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Extreme evangelism



By Ava Thomas
International Mission Board

IMB photo

J.D. Sommers hikes out to the overlook to join his ministry partner, Will Craig. For two months the university students joined a team in East Asia mapping remote trails and unmarked roads. Their work adds knowledge of the area to guide the national church in sharing the gospel.

Will Craig considered himself to be physically fit. He used running for exercise and for stress relief, which he needed especially when studying for pharmacy school finals.

"I'd been running as much as I could up until exam time," Craig said. "And then studying took over."

But as much as he enjoyed running, he found running in Alabama was nothing like climbing in thin air.

"Even in the best shape, your body has to change its physiology to respond to the demand required to perform simple tasks," Craig said. "So when I got to the mountains all the work I had put into getting into shape didn't have much of an effect."

The first time he headed up a 12,000-foot mountain, he was gasping for air halfway up. But when he reached the top and saw the un-reached people group on the other side, he found his burning lungs did not matter so much.

Buddhist prayer flags rustled over the tents in the valley, and the sound

of monks blowing conch shells echoed off the ridges.

The lostness hit Craig head on. "Everything just seemed so alien," the student said. "I'd never been overseas before, so I didn't really know what to expect."

The altitude was not the only thing that required acclimatizing, he said.

"It took a while to adjust to the lifestyle and the people," Craig said.

J.D. Sommers agreed. Like Craig, it was his first time out of the country or in high altitude. After

months of preparation, the two left Birmingham and were on top of that mountain in East Asia working with an International Mission Board extreme evangelism team just a few days later.

Well equipped

"The altitude was the biggest adjustment and something you can't really do much for. Other than that I felt fairly prepared and well equipped to do the work that was ahead of us," Sommers said.

But the people surprised him.

Alabama Baptist guys climb mountains to reach East Asia

Alabama Baptist girls take gospel to Himalayas

By Ava Thomas
International Mission Board

Small squares of paper curled in the wind and tangled around Laura Baker's feet. Thousands of scraps stuck in the grass and clung to the sides of a whitewashed furnace puffing sacrificial smoke.

The mountains heaved with Buddhist prayer papers.

All Baker wanted was for

the rocks to cry out.

"It breaks my heart to physically see the people's effort littered all over the mountain," she said. "They're so devoted to something false, when the Creator of these very mountains knows them by name."

She does not take that lightly.

That is why she and Katie Barnes decided to leave their jobs in Alabama and spend six months

"My first thoughts were mainly just trying to grasp how different the culture was from my own," he said.

The old men of the villages spend their days keeping big metal prayer wheels spinning, a symbol that means prayers are always going up to Buddha. Young women long for the day they can dedicate their first sons as monks.

At first it was hard to relate to the people there, Craig said.

"But I was reminded the whole time of how the Father is glorified in our diversity and how the whole experience — the people, the culture, the terrain and language — testifies to His majesty," he said.

Yaks roam around outside the
(See 'Volunteers,' page 11)

in remote parts of the Himalayas as part of the International Mission Board's Hands On program. And that is why the first thing they learned to say in the regional language is the name of the Most High God and the story of His Son.

"People up here probably wonder what our deal is," Baker said with a smile. "We
(See 'Watering' page 11)

COMMENT

How Were You Impacted by these Trends?

A recent study by Faith Communities Today identified seven characteristics of American church life during the first decade of the new century. How much was your church and your experience at church impacted by these trends?

1. Contemporary and innovative worship. Contemporary worship began on the West Coast in the 1990s and spread across the United States. By the end of the decade contemporary worship was the primary worship style for evangelical churches and was used by more than four out of 10 of all churches.

But contemporary worship did not always equate to church growth. During the decade innovation was added as well.

Innovative worship means different things to different people. For some it is praise music backed by electric guitars and rock-style drums. For others it is serving the Lord's Supper every week or kneeling in prayer or using liturgies as part of worship. Innovative worship seems to refer to styles with which participants were not previously familiar.

The study found that innovation more than doubled the spiritual vitality of the worship experience. For example, among churches using contemporary worship the percentage of churches judged to have high spiritual vitality jumped from 23.2 percent to 46.7 percent when innovation was added. Among churches not using contemporary worship the percentage of high spiritual vitality jumped from 17.4 percent to 38 percent when innovation was added.

Also the number of churches reporting rapid growth in attendance increased by about 50 percent when innovation was added to either traditional or contemporary worship styles.

2. Church is more than worship. Increasingly churches are moving from "supporting missions" to "doing missions." The survey asked about nine local missions programs to help evaluate local missions involvement. The study found an overall increase in local missions for all churches. The study also reported, "Most importantly, the net gain is the result of a significant increase for evangelical Protestant congregations such that the common wisdom that 'liberal' Protestantism was more involved in local social service work than evangelical Protestantism has now been reversed."

Member-oriented programs also increased as churches concentrated on offering prayer groups,



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

Bible studies, parenting and marriage enrichment classes, youth programs, musical opportunities and, especially, programs for young adults.

The study found that both the missions programs and the member-oriented programs positively impacted spiritual vitality and church attendance.

3. Decline in financial health. At the beginning of the decade 31 percent of churches reported excellent financial health. In 2010 that percentage had dropped to 14 percent. The rate of decline in the second half of the decade was twice as fast as in the first five years. A full 80 percent of American churches reported their finances had been negatively impacted by the recession. Every kind of congregation in every part of the nation seemed to experience financial decline.

A hopeful finding was that by 2010, one in 10 churches reported they were beginning to recover from the financial recession.

4. High levels of conflict. The report bluntly declared, "One of the disturbing surprises was the dramatically high level of conflict found in American congregations. Almost two of every three congregations in 2010 had experienced conflict in at least one of four key areas in the past five years (worship, finances, leadership or priorities)."

The report added that in one-third of the congregations the conflict was serious enough that members left or withheld contributions or a leader left.

Conflict negatively impacts a local church. Churches with some serious conflict were twice as likely to have low spiritual vitality, serious financial difficulty and a 10 percent or greater decline in attendance.

5. Aging membership. The median age of the American population increased from 35.3 in 2000 to 37.2 in 2010, primarily due to the aging of the baby boomer generation. That means the median age of church participants also increased. People age 65 and over make up at least one-third of the total membership of about 53 percent of oldline Protestant congregations and 23 percent of evangelical congregations.

The percentage of young adults age 18–34 de-

clined. Seventy-five percent of oldline Protestant congregations said less than 10 percent of their regular participants fell into this category. For evangelical congregations, 45 percent reported less than 10 percent of participants were young adults.

The survey found, "Congregations with older memberships lag (behind) younger congregations in spiritual vitality, growth in worship attendance, financial health, ability to find volunteers and breadth of programming." This is due in part to older congregations losing some of their capacity for change, and "congregational vitality is closely connected with innovation and change."

6. Fewer participants. The median church attendance in the United States is 105. For conservative Protestants it is slightly higher — 120. Broken down even more, 27 percent of all churches average 50 or fewer in worship attendance. Twenty-two percent of churches average between 51–100 worshippers. Only 10 percent of all churches average 500 or more in attendance.

The number of participants impacts leadership. Most churches have one clergy leader and a few part-time support staff members. Of necessity, the clergy leader must be a general practitioner with little opportunity to develop specialized ministries.

7. Majority of minorities. The upsurge in immigration has resulted in an explosion of languages used for Christian worship in the United States. The 2010 report showed the number of languages used in worship more than doubled in the decade. About 10 percent of all congregations reported worshipping in a language other than English, with Spanish being the most common.

Of major importance is the finding that the new minority populations are creating their own congregations rather than participating in historically white congregations. These congregations also attract a higher percentage of young adults than do white congregations. The racial/ethnic congregations are also disproportionately evangelical Protestant and disproportionately urban and Southern, the report found.

The majority of racial/ethnic churches started in the past decade were in big cities and older suburbs while the vast majority of churches started in new suburbs were white evangelical.

Obviously each of the seven trends is broadly described, but each of them may have impacted you or your church. Reflecting on them may bring insight into what you have experienced during the past 10 years and may provide a glimpse of what may lay ahead.

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Letters to the Editor

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"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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"We have a window, but it won't stay open forever. People are wounded and it's time to step in with the healing that only God can provide. God does not waste any circumstance. He will open people's hearts."

**Johnny Pons
Pennsylvania State University chaplain**



BP photo
Tennessee native Johnny Pons and his wife, Kathy, stand beside the Lion Shrine, a landmark at Penn State University where Pons has ministered for 22 years.

Healing for the hurt

Baptist chaplain brings hope, healing to Penn State following scandal

Johnny Pons has experienced God's sense of humor.

Pons grew up around Southeastern Conference football pulling for Vanderbilt and Alabama, having been reared in Hendersonville, Tenn., and its First Baptist Church.

Pennsylvania State University in State College, Pa., was the "beast of the East" and Pons admitted he "hated" the school from the perspective of football.

Fast forward a couple of decades. Pons has graduated from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and he and his wife Kathy have answered God's call to campus ministry, serving at none other than Penn State. Pons has come to respect the school that has a strong presence in Pennsylvania.

"One in 70 Pennsylvanians are Penn Staters," he said. "We knew we could come in and hopefully influence a broader region with the gospel."

And Pons has done that. He has represented Southern Baptists, a minority on campus and in the greater community, as director of New Life Fellowship at Penn State for 22 years.

He is in place to bring healing in the wake of the Jerry Sandusky sexual abuse scandal. Pons says he was stunned when the story broke last November. He had counted Sandusky a friend.

Sandusky, once one of the most respected citizens in the community, known for his lighthearted and gregarious personality, is now considered "a sullen, stone-faced, defeated" human being, Pons said.

Pons and others on campus are trying to process what has happened. Pons has the added responsibility of ministering to those perhaps least able to handle the turmoil — the students.

While everyone on campus sees the evil of the abuse and subsequent cover-up, Pons said, many are struggling to reconcile the Sandusky they knew personally with the Sandusky of the scandal. The legal battle and the university-sanctioned study led by former FBI director Louis Freeh revealed the late Joe Paterno and other university administrators concealed the abuse.

The cover-up has opened Pons' eyes to his own sin, he said.

'Prideful blindness'

"On the personal level I am capable of prideful blindness to my own sin. In fact I am sure that I have my own blind spots and areas of sin that I need to deal with honestly," he said, a revelation he has shared on his personal blog site, ponsanity.tumblr.com.

Pons said he also is capable of hiding information to protect himself or loved ones.

"This is perhaps the area of the whole mess that should strike the fear of God into each of our hearts," he said.

Pons shared questions he must address and help students face:

- ▶ How do I respond in truth and love to Sandusky and his family?
- ▶ How do I respond with compassion toward the abused?
- ▶ How do I reflect on the life and legacy

of Paterno and others involved in this scandal? Should a person be judged by his best or worst moments?

▶ What sins do I tolerate and why?

▶ Am I prepared for the same level of intense personal scrutiny that these men and Penn State have endured for the past few months?

These are tough questions Pons is ready to tackle, not only personally but also with those seeking his counsel.

As a minister Pons believes God has a purpose in the aftermath of the scandal.

