



INSIDE



Boaz-based group helps spread gospel throughout Amazon River basin

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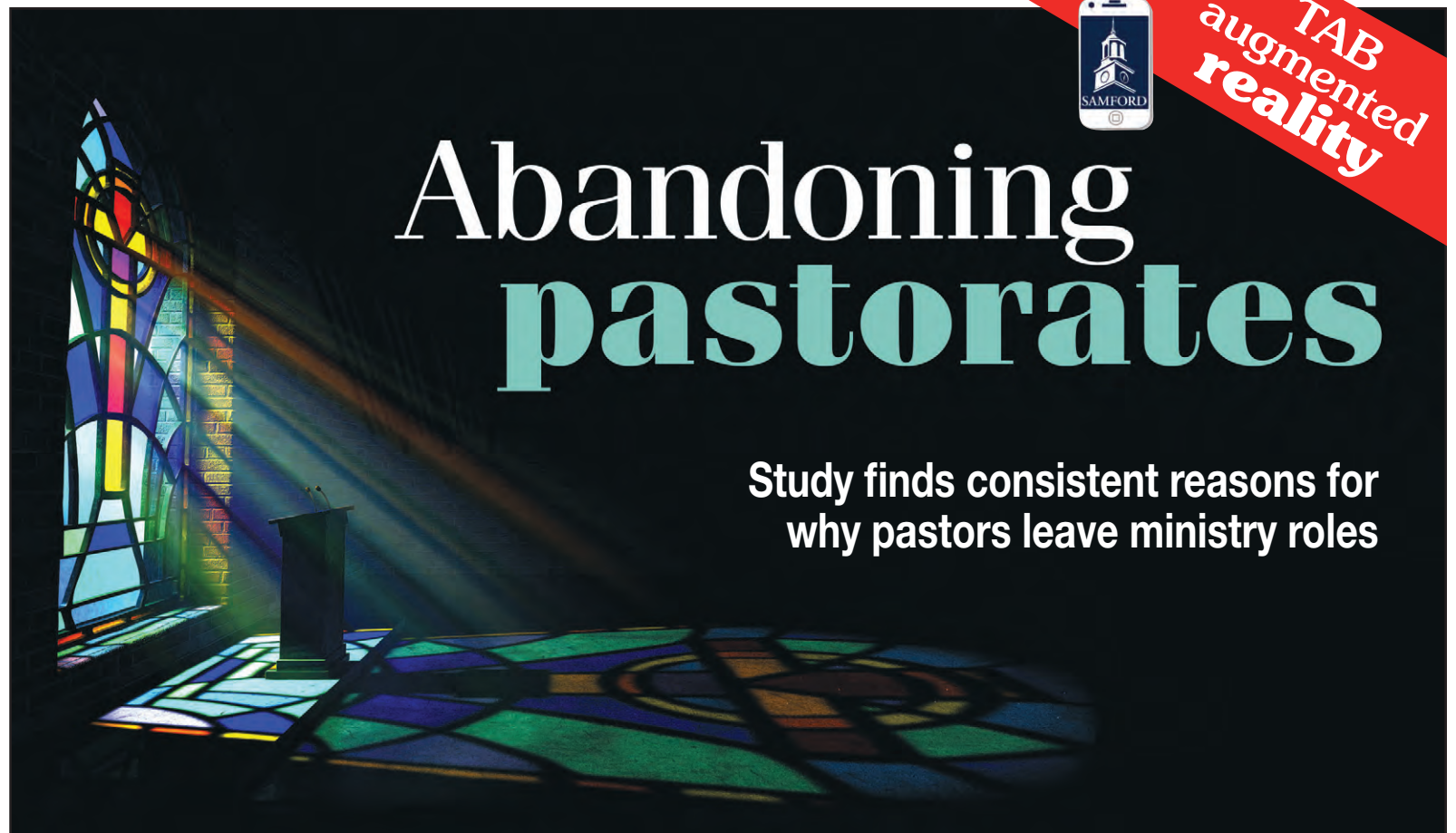
FBC Russellville pastor leads association in focused prayer effort

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National WMU leader Wanda Lee announces retirement

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Abandoning pastorates

Study finds consistent reasons for why pastors leave ministry roles

123rf.com

Henry felt a clear call from God to serve His church as a pastor. He finished up college and even went to seminary. He took on his first pastoral role at a small church 30 miles from his hometown. He served the church faithfully for years but by year 11, Henry felt disillusioned, fed up and tired of drama. Frankly he was burned out. He quit the ministry and never served as a pastor again.

Why did Henry, who once felt such a clear calling from God to serve as a pastor, eventually leave the ministry, never to return?

According to a recent LifeWay Research study, this “story” is a common one, at least more common than one might hope.

LifeWay Research surveyed 734 former pastors who left the pastorate before retirement age in four Protestant denominations. The sur-

vey found that there were several crucial elements missing from churches that could have led to pastors quitting the pastorate.

Trouble begins early, the survey indicates, with 48 percent of former pastors saying the search team didn’t accurately describe the church before their arrival.

Their churches also were unlikely to have a list of counselors for referrals (27 percent), clear documentation of the church’s expectations of its pastor (22 percent), a sabbatical plan for the pastor (12 percent), a lay counseling ministry (9 percent) or a support group for the pastor’s family (8 percent). Forty-eight percent say their church had none of these.

Dale Huff, director of the office of LeaderCare and church administration at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM), said he has seen countless times where a church sets its pastor up for failure by having unrealistic expectations of him.

“Most churches do not have any job description for a pastor,” Huff said. “But when I ask them why they say, ‘We just expect him to do anything that needs to be done.’ So he does walk in without a clear

48 percent of former pastors say the search team didn’t accurately describe the church before their arrival.

job description, which means he walks in with every member having his or her own job description for what a pastor should be and do. Those expectations are beyond reasonable. He cannot meet everybody’s job description.”

The LifeWay study points to ways churches can encourage pastors to stay in the ministry, said Ed Stetzer, executive director of the Nashville-based research organization.

“Having clear documents, offering a sabbatical rest and having people help with weighty counseling cases are key things experts tell us ought to be in place,” Stetzer said.

Of the pastors surveyed 56 percent say they clashed with their

churches over changes they proposed to the church, and 54 percent say they experienced a significant personal attack. Yet nearly half (48 percent) say their training didn’t prepare them to handle the people side of ministry.

“Many seminary programs don’t even require courses on the people side — they’re focused on theology, biblical languages and preaching, which are important, but almost half of the pastors felt unprepared for dealing with the people they were preparing in seminary to lead and serve,” Stetzer said.

Huff said even when he was in seminary 40 years ago he heard the same refrain: “Seminaries train in church history, theology and biblical studies, Greek and Hebrew but why don’t they train you how to get along with people?”

Hands on training

“There is that challenge,” Huff said. “Seminary is more academic and I don’t think we should dilute that. It is true that ministers go through the training at seminary and walk into a church not adequately prepared to deal with the people issues and the administrative, procedural and leadership issues that a local church requires. ...

(See ‘Challenging,’ page 4)

COMMENT



TAB
augmented
reality

Generalities and Stereotypes

Sometimes political commentators are prone to describe Christians with sweeping generalities and stereotypes. That is particularly true when speaking of Christians in the southern region of the United States and especially true during seasons of political debate.

Perhaps there is some justification for that. It is true that most of the 10 states with the highest percentage of Protestant Christians among their populations (including Alabama) are located in the Southeast. In those 10 states, Baptists make up the highest percentage of Protestant Christians in most cases. Baptists in Alabama, for example, make up about 42 percent of Protestant Christians. Methodists are a distant second.

But that fact belies the diversity among Christians in Alabama and elsewhere. As demonstrated by a recent study by Pew Research, Christians in Alabama are different demographically, theologically and socially.

For one thing there are as many Christians in Alabama age 18–29 as there are 65 and over. Pew found both groups make up 19 percent of the state's Christians. Another surprise is that the 30–49 age group makes up a larger percentage of the Christian population than the 50–64 age group — 34 percent to 28 percent, respectively.

Said another way Alabama has more Millennial and Generation X Christians than it does baby boomers and Silent Generation Christians. Pew found younger and older Millennials accounted for 25 percent of Alabama Christians while Generation X made up 28 percent — a total of 53 percent. Baby boomers totaled 33 percent of the total and the Silent Generation made up 13 percent for a total of 46 percent. The Greatest Generation accounted for 1 percent.

Gender breakdown

The gender breakdown for Christians nearly reflects the state's population. Men make up 47 percent of Alabama Christians, Pew found, while making up 48.5 percent of the population. Women compose 53 percent of Christians and 51.5 percent of the population.

Racially, Alabama reports 68 percent of its population as white, 26 percent as black and 3 percent as Latino. The Christian breakdown is 66 percent white, 27 percent black and 4 percent Latino. Other categories claim the remaining 3 percent.

Marital status begins to reveal significant dif-



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

ferences. Almost half of Alabama's Christian population is not currently married. The study found 20 percent of Christians divorced or separated, 18 percent never married, 6 percent widowed and 2 percent live with a partner. Currently married Christians make up only 54 percent of Alabama's Christians.

Educationally and economically, Christians are more heavily represented at the lower end of the scales. Almost half of the Christians (46 percent) report their highest educational achievement as high school or less. Not surprisingly, 41 percent of Alabama Christians report an annual income of less than \$30,000.

Only 21 percent of Christians report a college or post-graduate degree. Fifteen percent of Christians report a salary of \$100,000 or more while 22 percent report income between \$50,000 and \$99,999.

Practically all Alabama Christians (96 percent) say their faith is important to their lives. Eighty-eight percent attend services at least once or twice a month with 55 percent attending weekly. Daily prayer is practiced by 80 percent and 66 percent participate in small groups.

But participation does not lead Alabama Christians to the same conclusions. More than half (54 percent) believe right and wrong depends on the situation. Only 44 percent believe in absolute moral standards for right and wrong. While 55 percent report religion as a source for guidance about right and wrong, 36 percent cite common sense, reason or science as their first choice.

Politically 55 percent of Alabama Christians describe themselves as conservative, 27 percent as moderate, 10 percent as liberal and 8 percent said they did not know.

