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'FATHER FORGIVE THEM ...'

Medical doctor's rebuttal to Bill O'Reilly's contention that Jesus did not say "forgive them" while on the cross

What difference does it make how Jesus died?

By David A. Ball, M.D.
Special to state Baptist papers

Bill O'Reilly is host of Fox News Channel's political commentary program "The O'Reilly Factor." In his new book, "Killing Jesus," he discusses the Roman Empire and the life and death of Jesus from a historical viewpoint. This book has already sold millions of copies, but I differ with some of his views. At the heart of our difference is the cause of death — which has significant consequences. This was brought into focus in an interview with O'Reilly by Norah O'Donnell on "60 Minutes" in which O'Reilly made the following comments:

O'Donnell: "You include two quotes from Jesus on the cross, but not the most famous one: 'Father forgive them for they know not what they do.' Why not?"

O'Reilly: "We don't put in things that we don't think happened."

O'Donnell: "How do you know?"

O'Reilly: "Because you couldn't say something like that, audibly that people would hear. ... [Y]ou die on a cross from being suffocated. That your lungs can't take in any more air. You can hardly breathe. We believe Jesus said that, but we don't believe He said it on the cross, 'cause nobody could've heard it."

I have long contended that Jesus did not die of suffocation but died of a ruptured heart. I am frequently asked, "What difference does it make how Jesus died?" There are multiple answers to this question, but the above interview highlights one of the more important reasons. Since Jesus did not die of suffocation, He not only could have — He did say, "Father forgive them" O'Reilly is correct in saying suffocation prevents normal speech. Since Jesus died of a ruptured heart, His speech would have been perfectly normal right up to His sudden death, (See 'A ruptured heart,' page 7)



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COMMENT

Jesus — Guilty as Charged

The sign on the cross said it all: “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.” The sign was called a “titulus.” It contained the name of the person being crucified and the charge that resulted in the victim’s death. Rome wanted to make sure that passersby saw what happened to people who violated the empire’s rules.

Pilate paid special attention to this sign. Even if he considered Jesus a good man, everyone in Jerusalem had to understand what happened to a would-be king. Pilate ordered the titulus written in three languages — Aramaic, Latin and Greek. Aramaic was the language of Palestine and the Middle East. It had been for hundreds of years dating back to the exile. Jesus preached in Aramaic. Rabbinic literature was written in the Semitic language. It is what the people spoke so people from Israel could read the charge that brought Jesus to such an inglorious end.

Latin was the language of the Roman Empire. It was the official language, the language of the law. The Latin inscription verified this crucifixion was no accident. It was the decision of the Roman government that Jesus should die. And Rome’s charge against Him was that He was a rival king.

Pilgrimage to Jerusalem

Normally the two languages would have been enough but this was not a normal time. It was the Passover. Hundreds of thousands of Jews and religious seekers from across the known world had made pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover. Some scholars believe more than 2 million people crowded into the Jerusalem area for this most important religious observance of the year.

Pilate wanted to make sure those from other parts of the world could read the sign on Jesus’ cross so he had the charge written in Greek, the “lingua franca” or “common language” of the day.

The Gospels present slight variances about the actual wording of the sign but all agree that Jesus was charged with being “King of the Jews.” To that charge, Jesus Himself pleaded guilty.

John 18 presents the fullest record of Jesus’ exchanges with Pilate. Verse 37 records Pilate asking, “You are a King, then?”

Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a King.” Matthew, Mark and Luke all record Pilate asking, “Are you the King of the Jews?” and all report Jesus’ affirmative answer, “Yes,



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

it is as you say” (Matt. 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3).

There was no hedging or waffling in Jesus’ reply. He did not couch His answer in a story subject to various interpretations. His answer was direct and clear. Jesus told Pilate and the Roman Empire that He was King of the Jews.

Earlier that morning Jesus had stood before Joseph Caiaphas, the high priest, and the Jewish leaders called the Sanhedrin. It was Caiaphas who had counseled that it was better for one man to die than for the nation to be put at risk. Caiaphas had no intention of letting Jesus or anyone upset the arrangements that kept him in power as long as he kept peace between the Jews and Rome.

Frustrated by Jesus’ silence in the face of numerous charges, the high priest finally put Jesus under oath and demanded, “Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God” (Matt. 26:63).

This was not the first time Jesus had faced such a demand. John 10:24 tells of an incident on Temple Mount when the priests doing service there scolded Him and said, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”

‘Yes, it is as you say’

Jesus’ retort was, “I did tell you, but you do not believe” (v. 25). He then explained the miracles He did testified to Him being from the Father.

This time Jesus’ answer was more direct. Under oath to answer if He was the Son of God, the reply was straightforward. “Yes, it is as you say.” There was no misunderstanding. Jesus told the Jewish high priest and the religious leaders of that day that He was the longed-for Messiah, the Son of God.

Caiaphas could have believed. He could have fallen before Jesus and worshipped Him but he did not. “Blasphemy,” he cried and tore his clothes (Matt. 26:65). Tradition teaches that Jews were to tear their clothes whenever they heard an insult to God so it is likely that all the members of the Sanhedrin ripped their cloaks. They concluded this unlearned Galilean standing before them could not possibly be the Son of God. To claim such was to insult God and made Jesus worthy of death.

His own words condemned Him. Jesus told the religious leaders of that day that He was the King of the Jews.

Jesus had not kept His identity a secret. After healing a lame man at the Pool of Bethesda, the Jews tried to stone Jesus because He said, “My Father is always at His work to this very day, and

I too am working” (John 5:17). The following verse explains the Jews understood that by calling God His Father, Jesus was making Himself equal with God.

In John 8:58, Jesus told the crowd who He was when He said, “before Abraham was, I am.” The result was another attempt to stone Him. In John 9:37 He told a man whom He had just healed that the Son of Man was standing in front of him.

To the pilgrims in Jerusalem that Passover, Jesus plainly announced who He was on Palm Sunday morning when He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. The language one spoke did not matter. Jesus’ actions said it all. There was no misunderstanding the claim Jesus made when He fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, “See your King comes to you righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

To all the people Jesus of Nazareth said He was the King of the Jews.

The charge scribbled on the titulus hanging above Jesus’ head got it right. Jesus died as King of the Jews.

On this side of the cross there is another sign declaring who Jesus is. Romans 1:4 says Jesus was “declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead.”

Like Pilate, like Caiaphas, like all men everywhere, each of us must decide to call that message blasphemy or to join with those first disciples who called Jesus “the Christ, the Son of the living God.”



See 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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Bennington, Vt., is home to Summit Church, a new church plant by former Alabama Baptist pastor Randy Burns. Summit Church will officially launch Sept. 7, with a community outreach scheduled for May 17-18.

Decatur's Westmeade helps couple plant Vermont church, others follow

By **Melanie Smith**
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

It was a conversation with Scotty Hogan that left Randy Burns "amazed" and convinced that God was at work. Burns, a pastor for eight years, had felt God leading him to pursue church planting as a career. He began looking at the nation's most unchurched areas — the Northeast and the Northwest — as possible destinations.

Meanwhile Hogan, pastor of Westmeade Baptist Church, Decatur, had gone to Vermont to help in the startup of a new Baptist college in Bennington. He saw firsthand the need for more churches. He also visited Williams College, the college in Williamstown, Mass., where the Haystack Prayer Meeting occurred in 1806 and fostered a foreign missionary movement.

"It broke my heart that where the gospel came to America — the Northeast — is 4 percent Christian now," Hogan said.

He said he came home feeling "this was the place and this was the time" to lead Westmeade Baptist to fulfill his longtime vision of planting a church.

God had been preparing 36-year-old Burns too. While at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, he took classes in church planting and met several times with the professor teaching the classes. And before that he had started new ministries — a youth group at Lawrence County's Hillsboro Baptist Church in 2000 and a junior high ministry at Celebration Church in New Orleans.

'God knew'

"God knew I was going to be a church planter long before I had a clue," he said.

Burns went on to be pastor of three churches in Louisiana and Alabama. He was at Harmony Baptist Church, Hillsboro, when he had the life-changing conversation with Hogan in 2012. "I was amazed when he started sharing with me about his vision for Westmeade to be a sending church for a new church plant in an unchurched area," Burns said. "As we talked and prayed for some time, we both sensed the Lord leading us to work together on this endeavor."

Westmeade voted to bring Burns on staff as a church planting intern, committing to \$20,000 a year for five years for him. Burns began that position in June 2013 and since then has been going through training, developing relationships in Vermont, raising additional support and recruiting a team.

Burns said his new church, Summit Church, Bennington, will officially launch Sept. 7. The first community outreach is scheduled for May 17-18 and the first preview service will be June 1.

NAMB connection

The Burnses also will receive \$12,000 a year for three years from the North American Mission Board (NAMB).

Lyandon Warren, Vermont's church planting catalyst for NAMB, said he can't wait for the Burns family to arrive.

"They will be a visible sign to all of southern Vermont that God is up to some great things, spiritually speaking, and that brings with it great excitement," Warren said.

"People in our context are extremely encouraged when solid Christian couples move into Vermont to help build the Kingdom."

