The Alabama Baptist

Toll free 800-803-5201
www.thealabamabaptist.org

November 26, 2026

Vol. 191, No. 24
Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

The 2026 Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting was held Nov. 17–18 at First Baptist Church Trussville.

Family reunion

Alabama Baptists gather for 203rd annual meeting; honor Rick Lance for faithful leadership

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Worshipful, glorifying to the Lord, representative of all Alabama Baptists and a true family reunion feel — those were descriptions repeated often following the conclusion of the 203rd annual meeting of the Alabama Baptist State Convention.

Held this year at First Baptist Church Trussville, the gathering brought nearly 1,000 Baptists from across the state together for four days of activities — the annual meeting Nov. 17–18 and a variety of other activities, dinners and luncheons Nov. 15–17.

Registration for the annual meeting landed at 805 messengers and 122 guests for a total of 927 who officially registered.

(*See 'Renewed emphasis,' page 2*)



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

The current slate of Alabama Baptist State Convention officers was re-elected to a second one-year term — Jarman Leatherwood as president (left), Ryan Whitley as first vice president (center) and Mat Alexander as second vice president.



Renewed emphasis

Lance, Allen encourage Baptists to 'reclaim' state

(*continued from page 1*)

Along with passing the $38.5 million Cooperative Program budget and a goal of $23.3 million in special offerings for 2027, messengers also re-elected Huntsville pastor Jarman Leatherwood as president, Trussville-area pastor Ryan Whitley as first vice president and Gadsden pastor Mat Alexander as second vice president.

Mike Jackson also was re-elected as statistical and registration secretary, but the recording secretary has a new face, Lori McGough, who serves in the executive office of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. Outgoing recording secretary Debbie Oliver and Jackson will both retire from the SBOM in early 2027, but Jackson will continue assisting in various forms as a consultant.

Messengers also adopted four resolutions (see story, this page), elected a slate of new board members (see story, page 12) and honored Rick Lance as the outgoing SBOM executive director (see coverage, page 4).

Also honored were three Alabama Baptist laypeople for the volunteer work they do in serving others.

Sonali Albus, a member of Cropwell Baptist Church in Pell City, was named Outstanding Missions Volunteer of the Year. The award was presented by Scotty Goldman, director of the SBOM office of global missions.

Mark Wakefield, Disaster Relief strategist for SBOM, presented the DR-related Tommy Puckett Award for Excellence to Becky Noland of Valleydale Church in Birmingham and Ed Carpenter of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Athens.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Rick Lance (left), outgoing executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, and Derek Allen (right), executive director-elect, deliver the executive director's report together Nov. 17. They shared about an upcoming emphasis of 23 by 33 — 23,000 baptisms in Alabama by the year 2033.

Honored and grateful

"This is the last opportunity I get to make recognitions and celebrate the ministry of Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief," Wakefield said, acknowledging his upcoming retirement in early 2027. "It has been beyond anything I could have dreamt or hoped — to get to serve you and serve with you."

Wakefield also introduced the incoming DR strategist Frankie Stiefel from the Sand Mountain area and shared a few statistics from DR work so far in 2026: 1,055 deployed, 43,000 hours worked, 400 gospel conversations and 55 professions of faith.

During the SBOM executive director segment on the program, Lance officially introduced the incoming executive director Derek Allen to Alabama Baptists and the two of them delivered the report together.

They called for a renewed emphasis on "reclaiming Alabama for the Lord Jesus Christ."

Pastoral support, AI concerns among 4 resolutions

Alabama Baptist messengers to the state convention annual meeting in Trussville adopted four resolutions during the Nov. 17–18 gathering. No additional resolutions were proposed from the convention floor, and no changes were made to the four adopted. The resolutions read in part:

Special Resolution: On appreciation for Rick Lance

Honors Rick Lance for nearly three decades as State Board of Missions executive director ahead of his Jan. 31, 2027, retirement. It commends his Cooperative Program leadership and financial stewardship, extending prayers to Lance, his wife Pam and their family.

Resolution 1: On appreciation

Expresses gratitude to the Lord and to all those who served Him during the 2026 Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting held at FBC Trussville.

Resolution 2: On support of bivocational and part-time pastors

Affirms those titles reflect compensation rather than calling, urges congregations to share ministry burdens and calls on Baptist entities to provide accessible training and mentoring.

Resolution 3: On artificial intelligence, human dignity and faithful stewardship

Affirms humans bear God's image with unmatched dignity. Viewing AI as a tool under Christ's lordship, it warns against deception, job loss and chatbot reliance, urging oversight and irreplaceable church fellowship. (TAB)

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.

ANNUAL TAB SUBSCRIPTION RATES
Includes print, digital, app and full web access

Group Rate per subscriber per year — $19.95

Individual — $34.95 per year (26 issues)

JENNIFER DAVIS RASH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

NEWS SERVICES
Baptist Press (BP)
Religion News Service (RNS)
Morning Star News (MS)

POSTMASTER
Send address changes to:
The Alabama Baptist
3310 Independence Drive
Birmingham, AL 35209

ADDRESS CHANGE
Send old and new addresses, and name of church to:
Subscription Department
3310 Independence Drive
Birmingham, AL 35209
Allow two weeks.

To the best of our knowledge, all of the ads in *The Alabama Baptist* represent legitimate companies and offerings. However, one should always exercise normal business caution in responding to ads. Also, the information in Alabama News is typically provided by or approved by the individual, church or association represented.

Member of Alabama Press Association

Accredited member of Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability

TAB Media Group among top in nation

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

W	O	R	D	■	H	A	D	■	S	O	R	T
E	R	I	E	■	E	R	E	■	P	L	E	A
T	E	M	P	E	R	E	D	■	R	E	A	D
■	■	■	E	N	D	■	I	D	I	O	M	S
O	M	E	N	S	■	S	C	A	N	■	■	■
K	I	N	D	■	C	H	A	N	G	E	T	H
R	E	V	■	S	L	A	T	E	■	L	E	E
A	N	Y	W	H	E	R	E	■	T	S	A	R
■	■	■	H	E	A	D	■	W	H	E	R	E
M	E	D	I	A	N	■	H	I	E	■	■	■
A	D	I	T	■	S	P	I	N	N	I	N	G
M	O	R	E	■	E	A	R	■	C	L	A	P
A	M	E	N	■	D	Y	E	■	E	K	G	S

The crossword puzzle can be found on page 11.

Entity reports



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Rick Lance (right), executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, talks with Samford University President Beck Taylor (left) and University of Mobile President Charles Smith.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Rod Marshall (left), president and CEO of Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries; Russell Klinner (center), executive director of Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center; and John Ashworth, president of The Baptist Foundation of Alabama share their entity reports.

The full reports of convention boards and commissions can be found on pages 44–62 of the 2026 Book of Reports. Entities and auxiliaries work alongside the State Board of Missions to serve Alabama Baptists but have separate boards and leadership than SBOM.



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist



Photo by Gary Schultz

Above: Jennifer Davis Rash (left), president and editor-in-chief of TAB Media Group, takes a selfie with Wendy Westerhouse (center), executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, and Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. **Left:** (l to r) Alabama Citizens Action Program President Greg Davis, Alabama Woman's Missionary Union Executive Director Candace McIntosh and Alabama Baptist Retirement Centers President Ken Schroeder give their entity reports.

