

# THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



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## INSIDE



Get involved,  
have compassion,  
Luter says

◆ Page 5



Girls of Grace  
conference  
makes difference  
in teenage girls'  
lives

◆ Page 7



LoveLoud minis-  
try shows love of  
Christ by meeting  
significant  
human needs

◆ Pages 8-9



# 'We need Kingdom power'

Photo by Doug Rogers

'Let's just pray a minute,' Sammy Gilbreath of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions said following Chuck Kelley's challenge during the opening session of the State Evangelism Conference Feb. 25. 'May this night be etched in our hearts and minds as a turning point.'

## 'Thrilling' Evangelism Conference draws big crowd, online viewers

By Grace Thornton and Julie Payne  
The Alabama Baptist

Alabama Baptists are not dead yet." Sammy Gilbreath made that declaration with a smile to a full house at First Baptist Church, Trussville, on the opening night of the State Evangelism Conference.

"I pray the record books will record that revival broke out from Mobile to Huntsville, Gadsden to Tuscaloosa; that churches once declining are now standing straight and tall, and it all started with a group at First Baptist Church, Trussville, on a Monday night," said Gilbreath, director of the office of evangelism for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

The conference, held Feb. 25-26,

drawn a crowd of more than 1,000. More than 500 also watched online. And those present weren't a quiet crowd — the house resounded with amens, applause, comments and loud singing as a range of speakers and musicians challenged them to be the Church and reach the lost.

"A lot of churches today are hiding out," said Jonathan Falwell, senior pastor of Thomas Road Baptist

Church, Lynchburg, Va.

Many Baptists got used to the "glory days" of the Southern Baptist Convention, when people were "coming out of the woodwork" to get saved and Baptists had to build bigger churches, Falwell said.

"They were coming and coming and coming, and they're not coming anymore. Why not? Because we kept expecting them to come and

we forgot somewhere along the way that we're supposed to go," he said.

The uttermost parts of the earth are never found within the walls of the church, Falwell said.

"When we are walking with God, talking with Him, learning from Him and passionately sharing Him with everyone ... that's when the church stops being stoppable and  
(See 'Keep on,' page 3)

## 'Death of discipleship' reason for SBC's nosedive

By Jennifer Davis Rash  
The Alabama Baptist

Southern Baptists may indeed be planning their own funeral as a convention if something doesn't change and change soon.

Chuck Kelley didn't use those exact words, but the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary president sent that message to the more than 1,000 Alabama Baptists attending the opening session of the State Evangelism Conference at First Baptist Church, Trussville, on Feb. 25.

"On the whole our Great Commission momentum as a convention has disappeared," Kelley said dur-

ing his "State of evangelism in the SBC" sermon. Even while the convention spent two years talking about the Great Commission Resurgence, "we died on the vine," he noted.

It all comes down to discipleship, or rather the lack of, Kelley explained.

"The most significant and influential death in the modern history of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) was the death of our discipleship program.

"We are like the grandchildren of

farmers keeping harvest stories alive over coffee and dessert at family reunions," he said.

Pointing to baptism numbers from the 1940s and 1950s when Southern Baptists were untouchable, Kelley explained that the evangelistic growth during the "greatest" era happened because most Southern Baptist churches had more discipleship activities than evangelism activities.

"Aggressive evangelism was matched by aggressive  
(See 'Be disciplistic,' page 4)



KELLEY

# COMMENT

## Worship Is Loving God

A simple definition is supposed to be the best definition. If that is so, there is no better definition for Christian worship than loving the God made known through Jesus Christ.

Yes, there are many elements to worship — to pay homage, to revere, to praise, to be pious toward and to offer ceremonial observance. But there is no better description of worship than to love God.

Most Christians connect worship with praise and thanksgiving but that is not where worship begins. Worship begins with obedience. Jesus made this clear when He declared, “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in His love” (John 15:10).

The writer of 1 John echoed that thought when he wrote, “This is love for God: to obey His commands” (1 John 5:3).

### Following God

This New Testament teaching was not an unknown revelation to Jews and God-fearers of Jesus’ day. 1 Samuel 15 records God’s instructions for Saul as he headed into battle against the Amalekites. When Saul attempted to justify his disobedience to God’s direction, the prophet Samuel asked, “Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord?” Then Samuel declared the eternal truth, “To obey is better than sacrifices and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”

Later the prophet Isaiah quoted God as saying, “I am sick of your sacrifices ... your Sabbaths ... your holy days” (Isa. 1:11 ff). In verse 16 it is as if God shouts at the nation of Israel, “Stop doing wrong. Learn to do right” (vv. 16–17).

Jeremiah continued the teaching that obedience is evidence of love for God in chapter 7 where God says He did not bring Israel out of Egypt because He desired sacrifices. Instead, God said, “Obey me and I will be your God and you will be my people” (v. 23).

That modern-day Christians equate worship with praise and thanksgiving demonstrates a shallowness of biblical understanding. Yes,



### THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

praise and thanksgiving are worship acts but they are not the beginning of worship nor are they the total of worship.

Worship is impossible unless a relationship first exists between God and the worshipper. A relationship begins when one obediently trusts God, confesses personal sin and accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Obedience to God is the beginning of worship. That is what Samuel told Saul, what God said to Israel through the prophet Isaiah and what Jesus said to the disciples.

Some scholars define worship into three parts. There is worship through speaking, worship through listening and worship through doing.

Worship of speaking is offering praise and thanksgiving. It is an expression of the heart. It is right and good. But praise and thanksgiving cannot be used to induce worship. (However, praise and thanksgiving, especially through music, can be used to induce an emotional experience.) For praise and thanksgiving to be worship, they must be expressions of “a heart that is rapt by the mercies of God” and obedient to His commands.

If all one did in worship was to speak, how would that be expressing obedience to God? Because He is worthy of all praise and thanksgiving, He is worthy to be heard. That is why worship involves listening. What is God saying to His people? Listening to God’s Word and its interpretation is worship. Waiting silently before God is worship.

How can one claim to love God when one nev-

er listens to what God is saying to him or her?

And there is the worship of doing. Obedience shows love for God. Obedience shows He is worthy not only of praise and thanksgiving, not only to be heard. God also is worthy to be followed. His voice changes believers day in and day out.

Worship that does not impact behavior is not worship at all.

It was the apostle Paul who wrote in Romans 12:1 that believers should “offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God; this is your spiritual act of worship.” Living sacrifices — your spiritual act of worship. Submitting to God’s will is an act of worship. Loving God enough to follow Him is what is expected because “those who obey His commands live in Him and He in them” (1 John 3:24).

That truth caused one writer to observe that it is easy to confess Jesus in a hyped-up emotional service but it is another thing to confess Jesus to nonbelieving co-workers, family and friends.

At the recent Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference several speakers also tied worship as loving God together with obedience.

Southern Baptist Convention President Fred Luter asked if Christians love God enough to go to people who are hurting and if believers have enough compassion to help them (see story, page 5).

### ‘Grace is never alone’

Robert Smith, professor of preaching at Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in Birmingham, pointed out that “grace is never alone. Grace is always accompanied by good works (see story, page 1).”

Perhaps most dramatically New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary President Chuck Kelley left the audience speechless when he pointed out the results of modern-day Christians going after various trends and abandoning an emphasis of Christian discipleship (see story, page 1).

Evidently Southern Baptists have done a lot of worship that involves speaking but little worship that evidences listening and even less worship by doing.

## LETTERS

### TO THE EDITOR

#### CONTENT, SERVICE

On Feb. 1, 2013, I sent an email to *The Alabama Baptist* offices seeking help in locating the name of a book about missionaries that was reviewed in the Book Review section of your newspaper.

I’m writing to let you know that I appreciate the willingness of Neisha Fuson to continue the search through

a series of emails until she found the book title and publisher I was seeking.

I applaud the thoroughness and variety of the articles in *The Alabama Baptist*, beginning with the editorial (by Bob Terry).

I can depend on you to explain the “ins and outs” of Baptist polity, or any of your topics, in layman’s terms.

Now I can also applaud the quality of the staff as well.

*The Alabama Baptist* is quite deserving of the Nation’s Top Christian Newspaper award.

Lometa Stagg  
Huntsville, Ala.



## DON'T FORGET

to set your  
clocks forward  
March 10.





"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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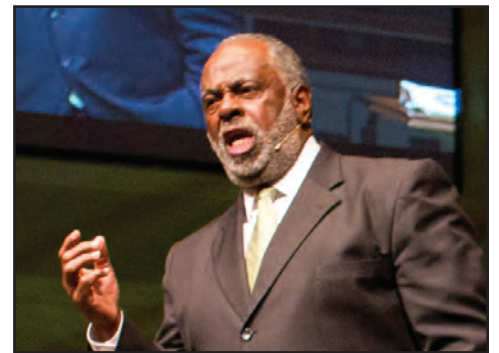
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FALWELL



FLOYD



SMITH

# 'Keep on knocking'

## Pray persistently, share boldly, speakers say

(continued from page 1)

starts being the Church," he said. Ronnie Floyd, pastor of Cross Church in northwest Arkansas, said the Church first began to see its mission when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, an event found in Acts 2:1-13.

It's a power-filled moment the Church needs to get back to, he said. "We don't need gadgets [and] we don't need schemes. We need Kingdom power."

With Kingdom power, a movement begins, he said.

"You not only see the movement born, you see the advance of the movement occur — the kingdom of God began to advance in the Spirit of God through the Church of God around the world when those people left the city of Jerusalem."

### God wants to 'use you'

Floyd told the audience that God wants to "use you to take His message" to every people group, both internationally and locally.

Robert Smith, professor of divinity at Beeson Divinity School of Samford University in Birmingham, added that God has been for the redemption of all nations from the very beginning, as evidenced by the story of Rahab the prostitute.

As recorded in Joshua 2, Rahab saved the Israelite spies in Jericho by letting them out of the city through her window, and as a result, they saved her whole family when Israel destroyed the city.

"Rahab shows us a different kind of ecclesiology. She didn't know Galatians 3:28 — that was about 1,400 years later," Smith said. "But she did experience that in Christ there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free."

She risked her life to save the Israelite spies because of what she had heard about their God, and for that faith she is commended in Hebrews 11:31. So Rahab — a "mess" — lived with Israel and became part of the genealogy of Christ, Smith said.

