

The Alabama Baptist



In January 2023, a senior adult Sunday School class at Eagle-Point Church, a campus of FBC Jacksonville, established Titus 2 ministry as a way to connect with college students.

Photo courtesy of Titus 2 ministry

‘Win-win situation’

Titus 2 ministry bridges generation gap between college students and senior adults

By Leann Callaway
The Alabama Baptist

After going through an “Experiencing God” Bible study, written by Henry, Michael and Richard Blackaby, a senior adult Sunday School class from the EaglePoint campus of First Baptist Church Jacksonville realized the opportunity the Lord was putting before the members to

bridge the generation gap between seniors and college students. “My husband is the Sunday School teacher for the class that started this ministry,” Sandra Pettit explained. “Our Sunday School class felt God was calling us to some kind of ministry in our community, but we didn’t know what it was. The previous year members of the class randomly shared testimonies about what God had

done or was doing in our lives. We felt these testimonies needed to be shared with the community [and] tried several outreaches with no interest.”
Connecting with community
Everything seemed to change as the group found a way to connect with the community and truly “experience God.”
“One Sunday as we were study-

ing our lesson for that week, Lamar [Pettit] stopped after reading an example about how God uses senior adults to minister to college students. He said, ‘Duh! We live in a college town. We could be ministering to college students.’”
The idea was initially met with resistance, as many in the class doubted students would want to “hang out” with senior adults. But
(See ‘Follow,’ page 7)

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2026 Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference — Rekindle The Joy



Friends in Alaska, Alabama rally around pastor, family after tragic accident

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Alabama Baptists have faithfully partnered with Alaska Baptists through official ministry channels since 2021, and they’ve prayed for, supported, encouraged and volunteered in a variety of ways these past five years.

Now, Alabama Baptists have the difficult but sacred opportunity to minister to Alaska Baptist pastor Cody Schwegel and his family as they walk through the tragic loss of their 18-year-old son, Greyer — the middle son of Cody and his wife, Katie.

Various media outlets in Alaska reported that Alaska State Troopers confirmed Greyer Schwegel and his friend, 17-year-old Paul Lingley IV, died July 14 following a head-on dirt bike collision on Prince of Wales Island.

Scotty Goldman, who works closely with all who are involved in the Alabama-Alaska partnership through his role at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, expressed deep sympathy for the two families.

‘Saddened to hear’

“We were saddened to hear of the tragic deaths of Greyer and Paul,” Goldman said. “We’ve worked with Cody and his family since 2021 when he and others launched Liberty Church on July 4 of that year in Craig, Alaska.”

Jamie Baldwin, who also represents Alabama Baptists among the work being done in Alaska, became somewhat of an embedded missionary with Liberty Church when



Alabama Baptists helped launch Liberty Church in Craig, Alaska. Pastor Cody Schwegel's son, Greyer, died from injuries sustained in a July 14 dirt bike collision.

it launched in 2021, working daily alongside the Schwegel family for the first six months. He has been back and forth in ministry there since then.

“Greyer was one exceptional young man, and he will be greatly missed,” Baldwin said. “He cared deeply for his friends and was always trying to get his unchurched friends in church.” He achieved that goal, at least for the moment, as young people from across the island came to Liberty Church to gather with Greyer’s family after his death, Baldwin noted.

Craig is a fishing and logging town with about 1,000 residents on Prince of Wales Island. The island, about 160 miles long and 30 miles wide, is accessible only by small aircraft or ferry.

Goldman said he has been en-

couraged to hear of the outpouring of love and support coming from people across the island and urges Alabama Baptists to be praying for both families.

Fervent prayers

“We pray God can use this devastating accident to further the work being done and help believers shine His light even brighter on the island,” Goldman said.



Pastor Cody Schwegel baptizes his middle son, Greyer, in 2022 at Liberty Church in Craig, Alaska. Greyer was the first person baptized in the church’s new sanctuary.

Cody Schwegel (center) shares updates on Liberty Church with Alabama Baptist missions and ministry leaders Scotty Goldman (left) and Jamie Baldwin (right) during one of their recent visits to Craig, Alaska.



Photo by Doug Rogers/Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

The Alabama Baptist

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

(ISSN 0738-7741; USPS 011-080)
© The Alabama Baptist, Inc.
is published every other week by The Alabama Baptist, Inc., at 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209. Phone: 205-870-4720. Statewide phone: 800-803-5201.
Website: www.thealabamabaptist.org
Email: news@thealabamabaptist.org or subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org
Periodicals postage paid at Baton Rouge, La.

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JENNIFER DAVIS RASH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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The crossword puzzle
can be found on page 11.



Rashional Thoughts

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

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

God uses even the tiniest investment in others for their good, His glory

The teen seemed hesitant at first but then snatched up the Bible and held it carefully in her lap. A few seconds earlier, I rescued the faux leather-bound hard copy collection of God's Word as she hopped in my car and almost sat on it.

Handing it across the console to her as she clicked her seat belt, I asked if she might hold it for me to keep it safe as we drove. She froze for a few seconds as if to analyze the item carefully to figure out what it was and then pleasantly agreed.

Fond memories

As we made our way to the next destination, the 15-year-old opened the Bible and flipped through the pages slowly and respectfully. She stopped along her journey through the books to recall something from childhood when she was last in church.

Smiles, giggles and bright eyes accompanied the memories she shared. The more she described various moments, I realized she was talking about Vacation Bible School and other children's ministry activities.

A voice from the backseat echoed fond memories of similar experiences, especially the cookies and other snacks they enjoyed. The two teen girls

swapped stories for several more minutes.

While it had been several years since either had been inside a church, much less opened or held a Bible, it mesmerized me to hear them pull such specific details back to the surface, and all because I asked one of the girls to hold the Bible that was free floating in my car.

My time with the teens was short, but I made sure to let them do most of the talking. I listened, smiled encouragingly and prayed silently for their hearts to soften to what God might be doing in that moment.

Even now as I share the experience with you, I'm reminded to continue praying for them and the people God might put in their path.

Pouring Jesus in

And while I could be tempted to think God had used me to help draw them closer to Him (which I do hope is the case),

God definitely used the experience to remind me how intensely He can use every investment we make in others for His glory.

As we come out of VBS season and turn our attention toward preparing the kids in our lives to head back to school, the days are busy but it's the individual

attention and care we provide that will be remembered most. It's the sights, sounds, smells and security — the sense of love, value and safety — they will carry with them.

Pouring Jesus in as much as possible also reinforces their foundation.

From the nephews and nieces who

hold much of my heart to dear friends' children who inched their way in as well to the cuties that cross my path at church and in the community, they bring so much joy and offer such a unique gift to the world.

I find myself wanting desperately to be part of their support system to ensure they are pro-

tected and prepared for the journey ahead. At the same time, some days seem fruitless, and I wonder if anything I might offer will really make a difference.

Simple reminders

Then a moment like the teenager sharing fond memories of VBS and how loved she felt during that time happens. She even surprised herself, I think, with the positive and peaceful emotions she sensed as she processed her memories.

Thank you, Lord, for simple reminders precisely when I need them.

I may not always know the best thing to do at the exact right time, but I am learning how God can and will work through us when we make ourselves available. He will provide opportunities for us to shine His light, invest in others for His glory and give us the strength and capacity if we merely trust and go.

He will also redeem our missteps along the way, and that revelation shifts my insecurities to courage and intrigue.

On my own, I can't imagine knowing how to participate in the communities who guide and care for the little children of the world, but in His strength and by following His path, all things are possible.

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Lessons learned from loved ones now in heaven

By **Hannah Whitman**
The Alabama Baptist

Two Angels: Eight Lessons Learned on Earth” is a book by George Elliott, a photographer and author who patterns the main characters in his book after two of his own family members who have made their walks into heaven.

In the book, Amelia Angel is patterned after Elliott’s daughter Amelia who died in 1995 at the age of 17 in a car accident. The other main character is named Angel T after his grandson Tyson Stewart who died at the age of 20 in an accident.

Elliott has the two family members meet in heaven because they didn’t actually know each other on earth. Even so, they shared a lot of similar qualities, he said.

