

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



Photo courtesy of Go Tell Crusades

The Cheaha Area Crusade, led by evangelist Rick Gage's Go Tell America team in partnership with more than 40 area churches, was held Sept. 27-Oct. 1 at Saks High School Stadium.

'Power-packed'

Cheaha Area Crusade draws thousands as 40+ area churches work together to plan, pray, follow up

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

James Howard said he'd been praying for a buddy of his for years. But he didn't expect it to be the lights from the football field that got him.

"He lives right behind the school," Howard said. "So he called me ... he said, 'What's going on at the football field? The lights are all going on, the music's

going on,' and I told him, 'We're having church.'"

Howard invited him to come to the Cheaha Area Crusade, led by evangelist Rick Gage's Go Tell America team in partnership with more than 40 area churches.

Howard's friend told him his car was messed up.

"I said, 'That's good. Mine ain't. I'll be at your house this afternoon, pick you up,'" Howard said. "It's

the guy that I've been praying for I went to high school with. He was my best friend in high school. And he was one of the guys that I've been praying for day in and day out. And now he finally reached out to me, wanting to come."

Lasting impression

His friend came, but he left early. The next day, he called Howard and said he couldn't get the speaker's

words out of his mind. He began to tell Howard about the alcoholism that ran in his family and his need for salvation.

"I was able to talk to him and pray with him, and I led him to the Lord that day," Howard said.

Later that day, he took his friend a Bible and found that his wife was ready to give her life to Jesus too. Then Howard watched as his friend (See 'For God's glory,' page 2)

SPOTLIGHT SPONSOR ...

"Encouragers" — 2026 Family Reunion of Alabama Baptists, Nov. 17-18 at First Baptist Church, Trussville



For God's glory

Gage: 'We came together for the purpose of enlarging the Kingdom'

(continued from page 1)
poured out every drop of alcohol from his refrigerator.
“So now he’s on fire. ... He wants to get in church. He wants to get plugged in,” Howard said.
Local churches, he noted, were planning to follow up with his friend and his wife for baptism and discipleship “because the sound was going through the community, through the trees, and he just heard it and he wanted to know what was going on.”

Commitments to Christ

He was one of more than 320 commitments to Christ made during the crusade, held Sept. 27–Oct. 1 at Saks High School Stadium. More than 7,000 people attended, with an additional 8,000 students addressed in local schools during the week.

The event was in conjunction with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions’ Celebration 250 Alabama, a vision to reach the state and nation with the gospel. As part of Celebration 250, outreach events were planned in each of Alabama’s 12 regions throughout October.

Typically Go Tell America does their events from Sunday to Wednesday, but Gage said they tacked on a fifth night to the



Facebook photo/Celebration 250 Alabama: Go Tell Cheaha Area Crusade
Prayer partners speak with people who responded during an altar call. More than 320 commitments to Christ were made during the crusade.

Cheaha Area Crusade to end on Thursday, Oct. 1. The churches in the area first met about the crusade in summer 2025, and under the leadership of Eric Snider, pastor of First Baptist Church White Plains, began working, praying and fasting to prepare for the event.

Snider said he first heard of Go Tell in the early 1980s as a teenager when they put on a similar crusade at his school.

“I knew Alabama Baptists were wanting a special night on Oct. 1,” he said, and while at Shocco Springs for an event, he saw a sign for Go Tell.

“It just seemed like God was putting it all together,” Snider said.

He said he’s “very thankful” for every church who helped pull off the event. “All those pastors and laypeople — 400 volunteers — they ought to be commended,” he said.

‘Every night was special’

Joey Hanner, pastor of First Baptist Church Saks in Anniston and outreach leader for the crusade, said “every night was special.” Christian band Rush of Fools led worship, and speakers included:

- Hank Parker, a professional bass fisherman

- Hugh Freeze, former Auburn University football coach
- Shane Pruitt, national Next Gen director for the North American Mission Board
- Tim Lee, Vietnam War veteran
- Runks Runkles, youth evangelist
- Ken Freeman, evangelist

Gage said it was “a power-packed week, and it was all for the glory of God, and we came together for the purpose of enlarging the Kingdom of God.”

The Lord knew

Hanner agreed and said it was evident the Lord “knew exactly who needed to be there.”

He said the prayer partners who talked with people who responded to the altar calls had been trained beforehand in sharing their faith and have intentionally stayed connected with the people they talked with at the crusade.

Each day during lunch, participating churches also met together to pray over the people who made decisions the night before and make a plan on how to connect them to local churches.

“It was awesome to watch God put things together,” Hanner said.



Facebook photo/Celebration 250 Alabama: Go Tell Cheaha Area Crusade

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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JENNIFER DAVIS RASH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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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 / Social media: @RashionalThts

Word of appreciation, note of gratitude for Rick Lance

It's the milestone moments during a leader's tenure that help define the ultimate legacy. While there's a thread of routine experiences that connects all those moments, it's the heightened segments that clearly display our foundational characteristics and leadership style.

In upcoming editions of The Alabama Baptist, our team — with assistance from the communications team at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions — will showcase glimpses of those moments for Dr. Rick Lance.

Dr. Lance has served as executive director of SBOM for more than 28 years and understands the inner workings of Alabama Baptists better than any among us. He retires Jan. 31.

Ways to connect with him

Everyone who can make it to the upcoming state convention annual meeting will have an opportunity to thank him for his service. He and his wife, Pam, are being honored with a re-

ception following the Tuesday (Nov. 17) afternoon session. See page 14 for more details.

You also can send him messages through his email at rlance@alsbom.org or write him at P.O. Box 681970, Prattville, AL 36068. I'm confident it will mean a lot to him to hear from you.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist
Jennifer Rash (left) was among speakers invited to share a reflection related to Rick Lance during a Sept. 15 event hosted by Baldwin Baptist Association.

As I've been thinking about how to share a note of gratitude, I decided to use the acrostic I presented during Baldwin Baptist Association's September event honoring Dr. Lance.

D — Difference maker, across the board.

R — Risk mitigator.

Will we ever know how many hours Dr. Lance has spent thinking through, thinking around and thinking with others about various situations?

L — Leader among leaders, at all the levels.

Think pastors, associational missionaries, state missionaries, national and international missionaries, fellow state entity

heads, national entity heads, seminary presidents and especially his peer group across the nation, state convention executive directors. He is a leader among leaders. He has been and he continues to be.

A — Alabama Baptist to the core.

N — Nonnegotiable faith in Christ, 100% solid.

C — Cooperative Program champion.

E — Excels in encouragement.

Dr. Lance, you likely will never know how many lives you've touched and how many people you've encouraged.

You've mentored, cheered for, grieved with, nurtured, celebrated with, challenged when needed and strived for the greater good — even if we didn't always agree.

Invested at all levels

You've done all the things that a loving father would do to lead and serve those entrusted to his care.

Thank you for investing so fully and completely in all of us as individuals, as church congregations and as ministry partners.

You have shepherded Alabama Baptists well.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist
Rick Lance shares with pastors and ministry leaders from the gulf coast area during a Sept. 15 event sponsored by Baldwin Baptist Association in Silverhill.

Your Voice



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

4 ways sports gambling undermines God's design

By Robert Hefner

Lead pastor, Pleasant Garden Baptist Church in North Carolina

I'm an avid sports fan. When college football kicks off, I'll be watching. What I won't be doing is gambling on the outcomes. But that's not the case for millions of Americans, especially countless young men, including those in our churches.

A new generation of gamblers no longer has to drive to an out-of-state casino to try to hit it big, but lose it bigger.

After the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the federal ban on sports betting in 2018, legal sports betting has expanded from just one state (Nevada) to 39 states plus Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico.

Legal sports betting surged from under \$5 billion a year to roughly \$150 billion last year, according to The Guardian's "The Big Bet" series. Recent statistics show 27% of Americans now have an active online sports betting account, a figure that climbs to 52% among men 18 to 49, according to a 2026 survey by the Siena Research Institute and St. Bonaventure University.

What's at stake

Additionally, 1 in 4 sports bettors have missed bill payments, and 30% have dipped into savings meant for rent and other essentials, a 2025 U.S. News & World Report survey found. This gambling avalanche isn't slowing down.

We need biblical wisdom and guidance for this shifting landscape. Scripture points to at least four ways gambling in general, and sports gambling in particular, undermines God's design.

► First, gambling undermines stewardship. Jesus warns that whoever is dishonest in little will be dishonest in much, and that those unfaithful with "unrighteous wealth" can't be trusted with true riches (Luke 16:10-11).

When we gamble, we squander what's been entrusted to us. Like the prodigal son, we squander what was hard-earned or freely given, which is the opposite of wise stewardship.

► Second, gambling undermines honest work.

Proverbs 13:11 teaches that "wealth gained hastily will dwindle, but whoever gathers little by little will increase it."

The Howard Center for Investigative Journalism found lottery advertising is heaviest in impoverished communities, targeting those most likely to see winning as their only way out. Getting rich quick actually means getting poor quicker.

► Third, gambling undermines contentment. Hebrews 13:5 and 1 Timothy 6:6-10 both tie contentment to warnings about loving money. The dopamine hit from gambling erodes that contentment.

