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— Evangelism Conference Opening Night —

'You've been forgiven'

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Ten days after Christ's ascension into heaven Peter preached on the day of Pentecost where 3,000 souls were saved, but he didn't earn that role by being perfect. In fact, if he had not been given a second chance then he would have forfeited the opportunity.

But Jesus knew who Peter would one day be and looked past the "denying Christ three times before the rooster crows" episode, said Robert Smith Jr., the Charles T. Carter Baptist chair of divinity at Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham.

Headlining the opening night of the Feb. 23–24 Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference at First Baptist Church, Trussville, Smith preached on "The Gospel of a Second Chance."

And while Luke 22:31–34 and 1 Peter 5:10 were Smith's primary texts, those in attendance heard rich nuggets from more than 20 other passages as he wove his sermon together in the typical seamless fashion for which he is known.

"All of us need a second chance, a 2,000th chance," Smith said.

From Noah to Abraham to Moses to Joshua, Jonah, David and the Sa-

maritan woman, the examples are rampant with God giving His people new opportunities.

Whether it be related to health, marriage, ministry or anything else, "God has a way of giving a second chance," Smith explained. "And because He is giving us that, we ought to give Him glory, magnify Him and bless His name."

'We are unforgiving'

But "we are unforgiving people. We never let people forget their errors," he noted. "There are Christians walking around right now still living under the cloud of unforgiveness."

"Stop walking around looking up at the bottom of your shoe. You've

been forgiven. This gospel that we preach is the gospel of a second chance."

To truly understand these second chances, slowing down to read the Bible is necessary, Smith said.

"The reason we get less out of the Bible than we should is that we read it too quickly. I want all senses to be evoked from the text," he said, noting he requires his students to read each verse in their sermon 50 times during their preparation so they will overflow with understanding.

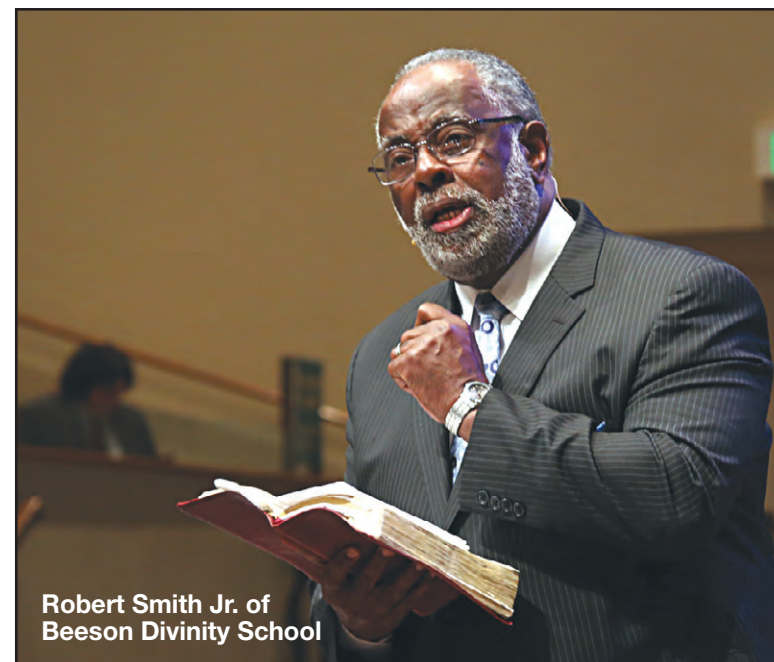
Circling back to Peter, Smith said he read the text related to Peter's denial too quickly at first. The passages in Matthew and Luke say Peter will deny Christ three times

before the rooster crows once, but Mark 14:30 says Jesus predicted it would happen before the rooster crowed twice.

"It seems to me that it should have only taken one crow to remind Peter of what he said," Smith said. "Yet he didn't get it the first time. The rooster crowed twice."

"Peter didn't really get it until Jesus looked straight at Peter. Then Peter wept bitterly," Smith said. "It was a time of great pain for Peter. ... When Jesus looked at Peter, it broke his heart — 'I've denied the One who brought me, taught me, kept me and never left me, the One who saved me. I've denied the One' ... but Peter gets another chance."

(See 'Listen,' page 7)



Robert Smith Jr. of Beeson Divinity School

Photo by Maggie Walsh



Rick Lance (left), executive director of the State Board of Missions (SBOM), and Sammy Gilbreath (second from left), director of SBOM's office of evangelism, lead participants by candlelight in prayer for national revival.

Photo by Neisha Roberts

COMMENT

Earning a Hearing for the Gospel

The sadness in Sammy Gilbreath's voice was unmistakable. Standing before participants at the recent Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference, Gilbreath shared that baptisms for Alabama Baptists were down again for 2014. The exact number according to the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) is 17,434, down from the 2013 total of 17,791. This is the fifth straight year of decline in baptismal totals.

What is happening in Alabama is happening across the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Frank S. Page, president and CEO of the SBC Executive Committee, recently reported that baptisms across the SBC have declined to their lowest level since 1948. The last year of record (2013) shows 310,368. Gilbreath, who serves as director of SBOM's office of evangelism, did not share exact numbers as he spoke but indicated SBC baptisms for 2014 would drop even further.

In the year 2000, Alabama Baptists reported baptizing 25,939. The SBC total was 416,094. Obviously there has been a serious decline. Not all churches report their statistics so the numbers may not be exact but the trend line is undeniable.

Baptisms per church

When the numbers are broken down by churches there were almost 10 baptisms per cooperating church (9.97) in 2000. In 2013 that number was about seven (6.73). Again the numbers are not exact but they are close.

Gilbreath used the opportunity to promote training events led by the state office of evangelism to help equip church members to share their faith. This year Alabama Baptists will focus on training in preparation for 2016 when the state emphasis will be sharing one's faith with non-Christians, he said.

Speakers during the annual evangelism conference offered a variety of explanations for the decline in baptisms. Baptists don't really care about the lost, Baptists are not sensitive to the Holy Spirit, Baptists don't bring lost people to church anymore — these were just some of the conclusions. And there is truth in all of them.

Compassion for those who do not have a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ may not be as widespread as in days past. We may hesitate to share a word of faith when we feel that inner nudging of the Spirit.



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

In most places Sunday morning worship is designed to strengthen Christian believers because that is who attends on Sunday mornings.

Other speakers contended that evangelism should be "red hot" and excited the crowd with stories of how God was transforming churches and people through ministry evangelism.

The examples were numerous: tutoring programs, sports ministries, English as a Second Language classes, support for local officials, respite care, divorce recovery groups and more.

Participants were challenged to identify needs in their communities and then meet those needs. In helping people where they hurt the Church demonstrates the love of God and earns a hearing for the gospel, speakers explained.

Interestingly Jesus used a similar approach for much of His evangelistic efforts. In Matthew 4:23 the Gospel writer describes how Jesus combined "preaching the good news of the Kingdom and healing every disease and sickness among the people." The result of this approach as reported in verse 25 was, "Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed Him."

Caring for human need

Even in the last week of His life Jesus still combined preaching with caring for human needs. In Matthew 20:29-34 the writer tells the story of two blind men who asked Jesus for their sight. The concluding verse says, "Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed Him."

What was true in Jesus' day is still true. When people know you care about them they are more open to listening to what you have to say.

Alabama Baptist churches are doing a lot of creative things to care for those around them. Several churches work with expectant mothers to help them understand and cope with all the changes taking place. One church pairs young mothers in the community with grandmother-types from the church. The goal is to help the young mothers learn basic habits of child care, cooking, home management and other everyday necessities.

Several churches sponsor divorce recovery groups to help those caught in the hurt of this terrible trauma to know they are not alone. Some churches provide basic car care for widows.

Hunger ministry

Hunger is a major ministry for many churches. The latest study by the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported Alabama has the third highest percentage of hunger among all states.

One in 6 residents lives with food insecurity. Among seniors it is 1 in 5; among children, 1 in 4.

Letting people know you care about them may earn a hearing for the gospel but one still has to present the gospel. One has to care enough about the person receiving ministry to share the most important message in the world — "that God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son."

One has to know how to share what Christ has done in one's own life and how to use the Bible to relate the Jesus story. One has to be willing to implement all the preparation

and actually convey the gospel.

That is why Baptist believers have to really care about those who do not know Jesus Christ. That is why believers have to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leadership and why it is important to help people hear the gospel.

How one responds to the invitation God extends through Jesus Christ is still the most important decision a human being will ever make. That is why the decline in baptisms in Alabama and SBC life is disturbing. It indicates that fewer and fewer people are coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

The first response to this problem may not be more words. To make evangelism "red hot" we may have to pay more attention to earning a hearing for the gospel through caring for people. Then we must be sure to share the clearest example of God's love for them — the gospel message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. 🙏

***Even in the last week
of His life Jesus still
combined preaching
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them they are more
open to listening to
what you have to say.***

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

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81%

The overwhelming majority (81%) of Americans agree that government should leave people free to follow their beliefs about marriage as they live their daily lives at work and in the way they run their businesses.

More at frc.org/marriagepoll

BP graphics

Be 'bold & tenacious'

Survey shows 81 percent for religious freedom on marriage views

Contrary to the "inevitability" narrative most Americans have accepted of same-sex "marriage," a new survey released Feb. 24 finds broad support for traditional marriage and protection of those who hold such views.

The survey, commissioned by Family Research Council (FRC) in partnership with National Religious Broadcasters (NRB), found that 81 percent of Americans agree that government should "leave people free to follow their beliefs about marriage as they live their daily lives at work and in the way they run their businesses."

Redefining marriage

Additionally 61 percent support the right of states and citizens to uphold traditional marriage, affirming the statement: "Supreme Court should not force all 50 states to redefine marriage." The survey also found 53 percent of Americans agree marriage should be defined only as the union of one man and one woman.

The survey of 800 registered voters conducted by WPA Opinion Research was released at a news conference in conjunction

with the NRB International Christian Media Convention in Nashville.

With the Supreme Court poised to rule this summer on the constitutionality of same-sex "marriage," FRC President Tony Perkins said the court "will be at a point of overreach if they impose a one-size-fits-all definition of marriage on the nation by redefining it."

Major policy decisions should not be made without broad social consensus, Perkins said, noting the continuing cultural debate about the issue of abortion more than 40 years after the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision.

"It's clear, based on [this] polling, that Americans have not reached a broad social consensus that marriage should be redefined," Perkins said.

Calling the findings "incredible," NRB President Jerry Johnson said it is a "slam dunk" that more than 80 percent of Americans agree that citizens should be free to practice their faith — including in their businesses. Even 80 percent of those who never attend church agree, he noted.

"Government has no right establishing speech codes or business codes on marriage and 81 percent of Americans agree entirely," Johnson said.

Marriage & Religious Freedom in America

A majority of Americans remain committed to the historic, biblical understanding of marriage.

By wide margins, Americans believe the government *shouldn't* prevent them from following their beliefs about marriage in the marketplace, or force a redefinition of marriage on all 50 states by court order.



53%
AGREE

Marriage should only be defined as one man and one woman.



81%
AGREE

People should be free to exercise marriage beliefs in the marketplace.



61%
AGREE

Supreme Court shouldn't force states to redefine marriage.

Johnson noted that NRB is an organization concerned with First Amendment rights of religion, speech and press and stated that the organization aims to become for the First Amendment what the National Rifle Association is to the defense of the Second Amendment.

Threatened with fines

Joining Perkins and Johnson at the news conference were the former owners of an Oregon bakery and a sports broadcaster who have been discriminated against for their support of traditional marriage.

Aaron and Melissa Klein, former owners of Sweet Cakes by Melissa in Gresham, Ore., are being threatened with \$150,000 in fines because they declined to bake a wedding cake for a same-sex couple.

In the wake of the controversy, the Kleins closed their business in 2013.

Aaron Klein, who now drives a garbage truck, said the new poll reflects how state governments and many in the judiciary are ignoring the voters' wishes. Yet Oregon, in 2004, adopted with 57 percent of the vote a state constitutional amendment defining marriage as between one man and one woman.

Klein underscored "an obligation to the next generation to stand up for our constitutional freedoms, not given by man, but given by God," whatever the cost resulting from such a stand.

Craig James, a former Fox Sports football analyst, was fired by the network in 2013 — 24 hours after being hired — when the network learned he supported traditional marriage as a 2012 U.S. Senate candidate in Texas.

"I hope that my situation becomes a poster child for employment discrimination," said James, a former NFL running back with 20 years' experience as a broadcaster.

"We have to be as bold and tenacious as those who are trying to trample" religious freedom, James said. "If we don't, we will lose it." (BP)

Marriage & Religious Freedom in America

61%

Six in ten Americans agree that states and citizens should remain free to uphold marriage as the union of a man and a woman and the Supreme Court shouldn't force all 50 states to redefine marriage.

Learn more at frc.org/marriagepoll

'God can bring revival'

Kevin Hamm, pastor of Gardendale First Baptist Church, speaks during the Feb. 24 evening session of the 2015 Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference.



Photo by Neisha Roberts

Conference speakers encourage participants to be broken on their knees, open to His passion

By Jennifer Davis Rash,
Maggie Walsh and June Mathews
The Alabama Baptist

Despite consistent threats of hazardous winter weather, attendance at the Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference remained steady with 300 to 400 people and 600 at the closing session. Another 426 people watched the conference over live stream on the Internet.

Georgia Baptist Convention officials cancelled their evangelism conference, which was scheduled for the same two days, but Alabama Baptist leaders pressed on and were pleased with the result.

