The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

‘Has to be God’

‘Good as dead’ church in Mobile experiences revitalization

By David Roach
The Alabama Baptist

Manor Baptist Church was as good as dead. The six remaining members voted to close and gave all the church’s money to charitable causes. The only thing left to do was chain the doors closed.

But before they could secure the chains, God showed up. As a last-ditch effort at survival, the aging white Mobile congregation called Donald Turner, an African American, as pastor two years ago. They hoped he might help them reach Black neighbors in their ethnically transitioning community.

“The church’s facilities had deteriorated,” Turner said, “so my family saved up two months of our tithes and used the money to clean up the building. We worked for three weeks then reopened.”

Turnaround

That first Sunday of the relaunch included eight of Turner’s family members plus the remaining six members who called him as pastor. Those six planned to leave, but Turner persuaded them to give him one week. That’s when the turnaround began.

Four or five new people joined the church weekly for nearly nine months. Then the average number of weekly new members dropped to one or two. By God’s grace and a steady diet of biblical preaching by Turner, Manor went from half a dozen people preparing for the church’s death to a multiethnic community of more than 70 who are experiencing new life in Christ. Thirty of those people have been baptized in the last two years.

‘Power of the gospel’

“In a time when many of our communities are becoming increasingly diverse, Manor Baptist Church stands as an example of the unifying power of the gospel,” said Kevin Blackwell, executive director of the Mobile Baptist Network. “Under the faithful leadership of pastor Donald Turner, this congregation has become a beautiful picture of believers from different backgrounds worshipping and serving together under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

“Having preached there recently, I was encouraged by the genuine love, unity and mission-minded heart of the church,” Blackwell said. “Manor Baptist is intentionally engaging its community with the hope of the gospel, and we need more churches that faithfully reflect this kind of Christ-centered vision.”



Facebook photo

Pastor Donald Turner (right) has baptized 30 new believers in the past two years at Manor Baptist Church.

Turner is not your typical Southern Baptist pastor. After retiring from the Air Force in 2006, he launched a career in the oil and gas industry. He came to faith in Christ in 2007 and committed to intense Bible reading — very intense. He read Scripture eight hours a day on the days he worked in Mobile Bay on an offshore drilling rig and 16 hours a day on his off days.

“It’s hard to describe what the Lord has done through my Scripture reading,” Turner said. “I’m now halfway through my seventh time reading the Bible.”

God’s perfect timing

Called to the ministry in 2017, Turner started two churches in ExxonMobil camps in Papua New Guinea while he worked there from 2019–23. Back in the U.S., he connected with Manor in God’s perfect timing.

But without the latest training in church growth, marketing and family ministry, could Turner revitalize

(*See ‘Momentum,’ page 12*)

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‘Humble leader’

Stiefel named next disaster relief strategist for Alabama Baptists

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Frankie Stiefel tried to find every way out of the role he could, but God wouldn’t turn loose, he shared Oct. 19. “Every time I would have an excuse, God had an answer.”

Stiefel, director of Sand Mountain Baptist Association’s disaster relief, begins as the next disaster relief strategist for Alabama Baptists on Jan. 1.

Current DR strategist Mark Wakefield retires Feb. 28 and will overlap with Stiefel to hand off the responsibilities.

Wakefield said Stiefel, who has served with SMBA DR since 2005, is the right person for the role.

“He has always taken his job as associational coordinator very seriously, and they almost always have a team to deploy,” Wakefield said. “Frankie has trained in most areas of disaster relief and has a real interest in learning all he can in order to be more useful.”



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

Frankie Stiefel (center) is announced as the incoming disaster relief strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions by state missionary Mike Jackson (left) during the Oct. 19 annual meeting of the Sand Mountain Baptist Association. Stiefel has served on the association’s DR team since 2005, and his wife, Michelle (right), has served as the association’s ministry assistant for 20 years.

‘A great asset’

Scotty Goldman, leader of SBOM’s Missions Mobilization Team, oversees hiring for the DR role.

“Frankie’s disaster relief experience, his knowledge of operating and maintaining the DR equipment, and his passion for DR ministry made him the perfect choice for this role,” Goldman said. “He will be a great asset to our team and a strong, humble leader for our yellow shirt army.”



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

Sand Mountain-area pastors and ministry leaders join Frankie Stiefel at the altar Oct. 19 as state missionary Mike Jackson (at podium) prays over Stiefel in his new role as the incoming disaster relief strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Stiefel resisted when Goldman reached out, but after learning the process of deciding who to approach was a two-plus-year process, “it hit me like a ton of bricks,” Stiefel said. “After that, we asked God to show us how to make it work.”



STIEFEL

When it came time to decide, the next sermon at their home church — Happy Home Baptist Church in Henagar — focused on Abraham and Isaac and the missed blessings of not surrendering.

As Pastor Dustin Henshaw preached, “we knew the message was for us,” Stiefel said.

‘Watching God move’

Stiefel’s wife, Michelle, who is in her 20th year as SMBA’s ministry assistant, said she has no doubt her husband is called to the role. “It has been incredible watching God move in so many ways the past few months as we’ve prayed about the opportunity.”

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 11.

Latest from disaster relief teams

Alabama Baptist deployments continue to work in areas affected by Isaias

Chainsaws, tarps, shower trailers, feeding units, Bibles and more continue to dot the landscape around Alabama's most widely damaged areas following the early October landfall of Hurricane Isaias.

Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief command posts initially operated out of Frisco City, Andalusia and Flomaton. Sixteen salvations have been reported so far.

The more than 500 requests for DR assistance have primarily come from the southernmost counties: Barbour, Coffee, Conecuh, Covington, Dale, Escambia, Houston, Mobile and Monroe. (TAB)



Facebook/Redemption Missions

Disaster Relief volunteers from Redemption Church, Saraland, pray with homeowners in the community.



Facebook/Ino Baptist Church

Winds from Hurricane Isaias toppled the steeple of Ino Baptist Church in Kinston, damaging the roof and an HVAC unit that serves the sanctuary. The church was one of three Alabama Baptist congregations whose buildings were damaged in the Category 2 storm.



Facebook/Bethlehem Baptist

Above: Frisco City's Bethlehem Baptist Disaster Relief team hit the ground running to bring Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief to Monroe County.



Facebook/Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief Mass Feeding

Below: Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief Mass Feeding volunteers from Mobile, North Jefferson, Autauga, Walker and Chilton Associations serve in Flomaton in Escambia County. **Left:** Bluebird Coffee Co. in Andalusia hosts a traditional breakfast for the mass feeding crew serving in town. The breakfast was provided courtesy of Turning Point USA.



Facebook/Christian Mission Centers

Above: The Coffee County Baptist Association Disaster Relief team removes tree debris that damaged Christian Mission Centers' Aftercare Program apartments in Enterprise the evening of Oct. 9, following Hurricane Isaias making landfall near Destin, Florida. **Below:** The Coffee County Baptist Association Disaster Relief team removes trees from homes in their community.

Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions executive director-elect Derek Allen (third from right) joined SBOM DR strategist Mark Wakefield (right) at various sites to encourage volunteers serving across South Alabama after Hurricane Isaias.



Facebook/Derek Allen



Facebook/Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief Mass Feeding



Facebook/Jud Waldrop

OPINION

Your Voice



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

8 areas for congregational review, refresh

By Morris Murray Jr.
Special to The Alabama Baptist

As with all parts of life, the routines found among congregations can easily become stale and predictable due to convenience, time restraints and complacency.

