

Feb. 25, 2016
Vol. 181, No. 8

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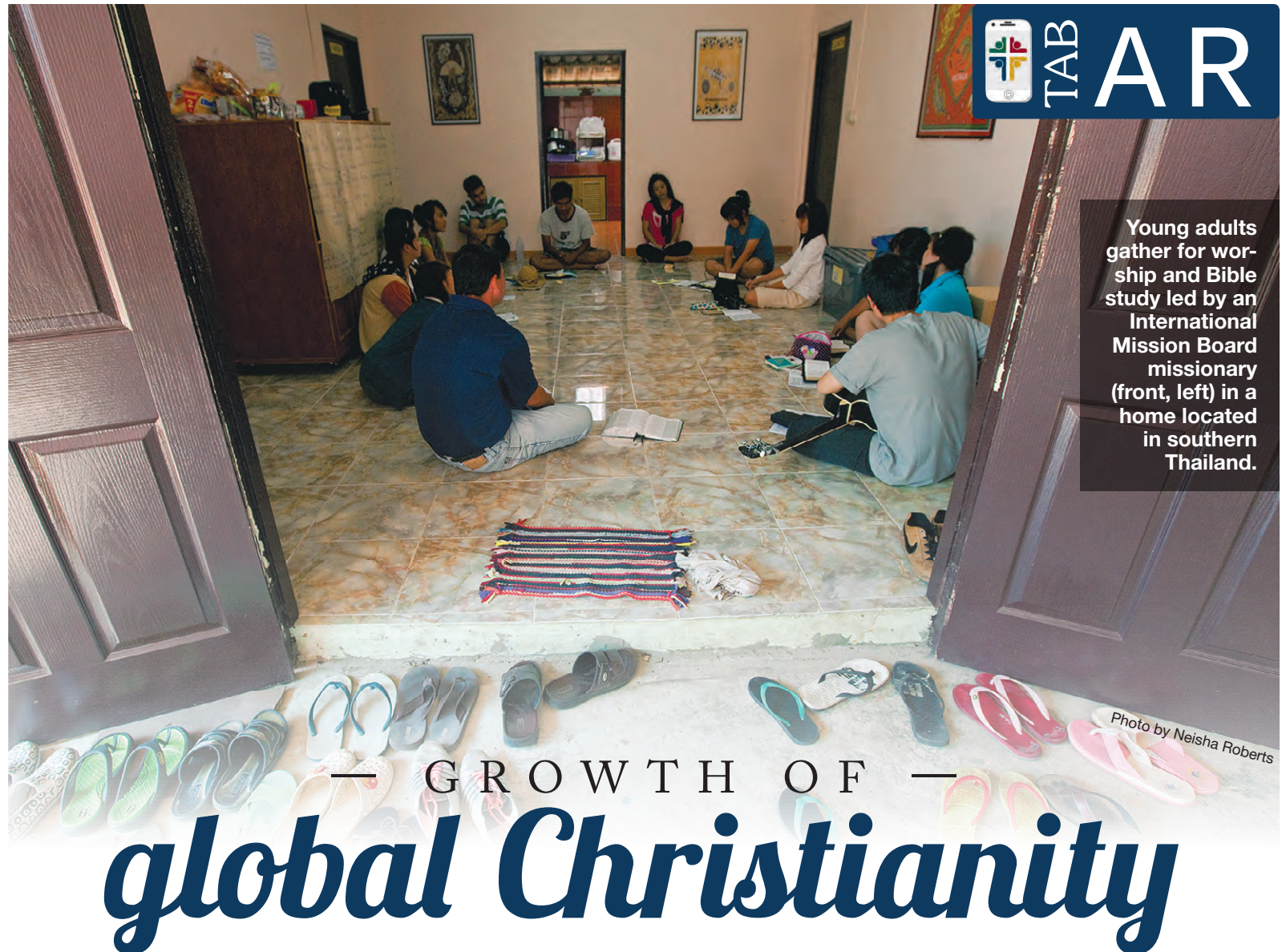
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Addiction prevention includes addressing heart matters, providing support

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Young adults gather for worship and Bible study led by an International Mission Board missionary (front, left) in a home located in southern Thailand.

Photo by Neisha Roberts

— G R O W T H O F — *global Christianity*

Christianity sees surge of growth in Global South, IMB research shows

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

In U.S. terms, the take-out order would include 100 pizzas instead of just 10 in order to feed all the Christians gathered for fellowship. That, in so many words, is what is happening in Nepal, as it currently has one of the fastest-growing Christian populations in the world.

Bishwa Mani Pokharel, news chief at Nepal's *Nagarik News*, said, "Before when Christians had a party they slaughtered a chicken. Now they

slaughter a goat" because the extra meat is necessary to feed all of the new people who have joined the guest list, NPR.org reported.

According to Nepal censuses, there were no Christians in Nepal in 1951. Just 10 years later there were 458 recorded. By 2001 there were 102,000 and another decade later the number tripled to 375,000.

In Nepal the growth could be attributed to internal changes, NPR reported, because the country was closed off to foreigners before 1950. The country also has tran-

sitioned from a Hindu nation to a communist-led secular republic, allowing for greater freedom of religion, although sharing the gospel is still illegal.

World Christian Database, a re-

source of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts, reports interpretations of 2010

(See 'Health,' page 3)

A Thai Christian (left) leads a local man (right) in prayer to receive Christ as his Savior. The local man came to receive health care at an open-air clinic sponsored by the International Mission Board.



Photo by Neisha Roberts

COMMENT



In Most Unexpected Ways

For American Christians it is hard to believe that China may soon become the largest Christian nation in the world. That role belongs to the United States or has for most of the past century. But while American Christians have thought of themselves as the 600-pound gorilla at the heart of the Christian world, the center of the Christian world has shifted inexorably southward to Africa, Asia and Latin America.

In 2010 estimates varied widely about the number of Christians in China. The Chinese government lowballed the number saying about 23 million of its more than 1 billion people were Christians. Some missions agencies active in the country placed the number between 100 and 123 million.

Pew Research Center landed about in the middle reporting 58 million Protestant Christians and another 9 million Catholic believers for a total of 67 million Christians using a broad definition.

That number in itself is astounding. When missionaries were forced out of China in 1949 the number of Christians stood at less than 1 million. Communist leaders outlawed all religions expecting that over time religious faith would cease to exist. Instead in 2010 there were more Protestant Christians in China than in Brazil (40 million) or South Africa (36 million), Pew found.

Growing number of Christians

By the end of China's notorious Cultural Revolution, marked by the death of Mao Ze Dong in 1976, Christians numbered more than 3 million by most estimates even though religious faith was illegal and the government actively sought to destroy its every trace. In a 30-year period, the number of Christians had tripled despite being cut off from the rest of the Christian world.

Three years later Christian churches began reopening — first in Shanghai and slowly across the country. Institutions of other religious groups such as Buddhist, Daoist and Islam also reopened.

If Pew's estimates of Christians in the official and unofficial Christian churches of China are correct (67 million), the growth rate of Christians has been about 10 percent per year since the churches were allowed to reopen in 1979. If one figures the growth rate since 1949, Christians in China have grown at a rate of 7 percent annually. That is significant growth despite periodic persecution from the government.

Fenggang Yang, director of the Center of Religion and Chinese Society at Purdue University in West LaFayette, Indiana, pointed out that if the 7 percent rate continues, then China



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

will have about 160 million Protestant Christians by 2025. That is about the same number of Protestant Christians reported in the United States in 2010 (159 million). But the number of U.S. Protestants is declining, according to all reports, while China's Protestant Christians continue to grow.

Yang points out that when Protestant and Catholics are combined China will have more than 247 million Christians by 2030, placing it ahead of Mexico, Brazil and the United States as the largest Christian nation in the world.

Projecting the 7 percent growth rate of Christians going forward, Christians could make up 16.1 percent of China's population by 2030, 32.5 percent by 2040 and 66.7 percent by 2050. That would be a miracle of biblical proportions.

But projections are just that — projections. What really happens could be far different. China's government is once again escalating persecution of Christians in some quarters. All that is certain is that God continues to do a marvelous work in China.

What is happening in China is just one of the movements that is changing the face of modern-day Christianity. The rapid growth of Christianity in Africa and Latin America is another. Scholars look to what is sometimes called the "Global South" and find what some term the "majority culture."

This majority culture is void of European or American characteristics. It is a culture of color, a culture of poverty, a culture of persecution. In an article titled "Christianity in Global Context: Trends and Statistics," by Todd M. Johnson, it was pointed out that by 2050 African, Asian and Latin American Christians will make up 71 percent of the Christian world.

Going in opposite directions

Both Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America rival Europe for the largest number of Christians on their respective continents. According to Pew, Europe still leads with 553 million Christians or 74.5 percent of the population. Sub-Saharan Africa reports 517 million Christians and Latin America reports 531 million.

But the growth of the Christian faith is going in opposite directions in these places. Christianity in Europe is expected to decline by almost 18 percent over the next 35 years — down to 454 million by 2050. Sub-Saharan Africa is expected to double the number of Christians in that time to 1.1 billion believers. If that happens, then Africa will have more Christians than any other continent.

Latin American Christianity is anticipated to grow by 134 million people — according to current trends — giving it 665 million Christians. That would give Latin America the second largest concentration of Christians.

North America will trail the pack if present trends continue. The total number of Christians in North America was set at 266.6 million in 2010. By 2050 that number is expected to be 286.7 million. That is a growth rate of 0.2 percent. Christians may still be the largest religious group on the continent but the number of unaffiliated will have almost doubled.

Interest in spirituality

Pew also noticed a new phenomenon in American religion. Pew found a growing interest in spirituality among church members as well as among those labeled "unaffiliated" — atheists, agnostics and those with no particular interest in organized religion.

Among religiously affiliated people, interest in spirituality jumped 7 percent between 2007 and 2014. Among unaffiliated, concern about spirituality jumped 5 percent. Non-Christian religions did not report a similar increase in spirituality.

Some wonder if the "religiosity" of organized religion has turned people off from participation in church but a growing desire for God is being expressed at the same time.

