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The reality — OF — spiritual highs



123rf.com

Spiritual mountaintop experiences not always evidence of spiritual success

By Maggie Walsh
The Alabama Baptist

From Moses seeing the burning bush to Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, the Bible is full of stories of Christians experiencing spiritual highs. This feeling of extreme connectedness to God can drive Christians to hop from church to church in search of more exciting worship or to constantly seek an intensity of God's presence in their lives. And those who exhibit these traits very likely are addicts, Jeanie Miley said.

For them, religion merges with entertainment which creates a spiritual thrill that must be continually chased, said Miley, a Houston-based author and retreat leader whose expertise includes spiritual growth and wholeness.

"Our culture seems to be drawn to that which gives us a buzz or helps

us to escape," said Miley, a member of River Oaks Baptist Church, Houston, Texas, where her husband serves as pastor. "That buzz distracts from emptiness, pain or boredom."

Christians continually striving for the feeling they experienced at a key spiritual moment, or who church hop in search of the more inspiring preacher and worship likely have fallen into this category, she said. The same is true for many who become fixated on the Rapture and other end-times dramas.

It's understandable that Christians want to seek that feeling of being spiritually connected or high, said Lisa Keane, clinical director at Pathways Professional Counseling.

"These times help fuel our relationship with the Lord and help remind us of who God is and what He has promised us," Keane said.

And there is nothing bad about such experiences.

"However, when these experiences become the thing individuals seek more than a daily, relational interaction with God, it often leaves them feeling disappointed or questioning their salvation," she said.

Lucy Worley, central missions and prayer coordinator for Experience Life, a multisite church in West Texas, sensed something wasn't right with her continual pursuit of spiritually intense experiences.

"For a considerable season of my life I thought something was wrong with me because I

no longer felt the way I did when I first came to the Lord," Worley wrote recently for *Relevant*, a magazine of faith and culture. "That 'on fire' feeling I always had as a new believer was suddenly impossible to attain."

She feared that the absence of

the feelings she had as a new Christian invalidated her faith.

"I had had some initial mountaintop experiences and I was now associating those intense emotions with a healthy relationship with God," she wrote in her article, "Faith Isn't All Mountaintop Moments."

"I liked that mountain and I didn't want to put in the effort of climbing a new one."

But these mountaintop experiences must be interlocked with the truth of God's Word, Keane said.

Subjective feelings

"We cannot have one without the other. Salvation is not a feeling. It is a fact. ... Our feelings are often subjective and based on our beliefs or experiences. Scripture lays out promises and truths for us to cling to even when we do not 'feel' God," she said.

It's natural and healthy for Christians to long for a closer relationship with Jesus, Stephen Hall added, but they often try to meet the longing with intense religious experiences.

"When we chase after an 'on-fire' emotional feeling, we pursue (See 'Journey,' page 3)

"When we chase after an 'on-fire' emotional feeling, we pursue the wrong thing."

**Stephen Hall
associate pastor,
NorthPark Baptist Church,
Trussville**

COMMENT

God is Good

One of the repeated emphases of the Old Testament is the goodness of God. Psalm 25:8 declares: “Good and upright is the Lord.” Psalm 86:5 adds: “You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to You.”

The theme continues in Psalm 106:1, “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever.” Those identical words are repeated in the first verse of Psalm 107 and 118.

Not only does the Old Testament declare that God is good, over and over the Bible illustrates God’s goodness. In Moses’ farewell address to Israel as recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy, the great leader describes how God established a special relationship with Jacob (who represents all the people). The writer describes how God shielded him, cared for him and guarded him.

The imagery shifts to a lesson from nature in Deuteronomy 32:11 when the writer uses an eagle to illustrate God’s goodness. When it is time for the next step in the eaglet’s growth, the mother stirs up the nest to hasten the next phase. But she does so protectively. Even though she encourages the young to test its wings and fly, she hovers nearby with comfort and assurance. She even flies beneath the eaglet to catch and carry her young on her pinions if necessary.

‘Ties of love’

Later in Israel’s history, the prophet Hosea would illustrate the goodness of God with a different image. In the opening verses of Chapter 11, Hosea compares Israel to a child whom



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

God taught to walk. Referring to the Exodus experienced, Hosea says God took them by the arms and “led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love.” God “lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them.”

Nutured by God’s goodness

In both illustrations Israel is seen as a needy infant nurtured by the goodness of God.

One cannot think about the goodness of God without recalling Psalm 23 and being reminded of the many ways the goodness of God is described in these memorable verses.

God cares for physical needs by leading to “green pastures.” God guides in the events of life. Instead of the threats of raging waters, God takes His sheep to still waters where they may safely drink. God cares for relationships. “He restores my soul.” He restores the wayward to the flock. He restores the penitent to Himself.

God guides in paths of righteousness, the Psalmist continues. One is not left to his/her

own senses in a confusing world. Rather the Shepherd illustrates His goodness by guiding one in paths of righteousness. With His rod and staff the Shepherd protects and rescues. No wonder one is comforted by such a good God.

Even in life’s darkest hours the Shepherd is present. One never will be abandoned or left alone, not even in the face of death itself.

Is it any wonder the Psalmist said that because of the goodness of God he would never live in want or need?

In Isaiah 46, God Himself speaks to the remnant of Israel in captivity in faraway Babylon. His words first draw attention to His goodness in days past (v. 3). God says He has “upheld (Israel) since you were conceived” and “carried since your birth.” These words affirm the same truth declared by Moses centuries earlier.

Then God turns to the future. In verse 4, God assures, “Even to your old age and gray hairs I am He, I am He who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.”

The goodness of God experienced in the past is the same type of goodness God promises for the future because He is good.

In Isaiah 58:11 the writer says it clearly. “The Lord will guide you always. He will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame.” Like today much of that part of the world was an arid place and water was one of the most precious resources. Because of God’s goodness the writer builds on that analogy and says, “You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.”

Life-giving waters will never fail because God’s goodness never fails.

It is one thing for God to be good. It is another to be in relationship with this good God.

Moses emphasized that this good God had a special relationship with Israel. Hosea looked back on the Exodus and saw how God’s goodness was poured out on Israel in that experience. In Psalm 23 the writer stresses relationship with the shepherd-sheep analogy. Isaiah accentuates relationship with the promise of continuous blessings.

‘His love endures forever’

Perhaps Psalm 48:14 best sums it up. There the Psalmist declares, “For this God is our God forever and ever.”

God is good and God offers Himself in relationship to all who believe in Him through faith in Jesus Christ, the ultimate illustration of God’s goodness toward humankind.

Is it any wonder the Bible celebrates God’s goodness and urges us to “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever”? ¶

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

EDITOR’S NOTE: During the past few weeks The Alabama Baptist has published letters related to the Syrian refugee crisis. These letters prompted stories by secular news outlets inside Alabama and beyond as well as reactions on social media. The letters published have represented a variety of views. Therefore the letters below will be the last published on this topic until there are new developments related to it.

NATIONAL SECURITY

My opposition to “refugees” is simple: national security. Those people invading other countries are mostly young males. They belong with their wives and children back home, protecting them, not on an expedition to cross the borders of other countries. Our agencies do not have

the resources to investigate and deport the terrorists. Muslims are taught in their Quran to kill all who reject Islam, Christians and Jews. A politico/religious group chopping off heads of Christians in their own land should not be considered for entry into our Christian communities. Muslims are not blending into our society if they live off welfare and demand special treatment under “sharia” law instead of accepting and abiding by the United States Constitution.

I submit that these are not refugees but potential terrorists, motivated to take over our country with their own unconstitutional laws. We see misbehavior leeching on donor countries. An honest student of history knows how Muslims have tried to force their pagan life on the world. Muslims are more dangerous than marching

armies of Germany in World War II.

Compromised borders and communities are not the “Christian way.” Misusing the Bible to allow this is stupid and jeopardizes the lives of families.

I am a born-again Christian, deacon and a retired National Guard command sergeant major. I have studied how totalitarians invade democracies. Like the watchman on the wall (Ezek. 33:6), I want to sound the alarm of the dangers.

James J. Kirksey
Robertsdale, Ala.

CANNOT BE WON

The discussion/argument regarding (See ‘Letters,’ page 14)



TAB
THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

"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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Constitutional amendment

Legislation calling for vote for state-sponsored lottery 'on fast track'

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Legislation promoting a state-sponsored lottery seems to be "on the fast track," according to Joe Godfrey, executive director of Alabama Citizens Action Program (ALCAP).

Rep. Alan Harper, R-Northport, is sponsoring House Bill (HB) 13, which calls for a vote of the people to approve or reject a constitutional amendment allowing lottery gambling in Alabama. The lottery would be operated on behalf and for the benefit of the state.

Its companion bill — Senate Bill (SB) 19, sponsored by Sen. Jim McClendon, R-Springville — was still in the Senate Tourism and Marketing Committee at press time.

HB 13 passed out of the House of Representatives Committee on Economic Development and Tourism following public hearings on both bills Feb. 10. It is now eligible to be debated and voted on by the full House of Representatives.

If either version of the bill passes the Legislature and is approved by voters in November, then lawmakers could establish a lottery in the 2017 regular session of the Legislature.

Because the legislation is calling for a constitutional amendment, it will require the approval of two-thirds of both chambers — 63 votes in the House and 21 votes in the Senate — to pass.

Godfrey said it is urgent to contact the state's senators and representatives.

"If we don't stop the legislation now, there will be a bill passed to allow a statewide vote



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

on a lottery and the churches are going to have to fund the fight."

Ask about the details of the bill and find out if casino gambling could be added to the law later without a vote of the people if the bill were to pass, Godfrey noted.

More than lottery gambling?

While McClendon claims the legislation would not allow any other form of gambling to be added, ALCAP legal adviser and Birmingham attorney Eric Johnston disagreed. He said the wording in the bill would allow the Legislature to set up casinos in the state after the constitutional amendment is approved by the people.

Godfrey has been encouraged by those opposed to gambling showing up to voice their concerns and made special mention of two legislators who spoke out.

"I especially want to thank Rep. Arnold Mooney, R-Birmingham, and Rep. Rich Wingo, R-Tuscaloosa, ... who spoke against the bills in each public hearing," he said.

"It is vital that your legislators hear from you, even if you have contacted them in the past," Godfrey said. "We need for them to oppose all pro-gambling bills and procedural votes."

For more information, visit alcap.com.

To contact your legislator, visit capwiz.com/state-al/home/.

'Journey of discovering God is what Christians should strive for'

(continued from page 1)

the wrong thing," said Hall, associate pastor at NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville, who holds a doctor of ministry degree with an emphasis on spiritual formation. "Our pride gets in the way, leading us to think our spiritual high is evidence of our spiritual success."

And if we search for that spiritual high by hopping from church to church, it can add to the struggle of pursuing a mature faith, he said.

"If we are not careful, we will place ourselves in seats of judgment during a church's worship gathering. Instead of engaging the Lord in whatever is being sung or said, we debate the merit, quality or preference of the worship experience," Hall said. "By constantly comparing the

insignificant preferences, we lose sight of the meaning of joining in corporate worship of Almighty God."

Church hopping also can keep Christians from really diving into their sanctification process or pursuit of holiness, Keane said. Being a part of a local church is key to that process.

