

The Alabama Baptist

Toll free 800-803-5201
www.thealabamabaptist.org

June 11, 2026

Vol. 191, No. 12
Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



Photo by Pam Henderson/The Alabama Baptist

Now what?

Tips for making time spent at the SBC Annual Meeting a worthwhile investment

By Mark MacDonald
The Alabama Baptist

You spent days at the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting, walking convention halls, listening to reports, participating in votes, visiting exhibitors, reconnecting with friends and meeting new ministry leaders. Now you're home.

Unfortunately, this is where many attendees lose most of the value.

The huge event ends, ministry responsibilities pile up and within a few weeks the lessons, conversations and opportunities begin to fade. Don't let that happen.

Here are five things every SBC Annual Meeting attendee should do after returning home.

1. Process before you proceed.

Before diving back into your normal routine, take an hour to review your notes, photos, emails and con-

versations. It's just 60 minutes. And worth it!

Ask yourself

- ▶ What were the most significant decisions?
- ▶ What trends did I notice?
- ▶ What excited me?
- ▶ What concerned me?
- ▶ What might impact our church in the future?

Your goal isn't to remember ev-

erything. It's to identify the few things that matter most.

2. Communicate what happened.

Most people in your church didn't hear the discussions, see the voting or experience the conversations happening in hallways and meeting rooms. Take time to communicate back to your staff, leadership team or congregation. Focus less on

(See 'SBC,' page 8)

SPOTLIGHT SPONSOR ...

Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions — One Mission, The Great Commission:
One Program, The Cooperative Program, Many Ministries, Great Commission Ministries



Catch the vision

Northport Baptist member helps MKs fund projects of their own

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Joe McComb said his pastor, John Jenkins at Northport Baptist Church, told him something a while back that alarmed him — that in 10 years, a large portion of the international missionary force would be retiring. “I wondered, ‘Now who’s going back for them?’ It got me to thinking,” McComb said.

And he began to get a burden to help the children of missionaries catch the vision of the work their parents were doing. That burden materialized into an idea — to give a small amount of money to help them fund missions projects of their own.

One of the first was the three children of a missionary he knew personally — Erica Patrick, an Alabama native whose story was featured in 2022 on TAB’s Stories podcast. Patrick lost her husband in 2020 after the family had served in East Asia together, and she has now moved back there with her three children.

So grateful

Patrick said she was so grateful for McComb’s generosity and that her kids were moved by it.

“We had a sub-cluster retreat in

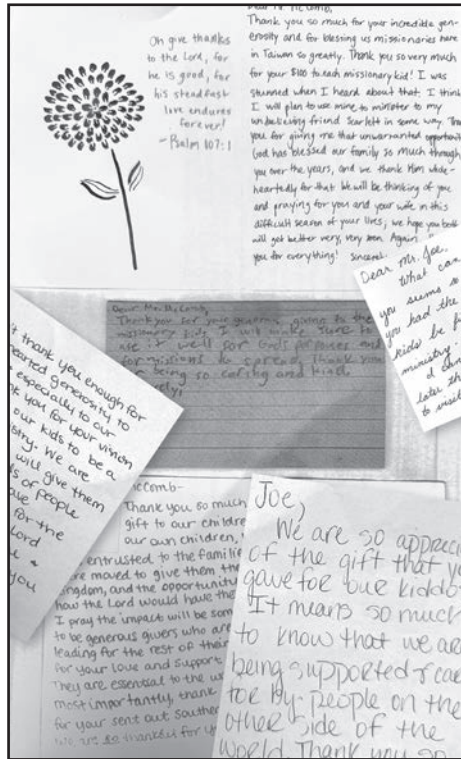


Photo by Grace Thornton/The Alabama Baptist

Over the years, Joe McComb has received handwritten thank you notes from families for the monetary gifts.

February 2025, and the church that Mr. McComb goes to, Northport Baptist Church, sent a team of people, including their missions pastor, to come and serve our personnel in preaching and leading activities and childcare at our retreat,” she said. “They brought lots of sweet gifts, including a financial gift for each child from Mr. Mc-

Comb. The gift was designated to be used for a ministry project that each of the kids was invested in in their own communities and wanted to give towards.”

McComb said he was thrilled to hear that the Patrick kids had decided to use the money to buy food and Bibles for new believers in the country where they were serving.

Cared for

He also began to receive notes from other families too who expressed gratitude for the gift. Some said it meant so much to know that their family is being supported and cared for. Others said that it encouraged what they were already praying for their children — to have compassionate hearts and eyes to see the people around them.

Now McComb carries on that tradition of sending money with church missions teams whenever they meet with missionary families — \$50 for any child age 6 to 11, and \$100 for those who are 12 and up.

“When God gets His hand on the money tree, things can happen,” he said. “It’s a simple little project, but it’s something others could easily do too if they felt led to do it.”

TAB Media Group wins national awards from press associations

Associated Church Press

► **1st place: Visual Communications** — Marc Ira Hooks, Jesus Wept — Camp Mystic

► **2nd place: Overall Excellence/Best in Class** — The Baptist Paper, Jennifer Davis Rash, Shawn Hendricks, Lauren Grim

Evangelical Press Association

Printed newspaper competition for work done in 2025

► **Award of Merit: The Baptist Paper** — Jennifer Rash, Shawn Hendricks, Grace Thornton, Lauren Grim, Dianna Cagle.

► **Award of Merit: The Alabama Baptist** — Jennifer Rash, Carrie McWhorter, Grace Thornton, Lauren Grim, Hannah Pruitt, Daniel Gilliland.



Welcome Taylor Inmon, TAB Media Group’s new summer intern

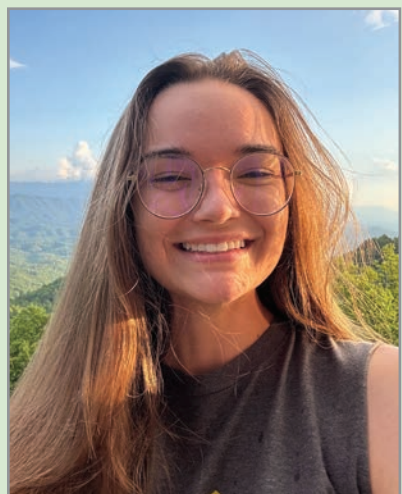


Photo courtesy of Taylor Inmon

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)

JENNIFER DAVIS RASH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

NEWS SERVICES
Baptist Press (BP)
Religion News Service (RNS)
Morning Star News (MS)

POSTMASTER
Send address changes to:
The Alabama Baptist
3310 Independence Drive
Birmingham, AL 35209

ADDRESS CHANGE
Send old and new addresses, and name of church to:
Subscription Department
3310 Independence Drive
Birmingham, AL 35209
Allow two weeks.

To the best of our knowledge, all of the ads in *The Alabama Baptist* represent legitimate companies and offerings. However, one should always exercise normal business caution in responding to ads. Also, the information in Alabama News is typically provided by or approved by the individual, church or association represented.

Member of Alabama Press Association

Accredited member of Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability



TAB Media Group among top in nation

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



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

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

Thanks for taking this journey to try new elements of our ministry with me.

▶ Set up a bulk order of The Kids Edition — 39 groups and growing every week.

▶ Engage with us on social media, sign up for one of our email newsletters, check out The Weekly podcast and/or help others subscribe to a print edition — more than 20.

▶ Donate to The Alabama Baptist or The Baptist Paper — more than 10.

▶ Read one full article in a recent edition — more than 10.

▶ Review tabmedia.group and/or other TAB-related sites — more than 10.

▶ Share information from a recent edition with others — more than 15.

Two areas lacking support

▶ Pray for three people in your church family — need a participant here.

▶ Add families to your group subscription list — need a participant here.

▶ Spend an extra 30 minutes reading God's Word — more than 5.

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

▶ Submit a letter to the editor or share a story idea — lots and we love it.

▶ Look to see where God is working around you — more than 5.

▶ Encourage kids to submit an entry to The Kids Edition — at least 10.

▶ Donate to the student internship fund held at The Baptist Foundation of Alabama (call 334-394-2000 for details) — 3.

