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# 'God-given purpose'

## Efficiency, spirituality important to tackling big or small tasks in today's busy lifestyle

The Alabama Baptist staff spent the week leading up to Memorial Day weekend in blitz mode with work projects and excessive email inboxes. Project Blitz Week, as they called it, gave everyone a chance to complete at least one overwhelming project that has been weighing on them. It also was a time to handle, archive and delete the thousands of emails sitting in their inboxes, sent folders and deleted folders.

Bill Gilmore, director of advertising, said the week was a morale boost because it provided a sense of catching up. "It gave us the opportunity to take care of something that remains on your to-do list but never reaches the priority level to be done," he said. "It was an important exercise because I tend to access my email more and more with my iPhone and then fail to file the copies of those same emails on my computer.

"Keeping it all organized will help us all be more efficient," he noted.

Linda Harrison, financial administrator, agreed, and added that the opportunity energized her to go a step farther. "Organizing my email provided the impetus for organizing the rest of my area," she said. "You really have to stay on top of things or they will pile up quickly and then you have a mess."

Glenn Akins, assistant executive director of the Virginia Baptist Missions Board, said keeping on top of emails is actually a way to do the Lord's work every day.

How does Akins equate his job

assignment of helping churches survive a post-Christian culture with answering emails in a timely and friendly manner? By viewing both as a way to help others get their jobs done. And that, he added, is being a living witness of Christ, whether in big or small moments and tasks. That's huge in an era when everyone — from pastors to I.T. techs — is extremely busy.

### Quick replies help others

"One of the ways I can honor them and acknowledge how harried they are, how thin their margins are, is by responding on a timely basis to their requests for help," Akins said.

That may seem odd to some but not to Matt Perman. Hearing another Christian connect the dots between efficiency and spirituality is music to his ears, he noted.

"I think this is a huge gap in the Church," said Perman, a Minneapolis resident, Baptist and author of "What's Best Next: How the Gospel Transforms the Way You Get Things Done."

That gap keeps Christ's followers from seeing the importance of the seemingly mundane day-to-day work they do on God's mission in the world, he said.

Perman's mission is to present a theology of labor and organization that pushes Christians to put the needs of others first — and not only by feeding the homeless or building houses in Haiti.

"Paul says 'abound in the work of the Lord,' and that means be productive," Perman said. "But we have this narrow view that 'the work of the Lord' means working in a soup kitchen or going ... to Africa."

There has been some pushback to Perman's theology of organization, including his critique of the practice of some Christians to treat the stress of life and work with spiritual retreats.

Retreats, whatever their form and length, can be useful in giving the faithful a time-out and a wider perspective on their challenges, he said. "But to me retreats are not the answer to everything."

They can even be problematic if they keep people retreating from challenges instead of facing them head-on.

Perman said tackling big or small chores, at home or at work, can be just as spiritually refreshing if a person sees those tasks from a Christlike perspective.

"A lot of times we don't see our work as service but just as something to get a paycheck," he said. "Your work takes on a whole new meaning when you see it as an avenue through which to serve others." But just as important as not run-



ning from or minimizing tasks like email and organization is not letting to-do lists become task-masters, said Jayne Davis, minister of spiritual formation for First Baptist Church, Wilmington, N.C.

"I never got the idea that Jesus got up in the morning and had a to-do list," Davis said. "He had one item on His list and that was to make God known to the world."

Davis said she agrees with much of Perman's conclusions, especially because she's "a to-do list kind of girl." Yet she must remember not to fall into the trap of equating her identity with her accomplishments or job. Also she must remember that to-do lists are never completed.

### Staying grounded

"We have to be fundamentally grounded in the idea that we are acceptable as ourselves before God," Davis said. "So make sure you know the ultimate goal of your list — which is making sure all those [items] have a God-given purpose."

That's the view Akins has of his to-do lists and email inbox, and it transforms any task into a work of service. "I might be responding to [someone who] needs a piece of information so she can do her job," Akins said. "Because if I am holding her up, it holds up something else down the line." (ABP, TAB)

**"Your work takes on a whole new meaning when you see it as an avenue through which to serve others."**

**Matt Perman  
author**

# COMMENT

## Now More Than Ever

Two events prompt these thoughts. The first is monstrous; the second, rewarding.

News reports indicate military intelligence teams from Great Britain and the United States are landing in Nigeria as I write these words. Their presence is the result of worldwide pressure caused by the kidnapping of 276 school girls by a Nigerian terrorist group called Boko Haram.

But it was not the kidnapping that sparked the outcry. It was a video posted by Boko Haram's leader Abubakar Shekau threatening to sell the girls as slaves that prompted the outcry. Politicians will blame each other for the lack of response for more than three weeks after the kidnapping. Some will say Nigeria's President Goodluck Jonathan did not want outside assistance and still refuses some of the help offered. Others will say the world did not care about the girls until a Twitter campaign launched in response to the threat to sell the girls as slaves.

This week, news programs have been talking about Boko Haram. They have been talking about the group's indiscriminate murders of thousands of people. Stories have tried to explain who this group is, what their name means and goals of the terrorist organization.

One would think Boko Haram was a new group that suddenly burst on the scene, judging by what is being printed and said in mainstream media as I write this column.

### Ongoing conflict

Not so. *The Alabama Baptist* has published stories since 1999 about the conflict between Muslims and Christians in the northern and central parts of Nigeria. In 2009 this publication published a story about Baptists of the world joining together in a Baptist World Alliance (BWA) prayer effort asking God to intervene in Nigeria's epidemic of violence. That story said that more than 10,000 people, mostly Christians, had been slaughtered by Boko Haram to that date.

Since 2009, *The Alabama Baptist* has published more than 30 stories about the attacks of this Muslim terrorist group on Christians in Nigeria and the surrounding countries of Niger, Cameroon and Chad. In 2012 *The Alabama Baptist* published a story about Nigerian Baptist leaders sharing with other Baptist leaders about their precarious situation. BWA leaders responded by writing to Nigerian President Jonathan urging action to safeguard Christians and others frequently targeted by Boko Haram.



### THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

Most of the western news outlets did not have time or space for stories of human atrocities in Africa, especially if they involved Muslim attacks on Christians. Now the media has been forced to pay attention, but they still ignore the anti-Christian foundation of this hate group.

This monstrous story is only one of many anecdotes illustrating the value of *The Alabama Baptist*. Week after week the paper provides news and information about our world that cannot easily be found in secular media. Daily *The Alabama Baptist* filters news sources from around the world with a commitment to bring important information and insights to Alabama Baptist readers in timely fashion. We report what God is doing in the world, about the conditions impacting God's people and examine issues from a biblical perspective. When this information is combined with the other valuable material published each week, it helps shape a Christian world view. No wonder the state Baptist paper is deemed by many to be an important resource for Christian living.

The second event is something to celebrate. Perhaps you saw the announcement in the May 22nd issue that *The Alabama Baptist* won the top Christian newspaper award from two of the nation's three ecumenical religious press associations. This is the second time in three years Alabama Baptists' state Baptist paper has earned this prestigious honor.

### 18th consecutive year

Evangelical Press Association and Religion Communicator's Council both gave *The Alabama Baptist* their award of excellence for Christian newspapers. A third association, Associated Church Press, honored the publication with its award of merit. In 2012, *The Alabama Baptist* also received the same awards from the three journalism groups. This is the 18th consecutive year that the paper has been judged as a top Christian newspaper by at least one of the national organizations.

Forgive me if I seem immodestly pleased with these awards but I am. The sense of accomplishment is not just for the general excellence of the publication but for the quality of the various parts

of the publication provided for Alabama Baptists week in and week out.

This year seven different sections of the publication received awards of excellence from at least one press association. Five other parts received awards of merit and a sixth area received an honorable mention.

The five-part January Bible Study series written by retired Christian theology professor Fisher Humphreys was judged as the best Bible reference. The coverage of the murder of Birmingham Baptist Karen Shahan, written by Jennifer Davis Rash and Neisha Fuson, garnered the top news coverage article. The exposé on human trafficking by Kristen Padilla took top honors for theme issue. Grace Thornton's "Thinking of Going" spread in which she laid out the steps in the missionary appointment process was honored as the best personally useful article. The appearance of the paper, compared to the beginning of 2012, earned the staff top honors in publication redesign. "The healing continues," a piece by Thornton tracing one man's journey regarding race relations, was judged the best general article. One of my columns also received top honors.

### Other awards

The Faith and Family section done in cooperation with the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries received an award of merit as a routine department of the paper. John Cantelow III, pastor of Sixth Avenue Baptist Church, Birmingham, "50 years after The Movement" earned the award of merit in the personal experience category. Executive Editor Jennifer Rash's monthly column "Rashional Thoughts" garnered an award of merit as did the paper's in-depth news entry on human trafficking.

The paper's six-part series on health care in America, written by Rash and Sondra Washington, garnered a third place in the article series category. Again I confess to a lack of humility when the health care series placed ahead of the entry by *Christianity Today*, the acknowledged journalism leader among evangelical Christians.

Also honored were the professional resource entry "How to deal with a shooter" by Thornton and the layout and design of the emphases on "How to Cope with Grief" by Lauren C. Grim.

How do these two events fit together?

Not only do readers find important information in *The Alabama Baptist* that often goes unreported in secular media, but also the elements — the articles, news stories, columns, editorials, Bible studies and all the rest — are presented in a professional, awarding-winning style.

Because of the issues covered, because of the quality of the articles and stories, because of its proven reliability, Alabama Baptists need their state Baptist paper. In fact, now more than ever you should read *The Alabama Baptist*. 📖

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"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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Billingsley High School student athletes Jade Glass (right) and Madison Price minister in the remote mountains of Guatemala in March. The girls, who are co-valedictorians of their graduating class, also have a heart to share the gospel of Christ.

# 'We is greater than me'

## Indian Grave Baptist student athletes have heart for missions

By Jessica Bates  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

**I**t's one thing to be a successful student athlete, another to be a successful academic. To be both while also in obedience to the cross is something entirely different. But Autauga County student athletes Jade Glass and Madison Price are examples of just that.

Believers in Christ since their formative elementary years, the girls are seniors graduating May 29 from Billingsley High School. Both also are student athletes, playing alongside one another on the varsity softball and basketball teams. And having maintained a perfect 4.0 GPA, they will serve alongside each other as co-valedictorians of their graduating class.

"My faith is important to me because it has made me who I am," Price said. "I accepted Christ at [age 6], and that has really helped me in my decision-making process. I've always known where to turn when I'm facing something that I don't know how to deal with on my own. If I don't know an answer, I know where to find it."

Glass, who accepted Christ at 7, added, "God loves me so much that He sent His Son

as a replacement for me because I am a sinner and always will be no matter how hard I try not to be. Even if it had just been me, I know that God would have still sent Jesus to take my place.

"Balancing my faith, school and sports hasn't been easy, but it was necessary," she noted. "School and sports are also very important to me, but I know where they belong in my priorities."

Price agreed balancing everything has been difficult.

"I've been playing sports, preparing to go to Guatemala and trying to maintain a 4.0 GPA," she said.

"There have been times when I get frustrated and I'm not sure how I'm going to make it through the week, but I always turn to Matthew 6:34, which says, 'Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.' I know that without Christ and the support of my parents, I couldn't have made it through high school and kept my sanity."

