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Faith and Family

Behind closed doors

To the outside world, Brandon and Jessica seem like a perfect couple. They are active at their church, they volunteer in the community and the photos Jessica posts on Facebook of their two toddlers are adorable.

In private, however, things are much different. Jessica feels like Brandon is distant from her. They are rarely intimate, and Brandon blames his constant irritability on work stress.

What Jessica doesn't know is that Brandon has a secret life. In a drawer in his desk he has a private cell phone that he uses to arrange appointments with prostitutes and to read pornographic novels. The phone also is filled with pictures — of women he has had affairs with, of women he has spied on and of himself performing lewd acts.

There have been times Brandon swore to himself he would stop looking at the photos and stop cheating on Jessica, but every time he has failed to keep his promise. He is certain that if Jessica finds out about his double life, his family, his job and his reputation will be ruined. Even if he wanted to get help, it's too late. Right?



The Church is not immune

EDITOR'S NOTE — This week's Faith and Family package focuses on sexual integrity and may not be appropriate for young readers in your home. Please use discretion.

Christians struggle with sexual sin just as much as nonbelievers

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Mention the term "sex addiction" and images of out-of-control celebrities often come to mind. We sigh, shake our heads and lament the moral failings of the rich and famous.

Unfortunately sexual addiction is a problem for an estimated 12 million Americans, daily destroying

marriages, families, careers and reputations. And the Church is not immune. In fact various studies have found that Christians struggle just as much as nonbelievers with sexual sin, and research suggests that half of church-going families see sexual sins like pornography as a problem in their homes.

Too easily accessible

The rise in sexual addiction may be blamed in part on the ever-

increasing amount of sexual content that is easily accessible online, but that is just part of the story, according to Christian counselors Tim Clinton and Mark Laaser, authors of "The Fight of Your Life: Manning Up to the Challenge of Sexual Integrity." Lust and sexual sin have been a battle since the fall of man, and the Bible shows the struggle human nature can face when sex is involved.

"You can trace it back to the

Book of Genesis where, in fact, we can read about several different sexual sins, including adultery, prostitution and incest, forms of sexual sin that people in the Church are secretly acquainted with," Clinton and Laaser write. Just as Satan sought to destroy the beauty of the God-ordained relationship between Adam and Eve, "the sexualization of our culture through television, grocery store magazines, endless

(See 'Addiction,' page 3)

Coming next week

A new logo for The Alabama Baptist



Say goodbye to the stained glass window that has represented *The Alabama Baptist* for almost 20 years.

COMMENT



TAB
augmented
reality

Platt's 'Blank Check' at IMB

International Mission Board (IMB) missionaries and staff members have been asked by IMB President David Platt to seek God's will for their lives as if they were putting a "blank check" before God. The reason for this spiritual search is Platt's announced goal of reducing the IMB missionary force and staff by between 600 and 800 people in order to balance expenses and income.

In addition to missionaries and staff working with a "blank check," it increasingly appears that Platt himself is working with a blank check as he reshapes the international missions strategy of Southern Baptists.

A first step for practically all new leaders is to reorganize to reflect that person's vision and Platt was no exception. Six months after being elected IMB president Platt proposed what he called a "reset."

Where previous administrations had decentralized certain tasks such as logistical support, Platt brought them back to Richmond headquarters. Five IMB vice presidents were reorganized out, including a former finalist for the IMB presidency. But no one complained. A new president has the right to shape the organization according to his vision and to surround himself with his own team.

At the February 2015 meeting where the reset was approved, Platt shared that IMB had operated with a \$21 million deficit in 2014 and was empowered to work with missionaries and staff to implement the reset. Later IMB officials acknowledged that even though income had gone up each of the last five years, the board had engaged in long-term deficit spending.

Long-term financial viability

In late August, Platt announced his plan to eliminate between 600 and 800 missionary and staff positions and restore long-term financial viability to IMB. The operating reserves had shrunk to four months instead of the desired six-month level, he said.

The previous administration had been aware of the financial problem but had opted to reduce the missionary and staff force through attrition rather than any drastic measures. Platt announced to IMB trustees that he was solving the problem through prompt action. Some board members pushed back, but the decision was Platt's to make as CEO.

Some argued the reduction in force was un-



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

necessary. Others praised Platt for taking decisive action to change IMB's financial structure.

While working on the structure, Platt also outlined a new strategy for sharing the gospel around the world. He called for "missional living" rather than "missionary living." Platt projected a strategy where the reduced missionary force would largely serve as church planters, each surrounded by a team of short-term volunteers.

"We need a strategy that doesn't cap our number of missionaries merely based upon how much money we have," he said repeatedly.

Platt led the board to broaden eligibility guidelines for missionary service by removing barriers such as divorce, speaking in tongues and teenage children in the home.

He also pushed the board more toward a role of resourcing churches to implement the church's missions strategy rather than IMB developing a worldwide strategy on behalf of churches with which churches could cooperate.

Eighteen months after being elected Platt has succeeded in reducing the missionary staff to the desired level. Though official numbers will not be released until late February, IMB reports that initial responses to reduction efforts indicate Platt's goal will be met.

He has reorganized IMB's structure, selected new leadership from inside and outside the organization, eased qualifications for missionary appointment and tilted the IMB's role in the denomination. That is a lot to accomplish.

On Jan. 14, Platt announced he was eliminating the IMB's communications department. Forty positions were eliminated, though 10 people were offered other positions in the organization.

The public announcement touted "no missionaries will be required to leave the field." Unfortunately, former missionaries who had been asked by IMB to work as staff in the communications department were not as blessed.

Unexplainably IMB planned no announce-

ment about eliminating its entire communications department. Nothing was to be said about jettisoning about 10 percent of its staff or about how IMB would tell its missions stories going forward.

Only after the news leaked on social media and several state paper editors asked about the development did IMB release any information at all. Even then the news was buried in the ninth paragraph of a 15-paragraph release.

Going forward communications work is to be done by IMB's global network communications teams headquartered in London and Chiang Mai, Thailand, and "other trusted partners." Sources indicate "other trusted partners" includes a Brentwood, Tennessee, organization called The A Group which markets Platt's Radical organization.

Needed changes

Again, as president of IMB, Platt has the right to reorganize the board structure and to do communications tasks in the way he deems best. Reports from IMB communication insiders indicate some changes may have been needed. At the same time he has the responsibility to operate transparently and not secretly before Southern Baptists.

IMB may be a corporation but it is not like a private business. At its core Southern Baptists are a volunteer body which demands transparency and open communication in order to function effectively.

And there is the question of strategy. The book "Marketing 3.0: From Products to Customers to the Human Spirit" argues that effective marketing today is driven by values. People connect with companies who share their values or who engage in initiatives that reflect their priorities.

That means IMB has to personalize the missions story for Southern Baptists in a way that impacts our being — our prayer, our giving and our going. Otherwise we will not have the volunteers, the money or the power of prayer behind our efforts.

That outside public relations firms can do a better job of connecting with our values and priorities than professional Southern Baptist communicators is yet to be demonstrated.

Closing the communications department was not a financial decision, according to IMB. The reduction in force to solve the deficit spending problem had been met in other ways. This was a strategic decision and now we will see if it works.

In the meantime Platt has written a large sum on his "blank check" from IMB. We pray the board of trustees works closely with him and others in senior leadership to "cash" that check through the best possible efforts to take the gospel to the unreached people of the world. 🙏

LETTERS
TO THE EDITOR

See page 9





"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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Addiction vs. sin

Church can be a place of healing for those dealing with sexual addiction

(continued from page 1)

porn sites and websites for adultery, as well as the sexual chaos of today's generations, are the enemy's missiles and landmines that assault us."

While society debates the long-term impact of pornography and hypersexualized behaviors, the Church faces its own battle, said Greg Oliver, executive director of Awaken, a Birmingham-based recovery ministry that seeks to equip the Church to effectively understand and engage the issue of sexual addiction.

"For many years a debate has endured both inside and outside the Church over the legitimacy of sexual addiction as a real disorder," Oliver said. "There are a variety of reasons why people reject the concept of sexual addiction. Many feel there is a lack of empirical research to support the conclusion that sexual addiction is real. Others criticize validating research as being conducted by those with a vested interest in making a living off sex addiction clients."

The most prevalent criticism within the Church is the belief that calling compulsive sexual behavior an addiction removes a person's responsibility for his or her own sinful actions, Oliver said.

"Does calling a problem an addiction necessarily mean that the addicted person is not responsible? Are 'addiction' and 'sin' mutually exclusive concepts? Is it not possible to adhere to a belief that both can exist in a Christian's life? These are critical questions," Oliver said.

These are good questions but they also hinder ministry to those who struggle with sexual sin.

The science of addiction

Though the American Psychological Association does not officially recognize sexual addiction as a disorder, the problem is very real, according to the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT). AAMFT's website describes sexual addiction as "a serious problem in which one engages in persistent and escalating patterns of sexual behavior despite increasing negative consequences to one's self or others."

Behaviors associated with sexual addiction might include:

- ▶ Compulsive masturbation
- ▶ Simultaneous or repeated sequential affairs
- ▶ Pornography (including magazines, videos and clothing catalogs)
- ▶ Isolation from spouse, partner or peers
- ▶ Cybersex or phone sex
- ▶ Multiple anonymous partners
- ▶ Unsafe sexual activity
- ▶ Strip clubs and adult bookstores
- ▶ Use of prostitution, escorts or massage parlors

▶ Frequent inappropriate sexual remarks or humor

▶ Unexplained mood swings or depression, especially before or after sex

In order to call these actions a disorder AAMFT says three key elements of the individual's mental state are often observed. First the sexual activity is often used to cope with emotional pain, manage stress or replace true intimacy. Another distinction is that as with other addictions, the sex addict's behavior brings no lasting gratification and the individual continues to pursue the "high" regardless of the financial or personal cost. A third factor is that often these patterns of behavior continue despite the individual's "sincere and persistent efforts" to stop.