▶ Discuss articles you've read recently with a group at church — 2, welcoming Malinda McGill to the challenge. She also prayed for TAB contributors and took a 30-minute walk at least three times recently, which brings that challenge up to 4 participants.

▶ Remove three negative items from your life — at least 3 have notified us.

▶ Order books produced by TAB Media Group — several hundred.

Looks like we are close to completing the challenge. Keep up the good work!

We need your help to keep a needed missions/ministry project going

Many of us have a favorite Bible — dog-eared, marked up and littered with notes — that's our go-to for the gospel, while a dozen others sit elsewhere in the house gathering dust.

Meanwhile, Christians all over the world pray daily to get their hands on any copy of Scripture, new or well used.

Love Packages works to address that issue, placing donated Bibles and gospel-based literature into the hands

of pastors and other Christians throughout the world.

With warehouses and distribution locations in Illinois and Alabama, Love Packages has shipped Christian literature to more than 150 nations since it began in 1975.

Decatur location

The Alabama Baptist has partnered with the Decatur, Alabama, location for more than five years now, and it's been an honor to serve as the Birmingham metro-area drop-off spot.

However, with the recent



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

changes at our building, we need your help to find a new drop-off location in central Alabama. Please

pray with us for a church, nonprofit or other group to step into the gap and serve believers desperately need-

ing Christian literature. It's an amazing way to serve on mission and provides consistent volunteer service projects.

Here to help

Our team will guide you in all aspects of this missions and ministry opportunity. Call us at 800-803-5201 or email support@thealabama-baptist.org.

Find out more about the ministry at lovepackages.org or search "Love Packages" at tabonline.org. (TAB Media Group)

Your Voice



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

FROM THE KIDS EDITION

Ms. Julie's Clubhouse



ChatGPT images

Why is the Bible special?

What are you reading, Ms. Julie?" Sam landed nearby and looked at my book. "It's a story about a knight and a princess who defeat an evil dragon," I said. "It's very exciting!"

"Cool!" Sam squawked and flew away. I love books — picture books, fairy tales, chapter books and adventure stories. Some books tell stories about real people or real events that have already happened. Some tell about what could happen in the future. Human

authors use their imagination or research to write these stories.

The Bible is filled with stories too, but it is not like other books. It is special because God guided or "inspired" human writers to share His words. (Read 2 Tim. 3:16 in your Bible.) Here's how we know the Bible is true.

1. The Bible tells us about real places. Egypt is where God's people were slaves before He rescued them. Jerusalem is the city where God's temple was built. Paul was a missionary to Turkey, Greece and Italy. These are countries and cities you can visit today.

2. The Bible tells us about real people. The Old Testament tells us the history of God's people and His promises to them. The New Testament tells us about Jesus' life, death and resurrection. It is focused on a promise too — the promise of eternal life for those who follow Jesus.

3. Everything in the Bible fits together. It is a collection of 66 books written by different people, in different places, at different times. But just like pieces of a puzzle, they all fit together to tell one big story.

The Bible is God's Word. It shows how God always keeps His promises. It explains how we can be part of God's family. God speaks to us through His Word. It teaches us how to live well with God and with people.

Meet the AUTHOR

Julie Redmond Donovan has been a children's minister for 16 years. She has an M.Div. from Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama. She and her husband, Connor, live in Oklahoma and have two children: Robert, 6, and Abigail, 4.

The Kids Edition

is an exciting faith-based monthly paper just for kids that includes fun activities, articles about God and more.



To subscribe or order copies for your group, scan the code or visit thebaptistpaper.org/kids-edition.

Ms. Julie's CLUBHOUSE

MEET OUR forest Friends

Where is God?

At the BEACH!

MEET THE author

For the full version, check out The Kids Edition!

OPINION

“In the South we sometimes talk about having churches on every street corner,” said pastor and ministry leader **Sam Rainer**. “And I say, ‘What’s wrong with that?’ This is gospel real estate, and God has called every church to bless its community. You are where you are for a reason.” Rainer, pastor of West Bradenton Baptist Church, Bradenton, Florida, for the past 10 years and president of Church Answers, recently led a breakout session at the Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference, at Heritage Baptist Church Montgomery.

Reflecting on 1 Timothy 3:16–17, **Hugh Freeze**, former Auburn University head football coach, said, “I need teaching every day; I need rebuking. Why? So that this servant of God can be thoroughly equipped for every good work. There is zero chance of us experiencing that peace and rest and being equipped for the career, for the calling, for the gifting — zero chance of that without us being in His Word, which is God-breathed. If I could beg you to have a consistency in

opening up the Bible and seeing what God has to say to you about who you are and whose you are, then you will know your ‘why’ no matter what your ‘what’ ends up being. Rest and peace are found in Jesus.”

“Unfortunately, sexual abuse happens everywhere. (It) happens at home, happens at school, happens at work, happens in church — like all the places you think you’d be safe — but it does happen everywhere. So it is important to address it everywhere,” said sexual abuse survivor **Elizabeth Smart**, who is now an activist, author and founder of the Elizabeth Smart Foundation.

“In the race of life, in trying to be an Olympian in life, the first thing you need to keep in mind is stay in the race. You are going to hit some rough times. It’s often human nature to give up and quit, because life can be difficult and it’s often a struggle. But stay in the race,” said **Rick Lance**, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.



LASS WORDS

BY **KEN LASS**
The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Want to improve your mood? Try this.

Did you know there is research that calculates how often people smile? Yep, I found it on the internet, so it must be true, right?

The study reveals some surprising results. For example, it found that the average child smiles around 400 times per day, but the average adult smiles only around 20 times per day.

My first reaction is: I want to meet the person who actually goes around counting all these smiles. But if you think about it, the results make sense. Researchers say children have very few things to worry about. They just enjoy life as it comes, whereas adults have the stresses of money, health and yes, child-raising.

Good for your health

Women smile more than men, about 60 times per day, the report said. Men were found to smile fewer than 10 times per day. This is because women tend to express their emotions more outwardly, while men have been culturally trained to remain stoic and cool. Still, I’d hate to think my life is so serious that I can’t find 10 reasons to smile in a day.

Smiling not only helps you be open and friendly, it’s good for your health. It releases endorphins to your brain that can give you a feeling of overall pleasure and relaxation.

The Bible speaks highly of a smile. Job talks about lighting up

people he met. “I smiled at them, and they could hardly believe it. My smile made them feel better” (Job 29:24).

Feeling of gratitude

In Proverbs we read, “A smile makes people happy. It will make them feel better” (Prov. 15:30). Throughout God’s Word, you read of gratitude because “God smiled down.”

Oh, one other thing about that research: It also found that people are very good at telling the difference between a fake smile and a real one. Fake smiles make people uneasy and suspicious, and are not included in the totals above.

This should not be a problem for true believers. We have plenty to smile about. Knowing our eternal destiny is secure, knowing God is with us always, finding authentic joy in ministry to others — those are blessings that should make even the most stone-faced among us flash a huge grin.

So go ahead, smile like a child all day. Why should the kids have all the fun?

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

BETHEL ASSOCIATION

► **Hoboken Baptist Church, Sweet Water**, celebrated its 150th anniversary May 17. Four former pastors participated in the service: Johnny Tucker, Irby Weaver, ventriloquist Gary Snodgrass with his “partner” Scotty and Warren Huggins, who served the longest tenure of 20 years. Additional guests included Terry Lolley (left), Bethel Baptist Association’s mission strategist. Susan Norris and Ray Jordan provided special music. The church received a commemorative plaque from Anna Speir (center), a commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Pastor Larry Cox (right) accepted the honor on behalf of the congregation. Lunch was served following worship.



Photo by Harold Speir

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► **Dustin Ratcliff** is the new pastor of **Shades Crest Baptist Church, Hoover**, and will begin July 26. He previously served as a staff pastor for Iron City Church, Birmingham, overseeing community groups, college ministry and the



Submitted photo

residency program as well as pastoral care and preaching throughout the year. He and his wife, Tara, have two children.

