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Reuters photo

A woman walks near the site of a bomb attack in Baghdad on Jan. 30. Car bombs in mainly Shi'ite districts of the Iraqi capital and a shooting killed at least 19 people Jan. 29. The death toll for the month was more than 1,000, according to Iraq Body Count.

# YEARNING for PEACE

## Iraqi Christians feel 'forgotten' amid violence, persecution

**W**hen Don Alan thinks of Iraq, he thinks of friends who sit trembling in their walled neighborhoods, afraid to take their kids to school.

There's good reason for their fear, he said. January was Iraq's deadliest month in nearly six years — more than 1,000 people died at the hands of gunmen and bombers. A total of 200 deaths were recorded during the first week of February, according to iraqbodycount.org. The website has tallied the nation's violent deaths since 2003.

Scores of people were killed on Feb. 5 alone, according to CNN. During the course of the day, car bombs, suicide bombers and gunmen littered

Baghdad and Mosul with bodies. Several of the attacks targeted security checkpoints, a normal part of life for Iraqis.

### Living in the shadows

"Checkpoints there are as common as stoplights in the United States," said Alan, a Christian leader in the region. "In Baghdad, life is surrounded by blast walls. Every neighborhood is sealed off by walls with only one or two entrances."

Fear is pervasive and bloodshed is common, he said. "The whole country is more unstable than it's been in quite a while, and it's been heading that way for quite some time."

Sectarian and political violence has been escalating for months, but recent fighting in the western province of Anbar has left 140,000 homeless and accelerated the uptick in the death count, according to CNN.

"My heart is broken for the people who have had to live through this for 10 or 11 years — they yearn for peace, and they are living with pretty severe post-traumatic stress symptoms," Alan said.

But sometimes what breaks Alan's heart the most is how the tragedy is lost on many Christians in the West.

"I'm afraid the Christian world has forgotten that there are hurting people in Iraq," he said. "Do we in the West have the courage and boldness to engage lostness in the midst of tragedy? My heart breaks when I read of 20, 30, 60 who have been

killed. I wonder if they ever had a chance to hear the gospel."

He also wonders if Christians in the United States remember they have brothers and sisters living out their faith in heavy persecution in Iraq. "They feel forgotten."

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



Reuters photo

Civilians gather at the site of a car bomb attack in Kirkuk, Iraq, on Jan. 15.

# COMMENT

## What Does It Mean to be Southern Baptist?

In a recent address at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., Frank Page said, “I wake up every day asking myself the question, ‘Who are we? Who is the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)? There is no discernible answer.’”

That seems like a strange response from the president and chief executive officer of the SBC Executive Committee, the highest administrative position in our denominational structure. If anyone can explain who Southern Baptists are, it should be him.

Page told the seminary audience that Southern Baptists now experience “tectonic plate-like fault lines” that make it impossible to describe what the SBC is like today. He identified the fault lines as theological, ecclesiological and methodological.

The theological fault line is the struggle between those who believe that Jesus died for “all who call upon the name of the Lord.” This view is usually described as “general atonement.” Against that stands the idea of “limited atonement” often identified with Calvinism. That interpretation holds that Jesus died only for the elect.

### Church governance

The ecclesiological fault line relates to church governance. Does Baptist belief in the doctrine of priesthood of all believers mean that all members are entitled to participate in church governance — often called congregational governance? Rising against that understanding is the idea of elder leadership where a select group of individuals are empowered to make decisions for the church. A third understanding is hierarchical leadership where the pastor and staff make decisions.

The methodological fault line stressing the SBC, Page said, is the tension between societal methods for work beyond the local church versus working together through the SBC.

Without saying it, Page pointed out the consensus that used to characterize Southern Baptists no longer exists. Southern Baptists now disagree about who can be saved, about how to do church and about how best to work together.

What he did not say is that Baptists have argued over these points almost since their beginnings. The people who became known as Baptists were so identified because they insisted that the Bible taught a believer’s church — only those who make a personal profession of faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior are eligible to be church members. This stood over against the practice of most Christian bodies of that day where church membership included all born into Christian families or in a region governed by the church.

Beyond that, Baptists quickly separated. As Robert Baker points out in his book, “The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People,”



### THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

the earliest Baptists embraced general atonement. But about a quarter of a century after the emergence of Baptists on English soil, the influence of Calvinism resulted in the founding of the first Baptist church preaching limited or particular atonement (only the elect can be saved).

That was about 1638, Baker says. Since then the two views have ebbed and flowed for dominance among Baptists, including Southern Baptists.

History is dotted with figures who tried to exercise autocratic rule in a local church and sometimes in a Baptist denomination. Against this has stood the democratic influence of the theological understandings called priesthood of believers. No human being or any institution can occupy the sacred space between God and man except Jesus Christ, the Great High Priest.

Baptists taught “each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord” (Baptist Faith and Message, Article VI, The Church).

### Scriptural offices of a church

More recently some have abandoned the position that the scriptural offices of a church are pastor and deacons. The office of elder has been established in some quarters. In most cases, elders are given decision-making responsibilities and democratic participation of all members reduced. This is consistent with practices of other denominations that place certain clerical offices between God and believers, at least as far as governing the church goes. Administrative efficiency and top down leadership practiced by some Christian bodies has always conflicted with the Baptist understanding of priesthood of believers.

Ever since Baptists in America organized the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist

Denomination in the United States of America for Foreign Missions in 1814 (better known as the Triennial Convention) Baptists have struggled over how to cooperate — societal method or convention method. Baker is again helpful. He points out that the first constitution of the missionary body left the plan of cooperating unclear. Some, like the convention’s first president Richard Furman of South Carolina, favored a strong central body. Francis Wayland, president of Brown College in Rhode Island, the nation’s first Baptist college, favored a societal plan.

Initially the convention idea carried the day but within 10 years Wayland succeeded in establishing a societal plan. Interestingly some of the founders of the Triennial Convention helped establish the SBC in 1845, and from its beginning the SBC provided for convention-based cooperation on work beyond the local church. Northern Baptists, now American Baptists, continued to practice societal methods.

Today the struggle continues as some promote the convention model of working together by giving through the missions channel called the Cooperative Program. Others choose to participate in and give only to selected causes. The debate is remarkably similar to that of Baptists 200 years ago.

Since 1949 when Baptists voted to move out of the Deep South and become a national Baptist body, the term “South-

ern Baptist” has lost its reference to a regional denomination. But as Page said, what the name now means is questionable. We don’t agree on doctrine. We don’t agree on the nature of the church, and we don’t agree on how to work together.

Perhaps a starting point in working through what “Southern Baptist” stands for is asking ourselves if we are really “Baptist.” Do we still believe in the primacy of Scripture, even when culture endorses a different understanding? Do we still want a believer’s church or the largest institution possible? Do we still believe in priesthood of all believers or prefer the most efficient system of church governance? Do we still practice that only Jesus can occupy the sacred space between God and humanity or prefer for people to do what we want them to do? Do we believe in cooperating with other churches in missions and ministries or supporting only what our church can control?

If we can determine what it means to be “Baptist,” then perhaps we can begin to work through what it means to be “Southern Baptist.”

