

# The Alabama Baptist



LaShawn Washington

Above: Pickleball instructor Jason Rash (center) offers tips for play while Liz Spiller (left) conveys his instructions through sign language.

Photos by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

## Open play

### Pickleball event in Birmingham helps deaf players learn the game, meet new friends

By Tracy Riggs Frontz  
The Alabama Baptist

When the idea of a pickleball outreach for the Deaf community surfaced, everyone around the table determined it needed to happen — and the Sept. 13 event exceeded expectations.

The energy and excitement exhibited by more than 50 participants during the two hours on and around

the courts also assured organizers they were on to something.

#### Opportunity for fun

LaShawn Washington, case manager for the deaf at the Birmingham Regional Center with Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind, and Liz Spiller, a passionate pickleballer who serves as an American Sign Language instructor, dreamed up the opportunity.

They pitched the plan to their friends at Pickleball Kingdom Birmingham, central Alabama's newest premier indoor pickleball facility (located on Lakeshore Drive in Homewood). TAB Media Group joined in as the official sponsor of the event, providing refreshments, dedicated court time and professional instructors.

The event was everything organizers hoped for, Washington said.

Both Deaf and hearing participants not only learned how to play pickleball but also tried out their new skills in a stress-free environment. Those in attendance met new friends, and several area students training in ASL volunteered their time for this unique opportunity to practice.

Representatives from Meadow Brook Baptist Church's Deaf (See 'No barriers,' page 2)

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# No barriers

## Sporting event brings people together on pickleball court

(continued from page 1)  
ministry also were on hand to serve and connect with those in attendance.

Washington is thankful the event went well — for both those deaf and hearing.

“September is National Deaf Awareness Month, a time to celebrate Deaf culture, honor the contributions of the deaf community and promote inclusivity,” she said. “Seeing everyone come together to play pickleball without any barriers was a great way to honor Deaf Awareness Month.

“Any Deaf event is important in the Deaf community because it brings deaf individuals together,” Washington added. “A lot of us are in the hearing world all day, every day ... work in the hearing world, family members are hearing and typically don’t communicate well.

“When an opportunity arises for us to get together, we tend to grab it, no matter how far (away) it is. It’s our way to connect with our culture; it’s our way to be ourselves and recharge until we are back in the hearing world again,” she said.

“A hearing person can benefit from being part of a deaf pickleball team by learning about Deaf culture as they play, by picking up some sign language and most importantly by realizing deaf people are just like them. We can do anything except hear.

“An event like this, a sporting event, proves that you don’t need to hear to participate in sports, whether you’re a fan or a player.



Photo by LaShawn Washington

ASL interpreters-in-training helped players and trainers communicate during the TAB Media Group-sponsored pickleball event for the deaf held Sept. 13 in Birmingham.

A deaf person feels equal and part of a team without having deafness stop them from participating,” Washington said. “Pickleball is a sport for all ranges of people: deaf, hearing, young, old. ... We even had a deafblind (low vision) person participate.”

### Pickleball Kingdom

The location — Pickleball Kingdom — worked out well because the corporate philosophy emphasizes community more than athleticism, according to Kyle Johnson, general manager of Pickleball Kingdom Birmingham.

“We love the game of pickleball, and we love people even more,” Johnson said. “People matter most,

and the unique game of pickleball is a good doorway to bring people together to compete and grow relationships. People are what matters most in life. Relationships are the currency that matters most and lasts. All of us are going through things in this life, and we believe we are better doing life and going through those things together.

“We have an inviting, inclusive atmosphere. Whether you’re young or old, big or small, experienced or new, Pickleball Kingdom welcomes you. We are thankful for any opportunity to host and love people through the game of pickleball,” he said.

TAB Media Group President Jennifer Davis Rash said sponsoring the event was an easy yes.

“We were thrilled to help make this unique and creative opportunity possible for our friends in the Deaf community,” she said. “We’ve shared countless stories of the resilience of the Deaf community, and we’ve made our content available in audio form for those with sight difficulties. We also work hard to connect people from all walks of life because we truly are better together, and we’ve watched God work in some incredible ways through His people.”

A deaf pickleball player teaches a hearing participant a sign in American Sign Language during the Sept. 13 pickleball event for the deaf at Pickleball Kingdom in Birmingham.



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

### The Alabama Baptist

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

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

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The crossword puzzle  
can be found on page 15.



# Rashional Thoughts

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

Email: [jrash@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:jrash@thealabamabaptist.org) / Social media: @RashionalThts

## Achieving clarity, common understanding takes time, willingness to try

I found myself doing it again — talking increasingly louder to the person not understanding what I was saying. Instead of reframing how I presented the information, I kept stating the same words while pumping up the volume. Somehow, I thought it would help.

Why do we go about it this way? I've even done it when trying to communicate with someone who speaks another language, and I've seen other people do it too.

We might slow down our pace a little, but we also increase the volume in an attempt to get the other person to understand.

Watching various discussions play out on social media recently, I noticed a similarity. While there's typically no sound associated with the back-and-forth comments, the heightened intensity is obvious.

### Losing the point

In the threads of quick-hit, straight-to-the-point statements, the foundational point can easily get lost, sidetracked or misconstrued.

And then we are tasked with clearing up the confusion and possibly a bit of damage control.

It makes me think of the illustration of squeezing toothpaste out of its tube and then demonstrating what it's like to put it

back in the tube — pretty much impossible.

Once something is said out loud and/or published in any type of format, it's out there and available to be shared globally within a few moments.

No matter how loud our explanation or how emphatically we write it, the person hearing or reading the message still interprets it from their vantage point, life experiences, cultural background and current frame of mind.

My new friend LaShawn (find out more about her on pages 1 and 2) reinforced this understanding for me recently when she helped me see how referring to those who are hard of hearing or deaf as "hearing impaired" is insulting to those who can't hear.

"It makes it seem like we are broken and need to be fixed," she shared.

I innocently thought I was being sensitive and appropriate when in fact I was trying too hard and ended up being offensive.

Some voices in Southern Baptist life are finding their way through similar situations.

Willy Rice, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Clearwater, Florida, is a little more than three months into his role as SBC president, a one-year term with the option of being re-elected to a second one-year term.

While he has been vocal and clear about his stances, he shared with our director of content Shawn Hendricks how he realizes his current role representing all Southern Baptists (not just those who elected him) provides the opportunity to be positive about what is working well rather than solely focusing on what needs changing.

Granted, Rice has an ambitious list of what he would like to see accomplished during his year as president, but his recent comments indicate he is trying to respect

the questions and concerns of those who might not agree with him on all the issues.

Speaking to SBC Executive Committee trustees during their Sept. 21–22 meeting in Nashville, Rice chose to focus on the productive moves that have been made in how the EC helps churches handle the horrific discoveries of sexual abuse.



Photo by Brandon Porter  
SBC President Willy Rice delivers first report to trustees of the SBC Executive Committee on Sept. 21 in Nashville.

Some would say he hasn't always handled his words quite as well and left an impression of insensitivity and possibly even lack of concern. You can find Shawn's full story at [thebaptistpaper.org](http://thebaptistpaper.org).

As we at TAB Media Group work to report through our various publications and platforms, please know we are working hard to grasp a full understanding of each situation and coverage opportunity.

It's one thing to merely report the words that are said in the moment; it's an entirely separate and complex responsibility to help connect the dots for what those words actually mean.

Thank you for always helping us with context and understanding, especially when we are trying to put the puzzle together of what wasn't said as much as what was said.

Jeff Iorg, president and CEO of the SBC EC, thanked TAB Media Group and other faith-based communicators in Nashville last week for holding strong to a philosophy of truth-telling, even when it isn't flattering.

And being positive while sharing the truth isn't always easy, he said, but he appreciates the effort — which of course reminded me of our motto, "truth with compassion."

# Your Voice



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

## Living faithfully to connect, influence and lead

By Eugene Mason

Leadership Ministries Minute

Jesus' followers in the Bible are called disciples. A disciple is a lifelong student, one who studies along with others and then lives out those teachings in daily life.

The key to a relationship with Christ is to be a disciple — and also to make disciples. This was Jesus' central command to us as He prepared to leave the earth. He told us clearly to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19).

In the New Testament we don't read one single account of a Christ-

follower practicing his faith entirely on his own. The example we are given is always, without exception, a group of believers following Christ together.

The idea that we can be disciples of Christ on our own was an issue in the early church — so much so that we are given New Testament instruction, "Do not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another all the more ..." (Heb. 10:25).

Disciples know God more fully. Proverbs 3:5-6 encourages believers to "trust in the Lord" rather than

rely solely on their own understanding. Disciples also build spiritual strength.

Joshua received a powerful command from God as he prepared to lead Israel into a challenging future. The Lord instructed him to meditate on God's Word continually so that he would be careful to obey it and prosper in his mission (Josh. 1:8).

### Anchored in Truth

Joshua's strength did not come from military skill alone. It came from anchoring himself in God's truth. Disciples are safeguarded against deception.

Modern culture presents countless competing voices that claim to define truth, purpose, morality and identity. Without a solid biblical foundation, it becomes easy to adopt beliefs and values that conflict with God's design. Scripture functions as a measuring stick against which every idea, philosophy and teaching can be evaluated.

The Apostle Paul reminded Timothy that "all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). God's Word equips believers to recognize error and embrace truth. But the goal of studying Scripture is not merely acquiring knowledge. The goal is becoming more like Christ.

God's Word has a unique power to reshape the heart and renew the mind (Rom. 12:2). This transformation occurs as Scripture replaces false assumptions with God's truth.

"Be sure that if you do ministry out here, you better check the Spirit of God and make sure that you're called. ... The devil will eat you alive. ... In Nevada, you have 24-hour gambling ... 24-hour drinking ... legal brothels," said **Curtis Fulenwider**, pastor of Fernley First Baptist Church, on ministry in Nevada. "In my years of experience ... you really better be called to go out and do ministry (at events like Burning Man). ... They are the lost of the lost."