CLEBURNE ASSOCIATION

► **East Heflin Baptist Church, Heflin**, celebrated its 75th anniversary May 10, the same date as the church’s first service in 1951. Larry Vinson, Cleburne Baptist Association’s associational missionary, representing the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented a plaque to the church. Pictured are (l to r) Shannon Roberts, deacon chair; pastor Timothy Swafford; Vinson; and deacons Terry Benefield and Lex Brown.



Submitted photo

COFFEE ASSOCIATION

► **First Baptist Church Elba** celebrated staff appreciation April 19, honoring Judith Tucker (left), the church pianist, and Ella Kate Ham (right), the organist, for their faithfulness and ministry for more than 50 years each. Tucker joined FBC and began serving as pianist in 1968. She also maintains the music library and serves as the church treasurer. Ham



Submitted photo

grew up at FBC and became a member in the sixth grade when she accepted Christ. After graduating from college, she came back to FBC. In 1974, Ham began playing the piano for the youth choir in addition to serving as the church organist. She is active in WMU and continues to play for the children’s programs. Tucker and Ham are retired school teachers. The church held a reception for them following the service. Kit Johnson is pastor.

ETOWAH ASSOCIATION

► **Jason Stewart** is the new pastor of **Riddles Bend Baptist Church, Rainbow City**. He also serves as a hospice chaplain for Gentiva Hospice, Anniston. He and his wife, Amanda, have two daughters.



STEWART

TUSKEGEE LEE ASSOCIATION

► **Pleasant Springs Baptist Church, Tuskegee**, will host Cooper Creek Band in concert featuring Wes Moore, June 27, 11 a.m.–1 p.m. The group plays a combination of rock, soul, country and gospel. Hot dog lunch combos include chips, cookie and drink. Other snacks also will be available. Ronald Sumner is pastor.

EDITOR’S NOTE — Please send news items to news@thealabamabaptist.org. Submissions that include complete details, at least one high resolution photo and the name and phone number of a contact person at your church are greatly appreciated.

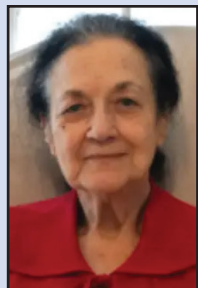
OBITUARIES

BETTY DRUMMOND

Decades of Baptist seminarians crossed paths with Lewis and Betty Drummond through the years and would likely still garner fond memories from the connections.

Lewis Drummond died in 2004 at age 77 and was buried on the campus of Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, where he served as president from 1988 to 1992. His wife, Betty, lived over 22 years without him, most recently in Dothan, Alabama. She died May 19 at 96 and will be buried next to him.

Through their years of ministry, the Drummonds also served at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and



DRUMMOND

Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in Birmingham (Lewis as a professor at both schools). He also led churches in Alabama, Texas and Kentucky.

Nicholas Clark, executive director of the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana, focused on the Drummonds for his dissertation at Southern Seminary. He shared with The Alabama Baptist about Betty’s two books she co-authored with her husband: “Women of Awakenings: The Historic Contribution of Women to Revival” and “The Spiritual Woman: Ten Principles of Spirituality and Women Who Have Lived Them.”

“She had a lot of different hats in the world they shared,” Clark said. “Betty Drummond was a faithful lifetime partner to Lewis Drummond.”

While they had no biological children, the Drummonds “really had a partnership in training these students,” he added.

B. GENE WEBB

B. Gene Webb, longtime Alabama Baptist pastor, died Feb. 15. He was 85.

Born in Roanoke, Alabama, Webb was a graduate of the University of Alabama and Southern Seminary (1968). He was ordained to the ministry in 1967 at First Baptist Church Oxford.



WEBB

He served as a youth minister at FBC Gastonia, North Carolina, and Parker Memorial Baptist Church, Anniston. He was senior pastor of FBC Lanett, where he served for over 20 years, and FBC Tusculumbia, where he retired in 2002. He then joined Parker Memorial Baptist again, and served as a deacon and Sunday School teacher.

Webb served on the Judson College board of governors and on the board for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission.

He is survived by his wife of 60 years, Jean; daughter, Lori; son, Kendel; and six grandchildren.

Birmingham Metro's Crain selected as associational leader of the year for 2026 by national organization

By Richard Nations
The Alabama Baptist

Birmingham Metro Baptist Association's executive director Chris Crain was honored June 7 as the Southern Baptist Conference of Associational Leaders' AMS of the Year.

SBCAL met in Orlando ahead of the SBC Annual Meeting and presented the award among other business reports and agenda items.

The award is made annually by SBCAL, which serves associational leaders (also known as associational mission strategists) in Baptist associations across the nation.

Faithful service

Ray Gentry, president and CEO of SBCAL, said a committee of associational leaders selected Crain based on letters of recommendation submitted. James Risner of the Greater Dayton Association of Bap-

tists in Ohio chaired that committee.

The nominators said they were impressed with Crain's faithful and consistent service to the pastors of the BMBA's staggering 180 churches.

'Accessible'

It was noted that, though he oversees a significant staff, "he remains personally accessible to pastors."

"He brings both relational strength and wisdom to every interaction, effectively ministering to pastors of all ages, levels of experience and church sizes and structures," the nominators said.

Pastor Michael Wallace, BMBA's moderator, said, "God has been gracious to provide cheerleaders for me along the way, at just the right times. But no one has been a bigger encourager and a better equipper than Dr. Crain.

"His knowledge is extensive. His compassion is



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist
Chris Crain speaks at a Birmingham Metro Baptist Association Missionary Appreciation luncheon.

genuine. His leadership is infectious," Wallace added. "He truly is a pastor to pastors."

Another nominator, Buddy Champion, pastor of First Baptist Church Trussville, said, "I have personally noticed that he listens to learn and then leads to transform the opportunity that is before him."

A collective note from the staff of the BMBA

highlighted that Crain's "biggest impact is in the lives of the pastors and ministry leaders. The hours he spends on the phone, over coffee or lunch, or in meetings with leaders are countless. Chris is always available to them and willing to lend a listening and compassionate ear and offer wise counsel."

Crain told The Alabama Baptist he loves being an AMS.

"No two days are alike. I like all the variety," he said. "My favorite day in the work is when I get to celebrate in the life of a church, help be a small part of their happiness."

But he said he prefers to stay in the background rather than the limelight.

Leading by listening

"I try to never forget what it is like to be a pastor of a local congregation," Crain said. "I like to be a Barnabas — to come alongside and listen to them. I try to lead with my ears and not my mouth."

Someone is always speaking to pastors (a deacon, a disgruntled church member, a conference leader, etc.) so he finds it help-

ful to listen, to let the pastors talk and affirm them.

One of the accomplishments Crain thanks the Lord for is a thriving weekly minister's conference, where pastors and church staff have lunch and learning experiences. He said he makes it a point to attend as much as possible. Sometimes a pastor just needs the fellowship of those who get it, he said.

The Birmingham metro area has about 1.2 million people, with 320,000 in the city. It is surrounded by suburbs and even some rural areas in Jefferson County. There are many different types of churches in the association, and Crain can be found in one of them almost every Sunday, preaching or just visiting the congregations.



GRAIN

The BMBA formed a service called CASH, which is a portal to receive electronic financial contributions for churches and to provide accounting services for churches at a

relatively low cost. They try not to displace any church staff in doing so, and they strive to keep the fees for the service affordable.

Their building is a beehive of activity, housing not only offices for the associational staff but also a crisis pregnancy center and counseling service.

Crain is a native of Jasper and "a coal miner's kid," as well as a lifelong Baptist, born in the Birmingham Baptist Hospital.

He and his wife, Carol, have three young adult children.

Crain said he is grateful to be a Southern Baptist. "I pray we see value in partnering together, especially in associational work."

Children's of Alabama® SAFE KIDS ALABAMA ADECA

STOP. LOOK. LOCK.
Parked cars get hot, FAST.

CHILDRENSAL.ORG/HOT-CAR

103 college students prepare for summer missions

By Grace Thornton

The Alabama Baptist

Ben Edfeldt says when you go to an International Mission Board sending celebration, you hear a striking similarity among the stories of new missionaries.

“A high percentage of them will say, ‘While in college, the Lord called me to go,’” he said. “It’s stunning to hear how many of them say that’s where they felt their first inclination of calling.”