To keep church life fresh and energized, continuously review these eight areas:

1. Experience with God. We must put stronger emphasis on a personal, firsthand experience with God and His worthiness to receive from us a fire of devotion that cannot be quenched or dampened.

2. Worship. Worship is important because God is important. We must always be evaluating both the nature and characteristics of Christian worship, regardless of what style of worship is employed.

3. Fellowship. The church is a fellowship of mutual participants anchored in brotherly and sacrificial love who are committed to God and to one another in fulfilling God's mission.

4. Understanding. How we understand and express the Christian faith in terms of biblical teachings should determine the nature of our preaching and practice. Therefore, we must be sure that our understanding is biblically accurate and adequate.

5. Bible study. We may yell, stretch and scream about the authority and inspiration of the Bible but neglect how it is to be used practically. We must not only find the grammatical-historical meaning of the texts in their appropriate contexts but also find room for the meaning of Scripture for us today and how to apply its significance in real life situations. We must convey how relevant its message continues to be now — not just what it meant then.

6. Awareness. We always stand in need of fresh awareness of the presence and power of God in the church, in the world, in individuals and even in our own lives. We cannot be unaware and unresponsive to the needs of others who are crying out to us for direction.

7. Concern for others. We must translate our awareness into helping those who have problems and needs in this present life. This is what Jesus did and what He calls upon His church to do. As servants of Jesus Christ, how can we do otherwise?

8. Ministry. Churches must avoid playing religious games internally and actively and compassionately respond to the burning issues of our day. We need to see that the ministry of the church is a continuation of the ministry of Jesus (read Luke 4:18 and Matt. 25:31–46).

In addition to these, there may be other areas in which church renewal efforts are stressed and accentuated.

In fact, there may be no legitimate limitations to such efforts. So, may readers adopt, adapt or add to these in accordance with their own wisdom, experiences and insights as God so directs.

Letters to the Editor

I have written this letter to remind voters to go to the polls on Nov. 3. ... Pray to your heavenly Father before going to vote.
Eleanor Loveless
Ranburne, Alabama

I read your article about adult child estrangement and the new Bible study for mothers and grandmothers in the Oct. 8 issue of The Baptist Paper. It was great. As a grandfather I can tell you that we men suffer too and need something like you wrote about.

I have a grandson I have not seen or spoken to in 8+ years. My wife and I have tried calling, texting, emails and cards (with checks) on his birthdays and on Christmases. No response. We don't know why he suddenly ended our relationship. He does cash the checks but without any thank yous or acknowledgement. My heart breaks because he and I were close when he was younger.
Reader
The Baptist Paper
(Find the article he is referencing at thebaptistpaper.org.)

Atheists believe in at least six miracles:
1. Something from nothing
2. Order from chaos
3. Life from non-life
4. Personal from the non-personal
5. Reason from non-reason
6. Morality from matter
—John Tyson
Seth Troutt
@Seth_Troutt on X

Manhood summed up:
Love deeply
Work hard
Be bold
Serve others
Follow the Shepherd
Daniel Ritchie
@DanielRitchie on X

"For all my life, my ministry has been to preach and teach the Word," said **Steve Mathews**, pastor of United Baptist Church in Valdese, North Carolina, related to ongoing health challenges. "Now God has moved me into this season where my ministry is to suffer well.

"Now I really have a sense of urgency," he said. "I should be dead, but God spared me. Every day that I get from Him is a gift, and I want to use it for the Kingdom."

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

> "Everyone has people who speak death into them. What they need is someone who will speak life into their soul. Be that one!"
>
> RICHARD BLACKABY
> *Author, Bible study leader*

"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.

A general rule of life is that privilege brings responsibility. If you're blessed with a high-paying job, you're responsible for showing up for work. If you're blessed to have a child, you're responsible for being a good parent.

How much more is this true for those blessed with eternal salvation?

In the first half of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he explained what God has done for us in Christ.

In chapter 4, he turns to how we should live because of Christ. Paul moves from our spiritual wealth to our spiritual walk.

Paul challenged the believers at Ephesus to walk worthy of the calling with which they were called.

Bill Wilks, pastor
NorthPark Baptist Church,
Trussville



Lass WORDS



BY KEN LASS
The Alabama Baptist

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Good news you need to hear

There's something you need to hear today. There are things you need to know. Things you can be sure of and can count on.

You need to hear this because most everything you see and hear and read these days is bad news — scary and frustrating and depressing news. You may be losing hope for the world in general and our country in particular. You see hate all around you. You are beginning to wonder if any sense of morality and righteousness still exists. You fear for the environment in which your children and grandchildren will grow up.

Yes, it's unsettling out there. But there are things you need to know. Things you don't always hear about.

On average, studies show around 68,500 people accept Jesus as Lord and Savior every day. That's roughly 25 million each year. That number is based on self-reported conversions and may not reflect persons who do not declare their decisions publicly. The numbers could be much higher.

Answering the call

Data also indicates that tens of thousands of people enter formal Christian ministry every year, with an increasing focus on youth ministry and bivocational positions as entry points.

Each year in the United States alone more than 75 million reportedly volunteer to serve in food banks, nonprofits and community improvement organizations. That's roughly 1 of every 4 adults in our country. In addition, surveys show that more than 54% of all Americans help neighbors in some informal way each year, such as running errands, caregiving and sharing tools, money and resources.

Volunteers reportedly provide nearly 5 billion hours of service each year, with an economic impact worth $167 billion. Thousands of churches donate billions of dollars and put in thousands of hours helping victims of disaster in all corners of the globe.

God is still in control

You need to know that God is still in control! That He is working through His people to accomplish His plan. That there is so much good going on. And if we hang in there in faith, we're going to be okay.

The prophet Isaiah tells us, "I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please'" (Isa. 46:10).

Don't let the world get you down. Be part of lifting it up. It's trendier than you think.

MEET THE AUTHOR

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

NEWS

Alabama news

FAYETTE ASSOCIATION

▸ **Sand Springs Baptist Church, Fayette**, celebrated its 150th anniversary, Sept. 13. The theme, "The Anchor Holds," was a celebration of God's faithfulness and remembrance of the tragedy in 2004 when an arsonist destroyed the former church building. Marlin Mayfield was the guest preacher. The church received a special commemorative plaque from David Nelson, a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Pastor Jon Elinburg accepted the honor. A celebration luncheon was served following the service.


Photo by David Nelson

GENEVA ASSOCIATION

▸ Longtime pastor **Teddy Ward** is available for interim pastorates and pulpit supply. He lives in southeast Alabama and recently served as pastor of **Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, Slocomb**. Called to preach at age 14, Ward has been preaching for nearly 60 years and has led several churches in the wiregrass region of Alabama. He also served as a church planter in New York for a few years. Ward and his wife, Charlotte, have been married for more than 53 years and have three sons and six grandchildren. To contact Ward, email wardteddy92@gmail.com or call 334-798-3793.

MADISON ASSOCIATION

▸ **Ron Madison** is serving as interim pastor of **Cornerstone Church, Huntsville**.

▸ **New Market Baptist Church** celebrated its 180th anniversary Sept. 27. Special music was provided by Olivia Reese, Lizzie Lee (shared an original song she composed) and the adult choir. Sue McWhorter, a commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented a plaque to the church, with three pastors accepting the honor. Pictured are (l to r) Harold Fannin, former interim pastor; Bobby Eads, former pastor; and Jeff Reeves, current pastor. A fellowship lunch followed.


