

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



Photo courtesy of the Baldwin County Corrections Center

A University of Mobile ministry team leads worship at the Baldwin County Corrections Center on Feb. 6.

Not forgotten

University of Mobile students lead live worship for inmates in Mobile and Baldwin counties

By Rachel Seale
The Alabama Baptist

Inmates at correctional facilities in Mobile and Baldwin counties recently participated in worship services with live music provided by students from the University of Mobile.

UM students visited the Baldwin County Corrections Center and Mobile County Metro Jail to offer

inmates the chance to worship together with a live band.

Jared Baria, UM director of student life and an adjunct professor, said he was looking for ways to serve the community, including in local prisons.

He received word from Marcus Huseth, chaplain at Baldwin County Corrections Center, that the facility wanted to host its first worship service with a live band.

“We knew that we could meet the need,” Baria said. “I think that’s just being faithful to what God has called us to do.”

‘Just a vision’

Huseth said the idea of offering live worship to those incarcerated just “popped into his head.”

“It was just a vision,” Huseth recalled. “Just wanting something extra.”

He discovered the facility offers church services weekly, but it had not hosted live worship bands until the UM group came.

He added that it’s important for inmates to know they are not forgotten — that people are still praying for and caring about them even though they’ve made a mistake.

Only a limited number are allowed in the facilities at a time, so
(See ‘Brothers,’ page 12)

COMING IN THE NEXT EDITION ...

Ageing Well — Resources that encompass all aspects of growing older, including basic tips for staying healthy, coping with challenges and preparing for the future.



Rashional Thoughts

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

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

Making good progress on 30-for-30 challenge taking place this year at TAB

More updates on the 30-for-30 challenge with several individual items combined to save space — thank you for taking this journey with me.

▶ Set up a bulk order of The Kids Edition — 24 groups so far.

David George, Tracy Robertson, Tracy Hanrahan, Bethel Baptist in Dora, Bethel Baptist in Robertsdale, 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, Sugar Creek Baptist in Texas, Crawford Baptist Church near Phenix City, FBC Tillman's Corner in Mobile, Valley Creek Baptist Church in Hueytown, Brantley Baptist Church in Luverne, Coaling Baptist Church, FBC Childersburg, FBC Union Springs, Heritage Baptist Church in Montgomery, Judson Baptist Church in Abbeville, FBC Montevallo and New Hope Baptist Church in Pell City

▶ Engage with us on social media, recruit others to follow us on social media, sign up for one of our email newsletters and/or help others subscribe to a print edition — 2 so far. *Debbie Campbell, Susan Stevens*

▶ Donate to The Alabama Baptist or The Baptist Paper for 30-for-30 — 4 so far.

Wayne Glasscock, Sam Peavler, Teddye Gandy, Jason Rash

▶ Subscribe to The Weekly podcast. Plus, a shoutout to our volunteer readers for the abridged audio version of our content — Tommy Ellison, Sallie Bryant, Don Shipp, Melanie McKinney, Daniel Gilliland, Robin McCall, Amy Hacker

▶ Read at least one full article in a recent edition — 8 so far.

Steven Presley, Lauren Grim, Shawn Hendricks, Carrie McWhorter, Grace Thornton, Dianna Cagle, Daniel Gilliland, Morris Murray Jr.

▶ Review thealabamabaptist.org, thebaptistpaper.org, groundlevelreports.com, tabmedia.group and/or youtube.com/tabmediagroup — 4 so far.

Trennis Henderson, Julie Donovan, Maggie Evans, Hannah Pruitt

▶ Share information from a recent edition with others — 2 so far. *Bob Little, David George*

▶ Take a 30-minute break from thinking about the most frustrating item in front of you — 1 so far. *Philip Morris*

▶ Pray for three people in your church family.

▶ Add families to your group subscription list.

▶ Spend an extra 30 minutes reading God's Word — 1 so far. *Marion Hardman*

▶ Submit a letter to the editor — 4 so far.

Morris Murray Jr., Mary King, Wolf Bernhardt, Randy Rogan

▶ 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

▶ Look to see where God is working around you — 1 so far. *Jamie Work*

▶ Encourage kids to submit an entry to The Kids Edition by emailing thekidsedition@tabmedia.group — 5 so far.

Carrie McWhorter, Lauren Grim, Julie Donovan, Sarah Gill, Shawn Hendricks

▶ Donate to the Hudson Baggett Student Internship fund held at The Baptist Foundation of Alabama (call 334-394-2000 for details) — 2 so far. *Wilma Catherine Broom and anonymous*

▶ Discuss articles you've read recently with a group at church — 1 so far. *Michael Ent*

▶ Pray for three writers who appear in TAB.

▶ Select three negative items in your life and remove them — 1 so far. *Marion Hardman*

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

▶ 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 — 8 so far.

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

▶ Take a 30-minute walk at least three times in the next 10 days — 3 so far.

JoAnn Strain, Steven Presley, Debbie Campbell

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. They also are found at tabonline.org.

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.

Your Voice



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

Finding grandeur of God's love in rural ministry

By Rich Bitterman

Cedar Ridge Baptist Church, Galena, Missouri

Our sanctuary may not be large, but it carries the weight of a couple generations of worship. You're immediately enveloped by a sense of history and familiarity. The pews, smooth and worn from years of prayer, have a certain timelessness to them. They smell faintly of furniture polish, a scent that's both comforting and grounding to me. It's a fragrance I've come to know well, since my wife and I also serve as the church custodians. Each week, as we take care of the space, I'm reminded that these pews aren't just for sitting — they're places where lives have been touched, prayers whispered and decisions made.

Present not polished

The simplicity of the sanctuary, with its modest pulpit, communion table and plentiful windows, speaks volumes about the heart of this church. There are no fancy productions here, just the faithful dedication of a community that honors the core elements of worship: the Word, the sacrament and prayer. In this space, the focus isn't on the extravagance of things, but on the quiet, profound simplicity of faith.

We don't have fancy lights or a sound system that could rival a concert hall. Instead, we have something better: a place where the simplicity of worship takes center stage. Here, it's not about being polished — it's about being present, about focusing

on God's Word, His promises and His grace.

Life at Cedar Ridge is more than what happens on Sunday mornings. This is a church where care takes on a tangible form. When someone falls ill, meals appear at their door, rides to appointments are quietly arranged and prayers are lifted up without ceasing.

When a family welcomes a baby, the whole church celebrates like it's their own child. And when sorrow comes, as it inevitably does in this life, no one grieves alone. Whether it's a potluck in the fellowship hall or a baptism in the lake down in the holler, everything we do reflects the heart of a family bound together by faith.

Every Sunday, the morning air seems to hum with anticipation. Our building is modest, but the warmth of the people inside overshadows any physical structure. As a new pastor, I'm learning to know every face, every name, every story. And when someone new walks through those doors, they aren't just noticed, they're embraced — welcomed into a family they didn't even know they had.

Heartfelt and grounded

Worship here isn't flashy, and it isn't meant to be. It's heartfelt and grounded. Our music might come from a piano or a guitar, sometimes both, but it always comes from the soul. Hymnals are passed down the

rows, and voices join together, untrained but earnest.

