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SUNDAY, MAY 8

CELEBRATE

Photo courtesy of Kelley Mitchell

Mother's Day



Daughter shares first-person account of her mother's love for Christ, others

By Maggie Walsh
The Alabama Baptist

I don't remember the exact moment the knowledge came, but from a very young age I knew I was never going to be like my mom.

By nature, I am quiet, introverted and stubborn. She is warm, kind-hearted and quick to laugh. And even as a child, I knew we were different.

But as the youngest of four children, I learned by observing others. I observed my siblings and learned how to stay out of trouble. I observed my dad and learned how to work hard. And I observed my mom and learned how to love.

For years I just thought my mom was born like that — with a heart

that envelopes you with love and never wavers. But the older I got, the more I saw that she, like me, was human. Sometimes she lost her temper and sometimes she made mistakes. And yet she was still the most loving person I'd ever known.

Loving others

Somewhere in my teenage years I began to try and understand how she could love others so fully. When I would hurt others with my sharp words I would think, "Why can't I just be more like Mom? Why are we so different?"

I found the answer in the marked-up, dog-eared pages of her women's study Bible. In flipping

through the worn, almost falling apart book I knew the difference wasn't rooted in how we treated others. Instead it was rooted in who consumed our hearts.

My mom's love for the Lord is the kind of love that reaches out to those around her and transforms hearts. It's the kind of love that reflects Jesus and inspires you to dive deeper into the ocean of His unfailing love. Her love transforms my heart each time she prays with me over the phone for whatever troubles me that day. It transforms my heart when I hear her sweet soprano voice sing hymns in her kitchen. It transforms my heart when I see her sitting outside early



Maggie Walsh (right) and her mom

Photo by Mackenzie Deal

in the morning, sipping coffee, Bible open on her lap.

Maybe one day we won't be so different. Maybe one day I'll have a heart like my mom's — consumed by the love of Christ. 🌿



NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER IS MAY 5.

"Shout it aloud; do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet." Isaiah 58:1a

COMMENT



By What Authority?

The day before, Jesus had accepted the accolades of the Jewish throng as He entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey. He had gone directly to the temple where He confronted the merchants and money changers. "My house shall be called a House of Prayer," He scolded as He drove them from that holy ground (Matt. 21:13).

The next day He was back in the temple teaching. That is when the chief priests and elders approached. These were not random Jewish leaders. The chief priests presided over the ecclesiastical courts. Their word was final in all matters of Jewish law. The elders were the judges in the civil courts. Together they sought to create a situation where Jesus would offend one or the other.

"By what authority are you doing these things," they demanded (Matt. 25:23). Would Jesus claim the authority of Caesar and offend all patriotic Jews? Would He claim authority from God? If so they would charge Him with blasphemy. If Jesus claimed authority of the law the chief priests would call Him a liar for they had never granted authority to this Nazarene. If Jesus refused to answer He would be condemned by His own silence.

An important question

The question of authority is still an issue among Christians. It is a question faced by every pastor and ministerial staff member. It is an important question. One noted Christian leader observed that "unless a man be clear in his own conscience concerning that (his source of authority), he cannot act with any comfort or hope of success."

One answer to the question of authority might be the Church. In Baptist life it is a local church which ordains or commissions one to specialized Christian service. Ordination is the way churches accredit a person as appropriate for ministry. With few exceptions every pastor has a certificate of ordination. It announces to other churches and to the world that the holder has been authorized to act as a minister of the gospel.

Governments recognize the authority of ordination or commissioning. Frequently certain civil powers, such as the authority to perform



THOUGHTS
By Bob Terry

weddings, are granted to those who have been ordained or commissioned by a church.

Ecclesiastical embellishment

But the question of authority is deeper than ordination. If authority was bestowed at ordination then it would only be an ecclesiastical embellishment.

Another possible answer is authority comes with preparation. Baptists are blessed to have colleges, seminaries and divinity schools to train their ministers. I know I am personally indebted to the men and women who taught me in a Baptist college and a denominational seminary.

Academic preparation expands knowledge, provides understanding, hones skills, introduces resources and prepares one for life-long learning. Academic study provides both a breadth and depth of insight available no other way. It is practically indispensable.

Accredited seminary degree

This month thousands of young men and women will receive ministerial degrees from seminaries and divinity schools. Many churches require their pastors to hold such a degree from a properly accredited school. Yet the majority of pastors in Alabama Baptist churches do not hold a properly accredited seminary degree.

That does not mean they do not have academic preparation.

I remember an incident during my seminary years when one of my professors got into a letter-writing controversy through the state Baptist paper. Because of the insights of the letter writer who challenged the professor, most people concluded the man was a retired professor.

When the writer turned out to be a bivocational pastor who had not finished college it was a reminder that learning can take place outside of a classroom setting.

Many ministers would like to have more formal training than they have been able to receive. In place of formal training these ministers engage in daily in-depth study and learning programs so they can "rightly divide the Word of Truth."

Academic preparation is important but authority for the minister does not come with a seminary degree.

When Jesus met with Nicodemus, the Jewish leader said, "We know You are a teacher who has come from God" (John 3:2). Had the chief priests and elders been paying attention, the miracles Jesus did would have testified to the source of His authority. As Nicodemus added, "For no one could perform the miraculous signs You are doing if God were not with him."

Though Jesus never answered His confronters, it was clear that His authority came from God.

'Call' to Christian service

That is the same source of authority for today's minister. Before ordination, a church wants evidence of a "call" to Christian service, evidence that the candidate has a special relationship with God. Every week as the pastor stands to speak, the congregation wants to know their pastor has been with God, that what the pastor shares is a word from God.

Theology books, commentaries, history books and all the rest may inform what is said but the core of the message is the result of time spent with God. Without that time with God, there is no authority in ministry.

Acts 6:4 emphasizes the importance of time with God. When the apostles began to be distracted from their primary mission by ministry needs in the congregation they asked for help so they could devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word.

In communion with God

Like the early apostles, today's minister must live in communion with God. He must spend time talking with God and listening to God in prayer. He must hear what the Spirit says through the study of His Word.

Acts 4 describes Peter and John appearing before the same people who questioned Jesus about His authority. The judges knew the two were "ordinary and unschooled." Yet "they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus."

When one lives in communion with Jesus through disciplined prayer and time in His Word, people will know we have been with Jesus and that is all the authority required. ¶

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

TRANSGENDER RESTROOMS

This is a major problem that we are facing in this country. In my opinion there should be three public restrooms: one for men, one women and one for transgender. That is the

only solution for the safety for our children and the men and women of this great nation. No mother is going to feel that it is safe for her child to go in any public restroom. Come on America, stand up for the safety of our children and the safety of others.

Demand that we have three public restrooms.

Betty Staffa
Bremen, Alabama ¶



TAB

THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

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

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What does it take to be middle class?



College degree not necessary to be middle class, according to majority

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

Although the financial gap between college graduates and those with a high school degree or less has never been greater, the percentage of Americans who think college education is necessary to be considered middle class has fallen.

In 2012, 37 percent of those surveyed by the Pew Research Center deemed a college education necessary to be classified in the middle class, as compared with only 30 percent in 2015.

The value individuals place on a college degree differs significantly by income, according to Pew. For those making less than \$30,000 a year in salary, 40 percent say a college degree is necessary to be in the middle class, compared with 26 percent of those who make up to \$74,999 a year.

Chuck Stokes, assistant professor of sociology at Samford University in Birmingham, previously worked for the Templeton Center for Thrift and Generosity and spent a lot of time thinking about what the middle class is and its importance in society.

"Good financial habits are essential (to be part of the middle class)," Stokes said. "But good habits are supported by good financial institutions, what we called 'prudential' institutions (at the Templeton Center for Thrift and Generosity). One reason why the middle class is eroding ... is that lower middle class folks are now surrounded by 'anti-thrift' institutions like payday lenders, lotteries and casinos that encourage them to spend now and pay (with interest) later. Upper middle class folks have greater access to prudential institutions which encourage them to save money, things like payroll deductions for retirement, zero percent financing for those with good credit, banks and credit unions that lend conservatively and at regulated interest rates and so on. One of the most prudential middle class institutions has historically been marriage, where adults (and their children) shared goods in a household, reducing waste and pooling resources.

"But marriage has been disappearing in the lower middle class," Stokes said, which relates back to the idea of completing a college degree to be in the middle class.

"Completing a college degree has increas-

ingly become the dividing line between upscale and downscale America. Look at all of the prudential institutions, including marriage, and you'll see that the college-educated have disproportionately better access to the helpful, thrifty institutions. Thus, while a college education may not be necessary to get you into the middle class, it is absolutely important to help you stay there."

So why is it that so many Americans do not think college education is a requirement for being classified middle class?

Stokes speculated "most Americans think of themselves as middle class but most ... haven't finished college," making it appear that a college degree isn't necessary to be middle class.

"Second there are still plenty of jobs available for the non-college educated," Stokes said, which implies that a college degree is not necessary to have a job in America.

One also doesn't need a degree in order to save, Stokes said.

"Finally a few wealthy Americans (some of them college dropouts) have complained about how college doesn't give a good return on investment for many Americans. I suspect enough of that sentiment has filtered through popular media to reduce Americans' confidence in the ability of a college degree to deliver on its promise of an upper middle class lifestyle.

'Going against the grain'

"So you can make it to the middle class, even the upper middle class, without a college degree. But you'd be going against the grain. Most Americans will be better off playing the odds and striving to finish college," Stokes said.

The Pew survey also found that overall,

Hispanics were more likely to consider factors necessary to be considered in the middle class — like owning a home or having a secure job. About 6 in 10 Hispanics say owning a home is necessary, compared to 38 percent of whites. Blacks fall between these two groups on most measures, Pew reported. However, 89 percent of both whites and Hispanics think having a secure job is a necessity for being deemed middle class, whereas 85 percent of blacks see it as necessary.

'Financial insecurity'

"Middle class is, almost by definition, a class of financial insecurity," Stokes said. "The truly wealthy don't have to work and the truly poor can't work enough to make ends meet. But the middle class work for a living. Maybe you don't have to work all your life, but you have to work. ... In the middle class if you stop working too soon, your middle class way of life is in danger. So jobs are just absolutely fundamental to the middle class."

He said it is vital to have a healthy middle class in America because the country began as a middle class society.

"For good or bad, America with a robust middle class is a restless society, never quite satisfied and very innovative. Middle class Americans have to be involved in their government to ensure policies are enacted that protect against both oligarchy and anarchy."

Stokes believes America's middle class has never really reached the "middle class ideal" and said growing a "healthy middle class is an ongoing project."