Photo by Jamie Reese

MARSHALL ASSOCIATION

▸ **Mike Williamson** is the new director of local ministries for **First Baptist Church Albertville**. Chris Johnson is pastor.

MORGAN ASSOCIATION

▸ **Mike Goforth** is the new minister to senior adults and pastoral care of **Central Baptist Church, Decatur**. Rob Hatfield is pastor.

NORTH JEFFERSON ASSOCIATION

▸ **Gardendale First Baptist Church** celebrated its 150th anniversary Sept. 27. The special anniversary service honored the church's rich history, celebrated lives transformed through ministry and looked forward with faith to the future. Kevin Hamm is senior pastor.

PICKENS ASSOCIATION

▸ **First Baptist Church Gordo** celebrated its 125th anniversary Aug. 16. The church was established with 15 charter members, and a church building was soon erected on the site where the present building now stands. David Singleton, a former pastor, was the guest preacher. Special music was provided by June Elmore, Charlotte Shirley, Robin Edgeworth, Lisa Tant and Jimmy Latham. Personal testimonies were shared by Al Elmore and Tim Meherg. The church was honored with special presentations from Lyle Dease, director of missions of Pickens Baptist Association, and David Nelson, a commissioner with the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Pastor Brent Edgeworth is pictured holding the plaque from ABHC. Lunch was served following the service.


Photo by David Nelson

SOUTHEAST ALABAMA ASSOCIATION

▸ **Smyrna Baptist Church, Dothan**, will celebrate its 161st homecoming Nov. 1, 10:45 a.m. Hosea Parker will be the guest speaker with music by The Byrd Family. A covered dish lunch will follow. Billy Womack is pastor.

ST. CLAIR ASSOCIATION

▸ **Central Baptist Church, Trussville**, celebrated its 175th anniversary Aug. 29–30 beginning with a churchwide dinner on the grounds Saturday night, historical presentations during the Sunday School hour on Sunday, and concluding with a watermelon cutting fellowship in the afternoon. Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, was the guest preacher. Special guests included former staff members Eric Gargus, Johnny Kilgore, and Stephen and Kim Searcy, who shared memories of their time serving at Central Baptist. A video recounting the church's history was shown and highlights were shared by member Kathy Burttram, who assisted church historian Suzi Richards with the research and organization of historical records and photos. The church received two special presentations, one from Argo Mayor Randy Hettich and another from June Mathews, a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. The service concluded with a note-burning ceremony, celebrating payment of a $1.7 million loan that was paid off in 10 years. Pictured are (l to r) James Langston, stewardship chair; Kim Tillman, church treasurer; and members Linda Osborn and Celia Jeffres. Paul Brasher is pastor.


Photo by June Mathews

TUSCALOOSA ASSOCIATION

▸ **Will Collins** is the new pastor of **Flatwoods Baptist Church, Northpor**t. He previously served as director of college ministry at Capstone Church, Northport. He and his wife, Paola, have one child.


Submitted photo

▸ **Coaling Baptist Church** kicked off its 150th anniversary celebration year Aug. 30. During the morning worship David Nelson, a commissioner with the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented a commemorative plaque to the church. Pastor Todd Burkhalter (pictured) accepted the honor. Following the service, a special luncheon was served.


Photo by David Nelson

WEST CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

▸ **John Barfoot** wrapped up his time as pastor of **Shady Grove Baptist Church, Selma**, in September. He and his wife, Gaye, served the church for six years.

OTHER

▸ Members and friends of the former **Mount Moriah Fellowship Baptist Church,** located between Forest Home and Pine Apple, celebrated the 198th homecoming Oct. 11. Daniel Troy Carmichael presided and Paul Gaston Petznick, priest of pastoral oversight of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Carlowville, and chaplain and counselor with Brother Bryan Mission, Birmingham, was the guest preacher. A luncheon followed with afternoon entertainment by the Yeldell Yellers Gospel and Blue Grass Band.

ALABAMA NEWS ITEMS COMPILED BY DIANNA L. CAGLE AND DEBBIE CAMPBELL

Encouragers

1 Thessalonians 5:11

2026 FAMILY REUNION of ALABAMA BAPTISTS

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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

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Visit alsbom.org/convention for more details.
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Third in a series

Felt needs

Understanding the struggles, needs of single-parent families in the church

By Denise George
The Alabama Baptist

Jeanie is rearing two young children by herself, working a full-time job and maintaining a household. Her ex-husband provides no childcare support. Her paycheck barely covers her family's most urgent needs, and each month she descends deeper into credit card debt. Jeanie's parents and siblings live too far away to provide childcare or practical help. They, too, struggle financially and are unable to assist with Jeanie's expenses.



Unsplash.com

On Sunday mornings, after she feeds, dresses and takes her children to Sunday School, Jeanie sits exhausted in a back pew. Fortunately, her church provides childcare for young children during the worship service. She loves her church and longs to serve in ministry and attend Bible studies and social events, but she has no time or energy — and no money to hire a babysitter. The hour-long worship service gives her a brief chance to sit still, pray, worship and rest from the week's strenuous workload.

Jeanie is one of about 8.7 million mothers living in a one-parent U.S. household rearing children under age 18.

Single-parent families make up one of the fastest-growing family types in America. A Pew Research Center review of 130 countries shows the U.S. has the highest rate of children living in single-parent households in the world.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2023), America's single-parent households — particularly mother-only households — are the second most common family living arrangement, and the proportion of these households has doubled since 1970.

Different reasons

Single-parenting can happen for many reasons, including divorce (28%), separation (15.5%) or death of a husband (4.3%). The highest percentage comes from mothers who have never married (52.1%).

Current trends in marriage, cohabitation, divorce and social norms suggest the situation is unlikely to change anytime soon.

Other situations also lead to one-parent families, such as:

- a spouse simply walking out and never returning.
- a parent is incarcerated or addicted to alcohol or drugs.
- military deployment and sometimes the trauma following the deployment.
- being a victim of domestic violence.
- severe disability, hospitalization or chronic illness.

Unique challenges

Whatever the reason, single-parent families inevitably face unique pressures and challenges two-parent households often do not. These may include:

- Financial struggles, poverty and economic insecurity. The official poverty rate for mothers in one-parent families is more than 30%. When moms work outside the home, their median income was $41,305 in 2024, far below the $132,959 median income reported that year for two-parent families.
- Overwork and exhaustion from juggling children, work, bills, meals, laundry, transportation, school issues, doctors' appointments and every household task alone.
- Loneliness and depression from little time to rest, build friendships or participate in fellowship and fun.
- Fear, stress and anxiety when overwhelmed mothers have no relational safety net — no nearby family or close friends to help them. They may worry about job loss, sickness, unexpected crises or even car trouble.

Single parents who do have family support are likely still overwhelmed, but they know they aren't alone and find their workloads cushioned. They have someone to call when the car breaks down, a child is sick at school or an emergency happens.

"[Many single parents] suffer in silence and pray they can keep up with their enormous responsibilities."

How to help

Many single parents will never ask for help from church leadership or members. They suffer in silence and pray they can keep up with their enormous responsibilities. When the church steps in and offers a compassionate safety net, it becomes a lifeline for them.

