUTS |
| CUCUMBER | OLIVES |
| CUMIN | ONIONS |
| DATES | PISTACHIO |
| DILL | POMEGRANATE |
| FIGS | RAISIN |
| FISH | SALT |
| GARLIC | VENISON |

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

"He causes the grass to grow for the cattle and vegetation for the service of man, that he may bring forth food from the earth."

PSALM 104:14

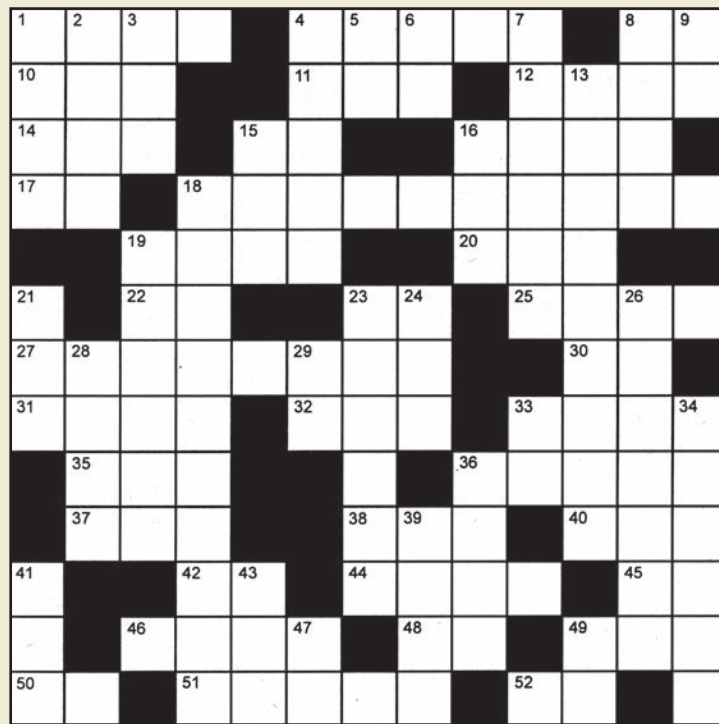
As a reminder, the team invites the submission of resumés and cover letters, which need to be sent to sbomsearch@gmail.com. Those emails must be received on or before March 31, 2026. After that, no additional resumés will be accepted.

CHRISTIAN Crossword



ACROSS

1. For God cannot be tempted with _____. (James 1:13)
4. The voice of doves _____ing upon their breasts. (Nah. 2:7)
8. From. (French)
10. Feather scarf.
11. Grow old.
12. Highest point.
14. He shall pour _____ upon it. (Lev. 2:1)
15. Prayer book. (abbr.)
16. Father, forgive _____. (Luke 23:34)
17. North Dakota.
18. He that goeth about as a _____ revealeth secrets. (Prov. 20:19)
19. Let God be _____, but every man a liar. (Rom. 3:4)
20. Absence. (abbr.)
22. Egyptian sun god.
23. He had sent messengers to _____ king of Egypt. (2 Kings 17:4)
25. Now the first lot came forth to Jehoiarib ... the fourth to _____im. (1 Chron. 24:7-8)
27. So can no _____ both yield saltwater and fresh. (James 3:12)
30. Citizens band radio.
31. Spanish aunts.
32. Prefix meaning "before."
33. Ye shall not fulfill the _____ of the flesh. (Gal. 5:16)
35. Liquefied natural gas.
36. Then _____ and the other apostles answered, we ought to obey God. (Acts 5:29)
37. Steamer. (abbr.)
38. Hubbub.
40. Before. (poetic)
42. Each. (abbr.)
44. It is a _____ thing that



By Janet Adkins Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- the king requireth. (Dan. 2:11)
45. Part of speech. (abbr.)
46. Naum, which was the son of _____. (Luke 3:25)
48. Return unto _____. (Mal. 3:7)
49. _____ boweth down. (Isa. 46:1)
50. What shall we _____? (Acts 2:37)
51. _____ women shall take hold of one man. (Isa. 4:1)
52. Representing 3.14159.
9. Former.
13. And I will _____ them with the sword. (Jer. 29:18)
15. The name of his city was _____. (Gen. 36:39)
16. Beverage.
18. I am purposed that my mouth shall not _____. (Ps. 17:3)
19. Absent without permission.
21. Ship's stern.
23. Indian nobleman.
24. They were afraid both _____ and other. (Jer. 36:16)
26. Ye _____ days and months. (Gal. 4:10)

