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INSIDE



Masters winner Watson glorifies God in game, shares faith in Tweets

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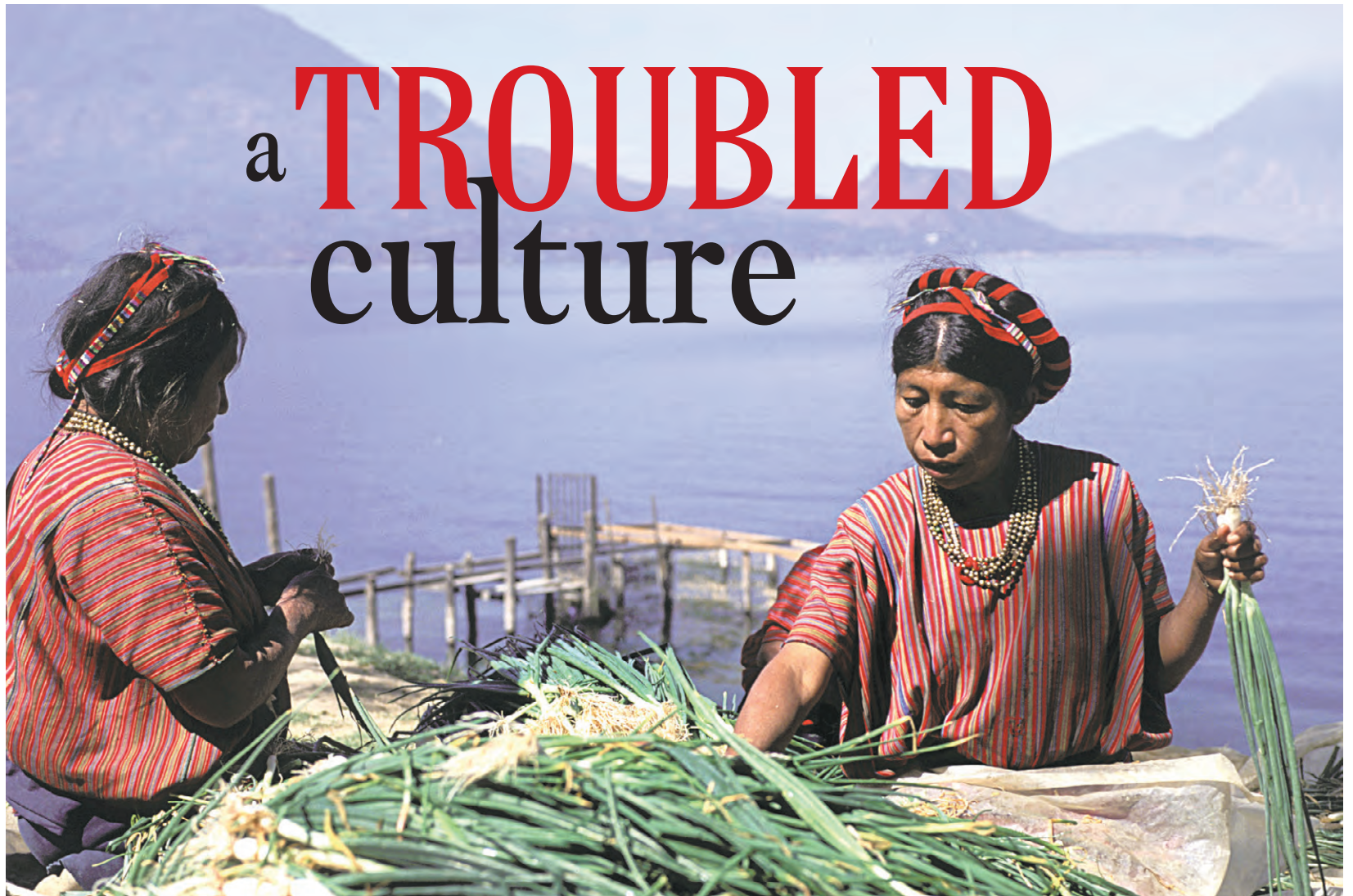
Organ donation, transplantation provides gift of life

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Intense demonic battle meets gospel as believers live in shadows in Central Asia

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BP photo

a TROUBLED culture

Mayan story about hopelessness of the people instead of 12-21-12, Baptist workers say

Wearing traditional handmade clothing, Mayan women sort a crop of onions they have just washed in Guatemala's Lake Atitlan. Soon they will sell these at an outdoor market in a nearby village.

Because the ancient 5,125-year Mayan calendar will end on Dec. 21, 2012, global interest in Mayans has skyrocketed in recent years.

Some New Age philosophers predict the beginning of a new era of enlightenment for mankind. Others say it's a countdown to the end of the world. Although many scholars dismiss these claims, tourists from

around the globe are flocking to Mayan ruins in Latin America. The calendar itself has been the subject of many books, movies, news specials and college lectures.

But most Mayans aren't concerned about the calendar, according to Southern Baptists who work among Mayan people groups. The real Mayan story isn't about the calendar at all, they say. It's about the people.

Jeronimo, for example, is one of nearly 5 million Mayan descendants living throughout Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and Belize. He was an alcoholic before Southern Baptist workers with Guatemala's Tajumulco Mam people group came with a message that changed his life.

Jeronimo accepted Christ as his Savior, and soon his wife and children did the same. Later he started the first evangelical church in his community. Then he began sharing Christ and planting churches in other

villages. He also translated parts of the Bible and other Bible storying materials into the local language so others could hear the gospel.

Despite success stories like Jeronimo's, many Mayans remain trapped in a spiritual darkness drawn from old traditions, said Gary Stone, Southern Baptist worker among the Tajumulco Mam.

"The Tajumulco Mam have always been known as a fierce and warlike people," Stone said. "Villages feud between each other and land wars are never ending. The culture is broken, and there is much darkness in daily life. Incest, stealing, lying, alcoholism, multiple partners, greed and other sins keep the Mam people in darkness."

Like many Mayan groups, the Mam cling to their heritage and live in small rural villages of between 50 to 100 families. They depend on
(See 'God,' page 4)



BP photo

In the village of San Francisco, Guatemala, a Mayan woman weaves colorful cloth that will be used to make traditional clothing.

COMMENT

Remembering that Terrible Day

The Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) has designated Sunday, April 22, 2012, as “A Time to Remember” the disaster of April 27, 2011. That was the day 62 tornadoes tore through the state leaving 42 Alabama counties as officially declared disaster areas. Authorities called it the second-worst natural disaster in the history of the nation.

A reported 272 people lost their lives. Damage ran into the billions of dollars. Scores of Alabama Baptist churches were either destroyed or heavily damaged. It was an experience that divided time into before and after that terrible day.

April 27 also was a day that proved the Baptist system works.

Part of the Baptist system is unofficial. It is the compassion-driven volunteers who picked up chain saws and worked through the night to help get ambulances to critically injured people in Shoal Creek Valley or the persons who plunged into the debris to check on neighbors or the people who fired up grills to prepare meals for people left homeless by the tornadoes. As the people of God, that is what Alabama Baptists do. That is who we are.

Another part of the system is the network of trained volunteers who responded with feeding units that prepared thousands of meals a day. Other trained volunteers worked by cutting trees off houses, caring for children, even providing shower units where people could get a hot bath or wash dirty clothes. Trained volunteers provided communications where telephones and cell towers had been destroyed. They coordinated assignments for volunteers and supplies across the state and many other helpful tasks.

Preparation proved valuable

This invaluable resource was in place because of the planning and preparation Baptists had done through the state convention and local associations. Experience had taught that Baptists needed to be ready when disaster struck and on April 27 Baptists were ready.

This preparation has earned Baptists a national reputation. Southern Baptists are recognized as the third-largest emergency response organization behind the American Red Cross and the Salvation Army.

Letters to the Editor

TRUE PROSPERITY

In my opinion, gambling is a sin. Our society has come to view gambling as harmless. People who can afford to gamble don't need more money, and those who need more money can't afford to gamble.

Gambling offers the false hope of instant abundance while at the same time denying both the means and the true purpose of prosperity that God intended. Gambling not only denies God as the provider, but also rejects His means and purpose of taking care of us. Gambling is believing in “Lady Luck” rather
(See ‘Letters,’ page 14)

THOUGHTS By Bob Terry



Editor Bob Terry looks through the commemorative issue as it comes off the press.
Photos by Jennifer Davis Rash

In a matter of days, Alabama Baptists contributed more than \$3 million through the SBOM for tornado relief. About that much more was contributed to efforts led by local Baptist associations and churches. Baptists were at the heart of community efforts to rescue survivors. Baptists were among the first to assist communities in recovery. Baptists remain at the center of efforts to help rebuild lives and homes destroyed that fateful day.

This Sunday, April 22, most Alabama Baptist churches will take time to remember what happened April 27 and to give thanks for all the good things that have happened since then — all the recovery and rebuilding that continues. Some churches plan to observe A Time to Remember on April 29.

A major part of the day's activities will be helping Alabama Baptists know the kind of ministries that have gone on in their name for the past year. Alabama Baptists will learn about the heavily damaged and destroyed churches and where those churches are now, about ongoing community ministries where Baptists have been the catalyst to bring people together to help others in the name of Christ and about what has been learned to help everyone be better prepared for the next weather-related emergency.

This information will be provided in a special commemorative issue of the state Baptist paper that has been prepared and sent in bulk to every Baptist church in Alabama that cooperates with the Alabama Baptist State Convention — more than 3,200 of them. The commemorative issue is 56 pages of full color telling the story of Alabama Baptists — the destruction, the rescue, the recovery and the rebuilding.

Every church is being asked to distribute these commemorative issues on April 22 and the days

that follow to their active resident families. Most will simply ask those attending Sunday School and worship to pick up a copy of the special issue before they leave. This commemorative issue is not part of the regular issues of *The Alabama Baptist*. It will not be mailed into the homes of subscribers. Distribution is planned through the churches.

This commemorative issue is provided to the churches at no cost. Major sponsors — Samford University as the Platinum Sponsor and the SBOM as the Gold Sponsor — together with advertisers covered most of the cost of the project.

Sharing how God used Baptists

The state paper staff worked with a talented group of writers and photographers to tell the exciting and inspiring stories of how God used Alabama Baptists in the days, weeks and months following the tornadoes. Most readers will be surprisingly pleased to learn all the ways Alabama Baptists have responded to individual and community needs.

The SBOM and directors of missions from the associations have worked with the staff of *The Alabama Baptist* to alert churches the special issue is coming. In fact, every church should have received its copies by the time you read this column. Still some churches may not have gotten word about the commemorative issue and may be confused by the box of papers they received. You can help by making sure your church puts out the copies for its families this Sunday morning. And if you hear any question about this project, we would greatly appreciate you sharing the above information to help make sure that every Alabama Baptist family has opportunity to learn how God has used Baptists since the April 27 tornadoes.

For more information, call 1-800-803-5201 or visit www.thealabamabaptist.org.

THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

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

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Thieves target Gadsden church; members target thief with love

By Anna Keller
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

James Memorial Baptist Church, Gadsden, has suffered about \$20,000 in damages within the last few months thanks to theft. Last December, the Etowah Baptist Association church discovered that someone had been tampering with the air conditioning unit and had stolen pieces of copper — leaving the unit destroyed.

“What the thief was doing was stealing copper pipe that ran from the a.c. unit to the building, then stealing the copper coil from the unit itself,” Pastor Mike Allums said. “When they do that, they rupture the lines and freon goes everywhere.”

Unfortunately, the church was hit again in late January. And James Memorial wasn't the only victim. Other churches in the area were reporting the same problem.

“It was surprising at first to think someone could do that to a house of God,” said Orva McDonald, the church's treasurer. “We couldn't believe [it] was actually happening, that someone was stealing from churches and businesses and community centers around town.”

After being hit twice (and instating a watch committee that signed up for shifts to keep an eye on the church's property overnight), James Memorial leaders decided it was time to invest in a security system. They were concerned that their insurance premiums would increase or — even worse — that they'd lose their coverage.

The church installed a laser-beam system in March, and early one morning the thief attempted to once again break into the units. But because the security system was in place, he moved across the street to a Church of Christ church instead.

‘We forgive him’

Finally, in early April, the thief was arrested, which was a relief to the many churches and businesses that had been targeted in recent months.

“He broke the law, so it was the right thing to press charges, but we also agreed that we needed to reach out to this man and in some way express the love of Christ to him,” Allums said.

“We had a responsibility to the community and other churches to see that he was punished, but we still felt an obligation to reach out.”

Since the arrest happened so recently, Allums isn't yet sure what reaching out will look like for his congregation, but he has seen the church's members show support for the idea.

“I think it's good that we're going to reach out,” McDonald said. “This young man is 19 years old. We want to show we forgive him and want to help him out. We want to show him we still care about him.”

‘Christian. Husband. Pro Golfer.’

Masters winner Watson glorifies God in game, shares faith in Tweets

There's something different about Bubba Watson.

The winner of the 2012 Masters golf tournament realizes he's not like most famous athletes.

In fact, he welcomes it.

“People always ask ‘Why is Bubba different?’” Watson said during a pre-Masters phone interview from Scottsdale, Ariz. “They're just trying to figure it out.”

Watson's identity is not wrapped up in his freakishly long drives from his lanky 6-foot-3, 180-pound left-handed swing — he leads the Tour with a 315-yard average.

Rather, take one look at his Twitter profile and you may figure out what's different about Watson: “@bubbawatson: Christian. Husband. Daddy. Pro Golfer. Owner of General Lee 1.”

Watson is an outspoken Christian golfer and he uses his Twitter account — along with his platform as one of the PGA Tour's magnetic personalities — to share about his faith in Christ.

“For me, it's just showing the Light,” the 33-year-old said. “There's people who want to put down Christians. I try to tell them Jesus loves you. It's just a way to be strong in my faith.”

Speaking to the Augusta, Ga., crowd and a TV audience after he won the Masters, he thanked “my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” His first Tweet after he won the Masters read simply: “To God Be the Glory!!!”