"She is commended for her faith and yet can't shake that designation (of being a prostitute)," he said. "But she makes her mess her message. Her faith is real, but it is flawed. We are all growing in grace."

And all believers can experience the provision of God as the spies did, Smith said.

"When people close doors on you, God can open a window."

Christians need to be willing to ask persistently for Him to do just that, said William Rice, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Clearwater, Fla.

Rice spoke of Jesus' story beginning in Luke 11:5 about the person who knocks on a neighbor's door at midnight and asks for three loaves of bread. The neighbor gives the bread, not because of friendship but because of that person's shameless audacity, Rice said.

In Luke 18, Jesus tells a similar story about a judge who first refuses to grant a widow justice against her adversary, but after her continued requests the judge finally gives her what she asks for. Rice said Jesus tells this story because He "wants you to pray and wants you ... to keep on praying and to never give up praying."

"God is eager to answer your prayer," Rice said. He explained that unlike the characters in the two passages, God "is eager to open a door for you."

"When will we be desperate (enough) to ask and keep on asking and seek and keep on seeking and knock and keep on knocking till our final breath ... for God's (work) to be done? It's that audacity, it's that faith, that Jesus is looking for in us," Rice said.

He is also looking for a people, a church sold out to Him as their Lord, said Herb Reavis Jr., pastor of North Jacksonville Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Fla.

"What needs to happen is a Holy Ghost revival where God's people get on the altar and give up their lives," he said. "It's about getting out of the way and letting Jesus take charge and take us where He wants to go."

### Following Jesus

Jesus doesn't want to be your co-pilot — He wants to be your pilot, Reavis said.

"This false way of looking at the Christian life has infected way too many of our people," he said. "They see Jesus as hell insurance and shove Him in a closet somewhere as if He's a fire extinguisher and just hope you never have to use it."

Salvation is a gift, Reavis said, but Jesus can't be Savior without also being Lord.

"Time is growing near. The end is coming. The answer is Jesus Christ," he said. "And



RICE



REAVIS



LANIER

what God needs is a man or woman who dares to abandon themselves fully to the lordship of Jesus."

That man or woman will be the bearer of good news to a world with no hope, said Dan Lanier, pastor of Northrest Baptist Church, Meridian, Miss.

"In a world filled with discouragement, disillusionment and doubt, we need to herald the good news," he said. "We should be living for the other world, because we are pilgrims passing through."

We are to be in the business of reaching people for Jesus, Lanier said.

"Folks, there is something better than what we have here," he said, telling those present that heaven is real and "beyond our comprehension."

"Let's go and tell every man, woman, boy and girl that there is One who is mighty to save," Lanier said. ☩

# Be 'disciplinistic'

## How many of 'us' care enough to do something about it?

(continued from page 1)  
discipleship. We were disciplinistic (a word created by Kelley to mean an evangelistic discipleship that continually seeks to incorporate both evangelism and discipleship at the same time)."

The emphasis on discipleship began to fade in the 1960s and has dropped steadily since then.

"We should have paid more attention to our discipleship process," he said. "As time went by and the world changed, that biblical worldview inspiring evangelistic discipleship dropped between SBC generations. The heart for evangelism remained strong, but the concern for discipleship was significantly weakened.

"Time had its impact. It always does."

Kelley pointed out that Southern Baptists have more of everything — churches, Baptists, ministries, missionaries, resources — than they've ever had, but they are bearing less fruit.

"The focus of our attention has become

more internal, inside the church, than external, in the field," he said.

It's not about methods or money or even the power of the gospel, Kelley said. "The Bible speaks little of methods. ... Having more money will not turn things around. ... The gospel of Jesus Christ is a message of incredible power still today."

So what is the problem?

"Discipleship is the crucial issue," he said, noting the typical Southern Baptist church is no longer anointed and Southern Baptists are distracted.

"Our behavior, the way we live our lives, is blending more and more with our culture," Kelley said. "Our problem is not that more of us don't witness to our neighbors. Our problem is that more of us do not look like and live like Jesus.

"If we do not produce children, youth and adults who live out a biblical worldview, no strategy for doing church will make us salt and light in the world," he said. "Baptist believers must be taught

how to be the distinctive presence of Christ in the culture.

"In times past God has worked through our Southern Baptist churches in a mighty way. In times present God is not working in a mighty way through most of our churches," Kelley said. "How are we going to respond to this?"

Noting the "if my people ... pray" Scripture in 2 Chronicles 7:14-15 and showing a photo of the Western Wall of Temple Mount in Jerusalem, Kelley zeroed in on his main point.

At the Western Wall, also known as the wailing wall, "Jews and pilgrims from all over the world come to see and weep over what was lost and pray that one day all will be restored," he said.

"If [Southern Baptists] do not respond, if we continue on this road we are traveling, there is only one question left: To what wall will our children and grandchildren go to weep and remember what Southern Baptists once were?"

"There is no silver bullet," Kelley said. "There is no plan of three things to do to turn your church around. There is no book I can put in your hand.

"There is only this: We pray about what we care about. If someone you know and love is in a crisis, you pray for them. If your church is facing a great crisis, you pray for it," he explained. "Question is: How many of us care?"

During a preconference dinner, Kelley shared five major shifts in Southern Baptist life to help Alabama Baptists dialogue about the future of the SBC. To watch the video, visit [www.alsbom.org/resources/videos](http://www.alsbom.org/resources/videos) and select "Dinner with Chuck Kelley." 📺

## Online streaming, social media does well

For the second year, the State Evangelism Conference was streamed live online, an option that seemed to resonate with viewers during the Feb. 25-26 event held at First Baptist Church, Trussville.

Per session viewership of the conference online ranged from a low of 273 people to a high of 502. Average time spent viewing per session ranged from almost 14 minutes to more than 27 minutes. The conference was seen in places as far away as the Philippines.

The SBOM's social media platforms were promoted at the conference, and those in attendance were encouraged to use the hashtag #alsec13 with their posts. The hashtag was used at least 107 times, and 71 messages were retweeted to others, some multiple times. During the two days, the SBOM gained 22 new followers to its Twitter account.

In addition, photos of the conference were posted at [www.flickr.com/alsbom](http://www.flickr.com/alsbom), and were viewed by 900 people on the second day alone. (SBOM)

## Kelley challenges ministers' wives to be 'holy women'

By Julie Payne  
The Alabama Baptist

Rhonda Kelley may be married to a minister, but that doesn't mean his quiet time counts as her quiet time, she said.

Kelley, an author, professor and the wife of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary President Chuck Kelley, challenged ministers' wives to be "holy women" with "holy habits" during the Ministers' Wives Luncheon on Feb. 26.

The event, which was sponsored by Alabama Woman's Missionary Union, was held during the State Evangelism Conference at First Baptist Church, Trussville.



KELLEY

"This holy conduct is not something ... that comes naturally to us, because all of us have sinful natures," she said, sharing from 1 Peter 1:13-16.

If wives are to be holy, they must be committed to God and His Word, she said.

God created ministers' wives uniquely — each with specific gifts and abilities and different experiences in life — so that "together He can use us in a special way," Kelley said.

"I knew that when God called me to marry my husband, He called me to be a part of my husband's life in ministry," she said. "With the privilege of our call to ministry comes great responsibility."

She said there is a higher standard because "we are in positions of leadership. And so much of what we say and we do is first a reflection [of] the Lord and secondly a reflection [of] our husbands and our ministry," she said. "We are called to a higher conduct."

For guidelines for this conduct, "we go to God's Word" and learn how to live holy lives, Kelley said.

But reading from 2 Timothy 1:8-12, she said Scripture makes it clear that ministers and their wives are not called because of their own works.

"Our call is not something ... we earn or deserve on our own," Kelley said, adding that it is because of God's grace that "we are called to minister alongside our husbands."

Kelley encouraged women "to enjoy the blessing of God's call on your own life, enjoy the blessing of God's call on your husband's life" and enjoy serving the Lord together and trusting in Him. 📺

## Scenes from State Evangelism Conference



Three On A String

Photo by Neisha Fuson



Photo by Doug Rogers



Photo by Doug Rogers



Photo by Neisha Fuson

# Laborers are few

## Get involved, have compassion, Luter says

By Jennifer Davis Rash  
The Alabama Baptist

It's not a new topic for Southern Baptist Convention President Fred Luter, but it is one heavy on his heart.

"Our nation is in trouble. Our society is in trouble. ... Things are getting worse and worse," he told those attending the final session of the State Evangelism Conference on Feb. 26 at First Baptist Church, Trussville. But the Church need not sit on the sidelines. It needs to respond by sending more laborers, said Luter, pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, New Orleans.

Preaching from Matthew 9:35-38, Luter asked, "What would Jesus do — with that text in mind and with our nation in mind?"

"Jesus would be concerned to go. Jesus would have compassion enough to help. Jesus would send out a challenge for more laborers," he said.

"If we want to change society, let's ask someone with a proven record of transforming lives," Luter said, noting Jesus always had the answer no matter the situation.

"If we are Christians, we should want to know the answer of 'What Would Jesus Do?' ... to reach this generation."

As Luter outlined Jesus' concern for people, he narrated the stories of several individuals influenced personally by Jesus when He was on earth. There was Zacchaeus, the blind beggar, the woman at the well and the woman caught in adultery.

"But not only those in the Bible can testify. I know there is somebody here tonight who can testify about Jesus' concern," Luter said. "When you were down,

when you were lost, Jesus found you. ... You wanted to die, but Jesus gave you a reason to live.

"I too can testify," he noted. "At one time I was too mean to live. I was going to hell and enjoying the ride.

"From the gutter He lifted me. He lifted me. Love lifted me," Luter shouted with joy and to an applause of amens.

"We must be concerned about people if we are going to see our nation change. You must be concerned about people, the lost, the unchurched, their hurts, struggles, addictions, pains, eternal destination," he said.

"We are dealing with a generation who is weary, wandering, scattered, shepherdless. They have no home training to speak of, no commitment of Christ to speak of, no values, no morals, no conscience," Luter said, noting the lack of fear of authority and disrespect for life. "Lives are being destroyed every day by sin and they don't realize it."

But Christians must show compassion, he said. "Those of you who have not gotten over being saved must show compassion."

Jesus also would send out a challenge to pray because the laborers are few, Luter said. And the challenge is to His disciples, not anyone else.

