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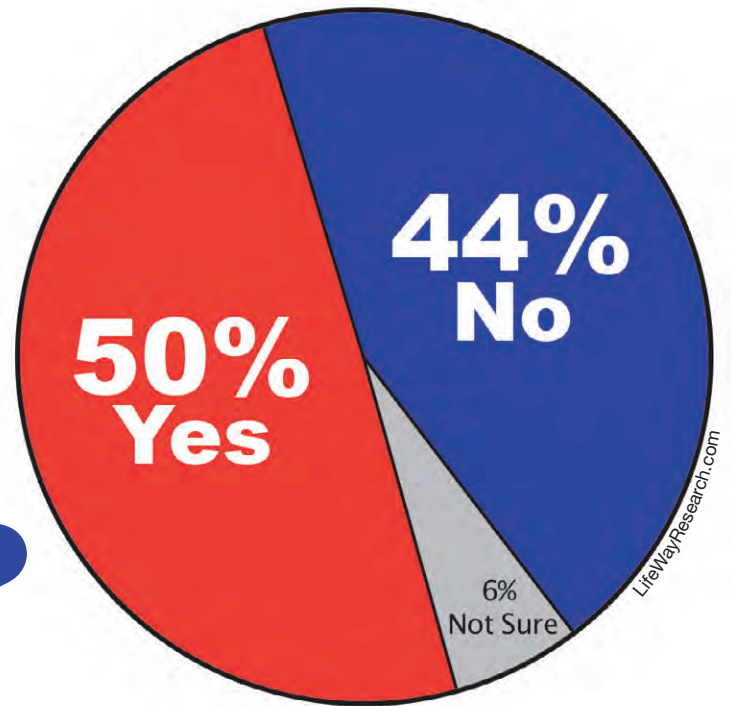


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Views among Americans

Are churches in America too segregated?



Churches still struggle with diversity on Sunday mornings, study shows

Sunday morning remains one of the most segregated hours in American life with more than 8 in 10 congregations made up of one predominant racial group, a LifeWay Research study shows.

And most worshippers, the study found, seem to like it that way. Two-thirds of American churchgoers (67 percent) said their church has done enough to become racially diverse.

And less than half think their church should become more diverse.

Those are among the findings of a study of church segregation by Nashville-based LifeWay Research. Researchers surveyed 994 churchgoers — who attend worship at least on holidays or more often — about race and the church. They also surveyed 1,000 Americans as well as 1,000 Protestant pastors.

Churchgoers, researchers found, are lukewarm about diversity. More than half (53 percent) disagree with the statement, “My church needs to become more ethnically diverse.” Four in 10 agree.

A third (33 percent) strongly disagree that their church needs to be more diverse. More than 4 in 10 (42

percent) felt strongly their church was doing enough.

Evangelicals (71 percent) are most likely to say their church is diverse enough, while Whites (37 percent) are least likely to say their church should become more diverse.

Most are content

African-Americans (51 percent) and Hispanic-Americans (47 percent) were more likely to say their church needs to be more diverse.

“Surprisingly, most churchgoers are content with the ethnic status quo in their churches,” said Ed Stetzer, executive director of Life-

Way Research. “In a world where our culture is increasingly diverse and many pastors are talking about diversity, it appears most people are happy where they are — and with whom they are.”

Not long after giving his famed “I Have A Dream” speech during the March on Washington in 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. was invited to lecture on race at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Mich.

In a Q-and-A session after the lecture King said Christians in the United States fail to live out the tenets of their faith.

“We must face the fact that in

America the church is still the most segregated major institution in America. At 11 on Sunday morning when we stand and sing that Christ has no east or west, we stand at the most segregated hour in this nation. This is tragic,” he said.

A previous study of Protestant pastors by LifeWay Research found more than 8 in 10 (86 percent) have congregations with one predominant racial group. The National Congregations Study found a similar lack of diversity in houses of worship.

As part of the study on segregation, LifeWay Research also surveyed 1,000 Americans about race. They found only about a third (34 percent) of Americans have regularly attended a house of worship where they were a minority.

Survey on ethnicity

Among those who had attended a church as a minority, 1 in 5 said their ethnicity hindered their involvement. Of those who have not been a minority in church, nearly a quarter (22 percent) said being a minority in a congregation would make them feel uncomfortable.

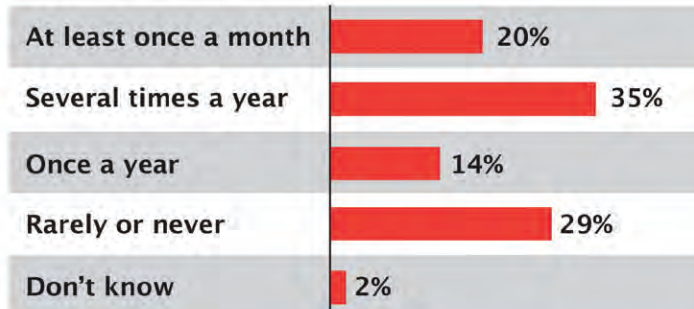
Still many Americans believe churches should be more diverse. Half (50 percent) agree with the statement, “Churches in America are too segregated.” Four in 10 (44 percent) disagree.

Stetzer said, “It’s fair to say churchgoers in communities with little ethnic diversity perhaps cannot relate to a multi-ethnic expectation. But in urban settings other (See ‘Diversity,’ page 13)

CHURCH SEGREGATION

IEWS AMONG PROTESTANT PASTORS:

Number of times pastors speak to their churches about racial reconciliation



COMMENT

Free Speech Is Costly

The reaction in the United States to the terrorist attacks in Paris that left 17 people dead would make one think the United States is unshakably committed to the constitutionally guaranteed right of free speech. In metropolitan areas across the nation people joined with Parisians and others across Europe to declare “Je suis Charlie,” or “I am Charlie,” a pledge of solidarity with the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*.

The exercise of free speech by that publication’s cartoonists and editors resulted in 11 people being murdered by Islamic terrorists. Reportedly the terrorists were offended by the publication’s treatment of the prophet Muhammad. It is not the first time perceived insults to the Muslim prophet resulted in terrorist activities. Salman Rushdie, author of “The Satanic Verses,” has famously lived under death threats for more than 20 years because of reactions to his book by some Muslim clerics who issued a “fatwah,” or “death sentence,” against him.

The United States Constitution enshrines freedom of speech as an inalienable right for all citizens in this country. But exercising that right has always been expensive and it seems to be becoming more expensive.

Paying the price

The late Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Doug Marlette is a case in point. Marlette drew “Doonesbury” and “Kudzu” before his untimely death in 2007. He wrote that the values and attitudes reflected in his cartoons were shaped by his Sunday School experience at Magnolia Street Baptist Church, Laurel, Miss. His cartoons could be biting, especially to religious bureaucrats. In Marlette’s obituary, a friend wrote, “I can’t think of a religious group he didn’t offend. He even offended the Episcopalians and you know how hard it is to offend an Episcopalian.”

Marlette offended the Clintons with a series of cartoons about the escapades of the former president, but the Clinton wrath was nothing like that coming from the defenders of North Carolina Sen. Jesse Helms, among them some Southern Baptist leaders. So infuriated were they over Marlette’s cartoons poking fun at Helms that they punished a Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) entity that dared to invite Marlette, a fellow Baptist, to be on a program.

For Marlette and the SBC entity, commitment to free speech was costly.

Consider what is happening on college campuses where prohibitions on hate speech are increasingly defined to prevent comments about biblically based ethical positions.

A 2014 report by the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education reported 59 percent of America’s higher educational institutions have



THOUGHTS
By Bob Terry

policies that infringe on freedom of speech while another 35.6 percent have policies that overregulate speech on campus.

The report cited policies that prevented speech that “teased” or “ridiculed” certain groups. In other places schools established “free speech zones” and did not allow students to talk about certain topics outside those designated areas on threat of expulsion.

Universities are under pressure to prevent speech that offends any group based on race, gender, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation. As a result, in some places Christian students must listen to advocates of homosexual behaviors but are punished if they speak up for traditional marriage as outlined in the Bible.

Increasingly for students who hold viewpoints that are biblically based and do not conform to “politically correct” opinions, practicing free speech is costly.

It can be costly to practice free speech in the public square as well. In 2012, Chick-fil-A President Dan Cathy found his company the target of a nationwide boycott because he announced the company supported traditional marriage and lent financial support to a Pennsylvania conference promoting traditional marriage enrichment. The company never was accused of discriminating against anyone.

Chick-fil-A was vilified because its founders dared support a view of marriage based on the Bible rather than the politically correct position of modern-day culture. Calls for tolerance and understanding advocated by the lesbian gay bisexual transgender (LGBT) community when their cause was unpopular were nowhere to be heard during the brouhaha.

Today former Atlanta fire chief Kelvin Cochran is learning that free speech is costly. Cochran is one of the nation’s leading authorities on fire safety. In between two terms as Atlanta

fire chief he served two years as U.S. Fire Administrator under President Barack Obama. He also is a deacon, Sunday School teacher and Bible study leader at Elizabeth Baptist Church, Atlanta, which cooperates with the Georgia Baptist Convention.

Cochran was fired Jan. 6 by Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed because Cochran published a book called, “Who Told You That You Were Naked.” The book is aimed at helping Christian men overcome the feeling of guilt over past sins. In a half-page section, the author calls homosexual behavior immoral.

Ironically Cochran received permission from the city ethics officer who told him the book was fine as long as he did not write about government or the fire department, sources reported.

But Cochran’s exercise of free speech in his book landed him in hot water. An investigation by the city found no evidence of discrimination by Cochran and no complaint was filed against him by any member of the Atlanta Fire Department. Still the mayor fired Cochran

saying the book undermined feelings of fairness and respect by the community related to employment decisions.

What a farce. Atlanta is known as one of the nation’s most “welcoming” cities for the LGBT community and the action by Reed is exhibit A that power and authority will go to great lengths to quash any speech it does not condone. Again, free speech in the United States is costly

and the cost is increasing.

One observer noted that once free speech is limited, the result will be further restrictions until the emphasis on the public good will be so powerful that the individual liberty of free speech will be assigned to history as an unfortunate experiment that did not work.

Religious issue

Is the United States headed in that direction? Standing for free speech in times of crisis is too little too late. Standing for free speech must be done in cases like Cochran’s, in cases like Chick-fil-A’s, in cases involving limitations on free speech on college campuses or in cartoons, whether they be published in “Kudzu” or *Charlie Hebdo*.