When I step into the pulpit, I'm not speaking to a sea of anonymous faces. I'm preaching to people I know — people I've prayed with, laughed with and cried with. My sermons are shaped by their lives, their struggles and their joys because we're walking this road of faith together.

I am learning the true beauty of a small church like ours is in the quiet moments. It's in the way we linger after service to talk about the week. It's in the spontaneous prayers offered over coffee at the men's breakfast or the way children sit beside their grandparents, absorbing the rhythms of worship from an early age.

It's not about programs or production value — it's about people. It's about a community that reflects God's love in real and personal ways.

Being the pastor of Cedar Ridge Baptist Church isn't necessarily about building something bigger. It's about digging deeper. It's about truly knowing the people you serve and allowing them to know you. It's about rejoicing together in the good times and standing together in the hard ones.

This is ministry in its purest form. It's not about chasing numbers or trends; it's about faithfully shepherding the flock God has entrusted to you, one soul at a time.



BITTERMAN

"I know people at home were terrified when they found out that there were groups over there (when the war started), but we did not have terror," said **Ed Litton**, pastor of Redemption Church in Mobile, who had arrived in Israel with a group of 30 others from his church and other congregations on Feb. 27, the day before the Iran war started. "We felt as safe there in the midst of missiles and drones as we do at home. There is no safety like the safety of being in the refuge of Jesus." Litton noted when a missile hit about a block and a half from his group's hotel in Israel, they could feel the explosion.

"We're all commanded to do the work of an evangelist," said **David Burton** of David Burton Ministries. "Jesus is going to use you until the day you die," he said. "Be aggressive. Be unapologetic."

"We are not sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners."

R.C. Sproul

Pastor and theologian

"Our salvation is in the sonship of the Son — we are sons in His sonship."

Steve McKinion

@stevemckinion on X

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“Faith is the certainty that even in the unknown, God already knows the way, and He walks it with you.”

@ FAITH . GRACE . TRUTH
on Instagram

“Easter is not about a single day,” said **Denise George**, author of “Preparing our Hearts for Easter: Daily Devotions for Individual, Family & Group Study,” released by TAB Media Group.

“It’s a spiritual journey that includes reflection, repentance, gratitude and renewed faith. I believe this daily devotional helps believers enter that journey more intentionally. I was drawn to this project because I’ve long believed that the weeks leading up to Easter are some of the most spiritually significant days of the Christian year. Sometimes, however, they are often the most hurried,” she noted. “We prepare our homes, our church programs, our music and our schedules, but we don’t always intentionally prepare our hearts.”

“As a father whose children are quickly stretching into adulthood, I wrote this book with them in mind. I wanted them to under-

stand, even in their teenage years, the unshakable tenets of our faith — truths that have shaped our family and, I pray, will continue to shape each of them throughout their lives,” said **Matthew Boswell**, author of the children’s book “That Holy Week So Long Ago.”

He noted, “As you read about Holy Week, I hope you see the glory and grace of King Jesus as never before. The one who gave His life invites you into a life of repenting of your sin and believing in Him as your Savior. Even today, a holy Savior still creates a holy people through the events of that Holy Week so long ago.”

“Thriving churches have the Great Commission as the centerpiece of their vision, while dying churches have forgotten the clear command of Christ.”

Thom S. Rainer
Author and church strategist



Lass WORDS

BY KEN LASS
The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

First impressions

Did you ever notice that when you first meet someone, you usually develop an immediate impression about them? They strike you in a certain way. Could be how they look at you, whether they smile or seem sincere, or whether they acknowledge you at all.

Sometimes the impression is positive — you like them right away. Other times they might appear cold or insensitive or rude. You decide right then and there you don’t care for them.

First impressions are a natural tendency, but I have found on many occasions that you can’t trust them. There have been so many times I have encountered someone I quickly assessed as unfriendly, even snobbish.

I know you’re not supposed to judge people, especially at first glance, but I couldn’t help feeling uncomfortable and negative about them. Then after talking and interacting with them over time, I realized I was completely wrong. They turned out to be engaging and kind folks — you just needed to get to know them better.

How we see God

Encountering God in your life can work the same way. You may initially see Him as a strict, angry authority figure who demands obedience and loyalty or He will punish you with eternal

damnation. Many people feel this way, and it keeps them from committing to their faith. But to think in this manner is to not know Him well enough.

God’s first desire is for your eternal salvation and joy. After all, you are His creation. Why would He want to harm you?

God’s nature

The Lord’s nature is all about love, not discipline. According to my internet search engine, the Bible uses the word “love” 361 times; it uses “punishment” nine times.

The more effort you spend in God’s Word, the better you will get to know Him.

You will learn He is not strict and unyielding. He is merciful and forgiving. Yes, He does want you to live a certain way, but that’s because He knows His way leads to genuine peace and security.

“The Lord is my strength and my defense; He has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise Him, my father’s God, and I will exalt Him” (Ex. 15:2).

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

AUTAUGA ASSOCIATION

► **Caleb Green** is the new youth minister for **Prattmont Baptist Church, Prattville**. He has been working with youth since 2010 and recently served as pastoral intern at First Baptist Church Tallassee. He is engaged to Colee Rayborn. Pete Chadwick is pastor.



Facebook photo

► **Ricky Hall** is the new



Submitted photo

associate and senior adult pastor of **First Baptist Church Prattville**. He previously served as senior pastor of Maple Avenue Baptist Church, Geneva. He and his wife, Hope, have two sons and four grandchildren. Ricky is the father of

senior pastor, Justin Hall.

BARBOUR ASSOCIATION

► **Doug Russell** is the new associate pastor/student minister of **Cross Baptist Church, Eufaula**. Russell previously served as youth/children's pas-



RUSSELL

tor of Union Baptist Church, Newberry, Florida. He and his wife, Wanda, have five adult children and five grandchildren. Jim Hill is pastor.

BETHEL ASSOCIATION

► **Nanafalia Baptist Church** will have its annual homecoming service April 12, 11 a.m. Randy Taylor with the Gideons, will be the guest speaker. Special music will be provided by different groups. Following the service, lunch will be served in the fellowship hall. Tommy Campbell is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► **Jim Collins** is the new pastor of **Palmerdale Cross Baptist Church, Pinson**. He previously served as pastor of Redemption Baptist Church, Jasper, as well as several other churches in Alabama. Collins also served as a strategy coordinator with the International Mission Board in Zacatecas, Mexico (2003–2007). He and his wife, Laura, have two children and two grandchildren.



Facebook photo

► **Valley Creek Baptist Church, Hueytown**, marked a historic milestone March 15 during a special service called "Celebration Sunday" to give thanks to God for the payoff of the loan on the children's ministry building. Children

opened the service in song, while the youth praise band and the adult worship team also led in worship. Following the service, everyone gathered for a meal where the final loan note was burned as a symbolic reminder that the debt had been completely paid.

In 2012, the church broke ground on the facility. The building officially opened in March 2013 and was constructed through a loan of \$856,000. Then in March 2025, a final campaign was launched called "Giving For Their Future" to eliminate the remaining \$96,400 balance.

Pastor Jeff Weathers said the moment represents more than a financial milestone. "This is a testimony to the faithfulness of God and the generosity of His people. For (14) years, the Lord has provided through the prayers and giving of our church family."



