



INSIDE



National WMU helps Liberian schools after Ebola outbreak

◆ Page 3



Faith and Family: Parenting anxieties

◆ Pages 5-7



'Serve because we are saved,' GenSend missionary says

◆ Page 13

About 5.2 million adults have PTSD during a given year. This is only a small portion of those who have gone through a trauma.

(Source: ptsd.va.gov)

Dealing with trauma



WMU's Project HELP: PTSD educates church members on how to help others

By Grace Thornton
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

How would you react if someone in your church went through something traumatic, such as a violent crime or a horrible car accident?

What would you do if you reached out to them and found them to be irritable or distant? Would you think it meant they didn't want your help? Would you stop trying?

Because the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are often misinterpreted, it takes patience, understanding and commitment to minister to someone with PTSD, said Jean Roberson, director of field education and instructor for Samford University's School of Public Health in Birmingham.

That's why national Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) launched a new effort in 2015 called Project HELP: PTSD to educate church members on how to better help those among them who are suffering.

"Sometimes we rush to help and we do something that actually makes

it worse. We have to educate ourselves and our churches in order to be helpful," Roberson said to a group of church leaders from across Shelby Baptist Association who gathered Feb. 26 at Community Baptist Church, Maylene.

The gathering was held to model for church leaders how to use Project HELP: PTSD teaching tools in their own churches. The project offers educational materials on PTSD, as well as a Bible study, prayer guide, list of ministry opportunities and guidance on how to start a trauma care team in your church.

'Not a light subject'

"Talking about how God has made us to deal with trauma is not a light subject," Roberson said. "You go through this horrific event and then it lives with you and you react physically, emotionally and spiritu-

ally. We see that happen to people. What would we do if that was our friends and family?"

Trauma affects nearly everyone at some point, regardless of social or economic status, Roberson said.

To put things in perspective, the leading cause of PTSD in the United States isn't military service, as many commonly think — it's car accidents.

It's important to know how to help a person

through the healing process, she said. "People may say or think, 'just get over it' or 'time heals all things' — which it doesn't."

The trauma could easily spark PTSD, which is a diagnosable condition if all eight of these symptoms are present at the same time for at least a month, Roberson said.

1. The stressor

This is an incident in which the person "was exposed to death, threatened death, actual or threat-

ened serious injury or actual or threatened sexual violence," according to Project HELP: PTSD.

"PTSD is always caused by a specific event and the person's symptoms can be traced back to that event," Roberson said.

And sometimes, even if the event doesn't seem traumatic to the outsider, it can be traumatic to the person if they perceived they were in great danger, she said. "It's the perception that determines the reaction."

2. Intrusion symptoms

The person persistently relives the event through nightmares and flashbacks and he or she may have intense reactions after being reminded of the trauma.

3. Avoidance

The person tries to avoid places, things or activities that remind them of the trauma.

4. Negative alterations in cognition/mood

This symptom can take the form of feeling alienated from others (and/or distancing himself or herself from others), showing less interest in activities that used to be important

(See 'Helping,' page 4)

For more information about Project HELP: PTSD and resources to help with PTSD ministry, visit www.alawoman.com/projecthelp.

Coming next week ...

The Church and poverty

What it means to serve the poor from a biblical standpoint



COMMENT

How Different the Gardens

One was an idyllic place, the other probably an olive grove. One garden was planted by God Himself, according to Genesis 2:8, the other by a family of farmers who eked out a living pressing olives into oil.

One garden's location was unknown. The Bible says only it was planted "toward the east in Eden." It must have been a beautiful place. The writer of Genesis says it contained "every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food." The garden was watered by a river system that included the great Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

Here God placed man giving him dominion over all creation. And here God offered Himself in fellowship with that part of creation He called "very good."

Only a small stream flowed near the second garden — the Kidron Brook. Over the centuries it had been a place of cleansing. First Kings 15:13 reports that at the Kidron Brook, Asa burnt "an abominable image for Asherah" which Maacah, his mother, had set up. In the reforms of Hezekiah, "all the uncleanness found in the temple of Yahweh" was cast into the Kidron Brook by the Levites (2 Chron. 29:16).

During the reforms of King Josiah all the pagan idols in Jerusalem were brought to the Kidron Brook to be burnt and smashed into dust.

Temptation in the gardens

The second garden was located along the eastern edge of this little brook at the base of the Mount of Olives. Crossing the Kidron was considered the gateway to the wilderness providing a hint of what the land was like. It was mostly dry, watered by runoff captured in large cisterns during the rainy season. It was not lush and verdant like the first.

Eden was the name of the first garden. The second garden is known as Gethsemane. In each of these special places came one the Bible calls Adam.

In Eden, Adam and his wife, Eve, lived in harmony with creation and with the Creator



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

but that all changed when the serpent described God as envious and unreliable (Gen. 3:1–9). God did not want their eyes to be open to the insights He alone possessed, said the serpent, and his lies about God grew bolder with each word. God did not want them to know what He knew or understand what He understood.

God was the enemy and could not be trusted, claimed this agent of evil and wickedness.

In Gethsemane temptation came to the One called the Second Adam — Jesus of Nazareth. It was not their first encounter. Three years earlier Satan had tempted Jesus but each time Jesus rejected the invitation to selfishness in order to be obedient to God.

Now the tempter was back. On the night before His crucifixion as Jesus looked at what lay before Him, He prayed, "Let this cup pass from Me" (Luke 22:42). So intense was His struggle that Jesus told friends He felt like He was going to die right then and there. His choice was to save Himself or to save others.

In Eden the first Adam concluded God could not be trusted. In rebellious defiance Adam tried to take that to which he was not entitled. He wanted to be like God. Adam ate the forbidden fruit.

In Gethsemane the Second Adam added to His prayer, "Yet not My will but Thine be done." This Adam would be obedient, even unto death.

Difference between the two Adams

Ironically the selfish grasping of the first Adam's rebellion brought sin, condemnation and death into the world. The selfless giving of the Second Adam provided the gifts of grace, forgiveness and life.

The writer of 1 John reflects on the story of the two Adams and concludes, "For all that is in the world, lust of the flesh (Adam's food) and the lust of the eyes (sexual temptation) and the boastful pride of life (to be like God) is not

from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and also its lusts, but the one who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:16–17).

The apostle Paul comments on the difference between the two Adams when he writes in Philippians 2:6 that "Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped."

As a result of Jesus' faithful obedience God offers to man something to which he has no right — forgiveness of sin.

In Eden shame and guilt was the inevitable result of disobedience. When God looked for Adam, Adam hid among the trees. Gone was the joy of fellowship with the Provider. Instead Adam hid his body behind fig leaves and himself behind anything that might keep him from God.

Still in charge

Gethsemane was a different story. In the distance Jesus could see the burning torches of a band of men winding down the road from Mount Zion. He knew they were coming for Him. But the Second Adam was not driven by fear or shame. He would not run or hide like the first Adam.

Instead Jesus greeted those who came to arrest Him with an almost satirical question "whom do you seek," for Jesus knew the answer. He knew all things. Before Him stood an array of ecclesiastical and civil power but Jesus was still in charge. No one would take His life but Jesus would give His life as a ransom for many.

From Eden the first Adam walked into history the victim of sin, a disobedient transgressor condemned to death. Because of him (and Eve) all humankind is destined to walk a similar path of transgression and trespass against the will of God. As the Bible teaches, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

From Gethsemane the Second Adam leaves in chains but none call Him victim. Jesus leaves as victor. His obedience to God conquers death and the grave. His selfless sacrifice opens the door for a new humanity formed through faith in Jesus.

The Garden of Eden shows Adam's act of selfishness. The Garden of Gethsemane shows God's act of graciousness. Eden illustrates condemnation. Gethsemane opens the door to forgiveness. Eden results in death. Gethsemane is the beginning of life for all who believe. 🙏

"As a result of Jesus' faithful obedience God offers to man something to which he has no right — forgiveness of sin."

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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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Renewed HOPE

National WMU helps Liberian schools after Ebola outbreak

Liberian schools closed for months because of the deadly Ebola epidemic are reopening with the aid of \$44,000 in grants from national Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) and its foundation, both headquartered in Birmingham.

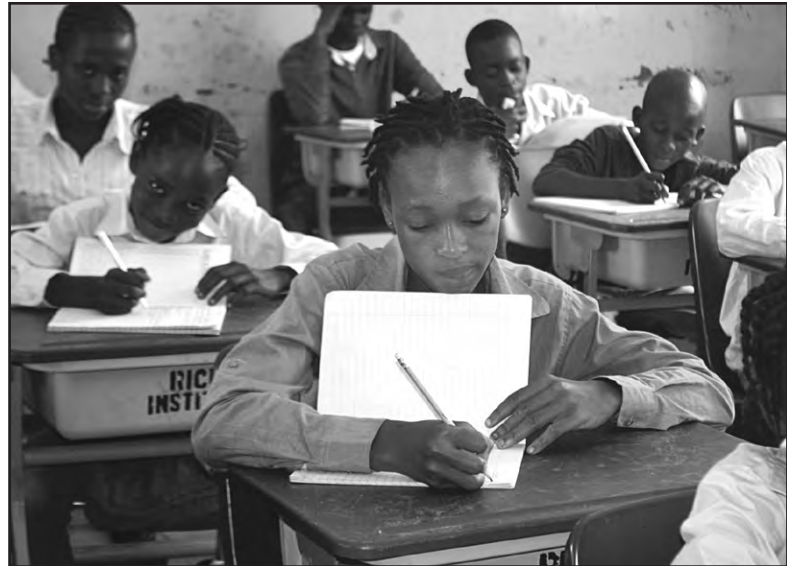
Olu Menjay, principal of the Ricks Institute, a Baptist school in Liberia that serves more than 600 kindergarten through high school students, said the gift brings renewed hope in the country where more than 3,500 people died from the Ebola outbreak that erupted in 2014.

"Schools have been shut down for seven months. This gift ignites renewed hope in a seemingly hopeless situation," Menjay said. The grants from the Humanitarian Emergency Aid for Rebuilding Tomorrow (HEART) Fund will partly fund operations at three schools.

Ricks Institute will receive \$35,000. Menjay said this is enough to cover meals for students for one month at a cost of \$5 a day per student.

The Marla Corts School and the Dellanna O'Brien School, both located in rural Liberian villages, will together receive \$9,000 to help them comply with new safety protocols designed to control the spread of disease. All schools will be required to use chlorinated water and soap, monitor temperatures using thermometers and wear uniforms that leave less skin exposed.

Liberian government officials allowed schools to reopen after the number of Ebola cases significantly declined. The health crisis left many unemployed and caused a desperate hunger crisis. Reopening



BP photo

Liberian schools closed for months because of the deadly Ebola epidemic are reopening with the aid of \$44,000 in grants from national Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) and its foundation.

schools is considered to be a significant, progressive step.