Ultimately free speech is a religious issue as evidenced in a growing number of situations across the nation. Baptists, who long have championed free speech, must be careful not to sacrifice this essential liberty by their silence. ❏

**“Baptists, who long
have championed
free speech, must be
careful not to sacrifice
this essential liberty
by their silence.”**



"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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'Enforcing our laws'

Officials should not hesitate to bring cases against electronic bingo, Strange says

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Alabama law enforcement officials can confidently investigate and enforce the state's anti-gambling laws and its ban on electronic bingo machines, said state Attorney General Luther Strange.

In a Jan. 7 memorandum to law enforcement personnel and district attorneys throughout the state, Strange emphasized that local officials should not hesitate to bring criminal and civil cases against those operating "so-called electronic bingo facilities."

A November 2014 ruling by the Supreme Court of Alabama settles the law, Strange said. In its 9-0 ruling against the Houston County Economic Development Authority, the state court reiterated that "the game traditionally known as bingo is not one played by or within an electronic or computerized machine."

State law holds that legal bingo must comply with the requirements set forth in 2009 in the state court's ruling in the Cornerstone case, Strange said. Those requirements state each player must use one or more cards with spaces arranged in five columns and five rows with an alphanumeric or similar designation assigned to each space and that a player must be part of a group of players who compete against one another to be the first to achieve a properly marked card. In addition a player also must pay attention to the values announced, mark his or her card accordingly and call out "bingo" in order to win.

'Does not comport'

"'Electronic bingo' does not comport with these requirements," Strange said.

Because the state Supreme Court has consistently upheld the 2009 definition of bingo, Strange said local law enforcement officials "can be confident in pursuing criminal and civil enforcement against illegal gambling."

"In some cases law enforcement has been hesitant to enforce Alabama's anti-gambling laws due to their perceived lack of clarity in

the law," Strange said. "The purpose of my Jan. 7 memo is to clearly state ... the law as upheld by the Alabama Supreme Court. 'Electronic bingo' in all its forms is illegal in Alabama."

The state has often been at odds with county officials in enforcing the law against electronic bingo. For example raids at four separate casinos in Greene County in March 2014 were carried out through a joint effort by law enforcement agents from the attorney general's office and the Alabama Department of Public Safety, according to a statement issued by the attorney general's office. No mention was made of assistance from local law enforcement officials.

In a statement published in the *Greene County Democrat* in April 2014, Greene County District Judge Lillie Jones-Osborne said she had "never been a willing participant in the Greene County raids." Jones-Osborne also stated she had denied search warrants sought by Strange's office in January 2014 to raid the Greene County bingo halls and had only signed the warrants when ordered to by the Alabama Supreme Court.

According to reports, some of those facilities are back in operation and local officials show little interest in enforcing the state's illegal gambling laws.

In October 2014 several media outlets reported that a Lowndes County bingo hall, Southern Star Entertainment Center in White Hall, was re-opening. Southern Star closed in 2012 after a raid by Strange's office. During a telephone call Jan. 16, a staff member at White Hall's City Hall said Southern Star is open.

In his January memo Strange encouraged local officials to reach out to the Alabama Law

Enforcement Agency (ALEA), a newly formed agency that consolidates state law enforcement agencies and functions into one entity. The Alabama Department of Public Safety, the Alabama Department of Homeland Security and the Alabama Bureau of Investigation are among the 12 agencies realigned under the ALEA.

In a Jan. 13 response to Strange's memo Gov. Robert Bentley commended Strange's commitment to the enforcement of anti-gambling laws. However, Bentley emphasized that local law enforcement and district attorneys, not state agencies, should take the lead in investigation and enforcement.

"I agree that ALEA is a valuable resource, but their resources are limited," Bentley wrote. "Local law enforcement holds the primary duty to investigate and enforce these laws."

A Bentley spokesperson clarified that ALEA will assist local law enforcement upon request, but because of "limited resources and manpower," ALEA cannot be the primary investigation unit.

Jennifer Ardis, Bentley's communications director,

wrote in an email, "The agency (ALEA) will assist local law enforcement upon request but cannot be the primary agency on illegal gambling investigations. That duty rests with the local law enforcement agencies."

Strange said he will continue to reach out to local law enforcement to assist in investigating and prosecuting cases of illegal gambling.

"Armed with the Supreme Court's definitive ruling against 'electronic bingo,' I plan to continue my outreach effort to local district attorneys and law enforcement," Strange said. "I encourage law enforcement to contact ALEA if they need assistance in investigating and enforcing our laws." ■



TAB photo

Alabama Baptists top previous year's total in CP receipts

By Bob Terry
The Alabama Baptist

I have never been more proud of Alabama Baptists than right now," declared Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM), after learning the state's year-end total for Cooperative Program (CP) giving.

According to figures released by the SBOM, Alabama Baptists gave \$40,216,409 to missions causes in Alabama and around the world through CP during 2014. That was \$476,208 more than contributed through the CP the previous year.

"Alabama Baptists continue to demonstrate sacrificial giving even in the most challenging of times," Lance said.

The increase is the first time in six years annual CP receipts from

Alabama churches have topped the previous year's total. Over the six years, annual totals fell from a high of \$44,782,408 in 2008 down to \$39,740,201 in 2013.

Despite the increase for 2014, the total still fell short of the \$41 million goal. Also, state CP totals are still 10.26 percent below the all-time high in 2008.

Continued support

Even with the slippage Alabama Baptists continue to lead all other state Baptist conventions in CP support of Southern Baptist causes. According to statistics furnished by the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee, Alabama Baptists gave \$16,981,419 to SBC causes through the CP during the last SBC fiscal year (October 1,

2013 to September 30, 2014).

That figure was \$477,289 more than the second highest contributor — Georgia Baptists who have more churches and members than Alabama Baptists.

For the first quarter of the current SBC fiscal year Alabama Baptists again led in CP giving with \$4,087,292 or 9.32 percent of the total \$43,875,087 given by all cooperating state conventions.

"The kingdom of God is better for the commitment of Alabama Baptists," Lance said. "I am grateful to serve alongside my convention family."

Bobby DuBois, SBOM associate executive director, pointed out that the CP is only one way Alabama Baptists support the SBC missions boards. Counting the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for Interna-

tional Missions and other designated receipts channeled through the SBOM, Alabama Baptists gave \$22,222,926 to the International Mission Board in 2014.

For the North America Mission Board including the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions and other designated offerings, the total was \$9,951,790.

When financial support for other SBC causes is added to these two numbers, work outside Alabama received a total of \$36,986,125 or 55.37 percent of all funds received for all causes by the SBOM.

"Alabama Baptists continue to be a pacesetter among state conventions in SBC life when it comes to missions support," DuBois said.

The CP goal for 2015 is \$40.5 million. ■



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Church Life

Part 3 of 3 in a series

Worship style doesn't really matter as long as God is the object, retired professor says

Worship wars have existed throughout Christian history — the experts will tell you that. They'll also tell you the debate has increased in significance as the modern church struggles to attract and retain members in a postmodern and post-Christian culture.

But two authors also said they're seeing signs that church leaders are embracing ancient forms of worship that transcend cultural fluctuations — and that may be key for the Church's survival at a time when those who shun faith outnumber those who embrace it.

Though many of the recent worship battles have focused on style, style doesn't really matter, said J. Daniel Day, retired senior professor of Christian preaching and worship at Campbell University Divinity School in Buies Creek, N.C., and author of the 2013 book, "Seeking the Face of God: Evangelical Worship Reconciled."

True purpose of worship

"Worship can be facilitated and used around any kind of style," said Day, former pastor of First Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C. The music and sanctuary decorations can be tailored to fit the tastes of the congregation. "But the question becomes ... 'where's the beef?'"

By that Day said he means the object of worship, which should be God. But over the centuries the purpose of worship in many evangelical churches has been to attract and evangelize new members.

That means turning the focus away from

the body of Christ and God, he warned.

That approach had its birth in American revivalism and lives today in worship that often ignores the historic Christian view of the Church as a body of believers focused on God.

"The gathering of the people becomes about the outsider rather than the community of faith," Day said. "It becomes effort to evangelize rather than to worship."

Another major shift away from historic Christian worship came even earlier, he added.

"The whole emphasis coming out of the Reformation was to convert worship into an educational experience," Day said. "So you had these didactic, Calvinist lectures that became the models for today's teaching sermons that go on for 45 minutes to an hour."

At that point churches ceased being places of worship. "The sanctuary becomes a lecture hall."

Or they become entertainment centers, Day said, where worship is about "being impressed by the magnificence of the place, the costumes and the jumbo screens."

Rather than just being an annoying difference of opinion with those who think differently, Day said these trends are damaging and contribute to the exodus of Millennials

and others from American churches.

It's fine to hold a service for seekers, but worship itself should not cater to a demographic, he said.

A growing number of scholars from a variety of traditions are exploring the value ancient approaches to worship can have in modern times, he added.

One is to provide a sense of authenticity and rootedness in the history and practice of the ancient Church. It's a value many of the so-called "nones" and "dones" say they find attractive — and often unavailable — in evangelical churches today.

"Can't we go back," Day asked, "and appropriate some of that ancient church stuff?"

That's precisely what is happening in many Baptist and other Protestant traditions, said Derek Hatch, assistant professor of Christian studies at Howard Payne University

in Brownwood, Texas, and co-editor of the 2013 book, "Gathering Together: Baptists at Work in Worship."

The growing embrace of historic worship forms is evidenced by the number of Baptist seminaries founded in the past 25 years. Most of those schools have encouraged deep explorations of Baptist and Christian history and practices.

"It's not just Baptists telling Baptists what Baptists have always said," Hatch said.

"Worship can be facilitated and used around any kind of style. But the question becomes ... 'where's the beef?'"

J. Daniel Day
retired senior professor
Campbell University
Divinity School

"There is a sense that we are participating in something bigger."

And that includes the liturgical and sacramental ways in which Christians historically worshipped.

"Worship classes aren't just about [teaching] three songs, a sermon and an invitation," he said.

Hatch said such coursework opened his eyes to a wider range of approaches to connecting congregations with God. He knows of many others who have had the same experience.

Re-vision worship

One important way is by re-visioning worship as an act that shapes belief, instead of the other way around. Such an approach can actually end up drawing visitors to faith.

"There's sort of an opening there — a fellowship — that can open doors down the line," Hatch said.

Baptists in the 21st century aren't the only ones to have experimented with liturgical worship. A decade ago, Hatch said, the emergent church movement introduced "postmodern worship" characterized by candles, darkness, colors, images and smells.