Comparing today to eight years ago, a recent Gallup poll found 50 percent of those surveyed say they feel financially better off and more than twice as many Democrats as Republicans say they feel better off.

The poll also found that 13 percent of Americans are "saving a lot" and 37 percent are "saving a little;" 27 percent are "making ends meet" while 8 percent are "drawing on savings" and 13 percent are "running into debt." ¶

The Alabama Baptist
has a new partner for printing the weekly publication.
Next week's issue (the May 12 issue) will be the first issue
with the new printer. Please alert us to any mailing
issues you might encounter as we work out the routine
kinks that come with any new relationship.

Building FOR God's kingdom

Attalla's Kyuka Missionary Baptist breaks ground on new church building

By Grace Thornton
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Zachary Burns wouldn't say his church's growth has been quick.

But he would say it's been steady.

"We've been blessed by God and we take that responsibility very seriously," said Burns, a member of Kyuka Missionary Baptist Church, Attalla, in Etowah Baptist Association.

The rural church may not be big — it runs about 90 in worship attendance — but it is active in missions and outreach, he said.

And because of that it's making room for more.

"Our new building is going to hold 280 — it's going to be a lot bigger," Burns said.

Outgrown its space

Pastor Jeremy Burns said sometimes people come to visit and find the church full and they're uncomfortable coming in. Not to mention the fact that the current sanctuary — though it's beautiful — forces folks to cross in front of the pulpit to go to the bathroom, he said.

"I've been pastor here for almost five years and even before I was here I feel like the church had almost outgrown the space. We wanted to make the room and we wanted people to feel comfortable coming."

Kyuka Baptist, Jeremy Burns said, has a heart for ministry and missions and to see their community know Christ.

"We're not building it for ourselves — we're building it for God's kingdom, not man's kingdom," he said. "God has grown us not just in numbers but He has grown us spiritually, too, and we just felt like it was time."

The current church building had been around for 104 years and it's seen a lot of change, Zachary Burns said.

"There was a wooden building that caught fire before we had the sanctuary we have today," he said. "We've been in this particular building a while."

But the church split once with part of the congregation moving to start a sister church in the area, Zachary Burns explained.

"They're a thriving church and they've been helping us with our building process," he said.

It's because of the healthy outlook of believers in the community that Kyuka has grown, he said.

"We are very active for a small country church. We take home missions and international missions very seriously."

Jeremy Burns agreed and said he sees God moving them forward to be able to grow their heart for missions even more.

"Two summers ago during a deacons

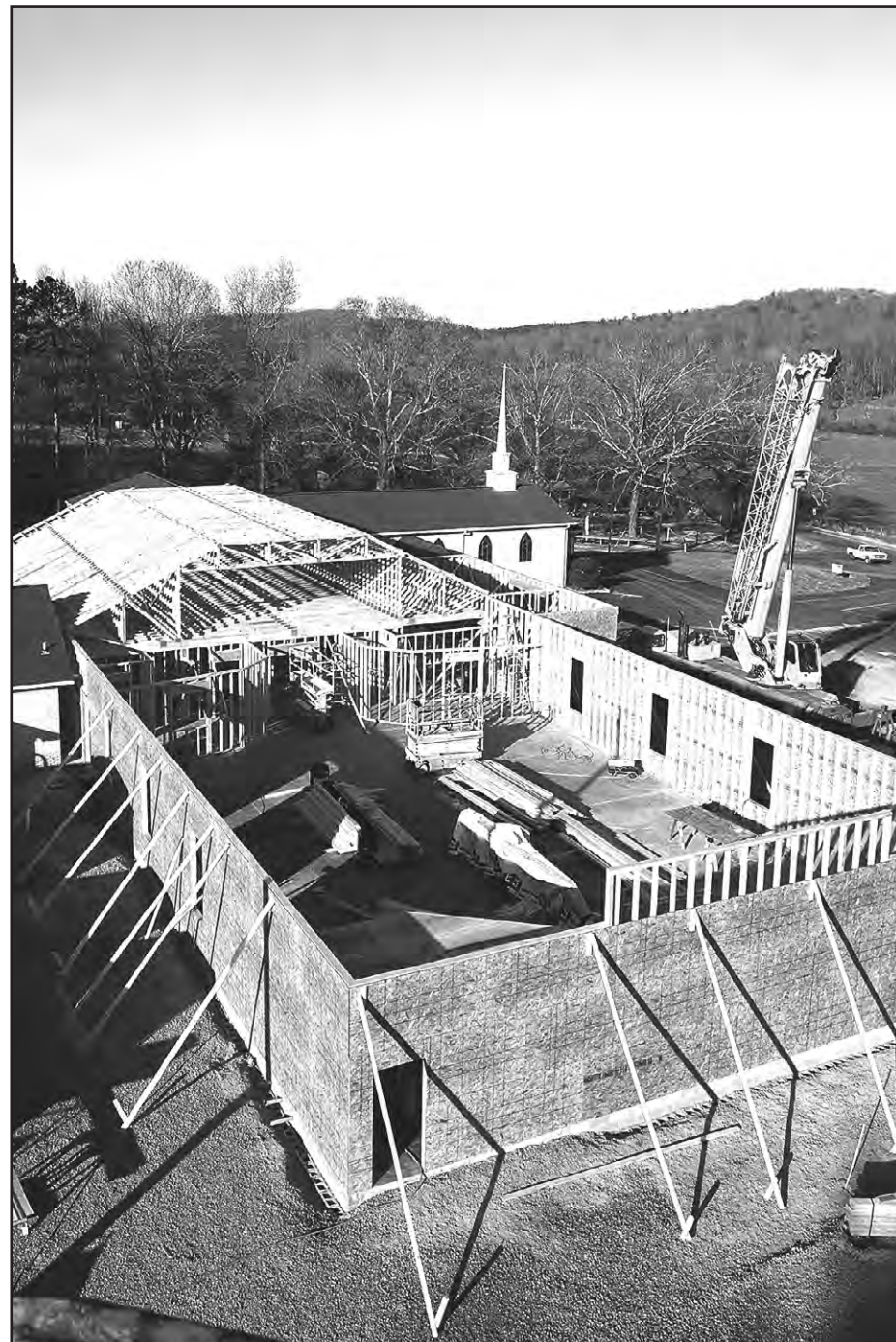


Photo by Zachary Burns

The new building for Kyuka Missionary Baptist Church, Attalla, in Etowah Baptist Association, will hold 280 people. The rural church runs about 90 in worship attendance and is making room for more.

"We're not building it for ourselves — we're building it for God's kingdom, not man's kingdom. God has grown us not just in numbers but He has grown us spiritually, too, and we just felt like it was time."

Pastor Jeremy Burns
Kyuka Missionary Baptist Church, Attalla

meeting, one of the deacons stood up and made mention that we've got to make some room," he said. "Things got rolling from there and we could tell the Lord was saying it's time."

As they talked with contractors, Jeremy Burns and others realized that having help from Carpenters for Christ, Builders on Mission and a few other groups was going to tremendously cut costs for them.

"We visited a few churches in the area that they had built and decided that the size and everything else was right for us, and we were excited," Jeremy Burns said.

So the church confidently moved forward. But it was going to be summer of 2017 before the groups could get to them.

"One of our deacons said that if the Lord wanted it to, it would all work out," Jeremy Burns recalled.

A little while later they found out that another church's plans had changed and they'd been moved up the waiting list to spring 2016.

"That made us get in gear," Jeremy Burns said.

The church voted on plans, prepared for the construction and a church member "cut down a mountain" on one side of the church to make room for a new parking lot, he said.

Fits like a puzzle

And it just so happened that the church's fellowship hall — which had been built separately from the sanctuary and was never connected — was in the perfect place to connect it like a puzzle piece to the other two buildings.

"All these things have happened and happened just right," Jeremy Burns said.

He said he believes God's hand has been on Kyuka, providing for it through the volunteer time of the builder groups and bringing new believers into the church's midst.

And he believes that as long as they continue to seek God, God will grow the church.

"I want to see us have a heart for the gospel to be carried to the ends of the earth," he said.✠

Ksenija Magda (second from right), newly elected Baptist World Alliance Women's Department president, visits with David George (right), Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) Foundation president, and others during a WMU luncheon at First Baptist Church, Center Point.



Photo by Neisha Roberts



Photo by Neisha Roberts

Ksenija Magda (left), president of BWA Women's Department, works alongside participants at a Woman's Missionary Union luncheon at FBC Center Point making salvation bracelets.

Encouraging women worldwide

Newly elected international leader urges Baptist women to come together

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

It was years before Ksenija Magda realized how God had specifically created her to serve and encourage women in their faith journey.

Magda, the newly elected president of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) Women's Department, didn't choose a path to work with women, she said. Having served alongside her husband, Toma, for years in ministry in Serbia and later Croatia, Magda thought God's plan for her life was to continue serving as a pastor's wife, something she felt called to do since childhood, she told *The Alabama Baptist*.

But while working as a professor at the Evangelical Seminary in Osijek, Croatia, her vision broadened and she "discovered that not many people train to be involved with

women and ... working with women was kind of a lowly job" — something she was determined to change.

In need of change

At 35, Magda was asked to help with Baptist women's work in Osijek. The existing group of women were on the other side of their 60s. They knew something needed to change in order to continue to be fruitful but they didn't know what.

Magda agreed to take on the role but felt like she was there to "make a decision on whether to resuscitate the group or let it die," she admitted.

While serving in that role Magda realized how marginalized women are and yet what an "immense influence women

are for the Church and for society." She also recognized how many women were unprepared and untrained spiritually, especially while at home raising children. No proper child care during church services and no programs for younger women were available at the time.

Called and equipped

She knew God had called and equipped her to help bring change and growth to the group, and that's just what she did.

Fast forward 30 years and Magda is still putting her calling to good use, this time in a global role she will hold through 2020.

BWA's Women's Department is composed of seven continental unions representing 193 national Baptist women's organizations from 156 countries. The organization focuses its core values on community,

unity in diversity, integrity, justice and service, according to its website.

"This (leadership) role is an amazing opportunity to encourage women all around the world to use their God-given gifts for the benefit of all," Magda said.

"Women have a big role to play when they realize their gifts and the amazing power of God in them. It is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead."

As president, Magda spends most of her time in the new role facilitating a structural change in the organization to involve today's generation of women, merging their fresh views on faith and life into a new structure that rests on a strong foundation.

"We believe that in a world in which

real relationships are falling apart we still need to call Baptist women to come together in Christ. We become His agents of peace and it also makes us aware of the others in the world, sisters and brothers, and of God's love for each of them.

