

THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

July 2, 2015
Vol. 180, No. 27

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www.thealabamabaptist.org

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Main photo by Neisha Roberts, small photos of the Battle of Iwo Jima: commons.wikimedia.org

'Lord, I'm in Your hands'

Alabama Baptist WWII veteran shares about God's guidance, protection

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

It had been hours since the 27th Marine Regiment had stopped for something to eat and a break. And the sun had long since slipped behind the 15-foot-high sand ridge closest to them, the remnant of a recent typhoon. As Horace Lee began to slide his gear off his back and settle in next to a cistern that was collecting rainwater, he saw something move out of the corner of his eye — a tree stump.

At first he thought he was hallucinating and just tired from the dan-

gerous trek of avoiding the "with-ering fire" that blazed above them. But the stump kept tilting back, away from the ground. Luckily, he said in an interview 70 years later, he was alert enough to see a hand reach out from beneath the stump in the darkness. He knew immediately the stump camouflaged one of the exits for the Imperial Japanese Army's 11 miles of underground tunnels. Lee grabbed a

hand grenade from his bag, pulled the pin and held it for as long as he could before tossing it toward the stump.

"I held the grenade ... for about seven to nine seconds, then tossed it and blew the stump away," Lee said. After the air cleared of debris, Lee and his fellow Marines investigated the scene and sealed the tunnel's exit.

That was one of the scariest

moments from his 36 days on the island of Iwo Jima, he said.

Lee was 21 at the time, serving during his first term with the U.S. Marine Corps in the 2nd Battalion, 27th Regiment, 5th Division, Team 227 Demolition Engineers, B Company Combat Team under the direction of Col. I.L. Antonelli.

At the age of 17, Lee had enlisted voluntarily, just one year and one (See 'Extraordinary,' page 17)

Many Americans concerned for nation's direction

We're gung-ho for the idea that the United States of America has a special status with God, and we're almost always proud of our nation.

But a new survey finds our flag-waving, All-American Fourth of July celebrations also are tempered by concerns that the

nation isn't the moral leader it once was, that Christians face discrimination here at home and that some folks aren't "truly American."

And although overall views shine bright red, white and blue, the level of our enthusiasm varies according to factors such as religion, age and (See '2 of 3 Americans,' page 8)



COMMENT

Don't Be Fooled

When former Auburn University football coach Pat Dye and former Alabama Power Company president Charles McCrary announced the formation of a new organization to promote gambling in Alabama, hope faded that the upcoming special session of the state Legislature would concentrate on adopting a state budget to take effect this October.

Instead the legislators will be sidetracked by another round in the ongoing fight over gambling in Alabama.

A spokesman for state Sen. Del Marsh said as much when he announced, "Sen. Marsh believes that giving the people the ability to vote on gaming should be an option in the special session." Marsh, who is president pro tempore of the Alabama Senate, became the primary sponsor of gambling legislation earlier this year.

Gambling will not be included in Gov. Robert Bentley's call for a special session but Marsh will likely introduce a constitutional amendment to establish a state-sponsored lottery and authorize casino gambling at the state's four dog tracks. It will take the same three-fifths majority to pass his proposed constitutional amendment whether it is done in regular legislative session or a special session.

Different reality

Dye said he believes a lottery and casino gambling would solve the state's financial problems. That is always the promise of the gamblers. But reality is far different. This year 20 states in addition to Alabama have a budget shortfall, according to the Alabama Policy Institute. All but one of those 20 states have a state-run lottery. Fourteen of the states have casino gambling as well.

Obviously gambling does not solve a state's financial problems. At best it is a Band-Aid to protect legislators from having to make difficult decisions about responsible government spending and just tax policies. At worst state-sponsored gambling is a manipulative tool of the powerful to protect themselves at the expense of society's most vulnerable.

The evidence is conclusive. As the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis reported, "A large portion of lottery profits come from people ... with the least disposable income." In other words, lottery is a sucker's bet for those who have no hope but to grasp at straws.

It is surprising and disappointing that noted business leaders such as McCrary and Ray-



THOUGHTS
By Bob Terry

mond Harbert, CEO of Harbert Management Corporation, have lent support to the effort to expand gambling in Alabama. Neither man would lead his company into a saturated market with a declining future. Yet that is the status of casino gambling.

In nearby Mississippi two casinos went broke and closed last year. In Atlantic City, the poster child of the gambling crowd, four casinos have closed or announced closing including the city's newest one, the \$2.4 billion Revel.

Atlantic City's gambling revenue is down more than 47 percent since 2006. In Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Indiana, Ohio, Wisconsin, Louisiana and other places the reports are the same — gambling revenue is declining with no stop in sight.

It is a pipe dream to think people will travel from out of state to gamble at Alabama casinos. The market for such behavior is too saturated for that. Alabamians will be the ones victimized by casino gambling. Is that what business leaders are encouraging rather than the proven disciplines of work, thrift and responsibility?

Burdening those least able to pay

Gambling places the financial burden of the state on the backs of those least able to pay rather than on a fair and just tax system focused on capital and corporations.

Pulitzer Prize-winning tax reporter David Cay Johnston found that 11 states already raise more money per person through lotteries than they raise through corporate income taxes. That is not the direction Alabama should go.

Through the years gambling has tried to wrap itself in various social causes — education, care for the aged, medical care and now jobs. Don't be fooled. Alabama Jobs Foundation is only the latest front designed to hide the self-

ish nature of gambling that results in losses for many in order for one to profit — either directly or indirectly.

The new gambling organization promises a slick media campaign complete with TV and radio ads. That is nothing new. Gamblers always have been able to outspend citizens' groups. This means elected officials will be placed under enormous pressures.

It is up to Baptists and other concerned citizens to counter those pressures — not with money but with contacts. Alabama Baptists make up more than one-fifth of the residents of this state. Baptists are the largest affinity group in Alabama and are located in every state house and senate district.

Contact elected officials

If those concerned about expanding gambling in our state — concerned about a state-sponsored lottery and casinos in every part of the state — personally contact their elected officials and ask them to oppose expanding gambling in Alabama it will make a difference.

During the recent regular session of the Legislature the state's mental health program was threatened with draconian cuts. But after an extensive effort to inform legislators about the importance of mental health programs, mental health was made a budget priority along with Medicaid and corrections. Contacting legislators really works.

Baptists and other concerned Christians don't have the dollars for a media campaign and we cannot fill

someone's campaign war chest with donations. But Baptists do have the votes. Baptists can make a difference if they want to. The time to make that difference is now.

This week Alabama Citizens Action Program mailed information to every Baptist pastor in the state and other religious leaders urging immediate contact with elected officials. A letter would be helpful. A visit or a phone call would be better.

Alabama has many problems that need attention from the state's Christian communities. Hunger and poverty are high in our state. Physical and mental health are below national norms. Education lags in places. Income is low.

Alabama does not need to complicate its problems by expanding legalized gambling. By acting now we can keep that problem at bay so we can work on the many pressing issues we already face. 🙏

To find your state senator's contact information, visit www.legislature.state.al.us/aliswww/Senators.aspx. To find your representative's contact information, visit www.legislature.state.al.us/aliswww/Representatives.aspx.

**The Alabama Baptist
will not publish an issue July 9.
The next issue will be July 16.**



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

(ISSN 0738-7741;
USPS 011-080)

© The Alabama Baptist, Inc. is published weekly except for one week in July and December by The Alabama Baptist, Inc., at 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209. Phone: 205-870-4720. Statewide phone: 1-800-803-5201. Fax: 205-879-6026. Website: www.thealabamabaptist.org. Email: news@thealabamabaptist.org or circulation@thealabamabaptist.org. Periodicals postage paid at Birmingham, Ala., and at additional mailing offices.

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Church Budget — \$13.75
Individual — \$22.25

DIGITAL

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Church Budget — \$8.50
Individual — \$14.95

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Christians, churches face religious liberty threats following SCOTUS 'marriage' ruling

Pastors and churches seem safe from forced conformity despite the 5-4 ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court to legalize same-sex "marriage," but religious institutions may have a more difficult future. Christian businesspeople also face uncertainties about their rights going forward.

The long-anticipated decision in Obergefell v. Hodges was announced June 26. The Court ruled: "The Fourteenth Amendment requires a state to license a marriage between two people of the same sex and to recognize a marriage between two people of the same sex when their marriage was lawfully licensed and performed out-of-state."

In one of the dissenting opinions, Chief Justice John Roberts said the Constitution was left out of the decision.

"Whether same-sex 'marriage' is a good idea should be of no concern to us," he said. "Under the Constitution, judges have power to say what the law is, not what it should be."

But Justice Anthony Kennedy said in the majority opinion, "The limitation of marriage to opposite-sex couples may long have seemed natural and just, but its inconsistency with the central meaning of the fundamental right to marry now is manifest."

Gov. Robert Bentley said, "I agree with 81 percent of the people of Alabama who believe that marriage is between one man and one woman. ... But we will always obey the law."

Alabama Attorney General Luther Strange said that while the decision may be the "law of the land," he suspects "the focus will now turn to the exercise of one's religious liberty."

"I will continue to defend the religious liberties of Alabamians and ensure that people and businesses honoring their religious beliefs are protected," Strange wrote in a statement.

Russell Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), agreed that religious liberty "is the next front in this skirmish in American life."

"I don't think this will result in pastors being forced to perform same-sex 'marriages,' but I think there will be more religious liberty questions. ... It is going to take legislative protection of basic first amendment rights ... and



RNS photo



Reuters photo

THE 14TH AMENDMENT'S EQUAL PROTECTION CLAUSE

No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

people of faith articulating why we believe what we believe," he said.

D'Linell Finley — pastor of Southlawn Baptist Church, Montgomery, and director of Samford University's Ministry Training Institute in Tuskegee — also expressed concern about religious liberty.

'Respect our rights' too

"In this diverse society where our liberties give us the right to make our choices, we want those groups to respect our rights to be people of faith with moral standards," he said. "We shouldn't be forced to abandon those standards or risk being called intolerant."

"I would encourage churches to be very firm in what they believe," Finley added. "The Church still has the high ground. We need to ... let people know with clarity where we stand and that we hold fast to our faith just as they hold fast to their lifestyle."

It comes down to how we are going to act as Christians, he said. "The Church is bigger than any immorality that society can throw at it. ... Before this decision came down, sin was already around us. As believers we have coped

with it ... since we have been saved.

"If God allowed us to overcome sin in the past and not allow it to overwhelm us, then I think He will allow us to do the same thing despite a Supreme Court ruling," Finley said. "I would suggest believers continue to be believers wherever they are working ... just as they have already been doing by managing to get along by meeting their responsibilities and not allowing the beliefs of other people to get in their head."

However, Moore said believers will need to understand the difference between being insulted and being persecuted.

Church leaders will need to instruct their congregations on what it means to live according to conscience, he said.

Moore and Finley both said religious institutions beyond the local church — Christian colleges and universities specifically — will likely face the most difficulties.

Alabama Baptist State Convention President Travis Coleman Jr. and Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama

Baptist State Board of Missions, also said the Court's decision "has far-reaching moral and legal implications, even beyond the stated intent of the ruling itself."

"We as Alabama Baptists need to remain faithful to our calling to be the people of God, even in a culture that is becoming increasingly adverse to the biblical views of marriage and family," they wrote in a joint statement. "Our mission has not changed. Our beliefs have not changed. Our calling to be the people of God has not changed. Now more than ever, we must be the voice of authentic biblical Christianity."

Coleman added, "Let us be reminded that though same-sex 'marriage' now becomes legal, it does not make it right. God's Word still remains true and is the guide for His children and His Church. Let us love and respect others who differ with us on this issue but let us also remain true to our convictions that biblical marriage is between one man and one woman. Please pray for our leaders as they sort out all the implications of this ruling concerning religious liberty and the Church."

For more on what the ruling means for Christians, visit ERLC.com/SCOTUS. (TAB)

Court upholds Arizona church's free-speech right on sign issue

For pastor Clyde Reed, a win at the highest court of the land was a significant victory not only for his small church but also for many Americans.

"I thank God that the Supreme Court affirmed our First Amendment freedoms and sent the message that the church's speech can't be targeted for restriction," Reed said after the U.S. Supreme Court's opinion was issued June 18. "More importantly, I am blessed to have been a part of a victory for free speech that will certainly outlast us and that I pray

will benefit others for many years."

The justices unanimously ruled a Gilbert, Arizona, sign code violated the free-speech rights of Good News Community Church. The decision not only will free Good News Church to set up its signs without harassment from the local government, but it could provide aid to the church planting efforts of the Southern Baptist Convention and other organizations that often use such signs to inform communities of their presence.

In its opinion, the Supreme Court overruled a federal appeals

court decision, finding the sign ordinance adopted by Gilbert — a Phoenix-area city of about 200,000 — "imposes content-based restrictions on speech" and fails to pass the government test for such a law. That code limited the size of directional signs — like those for church meetings — to six square feet and 12 hours for display while permitting far greater sizes and durations for the exhibition of political, ideological and homeowners' association signs.

The Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission had

signed a friend-of-the-court brief by the Christian Legal Society that contended the sign ordinance violated the church's freedom to speak and assemble.