"This scandal has touched students and community alike in a way that jars us from a business-as-usual pattern, and I believe there is hope for real change," Pons said. "I believe God has a redemptive purpose in every storm."

God will open hearts to the gospel, Pons believes, and is confident the coming months might reveal Penn State's finest hour.

"We have a window, but it won't stay open forever. People are wounded and it's time to step in with the healing that only God can provide," Pons said. "God does not waste any circumstance. He will open people's hearts."

As to the feelings he had for Penn State nearly 25 years ago, that has changed.

"We have planted our lives here and I am totally invested in this university," Pons said with conviction.

Knowing many Tennessee Baptists have already prayed for him, he requests prayer.

"It has been encouraging. God is good and I feel that," he said. (BP)



Photo by Doug Rogers

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE — Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee President Frank Page takes part in the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions meeting in Montgomery via Skype on Aug. 17.

Recovery anticipated

2013 proposed CP budget reflects \$1 million reduction from current year's \$43 million goal

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Alabama Baptists will consider reducing their Cooperative Program (CP) budget for next year when they meet in November.

Operating under an already-reduced budget for this year, Alabama Baptists will still come up short of receipts needed to meet the \$43 million goal for 2012, said Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM). So the SBOM approved a proposed \$42 million budget for 2013 during its Aug. 17 meeting in Montgomery. Messengers to the state convention in Montgomery will vote on the budget Nov. 13.

"We have to be reasonable and responsible," Lance said, noting the same percentages put in place for 2012 will exist — 57 percent to Alabama ministries and 43 percent to Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) ministries. All money coming in over the base budget will be split between Alabama and the SBC 50-50.

The \$1 million decrease in the budget from the current year will be absorbed by state convention ministries and entities and the SBC "across the board," said Bobby Dubois, SBOM associate executive director.

Prior to the recent recession, Alabama Baptists' giving had reached a high of \$44.9 million in 2007, but the receipts coming in from churches across the state have diminished since then. In 2011, \$40,600,000 came in and around \$41 million is anticipated for 2012.

"Still we have to anticipate some recovery at some point, so we think the \$42 mil-

lion goal is reachable in 2013," Lance said. "It is not the most conservative goal ever but it is reachable."

In order to get Alabama Baptists back on track to pre-recession days, Lance is challenging all Alabama Baptist churches to take part in the challenge to increase undesignated giving through the CP by 1 percent launched by Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee President Frank Page.

Lance's version of the challenge is for Alabama Baptist churches to increase CP giving by one-fourth of a percent of undesignated receipts each year for the next four years. This would yield a net increase of \$1.4 million per year. "If Alabama Baptists were to do two cycles of that then it would get us back to where we were," he said. "We could get back on our feet and look beyond this time."

Along with planning around a stalled economy, state convention leaders also must prepare budgets and strategies without knowing the final outcomes of negotiations with the North American Mission Board (NAMB) over funding of missionary work in the state. The Great Commission Ministries Task Force, created in 2010 to study how the state convention's future focus will be prioritized, also will likely have some funding implications for upcoming years' budgets.

More answers should be available by the October SBOM meeting, Lance said, noting the task force, which is the SBOM executive committee, will meet in executive session Oct. 11 and the SBOM will meet in executive session Oct. 12.

The task force report will be part of the upcoming annual meeting.

"It is not the most conservative goal ever but it is reachable."

**Rick Lance
executive director
Alabama Baptist State
Board of Missions**

Alabama Baptist State Convention Proposed 2013 Cooperative Program Budget

(To be considered Nov. 13, 2012)

	CP BASE BUDGET	STATE/SBC CAUSES BUDGET	TOTAL BASE/ CAUSES BUDGET	CHALLENGE BUDGET
SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION MINISTRIES	18,060,000	400,000	18,460,000	18,960,000
STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS MINISTRIES				
<i>EVANGELISM/DISCIPLINESHIP (34 full-time employees)</i>				
Evangelism	112,273	1,407	113,680	113,680
Sunday School and Discipleship	323,218	4,050	327,269	327,269
Collegiate and Student Ministries	101,237	1,269	102,505	102,505
Evangelism/Discipleship Salaries/Housing	2,120,974	26,579	2,147,552	2,147,552
Evangelism/Discipleship Travel/Field Services	237,360	2,974	240,334	240,334
<i>LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT (11 full-time employees)</i>				
LeaderCare/Church Administration	176,211	2,208	178,419	178,419
Leadership/Church Health	137,135	1,718	138,853	138,853
Worship Leadership/Church Music	90,437	1,133	91,570	91,570
Leadership Development Salaries/Housing	471,392	5,907	477,300	477,300
Leadership Development Travel/Field Services	58,246	730	58,976	58,976
<i>MISSIONS MOBILIZATION (14 full-time employees)</i>				
Associational Missions & Church Planting	824,790	10,258	835,048	835,048
Global Missions	191,753	2,403	194,156	194,156
Missions Mobilization Salaries/Housing	566,424	7,098	573,522	573,522
Missions Mobilization Travel/Field Services	63,522	796	64,318	64,318
<i>MISSIONS SUPPORT (29 full-time employees)</i>				
Executive Director				
A. Director's Office	51,398	707	52,106	52,106
B. Disaster relief	965	12	977	977
C. Supplemental Aid	965	12	977	977
D. Strategic Initiatives				262,514
E. Mission:Dignity (Formerly: Adopt an Annuitant)	8,683	109	8,792	8,792
F. Partnerships	965	12	977	977
Information/Facility Services				
Director's Office	471,545	5,883	477,428	477,428
Accounting & Human Resources	2,209,324	27,727	2,237,051	2,237,051
Church Compensation Services	15,287	192	15,479	15,479
Communications Services	167,195	2,095	169,290	169,290
Computer Services	146,405	1,835	148,240	148,240
Facility Services	1,522,262	19,076	1,541,338	1,541,338
Cooperative Program and Stewardship Development	86,499	1,084	87,583	87,583
Missions Support Salaries/Housing	1,529,669	19,169	1,548,838	1,548,838
Missions Support Travel/Field Services	105,425	1,321	106,746	106,746
SUB-TOTAL STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS MINISTRIES	11,791,559	147,765	11,939,324	12,201,838
CHURCH RETIREMENT PLAN (CHRP)	777,613	9,745	787,358	787,358
STATE CONVENTION ENTITY MINISTRIES				
Christian Higher Education Ministries				
A. A. Earl Potts Scholarship	117,364	1,471	118,834	121,286
B. Board of Aid to Students	266,849	3,344	270,193	275,766
C. Judson College	979,385	10,783	990,168	1,010,623
D. Samford University	4,729,431	66,260	4,795,691	4,894,468
E. University of Mobile	2,509,401	25,942	2,535,343	2,587,753
Other Entities and Commissions Ministries				
A. Children's Home and Family Ministries	266,339	3,338	269,676	275,239
B. Shocco Springs	572,262	7,171	579,433	591,385
C. The Alabama Baptist	580,378	7,273	587,651	599,773
D. The Alabama Baptist Retirement Centers	195,456	2,449	197,906	201,988
E. The Baptist Foundation of Alabama	390,913	4,899	395,811	403,976
F. The Christian Life Commission	25,703	322	26,025	26,561
G. The Education Commission	3,391	42	3,434	3,504
H. The Historical Commission	134,180	1,681	135,861	138,664
Auxiliaries and Other Ministries				
A. ALCAP	68,631	860	69,491	70,924
B. Woman's Missionary Union	531,146	6,656	537,802	548,895
TOTAL STATE CONVENTION ENTITY MINISTRIES	11,370,827	142,491	11,513,318	11,750,804
TOTAL STATE BOARD & ENTITY MINISTRIES	23,940,000	300,000	24,240,000	24,740,000
SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION MINISTRIES	18,060,000	400,000	18,460,000	18,960,000
TOTAL BASE AND CHALLENGE BUDGET	42,000,000	700,000	42,700,000	43,700,000
SPECIAL OFFERING GOALS				
Lottie Moon Christmas Offering	11,600,000			11,600,000
Annie Armstrong Easter Offering	6,100,000			6,100,000
Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries	2,600,000			2,600,000
World Hunger Offering	800,000			800,000
Disaster Relief Offering	200,000			200,000
TOTAL SPECIAL OFFERING GOALS	21,300,000			21,300,000
TOTAL BUDGET AND SPECIAL OFFERING GOALS	63,300,000			65,000,000

'Blessed'

Looking back at Vacation Bible School 2012

By Al Earnest
Special to The Alabama Baptist

The most exciting activity of the summer for many children is Vacation Bible School (VBS). It is also the most dreaded time for those responsible for enlisting volunteer administrators, teachers and workers to assist in crafts, recreation and other areas.

Soon after assuming the position the VBS director races to the children's and pre-school departments. In efforts to fill all positions she asks, begs and finally twists arms of teachers in these areas before getting reluctant volunteers to engage in VBS. Still having slots to be filled she pleads through the church newsletter and in worship services for helpers. She is terrified each time her phone rings — afraid someone is resigning even before VBS has started or the material has been given to the teachers.

VBS often begins with minimum staff. When workers are few the work is more burdensome, and getting repeat leaders for the next year becomes impossible.

As an adult I contributed little to VBS. I prayed each year for success and for the salvation of those attending. My only personal involvement was dressing as a Bible character once and telling his story as requested by a VBS teacher.

VBS 2012 at Southside Baptist Church, Andalusia, changed me forever.

In September 2011, as I prepared to teach my adult Sunday School lesson on spiritual gifts, the Holy Spirit breathed the following into my being: "What would happen if every member of your class used his or her spiritual gifts in VBS 2012?" This was a full ten months before the next VBS. I presented this to the class during that lesson and reminded them of the challenge several times before the VBS director began recruiting staff.

'Giving up was not an option'

When the associational VBS clinic was announced I again challenged the class and urged them to attend. Upon arriving at the clinic I discovered I was the only class member present. I was grieved and disappointed.

For me, giving up was not an option. Two weeks before VBS I wrote on the classroom marker board, "VBS 2012. Are you involved? If not, why not?" For two Sundays I attempted to get members to volunteer. Finally, the last week before VBS one lone member promised to assist me a night or two in teaching the fifth grade and another member volunteered to decorate the classroom.

The first night of VBS I was surprised

and elated to have four of my class members come into my room just before starting time. They returned each night. In addition one class member helped in first grade, two helped with refreshments, four attended Adult VBS, and one photographed all events and prepared a presentation for family night. Counting me that was a total of 13 members out of a class averaging 18 to 20 each Sunday.

I taught the first three lessons and then asked Ernie, one of my helpers, to prepare and teach the fourth lesson on the ABCs of salvation. He took the teacher's book, went to a corner of the room and began to pray and study the material. He had never taught children before.

When the fifth-graders returned from their missions activity on night four Ernie got down on his knees in front of them. He explained the lesson with great compassion. He then gave a time for response and questions. He invited them to ask Jesus to be their Savior. The kids received Ernie and the salvation lesson well, but most if not all of them were already Christians. We didn't have a salvation decision.

The final night of VBS I asked Ernie if he would again go over the ABCs of salvation with the kids. This time he played the devil's advocate. A fifth-grader took him on

with the following dialogue:

Ernie: "What does the A in the ABCs of salvation stand for?"