Take inventory

"I believe God knows we need people in our life to help confront us in our sins and to strive for His righteousness. ... If all we are doing is seeking after an experience that makes us feel good without taking the hard, honest inventory of areas of sin in our life, we will not grow and our relationship with the Lord will be shallow or nonexistent," she said.

"Church hopping keeps people on the surface and keeps individuals from developing the types of relationships that will lead to further sanctification."

Miley notes that the non-mountaintop periods in a Christian's life give them time to process their experiences and to remain open to where God is calling them next.

"God does come and get us through our questions and even through our doubts," she said.

These "flatland" periods also serve as reminders that the spiritual life is one meant for living in society, with all the responsibilities that come with family and jobs, she said.

Keane seconded Miley, adding, "When you choose to avoid the lows or hard times in your life or spiritual walk, you will also be

blunting the highs you could be experiencing."

Keane uses David as an example of a Christ-follower who experienced spiritual mountaintops and valleys and everything in between. "[David] groans about how he is feeling afraid or alone (in one Psalm), yet the next Psalm communicates clearly that he knows God is with him even when that feeling is not present."

At the end of the day, the journey of discovering God is what Christians should strive for, according to Hall.

"It's easy to look down on people when you are on a mountaintop. But any seasoned hiker understands that valleys, meadows, ridges and peaks are all part of the journey.

"Our longing must be for the journey." (BNG contributed)

Evangelical friction



American evangelical Christians split on whether or not to support Trump

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

A unique divide has surfaced among American evangelical Christians during this presidential election season — about half say Donald Trump would be a “good” or “great” president and about half say, “No way.”

On one side leaders like Jerry Falwell Jr., president of Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, and Franklin Graham, president and CEO of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, support Trump and say he is someone who “lives a life of loving and helping others as Jesus taught in the New Testament,” according to Falwell.

Graham agrees with Trump’s position on the United States’ nuclear negotiations with Iran and his stance on not permitting Syrian refugees into the country.

Graham said, “For some time I have been saying that Muslim immigration into the United States should be stopped until we can properly vet them or until the war with Islam is over.”

The other side

On the other side of the spectrum leaders like Russell Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, suggest evangelicals’ support of Trump is “illogical” and told the *New York Times* that “these voters must repudiate everything they believe” to back Trump.

At the heart of the friction is the reality that not all evangelicals think the same way or place importance on the same things. For some, social issues like gay “marriage” and abortion are paramount and would be deal breakers if their candidate held differing views than their own. For others, mostly younger moderates, things like the environment and economic issues hold more weight.

Another issue is the discrepancy in what the word “evangelical” actually means (see sidebar, this page).

For Moore, presenting Trump as “though he were a Christian is dangerous to the mission of the Church.”

“And then glossing over real character issues (is dangerous) when evangelicals

When you say ‘evangelical,’ what do you mean?

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

During an election season you might hear the term “evangelical” thrown around a lot. You may go to an evangelical Christian church, or at least think that you do, and may even call yourself an evangelical. But what does that term actually mean, especially when it comes to the polls?

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines “evangelical” as “of or relating to a Christian sect or group ... emphasizing salvation by faith in the atoning death of Jesus Christ through personal conversion, the authority of Scripture and the importance of preaching as contrasted with ritual.”

But when it comes to the polls the definition of “evangelical” is not quite as solid. It often depends on the method of measurement. For instance in one estimation more than one-third of Americans are evangelical. But another estimation says only 1 in 10 are evangelical. That’s a drastic difference.

So where does the discrepancy come from?

For one thing many polls simply ask a person how they identify themselves. If a person doesn’t know what “evangelical” means, they may mark incorrectly. Some polls even separate “evangelical” from “born-again Christian,” making it even more confusing.

Adding modifiers

Some polls add modifiers, like “white evangelical.” According to Pew Research, this is important because whites consistently vote conservatively and republican, whereas African-American Protestants are some of the most strongly and consistently democratic voters.

The term “evangelical” also comes with its own baggage, according to *Christianity Today*. Some equate “evangelical” with “narrow minded,” “fundamentalist,” “intolerant” and even “hate-monger.”

Instead of allowing society to define “evangelical” with negative terms, Chris-

tians need to understand what it means and then define it first, according to Anthony L. Blair, president and dean of Evangelical Seminary in Myerstown, Pennsylvania.

An evangelical Christian should offer “what we ourselves have experienced: an encounter with the mysteries of the kingdom of God in the realities of everyday life; a love that unites us with persistent, passionate gentleness into repentance and transformation; and the unspeakable joy of intimate companionship with the Savior of our souls,” Blair wrote in *Christianity Today*.

“Because of that experience our gospel is inherently Christological. Our core proclamation is that Jesus is Lord of all and the divine lover of our souls. Like the woman at the well, we run excitedly to our neighbors, even (or especially) those who have marginalized us, and we joyfully invite, ‘Come see a Man who knows everything about me ... and loves me still.’”



TRUMP

have been very clear (on their stance) on character issues when it comes to politicians with whom we disagree on multiple issues. That’s sending a signal that, I think, hurts our witness,” Moore said.

Some of those character issues include Trump’s two divorces, multiple affairs and history of using vulgar language as well as previously supporting abortion rights.

But Trump’s bold promise to help “Make America Great Again” still appeals to religious voters who have felt abandoned by Republicans.

Most Americans have consistently said it is important to them

that the president have strong religious beliefs but when it comes to Trump, according to a recent Pew Research Center survey, there’s a shift in thinking.

Although Trump is not widely viewed as a religious person, he is widely viewed by Republicans (56 percent of GOP vot-

ers) as a potentially “good” or “great” president, according to the survey. But only 5 percent of the 2,009 adults surveyed saw Trump as “very” religious, where 37 percent saw him as “not at all” religious.

These numbers are drastically different from other leading GOP candidates. Virtually all Republicans who express a view about their religiousness and who think Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio and Ben Carson would be successful presidents also say they view those candidates as “somewhat” religious. But just 2 percent of GOP voters think Rubio would be a “good” president and say he is “not particularly” religious and just 1 percent say the same thing about Cruz and Carson.

Results from the Iowa caucus Feb. 1 show that despite Trump’s “lack of religiousness,” he still came in second with 24.3 percent of the votes. Cruz won with 27.6 percent. There were a record 186,000 Republicans that participated in the caucus, with 45 percent of them participating for the first time.

Despite the dispute over Trump and other “religious” or “not religious” candidates, Ronnie Floyd, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, told Fox News he thinks Southern Baptists and other Christians should absolutely take part in the election and keep a biblical perspective while doing so.

‘Trust the Lord’

“Think about an America where 60 million Jesus-loving, God-fearing men and women stepped into their voting booths this election season — not with the intention of electing a ‘Christian president’ but with the intention of faithfully living out biblical values in the public square,” Floyd wrote in his opinion piece.

“When we know we have worked in the processes and prayed for the Lord’s will to be done, when all is concluded, we have the peace to trust the Lord who is sovereign over all affairs.” (BP, Pew contributed)

Baptist NEWS BRIEFS

COMPILED FROM WIRE SERVICES

National WMU exec. director search committee in place

BIRMINGHAM — National Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) President Linda Cooper has issued a call to prayer for those serving on the national search committee charged with identifying the woman God would have as the next executive director for national WMU.

On Jan. 11, Wanda Lee, who has served as executive director since 2000, announced to the WMU board her intention to retire.

The committee members are Joy Bolton, executive director of Kentucky WMU, who will serve as chairperson; Debby Akerman, former national

WMU president (2010–2015); Jill McNicol, president of Illinois WMU; Kathy Sheldon, president of Pennsylvania/South Jersey WMU; and June Tate, president of Colorado WMU.

Recommendations and resumés may be sent to WMU Search Committee, c/o Joy Bolton, Kentucky WMU, 13420 Eastpoint Centre Drive, Louisville, KY 40223; or to Joy.Bolton@kybaptist.org to be received no later than May 1. (WMU)



Supreme Court to hear from faith-based nonprofits

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court will hear oral arguments March 23 from faith-based nonprofits, including the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) insurance provider, GuideStone Financial Resources, claiming an Obamacare requirement violates their religious beliefs.

Some of the plaintiffs, such as the Catholic order Little Sisters of the Poor, oppose all forms of birth control. Others — like GuideStone, Truett-McConnell College in Cleveland, Georgia; East Texas Baptist University in Marshall; Houston Baptist University in Texas; and Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee — object to methods of birth control that take effect after the moment of conception.

The Department of Health and Human Services seeks to accommodate faith-based charities by allowing them to opt out of contraceptive coverage in their own health care plans. The lawsuits say the opt-out provision forces religious nonprofits to act in violation of their beliefs because "self-certification" would trigger the third-party coverage of "immoral" drugs. (BNG)

CP 6.07 percent above year-to-date budgeted projection

NASHVILLE — Year-to-date contributions to Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) national and international missions and ministries received by the SBC Executive Committee (EC) are 6.07 percent above the year-to-date budgeted projection and 1.91

percent above contributions received during the same time frame in 2015, according to a news release from EC President and CEO Frank S. Page.

As of Jan. 31, gifts received by the EC for distribution through the CP totaled \$65,938,701.74, or 106.07 percent of the \$62,166,666.67 year-to-date budgeted amount. The total is \$1,236,665.97 more than the \$64,702,035.77 received through the end of January 2015. (BP)



COOPERATIVE PROGRAM

Northern Baptist Seminary gets new president

CHICAGO — A pastor with Alabama ties who for nearly 20 years has led Baptist churches in the South will take the helm of Northern Baptist Theological Seminary in suburban Chicago, the school's board of trustees announced Jan. 29.

William D. Shiell, pastor of First Baptist Church, Tallahassee, Florida, will become president of the century-old seminary in Lombard, Illinois, on March 1. He has been pastor of First, Tallahassee, since 2013, following a nine-year pastorate at First Baptist Church, Knoxville, Tennessee. He is a graduate of Samford University in Birmingham and holds degrees from Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary in Waco, Texas. (BNG)

'Repugnant' + unacceptable

Purdue staff member threatens to rape pro-lifers

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

A Purdue University staff member recently took to Facebook with his pro-choice opinions, but in the process he landed himself under investigation over threatened rape and hate-type speech.

Jamie Newman, an accompanist and composer for the Division of Dance in Purdue's Visual and Performing Arts Department, expressed his outrage against Purdue Students for Life's posting flyers about the high number of abortions in the African-American community around the West Lafayette, Indiana, campus.

'Vile, racist'

In the Facebook post Feb. 3, Newman called the pro-life group "vile, racist idiots."

On StudentsforLife.org, Newman also posted, "And that you should have pulled this stunt at the beginning of Black History Month suggests that you are epically clueless or profoundly malicious. So which is [it] — embarrassingly dumb or simply evil?"

Later Newman posted on Live Action News, the media arm of the pro-life group Live Action, that he would rape the wife, daughter and great-grandmother of a pro-life commenter on the site.

In response to a comment by another user, Newman said, "Oh, I'm sorry. So, let me make my intentions quite explicit: I did in fact offer to rape Tom's wife/daughter/great-grandmother. Free of charge, even. I'm generous that way."

By Feb. 11, Purdue had closed the case. Brian Zink, university spokesman, reported that police had not found "sufficient evidence to take action" against Newman.