WMU Foundation President David George said, "Although returning to school is a great sign of improvement, many Liberians have

been unemployed for months. There will be a number of financial needs and these grants will help meet some of those needs. We've had a great partnership with Liberian Baptists for many years, and we remain committed to helping in meaningful ways."

At the height of the Ebola crisis in fall 2014, the WMU Foundation partnered with Liberians in Birmingham and Alabama Baptists to

pack a shipping container with rice, beans and other dry goods to send to Liberia. The food arrived in Monrovia in December 2014 and an emergency response team from the Liberia Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention began distributing the food.

Alabama Baptists were among the first to take action, donating food and money to the Help Liberia Food Drive. Alabama churches, businesses and WMU groups collected enough dry foods to fill a 20-foot container and more than \$12,000 was donated to the HEART Fund to pay for shipping and additional food.

WMU Foundation board member Judith Edwards said, "We opened our hearts and our arms to our friends in Liberia. We want to send our prayers but also provide something tangible." (BP, TAB)

**For more information on
how you can help, visit
WMU Foundation's website
at wmufoundation.com.**

Methamphetamine labs down 'significantly' in Alabama

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

Aside from the damage it does to the drug user, methamphetamine causes a plethora of suffering for those involved in the making, selling and distributing of the drug. But according to the Jefferson County sheriff's office, methamphetamine labs are down "significantly" in the state.

Most often "cooked" by combining household ingredients like pseudoephedrine (PSE) — found in over-the-counter sinus and allergy medicines — battery acid and lye, meth was dubbed "Alabama's No. 1 illegal-drug threat" in 2006.

But to combat that statistic Alabama adopted tougher meth laws in 2012 and also became a part of the National Precursor Log Exchange (NPLEX) system that "instantaneously tracks the purchases of all sales of PSE"

in Alabama, the sheriff's office reported. If an individual tries to purchase more than the limit of PSE medicine in a month or year, the sale is blocked and the Alabama Criminal Justice Information Center is notified, according to *The Montgomery Advertiser*.

The state also has a meth offender block list that prohibits the sale of PSE products to anyone convicted of a meth crime.

According to the National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators (NADDI), almost 80,000 grams of PSE were blocked from being sold in Alabama in 2014. That equates to cutting the sale of PSE products

by more than 33 percent in one year, making Alabama the third-largest decrease of all NPLEX states, according to the *Advertiser*.

American Character Builders, a partner ministry of Alabama Citizens Action Program (ALCAP), continues to combat drug addiction by reaching out to middle school and high school students. Resource kits that teach students to say no to meth, marijuana and



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cocaine were produced in 2011 and the kits include a teacher's guide, CD with a PowerPoint presentation, additional resource materials and 30 student booklets. Joe Godfrey, ALCAP executive

director, said, "There's so much opportunity here to help young people to grow and to learn to make healthy choices in life and to become productive citizens. And ultimately ... we would like to see their lives turned over to the Lord."

Ministries are working

And although drug users and dealers still find ways to feed their addiction, state laws, the NPLEX system and ministries of the Church are working. The Alabama Drug Abuse Task Force, created by Alabama legislation in 2012, reported that the number of labs busted dropped from 720 in 2010 to 154 in 2014.

To order American Character Builders resource kits "Saying NO to Meth, Marijuana and Cocaine," visit www.american-characterbuilders.org or call 205-985-9015. ☞

Helping trauma victims

Churches have opportunity to be supportive community

(continued from page 1)

to the person or expressing persistent strong emotions like horror or anger.

"Symptoms like this one can often be misinterpreted by people who try to reach out to help. They may think the person is 'crazy' or that they want to be left alone," Roberson said.

5. Alterations in arousal or activity

The person may startle easily or have trouble sleeping and they may be hyper-vigilant or aggressive.

"A person who has been through a trauma is often on constant high alert and that's hard for people to understand," Roberson said. "And for first responders or military (personnel) it's especially hard to turn off because in the place where the trauma happened hyper-vigilance was needed and valued. But in normal life it's hard for people to understand why they may be reacting that way."

6. Duration

The symptoms must all be present together for at least one month to be diagnosed as PTSD.

7. Function significance

The person may be unable to carry out his or her normal activities, such as work.

"For example if a woman gets sexually assaulted and the smell of sweat is a trigger for her that reminds her of the trauma, what is she going to do if her job is to be a personal trainer at a gym? It's going to be very hard for her," Roberson said.

8. Exclusion

The symptoms can't be explained by an outside factor, like alcohol use, medication or another illness.

In the midst of PTSD and other trauma-related issues "we cannot leave each other alone," Roberson said. Research shows that a supportive social community can be a major factor in PTSD recovery, she said, noting that the Church has an opportunity to be a glowing example of that.

The best way to help is to educate yourself and your church members on the topic and form a care team of members trained in how to best help trauma victims, she said.

"Often sitting down and having a long, meaningful conversation with them isn't the most helpful thing. They need these kinds of conversations but they need to be having them with a trained counselor who specializes in PTSD," Roberson said. "A care team is not a therapeutic kind of group, just a constant presence trying to eliminate some of the stress that goes on with life."

Often the best thing a care team can do is to make days a little easier for the victim and his or her family, she said. "Offer to babysit the kids so they can have a break or go do something relaxing, or set up a schedule for people to take them meals. Clean their house. Become their running buddy."

And if you're going to minister well to trauma vic-

tims, you have to commit to the long haul — even when walking with them through these things gets tough, Roberson said.

"The symptoms will not always be welcoming to people who are trying to help so you have to differentiate that the behavior is an expression of something that has happened — it's not who the person is." ❧

One church welcomed home a member of the military who had served a tour of duty in Afghanistan, only to notice he never came to church anymore. Instead of assuming he just didn't want to be there, church leaders asked the right questions and learned that because of PTSD, he couldn't be in crowds, and he always had to be near the back exit. They decided to start roping off the back three rows so he could sit in the middle, away from people and near the exit. It was a creative solution that helped relieve his stress and allowed him to come to church.

right to refuse to perform marriage ceremonies based on their religious beliefs.

Dubbed discriminatory, unnecessary and a waste of taxpayer money by opponents, the bill is just the beginning in the battle for religious freedom, said Johnston, attorney for Alabama Citizen's Action Program.

"Opponents of the bill do not understand what the bill does and it's because they don't want to," he said.

Gay "marriage" supporters are not simply fighting for their rights, Johnston said. "They want to force

everyone to agree with them and accept them. They don't want anything less than us being required to accept them and their sinful lifestyle."

Christians need an exception in the law, Johnston said, so they do not have to participate in something that they believe is wrong.

"Marriage is just one issue," Johnston said. "Everything about our culture is based on the model of a family with one man and one woman. When you begin to chip away at the meaning of family you begin to change the whole culture." ❧

Someone You Should Know

By Leigh Pritchett, Correspondent, *The Alabama Baptist*

Pauline Jordan



JORDAN

First Baptist Church, Opelika
Tuskegee Lee Baptist Association

FAVORITE VERSE: John 3:16

FAVORITE HYMN: "Blessed Assurance"

HOBBIES: Cooking for other people

FAMILY STATUS: Widow for 26 years after 55 years of marriage to husband James; two sons, Kenneth Jordan (deceased) and Rex Jordan; seven grandchildren; numerous great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren

Ninety-seven-year-old Pauline Jordan, of Opelika, has had missions on her mind for many years. In fact, until recently, she was president of her church's Woman's Missionary Union (WMU), a position she held for more than 25 years. As a result of her devotion, the group was named for her. Even though she no longer leads the WMU group, Jordan continues to work on fundraising efforts for its projects. From the 1950s to 1994, she was a hairdresser and saw her business as a missions field. It provided a means for telling others about Jesus. She also volunteered with a girls' ranch.

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

A: My parents were not Christians but we went to a revival (when I was 12 or 13 years old). Something happened; I asked Jesus to come into my heart. I was baptized in a creek. Nobody had ever talked to me about Jesus (prior to the revival).

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

A: In 1960 I learned about WMU and got involved in it. That's all I've done since then.

Q: What does your ministry work demand?

A: I owned my own shop so I sort of made my own rules. Nobody was to talk ugly.

When you're doing hair you have a good opportunity to witness. You've got a woman's hair all wet and curly and she's got to listen. Some will listen; some won't. It doesn't make you discouraged. There are still some you can talk to.

Q: What do you get from your ministry work?

A: Peace and a happy life. Even though everything didn't go right, you could still be happy.

Q: How do family members support you?

A: My husband was encouraging to me. My sister encouraged me as well.

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

A: To keep going where I'm going and doing what I've been doing. I'm going to still do the things that keep [the ministry] built up as long as I can get around.

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

A: What I will be able to do will make me content. I've always worked. I've got to learn to live without being the leader.

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

A: Without Him, I don't think I would have done anything. He has guided me all these many years to a wonderful life. ❧

Marriage bill is beginning of battle for religious freedom

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

It's one step in the right direction, Eric Johnston said, but unless Alabama's Legislature "takes a whole bunch of other steps in the right direction then (passing House Bill 56) doesn't even matter."

The bill, also known as the "Freedom of Religion in Marriage Protection Act," passed through the State House on March 12 with a 69-25 vote and moved to the Senate for consideration. The bill, sponsored by Rep. Jim Hill, R-Moody, is meant to give judges, ministers and other officiants the

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

Concern and control

As Dan and Margie sit outside the principal's office with their son, Jason, they wonder how things have gotten to this point. Jason has always been a sweet boy, even when his mischievous nature took over. Dan and Margie thought staying busy would help so they had carefully scheduled sports, music lessons and church activities to keep him headed in the right direction.

When Jason's preteen antics had gotten a little out of hand, they had always made it right with the neighbors. His pranks were just part of being young, after all — certainly nothing to be concerned about, at least that's what they thought.

However, as Jason's senior year approached and college acceptance season was looming, Margie ended up filling out Jason's college applications for him because he didn't show an interest. And now Jason had been caught vandalizing the locker rooms in the school gym. Neither Dan nor Margie can understand why Jason insists on making such poor choices. What did they do wrong?



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Parenting anxieties

'Fear is almost never a good reason for a parenting decision'

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

School violence. Grades. Abduction. Terrorism. Sexting. Dating. Bullying. College admission.

A parent's list of potential worries is often quite extensive which may explain why parental anxiety has reached an all-time high, according to child and family therapist David Anderegg, author of "Worried All the Time: Rediscovering the Joy in Parenthood in an Age of Anxiety."

"Parents have always worried about their kids. That's what parents do," Anderegg writes. "There's a reason why a protective mother used to be called a mother hen: hens do the same thing, protecting and worrying about their chicks."

Many parents today take worrying to the extreme, however.

"Excessive worrying is something that causes suffering in parents — suffering that is both unnecessary and also very real," Anderegg writes.

