

The Alabama Baptist

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Photo by Freepik

Not 'what' but 'why'

Prepping for Gen Beta: How your church can reach the next generation

By **Julie Donovan**
The Alabama Baptist

Generation Beta is only a year old now — they are a work in progress,” said Shelly Melia, program director for the master of arts in children’s ministry and master of arts in family ministry at Dallas Baptist University. “Gen Beta is/will be born from 2025–39 [and] to reach them institutions must win over their protective Gen Z parents and adapt from content delivery to authentic, relational mentorship.”

Melia recently shared research and analysis with members of

Oklahoma Baptist Children’s Ministry and discussed the importance of reaching next generations with the gospel.

Protective parents

Melia used an example of emperor penguins: After the mother lays the egg, the father protects it for 65 days. Once the baby hatches, the mother returns and the family is united. Emperor penguins are protective of their young and have a hard time letting them go.

Prior to this generation, Melia said, parents would willingly bring their children to church, but now

they are more timid to leave their child in a classroom.

“You must reach protective parents first to [reach] the children,” said Melia, suggesting a shift from “traditional lectures to interactive environments.”

“Shift from ‘what’ to ‘why,’” she urged. “This will take humility, curiosity, integrity, empowering parents and a desire to get into the trenches with the parents.”

Options include:

- ▶ Digital discipleship
- ▶ In-person community
- ▶ Interaction with believers
- ▶ Bold Bible teaching

▶ Theologically rich worship music

▶ Expectations to grow
“Leaders should foster an environment where questioning is welcomed and faith is explored rather than only dictated,” Melia said.

Skills needed

This generation is not satisfied with “because the Bible said so.” They thirst for the “why,” Melia said. Church leaders can include a variety of strategies to help these young people dig into the faith, including:

(See ‘Authentic,’ page 8)

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SCAN ME

Ready to serve

Student volunteer team meets church, community needs

By Linnie Russell
The Alabama Baptist

What does it look like when a new generation of believers steps up to serve its church families and communities? At Maple Avenue Baptist Church in Geneva, the Student Ministry Serve Team is seeking to set that Kingdom example.

The ministry team came to be after the church's former pastor started an adult serve team a couple of years ago, explained Michael Herrera, student and young adults pastor at Maple Avenue Baptist.

"We had this idea of doing that with the youth and having a team where we call on them and we say, 'Hey, there's this opportunity. Are you willing to help?'"

That's a call to which Maple Avenue's students have humbly and enthusiastically risen.

Over the past two months, the Student Ministry Serve Team has donned matching shirts and started a ministry of availability. Whether it's serving food at church events or passing out umbrellas in the parking lot during rainy weather, these students are eager and ready to serve their church family.

Their first big project was on Easter Sunday.

"They welcomed everyone," Herrera explained. "They passed out bulletins, and they were just there as a smiling presence — a greeting and welcoming presence."

Outside church walls

The team is also looking to step outside church walls to meet local needs.

"Our next project is going to be here in Geneva, hopefully helping out with some construction needs like building ramps," Herrera said. "We're going to be looking for opportunities to be a light in our community and to help out in whatever ways we can."

"We want our church to be a presence in our community," Herrera continued, "and we want to be a



Photo courtesy of Michael Herrera

The Student Ministry Serve Team of Maple Avenue Baptist Church has started a ministry of availability. Whether it's serving food at church events or passing out umbrellas in the parking lot during rainy weather, these students are eager and ready to serve their church family.

presence of serving — a positive reality of what the gospel is."

He also stressed the importance of outreach through both words and action.

"We want to share the gospel with people that haven't heard it. We

want to step into dark places and places of need. We want to help people out and to be the hands and feet of Jesus."

Herrera emphasized the gospel influence of young believers.

"One thing that's kind of been on my mind is just the importance of our students. They're not

just saying that they're Christians. They give feet to their faith, and they want to help and be a light in a dark world."

He believes that equipping students to serve and share their faith is especially important in a time when young people can be perceived as self-centered.

"In a world full of people taking selfies, we want students to know that they can just get together and serve the community and not really be about themselves, but about the Lord — about making Him known and loved and heard about."

Herrera has seen firsthand the servant hearts of his students as well as the remarkable ways God blesses people through them.

'Glad to help'

"We had a need in our community," he recalled, sharing one example. "It was an elderly couple. They needed some work done on the yard, and for them it was impossible. So I called up our team and I said, 'Hey, is anyone willing to help out this person after school?' And I had one boy say, 'Oh, yeah, I'll be glad to help.' He got it all done in two hours."

"I want [people] to see that our students are caring for our community. They care about our church, they care about the lost, and they are taking a step in the direction of brokenness."

"They want to bring refreshment to people's lives through the gospel by what they do and by their serving."

He also encouraged Geneva residents to reach out with any service project needs.

"If somebody has a nearby project in Geneva, Alabama, or the surrounding area — if you have a need — please call the church office and just let us know. If we're able to help, we'd love to."

To learn more about the serve team at Maple Avenue Baptist Church, check out our December article at tabonline.org/serve-team.

The Alabama Baptist

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

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 11.

INTERGENERATIONAL STYLE OF DISCIPLING

Alabama Baptist's men's ministry director Larry Hyche shares why it matters

By Taylor Inmon
The Alabama Baptist

Larry Hyche, director of men's ministry at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, is newly decked with a doctorate in education from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

He sat down with TAB Media Group's editor-in-chief Jennifer Rash to discuss the focus of his research — the influence of intergenerational discipling relationships on the emotional and spiritual health of Generation Z adults in Alabama Baptist churches.

Gen Z is made up of those currently 14 to 29 years old. They have been called digital natives and dubbed “the loneliest and most anxious generation.”

Technology's influence

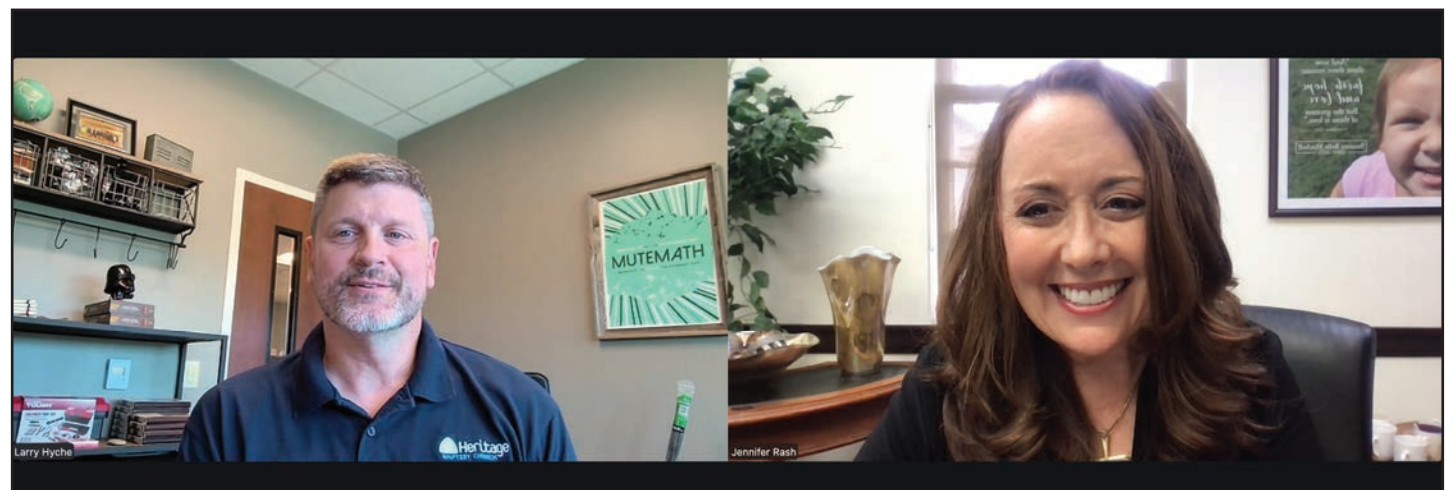
Many point to technology as a factor contributing to high anxiety.