"Accept the challenge of your executive director (Rick Lance) to Pray Across Alabama," Luter said. "If prayer changed your life, why can't the same God who changed you change those knuckleheads out there. ... Accept the challenge. Pray to God that He will send out more laborers. The harvest is ripe, but the workers, the volunteers are few." 🙏



LUTER



Photo by Doug Rogers

With a touch of Broadway and flair of storytelling, award-winning Christian singer/songwriter Larnelle Harris captivated the Tuesday evening crowd at the State Evangelism Conference held at First Baptist Church, Trussville.

Just three songs in and the more than 1,000 in attendance jumped to their feet for a standing ovation. A few songs later, it happened again. The final ovation pushed him back to the stage for an extra song.

Throughout Harris' concert, Alabama Baptists were engaged, singing along at times and sensing the presence of the Lord with each note.

The Monday evening crowd experienced another award-winning Christian artist with the sweet-spirited and loveable Charles Billingsley. His comfort level interacting with the choir of Gardendale First Baptist Church as well as the audience put those in attendance at ease.

Billingsley spent most of his time leading music rather than being the special music, and that brought a Sunday morning church feel to the atmosphere. He did get to showcase his songwriting and vocal skills in a few key moments Monday night and Tuesday morning though.

Other special music was provided by the choir of First, Trussville; music evangelist Bob Smith; music evangelist Frank Jones and Tim Head of Capitol Heights Baptist Church, Montgomery. (TAB)



Photo by Neisha Fuson



Photo by Neisha Fuson



Photo by Doug Rogers



Photo by Doug Rogers

# Across ALABAMA'S Associations

To submit news items, email [news@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:news@thealabamabaptist.org) or call 205-870-4720, ext. 112, at least three weeks prior to the event.

## BESSEMER

► **Tannehill Valley Church, McCalla**, will host the 4th annual Miles for Missions 5K Run/Walk and 1-Mile Fun Run on April 13 at Tannehill Ironworks Historical State Park. Early Bird Special registration is offered through March 15 with a guaranteed T-shirt. Pre-registration packet pickup will be at the church April 12, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Registration and packet pickup on race day is 6:30-7:30 a.m. The 5K Walk/Run will begin at 8:15 a.m. and the 1-Mile Fun Run will begin at 8:30 a.m. The awards ceremony will be at 9:30 a.m. and awards will be given to the three overall male and female finishers, male and female (over 40) and top two male and female in each age group. All proceeds from the event will benefit Casa Betania Children's Home in Jerez, Zacatecas, Mexico. To download a registration form visit [www.tannehillvalley.org](http://www.tannehillvalley.org) or call the church office at 205-477-6811 for a form to be mailed.

## BIRMINGHAM

► **James Edward Cato** is the new student/family minister at **First Church, Fultondale**. He is a graduate of Lee University in Cleveland, Tenn., and studied pastoral studies and counseling. He previously served as interim youth pastor at several churches. He also served Beechwood Church as their interim. He serves as area director for First Priority for the North Jefferson County area. He and his wife, Christy, have three children. ► **Shades Crest Church, Bluff Park**, will hold the 12th Annual High Country 5K on April 6, 8 a.m. There will be a Fun Run for kids at 9 a.m. The 2nd Annual Elementary School Team Challenge for Hoover elementary schools also will be part of the event. There will be a pre-race pasta dinner April 5 and a post-race pancake breakfast during the awards ceremony for runners and families. Pre-registration discount ends March 23. Cash prizes for the top three male and female runners will be given. Registration is available through [www.raceit.com](http://www.raceit.com) and space is limited.



CATO

## CHILTON

► **First Hispanic Church of Chilton, Clanton**, recognized Pastor Carlos Lemus' 10 years of ministry working with Chilton and Autauga associations during the church's recent 12th anniversary celebration. Lemus, Hispanic missionary for Autauga and Chilton associations, is pastor of the church.

## COFFEE

► The Coffee County Singles Cookout will be March 16, 4-7 p.m. at the **Coffee Association** building. All singles invited for a fun time of fellowship. To RSVP by March 14, call 334-894-6411 or email [ccbasingles@yahoo.com](mailto:ccbasingles@yahoo.com). John Granger is director of missions. ► **First Church, Elba**, will hold revival March 10-13, Sunday at 10 a.m. and 5 p.m., and Monday-Wednesday at 6:30 p.m. Sammy Gilbreath, director of the office of evangelism for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, will speak. Ronnie Marshall, minister of music for Calvary Church, Abbeville, will lead music. Childcare will be provided. Michael Woodham is pastor.

## COOSA RIVER

► **First Church, Talladega**, will hold revival March 17-20. Phil Glisson of Memphis, Tenn., will speak. Dennis R. Jones is pastor.

## MADISON

► **Murphy Hill Church, Toney**, will hold a gospel singing March 17, 6 p.m. featuring New Ground. For information call 256-828-3171 or 256-693-7381. Mike McFarlen is pastor.

## MOBILE

► James E. Messer Ministries, Inc. will hold the Bible & Evangelism Conference March 10-14 at **Government Street Church, Mobile**. The conference is sponsored by **Mobile Association**. For information visit [www.jamesmessenger.com](http://www.jamesmessenger.com). Thomas Wright is executive director of missions.

## MUD CREEK

► **Mickey Bell** has resigned as pastor of **Union Hill Church, Bessemer**.

## TUSKEGEE LEE

► **Tuskegee Lee Association** will hold a Ministers and Wives Retreat at The Summit Retreat Center in Fort Payne on April 4-6. Mike Jackson, director of the office of leadership and church health for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, will be the guest leader. A few spaces are available for those outside the association. For information call the association at 334-745-0588. Bill King is director of missions.

## REVERSE MORTGAGE NEWS

### You Can Beat FHA's Deadline

By Jimmy Dixon

Please PAY ATTENTION. FHA is about to pull the fixed rate standard reverse mortgage off the shelf. This is the reverse mortgage that currently gives more money to the homeowner.

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In order to get an FHA case number, I need a completed application and you will need to have a certificate from a HUD approved reverse mortgage counselor. These two things take time, so if you wait until the last week or two of March to contact me, you may have missed the boat.

This is no scare tactic. If you

would like to see the letter we received from FHA, I'll be glad to send you a copy, or you can find it by contacting HUD or FHA directly.

This product will be replaced by the fixed rate saver. On a median priced home, this product will approximately pay \$10,000-20,000 less. The variable rate standard will still be around, but it currently pays out less because it has an origination fee and does not have any lender credits.

Remember, like *The Alabama Baptist*, Jimmy covers our great state helping seniors improve the quality of their lives. He is Bible study director and an active deacon at Valley Creek Baptist Church, Hueytown. For a free brochure, quote or DVD, call him direct at 205-567-4800 or email [jdixon@mcgowinking.com](mailto:jdixon@mcgowinking.com).



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## in Loving Memory

of Alabama Baptist leaders, friends

### Eric Sullivan

#### Bessemer's Liberty pastor Sullivan dies at 49

Eric Sullivan, pastor of Liberty Baptist Church, Bessemer, died Feb. 25 at the age of 49.

Sullivan, who was born in South Carolina, called McCalla "home."

After serving in the United States Air Force and earning his associates degree in business administration in 1987 from the Community College of the Air Force, Sullivan began serving as youth pastor of New Testament Baptist Church, Sumiton.



SULLIVAN

In 1994, he was licensed to preach by New Testament Baptist and began serving as bivocational pastor of Fellowship Baptist Church, Sumiton, in 1995. Sullivan served 12 years at Fellowship Baptist before becoming bivocational pastor of Liberty Baptist in Mud Creek Baptist Association in 2010. He worked as a senior operator at Energen Resources in Oak Grove since 1989.

James Copeland, who serves as the youth pastor of Liberty, said he "learned a lot" from Sullivan.

"He was incredibly passionate about making sure that the congregation was in the Word — that was his battle cry the entire time he was here. ... His last sermon was a challenge to the church to love God more ... and I think he leaves a legacy of that."

Copeland also said as the church members met Feb. 27 for Wednesday night services they immediately noticed the absence of Sullivan's servant-like heart. It was Sullivan's custom to make plates of food at the fellowship dinner and deliver them to the senior adults.

Sullivan was recently elected president-elect of the Alabama Baptist Fellowship of Bivocational Ministers and served as vice moderator of Mud Creek Association, 2011-2012.

Sullivan is survived by his wife, Lori; nine children and one grandchild. (Neisha Fuson)



#### Cedar Bluff's Fair Haven marks 125 years

Fair Haven Baptist Church, Cedar Bluff, celebrated its 125th anniversary last fall.

Wendell Dutton, director of missions for Cherokee Baptist Association and representative for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission (ABHC), presented the ABHC plaque to the Cherokee Association church to commemorate its years of service.

According to Pastor Randall Lawson, an anniversary committee planned the day.

Photos of the church's history were compiled and shown on a screen in the sanctuary, and Lawson delivered the day's message. During the service, which Lawson described as "a worshipful time" with special music, he recognized church members and those who had established the church.

When looking to the future of Fair Haven, Lawson noted Fair Haven's ongoing van ministry, which he said the church plans to continue. This ministry was implemented to transport area children to Fair Haven for church. The parents do not attend church themselves, but they allow their children to attend with Fair Haven's assistance.

Lawson said it is a joy for the church to see the van door open and the smiling faces of these children arrive, many who otherwise may not have opportunities to attend. (TAB)

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

## Valleydale to host Girls of Grace

Weight, self-esteem, popularity, beauty, relationships. They're all things that can weigh heavily on the heart and mind of anyone, but especially a teenage girl.

"At times girls feel like they are the only ones who struggle with certain issues," said Denise Jones of Point of Grace.

That's why the contemporary Christian music group started Girls of Grace conferences (see story, this page). "It gives (girls) the opportunity to come together in a large group and realize that we all have our own struggles, and yet we are in this together," Jones said on [www.girlsofgrace.com](http://www.girlsofgrace.com).

Girls of Grace, a girls-only conference held at least 12 times a year across the United States, is coming to Birmingham on March 9, 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., at Valleydale Baptist Church, Birmingham.

### Performances

Featuring performances by Moriah Peters, for KING & COUNTRY, Lindsay McCaul and Point of Grace, this year's theme is "The Beautiful Truth," based on John 8:32, "And they will know the truth and the truth will set them free."

