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What it means to serve the poor from a biblical standpoint

# The Church and poverty



Meeting long-term poverty needs requires investment in relationship building

By Carrie Brown McWhorter  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Aside from the urgency of sharing the gospel, perhaps no other issue challenges the Church and its mission like poverty.

The poor are all around us: in our churches, our communities and throughout our world. More than 45 million Americans and 900,000 Alabamians live at or below the poverty line, according to data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau. Another 1.2 billion people around the world live in extreme poverty — subsisting on less than \$1.25 per day, according to the United Nations.

The issues surrounding poverty and poverty relief are complex, according to Ryan Hankins, executive director

of M-POWER Ministries, a faith-based social services agency in Birmingham. Even understanding what poverty actually is can be difficult, he said.

“Poverty is everywhere and it looks different everywhere,” Hankins said. “Poverty in Birmingham is different than poverty in Africa or in Boston or in Perry County. Wealth in one community is middle class in another community and poverty in another.”

Poverty generally is characterized by an individual’s lack of money, goods or means of support. However, it is wrong to think about poverty only in financial terms, argues Ruby K. Payne, an educational consultant and author of “A Framework for Understanding Poverty.”

“The reality is that financial resources, while extremely important, do not explain the differences in the

success with which individuals leave poverty nor the reasons that many stay in poverty,” Payne writes.

Payne asserts that factors such as literacy, physical health, a dependable and trustworthy support system and appropriate relationships and

role models are just as important. The presence of these resources can help individuals leave poverty; the lack of them often means staying in poverty.

The Church is usually good at providing relief in the form of financial resources like food, clothing and emergency

assistance but much less effective in meeting the long-term needs that help individuals move out of poverty. Meeting long-term needs requires an investment in relationship building, said Bethany Rushing, director of development at M-POWER.

“If we’re going to be like the church in Acts, where nobody had

any needs (Acts 4:34), we have to get involved and ask questions: Do you need a ride to work? Do you need someone to watch your children? We have to look for practical ways to serve the poor in daily life,” Rushing said.

That means putting aside the idea that anyone who works hard enough can maintain or improve their financial situation and recognizing how circumstances can play a role in poverty, Hankins said.

### Different circumstances

“Put yourself in a situation where you lose your job. Maybe you’ve got some money in the bank, a safe home and a good church family who will bring you food. It’s an inconvenience but you know how to manage it,” Hankins said.

“But what if you’ve just moved to a new city and don’t know anybody. And you lose your job. And you get a cancer diagnosis. It doesn’t take too many of those times for an inconvenience to become a crisis.”

Such cases of situational poverty (See ‘Meeting,’ page 5)

More than 45 million Americans and 900,000 Alabamians live at or below the poverty line.

U.S. Census Bureau

# COMMENT

## Which Hurt the Most?

**O**n the southwest side of Mount Zion lived the Jewish high priest Caiaphas and his father-in-law Annas. Jewish historian Josephus reports Annas had been appointed high priest by Quirinius (Luke 2:2) but removed from office by Valerius Gratus, Pilate's predecessor, nine years later.

Annas was a skillful politician. He became the power behind the throne for Caiaphas and five other family members, all of whom served as high priest. It is not surprising that John's Gospel says the soldiers and temple guards who arrested Jesus took Him first to Annas.

Imagine the scene. Annas, several members of the Sanhedrin and others who cooked up the scheme to have Jesus crucified anxiously await the mob dragging Jesus to them. When the gate to the courtyard finally opens, scores push through, even hundreds.

Near the back of the throng were two of Jesus' disciples — Peter and one identified only as "the other disciple." The second disciple knew the high priest and was known by him. He entered the courtyard without question. Peter was not known by the gatekeepers. It took the intervention of the other disciple for him to gain entrance.

Sometimes overlooked is the courage it took for Peter and the other disciple to follow Jesus to the high priest's home. Perhaps Peter still intended to keep his promise to die with Jesus. He had drawn his sword to protect Jesus. One sword against hundreds but he did it only to be told to stand down and let the events play themselves out.

### Peter's failed courage

As Peter stepped into the high priest's courtyard, his courage failed. The doorkeeper asked if he was being allowed into the crowded place because he was a follower of Jesus.

Think about it. At the far end of the courtyard stood Jesus bound like a common criminal. Peter could have gone to Him, comforted



### THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

Him by the presence of a faithful follower.

When Annas asked Jesus about His disciples (John 18:19), Peter could have stepped forward not only as a disciple but as the leader of the disciples. Peter's boldness might have encouraged the other disciple to identify himself as a Jesus-follower. Perhaps Peter could have offered Jesus a precious drink of water or provided some other comfort for Him.

### Possible eye-witness

At the very least Peter could have been close to Jesus in order to provide an eyewitness account of all that transpired for the other disciples who were not present.

Instead Peter told the gatekeeper he was not a follower of this rabbi from Galilee.

At one end of the courtyard Jesus was left alone to deal with the crafty Annas whose probing questions seem to search for some reason to charge the prisoner already arrested and standing before him. Jesus' response surprised the accusers. "Why ask Me?" he retorted. Jesus said He had taught in public places for all to hear, that He had spoken clearly for all to understand, that none of His teachings were secretive.

One of the guards thought the response impertinent. Jesus was not showing the proper respect due the former high priest, the guard concluded, and struck Jesus across the face. How tragic that like the guard in the

story some still act as if respect can be forced through violence.

Some believe the guard hit Jesus with a staff or rod and contend the incident fulfilled the prophecy of Micah 5:1 where the writer says of the promised ruler from Bethlehem, "They will strike Israel's ruler on the cheek with a rod."

No one in that crowded courtyard saw the blow as a fulfillment of prophecy. That would come later. The crowd saw only a painful blow. Jesus protested that since He only spoke truth there was no reason for the guard to strike Him.

The writer of Luke elaborates, writing the guards played sport with Jesus. They blindfolded Him, beat Him, mocked Him and insulted Him (Luke 22:63).

At the other end of the courtyard another drama was playing out. Perhaps taking their cue from Annas query about Jesus' disciples, those gathered around a warming fire asked Peter a leading question — "You are not one of His disciples are you?" Peter was quick to answer no.

Peter chose not to stand with Jesus. He hung to the fringes of the crowd. After the first lie to the gatekeeper, it was easier to tell the second lie. That is how sin works.

About an hour later a relative of Malchus — Caiaphas' servant whose ear Peter had cut off earlier that evening — confronted Peter again. This time the charge was unavoidable — "Didn't I see you with Him in the olive grove?"

Peter's response was as strong as the accusation. He knew nothing of Jesus, nothing of the garden and nothing of all the ruckus going on in the courtyard. Peter's first lie had to be covered by a second and now both had to be covered by a third.

That is when the rooster crowed. To those around him it was such a common thing they might not have noticed dawn's announcement. To Peter the sound was like the voice of God. That is when Peter remembered Jesus' words that "before the rooster crows today, you will disown Me three times."

### Two punishing blows

Luke's Gospel adds another poignant detail. Luke 22:61 says that at that moment "the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter." No words were exchanged between them. No words were necessary. Both knew what had happened.

Luke simply adds that Peter went outside and "wept bitterly."

What about Jesus? In that courtyard He endured two punishing blows. One was an abusive physical blow from a temple guard. The other was personal denial by a loyal and trusted friend.

Which do you think hurt Jesus the most? 🙏

## LETTERS

### TO THE EDITOR

#### CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM

I was very pleased to see Jim Williams' article titled "Reforming the State's Correctional System" in the Feb. 26 issue.

I fear Alabama Baptists are ignoring what is probably the No. 1 moral issue in our state. Even in a time when marriage itself is under attack, I believe this to be the No. 1 moral issue for Alabamians because these

prisoners are under our care.

At least we can say homosexual "marriage" was forced upon us from an activist judge. The physical and sexual abuse and the inhumane conditions of Alabama's inmates, however, are our fault, the result of hearts that are indifferent to what others are going through.

I also saw Scarlett Dunnam's letter to the editor in regards to sending

greeting cards to inmates. God's people are at work, but systemic changes will need to be made at the state government level.

Please continue to keep this issue before Alabama Baptists.

Charlie Dale  
Indian Springs Ala. 🙏





"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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# 'Different kind of DNA'

## Church planting in military communities initiative takes root in Mobile

By Neisha Roberts  
The Alabama Baptist

The life of a military serviceman or woman is a transient one — with many assignments lasting only six months while others could be up to three years. But moving around a lot is only one aspect of what makes military communities different from most others. For instance, military language is its own dialect of sorts, which can often sound foreign to civilians who don't understand the acronyms and terminology. And many servicemen and women are impacted by the aftereffects of combat, with some personnel struggling with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and depression.

With about 1 million active duty personnel (4 million people including their families) and about 23 million people including the veteran population, the military community is a subculture that needs ministering to, said Endel Lee, North American Mission Board (NAMB) national catalyst for church planting in military communities.

A recent NAMB initiative is focused on planting churches near each of the 275 military installations in the United States.

### Military subculture

A church plant of this kind has a "different kind of DNA and will focus on the specific needs of military personnel," said Lee, a Navy Reserve chaplain who has seen 33 years of military service.

The goal of this type of church plant is to "come alongside and connect with the chaplains and local leadership and ... find a way to help serve that chaplain and to partner with



Photo courtesy of Endel Lee

Endel Lee (left) meets with a consulting team in San Diego, Calif., March 2-4 to discuss how many church plants in military communities are immediately needed in the area.

them to help meet the spiritual needs of that particular population," he said.

That could mean providing a church that meets near the base for believers, helping the chaplain's office share the gospel or helping disciple new believers, among other things.

Relevant Church, Mobile, launched about a year ago and meets five miles from the U.S. Coast Guard Aviation Training Center, which has about 550 servicemen. It focuses on serving men and women in the military and Pastor Torrey Garrison has started the process of becoming a NAMB church planter to the military community.

Garrison works with Lee, who in his role as catalyst helps "connect the dots."

Lee said, "I reach out to folks who express an interest ... and help connect them to military communities ... making sure they are trained and have an understanding of what it takes to plant a church in that environment," Lee said. "I also look for churches or pastors who would like to be a supporting or sending church."

### Watch-care program

Garrison will go through an assessment process with NAMB, which will work with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions to officially make Relevant Church a church plant for the military community in Mobile. Relevant Church also applied March 25 to be a part of Mobile Baptist Association's watch-care program.

Garrison, who served in the Coast Guard for five years and is now an Air Force reserve chaplain, also leads a Bible study on base while working closely with the chaplain's office.

For others interested in planting a church in a military community, Lee said one of the obstacles is a "perception that (the servicemen and women) have everything they need (on base)." But 70 to 75 percent of personnel live off base, Lee said.