***“If we can determine what it means to be ‘Baptist’ then perhaps we can begin to work through what it means to be ‘Southern Baptist.’”***



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

(ISSN 0738-7741;  
USPS 011-080)

© The Alabama Baptist, Inc. is published weekly except for one week in July and December by The Alabama Baptist, Inc., at 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209. Phone: 205-870-4720. Statewide phone: 1-800-803-5201. Fax: 205-870-8957. Website: www.thealabamabaptist.org. Email: news@thealabamabaptist.org or circulation@thealabamabaptist.org. Periodicals postage paid at Birmingham, Ala., and at additional mailing offices.

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# 'Responding to His call'

## Pursue event challenges, equips, mobilizes students to reach nations

By Doug Rogers  
Special to The Alabama Baptist

**A**round 400 college students, high school seniors and their leaders attended Pursue, an annual state-wide event held Feb. 7-8 at First Baptist Church, Montgomery.

Pursue focused on challenging, equipping and mobilizing students to reach the nations by helping them understand the imperative of the



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Great Commission and their unique part in reaching the world for Christ.

To help achieve that goal, more than 30 breakout sessions were held, along with plenary sessions led by Chuck Lawless, Nik and Ruth Ripken, Gordon Fort and worship leader Matt Papa.

The event was held in conjunction with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions' (SBOM) Great Commission Prayer Conference and the Global Impact Celebration at First, Montgomery, giving students access to 20-plus missionaries.

Mike Nuss, director of the SBOM's office of collegiate and student ministries, said, "We were able to connect students face to face with missionaries from around the globe in an effort to help them understand how they can intersect their gifts and abilities with the needs of the world."

### 'Eternal impact'

"All in all, it was an amazing 24 hours of students listening for God's voice and responding to His call to a generation destined to make an eternal impact," he said.

Nuss added that hundreds of students made decisions at the conference with 132 indicating they will pursue missions service while they are in college and beyond.



Photo by Doug Rogers

Students place commitment cards on the altar and pray with each other at Pursue, an event for college students, high school seniors and their leaders, at FBC Montgomery, Feb. 7-8. The event was held in conjunction with the church's Global Impact Celebration and the State Board of Mission's Great Commission Prayer Conference.

**"We were able to connect students face to face with missionaries from around the globe in an effort to help them understand how they can intersect their gifts and abilities with the needs of the world."**

Mike Nuss

director of the office of collegiate and student ministries  
Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions



Photo by Doug Rogers

The Matt Papa Band leads worship at Pursue, Feb. 7-8. Hundreds of students made decisions with 132 indicating they will pursue missions service while they are in college and beyond.



Photo by Doug Rogers

Church planter Bill Johnson leads a breakout session at Pursue. Students had access to 20-plus missionaries and were able to connect with them face to face.

# Inspiration & encouragement

## State Evangelism Conference to include Brooklyn Tabernacle's Cymbala, former Gaither member Penrod

Coming up on its 67th year, the State Evangelism Conference is a place to find inspiration, according to Sammy Gilbreath, director of the office of evangelism for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM).

Gilbreath said there are two sides to the SBOM evangelism office — instruction and inspiration. Throughout the year Gilbreath and his staff instruct and train Alabama Baptists in how to share their faith or how to put an evangelism strategy in place, he explained.

"The other very valuable side is inspiration where we encourage people," Gilbreath said. "It's one thing to know how to do evangelism, it's another thing to do it."

And that's just what the State Evange-

lism Conference is meant to do — encourage pastors and church staff with good preaching and good music, Gilbreath said, so they return to their home church ready to lead.

Held at Eastmont Baptist Church, Mont-

gomery, the conference is scheduled for Feb. 24–25, with the first session beginning Monday at 6 p.m. A banquet dinner with Steve and Donna Gaines will be held Monday at 4:30 p.m. Steve Gaines is pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church, Cordova, Tenn., and a former Alabama Baptist pastor. Tuesday morning's session begins at 9 a.m.

The 2014 conference lineup includes speakers Jim Futral, executive director-

treasurer for the Mississippi Baptist Convention; Steve Gaines; Frank Cox, pastor of North Metro Baptist

Church, Lawrenceville, Ga.; Alan Floyd, pastor of Cottage Hill Baptist Church, Mobile; Bob Pitman, evangelist from Muscle Shoals; Brett Pitman, pastor of Highland Park Baptist Church, Muscle Shoals; Vance Pitman, pastor of Hope Church, Las Vegas, Nev.; and Jim Cymbala, pastor of The Brooklyn Tabernacle, Brooklyn, N.Y.

Music will be provided by Frank Jones, VOICES of Mobile and Guy Penrod, gospel music singer and former Gaither Vocal Band member.

Cox, who has spoken at several other Alabama Baptist conferences in the past including three other State Evangelism Conferences, said he is looking forward to helping motivate and inspire Alabama Baptists and be motivated himself.

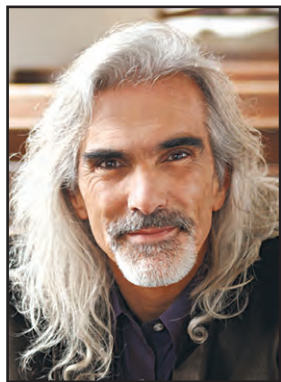
"I look forward to seeing God do some great things that day," he said.

Gilbreath said he continues to receive emails after each year's conference saying how the preaching, time of worship and fellowship made a difference in participants' lives.

One such email confessed the heart of a pastor who was ready to resign and leave his ministry. In his email the man said the conference helped put joy back in his life and he felt restored.

"[The State Evangelism Conference] made a total difference in his life and he's still preaching and teaching today," Gilbreath said. "We pray this conference will be a time of restoration and encouragement for those who

are just hurting." For more information about the conference or the schedule, visit [www.alsbom.org/upcoming-events/state-evangelism-conference/](http://www.alsbom.org/upcoming-events/state-evangelism-conference/). (Neisha Fuson)



PENROD



CYMBALA

### Famous Christians from previous centuries

## Heroes of the Faith

By Joanne Sloan

Joanne Sloan, a member of First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, has been a published writer of articles and books for 30 years. She has a bachelor's degree double majoring in history and English from East Texas State University (now Texas A&M–Commerce) and a master's degree specializing in English from the University of Arkansas (1978).



## Southern Baptists remember first African-American missionary

John Day Jr. (1797–1859) was the first African-American missionary appointed by the Foreign Mission Board (now International Mission Board) of the Southern Baptist Convention. He served as a dedicated servant of God for Southern Baptists in Liberia from 1845 until his death in 1859. February marks the 155th anniversary of his death.

Day was born in Hicks Ford (now Emporia), Va., on Feb. 18, 1797, into a family of free blacks. His mother was Mourning Stewart and his father John Day, whose white grandfather had owned a large plantation. His grandfather's will freed 17 slaves.

The elder John Day was a skilled

cabinetmaker who lost his business and property and left Virginia. His two sons, though, thrived. Thomas Day became a famous furniture and cabinetmaker in North Carolina. John Day Jr. became an ordained Baptist minister in 1821.