The Birmingham conference speakers include Chris Wheeler, youth speaker and director of student initiatives at Show Hope, a nonprofit orphan/adoption ministry founded by Steven Curtis Chapman; Annie Downs, inspirational author; Constance Rhodes, founder and CEO of FINDINGbalance, a Christian nonprofit company with an emphasis on eating and body image; and Amber Lehman, celebrity stylist to artists like The Civil Wars, Kenny Chesney and Three Doors Down.

For more information on the Birmingham Girls of Grace conference or to purchase tickets, visit [www.girlsofgrace.com/tour/birmingham-al-0](http://www.girlsofgrace.com/tour/birmingham-al-0) or call 1-888-483-0018. (TAB)

# 'The Beautiful Truth'

## Girls of Grace conference makes difference in teenage girls' lives

By Neisha Fuson  
The Alabama Baptist

Fans rushed to the signing table after the concert to get the group's autographs, shake their hands and have their pictures made together. One teenage girl asked a member of Point of Grace, "Where did you get your shoes?" The next girl in line had a very different type of question: "How did you keep yourself pure before marriage?"

The countless "deep" questions asked of the members of Point of Grace is what inspired them to found the Girls of Grace conference in 2002 with the hopes of "making a difference" in teenage girls' lives by "coming alongside parents and youth leaders and sharing what we know the Word says."

Point of Grace, a now five-time Dove Award-winning contemporary Christian music group, released its first album in 1993. The group has since released 16 albums — two of which achieved Platinum status. Leigh Cappillino, Denise Jones and Shelley Breen, the voices behind Point of Grace's familiar harmonies, released their most recent album, "A Thousand Little Things," in 2012.

Cappillino, who began singing with Point of Grace in 2004, said Girls of Grace strives to "give girls a renewed sense of confidence, a refreshed spirit and to open their eyes as to who they are by God's own design."

A one-day event hosted by Point



Photo courtesy of Word Entertainment

**'MAKING A DIFFERENCE'** — Point of Grace, Dove Award-winning contemporary Christian music group, performs during a Girls of Grace conference in Minneapolis, Minn.

of Grace, the conference's target group is teenage girls grades 6-12. A variety of guest speakers and Christian musicians reiterate messages from Scripture at the conference while addressing topics such as body image, good health, relationships, fashion and good choices.

Girls of Grace speakers "resonate in the hearts of the girls," Cappillino said. The speakers, selected depending on location and yearly Girls of Grace theme, share from experience and are sincere, something Cappillino said this generation of girls can spot a mile away.

This year's theme, "The Beautiful Truth," reflects on John 8:32

and the truth that God created each person in His image, beautiful and completely unique, Cappillino said. "Life is not based on numbers. It's not based on jeans size, height or the color of your hair.

"With as many years as we've been doing [this conference] the common denominator is the same: (girls struggle with) self-esteem, feeling good enough, comparing themselves and feeling like (they are) the only ones going through what they're going through," she said.

But the conference is not just for the girls. Moms and youth leaders are encouraged to attend with the girls because, as Cappillino put it, "a lot of times the moms (or leaders) need [encouragement] just as much as the girls do."

She said, on average, one out of every four attendees is an adult woman.

The conference recently added

the topic of social media and the importance of boundaries associated with it.

"It's a challenge not just for those girls. [Moms and leaders] have to be that role model. We have to hold ourselves accountable so our kids will see we are trying to be better people," Cappillino said of social media and the issues that can arise from it such as low self-esteem, judgment and bullying.

But since the conference was created for teen girls and their leaders, what do they think of Girls of Grace?

On the Girls of Grace Facebook page, [Facebook.com/girlsofgraceevent](http://Facebook.com/girlsofgraceevent), comments like, "Can't wait till next year" and "It was an amazing day" abound. One mom wrote, "Awesome day. My daughter is still talking about it. She woke up this morning with a new excitement in her eyes ... I can't thank you enough for being a catalyst in that."

And that's exactly why Point of Grace started the ministry in the first place.

Cappillino said, "I love (the conferences) because they inspire me, challenge me and encourage me in a way that I (think), 'We can make a difference and it starts one heart at a time, one choice at a time.'"

The speakers also share about the importance of a personal relationship with Christ.

"Maybe today the 'beautiful truth' is that you need Christ in your life," one speaker shared at a previous conference, Cappillino said. Each conference has a time of dedication and an opportunity for the girls to accept Christ, "which we know is the best Truth of all," she said.

For more information on the conference or to purchase tickets, visit [www.girlsofgrace.com](http://www.girlsofgrace.com). ☞

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# Demonstrating God's love

## LoveLoud ministry shows love of Christ by meeting human

**A** new home, new position, new ministry and new outlook came to Lorna Bius in the summer of 2012. But there was something oddly familiar about it all. Something in a childhood memory — forgotten for years — brought back the realization that Bius had seen this before.

"I'm discovering that sometimes people need to experience LoveLoud ministry for a while before they recognize it," said Bius, 2013 North American Mission Board (NAMB) Week of Prayer missionary. "It was true in my life."

Bius, the first LoveLoud catalyst appointed by NAMB, moved from Nevada to Colorado to give leadership for the effort in the West Region for NAMB. LoveLoud is a movement of churches demonstrating God's love by meeting significant human

needs while sharing Christ. "I only realized a couple of years ago that I first witnessed LoveLoud when I was a child," Bius said. "It started with my dad. When I was young, in early grade school, my dad took me with him on an errand. We drove into a neighborhood that I was unfamiliar with. He stopped in front of an old dilapidated house." The memory of what happened next reawakened Bius' understanding of LoveLoud.

### LoveLoud in action

"My dad went to the trunk and took out two grocery bags, one in each arm," Bius said. "He went to the door — it only had steps, no porch. When he knocked an older woman answered. She pulled back the screen door and my dad disappeared inside. A few moments later he came back out without the bags. He never said a thing about what he did. He showed me. I had forgotten about that day until the memory came back to me a couple of years ago. I realize now that was the first

time I saw LoveLoud in action." Now Bius hopes to multiply LoveLoud across the region. She will help discover churches that are already engaging in similar ministries, with the goal of replicating them contextually for other churches. Bius began networking almost immediately after her move.

"I've been able to follow up with people I met at the Send North America Conference and the Colorado convention annual meeting," Bius said. The Send North America Conference is NAMB's gathering for church planting and mobilization. "I've also connected with people whose churches have been featured in state newspapers. I tell them I saw them in the paper and am interested in how their strategies are working."

In addition to her new church family, Bius also has interaction with the Send North America: Denver team. Denver city coordinator Dave Howeth connected Bius with the group quickly. Denver is one of nine Send North America cities in the West region.

"Dave has been great," Bius said. "I'm so thankful that he brought me on board and helped me get established. I've made some good initial connections. Being in Denver is great. Twitter has been helpful, and I'm engaged in informal field research."

Bius isn't the only newbie with the LoveLoud team. She was on a conference call recently with new LoveLoud team leader Jerry Daniel and the newest LoveLoud catalyst, Taylor Field.

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NAMB photo

North American Mission Board Week of Prayer missionary Lorna Bius serves the West Region as the board's first LoveLoud catalytic missionary.



NAMB photo

Discovering new ways to help churches reach families is part of Lorna Bius' assignment as a LoveLoud catalytic missionary.

## Meeting significant human needs

"It was a brief conversation, but I'm excited about what Jerry and Taylor bring to LoveLoud," she said. "Taylor will help church planters visualize a day-to-day strategy that not only connects with their communities but will help them discover how they can transform their neighborhoods and reach into peoples' lives."

"Taylor said one thing that resonated with me, and I will be using it everywhere I have the opportunity to speak. He said we need to 'teach our people to be light, not lightning.' We need to be there, not with just the quick strike, but for the long term. As Jerry and Al [Gilbert] say, we are called to be a faithful presence of ministry so we can tell people about Christ when they ask why we care." Field is founding pastor of Graffiti Church in New York. Gilbert is NAMB's interim vice president for evangelism.

The annual Week of Prayer for North American Missions,

March 3-10, and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering provide support for Bius and other missionaries like her who serve on behalf of Southern Baptists in North America. With a goal of \$70 million, this year's offering theme is "Whatever It Takes — Reaching the One."

The heart of the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering is to support missions, Bius said. If there is anything she has more passion for than sharing her faith, it just may be Annie.

"It is amazing to me that I am able to see when people give in Mississippi or New York and then see it used to reach

someone for Christ in Phoenix," she said. "I get to see the other side of the offering plate, the effects of not just the funds but the heart behind the giving. It is incredibly potent with every offering and every voice."

### Generous spirit

"And not only giving, but in what the giving provides. It is phenomenal to be able to tell people that someone provided a resource because they wanted to help reach someone else for Christ," Bius said. "People are amazed, particularly in the West,

that someone they don't know would give to help them."

Bius also sees LoveLoud as an avenue to develop future missionaries and leaders. She said LoveLoud gives people the opportunity to participate in serving others, helps them develop interests and skills and shows them how to take those interests and skills and engage people with the gospel.

"When people walk away from LoveLoud they haven't just done something, they are becoming something," Bius said. "LoveLoud has a real opportunity to lead to church planting."

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# Mass. schools to allow boys in girls' restrooms

Under a sweeping directive issued by the Massachusetts Department of Education, boys and girls who identify as the opposite sex now are allowed to use whichever school bathroom and locker room they feel most comfortable in, and schools are discouraged from using gender-based clothes and gender-based practices — even from lining up elementary-aged children based on their sex.

The 11-page directive to the state's public schools was issued Feb. 15 and supposedly was released in light of a new state law — passed by the Legislature and

signed by the governor — that adds “gender identity” to the state’s non-discrimination code. Traditional groups said the new law did not require such a wide-sweeping directive from the education department.

Nevertheless, those groups said, the chain of events in Massachusetts demonstrates the repercussions of passing any law that adds gender identity to state nondiscrimination policies.

The directive explicitly states it is aimed at children of all ages.

“In all cases,” the directive states in laying out the new policy, “the principal should be clear with the

student (and parent) that the student may access the restroom, locker room and changing facility that corresponds to the student’s gender identity.”

School officials are only allowed to question the student if they believe the “student’s gender-related identity is being asserted for some improper purpose.” But in all cases, it is the student who decides his or her identity, and any uncomfortable feelings of other students are secondary, the document states. Gender-neutral restrooms and changing facilities are encouraged, but a transgender student is not required

to use them, the document states.