"As far as the university is concerned, the speech was repugnant and inconsistent with Purdue values," a Purdue statement read. "We don't condone it, but at this time no personnel action is intended."

Newman told the *Lafayette Journal & Courier* that his com-

ments were taken out of context and that the idea that he would rape anyone was "false and defamatory" and "a complete fabrication."

According to Indiana law, "A person who communicates a threat to another person, with the intent ... that the other person engage in conduct against the other person's will" has committed a class-D felony by making the threat.

On its Facebook page, Purdue itself saw backlash for having Newman on staff and not firing him immediately. The university also received countless calls from students, parents and alumni, according to jconline.com.

Julia Rosa, university spokeswoman, said a group of students filed a complaint Feb. 10 with the Purdue University Police Department.

At press time university officials were not available to comment on details of the investigation. ¶



NEWMAN

TAB Talks interviews Joe Godfrey



Photo by Neisha Roberts

The Alabama Baptist debuted its TAB Talks, live-interview conversations with ministry leaders throughout the state and nation, during the Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting November 2015, at Eastern Shore Baptist Church, Daphne. Here, Bob Terry (center with microphone), editor of the paper, interviews Joe Godfrey, Alabama Citizens Action Program executive director. Godfrey discussed the seriousness of the governor's decision to remove top-level enforcement of gambling laws in Alabama.



'Highly' ENGAGED

Alabama Baptist colleges integrate faith, learning

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Officials at Alabama's three Baptist institutions of Christian higher education did not hesitate when asked which model matched their school — engaged, of course.

"Engaged" is 1 of 4 categories outlined in the Mennonite Brethren theological journal *Direction* article on "Christian Higher Education: Engaging Society and Culture" by Merrill Ewert.

The institutions in the engaged category are described as ones that "examine their own basic values and faith commitments but then are also purposeful in promoting service and outreach in uniquely Christian ways. They are both high on reflection and high on action. ... [T]hey are engaged."

The three other categories are cloister, activist and minimalist. Those in the cloister category are high in reflection but low in action. Institutions in the activist



Photo courtesy of the University of Mobile
University of Mobile students from the School of Business wash vehicles at Dumas Wesley Community Center.

category are high in action but low in reflection, and schools in the minimalist category are low in both reflection and action.

"[Engaged institutions] ... build partnerships with people, communities and institutions in ways that promote student learning while also solving real-world

problems," Ewert explains in the article. "Professors draw on their disciplinary scholarship not only to teach students in the classroom but also to address the needs of society."

Scott Bullard, senior vice president and academic dean of Judson College in Marion, said

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SPOTLIGHT ON CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

the professors at Judson partner with the school's administration and office of faith-based service learning to ensure learning and spiritual growth take place inside and outside the classroom.

"We actually don't separate ... intellectual growth and spiritual growth," he said. "They are symbiotic and synergistic."

"Our motivation for service is unmistakably Christian," Bullard said, noting examples such as:

- ▶ an honors project in the social work department focusing on the importance of friendships for the elderly which includes Judson students spending time with residents of a local nursing home,

- ▶ an art class working with students in a school district whose funding for the arts has been taken away and

- ▶ an accounting program helping Marion residents with tax returns.

"These projects, while similar to those that occur at many institutions, are buttressed at Judson by the gospel of Matthew's idea that Christians in particular are to feed the hungry, visit the prisoner (and) take care of widows and orphans."

Judson President David Potts echoed those sentiments.

"We take very seriously the words of Christ where He calls us to outreach and ministry with

the poor, those in prison and those held captive by various life issues.

"Not only do we do good things ... but we are actually using what we are teaching and learning in the classroom," he noted. "Service components are part of the syllabi and part of the work of the class."

'To the least of these'

At the beginning of each new school year, the service outreach initiatives are launched with a day where students, faculty and staff are sent to work in area schools, workplaces and ministry offices. At the close of the day the Judson teams come back together to read Matthew 25.

"We use that time to think about the difference we will choose to make in outreach in our community in the coming academic year," Potts said, noting Judson is the only private college in Alabama to be listed as a community engagement institution by the Carnegie Foundation.

The other three Alabama schools listed in that category are Alabama, Auburn and the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

"Think about the ... millions of dollars they spend on outreach and service as part of their mission and look at Judson (See 'Students,' page 8)

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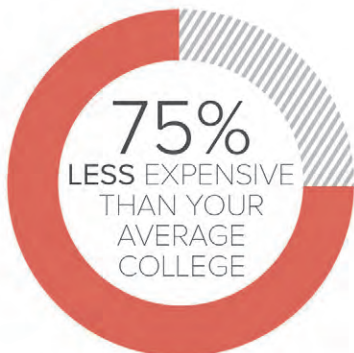
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“If we want our graduates to be change agents, we need to provide our students with opportunities and examples.” – Mark Foley, president, University of Mobile

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Ann Judson

Missionary to Burma
Translator
Advocate for girls' education
Judson namesake, ca. 1838

Dana Graham

Summer missionary
Student-athlete
Future girls' basketball coach
Judson alumna, ca. 2017

JUDSON COLLEGE

Who are you going to be?

Students apply theories they hear to realities of the world

(continued from page 7)

College in the middle of the blackbelt with a service-learning budget of under \$70,000,” Potts said. “It is extraordinary that Baptists can claim support for an institution that has such a distinguished record of service and outreach.”

The University of Mobile (UMobile) also has made a name for itself with faith-based service, President Mark Foley said.

“One day each fall we cancel classes for Project Serve so that students, faculty and staff can volunteer with their academic areas in 63 locations across two counties,” he said, noting the various departments also serve in other ways throughout the year.

Serving others

For instance, “during the past five semesters the School of Christian Ministries students, faculty and staff have served more than 48,000 hours locally,” Foley

said. “According to the IRS valuation of the monetary worth of volunteer hours, that amounts to an investment in our community of over \$1.1 million.

“If we want our graduates to be change agents, we need to provide our students with opportunities and examples of how to effectively use their knowledge and talents to effect change,” he said, noting the following examples of how that is played out at UMobile:

- ▶ business students starting and operating a clothes closet at a local community center,
- ▶ the basketball team helping with field day at an elementary school and
- ▶ ministry students tutoring athletes at a local high school.

“A defining vision for the University of Mobile is the idea of ‘Changing Lives to Change the World’ by integrating learning, faith and leadership to produce graduates capable of effecting

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Photo by Caroline Summers

Samford University pre-pharmacy students pack hygiene bags for the Backpack Buddy organization during Samford Gives Back, a campus-wide service initiative.

change,” Foley said. “We do this in ways that identify us as a highly engaged university that equips and empowers students to solve real-world problems from a distinctly Christian worldview.

“A university changes the world through the influence of her graduates — men and women of character who have mastered a body of knowledge according to their degree, who know how to think, who know what they believe and why they believe it, who have the courage to live and work according to those beliefs, and who have the willingness and the skill to use their influence in appropriate and effective ways to change the world around them,” he

explained. “Our emphasis on a Christian worldview across all academic disciplines is key to impacting students and preparing them to effectively use their influence.”

‘Faith into action’

At Samford University in Birmingham, Dana Basinger, assistant dean for Howard College of Arts and Sciences, is one of many professors who incorporate service into the classroom.

“That is how students learn to apply the theories they hear to the realities of the world,” she said. “That’s also how they learn to put faith into action. For instance, students in my classes (See ‘Volunteering,’ page 10)

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Volunteering in service teaches 'being new creation of God'

(continued from page 9)
provide tutoring and other after-school services for Birmingham's Restoration Academy.

"Samford students become so committed to the needs of those whom they are serving that they continue to volunteer long after my class has ended," Basinger said.

"And that's just one of the many examples where our students serve here and around the world," she said.

"Service learning has been a hallmark of Samford University for decades, and the current generation of students is more committed to it than other recent generations. We don't have to coerce them into action."

'Proactive and positive'

J. Michael Hardin, Samford provost and vice president, added that the faculty and staff lead the students in proactive and positive academic learning and in how to think about the world from their faith perspective.

"We have faculty in many fields whose research is nationally recognized and often is based on the individual's expe-

riences in how they apply the research in their profession and in the community," he said. "Our faculty and staff also actively lead our students to serve others."

"Last year alone, our students engaged in more than 719,000 hours of community service across the spectrum and around the world," Hardin said. "We make service learning an integral part of the curriculum, both on the undergraduate and graduate/professional levels."

"And we do that without compromising our identity as an academically rigorous university fully committed to our Christian mission."

"At Samford we teach our students that it does not matter who to fault for the problems of the world," he said. "Our goal is to do the work of God's kingdom here on earth and for heaven because of the hope for the future that is exemplified by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, as reflected in Scripture."

"Our job at Samford is to help students understand the concept of being the new creation of God by engaging them in doing and serving." ✝

SPOTLIGHT ON CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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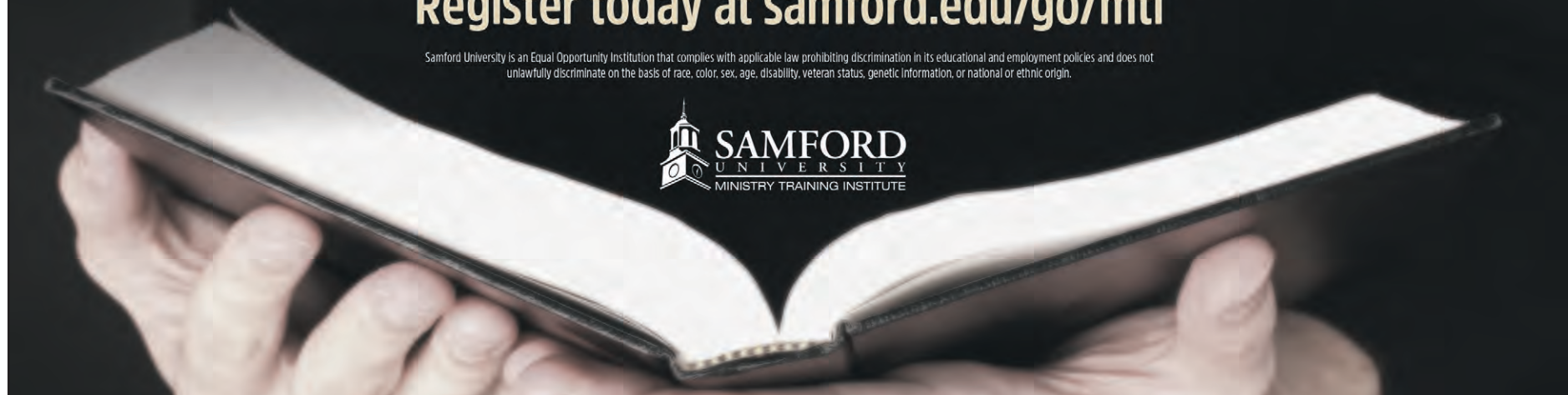
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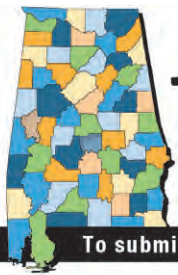
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ALABAMA-CRENSHAW

► **Ben Chandler** is the new director of missions (DOM) for **Alabama-Crenshaw Association**. He previously served as DOM for St. Clair Association before his retirement Jan. 31. He also served at Springfield Church, Brundidge, and First Church, Dawes, in Mobile, as well as DOM for Tennessee River Association. He holds a bachelor of science degree from Troy State University (now Troy University),



CHANDLER

a master of divinity degree from Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and a doctor of ministry degree from Midwestern Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri. He and his wife, Patricia, have two children and five grandchildren. His official start date is March 1.