28 PLUS YEARS OF FAITHFUL LEADERSHIP

THANK YOU,



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Right: On behalf of the Alabama Singing Men and Alabama Singing Women, SBOM's Karen Gosselin (left) presents Rick Lance with a commemorative plaque of a song commissioned in his honor for the annual meeting.

Above: "I have a flood tide of emotions," Rick Lance said on behalf of himself and Pam at the conclusion of the celebration service honoring his more than 28 years leading Alabama Baptists as executive director of the State Board of Missions.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Above: A specially curated piece of pottery by local artist Susan Gordon and a bouquet of flowers are presented to Pam Lance by Jamie McGlaughn (right), president of Alabama WMU. Pam was recognized for her faithfulness alongside her husband as he's led Alabama Baptists.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Above: Jim Graham (left), chair of the State Board of Missions trustees, announced Rick Lance's new executive director emeritus title and presents the framed resolution. **Right:** Bobby DuBois, retired associate executive director of SBOM, served 22 years alongside Lance, whom he called "the greatest leader" in the SBC.

Below: Jeff Iorg, president and CEO of the SBC Executive Committee, shares that during Lance's tenure, Alabama Baptists have given over $1 billion in CP monies.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

TO SEE A GALLERY OF PHOTOS, VISIT TABONLINE.ORG/RICK-LANCE.

DR. RICK LANCE

Executive Director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions



Photo by Gary Shultz

Above: Rick and Pam Lance pose with their family during a special reception held Nov. 17 which hundreds of people from across the state and nation attended prior to the evening celebration service.

Below: Chuck Kelley, president emeritus of New Orleans Seminary, shares how he's watched Rick Lance "work with excellence consistently, day in and day out, year in and year out."



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Above: Charles Billingsley leads worship during the celebration service Nov. 17, saying to Rick Lance, "You've been so kind and gracious to me through all these years, and I am so grateful." **Left:** Kevin Ezell, North American Mission Board president, emphasizes Rick Lance's passion for evangelism and genuine love for others during the celebration service.



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Above: Rep. Danny Garrett presents Rick Lance a commendation on behalf of Gov. Kay Ivey for his years of dedication to the people of Alabama. **Right:** Craig Carlisle (right) shares a book of more than 100 letters and a Bible signed by numerous Alabama Baptists with his longtime friend.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Above: State convention president Jarman Leatherwood (right) leads messengers in singing "Thank You for Being a Friend" to Rick Lance.

CONVENTION SERMON

Entrust 'faithful men' with the gospel

Steven Fraser, senior pastor of Riverbend Baptist Church in Gadsden, preached the convention sermon Nov. 18 and focused on entrusting "faithful men" with the gospel as noted in 2 Timothy 2:1–2.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Steven Fraser, senior pastor of Riverbend Baptist Church in Gadsden, delivers the convention sermon Nov. 18.

Some translations use "people," Fraser said, but "I'm going with Bill Mounce because he ... says this word is referring specifically to men because of the implication of teaching that comes at the end."

Three questions to ponder:

1. What is being entrusted to us?

It's the "what" of our ministry, Fraser said. "Something valuable is being entrusted to you and [me]. ... Any teaching that deviates from standard orthodoxy, we must combat. What we are to entrust is the gospel."

2. Who have we got to entrust it to?

"It takes intentionality," he said. "We need faithful men, which means reliable, having integrity concerning matters of faith and Christian obedience. Making faithfulness a priority, not popularity ... not availability ... not willingness ... but faithfulness."

3. What is the purpose of this entrusting?

"The purpose is to be able to teach others," Fraser said. "It's not only the protection of the gospel but the replication of it." (TAB)

TOP CP GIVING
CHURCHES/ASSOCIATIONS IN 2025

Top ten churches for total CP giving

1. Shades Mountain (Birmingham Metro)
2. Trussville First (Birmingham Metro)
3. Opelika First (Tuskegee Lee)
4. Montgomery First (Montgomery)
5. Dawson (Birmingham Metro)
6. Mount Zion (Madison)
7. Hunter Street (Birmingham Metro)
8. Golden Springs (Calhoun)
9. Prattville First (Autauga)
10. Tuscaloosa First (Tuscaloosa)

Top giving churches based on size (1–100)

1. County Line, Enterprise (Pastor: Danny Wiggins)
2. Dogwood Grove, Montevallo (Pastor: Todd Burr)

Top giving churches based on size (101–250)

1. Brewton First (Pastor in 2025: Cavin Cawthon)
2. Eastern Hills, Montgomery (Pastor: Jeremy Smalley)

Top giving churches based on size (251–500)

1. Parkway, Auburn (Pastor: Jeff Redmond)
2. Central, Decatur (Pastor: Rob Hatfield)

Top giving churches based on size (501–1,000)

1. Prattville First (Pastor: Justin Hall)
2. Enterprise First (Pastor: Ben Bowden)

Top giving churches based on size (1,001+)

1. Shades Mountain, Birmingham (Pastor in 2025: George Wright)
2. Trussville First (Pastor: Buddy Champion)

Top five associations per church giving

1. Birmingham Metro (Chris Crain)
2. Southeast Alabama (John Thomas)
3. Madison (Robert Mullins)
4. Montgomery (Neal Hughes)
5. Shelby (Ric Camp)

WOMEN OF WORSHIP CONFERENCE
JANUARY 29 & 30, 2027

When JESUS Prayed
Learning to Pray Like Jesus

WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN IN A WOMAN'S LIFE IF SHE BEGAN PRAYING MORE LIKE JESUS PRAYED?

Prayer is one of the most important privileges of the Christian life, yet many women long for a deeper, more consistent, more meaningful prayer relationship with God. They believe in prayer but sometimes struggle with knowing how to pray, what to pray, when to pray, and how to trust God with His answers.

Come along as we delve into the prayer life of Jesus, encouraging each of us to emulate His example in our daily lives. We will also enjoy fellowship, engage in breakout sessions, and participate in meaningful worship.

northpark Women
NorthPark Baptist Church
5700 Deerfoot Parkway
Trussville, AL 35173
205.352.4010

REGISTRATION AND MORE INFORMATION
Scan the QR code or visit nponline.org/events.
Friday Night from 6:00 until 8:00 PM
Saturday from 9:00 AM until 2:00 PM
$35 - breakfast & lunch included



FEATURED SPEAKER
DENISE GEORGE
Bible study leader and best-selling author

TAB MEDIA GROUP

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

IMPACTFUL

Leatherwood on Alabama Baptist ministry: 'Keep doing it.'

By Shawn Hendricks
The Alabama Baptist



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Jarman Leatherwood delivers the president's address at the Alabama Baptist State Convention at FBC Trussville on Nov. 17. He is pastor of House of Hope and Restoration Church in Huntsville.

Jarman Leatherwood acknowledged that being president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention can be like "drinking from a fire hose." But he's also seen enough after his first term in that role to know the Church is needed more than ever to deliver an "encouraging Word in a discouraging world."

Leatherwood gave his report to Alabama Baptists at the close of the Nov. 17 morning session.

Focusing specifically on 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Leatherwood encouraged Alabama Baptists to continue comforting those who are hurting and continue edifying each other — even when ministry gets hard.