Excessive worry and anxiety are often linked, and when parents become anxious in their parenting their decisions may be motivated by fear rather than logic, according to Rod Campbell, a licensed professional counselor for Pathways Professional Counseling, a ministry of the Alabama

Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries.

"Fear is almost never a good reason for a parenting decision. Running away from a dangerous situation might be a good idea, but making a deliberate choice out of fear is almost always an indicator that the decision is being made more from emotion rather than reason."

In recent years the term "helicopter parent" has become a popular description for parents who seem overly involved in their children's lives. Though the term was first used to describe parents of high school and college students who seemed to hover a little too much, the term has increasingly been applied to parents of children of all ages who seem overprotective or overcontrolling.

Too much control can backfire, however, leading to children who fail to mature into responsible adults. That's why children need age-appropriate opportunities to learn to be responsible for themselves, Campbell said.

Some of those opportunities will not end

as well as others, but those are teachable moments.

"Failure is a healthy and necessary part of life. Protecting your children from failure robs them of the ability to learn very important life lessons," Campbell said. "The younger a child can learn from a mistake, the less painful that mistake will be, relatively speaking."

That is not to say that parents should never get involved, Campbell emphasized.

"Grace is a good thing. Your child should not have to pay full-price for every single mistake. But grace, when taken too far, quickly becomes enablement," he said.

For Christian parents an active prayer life is key to balancing concern and control. Prayer allows all of us, especially parents, to turn our worries and concerns over to God, said Belinda Stroud, an associate in the office of Sunday School and discipleship for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

"Children are one of our greatest bless-

"Protecting your children from failure robs them of the ability to learn very important life lessons."

**Rod Campbell
counselor, Pathways
Professional Counseling**

ings, so naturally as parents, we tend to worry about them in many ways," Stroud said. "As a parent of two boys I remind myself of Philippians 4:6 often: 'Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God.' God is the example of the ultimate parent so gaining wisdom and insight from Him is best."

Instruction manual

"God also provided us an instruction manual, the Bible, and along with the Holy Spirit we can be guided to make the best decisions for our children," Stroud said.

Support from other Christian parents within a community of faith can help ease parental anxieties as well, Campbell said. Children are encouraged when they see their parents and their friends' parents living out their faith in real ways. The support of Christian parents who have "been there" is invaluable too, Campbell said.

"Never be afraid to ask for help. Look at families who have raised children who have become successful adults and ask them for advice. It's amazing what their experiences can teach you," he said. "And remember you will make mistakes while parenting. Learn from them and be ready to share a few years from now when a younger parent seeks your help." ❏



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Avoid temptation to be 'helicopter parent'; guide and teach but allow kids to learn own lessons

By Rod Campbell, LPC-S
Pathways Professional Counseling

I will never forget the day I met the ultimate "helicopter parents." They were describing their son to me and asking for help, fearful he would not be able to make a healthy transition into adulthood. They described his extreme moodiness, entitlement, tantrums, physical violence, difficulty finding and keeping a job, all-night video game binges and occasional drug use. As they spoke, I could almost see him in my mind's eye: the sullen teenager in pajama pants and a T-shirt lying on the couch and yelling for mom to bring him some soda or a sandwich. Then they dropped the bomb. Their son was in his early 30s.

Parenting trend

They had fallen victim to one of the most troubling trends in parenting today. They were so afraid their son would fail that they had become almost entirely reactive, allowing him to set the agenda through bad behavior. As a result they began bailing him out of problems in his childhood (there were literally no consequences for breaking the neighbor's window) and had continued throughout his teen years and well beyond

"It is important that we constantly keep in mind our primary objective as parents: preparing our children to be healthy adults."

Rod Campbell
counselor, Pathways Professional Counseling

until they essentially had a 12-year-old in a grown man's body still living in their home. The mom said to me near the end of the session, "I just don't know how we got here."

It is important that we constantly keep in mind our primary objective as parents: preparing our children to be healthy adults, capable of providing for their own needs and for the needs of others. Proverbs 22:6 says we are to train our children in the way they should go. The word used for training here implies a long-term effort of constant correction and guidance. One way to look at the process of training is to boil it down to five essential steps:

1. Teach principles.

We teach our children principles like honesty, humility and generosity because it is important that they know why they are doing what they are doing. Principles provide a basis to help our children figure out situations on their own.

2. Teach skills.

We teach skills like cleaning, driving and filling out job applications so our children know how to do what they will be expected to do as responsible adults. Most life skills cannot be taught by observation alone. No one learns how to drive by sitting in the passenger seat.

3. Require practice.

We must then require practice of both these skills and these principles so our children learn to do them well. Requiring skills practice is a bit easier for most of us. We easily get on board with kids having chores at home, helping with meals and learning to drive a car. However, practicing healthy life principles is vitally important as well. For example your child will learn the value of saving and earning money much better if they are required to be responsible for some part of their financial life at an early age.

4. Allow failure.

This is perhaps the most important step. Reflect for a moment on the most significant life lessons you have learned. For most of us the lessons we remember best involved making a big mistake and having to live with the consequences.

Lessons that last

Think about the first time you used a hand mixer. Did you pick up the mixer while the beaters were spinning and get dough all over the kitchen? Most of us learned that we must turn off the beaters before removing the mixer from the bowl because we had to clean up dough from places we had no idea it could travel. For most of us this lesson lasts a lifetime.

We must allow our children to learn their own lessons by allowing them to make mistakes and then requiring them to live with the results. They must help "clean up the mess" by paying for the replacement win-

dow or going without a car until they can afford the crash damage.

5. Debrief the results.

We also must constantly debrief with our children on their successes and failures. It is important to celebrate the victories with them and to let them know that you have seen how they handled difficult situations. It also is important to sit down with them after

a mistake or poor choice and help them work out what went wrong and how they would handle it if they had to do it over again. Keep in mind that during these times you are primarily acting as a consultant, helping them to think through the situation. You may not need to add any further consequences, and you absolutely do not need to say or imply "I told you so."

When you are not sure how to handle a situation with your 5-, 10-, 15- or 20-year-old, just remind yourself of the desired outcome: a healthy adult. Ask yourself,

▶ What principles does my child need to learn?

▶ What skills does he or she need to help with this situation?

▶ At what level can I be involved without taking away their opportunity to learn by experience?

Then allow them to make their choices and initiate a conversation about the results. The growth they experience will go a long way toward helping you let go of some of the parental anxiety you feel because they will be a step closer to becoming a responsible adult. ❏



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Follow God's model

God's Word offers helpful parenting guidelines, principles

By **Kathy Steele**

Associate professor of psychology and counseling and director of clinical training
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

Are you anxious about your children? Are you worried that they will not succeed or that they will not be happy? Do you ever hover over your children, managing every aspect of their life and becoming so hyper-focused that you lose sight of the identity and individual developmental process that each child must experience?

God's Word gives us specific guidelines and principles to protect us from the hyper-focus on our children that can be more destructive than helpful to our offspring. Three principles are essential for us to avoid this hyperfocus.

► The first principle is to avoid making the success or happiness of your children the primary focus of your life. In Exodus 20:2, God commands that we not have any other gods before Him.

Focus on God

When we love our idols we embrace and devote ourselves to them while making it our business to please them. Does that sound like a hyperfocused parent?

Deuteronomy 6:5 reminds us to "love the Lord your God with all your heart." Our God is a jealous God and does not want our children to be more of a focus in our lives than He is. Jesus described this same principle in Luke 14:26: "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters — yes even his own life — he cannot be My disciple." Jesus was not commanding us to hate our family members. Instead He is saying our love for Him must be so great that our love for family members seems to be like hate. Only by loving God with all our heart can we truly love our children in a healthy way. Find your greatest joy in thinking about God, meditating on His words, talking to others about Him, praising Him and giving Him thanks. Then you will delight in Him and not in your children (Ps. 37:4).

► The second principle is to follow God's model of being a loving parent. God notices we are hurting and shows us compassion. Psalm 56:8 says He catches our tears. Parents must learn to be aware and sensitive to their children. This means accepting their negative and positive emotions and helping them express those emotions in a healthy way.

God's presence with us is consistent but not overbearing. He does not protect us from painful circumstances nor does He always protect us from suffering. He allows us to fail and to make wrong choices, but He never leaves us (Ps. 139:1–12).

God is an incredible listener and always has time to listen to us. In Genesis 16:11–13, God listened to Hagar's cry and saw her

need. He told her to name her son Ishmael, which means "God who hears." After Hagar and Ishmael are cast out, God's messenger tells Hagar that "God heard the boy crying" and provided his needs (Gen. 21:17–18).

Over-involved parents often have their own

ideas of what they want to happen in the lives of their children and, as a result, they may not really listen to their children. Listening to and understanding the hurts or frustrations of your child's heart is an important component of their feeling loved and accepted.

► The third principle is to follow God's model of loving control in the lives of His children.

God responds to us with the "fruit" of His character. Love is the fruit of His character and some of the expressions of God's love include joy, peace (the opposite of anxiety), patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22–23). Parents may struggle to demonstrate these traits when our children fail to meet our expectations. However, we must put our expectations in God, not in our children and not in others who interact with our children. God is in control. He alone is God.

God's love includes allowing us to suffer. In "Effective Parenting in a Defective World," Chip Ingram emphasizes the importance of teaching our children to suffer well. To teach your child to suffer well, first find out what they are concerned about then pray about it. Don't minimize it. Second align Scripture with their suffering. Help them

to see how people suffered in Scripture and how God responds to suffering.

Finally help your child understand suffering is normal. This reinforces their faith in God's goodness and challenges them to see that God uses their suffering for good (Rom. 8:28). Allowing children to fail and experience suffering is a crucial part of their healthy growth and development spiritually.

God's love balances control with warmth. Help your child understand that boundaries are meant to teach, not to punish. This means parents should avoid setting limits out of anger or frustration. Healthy control includes taking a child's wishes and interests into account, not just laying down the law without discussion or explanation. The "automatic no" teaches children that their preferences and desires do not

matter. Yet God tailors His pathway for each of us, and if He directs us to carry out a task, He makes sure He has prepared us for that task. We should respond to our children the same way.

Balancing love and control

Perhaps one of the most powerful tools God uses to teach and shape us is the family. His patience and longsuffering with us is amazing. He never gives up on us, but He does give us boundaries and consequences, as we need to have with our children. May God's model of balancing love and control be the example we follow in parenting our children. 🙏

"May God's model of balancing love and control be the example we follow in parenting our children."