Both girls are members of Indian Grave Baptist Church, Billingsley, and were moved to return to Guatemala for a second spring break missions trip following the testimony of a guest speaker at their church. While in Guatemala, the girls worked

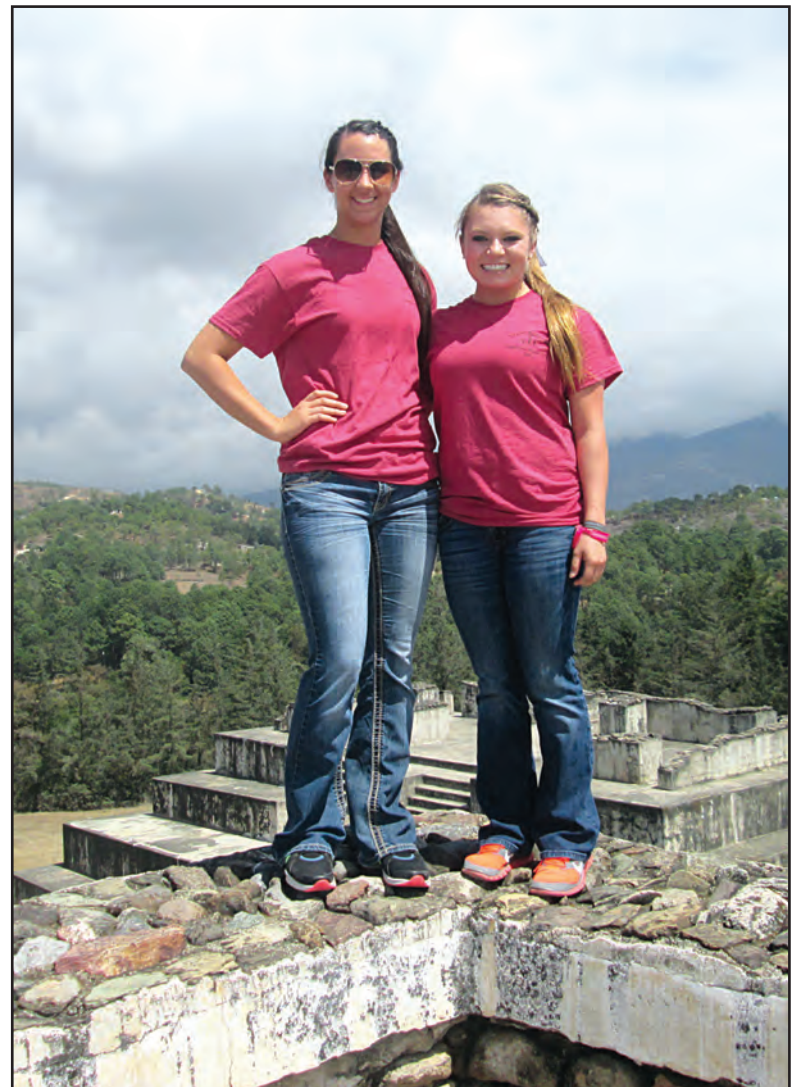


Photo courtesy of Jade Glass and Madison Price



Photo courtesy of Jade Glass and Madison Price  
Jade Glass (right) and Madison Price graduate from Billingsley High School on May 29. The girls maintained a perfect 4.0 GPA and were co-valedictorians.

with children from infants to teenagers, and seven teens made professions of faith.

Varsity girls' softball coach JT Lawrence said, "I try to get my girls to buy into the 'we is greater than me' philosophy. Jade and Madison represent character and morals that their teammates value and respect."

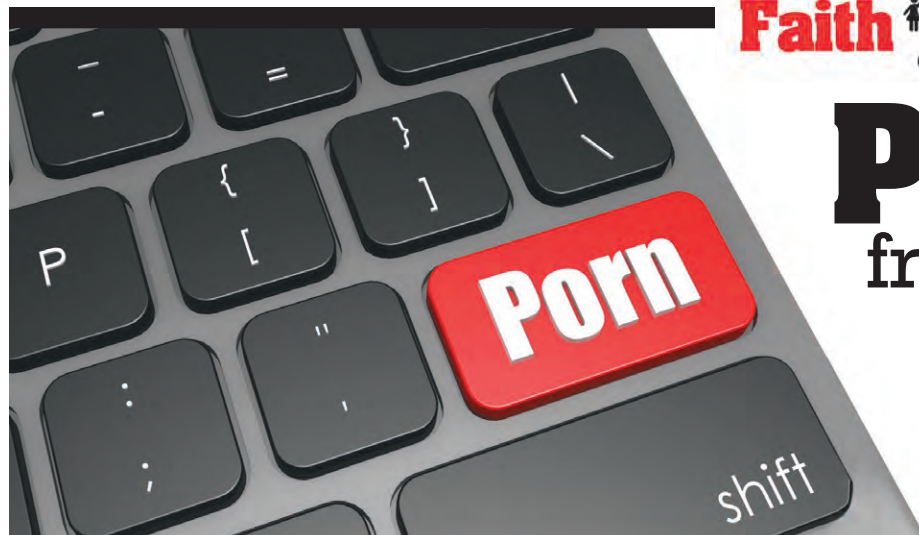
Price plans to participate in a missions trip to Mississippi in June in which she'll work to set up Vacation Bible School events and serve those there doing construction work. And while there are no definitive plans as of yet, Glass remains open to the prospect of future participation in missions.

Both will attend Troy University beginning this fall. While there Glass plans to study to be an athletic trainer, and Price plans to study sports management. They also plan to become actively involved in Baptist Campus Ministries.

Tim Scarbrough, pastor of Indian Grave Baptist, said, "They are both top-notch girls with a heart for the Lord and for others. They were excited when they went (to Guatemala), and they were excited when they came back. We're blessed to have them as a part of our church. Everybody wants to have more Madisons and Jades." 🙏

**"They are both top-notch girls with a heart for the Lord and for others."**

**Pastor Tim Scarbrough  
Indian Grave Baptist Church**



# Protecting from **PORN**

**Pornography 'No. 1 issue facing Christian men,' threat to 'marriages, homes and the Church'**

By Carrie Brown McWhorter  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

**F**orty years ago, few would have predicted the unprecedented amount of sexually explicit materials available to the average person. With the push of a button or the click of a mouse in the privacy of the home, a man, woman or child can view graphic images that once were reserved for seedy adult theatre screens or "skin" magazines.

In 1964, Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart famously described the threshold test for obscenity by declaring, "I know it when I see it." Increasingly, however, people of all ages are exposed to so much sexually suggestive and often explicit content that they are becoming desensitized to the dangers. It is a growing problem both outside and inside the Church, according to Jay Dennis, pastor of First Baptist Church at the Mall, Lakeland, Fla., and leader of the national anti-pornography movement Join One Million Men. In fact Dennis calls pornography "the No. 1 issue facing Christian men" and a threat to "marriages, homes and the Church."

While some may still think of pornography as a fringe industry, statistics say otherwise. According to Covenant Eyes, a company that makes Internet accountability and filtering software, the pornography industry generates \$13 billion annually in the United States, \$3 billion of which is online content. Estimates suggest that 68 percent of men and 18 percent of women in the United States use pornography at least once a week.

Christians are not immune from pornography. Covenant Eyes estimates that at least half of all men and 20 percent of all women in America's churches are struggling with some level of pornography. Dennis estimates that the number of men in the Church struggling with addiction to pornography could be as high as 8 in 10 men and as many as 5 in 10 pastors.

## Seeds of addiction

"It is taking men out, taking them out of a place of spiritual leadership in their homes and in their churches," Dennis said.

The seeds of addiction are often planted early in life. Men in recovery often cite early experiences with magazines like *Playboy* and *Penthouse* as their first foray into the world of pornography. For too many, those first furtive glances eventually evolve into behaviors that cross the line from bad habit into addiction.

"I would continue to go over and over back to the Internet just looking for something more to fulfill my fantasies and pleasures," said Kevin C. in a video testimony for the Join One Million Men effort.

## What's the harm in looking?

**When I was a teenager I started looking at girlie magazines with my friends. I told myself that it was OK to look at the pictures as long as I didn't act on the feelings they stirred in me. I always thought this was just a fun fantasy — something that made me more grown up. After all, don't all men look every once in a while? Recently though, I decided to check out some porn websites online. I figured it would be a one-time thing but I keep going back to those sites. I am afraid I may have a problem. What can I do to get these pictures and thoughts out of my head?**

Another man, Alan, describes his use of pornography as a "downward spiral into what would become a full-blown sexual addiction."

The average age of first exposure to pornography is 11. Dennis says the question is "not if but when" a boy will be exposed to pornography and warns parents to prepare for that eventuality.

Though men are more than 500 times more likely to look at porn than females, studies are showing increases in the use of pornography by women as well. Unlike men, who prefer images and graphic sex sites, women prefer erotic stories and romance sites, according to Covenant Eyes.

"Serotonin, endorphins, oxytocin — just looking at pornography is firing on every single neurotransmitter that we know about that is pleasurable," said Marnie Ferree, a specialist in the area of women with sexual addiction and founder of Bethesda Workshops, a Christian focused sexual addiction recovery program located in Nashville. "Pornography is a one-stop shop for everything neurochemically that feels good."

In a recent survey of women who are part of the online community of Dirty Girls Ministries, an online support forum for women with sexual struggles, almost half of the women who responded said they started "habitually and compulsively" watching pornography online when they were 13 to 17 years old. When asked to rate how well their parents taught them about the purpose of sex and prepared them for sexual temptations on a scale of 1 to 7, almost 90 percent gave their parents a 3 or below.

Hundreds of statistics point to the use and dangers of pornography to individuals but the consequences of pornography use on the family are perhaps most alarming.

According to sociologist Jill Manning, author of "What's the Big Deal About Pornography? A Guide for the Internet Generation," pornography consumption is associated with increased risk of marital distress, including infidelity, separation and divorce and a de-

valuation of monogamy, marriage and child-rearing.

Tommy Smith regularly counsels people whose lives have been torn apart by a life consumed with pornography. He has even worked with children who have found their father's pornography in the home.

## 'A very real problem'

"Pornography addiction is a very real problem and we need to raise awareness and let people know it is OK to come forward and discuss their struggles," said Smith, a licensed professional counselor with Pathways Professional Counseling, a ministry of the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries.

While some men refuse to acknowledge their use of pornography as sin, many men recognize the sin in their lives but feel alone in their struggle. Their guilt and shame may cause behaviors that further damage their relationships with family and friends, Smith said.

"Individuals struggling with pornography may eventually isolate themselves in order to keep their secret, fearing that someone will find out what they are doing in their private lives," Smith said. "Slowly but surely a secret like this will start to have big consequences on one's relationship with God and others."

That was the case with Greg Oliver, a former worship pastor who struggled for many years with pornography and sexual addiction (see story, page 6).

"Shame became a huge driving force in the struggle. As a Christian I knew what I was doing was wrong," Oliver said. "Because I believed that no one could know what I was struggling with, I wore a constant mask. There was too much to lose."

Men and women looking at their computer screens may feel like they are not hurting anyone else but pornography is much more insidious, according to Smith.

"The pornography industry and the sexualized entertainment industry are tearing apart our homes and marriages as well as damaging the self-esteem of young girls and boys," Smith said. "Our young people are the victims and will pay a steep price." ❏

## Protecting your **FAMILY**

*(Compiled from various sources)*

1. If there is any pornography in your home, destroy it immediately. Your child will find it if you have it anywhere.
2. Install Internet filtering and accountability software on all home computers, tablets, cell phones and games.
3. Cancel premium cable TV channels and set clear boundaries on what is acceptable and not acceptable to watch.
4. Help your child choose good friends. You do that by choosing your child's friends' parents, parents who share your values.
5. Set clear cell phone rules and boundaries.
6. Periodically look at your children's browser history, texts and cell phone photos.
7. Review the apps your child has downloaded to a phone or tablet.
8. Monitor your child's friends on social networking sites and keep their sites private.
9. Ask your child if he or she has been exposed to pornography.
10. Define the consequences of your child viewing pornography.

# LIES

## pornography tells you

### Porn can be associated with lust pattern of sinful nature

By Dr. Tommy W. Smith, LMFT  
and Lisa E. Keane, LPC-S  
Pathways Professional Counseling

**A**s professional counselors, we have many individuals who come for help with a variety of addictions. One of those addictions is pornography.

Often an addiction to pornography begins with soft pornography. Without intervention, the individual may progress to hard-core pornography and later escalate to illegal pornography.

Once upon a time pornography was hidden in the back rooms of bookstores or introduced to young men at fraternity parties. However, now pornography is widely available and anonymously accessible on the Internet.

As therapists, we see the lies people believe about pornography and the impact pornography has on their lives. In so many cases we have seen a spouse's addiction to pornography contribute to the breakup of a marriage. We have counseled hurting spouses and hurting children.

We have even worked with a family whose 7-year-old son had been exposed to pornography on his father's laptop computer. Unintentionally the father had introduced his own child to pornography. It has been said that if a child has a computer and the Internet, that child will find porn or porn will find that child.

One of the first lies you might tell yourself about pornography is that it will only be one time. You might see something that piques your interest, a sexually suggestive photo or video, for example, and decide to look. Later you might find yourself looking at the picture again or searching for more images online.

Like most people, you may think you can stop at any time. At first, you think you can handle it and that you will be able to keep your interest under control. Before you know it, however, you look up one day and realize that one image has snowballed into an addiction or habit that you cannot seem to stop.

Unfortunately most people who view pornography find themselves unable to shake free from its grasp. They experience shame and guilt for continually allowing themselves to seek out sexually explicit content. Like any addiction, the experience of "first things" only excites for a little while before a strong need to "go further" overwhelms one's best intentions.