Warren said the church partnering to start Summit — Capstone Baptist Church, North Bennington — will be challenged to continue to be evangelistic and make disciples. Summit will be Capstone Baptist's second church plant in seven years.

Burns said Capstone's pastor, Phil Steadman, has led the church in its desire to send missionaries and church planters all over New England.

Burns and his wife, Kelli, and daughters, Sarah Grace, 9, and Elizabeth Faith, 3, are not the only ones relocating to help found Summit.

Also going are Jake and Laura Ashley Stone,

Jonathan Thigpen and Rachel Crow, all members of Point Mallard Parkway Baptist Church, Decatur.

Burns' vision of small group connections and his aim to reach the 20-something demographic in Bennington made a deep impression, said Jake Stone, 26, who will be associate pastor and small group leader.

Thigpen will be worship pastor and Crow will be children's minister.

Jordan Grisham of Westmeade Baptist is a college student who will transfer to the new Northeastern Baptist College in Bennington and serve as student intern at Summit.

Another team member will be Lauren Cartwright of Tyler, Texas, a volunteer through NAMB whose love is college student ministry.

The Burns family began moving March 31 and the Stones' will move in May. Others will follow in the coming months.

Westmeade members will be part of the major events as well as provide continuous prayer support from Decatur.

"Having a sending church like Westmeade and having this time to raise support, recruit a team and receive training has allowed us to have a great start," Burns said. 🙏



Photo courtesy of Randy Burns

Randy Burns, his wife, Kelli, and daughters 9-year-old Sarah Grace and 3-year-old Elizabeth Faith relocated to Vermont to plant Summit Church, Bennington.

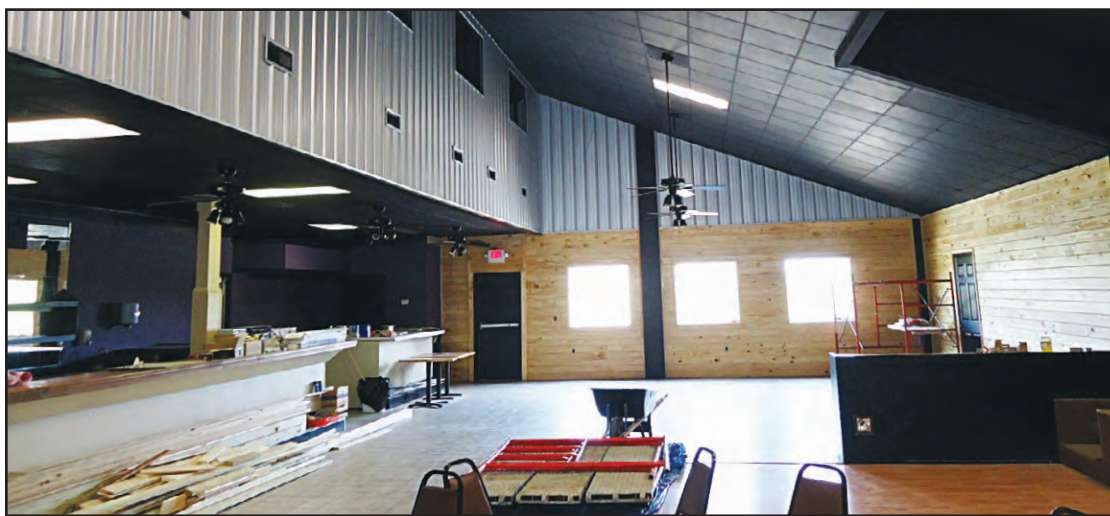


Photo by Ken Conaway

The Alabama chapter of Campers on Mission turn a former saloon into an after-school facility in the Riverside/Pell City area. The nonprofit organization Quest Kids Club & Family Center will officially open its doors June 2.

Engaging families

Former saloon transformed into after-school facility

By Julie Payne
The Alabama Baptist

Transforming a former saloon in Riverside into a kid-friendly, after-school facility required a recent all-hands-on-deck effort for the Alabama chapter of Campers on Mission (ALCOM).

Even the ALCOM ladies — who typically assist with lighter-duty sewing projects while on the worksites — rolled up their sleeves to clean and do most of the painting.

The group of 27 ALCOM volunteers arrived at the former saloon March 17 and worked through April 2, finishing two days ahead of schedule.

Within the two-story building, the group did carpentry work, removed and replaced all ceiling tile downstairs and built a new exterior façade, among other major tasks.

“We were very pleased with the accomplishments,” reported Ken Conaway, project co-leader. “This work crew was outstanding. God sent us people with the exact skill set we needed to accomplish the job.”

And as a result of ALCOM’s hard work, the nonprofit organization Quest Kids Club & Family Center will officially open its doors June 2 to the Riverside/Pell City area.

The idea for an after-school program in the area came from Kari Callahan, 24, associate minister to children at First Baptist Church, Pell City.

God stirring a passion

Callahan has felt called to ministry since she was in high school, and while volunteering at the Boys & Girls Club during college she felt God stirring a passion in her to begin an after-school program.

Fast forward to November 2013, when First, Pell City, was searching for a freezer to store 150 boxes of frozen Thanksgiving meals.

“God provided the freezer in a vacant building that had previously been a saloon,” Callahan recalled. “While making arrangements to use the freezer, the owner of the building asked if there was a way we could use the large building for any kind of ministry. At that moment it was like God said, ‘Here’s your kids’ club.’”

To actually transform the former saloon into a kids’ facility, several people suggested to Callahan the idea

of using ALCOM for the interior construction work. The organization was contacted, and within a week both Conaway and Bill Foster, who ultimately co-led the project, met with Callahan at the building to hear her vision for Quest.

“What a blessing [ALCOM was],” Callahan said. “They were so supportive and confirmed that they could do the work in three weeks. So we got everything ready for their campers to park in our lot and got all the supplies donated for them to work with by March 16.”

In addition to their volunteer labor, ALCOM “encouraged and supported the work that God is going to do through Quest Kids Club,” Callahan noted.

Callahan will serve as Quest’s director and said they will enroll up to 100 kids at a time. “My goal is for 50 percent of those kids to be on scholarship through donations,” she said.

Quest will be offered for kids in kindergarten through sixth grade. It isn’t associated with any one church, but it will offer Bible-based summer day camps and after-school clubs.

For the summer day camps, kids will be placed into “squads” according to age and gender. Squads will travel to different tracks, such as computer, art, recreation, lunch, snack and devotion.

In Quest’s after-school clubs, once children arrive a snack will be provided while a Bible lesson is taught. Kids will then go to designated areas to finish their homework, followed by opportunities for playtime.

Quest also will offer family events as well as parenting classes. There will even be opportunities for churches and other organizations to use the facility.

“I truly believe that Quest Kids Club is going to impact the lives of children and their families for the gospel,” Callahan said. “I see us reaching parents through their children and involving them in churches in our area.”

Her father, Ric Callahan, who serves as minister to children and families at First, Pell City, said God has prepared his daughter “for such a time as this. ... Through her leadership, Quest ... will reach children who need to know the love of Jesus and provide a great service to their families.”

For more information about Quest, visit www.questkidsclub.org. For more information about the work of ALCOM, visit www.alabamacom.org.



CALLAHAN

ALABAMA UPDATES

PEOPLE, CHURCHES MAKING NEWS ACROSS THE STATE

McFadden retires after more than 40 years in ministry

R. Pat McFadden is retiring from his role as pastor of First Baptist Church, Fort Payne, after serving nearly 27 years. His last day will be April 27.

McFadden has been in ministry for more than 40 years. He served as pastor in Texas; at Eastdale Baptist Church, Montgomery; and at First Baptist Church, Elba, in Coffee Baptist Association. From 1979 to 1982, he and his wife, Sue, were International Mission Board missionaries in the Dominican Republic.

McFadden said First, Fort Payne, is a congregation of people who has made it easy to serve as pastor and has seen them grow even stronger in missions, worship and care.

McFadden also said his long tenure at First, Fort Payne, has allowed him to enjoy ministering to people during the many seasons of life. “I’ve seen them come into the world, finish school, get married and stay here.”

A reception is planned for McFadden on April 27 from 2 to 4 p.m. at The Building in Fort Payne.

McFadden received his education from Clemson University in South Carolina and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and teaches Old and New Testament survey classes at Northeast Alabama Community College in Rainsville.

Even though he is retiring from being a full-time pastor, McFadden will be available for interim and supply work. (Leigh Pritchett)



MCFADDEN

Alabama church planter retires from ministry in state

After nearly 17 years of ministry service in Alabama, Ramon Rivas said goodbye March 16 with plans to continue his ministry work in Mexico.

Rivas served as a church planter for the Northwest Alabama Hispanic Coalition in Hamilton and was later commissioned by the North American Mission Board in 2008 as a church-planting missionary for Hispanic churches. He worked in various ministry capacities in Franklin, Winston, Colbert-Lauderdale and Marion Baptist associations.

Rivas began several new Hispanic missions. One was Primera Iglesia Bautista, Hamilton, in Marion Association — the first Alabama Baptist church owned by a Hispanic congregation — where Rivas served as pastor for eight years.