Rory Reid, a professor of psychiatry at the University of California, Los Angeles, and a leading expert on sexual addiction, said, "It's not that a lot of people don't take sexual risks from time to time or use sex on occasion to cope with stress or just escape, but for these patients, it's a constant pattern that escalates until their desire for sex is controlling every aspect of their lives and they feel powerless in their efforts to change."

Often sexual addiction, like other compulsive behaviors, can be traced to issues in the individual's family of origin, according to AAMFT. A background of abuse or neglect, addictions, incest, affairs or pornography use can all lay the foundation for sexual compulsion.

The high degree of shame associated with compulsive sexual behaviors means that many who struggle do not get help, and that's where the Church has a tremendous opportunity, according to Traylor Lovvorn,

co-founder of Route1520, a Birmingham-based ministry that provides counseling, group therapy support and resources for men and women who are affected by sex addiction and sexual sin.

Once an individual admits to having a problem with sexual sin, the next step is counseling with a qualified therapist who can help the individual begin making connections between life experiences and addictive behavior, Lovvorn said. The process is long and challenging, but the Church can provide a place for healing.

"Clinically sex addiction is an intimacy disorder. It cannot be cured in isolation," Lovvorn said. "Once a church and pastor understand that, the next question is, 'Where is that safe place that men and women who are struggling in these areas can ... find authentic community?'"

Support groups

Both Route1520 and Awaken offer Christ-centered recovery groups for men and women who have experienced the consequences of sexual brokenness. Support groups offer an opportunity for those at different stages of recovery to come alongside others who are on the same journey, Lovvorn said.

The encouragement that participants receive from being part of support groups helps them push through the hard work that leads to healing.

"There is a tremendous amount of hope for healing, but it is not a quick fix," Lovvorn said. "It's not possible to just say a prayer or to just say I'm sorry. Healing from addiction is a journey, not a quick fix formula. There are no shortcuts." ■

Helping a loved one

In order for a person to stop a destructive habit, they must admit they have a problem. This usually happens when a person experiences a life crisis like the threat of being fired, losing a spouse or financial ruin. Typically the person already has several problems related to their sex addiction but it is not until the crisis point that they realize they have to change.

If your spouse or family member is struggling with sex addiction there are steps you can take to help your loved one.

▶ **Don't shame the person:** Many times they feel a great deal of shame already.

▶ **Show them a "tough love" approach:** This involves setting boundaries for their behaviors and consequences for

breaking or violating the boundaries.

▶ **Seek God's guidance and encourage them to do the same:** Their relationship with God is their lifeline.

▶ **Be prepared for spiritual warfare:** Remember that as a Christian you are given all the armor and weaponry you need (see Ephesians 6).

▶ **Insist that there can be no secrecy from your spouse/family member:** They must maintain transparency with you as you hold them accountable.

▶ **Maintain filters on electronic devices and insist that your spouse/family member allows you to check these devices periodically:** Again the addict needs to maintain a high level of transparency.

Source: Steve Trader
Pathways Professional Counseling

Sexual temptation among teens

Parental influence, spiritual preparation key to teens' sexual integrity

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

When we think of hyper-sexualized media we usually think of X-rated magazines and online pornography. But what about the photos in the lingerie catalog or swimsuit issue on your coffee table? The racy romance novels on your bookshelf? The suggestive lyrics of your favorite songs?

A pastor once posed a thought-provoking question to our congregation: Would you allow two people to come into your home, sit on your couch and make out in front of your kids? Is it much different to watch television shows where much more happens in the span of an hour or to listen to music that glorifies casual sex?

In their book, "The Fight of Your Life: Manning Up to the Challenge of Sexual Integrity," counselors Tim Clinton and Mark Laaser emphasize "our sons and daughters are facing a myriad of temptations not available to previous generations."

Lasting impact

The exposure to sexual temptation starts early and its impact is lasting. In a study of adults with sexual compulsivity issues, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), researchers noted that patients who exhibited such tendencies also suffered from greater emotional disturbance, impulsivity and inability to manage stress than their peers. More than half of those in the UCLA study felt their sexual behavior began to be problematic before the age of 18. Another 30 percent reported that their problems began during their college-aged years, from 18 to 25.

UCLA professor Rory Reid said, "This

appears to be a disorder that emerges in adolescence and young adulthood, which has ramifications for early intervention and prevention strategies."

Marriage therapist and author Jill Manning noted in congressional testimony that youth are considered the audience most vulnerable to sexually explicit material because they can be easily coerced into viewing it and have limited ability to process obscene material once they encounter it. Youth also can develop unrealistic expectations about their future sexual relationship through repeated exposure to fantasy-based sexual imagery, Manning said.

The long-term consequences of early exposure to sexual content on an individual's spiritual health and future relationships has been examined in study after study, which leads to an important question: In a sex-saturated culture, how do we teach teens to maintain their sexual integrity?

Clinton and Laaser have some simple yet wise advice: "Prepare when you are strong for a time when you will be weak."

In other words parents who want to help their children face the difficult choices ahead should start talking about these issues now.

A good first step is open communication, according to author and counselor Brenda Yoder.

"Talk to your kids," she writes in a blog post at tentotwenty.com. "Talk with them about your expectations and why you believe what you do. 'Just because' is the wrong answer."

Waiting until your children are teens may be too late, which is why she urges parents to start the conversation early using age-appropriate discussions.

Yoder says parents also must evaluate the unspoken expectations and unwritten rules in the entertainment they allow youth to watch. While adults may be able to overlook inappropriate phrases or images, kids cannot, she argues.

"What you allow in your home sets the standard for your teens," she writes. "Eliminate things that are sexually inappropriate, degrading and dehumanizing."

According to a 2012 survey of teens

and parents by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 87 percent of teens said it would be much easier for them to postpone sex and avoid teen pregnancy if they were able to have more open, honest conversations about these topics with their parents. More than half of

sexually experienced young people who responded to the survey wish they had waited longer before having sex. Another study by the organization in 2014 found that two-thirds of 18-24 year olds agreed, "If teenagers knew that less than half of all teens are sexually active, it would help them wait longer to have sex."

Another effective strategy parents can employ is helping teens think through potential sexually charged situations beforehand.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), teens who regularly attend religious services are already less likely to have sex than their peers, but they too need to think through potential situations and have a ready answer when temptations arise.

One strategy is to mentally walk through situations where adult supervision may be lacking, including dates. Just as athletes and performers use visualization to prepare for upcoming challenges, teens can use a similar strategy to prepare for new situations, according to AAP.

"Ask your teenager to picture herself in a

given situation and imagine how she might react, as if watching herself in a movie frame by frame. For example: 'If I was invited to a boy's house and discovered after I got there that his parents were out of town, what would I do?' Let's encourage [teens] to think ahead, anticipate potential trouble and be alert to warning signs," an AAP source suggests.

Initiate conversations

Conversations about sex between parents and children can be uncomfortable and require tough questions. However, if parents don't initiate the discussion, peers will.

Parents who want to guide their children in a lifestyle of sexual integrity must be intentional, and one of the best ways to initiate the conversation is to let the Bible break the ice for you, said Ron DeHaas, president and co-founder of Covenant Eyes, a leading provider of Internet accountability and filtering software.

"The Bible provides children and adults alike with a foundation for how to grasp the subject of sexuality. There is no better source of information about sex and no better place to lay the groundwork of our understanding," DeHaas said.

If children are already accustomed to reading the Bible with their parents, turning to biblical passages about sex will seem natural to them. In addition, such conversations reinforce "the idea that sex is not in a special category that is outside the scope of God's interest. Sex is not a taboo subject that God is embarrassed about; rather, sex is something that is part of the good world God created," DeHaas said.

Sexuality and the battle to maintain sexual integrity is ultimately a spiritual issue, according to Clinton and Laaser.

"Our sexuality, though influenced by our families and culture, should be defined and managed by our faith and belief in what God has spoken." ❧

Resources for parents, teens

Websites

- ▶ www.intoxicatedonlife.com/the-talk/
- ▶ www.covenanteyes.com
- ▶ www.focusonthefamily.com

Books for parents

- ▶ "Effective Parenting in a Defective World" by Chip Ingram
- ▶ "How to Talk Confidently with Your Child about Sex" by Lenore Buth

Books for teens

- ▶ "Bloom: A Girl's Guide to Growing Up" by Susie Shellenberger
- ▶ "Boom: A Guy's Guide to Growing Up" by Michael Ross

Adult resources

Recovery ministries/ websites

- ▶ PathwaysProfessional.org
- ▶ AwakenRecovery.com
- ▶ Route1520.com
- ▶ UndoneRedone.com

Books

- ▶ "The Last Addiction" by Sharon Hersh
- ▶ "Porn Nation: Conquering America's #1 Addiction" by Michael Leahy
- ▶ "Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction" by Mark Laaser
- ▶ "Healing Your Marriage When Trust Is Broken" by Cindy Beall

Overcoming temptation

How does one overcome the temptation and maintain sexual integrity in a sex-obsessed culture? Here are some important steps to take:

- ▶ Turn to the Lord Jesus for strength.
- ▶ If sexual sin, including pornography, is part of your past allow others to help you avoid the temptation. Develop accountability partners — persons with whom you can be fully transparent.
- ▶ Consider the consequences of continuing to engage in sexual sin.