Another obstacle in reaching the military community is how often men and women are transferred to a different location.

"Because of the transiency of military personnel, it is challenging for them to find community

and get plugged in quickly, to build trust and familiarity. A church plant to a military community would seek to provide continuity for them and provide a setting where it is more conducive for them to settle in quickly," Lee said.

Garrison agreed and said Relevant Church wants to be a church that is "secure and solid" where military personnel can feel comfortable. He even focuses his sermons on military stories and uses military lingo.

And, he said, Relevant Church will continue to try to "strengthen our relationship between the base and our church and ... forge a friendship between each other to help them out and reach the military personnel and their families for Christ." ☞



Photo courtesy of Torrey Garrison

Pastor Torrey Garrison, of Relevant Church, Mobile, baptizes a new believer.



# Living missional lives

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## Helping the poor requires intentional efforts to see those who are suffering

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

**P**overty is not new to contemporary society. Throughout the Old Testament the presence of the poor and God's desire for His people to help them are evident. "Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his deed" (Prov. 19:17). "If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday" (Isa. 58:10). "If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you" (Lev. 25:35). In these and many other examples from the law, the prophets and the psalmist, God is characterized as a generous God who expects generosity from His people as well.

### Biblical illustrations

In the New Testament, Jesus uses a widow (Luke 21), a poor man named Lazarus (Luke 16) and a rich young man (Matt. 19) to illustrate the often uncomfortable relationship between wealth and faith. In three of the four Gospels, Jesus even acknowledges that the poor will always be with us (Matt. 26:11; Mark 14:7; John 12:8). If Jesus is quoting from Deuteronomy 15:11 here, as many scholars believe, the rest of that verse in which the Lord commands His people to "open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor in your land," continues to have relevance to contemporary believers.

For Montgomery's Community of Hope ministry, opening a hand includes feeding

100 children a day who otherwise might not get anything to eat because their school is out for spring break.

At Harvest Evangelism in Opelika it includes providing a home, transportation to work and GED classes to a couple and their young daughter who live in New York, rescuing them from a life of homelessness.

At M-POWER Ministries in Birmingham, it includes health services and job training.

The list could go on and on, since churches and ministries throughout Alabama are finding ways to help ease the effects of poverty in their communities and around the world. Yet poverty still exists and Christians continue to ask what more can be done. The challenge is turning that questioning into action. The first step toward action is prayer, said Ryan Hankins, executive director of M-POWER Ministries, a faith-based social services agency.

"When you look at the gospel account, there is less accounting of what Jesus said and more of what He did," Hankins said. "We can't minimize the importance of praying for the poor and praying for us to be affected by things going on in our world."

Our response cannot stop at prayer, however, Hankins said. Concern for the poor must result in action.

Jake Brown, pastor of Sunrise Baptist Church, Mobile, said, "I believe many Christians have the desire to help the poor but they are not sure how to do it. They may not know what resources to trust. They may think foreign governments are too corrupt. They may not believe ending poverty is possible."

Statistics published in 2014 by the Barna Group show that ending poverty is possible. In fact the percentage of people in the world who live in extreme poverty has decreased by more than half, though 84 percent of Americans are unaware of the decrease, according to Barna. Practicing Christians are significantly more likely than the general population to help the poor, and in 2013, more than half of Christians surveyed by Barna donated to a nonprofit organization to help people in extreme poverty.

Still there is more to do and awareness is a great starting point, Brown said.

"Christians need to be made aware of organizations like Baptist Global Response, Compassion International, International Justice Mission, Never Thirst, Samaritan's Purse and others that are making an honest effort to make a difference to meet the spiritual and physical needs of the poor," Brown said. "As a Church it's time we join with those who are taking Matthew 25:31-46 seriously and take

the lead in loving our neighbors as ourselves."

Loving our neighbors is about living lives that are missional, said Bethany Rushing, director of development at M-POWER. People get excited when they talk about missions projects but we are called to be Christians on mission every day of the year not just on trips. "It's about how we respond when someone asks us for money. It's about engaging in conversations that can build relationships and dignify the person who needs help. It's about looking for those who are suffering by driving a different way home from work or going to a different grocery store rather than avoiding areas where we might have those encounters."

### 'Created in God's image'

Our tendency is to insulate ourselves from situations and people we perceive as different in order to keep ourselves safe, Rushing said. To act differently requires an intentional effort.

"Even if you tell that person on the street, 'No, I can't help you,' you can make eye contact. Acknowledgement is dignifying. It's treating them as humans created in God's image who are loved by Him," Rushing said.

Missional living requires closing the gap between us and those who are suffering, she said. It also requires putting aside our negative attitudes and false assumptions about the poor.

"Everyone wants their family to be okay, even the poor," Rushing said. "To help the poor we have to put aside our fear of being taken advantage of and our need to know all the facts. We have to rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, get out of our comfort zone and share our lives in a way that shines a light for the cause of Christ." ❧

*"Even if you tell that person on the street, 'No, I can't help you,' you can make eye contact. Acknowledgement is dignifying."*

**Bethany Rushing**  
director of development, M-POWER

## Meeting needs in practical ways helpful to reaching poor

(continued from page 1)

may be hard to recognize, according to Payne, since those who find themselves facing a crisis after a death, job loss, divorce or chronic illness may refuse help or deny there is a problem. However, these individuals usually have some resources (education and/or family support, for example) or at least a working knowledge of the resources that might be available. In these cases the Church, when it knows of the situation, can often step in and provide resources to help.

In contrast generational poverty is defined as having been in poverty for at least two generations. The generationally poor have fewer resources, fewer role models and weaker support systems, according to Payne.

For the Church, they also present a more complicated challenge.

One common misperception — perhaps the most hurtful — is the assumption that the person who is poor, hungry or homeless is not a Christian, Hankins said.

“People seldom say that, but it’s evident when churches or ministries say things like ‘we don’t want to just meet their physical needs, we want to share with them the hope of Christ.’ That’s a wonderful, right thing to do, but it suggests that the person who has physical needs doesn’t know the hope of Christ. That may not be true,” Hankins said.

Taken a step further, that idea can suggest that a lack of faith is what got the person into a difficult situation, Hankins said.

### Reconciled to the Father

“The implication is that if you knew Jesus, you wouldn’t be poor, hungry or sick. It opens up theological paths that believers don’t want to go down and suggests potentially that Jesus came to just feed and heal people. In truth Jesus came to reconcile us to the Father. There is nothing in Scripture that says that being reconciled to the Father also prevents you from being hungry.”

So while the poor may in fact need spiritual guidance, breaking the cycle of poverty also is about helping people develop tools and resources, Hankins said. Two things that help individuals move out of poverty are education and relationships.

Rushing said, “We get asked here, frequently by volunteers who are church members, ‘I know that you help people, you teach people to read, but when do you do ministry?’ What M-POWER does — adult literacy tutoring, GED programs, career readiness and health care — it’s all ministry.”

“People in a situation of poverty have decided they want their lives to look different and we are helping meet their needs in a practical, helpful way so that can happen.” ■

# Walking a mile in her shoes

Doris Duntley’s story represents many who are trying to pull out of poverty

**T**he words that describe my life these days are not good ones. Frustrated. Tired. Sad. I’m only 34 but I feel so much older. I depended so much on my husband but

since he left I’ve been so overwhelmed taking care of the kids, paying the bills and simply surviving. He left us with \$10 and not much else. I’ve pawned the TV and the stereo and applied for help. But things still aren’t looking too good for us.

I don’t know how to get through to my son, Dan. He’s 17 and thinks he knows everything. He’s about to become a father but he still hangs out with those friends of his from school. They’re always up to no good and I worry every time I see the police that they’re coming to get him.

Diana is my baby girl. She’s 14 and growing up fast too. She doesn’t like school much but I want her to finish high school, not drop out like I did. She told me that a man near her bus stop has been talking to her a lot lately. Yesterday he told her he knew a way she could make some money fast. I don’t like the sound of that and I told her so, but she knows we’re getting desperate.

There’s not much food in the pantry right now. I applied for food stamps when my husband left and got my SNAP card today. But when I got to the grocery store, my card didn’t work. I had to go back to the social services office to get a new card — my third trip to that office. I know I wasn’t very nice to the man at the desk, but I was hungry — and irritated. I kept thinking that the bus fare would buy a hamburger. Anything sounds good right now.

Fortunately Diana gets to eat at school. Who knows where Dan is eating but he doesn’t ask for anything. I know he went down to the employment office today. If he could get a job, then we might be able to pay the gas bill and keep the heat on. I heard his girlfriend’s family was evicted from their apartment but he hasn’t mentioned them either. I wonder what his plan is. If he even has one.

Next month might be better. The lady at social services said we might qualify for some help next month. If that comes through, then at least I can pay the rent. And our SNAP card should work now so I can get some groceries. If I could just get a job, even something for just a few hours a week, then we might break even. At least we wouldn’t be so far behind.

### Poverty Simulation

Doris Duntley is a fictional character in the Community Action Poverty Simulation, an educational outreach program of Alabama Possible. During the poverty simulation, participants role-play the lives of families living at or below the poverty level. Upon arrival participants are assigned

1. **M-POWER Ministries:** [www.mpowerministries.org](http://www.mpowerministries.org)

2. **“Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help and How to Reverse It”** by Robert D. Lupton (HarperOne, 2012)

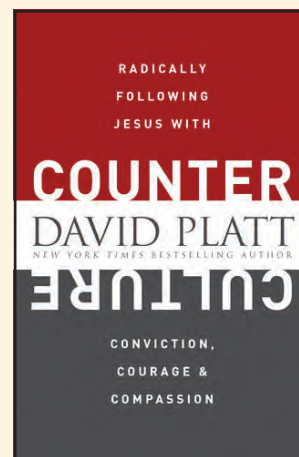


3. **“When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor ... and Yourself”** by Brian Fikkert and Steve Corbett (Moody, 2014)

4. **“Plunge 2 Poverty: An Intensive Poverty Simulation Experience”** by Jimmy and Janet Dorrell (New Hope, 2006)

5. **“A Framework for Understanding Poverty”** by Ruby K. Payne (aha! Process Inc., 2005)

6. **“Counter Culture: A Compassionate Call to Counter Culture in a World of Poverty, Same-Sex Marriage, Racism, Sex Slavery, Immigration, Abortion, Persecution, Orphans and Pornography”** by David Platt (Tyndale, 2015)



7. **“What Every Church Member Should Know about Poverty”** by Bill Ehlig and Ruby K. Payne (aha! Process, Inc., 1999)

Compiled by Carrie Brown McWhorter

Helpful resources

identities, families and life situations.