That’s one reason Edfeldt, director of the office of collegiate and student missions for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, feels so strongly about sending students out for spring breaks and summers.

Hope and desire

“We hope and deeply desire to see students have a heart for the nations,” he said. “We hope summer missions will return a yield and create the next generation of missionaries.”

This year, Alabama Bap-

tists are sending out 103 college students to serve in 22 countries and 11 states as part of One Mission Students, Alabama Baptists’ collegiate summer missions program.

To prepare, One Mission Students held a training and commissioning weekend in mid-April at Cropwell Baptist Church in Pell City. While there, students learned about spiritual warfare, had safety training and went through an airport security simulation, among other instructive experiences.

Edfeldt said he’s grateful for the way Alabama Baptists fund the spiritual and logistical support that helps students with everything from sharing their faith to applying for visas and finding the right flights.

“Every year, we have students who have never been on a plane before,” he said. “Students are paying for their trip, but Alabama

Baptists have made it possible for us to remove some barriers that our students have to overcome to get to the field.”

‘Powerful’

Edfeldt said he knows he’s biased, but he would argue that the One Mission Students Weekend is the “most powerful thing we do” as Alabama Baptists.

“We have a room full of students saying, ‘We want to spend part or all of our summer proclaiming the gospel

to the ends of the earth,’” he said.

And after they go, they will “be far better equipped to be engaged in their campuses and be far more passionate about it,” Edfeldt said.

He noted that it also is an opportunity for them to bless and encourage full-time missionaries on the field.

Chris Mills, SBOM student missions mobilizer,

said many of this year’s student missionaries are serving alongside Alabamians who are serving in other states and around the world. Some of those students are former One Mission Students.

“The longer I’ve done this, the more students I get to see take the next steps in their journey,” he said.

Getting to see former summer missionaries now serving overseas will help this year’s student missionaries see themselves in those places in the future, Mills said.

Anticipation

“I’m excited to hear the stories of what God is going to do this summer,” he said. “We’re praying that God will move in a mighty way among the students as they serve and among the people that they serve.”

Students from all of

Alabama’s Baptist Campus Ministries also served in March on spring break missions trips in locations ranging from Baltimore to Guatemala. A number of students served with Beach Reach in Panama City, where teams logged a total of 15,000 gospel conversations with spring breakers.

‘Strategic week’

Mills said these short-term trips can “radically impact the way they engage here and lead to more opportunities for them to serve in the future.”

Edfeldt agreed, saying that the students experience lostness in a new way, which creates a burden that they bring back to their campuses. They also become more comfortable with sharing the gospel.

“It becomes a really strategic week for our students,” he said.

SBC Annual Meeting helps build greater clarity and stronger relationships

(continued from page 1) reporting facts and more on providing perspective. Help people understand what happened and why it matters to them. Good communication turns information into understanding.

3. Follow up with new relationships.

SBC is one of the few places where pastors, ministry leaders, missionaries, seminary representatives and church communicators all gather in one place. Nurture those connections afterwards. Send a quick email. Schedule a coffee call. Connect on LinkedIn. Thank people for their time.

4. Revisit the exhibit hall from home.

Sort through your collection of brochures, business cards and resources. Which ministries (or businesses) deserve a second conversation? Which resources offer solutions to issues your church faces?

5. Rest, reflect, refocus.

Before making major decisions, give yourself a little

space to think, pray and process. The goal of attending SBC isn’t simply to be present and participate.


The goal is to return home with greater clarity, stronger relationships and a better understanding of how Southern Baptists can cooperate together to reach more people for Christ.

For more information about OMS, visit onemissionstudents.org/go.

LEEDS STAINED GLASS & CHURCH FURNITURE
SINCE 1995

Toll-free: 888.699.9679
AL local: 205.699.9679
Call for **FREE** on-site consultation
Ask for Terry Barnes, Owner
information@LeedsStainedGlass.com
Visit www.LeadsStainedGlass.com
for an online gallery of windows and church furniture!






AMERICA
250™

FREEDOM CELEBRATION

July 5 at 10:30 a.m.
The Baptist Church at McAdory



Featuring artist-historian Bobby Horton
Sharing 250 years of America’s songs of faith

4954 Eastern Valley Road
McCalla, AL 35111
bcam.info • 205-477-8265

'SPIRIT-FILLED' MISSION WORK

Church built into a big rock makes big impact near DeSoto State Park

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Chris Murdock says if you just go to his church and stay there, you don't have to wait very long before someone pulls up that you can talk to.

That's because Sallie Howard Memorial Chapel is a conversation piece — it's built into a boulder as tall as the church just outside DeSoto State Park in Fort Payne.

"One of the best things about it is to be there when somebody comes in for the first time and just see the expression on their face," said Murdock, who serves as the chapel's pastor.

'Unique' congregation

Inside the building, the pulpit sits just in front of the massive boulder. Outside, the boulder has a cross standing on top.

It's unique, but Murdock said to

him, the most unique thing about Howard's Chapel is the congregation.

"We get people who are at DeSoto State Park who come by the chapel for worship on Sundays but also all the time — it's never closed," he said. "People visit us who are staying in the park but more than that, in the last decade or more with the advent of Airbnb and VRBO, there are a lot of rental cabins in our area, and we're constantly getting people who are on vacation and are up here."

But they also have "regulars," Murdock said — people who live in the area or who have vacation homes there that they frequently visit.

Together they all make a full house every Sunday morning.

"People get there early and stay late," he said. "They don't want to leave; they just stay around talking to each other."



Photo by Doug Rogers/Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

Sallie Howard Memorial Chapel was built into a boulder near DeSoto State Park in the 1930s, and since 1974 it has been a mission of DeKalb Baptist Association.

Murdock said it's been a blessing to see the congregation there grow — it's a great new chapter of the story of Howard's Chapel. The chapel was built by Milford Howard as a memorial to his first wife and dedicated in June 1937. Over time, attendance dwindled. In 1974, it became a mission of DeKalb Baptist Association.

At that time, "the congregation started with a handful of people, but now the chapel is full almost every Sunday," Murdock said.

He said it's had a good run of faithful pastors since becoming a mission of DeKalb, and they have led the congregation there to be faithful and generous in their walk with God.

God continues to 'bless'

"The chapel is entirely self-supporting financially and gives generously to missions through the Cooperative Program and as-

sociational missions," Murdock said. "There is also a very active benevolence ministry."

God continues to "bless this unique and spirit-filled missions work," he said.

Giving church

He said it's a bold statement, but if every church gave like his, things would be different.

"We would've fulfilled the Great Commission already," he said.

Keith Wrenn, director of missions for DeKalb Association, said the chapel is a "wonderful outreach to all who visit at DeSoto State Park on Sunday."

He said thousands of people who make their way to the area have visited "the church built around a large rock."

"It's a small chapel with a large impact for the gospel, in a beautiful area of Alabama," Wrenn said.



Photo by Doug Rogers/Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

The boulder is visible at the front of the interior of Sallie Howard Memorial Chapel just behind the pulpit.

UPCOMING EVENTS
sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Christmas Backpacks

You and your church can make Christmas brighter for children living along the Mississippi River who are among the poorest in our nation. Generation after generation in the region lives without basic human necessities.

Partnership

Through a partnership between the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions and Alabama WMU, Alabama Baptists began providing Christmas Backpacks in 2015 and have filled almost 120,000 backpacks for children primarily in the Mississippi River Delta.

These backpacks contain food, toiletry items, clothing, school supplies and gifts for the Christmas season to children in the Mississippi River Delta and in Alabama who are in ex-



Photo courtesy of Whitney Exline

treme poverty, giving them and their families the opportunity to hear the good news of Jesus Christ.

Since 2022, we have also provided Christmas Backpacks through the ministry of our Alabama Baptist church planters in underserved areas of our state.

Because of those backpacks, thousands have heard the gospel and made professions of faith.

God is using Christmas Backpacks to grow His Kingdom!

How can you be involved?

Prayerfully decide how many backpacks you will provide.

Consider whether your church or association would like to partner with a specific site (and provide and help give out the completed backpacks) or provide filled backpacks to one of the statewide collection points at the end of October. For partnership information, contact Pat Ingram at pingram@alsbom.org or 334-613-2334.