"We need the new generation on board. ... Women are fundamental to the global Church and ... they need to realize that we belong together and we need to learn from each other and equip each other in order to change our circumstances to better reflect the glorious vision God has for His children and His creation."

The need to include younger women in Baptist ministry is not just a foreign issue, nor one that only exists in a war-torn country like Croatia, Magda said.

Christians in Croatia are still building their foundation for ministry now that the Croatian War of Independence (1991–1995) has ended, which claimed more than 20,000 lives and estimated \$37 billion in damaged infrastructure.

As the country continues to heal and move forward, Magda continues to build relationships with other believers across the world. She recently visited with Alabama Baptist women's groups to build relationships and to learn how women in the United States work to keep women's ministries alive.

Connecting with Alabama

She participated in a Birmingham Baptist Association Woman's Missionary Union luncheon held at First Baptist Church, Center Point, and prayed with the Women on Mission group of Shades Crest Baptist Church, Hoover, both held on March 12.

She said she hopes to establish new

ways of direct contact with Alabama Baptist churches and noted the women's department is "there to encourage the coming together of Baptist women ... because good things happen when we come together and we can accomplish more than the sum of our potential."

One way Alabama Baptist women can become involved with the global body of Baptist women is through the 2016 Baptist Women's World Day of Prayer on Nov. 7 titled "Arise, Shine" based on Isaiah 60:1. Magda also encouraged women to follow the women's department on Facebook and Twitter.

Leading locally

Back home in Croatia, Magda serves her local church by leading a children's Sunday School class and counseling

members when needed.

Magda and her husband also provide retreats for Syrian refugees, offer counseling to those in need and set up relationships with other churches and with the global Baptist body, all while maintain-

ing their daily responsibilities as pastor, pastor's wife and mom and dad to four children.

Even with so many ministry outlets, Magda said she still loves talking with young women about their faith the most.

"When you talk to older women you realize that they had taken on missions when they were young women.

"If you (as young women) are called by God to be a mom, that's OK and just as important as being in a leadership role as long as you accept it and live it out.

"Whatever God brings to your door, whatever He has equipped you with, make it work for Him." ☛

**For more information
on BWA Women's
Department or on the
Day of Prayer,
visit bwawd.org.**

Belief + behavior

'Highly religious' most likely to be happy, healthy

Look around. Three in 10 people you see claim they are pretty satisfied with life; happy, healthy and moral too.

They're the "highly religious," 30 percent of U.S. adults who say they pray daily and attend church at least once a week.

"Religion in Everyday Life," a new survey from Pew Research released April 12, teases out the particular ways the highly religious differ from the majority of U.S. Christians who are less observant and from non-Christians, including the "nones" who claim no religious identity.

The highly religious are overwhelmingly (95 percent) Protestant, Catholic or other Christians. Nearly half (49 percent) are white evangelicals. Most of the overall group (62 percent) are women.

Smiling away

And many are smiling. Four in 10 highly religious people say they're "very happy" with the way things are going in life, compared to 29 percent of those who are not highly religious.

Nearly 3 in 4 (74 percent) highly religious people say they're "very satisfied with family life" compared to 67 percent of those who are not highly religious.

And 47 percent say they gather with extended family at least monthly (compared to 30 percent of those not highly religious).

The less religious also may be

prayerful folks who attend worship less frequently or people with no religious affiliation who value moral behavior. The report points out that many say "attributes such as gratitude, forgiveness and honesty are essential" to what being religious or moral means to them personally.

Similarities

Still the survey finds many similarities in beliefs and behavior between the two groups.

Pew also asked people about what they saw as the essentials of their faith or philosophy.

According to the report, "Christians are about equally likely to cite moral behaviors as vital to their Christian identity as they are to mention explicitly religious behaviors."

Among Christians, the top 5 of 16 beliefs and behaviors were:

- ▶ Belief in God (86 percent)
- ▶ Gratitude for what they have (71 percent)
- ▶ Forgiving those who have wronged them (69 percent)
- ▶ Honesty (67 percent)
- ▶ Praying regularly (63 percent). (RNS)

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MOTHER'S DAY
May 8!



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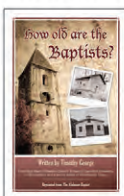
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PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Christians detained, fined in Turkmenistan

ASHGABAD, Turkmenistan — In two separate incidents in February, Turkmenistan state officials moved to stop Protestants exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief.

On Feb. 26, the pastor of Mary's Baptist Church — an officially recognized branch of the registered Baptist Church in Ashgabad — was questioned by the Ministry of State Security (MSS) secret police.

The MSS officers questioned the pastor for about 90 minutes.

On Feb. 20, members of the Greater Grace Church congregations in Ashgabad and Mary visited the town of Tejen to talk to local people about their faith. One church member from Mary offered religious literature to a man who was an officer of the State Service for Security Protection of Healthy Society (the former Anti-Drugs Police) in civilian clothes. The church member and three others were held for questioning until 10 p.m. Officers seized their religious literature, phones and money.

At the same time, police officers detained several members of the Ashgabad congregation and took them to the police station for questioning. Each church member was fined \$140 before being released. (F18)

Christian couple in China buried alive; wife dies

ZHUMADIAN, China — A Christian house church leader and his wife were buried alive for protesting the government-ordered demolition of their church in China's Henan province, China Aid reported in April. Li Jiangong, the church leader, managed to escape but his wife, Ding Cuimei, suffocated to death.

Communist government authorities ordered the demolition of Beitou Church in Zhumadian, Henan province, after the couple refused to relinquish the property to a local developer, according to The Christian Post. The couple stepped in front of the



bulldozing crew but were purposefully shoved into a pit and covered with soil.

Two construction crew members were detained by authorities and, according to China Aid, one of them was heard shouting, "Bury them alive for me. I will be responsible for their lives."

China Aid President Bob Fu called the killing "a cruel, murderous act" and called on Chinese authorities to hold the crew members accountable and "take concrete measures" to protect church members' religious freedom. (TAB)

Muslims in Uganda kill Christians' livestock

BUGADE, Uganda — Muslims in a village in eastern Uganda killed a Christian's pigs and tore down their church building in April, sources said.

A Muslim mob demolished the building of the 450-member Nalugondo Church of Uganda building at about midnight April 12, shouting, "We cannot live together with neighbors who are infidels. We have to fight for the cause of Allah," according to area sources. Nalugondo village is near Bugade, Mayuge District. The demolition followed previous threats via text message to various lay leaders and members and an attack on a church leader's pigs, the source of his income.

One threatening text said, "Let this be known to your church members that pigs are extremely unholy and an abomination before Allah, very outrageous and shameful. They are haram [forbidden] and unlawful as our holy Quran does prohibit them." (MS)

VOICE YOUR OPINION



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

Remember to:

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

High-quality marriages



Study shows more experience in dating could make it harder for some to do well in marriage

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

They could be simple or complex choices — go to Mexico with a friend from high school, eat that extra slice of cake, attend this college, run that marathon, kiss that boy, become physically intimate with one girl and then later with another girl. Regardless of the subject matter, decisions made in younger years can affect the rest of an individual's life, according to a recent study titled, "Before 'I Do:' What Do Premarital Experiences Have To Do With Marital Quality Among Today's Young Adults?"

The study found that among the 1,000 unmarried Americans surveyed who were in a relationship, 418 of those individuals got married over the course of five years. Since marriage involves leaving other options behind, more experience in dating could make it harder for some individuals to do well in marriage, according to the study.

And individuals with more relationship experience also are more experienced with breaking up and may develop a more jaundiced view of love and relationships.

The study, a part of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, found that a "norm in

our society" is the relationship sequence of "sex, cohabitation and sometimes children preceding marriage."

Larry Daniels, a licensed professional counselor and licensed marriage and family therapist with Pathways Professional Counseling, agreed with some of the findings in the study.

"It's like algebra — we build our lives off of what we've done before," Daniels said. Quoting Christian psychiatrist Curt Thompson, he said, "What we pay attention to we remember and what we remember we expect more of in the future."

Hard to shake guilt, shame

"With a checkered past that is bringing guilt and shame, it's hard to rid oneself of that," Daniels said. "I relate (life decisions today) to algebra because if I have a math test tomorrow and I don't pay attention to math today but instead go and play tennis, come tomorrow I'm not going to remember the math and I'm not going to get a good grade."

Along those same lines, a major finding in the study challenges the "Vegas Fallacy" or the idea that what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.

"Actually what people do before marriage appears to matter," the study states. "Specifically how they conduct their

romantic lives before they tie the knot is linked to their odds of having happy marriages."

According to some research, about 90 percent of Americans have sex before marriage, many having sex with multiple partners before marrying, which according to the National Marriage Project study, can be "risky if you're looking for a high-quality marriage."

"In general, couples who wait to have sex in their relationship report higher levels of marital quality."

Daniels agreed, noting that many younger people see "friends with benefits" as the norm.

"The mindset of today's youth is that decisions made now don't matter later but the research goes against that."

For those who want to avoid becoming intimate before marriage, Daniels offered two tips: "Make that decision in advance that you're not going to get into a physical relationship before marriage. You don't want to

wait until you're falling for someone and you're alone in a car or alone on the sofa and you're thinking, 'How far do I want to go?' Also discuss your hope for the future about not engaging in physical intimacy before marriage with anyone that you're getting serious with."

The Bible speaks about the bond formed between a husband and wife in several passages including Genesis 2:18-24, Mark 10:7 and 1 Corinthians 6:16, defining the bride and groom as becoming "one flesh" through physical intimacy.

"Whenever two people know each other at that level, they know each other in a way that's unique and special," Daniels said. "The Bible got it right. ... Two becoming one is the sexual union but it's also the mental, emotional and spiritual part. ... So if you've known someone at that level prior to marriage it can bring in shame and guilt and memories of those prior experiences to your marriage. Not that those things cannot be forgiven or you cannot move on from them, you're just adding more risk to

your marriage's level of happiness."

In the sample of Americans surveyed by the National Marriage Project, only 23 percent of individuals who got married over the course of the study were sexually active only with the person they married. Most respondents were physically intimate with five partners before marriage.

The men and women in the minority 23 percent reported higher marital quality

than those who had been physically intimate with others prior to marriage.

Daniels said, "When it comes to happiness, a lot has to do with ... feeling like they're not giving all of themselves to their spouse. You may say in public, 'I'll get over it,' but sometimes no matter what we say out in the open, in the privacy of a counseling session I hear a lot about loss and pain."

Daniels said one main way to overcome that guilt and shame is to "realize God has forgiven you."