During four 15-minute sessions, they must navigate typical challenges faced by individuals living in poverty, including acquiring or maintaining employment, caring for children or elderly family members, applying for public assistance and dealing with transportation issues. They interact with social service agencies, grocers, pawnbrokers, bill collectors, job interviewers, police officers, ministry leaders and others who might help them.

**For more information on the Community Action Poverty Simulation, go to [www.alabamapossible.org](http://www.alabamapossible.org).**

The simulation aims to increase participants’ understanding of the hardships and emotional toll experienced by the poor. *The*

*Alabama Baptist* correspondent Carrie Brown McWhorter participated in the poverty simulation at Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham, in February. The simulation at the church was the first of

a three-part study series on ministering to the poor and was part of the church’s Major Missions Projects community ministries focus. (TAB)

# Meeting hunger needs

## Southern Baptist churches feed hungry, share love of Christ

**S**outhern Baptist churches of various sizes and in various settings are feeding the hungry in the United States and a sizable number of Americans remain in need of such help. Nearly 1 in 6 live in “food insecure households” according to Feeding America, a nationwide network of 200 food banks.

Many people turn to churches in their need. Twenty-two percent of Americans say their family has received help from a church-run food pantry, LifeWay Research reported in November 2014.

Southern Baptists staff and stock thousands of local church and community-wide faith-based hunger ministries across the nation. Some have in-house food pantries. Some cooperate with community food banks. Some work with local ministries or agencies. Some provide after-school meals. Some place food in school children’s backpacks for the weekend. Some assist with community gardens.

In addition the Southern Baptist Convention created a fund, Global Hunger Relief (GHR), through which Baptists (and others) can contribute to hunger needs in North America and around the world. Gifts to GHR annually fund numerous hunger projects with 80 percent going to overseas hunger needs, administered through the International Mission Board, and 20 percent going to North American hunger needs, administered through the North American Mission Board (NAMB).

Because of Southern Baptists’ giving through the Cooperative Program, 100 percent of GHR funds help relieve hunger, with none used for administrative costs.

In 2014 more than 1,000 ministries in North America — mostly local churches with active food ministries — received hunger funds through NAMB.

Meeting hunger needs opens doors for volunteers to proclaim the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. Russell Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, has encouraged Southern Baptists to participate in GHR “not simply as an act of charity, not simply as an expression of our love, certainly not as a bare humanitarianism, but because we are a gospel people who as we feed and as we clothe are speaking and preaching a message that Jesus is Himself the Bread of Life.”



Volunteers package and distribute food through Heaven’s Windows, a nonprofit organization at New Seasons Church, Spring Valley, Calif.

Photo by Angie Kretschmar

Whether receiving funds through NAMB or not, Southern Baptist churches are feeding the hungry.

For instance New Seasons Church, Spring Valley, Calif., uses a nonprofit ministry on its property to distribute tens of thousands of meals each year to people in its poor neighborhood 11 miles east of San Diego.

The multi-ethnic church, which averages about 700 in attendance, was already running an active food ministry when it established the nonprofit, Heaven’s Windows, in 2009. In 2014 outreach to the hungry consisted of:

- ▶ A five-day-a-week food pantry.
- ▶ A monthly community distribution.
- ▶ A child nutrition program at 13 sites after school and during the summer.
- ▶ A hot meal each Wednesday for

community residents, many of whom are homeless.

- ▶ A hot meal that is delivered each Thursday to the homebound and disabled.

- ▶ A block party — known as Season of Love — on the Saturday before Thanksgiving that welcomed 3,600 guests and gave away 700 turkeys and 20,000 pounds of food.

Across the country in the Southeast, Trace Creek Baptist Church, New Johnsonville, Tenn., ministers to the needy in a town of less than 2,000 people about a 90-minute drive west of Nashville.

Trace Creek Baptist, which averages about 150 in Sunday worship, helps with the county’s church-run food pantry and stands ready to provide food when the pantry cannot, said Pastor Mark Warren.

The church also cooperates in a weekend backpack ministry with four other churches. The combined effort provides snacks and other food items for students whom teachers have identified as likely having a need for nutrition. The backpack ministry serves about 60 elementary and junior high students, Warren estimated.

### Feeding children

The church’s Wednesday night Awana ministry also has resulted in feeding needy children. A significant portion of the 80 to 90 children who participate in Awana during the school year are unchurched, Warren said. After learning some children arrived at Awana without eating dinner, the church now feeds about 70 children each Wednesday evening.

A note goes to families whose children are part of the backpack ministry to inform them churches are cooperating to provide the food.

Countless Alabama Baptist churches and associations also provide food ministries throughout the state.

*The Alabama Baptist* reported on one such ministry in the April 2 issue — Community of Hope.

Community of Hope is a ministry that provides tutoring for children in the Montgomery area, serves as a food pantry, provides furniture and clothing for low-income families and hosts evangelistic block parties among other events year-round. (BP, TAB)

## Important steps when starting a hunger ministry

**P**reparation is vital for churches that want to launch a hunger ministry, according to those with expertise in feeding the needy.

“It’s a lot more than just handing out food,” said Angie Kretschmar, executive director of Heaven’s Windows, a thriving ministry to the hungry based in San Diego County, California.

Here are some recommendations gleaned from the North American Mission Board (NAMB) and Kretschmar for congregations considering a hunger ministry:

**1. Recognize the need.** This includes discovering which churches and organizations already are feeding the hungry. A cooperative effort with others may be best. “The key is commitment to serve others in the name of Jesus,” according to NAMB.

**2. Find the food.** Locate the sources of food for the ministry. Check out food banks. Investigate the availability of surplus food, possibly from supermarkets or government agencies. Determine how much food can be provided through the church.

**3. Identify the volunteers.** Discover how many people are able to serve. A hunger ministry requires a “very, very reliable volunteer base,” Kretschmar said.

**4. Select a ministry.** Decide what kind of hunger ministry the church should initiate. It might be food pantry distribution, after-school feeding, weekend backpacks for students or another approach. Some choices require a place for storage and a plan for distribution.

**5. Plan for the gospel.** Resolve what the practice will be in sharing the good news of Jesus. NAMB’s steps for starting a hunger ministry are available at [www.namb.net/beginning-a-hunger-ministry](http://www.namb.net/beginning-a-hunger-ministry).

It’s possible, however, that God may drop a hunger ministry on a church. That’s what happened to Trinity Church, a church plant in Portland, Ore.

Trinity Pastor Clay Holcomb was visiting one day in the office of the elementary school that would be home to the church’s worship services.

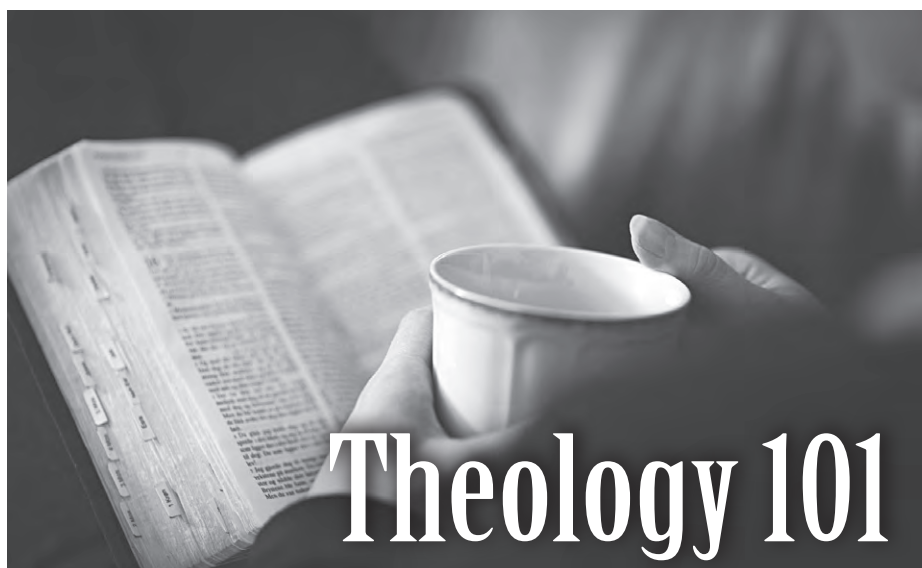
School officials were discussing Backpack Buddies, a program to provide meals for needy children, but were uncertain who would conduct it, since the school could not.

“We hadn’t even had our first service yet, and I said, ‘Well, we’ll do it,’” Holcomb recalled. He is NAMB’s Send City coordinator for Portland.

Trinity provided food for the backpack ministry for three years, serving 100 to 125 students in that time.

“The ministry helped build into our church a vision for the community,” Holcomb said, “and it helped us build credibility in the eyes of the people involved in the school.” (BP)

**To learn about Alabama Baptist churches’ efforts, visit [www.thealabamabaptist.org](http://www.thealabamabaptist.org) or call the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions at 1-800-264-1225.**



## Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

### Images of the Church

## The Church as God's Flock (Part 2)

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

Last week we began to think about the image of the Church as God's flock by examining Jesus' role as the Shepherd of the flock. This week we continue with this image by thinking about believers as sheep, or members of the flock.

We have noted previously that the disciples whom Jesus chose to be with Him were instrumental in establishing the foundation of the Church. On one occasion Jesus spoke directly to the Twelve using the imagery of a flock, saying, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

The Old Testament references the people of God as "the sheep of His pasture" (Ps. 100:3). God's care for the generation of His people whom Moses and Aaron led out of Egypt forms how the Psalmist encouraged his generation to follow God while confessing their faith. In Psalm 77:20 the author writes, "You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron." The prophet Isaiah picked up this image with the promise, "The Lord God comes with might, and His arm rules for Him; behold, His reward is with Him, and His recompense before Him. He will tend His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs in His arm; He will carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those that are with young" (Isa. 40:10-11). The New Testament draws upon the imagery of God's flock from the solidly rooted metaphor in the Old Testament.

### Remain alert

There are several possible truths to be gleaned from the thought of being sheep in God's flock and two of them will claim our attention this week. First as God's flock we must always remain alert to the possibility of what Jesus warned against, namely, "false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (Matt. 7:15). God's flock must always be on guard against false

teachers who espouse error. The apostle Paul cautioned the Ephesian elders about this danger. "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30). False teaching can come from either of two directions — it can come into the Church from the outside or it can arise from within the flock.

### Know His voice

The second truth might be stated as a practical directive: Know the voice of the Good Shepherd. Jesus declared that His sheep recognize His voice, but not that of the stranger (John 10:4-5). We have two basic strategies we could adopt. We could set ourselves to study all false religions and get acquainted with all perversions of biblical truth. In doing so, theoretically, we would be equipped to identify any error that might seek to infiltrate the flock. On the other hand we could choose the strategy of listening ever so closely to the voice of the true Shepherd so that we know what truth sounds like.