**February is  
Black History  
Month.**

Day Jr. felt called to be a missionary in Haiti but received little support from Virginia Baptists. Consequently he left for Liberia in 1830 as part of the American Colonization Movement. Within a year of their arrival in Liberia, his wife, Polly Wickham, and their four

or five children (sources differ on the exact number) died of disease.

He joined the Foreign Mission Board and continued to work closely among the Grand Bassa people. His ministry included preaching as well as setting up schools, churches

and a seminary. By 1857, Day had grown a church with 220 members and had baptized 34 new members between 1855–1857.

Today the legacy of Day is evident. Grand Bassa County is 93 percent Christian, and the Bassa County flag has four stripes, one of which honors Day.

### Other areas of service

In addition to his work as a missionary, Day was a signer of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the Republic of Liberia in 1847. He also served as the second Supreme Court Justice of the country from 1854 until his death.

Day wrote more than 100 letters to the secretary of the Foreign Mission Board. These contain stories of his labors. In December 1848 he wrote: "As far as I have been, which is about 75 miles interior ... 150 miles coastwise. ... I have preached to say 1,000 persons ... and, speaking low,

could be heard by the whole. Not a whisper, not a stir, until I had finished; every ear attentive."

He wrote also of his commitment even through suffering, "Nearly all of May and June, I was confined to my bed ... in the midst of the rains, a season which for many years has injuriously affected my lungs."

On Jan. 30, 1859, while trying to preach in Monrovia, he had to be carried from the pulpit because of a palpitation of the heart that incapacitated him. He died Feb. 15.

J.T. Richardson gave an account of his death. "Being asked by him as I approached his bedside ... if I was well, I answered, 'Yes.' Question by me: 'How are you?' His reply: 'If I speak with regard to the union subsisting between me and Christ, I am well, too.' ... Without a struggle or groan he fell asleep in the arms of Jesus." ❧

SPOTLIGHT ON CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

# Significance of **CHRISTIAN** HIGHER EDUCATION

‘Education is the most important element in modern civilization’ but also needs ‘soul’

By Andrew Westmoreland  
Special to The Alabama Baptist

**O**n July 25, 1850, Samuel Sterling Sherman rose from his chair at the third annual commence-

ment ceremony of Howard College in Marion. As he made his way to the lectern, he likely fumbled in his pocket for the spectacles that would enable him to read the manuscript he gripped in his hand. Those in the room — fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers, Alabama pastors and other assorted friends of the college — were present to mark a significant rite of passage for the young men seated before them.

Sherman, designated the founding leader of the institution that would become Samford University, had already shepherded Howard College through many of the birth pangs that accompanied an entity with boundless aspirations and seriously bounded finances. Across the town of Marion sat Judson College for women, created only a few years

earlier. Between Howard and Judson, and later with Mobile College (now University of Mobile) added to the mix, Alabama Baptists hoped to leverage their limited resources to provide for meaningful, useful education for generations of young men and women.

“Education is the most important element in modern civilization,” began President Sherman. (See ‘Equipping,’ page 6)



Judson College

Photo by Mary Amelia Taylor



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## Online courses offer wide range of opportunities

By Carrie Brown McWhorter  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

**O**nline education has grown exponentially in the past 15 years, increasing opportunities for students to pursue degrees at Baptist colleges and seminaries.

The National Center for Education Statistics defines distance education as instruction that uses technology to deliver material to students who are separated from the instructor. Distance education can take many forms, but increasingly, colleges utilize learning

management software such as Moodle or Blackboard to deliver Internet-based courses.

Nationally the number of students selecting distance-learning courses as part of their regular college curriculum increased 150 percent between 1998 and 2008, according to *EdTech: Focus on Higher Education*, a publication for academic instructional technology professionals. *EdTech* also reports that more than half of all college students have taken at least one online class, and approximately two-thirds of students believe that virtual learning provides increased flexibility for professional adults to take classes while working full-time.

### Alabama schools

Alabama has 56 public and private not-for-profit colleges and universities, many of which offer at least some online courses or programs. Many of those programs have earned national recognition.

In its 2014 report on colleges and universities, *U.S. News & World Report* ranked the University of Alabama at Huntsville as the 7th best online bachelor's degree in the country, and Auburn University as 6th best online graduate program. Alabama's Spring Hill College and Troy University were recognized as second and 20th, respectively, among southern universities for their efforts to help active duty military and veterans pursue a college education.

(See ‘Online,’ page 8)

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# Equipping students to be **SALT** & **LIGHT**

## Alabama Baptist schools remain faithful to founding principles

*(continued from page 6)*

“It is the palladium of free governments, the only secure and unfailing hope of republican institutions. No subject presents higher claims upon the wisdom of the statesman, the powers of the legislator, the benevolence of the philanthropist, the charities of the Christian,” Sherman said.

With this affirmation of higher education in general, the Howard president made certain, before concluding his lengthy remarks, that every listener in the room understood that education without a soul was not a worthy end. “How often do we find the most

profound attainments in science, in art, in literature; refinement and elegance of manners, together with all those external influences which a virtuous community and healthy public

opinion are accustomed to exert, totally inadequate to the task of rendering men virtuous, or even of holding in check the violent passions of a depraved heart?” he asked.

**“[Education] is the palladium of free governments, the only secure and unfailing hope of republican institutions.”**

**Samuel Sterling Sherman**  
founder of Howard College (now Samford University)

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**SPOTLIGHT ON CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION**



**Samford University**

Photo courtesy of Samford University

Sherman knew the value of an education that embraced every aspect of life, including the spirit.

From Judson in 1838 to Howard in 1841 to Mobile in 1961, Alabama Baptists have collectively and consistently sought to nurture educational institutions that would maintain the highest academic standards while embracing a Christ-centeredness that has never, is not and will never be understood and accepted by the larger culture. Those of us who serve within these

institutions are inspired by the challenge of remaining faithful to our founding principles and finding new ways to equip our students to be salt and light.

In the most recent survey of Samford's 3,000 undergraduates, 23 percent responded that they "agree" or "agree strongly" that they are "likely to pursue some type of Christian ministry as a full-time vocation." Added to these numbers are hundreds of our 1,800 graduate students who are actively preparing for tradi-

*Thank you, Alabama Baptists, living and in glory, for the gifts and prayers that propel the institutions we serve.*

*David Potts,  
Mark Foley and  
Andrew Westmoreland*



**University of Mobile**

Photo courtesy of the University of Mobile

tional and nontraditional paths of ministry. I imagine that similar statistics apply at Judson College and the University of Mobile (UMobile). Our students come to us from every walk of life. Many of them are privileged to have been raised in families where financial need is not an issue, but many would find it staggeringly impossible to consider our institutions without every shred of financial aid that can be pieced together. As one who fell into the latter category during my student days at a Baptist-related universi-

ty in Arkansas, I can attest to the burden that I feel to extend these opportunities to those who have the will, but not the way. For all of our institutions, the support we receive from Alabama Baptists is the cornerstone of our aid programs.