Fifth-grader: "It stands for admit."

Ernie: "What should I admit?"

Fifth-grader: "Admit that you are a sinner."

Ernie: "But I'm a good guy. I don't do anything really bad."

Fifth-grader: "It doesn't matter how good you are. If you ever lied, stole or disobeyed your parents you have sinned. You are a sinner. We are all sinners and we must admit this before Jesus will save us."

The dialogue continued through the B and C of salvation. It was evident the fifth-graders learned the lesson well.

The weekend following VBS was exciting for our class and other adult classes throughout the church. Many of these classes plan to be more involved in VBS next year. The VBS director gave special thanks for what our class did. The encouragement she received from our involvement made her look forward to VBS 2013 more than she had any other year. We were all blessed through the children. The group concluded that next year would find them helping in VBS in any way they can. We all left the room praising God for allowing us to be used for His glory. ☩

Beeson's Timothy George among Executive Committee's advisory team on Calvinism

An Alabama Baptist is among those named to the advisory team who will help Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee President Frank Page craft a strategic plan to bring together various groups within the convention who hold different opinions on the issue of Calvinism.

Timothy George, dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in Birmingham, is one of 16 members. The group will conduct its first meeting Aug. 29-30 in Nashville.

"My goal is to develop a strategy whereby people of various theological persuasions can purposely work together in missions and evangelism," Page said. The list was announced Aug. 15.

At some point in the coming weeks and months, he said, "most likely there will be the crafting of a statement regarding the strategy on how we can work together."

"I want to be very clear: this is not an attempt to redo the theological consensus that we have in the Baptist Faith and Message 2000," Page said. "It is practical in nature, not doctrinal."

Page emphasized that the group is "not an official committee" of the convention. He also said additional names could be added to the group. "It's a group of helpers helping Frank Page come up with some sort of strategy document," he said.

David Dockery, president of Union University in Jackson, Tenn., helped Page put together the list.

"We wanted people who truly represented the various constituencies involved in this theological discussion," said Page, who in May and then in June publicly said he was working on naming such a group.

Along with George and Dockery, the other 14 members are:

▶ Daniel Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C.

▶ Mark Dever, senior pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington.

▶ Leo Endel, executive director of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention.

▶ Ken Fentress, senior pastor of Montrose Baptist Church, Rockville, Md.

▶ Eric Hankins, senior pastor

of First Baptist Church, Oxford, Miss.

▶ Johnny Hunt, pastor of First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Ga.

▶ Tammi Ledbetter, layperson of Inglewood Baptist Church, Grand Prairie, Texas.

▶ Steve Lemke, provost and director of the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

▶ Fred Luter, senior pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, New Orleans, and SBC president.

▶ R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky.

▶ Paige Patterson, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

▶ Stephen Rummage, senior pastor of Bell Shoals Baptist Church, Brandon, Fla.

▶ Daniel Sanchez, professor of missions at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

▶ Jimmy Scroggins, senior pastor of First Baptist Church, West Palm Beach, Fla.

In early August Page was part of a panel discussion where he and other panelists said Southern Baptists should and can unite despite differences on the issue of Calvinism. (BP)



GEORGE

Share your success stories, tips

As churches across the state pack up VBS materials and focus their recruiting efforts on Sunday morning slots, VBS 2013 may seem a long time away. But before getting too far away from a VBS mindset, share your success stories and tips for recruiting volunteers to help with VBS. *The Alabama Baptist* staff will compile these and pull from them for the 2013 VBS resource and preparation articles. Email your stories, tips and resources to news@thealabamabaptist.org.

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Across Alabama's Associations

BESSEMER

► **Chris Sanford** is the new youth minister for **Raimund Heights Church, Bessemer.** He interned at Grace Life Church, Bessemer, and attended Southeastern Bible College in Birmingham. He is married to Cait. Tommy Chesser is pastor.



SANFORD

Commission Women" Sept. 4, 9:45 a.m. Candace McIntosh, executive director of Alabama Woman's Missionary Union, will speak. For information call 205-956-0388. R. Joseph "Joby" Tricquet Jr. is pastor.

CHOCTAW

► **Gilbertown Church** will celebrate its 100th anniversary Sept. 8-9. A tree planting ceremony will be Sept. 8, 5 p.m., and a fish fry and children's activities will follow. The celebration will continue Sept. 9, 10 a.m. Brad Bakane is pastor.

COFFEE

► The single adult committee of **Coffee Association** will host a Single Adult Appreciation Luncheon Sept. 9, noon-2 p.m., at First Church, Enterprise. Call 334-894-6411 to RSVP by Sept. 5.

DEKALB

► **New Harmony Church, Albertville,** will celebrate its 140th anniversary Aug. 26, 10:45 a.m. A potluck lunch and an old-fashioned singing will follow the morning service. For information call 256-659-2516. Kenneth Windsor is pastor.

LIMESTONE

► **Salem Springs Church, Elkmont,** will celebrate homecoming Aug. 26, 11 a.m. Former Pastor Harlon Hood will speak. Lunch will follow. For information call 256-232-4551. Kevin Ward is pastor.

MADISON

► **Rick Stone** resigned as minister of music for First Church, Birmingham, to become worship pastor for **Whitesburg Church, Huntsville.** His first day is Sept. 2. Jimmy Jackson is pastor of Whitesburg.

ST. CLAIR

► **Chris Nicastro** is the new pastor of **Son Rise Church, Odenville.** He previously preached at The Jimmie Hale Mission for 15 years. He and his wife, Amy, have one son.

Please submit news items for "Across Alabama's Associations" at least three weeks prior to the event.

BIBB

► **Mount Carmel Church, West Blocton,** will host the "Renew Your Mind" ladies retreat Sept. 8, 8 a.m. Tollie Meggs, Linda Plowman Fikes and Linda Crisswell will speak. A continental breakfast and lunch will be served. Robert Smith is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM

► Tuesday Morning Missions of **McElwain Church, Birmingham,** will host a covered-dish luncheon "Beauty Secrets of Great



Elizabeth Young "Betty" Evans

Former IMB missionary Evans dies at 89

Elizabeth Young "Betty" Evans died Aug. 6. She was 89. Evans was born in Balkan, Ky. She graduated from Black Star High School in Alva, Ky., in 1940 as valedictorian. She received degrees from Cumberland College, Western Kentucky State Teachers College (now Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, Ky.) and Mercer University in Macon, Ga.



EVANS

She married Charles "Chuck" Evans of Atlanta, Ga. In 1958 Chuck and Betty Evans were appointed by the International Mission Board to East Africa, where they served for 30 years.

Evans was a member of Trinity Baptist Church, Madison, where she enjoyed working with the Homework Helpers Tutoring Program. She played piano at the Morningside of Madison assisted living community for their Thursday Bible studies and then at The Terrace at Priceville, a senior living retirement community in Decatur. Her family members said she was a passionate advocate for missions and would have wanted to thank Alabama Baptists for their commitment to international missions as they pray, give and go.

Evans was preceded in death by her husband, Chuck, in 1989. She is survived by two daughters; one son; four grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

William "Bill" Hacker

Retired Alabama pastor, DOM Hacker dies

William "Bill" Hacker died Aug. 12. He was 89. Hacker grew up in Birmingham and during World War II served as a radio operator in the Navy.

Hacker received a bachelor's degree from Howard College (now Samford University), a master of divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and a doctor of ministry degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

He first served as pastor of Sixteenth Avenue Baptist Church, Decatur, and later served at First Baptist Church, Centre, and Fifth Avenue Baptist Church, Decatur. After retirement Hacker served as interim pastor for several churches in Cullman County. He also served as director of missions for Morgan Baptist Association for 28 years.

Bill and Hazel Hacker were members of First Baptist Church, Hartselle, at the time of his death.

Hacker is survived by his wife, Hazel; two daughters; seven grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.



HACKER

John Roberts

Longtime S.C. editor John Roberts dies

John Roberts, the longest-serving editor in the history of *The Baptist Courier*, died Aug. 15. He was 85.

Roberts, of Shelby, N.C., graduated from Gardner-Webb College, Furman University and the Peabody College of Vanderbilt University. He joined the *Courier* staff in 1965 as associate editor and business manager. The following year he became editor and held the job until his retirement in 1996.

Roberts served as president of the South Carolina Baptist Convention in 1979-80. He was chairman of trustees for the former Radio and Television Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention and president of the Southern Baptist Press Association (now the Association of State Baptist Papers). He served on the board of directors of Associated Baptist Press. He was a member of First Baptist Church, Greenville, S.C. Roberts is survived by his wife, Helen, six children and eight grandchildren.

ROBERTS

Someone You Should Know

By Christine Kapurch
Correspondent, TAB

THOMAS PERKINS

Glenn's Chapel Baptist Church, Gardendale
North Jefferson Baptist Association



PERKINS

FAVORITE VERSE: John 3:16

FAVORITE HYMN: "Amazing Grace"

HOBBIES: Winning souls to the Lord

FAMILY STATUS: Married for 62 years

to Elizabeth; four children, Thomas Jr., Diane, Joyce and Lanita; and one grandchild

Thomas Perkins, pastor of Glenn's Chapel Baptist Church, has been serving as a pastor for 61 years. He also spent 15 of those years as a police chaplain. He has been evangelism director for North Jefferson Association for 11 years. He also is often featured on the TV program "The Southern Gospel Show" where he serves as a prayer host. The show airs every Sunday between 7:30 and 8:30 a.m. on Charter Cable and features southern gospel music, talk sessions and guests.

Q: What influences in your life pointed you to Christ at the beginning of your faith journey?

A: I was 13 years old and a member of the church. ... During a Wednesday daytime revival meeting they asked everyone to come to the altar to pray. I stayed in my seat and I asked the Lord to come into my heart and that's when it happened.

Q: When and how were you led into the ministry?

A: Just by the call of the Lord ... I decided to move from Columbus, Miss., to Chattanooga, Tenn. I started working in a supermarket and about a week after I moved there the manager, who led Bible study, pulled me into the back and said he knew there was something eating at me. ... I spent the night praying and at 12 o'clock that night I surrendered. The Lord called me to preach and [all these] years later I am still in the ministry. All of my life I have been raised a Christian. God really brought conviction on me.

Q: What does the ministry demand?

A: (It demands) full devotion and dedication. I know when God calls He doesn't "un-call."

Q: What do you get from the ministry?

A: The Lord said, "Ask and you

shall receive." I have been truly blessed.

Q: How do family members support you?

A: They support me 100 percent. My wife is the best pastor's wife that I imagine anyone could find. They call her "Angel" in our church.

Q: How do you see yourself involved in the ministry in the future?

A: I don't plan to retire — there's always work to be done. A lot of people have been saved because of the TV show. We have 700,000 viewers that watch the program.

Q: What difference will this ministry make for you in the future?

A: It's a glorious ministry. I just feel like it's a door that God has opened. It's a real blessing to be able to pray for people.

'An Enhanced RISK'

Study finds 85 percent of films have sexual content

A recent study confirmed that as adolescents absorb sexual content from movies, they are more likely to attempt to live it out in real life. Statistics compiled in the study point to a major challenge for parents striving to raise godly children.