"If we confess our sins, God will

forgive us and if He can forgive us, who are we to hold on to that guilt ourselves?"

"I find that most people's lives are ruptured or broken in a relationship, but it's often through healthy relationships that God brings healing. A nurturing healthy relationship with a counselor, pastor, brother, sister, parent or spouse can be a conduit of God's cleansing power."

Unhealthy lifestyle patterns

The study also found that cohabitating before marriage leads to a lack of commitment and unhealthy relationship skills, as well as "financial distress, health risks, substance abuse and increased health insurance," Daniels said. "Cohabitation is setting yourself up for higher risk for more unhealthy lifestyle patterns."

According to the study, more experience in relationships could also lead to the mindset that there is always an alternative partner available.

"A strong sense of alternatives is believed to make it harder to maintain commitment to, and satisfaction with, what one already has," the study states. 🌈

Resources to share with those thinking about cohabitation or physical intimacy before marriage:

Book

► "The Ring Makes All the Difference: The Hidden Consequences of Cohabitation and the Strong Benefits of Marriage" by Glenn Stanton

Websites

► Focus on the Family: The Bible on Pre-Marital Sex and Sexual Morality at family.custhelp.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/26204

► Focus on the Family: Why Wait for Sex? at www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/preparing-for-marriage/why-wait-for-sex

► Faith and Family package by *The Alabama Baptist*: Cohabitation at www.thealabamabaptist.org/print-edition-article-detail.php?id_art=28494

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Ministry Training Institute
lecture on Philippians here



Photo courtesy of Samford University's MTI

As part of your subscription to *The Alabama Baptist*, you will receive a complimentary lecture taught by Kevin Blackwell, executive director of the Ministry Training Institute at Samford University for the next few weeks. Use your Aurasma app to watch the first lecture on Philippians by placing your mobile device over this photo. App instructions noted on page 20.

Across ALABAMA'S Associations

To submit news items, email news@thealabamabaptist.org or call 205-870-4720, ext. 112, at least three weeks prior to the event.

BIRMINGHAM

► **East Gardendale Church, Gardendale**, will have a fish fry May 14, 11 a.m.–1 p.m. Everyone is invited to bring their lawn chair and enjoy the food, music, fun and fellowship. Inflatables will be available for children. For more information call 205-608-0889. Allen Davis is pastor.

BLOUNT

► **Pleasant View Missionary Church, Holly Pond**, will hold its third Sunday night singing May 15, 6 p.m. Canaan's Crossing from Arab will perform special music. For more information call 256-796-5986 or 256-590-4468. Randy Burtram is pastor.

GENEVA

► **Maple Avenue Church, Geneva**, will host its 39er's C.L.U.B. luncheon May 10, 11 a.m. Walter Wilson, a gospel singer/songwriter from Dothan, will speak and perform special music. For more information call 334-684-9617. This will be the last program before summer break. It will resume in September. Mike Shirah is pastor.

MADISON

► **Hillwood Church, Huntsville**, will host Ivan Parker in concert May 27, 7 p.m. Doors will open at 6 p.m. For more information and to purchase tickets call 256-883-0485. Charles Freeman is pastor. ► **Ron Madison**, pastor of Mount Zion Church, Huntsville, will retire at the end of the year. At that time, he will have served the church for



MADISON

12 years. He previously served with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

NORTH JEFFERSON

► **Enon Church, Morris**, will hold a meet and greet with Steve Gaines on May 16, 10 a.m. Gaines will be one of at least three pastors to be nominated for president of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) at



GAINES

the annual meeting in St. Louis, Missouri, on June 14–15. Gaines will share his vision for the SBC and why God has led him to allow his name to be nominated. Russ Quinn is pastor.

SHELBY

► **Arkwright Church, Vincent**, celebrated Pastor **Donald Morris'** 30th anniversary with the church April 29 with a dinner at Lloyd's restaurant. The church also will celebrate the anniversary June 5.

ST. CLAIR

► **Markeeta Church, Leeds**, will hold a revival service May 10, 6:30 p.m. Kevin Hamm, pastor of Gardendale First Church will speak. The Gardendale First choir and praise team will provide special music. Jessie Hayes

is pastor. ► **McEntyre Church, Ashville**, will host The Willing Vessels during its fifth Sunday singing May 29, 2 p.m. Bobby Winningham is pastor.

WASHINGTON

► **Chapel Hill Church, Millry**, will celebrate homecoming May 15. True Heart will perform special music at 10 a.m. and worship will be at 11 a.m. Pastor Mike Chatham will speak. A business meeting will be at 11:45 a.m. and lunch will follow at noon. For more information call 251-846-2125.

WALKER

► **Lloyd Stilley** is the new pastor of **First Church, Jasper**. He previously served as pastor of First Church, Gulf Shores. Stilley serves on the Alabama Baptist Retirement Centers board of directors and on the governing board of South Baldwin Christian



STILLEY

Academy in Foley. He holds a bachelor's degree from Tennessee Temple University in Chattanooga; a master of divinity degree from Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas; and a doctor of ministry degree from New Orleans Seminary. Stilley and his wife, Leeanne, have two children and a grandchild on the way. ¶



Duck Springs Baptist marks 175-year anniversary

The toll of the old church bell rung in the 175th anniversary celebration of Duck Springs Baptist Church, Attalla, on April 17.

During the 10:30 a.m. service, former pastors were recognized and Wendell Dutton, Alabama Baptist Historical Commission representative, presented a certificate to the church. Michael Moon, minister of music, sang special music and Edwin Hayes, retired former pastor of First Baptist Church, Cullman, brought the message. Duck Springs Baptist is the home church of Hayes' wife's family.

The celebration also included a time for participants to share special memories of Duck Springs Baptist. Each participant received a copy of the church's history compiled by Mike and Debbie Bailey, Donna and Danny Guest, Elizabeth and Wayne Stephens and others. The group also collected church records from as far back as the 1840s, historical artifacts and pictures to display for the service. There also was a display honoring military veterans from the church.

Pastor Royce Head said it was a "great day." (Maggie Walsh)

Dothan's Bethel Baptist celebrates 125 years

In a service that celebrated its past while looking forward to the future, Bethel Baptist Church, Dothan, marked its 125th anniversary April 17.

The seven-person anniversary committee said in a letter, "We have a tremendous heritage to praise God for."

During the morning worship service, the Bethel Baptist choir sang special music and Tim Hall, minister of music for First Baptist Church, Demopolis, led praise and worship. Jerry Grandstaff, director of missions for Columbia Baptist Association, spoke during the service.

The celebration was especially meaningful for lifelong member Morris Stringer, who has been a part of the Bethel family for 77 years. Stringer presented a history of the church during the service which also recognized former pastors. The church bulletin included a brief history of Bethel and photos of former church buildings.

A potluck lunch followed the service. Ricky Plummer is pastor. (Maggie Walsh)

Lakeview BC commemorates 50th anniversary

Lakeview Baptist Church, McCalla, celebrated its 50th anniversary in a full service April 10.

In the 10:30 a.m. service Jeff Gilliam, former pastor of Lakeview Baptist for 14 years, spoke and Alabama Baptist Historical Commission Executive Director Lonette Berg presented a commemorative certificate to the church. A ladies quartet from Lakeview, Joyful Belles, sang special music, as did The Mission Heirs, a quartet from the McCalla area. Also, George Cooley, pastor of the Pleasant Grove Baptist Association church, played guitar.

During the catered lunch that followed the service, the approximately 170 participants were able to view various displays with scrapbooks on Lakeview's history including its missions trips to Brazil. (Maggie Walsh)

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Alabama Baptist Convention **State Board of Missions**Focus
on

ONE MISSION

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news and features about missions and ministries from the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions | (800) 264-1224 | alsbom.org

TEN COOPERATIVE PROGRAM FACTS



Thank you, Alabama Baptists, for supporting missions through the Cooperative Program. In doing so, you help spread the Gospel and minister in Christ's name in Alabama, across the U.S. and around the world.

Many positive facts may be cited about the impact of Southern Baptists in general and Alabama Baptists specifically related to CP support and stewardship. Here are ten such points of information:

1 For the past six years, Alabama Baptists have ranked first in total dollars given by state conventions

through the Cooperative Program. We are not the largest state convention or the wealthiest, but Alabama Baptists strongly support this God-given channel of missions support.

By Jim Swedenburg
State Missionary



2 Alabama Baptists are likewise first in per capita giving through the Cooperative Program. This demonstrates CP support is strong both in congregations and individual Alabama Baptist church members.

3 Alabama Baptists give \$1 of every \$10 given through the SBC Cooperative Program. While there are 42 state conventions of various sizes, Alabama gives approximately 10 percent of CP dollars supporting the SBC's national and international missions and

ministries.

4 On average, for each 100 undesignated dollars (tithes and offerings) given in local Alabama Baptist congregations, \$7.17 makes its way through the Cooperative Program. That is well above the national average.

5 Cooperative Program receipts for 2015 were \$2,045,695.93 below budget (-5.1%).

6 In spite of this \$2 million shortfall during 2015, the State Board of Missions (SBOM) still operated in the black with income exceeding our expenses. The shortfall is absorbed through internal management of personnel and other resources. (See #9 below.) No ministries have been eliminated that impact local associations and churches.

7 In 2015, Alabama Baptist churches gave 7 percent of undesignated receipts through the Cooperative Program. That is 26 percent more than the

average of all SBC churches.

8 Of total receipts received by the SBOM in 2015, the SBC received 55.5 percent.

9 The number of full-time SBOM employees in 1998 was 121. Currently the SBOM has 70 full-time employees. This ranks among the smallest Deep South convention staffs.

10 So far in 2016, Alabama Baptists have given more than \$1 million ahead of last year's receipts.

Thanks again, Alabama Baptists, for your generous support of missions and ministries through the Cooperative Program.

If your Alabama Baptist congregation would like more information on the Cooperative Program or to arrange a guest speaker about CP, please contact State Missionary Jim Swedenburg, director of Cooperative Program & Stewardship Development, at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 283, or (334) 613-2283, jswedenburg@alsbom.org.



Myers-Mallory

State Missions Offering

Myers-Mallory.org



WEEK OF PRAYER

FOR STATE MISSIONS
SEPTEMBER 11-18, 2016

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- DISASTER RELIEF
- CHURCH PLANTING
- CHURCH REVITALIZATION
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Alabama Baptist Convention
State Board of Missions

STATE GOAL
\$750,000



ONEMISSION:TheGreatCommissionONEPROGRAM:TheCooperativeProgramMANYMINISTRIES:GreatCommissionMinistries

TERRENCE JONES CAME TO ALABAMA TO PLAY QUARTERBACK FOR TUSKEGEE UNIVERSITY.