Photo courtesy of Jeff Weathers

BLOUNT ASSOCIATION

► **Pleasant View Missionary Baptist Church, Holly Pond**, will host its spring revival April 6–10. Services begin each evening at 7. Evangelist Jared Dixon will preach with special music by The Dixons. Everyone is invited. For more information, call 256-339-1862 or 256-590-1501. Earl Harper is pastor.

OBITUARIES

JOHN STEVEN "STEVE" GAINES

John Steven "Steve" Gaines, longtime Bellevue and Gardendale FBC pastor, died March 20. He was 68.



GAINES

It was announced he entered hospice care in early March.

At the time of his kidney cancer diagnosis in fall 2023, Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, shared, "I, along with many Alabama Baptists, are praying for pastor Steve Gaines and his family. He is much beloved by us, and we are praying for the best of God's blessings on him and his family during this important time of need."

Later in 2023, Gaines shared the cancer had spread to his lungs.

Gaines announced his transition to an itinerant ministry in September 2024 from the pastor role at Bellevue Baptist Church in Cordova, Tennessee, where he served as pastor from 2005 to 2025.

He previously served as pastor of Gardendale First Baptist Church for 14 years; pastor of West Jackson Baptist Church in Tennessee; pastor, associate pastor and youth pastor of Lake Shore Baptist Church in Lake Dallas, Texas; and youth pastor of FBC Milan, Tennessee.

While at Bellevue, Gaines was Southern Baptist Convention president in 2016–2017. Gaines was named Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's Herschel H. Hobbs Visiting Professor of Christian Preaching in 2017. He served on the SBC Committee on Nominations and as chairman of the SBC Resolutions Committee. Born in Mississippi and raised in Tennessee, Gaines played football at the University of Tennessee at Martin on scholarship. He began attending Fellowship of Christian Athletes at UTM and gave up his scholarship to transfer to Union University, a Christian college in Jackson, Tennessee, where he graduated in 1979. In October 1977, he was licensed to the gospel ministry.

He held a master of divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. While there, he was awarded the H.C. Brown Jr. Preaching Award for "Outstanding Achieve-

ment in the Study and Practice of Preaching" and the W. Fred Swank Evangelism Award. He also finished his doctoral studies at Southwestern.

Gaines is survived by his wife, Donna; four children; and 18 grandchildren.

FRANK WILLIAM MCCOLLOUGH

Frank William McCollough, a longtime Baptist campus minister, died Feb. 19. He was 85.

McCollough was a graduate of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He served as the Baptist campus minister at the University of Miami, then for a combined 18 years at Auburn University, the University of Montevallo and the collegiate office at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions in Montgomery. He wrapped up his responsibilities in these areas in 1996.

McCollough is survived by his wife of 62 years, Virginia Carolyn, and daughters, Alison Christa and Laura Carol.



MCCOLLOUGH

NEWS

► **Pleasant View Missionary Baptist Church, Holly Pond**, will host a singing April 19, 5 p.m. featuring The Kellys, a southern gospel quartet, from Lawrenceburg, Tennessee. For more information, call 256-339-1862 or 256-590-1501. Earl Harper is pastor.



Facebook photo

CALHOUN ASSOCIATION

► **Fred Bueto Jr.** is the new pastor of **Meadowbrook Baptist Church, Oxford**. He previously served as associate pastor of Southside Baptist Church. Bueto and his wife, Kim, have two children. His father, Fred Bueto Sr., served as pastor of Meadowbrook for 13 years (1984–1997) and most recently was interim pastor.



Submitted photo

COOSA RIVER ASSOCIATION

► **Darryl Wood** is the new interim pastor of **Southside Baptist Church, Talladega**.

COVINGTON ASSOCIATION

► **Bill Pritchett** is the new interim pastor of **Salem Baptist Church, Andalusia**.

EAST CULLMAN ASSOCIATION

► **East Cullman Baptist Association's** WMU ministry recently held its annual spring event for women and girls at **First Baptist Church Fairview**. The theme was *Daughter of the King* and the first 48 attendees were given a princess tiara to keep. Julie Smith, author of



Photo by Debbie Keaton

“Give me Everything ... Including the Crown” was the guest speaker. Special music was provided by Brooke Keaton. Each person was encouraged to bring breakfast items for the Cullman Caring for Kids Food Bank to help provide food for children in need. Randy Makemson is associational missionary.

GENEVA ASSOCIATION

► **Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, Slocomb**, has purchased 10 acres of land for future growth without acquiring debt. The church has doubled in the last 24 months with a total of 34 additions, 19 by baptism and 15 by letter. Teddy Ward is pastor.

MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION

► **Capitol Heights Baptist Church, Montgomery**, is hosting a Passover experience April



Unsplash.com

3 at 6 p.m. Cost: \$5 at the door. RSVP: 334-264-6461; or email: office@capitolheights.org. Russell Zwerner is pastor.

SAND MOUNTAIN ASSOCIATION

► **Ebenezer Baptist Church, Bryant**, will host a ladies luncheon, *Living Life with Zest*, April 11, 11:30 a.m. EST. Angela Guinn will be the guest speaker. Register at ebenezerbc.net or call 256-597-3435. Gene McCoy is pastor.

ST CLAIR ASSOCIATION

► **Tony Inmon** is the new pastor of **Cropwell Baptist Church, Pell City**. He and his wife, Denita, have served as missionaries with the North American Mission Board, the International Mission Board and local churches and church plants. The couple has one daughter.



Submitted photo

TUSCALOOSA ASSOCIATION

► **Mount Olive Baptist Church, Coker**, will host a drive through Easter drama April 3–4, 7:30–10 p.m. Everyone is invited to this free event. Eric Boykin is pastor. For more information, go to mymountolive.com/index.php/2026-easter-drive-thru-event.



Submitted photo

TUSKEGEE LEE ASSOCIATION

► **Jean Ivey** recently retired as the ministry assistant for **Tuskegee Lee Baptist Association**. She served in this position for more than 13 years and worked with three associational mission strategists including her husband, Wayne Ivey, who retired at the end of 2024. A reception was given in her honor at Providence Baptist Church, Opelika. The couple has two adult children and four



Submitted photo



File photo

grand-children. Russell Dean is the associational mission strategist.

► **Bill King (Bro. Billy Bob)** will present a musical program for the Hummingbird Dulcimer Group at **First Baptist Church Reeltown**, April 11 at 11 a.m. Tim Smith is pastor.

Children's Homes earns top honors for Christian workplace environment

The Best Christian Workplaces Institute has named Alabama Baptist Children's Homes a 2026 Best Christian Workplace.

Rod Marshall, ABCH CEO noted, “We chose to conduct an employee survey to measure the work culture we are trying to build. We want to know where we are succeeding and where we need to take a different approach.”

“The work at ABCH is challenging, and we strive to build a workplace culture that affirms and vitalizes our employees while they engage in frontline ministry that is exceedingly difficult. This survey helps us to identify areas where we are doing well and where we can do better.”

ABCH scored a 4.32 out of a possible 5 on the BCWI survey, meriting a “Best Christian Workplace” certification and designation as a “flourishing work environment.”

