# The Alabama Baptist

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November 12, 2026

Vol. 191, No. 23
Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.





Photo courtesy of West End Baptist Church

(L to r) Diane Dawson, Karen Watkins and Benita Hallmark of West End Baptist Church in Clanton make jump ropes by braiding strips of T-shirts.

# Fun for all

## West End Baptist women make jump ropes from T-shirts for Christmas shoeboxes

**By Grace Thornton**
The Alabama Baptist

It started with a little online inspiration and ended up being a big, fun project, according to Karen Watkins.

And now the women of West End Baptist Church in Clanton are sending more than 300 handmade jump ropes to children in other countries this Christmas season.

Watkins, the church's ladies ministry director, and Benita Hallmark, Women of West End's missions director, work together on women's events, and she said Hallmark "had seen something (online) where they were making jump ropes out of T-shirts."

### Creative effort

They then found some how-to videos on YouTube.

"Church members donated hundreds of T-shirts, and Benita cut them into strips," Watkins said.

Then the women met in late August for a rope braiding day, and in about three hours finished 72 jump ropes. They took home materials to keep working on them, and as of now they've finished more than 300 to pack in Operation Christmas Child boxes.

"West End Baptist donated 541 shoeboxes last year and is a central drop-off location in Alabama," Watkins said, adding that boxes are transported from West End Baptist to the Atlanta processing center "to be sent overseas to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ."

She said the jump rope project has been a great addition to their yearly shoebox project.

"It's fun, we enjoy it, and it's a great way to get involved in missions," she said.

## State convention news

Find full coverage from the annual meeting online this week and in print in the next edition.



# ‘Rekindle the Joy’

## Reflections from state Pastors Conference president

**By Grace Thornton**
The Alabama Baptist

Carl Williams said he didn’t expect to find himself in a hospital bed early in his tenure as Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference president.

“I woke up the first Saturday of this year not realizing I was having a heart attack,” he said. “I ended up spending two or three days in Brookwood Hospital. God brought me through that.”

And in light of that, Williams, pastor of First Baptist Church Demopolis, said he has spent this year making sure he’s taking care of himself as he’s led the conference and served his church.

“There have been some challenges with it, but there have been good experiences this year — I wouldn’t trade it,” he said.

It’s also provided him with a chance to reflect and think about how he could encourage other pastors.



CARL WILLIAMS

TAB file photo

### Giving back

“It’s given me an opportunity to give back to our pastors because I look back over my own life and realize just how much my pastors in my life have meant to me,” Williams said.

He said planning a day where they can come and be refreshed and encouraged “means a lot” to him.

That day — Nov. 16, the annual Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference — will focus on the theme “Rekindle the Joy.”

“When I started thinking about what I wanted the conference to be about and thinking about discouragement, the hard seasons that pastors go through ... I know there are so many joys that we get to experience in ministry that I believe far outweigh the sorrows of ministry, but I think we have to be vigilant to keep that joy kindled in our hearts because that joy sustains us,” Williams said.

*For more information about the Pastors Conference, visit albaptistpc.com.*

He said he wanted the conference to be a day that reminded pastors of the reasons they have to be joyful.

“We know guys might have to sacrifice some things to come, but it will be worth it,” he said. “It could be a tremendous opportunity for them to experience the presence of the Lord. We’ve got some great preachers coming, and the worship is going to be great.”

Williams said it’s been a “really fun” day to plan and that FBC Trussville has been a great host church to work with. He said he’s also grateful for other church supporters, event sponsors and the other Pastors Conference officers:

- Chris Jones, president-elect, pastor of Meadow Brook Baptist Church in Birmingham
- Andy Frazier, vice president, pastor of Jasper’s First Baptist Church, who moved into the role after Derek Allen was named executive director-elect of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions
- Richard Richie, secretary-treasurer, pastor of Blue Springs Baptist Church in Somerville

“With the logistics and keeping us all in line, I have a great team and the folks at Trussville ... there’s no way one person could do this,” he said.

### Encouraged

He said it takes a lot of work to pull off, but “the reward will be on Monday the 16th to see those pastors there and know that God is going to speak through those men that are coming and they’re going to hear a Word from the Lord.”

“Hopefully it will be a day that they’ll look back on and say, ‘I’m glad I was there — that was a divine appointment for me,’” Williams said.

***“Hopefully it will be a day that they’ll look back on and say, ‘I’m glad I was there — that was a divine appointment for me.’”***

**Carl Williams**
**president, 2026 Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference**


## The Alabama Baptist

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

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

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**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

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***The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.***

OPINION



# Rashional Thoughts

**By Jennifer Davis Rash, President and Editor-in-Chief**
Email: jrash@thealabamabaptist.org / Social media: @RashionalThts

## Attend or skip the Pastors Conference this year? I say attend and here's why

The title has always intrigued me, at least the last word in the title — Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference. Is it actually a conference?

A quick glance at the agenda might lead a person to think of it as a day-long church service with a slate of guest preachers. In some ways, that would be accurate.

The agenda also mentions several segments of musical worship, again much like a church service.

The annual gathering also showcases a few leaders from the platform, and they share announcements, take up an offering and provide an opportunity to vote — so another similarity to both a church service and a church business meeting.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

I always look for the team from Central Park Baptist Church in Decatur for our annual selfie. This one is from 2023.

However, if a conference is an event offering instructional sessions that help participants learn and grow in a specific area, inspirational speakers intending to motivate and the opportunity to network with other liked-minded folk, then it seems the Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference does indeed meet that criteria as well.

So, yes, it's a conference and, yes, it's a worship service — and it happens to be held in a church sanctuary too.

### This year's conference

This year's Pastors Conference will take place Mon., Nov. 16, at First Baptist Church Trussville ahead of the Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting Nov. 17–18 at the same location.

Conference president Carl Williams (see story, page 2) hopes the experience equates to a "divine appointment," and I'd like to encourage you toward that end as well.

It's not all about the preaching sessions or even the time singing worship songs together, even though those moments provide an opportunity to draw closer to the Lord as well as hear from Him through a fresh encounter.

In fact, many a believer through the years has ended up in one of the Pastors Conference sessions and unexpectedly experienced God in a way that provided the encouragement, hope and/or affirmation for the next steps they needed.

At the same time, the tremendous opportunities to share a cup of coffee with a friend you haven't seen in years or to mingle through the exhibits and meet countless new friends is truly priceless. And don't forget about all the resources you can explore — the vendors would love to show you what they have to offer. Stop by to say hello.




Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

(L to r) Maggie Evans, Susan Stevens and Debbie Campbell keep the coffee and water flowing at the 2025 Pastors Conference.

You will never know what you don't know as well as who all and what all you missed out on if you aren't there.

### Partnership

Our team at TAB Media Group is honored to assist each year's Pastors Conference officers in planning, organizing and executing the annual event. I'd especially like to thank Susan Stevens, Amy Hacker and Maggie Evans for their attention to detail and all the effort they pour into helping the officers' visions become reality. Several other TAB staff members, former staff members and various volunteers also assist in the effort.

As we look toward the Nov. 16 Pastors Conference, we can say without a doubt that Carl and his team of officers as well as the incredible staff at FBC Trussville have worked diligently to bring you a quality experience.

Coffee, water and snacks are our gift to you as you bounce between the sanctuary and the hallways. Lots of the booths you'll visit will have a candy dish or some type of snack available too.

And while lunch will likely need to be on your own that day (unless you are part of one of the specialty groups), you'll enjoy the variety of restaurant options near the church.

So, plan to clear your schedule Monday and come visit us. You never know which one moment will make the entire day worth it.

Plus, I'm hoping to break my record with how many selfies I can take with all of you, so be sure to find me when you get there.

OPINION

# Your Voice



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

## First person: My friend, Dr. Rick Lance

**By Joe McKeever**
Special to The Alabama Baptist

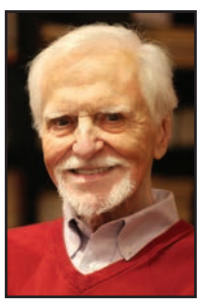
Rick Lance is retiring after 28+ years as executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. I heard about Rick Lance before we met. My wife told me about him.