**Serving God**

At the moment in every Samford commencement ceremony when I step to the lectern to confer degrees, as President Sherman did in the earliest days of the founding of the institution, I offer these words of congratulations and admonition: "On behalf of the authority vested in me by the board of trustees, in harmony with the recommendations of the faculty, and in accordance with the laws of the State of Alabama, I hereby confer upon you the degree that you have dearly earned,

together with our prayers that you will use what you gained here in service to God and humankind, wherever you may go in this needy world."

The world was needy 175 years ago as Alabama Baptists made their first investment in higher education; it is needy today. Judson, Samford and Mobile people are honored, as always, to proclaim Christ in word and deed while preparing students for active, useful, contemplative lives in the widest range of professions.

My colleagues and friends David Potts (president of Judson) and Mark Foley (president of UMobile) join me in expressing our heartfelt appreciation to Alabama Baptists, living and in glory, for the gifts and prayers that propel the institutions we serve. 🙏

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# ONLINE COURSES

## Alabama Baptist, other schools offer distance learning nationwide

*(continued from page 5)*

Nationally four-year public colleges and universities outpace four-year private schools in online course offerings. However, Alabama's three Baptist colleges have found ways to reach students through online course offerings and programs.

The Distance Learning Program at Judson College in Marion allows students to earn an undergraduate degree entirely online. Unlike traditional campus courses, distance courses at Judson are open to male and female students. The flexibility of the program also allows students to finish their degrees faster, according to director Kathy Chen.

"Most of our online courses are taught one-on-one, so distance learning students at Judson don't have to dwell on learning materials which they have already mastered," Chen said. "They are allowed to concentrate on the areas in which they need further study or often move on quickly to new learning materials, which in the end often leads to a faster path to graduation."

At the University of Mobile (UMobile), students can participate in a variety of online courses throughout the year, including summer. Summer classes are very popular with students, according to UMobile director of

media relations Kathy Dean.

"Summer is a time when students have traditionally returned home for a summer break and summer jobs, so our summer online courses provide students with the opportunity to get ahead in their academic program in a way that fits more easily into their summer schedule," Dean said.

At Samford University in Birmingham, the Cumberland School of Law offers one of the South's largest offerings of online law school courses. The courses, taught by regular faculty members, are often helpful to nontraditional students who need a more flexible schedule, according to the school's website.

### Future plans

At the undergraduate level, Samford offers several courses online and plans to add more fully online and hybrid courses, which combine online learning with face-to-face classroom learning.

Southern Baptist seminaries have reached out to students through extension programs for many years, but e-learning has expanded their opportunities to reach out to students around the world, especially those who want to balance missions and ministry responsibilities with seminary studies. Programs in theology, missions and Christian education

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**Kathy Dean**  
University of Mobile

are offered at many seminaries through distance learning.

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., offers hybrid courses that allow students to earn one year of on-campus credit toward a master's degree through a combination of online studies and two eight-day face-to-face terms on campus. Students earn the rest of their credits through online courses, extension centers or on campus.

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., offers online and hybrid courses in addition to offerings at extension centers. Southeastern also offers fully online options for completion of an associate's degree and three master's level degrees aimed at missionaries, church planters and anyone serving in a cross-cultural context, according to Jerry Lassetter, director of distance learning at Southeastern.

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS), Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

in Kansas City, Mo., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif., also offer graduate programs that can be completed online.

At NOBTS, fully online degrees include the master of theological studies, master of arts in biblical studies and master of arts in Christian education. NOBTS also offers a distance-learning track for the master of divinity that combines online, hybrid and face-to-face courses.

#### Degree options

Southwestern offers five fully accredited, fully online degree options, including the master of divinity and the master of theological studies. A fully online master of divinity also is offered at Golden Gate.

Distance learning also creates opportunities for lay people to increase their skills and knowledge. For example, Leavell College, the undergraduate program of

NOBTS, offers a range of online seminary courses that can be taken as noncredit courses.

Southeastern also is currently offering its second MOOC. A MOOC, or massive open online course, is a free course that offers any student with Internet access to view the same lectures as students on campus. Southeastern's first MOOC features seminary president Daniel Akin's "how-to-read-and-interpret-the-Bible course," called Hermeneutics.

"We decided that offering a MOOC was exactly in keeping with our mission of equipping men and women to fulfill the Great Commission. So far, more than 3,000 students have participated," Lassetter said.

Small-group materials are available for Bible study or Sunday School groups who want to go through the MOOC together. A Spanish version of the course and additional MOOCs in the areas of Old and New Testament studies are planned in the coming year, Lassetter said. ☞

## ONLINE LEARNING STATISTICS

65% of students have taken online classes.

89% of four-year public colleges and universities offer online classes.

60% of four-year private colleges and universities offer online classes.

23% of college graduates report that they have taken a class online.

71% of students believe that virtual learning provides increased flexibility to take classes.

62% of students believe that virtual learning provides the opportunity for professional adults to take classes while working full time.

27% of distance learners are employed full time.

50% of college presidents predict that 10 years from now most of their students will take classes online.

Source: <http://www.edtechmagazine.com/higher/article/2012/07/50-striking-statistics-about-distance-learning-higher-education>

  
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### CHURCH POSITIONS

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

**ASSOCIATE PASTOR-MUSIC:** First Baptist Church of Florence, Ala., is accepting resumés and music DVDs for the position of associate pastor-music. Reply to FBC, 209 N. Walnut Street, Florence, AL 35630, or email to: dmcgee@fbcflorence.com.

**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](http://www.wilmerchurch.com).

**MINISTER OF MUSIC:** Liberty Baptist Church, Deatsville, is seeking a part-time music minister to lead our adult choir and congregation. Church is located approximately 12 miles outside of Prattville, Ala. Please contact Bro. Joey Bentley at 334-365-9720 or email resumé to: pastorjoey@libertybaptistlife.org.

**WORSHIP LEADER:** Underwood Baptist Church in Montevallo is currently seeking a part-time worship leader to lead us in blended wor-

ship. Please email resumés to: info@underwoodbaptist.com.

**MINISTER OF MUSIC/WORSHIP:** FBC Fairview (NE Cullman County) is seeking a bivocational minister of music/worship to lead in blended worship services. Send resumé to: fbcfpastor@att.net by March 12.

**FAMILY PASTOR:** FBC Valley, Ala., is seeking a full-time family pastor. This position will work to disciple our children, youth, as well as work with parents. Please send resumés to: tammy@fbcvalley.org.