DOWN

1. Black wood. (poetic)
2. Faith is made _____. (Rom. 4:14)
3. Adjective suffix.
4. Thou preparest a _____ before me. (Ps. 23:5)
5. Symbol for the element Silver.
6. Exist.
7. Belonging to a notable harlot.
8. Greek community.
28. Greases.
29. News service.
33. French article.
34. _____ clef.
36. Skin opening.
39. Condemn to everlasting punishment.
41. Receive him not, neither _____ him God speed. (2 John 10)
43. Tavern brew.
47. Roman numeral four.
49. At intervals of two.

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

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.

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. Participant registration is now open.

SINGFEST events

Do you enjoy singing hymns? Join us for SINGFEST!

Each SINGFEST is a morning event featuring the singing of great old hymns of our faith and heritage. It's designed for senior adults, but all are welcome!

Join us on one of these two dates this month, each from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.:

- ▶ March 10 at First Baptist Church Demopolis
- ▶ March 17 at FBC Jasper

For more information, call Frank Jones at 334-613-2221 or 205-393-7020 or email him at fjones@alsbom.org. The event is free, but registration is preferred. Visit alsbom.org/singfest to register.

Transitional Pastor Training: March 23-24

Transitional Pastor Training, a two-day event planned for March 23-24 at the State Board of Missions, will equip pastors to take a church through a stage-by-stage process of renewed mission.

The training will feature two special guests — Henry Webb, who retired

in 2005 after 28 years of service at Lifeway in the areas of pastoral ministries, discipleship and deacon ministry; and Dan Garland, who was director of pastoral ministries for Lifeway from 2007 to 2015.

To register, visit alsbom.org/tpt.

Renew event encourages women to live for Christ

About 500 women gathered for Renew on Feb. 21 for a day of teaching, worship and focusing on missions.

Catherine Renfro, director of women's evangelism at the North American Mission Board, encouraged the women to live out of the overflow of the Savior and not the overload of the season.

She also talked about the Apostle Paul's life from Romans 10:1-15 and challenged them to evaluate their own hearts and ask God to

give them a heart for the lost.

"Nearly every woman in the room responded as Catherine encouraged them to lay their next steps on the altar as they commit to sharing Christ," said Candace McIntosh, executive director of Alabama Woman's Missionary Union. "Watching women lay their commitment on the altar, praying together and encouraging one another was a beautiful sight."

She said she prays that every woman "follows through on her commitment and lives a life more committed to sharing her story, living out the gospel and sharing the gospel with those who do not know." (Grace Thornton)



Photo by Tiffany Roy

The annual Renew event presented by Alabama WMU drew about 500 women to NorthPark Baptist Church in Trussville on Feb. 21. The gathering offered Bible study and worship, a place to connect with other women and a chance to focus on what God is doing around the world.



Photo by Tiffany Roy

Above: Catherine Renfro, national director of women's evangelism at NAMB, encourages women to lay their next steps on the altar as they commit to sharing Christ.



Photo by Tiffany Roy



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.



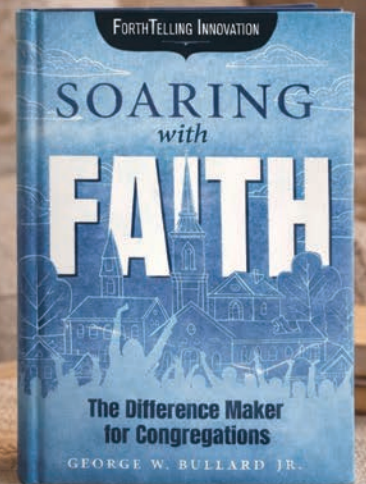
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Published by TAB Media Group in conjunction with Iron Stream Media

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR

Cypress Shores Baptist Church in Mobile, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a full-time senior pastor. Please email resumé to: cypress9631@comcast.net or mail to: 4327 Higgins Rd., Mobile, AL 36619.