From wherever we were living and pastoring, Margaret would travel back to Birmingham to visit her folks and would attend Sunday worship with them at the home church, West End Baptist Church.

When she returned, I got a report. That church had been God's arm of ministry to me during my college years. I loved it dearly and wanted it to do well. (These days, in its present incarnation, Mount Calvary Baptist Church meets there. This will always be holy ground for me.)

As a pastor's wife, Margaret saw more than most people, and her reports were always on target.

"They've got a good one," she said. "A young pastor fresh from seminary. His name is Rick Lance."



McKEEVER

A few years later, Rick became pastor of First Baptist Church Cullman. We were vacationing at Smith Lake in north Alabama, and I told her, "I'm driving to Cullman to hear Rick Lance."

It was June, traditionally a down time for churches. But First Baptist was packed out that day. After the service, I said to a deacon, "You folks have been fed spiritually today as well as anyone in the state." The man said, "Pastor Rick is that way every Sunday. And frankly, it scares us to death. We just know some big church is going to come and take him away."

They did.

Tuscaloosa's First Baptist was that big church. After four years in Cullman, Rick spent 15 years in Tuscaloosa. This is where he and I became good friends. I was pastor of FBC Columbus, Mississippi, 60 miles west on the same highway.



LANCE

From time to time, he and I visited. We preached for each other a couple of times, and when churches began sending cassette tapes of sermons, I signed up for his.

Early in 1986, Rick was dealing with the search committee of a big church in North Carolina. He told me later, "All the time I was walking around their facility, I kept seeing you here." When he withdrew his name, he gave them mine. In short order, I began seeing these people from North Carolina in my congregation.

In the summer of 1986, the Lord moved me to that church. Instead of it being the church where I imagined I would put in 20 years before retiring, it turned out to be a nightmare. I resigned after a difficult three years.

We ended up in New Orleans where we lived and ministered for the next 26 years.

More than once, Rick has apologized for recommending me to that church. We laugh about it now. I assure him the Lord was responsible and all is well — God had His purposes.

Rick became the leader of Alabama Baptists in 1998. It was one of the best things to ever happen to Baptist ministry in my home state, and I have rejoiced to see God using my good brother. Several times Rick has had me over to minister, speaking at the annual legislative luncheon in Montgomery in 2002 and another time speaking twice at the state convention. There is no way I could ever repay Rick for such a high honor as this.

### Life's greatest blessing

Alabama Baptists will honor Rick and his wife Pam at the 2026 annual state convention at FBC Trussville in November. He's invited me to add my bit to the occasion by sketching people in the exhibit area. On the walls in the same area, they will exhibit a number of cartoons I've made for this occasion, some honoring and some teasing my beloved friend.

When life is over and you and I look back at all that happened, we will quickly decide that one of God's greatest blessings was the great friends He let us serve alongside. A Canadian pastor friend once said, "A friend is God's apology for your relatives!" It certainly seems so, doesn't it?

"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," **Denise George**, author and TAB contributor.

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"The best ministry is personal and prominent. You don't need a platform. Just live in proximity to people."

**Christine Caine** on Instagram

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"I think (people are) hungry for something that is not cheap, quick truth. ... (They) are hungry for something that's transcendent, that knows no bounds of time ... rather than just [being] trendy — I think the church provides that," said **Trent Roseman**, a church planter with Redeemer City Church in Knoxville.

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"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," said evangelist and professional juggler **Nathan Dorrell**. "That has been part of my life journey with the Lord." Dorrell also serves as the children's minister at Edgemont Baptist Church in Shelbyville, Tennessee.

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OPINION

> "We have one mission, the Great Commission. We have one program, the Cooperative Program. We have many ministries, Great Commission Ministries."
>
> RICK LANCE
> *executive director, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions*

Paul told Timothy to "set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12). That's in the job description for church leadership.

**Chris Crain**, executive director
Birmingham Metro Association

"Pastors can carry a lot of weight if they try to do it all themselves. 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," said **Donald Turner**, pastor of Manor Baptist Church, Mobile.

"We want to share the gospel with people that haven't heard it. We want to step into dark places and places of need. We want to help people ... and to be the hands and feet of Jesus," said **Michael Herrera**, student and young adults pastor at Maple Avenue Baptist in Geneva. "One thing that's kind of been on my mind is just the importance of our students. They're not just saying that they're Christians. They give feet to their faith, and they want to help and be a light in a dark world." The Student Ministry Serve Team at the church has started a ministry of availability. Whether it's serving food at church events or passing out umbrellas in the parking lot during rainy weather, these students are eager and ready to serve their church family.

No country can survive a famine from the Word of God.

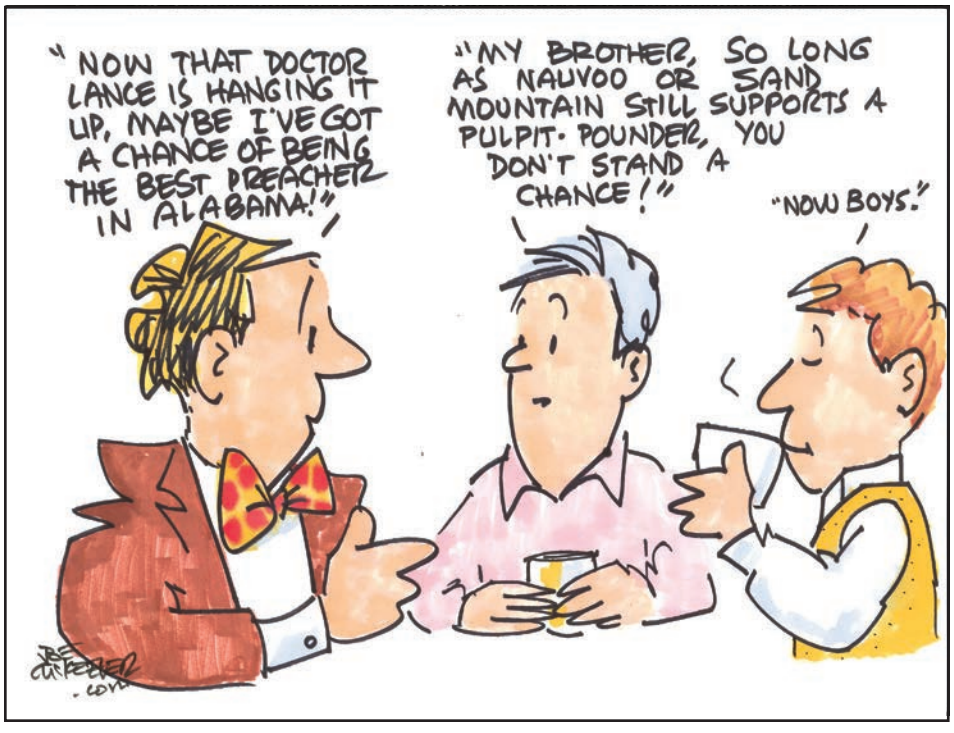
**Jeff Redmond**, pastor
Parkway Baptist Church, Auburn

"If there really is spiritual awakening and (we pray) genuine revival happening among Gen Z young adults, are we ready to receive them into our churches? Disciple them? They do not look, talk, think, or act like elder Millennials, Gen X, or Boomers."

**Matt Emerson**
@M_Y_Emerson on X

Anytime you help where you can, you are doing things that have eternal value.

**Hector Miray**
Faith & Fandom: Finding God in the Geek Culture




# Lass WORDS



**BY KEN LASS**
The Alabama Baptist

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

## The big God who 'controls the waters of your life'

I recently spent a few days sitting on the beautiful shoreline of Orange Beach, Alabama. It was a calm day on the Gulf Coast, perfect for relaxing under your umbrella or wading into the rolling waves.