"Due to weather it is half what we would have had but double what I thought we would have," said Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM).

Sammy Gilbreath, director of SBOM's office of evangelism, also was pleased with the "sweet spirit" of the event.

Noting he is sometimes asked about the purpose of the conference, "it's for encouragement and inspiration," he said.

And the eight preachers lined up to deliver sermons during the event Feb. 23-24 at First Baptist Church, Trussville, all sought to bring just that.

Kevin Hamm, pastor of Gardendale First Baptist Church, wrapped up the conference with a challenge for participants to open themselves totally to God.

With a focus on "we have never seen anything like this," Hamm said, "If God is going to bring revival to America ... we are going to have to be on our knees, broken."

The hindrances to revival start with God's people, Hamm said.

Burden for the lost

"When's the last time that we were so burdened about [the lost] we couldn't eat or sleep?"

It isn't that believers don't want people to be saved, he said. "But we really only want people who look like us and talk like us. But heaven isn't going to look like that. Shouldn't our churches look like heaven?"

"If you don't have a gospel for everyone then you don't have a gospel for anyone," Hamm said.

Believers also must discover a passion for Jesus, he said.

In the story of the paralytic in Mark 2, the four carriers knew exactly where to take him, Hamm said. "They knew Jesus was the answer. Not religion, church or a denomination, but Jesus."

Another hindrance to revival is resistance to change, Hamm said.

"These four carriers (in Mark 2) destroyed a roof to get this man to Jesus. And somebody, somewhere said, 'We ain't never done it that way before.'"

Open to change

"Change is not always bad. ... Sometimes the methods — not the message — can change," Hamm said. "If we are not open to change then many of our buildings will soon be empty."

Right in line with resistance to change is the lack of celebration in the church, Hamm concluded.

"Some church members today are more concerned about keeping rules than having a revival," he said. "When we celebrate the goodness and greatness of God it opens the door for God to pour out His Holy Spirit on us."

Dan Garland, regional director for LifeWay Christian Resources and former Kentucky Baptist Convention team leader for church evangelism and development, shared how church revitalization and evangelism are co-dependent.

The common denominator in revitalized churches is lost people getting saved and saved people learning to share their testimony, he said.

"We've got to start where we are and we've got to start with the one, not the masses."

So often pastors get paralyzed by masses, Garland said, thinking they have to save the world.

That is the beauty of Acts 2 and 3, however. The contrast between the salvation experience of 3,000 people in Acts 2 and the lame beggar receiving the miracle of walking in Acts 3 is the perfect example of pastoral ministry, Garland said.

"We can become so religious that we're no good to God," he said. "If we aren't careful, hurting people become invisible to us."

Through the undeniable reality and un-

forgettable impact of the lame beggar walking, the true power of Christ is displayed, Garland said. Lost people do not have to clean up, they just have to come to Him.

"Everybody that comes to [Christ] has to come as is and everybody is slightly irregular," he said.

"If God has changed your life why don't you let a little of that rub off? Why don't you get contagious?"

Evangelist Scott Dawson, who recently trained for and ran in his first marathon, borrowed the apostle Paul's oft-used analogy of a race in Galatians 6 to encourage ministers to stay the course.

Dawson said the typical race involves a start and a finish with running in between. And it's during the latter part of the running phase where distraction and discouragement can set in.

In that respect races are a lot like ministry, he said. Though people often start well, they don't always finish well. "But we're called to finish this race that's been set before us."

Referring to verse 17 where Paul mentions "the marks of Jesus" on his body, Dawson noted four marks needed for finishing the race.

The first is a spiritual mark, a relationship with Jesus that is personal not just professional.

"We've all got one thing in common. We've all sinned," he said. "No one ever has to teach us to be bad. It comes naturally. ... But the good news about God is that when we couldn't go to Him, He came to us."

The second mark of humility enables a person to be used by God. Pride is a self-sustaining spirit and everyone comes to a moment in their lives where they need to be brought down, Dawson said.

Paul exemplified the third mark of persistence when he refused to stop telling others about Jesus regardless of the personal cost, Dawson said.

"What would it take for you to stop following Jesus?" Dawson asked. "If He didn't get out of here without any pain and suffering, why should I?"

The fourth mark is passion. "Let's be passionate about Jesus."

And those who heard Josh Lancaster's message at the conference left the session counting their balloons.

The pastor of Underwood Baptist Church, Florence, wrapped up his sermon with a story about a young family's visit to an amusement park.

After spending \$100 to get in, staying more than 12 hours, riding all the rides and eating every hotdog in sight, the children cried on the way home because their father forgot to buy them some balloons.

"How many times have you said, 'Lord, I didn't get a balloon,' and forget about all the things He has done?" he said. "You don't think about what you've been given; all you can think about is that balloon that you never got."

Citing 2 Samuel 7, specifically David's unfulfilled dream of building a temple, Lancaster addressed disappointments and how to deal with them.

Inevitable disappointment

"If you live long enough, I can promise you that you're going to have disappointments," he said. "But I believe God cares about your broken dreams and disappointments more than you realize."

Disappointments can come in many forms, he said. Disappointment in oneself, a marriage, children, etc. — it is inevitable.

"You're even going to be disappointed in God at some point," he said. "But God is not threatened by your disappointment. He can handle our questions."

For example when David expressed a desire to build God a temple his motive was right but God had other plans.

"Just because it's a great idea doesn't necessarily mean it's God's idea," Lancaster said.

The key, he said, is to understand four things about God: He is personal, working on an eternal plan for each one of His people; He is provisional, extending grace in the midst of pain; He is purposeful, putting His people where they need to be, whether for their own benefit or somebody else's; and He is providential, doing whatever He is doing because He is God.

"Sometimes the question doesn't need to be, 'What have I lost?' but, 'What do I still have?'" ❧



GARLAND



DAWSON



LANCASTER

Charles T. Carter shares from John 3:31 about the incomparable Christ during the Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference held at FBC Trussville.



'Brag about Jesus'

Carter reminds participants Christ is coming

Photo by Maggie Walsh

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

Tonight I'm going to do my best to brag about Jesus," Charles T. Carter told participants at the opening session of the Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference on Feb. 23.

"My home preacher taught me as a boy that whenever you're called on to preach and you're not assigned a topic to take your Bible and get your books and do the best you can to ... brag about Jesus."

And so Carter did as he focused on "the incomparable Christ" by preaching from part of John 3:31 — "the One coming from above is above all."

'One of His kind'

"Every way you look at it, He's unique. He's the only one of His kind," said Carter, pastor emeritus of Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills.

The way He was prophesied and the way He was born both prove that, Carter said.

"Jesus did not come into existence in Bethlehem. He was in the beginning with the Father. There never was a time when the Son was not. The validation of this is that there are more than 2,000 fulfilled prophecies about Jesus in the New Testament," he said, also noting Micah 5:2 and Isaiah 7:14 and 9:6 from the Old Testament.

"His pre-existence is so vitally important because you cannot have an incarnation without a pre-existence," Carter said, pointing to John 1:1-3, John 8:58 and John 17:5.

The miracle of Christ's birth was not the way He was actually birthed but the way He was conceived, Carter said. "Nine months before He was born He was conceived by the divine power of the Holy Spirit. That was the miracle. That makes Him the incomparable Christ."

More proof comes in the way He lived, Carter noted.

"We know we try to be good and do good but we've all sinned," he said. "But in Him there was no fault. He lived without sin. That ought to put a fire in our heart and a passion in our voice as we proclaim Someone who was totally unique."

And the way Jesus died was like none other, Carter continued, referencing 2 Corinthians 5:21. "Jesus took His righteousness and imparted it to you and me. He had no sin in Him but all sin was on Him" at the cross.

The way Christ descended and ascended also point to His incomparableness, Carter said.

"We have very little talk about [Christ's apparent descent into hell] today ... (but that's what the Bible says (in 1 Peter

3:19 and 4:6). ... I think He told the fallen angels, 'Your judgment has been pronounced. You rejected the Lord God Almighty.'"

To those who died in faith in God, Jesus "showed that He was incomparable in that He went into the realm of the dead and preached the good news."

Christ's resurrection

As for Christ's resurrection, "our whole faith stands and falls on that," Carter said. "If there's no resurrection then our preaching is in vain."

"If you're not sure the resurrection really happened stop preaching today. Everything stands and falls in the resurrected world. He was who He said He was."

And then there is the way He intercedes and the way He returns, Carter concluded.

"[Jesus] presents our case before the Father ... You and I cannot lose with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit at the right and left hand of the Father," he said. "And from that lofty position, according to the Bible, one day literally, visibly, victoriously, bodily — Jesus is coming again." ❧

"Everything stands and falls in the resurrected world. He was who He said He was."

**Charles Carter
pastor emeritus, Shades Mountain Baptist Church,
Vestavia Hills**

Hammond stresses importance of faith as 'foundation of evangelism'

By Maggie Walsh
The Alabama Baptist

What is faith? What does it mean to have faith and how does it manifest?

These are the questions Thomas Hammond, pastor of First Baptist Church, Alpharetta, Ga., posed to participants of the 2015 Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference.

Seeking to glorify Jesus and "encourage my dear fellow pastors," Hammond tackled the issue of faith as the foundation of evangelism for every person, church and ministry.

"Faith is visible (but) it is in the invisible. When we have faith in the invisible God our faith is real.

"Faith is how you make transactions in heaven. You have to be willing to put yourself in a position of being vulnerable, of putting it all on the line for God to say, 'I see your faith.'"

With firm demands, faith "thrusts us into action" and in doing so imparts the power of God, he said.

"If [you] just sit back and do what [you've] always done, [you're] going to get the same thing [you've] always gotten. ... We haven't attempted anything bigger than us in a long time, Church."

Each church's ministries have to reflect the need of the community to get the community to Jesus, Hammond said. The problem isn't that churches don't have minis-

tries, he said, it's that the ministries are for the members and not for the lost.

Meeting needs

"When we see there's a need and we're willing to adjust our church and ministries to meet people at their point of need what we're going to see is transformation."

Such a transformation was exactly what happened at First, Alpharetta, when it began looking for ways to love its community. A little more than a year ago the church began an initiative called "Impact" that seeks to reach its city for Christ. The initiative began with prayer walking every street in Alpharetta and then moved to praying for every city employee. Thank-you notes to each employee followed and Hammond began re-

ceiving positive feedback from the community.

"Every time we changed the focus of our prayer God just began opening more and more doors."

While on their prayer walking routes church members prayed for "God to give us eyes to see needs" so they could exercise faith, Hammond said.

It was during that prayer walking journey that a group found Marietta Street, which houses 18 Hispanic families. "That was (now) our street," Hammond said.

By searching for practical ways to minister to this street — such as through tutoring programs and hosting a Christmas program — First, Alpharetta, launched a Hispanic ministry.

"It was so amazing how everything transitioned."

Hammond knows of two His-

panic men who have been called into the ministry from this group and "baptisms are happening all the time." This ministry has its own Sunday School classes and it will have its very first solo service on Palm Sunday morning.

And it all started with faith-led prayer.

"Evangelism is red hot right now. ... There are plenty of people right now in Alabama who need Jesus and they need a church that has faith."

Look for opportunities

Hammond encouraged every layperson and pastor in the congregation to take a fresh look at their community and look for opportunities to be Christ to their area.

"Just imagine the possibilities of great faith," he said. "Let's go win people to Jesus." ❧



HAMMOND

Eternal light

Madison shares with ministers' wives how God changed her perspective

By Maggie Walsh
The Alabama Baptist

Why shouldn't I go through trials?" It's not the normal question asked. Most often people ask God, "Why me? Why do I have to go through this trial?"

When Charlotte Madison — a retired Spanish and English teacher and member of Mount Zion Baptist Church, Huntsville, where her husband, Ron, serves as pastor — was diagnosed with bladder cancer in 2013 she struggled.

Madison opened up about her struggle at the 2015 Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference's Ministers' Wives Luncheon hosted by Alabama Woman's Missionary Union. She shared how

God used her experience to teach her how to reframe her perspective in a more eternal light.

Soon after she was diagnosed, Madison realized her best course of treatment was to have her bladder removed and use an external bag for urination, a urostomy bag. "I was so depressed, so dejected" at this point, Madison told the more than 50 women. "It was no coincidence, of course, that I was teaching Sunday School from (the book of) James around that time."

Facing trials

James 1:2 grabbed her attention. "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds." Madison knew God was taking her through this passage for a reason.

It was then that she asked her-

self, "Why shouldn't I go through trials?"

During this time Madison knew she needed a different perspective and that her circumstances needed reframing.

"My spirit was really rebelling against all of this but ... God's Spirit was working in me."

One night His Spirit spoke five reassurances to her: pray without ceasing, laugh every day, be thankful "because you have so much to be thankful for," reject fear because it's from Satan and "I've got this; everything is in My hands."

From that moment forward Madison used Ephesians 3:20-21 to reframe her perspective of her cancer. She would lean on "Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think" and glorify Him in all things.

Several months later Madison revisited James 1:2 with her renewed perspective.

'I release it all for You'

"It was really [then] that I think I was able to say, 'OK, God. I live or I die ... You have a plan and I release it all for You.'"

Madison was even able to reframe her urostomy bag. To the laughter of the women gathered, Madison shared that she named the bag a Spanish word that means "ugly little thing" and she'll talk to it when she's frustrated or needs some light humor.

It's time for reframing, Madison said, "when only one thing will please you and it's not what's going on in your life right now, when you find yourself filled with anxiety and fear, when you're filled with bitterness and when

you can't get out of bed every day."