8 rules

Elliott said he wanted to share his memories of his two family members to help others learn from them.

“They were so full of life, and they exhibited all of the characteristics in the eight rules in the book, and I wanted other kids to be able to learn lessons from their examples and what they believed,” Elliott said.

The eight rules in the book tell us to smile, be kind, laugh a lot, think

before speaking or acting, find out what excites you, give your family and loved ones hugs, give hope to people and tell people you love them.

Elliott said Amelia was one who did all eight of those things on a regular basis. When she was 17, she was a camp counselor at Camp Cosby in Alpine. One night when she was with some other counselors, they were in a car accident.

Tyson, Elliott’s grandson, died in 2020, and it was after he passed away that Elliott wanted to write this book.

“I made them angels because I

thought maybe children could relate to them better as those characters,” Elliott said. This is a book he wrote for remembering, he said, because “losing a child or grandchild never gets easier, but it is nice to have remembering.”

After Tyson died, Elliott said he wrote the book and then set it aside for a while. He said he knew he wanted it illustrated and published but was going to do that part himself.

Then he remembered an artist, Sandy Bishop, whom he had met at an art show where he had shown some of his photography.

The two decided to work to-

gether. Bishop painted every page by hand, and Elliott scanned them in for the book so that the brush strokes and roughness of a hand-painted piece is visible.

Elliott said the artistry and the way she captured the two angels are exactly as he imagined. He said she also captured the physical traits and expressions the two main characters exhibited during their lives.

“Every kid is special, and every kid makes a difference,” Elliott said. “By following the examples of Amelia Angel and Angel T, it will help them to make a difference, to be happy and be able to make other people happy as well. It also sparks questions about heaven and dying between parents and their children, and it gives them the opportunity to talk about that,” Elliott said.

Helping others

About 400 copies of the book have already been sold. Elliott said a portion of each sale goes to the Amelia Center, a counseling center for families who have lost children and other loved ones. The center was started after Amelia died so families could receive the kind of care George and his wife, Jerrie, needed after they lost Amelia.

Elliott said his wife enjoys the story he wrote about their daughter and grandson and likes how the book treats them and their character.

For more information about the book, email Elliott at gbephotos@yahoo.com.

“Healthy small groups require shared oxygen. Great conversation leaves space for reflection, disagreement, laughter and silence. It recognizes that the goal isn’t to show how much you know — it’s to help everyone grow,” said Christian media expert **Phil Cooke**.

“You make time for the things that you want to do,” said **Cindy Sproles**, a Tennessee native who writes devotions and books set in the Appalachian Mountains. “When you make the time, that’s practice, that’s work. It’s work that produces ... success.”

Sometimes being a pastor is lonelier than the third verse of a hymn, which is why it’s important to plug into pastor networks, local associations, your state convention and so forth. Find a Barnabas, be a Barnabas ...

Matt Henslee
@mhensless on X

Don’t let the sun go down on your anger! It’s toxic and will destroy you if left to spread like gangrene.

Richard Blackaby
@richardblackaby on X



Submitted photo
GEORGE ELLIOTT

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“A short definition of Christian ethics:
To live well, in ways suited to our design
as image-bearers of God.”

ANDREW T. WALKER
@AndrewTWalker on X

“Our goal is not simply to develop skilled musicians, but faithful worship leaders who understand the heart and purpose of worship,” said Kentucky Baptist Convention worship and music ministry consultant **Jason “Bubba” Stewart** on Boyce College’s fifth annual Student Worship Camp.

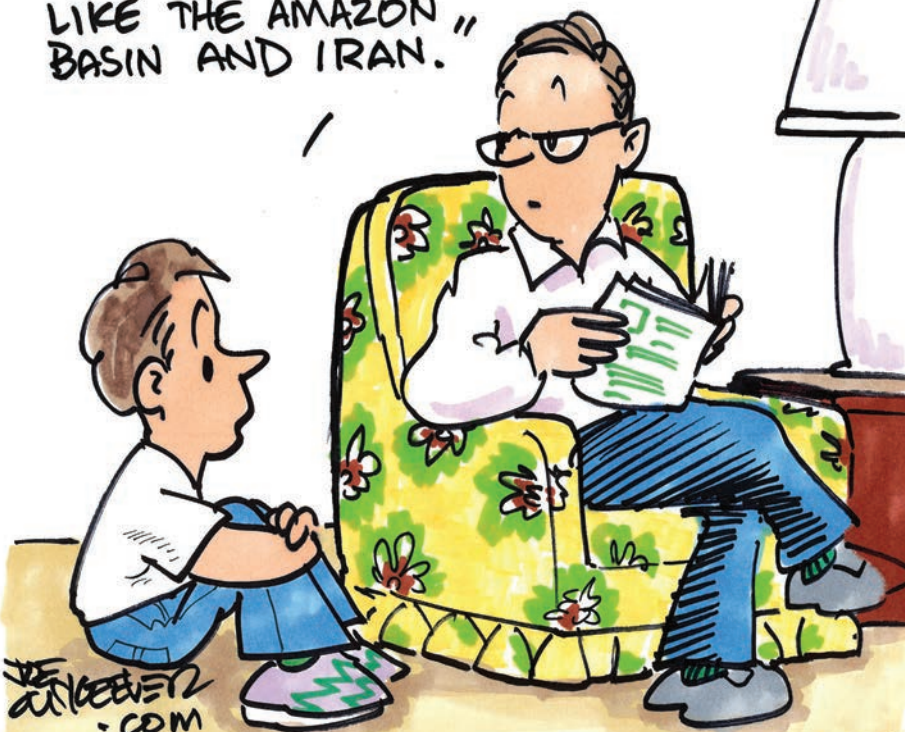
“We believe those serving behind the scenes in audio, video, lighting and production are just as vital to the worship ministry of the local church as those who sing and play on stage.”

“I want to die with my boots on. I don’t want to rust out. I told the Lord long ago that if He opens doors, I’m going to walk through

them unless He says, ‘No,’” said **Cecil Taylor**, former dean of the school of Christian studies at the University of Mobile, who has not slowed down much in his 13 years of retirement, continuing to write, preach and teach as the Lord opens doors.

“One of the most massive Kingdom things we can do on this side of eternity is to forgive,” said Christian singer-songwriter and worship leader **Stephen McWhirter**. “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.” He also is the author of “Radically Restored: How Knowing Jesus Heals Our Brokenness.”

“SO, POP, I WAS THINKING WHEN I GROW UP I’D LIKE TO BE A PREACHER—YOU KNOW, LIKE PASTOR MIKE. EVERYONE LOVES YOU, NO ONE CRITICIZES YOU, AND YOU GET TO DO MISSION TRIPS TO EXOTIC PLACES LIKE THE AMAZON BASIN AND IRAN.”



Lass WORDS

BY **KEN LASS**
The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Spiritual lesson from a cucumber?

Are you feeling a bit down today? Feel like you are too small to make a difference in the world?

You need to take a lesson from the cucumber. Yes, this common green vegetable, that grows like a weed in most gardens, can teach you something important about the role you play in God’s Kingdom.

I came upon this profound revelation while dining in a local restaurant. I ordered a meal that came with a salad as the first course. As I worked my way through it, I took note that the bowl contained a mixture of lettuce, cheese, tomatoes, crispy onion bits, croutons ... and deep in the bowl near the bottom, several small pieces of cucumber. You really had to search to find them.

Staying hydrated

I don’t really like salads, or vegetables in general, if I’m honest. But they’re supposed to be good for you, so I began munching my way through the assortment and found myself wondering which of these ingredients was actually the most beneficial.

When I got home I decided to research it (yes, I have too much spare time). Turns out that despite being by far the smallest element in the salad, the cucumber was by far the healthiest.

Cucumbers are 95% water. (Amaze your friends with that

trivia.) So they help keep you hydrated.

Cukes are also an excellent source of vitamins D and K, as well as potassium and calcium. They also provide a little fiber which is good for digestion. Cucumbers have antioxidants, which may help reduce inflammation and protect against chronic diseases.

Important benefits

They are good for your bones, your skin and blood sugar control, and a serving contains just 15 calories!