When ideology was translated to party affiliation, 52 percent claimed Republican leanings while 35 percent leaned toward the Democrats. No leaning was the position of 12 percent.

Those differences could be seen on some specific issues.

When asked about environmental regulations, 49 percent of Alabama Christians said stricter laws and regulations cost too many jobs and hurt the economy. Forty-three percent said

stricter environmental laws and regulations were worth the costs.

Regarding homosexuality, 37 percent said it should be accepted, 56 percent said it should be discouraged and 4 percent said both sides of acceptance/discouragement were equal.

Fifty-six percent of Alabama Christians support smaller government and fewer governmental services while 38 percent favored bigger government and more services. Three percent said the response of government should depend on the situation.

When it comes to helping the poor, 53 percent said government aid does more harm than good and 39 percent said it did more good than harm.

Same-sex "marriage" and abortion were both opposed by 62 percent of Alabama Christians. Twenty-nine percent favored same-sex "marriage" and 34 percent supported abortion in all or most cases.

Looking over the results from the Pew Research Center study it becomes clear that being certain about one's belief in God (98 percent) or one's belief in heaven (90 percent) does not mean Christians see other theological and social issues alike.

Significant differences

Even though Alabama could be called a homogeneous state with less diversity than many parts of the nation, we still have significant differences. Recognizing this reality is important for the Church more than the politician. Politicians desire a majority on a particular issue. The Church attempts to enlist everyone with the good news of Jesus Christ.

Churches require wise and sensitive leadership because even among its members, about 4 out of every 10 members are likely to hold a different view than the majority on most any issue.

Like the apostle Paul we can violate no principle of God in order to gain a hearing but as the Church we must use every lawful means in order to win some.

Recognizing that different positions are already reflected among church members is a starting place. Most churches already have young and old, rich and poor, male and female, Republicans and Democrats among their members. They have different life experiences and outlooks based on members who may be black, white, Asian or Hispanic.

The gospel invitation is for all to come to God through faith in Jesus Christ. Then, together, we study what the Bible teaches about issues such as care for the poor, care for creation, the gifts of life and sexuality and other important issues.

That leaves no room for jumping to conclusions based on generalities and stereotypes. Enlisting all in the service of Christ is the goal. 🙏

LETTERS
TO THE EDITOR

See page 11





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

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Amazon Hope

Nonprofit organization helps spread gospel throughout Amazon River basin

By Anna Keller
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When Ty Harris visited the Amazon River for the first time four years ago he immediately fell in love with the region and its people. At the time Harris was a participant in a 10-day missions trip and realized that though the trip was wonderful, it was cost-prohibitive for many people who would likely be interested in going in the future.

Inspired to help reach people in the 30,000-plus villages along the vast river, Harris, a member of Sardis Baptist Church, Boaz, began to raise money to start a nonprofit organization that would allow for more frequent and affordable missions trips to the Amazon River basin. Amazon Hope was the result.

Cost reduction

“With so many villages along the river that haven’t heard the gospel, you can send out a team every week and they’ll still take years to reach,” Harris said. “So we needed to go more often and the price needed to come down. Now we’re able to take people on a nine-day trip for \$1,000 plus airfare, so about \$2,000 total on average.”

This cost reduction (the trip used to be closer to \$3,300) comes largely from Amazon Hope’s purchase of a large boat, which they can use to take 25–30 Americans plus Brazilian translators down the river. According to Harris, there are other missions groups that reach out to villages along the Amazon, but few groups are able to travel as far down the river as Amazon Hope,

which travels up to 48 hours down the river to reach some of the more isolated groups. Many of these villages haven’t had exposure to the gospel, and the ones who have usually have a Catholic background with more of a works-based interpretation of faith and salvation.

Amazon Hope recently took a vision trip with a group of 17 pastors.

Once in a village, the missions group went door to door sharing the gospel through translators and leaving Bibles in each home. They were welcomed into schools where they shared God’s Word with students. Sometimes they did open-air preaching in villages.

During the vision trip the group saw 283 professions of faith.

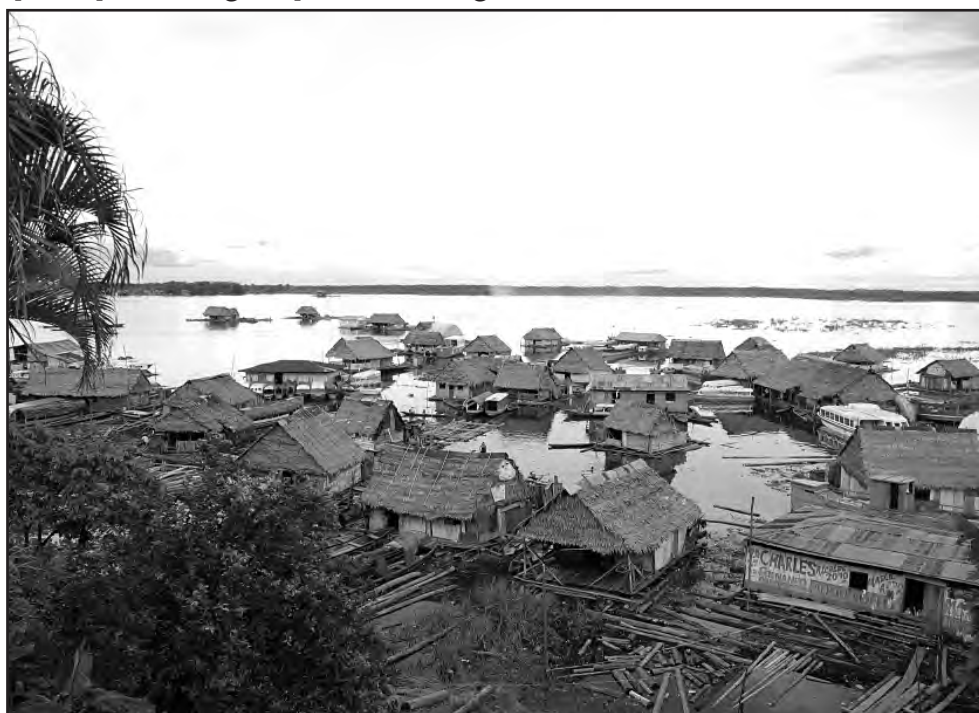


Photo by Sascha Grabow/CC BY

Amazon Hope reaches out to villages along the Amazon River, like the one pictured here. There are more than 30,000 villages along the river, which is 4,000 miles long.

A group of Brazilian church planters plan to follow up to continue the momentum going on in those villages.

“The Amazon people are really loving and caring,” Harris said.

“People ask if they’re poor. Compared to American standards, they would be very poor, but they’re not poor. They’re so blessed. They’re able to access food from the river or jungle. The only thing they’re hungry for is the gospel.”

But Harris doesn’t do all the work for Amazon Hope alone. He’s partnered with Zac Goforth, associate pastor of students and family life at Sardis Baptist. Goforth also serves on Amazon Hope’s board of directors.

Harris said Goforth “organizes people and I organize mechanics. You could say I’m in charge of all boat-related issues and he’s in charge of the evangelical stuff.”

Involving other churches

Since the vision trip went so well, Amazon Hope is now preparing for its first church-wide missions trips, scheduled for summer 2016.

Goforth said, “Part of our desire is not just to go share the gospel but to involve other churches along the way, because we know

how missions have changed our church.”

Through Amazon Hope there are currently trips scheduled with three church groups in June and July 2016.

Union Grove No. 1 Baptist Church, Albertville, is one of those churches. Pastor Jonathan Powell said he is “so excited” about his congregation’s enthusiasm for Amazon Hope and for the upcoming trip — the first international missions trip for many participants.

Catching the vision

“This church has caught on to the vision of what God wants us to do,” Powell said. “They’re very active in home missions and now are delving into international missions as well. When God’s people catch the vision of doing God’s work, [He] can do amazing things.”

Powell said he envisions Amazon Hope trips becoming a tradition for his church — something that isn’t restricted to once a year but instead takes place multiple times a year.

Beyond the chance to share the gospel with the unreached, Harris said the trips are like “bucket-list trips.”

“Whenever I’m there, I always think, ‘I’m on the Amazon River — I never thought I’d be here.’

“You see sloths and get to hold them. We go out hunting and catch piranha. You try a multitude of fruits you’ve never seen. There’s such beauty, and parrots, monkeys and capybara surround you.”

To learn more about Amazon Hope and how your church can schedule a trip with the nonprofit, visit AmazonHope.org.

‘Challenging role’

Church conflict, burnout, personal finances reasons for quitting pastorate

(continued from page 1)

But I think that to some degree that is true with almost any profession or vocation. Doctors have to go through a period of hands-on training as well as the classroom. Schoolteachers have to do a certain number of months of classroom teaching before they get their own classroom to lead.

“Beyond the people issues, we also need to train in the emotional and psychological aspects of ministry — how to manage the anger and then the frustration that comes from trying to lead a church. ... Churches don’t change as quickly as pastors would like them to. Frustration is a common cold of pastoring,” Huff said.

Though almost two-thirds of the pastors surveyed (63 percent) spent more than a decade as a pastor, they eventually moved on — most to another ministry role other than pastor (52 percent) but 29 percent to nonministry work.

Forty percent say they left the pastorate because of a change in calling. They also cite such issues as church conflict (25 percent), burnout (19 percent), personal finances (12 percent) and family issues (12 percent).

Interrelated issues

Stetzer said, “These things are interrelated. If you’re burning out, chances are when conflict arises you’re not going to respond well and that will make the conflict worse.”

A second survey of 1,500 current pastors was done in March 2015. Almost across the board the former pastors report

more negative views than current pastors who answered the same questions several months earlier, something Huff said points to the one-sided nature of the survey of former pastors — questioning only the pastors and not the churches they served.

“If you asked the churches about these pastors who have most immediately left you’d get a different impression of what the reasons were,” Huff said.

He did acknowledge, however, that an accurate survey would be unobtainable from a church because one member’s thoughts would not wholly reflect the church’s perspective on the situation.

Stetzer said, “Either current pastors are painting a rosy picture that doesn’t fully describe reality, or those leaving the pastorate are in a less healthy position. Probably there’s truth to both of those.”