The Missouri Baptist Convention and its Christian Life Commission also filed a brief in the case in support of the church. The brief — authored by the Southern Baptist, father-son lawyer team of Michael and Jonathan Whitehead — argued the sign code infringed the First Amendment protection of religious freedom, as well as free speech and assembly rights. (BP)

MAKING DISCIPLES

DISCIPLESHIP

Anytime. Anywhere.

NorthPark's D-Life helps create discipleship lifestyle through 'simple, profound' model

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

What do you think is keeping the people in your church from being disciples who make disciples? What's keeping you from doing it?

Is it because you feel you're not a Billy Graham or a Beth Moore?

Is it because you feel you just don't know how?

Whatever the reason, Bill Wilks says you can do it — it's simpler than you think.

He said he knows this because he's seen nearly his entire church turn into active disciple makers in the past two years.

What's their secret?

They're reading the Bible every day and they're meeting up every week to talk about what they're reading.

That's pretty much it, he said.

They call it D-Life.

"It's not a program; it's a lifestyle," said

Wilks, pastor of NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville. "And it's so simple it's profound. The simplicity is what's making it work. People are running with it."

D-Life started at NorthPark two years ago when Wilks began meeting with five other staff members each week to talk about what they were reading in the Bible each day. Their goal: to get through the entire New Testament together in a year and then to split into separate groups, add in more people and do it all over again.

Feeling confident

"It was birthed out of a desire to see more people really living out the Great Commission," Wilks said. "For many people in our churches, the concept of discipleship is to become more educated. It's more 'when's the next class I can go to?' than it is 'how can I be a disciple who makes disciples?'"

Most people in the pews are plenty educated, Wilks said, but few feel confident enough to teach someone else how to follow Christ.

But Jesus gave His followers a "really



simple model," Wilks said. "They had intimate fellowship, and He taught them in a very simple way and then sent them out to tell others."

D-Life is based on that model, he said.

Through an app, D-Life offers a year-long reading plan that has participants reading one chapter of the Bible each day on their own, then coming together once a

week in small groups to discuss it.

When they meet, one person facilitates. Another leads a prayer. A third retells the story that's assigned for the week, a story they will have all read in their personal time in the Word. A fourth person will read it from the Bible to see if anything was left out.

Each group chooses its own time and place for meeting up.

"It can be anytime, anywhere, any day of the week, and it can be in restaurants, coffee shops, homes or parks," Wilks said.

'Out in culture'

The only stipulation? "We just like for them to be out in culture, not in the church."

That setup makes a difference, Wilks said.

"The multiplication of it out in culture is just powerful," he said. "For example, there's a group of senior adult ladies who meet at Arby's every week, and a woman approached them one week because she saw them reading their Bibles together. They eventually led her to Christ. A few months later, the same thing happened again to the same group of ladies."

That's one way the groups are multiplying, he said. And that's the whole point.

"We are discipling each other to do evangelism, read, multiply," Wilks said.

Meeting outside the church invites encounters with strangers, but it also provides a neutral place to which people can invite their friends.

Sometimes they come. Often they stay. They meet Jesus.

And the groups grow.

"When it gets to eight or so, it's time for them to multiply and form two groups," he said. "It keeps us growing by multiplication rather than addition. And it gives us a natural place to connect people who visit the church and want to learn about following Christ."



Lisa Martin (right) shares during a D-Life group that meets on Thursdays at lunchtime. Groups meet weekly wherever they want — coffee shops, restaurants, parks or homes.

Photo by Neisha Roberts

The natural growth and movement of multiplication also keeps groups from getting stagnant, he said.

"I know I'm not the only pastor who has struggled for years trying to get Sunday School classes to multiply," Wilks said. "They don't want us to mess their class up. It's like pulling teeth."

With D-Life, NorthPark is seeing multiplication happen, though it's not about numbers, Wilks is quick to add.

"The first priority is training people to make disciples, period," he said. "If people leave the church and move somewhere else, they should be doing D-Life wherever they go, because it's a lifestyle. It's what we're supposed to be about. And it's a lifelong habit we're trying to cultivate."

'Unbelievable' results

The results have been "unbelievable," he said.

"We've got more people reading their Bible than ever before," Wilks said. "We've got groups sitting around discussing the Bible like never before."

They've grown from that first D-Life group of staff members to 52 groups meeting weekly. The groups range from the senior adult ladies at Arby's to a group of sixth grade girls that meet one morning a week at Chick-Fil-A — that group has already grown from four girls to nine this year.

Whole families are involved in some groups, joining other families and letting the children be the ones to retell the story. Other families are splitting up, with husbands, wives and teenage children all leading separate groups.

Each group grows together and then they go out and serve the community together.

Then they multiply and do it all over again.

The whole church has noticed the impact.

Ray Walker, a NorthPark member, says D-Life has been "transformational."

"My group has been meeting for a little over a year now and the impact on the men's lives has been incredible," he said. "Men in my group are excited about reading the Bible, sharing the stories and leading our time of discussion. It's been a great joy for me to see God work in the lives of these men and see how they have matured in Christ."

It's been a joy for Wilks to watch too — a joy he's now passing on to other pastors.

Several churches across the Southeast, including First Baptist Church, Arley, and First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Georgia, have brought Wilks in to train them in how to do D-Life in their churches.

At First, Arley, it's already going strong,



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

according to Pastor Zach Reno.

"Our people are so excited about D-Life," he said. "In my experience, it has been hard for many people within the church to engage in discipleship for many reasons, with the most common being that they have never seen it modeled or been given a model that works."

The approach, process and overall simplicity in D-Life makes it possible for any Christian to become a disciple maker."

Churches wanting to do D-Life can download training guides and reading plans and even personalize the D-Life app to

their own church, Wilks said.

Wilks said he's available to lead one-day boot-camp trainings at interested churches, or they can participate in quarterly trainings offered at NorthPark — or they can just download the materials from the D-Life website and start.

"I'd be happy to talk with anyone who is interested in doing this at their church," he said. "It's changed the conversation of our church. It's just contagious. And we want to pass it on."

**For more
information, visit
www.livingthelife.com
or contact Wilks at
205-228-0030.**

"Bill Wilks led my education staff through the D-Life training. We were absolutely amazed. It is simple yet profound. Finally — a discipleship strategy that incorporates ministry, accountability and multiplication. If you are looking for a discipleship process that both makes and multiples disciples of Jesus Christ, this is it."

Allan Taylor, minister of education, FBC Woodstock, Georgia

Above: A men's D-Life group that spans generations discusses the week's passage over breakfast at Cracker Barrel. **Below:** Bill Wilks, pastor of NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville, leads a D-Life training boot camp.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

MAKING DISCIPLES

GROWING disciples



ALPHA initiative helps churches develop personalized plan for mentoring new believers

By **Michael J. Brooks**
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

After someone comes to faith in Christ, what's the plan? Is it to bring them to the pastor and see what he says to do? Is it to tell them to come to all the things the church is doing and hope they'll grow?

Dan Garland said that's exactly what often happens, but it's not the way it was meant to be.

"I'd say 90 percent of churches don't have a systematic way to do [discipleship]," said Garland, director of pastoral ministries and church consulting for LifeWay Christian Resources. "Our churches might have a slogan or a mission statement but not a unified pathway to grow people in Christ-likeness."

'Crucial' part

And often that means that disciple-making — which is a "crucial" part of Christian life — falls by the wayside, he said.

One resource available to help churches develop that pathway is the ALPHA initiative,

created by Garland, who was formerly a longtime pastor in Kentucky. The ALPHA strategy gathers pastors and directors of missions (DOM) for a training conference and guides them in developing plans for their churches to help disciples grow.

Before attending the meeting, participants read four books on spiritual growth and the group process. Then during the meeting they tackle the assignment of planning a program of discipleship for their church and receive feedback from the group on their plan.

Garland walked a group of 13 pastors and DOMs from Alabama and Mississippi through this process at a recent conference in Mississippi. He encouraged pastors not only to help their churches provide multiple discipleship groups but also to spend time with individuals or groups themselves and "pass their faith along"

in a systematic fashion. Those who are disciplined should then be challenged to go and disciple others.

Garland said his office tracks all ALPHA participants and about 80 percent see growth in their churches.

Conference leader David Francis, director of Sunday School at LifeWay, said Sunday School is an effective tool for the assimilation of new members, but the genius of Sunday School is that it need not be confined to Sunday mornings.

"Churches are finding success with Bible study classes during the week on site or off premises, such as in members' homes," Francis said. "And we (LifeWay) have three major curriculum options as well as multiple short-term studies that can be used. Pastors and churches can choose the option that works best for them."

Francis also said how Sunday School

is carried out is important — Bible study that involves members in meaningful discussion is more effective than a lecture.

"What we think our classes ought to do is to move from rows to circles," he said. "The group process is enhanced, not hindered. A small group sitting and facing each other is more likely to discuss the implications of Bible study and better learn how these truths affect our daily lives."

'Important work'

Jim Futral, executive director of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, told those participating in the conference that it's vital for churches to "learn to do the important work of making disciples."

"Followers of Christ are called 'Christians' twice in the New Testament, and that's a great descriptor," he said. "But they're called 'disciples' more than 200 times."

Discipleship is "messy and it's hard," Futral said. "But this is what Jesus modeled and what He called us to do."

**For more
information on the
ALPHA initiative,
contact Beth
Watson at LifeWay
at 615-251-2216
or beth.watson@lifeway.com.**



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Upcoming conferences

'Returning to Disciple-Making' conferences tailored to pastors, church staff, key leaders

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 26

Montgomery Baptist Association
The Baptist Foundation of Alabama
 7650 Halcyon Summit Drive, Montgomery
 9:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m. (lunch included, cost: \$8)
 Registration required, deadline: August 20
 Contact office@mgmbaptist.org, 334-271-6227

THURSDAY, AUGUST 27

Columbia Baptist Association
Columbia Association Office
 1308 Ross Clark Circle, Dothan
 9:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m. (lunch included, cost: \$5)
 Registration required, deadline: August 20
 Contact [Emily Wright, ewrightcba@gmail.com](mailto:Emily.Wright@cba@gmail.com), 334-794-6281

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 24

Madison Baptist Association
Madison Association Office
 2318 Whitesburg Drive South, Huntsville
 9:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m. (lunch included, cost: \$5)
 Registration required, deadline: September 17
 Contact [Denise Panter, dpanter@madisonassociation.org](mailto:Denise.Panter@madisonassociation.org), 256-536-0015

'Returning to DISCIPLE-Making'

King to help church leaders redouble discipleship efforts

If you feel like your church has been missing the mark on making faithful and mature followers of Jesus Christ, there's no time like the present to get a new plan.

That's why the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions is offering a "Returning to Disciple-Making" tour at three locations around the state this August and September — to offer church leaders an opportunity to evaluate what they've been doing and learn new strategies they can implement.

Claude King, discipleship specialist at LifeWay Christian Resources, will lead the three events. King is best known as co-author of "Experiencing God" and "The Mind of Christ."

"Jesus' final command to His followers was to make disciples of all peoples and teach them to obey all He has commanded," King said. "Somehow many churches have neglected the disciple-making task and we are suffering the consequences. We must recommit ourselves to equipping the saints for the work of the ministry of building up the body."

In the past four years King has been the featured speaker for a number of disciple-making tour events in the state, and Randall Stoner, director of missions for Marshall Baptist Association, said

King was incredibly helpful in mobilizing church leadership in Marshall Association to redouble their disciple-making efforts in their churches.

"We had a very convicting conference with Claude King," Stoner said. "Everyone went away with a fresh desire to be a better faithful follower of Jesus Christ."

After the Marshall Association event, one church leader told Stoner that his church "had never been so convicted of their need to draw closer to God before."

"I highly recommend this conference to everyone," Stoner said.

The conferences will be held in Montgomery at The Baptist Foundation of Alabama on Aug. 26, in Dothan at the Columbia Baptist Association office Aug. 27 and in Huntsville at Madison Baptist Association office Sept. 24. The event will be held 9:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m. (See graphic at left for more details.) (TAB)



KING

For more information, visit www.alsbom.org/upcoming-events/returning-to-disciple-making or call Ramona Noah at 1-800-264-1225, ext 312.

MICHAEL W. SMITH

IN CONCERT

July 11, 2015

Oxford Performing Arts Center - Oxford, AL
 256-241-3322 | Oxfordpac.org | Groups Save 15%

A reverse mortgage testimony

By Bro. Max and Carolyn Youngblood, retired pastor and wife

After more than 50 wonderful years in the ministry in Alabama, Carolyn and I found ourselves with a mortgage with more than 20 years left to pay. (Part of the reason for this comes from living in a parsonage for most of those years. Those years resulted in not having any equity in a home. Churches, if you are not already doing so, please consider giving your staff a housing allowance.)

I had heard of Reverse Mortgages but did not think we would qualify since we had less than 50 percent equity in our home. After I saw Jimmy Dixon's article in *The Alabama Baptist* I decided to give him a call. Jimmy came to our home and we had a great time of fellowship and gained a great deal of information on the subject. We were still skeptical but we completed an application.

To shorten a long story, that was more than 5

years ago, and we never left our home for any part of the process. We also received enough cash to do the things we need to do.

Carolyn and I highly recommend this to anyone 62 or over that could use this kind of help. It has been an answer to prayer for us.



Max and Carolyn

A word from Jimmy:
 This past year we've seen several changes in the reverse mortgage world. In the last couple of months, FHA has made some changes but the reverse mortgage is still benefiting tens of thousands each year. If you didn't qualify for a reverse before, perhaps you do today, so please give me a call and I'll be glad to run the numbers for you.

For a free brochure or more information, call Jimmy Dixon direct at 205-567-4800 or email jdixon@mcgowinking.com. Like The Alabama Baptist, Jimmy covers our state helping seniors improve the quality of their lives. He is a Sunday School teacher and deacon at Valley Creek Baptist Church, Hueytown.

— Paid Advertising —



2 of 3 Americans say God has granted US exceptional role in human history

(continued from page 1)
race, according to the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI).

A PRRI survey released June 23 finds that 2 out of 3 Americans (66 percent) say God has granted America an exceptional role in human history. Not surprisingly, since the question presupposes a God, only 39 percent of people who don't identify with any particular religion (known as "nones") agree with that statement.

Still "American exceptionalism is a deep and abiding belief that's fundamental to the American DNA," said Daniel Cox, PRRI research director.

Indeed pride waves from this data like a flag: 63 percent overall say there was never a time they weren't "proud to be an American."

However, that enthusiasm doesn't mean they're not troubled on some points.

For example the country is split over whether Christians (72 percent of U.S. adults) are now facing as much discrimination as other groups.

About half of those surveyed — 49 percent, strongly led by white evangelicals at 70 percent — say yes. The other half — 47 percent, including 59 percent of "nones" — say no.

"Christians feel like they are swimming against a cultural tide that's rising against them," Cox said.

Evangelical concerns

He cited findings in other studies showing evangelical concerns over "everything from gay 'marriage' to marijuana legalization, the rising numbers of 'nones' and the falling numbers of people who consider religion important."

Overall a majority (53 percent) say the country today is not setting "a good moral example for the rest of the world."

They were not asked for examples, but Cox said each demographic, religious or political group "could point to things where they may think the U.S. has lost its way."

While 69 percent say they see "a typical American" when they look in their mirror, this is more true for whites (77 percent) than for blacks (61 percent) or Hispanics (48 percent).

This dovetails with a very narrow vision of who is "truly American." High on the list

of very or somewhat important characteristics are people who:

- ▶ Speak English: 89 percent say this is very or somewhat important.
- ▶ Believe in God: 69 percent.
- ▶ Were born in the U.S.: 58 percent.
- ▶ Are Christian: 53 percent.

The survey found "profound generational differences" on the image of what constitutes a true American, Cox said.

Most seniors (66 percent) said to be "truly American" it was important to be Christian — perhaps recalling a culture that is slipping away, he said. But only 35 percent of millennials agreed.

Among Americans who believe the U.S. was once a Christian nation but is not anymore, most "still wish we were," Cox said. This shift is a bad thing, according to 61 percent. Only 29 percent favor this cultural change.

Cox said he is "continually shocked" by how divided America is by race and by how differently issues are perceived by non-Hispanic white Americans and by minorities.

The survey data — gathered before a white supremacist allegedly killed nine black people in a Charleston, South Carolina, church — may reflect recent months of protests over criminal justice and police killings. It was conducted June 10–14, among 1,007 adults in English and in Spanish.

PRRI found that nearly 2 in 3 Americans overall (63 percent) say "protesting unfair government treatment is always a good thing for the country."

However, a lot of support "evaporates" when examined through the prism of race, Cox said.

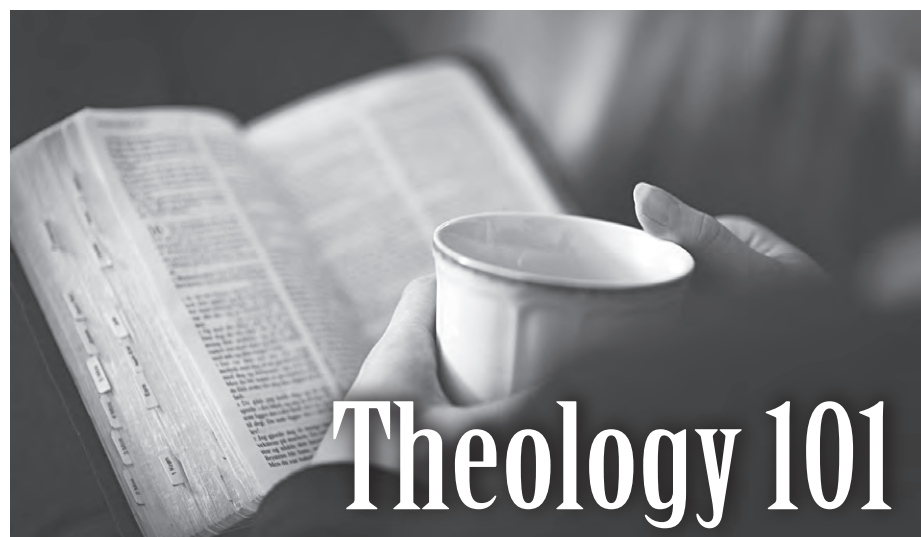
According to the survey, 67 percent of white Americans agree that Americans protesting government mistreatment always leaves the country better off.

"But fewer than half (48 percent) of whites say the same when asked about black Americans speaking out against and protesting unfair treatment by the government," the report says.

Among racial and ethnic minorities, including blacks and Hispanics, 56 percent agree that such protests benefit the country.

Even more (65 percent) agreed that when black Americans protest unfair treatment it makes the country better. (RNS)

**63 percent overall
say there was never
a time they weren't
"proud to be an
American."**



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Such a Great Salvation

Reconciliation

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

In recent weeks we have considered God's great salvation in terms of justification, sanctification and glorification. Another of the terms the Bible uses to help us understand the greatness of salvation is reconciliation.

On the everyday level, reconciliation refers to a change in the personal relationship between individuals. Such a change means that a situation of enmity and estrangement gets replaced by one of peace and restored fellowship. We all know too well how human relationships can become strained.

When some action or attitude comes between two persons, we often say they are estranged. For example marriage partners sometimes become estranged. They may separate or even divorce. First Corinthians 7:11 speaks of reconciliation between partners in marriage: "To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), the husband should not divorce his wife."

Back into fellowship

Estrangement sometimes happens between longstanding friends or even between family members. When reconciliation happens, we understand that whatever had been the separating issue has been resolved. Grace and forgiveness meet repentance and confession. When it happens, people who had become enemies are made to be friends, or family members on the outs with one another get back into mutual fellowship. Reconciliation is always a joyous occasion.

Reconciliation, both on the human level and the religious level, is a change in the relationship of a person with God. In a person's relationship with God, their sins and unbelief are the separating causes. The Bible reminds all of us, "Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God" (Isa. 59:2). The bridge across this separation has the shape of a cross. With His divine-human nature, Christ bridged the separation for those

who trust Him. It is as if with one hand (His divine nature) He grasped God's hand and with His other hand (His human nature) He took our hand. In His sin-bearing death He effectually joined our hand with God's hand, putting Himself squarely in the gap between God and us. "For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one," reconciling us to God "in one body through the cross" (Eph. 2:14–16).

Saving work of Christ

Several passages take up this idea to help us see this important dimension to the saving work of Christ. For example 2 Corinthians 5:19 declares, "In Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them." Romans 5:10 adds, "While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son."

Reconciliation passages tell us several important truths. One truth is that the work of reconciliation is entirely God's work. We do not reconcile God to us. Rather God reconciles us to Himself. God was working in Christ to reconcile the world to Himself. Since the cause of estrangement between God and His world is sin, the removal of this barrier is the essential requirement for reconciliation. Consequently reconciliation with God depends on the sin-bearing death of His Son whom He sent. The hostility that sin created and that separates sinners from a holy God could never be removed by human efforts. What we cannot do, Jesus did. He bore our sins in His body on the cross, with the result being the good news of reconciliation with God. ☞

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



Cleburne Association holds church security conference

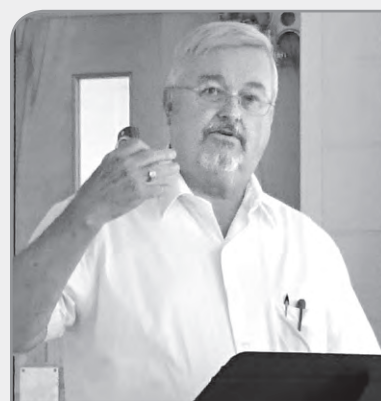


Photo courtesy of Cleburne Baptist Association

Cleburne Baptist Association held a church security conference June 8 at Heflin Baptist Church. The conference discussed several topics such as building security during services, van security, background checks for church staff and Internet/computer security. Chip Smith (left), an associate in the LeaderCare & church administration office of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, was guest speaker. Director of Missions Larry Riddle said the conference was to meet the needs of the association's churches and help prepare and protect them in the future. Nine associational churches were represented at the event.

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

ONE MISSION

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

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

Why Is the ACP Important?

Asking such a question may sound a bit skeptical, or even cynical. Yet currently, more times than I can ever recall, the question is posed. My purpose is not to defend the Annual Church Profile — or ACP as it is commonly known — rather I would like to offer a brief perspective as to why your participation in presenting the information is essential to the assessment of church health and vital for the assessment of all major aspects of Southern Baptist life and ministry.

Most churches keep records to use as a tool so they can evaluate their situations and track areas which need attention. Although there is no biblical requirement

for such record keeping, it does make good sense. If keeping records and reporting information is needed for the North American Mission Board as to church planting efforts and if such information is vital to the International



By Rick Lance
State Missionary

Mission Board as to church planting and Gospel-sharing internationally, then the principle would apply to local churches here at home in the Alabama Baptist family.

Researchers, like LifeWay's Ed Stetzer and those persons at the North American Mission Board, charged with tracking the progress of our efforts here in North America need this

information to make accurate assessments. Some researchers have indicated that the SBC has experienced a slight decline in recent years. Perhaps the decline is actually reflected in the number of churches preparing and presenting the essential information in the ACP. To choose not to participate leaves gaping holes in this important research process.

My appeal to you as a church leader is to make sure your church prepares and sends the ACP to your local association or the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. We will be good stewards of this information. The entities of the Southern Baptist Convention will be beneficiaries of the effort as well as your state convention.

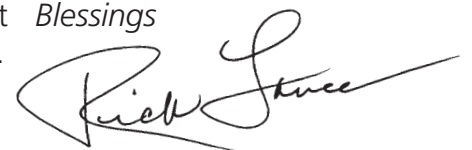
Not too long ago, 98 percent of Alabama Baptist churches participated in the

ACP. In recent years that number is 83 percent. Let us do our part in making the ACP process an accurate reflection of the ministries of Alabama Baptist churches. Personally, I would rejoice in seeing a return to at least 90 percent participation in this data sharing process in the near future.

I want to thank you in advance for your cooperation in this important endeavor among your family of faith.

For more information about the Annual Church Profile, please contact State Missionary Mickey Crawford at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 281, or (334) 613-2281, mcrawford@alsbom.org.

Blessings


Proverbs 1:7

GET ACQUAINTED DAY

At the Baptist Building, 2001 E. South Blvd. in Montgomery

Thursday, September 3, 10 am - 3:30 pm » 9:30 - 10 – Check-in and refreshments

Meet your state missionaries » Discover how we can partner together to fulfill the Great Commission » Tour the Baptist Building » Spouses welcome » Lunch provided

Ideal for pastors, church staff, secretaries or associational staff who are new to Alabama, new to their position, or who have never attended a Get Acquainted Day

Register by calling or emailing Sheila Rikerd, 1-800-264-1225, ext. 249, or (334) 613-2249, srikerd@alsbom.org, or go online to www.alsbom.org/gad.

WHY I BELIEVE IN THE COOPERATIVE PROGRAM



alsbom.org/cp

By **Britt Green**, senior pastor, First Baptist Church, Eclectic

I think it's noteworthy that most Baptists view the tithe as the basement of individual giving to the work of God through the local church. The reason is that the local church together can make more of a difference in the lives of our neighbors than individual believers could alone.



It's also noteworthy that many of the pastors who preach this message neglect to lead their churches to tithe to the greater kingdom work of Southern Baptists through the Cooperative Program. Let's not only embrace this spirit of cooperation in word, but by leading every church to work together for the advance of God's kingdom on earth by supporting the CP.

I am convinced that the Cooperative Program is the most efficient evangelistic missions-funding strategy in the world today, perhaps ever. One of the reasons I am a Southern Baptist is this spirit of cooperation — of shared passion and evangelistic, missional zeal — that we hold as people of common faith and practice.

The CP enables each of us, from small rural fellowships to metropolitan megachurches, to band together to reach the world with the good news of Jesus Christ. What is it that distinguishes Southern Baptists from other Christian groups? Two things: conservative biblical theology and a cooperative and comprehensive mission strategy — a strategy that would be impossible without the Cooperative Program.

Our commitments to sound doctrine and the CP are what make Southern Baptists shine Christ's light brightly for the world to see. CP gifts enable the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions to offer numerous training opportunities for all Alabama Baptists that would be otherwise very costly and impractical. As a pastor, I have been greatly encouraged and supported by the ongoing ministry of the State Board of Missions.

From printed resources to one-day seminars to long-term coaching partnerships, the State Board provides ample resources and opportunities to enhance the ministry of every Alabama Baptist church. And all of this is made available by churches' gifts through the Cooperative Program.

2015

MISSIONS ADVENTURE CAMPS

For girls in grades K-12 and boys in grades 2-6
High-adventure camping with a missions emphasis, featuring:

- Bible study and worship experiences • Time with missionaries • Crafts and cultural activities
- Ropes course for older campers • Canoeing/kayaking • Zip lines for those completing 4th grade and above • Swimming • Hiking

Missions Adventure Camp for Girls (girls completing grades 3-6): July 6-10, July 20-24

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

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

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

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

Church Planting Opportunities

Your Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions has placed a higher priority on church planting in recent years. The Future Focus initiative approved by messengers to the 2012 annual meeting of the State Convention included a goal to see 220 healthy, intentional church starts by 2020.

The Office of Associational Missions & Church Planting has undertaken the challenge to lead this effort.

Whenever church planting is mentioned, some will say, "We don't need any more churches in Alabama."

At first glance, it may seem counterintuitive to think of planting churches in a state that already has 3,286 Alabama Baptist churches. However, of the 5 million people who call our state home, more than 2 million don't attend church anywhere. Yes, in the buckle of the Bible Belt, 40 percent of people in our state do not attend any church.

We do not plant churches to transfer the already-saved members but to push back the darkness of lostness in our state and beyond — to reach the pockets of unchurched people who don't currently attend anyone's church.

To this end, we have initiated funding through the Cooperative Program for 47 new churches in Alabama since January 2013, and we have seen the Lord call out 12 planters to other states across North America.

The State Board of Missions seeks to provide systems and processes to provide support for the planting of healthy, intentional churches.

A recent study by LifeWay Research Director, Ed Stetzer, revealed that when church planters are assessed well, trained well and coached well, the church they're planting experiences an 85 percent success rate through the fourth year.

In response to this study and years of combined observation, we have spent much of our time and energy creating and strengthening these systems within our state: assessment, training and coaching.

About a year ago, we put in place the third of these elements by beginning several regional Coaching Networks for Church Planters. Each network offers 12 in-person coaching network sessions of four hours, each led by an experienced and competent coach. These networks are usually started following each Alabama Church Planting Basics training.

The training church planters receive at Alabama Basics is three intense days of what we call "drinking from a fire hydrant." Many times a planter will get out into his work only to face an issue that he remembers that we covered in the training but has difficulty applying those principles directly to his unique, real world circumstances.

The coaching network setting becomes the safe place for planters to share these challenges and receive assistance and encouragement from the coach and his fellow church planters.

Each coaching session includes a monthly training topic for everyone, individualized sharing of good news and challenges,

and personalized coaching and peer learning. This combination of training, peer learning and coaching components in one environment has proven to drastically improve the planters' ability to apply what they're learning.

Beyond that, it has helped planters build lasting relationships with like-minded Kingdom partners that will go on far beyond their 12-month coaching commitment.

One unforeseen benefit to the coaching networks is that they have also proven to be valuable for pastors of existing churches as well. Because of this interest, we are inviting non-planting pastors to join.

While the sessions are primarily and unapologetically focused on church planting, the biblical principles taught to planters are transferable, and most have direct application for pastors of established churches as well.

The goal of each coaching network is to equip these leaders to cooperate with God to reach as many people and make as many disciples as possible for the cause of Christ.

To take advantage of this renewed emphasis on training for church planting, you may register now for:

Alabama Church Planting Basics

NORTH ALABAMA ~ Thursday through Saturday, August 13-15, 2015 ~ Madison Baptist Association • 2318 Whitesburg Dr. S., Huntsville • Register church planting teams and potential church planters at alsbom.org/upcoming-events/church-planting-training

Churches Planting Churches

NORTH ALABAMA ~ Thursday through Saturday, August 13-15, 2015 ~ Madison Baptist Association, 2318 Whitesburg Dr. S., Huntsville ~ Register partnering or potential partnering churches at alsbom.org/upcoming-events/church-planting-training

Alabama Church Planting Basics en Español

Friday and Saturday, September 11-12 and 25-26, 2015
First Baptist Church, 430 1st St. S.W., Hamilton ~ Register Hispanic church planting teams and potential church planters at alsbom.org/upcoming-events/church-planting-training

Annual Church Planting Network Dinner featuring Ed Stetzer, executive director of LifeWay Research ~ Sunday, November 15, 2015, 5:30 p.m. ~ 3Circle Church, 10274 State Highway 104, Fairhope

Registration: For online registration, go to alsbom.org/upcoming-events/church-planting-training. These events are \$25 per person for SBC-affiliated participants. Non-SBC participants are allowed to attend but are charged \$100 per person. Each participant is responsible for their own hotel accommodations if traveling from outside the area.

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

By Lamar Duke
State Missionary



FOCUS on One Mission

WE GOT YOUR BACK

WHAT IF ...

... the mission team from your church was detained by a foreign government?
 ... a volunteer on your team was held by criminals in a foreign country?
 ... a natural disaster interrupted travel plans for your team?
 ... a volunteer became seriously ill or injured on the field?

ALL of these situations have occurred with Alabama Baptist teams!

We can help. Travelers' Shield has you covered!

... in the event of natural disaster, health problem, government detention or criminal act.

Travelers' Shield is offered to all who complete Faith Focused Safe-Travel Training.

FAITH FOCUSED SAFE-TRAVEL TRAINING

LEVEL A (\$45 per attendee)

August 13, Central Baptist Church, Decatur

October 1, Baptist Building, 2001 South E. Blvd., Montgomery

November 5, Canaan Baptist Church, Bessemer

LEVEL B (\$250 per attendee)

December 8-10, Baptist Building, 2001 South E. Blvd., Montgomery

*Register online at
a18c.org/ffst*

SHARING ACROSS Alabama

THE LARGEST TRAINING IN 20 YEARS will be undertaken by the Evangelism Office in 2015 with a great implementation — called "Sharing Across Alabama" — planned for 2016.

There will be nine identical events at locations across Alabama, making it possible for each director of missions and pastor to attend fairly close to home. Three strategic tools will be taught in each location:

CAST: a great, easy way to share a three-minute testimony and tell one's story.

Life Conversation model: how to share one's faith using three circles that can be drawn on a napkin or read from a tract.

Media Evangelism model: an idea for hosting people in a home setting where a Billy Graham DVD will be shared or an iPhone app will be used to communicate the Gospel.

Each training session for Sharing Across Alabama will begin at 1 p.m. and adjourn by 7 p.m. Each event will include training materials, dinner, a concert and a challenging message — all free of charge, thanks to the gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.

Hopes are that each Alabama Baptist pastor will consider attending one of these nine training sessions to learn more about equipping lay persons to share their faith in Christ.

Each of the following events takes place on a Thursday:

~ **July 9**, Marriott Capitol Hill, Prattville

~ **July 16**, Hotel Capstone, Tuscaloosa

~ **July 30**, Siloam Baptist Church, Marion

~ **August 20**, First Baptist Church, Satsuma

~ **August 27**, The Shoals RTJ Golf Course, Muscle Shoals

~ **September 10**, Highland Oaks RTJ Golf Course, Dothan

~ **September 24**, Silver Lakes RTJ Golf Course, Gadsden

~ **October 22**, Guntersville State Park Lodge, Guntersville

~ **January 7, 2016**, Samford University, Birmingham

Online registration is required at alsbom.org/sharingacrossalabama. Deadline to register is 30 days before each event.

For more information, please contact Ministry Assistant Lori McGough at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 245, or (334) 613-2245, lmcgough@alsbom.org

SPECIAL NOTE: The same information will be taught at The Summit: For Church Leaders, July 31-August 1 at Shocco Springs. Register for that event at Shocco.org. The sessions will be altered to fit the schedule of The Summit.



Baptist Men's Softball Tournament

August 7-8, 2015

Lagoon Park & Fain Park, Montgomery

- 40-team maximum • ASA sanctioned
- Round robin tournament • ASA-sanctioned teams only • Single elimination in championship round of 16 teams

Cost: \$165 entry fee

Each team will play at least four games.



For entry requirements to participate and an information packet, please contact Ministry Assistant Mondene Coker at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 273, or (334) 613-2273, mcoker@alsbom.org.



Equip 

...for Missions, for Ministry, for Life

Leadership Training of Alabama WMU

July 24-25, 2015 Shocco Springs Conference Center Talladega, Alabama

Leadership Training

Experience in-depth training for all church and associational directors, coordinators, facilitators, leaders and other team members of...

Women's Ministry
WMU
Women on Mission
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Adults on Mission
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Youth on Mission
Girls Ministry

Girls in Action
Children in Action
Mission Friends
Royal Ambassadors

and *Life-Enrichment Opportunities* through a wide variety of breakout conferences.

For more information, visit www.alabamawmu.org, email khelms@alsbom.org or call 800.264.1225, ext. 325.

also featuring the Alabama WMU Biennial Meeting

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

CHILDREN'S CHOIR SUMMIT **AND THE BEAT GOES ON** July 10-11, Shocco Springs *Children's Choir Summit is an*



It's not too late to register!

exciting, hands-on leadership conference that will allow you to:

Discover new ways to make choir a favorite for kids.

- Learn how you can use games to enhance your music program.
- Create an ideal opportunity for children to experience worship.
- Network with outstanding clinicians from across the U.S.
- Network with other people in similar situations.

Cost: \$110 per person (based on 3-4 persons per room and includes lodging, 3 meals, 8 sessions & dessert buffet). \$20 deposit per person due upon registration.

Clinicians: Artie Almeida, Steve Roddy, Pam Andrews, Paula Farrar, Teresa Granger, Sandy Stephenson, Carol James.

For more information, visit alsbom.org/children-summit or please call 1-800-264-1225: State Missionary Karen Gosselin, ext. 318, or (334) 613-2318, kgosselin@alsbom.org or Ministry Assistant Sharon Cleveland, ext. 279, or (334) 613-2279, scleveland@alsbom.org.

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

SENIOR ADULT CHOIR CELEBRATIONS

Thursday, October 22 - Dalraida Baptist Church, Montgomery, and Hunter Street Baptist Church, Birmingham

Friday, October 23 - First Baptist Church, Opelika, and Eastern Shore Baptist Church, Daphne

All Celebrations begin at 10 am

To register, please go to alsbom.org/seniorfest

ONE DAY TRAINING FOR LEADERS OF WMU, WOMEN'S MINISTRY AND ROYAL AMBASSADORS

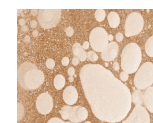


BAPTIST BUILDING,
2001 E. South Blvd.,
Montgomery

August 22, 9 a.m. - noon
Two hours of age-level training for leaders of preschoolers, children, students and adults followed by a one-hour session on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

COST: \$10 per person

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



ALABAMA WMU

FOCUS on One Mission

East Asia



Central Asia



ALABAMA BAPTIST BOYS CAMPS * JUNE AND JULY 2015 *

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

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

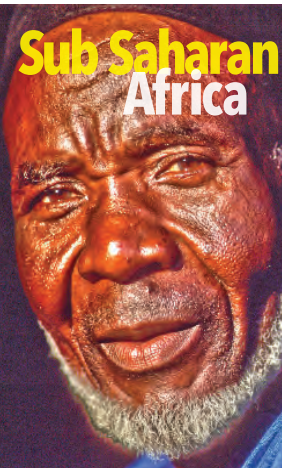


July 6-9	Northeast Alabama	Marshall Retreat Center, Guntersville	4th-12th Grade Boys Camp
July 9-11	Northeast Alabama	Marshall Retreat Center, Guntersville	1st-6th Grade Lad and Dad Camp
July 13-16	Northwest Alabama	Earle Trent Assembly Baptist Camp, Florence	4th-12th Grade Boys Camp
July 16-18	Northwest Alabama	Earle Trent Assembly Baptist Camp, Florence	1st-6th Grade Lad and Dad Camp
July 27-30	Central Alabama	WorldSong Missions Camp, Cook Springs	4th-12th Grade Boys Camp
July 30- Aug. 1	Central Alabama	WorldSong Missions Camp, Cook Springs	1st-6th Grade Lad and Dad or Mom Camp

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

alabama
ACTS 1:8
connections
CONFERENCE JULY 16,
10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
North Shelby Baptist Church,
Birmingham
alsbom.org/aal8c

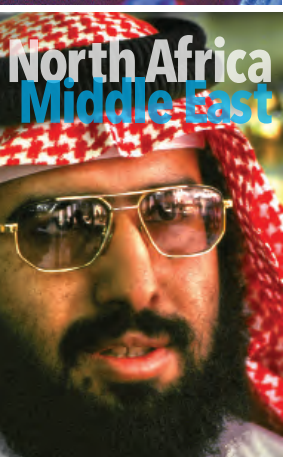
Sub Saharan Africa



Europe



North Africa Middle East



Americas



South Asia



South East Asia



REGIONAL SUNDAY SCHOOL & DISCIPLESHIP LEADERSHIP TRAINING

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In the good old summertime, the good old summertime ... Ah! Summertime in Alabama means extra family time with vacations, backyard picnics and evenings under the stars.

For Alabama Baptists, it also means high-quality Sunday School & Discipleship Leader Training. Regional training is available in three different parts of the state. Choose the location and date that is best for you.

There are three one-hour conference times at each location with multiple topics for each age group. Registration is \$5 per person before the early registration deadline, \$10 per person after the deadline.

SOUTH: Government Street Baptist Church, Mobile, August 15
EARLY REGISTRATION DEADLINE: August 13

For info or to register:
alsbom.org/south
Contact: Jamie Baldwin,
1-800-264-1225, ext. 240,
jbaldwin@alsbom.org

NORTH: Lindsay Lane Baptist Church, Athens, August 22
EARLY REGISTRATION DEADLINE: August 20

For info or to register:
alsbom.org/north
Contact: Daniel Edmonds,
1-800-264-1225, ext. 285,
dedmonds@alsbom.org

METRO: Lakeside Baptist Church, Birmingham, August 29
EARLY REGISTRATION DEADLINE: August 27

For info or to register:
alsbom.org/metro Contact: Jamie Baldwin,
1-800-264-1225, ext. 240,
jbaldwin@alsbom.org

CHURCH REVITALIZATION BOOK REVIEW:

Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change by William Bridges (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2009), 192 pages.

John F. Kennedy said, "Change is the law of life." There are many pastors who wish they could break or circumvent that law, but it would be better to embrace it as reality and adjust sails to navigate successfully the winds of change.

Change has happened, is happening and will happen. It can be situational, circumstantial, providential or transformational, but it does not have to be fatal or final. It will be what you understand about it and what you make of it.

However, change is not nearly as important as transition. According



By Daniel Edmonds
State Missionary

to William Bridges, "It isn't the changes that do you in, it's the transitions." Change is an event, transition is the process people will journey through to adapt to the change. "Change is external, transition is internal" (Bridges). In his book, William Bridges uses images from businesses and the Bible (Moses) to help the reader understand the process of

making the journey from the prison of procrastination through the wilderness of confusion to the "promised land" of the preferred future.

"Whatever is, will change. ... Where there's change, there's transition. That's the utterly predictable equation: change + human beings = transition. There is no way to avoid it. But you can manage it. You can. And if you want to come through in one piece, you must" (Bridges).

There are plenty of good books and experts in the area of change or transition management. John Kotter and James Belasco are among my favorite scholars on the subject.

However, if I could only have one book on the topic, it would be *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*, by William Bridges. Short, sequential and straight to the point: a very good read.

State Missionary Daniel Edmonds serves as director of the Office of Sunday School & Discipleship. He may be contacted at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 285, or (334) 613-2285, dedmonds@alsbom.org.



CHURCH
REVITALIZATION



TWO LOCATIONS IN 2015:

September 15: Parkway Baptist Church, 766 E. University Dr., Auburn
September 17: First Baptist Church, 18200 Highway 104 W., Robertsdale

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

EPHESIANS 5:19-20 (HCSB)

*Come celebrate
the Lord together!*

Frank Jones will be there to lead us as we sing hymns and worship God. The singin' begins at 10 a.m. and ends with lunch.

COST: \$10 per person (includes lunch)

REGISTRATION: alsbom.org/senioradultsingin

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

TRAINING FOR CHURCH LEADERS

THE SUMMIT

SHOCCO SPRINGS, JULY 31-AUGUST 1, 2015

Do you have plans for the summer? Consider adding a trip to "The Summit: For Church Leaders" at Shocco to those plans. Ministers and other professionals in many different areas of church life and ministry will be on the Shocco campus to lead training sessions. From preschool to senior adult ministry, all age groups will be represented.

Whatever your areas of interest or ministry in your church, you will have opportunities to gain new insights, hear new ideas and develop skills not only through training, but also through networking with others who serve in their churches.

The Summit begins on Friday, July 31, with Early Bird Mega Conferences from 1:30 to 3:30, followed by a worship rally beginning at 3:45. Supper will be served beginning at 4:45, followed by two conference times at 6:15 and 7:45. **Saturday's schedule:** breakfast beginning at 6:30, with conference times Saturday morning at 8:00, 9:30 and 11:00. Lunch will be served at noon.

The Summit is for pastors, other ministers, teachers and other workers and leaders. Watch your mail and check online at alsbom.org/summit for updates. You may go to shocco.org or call 1-800-280-1105 for pricing information and to register.

For more information about The Summit, please contact State Missionary Jamie Baldwin at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 240 or 334-613-2240.

NOMINATIONS SOUGHT FOR OUTSTANDING 2015 MISSION VOLUNTEER

The Office of Global Missions of the State Board of Missions would like to honor an Outstanding 2015 Mission Volunteer. **YOUR HELP IS NEEDED.**

Please think about lay people you know whom you feel are worthy of such recognition, and let us hear from you. We realize that there are many who could fit this requirement; however, for this purpose only one individual (or couple) will be selected.

Your recommendation will make a difference. The following information is required if a person (or couple) is to be considered:

1. The name, address and phone number of the person (or couple) being nominated.
2. The name, address and phone number of the nominee's pastor, the church to which he/she/they belong and their association.
3. A list of volunteer mission service: their Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and Uttermost where he/she/they have participated during the past five years, including locations and dates. (If the nominee(s) has not served in at least three of the Acts 1:8 areas, please do not nominate that person.)
4. Statements supporting your nomination as **Outstanding 2015 Mission Volunteer** (why you feel he/she/they should be recognized in this manner).
5. Your signature with address, phone, church and association.

To access an Information Sheet and Nomination Application, go online to a18c.org/missionsvolunteer.

If you do not have web access, request your Information Sheet and Nomination Application by contacting Ministry Assistant Virginia Gardner at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 238, or (334) 613-2238, vgardner@alsbom.org.

Requests may also be made by mail to Global Missions Office, Attn: Virginia Gardner, P.O. Box 11870, Montgomery, AL 36111-0870.

Please Note: No phone calls or e-mail recommendations and/or endorsements accepted! Nominations must be received, not postmarked, no later than Monday, September 21, 2015.

coaching on the run

september 10, 2015 SAMFORD UNIVERSITY
third floor of Sullivan-Cooney Field House * 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Cost: \$10 per person (lunch included)

Learn how to use coaching techniques to enhance your leadership skills, to be more effective in strategy planning, to be able to ask good questions and to strengthen the leaders around you. Coaching techniques will enable pastors and staff members to guide people through a process of discipleship and growth. **Bob Bumgarner**, certified coach and executive pastor of Chets Creek Church in Jacksonville, Fla., will be the conference leader.

To register or visit alsbom.org/coachingontherun for other information, please contact Ministry Assistant Debbie Dickey at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 218, ddickey@alsbom.org.

ONEMISSION: The Great Commission ONEPROGRAM: The Cooperative Program MANYMINISTRIES: Great Commission Ministries

Fall Senior Adult Retreat October 12-14, Shocco Springs

Theme: My Inheritance

If you made it to the Spring Senior Adult Retreat, you will surely want to return to Shocco Springs in the Fall for more great fellowship with other senior adults. If you weren't able to come in April, then you will not want to miss the Fall retreat! Bring some friends to enjoy the beautiful surroundings as you worship together.

State Missionary Eileen Mitchell asks, "Have you thought about your spiritual inheritance? What has God promised you, and what is the spiritual legacy you are leaving others?" Eileen and other leaders of the retreat ask you to come and consider these important questions. The retreat will begin with lunch on Monday, October 12, and end with lunch on Wednesday, October 14.

REGISTRATION/COST INFORMATION:

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

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



**Alabama Singing Men &
Alabama Singing Women
~ Retreats ~**

Thursday and Friday, **SEPTEMBER 10-11**
Shocco Springs

ASM directed by Tom Smith

ASW directed by Gayle Smith

REGISTRATION/COST: shocco.org/events-calendar or
1-800-280-1105

OTHER ONLINE INFO: alsbom.org/worship

For other information, please contact Ministry Assistant Cindy Parrish at **1-800-264-1225**, ext. 230, or **(334) 613-2230**, cparrish@alsbom.org.

FOCUS on One Mission

NOMINATIONS SOUGHT

The Troy L. Morrison Leadership/ Church Health Awards will be given to those individuals who have demonstrated evidence of leadership that has advanced the church in four key areas: kingdom growth, ministry advancement, missions involvement and numerical growth.

The recipients will be from three categories – New Work (church less than ten years old), Established Work (church older than ten years), and Bivocational (church where pastor holds dual employment).

Nominations may be made by visiting alsbom.org/leadership, then clicking on Leadership Development to access Troy L. Morrison information and download

a form. Or you may contact our office for a copy (see contact info below).

Troy L. Morrison Leadership/ Church Health Awards

Send your nomination form to ~ Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions ~ Office of Leadership & Church Health ~ Attn: Debbie Dickey ~ 2001 East South Blvd. ~ Montgomery, AL 36116

The deadline for receiving nominations is October 10, 2015. For more information call or email Debbie Dickey, ministry assistant, 1-800-264-1225, ext. 218, or (334) 613-2218 or ddickey@alsbom.org.

September 19, Shoal Creek Baptist Church, 13214 Holtville Road, Deatsville, AL 36022

Central Alabama LIBRARY WORKSHOP

This library training event will offer classes in all areas of library work. Anyone that is involved in any type of library work is invited (church, Christian school, public school or private school, even public library). The information provided will help your library grow.

The cost will be \$5 to help with the noon meal expenses. REGISTRATION WILL BEGIN AT 8:30 A.M. and the conference ends at 3:30 p.m. Swap table will be available.

To register please contact Marty Woodall, (334) 569-3854 or martybrooks@juno.com.

MEN'S

NIGHT OUT August 15, 2015

First Baptist Church, Athens

with

Brodie Croyle and Tommy Bowden

SATURDAY, **AUGUST 15, 2015**
First Baptist Church, Athens

Cost: \$10 per person (includes dinner and door prizes). Limit of 500 tickets available.

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

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

youthevangelismconference
JULY 24-25
SAMDORD UNIVERSITY

Register now for \$30 per person-includes conference fees, resources and Chick-fil-A lunch.

Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly... ~ Acts 6:7 (NKJV)

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'Extraordinary heroism'

Overcoming war-torn past, Blount Springs Baptist member lives out forgiveness

(continued from page 1)

month prior to the U.S.'s entrance into World War II.

Born in west Perry County, Lee was the second-oldest child of five and grew up on his family's cattle farm. His parents were members of Hopewell Baptist Church, Marion, and in 1934, Lee "gave his heart to the Lord" and was baptized.

After three years of drought in the 1930s, Lee's family could no longer sustain their farm and had to sell and move to Selma, where they purchased new land and harvested cotton and corn.

US neutrality

On the other side of the world Japan had invaded and conquered most of the coastal area of China in 1937. And Germany, part of the Axis powers with Italy and Japan, had invaded Poland and overrun France by the end of 1939. At the time the U.S. was holding to neutrality.

But Lee said, "I felt it was my duty to defend my country. ... We looked on it that the war ... was inevitable."

So he took his oath to become a Marine on Nov. 1, 1940. Once he arrived on Parris Island in South Carolina, he picked up his uniform and was assigned to a barrack.

"We were trained in close-order drill, combat, tactics, hand grenade and artillery. We went to the firing range and used M1s and .45 caliber pistols."

After graduating Lee was stationed at Marine Corps Base (MCB) Quantico in Virginia for one year. During his time there the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, killing more than 2,400 people and forcing the U.S. into war by Dec. 11. That's when training for beach landings really got serious, Lee said.

The regiment was sent to Hilo, Hawaii, and ran mock operations on the island of Maui in preparation for taking Japan's Bonin chain of key islands, including Iwo Jima. Mock operations continued at Saipan, part of the Northern Mariana Islands in the Western Pacific that the U.S. conquered in 1944.

If captured, Iwo Jima, located about 750 miles south of the mainland, would provide a base for attacks on the mainland and cut air raid times in half from Saipan to Tokyo.

On Feb. 19, 1945, the 27th Regiment was called on to be the first wave of invasion. Operation Detachment was underway.

They landed on Red Beach No. 1, located on the southwestern edge of Iwo Jima's coast. From there they would move north to block off the rest of the island from Mount Suribachi on the southwestern tip. The Japa-



Photo by Neisha Roberts

Horace Lee, WWII veteran and member of Blount Springs Baptist Church, Hayden, displays a photograph of himself in his Marine dress uniform.

nese had focused on creating inland hidden artillery, caves and tunnels, so the beach was relatively quick to obtain, Lee recalled, but that didn't make it any less intimidating.

"The first thing you did when you hit the beach was to say, 'Lord, I'm in Your hands. If it's Your will, see me through this.' ... You cannot fight in fear."

As the Marines advanced past the shore they met intense enemy fire. By evening of the first day 550 Marines were dead and more than 1,800 wounded.

Under Lee's direction as demolition team leader the men pressed north, overcoming each east-to-west terrace. His team built bridges, pulleys and winches for military vehicles to enable them to make it up the slippery and unstable sand terraces.

While traversing the terraces, "that's when the Japanese would lay down that withering fire and we were just an open target."

"We were in the middle of enemy fire-power as they were firing from Mount Suribachi (on the left side) and from the other highpoint at Airfield No. 1 (on the right). We were down below them."

During the day the team would struggle to gain ground, maybe 200 yards one day and 50 yards the next. At night they would sleep in a foxhole, a small hand-dug pit.

Several of Lee's friends were injured or killed in battle. He shared one graphic story of a friend who was hauling a truck of ammunition up to the 27th Regiment. When

the truck was about 30 feet away the Marine drove over a land mine and was instantly killed, leaving remnants of his body on the black, thick sand.

After four days of intense battle the 27th Regiment had made a path and served as a barrier for the 28th Regiment. The 28th, with about 300 men, landed on Green Beach, further south on the island and closer to Mount Suribachi. On Feb. 23 a 40-man patrol was able to reach the summit of the 556-foot Mount Suribachi to raise a U.S. flag and signal its capture — a glimmer of hope for those in battle and for their loved ones back home. But the battle wasn't over.

For another 32 days Lee and others in the 2nd Battalion would fight to obtain the island. Lee would remain for the full extent of the battle, spending five days in the hospital.

He was injured March 8 as the regiment made a push north while "the firing was real thick." Shot by machine-gun fire in the right leg, Lee was injured again as debris from nearby artillery shells rained on him.

Enduring to the end

By March 13, with his injuries healing, Lee's new job was driving the ammunition truck and delivering supplies to the front lines, a job he'd keep until March 26 — the end of the battle and the capture of Iwo Jima.

Waiting on the north side of the island, the mission complete, Lee and the 27th Regiment were transported back to Hawaii.

"I was praising the Lord all the way through. I was so glad to leave. Even though I was wounded I still had my hands, two feet and two eyes."

His next assignment, Operation Olympic, was a planned attack landing on Kyushu, the southernmost island of Japan, but it never took place. Instead President Harry S. Truman, who was elected in April 1945, authorized the use of America's secret weapon

— the atomic bomb. The Enola Gay, a B-29 bomber, dropped the first A-bomb on Hiroshima on Aug. 6, 1945. Three days later the second A-bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. These two crucial attacks ultimately led to Japan's surrender Sept. 2.

The war was over and Lee was presented with two Purple Heart awards in September 1945. The 5th Division was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation, given to units for "extraordinary heroism in action" and for displaying "such gallantry and determination ... in accomplishing its mission."

From September to December, Lee went back to work on disarmament assignments in Sasebo, Nagasaki, destroying "anything that was fighting material." The smell of Nagasaki was horrific, he said, with the heat causing the odor of battle and decaying bodies to intensify.

Lee's enlistment ended Nov. 19, 1946, and by Dec. 15 of that year, he was home.

Back in Alabama, Lee adjusted quickly to civilian life. He met up with a friend and they decided to get a milkshake and catch up.

"There was a pretty little waitress behind the soda bar," Lee said. "Two or three days later I went to visit Johnny again and we went to get another milkshake and that same waitress was behind the bar. After that I came regularly to get milkshakes."

Milkshakes and movies

He told the story of asking the girl behind the counter, Patsy, if she would go to the movies with him. After two invitations, the girl agreed, Lee said with a smile as he looked at Patsy sitting across from him in their home.

On June 28, 1947, the two were married at Southside Baptist Church, Birmingham. He would work with the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company (TCI), which later became U.S. Steel. He'd also work in gas pipeline construction, traveling the world to job sites, before retiring in 1989.

He and Patsy, who now live on a cattle farm in Hayden, raised a family along the way. They have three children, eight grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

Longtime members of Gethsemane Baptist Church, Hayden, the couple taught Sunday School and served in various ministries. For the last eight years they have been "faithful members" at Blount Springs Baptist Church, Hayden, Pastor Jeff Ingle said.

"Horace is one of the most humble men of integrity you will ever meet. ... He is committed to his Lord, his wife and the church," Ingle said.

Although Lee endured a war-torn season of life where he could easily harbor hate or fear, forgiveness is something he lives out day to day, Ingle said.

For Lee, a life lesson came from his time in battle, where he believes God taught him about His guidance and protection.

"If you believe and pray believing, God will take care of you. He has proven that He will. I've turned my life over to Him to lead and to guide and direct me, and He has." ■



Photo by Neisha Roberts

WWII vet Horace Lee holds one of his two Purple Heart awards.

Church Discipline

Shepherds OR shamers?

The return of church discipline in America

Growing instances of discipline raise questions about biblical guidelines, legal implications

By **Jonathan Merritt**
Columnist, Religion News Service

When Karen Hinkley decided to have her marriage annulled, she had no idea it would lead to a public shaming from one of the largest mega-churches in America.

After learning her husband was entangled in a decade-long child-porn addiction, Hinkley decided to call it quits. But as a member of The Village Church (TVC), a congregation of more than 10,000 people outside of Dallas, Texas, she was then subjected to disciplinary action that included formally airing the details of her marriage to the entire church body.

While there are no reliable figures, some church followers think the number of congregations using “church discipline” is growing among conservative congregations. As more cases come to light, they raise questions about the biblical basis and legal implications of such practices. Are these church shepherds just doing their best to care for their flocks, or are they crossing a line by shaming and shunning their so-called sinners?

Jonathan Leeman, author of “Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus,” runs a Washington-based ministry called 9Marks that believes rigorous church discipline is one of the nine central components of a “biblical church.”

If a church member is found to be participating in significant sinful behavior, the congregation should enact discipline, he writes. This may include excommunication or public disclosure of the situation, but usually it only requires personally confronting the sinner.

“In one sense, 99 percent of the discipline that happens in the church never reaches the whole church,” Leeman said. “It should be two loving friends talking to each other.”

The purpose of church dis-

cipline, according to Leeman, is to protect Jesus’ name, show redemptive love for the sinner and warn the broader church against a greater judgment in the afterlife.

Between 3,000 and 4,000 congregations nationwide are affiliated with the 9Marks ministry, which hosts conferences around the globe and operates on a nearly \$1 million annual budget. TVC is one of those churches. Many similar ministries, including pastor John MacArthur’s \$19 million-a-year Grace to You ministry and the 500-church Acts 29 network, promote similar teachings and are thriving too.

But Leeman also readily admits that church discipline can become authoritarian and abusive.

Abuse of authority

Former Seattle-based pastor Mark Driscoll oversaw the public shunning of members who were deemed to be sinful, a practice that contributed to his later resignation, for example. And Chicago-area pastor James MacDonald was recently forced to apologize for disciplinary actions that included labeling three church leaders as “false messengers.”

Leeman said, “The abuse of authority, we believe, is a particularly heinous sin because it lies about God and His good authority. [But] you don’t throw the baby out with the bathwater because someone has been a part of an abusive situation in the past. ... We should look to the Bible and ask how to practice it in a healthy and balanced manner.”

Those who promote rigorous church discipline say they have history on their side. And they are partially correct. But when Christians speak of church discipline today, they may not be referring to the practices of yore. Even the most stringent adherent would not condone behaviors reminiscent of American witch hunts or the Spanish Inquisition, for example.

Randall Balmer, a professor of American religious history at Dartmouth College in Hanover,

New Hampshire, and author of “The Making of Evangelicalism,” said, “The Puritan model is to put people in the town square or the village green in the stocks as a way of shaming the individual.”

But stocks — devices used to partially immobilize people for the scorn of passersby — have been moved to museums. Public behaviors now have legal implications.

After Hinkley’s church shamed her by publicly disclosing details of her personal life, some argued she should lawyer up and sue for slander or defamation. Others said she should have seen it coming.

When she and her husband, Jordan Root, joined TVC a few years earlier, they willingly

signed a five-page membership contract. By so doing, the couple agreed to submit to the authority of the church leaders and receive

any discipline administered if the couple sinned in the leaders’ eyes.

Eugene Volokh, a professor of law at the University of California, Los Angeles, Law School, said the law protects congregants from discipline by religious institutions when the case involves battery. But religious groups are free to expel people or even shun them by urging other

members to disassociate from them.

In Hinkley’s case, the fiasco brought about an apology from TVC’s pastor, Matt Chandler. In a sermon on forgiveness May 31,

“When shepherds become shunners and shamers instead of servants, they are no longer walking the way of Jesus.”

Jonathan Merritt
columnist

Chandler went even further, asking his congregation for forgiveness for instances where leaders overstepped their authority.

Possible self-critique

TVC is but one example that suggests church discipline proponents may need to engage in more rigorous self-critique. Jesus taught that one could judge the goodness of a tree by the fruit it produces. There are too many instances where current church discipline practices lead to abuse and pain rather than love and peace.

Augustine taught that one could tell whether a Bible interpretation is sound by looking to see if it leads to greater love for God and others. If an interpretation is not leading those who hold it to love others more, then perhaps the interpretation itself needs adjusting.

Church leaders are to be shepherds of grace and love who lay down their lives for their flocks. When shepherds become shunners and shamers instead of servants, they are no longer walking the way of Jesus. (RNS)

“[Church discipline] should be two loving friends talking to each other.”

Jonathan Leeman
author



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“As church discipline is conducted in a loving manner with the intent of restoration, the church family will be united. Christ will be honored. A secular world that is not impressed by churches tolerating open sin will notice the changed and transformed lives that result from a redemptive ministry.”

Barry Cospers
director of missions, Bessemer Baptist Association

Discipline & the modern church

Ministry of reconciliation, restoration can strengthen today's church, DOM says

By Barry Cospers
Special to The Alabama Baptist

What makes a church a true church? And how vital is church discipline to that definition?

The description of a true church goes back at least to the Belgic Confession of 1561: “If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin; in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary there to be rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the church. Hereby the true church may certainly be

known, from which no man has a right to separate himself.”

Historically and biblically, church discipline has been central to the church's faithful practice of gospel doctrine and order. If a church lacks these essentials, it cannot be defined biblically as a true church. But how many churches today adhere to this definition?

Fearful of lawsuits, many churches choose the path of least resistance that leads to unconfessed sin. The result of non-confrontation is an atmosphere where heresy grows unchecked. Other results include a false sense of unity and factions in the church because of a gradual abandonment of Christianity.

The Belgic Confession states that the third mark of a true church is church discipline. But what is church discipline and what is its purpose?

Church discipline, in its biblical context, is a ministry of love. It is not a church board acting like a police department. Church discipline is a ministry of discipleship by the people of God to assist fellow Christians who fall into sin.

Matthew 18 contains the biblical foundation and characteristics that are necessary for an effective discipline ministry. The ingredients include simple humility (vv. 1–6), frank honesty (vv. 15–17), united prayer (vv. 19–20) and a forgiving spirit (vv. 21–35). The church only gets involved if the individuals cannot reconcile conflict or open sin.

The benefits

Church discipline benefits the modern church. First, church discipline is good for the person disciplined by warning the person of the danger of sin and calling him or her to repentance. Second, church discipline is good for other Christians. Third, church discipline is good for the church as a whole by keeping the local body pure by protecting it from moral decay. Fourth, church discipline is good for the corporate witness of the church and therefore non-Christians. Fifth, and most importantly, church discipline is for the glory of God.

Some church members perceive church discipline as problematic and troublesome. These

perceptions are influenced by abuses from the past that resulted in scars and regrets instead of celebrations over reclaiming the fallen Christian and total restoration. The dismal results of the past should not cause a church to dispense with church discipline. The desire to reclaim and restore a fallen Christian should outweigh any negatives that could prohibit the practice of church discipline.

The purpose is restoration. In order for church discipline to work effectively, the church must have a healthy spiritual atmosphere. Church discipline is not a vindictive act or an act of hatred. Rather church discipline is an act of love and concern. As restoration takes place, the purpose is to restore the individual to a point of usefulness again in service to Jesus Christ. Church discipline involves rescuing the individual from a continual lifestyle of sin.

The decline of church discipline has left a visible mark upon the contemporary church. Al Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, described the decline of church discipline as the “most visible failure of the contemporary church.” He went on to describe the contemporary church as one that “sees itself as a voluntary association of autonomous members with minimal moral accountability to God, much less to each other.”

Implementing church discipline will be a challenge for many churches. Changes may

need to be made to keep the church proactive instead of reactive. First, a church should develop a covenant membership for members to sign describing the church's core values as well as who and what the church is as it seeks to bring glory to God by ministering in the community. This will minimize potential litigation situations.

Second, a church should incorporate church discipline guidelines into its constitution and bylaws. Describe the actions and sins that cause church discipline to be implemented. Express the redemptive intent of discipline — restoring the fallen Christian to a point of usefulness by God.

Honoring Christ

Third, a church should not implement church discipline until the church has learned its purpose. Since it is a form of discipleship, it should be taught for several sessions during the discipleship training hour.

As church discipline is conducted in a loving manner with the intent of restoration, the church family will be united. Christ will be honored. A secular world that is not impressed by churches tolerating open sin will notice the changed and transformed lives that result from a redemptive ministry.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Barry Cospers, director of missions for Bessemer Baptist Association, did his doctoral work on the topic of church discipline. ☞

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New hospital system

Birmingham's Baptist hospitals, Brookwood hospital announce merger

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

The four hospitals that make up Baptist Health System (BHS) are officially set to merge with Brookwood Medical Center in Birmingham to become a new hospital system.

The definitive agreements were signed late in the day June 22 and will include all health care-related businesses owned by both groups.

BHS president and chief executive officer Keith Parrott will become CEO of the new hospital system and anticipates the hospitals will begin operating as one company in September after receiving necessary regulatory approvals.

Parrott said the move allows BHS to secure a solid financial future and creates significant funds for capital needs while preserving the Baptist name and heritage of

doing health care with a spiritual component.

Negotiations have been ongoing since the letter of intent was signed between BHS and Tenet Healthcare of Dallas (which owns Brookwood Medical Center) on Dec. 15, 2014.

Twenty-nine members of the executive board for Birmingham Baptist Association (BBA), which approves the board members for BHS, met the morning of June 22 and overwhelmingly approved creation of the new hospital system.

While the new name has not been released, Parrott indicated "Baptist" will be in the name and that the five hospitals will operate with Christian principles.

The names of the four existing BHS hospitals — Princeton Baptist Medical Center, Shelby Baptist Medical Center, Walker Baptist Medical Center and Citizens Baptist Medical Center — will not be changed unless the current BHS board makes that decision. This board will remain intact and will be known as the legacy BHS board.

One of its roles will be to select five members of the new company's 10-member board to represent BHS' side of the partnership. The other five will represent Tenet.



PARROTT

Three of the 5 board members representing BHS are mandated to be part of participating BBA churches, and 1 of those 3 must be a senior pastor.

Parrott anticipates \$1 billion in annual revenue and 7,500 employees for the new hospital system. "We will be paying \$12 million in new tax revenues, so this is a positive for the community because we are not paying those now," he said.

Tenet became the obvious choice for a partner for BHS because of its track record of partnering with other faith-based institutions, the services it offers and its financial health, Parrott noted.

Economic realities

"With the economic realities of where health care systems are today ... to be healthy financially and able to move ahead with technological advances, we needed a partner," he said.

He also noted the new company will continue the BHS purpose of delivering health care in Christ's name by being Christian in its nature and focus. ☞

Want to know GOD?

Pastor Gregg Woodard
FBC Greenhill, in Killen

According to one magazine article, Kenneth Feinberg is considered the "go to" mediator in the United States. He has negotiated settlements involving several high-profile corporations and government entities. A mediator negotiates a settlement between two disputing parties, bridging the gap between the parties to bring them into a relationship that benefits both.

With all due respect to Feinberg, the greatest and original "go to" mediator is none other than Jesus Christ. First Timothy 2:5-6 says, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all men." Jesus' purpose in coming to earth was to be a mediator, to negotiate an agreement between two parties standing on opposite sides of a spiritual dispute — man and God.

The Bible makes it clear that man has a great need for the work of a mediator. Our sin and willful rebellion has put us at odds with God and made us into His spiritual enemies. Isaiah 59:2 says, "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear."

Paul identifies the disputing sides in this spiritual disagreement: on the one side is God and on the other side, men. Our sin has built a huge wall between us and God and spiritually we are at war with God. And to die while separated from God brings sure and eternal doom.

But the good news is that Jesus came to be the ultimate and final mediator between man and God. Paul identifies this great mediator: the "man Christ Jesus." And while mediators today perform their work in courtrooms, Jesus accomplished His great work on the cross of Calvary. When Jesus "gave Himself as a ransom for all" on the cross, He paid for our sins and brought us into agreement with God. If a man will repent of sin and turn away from sin and trust in God and the work of Jesus on the cross, he will be saved. ☞

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PASTOR: Are you called to rural Missouri? Gainesville FBC is seeking a full-time pastor. Please send resumé with Internet link/CD/DVD to: Gainesville First Baptist Church, ATTN: Pastor Search Committee, P.O. Box 627, Gainesville, MO 65655, or email: bjnn.kiger@gmail.com.

MINISTER OF MUSIC: First Baptist Church, Center Star, in Killen, Ala. (Florence area), is seeking a full-time music minister. Music degree is preferred. This position will be responsible for overseeing all music and media for the church including planning and leading worship in 2 Sunday morning services (1 traditional and 1 contemporary). Send resumé to: Music Minister Search Committee, 6620 Hwy. 72 E., Killen, AL 35645, or email: graceann.hall@fbccenterstar.org.

PART-TIME MUSIC MINISTER: Raleigh Avenue Baptist Church in Homewood is seeking a part-time music minister. Send resumé to: RABC, ATTN: Personnel Committee, 309 Raleigh Ave., Homewood, AL 35209, or jeantowry@rabc.org.

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Nazareth Baptist Church, located in Rainsville, Ala., is prayerfully seeking a youth/children's pastor. Candidates for the position must have a passion for reaching and discipling the youth/children with a strong emphasis on reaching families through this ministry. Must also be a strong leader and communicator, have excellent organization skills and demonstrate a faithful walk with the Lord being an example to the youth/children. Youth experience is preferred. Our church asks that you be in prayer for God's direction as we pray for the one He will send. Send resumé to: nazarethoffice@farmerstel.com, or mail them to: Nazareth Baptist Church, P.O. Box 541, Rainsville, AL 35986.

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River View Baptist located at 1311 California Street, Valley, AL, is looking for a bivocational youth/children's minister. Church phone: 334-756-3078. Send resumé to: Pastor, River View Baptist Church, P.O. Box 1472, Valley, AL 36854.

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Springville's Friendship holds Turkey Rodeo



Photo courtesy of Roger White

Friendship Baptist Church, Springville, held its first Turkey Rodeo on April 15 as an evangelistic outreach in the St. Clair Baptist Association area. Sammy Gilbreath, director of the office of evangelism for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, was guest speaker and the event included door prizes and lunch. Three turkeys were harvested during the event by 18 hunters. First-place prize went to Terry Posey, of Odenville, pictured here. Roger White is pastor.



Across ALABAMA'S Associations

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

CAHABA

► **Pisgah Church, Selma**, will hold a homecoming service July 19 with guest speaker Josh Young, minister of youth and children for Brent Church. Sunday School will begin at 9 a.m. with the service at 10 a.m. and lunch to follow. The church also will hold revival services July 20-22, 7 nightly. Cory Horton, pastor of Elkdale Church, Selma, will speak and Guy Anderson, minister of music and senior adults for Elkdale Church, will lead music. Harold Arnold is pastor of Pisgah Church.

CLARKE

► **Union Grove Church, Coffeeville**, will hold a homecoming service July 19, with Sunday School at 10 a.m. and the worship service at 11 a.m. Lunch will be served at noon followed by a gospel singing featuring Glory Road at 1 p.m. The church also will hold revival services July 20-22, 7 nightly. Darryl Brunson will be guest speaker. Cleon Kyles is pastor.

COOSA RIVER

► **First Church, Tallas-hatchie, in Alpine**, will hold a

homecoming service July 26, 10:30 a.m. A covered dish lunch will be at noon with a dedication of a historical marker for the church and cemetery at 1 p.m. Jim McCain is interim pastor.

COFFEE

► **Goodman Church, Enterprise**, will celebrate 100 years of ministry with a homecoming service July 19, 10 a.m., no Sunday School. A covered dish lunch will follow. Pastor Bruce Williams will preach and the Goodman Choir, directed by Kaye Clark, will lead music. For more information call 334-347-7714.

COLUMBIA

► **Malvern Church** will host Cody Irwin and Walter Wilson in concert July 11, 6 p.m. Refreshments will be served following the gospel singing. Everyone is invited. Hosea Parker is pastor.

ETOWAH

► **Etowah Association's Missions Center** will hold the 2nd annual fundraiser Hope It Floats Cardboard Boat Races on July 25 in Rainbow City. Boats will

arrive at 9 a.m. Race will start at 11. For more information visit etowahbaptistmissionscenter.com or call Donna McCartney at 256-442-5297.

MOBILE

► The youth department at **First Church, Axis**, will host a laser tag event in Mobile on July 17. For more information email Pastor Justin Lott at justinlott@bellsouth.net or call 251-656-3572.

MORGAN

► **Edwin Jenkins** has been named interim director of missions for **Morgan Association** and will begin Aug. 1. He previously served as pastor of First Church, Athens, and served in the office of leadership and church growth of the Alabama State Board of Missions.

He and his wife, Joan, have three children and 13 grandchildren. ☞



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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For July 5

Explore the Bible

By Miguel Echevarria, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Christian Ministries, University of Mobile

REAL LOVE
1 John 4:7-21

Seen in the Son (7-11)

Love is an indispensable characteristic of the Christian life. So much so that John exhorts his readers to “love one another” (v. 7).

Loving fellow Christians shows “one has been born of God and knows God” (v. 7). Paul calls this a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). But what if someone has no love for his brother? John says such a person “does not know God” (v. 8).

Echoing John 3:16, John now displays a picture of true love: “God loved us and sent his Son as the mercy seat for our sins” (v. 10).

Under the Old Covenant the “mercy seat” was the place where, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest sprinkled the blood of a sacrificial bull and goat, making atonement for the sins of Israel (Lev. 16:13-14; Heb. 9:7). This event was later fulfilled when God the Father initiated the New Covenant by sending Jesus, His Son and great high priest, to shed his blood so as to pay the penalty (to atone) for sins (Heb. 7:26-27; 9:11-12).

The sending of Jesus was an act of selfless love for humanity — one that preceded our own love for God (v. 10), for before Jesus’ arrival we were still His enemies (Rom. 5:10).

God the Father, then, is the example of the kind of love we are to display toward fellow Christians — selfless and without prejudice. As God did not withhold his

love from us, neither should we withhold it from others.

Perfected by the Spirit (12-15)

The Holy Spirit makes it possible for believers to persist in loving one another. He also makes sure believers hold fast to their saving confession — that Jesus is the Son of God (v. 15), the King over creation (Ps. 2).

It is assuring to know that God has sent his Spirit into our hearts (Gal. 4:6-7), seeing to it that we cling to Jesus.

Defined by the Father (16-18)

Christians — those who remain in God’s love — have the confidence they will prevail in the day of judgment. This is the day when God calls the living and the dead to stand before Him (Rev. 20). Christians have no reason to fear this event. They should instead look forward to it with eager expectation, knowing the King will declare them righteous.

Unbelievers, on the other hand, should fear the coming judgment. For them there will be a guilty verdict leading to eternal punishment (1 John 4:18; Rev. 20).

Imitated by His People (19-21)

What if someone claims to love God and hates his brother? John says such a person “is a liar,” because in reality the love of God is not in him (v. 20). As Jesus says, “By this all people will know you are My disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

Let believers, then, continue to love their brothers in Christ — not fearing the judgment but looking forward to their future vindication. ☞

Bible Studies for Life

By Noel Forlini, Ph.D.
Adjunct Professor of Biblical Perspectives, Samford University

WORK THROUGH CONFLICT
Joshua 22:11-12, 15-18, 26-27, 33-34

The day my eyeglasses broke also was ironically the same day I decided my particular way of viewing the world no longer made sense.

“How do you read?” (Luke 10:26). Jesus posed this question to a man seeking to understand eternal life and the nature of his own faith. Jesus’ question is a profoundly portable one, adaptable not only to how we read a text, but also to how we read particular situations in our own lives. The question acknowledges that I do read and that it matters how I read.

We all have a lens through which we view the world. Some of us wear rose-colored glasses and some of us don’t. However we read, it’s very difficult to take off the lenses we’ve worn our whole lives and view the world differently. Yet sometimes it’s entirely necessary. Sometimes our eyeglasses need to break in order to see what God wants us to see. This is especially true when faced with interpersonal conflict.

Confront the issue directly and express your concern with love. (11-12, 15-18)

The book of Joshua is comprised of two primary sections — the invasion and conquering of the land of Canaan and the allotment of that land to the tribes of Israel. For a brief moment the Israelites enjoyed relative peace and cooperation with one another. The inter-tribal strife that would characterize the book of Judges was largely absent in Joshua. A minor conflict did arise, however, over the intentions of three tribes: Reuben, Gad and Manasseh.

These three tribes built an altar, which was viewed with suspicion by the Israelites. Previous generations, particularly the patriarchs, were allowed to build altars and make sacrifices anywhere they chose (Gen. 12:7; 13:18; 28:16-22). The building of an altar was viewed as commemoration of some covenant made with God, or of some remarkable event that was to be memorial-

ized. The building of an altar was an act of worship.

By the time of the writing of Deuteronomy, however, God had commanded centralized worship (Deut. 12:1-13; 2 Kings 22-23). Therefore the actions of the three tribes were deemed a betrayal of God. The Israelites misread the situation, yet they confronted the issue directly and expressed their concern by sending the priest Phinehas.

Listen to the other side. (26-27)

In listening to the other side the Israelites discovered they had misread the tribes’ intentions. Reuben, Gad and Manasseh had not betrayed God, nor had they betrayed the Israelites. They built the altar as a witness to future generations, an ideal prized by the Israelites and commanded in the Torah (Deut. 6:1-25, Deut. 8). When Phinehas brought back word that these tribes’ intentions were honorable, war-making efforts ceased and peace was restored.

Embrace a solution that honors God. (33-34)

When faced with conflict it is easy to assume a fight, flight or freeze posture. We can charge ahead of the situation, armed with a false narrative and become combative. We can use our words or actions in ways that fail to promote peace and instead escalate the situation. We can run away from the situation, fearful of the conflict. We then internalize whatever false narrative we have crafted in our own minds and the relationship is never repaired. The situation never changes. Or we can freeze, unsure of what to do or say, and allow anger, frustration or our wounds to fester. We then, perhaps unknowingly, wound others in the same way we have been wounded.

Yet God offers a different way. Jesus’ sermon on the Church in Matthew offers a perspective that is neither overly combative nor overly passive. Healthy confrontation, the perspective of more than one person and the offer of forgiveness all provide a grace-filled way of reading a conflictual situation (Matt. 18:15-22). ☞

THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

will not publish an issue July 9.

Sunday School lessons for July 12

will be available at www.thealabamabaptist.org.

Christian Crossword

By Judy Ellis Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

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Across

1. Because the enemy hath said against you, _____. (Ezek. 36:2)

4. 16th letter of the Greek alphabet.

6. Color.

12. ____ seed.

15. ____ the chief. (1 Chron. 26:10)

16. ____ the son of Jair slew Lahmi. (1 Chron. 20:5)

17. A branch of the military. (abbr.)

18. Paid. (abbr.)

19. Doctor. (abbr.)

20. I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning _____. (Lev. 26:16)

22. And when ____ defied Israel. (2 Sam. 21:21)

23. Pharaoh’s daughter drew him up out of the water. (Ex. 2:5)

26. Hot or cold drink.

27. These things have I written unto you concerning them that ____ you. (1 John 2:26)

28. Sons of Benjamin. (Gen. 46:21)

29. New Testament. (abbr.)

31. Sound of laughter.

32. The Lord is thy ____ upon thy right hand. (Ps. 121:5)

34. Crush.

36. If ____ be blameless, the husband of one wife. (Titus 1:6)

38. Have ____ weightier matters of the law. (Matt. 23:23)

40. Judah’s firstborn.

42. Direction.

43. ____ not vain repetitions. (Matt. 6:7)

45. Determined to send ____ unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea. (Acts 11:29)

49. South American grass.

50. A continual ____ given him of the king. (2 Kings 25:30)

52. Drink waters out of thine own _____. (Prov. 5:15)

53. Revise.

56. Her majesty. (abbr.)

57. And in those days shall men ____ death. (Rev. 9:6)

58. After Joel and before Obadiah.

Down

1. Prayer ending.

2. Child of Aram. (Gen. 10:23)

3. Publish in the palaces at _____. (Amos 3:9)

4. Cooking vessel.

5. The sixth captain for the sixth month was ____ the son of Ikesh. (1 Chron. 27:9)

7. Isaac’s eldest son.

8. Remember that thou in thy ____ receivedst thy good things. (Luke 16:25)

9. Lunar module. (abbr.)

10. We are ____ and fatherless, our mothers are as widows. (Lam. 5:3)

11. Deep and ____.

13. Saul of ____.

14. Any of various nucleic acids.

21. Welcomes.

23. We would know therefore what these things _____. (Acts 17:20)

24. Bounce off.

25. Now the coat was without _____. (John 19:23)

27. ____, Meshach and Abednego.

30. Thy lips are like a ____ of scarlet. (Song of Sol. 4:3)

33. Opposite of “live.”

35. Went forth toward Geliloth, which is over

against the going up of _____. (Josh. 18:17)

37. Screams.

39. Indian hut.

41. Having faithful children not accused of ____ or unruly. (Titus 1:6)

44. Spanish. (abbr.)

46. And they came to ____, where were 12 wells of water. (Ex. 15:27)

47. Female sheep.

48. ____ ye well. (Acts 15:29)

51. Direction.

54. District attorney. (abbr.)

55. Then Nebuchadnezzar came near ____ the mouth of the burning fiery furnace. (Dan. 3:26)

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TOP 10

*downloaded songs from
iTunes in June*

CHRISTIAN & GOSPEL



1. Touch the Sky
By Hillsong UNITED
(Empires)



2. Holy Spirit
By Francesca Battistelli
(If We're Honest)



3. Flawless
By MercyMe
(Welcome to the New)

4. Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)
By Hillsong UNITED
(Zion)



5. Soul On Fire
By Third Day
(Lead Us Back: Songs of Worship)

6. Through All of It
By Colton Dixon
(Anchor)



7. Drops In the Ocean
By Hawk Nelson
(Diamonds)

8. Shoulders
By for KING & COUNTRY
(RUN WILD. LIVE FREE. LOVE STRONG.)

9. First
By Lauren Daigle
(How Can It Be)

10. How Can It Be
By Lauren Daigle
(How Can It Be)

Source: popvortex.com at press time



Finding Favour

Photo courtesy of Gotee Records

Reflecting change

Contemporary group's new album mirrors faith journey

By Leann Callaway
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

The message behind the music starts with the name for the contemporary group Finding Favour.

The group's theme verse is Proverbs 3:4: "So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man."

"We chose our group name based on this verse and to serve as a reminder that if we live by God's Word and His commandments, we will find favor with God and man," explained Blake NeeSmith, lead vocalist for the group. "Our hope is that we will be contagious Christians, living by God's Word and His commandments, and that we would be an example to others to live that way as well and find favor together."

Finding Favour consists of NeeSmith; Allen Dukes, guitar; Dustin Daniels, bass guitar; and Josh Duckworth, drums.

When Finding Favour performs they hope to offer more than a concert. They hope to provide students and young adults a life-changing encounter with God. Their first full album, "Reborn," was released June 23 and reflects their desire to see lives changed for God's glory.

"We want these songs to encourage people to be changed and live life differently," NeeSmith said. "The album title reflects the changes in our music and our lives. ... We aren't the same people we were five years ago. We are continuing to grow in our faith."

"Everyone in the group was raised in the church, and it seems like we were there every time the doors were open. When we weren't at school or at home, we were at church. We were all raised that way and grew up loving music. Eventually we got to the place where we were passionate about music and wanted to pursue music full-time. At the same time we wanted to make sure we were doing this for the right reasons and not following after our parents' faith, but finding our own faith in Jesus."

"After we graduated high school, we started reading the Bible for ourselves and started digging into who Jesus was for ourselves. During this time, we started exploring what it might be like to play music full-time for God's glory. Moment after moment and show after show, we grew from there and God opened doors for us to share our music and our story with others."

'Digging' for themselves

Finding Favour recently wrapped up the 42-city We Believe God's Not Dead Tour with the Newsboys and Audio Adrenaline. This fall they will be featured on the Air1 Positive Hits tour with artists such as David Crowder and Lauren Daigle.

While enjoying the journey, band members continue to take their task seriously.

"We want to share our message and music with as many people as we can," NeeSmith said. "We love meeting people, hearing their story and hearing about how God has transformed their lives." 🙏



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CHRIST is first

Barons' Richmond keeps Christ as focal point

By Bill Sorrell
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When baseball struck him out, Josh Richmond found a way to get back on base.

Toward the end of the 2012 season, Richmond was struggling. A right fielder for the Myrtle Beach Pelicans, he had a .178 batting average. He was released.

"I was devastated. I didn't know what I was going to do with my life. I didn't know what I wanted to do. I just felt empty," Richmond said.

Having a wife, Lauren, and son, Colton, then almost 2, Richmond was concerned about supporting them.

While he had grown up a Christian, he said he went about his business "not really seeking God. I always prayed and I always thought I had a relationship with Christ but I really didn't get into the Word."

After his release, he began to build a relationship with Christ.



Josh Richmond

Photo by John Shadrack

overall), Richmond sought guidance from Jon Edwards, now a pitcher with the Texas Rangers.

"I knew that he had a really strong relationship with Christ and I knew that his life had changed because of his faith. I sought him wanting guidance. We became great friends and [he] was the trigger to me just giving Jesus my soul and telling Him that I wanted Him to be my Lord and Savior."

Richmond was reading a book at the time of his release and he felt led to turn to page 27, his jersey number.

"People say they hear God talking to them. As my faith gets stronger I slowly start to feel that more. The day I got released I hit my knees.

I was just praying to God saying, 'I don't know what I am going to do with my life right now. I need You. Just help me get through this hard time.'

"He led me to read this book and something told me to turn to page 27. I turn to page 27 and it is a story about this guy and he has been laid off from his job. God had told him that this was all part of His plan, to trust. He was doing this to bring his relationship closer to God. That is basically when I felt at ease," Richmond said.

"You hear people say that they have been saved. It is such a stronger meaning than that. It truly is. When I decided to put Him first in my life and truly drop everything and give my life to Him is when I became at peace with everything around baseball. Being a father, a husband, He gets me through everything. He is my rock."

In 2013, Richmond started fresh. He was signed by the Chicago White Sox and has been with four of their minor league teams including the Birmingham Barons and the Charlotte Knights in 2014. Richmond played 100 games in 2014 in Birmingham.

Starting the 2015 season with Birmingham, Richmond has spent much of it on the disabled list.

Baseball does throw its own curve ball.

"It's hard to deal with so much failure. Sometimes you get frustrated. You have to let it all go and stay positive and keep a good attitude because God is ultimately in control," Richmond said. ☪

"It became real for me and a focal point in my life. That was the point where it was 100 percent. That is when I needed Him most and I really turned to Jesus. That is when my life changed."

Drafted out of the University of Louisville by the Texas Rangers in the 12th round in 2010 (376th

REFLECTIONS

"WHAT'S EVERYBODY READING?"



World of
RELIGION
Compiled from Wire Services

Vatican, US sign agreement to go after tax evaders

VATICAN CITY — The United States on June 10 signed an agreement with the Vatican to trace American taxpayers hiding assets within the walls of the city-state, the latest step in the Holy See's push for greater financial transparency.

The U.S. ambassador to Holy See, Kenneth F. Hackett, signed the intergovernmental agreement with Archbishop Paul Gallagher, the Vatican's foreign minister, bringing to an end two years of negotiations.

The deal sees the Vatican become the latest of approximately 62 countries to sign on to the U.S. Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA), a 2010 law that allows financial information to be directly reported to authorities in the U.S.

It applies only to U.S. citizens and permanent residents, not organizations, and aims to identify people who are not annually declaring all of their foreign assets to the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

The information Holy See is due to hand over under the law should have already been sent to the IRS by individuals, some of whom have already been warned of the new agreement.

U.S. officials would not say how many American individuals hold money at the Vatican, but the number is believed to be rather small, perhaps in the dozens, according to the *Vatican Insider*.

Gallagher said it was "unquestionably a historic event."

"As Pope Francis frequently reminds us, evading just taxes is stealing both from the state and from the poor," he said. (RNS)

Eritrea's religious freedom violations force many to flee

ASMARA, Eritrea — Eritrea, a country in the Horn of Africa known for having the second-largest number of migrants crossing the Mediterranean after Syria, is committing serious religious freedom abuses, according to a U.N. investigation.

The religious abuses are among a host of widespread human rights violations that are forcing Eritrea's citizens to undertake deadly voyages to Europe through North Africa, the U.N. Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights said.

Islamic State militants who control parts of Libya have grabbed Christian migrants passing through the country and are posing the biggest danger to fleeing Eritreans.

Early in 2015 the militant group kidnapped and later killed 21 Egyptians and 28 Ethiopians. The latest reports indicate Islamic State fighters have kidnapped 88 Eritreans traveling with smugglers across Libya. The report details deaths, disappearances, arbitrary arrests, torture, coercion and forced conversions.

The Eritrean government recognizes only four religious groups: Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholics, Lutherans and Sunni Muslims. Interference in religious affairs is rampant, with religious materials often confiscated.

The U.N. said, "All religious communities and their members are nevertheless to varying degrees targeted by restrictions and attacks by the government."

The Eritrean government dismissed the report as unfounded and devoid of merit. (RNS)

Filipino Christians fear bill will escalate violence

MINDANAO, Philippines — Christians and others in the southern Philippines have expressed strong fears that legislation creating an Islamic sub-state on Mindanao Island will exacerbate religious tensions rather than resolve them, as the proposed law would give leaders sufficient independence to impose "sharia," or Islamic law.

The Bangsamoro Basic Law, proposed by President Benigno Aquino III in September 2014 with the aim of ending decades of Islamist rebel violence in Mindanao, was approved by a House Ad Hoc Committee on May 20. The area already enjoys a measure of autonomy as the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao.

If Bangsamoro, or "Moro Country" with Moro being colloquial for "Muslim," were ruled under sharia, non-Muslims would become second-class citizens with drastically reduced rights. Critics of the bill say it would render the federal government powerless to redress human rights abuses under Islamic law.

At press time the bill was being deliberated by 24 senators in the Southeast Asian country. (MS)