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Digital devices in worship services

How far is too far?

123rf.com, graphic by Lauren C. Grim

Worshippers of all ages, even pastors use phones, tablets in church

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Bill Brown doesn't go anywhere without his iPad — not even the pulpit. His sermon outline is there, as is every sermon he has preached in the past year. His iPad also holds the church calendar and prayer list, study guides he uses in sermon preparation and e-books he can read whenever he has a spare moment. In short, Brown's iPad has become an integral part of his ministry as pastor of Beulah Baptist Church, Muscadine, in Cleburne Baptist Association.

"Having everything together in one place allows me to access what I need whenever I need it and from other devices if necessary," Brown said.

Millions of Americans now use some sort of electronic device to organize and manage aspects of daily life that used to require multiple books, calendars and notepads. According to a September 2013 study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, "91 percent of American adults own a cellphone, and many use the devices for much more than phone calls."

Those other uses include text messaging (81 percent), Internet access (60 percent), sending and receiving email (52 percent) and downloading apps (50 percent), the survey found. With those kinds of numbers, it is no surprise that the use of digital devices in churches, especially smartphones and e-readers, is on the rise. Simply put, these devices are going everywhere, church included, and convenience is often cited as the primary reason.

Less to carry

Alison Hoskins, a mother of three and a member of First Baptist Church, Huntsville, in Madison Baptist Association, said that reading the Bible on her iPhone reduces her load on Sunday mornings.

"All my children have their Bibles, which I end up holding," Hoskins said.

Brown's wife, Carol, echoed Hoskins' sentiments.

"My purse is so heavy with just

essentials it's wonderful not to have to carry a printed Bible. Plus I can enlarge the print and that helps me see better," she said.

Many worshippers use mobile phones and tablets to access Bible apps to follow along with Scripture readings. Some use the devices to take notes on the sermon. Churches have discovered other practical uses as well. For example, church nurseries no longer need to issue pagers to parents but simply text them on their cellphones when issues arise. Some people use their phones or tablets to give an offering online and often will do so during the normal collection time.

Increasingly preachers urge members to post their whereabouts and meaningful sermon passages to social media, according to South Carolina-based church consultant, blogger and author

"91 percent of American adults own a cellphone, and many use the devices for much more than phone calls."

Pew Internet and American Life Project study

George Bullard. However, using social media during worship is where some churchgoers, especially adults over 25, may begin to wonder if the devices are more distracting than helpful.

"I'm not against tweeting or posting to Facebook during worship, but I am cautious about the reason for such posts," said Bruce Fryer, a Sunday School teacher at First Baptist Church, Columbiana, in Shelby (See 'Benefits,' page 13)

Alabama Baptist Cooperative Program giving falls short

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

The year was 2008 and all Americans remember it well — the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression.

It also was the last time Alabama Baptists made their Cooperative Program (CP) giving goal.

In fact, Alabama Baptists exceeded the \$44,585,000 goal by almost \$200,000 despite the economic culture. The next year

wouldn't turn out the same.

They missed the 2009 goal of \$46 million by 5.13 percent, or \$2,359,421, and came in more than \$1 million less than 2008's giving.

And the trend continued downward, even as the goal dropped each year.

The 2013 figures indicate giving fell short of the \$42 million goal by 5.38 percent, or \$2,259,800.

"The economy continues to have a negative impact on our unified

budget called the Cooperative Program," said Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM).

"Despite this fact, the entities of our state convention have been frugal and wise during these challenging times," he said. "At the SBOM, we continue to do ministry audits of all positions and ministry assignments. Our full-time staff is only two-thirds the size it was some (See 'Alabama,' page 6)

COMMENT

A Faith for the World

Baptists are a missionary people. We believe Jesus' Great Commission recorded in Matthew 28:19–20 to “go into all the world” is a binding command on Christians everywhere and for all time. Mark's version of the Great Commission, Mark 16:15–16, makes it clear that as Christians go they are to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. Those who believe the gospel “shall be saved,” the writer declares. Those who do not accept it “shall be condemned.”

That makes taking the gospel to the whole world the most important task facing Christians; a task with eternal consequences.

Today Baptists and other Christians actively work at taking the gospel to people of every tribe and every tongue. Current missions strategy breaks the world's population into people groups, referring to groups who share a common language and culture. The International Mission Board (IMB) reports a total of 11,263 people groups in the world. Of that number 2,945 are considered “unreached and unengaged” according to an IMB website. That is defined as less than 2 percent of the population being Christian. The number of people groups with more than 100,000 population considered unreached and unengaged is 348, according to the website.

Unreached, unengaged

Looking at the numbers another way, about 191 million people make up the unreached, unengaged people groups. When one looks at the population of groups with 2 to 5 percent Christians, the number swells to 3.9 billion, according to IMB sources. That is almost 55 percent of the world's 7.2 billion population.

Christians make up about 32 to 33 percent of the world's population, but that percentage is rising. According to the International Bulletin of Missionary Research, every day about 82,000 people become Christians using the broadest definition of the term. That is about 40 percent of the 215,000 people born each day.

Of those 82,000, only about 6,000 will be found in North America. Christianity's greatest



THOUGHTS
By Bob Terry

growth will be found in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Some Baptist leaders urge missions activity as a way of bringing in the kingdom of God. For more than 200 years Matthew 24:14 has spurred missions zeal in some. The verse reads, “And the gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.”

Some conclude the verse teaches that once the gospel is preached in every nation the Lord Jesus will return. If that is correct, then Jesus' Second Coming could not happen until the gospel is preached in “the whole world” because Jesus cannot come until Christians share the gospel to every tongue and every tribe, that teaching holds.

Some question linking that verse and the return of our Lord. There is no way of determining how long “then” is, the questioning goes. Does it mean immediately or another 1,000 years?

More recently scholars have begun debating whether or not the early church believed the gospel penetrated the whole world in their lifetime. In Colossians 1:23 the apostle Paul urged the Colossian Christians not to move away from the hope of the gospel “which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven.” In verse 6 of that chapter, the apostle wrote of the gospel coming to the Colossians “just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing.”

Most Bible students understand these and similar references to be hyperbole, not statements of fact. The apostle was trying to illus-

trate the breath of the gospel's impact, not say that the gospel had been preached in the whole world.

Whether or not that interpretation offers insight into understanding Matthew 24:13 is up to the individual reader to determine.

At its core, the Christian motivation for sharing the gospel is not to bring about the return of the Lord. It is because the Christian faith is a faith for the whole world.

Jesus was crystal clear when He said, “For God so loved the world” (John 3:16). God's love is not selective. It knows no outsiders. It plays no favorites. The Bible teaches that every soul is made in the image of God, and God loves every soul made in His image.

Sacrificial love

One biblical scholar wrote God's love “leaps over every barrier to embrace persons simply because they are a member of the human race.”

John 3:16 teaches God saw a world that was perishing and loved every bit of it so much that He sent His only Son.

The word used here for love is *agapao*. It speaks of a sacrificial love. *Agapao* is not based on the need of the one being loved but on the choice of the one loving. God chose to sacrificially love a world that could not save itself and provided a way of escape — His only Son as an eternal sacrifice for sin.

In 2 Peter 3:9 one reads, “The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” When Jesus declared, “For God so loved the world...” He made the same point. God loves every person everywhere and longs for every person everywhere to respond to Him in faith and love.

The Good News of the gospel is that God loves the world — everyone in it. As the apostle John wrote in 1 John 4:19, “We love because He first loved us.”

While God's love is poured out freely on all people, it is forced on none. God's divine initiative of sacrificially loving the world requires a human response. Jesus not only said, “For God so loves the world,” He also said, “that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Only by personal faith in God's sacrificial love can anyone escape “perishing” and have “eternal life.”

That is why the Christian faith is a faith for the world. That is why Baptists are a missions people: so everyone everywhere may know they are loved by God and that by accepting His sacrificial love demonstrated in Jesus' death on the cross, they can be moved from perishing to life eternal.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

'DELICATE TOPIC'

I am writing to thank you for your recent article “Talk About a Delicate Topic” in the Jan. 9, 2014, issue of *The Alabama Baptist*. As an attorney who frequently deals with the legal side of such issues, I can see the drastic and sometimes destructive problems that are caused by a lack of planning by an individual for the end of his or her life. I am grateful for others like yourself

who help to spread the importance of such documents to everyone. Failure to plan ahead for such measure can have a negative effect on a recently departed person's friends and family, both internally and in their relationships with one another.

When I speak about estates and other end-of-life documents I tell people that end-of-life documents are a way to give peace of mind to oneself and a gift of

peace of mind and assurance to those who survive you.

I appreciate others who send the same message in order to support people in what is a difficult but very important topic.

David Benton King
Gadsden, Ala.





"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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Religion & ethics

Advanced technology complicates decisions about life and death

Making the decision to take a loved one off life support will likely never get any easier, and the questions that swirl around the decision will remain.

But "Scripture says that there is a time to live and a time to die. It is appointed for man to die so there comes a time when a person dies, and I don't think it is wise to continue that life without hope and justify technology to sustain a life just to sustain a life," said Jeff Riley, professor of ethics and chairman of the division of theological and historical studies at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Acknowledging that every case should be evaluated on its own merits, Riley said, "No set of standards will cover every case. We will never have a straightforward list of criterion. As Christians we seek wisdom from God as we consider the counsel of medical professionals."

And while technology allows for so many more options, it also is the advancement of technology that has complicated the decision-making process, he said.

"We don't want to avoid technology. It is good," he said. "However, prior to the 1960s, we didn't have the technology to keep us alive without at least lower brain function. Significant brain trauma, cardiac arrest or lung failure would typically lead to death. If there were trauma to the head, particularly the brain stem, then the heart or lungs would shut down. The person would die because of the relationship between the heart, lungs and brain."

How does technology fit in?

Today "technology has allowed us to resuscitate the heart and stimulate the lung function," he said. "When there is a disconnect between the brain, lungs and heart ... we can be put on a machine to breathe and force blood through the body.

"The question is, 'What is death and what is life and how does technology fit into this?'" Riley explained.

And just because technology can keep a person breathing even without brain activity, removing someone from life support would not equate to killing the person, he said. "It would allow death to run its course.

"If the condition of the brain would be the cause of death, you are not contributing to the person's death if you take the ventilator off after 24 hours of no brain activity."

Still it is hard to make the final call even with official test results indicating cessation of brain activity. And in all cases the person who is dying should be afforded value and dignity until the end, Riley said.

"We can see the breathing going on and the heart beat, but brain activity can't be seen without significant tests.

"Death is defined as the cessation of body

functions or irreversible cessation of [circulatory and respiratory functions or all functions of the entire brain]," Riley said. "If there is no upper or lower brain activity, then is it possible for the heart and lung to function? In rare cases, it might for a short period of time. ... If the brain stem is not functioning correctly or is dead, then the normal way our body works is that we would go into cardiac arrest and die."

Riley suggested one gage to use in making the decision about whether a person should be kept on life support is whether the person truly has a chance of recovery. Is there a way for the person's brain to recover and for the



123rf.com

person to live apart from technology?