Current and former pastors agree the job is demanding: 84 percent of current pastors and 83 percent of former pastors say they feel on call 24 hours a day, while 48 percent of each group say the demands of ministry often feel like more than they can handle.

On other measures, however, the differences can be stark:

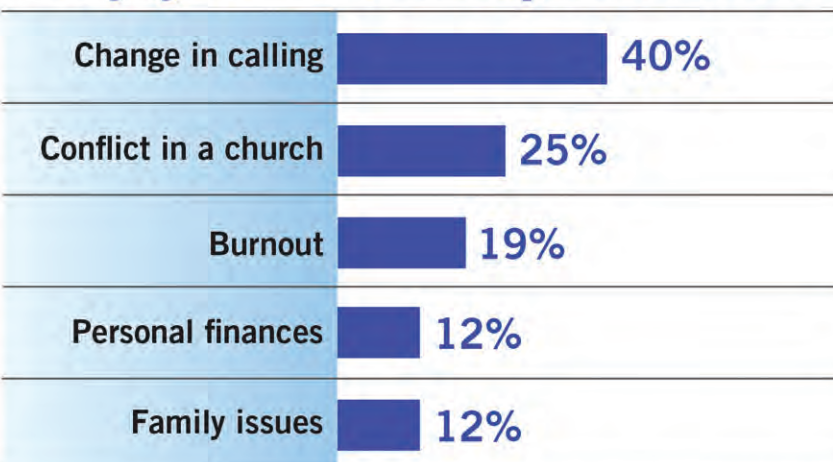
- ▶ 21 percent of current pastors versus 49 percent of former pastors believe their church has unrealistic expectations.

- ▶ 35 percent of current pastors versus 62 percent of former pastors report feeling isolated.

- ▶ 89 percent of current pastors versus 68 percent of former pastors feel free to

Among Pastors who Left the Pastorate before age 65:

TOP 5 ANSWERS: Why you left the pastorate?



Note: Respondents could select “All that apply”

LifeWay
Research

LifeWayResearch.com

say “no” to unrealistic expectations.

- ▶ 92 percent of current pastors versus 61 percent of former pastors believe their congregation provides genuine encouragement to their family.

- ▶ 94 percent of current pastors versus 74 percent of former pastors say they consistently protect family time.

Preventing conflict

Former pastors also are less likely than current pastors to report an enthusiastic spouse, to take a weekly day of rest and to work at preventing conflict. They are more likely to worry about their family’s financial security and frequently get irritated with people at church.

The churches in which they serve look markedly different, according to the survey. Current pastors report their churches are more than twice as likely as those of former pastors to offer a sabbatical plan and a list of counselors for referrals; more than three times as likely to have a lay counseling ministry and a document listing expectations of the pastor; and more than four times as likely to have a pastor support group.

“When we see a number of items all looking a little less healthy, they can add up,” Stetzer said. “But many of the gaps are preventable. It’s going to take a combination of the seminaries, academia, denominational folks and even outside ministries putting their heads together and seeking God on how best to support pastors.”

Huff said, “The best resources for a pastor having difficulty (in the church) are found in leadership — local associations and SBOM. There are resources to help pastors, they just have to reach out and accept them. Pastors do get burned out and toss their hands up and walk away. But that’s because they do not take advantage of the resources.

“Being a pastor is a challenging role but it still comes with all kinds of joy. ... Pastors who are still pastoring are not nearly as cynical as those who leave the ministry, which says something about those who do drop out. They have not been able to process their anger and have carried their issues with them and have been sunk by them. But the resources are there.” (LifeWay, Neisha Roberts)

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Prayer & spiritual awakening

FBC Russellville pastor leads association in focused, concerted prayer effort

By Anna Keller
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Russellville's Patrick Martin came home from the 2015 Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Columbus, Ohio, excited to implement a prayer event he'd experienced there.

"My wife and I attended an event that was about a spiritual great awakening, where we talked about the need for spiritual renewal in our country," said Martin, pastor of First Baptist Church, Russellville. "There were 7,500 people praying together for two and a half hours. It was one of the most impactful things I've ever been a part of as a Christian. I left there and felt like God was leading us to do something like that."

So when Martin returned home he shared the concept with his fellow Franklin Baptist Association leaders — and they were equally as excited about bringing the idea to life in their churches.

"We were going to do it regardless, but I saw the vision for getting all 35 churches in our association on board with doing this on the same day — one association praying for the same thing in all our worship services,"

Martin said. "Since I was the only one who had attended the annual meeting, I put together a worship service template, changing it so it was an hour-long program instead of two and a half hours."

Most of the association's pastors were on board and they all began praying to decide when the right time for this event would be. They landed on early January, thinking that starting the New Year with this kind of unique service would help focus their churches in 2016.

Prayer-focused worship

On Jan. 10, First, Russellville, along with several other churches in Franklin Association, hosted a special prayer-focused worship event, each at their own churches. At press time reports were still being compiled, but Martin estimates that at least 20 of the association's 35 churches participated.

Each of the participating churches structured things a bit differently, but at Martin's church they dedicated a full worship service to prayer.

"My folks loved it. They embraced it," he said. "We did prayer circles where we had folks gather up all around the congregation. It was fun standing up on the stage

and watching and listening when folks were praying out loud. You could hear this dull roar around the room."

Longtime First, Russellville, member Calvin Parmer said the church has never done anything quite like this.

"This is the first time we have ever spent the entire morning service in prayer that involved active participation of all in attendance," Parmer said.

"Beforehand there was some apprehension among our members, but this soon disappeared as soon as the program began. The prayer topics were areas of importance in our daily walk of life."

Martin divided the service into four prayer topics: "What would happen if God really moved?" (Acts 2); "It's time to repent"

(1 John 1:9); prayers for leadership (ranging from pastoral staff to President Barack Obama and everywhere in between); and "We want to be filled with God's power" (Acts 1:8).

Martin said, "When I came to this church, we decided we wanted to build a Great Commission church in Russellville. The vision of our church is carried out by being a group of people that is excited and empowered by the Great Commission.

"Our aim as a church was for this event to give us a springboard

for 2016, which we are calling 'A Year to Grow.' We want to grow financially, spiritually, membership-wise, through baptism, and this was a way to galvanize our people around one idea."

Larry Dover, Franklin Associa-

tion's director of missions, said it was important to bring prayer to the forefront in the association.

"Our association is like most: we need to pray more," Dover said. "I sensed an urgency in our churches that I have not seen in a long time. Maybe God is up to something."

Importance of prayer

Though First, Russellville, dedicated the full service to prayer, other churches in the association used that Sunday to have a traditional service that emphasized the importance of prayer throughout the service.

"All of the other pastors preached a sermon on prayer and spiritual awakening," Dover said. "All of them had times of prayer led by various members of the congregation. Some of them had altar calls during or at the conclusion of the service."

Martin said he hopes his church and others in the association can experience an event like this again, although he would want to be sure it's not so frequent that it loses its impact.

"One of the best things about this was the fact that our association did it together," he said. ☞



Photo by Patrick Martin

Members of FBC Russellville pray together during an association-wide prayer emphasis.

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Lyndon T. Montgomery

Former pastor dies at 92

Lyndon T. Montgomery, former pastor of several Alabama Baptist churches, died Jan. 8. He was 92.

When he was in his 20s, Montgomery began serving as pastor of churches in Morgan and Muscle Shoals Baptist associations, serving first at Valley Grove Baptist Church, Danville. He also served as pastor of other churches including Enon Baptist Church, Danville; Providence Baptist Church, Town Creek; Blue Springs Baptist Church, Somerville; Hopewell Baptist Church, Vinemont; Friendship Baptist Church, Danville; Ryan Baptist Church, Joppa; Old Town Creek Baptist Church, Moulton; Oak Ridge Baptist Church, Hartselle; and Flower Hill Baptist Church, Hillsboro.



MONTGOMERY

At the time of his death he was a member of Valley Grove Baptist.

He and his wife, Margaret, were married 63 years before her death in 2015. He is survived by two children, four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. (TAB)

Billy Joe Cox

Former bivocational pastor dies at 92

Former Alabama Baptist pastor Billy Joe Cox died Jan. 5. He was 92.

Cox earned a bachelor's degree from Howard College (now Samford University) in Birmingham and a master's degree from the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

He served as the bivocational pastor of 11 churches including Enon Baptist Church, Morris; Sharon Baptist Church, Pinson; Mineral Springs Baptist Church, Mount Olive; First Baptist Church,

Pinson; Joquin Baptist Church, Goshen; Damascus Baptist Church, Greenville; Mountain Creek Baptist Church, Marbury; and Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, Prattville.



COX

During this time Cox also taught industrial arts at Capitol Heights Junior High School in Montgomery and later served as parole officer for the state.

He was a member of First Baptist Church, Trussville, at the time of his death.

He is preceded in death by his wife of 70 years, Gurthel, and a grandson, Joey Cox. He is survived by three children, 11 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren. (TAB)

Hilton Dennis Logan

Former Shades staff member dies

Former business administrator for Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills, Hilton Dennis Logan died Jan. 5. He was 90.

After graduating high school, Logan served in the U.S. Navy. When he came home he earned a degree from the University of Alabama before re-enlisting in the U.S. Air Force Reserves.

Logan was the vice president of sales for Builder's Manufacturing in Leeds for the majority of his career.

He taught Sunday School at Shades Mountain Baptist for 55 years. He also served as a deacon, finance committee member and business administrator for the church.

He is preceded in death by his wife of 63 years, Jane. He is survived by three children, nine grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren. (TAB)



LOGAN

Someone You Should Know

By Leigh Pritchett, Correspondent, *The Alabama Baptist*

Jane Vickery Grace



GRACE

Hillview Baptist Church, Birmingham
Birmingham Baptist Association

FAVORITE VERSE: Romans 8:28

FAVORITE HYMN: "Sheltered in the Arms of God"

HOBBIES: Cooking, doing cross-stitch, reading, gardening

FAMILY STATUS: Wife of 50 years to husband, Hansel; daughter,

Tracy Grace; son, Thomas Grace (wife, Paula); three grandchildren

The ministry of 70-year-old Jane Grace is to prepare hearts for worship. That has been her mission as church pianist for nearly 49 years. She also is a member of the finance and personnel committees and vice president of the church's Prime Timers senior group. She received her education at Walker Junior College (now Bevill State Community College), the University of Alabama and Samford University in Birmingham. She retired in 2012 after 32 years with EBSCO Media.