Order bands and the Christmas Story (provided at no cost through gifts to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering) for each backpack.

Prepare the backpacks and pray for each child and family that will receive them.

Learn more, download a promotional flyer, order bands and Christmas Story booklets, and register your desire to participate at alsbom.org/christmasbackpacks.



TAB file photo

WORD search

- BOAZ
- LEGACY
- CORD
- LINEAGE
- COURAGE
- OATH
- DELIVERANCE
- OBEDIENCE
- DESTRUCTION
- PROMISE
- ENEMIES
- PROTECTION
- ESCAPE
- RAHAB
- FLAX
- RESCUE
- HEBREWS
- ROOF
- HIDDEN
- ROPE
- HOUSE
- SAFE
- ISRAEL
- SALVATION
- JERICHO
- SCARLET
- JESUS
- SPIES
- JOSHUA
- TRUST
- KINDNESS
- WALL

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

“... And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat. ...”

JOSHUA 6:20



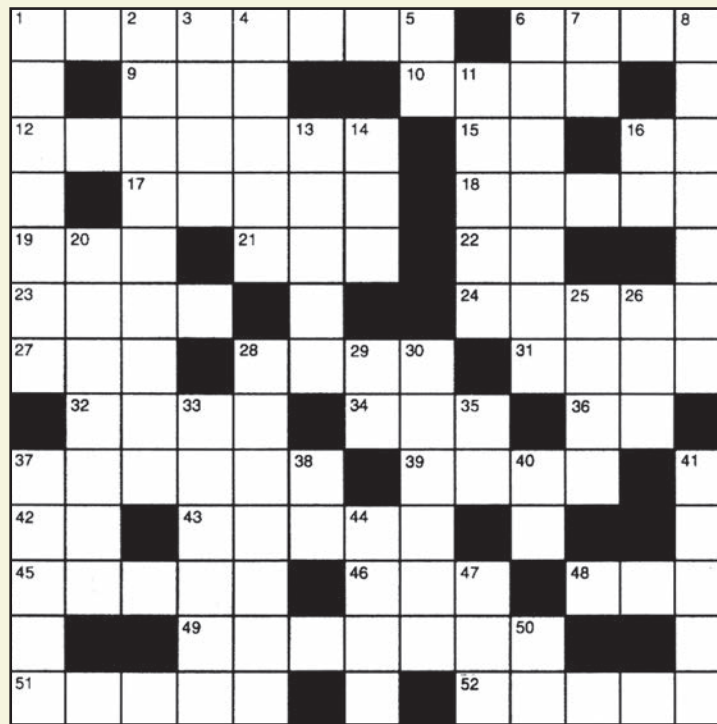
For more information, resources or to register, visit alsbom.org/christmasbackpacks or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.

CHRISTIAN Crossword



ACROSS

1. For ye are all the ____ of God. (Gal. 3:26)
6. Trust in the Lord, and do _____. (Ps. 37:3)
9. ____ no evil; hear no evil; speak no evil.
10. For the eyes of the Lord are ____ the righteous. (1 Pet. 3:12)
12. Pull threads.
15. Behold, I send ____ Angel before thee. (Ex. 23:20)
16. Whosoever trusteth ____ the Lord, happy is he. (Prov. 16:20)
17. Flaming.
18. "Where He ____ Me I Will Follow."
19. Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in _____. (Gen. 18:11)
21. He escaped the destruction of Sodom.
22. We.
23. Metal used to pave the streets in heaven.
24. 2 x 4 = ____.
27. Mentor to Samuel.
28. What shepherds do for the flock.
31. David did this to 20 Down.
32. A tingling that needs a scratch.
34. The foolish virgins forgot this. (Matt. 25:3)
36. Period of time between midnight and noon.
37. Language spoken by people of Ireland and Scotland.
39. The earth was without form, and _____. (Gen. 1:2)
42. The woman ____ the well.
43. So God created man in His own _____. (Gen. 1:27)



By Jennifer Breeding Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

45. Tool for hitchhiking.
46. Homonym of "earn."
48. And ____ go and prepare a place for you. (John 14:3; 2 words)
49. ____ are the pure in heart. (Matt. 5:8)
51. Sight, hearing, taste, smell or touch.
52. One of 51 Across.

DOWN

1. Be of good _____. (Ps. 31:24)
2. Person of ancient Israel.
3. Covering of a tree limb.
4. Being 40 days tempted of the _____. (Luke 4:2)
5. How is it that ye have ____ faith? (Mark 4:40)
6. First book of the Old Testament.
7. For better ____ worse.
8. Thickness, compactness.
11. Ye are of more ____ than many sparrows. (Matt. 10:31)
13. What running water does to soil.
14. ____ us therefore come boldly. (Heb. 4:16)

16. ____, ego, superego.
20. Bold Philistine.
25. It was meet that we should make merry, and be _____. (Luke 15:32)
26. Brother of Shem and Japheth. (Gen. 6:10)
28. Seamstress finger protector.
29. Sounds like "know."
30. Famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in ____ places. (Matt. 24:7)
33. What Zacchaeus does to the sycamore tree. (Luke 19:4)
35. ____, I am with you always. (Matt. 28:20)
37. The opening to heaven.
38. West coast state. (abbr.)
40. He ____ faithful and just. (1 John 1:9)
41. To determine the heaviness of.
44. Sudden, strong rush of air.
47. Device used by fishermen.
50. This ____ in remembrance of me. (Luke 22:19)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Intentional Leader Series

The next Intentional Leader Series, set for July 14, will focus on the Person aspect of the four Ps of leadership: Person, Pastor, Preacher and Pathfinder.

This chapter in this ongoing series will be led by Tim Beougher, professor of evangelism and church growth at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Who you are is at the heart of what you do. As a pastor or church

leader, you are a Christian. Your priority is relating to God and others, and growing in an emotionally healthy way is vital to overall leadership. You'll be encouraged to always maintain the priority of God first, family second and church third.

This event will be held from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the State Board of Missions. The cost is \$10, which includes lunch. Register at alsbom.org/ils.

All Nations Youth Camp at Shocco Springs

It's not too late to sign up for All Nations Youth Camp, a discipleship and missions-focused camp for middle school and high school students.

The focus of this year's camp — which will be held June 19–21 at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega — is to encourage students how to be transformed from Romans 12:1–2.

We invite you to send your students to this event full of discipleship, indoor and outdoor activities, team and individual competitions, wonderful worship, uplifting small group sessions and inspiring teaching of God's Word.

The cost is \$185 per student. For more information or to register, visit alsbom.org/event/all-nations-youth-camp.

Church workshops

These upcoming workshops held around the state are a great way to make sure your church is up to date on financial issues and your church leadership is prepared for retirement.

On each date, the Financial Issues Check-Up is held from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., and Preparing for

Retirement is 1–3:30 p.m.

► July 2 at the State Board of Missions in Prattville

► July 9 at Calhoun Baptist Association in Anniston

► July 21 at Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association in Sheffield

Register at alsbom.org/ events by locating your preferred conference date.

Persecuted Church

Critical turning point? Räsänen to appeal criminal conviction

Päivi Räsänen, a Finnish parliamentarian, has announced plans to appeal her criminal conviction issued by the Finnish Supreme Court for alleged “hate speech” over statements published in a 2004 pamphlet that expressed biblical views on marriage and sexuality.

The appeal to the European Court of Human Rights is the last legal opportunity for her conviction to be overturned and could serve as a critical turning point for free speech rights in Finland and Europe. (Decision Magazine)



Photo courtesy of Decision Magazine

Deadly attacks in Nigeria continue

More than 80 people have been killed in separate attacks in Nigeria as extremists continue to target Christians for persecution.

Christian Daily International-Morning Star News reported that Christians continue to be targeted for violence.

Nigeria is No. 7 on Open Doors’ 2026 World Watch List of the 50 places most difficult to be a Christian. (The Alabama Baptist)

Court rejects document showing Pakistani girl too young to marry

Christian Pakistani parents trying to prove their abducted daughter is too young to marry saw her official birth record rejected by the country’s Federal Constitutional Court.

The girl was 15 when she was abducted in November 2024, according to her parents.