"Discouragement is all around us," he noted. "Paul is writing to believers who knew what it meant to face discouragement."

Leatherwood added, "(Paul) reminded them of the hope that they had in Jesus Christ and challenged them to strengthen one another.

"Don't let the discouragement around you stop the encouragement that ought to come from you."

Focus on the mission

Avoid divisive topics, he continued, and focus on the mission. "We should not fight over whether or not we are serving a donkey or an elephant, but what we really should be serving is the Lamb," Leatherwood said, adding the Church must never lose sight that they're on the "same team."

"The blood that unites us is stronger than the politics that seek to divide us," he said.

> ***"Pastors, I know sometimes you feel overlooked — but your faithfulness will be rewarded."***
>
> **Jarman Leatherwood**
> **president, Alabama Baptist State Convention**

The Church should be a "place where wounded people find healing, not another place where people come to get hurt," Leatherwood said.

The key to remember, he said, is that the Church is not a "cruise ship" but should be a "battleship," fighting to help others when times are hard. "Every day we're taking hits," he said. "What we need are believers who are coming out ... to make sure your brother or your sister is okay."

Ministry-focused

Alabama Baptists, Leatherwood noted, are getting it right in so many areas — and must not relent amid the challenges and discouragements of life.

"Alabama Baptists, what you're doing through the Church ... keep doing it," he said, listing off the numerous Alabama Baptist ministries across the state. "Pastors, I know sometimes you feel overlooked — but your faithfulness will be rewarded. Keep doing it."



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Jarman Leatherwood jokes with the crowd after his re-election as president is announced in a unique and creative way by Ryan Whitley, first vice president — a poetic presentation.

Theme Interpretations

The Results of Encouragement

Justin Hall, senior pastor of First Baptist Church Prattville, challenged attendees at the Nov. 18 session of the state convention annual meeting to become intentional encouragers.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Preaching from Acts 11, Hall highlighted how Barnabas supported the early church in Antioch rather than hindering its unique growth.

"Barnabas had no desire to slow the work down, but to support it," Hall said. He urged leaders to counter cultural negativity by modeling this trait.

"Pastors, we need more like him in our churches," Hall added, reminding the audience that congregations adopt the spiritual attitudes of their leaders. "Who are you encouraging today?"

The Responsibility of Encouragement

Fulfill your biblical calling as encouragers — that was Stanley Williams' urging to messengers Nov. 17.

Williams, Alabama A&M University campus minister, pointed to Scripture's angels — those who strengthened Jesus and took Lot and Hagar by the hand — as models for how the local church should care for the broken.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

"We not only need to take people by the hand, but we must also patiently walk alongside them in the journey," Williams said.

True encouragement requires embracing the broken so they know they are not alone. Williams closed by challenging messengers: "The church in 2026 needs the courage to care."

The Reason for Encouragement

"God is not finished with Alabama Baptists," declared Tim Cox, pastor of Liberty Baptist Church in Chelsea. "We have a future that's strong because we have encouragement in Christ."



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Cox exhorted messengers Nov. 17 to actively encourage one another, reminding them that believers face real opposition and weariness. He emphasized that faith is a journey and spiritual growth does not happen in isolation.

"We're born again, but we're born into a community of brothers and sisters in Christ," he said.

Cox stressed that biblical encouragement goes beyond simply saying "something nice" — it means helping each other remain faithful.

"Encouragement is not something we outgrow." (Michael J. Brooks)

Gray honored with Fred Wolfe legacy award

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Carl Williams says pastors are his heroes, but he has a "special admiration" for a certain set of them — the ones who stay in the same place for a long time.

That's why Buddy Gray — who served 40 years at Hunter Street Baptist Church in Hoover before retiring this past summer — came to mind for this year's Fred Wolfe Lifetime Pastoral Ministry Award.

Presented Nov. 16 at FBC Trussville during the Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference, the honor named for longtime Alabama Baptist pastor Fred Wolfe made Gray its fifth recipient.

"Nobody can stay that long without God's sustaining grace and His favor," Williams said. "But I think that's what we should all be striving for as pastors — to plant our lives in the local church and have the mindset that we want to stay there and have as much impact for the Kingdom as we can over a long period of time unless God moves us somewhere else."

'God did the work'

Williams wanted to recognize Gray's long legacy of service, though he knows Gray would want the story to be about what God did over those four decades.

"God did the work, but He chose Buddy as His vessel to lead His congregation," he said.

When Gray became pastor, Hunter Street was a struggling church in downtown Birmingham desperate for revitalization — far different from the large congregation sitting in the hustle and bustle of Hoover today.

God gave Gray a vision for what that area could become, and he faithfully led the church to replant before church revitalization was common.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Carl Williams (left), president of the Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference, presents Buddy Gray, retired pastor of Hunter Street Baptist Church in Hoover, with the Fred Wolfe Lifetime Pastoral Ministry Award. Gray's wife, Tricia (right), stands with him.

Humble leadership

The Lord brought new life into that church under Gray's leadership, Williams said. But everyone he has mentioned Gray to this year "just speaks of his humility," Williams added.

"That's something that really stands out about him — he's a visionary leader, and he's a faithful communicator, but he's humble."

When Gray received the award, he said, "All the glory of course goes to God. ... It has been my joy to preach the gospel." He added that if anyone deserved an award, it was Hunter Street for "putting up with me all these years."

"I thank you for your faithfulness, especially you men who are serving as pastors," Gray said. "Thank you for what you have done and continue to do.

"I do believe that this next season of ministry for all of us is going to be more difficult than ever because we live in times that have changed."

The past 40 years have brought a series of new challenges, he said.

"For you to stand boldly and preach God's Word unashamedly, there will be a price to pay. I want to encourage you to stay faithful," Gray said. "God is giving you this ministry to testify to the gospel of grace. Stay true, my brothers. I love you."





Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Brothers Cory (right) and DJ (second from left) Horton joined their father, Johnye Horton, for a panel focused on ministry and family life, including the responsibility to model faithfulness for spouses and children. With Johnye's years of bivocational ministry as part of their family's story, the panel brought a multigenerational perspective to serving the church and caring for those closest to us. The panel was led by Carl Williams (left), Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference president.

'HIS GLORY'

Pastors Conference encourages tired ministry leaders to 'Rekindle the Joy'

By Shawn Hendricks
The Alabama Baptist

Pastor Theron Hawkins challenged pastors to not lose the joy of their salvation. Hawkins, lead pastor of New Life Haitian Baptist Church in Daleville, kicked off the Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference on Nov. 16 at First Baptist Church Trussville. This year's theme was "Rekindle the Joy." Preaching from Psalm 51, Hawkins reminded pastors that they are not alone when struggling to carry the weight of so many needs among their congregation. "Jesus saved you. You belong to Him. That joy can be found again," he said. "Rest in Him."



HAWKINS

South Carolina pastor Cory Horton, senior pastor of Brushy Creek Baptist Church in Taylors, focused his message on the abiding joy of Christ in the second morning message.

Preaching from 1 John 3:19, Horton noted that even when "stretched thin," pastors can "have confidence before God. ... The facts are you are the son of the King, and you have confidence before God." He added, "Your labor is not wasted."