So when trials come — because they're going to come — seek perspective, faith, joy and an eternal viewpoint, Madison said.

"Know that if God is God then He's not taken by surprise for this. ... [You] can trust that He is working in this situation."

Madison's honesty and vulnerability were encouraging for all the participants, said Sherry Crew, wife of Roger Crew, minister of education at First Baptist Church, Trussville.

"I think it's kind of a unique place that women feel like they're in (as ministers' wives)," she said. "People's expectations are sometimes unrealistic so it's good for people to know how normal our lives are and to have the support of other ministers' wives." ❧



Charlotte Madison speaks with women at the Ministers' Wives Luncheon held Feb. 24 during the State Evangelism Conference. Her husband, Ron, is pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church, Huntsville.

Photo by Neisha Roberts

Reavis suggests what it takes to win people to Christ

By June Mathews
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Every soul matters to Jesus," said Herb Reavis Jr. during his sermon at the Evangelism Conference on Feb. 24.

Basing his message on Acts 20, Reavis, pastor of North Jacksonville Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Fla., spoke on "What It Takes to Reach People."

While some might say the story of the sleepy young man in Acts 20 is just "one of those side details" in the Bible, Reavis disagreed.

"I believe that in this simple, unusual story we find what it takes to reach people."

Reavis suggested several points churches should consider when trying to reach people for Christ.

"First if you're going to reach your community it's going to take a worship service that is alive."

A worship service, he said, should be a time of celebration, a

place that's vibrant and pulsating with a spiritual enthusiasm for Jesus.

Adoration is another key component to a "winning" service. The focus of every worship service should be about Jesus — that's where praise and adoration come in, Reavis said.

Worship services also should be times of proclamation of God's Word, regardless of changes in style, music or use of technology.

Illumination occurs when the gospel is shared and that is what churches ought to do, he said.

"We're surrounded by a culture of darkness, but we've got the Light. Every time we stand up we ought to preach the gospel."

Lastly a good service provides a time of elevation. "I believe that when people come to the house of God they ought to leave ... ready to challenge the world with the gospel." ❧



REAVIS

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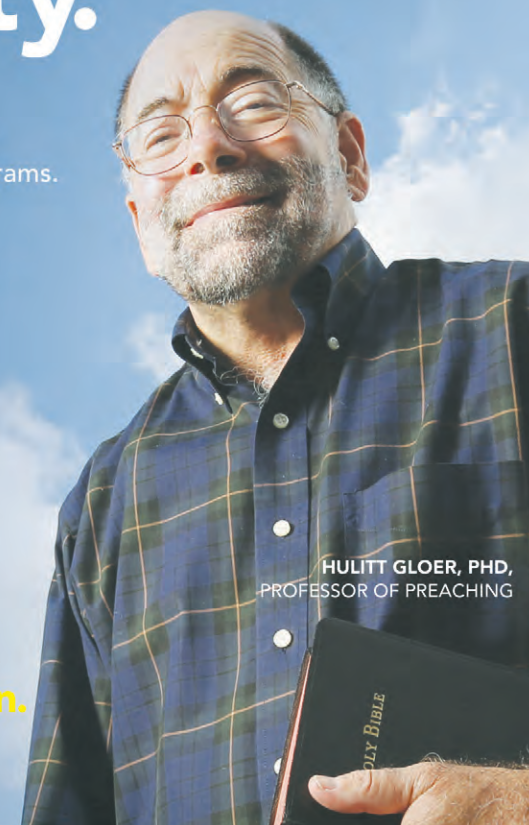
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PROFESSOR OF PREACHING

State Evangelism Conference

Daniel Crews, resident artist at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Fla., sings several pieces for participants at the Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference, Feb. 23-24.



Photos by Neisha Roberts

The combined choirs of Gardendale First Baptist Church, along with an interpretive dancer, perform during the Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference.

Praising Jesus

Traditional, contemporary music conveys gospel message at evangelism conference

By **June Mathews**
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

From beginning to end the music at the Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference provided a beautifully blended mix of traditional and contemporary styles. It also conveyed the gospel message as plainly as a three-point Sunday morning sermon and praised Jesus to the rafters and beyond.

Congregational singing was led by Roy McNeil, worship leader at Gardendale First Baptist Church, accompanied by music evangelist Frank Jones on piano. Choirs and praise teams from First Baptist

Church, Trussville, and Crosspoint Baptist Church, Trussville, sang during the conference's opening night session.

Gardendale First Baptist's choir provided a 45-minute concert complete with interpretive dance and a special youth feature during the closing night session. The driving rhythms from the accompanying orchestra as well as the intensity with which every song was poured out pulled conference participants into a high-energy time of singing and shouting.

Daniel Crews, resident artist at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Fla., served as special musical guest. The 30-year-old singer was accompanied at the conference by

wife Angela, who runs the sound board for his singing ministry.

Sammy Gilbreath, director of the office of evangelism for the Alabama State Board of Missions, invited Crews to the conference after hearing him sing in Florida.

Gifted with a powerful tenor voice and an extensive vocal range, Crews unfailingly provided exceptional performances in which his love for the Lord shone through. His ability to effectively deliver traditional hymns with a contemporary flair extended his

appeal to young and old alike.

Beginning with a full-out rendition of "How Great Thou Art," Crews captivated and held

For more information on Crews and his music, visit danielcrews.com.

conference participants with his classical yet contemporary style. Subsequent performances of "Jesus Saves," "Glory to His Name" and "It Is Well with My Soul" among other

favorites were met with an equally favorable amount of audience approval.

Newer selections included an capella rendering of the late Andrae Crouch's "My Tribute," as

well as songs from Crews' latest album, "Blameless Before You," including "Faithful" and "Face to Face."

Standing ovation

Crews' simple but stunning version of "Untitled Hymn (Come to Jesus)" prompted a standing ovation.

Appearance-wise, Crews has at least one quality of particular interest to some of the female members of his audiences.

"The question I get most of all is whether my hair is natural, and yes, it is," the curly-haired singer joked. "Little old ladies will come up to me and say, 'Who did your permanent?'"

"God did," he tells them. 🙏



Listen closely to God's calling

(continued from page 1)

In Smith's well-known sing-song style of concluding a sermon, he described the Scripture in Mark 16 where the risen Christ tells Mary Magdalene, "Go and tell My disciples and Peter."

"The 'and Peter' phrase meant Jesus was including [Peter]. He would not have felt invited if Jesus had not said 'and Peter ... I'm still including you.' When Peter got that word he finally understood that it is a gospel of a second chance.

"Sometimes the Lord has to keep speaking to us because He is the God of second chances."

The Bible is filled with examples of God speaking to His children, calling them multiple times in order to get their attention, Smith said. "When the Lord calls a name twice, it generally signifies urgency.

"When you sense that God is speaking in terms of a call or sacrifice, you need to say, 'Hush, hush, somebody is calling my name. It sounds like Jesus.'" 🙏

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'Growing trend'



Security risks of church Wi-Fi access can be mitigated by protective steps

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Free wireless Internet, or Wi-Fi, can allow congregants to post social media updates in real time, access Bible study apps during lessons or download podcasts that a pastor references in a sermon. Easy access to the Internet can bring problems as well, which is why cyber security experts recommend churches carefully consider their technology plans before offering Wi-Fi on their campuses.

With the proliferation of free Wi-Fi in restaurants, libraries and coffee shops, churches see the service as another way to reach out to the community and aid ministry leaders in ministry work, according to Justin Coleman, an associate with Simms Showers LLP, a Washington-area law firm, who concentrates on church and nonprofit law.

"Wireless Internet networks are already a stable fixture in many churches, used by many church staffs to carry out their daily duties. But there is a movement among churches to provide Wi-Fi to the entire congregation for a variety of reasons," Coleman wrote on the firm's blog in May 2014.

Alternative hang out

For example free Wi-Fi might encourage college and high school students to study and hang out at church or provide an alternative to home or coffee shops for those who do a lot of their work online.

"In other cases Wi-Fi access is used by worship leaders to integrate technology into church services, redirecting the use of mobile devices from being a distraction during Sunday service to becoming part of worship instead," Coleman wrote.

Free Wi-Fi brings risks as well, as a Catholic church in Missouri found out in 2013. Local officials seized the church's

computers after pornography downloads were traced to the church's IP address. Authorities later determined that the downloads were most likely from someone using the church's unsecured Wi-Fi network.

Illegal downloads

Other risks of Wi-Fi include unauthorized church members gaining access to important financial or personal files and illegal downloads of music or videos. In each of these situations the church could be held accountable for what has happened on its network, according to Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company, a company that insures churches and related ministries.

Though no system is foolproof, churches can provide Wi-Fi and protect themselves at the same time. Brotherhood Mutual advises churches to take key steps before allowing public Wi-Fi, including:

- ▶ **Creating a separate network for administration.** Administrative computers often contain confidential information, like bank account numbers or information from counseling sessions. When a church doesn't protect its wireless network someone using the same Wi-Fi connection could get their hands on church members' personal and financial information. Having a private network or sub-network for administration makes it more difficult for unauthorized people to access important files.

- ▶ **Encrypting sensitive files.** Encrypting files makes accessing them nearly impossible for nonchurch employees. For the most

secure encryption, consider installing encryption software on all church computers.

- ▶ **Installing both hardware and software firewalls.** Having two types of firewalls decreases the chance of a computer virus slipping through and damaging church computers.

- ▶ **Updating the operating systems.** Keeping software up-to-date removes bugs from the system and helps computers run more smoothly.

Passwords can limit access to a network as well, though there is no easy way to

keep people outside the church from getting the password. Some churches provide the password to those who ask and others print the password in the weekly bulletin.

That's how Brian Harris set up the Wi-Fi at Taylor Road Baptist Church, Montgomery, while serving as the church's communications director several years ago.

"Our thought was that we could hopefully trust our people not to be looking at things they shouldn't and that plac-

ing a password on the system would prevent people from driving up in our parking lot and using the Wi-Fi," said Harris, former web and social media strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM).

Recently installed Wi-Fi networks at Alabama Baptist campus centers throughout the state also rely on password protection, according to Doug Rogers, director of SBOM's office of communications and technology services.

"There's no limit to the number of ways churches can use wireless Internet and handheld devices to spread the gospel."

Brotherhood Mutual

Brotherhood Mutual suggests churches can make their Wi-Fi more secure by changing the password weekly and announcing the new password each Sunday morning, perhaps even correlating the new password with the sermon topic.

A content filter is another measure that can help prevent illegal Internet use.

Finally churches can protect themselves from illegal Internet usage by requiring all online visitors to agree to an Internet usage policy before accessing the Internet at church.

Simms Showers suggests key terms in the policy could include:

- ▶ Prohibiting activities such as online bullying and harassment, accessing obscene or offensive content, online gambling and illegally downloading copyrighted content.

- ▶ Requiring an age minimum and parental supervision of minors.

- ▶ Requiring visitors to use updated anti-virus software.

- ▶ Advising visitors to avoid sharing personal and sensitive information such as credit card numbers over the network.

- ▶ A "hold-harmless" clause that notifies the visitor that the church is not responsible for damage to the user's electronic devices or software, or the loss or theft of personal information. Despite the risks the benefits of a carefully managed Wi-Fi system can be great, according to Brotherhood Mutual.

Energizing ministries

"With preventative measures put in place, the growing trend of offering free Wi-Fi at church can continue to energize ministries. There's no limit to the number of ways churches can use wireless Internet and handheld devices to spread the gospel message through their city, their country and the world." ❧

Ministry Tips



WELCOMING GUESTS AND VISITORS

By John Herring

Executive pastor, NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville

We know we need to be welcoming to new folks at church, but we do not always know the mechanism for officially including them.

One way is to be cognizant of

people and activity going on around you, so you notice the new people.

You might even assign members of your Sunday School class or life group a particular area of the sanctuary to monitor.

While working to welcome every new person, you also could look for individuals or families who appear to be in a simi-

lar life stage as you and invite them to your group.

If they say "yes" take their name and a way to contact them.

When guests come to your class or group make sure they are greeted warmly when they arrive. Assign someone to have this responsibility and rotate it from time to time.

Another way to welcome newcomers is to seek to make an immediate connection by inviting them for coffee or lunch.

And send a follow up email or call them to let them know you really are interested in them and want to help them find a place of connection in the church family. ❧

Alabama Baptist Convention **State Board of Missions**Focus
on

ONE MISSION

ONE MISSION: The Great Commission ONE PROGRAM: The Cooperative Program MANY MINISTRIES: Great Commission Ministries

news and features about missions and ministries from the Alabama Baptist
State Board of Missions | (800) 264-1224 | www.alsbom.org

Resolution on Reaffirmation of Biblical Marriage

I commend to all Alabama Baptists the following resolution that was adopted by the State Board of Missions in February:

WHEREAS, Alabama Baptists continue their faithful and unwavering support for biblical marriage as the only legally sanctioned form; and

WHEREAS, Alabama Baptists have expressed this support in various ways, including as a resolution adopted by the 2013 annual meeting of our State Convention; and

WHEREAS, Court decisions during the past several months have effectively abolished biblical marriage as the only legally sanctioned form in numerous other states across our nation; and

WHEREAS, On Friday, January 23, 2015, U.S. District Judge Callie V.S. "Ginny" Granade ruled that Alabama's Marriage Protection Act and the Sanctity of Marriage Amendment are unconstitutional; and

WHEREAS, On Tuesday, February 3, 2015, a three-judge panel of the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals refused to extend a delay on the District Judge's ruling; and



By Rick Lance
State Missionary

WHEREAS, The effect of the panel's ruling is that on Monday, February 9, 2015, Alabama will become the 37th state in which marriage licenses must be issued by probate offices upon request to same-sex couples; and

WHEREAS, Several Probate Judges have expressed plans to no longer officiate for wedding ceremonies; and

WHEREAS, A landmark decision from the U.S. Supreme Court is expected within a few months regarding marriage and same-sex couples; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, That the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, meeting in Montgomery on February 6, 2015, expresses moral outrage, intense grief and strong disagreement over court rulings that have set our culture in a direction against the biblical definition of marriage; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we offer prayer and personal support for those Probate Judges who, exercising their personal religious liberties, conscientiously object to the affirmation of the marriage of same-sex couples; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we will pray for those with whom we disagree, specifically those who advocate the abolition of biblical marriage as the only legally sanctioned form; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we commit to pray for the justices of the U.S. Supreme Court who are expected this year to issue a landmark ruling that could abolish the sole legality of

biblical marriage throughout our nation; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we encourage Alabama Baptists and all Christians to continue to be faithful to the biblical definition of marriage and that we call for sincere repentance, earnest prayer and a commitment to seek God's face for a spiritual and moral awakening in America; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That we reaffirm the attached resolution that was adopted by messengers to the 2013 annual meeting of the Alabama Baptist State Convention.