"Cessation of life is the question," he said. "How much brain activity is necessary for life, for consciousness? What is the relationship of consciousness to being a human being, a person?"

"Even so, as long as the heart is pumping and the lungs are functioning, a person as a person is alive. Death occurs when all shut down." (TAB)

Ethicists criticize treatment of brain-dead patients

Many doctors are questioning continued medical procedures on a 13-year-old California girl declared brain-dead in early December 2013, calling interventions to provide nutrition to a dead body wrong and unethical.

Jahi McMath was pronounced dead by the coroner's office after suffering rare complications from a Dec. 9 tonsillectomy. Her parents, unwilling to disconnect Jahi from machines that keep her heart beating artificially, have transferred her from an Oakland hospital to an unnamed facility. The McMath family lawyer announced Jan. 8 that Jahi's new doctors had inserted a tube in her throat and another tube to provide nutrition to her stomach.

Many people don't understand the differences between a coma, persistent vegetative state and brain death, said Arthur Caplan, head of the division of bioethics at NYU Langone Medical Center in New York City. By moving the lungs up and down, a ventilator can "give the appearance of life," Caplan said.

But in fact, "brain death" is no different than any other sort of death: A brain-dead person is no longer alive. The term simply describes how the death was determined.

According to the Uniform Determination of Death Act, adopted by most states, death is defined as "irreversible cessation of circulatory and respiratory functions" or "irreversible cessation of all functions of the entire brain, including the brain stem."

Some of the differences between states of consciousness and brain death are:

Brain death: These patients are no longer alive. There has been an irreversible

cessation of all activity in both the brain and the brain stem. Reflexes that go through the spinal cord may persist even in a brain-dead state.

Coma: These patients are alive, but in a state of eyes-closed, depressed consciousness from which they cannot be aroused. Coma is distinguished from brain death by the presence of brain stem responses, spontaneous breathing or nonpurposeful motor responses. Coma has three possible outcomes: progression to brain death, recovery of consciousness or evolution to a state of chronically depressed consciousness, such as a vegetative state or minimally conscious state.

Vegetative state: Patients in vegetative states are alive but have severely impaired consciousness, although their eyes may open spontaneously. The eye opening may give the impression of consciousness, but there is no awareness of the environment. These patients do not acknowledge the examiner; they do not attend or track objects that are presented to them; their movements are nonpurposeful; they do not speak.

Minimally conscious state: These patients are alive, with a severe alteration in consciousness with intermittent but inconsistent behaviors suggesting awareness. Minimally conscious patients may occasionally have purposeful movements, and they may track motions with their eyes or speak.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Robert Stevens, associate professor of neuroscience/critical care at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, was a source for this story. (RNS)

Someone You Should Know

By Leigh Pritchett, *The Alabama Baptist*

James Messer



MESSER

*First Baptist Church, Tillman's Corner
Mobile Baptist Association*

FAVORITE VERSES: Romans 8:28 and Jeremiah 33:3

FAVORITE HYMN: "He Touched Me"

HOBBIES: Watching or attending Ole Miss football games

FAMILY STATUS: Married for 46 years to Toby; three children,

Jimmy, Chris and Amanda; and seven grandchildren

James Messer, 68, has been in the ministry for 49 years. For 20 years he was a pastor in Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama, where he served at First Baptist Church, Creola, and First Baptist Church, St. Elmo, both in Mobile Baptist Association. For the last 29 years, he has been a full-time evangelist. He has preached in more than 1,000 revivals in the Southeast, Alaska and India. His ministry, JEM Ministries (www.jamesmessenger.com), also has sponsored 50 Bible conferences throughout the Southeast. He is president of the Alabama Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists, serving the second time in four years.

Q: What influences in your life pointed you to the ministry?

A: The death of my father. My father wasn't a Christian. I became a Christian at 13. He died when I was 17. The fact that I never knew for sure about his faith in Christ led me to make certain that others heard the gospel of Christ. It breaks my heart that, if he's not in heaven, it's my fault.

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

A: I really knew before my dad died that I was called to preach. He asked me to stay there and help him until the family was back on our feet. He died about two weeks later.

Q: What does your ministry demand?

A: It demands a lot of prayer, a lot of Bible study, a lot of practicing what you say and study about, of loving God and loving people and thus trying to bring them together.

Q: How do family members support you?

A: My family is very supportive. They support me by being willing to sacrifice their time with me so that I can do what God has called me to do. They serve the Jesus that I serve.

Q: What do you get from the ministry?

A: Real joy, real peace, real confidence that my future is going to be much better than my past because of grace and faith.

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

A: I'm going to try to keep on until Jesus comes or He takes me home.

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

A: I hope that I will mature in my ministry and be pleasing to my Master Jesus.

Q: What difference has Jesus Christ made in your life?

A: Everything, all things. Without Him, I wouldn't be talking to you. 🙏

If you know of a person who should be featured as "Someone You Should Know," send his or her name, a contact number and the reason you think he or she should be featured to: Someone You Should Know, c/o The Alabama Baptist, 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209 or news@thealabamabaptist.org.



Photo by Julie Walters

Andrew Mann led one of the devotional times for the WMU meeting. Mann serves in the Bronx as pastor/executive director of Graffiti 2 Church and Community Ministries with the assistance of Proof, who works beside him in the ministry as a professional therapy dog (see story, page 5). 'WMU brings a breath of life to a church,' he said. 'You are such a blessing. Through your Project HELP focus on Human Exploitation, you helped raise awareness in our area of needs related to human trafficking in New York City.'

Raising the missions bar

National WMU board focuses on missions support

Raising the bar of missions involvement was the challenge woven throughout national Woman's Missionary Union's (WMU) board meeting, Jan. 11-13, at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega. It also was a time to look at missions offerings for the upcoming seasons — approving one mission board's decision to keep the same goal despite missing it for the past four, and possibly five, years and the other mission board's decision to reduce its goal by \$10 million.

"With Jesus' words in Mark 8:34 ... the bar was raised for those following Jesus," National WMU President Debby Akerman said in her address. "For the disciples He had called, as well as those who were the unnamed, not yet committed faces in the crowd, Jesus raised the bar of discipleship to a level that would now require whole-hearted surrender, sacrifice and service.

"WMU in our churches strengthens every generation to live surrendered to the call of Jesus to follow Him. As WMU guides our churches to look at the world through the eyes of Jesus and to love the world through the heart of God ... they will have a biblical, missional worldview."

Goals set for missions offerings

Tom Elliff, president of the International Mission Board (IMB), also illustrated the need for raising the bar of missions involvement with some statistics:

▶ 75 percent of the world's population live in areas hostile to the Christian faith.

▶ Almost two-thirds of IMB's budget comes from the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions (LMCO). This offering provides funding for the almost 4,900 missionaries on the field. Currently there are 864 strategic need requests, but the current budget will only allow 576 new personnel to be sent. There are missionary candidates in

the application process who could fill the remaining strategic needs if more funding was available.

"Missions involvement cannot be limited to a trip or a focus for one week during the week of prayer," Elliff said. "We must have a furnace of prayer, 365 days a year, to pray for an awakening across our nation and to pray for the nations."

That's why IMB officials wanted to keep the

LMCO goal at \$175 million, he said. Even though the giving of Southern Baptists has been at least \$25 million below the goal each year since it moved to \$175 million in 2009, Elliff said the goal is not too high.

What is needed is a spiritual awakening, for the eyes of Christians to be opened and hearts to be broken for the lostness in the world, he said.

North American Mission Board officials are taking a different approach with the 2015 Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions (AAEO). They

requested a \$10 million decrease from the 2014 goal of \$70 million to \$60 million for 2015. NAMB has been \$12 to \$15 million shy of the goal each year since moving to \$70 million in 2010.

"To fund the number of missionaries and church plants needed in North America, we need an Annie offering of \$100 million, but setting a goal we miss ... each year is discouraging and it puts a number in peoples' minds that's not real," NAMB spokesperson Mike Ebert told *The Alabama Baptist*. "Setting the goal at \$60 million makes it attainable and lets Southern Baptists know more accurately where the offering currently stands. In the meantime we are working on ways to share the needs with churches in hopes that we can start building toward that \$100 million."

National WMU's executive board approved both goals as well as adopted a new achievement plan for Royal Ambassadors (RA), called RA Trek, to be available in fall 2014. (WMU, TAB)



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Andrew Mann (standing) is executive director and pastor of Graffiti 2 Church and Community Ministries in the South Bronx. Here he helps students on computers as part of one of the ministries' children and youth programs.



Photo courtesy of Andrew Mann

'Missionary dog'

Proof accompanies her owner to Alabama as he shares about his work in NYC's South Bronx

By Julie Payne
The Alabama Baptist

Her weary expression and overall appearance revealed telltale signs the woman was experiencing a hard time in life.

But her countenance changed as soon as she spotted Proof, a yellow Labrador retriever. Before Proof's owner, Andrew Mann, could even utter a response, the woman had already asked Mann if she could pet Proof and was sitting on the ground with the dog. The cares of the world seemingly disappeared as Proof lovingly climbed into her lap and began licking her hands.

"Proof is not a 'cuddly' dog whatsoever," Mann noted of his dog's personality, but "they sat on the floor (together) for five ... minutes."

When the woman got up to leave, she turned back to Mann and — looking at Proof with tears in her eyes — said, "That dog is proof God exists."
"That was week one of (me) having Proof," Mann noted. "We have called Proof a 'missionary dog.' I do believe that ... if God can work through Proof then God can work through us for sure."

Mann, who served in several capacities with the North American Mission Board (NAMB) beginning as a summer missionary, is the executive director and pastor of Graffiti 2 Church and Community Ministries located in the South Bronx of New York City.

Originally from Missouri, Mann attended New York University as a freshman. That year he became involved with the ministry of Graffiti Church located in the Lower East

Side of Manhattan, a Bible-based church that strives "with committed hands and practical hearts" to serve its community, providing a safe haven for children, youth and adults. It was during that timeframe Mann felt a growing call to urban missions work and urban ministry.

Despite transferring to Wheaton College in Illinois, Mann still returned every summer to Graffiti as a summer missionary. During his last stint as a summer missionary, he was invited to meet with Graffiti's pastor/director, Taylor Field, who began to share with Mann his larger vision for New York City to begin other likeminded ministries and churches in various neighborhoods. "[Field] floored me and surprised me when he asked me if I would begin the next Graffiti up in the South Bronx," Mann said.

Mann began to pray about this unique ministry opportunity and ultimately visited the Mott Haven neighborhood he and Field had discussed, a neighborhood with about 90,000 residents — 30,000 of those under the age of 18.

"It was a hot summer day — fire hydrants were popped open, kids were out in the street playing — and I just had a strong sense of the needs of the families there as I ... prayed," Mann recalled of his initial visit.

In August 2005, Mann moved to the South Bronx to begin ministry work there, and today Graffiti 2 offers both a thriving ministry and a church.

