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Apologetics is for laypeople too

Atheist-turned-apologist shares how people can be equipped, successful with apologetics

By Kristen Padilla
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

The positive impact apologetics has on the kingdom of God took a visible form Jan. 18 at the SALT (Strategic Answers to Life's Thoughts)

Apologetics Conference at First Baptist Church, Montgomery. That form came from an atheist-turned-apologist by the name of Jay Watts, opening speaker and master of ceremonies for the conference.

"I was an atheist when I was younger — in my college years and my early 20s," said Watts, speaker and writer for Life Training Institute (LTI) in Atlanta. "I became a Christian largely because of apologetic arguments drawing me toward a reasonable belief that Christianity can be reasonably considered. But since I became a Christian, apologetics has become even more important to me."

Watts shared personal experiences as he lectured about the meaning of apologetics and how to approach it. "As an atheist, so many Christians tried to convert me by quoting the Bible," he said. "Then one person learned to speak the language I spoke. This one Christian was equipped to deal with me, to speak my language."

That's what apologetics is and equips you to do — to speak other

people's language by "answering questions, rationally and reasonably, and to give reasons for your faith," Watts explained. Not only do apologetics help answer the questions of those seeking God but it also helps the Christian to stay firm in his or her faith.

"Apologetics isn't just something I do on stage; it's not just something I do in front of university crowds. It's a part of my life," he said. "When I have personal doubts, apologetics has helped me to settle those."

"You are the apologetics community. You are making a difference in the world."

Jay Watts speaker and writer Life Training Institute

"The rational beliefs hold me even when my heart is breaking or when the world is telling me there is no answer, no solution; my mind anchors me," Watts added.

Apologetics is not only for scholars or seminary-trained individuals; it is for the laypeople too. "You are the apologetics community," Watts told the approximately 200 people gathered. "You are making a difference in the world as tent-makers, not professional scholars, not professional

'Keep all conversations about Jesus'

No generation gets to pick their spiritual assignments," said Alex McFarland, apologetics speaker and author, rounding out the Jan. 18 SALT Apologetics Conference at First Baptist Church, Montgomery. "We have a mission to know Christ, to proclaim Christ, to defend the faith. We don't have the luxury to say that is somebody else's problems."

Although apologetics is a helpful tool available to all Christians, "we've got to keep all the conversa-



Photo by Kristen Padilla

Jay Watts, speaker and writer for Life Training Institute (LTI) in Atlanta, speaks at the SALT Apologetics Conference at FBC Montgomery on Jan. 18.

translators, but people who have jobs but are still reaching out to the community and taking the tools and everything you are being given to touch the lives of people around you.

"My goal ... is to equip you ... to have a strategy of approaching apologetics," he said.

How can lay people be equipped and be successful with apologetics? Watts gives three keys to finding success.

First get a lay of the land by listening to the arguments out there

and asking yourself, "What are the arguments?" The arguments aren't new, he said, but spend time to learn what they are and "push yourself beyond your comfort level."

Second specialize in an area of apologetics. For Watts, he chose profile issues as his specialization.

"When I was an atheist, one of the things that I hated about the belief in God was that I couldn't marry it with the world that I saw around me," he said. "It always bothered,

(See 'Make it as a goal,' page 5)

a British Christian apologist from the late 19th to early 20th centuries.

"What do we say when people ask, 'Why Jesus? What makes Jesus unique?'"

McFarland's short answer is I.M.C. — Identity, Message and Credentials.

Jesus' unique identity is that He is God-incarnate. His message is forgiveness of sins and imputed (or credited) righteousness. Jesus' credentials include His resurrection,

(See 'Make time,' page 4)

COMMENT

Should Churches Resort to Renting Pews?

The question posed by the title sounds ridiculous but it illustrates how desperate church finances are becoming. In many churches, members are asking what can be done to raise enough money to pay the church's bills.

The first response of most Baptists is that people should tithe. The truth is few Christians tithe. A Barna study found only 5–7 percent of Christians practiced biblical tithing (giving 10 percent of one's income to God through the church).

Evangelical Christians do better than the national average with 24 percent self-reporting as tithers. Still that percentage is far short of the 96 percent of evangelicals who reported giving money to a church during the year of study.

As a percent of income, church members as a whole gave only 2.3 percent of their income to a church during the most recent year of study according to Empty Tomb, Inc., an organization that studies church giving.

The percent was down from 2.4 percent the previous year and marked the fourth consecutive year giving as a percent of income declined.

In fact, the percentage was 26 percent lower than giving to churches in 1968, the base line of the study, when the percentage of income given to a church stood at 3.1 percent. While evangelical Christians gave a slightly higher percentage of income to the church than Mainline or Catholic Christians, the rate of decline in giving for evangelicals was steeper than for other groups, the Empty Tomb study found.

Decline in benevolence giving

Giving to causes beyond the local church suffered more than church giving. The study reported, "Per member giving to benevolences (defined as causes outside the church such as missions and education) as a percent of income declined from 0.68 percent in 1968 to 0.34 percent in 2011, a decline of 48 percent ... and the lowest level in the study period."

That finding confirms what Southern Baptists have experienced. In the 1980s, cooperating churches gave an average of 10.5 percent of undesignated receipts to causes beyond the local church through the Cooperative Program (CP).



THOUGHTS
By Bob Terry

That percentage fell to 8.73 percent in the 1990s. For the first decade of this century, the percentage fell further to 6.8 percent and for the last year of record the percentage is down to 5.41 percent.

As reported in the Jan. 23 issue of this publication, Alabama Baptists gave \$39,740,200 in 2013 through the CP. That figure is just a little better than what Alabama Baptists contributed in 2002. However, total gifts from cooperating churches in 2002 were about \$619 million. A decade later total gifts were reported at about \$754 million.

Churches are not less missions-minded. Expenses such as insurance, utilities, maintenance and other costs have gone up during the decade. There are a number of churches in our state where the pastor and other staff members have not had any salary adjustment in four or five years. Many churches are pinching pennies just to pay their bills.

Members are giving less, in part because of the slow economy. Others give less because they have become "grazers" — a term for people who go to church irregularly, who listen to podcasts of a church service, who do worship on their own or with a small group of people.

So what is a church to do? Some churches

(not Baptists) still practice assessments whereby church leadership assesses families a certain amount annually based on the ability to pay. Even in Alabama, stories still circulate about deacons canvassing local merchants soliciting donations to help pay church bills. Churches have resorted to everything from church suppers to raffles to high-pressure campaigns to get people to give. At one time, churches even rented pews so active families would have a reserved place to sit each week.

All of this reflected a lack of attention to the biblical principles of stewardship and that may be part of today's problem.

Some churches are reluctant to emphasize biblical stewardship. Their position is that the pastor should focus on preaching Christ and giving will take care of itself. If you get the heart of the

person, you will get the pocket-book, the reasoning goes. Certainly giving is supposed to be a part of Christian discipleship. Giving should never be the result of some gimmick or manipulation. Still Christians must know what the Bible teaches about stewardship of possessions.

A recent study by *Christianity Today* called "State of the Plate" found that 42 percent of churches that experienced an increase in giving during the last year of record did so after the church conducted financial/generosity teaching initiatives through sermons, classes, semi-

nars and distribution of devotionals about the subject.

As people grew as Christian disciples in their understandings of biblical teachings about stewardship, they responded, the report concluded.

There is no question that the Jews who lived under Old Testament law were required to tithe. As Christians we live under grace. Our giving is to be motivated by love (1 Cor. 13:3). Our giving is to be done regularly (1 Cor. 16:2), generously (2 Cor. 8:2) and cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:7). Of course, giving one's money follows giving God one's self (2 Cor. 8:5).

As Christians we are responsible to God for all that we are and all that we have, not just the tithe. But before one can go beyond the tithe, one must start with the tithe.

If Jews living under the law were required to give a tithe, how can Christians under the grace demonstrated at Calvary give any less? How can any serious Christian give less than a tithe?

Is it time to call Christians to teach and practice the principles of Christian stewardship or would we rather resort to renting pews?

As Christians we are responsible to God for all that we are and all that we have, not just the tithe. But before one can go beyond the tithe, one must start with the tithe.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

'CLASHING VIEWS'

In response to the Jan. 23 article, "Pastors disagree about President Obama being part of events foretold in Scripture": A never-ending phenomena often exhibited in the American psyche and in nations who find themselves dead center on the world stage is the tendency to overestimate their place in world history and write

themselves and their circumstances into the decrees and will of God.

However, any careful reading of biblical history will reveal that throughout the Post-Solomonic period Israel had many kings who did evil in the sight of the Lord.

These kings were sometimes succeeded by kings who sought to correct the evil of their predecessors. But

at no time do the Scriptures suggest or imply that their evil was a harbinger of the end times or the Antichrist.

While the position of President Obama is disheartening and disappointing (See 'Letter,' page 10)





"If ye continue in My word, then ... ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:31-32

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'More than just a musical experience'

St. Olaf Choir's 2014 national tour to include Birmingham, Montgomery

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

The world-renowned St. Olaf Choir will launch its 2014 national tour with performances in Birmingham and Montgomery in early February.

The choir will perform Feb. 1 at 6:30 p.m. at Briarwood Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, and Feb. 2 at 2:30 p.m. at First Baptist Church, Montgomery. The choir also will join with the Tuskegee University Golden Voices Choir for morning worship at the Tuskegee University Chapel. The service begins at 9:30 a.m. and is open to the public.

The weekend of performances by the St. Olaf Choir is a rare opportunity to hear one of America's premiere collegiate ensembles, said Chip Colee, minister of music at First, Montgomery, in Montgomery Baptist Association.

"By most anybody's standards, the St. Olaf Choir is one of the finest choirs in the world," Colee said. "The choir has a respected tradition and is just very impressive."

Many people might be familiar with the choir because of its participation in the annual St. Olaf Christmas Festival, which is broadcast nationwide on public television and radio. What listeners may not realize is that the St. Olaf Choir tradition has long been a strong influence on other collegiate choirs around the United States, including the Samford A Cappella Choir.

"The Samford A Cappella Choir is — if you will — a direct descendent of the St. Olaf Choir, in that the founding conductor of the A Cappella Choir, George Koski, attended St. Olaf and was a member of that choir," according to Joe Estes, minister of music and worship at First Baptist Church, Trussville, in Birmingham Baptist Association.

Koski formed the first A Cappella Choir at Howard College (now Samford University) in 1949, incorporating a similar approach to choral singing as that taken by the founder of the St. Olaf Choir, F. Melius Christiansen. Gene Black, who succeeded Koski as the



Photo courtesy of St. Olaf College

The St. Olaf Choir will launch its 2014 national tour with performances in Birmingham and Montgomery in early February. The world-renowned choir has a 102-year history.

conductor of the A Cappella Choir in 1967 and served until his retirement in 1999, was influenced by Koski and the St. Olaf sound as well.

Hundreds of young musicians and future worship leaders received their training under Black at Samford, thus spreading the influence of the St. Olaf musical tradition throughout Alabama and the world, said Bob Hatfield, minister of music at Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham, in Birmingham Association.

The combination of Black's association with the St. Olaf Choir, former St. Olaf conductor Kenneth Jennings and current St. Olaf conductor (since 1990) Anton Armstrong also nurtured a beneficial relationship between the two choirs and the evolving legacy of each, Armstrong said. Armstrong is the fourth conductor in the choir's 102-year history.

"Dr. Black often reached out to us in his years as conductor of the Samford A Cappella Choir and derived his approach to choral singing from his own teacher and the influence of the St. Olaf tradition," Armstrong said.

Black's continued work with the Samford Alumni Choir continues this tradition, he added.