Kathy Steele
associate professor of
psychology and counseling
and director of clinical
training, New Orleans Baptist
Theological Seminary



Helpful Resources

► **The Power of a Praying Parent**, by Stormie Omartian, Harvest House (2014)

► **The Power of Praying for Your Adult Children**, by Stormie Omartian, Harvest House (2014)

► **Prayer Without Limits: Expanding Your Relationship with God**, by Elaine Helms, New Hope Digital (2015)

► **Mothers of the Bible Speak to Mothers of Today**, by Kathi Macias, New Hope Digital (2009)

► **Setting Up Stones: A Parent's Guide to Making Your Home a Place of Worship**, by Martha Singleton and Greg Singleton, New Hope Digital (2008)

► **Modern Parents, Vintage Values: Instilling Character in Today's Kids**, by Sissy Goff and Melissa Trevathan, B&H (2010)

► **The Parent Adventure: Preparing Your Children for a Lifetime with God**, by Scott McConnell, Selma Wilson and Rodney Wilson, B&H (2009)



Across ALABAMA'S Associations

To submit news items, email news@thealabamabaptist.org or call 205-870-4720, ext. 100, at least three weeks prior to the event.

BIRMINGHAM

► **Kevin Blackwell** is the new interim pastor of **First Church, Pleasant Grove**. He is assistant to the president for church relations at Samford University in Birmingham and previously served as a full-time pastor.

COVINGTON

► **Harmony Church, Andalusia**, will hold "Christ in the Passover" on March 22, 10:30 a.m. Sergio Danon of Jews for Jesus will recreate the traditional Passover service and explain how it foreshadowed Jesus' death and resurrection. For more information call 334-222-8117. Greg Cotter is pastor.

DEKALB

► **Ken Allen** is the new director of missions for **DeKalb Association**. He currently serves as pastor of East Side Church, Cullman, until March 22. He also has served at Concord Highland Church, Hueytown. He holds a bachelor of arts degree from Samford University in Birmingham and a master of divinity from New Orleans Seminary. He and his wife, Sandra, have four children. His first day will be April 5.



ALLEN

and expects to graduate in May. He previously served as student pastor for Cherry Street Church, Attalla. He also served at First Church, Guntersville. He and his wife, Kelly, have one child.

LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN

► **Yellow Creek Church, Leesburg**, will hold a special Sunday morning service to show support for the spiritual welfare of all local elected officials March 29, 10:45 a.m. Legislators, commissioners, board members, law enforcement, first responders and their families are invited. A fellowship meal will follow. For more information call 256-239-9220 or email preach1611@aim.com. Chad Brown is pastor.

MOBILE

► **Bayou Sara Church, Saraland**, honored pastor **Dennis Dunn** and his wife, Darlene, in celebration of their 15-year tenure at the church March 1. Church members presented an entertaining program of remembrance and gratitude. In appreciation of the couple's dedicated service the church surprised them with an Alaskan cruise. A reception and dinner followed the service.



DUNN

MONTGOMERY

► **Catoma Church, Montgomery**, will hold a Fifth Sunday Singing on March 29, 5:30 p.m. The gospel/bluegrass group Glory Bound will perform. A love offering will be collected. A finger food fellowship will follow the service in the Christian activity

center. Chad Underwood is pastor.

SHELBY

► **Mike Shaw** is the new interim pastor of **Riverside Church, Helena**. A past president of the Alabama State Convention, Shaw previously served as pastor of First Church, Pelham for 35 years before retiring in May 2014. ► **Siluria Church, Alabaster**, will hold "Christ in the Passover" on March 25, 6:30 p.m. Igor Barbanel of Jews for Jesus will present the event followed by a time of Q-and-A. A love offering will be collected. For more information call 205-663-7904. Michael Brooks is pastor.

SIPSEY

► **Gary Bonner** is the new director of missions for **Sipsey Association**. He previously served as associate director of missions for Tuscaloosa Association.



BONNER

TUSKEGEE LEE

► **Liberty Church, Opelika**, will hold a Music Only night March 29. Sunday night services begin at 5:30 with discipleship training led by Pastor Frank Chappell. Worship services follow at 6:30. Music Only is every third and fifth Sunday of the month.

WEST CULLMAN

► **Fairview West Church, Hanceville**, will hold revival services March 29–April 1. Sunday services will be at 10:45 a.m., 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. Monday–Wednesday services will be at 7 p.m. Dennis Trimble will speak. Trueman Davis is pastor. ☪

BY JIM WILLIAMS
jwillia@samford.edu

About Alabama

Jim Williams is executive director for the nonprofit, nonpartisan Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama

What Alabamians Think About Current Public Issues

Each year the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama (PARCA) conducts a public opinion survey on the major issues facing our state. The 2015 survey, completed in January, involved interviews with almost 600 Alabamians. We asked their opinions about state budget issues, taxes and schools.

There is broad consensus on most of these issues rather than the deep ideological divisions we hear so much about nationally. The lone exception is the question of whether Alabama should expand Medicaid coverage, where partisan disagreement is evident.

Asked to prioritize among four big public investments — education; health care for the poor and elderly; public safety including prisons; and law enforcement and highways — our respondents voted first for education and then for health care. Big majorities said they were willing to pay more in taxes to prevent cuts in those areas. A bare majority also would pay more for public safety, but highways were clearly a much lower priority.

Two-thirds of those polled believe that too little is spent on public education and 8 out of 10 said the level of funding makes a real difference in school quality. Strong majorities favored spending more on schools in a variety of categories; agreed that the state should equalize funding

for school systems that lack resources; and wanted to keep the education budget separate rather than combining it with the funding of other services. Three-fourths felt the state's goal of increasing the high school graduation rate is very important.

On corrections, respondents expressed the opinion that the state is not doing a good job of rehabilitating offenders. When options for reducing prison overcrowding were proposed, 80 percent chose investing more in rehabilitation efforts.

Support for Medicaid

More than 70 percent of our interviewees agreed that Medicaid, the state's program to provide health care to the poor and elderly, is very important. About 57 percent expressed willingness to pay more to preserve such a program from budget cuts. When the question of accepting federal funds to expand Medicaid was posed, 53 percent were in favor. However, there was a very sharp disagreement along partisan lines. Our analysis showed 76 percent of those identifying themselves as Democrats were in favor of expanding Medicaid, along with 53 percent of independents; but only 34 percent of Republicans favored this option.

The complete results of our survey are available at parcalabama.org/publications/blog. ☪

Ministry Tips



CONNECTING AGE-LEVEL MINISTRIES

By Andy Wilbanks

Minister of Children
Hunter Street Baptist Church, Hoover

Most of us grew up in churches where age-level ministries stood on their own. There was no connection between the different ministry areas and no teamwork to influence families. Thankfully that is

changing. Many churches and ministries realize they need a comprehensive, team approach to leading the next generation.

Even in our ministries most of us have been guilty of operating in a silo mindset without intentionally looking for ways to connect to the age-level ministries before and after us. As a children's minister, how do you connect with the preschool min-

istry and build on the foundation that has been established with that ministry? Have you considered asking the student minister to partner on some of your big events during the year to help build relationships with kids, parents and leaders for the future?

I think we would all agree Scripture teaches us that parents are the spiritual

leaders for their children. We the Church can't take on that responsibility. But we can be intentional about how we partner with parents to lay spiritual foundations as a team in age-level ministries.

Look for ways to collaborate and connect ministry areas to have the greatest impact. Go team, go! ☪

Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

2015 marks 75 years since death of famous poet, songwriter

Carl Gustav Boberg (1859–1940), a Swedish poet and statesman, left a legacy with the poem “O Store Gud” (O Great God), which became the great hymn “How Great Thou Art.”

This year marks the 75th anniversary of his death.

The son of a carpenter, Boberg was born Aug. 16, 1859, in Monsteras, Sweden. At age 19 he became a Christian.

Important positions

Boberg held important positions in both church and government. He served as a lay minister in the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden and edited a weekly Christian newspaper, *Witness of the Truth*, for 26 years (1890–1916). He served in the Swedish Parliament for 20 years (1912–1931).

He wrote more than 60 poems and songs. His most famous were “Jesus,

Jesus, Name Most Precious,” “My Soul Now Magnifies the Lord” and “O Store Gud.”

He died Jan. 7, 1940, in Kalmar, Sweden, and is buried in Monsteras.

He wrote the lyrics of “O Store Gud” in 1885 when he was just 26 years old. An experience he had while returning home from church one evening inspired the song.

“It was that time of year when everything seemed to be in its richest coloring,” he recalled. “The birds were singing ... everywhere. It was very warm; a thunderstorm appeared on the horizon and soon (there was) thunder and lightning. We had to hurry to shelter. But the storm was soon over and the clear sky appeared. When I came home I opened my window toward the sea. There evidently had been a funeral and the bells were playing the tune of

“When eternity’s clock calling my saved soul to its Sabbath rest.”

The poem was published the following year in the *Monsteras News*, but it took a long and circuitous route to become today’s popular hymn. It was set to a Swedish folk tune, and words and music were published in *Witness of the Truth* in 1891. The song was later translated into German. In 1927 it was published in a Russian version of the German text.

Stuart K. Hine, British missionary to Ukraine, then found the Russian version and translated it into English.

He wrote additional verses that became part of today’s familiar hymn. This expanded version was published in a missionary magazine, *Grace and Peace*, several years after Boberg died.

During a 1957 Billy Graham crusade, George Beverly Shea and Cliff Barrows

popularized the song, singing it more than 100 times because of audience requests.

Elvis Presley recorded two Grammy-winning versions of “How Great Thou Art” in 1967 and in 1974. Thanks to him, “O Store Gud” experienced a revival and became popular in Boberg’s native Sweden.

Ranked second

“How Great Thou Art” is a favorite in many countries. In America it is often ranked second after “Amazing Grace.” In 2014 a nationwide poll in Great Britain named it the most popular hymn.

Seventy-five years after his death, Boberg’s poem — a tribute to the majesty of God — lives on. There are 1,700 documented recordings of the song. It continues to reach new generations. Carrie Underwood’s recent version has sold more than 599,000 digital copies. ❧

By Joanne Sloan

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



BOBERG

REFLECTIONS



Alabama Legislature approves 2 bills allowing more cities to have wet/dry vote

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

After the Alabama Supreme Court struck down a 2009 law in February that allowed small towns in the state to vote on alcohol sales, the state Legislature responded “in favor” of alcohol sales. It approved two bills March 12 to allow more than 30 cities and towns in dry counties to choose whether they go wet or dry.

Gov. Robert Bentley signed House Bill 72 (HB 72) and House Bill 73 (HB 73) into law the same day, which at least makes the law “properly written,” said Birmingham attorney Eric Johnston.

Written in response

Both bills were written in response to February’s ruling — HB 72 to defend the validity of smaller towns’ referendums and HB 73 to fix the disputed law itself.

The 2009 law had been amended to allow cities with a population of more than 1,000 residents to hold wet/dry referendums. However, the amendment excluded Blount, Randolph and Clay

counties, something Johnston argued was a violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th amendment and what led to the law being struck down.

HB 73 was initially introduced by Rep. Jimmy Martin, R-Clanton, to include municipalities of 500 residents or more — but was amended to keep the threshold at 1,000.