▶ Learn to identify your triggers. Once you do, strive to eliminate these triggers from your life.

▶ Study the Scripture and what the Bible says about the topic of sexual purity.

▶ Strive to stay in a constant state of prayer.

▶ If currently addicted, seek professional help from a licensed therapist to help discover the root of the addiction.

Source: Steve Trader
Pathways Professional Counseling

Biblical freedom includes freedom from shame

By Greg Oliver
Executive Director, Awaken Recovery

There is very little direct mention of addiction in Scripture. However, there are several passages that when taken together shed light on a discussion about the development of addiction in a Christian's life.

In the two New Testament passages outlining the qualifications for elders and overseers — 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 — there is a common phrase used. One of the requirements of an overseer, given in 1 Timothy 3:3 and in Titus 1:7 is that he is “not addicted to wine.” The Greek word used here is “paroinos,” which literally translates “given to wine” or “drunken.” These are the only two places this word is used in Scripture, and although the New American Standard Bible (NASB) translates the word using the phrase “addicted to much wine,” its use here is admittedly not a clear indicator of addiction.

However, in the next chapter of his letter to Titus, Paul is admonishing men and women in how to live godly lives. In Titus 2:3 he writes, “Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine.” Many translations use the same English word “addicted” that NASB uses earlier in the overseer qualifications, but the word Paul uses here is different. Here he uses the word “dedoulomenas,” which NASB translates as the English word “enslaved.” This word is a version of a word used in several other Scriptures, all of which explicitly indicate slavery.

‘Both-and’ situation

Taking these three Scriptures together is certainly consistent with the assertion that A. addiction is real, and B. people are personally responsible. This is a “both-and” situation, not an “either-or.” The argument can be made that by a person's careless or sinful habit of being “given to much wine” (paroinos), he or she could eventually become “enslaved” or addicted to wine (dedoulomenas). The implication here is that what begins as a sinful choice can become an enslaving addiction. Although these Scriptures specifically address addiction to alcohol, it is not a stretch to apply the principles to other addictions.

Much of the research being conducted in the area of sexual addiction involves the study of neurochemical responses to sexual stimuli. Specifically, much research has been done on the way the brain and its chemicals respond to prolonged use of pornography. The conclusions suggest that when a person views pornography or engages in habitual sexual behavior like masturbation, the brain releases abnormally high levels of dopamine, norepinephrine, oxytocin and other chemicals.

Here's the problem with this overload. God has created and designed us with chemicals that prompt sexual focus and pursuit of our spouse (dopamine and norepinephrine) as well as

chemicals that bond us to the person with whom we are sharing the sexual experience (oxytocin). When we compulsively engage in sinful sexual behavior outside of the marriage relationship, we are training our brains to require unhealthy amounts of the pursuit chemicals, and we are training our brains to bond to an experience rather than a person. What begins as making one sinful choice and then another eventually becomes enslavement.

Spiritual enslavement

Christians who are addicted to sex and/or pornography are enslaved. They experience a spiritual enslavement as well as enslavement to their own hijacked brain chemistry. We were meant for freedom and so a sexually addicted Christian obviously experiences guilt, shame and a total lack of the pleasure they initially believed they were providing themselves. When leaders within the Church reject the concept of this enslavement, they unwittingly discourage those who are struggling from ever coming forward. Fear of rejection and condemnation keeps the addicted Christian in isolation, not experiencing the freedom that James 5 describes as coming through a process of confession, prayer and healing.

James 5:16 instructs Christians to “confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” The specific context of James 5 deals with physical sickness and its link to confession and healing. James recognized that although not all sickness can be attributed to sin (John 9:3), there is a clear link between hidden sin and physical illness. In Psalm 32:3–5, David describes the devastating physical toll that secret sin had on his body, and the relief that came through confession.

When Christians take the bold step of confessing their struggles within a safe community, they allow the body of Christ to respond to them with grace and support. They can experience love and acceptance rather than judgment and condemnation. Obviously it behooves the members and leaders of the local church to understand how we are to respond to revealed or confessed sin. As Christ's body we have a tremendous responsibility to communicate to struggling people that the Church is a safe place to acknowledge one's sin and to receive support and restoration.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Greg Oliver was a worship pastor for 15 years before his secret addiction to pornography and sex was exposed in January 2009. Since then he has been on a journey of recovery, coming to know God better and experiencing His grace like never before. He and his wife, Stacey, have experienced healing and restoration within their marriage, and through the ministry of Awaken they walk with individuals, couples and ministry leaders to help them experience connection and healing in the midst of sexual brokenness. ☞

Dangers of sexual sin

God's grace can overcome sexual sin

By Steve Trader and Lisa Keane
Pathways Professional Counseling

How many marriages have been damaged and ruined because of sexual sin? How many people have had serious financial issues associated with affairs or pornography? How many people are unable to have close relationships within their marriages because of the damage that shame has created?

Questions like these go on and on. To say that our country and our world have been damaged by the increasingly sexualized culture would be an understatement. According to a 2007 study by the American Psychological Association, our culture has been infused with sexual representations of girls and women, suggesting that this sexualization is good and normal.

Perhaps this is one reason pornography is now a multibillion dollar industry. One of the main reasons pornography has become so epidemic is its widespread accessibility. What used to be available only in a city's red-light district is now widely and quickly available on the Internet.

However, pornography is just one aspect of an array of sexual integrity issues in which individuals can struggle. As clinicians we see individuals who are struggling with other sexual risk-taking behaviors such as anonymous sex, multiple sexual partners, prostitution, sadistic and masochistic behaviors and exhibition/voyeurism. Although the psychological community has currently decided not to include sex addiction as a formal diagnosis, there are still very real physical and psychological consequences for individuals and their families when they engage in these risky behaviors. Their lives are greatly affected and impaired, and the individuals often suffer anxiety, depression, relationship problems and incredibly high levels of shame as a result of their choices.

Cultural pressure

Several surveys conclude that hypersexuality and other sexual addiction issues are more commonplace in American life, even among Christians, than we care to admit. In a 2014 survey by Barna Group for Proven Men Ministries, 77 percent of men between the ages of 18 and 30 who self-identified as Christians responded that they viewed pornography at least once a month. One-third of the Christian men surveyed reported that they had had sex with someone else while married.

A 2014 Kaiser Family Foundation study of adolescent sexual health reported that nearly half of surveyed high school students had sexual intercourse in 2013. In

counseling sessions we will often hear teenagers talk about the pressure they experience to engage in sexual conversations, sexting or sexual behaviors. Often a driving force for these behaviors is popularity or acceptance from their peers. This is true for our Christian as well as non-Christian clients.

As followers of Christ we know God sees all things. The myth that secret sin will not hurt others is damaging both to the individual and to the family.

Not only does sexual sin affect the life of the individual, it also affects the lives of his or her spouse and family. When an individual's sexual sin is exposed, the results are devastating. Marriages and families often are destroyed. Spouses are especially affected in many negative ways, including:

- ▶ Lack of trust
- ▶ Feelings of anger
- ▶ Thoughts like, “I’m not enough” or “I don’t measure up”
- ▶ Difficulties with forgiveness

▶ Self-image problems
Children are affected as well. They could feel ashamed of their parent's behaviors and lack understanding as to why their mother or father would struggle with sexual integrity. Without proper counseling many children in homes where sexual sin has been a problem may never understand what sex is really about in a healthy marriage between one man and one woman.

The real heart of the problem of sexual sin is that people try to meet their need for emotional intimacy in an unhealthy way. Think of it like this: Satan wants us to meet legitimate needs in illegitimate ways. God has placed a legitimate need in our hearts for intimacy. We see this fact in Scripture. Genesis 2:18 says: “It is not good for man to be alone.” Sexual addiction, whether to pornography, compulsive masturbation, repeated affairs or other sexual stimuli outside of marriage is counterfeit intimacy. This attempt at intimacy leaves a person feeling worthless, empty and helpless. The more a person uses this distorted sense of sexuality, the more it hinders them from being able to develop healthy and wholesome relationships. In 1 Corinthians 6:13 we're told, “The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord.”

As believers we know that while the world will define sexuality differently and often be more accepting of risky sexual behaviors, God has called us to a much higher standard of sexual purity and integrity. Through the amazing grace of Jesus sexual addiction can be overcome. Through the power of God a person can be set free. ☞



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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.

BETHEL

► **Linden Church** will host a wild game supper Feb. 12, 6 p.m. Bobby Humphrey will be the guest speaker. Tickets may be purchased at the door. Families are encouraged to participate. The church also will host a ladies luncheon Feb. 20, 11 a.m. The worship leader will be Brittany Lowe and the guest speaker will be Jami Webb. Purchase tickets in advance. Call the church office at 334-295-4278, ext. 1. William "Billy" Harris is pastor.

BIBB

► **Centreville Church** will host its Wild Game Dinner on Feb. 6, 5:30 p.m. Billy Harris will be the guest speaker. Please bring your favorite wild game

dish or dessert and invite your friends or family. Kenneth Fuller is pastor.

COLUMBIA

► **Malvern Church** will host Dirt Road Sports, of Colquitt, Georgia, on Feb. 7, 6:30 p.m. Everyone is invited. Hosea Parker is pastor.