Rivas’ heart for ministry was evident to those he worked with, including Keith Box, Marion Association’s director of missions.

“He is a very dedicated and committed man,” Box said. “First and foremost he loves Jesus. I’ve never met a man with such a drive and passion to win people to Christ. ... Only eternity will show the impact Ramon Rivas has had for the kingdom of God.”

Primera Iglesia Bautista, Hamilton, hosted a party March 16 to celebrate Rivas’ retirement from ministry in Alabama.

Rivas now lives in Texas and it is his “heart to start a mission in Mexico,” he said. He asks for prayers for God to open doors for this new chapter of ministry. (Julie Payne)

Alabama Baptist GIVING



Year to Date through March 31, 2014

MARCH

CP Challenge Budget Goal	\$3,475,000
CP Challenge Budget Gifts.....	\$2,635,867
Under Goal for Month.....	\$839,133

YEAR TO DATE

CP Challenge Budget Goal	\$10,425,000
CP Challenge Budget Gifts.....	\$10,080,863
Under Goal for Year.....	\$344,137

The monthly and year-to-date totals include CP base, CP state causes and SBC causes.



Photo courtesy of Hope Stephens

A group of girls enjoy the waterfront at Alabama Woman's Missionary Union's WorldSong camp in Cook Springs.

WorldSong Missions Place welcomes new mother-daughter staff leaders

By Anna Keller
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Since 1991, Alabama Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) has been hosting camp at WorldSong Missions Place, making memories and providing spiritual inspiration and guidance to guests from across the state.

The 2014 camping season at WorldSong is shaping up to be a great one, with new leadership on board (mother/daughter team Hope and Kaley Stephens) and a collection of counselors and staff that bring commitment and enthusiasm.

Camp director Hope Stephens, a former International Mission Board representative, was introduced to WorldSong when she and her family returned to the United States in 2009. WorldSong was a place they were asked to share their missions experiences. She said the camp immediately felt special to both her and her daughter Kaley (now the camp's program and activities director).

"It got under our skin and we just couldn't shake it," Hope Stephens said. "The past three camp directors have been single ladies, but I think God has called me there to bring something different as a married woman and a mother. It will be interesting to see how that impacts our camping style."

Camp had such a strong impact on Kaley Stephens that she changed her plans of becoming a Latin teacher and decided instead to major in recreation leadership at Jacksonville State University.

New roles

"I spent one summer at WorldSong and decided that was my calling," Kaley Stephens said. "I was at WorldSong whenever there was something going on — I was the counselor they couldn't get rid of."

Kaley Stephens said she looks forward to her role at WorldSong being a bit different this year and to sharing leadership responsibilities with her mother. The two

women have worked together before — they used to own a photography business.

The Stephenses also will introduce new programming elements to this summer's line-up, capitalizing on the talents of their staff.

Sarah Kuykendall, an Auburn University student who's majoring in nutrition and dietetics, will lead cooking and nutrition classes for campers as a nutrition intern.

"We'll have the girls cooking this year, and I'm going to talk about the science behind cooking as well," she said. "Nutrition is a relevant skill no matter what and it's cool to me to find out how things work in the human body. It's evidence to me that we have a God, and that's something I want to share this summer."

Kuykendall is an alumna of WorldSong herself and this will be her third year working on the camp's staff.

There are different types of camping experiences that take place each summer at WorldSong. The standard camp is for girls grades 3–6 and 7–12 and runs four nights and five days. They also offer mother/daughter camp (either one or two nights) and host a youth week during the summer

for girls grades 7–12 as well as a co-ed week for boys and girls grades 2–6.

Though the leaders and staff all bring different skills to use at camp, there's one element they all share: the desire to make

Christ's love feel alive and relevant to campers.

"Camp for me was where I learned what a relationship with Christ looked like," Kuykendall recalled. "I grew up in church but I didn't understand that you read the Bible every day and pray. Camp is where I learned what my relationship with Christ meant."

Coming from a missions background, the Stephenses hope to convey the breadth of what missions can mean.

Hope Stephens said, "My hope is that camp-

ers would walk away knowing that the Great Commission is something that starts right here. Becoming a missionary isn't something you do when you grow up and it's not something that only takes place far away — it starts here and now, right where you are."

For more information about WorldSong or to register for the Come Explore WorldSong event April 26, visit www.alabamawmu.org/registrationforcomeexploreworldsong.



Photo courtesy of Hope Stephens



Photo courtesy of Hope Stephens

Counselors and other leaders take time to lead girls in Bible study at WorldSong.

COME EXPLORE WORLDSONG

April 26 • 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. • Registration required

www.alabamawmu.org/registrationforcomeexploreworldsong

Across ALABAMA'S Associations

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

BIRMINGHAM

► **Lakeside Church, Birmingham**, will hold a senior adult luncheon May 13. For information or reservations, call the church office at 205-822-1240. Greg Corbin is pastor. ► **Nathan Daniels** is the new pastor of **Westmont Church, Birmingham**. He holds a master of divinity degree from Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in Birmingham. He previously served as assistant minister for First Church, Pleasant Grove. He and his wife, Jessica, have one son.



DANIELS

CLARKE

► A Live Crucifixion Reen-

actment called "The Hands and Feet of Jesus" will be presented throughout the day April 18 beginning at noon at Alpha Women's Resource Center in Jackson. There will be a special service at 6:30 p.m. Everyone is invited and encouraged to drive by during the day and attend the service. Pastor Bill Ellis of Stave Creek Church, Jackson, is organizing the event. For information call the church at 251-246-2701. Chris Baker is director of missions.

EAST LIBERTY

► **County Line Church, Dudleyville**, will celebrate its 179th anniversary May 4, beginning at 10:45 a.m. (CDT). Kevin Calhoun, of Columbus, Ga., will preach and the County Line Singers will provide special music. Dinner on the grounds will follow. For information call 334-864-0281. Everyone is welcome. Wayne Barrett Sr. is pastor.

ETOWAH

► **Bart Watts** is the new pastor of **Edgewood Church, Gadsden**. He holds a bachelor of arts in biblical studies from Southeastern Bible College in Birmingham and also has taken New Orleans Seminary extension courses. He and his wife, Susan, have three children.

OTHER

► **Trussville Southside Church, Trussville**, will celebrate homecoming April 27 with the singing and preaching of Squire Parsons. The worship service begins at 11 a.m. Lunch will follow. Al Choquette is pastor.

MONTGOMERY

► **Vaughn Forest Church, Montgomery**, has called **Kevin Blackwell** as interim pastor for a role that will last a maximum of one year while the pastor search committee works to find the church's next full-time pastor. Blackwell, who will continue in his full-time position as assistant to the president for church relations at Samford University in Birmingham, began the new part-time role with Vaughn Forest on April 13.



BLACKWELL

Senior Adult Evangelism Conference

is **May 5**, 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Lakeside Baptist Church, Birmingham. Harper Shannon, Jay Wolf and Ray Newcomb will speak. For more information, call 1-800-264-1225, ext. 245.

REFLECTIONS



The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know Your name trust in You, for You, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek You.

Psalm 9:9-10

Someone You Should Know

By Leigh Pritchett

Melissa Thompson



THOMPSON

*Randolph Baptist Church
Bibb Baptist Association*

FAVORITE VERSE: John 1:1

FAVORITE HYMN: "Worthy of Worship"

HOBBIES: Arts, crafts and yard work

FAMILY STATUS: Married for 11 years to Jeff; children, Cody, Grace and Luke

Melissa Thompson, 34, sees her mission as service. She is a servant in her church, association and community. In church, she is the Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) director, teacher in a young adult Sunday School class, discipleship training teacher, a member of the program committee, choir member and a hostess. For the association, she is WMU secretary. She also volunteers at Randolph Elementary School and gives private art instruction.

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

A: My parents. We were always there (at church) when the doors were open. It's something you do for God in obedience and to grow closer to Him. When I was 7 years old, my dad played Jesus in a cantata at church. When I saw that, I just really made the connection. That was a life-changing moment. Since then, it has been a time of drawing closer to Him.

Q: When and how were you led into your ministry work?

A: I always wanted to be involved. Some ladies asked me to serve on a committee and I said, "Sure." The more I serve, the more I want to serve to bring glory to Him.

Q: What does your ministry work demand?

A: Time would be the biggest. It (also) challenges me to

get more into God's Word and let Him feed me so I can help others.

Q: What do you get from the ministry work?

A: A closer relationship with God. You think, "Why shouldn't I do those because He did so much for us?"

Q: How do family members support you?

A: My kids come along and help do things. They're just always there. My husband is there. There's never a time when I have to say, "Are we going to church today?" He wants to be there as much as I want to be there.

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

A: I hope it never ends. I want there always to be something I can do for Him. I want to be a part of it. That's the blessing.

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

A: I want it to influence my children to take up that challenge and do it as much as I want to do it. Passing on the love of God.