Another big lie many people believe

about pornography is that they are not hurting anyone else by viewing these images as long as no one knows. However, we see that pornography can be part of a whole array of behaviors that are associated with the lust pattern of our sinful nature.

Viewing images or videos to gain sexual gratification is self-seeking. Such behavior does not honor God's original design of sexuality, which is to bring glory to Him in the context of marriage. Believers also are instructed not to lust after another person. In fact, in Matthew 5:28 Jesus equates the sin of lust with having an affair.

God has a beautiful design for sexuality yet our sin nature has greatly distorted that design. Romans 1:24-25 says, "Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the crea-

ture rather than the Creator who is forever praised. Amen." When God's design is distorted in any way, there are grave consequences to the individuals and to our society as a whole.

The last lie people believe about their choice to view pornography is that it will not have any long-term effects on them. "What is watching porn really going to do to me?" one might ask. Regardless of the type of addiction, an addictive lifestyle causes a person to be only a shadow of what God intended. Addiction of any kind is synonymous with idolatry. We develop our own ways of coping when we desire something as much or more than we desire God.

### Cheap imitation

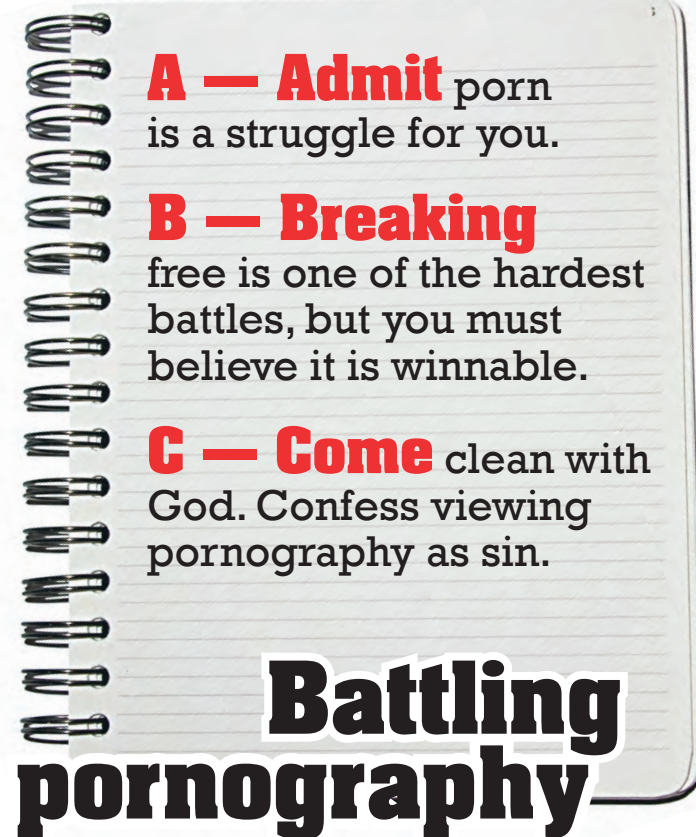
When we invest our time, energy and money in pornography or other addictions we become a cheap imitation of what God really designed us to be. Like Adam and Eve trembling in fear and nakedness in the garden, seeking comfort from their shame and guilt, we cling to our "fig leaves" to hide from the only True God. He is the only One who can make you and me whole again.

Do not believe the lies of pornography. Know that there is hope. The cycle of viewing pornography and sexual addiction can stop. Find help and seek out those who can support you in your journey toward healing and being who God designed you to be. ❏



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# ABCs

## Scripture provides important principles

By Jay Dennis  
Founder, Join One Million Men

**V**iewing pornography is a temptation for most Christian men and yielding to this temptation always ends in loss. The battle to overcome pornography is brutal — but winnable in Christ because the power of our resurrected Savior lives within every believer. We can be overcomers.

Those who are sexually addicted need intense therapy and a commitment to Christ-centered therapy. The Bible also offers strength and encouragement to those who struggle with viewing pornography. The booklet *Our Hardcore Battle Plan A-Z* (New Hope, 2013) examines 26 scriptural principles regarding addiction to pornography. Let's look at the first three — the ABCs of committing to live pornography free:

### A — Admit porn is a struggle for you.

Rather than justifying or excusing pornography, simply admit your struggle to God, to yourself and to caring people. There is great freedom in transparent acknowledgment. A secret possesses power — and Satan knows this. Shining the light of God's truth on anything sinful and hidden gives you the opportunity to break free. Once exposed, the chains of pornography begin to fall away and lose their power.

He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion (Prov. 28:13).

### B — Breaking free is one of the hardest battles, but you must believe it is winnable.

Battling pornography involves spiritual warfare. The flesh, your sinful nature, is going to fight back. Your mind is going to threaten you, suggesting you can't survive without looking at pornography. Satan is

going to tempt you — and bring tempting opportunities as never before. The truth: you can break free.

You can experience God's overcoming and healing power. God is greater than your stronghold.

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:4-5).

### C — Come clean with God. Confess viewing pornography as sin.

Repentance breaks the cycle of sin. Applied to pornography, radical repentance is essential.

Repentance involves brokenness and is a moment when God, the Holy Spirit, convicts you to change the direction you are going. You recognize your sin as being destructive in your life and contrary to God's will. You experience an overwhelming sense of sorrow for what you have done. You vow in God's power to no longer do that which God has revealed as sin in your life.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:19).

Whether tempted to look at pornography once, frequently struggling or addicted to pornography, you can experience freedom. Breaking free is a painful process but the rewards of freedom, peace and joy are far greater than the momentary rush of pornography. Guilt-free is the greatest feeling you and I can experience.

*EDITOR'S NOTE — Adapted from Our Hardcore Battle Plan A-Z, a 32-page booklet for men available at [WMUstore.com](http://WMUstore.com). ❏*

# ‘There is HOPE’

## Former Alabama minister shares about his recovery from porn addiction

By Greg Oliver  
Special to The Alabama Baptist

It’s over.” As I sat at my desk at the church, with my whole world spinning in my head, that was my conclusion. After 20-plus years of hiding, praying for deliverance, trying and failing again and again, my sin and addiction had finally caught up to me.

Before I ever entered ministry I already had a problem, though no one would know it because of the mask I wore. I grew up in a strong, Bible-teaching church, went to Bible college, married a missionary kid and went into full-time ministry. I had served at two different churches as well as on staff at the college I attended. I was worship pastor of a large church in Birmingham where I had served for more than 10 years. No one had a clue about the duplicity, the dishonesty — the battle going on inside me.

Without realizing it, I had learned to avoid the normal stresses and fears of life by running to pornography to make the pain go away. What started as seemingly “normal” behavior as a teenager — occasional pornography and self-gratification — turned into my go-to behavior anytime I felt anything negative. What I once considered normal behavior became a compulsion.

As a Christian, I knew what I was doing was wrong but I felt powerless to change. In hindsight, I can see that rather than allowing God to meet me in the painful, uncomfortable places of life, I was trying to avoid them at all costs.

The more I tried to manage my sin on my own, the more I failed. Every time I failed I felt further away from God, believing that His approval of me depended on how well I was performing and how obedient I was. My shame and despair drove me further from God and deeper into the addictive behavior.

The intensity of my sin grew to dangerous proportions. I crossed lines I never thought I would and eventually my adultery went beyond “in my mind” and I was physically unfaithful to my wife. Over the next few years the cheating became more frequent, and all the while I was on stage week after week living a double life and hating myself for my dishonesty and hypocrisy.

Something had to give and eventually the truth was exposed — I was exposed. Sitting at my desk thinking, “It’s over,” I had no idea what was ahead but I feared the worst.

### Facing consequences

I knew for sure that I was going to lose my job, but I also feared losing my family, my friends and my reputation. I believed my life was over. Some of what I feared would take place did happen. I lost my job and some friends chose not to walk with us through the experience. But much of what I had feared for years didn’t happen. In fact, some of what happened next even surprised me.

People approached me who had been through similar experiences. As they told me their stories I was floored to learn that others had struggled with the same things.

**“The freedom that comes from putting the struggle into the light far outweighs the risks.”**

## Helpful resources

- ▶ [beggarsdaughter.com](http://beggarsdaughter.com)
- ▶ [bethesda workshops.org](http://bethesda workshops.org)
- ▶ [dirtygirlsministries.com](http://dirtygirlsministries.com)
- ▶ [route1520.com](http://route1520.com)
- ▶ [join1millionmen.org](http://join1millionmen.org)



I was not alone. I wasn’t uniquely defective. The ability to share my story with someone and to have them respond in love, grace and acceptance was surprising, liberating and above all hopeful. I didn’t know what was ahead but I did know that life wasn’t over. God had not rejected me.

### Help from friends

My friends in the community of gospel-centered recovery also helped me see that God had not been angry with me while I was struggling. The distance I felt between myself and God was of my own making.

People in my community of recovery helped me to see that God was like the father in Luke 15, the parable of the prodigal son and the elder brother. The son was the one who had walked away and the father was the one who initiated restoration, rejoicing when the prodigal returned home.

For the past five years my wife, Stacey, and I have been walking in community with other men, women and couples who have shared the same struggles we have. God has poured into our lives through others and has allowed us to do the same.

Being part of a community that is centered around grace and the gospel changes everything. We meet in weekly groups designed to offer hope and support for people who are at any stage of recovery. We remind one another of the gospel, focusing on God’s heart more than on behavior, because we believe according to Romans 2 that it is God’s kindness — demonstrated in Christ’s sacrifice on the cross — that will lead a person to repentance.

If you struggle, there is hope. You are not alone. There is risk in admitting a compulsive, addictive sin struggle. No one can promise that there will not be consequences. However, I can say with absolute certainty that the freedom that comes from putting the struggle into the light far outweighs the risks.

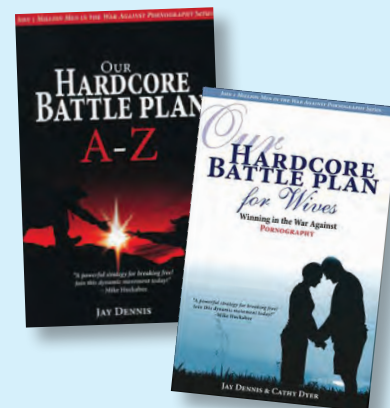
Living in isolation breeds fear, shame and death. We were created to live transparently in community with other believers, and I have found hope and life in living this way.

**EDITOR’S NOTE** — Greg Oliver lives in Hoover with his wife, Stacey. They have three children — in college, high school and middle school. They are members of The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham, where they lead a small group and where Greg serves on the worship team. They are active in Route 1520, a ministry that supports men and women affected by pornography and sexual addiction. For more information on Route 1520, visit [www.route1520.com](http://www.route1520.com).

## Books dealing with pornography

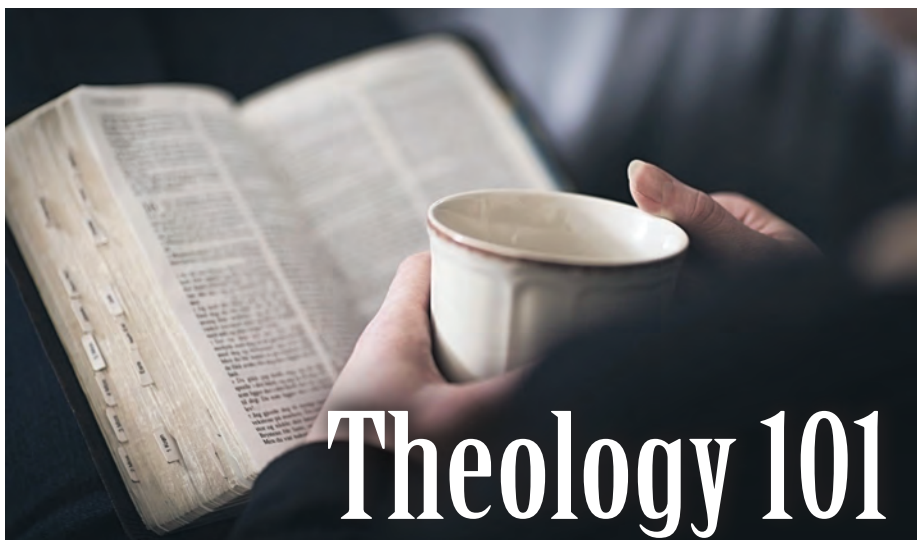
National Woman’s Missionary Union has united with Join One Million Men to help fight pornography addiction. Books available from WMU’s publishing arm New Hope Publishers are:

- Our Hardcore Battle Plan A-Z — a 32-page booklet for men
- Our Hardcore Battle Plan: 1 Million Women Praying — a 32-page prayer booklet for women
- “Our Hardcore Battle Plan: Joining in the War Against Pornography” — a book for men
- “Our Hardcore Battle Plan for Wives: Winning in the War Against Pornography” — a book for wives
- Our Hardcore Battle Plan DVD — a small group resource and planning guide for churches



## Apps & software

- Join One Million Men app (with daily Scripture delivery that helps you stay porn free and take captive your thoughts for Christ)
- K9 Web Protection (free Internet filter and parental control software)
- Covenant Eyes
- Safe Eyes



# Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

## From Easter to Pentecost

# Ascension Significance (final in a series)

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

Thus far we have seen that references to Christ's ascension occur rather often in the New Testament, sometimes directly stated and sometimes clearly implied. Its significance includes being the precursor to the sending of the Holy Spirit, the inauguration of Christ's high priestly ministry and the enablement of victorious Christian living for His followers.