Here are some practical, common-sense ways to help the single parents in your congregation:

- Know who they are, ask how you can help them and let them know they are valued members of the church family. Offer practical weekday help such as occasional meals, shopping or transportation to medical appointments. Create a church "care team" to be available in emergencies.
- Provide financial assistance. Create a benevolence fund that can assist single parents immediately and confidentially when urgent needs arise. Invite members to contribute regularly.
- Add childcare to every major church ministry event. Use trusted, background-checked, vetted adults to oversee children. Childcare is expensive and hard to find; offering it enables single parents to attend Bible studies, support groups, women's ministry events and worship services more easily.
- Create a single-parent support group where they can meet in a safe place, speak openly, grow in faith and receive prayer and encouragement from those who understand their unique struggles. This ministry addresses a vital need and demonstrates Christ's love.
- Keep a list of trusted Christian counselors for mothers experiencing anxiety, depression or overwhelming life circumstances. Referring mothers to vetted counselors provides immediate compassionate help, guarantees biblically grounded support, reduces stigma, equips pastors with a ready resource and protects the church from offering untrained advice.
- Provide workshops on budgeting, co-parenting and life-management skills. Bring in knowledgeable speakers for church-sponsored seminars.

Inclusion

- Avoid idealizing only "intact two-parent families" from the pulpit. Treat single parents as valued disciples. Include single parents and their children in social gatherings that also involve two-parent families.
- Organize children's ministries with one-parent families in mind. Many are unintentionally structured for two-parent households.
- Offer online or recorded options for Bible studies and church seminars. Evening events often exclude those who cannot attend in person.

When a church steps in with compassion, practical help and genuine spiritual care, it becomes a lifeline for a single parent and their children. When churches do this, single-parent families don't simply survive — they flourish — and the whole church family is strengthened in the process.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Name changed for privacy purposes.

"When a church steps in with compassion, practical help and genuine spiritual care, it becomes a lifeline for a single parent and their children."



Unsplash.com

If you are the parent in the single-parent family

Raising children alone is exhausting, lonely and often unrecognized. But God sees every unseen sacrifice and every late-night worry.

You are faithfully doing the work set before you, and you are doing holy work.

- **Give yourself grace.** Some days will feel overwhelming. Release the pressure to be perfect.

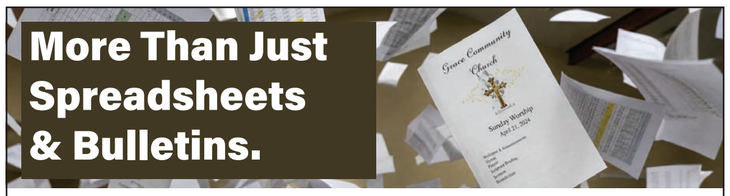
What your children need most is your steady love, your presence and your prayers.

- **Ask for help without guilt.** Asking for help is not a weakness. Let the church minister to you.

If your church offers childcare, support groups, Bible studies, recorded or online classes, or fellowship events, accept them and allow others to help you and your children. The church is a loving and compassionate family. Allow them these ministry opportunities.

- **Take opportunities to rest.** Whenever you can, take a brief walk, spend a few minutes in quiet prayer and listen to Scripture or worship music while you drive. Rest is not a luxury but a necessity for a healthy life. (Denise George)

"Asking for help is not a weakness. Let the church minister to you."



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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 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

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.

Encouragers
1 Thessalonians 5:11

For a complete schedule, to download the convention app or to pre-register, visit alsbom.org/convention or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.

Ministry Wives Luncheon: Nov. 17

Ministry wives serve the Lord in a unique way. As they serve beside their husbands, they experience situations unique to this special call.



DEW

The opportunity to share joys, difficulties and insights with others in similar situations is a blessing.

That's the idea behind the Ministry Wives Luncheon, set for Nov. 17 from 12 to 1:30 p.m. at First Baptist Church, Trussville.

If you're a ministry wife, you're invited to attend.

The speaker will be Tara Dew, a speaker, Bible teacher, author and wife of Jamie Dew, president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

For more information or to register, visit alabamawmu.org/mw.

WORD search

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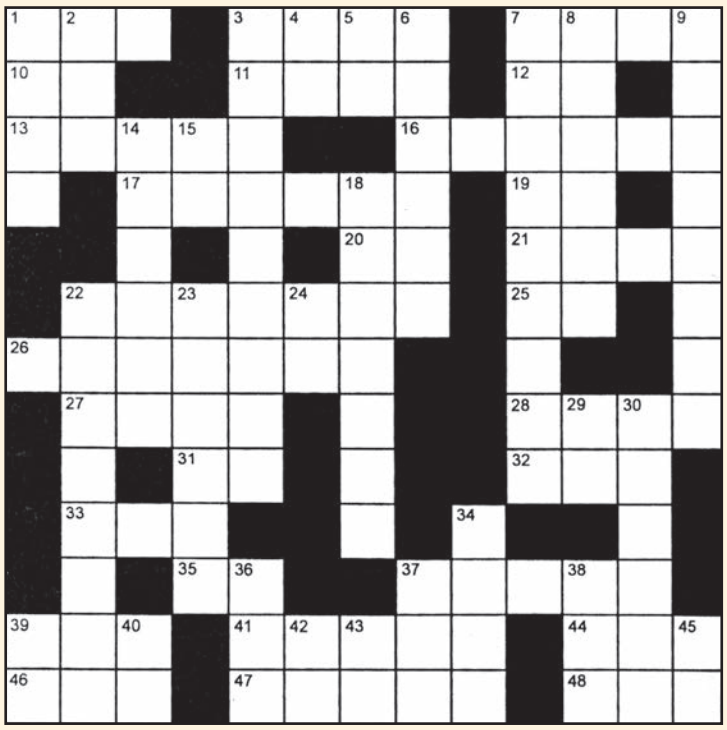
R C D N B R M H A E L T T M D
A X U E T W W Q T R P S K K Y
P E K X V R A M A T J E C M L

"Strength and honor are her clothing; she shall rejoice in time to come."
PROVERBS 31:25

CHRISTIAN crossword



By Susan F. Weimer Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

ACROSS

1. The ___ that covereth the inwards. (Lev. 3:3)
3. Went to sojourn in the country of ___. (Ruth 1:1)
7. Jehu destroyed ___ out of Israel. (2 Kings 10:28)
10. He placed ___ the east of the garden. (Gen. 3:24)
11. ___ also to save them to the uttermost. (Heb. 7:25)
12. Associated Press. (abbr.)
13. Nor height, nor ___, nor any other. (Rom. 8:39)
16. The Lord sent ___ unto David. (2 Sam. 12:1)
17. Unto ___ the prophet the son of Amoz. (Isa. 37:2)
19. Short for "hello."
20. Bureau. (abbr.)
21. Zimri, the son of ___, a prince. (Num. 25:14)
22. He shall send them a ___. (Isa. 19:20)
25. Her Highness. (abbr.)
26. In thee shall all ___ be blessed. (Gal. 3:8)
27. An eagle stirreth up her ___. (Deut. 32:11)
28. Ye shall find the ___. (Luke 2:12)
31. Hi in the mirror.
32. Of fowls also of the ___. (Gen. 7:3)
33. In addition, also.
35. New Jersey. (abbr.)
37. Nehemiah the son of ___. (Neh. 3:16)
39. Not on.
41. Being a wild ___ tree. (Rom. 11:17)
44. Though they be ___ like crimson. (Isa. 1:18)
46. Short for "good-bye."
47. The name of it called ___. (Gen. 11:9)
48. There was no room for them in the ___. (Luke 2:7)