I was sitting in my beach chair gazing out at the horizon when moving objects caught my attention in the distance: a school of dolphins doing their trademark leaps, arcing above the surface. They looked so cute and playful from that distance as they glided across the horizon.

About half an hour later I was getting pretty warm, so I decided to stroll into the shallows to cool off.

### Unexpected perspective

A woman about 15 feet away suddenly screamed. I turned just in time to see a dolphin bounding in and out of the water very close to both of us, not more than a few yards away. From that near view, I was stunned at the size and muscular physique of the creature. So much larger than I realized.

No longer cute and playful, it looked powerful and intimidating, a completely different impression from the distant view of the beach. It looked like it could easily knock me down and do whatever it wanted with me. Fortunately, the dolphin showed little interest and continued on its way.

A bit shaken, I made my way back to the beach chair. As I thanked God for protecting me, it occurred to me that my experience kind of resembled one's relationship with the Lord.

### Part of His plan

From a distance God looks smaller, and convenient and manageable. But as you get closer to Him, you begin to realize His dominating presence, His power, His love and His control.

God is not your playful buddy — He is the almighty and perfect architect of the universe, and you are part of His plan. He loves you unselfishly but also commands your respect for His authority.

Watching dolphins from a distance is fascinating and fun. Watching God from a distance is misleading and futile. Make sure you get close enough to know the big God because He controls the waters of your life.

### 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

### WILEY DONNELL "DONNIE" DUNN

Wiley Donnell "Donnie" Dunn, 20-year pastor of Banks Baptist Church near Troy and current pastor of Bethel Baptist Church, also located in Banks, died Oct. 24. He was 78.


DUNN

Dunn served in the U.S. Army and Army National Guard for more than 30 years, earning two Purple Hearts and a Bronze Star. When he retired, he worked as a mail carrier for 12 years for the U.S. Postal Service. He also was director of the Bible Reading Marathon held annually in Troy.

Dunn is survived by his wife of 54 years, Brenda; three children: Heather, Erica and Brady; and five grandchildren.


REESE

### BIGBEE ASSOCIATION

▸ **Harber Reese** is the new pastor of **Cuba Baptist Church**. He spent two years as an intern with First Baptist Church Newton, Mississippi, and has served as a supply pastor for other churches. He and his wife, Evie, have one child.

### BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

▸ **Tony Barber** recently marked his 20th anniversary as pastor of **Church on the Bluff, Hoover**. The church celebrated Barber on Sept. 13 in the morning worship service followed by an anniversary program, fellowship lunch and reception honoring Barber and his wife, Angie. During the anniversary program, he was honored with a special presentation from Birmingham Metro Baptist Association and official letters of recognition from Hoover Mayor Nick Derzis and Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey.



Submitted photo

▸ **First Baptist Church Birmingham** will host the Alabama Singing Men in concert Nov. 15, 6 p.m. Jim Cooley is pastor.

### BLOUNT ASSOCIATION

▸ **Pleasant View Missionary Baptist Church, Holly Pond**, will host a singing Nov. 15, 5 p.m., featuring The Williamsons from Oklahoma. For more information, call 256-339-1863 or 256-590-1501. Earl Harper is pastor.

### CALHOUN ASSOCIATION

▸ **Mack Amis**, senior pastor of **Parker Memorial Baptist Church, Anniston**, for more than 19 years, retired Sept. 13. A reception honoring him and his wife, Lynn, was held following his final sermon/retirement service. This year also marked his 50th year in ministry. He is available for pulpit supply, interim work, revivals, Bible conferences and consulting work in the areas of administration, stewardship and capital campaigns. Contact him at 256-454-3049 or mackamis@outlook.com.


AMIS

▸ **Tim Smith** is the new director of missions for **Calhoun Baptist Association**. He previously served as senior pastor of First Baptist Church Reeltown, Notasulga. A retired U.S. Air Force major, Smith earned two associate degrees from the Community College of the Air Force, a bachelor's degree from Wayland Baptist University, Plainview, Texas, and master's and doctor of ministry degrees from Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia. Smith is founder of Grace Pastoral Counseling services and is a board-certified pastoral counselor through the American Association of Christian Counselors and the International Board of Christian Care, certified SYMBIS facilitator (marriage and pre-marriage counseling). He and his wife, Dawn, have one son and one granddaughter.

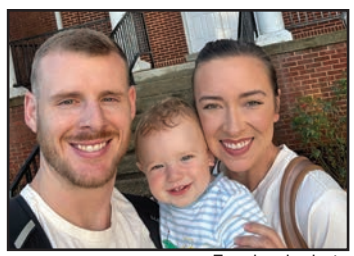

SMITH

### CHILTON ASSOCIATION

▸ **Bell Lane Baptist Church, Clanton**, will host Karen Peck and New River in concert Nov. 15, 6 p.m. Free admission. Everyone is welcome. For more information, call 205-755-1188. Chris Ferguson is pastor.

### LIMESTONE ASSOCIATION

▸ **David Anderson** is the new student and discipleship pastor of **Sardis Springs Baptist Church, Athens**, where he has been serving as interim student pastor. He and his wife, Morgan, have one child. Jeff Oates is pastor.


Facebook photo

### MUSCLE SHOALS ASSOCIATION

▸ **Mark Milwee** is the new associational missions strategist of **Muscle Shoals Baptist Association**. He previously served as pastor of Mount View Baptist Church, Trinity. Throughout his ministry he has been involved in missions at home and overseas. He is a graduate of the University of North Alabama, Florence, and Golden Gate Seminary (now Gateway). He and his wife, Amanda, have three children.


MILWEE

### PICKENS ASSOCIATION


Submitted photo

▸ **Jeremy McCrory** is the new pastor of **Gordo First Baptist Church**. He and his wife, Laura, have two children.

### RANDOLPH ASSOCIATION

▸ **Bryan Wortham** was ordained into the gospel ministry Aug. 30 at **First Baptist Church Wedowee**, and was called as the full-time next generation pastor. He had been serving as interim. Wortham and his wife, Charla, have two sons and two daughters. Keith Taylor is pastor.


Submitted photo

### SALEM-TROY ASSOCIATION

▸ **Linda Adams** has retired as ministry assistant/office administrator for **Salem-Troy Association**, where she served for more than 42 years. Throughout her career, Adams worked with six associational missionaries and several interims. She was honored at a retirement reception Aug. 30 hosted by the association. Averyt Walker is director of missions.



Submitted photo

### STATE BOARD

▸ Alabama Baptist state missionary **Jay Stewart** became GuideStone Financial Resources' state church engagement manager for Alabama on Nov. 1. Stewart, who has led the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions' Cooperative Program and church financial resources office since 2022, will remain in the Prattville/Montgomery area. He will be introduced in his new role during the Nov. 17–18 Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting. The position is part of GuideStone's pilot initiative.


STEWART

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

# REVIVAL

## Churches host gatherings for Deaf

Three Alabama churches hosted revival gatherings for the Deaf in October as part of Celebration 250 Alabama, a statewide prayer and worship initiative of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Across three cities — Montgomery, Madison and Birmingham — the gatherings brought opportunities to share God's Word through American Sign Language and to strengthen fellowship within Alabama's Deaf community. The gatherings included sermons and worship in ASL and time for meals and group discussions.

During the four-day revival at The Grove Church in Madison, three people accepted Christ and nine people rededicated their lives. (John Briggs)




Photo courtesy of Steve Dye

**Above:** The Grove Church in Madison hosted four days of Deaf revival events Oct. 1–4. **Below:** Participants at the Oct. 3 Deaf revival at Meadow Brook Baptist Church in Birmingham enjoyed biblical teaching, lunch and fellowship.



Photo courtesy of John Briggs



Photo courtesy of Kristy Kennedy

Cassell Grice, lead pastor of Family Deaf Church in San Antonio, Texas, brought the message and Mia Teague of Eden Westside Baptist Church in Pell City led worship at the Oct. 1 gathering at Heritage Baptist Church in Montgomery.