"That's not entirely different from what the Church did before," Hatch said. "Why did we lose that?"

Regaining liturgical worship and intentionality around baptism and communion could help the Church reverse declining attendance trends.

"It's really not about style, it's about thinking intentionally about a seamless garment — a unity of word and deed in which all these things tie together," Hatch said. (BNG)

Here comes the bride

These days Emma alternates between starry-eyed daydreams and stress-induced nightmares. Her wedding to Chase is eight months away — eight months of planning the wedding she has dreamed about since she was a girl. There are so many choices to make: location, time of day, bridesmaids and groomsmen, reception menu, invitations, wedding guests, honeymoon spot, etc. Her list grows longer daily. Now her pastor has asked them to add premarital counseling sessions to the calendar. Honestly she doesn't see the point. She and Chase are so in love. Sure they disagree occasionally but all couples argue sometimes. They have plenty of time to figure out finances, careers and family. The wedding comes first and everything else will work itself out, right?



123rf.com

Premarital counseling

Confront conflict with better communication in first year of marriage

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

My husband and I had been married exactly six days when we had our first argument. On the surface it was over a little thing — where to eat dinner that night. But my husband saw a deeper, more significant issue at play: Would we run to our parents when we had a need or would we face the need head-on together? Though the argument was minor I remember it as a foundational moment in our new life together.

In the heady days of wedding planning engaged couples can get carried away with romantic fantasies, never imagining that a minor disagreement might someday lead to a major argument. Unfortunately conflict in marriage is inevitable.

Human nature

Buddy Landry, assistant professor of marriage and family counseling at the University of Mobile, said, “How common is conflict in the first year of marriage? I can say with a degree of certainty that it happens in 100 percent of marriages. There’s no marriage in which it will not occur within the first year and it’s likely to occur within the first few days or weeks.”

It’s just human nature, Landry said. Two people cannot live together without conflict of some sort arising.

“Marriage brings together two different people with different perspectives, different expectations and different backgrounds,” Landry said.

Those differences aren’t necessarily bad. In fact differences are part of God’s design for marriage, according to June Hunt, author of “Marriage: To Have and to Hold,” a Biblical Counseling Keys resource, and founder of Hope for the Heart, a worldwide biblical counseling ministry.

God’s desire in marriage is to “mold the character of His children into the likeness of Christ,” Hunt writes. “In a marriage relationship God uses the distinct qualities, strengths and desires of women and men to help shape their character to reflect Christ while preserving their unique traits and personalities.”

Landry said merging those unique traits and personalities in marriage often is chal-

lenging especially during the first year.

One big source of conflict is the expectations each individual brings to the marriage. Sometimes one spouse brings unfair or unrealistic expectations into the marriage but often the expectations are not better or worse, or more or less realistic, Landry said. They are just different.

Household responsibilities are a good example.

Boys and girls learn to be men and women from their parental figures, Landry said. So a man, by observing his own father, learns the role he is to play as a husband. Likewise he learns the role a wife plays by observing his mother. The way these individuals play their roles are normal to him.

However, his wife has grown up in a different household where men and women play their roles a bit differently and that is her normal.

“The newly married couple has got to create a new normal for themselves in terms of the common ground they share and resolve their differences in a way that

brings them together rather than pushing them apart,” Landry said.

Other issues like extended family relationships, finances, sex and parenting must be handled in a way that sets a positive tone for future conflict as well. The goal of premarital counseling is to help a couple establish healthy patterns from the beginning, Landry said.

Negotiating differences

“Premarital counseling helps couples face the day-in, day-out realities of married life,” Landry said. “It helps deflate some of the unrealistic expectations each person may have and helps them learn to negotiate their differences.”

The hoped-for result is better communication and better conflict resolution, Landry said.

“Human behavior is notoriously hard to predict but the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. Patterns set early on are more likely to persist as a relationship persists. So if you set a path for success by interacting positively with your spouse and handling conflict in a healthy, functional way, you are more likely to handle conflict successfully in the future.”

Positive communication also is biblical, Landry said.

“Scripture exhorts us to speak the
(See ‘Truth,’ page 6)

“Premarital counseling helps couples face the day-in, day-out realities of married life.”

**Buddy Landry
assistant professor
University of Mobile**

Marathon of marriage

Taking time, energy to prepare can result in happier marriage, counselor says

By **Larry Daniels**
Pathways Professional Counseling

Marriage often is compared to endurance athletic events and for good reason. Failure to prepare well for either can lead to problems but both are enjoyable when the right investments of time and energy are made by the participants.

Couples who are looking forward to their upcoming wedding day can invest in their future by participating in premarital counseling with a trained professional counselor or clergyman. Just as a good coach can help an athlete improve his or her performance, premarital counseling can prepare a couple for a happier marriage. Talk about a win-win for your marriage.

Premarital counseling is the best way an engaged couple can prepare for one of the biggest and most significant parts of their adult lives. The wedding day is a wonderful day but a marriage is for a lifetime. If you are engaged then premarital counseling can help you learn or improve your skills for relating to the person who will become the most intimate person in your life.

Simply put, premarital counseling can help you be the best spouse you can be. Through premarital counseling you can intentionally begin practicing for a lifetime of being nice to one another — and please don't underestimate that last statement. Research shows that couples who invest in sound premarital counseling have increased

marital satisfaction while simultaneously lowering their risk for divorce.

Good premarital counseling involves reviewing, examining and studying the biblical roles of a godly husband and wife. In addition premarital counseling allows a couple to:

- ▶ Learn effective relationship skills in order to relate to their soon-to-be spouse in areas such as communication, conflict management/resolution and financial management.
- ▶ Safely express their expectations for their lives together in areas such as intimacy and sexuality; parenting; relationship roles and responsibilities; involvement with friends and extended family; spiritual beliefs; leisure activities; holidays; special occasions and other areas of potential conflict.
- ▶ Receive feedback regarding their relationship strengths and growth areas with the aforementioned issues.

▶ Reflect on their families of origin and how those might influence their marriage.

▶ Better understand how they can use their individual personalities and their relationship dynamics to their advantage in building a strong marriage.

Relationship inventory

Recently married couples who did not have access to quality premarital counseling also can take steps to help their marriages. One option is PREPARE/ENRICH, a relationship inventory and skill-building program that helps prepare engaged couples for their upcoming marriages and helps already married couples strengthen and grow

ily and marriage therapist and counselor for Pathways Professional Counseling, a ministry of Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries.

Fostering this type of positive communication may take discipline, training or even the help of a professional counselor or minister, Daniels said. However, he likens the work to the type of preparation athletes undertake in order to perform their best. The results are worth the effort.

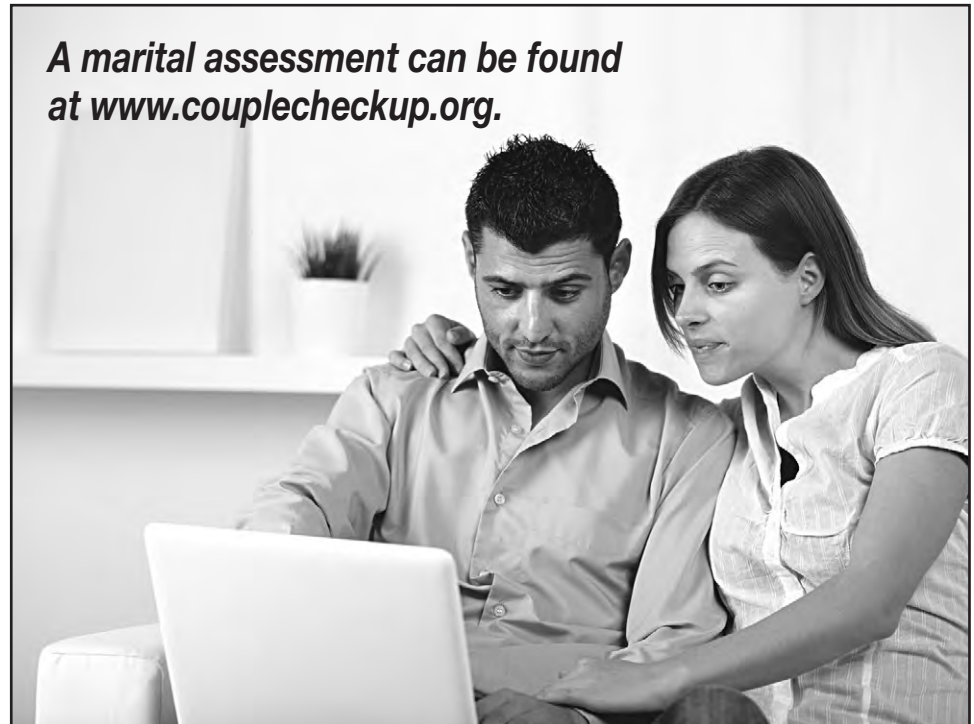
"With a little assistance from others, along with regular training, preparation, investment and consistent practice, any of us can be more efficient and healthy with anything we put our mind to including having a happier marriage." ❧



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their existing marriages. To find a PREPARE/ENRICH counselor near you, visit www.prepare-enrich.com.

Couples already married also can nurture their relationship in other ways. The following activities can benefit married couples of any age:

▶ Find an older Christian couple with a solid marriage who can mentor you and model healthy marital relationship habits and styles. Talk to them about what helps their marriage stay committed and strong. Spend time with them at least two or three times a year if not more. We become like those we are around most.

▶ Get involved in a biblically sound Sunday School class for couples. You all will benefit from sharing your joys, struggles and triumphs with others in similar life stages.

▶ Take a marital assessment on the website www.couplecheckup.org and receive feedback about the strengths and growth areas of your relationship. You also can download worksheets from this site to work on growth areas of your relationship.

▶ Go for marriage therapy even after your wedding. A couple does not have to be experiencing marital woes to benefit from counseling.

Married couples spend lots of money on homes, cars and other possessions, not to mention maintenance on all those possessions. Isn't a lifetime of increased marital satisfaction worth the same effort and investment?

"Good premarital counseling involves reviewing, examining and studying the biblical roles of a godly husband and wife."

Larry Daniels
therapist and counselor
Pathways Professional
Counseling

If you are engaged to be married, then I challenge you to invest at least six hours in quality premarital counseling before tying the knot and setting up house-keeping. If you are already married, then I invite you to spend a few hours in counseling to enhance your marriage relationship. In either case your relationship will benefit in the long run.