It's no longer the game's outcome that draws a wager, but real-time, in-

game bets on what's happening on the field. What UCLA's Dr. Timothy Fong calls "fast-food gambling" turns the next pitch or tackle into a micro-bet, deepening the addiction cycle through rapid dopamine reinforcement.

Loving your neighbor

► Fourth, gambling undermines love of neighbor. Gambling is a zero-sum game. It always involves a winner and a loser. Whether the bet is on a final score or lottery numbers, someone else's loss pays for someone else's gain.

Scripture calls believers to love their neighbor through action. Paul puts it plainly in 1 Corinthians 10:24: "Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor." Can you look someone in the eye and say, "I love you, so I'm hoping my gain requires your loss"?

This is where gambling differs from the stock market. When I invest, I'm risking what's in my own account. No one else has to lose for me to win. Not so with sports betting, the casino or the gambling apps. They all require one side's loss for the other side's win.

So what's the antidote? Godliness with contentment, Paul writes in 1 Timothy 6:6. Godliness means living oriented toward God in worship and devotion. Contentment means being satisfied regardless of circumstance. Together, Paul says, they produce "great gain" — a return that doesn't depend on the next pitch or the next play.

When we put our faith in Christ and in Christ alone as our only hope for salvation, all of our sin goes onto Him. All of His righteousness goes on us and you enter the Kingdom perfectly — that's the gospel.

Matt Minter

@MattSmethurst on X

When any person faces adversity, they will choose one of two paths: compromise or character. Regardless of the cost, always choose character. Jesus said, "Take up my cross and follow me."

Ronnie Floyd

@ronniefloyd on X

"The only safe way to face the end of history is to be ready for it to end today," **Jim Denison** of the Denison Forum wrote about ongoing reports of AI dangers. "Our greatest fear should not be that AI could end life on this planet, but that we are not ready for the day when God does."

"Our goal is to share Jesus," said **Fred Owenby**, an 81-year-old volunteer who has been involved in jail ministry for 16 years. "We want to help people not come back to jail."

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“When men choose not to believe in God, they do not thereafter believe in nothing. They then become capable of believing in anything.”

G. K. CHESTERTON
English Christian apologist writer

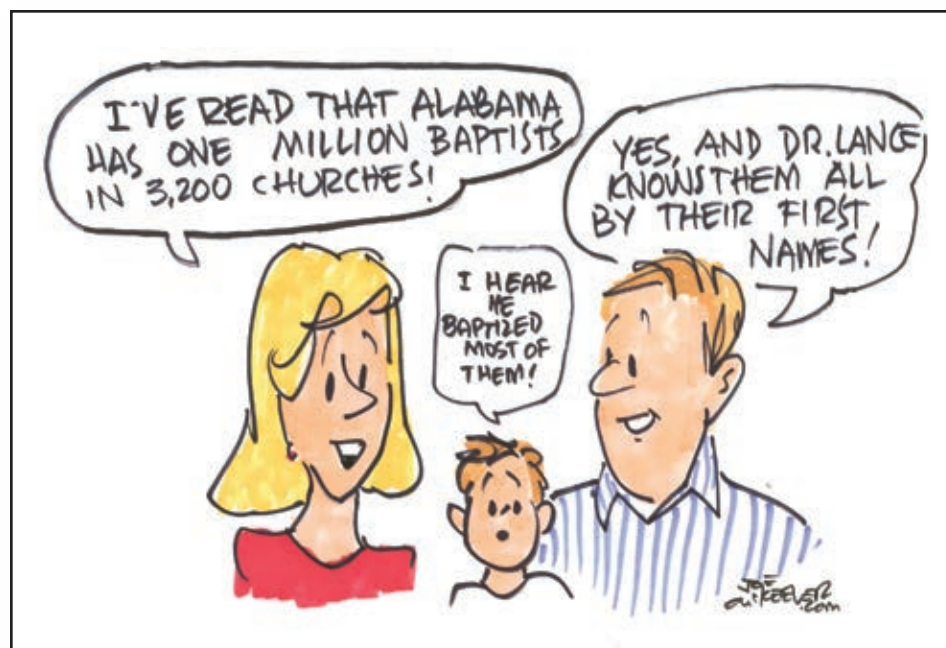
“As clearly as I know how, I call upon all of our churches to practice ongoing training, install proper protocols,” SBC President **Willy Rice** said. “And when faced with an accusation of abuse in their ministries, to take those seriously, to report to law enforcement immediately and to cooperate with all legal investigations fully. ... You do not have to navigate this alone. We are ready to help.”

“Scripture explains this good news some 77 times,” said **Gordon Fort**, senior ambassador for International Mission Board President Paul Chitwood. “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.

“It has to be done,” he 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.’ 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.”

“Don’t chase fads. There’s always the latest ... the greatest ... the hottest. Be cautious — just because a practice works well in one church doesn’t mean it will work the same in another,” said **Bruce Raley**, executive pastor of First Baptist Church Hendersonville, Tennessee. “Fads are always temporary. Just review the last several decades of church life. Once-popular practices were put on the shelf and replaced by the next. However, this doesn’t disqualify new methods. New creates excitement, and people invite others to what they’re excited about. Make sure change is based on your end goal and that new methods are grounded in principles.”



Lass WORDS

BY **KEN LASS**
The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Staying afloat — spiritually

When you take swimming lessons, one of the first things you’re taught is how to float — usually on your back. It’s as much a test of breathing as it is body movement because when you inhale and fill your lungs with air, your body becomes buoyant and lifts to the surface. As long as you maintain that air in your chest you will easily remain afloat.

But, of course, you can’t hold your breath forever. Eventually you will have to exhale and blow the air out. The instant you do this, you will begin to sink. The air in your lungs is your lifeline, your only means of physical survival.

Spiritual survival

The same is true of your spiritual survival.

In order to stay afloat amidst the stormy waves of life, you will need to fill your soul with the love of Jesus Christ. You need to inhale His Word, and do your best to keep it in your heart throughout all the ocean tides of your journey.

Yet we are only human.

Temptation is always trying to entice you to relax your guard. The moment you allow the influence of Jesus to escape, you will start to sink into the depths of

sin. That happens to all of us at some point. The only way back up is to return to the Lord and His path for your life. Fortunately, His oxygen is always there waiting for you to breathe in.

Backed up in Scripture

The analogy is backed up several times in Scripture, beginning in Genesis, where God “breathed life into the nostrils” of Adam (Gen. 2:7). Job stated, “The breath of the Almighty gives me life” (Job 33:4). In the Psalms we find it written, “You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust, You send forth Your Spirit, and they are created” (Ps. 104:29).

The key to floating on your back is to relax and breathe deeply and easily. The key to a joyful life, and an eternal reward, is to fill your heart with the living water of Jesus. He will always be your flotation device.

MEET THE AUTHOR

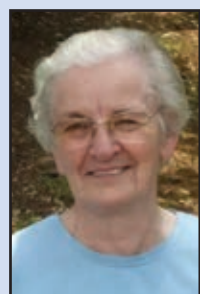
Ken Lass, an award-winning columnist for numerous publications and websites, is a retired Birmingham television news and sports anchor.

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

JOHNNIE G. GOLDEN

Johnnie G. Golden, longtime educator and wife to a central Alabama pastor, died Sept. 17. She was 99.



GOLDEN

She met her husband, Howard, while studying to be a teacher at Howard College (now Samford University). They were married in 1949. The couple had three children. He served as pastor in several communities in central Alabama. She taught middle and high school English and social studies. They retired in Lincoln, Alabama, and later moved to Wetumpka and to a retirement home in Montgomery.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Howard Golden, and daughter, Angela Hughes.

She is survived by her son, Steve Golden; daughter, Amelia Barnes; six grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

DARRELL THOMAS HIGGINBOTHAM

Darrell Thomas Higginbotham, longtime music leader for Hughes Memorial Baptist Church, Pinson, died Aug. 30. He was 78.

A graduate of Samford University, Higginbotham studied piano and voice, sang with Samford's A Cappella Choir and toured internationally with various musical groups. He later earned a master's degree in Christian education from Southern Seminary.



HIGGINBOTHAM

Higginbotham served as minister of music for Evans Baptist Church near Augusta, Georgia, from 1981 to 1990. He then returned to Alabama to serve alongside his father, who was pastor of 25th Avenue Baptist, Birmingham. Higginbotham began serving with Hughes Memorial in 1993 as the instrumental ensemble director.



Submitted photo

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► **Drew Sprayberry** (left) has been called as pastor of **Bethel Baptist Church, Pleasant Grove**, where he had been serving as interim pastor. He and his wife, Katelyn, have one child.

► Pastor **Michael Ent** celebrated his fifth anniversary

with **Raleigh Avenue Baptist Church, Homewood**, the first Sunday of October.

NORTH JEFFERSON ASSOCIATION

► **Ken Allen** is interim pastor of **Beechwood Baptist Church, Mount Olive**. He serves as director of the office of associational missions and church planting for the State Board of Missions.