Contagious joy

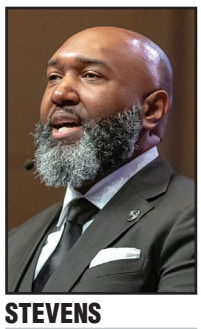
Preaching from Philippians 4, Shane Pruitt focused on "a joy that is contagious."

Pruitt is national next gen director for the North American Mission Board. Happiness comes and goes, he noted, but a Christian's joy runs deeper than happy feelings and life circumstances. Pruitt shared about the loss of his 10-year-old son, Titus, and the Lord's faithfulness to his family.



PRUITT

"We can always have joy, and that kind of joy is contagious because it doesn't come and go (with circumstances)," he said. "Our joy isn't built around (that) but Christ inside of us."



STEVENS

Speaking on the joy of a ministry calling, pastor Joe L. Stevens Jr. focused his message on one verse, Philippians 2:17. Stevens, pastor of Redeemer Fellowship in Saraland, noted there are times the Holy Spirit will lead us into hard places, "but it is for His glory." And it is worth it.

DJ Horton, senior pastor of Church at The Mill in Spartanburg, South Carolina, preached on "sustaining joy in the trial." Pulling from Job 1, Horton urged pastors to consider the grit they model in times of suffering. Regardless of the trials, believers should count it all joy.



PRESSLEY

Preaching from 2 Timothy 4, North Carolina pastor Clint Pressley focused on the joy of finishing well. "Keep going," he said. Comparing the challenge of finishing well to a marathon, the former SBC president said ministry leaders should pace themselves. "Walk if you've got to. Just don't quit" and keep "winning people to Jesus."

Reliable SIGN SERVICES

CHURCH SIGNS

Whether your church needs a brand-new sign or an update to an existing one, Reliable Signs is here to help! From design and fabrication to installation and service, we handle every step. With over 30 years of experience serving hundreds of churches across the state, we're ready to bring your church's vision to life.

DESIGN | FABRICATION | INSTALLATION | SERVICE



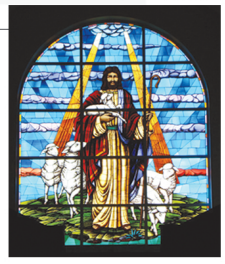
VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE INFO! RELIABLESIGNS.COM

CALL US 205.664.0955

PROUDLY SERVING THE STATE OF ALABAMA SINCE 1994

LEEDS STAINED GLASS & CHURCH FURNITURE
SINCE 1995

Toll-free: 888.699.9679
AL local: 205.699.9679
Call for **FREE** on-site consultation
Ask for Terry Barnes, Owner
information@LeedsStainedGlass.com
Visit www.LeedsStainedGlass.com
for an online gallery of windows and church furniture!



UPCOMING EVENTS
sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Consider year-end giving to support state missions

There's still time to give to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering! Every gift helps strengthen ministries including Alabama WMU, church planting, disaster relief, church revitalization and missions partnerships across our state and beyond. Your support continues to fuel the Great Commission in Alabama well beyond the offering season. Will you prayerfully consider giving today and help us finish the year strong?

Also, remember that gifts through the Cooperative Program and to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering must be received by the State Board of Missions by Dec. 31 to be counted for this year.



SBOM photo

Please mail them in time to be received by that date.

Thank you for your faithful giving throughout 2026!

Church Tax Conference

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 Church Tax Conference will help answer questions to get you started out right.

The conference will be held at different locations around the state:

- Dec. 3 (Early Bird Conference) and Jan. 7 at the State Board of Missions in Prattville
- Jan. 12 at First Baptist Church Fultondale
- Jan. 19 at Southeast Alabama Baptist Association
- Jan. 21 at Mobile Baptist Association
- Jan. 28 at Madison Baptist Association

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

To register, visit alsbom.org/events and search by date.

Pursue conference for high school seniors and college students

If you're looking for a way to encourage your high school seniors and college students to go deeper, Pursue should be on your February calendar.

The conference — set for Feb. 5–6, 2027, at Calvary Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa — will follow the theme Image Bearers.

Speakers will be:

- Jamie Dew, president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
- Tara Dew, national speaker, author, Bible teacher and wife of Jamie Dew

Worship will be led by Marcel Joseph & The Houze Band.

The conference will also offer breakout sessions both days and a late night session on Friday night.

To register, visit pursueal.org.

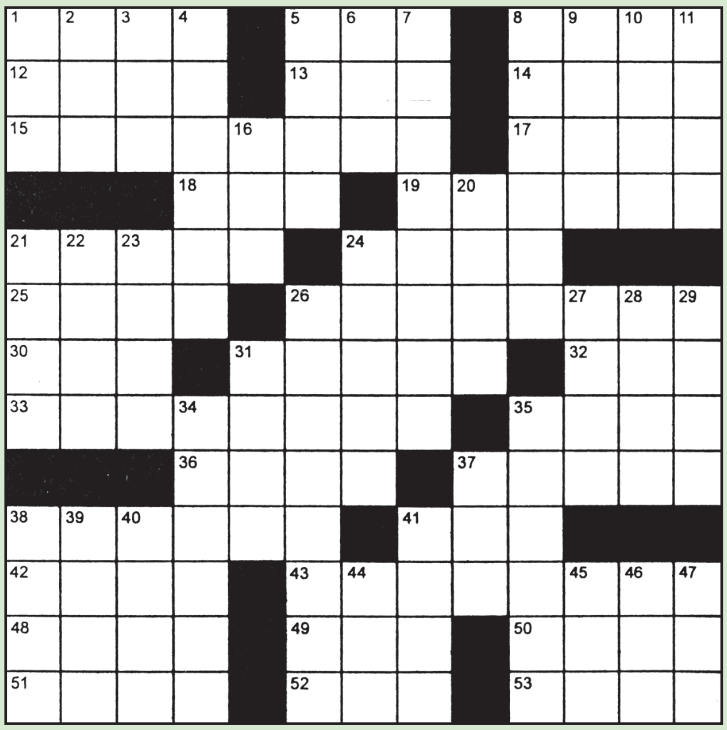
WORD search

RICK LANCE
ALABAMA
BAPTISTS
GREAT
COMMISSION
PASTOR
LEADER
BIBLE
MINISTRY
MISSIONS
EVANGELISM
CHURCHES
PREACHING
COUNSELING
DISCIPLESHIP
GOSPEL
FAITH
PRAYER
SERVICE
CONVENTION
OUTREACH
ENCOURAGER
FAMILY
PAM
SAMFORD
RELIGION
THEOLOGY
NOBTS
TUSCALOOSA
WEST END
UMOBILE
JUDSON

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

Congratulations, Dr. Lance!