In this last look leading up to Ascension Day, we turn to how the ascension resulted in gifting believers for effective Christian service. For this, we open again this week to Ephesians. In chapter 1, we read how an apostle prayed for other Christians in verses 15 through 22. As often happens when Paul prayed for others, his prayer almost imperceptibly transitioned from intercession into instruction. The intercession portion of the prayer requested that God give the readers "a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him" (v. 17), open their hearts to see "the hope to which He has called you" (v. 18), to appreciate God's "glorious inheritance in the saints" (v. 18) and to know "the immeasurable greatness of His power" to believers (v. 19). The measure of divine power worked in Christ both to raise Him from the dead and to seat Him at the Father's right hand (v. 20). Being ascended to that position of power and authority, Christ had all things put under His feet and was given to be head over all things to the Church, which is His body" (v. 22).

The first truth for this week is that the ascension led to Christ's headship over the Church.

Our ascended and enthroned Lord wants to fill His body, the Church, with all the fullness of God (v. 23). From the human perspective and as auxiliary to the truth of the priesthood of all believers, we often refer to a local church as a democratic body — one in which the congregation governs. Congregational church governance is a cherished Baptist distinctive, which of course we also share with other groups. However, from the perspective of this Ephesian

passage, we might want to say from God's perspective, the Church ideally is "Christocratic," a body ruled by its exalted Head.

Later in Ephesians 4, we read that the ascended and enthroned Christ apportioned grace to each member of His body (v. 7). His apportioning grace bestows gifts to believers and gifted leaders to the Church (vs. 8, 11).

Lest those of us who are in receipt of gifts think to leave the doing of ministry to the leaders, the passage sets forth the intention of the Church's Head: He gives gifted leaders for the purpose of building up the body by equipping "the saints for the work of ministry" (v. 12).

The intended goal is that all members of the body, members and leaders alike, "attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the fullness of Christ" (v. 13).

### Spiritual maturity

As our heavenly Head watches over His body, the Church, He delights to see that we "grow up in every way" spiritually, so that we do not remain "children, carried about by every wind of doctrine" (v. 14). One expressed mark of spiritual maturity is that we all come to speak "the truth," being careful that we do that speaking "in love" (v. 15).

From His heavenly position, the ascended Christ is looking for the whole body to be building "itself up in love" (v. 16). May our collective growth toward maturity warm the heart of Him who reigns in heaven at the Father's right hand. 🙏

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.



# SBOM finalizes sale of Taylor Road property in Montgomery

The Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) sold its Taylor Road property March 28 to Aronov Realty and its subsidiary Chase Corner LLC for \$2.5 million.

The 13.79 acres of land at the southwest corner of Interstate 85 and Taylor Road in Montgomery was originally purchased in 1986 for \$1,050,000 as a potential site for the SBOM's future relocation.

However, a decision in the mid-1990s was made to add on to the existing SBOM building at 2001 East South Boulevard in Montgomery rather than construct a new building on the Taylor Road property.

About a decade later, the conversation about relocation surfaced again. A decision was made to look toward relocating along the Interstate 65 corridor in Autauga County because it was more centrally located to the state and many of the SBOM employees lived in that area.

In November 2007, the Alabama Baptist State Convention authorized the SBOM to sell the Taylor Road property. The plan was that once the property was sold, the proceeds from the sale would be invested to buy the land and re-locate SBOM office space.

And while a developer submitted a contract to purchase the Taylor Road land within a few months, the homeowners' association of the subdivision that backs up to the property were concerned about the developer's ideas.

When the SBOM originally purchased the property, it agreed to have development plans approved by the original owners. After months of dialog and concessions, an impasse was reached and the developer sought a judicial opinion, which required the SBOM's participation.

However, at the last minute, the developer withdrew his development plan and the judge could only rule on the question of architectural review, so he ruled in favor of the neighborhood association. The ruling came in 2010, and an appeal did not overturn the decision in 2011.

The original developer pulled out once the contract ended, but a few months later in the Spring of 2012 Aronov Realty and Chase Corner expressed interest and a contract was signed.

### 'Business decision'

After nearly two years of studies and meetings with the homeowners' association, an agreement was reached for development of the property for retail, restaurant and business purposes.

"The sale of the property was a business decision made by SBOM leadership," said Bobby DuBois, SBOM associate executive director. "We are glad to have the sale completed so that we can move on to other pressing ministry needs.

"We are grateful to attorney Terry Wilson and commercial listing agent John Stanley for their expert guidance through the process," he added. "The properties subcommittee, executive committee and State Board of Missions have been very supportive and have helped guide the process to get us to the point of a final sale."

The properties subcommittee also affirmed the SBOM decision to delay any consideration about purchasing property in Autauga County and relocating the current office space, DuBois noted.

"We have no desire to enter into any land/building transaction that will cause the SBOM to incur debt at the present time." (TAB)

## Student internship program growing



Photo by Neisha Fuson

The Alabama Baptist is completing its first year with a new marketing intern program. The inaugural marketing intern team consisted of (l to r) Abigail Dorman (spring semester), Drew Hall (spring semester), Mary Lyndal Harrison (fall semester) and Jenna Sims (fall semester). All four graduated from Samford University on May 16-17. The marketing internships were added to an editorial internship program that has been in existence for nearly 20 years.

# Across ALABAMA'S Associations

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

## BALDWIN

► **Styx River Church, Robertsedale**, will hold a Vacation Bible School Preregistration Day on June 7, noon. There will be a cookout, games and inflatables. For information call 251-648-9554. Randy Sirmon is pastor.

## BESSEMER

► The Gospel Singing Outreach of **Southcrest Church, Bessemer**, will host The Waylighters and Sail On in concert June 6, 7 p.m. For information call the church office at 205-425-4991. Scott Bush is pastor.

## BIRMINGHAM

► **First Church, Birmingham**, will celebrate homecoming June 1 beginning with worship at 10:15 a.m. followed by lunch in the fel-

lowship hall. Former members are encouraged to attend. Interim pastor Charles T. Carter will speak.

## MADISON

► **Monte Sano Church, Huntsville**, will celebrate its 50th anniversary June 8. Bible study will be at 9:30 a.m. and the worship service will be at 10:30 a.m. with a catered lunch following at noon. For information or to RSVP, call 256-534-0153. Jimmy Tidmore is pastor. ► **Mable Hill Church, Ardmore**, will hold a gospel concert with Jeff and Sheri Easter and a catfish dinner June 1. Dinner will be from 4-5:30 p.m. (donation only) and the concert will be at 6 p.m. Mike Clark is pastor.

## MUSCLE SHOALS

► **Mount View Church,**

**Trinity**, will hold the "Color Your World" 5K at Oakville Indian Mounds Park and Museum in Lawrence County on June 14, 8 a.m. Onsite registration will begin at 6:30 a.m. Preregistration also is available at [coloryourworld5k.org](http://coloryourworld5k.org). The run will raise money for the church's fourth annual missions trip to Nicaragua in July. Johnny Mayes is pastor.

## PINE BARREN

► **Beatrice Church** will hold a yard sale and bake sale June 7, 7 a.m.-noon. All proceeds will benefit youth going to Centrifuge. Jeffrey Robison is pastor.

## ST. CLAIR

► **Cook Springs Church** will celebrate homecoming June 1, 10 a.m. Jimmy Hopkins is pastor. ☞

## Alabamians to serve on SBC Credentials Committee, lead worship

Alabama Baptists will serve on several committees at the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) annual meeting in Baltimore, Md., June 10-11. A full list of those serving ran in the May 22 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*.

After press time for the May 22 issue, Fred Luter Jr., SBC president, announced members of the Credentials Committee.

Cade Farris, pastor of First Baptist Church, Wedowee, and Greg Hyche, pastor of First Baptist Church, Brent, will serve on the committee along with representatives from 10 other states.

Also Roger McGee, who grew up at Shiloh Baptist Church, Sardis, and served as youth pastor of the former First Baptist Church, Midfield, will be the annual meet-

ing music director. McGee currently serves as pastor of music and worship for First Baptist Church, Alexandria, Va.

One Voice Choir, the youth choir of First Baptist Church, Montgomery, also will perform June 11.

For a list of Alabama Baptists serving and more information on the annual meeting, visit [www.thealabamabaptist.org](http://www.thealabamabaptist.org). (TAB)

## Tillman joins campus ministry

Emily Tillman has known for years that God was calling her to be a campus minister, and "what better place to begin that journey than Alabama?"

Tillman has been hired by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions as an associate campus minister for the University of South Alabama and Spring Hill College in Mobile effective June 1. She holds a master of arts in Christian education from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and most recently served as administrative assistant at the Youth Ministry Institute of New Orleans Seminary.

"I am excited about the opportunity to help students live out their calling throughout their college career and beyond, and I am looking forward to sharing the gospel on campus and in the vast missions field of Mobile," she said. (TAB)



TILLMAN

## Someone You Should Know

By Leigh Pritchett, *The Alabama Baptist*

### Kevin Wilburn



WILBURN

*First Baptist Church, Cullman  
West Cullman Baptist Association*

**FAVORITE VERSE:** Romans 5:8

**HOBBIES:** Spending time with family while fishing, hunting or four-wheeling

**FAMILY STATUS:** Married for 12 years to Mandy; son, Levi

Since he was 19, Kevin Wilburn has served either as a bivocational or full-time minister. Wilburn, 35, assumed the pastorate of First Baptist Church, Cullman, on March 9. For the past four years, he was pastor of First Baptist Church, Scottsboro, and recently received the Troy L. Morrison Leadership Award for established work. In those four years, average worship attendance at First Church, Scottsboro, increased by about 270 and the budget by hundreds of thousands. The church now has two Sunday morning worship services. It purchased additional property, renovated a building on it and collected \$480,000 on a single Sunday to pay for it all.

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

A: My parents. I was 10. I prayed to accept Christ one Sunday morning.

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

A: I used to speak at youth groups when I played sports. When I was 17, I felt called to the ministry. It was at Highland Baptist Church, Pulaski, Tenn., where I shared that publicly.

**Q: What does the ministry demand?**

A: Everything. I don't think you can separate life and ministry. Ministry is part of your life. When you follow the Lord, you're called to follow the

Lord. Everyone has a ministry.

**Q: What do you get from the ministry?**

A: I needed to pursue the ministry because that's what God wanted me to do. I get the satisfaction of knowing that I'm doing what God has called me to do. My goal is just to be what I am in Him.

**Q: How do family members support you?**

A: Mandy very much sees her role as supporting me. She's a super cheerleader and takes care of all the behind-the-scenes things in our world. Levi is 6 and is learning how to pray for Daddy now and to understand what I do.

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

A: You try to remain fruitful wherever God places you. I just want to be used to see the Kingdom grow.

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

A: I hope I can be like the psalmist said: "Even when I am old and gray" I want it said that I continued to serve the Lord. You value the journey and prepare for the next life.

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

A: He has made all the difference, period. He has changed every part of my life and continues to conform me into His image. ☞

## REFLECTIONS



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# ALABAMA

## UPDATES

PEOPLE, CHURCHES MAKING NEWS ACROSS THE STATE

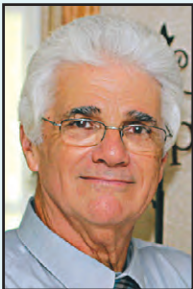
### Friendship's Johnson honored as 'salt and light'

On May 18, Randy Johnson thought his church was about to receive a commendation when Joe Godfrey, executive director of Alabama Citizens Action Program (ALCAP), appeared at the end of the service.

Johnson, pastor of Friendship Baptist Church, Bon Secour, in Baldwin Baptist Association, figured Godfrey was there to recognize the church for its contributions to ALCAP the past two years.