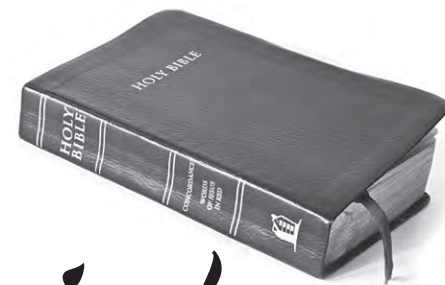
Not only would this allow us to stay attuned to Christ but it would enable us to filter out any teaching that doesn't ring true to His revelation in the Bible.

The strategy of knowing about all heresies would leave us with minimal edification, since we would have amassed doctrinal errors. But knowing God's truth in Christ will fit us for life now and in heaven to come. 🙏

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.



# 'ACT OF worship'



## Upcoming state Bible Reading Marathon expands to 4th location – Montgomery

By Maggie Walsh  
The Alabama Baptist

Christians from all denominations and demographics will gather together around the country May 3 to read the Bible publicly and purely, without commentary. The nationwide Bible reading marathons, usually beginning on the National Day of Prayer, are more than just reading words on a page. It's "an act of worship ... to honor and glorify God," according to Sheila Wright, co-chair of the Birmingham Bible Reading Marathon.

In its fifth year, the Birmingham Bible Reading Marathon is "an opportunity for believers in the ... area to come together in perfect unity" for His glory, Wright said.

This year's Birmingham marathon will begin May 3 at 6 p.m. at Southside Baptist Church, Birmingham, and conclude on the National Day of Prayer on May 7 at 11:30 a.m. To guarantee continuous reading, individuals sign up to read Scripture for 15-minute increments until the entire Bible is read aloud. Readers may use their own Bible or one that is provided and are encouraged to read in their native language.

And for the first time the city of Montgomery will participate in the national event. Hosted by His Vessel Ministries, the Montgomery Bible Reading Marathon will be held at the foot of the steps of the State Capitol building from May 7 at 8:30 a.m. through May 10 at 8:30 a.m. To kick off the event, Gov. Robert Bentley will read Genesis 1, followed by Montgomery County Commission Chairman Elton Dean and Mayor Todd Strange reading Genesis 2-3, respectively.

Every person that reads Scripture during either marathon will receive a certificate at the conclusion of their time segment detailing their reading time and verses read.

Marathons also will take place in Troy and Ozark. The ninth annual Troy Bible Reading Marathon, sponsored by Salem-Troy Baptist Association, will begin May 3 at 6 p.m. and conclude May 7 at noon. The 12th annual Ozark Bible Reading Marathon, sponsored by Dale Baptist Association, also will begin May 3 at 8 p.m. and conclude May 7 at noon. Each location will have special events at the start and end of the marathon.

Driving each marathon forward is the ultimate gasoline: prayer. Organizers said

### What's it like?

By Clella Lee  
Leadership consultant, Christian Women's  
Leadership Center, National WMU

I wasn't sure what to expect when I was invited to join the readers at the Bible Reading Marathon in 2014. But the beauty of young and old, male and female of varying races, ethnicities and denominations connecting to read the entire Bible round-the-clock in 90 hours was palpable.



LEE

As I picked up reading the Psalms where the previous reader stopped and then handed it off to the next when my 15 minutes was finished, I experienced a profound simplicity. No commentary. No interruption. Just individual voices forming a continuous, unified voice proclaiming the story of God's love and revelation to all people. It was a poignant symbol of what we are called to be and do as God's children.

That's why on May 5 it will be my privilege to climb the steps at Southside Baptist Church, Birmingham, to join the voices again this year. I will benefit from being reminded. I hope you will consider joining us. 🙏

they want to frame the events with prayer to fully give God control over the impact of His spoken Word.

Wright said, "We will also have people on site earnestly praying for His blessings on every person who attends and all aspects of the marathon." Julia Cleland, one of the founding directors of the Birmingham marathon and an organizer of the new Montgomery marathon, said she has heard "some powerful prayers" during the course of previous marathons. "The Lord is doing a mighty powerful thing (through the marathons)." 🙏

### To register for the marathons:

- ▶ **Birmingham, visit [www.libertypark.org](http://www.libertypark.org)**
- ▶ **Montgomery, visit [www.hisvessel.org](http://www.hisvessel.org)**
- ▶ **Troy, call 334-566-1538**
- ▶ **Ozark, call 334-774-2713**

# Across ALABAMA'S Associations

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

## BIRMINGHAM

► **Shades Mountain Church, Vestavia Hills**, will hold its annual women's conference "For Such A Time As This" with guest speaker Jen Hatmaker, an author, blogger and mother of five. Session 1 will be April 10, 6:30-8:30 p.m. Doors will open at 5:30. Session 2 will be April 11, 9-10:15 a.m. and session 3 will be 10:45 a.m.-12 p.m. Doors will open at 8:30. To register visit [www.shades.org/events/for-such-a-time-as-this](http://www.shades.org/events/for-such-a-time-as-this). Shades Mountain Church also will hold "LIFE: A Post Graduation Survival Guide" on April 14, 6-9:30 p.m. The event will feature practical wisdom, helpful advice, food and fellowship with other graduating college seniors and some young adults who have already graduated. To register visit [www.shades.org/event/life-a-post-graduation-survival-guide](http://www.shades.org/event/life-a-post-graduation-survival-guide). Danny Wood is pastor.

## COFFEE

► **Bethany Church, New Brockton**, will celebrate 125 years of ministry April 19. Bible study will be at 8:45 a.m. and praise and worship will follow at 9:45 a.m. Gunter Akridge and Gate will perform special music and Pastor Tony Dye will speak. For more information call the

church office at 334-894-2344.

## GENEVA

► **Maple Avenue Church, Geneva**, will host the 39er's C.L.U.B. on April 14, 11 a.m. Speakers will be Kalep and Ashley Roberson, missionaries with Belief in Motion's Project 127 Romania ministries based out of Loganville, Ga. Mike Shirah is pastor.

## DEKALB

► **Gravel Hill Church, Fort Payne**, will hold a gospel singing featuring Point of Honor on April 19, 10:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. There will be a covered dish lunch from 12-1 p.m. George Moses is pastor. ► **Mount Carmel Church, Fort Payne**, will hold a 75th anniversary celebration April 26, 10:30 a.m. A fellowship meal will follow. For more information call 256-845-2746. David Talley is pastor.

## HALE

► **New Hope Church, Moundville**, will hold a 175th anniversary celebration April 26, 10:30 a.m. The Judson College choir, led by Camilla Horne, will perform special music. Rick Lance, State Board of Missions executive director, will speak. A covered dish lunch will be served at noon and singing will continue

at 1:30 p.m. Conrad Baggott is pastor.

## LIMESTONE

► **Clements Church, Athens**, will hold revival services "Teach Me to Pray" on April 12, 9:30 a.m. and 6 p.m. Phil Hoskins will speak. Clements Church also will hold a "One Year Later" service April 26, 9:30 a.m. in the west parking lot. There will be a "Celebrating Kids, One Year Later" service for children ages 4-6th grade, 4-6 p.m. There will be activities, crafts, T-shirts, special gifts and more. For more information on either event call 256-729-1328. Tim Anderson is pastor.

## MONTGOMERY

► **Trinity Memorial Church, Montgomery**, will host Marvin Morrow in concert April 10, 7 p.m. A love offering will be taken. For more information call 334-264-8151 or 334-285-5112. Stan Holt is pastor.

## TUSCALOOSA

► **Flatwoods Church, Northport**, held an Easter egg hunt March 28 at Flatwoods Elementary School. The children who participated were told the story of Jesus by Flatwoods Church youth minister Anthony Winfrey. Harvey Edwards is pastor. ☪

## Glorieta suit dismissed against LifeWay, SBC

The U.S. District Court for New Mexico has dismissed all claims in a lawsuit against LifeWay Christian Resources, the Southern Baptist Convention and its Executive Committee (EC), and the Glorieta 2.0 ministry that bought Glorieta Conference Center from LifeWay 18 months ago.

Federal Judge James O. Browning issued the rulings in a suit filed by an Arkansas couple, Kirk and Susie Tompkins, who had been leaseholders at the conference center and claimed LifeWay and EC improperly handled the sale.

Browning's ruling came in five separate orders, including an order in September 2014 that dismissed several named defendants.

One of Browning's March 31 rulings states: "The Court cannot find any factual allegations from which it can infer that the defendants are liable for the misconduct alleged. Indeed, the Tompkins ... do not state a plausible claim."

LifeWay President and CEO Thom S. Rainer said, "This is incredible news. I thank God for His goodness." (BP)

# ALABAMA UPDATES

PEOPLE, CHURCHES MAKING NEWS ACROSS THE STATE

## Jones Baptist Church Pastor Hartley retires

Arthur (Art) Hartley recently retired from his position as pastor of Jones Baptist Church in Autauga Baptist Association.



HARTLEY

Hartley served in the United States Army from 1961 to 1964 after being licensed to preach in 1959. He was later called as pastor of First Baptist Church, Fairview, in Cullman, in 1967. He earned degrees from Samford University in Birmingham and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and then served as interim pastor and pastor of nine churches across the state.

Hartley served as pastor on two separate occasions of two churches: Jones Baptist and Shady Grove Baptist Church, Selma.

He officially retired in late December 2014 but Jones Baptist held a celebration in his honor Feb. 22.

Hartley and his wife of 53 years, Lizzie, have three children, six grandchildren and one great-grandchild. (Neisha Roberts)

## Northport Baptist marks Hinton's 50 years of service

Northport Baptist Church celebrated John R. Hinton Jr. on Feb. 15 for his 50 years as minister of music at the Tuscaloosa Baptist Association church.

Hinton earned a bachelor's and master's degree in music and a doctorate in secondary education from the University of Alabama.

He worked for 40 years in Tuscaloosa County and City school systems and served as principal of three elementary schools in the area.

At the February celebration both Hinton and the church choir performed special music. Mayor Bobby Herndon made a presentation proclaiming the day "Dr. John R. Hinton Jr. Day."

Hinton and his wife, Emalyn, have three children and eight grandchildren. (TAB)



HINTON

## REFLECTIONS



## Reverse Mortgage Change Delayed

By Jimmy Dixon

FHA will begin Financial Assessment for all reverse mortgages with an FHA case number on and after April 27

of this year. At present we do not care about income and do not do a credit analysis, 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.