# West Cullman church's sanctuary destroyed by fire; man accepts Christ during cleanup

**By Grace Thornton**
The Alabama Baptist

Pastor Wayne Wisner said he can already see God at work in the ashes of the fire at St. John Missionary Baptist Church in West Cullman Baptist Association that happened in the early morning hours of Oct. 5.

For starters, on Oct. 8 one of the men working to clean up the debris at the burned down sanctuary made a decision to follow Christ.

"He accepted Jesus yesterday, so we're setting up some time for him to get baptized and into the church," Wisner said. "God is working; we're a small church, but things are coming together really good."

### Cause of the fire

The fire destroyed the church's sanctuary but left its other facilities intact with minimal smoke damage.

Wisner said his understanding is the fire began when a woman tried to commit suicide by setting her truck on fire under the church's awning.

She survived the incident — Wisner said he believes from what he has heard and from their church's security camera that she got out of the truck at some point after the fire started. Multiple fire departments responded to the fire. The state fire marshal completed an investigation and released the site, Wisner said.



Photo by Justin Olvey

The sanctuary of St. John Missionary Baptist Church was destroyed by a fire in the early morning hours of Oct. 5.

The church plans to continue to meet in the fellowship hall while they clean up and prepare to rebuild.

He noted their insurance isn't enough to pay for a full rebuild, so the church will continue to pray about what to do next.

"We've had people call and offer us space, offer to build us pews for when we rebuild — the list goes on and on," he said. "Lord knows what might happen, but I believe the church is strong enough to overcome — we will with the blood of Jesus."

# Christmas in Alabama

## An invitation to worship

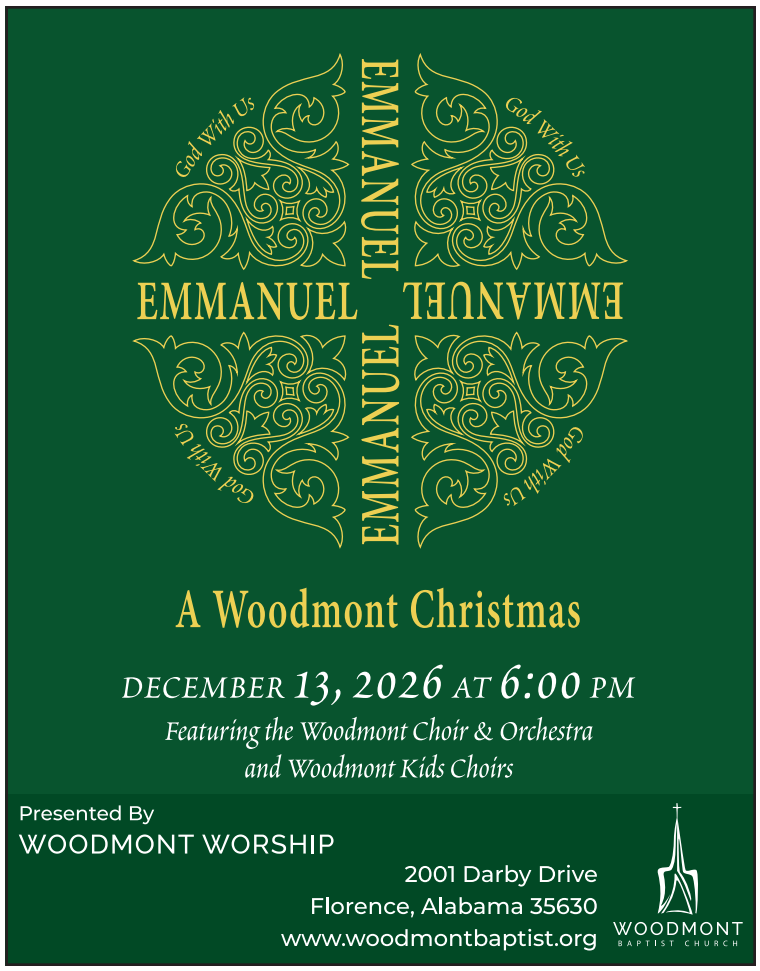
The first Christmas invitation came unexpectedly and majestically.

It was given by an angel of the Lord to shepherds keeping watch over their flock. The shepherds responded by going straight to Bethlehem to see the baby the angel spoke of (Luke 2).

In the next few weeks, churches large and small will host music and drama productions, candlelight services and special programs in celebration of the birth of Jesus, the promised Messiah.

Many still do not know Him. Perhaps this season, it's your turn to issue an invitation to someone who needs to hear the good news — "Unto us a Child is born!" (Isa. 9:6). (TAB)











Facebook photo

## Medical pros gather to focus on Christ, missions

Baptist Nursing Fellowship members from 13 states gathered Oct. 16–18 at Merrimack Church in Huntsville for the organization's 2026 annual summit, themed "Love Ye One Another."

"BNF has been such a gift to me, not just because of the friendships, but because it continually reminds me that nursing is more than a profession," Hannah Terrebonne said on Facebook. "It's an opportunity to serve, encourage, love and share the gospel with people right where God placed us."

### Worship, training

The host congregation welcomed attendees and supported the weekend's worship, Bible study, missionary conversations, professional presentations and fellowship.

Alabama recorded the largest delegation, and North Carolina received recognition for the highest percentage of increased membership for the year.

Saturday afternoon sessions addressed intergenerational understanding, artificial intelligence, wellness and health initiatives.

Special moments were a memorial service by the nurse honor guard and the pinning of five new Nightingales, a designation given to those who have served in BNF for at least 15 years and are 80 years or older.

The summit concluded Sunday with a free community health fair. (TAB)

# 'Special forces'

## Faith Church offers pop-up market, Saturday shop for clients

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



Photo by Dianna L. Cagle/The Alabama Baptist

The Leaf Pantry at Faith Church in Midfield holds His Table Pop-up Market each Wednesday from 1 to 3 p.m. People are able to get needed fresh fruits and produce, as well as baked goods and a variety of foods for their pantries.

For five years, Veronica and Eric Smoke have served individuals, families and veterans in the Birmingham area through the Leaf Pantry and Urban Farm at Faith Church in Midfield.

"This is ground zero for food insecurity," said Eric Smoke.

The ministry seeks to help meet needs by providing fresh, healthy food and pointing their neighbors to Christ. All the work is done by volunteers, Smoke said.

"We're selective about how we go about [recruiting] volunteers. We're intentional about how things are put out. The big picture is about a change in quality of life," he said.

The Smokes run a transportation business which aids in distribution of food for the ministry at the church. Smoke said they emphasize reclaiming dignity and the Golden Rule.

Eight appointments are offered every 15 minutes starting at 8 a.m. on the third Saturday of each month.



Facebook screenshot

**VERONICA & ERIC SMOKE**

Once clients are called back for their appointment, they are given a list of what meats are available and make choices from that list. They are then led through a "store" where they can shop for items such as breakfast cereal, soups, vegetables and fruits, hygiene and toiletry items, and other household items, including food and toys for pets.

There is also a clothing area, as well as a table highlighting resources in the area for a variety of needs.

### Pop-up market

The pantry also offers His Table Pop-up Market each Wednesday from 1 to 3 p.m.

Tables and tents are set up outside the church, and clients are able to choose from many breads and pastries, along with fresh fruits and vegetables.

The offerings vary depending on availability. Throughout the market, trucks are delivering goods to be distributed at the weekly and monthly events.

A farm stand was built on the property recently to offer more opportunities to serve the community. A young man pursuing Eagle Scout status through Scouting America completed the project. The church now uses two buildings and the farm stand. They also have an urban farm with help from the Jones Valley Teaching Farm in Birmingham.

Faith Church has another building they are planning to convert so at least the first floor can be used for the pantry. The campus has expanded, adding another church building and parsonage from a church that closed. Plans are for those facilities to be used for various outreaches, including a computer/technology center and a coffee station that could offer some daytime relief from the elements.