Instead Godfrey presented Johnson with the 2014 ALCAP-Dan Ireland Salt & Light Award.

"It was quite a surprise," Johnson told *The Alabama Baptist*.



JOHNSON

The award is named for Dan Ireland, director emeritus of ALCAP who was executive director for 30 years. In 2013, Ireland received the first award. Johnson is the second recipient.

Godfrey said, "This award was established to honor individuals who have made a difference in their community and in our culture for the cause of Christ. It is for individuals who have 'lived out' the command of our Lord Jesus in Matthew 5:13-16 to be 'salt and light' in our world."

Johnson said he considers Ireland a "hero."

ALCAP lobbies the state Legislature regarding moral issues and works with churches addressing such concerns in their communities and counties. Also ALCAP provides resources to schools and churches for dealing with substance abuse, bullying and other matters.

Godfrey noted that Johnson has ministered for 30 years at Home of Grace, a Christian program in Vancleave, Miss., for people dealing with substance addiction. Johnson has spoken at Mobile Rescue Mission, jails and prisons.

While a pastor in Jackson County, Miss., Johnson and other ministers sent 60,000 letters, urging residents to vote against gambling.

In the 1990s, Johnson was involved in an effort to get Mobile city officials to close strip clubs and an adult bookstore.

Johnson has been pastor of First Baptist Church, Oakman; Central Baptist Church, Opelika; Cypress Shores Baptist Church, Mobile; and churches in Mississippi and Louisiana.

Currently he is moderator of Baldwin Association, adjunct professor with the University of Mobile and a member of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions' Board of Aid.

He and his wife, Janie, are former house parents for the Mobile campus of Alabama Baptist Children's Homes. The Johnsons have four children and seven grandchildren. (Leigh Pritchett)



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

Mike and Mary Shaw greet about 1,000 guests who came to share their congratulations at the Shaws' May 18 retirement celebration at the Pelham Civic Complex.

# 'All because of God'

## Shaw to retire after 35 years at FBC Pelham

By Sondra Washington  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When Mike Shaw became pastor of First Baptist Church, Pelham, in 1979, he hoped God would allow him to stay at least five years with the Shelby Baptist Association church. Previously the appointments he held before and immediately after earning a doctor of ministry degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary lasted no more than three years. God answered Shaw's prayers and exceeded his expectations.

On May 31, Shaw will retire from First, Pelham, after serving 35 years as the church pastor, a responsibility that he considers an honor.

"This was all because of God," said Shaw, who also is the immediate past president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention. "[God] has been faithful to me even when I have failed Him. ... The fact that I've been able to stay here for 35 years is more of a tribute to these people than to me. They have been longsuffering and I love them. They are my family."

Shaw attributes his longevity at First, Pelham, to his personal devotional time with God. "I have a time every day that I spend with God, and I seek God, not just to give me a word to speak to someone but for a word for me," he said. "It's especially during the bad times that you have to keep those up."

Shaw also believes his strong support system has assisted him through the years. "My wife [Mary] and I are partners in ministry. She loves me and she prays for me. When times are tough, we stick together," he said. "I've also had wonderful support from my children, mother and daddy and in-laws, and the people of this church have been supportive."

The feelings are mutual between Shaw and his congregation.

Pat MacKay, Shaw's ministry assistant for nearly 18 years, said, "It has been a joy and a privilege (to serve with the Shaws).

"Normally a church has a good pastor or a good preacher. Brother Mike is both. It's a very rare combination," she said. "As for Mary Shaw [who is also

the church pianist], her love for the people is outstanding. ... They're a terrific team."

Willard C. Payne, chairman of the board of trustees at First, Pelham, said, "I was on the search committee that [selected Bro. Mike]. ... He has been my rock in gaining additional knowledge and understanding of God's Word. His love for me and other members has been demonstrated by him in so many different ways."

### Looking to the future

Shaw is thankful to have watched the church grow in physical size and number through the years, and he is proud that it now looks "more like heaven than it ever has" and includes people from various ethnic groups.

"This is going to be a new era for us and for the church," he said. "I'm excited for them and, to be honest, I'm excited for me. I'm excited for ... whoever the new pastor is. I'll be his biggest supporter and closest friend if he will let me, and he will be my pastor, my spiritual guide, because that's what a pastor does."

Hugh Richardson, director of missions for Shelby Baptist Association, said, "In the 35 years that [Mike Shaw has] been here, he has been a faithful gospel minister and he has carried out his ministry with a sense of humor and with love. He has been Kingdom-minded in his approach, and he's given leadership and wisdom to a multitude of activities."

On Father's Day, Shaw will baptize his oldest granddaughter at Blooming Grove Baptist Church, Jasper, and it will be a special occasion for his entire family.

"In 1984, my father died the day before Father's Day," he said. "The next year, our younger son had made his profession of faith, and I was baptizing him in 1985. So here in 2014, 30 years later, I'm going to be baptizing my granddaughter, his [Shaw's father's] great-granddaughter. She was the first girl born into the Shaw family for over 100 years."

Less than a year ago, the Shaw family welcomed another girl, and Shaw eagerly anticipates spending more time with her and the rest of his family in retirement. ☪



Photo courtesy of First Baptist Church, Palmerdale

### FBC Palmerdale youth perform during Holy Week

The First Baptist Church, Palmerdale, youth group performed 'Human Video' showing the miracles and teachings of Jesus in its sanctuary in late April. The group performed the piece under the direction of Connie Clayton and Sherry Rogers, both members of First, Palmerdale, as a part of other Holy Week festivities for youth groups in the area April 13-18. Richard Statham is pastor.

# Historical HIGHLIGHTS

FROM PREVIOUS ISSUES OF THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



## 50 Years Ago May 1964

**Hospital Ground Breaking:** The Birmingham Baptist Hospital (West End Baptist Hospital) had a ground breaking May 8 for its new \$5 million addition.

Dan R. Hudson, president of the board, announced that the building will be four stories high and is expected to be completed within 16 months. This will give the hospital a capacity of 500 beds. Mabry Rhodes, moderator of Birmingham Baptist Association, gave the invocation at the ceremony.

## 40 Years Ago May 1974

**Relief Funds Distributed:** Two Alabama Baptist officials flew to disaster areas of North Alabama on May 17 to begin distributing \$206,799 to 371 families resulting from the disastrous tornadoes that hit the area in April.

George E. Bagley, executive secretary for Alabama Baptists, and Earl Potts, coordinator of the relief effort, made stops in Huntsville, Jasper, Hamilton and Cullman to present checks to Baptist missions directors for distribution. The trip was made possible by Kellar Dick, a deacon at McElwain Baptist Church, Birmingham, who donated his plane, gasoline and time to fly the officials

to the disaster area. Bob Duck, administrative assistant in public relations for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, recorded responses and took photos.

## 30 Years Ago May 1984

**Alabama Nominees:** The 1984 Committee on Boards, Commissions and Standing committees has announced its nominations for the trustees of Southern Baptist Convention agencies. Alabamians nominated are Dewey Corder, of Montgomery, stewardship commission; Walter Barnes, of Birmingham, Brotherhood commission; and Frank Morris, of Opelika, Southern Baptist Foundation. Calvin Kelley, of Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Montgomery, was nominated to serve as trustee of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, replacing John R. Riddle.

## 20 Years Ago May 1994

**Church History Chair Established:** A chair of church history has been established at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond in memory of John Franklin Loftis, late executive secretary of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. The chair was established with a gift of \$250,000

from his widow, Deborah Carlton Loftis. Loftis and his 14-year-old daughter, Jessica, were killed in an auto accident last October in Birmingham where they lived. Loftis, who was 42 when he died, had directed the historical commission since 1988. Glen Hinson, who taught Loftis at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., will be the first John Loftis Professor of Church History.

## 10 Years Ago May 2004

**Alabama Disaster Relief Leaders Honored:** Two Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief leaders were

recently recognized by the North American Mission Board for their efforts.

Larry Murphy, a member of Bethany Baptist Church in Coffee Baptist Association, was one of two people nationwide to receive the 2004 National Disaster Relief Roundtable Outstanding Achievement Award.

Jerry Butler, pastor of South Sauty Baptist Church in Marshall Baptist Association, was one of five people nationwide to receive the 2004 National Disaster Relief Roundtable Distinguished Service Award.

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### CHURCH POSITIONS

**BIVOCATIONAL WORSHIP LEADER:** Position will involve leading blended worship, directing and utilizing a praise band and directing the adult choir. Send resumes to: ATTN: Pastor, Camp Ground Baptist Church, 3898 Andrews Avenue, Ozark, AL 36360.

**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.

**MINISTER OF MUSIC & SENIOR ADULTS:** First Baptist Church of Piedmont is accepting resumes for full-time position of minister of music and senior adults. Blended service. Please email resume to: sandra5131950@yahoo.com.

**ASSOCIATE PASTOR OF STUDENTS & FAMILY MINISTRIES:** First Baptist Church of Mt. Olive, Mt. Olive, Ala., is now accepting resumes for a full-time associate pastor of students and family ministries. Please submit resumes or questions by email to: Sheila@fbcmo.org.

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## Want to know God?

**Pastor Buddy Nelson**  
First Baptist Church, Anniston

If people want to know God they must come to grips with the question, "What is sin?" This is a basic question that begs an answer. The reason I say this is found in Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Christ died to save us from our sins. He brings forgiveness, love, acceptance and hope, qualities that we desperately need. He helps us know how we fit into God's plan for His kingdom on earth and the Kingdom in eternity. In other words, God gives purpose to life itself.

So what is sin? Sin is anything that distracts us from God. We talk about sin in our world by identifying things people do that are against God's teachings. One example identifies sin as breaking one of God's 10 Commandments. Sin — being distracted from God — causes those choices. Thus those choices are the result of sin. Look in Genesis 3 to the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The serpent enticed Adam and Eve to be distracted from God. The result was the choice of taking the fruit of the forbidden tree.

Look at Philippians 4:4 and 8, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice. ... Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things." Think about Matthew 6:33, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

When God is our focus, God is first in all things. We then live as God wants us to live. Allow me to put Romans 5:8 into my words: God loves you so much and wants you to be a part of His family; even though we were too busy to think about Him, God still sent His only Son, Jesus, to die for us. When we are ready to focus on God, first and foremost, the path will be ready for us to know Him through Jesus Christ. God sent His only Son so we would not become distracted.

Want to know God? Make Him your focus.



Photo courtesy of Samford University

Judson College President David Potts (left) receives an honorary doctor of humane letters degree from Samford University Provost J. Bradley Creed (center) with Samford board of trustees chair William Stevens looking on.

## Samford's spring commencement sees about 900 graduates

Samford University in Birmingham graduated about 900 seniors during commencement activities in May. Graduates, families and friends celebrated during seven graduation exercises for various schools and colleges of the university.

Judson College President David E. Potts delivered the address for Samford's Howard College of Arts and Sciences on May 17. Potts, who holds bachelor's and master's degrees from Samford, was surprised at the commencement with a Doctor of Humane Letters honoris causa in recognition of his accomplishments and service.

During his Samford address, Potts emphasized the spirit of Christian service that created both Alabama Baptist schools and that continues to find expression in the work of their students, faculty and staff.

In sharing a brief history of Samford, which was founded in Marion in 1841, he noted the selfless spirit and generous philanthropy of its early founders, who were committed to Christian education for men and women.

"While you and I may not establish a college or university ... or organize a missions board ... or publish a religious newspaper, our transformation of heart and spirit impels us to live transcendently," Potts said.

Later in the day, graduates of the School of the Arts and Orlean Bullard Beeson School of Education heard Homewood city school superintendent Bill Cleveland stress the importance of investing in people's lives by forming relationships.

In the inaugural May commencement for Samford's new College of Health Sciences on May 16, graduating seniors Anna Beth Shelton and Megan Montgomery shared thoughts of faith, service, grace and relationships.

At the Cumberland School of Law ceremony, speaker and retiring law dean John L. Carroll became the first recipient of a new award that will be given in his name. The John L. Carroll Service award is in recognition of the former federal magistrate judge's service and leadership of the law school. Law graduate Julien Mitchell Relfe, of Birmingham, received the law school's annual Daniel Austin Brewer Professionalism Award.

### Multiple programs

Commencement programs also were held May 16 for McWhorter School of Pharmacy with speaker Thomas Menighan, chief executive officer of the American Pharmacists Association, and Brock School of Business with speaker Martin Newton, a Samford business graduate and director of athletics.