In the upcoming national tour performances, the St. Olaf Choir will bring a "smorgas-

bord of music" to the stage. There will be music of the church from centuries past as well as contemporary compositions. Selections such as André J. Thomas' "I've Just Come From the Foundation," William Dawson's arrangement of "Ezekiel Saw de Wheel," Robert Scholz's arrangement of William Walker's "What Wondrous Love" and Yu-Shan Tsai's arrangement of Philip P. Bliss' "It is Well with My Soul" will showcase African-American spirituals and American hymnody.

Guest artist Catherine Rodland will accompany some pieces on grand pipe organ. There is even a part of the performance in which the audience will be invited to sing along with the choir.

Expect much more

Armstrong said audiences should expect much more from these performances than good music.

"Hearing the St. Olaf Choir is more than just a musical experience," Armstrong said. "What makes this ensemble distinctive is the way our singers perform at the highest artistic level and touch the hearts and souls of our listeners. Through body, mind, spirit and voice, our audiences are transformed."

Tickets are required and are available online at www.stolaf tickets.com or by phone at 1-800-363-5487.

Available seating will be on sale at the door on the day of each concert. Additional information on ticket policies can be found at stolaf tickets.com. ❧

"Through body, mind, spirit and voice, [St. Olaf's] audiences are transformed."

Anton Armstrong
conductor, St. Olaf Choir

The New Atheist

Robert Stewart, professor of philosophy and theology at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, speaks about three core beliefs that new atheists seem to have in common with one another.



Photo by Kristen Padilla

Modern-day atheists among best-selling authors, unite around core beliefs

By Kristen Padilla
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

What's the difference between the new atheist and the old atheist?" asked Robert Stewart, professor of philosophy and theology at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS). "The new atheists are still living and the old atheists are dead, for the most part."

After the laughter subsided, Stewart, who also holds the Greer-Heard chair of faith and culture at NOBTS, quickly moved everyone into the matter at hand. "The New Atheist," which was the title of his lecture at the SALT Apologetics Conference at First Baptist Church, Montgomery, on Jan. 18.

"The new atheists, in particular are best-selling authors, cited and championed on the Internet," he said. Some of these well-known atheists are Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett and Steven Weinber.

What these new atheists seem to have in common with one another are three core beliefs, Stewart explained.

First, new atheists believe "science and religion are mutually exclusive ways of looking at life. In short, religion and science are at war," he said.

Second, "Faith is a superstitious blind leap based on the denial of evidence."

'The great excuse'

This is a belief that Dawkins repeatedly echoes, Stewart said, quoting Dawkins as saying, "Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence."

Third, "Religion is inherently evil. The world would be better off without religion."

Stewart pointed out a quote from Weinber: "With or without religions, you would have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, that takes religion."

New atheists also have four common characteristic practices.

1. "They have a superficial knowledge of the Bible," Stewart said.
2. "They are theological novices.

"Now it's hard to be a theological expert without being a biblical expert without having read the Bible and understanding it fairly well," Stewart said. "It annoys me to no end how frequently Richard Dawkins will say publicly how Christianity is well represented by Westboro Baptist Church (known for its picketing at military funerals)."

3. "They are primarily irreligious, especially anti-Christian and anti-Muslim," Stewart said.

4. "They are materialists.

"They believe that all the realities that exist are material realities," he said. "If something exists it exists physically and can be known by the scientific method."

Because of these beliefs and characteristics, people often ask, "Does science of Darwin disprove God?" Stewart's answer is "no." One of a long list of historically, believing scientists is Francis Collins, who is most responsible for the Human Genome Project, which mapped and sequenced all human DNA.

"For quite a while in my 20s I was a pretty obnoxious atheist," Collins said. "At the age of 27, after a good deal of intellectual debating with myself about the plausibility of faith, and particularly with strong influence from C.S. Lewis, I became convinced that this was a decision I wanted to make,

and I became by choice a Christian, a serious Christian."

A second question often asked is, "Does religion poison everything?" Again, Stewart said, "No." He quoted Friar Thomas Crean from his book, "God is No Delusion," a response to Dawkins' "The God Delusion."

"That in the name of religion, good men may do bad things is no argument against religion, unless crimes of passion are arguments against human love," Crean wrote.

At the end of the day, though, "Why am I not a naturalist (or atheist)?" Stewart asked the audience. "A metaphysical naturalist is one that says the only realities that exist are physical things that can be known or discovered by the scientific method."

Therefore, naturalism undermines human rationality, human free will, morality and human relationality. It also cannot explain human consciousness and it must appeal to ad hoc solutions, which

are solutions you come up with to meet a problem.

"Those are some of the reasons that I'm not an atheist because those are the implications that follow from believing what they believe," Stewart said. "An atheist can't live with those implications. An atheist doesn't live with those implications."

To hear more of Stewart's lecture, visit www.youtube.com/user/tacticalfaith.

"Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence."

**Richard Dawkins
atheist/author,
'The God Delusion'**

Practical strategies for talking to atheists

STRATEGY #1:

- ▶ Ask them if they freely don't believe in God.
- ▶ Ask them if they think they are rational and can reason their way to the truth on important issues.
- ▶ Ask how certain they are.
- ▶ Ask them how this can be the case if naturalism, i.e., materialism is true.
- ▶ Ask them which they are more certain about — materialism or their own freedom and rationality.

STRATEGY #2:

- ▶ Ask them how important this issue is.
- ▶ Ask them if they believe in investigation and research.
- ▶ Ask them how they have investigated the question of God.
- ▶ Ask them if the intensity of their investigation has been proportional to the importance of the issue.

(Source: Robert Stewart, professor of philosophy and theology at New Orleans Seminary)

'Make time ... for lost people, McFarland says

(continued from page 1)

which proves His identity and message.

"The human heart craves peace, forgiveness, to have assurance that we're right with God," McFarland said. "Jesus is unique in what He promises: righteousness, forgiveness. He coupled these incredible claims with an unparalleled level of proof, i.e. His own resurrection from the dead.

"I want to ask you to do a difficult thing and challenge you before God to make time in your life for lost people," he continued. "Sinners sin and we are in a world of sin; and

the solution is the Savior and His name is Jesus Christ."

In a culture that is being led by naturalists and atheists, we have marching orders from God to take the gospel and we must not fail, McFarland said.

"We've got a Bible that's trustworthy, a tomb that's empty. We've got the Spirit of God that draws people.

"It's time for the Church to rise to the challenge of the hour and to be at our best," he concluded. "And to show that our message is true and we are committed to it." (TAB)

'Make it as a goal to be understood' more than being right

(continued from page 1)

deeply bothered me, the way human beings treated each other. And my solution for that as an atheist was just to say, "There is no right; there's no wrong. We're only animals acting within our nature."

Because of that worldview, Watts said he was staunchly pro-choice. But when he became a Christian he "started to understand there was a value to human life."

"We need to find those areas that animate us ... that excite us, that we want to study," he said. "At some point, if you want to make yourself a resource for the kingdom of God (then) find those areas that are of most interest to you and begin to study them," Watts added.

"There'll be a time when a depth of knowledge is needed and when that time comes, the kingdom of God needs people like you to answer that call."

Third be honest and be understood. "We should not (lie) if we represent the kingdom of God," Watts said. "We should be honest about what we know, we should be honest about the depth of our knowledge, the limits of our arguments."

"We should make it as a goal to be understood" more than being right.

Because in the end, "apologetics doesn't save people. Jesus saves."

'Point them to the cross'

"We use apologetics to clear the air and point them to the cross of Jesus Christ," he said. Paraphrasing from William Rusher, Watts said, "It's not right there that they're going to change their minds ... but what you say at that moment that lives with them for months afterwards."

This is Watts' story. The person whom he credits with the most responsibility in him becoming a Christian had not spoken to him for a year prior to his conversion. Yet it was this person's words that remained with him during that year and destroyed his worldview.

"They would have seen their work in my life as a colossal failure had I not gone to them after I became a Christian and told them what they meant," Watts said. "They were patient; they were kind."

Their arguments remained with him, like a pebble in his shoe, "to the point I woke up one morning and all their work just came crashing down on me and I was willing to look at Christ for the first time in my life, to consider Him," he said. "Their arguments won. I understood them and that understanding led me to Christ." ❧



Photo by Kristen Padilla

Participants in the SALT (Strategic Answers to Life's Thoughts) Apologetics Conference at FBC Montgomery hear a wide range of topics including how to approach apologetics, theology and philosophy, archaeology and 21st century storytelling.

Increase your net skills

Tactical Faith teaches how to be 'fishers of men'

Being an effective fisherman requires a certain level of skill, said Jay Wolf, senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Montgomery. "You must be skillful with your net. ... Jesus said to 'follow Me and I'll make you fishers of men' (Matt. 4:19)."

"Fishers of men" can use apologetics to increase their net skills, Wolf said. "Apologetics equips people to share their faith."

"So the whole point of hosting [the SALT] conference (see story, page 1) is to help people fish," he said.

For this reason First, Montgomery, the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) and *The Alabama Baptist* partnered with Tactical Faith for the second year to bring SALT (Strategic Answers to Life's Thoughts) Apologetics Conference to church staff members and lay people in Alabama.

SALT, held Jan. 18 at First, Montgomery, featured seven keynote speakers and a wide range of topics including how to approach apologetics, theology and philosophy, archaeology and 21st century storytelling.

Matthew Burford, founder and president of

Tactical Faith, opened the SALT conference acknowledging the faithfulness of God and of God's people that has made Tactical Faith and SALT possible. Tactical Faith is an Alabama-based nonprofit organization that provides apologetics resources

for churches. Within only three years of its formation in 2010, Tactical Faith has grown from three volunteers to more than 40 doing work in Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Georgia, Louisiana and Michigan.

And it's because of that faithfulness that Tactical Faith can bring in top apologetic experts at no cost for the participant for the purpose of connecting local churches with apologetics training.

"It's an honor for us to be able to partner ... to bring this about," said Billy Harris, SBOM state missionary. "Our prayer is that this will be equipping for all of us that we might be better Great Commission people."

To learn more about Tactical Faith, visit www.tacticalfaith.com. To watch the videos from the January SALT conference, visit www.youtube.com/user/tacticalfaith. (TAB)

"Our prayer is that this will be equipping for all of us that we might be better Great Commission people."

**Billy Harris
State Board of Missions**

Practical **TIPS** for talking to atheists

1. Listen and relate to them as people.
2. Discuss the opinions of their experts.
3. Avoid arguing evolution (or the age of the Earth).
4. Focus on physics and cosmology.
5. Use questions.

(Source: Robert Stewart, professor of philosophy and theology at New Orleans Seminary)

'Mature response'

FBC Birmingham pressing on amid recent events

Recent events concerning Richard Shahan, former children and families pastor at First Baptist Church, Birmingham, will likely take a toll on all parties involved.

But the First, Birmingham, congregation has been assured they will not be left alone to pick up the pieces.

"We assured the church that none of us are going to leave because of this," said interim pastor Charles T. Carter. Although most of the staff positions are filled by interims at the moment, "we are committed to see them through," he said.

Carter also commended the church for the way it has dealt with all aspects of the situation — from the July 23, 2013, discovering of Karen Shahan's body to the 53-year-old Richard Shahan being arrested and charged for his wife's murder to the recent report of a potential homosexual relationship.

"The church has responded as maturely and wholesomely and supportively as they could in a very, very, very delicate situation," Carter said. "The Scripture

admonition is to 'Bear ye one another's burdens ...' and we've tried to do that. We have failed in places and times, but I think ... by and large the church has been supportive.

"The church has done everything they could to provide spiritually the kind of support Richard and his 86-year-old mother, Louise (also a member of First, Birmingham) needed," he said.

At the same time Carter and other staff members are working to keep the church from becoming "obsessed" with the situation.

A church meeting was held Jan. 19 to discuss the situation, inform the congregation of counseling opportunities for members and encourage the fellowship.

"We are so traumatized by all these unforeseen developments and it may not be over yet, we don't know, but ... we must renew ourselves to being the church — to engage in missions and evangelism and discipleship and teaching," Carter said. "We must get back to letting the church be the church."