Why should you care about this? Well, think about it. Those little bits of cucumber in your salad are making the biggest difference and providing the most important benefit to your body.

There’s a metaphor here: You don’t have to be a big, important person to make a big, important difference. Every godly act of kindness and love makes the world around you a healthier place. People may not notice, but God will.

So be the cucumber in the salad of your world!

MEET THE AUTHOR

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

Alabama news

AUTAUGA ASSOCIATION

► **Calvary Baptist Church, Prattville**, will host a back to school “bash and splash” Aug. 8, 9–11 a.m. Backpacks filled with school supplies will be given out. Mike Watts is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► **Donnie Arrant** recently retired from **The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham**, after serving as associate pastor of administration for 32 years. The church held a reception honoring him and his wife, Cathy. Matt Mason is pastor.



Submitted photo

► **Gregory Clarke**, pastor of **New Hope Baptist Church, Birmingham**, for almost 40 years, has announced his plans to retire Dec. 31. During his tenure, he has been instrumental in starting a community food pantry, a senior citizens' recreation center, independent living apartments for seniors, a prison ministry and a weekly television broadcast for the homebound. He and his wife, Regina, have four children and eight grandchildren.



CLARKE

► **Birmingham Metro Baptist Association** Woman's Missionary Union will hold its annual meeting Aug. 22, 10 a.m.–12 p.m., Shades Crest Baptist Church, Hoover. The guest speaker will be Jackie Champion from the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries. ABCH requests that participants bring new diaper bags

and colorful backpacks for children in foster care. Lunch will be served. Cost is \$10 per person. Register by Aug. 17 through BMBA's E-Giving tab at onrealm.org/bmbaonline/-/form/give/GiveNow.

BLOUNT ASSOCIATION

► **Pleasant View Missionary Baptist Church, Holly Pond**, will host its monthly third Sunday singing Aug. 16, 5 p.m. with Children of the Promise from Georgia. For more information, call 256-339-1863 or 256-590-1501. Earl Harper is pastor.

DEKALB ASSOCIATION

► **Keith Hawkins** is the new pastor of **New Home Baptist Church, Crossville**. He previously served as a youth pastor in Boaz and as pastor of Liberty Hill Baptist Church, Horton. He and his wife, Erin, have three children.



Facebook photo

JUDSON ASSOCIATION

► **First Baptist Church Abbeville** has signed a contract to begin construction on its new sanctuary and education building. Pastor Ricky Sowell expects to break ground in September, with early 2028 as the projected completion. FBC's former buildings were destroyed by a fire in late 2024. Since then they have worshipped in the family life center, the one surviving building, and met for Sunday School in the classrooms of Abbeville Elementary School.

SHELBY ASSOCIATION

► **Kevin Beck** is the new minister of music for **First Baptist Church Alabaster**. He previously

served as worship and education pastor at Southside Baptist Church, Fayette. Beck and his wife, Shelby, have one son. Steve Andrews is pastor.

TUSKEGEE LEE ASSOCIATION

► **Chewacla Baptist Church, Opelika**, celebrated its 75th anniversary in conjunction with a July 4 celebration that included a bounce house and hot dog/hamburger lunch. During the activities, Calvin Milford (left), a commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, honored the church with a special presentation. Donnie Trimble (right), the oldest deacon, accepted the commemorative plaque on behalf of the church. Mark Murphy is pastor.



Submitted photo

WEST CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

► **Bill Goodwin**, pastor of **Ocmulgee Baptist Church, Selma**, recently celebrated 30 years in ministry. During a special worship service July 5, Goodwin (right), received presentations from Tommy Beach (left), deacon chair, and Mike Jackson, associate executive director of the State Board of Missions. Following the service, a reception was held honoring Goodwin and his wife, Sharon.



Facebook photo

EDITOR'S NOTE — Please send news items to news@thealabamabaptist.org.

Husband-wife team marks combined 140 years of service

Palmerdale Cross Baptist Church, Pinson, celebrated its longest-serving deacon, Mickey Gilliland, and his wife, Laura Lee, who is a charter member, with a special recognition July 12.

Current members of the church likely can't remember a time without the Gillilands, who married in 1959, serving in some capacity.

Mickey has been a deacon for 60 years, and Laura Lee a member for 80 years. She alternated playing the church piano and organ for many years.

The church organized in 1946 as First Baptist Church Palmerdale, and Laura Lee's family became the first official members.

FBC Palmerdale merged with Grandview Baptist Church in 2015 to become Palmerdale Cross.

Deacon chair James Rogers said, “When you think of Mickey you think of steadfastness. Anytime someone asks me what kind of person I'd like to imitate, I think of Mickey and Laura Lee.”

‘Rock solid prayer warriors’

Rogers describes the couple as “rock solid prayer warriors.”

Up until very recently, Mickey would show up and participate in every church work day, Rogers said.

On the occasion of Mickey's 94th birthday this year, PCBC shared a post, saying, “Mickey has such a big heart for people and quietly works behind the scenes to care for families, meet needs and show the love of Christ in the most practical ways.”

Mickey said he has enjoyed his years of service and especially loved cooking for the Brotherhood breakfasts.

According to their daughter, Leigh Anne, Mickey's declining health has begun to keep him from the work he loves. The Gillilands have one daughter, three grandchildren and five great-grandchildren with one on the way. (Taylor Inmon)

Birmingham church thrives amid change

By Taylor Inmon
The Alabama Baptist

When Rob Paul became the senior pastor of Huffman Baptist Church in Birmingham, in 2019, he knew change was imminent. The church once ran 1,500 attendees, but attendance had plummeted to 150 people.

In early 2022, Paul walked the halls of the “huge campus” asking God what was next for the aging congregation. As he prayed, the word “partnerships” came to his mind.

Partnerships

Since then, the church has hosted a couple of local Christian nonprofits. And when Paul learned that nearby Banks Academy was looking for a new home, Huffman began hosting the school on its campus with the full support of the congregation, said executive pastor Bill Sears.

Many Banks Academy families have joined the church, sparking renewed preschool, children’s and youth ministries, Sears added.

The demographics, Sears noted, have also shifted at the church with African American members now making up more than 30% of the congregation. The church has also baptized more than 80 children and parents with Banks Academy.

A few years later, another partnership began when South Roebuck Baptist Church moved in and began a traditional worship service in Huffman’s chapel.

South Roebuck pastor Gary Fisher said the congregation brought 50 people, which included those already absorbed into South Roebuck from First Baptist Church Roebuck Plaza.

Fisher and Paul agreed the congregations have blended in well together.

“You can’t tell who’s who when we’re together,” Fisher said.

‘Follow God in His work’

Mentors become a second family during a pivotal time of life

(continued from page 1)

it was enough to spark further conversation and curiosity.

“We discussed [it] with our college pastor, and he was excited about the possibility,” Pettit recalled. “He announced the idea at the college group’s Monday night service called Engage, which is open to all college students on the Jacksonville State University campus. He said, ‘If you are interested in a mentorship program with people your grandparent’s age then sign up tonight.’”

Beginning with 15 students, the group was called Titus 2 based on Titus 2:3–5.

“We were astonished,” she recalled. “We met monthly on a Sunday night in someone’s home, fed them a home-cooked meal, shared our personal testimonies and talked about topics that college students deal with. We love on them and take interest in their lives.”

Through the partnership, senior adult women and college girls have baked Christmas cookies together, made jelly and biscuits, had slumber parties, been on shopping trips and other activities.

The senior adult men have taught the guys to work on cars, among other things.

“We are now referred to as their Jacksonville grandparents and introduce them as such,” Pettit said.

Rewarding ministry

“Is ministry easy? Maybe not, but it is absolutely rewarding. Living in a college town does make it easier to start a college ministry, and already having a college ministry in place at our church helps.”

Pettit believes other senior adult ministries can experience the power of God’s work — both spiritually and personally — as they bridge the generation gap with students in their communities.



Photo courtesy of Titus 2 ministry

Titus 2 ministry began with 15 students and has since grown to 140 students being involved at the end of May 2026 before students left for summer break.

In 2023 Titus 2 started with 15 students and now there are 140 involved in the effort.