**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.

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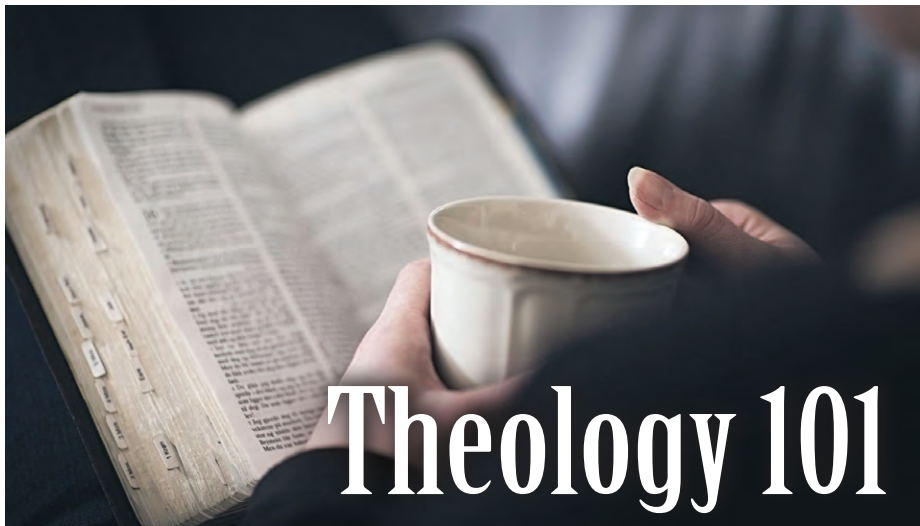
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# Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

## Doctrine of Christ

### Jesus: Came to Redeem Sinners

By Jerry Batson  
Special to The Alabama Baptist

When John the Baptist presented Jesus and His purpose for coming into the world, John couched his announcement in terms of “taking away” sin. He made that point by invoking the imagery of a lamb as a descriptive title for Jesus. John’s announcement was simple and to the point, “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

The imagery of a lamb recalls the temple sacrifices made under the old covenant. People brought sacrificial lambs, which priests offered in their behalf on the temple altar. God accepted the blood of the animals as atonement for the people’s sins.

The new covenant arrangement that Jesus introduced did not call for sinners to bring their lambs for sacrifice. Rather God provided the sacrificial Lamb. Jesus was that Lamb. Hence John accurately introduced Jesus as the “Lamb of God.” As God’s Lamb, sent for the redemption of sinners, Jesus was the perfect, unrepeatable, once-for-all sacrifice for sin.

#### Sacrifice for sins

We need to ask why a sacrifice for sins is needful. The Bible’s answer is quite clear. Sin creates separation from God and stands as a barrier between each of us and God. The sin of Adam and Eve resulted in their separation from God and His garden. Once separated, a barrier was erected that kept the guilty pair separated. Genesis describes that ancient barrier as guarding cherubim and a flaming sword (Gen. 3:24).

At the Last Supper, Jesus spoke to His disciples about going away to prepare a place for them. In doing so, Jesus told the disciples that they knew the way to where He was going. However, Thomas, in his typical frank honesty, asserted that the disciples did not know where Jesus was going, much less the way. Jesus’ response to Thomas and the others began with the declaration, “I am the Way” (John

14:6). Apparently Jesus had in mind the way to the Father’s house.

Foreshadowed by the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament, Jesus came as the final and perfect sacrifice that takes away our sin. In taking sin away, He removes the separating barrier between sinners who are guilty and God who is holy. By means of His self-sacrifice, Jesus opened the way back to God.

#### Lamb of God

Jesus came and died for our sins in order that He might open for us the way to an eternity with God, along with a life of fellowship with Him in the present time. To do this, Jesus had to remove the barrier of our sins, which blocks the path that leads into God’s presence for time and eternity. John’s prophetic word was that Jesus came to do exactly this by accepting His role as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Sin that separates also enslaves. Enslaved persons need to be set free. As Redeemer, Jesus sets sinners free from sin. Immediately He frees us from sin’s penalty. Over time He works in us to free us from sin’s power. One day He will return and redeem us from sin’s presence by gathering us unto Himself.

Of all the wonderful accomplishments of Jesus during His earthly ministry, not the least was His mission to redeem sinners. That accomplishment lay at the very core of why Jesus came. Linking this part of His mission with that of last week’s information, we affirm as Christians that Jesus came both to reveal God and redeem sinners. ☞

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.



## Global persecution of Christians topic of congressional hearing

The global persecution of Christians has gone from bad to worse, said U.S. Rep. Chris Smith at a congressional hearing on Capitol Hill on Feb. 11.

Smith, R-New Jersey, along with other U.S. House subcommittee members and various speakers, gave testimony about religious hostilities against Christians worldwide. Speakers noted that religious persecution violates basic human rights.

Smith likened the persecution of Christians in Iraq to genocide.

“Christians remain the most persecuted group in the world and thus deserve special attention,” he said.

Elliott Abrams, senior fellow for Middle Eastern studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, said past administrations have not taken the issue of Christian persecution seriously enough.

“The system isn’t working properly,”

said Abrams, who serves on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. “It sends a message to other countries that we don’t care.”

Abrams held up several photos of Christians who had either been harassed or killed for their faith.

“These images reflect a disturbing reality,” he said.

Other countries such as Nigeria, Vietnam, Burma and Egypt are notorious for persecuting Christians.

Abrams and Smith stressed that those countries that experience religious liberty must hold other countries to a higher standard.

John Allen, an associate editor at *The Boston Globe*, agreed by saying

that in the Western world, Christianity is seen as a “social institution.”

“It is hard for Christians to wrap their minds around persecution that takes place around the world,” Allen said. (RNS)

**“Christians remain the most persecuted group in the world and thus deserve special attention.”**

**U.S. Rep. Chris Smith**

## Big Oak Ranch to partner with LifeWay

Alabama’s Big Oak Ranch has entered into partnership with LifeWay Christian Resources.

LifeWay President Thom S. Rainer announced the partnership during the LifeWay trustee meeting Feb. 3-4 in Nashville.

Big Oak Ranch, a national ministry to abandoned and neglected children, has cared for 2,000 children since its founding in 1974 and now consists of a Boys’ Ranch in Gadsden, a Girls’ Ranch near Springville and Westbrook Christian School in Rainbow City.

John Croyle, founder and executive direc-

tor, is a well-known speaker and author in the state. His son, Brodie, serves as associate executive director and is becoming a sought-after speaker as well. Both Croyles played football for the University of Alabama.

“Big Oak Ranch saves children’s lives, and all of LifeWay can be involved in that ministry as we come alongside them and adopt Big Oak,” Rainer said. Employees are being given opportunities to donate to Big Oak as well as provide support in other ways that will “help save lives spiritually, physically and emotionally,” he noted. (BP, TAB)

## Want to know God?

**Pastor Gary Burton**  
Pintlala Baptist Church

There is a backstory to our desire to know God. The desire to know Him is God’s gift to us. The very capacity to respond to God indicates that a personal relationship is grounded in God’s grace. The Creator is more than ready with an offer of lasting, enduring friendship. Knowing God at the deepest personal level is essential for an effective life. Part of the backstory usually involves emotional pain, a gnawing sense of emptiness or an unshakable discontent and can be God’s way of preparing us for amazing transformation.

Have you noticed that anything that satisfies our physical senses is only temporary and rarely lives up to its hype? God created us with physical desires, but the satisfaction of those desires fades quickly. Did God design us so that any physical experience would never bring lasting happiness? Think about it. The desire for food, sex, power, wealth, fame or intellectual superiority was never intended to bring us permanent happiness.

Deep within us, at the central core of our lives, is the God-given desire to know Him. Our quest for lasting fulfillment be-

gins here, with the desire itself. However, God did not stop with creating this persistent desire, He also provides the means: He sent His uniquely born Son whose death on a cross made possible reconciliation with God and an incredible friendship that addresses our deepest longing. A personal friendship with God through Jesus Christ must simply be received. It cannot be achieved.