Shahan is currently under house arrest at his mother's home in

Homewood. He was released on \$100,000 bond Jan. 16 and is only allowed outings for medical, attorney or court appointments.

During the bond hearing, prosecuting attorneys said more than 3,000 emails were found indicating Shahan was planning to leave the United States and never return. The emails reportedly contained details about his plan to "begin a new life with his boyfriend."

Homeland Security ICE agents arrested him at the Nashville International Airport on Jan. 1 when he tried to board a flight to Berlin, Germany. From there, the prosecutors believe his plans were to fly to Kazakhstan, eventually moving to the United Kingdom.

But Richard Shahan, who was put on administrative leave from First, Birmingham, in August 2013, had announced his plans to serve for three years with Bible Mission International (BMI) before he resigned from the church effective Dec. 31, 2013. The church held a commissioning service for him Dec. 29 and had agreed to help support his new missions endeavor financially through BMI.

A preliminary hearing is set for Feb. 5 to determine if the case will go to the Jefferson County Grand Jury. (Jennifer Davis Rash and Neisha Fuson)



SHAHAN

Alabama updates

People, churches making news across the state

Bennett to retire from state missionary role

"She has epitomized the servant-mindedness of a devoted follower of Christ." That's how Rick Lance, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) executive director, described Mary Sue Bennett, who has served alongside him for more than 30 years.

She has served as a state missionary in the role of special assistant to Lance since he was elected in 1998 and was his administrative assistant for the 15 years prior to that while he was pastor of First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa.

"It's kind of a way of life," said Bennett, who will retire from her position at SBOM on Jan. 31.

Bennett, a member of First Baptist Church, Montgomery, also served as recording secretary for the Alabama Baptist State Convention for more than 15 years. She was awarded an honorary doctor of divinity degree by Judson College in June 2013. She had previously earned a bachelor's degree from William Jewel Col-

lege in Liberty, Mo., and a master's degree in religious education from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

Bennett met her husband, Don, at Southern Seminary, and they married in February 1967. For the next 16 years, she held a variety of positions including elementary and high school teacher; new mother; kindergarten director for First Baptist Church, Gainesville, Ga.; and staff member of First Baptist Church, Milledgeville, Ga. The Bennetts moved to Tuscaloosa in 1981 when Don was called to serve as a Baptist campus minister at the University of Alabama. They became members of First, Tuscaloosa, where Lance would begin serving as pastor in 1983 — and the rest is history.

"Personally, I am extremely grateful for all she has done to help me in my ministry both in the pastorate and at the SBOM," Lance said. "Mary Sue is one of those 'saints behind the scenes.'"

Bennett said she will always treasure the relationships formed at SBOM. "It's been a delightful and grand opportunity working together with a common cause, trying to serve Alabama Baptists. It's a lot of fun," she said, adding her appreciation and gratitude to Lance for the opportunity to serve together in ministry.

The Bennetts plan to move back to Tuscaloosa. They have two children and four grandchildren. (Neisha Fuson)



BENNETT

New African-American church planted in Tuskegee

It's not every day that a young man walks in and says he wants to reach your community for Christ, but that's exactly what happened to Bill King in July 2013.

King, director of missions for Tuskegee Lee Baptist Association, met Courtney Bullard when he was still a student at Auburn University.

Bullard, who grew up in Opelika and was a member of Bethel #2 Baptist Church, Opelika, has been preaching since he was 16. Now in his late 20s, Bullard sensed God's call on his life to reach out to the Opelika area, specifically the youth, and spoke with King about planting a church through the association.

King met several times with Bullard, and the association's church planting committee helped train and equip Bullard to plant a church to reach the African-American community. This will be the second predominantly black church to cooperate with Tuskegee Lee Association, the first being Rock of Ages Baptist Church, Tuskegee.

The new church plant — Sanctuary of Faith Worship Center — meets in the building that formerly housed the association's East View Baptist Church, which had been sitting empty for several years, King noted. He was "excited to see a new church" use it.

On Nov. 17, 2013, Sanctuary of Faith held its first service. Bullard noted that it was more of a soft launch and that Feb. 2 will be its official launch date since it now has a handful of people attending regularly.

"My hope is to see the community become really reached physically and spiritually," Bullard said, noting the church's mission is to evangelize, empower and equip. He plans to attend New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary through an extension campus in Atlanta in the future.

Central Baptist Church, Opelika, and its pastor Scott Ferguson will serve in a mentor role with Bullard and Sanctuary of Faith.

For more information, visit www.sofwc.org. (Neisha Fuson)



BETHEL

► Pine Hill Church will host its first gospel singing of 2014 on Feb. 1. The guest singers will be The Impacts, of Sevierville, Tenn. Doors will open for seating at 6 p.m. and the service will be at 7 p.m. For information visit www.pinehillbaptistchurch.com or call the church at 334-963-4412. Chris Kynard is pastor.

COFFEE

► Author and Bible teacher Angela Thomas will be at First Church, Enterprise, on Feb. 18, 6 p.m. A book signing and refreshments will follow the program. For tickets call the church at 334-393-5683 or contact Dove Christian Supply. Alvin (Sonny) Moore is pastor.

GENEVA

► Maple Avenue Church, Geneva, will host The 39er's C.L.U.B. (Christians Living Under the Blood!) nondenominational luncheon Feb. 11, 11 a.m.

David Bradshaw, pastor of First Church, Coffee Springs, will present the program. For reservations call 334-684-9617. Mike Shirah is pastor.

LIMESTONE

► Join Pastor Tim Anderson of Clements Church, Athens, and Pastor Dusty McLemore of Lindsay Lane Church, Athens, at the 5th Annual Joint Men's Conference on Feb. 7, 5-10 p.m. on the Clements Church campus. Dinner will be at 5 p.m. To register contact the church office at 256-729-1328 or visit www.clements baptist.org. Registration deadline is Feb. 2.

ST. CLAIR

► Macedonia Church #1, Margaret, will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2014 with the theme "Coming Home to Macedonia." The church will hold a celebration on a Sunday each month. Themes and dates for the upcoming months are: United in Love, Feb. 23; Servants of the Church, March 16; Storms, April 6; Home-

coming, May 4; Vacation Bible Schools, June 1; Patriotic, July 13; Prayer for the Future, Aug. 3; Centennial Celebration (Grand Finale), Sept. 21. Anyone who has held an office or served in any capacity is invited March 16 for the Servants of the Church celebration. For information call Barbara Gilbert at 205-594-5622. Pat Giles is pastor.

WINSTON

► Pleasant Hill Church #2, Double Springs, will hold a Senior Adult Revival Feb. 9-12. Times will be Sunday at 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. and Monday-Wednesday at 10:30 a.m. and 7 p.m. Greg Dollar will be the evangelist. Jeffrey Wiggins is pastor. ► Winston Association's Vacation Bible School (VBS) Early Bird Clinic will be Feb. 10, 6:30 p.m. at the association office. James Blakeney will lead the clinic. This is for all pastors, VBS directors and spouses. A meal will be served. For reservations call 205-489-5137 by Feb. 1. Al Hood is director of missions. ☞

Surrendered for China



Chinese Bible college president trains, equips students, partners with Alabama Baptist pastors

By Julie Payne
The Alabama Baptist

The students at a Bible college in China study the Word of God intensely for countless hours. And when the clock strikes midnight, even after a full day of studies there are still groups of them poring over Scripture.

These same students are financially burdened and wouldn't be able to afford to pay for their studies otherwise. But the Bible college — started by Zhou, a man with a vision from God — funds their theological education and has now seen 218 students graduate.

Zhou, who serves as the Bible college's president, is a third generation Christian within his family. While born and raised in a loving, Christian home he was "very rebellious toward religion," he said of his early years.

Praying to God

Zhou noted that at one point a tumor developed on his leg. When he went to have the tumor checked, the doctor advised surgery to remove it or else he would possibly become crippled. After his mother encouraged him to pray to God, Zhou decided to ask God to heal him — within 30 minutes. When his mother asked why he

would say such a prayer, Zhou replied that if it was truly an experience of God's intervention, and not just from the medicine he was about to take, he would be able to experience a speedy recovery.

What happened next amazed Zhou. The tumor suddenly vanished. "God healed me and heard my prayer," he said. That's the moment when God changed Zhou's life and he truly came to know Him, he said.

But even with his newfound faith, Zhou still wasn't willing to fully surrender his life to be used by God.

He sought a public service position and ranked at the top of the pool of applicants, but he was not selected. However, he experienced God again — this time in a still "voice" saying that while the world rejected him, God wanted him.

"I listened to God and surrendered to Him and I started doing church work," he said. What started with eight people grew to a staggering 1,500 in just three years.

Zhou said God then led him to begin doing missions work at the end of China's Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s. (The Cultural Revolution was launched in 1966 by Communist Party leader Mao Zedong in order to reassert his authority over the Chinese government, and it lasted roughly 10 years, according to history.com.)

During his early years of missions work, Zhou was distributing gospel tracts and was soon arrested by the police before being subsequently let go.

"I took the opportunity to share Christ with anyone willing to come and listen," he said. One particular day he decided to buy some fresh fruit at the marketplace. This attracted some children, and he began to share the story of Jesus with them. In the evening the children's parents came to pick them up, and Zhou was able to preach to the adults and encouraged them to come back. As a result 42 people received Christ as their Savior.

Laying hands

Zhou also shared a story about preaching one day when a demon-possessed woman began disrupting the group. "God spoke to me to lay hands on this woman to cast out the demon," he said. "And with God's power I [laid] a hand and prayed for her and cast out the demon."

Many of those in attendance were hearing the gospel for the first time and stayed through the evening to hear more about Jesus, he said.

But Zhou was arrested again, being told his open evangelism was a disturbance to the public and was attracting too many people. Despite the suffering he said he experienced while in jail, Zhou remained dedicated to the Lord's work. Once he was released, God gave him a vision to have a "big church," he said.

Planning for this church building was a five-year process from 2001 to 2006. As the church's construction was wrapping up, God gave Zhou the next phase of the mission — to begin a Bible college to train and equip students to become pastors.

The Bible college would run out of the new church building and would specifically recruit students in dire financial situations.

"The Bible college offers free tuition and all their living expenses," he noted, adding he doesn't draw a salary as president.

"Though it is hard work, there is much joy inside because it is such an honor and privilege to be able ... to equip so many students to do God's work," he said.

Zhou noted one of the greatest needs for Christians is that there are not enough pastors, preachers and teachers. There is a great need for China to hear the gospel, he added. With a population of 1.3 billion

there are an estimated 100 million Christians there, he said.

"There's still a great number of people ... who have not heard the gospel," he said. "Therefore it is our desire ... to continue to work hard to get more students graduated and sent out to different parts of China."

A team of co-workers serves at the Bible college, and invitations are often extended for guests — professors and others from overseas — to serve as guest lecturers. Ryan Whitley, pastor of CrossPoint Baptist Church, Trussville, is one of the Bible college's previous guest teachers.

Meeting Zhou approximately three years ago was "a providential appointment that God arranged," Whitley said, noting he was connected with Zhou through a pastor he knew in Hong Kong. In March 2012, Whitley, along with Buddy Gray, pastor of Hunter Street Baptist Church, Hoover, and John Thweatt, pastor of First Baptist Church, Pell City, made their first of two visits together to teach at Zhou's Bible college.

'It's been a thrill'

The tables were recently turned in mid-January when Zhou visited Alabama during his first-ever visit to the United States. While in Alabama, his visits included speaking at the three Baptist pastors' churches.

"We invited [Zhou] to come to the states and visit our churches," Thweatt said. "He did ... and it's been a thrill to have him come."

Thweatt said that throughout Zhou's message to the First, Pell City, congregation, in which Zhou shared his testimony and news about the Bible college, people were laughing, clapping and crying.

"We took up a very generous love offering for him to support the students," Thweatt noted. "It was one of the highlights of recent years as far as having a guest come into our church."