Responses show that 99% of employees surveyed said “ABCH reflects Christ to the world” and agree that “the mission and goals of ABCH make me feel my work is important.”

Employees also said they believe ABCH has an effective strategy for meeting the needs of those served by the ministry and would recommend ABCH to others as a good place to work.

'Putting Christ first'

Other highlights from the survey show that most ABCH employees agree they have opportunities to use their spiritual gifts in their work and that ABCH leaders keep a “focus on putting Christ first in daily decision-making.”

Holly Goff, ABCH human resources director, said Best Christian Workplaces “has a reputation for conducting thorough research and providing results and consultation to help strengthen and grow ministries like ABCH.”

“We were beyond pleased to be named a Best Christian Workplace, and we look forward to using our data in the coming months to make our ‘best’ workplace even better,” Goff said.

ABCH is Alabama's largest faith-based foster care provider, as well as the state's largest provider of professional counseling services from a Christian perspective. “Since 1891, we have sought to protect, nurture and restore children and families through Christ-centered services,” ABCH noted. “We are proud to be an entity of the Alabama Baptist State Convention. In 2025, we served 512 children, participated in 82 adoptions and provided counseling services to 2,492 individuals.”

To learn more, go to alabamachild.org. (Alabama Baptist Children's Homes)

EQUIPPED

Teen girls pursue deeper study of Scripture at Complete event

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Trish Jackson said one of her favorite things about the recent Complete event was this — the sight of teen girls furiously taking notes.

“We just wanted them to know the Word, just to dig into the Bible,” said Jackson, who serves as NextGen consultant for Alabama Woman’s Missionary Union.

The right tools

She said teen girls face a lot of things that are trying to hijack their identity, and often they don’t have the tools in their toolbox to fight back. That’s why she wanted this year’s Complete event to focus on equipping them to know the Word deeply and let that shape who they are.

“I wanted them to have a passion for seeing how God’s Word speaks to their heart and their identity,” she said. “I wanted them to be challenged to have a daily discipline in that.”

So the theme of this year’s Complete, a gathering for teen girls held March 6–7 at First Baptist Church Prattville

ville, was Know the Word, Know Your Worth. Around 250 girls gathered to hear speaker Heather Johnson, who has worked with Thrive, a ministry wives’ certificate program at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

“She made it so approachable, even for the seventh graders,” Jackson said.

Jenna Nicholson, half of the worship duo Jenna & Zoë, led worship.

The girls also had the opportunity to attend breakout sessions intended to help them learn to dive more deeply into Scripture, including topics ranging from “battling the lies of sin with Scripture” to “how to feel God when you’re just not feeling it.”



Photo by Tiffany Roy

More than 250 teen girls gathered March 6–7 at First Baptist Church Prattville for Complete.

Attendees also were given a number of resources, including the notebooks, pens and highlighters they were using for that furious note taking.

“They told their leaders that they enjoyed the intentional Bible study tools,” Jackson said, noting that overall it was “an amazing” weekend.



Photo by Tiffany Roy

Heather Johnson speaks on the theme Know the Word, Know Your Worth at the Complete event for teen girls in early March.



Photo by Tiffany Roy


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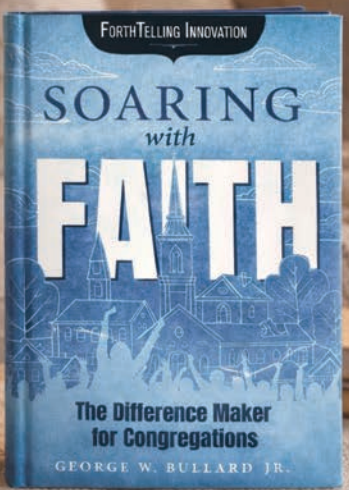


SOARING WITH FAITH



A respected consultant, futurist, and conflict-mediation expert, George 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

McIntosh named chair of WMU search committee

Candace McIntosh, executive director of Alabama WMU, has been named chair of the search committee to seek the National WMU's next executive director-treasurer following Sandy Wisdom-Martin's announcement on Dec. 10 of her intentions to retire by January 2027. Wisdom-Martin has devoted more than 35 years serving in Southern Baptist leadership roles with the past nine and a half leading national WMU.

Connie Dixon, president of national WMU, an-

nounced the search committee March 4 via the wmu.com website.

Serving along with McIntosh and Dixon are Linda Cooper, president of Kentucky WMU and president emerita of WMU, SBC; Sandra Hughes, president of California WMU; Phyllis Rodgers, president of Louisiana WMU; and Odelle Cadwell, former president of WMU of Michigan.

"After a season of prayer and fasting, I am very excited about the group God led me to appoint to this committee," Dixon

said. "Each has already been praying about this process and the leadership of WMU. At times this task has seemed overwhelming, but we serve an awesome and faithful God who I know is already preparing the next executive director. Please be in prayer for this committee and the task before us."

McIntosh joins Dixon in asking Southern Baptists to pray for the next executive director.

"We deeply covet your prayers as we move forward in dependence on the Lord," McIntosh said. "I am honored to serve alongside the women who have been chosen for this important responsibility.

"As a committee, we are humbled by the task God has entrusted to us. We do not take lightly the role of seeking the ninth executive director-treasurer who will



TAB Media photo

Candace McIntosh celebrated her 23rd anniversary as executive director of Alabama WMU on April 1.

lead WMU, SBC with wisdom and vision."

The search committee is refining a profile of characteristics, skills and experience desired for the position of executive director-treasurer and is seeking further input from various audiences.

A job description is posted at wmu.com/employment.

Resumés and recommendations may be sent to WMUSBCSearch@gmail.com through April.

McIntosh said there is not a specific timeline to present a candidate to the executive board of WMU and that the committee is committed to prayerfully following the Lord's leading and timing.

"We serve an awesome and faithful God who I know is already preparing the next executive director."

Connie Dixon, president of national WMU

Upcoming Anniversary Workshops
presented by Alabama Baptist Historical Commission

Learn about anniversary celebrations and give your planning a kickstart!

Locations & Times

- **Coosa River** Association office, April 7, 6–7:30 p.m. with supper
- **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.
- **Elmore** Association office, April 20, 1–2:30 p.m.
- **Tuscaloosa**, FBC Tuscaloosa, April 21, 10:30 a.m.–12 noon
- **Montgomery** Association office, April 22, 11 a.m.–1 p.m. with lunch
- **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.
- **West Central** Association office, May date/time TBD

To register, visit abhonline.com/anniversaries



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UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Time of encouragement and music for senior adults

Spend a morning in fellowship with other senior adults being encouraged through God's word and a time of music celebration!

ENCOURAGE is a worship service designed to encourage senior adults in evangelism and Christian

living. You'll be revived in spirit and motivated to continue serving in God's purpose for your life.

ENCOURAGE will be held May 4 from 9:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. at First Baptist Church Prattville.

Speakers will be:
▶ Edwin Jenkins, retired

pastor and state missionary

▶ Jim Henry, pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church Orlando, Florida.

Worship will be led by Greater Vision and gospel pianist Frank Jones.

The event is free, but registration is encouraged at alsbom.org/encourage.