Among the data reported in the study, published in July by the Association for Psychological Science:

- ▶ One significant influence on engagement in risky sexual behavior may be media — specifically, sexual exposure in movies.

- ▶ Among movies released from 1950 to 2006, roughly 85 percent contained sexual content (68 percent of G-rated movies; 82 percent of PG-rated movies; 85 percent of PG-13-rated movies; and 88 percent of R-rated movies).

- ▶ Sexual explicitness of PG-13-rated and R-rated movies has increased over the past decade.

- ▶ Seventy percent of the sexual acts

depicted in movies released from 1983 to 2003 occurred between newly acquainted partners, 98 percent included no reference to contraception and 89 percent resulted in no consequences.

- ▶ Adolescents sometimes seek out sexual media, with 57 percent of U.S. adolescents ages 14 to 16 reporting that they use media as a primary source of sexual information.

- ▶ Exposure to tobacco use in movies predicts initiation and escalation of smoking, and exposure to drinking in movies predicts initiation and escalation of alcohol use.

- ▶ Adolescents have a greater tendency to seek novel and intense stimulation between the ages of 10 and 15.

- ▶ Among the 1,200 children ages 12 to 14 who were surveyed initially, sensation seeking was generally low. Six years later, though, 63 percent had sexually debuted: 5 percent before age 15, 10 percent at age 15, 25 percent at age 16, 29 percent at age 17 and 31 percent at age 18 or older. (BP)



BP photo

Sex in movies influences teens' behavior, psychological study confirms

Exposure to sexual content in movies leads teenagers to have sex earlier and to participate in riskier sexual behavior, a study has confirmed, leading researchers to suggest incorporating media literacy training into sexual education.

The study, published in *Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, said roughly 85 percent of movies released from 1950 to 2006 contained sexual content, and only 9 percent of sexual content in movies contained

messages promoting sexual health. Sexual explicitness of PG-13-rated and R-rated movies has increased over the past decade, researchers also said.

Evidence suggests that adolescents' sexual attitudes and behavior are influenced more by movies than by other forms of media.

"Adolescents who are exposed to more sexual content in movies start having sex at younger ages, have more sexual partners and are less likely to use condoms with casual sexual partners," said Ross O'Hara, who conducted the re-

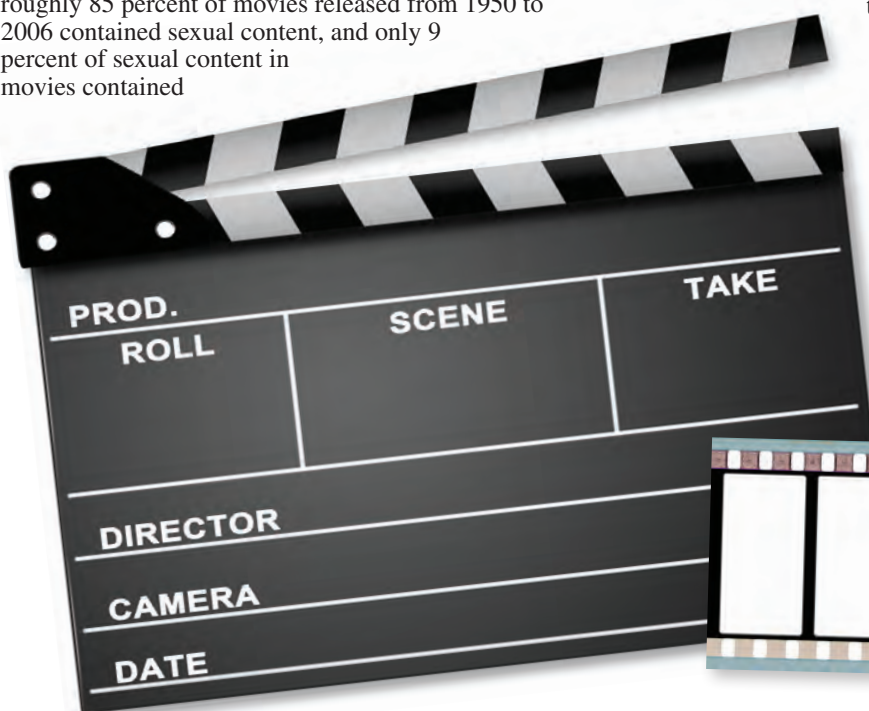
search with other psychological scientists at Dartmouth College in Hanover, N.H.

Richard Ross, professor of student ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, said allowing a middle school student to watch sex on the big screen is like allowing a toddler to ride in the front seat with no seat belt, standing up, at rush hour.

Allen Jackson, director of the Youth Ministry Institute at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, likened it to a pregnant woman drinking alcohol.

"There's an enhanced risk at that life stage," Jackson said. "There is an enhanced impact of the images that are viewed."

The study, which was funded by the National Institutes of Health, suggests that exposure to sex in movies may accelerate the normal rise in sensation seeking during adolescence, thereby promoting risky behavior generally, and that it has a lasting influence on risky sexual behaviors in adulthood. (BP)





Where did all the

WESTERN

Western films known for establishing good character now few and far between in Hollywood

A resolution of appreciation for **MAGGIE DEE WILKINSON**

WHEREAS, Maggie Dee Wilkinson has served sixty-six years as an active and devoted member of Mount Hebron Baptist Church of Leeds, Alabama; and

WHEREAS, Maggie Dee Wilkinson has served as teacher of the primaries and beginners Sunday school class, played the piano, sung in the choir and served as church clerk for forty years;

WHEREAS, Maggie Dee Wilkinson has possessed and exhibited the attributes of Christian stewardship, leadership and setting examples of Christian living to our Lord and Savior for her family and the community; and

WHEREAS, Maggie Dee Wilkinson feels that she must relinquish active service as church clerk because of health reasons;

NOW IT BE RESOLVED, the pastor, deacons and the membership at large of Mount Hebron Baptist Church do hereby express their appreciation to Maggie Dee Wilkinson for the dedicated service rendered to Mount Hebron Baptist Church and the community; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a copy of this resolution be spread upon the official minutes of Mount Hebron Baptist Church, the official minutes of the Birmingham Baptist Association and a copy be forwarded to *The Alabama Baptist*.

Done this 20th day of May 2012

— Paid Advertising —

This summer the Cineplex is crowded with a plethora of roughhewn comedies, several-too-many horror-thrillers, and a cascade of caped crusaders. But yet again, the cinematic landscape is bereft of the western. Oh, I know there's a new "Lone Ranger" in the works, but that's set for a July 2013 release. Why has the western been ignored by today's moviemakers?

I have a theory. If you look at the evolution of movie genres such as the horror film or the comedy or even the fairy tale, they each have morphed into products meant either to reflect our changing times or influence them. Horror films such as "The Bride of Frankenstein," "Dracula" or "Cat People" once were morality tales where good eventually triumphed over evil. But the scary movie has undergone more transformations than Lady Gaga's wardrobe. And with few exceptions, such as the psychological sci-fi thriller "Signs" (2002), most of today's entries into that film forum have

been little more than salutes to studio special effects departments. Fright flicks aren't really morality tales these days, just computer-generated gore-fests.

And comedies? Past generations have laughed at everything from the slapstick shenanigans of the Three Stooges, to the soulful hilarity of Charlie Chaplin ("City Lights"), to the sophisticated wit of William Powell ("The Thin Man"), to the prancing energy of Danny Kaye ("The Court Jester"), to the charming antics of Cary Grant ("His Girl Friday," "Bringing Up Baby"), to the staid buffoonery of Peter Sellers ("The Mouse That Roared"), to the satirical humor of Stanley Kubrick ("Dr. Strangelove"). Most of today's funny film folk go no further than comedy club raucousness with its "I-can't-believe-I-just-saw-that" syndrome. Jack Black, Will Ferrell, Seth Rogen, Ben Stiller and Jason Segal, along with their comic clones, are unbridled by codes of decorum. This era's screen comic peppers

his life observations with sophomore stench known in polite circles as bathroom humor.

But the western doesn't lend itself easily to revamping. Given, many have tried, and some with seeming success. But in the long run, their attempt has led to the near demise of the genre.

"Fright flicks aren't really morality tales these days, just computer-generated gore-fests."

Where John Ford's westerns were poetic in presentation, Sergio Leone's spaghetti westerns became campy — like cartoons for grownups. Sam Peckinpah gave us a masterpiece sendoff of the old West as Hollywood once knew it with his "Ride the High Country" (1960),

then redefined the horse opera with his excessive yet intriguing "The Wild Bunch" (1969). In his defense, with that film Peckinpah was actually attempting to point a finger at the increasingly violent nature of our culture. He filmed the savage action in close-up and slow motion, thinking it would speak volumes concerning the direction our society was heading. He was alluding to the corruption

of the soul and the changing of man's character. Sadly, he merely opened the door to violent exploitation, much the way Mike Nichols' "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" (1966) did for profane language.

From then on our western history was depicted with flawed heroes by filmmakers determined to dispel the glamour of the Old West. Even Clint Eastwood's admittedly brilliant and poignant "Unforgiven" (1992) wallowed in grime, with the genre's black-and-white themes now tinged with shades of gray.

In keeping with our more pessimistic times where filmmakers emphasize "reality" over symbolic allusion, no longer would the good guys wear the white Stetsons, the bad guys the black ones. Some, as in the case of "Brokeback Mountain" (2005), now wear pink hats — metaphorically speaking.

True, a great many B-westerns used Native Americans as little more than props, but the best of the westerns emphasized how the world thought of America: vast and full of mystery and promise. The western hero was never portrayed as petty or vindictive, but as a person of both rugged individualism and quiet dignity, someone whose word meant more to him than his own best interests. He faced formidable odds, defended the rights of others, showed regard for authority and paid tribute to the pioneers, those who made the ultimate sacrifice while building a new nation.

I could have made this column all about John Wayne, as his screen persona symbolized the world's assessment of America. Indeed the Duke is still seen as a Mount Rushmore-sized identity: solid, protective and patriotic. And it's John Wayne who starred



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WERN MOVIES go?

By Phil Boatwright
Columnist, Baptist Press



in one of the best American films ever made, "The Searchers" (1956).

Western lore-makers John Ford ("She Wore a Yellow Ribbon"), Howard Hawks ("Red River"), and Henry Hathaway ("True Grit") helped create Wayne's screen image, but director John Ford also gave us a primal portrait of the cowboy with "Hondo" (1953). In it Wayne played a loner who had once lived with the Indians — Hollywood finally paying tribute to the courage and lifestyle of the Native American. From Louis L'Amour's novel, it is the tale of a cavalry scout who rescues, and is then rescued by, a lone pioneer woman. The personification of the western, "Hondo," and the genre in general, dramatizes the one-time ideal of the American male.

Western's true nature

It is understandable why film-makers would want to debunk the fable of the Old West. However, in their zeal to correct the fictional elaboration of the pioneer period, they have lost sight of the western's true nature. The west-

ern poignantly dramatizes not just what we are, but what we can become.