Beeson Divinity School graduates received degrees during a commencement program and service of consecration May 7. Anglican bishop John A.M. Guernsey of the Mid-Atlantic Diocese of the Anglican Church in North America spoke.

University-wide student awards were presented at various programs. Caroline Reid Donaldson, a double art and English major from Greer, S.C., won the President's Cup. Anna Grace Poole, a psychology major from Arkadelphia, Ark., received the Velma Wright Irons award. Three graduating seniors were named winners of the 2014 John C. Pittman Spirit Award: Hannah Joy Barnette, of Birmingham; Sabbath Joy McKiernan-Allen, of Indianapolis, Ind.; and Kaleigh Elizabeth Warwick, of Alpharetta, Ga.

Samford's Air Force ROTC Detachment 012 commissioned nine cadets during ceremonies May 16.

Andrew Westmoreland is president of Samford. (Samford)

**"Our transformation of heart and spirit impels us to live transcendently."**

**President David E. Potts  
Judson College**

# 'Love God ... love His people'

## UMobile First Lady Marilyn Foley urges graduates to influence boldly with compassion

Encouraging the University of Mobile (UMobile) Class of 2014 to live intentional lives of influence, UMobile First Lady Marilyn Foley said receiving a diploma was a starting point, not a finish line.

"The rest of your life begins now — not Monday, not when you start that job, not when you get accepted to the next program, not when you get that next certification, not when you walk down the aisle. No the present moment is life. The future motivates; but life is always now. Don't miss it," Foley said.

The Mobile Civic Center was filled with families and friends of graduates as the shofar, a ram's horn, was blown to signal the start of the school's 48th commencement ceremony May 10.

The university awarded the honorary doctor of divinity to UMobile alumnus Joseph F. Johnson, pastor of Mount Hebron Church Ministries, Mobile. The Shofar Award was presented to Dale Younce, retiring professor of Christian ministries, for "steadfastness in ministry."

The university presented its top two awards to the outstanding male and female graduate selected by vote of the faculty. Both awards are presented to graduates who exemplify the mission of the university and selection is based on scholarship, Christian character, leadership and service. The Annie Boyd Parker Weaver Excellence Award was presented to Mallory Searcy, of Fairhope, who graduated magna cum laude with a bachelor of arts in humanities (honors with thesis). The William K. Weaver Jr. Excellence Award was given to Seth Brasher, of Pell City, who graduated cum laude with a bachelor of science in worship leadership.

Additional academic awards were presented during the Honors Convocation on May 9 on campus.

Foley said that as a mentor, parent and wife of UMobile President Mark Foley, she has always felt that graduation was a bittersweet moment as students she has known personally or admired from afar prepare to leave campus and spread across the globe.

"I've always wanted to stand in the lobby

like a mom shouting final reminders and instructions to her children running out the door," she said. "As a parent, as an educator, as a member of your team, your fan club, your cheerleading squad, I want you to leave UM with these final thoughts running through your head" — know what you believe, use your life to influence for what you believe and influence boldly with compassion.

"I think many people have misconstrued influence as he who can be heard the loudest, make the biggest waves, land the biggest punch. Jesus was none of that," she said. "Think about His life. It was marked by Truth delivered in love and serving others."

Johnson gave a rousing address after receiving the honorary doctor of divinity. He described his childhood as one of deep poverty, one in which the world said he would never amount to anything and eventually be institutionalized and, like his father, die in prison.

"Now that was the plan the world had for me. But by the grace of God, there was another plan," Johnson said. "And God said, 'This is the plan that I

have for you — one of good and not evil.' It sounded nothing like the plan of the world.

"I would say to the world: How do you like me now?" said Johnson, whose ministry has grown from 200 members in 1996 to more than 5,000 with more than 50 new ministries that impact the community through outreach programs and community-empowering projects.

### More than a professor

Johnson praised his former professor, Younce, who stood at his right on the stage and assisted President Foley in placing the academic hood signifying the honorary doctor of divinity over Johnson's head.

"The man to the right became my dad. He taught me, 'Son, walk with integrity. Love God, and if you'll love God, you'll love His people,'" Johnson said.

Younce has been serving in ministry since 1954 at the age of 16. At 17, he was preaching once a week on "Youth Speaks," a radio program. He joined UMobile's full-time faculty in 1994. (UMobile)



Photo courtesy of the University of Mobile  
University of Mobile President Mark Foley (right) awards alumnus Joseph F. Johnson, pastor of Mount Hebron Church Ministries, Mobile, the honorary doctor of divinity.

# 'I'd hate it too'



## Moore faces criticism after Christian talk radio comment

**A**Southern Baptist official is standing by a recent comment about Christian talk radio that prompted a network head to request publicly that he apologize or at least explain. Russell D. Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), used Christian radio as an illustration of Christians who condemn others without offering a word of reconciliation.

"I listened on the way back up here from my hometown to some Christian talk radio this week, against my doctor's orders," Moore said during a 50-minute message at the April 21-23 ERLC Leadership Summit in Nashville. "And honestly, if all that I knew of Christianity was what I heard on Christian talk radio, I'd hate it too."

"There are some people who believe that fidelity to the gospel simply means speaking, 'You kids get off my lawn.' That is not the message that has been given to us," he said. "If the call to repentance does not end with the invitation that is grounded in the bloody cross and the empty tomb of Jesus, we are speaking a different word than the word that we have been given."

Janet Mefferd, whose nationally syndicated radio show airs on 100 radio stations across the United States, was first to take offense.

"I find that really offensive for a few reasons," Mefferd said April 24. "First of all, I can think of an awful lot of people in the Old Testament who were pretty darn bold preaching the truth and God was awfully pleased with them."

Mefferd said she doesn't know if Moore was referring to her program, but she doesn't know anyone in the industry who is indifferent to whether or not people are saved.

The president of 95-station Bott Radio Network copied more than 70 Southern Baptist and evangeli-

cal leaders in a May 5 letter to Moore asking him to apologize for or at least clarify what he meant by his remark.

WND, formerly WorldNetDaily, reported on the dustup in a story headlined "'Nuclear bomb' hits Christian talk radio."

Moore appeared May 9 on the Erick Erickson Show, which airs on secular radio, and defended his comments in the context of his message that Christians who respond to sin only with condemnation without an offer to repent and believe aren't preaching the whole gospel.

"That doesn't mean everybody who is in Christian talk radio," Moore said. "There are just a ton of people who are doing good, gospel-centered work, but most people when they think of Christian talk radio, it's the same thing when someone says 'televangelist' in the last generation. Most people didn't think of the people who were doing it right. They thought of the typical paradigm that they often hear."

Mefferd said she waited to listen to Moore's comments in context

before voicing her first complaint. If Moore feels that way he should have confined his observation to one particular "strident and obnoxious" broadcast instead of "indicting the entire industry," she said.

Mefferd also said she was puzzled by how Moore's critique applies to Christian talk radio.

"Our genre is not a preaching show," she said. "We are doing issues. We are doing news. We are telling you what's going on out there. We're telling you the latest legislation, the latest court battles, those sorts of things."

"They're not preaching shows," Mefferd said. "They always point to the Lord Jesus. We always try to preach the gospel as much as possible or put it out there, share the Word with people and share the gospel with people, but we're not preaching shows. So I don't know what exactly he's expecting us to do." (ABP)

**"We always try to preach the gospel as much as possible or put it out there."**

**Janet Mefferd  
radio host**

**About Alabama**  
BY JIM WILLIAMS  
jwwillia@samford.edu  
Jim Williams is executive director for the nonprofit, nonpartisan Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama

## Exercising Your Power to Vote

**T**he ability to vote for public officials and issues is a precious power enjoyed by American citizens. This is the year for electing state officials in Alabama and you'll want to participate in the process.

June 3 is the date for primary elections when the Democratic and Republican parties nominate their candidates for the general election. Runoffs will be held July 15 in races where no candidate wins a majority and the general election will take place Nov. 4.

### Active voters

The most recent report of the Secretary of State shows 2,852,166 active voter registrations on file. This is about 400,000 more than at the same time in 2010, the last state election year. About 58 percent of registered voters participated in the 2010 general election but only 32 percent in the primaries and an even-lower 23 percent in the runoffs.

If you need information to navigate the voting process, consult the Secretary of State's informative elections website ([www.sos.alabama.gov/elections/](http://www.sos.alabama.gov/elections/)). Registration deadlines and the new photo ID requirements are among the basics everyone should know about.

Alabamians who wish to

vote must register and may do so at any time until the 10 days before an election. Registration forms can be obtained from the County Board of Registrars, the Secretary of State's website, public libraries and various governmental offices.

Beginning with the June 3 primary, Alabamians must present a valid photo ID to vote. Among the approved options are driver licenses, employee and other types of government-issued photo IDs, military IDs, student or employee IDs from colleges and universities, tribal IDs and passports. Free Alabama Photo Voter IDs are available for those without a valid form of voter ID. They can be obtained from the County Board of Registrars or the Secretary of State. At the polls, voters without valid IDs will cast a "provisional ballot" to be counted when eligibility is confirmed.

The Secretary of State's website also contains details to help military and overseas voters get access to ballots and instructions for those who can't make it to the polls and wish to vote absentee.

The government of our state begins with electing good leaders and in the end that depends on accepting our responsibility as citizens to participate in voting. 📞

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# Rashional thoughts

By Jennifer Davis Rash  
The Alabama Baptist

Executive editor • jrash@thealabamabaptist.org

## Blitzing my way to freedom

With my birthday being the same day as this week's publication date, it seems more than fair that I should be featured on the front page, right?

I agree, but I was unsuccessful in convincing others on staff. Oh well, at least my column was scheduled to run in this issue, so I could still sneak in a shameless plug.

And I know you are all thinking I must be getting close to 30 by now, but I will have to admit this is year 43.

Birthdays always send me into reflection mode and make me think about what was accomplished over the past year and what wasn't. You might even remember that turning 40 in 2011 launched my journey to find balance in life — spiritual, physical, emotional, etc.

The journey has been a two-steps-forward-one-step-back kind of experience, but I continue to make progress. My most recent single-tasking focus is actually helping quite a bit.

In fact, the overwhelming stack of undone projects is nearing a manageable level. It may take the rest of this year to achieve that level, but I'm encouraged by the ability to see the goal line for the first time.

One way I'm finding success is by using the blitzing method. My friend and mentor Terry Newberry taught me about blitzing in his book "The Boss" ([www.terrynewberry.com/the-boss.html](http://www.terrynewberry.com/the-boss.html)).

### Bring on the dreaded

"Blitzing the most difficult or dreaded job first provides a huge sense of accomplishment and momentum," Newberry writes. And he is right.

Once the ball gets rolling, new energy appears to tackle another project and another and another.

I've been working on this at home and the office. We even had a Project Blitz Week recently at *The Alabama Baptist* (see story, page 1).

It was fun to watch the weight lift from everyone's

shoulders and the energy level escalate throughout the staff.

And with new energy comes clarity and focus if we let it.

I gained a new appreciation for seeing clearly after having an allergic reaction in early May that landed me in the emergency room for five hours. My eyeballs swelled quite large and then my eyelids swelled shut — yes you may laugh at the image I'm sure you have of me right now.

### Making room to hear

I could not see anyone around me, but I heard the gasps and "oh mys" clearly as I made my way through the ER waiting room. It was hard for me to be so dependent on others and not be able to see. It was an odd feeling knowing so many people could see exactly what was happening to me while I relied solely on the reports of those with me.

And while I couldn't see at all for a while and then couldn't see clearly for several days, I realized how much more carefully I listened when I wasn't able to use my eyes to their fullest ability.

So many things compete for my attention and I'm constantly looking here and there and everywhere to take care of this task and that project and whatever else shows up unexpectedly. But with all the attention to daily life details, it's sometimes hard to hear God's still, soft voice.

What is He saying to me today? Am I truly listening to Him? Did I run right over what He was impressing on my heart because I was focused on everything else around me?

And if I'm truly honest, is it possible that I am actually more comfortable staying too busy and being too distracted to really hear Him because I'm not sure I'm ready for what He has to say?

It's exciting when you know you've heard from the Lord, but it also can be pretty scary. Will I be able to follow through with what He is asking?

# Rashional Extras...

## 6 Ways To Meet With God In The Midst Of A Busy Life

By Kristen Padilla  
[kristenpadilla.com](http://kristenpadilla.com)

As a mom I have found it more difficult now more than ever before in my life to spend quiet, reflective time with God. Before Philip was born, my morning routine consisted of coffee and reading Scripture and praying. Rarely do I get that time anymore. ... And because I have not been consistent in going to the well to receive spiritual nourishment, I have seen the effects in my attitude, thoughts, relationships, words, etc.