And the feeling was mutual for Zhou, who quickly sensed the churches' warm welcomes and said he felt at home while visiting Birmingham. "No matter where we go ... we have a heavenly Father who guides everybody together." In Christ we are all brothers and sisters, he said.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Name adapted for security reasons. ☞



Photos by Neisha Fuson

Chinese Bible college president Zhou (center) visited several Baptist churches in the Greater Birmingham area in mid-January. Ryan Whitley (left) and Charlie Wiles (second from left) of CrossPoint Church, Trussville, and John Thweatt (right), of First, Pell City, are among Alabama Baptists partnering with Zhou in his work. Raymond Foo (second from right) served as Zhou's translator in Alabama.

Mid-January saw thousands of protestors storm different locations in Ukraine, like Kharkov, pictured here. An estimated 500 were injured in a riot in Kiev, according to some reports.

'Desperately needs prayer'



en.wikipedia.org

Growing political unrest in Ukraine turns violent

As Ukraine is in the midst of domestic turmoil and disorder, a Baptist and former member of the country's Parliament, Pavel Unguryan, is asking for prayer.

Unguryan, who served in Parliament from 2008 to 2012, said, "Today, as never before, Ukraine desperately needs prayer. In light of recent events, we realize that only Almighty God can reconcile the conflicting parties and stop the violence and bloodshed in the country."

Protests in Ukraine started November 2013 after President Viktor Yanukovich pulled out of signing a free trade deal with the European Union in favor of closer economic ties with Russia. The unrest has grown in recent weeks and turned violent Jan. 19 when protestors in the capital of Kiev clashed with riot police. Thousands stormed the regional administration headquar-

ters in Rivne in western Ukraine.

Unguryan said five people were killed and more than 500 protestors injured. Other reports put the death toll at three and injuries at approximately 150.

Unguryan accused the authorities of "ignoring the demands of hundreds of thousands" of protestors, which led "the enraged people [to take] matters into their own hands."

'Large-scale gathering'

He reported that "after a large-scale gathering at Kiev's Independence Square (on Jan. 19) a group of protestors tried to break through the line of police forces to the building of Ukraine's Parliament to require the cancellation of a number of laws adopted Jan. 16, which severely restrict the constitutional rights and freedoms of citizens."

Unguryan, a Baptist youth leader in Ukraine who is a member of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA)

General Council and Commission on Ministry, said, "This confrontation resulted in a conflict which ... ignited the anger of protestors. In response the law enforcement officers used ... stun grenades, teargas, water cannons and traumatic weapons. The protestors 'armed' themselves with catapults and started hurling stones, tiles, and firebombs at the police. Thick black smoke from burning tires engulfed the city."

Kiev was in virtual lockdown. Business establishments closed and residents were advised by the government to stay off the streets.

Ukraine is a former Soviet republic that regained its independence in 1991, after the breakup of the Soviet Union. It has one of the largest Baptist bodies in Europe. The All-Ukrainian Union of Associations of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, a member organization of the BWA, has more than 121,000 members in more than 2,300 churches. (BWA)



Northport Baptist celebrates 175th anniversary

With about 850 people in attendance, Northport Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa Baptist Association celebrated its 175th anniversary Nov. 3, 2013.

Stephen Brown, Northport Baptist's associate pastor of education/administration, said former pastors and staff were invited to celebrate with the church, and the oldest living member was recognized.

Angie Cooper, representative from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented the church with a plaque.

There also was special singing and a video presentation that featured church history. Brown noted another special element was a play that featured some historical items.

John Nixon, Northport Baptist's pastor at the time, delivered a short sermon and a "huge dinner on the grounds" was held afterward, Brown said.

Historical displays in the foyer featured couples that had been married in the church over the years, as well as various ministries including the children's and music programs.

Brown added that many of the church families dressed up in historical attire for the anniversary day. (Julie Payne)

Randolph Baptist marks 150 years of ministry

Randolph Baptist Church in Bibb Baptist Association celebrated its 150th anniversary Nov. 10, 2013.

During the service, two former pastors, several members and the wife of an interim pastor all shared their memories of the church's past to a crowd of about 200.

Mavis Gates, representative from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented a plaque to Pastor Tony Reynolds.

Rep. April Weaver also presented a plaque, which was signed by Gov. Robert Bentley.

Reynolds, who delivered the sermon that day, said the church wanted the anniversary service to be a celebration of what God has done. "We didn't want it to be about us but (to) focus fully on Jesus," he noted.

Following the service was a "wonderful dinner on the grounds," Reynolds said. (TAB, Ann Williams)

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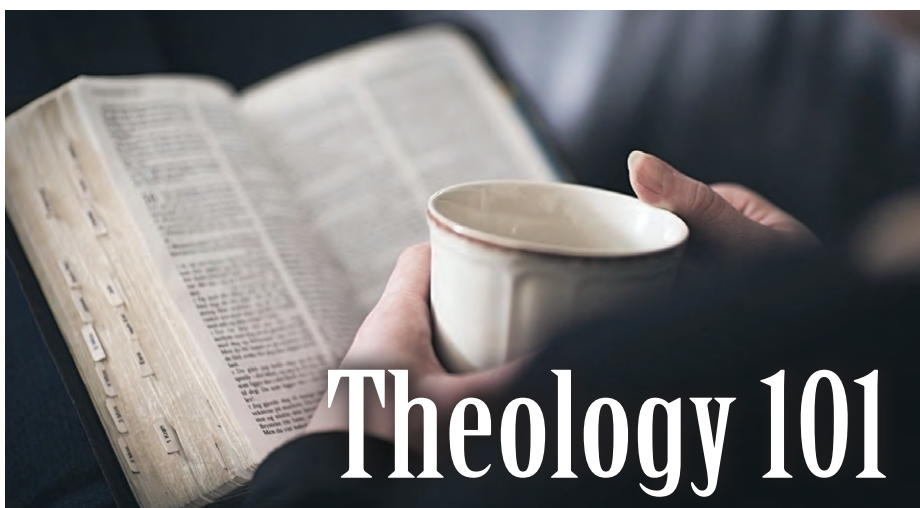
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Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Doctrine of Christ

Jesus: The Divine Word

By Jerry Batson
Special to The Alabama Baptist

This week we focus again on John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” What the first two phrases imply clearly, the third clause makes clearly explicit, “the Word was God.” To declare that Christ the Living Word is both coeternal (eternal along with God) and coexistent (existing along with God) is to imply His divine nature. Not satisfied with even a clear implication, the verse ends with a straightforward declaration of the full divinity or God-ness of Christ. He was God. The theological shorthand for expressing this truth is to say that Christ is coequal with God.

At this point, the coming of Christ into the world takes on a hard to imagine condescension. In “being found in human form” (Phil. 2:7), Christ chose to put aside the independent use of His coequality with God in order to take up full humanity, in which form He was able to humble Himself “by becoming obedient to the point of death” (Phil. 2:8).

A valued ally

Only an all-wise and all-powerful and all-loving God could pull off combining coequality with Himself and full identity with humanity, without diminishing or compromising either God-ness and humanness. Faith becomes our valued ally when we cannot logically explain the dual nature of the Living Word. We confess our faith that the coequal Christ became human without ceasing to be divine.

We get glimpses of this coequality in some of the statements Christ made. For example, in John 10:30, He declared, “I and the Father are one.” In addition, other parts of the New Testament make statements about the coequality of Christ. In fact, Philippians 2:6 speaks of Christ, using the phrase “equality with God,” when it reads, “Who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.”

In order to appreciate the coequality of God the Father and God the Son,

we do well to distinguish a coequality in essence or being from coequality of function. Some divine functions are said to be the prerogatives of God the Father, such as loving the world and sending His Son. Other functions are said to be the prerogatives of God the Son, such as giving His life a ransom for many or of becoming sin for us.

Cooperative and compatible

One other word might be added, while their functions are often distinguished, each Person of the Godhead is cooperative and compatible with the work of the other two. No tension exists between God the Father and God the Son.

The humility of the coequal Word is an example and challenge to all of us. Though being equal with God, Christ willingly subordinated Himself to the Father, so much so, that we can say that the Father sent His Son into the world. At this point, Christ is an example for husbands and wives. Marriage partners are equal in essence and value, but for the sake of harmony and a meaningful life together, we submit ourselves to one another — a matter of equals submitting to equals (Eph. 5:21). In the church, we espouse the essential truth of the priesthood of all believers, hence, we are a spiritual body of equals. However, in order to function effectively and fruitfully, we are told to submit ourselves to those who are the leaders — a matter of equals choosing to submit to an equal (Heb. 13:17).

The highest use of a privilege or position is to surrender it willingly for good and godly purposes. ☞

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.



‘Chance for ... stabilization’

New Egyptian constitution gives Christians hope

Egyptian voters have approved a new constitution, leaving Christians a bit more hopeful, though it does not secure basic rights for religious minorities.

One Egyptian Christian leader said the difference in attitudes he observed as he waited in line to vote was “a great tendency to celebrate a new Egypt that returned us back from the iron grip of radical Muslims,” Mission Network News reported.

The country’s new constitution was approved by 98.1 percent of the 38.6 percent of eligible voters who turned out for a two-day referendum in mid-January.

Christians are expected to fare slightly better under the new constitution compared to the one drafted during the one-year presidency of Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, who was removed from office July 2013.

Specifically the blasphemy statute that prohibited the “insult or abuse of all religious messengers and prophets,” which was used against Christians, has been removed, according to Morning Star News.

Still the new constitution renders Christians and other non-Muslims second-class citizens and establishes Islam as the state religion and sharia (Islamic law) as the “principle source of legislation” for Egypt.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry raised concerns Jan. 18 about the fairness of the vote, given that it was nearly unanimous. *The New York Times* said Kerry mentioned the “polarized political environment,” the absence of an inclusive drafting process or public debate before the vote as well as the arrests of those who campaigned against it.

“Democracy is more than any one referendum or election. It is about equal rights and protections under the law for all Egyptians, regardless of their gender, faith, ethnicity or political affiliation,” Kerry said.

Christians in Egypt “seem lined up behind the constitution,” Morning Star News noted as the vote was underway. “It is hard to find a Copt [member of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Egypt’s largest Christian

minority] who says they will vote against it, even if they don’t support it. One reason for this, human rights activists said, is the perception that the country will otherwise continue its descent into chaos or revert to the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood or hard-line Salafis.”

David Curry, president of Open Doors USA, visited Egypt ahead of the referendum. “The people are generally excited

about a chance for some stabilization,” he said.

Egypt recently declared the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization. However, Curry noted that some are concerned the Muslim Brotherhood will not fade from power without a fight.

As believers worldwide pray for peace in Egypt, Curry requested specific prayer for Christians in the southern part of the nation, outside Cairo. “There are some very radical forces in the more rural areas that make it very dangerous for Christians.”

Attacks on Christians in 2013 led to Egypt rising to No. 22 on Open Doors’ 2014 World Watch List, a ranking of the top 50 countries where persecution is most severe. (BP)



BP photo

An Egyptian woman shows her finger has been dipped in ink after voting on the new constitution.

NavPress sells Life Bible Study division; Alabama Baptist to direct new group

NavPress has sold its Life Bible Study (LBS) division, publisher of biblically based digital and print content, to the newly formed Life Bible Study, LLC, a group founded and owned by senior partners Barry Sneed and Quentin Whitwell.

LBS was originally known as Student Life Publishing and was based out of Birmingham. It was acquired by NavPress in 2010.

LBS is best known for its youth digital curriculum, providing group curricula for students, children, preschoolers and adults in digital and print formats.

The new owners will maintain the current sales and customer service team, adding new personnel as needed.

The new company will continue to deliver

Bible Studies for Sunday Schools and small groups through their enhanced online delivery system.

Former LBS president John Herring, executive pastor at NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville, will remain as managing director and direct publisher of the newly formed group. He has served Alabama Baptist churches for the past 30 years.