DOWN

1. Shall the rich man ___ away. (James 1:11)
2. Past tense of ingesting food.
3. The three and 20th to ___. (1 Chron. 25:30)
4. Obadiah. (abbr.)
5. Alabama. (ZIP code abbr.)
6. These are their names: ___ in the hill country. (1 Kings 4:8, NIV)
7. David comforted ___ his wife. (2 Sam. 12:24)
8. The son of _____ a Benjamite. (1 Sam. 9:1)
9. Heard them speak in his own ___. (Acts 2:6)
14. ___ then went out unto them. (John 18:29)
15. Tensile strength. (abbr.)
18. Arrogant, ___, disobedient. (2 Tim. 3:2, ESV)
22. ___ them through thy truth. (John 17:17)
23. Seal up the ___ and prophecy. (Dan. 9:24)
24. To be upon.
29. Joshua had taken ___. (Josh. 10:1)
30. Because of unbelief they were ___ off. (Rom. 11:20)
34. ___ had six sons. (1 Chron. 9:44)
36. These three men, Noah, Daniel, and ___ were in it. (Ezek. 14:14)
37. Avenue. (abbr.)
38. I have called by name Bezaleel the son of ___. (Ex. 31:2)
39. Obstetrics. (abbr.)
40. Chemical symbol for iron.
42. The sixth tone of the diatonic scale.
43. Ibidem.
45. Daniel. (abbr.)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

It's LIFE Clinic set for Jan. 24–27

Could your church benefit from an intentional, reproducible process that trains believers to share their faith, make disciples and equip others to do the same?

Come to the It's LIFE Clinic, set for Jan. 24–27, 2027, at FBC Gulf Shores. Participants learn a simple gospel presentation and then put it into practice through teams, prayer, personal witnessing and ongoing multiplication.

Developed by Lawrence Phipps, the It's LIFE process grew out of decades of pastoral ministry in which evangelism and discipleship became part of the culture of the church.

Rather than depending on a few gifted evangelists, It's LIFE helps ordinary church members become confident witnesses.

Those believers are then prepared to train additional teams, allowing evangelism to multiply throughout the congregation.

The process also helps churches follow up with new believers, connect them with small groups and begin life-to-life disciple-making.

For more information or to register, visit alsbom.org/event/its-life-clinic.

Assisting Individuals in Crisis: Nov. 30–Dec. 1

Would you like to be equipped to be a better help to people going through tragedies or disasters? You're invited to Assisting Individuals in Crisis, a two-day course that will train you using a recognized crisis intervention model.

This course is beneficial for chaplains, public safety, peer support and anyone else who works in a setting that might involve crisis intervention.

It will be held Nov. 30–Dec. 1 at the State Board of Missions in Prattville.

To register, visit alsbom.org/event/assisting-individuals-in-crisis.

Library conference: Nov. 7

Does your church currently have a library? Are you looking to start one? Do you want to rejuvenate an existing program?

If so, you're invited to the North Alabama Library Conference.

The conference will be held at Central Baptist Church in Decatur on Nov. 7, 8:30 a.m.–3 p.m.

The event is free, and lunch is provided. To register, visit alsbom.org/event/north-alabama-library-conference.

Mobile's Spring Hill reactivates historic chapel

By Erin Roach
The Alabama Baptist

Spring Hill Baptist Church in Mobile has found a way forward through a problem many Alabama Baptist churches face: how to not merely repair deteriorating buildings but reactivate them for ministry.

The chapel at Spring Hill is one of five houses of worship in Mobile designed by architect Thomas Cooper Van Antwerp, who followed the examples of Frank Lloyd Wright to establish a new Gulf Coast style in the mid-20th century.

Spring Hill's chapel opened in 1957 and served as the primary worship space for two decades, said Jason Pedersen, Spring Hill's business administrator and minister of adult education.

When a larger sanctuary was built in 1977, the chapel became a place for smaller gatherings such as weddings, funerals and Sunday School classes. Years of water intrusion plagued the space, however, and there was never an easy answer for how to repair it for ongoing use.

The chapel has been closed for about seven years, as long as some younger members can remember.

"Our current generations are missing the significance of it, the spiritual formation that happened there," Pedersen said. "They're missing that, and we don't want that to happen any longer."

A contemporary service has been meeting in the church's dining hall for a decade, and that was never intended to be a permanent worship venue, Pedersen said.



Submitted photo

Needing to act

Years of studying possible solutions led the church to realize they needed to act or risk losing the historic chapel and its tremendous ministry potential.

"Let's just say we would have a big problem if we tore down the building," Pedersen said. "Our older folks absolutely love it. ... It was a place of significant ministry milestones for so many people. ... They cherish it, and they're eager to get it back and put it back to work."

This past May, the church overwhelmingly approved a plan to renovate the chapel and upgrade aging HVAC systems across the campus.

To cover the cost, the church will rely on cash reserves built by years of faithful giving, as well as a capital campaign that was set to launch in October.

About 700 people attend Spring Hill's two services now, including 240 to 280 in the contemporary service with 300 chairs in the dining hall. After the chapel is gutted and rebuilt, it will accommodate about 450 people for that service.

Plans for the new chapel, which is expected to open by next Easter, include chairs that can be moved out to make space for various kinds of activities in a clean, updated environment.

The space is "likely going to be a workhorse on the weekends and during the week for many different ministries," Pedersen said.

"Since its founding in 1949, Spring Hill Baptist Church has faithfully proclaimed the gospel, made disciples and served the Mobile community," Pedersen said. "Throughout our history, one question has guided each generation: How do we make space for the people of God?"

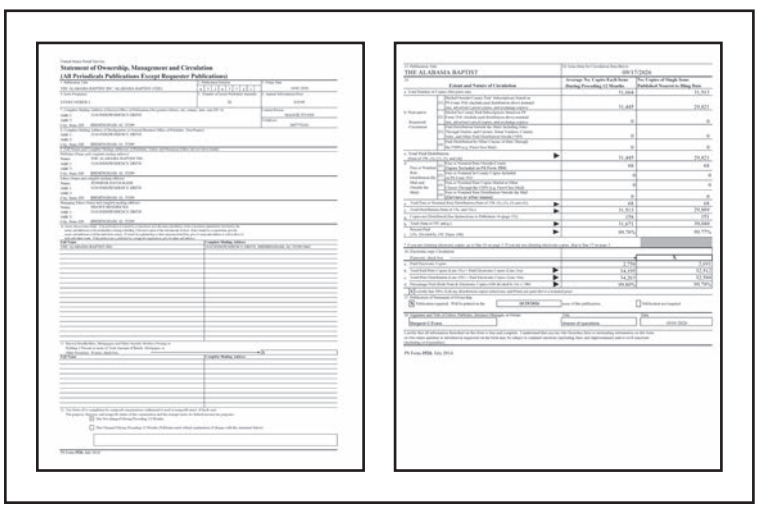
Restoration

The congregation first gathered in a home before members built a simple concrete block chapel with their own hands.

Then came the chapel designed by Van Antwerp, making this project "both a restoration of an important ministry space and the preservation of a meaningful part of Mobile's architectural heritage," Pedersen said.

"Our desire is to restore this historic space so future generations can hear the gospel, worship Christ, grow as disciples and declare God's mighty works."

As other Alabama church leaders grapple with similar building challenges, Pedersen welcomes conversations. Contact him at jpedersen@shbc.cc.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THE ALABAMA BAPTIST
09/17/2026

Momentum still going as Mobile pastor, congregation determine to rely on God

(*continued from page 1*)
a dying church? Absolutely, and with decidedly countercultural methods.

Sunday sermons focused heavily on sin and the reality that Christ's death does not secure salvation for anyone who fails to trust Him as Lord. God used that to save one Anglo couple who had attended Manor for a decade but resisted the attempts of 10 interim pastors to win them to faith in Christ.

"My first Sunday as pastor, I preached on the Lord's Supper," Turner said. The husband "told me he was struck by the statement that Jesus shed His blood for many. He realized he was a nonbeliever and outside of the many people reaping the benefits of Christ's death. Now this couple is heavily involved in the church."

Testimonies like that are piling up. In addition to Sunday services, Turner started a midweek Bible study. First, he taught through Revelation verse by verse. Then he moved to John. Currently, he is working through Acts.

Sunday School included only Turner's family the first six months. It has grown to 25, with classes for men, women and children.

The momentum is still going.

Outreach efforts this summer led three new families to faith in Christ. Two have been baptized. The third is undergoing preliminary discipleship and awaiting baptism. The congregation is approximately 80% Black and 20% white.

"God is just going out ahead of us to do this," Turner said of Manor's revitalization. On Sundays, "I haven't preached a series yet. God just leads weekly to the right Bible passage. It has to be God."

Turner's advice to other dying churches is not to give up and not to minister in their own strength.

"Pastors can carry a lot of weight if they try to do it all themselves," he said. "That was a big problem my first three months. Then a church member told me I was on track to burn myself out. Since then, I have tried to rely on God."

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For more information call 205-870-4720, ext. 200.

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Cypress Shores Baptist Church in Mobile, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a full-time senior pastor. Please email resumé to: cypress9631@comcast.net or mail to: 4327 Higgins Rd., Mobile, AL 36619.

PASTOR
Union Baptist Church, Clayton, Alabama, prayerfully seeks a pastor for a small but dedicated congregation. Please send resumés to: UBC20261@hotmail.com.

PASTOR
Bethlehem Baptist Church in Lacey's Spring is searching for a pastor. If interested please send resumé to either email or mail. Pastorsearch@bbc-ls.org or P.O. Box 27, Lacey's Spring, AL 35754.

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.

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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: northsidebaptistchurchjasper@gmail.com.

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

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PART-TIME MUSIC DIRECTOR
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BIVOCATIONAL WORSHIP/CHOIR LEADER
Silver Run Baptist in Seale is hiring a bivocational worship/choir leader. Resumés accepted via email at George.Bradley531@gmail.com.

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BIVOCATIONAL YOUTH PASTOR
Macedonia Baptist Church, Margaret, Alabama. Mail resumé to: P.O. Box 347, Margaret, AL 35112. Email to: edmostcl@aol.com. Phone: 205-238-1309

PART-TIME 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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~ Why research matters for your church ~

How quickly is your congregation growing older?

Research Insight Three: Why is it important to track the average age of members of your congregation and how many years they have been members?

Five years ago, Cornerstone congregation — a common type of congregation I encounter in my ministry — surveyed active attendees to identify their characteristics. No names were requested, and only the answers to the questions were collected.

They used a short survey on a four-by-six card that asked 10 questions of each family or household present. Only one person per family or household completed the survey.

Some congregations also do this online, so it tallies automatically.

Demographic data results

Two questions asked for each person's birth year and how long they had attended the congregation.

When they did this survey, they were urged to repeat it annually to track changes, but they didn't survey again for five years.

What did they discover? Attendance had not grown much. Few people joined, and few left.

The second survey results were discouraging. Over the past five years, the average age of Sunday attendees increased by four years, from 48 to 52. The average tenure of attendees at the congregation had also increased by four years, from 14 to 18.

The change in the average age of attendees confirmed that few adult-led families and households under 45 had actively connected with the congregation since the last survey. The Sunday Bible study group for people under 45 had struggled to reach and retain new members for several years.

Community population demographics showed that young-to-middle-aged households were increasing, but they were not connecting with Cornerstone. Was it the Bible study, the worship or the programs for children and youth?

At first, there was finger-pointing, but cooler heads prevailed, and leaders acknowledged that everyone's complacency allowed this focus on young-to-middle-aged families and households to go without sufficient attention.

It was clear the active congregation was beginning to be dominated by empty nesters, senior adults and mostly people who had been attending for 20 years or more.

The age and tenure trends for Cornerstone are not at a crisis point. In fact, they are typical of a congregation that was launched 35 or more years ago. This is not a crisis but rather an opportunity to act proactively.

First, assuming their community is experiencing an increase in families with children under 18, the church can begin having strategic conversations with families in this demographic within the congregation. This might determine what steps are needed to improve the quality and effectiveness of programs for these families and households.

Second, while working with these same families, leaders can explore opportunities to connect with these families in the community to nurture a spiritual relationship. They can also discover if these families are looking for a congregation and what type.

Third, they can work with longer-tenured members to develop a system for coaching newer members into leadership roles in the congregation. This implies that some longer-tenured members may need to step aside or move on to another spiritual leadership interest to make room for newer, younger members to ascend into leadership.

Coming up next

Research Insight Four: How many leaders does your congregation need to be a vital and vibrant disciple-making congregation? What do the numbers three, seven and 21 have to do with it?

EDITOR'S NOTE — Have a question for George to research and write on? Submit it to ForthTellingInnovation@tabmedia.group.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Sunday School Lessons

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



For November 8

SACRIFICE
Romans 12:1–13

Living sacrifice (1–2)

At this point in the Book of Romans, Paul shifts from writing about what the gospel is and what it means for us to how the gospel impacts our daily living. He begins by emphasizing that our bodies belong to God, and we are to offer them as living sacrifices.

Sacrifice was a common element of worship in Paul's day for all religions, but for Christians, Christ is the final sacrifice. This is why Christians did not participate in the Jewish temple sacrifices.

Instead, Paul tells his readers to give up themselves as the sacrifice. This means that every aspect of our physical lives should be carried out for God's glory. Work, sleep, worship at church and all other things should be done for the Lord.

Not only are our bodies for the Lord, but Paul tells us to renew our minds as well. Christianity is a religion that values the use of the mind to glorify God.

The entire person is to operate in a way that brings honor to God. Reading the Bible, meditating on Scripture and praying are ways we can renew our minds. Memorizing Scripture is a good way for the Bible to be at the ready when we are faced with temptations and opposing worldviews.

The idea that what I do for God in regular life actually matters has consequences. Christianity transformed the world because believers lived and worked for God's glory. Christians go the extra mile to care for others and are inspired to make products that help others. When we serve God with all our being, it is a form of loving our neighbors.

In the Church (3–8)

Not only does our work help society in general, but we are also to perform our work for fellow believers.

One of the marks of the early Church was the way they demonstrated love for each other. To do this, the Holy Spirit has given each believer gifts to help in supporting the body.

Paul lists some of these gifts in chapter 12. These gifts are to be used to serve and encourage the Church and are not to be neglected.

This is why church attendance is so important for believers. It is where we are encouraged and where we can serve one another.

The Church is put under stress when only a few people are willing to use their gifts.

We all should be striving to serve one another and be involved in church ministries so that the body of Christ can flourish.

In relationships (9–13)

Finally, Paul emphasizes that Christians are to honor and share with each other. Churches should be known by their generosity toward their own members in need.

This not only is a way of helping each other, but it is also a witness to the community that this is what Christianity is about — loving one another.