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

A: My Christian parents and wonderful Sunday School teachers as a child growing up.

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

A: I have been playing the piano at church basically all my life. I began taking lessons when I was 8 years old. My father led music at our church. When I was about 11 another girl and I would alternate Sundays playing for our church. At Walker College, I assisted Mrs. Bevell, the accompanist to the college choir.

Q: What does your ministry work demand?

A: Being on staff is demanding, but not in a bad way. You're expected to be at choir rehearsals, special group rehearsals, choir tours, funerals, weddings and other church-related activities.

Q: What do you get from your ministry work?

A: This ministry has been filled with years of blessings. To be able to use my God-given talent to bring joy through Christian music to other Christians every Sunday morning and evening for nearly 50 years — it has been more wonderful than words can express.

Q: How do family members support you?

A: My family has always supported me from the very beginning, especially my husband, Hansel. I could not have been as faithful were it not for his help.

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

A: I hope to be able to do what I am doing for several more years.

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

A: I have hoped and prayed a young man or young girl would be inspired to take piano lessons and be totally involved in church music. I hope to be an encourager to those who are bringing worship music to our church service.

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

A: Jesus Christ has made all the difference in my life. Because of my relationship with Christ, my desire to play Christian music in so many capacities has been fulfilled. 🙏

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



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.

BALDWIN

► **Josephine Church, Elberta**, will host its 2016 ladies event, "The Altar Life," on Jan. 23, 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Becky Brown, of Little Brown Light Ministries, will be the guest speaker. Lunch will be from A Catered Affair. For more information call 251-987-1973. Ted Mashburn is pastor.

COLBERT-LAUDERDALE

► **Highland Church, Florence**, will host Free Answers Conference on Feb. 28-29 with guest speakers Ken Ham and Terry Mortenson of Answers in Genesis,

The Creation Museum and The Ark Encounter. For more information call 256-764-1392 or email chris.underwood@highlandbaptist.com or visit answersoutreach.org/Florence16. John Brock is pastor.

BIBB

► **Schultz Creek Church, Centreville**, will host The Revelators on Jan. 30, 6 p.m. Ben Corley is pastor.

FRIENDSHIP

► **Union Hill Church, Oneonta**, will host The Durochers in concert Jan. 31, 6 p.m. For more information call 205-274-9232 or visit www.unionhill-

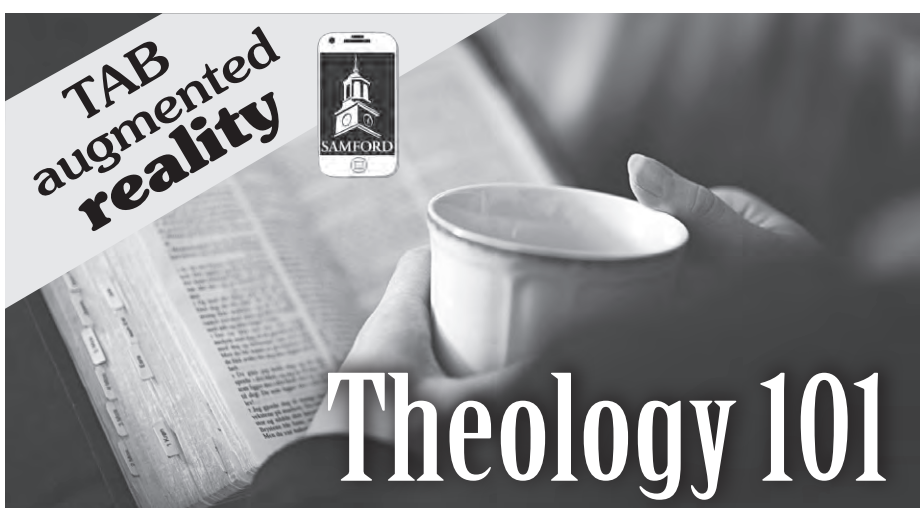
baptist.org. Bill Barnett is pastor.

RUSSELL

► **Bethany Church, Phenix City**, will host a showing of "War Room" on Jan. 24, 6 p.m. A 10-minute intermission will take place halfway through the movie and snacks will be provided. For more information call 334-297-1936. Jimmie Hobbs is pastor.

TUSKEGEE LEE

► **Lochapoka Church** will host Christian humorist Billy Bob Bohannon on Jan. 31, 11 a.m. A covered dish lunch will follow. Phillip Nelson is pastor. 🙏



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Knowing God

God Is Personal

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

We can know God, but only in the way and to the extent He wants to be known. The truth is we do not know God at the end of our human speculation or philosophical reasoning, but rather as the result of God revealing Himself. Knowing God is dependent on His self-revelation.

Last week we noted that our thoughts about God are challenged by the truth that He is Spirit. The challenge this week is to think about the eternal God of the universe as personal.

To be sure, human vocabulary is inadequate to capture fully the nature or essence of God. Finite minds do not have the capability to wrap themselves fully around an infinite God. However, as believers we do confess that God has revealed much about Himself that we can understand. An important part of this understanding is that God wants people to know Him as personal. Our thoughts about God are challenged when He presents Himself in Scripture as personal. All the persons we know or know about have bodies. God, however, is Spirit and personal.

Missing dimension

Quite often people who have tried to think deeply about God's existence have described God in impersonal terms. Through the centuries inquiring minds have sought to reason their way to God. Such philosophical efforts have spawned a number of descriptive names for God, such as "the Absolute," "the Unmoved Mover," "the Wholly Other," "the Ground of all Being," "the Prime Mover," "the Cosmic Principle," etc. To say the least, such terms are rather sterile, austere and distant.

Thinking about God in this way is never adequate or satisfying for people of faith. The missing dimension in all such efforts is the conclusion that God is personal. He is powerful, but is more than a mighty force. God wants us to know Him as He has chosen to make Himself known. He has introduced Himself to humankind as personal.

Being personal, God can be known by persons like you and me.

Jesus spoke of God in a personal way, referring to Him as "Father," a very personal term. For example when Jesus prayed He spoke to God as "Father." Two of His notable prayers from the cross were brief and to the point. In one prayer Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). A short time later Jesus again prayed, "Father, into Your hands I commit My Spirit" (Luke 23:46). We might say immediately that this was fine for Jesus to do, since He was God's Son. Then we remember that Jesus said that when His followers pray, we should say, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name" (Matt. 6:9).

Two-way personal relationship

Taking our cue from Jesus' words we can say with confidence that God wants to be known as personal and addressed in a personal way. Friendship with God is a two-way personal relationship. He wants us to become His friends and He wants to be our Friend.

God's nature as personal informs and inspires our praying. A high tribute is paid Moses in Exodus 33:11: "The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend." Prayer at its best might be envisioned as friends communing with one another. Such friendly interchanges require both listening and speaking. Someone observed rather whimsically that God must want us to do more listening than speaking because He designed us with two ears but only one mouth. 🙏

Jerry Batson is a retired Alabama Baptist pastor who also has served as associate dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University and professor of several schools of religion during his career.



National WMU's Wanda Lee announces retirement at meeting

Wanda Lee announced a search committee will be appointed to seek her successor as executive director/treasurer of national Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) at the group's board meeting Jan. 9-11.

In her report, Lee said no date has been set for her retirement. She pledged to continue to lead WMU until a new executive director is named.

"It's my desire to ensure a seamless transition as the committee seeks someone with a fresh vision for our future," Lee shared Jan. 11 at the meeting. "May God bless the new leader of national WMU as He's blessed me on my leadership journey."

Lee, at the age of 50, was elected the seventh executive director of national WMU in January 2000. She is the only woman in the history of WMU who also served as national president, an office she held from 1996 to 2000. She also served as president of Georgia WMU from 1993 to 1996.

Lee, who was born in Russellville, has served in church and associational WMU or missions roles since 1973 when her husband, Larry, was in his first pastorate at Gilgal Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa. She and her husband and two children also served as missionaries in St. Vincent, Windward Islands, with the International Mission Board (IMB) from 1979 to 1981.

When elected into her current position, Lee told the WMU executive board members and national and state WMU staff members present that WMU "in the local church and in my association made it possible for me to learn about missions and try my hand at leadership. Because of WMU, I heard God's call to missions and was appointed. I am who I am today because God was able to use this organization to teach me and create the atmosphere where I could hear Him speak."

During the January meeting WMU also heard missions reports and addressed ways it is assisting IMB personnel who have elected to take a voluntary retirement incentive. The meeting was at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega.

Board members, along with state and national WMU staff, also heard from North American and international missionaries who are seeking to share the love of Christ to those around them.

Whether serving in Indianapolis like Barry and Amy Rager or in Canada like

Susan Booth or across the globe, each missionary who spoke shared that he or she was a product of Royal Ambassadors (RAs) or Girls in Action (GAs). Many first felt called to missions at a young age through these missions organizations.

"By All Means" — the WMU emphasis to be launched in Southern Baptist churches across the country in September 2016 — highlights practical ways to share the gospel in today's postmodern culture. It is based on the apostle Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 9:22-23: "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings."

At the meeting, much focus was placed on tangible ways WMU is supporting IMB personnel who have elected to take a voluntary retirement incentive since IMB announced efforts to address budget shortfalls.

Lee said, "We have grieved these missionaries coming home as a WMU family, with IMB and with our churches. But the

world has come to our nation, and God, in His sovereignty, is bringing home one of our greatest resources — experienced missionaries who know various languages and cultures — and we need to help them during this transition."

'Wake us up'

"I pray this (reduction of field personnel) will wake us up out of our complacency," Lee said, "that we will truly understand the depth of lostness in our world and embrace our responsibility to share Christ. This understanding begins through missions discipleship programs like Mission Friends, GAs and RAs that cultivate a missions heart. Along with providing these learning opportunities, we pledge our strong commitment to promote and support the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering (LMCO), Annie Armstrong Easter Offering (AAEO), Cooperative Program and Global Hunger Relief ... those cooperative efforts to sustain and grow support for Southern Baptist missions."