GENEVA

► **New Hinson Church, Slocumb**, will host a barbecue cook-off Feb. 6. Judging will be held at 5 p.m. with dinner at 6 p.m. Deadline to enter is Jan. 29. For more information call 334-886-3097. Bryan Klobe is pastor. ► **Maple Avenue Church, Geneva**, will host its 39er's C.L.U.B. luncheon Feb.

9, 11 a.m. Bill Pritchett will be the guest speaker. For more information and reservations call 334-684-9617. Mike Shirah is pastor.

HALE

► **Community Church, Moundville**, will celebrate its 35th anniversary Feb. 7, 11 a.m. The Alabama Baptist Historical Commission will present the church with a letter and all former members are invited to participate. Jerry Koster is pastor.

WEST CULLMAN

► **First Church, Cullman**, will host a senior adult luncheon Feb. 5, 11 a.m. Christian comedian Billy Bob Bohannon will perform. Kevin Wilburn is pastor. ☞

Shocco to host weekend retreat for pre-teens

What do a surfing theme, hundreds of pre-teens, the state of Alabama and the month of February have in common? Easy — it's Pre-Teen Extreme 2016 (PTX2016) held Feb. 26–27 at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center's Adventure Camp facilities in Talladega.

A unique opportunity for students in grades 4–6 to gather and "nose dive into God's Word," PTX2016 will combine its theme of "Hang Ten" with lessons on how to be bold in your faith and how to share Christ with friends without fear.

The weekend will host guest speaker Kenneth Bruce, pastor of disciple making and students for Westwood Baptist Church, Alabaster.

Pre-teens will be able to par-

ticipate in adventure games, team building activities like the zip line, high and low ropes and a giant swing, as well worship at the third annual event. PTX leadership and Shocco Springs staff will supervise activities.

'Most important years'

Ric Callahan, pastor of families at Westwood Baptist, helped organize and start the first PTX and is the retreat's director (see Ministry Tips, this page, for tips on pre-teen ministry in your

church).

Grades 4–6 "are some of the most important years spiritually and relationally for children. ... We think a weekend away from home is the perfect opportunity for pre-teens to really dig into their faith and learn what it means to be a disciple of Jesus," Callahan said.

For more information about PTX2016, email tmaltz@ewestwood.org or Callahan at rcallahan@ewestwood.org or call 205-283-3246. (TAB)



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Baptist NEWS BRIEFS

COMPILED FROM WIRE SERVICES

WMU Foundation to grant more MK scholarships

BIRMINGHAM — The Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) Foundation will grant a greater number of college scholarships to missionary kids (MKs) in 2016, thanks to two estate gifts totaling \$65,000.

The foundation recently received the gifts and will add them to the endowments that support MK scholarships. The WMU Foundation currently offers scholarships for International Mission Board and North American Mission Board MKs.

"We know college tuition can be a real challenge for missionary families," said David George, WMU Foundation president. "WMU has a long history of supporting MKs and we will do everything in our power to provide as much scholarship support to as many qualified applicants as possible."

During the past 20 years, the WMU Foundation has granted scholarships to more than 400 MKs.

The number of applicants has increased in recent years, and many MKs who apply are turned down only because the funding has not been available. (BP)

CP 1.26 percent ahead through first quarter

NASHVILLE — Year-to-date contributions through the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) portion of the Cooperative Program (CP) are 1.26 percent ahead of the same time frame at the end of 2014 and 1.85 percent under the SBC CP Allocation Budget projection for the year according to a news release from SBC Executive Committee President and CEO Frank S. Page.

The \$45,762,032.53 received from Oct. 1, 2015, through Dec. 31, 2015, for distribution through the CP Allocation Budget represents 98.15 percent of the \$46,625,000 year-to-date budgeted amount to support Southern Baptist ministries globally and across North America. The total is \$568,051.82, or 1.26 percent, above the 2015 first quarter total of \$45,193,980.71.

CP allocation receipts for SBC work totaled \$13,948,903.24 in December 2015. Designated gifts received in December 2015 amounted to \$3,748,815.09. (BP)

IMB missionary to deaf dies of heart attack

MERIDIAN, Mississippi — International Mission Board missionary Ray Hodgins died of a heart attack Jan. 18 while on stateside assignment in Mississippi. He was 52.

Hodgins trained and empowered deaf believers in three countries: Uruguay, Paraguay and Mexico. He was appointed as a missionary with his wife, Cindy, in 2001.

Hodgins is survived by his wife and four children. (BP)

Ministry Tips

PRE-TEEN MINISTRY

By Ric Callahan

Pastor of families
Westwood Baptist Church, Alabaster

One of my favorite age groups is our pre-teens, those who are 4th–6th graders. The children in this category are smart, energetic and fun. They like to hang out with friends and love to learn new things about God.

Because of their uniqueness we minister to them in different ways.

They are not "little kids" and they really don't fit in a youth or student ministry either. They are in a transitional phase of life and are rapidly changing — physically, emotionally and mentally. They are dealing with pressures that are unique to them in regards to relationships, families and challenges at school. This group is constantly exposed to mature issues they are not equipped to process. In addition they are savvy enough to understand and relate

to the world through the Internet and other social media.

Churches that recognize the needs of early adolescence can and should consider developing ministries to meet these needs. A strategically developed plan to assist during this wonderful transition in life can address many of the cultural challenges of Christianity.

Specifically designed ministries and programs need to be implemented in churches

just for this demographic. Missions trips, retreats, camps, leadership training, fun Bible study groups, dynamic worship and service opportunities must all be considered when developing a comprehensive pre-teen ministry.

Whatever the vision you choose, do it soon. These kids and their families are vital to the ministry of your church and to the Kingdom. ☞



**TAB
augmented
reality**



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Knowing God

God Is Triune

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

Last week we were challenged to think of God as spiritual in nature as well as personal. The challenge becomes even greater this week as we read in the Bible that God has shown Himself to be both a unity and a trinity. As for His unity, we confess ourselves to be believers in one God. And in this confession we are right on target with how God has revealed Himself. However, at the same time He has revealed Himself to exist in three persons, a trinity within unity. The fact that oneness and threeness can both be true of God defies all mathematical precision, but this is how God introduces Himself in Scripture. We conclude from the Bible that the eternal God reveals Himself as “Father, Son and Holy Spirit,” with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence or being.

In contrast

In the Old Testament we find an emphasis on the unity or oneness of God, which stood in marked contrast to the multiplicity of gods among Israel’s neighbors. In the New Testament we encounter an emphasis on the threeness of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We come to the conclusion that the truth of God in three Persons came into view only as He progressively revealed Himself. The fullness and clarity of God’s self-revelation as a Trinity of Persons awaited the coming of Christ and outpouring of the Spirit. Attempts to explain how trinity and unity both apply to God always fall short in one way or another. For example one common attempt points to a man who can be a father, a son and a brother while being one individual. However, these human distinctions are distinctions of relationships and roles, while God’s threeness belongs to His essential being and nature.

As has been said in previous weeks in relation to His being, God is eternal and personal. This also is to be said

of each of the Persons who comprise God’s fullness. Just as God the Father is eternal and personal, so is God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. While the Son came into the world incarnate in human flesh, He is the eternal Son of God. What He is, He has always been and always will be.

Personal and eternal

In like manner the Spirit is personal and eternal. He has always been and we should always think and speak of Him in personal terms, such as “the Spirit, He” rather than “the Spirit, it.” In light of the fullness of God’s revelation about His nature as three Persons, we can hear intimations of this trinity of being in Genesis 1:26: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness.’”

We are in step with God’s self-revelation when we ascribe to His threefold being terms like equality, distinction and cooperation. As to equality, neither the Father, Son or Spirit is inferior to the other two, nor any one of the three superior to the other two. Within the essential unity of the Three, the Bible ascribes certain distinctions to the work of the Father, Son and Spirit. For example we might say with biblical warrant that as Christians we have been selected by the Father, saved through the Son and sealed with the Spirit. Or, with Scripture, we confess that the Father sent the Son into the world, and the Son sent the Spirit into the world. Again concerning salvation we might say that the Father authored it, the Son accomplished it and the Spirit applies it. ☞

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.



North Korea ranks No. 1 as most dangerous country for Christians

As North Korea once again held its spot for the 14th consecutive year as the most dangerous country for Christians, religious persecution on every continent has appeared to increase, according to a new report.

On Jan. 13, Open Doors released its annual World Watch list of the top 50 countries where it is most dangerous and difficult to be a Christian. According to the list, Islamic extremism “continued to be the primary driving force behind the expansion of persecution, with its rise being the lead generator of persecution for 35 out of the 50 nations on the list.”

This year’s top 10 included (1) North Korea, (2) Iraq, (3) Eritrea, (4) Afghanistan, (5) Syria, (6) Pakistan, (7) Somalia, (8) Sudan, (9) Iran and (10) Libya.

“The levels of exclusion, discrimination and violence against Christians is unprecedented, spreading and intensifying,” said David Curry, president and CEO of Open Doors USA, in a media release. “Christians longing to stay in their home countries are being forced to flee for their lives and for their children’s lives. The 2016 Open Doors World Watch List demonstrates that persecution isn’t just a Christian problem; it’s a global problem.”

According to the report, more than 7,000 Christians were killed worldwide for faith-related reasons. The loss of life during that reporting period, Open Doors said, is an increase of nearly 3,000 compared to the

2015 list. “This excludes North Korea and some of Syria and Iraq where accurate records do not exist,” the report noted.

“More than 2,400 churches were attacked or damaged, which is more than double the number from last year’s list.”