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



Photo by Doug Rogers/SBOM

Basic Legal Issues conference

Basic Legal Issues for Churches, a conference set for May 21, can provide your church staff with helpful information about legal challenges that come up in churches today.

This conference will

cover the top 10 legal issues facing the church and provide guidance in the proper operation of the church.

Topics include the lawsuit revolution, sexual misconduct, employment practices, church organization and op-

eration, incorporation, labor law, risk management, tax law and more.

The conference will be held at the SBOM on May 21, 9 a.m.–12 p.m.

To register, visit alsbom.org/events.

Upcoming Intentional Leader Series to focus on Pastor aspect

The next Intentional Leader Series, set for April 21, will focus on the Pastor aspect of the four Ps of leadership: Person, Pastor, Preacher and Pathfinder.

This chapter in this ongoing series will be led by Dale Huff, retired state missionary and pastor. Topics will include wisdom in caring for the flock, counsel for

difficult times and people, and maintaining your joy in service.

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

WORD search

- | | |
|------------|------------|
| ARROWS | HOUSE |
| BLESSED | JUSTICE |
| CHILDREN | KING |
| COMPASSION | LABOR |
| DELIVER | NATIONS |
| DOMINION | PEACE |
| ENDURE | POOR |
| ENEMIES | PRAYER |
| FLOURISH | PROSPERITY |
| FOREVER | QUIVER |
| GATE | REWARD |
| GLORY | SLEEP |
| GOLD | VAIN |
| GRASS | WARRIOR |
| GUARD | WATCHMAN |
| HERITAGE | YOUTH |

K R E L N M M K N K R O O P F
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 F C N A M H C T A W R T R K S

*"Unless the Lord builds the house,
they labor in vain who build it."*

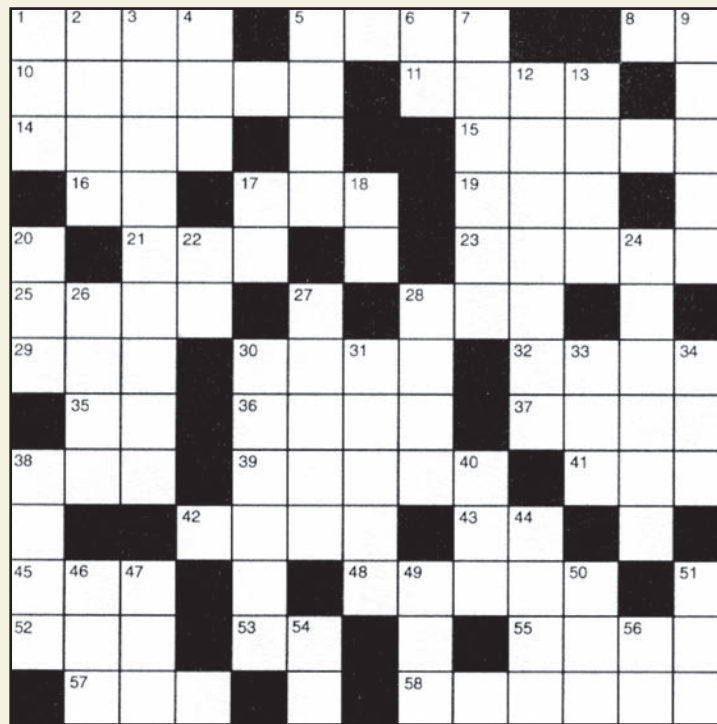
PSALM 127:1a

CHRISTIAN Crossword



ACROSS

1. If one went unto them from the _____. (Luke 16:30)
5. Sixth month of the Hebrew calendar. (Neh. 6:15)
8. Give tribute unto Caesar, or ____? (Luke 20:22)
10. A rod of an ____ tree. (Jer. 1:11)
11. He made him to suck honey out of the _____. (Deut. 32:13)
14. A good ____ is rather to be chosen. (Prov. 22:1)
15. Satan ... smote Job with sore _____. (Job 2:7)



By Udena McKee Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

16. Month. (abbr.)
17. American Medical Association. (abbr.)
19. Vase or vessel.
21. The absence or reverse of.
23. God set them in ... heaven to give _____. (Gen. 1:17)
25. ____ up thy strength. (Ps. 80:2)
28. Legislator. (abbr.)
29. A favorite.
30. His enemy came and sowed ____s. (Matt. 13:25)
32. The shepherds who ____ my people. (Jer. 23:2; NIV)
35. Direction.
36. To give off or out.
37. A fine grit stone for sharpening.
38. Do you submit to ____ rules. (Col. 2:20; NIV)
39. And all the ____ of the land. (Lev. 27:30)
41. To find fault.
42. Behold, I send an angel before _____. (Ex. 23:20)
43. Wind direction.
45. ____ no man any thing. (Rom.13:8)
48. There came two angels to _____. (Gen. 19:1)

52. ____ consider how great this man was. (Heb. 7:4)
53. Elkanah went to ____mah. (1 Sam. 2:11)
55. ____ your heart and not your garments. (Joel 2:13)
57. It shall bring forth ____ fruit. (Ezek. 47:12)
58. Condemned, especially to hell.

DOWN

1. Son of Bilhah and Jacob. (Gen. 35:25)
2. Chedorlaomer king of _____. (Gen. 14:1)
3. Descendants of Lot and his youngest daughter. (Gen. 19:38)
4. Female deer.
5. Wilderness of _____. (2 Kings 3:8)
6. Home of Abram. (Gen. 11:28)
7. Small or partial lobe.
9. At the beginning.
12. Home of Aquila and Priscilla. (Acts 18:1-2)
13. Now make us a _____. (1 Sam. 8:5)
17. The weight thereof was ____ hundred and thirty. (Num. 7:13)
18. Arizona. (abbr.)

20. Child shall play on the hole of the _____. (Isa. 11:8)
22. Either/____.
24. Wife of Elkanah. (1 Sam. 1:1-2)
26. Do not ____ the Lord your God. (Deut. 6:16; CSB)
27. Fiber.
28. Third son of Adam and Eve. (Gen. 4:25)
30. To fasten or restrain.
31. Last ____.
33. Variant of aeon.
34. Degree. (abbr.)
38. Iron sharpeneth _____. (Prov. 27:17)
40. I shall keep it unto the _____. (Ps. 119:33)
44. But I am a ____, and no man. (Ps. 22:6)
46. They also may without the word be _____. (1 Pet. 3:1)
47. Man had nothing, save one little ____ lamb. (2 Sam. 12:3)
49. Remember the days of _____. (Deut. 32:7)
50. Sons of God saw the daughters of _____. (Gen. 6:2)
51. Strange or different.
54. Morning time.
56. Nebraska. (abbr.)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Disciple Making Conference

The 2026 Alabama Disciple Making Conference isn't your typical event. It's a statewide gathering of pastors, ministry staff and church leaders who are passionate about making disciples who make disciples.

Whether you're just getting started or have years of experience, this is your opportunity to connect, collaborate and grow alongside others who share your heart for the Great Commission. What makes this gathering unique is its highly interactive format. It is a space for real conversations, practical questions and deeper insight. You won't just hear from leaders — you'll sit with them,

To register, visit ALDMConference.com or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



learn from them and be sharpened by them. The conference is set for April 20, 9 a.m.–6:15 p.m. at Fultondale First Baptist Church. For more information or to register, visit ALDMConference.com.