EDITOR'S NOTE
— Larry Daniels is a licensed marriage and family therapist and a licensed professional

counselor with Pathways Professional Counseling, a ministry of the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries. He serves offices in Mobile, Flomaton and Chatom. He is a PREPARE-ENRICH facilitator and trains other professional counselors and clergy to become facilitators of PREPARE-ENRICH. To contact Daniels, email ldaniels@pathwaysprofessional.org. ❧

'Truth and love ... must go together'

(continued from page 5)

truth in love. Truth and love can't exist separately — they must go together," he said. "Marriage should be a place for the expression of hurts and concerns but that communication always must be tempered with love."

One strategy that is useful for married couples, regardless of how long they have been married, is the "5-to-1 ratio" of positive communication, which relationship researcher and author John Gottman calls the "magic ratio."

That means for every one negative feeling or interaction between spouses, there must be five positive feelings or interactions, said Larry Daniels, a licensed fam-

10 tips

for improving your marriage before and after the ceremony

1. *Love one another as Christ has loved you.*
2. *Worship, pray and read Scripture together.*
3. *Listen to one another.*
4. *Learn the likes and dislikes of your fiancé or spouse.*
5. *Speak positively. Reduce or eliminate criticisms and definitely eliminate contemptuous accusations.*
6. *Make repair attempts when in conflict. Offer and receive grace and mercy regularly.*
7. *Offer and receive forgiveness when needed. It's OK to say you are sorry (this is actually a sign of strength, not weakness).*
8. *Be flexible.*
9. *Accept each other's suggestions when the situation allows.*
10. *Bring up problems and issues gently with your spouse.*

Source: Larry Daniels, Pathways Professional Counseling

Are you fit to be tied?

Ministers offer spiritual, financial, emotional guidance to engaged couples

By **June Hunt**
Hope for the Heart

Once upon a time an unhappy frog lived in the enchanted forest. Year after year the frog stayed in his swampy pond until the day he coaxed a beautiful princess to kiss him. In the twinkling of an eye the ugly frog turned into a handsome prince. Then the beautiful couple married and lived happily ever after.

If you are seriously dating, then you need to distinguish fact from fiction. If you believe marriage will meet all of your needs or miraculously turn your potential marriage partner into a prince or princess then you are living in fantasyland. God's Word exhorts us to be wise about our expectations for marriage and wise about whom we let into our hearts: "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (Prov. 4:23).

Learn as much as possible

How many couples choose their mates too quickly and then live their lives full of regret? In order to build a strong foundation for marriage, learn as much as possible about yourself, your future mate and God's purpose for marriage before you tie the knot: "Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him" (Prov. 29:20).

Couples who desire to please the Lord already have been given a picture of God's design for the marital relationship. The Bible tells us marriage is to reflect the sacrificial love Christ has for His bride, the Church. Although the backgrounds of a husband and wife may be different and their expectations may conflict, they can develop unity of heart through mutual submission and godly respect: "Submit one to another out of reverence for Christ. ... Each one of you [husbands] also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband" (Eph. 5:21, 33).

As they prepare for marriage, engaged couples can benefit from the practical advice given during premarital counseling. Ministers and mentors can offer spiritual, financial and emotional guidance to couples to help them prepare for their future together.

It's important to think of Christian marriage as a covenant agreement in which a man and a woman — both committed to Jesus Christ — are legally, physically and spiritually joined as husband and wife. A covenant is a vow, a pledge, a promise: "When a man makes a vow to the Lord or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he must not break his word but must do everything he said" (Num. 30:2). A covenant that is broken displeases the Lord. Premarital counseling can help individu-

als avoid being "tied" to the wrong person. In order to consider marrying, both individuals need to have the same spiritual foundation. Otherwise the marriage may fall apart. Premarital counseling provides a "spiritual checkup" for the engaged couple.

Counseling also can help individuals discover their motives for marriage. Sometimes an individual may wrongly believe marriage will help them find the love, significance and security they need. However, as a Christian one is totally complete in Christ, whether married or single: "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form and you have been given fullness in Christ" (Col. 2:9-10).

Finally premarital counseling can help a couple determine if marriage is right for them. Often couples have second thoughts about marriage, but they feel they are too far along with their plans to turn back. It is never too late to do what is right. No matter what has been said or done, don't do what is wrong. You are not married until you are married, so everything that precedes the marriage commitment is neither binding nor obligatory. If you are walking down the aisle yet know in your heart that what you are about to do is wrong, then stop.

Yes there will be hurt and pain involved but simply say, "God has not given me a peace about this marriage." It's better not to marry than to live to regret the decision to marry. Peace will come eventually: "The fruit of righteousness [doing what is right] will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever" (Isa. 32:17).

The most important decision a person can make, apart from accepting Christ as Lord and Savior, is the choice of a lifelong marriage partner. And since no one but God knows the future, the wisest decision we can make is to trust our future into the hands of the Lord and literally be led by His Spirit: "He [the Spirit of truth] will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

EDITOR'S NOTE — June Hunt is the founder of Hope for the Heart, a worldwide biblical counseling ministry that provides Biblical Counseling Keys, a collection of resources on 100 topics relevant to the Christian life. This article was adapted from the Biblical Counseling Keys publication, "Premarital Counseling: Are You Fit to Be Tied?" For more information about Hunt's speaking, counseling and radio ministries, visit www.hopefortheheart.org.

"In order to consider marrying, both individuals need to have the same spiritual foundation."

June Hunt
founder, Hope for the Heart

3 Ts

Practice the 3 Ts of relationship building

TALK

Converse as friends (and cultivate the friendship)

TIME

Spend time together

TOGETHER

Do things together (hobbies, interests, fun things)

Source: Larry Daniels, Pathways Professional Counseling

Learning how to help

FBC Montgomery to host Human Trafficking Summit

By Maggie Walsh
The Alabama Baptist

God's Word calls the body of Christ to be salt and light in this fallen world of decay and darkness." Jay Wolf, pastor of First Baptist Church, Montgomery, said this calling was all the motivation needed for his church to open its doors to host the Alabama Human Trafficking Summit on Jan. 30 from 9 a.m. to 4:45 p.m.

The movement to end human trafficking is worldwide, seeking to "End It" in every culture.

The first of its kind in the state, the summit is sponsored by the Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force, a collection of men and women from varying political and law enforcement backgrounds who seek to end human trafficking in the state through mutual cooperation, prevention efforts and legislative changes.

Initially passed through the House of Representatives by Rep. Jack Williams, R-Vestavia Hills, and later signed into action by Gov. Robert Bentley, the task force meets quarterly to strategize and coordinate efforts around the state.

One such effort is the summit. David Pinkleton, fundraising chair for the task force, said education is the main goal of the event.

"It's very groundbreaking to see people come together to learn about the issue and go back and work ... to help someone in this situation," he said.

Participants will learn about the two kinds of trafficking, sex trafficking and labor trafficking; how to recognize someone who is being trafficked; and what

steps to take to help victims and combat the issue.

Keynote speaker for the day will be Linda Smith, former congresswoman and founder and president of Shared Hope International, an organization based in Vancouver, Wash., that strives to eradicate sex trafficking and restore its victims in the United States and abroad.

The day also will feature speakers representing The WellHouse, a shelter in Birmingham for exploited women; Alabama District Attorney's Association; Homeland Security Investigations; Alabama Fusion Center; Federal Bureau of Investigation; and the U.S. Attorney's Office.

With January being Human Trafficking Awareness Month, the summit is an "opportunity to get out in front and educate people" about the prevalence of human trafficking all around Alabama, Pinkleton said. Human trafficking cases have been reported in Montgomery County, Birmingham, Fort Payne, Madison County, Huntsville, Albertville, Guntersville,

Dothan and Mobile, according to enditalabama.org.

"We're a pass through of human trafficking," he said, referring to Atlanta's status as one of the largest hubs for human trafficking in the country. People often are shocked to learn this fact, Pinkleton said.

Wolf said his greatest prayer for the event is for those who come into contact with trafficking victims to "set the captives free" with the truth of Christ.

"After all if a person is freed from human trafficking but goes to an eternal hell we have only met a temporary need," he said.

Registration for the event ends Jan. 26. ☪



ALABAMA UPDATES

PEOPLE, CHURCHES MAKING NEWS ACROSS THE STATE

Samford honors longtime pastor, educator Golden

Samford University in Birmingham honored longtime Alabama Baptist pastor and educator Howard Golden, of Wetumpka, for his service to the school and to God at a luncheon Dec. 15, 2014.

Golden recently retired after teaching for almost 60 years in the Samford Extension Division, now the Ministry Training Institute.

Samford President Andrew Westmoreland read a proclamation at the luncheon citing Golden's long tenure with the program.

"He was the pioneer in expanding the teaching ministry into state and federal prisons," Westmoreland said.

The Shawmut native was a pastor of churches throughout the state and Indiana and held leadership roles in the Alabama Baptist State Convention. Two of his Alabama pastorates included Lincoln Baptist Church and Calera Baptist Church.

Samford named him an Alabama Minister of the Year in 1996.

Golden served in the U.S. Navy during World War II before earning degrees at Samford and at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., where he graduated in 1952.

He and his wife, Johnnie, have three children, six grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. (Samford, TAB)



GOLDEN

Union Hill Baptist organist marks 40 years of service

To celebrate Mauara Phillips and her 40 years of service as church organist, Union Hill Baptist Church, Oneonta, asked Phillips to hold a recital Oct. 19, 2014.

She played a few pieces as well as three duets, one of which was with her granddaughter, Arian Phillips.

Mauara Phillips began playing piano when she was 13 and took lessons from organ teachers in the area. Later she took piano classes from Sneed State College in Boaz and Wallace State College in Hanceville.

She played piano for the Friendship Baptist Association church and then in September 1974 became the church's organist after it purchased an organ.

When asked what the 40 years of ministry meant to her Phillips said she felt "very blessed."

"We all have to start somewhere and (Union Hill) was very gracious. ... We just grew together. I'm thankful for a congregation that would allow that," she said.

Greg Hollis, Union Hill's music minister, said of Phillips, "Her dedication to her church and her craft are truly remarkable."

Phillips and her husband, Scott, have two children and one grandchild. (Neisha Roberts)

Birmingham Association's Duncan retires after 25 years

After 25 years of service to Birmingham Baptist Association (BBA), Margie Duncan retired Dec. 31, 2014.

During her time with BBA, Duncan served as an administrative assistant, director of human resources and director of office management. She also has served as coordinator for senior adults and singles groups.

