

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



Aubrey Miller, pastor of Faith Church, leads the Aug. 9 worship celebration marking five years of serving the Midfield community. Various partner ministry representatives participated including a group from Mountain Brook Baptist Church.

Photo courtesy of Birmingham Metro Baptist Association

What providence 'looks like'

Current story of Faith Church, legacy of Fairfield Highlands showcase God's hand

In early August, churches across the Birmingham Metro region honored 100 years since God planted a gospel witness in Midfield and five years since He continued that witness through a new congregation.

Once Fairfield Highlands Baptist Church, now Faith Church — the names have changed, the congregation has changed, and the season has changed, "but the God who plants His vineyard has never changed,"

wrote Chris Crain, executive director of Birmingham Metro Baptist Association, in a recent email newsletter.

Trusting God

"The same God who brought the vine, planted the vine and sustained the vine is still at work today. ... If His providence has brought us this far, then we can trust Him with whatever comes next."

On Feb. 6, 1926, God planted Fairfield Highlands, and countless

lives were changed. "It was a fruitful vineyard planted by the Lord," Crain said.

A day came when the congregation decided their greatest legacy would be the continued advance of the gospel and making disciples. They determined that even the closing chapter of their church would be another chapter of missions, Crain wrote.

In a "meaningful moment of co-operation," the congregation of Fairfield Highlands passed the

torch to Faith Church for a new season of ministry in the building, and BMBA served as the matchmaker. "That is what providence looks like," Crain said. "Long before anyone realized it, God had been preparing Fairfield Highlands to leave a legacy of faithfulness. He had been preparing Faith Church for a new home. ... Five years ago, those two stories came together because God had been writing them all along." (TAB Media Group, BMBA)

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SCAN ME

Help and hope

Alabama Disaster Relief serving as Indiana floodwaters recede

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Cookie Baker says she always prays for divine appointments when she goes out on an Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief trip. Baker, ABDR white hat leader in Anderson, Indiana, began to see those divine appointments soon after the team of 37 volunteers from Alabama arrived on Aug. 20. They were there to help those affected by severe weather that began Aug. 11. The system produced tornadoes, flash flooding and high winds, causing eight deaths and widespread damage in 54 counties. The ABDR team set up their command center at Kingston Avenue Baptist Church, and Baker said the “first person who walked in to request help got saved.”

That happened two more times as chaplains sat down to talk with area residents who came in carrying a tremendous emotional weight over the state of their homes, she said, adding that many are in need of help and hope. The team took dozens of job requests in those initial days. Assessors found homes with basements caved in and water damage up into the upper floors.



Facebook photo/Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief Mass Feeding
Volunteers load the Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief mass feeding unit's box truck with supplies before driving it to Anderson, Indiana, to help those affected by flooding.

“It’s a mess, and the people are hurting,” Baker said. The first flood recovery team went out Aug. 21 to start cleaning out a water-damaged home.

Encouragement

Mark Wakefield, state disaster relief strategist, said local residents and the pastor and congregation at Kingston Avenue Baptist were grateful ABDR came to help.

Wakefield said he hopes the volunteers’ presence will be an encouragement to the church as they try to minister to their community. “When we leave, we don’t want them to remember us — we want them to remember that the church is where they got help,” he said. Wakefield said more volunteers will be needed for this assignment. For more information or to contribute to the efforts, visit sbdr.org.

Wild game supper set for Sept. 26 in Haleyville

Fried fish, wild game, a shrimp boil, and much more will be featured at the Sept. 26 Hunter’s Harvest wild game supper at First Baptist Church Haleyville. Doors open at 5 p.m., and the event will conclude with a special presentation by outdoorsman and guest speaker T.W. Norman. The event is free, and more than \$5,000 in door prizes will be given away. Organizer Jason Hester encourages those interested to bring their family, friends and neighbors. For more information, call Hester at 256-366-9126 or the church office at 205-486-3762. FBC Haleyville is located at 1103 21st Street. (Hunters Harvest)

Fire destroys Ebenezer Baptist Church in Pennington



Facebook photo by Sheri Compton

Ebenezer Baptist Church in Pennington lost its building in an overnight fire Aug. 18. Jerry Snowden, chair of the church’s deacons, said the building was a “total loss.” The church, which is in Choctaw County in southwestern Alabama, is more than 175 years old. According to Chris Murphy, deputy state fire marshal who covers Wilcox, Choctaw and Clarke counties, the cause of the fire was determined to be lightning strike.

The Alabama Baptist

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

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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The crossword puzzle
can be found on page 11.



GUEST EDITORIAL

for this week's edition of The Alabama Baptist

By Russell Klinner, executive director, Shocco Springs Conference Center

Being right doesn't require proving the other person wrong

Years ago, Buster Taylor (previous Shocco Springs executive director) and I were “discussing” some plans for a renovation at Shocco. I was pretty convinced I was right (in the conversation where another option was on the table).

A longtime Shocco volunteer, Wilton Whigham, happened to be standing nearby. He knew the project well because he and I had worked together on the plan. So, naturally, I was defending what we had developed. I got a little bent out of shape. Then I kept pressing. And pressing. Honestly, I pressed the point way more than needed.

Looking and watching

Wilton never jumped into the argument. He just quietly stood there in those Liberty overalls and watched.

Liberty overalls with a pencil and pad in the front pocket became part of the image of Wilton at Shocco — walking through a project, looking at what needed to be done, quietly solving problems and usually knowing more about how to fix something than the rest of us in the room.

As I walked away from the conversation with Buster that day, Wilton followed. And in the kind of wisdom perhaps only a

retired rocket scientist who had spent a lifetime solving difficult problems could offer, he quietly said: “Russ, being right doesn't require proving the other person wrong.”

Knowing the difference

That one stuck. Maybe because I knew he was right. Maybe because he had just watched me demonstrate exactly why I needed to hear it. But I also think it stuck because of the man who said it. Wilton had lived enough life to know that being right and having to win are two very different things.

I thought about his words again recently when I read Romans 12:18: “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”

I have always loved the way Paul phrases that: “So far as it depends on you.” Paul understands we cannot control how every conversation ends. We cannot control how another person sees a situation. We cannot control what they believe happened. We cannot control whether they ever completely understand our point of view. But we can control how we respond.

Romans 12 does not tell us to ignore truth. It does not tell us to

avoid difficult conversations or pretend disagreement does not exist. Sometimes truth needs to be spoken clearly. Sometimes something needs to be corrected. Sometimes we need to stand our ground.

But there is a difference between speaking the truth and needing to win. And if I am not careful, I can become so concerned with proving I am right that I miss the much greater opportunity to reflect Christ.

“If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”

Romans 12:18

A few verses later Paul writes, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

That is a pretty high standard.

Sometimes obedience looks like choosing grace when we could press the point. Sometimes it looks like choosing peace when we could demand the last word. Sometimes it means recognizing that we have explained ourselves clearly enough and nothing good is going to come from explaining it one more time.

The last word

There is something in us that desperately wants that last word. “But they still don't understand.” “That isn't what happened.” “If I could just make one more

point.” But I have learned that “one more point” is often where peace goes to die.

Letting it go

You can tell the truth. You can stand by what is right. You can make the difficult decision. And then, when you have done what depends on you, you can let it go.

You can even walk away knowing you may still be right without needing the other person to admit that you are right.

Wilton has been gone for several years now, and we recently said goodbye to his wife, Kathy. But their investment in Shocco and me continues. There are buildings still standing because they served. There are ministries still stronger because they served. There are people who encountered the love of Christ because they served.

And there is at least one slightly hardheaded executive director who can still picture a retired rocket scientist in Liberty overalls, pencil and pad in the front pocket, walking beside him and saying, “Russ, being right doesn't require proving the other person wrong.”

I am still trying to learn it, Mr. Wilton. “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (Rom. 12:18).

Your Voice



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

Why I hate drywall and why you should too

By Mark Snowden
Snowden Ministries International

Standing around with pastors during a break at an associational pastor's conference, one pastor lamented that his church had stopped growing. When I asked why, he said his building could only hold so many people. When I asked him why a little thing like drywall would prohibit growth, it was like scales fell off his eyes.

"Reaching people for Jesus doesn't depend on our building size!" he almost shouted.

Not enough seats

An International Mission Board missionary once challenged me to add up all the available worship seating in our town. Taking that number, I was to double it for churches that might do two services. Were there enough seats for everyone who was not born again?

In the cities I have visited and lived, I have yet to know of a single place that could seat all the lost people in their community.

Here's why I hate the building material we call drywall:

Churches erect really well-designed and beautifully ornate barriers to growth. When we "max" out Sunday worship everyone gets so incredibly excited. (Most pastors can quote Easter attendance numbers — just ask.)

Thom Rainer, founder of Church Answers and former president of Lifeway Christian Resources, has said that buildings feel full when they're at 80% capacity. Praise the Lord and pass on the drywall.

Don't think I'm against high attendance drives and building programs. I'm just against thinking that it is enough to seriously bring spiritual transformation to millions headed for hell. Drywall hammered into meeting cubes should not define us as believers.

So, add up all the lost in your county. Divide by 200 as if the lost were new believers. Multiply by \$1.5 million that some researchers say it takes to build the typical church building. Get the idea?

What is it really going to take? When the Apostle Paul was writing the church at Corinth, he told them to not compare their spiritual growth with others: "For we don't dare classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. But in measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves to themselves, they lack understanding" (2 Cor. 10:12). The same can be said of churches that become content just filling

their meeting rooms while millions continue to be ignored outside of their church walls.

'Until all have heard'

Forget the drywall. Why not train witnesses to keep at it until all have heard and responded to the gospel? Why not encourage small group leaders to take disciples into their own homes and meet there so they can grow numerically and spiritually? And why not start some new churches while you're at it? Some of that 80% seating you'll need to feel full may be in a gym, a school, a rented office space, a truck stop, a show barn, a machine shop or your own home.

Reaching people for Jesus shouldn't be hindered by drywall.

EDITOR'S NOTE — A version of this article first appeared as a column in The Pathway, the newsjournal of Missouri Baptists.



SNOWDEN

"What would it look like if SBC churches, state conventions and national entities took steps that essentially state, 'We see you. We hear you. We love you. Jesus loves you. There is a place for you (families with loved ones who have a disability or individuals with a disability) at our church.' That's a game changer!" said **Tom Stolle**, chair of the SBC's Disability Ministry Task Force and executive director of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware.

"Be careful. ... If we get too busy climbing the ladder of success, we might get to the top only to look down and realize that Jesus is still at the bottom washing feet."

Priscilla Shirer

@priscillashirer on Instagram

"The most important message in the world, the good news of Jesus Christ, won't impact anyone if no one is paying attention," said **Dan Bel-lamy**, who uses balloon sculpting to share the gospel. "That's why I use these 'blown-up stories' to share life's biggest truths. I'm glad kids have as much fun seeing my work as I do creating it, but it doesn't mean anything if it doesn't impact their lives. I carry balloon sculptures to churches because I see God using my gift to bring the Bible to life for them. It's that simple."

"For we don't dare classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. But in measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves to themselves, they lack understanding."

2 Corinthians 10:12

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“God doesn’t need to provide the resources for what you are unwilling to obey him for.”

RICHARD BLACKABY

Author and Bible study leader

“I have a deep love for Alabama Baptists because this convention has played such a significant role in my own life and ministry,” said **Derek Allen**, executive director-elect of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. “Alabama Baptists invested in my family, taught me the gospel, helped prepare me for ministry and supported us when the Lord called us to plant a church in Miami.”

As we prepare for the summer’s end, every church should prayerfully ask a few simple questions. Are we intentionally engaging the community God has placed around us? Do our ministries reflect the people who now live in our neighborhoods? Are we looking for ways to partner with other churches rather than attempting to do everything ourselves? And are we investing our time and resources where they will make the greatest eternal difference?

Chris Crain, executive director Birmingham Metro Baptist Association

“It is incredible to me the ways that God displays Himself through-

out the Old Testament, the way He loves His people, the ways He is committed to His people and His redemptive heart for His people,” said **Tim Adams**, who serves as the vice president of student development and collegiate athletics at the University of Mobile. “We are familiar with a lot of the amazing stories of the Old Testament ... [and] probably confused by a lot of the harder stories of the Old Testament. People fall short, and people are evil. People misuse God’s provisions. It’s kind of like, ‘What do we do with this?’ What I love about the Old Testament is that God is constantly showing Himself as a redeemer by raising up a leader and restoring His people and His commitment to the Israelite nation. In a lot of ways, I see our story within the Old Testament. There’s a lot of places that we can relate what’s going on in our world today to things that happened back then.”

“Strong bodies grow from steady habits. Walking is the quiet hero of healthy habits. No equipment. No pressure. Just steady movement and real benefits,” according to the **Arthritis Foundation**.



Lass WORDS

BY KEN LASS

The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

When you’re asked, ‘What is it like to be old?’

Recently, I was entertaining my young grandkids at our house. Out of the blue, my 10-year-old granddaughter looked up at me and, with the sincerest of expressions on her face, asked, “Grampa, what is it like to be old?”

I was caught off guard. How do you answer that question? Do you tell her that your hair turns gray? That parts of your body begin to wear out and fail? Do you explain that you begin to have trouble remembering things, that you spend what seems like half your life in doctors’ waiting rooms? That you have aches and pains where you didn’t even know you had places? That younger people start to lose respect for your viewpoints and opinions? That you worry if you have enough money to last until you pass on?

Ugh! That paints a pretty bleak picture of old age. And that’s not my outlook on life.

Wonderful memories

So I chose to tell her that being old means you have this incredible catalog of wonderful memories to look back on and enjoy.

It means you have gotten so much smarter and gained much wisdom from your experiences. It means you finally have time to realize and enjoy the incredible blessings you have been given, like loving on grandkids, coming to know your children as adult

peers, being able to travel and see the wonders of God’s awesome creation, diving into hobbies you’ve always wanted to explore.

How you finally have the opportunity to devote time to ministries. Time to serve others and bring them joy and comfort. Time to read and study God’s Word and get closer to Him.

Closer to joining God

The older you get, the closer you are to joining God in His heavenly Kingdom. After all, the Bible loves old people. Proverbs 16 states, “Gray hair is a crown of glory. It is gained in a righteous life.” In Job 12:12, we read, “Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding in length of days.”

“Wow!” my granddaughter replied. “I wish I was old!”

I smiled and told her that one day she would be, and that it would happen so much faster than she expects. But I also want her to know that if you go through your journey trying your best to do the right things, and if you treat people with love and respect, life gets better every day.

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

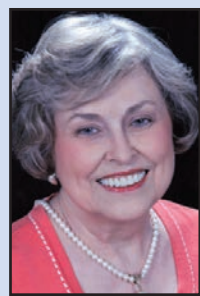
OBITUARIES

ANN RAY

Music minister Margaret Annette “Ann” Tomberlin Ray of Decatur died July 11. She was 90.

Her late husband, Joe Douglas Ray, led Southside Baptist Church in Decatur where she was involved in music ministry for nearly 40 years and helped launch a graded children’s choir ministry.

A graduate of Judson College, she and her husband both served as longtime trustees and



RAY

faithful recruiters. Both served on Judson’s trustee subcommittee for the granting of honorary degrees. She was listed among the “175 Faces of Judson College” during the school’s 175th anniversary.

Ray served on staff of First Baptist Church Williston, Florida, and as music associate and pianist for FBC Sylacauga. She

was instrumental in raising funds for a new organ when her husband was serving at Eastern Valley Baptist Church in Bessemer.

Ray also was pianist for Mignon Baptist Church in Sylacauga and, briefly in retirement, minister of music at Macedonia (now South Chapel Hill) Baptist in Decatur.

She is survived by two sons, Mark Douglas Ray and Charles Tomberlin “Tommy” Ray, both of Decatur.

TERRY GLENN “DUDE” SMITH

Terry Glenn “Dude” Smith of Maplesville died July 3. He was 75.

He served as a pastor for more than 40 years, serving in Chilton, Bibb and Jefferson counties. He also worked for Kimberly Clark Paper Corporation as a forester for 17 years. During his years as a pastor, he served with Alpine Baptist Church and Faith Baptist Church, both in Plantersville; Calvary Baptist Church, Centreville; Grant Street Baptist Church, Bessemer; Bethsalem Baptist Church, Billingsley; Pineview Baptist Church, Brent; Sardis Baptist Church, Maplesville; Mount Carmel #1 Baptist Church, Thorsby; and Chestnut Creek Baptist Church, Verbena.

He was preceded in death by his two children and is survived by his wife of 52 years, Pam; a daughter-in-law, a son-in-law and three grandchildren.



SMITH

BETHEL ASSOCIATION

► Chris Kynard, who had been serving as pastor of **Linden Baptist Church**, has accepted the pastorate of a church in London, Kentucky.

BLOUNT ASSOCIATION

► **Pleasant View Missionary Baptist Church, Holly Pond**, will host two singings, each beginning at 5 p.m. Sept. 5 will feature “The Perrys” and Sept. 20 “Living Faith.” For more information, call 256-339-1863 or 256-590-1501. Earl Harper is pastor.

CHEROKEE ASSOCIATION

► **Faith Baptist Church, Gaylesville**, celebrated its 50th anniversary Aug. 2. Testimonies were

shared by several charter members. The church was presented a commemorative plaque from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission by Larry



Photo by Larry Vinson

Vinson, associational missionary for Cleburne Baptist Association. Pictured are (l to r) Pastor Clay Moreland, and charter members Lavon Graves, Nancy Nelson, Linda Brown, Linda Crane and Hubert Crane.



EDGE

COFFEE ASSOCIATION

► Marcus “Marc” Edge is the new associate pastor of **Enterprise First Baptist Church**. He has been serving on staff as minister to high school students. He and his wife, Barrett, have one child. Ben Bowden is pastor.

EAST LIBERTY ASSOCIATION

► **Harriet Jones**, church pianist for **First Baptist Church LaFayette**, was honored with a surprise celebration at the conclusion of the July 26 worship service. She was recognized for her 50 years of ministry in this position and received a plaque presented by deacon chair Calvin Milford and Pastor Dan Jacobs. The church held a reception following the service.



Photo by Melanie Jacobs

MOBILE NETWORK

► **Mobile Baptist Network** will host a Cel-

ebate 250 Outreach Event at the USS Alabama Battleship Memorial Park Oct. 3, noon–4 p.m. MBN churches are encouraged to participate in this evangelistic outreach and network opportunity. Visit mobilebaptists.org to confirm participation. Kevin Blackwell is executive director.

PINE BARREN ASSOCIATION

► **Awin Baptist Church** celebrated its 100th anniversary June 14. The church sanctuary is the original structure with additional space added over the years. Keith Gambill, associational mission strategist for Butler Baptist Association, was the guest speaker. Additional special guests included Harold Smith, a former interim pastor. Deacon Jack Sadler (left) accepted a commemorative plaque given to the church from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission by commissioner Jim Lambert (right). Lunch was provided following the service.



Photo by Jessica Morgan

SHELBY ASSOCIATION

► **Larry Roberts**, pastor of **First Baptist Church Harpersville** for more than 10 years, retired in mid-August. Roberts also served several other churches in Alabama during his 48 years in ministry. FBC Harpersville honored him and his wife, Melanie, with a luncheon following the Aug. 16 service.



Submitted photo

ST. CLAIR ASSOCIATION

► **Johnny Kilgore** has retired as minister of music for **Central Baptist Church, Trussville**, where he served for 13 years. Kilgore and his wife, Pat, were honored during a recent worship service followed by a catered lunch and reception. Paul Brasher is pastor.



Submitted photo

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

Strengthening the community

Prattville youth pastor initiates ‘speed-mentoring’ event to bridge age groups

By Taylor Inmon
The Alabama Baptist

A group of senior adults from Glynwood Baptist Church in Prattville wanted to connect with youth in the church for discipling and mentoring opportunities.

They took the initiative, and minister to students Jonworth Locke worked out a plan — and it’s working.

The initial “bridge event,” as Locke described it, was so popular he has now instituted it as a quarterly experience, and participation continues to grow each time he holds a “speed-mentoring” session.

Crediting the Holy Spirit for the idea, Locke said it was “a bolt out of the blue.” A group of senior adults “literally begged for opportunities to mentor the youth” after hearing about intergenerational discipleship.

The presentation was made by Larry Hyche, men and boys ministry strategist at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, who recently completed his dissertation on the topic.

From there, the “speed-mentoring” concept surfaced, Locke said. “The senior adults were laughing, and the students were completely engaged,

“The goal of the event is not to build the relationship, but to give them the push to do it on their own.”

**Jonworth Locke
minister to students
Glynwood Baptist Church
in Prattville**



Photo by Jonworth Locke

Youth and senior adults at Glynwood Baptist Church in Prattville share stories and testimonies as part of an effort to encourage intergenerational discipleship.

off their phones for the whole two hours,” he said of the first event, noting he had a hard time getting them to wrap up after the session ended. They wanted to continue talking and visiting.

In the style of speed-dating, senior adults are stationed at tables which youth rotate between with prepared questions. They typically start with light icebreakers such as 90 seconds for “Your

most embarrassing childhood moment?” and then allow more time for deeper topics.

“The goal of the event is not to build the relationship, but to give them the push to do it on their own,” Locke explained.

Making a difference

While it’s still too early to tell which students will schedule regular one-on-

one time with which senior adults, Locke said he has noticed a difference on Sunday mornings.

The youth and senior adults are mingling more and even sitting beside each other in some cases, he noted.

Locke would love to share the idea with other churches and has even written a process manual that he’s glad to share. Email him at locke@glynwoodbc.com to receive a copy of the manual.

Learn more about Hyche’s findings on intergenerational discipleship at tabonline.org/ Hyche and watch an interview about it on TAB Media Group’s YouTube channel at youtube.com/tabmediagroup.

James Jackson serves as lead pastor of Glynwood Baptist Church. Follow his blog at jamesjackson.blog.

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Baptist Nursing Fellowship plans Huntsville summit

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

Combining missions and medical care continues to be a guiding force of Baptist Nursing Fellowship.

BNF, one of the compassion ministries of Woman's Missionary Union, is an organization that brings together nurses, healthcare providers, missionaries, Bible teachers, worship leaders and community partners.

The ministry is planning its annual summit Oct. 16–18 in Huntsville at a merging church whose pastor, Andy Kennedy, previously served as a missionary in Brazil and Germany.

This year's theme is "Love Ye One Another" based on John 13:34–35. The summit will include speakers, worship, missionary testimonies, participation by student nurses and a community health and

wellness fair at the church Oct. 18 from 1 to 3 p.m. On Saturday, a special 250th celebration of nurses will be held.

BNF members are encouraged to bring hygiene items to put together kits to give away during the wellness fair. The event also will have free food and door prizes, as well as a variety of health screenings (blood pressure, blood glucose, vision) and a kids corner with bounce houses, face painting, games and activities.

"We want to share those resources but also share Christ," said Charlotte Wyckoff, president of BNF and WMU director for her church, West Mastin Lake Baptist Church in Huntsville. "My prayer is that God will increase. We're asking the Lord to increase our membership, from our students to missionaries."

Friday will kick off with



Photo courtesy of Charlotte Wyckoff

Each year, nurses and other medical professionals gather for the Baptist Nursing Fellowship Summit. As part of the annual event, they collect, organize and distribute packets for a health fair and community outreach on the summit's last day.

registration, a silent auction, a prayer experience display and an opportunity to meet the missionaries.

Attendees will hear from Bible teacher Heather Johnson, a national trainer with Lifeway Women, and several missionaries throughout the event. Candace McIn-

tosh, executive director of Alabama WMU, will lead missions discussions during the worship sessions.

National event

BNF has about 400 members; 32 states have members. Wyckoff joined the group in the early 90s,

serving in several capacities at the local and state levels before serving in a national capacity.

Wyckoff has a heart for students. She works with other members to reach nursing students at 17 community colleges throughout Alabama through nursing fairs, goodie bags and more.

Throughout the year, BNF offers opportunities for continuing education hours along with Bible and book studies and prayer times.

One CE unit is offered each quarter, and four CE hours will be offered Oct. 17 during the summit.

The conference will be held at Huntsville Park Baptist Church and Mill City Church located at 3120 Triana Boulevard. For more information, visit baptist-nursingfellowship.com and go to the events page or email Marilyn Graves at bnfexec@gmail.com.

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'SPIRITUAL SUCCESS'

'Revitalized' community outreach sparks new energy for Prattville church

By Taylor Inmon
The Alabama Baptist

When Mike Watts became the pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Prattville, he set out to "revitalize" the small church. Revitalize is a big word, but well justified by Watts' recent, creative outreaches and the connections made as a result.

"Watts and his congregation are making a difference on the west side of Prattville," said Travis Coleman, interim associational leader for Autauga Baptist Association. "Since becoming pastor last fall, Mike has organized innovative events the church wasn't accustomed to with great spiritual success."

'Outside the box'

Having been a pastor for nearly 20 years, Watts said he's "learned to think outside the box to engage the community" — like the church's blood drives.

Calvary is one of the two most active sponsors of

all churches in the region for LifeSouth Community Blood Centers, according to Sharlene Carroll, a LifeSouth representative and member of CBC. Given CBC's weekly worship attendance of 40 to 50 members, that distinction speaks volumes, Watts said.

Saving lives

"I give double red on behalf of my dad, who is a cancer survivor," said Watts, who has already organized two blood drives on the church's campus this year.

Watts describes this ministry with a parallel: "When you're hospitalized and in need, and get a blood transfusion, your physical life was saved because someone gave their blood. Jesus Christ gave His blood for us to have eternal life."

The witness and symbolism of a blood drive are strong, he noted.

On April 23, CBC hosted an event for local first responders. Jeff Gaylor, a friend of Watts, was shop-



Photo courtesy of Michael Watts

Calvary Baptist Church members participate in a variety of community activities throughout the year, such as handing out water at Prattville's CityFest (shown here).

ping with his wife, Stephanie, for 10 weather radios the church planned to raffle at the event. Gaylor decided they should wait.

Later, while meeting with the deputy manager of the Autauga Emergency Management Agency, Gaylor recalled the woman hearing of their plans and giving him a massive box with more than 80 weather radios that had been "collecting dust."

CBC's camcorder and website are also new addi-

tions as of December 2025.

"A few people who have joined our church came to us after hearing our sermons and promo videos online," Watts said.

Calvary's older members have been joyfully supportive of the changes, he said.

Looking ahead

Watts recalled one of the senior members telling him, "You are what we needed. You've brought life back into our church."

On a recent Sunday, that same woman rededicated her life to the Lord, Watts noted.

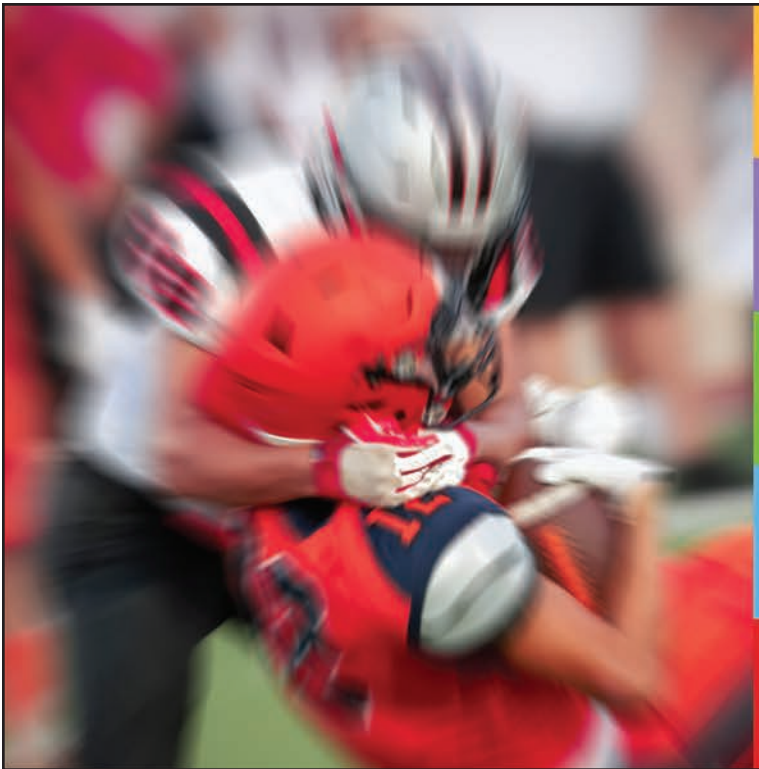
Watts also celebrated the involvement of new members. One of them is serving in the sound booth. And another, an electrician by trade, rewired and replaced parts in the dimming church sign.

The church also has a flourishing special needs ministry, one of the few in Prattville, funded by a non-profit thrift store run by the members of the church.

Now the church is planning several remodeling projects, including replacing the building's roof. The building is 75 years old and showing its age.

Gaylor, who headed a revitalization project for a church in Jacksonville, Florida, as pastor, has counseled Watts in grants available for small churches that can help provide funds for projects.

"This is what can happen when God shows up and a church follows its pastor on mission to reach the community," Coleman said.



A concussion is nothing to play with.

A concussion is a traumatic brain injury and should be taken seriously. Although fewer than 10% of concussions involve a loss of consciousness, it is important to understand the dangers and not take them lightly. Even a minor fall or collision may be of concern, so be alert to symptoms such as headaches, unsteadiness, confusion or other types of abnormal behavior.

Any athlete with a suspected concussion should immediately be removed from play and activity, evaluated right away by a doctor or healthcare professional, monitored and not left alone and not drive a motor vehicle. **To make an appointment, please call 205-638-6921.**

ChildrensAL.org/Concussion



Children's
of Alabama®



UPCOMING EVENTS
sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Week of Prayer for State Missions is almost here!

It's almost time for the Week of Prayer for State Missions, a concentrated time of prayer for Alabama Baptists, as churches across Alabama join together to pray for our state and for various Great Commission Ministries of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions and Alabama Woman's Missionary Union. This year's suggested dates for the Week of Prayer are Sept. 13–20, but churches are encouraged to focus on it at a time that best meets their sched-

For resources, visit myers-mallory.org or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



ule. The week coincides with the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering, received all year with spe-

cial emphasis during this week. There are a variety of downloadable resources to help you promote and observe the Week of Prayer and the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering at myers-mallory.org. This includes a prayer guide, poster, missions study with activities for all ages, bookmark, several videos that complement the prayer guide stories, slides and social media art. You can also order these resources using the form at this site.

Celebration 250 Alabama update

Celebration 250 Alabama is a powerful movement with a vision to reach our state and nation with the gospel. Throughout this year as we have celebrated our nation's 250th birthday, Alabama Baptists have been praying for and seeking revival. Many revival gatherings and other special events have

already been held across the state this year. The effort has been building up to the All-Church Alabama worship and prayer gatherings on Sept. 30 followed by Celebration 250 Revivals in multiple locations on October 1 and in the following weeks. A complete listing of upcoming events along with a variety of resources can be

found at celebration250AL.org. Hundreds have already made decisions for Christ, and we are praying for many more. Don't miss the opportunity to take part in a time of worship and prayer at your church on Sept. 30, then participate in revival services in the weeks to come.

Intentional Leader Series: Pathfinder — Sept. 15 in Prattville

The next Intentional Leader Series workshop will be led by Kevin Blackwell, executive director of the Mobile Baptist Network. Join us as we focus on the "pathfinder" aspect of

leadership. We'll talk about 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. ILS: Pathfinder will be held at the State Board of Missions in Prattville. Cost is \$10, which includes lunch. Register at alsbom.org/ils.

WORD search

- | | |
|--------------|---------------|
| COMMANDMENTS | LEARNING |
| COUNSEL | LIGHT |
| DELIGHT | LISTENING |
| DISCERNMENT | MIND |
| DISCIPLINE | PATH |
| EAR | PRUDENCE |
| EYES | SOUL |
| FEAR | SPIRIT |
| FOOLISH | STEPS |
| GLORY | TEACHING |
| HEART | TRUST |
| HONOR | TRUTH |
| HUMILITY | UNDERSTANDING |
| INSIGHT | WAY |
| INSTRUCTION | WISDOM |
| KNOWLEDGE | WISE |

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

*"The hearing ear and the seeing eye,
the Lord has made them both."*
PROVERBS 20:12

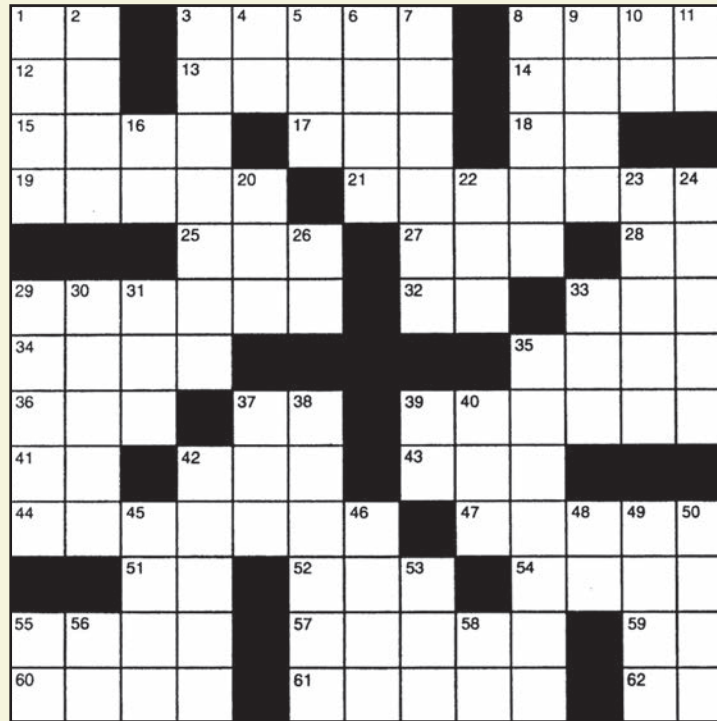
CHRISTIAN Crossword



UPCOMING EVENTS
sponsored by the State Board of Missions

ACROSS

1. Therefore the law ____ slacked. (Hab. 1:4)
3. And ____ drove thence the three sons. (Josh. 15:14)
8. Eli, ____ sabachthani. (Matt. 27:46)
12. The Lord will not ____ good. (Zeph. 1:12)
13. As with the taker of _____. (Isa. 24:2)
14. Thither cause thy mighty _____. (Joel 3:11)
15. Teman, and ____, Zephi, and Gatam. (1 Chron. 1:36)
17. ____ Jones, financial company.
18. Thou hast had pity ____ the gourd. (Jonah 4:10)
19. Even to the ____ of them. (Jon. 3:5)
21. They that observe lying vanities _____. (Jon. 2:8)
25. They that ____ thy bread. (Obad. 7)
27. And be thou like a _____. (Song of Sol. 2:17)
28. ____ the second year of Darius. (Hag. 1:1)
29. And ____ not to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely _____. (Amos 5:5)
32. What shall we ____ unto thee. (Jon. 1:11)
33. They shall lay hold ____ bow ... against thee, ____ daughter of Zion. (Jer. 6:23)
34. Even ____, will judge between the ____ cattle. (Ezek. 34:20)
35. Unto the ____ of the earth. (Micah 5:4)
36. And will ____ at all acquit the wicked. (Nah. 1:3)
37. For I ____ with you. (Hag. 2:4)
39. Came unto ____, unto ____ people (Judg. 18:27; reverse order)
41. ____ accept thy person? (Mal. 1:8)
42. Hast thou not heard long _____. (Isa. 37:26)
43. ____ have laid hands on their substance. (Obad. 13)
44. Who ____ not daily. (Heb. 7:27)
47. He shall ____ with his teeth. (Ps. 112:10)
51. Behold, I ____ against thee. (Nah. 3:5)
52. Now the Lord ____ prepared a great fish. (Jon. 1:17)
54. The son of Naum,



By Diana Rowland Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- which was the son of _____. (Luke 3:25)
55. Call me _____. (Ruth 1:20)
57. ____ was a man subject to like passions. (James 5:17)
59. It hath consumed ____ of Moab. (Num. 21:28)
60. As a man wipeth a _____. (2 Kings 21:13)
61. Whose soever sins ye _____. (John 20:23)
62. What do ____ imagine against the Lord? (Nah. 1:9)
- ## DOWN
1. Mine ____ hath done them. (Isa. 48:5)
 2. I have overthrown ____ of you. (Amos 4:11)
 3. He whom thou ____ is cursed. (Num. 22:6)
 4. For while they be folden together ____ thorns. (Nah. 1:10)
 5. They of Persia and of _____. (Ezek. 27:10)
 6. And ____, the firstborn ____ Judah. (1 Chron. 2:3)
 7. Yea, I am their _____. (Job 30:9)
 8. And now, behold, I ____ thee this day. (Jer. 40:4)
 9. There was one _____. (Luke 2:36)
 10. And so is this nation before _____. (Hag. 2:14)
 11. And his brightness was ____ the light. (Hab. 3:4)
 16. Alcoholics Anonymous. (abbr.)
 20. Children's game.
 22. Kanga's son in "Winnie the Pooh."
 23. And I will appoint over them four _____. (Jer. 15:3)
 24. Adam, Sheth, _____. (1 Chron. 1:1)
 26. Go up ____ the mountain. (Hag. 1:8)
 29. Duke Elah, duke _____. (Gen. 36:41)
 30. For ____ the harvest. (Isa. 18:5)
 31. And ____ on the east side. (Jon. 4:5)
 33. She called his name Ben _____. (Gen. 35:18)
 35. Which is the ____ of our inheritance. (Eph. 1:14)
 37. In his hand for very _____. (Zech. 8:4)
 38. Plead with your _____. (Hos. 2:2)
 39. This is ____ ephah that goeth forth. (Zech. 5:6)
 40. Take some of the ____ of oil. (Lev. 14:15)
 42. How shall I make thee as ____? (Hos. 11:8)
 45. Stopped their _____. (Zech. 7:11)
 46. Lest he ____ thee to the judge. (Luke 12:58)
 48. The land is ____ the garden of Eden. (Joel 2:3)
 49. Not spare continually to ____ the nations? (Hab. 1:17)
 50. The priests thereof teach for _____. (Mic. 3:11)
 53. Mine eye also is _____. (Job 17:7)
 55. Medical doctor. (abbr.)
 56. Howl, O Heshbon, for ____ is spoiled. (Jer. 49:3)
 58. When the king of ____ saw it. (Josh. 8:14)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Christmas Backpacks

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

Since 2022, we have also provided Christmas Backpacks through the ministry of our Alabama Baptist church planters in underserved areas of our state. Because of those backpacks, thousands have heard the gospel and made professions of faith. God is

using Christmas Backpacks to grow His Kingdom!

There is a need for churches and associations to partner with a specific site to provide backpacks and help give them out.

For partnership information, contact Pat Ingram at pingram@alsbom.org or 334-613-2334.

For groups planning to provide filled backpacks to one of the statewide collection points, Collection Week is Oct. 24–30. Visit alsbom.org/christmasbackpacks for packing suggestions and guidelines, a list of collection points, and much, much more!

Safe travel training

What would you do if your missions team was detained by a foreign government? Or if a natural disaster interrupted your missions experience or travel plans?

These situations and more have occurred with Alabama Baptist teams. B+ Training is designed to help team leaders respond

appropriately. This two-day training will be held Oct. 30 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Oct. 31 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Cropwell Baptist in Pell City. Lunch will be provided both days.

To register, visit alsbom.org/ffst. Questions? Contact Angie Williams at 334-613-2373 or email awilliams@alsbom.org.

Basic Church Security Training Sept. 26

It's important for your church to know how to keep its people safe and secure. This free training event covers the basics of starting and maintaining a church safety and security ministry. There will also

be a focus on medical considerations and protecting children. The event will be held 8 a.m.–noon Sept. 26 at Heritage Baptist Church in Montgomery. To register, visit alsbom.org/basic-church-security-training.



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

CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Central Heights Baptist Church in NW Lauderdale County, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a pastor. Please send resumé to: duane.keener@lcschools.org.

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: northsidebaptistchurch-jasper@gmail.com.

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.

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@hueytown-baptist.com.

CHILDREN'S DIRECTOR OR MINISTER

First Baptist Church of Remlap is seeking a part-time children's director or minister. If you or someone you know may be interested and would like more information, please contact our committee chairman, Lamar Wilson, at klwilson1950@gmail.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 resumé and cover letter to: Cyndy James, cjames@fbcbbm.org.

AVAILABLE FOR SERVICE

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Central Alabama. William: 334-399-4572.

TRAVEL/VACATION

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

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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, jokes and other items of interest to children that offers parents and grandparents a family-friendly gateway into discussions related to Christian values and principles. Subscribe at thebaptistpaper.org/kids-edition. Also available for bulk subscriptions and special events.

DAD'S NOTES

Need a succinct way to share life tips with someone in your life or looking for a refresher in the foundational areas such as faith, family, finances and fitness? Check out Jason Davis' "Dad's Notes" — found on Amazon. It's a quick read and every chapter is filled with a rich, practical life tip. You'll find yourself sharing what you learn with others.

~A resource for congregational vitality~

Launching a new congregation, part 3 — are these the same deacons?

Brian was 25 minutes late for the next deacons meeting. He had a pre-marriage counseling session before the meeting and needed to complete a crucial part of the conversation.

He sent a text to Trip and told him to go ahead and start the meeting. But when he got there, Trip said he was unable to formally start the meeting in their typical way.

All the deacons wanted to talk about was their experience with the newly launched congregation.

One of the deacons — not Trip — had gone to the whiteboard in their meeting room and started listing all the things the deacons were talking about.

The deacons brainstormed a couple of dozen items during their informal debriefing about the experience. Then they culled the list to seven impactful observations and action items.

First, we have never seen a group of people more passionate about the good news of Jesus Christ than the core group of the new congregation. Their passion is contagious, and we want more of it. We realize we have been missing it.

Second, many of us returned from the two days we spent with the core group more excited about our congregation's ministry than we had been in a long time. We did not even have to attend a weeklong revival or be preached to in a way that made us feel guilty.

Third, how soon can we sponsor or launch a new congregation in the growth area of our county, eight miles from our church location? It seems like a new housing development starts out there every month.

Excitement and responsibility

Fourth, although we are excited about this, we have an even greater responsibility to help the rest of our congregation catch this movement of God's spirit in our deacons. Perhaps we need to plan regular projects and other interactions with this new congregation and take more people from our congregation with us.

Fifth, one of the most dramatic changes was the suggestion that the \$500,000 we have projected to renovate our own worship center needs to be delayed by a couple of years so we can invest in launching new congregations.

Sixth, the first reason we want to do this is to help the new people moving into the housing developments have a Christ-centered congregation through which they can invest their lives and grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus.

Seventh, the second reason is that if we get as many people in our congregation as possible to pray, worship together and celebrate what God can do through a new congregation in that area, we will grow deeper as Christians and as a congregation. We will be different because of our involvement in launching a congregation.

Celebrate changed hearts

Trip, the deacon chair, and Brian, the pastor, looked at each other across the room. One of them smiled. The other shrugged and gestured as though to say, "Can you believe this?"

When Trip and Brian got together, Trip asked, "What do you think happened?"

"Well, if it was the emotion of the moment, it will pass," Brian speculated. "But if it was genuine, it will last. If it was an authentic movement of God among the deacons, we need to celebrate it and move forward. Until we hear otherwise, I believe that ought to be our plan."

They then worked on a follow-up proposal to take the deacons at their word and build on their passion.



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.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Sunday School Lessons

By Robert Olsen, Ph.D.
Professor of Historical Theology and Director of Intercultural Studies, University of Mobile



For September 13

COMING JUDGMENT Romans 2:1–13

No Excuses (1–5)

Paul begins chapter 2 by emphasizing that we need to be more concerned about our own sins than about judging others. This mirrors Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7 in the Sermon on the Mount. It is easy for Christians to be self-righteous and look at others' sins while ignoring our own. We need to be guided by the Holy Spirit and have sound Christian friends who can help point out sins in our lives.

This is often distorted today by Christians being told they are not allowed to judge others and their behavior. We have to remember that the Bible is full of judgments that we need to keep in mind.

For example, the Bible clearly lays out what acts are sinful. When we tell others what the Bible says in these instances, it is God judging, not us. We are merely stating what Scripture says. The difficulty Christians have is that they take personal convictions and try to put them on other Christians.

The Pharisees did not want to break the law of Moses, and so they added elements to the law to guard against it. Christians need to be careful not to add to what the Bible says.

From what Bible version to use to what clothes to wear to what songs to sing, Christians need to distinguish between biblical teaching and personal preference.

Perfect Standard (6–11)

God is going to judge each person according to their deeds. This is not works-based salvation, however. Christians are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8–9), and Paul emphasizes this throughout the rest of the Book of Romans.

Christians are the ones who, because of their salvation, do works that please God. A demonstration of our salvation leads to works that glorify God, not ourselves.

Those who are not saved do works that do not glorify God; they are self-seeking. The purpose of this passage is two-fold. First, it should motivate us to do good works that bring glory to God and not ourselves.

Second, it reminds us that those who are living for themselves need the gospel so that they do not receive God's wrath.

One Way (12–13)

There is only one way to be made right with God, and that is through Jesus Christ. Paul emphasizes that while the Jews have the law, it does not save them, and for Gentiles without the law, their actions condemn them.

In both cases, Christ is the solution. Some Christians believe that the purpose of the law in the Old Testament was to provide a works-based salvation and that if people could follow the law, they would be saved. But Paul denies this. (See especially Gal. 3:21–24.) The law was never meant to save.

Rather, it brings awareness of our sin so that we realize the need for a savior, who is Christ. It is by belief in Christ that we are saved — grace through faith. (See Eph. 2:8–9.) This is of utmost importance.

Since we can only be saved through Christ, the gospel needs to be preached to everyone everywhere. Some Christians believe that God will reach people from other nations apart from hearing the gospel. This is not what the Bible teaches. In fact, the drive for missions comes from this realization. The gospel needs to be preached to the man on the deserted island just as much as it needs to be preached to your neighbor in the U.S.

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

For September 20

SAVING FAITH Romans 3:21–4:5

Falling Short (3:21–26)

The question that every religion tries to answer is how to be made right with God or how to get on God's good side.

Throughout history, people have tried to satisfy God through various means — sacrificing animals and crops, bringing offerings to idols or in extreme cases, performing human or child sacrifice. What all these religions have in common is that they believe salvation is by works.

Thankfully, God has revealed Himself to us in Scripture so we no longer have to wonder about these things. God tells us plainly how we can be reconciled, and it is not by what we can do for God but rather by what God does for us.

Paul points out that everyone has sinned and therefore deserves damnation. But in spite of our wickedness, God chooses to justify us by the work of Jesus Christ.

It is not our works that save us but Jesus' atoning work on the cross.

While we are sinners, we are counted as righteous in God's eyes because He sees us with the righteousness of Christ.

Finding Hope (27–31)

The salvation we receive is a gift of God. It is not something that we can earn or something we deserve. We live in a world in which people think they can be good enough to enter heaven.

Paul has established that there are no good people; everyone is a sinner. Because we receive salvation as a gift, we have no room to boast.

Christians can never think we are somehow more deserving of God's love than others because of our own goodness.

Since we are justified by faith in Christ and not by our own works, does this impact us? What are we to do? First, we are to live in a way that pleases God because we are thankful for what God has done for us.

We do not do good works in order to be saved, but we do good works because we are saved. Second, because this is the only way for people to be made right with God, we need to tell this to other people.

It has already been established that everyone is a sinner in need of salvation, so because we have the knowledge of salvation, we need to share it.

This is what has driven missions throughout history, and it should drive us today.

Following Faith (4:1–5)

To make his point, Paul uses Abraham as an example. Abraham is the father of the Jews. Surely, if anyone was good enough on his own to be justified, it was Abraham. But Paul points out that even Abraham was justified by faith, not by works.

Considered righteous because of his faith and not because of his works, Abraham had Christ's righteousness applied to him just as it is with us today.

Some people believe that in the Old Testament, Jews were saved by works and only after Christ's resurrection are we saved by faith, but Paul points out that it has always been salvation by grace through faith, even in the Old Testament.

This likewise means that it is the only way people are saved today, which motivates us to support missions and to share the gospel with all cultures since they can only be saved through the gospel, not by the works of their own religions.

"What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.'"

Romans 4:3

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sunday School Lessons

Associate Professor and Executive Director of Christian Ministry, Samford University

By Scott Guffin



For September 13

GOD SPEAKS THROUGH THE BIBLE Psalm 19:7–14

In 2 Timothy 3, the Apostle Paul reminds us that when we engage with the Word of God, we are indeed interacting with God's words, breathed out by Him for His glory and our good.

In Psalm 19, David explores the nature of God's Word, which he refers to by various names such as instruction, testimony, precepts, commands and ordinances.

David's reflections are a great reminder to us today of how God still speaks to us through His Word.

God speaks to reveal His character and nature. (7–9)

It is a well-recognized truth that a person's words speak volumes about who they are. Jesus declares in Matthew 12:34 that "the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart."

In Psalm 19:7–9, David describes the Word of God as perfect, trustworthy, right, radiant, pure, reliable and righteous, thus revealing to us the character and nature of the One from whom it originates.

These verses also remind the reader of the impact God's Word has on those who encounter it. It is continually "renewing one's life," "making the inexperienced wise," "making the heart glad" and "making the eyes light up."

God speaks to encourage us and warn us. (10–11)

As David observes, the impact of the Word of God on our lives is positive, but it is not monolithic in the ways it accomplishes these ends.

God often speaks through His Word to encourage us, affirm us, inspire us and strengthen us. Other times, however, God's Word confronts us to warn and redirect us.

The writer of Hebrews notes that God disciplines us for our

own good because He loves us. (See Hebrews 12:5–11.) It is important for us on the receiving end to remember that God's discipline is not punitive but rather corrective.

Neither is it always painful. Sometimes it is uplifting and encouraging, as God affirms what is right in us and pushes us to new heights of connection with His will and work.

God speaks to convict us and guide us in right living. (12–14)

God will do this in the lives of believers regardless of our cooperation because we are His children. It is far better, however, to be in a position of submission to God when it comes to His dealing with our sin.

In verses 12–13, David focuses on two types of sins and invites God's activity in addressing both. First, "hidden faults" are the sins we often fail to see in ourselves, like pride and selfish ambition.

David notes that every person struggles to discern these and asks God to declare him innocent of such sins. Of course, the only way for this to happen is for God to reveal David's sins to him and for David to confess his sins.

If we listen, God will do the same with us through the convicting work of the Word and the Spirit. Second, "willful sins" are the ones we are clear on but engage in anyway. His cry is for God to grant him victory over such sins to prevent them from dominating him.

David's ultimate goal, expressed in verse 14, is that his words and even his thoughts would be found acceptable in the sight of God. This should be our goal as well.

As we engage with the Bible, it is important that we have ears to hear what God is saying to us through His Word.

God is speaking. Are we listening?

For September 20

GOD SPEAKS THROUGH HIS HOLY SPIRIT 1 Corinthians 2:6–16

In my estimation, the voices we encounter today are louder and more numerous than they have ever been. I have a setting on my cell phone that tells me every Sunday morning how much time I have spent on average per day on my phone and iPad in the previous week. I have often been tempted to turn off the setting because it serves as a painful reminder of how much time I commit daily to pursuing mostly nothing.

But I am not alone in my weakness. A quick internet search (ironic, I know) of studies reveals that the average American spends 5.5 to 6.5 hours per day on phones and tablets.

In the midst of this constant cacophony of voices, there is one voice that we as followers of Christ must seek out, discern and listen to — the Holy Spirit.

We can't comprehend His will by our own power or reasoning. (6–8)

Paul insists in verses 1–5 that when he proclaimed "the mystery of God" to the Corinthian church, he did not do so "with brilliance of speech or wisdom" but "with a demonstration of the Spirit's power." In verses 6–7, Paul contrasts "a wisdom of this age, or of the rulers of this age" with "God's hidden wisdom," noting that it is a wisdom not known or understood by "the rulers of this age."

Paul's message here to us is that the "wisdom" of the world is no wisdom at all and that true wisdom, which emanates from God, is unattainable to us in our natural state. Who will reveal it to us?

The Holy Spirit reveals to us the mind of God. (9–11)

When Jesus informs His disciples

in John 16 that He will send the Holy Spirit, He tells them that the Spirit "will not speak on His own, but He will speak whatever He hears" from the Father (v. 13).

Paul elaborates on this idea in 1 Corinthians 2:10, explaining that "God has revealed these things to us by the Spirit, since the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God."

What an amazing thought that the Spirit, who indwells us as believers, communicates to us the mind of God.

It is important to note here that everything the Holy Spirit says will always be consistent with God's revealed Word in Scripture because God does not contradict Himself. Indeed, the Holy Spirit's primary way of communicating with us is through the illumination of God's Word to us. For this reason, we are called as God's people to meditate on His Word, that the Holy Spirit might "turn on the lights" of His truth for us.

We must rely on the Holy Spirit to help us apply Scripture to our lives. (12–16)

In this passage, Paul notes that "the person without the Spirit" is unable to receive the things that come from the Spirit because those things are spiritually discerned. We as believers, however, have received "the Spirit who comes from God, so that we may understand what has been freely given to us by God."

As the Holy Spirit illuminates God's Word to us and we position ourselves to receive it through prayer and meditation, the Spirit helps us not only with knowledge and insight but also in application and transformation so that we may be conformed more and more to the image of Christ.

God is speaking to us through His Spirit. Are we listening?

*"Now we have received not the spirit of the world,
but the Spirit who is from God ..."*

1 Corinthians 2:12

‘Creative storytelling’

New approach to Deaf Bible translation begins with Book of Esther

When Deaf Pathway Global set out to test a new approach to Bible translation, the organization didn’t begin with a complex theological text or a long gospel narrative. Instead, they chose a story from Scripture filled with courage, tension and triumph.

They chose Esther. At first glance, the decision might seem unexpected, but for DPG, Esther was the perfect place to begin a venture in how the Bible reaches Deaf communities worldwide.

Established in 2020 as a nonprofit venture of Brentwood Baptist Deaf Church in Tennessee and the International Mission Board, DPG grew from efforts in the U.S. to provide American Sign Language-based Bible stories for Deaf communities. The ministry seeks to empower international Deaf communities with access to the Bible in their heart language.

‘Sign roots’

“Deaf Pathway Global’s translation model takes advantage of a concept we call ‘sign roots,’” said Nick Jungheim, an IMB missionary who serves as DPG president. “To explain sign roots, imagine if all spoken languages were built from a shared set of basic sounds. Even though the languages are different, those basics would still feel familiar across cultures.”

Jungheim, who is Deaf, said sign languages across the world share a common foundation, including natural body movements, facial expressions and the use of visual space.

Sign roots are developed through shared elements that form a kind of universal base layer, including the following:



Submitted photo
Deaf Pathway Global President Nick Jungheim (left) meets with Deaf Burkinabe, Gambians and Senegalese during a camp in Senegal. DPG selected team members for the Senegalese translation team from this camp.

- ▶ Movements for everyday ideas like eat, go, see, person or question

- ▶ Facial expressions that convey emotion, emphasis or grammar

- ▶ Intuitive pointing and use of visual space.

“Because of these shared roots,” Jungheim said, “Deaf people from different countries can often communicate meaningfully, even without knowing each other’s formal sign language. Conversations are not perfect, but understanding is often surprisingly high.”

DPG has built on this reality by creating sign root templates, which are visual frameworks that allow multiple translation teams to work from the same foundation, adapting it into their own heart languages.

“Creative storytelling provides the context that allows sign roots to carry rich meaning naturally,” Jungheim said. “Instead of explaining

abstract ideas directly, stories show them through lived experiences, which aligns closely with how sign language communicates visually and relationally.”

Since the sign roots method works best with stories, Jungheim explained how Esther stands out as one of the best books for the project.

Visual and dramatic

“I needed a narrative-style book of the Bible that all of our international teams could work on simultaneously,” he said. “The book also needed to be short enough to demonstrate that this translation model could serve as a proof of concept before beginning translation of the New Testament.”

With a total of 167 verses, Esther is concise yet highly visual, full of dramatic scenes and vivid characters. Just recently, DPG completed translating Esther in seven sign lan-

guages including American, Hungarian, Slovenian, Serbian, Senegalese, Chinese and Thai.

“To my knowledge, nothing like this has even been attempted before,” Jungheim said. “The project has already demonstrated the validity and potential of the translation model DPG is currently employing.”

Full access to Scripture

Before this new model, DPG primarily used chronological Bible storying, which translated selected Bible stories to help audiences understand Scripture as a unified narrative — “from Creation to Christ and beyond,” Jungheim described.

While effective, that approach has limitations. It introduces people to Scripture but doesn’t provide full access to the Bible. The sign roots model changes that. Now, multiple teams work simultaneously to produce the sign roots translation.

A new Filipino Sign Language team has begun work in Davao City, Philippines. If successful, this Philippines model could scale rapidly, bringing Scripture within reach of Deaf communities worldwide at an unprecedented pace.

The story of Esther is one of courage in the face of uncertainty. It’s a reminder that change often begins with a single bold step. In many ways, DPG’s Project Esther reflects that same spirit. What began as a carefully chosen test case has already demonstrated that a new kind of Bible translation is possible — a translation that is faster, more collaborative and globally connected.

And if this model continues to succeed, Esther, like the book’s character impacting the Jews, may impact Deaf communities worldwide “for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14). (IMB)