“God has wired us to live in community,” Hyche explained, but the current world has somewhat sabotaged the full scope of community.

He cites the ongoing litigation against Meta (the parent company of Facebook and Instagram), comparing the corporation's defenses to the tobacco industry's coverups of decades past. It can no longer be claimed the rise in anxiety and the rise of social media among Gen Zers are unrelated, he said.

“The way they were raised was different than how we were raised,” Hyche said. “So how can we meet in the middle and have some empathy for them?”

Having an extensive background in student ministry, Hyche found that “once [others] understand how



Larry Hyche, director of men's ministry at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, shares with TAB Media Group's Jennifer Rash about his research on Generation Z adults in Alabama Baptist churches.

we got to this point with Gen Z (rising levels of anxiety and depression), their eyes are opened and they're like, ‘We've got to do something.’”

That “something,” taken from a biblical model, is intergenerational discipling.

“We as Alabama Baptists have this tremendous opportunity with our teenagers and 20-somethings,” Hyche said. “And we're held responsible for it.”

Gen Z is starving for connection, he noted, reminding older believers “to seize the opportunity God has given us.”

More than 90% of professing Christian college kids Hyche sur-

veyed in 2025 would say “Yes, please,” to an offer of mentorship from an older believer.

His research found that while Gen Z generally doesn't trust the government, Hollywood or the media, they do tend to trust older adults.

Mentors needed

“They want to hear from you,” he said. They want to ask things like, “‘How did you know this was the career for you?’ ‘How did you know she was the one?’ ... You don't have to be a cultural expert. Matter of fact, they don't want you to try and understand their culture. It will freak them out.”

Hyche said younger generations see discipleship as individual rela-

tionships and small groups doing life together. Older generations tend to think of discipleship as a class on Sunday night rather than spending time together one-on-one.

“I love the idea that this (younger) generation may actually be the one to help pull us older generations back to a more biblical approach to discipleship,” he said.

When Rash asked about overcoming the hesitancy of older generations to offer guidance to a young believer, and strategies to that end, Hyche answered, “I think we've complicated it.”

A cup of coffee, intergenerational fellowship meals and non-age-specific missions trips are a good start.

Gen Z's “goals and dreams actually reflect the same values and dreams of the Baby Boomers,” Hyche said.

He and Rash urge the Baby Boomers, as well as their own Generation X peers, to do something with that information.

Watch the full conversation with Hyche and Rash at youtube.com/tabmediagroup.

“We as Alabama Baptists have this tremendous opportunity with our teenagers and 20-somethings ... and we're held responsible for it.”

Larry Hyche
director of men's ministry, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

Your Voice



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

Protecting kids from gambling's digital pipelines

By **Stephanie Smith**
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Years ago, parents could lock their front doors at night and reasonably assume their children were safe from the world's adult vices. Today, that security is an illusion.

The dangers no longer wait at the doorstep; they bypass it entirely, slipping directly into our homes through the glowing screens in the palms of our children's hands. Nowhere is this more evident than in the explosive, predatory rise of online sports betting.

Since the Supreme Court cleared the way for states to legalize sports gambling in 2018, the industry has grown into a multi-billion-dollar behemoth. But in its gold rush for profit, it has found a terrifyingly lucrative new target: our kids.

Fortunately, Washington is starting to pay attention, thanks to a refreshing wave of bipartisan sanity.

U.S. Sen. Katie Britt (R-Ala.), alongside Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), recently introduced the

Gaming Advertisement to Minors Enforcement Act.

The bill targets the digital pipelines feeding gambling content to children, and it deserves the full support of anyone who cares about the mental and financial well-being of the next generation.

Root of the problem

The GAME Act targets the root of the problem: the aggressive, algorithmic manipulation that pushes sportsbooks and prediction markets onto minors via platforms like TikTok and Instagram. It would ban these companies from aiming gambling ads at anyone under 18, putting teeth into the law by empowering the Federal Trade Commission to levy fines, up to \$100,000 per violation, against platforms that fail to comply. Repeated offenders would face the Department of Justice directly.

Critics will argue that tech-savvy teens will always find a way around age restrictions, or that the responsibility falls solely on parents to

monitor screen time. That is always the excuse of a predatory industry to continue its behavior. Further, that perspective ignores how fundamentally the landscape has changed.

This isn't your grandfather's backroom poker game; it is an optimized, hyper-targeted psychological apparatus designed to create addicts.

According to the Child Mind Institute, adolescents are uniquely vulnerable to gambling addiction because the brain's reward system is highly active while the regions responsible for impulse control are still developing. This biological mismatch makes the dopamine rush of a bet as addictive as cocaine.

Research highlighted by Newport Healthcare further warns that those who begin gambling before 18 are significantly more likely to develop severe disorders, which are frequently co-occurring with depression, anxiety and even increased risks of suicide.

Jarring reality

The data cited by Sen. Britt's office reveals a deeply jarring reality: one in six parents say they would have no idea if their child was actively gambling online, and 59% of adolescent boys report that gambling-related content began appearing automatically in their feeds without them ever searching for it.

By flooding social media with sleek advertisements featuring popular influencers and athletes, sportsbooks are normalizing high-stakes betting before a child can even drive.

They are turning middle and high schoolers into chronic bettors, often losing real money through digital wallets and setting up a lifetime of financial distress under their parents' own roofs. More importantly, the psychological toll is exceptionally severe; gambling disorder is linked to the highest suicide rate of any addictive disorder. Research indicates that 1 in 5 individuals with a gambling disorder attempt suicide. The rate is even higher for adolescent boys.

Deliberate effort

Sen. Britt's legislative push is not an isolated knee-jerk reaction. It is part of a steady, deliberate effort to protect kids from online exploitation and mental health damage. She has previously pressed the Department of Justice to crack down on unregulated, offshore gambling websites and urged the CDC to study the rising public health impact of youth gambling.

The GAME Act does not ban sports betting for adults but draws a hard, necessary line in the digital sand. It forces big tech and massive sportsbooks to stop treating our children as pawns in their high-stakes and high-profit strategy.

Congress has historically been slow to act on digital safety, but this is a clear-cut public health crisis. Sen. Britt is exactly right: our children are our greatest asset, and it is time for lawmakers to protect them from the digital casino operators targeting them for profit.

Letters to the Editor

In the "Your Voice" section of the April 2 edition of The Alabama Baptist, I enjoyed the article by Mr. Rich Bitterman. The article brought back a time when things were simple. May God continue to bless him, his family

and his church family. Thanks to all that teach the "Sunday School Lessons." I have learned many things that I didn't understand. Many thanks to all.

Affie Martin
Clanton

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EDITOR'S NOTE — Stephanie Smith is president/CEO of the Alabama Policy Institute.

First person: Consider opening your heart to ABCH

By James Fisk
Special to The Alabama Baptist

I just spent a weekend at Shocco Springs with an amazing group of people. I knew a few, but most were complete strangers from every corner of Alabama. There were married couples with children, married couples with no children and some single women all of whom share one passion: they love and care for foster children.

This has been the mission of the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes and Family Ministries for over a century. Across our state, hundreds of children have been placed in private established homes and become part of loving Christian families.

They get a foster parent or two, they may get an instant sibling or several, but they all get safety, security and unconditional love.

Many of these children have had a rough start in life; they come from hard places. Some have experienced more physical and emotional trauma firsthand than we have seen on the news. Some have seen more drugs than we have seen in the movies. Many were unwanted, unloved, uncared for. The state has removed them from an unsafe environment; they had no place to go.

Foster families open their homes and their lives to welcome children who are scared, scarred and suspicious.

The children may be hostile or too hurt to believe that anyone will treat them with kindness. For the first time in their short lives, many eat healthy food, sleep in a bed and receive medical care. Extraordinary foster parents are living ordinary lives — and they are just as busy as the rest of us. They are living out James 1:27, caring for orphans, healing young damaged minds and bodies.