After attending seminary in California, he was invited to consider returning to Alabama to plant a church in Washington Park in west Montgomery.

The weekend he and Thais visited, there were two

approximately 110 attending most weeks. The congregation is made up of 50 Anglos, 50 African Americans, and 10 Asian and Hispanics. Approximately 30-35 percent of the

members have followed the lead of their pastor and moved into the community. Jesus modeled incarnational living, and these folks are truly following His lead!

For more information about church planting among

Alabama Baptists, please contact State Missionary Lamar Duke at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 332, or (334) 613-2332, lduke@alsbom.org.

CHURCH PLANTER PROFILE

Although he did play quarterback for four years, the Lord had much more in store for Terrence than simply being a successful football player. He came to know Jesus as his personal Savior during his freshman year.

Terrence worked for several years with a collegiate ministry after graduation. He also met his wife, Thais, there.

fatal shootings in the community. But believing this was God's plan, he moved his wife and five children into Washington Park. He said that he and Thais thought, "How can we not go?"

The Strong Tower Church has



By Lamar Duke
State Missionary



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REGISTER: 1-800-280-1105 or shocco.org

For more information, go online to alabamawmu.org, or please contact Dawn Watkins at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 226, or (334) 613-2226, dwatkins@alsbom.org.



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- Women on Mission/Adults on Mission ✧ Women's Ministry
- ✧ Acteens/Youth on Mission
- ✧ Girls in Action/Children in Action ✧ Royal Ambassadors ✧
- Mission Friends

Cost:
\$10 per person

One Day is a great option for leaders who are unable to attend Equip in July.

ONE Day Training

SATURDAY, AUGUST 20

Baptist Building, 2001 E. South Blvd., Montgomery
9 a.m.-Noon

For more info, please go online to alabamawmu.org, or contact Kathryn Helms at **1-800-264-1225**, ext. **325**, or **(334) 613-2325**, khelms@alsbom.org.

youth evangelism conference yecal.org

july
22-23
2016

First Baptist
Trussville

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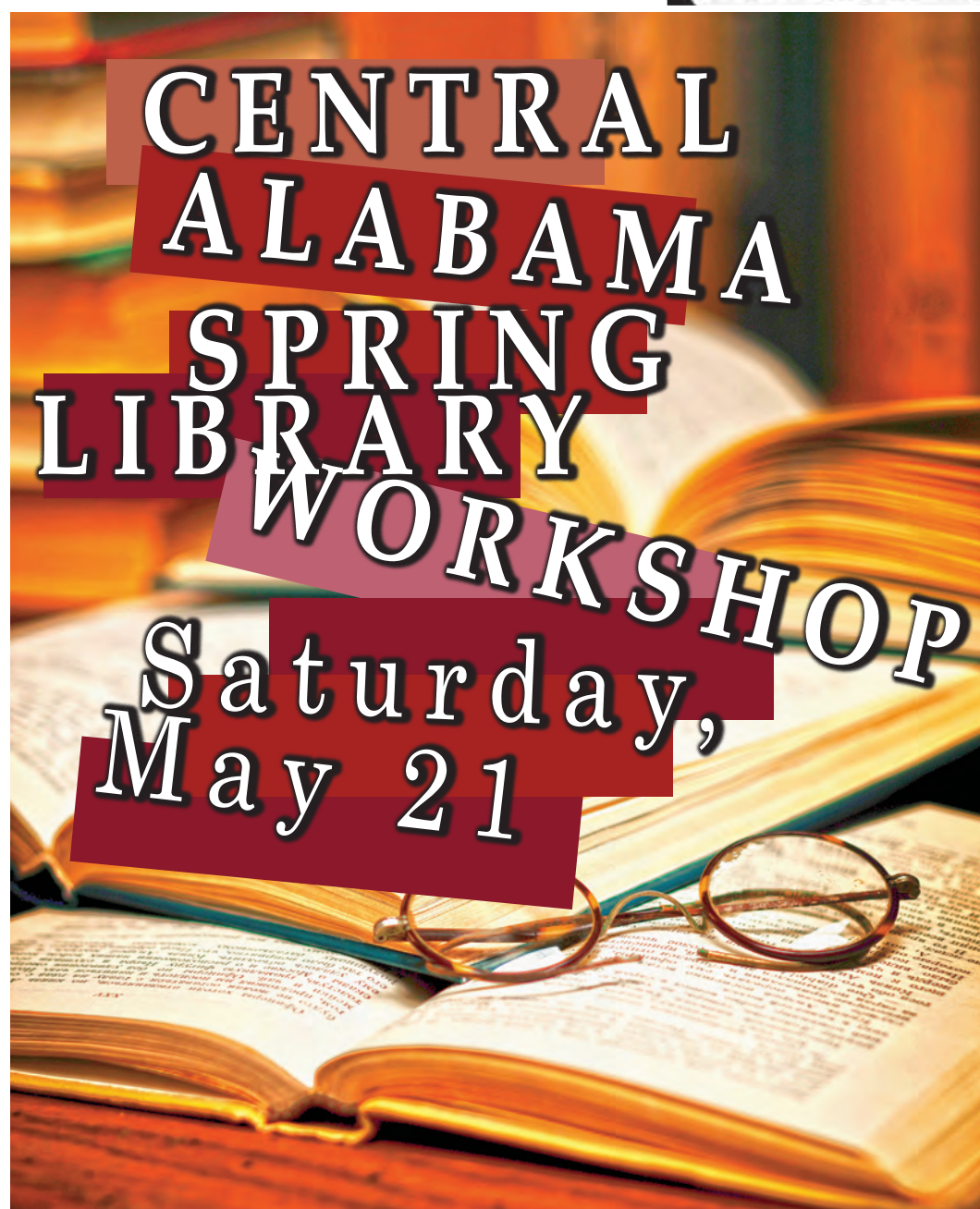
messages from
Walt Barnes
Clayton King
Chad Poe

worship with
The Museum

In Concert
Flame

speak

Ephesians 4:15



SHOAL CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH, 13214 HOLTVILLE RD., DEATSVILLE

Cost: \$5 (includes noon meal)

Registration will begin at 8:30 a.m.
The conference will conclude by
3:30 p.m.

This is a library training event. Classes will be offered in all areas of library work. Anyone involved in any type of library work is invited — libraries of churches, Christian schools, public schools or private schools — and public libraries. The information provided will help your library grow. A swap table will be available.

*For more information or to register,
please contact Marty Woodall
at (334) 569-3854 or
martybooks1@juno.com.*

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handbell workshop

May 21, 2016 Eastmont Baptist
9 a.m. - 3 p.m. Church, Montgomery

REGISTER ONLINE AT [ALSBOM.ORG/SPRINGRING](http://alsbom.org/springring)

Cost of lunch to be determined by host.

For more information, please contact Ministry Assistant Sharon Cleveland, **1.800.264.1225**, ext. **279**, or **(334) 613.2279**, scleveland@alsbom.org.

2016

for girls, boys and teen girls

Missions Adventure Camp at WorldSong

Missions Adventure Camp for Girls

(girls completing grades 2-6)

June 20-24

June 27-July 1

July 18-22

Cost: \$230 per person

Missions Adventure Camp for Teen Girls

(girls completing grades 7-12)

June 20-24

July 18-22

Cost: \$230 per person

Extreme MAC for Teen Girls

(girls completing grades 7-12)

June 13-15

Cost: \$130 per person

Mini Camp for Girls

(girls completing grades 2-6)

June 13-15

Cost: \$130 per person

CITs (Cabin leader In Training)

(girls completing grades 9-12)

June 27-July 1

Cost: \$230 per person

Missions Adventure Camp for Children

(coeds completing grades 2-6)

July 11-15

Cost: \$230 per person

Mom & Me

(girls completing grades 2-6)

June 16-18

Cost: \$130 per person

Mom & Me Little

(girls completing grades K-3 and their moms)

June 24-25

July 15-16

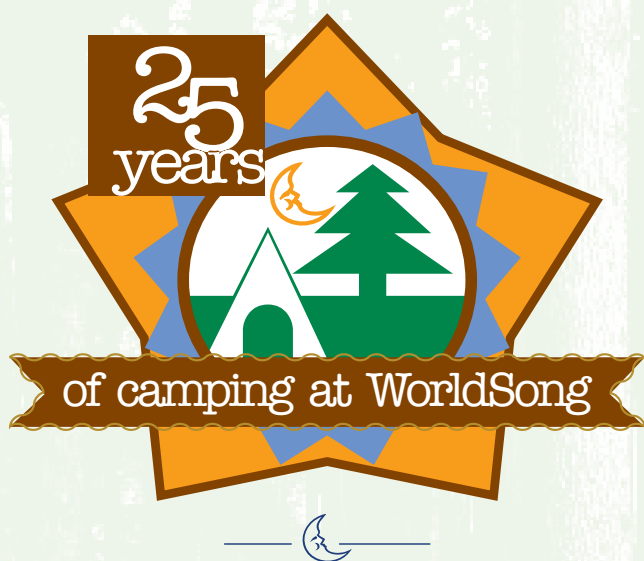
Cost: \$75 per person

Online: worldsongretreat.com

For more information, please contact Crystal Akers at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 223, or (334) 613-2223, cakers@alsbom.org.

MISSIONS

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CAMP PASTOR: **Luke Johnson**, Laurel, Miss.

WORSHIP LEADER: **Alan Cagle**, Crossgates Baptist Church, Brandon, Miss.

Online Info: supersummeral.org

Super Summer Alabama focuses on leadership and discipleship. Students will be challenged to deepen their faith and stand out as the leaders God wants them to be. The camp is open to students in Alabama who have completed grades 8-12 and exemplify solid spiritual leadership in their churches.

For more information, please contact State Missionary Jamie Baldwin at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 240, or (334) 613-2240, jbaldwin@alsbom.org.

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REGIONAL **SUNDAY SCHOOL & DISCIPLESHIP** LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Training is available for Sunday School & discipleship leaders on the dates and locations listed here. Experienced conference leaders will be at each location to offer tips on topics such as organization, lesson preparation, materials, encouragement and affirmation for you as a servant leader in your church, and there are always some new ideas.

At each location, there are three one-hour conference times with multiple topics for each age group. Go online to the web pages listed for

more information or to register. Registration is \$5 per person before the early registration deadline, \$10 per person after the deadline.