In "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance," director John Ford injected his dark-natured elegy with the pronouncement, "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend." Was Ford debunking his own career with this ironic fallacy? Well, he may have been going along with the herd as it were, stressing that the old ways must give way to the new. Progress is, after all, essential for a nation's well-being. But even in that picture the western's character still had something to teach future generations. The story was built around Jimmy Stewart's Ransie Stoddard, who is wrongly credited with killing bad man Liberty Valance. In reality John Wayne's Tom Doniphon did the shooting. Though Doniphon kills Valance from a darkened alleyway, it is this act that allows Stoddard to help civilize the West. Like Humphrey Bogart's in "Casablanca," it is a self-sacrificing deed.

Perhaps the decline in western movies also has to do with poli-

tics. Even with "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance," the genre's structure stresses that sometimes force is necessary to back up progressive ideals. This element defends the necessity of war, a concept not embraced by many in today's land of make-believe. The reality is civilization has not resulted by words alone. The western suggests and justifies this.

No other genre of film has done more to establish the need for character than the western. It clearly states that man finds his true self when he defends what is right and when he puts others first. This declaration reverberates with the same social awareness as President Kennedy's immortal words, "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what

you can do for your country." Maybe that's why they don't make westerns anymore.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Phil Boatwright reviews films for www.previewonline.org and is a regular contributor to 'The World and Everything In It,' a weekly radio program from WORLD News Group. (BP)

"No other genre of film has done more to establish the need for character than the Western. It clearly states that man finds his true self when he defends what's right, and when he puts others first."

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Vision, commitment

Pell City church sees growth, 'seeks to be closer to God'

By Anna Keller
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When Dale Foote preached his first sermon as pastor of Seddon Baptist Church, Pell City, in 1995 there were seven members in the congregation. Today the church counts 461 members.

Foote attributes the significant growth his church has seen over the last 17 years to its members' vision and commitment.

"It hasn't been fast growth — we've just done as much to meet as many people as we possibly could," Foote said. "The old saying is you don't ever get a second chance for a first impression, so we've always tried to put our best foot forward."

And it appears that tactic has worked.

"Seddon Baptist has discovered that they can love one another and commit to the Great Commission and be the church on mission that God intends them to be," said Ben Chandler, director of missions for St. Clair Baptist Association. "The atmosphere around Seddon

is one of a holy buzz and a family love that's attracting folks to become a part of the church."

Foote, who started as a bivocational minister at Seddon Baptist, became the church's full-time pastor when its membership reached 100. In the years since then the church has seen such significant growth that they are in need of a new building.

"Right now we have 12 Sunday School classes because that's all we have room for — and that includes using the sanctuary as a meeting space between services," Foote said.

"It's larger than it's ever been, and there's excitement here. We're strategizing every day to find new room for a larger Sunday School program."

The growth at Seddon goes beyond just member count. The average age of Seddon's church members is quite young — 25 to 27 years old — and about 15 to 20 percent of their members are non-Caucasian.

"We have no ethnic barriers, and we work to minister to everybody," Foote said. "Fellow pas-

tors often ask how I've been able to diversify my church. I always tell them it wasn't intentional, but that we just love on everybody. I'm a firm believer that God doesn't see in colors."

David Jones, the church's associate pastor, is a testament to the church's colorblind mentality. Jones — who is African-American — began attending Seddon in 2004 when his family was invited to visit by a friend of Jones' daughter. At that time the Joneses were the only black family at Seddon, but that never made them feel out of place.

"I've taught my kids to grow up thinking that color isn't important," Jones said. "They grew up saying, 'We're clear!'"

In fact, Jones remembers jokingly, once a local woman asked where Jones went to church. He told her and described the building's location. The woman asked, "Well, is it a white church?" Without realizing her question was related to race, Jones quickly responded, "No, it's a brick building."

"When I told the church about that, they laughed and laughed," Jones said. "But that's how our church is when it comes to race. It was never a barrier or something to overcome. We're just a place full of people seeking to be closer to God." ■

"[Race] was never a barrier or something to overcome."

**David Jones
Seddon Baptist, Pell City
associate pastor**

PNBC to establish its first center to assist churches with prisoner re-entry

The Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC) has set out to raise \$100,000 to establish its first national center to aid churches in helping individuals re-enter and reintegrate into communities after being released from prison.

The PNBC hopes to open its National Re-entry Resource Center at the group's national headquarters in Washington in 2013. The initiative, announced at the convention's 51st annual meeting held Aug. 5–10 in Memphis, Tenn., would build on the historically black denomination's Heal-

ing Communities model for engaging congregations in the restoration of individuals and families torn apart by crime, whether committed against or by a member of the church.

DeeDee Coleman, chair of the PNBC Commission on Social Justice and Prison Ministry, said with 7.1 million people incarcerated in the United States and rates disproportionately affecting black males, leaders expected to find that faith-based organizations were already involved in prisoner re-entry as part of their everyday ministry. To their surprise they

found the subject is often ignored because faith leaders are ashamed to talk about it when it affects someone in their own congregation.

The Healing Communities model, used by groups including the PNBC and American Baptist Churches USA, reframes the issue by pointing out that entire communities are affected by crime, incarceration and reintegration. It invokes unique strengths of the faith community like acceptance, compassion, forgiveness, redemption and restoration while encouraging those who commit crimes to assume responsibility for harm done to others and take action to repair harm to the victim, community, family and self.

The National Re-entry Resource Center would provide a "one-stop" resource for the 2.5 million members of PNBC churches seeking help with family reunification, domestic violence, victim awareness, community resources, training in life and job skills and re-entry support both through conferences and through addressing the social-justice aspect of mass incarceration. (ABP)

Churchgoers struggle with sharing Christ, survey finds

When it comes to discipleship, churchgoers struggle most with sharing Christ with non-Christians, according to a recent study of church-going American Protestants.

The study conducted by LifeWay Research found 80 percent of those who attend church one or more times a month believe they have a personal responsibility to share their faith, but 61 percent have not told another person about how to become a Christian in the previous six months.

Spiritual maturity

These results came from an extensive discipleship research project focused on measuring spiritual maturity in individuals. Overall LifeWay Research found eight biblical attributes consistently evident in the lives of maturing believers. Of those eight, "Sharing Christ" has the lowest average score among Protestant church attendees.

Three-quarters of churchgoers say they feel comfortable in their ability to effectively communicate the gospel, while 12 percent say they do not feel

comfortable telling others about their faith.

Despite a vast majority believing it is their duty to share their faith and having the confidence to do so, 25 percent say they have shared their faith once or twice, and 14 percent have shared three or more times over the last six months.

The survey also asked how many times they have personally "invited an unchurched person to attend a church service or some other program at (their) church." Nearly half (48 percent) of church attendees responded, "zero." Thirty-three percent of people say they have personally invited someone one or two times, and 19 percent say they have done so on three or more occasions in the last six months.

In the study, 21 percent of churchgoers say that outside of church worship services they pray every day for people they know who are not professing Christians. Twenty-six percent say they pray a few times a week. One-fifth (20 percent) say they rarely or never pray for the spiritual status of others. (BP)

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Volunteer opportunities in Haiti

Alabama Baptists involved in or interested in the missions and ministry partnership opportunities taking place with Alabama Baptists' orphanage ministry in Haiti will want to know about an Aug. 25 event.

FBC Montgomery is hosting an informational and sharing time that day from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. with lunch included.

"It's an update on what God has been doing with this ministry," said Jay Wolf, pastor of FBC Montgomery. It also will be a time to learn what opportunities are available for volunteers, he said.

Contact Alissa Irvin at airvin@montgomeryfbc.org or call 334-834-6310 to reserve a spot. (TAB)



IMB photo

Alabama Baptist Laura Baker (right) hands children the gifts she carried on a hike over the mountain. She uses the gifts and what she knows of the language to make friends with the children at a Buddhist festival.



IMB photo

A team of volunteers hike to a Buddhist festival in the Himalayas.

Watering the ground

Prayer important part of tearing down walls of spiritual bondage

(continued from page 1)

can't carry on a lot of super basic conversations about everyday things, but then we get to telling the story of Jesus and use words like 'forgiveness,' 'justification' and 'redemption.' "

Six months is too short to become a language whiz, she said, so they made a decision.

Learn the mountains. Learn the vital words. Then walk around and say them over and over.

'We share when we can'

"The first few times we were in the mountains we did a lot of hiking, sat in a lot of homes and drank a lot of tea," Barnes said.

And did not see any response.

"I was frustrated. I thought, 'We're not doing anything,'" she said. "And then one of the guys with us said, 'This is what we do. We drink tea for hours. We share when we can. And we pray.'"

That guy has shared among this people group as often as he can hike in for the past 12 years and has only seen three people come to faith in Jesus Christ.

But two of those three have been in the past eight months. And one of them wants to be baptized in his own village, in front of his family and community.

That man will be the first of that people group to be baptized.

"This is a hard place, but the walls are beginning to fall down and prayer is a huge part of that," Barnes said. "We see now the importance of carrying His name wherever we go."

She and Baker have shared the gospel story dozens upon dozens of times, with tents full of people. They have climbed peaks holding Buddhist monasteries just to ask

God to break the spiritual bondage of the valleys below.

"To think that we are walking around in areas where we might be the first foreigners to pray in the name of Jesus — that's so humbling," Baker said. "We get to water the ground. His grace allows us to be part of the process."

And as they stand on mountains with printed prayer papers piled high around their feet, they ask God to give the people eyes to see and ears to hear.

"The people throw these printed prayer papers in the air, hoping it will earn them peace," Baker said. "Their hearts are like this furnace — whitewashed on the outside and black on the inside. We just want them to hear and know truth."

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

"To think that we are walking around in areas where we might be the first foreigners to pray in the name of Jesus — that's so humbling."

**Laura Baker
International Mission Board volunteer**

Volunteers pray for barriers to be broken down

(continued from page 1)

houses and tents. Families inside make yak butter tea and watch satellite televisions that flash images of U.S. cities and western products.

The implications of that hit Sommers hard.

"It struck me that these people, while they do live very remote lives, still possess a lot of modern technology to connect them with the outside world," Sommers said. "But it shocked me to think that, through all of that, there was still little to no witness to the gospel in that area. Many of them had never

heard (of it) prior to our work there."

That is why he and Craig went, he said — to share and to pray that the people would have ears to hear.

"There are so many visible barriers to the gospel here, be it cultural or political," he said. "My biggest prayer is that those barriers would be broken down so that these people might see the light of the gospel and come to know Christ."

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

Pickens County women pray for state, nation

On the first Tuesday of every month 10 women gather at Carrollton Public Library to make a difference in their community with the power of prayer.

From its conception in May 1994 with six members, Esther Prayer Group has been meeting monthly with the mindset of Esther 4:14: "Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

"It's always been one of my favorite verses," said charter member

Bonnie Windle, a member of Carrollton Baptist Church. Windle was able to combine her interests in learning to pray and fostering race relations to form the biracial, non-denominational prayer group.

"This group touches a deeper place in my heart," Windle said. "It reaches across racial lines and shows us that we're just alike."

With members from Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist and Church of Christ congregations throughout Pickens County, Esther Prayer

Group works from the inside out. Its focus begins with families and schools within the county and expands into state and national issues.