"A pop-up for us is Scripture in real time," Eric said. "We try to be fully sustainable."

Neither Eric nor Veronica is retired. They both work full time. She is a nurse at UAB, and he runs Way to Go Courier. They work the food ministry around their schedules because the ministry matters to them.

The Smokes are invigorated by the work of the pantry/urban farm.

"This is the special forces," he said of the ministry and the volunteers.

He noted the pantry's specific outreach to veterans as being especially meaningful. Smoke said one of the veterans exclaimed, "You guys care about us," because the ministry met specific needs.

### Wish list

Two items on the ministry's wish list are a compact tractor with a bush hog and loader bucket to help with maintaining the grounds and the garden and a golf cart to help move people and supplies around the campus.

For more information, visit TheLeafPantry.org.

# Encouragers

## 2026

1 Thessalonians 5:11

## FAMILY REUNION of ALABAMA BAPTISTS

**November 17-18 • First Baptist Trussville**


RICK AND PAM LANCE

### 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:


CHARLES BILLINGSLEY Tuesday Evening

**President's Address**
**Jarman Leatherwood, Tuesday morning**

**Convention Sermon**
**Steven Fraser, Wednesday morning**

SCAN FOR CONVENTION INFO

**Theme Interpretations**
**Tim Cox, Tuesday morning**
**Stanley Williams, Tuesday afternoon**
**Justin Hall, Wednesday morning**

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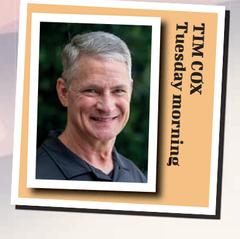
JARMAN LEATHERWOOD Tuesday morning

***Visit alsbom.org/convention for more details. Download the convention app at my.yapp.us/ABSC.***


STEVEN FRASER Wednesday morning


TIM COX Tuesday morning


STANLEY WILLIAMS Tuesday afternoon


JUSTIN HALL Wednesday morning


JOE MCKEEVER Cartoonist-Exhibit Hall

Cartoonist **Joe McKeever** will be in the exhibit hall to draw sketches of those who stop by.





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# *Rick and Pam Lance*

IN HONOR OF DR. LANCE'S 28+YEARS OF SERVICE AS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE ALABAMA BAPTIST STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS AND HIS UPCOMING RETIREMENT.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 17
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH TRUSSVILLE

4:30-6 P.M.
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HIGH SCHOOL AREA, 2ND FLOOR, BUILDING A

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

6:30-8 P.M.
SERVICE OF CELEBRATION AND APPRECIATION FOR DR. LANCE
MAIN SANCTUARY

*with special musical guest Charles Billingsley*

# Edmonds retires, looks back on discipling movement

**By Grace Thornton**
The Alabama Baptist

Daniel Edmonds said he remembers with clarity one of the last conversations he had with a cousin who died of cancer 30 years ago. In the years leading up to his passing, Edmonds' cousin had used his Sunday School class as a place to bring people in and make disciples.

"I told him ... what he did with his turning his Sunday School class into an outreach was really a model," Edmonds said. "He talked to me about it and said, 'I may be doing everything wrong,' and I told him, 'You may be the only person I know who's doing it right.'"



Photo by Doug Rogers/SBOM

Daniel Edmonds poses for a photo with his granddaughter, Maya Edmonds, at his retirement luncheon.

About a month later, in June 1996, Edmonds was named the new associate in the office of Sunday School at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, and he carried that model with him. Five years later, he became the office director.

And as the years went on, his office's methodology changed as he worked to hone the model that most closely mimicked what Jesus did in Scripture. It started with training church leaders through conferences, then moved to video, digital and one-on-one consultations.

## Disciple-making

And in 2010, the office's name changed to include discipleship too.

"I began to work and pray about how do you make a disciple-making movement as a state missionary? The more I prayed about it, the more I was convinced that disciple-making movements that start in a local church are led by pastors," Edmonds said.

So he began to reach out to pastors that he heard were making disciples well in their own churches and communities. They came together and created a discipleship network, forming "huddles" and discipling other pastors. That spread, and from there a disciple-making movement started.

"The disciple-making movement is one of the things I'll cherish most ... equipping and meeting the needs of churches and getting back to doing what God called us specifically to do," Edmonds said.




Photo by Doug Rogers/SBOM

Daniel Edmonds (center) and his wife, Terri, share a laugh with Rick Lance, SBOM executive director, during a Sept. 17 luncheon celebrating Edmonds' retirement as director of the SBOM office of Sunday School and discipleship.

Along the way, he wrote a book called "Start Small. Do It Right. Build It Strong." In its pages, he leads people down a path anchored by four invitations from Jesus — come and see, be with Me, follow Me and abide in Me.

"Those things that Jesus began to do and teach, like Luke writes in Acts 1:1 — that's really the heart of disciple making," Edmonds said. "It's not 'sit down and be still while I instill;' it's 'follow me.'"

Rick Lance, SBOM executive director, said he has had a "deep admiration" for Edmonds through the years.

## 'Cause of Christ'

"I have been impressed by his dedication to the cause of Christ. I have been encouraged by his ministry among us in the areas of small groups and disciple-making," Lance said. "Additionally Daniel possesses a quiet wisdom which has been an inspiration to me, especially in times of planning and decision-making. I have enjoyed our working relationship as we have labored together as partners in ministry. He is a dear friend and highly valued colleague."

## 'An honor to serve'

Edmonds said it's "been an honor to serve Alabama Baptists." In the days since his Aug. 31 retirement, he sees himself "in the same place I've seen myself for the entirety of my ministry — next year I'll be pursuing God's call on my life ... that's what I've always done."

He said he's blessed because of his time at the SBOM.

"To be able to go somewhere, do what God calls you to and do what you love for 30 years, and with absolutely great people ... it's just an overwhelming blessing."

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# ‘EXTREMELY GRATEFUL’

## Rick Lance ‘deeply honored’ for UM library collection bearing his name

A new collection of Christian resources at the University of Mobile’s renovated J.L. Bedsole Library is honoring the legacy of one of Alabama Baptist life’s longtime leaders while providing students with books and resources to deepen their faith and expand their learning.

The Rick Lance Christian Studies Collection, located in the library’s central bookcases, honors Lance, outgoing executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held at the library Oct. 22.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/
The Alabama Baptist

“I am deeply honored and extremely grateful for the privilege to have my name associated with the Christian Studies Collection of the J.L. Bedsole Library,” Lance said. “The University of Mobile strives for excellence in Christian higher education. That passion is epitomized in their efforts to help students develop a biblical worldview in life preparing them to serve Christ through their vocations.”

UM President Charles Smith shared during the ceremony, “We decided we wanted to honor the life and bear the name of a man who has championed the University of Mobile not only as a pastor, but also during his tenure (with) the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

“This collection is a fitting way to honor [Rick Lance’s] life of service while continuing his legacy of investing in the spiritual growth of students,” Smith said. “We pray these resources will encourage students to study God’s Word, grow in wisdom and prepare to serve Christ wherever He calls them.”

The library renovation was supported by a grant from the J.L. Bedsole Foundation and other donors. It transformed the second floor into a more inviting environment for learning, adding more than 700 square feet of bookcases, expanded individual and group study areas and additional meeting spaces. (UM)


Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

SBOM’s Rick Lance and Derek Allen (third, second from right) join University of Mobile leaders to cut the ribbon on the Rick Lance Christian Studies Collection at the newly renovated J.L. Bedsole Library at UM.



UM photo

Rick Lance shares his gratitude during the ribbon-cutting ceremony at the University of Mobile on Oct. 22.

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

# Download the 2026 State Convention app

Be sure to download the 2026 convention app for convenient access to a variety of useful meeting-related resources.

Available in the app will be the convention schedule, resources like the Book of Reports and the Daily Bulletin, information about featured convention speakers, a link to the live stream of convention sessions, a list of entities and ministries in the Exhibit Hall and more.

To download the app, visit my.yapp.us/ABSC or scan the provided QR code. The Annual Meeting will be held Nov. 17–18 at First Baptist Church, Trussville. Visit alsbom.org/convention for a complete schedule, to preregister and more!

**To download the app, visit my.yapp.us/ABSC or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.**




# Livestream Convention sessions

Can't make it to the Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting in Trussville?

You can livestream the sessions by visiting live.alsbom.org while the convention is in session Nov. 17–18.

Afterward, video recordings of all convention messages, theme interpretations and selected reports will be available at alsbom.org/convention.



Photo by Dianna L. Cagle/The Alabama Baptist

# WORD search

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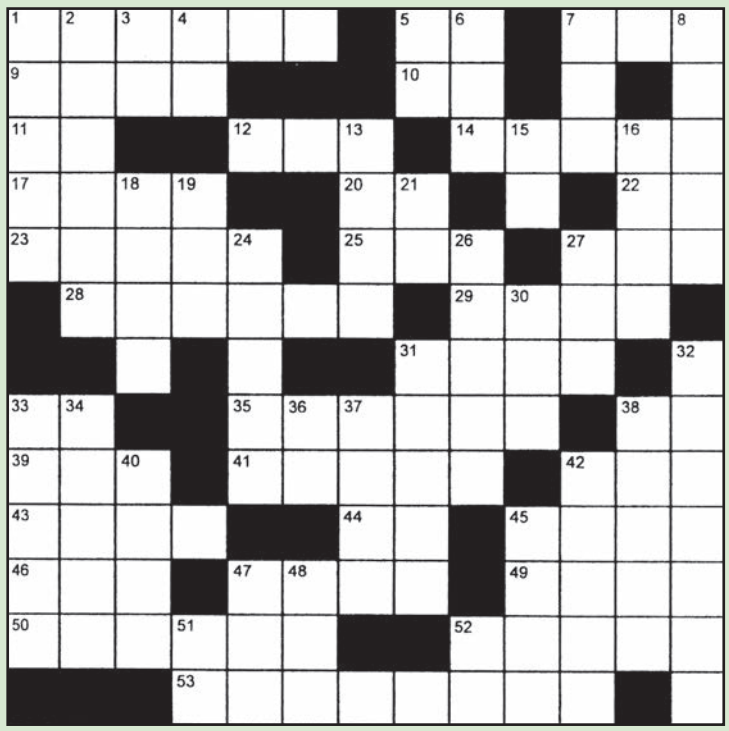
*"For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring."*

ISAIAH 44:3

# CHRISTIAN crossword



By Beverly Barnes Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

**ACROSS**

1. By their ___ ye shall know them. (Matt. 7:20)
5. Jesus loves ___.
7. Lean ___ unto thine own understanding. (Prov. 3:5)
9. Bad grammar.
10. ___ are of God, little children. (1 John 4:4)
11. Intensive Care. (abbr.)
12. The beginning and the ___. (Rev. 21:6)
14. A little ___ than the angels. (Heb. 2:7)
17. I will never leave ___. (Heb. 13:5)
20. Each. (abbr.)
22. Delaware. (abbr.)
23. I am meek and lowly in ___. (Matt. 11:29)
25. American Medical Association. (abbr.)
27. Let thy words be ___. (Eccles. 5:2)
28. Opposite of "brave."
29. Unto us a child is ___. (Isa. 9:6)
31. The head of the ___, the Church. (Col. 1:18)
33. Postscript.
35. Opposite of "depart."
38. ___ be it.
39. A hot cereal, ___meal.
41. ___ him, and let him go. (John 11:44)
42. A bicycle's handle___.
43. A little bird.
44. Missouri. (ZIP code abbr.)
45. Leave these out of your diet.
46. Cause thine ___ to hear. (Ps. 10:17)
47. A has___.
49. A continent.
50. One who works in a belfry.
52. Jesus saith unto her, give Me to ___. (John 4:7)
53. ___ evil with good. (Rom. 12:21)

**DOWN**

1. The just shall live by ___. (Gal. 3:11)
2. I will give thee ... hidden ___. (Isa. 45:3)
3. United Nations. (abbr.)
4. ___ is finished. (John 19:30)
5. The Lord is ___ shepherd. (Ps. 23:1)
6. Moray ___.
7. If any man be in Christ, he is a ___ creature. (2 Cor. 5:17)
8. ___ stones at him. (2 Sam. 16:13)
13. Was ___, and is alive again. (Luke 15:24)
15. Ohio. (ZIP code abbr.)
16. God sent him forth from the garden of ___. (Gen. 3:23)
18. Charity ... toward ___ other. (2 Thess. 1:3)
19. Period of time in history.
21. I ___ the way. (John 14:6)
24. The ___ of your faith. (1 Pet. 1:7)
26. Every perfect gift is from ___. (James 1:17)
27. To cook in a skillet.
30. Musical poem.
31. Buffalo.
32. He will not fail thee, neither ___ thee. (Deut. 31:8)
33. All ___ is given unto Me. (Matt. 28:18)
34. Abram took ___ his wife. (Gen. 12:5)
36. Rule out. (abbr.)
37. All Jews to depart from ___. (Acts 18:2)
38. Silk and ___.
40. Sea bird.
42. Famous musician, Count ___.
45. Old MacDonald had one.
47. Nickname for Beverly.
48. Before. (poetic)
51. ___ ye ... and teach all nations. (Matt. 28:19)
52. ___ all to the glory of God. (1 Cor. 10:31)

***All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.***

## UPCOMING EVENTS

*sponsored by the State Board of Missions*

# 64th Annual AABMA Conference

The Alabama Association of Baptist Ministry Assistants will hold its annual conference April 18–20, 2027, at Scott Dawson Evangelistic Association in Birmingham.

This will be our first conference at a new venue. Our conference speaker is Larry Hyche with the State Board of Missions. He is a phenomenal speaker, and you don't want to miss out.

The conference fee is $125.

Featured classes this year include Canva, InDesign, Excel and a NEW class that will help with the Publisher "crisis."

Watch your inboxes; emails will increase closer to conference time. More information is coming.

Visit myaabma.org to keep up with all the latest news and information.

# Early Bird Tax Conference: Dec. 3

Do you have responsibilities involving your church's finances? Are you a pastor wondering what tax changes will be taking place in the new year?

The Early Bird Tax Conference will help answer questions to get you started out right.

The conference will be held Dec. 3 at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions in Prattville from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The cost of this event is $15, which includes lunch and materials.

To register, visit alsbom.org/event/early-bird-tax-conference. For questions, call Lee Wright at 334-613-2241 or email lwright@alsbom.org.

**To register, visit alsbom.org/event/early-bird-tax-conference or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.**

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# TAB CLASSIFIEDS

*Place a classified ad for $1 per word. For information call 205-870-4720, ext. 200.*

## CHURCH POSITIONS

**SENIOR PASTOR**
Carrollton Baptist Church is seeking a full-time senior pastor willing to encourage spiritual growth and discipleship, engage our community and equip the fellowship of believers. Must believe in the inerrancy of Scripture and hold to salvation through faith in Jesus. Must be willing to keep office hours and make personal visits. CBC is a church located in a small town in west Alabama. We are about 40 minutes from Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and 30 minutes from the Mississippi state line. We are a church that loves God and loves our neighbors. We are looking for an undershepherd to follow God's leadership and guide us into the plans He has for us. Send resumés to: pastorsearch@carrolltonbc.org.

**SENIOR PASTOR**
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.

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

**PASTOR**
Full-time pastor — Jasper, Alabama. Pastor retired. Prayerfully seeking a pastor to preach the inerrant Word of God and shepherd our flock. (SBC) Resumé: northside-baptistchurchjasper@gmail.com.

**BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR**
Valley Grove Baptist in Danville, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a bivocational pastor called by God to shepherd, preach and lead our loving congregation. We are a rural, Bible-believing Southern Baptist church seeking someone to help us grow spiritually and reach our local community. Candidates should meet biblical qualifications of 1 Timothy 3: 1–7, hold to the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message guidelines while balancing pastoral ministry with outside bivocational responsibilities. Send your resumé and a brief philosophy of ministry to: valleygrove-baptistal@yahoo.com or mail to: Valley Grove Baptist Church, 6631 County Road 81, Danville, AL 35619. Please contact Jeff Turner at 256-606-1677 with questions.

**BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR**
Jones Baptist Church in Jones, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor. Please email resumés to: Jonesbaptistchurch4410@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.

**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.

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

**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.

**TWO POSITIONS**
Spring Hill Baptist Church, Mobile, Alabama, vacancies — financial secretary/manager: bookkeeper experience required; and youth pastor: some previous experience required. Send resumés to: info@shbc.cc or 2 So. McGregor Ave., Mobile, AL 36608.

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In Read and Speak Better English with "Phona-text" (What You SEE Is Exactly What You SAY), Delores Freeman Cork blends reading and ESL techniques for all ages with 50 Bible verses, books of the Bible, high-frequency words and 48 colorful pictures with a story about nature, numbers and more. Available on Amazon.

## TRAVEL/VACATION

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

***~ Why research matters for your church ~***

# How many leaders does your congregation need?

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

If your congregation is not counting, anticipating, calling out and developing potential leaders, you likely don't have enough.

It is a supply chain issue. Let me illustrate with a highly visible ministry. Many congregations participate in various aspects of disaster response.

In this ministry, establishing reliable supply lines for people, equipment and materials is essential. Otherwise, the ministry will be ineffective in the long term.

The same is true for congregations. Processes and systems are essential. Realizing the full Kingdom potential of a congregation requires a laser focus on multiple dimensions of leadership.

Your congregation may even be avoiding its spiritual responsibility to disciple-making and leadership development if it does not help members discern their spiritual calling and then deploy them into service.

## Developing leaders

A church may also fail to be faithful to God's call on all disciples if it limits, controls and hoards leadership roles within the congregation. Thus, an honest evaluation of staff and lay leadership needs is an essential responsibility for every congregation.

Some may ask if this is a nominating committee process. And I would answer, "No, it is not."

Developing leaders has little to do with how many slots you fill each year, though that is an annual pressure point in many congregations. It has to do with two things: Kingdom potential and disciple-making.

Your congregation is not called to be merely good enough. It is called to be all that God intends it to be within its community context or among the people groups it serves. This is your full Kingdom potential.

But a congregation can fill all leadership positions for the coming year and still fail to empower the people God has called to service. They may remain on the sidelines.

Many congregations determine the number of leaders they need based upon bylaws, policy manuals and/or decisions of core leaders. In this approach, people are recruited for leadership and service within and through their congregation to ensure the success of the congregation's programs, ministries and activities.

In a spiritual community, this is backwards. Determine how many leaders you need based on the number of people God is calling to specific, proactive discipleship roles. Then affirm, equip, support and deploy them through the congregation's ministry or through the ministry beyond the congregation to which God has called them.

## Empowering leaders

This is about empowering everyone according to God's call on their lives, even when there is no structured program, ministry or activity in the congregation that aligns with God's unique call on their lives.

This is where the numerical significance of three, seven and 21 comes into play. In the next few columns, I will draw on what I have researched and learned about these numbers from biblical, cultural and organizational perspectives.

Here are a couple of clues. First, are the numbers three, seven and 21 raw numbers, percentages or minimum values?

Second, how do the three hat colors worn by disaster response team members apply? The three colors are white for the incident commander, blue for the team leader and yellow for the volunteers.

*EDITOR'S NOTE — Do you have a question for George to research? 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 22

### UNITY
### Romans 14:5–20

#### Disagreement (5–8)

In chapter 14, Paul is dealing with issues that arose between Gentiles and Jews — mainly in regard to food regulations and sacred days. For example, Jews might have been criticizing the Gentiles for not honoring the Sabbath and not following dietary laws.

Gentile believers saw no special attachment to the Sabbath since they worshipped on Sunday, and the New Testament makes it clear that the dietary laws have been fulfilled. (See Acts 20:7, Mark 7 and Acts 10.)

Paul focused on encouraging his listeners to serve the Lord and not worry about a legalistic following of rules. This does not mean that all Old Testament teachings were overruled or disregarded.

The New Testament confirms many Old Testament laws, such as not murdering or stealing. Paul urges his readers to focus on loving their neighbors as an outflow of living for God. All of our motivations need to be our love for God and love for our neighbors.

#### Accountability (9–12)

Since Christ died for us, we owe Him our lives. How we live needs to reflect the love we have for God, which correlates to loving our neighbor.

This means we need to be careful how we judge fellow believers and also how we live in respect to them. Christians are called to judge other believers according to Scripture.

For example, 1 Corinthians 5 tells us to expel the immoral brother if he does not repent, but we need to understand that there are certain areas of living that are not clearly laid out in Scripture. In those cases, Christians need to live in an understanding manner.

#### Love (13–18)

Living in an understanding manner means intentionally trying not to cause fellow Christians to stumble. We are free in Christ to follow our consciences as long as we are following the Bible. There are many activities that are not wrong to do, but some people have a deep personal aversion to them.

Some people do not play cards because they associate it with gambling. Some people do not drink alcohol because they know the damage alcohol has done to individuals and families. Other Christians do not have a problem with such activities, assuming they follow clear biblical teaching regarding drunkenness and entertainment activities.

Those who practice their freedom in Christ are the stronger brothers and sisters. But for the sake of harmony, they need to curtail their freedoms around those who do not share the same convictions.

In the case of Gentiles and Jews, while there is freedom to eat pork, it would be wrong for a Gentile to eat bacon around a Jewish Christian who feels uncomfortable eating pork products.

For the sake of love, the stronger brother ought not to practice this freedom around those who do not share these convictions.

#### Edification (19–20)

Unity in the body of believers is an important biblical concept.

Being unified in love is a way that we represent Christ well both in the Church and within society. If we can act in love, looking out for the interests of others, we are practicing love that pleases God and represents Him well to those around us.

Living in love should be the mark of Christians, and it is imperative to give our beliefs action so that a lost and dying world sees how we treat one another and becomes open to hearing the gospel.

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

## For November 29

### PURPOSE
### Romans 15:14–21, 30–33

#### Joint Ministry (14–16)

For much of the 20th century, evangelicals focused on preaching the gospel, which is a necessary aspect of the Christian life. However, this preaching was often not followed up with discipleship.

When Jesus gave the Great Commission, He included the phrase, "teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). This means that Christians are not only called to share the gospel but also to build other Christians up.

We should pursue maturity in Christ, studying the Bible and seeking to apply it to every area of life, and we then need to help others do the same. Paul exhorts the Christians in Rome to help Gentile believers understand the implications of the gospel in their lives.

Sharing the gospel is important, but it is not the only aspect of being a believer. Discipleship is a crucial element of healthy churches. Discipleship can happen in community groups or Sunday School classes and by participating in church activities.

#### Spirit's Power (17–21)

Paul understood that Old Testament prophecies included the Gentiles and not just the Jews. This is seen especially in the Book of Acts.

Paul was compelled to preach the gospel to people who had not yet heard the gospel, and that is a calling that many share today.

Modern missionaries often go to unreached people groups so they can hear the gospel for the first time. It is up to churches to support those who have this calling.

Baptists have always been supportive of missions, and this is seen in how the churches organized themselves into a convention. Churches that belong to the Southern Baptist Convention support missions through the Cooperative Program, which uses money from churches to support various ministries, including international missions.

Paul's success in his missions work is attributed to God. In all of our ministries, we need to recognize that the glory for success goes to God, not ourselves. This also takes pressure off of us to be "successful" because we are judged by our willingness, not the results.