(The 2013 resolution may be viewed online at www.alsbom.org/resolutions.)

Proverbs 1:7

WHY I BELIEVE IN THE COOPERATIVE PROGRAM

// The Cooperative Program is what makes



us Southern Baptist. No other denomination has such a God-ordained and powerful way to support all of our missionaries with each of our tithes and offerings. No one does it better. I know that I am supporting missions each time I give. What a great feeling of being a part of

God's plan." — **Faye Brown**, Ozark Baptist Church (Dale Association)

For more information about the Cooperative Program, please contact State Missionary Jim Swedenburg at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 283, or (334) 613-2283, jswedenburg@alsbom.org.

Royal Ambassador CONGRESS

Friday - Saturday, March 27-28, 2015, Camp Hobbs (15 miles north of Montgomery)

- **FRIDAY NIGHT:** Campout. Many good areas for each church to find a place. Missionary displays.
- **SATURDAY:** State R.A. Pinewood Derby Race. 21 Field Events & Competition: climbing wall, archery, air rifles, football throw, baseball throw, Frisbee throw, tomahawks, hammer throw, running relay, sprints, log saw, etc.

Cost: \$5 per person participation fee. \$2 per person tent camping. \$5 per person cabin. \$4 per person breakfast. \$4 per person lunch. (No participation fee for event volunteers.) Download registration form at alsbom.org/RACongress.

For more information, please contact State Missionary Steve Stephens at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 268, or (334) 613-2268, sstephens@alsbom.org.

33RD ANNUAL Conference



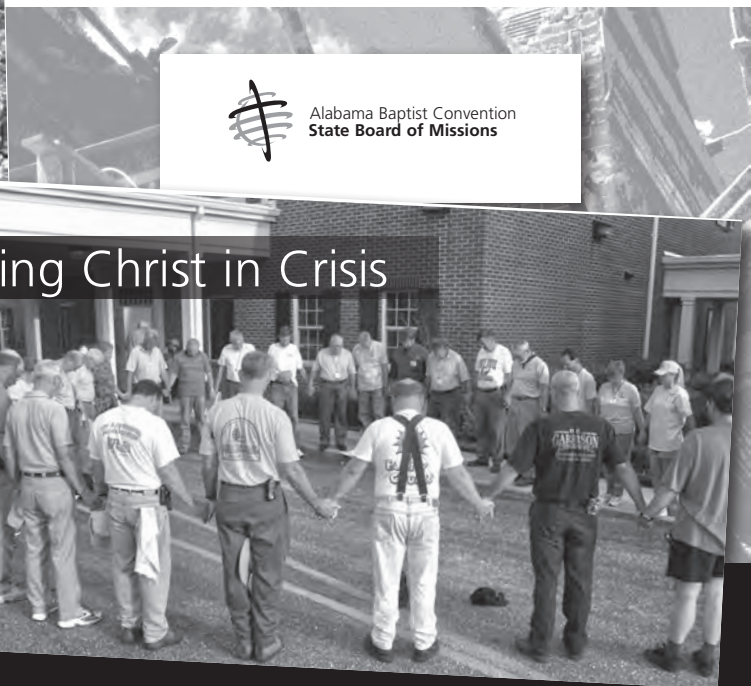
Theme: ***The Well***
(Isaiah 58:11)

Cost: \$276 per person (includes three nights double-occupancy room, eight meals and program fees).
Conference Speaker: Jodi Burbank, Westwood Baptist Church, Alabaster
Worship Leader: Libby Stokes Woolwine, Abingdon, Va.
For conference updates, check online
www.alabamabaptistsecretaries.com.



**Shocco Springs
March 8-11, 2015**

FOCUS on One Mission



 Alabama Baptist Convention
State Board of Missions

Sharing Christ in Crisis

Save the Date! April 10-11, 2015 State Disaster Relief Training Shocco Springs

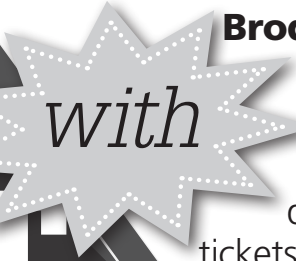
www.SBDR.org. Your connection to Disaster Relief: •Administration •Assessment •Chaplaincy •Childcare •Cleanup/Recovery/Chainsaw •Communications •Mass Feeding •Shower Deployment
Personnel eligible for Assessment training must have prior field experience in Cleanup/Recovery/Chainsaw.



Disaster Relief training is made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.

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MEN'S NIGHT OUT August 15, 2015 First Baptist Church, Athens



Brodie Croyle and Tommy Bowden
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Sponsored by First Baptist Church of Athens, Limestone Baptist Association and the State Board of Missions.

For more information, please contact State Missionary Steve Stephens at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 268, or (334) 613-2268, sstephens@alsbom.org.

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March 19, Liberty Park Baptist Church, Birmingham

May 14, Covington Association Office, Andalusia

LEVEL B (for team leaders):
April 20-22, Baptist Building, Montgomery
 Register online at www.a18c.org/ffst

FOCUS on One Mission

You're invited to join God in church planting across Alabama and beyond. The year 2015 holds much promise of being a time when many souls come to Christ through new church starts. We are pleased to invite you to the following training opportunities:

"Alabama Church Planting Basics" and "Churches Planting Churches"
(courses taught simultaneously)

TWO DATES/TWO LOCATIONS:

~ Thursday through Saturday,
April 9-11: The Baptist Church at McAdory, 4954 Eastern Valley Rd., McCalla

~ Thursday through Saturday,
May 14-16: 3 Circle Church, 10274 State Hwy. 104, Fairhope

EACH LOCATION WILL OFFER TWO TRACKS TO CHOOSE FROM:

1 ALABAMA CHURCH PLANTING BASICS FOR CHURCH PLANTERS AND PLANTING TEAMS: the ABCs of what it takes to plant a church from the planter and his team's perspective. We encourage every planter to attend and bring as many team members as possible (*if possible*). Participants will understand the structure on which to hang their vision, values, focus group, strategy, etc.

Sessions will begin on Thursday at noon and conclude on Saturday at 4:30 p.m. All funded church planters are required to attend all sessions. Meals and training materials are provided; therefore pre-registration is required. Registration is only \$25 for SBC-affiliated participants. Each participant is responsible for their own hotel accommodations if traveling from outside of the area. Non-SBC participants are welcome to attend for \$100 per person. Register at alsbom.org/churchplantingbasics.



2 CHURCHES PLANTING CHURCHES TRAINING FOR SENDING/PARTNERING CHURCHES: designed to examine the values underlying the rationale for becoming a sending church — to lead your church to support a new church plant. Then the six steps necessary to



2015 CHURCH PLANTING TRAINING EVENTS

make this a reality will be taught in detail. This training is designed for a church that is seeking to learn how to start a new church or churches from the "sending" church perspective. Many people are fearful of the idea of planting a church because they're uncertain about how to approach the process. The information in this training will dispel anxiety and give a game plan for Kingdom success.

Sessions will begin on Thursday at noon and conclude on Saturday at 4:30 p.m. Meals and training materials are provided; therefore pre-registration is required.

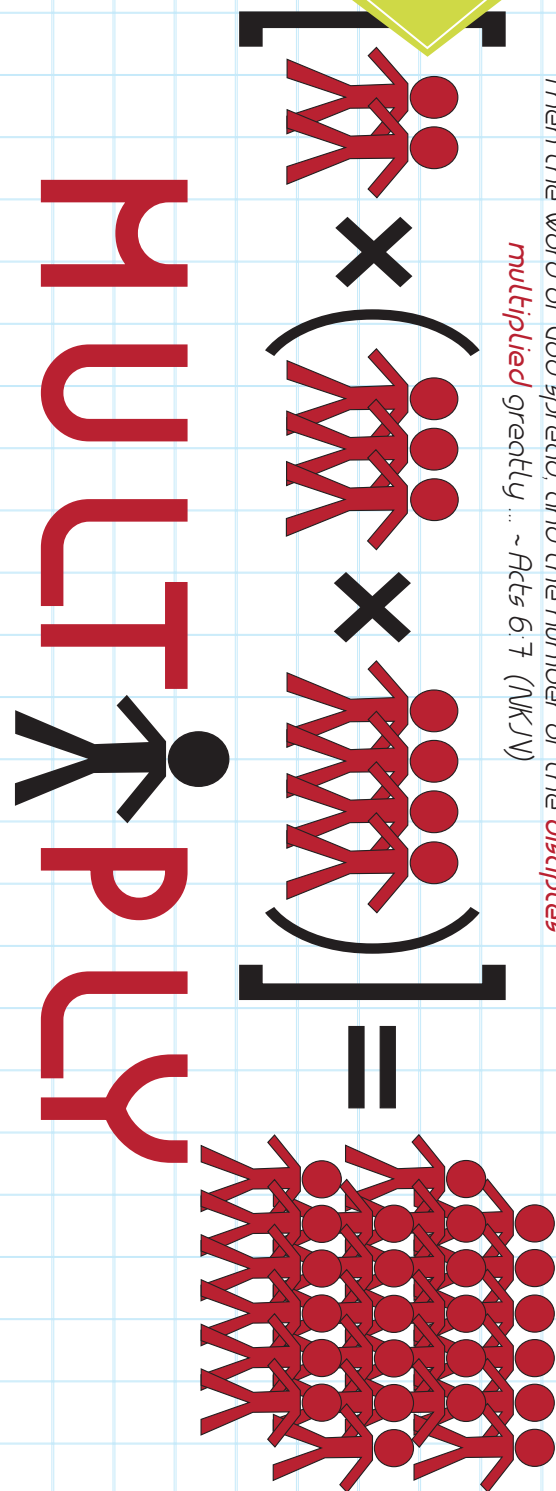
Each of the trainings runs parallel. Participants must select which training before beginning the seminar. A \$25 non-refundable registration fee is required to register for either of these events. Register at alsbom.org/churchesplantingchurches.

For more information, please contact Ministry Assistant Andrea Towns at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 244, or (334) 613-2244, atowns@alsbom.org.

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2015 Regional and State Bible Drills

REQUIRED ONLINE REGISTRATION:
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BY APRIL 13, 2015, FOR REGIONAL AND
STATE DRILLS

2015 REGIONAL BIBLE DRILLS

North Regional: East Highland Baptist Church, Hartselle • Thursday, April 16, 2015. Sign in begins at 3:30 p.m., drills begin at 4 p.m.

South East Regional: Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Dothan • Thursday, April 16, 2015. Sign in begins at 3:30 p.m., drills begin at 4 p.m.

North Central Regional: First Baptist Church, Pelham • Sunday, April 19, 2015. Sign in begins at 1:30 p.m., drills begin at 2 p.m.

South Central Regional: Eastmont Baptist Church, Montgomery • Sunday, April 19, 2015. Sign in begins at 1:30 p.m., drills begin at 2 p.m.

South West: College Park Baptist Church, Mobile • Monday, April 20, 2015. Sign in begins at 3:30 p.m., drills begin at 4 p.m.

West Central: First Baptist Church, Livingston • Monday, April 20, 2015. Sign in begins at 3:30 p.m., drills begin at 4 p.m.

North East: Meadowbrook Baptist Church, Oxford • Tuesday, April 21, 2015. Sign in begins at 3:30 p.m., drills begin at 4 p.m.

2015 STATE BIBLE DRILL AND SPEAKERS TOURNAMENT

April 25, 2015, Taylor Road Baptist Church, Montgomery. Registration begins at 12:30 p.m., drills begin at 1 p.m.

For more information, contact Ministry Assistant Nancy Henderson, 1-800-264-1225, ext. 313, or (334) 613-2313, nhenderson@alsbom.org.

GREAT COMMISSION PRAYER EVENTS

West Alabama Great Commission Prayer Conference March 5-6

Fayette First Baptist
Prayer rally on Thursday,
6:30-9 p.m.

Pastor/staff prayer gathering on
Friday, 9 a.m.-noon

LEADERS: Greg Frizzell,
John Franklin, Claude King and
Elaine Helms

NO COST TO ATTEND
(Sponsored by several west
Alabama associations)

Prayer Rally March 6-7

Circlewood Baptist Church,
Tuscaloosa

Prayer rally on Friday,
6:30-9 p.m.