Locally the group supported and participated in the National Day of Prayer in Pickens County as well as prayer walking in schools. Group members have prayer walked in Carrollton Elementary School, Carrollton High School, Aliceville High School and Pickens Academy. Bible studies also have formed as an offshoot of this group.

The group's interests also reach out into the country and its issues.

"America needs a healing," said Leola Hinton, a member of Cluster Baptist Church, Aliceville. "Our job is to humble ourselves and pray and hope that our prayers extend to the White House."

Esther Prayer Group's "political arm," First Presbyterian Church, Aliceville, member Martha Stokes, echoes Hinton's sentiments.

"I've always been interested in politics, so I keep up with issues and try to show the group how the decisions they (lawmakers) make in Montgomery and Washington impact our lives," Stokes said.

The group is currently sending up prayers for good legislation concerning gay "marriage" and abortion, Stokes said. Its goal is to

positively influence issues that are "fundamental to the family."

While the group's main focus is prayer, longtime members have declared that they have received a blessing through their involvement with the group.

"This group has been very, very instrumental in opening up my thinking," Stokes said. "It's made me appreciate different styles of prayer."

Both Hinton and Windle have found strength through their connection with the group.

Prayer and support

"It helps me to know that God works in others' lives," Windle said. "I'm encouraged when I hear others pray and know that they support me."

Esther Prayer Group is dedicated to continuing its 18-year ministry and hopes to reach out to bring new members into the group.

"We'd love to bring in younger women who can revive us and give us new blood," Windle said. "I think it would breathe new life into our group."

For more information about Esther Prayer Group or to get involved, contact Bonnie Windle at 205-367-8222.

(Maggie Walsh, TAB intern)

Want to know God?

Pastor Jim Tate
Memphis Baptist Church, Dothan

There are many who believe in God but do not know Him. James, the half-brother of Jesus, said, "Even the demons believe." There are many who call Jesus "Lord" but do not know Him. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of heaven." There is a difference between knowing about someone and truly knowing someone. I would like to introduce you to God.

God created you. When He knit you together in your mother's womb He had a purpose and plan for your life. His ultimate purpose for you is for you to bring Him glory. When we fall short of bringing Him glory, we sin. All of us have sinned and fallen short of His glory.

God hates sin. He is holy, perfect and pure. You and I are anything but holy, perfect and pure. We are sinners. While it is true that God hates sin, it is also true that God loves you and me. How does He reconcile His hatred of sin and His love for sinners? The answer is Jesus. Jesus is the mediator between holy God and sinful man. 2 Corinthians 5:18 tells us that God reconciled us to Himself through Christ. Romans 5:8 tells us that God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God loves you. When you grasp how much He loves you, you will begin to trust Him. You will trust Him to forgive your sins. Remember, Jesus died on the cross to reconcile you with God. Sin was the separator. God will forgive your sins if you will admit them and be willing to be changed.

God loves you. When you grasp how much He loves you, you will begin to trust Him. You will trust His leadership and guidance. 2 Corinthians 5:15 reminds us that when we realize how much He loves us, we will no longer live for ourselves but for Him. What does this look like? Everything you do and say will be done in the name of your Lord and Savior as an expression of thanks for what He did for you. I hope you will come to truly know the One who loves you.

Handful of positions eliminated at North American Mission Board

Five or six positions at the North American Mission Board (NAMB) have been eliminated in what is being described as fine tuning from the large-scale downsizing of more than 100 positions in 2010.

"[The current downsizing] is not a wide-scale adjustment," said Mike Ebert, NAMB's vice president of communications. "It ... reflects a refining of our direction and focus," he

said. "Some of these positions are being eliminated because those functions are no longer needed or have been absorbed by people in other roles."

While neither the positions cut nor the savings created by the cuts were released, Ebert said, "We ... are committed to keeping the cost and size of our Alpharetta staff down so we can maximize the resources with which Southern Baptists have entrusted us." (TAB)

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PASTOR: Pisgah Baptist Church, Sand Mountain Association in northeast Alabama, is accepting resumés for pastor. Full-time and bivocational resumés accepted. Rural, conservative Southern Baptist church. Average Sunday attendance 75-100. Send resumés to: Pisgah Baptist Church, c/o Pastor Search Committee, P.O. Box 10, Pisgah, AL 35765, or email to: gmillican@farmerstel.com.

PASTOR: Steele Baptist Church, Steele, Ala., is seeking God's will for a pastor. Please send resumés to: Steele Baptist Church, 3811 Pope Ave., Steele, AL 35987, or email to: steelebaptistchurch@gmail.com. Call 256-538-6612 for more information.

SENIOR PASTOR: Southern Baptist church in Jackson, Ala., is prayerfully seeking God's man for the full-time position of senior pastor. Please send resumés to: Pastor Search Committee, P.O. Box 685, Jackson, AL 36545.

MINISTER OF MUSIC: Wooley Springs Baptist Church in Toney, Ala., is looking for a full-time minister of music. Resumés may be mailed to: ATTN: Search Committee, 28025 Bethel Road, Toney, AL 35773, or email: search@wooleysprings.org.

TWO PART-TIME POSITIONS: Minister of music and minister of youth. Central Baptist Church in Gardendale is seeking to fill two part-time positions. We are a small church with blended worship (more modern upbeat music than traditional). Resumés can be emailed to: lawanna@cbcgardendale.com or Central Baptist, 4650 Newfound Road, Mt. Olive, AL 35117. Call 205-381-0766 for details.

STUDENT MINISTER: Munford Baptist Church is currently seeking to fill the position of student minister. Please send

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CHILDREN'S MINISTER: FBC Troy, Ala., is searching for a part-time children's minister. Responsibilities: oversee comprehensive children's ministry. Email resumés to: Luke Lane at lukelane40@gmail.com.

PART-TIME CHILDREN'S MINISTER: Crosshaven Church in the West Cullman Baptist Association is seeking a part-time children's minister (grades 1-6). All interested applicants should email their resumés to: pastor@crosshavenchurch.org. Visit www.crosshavenchurch.org for more information about our children's ministry.

OTHER POSITIONS

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Letters to the Editor

FUTURE OF SBC

As a second-generation bivocational Southern Baptist pastor who holds to traditional Baptist beliefs, [Dr. Terry's July 19 editorial] further increased my already deep concerns over the future of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) as a whole.

It seems to me that as the Neo-Calvinists accelerate their efforts to expand their influence within our membership, traditionalists like me are called upon to be patient and tolerant and to avoid

conflict at all cost. I am becoming more and more convinced that this is not the correct course of action.

I fear that in years to come we will find ourselves asking why we did not stand firmly and fight for our convention and our beliefs. If statistics are true and 85 to 90 percent of Southern Baptists do not embrace Reformed theology, then should we really stand silently by and allow the other 10 to 15 percent to take the reins of leadership within the SBC?

Should we not be concerned

when individuals with whom we disagree theologically now head the North American Mission Board, LifeWay Christian Resources, and at least two of our theological seminaries?

Should we joyfully continue to finance and support their no longer covert efforts to take theological control of our denomination, plant hundreds of new "Reformed" churches and train countless new purveyors of what Al Mohler termed "the shape of the future?"

Should we do so in the name

of "evangelistic cooperation," particularly in light of the fact that since the resurgence of Calvinism within our denomination baptisms and church membership have steadily declined?

Should we smile and nod and provide the structure and financial means to those who seek to redefine who we are as Southern Baptists and who claim intellectual superiority over those who do not agree with their teachings?

What I cannot understand is why those who so devoutly embrace Reformed theology do not associate themselves with the Presbyterian Church or, better yet, join together and seek to revitalize and reopen the hundreds of Primitive Baptist churches that sit empty all across the country. Why would they desire to associate with the intellectually inferior anyway?

Steven Stamps
Fayette, Ala.

OBEYING GOD

Since no man can "figure out" the sovereignty of God (chosen before the foundation of the world) and the free will of man (whoever will), we must by faith accept God's truth. However, in a practical sense, we must obey

the Great Commission that Jesus gave just before He went to heaven. We must obey Him and proclaim the good news to every people group. Some will be saved and some will not.

We are not responsible to save; God does that. We are responsible to give the good news that salvation is provided.

We should preach, "Whoever will may come." However, if some refuse to come, they are rejecting Christ and we must continue to say "Whosoever will."

One of the most effective evangelists who ever lived was an Englishman named George Whitefield. He was a strong Calvinist, yet he proclaimed "Whosoever will." Thousands were saved. It is imperative that Calvinists continue to preach the good news to the lost, because it is God's will to use His servants to work as laborers "in the harvest." Some will be saved and some will not. Our assignment is to give the gospel to every person.

Also, in order for God to use Southern Baptists to reach the lost and start churches, we must love one another and allow no conflict in our midst or in our hearts.

Gene M. Williams
Covington, Ga.

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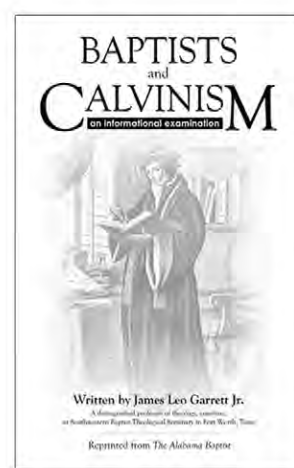
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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For August 26

Explore the Bible By Douglas K. Wilson Dean and Professor of Christian Ministries, University of Mobile

EMBRACING RESPONSIBILITIES

Ruth 3:10-13a; 4:1-4a, 9-10, 13, 17

Last week's lesson focused on expressed love, particularly Ruth's love for her mother-in-law, Naomi. This lesson again features Ruth, but we also address Boaz and his commitment to responsibility as a kinsman redeemer.

Boaz is first introduced in 2:1 as a "prominent man of noble (Hebrew *chayil*) character," not referring to aristocratic status but to his moral standing. This significant term describes Boaz (2:1), Boaz uses it to denote Ruth's character in 3:11 and the term is the first descriptor of an ideal woman in the acrostic poem of Proverbs (31:10). Honorable believers embrace responsibilities entrusted to them.

Accepting Responsibility (3:10-13a)

At Naomi's prompting Ruth visited Boaz one night, not as a sweaty laborer in his field but as a bathed, perfumed woman in need of a redeemer. She informed him that he was next of kin to her husband. Boaz had previously informed her that all her care for Naomi had been reported (likely among the elders, see 2:11; also Prov. 31:23, 31). In the passage from the heading Boaz speaks of her greater kindness shown to him. He counted it a privilege to be considered Ruth's kinsman redeemer.

Responsibility has its privileges. When Christians are placed in positions of authority we must be careful to recognize several key factors. First the authority comes from God, to whom we are accountable. Second our responsibilities affect people first. We must be good stewards, and we must recognize that we are our brothers' keepers. Individual believers, families and churches must demonstrate hospitality so that citizens do not become further dependent on government handouts. Finally we must walk with integrity, both in weighing our responsibilities and in claiming our privileges.

Acting with Integrity (4:1-4a)

Though Boaz was grateful for Ruth's proposal, he maintained his integrity by in-

forming her of a closer kinsman to Mahlon. If the unnamed kinsman found it impossible to redeem the Moabitess, Boaz would gladly become her redeemer.