The constitutional court has ordered an ossification test to determine her age.

While awaiting results, she remained at a government shelter, Christian Daily-Morning Star reported. (The Alabama Baptist)

Christian woman in critical condition following brutal attack in Pakistan

A Christian woman in Pakistan was reported to be in critical condition after two men brutally raped her. The 25-year-old woman was attacked April 11 as she worked in an orchard in Pakistan’s Punjab province, reported Christian Daily International-Morning Star News. One of the two Muslim males she identified as perpetrators is the contractor who had hired her and other females to harvest lemons. (The Alabama Baptist)

Angry brothers cut off Christian man’s hands for converting faiths

Weeks after a Ugandan man professed faith in Jesus and gave up Islam, the man’s brothers cut off his hands.

They recited Islamic scripture during the attack, the man told Morning Star News. A passerby found him and took him to a medical facility for treatment. (The Alabama Baptist)

Indian Chhattisgarh state institutes harsher anti-conversion law

A new and harsher anti-conversion law in India’s Chhattisgarh state requires any person wanting to convert to another religion or any entity conducting “conversion” work to register with a government authority.

The new bill exempts conversion or return to Hinduism, Morning Star News reported. Punishment for offenses range from a fine and 10 years in prison to a life sentence. India ranks No. 12 on Open Doors’ 2026 World Watch List of the 50 places most difficult to be a Christian. (The Alabama Baptist)

Pastor, family attacked on their property twice in two days in India

In an effort to make them flee their property in India, a pastor and his family were attacked two consecutive days and also accused of fraudulently converting people to Christianity. The family has lived in the same house for four generations. (The Alabama Baptist)

Pakistani Christian awaiting verdict, may face death in blasphemy case

A Christian man in Pakistan is awaiting a verdict in a blasphemy case that could result in his death.



SALEEM

The man was arrested in November 2022 for allegedly sharing on social media images deemed insulting to Muhammad, Christian Daily International-Morning Star News reported. He denies the charges. Conviction under the law mandates a death sentence.

Pakistan is No. 8 on Open Doors’ 2026 World Watch List of the 50 places most difficult to be a Christian. (The Alabama Baptist)

Nigeria spent \$10M to hide Christian persecutions, report claims

A new report claims Nigeria has funneled over \$10 million to a lobbying campaign to hide

a decades-long history of violence against Nigerian Christians.

Released by International Christian Concern, the report titled “Nigeria’s \$10 Million Genocide Cover-Up” alleges lobbying efforts were designed to influence U.S. policy discussions and improve Nigeria’s image in regard to the increasing reports of Islamic extremist groups targeting and killing Christians, as well as the government’s failure to intercede.

The report claims Nigeria’s public relations efforts have increased since 2025, when the U.S. designated Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern. (Decision Magazine)

Police arrest spurned Muslim man for threatening to kill Christian woman

A man in Pakistan who reportedly told a Christian woman to convert to his religion and marry him or be killed has been arrested.



Christian Daily International-Morning Star News, courtesy of family

Christian Daily International-Morning Star News reports the man was arrested April 5 after allegedly making the threat against

the woman in an April 2 letter. The letter gave an April 15 deadline for her to comply and was allegedly delivered at gunpoint. (The Alabama Baptist)

Pastor ordered to leave Russian territory or be deported

A Protestant pastor who has lived all of his 66 years in a now-occupied area of Ukraine has decided to stay despite being ordered to leave by Russian authorities.

Officials from Russia’s Migration Services told Vladimir Rytikov on March 21 that he was being expelled from the occupied Luhansk region in Ukraine.

Rytikov has been the pastor of a Council of Churches Baptist congregation in Krasnodon for 30 years. The group has chosen not to seek official registration, and the pastor has been repeatedly fined for “illegal missionary activity,” Forum 18 News Service reported.

The news service says Russian authorities have taken action recently against other Council of Churches Baptist congregations — raiding one in Slavyanoserbsk, fining pastors of congregations in Krasny Luch and Khartsyzk and escalating a case against a pastor in Mariupol. (The Alabama Baptist)

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

Place a classified ad below for \$1 per word. For more information call 205-870-4720, ext. 200, or email ads@thealabamabaptist.org. To place an online classified ad for \$9.99/month, visit thealabamabaptist.org/classifieds.

CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

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

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

Perdido Baptist Church, Perdido, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a bivocational pastor. Please email resumés to: smith73477@bellsouth.net or mail to: P.O. Box 136, Perdido, AL 36562.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Shell Banks Baptist Church on Fort Morgan Road is seeking a bivocational pastor. Please send resumé to: shellbanks7136@yahoo.com.

MUSIC MINISTER

Part-time music minister position. Montevallo First Baptist Church, Montevallo, Alabama. Blended service. For more information, contact pastor@montevallofbc.com.

OTHER POSITIONS

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS

The Baptist Churches in Lawrence County, Alabama (Muscle Shoals Baptist Association), are currently seeking resumés for the position of director of missions. The deadline for submission of resumés is June 22. Please send resumés to: Muscle Shoals Baptist Association, P.O. Box 485, Moulton, AL 35650-0485 or email them to: msbamoulton@bellsouth.net.

OPERATIONS MANAGER

Etowah Baptist Missions Center, located in Gadsden, Alabama, is a faith-based poverty-alleviation organization looking to hire an operations manager. Candidates must be a member of a local church and preferably reside in Etowah County. The role will include facilitating daily processes to run the center, administrative duties, monitoring resources, volunteer oversight and scheduling. The role requires organization along with

strong leadership and problem-solving skills. Questions can be directed to the executive director, Lance Hughes, at 256-295-7531 or by email at jobebmc@gmail.com. A more detailed job description will be provided upon submission of resumés.

PIANIST

Piano player needed on Sunday mornings from 11 a.m.–noon. Dozier Baptist Church, 253 School St., Dozier, AL 36028. Call 334-892-2423.

SIGNS

CHURCH SIGN

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

TRAVEL/VACATION

LOG CABIN

Lake Guntersville area, beautiful view and fully furnished. Discounts to ministers. Log on to <https://paradisevistatravel.com/2024/08/20/paradise-vista-cabin> to see pictures. Email Karen for reservations at kwlwdc@gmail.com or call 205-540-3600.

ABSOLUTELY THE BEST PRICES ON THE BEACH

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

RESOURCES

WAITING IN THE MEANTIME

In this 8-week Bible study, Denise George walks beside hurting mothers with honesty, biblical truth and gentle encouragement for the long road of estrangement of adult children. Perfect for individual study, church support groups, women's ministries and Christian counseling support resources. Available for pre-order on Amazon.

THE KIDS EDITION

The Kids Edition is a monthly publication for children ages 5 to 12 with articles, puzzles, and more. Order a group subscription at tabmedia.group.

~A resource for congregational vitality~

Soaring congregations have laypersons with a heartfelt visionary story

Are active laypersons in your congregation sufficiently captured by God's empowering vision for your congregation that they can speak from their hearts with spiritual passion about the story of what God is doing in and through your congregation?

If so, it is a difference maker for these congregations.

One day, Abby was shopping at her favorite big-box store. As she walked down an aisle, she noticed a woman pushing a cart toward her who looked familiar. She realized the woman was a guest at her congregation the previous Sunday. Abby had met her while volunteering in guest services but couldn't recall her name.

It seemed the woman also recognized Abby. As they drew closer and began talking, they shared a laugh over forgetting each other's names. However, they remembered their lovely conversation from last Sunday.

Hospitality with a purpose

Abby relearned her name was Madison and was introduced to Emma, her adorable 18-month-old, who greeted Abby with a bright smile from the cart. Madison warmly spoke about the wonderful hospitality and worship she and her family had enjoyed.

Just then, Elijah, Madison's lively 6-year-old, caught up with his mother, drawn to a colorful display of toys. Madison said Elijah also really enjoyed the gathering and was happy to see a couple of children he recognized from school. Her husband, Jason, recently started working as the new family practice doctor at the regional hospital's community-based urgent and emergency care center.