Jimmy Dixon

I still have a couple more training sessions on Financial Assessment 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 a certain amount of income and having a credit analysis.

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

For a free brochure, quote or discussion, call him direct at 205-567-4800 or email [jdixon@mcgowinking.com](mailto:jdixon@mcgowinking.com).



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# A Certain Trumpet

Sermons by Alabama Baptists

## Portraits of Jesus

### Our Good Shepherd – John 10:11

**M**y last tour in the Air Force was in Colorado Springs, Colo. Our apartment window blessed us daily with a majestic view of Pikes Peak. The allurements of the pristine beauty of the Rockies often drew us into the mountains. One of those gorgeous summer days found us hiking with friends above the tree line near 10,000 feet to go cutthroat trout fishing in one of the crystal clear crater lakes. As we crested the last rise we heard the undeniable sound of bleating sheep. Sure enough, in the meadow below a herd of sheep had followed their shepherd to a green pasture. Sheep are created to follow their shepherd.

Jesus has many descriptive names and titles throughout the pages of Scripture. Perhaps the most endearing and intimate name for our Savior is Good Shepherd. The prophets (Ezek. 34:23; Mic. 5:4) predicted the Messiah would come and shepherd His people. Shepherding is good preparation for leadership. The patriarchs of the Bible — such as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob — were shepherds along with Israel's greatest king, David. None compare to our Good Shepherd and no place in God's Word is His role more clearly defined than in our John 10 passage.

#### Constant supervision

We need a Shepherd because of the propensity of sheep to wander. Shepherding was a familiar part of Israel's daily life and history. Israelites knew sheep were dirty, defenseless, straying and helpless animals and requiring constant supervision. Sheep are an apt metaphor for the saints.

*Sheep are dirty by nature.* Sheep don't have an original thought. They do what they see others do. While the shepherd grooms them each evening, only when they're sheared do we see the glistening white wool. Before Christ comes into our lives, we are the wandering sheep of Isaiah 53:6 in need of the Shepherd Savior. At Salvation, something miraculous happens: "Though your sins be as scarlet ... they shall be as (white as) wool."

*Sheep are defenseless by nature.* Have you ever heard of an attack sheep? There's a reason you haven't heard it. Sheep are created defenseless, totally dependent on their shepherd. David reminds us of the defense of



**By Morgan Bailey**

*Morgan Bailey is pastor of Canaan Baptist Church, Bessemer. A graduate of Luther Rice Seminary in Lithonia, Ga., and*

*the Baptist College of Florida in Graceville, Fla., Bailey has served as a pastor for more than 30 years. He and his wife, Ritta, have two sons, one daughter-in-law and one granddaughter.*

our Shepherd (Ps. 23:4). His rod defends us from predators and His staff protects us from ourselves, rescuing us from the thicket and the crevice. Our Good Shepherd protects us from the adversary and adversity.

*Sheep are directionless by nature.* The ancient shepherd led his sheep, never driving them. They trusted him and knew his voice. The Good Shepherd's sheep trust Him. Through the intimacy of an ongoing relationship, we know His voice and gratefully follow His lead to fulfilling pastures.

*Sheep are dependent by nature.* Sheep are not naturally industrious. They are helpless and need not only the protection but the provision of the shepherd. The shepherd leads the sheep to green pastures for nourishment. Our green pastures are the pages of God's Word that nurture our soul.

#### Lead, feed and bleed

God's people still need a shepherd, so at Canaan Baptist Church, Bessemer, we call our 50-plus small group leaders shepherds. It's a reminder that like shepherds in antiquity and contemporary pastors today, they have a responsibility to lead, feed and even bleed for the sheep in their charge.

John masterfully paints a portrait of our worthy Shepherd. John begins by contrasting Jesus, the True Shepherd, against the false shepherds of the day. Israel was blessed by many faithful patriarchs, prophets and potentates. However, there were always imposters who were thieves, hirelings and false shepherds who deceived Israel (Jer. 23:1-2). Their mo-

tives were impure and their desire was to fleece God's flock for personal gain. Unfortunately as we fast forward to the contemporary Church we find the same malady, although their methods are more sophisticated (Matt. 7:15).

Jesus is our Good Shepherd. Those that follow His lead will enjoy the abundant life He promises His faithful sheep (John 10:10). Our Good Shepherd is the Savior who willingly lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11). Here Jesus looks ahead to the cross, where He would give His life as the sacrificial Lamb of God. Ours is a personal Shepherd who knows us and all of our needs perfectly (John 10:14). Finally our Shepherd invites us to know Him intimately in an ongoing personal relationship. Incredibly the relationship begins at salvation and never ends.

Yes ours is a Good Shepherd.

#### Secure in God's hands

During my tour at Colorado Springs I served inside NORAD located in Cheyenne Mountain Complex. At that time this was a self-contained city located a quarter of a mile inside the granite mountain. It served as our early warning system against nuclear attack. Every day I walked into the mountain passing two six-foot blast doors. They would shut behind me as a precaution in the event of a nuclear attack. If there was a secure place on the planet, that was it. We know there really is no place that is secure — except in the hands of God.

John ends this powerful passage reminding us of our eternal security. It's encouraging to know that the saints are well. The Good Shepherd at the point of our conversion places us securely in His hand (John 10:28). Then the Son takes the redeemed and places them in the hand of the Father (John 10:29). Christ then makes an emphatic statement — no one will be able to snatch them out of My hand or the Father's hand. Considering we are sealed by the Spirit at our conversion (Eph. 1:13) we are eternally secure in the Trinity. Paul asked the question another way: Who or what is able to separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:31-39)? No one and nothing. What an eternal joy to be the Good Shepherd's sheep. Are you securely in His sheepfold? 🐑

## Despite court ruling

### NYC churches allowed to rent public schools

**T**he 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals' ruling that prevents after-hours worship services at public schools in New York City stands after the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear the appeal March 30.

But despite the ruling New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio plans to allow churches to continue renting space in schools.

"Now that litigation has concluded, the city will develop rules of the road that respect the rights of both religious groups and nonparticipants," said mayor spokesperson Wiley Norvell in response to the ruling. "While we review and revise the rules, groups currently permitted to use schools for worship will continue to be able to worship on school premises."

Pastor Robert Hall of Bronx Household of Faith, which was the plaintiff in the case, said he was cautiously optimistic after the administration's response.

"We are gratified that he is allowing the churches to stay," Hall told *The New York Times*. "It remains to be seen what the long-term policy is going to be, however."

The recent court decision, issued without comment, was the third time the high court rejected an appeal by Bronx Household of Faith, which for years held Sunday services at a local public school. The church finished work on its own building near P.S. 15 in 2014 but said it still needs extra space for events that include religious services.

The city's board of education said it wanted to maintain a policy against allowing houses of worship from renting space in city-owned buildings to prevent a blurring of church-state lines.

#### Equal access for organizations

The mayor supports that policy in principle but in a marked change from his predecessor, Michael Bloomberg, de Blasio also has said he wants to allow congregations the same access as any other group.

"I stand by my belief that a faith organization playing by the same rules as any community nonprofit deserves access," de Blasio said a year ago after a federal appeals court upheld the city's ban, which the Supreme Court essentially affirmed.

Earlier this year as part of the mayor's push to provide universal pre-K for the city's children, the mayor's administration announced that starting in September pre-K classes will be permitted to break in the middle of the day for "nonprogram" activities such as prayer or religious instruction.

Supporters of Bronx Household of Faith and some 60 other groups that had been allowed to worship in public buildings pushed de Blasio to take action in the wake of the Supreme Court decision.

Jordan Lorence, senior counsel with Alliance Defending Freedom, which has represented the church in its legal battle against the city's policy, said of the upheld ruling, "This policy is clearly nothing more than religious segregation — the kind of segregation the mayor has said he opposes." (RNS)

*"And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle?" 1 Cor. 14:8*

# Biblical BLOCKBUSTERS

## Jesus depicted on small screen 'triggers conversation about faith'

By Patrick Ryan  
USA Today

**N**eed proof that biblical entertainment is Hollywood's holiest trend? Then look no further than Morocco, where three TV projects — National Geographic Channel's "Killing Jesus," NBC's "A.D. The Bible Continues" and CNN's "Finding Jesus" — were filmed on neighboring sets in 2014.

"You got this kind of 'Life of Brian'-esque world you're living in, where on all of our days off there's 36 disciples sitting around the pool and three Jesuses at the bar," said actor Stephen Moyer, who ditched the fangs from "True Blood" to play Roman governor Pontius Pilate in the Ridley Scott-produced "Killing Jesus."

Based on Fox News host Bill O'Reilly's follow-up to the books he co-wrote with Martin Dugard, "Killing Lincoln" and "Killing Kennedy," "Killing Jesus" tracks the last days of the Christian Messiah. Played by actor Haaz Sleiman, Jesus is portrayed less as a miracle worker and more as a political threat, and the script heightens the sexual tension between Jesus and follower Mary Magdalene (Klara Issova).

"It plays with the idea that Jesus' teachings are more important than the doing of miracles, that the idea behind what He's saying is the point and it doesn't need to have out-of-body, magical elements happening," Moyer said.

### 'The Passion of the Christ'

The \$12 million production is one of the latest endeavors to give Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection a grittier, more realistic feel — an approach Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ" introduced in 2004 to earn more than \$370.3 million. History Channel's 10-part miniseries "The Bible" took a similar approach in 2013 and drew 13.1 million viewers for its Easter Sunday finale.

Though "The Ten Commandments" and "The Greatest Story Ever Told" have become Easter staples, new faith-oriented entertainment has mostly failed to cross over in recent years, with

exceptions in "The Da Vinci Code," "Fireproof" and "The Nativity Story" in the mid-2000s.

But after the success of "The Bible" (and religion-themed films Rentrak says earned \$400 million in 2014, the most since 2006), studios have recognized demand and ordered more, including ABC pilot "Of Kings and Prophets" and TV One's "To Hell and Back."

"The Bible" was created by producer Mark Burnett ("Survivor," "The Voice") and his wife, actress Roma Downey ("Touched by an Angel"). They repurposed the series' section on Jesus for a stand-alone feature film "Son of God." It totaled \$59.7 million at the box office last spring thanks to grassroots marketing in churches nationwide.

It's now being followed with an NBC sequel, "A.D. The Bible Continues," a 12-episode event that, according to Burnett, takes a "Game of Thrones"-approach to the Bible's book of Acts, about the early church after Jesus' resurrection.

With "The Bible," "we didn't make Sunday School programming. We made stuff that was accurate to the Bible but realistic and didn't feel like it had been made on a shoestring budget," Burnett said. "And with 'A.D.,' we stepped it up even a stage further."