In April 2011, just before teeing off on the final round of the Masters, Watson took advantage of his social media platform to Tweet out two Bible verses on Sunday morning.

Some started complaining about his 140-character witnessing tactics, but Watson's response was simple: Feel free to unfollow, but the talk about God wasn't going away.

Some 100 people quit following him and in true Bubba style, he reached out and wished them well with goodbye notes.

The past month more Christian haters have tried to derail Watson's testimony — or as he mildly puts it, “write bad stuff.”

When someone tells him “Your God Tweets are lame,” Watson responds with, “I will pray for u and ur family.”

Among the 39,000-plus messages he's sent into the Twittersphere, he's sure to spread the gospel message: “God made everything & saved us from our sins & gives us hope and gives us eternal life! #Godisgood”

Sometimes he'll use his PGA platform — like the day after taking the lead with a headline-grabbing 10-under-par 62 at the Cadillac Championship in March — to bring God into the mainstream conversation.

Watson's Tweet before his third round: “The most important thing in my life? Answer after I golf 18 holes with @Justin-Rose99. #Godisgood” Later that day: “Most important things in my life — 1. God 2. Wife 3. Family 4. Helping others 5. Golf”

As golf's official major season bloomed during the week of the Masters, and Watson winning a major for the first time — only his fourth PGA Tour career victory — Watson seemed like a long shot. His best finish at



BP photo

SHOWING THE ‘LIGHT’ — Masters winner Bubba Watson credits his Christian faith for turning him from an angry golfer to a calmer golfer. He's also outspoken about his faith, crediting the Lord after his win.

Augusta National had been a tie for 20th in 2008.

But winning is no longer everything for Watson. There was a time in his life where drives slicing into the thick, five-inch rough or birdie putts rimming out would get the best of him and his blood pressure.

Watson will tell you, Angry Bubba was not a good look. Unbecoming, for sure.

“I was so wrapped up in ‘Why am I not winning?’” Watson said.

Things got so heated on the golf course that Ted Scott, his caddie since 2006, finally gave him an ultimatum.

“My caddie finally stepped up and said, ‘You're going to have to change, or I'm going to quit,’” Watson said.

Watson's temper-laced decorum was replaced with what some call “Bubba Golf,” which stresses golf mechanics less and puts a heavy focus on just playing golf and having fun on the course.

Watson won the Travelers Championship in June 2010, the Farmer's Insurance Open in January 2011 and the Zurich Classic a few months later.

In March, Watson led the Cadillac Championship after 54 holes before fading in the final round, missing a nine-foot putt by inches on the final hole that would have forced a playoff.

Watson credits three strong believers — Scott, along with his trainer Adam Fisher (“Fish”) and Watson's wife Angie — as the difference in his attitude.

Watson, who has long supported many charities, including the upcoming Bubba's Bash and the infamous “Golf Boys” video project said, “Not just in golf, but off the golf course, [I want] to be a light for Jesus.”

Taking time to study the Word

Perhaps the most powerful Christian impact Watson has experienced has been the PGA Tour's weekly Bible study, held every Wednesday night during tournament weeks.

The one-hour study is something Watson looks forward to regularly: “Getting more in the Word and realizing that golf is just an avenue for Jesus to use me to reach as many people as I can.”

Watson's journey to Christ isn't uncommon. He grew up in Bagdad, Fla., as a good kid but it wasn't until his senior year in high school that he gave himself to the Lord.

“I would say 2004 was my true time of becoming a Christian,” Watson said, “and shaping me into the man I am today.” (BP)

*“Not just in golf,
but off the golf
course, [I want] to
be a light for Jesus.”*

Bubba Watson



Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over Him.

Romans 6:8–9

Across Alabama's Associations

BALDWIN

► **First Church, Fairhope**, will host Acts: The 3 Man Show, a full-length theatrical production based on the New Testament book of Acts on May 4, 7 p.m. The show features monumental events of the early church through the stoning of Stephen, Peter's bold sermon at Pentecost, the conversion of Saul, Paul's trials before Nero and many other scenes. For more information, call 205-928-8685 or visit www.fb-fairhope.org. Jerry Henry is pastor.

BESSEMER

► **Fairfield Highlands Church, Midfield**, will hold a fifth Sunday celebration April 29, 11 a.m., with guest speaker T.A. Duke, former pastor, and Randy Harwell, former music director. A covered-dish lunch will follow with a special time of music beginning at 1:30 p.m. Ed Cruce is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM

► **Lake Highland Church, Birmingham**, will celebrate its 85th anniversary April 22 with worship at 11 a.m. followed by a potluck lunch in the fellowship hall. Jere Allen is pastor. ► **Robinwood Church, Birmingham**, will hold a Sunday Night Revival on May 6, 6 p.m., with Allen Davis, pastor of Gardendale East Church. The theme will be "Do you know where you will spend eternity?" Dale Creel is pastor at Robinwood.

CALHOUN

► **Ten Island Church, Ohatchee**, will have a food and clothes giveaway April 28, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. There will be barbeque chicken, smoked ham, boston butt and "all the fixings." For more information, call 256-454-3584 or visit www.tenislandbaptistchurch.com. Lee Bridges is pastor.

COFFEE

► **Bethany Church, New Brockton**, will have homecoming April 22. Sunday School begins at 9 a.m. with worship at 10 a.m. Lunch will follow the worship service. Tony Dye is pastor.

COLUMBIA

► **Bay Springs Church, Dothan**, will hold a Rally to Fight Human Trafficking youth rally April 28 to raise awareness to fight modern slavery and help its victims. Jud Daughtry and Jacob Hatcher will speak. There will be food, music, videos, fellowship and more. The cookout will start at 5:30 p.m. and the rally will be 6-7:30 p.m. For more information, call 334-692-3138 or email baysprings@centurytel.net. Scott Wyatt is pastor.

DEKALB

► **Rainsville First Church**, will host a memorial concert and worship service April 29, 6 p.m., to honor the victims of the April 27, 2011, tornadoes. The concert will feature contemporary Christian music singer Ginny Owens and Victoria Inman Griffith. Jeff Mann is pastor.

EAST LIBERTY

► **West Side Church, Lanett**, will host Christian humorist and musician Billy Bob Bohannon on April 29, 6 p.m. Jodie Robinson is pastor.

NORTH JEFFERSON

► **Greg Davis** is the new pastor of **Beechwood Church, Mount Olive**. He graduated from the University of Alabama at Birmingham and New Orleans Seminary. Davis is currently president of First Priority of Alabama. He and his wife, Sandi, have two children.

RUSSELL

► **Philadelphia Church, Smiths Station**, will hold Senior

Singspiration on April 26, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Skip Speed is pastor.

TALLAPOOSA

► **Jacksons Gap Church**, will hold a yard sale April 28, 7 a.m.-4 p.m. The money received for items sold will go to the youth summer trip fund. Charles Horton is pastor. ► **Lake Martin Church, Dadeville**, will host A Time to Remember on April 22, 3 p.m. with Mel Johnson, disaster relief strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. Testimonies of those in Tallapoosa County affected by the tornadoes will be shared at the event. Steve Poteat is pastor.

TENNESSEE RIVER

► **B.J. Shelton** is the new youth minister of **First Church, Scottsboro**. Shelton began ministry at First, Scottsboro, on March 18. He was ordained in 2011 and holds degrees from the Baptist College in Florida and Martin Methodist College in Pulaski, Tenn. He previously served as associate pastor to students at Elkton Church, Tenn., and student ministry intern and facilities manager at Southside Church, Opp. **First Church, Scottsboro**, also has **Martin Gureasko** as its new minister of music. Gureasko previously served at Whitesburg Church, Huntsville, and Third Church, Murfreesboro, Tenn., and is a graduate of Middle Tennessee State University, Liberty University and the University of Memphis.

TUSCALOOSA

► **Circlewood Church, Tuscaloosa**, will host Outdoor Extravaganza on April 21, 6 p.m. There will be wild game food, singing and door prizes. Eric Hixon of M.U.D. Ministries will speak April 22. For more information, call 205-553-4315. Herb Thomas is pastor.



BP photo

At a worship center in San Andres Itzapa, Guatemala, people of Mayan descent pay homage to San Simon (Saint Simon), also known as Judas Iscariot.

God moving among Mayans; Southern Baptists continue work

(continued from page 1)
crops like potatoes, beans, corn and peppers to survive. Most still wear traditional handmade Mayan clothing.

Poverty and lack of jobs sometimes force them to find work elsewhere.

"Many [Mam] travel to the U.S. to make their fortunes," Stone said. "Instead of finding the riches they desire there, many of them come back to Guatemala with addictions, venereal disease and broken relationships."

The traditions that give Mayan groups their unique identity often are a barrier to the gospel, Southern Baptist workers said.

"The primary religion is animism with a veneer of Catholicism overlaying it," said Alan Lyons, a strategy leader for Southern Baptist work among Mayans. "There are obvious examples of animistic, indigenous practices, like sacrificing chickens on the steps of the

church. Many church members have difficulty explaining what it means to be a follower of Jesus, and in times of crisis, they often revert back to animistic practices instead of trusting Jesus."

Many Mayans do not read and only speak one of the 69 Mayan languages. Stone and others are working with national believers to present the gospel in the groups' heart languages through oral Bible storying, gospel recordings and drama. Stone hopes the current upward trend in education will also help, as young people stay in school longer and learn to read.

Despite these difficulties, God has been moving among Mayan people groups. "When we arrived to work with the Tajumulco Mam, they were considered an unreached people group," Stone said. "Today, by God's great grace and mercy, they are no longer unreached." (BP)



istockphoto.com



Photo courtesy of South Roebuck Community Church

SOUTH ROEBUCK COMMUNITY CHURCH HOLDS LIFE SKILLS SEMINAR

South Roebuck Community Church holds a Life Skills Seminar for foster children, adopted children and at-risk Birmingham youth ages 13-18 on March 17. The multisession interactive program allows teens to explore general life skills, keys to motivation, academic excellence and self-reliance. Jerome Bell is pastor.

Alabama Cooperative Program Gifts

Alabama Baptist Giving

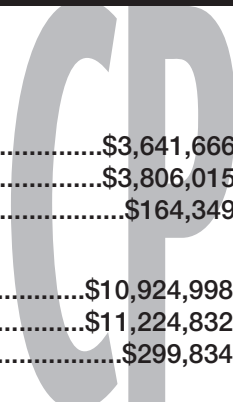
Year to Date through March 31, 2012

MARCH

CP Challenge Budget Goal	\$3,641,666
CP Challenge Budget Gifts	\$3,806,015
Over Goal for Month	\$164,349

YEAR TO DATE

CP Challenge Budget Goal	\$10,924,998
CP Challenge Budget Gifts	\$11,224,832
Over Goal for Year	\$299,834



The gift of **LIFE**

April is organ
donation month.



Common myths about organ donation, transplantation

Across the United States, more than 110,000 individuals are waiting for an organ transplant. In Alabama alone, more than 3,500 people are registered with the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), the nonprofit organization that operates the federally approved Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network. While they wait, approximately 23,000 Alabamians die in Alabama hospitals each year. Last year, only 110 of those deaths resulted in organ donations.

So why do so many potential donors fail to make a donation decision? Misinformation is one major reason, said Ann Rayburn, senior manager of professional education for the Alabama Organ Center (AOC).

Myth: All medical issues and behavioral choices equate to donor ineligibility

Many people mistakenly believe that medical issues or behavioral choices make them ineligible to donate organs. While infectious diseases and metastatic cancers automatically disqualify an individual from donating, other conditions, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, a history of smoking or even age, do not.

"Most people do not realize that different organs have different longevity," said Derek DuBay, assistant professor of surgery in the division of transplantation at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and a deacon at Liberty Park Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills, in Birmingham Baptist Association. "A liver, for example, is an organ that can go on forever and the same is often true for tissue and bone."

Myth: Emergency personnel will not try to save an injured organ donor

Another prevailing myth regarding organ donation is the fear that emergency personnel will not try to save an injured organ donor. Nothing could be further from the truth, Rayburn said.

"If you are in an accident, the number one priority is to save your life," she said. "Donation can only be considered after all life-saving efforts are exhausted."

In fact, most organ donors today fall victim to natural causes rather than accidents, DuBay said.

Prior to air bags and seat belts, most organ donors were victims of automobile accidents. Today, however, the most common donor is a middle-aged patient who has had a stroke or other brain trauma that leads to brain swelling and eventually to brain death, he said.

Myth: Religion prohibits organ donation

DuBay said sometimes people mistakenly believe that their religion prohibits organ donation or feel that the body has to be whole to go on to the afterlife. However, no major religion prohibits organ donation, DuBay said, and most religions have a positive stance toward donation, considering it an act of charity (see story, page 8).

Myth: Mutilation of body during recovery process

DuBay said some people also fear their bodies will be mutilated during the recovery process, which is another myth. Organ recovery is a surgical procedure, and just like other surgeries, physicians are respectful of the patient's body. An open casket funeral is still possible after organ donation, and the donor's family does not incur any additional costs for organ recovery. ■

A special section by *The Alabama Baptist*

By **Carrie Brown McWhorter**
Correspondent, *The Alabama Baptist*

LIFE in the midst of death

A theological and ethical reflection on the practice of organ donation and transplantation

By Jeffrey B. Riley
Special to *The Alabama Baptist*

The familiar Dr. Pepper tune is stuck in my head — a sign of good advertising — but the words have changed. No longer, “I’m a Pepper, you’re a Pepper,” but, “I’m a donor, he’s a donor, she’s a donor, we’re a donor, wouldn’t you like to be a donor too?” The video, produced by the Oschner Health System and filmed in the streets and carnival atmosphere of New Orleans, uses donors and recipients of organs through transplantation to encourage you to become a donor. All that you need to do to join the “organ donor craze” is to check the donor box on your driver’s license or go online and sign up on a donor registry. Simple. Easy. Free.