Metro-First Baptist Church, Trussville

Saturday, August 13
EARLY REGISTRATION DEADLINE:
Thursday, August 11
alsbom.org/metro

South-Government Street Baptist Church, Mobile

Saturday, August 13
EARLY REGISTRATION DEADLINE:
Thursday, August 11
alsbom.org/south

North-Lindsay Lane Baptist Church, Athens

Saturday, August 27
EARLY REGISTRATION DEADLINE:
Thursday, August 25
www.alsbom.org/north

For more information, please contact State Missionary Jamie Baldwin, 1-800-264-1225, ext. 240, or (334) 613-2240, jbaldwin@alsbom.org.

On
Mission
with the
Great
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& Monday - Friday,
July 11-15 &
Shocco & Springs

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COST: \$310 per person (\$80 deposit per person due upon registration)



For more information, go online to mixmusiccamp.org or contact Ministry Assistant Cindy Parrish at **1-800-264-1225**, ext. **230**, or **(334) 613-2230**, cparrish@alsbom.org.



SHOCCO SPRINGS, AUGUST 5 - 6, 2016
REGISTER ONLINE: WWW.SHOCCO.ORG OR CALL 1-800-280-1105

Now is the time to begin planning for the summer. While looking ahead, make sure to set aside time for family and friends. Give yourself some time to play and rest, but don't overlook another essential element in a happy, healthy Christian lifestyle that you must also reserve time to pursue: personal and spiritual growth.

AT THE SUMMIT: For Church Leaders, you will find plenty of opportunities to grow in knowledge and confidence in how to serve as a leader in your church. Ministers and other professionals in many different areas of church life and ministry will be on the Shocco campus to lead training sessions. From preschool to senior adults, all age groups will be represented.

The Summit begins on Friday with Early Bird Mega Conferences from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m., followed by a worship rally beginning at 3:45. Supper will be served beginning at 4:45, followed by two conference times at 6:15 and 7:45. Saturday's schedule begins with breakfast at 6:30 a.m., followed by conference times of 8:00, 9:30 and 11:00. Lunch will be served at noon.

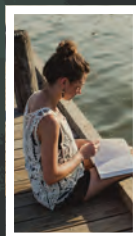
THE SUMMIT: For Church Leaders is for pastors, ministers, teachers, and other workers and leaders. There is no childcare.

UPDATES: alsbom.org/summit

Registration/Pricing: 1-800-280-1105 or shocco.org

For more information, please contact State Missionary Jamie Baldwin, 1-800-264-1225, ext. 240, or (334) 613-2240, jbaldwin@alsbom.org.

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**FRIDAY AND SATURDAY,
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Concludes with lunch at noon Saturday.

GUEST SPEAKERS: Chuck & Rhonda Kelley

COST/REGISTRATION: Call Shocco Springs at
1-800-280-1105.

ONLINE INFO:

alsbom.org/pastordeaconsouseretreat

For more information, please contact Ministry Assistant Debbie Dickey at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 218, or (334) 613-2218, ddickey@alsbom.org.

children's choir summit

OUT OF THE BOX

LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

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- Network with other people in similar situations.

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For more information, go online to alsbom.org/children-summit or contact State Missionary Karen Gosselin at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 318, or (334) 613-2318, kgosselin@alsbom.org; or Ministry Assistant Sharon Cleveland at ext. 279, or (334) 613-2279 or scleveland@alsbom.org.

ONEMISSION: The Great Commission ONEPROGRAM: The Cooperative Program MANYMINISTRIES: Great Commission Ministries

Tuesday, September 13, 2016

Baptist Building, 2001 E. South Blvd., Montgomery
9 a.m.-4 p.m.

GUEST SPEAKER: Jay Vineyard

REGISTRATION FEE: \$25 (includes materials and lunch)

This annual one-day workshop will help leaders in the church connect with each other and develop their leadership skills to create healthy churches.

LEADERconnect

Topics vary through a range of the most up-to-date leadership emphases.

For more information, please contact Ministry Assistant Debbie Dickey at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 218, or (334) 613-2218, ddickey@alsbom.org.

TAB
AR

Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Knowing God

God Is Provident

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

God wants us to know and trust Him as provident. To say that God is provident is to affirm that divine providence is a reality in our world and in our lives. This means that God did not just create the world and then leave it to its own fortunes. Rather, God's providence indicates that He is still actively involved in His creation, both the world at large and in our individual lives.

Christians generally think about divine providence at two levels: general providence and special providence. Let's begin by thinking about God's general providence. By His general providence, we are thinking about God's universal concern and control of the whole world. Jesus was speaking to this aspect of His Father's care for human creation when He said in the Sermon on the Mount, "He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). This is an example of God's general providence.

Providential work

Turning to the idea of special providence, we think of God's intervention into and interaction with specific events, situations, groups and individuals. For example, what on the surface may appear to be a quirky coincidence of circumstances may well be God working providentially behind the scenes.

People are sometimes heard to explain some event by saying, "For some strange or unknown reason things didn't turn out as I expected." People of faith might put it differently — that God's mercy was at work in preventive mission or that God's grace was at work in His benevolent mission. God's special providential work may be dramatic in an unexpected rain storm or a traffic snarl that prevented someone from being on an ill-fated plane flight or some other set of circumstances that resulted in a good outcome. God's providential work is often not so dra-

matic but is still a reality even when unseen by us.

A kind of subset of God's special providence is His interest in and interaction with those who have become His children through personal trust in Jesus. As Christians we have more than ordinary channels through which God can exercise providential care. Such channels include communication with God through prayer — God's communication with us through His written Word and His indwelling Holy Spirit — and the loving concern of fellow members of the family of God, through whom He often ministers.

Great mystery

When we have said all we know to say about God's providential intervention in the lives of His people, great mystery remains as to why sometimes we can see His mercy and grace displayed in what happens and why sometimes it seems God has been quiet and inactive. In either case our best response is to praise Him whether or not we see His providential hand at work.

If what happens seems bad and we find ourselves wishing God had intervened to shield us, then we do well to praise Him anyway. We may not understand what awaits us on the far side of life's disappointments and tragedies. After all, faith confesses that God's ways are beyond ours as far as the heavens are higher than the earth (Isa. 55:8-9).

Closely joined to God's providence is the truth of His purposefulness, which is next week's topic. ‡

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.



State Bible Drill & Speakers Tournament

2016 winners

The 2016 State Bible Drill and Speakers Tournament were held April 23 at First Baptist Church, Montgomery. The winners of each division are listed below.



YOUTH BIBLE DRILL
(l to r) second place, Chad Carden, Mount Zion Baptist Church, Alexandria; first place, Michael Hopkins, Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville; third place, Ali Grace Wright, Lee Heights Baptist Church, Florence

HIGH SCHOOL BIBLE DRILL

(l to r) second place, Ellie Morris, Leatherwood Baptist Church, Anniston; first place, Samantha Taylor, Lakeside Baptist Church, Birmingham



SPEAKERS TOURNAMENT
(l to r) third place, Goldon Gill, First Baptist Church, Theodore; first place, James Cole, Memphis Baptist Church, Dothan; second place, Sarah Cox, Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville

Photos by Doug Rogers

'100% disappointed'

Islam remains Bangladesh's religion as court rejects petition

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

The 28-year-long petition to remove the recognition of Islam as Bangladesh's official religion came to a halt March 28 when the country's Supreme Court rejected the petition and ruled the agency that filed it did not have the right to be heard in court.

Subrata Chowdhury, the lawyer for the Committee Against Autocracy and Communalism (CAAC) who introduced the petition, said he was "100 percent disappointed" with the court's decision.

The petition was originally filed in 1988 after then President Lieutenant General Hussain Muhammad Ershad declared Islam the official state religion in a constitutional amendment. It was submitted because "Bangladesh was founded as a secular state and having a state religion contradicts the basic structure of the constitution," according to University of Dhaka Professor Emeritus Anisuzzaman, a CAAC leader.

Although the 1988 amendment states that religious minorities are to be free to practice their religion in "harmony," Christians and other religious minorities have not been able to live in peace without the fear of extremist violence against them, The Christian Post reported.

Muslim protesters

During the court hearing those in support of Islam rallied against the proceedings and more than 7,000 Muslims protested and chanted anti-government slogans outside the national mosque in Dhaka.

One radical Muslim leader, Noor Hossain Quashemi, said during the protests, "If Islam gets scrapped as our official religion, we will unleash an all-out movement even if blood is needed to be shed."

While Christians in many Muslim-majority countries continue to suffer for their faith, some believers are standing strong and encouraging others to do the same.

As house churches in Iran have blossomed, for example, many pastors have been imprisoned or harassed. But one Christian held in Rajai Shahr Prison in Karaj,

Iran, recently exhorted Iranian Christians to continue to proclaim Christ in the face of persecution.

"If you are courageous in God's way, God's grace will be with you," said Ebrahim Firouzi, a 31-year-old pastor. "Do not fear what you are doing and raise the banner of Jesus."

According to Middle East Concern, the Iranian government has closed nearly all Farsi-language churches and has forced Christians to meet in secret.

Firouzi was convicted of crimes commonly given to Christians — actions against national security, being present at an illegal gathering and collusion with foreign entities — and sentenced to five years in prison.

But he's still hopeful.

"I ask you to pray for the re-opening of the churches in Iran that the government has closed by force so that the sound of worship and the praise can be heard in the buildings again," he said.

"We need to think especially

about the suffering of new believers. If my being in prison stirs the international community to work to prevent such future persecution of new believers, then my choice is to remain in prison."

"Now is the time to end the crackdown on the Church and set free prisoners who are behind bars for their religious beliefs."

**Paul Robinson
chief executive,
Release International**

Despite the crackdown on house churches in Iran, various groups have affirmed that the underground church is growing. More than 450,000 Christians are worshipping Christ within Iran's borders, according to Open Doors, an organization focused on helping the global persecuted Church.

With many moderates being voted into the Iranian government in recent months, the new majority could help draw down persecution, Morning Star News reported.

According to Paul Robinson, Release International's chief executive, "With Iran now voting for reform, now is the time to end the crackdown on the Church and set free prisoners who are behind bars for their religious beliefs."



It's hard to say what exactly faith and service look like, but this spring, it's going to look a lot like peanut butter and jelly!