Many Christians see success in the number of baptisms a church has, the number of ministries it has or the number of people converted to Christ. But our goal should be to glorify God in how we minister and trust God for the results.

We should remember to rely on God, not ourselves, because the success belongs to Him.

#### Focused Prayer (30–33)

Paul shows he recognized the importance and power of prayer by asking his readers to be in prayer for him. This shows us that prayer is a vital aspect of ministry and missions. We ought always to be in prayer for missionaries and ministers we know, using this section as a template.

We ought to pray for our missionaries to be free to share the gospel and be rescued from those who would oppose them. We also need to pray that the missionaries would be able to cooperate with local ministries and Christians — if there are any — so that they may be unified in mind and spirit, working together to share the gospel and build up the believers.

It is a privilege that we get to talk to the God of the universe, and we should be joyful that He allows us to participate in the ministries of other Christians — even in the remotest parts of the world!

***"For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me ..."***

**Romans 15:18**

# BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

## Sunday School Lessons

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



## For November 22

### THE DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS
### Acts 10:44–48, 16:30–34, 19:1–5

In many places and among many peoples in the world today, the act of baptism carries with it a significance that we often do not comprehend in a North American context. For many Muslims, for example, baptism into the Christian faith opens the door for intense persecution.

There are many reasons baptism is so significant, including the fact that it is a powerful external display of the miraculous internal transformation that God has accomplished in us.

#### Baptism is an outward demonstration of God's forgiveness. (10:44–48)

Acts 10 tells the story of God's mandate for Peter to carry the gospel to the Gentiles. Following God's leadership, Peter makes his way to the home of a centurion in Caesarea named Cornelius, where he shares the message of Christ with a group of Cornelius' relatives and close friends. Peter concludes by proclaiming that "everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins" (v. 43).

Baptism serves as a beautiful enactment of God's provision for us in Jesus. As a symbolic display of Christ's death, burial and resurrection, baptism reminds us that "you were buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And when you were dead in trespasses ... He made you alive with Him and forgave us all our trespasses" (Col. 2:12–13).

#### Baptism has an impact on others around us. (16:30–34)

Another powerful story of the baptism of new believers is found in Acts 16, where Paul and Silas have had their prison doors miraculously shaken open and their chains loosed. They reassure their jailer and prevent him from harming himself before he asks, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

Paul's answer is brief and to the point: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved — you and your household." Shortly afterward, the jailer and the members of his household are all baptized after placing their faith in Christ. The jailer rejoices.

While there is no biblical requirement for baptism to be done in the context of community — see the Ethiopian eunuch's roadside baptism in Acts 8 — there is an encouraging and testimonial aspect to communal baptism.

Imagine the overwhelming joy in the jailer's home as the household collectively expressed their newfound faith through the act of baptism!

When shared with others — particularly within the context of the local church — baptism is both a testimony of the gospel to those who do not know Christ and an encouraging reminder of God's work to those who do.

#### Baptism must be centered in Christ. (19:1–5)

The opening verses of Acts 19 tell the story of Paul's encounter with some believers in Ephesus who had only been baptized "into John's baptism," which Paul characterizes as one of repentance but not of Jesus.

These disciples are informed about all believers receiving the Holy Spirit and are baptized "into the name of the Lord Jesus." (See Rom. 8:9–11.)

Because this group is characterized as "disciples" who already "believed," we are reminded that our baptism does not precede our faith but rather is an announcement of our faith to the rest of the world.

As we declare through baptism God's forgiveness through the atoning death of Jesus on our behalf, let us also proclaim God's truth through our words and our walk. (See Rom. 6:4.)

## For November 29

### THE EVIDENCE OF FORGIVENESS
### Matthew 18:21-35

There is a line in the Lord's Prayer that most Christians who have been around a while are familiar with: "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt. 6:12).

While we may recite this passage as a matter of course, could it be that we are unthinkingly and unwittingly requesting something of God that we might not truly desire?

The literal application of this passage is that we are asking God to forgive us in the same manner that we have forgiven (note the past tense) others. What if God decided to take us up on this request? What if He truly decided to base His forgiveness of us on our forgiveness (or lack of it) for others? Would we be blessed, or would we be in a mess of our own making?

In response to a question about forgiveness from Peter, Jesus relates a parable of a man who begged for forgiveness yet refused to offer the same mercy to another. He concludes with a strong lesson regarding how and why we should forgive others.

#### We are to be generous in forgiving others. (21–22)

This story begins with Peter asking the kind of question we often ask: "Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? As many as seven times?" Peter is not asking about God's standard of forgiveness or even how to grow in this kindness toward others. Rather, Peter is asking to what extent he must follow God's expectations.

We are often guilty of asking similar questions, explicitly or implicitly, probing how far we must go to obtain God's approval, or how far we can go without incurring God's disapproval.

Here, Jesus answers Peter in a way that he likely did not expect: "Seventy times seven." In saying this, Jesus isn't providing Peter with a literal limit. On the contrary, Jesus is setting before Peter a seemingly impossible standard, but one that truly reflects the heart of God.

#### We can be generous in forgiving others because God has been generous in forgiving us. (23–30)

Jesus next tells a story to illustrate the point He is making to Peter — that the question is never about us currying God's favor through our own efforts, but rather to what degree our obedience can reflect the favor He has already granted to us.

The servant in the story hypocritically refused to extend to another the grace and mercy he had received from the master who forgave his debt. The positive takeaway is that we are to offer forgiveness generously to others just as we have received it from God.

#### A lack of forgiveness calls into question our own experience with God's forgiveness. (31–35)

Jesus concludes His story by telling how others reported their fellow servant's actions to the master, who then punishes him. The master highlighted the servant's hypocrisy in a question: "Shouldn't you also have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" Then, Jesus made clear the point of the whole story, noting that God will do likewise to the one who fails to forgive others as he has been forgiven.

Earlier, at the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6, Jesus had declared, "For if you forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well. But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your offenses."

Jesus' point is not that God is in the business of forgiving us only to the extent we forgive others, but rather that those who truly experience His forgiveness will be transformed and thus motivated to do likewise for others.

As we conclude this study in forgiveness, let us remember with gratitude how God has forgiven us and, taking His example, extend our forgiveness in like fashion to others.

# Keep pedaling

## Camp, Olvey finish Bike Bama for Bivocationals trek from Florence to Mobile

Nine days. 335 miles. Thousands of calories burned. And more than $15,000 given so far to provide scholarships for bivocational pastors.

Those are just some of the results from Bike Bama for Bivocationals, an effort undertaken by Baptist associational missionaries Ric Camp and Justin Olvey to bring awareness to the particular challenges faced by bivocational pastors and to raise funds to help pastors attend Samford University's Ministry Training Institute.

Camp is lead mission strategist for Shelby Baptist Association, and Olvey is director of missions for West Cullman Baptist Association.

Reach out to Camp at rcamp@shelbybaptist.org to make a donation to the scholarship fund. (TAB)




Facebook/Ric Camp

**Above:** Ric Camp and Justin Olvey completed their 335-mile journey at the Mobile Baptist Association office on Oct. 31. "The challenges of a bivocational pastor exceed our minimal discomfort," Camp wrote in an update.



Facebook/Ric Camp

**Above:** Camp and Olvey began their bike ride at the Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association in Sheffield on Oct. 22. Along the way, the riders enjoyed meals, prayer and fellowship times with pastors and leaders across the state.



Facebook/Ric Camp

**Above:** Ric Camp's wife Lisa followed the riders to provide safety and support. **Right:** A picture stop in Demopolis, where the Black Warrior River joins the Tombigbee River.



Facebook/Ric Camp

**Above:** Praying at the Fayette Baptist Association office, one of 10 associational stops along the way.

On Oct. 30, Mobile area bivocational pastors and their wives gathered for dinner and shared "amazing stories of how God has called them [and] uses them," Camp wrote in an update.



Facebook/Ric Camp



Facebook/Ric Camp