Afterschool programs are one of Graffiti 2's primary ministries, which include a first through fifth grade program as well as a sixth through 12th grade program called G.S.A.L.T. (Graffiti Serving and Leading Teenagers) that offers job-training components.



Photo by Neisha Fuson

Andrew Mann has owned Proof since 2006. The pair work together to share the gospel in the South Bronx of New York City.

Proof, Mann's lab and a canine assistance animal trained as a professional therapy dog, has been a popular fixture at Graffiti 2 for nearly eight years. Mann got Proof in 2006, and after they were trained together "she got on a plane and flew back with me to New York where she's been living — and you might say ministering — ever since," Mann said.

Reading incentive for kids

Dogs like Proof can be used as a reading incentive, as an anger de-escalation tool to calm kids down or to help with social interaction, Mann said, noting that Proof provides some of these roles within the Graffiti 2 programs.

"Over the years I've come to realize a very unique thing at Graffiti 2 is a very strong sense of family," Mann said. "Proof is kind of like the family dog. She adds to that environment and adds to that sense of 'hominess' for our church and for our ministry."

When invitations are extended for Mann to share about the ministry of Graffiti 2, Proof often will accompany her owner.

Mann, one of NAMB's Week of Prayer Missionaries to be featured in 2014, visited Alabama with Proof in early January. Their stops included the national Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) January board meeting (see story, page 4), and Shades Crest Baptist Church, Bluff Park.

David George, president of WMU Foundation, said Mann's intense love for the people of the Bronx is evident. "It is his home and he has a lifelong call to minister there and be Christ's love to the people he meets and works with there," George said.

"Also, we loved getting to know Proof and ... how she assists in the ministry of Graffiti 2," he noted of those visiting with Mann and Proof while they were in Ala-

bama. "She truly is a missionary dog."

Through the years, Mann has been able to use Proof as a tool to share the gospel, noting that the nature of his relationship with Proof can model the nature of God's relationship with His children.

"First of all Proof ... didn't love me first, I loved her first," Mann explained. "I had to go seek her out. She would've never known I existed if I hadn't come and gotten her."

"There are times that she's disciplined ... she eats food up off the floor not knowing it will make her sick and I have to clean up for her afterward," he said. "And ... how much is that true for us in our sin, that we do things we may not have a clue (will) ... hurt us, and then God will discipline us for that but it's also in the process of restoring us," he noted.

And just like the woman who had stopped in her tracks to sit down with Proof that day, sometimes Proof's mere presence has opened up unexpected doors for ministry.

'A reason to stop'

Mann recalled a time when he and Proof were walking down his block in New York City and on the corner was a particular man he had seen many times before. The man stopped him and began asking him questions about Proof. It turned out this man was experiencing problems in life and really just wanted an excuse to talk to Mann.

"There I stood ... with this ... guy in tears, talking to me as a pastor," Mann said. "If he hadn't had a reason to stop and talk to me, I don't think he ever would have."

For more information about Mann and Proof and the ministry work of Graffiti 2, visit www.graffiti2ministries.org and www.anniearmstrong.com/andrewmann. ☞

"I do believe that ... if God can work through Proof then God can work through us for sure."

**Andrew Mann, executive director and pastor
Graffiti 2 Church and Community Ministries**

Across ALABAMA'S Associations

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

BIRMINGHAM

► **Ray McKenzie** resigned as pastor of **First Church, Leeds**, and is now pastor of Cloverdale Church, Dothan. ► **Moody Radio and Radical**, the resource ministry of David Platt, pastor of **The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham**, have announced an official partnership for a new daily teaching program called Radical with David Platt. The program will be 24 minutes and features Platt's teaching from The Church at Brook Hills and various conferences. The program will air on Moody Radio owned and operated stations and select affiliates during the spring.

COLUMBIA

► **Ray McKenzie** is the new pastor of **Cloverdale Church, Dothan**. He previously served as pastor of First Church, Leeds. He also has served as pastor of Shiloh Church, Saraland, and Stave Creek Church, Jackson. He holds a bachelor's degree in religious education from Mobile College and a master's degree in religious educa-



MCKENZIE

tion and a doctor of ministry degree with a concentration in discipleship from New Orleans Seminary. He and his wife, Sandra, have two children and one grandchild.

DEKALB

► **Roger White** has resigned as pastor of **Liberty Church, Crossville**, and will begin Jan. 26 as pastor of Friendship Church, Springville.

MONTGOMERY

► **Gene Kim** is the new minister of college and missions for **Eastmont Church, Montgomery**.



KIM

He holds a master's of divinity from Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in Birmingham. He previously served as minister of children and youth for First Church, Chalkville, in Birmingham. He and his wife, Melissa, have one child. Mike Northcutt is pastor.

MADISON

► **Mount Zion Church, Huntsville**, will host its third annual Women's Conference Feb.

28-March 1. The keynote speaker will be Vicki Courtney and the worship leader will be Shaun Groves. The conference theme is "Poured Out: In Jesus' Name." It will be a weekend of worship and breakout sessions with a focus on serving Christ beyond the church walls. For information and registration visit www.pouredoutconference.com. Ron Madison is pastor.

MOBILE

► **Cloverdale Church, Grand Bay**, gave a total of \$1,403 to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. Their goal was \$600. Sissy Mason led the Lottie Moon effort.

ST. CLAIR

► **Roger White** will begin Jan. 26 as pastor of **Friendship Church, Springville**. He holds

a master's in theology and doctor of philosophy with focus in theology from Trinity College of the Bible Seminary in Newburgh, Ind. He previously served

as pastor of Liberty Church, Crossville, and as pastor of several other churches.



WHITE

Alabama updates

People, churches making news across the state

Deerfoot's Cole to retire after 57 years of ministry

After 57 years of ministry, Tommy Cole, minister of music for Deerfoot Baptist Church, Trussville, will retire Jan. 26.

Cole, whose father was a bivocational music director, said that one Sunday morning while in the choir he felt the call to enter both church and school music.

At just 16 years old, Cole would fill in for his father when needed and also directed children's choirs.

He went on to attend Howard College (now Samford University) in Birmingham, where he earned a bachelor's in music education in 1961. He would later earn a master's in music education from the University of Montevallo.



COLE

Throughout his career, Cole has served at several Alabama Baptist churches, including as minister of music for First Baptist Church, Attalla; MeadowBrook Baptist Church, Gadsden; Coosa Valley Baptist Church, Rainbow City; and Dwight Baptist Church, Gadsden. He has served as minister of music for Deerfoot Baptist since 2006.

Along with roles in the church, Cole also has served in Attalla City Schools and at Westbrook Christian School in Rainbow City, teaching English, band and chorus.

"I give my thanks to God who has led me and to the churches and schools that have invested in my life and ministry," Cole said.

Deerfoot will hold a retirement reception for Cole on Jan. 26 from 2 to 4 p.m. At 4 p.m. Cole will provide a brief concert with both vocal and piano solos.

"This church has been one of the most loving churches," Cole noted of his service at Deerfoot.

Roger Willmore, pastor of Deerfoot, said Cole has brought years of experience, wisdom and an obvious love for the Lord to the congregation.

"Tom Cole has been a colleague in ministry, but more than that he has been a faithful friend and encourager," Willmore noted. "He is a consistent, faithful, trustworthy, Christlike servant of God."

Cole has one son and one grandchild. Cole is available for interim and supply positions as well as revivals. To contact him, call 205-467-3014. (Julie Payne)

Alabama churches reassessing where to send missions dollars

(continued from page 1)
years ago. Other entities have made similar adaptations."

And while CP giving nationwide has been affected, Alabama has led the Southern Baptist Convention in giving through the CP since the 2008-2009 SBC fiscal year.

In 2013, Alabama Baptists contributed more than \$20 million total to the International Mission Board and nearly \$10 million total to the North American Mission Board.

'Missions gifts'

"These totals do not include funds sent directly from Alabama Baptist churches to the mission boards," said Bobby DuBois, SBOM associate executive director.

"Some of our churches are deciding to send more of their missions gifts directly to the SBC mission boards," he said.

"Some of our churches also are reducing the percentage of undesignated receipts historically allocated to CP and are using those funds to support local church missions efforts."

Lance said, "Our prayer is that 2014 will be a good growth year for giving through the Cooperative Program. This will make a difference in the lives of people in Alabama and around the world."

"We are grateful to Alabama Baptists for being pacesetters in CP giving and in contributing to our approved special offerings," he said. "May we continue to be faithful in this important area of missions commitment."

To learn more about Alabama Baptists' One Percent CP Challenge, visit www.alsbom.org or call Jim Swendenburg at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 283. ☞



Photo courtesy of Cary Hatcher

HARTFORD BAPTIST LADIES KNIT HEADBANDS, CAPS FOR CHILDREN IN NEPAL

Hartford Baptist Church in Geneva Baptist Association is reaching halfway across the world to Nepal to help keep children warm. A group of ladies from Hartford Baptist knitted more than 140 headbands and stocking caps for children in the primarily Hindu and Buddhist nation. The knitted items will be delivered in late January by a missionary from the church who serves in Nepal. Pictured left to right are: (front row) Stephanie Riley, Amanda Dillard, Mary Ann Shields and Patricia Guilford; (back row) Leesa Fleming, Lisa Moseley, Alice Dean, Angela Helms and Anita Fulford. Chris Kroll is pastor.

in Loving Memory

of Alabama Baptist leaders



William K. Weaver Jr.

UMobile founding president dies

The University of Mobile's (UMobile) founding president William K. Weaver Jr. died Jan. 13. He was 95.

Weaver served as president of UMobile (formerly Mobile College) from 1961 to 1984 and was most recently chancellor of the school.

Mark Foley, president of UMobile, said it took courage and determination for Weaver and other leaders such as J.L. Bedsole and T.T. Martin to start a college.

"To start a college from scratch — I can't imagine a more daunting task, yet that is what Dr. Weaver did. To build a college from the early days when it was little more than a cut off mound in the middle of a pine forest to a university with more than 1,600 students on 880 acres is amazing," Foley said. "I know Bill was proud of Mobile College and the University of Mobile and all that it has become. I will miss his humor, grace, smile and encouragement."



WEAVER

Born in Oxford and a 1936 graduate of Talladega High School, Weaver graduated in 1940 with a bachelor of arts from Howard College (now Samford University) in Birmingham and in 1943 with a master of theology from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. He was awarded the honorary doctor of divinity from Samford and the honorary doctor of law from UMobile.

He was ordained to the ministry by First Baptist Church, Talladega, in 1942 and served in World War II as a chaplain for the U.S. Navy. He served as pastor of First Baptist Church, Sylacauga, from 1950 to 1961 as well as in state denominational work in Alabama and Kentucky and in various national denominational roles. He served as chairman of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions and chairman of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. He also was the first director of religious activities at Howard College and was a deacon and Sunday School teacher at First Baptist Church, Mobile.

He was extremely active in community roles including being a Rotarian since 1950. He was selected as Mobilian of the Year 1983.