"Through a 'them before us' lens, adults must put children's long-term need for parental love, guidance, boundaries and belonging ahead of the cultural demand for immediate affirmation. Children do not need adults who applaud every feeling or desire. They need adults who love them enough to tell the truth, endure their anger and remain committed to them through conflict," said children's rights advocate and Christian author **Katy Faust**.

"The Bible is God's letter to me. It teaches me about God. It teaches me what is right and wrong. It teaches me how to live God's way. I will learn it and do what it says."

**The Discovery Clubs**,  
an after-school Bible club

## Letters to the Editor

Dear TAB Media Group,  
Thank you for remembering 9/11. May God richly bless you.

**Ann German Luck**  
Guntersville, Alabama

The messages and emails are flowing in consistently since we've released "Waiting in the Meantime: A Guided Journey Toward Hope and Healing for Mothers of Estranged Adult Children" through TAB Media Group.

Several churches have already launched Bible studies for their congregation and community, and many individuals also are working through the study on their own.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this much-needed resource to all who are facing this difficult season.

**Denise George**, author  
Birmingham, Alabama

Thank you to Jennifer Rash for participating in our special luncheon for Dr. Rick Lance in September. The presenters included several area pastors who have served closely with Dr. Lance.

She got the award for traveling the farthest to be part of the event, one of many being held in his honor as he looks toward retirement in January.

**Rick Ellison and the Baldwin Baptist Association team**

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“If you don’t disciple  
your kids, the world will.”

DANIEL RITCHIE  
*Evangelist*

“These scams exploit both fear and trust,” said **Brandon Waldeck**, director of enterprise risk at GuideStone Financial Resources, on a rapidly growing fraud scheme known as the “Phantom Hacker” scam. “Victims believe they are protecting their savings, securing their accounts or even helping law enforcement investigate serious crimes. In reality, they are transferring their money directly to criminals, and in many cases those funds are never recovered. That’s why recognizing the warning signs before money is transferred is so important.”

“I want people to know that when you trust Jesus with your greatest struggle, He can turn it into your greatest strength,” said Christian entertainer, juggler and illusionist **Boston Bachert**, who as a child was diagnosed with Tourette’s syndrome. “For the past 10 years of my life, I’ve made it my goal to show audiences spectacular stunts and mind-blowing illusions. Through these tricks, I’m able to share some incredible truths.”

“I’ve known God from a very early age,” Bachert said. “I accepted Christ as my Savior when I was 5 years old, and I grew up going to church every weekend. Knowing Christ and having a strong foundation in Him helped me get through some hard times as I got older. I trusted Jesus with my diagnosis, and He worked a true miracle in my life. The more I traveled and started sharing my story with others, I realized that I’m not alone. There are so many students and families struggling with things they can’t control.”

“Tragic moments demand a response from the pulpit on Sunday. People need a word of hope and a word that helps. The pressure on the pastor in such moments is hard and heavy. Pastors understand this particular kind of pressure and still find it difficult to handle. But this is a pastor’s responsibility. God’s Word, spoken through a wise, loving shepherd, is exactly what the church needs in these moments,” said **Danny Sinquefield** of the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board.



# Lass WORDS

BY KEN LASS  
The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

## Memories of the hardware store and a grandmother’s love

When I was a young boy, my father owned and operated a small neighborhood hardware store. This was in the late 1950s when malls and big-box stores were beginning to wipe out small businesses.

The only reason his store survived was Christmas season — from Thanksgiving to Christmas there was a rush of customers buying gifts and supplies to get their homes ready for the holidays.

There was no money to hire employees, so on busy Friday nights and weekends, Dad and Mom and my paternal grandmother worked the store. There was also no money for babysitters, so they brought me along.

The main floor had tools, paint, lawnmowers and such. Dad was the salesman; Mom was the gift wrapper. Gift wrapping was offered free with purchase. On the basement floor was the toy department and sports equipment area. Grandma worked the counter down there, and that’s where I mostly hung out.

### Taking the blame

I was given books to read and a few toys from home to play with. But I soon became bored with these. Against Dad’s instructions, I would frequently grab new miniature race cars off the shelves and play with them or take a baseball glove and ball and pretend I was a major league

pitcher. Dad would have been furious with me for playing with the merchandise, but Gram never squealed on me.

There was a grocery store next to us, and I would often open the cash register and take dimes and quarters out and go next door to buy popsicles. Of course this meant the register would not balance at the end of business, and Dad would always fuss at Grandma for not being able to make the right change. Gram knew what I was doing, but she never ratted me out. She loved me so much, she took the blame.

### ‘Selfless love’

When I went to church and was told about Jesus, how He gave His life on the cross to atone for my sins, how He took the blame for me, I thought about Gram. Her selfless love helped me understand about Jesus and ultimately led to my salvation. Gram went to heaven many years ago, but I’d give anything to see her again to give her a big hug.

Thanks to her and Jesus, one day I will.

## 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

### FRANKLIN LEE KIRKSEY

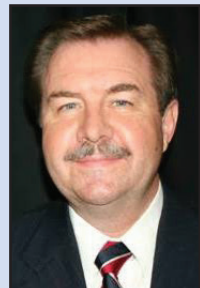
Franklin Lee Kirksey, former pastor of churches in Alabama, Mississippi and South Carolina, died Sept. 11. He was 64.

A Mobile native, he was a pastor for over 30 years and in ministry for 47 years. One of the churches he led was First Baptist Church Spanish Fort.

His columns appeared in newspapers in Baldwin, Mobile, Washington and Clarke counties, as well as in Cascade, Montana. He also was a frequent guest contributor to The Alabama Baptist newspaper.

He is the author of "Sound Biblical Preaching: Giving the Bible a Voice" and "Don't Miss the Revival! Messages for Revival and Spiritual Awakening from Isaiah."

He is survived by his wife of over 35 years, Sharon.



KIRKSEY

### AUTAUGA ASSOCIATION

► **David Greer** is the new part-time worship associate of **First Baptist Church Prattville**. He and his wife, Sarah, have three children. Justin Hall is pastor.

► **Autaugaville Baptist Church** will celebrate its 173rd homecoming Oct. 18, 9:30–11:30 a.m. with lunch to follow. Michael Gillyard is pastor.



GREER

### BETHLEHEM ASSOCIATION

► **First Baptist Church Monroeville** celebrated its 200th anniversary Aug. 2. The guest speaker was Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. Special guests included former pastors Randall Adkisson and Gary Miller who shared reflections of their ministries at FBC. Former minister of music Glenn Eubanks, who served at FBC for more than 39 years and is now retired, led the congregational music and directed two special anthems sung by the choir.



Photo by Albert Nettles

Each attendee was given a commemorative 20-page booklet with articles and photos spanning the church's 200 years of ministry. Pastor Micah Gandy (left) accepted a plaque given to the church by Jim Lambert (right), a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission.

### BIGBEE ASSOCIATION

► **Jackie Masters**, who served as secretary of **York Baptist Church** for 47 years, retired earlier this year. A reception was held June 7 to honor her years of service. Masters received a commemorative plaque, flowers, gifts and cards. She served with four pastors and one interim pastor during her ministry. "I enjoyed working with every pastor and interim and learned something new with each one," Masters said. She also has been an active member of the Alabama Association of Baptist Ministry Assistants organization for 51 years, holding various leadership roles, including president. Leon Ballard is pastor.



Submitted photo

### BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► **Meadow Brook Baptist Church, Birmingham**, is hosting a Deaf Revival on Oct. 3, 10 a.m.–3 p.m. Doors open at 9 a.m. Bob Moore will be the ASL instructor, and Sarah Wallenstein will be the music leader. The event will include worship, biblical teaching, fellowship, discussion and a free lunch and refreshments. To register, email [info@meadowbrookbaptist.org](mailto:info@meadowbrookbaptist.org). Cromwell Josey is Meadow Brook's Deaf ministry leader, and Chris Jones is lead pastor.

► **Canaan Baptist Church** and **Flint Hill Baptist Church**, both in Bessemer, along with **North Highlands Baptist Church** and **Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church** in Hueytown, are hosting Canvas Conference Oct. 3, 8 a.m.–1 p.m. in the fellowship hall of Pleasant Ridge Baptist. Morgan Bailey, author of "Canvas: Be a Portrait of God's Grace," will be the keynote speaker, focusing on biblical encouragement of how God uses every experience, from moments of spiritual victory to seasons of adversity and suffering, to transform a life into the image of Christ. Ticket price includes lunch; single ticket: \$25; two tickets: \$40. Register online at [pleasantrydebaptist.org/event-details/canvas-conference](http://pleasantrydebaptist.org/event-details/canvas-conference).

► **Valley Creek Baptist Church, Hueytown**, launched Valley Creek Arts in September, a ministry offering ballet and Irish dance classes in a Christ-centered environment for children. Haley Greatorex Hunt serves as director. Classes available for ages 6 to 18. Visit [vcchurch.com/vcart](http://vcchurch.com/vcart). Jeff Weathers is pastor.

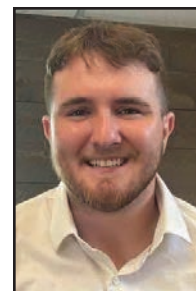
### CALHOUN ASSOCIATION

► **Tristan Cochran** is the new director of student ministries of **First Baptist Anniston** at **McClellan**. Donnie Sills is pastor.



FORD

► **Amber Ford** is the new children's ministry director of **First Baptist Church Saks**. She and her husband, Jake, have three children. Joey Hanner is pastor.



COCHRAN

► **Matt Scott** (below) is the new associate pastor of **Parker Memorial Baptist Church, Anniston**. He is married to Stephanie. Derrick Hartley is senior pastor.