The most difficult places for the Christian faith are likely to remain the Middle East — North Africa and Asia Pacific. In the Middle East and North Africa, Christians make up less than 4 percent of the population. Muslims account for more than 93 percent of the population.

In Asia Pacific, the dominant religions are Hindu, Islam and Buddhism. Christians are often the target of persecution.

Yet there is no predicting what God will do. Perhaps the Good News of Jesus Christ will again be freely proclaimed in the Middle East and North Africa as it was prior to the Muslim conquests of the sixth century and beyond. Perhaps the inhabitants of Asia Pacific will turn to God as revealed in Jesus as unexpectedly as those living in Communist China have done.

One thing is sure — God desires that all people everywhere have the opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel. Through His Holy Spirit, God makes that happen in the most unexpected ways. ✠

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

(ISSN 0738-7741;
USPS 011-080)

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

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— HEALTH OF GLOBAL — *Christianity*

Telling your story is easy, effective witness, Gilbreath says

(continued from page 1)

data that show there were approximately 2,361,224,000 Christians worldwide in 2013 and 2,418,026,000 in 2015.

The International Mission Board (IMB) is focused on the growth of evangelical Christianity, Jim Haney, director of IMB's global research department, told *The Alabama Baptist*.

And although Christianity is rapidly growing in places like Nepal, he said, "Over the past 100 years the percentage of the world's population adhering to some form of Christianity has remained relatively constant at roughly one-third of the global population. In other words Christianity is growing at the same rate as the global population."

"Within Christianity, the fastest growing population is that of evangelicals which is growing at nearly twice the global population rate," Haney said.

Sammy Gilbreath, director of the office of evangelism for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said his office has found that "telling one's story/testimony is the easiest and most effective witness since it is hard to argue with a person's own story" (see story, this page).

According to IMB's Annual Statistical Report, 337,385 people who heard the gospel presented by Southern Baptist missionaries became new believers in 2011 and 266,451 believers were baptized. Another 127,385 people became new believers in 2014 and 54,762 were baptized, according to the report.

Steve McCord, the IMB's analysis services and Geographic Information Systems team leader, noted that work continues to increase in hard to reach places and among unreached people groups, but those statistical gains are not as evident as when IMB missionaries worked among countries and people groups with a Christian background.

Haney said, "The rise of evangelical Christianity is primarily a Global South phenomenon with exciting growth in countries

such as China, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Philippines, Kenya, Uganda and even countries that would scarcely attribute any conversions to Christianity at all due to their historical religious traditions," like Nepal.

He did warn, however, that "global

How to share your testimony

Sometimes the idea of sharing your testimony — the story of how you came to know and believe in Christ — can be intimidating. But according to Sammy Gilbreath, director of the office of evangelism for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, "sharing one's story/testimony is the easiest and most effective witness since it is hard to argue with a person's own story, instead of something they may have read or memorized."

Share your story

"I believe if every Christian would learn how to share his or her story and make a commitment to do so, we could make a tremendous impact on the unreached world," Gilbreath said.

Here are some tips as you prepare your heart and mind to share your personal story and the gospel.

1. Write down your story/testimony

and write it the way you speak.

2. Share what your life was like before Christ and what your life revolved around the most. Share how those areas began to let you down.

3. Tell about the first time you heard the gospel and what your initial reactions were. Then tell when and how your attitude began to change and why. And finally share why you ultimately accepted Christ.

4. Share specific changes and illustrations about the things Christ has done in your life since you've accepted Him.

5. Practice reciting your testimony over and over until it becomes natural. This is your personal story. You should be able to share it easily because the events happened to you.

6. Try to keep your testimony to 3 minutes. That length makes it easy to share in conversation without it becoming a monologue. (Neisha Roberts, cru.org)

counts can be very misleading as they come largely from self-reports of churches and denominations. IMB depends on estimates of evangelical believers as we have defined evangelical faith and practice."

Natural disasters like the 2015 earthquake in Nepal may have boosted the rapid growth in Christian population because of groups like IMB and Climbing for Christ (C4C), an evangelical group based in New York, who have provided humanitarian aid and shared the gospel in the process.

C4C began its "Mission: Nepal" in 2008 and by 2011 it dedicated the first church in Dapcha, a village about 25 miles east of Kathmandu. There are now three churches in the village.

Tej Rokka, pastor of a C4C partner ministry called Savior Alone Redeems Asians, said, "(C4C) found some sick people and broken families and talked to them and prayed for them and miraculously these people were convinced and began to follow Christ," NPR reported. "They distributed some food for the people and clothes.

Because of that, people began to listen to them."

Baptist Global Response (BGR), IMB's relief partner, responded after the April 2015 earthquake with \$50,000 for initial efforts and secured a source for rice within the first few days of response.

Today BGR is still in the process of helping rebuild Nepal, with homes being reconstructed at 45 sites using BGR donations and volunteers.

Despite the growth of Christianity in some areas of the world, Haney noted there have been several challenges facing growth in the Global North such as intellectualism, cultural relativism and "a worldview that undercuts biblical authority and evangelical faith and practice."

Engage the unengaged

"It is important that we do not associate the growth of Christianity with the health of Christianity," Haney said. "Global numbers of Christian adherents can give us a false picture of the health of our churches and those within churches. For example some people groups may have a significant number of Christian adherents — counted because they were baptized into churches as infants — but have very few practicing Christians. This is why it is so important to engage the unengaged with church planting teams and reach the barely engaged with evangelical faith and practice which leads unbelievers to accept Jesus Christ as their sole source of salvation through faith in Him." ¶



Photo by Neisha Roberts

Believers in Chad, Africa, gather together to read the Word and encourage one another in their faith.

Influencing the culture



ALCAP provides Christian voice for political engagement on moral issues

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Influence is a powerful tool, and uniting Christians around the state to influence the political process is one of the goals of Alabama Citizens Action Program (ALCAP).

"God has given us the gift of living in a nation where we can influence our government," said Joe Godfrey, executive director of ALCAP. "If churches are not influencing their elected leaders at the city, county and state level, we could lose that wonderful gift of freedom."

Under Godfrey's leadership, ALCAP maintains an active presence in Montgomery, especially when the Legislature is in session, like right now. When the discussion turns to issues like gambling, alcohol sales and drug legalization, Godfrey works to mobilize church members to speak for the moral position. The goal? To influence the culture for good to pave the way for the gospel.

"If we don't speak out on these moral issues, the ultimate outcome is that sharing the gospel becomes more and more difficult," Godfrey said.

In this year's legislative session, lottery proposals and efforts to legalize daily fantasy sports websites like DraftKings and FanDuel are being discussed in Montgomery. Godfrey is walking the halls daily, speaking to legislators and addressing the moral implications of not only gambling but other issues like alcohol, biblical sexuality, abortion and tobacco and other drug issues. However, people in the pews need to know that ALCAP cannot fight the battle alone, Godfrey said.

"We can be down here talking to legislators about the issues and bills, but if they don't call their own senator and representative, things won't happen," he said. "They don't listen so much to us, they listen to constituents."

Pastors and church members need to be involved in the political process, just as Old Testament prophets spoke out against evil in their communities. Involvement is a New Testament command as well, Godfrey said.

"Jesus tells His followers to be salt and

light, to influence the culture in which we live," he said.

The political process is one way ALCAP does that but not the only way. The organization actively engages young people through American Character Builders, an education program that seeks to prevent bullying, drug abuse and addiction. Thousands of students participate in American Character Builders programs each year, and upcoming changes in the format of the programs will make them more user-friendly for youth ministers, teachers and young people.



GODFREY

Samford University students are working with ALCAP to shift the programs to a video-based curriculum. The videos, along with lesson plans, Bible study materials and discussion questions, will be available as downloads once they are ready.

The first topic to transition to the new format will be the anti-bullying program, and Godfrey hopes to have the videos ready

by the start of the 2016 school year. Other programs will be revised as funding allows. American Character Builders is a 501(c)3 organization, so all donations are tax-deductible and helpful to providing the program without cost to student groups.

Educational resources

"We want to be able to offer these resources free to anyone who can use them with students," Godfrey said.

Through the support of partner churches, organizations and individuals, ALCAP will continue to monitor legislation on moral issues and inform legislators of the social and moral implications of such legislation. The organization will continue to keep constituents involved as well, an effort that Baptists like Webb Adams and Franklin Kirksey appreciate.

Adams, a member of Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills, in Birmingham Baptist Association, responded to a recent social media update by Godfrey regarding the false promises of lottery revenue, noting the fact that lotteries take money from the poor and increase crime, bankruptcy, suicide and divorce. Kirksey, pastor of Spanish Fort Baptist

Tips for pastors, ministers

Alabama Citizens Action Program (ALCAP) works to unite Christians around the state to influence the government and political processes. But ALCAP also provides helpful resources for pastors and ministers as they lead the local church.

On alcap.com there are several biblical resources, helpful links and updates on current political issues.

One resource provides a list of items that are and are not legal for a church to do in order to keep its local church tax-exempt status.

For example churches may do the following:

- ▶ Preach on moral and social issues and civic involvement
- ▶ Educate on political process and political/social/legislative issues
- ▶ Distribute candidate surveys and incumbent voting records (but avoid editorial opinions)
- ▶ Encourage members to voice their opinions in favor or in opposition to certain legislation (Churches and other 501(c)3 organizations may support or oppose legislation so long as such activity comprises an insubstantial part of the overall operation. 501(c)4 organizations may support or oppose legislation without any limitations.)

- ▶ Discuss biblical instruction pertaining to moral and cultural issues such as abortion, same-sex "marriage," etc.