SENIOR PASTOR

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.

PASTOR

After the death of our pastor last year, Nolensville First Baptist Church located just outside Nashville in fast growing Williamson County is seeking a pastor. We are a Bible believing fellowship, worshipping in a traditional manner, looking for a strong leader to preach God's Word and shepherd our church family. We need a goal-oriented leader to develop and engage our members in an effective outreach effort in our community. Letters of interest, resumé and a link to videos of recent sermons may be sent to: NFBC Search Committee, P.O. Box 635, Nolensville, TN 37135, or submitted via email to: psc.nolensvillefbc@gmail.com.

PASTOR

Pintlala Baptist Church is seeking a full-time pastor. The candidate should be a self-starter, enthusiastic about the Word of God and excited for opportunity to bring new members to the church. Pintlala Baptist Church, which is located in the southwestern portion of Montgomery County, has a loving church family that is here to share the good news of Jesus Christ to serve our community (and beyond) in His love. We are genuine in our atmosphere and enjoy supporting one another. For more information, please go to: pintlalabaptist.com/ministry-position-open.

PASTOR

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

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Fyffe First Baptist Church is currently accepting resúmes for a bivocational pastor. Send resúmes to: Fyffe First Baptist Church, 198 Church St., P.O. Box 194, Fyffe, AL 35971, or email to: Fyffefbc@farmerstel.com.

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 PREACHER

Riverview Baptist Church, Millers Ferry, Alabama, is seeking a part-time bivocational preacher. We are a small church located in a retirement, recreational community. Send resúmes to: monica.rice60@yahoo.com.

PART-TIME PASTOR

Samaria Baptist Church is seeking a part-time pastor. The candidate should meet qualifications according to Scripture. Samaria is a loving church and a special place for God's people to worship. We are seeking a pastor who preaches God's Word and shepherds His flock. Please send a resumé by March 20 to: Samaria Baptist Church, 70 East Lake Rd., Jasper, AL 35501. ATTN: Waylan Hall

STUDENT PASTOR

Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Alexandria, Alabama, is seeking a full-time student pastor to lead our student ministry of 80-100 students (grades 6-12). Email your resumé to: pastorsearch@mzbclife.net. Subject line: Student Pastor

STUDENT PASTOR

Mexia Baptist Church is prayerfully seeking a full-time student pastor to lead our youth and children's ministry. Please submit resumé to: office@mexiabaptistchurch.com or P.O. Box 218, Mexia, AL 36458.

CHILDREN'S DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR

12th Street Baptist Church is looking for a children's department director. If interested, please call 256-546-0471.

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~A resource for congregational vitality~

Soaring congregations live into a future story of missional ministry

What is the difference between tell me *the* stories of Jesus, and tell me *your* story of Jesus?

We tell people *the* stories of Jesus because we have learned the inspiring Bible stories of the One who gave His life for us that we might have eternal life. The One who showed us how to live by the way He lived. The One who always expressed unconditional love.

But when we tell people *our* story of Jesus, we tell people how He shapes our lives. How daily we seek to live out our lives with the character and nature of Jesus. How we apply the unconditional love of Jesus in interactions with all people. What it means to strive to be a fully devoted follower of Christ.

The stories of Jesus come alive through our real-life testimony.

When we tell our story to people, they can personally connect in real time. This may motivate them to think about the possibility of their own Jesus story.

Planning words vs. future story

How do congregations tell their story of Jesus? What is the difference between reciting a two-to-six-word motto or a nine-to-15-word congregational vision statement versus telling people your version of the story of the spiritual strategic journey of your congregation?

When you recite a motto or vision statement, you are providing a static picture of the congregation. You are repeating words that act as a rallying point around the directive actions by congregational leaders. There may be excitement or celebration about being part of this but only modest personal spiritual passion.