I must admit that seeing donors and recipients alike is a powerful incentive to consider organ donation. Approximately 110,000 people are waiting for an organ and on average 144 are added every day to the list. But something seems to be missing from this video and most other means used to persuade us to become organ donors: explicit moral justification. Public and private invitations to become an organ donor often say simply that it is the right thing to do. But to say that something is right begs the following ethical question: on what basis do you justify the act? Moreover, is organ donation merely permissible or is it obligatory, or perhaps supererogatory (beyond the requirements of duty)? In other words, checking a box and being listed on a registry should not be confused with ethical and theological reflection on what it means to be an organ donor.

Granted, one important point is often raised — people are dying while waiting for organs to become available. Nevertheless, not one of the 18 or so who die every day awaiting an organ can be saved by you becoming a donor, unless you are willing to be a living, matching donor. In most cases, to save a life as a donor means that you must first die, which not only brings to mind another common New Orleans tradition — the jazz funeral — but also drives the Christian to a more profound level of moral and theological reflection on the issue of organ donation.

What does it mean to have a body in life and in death? All the consequences related to organ transplantation, the profound needs, success stories, and so forth — ought to take a back seat ethically to reflection on what it means to a person’s identity to be embodied. To consider giving away body parts for someone else to use strikes at the core of our personal identity. We don’t know life

and living apart from having a body. With bodies, we are born, mature, marry, live, suffer and die. With bodies, we love our Lord, spouses and families; we enjoy life, work, play and worship. With bodies, we laugh and cry, sing and suffer, hope and despair. God creates us embodied. Eventually, however, we will die. But what happens to our identity when we die?

In short, we continue to live, disembodied for a time in what theologians call “the intermediate state of the soul,” best captured by Paul’s words, “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8). A dead person no longer needs body parts, right? Even so, the Bible indicates that the disembodied state, what Paul calls being unclothed, is neither desired nor final, though to be in the presence of the Lord is preferred over current sufferings. Most preferred is to be in the presence of God clothed with our resurrected bodies (2 Cor. 5:1–10), a body that has a direct connection to our earthly, soulless, dead body.

‘Complete resurrection’

The church has acknowledged historically that what happens to the body before and after death has no immediate bearing on the hope of the gospel or the promise of the resurrection of the dead. The martyrs eaten by lions or burned at the stake, the saints lost at sea or in the desert and the faithful citizen decimated in an act of war are all promised full, bodily resurrections. Southern Baptists, in a resolution (see story, page 8), defend the practice of human organ donation, stating the “complete resurrection of the body does not depend on bodily wholeness at death.”

The resurrection occurs by the power of God, not the condition of the body. Even so, the Bible indicates and Christian theology affirms that in the resurrection God does not create a new body ex nihilo (out of nothing). The resurrection is of the dead, out of the grave, sea, or dust, such that some form of continuity is maintained with our earthly bodies even though a real, resurrected body is transformed into what Paul calls a spiritual body. A spiritual body is not a ghostly, ethereal existence but is a corporeal or physical body that is completely under the power and authority of the Spirit of God and thus limited only by God Himself.

Although the resurrected body is an existence we cannot yet fully comprehend, we do an example for the kind of bodies we will have at the resurrection — Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15). The same body placed dead in the tomb was raised from the dead on the third day and now resides in the presence of God

the Father. This continuity and discontinuity between our earthly and resurrected bodies creates ethical tension in the issue of organ donation. Does donating organs jeopardize the integrity of our bodily identity?

In this life, your identity is not divided. Certainly you can lose parts of your body, but your identity is captured in the whole of who you are and will be restored in the resurrection consistently with the whole of who you ought to be. Let me try to clarify this point with two illustrations.

First our bodies are always changing physically, though our physical identities remain the same. We see this obviously in the normal maturation of the body. I mature. I change, but I’m still me. What might not be obvious, however, is that within a seven-year span, the cells in your body are replaced. All of this physical change, however, is orchestrated internally and consistently, influenced by our environment and circumstances, and located in the plans and purposes of God. Very real changes to your body are harmonized by and consistent with your identity. Physical identity will be sustained in the resurrected body such that what is lost or, for some, never had, such as experienced by those with birth defects, will be graciously restored by the power of God at the resurrection.

A second illustration comes from my mother. When my mother had her gallbladder removed, she was told that she no longer needed it. Mom’s gallbladder was removed; her identity is still secure. The same could be said of living donors who give a kidney to someone. Their physical identity as a whole is secure even when part of their body is alive in someone else. We should insist that the identity of the deceased be maintained in the act of donation. Why? Because the hope of the bodily resurrection prevents us from saying that a dead body has no identity and therefore can be used indiscriminately as a source of body parts.

Motive matters

Motive also matters for the morality of organ donation. An improper motive would be: I’ll donate my organs because I’ll be dead anyway and will no longer need them. This motive alone has the same moral capital as giving your trash away and then claiming that you are a generous person.

St. Augustine serves us well on this point. In the book, “City of God,” he writes that proper funerals are not necessary for the sake of the resurrection, for bodies and limbs “will be restored and renewed, in an instant, not only from the earth, but also from the remotest hiding-places in the other elements into which their dead bodies passed in disintegration.” Nevertheless our treatment of the dead

is an opportunity to esteem the lives of those we love and to show that God is “concerned with the bodies of the dead, so as to promote faith in the resurrection.” Augustine continues, “If such things as a father’s clothes, and his ring, are dear to their children in proportion to their affection for their parents, then the actual bodies are certainly not to be treated with contempt, since we wear them in a much closer and more intimate way than any clothing.”

The practice of organ donation and transplantation must preserve the dignity of the human body, even in death. Proper motives that sustain human dignity are characterized by love, compassion and the desire to bear witness to the life giving power of Christ Jesus and to the hope of the resurrection. Jesus Christ is the great example of right motive. In giving His whole body for our eternal life, He opens the door for us to give parts of our bodies so that others might continue to live and have opportunity to know and serve God. We can be sacrificial with our bodies because we trust that the Creator and Redeemer of heaven and earth will resurrect us in full.

What ethical conclusions can we make in light of the above tensions?

First we should make room for the freedom of conscience. No one should be coerced into donating organs. Nevertheless tensions related to personal identity and to the prospect that the very practice of organ donation might contribute to a culture that wrongly views the human body might move Christians to reject organ donation and transplantation.

Second given that an appropriate motivation for organ donation is love, persons should not be coerced to do something they believe might be unfaithful toward God or that would offend the weak consciences of others. As Paul said regarding things permissible, the one who doubts is condemned, and whatever is not of faith is sin (Rom. 14:23). Those who are considering organ donations must, therefore, examine their own hearts and minds and choose what they deem is right before God, demonstrating love for strangers and neighbors who are in need of organs.

The short, easy answer is that organ donation and transplantation is permissible but is not obligatory, but the starting point for the one considering donation ought to be a deep reflection on what it means to be a person with a body, who lives and dies in relationship with God, family and others. If Christians properly and faithfully consider and decide on the issue of organ donation and transplantation, then even death becomes an opportunity to show the love of God and bear witness to the hope of the gospel and of the resurrection. ■



Jeffrey B. Riley, Ph.D., is associate professor of ethics and chairman of the division of theological and historical studies at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

When it's **time for action**

Family, physicians, organ center all involved in process of organ donation

By **Carrie Brown McWhorter**
Correspondent, *The Alabama Baptist*

Approximately 23,000 hospital deaths occur in Alabama each year, and under federal law, every one of those patients must be screened as a potential donor, regardless of age or diagnosis, according to Ann Rayburn, senior manager

of professional education for the Alabama Organ Center (AOC).

"There are so many people waiting for organ transplants, so if there is a possibility, we try to make it happen," Rayburn said.

Alabama law recognizes death in one of two ways. Cardiopulmonary death occurs when a patient's heart stops. Neurological death, or "brain death," occurs when a pa-

tient's brain stops functioning. Organ donation is possible after either type of death. But while donation after cardiopulmonary death has more limitations, donation after brain death can be emotionally confusing for the family.

"When a patient is brain dead, there are no brain stem reflexes, so there is essentially no input or output to the brain," said Derek DuBay, assistant professor of surgery in the division of transplantation at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) and a deacon at Liberty Park Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills, in Birmingham Baptist Association.

"The reflex to breathe is on the brain stem, so a patient who is brain dead is not breathing independently of machines," DuBay said.

Before a patient can be declared brain dead, two licensed physicians must agree that brain function has ceased based upon tests and examinations. To avoid any conflict of interest, neither physician may be involved in the procurement of organs or have an interest in the potential organ recipient.

For family members, concepts like "brain death" and "life support" can be very difficult to understand because what appears to be "life" may not be, DuBay said. For example, when a "brain dead" patient is on a ventilator, the patient is inca-

pable of initiating a breath — the machine is solely responsible for respiration. In the next bed, however, a patient could be in a coma and on a ventilator, yet that patient's brain is still functioning for respiration and other autonomic reflexes.

"People want to know for sure that everything is being done for their loved one, and when there is no visible difference

between one patient and another, yet one is declared brain dead, it can be very confusing," DuBay said.

When the AOC is notified of a potential donor, the first step is to check the AOC's organ and tissue donor registry, named Legacy. If the patient's name is on the registry, a representative of the AOC will take that information and speak with the family about the individual's wishes.

"We can't assume that a patient's family is going to know about their wishes just because someone's name is on the regis-

try," Rayburn said. "We want to work with the family to carry out the individual's wishes."

If no documentation is available or if the patient is under the age of 18, the family must make the donation decision. Rayburn said this is why it is important for you to talk to your family about your decision, regardless of your age.

Whether the individual is a registered
(See 'Organ,' page 8)

"The prevailing comment I hear from families is that donating their loved ones' organs helped them deal with a very difficult situation in a positive way."

— *Derek DuBay*
University of Alabama
at Birmingham

Waiting List Data

(as of Feb. 6, 2012)

The United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) maintains the national waiting list for organ transplants. The below data is from UNOS, which maintains a website at www.unos.org.

Organ Needed	Patients in US	Patients in AL
Kidney	90,696	3,397
Liver	16,083	107
Pancreas	1,319	15
Kidney/ Pancreas	2,125	49
Heart	3,137	23
Lung	1,692	40
Heart/Lung	60	6
Intestine	279	0
TOTAL	112,728*	3,570*

*Totals may be less than the sums due to patients included in multiple categories.

Graphic by Kevin Criswell



sxc.hu

SCREENING — Hospitals in Alabama see approximately 23,000 hospital deaths occur each year, and under federal law, every one of those patients must be screened as a potential donor, regardless of age or diagnosis.

Religious perspectives

on organ donation

SBC Resolution of Human Organ Donations

WHEREAS, Organ procurement for transplantation falls far short of demand; and

WHEREAS, Organ transplant technology has transformed many lives from certain death to vibrant productivity; and

WHEREAS, A Gallup poll reported in the *New York Times* May 3, 1987, that 82 percent of respondents would donate adult relatives' organs in appropriate situations, but only 20 percent had completed a donor card; and

WHEREAS, Complete resurrection of the body does not depend on bodily wholeness at death; and

WHEREAS, The values of a godless society promote self-sufficiency to such a degree that people are indifferent to the needs of others, as seen in resistance to organ donations; and

WHEREAS, Organ donation for research or transplantation is a matter of personal conscience.

Therefore be it RESOLVED, That we, the messengers of the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in San Antonio, Texas, June 14–16, 1988, encourage physicians to request organ donation in appropriate circumstances; and

Be it further RESOLVED, That we encourage voluntarism regarding organ donations in the spirit of stewardship, compassion for the needs of others and alleviating suffering; and

Be it further RESOLVED, That we recognize the validity of living wills and organ donor cards, along with the right of next of

kin to make decisions regarding organ donations; and

Be it finally RESOLVED, That nothing in the resolution be construed to condone euthanasia, infanticide, abortion or harvesting of fetal tissue for the procurement of organs.

<http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=791>

The United Methodist Church

We believe that organ transplantation and organ donation are acts of charity, agape love and self-sacrifice. We recognize the life-giving benefits of organ and other tissue donation and encourage all people of faith to become organ and tissue donors as a part of their love and ministry to others in need. We urge that it be done in an environment of respect for deceased and living donors and for the benefit of the recipients, and following protocols that carefully prevent abuse to donors and their families.

The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2000

<http://new.gbgn-umc.org/umcor/work/health/events/donation-sunday/>

The Roman Catholic Church

The act of love which is expressed with the gift of one's vital organs remains a genuine testimony of charity that is able to look beyond death so that life always wins.

Pope Benedict XVI (Nov. 7, 2008)

Conservative Judaism

Since the onset of the modern era of organ transplantation in the 1950s, leading



sxc.hu

rabbinic authorities from throughout the religious spectrum have seen in this new technology a new and effective means of fulfilling a divine mandate to save life — an obligation first expressed in the Torah itself: “You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor.”

<http://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/story/organ-donation-card?tp=272>

Evangelical Presbyterian Church

Pastoral Letter on Organ Donation and Transplantation (excerpt)

The Bible does not teach us that our bodies have to be in any special state in order to be resurrected. The resurrection is a fact revealed by God to give us hope both for now and for eternity. But the resurrection will be God's doing and we do not need to know

how He will accomplish it. It is enough for us to know that it will be.

God has given man the intelligence and skill to accomplish the transplantation of an organ from one person to another to benefit the latter. It is an act of love to give an organ so that someone else might live or somehow experience an improvement in his life. There are many people who are suffering or dying because of a shortage of organ donors. Christians should be leading the way to show the world how to give. We have received the gift of eternal life. Jesus gave sacrificially and we should follow His example.

Adopted 16th General Assembly
June 1996

<http://www.epc.org/about-the-epc/pastoral-letters/organ-donation-transplantation/>

Compiled by Carrie Brown McWhorter

Organ donation brings 'sense of closure' for family of deceased

(continued from page 7)

donor or the family chooses to donate organs, once the family has given permission for the donation, further testing begins. The individual is tested for transmissible diseases like HIV, hepatitis and other diseases that might harm the recipient.

They also test to see how well the organs are functioning.

“The testing (for transmissible diseases) takes six hours, but at the same time, we are identifying recipients that are going to be the best match,” Rayburn said.