The opportunity to pray with those who called the BBA office was a valued aspect of Duncan's ministry. But it is the people she has come to know in BBA churches and the BBA staff she will miss most.

She tells those in ministry, "God has a plan for your life. Just let Him lead you in every area."

Duncan plans to take her own advice and "never wants to quit serving Him," she said.

Duncan has two children and four grandchildren. (Maggie Walsh)



DUNCAN

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Joseph Coleman Thompson Sr.

Former Alabama pastor dies at 88

Birmingham native and former Alabama pastor Joseph Coleman Thompson Sr. died Dec. 1, 2014. He was 88.

Thompson received his education from Howard College (now Samford University) in Birmingham and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and served in the U.S. Army in 1949.

In Alabama, Thompson served churches in Sylacauga, Albertville and Birmingham. He also served as pastor of First Baptist Church, Tallahassee, Fla. and in Missouri.

Thompson is survived by his wife of 63 years, Elizabeth, and one son. (Maggie Walsh)



THOMPSON

His ministry spanned 57 years, serving as pastor of churches in New Orleans and across Alabama. For 20 of those years he was DOM for East Liberty Association. Wynn was serving as pastor of Todd Congregational Christian Church, Valley, at the time of his death.

Wynn is survived by his wife of 56 years, Clara; two children; three grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren. (Maggie Walsh)

Charles Stroud

Former Shelby DOM dies

Charles Stroud, who served as the director of missions (DOM) for Shelby Baptist Association for more than 15 years, died Dec. 20, 2014. He was 78.

Stroud earned a bachelor's degree from Howard College (now Samford University) in Birmingham and a master's degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

He served as pastor of First Baptist Church, Vincent; Meadowbrook Baptist Church, Oxford; First Baptist Church, Columbiana; and Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Montgomery. He also served as pastor in Ohio.

After retiring as DOM in 2005, Stroud decided to "connect the churches" by training for a 240-mile walk — stopping at each church in the association (70 at the time).



STROUD

Stroud was preceded in death by his first wife, Betty. He is survived by his wife, Mildred; three sons; two stepdaughters; nine grandchildren; and four step-grandchildren. (Neisha Roberts)

David Frank Jones

First, Sandusky minister dies

David Frank Jones, longtime minister of music at First Baptist Church, Sandusky, in Birmingham, died Dec. 29, 2014. He was 60.



JONES

He is survived by his wife, Janell; one son; and two grandsons. (Maggie Walsh)

Jones graduated from Fairfield High School in 1972. He began his music ministry with First, Sandusky, as an interim before becoming the minister of music for more than 24 years.

Jones was preceded in death by two sons, Brandon and Garrett.

Don Pendergrass

Former Alabama pastor dies at 73

Don Pendergrass, who served as pastor of several Alabama Baptist churches, died Dec. 16, 2014. He was 73.

Pendergrass graduated from Luther Rice Seminary in Lithonia, Ga., and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

He served as pastor of Muscle Shoals Baptist Church; First Baptist Church,

Cherokee; Huntsville Park Baptist Church, Huntsville; and East Gadsden Baptist Church, Gadsden. He also served as pastor of churches in Mississippi, Louisiana and Tennessee.

He was a member of Calvary Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, at the time of his death.

Pendergrass is survived by his wife, Faye; two children; nine grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. (Neisha Roberts)



PENDERGRASS

Susan Dianne Watts

West Jordan pastor's wife dies

Susan Dianne Watts, who served alongside her husband as a pastor's wife, died Dec. 1, 2014. She was 59.



WATTS

Watts worked as a teacher in the Mobile County School System for more than 23 years and served alongside her husband, Pastor Charles David Watts, as church pianist for West Jordan Baptist Church, Mobile. She also sang many solos at the church during worship.

Watts is survived by her husband, two children and six grandchildren. (Neisha Roberts)

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- Should be urgently assessed medically
- Should not be left alone
- Should not drive a motor vehicle

www.ChildrensAL.org/concussion

In a medical emergency, call 911 or go directly to your local ER

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Faith Baptist Church, Bartlett, TN

Go to myfaithbaptist.org for registration and information.

Across ALABAMA'S Associations

BIBB

► **Schultz Creek Church, Centreville**, will hold a fifth Saturday night singing with the Reno Quartet on Jan. 31, 6 p.m. Ben Corley is pastor. ► **Ashby Church, Brierfield**, will hold revival Jan. 25–28 with evangelist Billy Wyatt. Sunday night will be at 5 p.m. and Monday–Wednesday will be at 7 p.m. For more information call 205-665-1111. Shannon Allen is pastor.

COFFEE

► **County Line Church, Enterprise**, will hold discipleship studies each Sunday evening through March 29, 5:30 p.m. Co-ed and women's small groups will discuss how God's living Word inspires our life choices. Class options include: The True Story of the Old Testament. The Patriarchs, Share Jesus Without Fear and Facing Your Giants. For more information call 334-347-6082 or email [dwiggins@centurytel.net](mailto:dwiggin@centurytel.net). Danny Wiggins is pastor.

GENEVA

► **First Church, Geneva**, will host Debra Perry and Jaidyn's Call in concert Jan. 25, 11 a.m. Nathan Carroll is pastor.

MOBILE

► **West Mobile Church, Mobile**, will celebrate 25 years of ministry starting Jan. 23, 6:30 p.m. with a hot dog/chili dog birthday party at the Hanger. Ken Lee will provide a hayride around the grounds. A men's prayer breakfast will be Jan. 24, 8:30 a.m. Fred Wolfe will be the guest speaker. A continental breakfast will be served Jan. 25, 9 a.m. to kick off the celebration Sunday service at 10:30 a.m. Lunch will follow at Camp Grace's pavilion by the lake. The afternoon will

consist of games, worship and a message from Pastor Charles K. Gibbs at sunset. For more information contact Donna Skipper at 251-689-3303.

MONTGOMERY

► **First Church, Montgomery**, will host the Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force and the Alabama Human Trafficking Summit on Jan. 30, 9 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. Speakers include: Linda Smith, of Shared Hope International, and Attorney General Luther Strange, among others. Registration deadline is Jan. 26. For more information visit enditalabama.org. Jay Wolf is pastor.

SAND MOUNTAIN

► **New Home Church, Pisgah**, will host Jimmy DeYoung, noted prophecy teacher and journalist, Jan. 25, 10:30 a.m. during Sunday morning worship and 6 p.m. at the Bible Baptist Institute rally service. For more information call 256-451-3992. David Smith is pastor.

SHELBY

► **Siluria Church, Alabaster**, will host **Sen. Cam Ward** as the featured speaker for Men's Day on Jan. 25, beginning at 11 a.m. Ward served two terms in the Alabama House of Representatives and in 2010 was elected to the Alabama Senate representing parts of Shelby, Bibb, Chilton and Jefferson counties. For more information call 205-663-7904. Michael Brooks is pastor. ☞



WARD

MARKET PLACE

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT PLACING A CLASSIFIED AD, CALL THE ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT OF THE ALABAMA BAPTIST, 205-870-4720, EXT. 102, OR EMAIL ADS@THEALABAMABAPTIST.ORG. COPY DEADLINE IS TWO WEEKS BEFORE PUBLICATION.

CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR: Bellevue Baptist Church in Gadsden, Ala., is seeking a full-time senior pastor. Interested parties please send resumé to: jmc@copelaw.com or mail to: Bellevue Baptist Church, 150 Noccalula Drive, Gadsden, AL 35904. Church website: www.bbcgadsden.com.

PASTOR: Brent Baptist Church is accepting resúmes for a full-time pastor. Cut-off date is Feb. 4. Please send resúmes to: Brent Baptist Church, ATTN: Pastor Search Committee, P.O. Box 246, Brent, AL 35034. No electronic resúmes will be accepted. Please visit www.brentbaptistchurch.org for more information.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR: Shady Grove Baptist Church is currently seeking a bivocational pastor. Located about 10 miles from Selma and 35 miles from Prattville in Dallas County. We are a Southern Baptist congregation. Average worship attendance is 40. Please send resumé to: michelle.adams@ipaper.com or Michelle Adams, 234 Co. Rd. 83 Selma, AL 36703. Contact number: 334-874-3905.

BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC MINISTER: Community Baptist Church, Maylene, Ala. (Alabaster area), is seeking a bivocational music minister. Send resúmes to: cbcsearchcommittee@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC MINISTER: Bivocational music minister for Siluria Baptist Church in Alabaster. Send resumé to: 10696 Highway 119 South, Alabaster, AL 35007 or by email to: siluriabaptist@gmail.com.

MINISTER OF MUSIC & STUDENTS: Linden Baptist Church is accepting resúmes for the full-time position of minister of music and students. Interested candidates may submit their resumé by email to: scraft@servpro9855.com.

STUDENT MINISTER: First Baptist Church, Guntersville, is searching for a full-time student minister, grades 6–12. Please send resúmes to: Joel Samuels, 1000 Gunter Avenue, Guntersville, AL 35976 or jsamuels@gvillefbc.org.

STUDENT MINISTER: Concord Baptist, Anderson, S.C., is seeking a student minister (grades 6–12). Degree required from an accredited seminary

and minimum of three years church/ministry experience. Submit resúmes via email to: james@concordbaptist.com or to: Concord Baptist, 1012 Concord Road, Anderson, SC 29621, ATTN: Dr. Don Cox. Church website: concordbaptist.com.

OTHER POSITIONS

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS: Limestone Baptist Association is accepting resúmes for director of missions through Feb. 28. Please send to: P.O. Box 153, Athens, AL 35612 or robert@limestonebaptist.org.

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Want to know GOD?

Pastor Randy Billingsley
Riverside Heights Baptist Church,
Tallassee

Free. What an often misunderstood word. We were handing out homemade goodies, coffee, hot chocolate and water recently during a local Trade Day event. Attached to the free goodies was a piece of paper that advertised our upcoming Harvest Hoe-Down, another free event for the community. You would think the word "free" would have people lined up to receive our offerings. Alas, many people would not even take a free cookie.

People are assailed with advertisements about free stuff only to find out there is a catch. Unfortunately that same concept has permeated into the religious atmosphere. Some religions prey on people who are taught they have to give something in order to receive grace. The Bible says there is nothing you or I can offer to God in order to receive His grace.

John wrote about Jesus to professing believers in 1 John 2:2, "and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins." Propitiation is a big word with a wonderful message: Jesus, on the cross, took our sins upon Himself and there before God took the wrath and punishment due us for our sins. Jesus took God's wrath and turned it into favor toward us.