- ▶ Facilitate petition drives supporting or opposing legislation

Churches may not do the following:

- ▶ Endorse or oppose political candidates
- ▶ Contribute to Political Action Committees
- ▶ Campaign for candidates
- ▶ Fundraise for candidates
- ▶ Support or oppose judicial candidates

Pastors may do the following:

- ▶ Preach on moral and social issues and encourage civic involvement
- ▶ Engage in voter registration activities that avoid promoting one candidate or particular political party
- ▶ Distribute educational materials to voters
- ▶ Conduct candidate or issue forums where each duly qualified candidate is invited and provided an equal opportunity to address the congregation

Pastors may not do the following:

- ▶ Endorse candidates on behalf of the church
- ▶ Use church funds or services to contribute directly to candidates or political committees
- ▶ Use church funds to pay fees for political events
- ▶ Allow candidates to solicit funds while speaking in a church

Source: TAB, alcap.org

**For more
information on
what is/isn't legal
for churches to
do, visit alcap.com
or call 205-
985-9062.**

**For more information, visit alcap.com
and americancharacterbuilders.org.**

Church in Baldwin Baptist Association, joined the discussion as well, voicing his appreciation for the work of Godfrey and ALCAP.

"Thank you for standing for truth and righteousness," Kirksey posted online.

Educating voters will continue to be a large part of ALCAP's mission, as will voicing concerns to lawmakers as "Alabama's moral compass," Godfrey said. He desires prayer support for the work of ALCAP and American Character Builders. Financial support also helps continue

the mission. The third leg of the stool is influence, specifically that of voters who care about moral issues in the state.

Call your legislators

"We need people calling their legislators to say that in addition to the morality of the issues, some, like the lottery, are just terrible economic policy," Godfrey said. "Whether it's Sunday alcohol sales, wet/dry votes or lottery proposals, we need people to be engaged and to vote 'no' on those proposals." 🙏

ALCAP works to clear confusion over legality of same-sex 'marriage'

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

It's been a year since U.S. District Court Judge Callie Granade ruled that Alabama's refusal to recognize same-sex "marriages" was unconstitutional. And it's been more than seven months since same-sex "marriage" was legalized in the state.

But that doesn't mean everyone's OK with it. Several counties, including Cleburne and Elmore, have shut down all their marriage licenses offices, according to Internet sources, to avoid issuing same-sex licenses. A few other counties are only issuing licenses to opposite-sex couples.

In January, Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore ordered state probate judges to refuse licenses to same-sex couples, claiming the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in June 2015 did not apply to Alabama, but only to Michigan, Kentucky, Ohio and Tennessee.

However, many legal advisers see Moore's statement as nonsense.

"The Supreme Court decision has authoritative precedent that binds all state officials," said Ronald Krotoszynski, a law professor at the University of Alabama. "This is little different than a Southern governor ordering school officials to refuse to segregate schools," the *Los Angeles Times* reported.

After Moore's order, however, three probate courts reported that they had stopped issuing marriage licenses in early January.

During this time complaints were filed to the Judicial Inquiry Commission of Alabama in mid-February regarding the Alabama Supreme Court's silence on pending case *Ex parte State ex rel. Alabama Policy Institute*, submitted in March 2015, which upheld the state's same-sex "marriage" bans.

Since the state Supreme Court is still deliberating that case, supporting marriage between one

man and one woman should still be in effect, one complaint claims.

Terry Batton, Barbour County Tea Party president, who filed the complaint, said in a press release, "We always expect the justices of the Alabama Supreme Court to rule expeditiously in any case but especially one of such great importance. Instead they have been sitting on the case for almost eight months leaving probate judges, legislators and concerned citizens in quandary."

Null and void ban

But according to legal experts, the pending case should make the same-sex "marriage" ban null and void because of other developments in federal court, like the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals ruling that the decision in *Obergefell* nullified the ban, *msnbc.com* reported.

So why all the continued confusion?

Alabama law is unique in that it says probate judges "may" issue marriage licenses, not "must" or "shall," like in Kentucky's law for example. If a couple were to file a lawsuit against a court, the lawsuit could potentially fail because of the "may" clause. But that theory hasn't been tested yet.

Alabama Citizens Action Program (ALCAP) has fought to defend the biblical definition of marriage along this judicial journey.

Joe Godfrey, ALCAP executive director, has been directly involved with providing assistance and counsel to churches and pastors about the issue of same-sex "marriage." He's been invited by numerous Alabama Baptist churches and associations across the state to provide counsel on appropriate response to the marriage rulings and how they impact congregations, pastors, families and individual members (see TAB Talks, below).

For more resources on how to handle same-sex couples and same-sex "marriage" requests in your church, visit alcap.com or call 205-985-9062. ☎

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 (right), editor of the paper, interviews Joe Godfrey (left), Alabama Citizens Action Program executive director. Godfrey shared how churches can prepare themselves for potential issues related to same-sex relationships.

Baptist NEWS BRIEFS

COMPILED FROM WIRE SERVICES

ERLC joins others in call for payday lending reform

NASHVILLE — The Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) has joined other faith groups in calling for payday lending reform. The call came in a Feb. 11 letter to the U.S. House Subcommittee on Financial Institutions and Consumer Credit.

ERLC joins the National Latino Evangelical Coalition, National Baptist Convention, Center for Public Justice, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Ecumenical Poverty Initiative, PICO National Network and United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to form the Faith for Just Lending coalition.

Representing 92 million Americans, the coalition said payday lending businesses prey on the poor and bank on the likelihood the borrower will not be able to pay the loan off on time, resulting in mounting debt with rates as high as 400 percent.

The coalition is calling for a balance between the market need for credit and the need for consumer protection.

Messengers to the 2014 SBC annual meeting approved a resolution that denounced predatory payday lending and called on the adoption of government policies to end the practice. And messengers to the Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting in November 2014 also passed a resolution condemning the excessive interest rates charged by payday and title loan companies. (Maggie Walsh)

Southwestern Seminary releases new youth curriculum

FORT WORTH, Texas — Richard Ross has spent most of his life leading youth to a deeper relationship with Christ, so he didn't hesitate when he felt God's call to develop a small group curriculum for teens and young adults.

But even Ross, professor of student ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, was surprised at the result: a six-year free curriculum for grades 7-12 encompassing a multiyear journey to learn everything from apologetics and ethics to evangelism and missions.

The online "Disciple6" curriculum, written by 60-plus faculty and students at Southwestern Seminary, includes learner and leader guides spanning core doctrines of the faith to train disciples for Christ. The resource is available for download at Disciple6.com.

"Our broken culture, the millions of lost in the U.S. and the unreached people groups globally demand that we develop true disciples," Ross said. (BP)

Ryrie Study Bible author, theologian dies at age 90

DALLAS — Charles C. Ryrie, a scholar whose name abounds on Ryrie Study Bible editions with more than 2.6 million in print in various languages, died Feb. 16 at age 90.

Known for his end-times theology of dispensationalism, Ryrie was a longtime systematic theology professor at Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS) and a longtime member of First Baptist Church, Dallas.

The Ryrie Study Bible, with the professor's 10,000-plus explanatory notes, used the King James Version when it was first published in 1978. It is now available in New American Standard Bible and English Standard Version translations.

Ryrie also wrote more than 50 books.

During his time at DTS he also served as dean of doctoral students for more than 20 years before retiring in 1983.

A native of Alton, Illinois, Ryrie held degrees from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, DTS and Haverford College in Pennsylvania. (BP)



ROSS



RYRIE

Annual State Evangelism Conference seeks to renew, refresh ministry leaders

By Maggie Walsh
The Alabama Baptist

So often ministry leaders give and give without slowing down long enough to do a little receiving. That's why the annual Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference (SEC) is so important, according to Sammy Gilbreath, director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions' office of evangelism.

"There is little time for [ministry leaders] to just be fed. This conference attempts to do just that. (We want participants to) ... just come and allow the Lord to speak through His servants with music, worship and the preached Word," he said.

Held at First Baptist Church, Montgomery, on Feb. 29–March 1, the conference will be separated into four sessions with each session featuring one or more speakers and special music.

Jay Wolf, pastor of First, Montgomery, describes SEC as a combination of a worship service, instructional seminar, pep rally and family reunion and anticipates seeing God move throughout the conference.

"When God's family gathers to focus on our primary task of sharing the gospel, the Lord's favor and fire follows," Wolf said. "We anticipate a barrel of blessings ... for all who are able to attend."

In the first session Feb. 29 at 6:30 p.m. the speakers will be Steve Gaines, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church, Cordova, Tennessee, and Don Wilton, pastor of First Baptist Church, Spartanburg, South Carolina. Charles Billingsley, worship pastor at Thomas Road

Baptist Church, Lynchburg, Virginia, and president of Red Tie Music, will be the musical guest.

The remaining three sessions will take place March 1. At the 9 a.m. session, guest speakers will be Danny Lovett, pastor of The Church at Chelsea-Westover, Westover; Jimmy Jackson, pastor of Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville; and Mac Brunson, pastor of First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida.

The 2 p.m. session will feature Dusty McLemore, pastor of Lindsay Lane Baptist Church, Athens, and Daven Watkins, pastor of First Baptist Church, Pelham, as guest speakers. Billingsley will be the musical guest in both sessions.

For more information, visit alsbom.org/sec/ or contact Amy Nelson at 334-613-2258 or anelson@alsbom.org.

The final session will be at 6:30 p.m. Ted Traylor, pastor of Olive Baptist Church, Pensacola, Florida, will speak and award-winning singer/songwriter Larnelle Harris will be the musical guest.

Gilbreath prays participants drive home from the final session with a renewed spirit.

"I hope [they] will leave relaxed, rested and blessed by renewed fellowship with peers as well as challenged by the preaching and singing. I hope when they leave, they are closer to the Lord than when they came."

Additional events surrounding SEC include:

► The Church and Sexuality Conference, Feb. 29, 10 a.m.–3:45 p.m. (see page 12).

► Dinner with Steve Gaines, Feb. 29, 4:30–6 p.m. To register, visit alsbom.org/event/stevegaines/.

► Ministers Wives' Luncheon with guest speaker Kathy Litton, March 1. To register, visit alabama-wmu.org/ministerswives. ☛

ALABAMA UPDATES

PEOPLE, CHURCHES MAKING NEWS ACROSS THE STATE

Henry to retire after more than 30 years in ministry

Jerry Henry's ministry journey began when he returned from Army service in Vietnam. "When I came back my wife had answers to things I didn't have. ... She inspired me to start studying God's Word and I couldn't get enough."