MIX Worship Arts Camp

Does your child or teenager love music and fine arts? MIX Worship Arts Camp is the perfect place for them to spend a week this summer.

The camp, which is three camps in one — MIX for completed 2nd grade through 5th grade, MIX6 for completed 6th grade and REMix

for completed 7th grade through 12th grade. — is set for July 6–10 at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega.

MIX Worship Arts Camp will build lasting friendships and focus on discipleship and worship.

Lindsay Lyon, a former camper, said the camp made a big impact on her and taught her it was “not about the performance.”

“It's not about what other people think about you. It's about worshipping the Lord,” she said. “And this camp is the one thing that helped me understand that most of all.”

Register by April 30 to get the Next Best price of \$340.

For more information or to register, visit mixworshipartscamp.org.

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



BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST

'Getting real-life ministry experience that is off campus is a sweet and neat thing for them,' Baria says

(continued from page 1)

Baria takes a team of 6–10 students. The team does one service project a month on campus, as well as a community-wide project each month. The prison worship services have been added to the rotation.

"Because of COVID, I think a lot of those opportunities were shut for us," Baria said. "I think we already see God's faithfulness in [that] these doors are opening and they're reaching out to us."

He and the students are given an hour to spend with the inmates, leading worship. Baria also preaches a short message.

"From the strum of the first string of a guitar, before a student ever even sang the first lyric, there were grown men in tears," Baria said. "These students are faithful with the gifts that they've been given."

Three services

Part of the agreement required Baria and the students to lead one service for male inmates and another for females, males leading worship at the male service and females for the women in the prison.

Over Christmas break, leaders at

Mobile County Metro Jail asked Baria to provide worship services for its inmates, so they led one for males, one for females and another for juveniles.

Multiple professions

"That day, there were multiple professions of faith which was, I think, super encouraging for our students," Baria noted. "Just them getting real-life ministry experience that is off campus is a sweet and neat thing for them."

Baria said UM is on a four-day school week, and students selflessly give up their Friday mornings to lead worship though they could be sleeping in, working or going home for a three-day weekend. They choose to use their God-given talents to proclaim the gospel behind bars, he said.

"They want those brothers and sisters in the jails to know what they know," Baria said. "I have to be faithful to His Word to preach it and to proclaim it. That is a privilege of a lifetime, just as it is for a musician who's a Christian to sing about the King."

Though Baria and his team are



Photo by courtesy of Mobile County Sheriff's Office

University of Mobile students lead worship for a church service at the Mobile County Metro Jail on Feb. 6. The ministry team led three services — one for males, one for females and another for juveniles.

only in the prisons for an hour at a time, he's seen God's faithfulness and goodness working in the hearts of inmates.

"Brothers are fighting to lift their hands up during this service with chains on, with handcuffs on," Baria said. "That's hard work if your hands are that close together, but they're raising them in worship; God's moving in that."

Some inmates have shared their testimonies at the end of the worship services, Baria said, and there were 12 professions of faith during the three services at Mobile Metro by inmates of all ages.

"We're prayerfully praying for fruit that remains in their lives," Baria said. "We have to expose people to the gospel."

Huseth noted he's seen inmates' attitudes change as they hold each

other accountable and eagerly await the next church service or guest speaker.

"They're very excited about attending," Huseth said. "They're in a dark place, so bringing some type of light and showing that somebody from the outside's coming in and caring about them will have a positive impact."

Lasting meaning

Baria's prayer for his students is that the services will have lasting meaning in their lives as they graduate and leave Mobile. He prays those being ministered to would experience an eternal impact as they trust in Christ's living hope.

"These brothers and sisters are at a low, possibly the lowest, point of their lives," Baria said. "What better news to bring in there than the hope of Jesus Christ?"

Women worship in the Baldwin County Corrections Center led by University of Mobile students and Jared Baria, UM adjunct professor and director of student life, on Jan. 16.



Photo courtesy of Baldwin County Sheriff's Office

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

Place a classified ad below for \$1 per word. For more information call 205-870-4720, ext. 200, or email ads@thealabamabaptist.org.

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.

PASTOR

Pine Hill Baptist Church, Pine Hill, Alabama, is seeking full-time pastor. Average congregation size: 55–60. Pastorium provided. Submit resúmes to: victoria.collins10@gmail.com or call/text 334-455-9833.

PASTOR

Pleasant Grove Baptist Church located in Hixson, Tennessee (outside Chattanooga), is prayerfully seeking a full-time pastor with a servant's heart who loves God's Word and His church. PGBC is a growing, family-oriented, multi-generational congregation, celebrating 125 years of ministry this year. Pastor must be in agreement with the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 and called to preach and teach God's Word. He must also be committed to evangelizing, discipling, missions, pastoral care and community outreach. Resúmes should be sent to: Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, ATTN: Pastor Search Committee, 7634 Gann Road, Hixson, TN 37343 or email to: pleasantgrovehixson@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.

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@mzblife.net. Subject line: Student Pastor

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~A resource for congregational vitality~

Soaring congregations are clear about who Jesus is

Carrie, a life group leader in her congregation, posed the following question during a weekly gathering of a couples life group: “If our congregation is seeking to soar with faith on a spiritual and strategic journey to reach its full Kingdom potential, is it more important for us to understand what Jesus did or who Jesus is?”

When this question was raised, Andrew spoke first. He said for him it was about who. He especially liked to think about the presence of Jesus in his life while singing praise music with the congregation. In his personal devotional time, he often just sat and pondered the presence of Jesus in his life, rejoicing that Jesus was part of the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

His wife, Rachel, turned to him and said she was the opposite. She serves a ministry of the congregation in their neighborhood with a homeschooling group with which their children are connected. She feels doing the things of unconditional love in these settings, focused on what Jesus did and was, is of the greatest significance to her.

Andrew said, “I get that. I do some ministry things too, as you know. But I do it out of realizing who Jesus is.”

“Wait a minute,” interrupted Carrie. “Before you twist yourself into a pretzel trying to figure this out, let me tell you it is a trick question. It is essential for us to understand both who Jesus is and what he did. They are inseparable ideas if we fully understand Jesus as one expression of our Triune God.”

“Let me share some thoughts our discipling minister shared with group leaders during a recent training session.”

Soaring vs. strong

First, do not confuse personal preferences with Christian doctrine. Some people think about who Jesus is more when they worship. Part of their life preferences involve a deep and meaningful worship life. They read certain Bible passages or sing certain songs. Their hearts are aglow in worship about who Jesus is in our lives.

They are warmed and filled by the idea of being still and knowing He is God as we read in Psalm 46:10.

Some people see Jesus in the face of a child or a family in need. Others go on a missions trip to build a home or church

building and believe this is what Jesus the carpenter would do. Matthew 25:40, the “inasmuch” verse, speaks meaningfully to them.

Second, one way to think about the who and what of Jesus is that Jesus is God. It is the reconciliation of our lives to God which transforms us (see 2 Cor. 5:17–19). Our service to God takes place as His Holy Spirit dwelling within us represents who Jesus is.