When you tell people your story about the spiritual strategic journey of your congregation, you provide a living narrative of the congregational journey. You place personal passion into the story as you express how it feels to be living within the reality of a God-led journey. You invite people to experience their own unique adventure consistent with the congregation's spiritual strategic journey.

At its core, this is the difference between a left-brained strategic plan driven by metrics toward success and a spiritual strategic journey focused on God's future story of missional ministry. This represents the difference between a Strong congregation and a Soaring congregation.

What is God's future story of missional ministry? For me this is an adventure I have

helped congregations with all my life. It is one key to empowering congregations to soar.

First, congregations engage in a season of spiritual discernment where they generally seek God's direction for them. This lasts 100 days and involves large group prayer and small groups of three people meeting 10 times over the 100 days.

Scenarios for the future

Second, congregations develop three scenarios for the future, focusing on the direction toward which God is pulling it. Sometimes these scenarios are developed before the 100 days of spiritual discernment and sometimes after the 100 days.

Third, the congregation discerns which scenario is most like where God is leading it over the next seven or more years.

Fourth, it then crafts its future story of missional ministry by answering this question: If we with faithfulness, effectiveness and innovation live into the call of God upon our congregation, describe what the life and ministry of our congregation might look like seven years from now.

Fifth, it develops detailed actions for the first three years of the spiritual strategic journey for living into its future story.

Sixth, it begins living into its future story of missional ministry.

Seventh, it celebrates progress which fulfills the story every 120 days and adjusts details of the story according to God's leadership and their fulfillment.



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. In 2022, he began writing as a columnist for TAB Media Group's publication *The Baptist Paper*. Bullard continues to serve 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

For March 15

FOLLOWING JESUS Matthew 16:13–26

Much of the world touched by Judaism, Christianity and Islam have been introduced to the name of Jesus (Yeshua, Issa or a similar form of His name). To be familiar with His name, however, is not the same as knowing Jesus through faith in Him.

In our focal passage today, the Master surveys His disciples, asking them how people perceive Him.

His question is much like what Christians observe around Christmas and Easter when the unbelieving world — often through print and digital media — asks who Jesus really is. Even editors and influencers who are lost know that Easter is a great time to talk about Jesus.

Know the Messiah (13–20)

Who do people say I am? People were guessing then, and people are still guessing. Muslims believe Jesus to be a prophet. Depending on the Jewish people you speak with, they may consider Him to be anything from a blasphemer to a good moral teacher.

C.S. Lewis argued that if Jesus was not who He claimed to be, then He could have been neither good nor moral. Lewis proposed one of three possibilities: Jesus was a lunatic who believed what He said though it wasn't true; He was a liar who did not believe His own assertions; or He is Lord and far more than just a good man or moral teacher (Mere Christianity, Book II, Chapter 3).

Who do you say that I am? Simon Peter confessed Jesus as *Christos* (Greek for “anointed one”).

Jesus explained that Peter knew this only by revelation from the Father. This is still the case today. We can truly know Jesus only if the Father draws us (John 6:44).

Did you notice where this took

place? More than 20 years ago, my esteemed dean at the University of Mobile, Cecil Taylor, pointed out to me that they were in the region of Caesarea Philippi. A particular water-filled cave there is known as the “gates of Hades.”

When Jesus said that the gates of Hades would not prevail against the church (v. 18), He was using their location to help them remember that Jesus was the Anointed One, the Son of God.

Embrace His Mission (21–23)

Acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah (in Hebrew, *meshiach* means “anointed one”) was a good start. Peter had a problem with embracing Jesus’ mission to die as a substitute for sinners.

Peter argued with Jesus, insisting that he would not allow Jesus to be killed.

This was an act of defiance against God’s plan, leading Jesus to characterize Peter’s words as satanic. How was it so wicked? Peter was more focused on the concerns of man than about the will of God.

The mission of the Master is to do the Father’s will (John 6:38–40). Those who know the Messiah and embrace His mission are also committed to doing the will of the Father (Matt. 7:21).

Become His Disciple (24–26)

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? Some consider church attendance to be the proof of discipleship. No. I attended church for years without being a disciple of Jesus. Perhaps it is giving money to the church. No. Ananias and Sapphira attempted this and failed (Acts 5:1–11).