“It’s a win-win situation from God for all of us,” Pettit said.

For churches interested in beginning a ministry like Titus 2, Pettit suggests first looking around to see where God is working.

“Pray about what God wants you to do,” Pettit said. “Let Him know you are available, and know that you will have to make adjustments in your life to follow God in His work — late night talks, boyfriend breakup consoling, future life counseling, opening your home to meals, parties, sleepovers and spiritual advice.”

“We tell students that we can’t believe they want to hang out with old people. They tell us they can’t believe we want to keep up with them. One student told us she had prayed for something like this when she started school.”

College student Grayson James is grateful for the ministry of Titus 2.

“There are people who quietly change the course of life without ever asking for recognition,” he said. “The Titus 2 group is made up of those people.”

Offering encouragement

“What began as a Sunday School class became a place where college students found not only a seat at the table, but a family. They opened their homes, shared meals, prayed over us and faithfully pointed us to Christ,” James said.

“When I surrendered my life to Jesus in college, I needed wisdom, courage to leave my life behind and people to remind me to keep my eyes fixed on Him. In His kindness, God placed the Titus 2 group in my path.”

“Through their discipleship, encouragement and faithful prayers, they became His hands and feet to me. I thank Jesus for the Kingdom work they continue to do. Their faithfulness has become a part of my testimony, and I truly believe God used them to help save my life.”

Westwood senior adults celebrate America at VBS

By **Dianna L. Cagle**
The Alabama Baptist

Around 150 senior adults celebrated 250 years of the United States of America during the first day of their own Vacation Bible School.

Westwood Baptist Church in Alabaster held “In God We Trust” for its senior adults July 13–15.

This was the second year of VBS for the seniors, said Scott Morton, Westwood’s pastor of connections and generational ministries since 2019.

“They’re looking for fellowship,” Morton said. “They’re inviting their friends from other churches. They’re looking to reminisce back to when they went to Vacation Bible School. Our end goal is for them to have memories and to glorify God.”

Attendance at the senior adults’ second annual VBS doubled since last year’s inaugural event.

This year’s theme honored the special anniversary of the nation’s founding. Monday’s focus was on the military: its past, present and future.

Steve West, who retired 11 years ago from the Air Force, was one of the speakers July 13.

“God blessed me beyond

who I was because of who He is,” he shared. “He took a vessel that wasn’t perfect, had been broken many times. God takes you from where you are and moves you to where you should be as long as you let Him.”

‘You are evidence’

West currently works with more than 200 chaplains around the world as director of chaplaincy for the National Association of Evangelicals. He also is an author of two books: “The Bronze Scar: Understanding How PTSD Feels to Help Victims and Those Who Support Them” and “Beyond the Scar: Healing the Wounds of Trauma.”

“You are evidence that God brings us through,” he said.

“It has been so much fun,” said Darlene Carrigan, one of the volunteers who first approached Morton about the idea two years ago. Carrigan said the church’s monthly senior

adult luncheon draws between 75 and 100 people. She and another member, Nancy Runyan, prayed about the idea for a senior adults VBS and met with Morton to make it happen.

“We are really stepping up our program this year since it was a hit last year,” said another volunteer, Nan



Photo by Dianna L. Cagle/The Alabama Baptist

Uncle Sam wants to see you at Westwood Baptist Church’s senior adult VBS next year. What started last year with 75 senior adults grew to about 150 participants this year.

Scarborough, who helped organize and lead during the three-day event, which began at 8:30 each morning and wrapped up around 1 p.m. each day.

Felt like vacation

“Last year, we had 75 of our seniors attend,” she said. “It was a great week. Everyone enjoyed it, and we’re so thankful for a week of good Christian fellowship with a patriotic theme, crafts, activities, snacks and messages from our pastor, Kenneth

Bruce. They felt like they had a vacation with their church family.”

Scarborough said she hopes “this encourages other churches to start a senior adult VBS in their churches. ... This is geared to feed their souls for God’s glory at this stage in their life.”

Tuesday honored local fire and police officers, and Wednesday was a culmination with the senior adult

choir from First Baptist Church Trussville directed by Bob Smith and Kim Searcy. A luncheon was held the last day.

During the week, Uncle Sam was available for pictures, as was an authentic World War II jeep.

A bagpiper played the flag procession and a hymn, and Benjamin Franklin was one of the flag bearers.

Morton, a retired Navy chaplain, said the theme appeared to resonate with this generation of senior adults. Many made sacrifices for their country in some very tough times.

Around 20 volunteers served the adults through registration, teaching classes, leading arts and crafts, putting out snacks, decorations and more. Participants were asked to write notes of encouragement for current troops and take a toy soldier to display to remind them to remember to pray for the military.

To see a gallery of photos, visit tabonline.org/Westwood.



Photo by Dianna L. Cagle/The Alabama Baptist

Steve West, who retired 11 years ago from the Air Force, speaks to senior adults at VBS on July 13.

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LAYING A FOUNDATION

Super Summer Alabama brings record 412 students to UM campus

We don't need to be afraid about sharing our faith," said 13-year-old Paisley Welch of First Baptist Church Hazel Green, Alabama. "I want to have a good base on how to be a leader and to lead in the Christian faith."

That's why she and a record-breaking 412 middle and high school students from 34 churches across Alabama and beyond were on the University of Mobile campus July 13–17 for Super Summer Alabama 2026, a discipleship camp sponsored by Alabama Baptist Students, the student ministry arm of the State Board of Missions.

Super Summer Alabama is for students who want an opportunity to grow in their faith and go deeper in their knowledge of the Lord and His Word, said camp director Josh Meadows.

"Their passion for the Lord is intense," Meadows said.

Each year, pastors and youth leaders, called "deans," lead color-coded "schools" of students. Each of the nine schools has a different focus. For example: Red School studied the



Photo courtesy of University of Mobile

Bible from Genesis to Revelation; Silver School focused on apologetics; and Green School covered the doctrines of God focusing on spiritual disciplines, disciple-making and evangelism.

The University of Mobile's Worship Collective student ensemble led daily worship with messages from Cody Hale, lead pastor of The Orchard Church in Collierville, Ten-

nessee. Monday night's message from 1 John challenged students to seek Truth and determine if they are living in the light or darkness.

'Deeper grounding'

Matthew Jacobs, senior pastor of Elkdale Baptist Church in Selma, was dean of the Red School.

"Super Summer Alabama allows our students to have a deeper

grounding and understanding of their faith that prepares them for adulthood and college," said Jacobs.

Now in his fourth year as a camp leader, Jacobs said he looks forward to camp as much as students do.

"I love seeing students 'get it' and the light goes on," he said. "It lays a foundation they can build on when they go home."

Students who attend Super Summer Alabama on the university campus, then later enroll at the University of Mobile, are eligible for a \$2,000 UM Visit Scholarship.

Students who attend all nine components of the Super Summer Alabama program are eligible for a \$4,000 Super Summer Scholarship at UM and will have met requirements for the freshman course "Introduction to Christian Worldview."

Each summer, the University of Mobile welcomes thousands of middle and high school students to campus for a variety of conferences and camps. For more information about UM, visit umobile.edu.

For more information about Super Summer Alabama, visit supersummer.alstudents.org. (UM)

UM names Ashlyn Mitchell director of university communications

University of Mobile alumna and award-winning journalist Ashlyn Mitchell has returned to her alma mater as director of university communications.

Mitchell brings four years of television news experience to the role after serving as a multimedia journalist, reporter and anchor at FOX10 News in Mobile. She has covered news and human-interest stories across the Gulf Coast while developing a reputation for thoughtful storytelling and connecting with people from all walks of life.

As director of university communications, Mitchell will lead strategic communications and media relations for the Baptist university, working with campus leaders to share the stories of students, alumni, faculty and programs while advancing the university's mission and brand.

'Storyteller'

"Ashlyn is an exceptional storyteller who understands both our mission and the importance of communicating it with excellence," said University of Mobile President Charles Smith. "She has a deep love for the University

of Mobile, a heart for people and the professional experience to tell the stories of how God is working through our students, faculty and alumni."