In 2015 conflict and persecution continued to drive mass displacement in the Middle East, leaving 12.5 million refugees throughout the region, according to Open Doors.

“More than 1 million migrants traveled from the Horn of Africa and the Middle East to Europe in hopes of safer and better lives,” the report said. “In what was the largest Christian city in Syria, Aleppo, the Christian population has been reduced from 400,000 to a mere 60,000. Many Syrian refugees have given up hope of ever being able to return to their war-torn homeland.”

While North Korea remained at the top of the 2016 list, Eritrea and Pakistan rose to No. 3 and No. 6 respectively. They were the two largest countries to go up the list. Libya entered the top 10 for the first time.

The report defines Christian persecution “as any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. Examples include imprisonment, torture, beatings, rape and loss of home and assets.”

Curry said, “The Open Doors World Watch List serves as a clarion call to pray, advocate and remember [our] persecuted fellow Christians.” (BP)

TAB augmented reality

Watch your complimentary
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Photo by Chris McCaghren

As part of your subscription to *The Alabama Baptist*, you have been receiving a complimentary eight-minute lecture taught by Samford University President Andrew Westmoreland. Use your Aurasma app to watch the last of these eight lectures on Christian leadership from Romans by placing your mobile device over this photo. App instructions noted on page 13.

'The Church and Sexuality' conference to equip believers on how to address today's sexual issues

Today's culture is teeming with sexual issues — from the Supreme Court's ruling to allow same-sex "marriage" to the hacking of the Ashley Madison website, an "online store" for extramarital affairs. But what can the Church do to help? And how can believers be equipped to know how to handle these issues with biblical wisdom and Christlike compassion?

"The Church and Sexuality" conference will be held Feb. 29, 10 a.m. to 3:45 p.m., at First Baptist Church, Montgomery, immediately prior to the Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference.

Featuring keynote speakers Russell Moore, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission pres-

ident, and Timothy George, dean of Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, "The Church and Sexuality" will address issues of sexuality from both a biblical and cultural perspective.

'The biblical Truth'

Moore will cover the topic "Engaging the Culture Without Losing the Gospel" and George will address "The Biblical Truth About Sexuality in a Morally Relative Age." Two panel discussions will tackle "Religious Liberty in a Culture of Moral Decline" and "Taking This Back to My Church."

Multiple breakout sessions will be available to participants and will include: "Someone in

My Life is Gay — What Do I Do?" with Teman Knight; "They're Saying I'm Intolerant: Communicating a Biblical Perspective in a 'Co-Exist' Culture" with Tommy Treadwell; "Appropriate Policies and Procedures for Your Church: Navigating the New Cultural Landscape" with Jim Swedenburg; "Why Did God Make Me Like This: Questions About Gender Identity" with Rod Campbell; and "Keeping the Home Fires Burning: Sexuality Within Marriage" with Dale and Jena Forehand. Most of the sessions will be available to view online after the conference.

To register for the event, visit alsbom.org/event/churchand-sexualityconference. (TAB)

SBOM hosts Every Believer a Witness training

Looking for ways to mobilize your church body for evangelism?

The Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions has begun a series of training sessions for Every Believer a Witness, a ministry designed to motivate and train church members to share Christ with others.

Encouraging the church

During the clinic, pastors learn how to teach a seven-sermon series to encourage the church body and start a culture of outreach in their congregations.

The next available training sessions are:

► Feb. 16, Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills

► Feb. 18, Parker Memorial Baptist Church, Anniston

- March 22, Ozark Baptist Church
- March 24, First Baptist Church, Greenville
- April 12, First Baptist Church, Bay Minette
- April 14, First Baptist Church, Demopolis
- April 26, First Baptist Church, Fayette
- April 28, Highland Baptist Church, Florence
- May 24, Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville
- May 26, Broadway Baptist Church, Rainsville

All training sessions are 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Those interested in participating in a session must register at least 10 days prior to the event.

For more information or to register a session, visit <https://alsbom.org/everybeliever>. (TAB)



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New pulpit dedicated in member's honor



Photo by Tom Hester

Calcedonia Baptist Church, Centre, dedicates its new pulpit in honor of Kenneth 'Tater' Stinson, pictured here, the church's oldest member. Stinson was honored in November 2015 for his many years of service to the Cherokee Baptist Association church and his work on the previous pulpit that was built in 1959. The new pulpit was constructed by church member Tom Hester. Jimmy Pritchett is pastor.

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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

GLUTTONY AND HOMOSEXUALITY

I recently heard the following statement, "Pastors should only preach on homosexuality as often as they do other sins such as gluttony." Here are a few thoughts on this idea.

The statement carries some truth. Sadly many pastors have focused on homosexuality so much that they have developed their preaching ministry into weekly gay-bashing sessions from the pulpit. No wonder the lost world associates the word "evangelicals" with the term "gay-haters." This is why ministers should never misuse the pulpit by harping on certain sins and ignoring others. Instead of shutting a possible door of ministry by radiating a spirit of condemnation, the Church must find a way to leave the door of ministry open by speaking the truth in love.

However, the statement also is seriously flawed. In light of the cultural shift I do believe it is vital that pastors preach on homosexuality more often than gluttony because culture is not aggressively trying to convince society that gluttony is OK. Weight Watchers and Jenny Craig are quick to warn of the health risks associated with overeating. Culture understands overeating is not a good thing to

embrace and frowns upon anyone who would see obesity as a positive life choice. This is in stark contrast to how our culture has responded to homosexuality. Culture says homosexuality is a good thing to accept. Society has increasingly demonstrated an attitude of tolerance and sees homosexuality as an accepted life choice. Yet this is the very reason why Christians must speak the truth in love. Because of direct attacks from social progressives on the Bible's position on homosexuality, Christians must defend the truth of God's Word. My purpose in preaching on homosexuality is not to condemn the sinner but to combat the cultural shift.

Pastor Eric Martin
Seventh Street Baptist Church,
Cullman, Ala.

QUALITY OF MEMBERS

Your editorial comment in the Jan. 7 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*, "Best of Both Worlds," caught my interest and should also be of interest to all Southern Baptist church members.

Being close to your age group I remember your mention of W.A. Criswell, John Bisagno and other strong Christian servants such as H. Hobbs and others that were dedicated to the Christian ministry. Back in that day I believe

church members were more dedicated to the Lord's work than they are today.

It is my belief that the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) should be less concerned about large membership numbers, both in church and in Sunday School, and instead concentrate on the quality of its members.

It is easy to be a church member but not as easy to be an active Christian. This became more apparent to me while living many years in the Arabic world among Muslims. I've seen dedicated Muslims convert in Lebanon and then drug out of the church pew at worship time and killed in the street. My thoughts at the time were, "Would I be that dedicated to Jesus and give my life?"

When the local church truly fulfills its obligation of winning souls, teaching them God's Word and encouraging them to stand up and be counted as a serving Christian, then church members will be like they were 60 years ago and attend the SBC annual meeting.

Bob Lewis
Camden, Ala. 🇺🇸

Baptists to observe BWA Day 2016

Baptist World Sunday was established in 1927 as a day to "express and promote unity and fellowship among the Baptists of the world."

Today its known as Baptist World Alliance (BWA) Day and this year it will be held Feb. 6-7. It is a time when Baptists are encouraged to worship together and pray for one another, recognizing the work of Baptists throughout the world.

BWA was founded in 1905 and consists of 231 conventions and unions in 121 countries and terri-

tories comprising 42 million members in 177,000 churches.

BWA Day 2016 will emphasize the affirmation of Baptist identity within the worldwide Christian family. Several resources are available for churches that would like to participate and can be found at www.bwanet.org.

For more information on the event, call 1-703-790-8980, ext. 171 or 137 or email pandd@bwanet.org. (TAB)

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Historical HIGHLIGHTS

FROM PREVIOUS ISSUES OF THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



50 Years Ago January 1966

The 1966 State Evangelism Conference was held at Dauphin Way Baptist Church, Mobile, on Jan. 24–25. The theme of the conference was “Spiritual Conquest — ’66” and the host pastor was Harold W. Seever. The closing session was a giant rally of 4,000.

Bill Glass, who plays for the Cleveland Browns, was the concluding speaker. The freezing rain and cold failed to dampen the spirits of the crowd that listened as Glass emphasized the importance of communicating the gospel: “Stop trying to be spiritual policemen and concern yourself with sharing your faith.”

Roland Jarrard, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions’ secretary of evangelism, deemed the conference a success and said the closing youth and laymen rally would be

planned again for the following year.

100 Years Ago January 1916

The Alabama Baptist highlighted January Schools for Preachers that were beginning to grow within the state. A map was published indicating the locations where pastors would go into rural communities to train and encourage their colleagues much like a peer-led seminary. The school included such faculty as L.O. Dawson, of Grove Hill, and L.L. Gwaltney, of Bay Minette, who later became editor of the state Baptist paper.

“The opportunity to weld our ministry into a more solidified body is at our very door,” the article stated. Sponsors hoped to see an increase from 1915 when the school had met the needs of 125 pastors.

Also in January 1916, Birmingham hosted the first National Missionary Campaign convention encouraging laymen to become involved in missions. The meeting was a “notable gathering of inspiration.” Each city and county was asked to send their preacher and strongest laymen to the event. This conference would be a passing of the torch to involve others in the congregation in the missions field during a time when mainly preachers served in this capacity.