Morning session on Saturday,
8 a.m.-noon

LEADERS: Greg Frizzell, John
Franklin, Claude King and Elaine
Helms

NO COST TO ATTEND
(Sponsored by Tuscaloosa County
Baptist Association)

Unlimiting God: A Prayer Experience March 13-14

Woodmont Baptist Church,
Florence

Friday session, 6-9 p.m.

Saturday session,
8 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

FEATURED SPEAKER: Richard
Blackaby

COST: \$10 per person (includes
registration, materials and
snacks)

(Sponsored by Colbert-
Lauderdale Baptist Association)

For more information, visit
www.alsbom.org/leadership.

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- Canoeing/kayaking
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- Swimming
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Missions Adventure

Camp for Girls (girls completing grades 3-6):
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Mini Missions

Adventure Camp for Girls (girls completing grades 2-6): June 8-10

Missions Adventure Camp for Teen Girls (teen girls completing grades 7-12): June 15-19, July 6-10

Extreme Missions Adventure Camp for Teen Girls (teen girls completing grades 7-12):
June 8-10

Missions Adventure Camp for CITs (teen girls completing grades 11-12):
June 22-26

Missions Adventure Camp for Children (girls and boys completing grades 2-6): July 13-17

Missions Adventure Camp for Mom and Me (moms and girls completing grades 2-6): June 11-13

Missions Adventure Camp for Mom and Me Little (moms and daughters completing grades K-3):
June 19-20, July 10-11

Register now for early bird rates.

For more information, go online to www.worldsongretreat.com or contact Kathryn Helms at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 325, or (334) 613-2325, khelms@alsbom.org.

FOCUS on One Mission

ALABAMA BAPTIST BOYS CAMPS

JUNE AND JULY 2015

Alabama Baptists have provided summer camps for boys for more than 70 years. Steve Stephens has 23 years of experience directing the camps. Most of the camp counselors are college-age young men who have been recommended by their churches or campus ministers. Background checks and three current references are required. Reference information includes personal relationships, emotional and spiritual maturity, working relationships, and leadership ability. The most important question asked of a reference is: "Would you put your own child in the care of this young man?"

Camps feature outdoor worship, swimming, patriotic services, archery, outdoor cooking, Bible studies, rope craft, slingshots, air rifles, tomahawks, canoeing, Frisbee football, blow darts, compass course, hiking and nature identification, and missions classes with Southern Baptist missionaries.



June 22-25	Southeast Alabama	The Vineyard Christian Retreat Center, Ariton (near Ozark)	4th-12th Grade Boys Camp
June 25-27	Southeast Alabama	The Vineyard Christian Retreat Center, Ariton (near Ozark)	1st-6th Grade Lad and Dad or Mom Camp
July 6-9	Northeast Alabama	Marshall Retreat Center, Guntersville	4th-12th Grade Boys Camp
July 9-11	Northeast Alabama	Marshall Retreat Center, Guntersville	1st-6th Grade Lad and Dad Camp
July 13-16	Northwest Alabama	Earle Trent Assembly Baptist Camp, Florence	4th-12th Grade Boys Camp
July 16-18	Northwest Alabama	Earle Trent Assembly Baptist Camp, Florence	1st-6th Grade Lad and Dad Camp
July 27-30	Central Alabama	WorldSong Missions Camp, Cook Springs	4th-12th Grade Boys Camp
July 30- Aug. 1	Central Alabama	WorldSong Missions Camp, Cook Springs	1st-6th Grade Lad and Dad or Mom Camp

For a registration form, brochures or other information, check online at www.alsbom.org or contact State Missionary Steve Stephens (the camp director) at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 268, or (334) 613-2268, sstephens@alsbom.org.

ONE MISSION: The Great Commission ONE PROGRAM: The Cooperative Program MANY MINISTRIES: Great Commission Ministries

BAPTIST MEN'S DAY

DATE FOR 2015: SUNDAY, JUNE 21 (FATHER'S DAY)

THEME: "SPIRITUAL GIFTS: PRAYER AND DISCOVERY"

EMPHASIS: "WHO HAS THE GIFTS THAT GOD HAS GIVEN TO BELIEVERS FOR OUR CHURCH'S MINISTRY?"

Through prayer and a spiritual gifts survey, recognize the gifts that each man has to fulfill the mission of the church. A "Spiritual Gifts Discovery & Inventory" is available on the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions website at www.alsbom.org/men.

For a survey and other information, you may also contact Ministry Assistant Monica Thompson at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 227, or (334) 613-2227, mthompson@alsbom.org.

Senior Adult

Singin'



FOUR LOCATIONS IN 2015:

March 17: Skyland Blvd. Baptist Church,
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March 19: First Baptist Church,
223 Church St., Rainsville

September 15: Parkway Baptist Church,
766 E. University Dr., Auburn

September 17: First Baptist Church,
18200 Highway 104 W., Robertsdale

"... speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music from your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

EPHESIANS 5:19-20 (HCSB)

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the Lord together!*

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COST: \$10 per person (includes lunch)

REGISTRATION:

www.alsbom.org/senioradultsingin

*For more information, please contact
State Missionary Eileen Mitchell,
1-800-264-1225, ext. 221, or (334) 613-2221,
emitchell@alsbom.org.*

State Church Library Workshop



Friday - Saturday, March 20-21, 2015
Shocco Springs

THEME: "Celebrating 50 Years: Alabama Church Library Organization"

GUEST AUTHOR: Don Brown

REGISTRATION: 1-800-280-1105 or
www.shocco.org

For more information, please call 1-800-264-1225: State Missionary Mike Jackson, ext. 210, or (334) 613-2210, mjackson@alsbom.org; Ministry Assistant Debbie Dickey, ext. 218, or (334) 613-2218, ddickey@alsbom.org.

ONE MISSION: The Great Commission ONE PROGRAM: The Cooperative Program MANY MINISTRIES: Great Commission Ministries

Spring Senior Adult Retreat



Shocco Springs
Monday through Wednesday,
April 13-15, 2015

As you plan for spring cleaning and planting, begin planning also to attend the Spring Senior Adult Retreat at Shocco Springs. Come away for worship, reflection, rest, fun and some great fellowship as you make new friends and reunite with others. You can leave refreshed, renewed and ready to continue the work and mission God has set before you. The retreat will begin with lunch on Monday and conclude with lunch on Wednesday.

Cost per person: depends on choice of lodging

Registration: 1-800-280-1105

For more information, please contact State Missionary Eileen Mitchell, 1-800-264-1225, ext. 221, or (334) 613-2221, emitchell@alsbom.org.

Looming PERSECUTION

District judge warns of shift in culture

By District Judge Edward B. Vines
10th Judicial Circuit, Jefferson County

Every Sunday I have the privilege of being in the company of people who are consumed by love — people who love God more than they love themselves. People who give sacrificially of their time, talents and finances to help others.

Over the years I have watched many of my fellow church members pour their hearts into such wide-ranging efforts as storm relief, inner city literacy and support for victims of human trafficking abroad. I have never heard anyone mention hate as the motivation for any of this work.

As you look at the larger Christian community the numbers relating to dollars and man-hours given to those in need boggle the mind. For instance last year a total of 59,583 days of work were provided by Southern Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers.

In addition to those who actively engage in missions there are vast numbers of Christians who quietly live out their faith by working hard each day, obeying the law, paying taxes, telling the truth, respecting others and their property and teaching these same values to their children so that America's future may be stable and prosperous.

It is for this reason it doesn't seem to make sense that certain media outlets are engaging in coverage of the recent federal court ruling on same-sex "marriage" that could only be described as pubescent, mocking and disrespectful to those who are peaceful, love their communities and hold fast to the same 2000-year-old Judeo-Christian beliefs that have been both the bedrock of and a compass for this country. It seems illogical that there are those who would take such pleasure in presenting a seemingly endless stream of articles, images and cartoons they know are distressing to older Christians

who have selflessly invested in America during both times of war and times of peace.

It seems illogical, but it isn't because the type of religious liberty we enjoy in the United States is unique in history. In ancient Rome, Christians were crucified, tortured and fed to lions. In modern-day Pakistan they are used as slave labor in brick factories. In Iraq believers are being hanged, raped, buried alive and the list goes on.

Although persecution is foreign to American Christians it has by no means been uncommon in history or in other lands. In fact there were an estimated 45 million Christian martyrs in the 20th century alone, more than all the other centuries combined.

Contempt for Christians has been spreading across the nation with frightening momentum as the government has taken an increasingly active role in upending traditional moral standards for the sake of tiny minorities and forcing

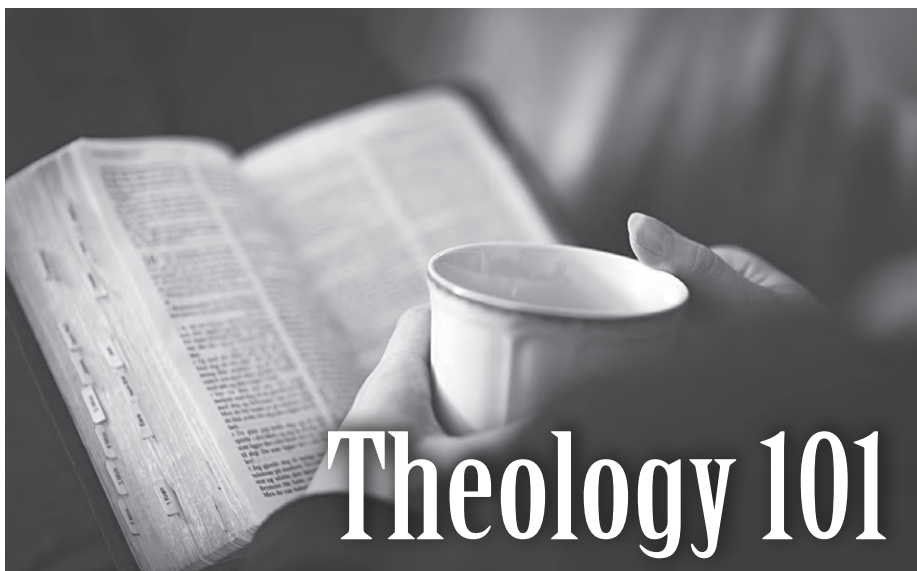
believers to participate in practices that violate their consciences, in some cases under penalty of law. A mere 10 years ago a scenario in which a Christian in America would be forced by the government to choose between his job and his faith would have been unthinkable but now bakers, proprietors of wedding chapels and probate judges are having to do just that.

Persecution in America

In America, Christians have been largely insulated from persecution but the time has come to accept that Christian values are no longer a guiding light in this country and when the day comes that the U.S. is no different from any other nation we will no longer be able to avoid the types of trials and tribulations experienced by our brothers and sisters around the world. Persecution is not here but it is coming. 🙏



VINES



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Images of the Church

The Church as God's Building (Part 3 of 3)

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

The metaphor of God's people being a building was at the heart of His promise of a new covenant. Using the verb "build," the prophet Jeremiah voiced God's promise about the future, "It shall come to pass that as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy and bring harm, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, declares the Lord" (Jer. 31:28). We might say God's promise to build ultimately took the shape of the Church as His new covenant building.

It is a truism to assert that every building is built by someone. Buildings neither hatch nor drop from the sky. They are built by a cooperative effort. In the language of Ephesians 2:21 a building must be "fitly framed together." A physical building requires a team of architects, construction foremen and workers, decorators and other craftsmen. The Church as God's building is being fitly framed together by many workers. What began with Jesus and the apostles has continued across the centuries.

Human instruments

While the Church is God's building He uses humans to build it. Human workers are "God's fellow-workers" (1 Cor. 3:9). This divine-human partnership has been going on since God poured out His Spirit following Christ's ascension. As was true for Paul and Apollos, the human side of the partnership depends on God's enabling grace (1 Cor. 3:10).

In the final analysis, the building belongs to the senior partner. Every local church belongs to God. A church does not belong to its founding pastor or its charter members. It is not the exclusive property of prominent families or faithful leaders. The church has never belonged to an apostle like Paul or a teacher like Apollos. It is God's building.

In the Church as God's building

the foundation is its first and decisive part. As with any foundation, it determines the size and weight that can be supported. The Church's foundation was laid from the beginning, "No one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). While human workers in cooperation with God build on the foundation they work under a caution flag that reads, "Let each one take care how he builds upon it" (1 Cor. 3:10).

Testing workmanship

The work of all human partners in building the Church will be tested at a future day when their workmanship will be disclosed. The imagery about that testing centers on fire and its effect on "wood, hay and straw" in contrast to "gold, silver and precious stones."

The work that passes the test will be rewarded. The work that fails the test will be burned up. Even though the worker may suffer loss, the worker himself "will be saved but only as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:12-14). The assertion of Deuteronomy 4:24 and Hebrews 12:29 that God is a consuming fire will have dramatic meaning on the day when God tests our workmanship.

As we choose to be involved in the work of the Church, we do well to always hold in mind that we "are workers together with God" (1 Cor. 3:9). He is the architect and construction foreman; we are simply His workers. As Church workers we always seek to know God's direction and then stay in step with Him. 🙏

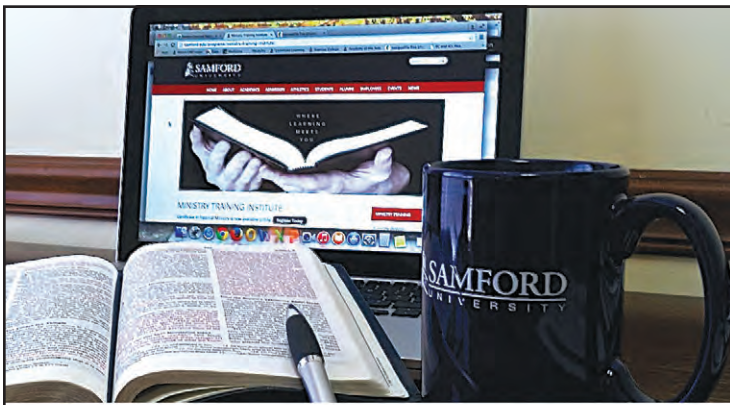
Jerry Batson,
retired associate
dean of Beeson
Divinity School at
Samford University
and professor at
several schools of
religion, is pastor
of First Baptist
Church, McCalla.