The document quotes state law in defining gender identity as “a person’s gender-related identity, appearance or behavior, whether or not that gender-related identity, appearance or behavior” is “associated with the person’s physiology or assigned sex at birth.”

Glenn Stanton, Focus on the Family’s director of family formation studies, said the debate over gender identity and transgenderism is tied to the debate over gay “marriage.”

“Transgenderism is only part of what same-sex ‘marriage’ is plowing the way for,” Stanton told Baptist Press. “When gender ‘doesn’t matter’ for marriage or parenting, it ironically becomes a much bigger issue in the agenda to rewrite the social script on what it means to be male and female. In saying it doesn’t matter, we end up talking about it at every turn. And this is where we find ourselves, and will, increasingly so. It is important for Christians to understand how and why this matters. Both male and female, in their sex-distinction and uniqueness, are what singly image the nature and likeness of God in the world. Is there any wonder it is being attacked so viciously?” (BP)

## Judge ‘wrong,’ AG ‘right’ on VictoryLand search warrant

The Supreme Court of Alabama issued a 46-page opinion March 1 explaining why Judge Tom Young of the Macon County Circuit Court was wrong to deny the State’s application for a search warrant to search and seize the gambling devices and gambling proceeds at the VictoryLand casino.

The Supreme Court’s opinion explains that current Alabama law, including its decision in the Cornerstone case, is “more than clear enough to serve as a guide to measuring the facts of this case.”

Under existing law, the Supreme Court explains that “the circumstances presented allow for no reasonable conclusion other than that probable cause exists for the issuance of the search warrant in this case.” The Court continued:

“The games depicted in the surveillance video and described in the affidavit proffered by Sisson in support of the application for the warrant do not reasonably resemble the game of ‘bingo.’ Without turning a blind eye to that which is depicted in the video and described

in the affidavit, a ‘man of reasonable caution’ could reach no conclusion other than there is a ‘fair probability’ that the machines in question are not the game of bingo and, instead, are slot machines or other gambling devices that are illegal under Alabama law.”

The Supreme Court concluded that “[a] circuit judge is not free to frustrate the enforcement of the criminal law by refusing to issue warrants necessary or appropriate to its enforcement in his or her circuit.” (AG)

## Want to know God?

By Pastor Sammie Reid  
Mount Zion Baptist Church, Warrior

The most important decisions we make in life are decisions related to our spiritual life. In view of this there are four facts every person should know.

The first fact we should know: The human race stands lost before a holy God. In his letter to the Christians in Rome, Paul wrote, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Notice the inclusive nature of this statement. The little word “all” is used. We have all sinned. Regardless of our family background, where we live and what our station in life may be, we have all sinned.

The second fact we should know: We will all face God in judgment. The writer to the Hebrews wrote in Hebrews 9:27 these words: “And it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.” Death is the common enemy of the race. Our appointment to meet God is already on His calendar. I am concerned that for many the road to Hell travels along many miles of good intentions. They intend to make peace with God tomorrow, but tomorrow never comes.

The third fact we should know: There is no salvation apart from faith in Jesus Christ. In John 14:6 we read the words of our Lord. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” Our good deeds do not provide access to the Father. Our family name does not provide access to the Father. The fact we were reared in the church does not provide access to the Father. The only way to the Father and salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ.

The fourth fact we should know: The individual must make his or her personal commitment to Jesus Christ. A family member cannot make your commitment. A friend cannot make your commitment. As you read this column, if you have not received Christ as your Savior, ask Him to come into your heart. Confess your sins and receive Him as your Savior. If you are a Christian share the good news of salvation with someone else. In Romans 10:13 we find a very comforting verse of Scripture. It reads, “For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

## MARKET PLACE

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### CHURCH POSITIONS

**PASTOR:** First Baptist Church, Hackleburg, Ala., is prayerfully seeking a pastor to lead this conservative small-town church of 300 members. A bachelor’s degree from a Baptist college or seminary degree is preferred. Send resumes to: First Baptist Church, Hackleburg, P.O. Box 128, Hackleburg, AL 35564, or email to: hfbcoffice@gmail.com by March 31.

**BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR:** Bethel Baptist Church in Brent, Ala., is seeking a bivocational pastor. Please send resumes to: Bethel Baptist Church, Mr. Danny Russell, 298 Tabernacle Road, Brent, AL 35034.

**WORSHIP LEADER/STUDENT MINISTER:** Camellia Baptist Church in Prattville is currently seeking a God-called individual to serve in this combination position. Seminary degree is preferred, previous experience required. Please send resumes to: 201 Woodvale Rd. Prattville, AL 36067, ATTN: Personnel Committee.

**BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC WORSHIP LEADER:** Bell Lane Baptist is seeking a bivocational music worship leader dedicated to lead adult choir and worship in blended service of traditional hymns and praise and worship music. Send resume to: sheila.bolton@att.net, or Bell Lane Baptist Church, ATTN: Sheila Bolton, 1000 Bell Lane Road, Clanton, AL 35045.

**BIVOCATIONAL MINISTER OF MUSIC:** Pineywood Baptist Church is seeking a bivocational minister of music. Send resume to: 498 Pineywood Road, Gardendale, AL 35071 or office@pineywoodonline.com.

**BIVOCATIONAL WORSHIP LEADER:** Center Grove Baptist Church is prayerfully seeking God’s man to lead our choir and congregation in blended worship services. Email resumes to:

peejinx@bellsouth.net, or mail to: Worship Search Team, 4607 Co. Rd. 1545, Cullman, AL 35058.

**STUDENT PASTOR:** First Baptist Church of the Islands in Savannah, Ga., is seeking a full-time student pastor to lead their student ministry (grades 6–12) in a growing and thriving church setting. The ideal candidate has a sense of God’s specific call to reach and minister to middle and high school students. Strong personal skills in relating to students and families will be expected along with a desire to invest life and time in the lives of students. Ability to oversee a variety of facets of student ministry is a must. This position will oversee approximately 60–80 students with potential for incredible growth. Please send resumes with cover letter and references to: searchteam@fbcislands.com, or to: Search Team, FBC Islands, 6613 Johnny Mercer Boulevard, Savannah, GA 31410.

**TWO POSITIONS NEEDED:** East Side Baptist Church in Cullman, Ala., is seeking a part-time music director. A pianist is also needed. Please respond by March 22. eastsidebaptist@bellsouth.net or 256-734-6144.

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# RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

by Jennifer Davis Rash • executive editor • jrash@thealabamabaptist.org

## Did you notice his eyes?

The man carried himself with confidence and purpose. He walked into the church and up to the welcome desk without hesitation.

"I'd like to go to your singles Sunday School class," he said.

"No problem," one gentleman said and pointed the man my way. "She will help you find your class."

As I wrapped up my conversation with a family of five new to our church and regrouped to help the gentleman at the desk, I noticed several people walk by and greet him, speak to him, pat him on the back, etc. Our church is a friendly church and the members are good about welcoming guests, but in this particular case no one spent more than a few seconds with the man before moving on.

When he turned to look at me, all I could see was pain in his eyes. He said all the right words and knew what to do in a church setting, but something wasn't right. I purposefully didn't take him to a class right away. I spent some time talking with him, got him a soda, asked questions and tried to get to know more about him. Within a few minutes, he was sharing his real story with me and he definitely needed to talk. He also needed a different class than the one he came in asking about.

The more I heard his story, the more I could narrow down which Life Group (or Sunday School) class would be best for him. I also knew exactly which leader would connect with him and personally located the class leader so that I could introduce them immediately. The connection was made, phone



numbers and email addresses were exchanged and the man knew he had a family of faith willing to walk with him on his journey.

The experience that Sunday shook me a bit. What if I had not slowed down long enough to really look into his eyes? What if I had not noticed the pain? What if I had not shown compassion and truly cared about him as a person?

Of course, the next person may have done all the right things and taken even better care of the situation, but it reminded me that we shouldn't leave these opportunities for the next person. What if the next person isn't paying attention?

God gave me the opportunity to encourage a fellow believer who was in a world of hurt that day. It meant I had to rearrange my schedule. It meant I didn't finish a project for one of the ministers when I said I would. It meant I missed catching up with many of my friends. But it also meant receiving a tremendous blessing.

As I drove home from church, I thanked God for allowing me to participate in the experience. I also wondered how many other hurting people had walked up to the welcome desk and received a friendly greeting but nothing deeper. How many others had I not noticed?

What about in everyday life outside of church? How many people do we see every day and never slow down long enough to read their eyes, observe their body language or notice their words?

And if we are honest, how many times do we sense someone needs to talk or needs a friend, but we don't want to invest the time, change our schedule or deal with it in general? How many times have we been so focused on the latest office or family drama that we missed noticing the sadness in the eyes of the person listening to us?

As Christian believers and church families, what difference could we make if we all slowed down and served others through the gifts of awareness, listening and encouragement? 🙏

# Rashional EXTRAS ...

What topics are  
on your mind?

Email jrash@  
thealabamabaptist.org

**EDITOR'S NOTE** — The following piece came in response to the Feb. 7 *Rashional Extras* note requesting readers to share their experiences related to grieving families.

## A Window to My World

When my 21-year-old son was diagnosed with neuroblastoma on Sept. 24, 2011, I started a personal journal. I titled it "With God's Help" and it was intended to be a way for me to process the journey ahead as we took John to MD Anderson Cancer Center the next week.

Instead, John died before we could even get on the airplane, just a few days later on Sept. 30.

The journal has become something else, a way to pour out my pain, to work through how to think, feel, be and do in this new life I now live. I do not hold back. It was such a relief to read the first page of C.S. Lewis' "A Grief Observed," a journal he kept about the death of his wife. His description of how grief feels gripped me and emboldened me to write honestly about my own journey. I write when the feelings well up and need to be expressed. Sometimes I write twice a day. Sometimes I skip months at a time. Sometimes it helps.

The following excerpt is what my grief felt like a little over a month after John died.

**Wed., Nov. 8, 2011**

I don't want to do this.

There is a beautifully wrapped package on my desk with a card, and I am supposed to open it. A sweet and kind and caring professor at the university where I work put it in my chair when I was off campus, and now I am supposed to open it.

I don't want to.

I don't want to be getting presents because my son is dead.

I don't want to be watering plants that were sent because my son is dead.