We've partnered with the Food Bank of North Alabama along with Kroger to put together the WAY-FM PB&J Drive. What we're doing is collecting plastic jars of peanut butter and jelly to donate to the Food Bank of North Alabama to provide sandwiches and other foods for children in need. PB&J is our focus, but other non-perishable food items can be donated. We'll be outside of Kroger each Thursday for a month collecting supplies. Stop by any of these locations on the following dates to drop off goods:

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May 12: Hartselle — 241 Hwy 31 S
May 19: Huntsville — 6070 Moores Mill Road



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Philip Wilson
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SPAD0908154012

International Day for Unreached seeks to spark 'revived movement of believers'

By Maggie Walsh
The Alabama Baptist

Growing up in the Bible Belt there's a church on every corner, so it can be hard for many Alabamians to imagine there are entire people groups throughout the world that have never heard the gospel message of Jesus Christ. But as of July 1, 2015, there were still 3,201 unengaged, unreached people groups (UUPG), according to the International Mission Board (IMB). That equates to about 2 billion people.

The Alliance for the Unreached is calling on radio stations, churches and individual media to "be the voice of advocacy for people who have yet to hear the gospel" by establishing the International Day for the Unreached on May 15.

The day will include a range of efforts to raise awareness, including a prayer movement and small groups focus. The alliance also is encouraging pastors to preach sermons on the topic May 15.

The Alliance for the Unreached is composed of Missio Nexus, Bibles for the World, Reach Beyond, Operation Mo-

bilization and the Seed Company.

Several Alabama radio stations also are partnering in promoting the effort such as Birmingham-based WAY-FM, Montgomery-based The JOY FM and Moody Radio stations in Selma, Dixons Mills, Tuscaloosa and Birmingham.

"The first Pentecost marked the beginning of the gospel going to the farthest corners of the earth," according to The Alliance for the Unreached website. "Imagine a revived movement of believers reaching the hardest corners of the earth for Christ until all have heard the only message that can give lasting hope."

'Comfortable'

Wayne Pederson, president of Reach Beyond, a Colorado organization that seeks to spread the gospel via radio and modern media, said it's easy to get "comfortable and complacent" in America because of the freedoms and access we have to all kinds of Christian resources.

"But we want to remind people ... that we're called to bring [the gospel] to all people," he said.

In order to spark a fresh move-



ment of God, Christians throughout America must come together in order to share the good news of Christ with those 2 billion unreached people, said Samuel Chiang, president and CEO of the Seed Company, an organization that aims to transform lives through Bible translation.

"There is a historic opportunity with efforts such as the International Day for the Unreached to bring awareness to the worldwide Church to finish the work together, in this generation," Chiang said.

Resources available for churches and individuals on the International Day for the Unreached website include bulletin inserts, sermon outlines, promotional posters and videos. For more information on UUPGs, visit IMB's website at imb.org.

For more information about the International Day for the Unreached, visit dayfortheunreached.org.

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Fox's Baier shares about hope at UMobile banquet

Bret Baier, chief political anchor for Fox News Channel, spoke about the power of prayer and the problems in Washington during the 11th annual University of Mobile Leadership Banquet on April 28.

The annual fundraiser event raised nearly \$128,000 this year as an audience of about 700 gathered at the Mobile Convention Center.

Special guests included more than 35 World War II veterans, including a 105-year-old dressed in uniform.

Baier told the audience that the political system in Washington is broken and something has to change.

"Both sides will tell you it's broken," he said. "But there is hope. There are people thinking about big things, on both sides of the aisle."

Baier spoke about hope on a more personal level as he told about the birth of his first son, Paul. Paul was born nearly nine years ago with five congenital heart defects and has had three open-heart surgeries and eight angioplasties.



BAIER

"He was our first son and we were ecstatic when we were told he was a boy. I was thinking Master's champion, Super Bowl ring, all kinds of things," Baier said. After Paul was born, "The doctor comes in and says, 'your son has to have emergency surgery in the next few days or he's

going to die.' So we went from the highest of highs to the lowest of lows in a matter of minutes. And all those things in my head changed dramatically," Baier said.

He recalled the period after Paul's first surgery.

"At that moment we're in the cardiac

intensive care unit. ... You pray to God and say, thank God that this heart was still beating — every beat, I was saying that. ... But you're scared. And it changes your world view."

Baier noted how the experience through his son's surgery, and later release from the hospital, taught him to "think big, think optimistic" and to "trust in the Guy upstairs and make it about family and friends." (UMobile)

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BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Paint Rock Missionary Baptist Church, Paint Rock, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor. Please submit resumé to: resume@paintrockmbc.com. See who we are at www.paintrockmbc.com.

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Northside Baptist Church, Opelika, Alabama, is searching for bivocational pastor. Send resumé to: Pastor Search Committee, 3001 LaFayette Parkway, Opelika, AL 36801.

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Rashional thoughts

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Executive editor • jrash@thealabamabaptist.org

It's not all about you

When my nephew, Jared, was a little bitty thing, he would get all over his brother with a consistent reminder, "It's not all about you, Jacob!"

The boldness of his approach and the intensity behind his words always made me smile, but the clear truth behind his appeal has stuck with me since the first time it rolled out of his mouth.

The key to strength in any relationship points back to whether the two parties are going to be self-centered or other-centered. This is true with friends, co-workers, all formulas of family relationships and especially in marriage.

"It's not all about you" was the focus of a recent article in *Relevant* magazine, "Marriage Isn't About Your Happiness."

An excerpt from the article by Debra K. Fileta says:

"Marriage is not about your happiness, it's not even about you. It's about love — which is something we choose to give time and time again. It's about sacrifice, serving, giving, forgiving — and then doing it all over again. ... Often, we're choosing 'personal happiness' over real commitment, over real love.

"They say marriage teaches you more about selflessness than you ever wanted to know. ... Because at the heart of it, real love is all about sacrifice. About the giving of yourself, in ways big and small."

It's about sacrifice

I agree with Fileta. Real love truly is all about sacrifice.

The seasons where my husband, Jason, and I focus sacrificially on each other at the same time bring such great blessings and richness to our relationship.

When one or the other decides to be less other-centered and more self-centered, frustrations mount and life is more strained.

And the times we have de-

cided to focus on ourselves rather than the other — simultaneously — it basically led to confusion, insecurity, disappointment and pain.

Being married long enough to have a variety of seasons (almost 19 years) also has given us the opportunity to truly start learning and growing in the process. And we both agree we prefer the sacrificial model hands down.

I'm not sure I can say it is easy. Many who are farther down the path tell me it does become more seamless, so I'm trusting that is the case.

I do know that putting Jason's needs before my own and sacrificing for him in big ways and small ways brings tremendous fulfillment and allows me to demonstrate real love, true love.

And I learned through the precious five and a half years we fought alongside our niece, Belle, in her cancer journey that the purity of the love received in return is worth all the pouring of yourself into another.

It seems so obvious to me now but it took years for me to get to this point. I'm not sure why because we were given the ultimate model of sacrificial love to follow — Jesus Christ.

It seems silly to not figure it out sooner. The example is so powerful.

But if you, like me, struggle to focus entirely on Jesus, then how much more will we struggle with giving of ourselves to ordinary humans?

My friend and co-worker, Grace Thornton, reminds me often that we are to desire God first, before ourselves and anyone or anything else. And from that place we are to let our lives flow outward.

"His heart is for us to know Him," Grace says, "making that the entire goal of our life and then trusting Him no matter what happens." ¶

Rashional Extras...

Share your favorite quotes, tweets, etc.
Email jrash@thealabamabaptist.org.

Have you ever felt stuck?

By Gary Hardin
Excerpt from *hopediscovered.com*

Have you ever felt stuck? You might feel that way now. You need money but it's not there. You need health but it isn't there. Your problems feel overwhelming and you aren't sure you have what it takes to make it through. It's like your hands are tied. You are nursing your wounds. You just feel beat up and it appears to you that you have no way out.

The greatest temptation in these situations is to give up. You know, throw in the towel and quit. But God calls us to refuse this temptation ... (and) to respond forcefully. ... Second Timothy 1:7 shows us how to do this.

It was written by a New Testament missionary — Paul. At the time Paul was in prison. He definitely saw no way out. But Paul did not cave in. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit he wrote some words that help us today.

1. When we see no way out, God gives us courage. That's the opposite of the word "timidity" in the verse. Instead of being intimidated by your challenges face them with courage that comes from God. How is this possible? Isaiah 41:10 answers that question: "Do not fear, for I am with you." We can be courageous because God is with us. What a

difference His presence makes.

2. Face your challenges in Jesus' power. ... Maybe you feel like a powerless victim. No pile of bills, no insult, no hurt, no problem or no failure is too big for Jesus to handle.

3. Keep on loving. ... Often the problems and challenges we face are because someone made bad choices that affect us negatively. A co-worker comes to work late habitually and you are left to catch up the slack. A committee member doesn't do what he or she promised and you end up cleaning the mess. Someone impulsively spoke harsh words to you and you want to strike back. ... In situations like these choose to love everyone. Look for ways to bless and help people.

4. Stay on course and keep going. Notice the last phrase of 2 Timothy 1:7: "of self-discipline." The word carries the idea of self-control or a cool head or a sound mind. So don't allow fatigue and all the headaches you face to stop you. When you feel knocked down then get up. Don't run from your problems. Stay on course. Conquer that temptation to quit.

2 Timothy 1:7 — "For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."

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"Great leadership isn't about the leader at all — it's about the mission of the organization, church, business or even family where the leader serves. And it is about who will replace the leader when he or she is gone."

Russ Crosson, president and CEO
Ronald Blue & Co.

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For May 8

Explore the Bible

By Robert Olsen, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Christian Ministries, University of Mobile

CONVERTED
Acts 9:3-9,15-20

The Confrontation (3-6)

Saul was a devout Jew — a member of the Pharisees. Jerusalem was the site of the persecution that happened in the previous chapter, but Saul’s zeal committed him to tracking down Christians outside of the city.

As he neared the city of Damascus a blinding light appeared, causing Saul to fall to the ground. Jesus spoke to Saul and those around him heard the sound but did not understand it. Jesus commanded Saul to go into the city where he would be told what to do.

Having had such a traumatic experience, Saul was transformed. In fact he would reference his conversion experience at several points in the future, because this was what changed his life. The same should be said for us today.

Each Christian has a testimony of what God has done in our lives. The work of God should be so transforming in our lives that we ought to live in a way that proves this, and it should naturally be a part of our conversation and life. Saul, whose name was changed to Paul, verified the saving and transforming power of the gospel. We ought to do the same.

In the King James Version, Jesus tells Saul, “It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks” (v. 9). This statement comes from Acts 26:14 where Paul recounts his conversion story to King Agrippa. It is likely a scribe in ancient times added this phrase back into Acts 9 recognizing that it was an actual part of Saul’s conversion story.

The Companions (7-9)

It is important to note that others were with Saul when this happened. They couldn’t understand the voice, but they

knew something had happened. The impact of Saul’s meeting with Christ was so harrowing that he did not eat or drink for three days. No doubt he was deep in thought and prayer at what had just happened.