Weaver was preceded in death by his wife, Annie. He is survived by one daughter, three grandsons and one great-granddaughter. (TAB, UMobile)

Phillip Ellen

Chandler Mountain's pastor dies

Phillip Ellen, pastor of Chandler Mountain Baptist Church, Steele, died Jan. 10. He was 74.

Ellen graduated from Etowah High School and also attended Samford University in Bir-

mingham where he played football under Coach Bobby Bowden.

Ellen served as pastor of Whites Chapel Baptist Church (now CrossPoint Community Church, Gadsden) for 40 years. Before stepping down as pastor there in 2005, the church's attendance had grown from 100 to about 1,500.



ELLEN

He was founder of several ministries including Coosa Christian School and Whites Chapel's bus ministry for area children.

He also took many missions trips to locations including Mexico, Albania, Ukraine, Russia and Honduras.

Ellen is survived by his wife of 54 years, Bobbie; four children; 12 grandchildren; and one great-grandchild. (TAB)

Arthur 'Wayne' Crumpton

FBC Alabaster pastor emeritus dies

Arthur "Wayne" Crumpton, pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church, Alabaster, died Jan. 12. He was 75.

Crumpton felt called into the ministry when he was 18 and shared his first sermon at his home church of Powderly Baptist Church. He was licensed to preach from the same church in 1957 and started working to pay for college.

Crumpton earned a bachelor's degree from Howard College in Birmingham (now Samford University) in 1961 and a master of divinity degree (1973) and a doctorate (1978) from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

He began serving as associate pastor of South Park Baptist Church, Birmingham, and was ordained in 1961. There he served alongside pastor E.E. Wells. Crumpton was quoted as giving credit to Wells for teaching him how to minister to people. "In order to reach people for Christ," Crumpton said, "you have to go where they are, knock on doors and get down with them, people to people. That's what I enjoy."



CRUMPTON

He later served as pastor of Green Valley Baptist Church, Hoover; Old Spanish Fort Baptist Church, Spanish Fort; and First Baptist Church, Alabaster, until his retirement in 2003.

He served as president of the Birmingham Pastor's Conference, president of New Orleans Seminary Alumni for the State of Alabama, moderator for Shelby Baptist Association and on the board of directors for Alabama Citizens Action Program.

Crumpton was preceded in death by his wife, Carole, and two sons. He is survived by two children, four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. (Neisha Fuson)

Clashing views

Pastors disagree about President Obama being part of events foretold in Scripture

Two prominent Texas Baptist pastors provided starkly different appraisals of the Obama Administration during January and both resulted in national headlines.

Robert Jeffress, pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, initiated the exchange with a claim in a soon-to-be released book that President Obama's re-election is paving the way for the Antichrist.

Dwight McKissic, pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church in nearby Arlington, responded with a blog saying he believes Scripture predicts the rise to power of African-American leaders such as Martin Luther King, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Fred Luter, the first black president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

McKissic said Scripture predicts the prominence of African-American leaders. He contends that Psalm 68:31, which reads, "Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God" points to an age where those of African heritage would "experience political and spiritual empowerment and renewal before the coming of the Lord within a Judeo-Christian context."

"In this obscure verse, God was showing David something," McKissic said. "I'm not saying this with certainty, but it appears that David was saying that descendants of Africa would have a political impact beyond Africa. David said princes shall 'come out of' Egypt or Africa. Africa would be their roots, but their 'shoots' would be elsewhere."

McKissic bases many of his arguments on J. Vernon McGee's reading of the genealogies of Genesis 10. McGee argues that these

genealogies of Noah's sons foretell the development of the races and mankind in history.

McGee believed the world's first great civilization, coming out of Africa, represented descendants of Noah's son Ham. That lasted until the time of Abraham, introduced in Genesis 11 in the lineage of Shem, followed by the ascendancy of Western civilization underway during Jesus' lifetime.

Paving the way

In his book, Jeffress said that while past attempts to predict the specific date for Christ's return were misguided, Christians can recognize prophetic events that might be taking place in the world and America's government today.

"For the first time in history a president of our country has openly proposed altering one of society's (not to mention God's) most fundamental laws: that marriage should be between a man and a woman," Jeffress said. "While I am not suggesting that President Obama is the Antichrist, the fact that he was able to propose such a sweeping change in God's law and still win re-election by a comfortable margin illustrates how a future world leader will be able to oppose God's laws without any repercussions."

"It is significant that the Antichrist will be able to persecute God's people, seek to change God's laws and usurp people's freedom of worship and commerce without any recorded opposition."

"Prior to the appearance of the Antichrist, people will have already become so numb to immorality, apathetic and even sympathetic to the persecution of religious 'extremists' (which will be the new term for committed Christians) and conditioned to the government's usurpation of personal freedom, that the Antichrist's rise to power will go unchallenged," he said. (Compiled from ABP stories)

EDITOR'S NOTE — How would you respond to these arguments? Email us at news@thealabamabaptist.org.

— Correction —

In the Jan. 9 issue of *The Alabama Baptist* the article "Baptist leaders examine ministry in 'new marriage culture,'" listed a Scripture reference in Russell Moore's text incorrectly. The correct reference is 2 Timothy 2:22-26.



To see *The Alabama Baptist* online obituary section, visit www.thealabamabaptist.org and click on People then Obituaries.

About Alabama

The Legislature Tackles Difficult State Budgets for 2015

By Jim Williams
Special to The Alabama Baptist

The 2014 legislative session is now underway. Without a doubt, the most difficult task facing lawmakers will be to develop sound, balanced state budgets for the fiscal year that begins next Oct. 1 and runs through Sept. 30, 2015.

Alabama is unique in having two big budgets for investing the money provided by state taxpayers. The bigger of the two is the Education Trust Fund (ETF), which draws its revenue mainly from state income and sales taxes. These are the state's major taxes in terms of size and growth potential.

ETF spending is capped by a formula based on historical revenue collections. The Legislative Fiscal Office estimates that about \$5.9 billion will be available for the 2015 fiscal year. This is about \$134 million more than spending programmed for the current year, but it remains almost \$800 million below the peak year of 2008, before the Great Recession.

If this money is allocated in the same way as in the current fiscal year, about 70 percent will go for K-12 education, 6 percent will go to the state's two-year colleges and state universities will get 19 percent, with 5 percent going to other agencies.

There are a number of claims on the new ETF money, including increases for employee insurance, the prepaid college tuition program and repayment of money borrowed from the education rainy day fund, as well as a proposed pay raise for educators. These items total more than \$134 million.

The budgetary problems of the ETF pale beside those of the State General Fund (SGF), which finances all state services other than education. This fund draws money from a number of sources, and 16 percent of the revenue is called "intermittent" by the Legislative Fiscal Office.

As a result, the SGF lacks growth potential, even though it finances a number of significant services. It is expected to provide

\$1.7 billion in revenues for the 2015 fiscal year. This is \$83 million less than the current year's appropriations.

The largest SGF agencies are Medicaid, which provides health care for low-income women, children, the elderly and others; and Corrections, which manages state prisons. They require well over half the money in the SGF, and both are seeking major increases. Third largest is the judicial system, which for the last few years has been funded in part with transferred highway money. The SGF also must repay, over time, \$598 million borrowed from state trust funds.

Maintaining viable services within the limits of the state's current revenues will be an extraordinary feat.

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



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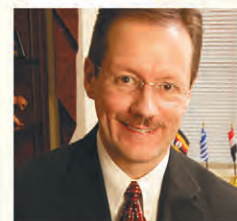
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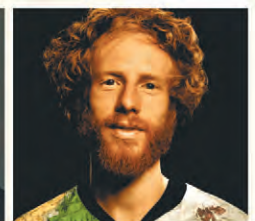
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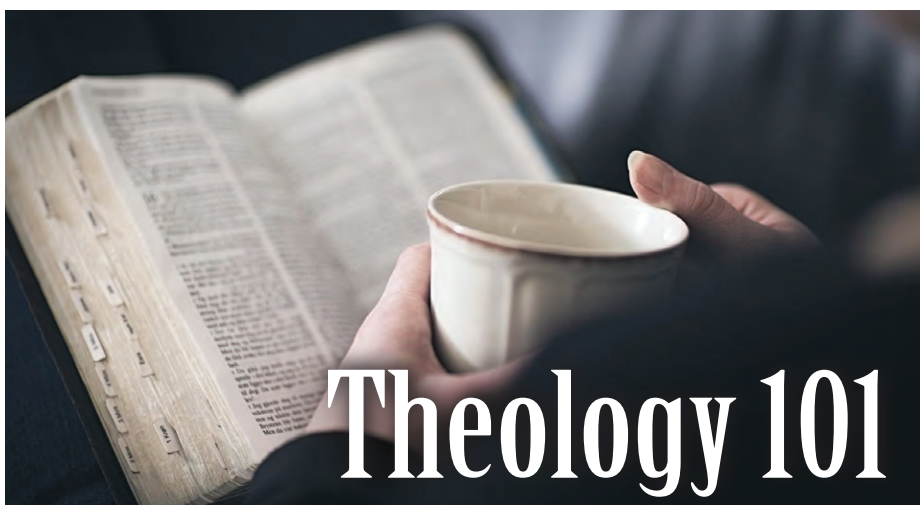


Matt Papa

ALSO: Nik and Ruth Ripken, authors of "The Insanity of God" plus dozens of missionaries from around the world



This resource is made possible by gifts from Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Doctrine of Christ

Jesus: The Distinctive Word

By Jerry Batson
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Last week these paragraphs cited John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God.” The second part of the verse contains a preposition that is pregnant with meaning. For Christ, the eternal Word, to be “with” God requires that both He and God have identifiable and distinguishable existence.

In fact, many students of language have maintained that the use of the term meaning “with” can carry the force of “face to face with.”

With such fullness of meaning, the opening sentence of the Gospel of John tells us that the eternal Christ has always been with God, while being in His own right distinct from the Father.

As people of faith, we choose to live with the truth of one God in three Persons, with the Holy Spirit rounding out the “three-ness” within the “one-ness.”

Jesus declared His individuality when He explained, “As the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son also to have life in Himself” (John 5:26).

Dare we envision eternity past as unmeasured timelessness when Father, Son and Holy Spirit enjoyed face-to-face fellowship within their essential oneness.

A kind of theological shorthand for speaking of this “with-ness” is to say that each Person of the Trinity is co-existent with the other two. As a result, the Father can be with the Son and the Son can be with the Father. Likewise, the Holy Spirit also is with the Father and with the Son.

In thinking like this, we have to be very careful not to think of three separate Gods.

As Christians, we are not polytheists — people who believe in multiple gods. We are monotheists — people who believe in one true God.

In the mystery and marvel of God

who revealed Himself as holy Trinity, each divine Person of the Godhead has identifiable and distinct personhood.

This brings us back to thinking about Christ as the co-existent and thus distinctive Word. Since Christ is co-existent with the Father, we understand that God did not abandon heaven when He came among us as the man, Christ Jesus. God was in heaven, but also was “in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself” (2 Cor. 5:19). We cannot explain the logic of this any more than we can explain how one God can exist in three Persons. Marvel and mystery are indeed the words that come to mind when speaking of God the Holy Trinity.