Jesus described His disciple: one who denies self, who takes up the cross (considering himself or herself crucified with Christ) and who follows Jesus (doing the Father’s will). Are you a disciple?

For March 22

GLORY Matthew 17:1–13

The event that took place on the Mount of Transfiguration made such an impact on Peter and John that both wrote of their experience decades later. Peter wrote: “We were eyewitnesses of His majesty” and “We ourselves heard this voice when it came from heaven while we were with Him on the holy mountain” (2 Pet. 1:16, 18). John added: “We observed His glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father” (John 1:14).

Transfigured (1–3)

Shortly after Peter’s confession of Jesus as the anointed one, the Master took His inner circle of disciples on a life-changing excursion. Peter and the sons of Zebedee accompanied Jesus to an encounter with Moses and Elijah, as Jesus was transfigured before them.

In his exuberance, Peter spoke up and suggested that they build separate shelters for Jesus, for Moses and for Elijah. While this may seem like an extraordinary response, it was in keeping with the annual celebration of Sukkoth (Feast of Tabernacles or Booths) as a reminder of Israel’s temporary encampments during the Exodus and later wilderness wanderings (Lev. 23:33–36).

Overshadowed (4–8)

The men were overshadowed by a bright cloud as the Father spoke audibly to them. This description brings to mind the journey of the Israelites through the wilderness, as God’s presence was manifested by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Ex. 13:21). In addition, we are reminded of the psalmist’s words: “The one who lives under the protection of the Most High dwells in the shadow of the Almighty” (Ps. 91:1).

As He did at Jesus’ baptism, the

Father affirmed Jesus to be His son (3:17). On this occasion, the Father added these words: “Listen to him” (17:5). Just as we are to listen to the Father (see Deut. 6:4 and Mark 12:29), we are to listen to the Son.

Jesus had previously told believers that listening to His words was insufficient if they did not act upon them. Such people are like those who build their houses on sand. After his encounter with the risen Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 15:7), James wrote and reminded believers that simply hearing Jesus’ words was not enough. He called believers to act on the word: “Be doers of the word and not hearers only” (James 1:22–25).

Instructed (9–13)

Permission to tell. Jesus gave clear instructions. Until Jesus was killed and raised from the dead, the disciples were not to tell anyone about this supernatural encounter. That did not keep them from asking questions though. What about Elijah?

1. Elijah in prophecy: Scribes were familiar with the prophecies of Malachi, but evidently the disciples were not: “Look, I am going to send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers” (Mal. 4:5–6a).

2. Elijah in liturgy: In addition to the Scriptures, Elijah’s return is marked in the Passover haggadah (Jewish text) that sets forth the order of the Jewish seder meal. One of the cups placed on the seder table is a cup for Elijah, anticipating the inauguration of the messianic age.

John the Baptist had a ministry comparable to Elijah. He lodged away from people. His diet was simple. He was unafraid to confront royalty about their sins. Ultimately, he called the Father’s children back to Himself.



By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.
Professor of Biblical Studies, University of Mobile

**“But Jesus came and touched them, saying,
‘Rise, and have no fear.’”**

Matthew 17:7

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sunday School Lessons

By Rony Kozman, Ph.D.

Assistant professor of Biblical Studies, Samford University



For March 15

GOD IS JUST Psalm 7:1–13

When injustice rears its head, look to God. (1–5)

When we pray this psalm, we ask God to rescue us from our enemies. The psalmist pleads with God to intervene so that he is not destroyed by his enemies. There is no one else to whom he can appeal. Only God can help.

But as part of his plea for God's aid and rescue, the psalmist asks only for God's just intervention. He is not asking for special treatment or for God to treat him better than he deserves. He only asks for God to right the wrong that he is experiencing.

The psalmist is innocent, and he simply asks God to act justly and to save the innocent.

If he is guilty, then he concedes that God should not rescue him but let him be defeated and killed by his enemy. The psalmist expresses confidence in his own righteousness in this situation — that he has not done wrong — and he pleads for God to rescue the righteous.