The conversation then delved into more details about the congregation. Madison smiled as she told Abby, "I am so happy I ran into you. My husband and I were just talking last night about how it's time to choose a congregation. Since moving here, we've visited many, but last night we realized your congregation really speaks to us. It would mean a lot if you could share what makes Summit Heights so special."

Abby beamed, with clear excitement shining in her eyes. This was the moment she was eager to share. "Well, at Summit Heights we ..." she began, speaking from the heart — not a rehearsed speech — about God's inspiring vision for her congregation and how it is embraced in their community, across the globe and in their own lives.

Madison was truly touched by the story

of Summit Heights. They kept chatting for a few more minutes, but eventually both children grew a bit restless, so they decided to move on, promising to meet again soon. They happily exchanged cell phone numbers to stay in touch.

As she walked away, Abby felt a wonderful warmth from her conversation with Madison. It wasn't just that she was able to share the church's vision clearly, enthusiastically and with pride. It was also that Madison, representing a younger group, seemed genuinely interested in the congregation's dream.

Here's a clear ownership perspective that really helps fulfill the vision:

First, when at least 21% of the actively engaged adults in a congregation are embraced by the vision, truly own it and make personal efforts to live it out, they become enthusiastic participants in disciple-making actions that help fulfill God's inspiring plan for their church.

Second, whenever the congregation faces an important decision, they consistently — always, not just sometimes — ask, "How will this help us fulfill our vision?" This question inspires the congregation and moves them forward by God's empowering vision, guiding their path.

Third, living out their clarity of vision isn't just one of the things these congregations do — it's the heart of everything they do and the top priority that guides all their actions.

Is this your congregation? If not, why?



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.

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.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Sunday School Lessons

By Jay T. Robertson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, University of Mobile



For June 21

REMEMBERING GOD'S WORKS Joshua 3:14–4:9

The day the Israelites thought would never come had finally arrived. The day when they would finally move out of the desert across the Jordan River into Canaan — a journey of only 11 days from Mount Sinai, which had taken them 38 years — was about to be realized.

Dry Ground (3:14–17)

This section highlights the climax of the Lord's wonders as His people crossed through the Jordan River on dry ground. Everything occurred exactly as the Lord had told Joshua.

The moment the feet of the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant touched the water's edge, the Lord would stop the river in its tracks.

The entire nation of Israel would pass through the dried-up riverbed on dry ground, in the height of the flood season. The God of the exodus is the God who would settle the Israelites in Canaan.

This miracle demonstrated for the Israelites that the living God was among them and would dispossess the peoples living in the promised land to allow His people to settle in the land.

The God of Israel is the Lord of all the earth. The Ark symbolized God's presence among His people and His faithfulness to His covenant promises.

When the people of Israel set out to cross the Jordan River, God Himself went before them. The significance of the Ark going first into the Jordan River shows that God must lead in any successful spiritual enterprise, and it is the same God who must lead and be followed.

The God who led Joshua is the same God who led Moses and worked through him.

Memorial Stones (4:1–7)

It was customary for peoples in the ancient Near East to me-

morialize events, specifically after battles they believed their armies were given victory in by the superior power of their gods. Israel also practiced this custom beginning with the time of Abram, who entered the land and built an altar at Shechem.

The purpose for selecting 12 men — one from each tribe (3:12) — now becomes apparent in chapter 4.

By instruction from the Lord, Joshua commanded the 12 men to each take a stone from the Jordan River.

These 12 stones were then set up as a memorial for future generations to remember the faithfulness of God who had delivered them out of slavery in Egypt and brought them victoriously into the promised land.

When their children would ask them about the purpose of the stones, the people were to remind them how the Lord had cut off the waters of the Jordan River and allowed them to cross over on dry ground. These stones were to be a perpetual memorial for the nation.

Lasting Reminders (8–9)

In addition to the 12 stones set up at Gilgal, which was Israel's first campsite in the promised land, Joshua also set up 12 stones in the middle of the Jordan River where the priests carrying the Ark had been standing.

Placing 12 stones in the riverbed commemorated the place that God had dried up, where the Ark had been held and where He showed by a miracle His mighty presence, power and worthiness of respect.

These memorials were for future generations of Israelites and "so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord's hand is strong, and so that you may always fear the Lord your God" (v. 24).

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

For June 28

WINNING STRATEGY Joshua 6:12–25

Joshua 6 provides a theological understanding of Israel's conquest of Canaan in this detailed description of God's strategy for defeating Jericho, the first city to be destroyed. The destruction of the Canaanites is the powerful work of the sovereign God.

The fearful judgment of God working to bring about the promised deliverance of His people is a significant theme throughout the Bible (Ex. 14:13–14, Rev. 19:1–2). The salvation of Rahab and her family demonstrates that the grace of God is not limited to Israel. We learn the principle that faith in God saves despite ancestry or descent. Moreover, the people of Jericho were given six days to flee from the city.

Instructions Obeyed (12–14)

The God who fights for His people, whose commander had already appeared to Joshua (5:13–15), had sworn to give the land to His people. Just as Rahab had confessed, the God of heaven and earth was undoubtedly able to lead them to victory over Jericho despite its being strongly fortified and tightly shut up.

The Lord commanded Joshua and his army to march around the city with the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant and seven priests ahead of the Ark blowing rams' horns. They were to march around the city for seven days. Men of war were positioned both ahead of and behind the Ark of the Covenant.

As the priests and the men of war made their march around the city, the people remained silent until Joshua commanded them to shout. Everyone obeyed the instructions Joshua had given them. For six days they walked around Jericho one time and then returned to their camp.

Victory Assured (15–19)

On the seventh day the priests

and the men of war circled Jericho seven times. The seventh circuit on the seventh day marked the climax of the battle.

With the rams' horns still blasting, it was now time for the men of war to get involved. "Shout! For the Lord has given you the city." This is a prophetic past tense. In other words, the future event is already as good as done since God promised He would do it.

Joshua also reminded the men of war that only Rahab and everyone in her house were to be spared because she had trusted in the God of Israel and had put her life on the line by protecting the two Israelite spies. Everything else was to be set apart to the Lord either by destroying it or by giving it to the Lord's treasury. If the people disobeyed the ban, they would in essence be setting themselves apart for destruction.

Walls Destroyed (20–21)

After marching around the city seven times, the priests blew their trumpets, the troops shouted with a great shout and the wall of Jericho collapsed to the ground. Then the troops advanced into the city and captured it.

Joshua and the troops did exactly as the Lord had commanded them, and the wall of Jericho gave way at God's command. No person or animal was spared except for Rahab and the people in her house.

Promises Kept (22–25)

Joshua sent the two spies who had scouted the city to get Rahab's family and move them to the Israelite camp.

The troops burned the city and set apart any gold, silver, bronze or iron for the Lord's treasury.

Our God is a faithful God. He saved Rahab and her family and gave the Israelites their first victory in Canaan. He is faithful to His people today.

*"The people shouted a great shout,
and the wall fell down flat ..."*

Joshua 6:20

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sunday School Lessons

By **Scott Bush, D.Min.**

Executive Director, Ministry Training Institute, Samford University



For June 21

SHOWING LOVE Luke 10:25–37

Your childhood afternoons may have included a ride on a magical trolley to the Neighborhood of Make-Believe as you visited “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood.”

The program ran on public television from 1968 to 2001, and nearly every episode opened with a musical invitation from the host: “Please, won’t you be my neighbor?” Neighborliness may seem like a quaint idea sometimes, but it does speak to something deep in us, and Jesus links it to nothing less than eternal life.

Loving others starts with loving God. (25–28)

An expert in Jewish law once asked Jesus, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus responded by asking this “lawyer” what the law says. Love God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind (Deut. 6:5), and love your neighbor as yourself (Lev. 19:18), the lawyer replied.

“Do this,” said Jesus, “and you will live.” Jesus’ response is provocative, if not terrifying. Could any reasonable, honest person claim to love God perfectly, to say nothing of always loving others unselfishly?

The Apostle Paul tells us that before we were reconciled in Christ we were enemies of God (Rom. 5:10). But God loved us when we were unlovable and unloving.

By grace and through faith, we are made alive in Christ (Eph. 2:5), able to love God and those who bear His image. (That’s everyone!) John says that we love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19). So love for God both precedes and enables genuine love for others.