The couple also promoted diversity in "A.D." — 15 nationalities are represented in the cast, Downey said — and in their CBS miniseries "The Dovekeepers," led by Chilean actress Cote de Pablo, formerly of "NCIS." It's adapted from Alice Hoffman's 2011 novel following four Hebrew women during the siege of Masada more than 2,000 years ago. While not explicitly biblical, it incorporates themes of bravery and honor into a desert romance.

But a spiritual message doesn't always translate to divine success. In 2014, "Noah" and "Exodus: Gods and Kings" recruited A-listers for biblical blockbusters but earned just \$101 million and \$65 million, respectively, though the overseas box office was more robust. "Left Behind" (\$14 million) and Kirk Cameron's "Saving Christmas" (\$2.8 million) didn't have a prayer with audiences or critics, either.

S.D. Kelly, a writer for the website Christ and Pop Culture, said, "I don't think Christian audiences, especially younger ones, are going to rush to the theater to support something just because all Christians are supposed to go see it. Younger audiences want more nuance and are a lot more forgiving of a 'Noah' and are interested in revisiting (Bible stories)."

But the glossy commercialization of the gospel isn't for everyone.

"It is kind of an uncomfortable bargain for some people, because they really want to support it and they are entertained by it, but it

also feels a little over the top in how we tend to think of Scripture," Kelly said.

Others embrace it. Ray Johnston, pastor of the multicampus Bayside Church in the Sacramento area, praised Downey and Burnett for the accuracy and meticulous care they brought to "A.D." The congregation is getting behind the film and has collected \$100,000 in donations to buy teaching kits for churches that can't afford them.

"For some reason Christians are known for what they're against and not what they're for," Johnston said. "Anything that triggers conversation about faith and values in America is a really good thing," even if some take liberties with their narratives. (RNS)

**"We made stuff that was accurate to the Bible but realistic and didn't feel like it had been made on a shoestring budget."**

**Mark Burnett  
producer, 'The Bible'**

## Want to know GOD?

By Jenni Ingram  
Zion Hill Baptist Church, Andalusia

**I** hope you would agree with me that these are frightening times we are living in. Here is a selection of top stories from online news feeds and various sources: A school system is closing now on Muslim holidays; Iraq says Islamic State has destroyed an ancient site; Gigantic crater opens; Same-sex "marriage" legalized; Hundreds stranded on snow-packed highways. In recent memory I have heard stories about civil wars in other countries killing thousands, young girls being sold into the disgusting business of human trafficking, children killing their parents and siblings — I could go on for hours.

However, there is good news. By knowing God we have security in knowing He has all of this under control. These things are happening because the enemy Satan is on the prowl. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus tells us, "Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in My name, claiming, 'I am He,' and will deceive many. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains" (Mark 13:5-8).

Are you ready for more good news? Jesus is coming again — soon, I believe — and He has prepared a place for all of those who believe in Him and have accepted His saving grace. Read Acts 2:21, "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." And if you don't believe Acts, how about in Romans 10:9-13, "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, 'Anyone who believes in Him will never be put to shame.' ... For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'" 🙏

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# Adopt a BLOCK

## Mo. Baptists join to change tumultuous Ferguson

**C**hanging the streets of unrest in Ferguson to streets of love and ministry is the aim of an “Adopt a Block” initiative now underway amid the Missouri city’s racial tensions.

Adopt a Block is “a good, simple plan,” said Stoney Shaw, pastor of First Baptist Church, Ferguson, one of the participating local congregations and a Missouri Baptist Convention church.

“We want to join with other churches and minister. Walking the streets and praying is a simple yet powerful plan,” Shaw said.

The initiative is coming to fruition as racial tumult continues in the city of 21,000 just northwest of St. Louis. The tumult was triggered in August 2014 when a Ferguson police officer shot and killed an unarmed black 18 year old in a heated confrontation. Tensions mounted with the March 4 release of a Justice Department inquiry that exonerated police officer Darren Wilson in the death of Michael Brown but found widespread discrimination by police against the city’s black residents. The police chief, city manager and a municipal judge soon resigned. Two police officers were wounded in gunfire March 12. On March 16 the accused shooter’s attorney claimed his client was beaten by police officers and coerced into confessing.

The Adopt a Block initiative is led by Jose Aguayo, a chaplain with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association’s (BGEA) Rapid Response Team and pastor of Dorea Ministries, Ferguson.

Teams of several church members have adopted a block in Ferguson for ongoing outreach. Other churches involved in the

ministry include Bethel Fellowship Assembly of God, Florissant; Grace Bible Church, Florissant; Refuge Church, St. Charles; St. Louis Harvest Church; Cote Brillante Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, all in the Ferguson area. Breaking the Barrier Ministries, Jehovah-Elyon Christian Ministries Foundation and St. Louis Dream Center also have participated.

“This is a point of connection with the community and a way to show love,” Aguayo said. “We want to establish a relationship with the people in the neighborhood.”

**“People will ‘see’ the gospel (of love and care) before they ever hear it.”**

**Pastor Stoney Shaw  
FBC Ferguson**

For now, Aguayo said, the ministry involves an introduction — “a hello with prayer.” As relationships develop “discipleship will follow. Eventually sports teams, community outings and study assistance for children and adults will take place.”

Adopt a Block is a ministry model begun about 20 years ago at the Dream

Center in Los Angeles, Calif., Aguayo said. First, Ferguson, hosted one of the initial training sessions in February, providing training and resources developed by BGEA. Prior to that the church also hosted a Nov. 13, 2014, prayer summit and has been part of local efforts to provide child care and revitalize downtown businesses that were looted in rioting after a grand jury declined to indict Wilson in late November.

“Prayer walking and talking with people is so important,” Shaw said. “They need to see our faces in the community.”

Shaw noted March 20, “This is a steady outreach to the same block or area of our community either weekly or every other week. We hope to get to know people on our block of ministry — to pray for each person and anything that is important to them and



**Top:** A group of volunteers gather every Saturday to minister to Ferguson, Mo., through Adopt a Block, an initiative led by Jose Aguayo, pastor of Dorea Ministries, Ferguson.

**Right:** During the end of spring break, several children were interested in what Adopt a Block volunteers were doing in their neighborhood.



Photos courtesy of Jose Aguayo

to develop a relationship with each one as we go back.

“As it develops, anyone in the church can have such a ministry anytime they want,” Shaw noted. “I believe most Christians want to have a ministry and once they understand this approach I believe most people will desire this ... instead of a ‘hit-and-run’ approach, cold turkey calls or confrontations.

### Sharing the gospel

“People will ‘see’ the gospel (of love and care) before they ever hear it. We know it is easier to hear the gospel from someone you know than a complete stranger.”

The Adopt a Block plan entails a central location for monitoring the progress of the churches, setting a place for weekly reports, follow-ups, networking and resourcing.

Shaw said churches of every size can embark on this type of ministry. “But it must be regular. Count the cost before you start,” he said. “If it isn’t sustained it will be

just like the other things we have done and then dropped. ... Just think — what if every church would adopt such a ministry? Ultimately many will come into the Kingdom and our churches will become a place that the world will say, ‘Those folks really do care.’”

Since starting in late February the Adopt a Block initiative has seen more than 60 volunteers each week. At press time the initiative was gathering volunteers every Saturday morning, but Aguayo said they would also begin meeting on Thursdays.

After the first week Aguayo said, “I got a text from a pastor (that had participated) that said ‘AWESOME SUCCESS.’ (In mid-March) a person told me that (Adopt a Block) was the best two hours of ministry she had ever been involved in.

“People are overwhelmed at how much love they are receiving. And people are excited about it, both on the giving and the receiving end.” (BP, TAB)

## Ministry Tips



### MINISTERING TO THE GRIEVING — A YEAR LATER

**By Michael J. Brooks**  
Pastor, Siluria Baptist Church, Alabaster

**A**nniversaries are special times for couples to celebrate and remember the events that brought them together. And everyone enjoys celebrating their birthdays — well, almost everyone. But some anniversaries are sad.

I thought of this two years ago while doing some yard work during spring break at the college where I worked. I was using some tools that belonged to my dad and remembered he died on that very day a year before. It was a time to remember his contributions to my life and my gratitude to God that he wasn’t suffering any longer.

For many years I’ve had the practice of

writing the deaths of church members and friends in my calendar so I’d remember the first anniversary of their passing. This affords a great opportunity for writing a note expressing concern and special prayer support that day.

Notes can be mailed to arrive on the anniversary date or the pastor, Sunday School teacher or other church friend can

be reminded to make a phone call expressing the same thoughts.

### More than a promise

We shouldn’t just promise to pray; we must pray for our friends. Counselors say it takes many months to deal with grief and the one-year mark is a major milestone. ☪

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# Church attendance

## Americans see value in attending church, LifeWay Research study shows

**T**he overwhelming majority of Americans say they find value in attending church, a new LifeWay Research study shows. Two-thirds of Americans think

attendance is admirable; only 11 percent consider church useless. Even among nonreligious people, 80 percent believe church attendance is acceptable and 43 percent label it admirable. Just 29 percent call it useless.

But despite their professed fondness for church, Americans are more likely to believe attendance is declining (55 percent) or the church is dying (42 percent) than growing (36 percent) or thriving (38 percent), according to the LifeWay survey of 1,000 Americans Sept. 19–28, 2014.

“Americans have a much more optimistic view of the people and practice of attending church than they do of the health of the church,” said Scott McConnell, vice president of the Nashville-based LifeWay Research. “Church attendance is much like regular exercise and driving the speed limit. People do not live out everything they admire.”

Confirming McConnell’s assertion that Americans’ churchgoing is at odds with their behavior, even on Easter — traditionally the best-attended Sunday of the year — large segments of the population say they don’t plan to attend.

### Mixed trends

Participants’ attitudes reflect the mixed trends of the past 50 years. While many mainline denominations have lost membership, some have grown. And while more people are Christian today than in 1970, Christians make up a smaller share of the burgeoning population, according to a study from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Mass.

Faced with those trends, many churches have shifted toward contemporary worship styles and new outreach methods, although 27 percent of Americans still think church attendance is outdated, LifeWay research found. That belief is even more pronounced among the nonreligious (42 percent), Catholics (31 percent) and people 25 to 34 years old (34 percent) who are among the Millennial generation in which fewer claim religious affiliation or profess belief in God, according to Pew Research Center.

Young adults, like most Americans, don’t see church attendance as an assumption in today’s culture. While 54 percent of those over 65 describe churchgoing as an expectation, that viewpoint is in the minority for every other age group — a sign that those who attend are making a personal choice rather than responding to societal pressure.