In other business, the WMU executive board:

▶ Awarded nearly \$184,000 in endowments, grants and scholarships in partnership with the WMU Foundation.

▶ Approved \$155 million as the 2016 LMCO goal.

▶ Approved \$70 million as the 2017 AAEO goal. (compiled from BP)



LEE

"I am who I am today because God was able to use this organization (WMU) to teach me and create the atmosphere where I could hear Him speak."

Wanda Lee
executive director/treasurer, National WMU

'My Secure Family' to equip parents in battle for their children's purity in today's digital age

By Maggie Walsh
The Alabama Baptist

There is a war being waged for the hearts and minds of children, Traylor Lovvorn of Undone Redone said, and it's one that his organization, Samford University's Ministry Training Institute (MTI) and *The Alabama Baptist* are fighting through events like "My Secure Family: Equipping Parents to Protect Children in the Digital Age."

"Events like this help prepare parents for the battle that they are in," said Lovvorn, who co-founded Undone Redone with his wife, Melody, to minister to those affected by sexual sin. "Good parenting is preparing our children for the world that we live in. In [this] age, shielding them from reality is no longer a viable option."

Dangerous websites

"My Secure Family," which will be held at Samford on Jan. 23 from 9 a.m. to noon, will cover specific apps and websites that are dangerous and educate and equip parents amid the ever-changing digital landscape.

"Our main focus will be to pro-

vide the framework that parents can use to begin or continue a healthy dialogue with their children in this area," Lovvorn said.

"We want our children to develop a biblical, Christ-centered worldview. So, as parents, we must counter the many, many messages that our children receive on a daily basis that [go against the Bible]."

As parents, Lovvorn and Samford's Kevin Blackwell understand that the vast sea of information the Internet provides to their children can be both good and bad.

Blackwell, assistant to the president for church relations and executive director of MTI, said, "As the father of three teenage girls I am concerned about the potential impact that digital media could have on my family. Parents must be vigilant in their response to the threats that are lurking behind each digital corner."

And parents having the right kind of information is key to making good decisions for their children, he said.

Lovvorn said, "For some

parents, [this seminar] will be a wake-up call as they begin to understand how easily the innocence of our children can be taken in our day and time.

"Our big hope is that, because of this seminar and some of the practical steps that are put in place as a result, many children who

otherwise would have been exposed to inappropriate content are protected and kept safe.

"It can be overwhelming and tempting, at times, to throw in the [towel]," he said. "But reminding ourselves what is at stake — the hearts of our children — has to be our main motivator as we engage this fight."

Blackwell said, "If you are the parent to children who have smart phones, tablets or who interact with computers you will need to make this seminar a priority."

Deadline to register for "My Secure Family" is Jan. 22. For more information or to register, visit www2.samford.edu/eve/index.php?formid=1281 or email mti@samford.edu.



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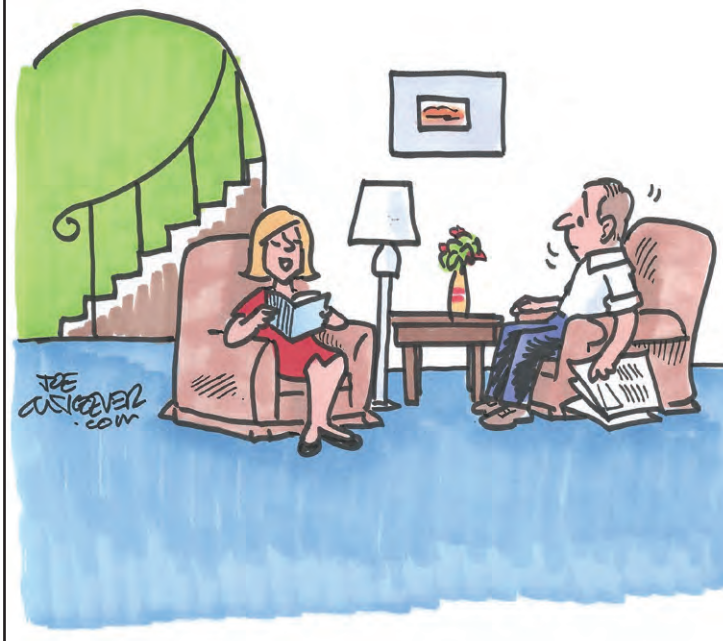
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- 3** Tap the [] icon at the bottom of the screen.
- 4** You will see pulsating dots, which indicate the app is searching for a target. Once it finds a target the dots will turn to a bull's-eye. The bull's-eye will remain until the augmented reality image loads.
- 5** Hold your device over a page or image in *The Alabama Baptist* (TAB) marked as augmented reality and watch the paper come to life.
- 6** If the image is slow to load at any point, then it may be your data speed or Wi-Fi strength. Change locations and try again.
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REFLECTIONS

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IMB closes communications office, lays off 30 staffers

The International Mission Board (IMB) publicly announced Jan. 14 the closure of its Richmond Communications Center effective April 29 and the accompanying layoff of 30 stateside staff members. Ten additional communications staff members are being transitioned to other positions.

The layoffs were the result of "reevaluating systems and structures across IMB not only because of IMB's financial realities but also to be the best possible stewards of resources that churches have entrusted to IMB to get the gospel to the nations," the IMB news release said.

The affected communications employees represent about 6.5 percent of the approximately 450 stateside staff members at IMB prior to the board's "organizational reset," which began in August 2015 with the launch of a voluntary retirement incentive for personnel 50 and older with five or more years of service. The goal was to find 600-800 missionaries or staff to take the VRI.

News of the communications layoffs came as IMB announced the beginning of phase two in its reset: a "hand raising opportunity" (HRO) for missionaries and stateside staff members "to transition outside the IMB if they believe God is leading them to a new place of investment in mission," according to the news

release. Individuals who accept the HRO must finalize their decisions by Feb. 22 and will receive "a package beyond the scope of a normal resignation."

Though overseas staff may volunteer to leave IMB for new fields of service, no missionaries will be "required" to leave the field as part of the continuing organizational reset, IMB said. And no additional teams, groups or departments will be eliminated during the organizational reset, the board said.

The termination actions for all involved IMB personnel were dictated by a financial crisis IMB President David Platt described as its own doing.

"The challenge we're addressing is that despite increased giving to the IMB over the last four years, for example, we have consistently spent more money than has been given to us each year," Platt explained in August.

He said IMB had been doing this "going back to 2010," and the organization had covered the overspending by dipping into reserves as well as by selling global properties, adding "our organization has spent, combined, \$210 million more than people have given to us."

The board will continue to release news and feature stories, photos and videos produced by IMB media workers based overseas. (BP, *Baptist Message*)



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Episcopal Church suspended for stance on gay 'marriage'

The Anglican Communion voted Jan. 14 to censure its American branch, the Episcopal Church, during a meeting in Canterbury, England, called to reflect on the future of the Communion.

The vote passed by a two-thirds margin and included prominent voices among African bishops who have loudly condemned the Episcopal Church for its liberal stance on gays.

The dramatic demotion, suspending the Church from voting and decision making for three years, follows a string of Episcopal Church decisions stretching back to 2003 when it elected Gene Robinson, an openly gay man, as a bishop of New Hampshire. In July 2015 the Episcopal

Church voted to allow its clergy to perform same-sex "marriages," a move not taken by the majority of churches in the Anglican Communion.

A statement issued by the Anglican Communion on Jan. 15 reads: "It is our unanimous desire to walk together. However, given the seriousness of these matters we formally acknowledge this distance by requiring that for a period of three years the Episcopal Church no longer represent us on ecumenical and interfaith bodies.

"The traditional doctrine of the Church in view of the teaching of Scripture upholds marriage as between a man and a woman in faithful, lifelong union."

The Anglican Communion con-

sists of 44 member churches from around the world, representing about 85 million Christians.

The suspension comes after four days of discussions among church leaders — "primates" in church parlance — over the Episcopal Church's position on gay "marriage" in relation to the position of the broader Anglican Communion.

Jeffrey Walton, the Anglican program director at the Institute on Religion and Democracy in Washington, said the suspension of the Episcopal Church is significant but does not, at this point, represent a schism, or irreparable rupture, within the Anglican Communion.

"This is not kicking the Epis-

copal Church out of the Anglican Communion, but it is saying that by making these decisions for the past 12 or so years the Episcopal Church has created this distance and there will be consequences to those decisions." (RNS)

— Correction —

In the article "State missionary Quimby set to retire Jan. 29" in the Jan. 14 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*, Quimby was incorrectly listed as being a member of Cottage Hill Baptist Church, Mobile. Quimby is a member of First Baptist Church, Montgomery.

Judson, office of LeaderCare to host pastors conference

Judson College in Marion and the office of LeaderCare and church administration of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions will again offer its annual pastors conference Jan. 26.

Larry Moyer — founder of EvanTell, a ministry committed to declaring the gospel clearly and simply — will be the featured speaker. He also is a writer, having authored several books such as "Free and Clear," "Show Me How To Share The Gospel," "Show Me How To Answer Tough Questions" and

"31 Days with the Master Fisherman."

The conference, meant to help pastors equip their church members to evangelize their communities more effectively, will begin at 10:30 a.m. with registration and coffee in Judson's Jewett Hall. A worship service will follow.

Moyer will speak at a special session for pastors following lunch.

To register, call Jill Stokes at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 316, or email jstokes@alsbom.org. (Judson)

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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Deerfoot Baptist Church, Trussville, Alabama, is seeking a full-time pastor. Resumés are being accepted. Email: dkovach@deerfootbaptist.org. Fax: 205-661-6073.

MUSIC/WORSHIP LEADER

Oak Bowery Baptist Church in Calhoun County, Alabama, is seeking a part-time music/worship leader. Resumés may be mailed to: Oak Bowery Baptist Church, ATTN: Personnel Committee, 3300 AL Highway 144, Ohatchee, AL 36271, or oakbowerybaptist@att.net.

TWO POSITIONS

Clearview Baptist Church in Birmingham is seeking a part-time worship leader and a pianist. Call 205-854-2027 or email: connie@clearviewbaptist.com.