Loving others looks beyond any biases. (29–32)

The lawyer seems confident in his love for God — which raises

many questions — but he seeks to justify himself where his neighbor is concerned.

Our devotion to God may be debatable, but our treatment of others is all too evident. Knowing this, the lawyer seeks to limit his responsibility by asking, “Who is my neighbor?” This prompts Jesus’ famous parable.

The victim in the story is attacked by robbers who leave him naked and beaten nearly to death. A priest and then a Levite, who are religious professionals, pass by without showing mercy — perhaps for fear of being robbed also.

Finally, a third traveler, a Samaritan, stops to render aid. Jesus’ hearers would’ve been scandalized by this. Jews hated Samaritans for ethnic and religious reasons. How could a Samaritan be the hero of this story?

It’s hard to imagine courage and compassion in the people we hold in contempt. God’s grace in our lives can take away our bias and prejudice (2 Cor. 5:16). In humility, we see ourselves as we are and others as fellow image bearers, worthy of respect and love.

Loving others is not always easy or convenient. (33–37)

The Samaritan risks his own life to help the fallen man and then spends his own money to care for him. The Greek word for his response describes a deep, visceral compassion, not shallow or self-serving but from the heart.

It’s hard not to see what Jesus has done for us in this story. He rescues us (2 Pet. 2:9), heals our wounds (1 Pet. 2:24), clothes us in His righteousness (Isa. 61:10) and gives us a home and a future (Heb. 12:28).

“Which ... proved to be a neighbor?” Jesus asked. “The one who showed mercy,” the lawyer replied, unable to even utter the word “Samaritan.” “Go and do the same,” Jesus commands. By His grace we can.

For June 28

CALLING OUT SIN Luke 11:37–46, 12:1–3

The word “hypocrite” has an interesting origin. It’s from ancient Greek and is a combination of two words — “hypo,” meaning “under,” and “krino,” meaning “to judge or interpret.” It originally referred to actors who wore large masks on stage. The players in a Greek drama were interpreting their characters from under the mask.

It didn’t take long for the word to take on the meaning that we use today. A person who speaks or acts in a dishonest or insincere way is like an actor wearing a mask. He or she is a hypocrite. Jesus warns that hypocritical, superficial religion is no substitute for heart-deep holiness.

Focusing on outward appearances while ignoring the condition of the heart is sinful. (11:37–41)

Luke once again tells of Jesus sharing a meal. A Pharisee invites Him to lunch and then takes offense when Jesus doesn’t follow the tradition of ceremonial washing.

More than mere hygiene, hand washing was an expression of personal purity, a way to remove any contamination from contact with unclean things or “less holy” people. Hypocrisy must always be propped up by comparison with those who we feel are inferior to ourselves.

The host was shocked, so Jesus addressed the real issue. Keeping the outside clean is pointless if the heart is selfish and greedy. A gracious, obedient heart, on the other hand, will purify the outside from within.

Focusing on religious practices while ignoring the greater need for love and justice is sinful. (42–46)

Jesus continues by addressing the Pharisees’ outward practice, saying that keeping a high profile in reli-

gious circles and making much of meticulous giving is all meaningless when true devotion and a commitment to justice are neglected. A religious reputation can be a deadly self-deception without genuine love for God and selfless love for others.

Hypocrites are not only deluded; they are also a danger to others. Jesus warns that hypocritical Pharisees are like unmarked graves. When a traveler unwittingly came into contact with such a grave, he would become ceremonially unclean.

Similarly, the self-righteousness of the Pharisees could infect those under their influence. Jesus went on to say that the scribes set impossibly high standards for people but offered no help in reaching them — presumably because they didn’t even meet them! Hypocrisy relies on appearances and discounts or even denies the transforming work that God does in the hearts of His people.

Sin will be exposed by God. (12:1–3)

As large crowds gathered around Jesus, He turned to the Twelve and gave them a personal reminder. He compares the shallow, showy religion of the Pharisees to leaven. Hypocrisy, like yeast in bread, may seem like a small thing but it will spread, affecting every area of a life. In the end, He says, the secret sinfulness of the Pharisees will be exposed and judged by God.

Christians also understand the power of secrecy where sin is concerned. The Apostle John encourages us to confess our sins rather than hide behind our carefully constructed reputations. When we do this, God is faithful (He always will) and just (He has won the right) to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Hypocrisy only puts a mask on our sinful hearts, but God gives His people a new heart that loves Him and loves others.

“Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed or hidden that will not be known.”

Luke 12:2

Reminded of God's agape love

IMB missionary couple reflects on 2 decades of proclaiming gospel in Philippines

Wade and Sharon Sigrest are International Mission Board missionaries serving among the Cebu Cebuanos in the Philippines, a nation made up of more than 7,600 islands. The Sigrests have served there for more than 25 years and are involved in Send Relief projects, training leaders, conducting Bible studies and leading a house church.

Both Wade and Sharon grew up attending church, where God shaped their hearts and drew them to Himself.

Early in their marriage, Wade told Sharon of his call to missions. Sharon remembered, "I didn't think much about it as he was in the military and we moved around, serving God in the places where He had planted us." Little did she know that one of those assignments would be a catalyst for their future work with IMB.

Call to missions

When Wade was stationed on the island of Guam, the Sigrests joined Calvary Baptist Church, where Filipinos make up more than half of the church membership.

Later, after resigning from the U.S. Air Force, Wade attended seminary at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Sharon attended an IMB missions conference at NOBTS where she spoke with missionaries from all over the world.

These conversations left her feeling overwhelmed. But when she talked with a missionary from the Philippines, "It was different. I remember thinking, 'I could live there.'"

Today Wade is the director of three Send Relief projects in the Philippines. Each project is staffed



Submitted photo
Wade Sigrest (right) leads a Bible study with young men. He and his wife, Sharon, lead regular Bible studies, and Wade mentors national partners in their ministries.

by local Filipinos who lead classes over a three-month period on topics such as Bible study, agriculture, healthcare and livelihood, including how to make cakes, national delicacies and homecare products like dishwashing soap and fabric conditioner.

The Sigrests support the local staff by training them in theology and gospel outreach, discipleship and planting churches.

Sharon leads weekly one-on-one Bible studies with several women. The church she and Wade founded meets in their home. She serves as the cluster prayer advocate, hosting an online prayer meeting each first Saturday. Each month she and Wade visit other teams, with Wade delivering leadership training.

Wade leads weekly men's Bible

studies, mentors national partners and shepherds their home church — training members for children's and adult ministries. The Sigrests travel by car and boat to oversee projects on two islands.

Relationships are important in the Philippines, and this culture connection is one of Wade's favorite parts of living there. Filipinos tend to be happy people who enjoy sitting and talking, celebrating birthdays and fiestas.

However, life in the city can be busy with people rushing from place to place. Many in Cebu (see-BOO) work in call centers, so their workday is at night to accommodate the time zone difference. Men often work on construction sites. Many people survive with low incomes and struggle to meet their daily needs.

In addition to physical needs, there are also pressing spiritual needs. The people need to hear the gospel. Professing Christians need to be disciplined.

Life in Cebu is a spiritual battle. Sharon noted.

"People are blinded and deceived by the evil one," she said. "They invite Satan into their home with all the idols they own. They don't know the truth and are convinced praying to the images will help save them."

This daily reality is heartbreaking. Sharon's favorite Bible verses, Ephesians 6:10–11, provide encouragement and a reminder that believers are called to live differently. Sharon has studied the armor of God with other women in Cebu to prepare them to stand against the schemes of the enemy.

Wade is reminded of God's agape love for him and the Cebuano people when he thinks of the story of the prodigal son. He knows God does not want anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9).

Prayer requests

He and Sharon offer the following requests for the Cebu Cebuanos in the Philippines:

▶ Pray more nonbelievers would hear, open their hearts and accept the gospel.

▶ Pray God would raise up more leaders who will sacrificially disciple others.

▶ Pray God would raise up more church planters and pastors.

▶ Pray for the resources and development of the Sigrests' farm project with a training center and multifunctional building, which will be used for training leaders, holding church and associational gatherings, and hosting youth camps. (IMB)



commons.wikimedia.org