I don't want to be crying in agony in the backyard under the stars at night because my son is dead.

I don't want to go into his bedroom and look at his things and touch them and not touch my son because he is dead.

I have done all the things I am supposed to do. I have gotten up in the morning and put on clothes and makeup and gone to work and walked around looking all normal when inside I feel like my heart has been ripped out and nothing is there.

I laugh.

I smile.

I make appropriate comments at appropriate times.

When someone asks — even when they don't ask — I talk and talk and talk about my son. When I am talking, I'm not having to look at my emptiness. I can just talk about it, and it's pushed away for the moment so I don't feel.

I don't want to do this.

I have done this long enough. I have done what I am supposed to do.

Now I want John back. I want to touch his face. I want to reach up and hug his neck. I want to feel his hand and watch him move. I want to walk into his bedroom like I did just a few weeks ago and see him lying on his back, his chest rising and falling as he breathes, with the cat perched atop his stomach.

I don't want to open this pretty package.

Because the only reason I have this package is that my son is dead.

**Kathy Dean, director of media relations, University of Mobile**

## Excerpt from [www.characterpath.com](http://www.characterpath.com), a blog by Gary Fenton

*Pastor of Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham (Dawson Family of Faith)*

How about this idea for a new Christian television reality show: "Spiritual Hoarders." Christians who go to Bible studies and worship, read Christian books, and listen to Christian music but never serve would tell their stories. Then a group of believers would perform an intervention. You could hold auditions in almost any church on Sunday morning. This show, of course, would be a take-off of the popular A&E

show, "Hoarders." But then we Christians do not appear to be too concerned about patterning ourselves after the world. Christians are intended to be God's investment bankers. God places spiritual gifts, natural talents and the fullness of the Holy Spirit in us, and then He expects a return on His deposit. The gifts of God are not ours to hoard, to hold and to treasure but to use for the glory of God and the good of humanity.

**EDITOR'S NOTE** — *Characterpath.com* approaches character from the perspective of the soul and personal conduct and is built on the assumption that character is more than just a system of values, but involves a right heart and informed mind.

# All eyes watching

## Church property fights in Texas, South Carolina could shape legal strategies in other states, denominations

When disgruntled congregations have left hierarchical denominations such as the Episcopal Church, they have often lost property battles as civil courts ruled buildings and land are not theirs to keep.

But outcomes could be different this year, court watchers say, as high-profile cases involving dozens of Episcopal congregations in South Carolina and Texas wind their way through state courts. That prospect has observers watching for insights that could shape legal strategies in other states and denominations.

Both cases involve conservative dioceses that voted to leave the Episcopal Church over homosexuality, among other issues. In South Carolina, congregations representing about 22,000 people are suing the Episcopal Church for control of real estate worth some \$500 million and rights to the diocese's identity. In Texas, the national Episcopal Church is suing about 60 breakaway congregations in the Fort Worth area for properties estimated to be worth more than \$100 million.

### Held in trust

The Episcopal Church argues, as it has in past cases, that local properties are held in trust for the denomination and cannot go with parishioners who choose to disaffiliate. But recent court actions are giving breakaway groups hope that things might go differently this time.

In South Carolina, plaintiffs are encouraged by a 2009 ruling by the state Supreme Court that allowed All Saints Church of Pawley's Island to retain property despite having left the Episcopal Church. If other breakaway churches have similar documents as All Saints did — deeds and contracts that show no intention to hold property in trust for the Episcopal Church — then they could win, according to Lloyd Lunceford, a Louisiana attorney and editor of "A Guide to Church Property Law."

"When no trust exists at all, the local church wins," Lunceford said.

"The South Carolina Supreme Court, like many state supreme courts, has held that the mere presence of an assertion of a trust (existing) in a denominational constitution is insufficient to create a valid legal trust. There has to be more."

In considering the breakaway churches appeal in the Fort Worth case, the Supreme Court of Texas is hearing its first church property case since 1909. The court is expected to clarify whether church property disputes in Texas will be decided by so-called "deference principles," which prevailed in 1909 and tend to favor top hierarchical entities.

Another option is to apply "neutral principles," which consider such factors as canon law, state law and agreements made among local churches, dioceses and other denominational entities.

Courts have increasingly used neutral principles, observers say, in part to avoid becoming ensnared in polity or theological debates. If the Texas high court uses that approach, then departing churches could win on the grounds that Texas law broadly allows for the revocation of trusts, according to Scott

Brister, a former Supreme Court of Texas justice who is now representing the Fort Worth defendants.

Revocable trusts, Brister said, include any that might be established by the Episcopal Church's so-called Dennis Canon, which was added in 1979 and says parish properties are held in trust for the Episcopal Church.

"We've got defenses that say we never agreed to the Dennis Canon, but let's say for the sake of argument that we did" agree to it, Brister said. "Under Texas law, you can revoke it," he said, adding that the Diocese of Fort Worth did exactly that more than 20 years ago.

St. Michael's, a church within the Diocese of South Carolina, is one of the most prominent Episcopal churches in Charleston, S.C.

The Episcopal Church, however, has a history of winning property cases and expects to build on that success. Fort Worth Episcopal Bishop Rayford B. High Jr. argued the Dennis Canon is binding since local churches agreed to abide by it.

"They were given access to church titles and church properties because they promised to abide

by the Episcopal Church" and its canons, High said. "Commitments were made. You can't just decide a little later on, 'I think I'll change my mind.'"

In South Carolina, the case is no slam dunk for recently departed churches, according to Martin Nussbaum, a Colorado Springs lawyer who specializes in church property cases. He noted the Episcopal Church has prevailed in most of its property cases, in part because local churches have agreed to abide by the Episcopal Church's constitution.

### Success in court

But, he added, the South Carolina Supreme Court 2009 Pawley's Island decision could help today's plaintiffs win.

"It's possible that the secessionists will have some success for some time, as long as they're in the South Carolina courts," said Nussbaum, an attorney with Rothgerber Johnson & Lyons. "If it goes over to (the U.S. Supreme Court), they'll lose."

To date, the U.S. Supreme Court has shown little interest in review-

ing state decisions in church property cases. Brister expects that will not change, and state decisions will stand. The high court's reticence to intervene might bode well for breakaway Anglicans in South Carolina, according to Robert Tuttle, professor of law and religion at George Washington University Law School.

"In South Carolina, where the South Carolina Supreme Court has ruled in favor of a separating congregation, (lower court justices) might be more sympathetic to the claim of the separating diocese of South Carolina" than judges in other states might be, Tuttle said.

Both the Texas and South Carolina cases are being watched closely, in part because of their size. Both involve dioceses and dozens of churches in large states, where jurisprudence can influence how judges in other states approach property cases, according to Brister.

The Texas decision "could influence other states, depending on what the circumstances of their state laws are," Brister said. (RNS)



RNS photo

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# Family Matters

## nurture

By John Killian, Pastor, Maytown Baptist Church

Lucy Dawidowicz was a Jewish lady in New York who went to Germany in 1946 to help Jewish people who had been displaced during the days of Hitler's reign. Lucy grieved over the destruction of entire communities. But in her days of talking with the survivors of the Holocaust, this lady collected many touching stories of bravery in the Jewish ghettos.

Janusz (James) Korczak ran an orphanage in a Jewish ghetto. One day, the Nazi soldiers blockaded the orphanage as they came to deport these Jewish orphans. Korczak made certain that each child was clean, had a small bag of bread and a flask of water. Korczak could have appealed his case, as the Nazis were to deport the children, but he refused to do so, saying that the children needed him and he would never let them go alone. Observers saw Korczak for the last time as he boarded the train, holding children in each hand, and loving them, even as they were being sent to their death.

Just as this brave man cared for and loved children as they faced the horrors of the Nazi death camps, we live in a culture where children may be brought back from situations of death. Children who lived in abusive situations, broken homes, and abandonment, need someone to love them, to hold their hands, to encourage

them through the challenges as they march away from the places of death.

As Alabama Baptists, we have the opportunity to hold these children and love them, showing them the love of Christ as they are led away from death and into life. We do so as we give, support, and work with the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries. This year, I pray that each Alabama Baptist Church will do something, will receive an offering, will include the Children's Homes in your budget, will take on a project of collecting goods for the Children's Homes, and will pray for this great work.

As the children of Alabama need loving care, may we live up to the words of Hebrews 6:10, "God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them."

**“ God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. ”**  
*Hebrews 6:10*

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\* Graphic represents giving totals as of press time.



\* The Ann Street Baptist Church trust fund has been used to purchase food, clothing and school supplies for the Mobile campus.

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# SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For March 10

## Explore the Bible By Dale Younce Professor of Christian Ministries, University of Mobile

### PLEASE GOD IN YOUR WORSHIP

#### 1 Timothy 2:1-15

Although Scripture gives no prescribed order of worship, all adults can benefit from a reminder that their worship is to align with biblical guidelines. Today's lesson identifies appropriate attitudes for believers involved in the corporate worship of the local church.

#### Pray For Others (1-4)

Paul begins with a statement about the priority of prayer. Paul urged Timothy not to allow the church to minimize prayer. When a local church ceases to depend on prayer, God soon ceases to bless its ministry.

"All men" makes it clear that the church should be praying for the lost. No person on earth is outside the influence of prayer. Special mention is made of those in places of civil authority. Even when we cannot agree with or respect men and women in authority, we are commanded to pray for them.

The purpose of prayer is to get God's will done on earth. God's will includes His desire that all men come to the knowledge of the truth through faith in Jesus. We cannot unravel the mystery of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility; both are taught in the Bible. We do know that we have the responsibility of praying for the lost and telling them the Jesus story.

#### Teach the Truth (5-7)

The one Mediator between God and man is Jesus Christ. A mediator is a middleman who stands between two and communicates with both. Through Jesus, Himself Man, God offers His forgiveness. In order for Jesus to be the Mediator, He must be both God and Man. The Lord Jesus is God from eternity and He became Man at Bethlehem.

Jesus gave Himself as a ransom for all people. Jesus' death on the cross was a substitutionary death for everyone. Although Jesus' death is efficient only for those who trust Him, it is sufficient for the sins of the whole world.

#### Behave in Worship (8-15)

Paul gives three essentials for effective praying by both men and women. (1) "Holy

hands" refers to a holy life. (2) "Without anger" refers to someone who is not a troublemaker. (3) "Argument" refers to open disagreements. Christians must learn to disagree without being disagreeable.