Foster families needed

ABCH families care for more than 500 children, but there are more than 5,000 in our state who need care. ABCH always needs financial support, but the real need is for more foster families who will step up to the challenge.

If you feel a tug on your heart, become extraordinary. Open your heart and your home, love a kid for Jesus and change lives, including yours.

EDITOR'S NOTE — James Fisk is a supporter and volunteer with Alabama Baptist Children's Homes and Family Ministries.

To discover how you can be a part of God's work through ABCH, visit alabamachild.org.



LASS WORDS

BY KEN LASS
The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

The power of listening

Sharon and I recently took a riverboat lunch cruise down the Cumberland River in Nashville. The cruise was great, but it was the lunch that lingers in my memory. It was served in a room full of circular tables that each seated 10 people. As we found our place, we wound up next to a young couple.

The man was talking intently to the woman — so intently that they never even acknowledged us sitting down next to them. I'm terrible at guessing ages, but I would say they were about 20. Neither was wearing a ring of any kind, so they appeared to be on a date. And judging by the gist of his conversation, it was a first date.

The young man never stopped talking to the girl throughout the entire lunch. I'm not exaggerating when I say he barely took a breath, yammering on and on about all of his adventures and experiences. Clearly, he was trying to impress her, but it wasn't working.

Escape hatch

The girl never got a word in, and all she could do was smile and nod politely. We felt sorry for her. You could tell she was wishing for an escape hatch.

His yakking was so relentless that I had to restrain myself from blurting out, "For heaven's sake, man, let her speak! Ask her a question! Tell her she looks nice. Anything! Just take a break!"

I managed to stifle myself, but it reminded me that while we can do much ministry by comforting, encouraging and consoling, sometimes the best approach is just to listen, to let others know you are there for them and to let them speak and vent.

'Slow to speak'

In the Book of James, the half brother of Jesus writes, "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger" (1:19). In Proverbs, you can find advice that says, "The one who gives an answer before he listens — this is foolishness and disgrace for him" (18:13).

We all have thoughts and opinions and experiences we'd like to share, but for any conversation to be truly enjoyable, it has to work both ways. That may be the only way we can continue a meaningful relationship. These two young people were complete strangers to me. I will likely never see them again.

But I'm pretty sure he didn't get a second date.

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

OBITUARIES

DANNY CARROLL COTTON

Danny Carroll Cotton, pastor of Oldfield Baptist Church, Sylacauga, since 2020, died June 21. He was 70.

Cotton, a native of Talladega, attended the University of Montevallo before serving in the U.S. Navy for 8 years (1977–1985). He worked for Frontrunners for more than 30 years and Me-Sun Inc. for another 15 years. He also was pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church (1989–2018) and financial ministry assistant at Coosa River Baptist Association for the last four years.

He is survived by his wife of 50 years, Linda; three children; and six grandchildren.

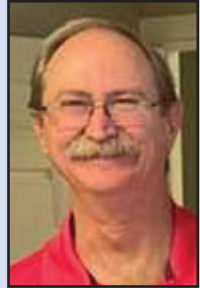
FREDDIE WILLIAM GREEN

Freddie William Green, a longtime minister of music, died May 30. He was 84.

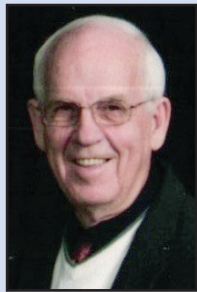
A Harpersville native, Green served full time at Bethel Baptist Church, Dothan; Seventh Street Baptist, Cullman; Hepzibah Baptist, Talladega (where he served twice, lastly until his retirement in 2010); and Eastdale Baptist, Montgomery. He also served in a variety of other church staff roles and the National Guard for six years.

He had a music degree from Baptist Bible Institute in Graceville, Florida.

Green is survived by his wife of 65 years, Patsy, and two daughters, six grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.



COTTON



GREEN

► The Senior Adult Ministry at **First Baptist Church Trussville** will host pianist Frank Jones' Oasis concert July 30, 1:30 p.m. with special guest vocalist Sandi Patty. Doors open at 12:30 p.m. For more information go to: frankjonesministries.org/oasis-birmingham-2023 or call 205-393-7020. Buddy Champion is pastor.

CLARKE ASSOCIATION

► The churches of **Clarke County** will host a nondenominational crusade July 27, 28 and 30, at 6 p.m. each day. Monday's service will be at Jackson High School Auditorium, Tuesday at Clarke County High School Auditorium and Thursday at Thomasville Civic Center Auditorium. The keynote speaker will be Alabama Baptist State Convention president Jarman Leatherwood, who is pastor of House of Hope and Restoration Church, Huntsville. The mass choir and music will be led by Cedric Burrell and Harrison Bridges, director and co-director of the Voices of Mobile from the University of Mobile. Anyone is welcome to join the mass choir. Final rehearsal will be July 12, at 3 p.m. in the Grove Hill Baptist Church sanctuary. For more information, visit clarkecountycrusade.com. Mark Presswood is the associational missionary.

COFFEE ASSOCIATION

► **Shane Traylor** is the new pastor of **Goodman Baptist Church, Enterprise**. He previously served as pastor of Clayton Baptist Church. He and his wife, Rachel, have two children.



Facebook photo

COOSA RIVER ASSOCIATION

► **Linda Cotton**, ministry assistant for **Coosa River Baptist Association**, recently celebrated 25 years in this position and was honored with a reception. During her tenure she has worked with three associational missionaries and currently serves with Wes Johnson, director of missions for CRBA. In addition to her various roles of leadership in the association and in her church, Oldfield Baptist Church, Sylacauga, she also served as an officer of Alabama Association of Baptist Ministry Assistants for several years. Oldfield Baptist was where her husband, Danny, served as pastor until retirement.



Submitted photo

MOBILE NETWORK

► **Jayden Carlos** is the new pastor of **First**

Baptist Church Theodore. He previously served as student pastor for The Church at Eastern Oaks, Montgomery. He and his wife, Haley, have two children.

► **Spring Hill Baptist Church, Mobile**, has begun renovating its historic chapel, with plans to reopen before Easter 2027. Ben Stubblefield is pastor.

SIPSEY ASSOCIATION

► **Bevan Chapel Missionary Baptist Church, Berry**, celebrated its 75th anniversary June 7. Kevin Morrison, associational missionary for Sipsey Baptist Association and a member of the church, shared a testimony of God's call on his life through Bevan Chapel. Several church members gave testimonies to God's faithfulness. Music was provided by various ensembles including church pianist Lisa Trimm, the pastor's wife, and their daughters. The congregation was honored with a presentation by Joyce Peters, a commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Pictured with the plaque is Alta Muriel Trimm, the oldest living member and her son, Pastor Randal Trimm, the great-grandson of the founding pastor W.M. Bevan.



Photo by Joyce Peters

WALKER ASSOCIATION

► **Blooming Grove Baptist Church, Jasper**, celebrated its 150th anniversary June 7. Two former pastors, Mike Ward and Keith Hudson, were the guest preachers. Historical highlights of the church were given by Shelia Pulliam and her husband, Gwen, who is the oldest living member. Special music was provided by the praise team. The church received commemorative plaques from David Miller, director of missions for Walker Baptist Association, and Debbie Campbell, representing the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Pastor J.D. Dickerson (pictured) accepted both honors on behalf of the church. Photos, banners and other historical documents were on display in the gym where a catered lunch was served. T-shirts, coffee mugs, black tumblers and gift bags, which included the printed history of Blooming Grove, were available to everyone.



Photo by Wendy Dickerson



Facebook photo

More than a music group

New director of Alabama Singing Men shares story, hopes for storied ministry

By Taylor Inmon
The Alabama Baptist

With a name like his, John Boozer said he learned along the way to have fun with it, noting he's heard all the jokes and has long embraced his nickname of "Booze."