So where does "free" come in? That favor toward us is God's saving grace and mercy that is freely offered, no strings attached. We can never pay anything on our own that could cover the cost due for our sins. But just because something is free does not mean you already have it. The free goodies we offered to passersby were theirs. All they had to do was reach out and take possession. Those who refused to take possession forfeited their claim on the prize. God offers you everlasting grace that is already yours. You can ignore the prize and walk away or you can accept God's saving grace. Simply believe Jesus is God's Son and ask Jesus to forgive you of your sins and save you for eternity by God's grace.

The gift of salvation, God's grace and mercy, is freely yours. Will you accept the gift provided by Jesus? ☞

Ministry Tips

SHOOTING CELL PHONE VIDEOS

By Doug Rogers

Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

Want to video a testimony on your next missions trip and only have a cell phone? Never fear — you can still produce a good video by following these tips.

1. Remember the key to good video is good audio. Find a spot that is quiet and free of background noise and get close to your subject to ensure that what he says

can be easily heard and understood.

2. Make sure your subject is well-lit and not standing in front of a background brighter than he or she is. For instance, don't place your subject in the shade with a brightly lit field behind him.

3. Hold your phone horizontally like a camera, not vertically like a cell phone. That way it will be ready for viewing on a computer or projector screen.

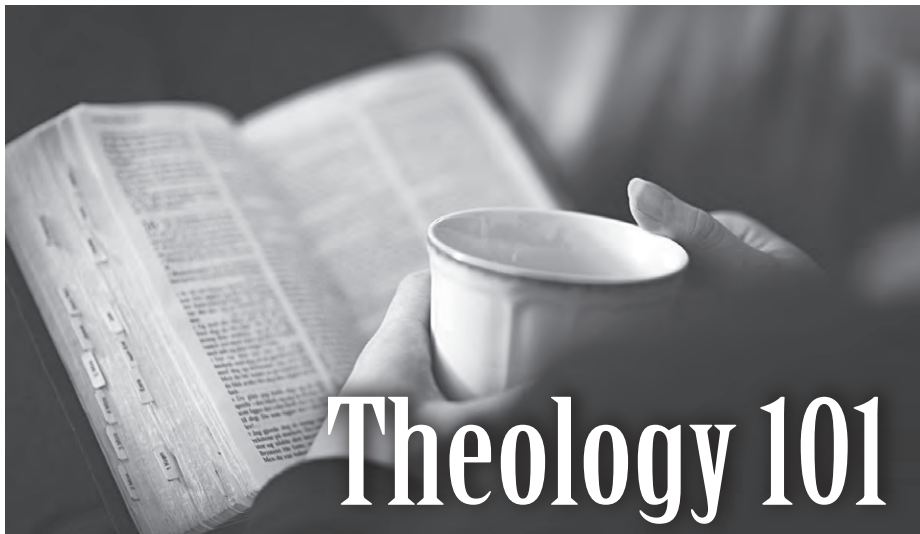
4. Frame up your subject well, with the

eyes about a third of the way from the top, and be sure he is in focus. On many phones, this can be done by tapping on the spot on the screen you want to be in focus (which also sets your exposure).

5. Keep it steady. Use both hands and hold your elbows close to your body. Accessories are available online that will not only help with this but provide the option of using a tripod.

Good luck and happy shooting. ☞





Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Images of the Church

The Body of Christ (Part 1 of 3)

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

One image that helps fashion our understanding of God's new covenant people, the Church, is that of a body. This image itself serves to remind us the Church is a living entity, not merely a building. It is composed of people who have been made alive spiritually through a personal relationship with Christ. Like all of the varied metaphors or images of the Church, the Church as the body of Christ is not presented systematically in one grand passage of Scripture. Rather the image is contextual. Some practical or theological need in a specific local church gave rise to the idea of being the body of Christ as a way of presenting truth to meet the occasion.

A hint of the imagery of believers being the body of Christ emerged during a season of persecution against Christians. In Acts 9 the ringleader of the persecution was Saul of Tarsus. When interrupted in his quest to inflict pain on believers in Damascus, the ascended Christ confronted the persecutor with a question, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (v. 4). Implicit in the question is the idea that in some sense Christian believers are so connected to Christ that He feels the pain of any hurt inflicted on them. Pain experienced by the body is felt by the Head of the body. What is implied here about believers being Christ's body is clearly expressed later in a passage like 1 Corinthians 12:27, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." Similarly, Ephesians 5:30 declares of believers, "We are members of His body."

Christ is the Head

A major truth about the Church as a body is that Christ is its Head: "He is the Head of the body, the Church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead that in everything He might be preeminent" (Col. 1:18). Headship over the Church is one dimension of the preeminence of Christ. In the significant passage about the relationship of a husband to his wife, that relationship

is elaborated by comparison with the relationship of Christ to the Church, "For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the Head of the Church, His body" (Eph. 5:23).

As Head of the body, the Church, Christ exercises the prerogative of appointing church leaders through the agency of the Holy Spirit. In concert with Christ and a part of our triune God, the Spirit gives some to be pastors and teachers, others to be evangelists and administrators (1 Cor. 12:28).

Church governance

The analogy of Christ as Head of the Church has an implication for church governance. We Baptists classify ourselves among those who espouse what we often term a "congregational" or "democratic" form of church government. We understand congregational church government to mean that members of a local church hold ultimate authority, as opposed to the authority residing in its ministers. This flows from and honors the doctrine of the priesthood of believers. Upon closer reflection we might say church authority, rather than being democratic, is really "Christocratic." This way of thinking honors the analogy of Christ as Head of His body, the Church. Maybe we do justice to this concept in a practical way by thinking of congregational authority as authority delegated by the church's Head to its collective membership. In addition whatever authority resides in the church's ministers also is delegated authority given by the members to the trusted leaders. ☞

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.



'Common witness'

Baptists to observe annual BWA Day

By **Carrie Brown McWhorter**
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Each year, Baptist World Alliance (BWA) Day recognizes the work of Baptists throughout the world. In 2015 the commemoration returns to its historic date of the second Sunday in February.

BWA, founded in 1905, is a fellowship of 231 conventions and unions in 121

territories comprising 42 million members in 177,000 churches. Its priorities are nurturing the passion for missions and evangelism; promoting worship, fellowship and unity; responding to people in need; defending human rights and justice; and advancing relevant theological reflection.

BWA Day has been celebrated since 1927 when the BWA Executive Committee, meeting in London, asked BWA President Edgar Mullins and General Secretary John Rushbrooke to prepare a "special statement" to express clearly the purpose of the BWA. The statement emphasized that the BWA "seeks to express and promote unity and fellowship among the Baptists of the world." A decision was made to introduce the observance of BWA Day in an effort to promote unity and fellowship.

The 2015 observance, set for February 7 or 8 depending on whether Baptists worship on Saturday or Sunday, also has an Alabama Baptist connection. The worship

liturgy for BWA Day 2015 was written by Gary Furr, pastor of Vestavia Hills Baptist Church, Birmingham, in Birmingham Baptist Association. Furr is a writer, poet, musician and teacher. He writes a blog on faith and music and the arts at www.garyfurr.org, and is co-author of "The Dialogue of Worship with Milburn Price."

The worship resource for BWA Day 2015 explores the meaning and implications of Jesus Christ as the door to increased unity of purpose in global Baptist life. The liturgy includes Scripture, hymns, prayers and readings framed using the hermeneutic of "Ubuntu," an African idea expressed as "I am what I am because of who we all are," Furr writes in the introductory notes.

Whether the local church utilizes the worship guide or not, BWA Day is a day to emphasize Baptist fellowship and to pray for the work of Baptist entities around the world, said BWA General Secretary Neville Callam.

'Celebrate our unity'

"I am convinced that the annual observance of BWA Day should represent an effort to build into the worship life of churches ... an opportunity to celebrate our unity and our common witness and to intercede for one another. BWA Day also should advance Baptists' knowledge of the worldwide Baptist family and its mission." ☞

The BWA Day 2015 worship resource and a bulletin insert are available for free download at bwanet.org. The liturgy is available in English, Spanish and Portuguese.

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Diversity in the church

Survey finds 1 in 5 pastors speak about race at least once a month

(continued from page 1) ethnic groups are not far away."

In a survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors, LifeWay Research found many have some diversity in their professional and social circles.

Most (84 percent) said they have spoken with a friend from a different ethnic group within the last week. Two-thirds (63 percent) said they've met with ministers from another ethnic group in the past month.

Still for many pastors the issue of racial reconciliation seldom comes up in sermons. Four in 10 (43 percent) said they speak on the issue once a year or less. Twenty-nine percent of pastors rarely or never do.

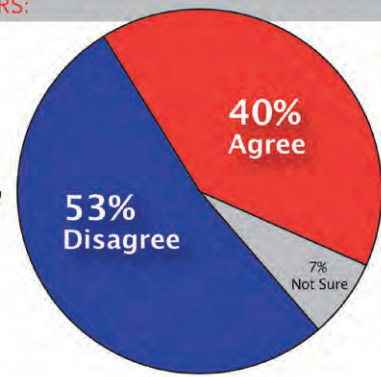
About a third (35 percent) speak on the issue several times a year. In addition, 1 in 5 speak about race at least once a month.

"The Bible talks a lot about men and women from every tongue, tribe and nation being in heaven, so it might be good to get accustomed to that heavenly

CHURCH SEGREGATION

VIEWS AMONG CHURCHGOERS:

"My church needs to become more ethnically diverse."



Note: May not equal 100% due to rounding.

LifeWayResearch.com



If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Galatians 5:25-26

expression here and now," Stetzer said.

Previous LifeWay Research studies have found nearly three quarters (72 percent) of Protestant pastors said their church is personally involved in racial reconciliation. Nearly all (90 percent) said racial reconciliation is

mandated by the gospel.

Researchers also found most Americans (82 percent) believe diversity is good for the country. Three quarters of Americans (74 percent) said the country has made progress on race relations. But 8 in 10 (81 percent) said there is still a long way to go. (BP)

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**One Week Only:
Jan. 22-29, 2015**

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For January 25

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

BE FAITHFUL IN ADVERSITY Nehemiah 6:1-19

I give a thematic title to each chapter when teaching Nehemiah. Our passage this week, Nehemiah 6, is titled "Ono; O Yes." Ono Valley (6:2) was in the lowlands between Jerusalem and the coastal plains of the Philistines. "O yes" refers to the celebration when the outer walls were sealed, providing a measure of physical security for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Phase one of the rebuilding project was completed in 52 days (6:15).