We cannot get our minds around such outrageous extravagance: grace in time of need, help in time of trouble, life in all its fullness, forgiveness of sin, unconditional love, peace, purpose and the prospect of a glorious life beyond death. Who can imagine the scope of such a gift? Surely the offer of this kind of friendship leaves us speechless and amazed. The best we can do is receive the gift of Christ and His saving friendship with humility knowing our lack of merit, with honesty knowing our inability to earn such standing before God and with trust knowing God’s track record of dependability.

In moments of honest reflection we must agree with St. Augustine’s assertion, “Because God has made us for Himself, our hearts are restless until they rest in Him.” ☞

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### COFFEE

► **Calvary Church, Enterprise**, will hold revival March 2-5. Sunday services will be at 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. and Monday-

Wednesday services will be at 7 p.m. Toney Wales, pastor of Elkton Road Church, Athens, will speak. Kerry Mitchell is pastor.

### EAST CULLMAN

► **First Church, Hanceville**, will begin Celebrate Recovery on March 6. It will meet every Thursday night, 7-9 p.m. It is Christ-centered support for drug and alcohol addiction, eating disorders, sexual addiction, food addiction, physical and sexual abuse, codependency and other life issues. For information call the church at 256-352-9150. Philip Wigley is pastor.

### LIMESTONE

► **Clements Church, Athens**, will hold revival Feb. 23-26 with guest evangelist Phil Hoskins. Services will be Feb. 23, 9:30 a.m. and 6 p.m. and Monday-Wednesday, 6:30 p.m. Child care is provided. For information call the church at 256-729-1328 or visit [www.clements baptist.org](http://www.clements baptist.org). Tim Anderson is pastor.

### MORGAN

► **Gary Linville** is the new pastor of **Shoal Creek Church, Decatur**. He previously served as pastor of churches in Mississippi. He also served on the staff of Blue Mountain College in Mississippi for the past 12 years. He



LINVILLE

and his wife, Heather, began serving at Shoal Creek on Jan. 12.

### SHELBY

► **Dogwood Grove Church, Montevallo**, exceeded its Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions goal for 2013. The congregation of approximately 315 resident members gave \$12,139.96 (the goal was \$9,500.00). Pastor Todd Burr and his wife, Kari, church Woman's Missionary Union director, led the church in this missions giving.

### ST. CLAIR

► **Jimmy Hopkins** is the new pastor of **Cook Springs Church**. He also serves as treasurer for St. Clair Association. Hopkins has served 30 years in ministry. He previously served as associate pastor of Cool Springs Church, Ashville, and as pastor of Bethany Church, Ashville. He is married to Judy.

### TUSCALOOSA

► **Coker Church** changed its name to **Valley Church**. Thad Harless is pastor.

### WALKER

► The men's ministry and the Challengers of **Northside Church, Jasper**, will sponsor the Outdoorsman Banquet on March 8 at the CHS Building in downtown Jasper. The expo will open at 4 p.m. and dinner will be served at 5:30 p.m. Sid Bream, former Atlanta Braves player, will speak. For ticket information call 205-384-3214 or visit [nbcjasper.net/outdoorsmen](http://nbcjasper.net/outdoorsmen). David Byrd is pastor.

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# SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For February 23

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

### FOLLOW WITH RENEWED PURPOSE John 21:3-7a, 15-17, 20-23

The term “backslider” was commonly used a generation ago to refer to a believer who had fallen into sin (or neglect of the Christian life). What hope is there for a backslider? Believers may be backsliders in such a lethargic spiritual state that they do not think of restoration to service; others may have a sensitive conscience about certain sins in their lives but believe they cannot be restored to useful Christian service. Believers who are not backslidden may become positive agents of change for fellow believers. All believers can be encouraged to be faithful followers of Christ and to seek His restoration when they falter. This lesson teaches that Christ calls imperfect humans to follow Him as they are trusting Him for strength and guidance.

### What Are You Fishing For? (3-7a)

This chapter in John’s Gospel is an epilogue added by John to highlight Peter’s restoration to public leadership among the disciples. It also points out three needs possessed by all who follow Jesus: to obey Him, to love Him and to follow Him.

The Lord had earlier (Matt. 28:10) instructed the disciples to meet Him in Galilee, which explains why they were at the Sea of Tiberias (Galilee). Six disciples and Peter composed the group and, when Peter announced that he was going fishing, the others agreed to go with him. They probably did not intend to return permanently to commercial fishing, which had been their former occupation. Peter, at least, had a need to be spiritually restored and to refocus on the work Jesus had for him to do.

Although the disciples were experienced commercial fishermen who knew well the waters of the lake, they labored all night and yet caught nothing. When dawn came, a man standing on the shore asked if they had caught any fish. (They did not recognize Him as Jesus, perhaps because of the lingering morning darkness.) Their disappointed

response, “No,” was followed by His instruction to cast their net on the right side of the boat and they would find fish. They cast the net and caught a huge number of fish. Because of the high catch or, more likely, because he had experienced a similar event earlier in Jesus’ ministry (Luke 5:3-7), John recognized the man as Jesus. The point here is that Jesus directs the lives of His own. He gives instructions and we are to obey. Our great need — like the struggling fishermen/disciples — is to obey Him.

### Do You Love Me? (15-17)

In this interview the Lord restored Peter to public leadership among the apostles. Jesus and Peter had previously met and privately taken care of Peter’s sins (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5). Since Peter had denied the Lord publicly, there was a need for public restoration. Reading this present account teaches us that the one all-important prerequisite for ministry is love for Jesus. Peter had denied the Lord three times; so three times Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love Me?” and three times Peter answered in the affirmative and three times Jesus re-commissioned Peter by instructing him to tend His followers. By this Jesus meant consistently feeding and nourishing believers spiritually. (This is a good reminder that the primary responsibility of Christ’s messengers is to teach God’s Word.) We demonstrate our love for Jesus when we repent of focusing on self-centered plans and return to following and serving Him in the ways that He wants. Our actions demonstrate that we love Him.

### What About Others? (20-23)

When Peter asked Jesus about what would happen concerning the disciple Jesus loved (John), Jesus responded that Peter should focus on his own discipleship rather than speculate about other followers. We must not permit our curiosity about others to distract us from following the Lord. He has His plans for us; He also has His plans for our Christian associates. But how He works in their lives is not my business; it is His business. Our business is to follow Him.

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

### IF GOD IS GOOD, WHY IS THERE SUFFERING? Job 30:26-31; 42:1-6

The human experience of suffering raises questions in many minds about the nature and character of God, and vice versa. The biblical account of Job’s suffering does not resolve this tension with rational explanations or philosophical arguments, but yields something greater: the assurance of God’s sovereignty over all that happens in His creation and of His presence with us in the midst of our darkest times.