All these years later, Henry has announced his retirement as pastor of First Baptist Church, Fairhope, where he has served for almost 15 years. He will retire May 31.



HENRY

After experiencing that initial desire for the Word, Henry felt God leading him to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, where he earned master's and doctor of philosophy degrees. He had earned a bachelor's degree from Auburn University prior to serving in the Army.

Henry also has served as pastor of Thomaston Baptist Church and Elkdale Baptist Church, Selma. Altogether he has served as a pastor for more than 30 years. He also served as chairman of the religion department at Judson College in Marion for five years.

Looking back on his years in ministry, Henry would advise young pastors to dig into the church they are called to. "You learn the people better the longer you stay with them. ... Learn to love them and be with them when they need you. Then preach the Word."

He and his wife, Susan, plan to remain in Fairhope and will serve "wherever God leads." They have three children and seven grandchildren. (Maggie Walsh)

Associational food pantry supplies more than food

At the Alabama-Crenshaw Baptist Association food pantry, housed in the associational office building in Glenwood, food is not the only thing going out the door with clients in need.

Jewel Killough, associational Woman's Missionary Union missions consultant, said volunteers at the food pantry read Scripture with the people who come in the door, pray with them, encourage them and offer "spiritual help."

The food pantry, open one Wednesday a month, provides a "balanced box" of food to people in crisis situations, Killough said. Each box has cans of fruit and vegetables, cooking oil, ketchup, cereal, flour, sugar, soups, cereal, pasta, peanut butter, jelly and other essentials.

The goods are donated by associational churches each month or purchased with money donated by the churches.

She said the "secret to the support" is having a scheduled calendar where two or three churches are assigned a certain month to give donations and send volunteers to work during the food pantry's open hours. And that "secret" has paid off by keeping the food pantry running for more than 15 years.

"I leave there just very happy and encouraged or sometimes I leave there crying because I sympathize with the needs," Killough said of the food pantry. "It's a moving experience to serve people and pray for them in that way." (Neisha Roberts)

Across ALABAMA'S Associations

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

BESSEMER

► **Southcrest Church, Bessemer**, will host bluegrass gospel band Brighter Day from Tuscaloosa on March 4. Doors open at 6 p.m. with food and door prizes. Special music begins at 7 p.m. A love offering will be taken. Scott Bush is pastor.

MARSHALL

► **Sardis Church, Boaz**, will hold special community outreach services Feb. 28. Robert Smith will speak at the 9:45 a.m. service and Junior Hill will speak at 6 p.m. For more information call the church office at 256-593-7762. Michael Goforth is pastor.

MONTGOMERY

► **Mark Raughton** is the new pastor of **River Bend Church, Lowndesboro**. He holds a degree from the Baptist College of Florida in Graceville. He and his wife, Lou Ann, have two children and three grandchildren.

RUSSELL

► **Tommy Poole** is the new interim director of missions for **Russell Association**. He previously served as pastor of Pine Grove Church, Phenix City, before his retirement in January.

He also has served at Sunderlan Church, Phenix City; First Church, Hurtsboro; First Church, Lincoln; Holland Creek Church, Phenix City; Ivalee Church, Atlanta; and Oak Station Church, Robinwood. He and his wife, Carolyn, have two children and four grandchildren. Poole holds bachelor's degrees in theology and psychology from William Carey University in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and a master's degree from International Bible



POOLE

Institute and Seminary. The association voted Feb. 4 and it became effective Feb. 15.

Institute and Seminary. The association voted Feb. 4 and it became effective Feb. 15.

WASHINGTON

► **Larry Thompson** is the new director of missions for **Washington Association**. He has served as pastor of Three Forks Church, Millry; True Vine Church, Chatom; and Liberty Church, McIntosh. Thompson holds a certificate in biblical studies from Liberty Bible Col-



THOMPSON

lege and Seminary in Homosassa, Florida, and took extension classes in pastoral studies through New Orleans Seminary. He and his wife, Wilene, have two children, three grandchildren and one great-grandchild. His first day was Jan. 1. ☛

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TAB
AR

Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Knowing God

God Is Unchanging

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

As believers, we often use the terms “omnipotence,” “omnipresent” and “omniscience” to speak of God being all powerful, everywhere present and all knowing. And we use the term “immutability” to speak of His quality of changelessness. Just as Hebrews 13:8 declares Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever, we can know that God in the fullness of His being does not change. He declared to the prophet Malachi, “I the Lord do not change” (Mal. 3:6). All that God created is subject to change, but the Creator Himself does not change. Addressing God, Psalm 102:25–27 declares: “Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will endure; yes, they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will change them, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will have no end.”

Sure word from God

The New Testament witness says, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (James 1:17). In its last book, the Bible gives us this sure word from God: “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Rev. 1:8).

God’s immutability extends to His Word; it is dependable. We can trust it. His promises are forever sure. His warnings also are forever serious; the day of His wrath will come. As Jesus put it, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away” (Matt. 24:35). Furthermore, God’s unchangeableness extends to His attributes. His mercies never fail. His love is everlasting. His goodness never waxes and wanes. God is good all the time. His truthfulness endures to all generations. His power never lessens.

His wisdom does not diminish. His holiness never becomes tainted.

Readers of the Bible might wonder, however, about the immutability of God when coming across statements like Jonah 3:10 concerning Nineveh: “God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil that He had said that He would do unto them, and He did it not.” Does God’s change of mind about the repentant Ninevites belie the claim that He is unchanging? Not at all. What is unchanging is His mercy. God’s mercy always reacts the same to genuine repentance. Repentance inevitably brings forgiveness.

What changed in Nineveh was not God but the Ninevites. God operates according to the unchanging principle given in Jeremiah 18:7–8: “If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it.”

Divine immutability is a double-edged truth. It offers no comfort to unrepentant sinners, for God has decreed sure and eternal punishment for them. It offers great comfort to believers as we have assurance that the God who sought us, called us and gave us salvation does not change. Thomas Chisholm captured God’s immutability in the opening words of a hymn, writing, “Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father; there is no shadow of turning with Thee; Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not; as Thou hast been, Thou forever wilt be.” ☛

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.



NASA attorney rebukes employees for use of ‘Jesus’ in newsletter

By Martha Simmons
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When a small group of workers at the Johnson Space Center (JSC) in Houston submitted the following notice to their June 2015 employee newsletter, they had no idea it would launch a legal missile at their lunchtime worship group:

“Join with the praise and worship band ‘Allied with the Lord’ for a refreshing set of spring praise and worship songs on Thursday, June 4, from 11:15 a.m. to noon in Building 57, Room 106. (The theme for this session will be ‘Jesus is our life!’) Prayer partners will be available for anyone who has need. All JSC civil servants and contractors are welcome.”

Shortly after the notice appeared, Mike FitzPatrick, president of “Allied with the Lord,” said he received a call from a NASA attorney objecting to the name “Jesus” appearing in the notice. “Jesus” made the notice too “sec-tarian” or “denomina-tional” for publication in the internal government publication, according to the lawyer, and would be censored from any future notices.

“Everybody in the club was really surprised,” Fitzpatrick said in a CBN News interview. “NASA’s had a long history of tolerance and even encouragement of religious expression by private individuals.”

NASA had previously supported the praise and worship group, which “lets the world know that scientists and engineers believe in Jesus,” FitzPatrick said.

“It was only when we put ‘Jesus’ in the newsletter (that) we got a rise out of the legal office,” he said. “I told the lawyer ... we will refrain from putting in ‘Jesus’ but I want to retain legal counsel.”

Written response demanded

On Feb. 8 an attorney representing First Liberty Institute, a religious liberty advocacy and legal defense organization, sent a letter to NASA asserting that “censoring of the club’s religious viewpoint is a violation of federal law and the First Amendment.”

The letter went on to say that Rebekah D. Reed, the attorney who called FitzPatrick, contended that using the name “Jesus” in the “JSC Today” newsletter would cause NASA to violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

The letter, which is posted on firstliberty.org, demands a written response from NASA no later than March 10 or the matter will be taken to court.

JSC news chief Kelly Humphries released the following statement Feb. 16: “NASA’s Johnson Space Center does not

prohibit the use of any specific religious terms or names in employee newsletters, or other internal communications. The ‘JSC Today’ daily electronic newsletter has cited numerous religious themes and holiday events throughout its history.”

‘Proselytizing’

“A May 28, 2015, ‘JSC Today’ posting for the praise and worship club was cited by some employees as proselytizing and an inappropriate use of federal resources. However, the newsletter has continued to make postings that have been religious in nature for both the praise and worship club and other organizations, and on multiple occasions have cited specific references to the name ‘Jesus,’” the statement reads.

The statement doesn’t go far enough for FitzPatrick.

“We’d like a certainty that what we’re doing is acceptable,” he said in the CBN News interview. “We’d really like an

apology ... from NASA (acknowledging) that our rights were infringed and in no uncertain terms that we can put ‘Jesus’ back into the newsletter.”

The issue could have special significance for Alabama, since NASA’s Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville employs 6,000 civil servants and contractor workers.

Jennifer Stanfield, NASA Marshall public affairs officer, said, “Employee groups are allowed to meet at lunch-

time or during nonwork hours as long as the meeting does not interfere with NASA work.” Some examples are weight loss meetings, book clubs and cancer support groups. Faith-based groups are permitted too.

Since Marshall’s newsletter is for official business, notices for these meetings may be posted by employees on the facility’s intranet, Stanfield said. However, no legal problems have arisen in connection with these notices.

This is not the first time NASA has struggled with controversy regarding separation of Church and state. In the months prior to the 1969 moon landing, Apollo 8 astronauts orbiting the moon on Christmas Eve broadcast a portion of the Creation story from Genesis. Atheist Madalyn Murray O’Hair filed a lawsuit alleging that the astronauts, as government employees, had violated separation of Church and state. The lawsuit was dismissed by the Supreme Court. ☛

“It was only when we put ‘Jesus’ in the newsletter (that) we got a rise out of the legal office.”