OTHER POSITIONS

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS

St. Clair Baptist Association in Ashville, Alabama, is receiving resumés for director of missions. Cutoff date to receive resumés will be Jan. 31. Please send resumés to: Moody First Baptist Church, c/o Chuck Edwards, 902 Church St., Moody AL 35004.

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Want to know GOD?

By Jeff Brantley
Minister of Students and Education
FBC Winfield

There are everyday, tiny annoyances that you can just count on. If you are waiting on a callback from someone, the phone will not ring until you step down the hall for a moment. The checkout line you are in will always be the slowest one. You can always count on these things happening.

However, we all have to deal with serious problems in life. At some point we will have to deal with the illness and death of loved ones. We have to make financial decisions. We all live in an imperfect world and deal with the consequences of our choices and others' choices.

One thing we have to face is what we believe about Jesus. First Corinthians 1:23 says: "But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles." A stumbling block is defined as an obstacle. Is Jesus really an obstacle? Well just as we have to decide how to drive around an object in the road, we have to decide what we are going to believe about Him. Even those who choose to believe that Jesus, or even the discussion about Jesus, is foolish will have to deal with Him.

Jesus is Lord. He has always been and always will be. Philippians 2:10 says: "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth." Some, however, will realize that too late. Matthew 7:23 says He will tell many to depart from Him, for He never knew them.

How then do you come to know Him? Can you come to know Him? Yes, you can. Romans 5:8 says: "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." You don't have to be perfect on your own. Jesus taught us in John 3:16 that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life. This belief means that we trust Him. It means we turn from the way we were going and follow Him. It means we acknowledge that we need His forgiveness and trust in Him as Lord. This is how we know Him. 🙏

Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

2016 marks 400th anniversary of theologian Owen's birth

John Owen (1616–1683) was the most prolific theologian of the 17th century. Charles Spurgeon, the 19th-century Baptist preacher, called him “the most profound divine who ever lived.”

This year is the 400th anniversary of Owen's birth.

He was born to Puritan parents in the village of Stadhampton, England. A child prodigy, Owen enrolled at Oxford University in Oxford, England, when he was 12. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in 1632 and a master's degree in 1635. He studied between 18 and 20 hours each day.

He began work for a bachelor of divinity degree, but he was dismissed from Oxford University after siding with the Puritan group and not the An-

glicans led by the university's chancellor.

Once ousted he became pastor of a church in Fordham and later led a church in Coggeshall. A dynamic preacher, he regularly had Sunday crowds of 2,000 people.

Owen preached during the English Civil Wars (1642–1651), a conflict that involved the Parliamentarians led by Oliver Cromwell and the Royalists led by Charles I and his supporters. A Parliament commander, Sir Thomas Fairfax, moved his headquarters to Coggeshall in 1648 and attended Owen's church, eventually introducing him to Parliament.

The day after the execution of Charles I in January 1649, Owen addressed Parliament. When his sermon was published, he

added a plea for religious toleration for all Christian denominations and urged authorities not to execute dissenters.

He caught the attention of Cromwell and became his chaplain.

In 1651, Cromwell, who was Chancellor of Oxford University, appointed Owen the dean of Christ Church, one of the university's colleges. From 1652 to 1657, Owen served as vice chancellor. He rebuilt the infrastructure at Oxford University and hired godly teachers.

He declined invitations to the ministry in Boston (1663) and the presidency of Harvard University (1670).

In addition to his other duties he wrote for 41 years and published more than 60

books, starting with “The Display of Arminianism” and concluding with “Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ.” Twelve volumes were published posthumously.

His “Exposition on the Epistle to the Hebrews,” “Doctrine of Justification by Faith” and his books on the Holy Spirit, the Trinity and atonement cemented his reputation as a great theologian.

He married Mary Rooke in 1644. They had 11 children, 10 of whom died in infancy. One daughter lived to be an adult but died of consumption (tuberculosis). Mary died in 1676.

Owen died Aug. 24, 1683, at the age of 67. His last words to a friend were, “I am going to Him whom my soul had loved, or rather hath loved me with an everlasting love.” ☩

By Joanne Sloan

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



OWEN

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Photo by Chris McCaghren

As part of your subscription to *The Alabama Baptist*, you will receive a complimentary eight-minute lecture taught by Samford University President Andrew Westmoreland. Use your Aurasma app to watch the seventh of eight lectures on Christian leadership from Romans by placing your mobile device over this photo. App instructions noted on page 9.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

SYRIAN REFUGEES

At the risk of being an outcast or considered a narrow-minded bigot, I must express my disagreement and disappointment with our Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) leaders in regards to the Syrian refugee crisis. I am against allowing the refugees the rights to America's soil and my neighborhood. These are the same people that hate America, hate Christians and have vowed to take over the world by destroying our way of life. Perhaps our leaders should study the Old Testament when God gave specific instructions to destroy these people (even their women, children and animals). Why would He give such instructions? Because He knew the impact these idol worshippers of false gods would have on His people. It is not a matter of loving your neighbor. My neighbors are the people that value the same standards of life and way of life that I value.

We owe it to our children and grandchildren to make good decisions for their future in America. And opening up our

country to tens of thousands of refugees with their unknown background but known hatred for Christianity and America will destroy any future our children may have.

These are the same people that are willing to give their lives to carry out their commitment to Allah. They don't have to be considered terrorists to hate Christians. Their religious conviction causes them that hatred.

What we will see is not more SBC churches being established but more mosques. What we will see is their way and their customs being forced on us to either observe or make way for us to give up our rights to observe their rights. They are victims of a more powerful force of Muslims within their own country but they are not victims when it comes to their lifelong hatred of us and our belief in Christ. It makes no sense to say to them, “I know you hate us and I know you want to destroy our country and way of life, and I know you will eventually find a way to kill us, but come on in anyways and live among us until you gain the strength and power to overcome us.” Has the SBC been turned over to a reprobate mind?

Ted Sessoms, Pastor
Arbor Springs Baptist Church
Northport, Ala. ☩

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Monday at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday at 9 a.m.

First Baptist Church, Montgomery

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For more information, please contact Ministry Assistant Amy Nelson at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 258, or (334) 613-2258, anelson@alsbom.org

Make plans also to attend **The Church and Sexuality Conference** earlier Monday, 10 a.m.-3:45 p.m., also at First Baptist, Montgomery. For more information or to register, visit alsbom.org/cas16.

Ted Traylor



Charles Billingsley



Larnelle Harris



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ALABAMA

UPDATES

PEOPLE, CHURCHES MAKING NEWS ACROSS THE STATE

Elkdale Baptist's Anderson celebrates 50 years of ministry

Guy Anderson is the kind of guy who “can stand on the stage and lead a fancy music function but can also have coffee on the back porch with you.”



ANDERSON

He’s talented musically — but caring for people is his hallmark, said Cory Horton, pastor of Elkdale Baptist Church, Selma.

“He’s the kind of guy who has a good story every time you meet him, the kind of guy who makes you laugh and smile,” Horton said.

And people from all across the state are celebrating Anderson on Jan. 23 at 2 p.m. at Elkdale Baptist, where he’s served in music ministry for 20 years. Because he hasn’t just served there — he’s served Alabama for more than 50 years in total.

Anderson said, “It’s been an honor and a privilege to serve the Lord and serve churches in worship development.”

A graduate of Samford University in Birmingham, Anderson was born and raised in First Baptist Church, Pleasant Grove, and served several churches in the Birmingham area before landing at First Baptist Church, Chalkville, for 19 years and then Elkdale.

He’s served state Baptists with music leadership at countless convention meetings, revivals and other events over the years. He also has sung with the Alabama Singing Men for about 30 years and has served as their president. His wife, Deborah, is involved too, serving as the accompanist for the Alabama Singing Women.

“The thing I treasure more than anything are those who have grown into music ministry themselves and are leaders,” Anderson said. “It kind of means you’ve passed the torch. Those are the kind of things that make you feel like the journey was definitely worth it.” (Grace Thornton)



VOICE YOUR OPINION

SPEAK UP on issues in the Baptist world by writing a letter to the editor of *The Alabama Baptist*.

Remember to:

- Include your name and address
- Focus on issues, not people
- Be as concise as possible

university of
mobile

PRESIDENTIAL SEARCH

The University of Mobile seeks a visionary leader, someone who understands UMobile’s opportunities and challenges and, with dependency on the Holy Spirit, is eager to lead the school into the future. The Search Team is looking for someone who is motivated and drawn to the external aspects of the presidency and who is accustomed to innovative thinking and taking appropriate risks beyond traditional approaches in expansion of the university’s mission and influence.

Tommy Thomas, Laura Coverstone, and Ed Poff of JobfitMatters are assisting the Search Team in the selection of UMobile’s next President. To view an Introductory Video and download the full Opportunity Profile, please visit:

www.jobfitmatters.com/umobile

To submit resumes or nominations, please call
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Located in Mobile, Alabama, on an 880-acre campus near Gulf Coast beaches, the University of Mobile is an institution of liberal arts and sciences and professional programs, intentionally dedicated to Biblically-based Christian culture in heritage, faith, and practice. More than 1,600 students are enrolled in over 40 undergraduate and graduate programs. Founded in 1961 by Alabama Baptists, the University of Mobile is affiliated with and supported by the Alabama Baptist State Convention.



SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For January 24

Explore the Bible By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D. Dean, School of Christian Ministries, University of Mobile

FOLLOWING THE KING Matthew 7:13-21, 24-27

In this age of postmodernism, the first portion of this chapter is taken out of context more often than any other that comes to mind. "Judge not" has been reinterpreted by unbelievers and some uninformed followers of Jesus to mean: "Christians are not allowed to say that anything is wrong, because that would be judging someone else." They ignore the fact that in this chapter the Master refers to certain individuals as dogs, pigs and wolves as well as thorn bushes, thistles and bad trees. Jesus' values are more than His own personal perspectives. He is our Sovereign and He differentiates between the wide and narrow ways, the bad and good fruit, the sandy and solid ground.

An honest overview of Jesus' teaching throughout Matthew 7 leads to the conclusion that Jesus taught His disciples to be discerning and that He makes righteous judgments. To avoid hypocrisy Jesus warns that the units by which we measure others will be the same units by which we are measured.