You don't have to be a stay-at-home mom to share my plight. You can be an outside-the-home working mom or dad. You can be a caregiver for an adult. In fact you can just be any adult with any responsibility. Life is simply busy and complicated.

But if you are like me, then you yearn for that time with God. You yearn to protect and treasure the relationship you have with your Creator and Savior. You yearn to hear from God, to feast on His Word and be fed by Him.

I haven't figured it all out, and this is not a comprehensive list, but the following are some ways I have found to foster spiritual formation and spend time with God in the midst of a busy and crazy life.

**1. Use "The Book of Common Prayer."** ... These prayers are rich in theology, Scripture and doctrine, and they are fashioned in such a way that the words are almost poetic in nature. Consider this prayer: "Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against Thee in thought, word and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved Thee with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.

For the sake of Thy Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in Thy will and walk in Thy ways, to the glory of Thy Name. Amen." What I love about this book is that it has prayers for different days (Monday, Tuesday, etc.), different times of the day (morning, afternoon, evening), holy days in the Church (Advent, Lent, Easter) and seasons of life (marriage, birth, adoption, sickness and death). It also contains the Psalms and a reading plan for the year. While there are doctrines that I do not agree with (e.g., prayers for the dead), I find this book very enriching to my spiritual life.

### 2. Download a Bible, Bible study tool or devotional app.

There are many apps designed to help one who is always on the go spiritually, some good and some not. My favorite app is a "Book of Common Prayer" app called Mission of St. Clare.

**3. Listen to sermons and podcasts online.** Listening to sermons has not only focused my mind on the Word of God but it helps usher the divine into the mundane. It is much easier to do mindless, endless household chores when I am hearing a sermon about the glory of God. I also recommend listening to sermons in the car, especially when you are going to be travelling for quite some time.

### 4. Listen to praise and worship music.

One thing I have started doing recently is writing down song titles we sing in worship each week at my church. I find the songs on YouTube, iTunes or Pandora and turn off the TV and put on these songs while I am getting ready in the morning. I'll put on music when I work out at home or when I am not listening to a sermon while doing chores. Sometimes when my son and I are playing quietly, I turn on worship music. What this music does for me is to fashion my mind on God, His glory and, if the songs are written well, on Scripture. It is much more difficult for my mind to wander, to

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worry, to be distracted or to be tempted when I am focusing on God through music.

**5. Make time for silence and prayer.** It is very difficult to cut out the noise in our lives when we are addicted to social media, our phones, our iPads and our laptops. I have noticed in my own life that when I do have a few moments of silence I immediately want to try to fill it with the things mentioned above. I am allowing these things to steal my time, my thoughts and my energy away from God and family. I want to learn to use these social media tools in moderation and only after I have spent time in prayer, silence and meditation with God. The more time and practice I put into being quiet and still before my God, the easier and more natural it becomes. Just recently I stopped listening to music for the entire duration of my running/walking. I'll listen to music for part of my run and then spend the rest in complete silence. I used to try to fill my time driving in the car by talking on the phone; now I try not to call people as much. I substitute talking on the phone with quiet prayer. I have noticed lately that by setting aside time to be silent and to pray, I am more aware of the sin in my life and equally, if not more powerfully, aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

**6. Don't forsake Scripture.** None of the five above options are meant to replace reading Scripture. As Christians we confess that Scripture is the Word of God. If this is indeed true and if we want to hear from God and know God's heart, we must remain in Scripture. As Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness."

RashionalThoughts  
can now claim  
"award-winning blog,"  
according to Religion  
Communicators Council  
and Associated Church  
Press. Yay!

"We are encouraged to regularly cease our work for the express purpose of resting. This rest refreshes us physically, emotionally and spiritually. Rest is an acknowledgement that we have limitations and testifies to our dependence upon God, who sustains the world and our lives even while we rest."

Catherine Lawrence  
Bible Studies for Life  
April 6 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*

# SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For June 1

## Explore the Bible By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D. Dean, School of Christian Ministries, University of Mobile

### WHEN YOUR WORLD CRUMBLES Ezekiel 1:1-3; 1:28-2:5; 6:7-10

For the next three months, we are studying the text of exilic prophets Ezekiel and Daniel. Young Daniel and his friends were ushered to Babylon during the first deportation to become a new generation of Judahite statesmen who would welcome their people to a new land. Ezekiel was among those taken from Jerusalem during the second deportation. They did nothing to deserve the Babylonian exile, yet they endured.

My grandparents faced the Great Depression, in which their economic world fell apart. Our parents had Vietnam and Watergate, and their political world crumbled. Then my generation experienced the dawning of 24-hour cable news service. We learned that the whole world is falling apart and there is little we can do about it. My students (and their children) are now discovering that they can share their faith while helping meet the needs of orphans, trafficking victims and those affected by storms.

#### Interrupted Life (1:1-3)

The opening verse may indicate that Ezekiel was 30 years old, having been in exile for five years already. If this is accurate (not all commentators agree that the "thirtieth year" is in reference to his age), the young Levite had come of age for priestly service (see Num. 8:24-25) while in captivity. As we discover in the subsequent chapters, Ezekiel was called to serve the Lord before his people, but he would not be ministering at the temple in Jerusalem.

We need to be prepared to go wherever the Spirit leads us, speak what is revealed to us and bear witness to Jesus wherever we go. Are you ready for God to interrupt your life? The following prayer is attributed to David Livingstone and has served me well in ministry: "Lord send me anywhere, but go with me. Lay any burden upon me, but sustain me. Sever any tie that binds, ex-

cept that which binds me to Your heart and Your service."

#### God's Glory (1:28)

Before Ezekiel, the last time God revealed His glory was during the time of Isaiah, as a transition took place between the leper king, Uzziah, and his son, Jotham. The reader may recall that Isaiah's experience brought him under great conviction. Like a leper crying out when healthy men walk by, Isaiah cried out to God: Unclean, unclean. I'm a man of unclean lips, and I live with a people of unclean lips.

When the Lord manifests His presence visibly, life changes. Ezekiel fell on his face. The heaviness was tangible. God was drawing near. When God spoke, the prophet listened to His every word.

#### Mission Improbable (2:1-5)

Like Isaiah and Jeremiah before him, this young priest was called to an impossible task. He would proclaim, "Thus says the Lord," knowing full well that the people would not listen to his message. The people would be convinced that Ezekiel was a prophet from God, but their response would be little more than indifference. Chapter 3 gives more insight, in which God tells the priest that he is called to his own people. His calling was to sound the shofar, to be a watchman on the wall, but most of his people would not listen.

#### Making Sense of Disaster (6:7-10)

Why did these good people have to face war, famine, disease, persecution and death? If God really chose them, wouldn't their lives be better? Why does God allow bad things to happen? Some would argue that either God does not care or He is incapable of doing anything about evil. Taking a Christ-centered approach, we should see that God sent His beloved Son. He faced homelessness, hunger and humiliation as a demonstration of the lengths to which God would go to purchase our salvation. Should we not endure as much, so that the world will know the one true God and His Son Jesus Christ?

## Bible Studies for Life By Kenneth B.E. Roxburgh, Ph.D. Chair and Armstrong Professor of Religion, Samford University

### GOD IS HOLY Psalm 99:1-9

Gore Vidal once analyzed today's culture with its "passion for the immediate and the casual." Everyone is in a hurry and that's true of Christians as well. In our Western culture we do not have much use for waiting. Much of our modern technology goes into reducing the waiting times in our lives. Waiting is an intrusion, a frustration, whether it be at line in Walmart or discovering that our airline has postponed or cancelled a flight we were expecting to board. It delays the real life we want to live.

The people of Israel knew the importance of taking time to be with God and were not frustrated by the length of time it took to seek after a relationship with God.

One aspect of the life of pilgrimage that we need to develop within our lives as God's people is that of the wonder of worshipping a God of glory and grace, majesty and mercy who calls us to love Him and to live our lives in His service.

The Psalms are the prayers of God's people, a people whose purpose in life is to love the Lord with all their hearts. Psalm 100 is a song of praise, uttered by the people of God, and gives us an insight of what happens when we encounter God in worship.

#### God Is Unique (1-3)

This psalm uses the term "holy" on several occasions as each section ends with a refrain in which the word "holy" is used. The word "holy," in its root meaning, contains the idea of apartness, being separate from. We often associate it as meaning "pure" but fundamentally it describes someone, or something, that is set apart from other people or things — a cut above the rest.

God is unique, exalted over all the people of the earth. In His presence the earth trembles as it is aware of the majesty of God's glory. In worship we are always face-to-

face with the mystery of God's presence: a God who is loving and yet a God who is holy and before whom we come with reverence and awe.

#### God Is Involved (4-5)

Worship not only draws forth our adoration, thanksgiving and praise but encourages us to realize that the God who is holy is committed to holiness in the whole of His creation.

In these verses this idea is linked to His love of justice and His establishment of equity and righteousness within human relationships. As God sits enthroned, reigning over His creation, He is concerned to see that right is done on the earth, that human life and society are ordered in such a way that the needs of every human being are safeguarded, with all forms of oppression, abuse of power, racism and sexism eliminated. Those who pray "Father ... hallowed be Your name" go on to cry "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Justice and righteousness are essential ingredients of the lives of those who worship the God who is holy.

#### God Calls for Obedience (6-9)

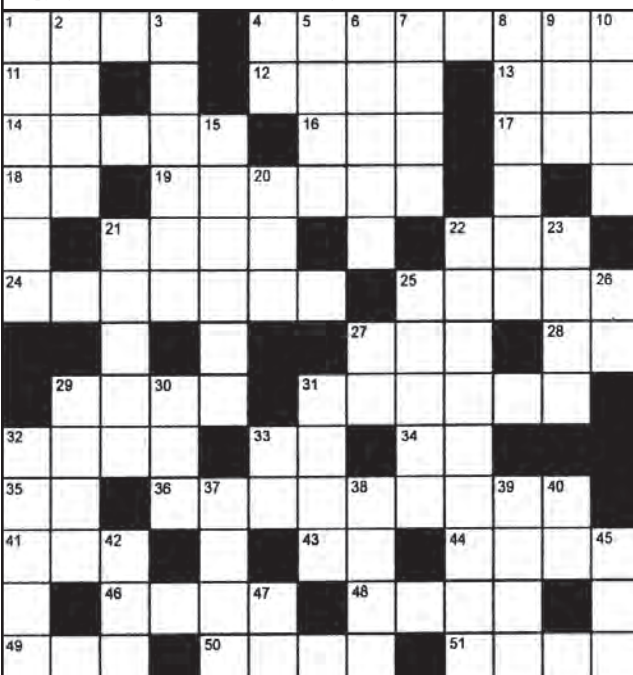
The closing section focuses on the privilege of God's people in knowing God, assured of His protection and loving provision as He answers our prayers. Yet the response of those who worship with thanksgiving is a life of gratitude and obedience to His "decrees."

In Israel's history their obedience was often momentary and fickle. In their failure they discovered the forgiveness of God but also knew that disobedience brought consequences.

Forgiveness does not turn the clock back as if nothing had happened. Failure to live in righteousness and without justice characterizing our relationships with others will bring consequences of chastening. God's grace is never cheap. His love is not sentimental. He loves with a holy love and calls us to live lives of holiness in our daily living.