Concerning a woman's role in public worship, believing women are to dress modestly. Paul is not prohibiting women from neatness and good taste. He is forbidding dressing ostentatiously or provocatively while engaged in public worship. He emphasizes a godly woman's inner life, adorning herself with Christian character and Christian service ("good works").

Paul is not saying that women have no right to minister and pray in public like men. He is aware of what he has previously taught in Corinth; his exhortation of silence did not prohibit women from speaking in public worship (1 Cor. 11:5). Paul is saying here that women are not to teach men authoritatively; they are not the final authority in the church as to doctrine or teaching.

Paul gives two reasons for his instruction. First is the order of creation. Adam was formed first, then Eve. Second, the woman was deceived and thereby fell into transgression. Eve's sin was primarily that of reaching a theological conclusion without the counsel of her husband. Ultimately, the responsibility for the fall rests with Adam, since he chose to disobey God without being deceived.

Verse 15 has generated a host of various interpretations. Paul is not saying that women are eternally saved from sin through childbearing or that they maintain their salvation by having babies, both of which contradict the biblical teaching of salvation by grace through faith in Christ, sustained forever by grace. The grammar of the verse helps interpret it. The verb "will save" is a future tense with a plural pronoun "they" as its subject. Paul is talking about women after Eve. The word "saved" means "to be preserved." Paul is saying, as a general principle, women have a unique responsibility and opportunity, through childbearing, to lead, teach and direct many in the human race out of sin and into godliness. ❏

## Bible Studies for Life By Scott McGinnis Associate Professor of Religion, Samford University

### HALF-HEARTED INTEREST OR TOTAL COMMITMENT?

#### Luke 9:20-26, 57-62

In "The Cost of Discipleship," German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote the "call of Jesus and the response of single-minded obedience have an irrevocable significance. By means of them Jesus calls people into an actual situation where faith is possible. For that reason his call is an actual call and he wishes it so to be understood, because he knows that it is only through actual obedience that a man can become liberated to believe." Bonhoeffer himself was no half-hearted believer: his defiant faith in the face of Nazi oppression would send him first to prison and ultimately to the gallows.

#### Total Sacrifice, Total Loss (20-26)

In Jesus' day, many claimants to the title of God's messiah promised liberation from Roman oppression. This political context of "messiah" was likely the reason that Jesus warned His disciples to tell no one who He was. His identity would soon be clear enough based on his actions.

The audience shifts in v. 23 as Jesus turns His attention to "them all" and issues a stern challenge to would-be followers to "take up their cross." Two thousand years have dampened the offensiveness of the cross as a form of execution. It was a horrid and shameful way to die, known to the Romans as a slave's punishment. We perhaps recover something of the sting of Jesus' words if we think of our modern associations with execution by hanging or electrocution.

Understanding the cross as an offensive image prepares the reader for the paradoxical statement that follows: only by losing our lives can we save them. Thankfully, discipleship does not require total understanding so much as total obedience. Martin Luther said that God's message tells us "plunge into the deep waters beyond your own comprehension and I will help you to comprehend even as I do."

#### Total Commitment (57-62)

Most scholars identify a key turning point

in Luke's Gospel that lies between our two focal passages. In 9:51 Luke tells us that Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem." From this point forward Luke records Jesus' slow but inexorable progress toward the city where His mission would culminate on a cross.

The scene on the road that Luke paints is a vivid one: one can imagine Jesus striding with purpose, His disciples following, some at a distance, and someone running alongside and promising, "I will follow you wherever you go." Or another: "I'll follow you but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus' replies seem abrupt, if not rude and provocative, particularly to the one who would bury his father. However, Luke's purpose here is to demonstrate quite clearly the high cost of discipleship. The road to Jerusalem leads to the cross and death, not to glory, at least not that of the sort anticipated by most.

The requirement to bury the dead was a key expectation of Jewish family life. This is not the only time Luke's Gospel places discipleship and family obligations at odds. In a similar passage Jesus tells His would-be followers that they must hate their father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters (14:26).

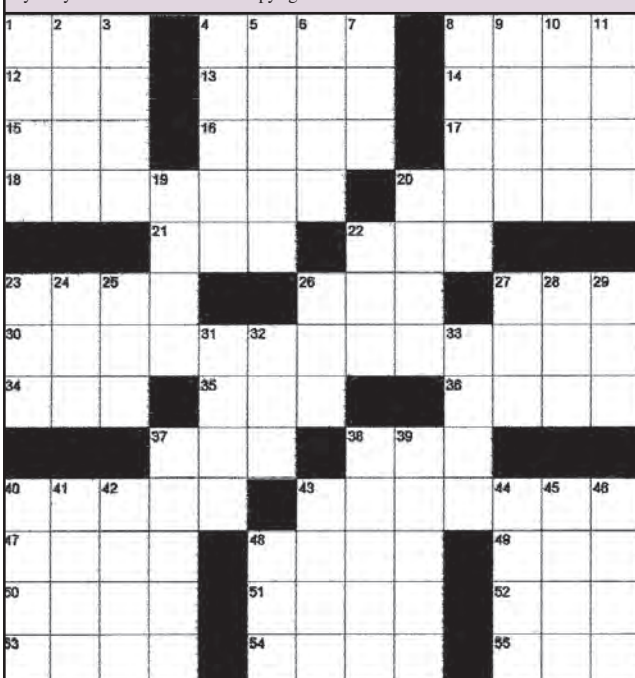
The words fall hard on modern ears, particularly in cultures where Christianity forms a key element of the broader social fabric. In such contexts, faith is understood more often than not to reinforce family commitments, rather than undermine them.

Although the instruction to "hate" is hyperbolic, Luke's first readers would have had little trouble seeing how following Jesus might create dissension in their families or other social relationships. The early history of Christianity is replete with stories of Christians who faced social ostracism or worse due to their faith.

To all those who would follow Him, Jesus' instruction is blunt but clear. Just as His face was firmly set on Jerusalem, so too disciples must fix their gaze on the goal. A farmer who looks backward plows crooked furrows, and disciples whose hearts are divided make poor followers. ❏

## Christian Crossword

By Judy Woodward Bates Copyright 2001 Clues from NIV Bible



### Across

- Leader of temple servants. (Neh. 7:47)
- Rush initials.
- Molten rock.
- One of Midian's kings. (Josh. 13:21)
- Greek letter or small amount.
- Adam and Eve's home.
- Mahal.
- "The Lord is ... \_\_\_ to anger." (Ps. 145:8)
- Clan listed in Ezekiel 8:6.
- Saul searched here for his father's donkeys. (1 Sam. 9:4)
- Son of Shiza. (1 Chron. 11:42)
- It helps one sleep.
- Cancer org. (abbrev.)
- "Give your rewards to someone \_\_\_." (Dan. 5:17)
- Certain over-water rescue. (abbrev.)
- "\_\_\_ them in their hands." (Luke 6:1)
- "Who may ascend the \_\_\_?" (Ps. 24:3)
- Climbing plant.

- Stitched border.
- A priest. (Neh. 12:12-15)
- Tribe listed in Rev. 7:5.
- KJV's spelling of this city. (Gen. 12:8)
- One of the 70 elders. (Num. 11:24-30)
- Son of Ham. (1 Chron. 1:8)
- Son of Zibeon. (Gen. 36:24)
- Father of one of the 12 spies. (Num. 13:5)
- Son of Caleb. (1 Chron. 4:15)
- Killer whale.
- Son of Shema. (1 Chron. 5:8)
- Computer lingo: MS-\_\_\_.
- East Indian tree.
- "Eloi, Eloi, \_\_\_ sabachthani?" (Matt. 27:45)
- Medical specialist. (abbrev.)
- Place listed in Neh. 11:31.
- Bridal path.
- "God's \_\_\_ foundation stands firm." (2 Tim. 2:19)
- Particle.
- "From the \_\_\_ of the bear." (1 Sam. 17:37)
- Directs.
- Cosam's son. (Luke 3:28)
- Blood vessel.
- Prophetess of Luke 2:36.
- Cain's brother. (Gen. 4:2)
- Measure of land.
- "Lie on \_\_\_ heaps." (Lam. 4:5)
- Son of Benjamin. (Gen. 46:21)
- Roman 54.
- "Some \_\_\_ way to arrest Jesus." (Mark 14:1)
- Banking machine.
- "Strike ... with a \_\_\_." (Mic. 5:1)
- Large vase.
- Drama degree.
- Son of Simeon. (Ex. 6:15)
- Provided nourishment.

- "A \_\_\_ for wild beasts!" (Zeph. 2:15)
- Name listed in Gen. 22:24.
- King of Tyre. (1 Kings 5:1)
- He divorced his foreign wife. (Ezek. 10:27)
- Name listed in Josh. 15:55.
- Ireland.
- Cyprinid fish.
- Descendant of Jonathan. (1 Chron. 8:36-37)
- Assistant.
- Heavy metal.
- Necessity.
- Actor \_\_\_ Holbrook.



## PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



### Sudanese officials raid Christian bookstores

**KHARTOUM, South Sudan** — Having deported scores of foreign Christians and demolished several church buildings in the past few months, Sudan continued ridding the country of Christianity in late February by raiding Christian bookstores in Khartoum and arresting Christians, sources said.

Men who described themselves as agents of Khartoum State Security confiscated books, films and archives Feb. 18 from the Evangelical Literature Centre (ELC), part of the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPEC) denominational headquarters, church leaders said.

"They took everything — not a single sheet of paper was left on the shelves," one church leader said. "They took the cinema, old movies and tapes and archives. They filled a big truck with our stuff from the ELC."

When SPEC leaders asked the security agents why they were taking the items away, they replied that they had "orders from above" to confiscate all Christian books, the church leaders said.

Prior to the raid, authorities of the National Intelligence and Security Services in Khartoum state sent a letter to SPEC leaders informing them of their plan to search the premises for Christian literature, according to the church leaders. They described the move as unlawful and unacceptable.

Security agents later confiscated two containers full of Christian books and Bibles at the SPEC headquarters adjoining the ELC, sources said.

### Rare moment happens in blasphemy case

**SHEIKHUPURA, Pakistan** — In a rare instance in Pakistan, a judge granted bail to a pastor accused of blaspheming Islam because the complainant admitted that he had mistakenly accused him, attorneys said.