That’s a positive finding, McConnell said. “I don’t think evangelicals would want that to be the reason people go to church anyway.”

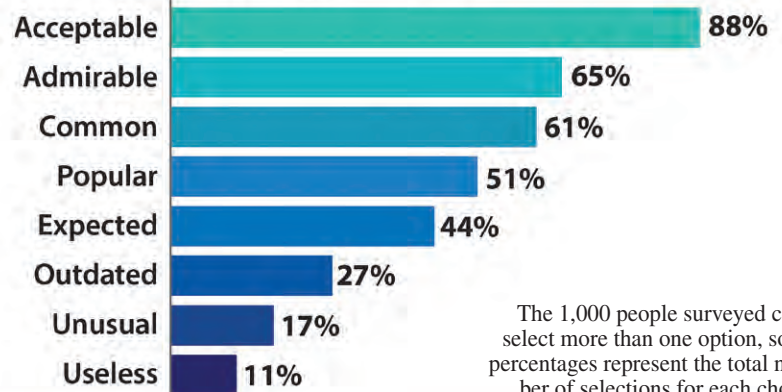
Women have more positive attitudes than men about churchgoing, the LifeWay study found, with 69 percent of women and 63 percent of men viewing attendance as admirable. Only 9 percent of women consider church useless, while 14 percent of men hold that opinion.

Larger shares of women also believe in the health and vitality of the church. Forty percent of women say the church is growing and 41 percent describe it as thriving. Among men, only 32 percent think it is growing and 34 percent label it thriving.

“The longevity of the Christian church proves it is not a fad,” McConnell said. “Some Americans feel cultural expectations to attend church, but our recent research shows that those who actually do attend hold more closely to the teachings of Jesus Christ.” (BP)

Among Americans:

### “Church attendance is... ”



The 1,000 people surveyed could select more than one option, so the percentages represent the total number of selections for each choice.

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# SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For April 12

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

### THE PROMISE FULFILLED Luke 24:19-35

#### The Questions Raised (19-24)

It is easy for us to look back over the events of Jesus' life, death, burial and resurrection and see how these events are the fulfillment of prophecy. We have the benefit of the New Testament, inspired and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, which clearly explains and demonstrates how Jesus had to come and die for us and be raised on the third day. However, the disciples and followers of Jesus did not understand this at the time of Jesus' crucifixion. Here in this passage these two disciples were hoping Jesus was the Messiah — the One who would come and redeem Israel. They were looking for a conquering ruler who would come and kick the Romans out of Israel and return the land to a place of prominence just like in the days of David.

The Jews were correct in thinking the Messiah would do these things but they only understood part of Old Testament prophecy. The Old Testament is clear that the Messiah will come and right all wrongs and bring the people of God into a land of peace and prosperity. But this would not be fulfilled until the Second Coming of the Messiah. The disciples and the Jews overlooked the other aspect of the Messiah.

#### The Old Testament Fulfilled (25-27)

What is this other aspect? It is that the Messiah had to suffer. Jesus explained to His disciples that the Old Testament points to the need for a suffering Messiah. While it is true the Messiah would come and return God's people to a position of prominence, the Old Testament also prophesies that the Messiah would have to come and suffer for His people. When one reads Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 it is an obvious allusion to the crucifixion. Jesus knew He was going to have to suffer and He explained this continually to His disciples but they did not understand what He was talking about (Luke 18:31-34).

It is common for Christians to overlook the Old Testament and think it is not worth reading or that the New Testament is better. The truth of the matter is the entire Bible is God's record to us. The Old Testament is vital. We cannot truly grasp the New Testament unless we have the Old Testament to help us understand it. Jesus walked along with these two disciples and explained how the entire Old Testament was pointing to the Messiah. The Holy Spirit has inspired both the Old Testament and the New Testament and since God is not a man that changes His mind (Num. 23:19), the truth revealed in the Old Testament is still valid for us today. Therefore we can see how the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in Christ and thus we can trust that the prophecies yet to come to pass also will come true.

#### The Messiah Revealed (28-32)

Once Jesus and these disciples reached their destination it was revealed to the disciples that Jesus was the Messiah. Their greatest hopes were met in this event. Jesus, in whom they had placed their hope, was the true Messiah. He was risen from the dead and still alive.

#### The Resurrection Proclaimed (33-35)

This great joy caused the disciples to do what came naturally — they told their friends. These two went back to Jerusalem and told the disciples the news of the resurrection. But it didn't end there. In the book of Acts we see the disciples continue to tell others about Christ which often led to their persecution (like that of Peter, Stephen and Paul). But it did not matter to them. The truth of the resurrection is so important and so powerful that no man or group of men could silence them.

Even today Christians are called to share the gospel with the world and we can see that today Christians continue to be persecuted and killed for this message of love and redemption. But just like in the book of Acts, nothing can stop the message of the gospel. 📖

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

### ASCENDED LIKE NO OTHER Acts 1:3-11

Several years ago author Mitch Albom wrote "Tuesdays with Morrie." The book recounted the author's visits over several weeks with Morrie Schwartz, one of Albom's college professors. Schwartz was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) and was aware he had only months of life remaining.

The book describes the friendship the two developed over conversations they had during the final weeks of Schwartz's life. Their talks covered a range of topics including death, life, love, acceptance and relationships. The author recalled many of Morrie's sayings including "Learn to give yourself and to forgive yourself," "Love wins. Love always wins" and "The most important thing is to learn how to give out love and to let it come in."

Morrie died Nov. 4, 1995. His final words of wisdom and advice about life and death resonated with readers. Albom's book was a bestseller in 1998 and has sold more than 14 million copies.

This Sunday's lesson invites us to consider the final words Jesus offered before He ascended. Because they were His final words to the disciples, we should give them closer attention.

#### Jesus equipped His disciples for His departure. (3)

Luke must have anticipated future readers of his account of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and the spread of the gospel. He informed both present and future readers that many persons saw the resurrected Jesus and heard Him talk about the kingdom of God. The testimony of these witnesses could surely be verified with little effort because Jesus presented Himself during a period of many days (Luke 24:13-53). It would be impossible to deny Luke's claims, given the large number of people who could verify his words. The kingdom of God Jesus spoke of represented the saving power

of God, confirmed and made life-changing through Jesus' resurrection. This Kingdom would be unlike any earthly kingdom. It would be a Kingdom impossible to contain within borders, with citizenship consisting of any and all who followed Christ regardless of race, gender, culture or geographic homeland. The leader of this Kingdom would be a spiritual leader different from and transcending all human concepts of kingdoms, power and rulers.

#### Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to empower His followers. (4-8)

Jerusalem was the place to be for what would begin as a result of the resurrection. Jesus may have anticipated His followers' anxiety about when He would no longer be physically present. He told them to stay in Jerusalem and wait for a "gift" from the Father.

Sometimes we can be too quick to leave sacred places after holy moments. Maybe our culture of busyness and instant gratification has diminished our capacity for waiting. How many gifts from the Father have we missed because we became impatient and moved on to other things?

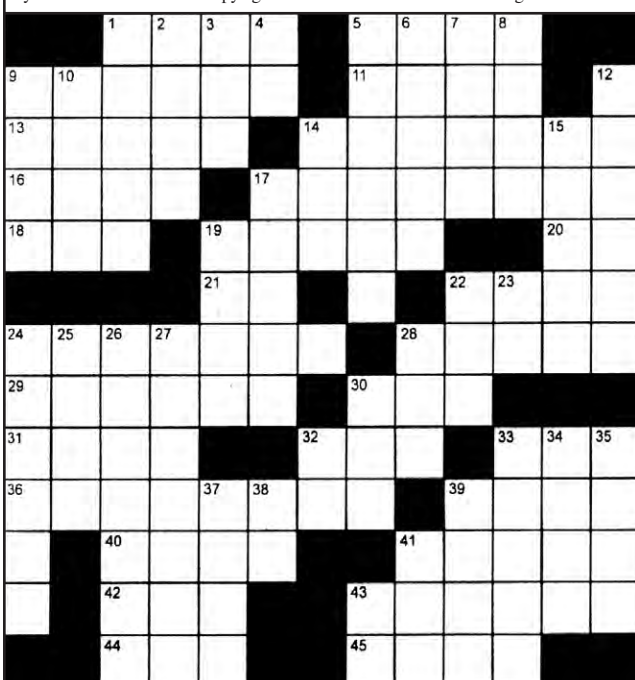
Jesus knew the gift He spoke of was already present and soon His followers would become fully awakened to the Spirit's presence and power. They would become aware of the ever-present Living God whose Spirit so completely indwells and enlivens that they could do no less than eagerly tell others about the life-changing gift they had received.

#### Jesus ascended and will return for His followers. (9-11)

The disciples experienced many things as Jesus' followers. Recent events of His passion, death and resurrection must have been occupying their thoughts when Jesus told them about the Father's gift. Then to see Him ascend into a cloud — they had yet another unusual incident to think about. No wonder the angels had to redirect their focus back down to earth — where ministry was needed. 📖

## Christian Crossword

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



### Across

- Lot sat in the \_\_\_ of Sodom. (Gen. 19:1)
- Son of Shem. (Gen. 10:22)
- Rehoboam sent \_\_\_ who was over the tribute. (1 Kings 12:18)
- Where the altar is in an Eastern Church.
- Person.
- Sick people ... taken with \_\_\_ diseases. (Matt. 4:24)
- Elder son of Zeus.
- Sanballat the \_\_\_. (Neh. 2:10)
- Name prefix. (Simon \_\_\_ Jonah)
- Pertaining to an ecological sere.
- Newspaper person. (abbr.)
- British thanks.
- False god.
- Hide thyself by the brook \_\_\_. (1 Kings 17:3)
- \_\_\_ in me, and I in you. (John 15:4)
- By the \_\_\_ of Babylon, there we sat down. (Ps. 137:1)

### Down

- Wife of Hosea. (Hos. 1:3)
- Belonging to a son of Jether. (1 Chron. 7:38)
- Sunbathe.
- Printer's measure.
- He laid the foundation thereof in \_\_\_ his firstborn. (1 Kings 16:34)
- Edom \_\_\_ ted from under the hand of Judah. (2 Kings 8:20)
- So be it.
- Seagoing prefix.
- And \_\_\_ told Jezebel all that Elijah had done. (1 Kings 19:1)
- He set it up in the plain of \_\_\_. (Dan. 3:1)
- It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a \_\_\_ . (Matt. 19:24)
- In the borders of \_\_\_ on the west. (Josh. 11:2)
- Abraham ... offered him ... in the \_\_\_ of his son. (Gen. 22:13)
- Warms.
- Mix.
- Business watchdog.
- The king of \_\_\_ they took alive. (Josh. 8:23)
- Give recognition.
- For the laborer is worthy of his \_\_\_. (Luke 10:7)
- Avoiding.
- Short answers.
- Motorists' club.
- Woman's name.
- Court. (abbr.)
- Once more.
- Slew the kings of Midian ... Zur ... Hur and \_\_\_. (Num. 31:8)