CHRISTIAN crossword



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

ACROSS

1. In the beginning was the ___. (John 1:1)
5. I ___ rather be a doorkeeper. (Ps. 84:10)
8. Two of every ___ shalt thou bring into the ark. (Gen. 6:19)
12. One of the Great Lakes.
13. Come down ___ my child die. (John 4:49)
14. Between blood and blood, between ___ and plea. (Deut. 17:8)
15. God hath ___ the body together. (1 Cor. 12:24)
17. Thou shalt ___ this law before all Israel. (Deut. 31:11)
18. He loved them unto the ___. (John 13:1)
19. Figures of speech.
21. Signs, good or evil.
24. To glance at quickly.
25. Be ye ___ one to another. (Eph. 4:32)
26. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and ___ not. (Ps. 15:4)
30. Last book of the Bible. (abbr.)
31. Blackboard or roofing tile.
32. Confederate commander.
33. In any place.
35. Russian emperor.
36. The very hairs of your ___ are all numbered. (Matt. 10:30)
37. Your fathers, ___ are they? (Zech. 1:5)
38. Middle.
41. To hasten.
42. Entrance.
43. Twirling.
48. He loved ... Rachel ___ than Leah. (Gen. 29:30)
49. Give ___ to my words. (Ps. 5:1)
50. Applaud.
51. I am alive forevermore, ___. (Rev. 1:18)
52. Tint.
53. Electrocardiograms.

DOWN

1. They are ___ with the showers. (Job 24:8)
2. Unrefined mineral.
3. Edge.
4. Rely.
5. Thou shalt kill of thy ___. (Deut. 12:21)
6. They ___ all plain to him. (Prov. 8:9)
7. King David did ___ unto the Lord. (2 Sam. 8:11)
8. ___ up, O well. (Num. 21:17)
9. Butter substitute.
10. A quantity of paper.
11. Urchins.
16. Dashes.
20. Great ___.
21. Vegetable.
22. Manner.
23. Let not thine heart ___ sinners. (Prov. 23:17)
24. Broken pottery.
26. His leprosy was ___. (Matt. 8:3)
27. He is God; there is none ___ beside Him. (Deut. 4:35)
28. His anger did ___ perpetually. (Amos 1:11)
29. ___ a little, and there a little. (Isa. 28:10)
31. Karite tree.
34. To bleach.
35. Thou shalt by no means come out ___. (Matt. 5:26)
37. That I may ___ Christ. (Phil. 3:8)
38. Mother.
39. Esau, who is ___. (Gen. 36:1)
40. Dreadful.
41. Weigh silver in the balance, and ___ a goldsmith. (Isa. 46:6)
44. For this cause ___ ye tribute also. (Rom. 13:6)
45. Kind, breed.
46. Old horse.
47. Gallons per second. (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.

2026 Week of Prayer is almost here!

The Week of Prayer for International Missions and Lottie Moon Christmas Offering is coming up Nov. 29–Dec. 6.

Visit alsbom.org/lottie to learn more about how your gifts and prayers are making a difference. While there, sign up to receive daily prayer prompts in your inbox during the week!

To learn more, visit alsbom.org/lottie or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.

Bivocational retreat

The Bivocational Minister and Spouse Retreat — set for Feb. 5–6 at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega — offers bivocational ministers and their wives a chance to get away and enjoy fellowship, encouragement and inspiration in a relaxing retreat environment.

To register, visit alsbom.org/bivoretreat.

Boards & commissions

Trustees, board members elected to serve State Board, other entities

EDITOR'S NOTE — Messengers voted to elect or reelect the following during the 2026 Alabama Baptist State Convention. An asterisk (*) before the name indicates a layperson. The executive committee and State Board of Missions members are grouped by associations. Board members of convention entities are designated by church membership.

Executive Committee

Chair 2026–2027:
Jarman Leatherwood
(state convention president)
Ben Stubblefield, David Byrd

State Board of Missions

Terms to expire 2029: James Jackson, Autauga; Josh Raybon, Baldwin; Wayne Smith, Bigbee; Jim Cooley, Kyle Sullivan, Birmingham Metro; Richard Farrow, Carey; Wendell Dutton, Cherokee; James Watkins, Chilton; Marlon Brown, Clarke; Chad Hess, Colbert-Lauderdale; Mark Whittington, Conecuh; Chris Davenport, Covington; Willem P. Brent, Dale; *Debra Early, DeKalb; Bruce Spivey, Geneva; Cecil Sanders, Judson; Tim Coleman, Marion; Jonathan Lancaster, Marshall; David Roach, Charles Miller, Mobile; Justin McAlpin, Morgan; Zac Reno, Jacob Elliott, North Jefferson; David Hairston, Sand Mountain; *Andie Bell, Shelby; Allen Singley, Southeast Alabama; Ryan Whitley, St. Clair; Earl Goode, Sulphur Springs; *Nanci Lyn Speagle, Tallapoosa; Will Byars, Tuscaloosa; David Byrd, Walker

— Convention entities —

Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries

Terms to expire 2027: Aubrey Miller, Faith Chapel, Midfield; *Chris Blackerby, Hunter Street, Birmingham

Terms to expire 2030: *Amy Corbin, Chapel Hill, Tuscaloosa; *Mike Johnson, Woodmont, Florence; Blake Kersey, First Baptist, Decatur; Taylor Rutland, First Baptist, Dothan; Bo Wilcoxson, First Baptist, Haleyville; Winston Wilks, Henagar, Henagar

The Alabama Baptist

Terms to expire 2030: Travis Coleman, First Baptist, Prattville; Tommy DeRamus, Shades Mountain, Birmingham; Jeff Gardner, First Baptist, Trussville; Stephen Hall, NorthPark, Trussville; Rick Klepper, Dawson, Birmingham

The Baptist Foundation of Alabama

Terms to expire 2030: Bobby DuBois, Heritage, Montgomery; *Gary Phillips, Calvary, Tuscaloosa; *Donald Lambert, Highland, Florence; *Vicki Martin, First Baptist, Dothan; *Thomas Watkins, Jubilee, Fairhope

Alabama Baptist Historical Commission

Terms to expire 2030: *Natalie Bell, First Baptist, Fort Payne; *Katie Corbitt, First Baptist, Notasulga; Michael Brooks, Siluria, Alabaster; Larry Vinson, Antioch, Heflin

Alabama Baptist Retirement Centers

Terms to expire 2028: *Shirley Smith, Southside, Andalusia

Terms to expire 2030: *Jane Boysen, First Baptist, Prattville; *John DeShazo, First Baptist, Trussville; William Hand, North Shelby, Birmingham; *Glenda Harris, First Baptist, Prattville; *Forrest Hatfield, First Baptist, Pelham

Christian Life Commission

Terms to expire 2030: *Melissa Bowen, First Baptist, Prattville; Kenny Hatcher, Guin, Guin; Lee Tate, Benton, Selma; *Karen Watkins, West End, Clanton

University of Mobile

Terms to expire 2030: *David Connor, Redemption, Saraland; *James Counselman, Eastern Shore, Daphne; *Chris Jackson, First Baptist, Andalusia; Daven Watkins, First Baptist, Pelham

Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center

Terms to expire 2030: *Katy Langley, First Baptist, Trussville; *Stacey Gunn, First Baptist, Reeltown; *Daniel Reeves, Whitesburg, Huntsville; *Julian Stephens, Spring Hill, Mobile