"Returning to the University of Mobile feels like coming home," Mitchell said.

"UM equipped me with the skills, confidence and Christ-centered foundation to step into the news world and be a light.

"I'm excited to give back to a university that has given so much to me — one that is committed to preparing students like myself to impact

the world for the Kingdom of God."

Mitchell graduated summa cum laude from the University of Mobile in 2022 with a bachelor of arts in communication and minors in French and government.



MITCHELL

As a student, she served as vice president of the UM Ambassadors program, interned with the Office for Marketing and Communications, worked in Student Life, served as a graduate assistant in Residential Life and was

crowned Miss University of Mobile 2022.

Mitchell succeeds Kathy Dean, who retired after 33 years of leading the university's communications and public relations efforts.

Dean served under five university presidents and helped shape the university's voice through decades of growth, earning national recognition for excellence in higher education communications.

Mitchell will build on that legacy as she leads the university's communications strategy into its next chapter. (UM)



UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Two SingFests coming up in September

This popular senior adult event features nearly two hours of just singing the great hymns and songs of our generation. Over that time, Frank Jones will lead in singing 30–35 different songs — something for everyone. Choose from two dates and locations:

- Tuesday, Sept. 8 — Parkway Baptist Church, Auburn
- Tuesday, Sept. 15 — Gilliam Springs Baptist Church, Arab



SBOM photo

Both events begin at 10 a.m. and will conclude by 11:45 a.m. Make plans to enjoy lunch at an area restaurant after we finish. Register your group today at alsbom.org/singfest.

ILS: Pathfinder event

The Intentional Leader Series: Pathfinder event is coming up Tues., Sept. 15, at the SBOM Office Facility in Prattville, 9 a.m.–2 p.m. It will be led by Kevin Blackwell, executive director of the Mobile Baptist Network. Join us as we focus on strategically leading with intentionality in following God’s plan for your church, helping followers understand the “why” of the plan all throughout the process, then evaluating the results as you near completion. Cost is \$10, which includes lunch. Register at alsbom.org/ils.



BLACKWELL

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



2026–27 Resource Directories now available to plan ahead

It’s time to order your 2026–27 Resource Directory! This 16-month calendar has State Board of Missions events and emphases already printed with plenty of room for you to add your church’s events. It also includes an alphabetical listing of ministries and services along with directories of associational, state and SBC contacts. Order yours by visiting alsbom.org/rd or contacting Traci Jackson at tljackson@alsbom.org or 334-613-2249. Please limit to 20 copies per church.

WORD search

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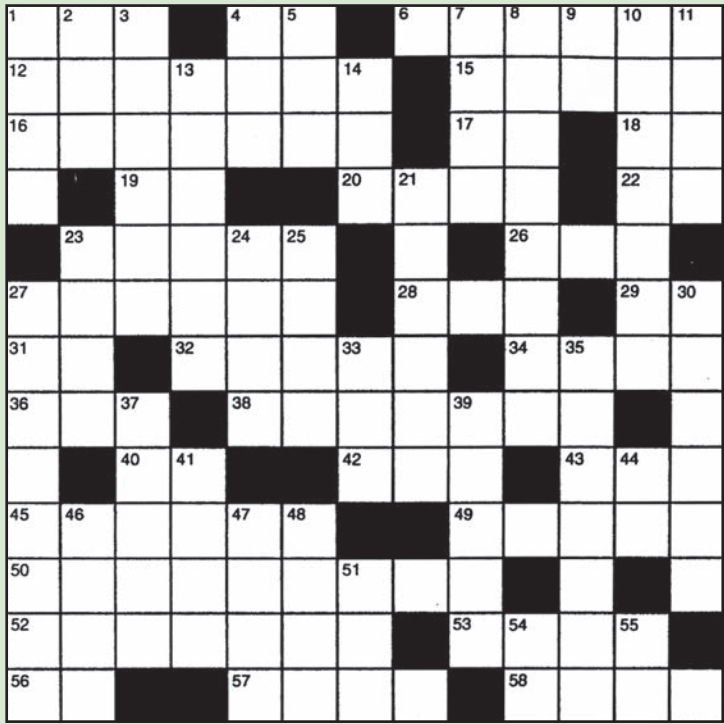
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H N E D E L N T M K C K M E H

“The whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh and set up the tabernacle of meeting there.”
JOSHUA 18:1a

CHRISTIAN Crossword

ACROSS

- 1. Because the enemy hath said against you, _____. (Ezek. 36:2)
- 4. 16th letter of the Greek alphabet.
- 6. Color.
- 12. ____ seed.
- 15. ____ the chief. (1 Chron. 26:10)
- 16. ____ the son of Jair slew Lahmi. (1 Chron. 20:5)
- 17. A branch of the military. (abbr.)
- 18. Paid. (abbr.)
- 19. Doctor. (abbr.)
- 20. I will even appoint over you terror, consumption and the burning _____. (Lev. 26:16)
- 22. And when ____ defied Israel. (2 Sam. 21:21)
- 23. Pharaoh's daughter drew him up out of the water.
- 26. Hot or cold drink.
- 27. These things have I written unto you concerning them that ____ you. (1 John 2:26)
- 28. Son of Benjamin. (Gen. 46:21)
- 29. New Testament. (abbr.)
- 31. Sound of laughter.
- 32. The Lord is thy ____ upon thy right hand. (Ps. 121:5)
- 34. Crush.
- 36. If ____ be blameless, the husband of one wife. (Titus 1:6)
- 38. Have ____ the weightier matters of the law. (Matt. 23:23)
- 40. Judah's firstborn.
- 42. Direction.
- 43. ____ not vain repetitions. (Matt. 6:7)
- 45. Determined to send ____ unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea. (Acts 11:29)
- 49. South American grass.
- 50. A continual ____ given



By Judy Ellis Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- him of the king. (2 Kings 25:30)
 - 21. Welcomes.
 - 23. We would know therefore what these things _____. (Acts 17:20)
 - 24. Bounce off.
 - 25. Now the coat was without _____. (John 19:23)
 - 27. ____, Meshach and Abednego.
 - 30. Thy lips are like a ____ of scarlet. (Song of Sol. 4:3)
 - 33. Opposite of "live."
 - 35. Went forth toward Geliloth, which is over against the going up of _____. (Josh. 18:17)
 - 37. Screams.
 - 39. Indian hut.
 - 41. Having faithful children not accused of ____ or unruly. (Titus 1:6)
 - 44. Spanish. (abbr.)
 - 46. And they came to ____, where were 12 wells of water. (Ex. 15:27)
 - 47. Female sheep.
 - 48. ____ ye well. (Acts 15:29)
 - 51. Direction.
 - 54. District attorney. (abbr.)
 - 55. Then Nebuchadnezzar came near ____ the mouth of the burning fiery furnace. (Dan. 3:26)
- DOWN
- 1. Prayer ending.
 - 2. Child of Aram. (Gen. 10:23)
 - 3. Publish in the palaces at _____. (Amos 3:9)
 - 4. Cooking vessel.
 - 5. The sixth captain for the sixth month was ____ the son of Ikkes. (1 Chron. 27:9)
 - 7. Isaac's eldest son.
 - 8. Remember that thou in thy ____ receivedst thy good things. (Luke 16:25)
 - 9. Lunar module. (abbr.)
 - 10. We are ____ and fatherless, our mothers are as widows. (Lam. 5:3)
 - 11. Deep and ____.
 - 13. Saul of ____.
 - 14. Any of various nucleic

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.



UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

NextGen Lunch & Learns

Healthy ministries are built on meaningful connections. The NextGen Lunch & Learn series provides preschool, children, student and discipleship leaders with a space to discuss this year's theme, Relationships Matter.

Choose the location nearest you and then register your ministry leaders at kidzlinkal.org/next-gen.

- Sept. 8 — Woodmont Baptist Church, Florence
- Sept. 10 — Calvary Baptist Church, Dothan
- Sept. 22 — First Baptist Church Prattville
- Sept. 24 — CrossPoint Church, Trussville

To register, visit kidzlinkal.org/next-gen or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



- Sept. 29 — West Mobile Baptist Church, Mobile
- Cost is \$10 and lunch will be provided. Each event will be held from noon to 2 p.m.