Boaz called together a quorum of 10 elders in order to conduct business at the gate of the town (tribal business is still conducted this way in many parts of the world). He also requested the kinsman so Ruth's future could be settled by the end of the day (3:18).

Jesus made it simple: let your yes be yes; let your no be no. We are to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. Some believers are as wise as serpents and just as venomous. Boaz knew how the world worked, and he followed Scripture as his guide for conducting this business with integrity (Deut. 25:7-10).

Embracing Future Security (4:9-10, 13, 17)

In the intervening passage the kinsman chose to retain his own inheritance rather than redeem Mahlon's fields. His sandal was removed and, according to Deuteronomy 25, he was then known as the "unsandaled man." Perhaps this is why he was never named.

Boaz redeemed Ruth, married her and in time fathered a child. Though officially their son Obed (servant) was the legal heir to Mahlon, the genealogies acknowledge Boaz as the father (Matt. 1:5).

Genealogies are significant to the Jews, as they delineate family history. Every name represents a life, full of stories and experiences, all witnessing God's faithfulness in small and great ways. These name lists should be important to Christians as well, for they are the human records that point to God Incarnate, Jesus the Anointed One.

Matthew considered this family history so significant that he traced it back to Abraham (four generations further than in Ruth; see Matt. 1:1-17). Luke researched further, tracing the family line back another 20 generations all the way to Adam (Luke 3:23-38). For the village of Bethlehem, their future security would not rest on Obed, or Jesse, or even King David. Their hope would be in Christ alone.

Bible Studies for Life By Kenneth B.E. Roxburgh Chair and Armstrong Professor of Religion, Samford University

PERSEVERE IN OBEDIENCE

Jeremiah 37:11-17; 38:4-6, 14-18

Popularity in ministry is not always a sure sign of God's blessing. Sometimes we can become obsessed with having a larger and larger gathering of people in worship. Although this is often seen as a clear indicator of God's blessing, it was not the case with people like Jeremiah or even the early Baptists in New England in the 17th century. They, like Jeremiah, knew what it was to experience rejection, persecution and loss of livelihood. Indeed, in Jeremiah's case we only know of two people who continued to be his friends during his ministry: Baruch his scribe (36:14; 45:1-5) and Ebed-melech the Cushite (38:7-13; 39:15-18).

Persevere When Attacked (37:11-17)

Jeremiah, however, remained dutiful in his discipleship. In Jeremiah 37 we find him locked up in a prison and in the following chapter he is thrown into a cistern filled with mud and grime, all with the intention of tempting him to give up. He is even charged with treason — with attempting to leave the city and become a spy for the Babylonians. We see how Jeremiah will never give in to pressure to compromise when he is brought before the king and asked what the future holds. Without blinking an eye he replies, "You will be handed over to the Babylonians." His honesty and integrity led the king to protect him from his enemies. It may not always be clear, but Jeremiah discovered that faithfulness to God is the best policy and that the grace of God will keep us safe.

Persevere When Others Waver (38:4-6)

One of the harder aspects of Jeremiah's ministry was the loneliness he encountered. He often felt that he alone was true to his calling. Following a period of protection by the king, even Zedekiah gave in and allowed the prophet to be handed over to his enemies who dropped him into a cistern. The Scriptures tell us that the cistern "had no water in it, only mud, and Jeremiah sank down into the mud." We can only imagine what

thoughts were running through his mind and what fears and doubts were filling his heart since no words are recorded. His prayers to God are silently offered and, as in our situation, heard and answered by the One who rules over all things.

Persevere Through Obedience to God's Word (38:14-18)

It only took the courage of one man — Ebed-melech, a Cushite, probably from the upper Nile region of Egypt and someone who was not even an Israelite — to speak courageously to the king and plead for Jeremiah's life. It took 30 men to eventually lift him out of the mud and bring him to safety. Who knows what one word, spoken with courage and conviction, can do to bring about change.

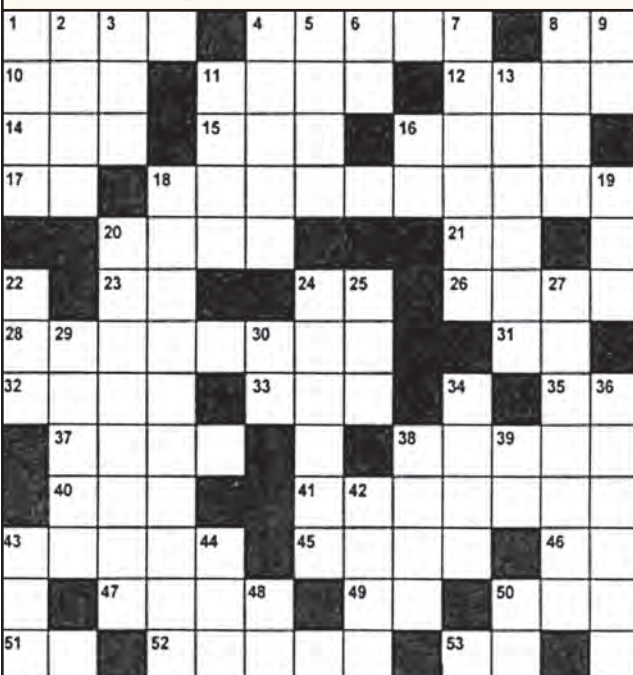
Once again Jeremiah was brought before the king, and once again he refused to water down the message God had given him. The prophet knew that only if the king listened to and obeyed God's message that came through him would judgment be averted. The whole passage reminds us once again that we are never to sugarcoat the message of the gospel. Furthermore, we must never expect everyone to respond positively to the message we proclaim. The nation did not listen to Jeremiah's final message and the city fell to the Babylonians. Zedekiah had been offered hope by Jeremiah but he did not listen, and chapter 39 tells us that instead of experiencing mercy he saw his sons killed before he was led into captivity and blinded by the Babylonians.

There is nothing capricious or arbitrary about the holiness of God. He is never spiteful or vindictive. He is never unpredictable. His wrath is His settled, unremitting antagonism to evil in all its forms and manifestations. R.W. Dale, the British Congregational theologian of the 19th century, once said, "It is partly because sin does not provoke our own wrath, that we do not believe that sin provokes the wrath of God."

Jeremiah had a full understanding of God's character — His holiness, wrath and mercy — and he preached all aspects of this to his generation.

Christian Crossword

By Janet Adkins Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

- A sword is upon the liars; and they shall _____. (Jer. 50:36)
- A little oil in a _____. (1 Kings 17:12)
- The glory which thou gavest _____. (John 17:22)
- Bringing gold, silver, ivory, and _____. (1 Kings 10:22)
- I will ____ out my spirit unto you. (Prov. 1:23)
- Calf meat.
- Thou ... hast ____ forth the people. (Ex. 15:13)
- Sounds of hesitation.
- Whose names are in the ____ of life. (Phil. 4:3)
- They could not enter ____ because of unbelief. (Heb. 3:19)
- True ____, help those women which labored. (Phil. 4:3)
- Even as a ____ gathereth her chickens. (Matt. 23:37; plural)
- Roman numeral 6.
- Like.
- Egyptian god.
- Doth not ____ one of you on the sabbath loose his

- ox? (Luke 13:15)
- One who installs or endows.
- See thou tell ____ man. (Matt. 8:4)
- As he thinketh in his heart ____ is _____. (Prov. 23:7; 2 words)
- Grain.
- Border state. (abbr.)
- Do all things without ____urings. (Phil. 2:14)
- Short for Elizabeth.
- Erie law enforcement agency.
- Made you ____s to feed the church. (Acts 20:28; archaic)
- They shall build houses and ____it them. (Isa. 65:21)
- Orderly.
- Southwestern state. (abbr.)
- Yesterday. (Spanish)
- Route. (abbr.)
- Greek letter.
- Ye shall be unto ____ a kingdom of priests. (Ex. 19:6)
- And the king was _____. (Matt. 14:9)
- The ____ head fell into the water. (2 Kings 6:5; alt. spelling)

Down

- Surrealist artist.
- Ye shall see heaven _____. (John 1:51)
- Senator ____ Kennedy.
- Wine bottle stoppers.
- A type of trick.
- Went forth with them from ____ of the Chaldees. (Gen. 11:31)
- Man was created, did not ____.
- Dangerous shark.
- Hebrew for "god."
- Unskilled worker.
- Carried by the wind.
- Let him ____ Anathema. (1 Cor. 16:22)
- A thousand years in thy sight are but as _____. (Ps. 90:4; plural)
- Yah ____.
- Children of Ziha, the children of _____. (Neh. 7:46)
- Publican ... would not lift up so much as ____ eyes. (Luke 18:13)
- Let us ____ together. (Isa. 1:18)
- Thou ____ the man. (2 Sam. 12:7)
- In whatsoever state I am, therewith to be ____.

- (Phil. 4:11)
- System of naming things: ____clature.
- I go unto Jerusalem ____ minister unto the saints. (Rom. 15:25)
- Covet earnestly the ____ gifts. (1 Cor. 12:31)
- Pertaining to the skin.
- Rude child.
- Symbol for tellurium.
- Weird. (alt. spelling)
- Belief system. (suffix)
- Mixed-up Elks Club.
- Northern Pacific or B&O _____. (abbr.)
- Former mate.



'God with us'

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist



Nathan Tasker

Photo courtesy of Bozeman Media

Christian artist, songwriter Nathan Tasker shares about Jesus' comforting love through songs after experiencing grief

As a songwriter, Nathan Tasker has always been aware of the spiritual impact his words will have on his listeners. However, after a year of professional highs and personal lows, Tasker's music is ministering not only to audiences across the world, but to Tasker himself in ways he never imagined.

Tasker was a successful Christian artist in his native Australia when he and his wife, Cassie, moved to the U.S. in late 2006. Tasker called the move "ordained," inspired by a desire to be part of a larger community of Christian artists.

"We had created something unique and special in Australia, but I don't think I would have grown as much as an artist or in my faith if we hadn't moved here," Tasker said.

Following the release of his U.S. debut album "Home" in May 2011, Tasker saw his professional profile rise as three songs from the album reached the top of the Christian charts in Australia and the United Kingdom. He toured with Bebo Norman, gaining an even broader audience for his music.

Tasker's personal life was soaring, too, as he and Cassie learned they were expecting their first children — twins. Unfortunately their excitement was short-lived. Not long after they learned about the twins, Cassie's father died as the result of a brain tumor. Then at just 20 weeks pregnant Cassie was admitted to Baptist Hospital in Nashville. The amniotic sac around their baby girl had ruptured, and Cassie began emergency bed rest in an attempt to allow both babies to continue to grow and survive.

Two weeks later, Cassie went into labor. The first baby, Lucy, was stillborn; Jack arrived two hours later and lived only for a few hours.

The grieving couple, so far from family and friends in Australia, were lifted up by their church family in Nashville.

"They gathered around us in very real and practical ways — from our pastor and Bible study leaders visiting with us in the hospital to the dinners that were brought to us every other night for over two months and the many prayers by those who didn't even know us and yet beseeched God on our behalf," Tasker said.