BLOUNT

► **Pleasant View Missionary Church, Holly Pond**, will hold its regular third Sunday night singing Feb. 21, 6 p.m. with Unity Quartet from Scottsboro. For more information call 256-796-5986 or 256-590-4468. Randy Burtram is pastor.

BETHEL

► **Linden Church** will host

Frontline, an annual youth conference, Feb. 26, 6 p.m. The event is for students grades 6–12. Bethany Barr Phillips will lead worship and Robbie Robison will speak. For more information contact Lynda Roberson at 334-295-4278, ext. 3. Billy Harris is pastor.

CENTRAL

► **Ray Church, Alexander City**, held a retirement dinner for Edith Spivey on Jan. 24. Spivey served as the church secretary and treasurer for more than 30 years. Mike Jones is pastor.

MADISON

► **Travis Collins** is the new pastor of **First Church, Huntsville**. He previously served as interim pastor at Gayton Church, Richmond, Virginia. He also served as interim pastor at First Church, Huntsville. He holds a bachelor's degree from Samford University in Birmingham and a master of divinity degree and a doctor of philosophy with an em-

phasis on missions from Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He began the position Feb. 7 after it was announced to the church Jan. 31. He and his wife, Keri, have three children and two grandchildren.



COLLINS

MONTGOMERY

► **Eastern Hills Church, Montgomery**, will host guest preacher Harper Shannon, who served as the church's second pastor from 1959 to 1962, Feb. 21. The service will be one of many events to celebrate the church's 60th anniversary. Shannon also served as director of the office of evangelism for the State Board of Missions from 1985 to 1997. Rick Marshall is pastor. ✝

Pope, Russia's patriarch meet for first time

At a historic meeting Feb. 12, Pope Francis and Russia's Orthodox Patriarch Kirill of Moscow signed a joint declaration on the issue of persecuted Christians in the Middle East and North Africa. That they met at all was significant since both Churches have had a long-held hostility against each other after splitting in the 11th Century, mainly over the issue of papal authority, according to bbc.com.

About two-thirds of the world's 225 million Orthodox Christians are Russian, hence the need for a healed relationship between the two.

But it's not that other leaders haven't tried to fix the divide. Previous popes have attempted to end the Great Schism of 1054 but have failed because of various issues.

A driving force behind the meeting at Jose Marti International Airport in Havana, Cuba, the BBC reported, was the realization "that when Christians are persecuted or driven out of their homes in the Middle East and Africa, their killers are not interested in which Christian denomination they come from." So the Churches have some common ground in regards to protecting their own. Intersecting itineraries also made the meeting possible, with both leaders visiting Latin America at the same time.

Reconciliation

Patriarch Kirill also reportedly has made "warmer" steps to reconcile with the Orthodox Church than his predecessors, and although he doesn't represent the whole Eastern Church, he does speak for a large portion of it.

"Moscow may also be keen to reassert its relevance on the global religious stage as well as in secular foreign affairs after its decades of official Soviet atheism," according to bbc.com.

Does this mean the Great Schism is over? Not likely, according to news sources. But it does represent a hopeful future for both Churches.

The Holy See and the Moscow Patriarchate said in a joint statement that the meeting "marks an important stage in relations between the two Churches. The Holy See and the Moscow Patriarchate hope that it will also be a sign of hope for all people of goodwill." (Neisha Roberts)

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10:15 AM Ken Ham — Genesis & the State of the Culture	11 AM Ken Ham — Science Confirms the Bible (grades 7-12)
6 PM Ken Ham — One Blood, One Race	6:30 PM Ken Ham — Communicating the Christian Message in a Secular World
7:30 PM Dr. Terry Mortenson — Millions of Years: Where Did the Idea Come From?	8 PM Dr. Terry Mortenson — Noah's Flood: Washing Away Millions of Years

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Busby, Allison Norieta, Repton: Eastwood BC of Monroeville
Cobb, Faye & Allison, Thomasville, GA: Faye & Wayne Parker
Cross, Margaret, Linden: Progressive SS of Providence BC of Gallion
Davis, Adolph, Linden: Providence BC of Gallion
Dickerson, Carolyn "Pickle", Irondale: Billy & Katrine Moore
Dyess, Robert, Gautier, MS: Carlton & Virginia Sharpless
Faircloth, Peggy, Birmingham: Marjorie Kay Nix, Mr. & Mrs. J. Wray Pearce
Farrior, Myrtha: Wilma F. Revel
Farrior, Mr. & Mrs. W. C., Luverne: Wilma F. Revel
Gibbs, Eddie, Marion Junction: Clifford & Sara Melton
Grissett, James W., Andalusia: Ottis & Betty Reynolds
Gunn, Ernestine B.: Carlton & Virginia Sharpless
Harrelson, Mrs. Luzine, McKenzie: Durant Chapel BC of Bay Minette
Howard, Elton, Birmingham: Mr. & Mrs. J. Wray Pearce
Jackson, Eleanor, Birmingham: Mr. & Mrs. J. Wray Pearce
Julian, Roy L., Vincennes, TN: Durant Chapel BC of Bay Minette
Knight, Terrell Bice, Alpharetta, GA: Mary Ann Short
Lassiter, Max C., Huntsville: Mr. & Mrs. J. Wray Pearce
Mandy, Robert W., Huntsville: Mary Ann Short

Miller, Diane, Pell City: Harlan & Annette Taylor
Mixon, Lois, Bay Minette: Faye & Wayne Parker
Moore, Stephen Eric, Red Bay: Billy & Katrine Moore
Oglesby, Marshall C., Gilbertown: Sarah A. Gibson
Salter, Katherine Ryland, Bay Minette: John T. Salter, Faye S. Parker & Elaine Roley
Sanford, Jimmie, Dadeville: Faye & Wayne Parker
Short, Donald H., Norcross, GA: Mary Ann Short
Tibbs, Violet, Hueytown: Concord BC of Bessemer
Tucker, Jerry, Huntsville: Faye & Wayne Parker
Walker, Vicki, Birmingham: Marjorie Kay Nix, Mr. & Mrs. J. Wray Pearce
Weeden, Ray, Selma: Clifford & Sara Melton
West, Bobby, West Blocton: Clifford & Sara Melton
White, Lois, Smiths: Mr. & Mrs. J. Wray Pearce
Wisener, Houston, Salem: Pleasant Grove BC of Salem
Wood, Elizabeth, Selma: Clifford & Sara Melton

Honors are listed below (the name of the honoree is bolded).

Abbott, Rev. Bill & Susan, Southside: Mrs. Zoe Benefield
Craig, Tom & Dottie, Birmingham: Buddy & Emily Kirk
Farrior, Myra, Luverne: Wilma F. Revel
Gibson, Joseph & Teresa, Butler: Sarah A. Gibson
Gibson, Samuel, Jr., Berea, KY: Sarah A. Gibson
Hall, Joe & Marjorie, Gadsden: Mrs. Zoe Benefield
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Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

By Joanne Sloan

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



2016 marks 200 years since AME Church's founder was elected as first bishop

Richard Allen (1760–1831), one of America's most influential black leaders, was the founder of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. This year is the 200th anniversary of his election as the church's first bishop.

The United States Postal Service honored him Feb. 2 with a stamp as part of its ongoing Black Heritage Series.

Allen was born a slave in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on Feb. 14, 1760. When he was 8 his owner, Philadelphia lawyer Benjamin Chew, sold him and his family to Stokeley Sturgis, a plantation owner in Delaware. Because of financial problems Sturgis soon sold Allen's mother and three of his siblings.

'I cried unto Him'

When he was around 17 he experienced a conversion. "I cried unto Him who delighteth to hear the prayers of a

poor sinner and all of a sudden my dungeon shook, my chains flew off, and glory to God, ... the Lord, for Christ's sake, had heard my prayers and pardoned all my sins," he said.

After Allen joined the Methodist church he influenced his master, Sturgis, to become a Christian. Sturgis then gave his slaves the opportunity to buy their way out of slavery. In 1783, after working extra jobs for five years, Allen bought his freedom for \$2,000.

He began preaching in Methodist churches in the Baltimore, Maryland, area.

Returning to Philadelphia in 1786, he joined St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church. He preached to African-Americans at special services at 5 a.m. on Sundays.

When they began attending regular morning services, the church started segregated seating. Because of this segrega-

tion Allen decided that black congregants needed a separate church. In 1787 he and other black Methodists formed the Free African Society in Philadelphia.

Allen founded the AME Church in 1794. It was the first independent black denomination in the United States. His church, Mother Bethel AME Church, is located on the oldest church property in the U.S. to be continuously owned by blacks.

In April 1816, Allen was elected bishop of the AME Church. He was the first black bishop in the U.S.

After his first wife, Flora, died in 1800, Allen married Sarah Bass, a widow. They had six children.

In addition to maintaining a home Sarah Allen led a missionary group which helped the clergy and the needy.

The Allens had a passion for education and organized day schools for children.



ALLEN

They also were fervent abolitionists. Their home and the basement of their church served as stops on the Underground Railroad.

Richard Allen died March 26, 1831, at his home. Many white people and free blacks from across the nation attended his funeral.

'One of the purest friends'

Abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison wrote that Allen was "one of the purest friends and patriots that ever exerted his energies in favor of civil and religious liberty."

Sarah Allen died in 1849 and was buried next to her husband on the lower level of Mother Bethel AME. Today the site houses the Richard Allen Museum.

Allen's legacy remains strong. Mother Bethel AME still holds services and today the AME Church has 2.5 million members, 8,000 ministers and 6,200 congregations. ☛

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Imam suspect in Christian's killing

An imam who threatened a convert from Islam in eastern Uganda has been arrested in connection with the killing of a 28-year-old Christian.

Laurence Maiso's body was found at his house Jan. 27 around 5 p.m. in Numuseru village, Naboa Sub-County in Budaka District.

Four days earlier, Imam Kamulali Hussein had met him and his wife on a local road. According to Maiso's wife, the imam told him, "You have refused to join us. Do you know that Allah does not want us to have a kafir (infidel) neighbor? And you should know that Allah is about to send to you the angel of death in your house."

Four days later Maiso's wife went to see a friend in nearby Lupada village. She returned to find her husband dead on the floor. The next day Hussein was arrested. Police were still looking for other suspects at press time. (MS)

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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR



(continued from page 2)
the refugees is one that cannot be won by either side. *TAB* has certainly sparked the topic by printing the original letter in the Jan. 21 issue and the response letters in the Feb. 4 issue.

One writer stated, "These are not people who hate America, hate Christians and vow to destroy our way of life." I encourage everyone to go to YouTube and watch the video: "Islamic Scholar Outlines Islam's Intentions for America." The speaker's statements are coming from what the Quran teaches in Sura 9:29. There are many other similar videos of Islamic leaders speaking of the destruction of America. True, not all Muslims are radicals. Not all who say they are Christians truly follow Christ either.