We must seek to live just lives and to be just in our dealings so that if others despise or mistreat us, we can plead with confidence like the psalmist for God's justice to intervene.

James urges his audience to persevere in doing good even when they are mistreated, knowing that God's judgment and justice are coming. He says they must strive to ensure that they land on the right side of God's coming judgment and receive His compassion and mercy. (See James 5:7–11.)

This psalm also speaks with the voice of Jesus, the Son of David, the Righteous One who suffered unjustly and cried out for God not to forsake Him but

to intervene and to rescue Him. (See also Matt. 27:46, Ps. 22:1.)

God alone is the Righteous Judge. (6–9)

As we pray this psalm, may we be such a people who seek God's justice and Kingdom that we can join this voice and confidently plead with God to rise up against those who conspire against God's people.

But most especially as Paul tells us, may God ultimately vanquish our enemies — not those who have flesh and blood but the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:12) and the power of sin and death that seeks to destroy us (1 Cor. 15:25–27, 56–57).

Without repentance, judgment awaits. (10–13)

God is righteous. He is the Righteous Judge who will make all things right. No one is more committed to justice than God is. No one is more opposed to and angry with injustice than God is. His armaments are ready to defeat evil and to establish justice, to ensure that the wicked receive

what they rightly deserve.

But even with God's readiness to defeat the wicked, He is ready and eager to turn His wrath away from anyone who repents of their evil ways and turns to fear the Lord and to live in justice with their neighbors.

In Christ, God has defeated our great enemies of sin and death. God has sent His Son and Spirit to liberate us from the reign of sin and death (Rom. 8:2), and He has placed His Spirit in us so that we do the justice that God requires and so that our mortal bodies will be resurrected to eternal life when the Lord returns to establish justice.

“My shield is with God, who saves the upright in heart. God is a righteous judge who feels indignation ...”

Psalm 7:10–11a

For March 22

GOD IS OMNIPOTENT Isaiah 44:6–9, 21–28

There is no god like our God. (6–9)

In Isaiah 43, God promises that He will restore Israel. Even though the people of Israel have burdened the Lord with their sins (v. 24), God nevertheless declares to them, “I am the One; I sweep away your transgressions for My own sake and remember your sins no more” (v. 25).

Israel's ancestors and its leaders rebelled against God (v. 27), and so God handed them over to destruction at the hands of their enemies (v. 28).

For their sins, Israel received the curses of the covenant, including their defeat by foreign nations throughout their history. Even still, chapter 44 tells us God has not forgotten Israel whom He has “chosen” (v. 1) and whom He made and formed in the womb (v. 2). He is not finished with His people.

Because God has chosen to love Israel as His people, He will intervene and rescue His children.

God is Israel's King and Redeemer (v. 6), and in this context of His promised restoration He declares, “I am the first and I am the last. There is no god but Me. Who, like Me, can announce the future? Let him say so and make a case before Me” (vv. 6–7).

The gods of the nations are nothing compared to the Lord. No god comes before the Lord; He is the first. And no god comes after the Lord; He is the last. Only the Lord can announce the things that are to come.

The point of this assertion is more than that God predicts the future. He can declare the things to come, that He will restore Israel and make Israel flourish because He is all-powerful and has

the ability and strength to accomplish this.

He knows and declares the future restoration of His people because He has the power and ability to bring these things about.

God works on behalf of His children. (21–23)

In contrast to the God of Israel's power to bring about the future restoration of His people, the gods of the nations and their idols are impotent.

These idols are made from the same wood that the idol maker uses as fuel for the fire he uses to cook his food and to keep himself warm (vv. 14–17, 19).

God's people must not put their hope or confidence in such impotent gods, but they must remember the Lord who formed them because they are His servants and if they return to Him, He will forgive their sins.

God will intervene. He will save His people. And that this will surely happen in the future is again secured by God's power and might to bring the salvation of His people to pass. God is so powerful that He can tell the heavens to sing as though He has already done it: “Rejoice, heavens, for the Lord has acted” (v. 23).

God is all-powerful. (24–28)

The Lord is the great God who created the heavens and the earth, and He did it all without anyone's help (v. 24). This again highlights God's power.