**Mike FitzPatrick
president, praise and
worship club**

VOICE YOUR OPINION

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- Be as concise as possible

Missions lifestyle

National WMU names Montgomery teen as Acteens panelist

National Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) named Sarah Golden of Eastern Hills Baptist Church, Montgomery, as a 2016 National Acteens Panelist. The National Acteens Panel is comprised of teen girls who demonstrate a commitment to missions and leadership in their church, school and community.

Acteens is WMU's missions organization for girls in grades 7-12. Through Acteens, girls grow in their relationships with God and each other as they learn about and participate in missions, develop leadership skills and become actively involved in ministry.

Golden, from Pike Road, has been involved in Acteens for six years and has demonstrated a commitment to serving others and sharing Christ.

"Missions is important to me because of how much of an impact it leaves on every individual," Golden said. "The missions field also teaches people how to love like Christ loves. With Christ's love, I can see people in a new light."

She adds that Acteens has taught her the true meaning of a missions lifestyle.

"To be a missionary you do not have to be a certain age or look a certain way; you just have to have God's love in your heart that urges you to share your story along with His," she said.

A safe haven

Golden describes Acteens as a place where she has not only grown in her knowledge of missions and her relationship with God, but also as a safe haven where she can look to friends and role models for guidance.

"It's a great support base for people who need prayer or encouragement in their life," she

said. "We are there to listen to every girl who is going through a tough time. I have never doubted if my Acteens girls were going to be there for me when I was feeling down."

Candace McIntosh, executive director of Alabama WMU and Acteens leader at Eastern Hills Baptist, said of Golden, "I have watched her grow in her understanding of who God is and in her desire to serve Him when and in whatever way she can."

Golden will serve alongside three other panelists: Hannah Hutton of Hyde Park Baptist Church, Austin, Texas; Jemima Louis of Tallowood Baptist Church, Houston, Texas; and Ana Sandoval of Freeman Heights Baptist Church, Garland, Texas.

Kym Mitchell, student resource team leader for national WMU, said, "We are thrilled to have these young women as ambassadors for Acteens because the call to make disciples among their generation is so great. We

know this panel will influence young women across the country as the Lord shapes them into the next generation of leaders."

The panelists will serve through Dec. 31 and receive a \$1,000 scholarship from the Jessica Powell Loftis Scholarship for Acteens from the WMU Foundation. They will be featured at the WMU Missions Celebration and annual meeting in St. Louis, Missouri, on June 12-13, where they will meet national and international missionaries and missions leaders from across the country.

Speaking engagements

They also may be invited to speak at church, associational and state Acteens and WMU meetings and events and will write articles for *The Mag*, the Acteens missions magazine, and the Acteens website, wmu.com/acteens.

Applications for the 2017 National Acteens Panel are available at wmu.com/acteens and in the fall issue of *Acteens Leader*. All applications must be submitted to national WMU by Nov. 1. (WMU)



GOLDEN

Reverse Mortgage News

By Jimmy Dixon

Max Youngblood is a retired pastor who faithfully served the Lord for 50 years. Several years ago I assisted him and his wife, Carolyn, in getting a reverse mortgage. Since that time I have shared their testimonies such as, "Living with a Reverse Mortgage" with *The Alabama Baptist* readers. Last week Bro. Max sent me the following email to use in this article:

"November 27, 2015, was my and my beautiful wife's 57th anniversary. The next day she went home to be with the Lord after 20 days in CICU. In September 2015 we left our home and moved in with our daughter when we could no longer care for each other. Having now come full circle I can say the reverse mortgage was a tremendous blessing to us financially. For anyone considering a reverse, I recommend it along with recommending you contact Jimmy Dixon. He is an honest Christian gentleman."



Max and Carolyn

I sincerely appreciate Max's words and it was my blessing to get to know Carolyn. Because of God's grace I look forward to seeing her again. To Bro. Max, she'll look more beautiful than ever before!

Like *The Alabama Baptist*, Jimmy Dixon covers our great state helping seniors improve the quality of their lives. For a free reverse mortgage brochure or proposal, call him direct at 205-567-4800 or email jdixon@mcgowinking.com.



Jimmy Dixon

— Paid Advertising —



New logo dramatizes descriptive words — inform, inspire, connect

If you're a regular reader of *The Alabama Baptist* then by now you've seen numerous references to the state Baptist paper's new logo — "a cross outlined by people reaching with outstretched arms to the world," according to Editor Bob Terry.

After 20 years, the new logo represents something fresh and unique but also still boasts the cross as the focal point.

And "graphically the new symbol dramatizes the publication's three descriptive

words — inform, inspire, connect," Terry wrote in his Feb. 4 editorial.

To hear more about the logo and the inspiration for its design, stop by *The Alabama Baptist*'s display at the Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference at First Baptist Church, Montgomery, on Feb. 29-March 1.

Visit alsbom.org/sec/ for more details on the conference or email news@thealabamabaptist.org with questions on the logo. (TAB)

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Addiction among teens

Addiction prevention includes addressing heart matters early, providing support for those who struggle

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

As more and more heroin addicts attribute the start of their addiction to legal prescriptions, Christian recovery specialists say parents must take a greater role not only in encouraging their children to avoid drugs but also to address the heart issues that often lead young people to drugs in the first place.

The availability of heroin and other street drugs continues to be a focus of law enforcement in Alabama and the United States. However, the availability of prescription opioid medications is an equally important issue, said J. Sándor Cheka III, executive director of the Addiction Prevention Coalition in Birmingham.

"Sixty-four percent of our kids are getting their opiates from a friend or family member," he said. "The question we have to ask is why are so many opiates accessible like that?"

Prescription medication

One reason is that Alabama doctors prescribe a lot of pain medication. A 2012 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study named Alabama No. 1 for opioid prescriptions at a rate of 143 prescriptions per 100 residents. Some of those medications are prescribed for chronic pain. Others are prescribed to treat the pain after surgery or an injury. In those cases, the worst pain usually passes within a few days, but a prescription may contain enough medication for 2 to 4 weeks. Often those unused pills sit in a medicine cabinet "just in case." The temptation for teens and even guests in the home can be powerful, Cheka said.

"One guy in one of our recovery programs lived in one of the wealthiest places in Birmingham. He said that every house he went into he could

come out with a medication that would make him high. We have the perception that prescription drugs are safe because the (Food and Drug Administration) approved them and a doctor prescribed them."

Teenagers are especially susceptible to that perception, Cheka said. As a result, a teen faced with the choice between smoking marijuana or taking a Percocet might

How to dispose of unused medication

The Partnership for Drug-Free Kids asks parents and grandparents to pledge to safeguard their medicines and speak to their families about medicine abuse. One way to

safeguard children and teens from prescription abuse is to safely dispose of unwanted, unused or expired medications. Walgreens recently announced it would install safe medication disposal kiosks at more than

500 drugstores in several states including Alabama before the end of 2016. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration also sponsors National Prescription Drug Take Back Days in coordination with local law enforcement officials. April 30 is the next scheduled take back day.

Most medications can be disposed of in household trash, but the U.S. Food

and Drug Administration recommends a few simple steps:

1. Mix medicines (do not crush tablets or capsules) with an unpalatable substance such as dirt, kitty litter or used coffee grounds;
2. Place the mixture in a container such as a sealed plastic bag;
3. Throw the container in your household trash;
4. Scratch out all personal information

on the prescription label of your empty pill bottle or empty medicine packaging to make it unreadable, then dispose of the container.

Some medications pose a danger to the community water supply or to the environment and should never be flushed down the toilet. (Carrie Brown McWhorter)

For a list of disposal suggestions for specific drugs, visit the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's website at www.fda.gov.

reason that taking the Percocet is safer. Even parents might not be alarmed by the choice.

Some who have never dealt with addiction argue that the pills are not to blame since an individual chooses to misuse them. Unfortunately addiction is a much more complicated issue. For one thing research suggests that addiction is due 50 percent to genetic predisposition and 50 percent to poor coping skills.

Families should talk with their children about genetic tendencies toward drug and alcohol addiction just as they talk about heart disease, cancer or diabetes, Cheka said.

"Just because you are genetically predisposed doesn't mean you are going to become an addict, but parents need to have that conversation," he said. "Kids need to hear that substances are a destructive force and that the reason we don't do this is because there's a possibility for us that it could be a big problem."

Parents also should help children learn effective coping skills from an early age, Cheka said.

"Sixty-four percent of our kids are getting their opiates from a friend or family member."

**J. Sándor Cheka III
executive director, Addiction Prevention Coalition**

centered residential recovery ministry in Bessemer, addiction counselors emphasize the development of coping skills since those are behaviors that can be changed, said Amy Jones, director of marketing at The Foundry.

"We teach that addiction is a choice to numb one's feelings with something rather than deal with them in a healthy way," she said.

Therefore the goal of recovery is to empower the addict to make healthy choices during the rough patches and rebuild their hope and dignity through those positive choices, Jones said.

Equipping children

It is never too early to empower children to make healthy choices that will help them say "no" to the temptation of drugs. Both the family and the Church can equip kids by helping them develop their identity in Christ and trust in His power during difficult times.

Cheka said, "Too many kids, from a fundamental spiritual level, have no hope. When one thing goes wrong their entire value comes crashing down. Unless they have hope outside themselves, which we know is Christ, they feel like their whole lives are falling apart."

The Church also has a tremendous opportunity to support those who struggle with addiction and their families, Cheka said.

"Scripture says we are comforted in our distress so that we might comfort others, so part of ministry to families is to walk beside those who struggle with addiction and let them know you're going to stand by them," he said. "So often families think they're alone. They need to know other people have gone through this and be welcomed with arms of love, not condemnation." ✠

Resources for addicts and their families

Websites

- www.addictionpreventioncoalition.org
- www.foundryministries.com
- www.celebraterecovery.com
- www.alcap.com

Books

- "Life's Healing Choices: Freedom from Your Hurts, Hang-ups and Habits" by John Baker
- "Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No to Take Control of

Your Life" by Henry Cloud and John Townsend

► "Healing the Addicted Brain: The Revolutionary, Science-Based Alcoholism and Addiction Recovery Program" by Harold Urschel

► "Love First: A Family's Guide to Intervention" by Jeff and Debra Jay

► "Broken: My Story of Addiction and Redemption" by William Cope Moyers

► "Everything Changes: Help for Families of Newly Recovering Addicts" by Beverly Conyers ✠

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

ANTI-TRUMP

For a number of reasons, I think it's most unfortunate that Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission Executive Director Russell Moore participated in the anti-Trump edition of the *National Review*.