And although the law is “fixed” now, Joe Godfrey, executive director of Alabama Citizens Action Program (ALCAP), said, “We are disappointed that these bills passed and were signed into law, and that these communities can now legally sell ... alcohol — a mind-altering and addictive drug.”

“The only hope for moving our culture away from its current obsession with alcohol and

other drugs will be for churches to educate their own members and members of the community ... about the addictive nature of

alcohol and the danger it poses to families.”

Godfrey said ALCAP will continue to speak out about the expansion of alcohol sales in Alabama. The next “big battle,” he said, will be to try to stop the passage of Senate Bill 115, which calls for the privatization of all Alcoholic Beverage Control stores in the state.

Alabama is a “control state” which means it controls the retail sales of liquor, something Godfrey said leads to a lower consumption of liquor than privatized states.

“ALCAP wants to see low consumption continue in Alabama,” Godfrey said. ❧

“The only hope for moving our culture ... will be for churches to educate their own members.”

**Joe Godfrey
executive director, ALCAP**

Immigration reform

LifeWay study finds evangelicals want border security, path to citizenship

When it comes to immigration reform, American evangelicals want it all. Nine out of 10 (86 percent) want more border security. Six in 10 (61 percent) support a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. More than two-thirds (68 percent) favor both.

Those are among the results of a new survey of evangelicals from Nashville-based LifeWay Research. The study, sponsored by the Evangelical Immigration Table and World Relief, found widespread support for immigration reform.

"Evangelicals are united in their desire for significant immigration reform," said Scott McConnell, vice president of LifeWay Research.

A number of high profile evangelical groups have promoted immigration reform in recent years, including the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). Many evangelical pastors also support reform.

A November 2014 LifeWay Research study found many pastors want a mix of justice and mercy when it comes to immigration. More than half (54 percent) support a path to citizenship. Most (91 percent) evangelical pastors also say the government should stop illegal immigration.

In the February 2015 study researchers found similar views among all evangelicals.

Nine out of 10 (88 percent) say reform should respect the rule of law and secure the national borders (86 percent).

They also want to protect the unity of immigrant families (72 percent) and to respect people's God-given dignity (82 percent).

More than two-thirds (68 percent) of evangelicals say it is important for Congress to take action on immigration reform in 2015.

"We pray for Congress to stop waiting and start legislating."

**Leith Anderson
president, National
Association of
Evangelicals**

Leith Anderson, president of NAE, said, "Evangelicals care about immigrants and want immigration reform. We pray for Congress to stop waiting and start legislating."

Researchers found some differences by age and ethnicity among evangelicals.

Those over age 64 (84 percent) are more likely to want Congress to act than those 18 to 34 (59 percent). Those 18 to 34 are more likely (72 percent) to say reform should include a path to citizenship.

Hispanic evangelicals (79 percent) are more likely than white evangelicals (54 percent) to support a path to citizenship.

Some evangelicals are uneasy about the number of recent immigrants to the United States, according to the survey.

Almost half (48 percent) say immigrants drain the country's economic resources.

Other evangelicals view immigration as a chance to love immigrants (40 percent) and or to share Jesus with newcomers (42 percent).

Messengers to the 2011 Southern Baptist Convention in Phoenix, Ariz., approved the resolution "On Immigration and the Gospel" that called for the advancement of the gospel of Jesus while pursuing justice and compassion. The resolution urged the government to make a priority of border security and holding businesses accountable in their hiring. It also requested that after securing the borders public officials establish "a just and compassionate path to legal status, with appropriate restitution ... for those undocumented immigrants already living in country."

Researchers asked evangelicals to list which factor has most influenced their beliefs about immigration. One in 10 (12 percent) chose the Bible, and only 2 percent named their church.

Among other influences: relationships with immigrants (17 percent), friends and family (16 percent) and the media (16 percent).

Reaching out to immigrants

LifeWay Research also found many churches don't talk about immigration, and few take action on this issue. Two-thirds of evangelicals (68 percent) say their church has never encouraged them to reach out to immigrants.

About half (53 percent) are familiar with the Bible's teaching about immigrants. Two-thirds (68 percent) say they'd value hearing a sermon about the Bible's views on immigration.

"The sad part of this research on immigration is that American evangelicals are more influenced by the media than by their Bibles and their churches combined," Anderson said. "We need to turn off our TVs and open up our Bibles." (LifeWay, BP)

Want to know GOD?

Pastor Jay Stewart
First Baptist Church, Ashville

The time I spent in college at Jacksonville State University was a great time of growth in my life. I was very idealistic and optimistic about life and my plans for the future. Many times, unfortunately, my optimism was accompanied by procrastination.

At the end of my third semester as a vocal major I was called in for a "heart-to-heart" discussion with my voice professor, Dr. Richard Armstrong. "Doc," as everyone called him, was kind but direct. He told me if my progress and effort didn't improve, I would not make it as a voice major.

He said, "Jay, you need to look down the road 30 years and decide what you want your life to be like. Once you think you've figured that out, you need to do the same thing again for 20 years from now and so on.

... If what you are doing right now doesn't move you to where you want to be 30 years from now, you're wasting your time." That was a wake-up call.

As important as college degrees and what we're going to be "when we grow up" are, they pale in comparison to eternity don't they? The vast majority of Americans believe in life after death so I'm guessing you do too. If you look down the path of your life all the way to the end, are you certain that will be heaven?

First John 5:13 states, "These things have I written unto you, that you may know that you have eternal life." You can know where your eternity will be spent. Because people aren't perfect (Rom. 3:23) we can't go to heaven based on our goodness. We have to have help — perfect help. Jesus provided the way when He went to the cross (John 3:16). Romans 10:9-10 shows us the way to access the help Jesus offered. "That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart God has raised Him from the dead you will be saved." By receiving this offering of love from God, you can be assured you aren't wasting precious days in this life and most of all be assured the hope of heaven. 🙏

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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR: Southside Baptist Church is seeking a full-time pastor. Send resumés to: Pastor Search Committee, Southside Baptist Church, 1213 West Bypass, Andalusia, AL 36420, or email resumés to: southside@sbcandalusia.com. Resumés should be received by May 15.

MUSIC WORSHIP LEADER: Mt. Signal Baptist Church near Hargis Retreat in Chelsea, Ala., is looking for someone to lead music worship. We are a small traditional church attempting to reinvent ourselves for another generation of worshippers. Guitar, etc. a plus as we try to reach the next generation. Small weekly compensation available. Contact Pastor Leonard Irvin at 205-913-4458 or airvin@bham.rr.com.

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.

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.

més to: greensboro@bellsouth.net.

DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S MINISTRY: First Baptist Church of Ashville is accepting resumés for the position of full-time director of children's ministry. Resumés are accepted at P.O. Box 579, Ashville, AL 35953.

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY DIRECTOR: First Baptist Church of Birmingham is seeking a part-time director for our children's ministry program. This person should be a committed believer, gifted in organization and leadership, and most of all committed to loving children and their families. Resumés can be sent to: cjames@fbcbham.org or mailed to: Children's Search Committee, 2209 Lakeshore Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209.

OTHER POSITIONS

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS: Mallary Baptist Association of Albany, Ga., is seeking a director of missions. The association presently serves 50 churches and missions in the counties of Dougherty, Lee and Worth. Qualified candidates must be a committed Southern Baptist Christian who demonstrates a sense of call to missions service and evangelism. Previous experience as a director of missions, pastor, church staff member with specific mission responsibilities or other association staff position desired with supervisory and administrative experi-

ence. Candidate must understand Baptist denominational issues and have the ability to work with diverse congregations. A degree in pastoral or educational ministries from an accredited Baptist seminary preferred. Resumés will be accepted through May 31 and may be mailed to: Mallary Baptist Association, ATTN: DOM Search Committee, P.O. Box 50593, Albany, GA 31703, or emailed to: minassistant@mallyary-baptist.org.

CLERICAL SECRETARY: M-TH, 8-4. Paid vacation, sick time and holidays. Please mail resumés to: Grandview Baptist Church, 2400 Forrester Road, Dothan, AL 36301.

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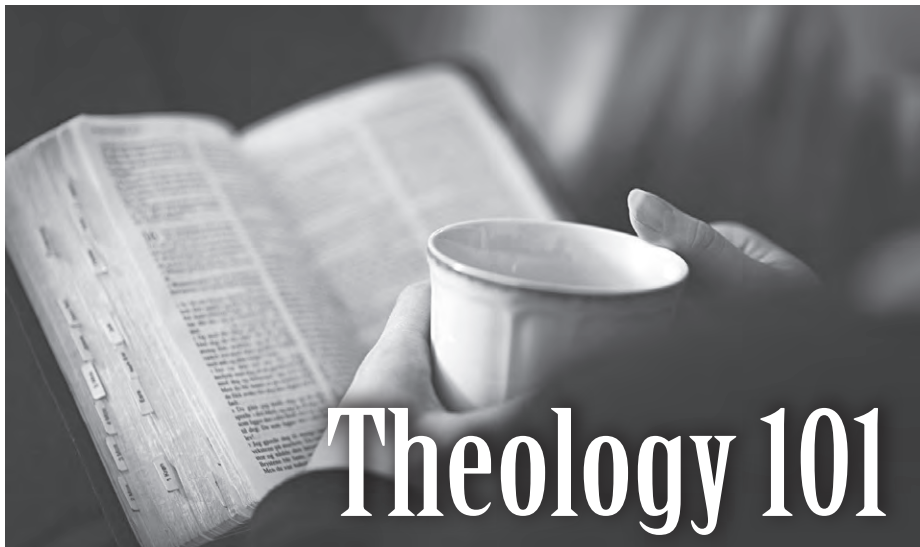
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Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Images of the Church

The Church as Priesthood

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

We took notice last week that in 1 Corinthians 3:16 and Ephesians 2:21 the Church is termed a temple. The imagery of the Church as “a holy temple in the Lord” is closely associated with the image of the Church as a holy and royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:5, 9). In reading the Old Testament we connect the priesthood with the temple. This week our image of the Church makes that small step from temple to priesthood.

It is not without significance that these images compel us to think of believers in a collective sense. As noted last week, the plural form of “you,” in the declaration that “you are God’s temple” (1 Cor. 3:16), designates the whole congregation as a temple.

Likewise while we might think of each individual believer as a priest, the idea of priesthood implies a company of priests. When we think of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers we are thinking collectively, not individually. A priesthood must be envisioned as a fellowship of individual priests. Using everyday phrasing, we must always say of the Church, “We are in this together.”

Offering sacrifices

What can we say was the basic function of the Old Testament priesthood? In short summary we can say that priests represented the people before God. The most obvious way they did this was to offer to God the sacrifices the people brought to the altar. Symbolically this representation was seen in the breastplate worn by the high priest when he entered God’s presence. That breastplate had on it precious stones that represented the tribes of Israel (Ex. 39:14). On behalf of the people the priests offered sacrifices to God.