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

A: All the difference. There's a hope. There's Someone to serve, Someone to honor. He's so worthy of everything. I can't imagine what it would be like not to be a believer. ☩

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



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Doctrine of Christ

Christ Was Raised

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Christ is at the heart of the gospel. Its good news swirls around who He is and what He did. Last week we looked at the first part of the summary of the gospel as found in 1 Corinthians 15:3 in the declaration of Paul the apostle, “I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.”

Through the centuries Christian faith has confessed that Christ was raised on the third day. His bodily resurrection stands as the distinctive component of our faith. Those who have gone before us have pondered deeply the reasons for this confession. Their ponderings may well bless us as we approach Easter 2014.

The empty tomb

Many take the starting point for belief in the resurrection of Jesus the reported fact of an empty tomb on the third day. Both Jesus’ friends and His enemies attested that the tomb was empty. A small group of women that included Mary Magdalene were the first recorded eyewitnesses to the empty tomb (Matt. 28:1–6). After she shared what she saw, or rather did not see since Jesus had vacated it, Peter and John also became eyewitnesses of the tomb’s emptiness. Outsiders like the guards posted to watch the tomb knew it to be empty as did the authorities who had insisted on Jesus’ execution. Those authorities also offered a bribe to the guards if they would spread the idea that Jesus’ friends had removed His body (Matt. 28:11–13).

In addition to reports that His tomb was empty were repeated reports of eyewitnesses who claimed they had seen the risen Christ. Eyewitnesses of the vacated tomb included individuals who saw Him on the day of His resurrection: Mary Magdalene, as well as 10 of His 12 disciples and two unnamed

followers who walked with Jesus from Jerusalem to their home in nearby Emmaus. Later the record tells us that the risen Lord appeared to more than 500 at one time (1 Cor. 15:6).

Beyond an empty tomb and reported appearances, evidence for Jesus’ resurrection can be seen in the changed lives of those who did encounter Him alive again. The reality of the resurrection was a major part of the transformation of a disciple like Peter from a distance-following, cowering, fearful, denying disciple prior to Jesus’ death into a fearless witness standing before the very people who engineered the crucifixion and charging them with Jesus’ murder (Acts 3:11–15; 4:8–13). Whence such boldness? In no small part, the changed lives of the disciples were because a conviction that Jesus who had died was indeed alive again. This conviction, coupled with the fullness of the Holy Spirit, goes a long way in explaining their own death-defying boldness. (In future weeks we will begin thinking about the Person and work of the Holy Spirit in the world and in the lives of believers.)

We can go a step beyond the changed lives of others as evidence of a real resurrection that followed a real death. We can look into our own hearts. Often many of us have sung the familiar words, “You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart.” It may well be that the confirming proof of the resurrection of Christ is our own Christian experience. ☩

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.



A ruptured HEART

‘The only error is O’Reilly’s logic,’ Ball says

(continued from page 1)

and then He would have had enough breath to cry out and suddenly die.

What bothers me as a conservative Christian is many people reading O’Reilly’s book will be convinced there are errors in the Bible. The only error is O’Reilly’s logic.

1. If Jesus did not have enough breath to say, “Father forgive them ...” then how did He say the other quotes cited by O’Reilly?

2. The Synoptic Gospels all say Jesus cried out with a loud voice and gave up the spirit.

3. Matthew and Mark also say Jesus cried with a loud voice saying, “My God, My God ...”

4. You cannot cry out with a loud voice if you are suffocating.

Whether one believes in the inerrancy of the Bible or not (and I do), O’Reilly’s argument cannot be used as evidence for errors.

Like O’Reilly, I have also written a book about the crucifixion, “The Crucifixion and Death of a Man Called Jesus: From the Eyes of a Physician.” However, my book is not simply a recapitulation of historical facts and assumptions. I have done scientific studies on the crucifixion of Jesus, including more than 200 simulations on a shop-made cross with real-life subjects.

Not one of them has ever had any difficulty breathing. With approximately 20 of these I have recorded oxygen saturation levels, pulmonary function studies, blood pressure, pulse rate, respirations and hang time. I have published two scientific articles and written a book explaining my view. I was on the History Channel presentation of the crucifixion in 2008 and have been filmed for an upcoming presentation of the crucifixion by the Discovery Channel. I have done live presentations of the crucifixion in about 150 churches in 17 states. With this background, I am absolutely confident Jesus did not die of suffocation. He died of a ruptured heart. God gives us confirmation of this with a post mortem exam cited in John 19:33–34: “But when they came to Jesus, and saw that He was dead already, they brake not His legs. But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.”

The detailed explanation of this post mortem exam is beyond the scope of this article but is explained in my book.

The widely held theory of suffocation is a result of “scientific assumption” without dynamic studies. It has been held as the principal reigning cause of death for around 80 years and is still considered by many as the cause of the death of Jesus. (I too originally believed this before I began to study the crucifixion in earnest.) There are no scientific studies that suggest Jesus died of suffocation. It can only be accepted through “circular reasoning” as follows:

1. Suffocation was the usual means of death by crucifixion.

2. Therefore Jesus died of suffocation.

3. The Bible quotes Jesus as saying, “Father forgive them ...”

4. He could not have said this because

... 5. Suffocation was the usual means of death by crucifixion.

The suffocation theory has held sway among scientists for years because “it sounds logical.” This logic reminds me of Galileo’s 1589 experiment when he

dropped two balls of different masses from the Leaning Tower of Pisa to demonstrate time of descent was independent of their mass. (Prior to that it was held as inviolable truth the heavier ball would fall faster because it sounded so logical.) Likewise the suffocation theory might sound logical, but it is not validated with empirical data.

Sagging church growth

As the media chips away at the truth of the Bible, we should not be surprised church growth is sagging. Christian people cannot afford to allow these challenges to go unanswered. The Bible quotes Jesus as saying, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” As with everything in the Bible, there is a reason for its inclusion. This quote by Jesus (from the cross) is specifically directed to those responsible for His crucifixion. I am responsible. I am guilty. It was my sins that nailed Jesus to the cross. I am so thankful He forgave me then and there. Aren’t you?

EDITOR’S NOTE — David A. Ball, M.D., has been in the general practice of medicine in Batesville, Miss., for 44 years and is a bivocational evangelist and member of the Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists. He is a deacon and Sunday School teacher at First Baptist Church, Batesville, Miss., and may be contacted at dball@panola.com. ☩

“I am absolutely confident Jesus did not die of suffocation. He died of a ruptured heart. God gives us confirmation of this with a post mortem exam cited in John 19:33–34.”

**David A. Ball
doctor and bivocational evangelist**

Ukrainian, Russian Baptist leaders call churches to prayer in an 'atmosphere of holy desperation'

A meeting April 8 between Vyacheslav Nesteruk, president of the Baptist Union of Ukraine, and Aleksey Smirnov, president of the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, marked the first time the heads of the two Baptist unions have met since a political crisis began November 2013 putting the two nations on the brink of war.

The Baptist leaders issued a joint statement, calling on churches "to pray continually for peace between our peoples as well as for those who have suffered during the course of the recent political stand-off."

They also pledged their "sincere willingness to pray and support deeds of fraternal dialogue and the promotion of peace in the Russian and Ukrainian societies." They appealed "to all who are responsible for the future of our countries to hold firmly to the principles of freedom of conscience and confession as well as the non-interference of the state and political forces in the internal life of religious organizations."

The Ukrainian crisis has kindled an interdenominational prayer movement in the nation, said a Southern Baptist evangelist who ministers there and has accepted an invitation from Ukrainian Baptists to preach on a national day of mourning in Kiev.

Ukrainian Christians believe only God can protect the nation from Russian control in the midst of upheaval that led to the ouster of President Viktor Yanukovich in February, said Michael Gott, who has been ministering in Ukraine nearly 40 years.

"The churches, the Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church, the evangelicals, the Baptists and the Pentecostals are now having prayer meetings together, asking God to intervene in their nation's history — and it is an atmosphere of holy desperation," Gott said.

"They are saying, 'God if You don't help us, we're down the tubes. We're facing a collapse of our whole nation.'



Photo by the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Russia
Aleksey Smirnov (left), president of the Russian Baptists, meets with Vyacheslav Nesteruk, president of the Ukrainian Baptists.

"What [the revolution] has caused is an amazing thing," said Gott, a Texas-based evangelist who spends up to six months a year in Eastern Europe.

Gott is scheduled to preach an April 27 sermon commemorating the estimated 100 people killed when Yanukovich was ousted from power. Details are still being finalized for the event expected to draw up to 50,000 Ukrainians and to be televised nationally, the result of the new government declaring the service an official religious and cultural event, Gott said.

National day of mourning

"They want me to preach a message on this special day," Gott said. "It is a national day of mourning for all of the people that were killed by the snipers during the Ukrainian revolution when President Yanukovich was removed from office and he ordered snipers to come out and shoot people. Roughly 100 people were shot and they're going to have a time when the nation comes together to mourn the horror of all of this."

"Because I'm going to be there preaching a rather large evangelistic event, I was invited to speak," Gott said.

"The Ukrainian people not only want to do this memorial for these people who died, but we're going during their Easter celebration, which adds a dimension to this, and it's one of the reasons they expect the crowds to be so large."