We also love our fellow believers by hating what is evil. Fellowship with believers helps us to be aware of sin in our lives. It also helps us be able to judge many worldly ideologies. Christians are sometimes fooled by claims that such beliefs are actually loving and should be supported by the Church.

Other Christians help point us to Scripture to judge the worldviews we encounter every day. Focusing on discipleship and teaching within the Church is one way to prepare us and build each other up.

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

For November 15

REPRESENT
Romans 13:1–14

Honor authorities (1–7)

Continuing in his theme of how Christians are to live, Paul addresses the role of Christians and the state. Christians have always understood that we live in the world while not being of the world, and this frequently causes tension between governing officials and Christians.

Paul tells his audience that we are to live in society and obey the laws of governing officials. However, this obedience does not carry over into the areas of worship and practice.

In early Church history, there were several times when all citizens — including Christians — were required to offer sacrifices to the Roman gods. This was seen by the Church as idolatry, and the believers refused to participate.

This follows the example of the apostles in Acts when they refused to obey the state rather than God. (See Acts 4:19–20 and 5:29.)

There are countries today such as Afghanistan, North Korea and China where Christians are forced to decide if they will obey the state's mandate and forsake Christ or face consequences of prison or death. But even in places where Christianity has had a major impact like in Europe or the U.S., there are laws that have been put in place to prevent Christian expression.

A woman in England was arrested for praying silently outside of an abortion clinic, a pastor in Canada was imprisoned for preaching to a congregation during COVID-19, and California has just passed an anti-hate speech law that could prevent churches from speaking the truth of the Bible.

Christians need to decide before persecution occurs how we will act if and when what we are told by the government to do violates the teaching of Scripture. The example of Daniel, the apostles and Church history show us that it is better to obey God rather than man, even if it means persecution, imprisonment and death.

Honor each other (8–10)

Paul goes on to tell Christians how we are to live in society. We are to love our neighbors. Many Christians believe love means supporting their neighbors' choices no matter what. However, Jesus never affirmed what other people did unless it was supported by the Bible.

People often bring up the woman caught in adultery in John 8 as an example of Jesus loving a sinner. This is true. However, Jesus tells the woman to go and sin no more.

He does not affirm her bad behavior but encourages her to give up the lifestyle of sin. Likewise, loving our neighbors means telling them the truth.

So while we love our neighbors, helping them to see the truth of a destructive lifestyle is actually a true form of love because it helps them see the truth of the gospel and the beauty of God's plan for flourishing.

Honor Christ (11–14)

Believers are to behave in a way in which we call out sin in love and truth. As Paul repeats throughout his writings, being saved does not provide a license to sin. Unfortunately, there are many examples in history of so-called Christians living in open sin, which exhibits hypocrisy and mars the Church.

Non-Christians may point to such figures and suggest that Christians do not live what they say they believe. If we are persecuted for righteousness' sake, then that is worthwhile. Along with sharing the gospel, our lifestyle serves as an example that our beliefs have transformed us, which often stands in stark contrast with the world.

"Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law."

Romans 13:8

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sunday School Lessons

By Scott Guffin
Associate Professor and Executive Director of Christian Ministry, Samford University



For November 8

THE REASON FOR FORGIVENESS
Isaiah 43:1–7, 21–25

The book of Isaiah may be clearly divided into two distinct sections. The first, chapters 1–39, deals mainly with the warnings of God to His people, calling them to repentance and obedience to His ways. These warnings are peppered with references to a future Messianic king. Many are familiar to us from their being read in conjunction with the Christmas story.

The second part of Isaiah, chapters 43–66, addresses the people of Judah at the end of their time of exile, roughly 200 years later. Sections of this latter part refer to a coming Messianic suffering servant, thus rounding out the prophecies Jesus would fulfill as both the one at whose name "every knee should bow" (Phil. 2:10) and the one who came "not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

Amid these prophecies, we find other expressions of the foundations of the gospel, particularly in passages that highlight the character of God and His heart toward His people. Isaiah 43 is a strong example of such a passage that relates to us the loving and forgiving nature of God.

God redeems and forgives us because He loves us (1–5a).

Isaiah 43 begins with God's expressions of His love for His people, as He tells them, "you are precious in my sight and honored, and I love you."

Because of His great love for them, God says that He has redeemed His people and called them by name. Consider those who call us by our own personal name and the closeness that such an intimate address implies.

God declares how His passion for His people is demonstrated through His providential protection. This redeeming, protecting love of God is the source from which His forgiveness pours forth to those who belong to Him. The assurance that His love brings negates our fears, as does His presence in our lives.

God created us for His glory and desires to bring us back to Himself (5b–7).

As God calls forth His people, He ultimately does so for His glory. While some might see this as self-aggrandizing, God's desire to be glorified makes complete sense in light of who He is. Who else's honor would He seek? Who else would He call us to praise?

To seek the glory and honor of anyone else would be to place a spotlight on one who cannot redeem us, forgive our sins and save us. Such a thing would point us toward certain doom and would be antithetical to God's very nature.

On the contrary, God calls us back to Himself, to His glory, a work He has been engaged in since the fall of humanity in Genesis 3. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5 that in Christ, God is ever engaged in the work of reconciling people to Himself, calling them back into relationship with Him.

God does not want us burdened with sin (21–25).

As God calls His people to Himself, He laments that the people of Judah have not called on Him. He reminds them (and us) that He is the One who sweeps away their transgressions and remembers their sins no more.

Imagine hearing from God Himself how much He loves you, how He desires to claim you as His own, to redeem you, and to unburden you from your sin and its eternal consequences.

May we never tire of hearing of and receiving the grace of God! May we never grow weary of expressing it to others! May we instead respond with urgency to the One who calls us by name and who stands ready to forgive and redeem and encourage others to do the same.

For November 15

THE PATH TO FORGIVENESS
Ephesians 2:1–10

Imagine a scenario in which you are in imminent danger of death, unable to do anything. Suddenly a rescuer swoops in to save your life, delivering you from a certain demise. In Christ, this is exactly what God has done for us, meeting us when we are at our worst, in dire straits and unable to do anything to better our state. Through the sacrificial death of Christ, who on the cross took upon Himself the punishment that was meant for each of us, God offers us rescue of an eternal kind, a deliverance from sure punishment and death.

We are dead in our sins apart from Christ (1–3).

After reminding his readers of all the good things they have in Christ — redemption, forgiveness of sins, adoption as sons, an eternal inheritance, every spiritual blessing, all sealed with the Holy Spirit — Paul reminds them who they were before Christ. He reminds them how God has lifted them from their previous circumstances to become those "who have been brought near by the blood of Christ."

In describing their former state, Paul reminds his readers that while they are physically alive, they were spiritually "dead" in their trespasses and sins and separated from God (see Isa. 59:2).

Outside of Christ, this is the natural state of human beings, and it is a dire one, because its eventual destiny is to be subject to the wrath of God.

We are made alive through Christ (4–7).

In contrast to the terrible news in the previous section of the passage, verse 4 begins with two beautiful, powerful words: "But God." While we find ourselves in a dreadful position — separated relationally from God, dead in our sins, and without any ability to better our circumstances — God steps in and offers us salvation in Jesus Christ.

He does this because He "is rich in mercy" and because of His "great love" for us. Paul notes that God doesn't wait for us to better our situation before He deals with us, but rather, finding us dead in our trespasses, He acts to make us "alive with Christ."