As the distinctive second Person of the Trinity, Christ declared that the Father had sent Him. Having been sent by God, Christ was found frequently talking with the Father in both

public and private prayer. People heard Him assert that He came to do the will of God who sent Him saying on one occasion, “I seek not my own will but the will of Him who sent me” (John 5:30).

As the co-existent and eternal Word, Christ was with the Father from all eternity past. This being true, He came uniquely qualified to reveal God, as well as to declare God’s will for our lives. In a way that no other could ever do, Christ was able in the days of His flesh to show the world what a God-pleasing life looks like when lived in our kind of world and amid our kind of temptations. ☪

**“As Christians,
we are not
polytheists ... We
are monotheists —
people who believe
in one true God.”**

*Jerry Batson,
retired associate
dean of Beeson
Divinity School at
Samford University
and professor at
several schools of
religion, is pastor
of First Baptist
Church, McCalla.*



Feed One Hungry Child

Dawson packs meals to feed thousands worldwide

By Julie Payne
The Alabama Baptist

The goal was to pack enough meals in one day to feed 100,000 starving people around the world.

And that goal wasn’t just met; it was exceeded by 8,864 meals. Hundreds of volunteers took part in the Feed One Hungry Child event put on by Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham, in conjunction with the Feed My Starving Children (FMSC) nonprofit organization.

According to Ben Hale, minister of evangelism and missions for Dawson, the meal-packing event was a part of a five-day emphasis at the church called GO BEYOND! During this emphasis, which included a missions fair and special guest speakers, Dawson members were challenged to serve in a variety of ways beyond the church’s walls.

Dawson first learned of FMSC through other local churches that had conducted similar events with the organization, Hale said. “Their results were positive, so we used it as an application of our GO BEYOND! [emphasis],” he noted.

More than 500 volunteers — many from Dawson and others from the surrounding Homewood community — worked in two-hour shifts for the meal-packing event Jan. 11.

The event was held at the Exceptional Foundation, which is located a half-mile from the church. Once volunteers arrived at the worksite via a shuttle service from Dawson’s parking lot, they were shown a short orientation video about their role in the food packing process.

After the bulk food was unloaded off the truck, packing stations were used to both mix the food and place the meals into plastic bags. Volunteers worked at these packing stations, serving in an assembly-line setup. The meals were then boxed and loaded back on the truck for shipping. “At the end of the day, the food is ... ready to

ship overseas,” Hale said of the process.

The food packed was a nutritious mixture of rice, dried vegetables, soy, vitamins and minerals. This type of mixture is “easy and safe to transport, simple to make with only boiling water and culturally acceptable worldwide,” according to FMSC’s website.

“[The food] was purchased through the faithful missions giving of our membership,” Hale said. “A part was also purchased by Dawson children through their commitment day banks last November.”

Hale noted Feed One Hungry Child was a “cross-generational service event,” and many parents served with their children. “Grandparents worked side-by-side with their children and grandchildren helping to feed hungry people,” he said. “It was a beautiful picture of what the church should look like.”

Participation of all ages

One parent who served was Dawson member Kris Griffin, who volunteered with her husband and their five kids. The participation of all ages was one of the “great things” about the event, she said.

Griffin noted her role as volunteer coordinator for the event “very quickly became obsolete” once she realized how quickly church members were signing up to participate. “We thought we’d have to spend time recruiting people” but the recruitment took care of itself, she noted. “The way this was so organized and so well-planned — it couldn’t have gone better.”

And Hale said the success of Feed One Hungry Child has made it likely Dawson will participate in the event again in the future.

“We wanted every member of the church to understand that every Christian has a biblical responsibility to serve,” he said. “Every member was asked to make a commitment to be open to God’s leading in the future.”

For more information about FMSC and ways your church can volunteer, visit www.fmsc.org. ☪



Photo courtesy of Dawson Memorial Baptist Church

More than 500 volunteers participate in the Feed One Hungry Child meal-packing event Jan. 11. The event was put on by Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham, in conjunction with Feed My Starving Children, a nonprofit organization.

John Grady, a Southern Baptist representative, takes in the view just below the Punta Olympica, a 16,000-foot pass. Although the main mountain roads have been improved significantly in recent years, many ministry locations still remain accessible only with specially outfitted vehicles designed to function at the reduced oxygen levels of the Andes.

Spreading the gospel

Alabama native among group ministering to Quechua people in Peru's Ancash region

Southern Baptist representative Josh Murphree doesn't live at the ends of the earth, but he says he can see it from his back porch.

The Alabama native grins when he says this, but it does take some expert driving to get to San Luis in the Ancash region of Peru, where he lives with his wife, Crystal, and their two children. Driving to the town deep in the Conchucos Valley from Peru's capital of Lima entails crossing a mountain range on perilous roads and traversing a 16,000-foot pass.

"It's been tough to home-school. We have been very lonely at times. We're eight hours away from an ATM or restaurant that won't make us sick," Murphree said. "It's been tough but very rewarding at the same time. We realize we're right in the middle of where God wants us to be."

The Northern Conchucos Quechua live in this geographically demanding area that provides plenty of obstacles that hamper the spread of the gospel. There, Catholicism has

been fused with indigenous animistic beliefs. Biblically based evangelical believers are much harder to find.

In 2012, student researchers for the Ancash Quechua team — of which the Murphrees are a part — discovered a cluster of five small Baptist churches in the remote Huánuco region. Team leader John Grady learned that these fellowships may date back to a Southern Baptist representative who traveled into the area by horseback about 20 years ago and led several people to Christ.

Teaching, training

Grady said these five churches are some of the few that have not slipped into heresy.

"A lot of pastors can't read the Bible and have dismissed it as old news," he said.

On the edge of the rainy season later that year, Grady, Murphree and another colleague made a trip into Huánuco to teach and train there. The villages were seemingly cut off from the outside world in the rugged terrain high above the Marañón River, Murphree said.

"It was amazing to experience a culture that

did not depend on outside trade but only from their own crops," he said. "At the elevation where we stayed most of the people grew potatoes and cold-weather crops."

When they arrived there were believers there "with 20 years of questions in the making," Murphree said. For six days they met with the churches, first in the main town of Huacra-chuco, and then journeyed to outlying villages to teach in other fellowships.

"We were able to spend some time with leaders in the churches, teaching oral means of sharing the gospel in Quechua through stories," Murphree explained.

"We realize we've got to put a lot of our effort into Bible storying, whether it's teaching the stories to outreach groups and house churches, helping them to multiply our efforts," Murphree said. The leaders of these small groups have become excited about this way of teaching.

"Rather than preaching on a few verses they said, 'I'm going to learn these stories and tell people what the Bible says. They'll understand it this way.'" (BP)



BP photo

Want to know God?

Pastor Tony Barber
Bluff Park Baptist Church, Hoover

I've got a confession to make: I don't understand the concept of God's revelation of Himself that we refer to as the "trinity." But I believe in it because that is what the Bible teaches. But I don't understand how Mary conceived a child without a human father either or how Jesus walked on water. I cannot begin to understand how Jesus touched a lame man and made him walk, made a blind man see, fed thousands with just a few fish and some bread, or turned water into wine. And I certainly don't understand how Jesus was dead and came back to life. But I believe each of those things with all my heart. The Bible says they happened.

And here is something else I believe: God loves me and God loves you. That is exactly what the Bible says; the difference is that I can feel that concept. I don't understand how He could love someone like me, but more than 30 years ago I made a conscious decision to believe through faith that Jesus is the Son of God and that He died for my sin. I repented of my sin, asked Him to save me and made Jesus the Lord of my life.

Now I feel His love in so many ways. In times of darkness or confusion I feel a peace that passes the understanding of human minds. In times of trouble I feel a quiet joy. With His Spirit within me I have learned to love people that the world says are unlovable. I have learned to forgive people that have done otherwise unforgivable things. All because I came to know, and thus love, the God who loves me.

Don't you want to know Him like that too? Not just know the concept of a superior supernatural being but to know Him personally. Will you take the steps I took so long ago that brought me into a close, personal relationship with God? I can promise you this: Knowing God will make a difference in every aspect of your life.

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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR: Harmony Grove Baptist Church in Winfield, Ala., is seeking a full-time pastor. Please send resumés to: Harmony Grove Pastor Search, P.O. Box 1432, Winfield, AL 35594, or harmonygrovebaptist@gmail.com.

PASTOR: New Haven Baptist is searching for a full-time pastor. Send resumés to: New Haven Baptist Pastor Search Committee, 100 New Haven Road, Anniston, AL 36201.

SENIOR PASTOR: Send resumés to: FBC of Chalkville, 2100 Old Springville Road, Birmingham, AL 35215.

WORSHIP LEADER: Wilton Baptist Church in Wilton, Ala., (near Montevallo) is prayerfully seeking a worship leader. Send resumés to: musicsearch@wiltonbaptist.com or P.O. Box 160, Wilton, AL 35187.

PART-TIME MUSIC MINISTER: Meek Baptist Church in Arley, Ala., is seeking a godly man to lead our choir and congregation in blended style worship. Email resumé: meekbaptist@bellsouth.net. www.meekbc.com.

BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC MINISTER: Indian Springs First Baptist Church seeks bivocational music minister for blended worship, adult choir and praise team. Send resumé to: charleshoustondale@gmail.com.

PART-TIME MUSIC MINISTER: Concord Baptist Church, Hueytown, Ala., is seeking a music minister to lead a blended service with both a choir and praise band. Send resumés to: concordbaptist@bham.rr.com.

STUDENT PASTOR: Wilton Baptist Church in Wilton, Ala., (near Montevallo) is prayerfully seeking a student pastor. Send resumés to: youthsearch@wiltonbaptist.com or P.O. Box 160, Wilton, AL 35187.

MINISTER TO STUDENTS: First Baptist Church in Bells, Tenn., is seeking a full-time minister to students (K-12). Parsonage is provided. For more information or to apply, email: ddavisfbc@bellsouth.net.

FULL-TIME YOUTH PASTOR: Whorton Bend Baptist Church is searching for youth pastor/leader. Please send resumé to: Joey Jones, pastor, joeyjones@bellsouth.net or call 256-312-6455.

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Photo by Neisha Fuson

Mildred Hyden (right), attends a concert put on by Buddy Majors at First Baptist Church, Pleasant Grove, Jan. 9. She has been a member of the church since the 1960s.



Photo by Neisha Fuson

Buddy Majors sings around the state to senior adult groups and others as a part of his ministry.