Narrow versus Wide? (13-14)

The neon lights may be bright on Broadway or the Vegas strip, but the narrow way is lit by a hand-held oil lamp. "Your Word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path" (Ps. 119:105). One would think that a well-lit, well-worn path that many people travel would be safe, with firm footing and security from marauding robbers. And so it is. But if you take that path you will be headed in the wrong direction. Destruction is straight ahead if there is no repentance.

Robert Frost wrote of the road less traveled, and that choosing this path "has made all the difference." Long before the

poet laureate penned those words, however, the Master explained that only few find the narrow path that leads to life.

Keep in mind that Thomas asked Jesus to tell the disciples how to get where He was going (John 14:5). In essence Thomas was asking for a map: "How can we know the way?" Jesus is the Way, He explained. If we want the narrow path that leads to life, we must follow Jesus.

Good versus Bad? (15-21)

Jesus clearly delineates false prophets (wolves) from true believers (sheep). He also distinguishes good trees from bad trees based upon their fruit. Far from holding to an "anything goes" mentality, Jesus tells His listeners that the character of the individuals is found in the fruit that they bear. "So you'll recognize them by their fruit."

Rock versus Sand? (24-27)

Anyone who has built waterfront property on the Gulf Coast will tell you that hurricanes are merciless. The rains fall, the winds howl and the backwaters swell. Building a structure on the beach often turns into an expensive investment. By contrast some of the old lighthouses up the coast of the Northeast have been battered by many storms for decades, yet they continue to stand. The difference is their foundation; they've been built on bedrock.

Jesus contrasts two groups of hearers: those who receive His words and those who reject them. People hear the words of Jesus, but that is not enough. The person who hears Jesus' teaching but ignores Him has a weak foundation. The storms of life will come and his house will come crashing down. Those who hear the Master and respond in obedience face the same kinds of storms, but their house stands. They have built on the bedrock of His Word. 📖

Bible Studies for Life By James R. Strange, Ph.D. Associate Professor of Religion, Samford University

DISTINCTIVE IN MY CHARACTER Matthew 5:1-12

Today we begin a six-lesson series on the first part of the Sermon on the Mount (compare it with the "Sermon on the Plain" in Luke 6). These lessons present readers with notes similar to what they can find in a study Bible.

This "sermon" is the first of five large collections of Jesus' teachings in the Gospel of Matthew, perhaps meant to mimic the five books of Moses (5:1-7:28; 10:5-11:1; 13:1-53; 18:1-19:1; 24:3-26:1). The last verse of each collection begins with the phrase "when Jesus finished."

The "sermon" begins with what Christians call the "Beatitudes," so-named for the first word in the Latin translation. Luke gives a shorter list in 6:20-23. Many beatitudes appear in the Old Testament and other Jewish writings (Gen. 30:3; Job 5:17; Dan. 12:12). "Blessed are" translates a word that also can mean "happy are" or "fortunate are." In Matthew, however, Jesus isn't talking about a feeling of being happy or about luck. Rather it is God who blesses people who have these distinctive qualities.

God blesses our dependence upon Him. (1-6)

Matthew presents Jesus delivering His commandments (28:20) on a mountain to the 12 disciples similarly to how Moses received God's commandments on Mount Sinai and delivered them to the 12 tribes.

Compare Luke's "Blessed are you who are poor" and "Blessed are you who are hungry now." While Jesus talks about the plight of the destitute in Luke, in Matthew He talks about a person's spiritual character and the rewards God will give in the next life.

"The poor in spirit" refers to those who are humble. "Those who mourn" probably means those who suffer because of their

righteousness, a common idea in the Bible. Jesus will say it more clearly in verses 10-12. By saying "heaven," Jesus, a pious Jew, avoids saying God's name. It is characteristic of Jesus' speech in Matthew.

"Meek" refers to those who relinquish power, relying on God rather than on themselves. Jesus is the prime example (Phil. 2:5-11). Jesus may rely on Psalm 37:11. The same word can be translated as both "righteousness" and "justice." Justice and mercy (5:7) are two important aspects of God's character. "Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" seek God's justice over human laws or attitudes.

God blesses our actions toward others. (7-9)

"Mercy" is the counterpart to justice. God judges mercifully, not punishing in the way humans sometimes do. To be "pure in heart" means to be pure in one's intentions. The "heart" is the seat of the mind. In another famous passage in the sermon, Jesus will say that what one intends is as important as what one does (5:21-48; we'll deal with it in future lessons).

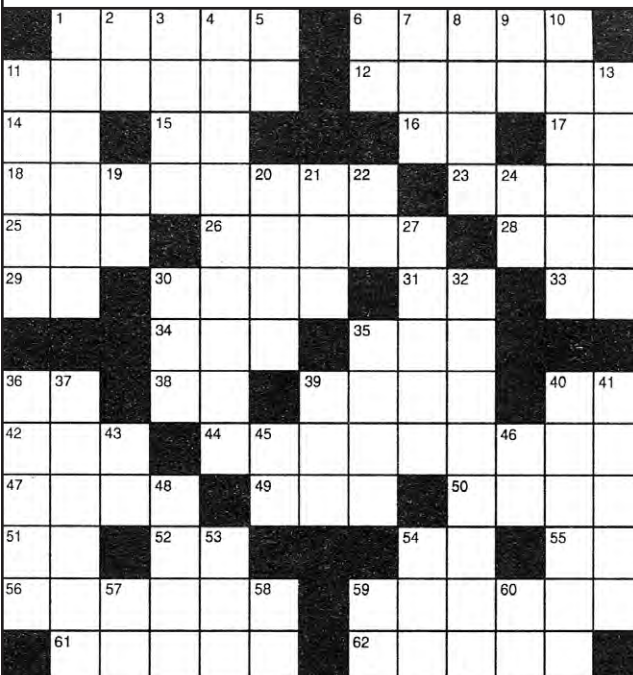
In Isaiah 9:6, "Prince of Peace" refers to the end of warfare. By contrast, here "peace" refers to a person's well-being. "Peacemakers" are those who look after the well-being of others.

God blesses our joy in the face of persecution. (10-12)

This last section offers an antidote to any prosperity gospel. Jesus seems to expect that, despite their attitudes toward God and how they deal with others (or maybe because of these things), His followers will face persecution (1 Thess. 2:2, 14-15; 1 Pet. 3:14; 4:14; 5:8). He is not talking about persecution for crimes or for legal yet bad behavior, but for obeying God as the prophets did. The reward for such faithfulness happens, not in this lifetime, but in the next. 📖

Christian Crossword

Diana Rowland Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

- God created the heavens and the _____. (Gen. 1:1)
- The darkness he called _____. (Gen. 1:5)
- Doth not even _____ itself teach you. (1 Cor. 11:14)
- They had made themselves _____ to David. (1 Chron. 19:6)
- The kingdom of heaven is _____ hand. (Matt. 3:2)
- And bring your youngest brother unto _____. (Gen. 42:34)
- Darkness was upon the face _____ the deep. (Gen. 1:2)
- The serpent beguiled _____, and I did eat. (Gen. 3:13)
- Make Jerusalem _____, a den of dragons. (Jer. 9:11)
- We are _____ men. (Gen. 42:31)
- Called by name Bezaleel the son of _____. (Ex. 35:30)
- Lot chose him all the _____ of Jordan. (Gen. 13:11)
- Ninety years _____ and nine. (Gen. 17:1)
- Multiple sclerosis. (abbr.)
- But here is the _____?
- Give me children, _____ else I die. (Gen. 30:1)
- Do, re, mi, fa, so, la, _____, do.
- Abide ye here with the _____. (Gen. 22:5)
- And _____ the lamp of God went out. (1 Sam. 3:3)
- And, _____, Sarah thy wife shall

- have a son. (Gen. 18:10)
- Postscript. (abbr.)
- Mathematics. (abbr.)
- Cajun state. (abbr.)
- When we came to the _____. (Gen. 43:21)
- Zethan and Tharshish and _____. (1 Chron. 7:10)
- Drive, park or reverse.
- We may _____ of the fruit of the trees. (Gen. 3:2)
- Was like a weaver's _____. (2 Sam. 21:19)
- And _____ went on his journeys. (Gen. 13:3)
- Abram called _____ the name of the Lord. (Gen. 13:4)
- Not a man left in _____ or Beth-el. (Josh. 8:17)
- Zip code abbreviation for Delaware.
- Of Manasseh, _____ with her suburbs. (Josh. 21:25)
- Which lieth _____ the south of _____. (Judg. 1:16)
- Like a _____ of fire in a sheaf. (Zech. 12:6)
- If _____ find in Sodom, _____ I will spare. (Gen. 18:26)
- For his _____ unto the Lord _____ ram. (Lev. 5:15)
- Male and female _____ created them. (Gen. 1:27)
- The waters shall _____ more become a flood. (Gen. 9:15)
- _____ set my bow in the cloud. (Gen. 9:13)
- Ask me never so much dowry and _____. (Gen. 34:12)
- _____, every one that thirsteth. (Isa. 55:1)
- What meaneth the noise of this _____? (1 Sam. 4:14)
- The vision of _____ the Elkoshite. (Nah. 1:1)
- Unto thy _____ will _____ give this land. (Gen. 12:7)
- And the king of _____ he hanged on a tree. (Josh. 8:29)
- That ye do not your _____ before men. (Matt. 6:1)
- Slang for "snatch" or "catch."
- Prince Charles and Princess _____.
- Abbreviation for book of Romans.
- And to the east, and to the _____. (Gen. 28:14)
- Also I shook my _____. (Neh. 5:13)
- The sons of Eliezer were, _____ the chief. (1 Chron. 23:17)
- At the _____ of the garden of Eden. (Gen. 3:24)
- Let there be _____. (Gen. 1:3)
- To make _____ wise, and did

- _____ (Gen. 3:6)
- Missing in action. (abbr.)
- Of the Gershonites were, _____ and Shimei. (1 Chron. 23:7)
- He _____ his trained servants. (Gen. 14:14)
- Not available. (abbr.)
- And there _____ put the man. (Gen. 2:8)
- And _____ said unto me. (Gen. 24:40)
- Let the sea _____. (1 Chron. 16:32)
- National Council of Churches. (abbr.)
- Go to the _____, thou sluggard. (Prov. 6:6)
- And he knew her again _____ more. (Gen. 38:26)
- Initials of Hubert Humphrey.
- _____ heard thy voice, and _____ was afraid. (Gen. 3:10)
- About. (abbr.)