150 Years Ago January 1866

In 1865, *The Alabama Baptist*, published at the time as *The South Western Baptist*, was shut down by federal officers who fined Editor Samuel Henderson \$20,000. The paper was publishing secular as well as religious news at the time, and Henderson was vocal about

his support of secession. The paper did not resume publication in Alabama until 1873. Instead Alabama Baptists received their news through an “Alabama Department” section of Georgia’s Baptist newspaper, *Christian Index*.

The *Christian Index* relied on the editor of *The South Western Baptist* to provide information to fill the section. On Jan. 17 the federal garrison, which had been occupying Tuskegee where *The South Western Baptist* was published, departed. Gov. Patton made an address to the Alabama Legislature stating that as soon as the Alabama state militia could be armed the entire state would be relieved of federal garrisons. “Thanks to the wise and patriotic policy of President Johnson, we now begin to breathe easier and to feel a better day is at hand,” the paper stated. ☞

Want to know GOD?

Pastor David R. Mills
Shiloh Baptist Church, Ralph

Have you considered today’s high school students are too young to remember 9/11? An event seared into our memories as adults is literally “history” for an entire generation. They believe in 9/11 solely from the evidence. Suppose you were talking with some high school students and they said, “Actually because 2001 was so long ago we really question whether 9/11 even took place.” How would you react? Most likely you would counter, “But it did happen. Just look at all the evidence. And I am a witness.” If the students maintained their disbelief you would know they had a fundamental flaw in their reasoning; namely, they err in believing truth cannot be sustained over time.

In this light what is your belief concerning the resurrection of Jesus? Perhaps you are approaching the evidence for the resurrection with flawed reasoning. The preservation of such a monumental event as the resurrection across two millennia is not only possible but it’s also fundamentally unrelated to the length of time that has transpired since it took place.

The entire basis of the Christian faith is predicated on the historical truth claim that Jesus died and came back to life. At the point of the crucifixion Jesus’ disciples failed to understand that the Old Testament prophets had clearly predicted the sacrificial death of the Messiah (Isa. 53; Dan. 9:26). The disciples were shocked to see Jesus alive again. However, after touching Him, talking to Him and absolutely confirming Jesus was indeed alive they radically changed. Soon after Christ was crucified, Peter and John publicly declared Jesus was “the One whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses” (Acts 3:15). The resurrection validates the death of Jesus as a sacrifice for your sin. “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation” (Rom. 10:9). ☞

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For information about placing a classified ad, contact the advertising department of *The Alabama Baptist at 205-870-4720, ext. 102, or ads@thealabamabaptist.org. Copy deadline is two weeks before publication.

CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

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

PASTOR

Calvary Baptist Church in Abbeville, Alabama, is seeking a full-time pastor. Send resumes to: calvarypersonnel@comcast.net, or by mail to: Calvary Baptist Church, 310 Dothan Rd., Abbeville, AL 36310, ATTN: Pastor Search Committee.

PASTOR

Southside Baptist Church of Andalusia is seeking a full-time pastor. If God is leading you to a new place of service, consider Southside where you will find a strong and loving congregation, a supportive paid and volunteer staff, solid finances and a dynamic, evangelistic and missions-minded atmosphere. God may have just the right assignment for you in Andalusia. Send your resume by Feb. 15 to: Pastor Search Committee, Southside Baptist Church, 1213 West Bypass, Andalusia, AL 36420, or email to: southside@sbcandalusia.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR
Chapel Hill Baptist Church is

searching for a bivocational pastor for our church. Please send resume to: Pastor Search, ATTN: Mike Moody, 2489 Gopher Ridge Rd., Samson, AL 36477.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

First Baptist Church of McCalla, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor. Interested parties may email resumes to: mccallab@att.net, or mail them to: P.O. Box 268, McCalla, AL 35111. Phone number is 205-477-6131.

WORSHIP LEADER

Cullman County church seeking full/part-time qualified worship leader. Worship style is primarily praise and worship led by the worship leader and worship team. Please send a cover letter and current resume to: ckpenn4@gmail.com. No phone calls or on-site visits will be accepted. Deadline to submit resume will be March 1.

MUSIC/WORSHIP LEADER

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

PART-TIME MUSIC MINISTER

Siluria Baptist Church in Alabaster is seeking a music minister to direct blended worship. Send resume to: 10696 Highway 119 South, Alabaster, AL 35007, or by email to: Siluriabaptist@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL MINISTER OF MUSIC

Contact Bro. Jason Meaux at jmeaux@turnervillebaptist.org.

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.

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Rashional thoughts

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Executive editor • jrash@thealabamabaptist.org

Shockingly speechless

Yes, the rumors are true. I can confirm I was indeed left speechless earlier this month — not only once but twice. Many were shocked to witness the historic events.

Editor Bob Terry and *The Alabama Baptist* staff get all the credit as they found a way to surprise me with a feature article and a party celebrating my 20th anniversary with Alabama's state Baptist newspaper. And if that weren't special enough, I also received calls, emails, letters, texts, Facebook posts, tweets, video messages, gifts and personal appearances by friends and family from various parts of the state, across the nation and around the world.

It is still hard for me to believe all of that was done for me. I remain speechless and thank all of you for honoring me the way you did.

I know that finding me speechless once, much less several times, is hard to believe, especially for the number of you who referred to my "gift of gab" in the notes you wrote. And you know me well, I do like to talk — a lot.

But 2016 has discovered a more contemplative version of me so far. Along with the celebratory moments, another anniversary struck other emotions.

Marking the date

January 17 marked one year since my young niece and god-daughter Belle Mitchell left us for heaven (to read more about her cancer journey, visit "Snapshots of Belle" at www.rashionalthoughts.com).

It is true what the grief experts say — you do adapt and learn to live without the person you are missing — but the ache of missing him or her lives on. I'm not sure I realized the degree of how much I missed Belle would actually increase with time but it is happening. I find myself con-

tinually needing a hug from her, wanting desperately to hear her laugh and/or wishing for one more silly moment with her.

Still I hold on to what others have shared with me — each day we live is one day closer to being with her again. And each day we have an opportunity to do great things for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We can choose to tackle each day and make a difference for the Kingdom or we can fall into a pit and let the enemy convince us we are not able to keep moving.

Believe me, I've fallen into the pit a few times and some days I might have been easily convinced to stay there, but every time a friend or family member came along and pulled me out, reminding me to keep my eyes on Jesus.

Again, I am overwhelmed with the love surrounding me, and I am convicted to not take it for granted or overlook others who might slip past our gaze and be falling further and further into their own pit.

The lyrics in Sidewalk Prophets' "Save My Life" touch on this point:

"... You come here every Friday night; I take your order and try to be polite; And hide what I've been going through; If you looked me right in the eye; Would you see the pain deep inside; Would you take the time to;

Tell me what I need to hear; Tell me that I'm not forgotten; Show me there's a God. ..."

Belle taught me how to love unconditionally (consistently showing grace, mercy and forgiveness while also showing others there is a God), live life to its fullest (despite the obstacles that undoubtedly will appear in your path) and laugh as much as possible (even amid the pain and fear). She knew how to celebrate life — and I want to be like Belle when I grow up. 🙏

Rashional Extras...

TAB augmented reality

How to know God more

Excerpt from the soon-to-be-released book "I Don't Wait Anymore: Letting Go of Expectations and Grasping God's Adventure for You" by Grace Thornton

The only step is to come to the Word with open hands and a heart of desire, and from there God begins to rewrite our miniscule view of Him into something grandiose. Revelation enlarges our hearts for God, shaves off the burden of the worldly things we dream of. The more we drop, the higher we can hold our empty hands.

Here are a few practices that have helped me along the way. ... It's not a formula but it is a place to start.

► Spend time with God.

There's no way around this one.

► Find your own rhythm.

It's not about legalism, but it is about discipline — we care enough to set aside the time and the effort to get to know the God of the universe.

► Read. Read lots. And then read some more.

It's vital that we read from the perspective that we're going to learn more about who God is, not read a guidebook to our lives. It was always meant to be about God, not us. But learning who He is — and learning what His love looks like — changes everything about us. ... (We also need to understand) why God did what He did at that time and place.

► Find a structure that works for you.

There are methods and plans and all kinds of helps out there to

provide structure for Bible reading. ... For me the thing that's been most effective is a plan that has me reading in several different places in the Bible at one time, with a little bookmark for each section. If I want to read something from all of the sections, I can, or if I want to only read one and really meditate on it and pray over it for a long time that day, I can. That way I'm always moving forward but never falling behind, and I never feel like I have to frantically catch up.

► Let the words soak in.

Give yourself the time and space to read a passage, re-read it verse by verse, let the words soak into your mind and heart. Let the truth wash over you in a way that it sticks. Memorize verses and passages that speak needed truth to your soul.

► Journal, if you like.

I write what God is teaching me, I write verses that jump out at me and sometimes I write out my prayers.

► Talk with others.

Even though our relationship with God is really personal, it also was meant to be lived in community. In talking about what God's teaching us in His Word, we sharpen each other.

EDITOR'S NOTE — "I Don't Wait Anymore: Letting Go of Expectations and Grasping God's Adventure for You" by Grace Thornton will be released May 10. Visit <http://tinyurl.com/gthorn-ton2016> to preorder your copy.

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"Being a disciple of Jesus means more than just believing in Jesus. A disciple wants to learn from the Master in order to live and love like the Master. The disciplines of the Christian life are those practices which shape us into the likeness of Christ. They begin to shape our conduct, influence our priorities and determine our character. The Bible describes us as the clay which is formed by the Potter."