'Dream ministry'

Buddy Majors uses love of music to minister to senior adults across state

By Neisha Fuson
The Alabama Baptist

The woman in the pink floral sweater sat as close to the stage as she could, singing and clapping along to each song. At a Jan. 9 concert at First Baptist Church, Pleasant Grove, Buddy Majors sang songs from a variety of decades including "Country Roads" by John Denver, "Elvira" by

The Oak Ridge Boys and "Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)" by Chris Tomlin. Majors, who serves as the interim associate pastor and minister of music for First Baptist Church, McCalla, said he's been singing his whole life but was just recently able to fulfill his dream of singing and ministering to senior adults. Performing with pre-recorded tracks, Majors sings several songs, "adds in a little humor" and shares the gospel at each concert.

in 1978); associate pastor of music/education/youth at First Baptist Church, Remlap; associate pastor of music/education at Clayridge Baptist Church, Clay; and pastor of West Highland Baptist Church, Bessemer, for seven years until he retired in 2012. He then made his way to First, McCalla, and began his "dream ministry."

'Still needed'

Throughout his years of service in Alabama churches his "compassion really grew" for senior adults and he wanted to "minister to them and give them some input to help them realize they're still needed and still had a place in our church and our society."

So about 250 times a year Majors makes his way across the state to sing to and encourage senior adults. In the midst of all that traveling, Majors also released three self-produced CDs. Majors, 72, said he plans to continue his singing ministry "just as long as the voice holds out."

And according to Harold Newberry, pastoral care minister at First, Pleasant Grove, Majors' ministry is making an impact.

"I think he would make good programs in the church whether senior programs or not. He would be a good addition," said Newberry, who leads the senior adult choir and programs.

And Mildred Hyden, who sat in the front row at the concert, agreed. A member of First, Pleasant Grove, since the 1960s, Hyden said the event was "great and couldn't be better." Majors "sang the songs that we love." ❧

"I used to visit a lot in homes of senior adults and found that they were really a segment of our congregations that was lonely and lost ... and had been passed by," Majors said of his ministry.

Full-time ministry

Called to full-time ministry in 1963, Majors graduated from Samford University in Birmingham with a bachelor's degree in education. He later took music courses at Jefferson State Community College in Birmingham, and then earned a master's degree in religious education from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

He has served in several roles across the state throughout his lifetime such as music/youth/evangelism coordinator at Pleasant Valley Baptist Church, Bessemer; music pastor at the former First Baptist Church, Shade Grove, in Adamsville (where he was ordained

"I used to visit a lot in homes of senior adults and found that they were really a segment of our congregations that was lonely and lost ... and had been passed by."

Buddy Majors

interim associate pastor/minister of music, First Baptist Church, McCalla

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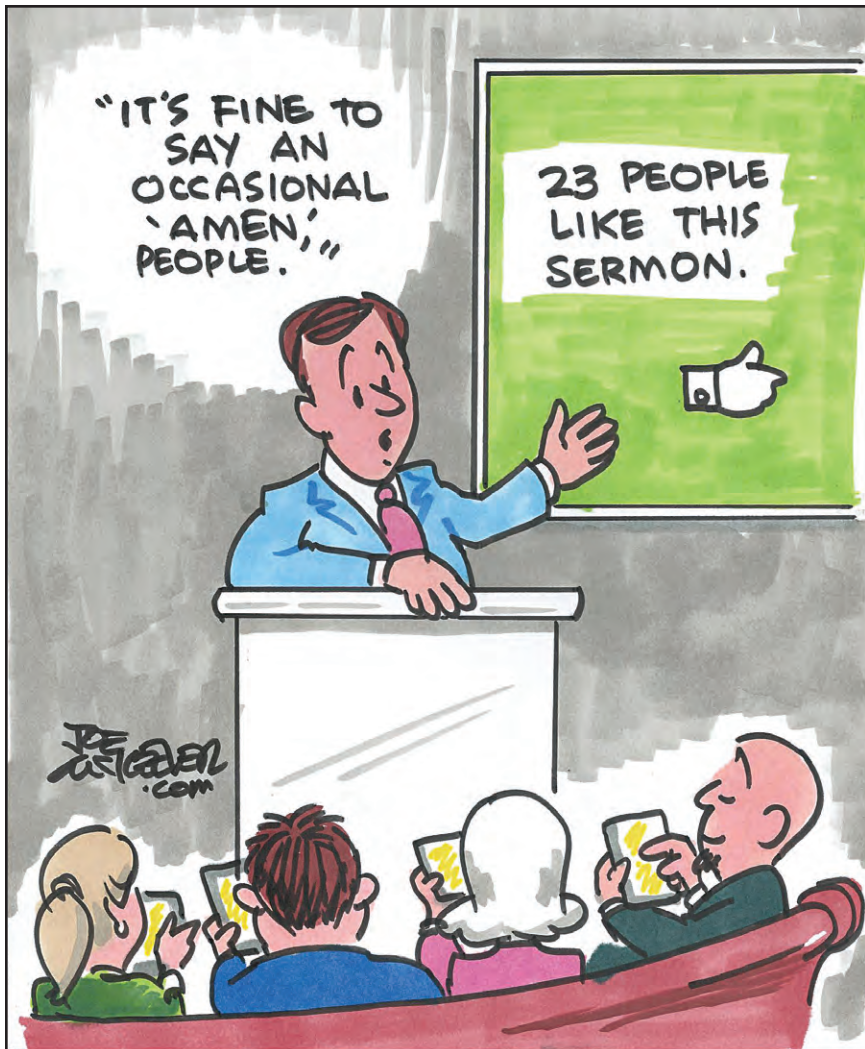
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Digital devices in worship services

What people are saying on FACEBOOK

QUESTION: Did you or the person next to you use a cell phone or tablet during church this morning?

If you answered yes, I would like to hear why you chose the digital text instead of a printed Bible. If you're not a fan of digital devices, what do you think when people use their devices during worship?



Alison Poe Hoskins

I used my iPhone. All my children have their Bibles — which I end up holding. I need a suitcase, I tell ya! Hunter was ADAMANTLY against me using the phone bible in church — until he left his at home one Sunday ... now we're pretty much eBible users. We sit in the balcony. I'm not sure anyone thinks anything — there are others around us who use their eBibles. At our church, it has become pretty commonplace.

Don Davis

I used my iPad, mostly for convenience. I also use it for Scripture reference during Sunday School, because I can find things a little faster.

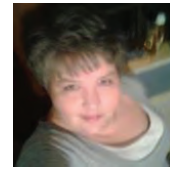


Jessica Henry Thompson

I use my Bible app at church. I like to bookmark and add notes for home study.

Lakisha M. Bryant

I love a hard copy. Nothing like being able to dig in and search out the Scripture. I find however that on most Sunday mornings by the time I've gotten myself, both boys and the husband out the door already late for praise team practice that adding one more thing to the diaper bag is overboard so I choose to bookmark and read from digital during the service and make my notes to later run down during my time at home. But I tend to find it very tempting to venture into other digital/social parts of my phone.



Leslie C. Clark

I used the app on my phone today but I prefer my Bible. I have notes from past sermons that I have written in there. Also when I see my notes and the dates I remember my feelings that I had at that time.

Stephanie Ashley

I use my iPad because I can locate Scriptures quickly, but also because I can quickly type my notes into the Bible app I use while viewing the Scriptures. The dual action also cuts down on things I need to take to church. I don't know about you, but I have an awful tendency to lose my pen!



Clay Owens

I use YouVersion for following along at church in the worship service and Life Group, and I also have an electronic version of our curriculum that I read instead of using the printed quarterly.



Carol Swaney Brown

I used mine Sunday p.m. service. My purse is so heavy now with just essentials it's wonderful not to have to carry a printed Bible. Plus, I can enlarge print that helps me see better. Mostly I watch the projection screen if available although if I have a question in my mind about the text I'll go to digital to look at chosen text contextually.



(Compiled by Carrie Brown McWhorter)



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*J. Rodney Bledsoe, J.D.
 Chief Development Officer*

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Benefits of technology use includes reaching youth

(continued from page 1)
Baptist Association. “Am I posting for my own self-gratification, to create an image for my Facebook readers, or am I posting hoping someone will reply back to me with a serious question that I can turn into a witnessing opportunity?”

Fryer believes that if the latter reason is the motivation, then posting a status update from church or tweeting a sermon point can be a legitimate way to reach outside the church walls.

Not limiting God

“Maybe some are called to witness by posting and tweeting,” he said. “I don’t know, but I’m not going to limit God to only my way of thinking.”

Pastors and churchgoers who are bothered by the existence of cellphones in the pews must realize there’s really no going back, Bullard said. In his opinion, churches with no-cellphone policies “have their head in the sand,” he said.

Churches make a mistake when they deny worshippers access to the gadgets they have come to live with and use for daily communication, Bullard said. It’s not about being techy for the sake of being techy but rather about allowing all members, especially teens and

young adults, 98 percent of whom are social media users, to actively participate in worship.

“Those who are trying to reach the younger generations realize (the use of technology in church) is going to happen. I have suggested there ought to be a 17-year-old kid in the control booth texting the pastor’s sermon,” Bullard added. “And I would say, ‘Everybody get out your phone and check in that you’re here in worship.’”

Church members who worry that people in the pews may be playing games, texting friends or sending emails about non-church topics shouldn’t, said Alan Rudnick, pastor of First Baptist Church, Ballston Spa, N.Y. Christians long have used pencil and paper to jot down grocery lists and doodle during sermons, he said. Churchgoers also have been known to sleep through services — long before there were smartphones to distract them.

For these reasons and many others, the benefits of technology outweigh any negatives, Rudnick said.

“We have to remember that, as long as we don’t make it a gimmick, it’s just another form of communicating the gospel and interacting with the gospel,” he said. (ABP contributed)

TIPS for using social media

TO PROMOTE WORSHIP AND OTHER CHURCH ACTIVITIES

- 1. ALLOW** a worshipper to post a quotation from a sermon that struck home.
- 2. DIRECT** visitors to your church website.
- 3. POST** days and times for services and activities.
- 4. INVITE** users to special events by creating Facebook events.
- 5. PUBLICIZE** an upcoming message series.
- 6. CAPTURE AND UPLOAD** to the Internet video of special guests if there are no security restrictions.
- 7. POST** a link to a recent sermon video or audio download.
- 8. ANNOUNCE** the menu for Wednesday night suppers.
- 9. USE** church-specific hashtags and popular Twitter hashtags such as #Jesus, #prayer and #church.
- 10. “CHECK IN”** during worship or other activities using Facebook, Foursquare or Google. (Check in means to use the GPS feature on a device to announce you are at a particular location.)



(Compiled from various sources by Carrie Brown McWhorter)

Social media & technology stats

- ▶ Number of smartphone owners in the U.S. (as of 2013) — **140 million**
- ▶ Total number of Facebook users worldwide — **1.15 billion**
- ▶ Total estimated number of Twitter users worldwide — **220 million**
- ▶ Total percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds who already use social media — **98 percent**
- ▶ Total percentage of people on Earth who use Facebook — **11 percent**
- ▶ Total amount of minutes people spend on Facebook every month — **700 billion**
- ▶ Average amount of time a person uses Facebook per month — **15 hours 33 minutes**
- ▶ Total amount of people who access Facebook with a phone — **250 million**

(Compiled from various sources by Carrie Brown McWhorter)

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- RIDIN' READY** as Gideon
- RIDIN' OBEDIENT** as Ruth
- RIDIN' FAITHFUL** like Nehemiah
- RIDIN' BOLD** as Peter
- RIDIN' COURAGEOUS** as Esther

Know what to do in case of suspected concussion.