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'Use your story'

American immigrant migrates to Canada to plant church

Clint Eastwood directed, produced and starred in a film called "Gran Torino" in 2008. The film was about Walt, a retired Detroit autoworker and widower whose neighborhood was no longer homogenous. Gangs were wreaking havoc in the area. When an Asian teen refused to steal Walt's treasured Gran Torino automobile under gang initiation pressure, Walt befriended the boy, who was Hmong.

Eastwood filmed the movie in Daniel Yang's childhood neighborhood.

"'Gran Torino' was glamorized compared to how I grew up," said Yang, who is a second-generation American Hmong. "Jesus, rock 'n' roll and the girls in my youth group saved me [from the gang experience]."

Minority group

The Hmong are a minority people group from Southeast Asia, and they have no homeland. They reside in Vietnam, Thailand, China and Laos. Following the Vietnam War and the Laotian Civil War many sought refuge in Thailand. By the late 1970s, many of those refugees resettled in Western countries. Detroit was just one landing spot.

The immigrant experience defined Yang both then and now. As he struggled to define God's

call upon his life after college and while starting his career, one thing became clear from God, "I made you for the Word," Yang felt Him saying. "I'm going to use your story of being a second-generation immigrant."

Immigration is a jolting experience as families face lingual, cultural and economic barriers.

His parents made a profession of faith through a Lutheran church then started attending a Southern Baptist church. By age 7, Yang also had professed faith in Christ.

"It set the trajectory of my life and prevented me from joining gangs," Yang said.

By age 21, Yang sensed a calling to "some kind of missional ministry."

But first there was the American dream.

Yang attended the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor on a full scholarship majoring in computer science, then spent more than eight years as a software developer. But deep inside he wanted to study the Bible and answer the question, "Do I believe this stuff?"

He enrolled in extension courses through Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.,

and realized God was redirecting him to vocational ministry.

"I didn't want to be a pastor," Yang said. "I thought I would be a missionary."

He learned about church planting and saw it as a great merger of being a missionary and staying in North America where he felt led to help churches navigate cultural

issues. Detroit seemed the natural place to do that.

But even with a team and meeting place secured, Yang and his wife, Linda, realized Detroit was not their destiny.

So he detoured to Texas.

After participating in an assessment process and deciding not to plant in Detroit, Yang received an invitation to Texas

where he joined the staff of Northwood Church for the Communities in Keller, a predominantly Anglo congregation where he developed a college and young adult ministry while also serving as an associate worship pastor.

"God was orchestrating something completely different from what I would have ever planned for myself."

He finished his seminary degree

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NAMB photo by George Qua-Endo

2015 Send North America Week of Prayer missionary Daniel Yang (center) speaks with two Send North America Experience Toronto tour stop participants. More than 1,000 Christian leaders gathered to discover more ways to help push back lostness in their city. Toronto is one of 32 Send North America cities where evangelistic church planting efforts are aimed.

at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, while receiving mentoring at NorthWood Church. Pastor Bob Roberts introduced Yang to the North American Mission Board's (NAMB) then Farm System, aimed at assisting churches in discovering, developing and deploying the next generation of missionaries.

Yang began looking for a city to plant a church. That's when Toronto, Canada, came into view. After their second vision trip there Yang recalled, "My wife looked at me and asked, 'Why aren't we doing this already?'"

Though just four hours from Detroit, the cities are vastly different. Detroit is 87 percent black. Toronto is vastly intercultural and rapidly on the rise as the financial capital of Canada, while Detroit has been in steady decline. Still he found one similarity.

"I grew up in one of the worst neighborhoods in Detroit and Regent Park historically was the worst in Toronto," Yang said.

Regent Park is a revitalizing area near downtown Toronto. Today Regent Park is fast changing as young adults, many of whom are college educated, are choosing to live there.

"It's a thinking city. You en-

gage people's hearts through their minds," Yang said.

Fellow church planter Mike Seaman and his wife, Missy, joined the Yangs in planting Trinity Church. The families started a home Bible study as they began building relationships in the city.

Influencing the city

"It's always tempting to do what is manageable and predictable," Yang said. "We could have stayed a house church for a long time."

Through a relationship with the Toronto Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club, a meeting space opened up. In September 2013, Trinity Life Church launched with the motto, "Discovering identity and destiny in Christ, influencing the city and the world."

As one of North America's most culturally diverse cities, Toronto is a natural platform for influence. This is one of many reasons it is 1 of 32 Send North America cities. But first there's the matter of planting more churches there.

"We'd like to see multiple churches planted in different neighborhoods," Yang said. Soon a church planting intern will join them from NAMB's Farm System.

Yang has come to appreciate how Canadian and Southern Baptists do missions through the Cooperative Program and Annie Armstrong Easter Offering.

Yang recognizes the advantage that support from NAMB and Canadian Baptists affords him.

"We are part of something bigger." (NAMB)

Building Faithful Families GOSPEL CONCERT



Friday, March 20

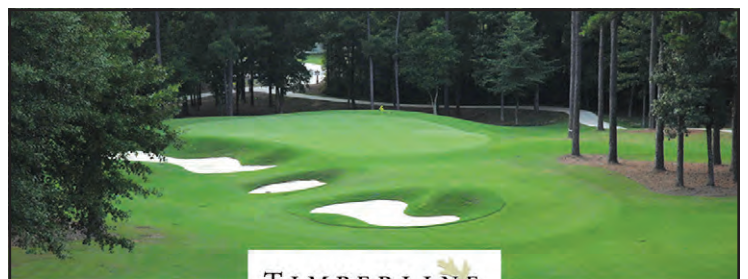
Pre-concert music begins at 5 p.m.
Concert begins at 6 p.m.

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Reverse Mortgage Change Delayed

By Jimmy Dixon

I got word about two weeks ago that FHA will delay Financial Assessment for another 30 or 60 days.

That's good news because at present we do not care about credit scores or income, but that's about to change. If you or someone you know is considering getting a reverse mortgage, I would encourage them to contact me and let me help them get an FHA case number so they can avoid the financial scrutiny. I'm sure I will have people in the next few months who will want to qualify for a reverse mortgage, but they will not. I don't have any better avenue than this article to try and get the word out, so please pass the word to



Jimmy Dixon

your relatives and friends.

I still have four more training sessions on Financial Assessments, and I plan to keep you up-to-date as time passes. But for now, it wouldn't hurt to let me help you secure that case number. That way you can avoid proving income and having a credit analysis.

Remember, like The Alabama Baptist, Jimmy covers our great state helping seniors improve the quality of their lives. He is a Sunday School teacher and deacon at Valley Creek Baptist Church, Hueytown.

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'Reset' button

Platt unveils changes to IMB's strategy, realignment of its structure

International Mission Board (IMB) President David Platt proposed streamlining the missions agency's strategy and structure in keeping with his desire for IMB to exalt Christ and work more effectively toward accomplishing the Great Commission.

He presented his proposal during IMB's Feb. 24-25 trustee meeting in Houston, Texas, and trustees unanimously voted to approve the plan.

"We want to empower limitless missionary teams to make disciples and multiply churches among unreached people," Platt said. "We need a strategy that doesn't cap our number of missionaries merely based upon how much money we have."

IMB operated "in the red" last year, with the agency's operating expenses exceeding income by nearly \$21 million, Platt noted.

"Right now our funnel is really small ... such that we're turning people away," he said. "And what I'm saying, what we know, is that we need to blow open this funnel and create as many pathways as possible ... to get the gospel to unreached people."

Multiplying churches

IMB must creatively consider how to leverage the avenues God has given for limitless men, women and families to join together on missionary teams to make disciples and multiply churches among unreached people groups, Platt said. Since his election in August 2014, Platt has stated his five biblically based desires for IMB are to exalt Christ, mobilize Christians, equip the Church, facilitate church plant-

ing and play its part in completing the Great Commission.

Platt recommended to IMB trustees a "reset" of the agency's strategy and realignment of its structure to focus on five main areas:

- ▶ Global training, led by Zane Pratt, who was named vice president of global training during the November 2014 trustee meeting.

- ▶ Global engagement, which entails work formerly called "global strategy," to be led by John Brady. Trustees elected Brady, current vice president for global strategy, as vice president of global engagement.

- ▶ Operations and finance, which consolidates the current offices of personnel, logistics and finance into one team. Trustees affirmed the search for a person to lead the newly formed operations and finance work. Randy Pegues, vice president of global logistics support; Tom Williams, vice president of global personnel; and David Steverson, vice president of finance, will step out of their current positions and into other assignments to be determined in the days ahead.

- ▶ Mobilization, which "re-envision" the current church and partner services team to more effectively mobilize Christians and churches for global missions, to be led by a to-be-named vice president of mobilization. Ken Winter, vice president of church and partner services, plans to return to work in a local church.

- ▶ Strategy, which overarches all the areas with a "relentless" focus to unify IMB culture. As a result the current office of global strategic mobilization, currently led by Scott Holste, will fold into the new strategy in various ways.

Some areas will report directly to Platt and Sebastian Traeger, IMB executive vice president. The current office of prayer, led by Gordon Fort, will be "infused across this entire strategy," Platt said.

'Used by God'

Clyde Meador, executive adviser to the president, said IMB has gone through many minor and major "resets" in its history to adjust to changing needs. Each "recalibration" of the organization "has been used by God" to advance His Church, Meador said.

Platt said the changes are intended to be reproducible through IMB's national partners around the world. Maintaining a cycle of making disciples among unreached people and seeing churches established, then seeing those churches send Christians to unreached people is IMB's mission.

"Let me be clear — strategy and structure are not the ultimate answer to seeing Christians and churches engaging unreached people with the gospel. ... What that means is that more than we need a streamlined strategy or a simplified structure, we need the power of God to do what only He can do.

"This is why I am calling everyone across our IMB family ... to fast and pray because only God can do this work. ... Let's get down on our knees, then get up ... and do whatever it takes, no matter what that means, to set the sails for God to empower limitless missionary teams who are making disciples and multiplying churches among unreached people for the glory of His name." (BP)

Want to know GOD?

Pastor Torrey Garrison
Relevant Church of Mobile

In the military there is one phrase that is repeatedly drilled into our heads: "Trust your training." As a unit forming into place, every person is thinking about what their next move will be. Will it be to lay down cover for their brothers in arms or will they be the first to lead the next movement?

Every decision made in the military is based on this one phrase, "Trust your training." The reason this statement is so powerful is not only that it's representative of the many hours of training each soldier goes through but also the lessons that have been tested. Each and every lesson you are taught in training has been put into motion in some aspect of life. It has been tested and found to be truth. Therefore it is a key element to all successful teams. In other words learn from others, both the negative and positive.

Being a Christian falls right into where this holds true. Accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, believing in Him and turning your life over to Him has been tested and found to be a valuable and wise decision. Not only has this decision been tested in the good times but it also has been tested in the bad times. We can look around at any given moment and see many of the things we have been taught. We can see God move in people's lives. We see where those in despair have leaned on those things they have been taught.

There is no better time than today to take a lesson from what others have learned and put it into place in your own life. You may not even want to "trust the training" yourself but others have already put those things to the test for you. Your training will tell you Jesus desires a relationship with you. In return for your belief He gives you the promise of eternity. We all need to just "trust our training." He is worthy. Nahum 1:7 says, "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; He knows those who take refuge in Him." 🙏

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MINISTER OF MUSIC: Taylorville Baptist Church is seeking a part-time or interim minister of music. Interested parties should send resumés to: Taylorville Baptist Church, 7201 Moundville Lane, Tuscaloosa, AL 35405, or email resumés to: jnelson@taylorvillebaptist.org. 205-758-0868.

PART-TIME MUSIC MINISTER:

First Baptist Church of Vina, Ala., is seeking a part-time music minister. Send resumé to: First Baptist Church of Vina, P.O. Box 857, Red Bay, AL 35582.

PART-TIME MUSIC MINISTER:

First Baptist Church of Red Bay, Ala., is seeking a part-time music minister. Send resumé to: First Baptist Church, c/o: Music Minister Search Committee, P.O. Box 616, Red Bay, AL 35582. 256-356-9505.

MINISTER OF MUSIC & YOUTH:

Greensboro Baptist Church is accepting resumés for the position of full-time minister of music and youth. Interested parties should mail resumés to: Greensboro Baptist Church, c/o Search Committee, 908 Main Street, Greensboro, AL 36744 or email resumés to: greensboro@bellsouth.net.

STUDENT PASTOR: First Baptist Church of Alexander City announces a full-time position for student pastor grades 7-12. Resumés are accepted at P.O. Box 400, Alexander City, AL 35011 and spsc@fbc-ac.org.

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Reports from the one-third (of the nation's live greyhound racetracks) that do provide numbers show nearly 12,000 injuries and 1,000 deaths since 2008.

'Despicable' treatment

123rf.com

GREY2K USA Worldwide hopes to end greyhound racing in Birmingham, Mobile

Christine Dorchak has seen 42 greyhound racetracks close. She helped it happen at 28 of them.