Potential recipients are listed on a national registry operated by the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), the nonprofit organization that operates the federally approved Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network. Everyone on a waiting list for a transplant is listed with UNOS, Rayburn said.

When a donor is available, officials at UAB access UNOS and enter information about the donor, including height, weight, age and the zip code of the patient's

hospital. The site then generates a list of recipients in order of priority, which is determined by how long a patient has waited and how well a patient matches the donor. Patients waiting for hearts, livers and lungs have a critical status affiliated with them as well.

“The sicker a patient is, the higher [his or her] place on this list,” Rayburn said.

According to DuBay, research studies have shown that there is a lot of mistrust about how organs are allocated. However, he said the process is very transparent and carefully organized to withstand public scrutiny.

Waiting list equal for all

“You can't do things like pay more money to work yourself to the top of the list,” DuBay said.

And just because a donor dies in Alabama doesn't mean individuals on the waiting list from Alabama will receive an organ.

“All the guidelines for determining recipients are dictated by UNOS,” Rayburn said.

Once the recipients have been identified, the hospital staff and AOC representatives work together to schedule an operating room and surgeons to recover the organs. Once the surgery is completed, the organs are taken to the hospital where the transplant will take place.

The time between recovery and transplant is critical, she said. Hearts and lungs must be transplanted within four to six hours of recovery, livers and pancreata must be transplanted within 12 to 24 hours and kidneys must be transplanted within two to three days.

“In each case, the transplant happens as soon as possible,” she said.

Patients who wish to donate their eyes do so through the Alabama Eye Bank, Rayburn said, and if a patient is going to donate organs and eyes, representatives work together so the family does not have to complete multiple sets of paperwork.

Once the donor patient's organs are recovered, the body is released to the family for burial. Within about two weeks, the

donor family will receive a letter of condolence and thanks from the AOC. The family also will learn what organs and tissues were recovered and what the AOC knows about the recipients, Rayburn said. Since the donation and transplant process is anonymous, no information about either the donor or recipient is released without consent.

Good out of bad situation

Because the process of organ donation involves tragedy, death and grief, often in a short period of time, approaching a family about the decision can be awkward, DuBay said. However, he regularly meets with families of organ donors and regularly hears positive thoughts from family members.

“The prevailing comment I hear from families is that donating their loved ones' organs helped them deal with a very difficult situation in a positive way,” he said. “Especially when the death feels premature, the family feels a sense of closure, that something good came out of a bad situation.” ■

5-year-old donor

Child's decision to be organ donor saves at least 5 lives

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, TAB

The conversation started with a television commercial for the Alabama Organ Center (AOC). The commercial highlighted the story of a young girl whose family had donated her organs after she died of a brain aneurysm. The ad became a topic of serious conversation around the dinner table that night for Sandy Sides, her husband, Stephen, and their older children, Kayla and Micah, and it prompted a mutual family decision — they would all register as organ donors.

The next day, Sandy went online at her mother's house to register, and while she was at the computer, the family's youngest child, 5-year-old Savannah, who had been at a friend's house the night before, walked into the room and started asking questions. "I sat her in my lap and tried to explain what I was doing, and then I said, 'Savannah, you're mama's baby. You have a long time to think about that.'" Sandy remembers Savannah looking up

at her, compassion in her eyes, and responding, "Mommy, you need to sign me up, too. I'm not going to need them when I get to heaven."

At that moment, Sandy could not refuse Savannah's sincere request. Exactly one month later, that conversation took on unimaginable significance when Sandy and Savannah Sides were in a horrific auto accident near their home in Jasper. Sandy's injuries were severe, leaving her in a coma for two weeks and requiring multiple surgeries and intensive therapy in the following months.

As bad as Sandy's injuries were, however, Savannah's were worse.

"She had no internal injuries and no broken bones but she had suffered severe brain trauma," Sandy said.

When the neurologist gave Stephen the news that Savannah had no brain activity, he was faced

with a decision, and even in his grief, he remembered Savannah's request.

"I asked the doctor if Savannah could help someone else, if there was someone she could help first (before she was removed from life support)," Stephen said.

He told the doctor that Savannah had asked to be an organ donor and the doctor quickly contacted the AOC. Savannah's heart valves, liver, kidneys, eyes and tissue were donated, and the Sides family knows that at least five lives were saved by Savannah's organs.

While they find joy in knowing the impact of Savannah's life, the family's recovery still has been a struggle. Looking back, they now realize that God was preparing them all for the journey ahead.

Six weeks before she died, Savannah was saved. About that same time, Sandy was teaching the book of Job in her middle school Sunday School class.

"We were talking about never walking away from God, no matter how difficult things are," she said. "Now I realize I wasn't teaching them; I was teaching myself."

"God was getting us ready, preparing us all, and we didn't even know it," she said.

Inspiring others

In the months that followed Savannah's death, Stephen and Sandy heard countless stories about their daughter, many of them about a little girl with a passion for Jesus and a desire for her friends to know Him like she did.

Savannah's teacher remembered Savannah talking about Jesus at school. Strangers told Sandy similar stories, even recalling Savannah praying for them. And many stories ended with someone coming



Photo courtesy of Sandy Sides

A SPECIAL BOND — 7-year-old Alexis, of Jacksonville, Fla., received Savannah's liver when she was 18 months old.

A TESTIMONIAL

Rainsville's Nazareth member waits for kidney

I have been on the kidney transplant list for two and a half years. I still have a hard time talking about it because I am afraid that people will feel I am pressuring them into donating if I share my story.

Three years ago when my doctor told me it was about time to start dialysis, I was very upset. I had watched my mother and aunts go through so much pain as they lived with polycystic kidney disease and hemodialysis and now I was facing the same future. I have now been doing peritoneal dialysis for two years.

In the beginning, I didn't want to share my situation with

anyone except immediate family. I didn't want people to feel sorry for me. I finally opened up to my pastor, Roger Graham, at Nazareth Baptist Church. Once I opened up to my church family though, I felt like a weight had been lifted from my shoulders. I know it was from all the love, prayers and support that I received and continue to receive from them.

They are such a source of strength for me. My family and co-workers also have been so supportive. My husband, Eddie, and daughter, Brandy Byrum, are always there to help in any way possible.

At first, I thought finding someone willing to donate would be the

hardest part of this journey. But since then, more than 10 people have offered to be my donor. I now know the hard part is finding a match.

I try not to dwell on the daily routine of the dialysis and waiting for a kidney. I know that things will happen in God's time and I know His plan is better for me than anything I could hope for (Jer. 29:11).

My main prayer is that God will use me and my situation to help others. I can't complain about my situation because I am so blessed and grateful for each day that I have.

Paula Nance
Fyffe, Ala.



Photo courtesy of Sandy Sides

PASSION FOR JESUS — Savannah poses for a photo at church just weeks before she died. This was one of the last photos taken of her. The logo on her shirt is now the logo for the Savannah Faith Miracle Ride.

to know the Lord, like the story of one young boy who answered the altar call at his church the Sunday after Savannah's death. He told his preacher that Savannah had told him about Jesus at school, and if that was where she was, he wanted to make sure he went there too.

All the stories continue to inspire Stephen and Sandy, who regularly share their testimony at churches and events that encourage organ donation. They are active in their home church, New Prospect Baptist Church, Jasper, in Walker Baptist Association, where Stephen also serves as a deacon.

Ben McLain, youth pastor at the church, said he feels honored and blessed to know the Sides family. Though their journey has not been easy, he said, their faith in Christ has always been evident and their testimony is an encouragement to everyone who hears it.

"A lot of Christians have faith on the mountaintops but the Sides have had valleys. Yet their faith in Christ has always given them the resolve to keep moving forward and to use their story to tell God's story," McClain said.

On April 28, another chapter in the Sides' story will be written at Kayla's wedding. The honorary bridesmaid will be a 7-year-old girl from Jacksonville, Fla., named Alexis. Alexis and the Sides fam-

ily share a special bond — she received Savannah's liver when she was 18 months old, and Kayla wanted Alexis to share this part in her wedding. The Sides say it is an "awesome blessing" to be part of Alexis' life and to see photos of her playing soccer and dancing thanks to Savannah's gift. At the wedding, Alexis, Micah and Kayla will light a memorial candle, representing that they have been joined as brother and sisters through Savannah.

Knowing the recipients

"When people see photos of Savannah and Alexis and ask, I tell them that Alexis is my organ-recipient daughter," Sandy said. "I lost my daughter in a car accident, but another little girl is alive because she has my daughter's liver."

Such moments are precious to Sandy and Stephen because they are following Savannah's example of telling others about Jesus. And as they do, they encourage others to consider organ donation as well.

"We carry brochures everywhere we go," she said. "We always ask two questions: Do you know the Lord and are you an organ donor?"

Sandy said that like Savannah, she wants to be fearless about sharing her faith, knowing that seeing lives saved — both physically and eternally — is the goal. ■

"If one life is changed because of our experience, I know it's worth it."

— Sandy Sides

Living donations

FBC Jacksonville Pastor Derek Staples donates kidney to church member

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, TAB

Last August, Pastor Derek Staples led a prayer service at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, for Jennifer Borders, a church member suffering from advanced kidney disease. Jennifer was preparing to begin dialysis, and her name soon would be added to the national waiting list for a kidney transplant.

As the service ended, Staples turned to Jennifer's husband, Jason, and said, "Wouldn't it be something if God used someone in this room to be a channel of blessing to reveal His glory?" Lit-

tle did Staples know that God was in fact planning to use someone in that room, and that "someone" was him.

Knowing Jennifer's need, Staples joined a handful of members from First, Jacksonville, in Calhoun Baptist Association, who volunteered for a blood test that would determine if any of them might be a match for her. Since Jennifer and Staples' wife, Julie, share a blood type, he expected that if either of them were candidates, it would be Julie. However, in December, Staples got the news that he was a match, and if was willing, they would proceed with further testing to determine whether he could give a kidney to Jennifer.

"We were convinced it was of

the Lord, and throughout the process, the Lord kept confirming it was His will," Staples said.

Further tests showed that Staples, 51, was indeed a suitable donor, and a few weeks later, Derek Staples became a living organ donor.

According to the website of the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), the first living organ donation happened in 1954, when a kidney from one twin was successfully transplanted into his identical brother. Today more than 6,000 individuals choose to become living donors each year. Kidney donations are by far the most common, but living donors also can provide a lobe of a lung or a portion of a liver, pancreas or intestine. While many living donors choose to give to a relative, one in four donors is not biologically related to the recipient. Even total strangers can be living donors to someone who is waiting for an organ transplant.

"Especially when a kidney donation is involved, a living donor usually provides the best possible outcome," said Derek DuBay, assistant professor of surgery in the division of transplantation at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) and a deacon



Photo by Trent Penny

'LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR' — FBC Jacksonville Pastor Derek Staples (second from left) and his wife, Julie, spend time with church member Jennifer Borders (second from right) and her husband, Jason.

at Liberty Park Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills, in Birmingham Baptist Association. "When compared to dialysis, a pre-emptive kidney transplant offers the most improvement in health and a huge survival advantage to the patient."

While the potential benefits are great, organ recovery and trans-

plant surgeries involve risks as well. For this reason, living donors go through an extensive process of education about the transplant process prior to surgery. Part of this preparation involves meeting with a living donor advocate, who works only with the potential donor to ensure that he is indeed

A TESTIMONIAL

Blog entries from recipient

Chloe's Take
March 7, 2012

When I think about the past few months I realize how thankful I am for my mom getting a kidney. When I saw my mom go to dialysis 3 days a week for 3 hours each day, and her coming home from work tired it really made me think, "How is she doing all of this?"

I can't even describe just how thankful I am for Dr. Derek and him giving a kidney just for my mom. To me he saved my mom's life and stopped her from being so sick and tired all the time.

When my mom told me the transplant date, I was really ready for it to come. I couldn't wait for the day where we were able to go back to our normal routine. I actually wasn't worried though, I knew that God would take care of her. It is so great having her back at home and seeing her every day. It was so hard just to be away from her for 21 days.

Chloe, 13, daughter of Jennifer Borders, kidney transplant recipient

Can't Sleep Again

Ok, so it's one thirty in the morning and I can't sleep. I have

a lot on my mind and Jason had said I needed to put the bad stuff and not just the good out there for you to read. I know in my heart that God is totally in control and I put my life completely in his hands, but I am still human.

The fact that I'm undergoing my third kidney transplant is a little overwhelming. I worry about how all this is affecting my girls and about Dr. Derek's part of the surgery.

I decided that God must have me up for a reason, so I went in my Bible to Job 42:1-2 where Job is talking to God and he says "I know you can do anything and your plans can't be changed," and then he goes on to say, "I had heard of you before, but now my eyes have seen you."

That is my passion — that through the things we go through and all God has planned for me and my family that if nothing else we see God and people see Christ in us. Just remember God has a plan for each of our lives and we may not always understand it but it is what's best for us.

Jennifer Borders, kidney transplant recipient
<http://2givelifewordpress.com>

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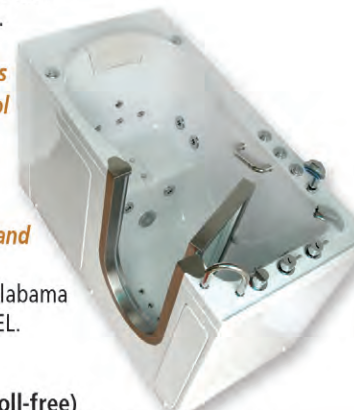
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willing to give and comfortable with the process, according to Maryann Bonventre, living donor coordinator at UAB Kidney Transplant Center. A new Kidney and Pancreas Transplant Clinic also opened at UAB in March.

“Donating (an organ) is pretty much the greatest gift you can give to someone while you are still alive, so it needs to be something you are completely convinced you need to do,” Bonventre said.

“We want them to donate because they desire to give a kidney, not because everybody else wants them to.”

‘Love your neighbor’

For Staples, the decision to donate was directly related to his belief that the Bible instructs Christians to help others.

“Jesus said, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ and most of us as believers on a daily basis are trying to work out what that means,” he said.