Applying the priesthood imagery to the Church we might say that as a holy and royal priesthood we also offer spiritual sacrifices to God. First Peter

2:5 puts it like this, “You yourselves like living stones are being built up a spiritual house to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

The Bible doesn’t leave us wondering about what spiritual sacrifices are. They include the offerings of our bodies in dedication to God (Rom. 12:1); of our praise to God (Heb. 13:15); of doing good to others and the sharing of our material gifts (Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:16); and, from time to time, of our brokenness and contrition when we sin (Ps. 51:17). The idea of offering something up to God is the language of worship. As a royal priesthood, the Church’s engagement is that of worship.

Proclaiming excellencies

When 1 Peter 2:9 terms the Church “a royal priesthood,” it goes on to explain the function to be that of proclaiming “the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” In this instance the assignment is couched in the language of witness or proclamation.

We have two very basic ideas connected with the Church as a priesthood — that of worship and of proclamation. When we look inward at ourselves as the Church, we exist to worship God. When we look outward at our world, we exist to proclaim God’s truth to others. A healthy priesthood engages in both simultaneously. Along with other ministries, we worship — offering up spiritual sacrifices to God — and we witness — proclaiming the excellencies of God. 🕊

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.



‘Exceptional growth’

Samford’s nursing school among top in nation

According to *U.S. News and World Report*, Samford University’s nursing school master’s programs are among the best in the nation.



The Ida V. Moffett School of Nursing in Birmingham was ranked among the top 100 best nursing schools by the report released March 10 — the *U.S. News*’ first expanded ranking of nursing schools.

Rankings were based on 13 quality indicators related to student selectivity and achievement, faculty resources, research activity and peer assessments of quality and specialties.

Master’s concentrations

Samford’s nursing school offers master’s concentrations in family nurse practitioner, nurse educator and nurse anesthesia.

Jane S. Martin, Ida V. Moffett School of Nursing associate dean for graduate programs, said, “Our programs are still young compared to many across the United States. It’s remarkable to think that in 1997 we graduated our first class of just two students. Fast-forward to today and we have

400 enrolled in our graduate programs and alumni living in 40 different states and in countries around the world.”

Samford President Andrew Westmoreland said, “This new ranking is a strong affirmation of the exceptional growth — both academically and numerically — of our graduate programs in nursing.

“To be among the top 100 schools nationally the first time we enter this ranking affirms the efforts of our nursing faculty and administration to make (the school of nursing) a recognized leader in nursing and health care education.” (Samford, *TAB*)

“This new ranking is a strong affirmation of ... growth.”

Andrew Westmoreland, president, Samford University

Kinsey Baptist Church honors accompanists



Photo courtesy of Kinsey Baptist Church

Kinsey Baptist Church recently honored Evelyn Raley Laseter (right) and Melinda Hardy Cochran (left) for their combined 50 years of playing the piano and organ for the Columbia Baptist Association church. Pastor Bradley Hardy (center) presented each woman with a gift certificate and plaque Jan. 18 commemorating their years of service.

'Constructing children'

Biological same-sex parents could be reality by 2017

Same-sex couples could soon have their own biological children by utilizing a reproductive technology being developed by researchers at Cambridge University and Israel's Weizmann Institute of Science. But Christian bioethicists have classified the potential new technology as rife with moral problems.

Exuberance over such technologies is "all expressed in terms of what the adults want and desire," said Paige Cunningham, executive director of the Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity. "I would like someone to say, 'What about the children?' They don't have any voice in how they are the subject of an experiment like this."

Cambridge and Weizmann Institute researchers have discovered how to take skin cells from an adult, transform them into what are known as induced pluripotent stem cells (iPS) and then develop those iPS cells into the precursors of human eggs and sperm. The production of iPS cells is not new, but their potential development into eggs and sperm is.

The next step of the research process will be to develop the precursor cells — known as primordial germ cells (PGCs) — into mature sperm and eggs. The maturation process will involve inserting the PGCs into a human or animal ovary or testicle, or developing a laboratory process to achieve the same effect.

Producing embryos

If the research proves successful, an egg could be developed from the skin cells of a male and then combined with the sperm of another male to produce an embryo. A surrogate mother would have to carry the resultant baby to term. Alternately, a female's skin cells could be developed into sperm and combined with an egg from another female, with one of

the two female partners carrying the baby to term. Jacob Hanna, one of the lead researchers in the project, said, "We have succeeded in the first and most important step of the process, where we succeed in reaching the progenitor cell state for sperm and egg, though it is very important to emphasize that we have not achieved mature sperm and eggs. So we are now focusing on completing the second half of this process."

If lesbians someday use this technique to become parents, they will only be able to produce female offspring unless a Y chromosome is somehow imported into their genetic material — because female genetic material does not contain the Y-chromosomes necessary to produce baby boys.

David Prentice, vice president and research director of the Charlotte Lozier Institute in Washington, said, "We're talking about manufacturing children in all of these [scenarios]. If you get into that mindset, you might envision having not a sperm bank, but a Y-chromosome bank where you can just add a Y chromosome to some of these cells, find the right mix that you want of traits and add that Y chromosome in there. It's of great concern."

Cunningham said producing rather than procreating a baby is "inherently wrong."

"When we start constructing children ... we are no longer welcoming [the children] but we are creating them, in many cases to fulfill a desire or need of our own," she said.

Developing babies from PGCs could produce children with genetic defects as well as cause psychological harm not quantifiable with science, Cunningham said.

"Anytime you start messing around with genes, there is a high likelihood of harm," Cunningham said.

Biological same-sex parents could be a reality by 2017, news sources predict. (BP)

"[Children] don't have any voice in how they are the subject of an experiment like this."

**Paige Cunningham
executive director
Center for Bioethics
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Reverse Mortgage Change Delayed

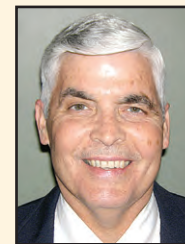
By Jimmy Dixon

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

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.



Jimmy Dixon

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.

For a free brochure, quote or discussion, call him direct at 205-567-4800 or email jdixon@mcgowinking.com.



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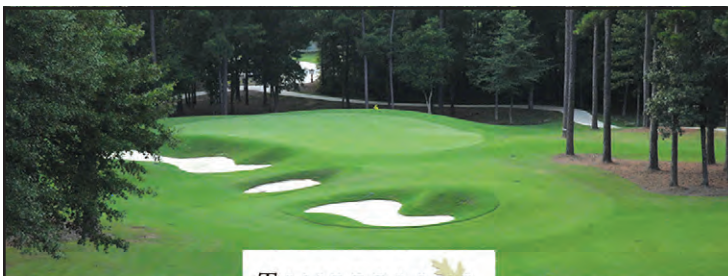
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Whatever it takes

'Serve because we are saved,' GenSend missionary says

Gabriel Revilla recalls a "Nike moment" when his college pastor in Miami, Fla., approached him with a question.

"What do you think about recruiting an actual team of students and allowing them to come to Miami to reach lostness here?" Gus Hernandez, collegiate pastor at Christ Fellowship Baptist Church, Miami, asked Revilla.

The question was neither small nor random.

Hernandez knew Revilla's heart and potential for leadership in ministry.

Revilla accepted the challenge and decided to "Just do it."

Hernandez connected Revilla with a North American Mission Board (NAMB) Generation Send (GenSend) mobilizer. That mobilizer challenged Revilla to experience the GenSend model by leaving his comfort zone in Miami to learn how to be a missionary in another major city.



Gabriel Revilla (left), a missionary for Send North America, talks with Bryan Martin at Christ Fellowship Baptist Church, Miami, Fla.

NAMB photo by Hayley Catt

Through Christ Fellowship Baptist, Revilla gained early exposure to missions in Miami. They regularly hosted a missions camp that included all seven of the church's campuses meeting for an entire week at the downtown campus to serve the city of Miami.

ANNIE ARMSTRONG
EASTER OFFERING

National goal
\$60 million

Alabama's goal
\$6.1 million

"Missions is important because when our heart is in God then our heart is in the

nations because God is in the nations," Revilla said.

In early June 2014, Revilla attended a Next Generation Leader's Conference in Nashville. That conference helped prepare him for his Chicago assignment in 2014. His assignment to Miami would start in 2015.

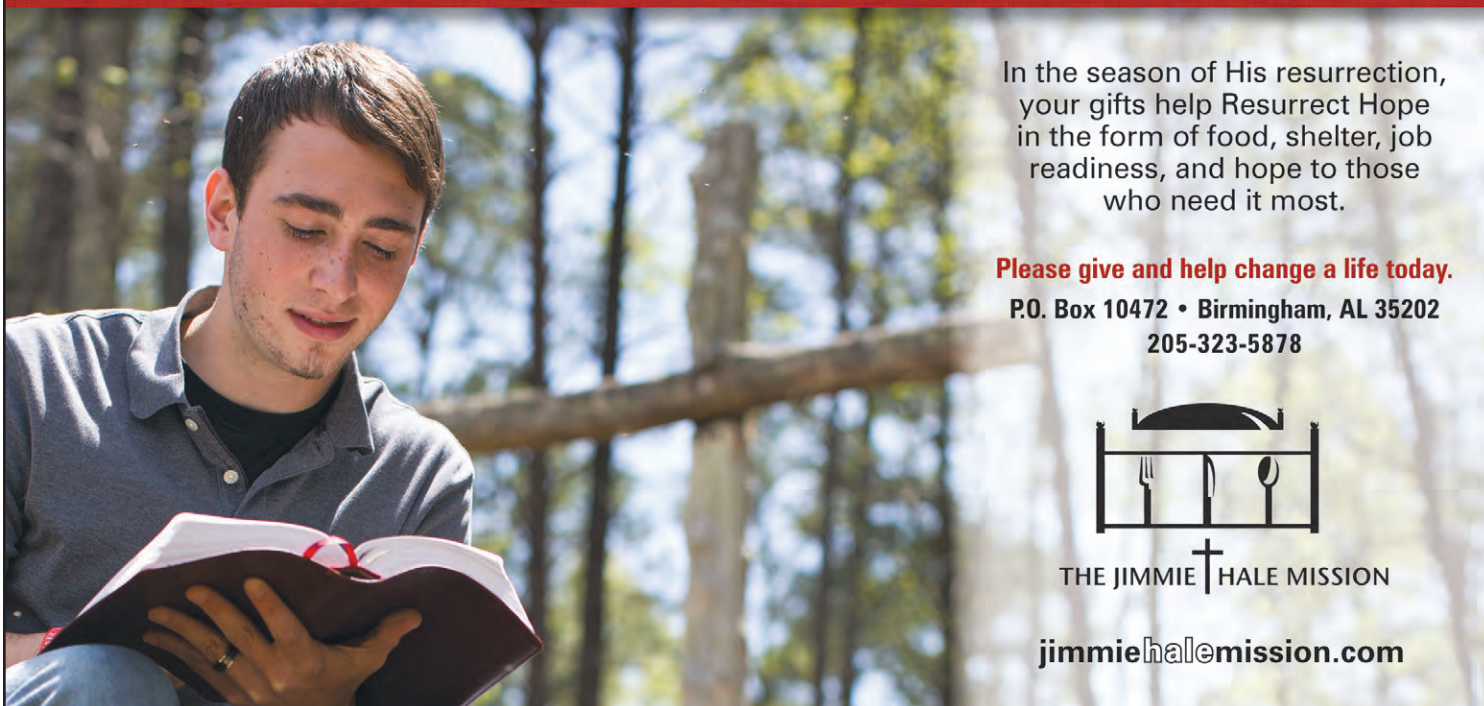
Send North America

Like GenSend missionaries in other cities, Revilla's assignment was to walk the streets and engage people. NAMB designs this immersion as part of the Send North America strategy to help a generation of Southern Baptist college students develop a heart for America's major metropolitan areas where most of the nation lives. Chicago and Miami are 2 of 32 Send North America cities.