### (30:26-31)

In these closing verses of chapter 30, Job is midway through the last of two final speeches (chapters 28-31). He is describing and lamenting his suffering, which has come to him in spite of the compassion he showed others in their times of suffering (v. 25). For Job, however, there seems to be no such consolation or relief. Hopefulness and patience have not yielded improvement. Things only seem to go from bad to worse (v. 26). Like most who suffer pain and loss, Job’s suffering is multifaceted. There is the heart-pain of loss and grief that ties your stomach in knots (v. 27a); there is the dismal specter of living under a dark cloud, despairing that things will ever improve (v. 28a); there are the feelings of isolation and self-pity as he considers how others look upon him (vv. 28b-29); there is the physical pain of his affliction (v. 30); and there is intense sadness and loss of joy (v. 31).

In at least one respect, Job’s case is unique, for we know that God allowed Satan to test Job through intense suffering. Job’s story, however, is common to us all. For suffering, in various forms and degrees, visits all of us. It is no respecter of persons. Suffering is a byproduct of sin’s effects on the creation. The perfection of Eden was lost with humanity’s willful choice to disobey God. So we live in a marvelous but dangerous world and are thereby subject to all the wonders and horrors of life in that world. In

affirming this truth, we should be careful not to discount the intensely personal and painful experience of others’ suffering. At the same time, we should also be mindful that God sends rain on the just and on the unjust (Matt. 5:45) — that no one merits an exemption from suffering.

### (42:1-6)

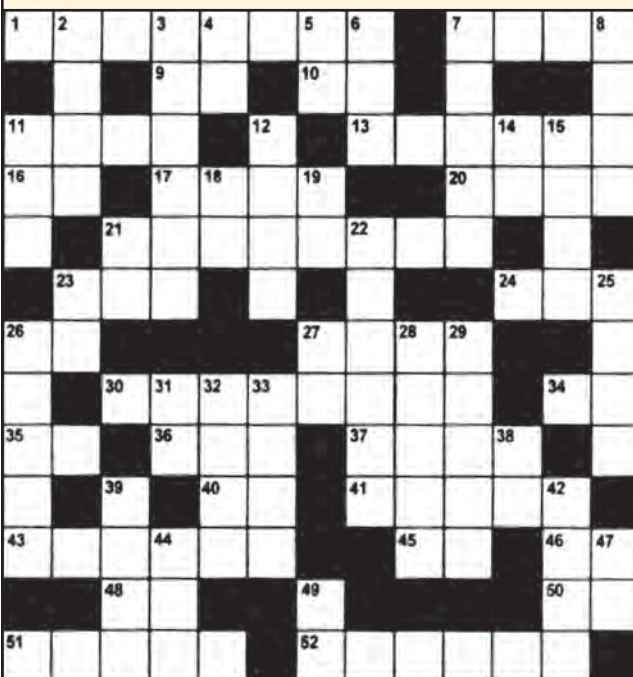
In chapters 38-41, the Lord answers Job, but He does not give Job the answers he seeks. In fact, the Lord responds to Job’s questions with questions of His own. In doing so, God is not dodging Job’s questions but calling his attention to a much larger, more profound truth that eclipses even the mammoth question of human suffering. God reveals to Job the boundless dimensions of His sovereignty over all creation.

Job’s response is brief but profound. He utters words of humble praise (v. 2), honest confession (vv. 3-5) and heartfelt repentance (v. 6). As Job proclaims, “I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted” (v. 2), he is acknowledging that God is sovereign and purposeful even in the very worst places and times of life. Job recites God’s own words back to Him (vv. 3a, 4) as pretext to confessing that he had been speaking out of ignorance (v. 3b) and with an anemic view of God (v. 5). Finally Job repents of what he now sees as the foolishness and irreverence of demanding rational explanations from the Lord, to whom all creation owes its very existence and unconditional adoration (v. 6).

Job’s circumstances have not changed; his suffering is real and painful. His questions have not been answered; Job still cannot explain why this has happened to him. But Job has a new and greatly expanded view of God, which changes everything. Regardless of our circumstances, God Himself, as revealed to us in the Scriptures and supremely in the person of Jesus Christ, should be the object of our faith, not His benefits. And even through suffering, our good and faithful God is able to bring about His redemptive purposes for the benefit and blessing of all creation.

## Christian Crossword

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### Across

1. Belonging to a minor prophet.
7. Belonging to the son of Issachar. (Gen. 46:13)
9. I’m \_\_\_ the end of my rope.
10. Each. (abbr.)
11. The beloved disciple.
13. Spoken of by \_\_\_ the prophet. (Matt. 24:15)
16. Abbreviation meaning “all right.”
17. Though they have \_\_\_ chariots. (Josh. 17:18)
20. Woodworking tool.
21. Cupbearer to the king. (Neh. 1:1, 11)
23. Styling \_\_\_ for the hair.
24. \_\_\_ is the father of Canaan. (Gen. 9:18)
26. Negative.
27. They set the ark ... upon a new \_\_\_\_\_. (2 Sam. 6:3)
30. \_\_\_ lamented for Josiah. (2 Chron. 35:25)
34. \_\_\_ of the Chaldees. (Gen. 15:7)

### Down

2. Written in the \_\_\_ of the prophets. (Luke 7:50)
3. He had the gift of interpreting dreams.
4. A word ... in due season, how good is
35. And \_\_\_ shall rule over thee. (Gen. 3:16)
36. Type of armament.
37. “I \_\_\_ that test!”
40. \_\_\_ have and to hold.
41. 28th book of the Bible.
43. Belonging to a man of mount Ephraim. (Judg. 17:1)
45. Compass direction.
46. He dwelleth in \_\_\_\_\_. (John 6:56)
48. Tyrone (abbr.).
50. “\_\_\_ top of old Smokey.”
51. Pharaoh’s daughter called his name \_\_\_\_\_. (Ex. 2:10)
52. Before the Israelites had kings, they had \_\_\_\_.

- \_\_\_! (Prov. 15:23)
5. Where is \_\_\_ that is born King of the Jews? (Matt. 2:2)
6. Why is thy countenance \_\_\_? (Neh. 2:2)
7. Prophet to Nineveh.
8. Part of a shoe.
11. The patience of \_\_\_\_.
12. The name of Samuel’s firstborn was \_\_\_\_\_. (1 Sam. 8:2)
14. \_\_\_, ego, superego.
15. Seraiah, Jeremiah, \_\_\_\_\_. (Neh. 12:1)
18. Blood factor.
19. Southwestern state. (abbr.)
21. Compass direction.
22. As my servant \_\_\_ hath walked naked. (Isa. 20:3)
23. \_\_\_ in peace. (Acts 7:50)
25. Barnabas took \_\_\_, and sailed to Cyprus. (Acts 15:39)
26. 34th book of the Bible.

27. 900 in Roman numerals.
28. Radar beacon.
29. Solomon was not arrayed like one of \_\_\_\_\_. (Matt. 6:29)
31. For example.
32. Boaz begat Obed of \_\_\_\_\_. (Matt 1:5)
33. Seth called his son’s name \_\_\_\_\_. (Gen. 4:26)
38. Defensive End. (abbr.)
39. \_\_\_ of the Apostles.
42. Prophet who was a herdsman of Tekoa.
44. Yes (nautical).
47. Printer’s measure.
49. Middle Atlantic state. (abbr.)