TOP 10

*downloaded songs from iTunes
at press time*

CHRISTIAN & GOSPEL



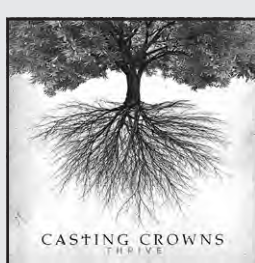
1. Good Good Father

By Chris Tomlin
(Good Good Father)



2. The River

By Jordan Feliz
(Beloved)



3. Just Be Held

By Casting Crowns
(Thrive)



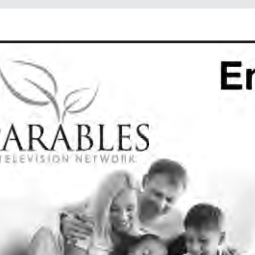
4. Trust In You

By Lauren Daigle
(How Can It Be)



5. How Can It Be

By Lauren Daigle
(How Can It Be)



6. Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)

By Hillsong UNITED
(Zion)



7. This Is Amazing Grace

By Phil Wickham
(The Ascension)

8. First

By Lauren Daigle
(How Can It Be)

9. Fix My Eyes

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

10. Holy Spirit

By Francesca Battistelli
(If We're Honest)

Source: popvortex.com



Photo courtesy of Merge PR

New awareness

Timmons hopes to inspire spiritual awakening

By Leann Callaway
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

In the midst of battling an incurable cancer for more than a decade, singer/songwriter Tim Timmons remains committed to living each day to the fullest and giving glory to God.

“Whatever the day involves, whether it’s joy or sorrow, I want to be in the presence of God,” Timmons said. “We are called to represent Him and reflect His love to others, wherever He leads us each day.”

As he performs concerts around the country, Timmons hopes to encourage audiences to rely on Christ as their source of stability and strength during life’s storms.

“The same power that raised Christ from the dead is alive in me, and I want to tell people about it,” Timmons noted. “As we take time to tell others how Christ is working in our own life, that’s what will point others to Him.”

In Fall 2015, Timmons joined MercyMe and Phil Wickham on the Greater Than Tour. In addition, Timmons partnered with K-LOVE TV for a feature called “Timmons Pantry Raid,” which showcased his cooking skills while exploring the homes of various Christian artists and selecting random ingredients found inside their pantries to make meals.

“At the end of the week, everyone says they

don’t have enough food and have to go out to eat,” Timmons explained. “I wanted to show people that they can make a meal from whatever ingredients they have available.”

“I hope the show [was] a vehicle for great conversations. I love cooking, but it isn’t why I wake up in the morning. I love music, but that isn’t why I wake up in the morning. What energizes and motivates me to face each new day is trying to figure out how to seek first the kingdom of God. Cooking is a vehicle, just like music is a vehicle to share about the availability of the kingdom of God.”

With his new album, “Awake Our Souls,” Timmons seeks to inspire listeners to experience the fullness, freedom and forgiveness available through a

relationship with Christ.

“Over the past few years, I’ve been trying to rest, dwell and experience the presence of God each day,” Timmons said.

“This perspective has radically changed my life, and I just want to invite people into a new awareness about the availability of the kingdom of God. As believers we have access to the fullness of God.

“This whole record is centered around the question: ‘What does it look like practically to seek first the kingdom of God?’ If we lived like that, we would have a different nation.”



“I just want to invite people into a new awareness about the availability of the kingdom of God.”

Tim Timmons, Christian singer/songwriter

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'Faith motivates me'

Titans linebacker strives to be man of God first

By Bill Sorrell
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Wesley Woodyard's favorite Bible verse has nothing to do with his most embarrassing moment.

When he was a freshman at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, Woodyard was wearing a medical boot and carrying a plate full of chicken nuggets. He hit a slick spot, spilling his food and beverage all over him.

Although he could relate his favorite verse, Proverbs 24:16, to that embarrassing moment, instead Woodyard, a linebacker for the Tennessee Titans, applies it to his pro career: "For though a righteous man falls down seven times, he rises again."

Undrafted in the 2008 NFL Draft, Woodyard was signed by Denver as an unrestricted free agent that year and just finished his eighth NFL season.

"Every year you have to prove yourself. Every year there is a new challenge. It always feels that you are on the bottom of the totem pole and you have a scratch mentality. You are always trying to kick and scratch and make a way. The only thing that stays consistent throughout my life is the Lord and His Word," Woodyard said.

"The righteous man falls down seven but gets up eight."

During the 2015 season, Woodyard had 112 tackles and five sacks. In his first season with the Titans in 2014 he finished with a career-high and team-leading 134 tackles while starting every game.

From 2008 to 2013, Woodyard played for Denver. In 2012 he was the only NFL player to have at least 100 tackles, five sacks and three interceptions. During the last 30 years, he was the 12th NFL player to accomplish it.

'Uplift His name'

"Being an undrafted free agent I thought I wouldn't be able to play this game anymore and I fell to my knees and asked God that if He gave me a chance to play football, I would uplift His name. He has continued to bless me throughout my career," said Woodyard, 29.

As soon as Woodyard gets out of bed, he is on his knees "spending time with God. I make it a point every morning that I get on my knees and

give thanks to the Lord for Him waking me up and for His grace and mercy. Faith motivates me every day. I can get up every day and continue to try to be a better man. God loves me through all my flaws."

God provides the inspiration to keep going, Woodyard said.

"I try to use my play for the Lord in the good times and bad times. ... I call on the Lord to give me strength in the good days and the bad days. I have learned that I need to call on Jesus all the time, to speak His name. There is power in His name and that will set us free."

Praying before and after a game, Woodyard's focus goes beyond the win-loss record. His 16Ways

Foundation impacts at-risk youth and sponsors community projects such as three football camps, mentor programs and toy drives.

"I try to be a light to the community and to the world. I try to live it," Woodyard said.

Tennessee wide receiver Harry Douglas said Woodyard brings a positive attitude and leadership to the team.

"He is one of those work-hard guys who never quits, who never stops. Energy is high. He has got a motor. I am lucky that I get to play with a guy like that."

Delanie Walker, Tennessee tight end, said that Woodyard's "faith is everything. He always talks about it. He preaches to us. I think that is what carries him and makes him a great leader on this team because of his faith."

Teammates elected Woodyard a permanent team captain in 2014 and 2015. He has received the honor eight times in his NFL career.

Douglas said, "He has been a captain every year he has been in the league, even in his rookie year in Denver. He is a great leader who goes hard. You just love to have a guy like that no matter what. ... I love his overall demeanor and the love he has for God, his family and for the game of football."

By "staying consistent" through prayer and Bible study, Woodyard wants to "be a good, positive light for the Kingdom" and not give in to temptations that NFL players face.

"I try to pray that He has His will and His way in my life. I think my purpose is to continue to be a shining light, no matter what. I thank God for bringing me through my challenges," Woodyard said. "If people know God and know His Son, Jesus, they have the same blessings and the same chances that I have. Every day is a blessing to wake up knowing that He is with me." ❧



Wesley Woodyard

Photo courtesy of the Tennessee Titans

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



NISS officials arrest church leader in Sudan

KHARTOUM, Sudan — The head of discipleship at a North Khartoum, Sudan, church has been arrested, sources said.

Agents of Sudan's National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) went to the home of Telahoon Nogose Kassa, 36, one night the second weekend of December 2015 and told him to report to their offices, sources said. When he went to a NISS office the following day officials arrested him and took him to a detention center in Khartoum, the sources said.

NISS officials gave no reason for the arrest, though they questioned him for five consecutive days about his relationship with a foreign missionary who had attended a discipleship class, sources said. They believe he was targeted for his Christian activities and his opposition to government interference with his church, Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church.

The church has fought a government takeover of its property. Kassa's arrest comes four months after two South Sudanese pastors, Peter Yein Reith and Yat Michael, were released following eight months in prison on false charges of capital crimes because of their efforts to defend the church against the illegal sale of its property.

Since Kassa's arrest in mid-December, only his parents have been allowed to visit him, and only once, in Kobar Prison. Authorities have prohibited church members from visiting him, sources said. There were no charges brought against him at the time of his arrest. (MS)

Islamic extremists kill 2 Christians in attack

EL WAK, Kenya — An attack on a bus and a truck in Kenya by Islamic extremists from Somalia's Al Shabaab insurgency took two Christian lives in December 2015.

In the attack on a bus with more than 100 passengers in northeast Kenya on Dec. 21, 2015, the Al Shabaab rebels tried to separate Christians from the Muslims for execution. But Muslims on board took pains to protect the Christians, an area source said.

Al Shabaab militants stopped the bus from Nairobi to Mandera near El Wak village. Weary of Islamic extremist attacks on Christians that have caused workers and teachers to flee the area, Muslims on board told the assailants that the militants would have to kill them all or leave them in peace. The Muslim passengers loaned their Islamic face coverings to Christian women and hid other Christians behind bags.

The area Christian source said one Christian who tried to flee was gunned down.

Government officials praised the area Muslims for showing national unity, while observers pointed out they also are weary of Islamic extremist attacks on Christians that have caused workers and teachers to flee the area. (MS)

Police officers harm 2 Christians in India

THOMAS NAGAR, India — Police hostility toward Christians in India continued as officers in Tamil Nadu reviled two Christians for their faith and seriously injured them, sources said.

The two Christians, A. Rethinakumar and C. Nova of Jesus Redeems Ministry, were traveling by motorcycle in Thomas Nagar on Nov. 3, 2015, when two policemen stopped them and began verbally abusing them, according to attorney T. Hubertson, who submitted a petition to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) about the assault.

"The two policemen were heavily drunk and calling the Christians 'sons of prostitutes,'" Hubertson said. "They told the Christians to remove their helmets and started punching them in the face."

On Nov. 22, 2015, NHRC registered a case against the two officers for assault. Police officials, however, have not taken any action against the assailants, sources said. (MS)