One is that his participation implies to many the acquiescence of other Southern Baptists. We know our leaders only speak for themselves but other non-Baptists may not know this. Second it's puzzling to me why Moore would accuse Trump of being "secretly" pro-choice but ignore the three candidates on the other side who are openly pro-choice. And finally no pri-

mary votes have been cast yet so denouncing a candidate isn't helpful. Let the people speak.

Michael J. Brooks
Alabaster, Ala.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This letter was written before the February Iowa caucuses. ✱

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- 5** Hold your device over a page or image in *The Alabama Baptist* (TAB) marked as augmented reality and watch the paper come to life.
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- 7** Each week when TAB arrives, open the app and hold your device over the augmented reality articles.

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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Millry Baptist Church in Millry, Alabama, is receiving resumés for a pastor with a master of divinity degree from a Southern Baptist seminary. Pastoral experience is required. Please submit resumés via email to: se-giles29@gmail.com or mail to: Millry Baptist Church, P.O. Box 197, Millry, AL 36558.

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

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

WORSHIP LEADER

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

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.

PART-TIME WORSHIP PASTOR

East Side Baptist Church in Cullman, Alabama, is accepting resumés for a part-time worship pastor. Please submit resumés by March 6 to: esbc-searchteam@gmail.com.

MINISTER OF MUSIC & SENIOR ADULTS

FBC Bay Minette is seeking a full-time minister of music and senior adults. Please send resumés to: Dr. Larry Beauchamp, P.O. Box 1628, Bay Minette, AL 36507, or revbeau46@gmail.com.

YOUTH MINISTER/ASSOCIATE PASTOR

Purpose Baptist Church, a fundamental, conservative congregation in Opelika, Alabama, is seeking a youth minister/associate pastor. We will consider bivocational as well as full-time applicants. Apply online at tgrantham@purposechurch.net.

YOUTH & CHILDREN'S MINISTER

Brent Baptist Church is currently taking resumés for a youth and children's minister. Please send resumés to: P.O. Box 246, Brent, AL 35034, or email to: brentbc@bellsouth.net.

OTHER POSITIONS

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS

The Calhoun Baptist Association requests resumés for the position of director of missions. Please send your resumé to: ATTN: DOM Search Committee, CBA, 1130 Woodstock Ave., Anniston, AL 36207.

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS

Sulphur Springs Baptist Association, 23 churches, accepting resumés for bivocational director of missions. Send to: DOM Search Committee, 4501 Greathouse Road, Dora, AL 35062 or email to: SSBAoffice@gmail.com by March 10.

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Rashional thoughts

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Executive editor • jrash@thealabamabaptist.org

Read the directions carefully

It has happened more times than I care to admit and each time is just as embarrassing as the others. You may have done it a time or two yourself especially if you communicate via email and/or text messages on your smartphone.

And I know better, I really do, but I continue to do it — failing to read a document, an email, a text or how-to instructions carefully.

You know the drill. We know we should slow down and read all the words and make sure we understand what is being communicated before we respond or act, but for some reason we tend to skim the text and then take action.

And many of us can remember that particular exam given to us by that one teacher or professor determined to teach us a life lesson. He or she handed out the test papers and said, “It is important to read through all the questions first, then take the exam.” The top of the test paper also stated, “Read all questions before answering any of them.”

But what did we do? We answered the questions as we read them because we thought it would take less time. We didn’t want to read through all of them and then come back to the first one to start answering them.

Of course, the disappointment hit hard when we reached the last question and realized why one or two students got up fairly quickly and turned in their exams. The final question wasn’t a question at all. It stated, “Do not answer any of the above questions. Sign your name here, turn it in now and you will receive an A. All others will fail this test.”

Ouch — if only we had followed the instructions. And yet still today, I find myself failing to read carefully through correspondence and other forms of communication.

I’m not sure if it is because

my full-time work requires such careful reading, editing and fact checking that I get a little slack when it comes to other content or if it is merely a result of going in too many directions, but it happens more than it should.

The one good thing about realizing what I’m doing is that I am reminded to be kind and gracious to others when it happens to me. And it does happen — often.

I might send an email or text asking three questions and the reply comes back with only one question answered. Or I might provide an outline for what all needs to be in a story and 75 percent of what I noted is written but the other 25 percent is overlooked.

It happens at work, at home, at church, in the neighborhood, at school and anywhere else we interact with people.

The deadline was clearly marked in the notice but somehow we didn’t see it. The change of plans was tucked inside the other three paragraphs of information but we stuck with the original schedule because we missed that note.

Take the challenge

If you are still with me and are truly reading through the column rather than skimming it, then I would encourage you to take the challenge I’m giving myself — slow down and read carefully. I believe we could save a lot of time, missteps and apologies by doing it right the first time.

I also wonder how much of the habit of not slowing down to read carefully could spill over into our biblical studies. How many times do we skim the Scriptures rather than carefully and thoroughly read every word? What are we missing if that is the case? Could God be blatantly showing Himself to us in a life-changing way that we are sadly missing because we’ve chosen to skim rather than absorb? #

Rashional Extras...



Healing requires facing the pain

www.lifebeyondbetrayal.com

People everywhere are struggling through life with wounded emotions. Lies, deceit, slander, selfishness, misunderstanding and abuse are wounds that can cut deep and have a profound and lasting impact.

There comes a time in the healing process when we find ourselves having to face these hurts instead of sweeping them under the rug in an attempt to make them go away. Along with the pain and all the emotions, we cannot build walls or stuff things into dark closets or pretend they will simply go away. Bringing these emotions out into the open is difficult because we don’t know what others will think. But we don’t want to repress these emotional wounds; rather we need to share them with a trusted friend.

James 5 says a key to our healing is in the sharing of the need — the widening of the circle of

trust. Bringing our hurts into the open gives us an opportunity to bring safe, trusted friends into community with us. It tells us in Scripture that the truth sets us free, and it also helps us keep healthy perspectives on others with life issues. We cannot heal and walk this journey of recovery alone because we were not created to be alone. We were created to be in relationship with others, so be encouraged by allowing some safe and trusted community into your healing journey.

Secondly we need to recognize that healing and victory from our emotional wounds is recognizing that Jesus is our Healer, just like He is the healer of our bodies. We can move from our emotional hurts to being able to relish in the healing grace of Jesus Christ. Remember — ultimately it is our choice whether we heal on this journey toward restoration and wholeness.

“Leadership is a skill that can be learned and it improves over time with all the stops and starts. ... Leadership opportunities give us that chance to learn our strengths and weaknesses and learn to do something ordinary extraordinarily well. ... Never let fear or insecurity or lack of self-confidence get in the way of what He is calling you to do. Let [God] finish that good work in you that He’s already started.”

Wanda Lee
Executive director
National Woman’s
Missionary Union

Serenity Prayer

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.

“Perhaps we’ve become so consumed with our gadgets that we are losing our ingenuity, inspiration and originality. I fear that our fixation with phones is mitigating our imaginative spirit. Or, in a world filled with white noise, perhaps we’ve forgotten how to be silent.”

Excerpt of a Facebook post by Al Blanton
Jasper, Alabama

“Wherever you go, there you are.”

Jim Oakley
Retired from the University of Alabama and
mentor to countless communications students/alumni

@EdLitton

We don’t need (to be) rescued from the idols around us but (from) the idol worshipping heart within us.

@johnnymhunt

Our failings are never meant to be the cause for despair but instead an invitation to receive God’s grace afresh.
@WisdomHunters #grateful

@NorthparkBapt

How awesome to know that no matter what we have done, God can restore us and save us! #verseoftheday #psalm80_19

Follow me
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and Periscope:
@RashionalThts

Church, Sexuality Conference to equip pastors, believers

By Doug Rogers

Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

A conference on sexuality may not seem like a typical topic for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) to tackle, but then again, these aren't typical times. In the days following the Supreme Court's ruling on same-sex "marriage" in 2015, SBOM formed a Church and Culture Task Force to help churches minister more effectively in a rapidly changing culture.

One result of that task force is the upcoming Church and Sexuality Conference on Feb. 29 at First Baptist Church, Montgomery. The conference will begin at 10 a.m. and conclude at 3:45 p.m. It immediately precedes the State Evangelism Conference (see story, page 6).

"For several decades our Alabama Baptist churches have been challenged by the sexual revolution occurring in our nation, a revolution that has become a tsunami of change with the legalization of same-sex 'marriage,'" said retired state missionary Dale Huff, who serves as chairman of the task force.

The conference will headline Russell Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, and Timothy George, dean of Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham.

Moore also will participate in a panel discussion along with Joe Godfrey, executive director of Alabama Citizens Action Program, on the topic of "Religious Liberty in a Culture of Moral Decline."

Participants will have the opportunity to choose from 1 of 9 breakout sessions designed to equip ministers and church members with tools to respond to cultural issues including cohabitation, gender identity, pornography, homosexuality, intolerance and sexuality within marriage.

A second panel discussion, "Taking This Back to My Church," will conclude the conference.

"We felt it was important to end the day with a very practical discussion focused on 'Where do we go from here and what do we do with the information we've learned?'" Huff said.

To register, visit alsbom.org/cas16.



Photo by Debbie Campbell

ABCH honors Evergreen Baptist

Rod Marshall (right), president and CEO of Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries (ABCH), presents Jim Collins (left), pastor of Evergreen Baptist Church, with a plaque in appreciation Feb. 14 for the church's role in the formation of ABCH in 1891. February 14 marked the ministry's 125th year of service.

Want to know GOD?