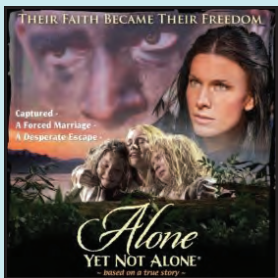
# TOP 10

downloaded songs from iTunes

## CHRISTIAN & GOSPEL



**1. Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)**  
By Hillsong UNITED  
(Zion — Deluxe Edition)



**2. Alone Yet Not Alone**  
By Joni Eareckson Tada  
(Alone Yet Not Alone — Single)



**4. This Is Amazing Grace**  
By Phil Wickham  
(The Ascension)



**6. Shake**  
By MercyMe  
(Shake — Single)



**7. You Won't Let Go**  
By Michael W. Smith  
(You Won't Let Go — Single)



**8. Speak Life**  
By tobyMac  
(Eye On It — Deluxe Edition)



**9. Write Your Story**  
By Francesca Battistelli  
(If We're Honest — Deluxe)



**10. Overcomer**  
By Mandisa  
(Overcomer — Deluxe Edition)

Source: iTunes at press time



Photo courtesy of UMobile

Voices of Mobile, a University of Mobile vocal ensemble, will perform on the internationally broadcast television program 'In Touch with Dr. Charles Stanley,' beginning the week of Feb. 23.

# International broadcast

## Voices of Mobile to perform on Charles Stanley's TV program

The University of Mobile (UMobile) vocal ensemble Voices of Mobile will be featured on the internationally broadcast television program "In Touch with Dr. Charles Stanley."

The program airs the week beginning Feb. 23. To find broadcast times and stations, go to [www.intouch.org/broadcast/find-a-station](http://www.intouch.org/broadcast/find-a-station). Stanley is senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Atlanta; founder of In Touch Ministries and a *New York Times* best-selling author.

"It's a tremendous opportunity for worldwide exposure for our university," said Roger Breland, vice president for project development and executive director of UMobile's Center for Performing Arts. "You can be anywhere in the world and you can see Dr. Charles Stanley through his In Touch Ministries."

### In Touch Ministries

In Touch Ministries programs are seen and heard around the world on more than 2,600 radio and

television outlets in more than 50 languages, with a mission of leading people worldwide into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ and to strengthen the local church, according to [intouch.org](http://intouch.org).

Breland said Voices has performed at least six times during worship services at First, Atlanta. Stanley's sermons are taped and later broadcast to stations worldwide. Breland was notified that the group's performance of the song "Were You There" would be included in the upcoming broadcast.

### Vocal ensemble

Voices of Mobile is one of more than 24 vocal and instrumental ensembles at UMobile.

Breland, a member of the Gospel Music Hall of Fame and founder of TRUTH, one of the first contemporary Christian ensembles, travels with Voices as the group shares the gospel message throughout the United States and beyond.

Voices recently returned from a concert in South Padre Island, Texas, and will be performing at the Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference in Montgomery on Feb. 25. (UMobile)

*"It's a tremendous opportunity for worldwide exposure for our university. You can be anywhere in the world and you can see Dr. Charles Stanley through his In Touch Ministries."*

Roger Breland, director of Center for Performing Arts  
University of Mobile



NAMB photo

Student leaders Matthew Nutbrown (left) and Matthew Stringfellow (right) talk with Lucas Aube (center) on the campus of Bishop's University in Lennoxville, Quebec, Canada. Much of Encounter Church's outreach is aimed at students in the community.



NAMB photo

Encounter Church student leaders Graeme Buchanan (left) and Christine Brady help Pastor Lucas Aube (center) prepare the weekly Tuesday night free dinner for college students in Lennoxville, Quebec, Canada. Students like Malcolm Buckle (far right) are the focus of much of Aube's ministry.

# 'Hands & feet of Jesus'

## Quebec church planter helps students encounter gospel in increasingly secular culture

Canadians easily dismiss Christianity — especially in Quebec. The history of mistrust is woven deep within the fabric of Québécois culture — a culture that's decidedly Catholic and, at the same time, increasingly secular.

But Lucas Aube in Lennoxville, Quebec, has worked to make rejecting Christ a greater challenge than ever among the thousands of students of Bishop's University and Champlain College.

It's not been easy. The immediate response many give to Christian outreach has been one of disdain, skepticism and even, as Aube has experienced, disgust at the crazy religious people. Intentionally engaging people in ways that destroy stereotypes is changing that perspective.

"We are living as the hands and feet of Jesus on a weekly basis," said Aube, who is planting Encounter Church with the goal of having a self-sustaining church that reaches students and the families in the surrounding communities.

Aube is one of six missionaries featured in the North American Mission Board's (NAMB) 2014 promotion of the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering (AAEO). The church plant he leads as pastor is part of NAMB's effort to help Southern Baptists start 15,000 new churches in 10 years. Half of NAMB's financial support comes from AAEO.

### Sharing stories of faith

Aube and his leaders train members to share their stories and to talk of faith in Christ as a journey and a process.

"When you talk to them in these ways they see you as at least an option on part of their journey instead of something to avoid at all costs," Aube said.

"They expect Christians to be nasty and terrible to them," Aube noted. "They're blown away with the love and hospitality that we are showing them. The barriers seem to be coming down. They're like, 'Wow. We can't believe you guys are Christians. You're so nice.' They're blown away that Christians are there in a

way that has no strings attached," he said.

Aube is quick to point out how critical partnerships with other churches have made his ministry possible.

A team from First Baptist Church, Midland, Texas, learned of Encounter on a missions trip to Quebec, and the church has been part of the ministry ever since. First, Midland, has been integral to Encounter's continued growth and crucial to weekly outreach efforts — efforts that require significant resources.

"Without them we would not be able to continue the work we have here," Aube said. He noted First, Midland, helps provide the food that goes into weekly meals to several hundred students.

Hospitality along with Tuesday night home cooked meals for about 300 students have provided the primary opportunities for students to emerge from atheism, agnosticism or some other belief into belief in the gospel.

"These opportunities really take a lot of time and energy and sometimes you feel like it's going nowhere," Aube said. "But over time we've seen people experience radical transformation."

Aube said students actually look forward to hanging out with the people of Encounter.

Chances are that before university, going to church for a meal was the last thing on their list.

"The students love it," Aube said.

"Because that trust relationship is there we've been able to go deeper in conversation. On Tuesday nights, for example, they say, 'We're going to church to have a meal.' That's their language. We've never used that language with them."

Aube said that in a lot of ways the work of reaching students in Quebec often boils down to working hard to remove every barrier but then working hard to get out of

the way to watch the gospel bring people to life.

"At its very core the gospel is offensive," Aube said. "We aren't supposed to add to that offense. We are supposed to seek and create opportunities for the gospel to do the work."

To view a video on Aube's work and learn more about his ministry, visit [www.anniearmstrong.com](http://www.anniearmstrong.com). (NAMB)

***"At its very core the gospel is offensive. We aren't supposed to add to that offense. We are supposed to seek and create opportunities for the gospel to do the work."***

**Lucas Aube**  
pastor and church planter, Encounter Church

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