Paul speaks in a similar fashion in Romans 5, declaring that while we were "helpless ... ungodly ... sinners," and even God's "enemies," God showed His love for us by sending Christ to die for us.

In summarizing God's redemptive activity on our behalf, Paul exclaims, "You are saved by grace!" In addition to rescuing us from death, God has also blessed us by "raising us up" and "seating us" with Christ, that His grace and kindness toward us might be on display.

We are saved by Christ for a purpose (8–10).

In verses 8–9, Paul lays down a formulaic theological statement regarding the process of salvation by grace alone through faith alone that will become a cornerstone of Protestant doctrine. Paul reiterates here that our salvation is a matter of God's grace toward us, to be received "through faith."

To clarify further, Paul notes that our salvation is in no way a function or result of our actions. Rather, it is strictly a gift of God, to the degree that we can claim nothing for or from ourselves. Even our ability to respond in faith is a gift from God!

However, God does not save us simply to grant us our eternal "fire insurance." No, God saves us — and subsequently shapes us — into the image of Christ in order that we might fulfill His original purpose for us — to do His good works.

While we are not saved in any way by good works, we are certainly saved for good works. God has designed us to do the things that Jesus came to do — to serve others in humility and ultimately to "seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). We are people saved by God, and we have work to do.

It is only in comprehending the desperateness of our former circumstances that we can understand the depth and breadth of the love, grace and mercy of God and to "be about our Father's business."

Formation of lasting faith

What happens after 'the ABCs' in church? Tips for discipling children well

By Julie Donavan
The Alabama Baptist

The ABCs of salvation offer a simple way to understand Christian faith. But after children understand the ABCs and accept Christ as their Lord and Savior, are they truly discipled in the church?

While the salvation of anyone, especially a child, is a blessing, more needs to be done, according to Shelly Melia, program director for the master of arts in children's ministry and master of arts in family ministry at Dallas Baptist University.

"The world will disciple our kids if we don't," Melia said in a presentation earlier this year to members of the Oklahoma Baptists Children's Ministry Association.

The secular world understands the value of gaining a child's attention and devotion, she said.

It's not just about the ABCs, she said, which she explained as:

A: Admit
B: Believe
C: Commit/Confess
D: Decide
E: Every day
F: Follow
G: God

4 essentials

Melia noted four essentials of discipleship.

▸ **Relationships.** "The single most catalytic factor to influence the formation of lasting faith in children is loving, caring, adult relationships," Melia quoted from Matt Markins' book "The Faith of Our Children."

▸ **Bible stories.** Utilize curriculum that focuses on Bible stories rather than topical issues or thematic approaches that overshadow biblical content.

Help children locate stories in the Bible. Give children opportunities and space to respond to the story with curiosity and wonder.

Notice and normalize struggles, suffering and mistakes made by people in Bible stories, avoiding the temptation to emphasize victories and miracles.

▸ **Rituals.** Rituals create a collective memory that can be accessed during times of difficulty and crisis. "Synchronous intergenerational rituals" tie communities of faith together, Melia said.

Rituals can help shape understanding of who God is and what He values. They move children from spectators to full participants in their faith communities.

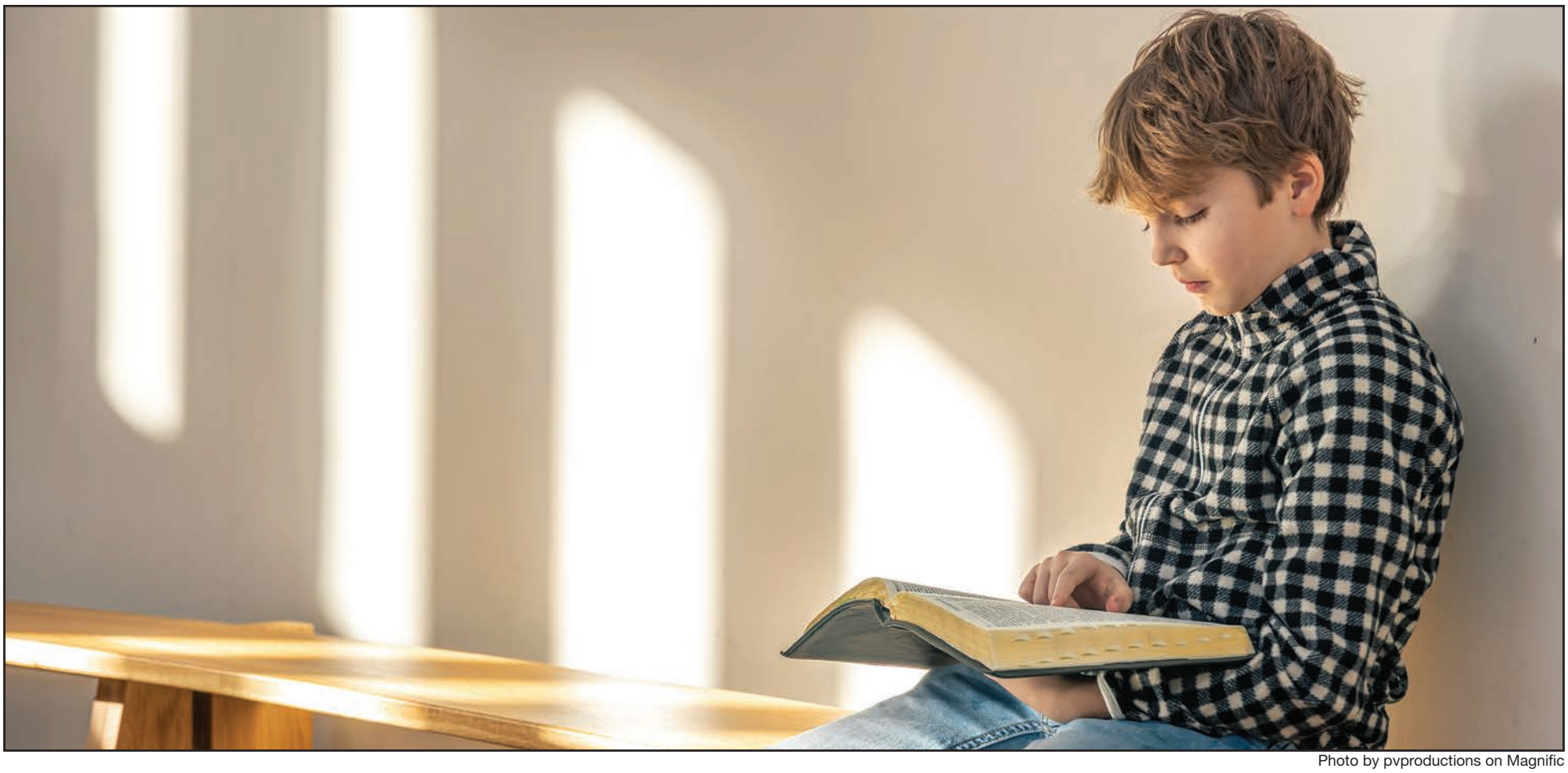
▸ **Doubts.** Doubts are a signal there is a need for dialogue. Doubts are an important part of the development of faith formation, and they can lead to deeper faith, Melia said.

Allow the Spirit to work

"After dialogue about the doubts, recognize and respect the work of the Holy Spirit," Melia encouraged.

"Determining if a childhood experience was real is not your job," she emphasized.

"Our responsibility and privilege is to walk alongside a child/teenager and make sure there is a space and time for them to have their questions explored and answered."



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