— Report of Committee on Committees —

Committee on Boards and Commissions

Chair 2026–2027: Daven Watkins

Terms to expire 2028: *Beth Henderson, Mt. Zion, Huntsville; Mark Smith, First Baptist, Remlap; *Donna McCullough, First Baptist, Wedowee; Matt Hawkins, Crawford, Phenix City; *Judy Gay, First Baptist, Headland; *Mandy Wilburn, First Baptist, Andalusia; Ty Parten, Thomasville, Thomasville; *Jan Lowery, Centreville, Centreville; *Deborah Wiggins, First Baptist, Gordo; Mike Norton, Mt. Hebron, Spruce Pine; *Abigail Bradford, Dawson, Birmingham; *Ashley Spivey, First Baptist, Montgomery

Audit Committee

*Chair 2026–2027: *Jay Knight, Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham*

Terms to expire 2029: *Nathan Edwards, First Baptist, Gadsden; *Jay Knight, Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham

Committee on Time, Place & Preacher

Chair 2026–2027:
Michael Mynatt,
Hillcrest, Enterprise

Terms to expire 2027: Kevin Cobb, West Mobile, Mobile; Clint Landry, First Baptist, Wetumpka; TJ Phelps, Centreville, Centreville; Mark Presswood, Thomasville, Thomasville; Robert Mullins, Mount Zion, Huntsville; Michael Mynatt, Hillcrest, Enterprise; Wade Wallace, Calvary, Russellville

Committee on Resolutions

Chair 2026–2027:
Ben Stubblefield, Spring Hill, Mobile

Terms to expire 2027: *Whitney Alexander, First Baptist, Gadsden; Stuart Davidson, Eastern Shore, Daphne; Blake Kersey, First Baptist, Decatur; David Roach, Shiloh, Saraland; Will Spivey, First Baptist, Opelika; Ben Stubblefield, Spring Hill, Mobile; *Marisa Taylor, Ridgecrest, Trussville

Committee on Order of Business

Chair 2026–2027:
Rusty Sowell, Providence, Opelika

Terms to expire 2027: Justin Hall, First Baptist, Prattville

Terms to expire 2029: Frank Bowling, Eastmont, Montgomery; Justin Nelson, First Baptist, Clanton

Memorials Committee

Chair 2026–2027:
Rick Marshall,
Eastern Hills, Montgomery

Terms to expire 2027: *Charlotte Crane, First Baptist, Clanton; D'Linell Finley, Southlawn, Montgomery; Ricky Hall, First Baptist, Prattville; Rick Marshall, Eastern Hills, Montgomery; *Wendy Westerhouse, First Baptist, Talladega

Insurance Committee

Chair 2026–2027: Reyn Norman, First Baptist, Montgomery

Terms to expire 2029: *Alan Taylor, First Baptist, Trussville

Looking ahead

The 2027 annual meeting will be held Nov. 16–17 at Eastmont Baptist Church in Montgomery.

Mark Bethea, pastor of First Baptist Church Montgomery, will deliver the convention sermon.

Mack Amis, pastor of Parker Memorial Baptist Church in Anniston, is the alternate preacher.

In 2028, First Baptist Church Trussville will host the annual meeting in combination with a Sending Celebration of missionaries being appointed by the International Mission Board. (TAB)

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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

CHURCH POSITIONS

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
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: northsidebaptistchurchjasper@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR
Pleasant Springs Baptist Church is seeking a bivocational pastor. Please send resumé to: PSBC, 409 Winchester Rd NE, Huntsville, AL 35811.

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: valleygrovebaptistal@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.

DISCIPLESHIP AND MUSIC PASTOR
FBC Paris, Kentucky, is seeking a discipleship and music pastor to shepherd church members through our discipleship process by planning and leading discipleship and music ministries. Key expectation #1: Emphasize discipleship within the FBC Paris music ministry. Key expectation #2: Facilitate church member engagement and progress through the discipleship process of FBC Paris. Key expectation #3: Provide pastoral oversight for worship services and special events. The full job description is also posted at https://fbcparisky.com/resources. Interested candidates can send their resumés to: kyle@fbcparisky.com.

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.

AVAILABLE FOR SERVICE

SUPPLY PREACHING
Central Alabama. William: 334-399-4572.

BUSINESS

STEEPLES, ETC.
No job too big or too small. Call for free on-site consultation. Toll-free 1-888-699-9679 or Alabama local 205-699-9679. Ask for the owner, Terry Barnes. Visit gallery at leedsstainedglass.com.

TRAVEL/VACATION

LOG CABIN
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.

Tara Dew shares love of God with ministry wives

By Dianna L. Cagle
The Alabama Baptist



Photo by Dianna L. Cagle/The Alabama Baptist

Tara Dew speaks at the Alabama WMU ministry wives luncheon Nov. 17 at FBC Trussville during the 2026 Alabama Baptist State Convention. She is an author, speaker and Bible teacher. Her husband, Jamie, is the president of New Orleans Seminary.

For the first time in several years, ministry wives had a dedicated luncheon at the state convention.

Hosted by Alabama WMU, the event featured author, speaker and Bible teacher Tara Dew.

"I love Alabama," said Dew, wife of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary President Jamie Dew. "Y'all have been such sweet, dear partners to Jamie and me since we moved to the Gulf Coast seven years ago."

At NOBTS, Tara Dew teaches in the Ministry to Women program and leads Thrive, a certificate program for ministry wives.

Dew recalled the early days of ministry when her husband led a small country church. During her initial interview, the very first question she was asked was, "Do you play piano?"

Already feeling she didn't look or sound like a traditional pastor's wife, she changed her outfit five times, battling feelings of inadequacy. This is just one example of the complexity of being the wife of a ministry leader, Dew said.



Photo by Dianna L. Cagle/The Alabama Baptist

Attendees share prayer concerns and pray with one another at Alabama WMU's ministry wives luncheon.

Teaching from Psalm 23 and her recent book, "Overflowing Peace: What God Says About A Peace-Filled Life," she explained the difficult, often dirty work of shepherds who stayed constantly with their sheep to keep them safe. She pointed out a shift in the psalm: the opening verses refer to God as "He," but later switch to a much more personal "You."

Never alone

Dew wanted ministry wives to know they are never alone on their life journeys. She reminded them of the biblical name Immanuel, which translates to "God with us."

"Sometimes, my friend, it's in the darkness that I hear God's voice most clearly," she said.

Dew detailed a shepherd's tools: a rod to defend against enemies and a classic hook or staff used to guide sheep away from crevices and pull them from danger.

God guides us

In the same way, God protects and guides us in a variety of ways with a variety of tools, she noted.

Dew said there was another tool shepherds used: oil. They rubbed oil on the faces and especially around the noses of sheep to keep nasal flies from infesting the animals and causing severe irritation.

"You and I can have some pesky, intrusive thoughts, can't we?" she asked, noting how many women are ensnared by swirling lies. But just as the oil protects the sheep, God renews our minds and lives, Dew explained.

'Good plans'

Dew closed by reflecting on a personal change in plans. When her husband first interviewed for the NOBTS presidency, they were hesitant to leave their friends, family, church and roles at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina.

At first, "all we could see was what we were losing," Dew confessed. But stepping out in faith showed them that "(God) has good plans," she said. "I can attest that goodness and love have come to us."