Inspiring examples

Jesus provided us with amazing examples of how we live out what. He shared inspiring examples in the tremendous collection known as the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5–7. Out of the who we engage in the what — not either/or but both/and.

Third, the tendency is for soaring congregations to focus on who Jesus was, is and will be eternally. Strong congregations focus more on what Jesus did, does and will do as part of our Triune God.

Fourth, which one is best? Neither. Both are needed. The emphasis and the focus of each should arise from the spiritual call of God on each congregation. The Kingdom of God needs both soaring and strong congregations who understand God's call, and prophetically and boldly live into that call.



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 is the publisher for his *ForthTelling Innovation* book series — 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 April 12

ETERNAL LIFE Matthew 19:16–30

Temporal wealth is a matter of perspective. When we Americans think of rich people, names like “Bezos” or “Musk” or “Gates” probably come to mind. For the masses of people in much of the world, the resident American in their midst might be perceived to be the wealthy one.

When our family lived in Nicaragua, we were rich in contrast to our neighbors. The annual government salary for the military, police officers and school teachers was about \$5,000. The university’s employees were well compensated by comparison. While we were not rich by American standards, we were wealthy in the eyes of our neighbors.

Unwilling (16–22)

This week’s passage is about the rich young ruler and Jesus’ teaching about the rich. Who are the rich? At what point do you and I become the rich person about whom Jesus is teaching?

In the 1980s, I was introduced to Walter Chantry’s book “Today’s Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic?” In it, he unpacks the story of the rich young ruler to explain Jesus’ method of evangelism.

Jesus addressed the reality that only God is good. While not denying His deity, Jesus was stating that a man alone cannot attain God’s standard of goodness. Next, Jesus pointed to the commandments as the measure of God’s expectations.

The man claimed to have kept all the commandments since childhood, but Jesus pointed out that the young man was guilty of coveting. “It would not do simply to quote Exodus 20 again. Jesus translated the tenth of God’s commands into a practical test by demanding that he abandon his riches” (Chantry, p. 44).

What was Jesus calling the man to do? He was to surrender

his earthly status and follow Jesus. He had called Peter and Andrew, James and John and Matthew to absolute surrender. Jesus was calling the young man to do the same, but he was unwilling.

Possible (23–26)

It will be hard for a rich person to enter the Kingdom. Jesus wanted to emphasize this so He said it again. It would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.

What is the eye of a needle? Is it that door within a door that you heard about on social media? No, not likely. The large door that contained a smaller door for individuals to pass through was built in the Middle Ages.

A textual variant in the manuscripts has led some to argue that Jesus’ intended word was “rope” (“kamilon”) through the eye of a needle rather than “camel” (“kamelon”). Others state that “camel through the eye of a needle” is likely since it echoes a comparable expression in the Talmud (Berakhot 55b).

The expression was Jesus’ use of hyperbole to communicate that it is impossible apart from the intervening work of God for a rich man to enter the Kingdom. Salvation is only possible when gifted by God.

Reward (27–30)

Peter understood the analogy, confessing that he and his fellow disciples had surrendered everything to follow Jesus.

The Master affirmed his confession and promised that the disciples would receive their reward for their surrender and service.

A portion of the reward would come in this life (Mark 10:30), and part will come in eternity. Our hundred-fold inheritance must not be our motivation for surrendering to the Master, but it is His promise to us. Whether first or last, followers will spend eternity with Him.

For April 19

GRACE Matthew 20:1–16

Grace — God’s riches at Christ’s expense. That’s a simple acronym to remember. Another thing to remember is that grace and mercy are two sides of the same coin in God’s redemptive plan.

Grace is God’s unmerited favor toward followers of Jesus. God gives us what we do not deserve. By contrast, God’s mercy is withholding what we actually deserve — His wrath. Our focus in this study is grace.

Workers Hired (1–7)

Jesus provides another parable of the Kingdom. This one is about a man hiring day laborers to work his vineyard. Several times throughout the day — early in the morning, 9 a.m., noon, 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. — he recruited men in the marketplace to join in the work. For the early workers, he promised his recruits a denarius each. For those hired later in the day, he said, “I’ll give you whatever is right.”

Equally Paid (8–12)

At the end of the day, he paid each laborer what he promised them. My generation — the boomers — started in a job market being paid by the hour. Our parents and some of our older siblings may have been paid by the day.

Most Americans alive today would consider it unjust for someone working a 14-hour day to be paid the same as someone working three hours. Rather than being grateful for the job and being paid what was agreed the same day, complaints would be lodged and lawsuits would be filed. But let’s not get too far off topic.

Some of you readers were led to faith in Jesus by your parents when you were children. Others, like me, surrendered to Jesus as college

students. Still others began to follow Jesus in your middle years. A few of you have begun trusting Jesus in the twilight years of your life. How many of us deserve His forgiveness? None. What does God owe us? Nothing. Why would He save any of us? He chose to save us because He is gracious and compassionate.

Whether you follow Jesus for 80 years or eight minutes, the saving grace of God is still the only reason we will spend eternity with Him. Jesus was crucified, was buried and was raised from the dead. Jesus paid it all.

Grace Exemplified (13–16)

Was the man obligated to hire the men? No. Was he obligated to pay the men who worked all day a higher wage than they agreed to? No. Was he obligated to pay any less to men he hired later? No. Why not? It was his vineyard, his jobs, his money and his work.

Why did he hire the men? He chose to give them a sense of worth to labor as Adam did in the garden, as God’s covenant people did six days each week. Why did he pay a denarius to each of the men who only worked a portion of the day? He chose to give every man a day’s wage whether he worked the entire day or a portion of it.

God knows every thought you have ever entertained. God hears every word you speak whether it is whispered inaudibly or broadcast widely. God knows every attitude you have ever held, and He knows every act you have ever committed. “But God, who is rich in mercy ... made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses” (Eph. 2:4–5). That is amazing grace!

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

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early to hire laborers for his vineyard ...”

Matthew 20:1

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sunday School Lessons

By Rony Kozman, Ph.D.

Assistant professor of Biblical Studies, Samford University



For April 12

GOD IS ETERNAL Psalm 102:18–28

The authorship of this psalm is uncertain, though some scholars suggest it could have been written by one of the Old Testament prophets. Traditional Christian liturgy includes Psalm 102 among the seven penitential psalms, along with Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 130 and 143. These psalms express themes of contrition, repentance and reconciliation with God.

The title of Psalm 102 says it is the prayer of a person who is afflicted or suffering in some way and who is feeling weak and overwhelmed by circumstances.

The psalmist is pouring out his lament or concern before the Lord. The psalmist begins by asking the Lord to “hear my prayer” and “let my cry for help come before You” (v. 1). The psalmist then cries out for God to help him: “Listen closely” or “turn your ear to me,” the psalmist pleads. “When I call, answer me quickly” (v. 2).

In the early verses of the psalm, the psalmist is clearly in deep distress, taunted by his enemies day and night (v. 8). He groans aloud, for he is reduced to “skin and bones” (v. 5). He is in such agony that he does not even eat (v. 4).