Nesteruk and several other Baptist leaders invited Gott to preach after he was already scheduled to tour western Ukraine with the Arkansas Master Singers April 21–May 2.

Gott will arrive in Kiev ahead of the choir to meet with Baptist leaders and celebrate Easter with his membership church there, Dom Evangeliya (House of the Gospel) Baptist Church.

"This invitation came to us from the Ukrainian Baptists themselves," Gott said. "We've [Michael Gott International] been going there for many, many years and they asked us to come." The trip could still be cancelled if the political climate changes in Kiev and western Ukraine.

"The fact is the western part of Ukraine is pro-American, it's pro-European, it's pro-Western, and so we have had to, almost within 72 hours, reschedule our whole itinerary," Gott said. "And yet this could be cancelled if there was a military invasion of Ukraine." (BP, ABP, TAB)



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Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

2014 marks 225th anniversary of 'Just As I Am' writer's birth

Charlotte Elliott (1789–1871) was struggling with doubts about her salvation. A family friend, a notable missionary, admonished her simply to “come to Christ just as you are.”

That statement led not only to Elliott's conversion but also to her writing a hymn known the world over — “Just As I Am.”

This year marks the 225th anniversary of Elliott's birth March 18, 1789, in Clapham, England.

César Malan, a hymn writer of Geneva, Switzerland, visited Elliott's father in May 1822. While speaking to Elliott, he asked her whether she was a Christian. She resented his question but later apologized for her rudeness. She confessed she wanted to come to Christ but didn't know how. Malan told her, “You must come to Christ just as you are.” With

his help, she trusted Christ for her salvation. For 40 years afterward until Malan's death, Elliott wrote him a letter each year on May 9, her spiritual birthday.

Elliott did not write her famous hymn until 12 years after her conversion. By that time, now 45, she had become an invalid and was living with her brother, H.V. Elliott, in Brighton, England.

In 1834, family members were busy morning and night preparing for a bazaar that would benefit St. Mary's Hall, a school Elliott's brother had founded for the education of clergymen's daughters. Elliott was eager to help, but because of her physical ailments she could not. The night before the bazaar, she was restless and wrestled with a sense of uselessness. She

fell into a spiritual conflict and questioned the reality of her relationship with Christ.

The next day while the rest of the family worked at the bazaar, she wrote down for her own comfort the message of pardon and peace she had heard from Malan more than a decade earlier: “Just as I am, without one plea, But that Thy blood was shed for me, And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I come.”

Little did Elliott know that her words of assurance — about Jesus loving her just as she was — would impact millions.

In 1836, she published a little volume containing the poem but without her name. An anonymous woman had the poem printed in leaflet form, and it circulated throughout England. Then in 1849,

William Bradbury composed music for the lyrics and published the song.

The hymn has been translated into numerous languages all over the world. Evangelist Billy Graham used it as the invitation in his crusades. Countless stories have been told of the impact of the hymn upon people's lives.

Donated receipts

In Elliott's lifetime, receipts for sales of the hymn were donated to St. Mary's Hall.

Elliott went on to write approximately 150 hymns and many poems.

On Sept. 22, 1871, she died in Brighton at the age of 82. After her death, more than 1,000 letters were found among her belongings written by people who told her how her hymn had touched their lives. ☞

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).



ELLIOTT

RELIGION in America

Compiled from Wire Services

ACLU defends student's right to read Bible

NASHVILLE — The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Tennessee is speaking up for an elementary school student reportedly told he could not read the Bible during an after-school program funded by taxpayers.

The group often in the news for opposing attempts to promote religious activities in public schools recently sent a letter to the Cannon County REACH after-school program explaining that students have a right to read religious texts if they so choose during free-reading periods.

Thomas Castelli, ACLU-Tennessee legal director, said in a press release, “While (the First Amendment exists to protect religious freedom), that also means schools may not impose or promote religion. (But) students can engage in religious activities that they initiate, provided they do not cause a disruption or interfere with the education of other students.”

US sees decline in anti-Semitic incidents

NEW YORK — Continuing a decade-long drop, anti-Semitic incidents in the U.S. declined by 19 percent, according to the Anti-Defamation League's (ADL) most recent annual audit.

In 2013, the ADL counted 751 anti-Semitic incidents, a decline from the 927 incidents in 2012. Compiled since 1979, the ADL annual report includes assaults, vandalism and harassment targeting Jews. Anti-Israel incidents are only counted when they cross the line into anti-Semitism.

The ADL noted one “dark spot” in its survey: a significant increase in anti-Semitic assaults — 31 incidents, up from 17 in 2012.

Incidents of anti-Semitic vandalism in 2013 dropped to 315 from 440 in 2012. ☞

NYC churches suffer setback after court upholds policy to bar worship services in city schools

Dozens of churches stand to lose their meeting places in New York City public schools after another unfavorable court ruling.

On April 3, the U.S. Second Circuit Court of Appeals again upheld a policy that bars worship services in the city's schools, saying the rule does not violate the First Amendment protection of religious liberty. The latest opinion in a nearly 20-year court case enables, though it does not require, the city's Board of Education to evict as many as 80 congregations that use school facilities for corporate worship.

Bronx Household of Faith, the church involved in the lawsuit, is considering whether to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court or beyond the three-judge panel that made the decision to the full appeals court, its lawyer said.

No SBC churches

There are no records of Southern Baptist churches meeting in New York City schools, but seven reportedly were using city school facilities as recently as 2012.

The Board of Education's policy prohibits “religious worship services” or using a school building as a “house of worship” outside normal hours, even though it permits individuals and other organizations

to use the facilities for activities. The rule, however, allows religious groups to use schools “for prayer, singing hymns, religious instruction, expression of religious devotion or the discussion of issues from a religious point of view,” according to the Second Circuit Court.

In a 2–1 decision, the Second Circuit panel ruled the policy infringed upon neither of the First Amendment's religion clauses — the right to exercise religion freely and the ban on government establishment of religion.

“Its sole reason for excluding religious worship services from its facilities is the concern that by hosting and subsidizing religious worship services, the Board would run a meaningful risk of violating the Establishment Clause by appearing to endorse religion,” judge Pierre Leval wrote for the majority.

In dissent, judge John Walker said it was an “easy call” to conclude the board's policy is not neutral. He rejected the majority's opinion that the government would be subsidizing religion if it permitted worship services in its school. The board “charges the same rate to all organizations using its facilities,” he said.

“Of the 50 largest school districts in the United States, New

York City alone entirely excludes religious worship from its facilities,” Walker wrote, adding, “It is striking that none of these other school districts appear to have the slightest concern about violating the Establishment Clause, nor have any of their community use policies been found to violate the Clause.”

First Amendment right

Jordan Lorence, lawyer for Bronx Household of Faith and senior counsel for the Alliance Defending Freedom, said in a written statement, “The First Amendment prohibits New York City from singling out worship services and excluding them from empty school buildings ... because the buildings are generally available to all individuals and community groups for any activity ‘pertaining to the welfare of the community.’”

New York Mayor Bill de Blasio continued to express support for the churches' right to use the schools. “I stand by my belief that a faith organization playing by the same rules as any community nonprofit deserves access,” he was reported as saying. “They play a very, very important role in terms of providing social services and other important community services.” (BP)

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR



ATTENDANCE 'EXCUSES'

I saw the front-page article on church attendance ("Alabama Baptists, others consider why only half of US adults say attending church is important") in the April 3 issue of *The Alabama Baptist* and just had to read it all the way through. That is a topic that has been on my mind a lot lately.

I was raised with the understanding you went to church three times a week — Sunday morning and evening and Wednesday evening — as a means of remaining spiritually strong in the face of the culture. Now it looks to me like a lot of Christians would rather be sitting in their easy chairs watching TV on Sunday nights. I get the sense that our commitment to the Lord is lessening as we find excuses to not attend.

Our idea of consistent attendance is showing up on Sunday mornings to be seen in church and have our one feeding out of God's Word.

Are we slowly but surely slipping our way into the Laodicean church as we balance our commitment against our comfort?

Bob Van Elsborg
Enterprise, Ala.

CHURCH ATTENDANCE

I read the article "Alabama Baptists, others consider why only half of US adults say attending church

is important" in the April 3 edition of *The Alabama Baptist* with interest.

The reasons for low or infrequent attendance are myriad, but one thing is for sure. People who don't go to church think that whatever else they're doing with that time is more important. Whether it's sleeping, reading the newspaper, watching TV or whatever. That tells you how important church attendance is to them.

One other hard fact flies in the face of what Barna reports as well.

A couple years ago, *The Alabama Baptist* published figures on church attendance and membership in Alabama by county. The figures showed that attendance at Southern Baptist Convention churches in the six largest population centers in Alabama represents only 33.28 percent of membership. So to state the 49 percent of the general population thinks church attendance is important tells me that's what those folks said, but that's not what those folks really believe.

Expressing a preference for a religion doesn't mean a thing, and such surveys as this one are meaningless in trying to address the problems.

Robert G. Cleveland
Pelham, Ala.