## Christian Crossword

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### Across

- Mary's relation to Joseph.
- O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name \_\_\_\_\_. (Ps. 34:3)
- Trust \_\_\_\_\_ the Lord, and do good. (Ps. 37:3)
- Appliance used for baking bread.
- Nickname for Sarah's husband.
- Thy rod and thy \_\_\_\_\_ they comfort me. (Ps. 23:4)
- Ask, \_\_\_\_\_ it shall be given you. (Matt. 7:7)
- Small Business Administration. (abbr.)
- They toil not, neither \_\_\_\_\_ they spin. (Matt. 6:28)
- They shall mount up with the winds as \_\_\_\_\_. (Isa. 40:31)
- Wile E. Coyote's mail order company.
- What Jesus did for the 5,000 followers.
- To refer to briefly or incidentally.
- Shades of color.
- \_\_\_\_\_ we walk by faith, not

### Down

- Mr. \_\_\_\_\_
- Depend.
- The glory of this \_\_\_\_\_ house shall be greater. (Hag. 2:9)
- "O \_\_\_\_\_ Night."
- Southeast. (abbr.)
- I will be \_\_\_\_\_ enemy unto thine enemies. (Ex. 23:22)
- Receive the kingdom of God \_\_\_\_\_ a little child. (Mark 10:15)
- He taketh away the first, that he may \_\_\_\_\_ the second. (Heb. 10:9)
- Pollen-loving insect.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Fi, Fo, Fum.
- Be \_\_\_\_\_ in the Lord. (Ps. 32:11)
- The one and \_\_\_\_\_.
- Is to hearing as a mirror is to seeing.
- Parable of the \_\_\_\_\_ Talents. (Matt. 25:14)
- For the Son of Man is come to save that which was \_\_\_\_\_. (Matt. 18:11)
- One Bobbsey sibling.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (Prov. 2:6)
- "Come \_\_\_\_\_ My Heart, Lord Jesus."
- Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without \_\_\_\_\_? (Rom. 3:3)
- Glory \_\_\_\_\_ God in the highest. (Luke 2:14)
- Egg shaped.
- Parts of a chromosome that influence characteristics.
- From the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the \_\_\_\_\_ of it. (Ps. 19:6)
- Let him make speed, and \_\_\_\_\_ his work. (Isa. 5:19)
- \_\_\_\_\_ and flow.
- Harvest.
- Of whom the whole \_\_\_\_\_ in heaven and earth is named. (Eph. 3:15)
- Geography. (abbr.)
- Two weeks.
- Buck or doe.
- Complete.
- South Dakota. (abbr.)
- Do, Re, Mi, \_\_\_\_\_.
- Cain \_\_\_\_\_ up against Abel his brother. (Gen. 4:8)
- Granny Clampett's homemade \_\_\_\_\_ soap.
- Removable piece of table top.
- Convent attire.
- Street. (abbr.)
- What Jacob's sons did to Joseph. (Gen. 37:27)
- Edible red root.
- Parts of a snail's pace.
- Laughter.
- Long period of time.
- Daniel's temporary dwelling.
- \_\_\_\_\_ -yo.



# TOP 10

## best-selling books

Source: Christian Book Expo

### FICTION

1. **The Last Bride**  
By Beverly Lewis (Baker)
2. **Bridge to Heaven**  
By Francine Rivers (Tyndale)
3. **Woman of Courage**  
By Wanda E. Brunstetter (Barbour)
4. **The Auschwitz Escape**  
By Joel C. Rosenberg (Tyndale)
5. **The Harbinger**  
By Jonathan Cahn (Frontline)
6. **Looking For A Miracle**  
By Wanda E. Brunstetter (Barbour)
7. **Seasons of Tomorrow**  
By Cindy Woodsmall (Waterbrook/Multnomah)
8. **Fifteen Minutes**  
By Karen Kingsbury (Howard)
9. **An Amish Garden**  
By Beth Wiseman (Thomas Nelson)
10. **Son of God**  
By Roma Downey (FaithWords)

### NONFICTION

1. **Heaven is for Real — Movie Edition**  
By Todd Burpo (Thomas Nelson)
2. **Heaven is for Real**  
By Todd Burpo (Thomas Nelson)
3. **Smart Money Smart Kids**  
By Dave Ramsey (Thomas Nelson)
4. **Jesus Calling**  
By Sarah Young (Thomas Nelson)
5. **Four Blood Moons**  
By John Hagee (Worthy)
6. **The Women of Duck Commander**  
By Kay Robertson (Howard)
7. **The Five Love Languages**  
By Gary Chapman (Moody)
8. **I Am a Church Member**  
By Thom S. Rainer (B&H)
9. **The Daniel Plan**  
By Rick Warren (Zondervan)
10. **The Total Money Makeover**  
By Dave Ramsey (Thomas Nelson)

# Spotlight on Christ

## 'The Voice' contestant attributes musical foundation to Birmingham's Mountain Brook Baptist Church

By Leann Callaway  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Since placing in the top eight during season four of NBC's singing competition "The Voice" in 2013, Sarah Simmons has continued pursuing platforms that showcase inspirational messages. And she attributes her musical foundation to Mountain Brook Baptist Church, Birmingham.

"I started going to church as a little girl but really came to know God when I was about 13 years old," Simmons said. "My mom took me to church and my big sister was a tremendous influence spiritually for me. I started going to youth group with her and that ministry really became an instrumental part of my life growing up. I started leading worship at church and it was such a blessing."

Not only did she lead music for the youth group, she also started writing music.

"My dad was in and out of my life at the time so God really became my constant and consistent father for me," she said. "My dad is now a very big part of my life and I'm so grateful for that."

"Ever since I was a child I realized that God had given me a gift for singing, and I knew that when I sang everything really just released from me in a good way," said Simmons, who began traveling the country and performing with a musical theatre troupe at age 13.

"During college I went to the University of Mobile and studied worship leading," she noted. She later transferred to Visible Music College in Memphis, Tenn., at age 20.

"I transferred to Memphis to study worship leading and then, with encouragement from teachers, changed my major to vocal music," she said, noting it was during that time friends and teachers encouraged her to audition for "The Voice."

"I had never watched the show before auditioning but a couple of my friends encouraged me to try out," Simmons said. "At the time I didn't really take them seriously."

But her college president, Ken Steorts, was asked by the show's producers if he had anyone to refer for a private audition and he gave them Simmons'

name. She auditioned at Ardent Studios in front of three casting directors and eventually made it to the top eight, "which changed my life," she said.

Today Simmons desires to reach audiences around the country with an uplifting message while performing concerts.

"A lot of people told me that they hoped I wouldn't change when I moved to Los Angeles, and I'm happy to say that I have not changed," she said. "I don't believe a place can really change you unless you give it power to, and the only power I give to something or someone is God. That's how I stay grounded in the music industry. I read the Bible and constantly pray throughout the day and that helps me stay focused on Him, wherever I am."

"When I'm performing concerts I want people to know that there is hope and there is love," Simmons said. "It's the message of the gospel, plain and simple."

"This platform has allowed me to help others in various ways. I've been able to sing for several charity events, and I'm especially moved to be a part of events focused on bringing awareness to those fighting cancer and the need for help financially for research," she noted.

"I've also been involved in helping organizations bring awareness to human trafficking around the world. I am grateful for opportunities to bring others closer to Him."

Simmons encourages other believers who are appearing on "The Voice" or considering auditioning for the show to use their performances as opportunities to shine the spotlight on Christ.

"I really want to encourage other believers who are appearing on the show to keep spreading Christ's love," she said. "It's the greatest commandment so we have to keep spreading it. When I was on the show, my dwelling times with God were what really helped keep me at peace. So I would encourage others to do the same — even if you're crazy busy take some time during the day to just sit in silence. Remember that God is with you wherever you go and to rest in His plans, just like Jeremiah 29:11 reminds us." ❧



Photo courtesy of Biscuit Media Group

Sarah Simmons

*"When I'm performing concerts I want people to know that there is hope."*  
Sarah Simmons, singer/songwriter



BP photo

The city of Paracin, Serbia, is one of the hardest hit areas during eastern Europe's recent flooding, with thousands displaced from their homes.

# Message of hope

## Baptists meet needs as severe floods hit eastern Europe

**I**n the midst of the worst flooding Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina have faced in recorded history, International Mission Board (IMB) and Baptist Global Response (BGR) representatives are working to meet needs and share hope.

The heaviest rains in 120 years hit the eastern European countries in May, causing severe damage and forcing thousands from their homes.

Josh and Kristen, IMB workers in Kraljevo, Serbia, said the death toll is rising as the water recedes.

"Please pray for this nation we love and its people," Kristen said. "In Kraljevo alone, there are over 1,000 flooded homes and 6,000 displaced people."

BGR released funds May 18 to purchase food for those in need. The day before, Ondrej Franka, president of the Union of Baptist Churches in Serbia, had issued an urgent appeal for food, clothing, bottled drinking water, rubber boots, blankets and other bedding and hygiene packs.

Josh and his son, Dayne, have been gathering blankets, clothes and hygiene products for distribution to those affected by the flooding. They've also been involved in the hard task of clearing homes of debris.

The couple said they are amazed by the Serbian people and their resiliency.

"Rather than being frozen by despair, everyone is

out working, helping people and praising the Lord things were not worse," Kristen said.

When the flood hit, one family had just completed renovations on their home, which was damaged four years ago by an earthquake. "They said they will just begin again," she said.

While Josh and Dayne do the manual labor, Kristen and her other four children pray and bake cookies. "At least I feel like I am helping a little," she said.

Josh gives bags of cookies and a Bible to anyone he meets, sharing a message of hope.

Franka said above all, the Serbian people need prayers.

"This is the most important as we minister to our beloved people in the name of the Lord," he said.

"This disaster can be used in God's providence that something good may come out of it. This is a great opportunity to help Serbia and show the people and especially authorities that God cares, and not only for the physical needs of Serbian people but spiritual even more."

Kristen agreed.

"Our prayer is that many will come to know Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior through this awful tragedy," Kristen said.

*EDITOR'S NOTE — Surname omitted for security reasons. (BP)*

**For ways that  
you can help  
flood victims,  
visit [gobgr.org](http://gobgr.org).**

### PLEASE PRAY:

- ▶ For the water to dry up quickly now that the rain is slowing.
- ▶ For those who are stranded and need assistance.
- ▶ For families who have lost loved ones.
- ▶ For God to protect against any type of outbreak or epidemic as a result of the flood.

## RELIGION in America

Compiled from Wire Services



### Court allows 'under God' to stay in pledge

**BOSTON** — The highest court in Massachusetts upheld the legality of the phrase "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance on May 9, dealing a blow to atheist groups who challenged the pledge on anti-discrimination grounds.

The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court said the daily, teacher-led recitation of the pledge in state public schools does not violate the state's equal rights amendment and is not discriminatory against the children of atheists, humanists and other non-theists.

"Participation is entirely voluntary," the court wrote as a whole in the decision of *Doe v. Acton-Boxborough Regional School District*, brought by an anonymous humanist family. "(A)ll students are presented with the same options and one student's choice not to participate because of a religiously held belief is, as both a practical and a legal matter, indistinguishable from another's choice to abstain for a wholly different, more mundane and constitutionally insignificant reason."

"We are very disappointed by the court's ruling," said the plaintiffs' attorney David Niose, legal director for the American Humanist Association's (AHA) Appignani Humanist Legal Center. "No child should go to public school every day, from kindergarten to grade 12, and be faced with an exercise that portrays his or her religious group as less patriotic."

The AHA has a similar case pending in New Jersey. In a statement issued after the ruling, officials there said they would continue to wage discrimination cases under other state constitutions.

### Leaders advocate for end of Christian persecution

**WASHINGTON** — Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox leaders joined forces May 7 to call for an end to the silence over persecuted Christian communities in Egypt, Iraq and Syria.

"What we are seeing here is ecumenical cleansing," said Leith Anderson, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, who called the region "the unsafest place in the world for Christians."

More than 180 clergy, seminary professors, authors and activists have signed a "pledge of solidarity and call to action" that advocates for a special envoy focused on Middle East religious minorities in addition to a regional review of U.S. foreign aid to ensure recipients uphold principles of pluralism and religious freedom. They also seek assurance that religious minorities receive fair access to United States refugee assistance.

"The current trajectory, marked by political violence and, in the cases of Iraq and Syria, full-blown war, risks a Middle East largely emptied of the millennia-old presence of Christians," reads the statement, citing cases of executed Christians, demolished churches, kidnapped clergy and forced conversions.

Andrew White, chaplain at St. George's Anglican Church in Baghdad, said the people he sees at a church-related clinic wonder if Christians in the West have forgotten them.

### Religious advocacy group earns win for 'Flip it Forward'

**ATLANTA** — The Atlanta, Ga.-based SunTrust Banks, Inc., reversal of a decision to cut ties with Benham Real Estate Group owned by David and Jason Benham is one example of Faith Driven Consumer's recent advocacy effort.

The Benham brothers' upcoming new HGTV series "Flip it Forward" was cancelled after the network learned the Benhams, who are professing believers in Jesus Christ, had voiced concerns related to homosexual rights and abortion in past public events.

Faith Driven Consumer is the group behind the IStandWithPhil.com movement, which played a leading role in Phil Robertson's return to "Duck Dynasty." The recent campaign, FlipThisDecision.com supporting the Benham twins, had more than 19,000 supporters at press time.

When SunTrust announced it was severing ties with Benham Real Estate Group, Faith Driven Consumer deemed the action discriminatory and launched a public outcry, which led SunTrust Banks to reverse course.

"We are grateful to those many thousands who came together and collectively raised their voices in a united call for tolerance, fairness and equality for all Americans," said Chris Stone, founder of Faith Driven Consumer and a certified brand strategist.