He even says that this suffering is ultimately God’s doing: “Because of your great wrath, for you have taken me up and thrown me aside” (v. 10). And later, he says of God, “In the course of my life he broke my strength; he cut short my days” (v. 23). In the course of his expressed agony, the Psalmist repeatedly voices the brevity of his own days: “my days vanish like smoke” (v. 3); “My days are like the evening shadow; I wither away like grass” (v. 11).

In every generation, God rescues those who call to Him and serve Him. (18–22)

There is still hope, despite the

psalmist’s current anguish. These words are written for a future generation. People who have not yet been born will praise the Lord.

God may be in His “holy heights” but He is not absent or distant.

He sees the suffering of His people and hears them when they call out to Him.

God endures and reigns through all generations. (23–25)

In comparison to his own days that vanish, fade and wither, the psalmist extols the enduring days of God: “But you, Lord, sit enthroned forever; your renown endures through all generations” (v. 12).

The LORD created the heavens and the earth, and while “they will perish” and “will all wear out like a garment” (vv. 25–26), God remains, remains the same and [His] years will never end” (vv. 26–27).

God is eternal, and His children will live with Him forever. (26–28)

Why does the psalmist appeal to God’s enduring and never-ending days?

The psalmist’s suffering is the suffering that he experiences with the people of God who are suffering from defeat and devastation at the hands of their enemies.

This is why the psalmist asks for God to “have compassion on Zion ... for her stones are dear to Your servants; her very dust moves them to pity” (vv. 13–14).

The psalmist has confidence that “the LORD will rebuild Zion and appear in His glory” and “respond to the prayer of the destitute” (vv. 16–17). In appealing to God’s eternal nature, the psalmist asks God to rescue his people from their fading ways so that his people may live before God and live in His presence forever.

For April 19

A MISSION FULL OF OPPORTUNITIES Acts 3:1–10

In the Gospels, John the Baptist compares the baptism he performs with the one that Jesus enacts: “I baptize you with water, but he will baptize with the Holy Spirit” (Mark 1:8).

In Acts 1, the resurrected Jesus, while He was eating with the apostles, instructed them, “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard Me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (1:4–5). Then Jesus tells the apostles, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (1:8).

This select group of men were there together “the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among [them], beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from [them]” (1:21–22). In other words, these apostles were direct eyewitnesses of Jesus ministry from its beginning all the way through Jesus’ death and resurrection. This baptism in the Holy Spirit supplies the apostles with power as they bear witness that Jesus is the resurrected Lord.

See the opportunities your encounters with people provide. (1–4)

While these apostles were together, they were all “filled with the Holy Spirit” (2:4) and enabled to bear witness to “God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven” (2:5). We then read that Peter stood up and proclaimed the good news to his fellow Jews, that God had appointed Jesus Lord and Messiah (2:14–36).

Those who respond with repentance are instructed to “repent and be baptized ... for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (2:38). Although the apostles are first baptized with the Holy Spirit, they are not

the only ones who receive the Holy Spirit. Those who respond positively to the gospel proclaimed by the apostles also receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit that Jesus performs.

Share the love of Christ through those encounters. (5–8)

The baptism with the Holy Spirit establishes the context for what Peter and John do in Acts 3. They are carrying out their apostolic mission. They have been especially commissioned by Jesus and given special power for their apostolic mission of being witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

Here we see Peter and John at the temple gate, carrying out the commission Jesus gave them in Jerusalem. Just as Jesus heals by the power of the Spirit in the gospels, so also Peter and John carry out Jesus’ mission of furthering God’s Kingdom by healing the lame man.

We should praise God for how we have been restored through the name of Jesus. (9–10)

Reading this story, we may place ourselves in the position of the commissioned apostles and learn from their courage and boldness to testify to the good news of Jesus’ resurrection and enthronement as the Son of David. We also can place ourselves in the story and align ourselves with the lame man who receives restoration from the apostolic ministry.

Peter and John, like Jesus in the gospels, heal the man by the power of the Holy Spirit. In response, the man jumps to his feet and walks (3:8) and then walks with the apostles and praises God.

As those who have received the good news that the apostles proclaimed, who have been restored and who have received the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, we too should praise God so that those around us see how we have been transformed. We also should walk with the apostles (3:9) and devote ourselves to the teaching of the apostles — to the teaching of Peter and John and the others (2:42).

God's goodness

New movie, book spotlight MercyMe lead singer's story of grace, redemption

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

It would be easy to assume MercyMe lead singer Bart Millard is set for life considering the song he wrote, “I Can Only Imagine,” is said to be the bestselling Christian song ever. The song resonated with fans worldwide and inspired a movie and book.

But the truth is that success doesn't keep away heartache, pain or depression. The February 2026 releases of the film “I Can Only Imagine 2” and book “Even If: Trusting God Through the Fire” share Millard's own struggles in those areas — and the power of God's grace.

“I would be the funny ‘aww shucks’ guy in public, but I ... was dealing with a deep depression for years,” Millard said. “It was difficult and challenging to show that side.”

Millard wrote “Even If: Trusting God Through the Fire,” with his wife, Shannon, and creative collaborator Robert Noland. Millard's oldest son, Sam, also contributed.

Both the book and the movie portray what Millard's life looked like following the success of the song “I Can Only Imagine.”

In the years that followed, Millard faced hardship after hardship. Within the same year, he saw the deaths of his brother-in-law and uncle, his daughter was born prematurely, and his father-in-law had a brain tumor.

But the most life-changing event was that the Millards' oldest son, Sam, was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes at age 2.

Everything changed, they write.



BART MILLARD

Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Bart Millard, who had been abused by his father while growing up, had to intentionally inflict pain on his child, who had no way to understand that he was doing it to keep him alive.

“When Sam comes along with diabetes at 2 years old, and I have to be a grown up and I have to do hard things for my son, there was a lot of anger.

“The idea that I couldn't fix my son — that he was broken, kind of on my watch — led to a lot of depression and anger.

“I couldn't fix it. The similarities between when I was a kid and my dad would put his hands on me — I was like, ‘Why are you hurting me?’ Then to hear my son say the same thing when I gave him his first shot triggered something.

“[I'm thinking] I'm trying to be the furthest thing [from my father], but yet I'm still harming my child

uses a permanent marker to write an “X” on the inside of his wrist as a reminder to be grateful.

When Millard vented his anger and hurt to Timmons during a songwriting session together, Timmons responded with the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Still, Millard had a poignant question that couldn't be resolved.

Songwriting inspiration

The song “Even If” became the answer to Millard's question: “What if you aren't saved from the fire?”

“Even If,” co-written by Millard, Timmons and others, became MercyMe's next megahit. The song resonated with listeners who had the same question.

Much more than having another hit, Millard said he is simply thankful that God didn't mind his questions and stayed by his side through it all. He's grateful the song ministers to others.

In the introduction to his book, Millard says, “One thing the past 22 years ... has shown me: If we are actually going to follow Jesus, then we have to own up to and deal with our doubts as well as our faith, allow for

the questions as well as the answers ... and accept the trials along with the triumphs.”

He quotes Job 13:15: “Even if God kills me, I'll still put my hope in Him.”

“One truth Shannon and I have come to better understand over the years is that when we truly follow Jesus through the

dark valleys — through the rain, trouble and death we experience in this life — in His time, He will lead us to discover how good He is when we are broken.”