Baptist NEWS BRIEFS

COMPILED FROM WIRE SERVICES

CP giving 1.45 percent below year-to-date goal

NASHVILLE — Year-to-date contributions to Southern Baptist national and international missions and ministries received by the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee are 1.45 percent below the year-to-date SBC Cooperative Program (CP) Allocation Budget goal. They are 1.04 percent below contributions received during the same time frame last year, according to a news release from SBC Executive Committee President and Chief Executive Officer Frank S. Page.

The year-to-date total represents money received by the Executive Committee by the close of the last business day of March and includes receipts from state conventions, churches and individuals for distribution according to the 2013-14 SBC CP Allocation Budget.

The \$94,359,024.45 received by the Executive Committee for the first six months of the fiscal year, Oct. 1 through March 31, for distribution through the CP Allocation Budget represents 98.55 percent of the \$95,750,000 year-to-date budgeted amount to support Southern Baptist ministries globally and across North America. The total is \$993,030.41, or 1.04 percent, less than the \$95,352,054.86 received through the end of March 2013.

Designated giving of \$118,704,971.09 for the same year-to-date period is 0.18 percent, or \$209,246.52, below the \$118,914,217.61 received at this point in 2013. This total includes only those gifts received and distributed by the Executive Committee and does not reflect designated gifts contributed directly to SBC entities.

March's CP allocation receipts for SBC work totaled \$14,632,338.67. Designated gifts received in March amounted to \$26,514,011.83.

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PASTOR: South Hamilton Baptist Church is accepting resumes for pastor. Full-time and bivocational resumes are being accepted. Please send resumes to: 1805 Military Street S., Hamilton, AL 35570, or email to: southhamilton@gmail.com.

PART-TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC: Westwood Baptist Church, Birmingham, Ala., is currently seeking resumes for the position of minister of music (part-time). Services include blend of contemporary and traditional music. Email your resume to: steve.potts@wbclive.com or call 205-798-3341.

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BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC DIRECTOR: Flatwoods Baptist Church in Northport, Ala., is seeking a bivocational music director who will serve the church by planning and leading our worship/music ministry. The music director will be responsible for coordinating with all the church staff in planning, scheduling and directing the music program and ministries of the church. We are seeking someone who is a talented and passionate leader to plan and conduct a God-inspired music ministry. Send resume to: fwbcpersonnel@hotmail.com.

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 resume: meekbaptist@att.net. www.meekbc.com.

STUDENT MINISTER: First Baptist Church, Dothan, Ala., is seeking and praying for God's person to fill a student minister position for students in grades 7-12, as well as the college-aged students. If interested, please feel free to forward your resume to our Youth Advisory Committee Chairman, Courtney Mann. courtneymann@fbcdothan.org.

MINISTER OF CHILDREN & FAMILIES: First Baptist Church of Foley, Ala., is accepting resumes for the full-time position of minister of children and families. Please email resumes to: scollins@fbcfoley.com.

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Want to know God?

By Pastor Brian Lee
Shades Crest Baptist Church, Bluff Park

Several years ago I purchased a pallet of centipede sod, and early one July morning I began laying roll after roll of it in my front yard. By the end of the day I was exhausted, sore and dirty — really dirty. In fact, I don't recall ever having so much dirt on my body before. Sweat mixed with dirt covered me from the top of my head to the bottom of my feet. I was a mess. I've never enjoyed getting a shower more than I did on that day. The cool water was refreshing, and before long I was clean again.

Perhaps you can relate with that on a spiritual level. You bought what the world had to offer as you tried to lay down a life for yourself. Along the way, you compromised your morals, hurt people around you and violated your own soul. As a result, you found yourself covered with the dirt of shame and regret. It wasn't a good feeling, so you did everything you could to get rid of it.

However, try as you may, it still clings to your soul reminding you of the poor choices you made. The result is a debilitating sense of self. One person described it as feeling "a glob of unworthiness" inside. In such a state, what you want more than anything is to feel clean again. That's true for all of us. There's not a person alive who is beyond the need to be made clean.

What we may not realize is that even when we are still covered with the dirt of the past and our shame is ever before us, God still loves us and has a way for us to be clean again. It's called forgiveness. John, one of the first followers of Jesus, put it this way, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

So you don't have to be defined by your shameful past anymore. You can be clean. How? Tell God the truth about your regrets and failures. Take responsibility for the sinful choices you have made. Then allow the wonderful shower of His grace to wash over your life cleansing you from all of it. The shower is waiting. Climb in and enjoy.

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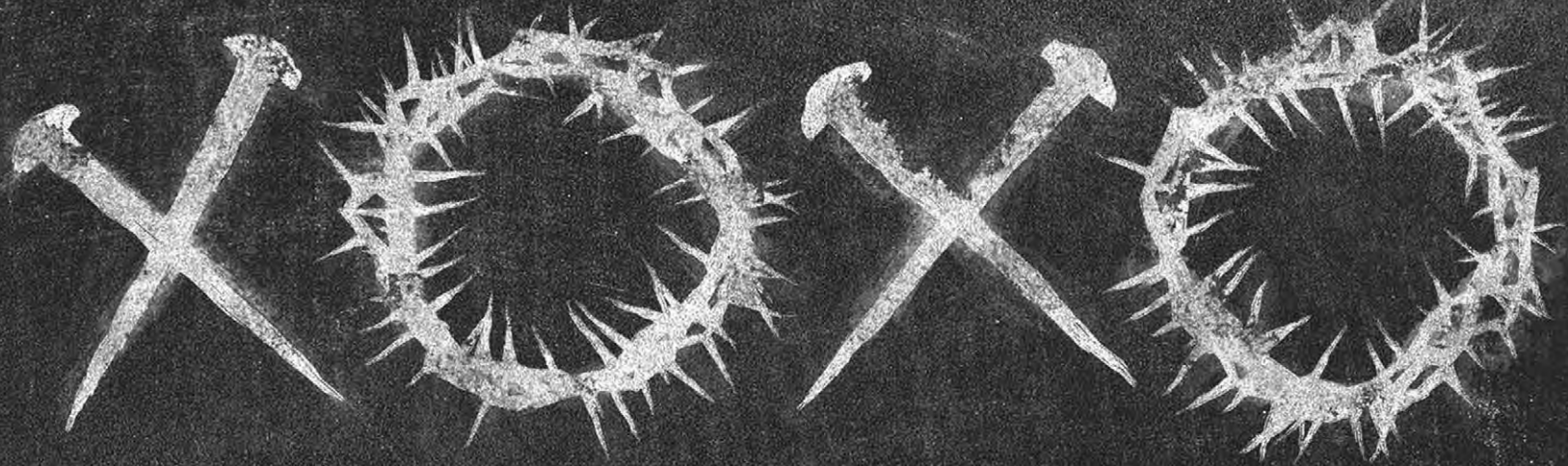
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UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

► **University of Mobile to Hold New Student Registration Day:** The University of Mobile is holding its next New Student Registration Day on May 16 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

New students may register for classes offered during summer and fall semesters. The New Student Registration Day includes orientation.

Additional New Student Registration Days are June 6 and July 11, also from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

For more information or to RSVP for a New Student Registration Day, visit www.umobile.edu or call enrollment services at 251-442-2222.

SAMFORD UNIVERSITY

► **Samford to Host NASCAR's Waltrip:** Samford University journalism and mass communication (JMC) department and Talladega Superspeedway will host NASCAR hall of fame inductee and Fox Sports' "NASCAR on Fox" analyst Darrell Waltrip for a special public event at the university April 15.

Waltrip will speak in Brock Forum, Dwight Beeson Hall, from 11 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. He will then take part in a meet-and-greet event in Ben Brown Plaza until 12:45 p.m. The event will include food, contests, giveaways and photo opportunities with the Talladega Superspeedway pace car and a vintage

stock car. Members of Talladega Superspeedway's staff also will be available to answer any questions about the May 2-4 race weekend.

Also at the April 15 event, Samford JMC students will host a fundraiser for Feed The Children, a Waltrip-supported philanthropy that provides resources for those without life's essentials. Talladega Superspeedway is offering NASCAR memorabilia for a silent auction and donations will be accepted onsite. All activities are open to the public.

For more information, visit www.samford.edu.

► **Samford to Host Political Journalist Whitmire on April 15:** Samford University's journalism and mass communication (JMC) department will host journalist Kyle Whitmire for the department's 2014 Robinson Forum on April 15 at 7 p.m. in Brooks Auditorium, Brooks Hall. The local government and politics reporter for *The Birmingham News* will speak about ethics in journalism in the digital era.

Whitmire, an Alabama native, graduated from Birmingham-Southern College in 2001 and has had a 13-year journalism career, including work as production manager for *The Western Star*, staff writer and new media editor for *Birmingham Weekly*, stringer for *The New York Times* and new media editor/senior writer at *Weld for Birmingham*.

In 2008 and 2009, Whitmire's "War on Dumb" column was awarded first place for the best political column in the 55,000 and under circulation division by the Association of Alternative News-

weeklies and the Medill School of Journalism.

For more information, contact the JMC department at 205-726-2948.