Submitted photo

CLARKE ASSOCIATION

► **Clay Mosley** (left) is the new pastor of **First Baptist Church Jackson**. He and his wife, Morgan, have three children.

ESCAMBIA ASSOCIATION

► **Matt Burkhart** is the new student minister of **First Baptist Church Brewton**. He previously served as student minister of Smiths Station Baptist Church. He and his wife, Ashley, have three children. Chase Clower is pastor.



Facebook photo

ETOWAH ASSOCIATION



Submitted photo

► **Steve Lucy** has been called to serve as interim pastor of **Riddles Bend Baptist Church, Rainbow City**. He and his wife, Dawn, have two children.

MARSHALL ASSOCIATION

► **Mount Olive #2 Baptist Church, Union Grove**, celebrated its 100th anniversary Sept. 13. Rick Lance, executive director of Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, was the guest speaker. Special music was provided by Trusting Grace Quartet. The church was honored with presentations given by Lance on behalf of SBOM; another from Eric Taylor, associational mission strategist of Marshall Baptist Association; and Wendell Dutton, a commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Pictured are (l to r) Dutton, deacon chair Dave Brand and Pastor Bryan Mosley. A new communion table Bible was dedicated, and a time capsule was sealed to be opened in 50 years.



Photo by Marcille Dutton

MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION

► **Kenny Hoomes**, associate pastor of spiritual maturity and senior adults of **First Baptist Church Montgomery**, for more than 23 years, recently retired. He also served at First Baptist Prattville; Indian Springs First Baptist Church; Chisholm Baptist Church, Montgomery; Southside Baptist Church, Bay Minette; and First Baptist Canoe, Atmore. Hoomes and his wife, Donna, were honored with a reception Sept. 13. Their ministry legacy spans 50 years. Mark Bethea is pastor.



Photo courtesy of Kenny Hoomes

MUSCLE SHOALS ASSOCIATION

► **Robert Smith**, director of missions for **Muscle Shoals Baptist Association** since September 2007, celebrated his retirement July 26. The afternoon reception was hosted by the association at Moulton Baptist Church. From 1978 to 2007, Smith served as pastor of five churches. Pictured left to right: daughters, Michelle Barger and Melissa Brunner, Smith and his wife, Cindy, seated.



Submitted photo

SOUTHEAST ASSOCIATION

► **Josh Davis** is the new student ministry leader of **Rehobeth Baptist Church, Dothan**. He and his wife, Kacie, have three sons. Chad Hixson is pastor.



Submitted photo

WALKER ASSOCIATION

► **Hancel Cox** (right) recently celebrated 45 years as associate pastor of **Edgil Grove Baptist Church, Jasper**. He and his wife, Cindy (left), were recognized during a reception given in their honor Aug. 30. David Miller, director of missions for Walker Baptist Association, said, "Throughout his ministry, Bro. Hancel has impacted many lives and has consistently demonstrated the love of Christ through his service to the church and the community." Scott Argent is pastor.



Submitted photo

Persecuted Church

Rebel militants targeting church leaders for abduction, death

Six of the captives have been released. In an Aug. 10 article, Morning Star News quoted area Christians as saying Yaqob Ibrahim Tia, his two sons, his nephew and Tia's brother were freed July 28. Zakaria Suliman Jana, according to the sources, was freed Aug. 1.

Rebel militants, in the span of eight days, killed a pastor and an undetermined number of Christians and abducted another pastor and church leader. Sources told Morning Star News that the rebel militants are a breakaway faction of the Islamic extremist group Sudan People's Liberation Army-North (SPLA-N).

Seven falsely accused Christians sentenced to 'rigorous' prison

Seven Christians — six of them pastors — were sentenced to "rigorous" imprisonment after being convicted on false charges of violating an anti-conversion law in India.

The seven were falsely accused of enticing people with money to convert to Christianity, reported Morning Star News. A birthday party for a 5-year-old girl sparked the accusations.

The seven were convicted June 12 under India's penal code of "promoting enmity, hatred or disharmony between different religious groups" and "deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage the religious feelings," as well as a provision under the anti-conversion law in India's Madhya Pradesh state regarding luring people to convert. In addition to five years of rigorous imprisonment, they were fined \$1,040, reported Morning Star News.

Militant group kills pastor, church worker, 11 other Christians

A militant group staged attacks in several locations in one Nigerian state, killing a Baptist pastor, a church employee and 11 other Christians.

On Sept. 20, Muslim Fulani gunmen killed a pastor and his secretary in Dorowa Babuje village in Nigeria's Plateau state, reported



Photo courtesy of Morning Star News

Christian Daily International-Morning Star News, referencing information from Truth Nigeria. The pastor's son was critically injured.

Another Christian was slain in Rantyidi village in an attack at the same time, according to Christian Daily-Morning Star.

On Sept. 19, five Christians were killed in a Fulani ambush on Gana-Ropp village. The day before that, Fulani militia killed one Christian in Rakok village, stated Christian Daily-Morning Star. In NTV village on Sept. 15, "Fulani terrorists" killed three Christians, a resident told the news outlet. Dorowa Babuje was attacked on Sept. 6, where one Christian was slain and another injured.

Christian woman's plight gets attention of U.S. Congress members

Eleven members of Congress contacted a Pakistani government official to seek protection for a young, kidnapped Christian woman.



Photo courtesy of Morning Star News

The group's Aug. 20 letter is in regard to Neha Faqir, age 18, whose family says she was abducted and forcibly converted to Islam.

She had left her home in Kot Radha Kishan in Pakistan's Punjab province on March 24 for training at a sewing center. She did not return. An attorney for Christian Solidarity International, which is aiding her family, said Faqir was later found at an Islamic seminary and had converted to Islam, reports Christian Daily International-Morning Star News.

Kidnapped girl forced to marry captor; non-relative given custody

An abducted teen girl forced to marry her captor was placed in judicial custody by one magistrate, then given to a non-relative by another.

Sixteen-year-old Mehnaz Nadeem disappeared May 15 from her home in Pakistan's Punjab Province, the family attorney told Christian Daily International-Morning Star News.

Attorney Hanif Hameed said police recovered Mehnaz on May 29 in Sialkot at a hotel where she was with Ansar Syed, the Muslim man who allegedly abducted her. Medical evaluation found that Mehnaz had been sexually abused.

Iraqi top appellate court affirms woman's right to register as Christian

Iraq's top appellate court has concurred with a ruling allowing a woman to change her religious status to Christian in the government database.

Alliance Defending Freedom International, which supported the woman's legal journey, identified her only as Maryam, explaining that she was automatically registered as a Muslim

after her mother married a Muslim while Maryam was a minor.

Prior to the remarriage, Maryam had been raised in a Christian household, ADF International stated. An Iraqi ordinance stipulates that "minor children shall follow the religion of the parent who has converted to Islam."

Five sons hospitalize father for putting faith in Jesus Christ

A Ugandan man was hospitalized for a week after his adult sons attacked and beat him for putting his faith in Jesus Christ.

After Abumusa was discharged from Iganga Hospital, he sought refuge at the home of a friend in a different village. Abumusa has reportedly not filed a report against the sons, for fear of more hostility.

Villagers in Indonesia pressure officials to halt church's services

Some villagers pressured local authorities in Indonesia to stop a church's use of a building, alleging that the church's activities are causing societal tension.

Members of East Java Christian Church in Dermo village in Indonesia's East Java province had been worshipping in a traditional prayer house, which doesn't need a permit, rights advocates told Morning Star News.

However, Muslim residents of the village pressured officials of the Pasuruan Regency Legislative Council on July 20 to halt services at the church.

The Muslims claimed the services were causing social tension, the church had no permit and it was located in a predominantly Muslim area.



Photo courtesy of Morning Star News

Christian relief worker in Sudan still captive after five months

A Christian relief worker, whom rebel militants in Sudan abducted five months ago, is believed to still be their captive.

Sudan People's Liberation Army-North rebels kidnapped Najwa Musa Konda on April 1 in Sudan's Nuba Mountains after intercepting her vehicle as she traveled toward South Sudan.

Morning Star News reports that Konda — an Episcopal Church of Sudan member — is an aid worker with Nuba Relief, Rehabilitation and Development Organization. Morning Star states she was still captive as of Aug. 24.

ALCAP urges voter turnout on Nov. 3

Voter turnout continues to decline during the non-presidential elections, and Greg Davis at Alabama Citizens Action Program wants to change the statistics.

As ALCAP's president, he frequently mentions the importance of voting as he travels across the state and has increasingly intensified his message as the Nov. 3 general election nears.

Davis wants churches to come alongside him in the effort, so ALCAP recently launched a statewide non-partisan campaign urging Alabamians to vote in the Nov. 3 election.

Bulletin insert

The campaign offers a free double-sided bulletin insert for churches to use. The digital file can be downloaded and printed or ALCAP staff can mail printouts to the church.

Time is of the essence, though, Davis said. Consider providing the bulletin inserts titled "Pray. Prepare. Vote." each Sunday now leading up to the election. The inserts do not make recommendations for how to vote, strictly focus on the reasons to vote and outline which offices are on the ballot.