“I am humbled to be able to serve in this way,” Herring told *The Alabama Baptist*. “Because our roots are here, many Alabama churches have been with us from the very beginning. I am so grateful for their continued faith in us.”

For more information, visit lifebiblestudy.com. (NavPress, TAB)

Historical HIGHLIGHTS

FROM PREVIOUS ISSUES OF THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



50 Years Ago January 1964

Need for a Church: Concord Baptist Church, Fayette County, was organized June 19, 1839, when 17 people met at the old Fellowship Meeting House and felt the need for a church to serve the area. They became the charter members of Concord Baptist Church. The first church building was located near Davis Creek where new converts were baptized. The first pastor of the church was Tilmon Howell and one of the first church clerks was James Richards. In later years the church was moved to the present location and a new building was completed

in 1961. One of the earlier pastors at the new location was Joseph J. Patterson, grandfather of the contractor, Marvin L. Poe, who built the new building. The present pastor is Rayford Rice.

40 Years Ago January 1974

A "New" Facility: When Tennessee River Baptist Association called Noel Walker as missionary, the utility room of the missionary's home was the only office for the association. In 1971, the association made a step forward by securing an office in downtown Scottsboro. Then in August 1973 the "new" facility, a house located

on Highway 72 just outside Scottsboro next to the missionary home, was purchased for \$9,000. The five rooms of the house will be used as a conference room, reading room for free Sunday School materials available to churches, office space, counseling facilities and a special area designed for filmstrips and projectors available to the churches. This is a gigantic step forward for Tennessee River Association.

30 Years Ago January 1984

A Gift of Land: Members of Garywood Baptist Church, Hueytown, are excited about the recent gift to the church from the George Knight family. The gift of property was donated to the church in memory of George Knight's mother and father, Mr. and Mrs. D.M. Knight. Participating in the dedication of the three lots were George Knight and his daughter, Mrs. Charles (Lou) Najjar, and her son, Charles Najjar. Representing the church were Don Earley, Coleman Hubbard and Pastor Bill Pomeroy. The D.M. Knights also have four daughters who are members of Garywood Baptist Church: Inez Earley, Eula Mae Murray, Mary Parsons and Betty Ledbetter.

20 Years Ago January 1994

New Forest Center Dedicated:

The University of Mobile dedicated its new \$1.1 million Dwight Harrigan Forest Learning Center during ceremonies Jan. 8 on the north Mobile campus. Speakers included Alabama Sen. Ann Bedsole, of Mobile; University of Mobile President Michael A. Magnoli; Hazel Fournier, president of the Mobile County board of school commissioners; and Dwight Harrigan, president of Harrigan Lumber Company in Monroeville and executive vice president of Scotch Lumber Company in Fulton. The center is a joint project of the Alabama Forest Resources Center and the University of Mobile. It is designed to provide hands-on education about forest ecosystems, land and water management, and the crucial contributions forests make to the quality of life.

10 Years Ago January 2004

Samford Announces Advances on Campus: Samford University in Birmingham unveiled plans Jan. 29 for advancements at the school that could total \$200 million. The advancements include building new buildings, renovating old buildings, increasing the student body and adding endowments. Top priorities for new buildings include a recital hall, new dormitory rooms and/or residence hall and a varsity sports and student fitness center.

LETTERS

(continued from page 2)

ning, we in the West must remember that though we have might, on this issue we are in the minority.

The issue of same-sex "marriage," though acceptable in the West, is antithetical to the practices and beliefs in the rest of the world.

Moreover, if history is to be believed the danger for us in the West is not as Pastor Jeffress would suggest the beginning of the end with respect to the world but the beginning of the end with respect to the West. Respectfully, I would

withhold comment on Pastor McKissic's remarks as

the views he posits are in his own words "without certainty."

That withstanding the role of persons of African heritage on the world stage be it education, entertainment, government, law, medicine, religion, politics, science or sports, is in the words of Thomas Jefferson, "self-evident."

Leander C. Jones
Tuscaloosa, Ala.



MARKET PLACE

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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR: Harmony Grove Baptist Church in Winfield, Ala., is seeking a full-time pastor. Please send resumé 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 resumé to: New Haven Baptist Pastor Search Committee, 100 New Haven Road, Anniston, AL 36201.

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

WORSHIP MINISTER: Wilmer Baptist Church is searching for an experienced, spirit-filled individual to join us full-time as our worship minister. We are also searching for an interim worship leader until that position is filled. For a detailed job description for both positions, visit www.wilmerchurch.com.

WORSHIP LEADER: Wilton Baptist Church in Wilton, Ala., (near Montevallo) is prayerfully seeking a worship leader. Send resumé 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.

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

STUDENT PASTOR: Southside Baptist Church in Troy, Ala., is currently seeking to fill the position of a full-time student pastor. This ministry position will be responsible for ministering and discipling students from 7th grade through college. Full-time ministerial experience and four-year degree is preferred. To apply, please send your resumé to: southside@troycable.net, ATTN: Student Minister Search Committee.

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.

OTHER POSITIONS

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Want to know God?

Pastor Tony Barber
Bluff Park Baptist Church, Hoover

I've been a pastor for almost 29 years and as such have presided over many funerals. I have spoken at the funeral of a newborn, a lady who was 107 and everything in between. I may have been caught off guard about when they died but not that they died. That knowledge has driven me. I want to be sure that everyone I know is prepared for death.

I don't want to sound fatalistic or pessimistic. I just want you to think about the hereafter long enough to be concerned about it; to take the necessary steps to assure that your "final estate" is a place of eternal happiness and rejoicing. There is only one way to do that. Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." There are not many paths to heaven, there is just one.

"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." Jesus said that in John 3:3.

But what must you do to be "born again"? Do you have to recite a certain creed? Must you marry in a particular church, confess to a human priest, pray while facing a certain way four times a day? Thankfully, no.

It is simple, really.

You have to realize that you are a sinner and that if you are not "born again" you will die in those sins and spend eternity in a place we call hell.

Upon that realization you must understand that God loves you and has made a way for you to escape that destiny.

You must confess that sin, ask Jesus to forgive you and simply ask Him to be your Savior, thus making Him the Lord of your life. The apostle John wrote in 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." In short, you will be born again. Don't you want that?

Now find a good, Bible teaching church with caring believers and begin studying the Word of God so that your life on this earth will reflect some of the glory that awaits you in heaven.

Someone You Should Know

By Leigh Pritchett, *The Alabama Baptist*

Bo Shedd



SHEDD

*Etha Baptist Church, Cullman
East Cullman Baptist Association*

FAVORITE VERSE: Romans 8:28

FAVORITE HYMN: "What a Friend We Have in Jesus"

HOBBIES: Hunting and fishing

FAMILY STATUS: Wife, Melinda; children, Bailey and Gage

Bo Shedd, 43, has been in full-time evangelism for 21 years. He began singing gospel music as a boy and preaching at age 13. His message in word and song has taken him all over the United States and into 19 countries. He is an evangelist to children, students and adults. His "America's Too Young to Die" program — covering alcohol and drug issues, teen suicide, school violence and the need to make positive choices — has been presented in school assemblies. During summers, he also leads student camps.

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

A: The influence of my life was children's church. They had a flannelgraph board. They put characters on the board and helped me understand Genesis, the story of Daniel. I was convicted through the teaching of the Bible through the flannelgraph board. I was 6 years old when I came to know Christ. The Holy Spirit spoke to my young heart.

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

A: In the third grade, I was asked to sing in school. When I was 13, I realized my friends around me in school were lost and God could use me to minister to them through singing and speaking.

Q: What does the ministry demand?

A: The ministry demands from my life a personal consecration, a personal walk with Jesus Christ, Bible study, prayer time and obedience to His call. As for the Great Commission, it demands that we go into all the world, town to town, city to city, country to country. It also demands time

away from the family, which is hard.

Q: What do you get from the ministry?

A: I'm a servant of Jesus Christ. It's an honor to carry His message and His cross. I feel like I get to be used by God for His ministry. I'm involved because of what God did through His Son. I think the greatest miracle is still salvation. The greatest joy you'll ever experience is getting to lead someone else to Christ.

Q: How do family members support you?

A: My wife is very supportive through prayer. We pray together before I go on these endeavors. My family is instrumental in prayer and spiritual guidance. My parents pray; churches pray; my brothers and sisters pray.

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

A: We do a Generation Fest. Bands play. They hear the gospel. Every student gets a Bible. We do crusades in other countries. As long as people are being born and there is a gospel, it is relevant. We're going to have to reach people where they are with the gospel.

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

A: It's God's ministry. The gospel has ... to get before people.

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

A: Jesus Christ has made all the difference in the world. Without His Lordship, I would not be where I am today. He is my Sustainer, my Comforter, my Healer. I can talk to Him and He listens to me. He cares about all areas of my life. He is involved in all facets of my life. 🙏

Possible game-changer

Attorney in abuse case says verdict is 'wake-up call' for Baptists

The attorney for a man awarded \$12.5 million by a Florida jury for childhood sexual abuse suffered at the hands of a Baptist minister says the verdict could be a game-changer for how Southern Baptists handle credible accusations of clergy misconduct. "I think it's a good thing for the Florida Baptist Convention to clean up their act," attorney Ronald Weil of the Miami-based law firm Weil, Quaranta, McGovern said Jan. 22 of the Jan. 18 judgment by a Lake County, Fla., jury against the 3,000-church statewide affiliate of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). "Hopefully this is a wake-up call for them to do that."

The jury handed down a unanimous verdict, awarding damages to a victim now in his 20s who claimed he was molested as a child by a church planter trained and supposedly vetted by the Baptist state convention. A previous jury found the convention responsible for the minister's actions in 2012.

Douglas Myers was arrested in 2006 on felony charges of molesting the boy repeatedly over a six-month period ending in 2005.

Weil, a 30-year civil trial lawyer who specializes in sexual abuse and victims' rights litigation, said to his knowledge it is the first time for an SBC state convention to suffer a verdict in a case involving child sexual abuse.

A 2008 article in the *Nashville Scene* quoted SBC General Counsel Jim Guenther saying the SBC has never lost a lawsuit of any kind in the 50 years he has represented the denomination.

Guenther said the SBC had only been sued in sexual abuse cases five times and settled only one of those. That was not through an admission of guilt, but because the insurance company chose to pay the plaintiff a "small nuisance value" rather than the attorney fees to try the case, he added.

Augie Boto, legal counsel for the SBC Executive Committee, said in a blog interview quoted in the article: "Though the SBC is named as a party in legal proceed-

Florida Baptists to appeal verdict

The Florida Baptist Convention plans to appeal a jury's decision Jan. 18 to award \$12.5 million in damages in a lawsuit claiming Baptist officials didn't check far enough into the background of Douglas Myers, a church planter convicted in 2007 of sexually abusing a 13-year-old boy (see story, this page).

Another jury in May 2012 found the Florida Baptist Convention liable for running criminal, credit and background checks but neglecting to check references before helping Myers plant two now-defunct churches with training, financial aid and what the

lawsuit termed implied endorsement by reporting news of his endeavor in the state Baptist newspaper.

At the time a lawyer representing Florida Baptists challenged the ruling.

He said it was inconsistent for the jury to agree with the convention's main argument that Myers was not an employee of the state affiliate of the Southern Baptist Convention and yet still hold convention officials accountable for actions of someone they did not hire or supervise.

An appeal could not be filed until after the penalty phase. (ABP)

"SBC polity is the major reason for its frequent dismissal out of lawsuits on motions for summary judgment."

**Augie Boto
legal counsel, SBC
Executive Committee**

ings about twice per year on average ... it has not ever had a judgment rendered against it throughout its entire existence. SBC polity is the major reason for its frequent dismissal out of lawsuits on motions for summary judgment."

Guenther said in the denomination's system of governance, local churches are responsible for choosing and supervising their

ministers and not the national organization. "The law does not hold persons liable for things they had nothing to do with," Guenther told the *Nashville Scene*.