Serving as interim minister of music at North Shelby Baptist Church in the Birmingham metro area since 2018, Boozer said his pastor even calls him that from the pulpit.

When he taught at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, from 2000 to 2017, his students also used the nickname. And now as the newly named director of Alabama Singing Men, he'll see whether it sticks.

Boozer joined ASM in 2025, but he participated in the group's first-ever concert at a state convention annual meeting in 1973 while he was in college at Samford University.

"More than being a music group, it's a group of guys who come together for fellowship," he said, noting ASM has been featured at state convention annual meetings for 50 years running now.

ASM has had three directors since its inception in 1973: Paul Hall, Timothy Banks and Thomas Smith. Smith retired from the position two years ago, after 25 years of faithful conducting.

Interim leaders

In the interim, longtime music ministers Ed Cleveland (currently serving as minister of senior adults at First Baptist Church Montgomery) and Roger Walworth (music minister for First Baptist Church Fort Payne) jointly led the group.

Boozer said the two men did an



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

outstanding job maintaining the group's high standards and brotherhood during the interim period. It was recently, ahead of ASM's annual fall retreat at Shocco Springs Conference Center, that the group asked Boozer to step up as their new director.

"It's an incredible honor to be in this position. We have some wonderful men in the state of Alabama who've given their lives to worship the Lord," he shared.

ASM's accompanist of 43 years, acclaimed pianist Frank Jones, said, "We are blessed to have Booze as our new conductor."

Boozer holds a bachelor's degree in church music from Samford University in Birmingham, a master's degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and a doctorate in choral conducting from Louisiana State University.

Experience

He's served churches in Alabama, Kentucky, Florida, Georgia and North Carolina. Boozer formerly taught at Baptist College of Florida and Southeastern Seminary. He now teaches at Kenya Baptist Theological College, serv-

ing as chair of its music department and traveling to Kenya several times each year. He's served in various other ministries through the years, including as a children's music camp leader at Shocco and in a staff position at Ridgecrest Conference Center in North Carolina. He's been a guest conductor and clinician at over 100 events.

Family life

Boozer and his wife, Patricia, have two adult children, John Britt and JoBeth, and six grandchildren. He's an avid cyclist and enjoys coaching his grandson's recreation league basketball team.

During ASM's upcoming retreat Sept. 10–11, members will spend two days in rehearsal, learning the music for their upcoming season. Along with the annual concert at the state convention in November, ASM travels for a spring tour and provides special music at several churches.

Boozer said he is excited about the current musical repertoire because it offers a variety of new arrangements for the group. It includes spirituals, beloved hymn settings and some contemporary pieces.

"I'm excited about getting to know the guys better, developing more relationships and involving more men as I meet them," he said.

All Baptist men who serve in music ministry, whether in an official capacity or as a faithful choir member, are welcome to sign up at alabamaworship.org/asm.



BOOZER

"It's an incredible honor to be in this position.

We have some wonderful men in the state of Alabama who've given their lives to worship the Lord."

John Boozer
director, Alabama Singing Men

PASSING THE BATON

Hunter Street Baptist Church members affirm Chandler Snyder as next pastor

Chandler Snyder has stepped into the pastorate of Hunter Street Baptist Church in Hoover. He was affirmed by church members after preaching in view of a call during both worship services June 28.

Longtime pastor Buddy Gray retired at the end of June and preached his final sermon to the congregation as pastor June 21. He also was honored with a celebration drawing people from around the state and nation June 14.

Gray applauded the decision to call Snyder and was on hand June 28 to welcome him.

Snyder comes from the staff of Southwestern Baptist

Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and is a former International Mission Board missionary along with his wife, Kelli.

From 2012 to 2022, the Snyders served as pioneer church planters in Madagascar; city leaders for Cape Town, South Africa; and missionary trainers for the sub-Saharan Africa affinity in Nairobi, Kenya.

He has a master of divinity from Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, a bachelor's degree from the University of Kentucky and is currently working on his Ph.D. from Southwestern Seminary.

The Snyders have three children — Waverly (16), Elodie (12) and Atticus (10). (TAB)



SNYDER



Photo courtesy of Hunter Street

Buddy Gray, longtime pastor of Hunter Street Baptist Church in Hoover, welcomes Chandler Snyder as he steps into the pastorate June 28. Snyder comes from the staff of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and is a former IMB missionary.

Authentic relationships will help churches reach Gen Beta

(continued from page 1)

- ▶ Critical thinking
- ▶ Creativity
- ▶ Emotional intelligence
- ▶ Digital ethics
- ▶ Resilience
- ▶ Empathy
- ▶ A clear moral compass rooted in truth
- ▶ Authentic relationships and emotional presence

- ▶ Collaboration
- ▶ Resilience and hope through faith
- ▶ Guidance in digital and moral discernment
- ▶ A strong sense of identity in Christ

Melia and Shane Pruitt offer practical tips for leaders in their book, "Reaching Generation Alpha."

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Students gather at UM for MFuge missions camp

Nearly 2,500 students representing 96 churches across the South will come to the University of Mobile this summer for MFuge Camps, a missions-focused experience that combines community service, spiritual growth and gospel-centered discipleship.

Hosted by Lifeway Christian Resources, MFuge campers will serve the Mobile community while participating in worship, Bible study and ministry experiences designed to strengthen their faith.

The University of Mobile has hosted FUGE Camps since 1981 and has served as one of the longest-running MFuge locations in the nation since the missions-focused camp model launched in 1996.

Through hands-on ministry and intentional discipleship, campers will have opportunities to discover God's calling, deepen their relationship with Christ and learn what it means to live on mission.

"MFuge reflects our shared commitment to making disciples and developing Kingdom leaders," said University of Mobile President Charles Smith. "We are grateful for this longstanding partnership and the opportunity to see lives transformed through the gospel as students serve the Mobile community and beyond."

Last summer at UM MFuge camps, 114 students made professions of faith in Christ, while 14 sensed a call to vocational ministry. Campers also served at 41 ministry sites throughout the Mobile area, contributing 1,428 hours of ministry and helping raise \$16,922 through the camp's missions offering.

Regional impact

The impact extended far beyond Mobile. Across all FUGE Camps locations last summer, 52,342 campers from 2,016 churches participated in missions experiences that resulted in 1,954 salvations and 479 calls to ministry. Campers gave more than \$445,000



Photo courtesy of the University of Mobile

through missions offerings and served at 381 ministry sites, contributing more than 10,700 hours of ministry in communities across the nation.

MFuge Camps are designed to help students move beyond learning about missions to actively living out their faith through service. Campers spend their days serving in local communities and their evenings gathering for worship, Bible study and fellowship.

The experience challenges students to see missions not as a one-week event, but as a lifestyle of following

Christ and serving others.

A hallmark of MFuge is its emphasis on hands-on ministry. Throughout the summer, campers will spread across the Mobile area to partner with local ministries and organizations serving people with a wide range of needs.

Variety of projects

Students may serve through construction, painting and yard work projects; children's ministry; recreation outreach; and social ministries that include food assistance programs, clothing distribution centers,

nursing homes and other community organizations.

The goal is to meet practical needs while building relationships and creating opportunities to share the love of Christ.

But for many students, the most significant moments of MFuge happen not through the projects they complete, but through the ways God works in their hearts throughout the week.

Whether through a profession of faith, a call to ministry or a renewed commitment to follow Christ, students often leave camp with a deeper understanding of God's purpose for their lives.

"One of the greatest joys of hosting MFuge is seeing students discover that God can use them right now to make a difference," Smith said. "Our prayer is that they leave Mobile with a deeper love for Christ, a greater heart for serving others and a renewed commitment to live for His Kingdom wherever He calls them." (UM)

Samford University selects Ream to lead Mann Institute

Samford University has selected Todd C. Ream to lead the new Mann Institute for Christian Faith & Learning.