Pastor Darrell Cook
Dogwood Grove Baptist Church, Adger
Excerpt from his "A Certain Trumpet" column on prayer in the Jan. 14 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*

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JUDSON COLLEGE

► **Judson College to Host Master Piano Class:** Judson College in Marion will welcome nationally certified piano instructor Amy Aberg McLelland to campus for a presentation and master class on "The Art of Effortless Piano Playing" on Jan. 29. This event, set for 1–3 p.m., is open to the public and free of charge. Space is limited. For more information or to reserve seating, contact Cindy St. Clair at 334-683-5187 or cstclair@judson.edu.

SAMFORD UNIVERSITY

► **Samford University Oral History Project Collects Memories of Missions, Wars, Civil Rights Era:** Samford University's Office of University Historian and University Library's Special Collection and University Archives Department in Birmingham have collaborated to create STORI, the Samford Traditions and Oral His-

tory Recording Initiative.

The STORI project is an opportunity to revitalize the oral history work that began in the 1970s. Many alumni, retired faculty and board members have been interviewed as part of the institutional research initiative leading up to Samford's 175th anniversary. The site can be viewed at <http://oralhistory.samford.edu/>.

► Christian Author, Musician to Speak at Luncheon:

The Samford University Legacy League will host Kelly Minter as guest speaker at its scholarship luncheon Jan. 28 at 11:30 a.m. Minter, a Christian author, musician, Bible study creator and speaker, is passionate about women discovering Jesus through Scripture. For more information, visit www.samford.edu/legacy-league or call 205-726-2247.

UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

► **Alabama Metal Artist to be Featured Speaker at University of Mobile Febru-**

ary Art Talk: The University of Mobile's (UMobile) Marilyn Foley Art Gallery will feature Alabama-based metal artist Catherine Partain Shamblin at Art Talk on Feb. 18 at 1 p.m. Shamblin's exhibit, "The Way of Forgiveness: Found Object Sculpture by Catherine Partain Shamblin," is on display through Feb. 26. For more information, contact Phillip Counselman at 251-442-2283 or pcounselman@umobile.edu.

► **University of Mobile Invites Students to Jan. 29 Visit Day:** The University of Mobile (UMobile) will welcome prospective students and their families for visit day Jan. 29. Students who attend a visit day and later enroll may earn a \$2,000 scholarship. Register for a UMobile visit day online at www.umobile.edu/visit or call 251-442-2222. The next visit day is March 18.

► **University of Mobile Presidential Search Update:** To keep up with information related to the University of Mobile's presidential search, visit umobile.edu/presidentialsearch.

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Answers in Genesis conference schedule

Sunday, Feb. 28

9 AM Dr. Terry Mortenson — Dinosaurs: Have You Been Brainwashed? (youth/college session)
10:15 AM Ken Ham — Genesis & the State of the Culture
6 PM Ken Ham — One Blood, One Race
7:30 PM Dr. Terry Mortenson — Millions of Years: Where Did the Idea Come From?

Monday, Feb. 29

9 AM Ken Ham — Dinosaurs for Kids (grades K–6)
11 AM Ken Ham — Science Confirms the Bible (grades 7–12)
6:30 PM Ken Ham — Communicating the Christian Message in a Secular World
8 PM Dr. Terry Mortenson — Noah's Flood: Washing Away Millions of Years

For more information, visit answersoutreach.org/Florence16



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TAB augmented reality

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- 1** Download the Aurasma app from your app store.
- 2** Choose the "ALBaptist" profile under channel and tap "Follow." You will only have to do this one time. (Any ALBaptist options will allow you to follow *The Alabama Baptist*.)
- 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.
- 7** Each week when TAB arrives, open the app and hold your device over the augmented reality articles.

American pastor Saeed Abedini's release from prison in Iran a result of prayer, according to family, supporters

After three-and-a-half-years of imprisonment in Iran, American pastor Saeed Abedini has been released.

He was freed Jan. 16 and arrived in the United States on Jan. 21 after receiving medical care in Germany.

Abedini was staying at a retreat center with his parents until his wife, Naghmeh, and two children arrived Jan. 25, according to news reports.

Naghmeh Abedini said prior to his arrival in the U.S., "We are ready to welcome him home. ... The kids are really excited because they are making welcome home signs."

"There's a lot of readjustment and a lot of healing that needs to happen," she said. "It's time for our family to heal and to move forward."

Saeed Abedini was serving an eight-year prison sentence because of his Christian faith.

The American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ) lobbied extensively for Saeed Abedini's release, which was announced the morning of Jan. 16, but had been considered imminent for two months, ACLJ Chief Counsel Jay Sekulow said in a video on the ACLJ website.

Grateful for support

In a conversation with Sekulow, the pastor expressed thanks for his release.

"I cannot underscore enough how grateful he is for the tireless efforts of the millions of people who prayed and spoke out for his freedom over the last nearly three-and-a-half years," Sekulow said of Saeed Abedini.

"In a phone call from a U.S. military hospital in Germany where he's being treated, Pastor Saeed thanked our entire ACLJ team and the more than 1.1 million ACLJ members who

worked to secure his freedom, saying, 'May God bless you for everything you did.'"

In several of Naghmeh Abedini's Facebook posts she spoke of her husband's health.

"I am talking to Saeed right now," she posted at 3:39 p.m. Jan. 17. "He is doing well."

Thank you all for your prayers."

Saeed Abedini had already landed in Germany, via Geneva, Switzerland, his wife noted.

She spoke with President Barack Obama a couple hours earlier.

"President Obama just ... called [me] moments ago and congratulated our family on Saeed's release," she wrote just after 1 p.m.

Negotiations

"We had met with President Obama [in 2015] and he had promised that getting Saeed out of Iran was a high priority for him," she wrote. "I could see his love and compassion as he spoke last year and again today."

The Obama administration secured the release of Saeed Abedini and three other Americans in a prisoner swap amid nuclear disarmament negotiations.

In turn, the U.S. is granting clemency to six Iranian-Americans and one Iranian serving sentences or awaiting trial in the U.S., President Obama announced.

Washington Post reporter Jason Rezaian, U.S. Marine veteran Amir Hekmati of Flint, Michigan, and Nosratollah Khosravi-Roodsari also were released, although Khosravi-Roodsari has chosen to remain in Iran, NBC News reported.

'Move of God'

Released independently of the prisoner exchange was Matthew Trevithick, a Boston University graduate studying Farsi in Tehran, who has already arrived at his home in Hingham, Massachusetts, according to NBC News.

The release of Saeed Abedini and the other Americans was the result of prayer and the Lord's intervention, Sekulow noted.

"We want to rejoice that the Lord has set these individuals free," Sekulow said.

"At the end of the day this was a move of God because so many circumstances had to line up correctly for this to happen, and it did," he said. "And that's not humans doing that; that is the Lord and we were just instruments to do our part."

Saeed Abedini had been sentenced Jan. 27, 2013, on charges he threatened national security by planting house churches in Iran years earlier and had been under house arrest since July 2012. (BP)

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Reverse Mortgage News

By Jimmy Dixon

This past week I had the privilege of helping folks with their reverse mortgage applications in Foley, Jackson, Arley and Birmingham. In the next couple of weeks I plan to help others in Wetumpka, Maplesville, Oneonta and more. The advantage of doing business face to face instead of over the phone or through the mail is for my customers, but I must admit, I love getting to know people and it helps to see the house.

When I travel to my customers there's another advantage for them — they never have to leave their home during the entire reverse mortgage process. Normally we do all the paperwork at the kitchen table, which means the application and then the closing. I have had some folks who would

rather do the paperwork at a restaurant and that is fine. If it's around meal time, I'll even pick up the tab. Regardless of where the table for the paperwork is, I'll make the



Jimmy Dixon

process as easy for you as I can. I learned this from the One I've been following for a long time now, He said, "My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Please give me a call and I'll be glad to talk with you about Him and about reverse mortgages. Got questions?

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



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32. They gave ____ money unto the soldiers. (Matt. 28:12)
33. Doth not even ____ itself teach you. (1 Cor. 11:14)
34. Lydia, a ____ of purple. (Acts 16:14)
35. ____ the son of Kushiayah. (1 Chron. 15:17)
36. They will be done in earth, ____ it ____ in heaven. (Matt. 6:10)
39. Western slang for "girl."
42. Arad, and _____. (1 Chron. 8:15)
43. The Jews of ____ sought to stone thee. (John 11:8)
46. I ____ no pleasant bread. (Dan. 10:3)
47. Master of Health Administration. (abbr.)
50. Saying, ____, thou that destroyedst the temple. (Mark 15:29)
52. Before Christ is B.C.; Anno Domini is ____.

'Bigger than US'

Christian band Building 429 encourages students to take bold stand for Christ

By Leann Callaway
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

With its new album, "Unashamed," the Dove Award-winning band Building 429 hopes to encourage students to take a bold stand for Christ in their schools and communities.

"Through this record we wanted to get people talking about their testimony and how God has given them hope," lead singer Jason Roy said. "When you look around the world today and hear the news stories, you realize this world is desperate for hope."

"This album is very much about events in our society today and how Christians are constantly under attack for their beliefs. Our band is a body of believers and we want to show others how our lives have been transformed by the gospel."

All the songs on the album are centered around the theme of Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile."

In addition to Roy, the group consists of guitarist Jesse Garcia, bass player Aaron Branch and drummer Michael Anderson.

During concerts Roy often shares his life experiences and struggles in hopes of connecting students to the gospel.

'God at work'

"In my own life there is so much more power when I admit my weaknesses and failures and show the path that looked broken and messed up," Roy said. "When I admit that by the goodness and grace of God, I have found salvation and it has completely changed the direction of my life, it shows the power of God at work."