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Sunday School Lessons

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.
Professor of Biblical Studies, University of Mobile



For December 6

PRAYER
1 Samuel 1:9–18, 24–28

Context is a significant factor in studying Scripture. During the final years when judges ruled Israel, everyone followed their own rules (Judg. 21:25). Priests and judges were corrupt. They neither followed the Mosaic law nor received revelation from God (1 Sam. 3:1). During this quarter, we will study the transitional period when Israel rejected their heavenly King for an earthly substitute, and the Israelite monarchy was established.

Within the first few verses of 1 Samuel, the narrator introduces readers to the geographical, tribal, genealogical, marital and ritual context of Samuel's family. The spiritual stage is set with the introduction of Eli and his sons, priests and stewards of the tabernacle at Shiloh. The narrative describing Hannah's ongoing infertility, Peninnah's merciless provocation and Elkanah's emotional insensitivity leads the reader to empathize with Hannah's fervent prayer for God to grant her a son.

Fervent (9–11)

Every year, this Ephraimite family traveled to Shiloh to worship and sacrifice to the Lord of armies (hosts). And every year, Elkanah provided bountifully for Hannah, Peninnah provoked her incessantly and Hannah prayed fervently for a child.

As in years past, Hannah wept and begged God for a son. This year, she promised for her son to be set apart for service and that he would be a Nazirite, visually marked by his uncut hair and beard. (See Num. 6:1–21.) And this year, she caught the priest's attention.

Persistent (12–18)

Eli noticed that Hannah's lips moved, but he heard no sound. He accused her of being drunk. Hannah wasn't in need of detoxification; she was desperate. She explained that only God could fulfill the longing of her heart, and she would persist in her prayer until the Lord answered her.

Once Eli realized the weight of Hannah's burden, he pronounced that God would grant her request. She received a benediction of peace. Her final request was not simply for peace but also that Eli would look upon her through the eyes of grace, not as an unworthy woman (also known as a daughter of wickedness or Belial) but as a servant of God.

Hannah's persistence reminds Christians of the widow who relentlessly begged the judge for justice in one of Jesus' prayer parables (Luke 18:1–5) or of the man at midnight who kept knocking on his neighbor's door until he gave him bread (Luke 11:5–8). God heard the cry of Hannah's heart.

Fulfilled (24–28)

In the intervening verses, Hannah conceived, bore Samuel and delayed returning to Shiloh until Samuel had been weaned. Once he no longer needed nursing, Hannah brought him to Shiloh along with an offering of a bull, flour and wine. This was not the prescribed sacrifice for cleansing after childbirth (Lev. 12) or the redemption tax for a firstborn son (Num. 18:15–16). Instead, they seem to be more practical offerings of meat, bread and wine for Eli and his sons.

Hannah fulfilled her commitment to the Lord and to Eli by bringing Samuel to Shiloh. For the remainder of his life, Samuel would learn the Word, the ways and the wisdom of God. He would see the tribes of Israel devolve from ignoring God to rejecting God as their King, calling for a human king instead. Hannah's testimony of faithfulness sets her apart in this time and reminds believers that God is faithful to all who call on Him in faith.

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

For December 13

CALLING
1 Samuel 3:1–14

In the intervening narrative since the last lesson, the narrator records Hannah's extensive prayer, the actions of Eli's wicked sons and God's gracious blessing of more children through Hannah. After Hannah "loaned" Samuel to the Lord's service, God granted her three more sons and two daughters.

Samuel grew in his understanding of the Lord (2:21). He also grew physically and socially (2:26). In fact, these transitional verses look like Luke's descriptions of Jesus' development from childhood to adolescence to adulthood. (See Luke 2:40, 52.)

Students of Scripture must note that when the term "hekal," a word translated "temple," is used in chapter 3, Solomon's temple had not yet been built. This term can refer either to the tabernacle as a whole or to the Holy Place, a covered area within the tabernacle where the bread table, altar of incense and lampstand resided, or to the Most Holy Place, which housed the Ark of the Covenant.

Scholars insist that Samuel did not sleep in the Holy of Holies where the Ark was. C.F. Keil argued that "temple" refers to the whole tabernacle compound. However, in the days when "everyone did whatever seemed right to him" (Judg. 21:25) and Phinehas and Hophni would take the Ark into battle (4:1–4), is it unreasonable to think that Eli had Samuel sleeping "where the Ark of God was located"? This writer is inclined to read that Samuel was sleeping in the Most Holy Place, although he did not belong there.

A persistent call (1–7)

This time was marked by a dearth of supernatural visions. Verse 1 uses the same phrase found in Proverbs 29:18 — "eyn chazon," which means "no supernatural revelations." With priests ignoring Torah instructions regarding sacrifices, it was no wonder that they did not hear from God. They paid no attention to God's instructions through Moses. Why would God speak to them? Or if He did, would they have ears of faith to hear Him?

Eli was sleeping where the lamp was burning. Samuel was lying down in the temple where the Ark was. Samuel was learning ritual practices at the tabernacle, but he did not yet know God, nor had he learned to discern God's voice.

When he was awakened by a voice, he assumed that Eli was calling him. Samuel responded to the call three times before Eli discerned that God was calling Samuel.

An attentive ear (8–10)

When Eli finally realized what was happening, he told Samuel to go back where he had been and listen for the voice again. When God spoke, Samuel was to respond that he was listening.

In some primary oral cultures, a community's storyteller will begin a story by asking, "Are you ready to hear?" The community's response is, "We are ready to hear!" Such was the case with Samuel. May God grant our congregations and our families that expectant attitude and attentive ear to listen to what God is saying!

A dire message (11–14)

What a message! God told Samuel that He would fulfill the judgment against Eli and his sons, just as a visiting man of God had pronounced it (2:27–36). Even worse, there would be no atonement for their sins since they blasphemed God and did not take the sacrifices seriously. Ultimately, they rejected the atonement of Christ, because all the holy sacrifices of the Old Testament point to the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ (Heb. 9:11–28).

Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if He calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.'"

1 Samuel 3:9

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE



By Adam Winn, Ph.D.
Chair and Professor, Department of Biblical and Religious Studies at Samford University

For December 6

THE VIRGIN BIRTH: MARY'S STORY Luke 1:26–38

Mary, a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, is visited by an angel. (26–29)

This story is preceded in Luke by another story — that of the announcement about the birth of John to his father, a priest named Zechariah, and the subsequent birth of John.

The stories have strong parallels and are meant to be read side by side. Gabriel, the same angel that announced the birth of John, comes to a virgin named Mary. Mary lives in the Galilean town of Nazareth, and she is engaged to a man named Joseph. Gabriel greets Mary and describes her as "favored woman" and tells her, "The Lord is with you."

It is noteworthy that the latter words are similar to words spoken to Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Joshua and David, and they are used to communicate God's support and God's intention to use a person for a special purpose.

The angel told the virgin Mary that she would conceive and give birth to a son. (30–33)

The special, divine purpose that Mary is chosen for is then explained. After telling Mary not to be afraid and reiterating her favor with God, Gabriel tells her that she will bear a son and she will name Him Jesus — the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means "Yahweh saves."

Mary is then told four things about this Son: He will be great, He will be Son of the Most High God, God will give Him His ancestor David's throne and His reign and Kingdom will have no end.

These words from Gabriel draw strongly from God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:12–16, a text with significant messianic expectations for Jews of the first century.

In these verses God says of David's offspring, "I will be His Father, and He will be my son," and His house, Kingdom and throne will be established forever.