All this to say, I am a veteran that loves this country, a deacon that loves his church and a former International Mission Board missionary that loves all God's people around the world. But I do not believe the Bible says anywhere that we have to allow people that do not want us to exist into the U.S. and love them here. Can we not love them where they are? Try to reach them where they are? I am certainly no prophet, but if

you look at what is already happening in places in the U.S. such as Dearborn, Michigan, marching in the streets condemning Americans and America, you can see that without some restraints and regulations, we too may someday in the near future become refugees ourselves. Then where will we go?

Calvin Wolverton
Clay, Ala.

SUPPORT OF SESSOMS

Let me start by saying that I 100 percent support Pastor Sessoms' letter. For other so-called Southern Baptist Convention leaders to call his letter "garbage" is another attempt at political correctness, which is weakening this great country.

Pastor Sessoms didn't call for destroying the Syrian Muslims or Muslims at all. What he pointed out is simple: if we stand by and allow these "refugees" into our country without a proper vetting system we are setting ourselves up for failure.

We can no longer put our heads in the sand and stand by while factions of enemies of the United States walk onto our soil, in our own backyard and potentially plan attacks.

Yes we are to love our enemies. And at this point in time in history, we need to love them from afar.

I consider my church family "like-minded believers." Why aren't other Middle Eastern countries bending over backwards to take in these refugees? The refugees would be going to be with other "like-minded believers" due to their shared faith in Islam. I'll tell you why.

Other Middle Eastern countries know what they will be possibly getting. They understand that ISIS has planned to infiltrate the refugees with fighters in order to gain access to countries they ordinarily wouldn't be able to have access to.

I know many Christians feel, as I do, that our country is headed in the wrong direction. And while we wait on our heavenly home we need to protect our homeland, our families and certainly our children's future.

Scott Manns Sr., Pastor
Midway Baptist Church,
Thomasville, Ala. ✝

Men, women pray together at Western Wall

Making the new prayer space at the Western Wall was meant to be "historic" and "revolutionary," creating a permanent area where male and female non-Orthodox Jews could worship together.

But it also has underscored a divide between Israel's Orthodox and the Diaspora, or Jews living outside of Israel.

Rabbi Uri Regev told *The New York Times* that too much attention has been devoted to the Western Wall in comparison to work done in other areas of Israeli life where many Jews have been suffering under the strictly Orthodox rabbinate — which doesn't even recognize Reform or Conservative Judaism as Judaism at all. Under this control many immigrants do not qualify as fully Jewish and cannot even be married or buried in Israel.

Regev thinks the compromise of the new prayer space is "in some sense ... dramatic. I hope that this euphoric phase will not weaken our ability to look reality in the face ... and understand that compelling battles still lie ahead."

The new prayer space will be governed by a committee comprised of the Jewish Agency and will include representatives from the Reform and Conservative movements, the Jewish

Federations of North America, the Israeli government and Women of the Wall, a group that has been bucking the male-dominated Western Wall for 27 years. (Neisha Roberts)

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Men's Hall of Fame seeks nominations

The Alabama Men's Hall of Fame is seeking nominations for its 2016 induction class. Nomination deadline is March 15.

The Hall of Fame recognizes men who are native to or identify closely with the state and who have made significant contributions on a state, national or international scale.

All nominees must have been deceased for more than two years.

A nomination form and a

list of all current members is available at www.samford.edu/groups/amhf/.

All nominations will be reviewed by a selection committee designated by the Hall of Fame board.

Nominations must be postmarked by March 15 and mailed to Alabama Men's Hall of Fame, P.O. Box 292307, Samford University, Birmingham, AL 35229.

For more information, contact Annette Green at 205-492-3936. (*TAB*)

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INTRODUCING OUR NEW LOGO



After almost 20 years, *The Alabama Baptist* has launched a new logo and style for the ministry. A new look and feel to our digital platform, including an upgraded website, will follow soon. To read the details behind the design of the mark as well as the overall logo, visit www.thealabamabaptist.org and search for “With Outstretched Arms” (Bob Terry’s editorial from Feb. 4).

Bipartisan congressional prison task force mirrors SBC resolution

The recommendations of a bipartisan congressional task force on reducing the federal prison population have drawn praise from some evangelicals and at several points parallel the recommendations of a 2013 Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) resolution on “America’s growing prison population.”

Among the recommendations of the Charles Colson Task Force on Federal Corrections were elimination of mandatory minimum sentences for some nonviolent drug and weapon-possession offenses; implementation of a Second Look program to permit early release of some inmates who have served at least 15 years; and provision of additional faith-based programs in federal prisons.

Federal prisons held nearly 200,000 people at the end of 2015, according to the task force’s Jan. 26 report. This number is 20 percent above capacity. America’s local, state and federal prisons combined hold more than 2.2 million inmates on any given day, marking the “highest incarceration rate in the world.”

The task force estimated that the implementation of its recommendations would reduce the federal prison population by 60,000 inmates and save the government \$5 billion.

“I am delighted to hear the recommendations of the Charles

Colson Task Force,” said David Crosby, a member of the 2013 SBC Resolutions Committee and the primary author of the prison reform resolution’s first draft. Prison overcrowding “diminishes any prospect for rehabilitation, exacerbates problems with inmate violence and creates unsafe work environs for public employees. As Christians we must be concerned about these conditions.”

The Colson Task Force issued six broad recommendations in its report, each of which included multiple specific policy proposals:

- ▶ Preserve prison for those convicted of the most serious crimes.
- ▶ Promote a culture of safety and rehabilitation in federal facilities.
- ▶ Incentivize participation in risk-reduction programming.
- ▶ Ensure successful reintegration by using evidence-based practices in supervision and support.
- ▶ Enhance system perfor-

mance and accountability through better coordination across agencies and increased transparency.

▶ Reinvest savings to support the expansion of necessary programs, supervision and treatment.

“Guideline sentencing has all but eliminated the most significant purpose of prison, that is, rehabilitation.”

**Mark Wohlander
Immanuel Baptist Church,
Lexington, Kentucky**

The SBC resolution, adopted by messengers assembled in Houston two and a half years ago, similarly expressed “support of legislative policies that seek to reduce high incarceration rates without jeopardizing public safety” and affirm that “probation and

parole may serve as a wise, just and effective alternative to prolonged incarceration for certain nonviolent offenders.”

Mark Wohlander, a former federal prosecutor and member of Immanuel Baptist Church, Lexington, Kentucky, affirmed the task force’s recommendations.

‘Nothing more’

“The implementation of the federal sentencing guidelines and abolishing parole in the federal system have combined to ensure that federal prisons continue to be nothing more than warehouses,” Wohlander said. “What Congress failed to understand when the guidelines were promulgated was that incarceration had four purposes: retribution, incapacitation, deterrence and rehabilitation. Guideline sentencing has all but eliminated the most significant purpose of prison, that is, rehabilitation.” (BP)

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CWLC welcomes new leadership consultant

National Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) has appointed Claudia Johnson as the leadership consultant for WMU's Missions Resource Center and Christian Women's Leadership Center (CWLC).

Johnson will be focusing on developing online learning resources and training opportunities. She also will work to incorporate leadership principles into all age levels of WMU's content.

Johnson served as a teacher and missionary with the International Mission Board (IMB) for nearly 28 years.

Wanda Lee, executive director of national WMU, said, "We are thrilled to have someone with Claudia's wealth of teaching and missions experience serve in this role. We believe her unique perspective on leadership, having lived it out in another culture, will be key to the success of the CWLC and how we engage women in leadership within their church, workplace and community."



JOHNSON

Johnson and her husband, David, served in Bangkok, Thailand, ministering to refugees fleeing religious persecution. There, she established and led a school for refugee middle and high school students. The couple returned to the U.S. as part of IMB's voluntary retirement incentive.

CWLC provides resources for women seeking leadership development in a Christian context. (WMU)

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WMU Foundation keeps those in need warm with blankets



Photo by Neisha Roberts

Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) Foundation's #WarmOurWorld campaign raised more than \$7,000 to send to Arab Woman Today to purchase blankets for Syrian refugees in Jordan. The campaign also asked donors to raise money locally or donate a blanket to places like The WellHouse in Birmingham. Candice Lee (right), director of marketing at WMU Foundation, presented Ashley Anderson (left), development director at The WellHouse, with more than 20 blankets at a prayer time and cookie reception Feb. 11 at the national WMU building in Birmingham.

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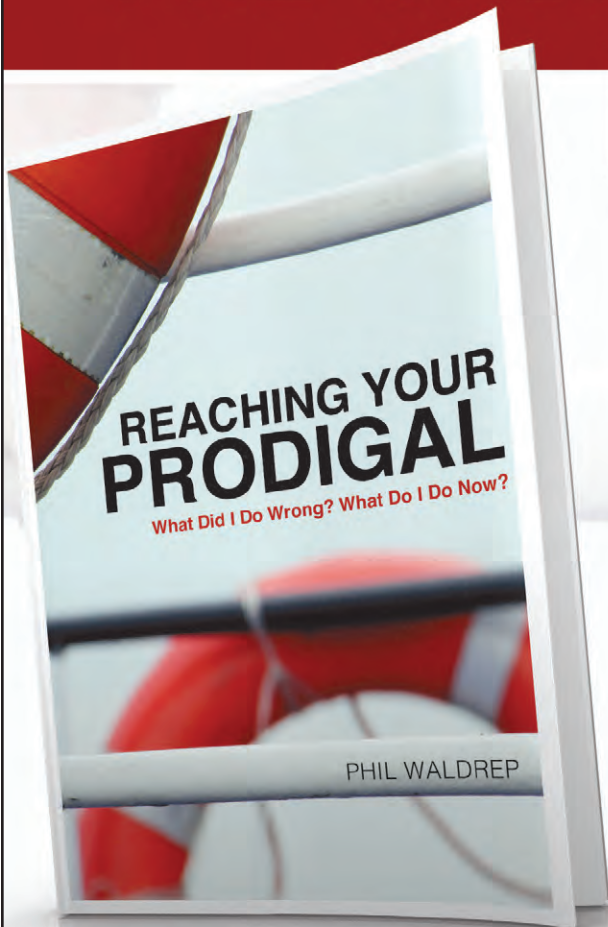


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A Legacy of Faith

"A Tribute to Our Pastor, Our Father"

It was a typical Sunday morning at the Maples home. Preparations were already in place for the usual flurry of activity that accompanied every Sunday. With a family of 12 children — yes, 12 — the pastor/dad made sure his “quiver full” would be in their Sunday School classrooms and assuming their positions in the pews afterward. There were as many as nine children living at home at one time. This often meant two trips to get everyone there!

It must have been quite the sight to see them pulling into the parking lot with the eldest at that time driving the group. Arms and legs were protruding from the packed vehicle with kids spilling out as soon as the gear hit “park.”

Dad was already there. He was always the first person at church so he could make sure everything was in order and ready to greet people as they arrived. He watched in pride as the family bolted inside, eager to begin their favorite day of the week.

P.E. Maples’ ministry spanned more than 50 years as he pastored churches across north Alabama and Tennessee. With a heart for people and for sharing the gospel, he was blessed to baptize hundreds of people including his own 12 children and many of his grandchildren.

He had a gift for leadership and motivation. He poured his heart into the churches he pastored with his vision, compassion, humor, zeal and energy. All of his sermons were original as he combed the Scripture, bathed his preparation in prayer and meticulously outlined how to present a transformational message without “sugar-coating” the Truth.