In 2016, Revilla will mobilize a GenSend team to meet Miami and learn how to minister there.

"We don't serve to get people saved; we serve because we are saved. I want to be a part of that." (NAMB)

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For March 22

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

COMPASSION FOR LOST PEOPLE Obadiah 1:1-4, 10-17

Check Your Arrogance (1-4)

Edom was the land of Esau, Jacob's brother. Just as there was enmity between the brothers in their lives, there was strife between these two nations throughout their history. Edom rejoiced whenever Israel or Judah were attacked by their enemies. Such behavior angered the Lord who determined to bring judgment upon this small nation.

The land of Edom was located to the south of Israel in a mountainous region which made the Edomites feel safe in their strongholds. However this form of pride, as with all forms of pride, was offensive to God, who swore to break down their strongholds. We can rejoice that God is a God of justice who brings down the prideful, especially the enemies of God's people.

But we need not look at others to see pride. Pride is a struggle for most people, Christian or non-Christian. God says that pride comes before the fall (Prov. 16:18) and when we become prideful it means we are focusing on something other than God. We can think too much of ourselves because we compare ourselves to those around us. However, our measuring rod is Christ, who was perfect.

When we compare ourselves to Christ we immediately see our fallenness, brokenness and wickedness. It should fill us with repentance and encourage us to show mercy to others. We cannot save ourselves and we cannot forgive our own sins. We depend upon God our Savior for this and since we cannot save ourselves, we need to recognize that there is no room for us to boast (Eph. 2:8-9) or become prideful.

Show Mercy and Grace (10-14)

When Judah was attacked Edom rejoiced. God confronted them for their attitude toward their "brother" Jacob. Instead of rejoicing they should have mourned. This is a good lesson for us because it is

easy for us to delight in the downfall of our enemies but Jesus tells us to love our enemies and bless those who curse us (Matt. 5:43-48). We should have a sense of sorrow toward those who oppose us and desire to see them come to know God personally through Christ. Christians above all other people should be filled with mercy and compassion for others because we recognize the mercy and compassion God has shown us by sending Christ to die for us to pay for a debt that we could not.

Expect Retribution (15-16)

Because of Edom's wretched behavior and attitudes, God was going to punish them. God shows mercy and compassion to all people (Matt. 5:45; Acts 17:27) but many people refuse to listen or see God's provisions. The Edomites, who were so opposed to God's people, would have to face the wrath of God. This prophecy of Obadiah would be fulfilled by 100 B.C. when their kingdom was finally destroyed and lost to history.

God's prophecies will come true. This is evident throughout the Bible but it also means those prophecies that are yet to be fulfilled will be fulfilled. We can have a confidence that God's Word is true. We should heed the warnings and admonitions in the Bible because we can be sure that God will do what He has promised.

Live in Hope (17)

While Edom would be destroyed, God would provide for His people. This was true in history, as Edom was wiped out and Israel lived on, even if only the form of a remnant at times. When the day of the Lord comes all of God's people will be brought up into His presence while His enemies, those who do not place their trust in Christ, will face eternal punishment and separation from God. If we truly love others as we are commanded to do, we should tell them about Christ and live in a way that is consistent with His teachings so they can see that we have been impacted by Christ. 🙏

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

TEACHINGS LIKE NO OTHER Mark 1:21-22; 10:17-22

These are interesting times for teachers and students. Topics such as "common core," "performance-based assessment" and "teaching for the test" are in the news on a regular basis. Public school educators in particular face growing challenges in the present context of shifting expectations and demands. There are many "experts" eager to provide an opinion about what constitutes good teaching. They consider their insights the best of all for use deciding student progress and the efficiency of teachers and schools. Fortunately, or rather unfortunately, authoritative experts are all too common these days.

Jesus lived and taught in a time when there were many so-called "authoritative" voices. Many religious leaders of that time not only claimed to be authoritative, they expected others to regard them as such. The Gospel writers raise important questions about these leaders. Who among so many religious authorities had credibility? Who could be regarded as trustworthy, wise and true? Mark's Gospel records two incidents that provide insight about Jesus the Teacher and how people responded to His lessons about faith and living right.

Jesus taught with authority. (1:21-22)

Capernaum was home base for Jesus' Galilean ministry (2:1). The language of verse 21 implies that synagogue attendance was a regular Sabbath activity for Jesus. This helps us understand why He would be received as a teacher; He was known among those attending the synagogue. He had become someone with credibility, likely because of his faithful attendance and the fresh insights He offered. Services in the synagogue included readings from Scripture, instruction based on the Law and prophetic writings, prayers and blessings.

It is important to note that after Jesus' teachings began to be rejected (Mark 6), He stopped teaching in the synagogue. The

synagogue became a symbol of the hostility His message generated among the religious establishment. His "students" were astonished at His teachings. His words had the power of both conviction and knowledge. Unlike the religious leaders, His teaching was considered authoritative, as if He spoke from first-hand experience.

Jesus' instruction was motivated by love. (10:17-21a)

On another occasion, Jesus encountered a seeker who had heard about His teachings. Mark records that the man ran to Jesus and fell on his knees before Him. Kneeling was a common approach to Jesus used by those seeking healing from infirmities. This man inquired about healing of a spiritual infirmity. Mark compared eternal life to the kingdom of God (vv. 23-25). This kind of life is not limited by time. It encompasses all of life, both now and in the future. The kingdom of God has an effect on how one lives his or her life. This was made clear by Jesus' response to the pious seeker. Mark alone notes that Jesus felt affection for this man, possibly because of the seeker's humility and sincerity.

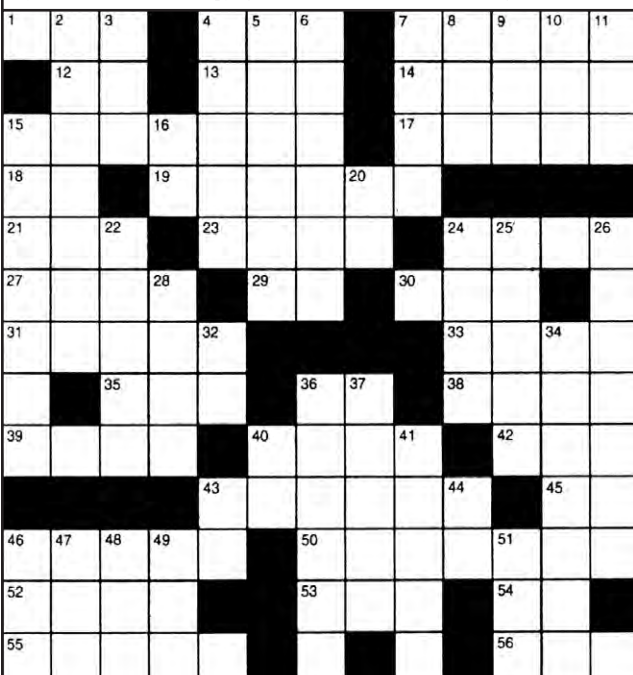
Jesus' teaching calls for a response. (10:21b-22)

We might think one who kept all the commandments and lived a truly good, devout life would have been a part of the Kingdom. Not so, said the Good Teacher. There was one more surprising requirement. Jesus' message was about meaningful, unbounded life to come as well as for the present: "the kingdom of God is within the hearts of people" (Luke 17:20-21). Yet getting the heart ready for the kingdom of God is not so easy. The pious seeker went away sad upon hearing Jesus' response. We must not be quick to judge this seeker.

The life of discipleship involves challenging choices that require sacrifice. Yet there is great fulfillment and blessing that accompanies obedience. Perhaps Jesus was just as sad for the seeker's sake as the seeker was with Jesus' answer. 🙏

Christian Crossword

By Janet W. Adkins Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

- Bachelor. (abbr.)
- Limb.
- Toi sent ___ his son. (2 Sam. 8:10)
- Sea level. (abbr.)
- Greek letter.
- A land of oil ___ and honey. (Deut. 8:8)
- Till there stood up a priest with Urim and ___. (Neh. 7:65)
- Milk source.
- Egyptian sun god.
- Midpoint.
- Elf.
- Gloomy.
- Ye ___ Antique Shoppe.
- Extremely.
- Direction.
- Wing.
- Fool.
- Extra duty drill instructor.
- Brown.
- Added to a letter.
- Man's name.
- Ogle.
- Sounds of laughter.
- And Adam called his

- wife's name _____. (Gen. 3:20)
- He leadeth me ___ the still waters. (Ps. 23:2)
- That I will give you the rain of your land ___ his due season. (Deut. 11:14)
- I will extend peace to her like a _____. (Isa. 66:12)
- And took upon him the form of a _____. (Phil. 2:7)
- By mouth.
- A son of Gad. (Gen. 46:16)
- Symbol for Beryllium.
- That he may dip the tip of his finger in _____. (Luke 16:24)
- They shall say no more, the ___ of the covenant. (Jer. 3:16)
- Down
- For I am not ___ of the gospel of Christ. (Rom. 1:16)
- Chartered Life Underwriter. (abbr.)
- Bearing weapons.
- African animals.
- Second and third days of the week. (abbr.)
- Journal. (abbr.)
- Ancient.
- Make free, disencumber.
- Hail.
- Meridian. (abbr.)
- Not important.
- Master of Ceremonies. (abbr.)
- Emergency room. (abbr.)
- Having a tendency.
- Margarine.
- Long-handled spoon.
- Distinguished.
- Second person possessive.
- Tennessee. (abbr.)
- Practicer of devination.
- The peace of God which ___ all understanding. (Phil. 4:7)
- More bashful.
- Blessed be ___ that cometh in the name of the Lord. (Ps. 118:26)
- And we were driven up and down in ____.