Get Acquainted Day is September 1

Don't miss this opportunity for pastors, ministerial staff, ministry assistants or associational staff who are new to Alabama to meet your state missionaries and become familiar with all the ministries of the Alabama Baptist

State Board of Missions, as well as our larger convention family. Lunch will be served. The day begins at 9:30 a.m. (with check-in at 9) and will conclude no later than 3 p.m. Register today at alsbom.org/gad.

Take advantage of 2026 GroupLife training videos

GroupLife is a ministry resource designed to help churches strengthen Sunday School and small-group ministries. Through on-demand training videos, age-group specific tools and practical guidance for leaders,

GroupLife equips churches to build healthy, disciple-making groups centered on God's Word and meaningful relationships. Check out this year's videos — as well as helpful resources from past years — by visiting alsbom.org/grouplife.

UM launching Tom Elliff Center for Missions

The University of Mobile is launching the new Tom Elliff Center for Missions as fall semester begins, creating a campus hub where students can grow as Kingdom leaders through missions training, discipleship, service opportunities and partnerships with churches and ministries around the world.

A kickoff event will be held Aug. 28.

Opportunities

The new center will expand opportunities for students in every academic major to explore God's calling through missions experiences, leadership development, international friendships and practical ministry training.

The launch marks the beginning of a phased effort to build a Great Commission ecosystem that connects students with missionaries, churches and ministry partners while preparing them for a lifetime of Kingdom impact.

"The Tom Elliff Center for Missions represents the heart of who we are as

the University of Mobile," said UM President Charles Smith. "Our mission is to equip students through Christ-centered learning and community to pursue God's calling in their lives. The center provides another intentional pathway for students to discover how God can use their gifts to advance His Kingdom, whether they serve across the street or around the world."

The center will serve as a gathering place for missionary training, collegiate mobilization, international student hospitality and missional community. Throughout the coming academic year, students can expect opportunities to participate in missions fellowships, leadership training, workshops with pastors and missionaries, local and international missions experiences, and activities that foster friendships with international students on campus.

Austin Holcomb, director of the Tom Elliff Center for Missions and assistant professor of missions, said the



Photo courtesy of the University of Mobile

center is designed to help students move from simply learning about missions to actively living out the Great Commission.

"Our goal is to provide biblical training and create opportunities that help every student take meaningful next steps to go and make disciples of all nations," Holcomb said. "We want students to graduate prepared to serve as ambassadors of the gospel wherever God leads them."

Among the initiatives planned for the first year are:

- Mission fellowship

gatherings held on Friday mornings for spiritual formation and community.

Scholarships offered

Students who commit to the 6–8 meetings per semester will receive a \$500 scholarship that can be applied toward an approved missions experience during their tenure at UM.

- Mission forum workshops featuring visiting guest missionary speakers and ministry leaders that will address specific topics.

- International connections group gathering stu-

dents from diverse countries and backgrounds to express Christian hospitality and foster campus community.

- Mission experience trips to participate in service projects with Baptist partners.

- Scholarship and leadership opportunities to encourage Great Commission involvement across all University of Mobile departments.

The programs will focus on creating training pathways and developing resources that equip students for faithful service throughout their lives.

Guiding the Tom Elliff Center for Missions is a leadership team with decades of missionary service and global ministry experience. Holcomb and senior advisors D. Ray and Amanda Davis have spent years serving through the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, mobilizing churches, training missionaries and helping believers answer God's call to take the gospel to the nations. (UM)

Report: Christians worldwide urged to stand together

Even as roughly 380 million believers face persecution every year, Christianity continues to grow — even in the most hostile nations where faithfulness commonly means imprisonment, torture or death, according to a new report.

International Christian Concern's recently released 2026 Global Persecution Index began with an urgent call: "Our brothers and sisters in Christ are beaten, imprisoned and even killed for their faith. In many countries, it is illegal for them to share the gospel. We must stand with them."

Each new page of the report paints a sobering yet hopeful picture of global re-

ligious freedom facing rapidly growing persecution.

Among the most alarming trends:

- Growing "religious nationalism" that snuffs out religious freedom.

- Tightening state control over religious organizations.

- Rising terrorism and authoritarianism fueling violence and oppression.

- Foreign regimes leveraging Western technology to supercharge persecution.

Despite relentless repression, according to the report, Christianity remains and is even expanding in surprising places like Iran and Asia. Believers are refusing to stay silent. (Decision Magazine)

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CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR

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

PASTOR

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

PASTOR

First Baptist Church-Boyle, Mississippi, is searching for a full-time pastor. A resume may be sent to: fbcboyle1@outlook.com addressed to Pastor Search Committee.

PASTOR

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

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

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

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Vestavia Hills Baptist Church in Decatur, Alabama, is seeking experienced bivocational pastor for congregation of about forty. Conservative with traditional worship and music. Respond to: Search Committee, 3301 Spring Ave. SW, Decatur, AL 35603.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

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

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 resume to: Melodie Valentine, Chairwoman of Personnel, 15126 Balsam Drive SE, Huntsville, AL 35803.

BIVOCATIONAL YOUTH MINISTER

The Hueytown Baptist Church is a mid-sized congregation located in the Birmingham metro area. We are in search of a bivocational youth minister to join our staff, and work with our youth team and volunteers to help the youth of our church and community become, grow and engage as disciples of Jesus Christ. Interested applicants may reply to: office@hueytownbaptist.com.

OTHER POSITIONS

FINANCIAL ASSISTANT

FBC Birmingham is seeking a full-time staff member, with experience in Shelby Next systems preferred. Duties include, but not limited to, accounts payable, payroll, general ledger and processing contributions. Please send resume and cover letter to: Cyndy James, cjames@fbcbh.org.

REMOTE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Carlos M Consulting is seeking a motivated remote administrative assistant to provide administrative support, manage emails, coordinate appointments and prepare documents. If you are organized, responsive and possess strong communication skills, we'd love to hear from you. Flexible hours, remote position, immediate consideration. Part-time, \$640 weekly. Apply now. Resumecarlosconsulting@gmail.com or text 662-276-1267.

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~A resource for congregational vitality~

Should your church help launch a new congregation?

Trip attended a denominational meeting for deacons where a speaker urged every church to help launch a new congregation.

Every church? Not Calvary, he thought. They were a plateaued congregation that needed a new vision to move forward. That was why they called Brian, a mid-career pastor, to lead the church.

Then he remembered that after seminary, Brian served as pastor of a new congregation. Perhaps he could tell him why any church — especially Calvary — should consider helping launch a new congregation.

Trip told Brian by text message he wanted to talk about this. Brian thought and prayed about it. He felt it might be what Calvary needed.

As chairperson of the deacons at Calvary, Trip felt he should be prepared for the next deacons gathering as five other deacons had attended the training and had questions about launching a new congregation.

"Frankly, Brian, at first I thought it was a crazy idea," Trip shared when they met. "But I talked with my wife about it, and she thought we should not dismiss it without prayerful consideration. What do you think?"

Brian said his initial response was negative as well.

"Then I began to pray, which led me to ponder the idea," he continued. "It led me to consider the impact on the sponsoring churches of launching the congregation where I was pastor after seminary.

"I wrote a list of ways I remembered these churches were impacted and improved their own ministry while helping us launch. We are in an era when church planters launch congregations. When I came along, churches launched congregations."

Here's what Brian means:

First, three sponsoring churches helped launch the congregation Brian led as a church planter. One was the lead church that had launched before. The other two were supporting churches learning the launch process. This was the common model.

Second, each congregation made a financial commitment to the first three years of the new congregation. The lead congregation committed the most, exceeding what their denomination would contribute during the launch years.

Third, the sponsoring congregations had pastors, staff and laypeople with a variety of spiritual gifts and life skills who would contribute to the effort. For example, the three pastors had diverse gifts and skills, and each

one poured into Brian's life as the church planter.

Fourth, staff and laypersons from the sponsoring congregations provided various resources needed to launch the congregation. From the three congregations, more than two dozen families committed to be part of the core team launching the congregation and to stay with the new congregation for one to three years.