But Weil said the local-church autonomy argument is "really a legal strategy and not so much a reality," noting that voluntary cooperation doesn't prevent state and national

conventions from chastising churches that affirm homosexuality or call a woman as pastor.

Gary Yeldell, the state convention's attorney of record, said he is confident that the judgment will be reversed on appeal. "This confidence is based, in large part, on the jury's express finding that Myers was an independent pastor who was not hired, employed or supervised by the convention," he said in a statement Jan. 21.

Weil said regardless of who signed the minister's pay check,

he was an "agent" of the state convention, which gave him training and conducted criminal, motor vehicle and credit checks but didn't bother to contact "his two immediate previous churches, where he was run out of town" over inappropriate conduct with boys.

Weil said his client is now attending college and does not wish to be identified.

"He has good days and he has bad days," Weil said of his client's recovery from childhood trauma and betrayal. He said one thing the jury "absolutely rejected" was the idea that the victim would be able to walk through the experience unscathed.

Christa Brown, a victims' advocate and survivor of sexual abuse herself, welcomed the judgment against Florida Baptists.

'Only a matter of time'

"Cases such as this are what it will take for kids to ... gain better protection against preacher-predators in the [SBC]," Brown said. "I believe it is only a matter of time before courts will recognize that, in the context of clergy sex abuse, Southern Baptists are distorting their doctrine of local church autonomy so as to make it function as a legal strategy for minimizing the risk of liability rather than as a true religious doctrine."

Eight years ago Brown fought unsuccessfully to get the SBC to adopt safeguards like an independent panel to receive and evaluate reports of clergy sex abuse and a database listing confessed and credibly accused individuals for use by search committees. (ABP)



JUDSON COLLEGE

► **Judson College Celebrates Founders' Day:** Judson College in Marion celebrated Founders' Day in its weekly chapel service Jan. 7. In addition to being the first day of classes for the spring semester, Jan. 7 marked the 175th anniversary of the first day classes were ever held at Judson.

Mary Amelia Taylor, marketing and web communications specialist, gave a brief history of Founders' Day, during which portraits of Milo P. Jewett, the college's first president, and Edwin D. King, the first chair of the board of trustees, were ceremonially draped with Judson's traditional colors. Susan Jones, interim vice president and dean of students, delivered the message.

► **Timothy and Denise George Featured Speakers at Judson College:** Timothy George and his wife, Denise, were the featured speakers during the annual Christian Emphasis Week at Judson College in Marion, Jan. 14-16. This year's event was titled "Following Jesus in Today's World: Life, Race, and Prejudice."

Timothy George, dean and professor of religion at Beeson Divinity School, presented "Loving the Least of These: The Sacredness of Life" on Jan. 14.

Denise George, a full-time author and speaker and adjunct instructor at Beeson, spoke Jan. 15-16. Her presentations were "While the World Watched: Racial Reconciliation" and "Secret Holocaust Dia-

ries: Standing with the Victims."

The common thread running through all of the messages delivered by the Georges is that all persons are created in God's image, and that this core doctrine deeply impacts the way in which we should live with and care for all persons.

SAMFORD UNIVERSITY

► **Samford Invites Pastoral Ministers to 'Meet the Authors' on Feb. 3:** The authors of two new books on pastoral leadership and renewal will lead a seminar sponsored by Samford University's Resource Center for Pastoral Excellence on Feb. 3.

The "Meet the Authors" program will feature writers Penny Marler and Larry Dill, co-authors of "So Much Better: How Thousands of Pastors Help Each Other Thrive"; and Sarah Shelton and Chris Hamlin, co-authors of "The Teaching Church: Congregation as Mentor."

The event will begin at 9 a.m. in the Howard Room, located in Samford's Beeson University Center, and will conclude at noon with lunch in the Samford cafeteria.

Reservations are requested by Jan. 31. For more information or to register, visit www.samford.edu/rce or call 205-726-4064.

► **Beeson's Lay Academy of Theology Offers Courses, Seminars and More:** Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in Birmingham will offer various courses through its Lay Academy of Theology. The noncredit offerings are designed to be of interest to clergy and laity.

The evening courses, led by Beeson professors, meet one night a week for six weeks, starting at 6 p.m. and ending at 8 p.m.

Beeson professor Gerald Bray will lead a weekday seminar, *The Life and Thought of John Calvin*, Jan. 27-31, 1:30-3:30 p.m.

Two of Beeson's three annual lectureships will be held during the spring semester: *Biblical Studies Lectures* featuring Craig Keener, professor of New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Ky., Feb. 4-6; and the *William E. Conger Jr. Lectures on Biblical Preaching* featuring Andrew Purves, professor of historical theology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, March 4-5. The lectures are open to the public and most will be held at 11 a.m. each day in A. Gerow Hodges Chapel.

The Lay Academy of Theology's *Boot Camp for Christian Writers*, led by veteran writers Denise George and Carolyn R. Tomlin, will offer two seminars in February. Additional Boot Camp

seminars will be held in April.

For complete course descriptions and more information, visit www.beesondivinity.com/layacademy or call 205-726-2731.

► **Brock School of Business MBA Students Honored:** MBA students from Samford University's Brock School of Business in Birmingham won second place in the U.S. Association of Small Business and Entrepreneurship competition sponsored by Baylor University.

Kevin Gibson, Josh Reed and Lu Wang wrote the case "Urban Cookhouse" in the summer of 2013 under the supervision of professor Chad Carson, associate dean in the Brock School of Business. This case focused on the opportunities and challenges facing the Birmingham restaurant and co-owner David Snyder as he considered the firm's strategic growth options and human resources challenges resulting from this growth.

► **Samford's Academy of the Arts Offers Varied Classes for All Ages:** Samford University in Birmingham has founded a new Academy of the Arts that offers a number of noncredit creative courses

designed to appeal to a variety of interests and ages. Registration is open for classes that begin at various times throughout late winter and early spring.

More than 30 classes are offered in culinary, performance arts, art history, photography, painting, writing and crafts.

For information, visit www.samford.edu/academy-of-the-arts/ and click on the area of interest.

UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

► **Learn About College Life at University of Mobile Visit Day on Jan. 31:** The University of Mobile (UMobile) invites potential students to Visit Day on Jan. 31. The event runs throughout the day, allowing students to tour campus, observe college classes and experience college life for a day.

After the tour, the UMobile Center for Performing Arts will offer a concert.

For information, visit www.umobile.edu/visit or call Enrollment Services at 251-442-2222.



Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

Galatians 6:8

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Rashional thoughts

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Executive editor • jrash@thealabamabaptist.org

A sincere nod or strictly perseverance?

The more I talked the more his eyes glazed. Why I continued to spill out the ridiculous amount of information, I do not know. After all, he wasn't retaining any of it, so I was basically wasting my time and his.

And while I could be describing almost any lengthy conversation I have with my sweet hubby, this particular conversation was with a ministry peer.

I usually have decent observation skills and can read my surroundings well. Knowing the appropriate way and time to share information, delve into a lengthy discussion or ask someone to join a spontaneous brainstorming session will certainly influence the results, or at the very least the efficiency of the process.

These are things I know well and work hard to always assess. I also know what it feels like to be on the other side.

You get caught by someone unexpectedly and it's a day when you are already overwhelmed, overworked and pretty much exhausted. The other person isn't doing anything wrong and may even be sharing positive news, but by not being aware of your inability to absorb what is being dumped on you, he or she sends you into a mental battle of perseverance versus creative escape.

You stand there nodding, saying things like "Uh huh" and "of course." You determine to basically agree to all that is being outlined before you because that will take less time than debating or discussing the details. You convince yourself that the person will wrap up sooner if you don't contribute to the conversation.

At least those are thoughts that go through my mind in those situations. Does that ever happen to you? (I hope it isn't happening right now as you read this column!)

Anyway I would venture to guess that most of us have been on both sides of this situation, and I'm curious as to why we

keep doing it to each other.

In my recent experience, I knew exactly what was happening, but I also convinced myself that I had to transfer the information to the other person at that moment.

Why did it have to be right then? Not because there was a vital deadline but because I needed to move something out of my brain and off my to-do list. I had planned to check that off my list and chose not to adapt to the situation.

How much of what we do every day is basically taking information of some type from one person and handing it to another person? Sometimes I think we live in an endless tangled web of assembly lines. Instead of taking the item from the person on the left and handing it to the person on the right, we are moving in and out of all the lines handing things to this person and that person — making the rhythm inefficient and chaotic.

In some ways, the spontaneity and creativity is exciting and fresh. In other ways, the lack of order is tiring and unproductive.

And so in this transfer of information from my brain to yours, I merely want to note a few reminders for myself while sharing with you another life lesson I'm trying to learn:

- ▶ Be aware of the other person's schedule, pressures and energy level.

- ▶ Give the gift of "just the facts" and let the other person ask for the details he or she needs.

- ▶ Be willing to put any information that can wait on hold if the timing or situation seems wrong.

- ▶ Try to solve issues or problems (within the appropriate boundaries, of course) before automatically handing the problem to someone else.

- ▶ Be positive and encouraging (as long as it is real and not a fake attempt).

- ▶ Surprise a family member, friend, co-worker or fellow church worker by taking something off his or her plate. ☺

Rashional Extras...

Follow me on
Twitter:

@RashionalThts

Keeping volunteers fulfilled

"Too many willing-hearted volunteers have been wounded 'on the job.' They've responded to an invitation to serve, only to end up in a volunteer position that was poorly conceived, resulting in tasks that few people would find fulfilling. Or they show up to serve and discover they have nothing to do; an unprepared volunteer coordinator has wasted their time, causing them to lose precious hours they had willingly carved out from their busy schedule.

"Some work hard on menial tasks without ever hearing how their efforts serve a grander cause; they're given plenty of work, but no vision. Others have felt overwhelmed by unreasonable demands for which they've not received proper training; rather than being set up to win, they get put on the express lane to frustration and failure.

"Many have been hurt when a coercive leader drafted them to 'fill a slot' without considering their gifts or talents or what they love to do. Some have given hours — and maybe even years — in voluntary service to an organization or church, without receiving a single thanks.

"But it doesn't have to be that way. ... Volunteers can experience a deep satisfaction and have a profound impact on others. ... [Church leaders can learn to care for volunteers properly, provide the right training, recruit better, etc.] ... We talk with volunteers about these issues so we can

learn from their experiences and continue to improve the volunteer culture in our church.

"The church was designed to be primarily a volunteer organization. The power of the church truly is the power of everybody as men and women, young and old, offer their gifts to work out God's redemptive plan.

"Jesus chose to advance His work primarily on the shoulders of ordinary people who live in the real world of family and business and community. He believed the same skills used to make clay pots and herd livestock and bake bread could be used to advance the kingdom of God.

"The apostle Paul felt so strongly about being a volunteer that in 1 Corinthians 9 he reminded people that he himself was one.

"I believe that the church is the hope of the world. But that hope rests on the willingness of volunteers from all walks of life ... to be mobilized, empowered and used by God.

"Once you decide to invest even a small portion of the blessings God has given you into the lives of others, you'll find the seed of something powerful sown in your own soul.

"And someday, in the midst of giving yourself in the spirit and act of volunteerism, that seed will blossom into the amazing realization that this is what you were made for."

Bill Hybels
"The Volunteer Revolution"

Three ways to live on mission with gospel intentionality

1. Prayerfully watch and listen to the Holy Spirit to discern where God is already at work in the world around you.
2. Meet and engage people in the normal rhythms of life.
3. Look for ways to proclaim the gospel in word and deed.

Facts & Trends
Fall 2013

Thanks for sharing about yourself in the Jan. 2 Rashional Thoughts, "Clearing the clutter starts with me."

The thing I think would make Christians more excited and thankful is a clear understanding of their spiritual gift. Knowing it makes an enormous difference in your understanding, task selections and success.