A concussion is an injury caused by a blow to the head in which the brain moves rapidly and may collide with the inside of the skull.

Even a minor fall or collision may be of concern, so be alert to symptoms such as headaches, unsteadiness, confusion or other types of abnormal behavior.

Any athlete with a suspected concussion:

- Should be **IMMEDIATELY REMOVED FROM PLAY/ACTIVITY**
- Should be **urgently assessed medically**
- Should **not be left alone**
- Should **not drive a motor vehicle**

Children's of Alabama **CONCUSSION CLINIC**
205.934.1041 www.ChildrensAL.org/concussion

IN CASE OF MEDICAL EMERGENCY, CALL 911 OR GO DIRECTLY TO YOUR LOCAL ER

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For January 26

Explore the Bible By Dale Younce, Th.D. Professor of Christian Ministries, University of Mobile

OUR MESSIAH: ABUSED! John 18:1-6, 17-24

What does it mean to suffer abuse? Tragically many adults have experienced the pain of unfair treatment or have even been hated and betrayed by others. Yet none have been so intensely abused as was Jesus. Further what Jesus suffered in terms of abuse was for others' sake, not His own. Jesus knew that He would suffer abuse as part of God's plan to provide forgiveness for sinners. That He was willing to suffer abuse for us should evoke a deep gratitude on our part.

Being Betrayed (1-6)

As Jesus drew near the Garden of Gethsemane, He knew (18:4) that His purity and sinlessness would be violated as He bore the wrath of God for sinners. Yet the abuse of betrayal, denial and being reviled was only preliminary to His redemptive suffering on the cross.

Jesus was aware of this as He and His disciples crossed the Brook Kidron (an intermittent stream that was dry most of the year but became a torrent during the rainy season), which ran through the Kidron Valley east of Jerusalem between the walled city on the temple mount and the Mount of Olives. On the western slope of the Mount of Olives, there was a garden enclosed by a wall; it was called the Garden of Gethsemane (the garden of the olive oil press). Here, apparently with the owner's consent, Jesus and His disciples often stayed for rest and prayer when they came to Jerusalem. Judas knew the place.

Somewhere around 2 a.m. Judas arrived at the garden with a large contingent of Roman soldiers and temple police. The Roman cohort numbered between 300 and 600 troops. The reason the arresting party thought they would need many soldiers was that they did not know how many followers of Jesus there were who would fight for Him. They came expecting resistance.

What the arresting party met was Jesus calmly presenting Himself as the One they were seeking. His statement "I am" is phe-

nomenal. (The "He" is not found in the original text, but is needed in English.) Earlier in His ministry, Jesus had used the same wording to indicate that He was Jehovah of the Old Testament (John 8:58-59). Here, for a brief moment, Jesus revealed Himself as "I AM," the Almighty God. The revelation was so overwhelmingly powerful that they fell backwards to the ground in fear, dismay and utter confusion. They did not fall forward to worship Him. This revealed to these men that Jesus was absolutely in charge; they could not arrest Him without His permission. They were seeing Jesus of Nazareth, the God-Man. We are right to be amazed at and grateful for Jesus' boldness and calm willingness to face betrayal and arrest for our sake.

Being Denied (17-18)

These verses bring us to the first of Peter's three predicted denials (John 13:38). His first denial came soon after being let into the courtyard of the home of the high priest. It is significant that this first denial of the Lord was not before a powerful, terrifying Roman soldier but before a simple, servant girl. Her question to Peter indicated she expected a negative answer. Peter denied Jesus by denying that he was one of the disciples. We are humbled by and grateful for Jesus' willingness to patiently endure the faltering faith of His followers.

Being Reviled (19-24)

In the first of His three Jewish trials, Jesus was taken before Annas, the father-in-law of the current high priest, Caiaphas. At this informal but illegal (before sunrise) hearing, Jesus requested that witnesses be called. Jesus said His ministry was carried on openly; He had nothing to hide. Jesus' words left the Jewish religious leaders with no case. So they resorted to abuse. One of the officers slapped Jesus, to which Jesus replied that, since they could not accuse Him of speaking wrongly, why abuse Him for speaking the truth? We are grateful and encouraged in our faith by Jesus' willingness to remain steadfast in His mission despite being falsely accused and physically abused.

Bible Studies for Life By Thomas L. Fuller, Ph.D. Beeson Divinity School, Samford University

HOW CAN I BE SURE GOD EXISTS? Psalm 19:1-14

"The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Ps. 53:1a). In Western society, it was once nearly unthinkable to question the existence of God, much less to express such doubt openly. Times have changed. A 2007 survey conducted by the Pew Forum found that 51 percent of U.S. adults are absolutely certain in their belief in God and view God as a real, personal being. While the question of God's existence may be firmly settled in the minds of professing Christians, we live among people who are increasingly skeptical of this claim and comfortably vocal about it. The Bible assumes the existence of God and does not seek to argue the point with rational proofs. It does, however, point us to ways in which God reveals Himself.

(1-6)

In vv. 1-6, the psalmist points us to the revelation of God in nature. In the glory and majesty of the skies (1-4b) and of the sun (4c-6), we catch a mere glimpse of God's glory and majesty. Notice the communication terminology of vv. 1-3: declare, proclaims, pours out speech, reveals knowledge. Creation makes an argument for the existence of God that never ends, that cannot be silenced, that cannot be refuted, that transcends our paltry words and concepts.

Notice also the emphasis on order and regularity in vv. 4c-6: that the rising and setting of the sun (and, by extension, the seasons of the year) reveal a God of constancy and wisdom.

God is revealed to us in the majestic beauty and perfect complexity of nature. Paul makes a similar point in Romans 1:19-20 and 10:18. This mode of revelation, however, is indirect and general. We are not left to discern the existence of God through nature alone, for God has revealed Himself in more specific and direct ways.

(7-11)

In vv. 7-11, the psalmist points us to the revelation of God in Scripture. The law of

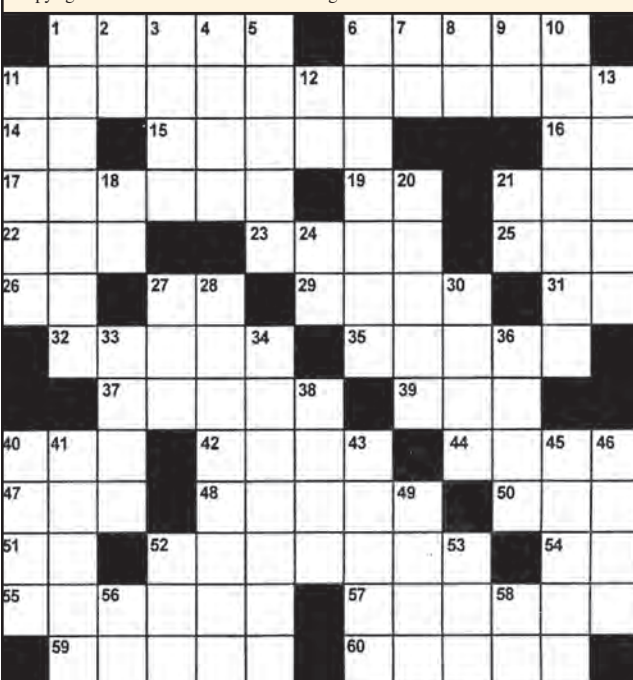
the Lord — *torah* — is a greater and clearer revelation of God. It is significant that in these verses the psalmist refers to *Yahweh* (the Lord), the covenant God, rather than *El* (God), the creator God (v. 1). In His covenanting work, God reveals Himself in a more personal way. God's word in its various forms — law, testimony, precepts, commandment, rules — is wholly sufficient and trustworthy, revealing our omnipotent and faithful God; it is a treasure and a blessing, revealing God's beauty, wisdom and worth. The covenant Lord has given us His word that we might know Him, worship Him and serve Him. What the psalmist could only anticipate, however, we now celebrate: that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Jesus Christ, "the only Son of God, who is at the Father's side, He has made Him known" (John 1:18b).

(12-14)

The question of God's existence is no mere matter of intellectual inquiry but an intensely personal and existential question with radical implications for how we see ourselves and others and for how we live our lives. The closing lines of the psalm reflect the gravity of the matter. The psalmist doesn't "reach a conclusion" but offers a prayerful response. Like Isaiah's vision of the Lord (Isa. 6) and Job's encounter with God (Job 38-42), the psalmist expresses a keen awareness of his sinfulness and pleads to be found acceptable before the holy God. In the truest sense, acknowledging God's existence demands a personal response. The psalmist models for us the appropriate response to the one true God: a humble plea for mercy and favor and a worshipful submission to His sovereign and gracious will.

Christian Crossword

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Across

- Like a flying _____. (Rev. 4:7)
- Boards of fir trees of _____. (Ezek. 27:5)
- Treatise have I made, _____, all that Jesus began. (Acts 1:1)
- Ye shall be witnesses unto _____. (Acts 1:8)
- Descended to the stone of _____. (Josh. 18:17)
- Peter and John about to _____ into the temple. (Acts 3:3)
- Took a wife _____ whose _____ was Tamar. (Gen. 38:6)
- California. (abbr.)
- I will punish _____ in Babylon. (Jer. 51:44)
- Animal that sounds like new.
- Earth shall _____ to and fro. (Isa. 24:20)
- Close relative to reindeer.
- Alcoholics Anonymous. (abbr.)
- Why look ye _____ earnestly on us? (Acts 3:12)
- To _____ away disciples. (Acts 20:30)
- It _____ not for you to know. (Acts 1:7)
- The son of Jair slew _____. (1 Chron. 20:5)
- _____, Judah's firstborn ... and the Lord slew _____. (Gen. 37:36)

Down

- As many as were ordained to _____ life believed. (Acts 13:48)
- Saying, _____ thou that destroyest the temple. (Mark 15:29)
- From _____ to Rimmon. (Gen. 38:7)
- Shilshah, and Ithran and _____. (1 Chron. 7:37)
- Ye _____ of Galilee. (Acts 1:11)
- Adam was first formed, then _____. (1 Tim. 2:13)
- _____, it, raise it. (Ps. 137:7)
- The troops of _____ looked. (Job 6:19)
- _____ boweth down, Nebo stoopeth. (Isa. 46:1)
- An odour of a sweet _____. (Phil. 4:18)
- And in the _____ sea. (Acts 7:36)
- Until _____ offering should be offered. (Acts 21:26)
- _____, the son of Azariah. (Ezra 7:3)
- North American. (abbr.)
- The _____ said unto me ... I have given _____ unto the children of Lot. (Deut. 2:9)
- _____, and Ramah, and Hazor. (Josh. 19:36)
- Could ye not watch with _____ hour? (Matt. 26:40)
- People of an ancient Asian country.
- (Zech. 14:10)
- Machine for weaving.
- The sons of Midian; Ephah, and _____. (Gen. 25:4)
- Desire the _____ milk of the word. (1 Pet. 2:2)
- Erected an altar, and called it _____-elohe-Israel. (Gen. 33:20)
- Name unknown. (abbr.)
- This _____ that which was spoken. (Acts 2:16)
- Barzillai the Gileadite of _____. (2 Sam. 17:27)
- I am Alpha and _____. (Rev. 1:8)
- _____, ha. (Job 39:25)
- Bringing sick _____. (Acts 5:16)
- Name unknown. (abbr.)
- Sound an _____. (Joel 2:1)
- Why should it _____ thought a thing incredible? (Acts 26:8)
- Called the altar _____. (Josh. 22:34)
- And _____ opened her eyes. (Acts 9:40)
- Two _____ for one _____. (Ex. 16:22)
- I _____ my glittering sword. (Deut. 32:41)
- _____ offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice. (Heb. 11:4)
- Duke _____. These _____ the dukes of Edom. (1 Chron. 1:54)
- Went _____ unto her ... called his name _____. (Gen. 38:2, 3)
- Of the tribe of _____. (Rev. 7:6)