- Network.
- Southeast Asian country.
- Is there any taste in the white of \_\_\_ egg? (Job 6:6)
- NASA prefix.
- In him is the love of \_\_\_ perfected. (1 John 2:5)
- \_\_\_ visit the fatherless and widows. (James 1:27)



# TOP 8

downloaded songs from iTunes  
At press time

## CHRISTIAN & GOSPEL



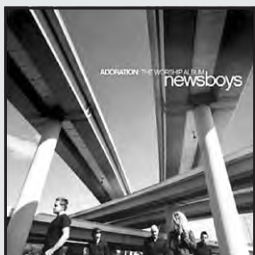
### 1. I Am

By Mark Schultz  
(I Am – Single)



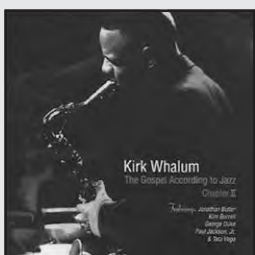
### 2. Bless the Broken Road

By Selah and Melodie Crittenden  
(Bless the Broken Road – The Duets Album)



### 4. Falling In Love With Jesus

By Kirk Whalum  
(The Gospel According to Jazz, Chapter 2)



### 6. Come, Now Is the Time to Worship

By Phillips, Craig and Dean  
(The Worship Collection)



### 7. Shine

By Newsboys  
(Newsboys: The Greatest Hits)



### 8. Glory

By Selah and Nichole Nordeman  
(Bless the Broken Road – The Duets Album)

*“I really want for people to understand that no matter where they are at ... they are deeply loved by the Creator of the universe.”*

Shawn McDonald  
musician



# Hope and healing

## Musician Shawn McDonald ‘ceased running from God’

By Leann Callaway  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

**W**hen musician Shawn McDonald performs concerts around the country he cannot help but tell about the influence of God’s unfailing love in his own life.

During his teen years, McDonald felt his life spinning out of control.

A pivotal turning point came when McDonald decided to stop running away from God and started running toward Him — asking for help and forgiveness. In Christ he discovered a Savior willing and waiting to rescue, redeem and restore.

“I’ve gone through some dark seasons and have been in some difficult places,” he shared. “Recently a friend reminded me that the only way out of the darkness is to draw near the light. During those dark times, there is really a need to draw near God and be close to Him.”

As McDonald began to refocus, he found a way to connect others to the life-changing love of Christ through music.

### Desire to help

“For me writing music is the way that I express my thoughts and my heart. I hope that my songs will encourage people and help bring healing by leading them to a relationship with Christ.”

Through his music and message, McDonald desires to help people respond to God’s love with songs of adoration, praise and thanksgiving.

“I’ve always tried to be transparent when I’m writing songs because I believe that our own struggles and stories will have the greatest impact on others,” he said. “They need to know that in the midst of their struggles, there is hope. That’s how I approach songwriting. It’s a glimpse into my life and what God is teaching me.”

“There is nothing you can do that will make God love you less — just look at the story of the prodigal son. I really want for people to understand that no matter where they are at in their journey, they are deeply loved by the Creator of the universe and that He has the power to make all things new. So we need to stop trying to run away from God and start a new journey by resting in His unfailing love, forgiveness and grace.”

McDonald’s latest album, “Brave,” is designed to inspire people to go further on this journey as they pursue a daily walk with Christ.

“In the past I’ve always been a very timid soul and have often been afraid of being judged, which

has probably caused me to miss out of a lot of things in life,” McDonald acknowledged. “As I look back on that phase of my life and remember feeling like I didn’t fit in, I realize there are probably a lot of people out there who feel the exact same way.

“We all feel inadequate at times. The album focuses on putting down our insecurities and fears and simply trusting in God. Our courage and strength comes from Him.”



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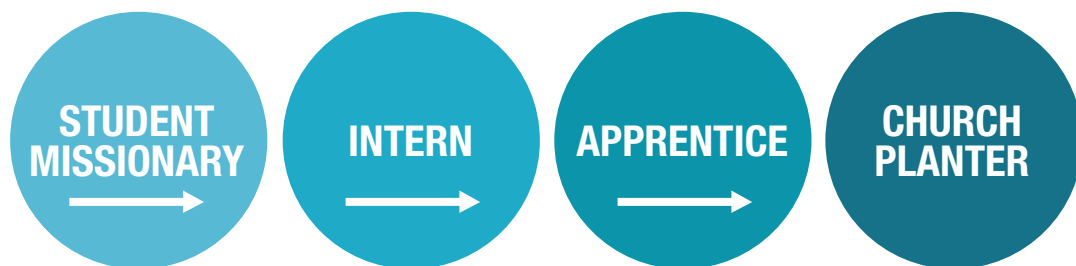
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# NAMIB

## Farm System



### NAMB's developmental pathway sees great fruit

By Kevin Ezell  
North American Mission Board

If you watch Major League Baseball in March you'll see players you've never heard of on the diamond. That's what spring training is all about — young players from a team's farm system showing what they can do against major league talent. The farm system plays a critical part in building a winning team.

At the North American Mission Board (NAMB) we also believe in the important role a farm system plays in fulfilling our mission to help Southern Baptists start evangelistic churches. That's why we've designed a developmental pathway centered around the local church for the church planters of tomorrow. And here's the good news — just a few years into this effort we are already seeing great fruit.

Take Muche Ukegbu for example. Ukegbu was a part of Blueprint Church, Atlanta, when he became an intern with NAMB and then served on our first GenSend team in 2012. As a GenSend missionary he had a firsthand look at church planting in some of the toughest-to-reach cities in North America. At the end of the summer he started serving as a NAMB apprentice with church planter Dhati Lewis back at Blueprint.

One day during dinner Lewis asked Ukegbu, "Where do you see yourself in five to 10 years?" Ukegbu started realizing God was calling him to plant a church.

Ukegbu and his wife, Diamone, looked at a couple of different cities, but soon settled on Miami. Thanks to the relationships he had developed at Blueprint, Ukegbu gathered a team of 22 people to help him plant a church in Miami before leaving Atlanta. This Easter, he and his team will officially launch The Brook in North Miami.



Photo courtesy of Muche Ukegbu  
Muche Ukegbu, shown here with his youngest son, Noah, is a church planter set to launch The Brook church in North Miami.

Ask Ukegbu about the significance of his time in NAMB's Farm System, and he is clear: "You teach what you know, but you reproduce who you are. In the last five years, being around solid men and being able to engage with them, lead with them and have them pour into me has made all the difference in the world."

In fact Ukegbu points particularly to the influence of Lewis as a key mentor in his life. Ukegbu says Lewis modeled for him what it was like to be a catalytic leader who is generous with his time and his influence.

I can't wait to see what God is going to do through Ukegbu and The Brook because we've already seen what God has done in him during the last few years.

Because of the immense level of lostness in North America, we need to greatly increase the number of men like Ukegbu our churches are reproducing and sending out. As you look to multiply leaders in your context, I hope you'll point them toward our Farm System as we work together in this effort.

And please pray for Ukegbu as he heads toward his Easter launch. 🙏

**"Because of the immense level of lostness in North America, we need to greatly increase the number of men like Ukegbu our churches are reproducing and sending out."**

Kevin Ezell  
President, North American Mission Board

## PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



### Attacks on Christians in India increase 55 percent

NEW DELHI — The number of incidents against Christians in India has increased 55 percent since Hindu nationalist Narendra Modi became prime minister in May 2014, according to figures from the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI).

During a protest by religious minorities near India's Parliament House on March 19, rights activist and Christian leader John Dayal said there have been 168 incidents against Christians in Modi's first 300 days in power. That figure compares with 108 such cases in the 300 days before Modi took office on May 26, 2014, according to EFI.

Reported attacks against the Christian community in January totalled 20, with another 20 in February and 13 in March, according to EFI. By comparison, in the first five months of 2014 there were only 32 anti-Christian incidents before Modi took power.

Dayal, former member of the National Integration Council, said the number of incidents in Modi's first 300 days pertains only to reported cases and that the actual number is higher. Cases ranged from false accusations of "forcible conversion" to desecration of church buildings to violent attacks on Christians.

"Illegal police detention of church workers and denial of constitutional rights of freedom aggravate the coercion and terror unleashed in hate speeches and campaigns of ghar wapsi ['homecoming,' or reconversions to Hinduism]," he said.

The tone set by Modi's National Democratic Alliance government has emboldened Hindu extremists in several parts of the country to attack non-Hindus, Christian leaders say. Coercion to convert to Hinduism continues. (MS)

### Russia continues to make religion difficult

SIMFEROPOL, Crimea — One year after Russia's March 2014 annexation of Crimea, those who wish to exercise their freedom of religion or belief continue to face difficulties because of Russia's strict religious restrictions.

Individuals and religious communities have faced raids, fines, religious literature seizures, government surveillance, expulsions of invited foreign religious leaders and obstructions to regaining places of worship confiscated in the Soviet period. Only 1 percent of communities which had state registration under Ukrainian law have succeeded in gaining the compulsory Russian re-registration.

All 150 re-registration applications submitted to Crimea's justice department ahead of the original Dec. 31, 2014, deadline were initially rejected as they were "very bad," according to the justice department.

Even after the extended March 1 deadline, only two centralized religious organizations (one of the Orthodox dioceses and the Muftiate) have been re-registered and only 12 local communities.

Without registration under Russian law, religious communities can meet, but cannot enter into contracts to rent property, employ people or invite foreigners. Members of a wide range of religious communities are highly cautious about discussing anything that could be interpreted as criticism of Russian rule for fear of possible reprisals. (F18)

### Turkmen police raid Protestant leader's home

GALKYNYSH, Turkmenistan — Narmurad Mominov, a Protestant leader from Galkynysh in Lebap Region of eastern Turkmenistan, was fined two weeks' average local wages in late February after police raided a private home, local Protestants said.

Many of those present were held until the early hours of the morning, while some were pressured to renounce or change their faith. One who did so was told to "repent" publicly in the mosque.

During a search police had found a copy of the New Testament and blamed Mominov for giving it to the homeowner. Local Protestants had feared that he could have been given as much as a 15-day jail term.

One Baptist homeowner in the city of Mary told police who seized four hymnbooks from her guests: "Who can forbid us from praying? Who can forbid us from inviting others as guests?" (F18)