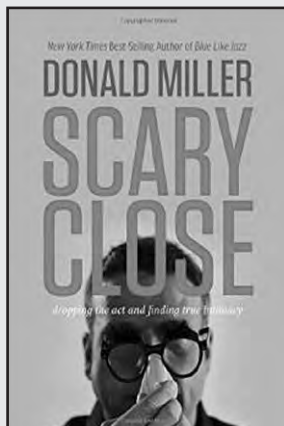
- (Acts 27:27)
- British. (abbr.)
- Electron volt. (abbr.)
- And the second ___ shall be an emerald, a sapphire and a diamond. (Ex 28:18)
- And also the Jairite was a chief ruler about David. (2 Sam. 20:26)
- Large tub.
- Eel. (Old English)
- Arab cloak.



TOP 8

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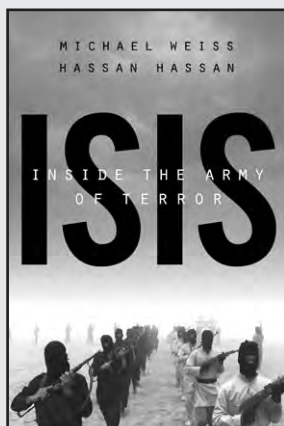
RELIGION & SPIRITUALITY



1. Scary Close
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(Thomas Nelson)

2. ISIS
By Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan
(Regan Arts)

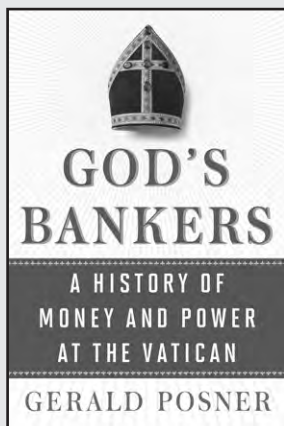
3. God's Bankers
By Gerald Posner
(Simon & Schuster)



4. Counter Culture
By David Platt
(Tyndale)

5. Life is ____.
By Judah Smith
(Thomas Nelson)

6. Rise
By Trip Lee
(Thomas Nelson)



7. Bioethics Across Culture
By Darryl R.J. Macer
(Eubios Ethics Institute)

8. Jesus, Jihad & Peace
By Michael Youssef
(Worthy Publishing)

Source: iTunes.com at press time



Photo courtesy of Provident Label Group

More than a title

Heath's new album aims to challenge, share gospel

By Leann Callaway
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

For singer/songwriter Brandon Heath, "No Turning Back" is more than just the title of his latest CD. The songs are centered around and celebrate his life-long commitment to follow Jesus.

As a teenager Heath surrendered his life to the Lord at a Young Life camp in 1995.

Now 20 years later Heath desires to share the gospel through music and lead others to Christ. Heath hopes the songs on this album will help listeners reflect on what matters most in life and rejoice in the assurance of salvation.

"The new album is about the things that were going through my mind at the time I came to know Jesus as my Savior, and I wanted to capture my eagerness to know Him. I hope that people are reminded of their own experience when they first came to know Christ when they listen to these songs.

"I hope their joy is restored as they remember their salvation story and reflect on how present God is in our lives. When God says we are a new creation, He means it. The new has come and there's no turning back."

Reaching out

During concerts Heath challenges audiences to reach out and make a difference to those in need. His concerts have helped raise awareness for missions organizations such as Food for the Hungry, Blood: Water Mission, International Justice Mission, Young Life and Restore International.

"Hopefully people are not only connecting to the

music, but also the message behind it," Heath noted. "I want people to realize that if they place their faith in Christ, they will be delivered from their old life (and) given a new lease on life and fresh start to lead the kind of life that God wants His children to lead — with our lives glorifying Him."

By sharing his own life experiences, Heath hopes to inspire others to walk in faith and follow Jesus.

"I think the longer I get to know the character of Jesus, the more compassion I have for others,"

Heath said. "It is one thing to have compassion and another thing to act on it. Most times it starts with the people around you."

Heath is currently appearing on "The Table Tour" with Nichole Nordeman and the contemporary band Love & The Outcome. The tour benefits Feed the Children, one of the world's leading anti-hunger organizations.

"We want to share songs and stories and also allow the audience to share things that are on their hearts," Heath said. "It's

a cool opportunity because community happens around the table."

With music reflecting life-changing truth, Heath remains grounded on a firm foundation and delivering music with a powerful message that changes lives for God's glory.

"I love crafting a song and making something out of nothing. I love taking the little moments that we have during the day and turning them into a song. That's my favorite way to write a song.

"I love hearing stories about how the songs have impacted people in unexpected ways and how they have responded by finding redemption and restoration through a relationship with Christ." ❧



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'Jesus is still Lord'

Christians in Niger stand firm despite persecution

Persecuted Christians in the West African country of Niger remain "very upbeat" and continue to move forward despite attacks in their country earlier in 2015. International Mission Board (IMB) strategy leader Greg Dorsey said local Christians told him, "We've only lost things. We've not lost the Church, just some buildings."

Small mobs of Muslims reportedly ransacked and burned more than 50 structures throughout Niamey in mid-January. The incident appeared to be related to an eruption of violence in Niger on Jan. 16–17 that left at least 10 people dead over protests of a magazine cover — published by the satirical publication *Charlie Hebdo* — featuring a cartoon of Mohammed. *Charlie Hebdo* ran the cover in response to the Jan. 9 terrorist attack on its offices that claimed the lives of 12 people.

Both missionaries and national believers in Niamey found marks on their gates, indicating their homes were potential targets.

The strategy leader expressed thankfulness that buildings, not people were targeted in Niamey.

"There is a sense that this is the time for the Church, that ... what was meant for evil, God intends for good," he said. Instead of seeking retaliation or revenge, believers who lost their homes and possessions voiced confidence that "God is good and Jesus is still Lord."

Fellow strategy leader Brian Foshee said, "They see ... this is how we can demonstrate what it means to follow Christ and what we do if we're going to follow up what we believe with our actions."

Powerful testimony

Foshee said he was encouraged to hear that a representative of the evangelical churches in Niamey stated publically on radio and television that local believers forgave those who damaged and burned their property.

"That was pretty powerful."

Dorsey shared the story of a university student who lost everything — all of his books and clothes. The student said "Hey, I forgive you. It's OK. It was just stuff I lost ... and I forgive you."

Though the attacks appeared to be well-planned

and coordinated, stories abound of members of the Muslim community who warned their Christian friends and neighbors of impending danger. Some Muslims protected the homes of Christians while they were in hiding and offered them shelter.

Dorsey said some Christians expressed that their Muslim neighbors were ashamed of what was done in the name of Islam.

"It would be worth noting, while they targeted the Church very, very clearly, they also were targeting others as well," Dorsey said. "They targeted, I believe, some Christian businesses along the way, but they also targeted the 'evils' for Islam — such as bars and nightclubs and brothels. Some hotels with bars sustained heavy damage."

Dorsey said believers appear to be working through the fear and vulnerability they felt during the attacks, "addressing their fear with faith and moving forward."

"It became an opportunity for [IMB personnel] to reflect on their fear in comparison with their faith and how they were going to respond. Right now I think we'll move forward with greater courage."

Foshee said he hopes the persecution in Niger will increase awareness among Christians in the United States of what life is like in West Africa, "where the Christian population is less than one-tenth of a percent of the total population and how much Christ needs to be made known in a place like this."

Dorsey said the attacks in Niger also should serve as a reminder of churches around the world facing persecution.

"Pray for the people in those churches, that they would remain firm in their faith," he said.

► Pray for missionaries and national believers who live in parts of the world where Christians are persecuted.

► Pray that believers will be bold in their witness and gracious, loving and forgiving toward those who persecute them.

► Pray that believers will know how to share their faith in love and will demonstrate the hope and confidence they have in Christ.

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



Photo by Nate Bramsen/BP photo

This portion of Scripture was found outside a burned church in a village in Niger.

"They see ... this is how we can demonstrate what it means to follow Christ."

Brian Foshee

International Mission Board, strategy leader

RELIGION in America

Compiled from Wire Services



Utah passes LGBT nondiscrimination bill

SALT LAKE CITY — After seven years of debate and a historic compromise, the Utah House of Representatives on March 11 voted final passage of a bill to enact the state's first statewide nondiscrimination protections for the gay and transgender community, while providing safeguards for religious liberty.

The 65–10 vote was the last legislative hurdle for the bill, just one week after it debuted with the blessing of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) and the lesbian gay bisexual transgender (LGBT) community.

Utah's Republican Gov. Gary Herbert signed the bill at a ceremony March 12.

Under the bill pre-existing anti-discrimination laws for housing and employment were amended to include sexual orientation and gender identity; clarified exemptions for religious institutions; and provided protections for religious expression.

The legislation makes it illegal for employers and landlords to discriminate against individuals based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. Religious organizations and their affiliates, along with the Boy Scouts of America, are exempt from the bill's requirements.

The measure's other religious protections prevent workers from being fired for expressing beliefs on marriage, family or sexuality unless they conflict with the employer's business interests.

With its enactment, Utah became the 19th state to provide protection for the LGBT community in housing and employment based on both sexual orientation and gender identity, according to data tracked by the national Human Rights Campaign. No federal laws provide such protections. (RNS)

Fla. city official's threat called 'war on Jesus'

LAKE WORTH, Fla. — A south Florida church has received notice from local officials that it must obtain a business license or shut down, even though federal and local laws exempt churches from obtaining such licenses.

Common Ground Church, Lake Worth, Fla., which has been threatened by city officials, held a prayer rally for local government on the City Hall steps March 3.

"That's a violation of the First Amendment, but number two, it's a violation of their own code," Liberty Counsel chairman and founder Mat Staver said. "Churches [in Lake Worth] are not required to get business licenses."

Common Ground was told by Lake Worth city officials it would have to cease its activities and pay up to \$500 per day in fines if it did not obtain a business license by March 2, Staver said. Since that time the city has opted not to enforce its demand, saying instead that the church which meets in a coffee bar owned by the pastor must obtain only a "use license" that regulates the number of people permitted to gather.

The city still claims Common Ground technically needs a business license, Staver said.

Pastor Mike Olive called the city's treatment of the congregation "a war on Jesus."

"I really believe this is about Jesus and the message of light." (BP)

America in 'Great Decline' of religion, study shows

CARBONDALE, Ill. — A new survey shows that what some are calling the "Great Decline" of religion in America continues. Since 2012, the United States has about 7.5 million more Americans who are no longer active in religion.

The 2014 General Social Survey (GSS), released in early March 2015, found: 1) More Americans prefer "no religion."

When asked their religious preference, nearly 1 in 4 Americans now says "none." 2) Americans aren't going to church like they used to. More than one-third of Americans (35 percent) never attend a worship service (other than weddings and other ceremonies). 3) More Americans say they never pray. The percentage who never pray is 17 percent, up from 14 percent.

The GSS is the gold standard for sociological surveys. Funded by the National Science Foundation, this multimillion-dollar study gives the most accurate data on American society — including religion. (RNS)