

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



IMB photo

Buildings were reduced to rubble when two earthquakes hit Venezuela on June 24. Send Relief partners responded within 24 hours and are committed to continued relief efforts.

Gospel hope

God at work — food, medicine, training — even before Venezuela quakes

When two powerful earthquakes struck Venezuela's north-central coast at the end of June, lives changed in an instant.

Hundreds of buildings were damaged or destroyed. Thousands of families were forced from their homes, many sleeping outside out of fear. Churches, schools and neighborhoods are now helping shelter those with nowhere else to go.

But long before the earthquakes, God was preparing His Church. Send Relief and its parent organization, the International Mission Board, have partnered with Venezuelan Baptist churches to strengthen communities through practical compassion and gospel hope.

Venezuelan churches are feeding families, providing medicine and medical care, and bringing hope to their neighbors in Jesus' name.

The destruction across Venezuela is heartbreaking. Families have lost loved ones. Thousands remain displaced. The road to recovery will take months — and likely years.

God's faithfulness

Yet even in the midst of tragedy, we can see God's faithfulness. Churches were already present. Food ministries were already serving. Medicine was already available.

Disaster response leaders had already been trained.

Because of your generosity, these ministries were in place before the earthquakes happened. Thank you for helping the local church respond with compassion, courage and the love of Jesus. (IMB)

EDITOR'S NOTE — To read this story in its entirety, visit tabonline.org/Venezuela.

SPOTLIGHT SPONSOR ...

Beeson Divinity School — Faithful formation for lifelong ministry



'A tribe'

'What surprised me was finding community,' writer says

By Dianna L. Cagle
The Alabama Baptist

Writers attending the recent Southern Christian Writers Conference in Birmingham left with new friends and ideas, as well as helpful tips to continue their writing journeys.

"I came expecting opportunities to meet authors, editors, publishers, agents and other writers," said Carolyn Donaldson, an author and real estate agent from Tennessee. "What surprised me was finding community, a tribe, ... a family of believers using their gifts in different ways for the same purpose ... to honor Christ through their work."

Around 200 writers attended SCWC June 19–20 at The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham. The annual event also featured a book room, prayer room and keynote speakers Charles Ghigna, also known as Father Goose, and Cindy Sproles, a Tennessee native who writes devotions and books set in the Appalachian Mountains.

"My books, like yours, have taken me many places," said Ghigna, who has written more than 5,000 poems and written over 100 books. "Every time I have a new (book), it's my favorite."

Ghigna lives in Homewood, Alabama, and credits his wife with his inspiration. He urged the participants to write not for children but as a child. Ghigna read poems from "A Poem is a Firefly" and "The Very Hungry Caterpillar's First Poems," which he created with Eric Carle, author and illustrator of "The Hungry Caterpillar."

Importance of networking

Sproles told attendees, "Word of mouth is your best friend," when it comes to publicizing your work.

Commitment is also important. "You make time for the things that you want to do," she said. "When you make the time, that's practice, that's work. It's work that produces ... success."

She urged the writers to submit their work to competitions. "Put yourself out there," she said.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Each breakout session time featured a brainstorming time for writers to help each other get unstuck for next steps in the writing process.

Each year, SCWC celebrates outstanding writing with a few awards in different genres and mediums.

► **Magazine Article** — first place: Marla Price for "More than Meets the Eye" in Tailgate Magazine; second place: Doug Smith for "Kids and Chatbots: How dissenting views got me disinvented" in Mind Matters; third place: Deborah Malone, "Red Dirt People" in Georgia Backroads; honorable mention: Laura Lee Leathers, "A checkup from the neck up" in Mississippi Christian Living; and Vanessa Jones, "Role Reversal" in Home Life

► **Newspaper Article** — first place: Solomon Crenshaw Jr., "From Selma to Montgomery: Alabama marches for civil rights once again" in The Handbasket; second place: Tracy Riggs Frontz, "Ady's BIG army helping those with disabilities make 'beautiful things,'" in The Alabama Baptist; third place: April McCay, "Dad and me at the Vietnam Veteran Ceremony" in The Blount Countian

► **Short Fiction** — first place: Carole Lehr Johnson, "Heritage of Faith" in Semiquincentennial: A Collection of Diverse Short Stories; second place: Susan Poole, "Here Comes the Sun: Laurel's Story" in Songs of the Heart; third place: Cin-

dy Pye, "On a Skate and a Prayer" in Love for Keeps

► **Poetry** — first place: Kelly Mize, "A Guest Unseen," Anchored Magazine; second place: Bill King, "His Name is Jesus" in This Little Line of Mine: Lyrics, Lines, and Rhymes; third place: Eddie Burchfield, "To Be Kind is the Right Kind" in Chelsea Magazine; honorable mention: Rebecca Lusk, "The Stations of the Cross" in A Collection (East Side Writer's Group)

► **Blog Post** — first place: Billy Ready, "Listening Well, Loving Well"; second place: Susan Poole, "Splashing"; third place: Cyndy Pye, "Beauty and Difficulty"; honorable mention: Shea Pirtle, "His Signs"

► **Devotion** — first place: Kelly Mize, "A Whisper of Peace" in Arise Daily Devotions; second place: Mark Wainright, "He is Risen" in Go! Magazine; third place: Carissa Lovvorn, "Name in the Sky" in Coffee with God, vol. 6; honorable mention: Alice Murray, "New Chapter, New Perspective" in All Things New

This year's Joanne Sloan Award for the Encouragement of Writers was given to Cheryl Wray, coordinator of the Southern Christian Writers Conference.

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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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.

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The crossword puzzle
can be found on page 11.



GUEST EDITORIAL

for this week's edition of The Alabama Baptist

By Carrie Brown McWhorter, special assignments editor

'Commonplace' abilities allow us to serve, influence others

Very soon, Facebook feeds will be filled with first day of school photos — sweet faces that are all at once excited and nervous about another new beginning.

Things are different in the McWhorter family this year. My husband and I have been empty nesters for a while, but this fall is the first in 20 years that we don't have a student starting back to school.

Our children are "grown and flown," as the saying goes. And we are all at once excited and nervous about another new beginning.

Perhaps that's why the topics covered in this year's Back to Campus edition resonated with me (see section B in this issue).

Unlimited opportunities

Pastor and professor Michael Grayston challenges us to keep technology and its impact in perspective (see "AI has not caught God by surprise" on page 2B) and reminds us of an important truth: God's purpose for us is never limited to a particular profession or even a season in life.

From the moment of our conversion, our purpose is grounded in our relationship with Christ and our calling to love and serve others.

The most recent State of the Bible survey from the American Bible Society affirms how Scripture engagement reinforces that calling (see "Inspired view" on page 3B).

Inspired by God

Bible readers are more confident of their purpose in life and flourish, even amid challenges, because they view their calling as inspired by God, the 2026 survey finds.

When our children were at home, we sought to set an example of Bible study, prayer and service to the church and community. It was a responsibility and a calling.

Now the question is: Who is God calling us to disciple next?

While we may not have a clear and specific person or group in mind, we are confident that God's plan for us still includes serving those around us and pointing them to Jesus.

No matter the season you are in, if you are a follower of Christ, that is your calling too.

You may not realize it, but the simple act of reading The Alabama Baptist and The Baptist Paper each week is preparing you to help others.

Consider the value of this edition alone.

Do you know someone with a child with an intellectual disorder? That parent likely wonders what the future holds for their beloved child. Share the article on page 5B with them. Encourage them with information about programs designed to help these special students thrive.

Are you the parent or grandparent of a college student? Tell them about the ministries of the State Board of Missions that reach students with the gospel and help them grow in their faith (learn more on pages 10-11A and 9B).

Do you teach middle school or young high school students at church? Tell them about colleges that offer students a distinctly Christian college experience. Several are featured in this year's Back to Campus edition.

God gives you knowledge and experience for a reason — pray for opportunities to use it wisely.

Ordinary but special

A recent Facebook post by popular author and speaker Andy Andrews says it well:

"Many of us overlook our greatest assets because they come so naturally to us. The things we know. The skills we've developed. The lessons we've learned. The experiences we've survived."

"We assume they aren't particularly valuable because they've become ordinary to us. But what is ordinary to you may be life-changing to someone else.

"A teacher rarely thinks about how remarkable it is that she can explain a difficult concept. A mechanic doesn't marvel at the skills he's developed over decades. A grandmother may not realize the wisdom she's accumulated simply by living faithfully through life's ups and downs."

Fulfilling the mission

"The abilities that seem commonplace to us are often the very things that allow us to help others," Andrews noted.

The mission of TAB Media Group is to produce Christian resources to help you, your family and your church grow in faith.

It can become commonplace for our publications to arrive in your mailbox or inbox. Don't let that happen!

From the edition you are reading now to all our other resources, including our website, The Kids Edition, new books for adults and children, and so much more, TAB Media Group wants to help you live your purpose.

What is God calling you to in this season? Who will you help today?

Your Voice



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

Adding life to your years with abundant living

A recent ad for the WHOOP Advanced Labs app explains the difference between “healthspan” and “lifespan.” With healthspan, “the goal is to add life to your years, not just years to your life.”

They are referring to improving your health. However, adding life to your years is a general definition of abundant life. Jesus said, “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). Let’s look at three aspects of abundant life.

First, there is the appropriation of abundant life. According to Roget’s Thesaurus, an appropriation is “something, as a gift, granted for a definite purpose.”

Abundant life is a gift connected to the gift of eternal life. Someone explains, “abundant life does not

consist of an abundance of material things. If that were the case, Jesus would have been the wealthiest of men. But just the opposite is true.”

Matthew 8:20 says, “And Jesus said to [a certain scribe], ‘Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.’” Jesus’ purpose for coming to earth was to provide life eternal and abundant (John 10:10b) to everyone who would believe in Him and receive Him as Savior and Lord (John 1:12–13).

Appreciation

Second, there is the appreciation of abundant life. To genuinely appreciate abundant life, you must specifically define it. The word translated “abundant” comes from the Greek word “perisson,” meaning “exceedingly, very highly, beyond measure, more, superfluous, a quantity so abundant as to be

considerably more than what one would expect or anticipate.”

Ephesians 3:20 reads, “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.”

Vance Havner observes, “I’m often amused and amazed at the way we equate Christianity with success, popularity and prosperity. We may not admit it, but we use the same old gauge the world uses, except we employ religious language. It would appear that gain is godliness with us, in spite of Paul’s formula that godliness plus contentment equals great prosperity” (1 Tim. 6:6–11). Paul exhorts in Colossians 3:2, “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.”

Third, there is the application of abundant life. Note the word twice translated “may” in John 10:10b. This speaks of the possibility of possessing abundant life. You must take it and make it personally yours.

Jesus prayed in His high priestly prayer in John 17:3, “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

As someone notes, “This definition makes no mention of length of days, health, prosperity, family or occupation. As a matter of fact, the only thing it does mention is knowledge of God, which is the key to a truly abundant life.”

Franklin L. Kirksey
Robertsdale, Alabama

3 tips for success in college, life

1. Set intentional priorities. Decide what is important to you. Make those things the center of your activities at the start of school. If your faith matters to you, then that must be a priority. Priorities help someone decide what to do and not to do when there are lots of choices.

2. Choose friends carefully. Your friends have a big influence on where you go, what you do and who you become. Make friends by your priorities. If your friends have similar priorities, you are more likely to practice those priorities. Keep hanging out with other believers who will encourage and help you.

3. Face doubts about faith and Scripture head-on. Tough questions will come, but just because you do not know an answer does not mean there isn’t one. Ask people who know more than you do. Remember the words of the father who brought his sick son to Jesus: “I do believe! Help me overcome my unbelief!”

Arliss Dickerson
Adapted from “162 Tips & Hacks for College Freshmen”

Vacation Bible School

There are many ways to prepare for Vacation Bible School. Prayer is an obvious one. Prayer walking offers every church member an opportunity to lay an intentional, strategic spiritual foundation for ministering to children.