Staples said the experience has taught the entire congregation more about what it means to be a servant, and he believes that is why God chose him to be a donor.

“It’s very humbling to know that of all the people in this community and in this church, God selected me to give a kidney to Jennifer,” he said. “Maybe the Lord selected me as a pastor to help communicate with others the importance of loving and caring for each other.” ■

A TESTIMONIAL

Then-college student donates kidney to fellow church member

On Dec. 18, 2006, Alabama Baptist college student John Phipps lay alongside his new friend Steve DeVane in a hospital bed at the University of Alabama at Birmingham Medical Center.

In just a few hours, Phipps’ kidney would be removed and placed inside DeVane. It took about five hours and required two separate procedures, but all went well.

Donating a kidney is no longer an uncommon procedure but still one filled with risks, sacrifice, hope and complete trust.

For the junior and 2006–2007 Student Government Association president at the Baptist College of Florida (BCF), Phipps’ trust was completely in God.

He trusted that his kidney would be accepted by his friend’s body and God would add His blessings and watchcare over them both.

Initially when Phipps heard DeVane needed a kidney transplant, he was reminded of a commitment he had made to God only a few years prior.

Phipps had read an article about a teacher who donated a kidney to one of his students.

Being moved by the teacher’s generosity, Phipps told God then that if one day someone needed one of his kidneys, he would be

obedient and give it to him or her.

“I wanted to be obedient and faithful to God in whatever I had,” Phipps said. “I didn’t really know Steve that well, but I was very aware of the commitment that I made to God.”

He remains convinced he was the one God had chosen to donate a kidney for DeVane.

At the time DeVane’s kidney was failing, his blood levels were fluctuating and his energy was decreasing. He knew he had to have a new kidney soon to keep his blood clean.

“The way it all happened, is completely humbling,” Phipps said.

DeVane said he felt like a new man after the surgery. “I have so much energy it feels like a miracle drug,” he said.

Travis Free, pastor of Rehobeth Baptist Church in Columbia Baptist Association, shared how the experience of his church members at the time provides the ultimate story in “sacrificial giving.”

The sequence of events that brought Phipps to BCF and Rehobeth at just the right time to be the donor for DeVane was nothing short of a miracle, Free said.

Phipps moved his membership letter to Rehobeth while attending BCF. DeVane was already a member there.

BCF President Thomas A. Kinchen added, “When we see actions like those of John Phipps, we are reminded that our Lord still shows His love through His faithful servants.

“The God we serve is all about miracles,” he said. “I am con-



Photo courtesy of Baptist College of Florida

SACRIFICE — Thomas A. Kinchen (left), president of Baptist College of Florida (BCF), shows his appreciation to BCF student John Phipps, of Alabama, several weeks after he donated his kidney.

victed by the fact that we seem so surprised when He works His wonders.”

Phipps graduated from BCF in 2008 and is currently a student at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., studying biblical leadership.

He hopes to serve as an administrative staff member at a church in the future.

Phipps and his wife, April, have three children.

They are members of Open Door Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C. (BCF)

A TESTIMONIAL

A mother’s perspective

Most of you probably know the story of my son Ben’s illness when he was 14. He miraculously survived the rare and often fatal syndrome that attacked him from nowhere, but he was left with no kidneys. He needed a transplant. Several family members tried to donate a kidney to

him, but all of us were rejected for one reason or another. After a year of dialysis we got a call that a kidney was available for Benjamin.

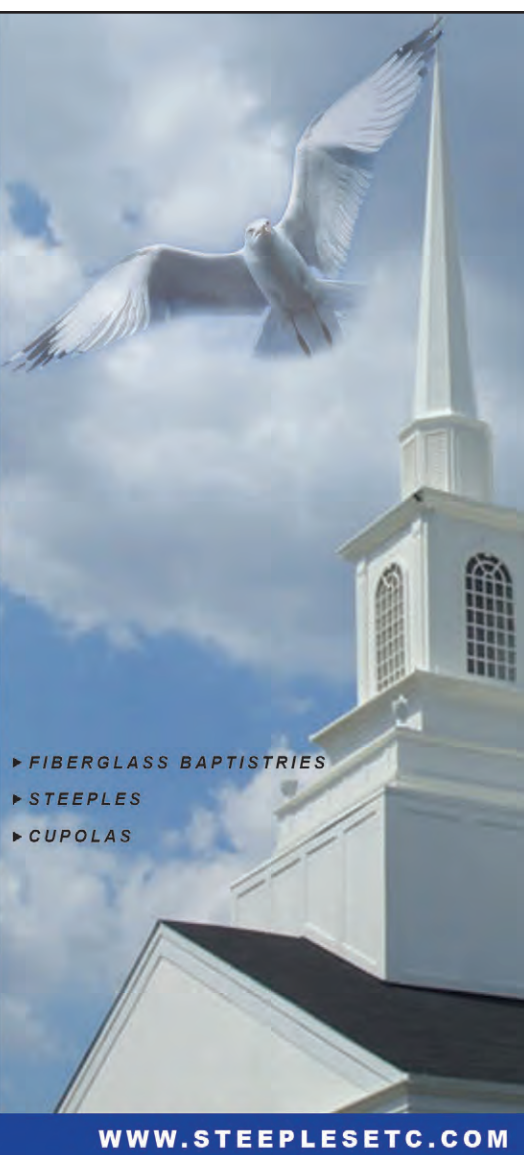
We grabbed our clothes and headed for UAB, elated. Our elation was tempered by sadness when we learned that the donor was an 18-month old baby girl who had died; we learned by accident that the baby’s name was Catherine. After all these years, little Catherine’s kidney still filters the blood in Ben’s body. Today, Ben and Paula have honored her memory by naming their baby girl Ansley Catherine.

2011 Facebook post from Martine Bates Sharp Hartselle, Ala.

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Sardis Missionary Baptist Church

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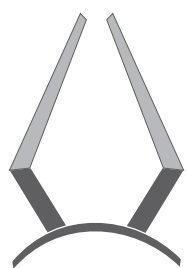
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Letters

(continued from page 2)

than trusting in God for our daily bread, both for the provision of the bread and also for the privilege of earning it — it's called work.

Everything about gambling contradicts biblical principles and godliness. Lottery, gambling, video games and casinos violate the principle of how one is to live before God.

How can anyone say that something that is a sin can benefit our children? As Christians, we should oppose gambling and the culture it produces. As gambling becomes more prevalent, so do addiction and crime. Thanks for listening.

Thanks for a wonderful paper, which I look forward to.

Marlene Suther
Valley Grande, Ala.

A DARK WORLD

Excellent and insightful comment about gambling in the March

22 issue — "Where Am I Blind?" Bringing light to a dark world is my prayer also.

Buddy Kirk
Carrollton, Ala.

TRAYVON MARTIN

This article appears to have been written before the disclosures that two mainstream media outlets have edited both the 911 tape and photos of the injuries to Mr. Zimmerman to highlight some agenda of their own.

While we are cautioned in the article about the "need to be very careful in the rush to judgement," it appears that *The Alabama Baptist* may very well have done so itself.

This story would have been better off to be shelved until more evidence had been presented, rather than being published merely to jump on the bandwagon of political correctness.

Michael S. Mince
Henagar, Ala.

20-20 VISION

My compliments on the editorial "Where Am I Blind?" in the March 22 issue.

Your vision is 20-20 on the gambling issue. How hypocritical can one become — thanking God to be free to continue in sin! Addicted, chance-seeking individuals spend income needed by hungry, sometimes homeless, families to add to casino operators' millions. How tragic!

They are like vultures waiting to prey upon "the weak" who are trying to survive amid life's pressures.

Odean Keel
Camp Hill, Ala.

DECLINE FOR BAPTISTS

I was very interested in the editorial you wrote in the March 29 issue — "Will Alabama Baptists Become References in a History Book?" —

about the danger of decline for Baptists.

One of my concerns is that we are currently in a day when many young believers feel God is calling them to ministry but not to local church ministry. I believe we have to recover a sense of investment in the local church.

I can think of a number of reasons why we have lost this connection to the local church, among them the fact that for a generation churches have transitioned from using students as part-time staff to full-time staff members, the rise of the megachurch model and the influence of writers and teachers who sometimes encourage skepticism toward local church ministry. Nonetheless we live in a time when we desperately need gifted leaders to be ready to commit themselves to local churches again.

Jim Cooley
Haleyville, Ala.

MARKET PLACE

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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR: Vacancy for a full-time pastor. Please send resumé to: Forest Avenue Baptist Church, Search committee, P.O. Box 611, Jackson, AL 36545, or email: fabc7637@att.net.

SENIOR PASTOR: Tennessee Avenue Baptist Church (TABC), a conservative SBC church in Bristol, Tenn., is prayerfully seeking a senior pastor. We have an average attendance of 450 on Sunday mornings. TABC operates a day-care with an enrollment of 110 children and a K-12 Christian academy with an enrollment of 165 students. Please visit tabaptist.org for more details.

SENIOR PASTOR: Church prayerfully seeking God's leadership in search for senior pastor. Please mail resumé to: Search Committee, First Baptist Church of Rogersville, 222 College Street, Rogersville, AL 35652.

SENIOR PASTOR: Bethlehem Baptist Church, located in Clarksville, Ga., is seeking a full-time senior pastor. BBC is nestled among the mountains in a vibrant community and is a mission-minded church committed to proclaiming the never changing gospel to an ever-changing world. With attendance averaging 400-500, we have multiple staff members and two Sunday School sessions and worship services. Poised for growth, our congregation desires a pastor to lead us in the evangelism of our local community and beyond through outreach, biblical teaching and fellowship. Our building and grounds are debt-free and well-maintained. Send resumé to: Pastor Search Committee, P.O. Box 448, Clarksville, GA 30523 or bbcpsc@gmail.com.

MINISTER OF EDUCATION/ADMINISTRATION: Lakeland Baptist Church is seeking a full-time minister of education/administration. Lakeland is located in the heart of the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. Those considered will be passionate about Sunday School and have a strong, successful background in finance, leadership, property management and staff relations. Seminary or comparable degree is preferred. Please email resumé to: Dr. Ron Osborne, rosborne@lakelandbaptist.org.

MUSIC MINISTER: Pineville Park Baptist Church in Pineville, La., is seeking a full-time music minister. If interested, email resumé to: Pastor Steve McAllister at steve@pinevillepark.org.

BIVOCATIONAL MINISTER OF MUSIC: Fulton Baptist Church, Clarke Association, is seeking a bivocational minister of music. Please send resumé to: Fulton Baptist Church, P.O. Box 409, Fulton, AL 36446 or call 334-636-5305.

FAMILY MINISTER: A local Baptist church in Cullman is searching for a leader to develop family ministry programs for young families, children and youth. The ministry will need 20 hours per week. Send resumé to: Search Committee, P.O. Box 914, Cullman, AL 35056.

MIDDLE SCHOOL MINISTER: First Baptist Church of Trussville, Ala., is seeking a full-time middle school minister to lead students in grades 7th and 8th. College undergraduate degree required. Previous student ministry experience preferred. Please submit resumé via email to: resumes@fbctrussville.org or mail to: Middle School Minister Search Team, ATTN: Allison Stanley, 128 N. Chalkville Road, Trussville, AL 35173.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR FOR RECREATION & STUDENT MINISTRIES: First Baptist, Harrison, Ark., is accepting resumé for associate pastor for recreation and student ministries. Must have at least college degree and 3-5 years full-time experience in similar field or seminary degree with part-time experience. Send to: Rob Davis (robd@fbharrison.org).

OTHER POSITIONS

CHURCH PIANIST: Heritage Baptist Church of Southside, Ala., near Gadsden is looking for a church pianist for Sunday morning and two Sunday nights per month. If interested, please contact Jeff Thompson at 256-312-0746 or John Herron at 256-312-1063.

PART-TIME PIANIST: Robinwood Baptist Church, Birmingham, Ala. Primarily Sunday morning and choir rehearsal responsibilities. Salary is negotiable.

Email resumé to: godhope@bellsouth.net.

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS: Suwannee Baptist Association, an association of 39 churches in Suwannee and Hamilton counties in Florida, seeks a director of missions. A job description is available on the website: suwanneebaptassoc.net. A description is available upon request from smbsearch@gmx.com and where resumé should also be directed.

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PATRIOTIC SINGING FLAG: Six-tier lighted patriotic singing flag (Elizabeth town, Ky.). Used for choir cantatas. Manufacturer's construction/lighting instructions included. Photos available. POC: John Rice, john@severnsvalley.org or 270-765-7822.

MISCELLANEOUS

7TH ANNUAL GOLF TOURNAMENT: "Hole-in-One for Hope" May 30, 2012, Grand National Robert Trent Jones/Opelika, Ala. Benefiting Hosanna Home, Hope's Inn and His Place. Contact Harvest Evangelism Office, Opelika. 334-754-0777 or e-mail: andy@harvestevangelism.org. Registration deadline: May 20.

HOMESCHOOL EXPO — MONTGOMERY: June 28-30, 2012 — Montgomery Convention Center. Learning and fun for whole family. Exhibitors and workshops. Learn to homeschool, Worldview Teen Track, KidsZone. 1-888-264-7763, www.alabamahomeschoolexpo.com.

Want to know God?

By Pastor Edwin Jenkins
First Baptist Church, Athens

Every individual realizes quite soon that life is filled with challenges. Those challenges arise from various sources and present themselves in many ways. Some are great, some are small, but each can become quite important. Because challenges arise in the life of every person, we all must face them.

In most cases we are offered choices. We can choose to face the challenge, fight the challenge or fear the challenge.

Ultimately we decide whether we will move toward the challenge, away from the challenge or seek to avoid the challenge.

Some challenges present us with the opportunity to change. Change is difficult in some cases and is readily embraced in others. Because of the nature of life itself we realize that change is truly inevitable.

So why all this talk about challenge, choice and change?

There are some issues in life that challenge us to a degree.

We choose a direction regarding those issues and change if we feel that to be appropriate. In those cases, the issue is not, as we often say, a life-and-death matter.