► **Samford University's Institute for Continued Learning Launches Tech Certificate Program:** Samford University, in partnership with Birmingham technology leader ThinkData Solutions, announced April 7 the launch of the university's new Tech Certificate program.

Offered through Samford's Institute for Continued Learning, the 60-hour certificates can be completed at an individualized pace.

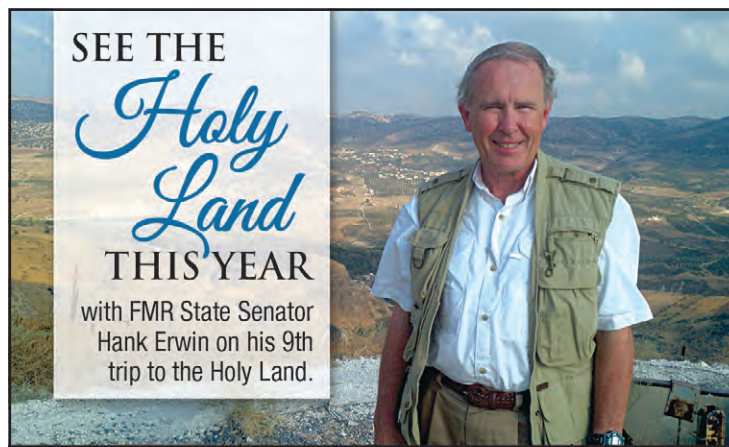
For more information, visit www.samford.edu/continued-learning.

JUDSON COLLEGE

► **Judson Art Students Featured at Selma Art Guild Gallery:** The Selma Art Guild, ArtsRe-vive and Black Belt Treasures bring "The Art of Printmaking," an exhibition of prints from three of Alabama's finest printmakers and their students, to Selma: Scott Stephens, professor of art, University of Montevallo; Heidi Lingamfelter, assistant professor, Auburn University at Montgomery; and Jamie Adams, assistant professor of art, Judson College in Marion.

The exhibition features Judson students Haley Hester, Mary Mack, De'Aunna Elliott, Lindsey Holt and Rebecca Horner.

The exhibition will be on display to the public at the Selma Art Guild Gallery every Friday and Saturday, noon-4 p.m., until April 26.



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Photo courtesy of Randy Gunter

Pastor Randy Gunter, of MeadowBrook Baptist Church, Gadsden, holds a pastor and church planter Bible training conference in Entebbe, Uganda, in February with the purpose of taking students through a one-year training in basic seminary courses.

Gadsden's MeadowBrook hosts ongoing Bible training conference for South Sudanese pastors

By Julie Payne
The Alabama Baptist

While previously working with South Sudan churches, Randy Gunter recognized an eye-opening need.

That need manifested itself in different forms — from the extremely limited resources to Bible training that was nearly nonexistent.

Aware these South Sudanese church leaders were both hungry to learn and extremely bright, Gunter, pastor of MeadowBrook Baptist Church, Gadsden, said his church decided to bring the Bible training directly to them so they could then multiply it to others.

The result of that vision is an ongoing conference for South Sudanese church leaders and church planters with the purpose of taking them through a one-year training in basic seminary courses.

Switch in locations

Originally scheduled to be held in South Sudan, tribal fighting within the country pushed the conference to Uganda instead, Gunter explained.

The conference's first session, which focused on "Hermeneutics and Homiletics," took place Feb. 12-19 with approximately 25 eager South Sudanese church planters and pastors soaking up the material for eight to nine hours each day.

Gunter co-taught the sessions with Gary Cardwell, director of missions for Etowah

Baptist Association. They used The Timothy Initiative training materials but rewrote the curriculum to make it interactive for their students, Gunter explained.

While having experience leading other conferences in the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica, Gunter said this was his church's first attempt "to take a designated group of pastors and church planters through a series of trainings so they may be better equipped for their ministry."

Training of Trainers

In addition to the Bible training, he noted a team of four from MeadowBrook Baptist led Community Health Evangelism (CHE) Training of Trainers.

"CHE is an integral ministry strategy that seamlessly integrates evangelism, discipleship and church planting with community health and development," Gunter said. "Through CHE ministries, people become followers of Jesus and whole communities are lifted out of cycles of poverty and disease."

He added, "The [CHE] training gave the church planters the necessary strategy to reach new communities and establish churches among new believers being disciplined."

Cardwell, who noted it was his first trip to Uganda, said he went to be a blessing to the church planters and pastors but came back far more blessed as a result of the relationships that were made.

"Equipping them in sharpening their skills in order to communicate biblical truths, as well as applying those truths in the lives of those they minister to, was a

great thrill for me," he shared. "I plan to be involved in future opportunities when possible."

Those future opportunities include five additional conferences over the next several months to both train and be in relationship with the pastors and church planters. Future sessions include topics such as "Church Planting and The Book of Acts," "New Testament Gospels" and "Major Bible Doctrines."

According to Gunter, all of the trainers for the future sessions will be from MeadowBrook or directly connected to the church. Gunter, who had visited both South

Sudan and Uganda several times before the first conference session in February, also plans on returning to teach future sessions.

Rewarding experience

Gunter noted that in his role with the conference, building and having relationship with the South Sudanese is extremely rewarding.

"They are extremely hospitable and kind people," he noted. "All of our missions emphases seek to train and invest for multiplication. It is rewarding that most of the ministry and expansion takes place while we are not in country." 🙏



Photo courtesy of Randy Gunter

Pastor Randy Gunter of MeadowBrook Baptist Church, Gadsden, helps with Community Health Evangelism training in Pajok, South Sudan, in August 2013.



Photo courtesy of Plan A Media

Natalie Grant says her latest album, 'Hurricane,' is the 'most personal' record she has ever made — with lyrics pulled from her own life experiences such as postpartum depression.

'Catalyst for healing'

Christian singer Grant deals with depression; encourages listeners to 'surrender weaknesses'

By Leann Callaway
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

As Christian recording artist Natalie Grant performs concerts across the country, she hopes the songs on her latest album "Hurricane" will connect audiences to Christ in the midst of life's challenges and storms.

"We often ask God to come rescue us from the storm," Grant said. "However, I think that sometimes He's saying, 'My child, I've done everything that I need to do but you have to do your part. Take a hold of the hand that I'm extending.' I remember reading Matthew 14, which is a passage of Scripture that I've known for years, where Jesus sent the disciples ahead in a boat and He stayed back to pray. On this particular day what struck me the most while reading the story was that the Lord sent the disciples straight into the storm. He knew exactly when the storm was coming and He still sent them straight into it.

"Sometimes we think that God is going to get us out of the storm instead of realizing that He may have actually been preparing us for the purpose of going through the storm. We learn more about the character of the God that we serve when we're in the middle of the storm than we do when we are on the mountaintop. I had been saying, 'Lord, get me out of these storms — stop the storms.' However, Jesus was saying, 'No, I'm coming into your storm.'"

Depression, busy touring schedule

Following the birth of her third child, Grant suffered from postpartum depression while resuming a busy touring schedule. During this time, her father was diagnosed with cancer and her nephew struggled with a heroine addiction.

Grant felt the storms intensifying all around her but

was afraid to admit that the waves were about to come crashing down. "Postpartum depression was something that I struggled with very privately and quietly," Grant acknowledged. "I felt this shame and thought that I couldn't talk about it because what kind of mother would I be that I would be questioning the sovereignty of God? My daughter, Sadie, was the miracle that I didn't know to ask for and a precious blessing to our family that we didn't expect.

"My family was facing serious situations with my father and nephew that we had never experienced before, and I felt like the storms of life were pounding down all at once. You get to this place where it's like, 'Enough, I just can't take anymore.' I found myself in this pit of darkness that I had never been in before," she said. "I had never experienced depression and it was becoming harder each day to put one foot in front of the other. It didn't make any sense to me but I still couldn't shake it. It was quite crippling for me and I struggled for about 18 months."

While seeking the Lord's guidance and direction, Grant recognized the importance of revealing personal struggles in an effort to minister to others facing similar situations.

"When I got to the place of admitting my brokenness, I think that's when the Lord was able to take hold," she said. "Dealing with depression as a Christian artist was so shameful to me because I thought, 'What kind of Christian am I? I'm singing all these songs and quoting all these Bible verses that I'm telling everyone else to follow but I'm not believing it in my own life.' I think that's why I struggled longer than I should have because I just stayed quiet about it. Once I started to give a voice to it, I saw God using my weakness

to show His strength and power. I ended up writing more songs on this record than I've ever written before — it's amazing how the songwriting process became a catalyst for my healing."

Christ as an anchor

By sharing the message behind the music, Grant hopes these songs will be effective in connecting people to Christ as their anchor. "This is the most personal record that I've ever made," Grant noted. "There's a song called 'Burn Bright' that I wrote as a letter for my nephew struggling with drug addiction. I had no idea how many families I would hear from who have been touched by addiction. ... It's a reminder that God has a specific purpose and plan for

each individual life. As a child of the everlasting light, we were made to shine.