By Pastor Greg Hyche

Ladonia Baptist Church, Phenix City

I was recently greeted by an older lady crying inside the church office. I began to talk with her and the lady expressed many challenges that she and her family were facing. She was slowly losing her hearing, which was evident in her speech, and that was contributing to a loss of income. She stated she felt abandoned in so many ways. After I spoke with her, I began to consider how we all at some point and time must have felt abandoned. The enemy will always try to isolate us by making us feel hurt and alone. So how do we overcome abandonment?

First we must have faith in Jesus. Faith is admitting that we are sinners in need of saving. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life." Not only must we admit and believe that Jesus is Lord but we also must confess by telling others about the hope within us. When you know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior you are never alone because His presence is always within you.

Second we must trust His Word. We must live each day trusting His promises that He is sovereign and in control of all of life's storms. We must search the Scriptures and memorize His promises knowing that His goodness will prevail. We must live out Proverbs 3:5-7: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not unto your own understanding but in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths."

Third we must call upon God. Psalm 145:18a says, "The Lord is near to all who call upon Him." What a glorious promise to know that He is near us. When we call upon Jesus we have assurance that we are not abandoned or alone.

If you are feeling abandoned and alone today, may you be encouraged to take the necessary steps to have faith in Jesus, trust His promises and call upon the name of the Lord — knowing that you are not abandoned but loved by Jesus.

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For February 28

Explore the Bible

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

ACCESS GRANTED
Matthew 13:1–13

First century Jews were anticipating a visible messianic kingdom in which the son of David would provide economic stability, military security and political autonomy for the remnant of Judah. They were tired of the Gentile leaders from Rome monopolizing all the authority. Messiah would re-establish the glory of a Davidic dynasty which they had anticipated since the return from Babylonian exile more than 500 years prior.

In contrast to their expectations Jesus spoke of a secret Kingdom, one in which the ruling class of highly educated and well-connected men were left uninformed and in which the common person had access to the Kingdom. The keys to unlock this secret Kingdom were given by means of parables.

In fulfillment of Scripture, Jesus taught the crowds with parables (13:35; Ps. 78:2). A parable is a simple story in a familiar setting usually intended to teach a single spiritual truth. As Jesus explains in this passage, these stories were intended to instruct hearers who were prepared to receive the message of the Kingdom. Throughout this chapter, Matthew repeatedly quotes Jesus, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like ...” (vv. 31, 33, 44, 45, 47).

A Crowd (1–3a)

“Such large crowds gathered around Him that He got into a boat and sat down while the whole crowd stood on the shore” (v. 2). In parallel passages, Mark makes reference to “a very large crowd” (4:1) and Luke writes “a large crowd” (8:4). Jesus went to the boat in order for the gathering to hear Him.

What kind of people made up this crowd? The content of Jesus’ teaching indicates His audience. Some were men

who worked in the fields, perhaps as day laborers who longed for a field of their own. Women were there and they would certainly have understood Jesus’ point about working the yeast through lumps of dough as they kneaded them. Others were merchants who would appreciate the value of a rare pearl. Still others were fishermen who could distinguish edible fish from inedible ones.

A Parable (3b–9)

Planting seed in much of the world is very different from what we Americans know. They don’t disc, plow, fertilize and seed with tractors and implements. Instead they use animals to break up the soil and plant by hand. Some still practice the art of broadcasting, by which the sower casts his seeds broadly. The benefit of this method is that you can reap bountifully if you sow bountifully. The problem is that seeds go everywhere, including among the pathways between rows, the stony areas and the edges of the fields which may be overgrown with vines and weeds. The only seeds that mature and come to harvest are those that land in the deep, fertile soil.

A Reason (10–13)

Why does Jesus teach in such an enigmatic way? Why is He secretive about the nature of the Kingdom? Jesus explains that not everyone would receive the secrets of the Kingdom. Many people have eyes but will not see. They have ears but they refuse to listen. They have hearts that are calloused to the revelation of Jesus, and they refuse to receive Him (Isa. 6:9).

“Anyone who has ears should listen” (v. 9). Followers of Jesus must beware of complacency. We are recipients of the gospel by the grace of God, and He expects that the seeds implanted in us will bear fruit. Listening to God’s Word is more than hearing it; we must act in repentance and in obedience. ☞

Bible Studies for Life

By James R. Strange, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Religion, Samford University

DISTINCT IN MY LOVE
Matthew 5:43–48

Today we conclude our unit on the Sermon on the Mount with the most challenging teaching of all, especially during a presidential election. We hear candidates ignoring our better natures to prey on our fears. Even Christians who know what Jesus says about enemies — and how He responded to His own — allow their fear to drown out Jesus’ words and examples.

Love even those who hate you. (43–45)

We know that Leviticus 19:18 says, “Love your neighbor.” When Jesus mentions that listeners know the saying “hate your enemy,” perhaps He is talking about an oral religious tradition in His day or just a common practice. In any case, what Jesus says next is just as hard to swallow today as it was for Jews living under Roman occupation: We know that people exist who seek our destruction, who indeed are killing our brothers and sisters in Christ in Iraq and Syria. So these are the enemies we must think about if we wish to take Jesus’ instructions seriously. Some readers also will be able to bring to mind co-workers, family members and former friends who have wronged them.

Why should we love these people and pray for them (compare Luke 6:27–36; Rom. 12:4–5)? It is because when we do so, we become like God. With the phrase “so that you may be children of your Father in heaven,” Jesus invokes creation, specifically to humans being created in the image of God. In Genesis 1 this means doing what God does: creating (“Be fruitful and multiply”) and controlling destructive chaos (“Fill the earth and subdue it”). In the Bible, both the rising sun and the falling rain signify God’s blessings (see Num.

6:25; Job 5:10; Ps. 18:11, 147:8; Jer. 5:24; James 5:7). Jesus contests the idea that God blesses only the righteous and punishes only the wicked (examples abound in Proverbs and Job). If God can send good things to evil people, we can love them and pray for them.

Notice that the challenge is even more difficult than it seems at first. “Love your enemies” is the counterpart to God’s tangible blessings of sun and rain. Jesus says not only to feel loving feelings for our enemies, but also to do loving things for them (see Matt. 5:38–42 and last week’s lesson).

Love in a way that is a testimony to others. (46–47)

Roman tax collectors were allowed to bid for their jobs. They made a living by taking for themselves a cut of what they collected. Hence, taxes and tariffs became quite onerous and some people counted tax collectors as the worst of sinners. The meaning of these verses is clear.

Love like God does. (48)

“Perfect” means “complete.”

It seems impossible to start with Jesus’ first instruction: “Love your enemies.” We might find it easier (but not easy) to pray for them first. If we genuinely pray — ask God to heal their infirmities, provide them with food and shelter and safety, to grant them wholeness and grace, to soften their hearts so that they repent — we will allow God to bring about a transformation in ourselves. For one thing it’s difficult to hate people for whom you are praying in genuine goodwill. Also it becomes much more difficult to dehumanize them by calling them animals or by thinking of them as insane (“madmen”) or as purely evil (only Satan is that). When we pray in this way we realize that we are asking God to give them the same things we ask for people we love and for ourselves. ☞

Christian Crossword

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Across

1. Strive to enter in at the strait _____. (Luke 13:24)

5. A crown.

10. A Christmas carol.

11. He leadeth me _____ the paths of righteousness. (Ps. 23:3)

12. Hesitating sound.

13. _____ whose stripes ye were healed. (1 Pet. 2:24)

14. The seventh month of the Jewish year.

15. Variety. (abbr.)

17. Room. (abbr.)

18. Train up a child in the way he should _____. (Prov. 22:6)

19. United States Mail. (abbr.)

22. Sara's maid.

25. One tenth of one's income.

26. Blood classification system.

27. The children of _____. (Ezra 2:57)

29. To cut.

31. Clan.

33. Digit of the foot.

34. Place. (abbr.)

35. Where the Beatitudes are found.

37. _____ save me for thy mercies' sake. (Ps. 6:4)

38. Between Beth-el and _____, on the west side of the city. (Josh. 8:12)

39. _____ children arise up and call her blessed. (Prov. 31:28)

40. Queen who risked her life to save her people.

43. Nova Scotia. (abbr.)

45. Right side. (abbr.)

46. Second tone of a scale.

47. He that winneth souls is _____. (Prov. 11:30)

49. This is the day which the Lord hath _____. (Ps. 118:24)

50. The cow and the _____ shall feed. (Isa. 11:7)

52. The Lord is good _____ all. (Ps. 145:9)

53. South Dakota. (abbr.)

54. David's close friend.

55. And _____ him that knocketh it shall be opened. (Matt. 7:8)

Down

1. A knot on the trunk of a tree.

2. Account of. (abbr.)

3. The days of our years are three score years and _____. (Ps. 90:10)

4. The cousin of Mary.

5. Roman goddess. (Acts 19:27)

6. No room for them in the _____. (Luke 2:7)

7. Prayers, especially in private.

8. Equal Rights Amendment. (abbr.)

9. But as for me and _____ house, we will serve the Lord. (Josh. 24:15)

16. Naomi's daughter-in-law.

20. They were told of the birth of Christ.

21. Whimper or whine.

22. Sell whatsoever thou _____, and give to the poor. (Mark 10:21)

23. Burrowing animals with pouched cheeks.

24. Symbol for element radium.

28. Mountain. (abbr.)

30. Doctors group. (abbr.)

32. Concise.

36. A landmark on eastern boundary of Canaan. (Num. 34:11)

37. _____ how great is thy goodness. (Ps. 31:19)

40. A son of Gad. (Gen. 46:16)

41. Ye shall not _____ the Lord your God. (Deut. 6:16)

42. A bruised _____ shall he not break. (Matt. 12:20)

44. The little owl, and the great owl and the _____. (Deut. 14:16)

48. A retirement plan.

50. Billie Jo, Bobby Joe. (abbr.)

51. A prefix meaning "early."

52. Symbol for the element tantalum.

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Photo courtesy of Merge PR

“I want to help people connect with God and help them understand His heart for us.”