An accomplished author, professor and administrator with 30 years of experience in higher education, Ream currently serves as university professor and executive director of faculty research at Indiana Wesleyan University, senior fellow for public engagement for the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities and publisher for Christian Scholar's Review.

Funded by an \$11 mil-

lion endowment from the late Samford alumnus and benefactor Marvin Mann, the Mann Institute aspires

to foster the integration of Christian faith across the disciplines to form educators for faithful service to students, the academy, and the Church.



REAM

A native of Fullerton, California, Ream holds degrees from Baylor University, Duke University Divinity School and Pennsylvania State University.

Ream and his wife, Sara, have two adult daughters. (Samford)

PROCLAIMERS

The goal of Proclaimers is to inspire students to embrace the gospel and proclaim God's truth to the world. Students will learn from the biblical examples of men and women who courageously proclaimed the truth and brought glory to God.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Called conference for teens and young adults

For a teenager or young adult, the call to ministry can seem like the most complex decision to wade through. That's why the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions created the Called conference.

The conference, which will be held Aug. 1 at Samford University, is a one-day event designed to help young men and women, high school through college, who are considering the life-changing call to ministry.

Called 2026 will feature powerful mainstage talks and breakout sessions led

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



by people who've walked the ministry path themselves, including featured speaker Kevin Blackwell, who serves as executive di-

rector of the Mobile Baptist Association and is assistant professor of disciple-making at the University of Mobile. With more than 30 years of ministry experience, he also has served as director of the Ministry Training Institute at Samford University.

He and the other conference speakers will share real stories, wisdom and tips to inspire and guide students as they step into their own journey.

The cost for the conference is \$30. For more information or to register, visit calledconference.org.

Children's Music Summit

It's back — a hands-on training event for preschool and children's music leadership to get you excited about teaching these precious children about God through music!

The Children's Music Summit offers exciting hands-on training for chil-

dren's choir workers and daycare workers. Discover new ways to make choir or music time a favorite for kids and watch the love for worship come alive in your preschoolers and children!

You'll also learn to use games and toys to add more fun to your music time.

This event features clinicians from all over the Southeast and beyond.

The Children's Music Summit will be Aug. 8, 8 a.m.–3:30 p.m. at First Baptist Church Trussville. For more information or to register, visit alabamaworship.events.

English as a Second Language workshop to be held in Decatur

Many internationals who live in Alabama have never had their own Bible or heard of Jesus specifically. Offering English classes is a great way to share the love of Jesus with them.

A first step toward getting involved is to attend

the upcoming ESL workshop set for July 31–Aug. 1 at First Baptist Church Decatur. You'll learn how to get started, organize the ministry, plan lessons and share your faith with your students.

The workshop will run

Friday from 1–8 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m.–4 p.m. To be certified, you must attend all 12 hours of training. The cost is \$25 and includes a teacher manual and meals.

To register, visit alsbom.org/esl.

WORD search

- DELIVER
- MIGHTY
- ETERNAL
- MOUNTAIN
- EXALT
- NATIONS
- FEARLESS
- PEACE
- FOREVER
- PRAISE
- FORTRESS
- PROTECTION
- GLORY
- REFUGE
- HEAVENS
- RIGHTEOUS
- HELP
- RIVER
- HOLY
- SALVATION
- HOPE
- SOVEREIGN
- JOY
- STRENGTH
- JUSTICE
- TRUST
- KING
- TRUTH
- LIGHT
- VICTORY
- MAJESTY
- WORSHIP

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"Send out Your light and Your truth! Let them lead me; let them bring me to Your holy hill and to Your tabernacle."

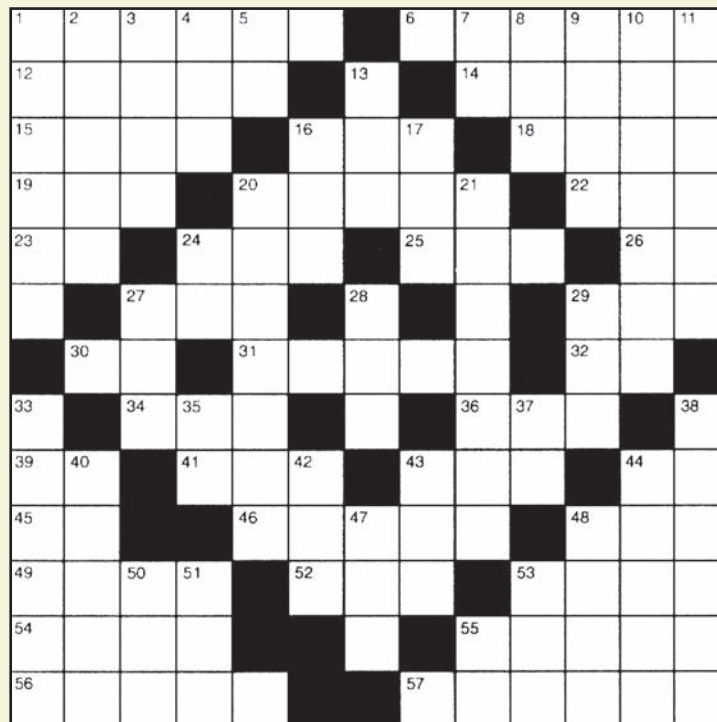
PSALM 43:3

CHRISTIAN Crossword



ACROSS

- 1. Compassionate. (James 5:11)
- 6. Pleasant and mild.
- 12. Musical saga.
- 14. Mount. (Esther 6:8)
- 15. Inquisitive.
- 16. Behold.
- 18. ___ weigh the path. (Isa. 26:7)
- 19. Taken in adultery in the very _____. (John 8:4)
- 20. Seat of affection. (Phil. 1:7)
- 22. Eccentric joker.
- 23. Left hand. (abbr.)
- 24. Introducing new angle. (Matt. 5:22)
- 25. Words of a talebearer ___ as wounds. (Prov. 26:22)
- 26. His banner over ___ was love. (Song of Sol. 2:4)
- 27. A memorial of _____. (Matt. 26:13)
- 29. For each.
- 30. Invitation to partake. (Isa. 55:1)
- 31. Herein is a marvelous _____. (John 9:30)
- 32. Hath translated ___ into the Kingdom. (Col. 1:13)
- 34. High priest. (1 Sam. 1:9)
- 36. He that hath an _____. (Rev. 2:7)
- 39. Either.
- 41. This ___ thing I do. (Phil. 3:13)
- 43. Woman's name.
- 44. Any one of God's children. (abbr.)
- 45. In regard to.
- 46. Merrily.
- 48. There's more.
- 49. Goliath's hometown. (1 Sam. 17:4)
- 52. Part of clay, part



By Martha Wall Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- of iron. (Dan. 2:41)
 - 53. Pagan city. (Isa. 37:13)
 - 54. Resound.
 - 55. Friendly expression.
 - 56. Where your treasure is, _____. (Matt. 6:21)
 - 57. ___ of gold in pictures of silver. (Prov. 25:11)
- DOWN**
- 1. Levels of intonation.
 - 2. Period.
 - 3. Snug habitat. (Ps. 84:3)
 - 4. Root out of ___ ground. (Isa. 53:2)
 - 5. Each. (abbr.)
 - 7. Wordless question.
 - 8. East of Eden. (Gen. 4:16)
 - 9. Describing metal or mettle.
 - 10. Takes for granted.
 - 11. Often a treasured communication.
 - 13. Satan's affirmative. (Gen. 3:1)
 - 16. Place.
 - 17. Historical time.
 - 20. Feeling pain.
 - 21. A great sadness.
 - 24. Exist.
 - 27. Gardening tool.
 - 28. Reward: death. (Rom. 6:23)
 - 29. To destroy them, and had cast _____. (Esther 9:24)
 - 33. God does not _____. (Isa. 49:15)
 - 35. Look.
 - 37. Associate in arts.
 - 38. Scratches.
 - 40. A measure to ___ even unto you. (2 Cor. 10:13)
 - 42. If any man ___ of this bread. (John 6:51)
 - 43. Beverage.
 - 44. Not fresh.
 - 47. A charged subatomic particle.
 - 48. Their feet run to _____. (Prov. 1:16)
 - 50. An article.
 - 51. Aaron's resting place. (Num. 20:25)
 - 53. An evil creature.
 - 55. Spanish. (abbr.)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Celebration 250 Alabama

This year marks our nation's 250th birthday, and we are praying for revival! Celebration 250 Alabama is a powerful movement with a vision to reach our state and nation with the Gospel.