Karma Patras, a 55-year-old pastor of Bado Malhi, Sangla Hill, had been languishing in Sheikhpura District Jail since October 2012 after preaching on Christ's sacrifice at a funeral Oct. 13 attended mainly by Christians. Some Muslims present thought he was speaking against the Islamic animal slaughter ritual observed at the time. Patras was confused when police showed up at his home later that day and arrested him on charges of defaming Islam.

Victims of false accusations of blasphemy in Pakistan usually spend months in jail without trial, and then many more months after conviction. If charges are dismissed it does not usually happen until cases reach appeal, as most trial judges cannot withstand the pressure of furious Islamic extremists. Retraction of an accusation also is rare in Pakistan.

"Patras' release is the rarest instance of a complainant in a blasphemy case retracting his statement," one attorney said. Pakistan is nearly 96 percent Muslim, according to Operation World. Christians make up 2.45 percent of the population.

### Libyan officials continue to arrest Christians

**BENGAZI, Libya** — Arrests of Christians who are accused of proselytizing in Libya continue, with a total of seven now known to be in custody including one reported to have been tortured, sources said.

Four expatriate Christians in the eastern coastal town of Benghazi were arrested Feb. 10, accused of proselytizing. Libya's Preventative Security Unit arrested the Egyptian, South African, Korean and dual Swedish-American Christians, who have yet to be officially charged.

Preventative Security spokesman Hussein Bin Hmeid said in a statement to Reuters that the four Christians originally arrested were printing books calling for conversion to Christianity. He said the country is 100 percent Muslim and that proselytizing "affects our national security."

Preventative Security is an internal police force formed during the Libyan Revolution by regional rebel leaders.

Another wave of arrests was said to have taken place Feb. 17 in Tripoli. Sources in Libya reported to contacts in Egypt that no one has been able to contact these detainees, learn their location or even get an estimate of the number of those said to be arrested.

# Definition of marriage

## Supreme Court urged to leave marriage case to states

**U**rging the Supreme Court not to legalize gay "marriage" for all 50 states, supporters of California Prop 8 say in a court brief that opposite-sex couples' unique ability to procreate — thus benefiting society by "creating and nurturing the next generation" — provides states with a rational reason to define marriage in the traditional sense.

The 65-page opening brief by ProtectMarriage.com — the official proponents of Prop 8 — asserts that children need a mother and a father, and it even quotes President Obama, a supporter of gay "marriage," as he underscored the need for fathers in children's lives.

The Supreme Court will hear two cases March 26–27 that could either affirm the historical definition of marriage or legalize gay "marriage" for the entire nation. One case concerns a portion of the Defense of Marriage Act that defines marriage for the federal government, while the other case involves Prop 8, a 2008 state constitutional amendment that defined marriage as between a man and a woman.

It is the Prop 8 case that could lead to the most wide-sweeping ruling, potentially wiping out similar constitutional amendments and laws in 41 states — and, overnight, legalizing gay "marriage." Currently only nine states recognize gay "marriage." The U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals overturned Prop 8.

### 'Broad public participation'

"Controversial social policy issues such as this are particularly well suited, of course, for the give and take of the democratic process, where individuals may persuade or be persuaded, and where broad public participation, compromise and incremental change are not only possible but likely," the ProtectMarriage.com brief states. "Decisions reached through this process are more likely to be regarded by a free people as legitimate and to be widely accepted than decisions reached in any other manner."

Governments have not limited marriage to opposite-sex couples out of any hatred of gays, but instead out of a desire to ensure children are raised in stable

homes, with a mother and father, the brief repeatedly states.

"The gendered definition of marriage has prevailed in all societies throughout human history not because of anti-gay animus but because marriage is closely connected to society's vital interests in the uniquely procreative nature of opposite-sex relationships," the brief says.

### 'Vital' interest of society

States provide marriage licenses and benefits to opposite-sex couples because society has a "vital" interest in "responsibly creating and nurturing the next generation," the brief states.

That unique ability to procreate can either help or harm a society, the brief asserts. It becomes harmful when children are born out of wedlock, without a mother or father, and grow up in an unstable home.

"An animating purpose of marriage is to increase the likelihood that children will be born and raised in stable and enduring family units by their own mothers and fathers," the brief states. "Because relationships between persons of the same sex do not have the capacity to produce children, they do not implicate this interest in responsible procreation and childrearing in the same way."

When parents do not take responsibility for raising their children, "society is often forced to assist through social welfare programs and other means."

The "indisputable difference" between same-sex and opposite-sex relationships in the ability to procreate "demonstrates that Proposition 8 is constitutional," because the Constitution requires only that a state "treat similarly situated persons similarly, not that it engage in gestures of superficial equality," the brief says.

Legalizing gay "marriage," the brief says, would transform "marriage from a public institution with well-established, venerable purposes focused on children into a private, self-defined relationship focused on adults." This would denigrate "the importance of mothers and fathers raising the children they create together." (BP)

**Gay "marriage" would denigrate "the importance of mothers and fathers raising the children they create together."**

**ProtectMarriage court brief**



Photo by Lonette Berg

## Preachers marks 50 years

**J**ames Preachers, pastor of J Mount Carmel Church, Coffee Springs, and director of missions for Sardis Baptist Association, celebrates 50 years of ministry service Feb. 17. He is pictured with a letter of commendation from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, a letter of congratulations from Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, and a plaque from Mount Carmel. (TAB)

# Focus on faith

By Bill Sorrell  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist



Photo by Joe Murphy/NBAE via Getty Images

Mike Conley (right) of the Memphis Grizzlies drives to the basket against Jeremy Lin of the Houston Rockets on Nov. 9, 2012, at the FedExForum in Memphis, Tenn.

## Memphis Grizzlies point guard Conley lives for Jesus on, off basketball court

**T**here was more than food on the menu for Mike Conley at a Memphis restaurant recently. He got a taste of humility.

As the Memphis Grizzlies point guard was eating with his father, Mike Conley Sr., a fan asked, "Mike Conley, can I have your autograph?"

As Conley Jr. reached to sign the paper, the fan snatched it away and gave it to Conley Sr., a world champion and Olympic gold and silver medal triple jumper.

"My dad started laughing and he was like, 'Yeah, you are still my son. I am no longer known just as your dad,'" Conley said.

Staying humble is one of the character traits that Conley said his father taught him, along with being respectful and honest, working hard and carrying himself at a high level.

Conley's mother, Rene, added another ingredient: faith.

"My mother is my biggest spiritual role model," he said. "She has great faith and has always been very religious — her mother and her mother down the line. Everything she has done in raising me, I really look up to her for it. She got me headed in the right direction."

Conley's journey of faith has taken him through the rigors of the NBA, with its challenges, criticisms and lofty goals.

"Life is much easier [with faith]," he said. "You cut out a lot of nonsense. There are obviously a lot of temptations in the NBA.

Being on TV, running into a bunch of people, you are always vulnerable to a lot of things. Being able to block that out and concentrate on your faith and living a good life is important."

Drafted in 2007 in the first round (fourth overall) out of Ohio State, Conley has spent his entire career in Memphis and this season is having near career highs in scoring (13.4

points per game), steals (2.2 per game) and 3-point field goal percentage (.371). He became the all-time assists leader Dec. 21 with 2,223 when he passed former Grizzlies point guard Jason Williams.

A key to Conley's accomplishments has been his unflappable demeanor, which puts the game into perspective.

"I understand that it's never really too bad or really too good," said Conley, who wears jersey number 11 because of his Oct. 11 birthday. "Having faith and believing in something regardless of the situation keeps you at an even keel and allows you to do the things you do."

Grizzlies forward Zach Randolph said Conley was brought to Memphis to be a leader.

"He gets on us," Randolph said. "He's not a rah-rah guy. He is a great person. He's got a great family and his faith has always been there."

As Conley watched his family overcome difficult situations, including the death of loved ones, he knew there was something that got them through.

"[My mother] always seemed to have some kind of strength in her," he said. "I just wanted to be like her more than anything."

Conley's message centers on Christ.

"Jesus means the world," he said. "Jesus means everything. It's what I live for. He is what I do my work for in the community, passing on as much as I can to anybody that needs it."

Conley prays during the day and attends Bible studies before road games. He is a member of New Haven Missionary Baptist Church, West Helena, Ark., where his uncle Rodney Corbin serves as pastor. At age 10, Conley was baptized at Christian Life Cathedral, Fayetteville, Ark, and he attended Eastern Star Baptist Church, Indianapolis, when his family moved.

"It's something that changed my life," said Conley of the

move, which happened when he was 12. "It got me really focused on basketball and allowed me to get where I am today."

Tony Parker, an All-Star point guard for the San Antonio Spurs who has won three NBA championships, calls Conley one of the league's 10 best point guards.

"He is one of the guys I have a lot of respect [for]," Parker said. "He is a great competitor, and I like the way he plays the game. He is very unselfish and aggressive when he needs to be. He plays good defense. He knows when to shoot, when to pass. He has great tempo and great patience."

Conley, who is 6 feet 1 inch tall and weighs 185 pounds, has used faith to overcome critics.

"My inspiration to keep going is just being motivated by all the people who said I couldn't do something in life, whether it is basketball, being too small or whatever it is," he said.

He relies on his favorite Bible verse of Isaiah 54:17, which says, "No act performed against you shall prosper."

### Handling adversity

"I forgave [the critics] after a while," he said. "You get used to everybody being so critical of you that you just go about your business and worry about getting better. I never said, 'I told you so,' or anything like that. I always thank them and try to use it in some way in a constructive way. I've grown in a lot of areas. I've been able to handle a lot of adversity, a lot of ups and downs."

Off the court, Conley plays video games, bowls and goes to movies. For the last two years he has been learning to play the piano.

He recently became engaged to Mary Peluso, whom he met at Ohio State.

"We have not set a [wedding] date," he said. "We are being real patient."

This transitional season, with its trades, has demanded patience as players adjust.

"Having faith and staying strong, just believing not only in myself but in my team and my new teammates and my coaching staff that we'll be alright is getting us through," Conley said. "Being a follower [of Christ], my life has changed. I have developed into the man that really appreciates life. I am not the perfect man. I make mistakes. I am willing to repent of them and sacrifice my time for others and try to be there for everybody else." ❧



Photo by Joe Murphy/NBAE via Getty Images

Mike Conley