On the other hand, some issues demand a response. In fact, there is one issue that is not only a life-and-death matter but also an eternity-impacting matter.

What will you do or have you done with Jesus?

Jesus, God's only begotten Son, died on the cross of Calvary. He was buried and He arose from the grave. He did so to pay the price for mankind's sin — man's rebellion against God. All have sinned.

By believing in Jesus, putting our faith in Him and Him alone, we can be reconciled to God. In fact, there is no other way to be made right with God.

Have you ever faced the challenge of admitting your sin and turning from it? Have you ever made the choice to believe in Jesus and what Jesus has done for you? Have you ever allowed Jesus to change you from above, by being born again?

If not, why not consider that challenge, that choice and that change today — right now?

About Alabama

Alabama's Economic Progress

By Jim Williams
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Alabama, like other states, is in the middle of a slow recovery from the Great Recession that began in 2008. Recent statistics show signs of progress, but they also point to remaining weaknesses.

Alabama is one of 45 states in which personal income, measured on a per-person basis, regained its pre-recession level in 2011. However, the amount of income, and the rate at which it grew, were below average.

January was the fifth consecutive month in which the unemployment rate in Alabama was below the national average. On the other hand, the number of unemployed remains high, at 7.8 percent of the labor force, and in 24 counties more than 10 percent of workers are unemployed. The total number of people employed in Alabama remains below the peak that was achieved in December 2007.

Housing 'affordable'

Home sales and construction were hit especially hard by the recession. Housing statistics maintained by the University of Alabama's (UA) Alabama Center for Real Estate show that February was the eighth consecutive month in which more Alabama homes were sold than in the same month for the prior year. Housing in Alabama remains very affordable by national standards that compare home prices to personal income.

However, the number of homes sold annually remains below the pre-recession years, and the median price is still 15 percent less than its peak in 2007. The average home sold in February had been on the market for 172 days, about a month longer than the average for the five previous years.

Alabama's home foreclosure rate is half the national average, and the number of foreclosures in February was about 19 percent lower than a year ago, according to the RealtyTrac website.

UA's Center for Business and Economic Research projects that the state's economy will grow by 2.5 percent during 2012. This reflects steady progress when compared with the 2.2 percent increase for 2011 and the 2.0 percent increase for 2010. However, employment is expected to grow by only 1.1 percent.

The center's most recent survey of Alabama business leaders finds that their confidence in the state's economic prospects has returned to pre-recession levels. Perhaps this positive sentiment is the strongest available evidence that we are in the springtime of economic recovery in Alabama.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Jim Williams is executive director for the nonprofit, nonpartisan Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama. Jim may be contacted at jwillia@samford.edu.

Fight to save unborn lives continues

Pro-life lawmakers in Alabama attract media attention

By Sondra Washington
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Pro-life lawmakers at the Alabama Statehouse plan to capitalize on last year's momentum in the fight to save unborn lives, but abortion supporters are not going down without a fight.

Sen. Clay Scofield, R-Guntersville, witnessed this firsthand when Senate Bill (SB) 12 was being considered by the Senate health committee. The legislation would establish the Right to Know and See Act and require that except in medical emergencies "a physician perform an ultrasound, provide verbal explanation of the ultrasound and display the images to the pregnant woman before performing an abortion."

Although a bill passed in 2002, called the Woman's Right to Know Act, prohibiting the "performance or inducement of an abortion without voluntary and informed consent," Scofield said his bill would remove the doctor's ability to "lie" to women, telling them their babies are a "clump of cells or mass of tissue." It would also make sure women know they have the right to see the ultrasound if they choose.

"Right now, the state of Alabama requires that ultrasounds be performed before the abortion is done ... to determine the age of the child," Scofield said. "There are so many women ... who either were denied that right or did not know ... they could see the image."

Scofield said the bill ignited a "media firestorm" with his opponents focusing their arguments on the idea that women would be forced to undergo an invasive ultrasound procedure.

"What is wrong with ensuring that the woman has as much information as possible before she has to make that decision?" he asked.

Scofield is currently making clarifications to the bill and plans to reintroduce it at a later date. The companion bill — House Bill (HB) 418 — was filed by Rep. April Weaver, R-Alabaster.

Other pro-life bills expected to attract a great deal of attention are those like HB 112, which passed from committee April 5.

Sponsored by Rep. Ed Henry, R-Decatur, the bill will "prohibit health insurance coverage of elective abortions unless the insured has paid additional monies for a separate rider" and allow Alabama to opt out of "allowing abortion coverage by exchanging participating health plans."

Focused on insurance

Similar bills addressing this matter include SB 10 and SB 335, sponsored by Sen. Greg Reed, R-Jasper, and SB 20, sponsored by Sen. Shadrack McGill, R-Scottsboro. SB 10 and SB 20 are awaiting a third reading before the Senate.

"I would like to see us minimize the number of abortions ... any way we could," said Reed, who also chairs the Senate health committee. "Last year, we had a total of seven bills that came out of committee and actually passed the Alabama Senate. This year, we are on (the same) track where three bills have passed out of the Senate health committee."

Other pro-life bills:

► HB 493, sponsored by Rep. Jack Williams, R-Birmingham, seeks to exclude ectopic pregnancies from the definition of abortion. It is pending a third reading in the House.

► SB 6 and SB 96, sponsored by

Sen. Gerald Allen, R-Tuscaloosa, will establish the Abortion-Inducing Drug Safety Act and make it "unlawful to administer any abortion-inducing drug to a woman without her receiving an exam by a physician." Both bills are in the Senate health committee.

► SB 105 sponsored by Sen. Cam Ward, R-Alabaster, and HB 375, sponsored by Rep. Mary Sue McClurkin, R-Indian Springs, and co-sponsored by eight others, address the rights of health-care professionals to refuse to perform any medical services that violate their conscience. SB 105 is awaiting a third reading, while a HB 375 is pending action by the House health committee.

► McClurkin also sponsored HB 223, which will "provide comprehensive standards of medical care for abortion and reproductive health centers."

Eric Johnston, a Birmingham attorney and president of the Southeast Law Institute, calls this bill the most important pro-life legislation in the Statehouse.

"It sets up a significant structure for regulating abortion clinics in the sense that they have got to provide a higher level of health care — what you would expect from your doctor," he said. "It requires the abortion doctor to have admitting privileges to a local hospital and requires him to stay in the abortion clinic after he performs an abortion."

Retired Director of Missions Robert 'Neal' Wyatt dies at 81

Robert "Neal" Wyatt, retired director of missions (DOM) for several Alabama Baptist associations, died April 7. He was 81.

Wyatt attended West Virginia University; New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary; Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.; and the Baptist Bible Institute (now the Baptist Col-

lege of Florida) in Graceville, Fla. He received degrees in theology and religious education.

He retired from the U.S. Navy as a warrant officer and served as pastor at Old Town Baptist Church, Evergreen, from 1971 to 1974.

With a total of 26 years as a DOM in Alabama, Wyatt served Alabama-Crenshaw Baptist Association from 1974 to 1976; Carey, Clay and Randolph Baptist associations from 1976 to 1984; and Covington Baptist Association from 1984 to 2000.

He led Covington Association to begin the Christian Service Centers in Andalusia, Opp and Florida.

He was a member of First Baptist Church, Andalusia, at the time of his death.

Wyatt is survived by his wife of 56 years, Kittye; two sons; and six grandchildren. (TAB)



WYATT

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EXTREME DARKNESS

in Central Asia

Intense demonic battle meets gospel as believers live in shadows

By Ava Thomas
International Mission Board

Lizzie Francis huddled in the back seat and watched as the gang formed around the pickup truck. She clutched her friends' two toddlers as one of the men, flanked by his brothers, got out a gun and waved it at his neighbor, yelling obscenities and threatening to end his life.

The neighbor had been parked in the street in his way when his family came back from a picnic in the countryside. At the picnic, Francis had been their guest for the day, for the eating, laughing, dancing ... and now gun-slinging.

"They are incredibly hospitable," Francis said of the people in the Central Asian city where she lives.

"But the darkness is under the surface all the time, just waiting to come out."

A need for Jesus

As she prayed over the little boys, one of the sisters — Francis' closest friend in the city — swiped her brother's gun and slipped it quickly into Francis' hands.

"Hide this," her friend said. "He won't come after you if you have it."

They wouldn't dare hurt a guest. She slipped it in her purse and turned to head toward the house.

And as she did, he tackled her friend facedown in the muddy street just behind her, beating her with his fists over and over and over.

"I could only watch as it happened. I didn't know what to do," Francis said. "They need Jesus so desperately. Until they know Him, they will never know how to love even their own family."

Alex Franklin, who lives among the same people group, said it's like tea — the people have been steeped in darkness for so long that they can't become pure water without a miracle.

"Islam has had a stronghold in the culture there for 1,400 years. If you've been told a lie long enough and loud enough, you eventually believe it," he said. "But even more of a stronghold than the religion is the culture — it tries to stifle and shut out anyone who speaks the truth."

Some days the darkness presses on Francis so hard she literally feels a weight on her chest.

Some days it manifests itself in other ways. "We went recently to visit a woman who was genuinely asking questions about the gospel — something that rarely happens here. While I was trying to share, her children were acting so badly — being violent and unruly in a way that we knew was much more than just misbehavior," Francis said.

After a lot of struggling, the 5-year-old son sank his teeth into Francis' friend Jane as she was playing with him. She rested her hand on his shoulder and prayed over him silently.

"I prayed in Jesus' name for whatever was in him to get out. And right as I finished praying that, without saying a word out



IMB photo

Believers living in Central Asia say spiritual darkness has had a stronghold in the region for so long you can sometimes feel the weight or see the battle manifesting itself in visible ways.

loud, he turned slowly and glared at me, as if he knew exactly what I was praying," Jane said.

Franklin said the believers who live there know that wherever they go, the darkness will lash out.

"We don't have the home field advantage here, so we expect the crowd to be whooping and hollering against us," he said. "We take faith in knowing that He has won the victory."

The move of the gospel among the people of that city is slow and hasn't been going for very long, Franklin said. "The darkness is smothering sometimes. It's also physically hard on people who come here to share — many in the past died of diseases. And the mothers often struggle emotionally until they break, because culturally they are kept in the house much of the time."

Francis, Franklin and several others have shared the gospel over and over and over. Few show interest. One friend who has heard Bible stories until she knows them by memory will seemingly get close to believing, then back away, Francis said. "She will ask questions and read the Word even to the point of exposing herself to persecution from others," Francis said. "But then she'll ask me not to talk about Jesus in front of her, because she sees flames in front of my face

when I do. There's a real battle going on for her soul." And for the souls of the others there, but God is winning the victory, she said.

As Francis and others share, some hear and do believe. Some have given everything to Jesus and been forsaken by their families, imprisoned or even murdered.

Not a normal visit

"Jane and I were invited recently to the home of some friends. The husband is a believer, but the wife is not," Francis said. "It wasn't long before we realized a normal visit wasn't what she had in mind."

In front of the two guests, and in front of her own children, the wife began to berate the husband for

his faith in Jesus. "With a crazy, demonic look in her eyes, she forced him to say that he followed Jesus while she recorded his confession," Francis said. "Then she turned to him and said, 'I hope you die the same kind of death as this Jesus that you love.'"

It's dark there, but faith persists, Franklin said. "Our encouragement is Scripture — we know that some day people from every nation, tribe and tongue, including these people, will praise Him around the throne," he said. "God is calling people out. It just is taking a while."

EDITOR'S NOTE — Names have been changed. (IMB)

"Islam has had a stronghold in the culture there for 1,400 years. If you've been told a lie long enough and loud enough, you eventually believe it."

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IMB photo

Death — even at the hands of one's own family — is a real threat for Muslims in Central Asia who become Christians. Choosing Jesus often costs new believers their homes, jobs, marriages and contact with their children.

FOLLOWING CHRIST

'Free gift' of salvation comes at high price in Central Asia

His heart pounds as he presses his two young daughters tightly to his chest and darts into the freezing rain. His wife follows close behind, quietly making her way through the darkness to the taxi idling outside the family's home. Faruq and Jamilah aren't safe here anymore; police have finally tracked them down. Faruq knows they will soon come to arrest him.

This isn't the first time Faruq has been forced to disappear, but it is for the same reason — his decision to follow Christ.

At 18, he abandoned the Muslim tradition of his parents in search of what he calls the "real God." But for many Christians in Central Asia whose belief in Jesus is born out of the ashes of a past Islamic faith,

Christ's "free gift" of salvation comes at a high price.

Faruq's own nightmare began not long ago. As he prayed alone late one night while his wife and daughters slept, more than a dozen policemen slipped silently over the walls surrounding the family's compound. Within moments they were inside the house. Faruq and Jamilah watched in horror as police ransacked their living room, confiscating Bibles, Christian books, literature and videos as well as other gospel materials.

Rounds of interrogation began as soon as Faruq arrived at police headquarters. Why did he become a Christian? Was someone paying him to convert Muslims? The police didn't like his answers.

"I told them my testimony," Faruq recounted. "I said, 'There's no money.'"

Early the next morning Faruq was thrown into a small holding cell, exhausted, afraid and totally alone. Seeds of doubt planted by the police about his own decision to follow Jesus were taking root. Perhaps he'd made a mistake?

"I was thinking maybe they are right," Faruq said, but he suddenly was reminded how and why he came to love Christ.

It started with a burning curiosity to know his Creator. "I was trying to reach to God. I was praying and I was fasting. At midnight I was going to the mosque to pray alone," Faruq said.

But that fervor eventually faded to disappointment at the emptiness and insecurity he found while studying the Quran at a local madrasa (Islamic school). By 18, he was tempted to give up on religion altogether.

A seemingly random encounter with a foreign believer placed a Bible in Faruq's hands. He began to read it and was immediately struck by Jesus' words in John 10:10 — "I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance."

Faruq believed. Five days later police changed tactics, dumping Faruq into an open, overcrowded central jail packed with more than 200 inmates.

Faruq spent the next 10 days in the central jail, sleeping on concrete with a water-filled plastic Coca-Cola bottle for a pillow.