If you were privileged to

have him as your pastor, you will remember his Bible with names inscribed inside of those he led to become Christians. Perhaps your name is one of them. There may be tangible remembrances such as educational spaces that he helped build using his great carpentry skills. (Most of his ministries included a building program.) You might remember that he visited the sick, the needy, the nursing

homes and hospitals on a weekly basis.

Your thoughts might recapture the sight of “Preacher” on the church lawnmower making sure the property was presentable. Perhaps you will recall with a smile his great work ethic which just might account for the longevity of his pastorates.

He led his churches the way he led his family — God-centered. His faith paved the way for a healthy church family and healthy homelife. He modeled what he preached from the pulpit. With this huge example of faith, his children now carry on where he left off. Within the Maples family today there are ministers of education, music, deacons and children; young adult ministry directors, Sunday School teachers, Bible study leaders, pianists, choir members, church ministry assistants, VBS directors and teachers; financial team leaders and church audio/visual technicians. He would have been extremely thankful and humbled to see them continue his example of faith, family and service.

On this, what would have been his 100th birthday, we, his children, are deeply grateful and blessed that he was our pastor and mentor for many years and our loving father for 93 years. “We were listening, Dad, and we were watching.” We say, “Thank you.”



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SAMFORD UNIVERSITY

► **Walthall, Woolley Win Top Faculty Awards at Samford:** Samford University professors Howard P. Walthall and Thomas



WALTHALL

W. Woolley received two top university faculty awards during the 2016 spring semester opening convocation Jan. 26.

Walthall, who has taught at Samford’s Cumberland School of Law for 40 years, received the George Macon Memorial Award for outstanding performance in inspiring students to greatness.

Woolley, a statistics professor in the Brock School of Business, received the Jennings B. Marshall Service Award for significant and sustained service



WOOLLEY

contributions to the university.

► **Samford Online Nursing Graduate Programs Climb to 13th Nationally:** Graduate programs in Samford University’s Ida V. Moffett School of Nursing in Birmingham vaulted into 13th place in new national rankings released Jan. 12 by *U.S. News & World Report*. Samford moved up from No. 24 in 2015 and No. 35 in 2014 in the rankings.

Samford was the highest ranked program in Alabama and among its peers in the Southern Conference.

UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

► **University of Mobile Hosts Lecrae ‘Higher Learning Tour’:** The University of Mobile (UMobile) is bringing Grammy Award-winner Lecrae to the Mobile Civic Center Theatre on March 2.

The hip-hop artist is bringing his Higher Learning Tour to college campuses and in college towns across the country. Prior to his Mobile concert, Lecrae will meet with UMobile students during chapel on campus.

Doors open at 6 p.m. Tickets are on sale through Ticketmaster and the Civic Center box office.

► **University of Mobile Presents ‘Night of Classical Mas-**

ters’: The University of Mobile (UMobile) Center for Performing Arts will present a “Night of Classical Masters” featuring UMobile’s Chorale, String Ensemble, Orchestra and Symphonic Winds on Feb. 23, 7 p.m. at Dauphin Way United Methodist Church, Mobile.

The UMobile String Ensemble will open the concert and the UMobile Orchestra and Chorale also will perform.

Tickets can be purchased at iTickets.com and will be available the night of the production.

JUDSON COLLEGE

► **Alabama Women’s Hall of Fame to Induct Two New Members:** Sarah Haynsworth Gayle (1804–1835) and Anne Mae Beddow (1893–1974) will be inducted into the Alabama Women’s Hall of Fame at Judson College in Marion on March 3.

The lives of these two women reflect the change in the position of women in Alabama and attitudes toward them in a half century.

The induction ceremony will take place in Judson’s Ramsay-McCrummen Chapel and will be open to the public. A luncheon will follow. To make a reservation for the luncheon, contact Beth Poole at 334-683-5109. ☪

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Benny M. Russell

Former minister of music dies at 78

Benny M. Russell, former minister of music for several Alabama Baptist churches, died Jan. 30. He was 78.

Russell, a native of Huntsville, earned his bachelor's degree from Samford University in Birmingham and master's degree from the University of Alabama.

He served as a bivocational minister of music at 20 Alabama Baptist churches, starting at Huntsville Park Baptist Church, Huntsville, when he was 17 years old. He served his last church, Brent Baptist Church, as a full-time minister of music and celebrated his 60th year in ministry in December 2015.

Russell also taught at Robinson Elementary School in Birmingham; Banks High School (now L. Frazier Banks Middle School) in Birmingham; Collins-Riverside Middle School in Northport; Northport Middle School; Holt High School in Tuscaloosa; Tuscaloosa Christian School in Cottondale; and Stillman College in Tuscaloosa. Russell also composed music and hymn arrangements.

He was a member of Circlewood Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, at the time of his death. He is survived by his wife, Jo; one child; and one grandchild. (TAB)



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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

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

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

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

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

New Elkahatchee Baptist Church is seeking a bivocational pastor. Please send resumé to: Pastor Search Committee, 3380 Elkahatchee Rd., Alexander City, AL 35010.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Chapel Hill Baptist Church is searching for a bivocational pastor for our church. Please send resumé to: Pastor Search, ATTN: Mike Moody, 2489 Gopher Ridge Rd., Samson, AL 36477.

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MUSIC/WORSHIP LEADER

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

OTHER POSITIONS

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Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Knowing God

God Is All Knowing

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

Just as Christians often use “omnipotent” to speak of God possessing all power and “omnipresent” to describe how He is everywhere at the same time, Christians also use “omniscience” to speak of God knowing all things. His omniscience and omnipresence go hand in hand. Pervasive presence and perfect knowledge are complementary aspects of God’s essential nature. Psalm 147:5 puts it like this: “Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite.” In short, God possesses infinite power, presence and knowledge.

We have thought in recent weeks how the qualities of God-ness include Him being eternal, Spirit, personal and triune. We also have noted that omnipotence and omnipresence are among God’s essential qualities along with omniscience. He has not acquired all these characteristics over time. They speak of what God is, has been and will forever be. These characteristics belong to His nature or being. For this week, what can we say about God being omniscient or all knowing?

As humans we may forget some things from the past. We may have imperfect or limited understanding of the present. We certainly do not know details about the future even though we sometimes can foresee possible or even probable outcomes. God’s nature as everlasting means He always knows what is past, present and future. No gap exists in His knowledge. God knows all things perfectly and completely. The confession of Peter in John 21:17 was right on target: “Lord, You know all things.” The assertion of 1 John 3:20 contains the same idea: “God is greater than our heart and knows all things.”

Among implications that flow from the truth of God being all knowing is the validity of biblical prophecy. Predictive prophecy is rooted in God’s awareness or knowledge of what lies in the future. God spoke through Isaiah, saying, “I am God and there is no oth-

er; I am God and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done” (Isa. 46:9–10). Something more must be said about God’s knowledge of the future. The truth that He knows what has not yet come to pass does not diminish human freedom of choice and resultant accountability. That God knows in advance what will happen does not necessarily mean that He causes it to happen. Foreknowing is not to be equated with “fore-causing.”

Godly living

Also among the implications flowing from this divine omniscience is the incentive for godly living. If we allow the truthfulness of Psalm 139:1–3, as we certainly should, then it intensifies our attention to what we do, where we go, what we say and even what we think: “O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether.”

God’s omniscience qualifies Him to be the perfect Judge of all the earth. He knows and remembers not only human deeds but also the motivations that lie behind them. David addressed his son, Solomon, charging him, “Know the God of your father and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts” (1 Chron. 28:9).#

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.



Army chaplain creates documentary to raise awareness among civilians

In 2010, Justin Roberts was a newly minted Army chaplain and “very green” when he reported for duty with a crack battalion of the 101st Airborne Division.

“I showed up with my helmet cover on backwards,” he said. “I had a lot to learn.”

And learn he did — first about the appalling rate of suicides afflicting military members, then about bravery and sacrifice during a deployment with the Screaming Eagles that year to Afghanistan. The unit lost 18 soldiers killed in action and 200 earned Purple Hearts.

Upon the unit’s return a year later, Roberts said he learned another hard lesson:

“that churches don’t do nearly enough to minister to physically, emotionally and spiritually wounded soldiers and their families.

“You would think churches would be No. 1 in being part of the answer, but I think they are simply unaware there is a problem at this point,” Roberts said.

So Roberts filmed and directed “No Greater Love,” a feature-length documentary using combat footage he shot while in Afghanistan along with post-deployment interviews of troops and their families.

The film, which was recently screened at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, shares the realities of war as experienced by the soldiers who served in Kunar Province, one of the most mountainous and treacherous parts of Afghanistan. The realities of losing loved ones to combat death, suicide or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) also is presented.

“These are a group of people struggling to reconnect with society,” said Roberts, now a civilian filmmaker.

“This film is to help raise awareness.”

It’s already accomplished that in film circles since its first viewing in September 2015.

The film has earned several honors, including Best Documentary and the Mass Impact Award at the Boston Film Festival, where it premiered. It claimed Best of Show and Best Documentary at the Lake Charles Film Festival and Best Military Film at the San Diego Film Festival, among others.

And it also drew the attention and passion of Laura Fong, assistant professor and journalist-in-residence at Mercer’s Center for Collaborative Journalism.

Fong eventually became a producer for the film after meeting a soldier at a military hospital. He had been part of Roberts’ unit. She then connected with the chaplain while he was still on deployment.

The unique vision Roberts brings to the subject — as both a filmmaker and a member of the unit being documented — provides the film with an original per-

spective and message, Fong said.

She couldn’t say “no” when Roberts asked for help producing the film.

As a photo journalist, Fong said she’s been documenting the lives and struggles of military members, veterans and their families for a decade. “No Greater Love” is among the most moving accounts of war and its aftermath that she’s seen.

“It’s just so profound,” she said of the film she co-produced.

Roberts said his lessons also have been profound. Just before leaving for Afghanistan, Roberts said he asked a trusted first sergeant how he should conduct his ministry overseas. The noncommissioned officer,

who didn’t particularly care for chaplains, advised him to stay near the action and to accompany each platoon on at least one patrol.

“Connecting (with soldiers) wasn’t a nice thing, it was a critical thing,” he said. “It saves lives.”

And it’s those kinds of connections that military members, veterans and their families need from churches now, Roberts said.

“My encounter with the Church when I got

back has been strained because I keep on encountering pastors who are not intentionally reaching out to veterans,” said Roberts, who was raised Southern Baptist and attended Dallas Theological Seminary in Texas before entering the Army.

Church involvement

Some congregations are afraid to take on such ministries for fear that the difficulties of working with combat veterans and the families can be overwhelming.

But those congregations could learn about faith from those who served in military-related ministries.

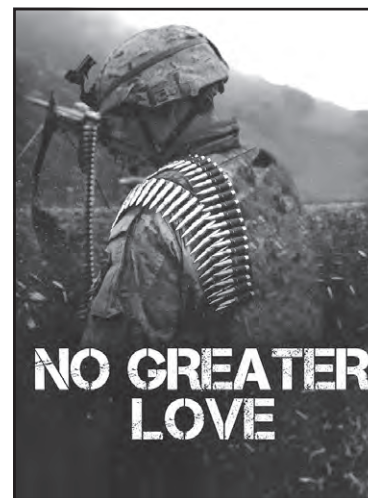
“I saw people with mixed relationships with God be willing to die for one another,” he said. “I have never seen that in the Church.”