Emotional highs and lows can take a toll on leaders. In order to establish firm footing, a leader must find stability and security in the faithfulness of God. In this chapter Nehemiah faced distraction, accusation, celebration and disappointment. He remained faithful to his tasks by trusting that God was accomplishing this major task.

When Falsely Accused (1-9)

Geshem, an Arab, conspired with Sanballat to dissuade Nehemiah from leading the rebuilding project. On four occasions they sent him an invitation to leave Jerusalem to confer with them. Nehemiah was aware of their plans to harm him so he remained at his post overseeing the construction. Attempt No. 5 was an open letter of accusation suggesting Nehemiah planned to declare himself king in the walled city of Jerusalem. Regardless of the accusations and intimidation he faced, the governor was determined to fulfill his task.

Jesus taught His disciples to thrive in the midst of false accusation, anticipating that enemies of Christ would use this tactic: "Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of Me. Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven" (Matt. 5:11-12).

When Promised False Security (10-14)

Shemaiah, another conspirator with Sanballat, attempted to intimidate Nehemiah

into taking refuge in the inner courts of the temple where only Levites and priests are allowed: "Let us meet at the house of God inside the temple. Let us shut the temple doors because they are coming to kill you ... tonight" (6:10).

The governor would have none of it. He was well versed in the Law, knowing Aaron's sons had been put to death for their insolence within the tabernacle (Lev. 10:1-2). Certainly Nehemiah knew the great King Uzziah had been sentenced to a life of leprosy for burning incense within the holy place in the first temple (2 Chron. 26:16-23). He was determined not to sin against God by taking refuge in the second temple.

When Factions Arise (15-19)

Nehemiah was fully aware God had granted him favor to relocate from Persia, to receive all the materials for rebuilding the walls and to continue the work without interruption until it was done. The public intimidation tactics ceased but the whispering conspiracy continued.

Tobiah, an Ammonite ally of Sanballat, had inside information about activities within the city. Inter-marriage with Jerusalem aristocracy (6:17-18) and the family of Eliashib the priest (13:4) allowed him the influence to undermine Nehemiah's leadership. This access would continue for years, leading to a significant encounter when Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem for his second tour of duty as governor (13:6-9).

The Bible is replete with factions which fracture the focus of God's people. Moses faced opposition from a wide variety of individuals, including his wife and his siblings. Jesus' disciples seem to have argued regularly, often over who was the best disciple. The church members at Corinth were at odds over their favorite teachers and practices.

Wise leaders face accusation, intimidation and infiltration with care and confidence. Nehemiah was a godly civil servant who was careful to honor God in all he did and confident God was able to complete the work He had begun: "They realized this task had been accomplished by our God" (6:16). 🙏

Bible Studies for Life By Kevin Blackwell, D.Min. Assistant to the President for Church Relations, Samford University

READY TO HELP THE POOR Deuteronomy 15:7-11

The book of Deuteronomy is an important book in the Old Testament Canon. This is evident when you read the New Testament. There are more than 100 references to the book in the New Testament and Jesus quoted from it more than any other Old Testament work. Its importance is seen in the setting of its words.

As Moses nears the end of his life he emphasizes the historical nature of Israel's relationship with God to the second generation of wilderness sojourners. As they prepare to enter the Promised Land, Moses reminds them of the importance of the laws and the results of disobedience. In chapter 15, Moses speaks of the specific laws that deal with some of the unique agricultural needs, specific sacrificial laws and relational truths Yahweh wanted His people to grasp.

Don't be hardhearted or tightfisted. (7)

In God's law there are many references to taking care of those in need. The Jews were required to take care of the poor, orphans, widows and strangers among them (Ex. 22:22-23; Lev. 19:34). This is unique among other ancient laws that generally favored the wealthy.

According to Exodus 15:4 there would be no poor among the Jews if they would take care of their poor neighbors. There are two direct commands given: to be openhearted and to be openhanded. This is the opposite of being hardhearted and tightfisted toward the brothers around you who are suffering. It was a characteristic of the early Church in Acts that their generosity toward one another brought godly unity and contentment within the Church (Acts 4:32).

Could the same be said of the Church today? Simply put, any church that doesn't have a generous heart toward the needy will not reflect the One who died for it. As the Israelites settled in their designated areas of the Promised Land there would be those

who needed a loan or help from the ones who could afford it. How a society treats its poor says much about the heart of that society. Christians are called to be generous (openhearted and openhanded).

Share freely when you see a need. (8-9)

These verses refer to the "year of release," also known as the "sabbatical year." During this year all creditors give up their rights in respect to loans that were still outstanding. The primary purpose of this law was to help alleviate poverty in Israel. Therefore the temptation for the Israelites would be to not lend help to a needy person because of the upcoming year of release. To make such a loan just before the year of release would essentially be a free gift to the needy without any hope of reimbursement.

The needs of the poor are not seasonal — they are constant. Verse 9 is a strong warning to the Israelites and also gives great insight into the heart of God toward the needy. The point is strong — to ignore or put aside the needs of the poor is to grieve the heart of God. Christians ought to have giving hearts toward those in poverty.

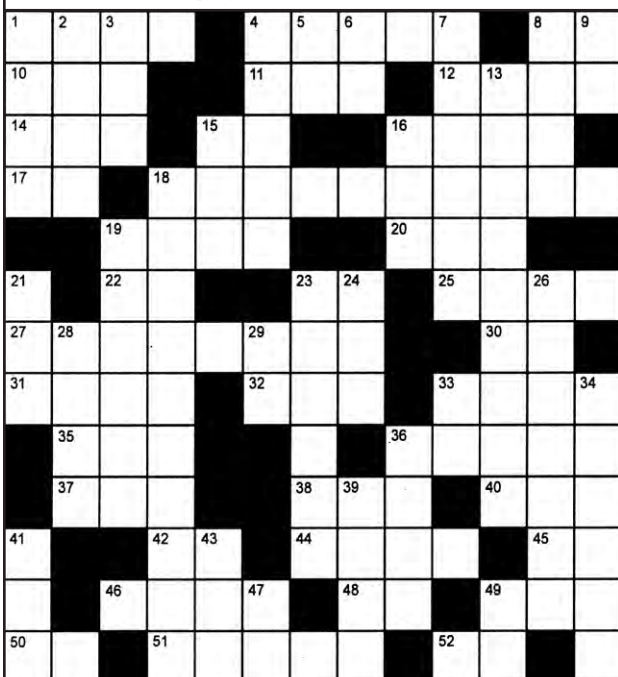
It often is believed that the poor person is lazy or has made bad choices to bring them to this point. There are times this is true but many are in impoverished situations because of the choices of others. Regardless of how the person got to this position the Christian is called to assist him or her.

God blesses us and our giving. (10-11)

Verse 10 speaks of the "heart" of giving to the poor. We are called not only to help the poor, but to do it with the right attitude. God will not bless those who give to the poor in a grudging manner. God knows the poor will always be with us, but if Christians will do the Lord's will in assisting those in need fewer children will go to bed hungry. The idea of giving is not restricted to financial assistance — we also are called to give our time and talents to reverse systemic poverty. 🙏

Christian Crossword

By Janet Adkins Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

- For God cannot be tempted with _____. (James 1:13)
- The voice of doves _____ing upon their breasts. (Nah. 2:7)
- From. (French)
- Feather scarf.
- Grow old.
- Highest point.
- He shall pour _____ upon it. (Lev. 2:1)
- Prayer book. (abbr.)
- Father, forgive _____. (Luke 23:34)
- North Dakota.
- He that goeth about as a _____ revealeth secrets. (Prov. 20:19)
- Let God be _____, but every man a liar. (Rom. 3:4)
- Absence. (abbr.)
- Egyptian sun god.
- He had sent messengers to _____ king of Egypt. (2 Kings 17:4)
- Now the first lot came forth to Jehoiaarib ... the fourth to _____im.

- (1 Chron. 24:7-8)
- So can no _____ both yield salt water and fresh. (James 3:12)
- Citizens band radio.
- Spanish aunts.
- Prefix meaning "before."
- Ye shall not fulfill the _____ of the flesh. (Gal. 5:16)
- Liquified natural gas.
- Then _____ and the other apostles answered, we ought to obey God. (Acts 5:29)
- Steamer. (abbr.)
- Hubbub.
- Before. (poetic)
- Each. (abbr.)
- It is a _____ thing that the king requireth. (Dan. 2:11)
- Part of speech. (abbr.)
- Naum, which was the son of _____. (Luke 3:25)
- Return unto _____. (Mal. 3:7)
- _____ boweth down. (Isa. 46:1)
- What shall we _____?
- (Acts 2:37)
- _____ women shall take hold of one man. (Isa. 4:1)
- Representing 3.14159.

Down

- Black wood. (poetic)
- Faith is made _____. (Rom. 4:14)
- Adjective suffix.
- Thou preparest a _____ before me. (Ps. 23:5)
- Symbol for the element Silver.
- Exist.
- Belonging to a notable harlot.
- Greek community.
- Former.
- And I will _____ them with the sword. (Jer. 29:18)
- The name of his city was _____. (Gen. 36:39)
- Beverage.
- I am purposed that my mouth shall not _____. (Ps. 17:3)
- Absent without permission.
- Ship's stern.
- Indian nobleman.

- They were afraid both _____ and other. (Jer. 36:16)
- Ye _____ days and months. (Gal. 4:10)
- Greases.
- News service.
- French article.
- _____ clef.
- Skin opening.
- Condemn to everlasting punishment.
- Receive him not, neither _____ him God speed. (2 John 10)
- Tavern brew.
- Roman numeral four.
- At intervals of two.



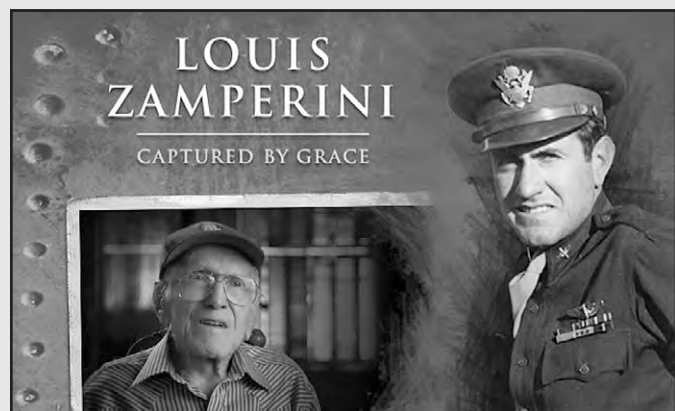


Photo courtesy of BGEA

Documentary response to 'Unbroken' movie released

Louis "Louie" Zamperini was indeed broken by his ordeal as a WWII prisoner of war (POW) and was only healed by his acceptance of Jesus Christ as savior, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) proclaims in its documentary response to the film "Unbroken."