Many who committed to stay for more than one year never left.

Prayer strategy

Fifth, each congregation had a prayer strategy to provide spiritual support for the new congregation. This was the most amazing thing. Numerous laypersons were spiritually convicted by the power of prayer and came forward with finances, equipment, materials and volunteer skills that their own congregation did not know they had.

Sixth, the congregations discovered that by helping a new congregation launch, they also boosted the vitality and vibrancy of their own congregation. The supporting congregations weren't reaching their full Kingdom potential, and some amazing things happened once their people were praying and focusing on missional engagement.

Seventh, one of the congregations became the lead congregation for another new congregation that launched a few years later.

Next: See what happened when they talked with the deacons about the possibility of helping launch a new congregation.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

George Bullard spent five decades in Baptist congregational and denominational ministry. His min-

istry roles included three churches, three associations, three state conventions and one national entity. In 2022, he began writing as a columnist for TAB Media Group's publication The Baptist Paper. Bullard continues to serve as a strategic thinking mentor for Christian leaders through his ForthTelling Innovation ministry. TAB Media Group is the publisher for his ForthTelling Innovation book series — available on Amazon.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Sunday School Lessons

By Jay T. Robertson, Ph.D.
Professor of Systematic Theology, University of Mobile



For August 16

COMPROMISE Judges 16:16–31

No study in Judges is complete without investigating Samson. The angel of the Lord had appeared to his barren mother and announced that she and her husband would have a son and that he was to be raised as a Nazarite. The Spirit of the Lord was with Samson, and he was a judge in Israel for 20 years.

Strength Departed (16–20)

Samson had a history of flirting with disaster. In Judges 14, Samson had married a Philistine woman, but the marriage didn't survive the wedding feast. Then he foolishly went to Gaza to visit a prostitute. This visit to the prostitute casts him in the role of a fool destined for destruction.

By now we expect episodes in Samson's story to revolve around women. This time he fell in love with a woman named Delilah. The leaders of the Philistines went to her to convince her to discover the source of Samson's great strength in exchange for 1,100 pieces of silver from each.

Delilah's love for money far exceeded her supposed love for Samson. She asked him about the source of his strength three separate times, and he toyed with her each time. Each time she set the trap, he easily broke free. But she nagged him daily until he finally told her the truth.

While he slept with his head resting on her lap, Delilah had a man slip in and shave his hair. She then woke Samson, and he attempted to escape the trap once again, but this time he was helpless and weak. The greatest tragedy was the fact that Samson did not realize the Lord had left him.

It was not Samson's hair that had given him strength. It was the Lord Himself. His uncut hair was a sign of his being set apart to the Lord as a Nazarite. The Lord withdrew His strength from Samson.

Samson Defeated (21–25)

The man who lived his life by the lust of his eyes had his eyes gouged out. The Philistines brought Samson down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles. They humiliated him by forcing the mighty man to grind grain in the prison.

But his hair began to grow again. The Lord was committed to completing the work in Samson to "begin to save Israel from the power of the Philistines" (13:5). God's plan had not changed.

All people — even unbelievers — are religious because we are all created in the image of God. The Philistine leaders gathered their people together to offer their god, Dagon, a great sacrifice because they believed he had delivered their powerful enemy into their hands.

They decided it would be even more enjoyable if Samson were brought to the party to entertain them.

Philistines Destroyed (26–31)

Led by the hand of a young man, the mighty warrior asked to be positioned so he could lean on the pillars supporting the Philistine temple.

Then Samson called out to the Lord and asked for Him to act on his behalf and strengthen him so he could get vengeance on the Philistines for gouging out his eyes.

Samson then leaned onto the two middle pillars supporting the temple and brought it down, killing thousands of Philistines.

Even at the end of his life, Samson did not understand his role as Israel's deliverer. His concern was merely personal revenge, which motivated him so strongly that he was willing to surrender his own life to achieve it.

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

For August 23

FAITHFULNESS Ruth 1:11–18; 2:5–12

The Book of Ruth teaches that in His sovereign design, God ordains sorrowful tragedy to set the stage for supernatural triumph. God's providence and faithfulness will not fail no matter how dark the times. The book is located historically during the time of the judges. We are introduced to a Judean family fleeing famine in Bethlehem and relocating in Moab.

Things went from bad to worse once they settled in Moab. Elimelech died and left Naomi with her two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. They married Moabite wives named Orpah and Ruth. Within 10 years, both sons also died.

Loss (1:11–15)

Naomi shouldered the burden of caring for her two daughters-in-law. Without her husband and her two sons, her security was lost and her future bleak. She struggled to provide for herself as well as Orpah and Ruth. When Naomi heard that the Lord had ended the famine in Bethlehem, she decided to return home.

Naomi knew the best scenario for Orpah and Ruth was to return home to find husbands among the Moabite men, but both daughters-in-law wanted to go to Bethlehem with Naomi. She insisted that staying with her would ruin their lives, and her bitterness would engulf them.

Orpah kissed her mother-in-law and headed back home, but Ruth was determined to stay with Naomi.

She "clung" to her. This is the same word used in Genesis 2:24 to describe a man leaving his father and mother and bonding with his wife.

She felt sorrowful about the loss of her husband but also the loss in Naomi's heart. She would not let Naomi suffer alone.

Loyalty (16–18)

Ruth fully committed herself to

Naomi's home, people and God. She pledged to remain with Naomi until her death. Ruth's declaration to Naomi revealed the depth of love she had for her.

Ruth's hallmark expression of loyalty to Naomi and commitment to the family she had married into was accompanied by her vow to live for the Lord, the God of Israel. This testimony evidenced Ruth's conversion from worshipping Chemosh, the chief deity of the Moabites.

She enjoined her life to Naomi's and called on God to witness her covenant. Ruth's loyalty has been commended throughout generations. In this age of self-indulgence, her loyal love sparkles like a rare jewel.

Naomi had no argument left in her. The two widows continued their journey to Bethlehem, which would have taken about 7 to 10 days.

Provision (2:5–12)

Before beginning the next act in the drama, the narrator introduces a new character, Boaz, who was a relative of Elimelech. "Boaz" means "in him is strength." He was a prominent man characterized by valor, wealth and property.

After settling in Bethlehem, the two widows needed food to survive, so Ruth asked Naomi for permission to glean in the grain fields. With Naomi's blessing and according to the benevolent providence of God, Ruth "happened" to be in the portion of the field that belonged to Boaz. Boaz asked about Ruth's identity and discovered a family connection.

Boaz spoke to Ruth and instructed her to stay in his field and to stick close to his female workers who were bundling the grain. He also offered her water and protection from his young men.

Ruth was overcome with gratitude for Boaz's display of kindness toward her. Likewise, Boaz was struck with amazement at Ruth's loyalty to Naomi and to the God of Israel.

"But Ruth said, 'For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge ...'"

Ruth 1:16

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sunday School Lessons

By Scott Bush, D.Min.

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For August 16

AN OUTWARD FOCUS 1 Corinthians 10:23–33

Martin Luther begins his “Treatise on Christian Liberty” with two sentences that appear to contradict: “A Christian is an utterly free man, lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is an utterly dutiful man, servant of all, subject to all.”

He explains that, when we are united to Christ, our consciences answer only to Christ. No one can condemn us because Christ paid for our sins, and no one can make demands of us because our allegiance is to Him alone.

On the other hand, our union with Christ also means that we join Him in His sacrificial love for others.

Jesus came to serve and give His life as a ransom (Mark 10:45). If we follow Him, our lives will also be marked by service and self-giving.

We are free as Christians from the judgments of our critics, but we are also obligated to love and serve.

Do what is beneficial to others. (23–24)

“I have the right to do anything” may have been a popular slogan in Corinth. The city was known for its indulgence. Christians may have even adapted the phrase to respond to legalists who added rules to the apostles’ teaching to suit themselves.

The phrase in verse 23 cannot mean that Christians are free to sin (Rom. 6:1–2; Titus 2:11–14) but it does affirm that, apart from what Scripture commands or forbids, Christians are free to differ.

Paul, however, reminds us that to make better choices we need to ask better questions.