And now she has her sights set on the racetracks in Birmingham and Mobile, the only two in the state that still host live greyhound races.

The sport is "cruel and inhumane," and it "not only costs greyhounds their lives, it is a parasite on taxpayers," said Dorchak, president and general counsel for GREY2K USA Worldwide, an organization aimed at ending all greyhound racing.

GREY2K recently released "High Stakes," the first comprehensive national report on the greyhound racing industry, and delivered it to Alabama lawmakers to get the ball rolling on introducing restrictive legislation in the state.

Since 2008, about 80,000 greyhounds have been registered to race with the National Greyhound Association, but the association "can't tell you what happens to the vast majority of those dogs," Dorchak said.

That's because Alabama and Florida don't require state records for what happens to their greyhounds. Those two states alone host two-thirds of the nation's live racetracks, Dorchak said.

Reports from the one-third that do provide numbers show nearly 12,000 injuries and 1,000 deaths since 2008, "so you can imagine how many more injuries there must be that we cannot document for you," Dorchak said.

The most common injury is a broken leg, which is "almost a death sentence," because often the dog is destroyed and replaced, she said. Other dogs die from broken necks or

skulls, from being trampled or electrocuted on the track or from contracting an illness in the warehouse-style kennels.

In those kennels living conditions are abysmal, she said. "The greyhounds are kept confined in small, stacked cages for an average of more than 20 hours a day. They race every four days or so, so they spend most of their time in cages where they can barely stand up and turn around."

At Birmingham Race Course in 2013 — the last time the Birmingham Racing Commission chose to share its findings with the public, Dorchak said — inspectors reported three times that the kennel facility was "filthy, noxious and that the place (was) crawling with fleas. The dogs were infested."

But no citations were given even though no efforts were made to improve conditions in between those reports, she said.

And Mobile Greyhound Park does not do any inspections of kennels at all, she said.

"It's a very bad business for the dogs," and the injuries and "despicable" treatment are being hidden from the public in Alabama, Dorchak said.

"Because it's a dying industry, there's very little money to spend to care for the dogs," Dorchak said.

Wagering at Birmingham Race Course is in "catastrophic decline," with total bets falling 20 percent from 2012 to 2013, she said. The track in Mobile saw a 61 percent decline in money wagered from 2008 to 2013.

But still the industry persists. Birmingham Racing Commission has "bent over backwards" to bail out Birmingham Race Course, giving them a \$400,000 emergency gift in 2010 and \$398,000 more to help pay

taxes it owed for 2011, Dorchak said.

The track says "they are in survival mode and they can't make it on their own, so the racing commission gives this dying facility money so it can keep doing what it's doing, which is losing money," she said.

Why? Because the tracks' licenses require that they host live racing in order to exist at all as a gambling facility, Dorchak said. "Even if they wanted to, Birmingham and Mobile could not give up live races. If they did, they would have to give up their licenses entirely."

And much of the income of these tracks comes from betting on simulcast racing, just like two other facilities in Alabama — Greenetrack in Eutaw and VictoryLand in Shorter — which simulcast greyhound and horse races from Alabama and other locations.

It's a tangled web of a cruel industry and taxpayers are footing the bill, Dorchak said, citing an Auburn University study showing that "each additional dollar of greyhound handle is estimated to reduce net state revenue by a whopping and statistically significant \$7.61."

"It's a pit for the community and it's a shame what's happening to greyhounds here," Dorchak said. "Once we have these records out in the public domain it will be

very hard for these tracks to defend themselves."

That's how GREY2K fought until it ended greyhound racing in New England and other parts of the United States, and that's the way the organization is starting to fight in Alabama now, she said.

Informing the public

"I'll be writing a bill to require that injury records be made available to the public," with the hope that getting the public informed will ultimately lead to the prohibition of greyhound racing in the state, she said.

Joe Godfrey, executive director of Alabama Citizens Action Program (ALCAP), said ALCAP welcomes any organizations that want to partner in ending gambling of any

kind in Alabama.

"Our focus with ALCAP is with the gambling aspect, and anything we can do, any reason we can give for discouraging the expansion of gambling in our state, we are going to be working with those groups and trying to accomplish that," he said.

Dorchak said GREY2K is right there with them.

"We are trying to reduce gambling, on greyhounds in particular," she said. (TAB)



TAB photo

The Birmingham Race Course is in 'catastrophic decline,' with total bets down 20 percent, Christine Dorchak said.

For more information about GREY2K visit www.grey2k.org.



Photo by Neisha Roberts

Christine Dorchak, president and general counsel for GREY2K USA Worldwide, holds a news conference Feb. 19 at *The Alabama Baptist* to discuss her desire to close the two 'inhumane' greyhound tracks in Alabama.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For March 8

Explore the Bible By Robert Olsen, Ph.D. Assistant Professor of Christian Ministries, University of Mobile

EVERYONE ACCOUNTABLE Zephaniah 1:1-11

Sin has consequences. We often think sin only affects ourselves but our sin also impacts those around us. We can see this in situations where a CEO embezzles money and leaves employees with no retirement funds. We see this when a leader of a country implements bad policies that negatively impact innocent lives. We see it in the Bible as well. Here in Zephaniah, the opening verses reveal the sweeping nature of God's punishment because of Israel's sin.

Judgment Encompasses Everyone (1-3)

The impending destruction prophesied in these verses is likely to be an immediate punishment carried out by the Babylonians (in 586 B.C.), but it also is pointing toward end time's judgment when God will judge the nations and there will be a new heaven and new earth.

The Danger of Spiritual Compromise (4-6)

Why was God so angry with the Israelites? Idolatry. The Israelites had struggled with idolatry since their Exodus from Egypt. One of the reasons for this struggle is that the foreign gods like Baal and Ash-toreth were visible. There were statues and physical representations of these gods and it is often easier to trust in something visible than something invisible or intangible.

This is true for us even today. While we do not bow down to foreign idols made by hands, we often put our faith and trust in things like our job, money, possessions or our country. Since we are supposed to put our trust only in God, trusting in worldly things is really a form of idolatry.

So while it is easy to point fingers at the Israelites and condemn them for worshipping idols made of stone and wood, we really are no different. What is the solution to this? We need to constantly check our hearts and pray that God would reveal to us the idols in our lives. Then we need to pray that

we would trust God alone for our security and salvation, not our bank account, retirement fund or anything else.

The Israelites were guilty of worshipping the Lord while also worshipping foreign gods. They had given up trust in God alone and began to trust other gods as well. And just like the Israelites we often trust in God and something else. We will often go to church and worship God and then go home and worry about our finances and our lives. Instead of trusting in God alone we look to other things to satisfy and save us.

Idolatry would be a struggle for Israel until the exile in 586 B.C. God was going to punish them to change their hearts. Just as parents discipline their children for the benefit of the children, God also disciplines those He loves to get them to change their behavior (Heb. 12:7-11; Prov. 3:12).

A Day of Reckoning is Coming (7-11)

Apparently the leaders of Judah were guilty of wearing foreign clothing, a sign that they desired foreign culture. They were mixing their religion with the religion around them. This is called syncretism.

Sadly we see this occur too often in American Christianity. Some people blend their view of America with Christianity, making a sort of civic religion where they believe being an American makes them a Christian. Other people take their Christianity and blend it with the culture so that they believe God desires for them the things that our culture says we ought to have. Many American Christians believe God wants us to be happy so some Christians divorce their spouses because they are not happy. Other Christians embrace homosexuality because our culture says it is an acceptable lifestyle. Our views need to be determined by the Bible, not society.

The Israelites were disciplined for forsaking the true God and we will be disciplined for doing the same today. ☞

Bible Studies for Life By Michael K. Wilson, M.R.E. Director, Resource Center for Pastoral Excellence, Samford University

A BIRTH LIKE NO OTHER Luke 1:26-35

A family in my neighborhood waits until late January to remove their Christmas tree. This practice seems strange to me. For most of us, after the weeks-long anticipation of Christmas, once Dec. 25 comes and goes we abruptly shift our thoughts to other things. We get back to our routines. We don't think any more about angels and shepherds; Mary, Joseph and the Baby; or the Bethlehem stable. Christmas is out of sight and out of mind — at least until the next, ever-sooner Christmas season selling frenzy.

We should keep the story of Jesus' birth on our minds more than just at Christmas. His birth and the manner in which He was born are pivotal teachings of the Christian faith. The story of His birth helps us understand the full meaning of Emmanuel, God with us.

Jesus was born of a virgin. (26-31)

Mary was not the only childless woman visited by a divine messenger delivering wondrous and unexpected news. Zechariah and Elizabeth were of advanced age when the angel announced a son would be born to them. Their childless condition is reminiscent of Abraham and Sarah, significant figures in Hebrew history. John would resemble another key figure in Hebrew history, Elijah (Luke 1:5-17).

The child announced to Mary also would come as the result of even greater wondrous activity than John's birth to an elderly mother. Though Zechariah and Elizabeth are identified as "righteous before God" (Luke 1:6) Luke provides no description of Mary to suggest she is anything other than an ordinary young peasant woman. Yet it is through her that God's redeeming initiative was introduced to the world.

This is not the only example in Scripture of God's creative, redeeming activity occurring in unexpected and surprising ways. We also should consider how God continues creative, redeeming activity in this day and

time — through each of us — when we live in obedience to God. Though Jesus' birth was unlike any other He was clearly born a flesh-and-blood human being. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). This is why Christians declare with confidence, "Emmanuel, God is with us."

Jesus was born to reign as Messiah and King forever. (32-33)

This Child, born of wondrous, divine initiative, would be called "the Son of the Most High" (v. 32). Luke's Gospel uses "Most High" as a description of God. It is clear Luke intended there to be no doubt the Child born to Mary and Joseph was unlike any other. Luke identifies Jesus as being in the lineage of King David, perhaps the most significant personality in Hebrew history. Furthermore his narrative presents a clear and specific divine connection between Jesus and God. This Child would be of greater significance than Abraham, Elijah or David. Jesus would be the longed-for Messiah of the great prophetic writings; a Messiah whose reign would have no end.

Jesus was born of God. (34-35)

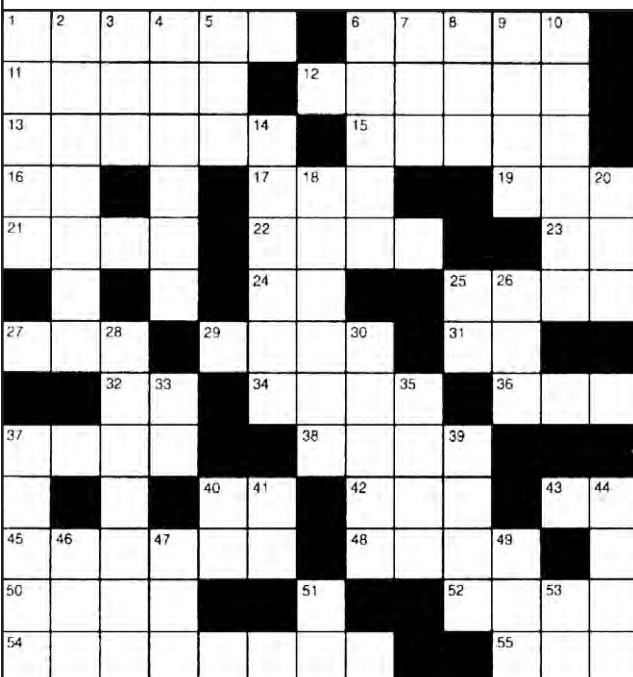
Luke the physician must surely have understood the mechanics of procreation. His description of the birth announcement emphasizes the divine initiative of creator God and the unique status of the Child to be born. We understand Luke's interpretation of these events and his clear sense of God's involvement.

But Mary's response to the angel's announcement should not surprise us. It was an honest question, asked with sincerity by a young woman who was likely thinking many fearful thoughts. "The power of the Most High will overshadow you" (v. 35) brings to mind the cloud of God's presence in the stories of the Exodus (Ex. 40:34-38). Luke uses the same image in the account of Jesus' transfiguration (Luke 9:34).

The assurance of God's presence can calm the most anxious and uncertain of persons. With God nothing will be impossible — even redeeming broken humanity. ☞

Christian Crossword

By Udena McKee Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

- Led the Israelites over the Jordan river. (Josh. 4:1)
- Queen of the _____. (Matt. 12:42)
- A crown of gold round _____. (Ex. 25:11)
- Disciple and successor of Elijah. (1 Kings 19:16)
- Marked with bands.
- Part of the small intestine.
- Overdraft. (abbr.)
- Born in his ____ house. (Gen. 14:14)
- The ____es saw a man coming forth out of the city. (Judg. 1:24)
- ____ thou return unto the ground. (Gen. 3:19)
- Loose outer garment worn by ancient Romans.
- He built there an altar, and called the place ____-bethel. (Gen. 35:7)
- The Lord your God, ____ it is that fighteth for you. (Josh. 23:10)
- Spiral or twisted form.
- Who heard ____ words of God. (Num. 24:4)
- Whoso putteth his trust

- in the Lord shall be _____. (Prov. 29:25)
 - ____ an earring of gold. (Prov. 25:12)
 - Los Angeles. (abbr.)
 - Thus you ____ify the word of God. (Matt. 15:6)
 - One who excels.
 - If a man have long _____. (1 Cor. 11:14)
 - Past participle of lie.
 - The men of Bethel and _____. (Neh. 7:32)
 - Where golf ball is placed.
 - Give ____ this day. (Matt. 6:11)
 - City where the Philistines took the ark. (1 Sam. 5:1)
 - First home of Adam and Eve. (Gen. 2:8)
 - A native of Thailand.
 - What hast thou ____? (Gen. 4:10)
 - A good king of Judah. (2 Chron. 29:1)
 - A male cat.
- ### Down
- A dress or shirt ruffle.
 - Shortest book of the Old Testament.
 - Hannah prayed for a _____. (1 Sam. 1:11)
 - To crowd together.
 - Indian tribe from western United States.
 - His ____ was in his hand. (1 Sam. 17:40)
 - Her mouth is smoother than _____. (Prov. 5:3)
 - ____ them to fasten the curtains. (Ex. 26:6)
 - ____ shall ye say to David. (1 Sam. 18:25)
 - Your steps will not be _____. (Prov. 4:12)
 - Where Joseph found his brothers. (Gen. 37:17)
 - Full of sorrow.
 - Jonadab told Amnon to pretend to be _____. (2 Sam. 13:5)
 - Symbol for calcium.
 - United States of America. (abbr.)
 - Job's friend. (Job 2:11)
 - To fill with joy.
 - Symbol for Argon.
 - Thou hast not ____ unto men, but unto God.