Growing up Roy dealt with issues surrounding his parents' divorce, including heartbreak, pain and bitterness that carried over into his teenage years.

Those emotions intensified after Roy discovered that his father,



Photo courtesy of Merge PR

a weight-lifting champion, had become addicted to performance enhancing drugs and other illegal substances.

Peace amid turmoil

Seeking relief from his turbulent home life, Roy began attending a local church with friends and became active in the youth group.

"When I was 15, I accepted Christ because I wanted to know peace and love in the middle of the turmoil in my life," Roy said.

"A major struggle was coming to terms with who my father was and who he wasn't. Despite the mess that we were dealing with, I still loved him no matter what. I prayed for him constantly because I realized that the worst thing would be if my dad left this planet without knowing that I loved him and that God loved him."

Roy began using music as a way to express what he was feeling and he wrote songs about his personal struggles.

"I started writing songs about

all the things that I was too scared to say to my dad and all the things I wished I could say to my mom about all the brokenness we experienced. I didn't know where else to turn. Writing songs provided an outlet to express my emotions. All I could do was place my trust in the Lord and rely on Him for the strength to get through each day."

After high school, Roy's interest in music continued and he began performing with friends at local coffeehouses and churches. As the group's popularity began building, it wasn't long before they received invitations to perform at larger gatherings, including conferences and music festivals.

About the same time that Building 429 started touring

across the country, Roy learned that his own relationship with Christ had made a profound impact on his father, who sought relief from his addictions and surrendered his life to the Lord.

"Seeing how my dad's life has changed is a tremendous testimony of God's power and redemption," Roy said.

With their music and message rooted in Scripture, Building 429 desires to provide a source of hope and healing for families dealing with difficult situations.

Their group name is based on Ephesians 4:29: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."



The songs on their album, "Listen to the Sound," helped the band garner recognition as one of Christian music's most influential bands when their hit single "Where I Belong" was listed as Billboard Magazine's No. 1 Christian song of 2012.

Following the success of that project, they released "We Will Not Be Shaken," which debuted at No. 1 on Billboard's Christian albums chart and garnered a Grammy nomination.

The band maintains a busy schedule performing concerts around the country, including "Winter Jam Spectacular Tour." The group also performed on the "Women of Faith Farewell Tour" and was featured on the "Very Merry Christmas Tour" with NewSong.

Building 429's goal is to offer more than a concert when the group performs. The group desires to provide students and young adults with a life-changing encounter.

"At every concert we want to encourage believers to live out their faith in a way that others would know that something is different about their life and it would open the door to share about their living hope and how Christ has changed their life," Roy said.

"One of the messages that I've been sharing at our shows is that we cannot outrun the mercy and grace of God, yet let us not sin inside the freedom we have, but let us draw near to the Lord. We want to encourage people to go deeper. During our concerts our deepest desire is that life change and ministry will take place."

'Along for the ride'

"My favorite part is when a song takes off and you can almost feel it leave your control. When the Holy Spirit moves in the room, you feel like you are just along for the ride. I really look forward to those moments because it continually reminds us that there is something bigger than us at work. During those moments, I'm reminded that the time spent performing ... and traveling really does matter and is building up the Kingdom." 🙏

Staying strong in **faith**

Grizzlies forward maintains trust in God on, off court

By Bill Sorrell
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Questions raced through Jeff Green's mind after a diagnosis did what NBA guards find difficult to do — it stopped him in his tracks.

"Will I live? Will I ever play basketball again? Will I see my family? How did it happen?"

It's a strange feeling, said Green, a Memphis Grizzlies forward, to have "something that you love like basketball and life in general being questioned within seconds of thinking you are fine."

In December 2011, Green learned that the root of his left heart valve, which pumps blood in and out of the heart, was swollen and an aortic aneurism was found during a stress test. Green, who was playing for the Boston Celtics at the time, had surgery in January 2012.

Returning to the NBA, which he entered as a first-round draft and fifth overall pick by the Celtics in 2007, was not foremost in Green's mind as he lay in a hospital bed for six days unable to move.

"My faith in God was all I had. I had to put all my trust in God and that is what I did. It was all in His hands. I had to accept the process, continue to stay strong and show that I am capable of handling the circumstances that He was giving me," Green said.

"I am strong in faith. I am someone who always had to stay strong through the circumstances of life I was dealing with. I always had to trust that path that God was leading me on."

College play

Green played collegiately at Georgetown University in Washington where he was second team All-American and Big East Player of the Year in 2007, averaging 14.3 points per game.

In his seventh season as a pro, Green, who made the NBA All-Rookie first team in 2008, played 2007–08 in Seattle to whom he was traded by Boston; 2008–10 in Oklahoma City; and 2010–14 in Boston. He came to the Grizzlies in 2015. He has averaged 14.1 points per game during his career.

His recovery from heart surgery forced him to

miss the 2012 season. But basketball was not what Green was praying about during that time.

"I honestly wasn't praying about getting back to the game. It was more just seeing another day and getting healthy. The game comes and goes whether you are healthy or not. My thing was being able to see the next day, being able to stay healthy, being able to see my family and hoping they stay strong. Those were my biggest fears."

More significant than the NBA career he has built has been "the character that I have built for myself, ... staying strong in my faith, overcoming the obstacles that I have endured in my life and showing people that this isn't everything," he said. "There is more to life than just basketball. A lot of people just see basketball when they see an NBA player."

Getting back on his feet was rough, Green said, but digging into the Bible has helped.

"I have a lot of people in my life who have helped me with the study of His Word," he said. "I try to keep that strong bond between those people. I try to stay strong and see His Word and use it in my everyday life."

When he was a child he was baptized at a Baptist church in Maryland. While playing for the Oklahoma City Thunder, Green was a member of Fifth Street Missionary Baptist

Church, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

"It's a great church. I found a home there." He continues to stay in contact with its pastor, A. Byron Coleman, who is chaplain of the Thunder.

Green has been a positive presence for the Grizzlies. Memphis point guard Mike Conley calls Green "a phenomenal person" whose faith is evident.

"He has great faith. He believes. You can see it in the way he lives his life. He is a good role model and that is what you want to be in life," Conley said.

Jesus means "everything" to Green.

"He is life," Green said. "He is the one who gives us life. He is the one who watches over us and protects us. We have to put our faith and trust in Him that He is leading us the right way. I wouldn't be here on this court today if it wasn't for Him." ❧



Jeff Green

Photo by Joe Murphy/NBAE via Getty Images

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Ugandan pastor beheaded over land dispute

NANSOLOLO, Uganda — A pastor in eastern Uganda was hacked to death in December 2015 as he and other church members resisted an effort by Muslims to take over their land, area church leaders said.

In Nansololo village near Mazuba, in Namudumba District, Muslims erected a boundary fence with poles and barbed wire that included land of the Pentecostal Church Ministry (PCM), a church elder said. A church member who lives close to the church building called Pastor Bongo Martin, who immediately came to the site.

"Why are you encroaching on the church's land and removing the boundary marks?" Martin asked. A church member said the Muslim leader answered, "We have told you many times that we do not want the church to be located near our mosque. Your church has been taking our members to your church." A Muslim named Abdulhakha Mugen then drew his sword and struck the pastor's neck, church members said. Martin, 32, was then decapitated.

PCM has documents showing it bought the disputed land from Kanya Ephraim for \$1,000, a church leader said.

The church intended to establish an orphanage in the center of Nansololo, but plans are now on hold.

About 85 percent of the people in Uganda are Christian and 11 percent Muslim, with some eastern areas having large Muslim populations. (MS)

Muslims disrupt prayer meeting in Pakistan

NAWAN PIND, Pakistan — Muslims in a town in Pakistan's Punjab Province who seized a church property have disrupted a prayer meeting at a private residence, sources said.

After police arranged a meeting between the Muslims and members of the congregation in Sialkot District on Jan. 4, the Muslims instead armed themselves with guns and machetes and attacked the Christians' family members in their homes, said Bashir Masih, a Christian in Nawan Pind, Sadho Mahal.

When the congregation of about 30 Christians began worshipping, Rashid Jutt, a Muslim in his late 20s, arrived to disrupt the meeting. Jutt was forced to leave but returned the next day with about 30 men and began to attack the Christians.

Masih said, "We immediately telephoned the police emergency helpline and a patrol vehicle arrived there after some time. The police rescued our boys from the attackers' clutches, but they did not arrest any of the Muslims."

Instead police told the Christians to resolve the issue at a village council meeting. Masih said that although none of the Christians were seriously injured, the area's 10 to 12 Christian families were shocked and fearful. (MS)

Baptists in Crimea exorbitantly fined for meeting

SAKI, Crimea — Three of 8 Baptists from Saki in western Crimea who refused to pay fines for holding a public religious meeting were sentenced to 20 hours of community service each between October and December 2015. Five fines were imposed by Judge Irina Shevchenko without a formal court hearing.

A fine of about six weeks' average local wages has been ordered to be automatically deducted from the wages of another Baptist. Items from the homes of four others have been identified for possible seizure. Council of Churches Baptists refuse to pay fines imposed for exercising their freedom of religion or belief.

However, Crimea's Supreme Court has overturned July 2015 fines imposed on two Jehovah's Witnesses distributing religious literature. Meanwhile, after the deadline for all religious communities to re-register with the Russian Justice Ministry expired Jan. 1, only about 400 religious organizations have been re-registered. More than 1,100 religious communities that had legal status under Ukrainian law no longer have legal status under Russian law. (F18)