The BGEA documentary, "Louis Zamperini: Captured by Grace," tells the story of Zamperini's deliverance from alcoholism, nightmares and undiagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) suffered after drifting in the Pacific for 47 days and enduring two years of beatings, starvation and hard labor at a POW camp in Japan.

BGEA vice president and associate evangelist Will Graham said the film "Unbroken" ended before telling the most important aspects of Zamperini's life that were detailed in the bestselling Laura Hillenbrand book, "Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience and Redemption."

An incomplete picture

"I think that's what the remarkable story of 'Unbroken' is all about. Louis was not a man that was unbroken, he was actually broken when he came home," Graham said. "The war had destroyed his life. ... It wasn't until he experienced forgiveness personally that he was able to forgive others. And he served God the rest of his life after that."

The film "Unbroken" paints an incomplete picture by not including Louis' decision to follow Christ, Graham said.

"To us that's one of the most

important parts of Louie's life," Graham said. "People have a misconception that when Louis came back from the war and he hugged his family, that everything was peachy and rosy, everything looked good. But that's when actually he was broken the most.

"It was those years after the war, when he had fame, he had everything given to him ... but deep down inside he was

"It wasn't until [Louis] experienced forgiveness that he was able to forgive others."

Will Graham
BGEA vice president and associate evangelist

wrestling with some demons in his life. And it was anger and hatred and he wanted to murder his captors. And so he had nightmares every night, tormented again by his captors, in his dreams that is. We know that's PTSD but back then they didn't know what to call it," Graham said.

"It was because of that that Louie would end up giving his life over to Christ and his life was forever changed. No more nightmares, no more hatred and he was able to go back and tell his captors about Jesus Christ. So if Jesus Christ forgave him, then Jesus Christ could forgive them also."

Zamperini accepted Christ at a Billy Graham crusade in Los Angeles in 1949. BGEA produced the documentary in hopes that Zamperini's story would draw others to Christ, the younger Graham said.

"The only purpose" of the documentary is "to tell people about Jesus Christ and that was really at Louie's heart as well," Graham said. "He wanted to tell people how Jesus changed his life. We want people to come to know Christ. We want to see people give their life over to Christ just like Louis." (BP)



Photo courtesy of Shore Fire Media

Dove Award-winning artist Ginny Owens recently released her 14-track record, 'I Know A Secret,' inspired by the 'secret' Paul speaks about in Philippians 4:12.

Content & free

Dove Award-winner Owens shares inspiration for 'Secret'

By Anna Keller
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Ginny Owens claims she doesn't like to be bored — and her life certainly doesn't seem to include much down time. When the prolific singer/songwriter isn't writing or recording music, she's either working with her nonprofit, The Fingerprint Initiative, or she's cooking, spending time with friends, hiking or reading.

"Maybe it's something that's happening as I'm getting older, but I just feel like there are so many things to be done," Owens said. "Whether it's growing your relationships with others, strengthening your faith, experiencing new things — there's this sense of so much out there."

Owens recently released her eighth studio album, "I Know A Secret," a record the Nashville-based singer describes as "musically diverse," including some pop, country and gospel influence.

"Since I grew up in Jackson, Miss., I can never get too far away from gospel," she said.

Inspired by Paul

The album was inspired by the words of Paul in Philippians 4:12, which reads: "I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want." Owens said she was struck by the idea of being content and free of anxiety regardless of the situation and this

album was inspired by the journey to find that "secret" Paul references.

Owens is a three-time Dove Award-winner and is known for her thoughtful lyrics and beautiful melodies. She said at this point in her career she's developed a bit of a musical process, but writing lyrics hasn't gotten any easier over the years.

"I have trouble with trying to be concise — I tend to be too wordy," Owens said. "So the music comes together, but the lyrics often take a while to get right."

Regardless, the process seems to be working, as Owens has been heralded for her work by Christian and secular organizations and fans alike. She was named Gospel Music Association's New Artist of the Year in 2000 and has built momentum ever since, gaining nearly one million records in sales and releasing a collection of No. 1 hits.

On her short-term agenda Owens is looking forward to an upcoming trip to Israel — her first time in that country — as well as the re-launch of The Fingerprint Initiative, which is currently being rebranded.

The organization, which launched in 2005, helps address international and national outreach and missions needs and partners with local organizations to stock food pantries and build affordable housing.

"I love that we can help people find missions work across the country, across the world or right out their backdoor," Owens said.

Owens' 14-track latest record, "I Know A Secret," is available now in stores and online. For more information, visit ginnyowens.com. ☞





IMB photo

Nancy Potter (left) checks the blood pressure of a pregnant woman at a prenatal clinic in Southeast Asia. These regular clinics allow believers to build relationships among many local communities and provide opportunities to share the gospel where it has never been heard.

A deeper heart level

Prenatal classes catalyst for new life, faith, churches

The young woman gingerly crawls off a motor scooter, grateful for the ride. Before, Kalliyen Seng could make the two-mile trek from her home on a bicycle. But now that she's nine months pregnant and could give birth at any moment, it's harder to pedal that distance.

The woman steadies herself, then waddles inside for a weekly pregnancy health class. She's greeted by community health workers and International Mission Board (IMB) missionary Nancy Potter.

Nancy looks around the crowded room and smiles. If someone had told her a few years ago that churches in this part of Southeast Asia would start as a result of pregnant women learning to be healthy, she might have scoffed. Most of these women do not even have a third-grade education. Their families live on less than \$1 a day. Yet God uses these women as catalysts for spreading His Word.

"I'm not sure if it started with the women because when you are pregnant it's nine months of uncertainty or what," Nancy said. "But if you look at how most of the new village house churches started, it's through women."

Newfound faith

As if to accentuate Nancy's point, Kalliyen scoots across the floor to the missionary nurse from Oklahoma. The reason she came today was really to ask everyone to pray for her husband. She prays that she will deliver a healthy baby and that this will lead her husband to ask questions about her newfound faith.

Like most attending the prenatal classes, Kalliyen did not know anything about Jesus. The former Buddhist came to learn about giving birth and how to take care of her baby. Some of the highest maternal mortality rates are here. Five women die every day during childbirth, according to a 2013 United Nations report. Surviving childbirth isn't even an end to the fears for these young mothers. For every 1,000 births

around 50 children never see their first birthdays.

Nancy and her husband, William, who have medical backgrounds, created a simple curriculum to teach about healthy prenatal and post-pregnancy care.

Local Christians teach the health classes on everything from washing hands to burping babies. Each lesson ends with a biblical truth and prayer. This approach combines aspects of a discipleship and church-planting program called Training for Trainers (T4T) with human needs.

'House of peace'

Kalliyen, like most of the new believers, came to faith after the health workers repeatedly visited her home the day after classes as "follow up." When a "house of peace," or a family interested in learning Bible stories is found, a small group is formed.

Sovaan and Maly Lim opened their tiny home to a small group when Maly was pregnant. Local Christians came each week to pray, sing praises to God and teach a Bible story. Maly came to Christ one year later, but Sovaan remained a drunkard and gambled away the family's money but he kept watching and listening.

"I didn't think we'd ever have any men in our small groups," Nancy said. "But then the husbands saw their wives' countenance change. They saw healthy babies where in the past there was only death ... and that provided a natural presentation of the gospel from their wives."

Then one-by-one, the men came to Christ — including Sovaan.

"I learned about the words and truths of God," Sovaan said. "Now it's our turn to take this lesson and teach to the people in our village ... then we will go share in the next village."

To view a video featuring the Potters, visit vimeo.com/95757581.

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

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Christian shot, killed while entering church in Kenya

MOMBASA, Kenya — Police in Kenya's coastal area are searching for a gunman who shot a Christian dead at the gate leading to a church worship site Jan. 11 in Mombasa, Kenya.

As George Muriki arrived with two church members at the gate leading to Maximum Revival Ministries church, one of two gunmen shot him three times in the back, apparently mistaking him for the church pastor.

"The two other church members, who happened to be ladies, were pushed aside and one of the attackers said, 'This is the church pastor,' and then the attackers fired three times right at the back of George, who died at the spot," said the pastor, whose name is withheld for security reasons.

The pastor based his account on what the two traumatized women who witnessed the shooting told him. Sources said Muriki tended to dress similarly to the way the pastor dressed.

"My life is in danger — I know I was the target," the pastor said.

The pastor said his wife and other church members are living in terror and his family has moved to another person's home to avoid a possible assault.

"The school hall also is not safe," he added. "We have to move to another location. Otherwise we are going to lose many members who are now afraid to come to church."

At press time Muriki, who was active in the 120-member church, was to be buried in his hometown of Meru in central Kenya. He had come to the Mombasa area in 2012.

Sudanese pastor detained since December 2014

JUBA, South Sudan — Security personnel in Sudan have held a pastor from South Sudan since Dec. 21, 2014, after he delivered a sermon at an embattled North Khartoum church.

Agents from Sudan's National Intelligence and Security Services arrested Yat Michael of the South Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church after Sunday worship concluded at Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church on Dec. 21. At press time he remained in jail without charges.

Police in North Khartoum on Dec. 2, 2014, beat, arrested and fined 38 Christians from the church after nearly two weeks of raiding and demolishing church property. They were released later that night.

Michael had been invited to encourage the congregation to stand firm amid persecution. Besides arrests, the North Khartoum church compound has been subject to demolition of buildings and part of its worship center as Muslim investors seek to take it over.

Baptists in Kazakhstan stand firm amid persecution

ORAL, Kazakhstan — Baptists in Kazakhstan continued to be targeted by law enforcement and government officials in December 2014 through fines, threat of jail time and property seizure.

Nikolai Novikov has been fined three times in two years, jailed for five days, placed on Kazakhstan's exit ban list (with a restraining order placed on his car) and now faces his garage being confiscated.

The Baptist from West Kazakhstan Region refuses to pay any of the fines imposed for meeting for worship without state permission.

Also in December, Aset Doskeyev of Almaty's Religious Affairs Department wrote to local registered religious communities that holding meetings for worship away from state registered places of worship is an offense.

Another Baptist, Maksim Volikov, was fined the equivalent of one month's average salary for talking to people about his faith and offering them religious literature without state permission. ☞



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