Basing our decisions on our rights alone is shortsighted and selfish.

Is it beneficial? Does it build up? Both of these questions move the focus to others. Yes, we rejoice that Christ has set us free from legalism and petty

criticism, but our freedom is a gift that allows us to consider the good of others above our own.

Don’t offend others unnecessarily. (25–30)

One specific issue of Christian liberty at Corinth centered on meat from the markets that had been used in sacrifices to idols. Some Christians felt that to eat it was to participate in idol worship.

Others, like Paul, saw no need to abstain since the gods of Corinth were not real, and the meat could be eaten with thanksgiving to the actual God who provided it (Ps. 24:1).

Paul even saw his freedom to eat as an opportunity to share the gospel. He could dine with unbelievers without being offended or causing offense.

Paul does, however, give an important caveat. If someone else at the meal — presumably another believer — takes offense at the meat, Paul says that he will choose not to eat it, not because his own conscience is changed but out of consideration for the feelings of another.

He calls his readers throughout this letter to be willing to lay aside their rights in order to show love. Many issues of liberty in our churches today (entertainment choices, attire, social habits, political opinions, etc.) have become bitterly and unnecessarily divisive because we insist on our rights at the expense of our relationships. This should never be.

Seek the benefit of others and the glory of God. (31–33)

Prioritizing people over our personal freedoms is essential to effective ministry and healthy churches.

While we can never compromise the gospel or excuse sin, we must always be willing to set aside our preferences and prerogatives to share Jesus and nurture faith in others.

For August 23

A WAY TO SERVE 1 Corinthians 12:12–24

It may surprise you to learn that the idea of membership has its origins in the early church. Today the word is used more loosely — we may be “members” of Sam’s Club or the Y — but the idea of individuals who function together for mutual benefit, like the parts of a human body, originates with Paul. Using the imagery of hands, feet, eyes and ears all working together, the apostle paints a picture of a healthy church where the gifts of the members differ but all live and serve interdependently to bless each other and glorify God.

God’s intent is for Christians to work and serve together. (12–13)

The Corinthians were a divided group socially, morally and doctrinally, so it’s not surprising that they were also divided over their practice of ministry, specifically the use of spiritual gifts. When we read Paul’s letter to them, it’s not hard to imagine bitterness, jealousy or sinful pride as those with certain gifts were celebrated while others went unnoticed.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that, although they are a diverse group, they have been “baptized by one Spirit into one body.” As in believers’ baptism, they have been immersed into the life of the Church together. They are no longer “Jew or Greek, slave or free” but one family in Christ, one body (Gal. 3:28). They’ve been given one Spirit to drink, which unites all Christians in service and love (Rom. 8:9).

God has given every believer a specific role and responsibility in the body of Christ. (14–18)

Paul returns to his main meta-

phor to show that every Christian fills a vital role in the life and ministry of the Church.

The human body is composed of parts that differ greatly from each other but work together in marvelous ways. The work of the Church is no different. Gifts for preaching and teaching must serve in concert with gifts for service, administration, mercy, hospitality, generosity and encouragement for the Church to achieve her mission.

The apostle compares a member who envies another’s role in the life of the Church to a foot that would rather be a hand or an ear that would rather be an eye. A body lacking feet or ears would not be able to function as designed. Similarly, believers who despise their own gifts and envy the gifts of others are forgetting the wisdom and goodness of the Designer of the Church. Paul emphasizes that it is God who has arranged the body.

Further, God has put His Church, the body of Christ, together in exactly the way He desires. Surely, it is a dangerous thing to grumble or complain about something that is both God’s design and desire.

God has made every believer a necessary part of the body of Christ. (19–24)

Each gift and each member of the body of Christ is necessary. No one is so important that he can say to a brother or sister, “I don’t need you.” In our churches today, we may be tempted to believe that the strong, the talented or the wealthy are essential to our success and others are only incidental.

Nothing could be further from the truth! Paul calls the weaker members of our congregations “indispensable,” and we do well to remember that every member is a gift from God — not only to the Church but to each of us individually as well.

*“But as it is, God arranged the members
in the body, each one of them, as He chose.”*

1 Corinthians 12:18

Joining Jesus every day

Tim Timmons shares lessons of contentment in God's work in all things

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

For Tim Timmons — a singer, songwriter, author, podcaster and self-proclaimed “bald guy” — focusing on gratefulness and contentment no matter the circumstances means writing an “X” on his wrist each morning with a permanent marker.

Several factors led to this tangible reminder. Timmons heard there are only 10,080 minutes in a week. He had spent years focusing on only 80 minutes — the Sunday morning church service.

“I found myself soul-tired in the last two years of my full-time, well-paying job at our church. I had spent my life working for God, leading worship and small groups, having quiet times and loving people who were hard to love,” he said. “I wrote songs that pointed others to Him and tried so hard to get them placed on projects to be shared with the wider world.”

Timmons continued, “I found myself spiritually exhausted. If I were being graded on my work for God, I would have given myself an ‘A’ for sure. So why wasn’t He using me? Why wouldn’t He use the gifts and tools given to me to point people back to Him? Furthermore, why would He use certain other artists who seemed more in it for their own fame and glory, not God’s?”

Grief and gratitude

“I knew I had to quit the exhausting game of working ‘for’ Jesus. I was finally done,” Timmons said in his recent release, “Waking Up Again: A Journey of Grief and Gratitude.”

Timmons truly wanted to “join Jesus” every single day. He was trying



Tim Timmons and wife, Hilary Beth Timmons

Courtesy photo

to trust Jesus with the next step — not just in the big decisions of life but in every moment. He aspired to “not work ‘for’ Him but walk ‘with’ Him.”

The ancient persecuted church showed they were Christ-followers by drawing an “X” in the sand. Timmons adopted that idea by combining the “X” on his wrist each day with a prayer for God to open only the doors He cared about.

This reminder helped Timmons keep his focus where it needed to be, even after being diagnosed with incurable cancer and wanting to quit. He began to learn about the difference between doing things “for” Jesus and doing things “with” Him. He did a word study and found that “doing for” was rarely used in the Bible.

“But we — you know, in Christian circles — use that word all over the place. We do things for God. We

evangelize for God. We are nice to people for God. We are nice to our enemies — trying to be — for God,” he said.

“But at some point, I’m just not that awesome. I’m not that powerful to actually work through those things. But if I get to love my enemy with Jesus and pray blessing, that’s ‘with.’ With Him, my life looks like Jesus.”

Timmons grew up in a family that was very well-off but then encountered struggles after his parents’ divorce. His natural inclination is to worry — especially concerning finances — instead of trust.

However, just like he practices songwriting to be prepared to write a great song, he now actively practices trust.

“I’ve been addicted to worry most of my life. (But now) I’ve been practicing for the past 10 years, saying, ‘Jesus, you have my attention. I, if I

were king, this is how it should go. But apparently, I’m not the king — and apparently You are,’” Timmons said.

Looking at Timmons’ life now, it would be easy to think that he “made it” and contentment should be easy.

He has lived 20+ years after the cancer diagnosis. His songs have gotten some traction. Some of his journey is included in the film “I Can Only Imagine 2,” a sequel to the incredibly popular movie, “I Can Only Imagine.”

Both are about the contemporary Christian group MercyMe and the lead singer Bart Millard before and after the band’s rise to fame.

However, behind the scenes, it was very different.

“Even as we’re making movies about my life, we were having some major financial [issues]. I wasn’t working as much as I thought. I mean, we’re taking out credit card debt. This huge movie’s out, and it’s just like, ‘OK, this is really stressful, and I hate all this stuff,’” Timmons said.

Back to the ‘X’

However, Timmons uses the “X” to focus on what God is doing instead of worrying.

Timmons continued, “Jesus, You woke me up again today, and I’m going to join you in the midst of this stuff.”

“I’m going to practice trusting that You’re actually at work, even in the midst of these hard situations.”

He has also learned the difference between surrender and contentment.

He noted, “I think about that as I am learning how to join Him in life, in the midst of my grief and in the midst of my day — with gratitude.”

To learn more about Tim Timmons, visit timtimmonsmusic.com.