Submitted photo

### CHEROKEE ASSOCIATION

► **New Prospect #2 Baptist Church, Centre**, celebrated its 100th anniversary Aug. 16. Music was provided by Hannah Rhinehart, Tony O'Neil and special guest Sen. Andrew Jones, R-Centre. Deacon Chris Whorton shared the history of the church and two former pastors, Tony Shubert and Greg Locklear, recounted highlights during their ministries at New Prospect. Wendell Dutton (right), a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented a commemorative plaque with members (l to r) Whorton; Ann Murphy; Jimmy Graham, the oldest original continuous member; and pastor Tony McCain accepting the honor on behalf of the congregation. A fellowship meal followed.



Photo by Marcille Dutton

### ETOWAH ASSOCIATION

► **Becki Morgan**, financial secretary for **First Baptist Church Gadsden**, was recognized for her 30 years of service during worship Aug. 23 followed by a lunch and reception. She and her husband, Scott, have one child and one grandchild. Mat Alexander is pastor.



Facebook photo



Submitted photo

► **Scott Hassell** is the new pastor of **Paden Baptist Church, Gadsden**. He previously served at First Baptist Church Southside. He and his wife, Mindy, have one son.

## MADISON ASSOCIATION

► **Codey Cline** is

the new senior pastor of **Monte Sano Baptist Church, Huntsville**. He and his wife, Alexis, have six children.

► **Terry Slay**, minister of adult education of **Mount Zion Baptist Church, Huntsville**, for almost 14 years, recently retired. A reception was held



Submitted photo

July 12 in his honor. Slay also served on staff at the following churches: Hunter Street Baptist, Hoover; First Baptist Opelika; Huffman Baptist, Birmingham; and Calvary Baptist, Dothan. He enjoyed ministering to young men while serving as team chaplain for several high school football teams in Alabama. He and his

wife, Teresa, have two adult children and five grandchildren. Kevin Moore is pastor.

## MARSHALL ASSOCIATION

► **Jeremy Plunkett** is the new student pastor of **First Baptist Church Douglas**. He previously served as youth pastor of First Baptist Church Madison, Florida. Plunkett is also a chaplain for Marketplace Chaplains, Guntersville, and Cultivate Clinical Counseling, Cullman. He and his wife, Amanda, have three children. Heath Dunn is pastor.



Facebook photo

## MOBILE NETWORK



BLACKWELL

► **Ethan Blackwell** is the new student pastor of **Shiloh Baptist Church, Saraland**. David Roach is pastor.

► **Tanner Rowell** (shown here to the right with his wife, Adrianna) is the

new pastor of **Hill Spring Baptist Church, Mobile**. He previously served as student pastor of First Baptist Church Reeltown.



Submitted photo

## MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION

► **Dan Harrison**, associate pastor of administration and senior adults of **Eastern Hills Baptist Church, Montgomery**, retired Aug. 30 after 47 years in vocational ministry, 17 years of which were at Eastern Hills. The church honored Harrison and his wife, Leisa, Aug. 30.



Photo by Neal Hughes

## NORTH JEFFERSON ASSOCIATION

► **Austin Faulkner**, who had been serving as youth minister of Beechwood Baptist Church, Mount Olive, is the new youth pastor of **Gardendale Baptist Tabernacle**.



Submitted photo

► **Mika Marcum** is the new pastor of **Calcedonia Baptist Church, Gardendale**, where he has been serving as interim pastor. He and his wife, Kandy, have three adult children and nine grandchildren.

► **Waterstone Church, Warrior**, will celebrate its 150th anniversary Oct. 18, with one worship service

at 10 a.m. and lunch to follow. Jerrel Brown is pastor.

## SOUTHEAST ASSOCIATION

► **DJ Sims** is the new student minister of **Memphis Baptist Church, Dothan**. He previously served as associate pastor to students of First Baptist Church Samson. He and his wife, Daphne, have one daughter. Jim Tate is pastor.



SIMS

## TALLAPOOSA ASSOCIATION

► **Eagle Creek Baptist Church, Dadeville**, celebrated its 175th anniversary Aug. 9. Former pastor Taylor Gurley was the guest preacher. A printed history of the church was included in the church bulletins, and church historian Danny Lloyd along with two members shared high-



Photo by Jimmie Mathews

lights and memories. Longtime musicians Vicky Patterson (pianist) and Debbie Brewer (organist) were recognized for their ministry. They each have served the

church almost 60 years. June Mathews, a commissioner with the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented the church with a special plaque. Pastor Wesley Price accepted the honor. A meal was served following the service. The anniversary also kicked off a four-day revival.

*EDITOR'S NOTE — Please send news items to [news@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:news@thealabamabaptist.org).*



Photo courtesy of FBC Center Star

## Church library contest spurs building projects among children, youth

What began as a way to commemorate the 250th anniversary of America became a Lego bricks competition for the children and youth within First Baptist Church Center Star in Killen.

"I think that Lego building teaches problem-solving, critical thinking and fine motor skills," said Tammy Brown, church librarian. "I always loved watching my kids build and get engulfed in a project."

"Our church library has been a tremendous blessing to our congregation and a valuable resource for ministry," said pastor Shandy Dill. "Our dedicated library staff does an outstanding job of providing quality resources that encourage people of all ages to read, learn and grow while also creating meaningful opportunities for connection throughout our church family."

Dill said the summer competition was a "tremendous success, giving children and families a chance to express their creativity while creating a meaningful experience that made them feel valued and celebrated by our entire church family."

The contest also brought increased foot traffic into the church library.

"One of the greatest benefits was that it also brought parents, grandparents, family members and friends into the library, giving them an opportunity to see all that our church library has to offer," said Kip McKee, administrative pastor. "Our library is more than a room filled with books — it is a ministry that helps people learn, grow, connect and strengthen their faith."

There were four age divisions: preschool-kindergarten, 1st-3rd grade, 4th-6th grade, 7th-12th grade.

The winners were: Owen Kelly, preschool-kindergarten, jet; Emmett Yarbrough, 1st-3rd grade, rubicon; Henry Yarbrough, 4th-6th grade, Earth's orbit; and Kolton Springer, 7th-12th grade, battleship. Winners received a cash prize at the church's back-to-school event.

Brown said the church plans to make it an annual summer promotion. She said the college/career set wants to be included next year. (TAB)

# REFLECTIONS ON A LIFE

## Re-Christianizing John Howard: A historical role model for Alabama Baptists

In 1841, James H. DeVotie, pastor of Siloam Baptist Church in Marion, took a vague idea for a men's college and made it a reality.

In just a few months, DeVotie secured the consent of the Alabama Baptist State Convention, leaders for the new institution, financing, facilities and a name: Howard College, in honor of John Howard, a British philanthropist and prison reformer who had died more than 50 years earlier.

Selecting Howard's name was an intentional choice. Howard exemplified enlightened Christian benevolence. He was a man whose Christian faith shaped his intellect, whose intellect informed his moral vision and whose moral convictions compelled him to serve others.

### Cornerstones of education

Howard provided a role model for the type of young men DeVotie and the board of trustees hoped the college would produce.

They envisioned students who would embrace and advance the

gospel through faith, pursue a deeper understanding of God's creation through intellect, serve their neighbors and their country through benevolence, and develop the habits of virtue necessary for good citizenship.

These four ideas (faith, intellect, benevolence and virtue) were the cornerstones of education at Howard College, and John Howard was their example.

September marked the 300th anniversary of Howard's birth. It is an opportunity to remember John Howard again and to recover a more accurate portrait of his life and work.

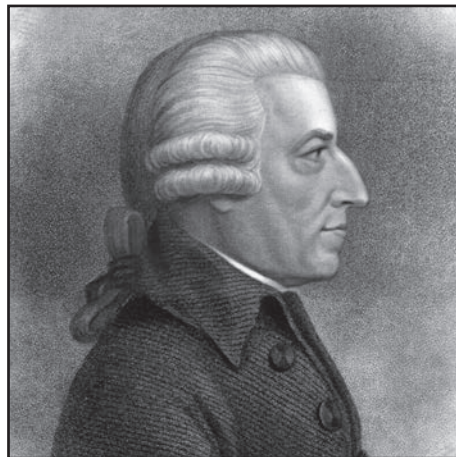
Howard's Christianity was not an accessory to his social concerns. It was the intellectual and theological framework within which those concerns made sense. Howard did

not use the language of "social justice" (a term coined decades after his death). He operated with a different moral vocabulary — one rooted in Scripture, Christian

discipleship, the convictions of English dissent and the responsibilities of Christian citizens.

Howard's Christianity was never a private matter. His reform program included chaplains, religious instruction, Bibles, Sabbath observance and solitude intended to encourage reflection and repentance.

Religious reform was part of his understanding of what genuine reform required. He spoke the language of sin, repentance and humility. He never referred to himself as a reformer but a sinner accountable to God.



JOHN HOWARD

Photo courtesy of Samford University Special Collection

DeVotie and the first trustees of the institution now known as Samford University saw in Howard a person whose Christianity produced intellectual seriousness, whose faith and intellect produced moral clarity and whose faith and moral convictions produced action.

### Christian worldview

They believed an education at Howard College would cultivate the same combinations in their students, and the Howard name would remind a Christian university that its heritage is not merely a collection of worthy causes. It is a way of understanding the world.

**EDITOR'S NOTE** — This article was adapted by S. Jonathan Bass, professor of history at Samford University, from his book on Samford's history to coincide with the 300th anniversary of John Howard's birth. The book "From Every Stormy Wind That Blows: The Idea of Howard College and the Origins of Samford University" can be found on Amazon.

## Samford experiences largest freshman class in history

Samford University enrolled its largest freshman class in history this fall, continuing years of growth as colleges across the country prepare for a smaller pool of high school graduates.

The private university opened the fall semester with 6,522 students, its highest enrollment in 185 years and more than 40% higher than in 2009, according to figures released Sept. 9.

Its freshman class grew even faster. Samford enrolled 1,270 first-year students, up 9.8% from last year's record class

of 1,156. Undergraduate enrollment also reached a record 4,575 students.

### Demographic shifts

The timing is notable because colleges have been preparing for years for a demographic slowdown.

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education projects the number of U.S. high school graduates has peaked at about 3.9 million in 2025 and will decline about 13% through 2041. The drop is largely tied to lower birth rates following the Great Recession.

College enrollment itself has not started falling

nationally. Postsecondary enrollment increased 1% in spring 2026, while undergraduate enrollment rose 1.3%, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

Enrollment at private nonprofit four-year colleges, the group that includes Samford, was essentially flat.

But the demographic shift is not expected to affect every part of the country equally.

The South is projected to see a 3% increase in high school graduates between 2023 and 2041, according to WICHE, while the

Midwest, Northeast and West are all expected to see double-digit declines.

That geographic shift could leave Southern colleges with a larger pool of prospective students even as the number of high school graduates declines nationally.

### High achievers

Samford already attracts a large portion of its student body from outside of Alabama. More than 62% of all students and 76.3% of this year's freshmen come from out of state.

President Beck Taylor said applicants are arriving

with some of the strongest academic credentials Samford has seen.

"High-achieving students value Samford," Taylor said. "They seek a transformational education on a residential campus where they'll be nurtured, motivated and equipped to lead lives of meaning and purpose."

Samford has spent heavily over the past three years to make room for continued growth, completing more than \$300 million in campus projects, including four new residence halls. (Alabama Daily News)

## UM earns top marks from Niche

The University of Mobile continues to climb in the new 2027 Niche Best Colleges rankings, earning several Top 10 rankings in Alabama and Top 100 national rankings. The recognition highlights the university's commitment to providing a Christ-centered education where students are known by name and equipped to grow in faith as they prepare for their God-given callings.

In addition to securing the No. 1 ranking for Safest College Campus in Alabama for 2027 for the sixth year in a row, UM ranks No. 2 for Best College Dorms and among the state's Top 10 for Most Diverse Colleges, Best College Campuses and Colleges with the Best Student Life.

Nationally, the university ranks among the Top 100 Safest College Campuses and Top 100 Best College Dorms in America.

Niche is a leading college and school research platform that uses data and reviews from students, alumni and other sources to evaluate colleges across a range of categories.

### Significant growth

The recognition comes as UM continues to experience significant growth across campus, including a record overall enrollment increase and residence halls at full capacity for the second consecutive year.

"Every achievement we celebrate at the University of Mobile is ultimately a testimony to God's faithfulness," said UM President Charles Smith. "We are grateful for the growth He has entrusted to us and for the opportunity to provide a place where students are known, cared for and challenged to grow in their faith. These recognitions are an encouragement to continue pursuing excellence while keeping our eyes fixed on our mission to multiply Kingdom leaders for the glory of God and the good of the world." (UM)



Photo by Dianna L. Cagle/The Alabama Baptist

Young men at this year's Fortify event hear from a panel of fathers during a breakout session on practical advice for biblical friendship and dating. Conference attendees heard from several men at various stages in life on a variety of topics.

## Atkins challenges teen boys 'to do bold things for Christ' at Fortify event

By Dianna L. Cagle  
The Alabama Baptist

A young man needs to surround himself with "mighty men" to make it in life.

Daniel Atkins, pastor of Taylor Road Baptist Church in Montgomery, talked about the kind of mighty men out of 2 Samuel 23 at the annual Fortify conference held at Westwood Baptist Church in Alabaster on Aug. 29.

"I need mighty men in my life, and God has called me to be a mighty man in the lives of others," said Atkins, who served as the main speaker for the one-day event.

These men are not meek, not scared, not complacent ... but men of prayer who are dedicated to be men of the Word, Atkins shared.

Around 300 young men in grades 6-12 gathered from across Alabama. Around 35 churches, including one from Tennessee, brought youth to the event planned by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

### 'Men who will remain'

"I need men in my life who will fight for me," Atkins said. "Men who will remain when everyone else runs."

These men need to be committed, courageous and competent.

"We're called not to leave any man behind," Atkins said. "We're

called to honor, courage and commitment."

He warned the young men and their leaders not to take the enemy lightly.

"You and I are engaged in spiritual warfare every single day," he said. "What the enemy wants to convince you of is that he's harmless ... that he's after someone else."

Atkins used three sessions to cover the theme "One Another."

"I need men to speak truth into my life ... to do bold things for Christ," Atkins said.

During the second session, Atkins urged the men to not shy away from vulnerability.

"If you're going to experience victory in your life, you're not going to do it alone," he said. "I need guys in my life I can be real with without fear."

Atkins said it's important for men to surround themselves with people who take initiative and who are willing to risk everything. Later, Atkins spoke about how Nathan con-

fronted King David in 2 Samuel.

"God uses other believers in your life for correction," Atkins said, highlighting Nathan's boldness to go before the king to express truth. "Nathan wasn't afraid of the fallout. Loving accountability is bold. Loving accountability is redemptive."

Breakout session topics included "dads dropping truth,"

a panel of fathers/grandfathers offering advice on biblical friendship and dating; how to help a friend struggling with pornography; how to disciple or mentor other people; identity: who God says you are; and one session for leaders on the potential use and dangers of artificial intelligence.

One Step Closer, a group of three men from South Alabama, led music.

Larry Hyche, state missionary, leads men's ministry and spiritual development work for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Visit [alabamamen.org](http://alabamamen.org) to learn more about future events, including next year's Fortify conference.



Photo by Dianna L. Cagle/TAB

Daniel Atkins, pastor of Taylor Road Baptist Church in Montgomery, talks to 6th-12th grade boys at the annual Fortify conference Aug. 29.

# Felt needs

Second in a series

## Creating a church of belonging for the lonely

**By Denise George**  
*The Alabama Baptist*

Sally arrives at church early, sits in a back pew and initiates little conversation with members as they arrive and walk past her to their seats. She offers a faint smile — a smile no one sees. Throughout worship, she sits still, quiet and alone, feeling as if she doesn’t belong. Before the closing benediction, she picks up her purse and silently slips out. Sally is one of the many lonely members in church who feel out of place, disconnected, isolated and invisible.

**Emotional struggle**

Loneliness has become a widespread emotional struggle, possibly even headed toward a crisis, in the U.S. and the Church.

According to the U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory (2023), “Loneliness is now considered an epidemic-level public health concern, associated with higher risks of depression, heart disease, cognitive decline and shortened lifespan.”

“Loneliness is like hunger or thirst,” Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy stated. “It’s a feeling that we experience when something we’re lacking for survival is missing from our life.”

When ignored, loneliness can erode a person’s spiritual life, mental health and overall well-being.

Behavioral scientist Susan Mettes, author of “The Loneliness Epidemic,” states loneliness can bring varying levels of pain. “Those whose loneliness is constant and chronic have likely experienced how loneliness

can chip away at health and quality of life,” Mettes said.

**Harms spiritual growth**

Loneliness harms a member’s spiritual growth. Members may stop participating in worship services, small groups and church-sponsored events. Chronic loneliness can weaken a member’s prayer life and Bible study as well as cause feelings of unworthiness and a sense of spiritual abandonment.

Most often, if the problem isn’t addressed, lonely members quietly slip away from church.

Loneliness can affect:

- ▶ Young adults who are leaving home, going to college or new jobs and forming lifetime identities.
- ▶ Singles of all ages who attend church alone, feel outside of church

social groups and have little or no relational support.

- ▶ Widows and widowers who live alone and grieve the loss, emotional support and companionship of a spouse.
- ▶ New members or visitors who know few people in the church.
- ▶ Physically disabled members or those with chronic mental, emotional or physical illnesses.
- ▶ Elderly adults with decreasing health and social interaction.
- ▶ Divorced or separated members who live alone or with their dependent children.
- ▶ Those who suffer from loss, trauma, PTSD, extreme shyness, etc.
- ▶ Caregivers who devote their time and energy to care for an elderly parent, disabled or ill spouse and/or children.



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- ▶ Members who have few financial resources, insufficient educations, low-paying jobs or are unemployed.
- ▶ Military families with a deployed spouse or parent.
- ▶ Families with an incarcerated spouse or parent.

### What the Church can do

When a congregation genuinely cares about people, they respond to the lonely and show discipleship in action to those in their spiritual family. Here are some suggestions on how to respond:

- ▶ Train staff and small group leaders to look for members, like Sally and others, who seem isolated, rarely engage with others, feel uncomfortable in groups and seem awkward or embarrassed around other members.
- ▶ Select front-door greeters to welcome visitors and members into worship services. Ask them to learn their names, escort visitors inside, seat them beside other members and introduce them.
- ▶ Allow a brief “meet and greet” break during services and encourage

- members to speak to each other and introduce themselves.
- ▶ Personally invite individuals who attend alone to group events, volunteer opportunities and Bible studies.
- ▶ Host intergenerational events that bring different ages together for fun and fellowship.
- ▶ Preach about the problem of loneliness from the pulpit; invite speakers to address loneliness in church-hosted workshops or seminars; ask compassionate members to reach out to the lonely to support, encourage and assure them they belong to the church family.
- ▶ Engage the lonely in sincere conversation, listening closely as they speak so as to discern their needs. Follow up with a note, phone call or email. Invite them for coffee or lunch. Introduce them to others with similar interests.

### Christian counselors

- ▶ Work with Christian counselors in the church and community to help those with specific concerns like loss,

## What to do if you are the lonely person

If you feel shy, uncomfortable or lonely in a church setting, know that you’re not alone.

Lonely people fill many church pews as the epidemic of loneliness grows in our nation. Many feel invisible, isolated or disconnected.

If you are the lonely person in your church, here are some practical ways to connect with others:

- ▶ **Arrive a few minutes early for the worship service.** Be the first one to speak — smile, nod and introduce yourself to those around you.
- ▶ **Sit in the same place each week.** This builds recognition, helping people connect faces with names. Friendships will form naturally over time.
- ▶ **Start with one small step.** Choose one connection — a class, Bible study group or sup-

port group. Attend regularly and get to know the members. When you feel comfortable, choose another group to add.

- ▶ **Volunteer to serve according to your gifts.** Ask the pastor or a staff minister how you can help with church ministry. Choose tasks you love — working with children, teaching, preparing community dinners, encouraging others or serving as a welcoming greeter, etc.

You’ll become a treasured team member, working alongside others for a shared purpose.

- ▶ **Keep showing up.** Become a dedicated volunteer the church can count on. Attend groups, services and activities consistently. A steady presence builds trust, recognition, friendships and connections in the church and community. (Denise George)

trauma, PTSD, depression, rejection and other painful life experiences.

- ▶ As a congregation, pray for and with the lonely, invite them into the church’s social circles and genuinely connect with them.

### Building unity

In John 17:21, Jesus prayed, “that all of them may be one.” In this prayer, He prayed specifically for his current disciples and for all future followers, including believers today.

When church leadership and members reach out to those who are lonely, they build connection and

unity among Christians from across generations. Relationships deepen, spiritual growth increases, lonely members feel like they matter and belong to the church family, and the church transforms into a place of grace, fellowship, friendship and genuine love. The church becomes a home, and the members unite as a caring, compassionate spiritual family — each reflecting to others the welcoming heart of Christ.

*EDITOR’S NOTE — Name has been changed for privacy purposes.*

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# 'We must be willing to serve,' says IMB's Fort

By Michael J. Brooks  
The Alabama Baptist

Gordon Fort was a world away from home when he awoke in the middle of the night to a Facetime call from his daughter.

"I expected bad news, but she showed me a sparkling diamond on her finger," Fort recalled. "On another occasion, a friend [told me] a man I knew and loved who had three leukemia cancers was then in remission. This, too, was good news."

"The church is exhorted to share good news with a world in need."

## 'Share the good news'

Fort, senior ambassador for International Mission Board President Paul Chitwood, spoke at a Sept. 10 missionary appreciation banquet hosted by Birmingham Metro Baptist Association. The event drew more than 400, including some 100 retired, furloughing or transitioned missionaries.

Fort and his wife Leigh Ann were appointed as IMB missionaries to Botswana in 1985 and now make their home in Hoover.

"Scripture explains this good news some 77 times," Fort told those gathered. "Sometimes it's the good news about salvation, sometimes it's the good news about Jesus Christ, and sometimes it's the good news of the Kingdom of God. Jesus said this good news will be proclaimed in all the world before the end comes."

Christ's exhortation was both an imperative and a prophecy, he said.

"It has to be done," Fort said. "Jesus didn't give us 'The Great Suggestion' or 'The Good Idea,' but 'The Great Commission.' As His disciples we're commanded to share the good news."

"The word 'preached' in the New Testament actually means 'to herald,' just as the trumpeters would

herald the beginning of the Greek games. But it's also a prophetic word since He told us about 'the end,'" Fort continued. "According

to the Book of Revelation, people from every language, tribe and nation who've responded to the good news will gather to worship at the throne of God."

The word "witness" in Matthew 24:14 is the basis of the English word "martyrdom," Fort said.

"We must be willing to serve the Lord where we are and wherever He calls us," he explained. "There's no nation that doesn't need the good news and no government with the right to prevent our sharing the good news. God wouldn't call us to herald the good news if He didn't real-

ize our potential to do so and if the world didn't need to hear it."

Fort related a conversation with the late Alabama health officer Ira Myers, whose daughter, missionary doctor Martha Myers, was killed in Yemen in 2002.

## 'Testimony to obedience'

"I asked him why she was buried behind the Jibla Baptist Hospital rather than in America," Fort recalled. "Dr. Myers said his daughter told him before she went overseas that if she died, she wanted to be buried in Yemen as a witness."

"The hospital where she worked served 40,000 patients every year. Her grave is a testimony to her obedience to the call of God and her commitment to serve people in need."

"The end' is coming, and no man knows the hour or the day," Fort said. "And the end is coming for each of us. We must live every day with the end in view and a sense of urgency to herald the good news."

Fort said of IMB missionaries, "Your support is the anchor that moors us to our purpose."

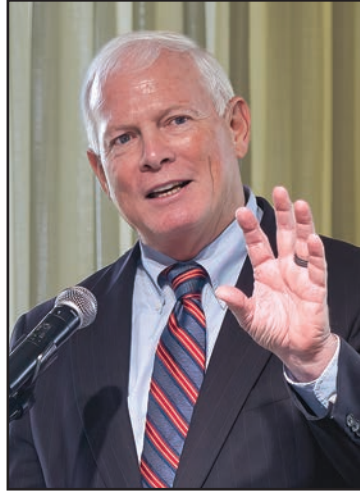


Photo by Gary Schultz  
Gordon Fort, senior ambassador for IMB President Paul Chitwood, was keynote speaker at a missionary appreciation banquet hosted by Birmingham Metro Baptist Association on Sept. 10.

an event for senior adults

# Saints Alive

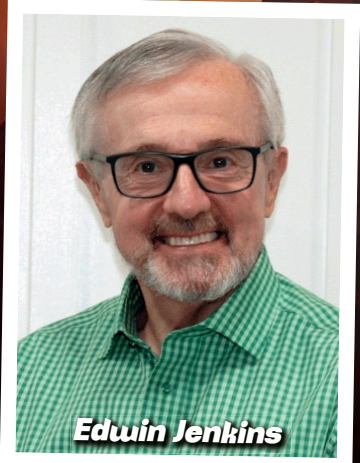
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# 'TRUST HIS GRIP'

## Southern Baptists celebrate 46 new IMB missionaries

**S**outhern Baptists gathered Sept. 16 at The Heights Baptist Church in South Chesterfield, Virginia, to celebrate 46 International Mission Board missionaries preparing to take the gospel to the nations.

Trustees voted to approve the fully supported missionaries, plus three Canadian missionaries who were not present at the third Sending Celebration the IMB has ob-

served this year. One previously appointed missionary joined her husband on stage during the event.

### Blessings, challenges

"These brothers and sisters are going to some difficult and hard-to-reach places," said Todd Lafferty, IMB executive vice president, explaining why some missionaries could not have their faces shown during their testimony time. Some

had alternate voices to protect their security.

"As you hear their stories, pray about your involvement in international missions," he said.

Among those who shared their stories were Danilo and Hannah Antunes, who are preparing to become the first IMB missionaries in a region in Spain considered to be the country's least engaged region.

Danilo grew up in Brazil as part of a fifth-generation pastoral family. He witnessed both the blessings and challenges of ministry firsthand. Despite that heritage, he never planned to become a pastor. A missions trip to Cuba became the turning point God used to call him into ministry.

Hannah's interest in missions began early, leading to a missions trip to Mexico City at age 12 and later a



IMB photo  
Friends and family gather around Danilo and Hannah Antunes in prayer during a Sending Celebration in South Chesterfield, Virginia. They are among 46 IMB missionaries sent to share the gospel worldwide.

move with her family to the Dominican Republic.

Danilo and Hannah ask for prayer as they prepare for this next chapter. "We don't only want to go to the field; we want to stay on the field," Danilo said. "We believe the Lord will have us there for the long haul."

### Missions and music

Dusty and Ashley Jackson, both music teachers, previously served at a Christian international school in South Korea. They are moving to the Philippines to serve at a school that educates missionary children.

Dusty will teach orchestra, and Ashley will lead middle and high school choir. They hope to impact students musically and spiritually.

Ted Traylor, senior pastor of Olive Baptist Church in Pensacola, Florida, spoke on Isaiah 41:10-14 and emphasized fighting doubt and fear.

"He will hold you with His righteous right hand," he said. "Trust His grip."

Carol Pfeiffer, IMB trustee chair, led a prayer time for the missionaries.

The next Sending Celebration will be Nov. 9, 2026, at First Baptist Church Kettering, Ohio. (IMB)



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Scott Dawson Evangelistic Association



# UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

# Reception for Rick and Pam Lance to be held at 2026 Annual Meeting

A reception in honor of Rick and Pam Lance will be held on Tuesday afternoon, Nov. 17, at First Baptist Church, Trussville, from 4:30 until 6 p.m., between the afternoon and evening sessions of the Alabama Baptist State Convention Annual Meeting.

It will take place in the church’s high school ministry area on the second floor. Heavy hors d’oeuvres will be provided, and all convention messengers and guests are invited to stop by.

Dr. Lance has announced his retirement effective Jan. 31, 2027, following more than 28 years of leadership as executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Following the reception, there will be a time of celebration and appreciation for Dr. Lance in the Tuesday evening session, which will begin at 6:30 p.m. in the main sanctuary. The service will also feature the music



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

of vocalist and worship leader Charles Billingsley.

The theme of this year’s “Family Reunion” of Alabama Baptists is “Encouragers,”

based on 1 Thessalonians 5:11. Additional highlights of the gathering will include the president’s address on Tuesday morning by Jarman Leatherwood, pastor of House of Hope and Restoration Church in Huntsville, and the convention sermon on Wednesday morning by Steven Fraser,

pastor of Riverbend Baptist Church in Gadsden.

Encouragers theme interpretation times will feature Tim Cox, pastor of Liberty Baptist Church, Chelsea; Stanley Williams, campus minister at Alabama A&M University in Huntsville; and Justin Hall, pastor of First Baptist Church, Prattville.

Messenger pre-registration is open. Visit [alsbom.org/convention](http://alsbom.org/convention) for more details.



1 Thessalonians 5:11

# WORD search

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“And Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David, except that he sacrificed and burned incense at the high places.”

1 KINGS 3:3

To pre-register, visit [alsbom.org/convention](http://alsbom.org/convention) or scan the code below with your smartphone’s camera.