Kari Jobe
Christian artist

‘Just a vessel’

Kari Jobe uses worship songs to lead audiences to ‘feet of Jesus’

By Leann Callaway
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

With praise songs such as “Forever (We Sing Hallelujah)” being nominated for Worship Song of the Year at the 2015 Dove Awards, Kari Jobe is one of the most powerful voices in contemporary Christian music.

Recognized for the influence she is making on congregations around the globe, Jobe also was nominated for the prestigious honor of 2015 Dove Artist of the Year.

Despite the accolades and awards, Jobe keeps her focus on Christ and remains committed to ushering worshippers to the throne of God.

“I consider it a great honor and a great responsibility to be leading people in worship, but it’s not about me or my desires,” Jobe acknowledged.

“It’s about allowing the Holy Spirit to be at work and me stepping out of the way. I’m just a vessel that God is using during this season to draw people closer to Him. I don’t care what song I sing if the heart of it is that people fall more in love with Jesus and they understand the heart of God for them.”

More personal worship

With her new album, “Majestic (Revisited),” Jobe hopes to encourage and equip worshippers. The songs on this album are designed to remind worshippers to dwell in the beauty and majesty of God’s presence. The album is re-imagined for a more personal worship style with all the songs from her highly acclaimed and Dove Award-winning live album “Majestic,” which won worship album of the year in 2014.

Over the past few years, Jobe’s songs have become a staple among contemporary worship services and listed

in the top 25 of most popular songs sung in churches today.

While leading worship for church services, women’s conferences and other ministry events, Jobe hopes to inspire audiences to press into God’s truths.

“I want to help people connect with God and help them understand His heart for us,” Jobe said. “Music can be a powerful way to minister to people in times of trouble — to lead them to the feet of Jesus who can bring peace, life, hope and healing. I’ve really been impacted to write songs that someone could sing to the Lord during challenging times, even when they can’t find the right words on their own.

“During those times, I pray that these songs will encourage and remind people that nothing can separate us from the love of God and there is nothing that He can’t handle. He is the ultimate source of comfort, strength and protection.

“It’s especially important for students to hear that message and know the truth of what God proclaims, because they are up against such a battle with the lies of this world.”

Jobe accepted Christ at a young age and says her teenage years played a pivotal role in drawing her closer to the Lord. She began leading worship when she was 13 years old.

“I was always in church growing up,” Jobe said. “When I was a teenager, I started growing in my relationship with God and realized that He wanted a relationship with me. I realized that I couldn’t just latch onto my parents’ faith and belief in Christ, I had to

make my own decision to follow Him as well.

“I started to understand what that meant and looked like. I’m very thankful that I finally got that revelation. I really don’t see myself any differently than when I was just starting out and leading worship. The only difference is now when I open my eyes, there’s a few more people worshipping God with me.”

Overcoming through worship

Today Jobe uses her music and message to help raise awareness for missions organizations such as the A21 Campaign, which focuses on abolishing human traf-

ficking in the 21st Century. While touring around the country, Jobe encourages audiences to take action and combat human trafficking with the gospel.

“I have such a desire to go to war for people’s lives and to help them overcome the enemy through their worship and declaring the greatness of our God,” Jobe said. “I get so mad at the enemy, especially for the lies he feeds to teenage girls and women about their self-worth. I want them to understand how deeply God loves them and how His redeeming love can rescue them out of their darkness.

“Worship has always been such a place of rescue and refuge in my life, and it also brings reflection and restoration. Worship provides such a beautiful picture of what heaven might be like [as we’re] singing praises to our Creator. My desire is to help people fall more in love with Jesus, glorifying Him through these songs and magnifying the name of Jesus above all names.” ¶



“I pray that these songs will encourage and remind people that nothing can separate us from the love of God and there is nothing that He can’t handle.”

Kari Jobe
Christian artist

'He redeemed me'

Former UNA player's spiritual impact driven by hope

By Bill Sorrell
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Working with Common Ground Montgomery in the summer of 2015, Lee Mayhall heard answers to questions that broke his heart.

As he led eight third-grade boys in Bible study in the urban youth ministry, he started asking about their family life.

"Almost all of them, their fathers were not in their lives. The brokenness of their homes really broke my heart, just the things they were saying and how normal it was to them. Some of them called me Dad. I just really hurt because I didn't want what they see in their lives to be a generational thing that happened over and over again," said Mayhall, a wide receiver on the University of North Alabama (UNA) football team who completed his senior season in 2015.

"God began to show me what He really means by loving people and He began to give me a burden for the poor and for loving people in the urban community," he said.

But Mayhall's heart hasn't been the only thing broken. During a game in 2014, he broke his right ankle and fibula. By June 2015 he wondered if he would be able to play his senior year.

But Mayhall went from being told that he may never play again to being named a first-team All-American and first-team All-Gulf South Conference (GSC) in 2015.

Making an impact

On the field and off, in the classroom and spiritually, Mayhall has made an impact at UNA.

At the end of the 2014 and 2015 seasons, Mayhall, who is a chemistry major with a 3.97 GPA, was named first-team Capital One Academic All-America. He was the first football player in school history to be named Academic All-America. He also was named Academic All-GSC in 2013, 2014 and 2015 and GSC Commissioner's Top 10 in 2014.

UNA head football coach Bobby Wallace said, "He is such a great football player and student and obviously he is one of the best in the country to [be named Academic All-America]. It's a great honor for us to have him selected.

"[Mayhall] is a great leader. He is a great exam-

ple and great role model for young players. He is an influence and obviously has a great spiritual effect on the players. ... You have to walk the walk. You can't just talk the talk."

Mayhall's spiritual impact is driven by his hope. "There is always hope for something better and that is Christ and being completely redeemed with Him in heaven. I think that is the hope that drives me. I think that it starts with the cross.

"Without being intentional with God, you realize how much you can't do on your own and how much

you fail. ... To worship God, that is my sole identity. Nothing else gives me value in life (more than) knowing that," Mayhall said.

The spring semester of his freshman year at UNA was the turning point. Mayhall realized he was living an "empty life."

Although he had grown up going to church, he was unsure whether he was a Christian.

When Mayhall came to UNA his goal was "to have as much fun now and then I can settle down and get my relationship back with God when I get out of college."

That spring Mayhall met Campus Outreach director Michael Cody, who became his spiritual mentor. Cody

shared the gospel in a way Mayhall had not heard before.

Mayhall said, "I got super interested in my faith and God has really started a work in me. ... He showed me that I was living for myself, for my own personal glories, (for) my comfort and my life was all about me. He started breaking me down and showing me that my hope was not in Him but in this world. He continued to break me down internally and show me who He really was."

And football has been a platform for Mayhall. "It's just a great opportunity to share my faith with [my teammates] because they are my friends. ... I feel like I have a love that can connect," he said.

Cody calls Mayhall "a magnet. ... He is an easy guy for guys from a lot of different backgrounds to trust and build a relationship with real quickly. He is able to share Christ with them and has a lot of credibility when he shares Christ because he demonstrates personal love for them."

Quarterback Jacob Tucker said, "He doesn't have to say a word to show God's love. He is able to demonstrate it through his actions and that is what makes him so special." 🙏



Lee Mayhall

Photo by Mason Matthews



World of
RELIGION
Compiled from Wire Services

Government cracks down on corrupt pastors in Africa

NAIROBI, Kenya — Led by charismatic preachers and self-proclaimed prophets, African churches are swelling with promises of miracle healings, signs and wonders.

While trying not to trample on religious freedom, governments are increasingly frustrated with tales of clergy fleecing their followers and are proposing a raft of new measures to protect unsuspecting church members from corrupt or immoral schemes.

For instance in Kenya, a Nairobi pastor, Njohi, banned women from wearing undergarments and bras to church. Njohi argued that the women should be free in body and spirit to receive Jesus.

In January, Kenya unveiled a number of rules designed to regulate religious groups and prevent youth radicalization by Muslim terrorist groups.

After bitter protests by church leaders, the attorney general withdrew the rules, including one that would have required all clergy to hold theological degrees. But President Uhuru Kenyatta indicated it remains his intention to rein in rogue preachers.

"Those evil men and women who use the name of God to take advantage of the citizens and fleece them must be uprooted," Kenyatta told a gathering in Kisumu city days after the withdrawal of the regulations.

In South Africa, the South African Council of Churches has called for some kind of guidelines to help churches self-regulate.

Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana, the council's general secretary, said, "We believe there is a role for the government to play, for example to protect (followers) from harm." (RNS)

Gospel for Asia in lawsuit over misuse of donations

DALLAS — Along with several of its affiliates, Gospel for Asia (GFA), a United States-based missions agency that operates primarily in India, was named in a class action lawsuit Feb. 8 for fraudulently soliciting hundreds of millions of dollars in charitable donations and misdirecting the money to K.P. Yohannan, the organization's leader.

Initiated by Dallas-based Stanley Law Group, the lawsuit comes four months after the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA) cut ties with the organization for violating five of the ECFA's seven core standards, according to The Christian Post.

Before removing GFA from its accreditation list, ECFA provided 16 key concerns to the organization regarding its financial affairs. Concerns included the presence of excessive cash balances held in partner field accounts in India, according to the Post, and the use of missions trip participants to move thousands of dollars out of the country that were not reported to U.S. authorities.

Plaintiffs in the case allege that GFA, Yohannan and other GFA officials misrepresented to donors how, when and where donations would be spent, the Post reported. The money was then collected into for-profit businesses and used in constructing headquarters. (TAB)

Places of worship destroyed by authorities in France

CALAIS, France — Despite authorities promising to not destroy places of worship, a church and mosque were destroyed in a camp for migrants and refugees in France.

In Calais, bulldozers moved into the camp Feb. 1 and tore down the mosque and St. Michael's Church, a makeshift chapel serving mainly Orthodox Ethiopian Christians, according to *National Catholic Reporter* (NCR).

"Devastated residents watched the destruction," charity Help Refugees UK wrote on its Facebook page. "The bulldozers are currently tearing down the church while residents scramble to rescue what they can from the building."

The camp has become one of the focal points of Europe's migration crisis with more than 1 million people arriving to the region by sea in 2015, according to NCR. (TAB)