Faruq had been so consumed with survival that he'd pushed aside a deep-seated fear gnawing at him since the night of the raid: what happened to his wife and children?

"God, I don't know [what to do]. If You gave me this family, then I want to trust You that nobody can take them away. God, give them back to me," he pleaded.

A week later Faruq was released from jail.

Much has changed since Faruq's arrest. Shortly after reuniting with his family, he and Jamilah left the country with their daughters. But

God soon called them back; there was work to be done.

Today Faruq's ministry is thriving. Discipled and mentored by Southern Baptist workers and other like-minded Great Commission Christians, he is busy training a new generation of leaders with the goal of spreading house churches across the nation.

But behind every sharing of the gospel the specter of persecution remains.

"I am a criminal right now; the government is looking for me," Faruq said. He isn't alone.

The 15-year-old daughter of another Christian couple Faruq is discipling was raped because of their faith. With two young daughters of his own, it's

a possibility that terrifies Faruq. But he's determined not to allow that fear to keep him from answering God's call.

As for the future, Faruq said he's taking things one day at a time, seeking God's will and depending on His provision and protection.

"I expect thousands of [new believers] very soon," he said. "They will work miracles and wonders. God told me to go and raise leaders and be ready for His glory." (BP)

"God, I don't know [what to do]. If You gave me this family, then I want to trust You that nobody can take them away."

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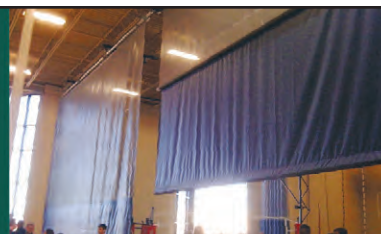
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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For April 22

Explore the Bible By Cecil Taylor Dean, School of Christian Studies, University of Mobile

CHRISTIANITY 104: BE GOOD NEIGHBORS Luke 10:25-37

The Question (10:25-29)

A smug city lawyer threw a question at a country preacher, hoping to embarrass him. The unnamed legal expert knew the Hebrew Bible spoke of an "eternal inheritance" for God's people (Dan. 12:2). So he asked Jesus what he had to do to be sure of life everlasting. Jesus answered the question with his own question. "You are the lawyer. What does the law say?" The law, said the expert, said a man must love God with everything he had and must also love his neighbor as himself (Deut. 6:5, Lev. 19:18). "Good answer," Jesus replied. "If you keep the law as well as you quote it, you need not worry about a share in the life everlasting." Do not think Jesus made salvation a matter of works. "Loving God" in other contexts passes for faith.

Loving God was no problem for the lawyer. His real difficulty was in loving his neighbor. "Who is the neighbor I must love?" An old Jewish book of wisdom (Sirach 12:1-4) told its readers not to help a sinner. The lawyer's question may imply some people were neighbors and others were not, and even suggested he had to love only his fellow Jews. Jesus answered his question with a familiar story.

The Story (10:30-35)

"A man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho." The road was treacherous. It covered only 17 miles but dropped 3,400 feet in elevation. Much of the trail followed the Wadi Qelt, a narrow gorge with steep sides and sudden turns. Limestone caves pitted the walls of the canyon, perfect hiding places for hoodlums. Five miles above Jericho on the old road is a pass called "the Ascent of Blood," a name given because of the blood robbers shed there. As the man made his way to Jericho a gang jumped him, took everything he had, beat him brutally and left him for dead on the roadside.

By chance a priest came by. Priests were

descendants of Aaron who ran the temple service in Jerusalem. Surely a man of God would stop to help. He did not. A Levite came by as well. Levites were members of the tribe of Levi but not of Aaron's family. They helped the priests at the temple. Surely this man of God would stop to help. He did not. To check on the victim was dangerous (the robbers might still be near), inconvenient and possibly costly. If he was dead, touching his body might defile them and cost the price of the ashes of a red heifer, the loss of temple privileges for a week, and the expense of tearing a perfectly good garment as a sign of grief and of burying the body.

Then came a Samaritan. Jews considered Samaritans rascals and renegades and hated them. Almost unbelievably this man stopped to help. As best he could he treated the victim's wounds, pouring in wine to sterilize and oil to soothe. He tore his own clothing to make bandages. Then he walked while the Jew rode his donkey. At the inn he paid for two week's stay and pledged unlimited credit for additional expenses. All with no hope of reimbursement because Samaritans had no legal standing in Jewish courts.

Here were three philosophies of life. The robbers lived by the principle, "What's thine is mine. I'll take it!" The priest and Levite lived by the principle, "What's mine is mine. I'll keep it!" The Samaritan lived by the principle, "What's mine is thine (if you need it). I'll share it!"

The Issue (10:36-37)

"Which of the three was neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" Jesus asked. The lawyer gagged on the hated name "Samaritan." It was all he could do to snarl through tight lips, "The one who showed mercy to him." "Right," said Jesus. "Now go do as he did! That is what it means to love your neighbor as yourself!"

Strictly speaking the sharp city lawyer never got an answer to his question. It was the wrong question. The issue was not "Who is my neighbor?" but "To whom may I be a neighbor?" And the answer is, "Who needs me is my neighbor."

Bible Studies for Life By James R. Barnette Associate professor of religion, Department of Religion, Samford University

JESUS IS COMING AGAIN Matthew 24:9-14, 39b-44; Revelation 7:9; 22:12-14

See the End Game (Rev. 22:12-14)

Here Jesus Christ speaks words of assurance to John and to us. Christ will come again soon as judge. He will bring "reward" with Him, literally "wages." It is impossible for us to discern just how "soon" Christ's return will be. God's time is eternal, and the word "eternity" itself means literally "timelessness." When Paul describes Christ's return as being "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15:52), such eschatological language is not captive to the measurement frame of the solar system. Rather than obsess over when the Consummation will occur, we must focus on our present ministries of bringing the gospel to others.

Verse 14 constitutes the last of seven beatitudes to be found in Revelation (see 1:3, 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7). This final beatitude pronounces blessing on those whose purity is rewarded by admission to eternal life. Their robes are white and pure because of the cleansing power of Christ (Rev. 7:14). The verse stresses their active part in this process: they "wash their robes," that is, they have kept their witness in spite of persecution.

See that You Are Ready (Matt. 24:39b-44)

These verses emphasize the necessity for watchfulness in view of the unexpectedness of the coming of the Son of Man. We need to be prepared. There will be a division coming, for "one will be taken and the other left." The thrust of this section is to insure our being ready for His return.

This section concludes with the mini-parable of the burglar. This is one of five parables addressing the Second Coming of Christ. The other four are the parable of the 10 virgins (Matt. 25:1-13), the parable of the porter (Mark 13:34-37), the parable of the servants (Matt. 24:45-51), and the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30). The comparison of an unexpected event with a thief breaking in is

found in 1 Thessalonians 5:2, 2 Peter 3:10, and Revelation 3:3, 16:15.

See that You Are Faithful (Matt. 24:9-14; Rev. 7:9)

In the future, secular catastrophes will come, but they do not announce the end of history. Such will involve the world's persecution of the church, the pressures which cause brother to betray brother, defection from the church, false prophets deceiving many and lawlessness which undermines the freedom of true love for God. Yet Jesus' words of encouragement are that "he who endures to the end will be saved." This reference corresponds with the statements to the churches of Asia Minor, "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with me on my throne" (Rev. 3:21).

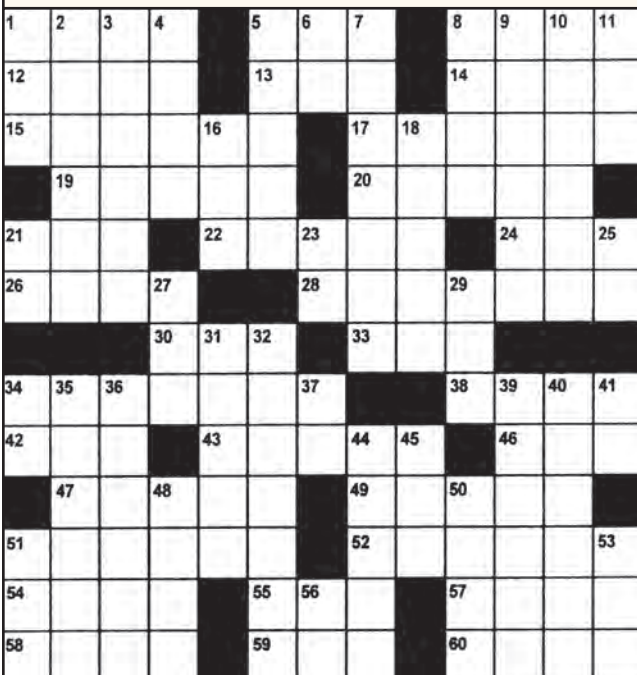
The end of the age will not come, as Jesus stated explicitly, until the gospel of the Kingdom has been preached as a witness of the nations. This is a reference to worldwide evangelism, the proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles and to all nations of the world. Significantly, all four Gospel writers affirm that Jesus spoke of this worldwide mission. It is consistent with His redemptive ministry to have picked up their last question concerning the end of the age and answer it first.

In John's Revelation, a "great multitude" embraces the gospel and at the Consummation they stand before the throne "in front of the Lamb." Every "nation, tribe, people and language" is represented at this glorious moment. The multitude is clothed in white (3:14, 4:4, 6:11). They hold palm branches in their hands, as if celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles (see Lev. 23), and are like the crowd who welcomed Jesus the humble King into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. In ancient Israel the palm branch was a symbol of victory. These victors carry palm branches not so much to celebrate their own victory as the complete victory of the Lamb. This vision of John is a preview of the final heavenly state of Christians that is described in Revelation 21 and 22.

James Barnette is the teaching pastor of Brookwood Baptist Church, Birmingham.

Christian Crossword

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Across

- The ___ of life. (1 John 1:1)
- There is a ___ here. (John 6:9)
- The month of _____. (Deut. 16:1)
- Roboam begat _____. (Matt. 1:7)
- Naaman, _____, and Rosh. (Gen. 46:21)
- Woman's title equal to a "sir."
- Sky is _____ but can ye _____. (Matt. 16:3; 2 words)
- Cut down, O _____. (Jer. 48:2)
- Fountain both ___ salt water and fresh. (James 3:12)
- Maketh the seven stars and _____. (Amos 5:8)
- Unto you, young _____. (1 John 2:13)
- Not weary in well _____. (2 Thess. 3:13)
- Timothy. (nickname)
- Escaped the ___ of the sword. (Heb. 11:34)
- A ___ person. (Prov. 6:12)
- The flower of her _____. (1 Cor. 7:36)
- As a ___ gathereth. (Matt. 23:37)
- Thou barren that ___ not. (Gal. 4:27)
- Bakbukiah and _____. (Neh. 12:9)
- Receiving the ___ of your

Down

- Will also ___ up us by his own power. (1 Cor. 6:14)
- Neither did we ___ any man's bread. (2 Thess. 3:8)
- Was ___ an Ahohite. (1 Chron. 27:4)
- Eliohoreph and _____. (1 Kings 4:3)
- Abimelech king of ___ sent ... for she is ___ man's wife. (Gen. 20:2, 3; 2 words)
- Sons also of Jediahel; _____. (1 Chron. 7:10)
- Not ___ all to come _____. (1 Cor. 16:12; 2 words)
- ___ thou on my right hand. (Acts 2:34)
- ___ Ephesus, and ___ the faithful. (Eph. 1:1; 2 words)
- ___, let ___ escape thither. (Gen. 19:20; 2 words)
- ___ an Ithrite. (2 Sam. 23:38)
- ___ said, ___ that ___ had wings. (Ps. 55:6; 3 words)
- men. (Gal. 6:10; 2 words)
- ___, thou that destroyest the temple. (Mark 15:29)
- Kinah, and _____. (Josh. 15:22)
- The son of _____. (Luke 3:28)
- From ___ in the valley. (Num. 21:20)
- ___ have ... think of ___ ... didst receive _____. (1 Cor. 4:6, 7; 3 words)
- Zechariah, _____. (1 Chron. 15:18)
- ___ commandment. (1 John 2:7)
- To fight with words. Profitable to thee and to _____. (Philemon 11)
- Abideth ___ him sinneth not. (1 John 3:6)
- ___ little children. (1 John 3:18)
- ___ shall say. (1 Cor. 12:16)
- African antelope or wildebeest.
- Isaac dwelt in _____. (Gen. 26:6)
- ___ is very bold ... ___ was found. (Rom. 10:20; 2 words)
- Not ___ ashamed before him. (1 John 2:28)
- Them that rejoice _____. (Isa. 24:8)
- King Rehoboam sent _____. (1 Kings 12:18)
- Fa, So, La, _____. (1 Thess. 2:13)
- To Remmonmethoar _____. (Josh. 19:13; 2 words; reverse order)
- And ___ his son. (1 Chron. 6:26)
- ___ is the Spirit. (1 John 5:6)
- Havilah, and _____. (1 Chron. 1:9)
- Naaman, _____. (Gen. 46:21)
- For example, July 1, 1994.
- ___ the Ahohite. (1 Chron. 11:29)
- General Accounting Office. (abbr.)
- ___ ... and ___ will write. (Rev. 3:12; 2 words)
- The children of _____. (1 Chron. 7:12)



RESOURCES:

Your Guide to Today's New Music and Literature



Sound Bites

By Rick Sharp

JACI VELASQUEZ

Diamond

InPop Records

After a four-year break to marry and have two children, seven-time Dove Award winner Jaci Velasquez is back, as strong as ever, with her new record "Diamond." With more than 4 million albums sold, including three Platinum albums and three Gold albums, "Diamond" continues the warm, strong vocals and clean pop sound that Velasquez is famous for, and even throws in a little rock swagger on songs like "Girl."