The angel explained that the Holy Spirit would make this happen, for nothing is impossible with God. (34–38)

This promise from Gabriel leads to a natural question from Mary. It is important to clarify that this is not a question expressing doubt as much as it is a question about how this would be possible or come about given her status as a virgin. Gabriel tells her that her child will be born by the power of God's Spirit coming upon and overshadowing her.

This will result in two truths regarding the child. He will be "holy," one unblemished by sin and set apart for God, and He will be called "Son of God." Then, without a request from Mary, Gabriel seems to offer supporting evidence of his claim by describing the miraculous circumstances of Elizabeth giving birth after a long life of barrenness.

He concludes by declaring, "For nothing will be impossible with God." To this explanation, Mary responds in faith, unlike Zechariah, saying, "See, I am the Lord's servant. May it happen to me as you have said."

While this story offers invaluable information about the circumstances surrounding the announcement of Jesus' birth and His identity, it also intentionally contrasts the response of Zechariah and Mary regarding God doing the impossible through them.

Where Zechariah responds with doubt and a request for a sign, Mary, after the angel explains how the birth will come about, responds in faith. In this way, Mary becomes a model of trusting God even in the face of what seems impossible.

For December 13

THE VIRGIN BIRTH: JOSEPH'S STORY Matthew 1:18–25

Joseph, engaged to marry Mary, discovers that she is pregnant by the Holy Spirit. (18–19)

This week we look at the announcement of Jesus' birth in the Gospel of Matthew, which describes Joseph's experience. We are told that Jesus' mother, Mary, was engaged to a man named Joseph.

This relationship would have been a legally binding agreement between Joseph and both Mary and her family. It would have required a divorce to terminate it. However, before the marriage and the cohabitation that would follow, Mary is found pregnant.

While we are told that she is pregnant by the work of the Holy Spirit, Joseph at this point is only privy to the pregnancy, not its origin. A pregnancy out of wedlock and presumably by a man other than Joseph would have been shameful enough to force Joseph not to go through with the marriage. However, Joseph decides to act in a way that will bring the least amount of shame to Mary by divorcing her quietly and ending the engagement.

Matthew says that such behavior is consistent with Joseph's identity as a righteous man. It seems noteworthy here that Matthew links compassion, kindness and forgiveness toward one who wrongs you as traits of righteousness, as will Jesus later in His teachings.

An angel appears to Joseph and confirms that Mary is pregnant by the Holy Spirit and that Jesus will save His people from their sins. (20–23)

Before Joseph can move to divorce Mary, an angel tells him that he should not be afraid to take Mary as his wife, for the child to be born to her is from the Holy Spirit.

Additionally, Joseph is told the child's name will be Jesus and that He will save His people from their sins. While salvation from individual sins is not excluded, the idea of Israel as a whole being delivered from their national rebellion and sin is also likely in view, particularly with the phrase "His people."

In many ways the Jews were still awaiting God's full restoration of Israel and the fulfillment of all the promises found in Scripture. That Matthew connects this verse with Isaiah 7:14 has troubled some, who say the verse in its original context does not seem to be about a future Messiah. Yet such trouble comes from a narrow and modern reading of the word "fulfill." For Jews in the first century, this could refer to God repeating patterns from the past in the present and, in this way, bringing Israel's story to its completion.

Thus, in this citation, Matthew is likely drawing on the long history of God using the miraculous birth of a son (such as Isaac or Samuel) as a sign of Israel's deliverance and noting that God is again giving just such a sign for Israel's final deliverance.

Joseph obeyed God and named Him Jesus. (24–25)

In these verses, we see that Joseph responds faithfully to God's instruction that is given through the angel. He does not divorce Mary but rather moves forward in marrying her.

Additionally, he is faithful in abstaining from sexual relations with Mary until after she has given birth and in giving the child the name Jesus, as the angel commanded.

While the text does not say this, Joseph's choice to move forward in marrying Mary in these circumstances would have likely come with social embarrassment and shame. Despite such difficulties, Joseph is faithful to God in his actions.

"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel."

Matthew 1:23

Life at CONVENTION



Facebook photo/The Baptist Foundation of Alabama

Alabama WMU president Jamie McGlaughn (left) and Alabama WMU executive director Candace McIntosh enjoy Dippin' Dots at The Baptist Foundation of Alabama booth at the Pastors Conference. Visitors were encouraged to connect the dots by subscribing to TBFA content by scanning its QR code.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Mark Wakefield (center), disaster relief and chaplaincy ministries strategist, bestows the Tommy Puckett Award for Excellence on two disaster relief volunteers: Ed Carpenter (left) and Becky Noland (right).



TAB photo

Debbie Campbell (right), director of communications for TAB Media Group, visits with Lonette (center) and Steve Berg at the TAB Media Group booth in the exhibit hall. Lonette served as executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission for 17 years before retiring in December 2023.

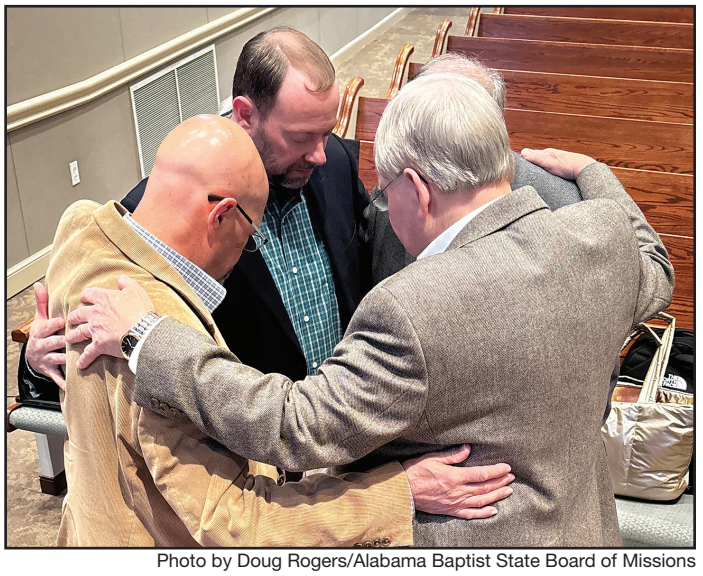


Photo by Doug Rogers/Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

Travis Coleman (front right), former pastor of FBC Prattville, prays over current pastor Justin Hall (back left) before he delivers the Wednesday morning theme interpretation.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

FBC Trussville's Mason Aldridge and Lance Pate perform a skit on the impact of encouragement during the afternoon business session Nov. 17. Aldridge serves as worship pastor, and Pate serves as executive pastor.



Facebook photo/Lindsay Allen

Marshall, son of SBOM executive director-elect Derek Allen, takes a photo with Waffles, the unofficial mascot of TAB Kids, in the exhibit hall.



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

The 2027 Pastors Conference officers are (l to r) Andy Frazier, president-elect and pastor of Jasper First Baptist Church; Chris Jones, president and pastor of Meadow Brook Baptist Church in Birmingham; Richard Richie, secretary-treasurer and pastor of Blue Springs Baptist Church, Somerville; and Andy John King, vice president and pastor of Lindsay Lane Baptist Church in Athens.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, recognizes former convention presidents at the 2026 Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting.