

THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



July 30, 2015
Vol. 180, No. 30

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INSIDE



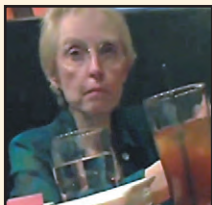
New First Amendment Defense Act gets Alabama support

◆ Page 3



Why discipline of reading is important for Christians

◆ Pages 4-8



Second Planned Parenthood video brings polarized media response

◆ Page 9

No easy fix

Alabama Legislature seeks solution to budget crisis

By **Martha Simmons**
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When Alabama legislators reconvene Aug. 3 in a truncated special session, they will be tasked with resolving the state budget crisis. Before they lay several choices: tax increases, cuts to government services, competing gambling proposals and otherwise robbing Peter (the Education Trust Fund and the recent BP oil spill settlement) to pay Paul (the tapped-out General Fund).

The state's General Fund is facing a projected shortfall of about \$200 million for the 2016 fiscal year budget beginning Oct. 1. In the regular session, lawmakers balked at Gov. Robert Bentley's proposals — which included tax hikes — to raise \$541 million in additional revenue. They instead approved slashing funding for various state agencies, a plan that Bentley promptly vetoed.

Gambling also emerged as a potential budget fix. Sen. Del Marsh, R-Anniston, surprised many when

he introduced a bill calling for a statewide vote in September to allow for expanded gambling in Alabama, citing an Auburn University at Montgomery study showing that a state lottery and Class III gambling (slot machines, poker, blackjack, etc.) at the state's four dog-racing tracks could generate some \$400 million annually for the state. Marsh's proposal never came to a vote in the regular session, and research by *The Alabama Baptist* proved the study he based his legislation on did not give a complete picture of the state's situation related to the expansion of gambling (see story in the May 21 issue).

The Poarch Band of Creek Indians (PCI) has offered to cover the state's budget shortfall in exchange for exclusive gambling rights, an offer that the governor has the authority to negotiate but so far has rebuffed. The tribe currently operates three casinos in the state that offer slot machine-style



bingo gambling. The legality of these facilities remains in question, and Attorney General Luther Strange has requested no decisions be made related to the PCI gambling request until the pending case has been settled.

Special session

But the Alabama constitution requires a balanced budget, so after the failure to set a budget in the regular legislative session, lawmakers expected a special session to be called in August. What legislators didn't expect was for the governor to issue a proclamation July 10 calling them back into session July 13. Legislators arrived in Montgomery as ordered but met only about 15 minutes before recessing the special session until Aug. 3, saying that committees needed more time to come up with their own plans for fixing the budget.

The governor's special session

call specifically excluded consideration of gambling proposals. However, Marsh has reintroduced his gambling bill which, despite the governor's mandate, could be brought up for discussion with two-thirds majority vote in both houses. To counter his proposal, PCI is airing television commercials promoting the proposed compact and bailout plan.

Bentley wants the House and Senate to consider only his trimmed-down package of revenue increases — about \$301 million worth this time — including:

- ▶ Additional taxes on tobacco
 - ▶ Increasing business privilege tax on larger businesses
 - ▶ Eliminating taxpayers' ability to deduct their federal social security tax payment from state income taxes or, as an alternative, new taxes on soft drinks
 - ▶ Shifting money from the Education Trust Fund to the General Fund and eliminating certain earmarks
 - ▶ Allocating a portion of the state's BP Deepwater Horizon
- (See 'State,' page 11)

To find your state senator's or representative's contact information, visit www.legislature.state.al.us.

Coming in two weeks:

BACK TO CAMPUS



Fall 2015

COMMENT

Message, Missions and Methodology

Frequently people lump all Baptist churches together as if they composed one giant denomination. Nothing could be further from the truth. Wikipedia lists 62 national Baptist bodies in the United States, and there may be more.

Baptist is not a protected term. It can be used by any group of Christians who considers themselves of that tradition. Historians tell us the word Baptist was first used as an insult to those who held that Christian baptism could only be offered to one who had made a personal profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

In the middle of the last millennium, infant baptism was almost universally practiced. It declared the child a member of the Christian faith and promised the child would be reared in that faith. Most people thought it absurd to “re-baptize” someone.

From insult to accepted title

Eventually this term of derision was adopted by those holding to believer’s baptism as an appropriate description of what they taught and the term Baptist was added to the various groups of Christian believers.

Over time Bible scholars have acknowledged that Baptist understanding is strongly supported by Scripture. In 1982, for example, The World Council of Churches reported, “[B]aptism upon personal profession of faith is the most clearly attested pattern in the New Testament documents” (from the Faith and Order Paper No. 111 adopted in Lima, Peru).

Baptist insistence on a personal profession of faith followed by baptism is now widely accepted, especially among evangelical believers. In fact most evangelical churches by whatever name hold to the doctrinal distinction that once characterized Baptists. Pentecostal churches, Bible churches, most nondenominational churches and many, many more preach what used to be called a Baptist understanding of salvation and baptism.

As the Baptist understanding of salvation and baptism has grown in popularity, use of the term Baptist has declined. Churches proclaim traditional Baptist doctrine but are not part of a Baptist denomination. Among Baptists, a growing number of churches as well as denominational entities have dropped Baptist from their nameplate. By obscuring their denominational history, they hoped to attract more members.

In some cases the Baptist brand has been called a hindrance. LifeWay Christian Resources



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

reported in 2011 that 40 percent of Americans had an unfavorable reaction to the name Southern Baptists and the percentage of unfavorable reactions was higher among the unchurched. Another study reported the word “Baptist” is often associated with a type of angry, judgmental kind of fundamentalism with bickering and infighting.

The list of 62 national Baptist bodies can be cited as Exhibit A that such criticism is not entirely undeserved.

Add the cultural shift away from belonging to organizations — churches or denominations — and one finds the ironic position where Baptist theology is winning the day but Baptist denominations are declining, including the Southern Baptist Convention. Some futurists even question if large, volunteer, national denominations will be a part of the religious future of the nation.

Denominations that have a strong top-down structure may survive, some say. But free-church denominations — where local church autonomy is emphasized and denominational cooperation is voluntary — may fracture into smaller, more limited structures than modern-day denominations.

This view of the future holds that basic theology will be unchanged. Churches will continue to preach the lordship of Christ, the authority of Scripture, personal salvation, believer’s baptism and local church autonomy.

Missions and ministry will continue to be priorities.

Working together

The unanswered question is about methodology. Will churches work together for missions and ministry and if so, how?

Some argue there will be little cooperation among large churches a few years from now. With the importance of denominational ties waning, large churches will focus on their own programs for education, missions and ministries largely unconnected to other groups of believers.

Others insist that large churches or institutions like colleges or seminaries will become hubs for networks of missions and ministries. These futurists point to churches like Saddleback Church,

Lake Forest, California, where Pastor Rick Warren networks with thousands of churches across the globe for education, missions and ministry projects. Leadership from numerically large churches or entities could allow churches without great resources to benefit from the other’s knowledge and expertise.

Still others point to existing networks for church planting, child adoption, ministry training, children’s work and other causes as the most likely model of the future. Today’s desire for participatory leadership in a flat organizational model argues for networks where churches of any size can participate, some say. In networks, most of which are relatively small compared to national religious bodies, results are more immediate because processes are simpler and personal influences are more tangible.

In each possibility, denominational identity or geographical proximity are unimportant. Theological commitments and program priorities are paramount.

Southern Baptists share the theological message that characterized Baptists across the years. We are motivated by the same impetus for missions and ministry. A distinction has been our methodology — cooperation. In a convention structure Southern Baptists banded together for missions, ministries, benevolence, education, evangelism and other causes.

Advancing God’s kingdom

State and national causes have been mutually supportive and both have been undergirded through one giving channel — the Cooperative Program. Like boats riding a changing tide, Baptist work locally, nationally and around the world rose together and fell together. Churches large in resources and those not so large sat together in associations, conventions, committees and board rooms to determine what was best for the whole.

Now the success of this approach may be its own undoing. If some of the prognosticators are right, then cooperation may be on a much smaller scale going forward.

The phenomenal changes in communications, together with increased availability of resources and ease of travel all mean tomorrow’s denomination will be different than yesterday’s, even if the exact shape is unclear. Yet it is too early to lament the death of Baptist bodies. The wisdom of cooperating as a denomination to support a wide range of programs may yet carry the day.

In the meantime those of us identified with the Baptist tradition may rejoice that Baptist understandings of salvation and baptisms continues to grow in acceptance. We also can pray about the future of Baptist denominations, remembering always that the goal is to advance God’s kingdom, not the kingdom of Baptists. 🙏

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

See page 13





"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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Protecting religious freedom



First Amendment Defense Act gets Alabama support

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Two members of Alabama's U.S. congressional delegation have signed on to legislation intended to protect the religious freedom of those who oppose same-sex unions.

The First Amendment Defense Act (Senate Bill 1598 and House Resolution 2802) was introduced June 17 by Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, and Rep. Raúl Labrador, R-Idaho. The legislation prohibits the federal government from taking "any discriminatory action against a person, wholly or partially on the basis that such person believes or acts in accordance with a religious belief or moral conviction that marriage is or should be recognized as the union of one man and one woman, or that sexual relations are properly reserved to such a marriage."

Rep. Robert Aderholt, R-Alabama, and Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Alabama, have joined 134 House sponsors and 36 Senate sponsors of the legislation. The bill comes in response to the June ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court that overturns state bans on gay "marriage."

'Troubled' ruling

Aderholt called the court's ruling "troubling," noting questions about how the ruling will affect religious organizations and educational institutions. Aderholt said his concerns extend to the possibility that gay "marriage" advocates will challenge the tax-exempt status of congregations that disagree with the ruling and preach about it from the pulpit.

"We need legislation that makes it clear this type of attack on religious liberties will not be tolerated," Aderholt said in a statement to *The Alabama Baptist*. "Our Founding Fathers included religious freedom in the First Amendment for a reason. They wanted to ensure that

Americans were always free to practice their faith. This bill was written to protect our precious First Amendment freedoms guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution."

Alabama Baptist leaders are voicing their support for the effort.

Joe Godfrey, executive director of Alabama Citizens Action Program, said the First Amendment is "being distorted to say something it was never intended to say" and that stronger religious liberty protections are needed.

"If we don't get these protections, we are going to see our religious liberty continue to slide down a slippery slope," Godfrey said.

The potential impact of the Supreme Court's recent 5-4 decision affirming same-sex "marriage" on religious organizations continues to be a topic of debate. The Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (BJC) says it doesn't remove the constitutionally mandated separation of church and state.

"Churches will continue to make their own decisions about what kind of marriage ceremonies they conduct," BJC General Counsel Holly Hollman said in a June 26 article on the BJC website. "Ministers will not be forced to perform same-sex weddings."

But questions about religiously affiliated institutions and individuals with religious objections will depend on new fact scenarios and the interplay of a variety of laws, she said.

Godfrey also is concerned about how the ruling may affect Christians in the workplace.

"What if your employer says to you, 'You go to a church that engages in hate speech because it preaches against homosexuality, so you need to move your membership or lose your job.' Something needs to be in place to protect our rights," Godfrey said.

In a July 7 letter urging congressional support of the First Amendment Defense Act, Na-

tional Religious Broadcasters President Jerry Johnson called the measure a "shield against federal agents who might be tempted to use tax treatment, licensing, grants and the like to coerce or discriminate against individuals or organizations that merely wish to live in light of their religious conviction that marriage is the union of one man and one woman."

Long tradition

Ryan Anderson, a senior research fellow at The Heritage Foundation who researches and writes about marriage and religious liberty, said the First Amendment Defense Act "follows our nation's long tradition of protecting the natural right to the free exercise of religion and freedom of association as enshrined in our Constitution."

"It ensures that the federal government respects the rights of individuals, businesses and organizations that wish to act in accordance with their beliefs about marriage," said Anderson, author of a forthcoming book, "Truth Overruled: The Future of Marriage and Religious Freedom," endorsed by Southern Baptist pastor Rick Warren and Russell Moore of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission.

A primary criticism of the current bill is the statement that includes protection from discrimination for those who have a moral conviction that "sexual relations are properly reserved" to a marriage between one man and one woman. Critics say that language would allow employers to fire women for getting pregnant outside of wedlock.

In a July 22 blog post for BJC, Don Byrd cited a *Washington Post* article reporting that Rep. Charlie Dent, R-Pennsylvania, has prepared an amendment to overhaul the bill, narrowing its focus, should it come to the floor. (BNG contributed)

Ministry Tips



READ WIDELY

By Simon Knighten

Deacon, The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham

After about 10 years in ministry I found myself in an intellectual rut. My Bible study was solid, yet I was struggling to make impactful connections in my preaching. As I prayed, God led me to institute a reading rotation that allowed me to deepen my well, so to speak. I began to keep four types of books in rotation. This grouping is in addition to my

normal Bible reading plan and sermon preparation.

First I read a theological book (systematic, biblical). Second I read a practical ministry book (pastoral insights, counseling, administration or leadership). The third type of book I read is a nonfiction book such as a biography or an account of the Civil War. The fourth type of book I read is a work of fiction (novel, collection of poetry or humor). This reading

approach provides great supplements to sermon preparation in regards to illustrations.

Another benefit to this approach is that it keeps the mind active and engaged through the use of various types of literature. I have seen God use my reading to expand not only my preaching but also my ability to engage those around me in conversation for the advance of His kingdom. 🙏

RECALL YOUR FOCUS

From the Bible to fiction to news, reading is 'good discipline' for Christians

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

It's right in the center of her back porch that, over the years, Alex Wolf learned a valuable lesson — she isn't the center of the universe.

It was a vital revelation, she said, and it happened in the pages of a good book or two ... or three ... or 300.

"I think humans have always been a fairly narcissistic bunch. This isn't a recent development of the selfie era; self-focus has been a part of our sin-laden DNA since the fall," Wolf said. "But Scripture makes it quite clear that I should not be my own first priority or focus. My universe must revolve around Jesus Christ and His commands ... and Jesus asks that we shift our focus from the inside to the outside, from ourselves to others."

Reading, she said, is an activity that reorients us — it "encourages self-forgetfulness" and "allows us to recalibrate our focus."

She's not the first Wolf with these thoughts.

"I come from a family of voracious readers," she said, including her father, Jay, who serves as pastor of First Baptist Church, Montgomery.

"My dad has always loved to read and often talks of devouring multiple books per week as a young person," she said.

Her mother, Mary Ruth, is the same way. The couple loved books and led by example. The latter would've happened incidentally anyway, but it was intentional too, Jay Wolf said.

"In our home, my wife and I advocated that our children read, so we spent a lot of time sharing

books with our treasured children," he said.

Mary Ruth Wolf agreed. "We always taught our children that a reader is a leader," she said. For her and her family, reading is both a beloved activity and a life-enriching discipline.

Jason Dees, pastor of Valleydale Baptist Church, Birmingham, said he agrees with that sentiment completely.

"Since I was a child, reading has opened my eyes to the world, and it has opened my imagination," he said.

Reading 'can draw you closer to God'

And, Dees said, it has led him closer to the Lord in a number of ways, beginning with daily Scripture reading. Each morning finds him with a cup of coffee in one hand, a Bible in the other.

"I study my Bible in the mornings for devotion and for sermon preparation," he said.

Jay Wolf said his routine looks similar.

"My primary reading is focused on God's Word," he said. "I start in the early morning with a 'quiet time' where I read Scripture and pray and set the course for a surrendered day."

During the day, other sermon and church-related reading may happen, and at night leisure reading, but the Bible comes first.

Mary Ruth Wolf said it's important for her to discipline herself to do that first too, before she does any other reading.

"My quiet time comes first," she said. "I've heard it said that one third of the world doesn't have access to a Bible, and 2 billion people in the world can't read. Reading Scripture is something I never want to take for granted."

(See 'Daily,' page 6)

IMPORTANCE OF A READING PLAN

BRATE

S



IMPORTANCE OF A READING PLAN

DAILY DISCIPLINE

"I am a reader because I deeply want to know the Lord and I want to understand His Word and I am desperate to connect with people."

Pastor Jason Dees
Valleydale Baptist Church, Birmingham

'Books teach us universal lessons through specific stories'

(continued from page 4)

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, agreed that reading Scripture is a joy that believers should never neglect.

"Even though one may have been a Christian for years, even decades, Bible reading is as fresh as a new day," he said. "Something brand new is awaiting you every time you spend time studying the Bible."

So it follows that believers should discipline themselves to do it daily, he said.

But secondary types of reading can contribute to spiritual growth too, Lance added. "Reading is an excellent discipline for the Christian," he said. "I think reading a book is similar to having a conversation with

someone you probably have never met but after the experience of reading their work, you feel as if you know them."

That includes people like Augustine, Martin Luther, George Mueller and Andrew Murray — a great cloud of witnesses from whom Christ followers can learn, Lance said.

Reading can draw you closer to people.

Reading can bring you into the lives of heroes of the faith, but it also can draw you closer to the people right around you in your family, your workplace and your zip code, Dees said.

"I am a reader because I deeply want to know the Lord and I want to understand His Word and I am desperate to connect with people," he said.

One way Dees achieves the latter is to meet up with people and read.

"I have a men's group and we read through books together," he said. "Our

(Valleydale Baptist) interns and I also read books together, and I am in a regular mentoring group with other pastors around the country, and we will read two to three books between meetings."

That kind of thing isn't reserved for pastors.

Mary Ruth Wolf said one of the first things she did when she got all four of her children in school was to join a book club.

It was a great way to meet other people in her community and share experiences alongside them, she said.



Photo by J. Owens

Reading can change you, much like travel does, Alex Wolf says. But it has the benefit of costing very little, and it can be done anywhere, anytime.

Reading can open your eyes to the world.

Knowing what's going on around you can help you connect with people too, Dees said.

"Every morning, I like to read the headlines of the day," he said. "I also enjoy reading periodicals more fully at night."

The New York Times, *Wall Street Journal* and *AL.com* make his list, as well as *Time*, *Rolling Stone* and *The New Yorker*.

"Karl Barth once said that there are two books that every pastor should read every day — his Bible and his newspaper," Dees said. "Any pastor worth his salt is a reader for two reasons. First, he wants to understand God, His Word and His doctrines, and secondly he wants to connect with his people."

Jay Wolf said he's a "news hawk" too, and for similar reasons.

"I started reading the newspaper when I was 8 years old and have a great interest in and hunger for current events because they reflect the human condition," he said.

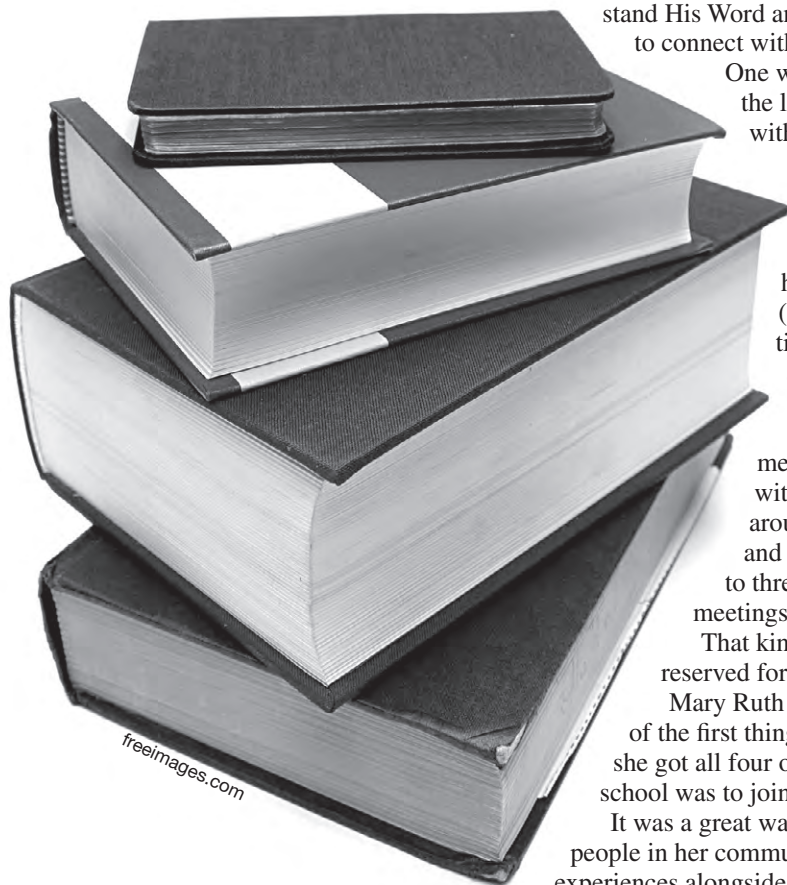
Reading can improve your life.

Alex Wolf said the books she's read have definitely reflected the human condition — but they've also refined her own worldview.

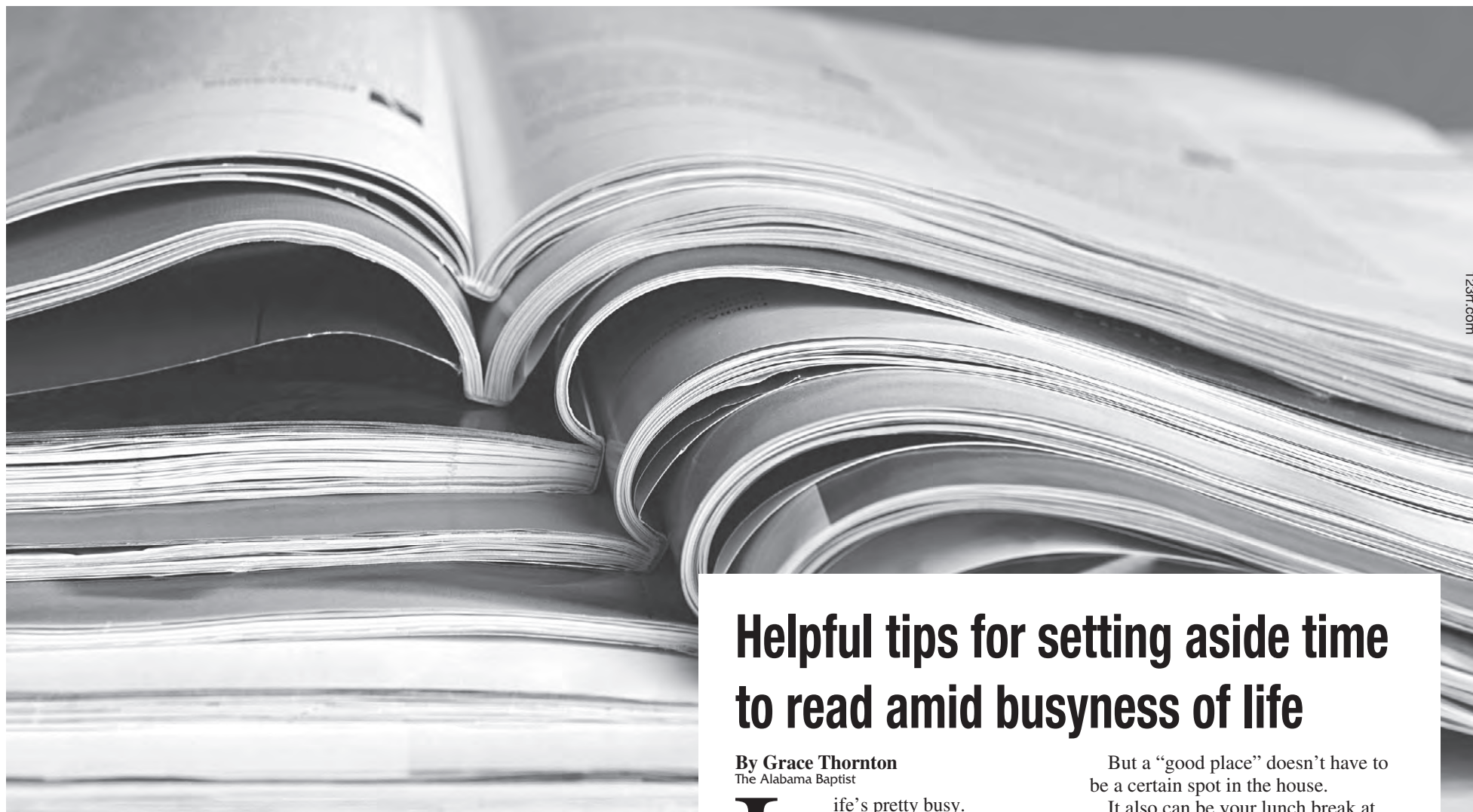
"In my own mind, reading is akin to and as vital as traveling," she said. "Both books and travel lead to the revelation that the world is absolutely enormous and the spectrum of experiences to be had is near limitless. Reading and traveling lead to the revelations that I am not the center of the universe and that I am not alone in the universe because someone somewhere has felt what I am feeling."

The great advantage reading has over travel is that it can be done anywhere, anytime at minimal cost, she said.

"Books teach us universal lessons through specific stories, which helps me recognize the lessons to be learned from the story I am living out in my real life," Alex Wolf said. "And often it wraps words around thoughts, opinions and feelings I never realized I had." ❧



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Helpful tips for setting aside time to read amid busyness of life

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Life's pretty busy. Between work, family, laundry, email and everything else, it's not always easy to find a minute to pick that book up off the coffee table and read.

So how do we carve out the time?

1. Think of it as therapy.

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, leads a busy life.

But reading is important enough to him that he carves time out for it every day.

"Reading has always been therapy for me," Lance said. "In a busy world of demands and commitments, reading the Bible and choice books can be a retreat without traveling to a literal destination."

It's a convenient retreat, but getting there requires discipline, just like exercise or eating right.

But, like Lance, if you can think of it as a restful (though productive) activity, it might be easier to train yourself to click the TV off and pick up a book for a few minutes each day instead.

2. Find a good place.

Many dedicated readers say that having a good spot where they like to sit and read helps motivate them to want to return to that book over and over.

Alex Wolf's spot is the brick courtyard in her backyard. And she says her mother, Mary Ruth, always chooses a certain chair.

"My mental picture of my mother is her sitting in this overstuffed brown armchair in the corner of our living room," Alex Wolf said. "She has her feet tucked beneath her and a book in her hand, and usually another pile of books on the table nearby."

But a "good place" doesn't have to be a certain spot in the house.

It also can be your lunch break at work, a waiting room where you go often or the carpool line at school where you sit each afternoon. Being proactive and having a book with you can help to redeem those moments you might normally while away on your smartphone.

Lance said he does this when he travels.

"I have a Kindle or books with me when I travel by car and plane," he said. "Books are wonderful companions when one is traveling."

Mary Ruth Wolf agreed.

"On car trips our children carried stacks of books. We also listened to books on tape," she said.

3. Train yourself to focus better.

For many people it's getting harder and harder to sit and focus these days. Impatience and forgetfulness are an "ugly toll of technology," according to *The New York Times*, and *The Atlantic* reports that our ability to focus starts to dwindle as early as our 20s.

It's something any would-be reader has to be aware of — and combat.

The blog Liferhacker noted that focusing our attention is a "form of endurance athleticism," something we can practice and train for, stretching our capacity to focus.

"It is as much Twitter's fault that you have a short attention span as it is your closet's fault it doesn't have any running shoes in it," Liferhacker reports. "If you want the ability to focus on things for a long period of time, you need attention fitness." 📖

“Reading is an excellent discipline for the Christian. I think reading a book is similar to having a conversation with someone you probably have never met but after the experience of reading their work you feel as if you know them. ... Reading has always been therapy for me. In a busy world of demands and commitments, reading the Bible and choice books can be a retreat without traveling to a literal destination.”

Rick Lance, executive director
Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

WHAT ARE YOU READING?



Alabama Baptists share about what they are currently reading

MARY RUTH WOLF

FBC Montgomery

“Becoming Odyssa: Epic Adventures on the Appalachian Trail” by Jennifer Pharr Davis

It’s the true story of a girl who, after graduating from Samford University in Birmingham, decided to make the iconic 2,200-mile trek that rambles through 14 states. Would I ever do this? No. But I’m totally intrigued by people who attempt such adventurous endeavors.”

SCOTT BULLARD

Judson College

“The Christian College Phenomenon” edited by Samuel Joeckel and Thomas Chesnes from Palm Beach Atlantic University, a Christian college in Florida

The book’s contributors, all employees of Christian colleges, explore practices at America’s fastest-growing colleges and make a compelling argument that the reason many of the fastest growing colleges are Christian colleges is because Christian institutions are by their very nature called to provide what today’s young people desire: to be challenged within the walls of the classroom but also outside of the classroom. The book’s contributors also emphasize that Christian colleges are no less academically rigorous than their secular counterparts; indeed data suggests that Christian colleges and universities are engaging in some of the finest teaching in America. The book, although it covers several themes that have been traced before, is worthwhile reading.”

LESA MOORE

University of Mobile

“The Noticer Returns” by Andy Andrews

In this book Andy Andrews meets his old friend, Jones, again after many years. He tells the story of several individuals and families who are struggling with various issues such as success, careers, relationships and parenting. Their encounters with Jones lead them to change their perspectives on life and circumstances in order to find solutions to the problems they face. Andy Andrews is a wonderful storyteller and I love how he

incorporates the culture of the Gulf Coast into his stories. One of my favorite parts is his emphasis on the importance of faith and trust in God to fulfill our assignments here on earth using illustrations of the legendary ‘jubilee’ that takes place in Fairhope.”

KEVIN BLACKWELL

Samford University

“Church Unique: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Capture Culture and Create Movement” by Will Mancini

It is not your average church strategy book. As a matter of fact Mancini suggests that taking the average cookie-cutter strategic process may not be the best idea for a church. The author emphasizes finding the unique vision for your church by understanding the ‘culture’ of ministry in the congregation. I am enjoying Mancini’s perspective on vision because it is fresh and unique. Many leaders succumb to the temptation of trying to replicate the vision and strategy of other churches and then force it into their congregational structure. Wise leaders find God’s unique vision for their ministry context and then develop a strategic approach that matches that vision. It is not a book that you can read quickly — it is one that you need to slowly and meticulously work through.”

RICK LANCE

Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

“Onward: Engaging the Culture With-

out Losing the Gospel” by Russell Moore

This is a very well-written and timely book authored by the leader of our SBC Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. In this work Moore makes a strong case for what he calls ‘convictional kindness’ in relationship to a culture that is increasingly in opposition to our biblical worldview. Each chapter spotlights a major issue that is a matter of concern for evangelical Christians.”

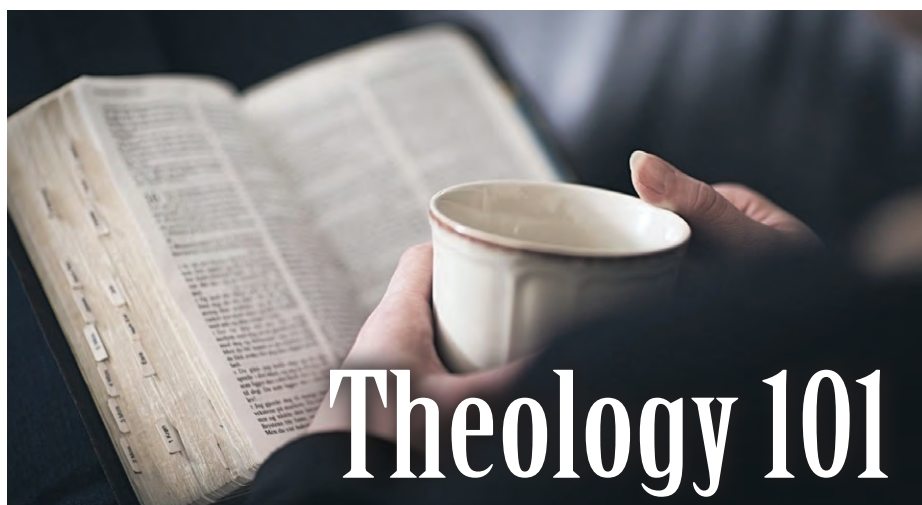
ROSALIE HUNT

Retired missionary

“Who Is This Man?: The Unpredictable Impact of the Inescapable Jesus” by John Ortberg

It is amazing to realize how much I didn’t know about Jesus, especially about the dominating role He has played in creating our history and our culture. I find Ortberg easy to read but it certainly isn’t fluff. Ortberg gives remarkable insight into how Jesus, 2,000 years after He lived, is still impacting the everyday lives of people across the globe. No one else in history has had near the influence of the Son of God, who lived among men for a mere 33 years. This talented author has written the most refreshing perspective on Jesus and His conversation with the Samaritan woman that I have ever read. This book is one I plan to keep and read again.”

Tell us what you are reading, a quick summary of what it is about and your response to it so far. Email news@thealabamabaptist.org or send us a message on Facebook. You may also mail your information to 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Such a Great Salvation

Regeneration

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

Regeneration is a more formal or theological way of referring to the new birth. The term itself points us to an inward re-creating of a fallen human nature through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Regeneration is a twin with reconciliation in the sense that both occur at the moment of conversion. Our restored relationship with God who made us (reconciliation) includes the reception of a new nature (regeneration), which also is described as experiencing a new birth.

Regeneration expresses what Jesus told Nicodemus: “I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Nicodemus thought in physical terms, but Jesus was speaking to him with spiritual meaning. Although he was a Jewish scholar, Nicodemus failed to make a connection between Jesus’ words and the prophetic words of Ezekiel 36:26–27: “I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes and be careful to obey My rules.” Jesus came and died to make possible the realization of Ezekiel’s prophetic vision of people with new hearts becoming dwelling places for God’s Spirit.

From its prophetic roots all the way to its realization in Jesus’ saving work, regeneration is a work of God. Spiritual birth is not something people do for themselves nor is it something Christians can do for other people. Regeneration is exclusively the work of God. Since new birth is a work of God and not our doing, it is entirely attributed to His grace. Nowhere does the Bible suggest that regeneration is promised to those who deserve it or who might in some way be especially religiously inclined.

God’s saving work not only changes condemnation before Him into accep-

ance with Him, it begets a child of God and begins a transformation process that ultimately makes a sinner resemble the Savior. God’s goal was not the reformation of ungodly individuals, but their transformation into new creations in Christ Jesus. As an analogy of salvation, new birth suggests the irreversible nature of our great salvation. On any level, what is born cannot revert to an unborn status. The egg that hatches a baby chick can never become an egg for an omelet. Once born again a person is forever different. The old life is over; a new life has begun.

‘New self’

Colossians 3:9–10 envisions this new life as putting off “the old self with its practices” and putting on a “new self which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator.” While we might understand regeneration as the initial or inaugural work of the Spirit of God in the inner being of each person who repents of sin and makes a faith commitment to Christ, we should also say that regeneration is the beginning of a newness of life for which sanctification is the continuation.

Just as Jesus explained to Nicodemus, the new birth requires being born of the Spirit. In that explanation Jesus informed Nicodemus that regeneration is a sovereign working of God’s Spirit. He compared that work to the blowing of the wind, which lies beyond human origination or manipulation. When we’ve said all we can about human nature being reborn, elements of gracious mystery remain. ☪

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.



Second Planned Parenthood video brings polarized media response

A week after America saw a stunning undercover video of a Planned Parenthood (PP) executive discussing the methods and price tag of harvesting fetal parts, a second video rocked social media.

Showing more discussion of the same topic, the video featured a different PP doctor negotiating higher prices for fetal parts, saying she wanted “a Lamborghini” and that she could use “less crunchy” techniques to keep fetal parts intact.

Hundreds of thousands have responded in moral outrage, calling for the government to defund PP. While the Obama administration said it will not agree to defund PP, U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch said the Department of Justice would “review all the information.”

The sale or purchase of human fetal tissue is a felony and federal law prohibits altering the timing and method of abortions for the purpose of fetal tissue collection.

The public response has been both staggering and polarized, with major media coverage

falling sharply on opposing sides. Some have called the undercover video operation deceptive and “heavily edited.”

“The *New York Times* editorial board, whose members are almost all pro-choice, decided that those who are providing the baby parts are the real victims,” wrote RNS columnist Jonathan Merritt. “In a story titled ‘The Campaign of Deception Against Planned Parenthood,’ they characterized the videos as nothing more than ‘the latest in a series of unrelenting attacks on Planned Parenthood.’”

“The *Times* did not merely get the Planned Parenthood story wrong; they missed it completely,” Merritt wrote.

He’s not alone in that opinion.

Leaving the word ‘baby’ out

A July 21 News Busters article criticized the three national broadcast television news programs for devoting only 9 minutes and 11 seconds to coverage of the Planned Parenthood videos the week of their release, with ABC giving just 46 seconds to the story. News Busters contrasted that with 31 minutes and 11 seconds spent on Planned Parenthood by ABC, CBS and NBC in 2012 the week Susan G. Komen temporarily stopped funding America’s largest abortion provider.

News Busters added that all three net-

works “censored the word ‘baby’” from their coverage of the videos “and instead used the term ‘fetal tissue.’ Similarly, from the beginning of their coverage ABC, NBC and CBS labeled the makers of the videos as ‘anti-abortion activists’ rather than use the ‘pro-life’ label.”

Roger Alford, communications director for Kentucky Baptists and former Associated Press correspondent, said the mainstream media has taken “a wide variety of approaches to this coverage.”

‘Society has gone off the rails’

Alford noted the contrast between a pro-life *USA Today* op-ed by Kirsten Powers calling the videos “stomach-turning” and “damning” and the *New York Times* editorial criticizing the Center for Medical Progress’s (CMP) undercover video campaign as “a dishonest attempt to make legal, voluntary and potentially

lifesaving tissue donations appear nefarious and illegal.”

Such vastly different responses illustrate the issue that Tom Beau-

champ, Georgetown University professor of philosophy and senior research scholar at the Kennedy Institute of Ethics in Washington, D.C., says lies at the heart of the debate: Can PP be shut down in a showdown over the moral status of embryonic and fetal life when one camp believes it is a life worthy of protecting and the other doesn’t?

“[I]f you don’t see this embryo or tissue — whether from an abortion or a miscarriage — as having a moral status, you don’t see the issue of giving consent for its use in research. It’s not a person to you,” Beauchamp said. “There is no neutral concept of personhood. Everyone picks their starting point.”

But Powers wrote that “society has gone off the rails” when no one will question abortion doctors or hold them accountable.

Merritt agreed. “A society cannot fix what it will not acknowledge is broken,” he wrote.

But David Daleiden — the 26-year-old mastermind behind the 30-month-long undercover operation — is giving his best shot at getting people to think and react differently to PP.

“We have thousands of hours of video and audio,” said Daleiden, of the pro-life group CMP. “This is not all we have. This is just the beginning.” (BP, RNS, TAB)

To watch the videos released by Daleiden, visit www.centerformedicalprogress.org.

Watch for major breaking stories on the topic in upcoming issues of The Alabama Baptist. Follow regular, ongoing coverage on our Top Story of the Day website, alerts.thealabamabaptist.org.

Historical HIGHLIGHTS

FROM PREVIOUS ISSUES OF THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



50 Years Ago July 1965

Only One in Alabama: During the month of July, George B. Hossack, pastor of Airdrie Baptist Church, Airdrie, Scotland, is filling the pulpit of First Baptist Church, Opelika. Jon Appleton, the pastor, will be filling the visiting pastor's pulpit in Scotland in

an exchange program involving 18 preachers.

40 Years Ago July 1975

New Editor: Bob Terry, associate editor of the Kentucky state Baptist newspaper, *Western Recorder*, has been elected editor of *Word & Way*, state newspaper of

the Missouri Baptist Convention. He is the grandson of L.O. Terry, a member of Sulphur Springs Baptist Church, near Hillsboro. (Note: In May 1995, Terry was elected editor of *The Alabama Baptist*.)

30 Years Ago July 1985

WMU Consultant Named: Alabama Baptist Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) has named Barbara S. Owen, of Montgomery, as consultant in Mission Friends and Missions Growth. She previously was a mathematics teacher at St. James School in Montgomery and is a member of First Baptist Church, Montgomery.

20 Years Ago July 1995

Buildings Gone — Church

Remains: On June 12 a fire broke out at Roaches Cove Baptist Church, Fackler, and by 5 a.m. all the church buildings had been destroyed, including an education building that was completed in 1994. Pastor Chris Guinn and others testified that they had lost the buildings "but not the church."

10 Years Ago July 2005

Pickens DOM Leads Sunday School Broadcast: Since December 2004, the WALN Radio Sunday School Program has been broadcast twice weekly on 89.3 in Carrollton. The program was started by WALN station manager Mike Hall, who also serves as pastor of New Salem Baptist Church, Reform, and Pickens Baptist Association Director of Missions Gary Farley. 🙏



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CHURCH POSITIONS

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Steele Baptist Church, Steele, Ala., is seeking God's will for a bivocational pastor. Please send resumés to: Steele Baptist Church, 3811 Pope Ave., Steele, AL 35987, or email to: steelebaptistchurch@gmail.com. For more information, call 256-538-6612.

MINISTER OF MUSIC

Bellevue Baptist Church, Gadsden, accepting resumés for minister of music. Email resumés and hyperlinks to YouTube sites with samples to: secretarybellevue@gmail.com, or mail resumés and DVDs to: 150 Nocalula Dr., Gadsden, AL 35904.

PART-TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC

Are you called to help God's people worship Him with sincerity and joy? Westwood Baptist Church, Birmingham, Ala., is eagerly seeking a part-time minister of music. Contact Pastor Steve Potts (phone: 205-514-5077, email: steve.potts@wbclive.com).

PART-TIME MUSIC MINISTER

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

ASSOCIATE PASTOR OF YOUTH & RECREATION

Poplar Heights Baptist Church, Jackson, Tenn., is searching for a full-time associate pastor of youth and recreation. We are seeking someone with at least a college degree and 2 years of experience in the area of youth and/or recreation. Send resumé to: Associate Pastor Search Committee, Poplar Heights Baptist Church, 1980 Hollywood Dr., Jackson, TN 38305, or freida@poplarheights.com.

MINISTER OF YOUTH

East Highland Baptist Church in Hartselle is accepting resumés for a bivocational youth minister. Send resumés via email to: searchcommitteeehbc@gmail.com.

YOUTH/CHILDREN'S PASTOR

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rection as we pray for the one He will send. Send resumés to: nazarethoffice@farmerstel.com, or mail them to: Nazareth Baptist Church, P.O. Box 541, Rainsville, AL 35986.

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MISCELLANEOUS

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Want to know GOD?

By Pastor James Pace
Calvary Baptist Church, Tusculumbia

One of the biggest barriers to evangelism today can simply be a failure to ask. I can remember my own salvation experience as a young boy. God's Spirit was calling me. He was at work in my life. Yet I had great fear about accepting Christ. My fear came for different reasons, such as being very bashful. There was no way I would ask anyone about being saved or walk an aisle, etc. I also had a fear of water and understood that baptism came shortly after salvation. So as a small child I stood and held tightly to the pew in front of me, wishing desperately that I could accept Jesus, but living in fear about doing so.

I also remember well the day I did accept Jesus. My mother read the Bible to me one night, as was our custom, and when she read verses about believing in Jesus Christ, I thought, "If I could only do that." That night when she finished reading, she looked at me and said, "Have you ever thought about giving your life to Jesus Christ?" I had surely been thinking about it and was holding back because of fear. That night, I said yes to Jesus and He saved me.

Fast forward in my own life to a time when God was convicting me to be more involved in evangelism. He had placed a little girl on my heart and I knew I needed to ask her if she was ready to accept Jesus. But I put it off. Once again, I let fear control my actions.

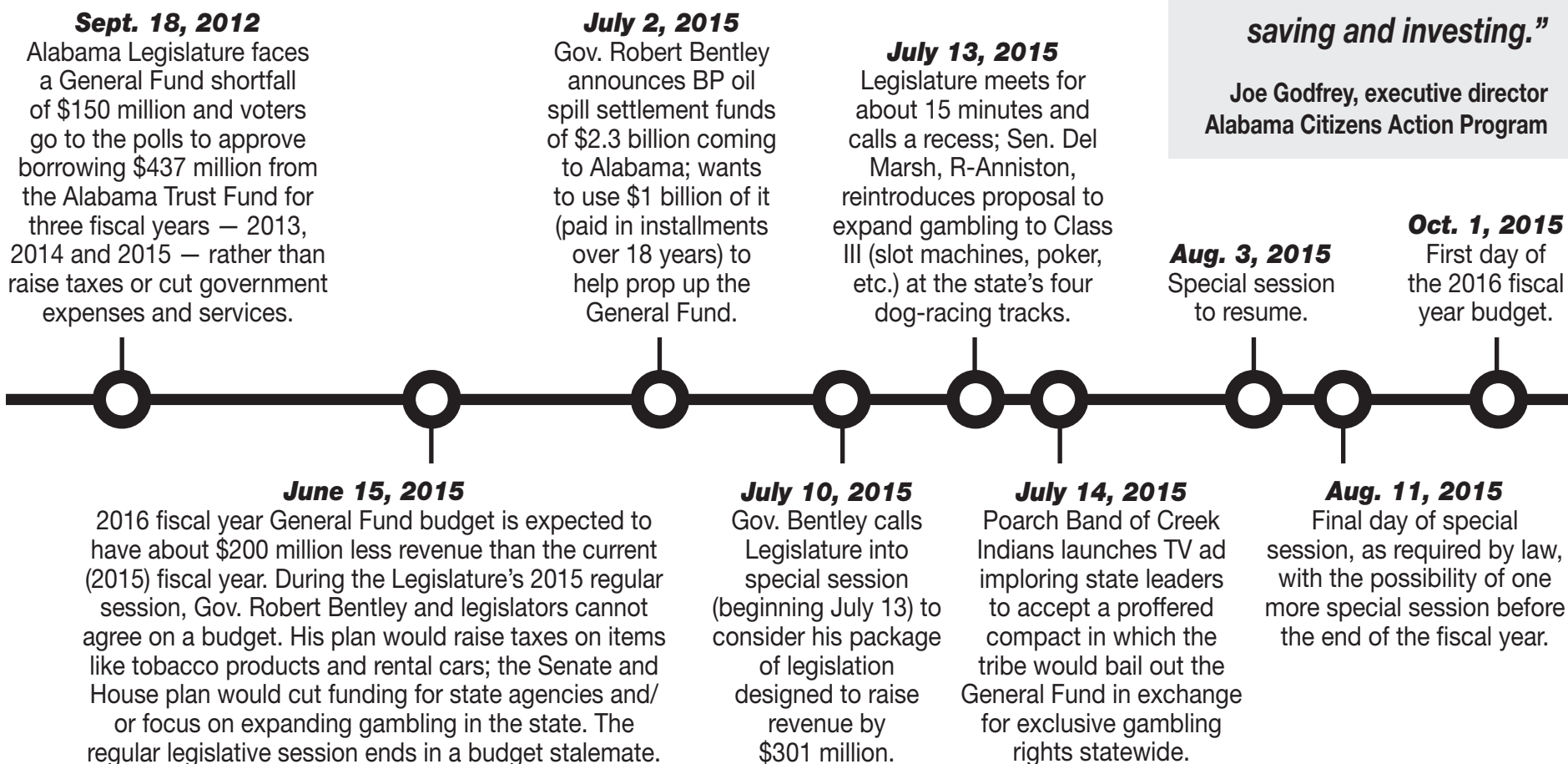
Then one day not long after, I was driving down the road when a baseball rolled out in front of my car. Without thinking, a little girl darted out in front of me. I slammed on my brakes and the girl looked up at me in fear. It was the same shy little girl God had put on my heart. I drove on but God began to convict me greatly that I needed to ask that little girl if she was ready to accept Jesus. The next time I saw her, I did ask. Guess what? She accepted Jesus that day. Sometimes all we need to do is ask. 🙏

Budget crisis timeline

By Martha Simmons
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

“If our state becomes dependent on gambling as a revenue stream, then it will start encouraging its own citizens to gamble instead of working hard, saving and investing.”

**Joe Godfrey, executive director
Alabama Citizens Action Program**



State promises ‘people can gamble their way out of poverty,’ Godfrey says

(continued from page 1)

oil spill settlement to the General Fund (about \$1 billion paid out in installments of about \$55.5 million per year).

Also listed in the governor’s agenda for the special session is a proposed \$50 million bond issue to build a new hotel and conference center at Gulf State Park.

During the three-week recess, legislators have undoubtedly been getting an earful from teachers upset about raiding the Education Trust Fund and business and government leaders furious about diverting more than half of the oil spill settlement away from the Gulf Coast and into Montgomery’s coffers. They also have likely heard from government agency heads fearful of slashed budgets, citizens wanting cost-cutting measures and smaller government, constituents who are vehemently for or against gambling and devout anti-taxers.

Possible exaggeration

But out of all the voices those with pro-gambling interests in the state have Alabama Citizens Action Program Executive Director Joe Godfrey concerned. It has been reported in news outlets

that pro-gambling people and businesses are possibly exaggerating the depth of the funding crisis in the state in order to gain support for expanding gambling, Godfrey said. There also will likely be a major campaign to fight new taxes, but that is hypocritical because gambling is a tax, he added.

‘Tax on the poor’

“Gambling is a tax on the poor. The casinos and lottery proponents will actually target the low-income areas of our state promising that people can gamble their way out of poverty. That is a lie,” Godfrey said. “And if our state becomes dependent on gambling as a revenue stream, then it will start encouraging its own citizens to gamble instead of working hard, saving and investing in goods and services that will actually grow our state economy.”

The Alabama Baptist has researched studies that prove using gambling as a foundation for a state’s economic stability is bad business. To read more, visit www.thealabamabaptist.org and search “gambling.”

And while Sen. Rusty Glover, R-Semmes, agreed, “there’s not a lot of en-

thusiasm for taxes,” he also is opposed to expanding gambling in the state. Still, he thinks the allocation of BP oil spill settlement funds will spark more controversy than the gambling proposals.

“That’s pretty much the issue that’s going to slow things down tremendously,” Glover said, noting that Mobile and Baldwin legislators have been meeting with local officials and drafting legislation to direct more of the settlement money to the

Gulf Coast. “We’re pushing very hard for that.”

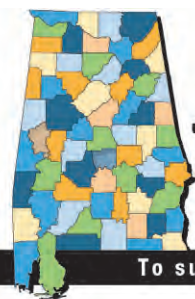
Since Alabama law provides that the Legislature may meet in special session for up to 12 days during a 30-day calendar period, lawmakers will have only nine days left to convene between Aug. 3 and the last possible legislative day, Aug. 11. Considering the incendiary nature of most of the proposals on the table for fixing the budget, a second special session is likely. ☞



Rashional thoughts

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

To read “*Definitely the right decision*,” this month’s Rashional Thoughts column, visit rashionalthoughts.com.



Across ALABAMA'S Associations

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

BIRMINGHAM

► **East Gardendale Church, Gardendale**, will host August Alive 2015 with revival services each Thursday night at 6:30 p.m. Guest speakers will include Skip Lowery (Aug. 6), Daniel Wilson (Aug. 13), Doug Dortch (Aug. 20) and Junior Hill (Aug. 27). Special music will be provided by Skip and Tawana Lowery and three East Gardendale Church gospel groups (Aug. 6), The Stephens (Aug. 13), Donna Weaver (Aug. 20) and The Rushing Spring Church Choir (Aug. 27). Allen Davis is pastor.

ETOWAH

► **East Gadsden Church, Gadsden**, will celebrate its 125th anniversary Aug. 9, 10:30 a.m. with the theme, "Honoring our past, embracing our present and looking forward to our future." Lunch will follow. For more information call 256-543-7300. John Dickinson is pastor.

FAYETTE

► **Pilgrim Rest Church, Fayette**, will host revival services Aug. 2-5. Sunday's service will be at 5 p.m. Monday-Wednesday services will be at 7 nightly. Guest speakers will be Robert Cobb, Sunday; Ryan James, Monday and Tuesday; and Jeremy Woolbright, Wednesday. Special music will be performed nightly. Randy Anderson is pastor.

LIMESTONE

► **Kevin Ward** is the new director of missions for **Limestone Association**. He began July 27. Ward is a graduate of Union University in Jackson, Tennessee.



WARD

He previously served as pastor of Salem Springs Church, Elkmont, and as youth minister of First Church, Athens. He and his wife, Ginger, have three children.

MORGAN

► **Clayton K. Speed** has been named the new pastor of **First Church, Hartselle**. His first day will be Aug. 16. He most recently served as associate pastor of First Church, Trussville. Speed earned a bachelor's degree from the United States Military Academy at West Point in New York, and a master of divinity degree from Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham. He is a



SPEED

doctor of ministry candidate at Beeson. He and his wife, Mary, have four children.

ST. CLAIR

► **Joe Karr** is the new pastor of **Corinth Church, Trussville**. He began June 14. He earned a bachelor's degree from South-eastern Bible College in Birmingham and served as minister of evangelism at First Church, Moody, and pastor of Rose Hill Church, Birmingham, and several other churches.

SULPHUR SPRINGS

► **J.J. Creel** is the new pastor of **New Temple Church, Dora**. His first day was July 12. Creel

earned a bachelor's degree from Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia.

Creel previously served as associate pastor of Mount Carmel Church, Cordova; discipleship pastor of New Temple; pastor of Union Grove



CREEL

Church, Cordova; and pastor of Providence Church, Oakman. He and his wife, Angela, have two children. ☪

FBC Montgomery to host Haiti Summit on Aug. 15

If you feel like God is tugging you toward missions, maybe even toward a Third World country, Haiti may be the place He's calling you to, John Bush said.

It's only a two-hour flight from Atlanta. Alabama Baptists already have a strategy in place there.

And most importantly — God is on the move, Bush said.

"God is doing amazing things through Alabama Baptists in Haiti," said Bush, a member of First Baptist Church, Montgomery, who serves with Children's

Hope ministry in Haiti. A strong effort began in Haiti in 2010 after a major earthquake claimed the lives of more than 100,000 people and decimated about 250,000 homes.

Wide range of ministry

Alabama Baptists committed to a major rebuilding and ministry effort in Haiti and since then teams have built and staffed orphanages, built churches and homes and sent teams to do medical missions, sports camps, evangelism and more.

The fourth annual Haiti Sum-

mit, set for Aug. 15, 9:30 a.m.—noon at First, Montgomery, is open to all Alabama Baptists interested in finding out more about missions possibilities in Haiti.

After seeing everything God has done in Haiti in the past several years, Bush said he and others just "sit back and say, 'What's next?'"

And they are inviting others to come to the summit and ask the same question.

For more information, contact Bush at john@childrens-hope.com. (Grace Thornton)

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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR



LIQUOR SALES

While I appreciate Jim Williams' "About Alabama" article in the July 16 issue, "State Budget Reform Is a Must," I want to challenge him on one point. Privatizing liquor sales in Alabama is a terrible idea. It will not save the money that its proponents say it will, but will actually result in a loss of revenue for the state. Alabama ranks among the highest in tax revenue from the sale of liquor among all 50 states (consistently in the top five and sometimes No. 1), yet it consistently ranks among the lowest (sometimes No. 50) in consumption, which is of the greatest concern to Alabama Citizens Action Program (ALCAP). When states move from a "control" system to a "privatized" (or "licensed") system, revenue drops dramatically and consumption climbs.

Because alcohol is a mind-altering and addictive drug that destroys families and lives and actually has an overall negative impact on the economy, we want to see the controls remain in

place. In fact, we believe that the Legislature should give more regulatory control to the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board than it currently has. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that more than \$225 billion is spent annually cleaning up the mess left behind by alcohol. That means that for every \$1 of tax revenue coming to the State of Alabama from alcohol sales, it costs the state \$15-\$18.

When I hear legislators say, "We need to get Alabama out of the liquor business," I argue, "We're not in the liquor business; we're in the control business."

Facts related to this issue can be found at www.alcoholjustice.org. Under the "Campaigns" tab, click on "State Control and Regulation" to read several documents that give the facts about "control" vs. "privatization."

Joe Godfrey
ALCAP

Trussville's CrossPoint Baptist kicks off 13-project missions plan

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

CrossPoint Baptist Church, Trussville, is committed to going deeper in all facets of faith, including missions.

That commitment led the church to adopt a 13-project missions plan that kicked off in May with a medical missions trip to China. Other 2015 trips will send medical missionaries to Cambodia and Honduras, student missionaries to the Dominican Republic and South Carolina and church planting and discipleship teams to Iceland and Utah. Teams also will go to Tennessee, Uganda and India.

"Our church is really excited as some of the missions teams are returning with news of the great things God is doing through CrossPoint," said James Sampley, minister of missions and senior adults. "This church has been energized during the past two years as more go and return with wonderful testimonies. Our people have an air of excitement and expectation."

Missions goals

Sampley said CrossPoint has 170 people involved in the 2015 missions projects and the church is already working on projects for 2016.

Ambitious missions goals are not new to CrossPoint, said Pastor Ryan Whitley — rather it's part of the church's vision and passion for spreading the gospel.

"The goals have opened the doorway for our people to participate more freely in missions, and they have responded enthusiastically," he said.

Whitley introduced the missions goals in fall 2014, challenging CrossPoint members to pray more, serve more and give more. Many Bible study groups began focusing on missions objectives immediately, and giving to missions increased by 30 percent in the first 90 days of 2015, Whitley said.

Brainstorming new ideas

Don Daniels' class was one of those that jumped in quickly. His couples Bible study class brainstormed missions ideas and followed several new ideas to expand their missions service.

"It's been an exciting time in our class and in our church," Daniels said. "There's been a lot more conversation and a lot more participation. Our folks are directly involved in going and doing, and those who are hampered in going are giving. They just amaze me."

CrossPoint is working with the North American Mission Board to begin partnering to plant a church. This summer also brought a revamped Vacation Bible School (VBS) effort, named SMASH, to reach more children in the Trussville/Birmingham communities near the church.

Whether traveling to other countries, crocheting baby blankets or helping with SMASH, members of CrossPoint are simply excited about being involved in missions, Sampley said.

"I have never known such excitement for missions from the pastor and the people," Sampley said. "In every respect the response has far exceeded our anticipation." ❧

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For August 2

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

GLIMPSE OF THE THRONE Revelation 4:1-11

God's Glory (1-6a)

The future is more present than we think. Scripture is replete with images of a future yet present kingdom of God (2 Sam. 7; Ps. 2; Dan. 2, 7; Mark 1; Luke 10; 1 Cor. 6; Gal. 5; Rev. 21). That is to say, the Kingdom has been ushered in but awaits its final consummation at the second coming of Jesus. Theologians call this the "already-not-yet" view of God's reign. John uses the apocalyptic symbol of an "open door in heaven" (Rev. 4:1) to underscore that access to the Kingdom has come. Believers enter the Kingdom through the Door, who is none other than Jesus Christ (John 10:9).

Following this image John has a Holy Spirit-inspired visionary experience before the throne of God (Rev. 4:2-11). Around God's throne are 24 elders "clothed in white garments with golden crowns on their heads" (Rev. 4:4). While scholars dispute their identity, one thing is certain: they remain in God's presence, encircling His throne and worshipping Him (Rev. 4:10). What a glorious privilege to see the throne room of God.

Christians — those who have entered through the Door — should follow the example of the elders. One of the ways to do so is by living in a manner that exemplifies their citizenship in the Kingdom (loving their neighbor, sharing the gospel, et al.), thus bringing God praise and glory.

God's Holiness (6b-8)

Also around God's throne are four living creatures that never cease to praise Him. Throughout the book of Revelation these beings "stand sentinel at the throne (5:6; 7:11; 14:3) and take the lead in pouring out divine judgment" (6:1, 3, 5-7; 15:7). Day and night these celestial creatures never stop saying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord

God almighty, who was and is and is to come" (Rev. 4:8). Most likely these creatures are representative of the entire created order bringing worship to God as described in "Revelation" by Grant R. Osborne.

God's Sustaining Power (9-11)

When the creatures give glory, honor and thanks to God, the 24 elders fall down and cast their crowns before His throne, saying, "Worthy You are, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things and by Your will they existed and were created" (Rev. 4:11). The fact that God created and sustains all things makes Him worthy of all honor. And as a Creator, He sits enthroned over His creation, receiving praise from the elders and living creatures. No one else is worthy of worship.

Like these celestial beings, humans are to worship the Creator and Ruler of the universe. To worship anyone or anything else is idolatry. Rightly does Jesus quote Deuteronomy 6:13: "Worship the Lord your God and only serve Him" (Luke 4:8). Let us then seek to enter the Kingdom through Jesus Christ, so we might dwell in the presence of the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. There is no other way into God's kingdom. Matthew expressly states we must "enter through the narrow gate," for all other ways "lead to destruction" (7:13).

Those who have "already" entered must realize the Kingdom has "not yet" been consummated. Until then, there will be false rulers that vie for our worship. Christians must not succumb to such temptation. They must keep their eyes on Jesus so they will one day experience the worship of God's throne here on earth, where people of every tribe and tongue will worship before the throne of the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 20-22). What an amazing day that will be. ☩

Bible Studies for Life By Noel Forlini, Ph.D. Adjunct Professor of Biblical Perspectives, Samford University

RETURN TO PRAYER Nehemiah 1:3-10

We must acknowledge when trouble and distress come upon God's people. (3)

The ancient psalmist once made this plaintive cry: "By the rivers of Babylon — there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion. ... For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion.' How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" (Ps. 137:1-4). The story of the Israelites is, in part, a story about the melancholy longing for home. They were promised land, descendants and blessing (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-6; 17:1-8), yet these promises were long deferred, the prophets attested, because Israel broke faith with God. Retribution theology, the dominant theological position of the day, said if a person or nation was suffering it was the direct result of sin. It was a world where the Israelites had, the prophets claimed, sealed their fate as those permanently exiled.

In his elongated farewell address to the children of Israel, Moses vacillates between optimism that they will lay claim to the promises made to them and pessimism that this is not possible because of the Israelites' penchant for sin (Deut. 29-30). Moses indicated that there might be grace in the end, if the Israelites did as he commanded: "Choose life — if you and your offspring would live — by loving the Lord your God, heeding His commands and holding fast to Him. For thereby you shall have long life and shall long endure upon the soil that the Lord swore to your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give to them" (Deut. 30:19b-20). The Israelites' laying hold of the promises was dependent upon God's

grace, yet their response to that grace also was believed to play a role.

We are to respond to troubles by turning to God in prayer. (4-6a)

By the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Lord had graciously sent them home. He raised up Cyrus, a Persian king, to send the Israelites back to their land, as Isaiah prophesied: "Fear not, for I am with you: I will bring your folk from the East, will gather you out of the West; I will say to the North, 'Give back.' and to the South, 'Do not withhold.' Bring My sons from afar, and My daughters from the end of the earth" (Isa. 43:5-6). Cyrus functions as a savior figure for the Israelites, allowing them not only to return home but also to rebuild that home (Isa. 45:1-3; Ezra 1:2-4; 6:3-5; Zech. 1:2-4).

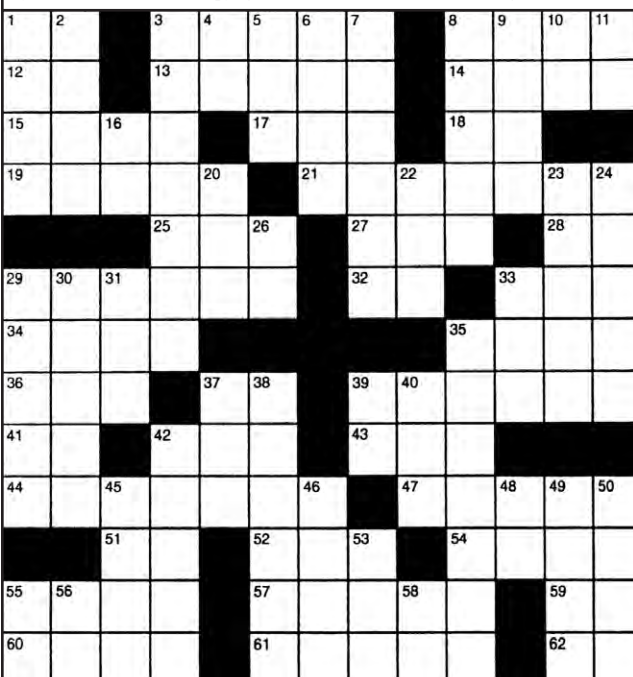
The so-called "Second Temple Period" (515 B.C.E.-70 C.E.) was a critical marker in the faith formation of the Jews. During this period, the Temple is rebuilt and the Torah becomes a portable fatherland for the Jews. The Torah, as well as public prayer and Sabbath-keeping, becomes central to their faith. During this period, the focus also shifts from one central leader to the responsibility incumbent on the people as a whole for their own expressions of faith.

We are to confess any sin and seek restoration to God as we pray. (6b-10)

In the prayer of the governor Nehemiah, the words of Moses are recalled (Neh. 1:7-11). The priestly concern of Ezra that the Israelites remain a "holy seed" (Ezra 9:1-2; Isa. 6:13) coupled with Nehemiah's concern that "return" — not only to the land but especially to God — included a change of heart. In the prayers of these leaders we can find a model for our own turning and returning to God and to the commitments we are to make as God's children. ☩

Christian Crossword

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Across

- Therefore the law ____ slacked. (Hab. 1:4)
- And ____ drove thence the three sons. (Josh. 15:14)
- Eli, ____ sabachthani. (Matt. 27:46)
- The Lord will not ____ good. (Zeph. 1:12)
- As with the taker of _____. (Isa. 24:2)
- Thither cause thy mighty _____. (Joel 3:11)
- Teman, and _____, Zephi, and Gatam. (1 Chron. 1:36)
- ____ Jones, financial company.
- Thou hast had pity ____ the gourd. (Jonah 4:10)
- Even to the ____ of them. (Jon. 3:5)
- They that observe lying vanities _____. (Jon. 2:8)
- They that ____ thy bread. (Obad. 7)
- And be thou like a _____. (Song of Sol. 2:17)
- It hath consumed ____ of Darius. (Hag. 1:1)
- And ____ not to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely _____. (Amos 5:5)
- What shall we ____ unto thee. (Jon. 1:11)
- They shall lay hold ____ bow ... against thee, ____ daughter of Zion. (Jer. 6:23)
- Even _____, will judge between

- the ____ cattle. (Ezek. 34:20)
- Unto the ____ of the earth. (Micah 5:4)
- And will ____ at all acquit the wicked. (Nah. 1:3)
- For I ____ with you. (Hag. 2:4)
- Came unto ____ unto ____ people (Judg. 18:27; reverse order)
- ____ accept thy person? (Mal. 1:8)
- Hast thou not heard long _____. (Isa. 37:26)
- ____ have laid hands on their substance. (Obad. 13)
- Who ____ not daily. (Heb. 7:27)
- He shall ____ with his teeth. (Ps. 112:10)
- Behold, I ____ against thee. (Nah. 3:5)
- Now the Lord ____ prepared a great fish. (Jon. 1:17)
- The son of Naum, which was the son of _____. (Luke 3:25)
- Call me _____. (Ruth 1:20)
- ____ was a man subject to like passions. (James 5:17)
- It hath consumed ____ of Moab. (Num. 21:28)
- As a man wipeth a _____. (2 Kings 21:13)
- Whose soever sins ye _____. (John 20:23)
- What do ____ imagine against the Lord? (Nah. 1:9)
- Mine ____ hath done them. (Isa. 48:5)
- I have overthrown ____ of you. (Amos 4:11)
- He whom thou ____ is cursed. (Num. 22:6)
- For while they be folden together ____ thorns. (Nah. 1:10)
- They of Persia and of _____. (Ezek. 27:10)
- And _____, the firstborn ____ Judah. (1 Chron. 2:3)
- Yea, I am their _____. (Job 30:9)
- And now, behold, I ____ thee this day. (Jer. 40:4)
- There was one _____. (Luke 2:36)
- And so is this nation before _____. (Hag. 2:14)
- And his brightness was ____ the light. (Hab. 3:4)
- Alcoholics Anonymous. (abbr.)
- Children's game.
- Kanga's son in "Winnie the Pooh."
- And I will appoint over them four _____. (Jer. 15:3)
- Adam, Sheth, _____. (1 Chron. 1:1)
- Go up ____ the mountain. (Hag. 1:8)
- Duke Elah, duke _____. (Gen. 36:41)
- For ____ the harvest. (Isa. 18:5)
- And ____ on the east side. (Jon. 4:5)
- She called his name Ben-_____. (Gen. 35:18)
- Which is the ____ of our inheritance. (Eph. 1:14)
- In his hand for very _____. (Zech. 8:4)
- Plead with your _____. (Hos. 2:2)
- This is ____ ephah that goeth forth. (Zech. 5:6)
- Take some of the ____ of oil. (Lev. 14:15)
- How shall I make thee as ____? (Hos. 11:8)
- Stopped their _____. (Zech. 7:11)
- Lest he ____ thee to the judge. (Luke 12:58)
- The land is ____ the garden of Eden. (Joel 2:3)
- Not spare continually to ____ the nations? (Hab. 1:17)
- The priests thereof teach for _____. (Mic. 3:11)
- Mine eye also is _____. (Job 17:7)
- Medical doctor. (abbr.)
- Howl, O Heshbon, for ____ is spoiled. (Jer. 49:3)
- When the king of ____ saw it. (Josh. 8:14)





RICK SHARP

In loving memory

TAB music reviewer Rick Sharp dies at 62

Rick Sharp, an accomplished musician who wrote music reviews for *The Alabama Baptist* (TAB) for almost five years, died July 20. He was 62.

Sharp wrote his first review in December 2010 after joining his then new wife, Martine Bates Sharp, in writing for TAB. They became an instant hit with readers as the Media Reviews writing team, focusing on music, books and movies.

Martine Sharp has been writing book and movie reviews for TAB since 2005.

Rick Sharp's final music review ran in the June 25, 2015, issue.

"We were so blessed to have Rick as part of our team," said TAB executive editor Jennifer Davis Rash. "I'm thankful Martine shared him with us. We are going to miss his fun personality and positive spirit."

A native of Decatur, Sharp was a member of Central Baptist Church, Decatur, where he played guitar in the praise band.

Rob Jackson, pastor of Central Baptist, described Sharp's fun and giving spirit, love for his family and focus on the Lord during the July 22 funeral at the church.

Sharp is survived by his wife, six children and 11 grandchildren. (TAB)



MARTINE & RICK SHARP



Photo courtesy of Fair Trade Services

Ongoing legacy

Audio Adrenaline gains momentum by staying focused on its mission

By Leann Callaway
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

While performing and touring for nearly three decades Christian rock band Audio Adrenaline has become one of the most respected groups in the Christian music industry.

Along the way the group has received numerous awards and accolades including two Grammy Awards and five Dove Awards from the Gospel Music Association. They also have garnered 14 No. 1 radio singles with signature songs such as "Big House," "Get Down" and "Hands and Feet."

Through the years, the group has remained committed to its mission, ministry and message.

Although founding member Mark Stuart was forced to step down from his role as lead singer because of vocal chord problems, he is still heavily involved with the songwriting and decision-making process. He said he desires to help the group impact future generations for Christ.

Another significant change is the departure of the group's co-founder and bass player Will McGinnis, who has increased his involvement with the Hands and Feet Project in Haiti.

Hands and Feet Project

Stuart's parents served as missionaries in Haiti, and the experiences Stuart had there left a lasting impression on his life and inspired him to create the Hands and Feet Project in 2004. The goal of this project is to create a children's village that provides a caring environment for orphaned children with a home, food, education and the love of a Christian family.

By using this platform to raise awareness for orphans in Haiti and around the world, Audio Adrenaline gains momentum by staying focused on its mission.

The new lineup for Audio Adrenaline features lead singer Adam Agee, bass player Dave Stovall, guitarist Brandon Bagby and drummer Jack Campbell.

"Hearing the old classics with the new message makes me proud to be part of a legacy that continues to focus on the glory of Christ and the absolute joy of becoming His hands and feet," Stuart said.

Audio Adrenaline's latest album, "Sound of the Saints,"

chronicles the next chapter in the band's journey with songs designed to inspire people to build a solid foundation of faith and encourage them to stand strong as believers. The album debuted at No. 1 on Billboard's Top Christian Albums chart.

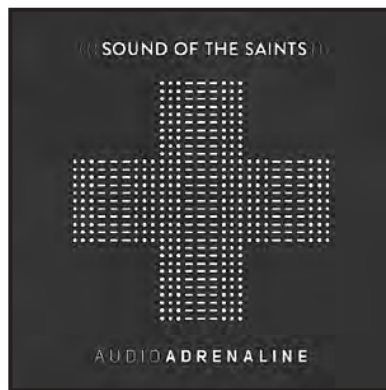
Agee said, "I think the most beautiful sound is hearing God's children singing praises back to Him. I hope when people listen to these songs that they are encouraged to respond by walking in faith, to live out what they believe and to be the hands and feet of Jesus by meeting needs around them."

One of their new songs, "Move," was recently selected as the opening theme for "MLB Now," which airs daily on the Major League Baseball Network.

"This song is about getting out there and making a difference in this world by telling others about Jesus," Agee said. "You can't do that if you are sitting in your living room. You have to get out and move."

To encourage young people to reach out and make a difference in the lives of others, band members share about a variety of missions organizations during concerts. More than having a passion for music, the group has a calling to touch lives.

"During concerts, we want to encourage people to put the lyrics of our songs into action," Agee said. "I am so excited to be a part of the ongoing legacy that is Audio Adrenaline and continuing to impact lives for God's glory." ❧



Missions revolutionary

77-year-old retired missionary continues to reach lost

How can God use one faithful life to change the world? Consider 77-year-old Jim Slack.

He retired from the International Mission Board (IMB) in June after 50 years as a missionary, missiologist, strategist, researcher, ethnographer, teacher and passionate advocate for unreached peoples, especially oral learners who need God's Word in forms they can understand.

Slack has been at the center of several movements that revolutionized modern missions. And he's not through yet. He has multiple projects in the works, from investigating potential church-planting movements to guiding missions-related dissertations by seminary students.

"Whatever physically I can do, I want to do," Slack explained in his trademark Louisiana rasp.

Slack was a bright young college grad on the way to law school when a summer of ministry in Hawaii — still considered by many a "foreign missions

field" in those days — captured his heart and mind for missions. He returned home to tell Mary, his wife-to-be, that life plans had changed. She happily informed him that she had surrendered her life to serving God in missions years earlier.

Before they went to the Philippines as Southern Baptist missionaries in 1964, however, Slack worked as a researcher with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Graham was helping lay the foundations of what would become the Lausanne Movement, which called the Church to obey its biblical responsibility for world evangelization by making disciples among all peoples.

"Billy Graham said, 'We have misunderstood the Great Commission,'" Slack recalled. "The Great Commission is: You shall make disciples of ... the nations, the unreached people groups."

Slack put that into practice as

a church planter in the Philippines. He moved as soon as he could to Mindanao, where restive Muslims and tribal peoples had never heard the gospel. He trained local believers to evangelize and start churches and participated in key research projects that challenged missionaries to move beyond the reached to the unreached.

While doing doctoral work in seminary early in his missionary career, he encountered a book about the global challenge of evangelizing people who can't read.

"I wish I'd had that book when I first went to the field," Slack said. "Mindanao Muslims couldn't read, didn't want to read, weren't going to read. And the tribal people in the mountains didn't even have a written language."

Missionary Bible translators were doing heroic work in many cultures. But what was the point of spending years translating the Bible into indigenous languages if people couldn't, or wouldn't, read it? Until they were willing and able to read, an alternate approach was needed to deliver God's Word to the people around the world belonging to cultures that communicate orally.

Bible Storying

Working with missionary colleague J.O. Terry and others, Slack helped develop Chronological Bible Storying — later shortened to Bible Storying — a simple, flexible, transferrable way to deliver the truths of the Bible to oral learners. It has become one of the most effective and widely used missions methods of the modern era.

Twenty-five years ago Slack transitioned to IMB's Global Research team during another revolutionary period. More recently, as IMB and the North American Mission Board partner to reach the waves of peoples immigrating to America, Slack has trained church leaders in some of the biggest U.S. urban centers to reach the unreached in their midst.

"If we do not win the people groups here, we will not grow." (BP)



SLACK

REFLECTIONS



Baptist NEWS BRIEFS

COMPILED FROM WIRE SERVICES

GuideStone appeals contraceptive mandate ruling

DALLAS — GuideStone Financial Services has filed an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court against the government's contraceptive mandate that will require certain ministries served by GuideStone and a host of other religious nonprofit organizations to provide abortion-causing drugs and devices in their employer health plans or risk crippling fines.

The 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled July 14 that religious organizations including GuideStone must either cover FDA-approved contraceptives in employee insurance plans or follow the government's rules for opting out of the contraceptive mandate through a special "accommodation" option.

But the accommodation itself is an issue, the plaintiffs argued. The act of filling out the accommodation form that kicks in third-party coverage would make the organizations a party to providing the very drugs and devices they oppose on religious grounds.

The 10th Circuit opinion came in three combined cases that included not only GuideStone as a party but two Southern Baptist-affiliated schools — Truett-McConnell College in Georgia and Oklahoma Baptist University — and Little Sisters of the Poor, a Roman Catholic order of nuns in Denver, Colorado. (RNS, BP)

Former IMB president's wife, 'model of faith' dies

OKLAHOMA CITY — Jeannie Elliff, wife of former International Mission Board (IMB) President Tom Elliff, died July 20 at her home in Oklahoma City following a long struggle with cancer. She was 69.

"To use Paul's words from 2 Corinthians 6:10, we are filled with sorrowful rejoicing at the news of her passing," said IMB President David Platt. "We grieve with [those] who have known and loved this woman of prayer and model of faith."

Elliff, who had fought two previous bouts with cancer, was diagnosed a third time in summer 2014. She served as a missionary in Zimbabwe in the early 1980s and sent two children and their families overseas as missionaries. Elliff is survived by Tom, her husband of 49 years; four children and 25 grandchildren. (BP)



ELLIFF

Retired IMB missionary, Alabama Baptist dies

HUNTSVILLE — Alabama Baptist Benjamin Edgar Hope, retired International Mission Board missionary to Brazil for 33 years, died June 11. He was 79.

Hope graduated from Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee, Oklahoma. He earned a master of divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and served as a church planter in Cleveland, Ohio.

He and his wife, Berdie Lou, and their two children began missions work in Brazil in 1967. Hope served as pastor and interim pastor for multiple churches, taught at a local seminary and founded a new ministry for helping churches in crisis. The couple retired in 2000 and Hope served as a deacon at White Springs Baptist Church, Rainbow City. He was a member of Locust Grove Baptist Church, New Market, at the time of his death.

Hope is survived by his wife, two children and two grandchildren. (TAB)

LifeWay, BGCE partner to run evangelism center

NASHVILLE — LifeWay Research and The Billy Graham Center for Evangelism (BGCE) at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, have partnered to "facilitate the advancement of biblically faithful evangelism."

Ed Stetzer, executive director of Nashville-based LifeWay Research, will serve as senior fellow for the evangelism center.

He will consult and lead the center's Wheaton-based staff and oversee a national survey about the state of evangelism in America. The findings of this research project are slated for release in 2016. (BP)