"My prayer is that these songs will be like an anchor to people," she said. "When I hear stories about how these songs have impacted families and find out that God really did answer the specific prayers for them, it's very humbling. If you listen to the record it's not a reflection of where I was living. It's a reflection of where I believed I was going and that is the result of having hope. Hope is what keeps the light on in the dark moments. Hope is the thing that helps us put

one foot in front of the other, knowing that we may be in the midst of pain but believing that a better day is coming. I really wanted songs that were hopeful and full of encouragement because that's what I was looking for in my own life."

While sharing stories about trials and triumph Grant emphasizes to audiences the importance of surrendering weaknesses over to the Lord and relying on His power, protection and provision.

"I'm grateful that I don't struggle with depression anymore and my father is doing fantastic," Grant said. "These songs are all a part of my journey. From start to finish from the very first words of the first song stating 'here I am crying out on the floor' to the last song that proclaims 'we win in the end.'"

"So many people feel like they have lost everything in life and I just couldn't shake the idea that no matter what believers will face on this earth, we win in the end," she said. "When it's all said and done God is going to make sense of the stuff that we think makes no sense in this life. We may not get the answers this side of heaven but there is coming a day when the sun will always shine and He will wipe every tear away." ❧



"When I got to the place of admitting my brokenness, I think that's when the Lord was able to take hold. ... Once I started to give a voice to it, I saw God using my weakness to show His strength and power."

Natalie Grant
Christian singer

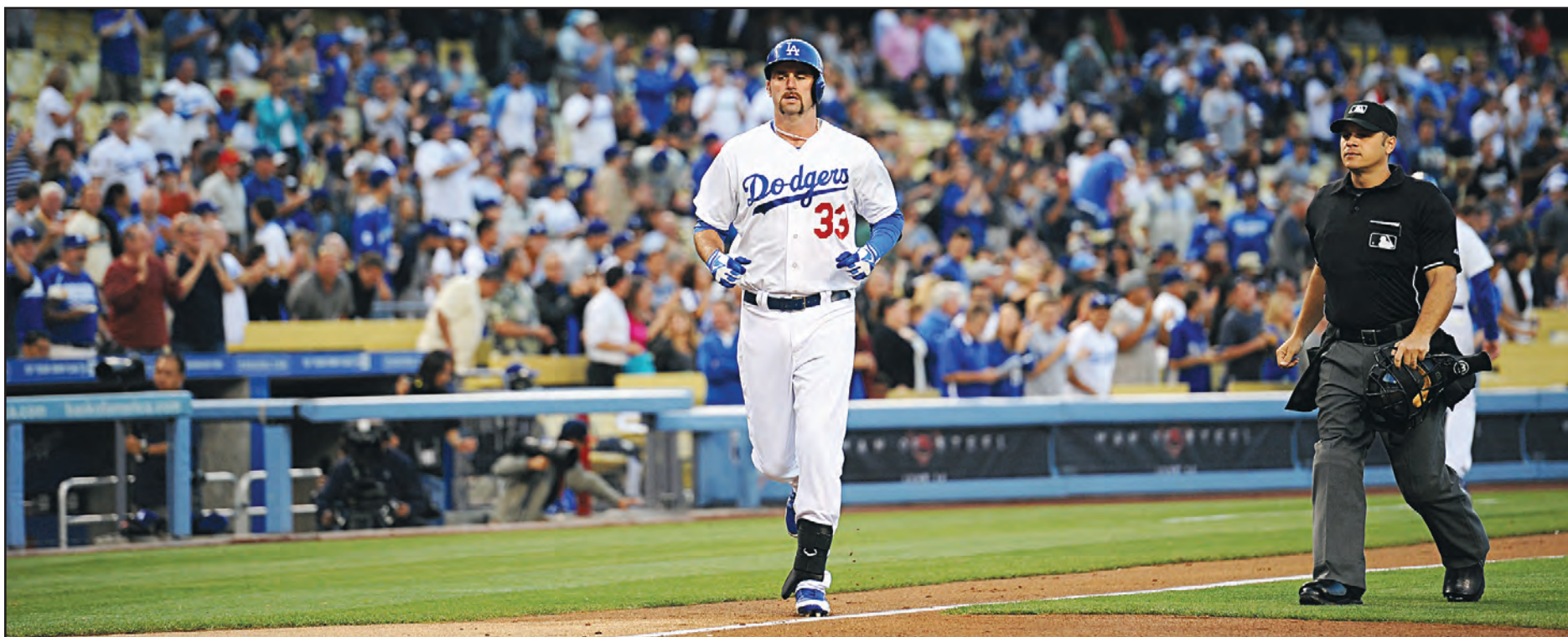


Photo by Jon Soo Hoo/LA Dodgers

Scott Van Slyke of the Los Angeles Dodgers solidified his faith and salvation in Christ at the age of 14 at a Billy Graham crusade.

FAITH in action

Los Angeles Dodgers' outfielder, first baseman Van Slyke relies on faith to stay levelheaded

By Bill Sorrell
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Playing hide-and-seek with his brothers, Scott Van Slyke climbed a pine tree that was 50 feet tall. He fell, and on the way down to the ground, hit every branch. Bleeding, Van Slyke, then 10, ran inside and told his parents Andy and Lauri Van Slyke. They asked him if he was all right.

Although he answered no, they could tell he was OK and told him to go back outside.

"That was the rule during the summer; you had to be outside," said Van Slyke, an outfielder and first baseman for the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Since he began playing baseball at age 5 and watching his father play Major League Baseball for 13 seasons, Van Slyke has spent most of his summers outside.

"Playing in the big leagues has been my dream since I can remember," said Van Slyke, 27. He skipped college and was drafted from Missouri's John Burroughs School. He was the Missouri Gatorade Player of the Year in 2005.

'A game that hasn't changed'

"I wanted to get a jump start. I feel like I got a great education at John Burroughs," he said. "I could have gone to college and learned a few more things, but baseball is what I wanted to do for my profession. It's a game that hasn't changed. It is a [melting] pot of what America is — Latinos, black people and white people. The players get better. Even the guy who is most talented is not promised a spot on a big league team. It is definitely how much work you put into it. Always play hard and have fun and don't take it too seriously."

Drafted in 2005 by the Dodgers, he has gone from his professional debut with the Gulf Coast Dodgers to Los Angeles in 2012.

He's been an all-star with Triple-A Albuquerque, Single-A San Bernardino and Double-A Chattanooga and was the Dodgers' Minor League Player of the Year in 2011 with Chattanooga.

His father, who played with St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Balti-

more and Philadelphia from 1983 to 1995, is now a coach with Seattle. However, it was watching his father off the field that provided the most profound influence.

"They live their life for Christ, and how they help other people is what drove me to the realization that Christ is real," Van Slyke said of his parents.

Growing up in church, he went to a Billy Graham crusade when he was 14. "That's when I solidified my faith; salvation is for anybody. It doesn't matter where you were born or (who you were) born to."

His faith has kept him even-keel. "Faith gets me through the rough times and keeps me levelheaded when I'm doing well."

Former Chattanooga teammate Dustin Yount said, "He doesn't get too high or too low. He is definitely a good role model — I think a lot of people look up to him."

Through Bible study with his wife Audrey, Van Slyke has nurtured his faith. During the off-season in St. Louis, they attend The Journey Church downtown. They are involved in small group Bible study with six other couples. Topics include dealing with temptation.

"Nobody is free from temptation. Nobody is ever perfect," he said. "Everybody is watching you. You are influential. You can easily steer someone in the wrong course and, in the same way can steer someone to Christ. It is not easy being a Christian. You have to stay a real person through non-Christian eyes. Having good friends around you holding you accountable keeps you out of trouble."

When he struggles through a batting slump, talking with his wife and reading the Bible encourages Van Slyke. His favorite verse is Philippians 4:13.

"You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. That doesn't have anything to do with the physical aspect as much as mental. I say that a lot when something bad is going on."

Playing 27 games with the Dodgers in 2012, he hit .167 with two home runs. His first major league home run came on May 20 and on June 1. He spent 95 games in 2012 with the Albuquerque Isotopes and had 18 home runs and hit .327. He started the 2013 season with the Isotopes and hit .397 with nine home runs and 30 RBI in 34 games. He was promoted to Los Angeles and hit .240 with seven home runs and 19 RBI. In 53 games he was seventh on the team in home runs and at one point was second on both the Dodgers and Isotopes in home runs. In September 2013, he slammed a two-run, 11th inning home run against Arizona.

What helped get him to Albuquerque and then Los Angeles was a torrid 2011. During that season in Chattanooga he led the Southern League in batting average at .348 and had 20 home runs and 92 RBI. He was the MVP of the Southern League All-Star game.

Van Slyke has used his skills off the field to help his father lead a Fellowship of Christian Athletes camp in Missouri. One off-season he scuba dived at the Great Barrier Reef in Australia. "It is a lot of fun to see what kind of creativity God has," he noted.

Van Slyke shows his faith "through my love for everybody," he said. "I don't condemn people at all. I don't show malice toward anybody. I am easy to forgive (others). I try to watch my tongue. I have a kind heart." ❧



VAN SLYKE