"The materials name no candidate and no political party. ALCAP does not endorse candidates or parties."

National figures from recent elections indicate roughly half of self-identified Christians do not cast

a ballot in a given election, Davis noted.

"It is important for Bible-believing Christian people to vote their values," he said. "Your vote does matter, and collectively our vote makes the difference. Between now and Nov. 3, please pray, prepare and vote."

The insert presents four reasons ALCAP describes as grounds for Christian civic participation — spiritual, civic, prayerful and caring responsibilities. Each is tied to Scripture. Its reverse side lists every office on the Nov. 3 ballot, from U.S. Senate through county school boards, along with the statewide constitutional amendments of note.

Two of those amendments concern public schools, Davis said.

Amendment 3 would require daily recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in public K-12 schools and permit student-initiated, student-led prayer.

Amendment 4 would require weekly broadcast or performance of the first stanza of "The Star-Spangled Banner."

"Half the people we are trying to reach are already in a pew on Sunday morning," Davis said. "We did not need to find them. We needed to hand their pastor something to give them."

The bulletin, a sample ballot, social media graphics and voter registration information are available at alcap.com/vote. (The Alabama Baptist)

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Encouragers

2026

1 Thessalonians 5:11

FAMILY REUNION of ALABAMA BAPTISTS
November 17-18 • First Baptist Trussville

SPECIAL EVENTS:

RECEPTION honoring retiring executive director
Rick Lance and his wife, Pam
Tuesday, 4:30-6 p.m., High School Ministry Space

EVENING CELEBRATION, featuring the music of Charles
Billingsley and a time of celebration and appreciation
for Dr. Lance • Tuesday, 6:30-8 p.m., Main Sanctuary

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS:

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS
Jarman Leatherwood, Tuesday morning

CONVENTION SERMON
Steven Fraser, Wednesday morning

THEME INTERPRETATIONS
Tim Cox, Tuesday morning
Stanley Williams, Tuesday afternoon
Justin Hall, Wednesday morning

Messenger pre-registration is open!
Visit alsbom.org/convention
for more details.



SCAN QR CODE
 FOR MORE INFO



**RICK AND PAM
 LANCE**



**CHARLES
 BILLINGSLEY**
 Tuesday Evening



**JARMAN
 LEATHERWOOD**
 Tuesday morning



STEVEN FRASER
 Wednesday morning



TIM COX
 Tuesday morning



STANLEY WILLIAMS
 Tuesday afternoon



JUSTIN HALL
 Wednesday morning

STATE CONVENTION PREVIEW

The Gathering
ORDER OF BUSINESS

NOVEMBER 17-18, 2026 • FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, TRUSSVILLE • THEME: ENCOURAGERS • SCRIPTURE: 1 THESSALONIANS 5:11

TUESDAY MORNING

8:10	Pre-Session Music.....	Frank Jones
8:15	Special Music	Alabama Singing Men & Women
8:35	Prayer.....	Michael Wallace
8:40	Call to Order	Jarman Leatherwood
	Greetings	
	Birmingham-Metro Baptist Association	Chris Crain
	First Baptist Church, Trussville	Buddy Champion
	Congregational Singing	Guy Anderson
8:50	Enrollment of Messengers.....	Debbie Oliver
8:55	Committee on Order of Business.....	Rusty Sowell
9:00	Committee Appointments	Jarman Leatherwood
9:05	Memorial Service.....	David Byrd
9:15	Introduction of Resolutions.....	Jesse Reeder
9:20	Special Music	Alabama Singing Men & Women
9:30	Theme Interpretation:	
	The Reason for Encouragement	Tim Cox
9:55	Entities Discussion	
	<i>The Alabama Baptist, Jennifer Davis Rash;</i>	
	<i>Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, Wendy Westerhouse</i>	
	Committee Reports	
10:10	Committee on Committees.....	Donnie Payne
10:20	Committee on Boards and Commissions.....	Ben Hayes
	Recognitions	
10:30	Recognition of Former Convention Presidents ..	Rick Lance
10:40	Recognition of New Pastors and New Church Staff Members	Mike Jackson
10:45	Celebrating the Cooperative Program.....	Jay Stewart
10:55	Entities Discussion	
	<i>The Baptist Foundation of Alabama, John Ashworth;</i>	
	<i>Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center, Russell Klinner;</i>	
	<i>Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries,</i>	
	<i>Rod Marshall</i>	
11:15	Miscellaneous Business	
11:20	Presentation of Convention President	Rick Lance
11:25	Special Music	HHR Praise Team
11:30	President's Address	Jarman Leatherwood
12:00	Benediction	Ross Clemmons

TUESDAY AFTERNOON

1:30	Congregational Music	Mason Aldridge, Clay Campbell
1:40	Prayer.....	Jesús Navarro
1:45	Executive Director Report	Rick Lance
2:00	State Board of Missions Recommendations, Reports, and Recognitions	

2:45	Congregational Singing.	John Woods
2:50	Theme Interpretation:	
	The Responsibility for Encouragement ...	Stanley Williams
3:15	Entities Discussion	
	<i>Alabama Woman's Missionary Union, Candace McIntosh;</i>	
	<i>Alabama Citizens Action Program, Greg Davis;</i>	
	<i>Alabama Baptist Retirement Centers, Ken Schroeder</i>	
3:35	Miscellaneous Business	
	Committee Reports	
3:40	Resolutions Committee.....	Jesse Reeder
3:55	Committee on Time, Place, and Preacher	Chris Crain
4:00	Audit and Insurance Committees	Mike Jackson
4:05	Benediction.....	Morgan Bailey

4:30-6:00 Reception for Rick and Pam Lance

High School Ministry Area, 2nd Floor, Building A

TUESDAY EVENING

6:15	Special Music	Frank Jones
6:30	Welcome, Prayer and Recognitions	Buddy Champion
6:35	Congregational Worship	Charles Billingsley
6:40	A Time of Celebration and Appreciation for Dr. Rick Lance and Featuring Musical Guest, Charles Billingsley	
8:00	Benediction.....	Robert Smith

WEDNESDAY MORNING

8:30	Congregational Music	David Inestroza
8:35	Prayer.....	Theron Hawkins
8:40	Theme Interpretation:	
	The Results of Encouragement	Justin Hall
9:05	Election of Officers	
9:15	Previously Scheduled Business	
9:45	Resolutions Committee Report	Jesse Reeder
10:00	Entities Discussion	
	<i>University of Mobile, Charles Smith;</i>	
	<i>Samford University, Beck Taylor</i>	
10:15	Election of Officers	
10:25	Congregational Music	David Vaughan
10:30	Introduction of Convention Preacher and Alternate Preacher	Jarman Leatherwood
	Special Music	Mason Aldridge
	Scripture	Mark Bethea
10:40	Convention Sermon.....	Steven Fraser
11:10	Introduction of Convention Officers.....	Rick Lance
11:15	Benediction and Adjournment.....	Daniel Atkins

STATE CONVENTION PREVIEW

Messengers to consider \$38.5 million CP budget

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Messengers to the Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting in November will review and vote on the proposed 2027 Cooperative Program Allocation Budget of \$38.5 million.

The proposal is \$1 million more than the 2025 budget and nearly \$1.5 million less than actual receipts from 2025. It continues the 50–50 allocation allotment of half to Alabama missions and ministry causes and half to Southern Baptist missions and ministry causes. Each half equals \$19,250,000.

Top CP contributor

Alabama Baptists have consistently been the top CP contributor at the SBC level among all state conventions.

Rick Lance, executive director of the State Board of Missions, described the 2027

budget proposal as “both ministry-driven and fiscally conservative.”

“It is ministry-driven in that it focuses on the three major strategic priorities approved by the convention — evangelism and discipleship, missions strategy, missions mobilization,” he said. “This budget proposal is also fiscally conservative in that the proposed expenditures reflect comprehensive research on past giving patterns and projected Cooperative Program gifts for 2027.”

Lance also noted the importance of a “reachable and responsible” budget with the executive director transition taking place.

Derek Allen, executive director-elect, will take the reins Feb. 1 following Lance’s Jan. 31 retirement.

Of Alabama Baptists’ half of the CP Allocation Budget, \$12,550,854 goes to SBOM ministries, and \$6,699,146



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

2026 state convention officers (l to r) Ryan Whitley, first vice president; Jarman Leatherwood, president, and Mat Alexander, second vice president, are up for re-election to a second, one-year term. No other nominees have been announced at press time.

goes to state convention entity ministries with Christian higher education receiving nearly 54% of the amount for entities.

Christian higher education includes University of Mobile, Board of Aid to Students and the A. Earl Potts Scholarship.

Others designated as enti-

ties are Alabama Baptist Children’s Homes & Family Ministries, Shocco Springs Conference Center, The Alabama Baptist, Alabama Baptist Retirement Centers, The Baptist Foundation of Alabama, Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, Christian Life Commission and two auxiliary-type min-

istries — Alabama WMU and ALCAP.

Regarding the SBOM ministries budget, evangelism and discipleship with 35 full-time employees receives \$3,469,876 while missions mobilization with 10 full-time employees receives \$1,786,979.

Missions strategy with 23 full-time employees (including the executive office) receives \$6,494,661.

Messengers also will vote on the special offering goals for a total of \$23,300,000:

- ▶ Lottie Moon Christmas Offering — \$12 million
- ▶ Annie Armstrong Easter Offering — \$6 million
- ▶ Children’s Homes offering — \$3 million
- ▶ Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering — \$1.5 million
- ▶ World Hunger Offering — \$800,000

For more information, visit alsbom.org/convention.



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For more information, visit albaptistpc.com.

Make your meal plans now

Variety of gatherings to take place in conjunction with the 2026 Annual Meeting

Sunday, Nov. 15

► **Setup for sponsored booths for Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference** — see information provided to you via email or contact Susan Stevens at TAB Media Group at sstevens@thealabamabaptist.org.

► **Alabama Church Planter Network** — The Alabama Church Planter Network will hold a dinner Nov. 15 at Hope Fellowship, 2100 Old Springville Road, Birmingham, 5–9 p.m. For more information, visit plantalabama.org/events.

Monday, Nov. 16

► **Alabama Baptist Conference of Associational Leaders meeting** — ABCAL members will meet Nov. 16, 8 a.m.–1 p.m. Theme: The Priority of Discipleship. \$30 per person/\$50 per couple. For more information, visit abcal.online.

► **Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference**, Nov. 16, all day, FBC Trussville. Morning session starts at 9, afternoon session at 1:30 and evening session at 6:15. For more information, visit albbaptistpc.com.

► **Church and Community Ministries Meeting** — This group will gather Nov. 16 at 10 a.m.–2 p.m. at Serving You Ministries, 6523 1st Ave N, Birmingham. Contact Kristy Kennedy at 334-613-2311 or kkennedy@alsbom.org to reserve a spot.

► **Unite: A Gathering of Alabama Baptist College Ministry Leaders** — The Unite event will be held Nov. 16 at FBC Trussville — MS Worship Space (C building basement), 4–8 p.m.

► **Hispanic pastors and leaders** — This group will meet Nov. 16 at 6 p.m.

Tuesday, Nov. 17

► **Ministry Wives Luncheon** — Alabama WMU will host the luncheon Nov. 17 from noon to 1:30 p.m. in the fellowship hall at FBC Trussville with guest speaker Tara Dew. There is no charge; however, due to space limitations, registration is required. Register by Nov. 10 at alabamawmu.org/mw.

► **Alabama Baptist Children’s Homes Pastor’s Lunch** — ABCH is hosting a lunch for pastors Nov. 17, 12–1:30 p.m. at FBC Trussville. To register, email dgeorge@alabamachild.org.

► **Disciple-Making Leaders Breakfast** — This group will meet Nov. 17 for lunch at Children’s Gathering Space at FBC Trussville, 7:30–8:30 a.m. Register at DiscipleMakingAL.com/Bfast.

► **ALCAP** — Alabama Citizens Action Program will hold a lunch

for pastors and their wives Nov. 17 at FBC Trussville, 12–1:15 p.m. To register, visit alcap.com/pastors-luncheon-registration.

► **Southern Seminary** — Southern Seminary will hold an alumni luncheon Nov. 17 at FBC Trussville, 11:30 to 1 p.m. \$25. To register, visit inside.sbts.edu/alumni.

► **Southwestern Seminary** — Southwestern Seminary will hold an alumni luncheon Nov. 17 at FBC Trussville.

► **New Orleans Seminary** — New Orleans Seminary will hold an alumni luncheon Nov. 17 at FBC Trussville. To register, visit tabonline.org/NOBTS.

► **Reception for Rick and Pam Lance** will be held Nov. 17 at FBC Trussville (second floor, high school ministry area) from 4:30 to 6 p.m. Come and go event with heavy hors d’oeuvres provided.

1

FBC TRUSSVILLE
128 N Chalkville Rd.
Trussville, AL 35173

2

Half Shell Oyster House
218 Main St.
.4 miles

3

Walk-On’s Sports Bistreaux
464 Main St.
.8 miles

4

Thai Basil & Sushi Restaurant
445 Main St. #121
.8 miles

5

Levant Mediterranean Fusion
199 Beechnut St.
.8 miles

6

Edgar’s Bakery
158 Main St.
.6 miles

7

Moe’s Original BBQ
163 Main St.
.5 miles

FINDING COMMUNITY

Support group offers rest for dementia caregivers in Birmingham area

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Caregiving is hard, and caregivers need support to continue in this demanding role for days, months and even years.

A program like Pathways Respite, a ministry that meets at The Church at Liberty Park in Vestavia Hills, gives those with dementia structured time for stimulation and socializing. It also provides their caregivers with much-needed time to take a break, run errands or do any of the other things often left undone because caregiving took precedence.

However, sometimes caregivers need more than free time. They need a chance to connect with someone walking a similar path, to share

what's particularly hard and to meet with others who truly understand. They need to hear from those who have not only walked this path but have training and experience in this field.

Needing support

A new group for caregivers is meeting each Wednesday at The Church at Liberty Park to help. Pathways Connect is specifically geared toward caregivers of those with any form of dementia. It's free and open to anyone in this situation.

"Care for the caregiver is where I'm focused and where my heart is," said Vanessa Bragg, retired nurse and volunteer coordinator of support for Pathways Respite. "I just understand the value of information, educating them, encouraging them, helping them to take



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist
Pathways Respite, a ministry that meets at The Church at Liberty Park in Vestavia Hills, gives those with dementia structured time for stimulation and socializing, as seen here.

the time to focus on themselves and maintain their own health.

"It all comes down to being able to understand the disease ... and it's invaluable, I think, for someone to sit down in a support

group and be heard and to be seen," Bragg said.

Bragg knows how lonely this road can be. When she was in her late 40s, she "was an anomaly" in the caregiving world because she was caring for a parent. Most caregivers she encountered were caring for spouses. Through one such support group — and five women who were willing to be insistent — she found the community she needed.

These women were all caring for their husbands. One day, they told Bragg that they were going to lunch and that she was coming with them. They wouldn't take no for an answer.

"So it was these ladies who took me up under their wings, connected me with them, and we went out and got lunch and sat there. ... The camaraderie, the understanding that they're there for you — you find friendships. That was an 'aha!' moment for me.

"Those relationships that have formed from the people who are in the support group

— you can't put a price on that," Bragg said.

Even with all of her experience both personally and professionally, Bragg doesn't claim that she knows everything. The Pathways Connect meetings won't be formal teaching sessions, although a lot of learning will happen.

Instead, Bragg wants the caregivers to have the freedom to bring up the subjects they most need information about — with no pressure to speak if they aren't ready.

She plans to use the topics that are brought up to share resources that target those specific needs.

"I want them to leave with a little pearl of wisdom or some encouragement," Bragg said.

She hopes each meeting can be a time to learn from each other and a place where everyone has a chance "to speak and to be heard."

Sharing resources

Though this support group is a ministry and is being held at a church, the caregivers don't have to be Christians to attend. But Bragg will be candid about how she has been able to do what she has in her caregiving roles.

"I tell them who I am, where I go to church. I ask them if they believe in Jesus because I could not get through this disease, even though this is my ministry, without Him," Bragg said.

For more information about Pathways Respite or Pathways Connect, contact Leigh Simmons, director of Pathways, at 205-913-6373 or at leigh.simmons@libertypark.org.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

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

A reception in honor of Rick and Pam Lance will be held on Tuesday afternoon, November 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 of Building A, adjacent to the sanctuary.

Heavy hors d’oeuvres will be provided, and all convention messengers and guests are invited to stop by.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

Encouragers
1 Thessalonians 5:11

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 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.

Messenger pre-registration is open. Visit alsbom.org/convention for more details.



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

There’s still time to give to the Myers-Mallory Offering

Thanks to those who participated in the 2026 Week of Prayer for State Missions.

Remember it’s not too late to give to the Myers-Mallory State Missions

Offering or for a local church to hold its own week of prayer.

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.

WORD search

- ADAM

BEGINNING

BIRDS

BLESSING

CREATION

CREATURES

DARKNESS

DAY

DRY LAND

EARTH

EDEN

EXPANSE

FIRMAMENT

FISH

FRUIT

HEAVENS
- IMAGE

LIGHT

LIKENESS

LIVESTOCK

MOON

NIGHT

REST

SABBATH

SEAS

SEASON

SEED

STARS

SUN

VEGETATION

WATERS

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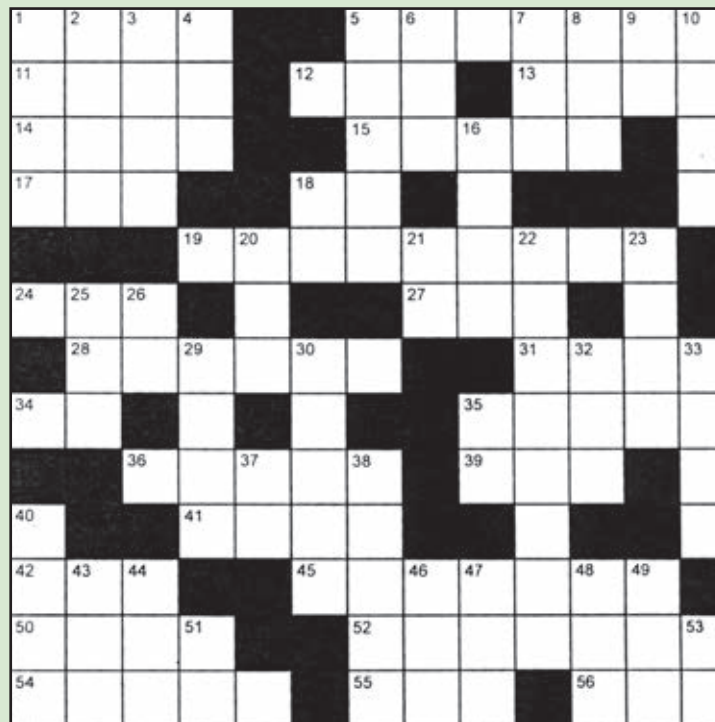
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N H V G K R S T W G A Z F S Y D H
T Y P P R Q E T L F T C J C U T P
L F K C H R L X T K I V H J R N R
K C O T S E V I L Q O K G A P W K
K F L I K E N E S S N L E K M V T

“Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also.”
GENESIS 1:16

CHRISTIAN Crossword

ACROSS

1. Matthew, Mark, Luke, ____.
5. Yet will I leave a ____.
(Ezek. 6:8)
11. Jesus cried, "____,
Eloi, lama
sabachthani?"
(Mark 15:34)
12. Sun. (Spanish)
13. Ancient South
American Indians.
14. Jesus ... touched
him, saying, I ____.
(Matt. 8:3)
15. ____ yourselves unto
God. (Rom. 6:13)
17. Jacob ____ pottage.
(Gen. 25:29)
18. Mom.
19. Ye say that I cast
out devils through
____. (Luke 11:18)
24. Under oaks and
poplars and ____s.
(Hos. 4:13)
27. North northeast.
(abbr.)
28. Thy name shall be
called no more
Jacob, but ____.
(Gen. 32:28)
31. But ____ found
grace in the eyes
of the Lord.
(Gen. 6:8)
34. Maine. (abbr.)
35. Sharpen every
man his ____.
(1 Sam. 13:20)
36. ____ thy wife shall
bear thee a son.
(Gen. 17:19)
39. Give ____ to my
words, O Lord.
(Ps. 5:1)
41. Texas city: El ____.
42. Choose.
45. Joseph took them
both, ____ ... and
Manasseh.
(Gen. 48:13)
50. Butter substitute.
52. I beseech ____.
(Phil. 4:2)
54. No scrip, no bread,
no _____. (Mark 6:8)
55. A time to rend, and
a time to ____.



By Amy Rognlie Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- (Eccles. 3:7)
56. Cow noise.

DOWN

1. Where is He that is
born
King of the ____?
(Matt. 2:2)
2. A dish of many
ingredients.
3. God will ____ thy right
hand. (Isa. 41:13)
4. Nothing.
5. Ye are a chosen
generation, a ____
priesthood.
(1 Pet. 2:9)
6. The child did minister
unto the Lord before
____. (1 Sam. 2:11)
7. Same as 4 down.
8. With; as well as.
9. North Carolina. (abbr.)
10. Weed.
16. Thou hast been in ____
the garden of God.
(Ezek. 28:13)
18. Myself.
20. Period of time.
21. Zinc. (abbr.)
22. ____ the king of Syria
was sick. (2 Kings 8:7)
23. The ____ out of the
wood doth waste it.
(Ps. 80:13)
25. A faithful witness will

- not _____. (Prov. 14:5)
26. Master of science.
(abbr.)
29. They that sow in
tears shall ____ in joy.
(Ps. 126:5)
30. To obliterate.
32. All that handle the
____. (Ezek. 27:29)
33. ____ me, O Lord.
(Jer. 17:14)
35. Southeast. (abbr.)
37. Egyptian sun god.
38. [Love] always
protects, always
trusts, always ____.
(1 Cor. 13:7)
40. Space.
43. Palestine Liberation
Organization. (abbr.)
44. There met Him
____ men that were
lepers. (Luke 17:12)
46. Color.
47. The second ____
shall be an emerald.
(Ex. 28:18)
48. They departed from
____. (Num. 33:45)
49. Deceased Chinese
leader, ____ Tse-tung.
51. Old English. (abbr.)
53. He had sent
messengers to ____
king of Egypt.
(2 Kings 17:4)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.



UPCOMING EVENTS
sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Christmas Backpacks

If your church is participating in the Christmas Backpacks ministry, remember that Collection Week is coming up October 24-30! Visit alsbom.org/christmasbackpacks for packing suggestions and guidelines, a list of collection points, and much, much more!

Since 2015, Alabama Baptists have filled almost

120,000 backpacks for children primarily in the Mississippi River Delta, through a partnership between the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions and Alabama WMU.

For more information about how your church can be involved, contact Pat Ingram at p Ingram@alsbom.org or 334-613-2334.



For more information, visit alsbom.org/christmasbackpacks or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.

Have you turned in your ACP?

The Annual Church Profile (ACP) is one of the most practical ways churches partner each year with the local Baptist association, the State Board of Missions and the Southern Baptist Convention to prepare for the future.

As churches take stock of where they are in key statistical categories, it enables the SBOM to provide resources and offer training to meet specific needs.

If your church hasn't completed this year's ACP, there's still time. They may be turned in through your association or online at al.sbcworkspace.com.

If you need help complet-

ing the ACP, please contact your local association or Sandy Harmann at the SBOM, 334-613-2266 or s harmann@alsbom.org.

To submit your Annual Church Profile online, visit al.sbcworkspace.com or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



God equips those He calls

Tuscaloosa native to help young women, adults in South Africa

By Rachel Seale Sweetin
The Alabama Baptist

Growing up in Tuscaloosa, Farris Turner attended First Baptist Church with her parents, who emphasized a relationship with Jesus over religion.

The Tuscaloosa native said she always felt called to ministry. In just second grade, Turner told her mother they needed to move to China because there were people there who did not know Jesus.

“Even when I was little, the Lord had already kind of laid on my heart the gospel being for everybody — for all people of all nations,” Turner said. “That’s always been something I’ve been passionate about.”

In middle school, Turner and her family began attending North River Church. During high school, Turner went on her first long-term missions trip, which was to Ukraine and Romania. She enjoyed being on the missions field but decided to attend college at Belmont University in Nashville, graduating with a degree in global leadership studies and psychology.

Turner then interned with S-Cape, an anti-trafficking organization in Cape Town, South Africa. She quickly fell in love with her work and the country. Turner said that while she was there, she wrote in her journal, “Lord, please call me back here full time.”

God continued to work on her heart as she came back to the U.S. and received her master’s degree in marriage and family therapy from the University of Alabama.

Turner then moved back to Nashville and became a therapist who specialized in working with teenagers and perinatal care for women. She attended The Church at Wood-



FARRIS TURNER

Photo courtesy of Farris Turner

bine in Nashville, a branch of Brentwood Baptist Church in Brentwood, Tennessee.

Wrestling with God

Turner recalls sitting in church soon after moving back to Nashville. An international missionary was telling his story.

“That whole sermon, I was wrestling with God,” Turner said. “I was pulling a Jonah.”

She told God He would have to make it clear if going overseas was His will for her. A woman approached her at the end of the service and gave her the answer.

“I don’t know what the Lord’s doing in your heart, but whatever He’s telling you to do, you need to go do it,” Turner recalls the woman saying to her. “I feel like I’m supposed to tell you that you’re sent.”

Turner said she feared going back overseas as a single woman. The lady also spoke to this fear.

“She goes, ‘I feel like I’m also

supposed to share with you that I got called to go into ministry in South Africa as a single woman, and the Lord took care of me.’”

Turner was preparing to serve as the new, part-time young adults director at King of Kings Baptist Church in Cape Town, South Africa, an assignment that began in August. This includes being a part-time therapist at Bright Hope Pregnancy Care Centre. “The pieces have just kind of fallen into place of a position and a ministry in South Africa that fits perfectly with my passions and what I’m good at,” Turner said.

An eternal impact

Turner expressed excitement about working at the church’s new pregnancy crisis center with young girls who are pregnant due to assault.

“I’m hoping that the impact that I have is showing the power of the gospel through meeting the physical need of helping these girls heal their wounded hearts,” Turner said. “If we

just tell them about Jesus and walk away, that’s not really showing the gospel in action.”

Providing other options

Abortion is not very accessible in South Africa. Many women give birth and abandon their children. Turner said baby boxes — designated spots at churches where women could place their children in hopes of giving the baby a better life — were recently outlawed.

“Our church just developed this pregnancy crisis center as a way to say, ‘There is another option. You have people that are going to walk alongside you,’” Turner said.

The center offers counseling and discusses adoption and is open to anyone, not just believers.

“The dream would be that these girls and young women would feel comfortable coming to our church and continuing to flourish in discipleship through the church,” Turner said. “That’s a long-term goal.”

Turner’s special gift is discipleship. She said South Africa is a Christian country, but many people tend to mix their belief in Jesus with other spiritual forces.

South Africa also has strict work visa laws, so legally Turner cannot get paid for her ministry. She has trusted in God’s provision.

“I have to be fully funded by fundraising,” Turner said. “I was overwhelmed by it at first, but God has just shown up again and again and again.”

Turner is covered for her first year of missions in Cape Town and is planning for longer.

“I am definitely open to staying,” Turner said. “I’m hoping the Lord just makes it super, super clear what I’m supposed to do at the end of the two years.”

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~ Why research matters for your church ~

Counting baptisms — it is not as simple as it sounds

Research Insight Two: In a Baptist congregation, the reasons people get baptized are more varied than you might think. It is more than just a testimony from new Christians.

So, who gets baptized in your church — and why?

For Baptists and other denominations, baptism is a spiritual testimony. A person's salvation is the most significant transformation they experience. It marks the beginning of their journey as an ever-maturing Christ-like disciple.

Counting baptisms should be simple, but it is not. The more complex we make the process, the more we blur the focus on evangelism. Here are five ways baptisms are counted. Consider the implications for evangelism. The focus is not to make a doctrinal statement but to consider the impact on Kingdom growth.

First, Baptists primarily count baptisms when a person receives Jesus as Savior and Lord and then testifies to this by being baptized by immersion into the congregation's fellowship.

Second, a person was baptized as an infant in another Christian tradition. Later, they confirmed their commitment to Jesus as Savior and Lord, but they were never baptized by immersion to bear witness to their new life in Christ.

Third, because baptism by immersion matters, many Baptist congregations will also baptize by immersion those who join their fellowship from a congregation that uses a different approach to baptism. They were baptized after becoming followers of Jesus, but the mode of baptism was not immersion.

Fourth, regardless of the method or motivation, a person was baptized as a child or as an adult before spiritually accepting Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. Therefore, they have not yet publicly testified to their new life in Christ through baptism.

Fifth, a person accepted an invitation to be baptized but later realized they did not understand what they were experiencing and had not yet become a Christian. Their emotions at the time led to their baptism rather than a transformation of their spiritual life. They need the opportunity to testify to their faith through believer's baptism.

Questions about baptisms

One: Which of the five categories most clearly represents the baptism of a new Christian soon after they received Jesus as their Lord and Savior? Consider the account

of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:35–38.

Two: Which ones, for solid spiritual reasons, count people more than once because they are baptized more than once?

Three: Over the life of congregations, do the reasons for and the identity of those who are baptized change? As the average age of congregations increases, fewer children are likely to grow up, experience salvation and be baptized. Also, perhaps more people are coming from other denominations who were already Christians but had not been baptized by immersion.

Four: Are fewer people overall baptized — as happens in many congregations after they reach an acceptable size — because they reduce their emphasis on evangelism? Some congregations reduce their focus on evangelism once they reach a comfortable size. Somewhere late in a congregation's first generation, the emphasis on evangelism decreases. Is your congregation one of these?

Five: Are baptisms the right metric to count, or should congregations place more emphasis on new Christians? Pastor conversations and denominational reports often ask about the number of baptisms. Should the question be changed?

Coming up next

Research Insight Three: Why is it important to keep up with the average age and the years people have been members of your congregation? Which is more important?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

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

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Sunday School Lessons

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



For October 25

BELIEVE
Romans 9:30–33;
10:1–3, 9–17

Righteousness
through faith (9:30–33)

The Jews rejected the gospel because their intent was upon following the law. They did not understand that the law was never meant to save or make one righteous and that salvation comes from grace through faith, not by works.

In the Book of Isaiah, it is prophesied that the Messiah will be a stumbling block for the Jews (8:14).

Today, Jesus is still a stumbling block because most people don't want to hear the idea that one needs a savior to be made right with God.

Instead, most people in the world believe they are good enough to get into heaven because they are generally good people. But the Bible teaches that no one is good and therefore everyone deserves hell.

Only Christ, who came as both God and man, lived a perfect life and defeated death by rising from the dead after being crucified.

Misguided zeal (10:1–3)

The Jews were zealous for the law because they believed that following the law would make them righteous. Unfortunately, we see evidence for zeal in many religions today but without an understanding of grace.

I know several Christians who admire how devout and zealous Muslims are who pray five times a day or Jehovah's Witnesses who go door to door proselytizing. However, the reason they do this is because those religions teach a works-based salvation.

True, since Christians have the truth, we should be zealous for bringing glory to God who has saved us, but we need to be careful not to perform our good works so that God might save us. It is by grace we are saved, not works.

Salvation
available to all (9–13)

Paul then goes into one of the clearest explanations of the gospel in the entire Bible in verses 9 and 10.

The gospel is not some sort of mental assent or test of intelligence. It is believing that God raised Jesus from the dead and believing that Jesus is Lord. This is the stumbling block for the Jew who tries to follow the law and for the Gentile who thinks it is foolish.

However, people from all walks of life embrace this truth — prisoners, children, uneducated people — because it is not dependent upon our ability but on God's ability to save us.

Go tell (14–17)

Since salvation is by grace through faith for all who believe, the logical conclusion is that word of this needs to spread. The 20th century brought about the notion that all religions are equally valid, and all religions help lead people to God.

You may have heard the popular expression that each religion is one side of the same mountain, moving us to the top, presumably where God is. The Bible clearly teaches against this. We cannot wishfully hope that maybe God in His mercy will somehow reach people from other religions where the gospel has not been heard.

The Bible says there is no other way to be saved apart from calling on the name of Christ. (See Acts 4:12 and John 14:6, for example.)

If God will save people anywhere in the world apart from hearing the gospel, then the natural conclusion is that I don't need to share it.

Any time this view has been espoused, missions wanes. However, when we understand that the Bible teaches that we have a duty to share the gospel, missions flourishes and people are saved.

For November 1

KINDNESS
Romans 11:11–24

Rejection (11–16)

Chapter 11 of Romans is one of the most mysterious passages in the New Testament and has been subject to many interpretations throughout church history.

The issue of the Jews and their relation to the Church has always been a controversial one. Questions abound surrounding the role Jews play now that Christ has come. And has God rejected the Jews because the gospel has gone to the Gentiles?

Regardless of these questions, Paul points out that there is still a plan for the Jews. In fact, one of the reasons God brought salvation to the Gentiles was to make the Jews jealous for God.

The hardening of the Jews allowed the spread of the gospel to the rest of the world, so even in their rejection of the Messiah, God used it for good. And even though large groups of Jews rejected the gospel, there is still hope for their salvation.

No one is so far away from God that they are beyond the reach of the gospel. Since sin has alienated everyone from God, everyone is equally separated — and the gospel is the only way to bridge the gap sin has created between mankind and God.

Grafted (17–22)

Paul uses the imagery of an olive branch representing the people of God to show the relationship between the Jews and Gentiles. While the Jews were historically the people of God — the original olive branch — the Gentiles have been grafted in. However, this is not due to the worthiness of the Gentiles but because of God's grace.

Just because the Jews rejected Christ doesn't mean that Gentiles

should boast in their salvation. Salvation is always by grace through faith, leaving no room for boasting.

Unfortunately, there have historically been movements within Christianity to persecute the Jews, seeing them as the ones who killed Jesus.

Focusing on one group of people as somehow especially guilty is nonsensical. This can play out sometimes today among Christians if we look down on those who are not Christian. It can be frustrating to see people making fun of Christianity or trying to push ungodly views on society.

But instead of getting angry at these people and looking down on them, we need to remember that they need Jesus. We should support missions and ministries that help share the gospel. Praying for the lost shows we put our hope and faith in God and keeps us from being angry or depressed at the state of society and the attacks on Christianity.

Restoration (23–24)

God has not abandoned the Jews, however. The gospel is available to all people, including the Jews. Even though many have rejected Christ, the gospel never changes and is able to be accepted by all people, including the Jews.

Some believe that the Jews had the law to save them, but the law was never meant to save; it was intended to point to Christ.

Therefore, the Jews still reading the Old Testament have the Scriptures that point to Christ, but like all unbelievers, they are unable to see the gospel clearly.

It is the job of believers to share the gospel and pray for unbelievers. Pray that the Holy Spirit will remove the scales from their eyes and that they may see the joy of the salvation of the Lord.

*"I magnify my ministry in order to make my fellow
Jews jealous, and thus save some of them."*

Romans 11:13b–14

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sunday School Lessons

Associate Professor and Executive Director of Christian Ministry, Samford University

By Scott Guffin



For October 25

THE SOURCE OF FORGIVENESS Psalm 103:1–13

It is easy for us as we pass through this life to fail to recognize the immense blessings that God pours out on us continually.

A great antidote for this forgetfulness is simply taking the time to recognize the work of God in our lives and expressing our gratitude to Him for all He does for us.

In Psalm 103, David counts the blessings of God and reminds the reader of their effects. David begins the psalm with a beautiful doxology and tells us not to forget God's benefits.

Among the "benefits" that David addresses is the amazing forgiveness that God offers through His gracious gift of salvation, which we know is given to all who place their faith in Christ.