As part of this statewide effort, churches and believers will unite in prayer, preparation and proclamation, lifting high the name of Jesus across Alabama and beyond leading up to the nation's 250th birthday.

The effort culminates with All-Church Alabama worship and prayer gatherings on September 30 and continues with Celebration 250 Revivals in multiple locations on October 1.

This initiative calls every church to join together in revival readiness, community outreach and sharing the message of salvation in Christ.

You can find resources for your church or more information about events at celebration250al.org.



Answering God's call

There's a need for more pastors, worship pastors and youth pastors, and often God is preparing them — they just need to be encouraged to accept His call.

That's what Calling Out the Called Sunday on Aug. 9 is for — to ask church members to rise up and answer God's call to lead churches. The prayer is that

Alabama Baptist pastors will utilize their Sunday morning service to preach, teach and sing about the ways in which God calls out the called.

For more information or resources to help your church participate in Calling Out the Called Sunday, visit callingoutthecalledal.org.

Reaching and Teaching the Next Generation

Reaching and Teaching the Next Generation is a great opportunity to equip your preschool and children's ministry leaders.

Shelly Melia, director of family ministry and children's ministry programs at Dallas Baptist University, will be the featured speaker

at the event, which is set for Aug. 9, 2:30–5:30 p.m., at Westwood Baptist Church in Alabaster.

There will also be more than 10 breakout conferences. There is no charge for this event.

To register, visit alsbom.org/nextgen.

Hope Road Ministry encourages pastors

By Leann Callaway
The Alabama Baptist

For many pastors, the road to longevity in ministry is often the “road less traveled,” as many are unable to endure the test of time or withstand struggles along the way.

Mike Ward understands firsthand. That’s why with 36 years’ experience in church engagement, and having served as a pastor in five churches in three states, he has started on a new journey focusing on “an intentional ministry of hope to every pastor, preacher and man.”

Inspired by the Holy Spirit and his own difficult experiences, Ward, a member of West Point Baptist Church in Cullman, started Hope Road Ministry as a way to encourage pastors to stay the course and to build them up.

“I’ve been victorious on the mountaintop and also

been spiritually exhausted in the valley,” Ward said. “I’ve walked through failures and victories. I’ve experienced the work of repentance as well as the work of restoration. God has called me to encourage the man of God.”

Restoration

And for those who have “made a wrong turn in their Christian life or ministry,” Hope Road strives “to let them know that we are here to help them get back on the right road, the road filled with hope to witness victory and restoration in Jesus,” he added.

Ward was called to preach at a young age and for 16 years served as pastor of churches in Mississippi, Tennessee and Alabama.

“I went through a struggle in my last pastorate,” Ward acknowledged. “God had blessed our church ... but I was spiritually spent.”



Submitted photo

Mike Ward, founder and director of Hope Road Ministries, desires to equip and encourage pastors.

“I found myself, as too many preachers do, studying my Bible for ‘something to preach to my congregation’ instead of studying my Bible so that Jesus and the Holy Spirit could preach to me, and that is dangerous.”

Burned out, he left his church and his marriage, mistakes he admits in his desire to prevent other pastors

from making the same ones.

“An alarming number is that 86% of pastors’ wives say the ministry has had a negative effect on their family. We have to help.”

Troubling statistics

From those troubling statistics and his own experiences, Ward knows the importance of intervention and

prevention, and he is committed to trusting the Lord to provide opportunities to reach struggling pastors.

“Sharing the gift of encouragement is the most amazing blessing,” he said.

Hope Road Ministries offers a variety of resources and programs, but “there is no manual on this ministry. ... It is ever-evolving as the Holy Spirit leads,” he said.

Ward hosts various events, including some meals specifically for pastors and others for pastors and their wives. He also is available for one-on-one meetings — even if it’s just a cup of coffee and prayer.

“I want to be able to say ... ‘the bridge is out at the bottom of the road you are on. Be careful.’ ... I have a compelling desire to encourage the man of God, so he doesn’t have to experience life on the broken road I traveled.”

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CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR

Dalraida Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama, is accepting resumés for a senior pastor. Visit <https://www.DalraidaBaptist.com/pastor> for more information.

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.

PASTOR

Brent Baptist Church in Bibb County, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a part-time pastor (up to 20 hours a week) who has a heart for missions, outreach and growing disciples. Please email resumés to our church office at brentbaptist.office@gmail.com

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Goodwater Baptist Church, Goodwater, Alabama, is searching for a bivocational pastor. Please submit resumés to: sneighbors52@charter.net.

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.

INTERIM MINISTER OF MUSIC

Hillwood Baptist Church is currently seeking an interim minister of music. Send resumé to: Melodie Valentine, Chairman of Personnel, 15126 Balsam Drive SE, Huntsville, AL 35803.

OTHER POSITIONS

ASSOCIATIONAL MISSION STRATEGIST

The Autauga Baptist Association is seeking a God-called, visionary leader to serve as our next associational mission strategist (also known as director of missions). This full-time position provides spiritual, strategic and relational leadership to approximately 31 Southern Baptist churches and one Hispanic mission in Autauga County. Interested candidates are asked to submit: 1) a resumé or curriculum vitae; 2) a cover letter sharing your personal testimony, your call to ministry, your missional experience and your philosophy of associational ministry; and 3) a link to recent sermons (video preferred). Please email your submission to: abasearchc

mte@gmail.com or mail to: the Autauga Baptist Association, 326 S. Washington St., Prattville, AL 36067. Submissions will be accepted through July 18.

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 July 15. 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.

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~A resource for congregational vitality~

Let me give you something to talk about

Remember the romantic love Bonnie Raitt sang about in her 1991 recording: “Let’s give ’em something to talk about.” I want to give you something much better to talk about — love for the good news of Jesus.

Over the past 2,000 years, various approaches have gathered people for worship and discipleship and then sent them out locally and globally to share the good news.

Strategies for launching and developing churches have varied, yet the message remains the same. And the primary vehicle for the message is congregations of various sizes, types, locations and styles, in multiple contexts, and with a variety of ways, sharing the good news.

Kingdom growth

In North America, among Christian groups that focus on launching new congregations of various types using various methodologies, we have seen a shift over the last four decades that has changed the character and nature of church and Kingdom growth.

One issue to talk about is: Do congregations multiply other congregations with a unique and shared vision among the launch team? Or do church planters do the multiplication based on their personal vision?

A second issue is whether existing congregations should launch new campuses with the same vision as the main campus, or whether they should launch new congregations with a distinct vision from God.

A third issue is perhaps the most important. This is due to the shift over the past four decades toward church planters launching new congregations (rather than investing in established congregations) and the growing trend of multi-site congregations.

Given the trend that fewer people in North America — as a percentage of the population — are becoming and growing as disciples in evangelical congregations, do we need to reconsider the approaches we now accept as the norm?

Key difference

I believe this is a key difference between a Christian movement focused on “strong” congregations and one focused on “soaring” congregations, as I outline in my recent book “Soaring with Faith: The Difference Maker for Congregations.”

Strong congregations either send out

church planters with a personal vision for a new congregation, or they launch a campus with the same vision at the central multi-site congregation. This is a church-growth approach.

Soaring congregations launch new congregations — often with the assistance of a couple of other congregations in their association — with a unique vision for the community context or people group to whom God is sending them. This is a Kingdom-growth approach.

If your core commitment is to fulfill the Great Commission, your love for the good news of Jesus should prompt you to talk about the difference between Kingdom growth and church growth.

My conviction is that we have moved over the past four decades toward valuing the growth of individual church congregations more than the growth of the Kingdom throughout our God-empowered movement of Christians.

How do you see it?

The reality is that our strategies over the past four decades have led to a decline in membership and attendance. Something is not working.

Despite our proclamations of being “all in” to fulfill the Great Commission, we appear to be going backward. Is that acceptable to you?



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 Jay T. Robertson, Ph.D.

Professor of Systematic Theology, University of Mobile



For July 19

VITAL DECISION Joshua 24:14–24

This chapter contains Joshua's final words to the people of Israel. Joshua's speech (vv. 2–15) is followed by a series of responses by the people and Joshua (vv. 16–24). The primary theme of this section is worshipping the Lord faithfully by forsaking all other gods of the people in the land.

Although Joshua was skeptical of their commitment to the Lord, Israel vowed to remain faithful. Joshua then made a covenant with the people at Shechem, and he wrote it in the book of the law of God.

Challenge (14–18)

Joshua began his challenge by reminding the people how God had faithfully provided for them. The Lord had brought Abraham to the land of Canaan and multiplied his descendants. God had watched over them while they were in Egypt, destroyed their enemies and delivered them from slavery in Egypt.

After being with them in the wilderness for 40 years, the Lord brought them into the promised land. He defeated the peoples living in Canaan and gave them the land. Everything they had was due to God's kind providence.

Built upon these truths, Joshua challenged the nation to "fear the Lord and worship Him in sincerity and truth."

Fearing the Lord is not bowing down to Him with terror and dread. Rather, it is having a deep-seated reverence and awe for Him that would cause them to hate evil and reject all other gods.

Following the Lord is not simply going through the ritualistic motions of worship. Worship of the Lord is done with blamelessness and in truth, which can never be done in the presence of other loyalties. Idolatry had always been an issue for Israel.

Joshua challenged the people to make a choice to follow the Lord faithfully.

The Lord would not accept any attempt at syncretism. He is a jealous God and requires undivided devotion.

Joshua made it clear where he stood: "As for me and my family, we will worship the Lord" (v. 15). The people promised to worship the Lord as Joshua challenged them to do. They promised to stay away from the influence of pagan gods, obey the Lord and worship Him alone.

Warning (19–24)

Joshua was skeptical about the people's commitment to serve the Lord faithfully, but the people remained firm in their intentions.

In Exodus 19 and 24, the people whom the Lord had brought out of Egypt boldly proclaimed that they would do everything the Lord commanded them to do. In each case they quickly forsook the Lord. Joshua was just as skeptical about those who made the same promises at Shechem.

Joshua's skepticism highlights the inability of the people to follow the Lord faithfully.

They did not possess hearts capable of keeping the law of God. Brothers and sisters, we should never get over the blessings we experience every day as new covenant believers (Ezek. 36:25–27).

While again affirming their loyalty to the Lord with their words, some of the people were still clinging to pagan gods. Don't play with God. God is not to be taken lightly. Joshua commanded the people to repent and turn their hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.

This appeal is still relevant to people today who need to leave behind the idols of their hearts and worship the Lord wholeheartedly. May the Lord grant us the grace to trust Him and live our lives as an act of worship for His glory.

For July 26

CONSEQUENCES Judges 2:11–23

Although the Lord had given all the promised land to the Israelites by the time of Joshua's death, there were still areas in their tribal allotments where they needed to drive out the inhabitants and possess the land. After some measure of success at first, they were unable to drive out the Canaanites in the valley (1:2–19). The Israelites compromised with the Canaanites and agreed to coexist with them.

Therefore, the Lord declared that He would not drive out the Canaanites from the land. The Canaanites would therefore be thorns in their sides, and their gods would be a trap to them.

The Evil (11–15)

As soon as Joshua and the elders who served with him died, the next generation arose, which did not know the Lord or the works He had done for Israel (2:10). As predicted by Moses, Israel did "evil in the Lord's sight," which refers to idolatry. In contrast to Joshua's contemporaries, who had served the Lord (v. 7), Israel now served the Canaanite storm-fertility god Baal and the war-love goddess Astarte in their various local forms. This explains why these false deities are called "Baals" in verse 11 and "Ashtoreths" in verse 13.

These so-called deities were attractive to Israel because they promised their worshippers agricultural prosperity, abundant offspring and national security. By rejecting God, Israel provoked the Lord's jealous anger.

Because of their disobedience, God took away the prosperity and security Israel hoped their pagan gods would provide. He delivered His people into the hand of marauding invaders and the hostile nations around them. When the Israelites went to battle, the Lord actively opposed them and brought about their defeat, just as He had threatened to do (Deut. 28:25).

The Cycle (16–19)

Even in anger, the Lord did not

abandon Israel.

When they groaned under the oppressive hand of their enemies, the Lord was moved to pity on their behalf. The absence of any mention of repentance highlights both God's mercy and Israel's spiritual poverty.

God's pity moved Him to deliver His people through divinely appointed military leaders called judges who were also responsible to give the people moral guidance. God's mercy, however, had no lasting impact on the nation. They quickly turned from the path of obedience and prostituted themselves to pagan gods. Each new generation acted more corruptly than the previous one.

Throughout the Book of Judges, we encounter repeated cycles. First, Israel abandoned the Lord and worshipped Canaanite gods. Second, God judged His people by allowing their enemies to oppress them. Third, Israel cried out to God for deliverance.

Fourth, the Lord demonstrated pity for His people by raising up a judge to deliver them. Fifth, there was a period of peace during the lifetime of the appointed judge. And sixth, the Israelites would persist in rebellion against God and act more wickedly than the previous generation.

The Declaration (20–23)

"The Lord's anger burned against Israel." God will not tolerate idolatry among His people. Because His people violated the covenant He had made with them, He declared He would not drive out the nations left in the promised land.

God left the inhabitants in the land to test Israel. Would they turn back to God and walk in His ways like their forefathers, or would they continue in rebellion against Him? The Lord did not grant His people victory over the Canaanites in the land. Israel's unfaithfulness resulted in the loss of God's blessing.

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

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sunday School Lessons

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

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For July 19

FELLOWSHIP WITH BELIEVERS 1 Corinthians 1:1–13

For church folks, the word “fellowship” probably brings to mind a favorite casserole or dessert, but fellowship is much more than a meal or gathering on a congregational calendar. In fact, in its broadest sense, fellowship can’t be scheduled. It’s not merely something that we do; it’s something that we have because of who we are. The primary word for fellowship in the Greek New Testament is “koinonia.” It occurs 20 times and emphasizes things held in common — the life, work and hope of the Church that all believers share through our union with Christ.

Fellowship with other believers comes because of a shared trust and commitment to Jesus Christ. (1–3)

Corinth was a large and wealthy city in Paul’s day known for its temples to various gods, its lucrative trade route and tourism from its famous athletic competitions. In such diverse places, people tend to associate with those of similar status, background, interest or employment, often creating tension and rivalry with others.

In the greeting of his letter to the Church, Paul begins with his own calling as an apostle by the will of God, emphasizing his authority and responsibility to address the Corinthian church. He moves quickly, however, to the calling of the Corinthians themselves. They have been sanctified in Christ, meaning they are made holy by His sacrifice for their sins but also that they are set apart. Their primary identity is no longer their occupation or ethnicity or family. They have been called together into one new family with all of those who trust in Jesus.

Fellowship is strengthened and enriched as Christ works through us. (4–9)

Paul’s gratitude for God’s grace

among the Corinthians is further expressed in his mention of their gifts. The Corinthian church had given evidence of their faith in Christ through effective teaching and testimony (speech) based on clear understanding of the gospel (knowledge). Though Paul will address deficits in these areas, here he celebrates them as gifts from God to enrich the Church.

Spiritual gifts are abilities given by God for faithful use by believers to strengthen the congregation for service and love. We see sample lists of such gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12 and Ephesians 4, though these are not exhaustive.

Great emphasis has been placed on discerning one’s gifts, but perhaps a better approach is to simply serve faithfully and love sacrificially, allowing gifts to be revealed in the context of ministry and affirmed by those with whom we serve.

Fellowship is lost when we divide over preferences and opinions. (10–13)

Paul turns next to his disappointment over the division within the Corinthian church. Groups had formed around distinctive doctrines or practices and had even been associated with well known teachers Cephas (Peter), Apollos, Paul and even Christ.

Exclusive connections to these four were only imaginary, but the conflict the groups created was all too real. Paul pleads with them to return to the common ground of the gospel.

While there is room for Christians to hold diverse tastes and opinions on matters such as worship styles or politics or even to disagree about fine points of doctrine, under the headship of Christ and the authority of Scripture, we are one.

Our fellowship is a powerful testimony of His work in us and our willingness to set it aside damages our witness. Set apart at the cross, we now belong to Him and, just as much, to each other.

For July 26

WISDOM FROM GOD 1 Corinthians 1:20–25; 2:9–16

A little gardening proverb helps explain the difference between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge tells you that a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom tells you that it doesn’t belong in a fruit salad. Knowledge involves facts, but wisdom goes further to meaningful insights and applications. Even in a day with unprecedented access to information, when we live our lives without wisdom, our observations will be shallow and our conclusions self-serving. We need true wisdom.

Worldly wisdom amounts to foolishness. (1:20–25)

Paul contrasts the wisdom of the world with the wisdom of God. Jews expecting a Messiah who would work mighty miracles to deliver and exalt his people would be scandalized by a humiliated king. In fact, the Greek word for “stumbling block” in verse 23 is “skandalon.” Greeks (Gentiles), who prided themselves on their culture and civility, would reject a dying Savior.

Our world has the same reaction. Those who justify themselves — who are wise in their own eyes — will refuse to see their sin and their need for atonement. Those seeking comfort and applause will never follow one who lays down his life and would be even less likely to lay down their own.

But Paul declares the wisdom of this world to be foolishness. To live for this life alone is to foolishly forfeit eternity. To live for oneself alone is to miss the real joy and peace that Jesus gives today. The world sees the cross as a loss but, for those who are in Christ, it is infinite gain.

The Holy Spirit reveals the mind of God. (2:9–11)

The wisdom of God is made

known to us by the Holy Spirit, who lives in every believer (Rom. 5:5, 8:9). Paul tells the Corinthians that the Spirit reveals the “depths of God” — His very thoughts — for the guidance and benefit of His people.

The primary way that the Spirit makes the thoughts of God known is through the illumination of Scripture. According to theologian Robert Reymond, illumination is “the Holy Spirit’s enabling of Christians generally to understand, to recall to mind and to apply or grasp the Scriptures they have studied.”

Consider what an immense privilege it is that the Spirit of God lives within us to make His Word plain and help us to live by it. How vital it is, then, that we are diligent in our study and meditation upon the Scriptures.

We must depend on the Holy Spirit to distinguish God’s will from human thinking. (12–16)

In verse 12, Paul once again makes a contrast, this time between who we were before we were saved and who we now are in Christ. Few would know more about this transition than Paul, who was knocked to the ground on the road to Damascus only to rise as an entirely new man. His new perspective on God, the world, himself and virtually everything else was a gift. He here reminds his readers that their perspective on life has changed. They are spiritual and can see things spiritually.

Others may regard our devotion to Jesus, our hope of eternal life, our commitment to holy living and even our love for our neighbors as foolish. When they do we must be patient, maintaining a gracious witness, but we should not be surprised. We have been transformed by the cross. Worldly wisdom is folly to us now because we’ve been given the mind of Christ.

“For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

1 Corinthians 1:25

Willing vessels

Building SonLight Ranch: How a 'God-sized dream' is becoming reality

By Rachel Seale
The Alabama Baptist

Shirley Windham Jay's face lit up as she navigated her golf cart through the tall grass on the Moundville property she and her husband bought after they felt God leading them to sell their house in Northport and open a ranch for rescued horses where children can come learn about Jesus.

Jay laughed as she explained how she and her husband Chuck uprooted their "comfortable lives" to start turning their "God-sized dream" into a reality.

"We can't seem to escape it, so we gave in and said, 'OK, Lord, have your way,'" Jay said.

The idea for SonLight Ranch is now more than a dream. The couple hopes to build a hospitality building for praise and worship nights and spiritual retreats for groups to enjoy.

"When they come to a spiritual retreat or a praise and worship night, they learn that it's all about relationships, about your first-and-foremost relationship with God and with other people," Jay said. "In the hospitality building, I want a big sign that [says], 'People need community like horses need a herd.'" Jay envisions packing Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes, having story time and doing crafts with children in the hospitality building.

Helping children

Jay spent 38 years in the classroom as an elementary school teacher and reading intervention teacher, so children have always had a special place in her heart. Students often told her about their home lives and family struggles. She said she thinks kids deserve a place to escape and to not only have fun, but to also learn about their true worth in Jesus.



Photo courtesy of Shirley Windham Jay

One day as Jay drove home from work, she heard Kim Meeder on the radio tell about starting Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch. Jay recalled the way Meeder bonded with a horse after familial tragedies as a little girl.

"I hear that radio show, and it's like a dream just got planted inside of me," Jay said. "I had grown up with horses, and I love horses and I never thought I would have a horse again."

In October 2023, the Jays attended the IGNITION event at Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch where they learned more about starting their own ministry.

Chuck Jay is a solar designer and installer, and he often receives information from SonLight Power, which is a missions-minded organization. The couple loved the name and decided to use "SonLight" in the title of their own ministry.

"Our vision statement is 'to illuminate the love of God that He demonstrated through His Son, Jesus Christ, and to populate heav-

en,'" Jay said. "We want people to come to know Christ here."

The couple was baptized together in the pond on the property about a month after moving to Moundville. They hope other baptisms will follow.

Jay now has two horses and one pony that a friend sold her after Jay helped care for them one summer.

Impeccable timing

"God knows us better than we know ourselves," Jay said. "God's timing is impeccable."

The Jays have been living in a small camper on their property since July 2025. The couple's new house is almost finished being built. Jay said they added an upstairs loft area to their new home for college students to be able to spend the night during retreats.

A few years ago, the couple drove around looking for land to buy, and God provided the perfect place when the timing was right.

Jay recalls laying on the couch with COVID in April 2024, wonder-

ing what she and Chuck were getting themselves into as she got the call saying their offer on a 65-acre property was accepted.

"We believe we're actually doing this for a couple of younger couples probably one day because I'm 62 and he's 68," Jay said.

Speaking to hearts

The couple's prayer is that the ranch experience will be completely free to the public, so they are in the process of applying for 501(c)(3) status to become a nonprofit ministry. This would allow donations from supporters to be tax deductible.

"We don't want anybody to not get to come, you know, because of money," Jay said.

God continues to make a way for SonLight Ranch to become a reality by constantly sending people to the Jays.

Teams from Builders for Christ, God's House of Hope and West Alabama Mechanical, a mechanical contractor in Moundville, have cleared trees and built fences on the property.

Jay said she also prayed for God to provide the ranch with saddles and bridles. One man who serves on the prayer team alongside the Jays at their church told them God woke him up at 5 a.m. to tell him he needed to give the couple his saddle.

"I was just blown away," Jay said. "And I said, 'Well, I've been praying for saddles.'"

Jay said her husband also wanted a tractor for the ranch. Her cousin's husband heard God tell him to provide Chuck with a tractor.

"God wants our lives to be an adventure," Jay said. "There's so much He wants to do. He just needs willing vessels, but you've got to ask Him so you'll know what to do."