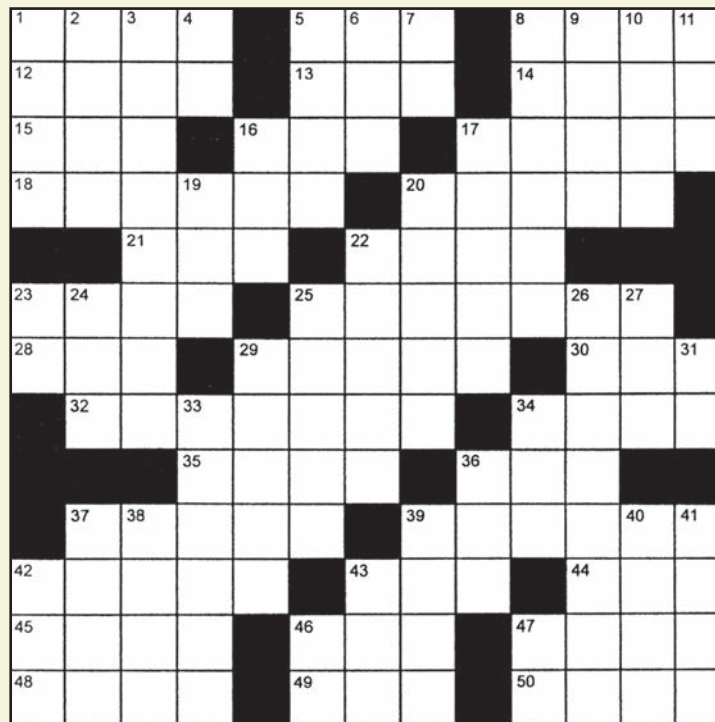
# CHRISTIAN Crossword



**UPCOMING EVENTS**  
sponsored by the State Board of Missions

## ACROSS

1. I am the brother to dragons, and a companion to \_\_\_\_\_. (Job 30:29)
5. \_\_\_\_\_ the son of Abdiel. (1 Chron. 5:15)
8. Festive.
12. An invasion.
13. Leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent \_\_\_\_\_ him. (Amos 5:19)
14. For this \_\_\_\_\_ is Mount Sinai in Arabia. (Gal. 4:25)
15. But let him \_\_\_\_\_ in faith. (James 1:6)
16. To marry.
17. Outer layer.
18. The man took a golden earring of half a \_\_\_\_\_ weight. (Gen. 24:22)
20. Trainee.
21. A brother offended is harder to be \_\_\_\_\_ than a strong city. (Prov. 18:19)
22. In that day when I \_\_\_\_\_ up my jewels. (Mal. 3:17)
23. The churches of \_\_\_\_\_ salute you. (1 Cor. 16:19)
25. Governing board.
28. Possesses.
29. The dogs came and licked his \_\_\_\_\_. (Luke 16:21)
30. Meadow.
32. Era.
34. Now the coat was without \_\_\_\_\_. (John 19:23)
35. For my yoke is \_\_\_\_\_. (Matt. 11:30)
36. A scarf.
37. Roller or ice.
39. Cooled.
42. Blaze.
43. Illuminated.
44. \_\_\_\_\_, Elah and Naam. (1 Chron. 4:15)
45. Who shall \_\_\_\_\_ us away the stone? (Mark 16:3)
46. What \_\_\_\_\_ eth thee, Hagar? (Gen. 21:17)
47. To break suddenly.
48. Children, \_\_\_\_\_ your parents in the Lord. (Eph. 6:1)
49. Thou shalt \_\_\_\_\_ thy children's children.



By Evelyn M. Boyington Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- (Ps. 128:6)  
50. To leer.

## DOWN

1. Danish money.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ me, and I shall be whiter than snow. (Ps. 51:7)
3. Go, and do thou \_\_\_\_\_. (Luke 10:37)
4. Midwest state. (abbr.)
5. \_\_\_\_\_ was a keeper of sheep. (Gen. 4:2)
6. In whom are \_\_\_\_\_ all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Col 2:3)
7. \_\_\_\_\_ is finished. (John 19:30)
8. God sent him forth from the \_\_\_\_\_ of Eden. (Gen. 3:23)
9. Terror, consumption and the burning \_\_\_\_\_. (Lev. 26:16)
10. And it shall come to pass in the \_\_\_\_\_ days. (Isa. 2:2)
11. Rabbi, thou \_\_\_\_\_ the Son of God. (John 1:49)
16. Blind, or broken, or maimed, or having a \_\_\_\_\_. (Lev. 22:22)
17. And they baked unleavened \_\_\_\_\_ of the dough. (Ex. 12:39)
19. All the Chaldeans, Pekod, and Shoa and \_\_\_\_\_. (Ezek. 23:23)
20. Tricky.
22. A \_\_\_\_\_ heart doeth

- good like a medicine. (Prov. 17:22)

23. \_\_\_\_\_ sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity. (Isa. 1:4)
24. A pouch.
25. Who shall \_\_\_\_\_ him up? (Gen. 49:9)
26. Washing.
27. For all the promises of God in him are \_\_\_\_\_. (2 Cor. 1:20)
29. The last \_\_\_\_\_ of that man is worse. (Matt. 12:45)
31. I \_\_\_\_\_ become a fool. (2 Cor. 12:11)
33. Almost.
34. This is my beloved \_\_\_\_\_, in whom I am well pleased. (Matt. 3:17)
36. The lapwing, and the \_\_\_\_\_. (Lev. 11:19)
37. A sloppy person.
38. Cabbage.
39. Yet they had a \_\_\_\_\_ for the mattocks. (1 Sam. 13:21)
40. Epochal.
41. To deceive.
42. I am full of tossings to and \_\_\_\_\_. (Job 7:4)
43. But wild beasts of the desert shall \_\_\_\_\_ there. (Isa. 13:21)
46. Even \_\_\_\_\_ Christ forgave you, so also do ye. (Col. 3:13)
47. Even \_\_\_\_\_, come, Lord Jesus. (Rev. 22:20)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

## A look at the 2027 senior adult events calendar

A busy slate of activities and events has already been planned for senior adults and their leaders in 2027. Be sure to mark your calendars now so you won't miss these great opportunities!

### SALT CONFERENCES (Senior Adult Leadership Training)

- NORTH: Tuesday, Aug. 17 — Seventh Street Baptist Church, Cullman
- SOUTH: Tuesday, Aug. 24 — Southside Baptist Church, Greenville

### SINGFEST

- Tuesday, March 9 — First Baptist Church, Boaz
- Tuesday, March 16 — First Baptist Church, Winfield
- Tuesday, Sept. 7 — Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Dothan
- Tuesday, Sept. 14 — First Baptist Church, Bay Minette

### SAINTS ALIVE 2027

- NORTH: Tuesday, Oct. 26, 2027 — Central Baptist Church, Decatur
- SOUTH: Thursday, Oct. 28, 2027 — Calvary Baptist Church, Dothan



Visit [alsbom.org/senior-adults](https://alsbom.org/senior-adults) for all the latest information!

## There's still time to give to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering

Thank you for your participation in the 2026 Week of Prayer for State Missions. Remember it's not too late to give to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering.

Gifts are received until the end of the year and help support Alabama Woman's Missionary Union, disaster relief, church planting, church revitalization and partnership missions.

For more information and resources, visit [Myers-Mallory.org](https://Myers-Mallory.org).

For more information and resources, visit [myers-mallory.org](https://myers-mallory.org) or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



# Register now for ‘It’s Life’ evangelism training

**By Jennifer Davis Rash**  
The Alabama Baptist

**L**earn to share your faith and disciple others to share theirs. It’s tested and proven, said Lawrence Phipps, pastor of First Baptist Gulf Shores and founder of It’s Life Ministry.

Phipps has been producing and polishing It’s Life materials for nearly 15 years. The current nine-week evangelism and discipleship training resource caught the attention of leaders at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, and a partnership has blossomed.

Together, Phipps and SBOM representatives Rob Jackson and Daniel Edmonds will lead a three-day training event for church leaders in late January. Interest is building from surrounding states as well.

Jackson, director of SBOM’s office of evangelism

and church revitalization, said, “We’ve been praying through how we can have Alabama Baptists reaching more people once again for the gospel of Jesus Christ. It’s such a critical time. Look at our world — we are in turmoil. The only solution is Jesus Christ. We’ve got to be out there sharing the love of Christ.”

**‘Simple, workable’**  
“As we began to pray through it, we decided we want ... a simple, workable strategy, not just training in evangelism but also disciple making.

“That’s the strategy, and that’s what Lawrence has done,” Jackson said, noting Phipps’ past experience in evangelism training.

The goal is simple but important, Jackson said.

“We would like for Alabama Baptists to increase baptisms from 13,000 last

year to 23,000 by 2033,” Jackson added. “If we are going to do this, we need one strategy.

“That’s why we are getting behind It’s Life, not just Alabama but several of the surrounding states such as Mississippi, Louisiana and Florida as well. We want our states and this nation reached for Jesus Christ.”

Phipps described the nine-week experience as “on-the-job training” and said he’s gotten lots of positive feedback already. He looks forward to sharing it.

The Jan. 24–26 event begins with Sunday night dinner at the church.

Training takes place Monday and Tuesday and wraps up with teams and leaders going out in the neighborhood to do door-to-door visiting Tuesday evening.

The Life gospel presentation follows this pattern:

*God is Love. People are Imperfect. Jesus offers Forgiveness. We can have Eternal life.*

## Start slow and build

Phipps hopes those attending the January event will return home and launch training in their home church.

Phipps encourages pastors to bring up to three others from their church to the training if possible.

The cost is \$25 per participant, which covers three meals, and \$50 for

the church’s resource kit (a \$100 value reduced because of the partnership with SBOM). Only one kit is needed per church.

Also, First Baptist Gulf Shores is providing free lodging for the first 10 bivocational pastors who sign up.

Bivocational pastors will likely lose time and pay to take off work to attend, so the church wanted to help.