- (Acts 5:4)
- A tract of open land.
- Your Father knoweth what things ye have ____ of. (Matt. 6:8)
- Account of. (abbr.)
- Part of the psyche.
- All of a man's ways ____ innocent to him. (Prov. 16:2)
- ____ is a tree of life to those who take hold of her. (Prov. 3:18)
- Give me children, or else I _____. (Gen. 30:1)
- That which was torn by beasts I brought ____ unto thee. (Gen. 31:39)
- Mother.
- Before them there were ____ such locusts. (Ex. 10:14)



TOP 10

best-selling Christian books

February 2015

FICTION

1. **The Third Target**
By Joel C. Rosenberg (Tyndale)
2. **The Harbinger**
By Jonathan Cahn (Frontline)
3. **A Woodland Miracle**
By Ruth Reid (Thomas Nelson)
4. **The Shack — Mass Market Paperback**
By William Paul Young (Windblown Media)
5. **The River**
By Beverly Lewis (Bethany House)
6. **The Preacher's Bride Collection**
By Diann Mills (Barbour)
7. **Steadfast Heart**
By Tracie Peterson (Bethany House)
8. **Redeeming Love**
By Francine Rivers (Waterbrook/Multnomah)
9. **The Shack**
By William Paul Young (Windblown Media)
10. **Colorado Dawn**
By Erica Vetsch (Barbour)

NONFICTION

1. **Jesus Calling**
By Sarah Young (Thomas Nelson)
2. **I Am A Church Member**
By Thom S. Rainer (B&H)
3. **You Can, You Will**
By Joel Osteen (FaithWords)
4. **The Total Money Makeover**
By Dave Ramsey (Thomas Nelson)
5. **Living Well, Spending Less**
By Ruth Soukup (Zondervan)
6. **The Best Yes**
By Lysa TerKeurst (Thomas Nelson)
7. **Jesus Calling — Deluxe Large Print**
By Sarah Young (Thomas Nelson)
8. **The Five Love Languages**
By Gary Chapman (Moody)
9. **Keep It Shut**
By Karen Ehman (Zondervan)
10. **The Five Love Languages — Hardcover**
By Gary Chapman (Moody)

Source: Christian Book Expo

More than a hobby

Former missionary kid Harris writes for God's glory

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

As a missionary kid attending high school in Thailand, Karina Harris was like many teenagers, using her imagination to write short stories and poems to share with her friends.

She never dreamed her love of creative writing would turn into more than a hobby, but the five-time author has connected with readers through her powerful stories of mystery, romance and God's amazing love.

Harris' writing career took off in 2008 when she switched to a new teaching position at Albertville Elementary School. Serving as a reading intervention teacher allowed Harris a little more free time outside of school hours and she used that time to write. What had been just a hobby blossomed from there.

Her first novel, "Second Chance," was published in 2009. A second novel, "Third Time Around," was released in 2012. Next came the Elements of Change series with "And Then the Rain," "Through the Fog" and "Into the Sun."

Readers call Harris' stories "powerful" and "real" with characters who "deal with real life situations in very human manners while still showing their faith in God and growth as they continue learning to walk with Him."

Harris did not set out to write Christian fiction, however, and she is hesitant to apply that label to her novels.

Turning to Christ

"When I started writing 'Second Chance' I wasn't planning to write a Christian novel. I wanted to write a clean story that people could enjoy. But about halfway through writing the book it became clear that some of the turmoil my character was going through couldn't be solved without her turning to Christ," Harris said.

At that point Harris was faced with a decision.

"I had to ask myself how I could ask God to honor this endeavor if I wasn't willing to publicly honor Him in what I was doing," she said.

As she continued to write Harris said she became more comfortable including faith in her stories, especially in her historical fiction.

"As these characters are struggling with whatever the situation might be, like feeling unworthy or unloved, the truths that are brought forth in the context of the story are that each person is worthy in God's sight and that you can't be or do anything that makes God not love you," she said.

Harris emphasized that the spiritual truths must be organic to the story and characters, not tacked on or stuck in just to emphasize a spiritual lesson.

A great plot

"I have read books where the author's purpose seems to be to preach a sermon and I never wanted my books to be that way," she said. "I feel like you still have to have a great plot or readers won't like the story."



HARRIS

Harris said she spends a lot of time in the planning stages of a novel developing each character into a "real" person so readers can relate to them.

"If my characters seem like cardboard cutouts, readers aren't going to be able to relate to them. I want them to be just like real people, with both admirable qualities and weaknesses. Just like there are no 'super-Christians,' characters can't be perfect."

Harris also likes to use a variety of settings in her novels, perhaps because she lived in many exotic locations herself early in life.

Her parents, LaMon and Pat Brown, were appointed International Mission Board missionaries to India

when Harris was in third grade. Despite the culture shock Harris said she viewed the missionary life as a "grand adventure." Later the family lived and served in Thailand and Harris still calls it the "home of her heart."

Harris currently is working on a sixth novel and admits that making time for writing is challenging. She and her husband, Patrick, have two children, a daughter in college and a son in high school. Harris and her family are active members of First Baptist Church, Albertville, in Marshall Baptist Association, and Harris works in the nursery and sings in the choir.

She also has to fit writing in with her full-time job, but teaching third grade language arts fits right in with her love of writing.

"It's wonderful to share my love for writing with my students," she said. "They think it's cool that their teacher is an author." ❧

Karina Harris' novels are available in print and e-book format at most major booksellers. For more information, visit www.karinaharrisauthor.com.

Prays then plays

Utah Jazz's Hayward plays for 'glory of God'

By Bill Sorrell
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Had he made it, it would have been his biggest thrill in basketball. Gordon Hayward's desperation half-court shot at the buzzer of the 2010 NCAA national championship game against Duke University hit the backboard and rim, leaving Butler University three points shy of one of college basketball's most shocking title game conclusions.

"It was a fun run. I wish it would have ended differently," Hayward said. "Maybe later in life I can go back with my old teammates and laugh about it."

During that 2009–2010 season, Hayward, a sophomore, led the Bulldogs to the national championship game at Lucas Oil Stadium, less than a half-hour from campus. He led the Horizon League in scoring (15.5 points per game) and rebounding (8.2), was the league's Player of the Year, a third-team All-American and the MVP of the West Region.

Becoming the school's first player drafted into the NBA since 1950, Hayward left Butler in 2010 after the Utah Jazz selected him ninth overall in the first round. Hayward, a 6-foot-8-inch, 225-pound shooting guard/small forward, experienced another thrill when the Jazz played the Indiana Pacers.

Hayward's rookie season in the NBA was his first away from home.

"I've had to grow up a lot. I had to move out by myself. When you are out by yourself, the NBA is a tough league. There are ups and downs. It is always nice to be able to fall back on Him. I know that He is there for me," said Hayward, 24, now married. He and his wife, Robyn, are expecting their first child in June.

It also was the first time Hayward was not able to go to his home church in the Indianapolis area where he was baptized.

"My parents (Gordon Scott Hayward and Jody Hayward) went to church every Sunday. They have been there for me my whole life. They took me to church," he said. "It's always been a staple; something I try to do. As long as I am worshipping the Lord, it's all the same. (Denomination) doesn't matter to me."

Before each game his mother texts him the message, "Remember Who you play for."

"It helps remind myself why I am doing this. I am playing for the glory of God," Hayward said. "It makes life easier. It takes a lot of pressure off of you.

My inspiration first and foremost always has to be God. I play every game for Him and after that my inspiration is my family."

In his fifth season in the NBA, Hayward has grown in his faith.

"(My) faith has been good because of the people I have been around. The Jazz have always had good people and people with strong faith. There are always chapel services that you can go to," Hayward said.

This season Hayward is averaging a career-high 19.7 points per game, 5 rebounds, 4.3 assists, 2.7 blocks, .391 three-point percentage and 45 percent from the field.

He was a finalist for the International Basketball Federation's 2014 USA Men's National Basketball Team.

His favorite verse — Philippians 4:13 — fuels his competitive spirit.

"I think that I learned that I can accomplish a lot more than I ever thought I could. I have become (a) more confident player and somebody that the team can lean on toward the end of the game. I have developed off-the-dribble game and gotten better all-around."

Utah forward Steve Novak calls Hayward "such a valuable player because he distributes the ball and he can score."

Rudy Gobert, a Utah forward-center, said Hayward brings "pretty much everything" to the Jazz.

"That is why he is a

good player. He is a very good scorer for us. He can shoot. He can drive. He is a very good passer and I like the way he plays defensively."

A player who likes to run in the open court, Hayward has worked on bringing energy with solid defense.

While Hayward has a quiet leadership style, Gobert said, he has the team's respect.

'Guy we all respect'

Novak said, "He is someone the whole team respects. They respect his ability, his IQ and I think that is important. Seeing the guy who we look to, he has got to be a guy we all respect."

Hayward's twin sister, Heather, played No. 1 singles for her high school tennis team, and he played in the Indiana State Open in mixed doubles in 2005.

"(God) has put me in the spotlight," said Hayward, who hit a game-winning shot Nov. 5, 2014, in a 102–100 victory over the Cleveland Cavaliers. "Someday I will be able to go to my real home and this is all to praise Him on earth." 🙏



Gordon Hayward

Photo by Melissa Majchrzak — NBAE

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Baptists in Kazakhstan fined, jailed for beliefs

ASTANA, Kazakhstan — Kazakhstan continues to jail people for exercising the right to freedom of religion or belief. Vasilii Kliver, a Baptist in Aktobe Region, was given a five-day jail term Feb. 5 for nonpayment of a 2008 fine. He said police arrested him at home in the morning and took him to a court where he was tried and sent to jail.

Judge Saule Spandiyarova ignored an administrative code limitation on punishments when jailing Kliver, who said, "We are not afraid and are glad to suffer for the Lord."

Maina Kiai, United Nations special reporter on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, noted after visiting Kazakhstan in January, "[There is] a general unwillingness to properly protect human rights in the country, and of a sense of impunity by some officials." He also noted state intimidation of those he met. Talgat Rakhimov, head of West Kazakhstan Region Religious Affairs Department, refused to tell why sports fans can share their views anywhere on the street without state permission, but religious believers need state permission.

Kiai said, "It was remarkable that in many of the meetings I had with government officials, the emphasis was on the restrictions to the rights rather than the rights themselves. This is a misconstruction of human rights where the focus must be on facilitating and enjoying the right first and foremost before restrictions, which need to be interpreted narrowly." (F18)

Village leaders refuse to let Christians return home

CHIAPAS, Mexico — In 1 of at least 3 instances of persecution of Christians in southern Mexico's Chiapas state in January, village leaders reneged on their agreement to allow 47 evangelicals who were expelled for their faith to return to their homes.

In accordance with the agreement arranged by state officials, Protestants from Buenavista Bahuitz village Jan. 20 tried to return to their community after syncretistic Catholics — who fuse together various beliefs into one religion — expelled them in 2012 for their faith. When the Protestants and Chiapas officials accompanying them reached Buenavista Bahuitz, community leaders again refused entry until the Protestants convert to Catholicism, according to advocacy group Christian Solidarity Worldwide.

"Traditionalist" Catholics of the village, who practice a blend of Roman Catholicism and indigenous customs involving drunken festivals, have been at odds with the Protestant minority for years. Local authorities who are such syncretistic Catholics told them they could come back to their property only if they became Catholic and took part in their religious activities, including paying for the costly celebrations that involve large amounts of alcohol.

The Christians declined the offer. They returned to church property in Comitán de Domínguez where they've lived as displaced persons for two and a half years. (MS)

Christian crosses burned, destroyed in Myanmar

YANGON, Myanmar — Despite democratic reforms and international pressure that have pushed Myanmar to improve its human rights record in recent years, religious freedom remains heavily constrained across the country, including in Chin State along the northwest border.

"There is no improvement with regard to religious freedom in Chin State," said Pu Zoe Ram, chairman of the Chin National Democratic Party. "Authorities destroyed crosses during the military regime and continue to do so."

The Chin Human Rights Organization documented 13 incidents of large crosses being destroyed by order of the ministry of religious affairs during the country's half-century military regime, which formally ended in 2011.

Cross destruction isn't the only problem plaguing Chin State's Christians. Salai Ling, program director of the Chin Human Rights Organization, said youth development schools in border ethnic regions have been set up to convert Christians to Buddhism.

"The government's plan is to intentionally change our beliefs and mindsets," Ling said. (RNS)