Roberts said he is working with Cru Military, a ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ, to form a relational ministry structure that churches can plug into.

The idea is that seeing the emotional and physical price soldiers and their families pay to wage war will open pocket-books and inspire ministry, he said.

“The great irony is that the one people group in our country who are in desperate need of help from the Church and ministry, they are not a target for ministry,” Roberts said. “It’s not on the agenda.”

Another documentary, produced by an Alabama-based ministry, also addresses PTSD — “Invisible Scars: Hope for Soldiers With Hidden Wounds.” For more information on this documentary, visit www.thealabamabaptist.org and search “PTSD.” (BNG, TAB)



SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For February 21

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

WHAT'S THE SIGN? Matthew 12:38-42

Throughout the Gospel accounts Jewish leaders and followers regularly look for signs to confirm the work of God. John explains that the selected signs in his record are intended to lead readers to believe that Jesus is the Anointed One (John 20:30-31). In his first epistle to Corinth, the apostle Paul affirms that "Jews demand miraculous signs" (1 Cor. 1:22).

Not all people want a sign from God. Bible students may recall King Ahaz, who refused a sign from God offered by the prophet Isaiah. God's sign of the virgin conception was revealed in spite of the unbelieving king's rejection. In this week's lesson we will explore King Jesus' response to yet another request for a sign.

Seeking a Sign (38)

"Teacher, we want a sign from You." Jesus has given sight to the blind, opened deaf ears, made the lame to walk, cast out demons and raised the dead. Yes, but we want another sign. A fine line exists between asking for a sign to discern God's will (like Gideon in Judges 6) and these religious leaders who refused to believe regardless of how many times Jesus demonstrated His authority over the natural and supernatural realms.

Identifying the Sign (39-40)

Jesus characterized this generation as evil and adulterous. The scribes and Pharisees who requested a sign failed to recognize that in contrast to God's holiness, all their righteous deeds were like rags (Isa. 64:6). They refused to acknowledge that no one is good except God (Ps. 14:2-3). These religious leaders were self-righteous (Rom. 10:3), following their own traditions rather than the Law. They were guilty of idolatry, which is spiritual adultery.

The burial of Jonah (inside the sea crea-

ture) and his recommissioning served as the only sign Jesus was willing to offer. Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for "three days and three nights" (some would interpret this as portions thereof), and Jesus foreshadows His own death and resurrection with this sign.

A Warning Sign (41-42)

"Men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it." Just as we encountered in last week's lesson, we see Jesus bringing indictments against a generation who refused to learn from the past. They were fully aware of God's judgment upon the Gentiles in Tyre, Sidon, Sodom and Nineveh. In spite of that knowledge, they refused to repent of their sins and acknowledge that Jesus is Lord.

The Ninevites believed God (Jon. 3:5), fasted and repented of their idolatry when Jonah brought God's message of judgment to the Assyrian capital. When the Queen of Sheba heard about the wisdom of God bestowed on King Solomon, she went to investigate. Her conclusion was that Yahweh had blessed Solomon with wisdom, and that Yahweh was worthy of praise (2 Chron. 9:8). In both instances, Gentiles encountered the Word of God and adjusted their lives accordingly. By contrast the scribes and Pharisees were superbly aware of the content of Scripture without willingly surrendering to its message.

Jesus' death, burial and resurrection serve as the central theme of the gospel (1 Cor. 15:3-4). In the latter chapters of his Gospel, Matthew reiterates this theme (16:21; 17:23; 20:19), explaining that Jesus foretold His death and resurrection. We would do well to pay attention to this. In a day when the gospel message is often assumed, it is good to be reminded of the centrality of Jesus' atoning work for sinners like you and me. ☩

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

DISTINCT IN MY REACTIONS Matthew 5:33-42

We continue our unit on the Sermon on the Mount and this week we look at a third passage in what has incorrectly been called "The Antitheses." Jesus' instructions are not antitheses of the Jewish law. Rather, in good Jewish fashion, they "build a fence around the Torah" and so fulfill it (see Matt. 5:17).

Display integrity with your words. (33-37)

Jesus referred to the Ten Commandments in the previous two passages. Here He moves on, paraphrasing and combining Exodus 20:7, Leviticus 19:12 and Deuteronomy 5:11 and 21:21-23. These passages allow people to take oaths (which invoke God's name) with the proviso that people carry them out. Otherwise one is misusing the name of God. Biblical passages inform us that oaths, blessings and curses had power, and once spoken could not be reversed (see the examples of blessings in Gen. 27:30-37, 48:8-20 and the vow in Judg. 11:29-40). There is some evidence that in Jesus' day, people took oaths to seal business deals and legal agreements as added security, invoking curses from heaven as a substitute for God (as we do when we say "thank heaven") and upon the earth, Jerusalem and their own heads. Jesus' prohibition of oaths is unusual: do not invoke God to seal a deal. Rather speak as a person of integrity. Do what you say you will and don't do what you say you won't. James refers to this teaching in 5:12 of his letter.

Just let it go when you are humiliated or insulted. (38-39)

The language Jesus refers to occurs in Exodus 21:23-25, Leviticus 24:19-20 and Deuteronomy 19:21. To our ears, the allowed retribution sounds harsh and the

phrase certainly has been abused to justify vengeful acts of both individuals and countries. We should remember, however, that these passages restrict revenge: an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth are allowed but a life for an eye or tooth is not. Furthermore, God is giving guidelines for judges to decide cases not instructions for individuals to exact their own revenge. Later, Rabbis will re-interpret these laws by laying out monetary compensation for such injuries. In this and the next passage, Jesus apparently has Deuteronomy 32:35 in mind: "Vengeance is mine and recompense" (that is, they are not yours; compare Rom. 12:19).

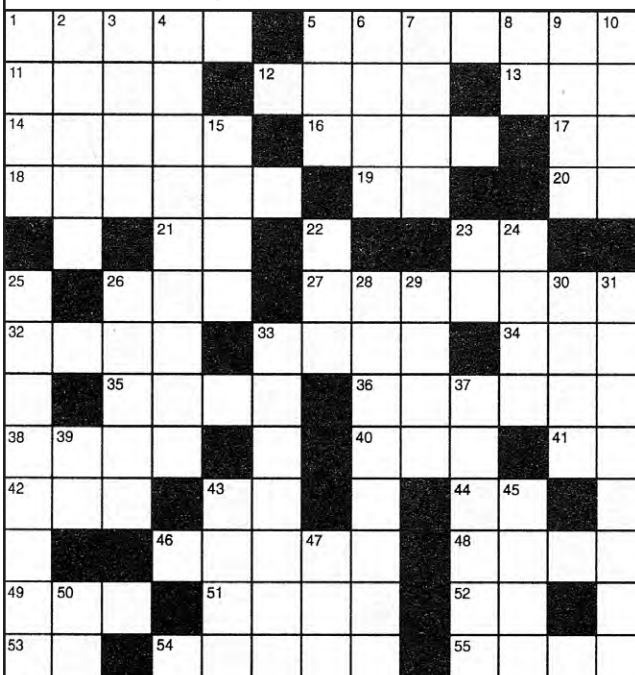
Go the extra mile for others, even those who want to take advantage of you. (40-42)

For right-handers a strike on the right cheek requires a back-handed slap, which implies that the slapper literally adds insult to injury. To offer the other cheek avoids responding to violence with violence (see Matt. 26:52-53), but it also confronts the one using violence. It has been a hallmark of nonviolent resistance in America. In Jesus' day, a Roman soldier could force a civilian to carry his gear for one mile. Some might have considered it their civic duty to do so. Certainly the soldier would. Jesus says, in essence, "Don't just limit vengeance, don't even seek it. Perform acts of generosity instead and so confront your abuser." Jesus also may be foreshadowing His own fate and His response (see Matt. 26:67; 27:35).

Christians know they are not immune to promoting and engaging in acts of violence. Fear often leads to rage; not only to a desire to exact revenge but also to a falsely righteous insistence that we must seek it to remain safe. Because of our rationalizations no one needs to hear Jesus' words more than we ourselves. ☩

Christian Crossword

By Debra Michaels Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

- Musical instrument. (Dan. 3:5)
- Large water bird. (Lev. 11:18)
- A stroke with a whip.
- A son of Cush. (Gen. 10:7)
- In my Father's house ___ many mansions. (John 14:2)
- Straight across a ship; abreast.
- Wild animals or birds hunted.
- Arkansas. (Zip code abbr.)
- ___ of Eden.
- Pound. (abbr.)
- Ancient Thebes and capital of upper Egypt. (Nah. 3:8)
- Delaware. (Zip code abbr.)
- Senior. (abbr.)
- Species of ox.
- Moses' ark was made of this. (Ex. 2:3)
- Double reed woodwind instrument.
- God is ___ present.

- The pure in heart ... shall ___ God. (Matt. 5:8)
- Musical composition for two.
- Set the table with these.
- Certain days in the Roman calendar.
- Yes.
- Prefix meaning "two" or "double."
- A close friend.
- Tennessee. (Zip code abbr.)
- Right Reverend. (abbr.)
- I ___ unto the Lord with my voice. (Ps. 3:4)
- Jot.
- To meet the Lord in the ___. (1 Thess. 4:17)
- Form of the word *air*.
- There ___ I in the midst of them. (Matt. 18:20)
- Right. (abbr.)
- Poet Thomas.
- To wash.

Down

- Wild plant. (Job 8:11)
- Gave Jacob his two daughters. (Gen. 29)

- One who uses.
- One of the apostles. (Matt. 10:3)
- A thick pin.
- Son of Shobal. (Gen. 36:23)
- Favorite sacrifice. (Ex. 29:39)
- California. (Zip code abbr.)
- A child of Dishan. (Gen. 36:28)
- Roman emperor who persecuted Christians.
- The ___ ... shall inherit the earth. (Matt. 5:5)
- International Business Machines Corporation. (abbr.)
- Sister. (abbr.)
- Where moth and ___ doth corrupt. (Matt. 6:19)
- Captain of Pharaoh's guard. (Gen. 37:36)
- To sing with sudden changes in voice.
- ___ able; not forgivable.
- Easter flower.
- To Abraham and his ___ were the promises

- made. (Gal. 3:16)
- To feel or sow indecision.
- Son of Kenaz. (Josh. 15:17)
- In the air.
- Irish father.
- Waiter's necessity.
- Pear-shaped tomato.
- A period of time.
- And God saw the light, that ___ was good. (Gen. 1:4)





"We want to raise up anthems for the Church because the joy of the Lord is our strength."

Chris Llewellyn
Rend Collective

Irish worship band Rend Collective is made up of (l to r) Stephen Mitchell, Chris Llewellyn, Gareth Gilkeson, Patrick Thompson and Ali Gilkeson.

Photo courtesy of The Media Collective

Secondary importance

Irish worship band Rend Collective places relationship with God, each other above music

By Leann Callaway
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

As the Irish worship band Rend Collective performs concerts around the world, they entertain with a variety of musical instruments and engage audiences with high-energy praise songs celebrating God's faithfulness.

While gaining acclaim and attention during their travels, their newest worship album, "As Family We Go," garnered the No. 1 spot on the iTunes Christian albums chart in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The album also landed in the top 10 albums overall in seven countries including the U.S., U.K. and Canada.