God's power and ability to restore Jerusalem will prove Isaiah's promises true that Israel will be restored, Jerusalem will be rebuilt, and the foundation of the temple will be laid (v. 26, 28).

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

“Thus says the LORD ... ‘I am the first and the last; besides Me there is no god.’”

Isaiah 44:6

‘Discipleship experience’

Respite ministry connects churches to families living with dementia

By Lonnie Wilkey
The Alabama Baptist

Respite for All, an Alabama-based nonprofit that began in 2012 to assist people living with dementia and their caregivers and families, has grown dramatically over the past 13 years.

As of December 2025, there were 65 respite communities in 18 states engaging 1,250 people with dementia, according to Daphne Johnston, co-founder of RFA. That means some 1,250 volunteers who contributed 500,000 volunteer hours during the year.

Johnston and Lawson Bryson launched a respite ministry 14 years ago at First United Methodist Church Montgomery, and it has expanded to include 11 denominations, Johnston said. RFA will launch its first Roman Catholic ministry church in Birmingham in September.

“We think every denomination needs it.”

Millions in need of help

Statistics support that. More than 6 million Americans are living with dementia or Alzheimer’s in the United States and that number is expected to double by 2050, according to the RFA website.

Johnston stressed that 6 million reflects only those who have been diagnosed.

“Think of the millions of people who have dementia but have not yet gone to the doctor to be diagnosed,” she said.

While Alzheimer’s is the best known and most prevalent type of dementia, there are some 120 different types and forms.

The number of RFA respite sites



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist
Respite For All ministries at two Alabama Baptist churches — FBC Huntsville (shown here) and The Church at Liberty Park — continue to grow and expand.

continues to grow as 21 ministries are slated to begin this year, Johnston noted.

“We are on the cusp of doubling in size from the 65 we now have.”

Johnston, who established the RFA Foundation along with Warren Barrow, a Montgomery businessman whose wife was diagnosed with dementia, explained how it got its name.

“We began the ministry so we could give caregivers a break,” Johnston said. “But once we got our friends with dementia together, we discovered they also needed a break from their stressed caregiver and were excited to meet and be with new friends.”

“That’s how we came up with the name Respite for All. It’s a respite for the caregivers, the people living with dementia and the volunteers,” Johnston said.

She defined respite as “taking a break from something hard. There’s nothing harder than living with dementia 24–7.”

Respite for All guides churches and organizations in building successful communities that provide social support for families living with dementia, Johnston explained.

She stressed that RFA is based on a social model of care.

“That’s what sets us apart from other ministries,” she said.

Churches do not have to have medical personnel on hand because no medical care is provided or medicines given out during the four-hour stay.

RFA is staffed by church volunteers (primarily senior adults) who minister to individuals living in the early to middle stages of a diagnosis, who are able to care for their

own restroom needs, are comfortable in a group setting and are able to eat on their own, Johnston said.

“It truly is a discipleship experience for both the volunteers and our friends with dementia.”

“It truly is a discipleship experience for both the volunteers and our friends. Volunteers are the lifeblood of the ministry,” Johnston said.

RFA’s model of care is based on partnerships with faith communities (churches) that provide free space and a network of volunteers who offer companionship, in addition to activities.

Churches that adopt the RFA model do not have to “reinvent the wheel,” she noted.

“We provide training on ... everything a church needs to know.”

The beauty of RFA is that it can be done by any size church no matter the location, Johnston said.

Churches that commit to launching a site are eligible for a \$10,000 grant through the RFA Foundation. That helps fund a part-time director chosen by the church, and each site is a stand-alone ministry.

No one turned away

The churches are autonomous and set their own guidelines as to days the ministry is available, Johnston said, while each church determines a modest tuition (generally \$20 to \$50 a day) to assist with operating expenses.

She stressed, however, that no one is turned away.

“Scholarships are available from the local church,” she affirmed.

Johnston urged churches to consider partnering with RFA.

“Your church will be an asset locally when you can provide this ministry to the entire community.”

For more information, visit respiteforall.org.