"Diamond," the title cut, starts the album out with a bang, showcasing Velasquez's vocal strength. Any questions about Velasquez's four-year absence are answered here. "Girl" is a light, danceable pop-rock tune with a positive message for the ladies. "The Sound of Your Voice" has a compelling message of the power of God's voice, wrapped up in a rock anthem vehicle. A prayer for God's reassurance, "Tell Me Again" moves from a touching, breathy vocal style to classic Velasquez belting out the ending with that power we love so much.

Velasquez is back, and mil-

lions of folks couldn't be happier.

KUTLESS

Believer

BEC Recordings

Portland, Ore., rock-and-worship band Kutless' seventh mainstream album, "Believer," will be seen as a departure from much of its previous work. Softer, certainly, although there are still hard rocking songs here as evidenced by the guitar-heavy "Gravity" and "Need." Some things that haven't changed are the band's strong Christian message, great lyrics, excellent musicianship and some of the best worship music in the Christian music scene.

"Gravity" and "Need," with their excellent guitar work and driving choruses, will please old-time Kutless fans, although even here, the new sound is evident. "If It Ends



Today," the album's opener, is a rousing, guitar-rich rocker and one of the album's best.

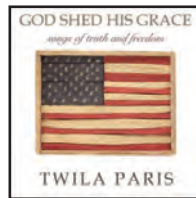
While some may lament the passing of the constantly hard-driving Kutless of earlier days, many — myself included — will see this as the natural evolution of a really great band. This may be the best yet.

TWILA PARIS

God Shed His Grace: Songs of Truth and Freedom

eOne Christian Music

Self-described as "an album of encouragement for Christian patriots" and a "love letter and prayer" for her country, Twila Paris has released her 23rd project. While Paris says this is "not just a greatest hits album," many will see it that way. There are two new recordings here, our national hymn "God of Our Fathers" and "America the Beautiful." The rest are previously released songs, spanning her 30-year music career. Everything has been remastered, most likely to capture newer techniques,



better equipment and current thinking in distribution formats.

With 33 No. 1 hits and multiple Dove Awards to her credit, including three for "Female Vocalist of the Year," Paris is much loved in the patriotic Christian music world. Her many fans will love having her best songs collected into a single CD.

Paris will tour this spring on the Classic Christian Tour with Michael Card, Steve Green and Wayne Watson.

Book Reviews

By Martine Bates Sharp, Ed.D.

One Hope: Believing God When There's Every Reason to Give Up

Michael Mason. Hartselle, Ala.: Michael Mason Ministries, 2011. 105 pp. (Paperback).

"One of the biggest surprises for me as a pastor is the number of hurting people in my congregation. We hide our hurts so well ... but most of us need our hope in Christ renewed," author Michael Mason writes. This book is Mason's gift to hurting people who "feel their circumstances are hopeless."

And what a gift it is! "One Hope" takes the reader through the four days between the time of Lazarus' death and the time he was raised from the dead, describing the impatience Mary and Martha felt when Jesus didn't come right away, the anguish they experienced when their brother died and the joy that erupted when Jesus stunned the crowd by calling their brother out of the grave.

The narrative deftly ties the bibli-

cal story to the lives of modern-day readers, with illustrations that hit home, helping the reader see that the biblical account has strong implications for us today and that the only hope that really changes anything or anyone "has a name — Jesus."

The book is written in an easy, conversational style laced with humor and personal stories. It doesn't take long to read, but once read, will be remembered, re-read and shared with others who are in need of hope.

This is the second book for Mason, president of Michael Mason Ministries and pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Morgan Baptist Association.

Addressing the Needs of the Poor: A Church Mobilization Guide

Mark Hazen. Bloomington, Ind.: CrossBooks, 2011. 130 pp. (Paperback)

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there were 46.2 million Americans living in poverty in

2011. That was up almost 4 million from the year before and the number continues to rise. Mark Hazen makes a strong case for the need for churches to help the poor, beginning with a series of verses that forms a clear biblical mandate.

"How is it, then," asks the author, "that many churches and individual Christians are still not engaged in helping the needy?" Hazen gives at least a partial answer: because they do not know how. This book is a how-to guide for churches and individual Christians who desire to help the poor but have no idea where to start.

The heart of the book contains tables for the different classifications of people who are likely to need help — children, the elderly, families — the needs they are likely to have and a table of needs and suggestions for meeting those needs.

It is well-organized and engagingly written; an individual or group seeking to help those in need is likely to find this book helpful, either as motivation or as a manual.

FIREFLIGHT

Now

Provident Label Group LLC

"Now" is the fifth full-length studio release from Christian hard-rock band Fireflight. Released March 6, "Now" continues the hard-hitting rock style of previous albums, albeit a little more glossy and processed than the band's earlier efforts.

As always, strong vocals from



front woman Dawn Michele gives a clean edge to the roaring grunge sound of the band. Guitar work is exceptional, although a little over-processed for me. Drummers, especially you hard rockers, will love the record.

"Stay Close" combines searing vocals and furious guitar work into perhaps the best song on the record. The title cut is a driving rocker prodding us to be our best.

No doubt longtime Fireflight fans will find issues with the over-processed new sound. Still, this is a good record all wrapped up into a driving, well-performed package.

Christian Marketplace

Top Ten Best Sellers

Nonfiction

1. **Jesus Calling**, Sarah Young (Thomas Nelson)
2. **Heaven Is for Real**, Todd Burpo (Thomas Nelson)
3. **Jesus Calling, Large-Print Deluxe Edition**, Sarah Young (Thomas Nelson)
4. **The 5 Love Languages**, Gary Chapman (Moody)
5. **The Necessity of an Enemy**, Ron Carpenter (Waterbrook/Multnomah)
6. **Jesus Calling, Deluxe Edition**, Sarah Young (Thomas Nelson)
7. **The Resolution for Men**, Stephen Kendrick, Alex Kendrick and Randy Alcorn (B&H)
8. **One Thousand Gifts**, Ann Voskamp (Zondervan)
9. **Crazy Love**, Francis Chan (David C Cook)
10. **The Resolution for Women**, Priscilla Shirer (B&H)

Fiction

1. **The Harbinger**, Jonathan Cahn (Charisma Media)
2. **Downfall, Intervention Series #3**, Terri Blackstock (Zondervan)
3. **Longing, Bailey Flanigan Series #3**, Karen Kingsbury (Zondervan)
4. **Loving, Bailey Flanigan Series #4**, Karen Kingsbury (Zondervan)
5. **Courageous**, Randy Alcorn, Alex Kendrick and Stephen Kendrick (Tyndale)
6. **Illusion**, Frank Peretti (Howard Books)
7. **Leaving, Bailey Flanigan Series #1**, Karen Kingsbury (Zondervan)
8. **My Foolish Heart, Deep Haven Series #4**, Susan May Warren (Tyndale)
9. **Learning, Bailey Flanigan Series #2**, Karen Kingsbury (Zondervan)
10. **Desert Gift, Side Roads Series #2**, Sally John (Tyndale)

'Writing songs of hope, life'

Christian hip-hop artist Lecrae shares testimony through music

By Leann Callaway
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Growing up in a broken home, Christian hip-hop/rap artist Lecrae Moore struggled in his search for significance and self-worth. During his teenage years, hanging out with the wrong crowd only added to his confusion along with the effects of drugs, drinking, partying and broken relationships. Moore knew his life was frantically spinning out of control.

At the age of 19, Moore reached a pivotal turning point when a friend invited him to a Christian conference. As Moore looked around at the crowd, he noticed a distinct difference in their lives. Moore realized that these young adults were passionately in love with Jesus and it became an eye-opening moment for him.

Not long after, Moore was in a serious car accident but walked away without a scratch. It was then that he realized what he needed most in his life — a relationship with Christ.

As Moore started attending church regularly, he wanted to tell others about how his life had been radically transformed by the gospel. During his college years at the University of North Texas, he printed out his testimony and passed it out across the campus.

Moore also began volunteering at a juvenile detention center and started sharing songs as a way to offer hope and encouragement. It was then that he realized how he could use those songs to lead others to the Lord.

"I always loved music and was involved in music as far back as I can remember," Moore said. "A large part of songwriting was my desire to capture a lot of my life experiences and the struggles that I went through — being raised in a single-parent home, never knowing my father because he was on drugs. I just wanted an outlet to express some of those emotions."

"Writing songs let me do a lot of introspective soul-searching, and while looking for answers, I ran into a group of people who challenged me with the truths of the gospel. When my faith changed, my music also changed. I stopped



Photo courtesy of Reach Records

CHANGED — During his teenage years, Lecrae Moore was searching for significance. Today, as a popular Christian hip-hop/rap artist, his testimony impacts teenagers and young adults.

writing dark songs of hopelessness and began writing songs of life and hope."

From there, Moore began performing at concerts and sharing his testimony around the country.

Today as a husband and father, Moore desires to set a strong example of the life-changing love of Christ for his family. Despite a busy touring schedule, Moore has made it a priority to be actively involved with his family and also offering leadership, guidance and support for two church plants in the Atlanta area.

'Walk as a leader'

"My platform has really increased more than I could imagine, and I think God has been teaching me how to steward that well," Moore said. "I'm learning how to walk as a leader, how to be a responsible and faithful leader by walking in God's Word and truths."

Moore also has helped establish Reach Records and the 116 Clique, based on Romans 1:16, as a mentorship group for Christian hip-hop and rap artists. Moore and his label mates are planning an Unashamed tour for the fall. It will raise funds to help the fight against social issues such as

child hunger and sex trafficking.

In addition he has created the Man Up conference and curriculum addressing what it means to be a godly man. He recently shared his testimony on a commercial for I am Second, which has been impacting lives across the country. The influence of his music and platform has led to garnering a nomination for the prestigious honor of Artist of the Year at the upcoming Dove Awards in Atlanta.

"People have shared countless testimonies of how they have been radically shaken by hearing what Jesus has done in my life," Moore said. "I'm a regular person who has struggles like anyone else. People may see me on stage in front of people, but there's no rock star element here."

"Jesus called me to make disciples, not to be a rock star. I just want to write music that people can relate to and helps keep them focused on Christ. I also hope that these songs will inspire, encourage and motivate people to serve God."

"Because of Christ, I have found what I had been searching for all along. Christ is my source of significance and my source of worth because my identity is found in Him." ❧

Americans think Christianity has positive impact, study shows

Americans feel the "Christian faith" has a positive impact on help for the poor and raising children with good morals, according to a new poll.

In a study conducted by Grey Matter Research, more than 1,000 American adults were asked if the Christian faith had a positive, negative, or no real impact on 16 different areas of society, such as crime, poverty and the role of women in society.

Strong majorities (72 percent) said Christianity is good for helping the poor and for raising children with good morals. Around half (52 percent) said Christianity helps keep the U.S. as a "strong nation," and nearly as many (49 percent) said the faith had a positive impact on the role of women in society.

Although Christianity has been criticized for its traditional views on abortion, contraception and gen-

der roles, "Americans aren't buying into it," said Ron Sellers, president of the Arizona-based Grey Matter Research.

In six of the 16 areas, sizable numbers of Americans said Christianity had little or no impact, including the environment, business ethics, civility and substance abuse. Americans were roughly split, at about one-third each, on Christianity's impact on racism. (RNS)

World Religion

Compiled from Wire Services

Thousands mourn Egypt's Coptic Pope Shenouda III

CAIRO, Egypt — Egyptian Christians are mourning the death of Pope Shenouda III, the longtime leader of the Coptic Orthodox Church, who died March 17 at the age of 88.

His funeral was held March 20 at St. Mark's Cathedral in Cairo, where his body had been sitting in state on a large wooden throne.

Tributes have come in from around the world, with Pope Benedict XVI offering prayers and President Obama praising Shenouda as an "advocate for tolerance and religious dialogue."

Shenouda, the 117th Patriarch of Alexandria, ruled for 41 years amid great political turmoil. A supporter of former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, he was an outspoken advocate for Christians in a predominantly Muslim nation.

Shenouda spent more than three years in exile in the desert monastery of St. Bishoy, after then-President Anwar Sadat stripped him of his powers for criticizing violence against Copts by Islamic extremists.

Copts make up about 10 percent of Egypt's population.

Mubarak freed Shenouda in 1985. More recently, Shenouda presided over a period of danger for his flock as Copts were targeted by militant Islamic groups following Mubarak's downfall a year ago.

Shenouda was buried at St. Bishoy. Egypt's ruling military council said a military transport plane took Shenouda's body from Cairo to St. Bishoy after the funeral.

Coptic leaders say there is no timetable to pick Shenouda's successor.

Dioceses reject 'Covenant' to bind Anglican Communion

LONDON — A proposed "Covenant" aimed at ensuring unity across the worldwide Anglican Communion appears to have failed, leaving the world's third-largest Christian body facing an uncertain and likely fragmented future.

The Covenant, born of an idea in 2004 to try to set boundaries in belief and practice for the Communion's 40 member churches, appears dead after a majority of dioceses within the Church of England voted to reject it. The Covenant had been billed as a way to heal the growing splits within Anglican churches over a range of issues that centered on same-sex unions and homosexual bishops.

One of its biggest supporters was Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, who backed the Covenant's call to member churches not to take steps or adopt policies that could antagonize Anglicans in other countries.

Failure to abide by the Covenant would result in a kind of second-tier membership for independent-minded member churches.

Williams announced March 16 that he will step down at the end of the year to return to his roots in academia, depriving supporters of the Covenant their most powerful voice.

British government moves to restore freedom to pray

LONDON — The British government has fast-tracked a move to restore the rights of towns and cities to hold prayers as part of their official business, effectively overriding a High Court order to stop the practice.

Communities Secretary Eric Pickles spearheaded the introduction of a new "general power of competence of local authorities in England" that gives new powers to local governments to resume prayers and to sidestep the court ruling that was issued earlier this year.

The parliamentary order took effect immediately when Pickles signed it April 6.

In its own decision against Bideford Town Council, in southwest England, the High Court said in February that it was illegal for town halls to continue with the centuries-old practice of conducting prayers at the start of official meetings.

The British government now says, "Parliament has been clear that councils should have greater freedom from interference."

In broadening these new powers to town and parish councils, it adds, it enables them to "innovate" and "hands them back the freedom to pray." ❧

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