Pray in every room, hallway, classroom, doorway and outdoor space used by your church.

Prayer walking turns preparation into worship as the Holy Spirit reminds us that VBS is far more than an event. It is a ministry of the church and one of its largest evangelistic outreach opportunities.”

Nancy Duggin
Prayer catalyst
Tennessee Baptist
Mission Board

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“Your time can be used to bless people, solve problems and expand God’s Kingdom. It would be a tragedy to waste it.”

RICHARD BLACKABY

Author and Bible study leader

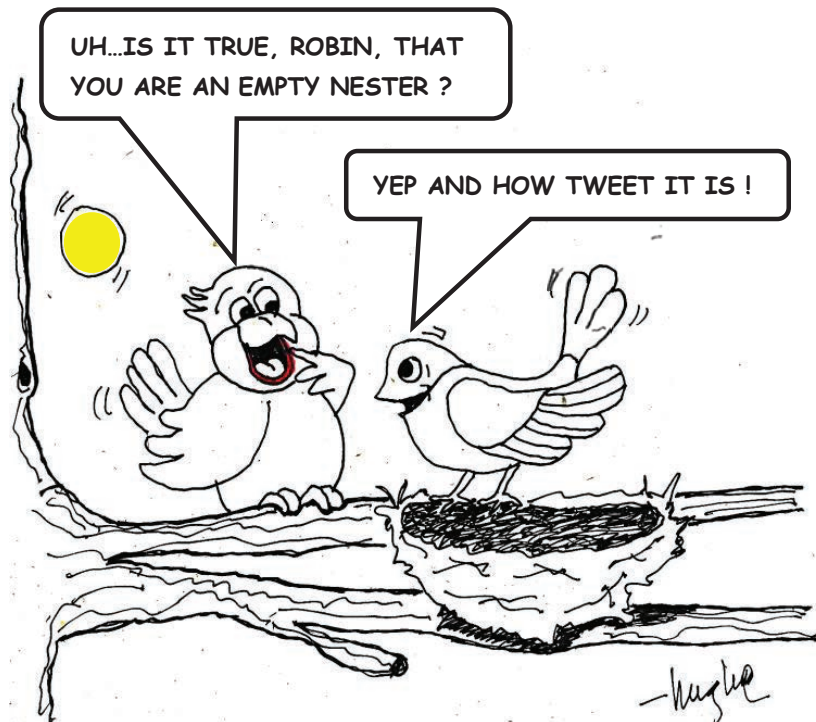
“I always strived to be a shining light to these children. I made many friends, and I still get hugs today,” said **Jane Davis**, a retired bus driver and member of Lakeview Baptist Church in Pembroke, Kentucky. “You don’t know what these children live under. They just need somebody to love them and be kind.”

“The Bible teaches that sin has a ripple effect that harms not only the participant, but those around him. This seems particularly true for addictive behaviors, and gambling is no different,” said **Miles Mullin** of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission.

“Every Baptist institution exists at the Lord’s pleasure, not our own pleasure or the pleasure of any other person or group of people. We are not entitled to existence, no matter how long we’ve been around or how influential we’ve been or are.

No matter what life support we may be on, we will cease to exist when the Lord decides. We exist to serve Jesus and to do as He commanded us. Jesus’ commands can be fleshed out through us in seemingly endless ways, so we need to continually seek His direction for our institutions to be sure we are doing what He commands us to do,” **Eric Black**, executive director, publisher and editor of Baptist Standard.

Some believers “are rightly asking themselves what does it look like for me as a Christian to love my country: ‘I love God, and I love my country at the same time.’ And of course ... yes, we can. If we order them rightly, if we love God supremely, then we have these lesser commitments that we also have,” said **Dan Darling**, author of “In Defense of Christian Patriotism: Equipping Believers for Political Theology, Civic Duty and Love of Nation.”



www.hughkilpatrickcartoonist.com

FRIENDLY TWEETS

Lass WORDS

BY KEN LASS

The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Running your race

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (Heb. 12:1).

The New York City marathon is the largest running event in the world.

In 2024, 56,012 began the race, which winds through all five boroughs of America’s largest city. Yet among that huge number, fewer than 10 runners had a realistic chance of actually winning.

For most everyone else, the goal was not to win — it was simply to finish. Their competition was themselves. It didn’t matter what the crowd around them was doing. They had their own goal, their own race, and they were focused on accomplishing it.

Setting a goal

An overwhelming majority did. Out of more than 56,000, just 366 did not finish. Garth Barfoot was the oldest to cross the finish line, at 88.

It took him 11 hours and 23 minutes, but he got it done. Some people thought he was crazy and foolish to try at his age, but he didn’t care. He set a goal, trained for it and succeeded.

The verse from Hebrews tells believers we all have a race to

run, with the goal of living a godly life.

The movement away from God in our culture is making that a bigger challenge.

Kind of like running a marathon, we have to train for it — study God’s Word, get involved in ministry, socialize with fellow Christians. We have to stay spiritually hydrated.

Living water

Going to church and Bible study can provide that drink of living water.

We have to set the goal of finishing our Christian walk and focus on it. The secular world may think it foolish, even crazy, but that’s OK. They don’t get it. They’re running a different race, with a different goal.

When faithful Christians finish their life marathon, the One waiting at the finish line will be Jesus Christ Himself. He probably won’t hang a medal around your neck or give you a T-shirt. He will, however, welcome you to eternal paradise.

No matter when you finish, this will be a race you have won.

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

WALTER BELL STAGGS JR.

Walter Bell Staggs Jr., chaplain and lay minister from Mobile, died June 25. He was 85.

Staggs was a member of Cottage Hill Baptist Church, Mobile, and served as a trauma chaplain for eight years with what is now USA Health University Hospital.

He also served with Gideons International, the Billy Graham Rapid Response Team and as director and chief financial officer of a nonprofit to support missionaries and pastors in Nigeria.

He held a bachelor's degree in business administration and a law degree from the University of Alabama as well as a master of divinity in hospital chaplaincy from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.



STAGGS

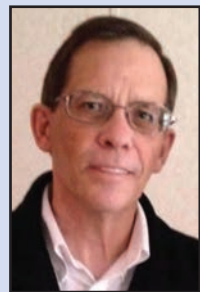
STEPHEN WALLEY

Stephen Walley, founder of Servants Alive Ministries and longtime pastor of Myrtlewood Baptist Church, died July 3. He was 68.

He served as pastor of Myrtlewood Baptist for the last 29 years and founded Servants Alive in 2003. The ministry encouraged pastors in their walk with Christ, their families' lives and ministry assignments. For the last 12 years, Servants Alive produced a yearly devotional "The Richly Indwelling Word" containing 365 devotionals written by various ministers, friends and business associates.

Walley was a graduate of the University of Mobile and received a master of divinity degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

He is survived by his wife of 32 years, Dot; four sons; one daughter; 11 grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.



WALLEY

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► David Awtrey (right) celebrated 20 years as senior pastor of **First Baptist Church Pinson** on June 28. The special service included guest preacher Craig Carlisle (left), first vice president of SBC and Etowah Baptist Association's director of missions, additional guest speakers, presentations and videos of congratulations. A meal followed with more shared memories honoring Awtrey and his wife, Lynne.

► **Matthew Morrison** is the new student minister of **Lakeside Baptist Church, Birmingham**. He previously served as pastor of students and missions for First Baptist Church Weaver. His wife is Morgan. Greg Corbin is pastor.



Submitted photo



Facebook photo

BLOUNT ASSOCIATION

► **New Home #1 Missionary Baptist Church, Blountsville**, held its final worship service in the original building July 5. Construction on the new worship center is nearly complete. Matthew Fallin is pastor.



Facebook photo

CHEROKEE ASSOCIATION

► **Kelsy Plummer** is the new children's ministry director of **Pine Grove Baptist Church, Centre**. She and her husband, Dallas, have seven children. Plummer is an experienced foster mom and elementary school teacher. Zach Richards is pastor.



Submitted photo

COOSA RIVER ASSOCIATION

► **Nicholas Gandy** is the new pastor of **Sycamore Baptist Church**. He previously served as pastor of Elkdale Baptist Church, Selma. He and his wife, Mary, have one child.



Facebook photo

ETOWAH ASSOCIATION

► **Damascus Baptist Church, Gadsden**, celebrated its 75th anniversary June 28 with gospel quartet The Alabama Cross-



Photo by Teresa Gamblin

men. Peggy Johnson (center) was recognized as the longest tenured member, and Wendell Dutton (right) from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented a plaque marking the anniversary to pastor Eddie Stevenson (left).

GENEVA ASSOCIATION

► Members of **First Baptist Church Samson** held a farewell lunch June 28 for DJ Sims, who served as associate pastor to students for eight years. Congregational leaders said Sims and his family will be greatly missed but they send them off to their next chapter with well wishes and gratitude.

MOBILE NETWORK

► **Mobile Baptist Network** will host Equipped Church Workshop on Aug. 15 from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at Highpoint Baptist Church, Eight Mile. Registration and continental breakfast will be available at 8 a.m. The plenary speaker will be Robert Mullins, executive director of Madison Baptist Association. Three breakout sessions will cover topics such as leadership tips, litigation concerns and church security. Tickets are \$10 per person. Please register by Aug. 6 at mobilebaptists.org/register.

MUSCLE SHOALS ASSOCIATION

► **Old Town Creek Baptist Church, Moulton**, paid the debt on its three-year-old sanctuary. A double tithe was encouraged on Easter, and the congregation answered by paying the remainder of the mortgage. During its annual homecoming May 24, (l to r) deacons Barry LouAllen, Daniel Duke, Wendell Mitchell, Kenneth Hanvy and Johnny Riggs, along with pastor Ronny Jones, burned the church's final note. Former interim pastor Tim Keenum was the guest preacher. Dinner on the grounds was served following the service.



Photo by Brianne Roberts

SULPHUR SPRINGS ASSOCIATION

► **John Foles**, pastor of **Bethel Baptist Church, Dora**, will be honored Aug. 2 for his 20 years of ministry at Bethel. Foles and his wife, Tommie Gail, have three adult children.

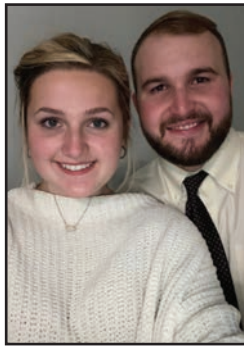


Submitted photo

NEWS

ST. CLAIR ASSOCIATION

► **Zac Bozeman** is the new associate pastor of **Eden Westside Baptist Church, Pell City**. He previously served as senior pastor of First Baptist Church Dora. He and his wife, Jordan, have two sons. Jacky Connell is pastor.



Facebook photo

TALLAPOOSA ASSOCIATION

► **Eagle Creek Baptist Church, Dadeville**, will celebrate its 175th anniversary Aug. 9. Worship begins at 10 a.m. with dinner on the grounds to follow. Wesley Price is pastor.



Facebook photo

TENNESSEE RIVER ASSOCIATION

► **Chad and Crystal McCrary** are the new directors of middle school ministries for **First Baptist Church Stevenson**. Chad will also serve as associate pastor. The couple has two sons. Ron Namanny is pastor.

OTHER

► The 69th annual **Alabama Baptist Deacons' Retreat** for men and boys will be held at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center, Aug. 7–8. The opening session begins at 2 p.m. Friday, and the final session begins at 3:30 p.m. Saturday. Keith Beatty will be the worship leader. Guest speakers for the sessions are Justin Hall, Roger Little, Bob Pitman, Jesus Navarro, John Brock, Jeff Allred, Gil McKee and Mike Go-forth. Visit alabamadeaconsretreat.org for lodging information and cost.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Email news items to news@thealabamabaptist.org. Please include complete details of the event or honor and at least one high resolution photo.



Photo courtesy of White Pond Baptist Church

Participating in the ribbon cutting are (l to r) Kenneth Fisher, project committee chair and visionary; J.W. Huett, chair of the deacons; Donnie Burns, pastor; and Autauga Association mission strategist Travis Coleman.

White Pond Baptist Church dedicates new multipurpose building

The congregation of White Pond Baptist Church in Marbury held a special dedication service and open house-style tour for its new multipurpose building June 24. The church shared a supper of Mexican food and cut a red ribbon to celebrate the addition to the campus.

Ministry assistant Amy Fray described the building as a gym with three “good-sized” education rooms and bathroom suites attached. Above the classrooms is an upstairs space that could be used for additional classrooms in the future. They plan to use the rooms for their

adult Sunday School classes, who have been meeting in a divided fellowship hall.

Fray said the project was a “longtime vision that God has brought to fruition very smoothly.” The builder was a professing Christian who “did not let the grass grow under his feet!”

Construction began in October 2025 and was completed in May. “We didn’t have to make anything happen,” Fray celebrated.

White Pond is a church in Autauga Baptist Association. Donnie Burns is pastor. (Taylor Inmon)

FBC Jacksonville breaks ground on new building

It’s been four years since members of First Baptist Church Jacksonville sold its north campus to Jacksonville State University, four years since the combined sites started meeting in the EaglePoint campus (part of the church since 2008) and three years since new land was purchased.

In moving forward, the church broke ground July 19 on its new building, which will sit on a 46-acre property. Pastor Derek Staples said he is grateful for this gift for many FBC generations to come.

“Whatever God puts in their hearts, they’ll be able to do,” he said.

Staples said the new building will house a state-of-the-art kids and youth wing, a big commons area and a fellowship hall with a



Rendering image courtesy of Chapman Sisson Architects

café. He expects the permanent worship center to be complete by 2030. Until then, the congregation with around 500 in Sunday morning attendance will worship in two services in what will become the permanent youth worship area.

This space can comfortably fit 350 people.

While church leadership and members had hoped to walk into a new building debt-free, a legal dispute with adjoining land owners — and the difference in construction costs following a few years of delay due to the litigation — means about one-third of the \$14 million project will be paid off over time.

Staples said the church is trusting in the Lord’s provision, noting the revenue from the future sale of the EaglePoint campus will go toward the remaining balance.

The congregation also has maintained unity throughout the process, he added.

“They have strived for a oneness that speaks to the gospel,” Staples said. “As a pastor, I just don’t want to mess it up!” (Taylor Inmon)

Former UM dean Cecil Taylor diligent in retirement

By Erin Roach

The Alabama Baptist

Cecil Taylor, former dean of the school of Christian studies at the University of Mobile, has not slowed down much in his 13 years of retirement, continuing to write, preach and teach as the Lord opens doors.

In March, Taylor visited UM to sign copies of his book "Patterns for a New Testament Church" and hand out copies of a flash drive called "Life Works" containing 65 years of sermons, Bible studies and other documents.

The book was inspired by the now out-of-print George McDaniel book "The Churches of the New Testament," and it developed from a series of sermons Taylor preached.

"I started out by showing scenes from the cities where the churches were located —

things that would have been there when Paul went there, such as pieces of the wall or an aqueduct or something," Taylor said.

Some have called "Patterns for a New Testament Church" a series of cameos of churches, he said.

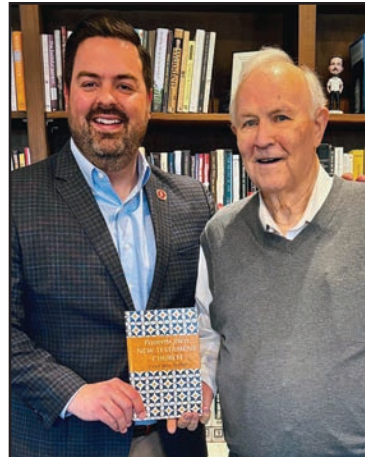
"My objective was not to focus on what New Testament churches believed. Plenty of books have been written about that. I wanted to investigate how they behaved," Taylor said. "What characterized these churches? What were their marks? What can we say

about how they operated?"

Taylor relied heavily on the Book of Acts and letters to the churches to formulate snapshots on governance, worship style, community impact, generosity and other topics.

As for Life Works, Taylor is ready to share a copy of the drive with anyone willing to send a mailing address and \$25 to cover the cost. It contains more than 600 sermons,

12 full sets of class notes from UM Christian studies classes, more than 30 studies on books of the Bible, more



Instagram photo
Cecil Taylor, former dean of the school of Christian studies at the University of Mobile, visits with UM president Charles Smith. Smith holds Taylor's book, "Patterns for a New Testament Church."

than 200 Sunday School lessons published by TAB and various theological materials from a lifetime of ministry.

A couple of friends who live near Taylor in Marshall, Texas, regularly use his material as they teach Sunday School classes, he said, and one of them preaches in a local prison using the flash drive content.

Taylor stays busy in retirement editing and writing, and he preaches and leads a Bible study at an independent living center near his home in Texas.

"I want to die with my boots on. I don't want to rust out," Taylor said. "I told the Lord long ago that if He opens doors, I'm going to walk through them unless He says, 'No.'"

Taylor said he and his wife are doing what they think God wants them to do, even though it looks a little different than they expected.

"We just let Him tell us what to do, and we go do it," Taylor said.

To order a copy of the Life Works flash drive, write to Taylor at drcrt@aol.com.

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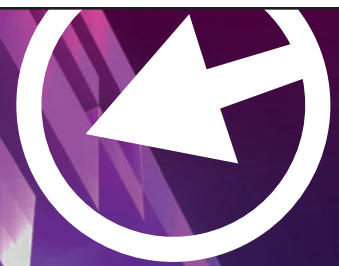
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Westwood Baptist Church, Alabaster

With Dr. Shelly Melia, *director of family ministry and children's ministry programs, Dallas Baptist University*



For more information, contact Janet Eikenberry, 334-613-2312, jeikenberry@alsbom.org, or visit kidzlinkal.org/next-gen

NEXTGEN

This conference is made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.

'AMAZING JOURNEY'

Wetumpka's Village Church celebrates 'another opportunity for growth'

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Patrick Franklin never thought he would be planting a church in Wetumpka. Honestly, he expected it to be in Phoenix, Arizona.

But God had other plans, and Franklin saw the "convergence" of those plans happen when Wetumpka's Village Church, a church plant now averaging around 150 in worship, met June 7 in a fully stocked facility gifted to them by another local congregation.

"We're just so excited about how we're going to reach the community now that we have our own space," Franklin said. "One thing

I'm trying to press into our people is that this isn't the finish line — this is a starting point."

In 2020, Franklin and his wife, Brooke, had toured Phoenix, "the hotbed of church planting," with the intention of moving there, he said. But when they prayed separately, they came back together with a "no" from the Lord.

"We knew we weren't supposed to plant there; we were supposed to plant where we came from," he said.

So they did, and in August 2023, Village Church was born, with Coosada Baptist Church serving as its sending congregation.



Photo by Brad Smith
Pastor Patrick Franklin prays during Village Church's first service in a building given to it by another local congregation in Wetumpka.

"It's just been this amazing journey of watching God do unbelievable things," Franklin said.

They've seen their min-

istries grow. They've held baptisms and conferences. And recently they've been averaging about 150 people in worship.

In April, a local church reached out to offer them a 25,000-square-foot facility sitting on 12 acres of property. It came fully stocked with chairs, tables and equipment.

"This is going to be just another opportunity for growth, another opportunity to reach deeper into this community," he said.

Kevin Garrett, director of missions for Elmore Baptist Association, said the tremendous growth at the church has been exciting.

"God has been gracious throughout the story of Village Church," he said. "I look for the Kingdom to be advanced in even greater ways as they remain faithful and God provides."

SALT

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SOUTH • THURSDAY, AUGUST 20
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, ANDALVSIA
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FOR SENIOR ADULT MINISTERS/LEADERS/TEAM MEMBERS

SESSION TOPICS:

- Beyond the Church Walls (Senior Adults on Mission in Your City)
Ed Cleveland, Minister of Senior Adults, Montgomery FBC
- Programming That Matters (Developing a Thriving Senior Adult Ministry)
Clay Layfield, Central Baptist Church, Warner Robins, Ga.

EVENT IS FREE — LUNCH INCLUDED — REGISTRATION REQUIRED NO LATER THAN AUG. 14. (VISIT [ALSBOM.ORG/SALT](https://alsbom.org/salt) OR SCAN THE QR CODE).

Questions? Contact Frank Jones at 334-613-2221 or email fjones@alsbom.org.



This conference is made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.



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 by

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



people who’ve walked the ministry path themselves, including featured speaker Kevin Blackwell, who

serves as executive director of the Mobile Baptist Network 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.

Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering

The legacy of two spiritual giants. Two periods of time. Two lives well lived for one mission — the Great Commission.

These two women — Kathleen Mallory and Dr. Martha Myers — are the namesakes for the offering that helps support these five Great Commission Ministries of Alabama Baptists: Alabama WMU, disaster relief, church planting, partnership missions and church revitalization.

The goal for this year’s Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering is \$1.2 million, and the Week of Prayer focus for the offering is set for Sept. 13–20.

Mallory — who served as leader of Alabama WMU from 1909 to 1912 and then head of national WMU for 36 years before she died in 1954 — lived a humble lifestyle so she could give as much money as possible to missions, said Candace McIntosh, executive director of Alabama WMU.

Myers, who grew up in an Alabama Baptist church, served 25 years as a medical missionary in Yemen before being killed by an extremist there in 2002.

The offering honors their legacy by funding these five strategic priorities that strengthen missions and ministries in Alabama and beyond.

For more information or resources to promote the offering and the week of prayer at your church, visit myers-mallory.org.

Church Weekday Education Conference for teachers and directors

If you’re a church preschool teacher or director, the Church Weekday Education Conference is for you.

We’ve got two options for you to attend:

- Aug. 7 at Westwood Baptist Church in Alabaster
 - Aug. 21 at Heritage Baptist Church in Montgomery
- This conference provides

credits to meet the training requirements of the Alabama Department of Human Resources.

For a list of topics or to register, visit alsbom.org/cwe.

WORD search

- | | |
|--------------|---------------|
| BLESSING | MOCKER |
| COMMANDMENTS | OBEDIENCE |
| CURSE | PEACE |
| DEATH | PRAYER |
| DISCERNMENT | PRIDE |
| EVIL | PURITY |
| FAITHFUL | RIGHTEOUSNESS |
| FEAR | SALVATION |
| FOOL | SCOFFER |
| FOOLISHNESS | SIMPLE |
| HOPE | TEACHING |
| HUMILITY | TEMPTATION |
| INTEGRITY | TRUST |
| JOY | TRUTH |
| LIFE | WICKED |
| LORD | WISDOM |

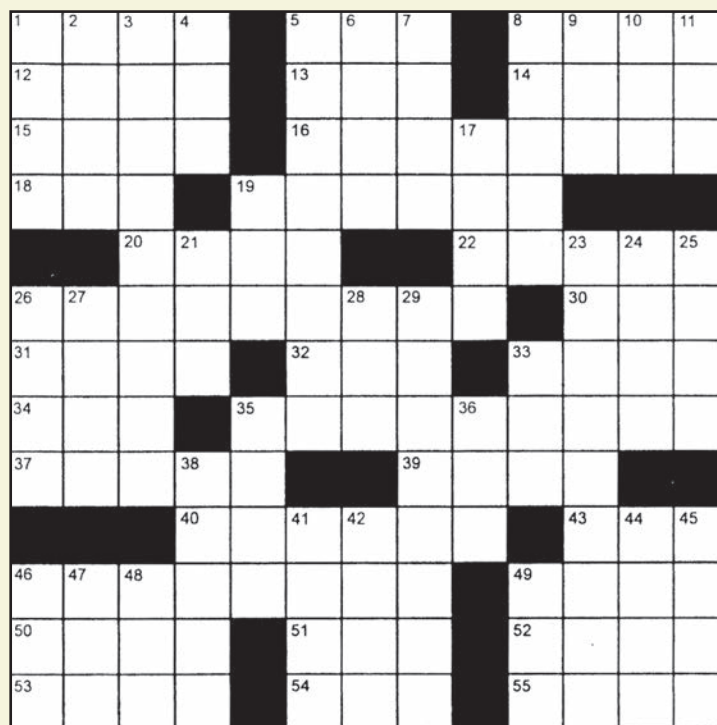
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L U F H T I A F Y W K M L V Y
N Q L P F O O L I S H N E S S
R S S E N S U O E T H G I R W

“Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore, get wisdom.
And in all your getting, get understanding.”
PROVERBS 4:7

CHRISTIAN Crossword

ACROSS

1. Ruth's second husband.
(Ruth 4:13)
5. Special attention.
(abbr.)
8. Donkey's cry.
12. He is ___ even to subdue all things.
(Phil. 3:21)
13. Note of debt.
14. Citrus fruit.
15. Frog's cousin.
16. Paul's companion.
(Acts 13:2)
18. Israeli Jew. (abbr.)
19. Took care of.
20. But Peter followed him ___ off.
(Matt. 26:58)
22. Concise; to the point.
26. Engraves.
30. He that hath an ___, let him hear.
(Rev. 2:7)
31. Reserve Officers' Training Corps. (abbr.)
32. Assist.
33. Capital of Peru.
34. For there is ___ God. (1 Tim. 2:5)
35. Approximates.
37. Pertaining to Norwegians.
39. Become pale.
40. The blood of Jesus Christ ... cleanseth us from _____.
(1 John 1:7; 2 words)
43. British fliers.
(abbr.)
46. The Lord our ____ Lord. (Mark 12:29; three words)
49. Tale.
50. The golden calf was one. (Acts 7:41)
51. Cereal grass.
(sing.)
52. We have seen His ___ in the east.
(Matt. 2:2)
53. And straightway they forsook their



By Lee Esch Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- ___ (Mark 1:18)
54. Speed measurement.
(abbr.)
55. Segment of time served.

DOWN

1. Body wash.
2. Woodwind instrument.
3. Gypsum.
4. The letter "Z" to a Briton.
5. Lake ____.
(Sea of Galilee)
6. Allow temporary possession.
7. Coagulated milk.
8. Knife part.
9. Eve was created from one.
10. Physicians group.
(abbr.)
11. Affirmative reply.
17. Let down your ___ for a draught.
(Luke 5:4)
19. Roofing substance.
21. Government airwaves overseer.
(abbr.)
23. Repeat.
24. Jesus Christ,

- the___ yesterday, and today and forever. (Heb. 13:8)
25. Epochs.
26. He shall rule them with a rod of ____.
(Rev. 2:27)
27. Unacceptable deed. (informal)
28. Tiny portion.
29. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity ____.
(1 Cor. 8:1)
33. Boy.
35. Slippery fish.
(plural)
36. What is ___, that thou art mindful of him? (Ps. 8:4)
38. Travels by water.
41. Cloth producer.
42. Break suddenly.
44. Mount Sinai.
(Gal. 4:25)
45. Barn locale.
46. Cotton ____.
(Eli Whitney invention)
47. Lengthy lyrical poem.
48. Speck.
49. Ultrafast airplane.
(abbr.)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Fortify event for teen guys

The world can be tough on teen guys. But they can find help at Fortify, a transformative one-day event focused on building a strong, Christ-centered identity amid today's self-absorbed culture.

Fortify, set for Aug. 29 at Westwood Baptist Church in Alabaster, offers impactful biblical teaching, engaging worship and practical breakout sessions to help your teen guys gain vital tools to navigate life's challenges. Don't miss this opportunity to connect your guys with godly role models and peers who inspire courage, purity and purpose in their faith journey.

Daniel Atkins, pastor of Taylor Road Baptist Church in Montgomery, will be the featured speaker.

Breakouts include:

► Dads dropping truth: Dads offer practical advice on biblical friendship and dating

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



► How to help a friend struggling with pornography

► How to disciple or mentor other people

► Identity: Who God says you are

► Addressing AI: potential uses and dangers (for leaders)

The cost for Fortify is \$25 and includes Chick-fil-A lunch.

For more information or to register, visit alabamamen.org/fortify.

Connect your high school graduates to a Baptist Campus Ministry!

Baptist Campus Ministry exists to serve as an evangelistic outpost directly on the college campus. The organization is student-led and campus minister-directed in order to reach students with the gospel of Jesus Christ, grow faithful Christian disciples and involve students in missions and ministry.

If you have recent high school graduates in your church heading to college, encourage them to connect to the BCM on their new campus.

Visit alabamabcm.org/campuses to see a list of BCMs around the state or to submit a student's name to be connected to a campus minister.

Persecuted Church

Nigerian Christians killed; attackers met with armed resistance

More than 60 Christians lost their lives in April and May in the relentless violence against believers in Nigeria, according to reports from Christian Daily International-Morning Star News. A statement from Evangelical Church Winning All called the victims “martyrs” who were killed for “refusing to abandon the post God had given them.”



Photo courtesy of Morning Star News

In Kwara State, gunmen invaded a nighttime prayer vigil in Nigeria, killing three and kidnapping 15 others. Meanwhile, residents in several villages were able to thwart assailants’ planned attacks, Truth Nigeria said.

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

Coptic Christian appealing blasphemy conviction, 5-year prison sentence

A Coptic Christian scholar, Augustinos Samaa, whose YouTube postings about Christianity have a following of more than 100,000, has been sentenced to a five-year prison term and hard labor for his conviction on blasphemy charges in Egypt. Samaa was convicted under Egypt’s blasphemy statutes and is part of a trend in Egypt, according to ADF International, who is handling his appeal.

Egypt is No. 42 on Open Doors’ 2026 World Watch List of the 50 places most difficult to be a Christian. (The Alabama Baptist)

Relatives attack Somali Christian for putting faith in Jesus

A 22-year-old Somali woman required hospitalization and surgeries after relatives beat her for placing her faith in Jesus Christ.

Sources told Morning Star News that four men beat the woman, who was aided by her neighbors.

Somalia is No. 2 on Open Doors’ 2026 World Watch List of the 50 places most difficult to be a Christian. (The Alabama Baptist)

Man in Uganda attacked, beaten unconscious for putting faith in Jesus

A 28-year-old man in Uganda was attacked and beaten unconscious in May for becoming a Christian. Sources told Morning Star News the man’s Muslim in-laws are the alleged assailants.

Awali was lured by his attackers, who claimed

his daughter was ill. Uganda’s constitution and laws allow for freedom of religion, including converting from one faith to another.

However, Christian churches increasingly have received threats of violence, and some Christian converts have been attacked, killed or excommunicated by Muslim family members, the World Atlas reported. (The Alabama Baptist)

China keeps tightening control over believers, but growth continues

Christians in China continue to feel pressure from the communist government as President Xi Jinping reportedly intensifies efforts to shut down unregistered churches.

But according to a new report from the Wall Street Journal, arresting more and more Christians apparently hasn’t stopped a resilient movement of house churches from spreading.

The May 18 report noted increased digital surveillance, government pressure, ongoing arrests and interrogation of believers who worship at churches that are not state-approved. (The Alabama Baptist)

Teen girl in Pakistan kidnapped, forced to wed married man

A teen girl with medical and mental health difficulties has been abducted, forced to convert to Islam and wed the married man who kidnapped her, her Christian father told Christian Daily International-Morning Star News.

A woman in the neighborhood identified the man as her own husband, who had disappeared with the woman’s two minor children.

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

Church in UK appeals order banning street evangelism in community

The Bread of Life Community Church in Essex, England, will appeal a legal notice that could criminalize aspects of its street preaching, Premier Christian News reported. The notice said the church’s sharing of “religious messaging” mentioning “hell” spreads “harassment, alarm and distress” in the community, and the preaching is having a “detrimental effect on the community.” The court has scheduled a two-day appeal Oct. 22 and 29. (Decision Magazine)



Photo courtesy of Christian Concern

Court case filed in deliberate destruction of churches

A court case seeks compensation to rebuild churches and other religious sites ruined in attacks upon Christian communities in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The attacks came after DRC military and militia groups recaptured the city of Uvira from M23 rebels who had occupied the city for months, reported Alliance Defending Freedom. Then came deliberate destruction of five Christian churches and more than 70 homes.

DRC is No. 29 on Open Doors’ 2026 World Watch List of the 50 places most difficult to be a Christian. (The Alabama Baptist)

Baptist pastor faces expulsion from Russian-occupied Ukraine

Vladimir Rytikov reportedly faces expulsion from his birthplace in Russian-occupied eastern Ukraine after authorities accused him of “illegal missionary activity” and cancelled his residence permit, reported rights monitor Forum 18.



RYTIKOV

Rytikov, 67, has led an unregistered Council of Churches Baptist congregation in the city for about 30 years. He has been fined multiple times. (Christian Daily International)

Iraqi court’s ruling for Christian woman may set legal precedent

An Iraqi court’s recent ruling allows a woman to change her religious status to “Christian” in the national database, and may set a legal precedent benefiting religious minorities.

Maryam (name changed for security) had been automatically designated a Muslim in Iraq’s national database after her mother married a Muslim while Maryam was still a minor. Alliance Defending Freedom International, which supported her case, noted Maryam’s childhood household was Christian prior to her mother’s remarriage.

Iraq’s National Card Law states that minor children must be registered under the “religion of the parent who has converted to Islam.”

In January 2025, as an adult, Maryam sought court intervention to change her registration to Christian, and the court ruled in her favor in May 2026, ADF International reported.

ADF International reported that having a religious designation either inaccurate or assigned can cause complications, such as putting non-Muslims under jurisdiction of Sharia (Islamic law) court. Iraq is No. 18 on Open Doors’ 2026 World Watch List of the 50 places most difficult to be a Christian. (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

SENIOR PASTOR

Dalraida Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama, is accepting resumés for a senior pastor. Visit <https://www.Dalraida-Baptist.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

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

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

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.

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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~

Calling out the called one congregation at a time

I love the posts that pop up regularly on social media that ask questions like, “Are you old enough to remember when ... ?”

They ask questions like: “Do you remember when the driver’s left foot had to push a button on the floor of the car to turn the bright headlights on and off?” or “when there were only three channels on your television” or “when you stayed home from Sunday evening church to see the Beatles appear on the Ed Sullivan Show?”

Four-part altar call

Concerning church, do you remember when there was an altar call of the end of every worship service that had four parts to it? First, come forward if you want to receive or publicly profess Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior.

Second, if you want to transfer your membership from another church. Third, if you want to rededicate your life to Jesus. Fourth, if God is calling you to vocational Christian service.

If you remember this four-part altar call, then you are my people. If you do not, then I want to talk with you about the fourth part of the altar call.

The issue of too few people appearing to be called into Christian ministry service as a lifelong vocation is talked about regularly. I agree with the angst about this issue. Yes, I believe there are too few people committing to lifelong roles of Christian service out of a sense of God’s spiritual call.

Perhaps it is because local congregations lack a formal system to help ever-maturing Christlike disciples understand the call of God on their lives. This applies to everyone, including people God is calling to be faithful and effective laypersons. But it may especially be true of people God is calling to a lifelong formal — even ordained — Christian ministry role.

Void that needs to be filled

Perhaps altar calls asking people to publicly declare they feel God is calling them into vocational Christian service ran their course. That happens to many things.

The challenge is it was not replaced with something that was equally effective. I believe there is a void that needs to be filled either with the former emphasis and method, or a new, even more effective way.

I certainly believe local congregations ought to take a lead in this effort. My role is not to design the new emphasis and method, but to call for it. Perhaps God is calling your congregation to engage in new initiatives in this area.

As you think about the need for congregations to call out the called, let me give you a background of how it happened in my life.

The Baptist congregation I grew up in used the four-part altar call. When I was 12 years old, I went forward during a spring revival and told the pastor I felt called to vocational Christian ministry.

This declaration was not an event. It began a learning journey. Our congregation had a learning community for people who felt called into formal Christian ministry roles. We had almost two dozen people in that learning community. We met regularly for prayer, training and planning for the next steps in our response to God’s call.

What is your church doing?

How is your congregation currently focusing on calling out the called? How does God want your congregation to focus on this?

Are you called to vocational Christian ministry, but don’t know what to do with that sense of call? Begin with a conversation with your pastor or another trusted leader.



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 August 2

CALLED **Judges 6:1–4, 7–16**

Oppression (1–4, 7–10)

The dreadful cycle we were introduced to last week rears its ugly head once again. The Israelites abandoned the Lord and worshipped the false gods of the Canaanites. Their defiant disobedience resulted in the Lord’s anger, which in turn led to God punishing His people.

This time the Lord sent the Midianites against His people. These wandering herdsmen from east of the Red Sea attacked Israel over a period of seven years, leaving little of value behind.

Rather than simply demanding tribute from Israel, the Midianites, along with the Amalekites and other easterners, invaded the land en masse, destroyed the ready-to-harvest crops and forced the Israelites to hide out in secure areas. Severely weakened by these attacks, the Israelites cried out to the Lord for deliverance.

In previous cycles God responded by sending them a deliverer (3:9, 15) or by announcing His intention to deliver them (4:6). The pattern is altered here. God did indeed intend to deliver Israel from its misery, but before expressing this intention, He sent an unnamed prophet to confront the nation with the reason for its troubles. God put His people on notice that He would not always automatically deliver them from their suffering. At some point they had to recognize and repent of the underlying issue of their unfaithfulness.

The prophet reminded the people of God’s gracious acts. Their covenant-keeping God had rescued them from all of their oppressors and had enabled them to conquer the promised land. The prophet then reminded them of God’s demand for loyalty and concluded with a brief accusation.

Commission (11–14)

The angel of the Lord met Gideon while he was hard at work threshing wheat in a winepress in

an attempt to hide the wheat from the Midianites.

The angel of the Lord spoke to Gideon, saying, “The Lord is with you, valiant warrior.” These words were meant to inspire confidence in Gideon. The divine commission assured him that God enabled him and that Gideon would hold a military role.

Gideon, like Moses before him, balked at the suggestion that God might use him to defeat the Midianites. Gideon answered politely but then questioned the reality of God’s presence and altered the personalized “with you” (v. 12) to a collective “with us” (v. 13). Gideon argued that the circumstances proved that the Lord had abandoned His people and given the nation over to Midian.

His argument was correct as far as it went. God had temporarily abandoned Israel but only because they had sinned against Him (Deut. 32:15). Gideon gave no indication of understanding this important fact, nor did recalling God’s miraculous deeds impact his perspective.

Reassurance (15–16)

The Lord was not dissuaded by Gideon’s arguments and formally commissioned him to go and defeat the Midianites.

Focusing on the words “the strength you have” (v. 14) rather than the assurance of God’s presence (v. 12), Gideon questioned his suitability for the mission. After all, his family was the weakest in Manasseh, and he was the youngest in his father’s family.

Gideon’s apparent ignorance of the patriarchal traditions is striking. Anyone familiar with those accounts will remember that God can take the youngest and seemingly most insignificant and use them mightily to accomplish His purposes. In response to Gideon’s argument that he was not qualified for the assignment, the Lord personally assured him of His presence. With God’s enablement, Gideon would completely destroy the Midianites.

For August 9

TRUST **Judges 7:1–8, 19–23**

The Midianites continued to oppress the people of Israel. The Midianites were descendants of Abraham by his concubine, Keturah. They had been enemies of Israel since the time they opposed Israel when Moses led the nation into the region east of the Jordan River in preparation to enter Canaan.

For seven years they had been raiding Israel and plundering anything of value. Reluctantly and with God’s reassurance, Gideon responded to God’s call to fight the enemy of his homeland.

Too Many (1–3)

Even after the Spirit of the Lord had clothed Gideon, he remained unconvinced that the Lord would deliver Israel through him. He tested the Lord twice with a fleece before he would muster the troops and go out to battle against the Midianites and their allies.

Gideon and his army of 32,000 soldiers were encamped about five miles south of the invading army beside the spring of Harod, which means “trembling.” The very name hints at the emotional state of Gideon’s army.

The Midianites outnumbered the Israelites nearly four to one, so the Lord’s next word to Gideon had to have caught him completely off guard. The Lord told him that he had too many troops for Him to give the Israelites a victory over the Midianites because Israel would believe they had actually won the battle themselves.

The Lord, therefore, implemented a two-part plan to reduce the size of the army. All who were afraid were urged to depart. Twenty-two thousand of Gideon’s men left. With only 10,000 soldiers remaining, Gideon’s army went from being outnumbered 4–1 to being outnumbered 12–1.

Still Too Many (4–8)

Announcing that the army was still too large, the Lord devised another scheme to trim the army’s size. When the men went down to the water to drink, Gideon was to separate those who lapped like a dog and those who knelt and scooped up water with their hands. The Lord chose the men who lapped — for they numbered only 300 men — and sent the rest of the men home.

No reason for the distinction is given, so it shows nothing about their ability as soldiers. The Lord downsized Gideon’s army so there could be no doubt that it was the Lord who gave them the victory.

With only 300 men remaining, Gideon had growing concerns about attacking the Midianite army. They were now outnumbered 450–1. Graciously, the Lord told Gideon to spy on the enemy camp and listen to what they were saying because He knew it would encourage Gideon. So Gideon took his servant, Purah, and they overheard the Midianites discussing a dream one of them had revealing that God would give Gideon victory over them.

Just Right (19–23)

Now convinced that the Lord’s power was sufficient, Gideon began to exercise leadership and devised a scheme. He divided his 300 men into three companies armed with only trumpets and torches. The torches were concealed in earthenware jars to disguise their approach and keep the flames burning.

Gideon’s men blew their trumpets on cue, revealed their burning torches and shouted, “A sword for the Lord and Gideon!” Caught totally off guard, the Midianites panicked, and the Lord caused the enemy soldiers to attack each other with their own swords. Survivors fled from the presence of Gideon and his 300 men.

“And the LORD said to Gideon, ‘With the 300 men who lapped I will save you ...’”

Judges 7:7

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sunday School Lessons

By Scott Bush, D.Min.

Executive Director, Ministry Training Institute, Samford University



For August 2

A SERVANT'S HEART 1 Corinthians 3:5-15

There was a time when foot washing in Christian worship services was common in certain parts of the country.

Often practiced prior to observing the Lord's Supper, members would take turns reverently rinsing and toweling the feet of one another, commemorating Jesus' act of humble service toward His disciples.

While the place of the practice in a worship service is debatable, the image is profound. Greatness in the Kingdom of God is marked by humble service.

However, our natural tendency is to resist or even resent service, especially selfless or hidden service. How are we, then, to follow the example of Jesus and humbly serve one another in love? Our text suggests three ways.

Serve where God has placed you. (5-8)

Apollos was a talented teacher who served the congregation at Corinth after Paul planted it. When division crept into the church, some members identified with Apollos while others rallied to the original teacher, Paul. (See 1:11-13.)

Paul and Apollos themselves were not at odds with each other. In fact, Paul portrays their work as complementary, each supporting the other like workers who sow and then water a crop. Further, he emphasizes that they both served God, who ultimately does what neither Paul nor Apollos (nor anyone else) can. Only God can give the harvest.

Our joy in service depends on the settled conviction that God, in His wisdom and grace, orders our steps and fits our lives together for His glory.

Petty rivalries and prideful ambitions only serve our own interests and rob us of the real satisfaction of serving where He has placed us.

Serve by keeping the focus on the foundation of Christ. (9-11)

Next, Paul takes an illustration from the world of construction, describing his teaching about Jesus as foundational to the faith of his readers.

Paul and the other apostles were directly commissioned by Jesus to speak for Him. Their inspired, authoritative testimony (sometimes written down by their close associates) forms our New Testament.

Whatever our service may be, it must be firmly grounded in the teaching and example of Jesus. When we serve others by meeting needs for food, housing, education and medical care, we do well to remember that Jesus calls us to this (Luke 10:37), that He gives us an example to follow (Matt. 9:35) and that, in serving others, we are serving Him (Matt. 25:40).

When we work for peace, justice and social change (Mic. 6:8), our service must be guided by the Scriptures (Rom. 12:2). When we serve by teaching, preaching, witnessing, counseling or encouraging, our fruitfulness depends on our faithfulness with the Word (Rom. 10:17, 2 Tim. 3:16).

Serve to impact eternity. (12-15)

Paul continues his construction metaphor by calling on his hearers to pay attention to the quality of their service. High-quality building materials endure, while a structure of wood, hay or straw will not stand the coming test.

Service is a duty, but it's also a delight, especially when we know that our work matters both now and forever. When our service is rendered faithfully, selflessly and in a way that honors Christ and His Word, it has eternal impact.

Our reward is the joy of seeing our King honored (Rev. 5:13) and knowing that we are being conformed to His image and fit for His company forever (Rom. 8:29).

For August 9

A HUMBLE ATTITUDE 1 Corinthians 3:18-4:7

The word "humble" evokes a wide range of ideas for us. As an adjective, it can denote simplicity or unpretentiousness and serves as an antonym for "conceited" or "overbearing." As a verb, however, "humble" can be less winsome. To humble someone means to put them in their place or bring them down a notch, so not many of us would aspire to be humbled. Even when humility seems like a good idea, the thought of humbling ourselves is difficult.

Paul loves the Corinthians even though they are at times divisive or arrogant, so he gives his readers essential guidance for walking in humility, faithfulness and gratitude.

Believers have no room for boasting because we belong to God. (3:18-23)

First, Paul warns about the danger of self-deception. Those who settle for the ethics and aspirations of a world that is passing away are foolishly wasting their lives. They may give the appearance of wisdom, but they've missed the most essential fact that God is sovereign over all of life. To know, love and obey Him is the greatest good in life, and to settle for less is folly. This way of thinking may put us at odds with the world, but it puts us in line with God's purposes, which are always good for His people (Rom. 8:28).

Because God is over all, our rivalries within the Church are out of place. The Corinthians were like squabbling children, each group grabbing for what they wanted and forgetting that their Father had promised the very best to them all. They rallied around their favorite teachers as though each was in competition with the others, not seeing God's design working throughout.

In our churches today, we are easily distracted and divided by our

different tastes, interests and emphases. When we humble ourselves, we can see the big picture and trust the wisdom of the One who put us together and holds us all.

Stay faithful to the work God has given you. (4:1-5)

Establishing that God is over all, Paul next reminds the Corinthians of their responsibilities as stewards of the gospel. Using his ministry as an example, Paul boldly asserts that he is a servant of Christ entrusted with His message and that he is not concerned about public opinion. In humility, he sees his work as a response to the love he has received. Paul's aim is not to please or impress others but to be faithful.

Like Paul, we have been entrusted with the message of the gospel and given the mission to make disciples, both across the street and around the world. We must not become discouraged or hesitant when we are criticized for this. Again, a humble view of ourselves in light of the greatness of God and the power of the gospel should motivate us. Whatever part we play in God's plan for His people, we must be faithful.

Don't take credit for what God has done. (6-7)

Finally, Paul reminds his readers that all they have and all they are comes from God. This truth is the antidote to their self-centeredness and gives glory to God for His wisdom, power and grace.

Just as the stewardship of the gospel requires faithfulness, so does all of life. If everything is a gift, then we ought to be grateful. The regular practice of expressing our thanks will keep us both humble and happy in Jesus.

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

"So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth."

1 Corinthians 3:7

‘Radically restored’

Musician Stephen McWhirter’s new book speaks to God’s grace, forgiveness

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

An author who never meant to write a book. A musician who never planned to be a Christian singer-songwriter and worship leader. A meth addict who never wanted to give up meth. A preacher’s son who never intended to forgive. This is Stephen McWhirter. “Radically Restored: How Knowing Jesus Heals Our Brokenness” is McWhirter’s recent release that includes his testimony of how God’s grace brought him out of the darkness and into His light.

“Brokenness” isn’t simply a word in the title; it’s the reason behind the book’s themes of grace and forgiveness. After McWhirter was saved, he had a thought. “If broken people break things, do healed people heal things?” he wondered.

“I mean, it’s the same concept of forgiveness,” McWhirter noted. “Those who have been forgiven much must forgive much. If I’m a broken person and I break a lot of things around me, the obvious flip side is that I’ve been healed, so now I’m someone who heals things around me and forgives things around me or has grace for things around me, builds people up around me instead of tearing them down.

“I believe this primarily comes from someone who spends time with Jesus. You spend time with Him in His Word. You spend time with Him in prayer. You’re shaped out of that place and not for the sake of what you’ll do on a stage or what you’ll teach somebody, but you — and just you — and Him, right?” McWhirter said.



STEPHEN MCWHIRTER

Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

McWhirter said that as a teen and young adult, he was very good at breaking things. He put his fist through many walls and car radios.

He broke relationships with family, employers and friends. Instead of living by, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it,” he instead lived out the belief, “If it’s broke, keep breaking it.”

He tried just about every drug he could get his hands on. He was arrested for stealing, possession of narcotics and underage drinking seven times before he was 21 years old. He used his musical gifts to play in a hardcore, metal rock band.

There was a reason for this brokenness, the reason he broke everything he touched. His father, a preacher, was also an abuser. His father abused his mother behind the scenes while pretending to have a perfect family

in front of others. His family had a rule: Keep the lie that everything was OK, and hide the bruises and the pain at all costs.

‘It’s the gospel’

Forgiving his father was one of the hardest things McWhirter ever had to do. Giving up his addictions was nothing in comparison.

“Forgiveness is about a debt — a legitimate debt that people owe you or you owe someone. You have the ability to tear that debt up, just like Jesus did. To the world that’s offensive, but it’s the Kingdom, right? It’s the gospel,” he said.

“One of the most massive Kingdom things we can do on this side of eternity is to forgive,” McWhirter continued. “It’s the most hard. It’s the most offensive. It’s also one of the most powerful things we can do. I believe there’s something important on the other side of that.”

A week after McWhirter was saved, he drove to his father’s house, entered his bedroom and told him that he forgave him for hurting his mom and for the trauma he put their family through. He told him that he believed Jesus was leading him to forgive.

Only through grace

This didn’t lead to a Hallmark moment. His dad didn’t get up, crying and hugging McWhirter. He just looked shocked and muttered, “OK.”

“I wish forgiving my dad was all God asked me to do. I felt like all of heaven watched my awkward moment of forgiving my dad and was saying, ‘That was crazy!’ And then, like in an infomercial, God shouted, ‘But wait! There’s more!’” McWhirter says in “Radically Restored.”

His fiancée (now wife), Tara, told McWhirter that she believed his dad should baptize them. Then she went even further by saying she thought he should officiate their wedding. Both acts of obedience led to healing father and son.

“Philippians 2:13 says, ‘For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him.’ There is this part of His grace that’s like, ‘Hey, I don’t want to do this, so You’ve got to do it through me, and You have to help me believe that You can,’” McWhirter said.

And God did.

There were many other times when McWhirter said, “I don’t want to do this. I need You to do it for me.

“You know, it’s a constant thing. This is why you have Him in you because on your own, you literally can’t do it. You couldn’t save yourself. You weren’t a sinless, perfect sacrifice. He was.”



To learn more
about Stephen
McWhirter, visit
worshipjesus.life.

The Alabama Baptist

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SPECIAL SECTION

Resources and stories to help soon-to-be college students, as well as their parents and grandparents

Back to Campus

INCLUSIVE

Students with intellectual disorders find a place to belong

AFFORDABLE

New bill proposes tax relief to help with extracurricular expenses

INSPIRED

Higher sense of purpose promotes better workplace

'AI has not caught God by surprise'

BY MICHAEL GRAYSTON • RELIGION NEWS SERVICE

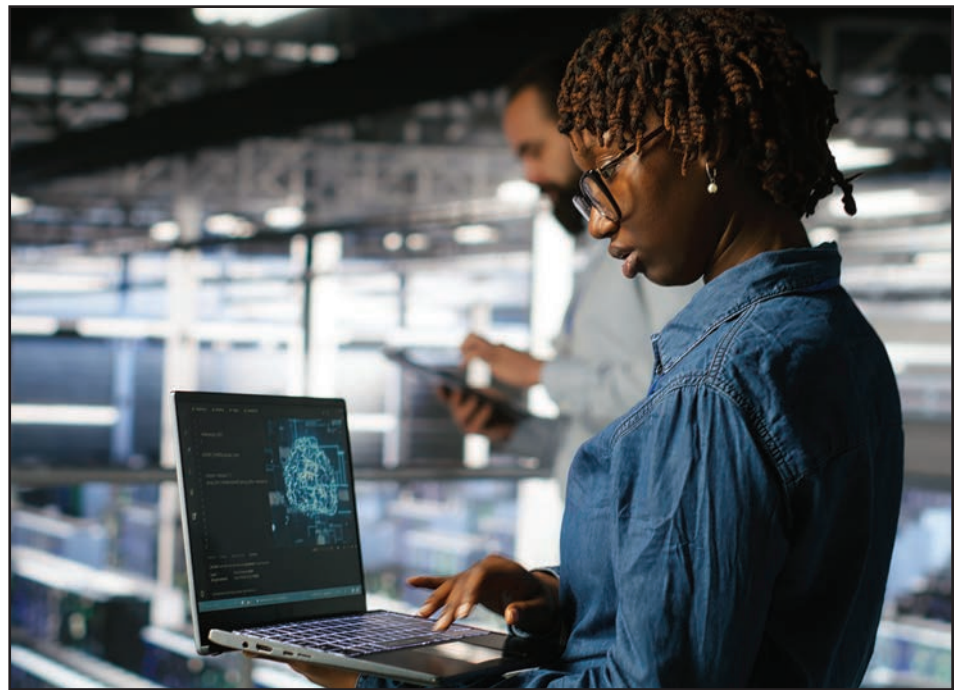


Photo by DC Studio on Magnific

Opinion: Regardless of technological changes, God's call to love, serve remains

I was having coffee with a friend, the father of two young daughters. He mentioned a growing concern: "I am not sure how to advise my girls regarding college. Is college even the right move for them? It seems like all these jobs are being lost to AI."

While his daughters have a few years before they graduate from high school, the question is timely and valid. Current college students are feeling the pressure as well; a recent study said students are increasingly considering changing their majors due to the threat artificial intelligence poses to their industry and the expected loss of jobs.

While some argue AI will ultimately create more jobs than it eliminates, the anxiety around this shift is real and growing. For many, the uncertainty is about more than employment — it's about meaning and purpose.

Deeply practical problem

When someone approaches me regarding AI, the volatile job market often comes up. And why wouldn't it? AI's impact on the job market has created a deeply practical problem, and people are concerned they will be squeezed out of their jobs, their homes and the communities.

The conversation with my friend centered on AI and its influence on the job landscape, a topic which will no doubt dominate living room discussions, news stories and political campaigns indefinitely; his concern, however, went beyond his daughters' ability to pay their future bills.

He was more focused on the dignity of vocation.

Vocation, after all, is not simply clocking in for a day's pay. Its roots run deep: The word "vocation" originally referred to a summons from God to a particular purpose or function, especially in a religious sense.

It is logical to connect the two: work and vocation. The terms are often synonymous in secular terms, but vocation goes beyond occupation. Vocation is what we are called to do by God; it is divinely purposed and extends to all areas of life. As the Apostle Paul noted, "Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people" (Col. 3:23).

It's incredibly challenging to remove occupation from vocation. Our job naturally absorbs a great deal of time, and for many of us, is the primary source of community in our lives. As theologian Millard Erickson noted in "Christian Theology," Christians are meant to live in service to God.

"Every legitimate occupation is a sphere in which one can and should serve God," Erickson writes, "so that there is no valid distinction

between sacred and secular work."

Every occupation provides an environment where the Christian can and should glorify God, serve God and serve others. If AI takes away a person's occupation, how does that impact their vocation? If AI can take away a significant portion of a

person's vocation, will it keep them from fulfilling their calling?

This concern shifts the conversation from the very real and great practical implications of a massive job upheaval to the even greater concerns of people struggling to live in the purpose that they believe God called them to.

Progress has impacted industry over and over again. For decades, people's jobs have changed due to the emergence of new tools and technologies, yet people continue to find jobs and purpose.

Still, this reality pacifies neither the anxieties nor the fears of people attempting to navigate the best path forward in their vocation.

There may be a unique opportunity for religious communities to speak hope into a culture anxious about the future of work. Occupations will inevitably change, but a sense of calling can remain deeply

"Vocation is what we are called to do by God; it is divinely purposed and extends to all areas of life. As the Apostle Paul noted, 'Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people' (Col. 3:23)."

rooted in something more enduring than the latest technology.

Scripture reminds us, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

AI has not caught God by surprise, and his purpose for us was never limited to a particular profession. In the midst of an ever-changing reality, our purpose is grounded in our relationship with God and our calling to love and serve others.

God-given purpose

A teacher who loses a classroom, a graphic designer who loses clients or a programmer whose tasks are replaced by automation has not lost their God-given purpose. The occupation, work environment and surrounding community will continue to change, but the calling remains.

So perhaps the more pressing question isn't whether AI will change what career advice we give the next generation. Of course it will. Instead, we need to ask: How will people of faith and our communities remain grounded in our deepest callings despite those changes?

AI will transform the workplace, but it cannot replace the vocation God has given people. God's call remains the same. Honor God in service, work and love.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Michael Grayston is a campus pastor at LifeFamily Church in Austin, Texas, and an assistant professor at Liberty University.

Inspired view

BY CARRIE BROWN McWHORTER • THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

Higher sense of purpose, calling promote better workplace, career outcomes

Ask many young adults why they are going to college, and they'll likely say something along the lines of "to get a job." Ask them what kind of job — and why that's the one they want — might give them pause.

For Christian students, considering where and how God wants to use them in the workplace can feel like a daunting task. But it doesn't have to, said Bryan Dik, a vocational psychologist, professor of psychology at Colorado State University and co-founder and chief science officer of jobZology.

Dik studies the intersection of faith and work and has authored several books on the subject, including "Redeeming Work" and "Make Your Job a Calling." He also hosts the Purposeful Work Podcast.

Dik recently spoke with Darren Shear in an episode of Christianity and Business, a podcast produced by Houston Christian University to help Christian business leaders integrate biblical values into their business practices. Shear is founder and director of Christian Business Leader, an organization that produces tools to equip marketplace Christians with a Christ-centered, Bible-based framework for the work they do.

Making sense of experience

Believers and nonbelievers alike are trying to make sense of their experience, including their experience at work, Dik said. "They want it to matter."

A key difference for believers in Christ is the worldview they bring to the workplace.

"To the extent that we're able to tap into that and lean on that ... Christians are able to experience a kind of existential joy from their work," Dik said.

Shear said there's an old saying,



Photo by Freepik

"people don't quit jobs, they quit bosses."

"Colossians 3:23 says, 'Do your work as unto the Lord, not working for men.' So we've got the best boss, the best leader, if we have the right mindset," Shear said.

We've also got the Bible to guide us. Scripture-engaged adults are more confident of their calling or purpose in life and thereby flourish, the American Bible Society said in its latest release from the 2026 State of the Bible.

Those who are least engaged with the Bible often continue to seek a purpose or calling well into adulthood, and score lower on researchers' flourishing scale, ABS said of findings released July 9 in the study's fourth chapter.

Adults with the strongest sense of calling score 7.8 on the human flourishing scale of 10, compared to a score of 6.1 among those with

the lowest sense of calling. Those with a stronger sense of calling also continue to flourish through life's challenges.

Scripture engagement makes the difference, said John Plake, ABS chief innovation officer and State of the Bible editor-in-chief.

"People with a strong sense of calling flourish more, and Scripture is at the heart

of that connection," Plake said. "And when life is disrupted by grief, job loss or a serious illness, people who turn to Scripture find real comfort. Many don't just endure the hardship; they come through it even stronger."

"Once I have a clear understanding of how God has made me unique, then the question is: What does that mean in terms of opportunities in the world of work? ... Where can my gifts be best deployed?"

Bryan Dik
Vocational psychologist

Scripture-engaged adults also view their calling as spiritual or inspired by God, ABS said, as Scripture records many examples of spiritual callings. The vast majority (94%) of practicing Christians view the sense of calling from at least a somewhat spiritual lens, researchers said, compared to 70% of all Americans.

For young adults discerning a career path, Dik offers this advice: Look at your gifts, experiences and strengths.

"In vocational psychology, we look at things like interests, work-related values, personality traits, abilities and skills," Dik said. "Once I have a clear understanding of how God has made me unique, then the question is: What does that mean in terms of opportunities in the world of work? Where can my gifts be best deployed? What are the needs in our community and in our world that I might be uniquely equipped to satisfy?"

Guidance and feedback

Dik suggests putting together a personal board of directors — three to five people in your life who have your "best interest in mind, who have a lot of wisdom, who don't have an agenda but who can provide some guidance, feedback and candid honest advice."

Being part of a community of believers with "like-minded folks who share your values" is important, he said, and so is praying and leaning on God for guidance.

"Most of us need to pray for wisdom rather than divine revelation to help make decisions," Dik said. "Our data shows that when people make choices to pursue paths that align with their unique constellation of gifts, the outcomes are better." (with reporting by Diana Chandler for Baptist Press)

Smooth transition

BY CARRIE BROWN McWHORTER • THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

High school senior year checklist for parents

If you have a rising high school senior, you likely already have a long to-do list. Deadlines for graduation, yearbook, portraits and all the accompanying fees come quickly.

Counselors and teachers will give your senior a lot of advice about planning for their future education or career. But what can you do in these next few months to help your student make a smooth transition to their next step?

Here are five suggestions:

1. Pray for and with your senior. This is an exciting — and sometimes scary — time. Spend time with your child. Listen to their questions. Encourage them to seek the Lord in their decisions, and let them know you are praying for them.

2. Accompany your student on campus visits. If your child is considering a college or training program, schedule a trip to campus: tour the facilities, talk with admissions counselors or other students, drive through the town. Often, a visit is the final step in making a decision about whether an option is a good fit or not.

3. Complete the FAFSA. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid is a form that students in the United States complete annually to determine their eligibility for financial aid for college, technical schools or graduate programs. The form can be completed even if your student hasn't yet applied to or been accepted by any post-secondary institutions.

Filling out or providing information for the FAFSA is critical for your student whether you plan to contribute financially to their post-

secondary education or not. This data is used to determine eligibility for federal, state and school-based financial aid, including work-study programs, federal grants, loans and scholarships. The online form typically opens Oct. 1 and has been streamlined in recent years.

Completing the FAFSA early maximizes your child's chances of receiving funding. For more information, go to studentaid.gov.

Basic life skills

4. Prepare them for life outside your home. Hopefully your child is experienced in, or at least familiar with, basic life skills like doing laundry, preparing simple meals, making appointments and budgeting. If not, you've got a few months to teach them how to successfully live on their own. This includes knowing how routine banking, medical insurance and

vehicle maintenance should be handled.

5. Prepare for emergencies. Discuss common scenarios and what steps to take in the event of an accident or emergency.

Keep copies of important documents, including driver's license, Social Security card, birth certificate, passport, health insurance card, vaccination records and vehicle title, registration and proof of insurance with you so you can reference them quickly if needed.

If there's a campus health center, find out how it works, but also make a list of doctors, dentists, hospitals and other medical providers covered by your insurance in your child's new town. Consider implementing a HIPAA authorization and a medical power of attorney so you can help your child in the event of an extreme medical emergency.



Photo by Freepik

Lasting effects of unpaid college loans

Roughly one in five borrowers repaying federal Direct Loans tied to Alabama colleges is more than 90 days delinquent, according to federal data released in early July.

The estimated nonpayment rate crept up to 19.7%, just above the 19.3% rate last summer. The increase is small, but the lack of improvement is not good news.

Federal education officials consider nonpayment an early warning of how many borrowers could eventually default. And nonpayment of student loans impacts not only borrowers but colleges too.

According to studentaid.gov, delinquency begins the day after a payment is due. After 90 days, a loan servicer must report the delinquency to national credit bureaus, affecting the borrower's credit score and remaining on his or her credit history.

Long-term impact

If payments are not made for 270 days (about nine months), a loan officially enters default. This triggers the entire balance becoming immediately due, wage garnishment and the loss of eligibility for future federal aid.

High default rates also can have consequences for the colleges the borrower attended. Institutions can lose access to federal student loans and Pell Grants if their official default rates become too high.

For now, the overall picture at Alabama colleges has changed very little. Twenty Alabama institutions — public, private nonprofit and for-profit — had nonpayment rates of at least 30%, the same number as last year.

The institutions with the highest rates also remained largely the same.

Read more at tabonline.org/loan-defaults. (Alabama Daily News, TAB Media contributed)

Inclusive

BY CARRIE BROWN McWHORTER • THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

College programs offer students with intellectual disorders a place to belong, grow

University of Alabama student Morgan Kohn has a busy schedule. He is involved in Al's Pals, a mentoring program with local schools in Tuscaloosa, and he is active in several ministries at Calvary Baptist Church. His career goal is to be a paraeducator in a school system — and UA's CrossingPoints Program is helping him prepare.

CrossingPoints is one of 371 inclusive post-secondary education programs in the U.S. for students like Morgan with intellectual developmental disorder, a condition which covers a range of delays beginning before age 22 and resulting from a range of causes, including genetic conditions like Down syndrome, perinatal causes like premature birth or postnatal injury such as stroke or certain infections.

Children with intellectual disability may walk and talk later than their peers; struggle with memory, problem solving and understanding social rules; and/or need varying levels of support throughout their lives, from mild assistance to lifelong care.

Children with intellectual disorders benefit greatly from early identification and supportive interventions. But for the estimated 420,000 school-age children with

intellectual disability, the end of high school can also mean an end to the academic, social and practical structures they have known.

Think College, an organization that provides resources, technical assistance and training related to college options for students with intellectual disability, says fewer than 2% of affected students will attend college.

"Many people do not know students with intellectual disability have the desire and ability to attend college with their peers and siblings," according to information posted at the Think College website. Yet the benefits of IPSE include not only learning options, but also opportunities for better employment, social and independent living outcomes.

Programs like CrossingPoints are filling a much-needed gap for these students and their families.

CrossingPoints students are full-fledged UA students, said program director Amy Williamson. They have access to academic classes, internships, social clubs, Greek life, athletics, recreation, residence and dining halls, campus offices and employment opportunities. They are fulfilling the same dreams that any other student has, she said.

"Our students have the opportunity to get involved on and off campus in meaningful and inclusive ways,"

Williamson said. "In the classroom, our students have a tailored, specific-to-the-student plan of study that equips them for the career of their choice. We love seeing their success once they leave us as they find gainful employment, become contributing members of society and move out of their family's home."

Answered prayer

Audrey Owens has those same dreams. She especially loves to sing and act. But Audrey, 23, along with her twin sister, Abby, was a micropreemie, born at just 23 weeks gestation. As a result of her premature birth, she has several disabilities that make it more difficult to see, write and process information.

When her family found Union University's EDGE Program, it was an answered prayer.

"Before EDGE, there was not a program where I could go learn those things (singing and acting). When I go to EDGE, I can also participate in clubs and college classes," Audrey said. She looks forward to living on her own, learning more about shopping and cooking, and enjoying the Night to Shine event at Union.

Audrey will join an active and engaged community of students, said Rebecca Holloway, EDGE Program director.

"Students in the EDGE Program are not only allowed to be here at Union University; rather, they are meaningfully included and are a celebrated part of our campus culture," Holloway said.

"We believe our students are created in the image of God, created a specific way, for a plan and a purpose. We see it as our responsibility to walk alongside our students to help them discover who God created them to be."

Holloway said people often see the EDGE Program as a service to families and students, but she sees it differently.

"In reality, the students in the EDGE Program are serving our campus and community in larger ways than we can ever serve them," Holloway said. "I experience the love, joy, goodness and kindness of God in larger ways from my students than from anyone else. I am constantly reminded by my students to reset my priorities to what matters most — people, community and the gospel."

Other IPSE programs in Alabama include the EAGLES Program at Auburn University, Falcon Flight at the University of Montevallo, PASSAGE USA at the University of South Alabama and The Horizons School in Birmingham.

For a national list and more information, go to thinkcollege.net.



Submitted photo

Lindsay Davis, a Birmingham native and student in Union University's EDGE Program, speaks with a young Peruvian man who, like her, has Down syndrome.

The two met while Lindsay and other EDGE students were on a missions trip with the organization Joni and Friends.



Submitted photo

Morgan Kohn, a third-year student in the University of Alabama's CrossingPoints program, is active at Calvary Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa, where he is part of a D-Life Group, the Connect Team and The Well college ministry.

Alternative

BY RACHEL SEALE SWEETIN • THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

Colleges accepting new standardized test option opens doors for students

The Classic Learning Test is a new standardized test option that some colleges and universities are now accepting in their admissions process. The test serves as an alternative to the ACT and SAT for students who were educated during their K–12 years using a classical curriculum.

According to the CLT website, more than 300 schools accept these test scores as an alternative to the ACT or SAT. Samford University, University of Mobile, Faulkner University and Kingdom College are four schools in the state of Alabama accepting CLT scores.

The CLT tests reading, grammar, writing and mathematics skills;

however, the test also focuses on historical and classical literature.

In a press release from Louisiana Christian University, Amy Dufrene, director of counseling services, said the CLT takes two hours to complete and is proctored electronically.

The shortened test time and ability to take the exam at home in a familiar setting helps students who have test anxiety to perform better, Dufrene noted.

Hali Givens, assistant vice president for enrollment services at the University of Mobile, said accepting CLT scores levels the playing field for students who were home-schooled or attended classical Christian schools.

“It was a good standard for students who are coming out of the classical Christian school,” Givens said. “It just kind of made sense for us to accommodate those students who have come in and have proven to be very high academic students and well-performing students.”

Mission alignment

The CLT aligns with the mission of the school as a Christian university, and the university has accepted CLT scores for a few years, she noted. Givens said students also have the choice to opt out of submitting any standardized test scores if their GPA is 2.75 or higher, an option many are taking.

Brian Kennedy, dean of admissions at Samford University, said Samford accepts ACT, SAT and CLT scores, as well as a test-optional choice. He said the majority of applicants choose to submit ACT or SAT scores.

“Typically, less than one-third of our applicants apply test-optional,” Kennedy wrote.

Givens noted a lot of students who take the CLT also take the ACT. Most of UM’s applicants are in-state students, she said. Since all public high schoolers in Alabama are required to take the ACT at least once, the ACT is the test that most students submit in the application process.



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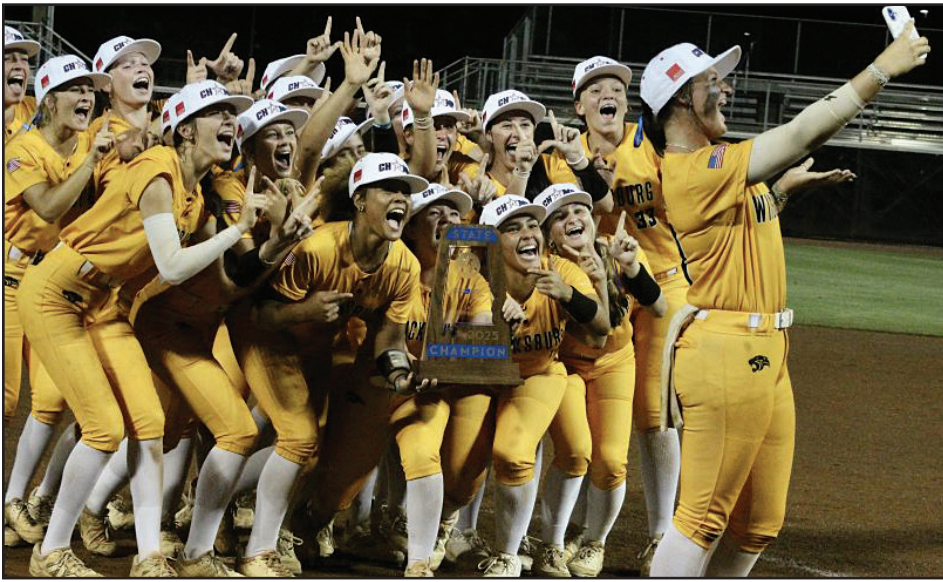


Photo courtesy of Alabama Daily News

Affordable activities

BY ALEX ANGLE • ALABAMA DAILY NEWS

New bill proposes tax relief to help families with extracurricular expenses

Congressman Shomari Figures' new bill aims to give a tax break to families who pay for their children to participate in sports, arts programs or tutoring.

The Affordable Youth Enrichment Opportunities Act, introduced June 24, would create a federal tax deduction of up to \$5,000 for eligible families who itemize deductions and pay out of

pocket for extracurricular activities. The deduction would be limited to those who make between \$100,000 to \$200,000, depending on filing status.

Inspiration

A Mobile native, Figures said a trip back to his old high school inspired him to introduce the legislation after hearing firsthand about the high costs that come with

students playing football or other sports.

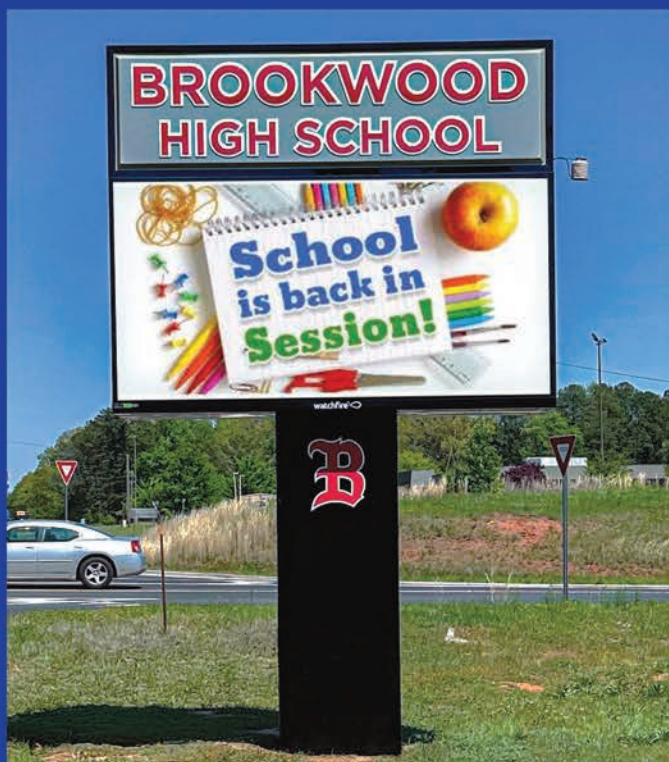
"Saying that your kid can only play in something that's as culturally significant in the South as organized sports, such as football or basketball, that is contingent on your ability to be able to pay \$500, 600 or 1,000 bucks, it's something that a family shouldn't have to struggle with," Figures told Alabama Daily News.

The tax deduction could include expenses such as program and registration fees, equipment and training and instruction costs.

Digital learning

It could also cover digital learning platforms and expenses associated with practices, competitions, rehearsals and performances. The bill would apply to all dependent children under the age of 19.

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The Wall Street Journal (2026)

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Place to build relationships

BY SAMFORD UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATION TEAM



Image courtesy of Samford University

Samford’s sports industry program to officially open new student lounge

Samford University will hold a ribbon-cutting Oct. 2 to officially open the new Sports Industry Program Student Lounge on the third floor of Cooney Hall in the Brock School of Business.

Special space

“In the world of sports, the locker room is sacred,” said Darin White, the Margaret Gage Bush Distinguished Professor and founder of the Sports Industry Program. “It is

where teams bond. It is where the hard conversations happen. It is where you celebrate together after a big win and where you pick each other up after a tough loss.

“I have lived that my entire life as a player and as a coach,” said White, a Hall of Fame college soccer coach at Union University, where his team won a National Christian College Athletic Association national championship. “That is what this space is for our students. It is their locker room. It is the place where they will

build the relationships and the community that will carry them through their careers in the sports industry.”

Designer

The lounge was designed by Advent, the Nashville-based experience design firm that completed projects for some of the biggest sports organizations in the country, including the Dallas Cowboys, the Kansas City Chiefs, the PGA of America and the Oakland Athletics. The space was made possible through

the generous support of program donors.

Samford’s Sports Industry Program was founded in 2011, followed in 2017 by the launch of the Center for Sports Analytics, the first of its kind in the nation. The program has four curriculum pathways: Sports Marketing, Sports Business Analytics and Strategy, Team Strategy and Player Performance (aka Moneyball), and a program that allows students to earn a bachelor’s degree and MBA in five years.

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‘Door opener’

BY CHEYANNE BURGE • UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

Voices of Mobile’s Puerto Rico trip ‘beautiful picture’ of ‘Lord’s intentionality’

When students and staff from the University of Mobile’s Voices of Mobile traveled to Puerto Rico this spring, they expected to serve.

What many did not expect was just how deeply the trip would impact their own hearts, faith and relationships with the Lord.

“To say that our mission trip to Puerto Rico was life-changing would be an understatement,” said Cedric Burrell, executive director of Voices of Mobile.

“For me, this trip was such a beautiful picture of the Lord’s intentionality,” he noted, “and it was honestly a reminder of the privilege and

honor that it is to be trusted by the Father to minister to His people.”

Throughout the week, the ensemble from UM’s Alabama School of the Arts led worship; ministered in churches, schools and senior homes; partnered with local ministries; and built relationships with people across Puerto Rico. While music opened many doors, students quickly realized the trip was about much more than performances.

“While our music was the initial tool that the Lord used for ministry, it ended up simply serving as a door opener for connection, prayer and us truly getting to share the gospel everywhere that we went,” Burrell said.



Photo courtesy of University of Mobile



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Photo courtesy of University of Mobile

‘High calling of learning’

BY KATHY DEAN • UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

University of Mobile awarded grant, launches major renovation of library

The University of Mobile has launched a major renovation of its library, thanks to a generous gift from the J.L. Bedsole Foundation.

“We deeply appreciate the Bedsole Foundation’s longstanding commitment to education and community impact,” said University of Mobile President Charles Smith. “It’s impossible to tell the University of Mobile story without mentioning J.L. Bedsole and the work of the Bedsole Foundation. This

dear family and foundation have supported the University of Mobile from our earliest days, and their continued support is impacting the lives of thousands of students here at UM.”

‘Stand as symbols’

Speaking of the importance of the library renovation, Smith said, “Libraries are far more than repositories for books; they stand as symbols of the pursuit of truth and the high calling of learning. It is fit-

ting then that a place so central to that calling should reflect both the beauty and seriousness of Christian learning.”

The second-floor renovation to UM’s J.L. Bedsole Library — named for the first chairman of UM’s board of trustees — adds more than 700 square feet of bookcases, expands private and group study spaces for students, creates one of the largest classrooms on campus and adds three conference rooms.

The redesigned space is bright and airy, taking advantage of the nearly floor-to-ceiling windows that overlook the campus. New furniture throughout will provide students with a large, comfortable and inviting environment for learning.

Honors Program space

The renovated space also features dedicated space for UM’s Honors Program, giving these student scholars space to fellowship, study and debate ideas.



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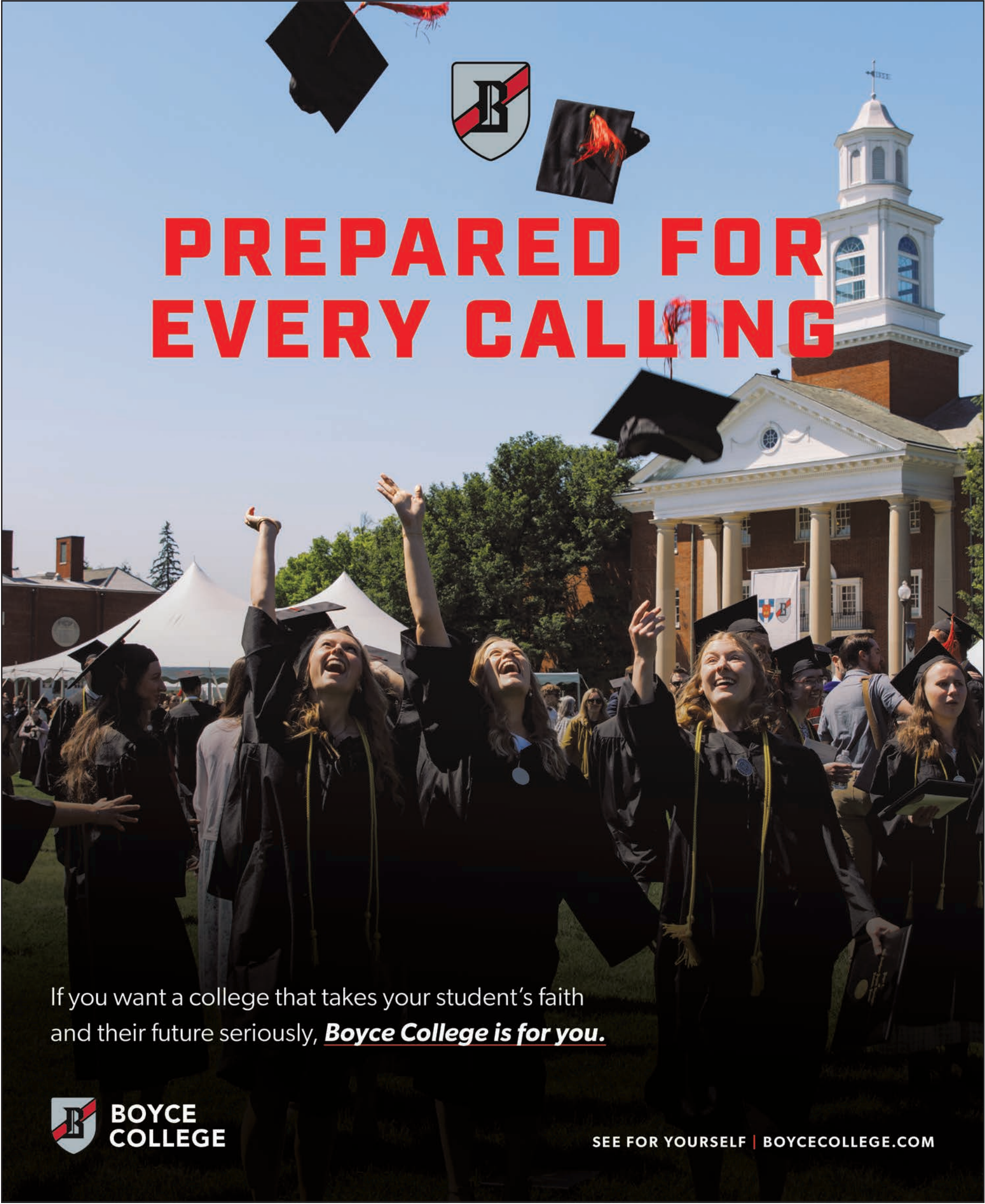
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