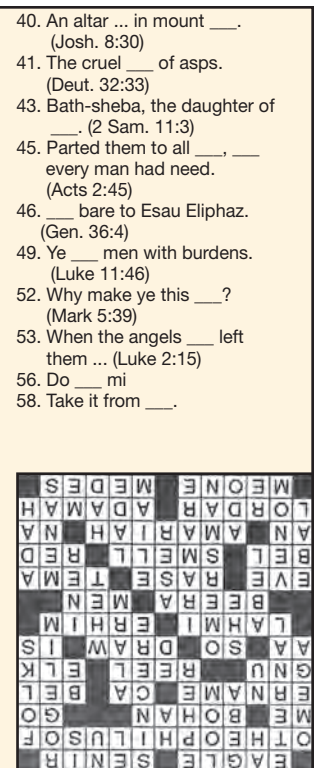




Photo by Rick Sharp

Fellowship for the Performing Arts, a New York organization that has as its mission 'to present theater from a Christian worldview that engages a diverse audience,' recently brought C.S. Lewis' 'The Great Divorce' to Birmingham's Alabama Theater.

New York company brings C.S. Lewis' 'The Great Divorce' to Birmingham

By Martine Bates Sharp
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Max McLean says that after he became a Christian, the first book he read besides the Bible was C.S. Lewis' autobiography.

"I was impressed by how smart the author was and how he used language. But I didn't understand a word of it," he said.

The fledgling Christian persisted, however, reading "The Screwtape Letters" next. McLean was hooked.

"As soon as I started reading, I said, 'I know this fellow,'" he recalled.

McLean is founder and artistic director of the Fellowship for the Performing Arts (FPA), a New York organization that has as its mission "to present theater from a Christian worldview that engages a diverse audience." In a culture that marginalizes all things Christian, including Christian literature and entertainment, the FPA seeks to challenge "assumptions about truth and reality" and to engage the imagination.

"When we do our work with excellence and respect we receive a fair hearing in the cultural marketplace," McLean wrote in a newsletter article. "One of the challenges we face in New York is that many artists perceive Christianity as a political ideology. This means that they often experience the Christian worldview by what it is against. By creating high quality theatre, the wonder of Christ is conveyed under more favorable conditions."

The FPA brought Lewis' work "The Great Divorce" to Birmingham's Alabama Theater recently, playing to a nearly full house. The two performances drew a fairly young crowd, given that Lewis died in 1963 — perhaps not so surprising, since Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, whose popularity continues among young adults, were contemporaries and close friends.

"The Great Divorce" was the second Lewis book to be adapted for the stage by McLean and the third time the FPA has traveled to Birmingham. "The Screwtape Letters" was performed in September 2011 and January 2013.

Audiences who attend the performances of "The Great Divorce" and "The Screwtape Letters" are usually familiar with Lewis, McLean observed.

'A C.S. Lewis convention'

"It's like a C.S. Lewis convention," he noted.

An informal canvas of those who attended the recent play in Birmingham yielded a range from dedicated Lewis fans to those who were unfamiliar with the author but came with a friend, to some who were there because they enjoyed theater productions.

For those who are not familiar with the book, the title seems odd. McLean explained that the name "The Great Divorce" was written in response to [William] Blake's 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.' Blake tried to find a

point at which good and evil could be reconciled."

Lewis, believing a reconciliation was not possible, wrote of the final divorce of good and evil, heaven and hell. He wrote in 1945 in his preface to the book, "I do not think that all who choose wrong roads perish; but their rescue consists of being put back on the right road. Evil can be undone, but it cannot develop into good."

The title was not Lewis' choice, but his publisher's. The original title was "Who Goes Home?"

The stage adaptation features three actors, each playing several characters from the book. The characters are all put on a bus, taken to the outskirts of heaven and given the choice to continue on to heaven or to take the return trip that will result in their being doomed to hell. The choice is not as clear-cut as one might expect; even at the very gates of heaven, the choice to give up selfish ambition and desire is not an easy one for some of the characters.

Birmingham was the second stop of the nine-city tour. 🏠

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Max McLean
founder and artistic director, Fellowship for the Performing Arts



IMB photo

Students sign with Mason Barrett (left) during Warren Baptist Church's first encounter with the Deaf Malagasy at a Deaf school in Antananarivo, Madagascar.

'Where God was leading'

Georgia Baptist church reaches deaf in Madagascar

It's like learning to swim by being pushed off the high dive — and Mason Barrett just got shoved. The 33-year-old real estate agent sits wide-eyed in a tiny, crowded living room in Madagascar's capital city, trying desperately to understand what anyone around him is saying. Hands fly in a flurry of conversation, mostly get-to-know-you type questions: What's your name? Are you married? Were you born deaf?

That last question might sound strange if this wasn't one of the thousands of Deaf communities that Barrett has come to serve. He's part of a team from Warren Baptist Church, Augusta, Ga., that's traveled more than 9,000 miles for a single purpose: sharing Jesus with the Deaf Malagasy.

Madagascar is home to roughly 110,000 Deaf, less than 1 percent of whom are disciples of Jesus Christ. Most follow a centuries-old tradition of ancestor worship. There may be a "vener of Christianity," said representative Matt Spann, a Texas native who leads the International Mission Board's (IMB) Madagascar team, but "they fear their ancestors more than they fear God." That's what Warren Baptist has come to change.

Sending a hearing church to evangelize the Deaf may seem a fool's errand, especially since Warren has absolutely no experience with Deaf ministry. Roger Henderson, Warren Baptist's missions pastor, said the decision left many scratching their heads — including the very people he tasked with choosing which unengaged, unreached people group (UUPG) the church would embrace.

Cue a young men's discipleship group Henderson affectionately refers to as the "Ten Angry Men." They were "angry" because of the lack of Christ-centered leadership they saw in many of today's Christian men.

Sorting through the more than 3,800 UUPGs identified by the IMB, the men researched and prayed through their top picks, eventually voting on their selection in Madagascar.

"All throughout the Bible, God uses our weak-

nesses to display His strength — from Moses to David to Paul," said Vesta Sauter, who leads IMB's global Deaf work with her husband, Mark. "I think He knew exactly what He was doing when He chose Warren Baptist to bring the gospel to the Deaf of Madagascar."

God miraculously gave Warren Baptist a man named Phillip Easterling — a pastor and church planter from Asheville, N.C. He's Warren Baptist's way of gaining access to Madagascar's Deaf community — he was born deaf.

Back in the tiny, crowded living room in Antananarivo, Madagascar, Easterling watches as Barrett and the rest of Warren's team struggle to communicate with their hosts. News about their American guests has spread quickly, and the house was overflowing with more than 20 visitors.

Overcoming barriers

Easterling tries to translate both sides of several conversations. But after 20 minutes, he stands abruptly and leaves Warren's team members to fend for themselves. He challenged each member of Warren Baptist's team to tell a Bible story using Malagasy sign.

Henderson believes God will equip Warren Baptist to overcome barriers of sharing the gospel. He said the first trip is just the beginning, a litmus test of sorts. In a week, Warren's team has managed to learn a surprising amount of Malagasy sign and forge genuine relationships.

It is Warren Baptist and thousands of other Southern Baptist churches across the United States that make this ministry possible through their giving through the Cooperative Program and Lottie Moon Christmas Offering.

"When you go ... it puts a real, live person to the offering. And that tangible connection is just so gratifying, especially when you're trying to evangelize a UUPG," Henderson said.

To learn more about the IMB's Embrace initiative, visit call2embrace.org. (IMB)

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Legality of Bible Society of Malaysia raid debated

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia — Should non-Muslims be able to use the term "Allah"? That is the question at the center of a heated controversy right now in Malaysia where Sunni Islam is the official religion.

The Bible Society of Malaysia (BSM) offices in Damansara Kim, near Kuala Lumpur, were raided without a search warrant by the Selangor Islamic Affairs Department (JAIS) and local police Jan. 2.

During the raid, 330 Bibles — 320 copies of the Malay Bible and 10 copies in Iban, an indigenous language — were confiscated. JAIS also detained BSM president Lee Min Choon and office manager Sinclair Wong for questioning. Both were released on bail after two hours without charge, but police instructed them to return for further questioning by JAIS on Jan. 10, which they did.

JAIS, which has no jurisdiction over non-Muslims, did not provide reasons for the raid. The religious agency, which advises the head of Islam within the state on Islamic matters, was purportedly acting under the Selangor Non-Islamic Religions (Control of Propagation Among Muslims) Enactment of 1988. This enactment prohibits non-Muslims from using more than 40 religious terms, including "Allah," an Arabic word that also serves as the Malay word for God. The word "Allah" appears in copies of the Bibles that were seized during the raid.

But BSM officials do not believe they violated any laws.

In 2011, a plan known as the 10-point solution was developed by the National Unity Consultative Council. In the solution, the government had assured Christians in East Malaysia they were free to print and import Malay-language Bibles. It also allowed Malay-language Bibles to be printed or brought into West Malaysia so long as they bear the symbol of the cross and the words "Christian publication" on the front cover.

Kazakh Baptists refuse to pay fines, jailed

AKMOLA REGION, Kazakhstan — Two Baptists in Kazakhstan recently served 48 hours in jail after refusing to pay fines handed down in 2013 for worshipping and sharing their faith without the government's permission.

Shoe-repairer Vyacheslav Cherkasov and plumber Zhasulan Alzhanov were sentenced Jan. 9 in Kazakhstan's northern Ak-mola Region, according to Forum 18. They were released Jan. 11.

The two were among more than 60 Baptists fined in Kazakhstan in 2013 who refused to pay fines in an act of civil disobedience. They are part of the Council of Churches Baptists, which argues that compulsory state registration of religious exercise violates religious freedom protections in Kazakhstan's constitution and international human-rights obligations.

Want to see your news in The Alabama Baptist?

Email your information to news@thealabamabaptist.org; fax it to 205-870-8957 or call 1-800-803-5201, Ext. 112. Church announcements should arrive three weeks prior to the event.