'Family on a mission'

"For us, music is very much secondary or even somewhat farther down the list of importance to us," lead singer Chris Llewellyn said.

"Our relationship to God and each other is really important, that's why we wanted to include the word 'family' in the (album) title. We aren't really so much a band as we are a family. We're a family on a mission and on a great adventure while giving thanks for what God has called us to do and being a light to the world."

In addition to Llewellyn, Rend Collective is made up of Gareth Gilkeson, Ali Gilkeson, Patrick Thompson and Stephen Mitchell.

Since the release of their first album, "Organic Fam-

ily Hymnal," the group's energetic style of worship has earned a strong following with career sales of more than 300,000 albums. In 2014 the group released "The Art of Celebration," which earned the No. 1 spot on the Billboard Christian albums chart within the first week of its release.

Release from guilt and shame

"During The Art of Celebration Tour, we collected stories and created a celebration wall where people could post victories in their lives," Llewellyn said.

"It was interesting to see how often people were celebrating the fact that they were released from guilt and shame. It was overwhelmingly the response we received that people felt free again from a sense of condemnation.

"It reminded us to emphasize a message about how grateful we are that guilt and shame don't have the last word over us, that the cross does," he said.

"It was overwhelming to see the impact of how the Holy Spirit can work through music."

In spite of their rapid success, the group remains committed to shining the spotlight on Christ and pointing

audiences to Him.

"When we're leading worship at events, we realize that most people are coming from a place of brokenness, disappointment or some obstacle in their life where they need God's help," Llewellyn noted. "There is no one who is perfect or without any scars.

"We want to give the Church anthems to sing over those

situations because we believe even when things seem impossible that our God is still on our side and fighting for us.

"Whenever God is with us, every giant will fall and every mountain will move in His name. We want to raise up anthems for the Church because the joy of the Lord is our strength.

"By the grace of God through the Holy Spirit working in us, believers can still find ways to worship and celebrate even in the midst of difficult situations because we have an eternal hope.

"It's amazing how God provides the strength to continue during seasons of suffering."

In 2014, Rend Collective played 150 shows with performances in Brazil, Hungary, Switzerland, Hong Kong and Canada. In Fall 2015 the group performed around the country on the "Love Ran Red Tour" with Chris Tomlin. This year the group will headline the As Family We Go Tour in the U.S. and U.K.

"What we're hoping for is a strong sense of unity when we're playing our shows and leading worship," Llewellyn said. "We're hoping it can be a time when people can gather together for strength so believers can go out and be scattered and be light in the world."

One Church

"My favorite part is getting to sing with the Church across the world. It's such a beautiful thing to get to see so many different colors, shapes and sizes of the body of Christ.

"By traveling around the world, we get to see the body of Christ in a way that most people don't because they are at one church. We get to experience an aerial view of what God is doing around the world and it's really special to be a part of something so beautiful." ✠



FOLLOWING A legacy of **faith**

Miami Heat power forward gives thanks to the Lord

By **Bill Sorrell**
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Growing up on the mean streets of Miami, nothing was given to Udonis Haslem nor did anything come easy. At almost every corner, his faith was tested.

His biggest test came in July 2010 when his mother, Debra Haslem, died of cancer at age 53.

“Growing up in the inner city, losing my mother to cancer and losing a lot of family and friends to drugs and violence and different things — my faith has been tested a lot,” said Haslem, a power forward for the Miami Heat.

By overcoming hardship and struggles, Debra Haslem became her son’s role model, leaving a “legacy of faith” when she died, said Udonis Haslem, who was 30 at the time of his mother’s death.

While Udonis Haslem was growing up, his mother battled drug abuse. In 2001 she sought treatment and had been drug-free for almost a decade.

“I continued to believe through every trial and tribulation and grow closer and closer to the Lord,” Haslem said. “Without my faith I wouldn’t be here.”

Through it all Haslem has relied on his favorite Bible verse, Proverbs 3:5-6: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths.”

Haslem’s path to the NBA is unlike most. He and teammate Dwayne Wade have played for the same NBA team their entire careers. They are in their 13th season with the Miami Heat.

Athletic Hall of Fame

Playing four seasons with the University of Florida in Gainesville and helping the Gators advance to the NCAA Men’s Division I Championship tournament each time, Haslem, who was a center, left with the third most points in school history (1,782) and was 10th in rebounds (831). He averaged 13.7 points and 6.7 rebounds. He was inducted into the University of Florida Athletic Hall of Fame in 2012.

After being an undrafted free agent, Haslem went to France in 2002 to play professionally. During his nine months there, Haslem learned to speak French.

Signed by Miami in 2003, Haslem’s biggest

thrill in sports is shown on his fingers — three NBA championship rings (2006, 2012 and 2013).

He is the Heat’s all-time leading rebounder (offensive and defensive) with 5,637 through 21 games this season. He has an additional 791 rebounds in the playoffs. He is the first undrafted player in NBA history to be a team’s all-time leader in total rebounds. He has scored 6,425 career points (8.1 per game average) through 21 games this season and 812 points

in the playoffs (5.9 average).

“Being a good, all-around team guy; helping my guys; being a guy they can depend on, whether that be for advice or whether that be on the court, just being a great team guy,” is his focus, Haslem said.

Memphis Grizzlies guard Courtney Lee said of Christian players, “There are a lot of us in the league. It makes me feel good. I consider him (Haslem) a brother now. He is a follower (and I’m) happy to see that and happy to learn that he is a Christian.”

Another NBA player who is a Christian, Anthony Tolliver, a forward for the Detroit Pistons, described Haslem as a “high character guy. He is the ultimate teammate. Every single person that I know that knows him knows that he is an outstanding guy and that he treats people

with a lot of respect. I always see him at chapel and we get a chance to talk about it a little bit. I haven’t had a ton of experience with him outside the basketball court but certainly every time we play the Heat, I see him and we get a chance to talk.”

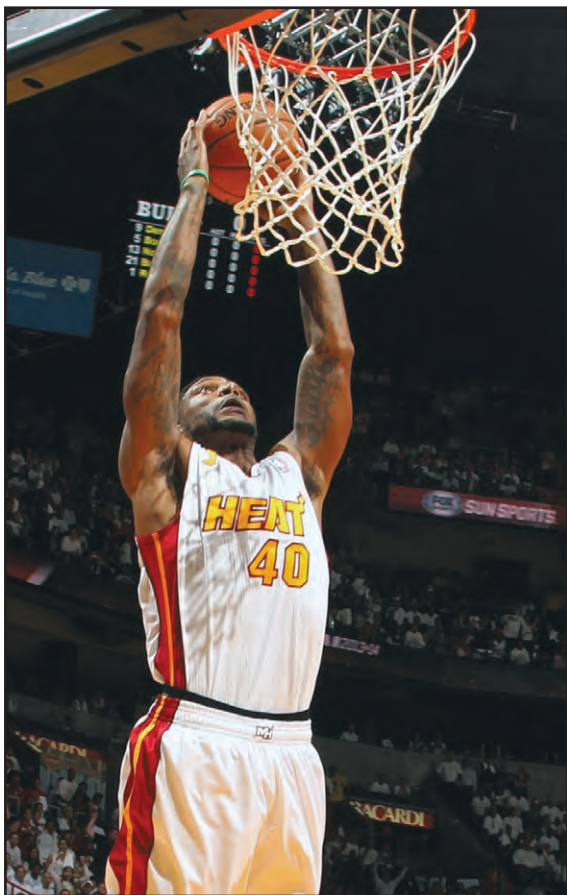
Haslem, 35, became a Christian when he was a child. He is a member of Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist Church, Miami, Florida.

“If I ever have the opportunity to inspire people, I tell people to keep the faith and stay prayed up and be thankful to the Lord,” Haslem said. “I get down on my knees. I pray every night. I give thanks for everything that I have. ... I am always conscious to focus on not the things that I don’t have, but the things that I have.”

Haslem wants to be an example when things don’t come easy.

“Nothing has been given to me. My faith has been tested my whole life, my faith in the Lord, my faith in myself. I have had to persevere.

“Nothing is impossible. My faith is strong enough.” ✠



Udonis Haslem

Photo courtesy of NBA Photos

RELIGION
in *America*

Compiled from Wire Services



Church retirement plans see boost from PATH 2015

DALLAS — Legislation signed into law in December 2015 will have a positive impact for both those who participate in and those who operate church retirement plans. Provisions of the Protecting Americans from Tax Hikes (PATH) Act of 2015 will allow church retirement plans to include automatic enrollment features regardless of state wage withholding laws, as well as allow for certain kinds of transfers and mergers between accounts of the same employer.

Among certain church-related employers, provisions will help distinguish between different kinds of church and denominational governance structures — which will address the issue of counting employees for benefit purposes.

The legislation took three Congresses to consider before being tacked onto the PATH Act. President Barack Obama signed the bill into law Dec. 18, 2015.

A major “win” in this new legislation is leveling the playing field between secular employers’ plans and church-related employers’ plans when it comes to offering automatic enrollment plans. Among the provisions in the law is a component that preempts any state law that interferes with the ability of a church plan to offer automatic enrollment programs. Under automatic enrollment programs, employees automatically enroll in the retirement plans at a preset level of deferrals but employees have the option to opt out or make changes to the amount deferred. (GuideStone)

Wheaton College, professor part ways over ‘same God’

WHEATON, Illinois — An agreement has been made between a Christian college and one of its associate professors regarding her statement that Muslims and Christians worship the same God — the professor will leave the college.

Wheaton College in Illinois released a statement Feb. 6 acknowledging that the college and associate professor of political science Larycia Hawkins “have come together and found a mutual place of resolution and reconciliation” and have reached “a confidential agreement under which they will part ways,” according to The Christian Post.

Hawkins, who taught at the school for nine years and was the school’s first black female tenured professor, was suspended after writing that Muslims and Christians “worship the same God,” in a Facebook post Dec. 10, 2015.

After Hawkins’ initial post and another referring to wearing a “hijab,” or Muslim woman’s head covering, the college released a statement about her administrative leave while reviewing the “theological implications” behind her comments.

During a press conference Feb. 10 the college and Hawkins addressed their reconciliation and her departure. (Neisha Roberts)

‘Moral’ movies, shows recognized at Movieguide gala

UNIVERSAL CITY, California — The “best, most inspiring movies and television programs that resulted in a great increase in man’s love or understanding of God” were recognized at the recent Movieguide Faith & Values Awards Gala at the Universal Hilton in Universal City, California, on Feb. 5.

The Epiphany Prize for the Most Inspiring TV Program went to Dolly Parton’s “Coat of Many Colors,” a show about her childhood in Tennessee. “War Room” was awarded a \$100,000 Epiphany Prize for Most Inspiring Movie of 2015.

Ted Baehr, Movieguide’s founder and publisher, released the 2016 Annual Report to the Entertainment Industry at the event, showing that most family-friendly movies averaged more than \$73.01 million per movie in 2014 in the United States and Canada, according to The Christian Post.

“The least family-friendly movies with the most offensive, obscene or anti-family, immoral content averaged only about \$17.59 million,” Baehr said.

The gala event will be telecast Feb. 22 and 24 on REELZChannel. (Neisha Roberts)