Bob Cosby, M.D.
Birmingham, Ala.

"The word missional is a popular buzzword in the church today. Living missionally simply means having a Great Commission and Great Commandment mindset in all your encounters."

Thom S. Rainer
President, LifeWay Christian Resources

MAKING PROGRESS?

What spiritual discipline are you focused on right now?
How do you plan to make progress in that area?

Email me at jrash@thealabamabaptist.org.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For February 2

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

OUR KING: CONDEMNED! John 18:33-19:3, 9-11

Many adults in the United States and other western nations have a limited understanding of royalty. We might be intrigued and even excited over the pomp and circumstance of a royal wedding or some other ceremony, but we think little about the actual authority of a royal family. While Jesus affirmed that He was a King, He explained that His kingdom was of a different order than other earthly kingdoms. As the Eternal King, Jesus exercises the highest authority and deserves our wholehearted submission and loyalty. Today's lesson investigates the nature of Jesus' kingship and specifies how we need to submit to His authority.

Unlike Any Worldly King (18:33-38a)

During Jesus' first civil trial, Pilate was attempting to learn if Jesus was a threat to the Roman Empire. The Jewish religious leaders said He claimed to be king. When Pilate asked Jesus point-blank, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus replied by asking Pilate the source of his information. Pilate indicated his information came from the Jewish leadership. Jesus then asserted that He was a King but that His kingdom was not "of this world." By this phrase, Jesus did not mean that His kingdom is not going to be on this earth someday. He meant that His kingdom does not have its source or origin in earthly political power or in national ambitions. His kingdom has no connection with the evil world system that is in rebellion against God. At His Second Coming, He will establish His kingdom on the earth with justice and righteousness. He is unlike any worldly king. We can recognize and serve Jesus as our Eternal King.

Rejected as King By Some (38b-40)

Apparently Pilate understood what Jesus meant. Though a King, Jesus was no threat to Rome. Pilate announced to the religious leaders that he found Jesus guilty of no offense against Rome. Finding no

grounds to condemn Jesus, Pilate offered to release Him. But the accusers demanded that Barabbus (a well-known terrorist) be released, not Jesus.

Sadly there will always be some people who adamantly reject Jesus as their King. But we who are His followers humbly submit to Him and serve Him regardless.

Mistreated as King By Others (19:1-3)

Apparently Pilate was intimidated by the religious leaders, because, contrary to justice, he ordered Jesus punished by scourging, a beating with a whip embedded with bits metal and bone. The soldiers mocked Jesus as King of the Jews. They placed on His head a crown made of thorns; they threw upon His shoulders a purple (the color of royalty) robe; they slapped Him, all the while mocking Him with these cynical words, "Hail, King of the Jews." This was only the beginning of our Lord's mistreatment. We need to be aware that even today some people or groups will act with hostility and violence toward Jesus by threatening those who serve Him as King, and we can pray for strength to faithfully follow Him regardless.

Divine Authority as King (19:9-11)

In all of this, Pilate proves to be a pathetic and tragic figure of a man. Knowing he had violated Roman law and had confessed with his own lips that Jesus had committed no crime, he did not have the moral courage to free Jesus because he feared the Jews. When Jesus refused to answer His question, he threatened Jesus. As the Roman governor, he had the authority to release Jesus or to crucify Him. Jesus' self-control was amazing; He was more composed and calm than Pilate. In response to Pilate's threat, He quietly remarked that whatever authority Pilate possessed had been given to him by God. We who are followers of Jesus can submit ourselves to Him as our King and serve Him confidently because His divine authority supersedes all worldly authority.

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

WHAT ABOUT PEOPLE WHO'VE NEVER HEARD ABOUT JESUS? Romans 1:16-25

Jesus said, "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). That "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved," is a staple of historic Christian orthodoxy (Acts 4:12). And so, as Jesus' disciples, we are commissioned to "make disciples of all nations" and to be His witnesses "to the end of the earth" (Matt. 28:19; Acts 1:8). Sadly, however, we know that there are those who have never heard of Jesus or the good news of God's marvelous gift of salvation in Him. Is it fair that they should suffer eternal separation from God?

In the early chapters of Paul's letter to the Romans, the apostle makes the case for the sinfulness and guilt of all people. He prefaces the argument in 1:16-17, declaring that in the gospel "the righteousness of God is revealed." This statement raises obvious questions, such as: From what do we need to be made right? And how were we to know about God and His righteous standard? It is to these questions that Paul writes in the remaining verses of chapter 1.

(18-25)

One way to approach these verses would be as if you were a reporter conducting an interview. In each verse, Paul makes a point that raises a question addressed in the following verse.

Q: For what purpose has God revealed His righteousness in the gospel? A: Because "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth" (18). God hates evil. While the popular conception of evil typically entails heinous acts intentionally committed against others, the true essence of evil is rejection of God and His righteousness (Gen. 3).

Q: And what is the truth they suppress?

A: It is the truth "about God" — truth that is "plain to them," truth that "God has shown to them" (19). It is the knowledge of God.

Q: How has God made Himself plain to all people? A: He has clearly revealed His attributes, His power and His nature in the visible elements of His creation (20a). This is what we refer to as God's general revelation of Himself. Scripture attests to this in other places and ways (Job 37-42; Ps. 19; Isa. 6:3; Acts 14:14-17).

Q: And how did they suppress this plainly revealed truth? A: Having "clearly perceived" the truth of God, they chose not to honor Him or give thanks to Him but to live according to their own wisdom and desires, to worship and serve the created rather than the Creator (21-23). This is not rejection of the truth of the gospel — which is God's special revelation through Christ and the Scriptures — but a willful rejection of the God who is Creator and Righteous King.

Q: So what are the consequences of this? A: In short, the wrath of God (18). While we typically think of God's wrath in the future tense, as a coming day of God's judgment (Rom. 2:5, 8; 1 Thess. 1:10), there also is a present-day manifestation of it: God "gives them over" to their pursuits; He leaves them to their own devices (24).

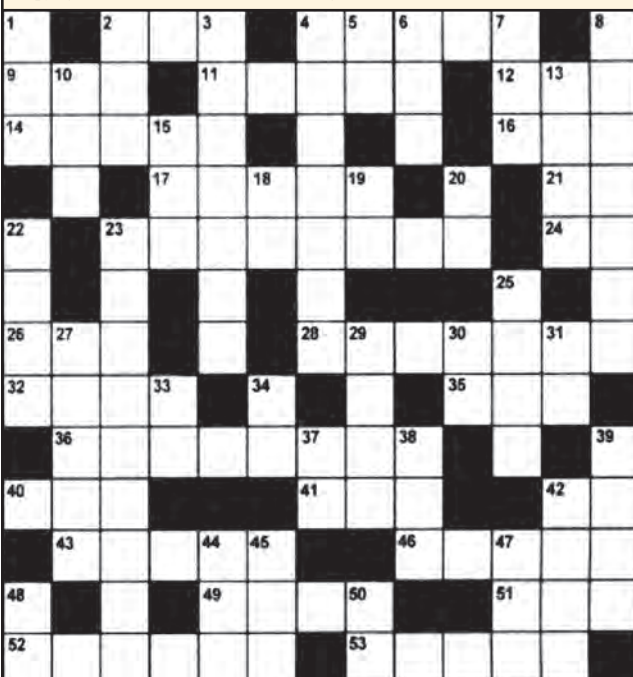
God has revealed Himself plainly to all, such that we are "without excuse" (20b). While it may offend sensibilities to assert that those who have never heard the gospel are nonetheless subject to God's wrath, we place our trust ultimately in God, in His perfect justice and mercy and in His trustworthy word. And, like Paul, we keep our singular focus on the gospel.

(16-17)

While God has revealed Himself in general ways to all people, He has revealed Himself perfectly in the gospel of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. The good news of Jesus Christ isn't just informative but has the power to save and to change lives. Sharing the gospel with others should be our focus and passion, for it is our hope and our mission.

Christian Crossword

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Across

- Behold, it ___ very good. (Gen. 1:31)
- Thou and thy house shall be ___. (Acts 11:14)
- Sound of sudden enlightenment.
- Long-legged bird.
- Before. (poetic)
- West African river.
- The beast ... shall make ___ against them. (Rev. 11:7)
- Peels.
- Intravenous. (abbr.)
- My ___ ye shall keep. (Ex. 31:13)
- Yes. (Russian)
- Love worketh no ___ to his neighbor. (Rom. 13:10)
- She bound the ___ line in the window. (Josh. 2:21)
- A type of star.
- ___ ye drink of the cup that I drink of? (Mark 10:38)
- ___ them through thy truth. (John 17:17)
- To ___ at liberty them

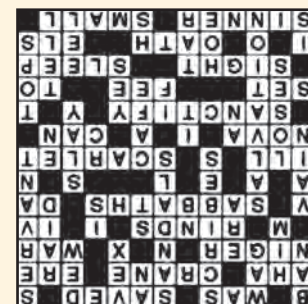
that are bruised. (Luke 4:18)

- The price set by a professional person.
- ___ and fro.
- I have sinned ... and in thy ___. (Luke 15:21)
- Them also which ___ in Jesus. (1 Thess. 4:14)
- Israel ... had made a great ___. (Judg. 21:5).
- Elevated trains.
- God be merciful to me a ___. (Luke 18:13)
- They had a few ___ fishes. (Mark 8:7)

Down

- A prohibition.
- Every one that passeth by shall ___ his head. (Jer. 18:16)
- The pen of the ___ is in vain. (Jer. 8:8)
- Gird thyself, and bind on thy ___. (Acts 12:8)
- Sent ___ angel and brought us out of Egypt. (Num. 20:16)
- ___ certain of the church. (Acts 12:1)
- God give thee of the ___ of heaven. (Gen. 27:28)
- O thou wicked ___. (Matt. 18:32)
- Let ___ that readeth understand. (Mark 13:14)
- A sudden attack.
- Equal Rights Amendment. (abbr.)
- New Brunswick. (abbr.)
- Saint. (abbr.)
- There ___ none good but one. (Mark 10:18)
- Use not ___ repetitions. (Matt. 6:7)
- Thou art the God of my ___. (Ps. 25:5)
- The revenger of blood ... shall ___ the murderer. (Num. 35:19)
- Doesn't win.
- Sidewalk ___.
- Royal Canadian. (abbr.)
- Printer's measure.
- I will be ___ enemy unto thine enemies. (Ex. 23:22)
- How is ___ that ye are come so soon? (Ex. 2:18)

- ___ now I have found favor in thy sight. (Gen. 18:3)
- Yea.
- The ___ of the mountains seen. (Gen. 8:5)
- ___ John what things ye have seen. (Luke 7:22)
- Tool for weeding.
- ___ and feathers.
- Snakelike fish.
- This ___ the way. (Isa. 30:21)
- High School. (abbr.)



MUSIC REVIEWS

Scott Bouldin

The Plan You Have For Me
Scott Bouldin Ministries

As a music reviewer, I have the privilege of listening to a lot of new music. Stuff most people won't ever have a chance to hear, given the economic realities of music production and distribution. And there is a lot of good music out there. Godly, talented people who use their time and talents to bring the message of praise and salvation to congregations all over the country are playing every week, bringing moving praise and worship music to hundreds of thousands of people. Sometimes I get a glimpse into the ministries of these servants who may never get to play to a stadium full of screaming worshippers. When I do, I'm humbled, I'm touched and I'm reminded of my own ministry as a church musician.



Scott Bouldin, worship pastor of Kennedy Baptist Church in Lamar Baptist Association, sent an email asking if I'd be willing to give his team a critique of a new project they had recently put together. Written mostly by Bouldin and his team and recorded without a lot of the production tools in use on most of what we hear, I have to say that I was impressed. Lyrically and melodically, this is a record I loved listening to. Certainly not slick, but good solid, heartfelt worship music that I'm sure sounds even better performed live in their church.