Tasker's fellow artists helped him through the grief as well, probing the themes of suffering and faith as they wrote together. Though written with the idea of encouraging others in mind, the songs have had an impact on Tasker's own heart as well.

"I now find that the songs are not only serving those in front of me, but are turning around and reminding my own heart of truth — of the love God has for me even as I cry out in my sorrow or shake my fist in my anger and confusion," Tasker said.

As he and Cassie have navigated the waters of grief they have experienced a hope greater than their sorrow. That

hope, he said, comes from the comforting love of Jesus.

"Both of us have explored what it means for Him to be known as the 'Man of Sorrows,' well acquainted with grief of every kind," Tasker said.

The soon-to-be-released single "Eternity," the third release from "Home," holds special significance in light of the losses the Taskers have experienced. The song was inspired by the legacy of Arthur Stace, a homeless alcoholic who lived on the streets of Sydney, Australia. Stace's life changed when he became a Christian, and he sought to make others consider their own spiritual condition by writing the word "eternity" in chalk more than 500,000 times around his city.

Sharing with others

"Obviously the message of eternal life, won for us by the death and resurrection of Jesus, is the most important message I can share. And it's even more poignant as I contemplate my father-in-law and my twins who are now experiencing that reality," Tasker said.

He has even begun to share his personal story from the

stage in hopes of encouraging others who are experiencing pain and loss. After working with Tasker on tour, Norman praised both Tasker's musical talent and his gift of relating to an audience.

"[His] ability to pursue great art, to connect with a live audience on a profound level and to be genuinely relational is as uncommon as it is inspiring," Norman said.

As a result of Tasker's honesty in front of audiences, fans have shared their own deepest hurts and sorrows with the Taskers, which Nathan called "a humbling and terrifying experience."

"It has helped me to remember that the church is full of a lot of heartache and personal loss, and if our sermons, songs and prayers don't speak to this then a lot of what we do is in vain," he said.

In his words, both spoken and sung, Tasker's top priority is to honor Jesus, a goal that resonates with audiences.

"Ultimately I hope that Jesus, 'God with us,' is held up as the One who truly understands our pain more than we could ever imagine and stands beside us in the midst of our sorrow." 🙏

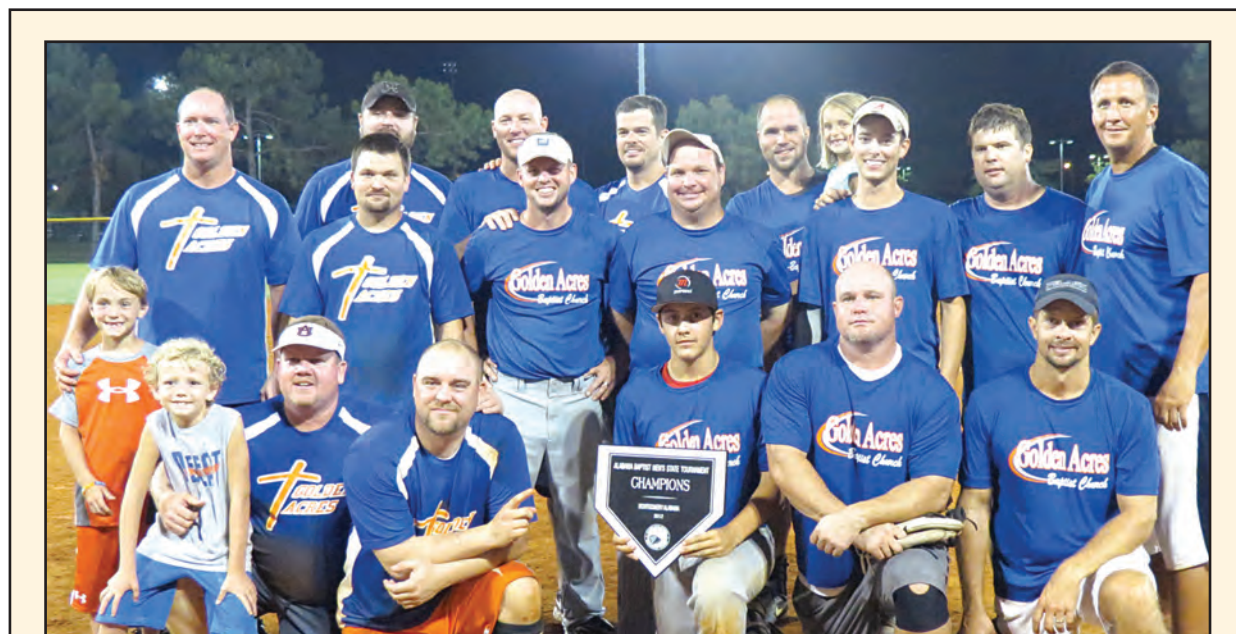


Photo courtesy of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

GOLDEN ACRES MEN'S TEAM WINS SOFTBALL TOURNAMENT

Team Golden Acres #2 from Golden Acres Baptist Church, Phenix City, in Russell Baptist Association wins the Alabama Baptist Men's State Softball Tournament in Montgomery at Lagoon and Fain Parks on Aug. 10-11. Thirty-five teams participated. Ray Cummings is pastor.



RNS photo

Henry Clarke, co-pastor of Hillsview Church, which meets at the Palace Theater in Eastwood, N.Y., focuses on helping and loving people despite his diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome at the age of 45.

'In my weakness, God's strength is perfected'

New York pastor perseveres despite autism diagnosis

Henry Clarke has always enjoyed solving puzzles. But until he was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome at the age of 45, much of his life was a puzzle he just could not work out.

Things like math, engineering and computer systems were always a cinch for Clarke to understand, even without formal training. He could usually read a book or manual or just look at a problem and figure out what needed to be done. Because he found the pace of classroom learning boring, Clarke dropped out of school without finishing.

In his late teens he was watching TV one Sunday morning when he heard a TV minister asking viewers if they were tired of their lives. "I thought, 'I would like my life to be different,' and I prayed, but I didn't know if it would be," Clarke said.

After becoming a Christian, Clarke got his GED diploma and found acceptance from some young pastors. "They just loved me and accepted me," he said. "While I didn't notice how important that was, it was a contrast to being an outsider in other aspects of my life."

Clarke moved to Florida to help with a new church, and within five years he was working at the largest engineering firm in Jacksonville, Fla. He also met his wife, Susan, a Bible school graduate who had just completed missionary work in Eastern Europe.

Throughout their marriage Susan Clarke observed her husband's quirky and troubling behaviors, but because he was brilliant and successful she shrugged off his meltdowns and compulsions as eccentricity.

She finally realized her husband had a serious problem when he gave a talk at an Indiana church about their missionary work. As he spoke to the congregation he kept poking his fingers through holes in the lectern, so distracted by the holes he kept losing

his train of thought. She confronted him about his behavior on the drive home, but he rejected her concerns.

She also was anxious about her husband's social challenges. He often missed social cues and had to shut himself in the basement after periods of social or professional interaction with other people.

In 2009, when he was an associate pastor at Abundant Life Christian Center, East Syracuse, N.Y., Henry Clarke finally faced the puzzle that was his life.

He looked for answers. "I came across this article about adults with Asperger's syndrome, and quite frankly, I thought I was reading my own story, so I dug further," he said.

Henry Clarke took a test he found online — the Autism Spectrum Quotient — which indicated he likely had some form of autism. While the results were a revelation, it was still a devastating diagnosis. "It can only be described as my life coming together and falling apart at the same time," he said.

His armchair diagnosis was soon confirmed by a neuropsychologist, and he looked to God for help.

"One of the things that helped me through all of this was something the apostle Paul wrote: 'In my weakness, God's strength is perfected,'" Henry Clarke said. "I had to acknowledge my weakness and (His) strength."

The Clarkes are facing the issue head-on as co-pastors at Hillsview Church, Eastwood, N.Y., a new, independent congregation they've started.

"We're trying to focus on helping and loving people, but we're also saying whatever is on the inside of you, that's what we want to develop," Henry Clarke said. "And that means us being real honest with ourselves about what our limitations are and our need for one another." (RNS)

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Saudi officials deport Christians for prayer meeting

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia — Saudi Arabia has deported the last of 35 Ethiopian Christians who were arrested during a December prayer meeting and imprisoned during the ensuing months.

The now-deported Ethiopian Christians — 29 women and six men — were praying Dec. 15 in the city of Jeddah when Saudi police raided the private home in which they were meeting. On Aug. 1 the Saudis completed deportation of the Ethiopians, according to International Christian Concern (ICC).

Saudi officials assaulted, harassed and sought to coerce the Christians to convert to Islam while in prison, ICC reported. They strip-searched the women, including searches of their body cavities, and physically abused the men, some of the Ethiopians told ICC by phone during their imprisonment.

A Muslim preacher came to the prison at the authorities' request in February in an effort to persuade the Christians to leave their faith.

"The Muslim preacher vilified Christianity, denigrated the Bible and told us that Islam is the only true religion," a female prisoner told ICC by phone.

Saudi Arabia — which bars all public expressions of religious belief other than an extremely strict interpretation of Islam referred to as Wahhabism — is one of the world's worst violators of religious liberty. The U.S. State Department has designated the Middle East nation as a "country of particular concern," a designation reserved for governments that are particularly severe in violating religious freedom.

Pakistani Hindus flee to India to escape harassment

BALUCHISTAN, Pakistan — Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari has appointed a three-member Senate committee to look into reports that nearly 250 Hindus have fled to neighboring India to escape harassment and discrimination.

The panel is meant "to instill a sense of security" in the Muslim-majority country's Hindu minority, according to *The Times of India*. According to reports, Hindus from troubled Balochistan and Sindh provinces traveled to India on 30-day pilgrim visas granted by the Indian government.

Pakistani officials detained the Hindus at the border for hours Aug. 10 and made them sign declarations that they would return to Pakistan.

"The crime level against Hindus is worsening (in Pakistan). We informed the media about our people traveling to India," Ramesh Kumar Vankwani, chairman of Pak Hindu Council, told ENInews on Aug. 13.

"Our people are facing serious problems of kidnapping, conversions and forced marriages," Vankwani said.

More than 96 percent of Pakistan's 180 million people are Muslims, while Christians and Hindus account for about 1.5 percent each.

"We fully support the Hindus in this," Joseph Francis, founder director of CLAAS (Center for Legal Aid Assistance & Settlement) based in Lahore, Pakistan, told ENInews. "Both the Hindu and Christian communities are undergoing the same suffering."

Confiscations of privately owned religious books on rise

TASHKENT, Uzbekistan — In what some in Uzbekistan think may be a change in the authorities' repression policy, there has been an apparent increase in confiscations of privately owned religious books from homes during raids. Associated with this have been violations of due legal process.

These include denials of legal representation, misrepresentation of whether a defendant has pleaded guilty, verdicts not being provided within the time laid down in law, and so-called "expert analyses" that have confused Protestant books with Jehovah's Witness books.

As police confiscated one Bible in Uzbek, one Bible in Russian and a book by John Bunyan from one Protestant they said, "Don't you know that it is prohibited to keep such books at home?"

Police also stated the books would be sent for "expert analysis" by the Religious Affairs Committee and their owner will be fined.