God blesses us in many ways, including forgiveness. (1–5)

While David's list of the blessings of God is not exhaustive, it does cover some key items for which we should all be thankful. In verses 3–5, David mentions some ways God addresses the depth of brokenness in our lives, referencing how He forgives our sins, heals our diseases and redeems our lives.

Beyond merely rescuing us, David notes that God elevates us as He "crowns" us "with faithful love and compassion."

Going even farther above and beyond what we deserve, God also "satisfies" us "with good things," uplifting, encouraging and energizing us to live our lives for Him.

David's language in verse 5 is reminiscent of Isaiah 40:31, where the prophet proclaims that "those who trust in the Lord ... will soar on wings like eagles."

God's forgiveness is evident in how He treats His children. (6–8)

Over the next three verses,

David reminds the reader of the character of God, highlighting the fact that God's actions toward His people stem not from who they are or what they have accomplished but that they emanate from His heart as a function of who He is.

In verse 8, David describes the character of God in a way that is repeated almost identically in eight other places in the Old Testament: "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love."

For those who come to know God, this recognition and recollection of who God is serves to buoy us in our most difficult times, especially when our vision of God is obscured by our struggles.

We do not deserve forgiveness but God forgives completely. (9–13)

It is especially in the hard times — sometimes brought on by our own sinful actions — that it is vital to recall a truth that David himself had come to embrace. God "has not dealt with us as our sins deserve or repaid us according to our iniquities." Quite the opposite is true.

Although we do not deserve His favor, God forgives and His forgiveness is complete. Out of His great heart of "faithful love," God removes our sins from us "as far as the east is from the west." God reflects the heart of a compassionate Father who recognizes our frail nature and acts toward us accordingly.

In verse 14, David declares that God remembers that He has created us from dust, a reminder both of God's creative genius and of His reason for looking on us with patience.

As we count the blessings of God in our lives, let us remember with joy that God's forgiveness means everything to us. As the very source of forgiveness, God deserves for our souls to bless Him in return.

For November 1

THE PICTURE OF FORGIVENESS Leviticus 16:6–10, 15–19, 20–22

It is not an unusual thing for people reading through the Bible to become confused by the book of Leviticus and to be tempted to skip right over it. We do so to our disadvantage, however, as we miss the instructions of God regarding the sacrificial system that will serve as the precursor of what is to come. In Leviticus 16, God provides instructions to Aaron (through Moses) regarding one particular day of the year, when a special sacrifice was to be made for the sins of the people of Israel. In Leviticus 23, this day is given the Hebrew name Yom Kippur, which translates to "Day of Atonement" in English.

Living in the light of New Testament revelation, we can see today that in establishing the Day of Atonement, God was pointing forward to a singular day when a far greater sacrifice — a once and for all sacrifice — would be made.

God provides a way for our sins to be forgiven. (6–10)

As God describes in detail the preparation process for carrying out the sacrifices associated with the Day of Atonement, He instructs Aaron as the high priest to choose a bull for a sin offering and then two goats — one of which will also be a sin offering and the other of which will be kept alive. Over the next several verses, God will explain what is to be done with each of these animals, but it is clear that all three will in some way be utilized for the purpose of forgiving the sins of the people. This desire to forgive and cleanse people from their sins is at the heart of the character of God, who does not want "any to perish but all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

God requires a sacrifice for our sins to be forgiven. (15–19)

Consistent with His character, God provides a way for His people to be absolved of their sins through the annual sacrifice of animals according to these specific rituals that would continue until the coming of a far superior sacrifice in the person

of Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews notes in Hebrews 8:13 that Jesus rendered the "first" covenant obsolete through His sacrifice on the cross for several reasons: Jesus offered up His own blood rather than the blood of animals as a perfect sacrifice (Hebrews 9:12). Jesus did not enter a manmade tent but rather heaven itself, appearing in the presence of God on our behalf (Hebrews 9:24). Jesus' sacrifice did not need to be repeated year after year, but rather was a once-and-for-all sacrifice that need never be repeated, because it is effective for all time (Hebrews 9:25–26). While the blood of animals can never fully take away sins (hence the need for an annual sacrifice), the sacrifice of Jesus Christ offers a path for the sinner to be purified fully (Hebrews 10:1, 11–14).

When God forgives our sins, He takes them away. (20–22)

The nature of God's forgiveness of the sin of His people is pictured in verses 20–22 through the practice regarding the "scapegoat." Of the two goats initially chosen for the Day of Atonement rituals, one was to be kept alive. God directs Aaron to lay hands on this goat and confess over it the sins of the people. Then, the goat is to be led off into the wilderness, never to return. The symbolism here relates to how God deals with the sins of those who confess them, separating us from our sin "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12). It is worth noting here that absolution for sin follows the confession of sin.

The annual practice of the Day of Atonement served as a beautiful reminder of God's forgiveness to the people of ancient Israel. Our English word "atonement," coined as far back as the 1300s, literally comes from the verbal mashup of "at-one-ment," which refers to the act of being relationally reconciled to another person. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5 that this idea is at the very heart of God's activity in the world.

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

MORE THAN ENTERTAINMENT

‘Crazy Tie Guy’ connects audiences with the gospel, ‘how awesome God is’

By Leann Callaway
The Alabama Baptist

Nearly 30 years ago when Nathan Dorrell was balancing seminary studies along with starting a creative ministry, he earned a nickname that made it easy for him to be recognized and remembered.

But more than recognition, Dorrell has always wanted audiences to remember Jesus.

His stage name came in 1997 when he performed at a church near Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he was working on his master of divinity degree.

“I needed a costume for a church that wanted me to juggle,” he recalled. “I didn’t want a clown outfit, but I didn’t want to look like anyone else either. ... I decided on a tie and knew it would have to be a crazy one for the kids. ... So I sewed the tie onto the shirt.

“When I was being introduced the guy looked over at me and forgot my name, so he introduced me as the Crazy Tie Guy,” Dorrell remembered. “I didn’t think anything about it — I just shared my juggling and told the kids about Jesus. Then at the next church the same thing happened, and I realized that a connection had been made.”

Unique opportunity

Today, Dorrell is children’s minister at Edgemont Baptist Church in Shelby, Tennessee, and an evangelist and professional juggler.

His performances combine the art of juggling, unicycling and stilt-walking. His wife, Kathy, and their children join in the fun at churches, camps and conferences around the country.



Submitted photo

In addition to being an evangelist and professional juggler, Nathan Dorrell also serves as the children’s minister at Edgemont Baptist Church in Shelby, Tennessee. Known as the “crazy tie guy,” Dorrell has spent more than 30 years performing in churches, camps and conferences around the country.

During his college years, Dorrell realized the unique opportunity juggling provided not only to entertain children, but also to engage them with the gospel.

“I was working with inner-city kids as a summer missionary in Knoxville, Tennessee, when God started my juggling ministry,” Dorrell recalled. “I could not get the kids to stop and listen to me, and I was pulling my hair out trying to share the gospel with [them].

“God reminded me one night that He had taught me how to juggle in sixth grade. I didn’t know much, but I decided to try sharing Jesus while I juggled one day,” Dorrell said. “God worked in the lives of those kids that day.”

The lessons learned that summer greatly impacted Dorrell, laying the foundation for his ministry.

“I don’t care if I’m juggling, tying trick knots, using a lasso or balancing things on my head, I just ask God what it is He wants me to share and I join Him in the message ... in a creative way,” Dorrell said. “That has been part of my life journey with the Lord.”

Open doors

With his impressive juggling skills, Dorrell has earned several world records, opening doors for people to connect with the ministry — including an appearance in a 2017 Super Bowl commercial for Advil that featured him juggling three balls underwater.

“I remember asking God what He wanted me to share at a Vacation Bible School one summer, when Life-way had done the Submerged VBS for the theme,” Dorrell noted. “I felt like God wanted me to share that He

wanted people to go deep with Him and not have a surface relationship. I used it as an opportunity to connect audiences with the sower and the seed parable — that if you just stay on the surface, you don’t get deep with God and get rooted.”

Dorrell said he then decided to set the world record for underwater bowling ball juggling.

“It is amazing how sometimes God doesn’t use the messages in the way you expect. I didn’t get many calls from churches that were doing Submerged that summer. I wondered why God had me go through all that practice and work to share that message only a few times.

“I got a call from someone who had seen the YouTube video of me setting that record, which actually had less than 100 views at the time. They wanted to buy it for a commercial, but they weren’t allowed to tell me for what or when it would air. I made sure it was a family-friendly thing and sold the video while retaining the rights.

“The next year my sister-in-law called us up and let me know she had just seen me on a Super Bowl commercial.

“You never know what God is going to do,” Dorrell said.

He continues to see God move in extraordinary ways. Wherever Dorrell and his family perform, their desire is to point audiences to Christ.

“During our shows, our desire is to share Jesus in a way that audiences will go away in awe of Jesus,” Dorrell explained. “We don’t try to knock their socks off with how good we are, but we do want to bless their socks off with how awesome God is and how wonderful it is to have Jesus as Savior.”