As this is a new work, I believe the only way to get their CD is through their website at www.scottbouldinministries.org. I think you might even get it without cost. Don't let that put you off. Give them a listen. I think you'll like it.

Downhere

Love & History: The Best of Downhere
Centricity Music

We've come to view music projects that contain "the best of" in their title as a placeholder, a way to keep the artist in our minds while they struggle to get a new project in the hands of their fans. While we don't know what's next for longtime



Christian rockers Downhere, we do know this is their last album since their retirement at the beginning of 2013. Thirteen years of evolving music fills the CD, giving an insightful glimpse into the maturing of a band that we've all come to love.

Two Dove Awards, 24 Covenant (GMA) Awards and four Juno Awards punctuate their time together. There's nothing new here, but their tight harmonies and soaring melodies make this a must-have for any Downhere fan.

Physical CDs are only available in their home country of Canada, while the digital version is available at all the normal digital outlets. If you're a fan, having all their best together on one CD is a great way to remember a great Christian band. 🎧

Meet the reviewer

Rick Sharp writes music reviews for The Alabama Baptist. He is a writer and musician and a member of Central Baptist Church, Decatur, where he plays guitar in the praise band.



Photo courtesy of the University of Mobile

University of Mobile's Steve Dunn (conducting) prepared the orchestration of Steve Curtis Chapman's 'For the Sake of the Call' to be debuted at Carnegie Hall on Feb. 8.

'For the sake of the call'

UMobile professor fills in orchestration 'gaps' for Chapman

When Christian music's most awarded recording artist Steven Curtis Chapman makes his Carnegie Hall debut Feb. 8, he will be backed by a 50-piece orchestra playing a few notes born out of Mobile.

University of Mobile (UMobile) music professor Steve Dunn said his orchestration of Chapman's hit "For the Sake of the Call" will be his own Carnegie Hall debut as well.

"I've written more than 1,000 pieces of music, including about 250 that have been published, but I've never written anything that has been performed at Carnegie Hall," said Dunn, assistant professor of music and director of Symphonic Winds at the UMobile Center for Performing Arts.

Chapman will kick off the spring leg of The Glorious Unfolding Tour with the Carnegie Hall concert in New York City, featuring his band plus a 300-voice choir and 50-piece orchestra. "The Glorious Unfolding" is Chapman's 18th album. He has 58 Gospel Music Association Dove Awards, five Grammys, an American Music Award, 47 No. 1 singles and approaching 11 million albums sold.

Dunn said he doesn't know Chapman, but he does know Camp Kirkland, considered one of the nation's premier church orchestrators and arrangers. Kirkland will conduct the New York orchestra and is in charge of turning music written for Chapman's band into orchestra arrangements.

Dunn said he was a high school student when he first met Kirkland and showed him an original composition. Since then, Kirkland has been an influential mentor and Dunn is on Kirkland's "go-to list" when arranging and composing is needed for someone of the caliber of Chapman.

Dunn was given a recording of Chapman and his band performing the No. 1 hit "For the Sake of the Call." Accompanying that were 20 pages of mostly blank staves, with only the choral arrangement and original band notes for guitar, piano and drums filled out.

He had five days to write 116 measures for 17 different instruments. That quick turnaround isn't uncommon in the industry, Dunn said.

"My job was to fill in the gaps with other instruments,"

Dunn said. "I determine which instrumentation will help improve that particular moment, or create that particular sound. You have to know how the instruments work together. It's like you are given a skeleton and you have to know how to put the muscle and skin on it. Depending on how you do that, the result can sound different ways."

Dunn, who teaches orchestration at UMobile, said facing 20 pages of blank musical staff can be intimidating.

"That's the time I have to say, 'Lord, I know I've done this before, so I trust I can do it again,'" Dunn said. He "hears" the notes in his head, occasionally checks a chord on the keyboard in his office and writes notes for instruments ranging from oboe to tuba. If there is time, he will put a few stanzas into notation software that provides a playback of the music with all instruments. Usually there isn't time.

'Just right'

Even without actually hearing the notes played together, Dunn said he knows when the orchestration is right. He likens it to a chef knowing when a dish needs a dash of this spice or a pinch of that one, how an artist is able to mix paint to achieve just the right color or how an interior decorator can look at a room and instantly know where to place a lamp to achieve the right feel.

Carnegie Hall isn't the only Feb. 8 debut for Dunn. High school students in the UMobile Honor Band will perform "Elegy," Dunn's new original composition, at 1 p.m. at the Saraland High School Performing Arts Center. The concert will be conducted by Jim Hansford, director emeritus of Oklahoma Baptist University Bands, and caps a three-day clinic for talented music students.

Registration is being accepted for the UMobile Honor Band, set for Feb. 6-8. Online registration is at www.umobile.edu/honorband2014 or call Dunn at 251-442-2447.

Dunn will be at the Honor Band performance and will hear "Elegy" performed live, but he won't get to hear the orchestration for Chapman. He's okay with that.

"It's always nice to hear it performed, but I don't have to. I've kind of heard it on my own, in my head, and I can live with that. Knowing it was performed and other people have heard it is enough," Dunn said. (UMobile)



Nazareth, Israel

BP photo

‘Illegal missionary work’

Jewish debate cause for concern for Christians in Israel?

As Barry Barnett’s plane lifted off from Tel Aviv’s Ben Gurion International Airport in December 2013, he sat torn with emotion.

During the prior two weeks the British citizen had been harassed, arrested, interrogated, locked in jail and deported from a country that he had loved deeply since childhood.

Born to a German Jewish woman, Barnett — who believes his faith in Jesus completes his Jewish identity — had been in Israel for about a month and was happy to be returning to the safety and comfort of his London home. At the same time, he was sad at the thought that he might never see Israel again.

A worker with Jews for Jesus U.K., the 50-year-old Barnett was arrested Nov. 20, 2013, near Beer Sheva in southern Israel by immigration enforcement officers while volunteering in an outreach to Israelis.

Barnett was held for four days and then told by authorities that telling others about his belief in Jesus was “illegal missionary work” because he was under a tourist visa. They released him on a \$1,440 bond and ordered him to leave the country by Dec. 3, 2013.

If Barnett’s deportation order stands, it could set a legal precedent to limit missionary work or other forms of religious expression by foreign visitors.

Dan Sered, Israeli director for Jews for Jesus, said, “The global ethics code for tourism, which the state of Israel signed and even advertises on its own Ministry of Tourism Web page, states that tourism for the purpose of exchanging religious beliefs is not only valid but also should be encouraged.

“[Barnett’s case] is important because any Christian who comes to Israel could be deported for simply expressing his faith,” he said. “For example, there are pastors who come to Israel with tour groups and preach at different religious sites. Now Israel is saying that these pastors are going against their received B2 visa and they are doing something wrong. This might hurt tourism to Israel, not to mention that as the only democracy in the Middle East, Israel should be an example of religious freedom and freedom of speech.”

When Barnett was in his 20s, he lived in Ashkelon, Israel, where he studied Hebrew and did community service activities with children. His British father is Jewish. His mother is a “Kinder,” one of the adult survivors of a group of some 10,000 children of Jewish parents who were rescued from Europe in 1939 to save them from Adolf Hitler’s “Final Solution.”

Barnett started to believe that Jesus is the Messiah after a difficult divorce led him to seek God more deeply. His search eventually led him to read a copy of the New Testament, and he started to believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

To those who oppose Messianics, this fact alone means Barnett is no longer a Jew. For them, belief in Jesus eliminates one’s ethnicity, self-identity, history, ancestry and culture.

Belief in Jesus

Most Israelis aren’t this extreme and treat Messianics with tolerance or view them as a curiosity. But the leaders and adherents of hard-core Orthodox sects in Israel tend to view Messianic believers as either cult victims or traitors.

“Throughout history, Jewish people have been told that if you convert to Christianity, you are leaving Judaism ... but that is not true at all,” Barnett said. “It is not a conversion, but it is a completion ... of being a Jew.

“The question isn’t, ‘Can you be a Jew and believe in Yeshua?’ The question is, ‘Is Jesus the Son of God, the Savior of the world?’”

The Israeli court system has historically been a bastion of protection for Messianic Jews. It has come to the defense of Messianic Jews against the Ministry of Interior and against quasi-governmental religious organizations that wield considerable power in Israeli society. There are approximately 20,000 Messianic Jews living in Israel, according to the U.S. State Department.

According to a 2011 report of the Central Bureau of Statistics in Israel, there are 7.9 million people living in Israel, of which, 76 percent are Jews and 2 percent are Christians. (MS)

RELIGION

in America

Compiled from Wire Services



Judge strikes down Okla. same-sex ‘marriage’ ban

OKLAHOMA CITY — A federal judge ruled Jan. 14 that Oklahoma’s voter-approved ban on same-sex “marriage” violates the U.S. Constitution.

Oklahoma Attorney General E. Scott Pruitt called U.S. District Judge Terence Kern’s ruling “a troubling decision” and said the high court had recently noted “it is up to the states to decide how to define marriage, not the federal government.”

In 2004, Oklahoma voters enshrined heterosexual marriage into the state constitution. Two lesbian couples then sued for the right to marry and to have marriages in other states recognized in Oklahoma.

Kern ruled that the 2004 amendment violated the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution, calling the ban “an arbitrary, irrational exclusion of just one class of Oklahoma citizens from a governmental benefit.”

“Excluding same-sex couples from marriage has done little to keep Oklahoma families together thus far, as Oklahoma consistently has one of the highest divorce rates in the country,” Kern wrote in his 68-page opinion.

“Equal protection is at the very heart of our legal system and central to our consent to be governed. It is not a scarce commodity to be meted out begrudgingly or in short portions,” Kern wrote.

Gov. Mary Fallin criticized the decision, saying, “The people of Oklahoma have spoken on the issue,” with 75 percent of voters supporting the traditional definition of marriage.

“I am disappointed in the judge’s ruling and troubled that the will of the people has once again been ignored by the federal government,” she said in a statement.

Imago Dei coalition to encourage respect for all people

NEW YORK — A group of Christian leaders has set up a new campaign to emphasize that all people — gay, liberal, undocumented or otherwise — reflect the image of God.

Six Christian leaders, including Focus on the Family President Jim Daly, “Touched by an Angel” star Roma Downey and her producer husband, Mark Burnett, have created a coalition called Imago Dei, Latin for “image of God,” to encourage people to treat each other with respect.

“If we had the image of God in mind for every human being, we could change the world,” said Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, who is leading the cause.

The campaign is intended to include all human beings, but it offers specific examples. “For the image of God exists in all human beings: black and white; rich and poor; straight and gay; conservative and liberal; victim and perpetrator; citizen and undocumented; believer and unbeliever,” the campaign states.

Rodriguez said it is not intended to target a specific group or issue. “We intentionally listed groups to capture the idea that there’s no exception to the rule,” he said.

Rodriguez and Daly were included in a movement of religious leaders that created the Manhattan Declaration, a 2009 manifesto that emphasized protecting religious liberty and resisting abortion and gay “marriage.”

American Bible Society names Peterson new leader

NEW YORK — The American Bible Society (ABS) has named a new president, Roy Peterson, who will begin his duties in February at the New York-based ministry.

Peterson currently is president and CEO of The Seed Company, a ministry based in Arlington, Texas, that has been a catalyst for 800 Bible translation projects/partnerships worldwide by organizations, groups and individuals since its launch in 1993 by Wycliffe Bible Translators.

Pieter Dearolf, ABS board chairman, said Peterson’s “decades-long leadership in Bible translation and depth of experience will serve him well as he helps lead American Bible Society into our third century of ministry.”

Peterson joined The Seed Company in 2003. He had been president and CEO of Wycliffe USA since 1997 and spent eight years in Ecuador and Guatemala in various Wycliffe leadership positions. Peterson previously held management positions with U.S. Shoe Corporation, Florsheim Corporation and American Greetings Corporation.