For more information and to register visit [alsbom.org/event/its-life-clinic](http://alsbom.org/event/its-life-clinic). (The Alabama Baptist)

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## CHURCH POSITIONS

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Faith Baptist Church in Loretto, Tennessee, is prayerfully seeking a full-time pastor to lead and shepherd our congregation. We are a Bible-believing, Christ-centered Southern Baptist church committed to worship, evangelism, discipleship, missions and serving our community. We are seeking a pastor who is called by God, grounded in Scripture and able to provide spiritual leadership through preaching, teaching, pastoral care and outreach. Interested candidates should submit a resumé, statement of faith and links to recent sermons to: Pastor Search Committee, pastorsearch@faithbaptistloretto.org. Mailing address: Faith Baptist Church Pastor Search Committee, P.O. Box 153, Loretto, TN 38469.

### PASTOR

Crawford Road Baptist Church in Phenix City, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a full-time pastor with a heart for missions, outreach and growing disciples. Resumés with references and sermon links may be sent to: crbchpc@gmail.com.

### PASTOR

Cottonton is seeking a full-time pastor. Please send resumé to: Cottonton Baptist Church, P.O. Box 35, Cottonton, AL 36851.

### PASTOR

Central Heights Baptist Church in NW Lauderdale County, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a pastor. Please send resumés 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

West Blocton First Baptist is seeking a bivocational pastor. Please email resumés to: stephen12white@gmail.com.

### BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

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

### BIVOCATIONAL WORSHIP LEADER

Mt. Olive Baptist Church in Monroe County is seeking a bivocational worship leader to

lead traditional worship with a choir on Sunday mornings. Please contact jsslayton@gmail.com.

### BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC MINISTER

New Center Baptist, Hartselle, Alabama, (newcenterbaptist.org) seeking bivocational music minister for blended services, leading choir and coordinating volunteer musicians. Email resumé to: raykballaw@gmail.com or contact pastor at 256-221-6880 for more information.

### 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.

### 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.

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## RESOURCES

### 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](http://thebaptistpaper.org/kids-edition).

~ Why research matters for your church ~

# Knowing household demographics can focus your congregation's ministry

In this column, we launch a series of real-time insights on how to connect reliable data to Kingdom growth. Let's address the first research insight from the previous column.

**Research Insight One:** Your congregation should shift from simply counting individuals engaged with your congregation to capturing household-level demographics.

Counting the number and type of households offers a realistic look at who is participating in your congregation's gathered ministry compared with who is in your community context or among the people groups you serve.

How might this knowledge make your congregation more effective? The reality is that only 10% of households in the U.S. are traditional, classic households — those have a husband and wife who may both be employed and have one or more children under 18. The other 90% of households are something else. If a congregation focuses its ministry primarily on traditional households, it overlooks many households.

## 7 insights to consider

► You likely have people from a variety of household types engaged in your congregation. But where is your primary focus? Which household types do you prioritize in your programs, ministries and activities?

If your pastor, staff and lay leaders prioritize classic, traditional households as the preferred household type, then your congregation will target its efforts there.

► Counting only individuals can obscure whether a church reaches and embraces the full diversity of families and households in a community or only a slice of people, primarily from traditional nuclear families. Comparing congregational household profiles with local demographic data highlights underserved populations.

These may include single-parent, one-person and multigenerational households, among other household types.

► Comparing congregational demographics with neighborhood data helps leaders design programs, ministries and activities tailored to real needs. Ministry examples include eldercare support in aging neighborhoods, affordable after-school programs in areas with a high concentration of single working parents, and support groups for men and women.

► Many congregational disciple-making programs default to standard age-graded

tracks. Household insights encourage intergenerational initiatives, family-centered discipleship and specialized support groups for nontraditional households.

► Decisions about tithing and other acts of generosity are made at the household level. Measuring financial giving and participation at the household level, rather than at the individual attendee level, yields far more accurate budgeting, giving-capacity forecasts and stewardship strategies.

► The needs of the member care ministry can be measured because it is centered on households. Tracking households ensures that member care extends to non-attending family members, roommates and other household relationships, preventing isolated care for the individual in the pew.

► Considering household dynamics helps identify critical life-stage transitions. For example, this includes ministry to empty nesters, the recently widowed and emerging adults establishing their own homes. Particularly consider newly empty-nest couples. These households have real-life needs that are often overlooked. They may disengage from active congregational life.

Based on this information about households, what new or revised actions should your congregation take? Who will take these actions and by when?

Look for more research insights on these questions in two weeks.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

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# EXPLORE THE BIBLE

## Sunday School Lessons

Professor of Historical Theology and Director of Intercultural Studies, University of Mobile

By Robert Olsen, Ph.D.



### For October 11

#### STRUGGLE Romans 7:4-6, 14-25

##### Freed (4-6)

Paul uses an illustration from marriage to show that believers are now no longer “married” to the law but are now “married” to Christ.

In the Old Testament, if a man died, his wife was free to remarry. Because of Christ’s death and fulfilling the law, we are no longer bound to the law but are bound to Christ. Therefore, we are no longer slaves to sin.

Instead, we overcome sin through the power of the Holy Spirit. Since we now live for Christ, we bear the fruit of righteousness, doing good works not out of obligation but freely out of love for Christ.

This is often difficult for Christians to understand. They feel that as a Christian they HAVE to do good works, but in reality we GET to do good works.

A sign of maturity as a believer is that good works become a natural desire for us. The fruit of the Spirit becomes a natural overflow of new life in Christ.

##### Conflicted (14-23)

Even though the law shows us our sin, Paul points out that the law is not evil. In fact, the law is a gift of God to show us we are in need of a savior who will fulfill the law on our behalf. This is how Christ frees us from the power of the law.

However, in spite of the freedom we now have in Christ, sin is still a real problem.

Becoming a Christian does not mean we no longer struggle to live a godly life. Even though Christians are indwelt with the Holy Spirit, they still wage war against the flesh.

Every Christian fights against sin, and in this passage we see this with Paul.

Paul, one of the greatest examples for us, found himself laboring against the power of sin. If this is true for Paul, then

it is true for all of us. When we war against sin, we are being sanctified. One word of encouragement regarding the fight against sin is that it helps us rely on God because we are not able to achieve sanctification on our own. Furthermore, it helps us to show grace and mercy to other Christians who are struggling with sin.

Knowing that sin constantly opposes Christians should cause us to realize the importance of relying on God daily. We should constantly be in prayer to avail ourselves of the help of the Holy Spirit to fight against sin.

##### Hope (24-25)

Having reflected on the unfortunate struggle with sin in his own life, Paul demonstrates his frustration with the line he shouts in verse 24 and the question that follows: “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”

He answers his question in the next verse: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

When Christians sin, the Holy Spirit convicts us and points out our sin. While this can demotivate us, frustrate us and cause us to despair, we look to Christ for our solution!

Sin should drive us to look to Christ and help us remember our sins are forgiven. We can move on in victory. Many times nonbelievers point out the sins of Christians to show us we are imperfect.

We always have to remember the gospel that shows us that God loves us in spite of our sins and forgives us.

This is the glory of the power of the gospel! We need to remember that we live in the victory of Christ and are no longer defined by our sins but by Christ in us.

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

### For October 18

#### INDWELT Romans 8:14-27

##### Relationship (14-17)

Chapter 8 begins with one of the most significant statements in the entire Bible: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.” This is astounding!

The gospel shows us that we are not held accountable for our transgressions against God, but God instead considers us righteous because of what Christ did for us.

We receive this pardon by grace through faith, and we are now adopted into God’s family. (See Eph. 2:8-9.)

Not everyone receives this adoption; it is only for those who believe in Christ and His atoning death and resurrection. A common sentiment people repeat is that everyone is a child of God, but only Christians are children of God. (See John 1:12-13.)

Adoption was common in the Roman Empire and came with significant benefits. Therefore, Paul’s readers would understand that adoption is an act that comes with life-changing advantages.

Being adopted into God’s family means we are full heirs of God’s promises.

We are no longer slaves to sin but are free to resist sin. The guarantor of this is the indwelling Holy Spirit, God Himself!

##### Hope (18-25)

One might wonder why we still suffer if we are adopted sons and daughters of God. Early Christians were persecuted, and in many parts of the world they are still persecuted today.

If God loves us, why does He allow this to happen? Paul points out that all of creation groans for redemption.

Because of the curse of Adam from Genesis 3, we live in a fallen

world. Things do not work the way they were intended. The earth is afflicted with earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes and other natural disasters.

Humans are afflicted with disease, death and heartache, and sin has corrupted our very minds so that humans have evil desires and thoughts leading to acts of evil and cruelty.

However, Paul points out that these sufferings are short lived and are in fact momentary and do not compare with our future life with Christ in the new earth.

This has always been the Christian hope. It is what allows us to face trials and sufferings because we know that there will come a time when these will cease and we will be with the Lord.

It is sometimes said that Christians are too heavenly minded to be any earthly good.

In reality if Christians are heavenly minded, we will make things better on earth as we try to carry out God’s will here, sharing the gospel with others so they too may share in the hope we have in Christ.

##### Help (26-27)

While we are still on this earth, we face frustrations and trials, and sometimes we struggle even to know how to pray in the midst of these ordeals.

Paul informs us that in times like these the Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf. There may be times when we are so overcome with pain or grief that we just sit in silence, but the Holy Spirit prays for us in accordance with the perfect will of God.

This is also why we do not need to speak to God in fancy language. God knows our needs, and our inability to communicate clearly in our prayers does not hinder His will from being done.

***“For I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory to be revealed...”***

Romans 8:18

# BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

## Sunday School Lessons

Associate Professor and Executive Director of Christian Ministry, Samford University

By Scott Guffin



### For October 11

#### GOD SPEAKS AND WE RESPOND Psalm 119:30–40

When I was a young college student, I was riding with my grandfather — a rural pastor and cattle farmer — to his farm to help him with some work. As we talked, I mentioned that I was intently seeking the will of God for my life.

My grandfather said something profound to me in response that has stuck with me ever since: “If you want to know God’s will, do God’s will.” I came to understand the truth that God has already revealed much of His will to us, and it is up to us to respond to it in obedience. As we do, God unfolds His will for us to an even deeper and greater degree.

The writer of Psalm 119 reveals a deep affection and reverence for the will of God as found in the Word of God, which he refers to variously as God’s instructions, precepts, statutes, commands, judgments and decrees. He calls on the Lord to reveal its depths to him and to guide him in faithful obedience to it.

#### Choose to obey God’s will. (30–32)

In the beginning of this passage, the psalmist declares that he has intentionally chosen to walk in obedience to God’s Word. He expresses his commitment in three statements in succeeding verses: “I have chosen the way of truth,” “I cling to your decrees,” and “I pursue the way of your commands.”

Each one displays in a slightly different way the foundational dedication of the psalmist to God’s will as revealed in His Word. We also must make an intentional choice to obey God and walk in His ways.

As Joshua declares in Joshua 24:15, “Choose for yourselves today. ... As for me and my family, we will worship the Lord.”

#### Pray for clarity and understanding of what God wants. (33–35)

The psalmist, however, recognizes his own frailties when it comes to understanding and following God’s will, so he asks God to teach and instruct him in His ways.

He realizes that while we sometimes have a clear understanding of God’s Word and its application in our lives, there are other times that God’s will for us is a little more nebulous.

In times like these, we need to request God’s help, asking Him to illuminate His Word by providing insight, understanding and wisdom through our interaction with the Holy Spirit.

#### Desire to follow God more than anything else. (36–40)

Finally, the psalmist requests of God, “Turn my heart,” and “turn my eyes,” knowing that true, long-term, faithful obedience requires more than knowledge; it necessitates an alteration of one’s own will.

In Romans 12:2, Paul highlights this truth, calling on believers not to be conformed to the world but rather to “be transformed” by the renewing of our minds.

While we are certainly called to make intentional efforts to model our lives after Jesus Christ, we must ultimately acknowledge, lean into and depend upon God Himself to do the work in us.

Paul notes as much in Philippians 2:12–13, where he tells the Philippians to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,” noting that “it is God who is working in you.”

The heart that is transformed by God in this way is the one that desires more than anything to know and to do God’s will.

Like the heart of the psalmist in verse 145, it says to God, “I call with all my heart; answer me, Lord! I will obey your statutes.”

### For October 18

#### THE CRY FOR FORGIVENESS Psalm 51:1–13

All of us will need to ask forgiveness of someone at some point in our lives. The truth of this statement is a given, because as human beings, we all sin and fall short of God’s glorious ideal for us. In so doing, we often find ourselves having offended, insulted, or harmed others, requiring us to seek forgiveness from the injured party to restore the relationship to its former state.

Psalm 51 begins with the following heading: “A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.” In this psalm, we find a record of the groanings of the heart of Israel’s King David, as he wrestles with his own sinfulness following the discovery of his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and his murderous attempt to cover his tracks. Having been confronted by the prophet Nathan, David cries out to God for forgiveness and restoration.

#### Our sin is ultimately sin against God. (1–4)

The effects of David’s sin clearly went beyond the boundaries of his relationship with God. In addition to committing adultery with Bathsheba, David ordered that her husband Uriah be placed in a position in battle that was guaranteed to bring about his demise. Stacking sin upon sin, David’s moral failure and selfish treachery damaged multiple families and, one could argue, impacted the entire nation which he served as king.

Ultimately, however, David realizes that the greatest offense he has committed is in turning his back on God’s expectations for him, choosing his own desires over faithful obedience. David uses three different words to describe his rebellion against God: “transgression,” meaning to rebelliously cross a line or willfully rebel; “sin,” which refers to missing the mark and falling short of God’s standards; and “iniquity,” which describes crooked or twisted behavior that emanates from a corrupt heart.

David sees all three in himself and

declares that God is justified and blameless in His judgment of David’s sin.

#### The way out of our sin begins with turning to God in repentance. (5–9)

Recognizing his own guilt and the judgment he is due for it, David actually begins this psalm in verse one with a cry for God’s grace, love and mercy, appealing to the character and heart of God in dealing with his sinfulness. In verses five through nine, David references again the character of God and the resulting activity of God that naturally follows. David notes that God values honesty and integrity in the “inner self” and that He is a teacher of deep, internal wisdom. But, he also acknowledges that God has “crushed” his “bones,” referring to the intense convicting work of the Holy Spirit in his life. Between these thoughts, David cries out to God in verse seven to purify him and wash him clean of his sin.

#### God restores us to a place of fruitfulness. (10–13)

David extends his plea for God’s forgiveness and restoration in verse 10, imploring God to create a clean heart in him and to restore the joy that results from God’s salvation. He earnestly begs God not to banish him or to withdraw His Spirit, but rather to grant him a spirit that desires to follow God. David then pledges to “teach the rebellious” the ways of God and to lead sinners back to God. In essence, David is promising to teach others the lessons that he has gained through his own mistakes and failures.

As we consider our own lives, it is important to realize that the impact of our sins always extends beyond us. Our failure to be faithful can damage relationships, hurt others, and can even bring harm upon the body of Christ. While it is important that we ask forgiveness of those we have wronged, it is vital that we recognize that our sin ultimately is against God. It is from Him that we need forgiveness, and thus to Him that we must cry out in sorrow and repentance for our rebellion.

# Passionate about sharing Christ

## Motorcycle riders of faith lead other bikers to Jesus during annual rally

**A**t the F.A.I.T.H. Riders' ministry tent during the 86th annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally in August, gospel conversations happen every day, and many result in changed lives.

"I met a quiet man with tattoos all over his arms wearing a T-shirt with cutoff sleeves who said he wanted to hear my testimony and enter our bike giveaway," a F.A.I.T.H. Rider said. "As part of my personal story, I shared how I was convicted about my sin, understood that Jesus' death paid the cost of my salvation, pledged to turn away from my selfish desires and made Jesus my boss.

"That man experienced the same conviction, confessed his sins, accepted Jesus' gift and made Him his Lord," F.A.I.T.H. Riders' board chairman Warren Abraham told Baptist Press. "From my first testimony-sharing experience at the 68th annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally in 2008 until now, my testimony, the gospel message and salvation invitation have been the same. How the audience responds to the Holy Spirit's conviction is up to them."

### 'Sturgis model'

This is the "Sturgis model" of intentional, relevant, evangelistic witness at events that draw large, specific-interest crowds. There's a motorcycle (prominently displayed on the sidewalk) to be given away; a "catcher" who invites passersby to enter a 15x30-foot tent for a chance to win that motorcycle; a "sharer" who gives his/her gospel-centered testimony in 3 minutes; and a "recorder" who takes the listener's information and places it into a rotating drum with all other entries.

"Our testimonies establish rapport with our audience and open the door for our focus: sharing the gospel and



A biker (left) prays with a F.A.I.T.H. Rider "sharer" during the early-August Sturgis Motorcycle Rally in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

BP photo

inviting a response," Abraham said.

The concept was first used by Southern Baptist evangelist Ronnie Hill in 2004 at a NASCAR rally in Bristol, Tennessee. Jim Hamilton, then-executive director of the Dakota Baptist Convention and a motorcycle enthusiast, heard about it and adapted the concept for Sturgis in 2006. The next four years Hamilton brought Hill to Sturgis to train up to 150 volunteers a year in giving their 3-minute testimonies. Dakota leaders eventually took over the training.

Dakota Baptist Convention built the evangelistic ministry at Sturgis with the primary support of Georgia Southern Baptists and the North American Mission Board.

Black Hills-area churches housed volunteers, hosted pancake breakfasts, a "clean and sober" camp for bikers and more.

Activities also included prayer initiatives before, during and after the event and follow-up with those who made a decision for Christ.

"This [the Sturgis ministry] is one of the best things that ever happened in the Dakotas," Hamilton said recently. "Typically pioneer areas never have that level of impact. The Lord just arranged things where the Dakota Baptist Convention could have something birthed in it that could impact the nation and beyond."

### A matter of F.A.I.T.H.

F.A.I.T.H. Riders, a Southern Baptist ministry housed in local churches, was first involved in Sturgis a year or two after the ministry started. It's an organization that has grown from two couples in Florida in 2002 to 420 chapters across the nation today. F.A.I.T.H. Riders took over ministry efforts at Sturgis in 2020.

They also began to use the Sturgis model in local evangelism ministries across the nation and at other major events like Daytona Bike Week in Florida (each March), Myrtle Beach Bike Week in South Carolina (each May), Lone Star Rally in Galveston,

Texas, (each November) and over the late September/early October weekends, at Smoky Mountain Bike Weeks in Maryville, Tennessee, and Bikes, Blues and BBQs in Rogers/Eureka Springs, Arkansas.

### Making Jesus the 'boss'

At Sturgis this year, F.A.I.T.H. Riders reported a total of 1,892 gospel-centered conversations and 209 people who "made Jesus their boss." The total for their last six years at Sturgis: 10,089 gospel conversations and 1,132 professions of faith in Jesus.

F.A.I.T.H. Riders is a ministry that utilizes members' shared interest in motorcycles and in evangelism. Its name is an acronym for Forgiveness, Available, Impossible, Turn and Heaven. Its scriptural watchword: 2 Peter 3:9. Its motto: No one left behind.

At the top of the homepage on its website — [faithriders.com](http://faithriders.com) — the nonprofit organization self-identifies as "A motorcycle ministry passionate about sharing Christ with the world."

This year about 100 F.A.I.T.H. Riders and 20 locals volunteered at Sturgis. Leaders said they would like to see more local churches and more Southern Baptists involved in each of its ministry locations.

Volunteers at F.A.I.T.H. Rider ministry events work in 3-hour shifts, from 9 a.m. until 6 p.m. In the evenings volunteers gather for prayer, worship and testimonies of the days' interactions.

"F.A.I.T.H. Riders have a heart for lost bikers," Abraham said. They "personally bear physical and monetary burdens to ensure this people group has the opportunity to hear truth and accept God's gift of salvation through Jesus ... so that none perish, but all come to salvation." (Baptist Press)