The Commission (15-20)

The Lord told Ananias to go find Saul because God was going to use him to present the gospel to the Gentiles, to kings and to the Jews. He also revealed to Ananias that Saul would suffer for Jesus.

This was a terrifying thought for Ananias — Saul was a known persecutor of Christians. Ananias was going to have to go and aid someone who was an enemy of the Church. But he was obedient.

This is a key element for Christians. We need to be listening to the Holy Spirit’s leading and we need to obey what He tells us to do. It is not always what makes logical sense — often God’s calling goes against logic, such as the case with Ananias. But God’s ways are always better than our ways, even when being obedient leads us into danger or discomfort.

Ananias placed his hands on Saul and reported to him that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit and regain his sight.

Saul was then baptized, showing his solidarity with Jesus, and spent time with the believers in Damascus being disciplined. Saul then preached in synagogues recounting how Christ was the Jewish Messiah.

True to the Word of God that came to Ananias, eventually Saul preached the gospel to the Gentiles, to kings and to the Jews. He also would suffer much for the name of Christ, so much that it would eventually cost him his life at the hands of the Roman emperor Nero. Imagine how different Saul’s life might have been if Ananias hadn’t been obedient.✠

Bible Studies for Life

By Jim Barnette, Ph.D.
Samford University and Brookwood Baptist Church, Mountain Brook

REDEEMED FROM CRIPPLING DOUBT
Luke 1:11-20, 63-65

The announcement of John’s birth signaled a most miraculous event for his parents. Like Sarah in the Old Testament, Elizabeth was beyond the age of child bearing. Like Isaac and Hannah, Zechariah and Elizabeth had prayed for a child. Even their names are appropriate for this occasion of wonder: Zechariah means “God has remembered” and Elizabeth means “My God’s oath.”

God’s Word is sure. (11-17)

After assuring Zechariah that he need not be afraid, the angel tells Zechariah that his prayer had been heard. Soon it will be clear that not only will God give the aging couple a son, but their child will be the forerunner of the Messiah as well. Zechariah is told that he will name the child “John,” which means “Yahweh has shown favor.” Ordinarily, giving a name was the father’s duty. When God took over this task, it was a sign that He was making the child His responsibility.

The second angel goes on to announce the joy and gladness that will accompany not only the birth of John but also the coming of the Messiah to Israel. Throughout Luke’s gospel, joy is the spontaneous response of God’s people to His acts of wonder and grace. The shepherds are told “good news of great joy.” In the middle of Luke, the three lost-found parables (lost sheep, lost coin, lost son) culminate in joy over the finding of the lost one. And at the end of Luke, the disciples return to Jerusalem “with great joy” over witnessing the risen Christ.

Doubting God’s Word hinders our walk and service for Him. (18-20)

The incredulity of the angel’s message is lost neither on Zechariah nor on the reader. Zechariah’s response is a similar

quote of Genesis 15:8: “How will I know that this is so?” The allusion to Abraham carries a clear implication: A new child of the covenant is about to be born and God is acting in a mighty way, just as in the days of the great patriarch.

The angel returns Zechariah’s emphatic “I am old” with an equally emphatic “I am Gabriel.” The previously anonymous angel now issues his name and with it his credentials. He is Gabriel, known to us from Daniel 8-9 as trusted by God to reveal divine mysteries. The angel identifies himself as one who stands in the very presence of God. What is more, he has been sent by God to deliver this message. Gabriel’s words, hard as they are to comprehend, need to be accepted.

Obedience to God’s Word leads to joy and praise. (63-65)

After nine months of being deaf and mute, Zechariah wrote on the tablet, “His name is John.” The name was common in New Testament times. The neighbors’ surprise to this choice was because of pious parents choosing a name that was unknown to Zechariah’s family.

Once again it was God who named the infant, not the earthly father as was custom. Immediately after making this declaration, Zechariah’s tongue is loosed. Struck dumb because he doubted, now he speaks clearly. As soon as he obeyed God’s instructions in naming the child, he was healed. With that he burst into his marvelous hymn of praise to the Messiah, whose coming would be announced by his son, John.

Fear is a characteristic reaction to miraculous occurrences in Luke and in Acts, and this is the response now of “all their neighbors.” John has not yet appeared on the public scene in Israel, but the widespread effect of his ministry is already anticipated by that public.✠

Christian Crossword

By Joan M. Jarzebinski Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

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Across

1. To glorify or honor.
5. Form by heating and hammering.
9. Her. (opposite)
10. “Much ____ About Nothing.”
11. Body part for hearing.
12. Anno Domini. (abbr.)
13. Republican party. (abbr.)
15. X-ray person. (abbr.)
16. Railroad.
17. O Lord, ____ me. (Jer. 15:15)
20. ____ unto others ...
21. A Gadite. (1 Chron. 5:15)
22. Submit yourselves unto the _____. (1 Pet. 5:5)
25. Springs.
27. Sweet fluid made by bees.
30. Knock.
32. Come ____ with me. (1 Kings 13:7)
36. Do, re, mi, ____.

Down

1. Egyptian ruler.
2. To travel on.
3. I _____. (John 8:58)
4. In them did _____. (1 Pet. 1:11)
5. I will not ____ thy word. (Ps. 119:16)
6. With reference to. (abbr.)
7. ____ of Eden.
8. For the ____ of the people. (Heb. 9:7)
10. Large monkey.
14. Amorite king. (Josh. 13:12)
18. This man’s religion is _____. (James 1:26)
19. What did you say?
23. City south of Jerusalem. (Josh. 10:3)
24. Princess ____.
26. Mountain range in Soviet Union.
28. Minor prophet.
29. Test.
30. In thy majesty _____. (Ps. 45:4)
31. Physical education. (abbr.)
33. Metal-bearing rock.
34. Girl’s name.
35. His name shall ____ forever. (Ps. 72:17)
36. Extraordinary acts.
40. Ye ____ Country Inn.
43. Tap gently.

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BOOKS

MOVIE
REVIEW**Honoring the Code: Warriors and Moral Injury**

Crosswinds Foundation for Faith and Culture

I had never heard the term “moral injury” before viewing this film. My guess is that I am not alone. The concept, however, is one that warrants more attention from the public and from organizations that can offer help. A little research revealed that although moral injury is related to post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), it is not the same thing. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), PTSD “can occur after someone goes through a traumatic event like combat, assault or disaster.”

‘Act of transgression’

On the other hand, again according to the VA, the key precondition for moral injury is “an act of transgression, which shatters moral and ethical expectations that are rooted in religious or spiritual beliefs or culture-based, organizational and group-based rules about fairness, the value of life and so forth.”

“Honoring the Code” is a film by Crosswinds Foundation for Faith and Culture, a Birmingham-based organization that was made to raise awareness of moral injury and point the way to help.

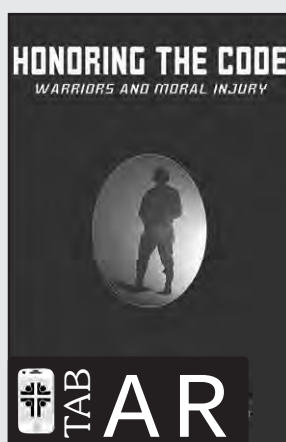
Linwood Bragan, executive director of Crosswinds, noted the number of suicides among returning war veterans, saying, “even secular sources will tell you these

warriors are struggling for a moral authority that can offer them forgiveness.” Indeed, research published in journals bears this out. The VA cites a study that proclaims, “Religion and spirituality are critical components of moral

injury. ... Forgiveness is also an important mediator of outcome.”

Bragan noted, “We all know that the ultimate authority for forgiveness is God Himself.”

According to Crosswinds president and founder Bob Waldrep, the movie will premiere May 12 at the Carmike Summit Theater in Birmingham. Tickets are available at the Honoring the Code website, honoringthecode.com. Group discounts are available to groups of more than 10 people. ☛



“Even secular sources will tell you these warriors are struggling for a moral authority that can offer them forgiveness.”

Linwood Bragan
executive director, Crosswinds Foundation
for Faith and Culture

Media reviews

**Help! I'm a Deacon!**

Joe McKeever. Cleveland, Tenn.: Parson's Porch Books, 2015. 141 pp. (Paperback).

If you are reading this in *The Alabama Baptist*, you undoubtedly recognize the name of the author; he is the cartoonist who delights us with his humorous drawings that cut to the heart of Baptist life.

Joe McKeever may have even drawn your picture at some event around the state; with his keen eye and quick hand, he can turn out dozens of amazing drawings in a few minutes' time.

But did you know that McKeever is an author too? “Help! I'm a Deacon!” was written from the perspective of a pastor who has worked with deacons as a pastor for 42 years, who reports that he loves deacons and yet admits to bearing “scars from confrontations with a few deacons over the years.”

McKeever seasons his wise insights with the humor we all have grown to expect from him through his cartoons. He tackles tough issues with grace, and the result is a book that I would strongly recommend for anyone who is a deacon or might ever

become one. Or who might go to church with one.

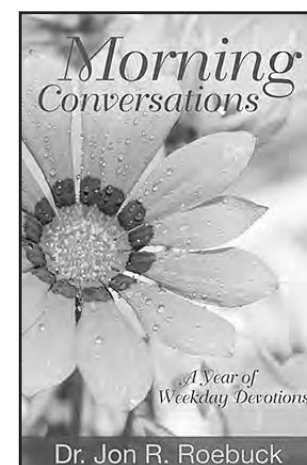
Morning Conversations: A Year of Weekday Devotions

Jon R. Roebuck. Macon, Ga.: Nurturing Faith. 260 pp. (Paperback).

I was initially intrigued by the organization of this book — there is a devotion drawn from each book of the New Testament. But it was the content of those devotions that held my attention.

The one-page devotions are short, simple, but convicting. Each one begins with a verse (the author urges the reader to read the entire chapter), some background, then an application where the author turns the spotlight on the heart and how the words relate to our lives today. The author displays a pastor's heart in his words to the reader — assisting those who read the devotions to understand and apply the helpful words.

Author Jon Roebuck is pastor of Woodmont Baptist Church, Nashville, and adjunct professor at Belmont University in Nashville. ☛

**Meet the reviewer**

Martine Bates Fairbanks, Ed.D., reviews books and movies for The Alabama Baptist. She is a university professor and retired principal. She is a member of Central Baptist Church, Decatur.

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**If you have a book you would like reviewed, mail a copy to:
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'I never lose faith'

Former Bama forward keeps God first in NBA

By Bill Sorrell
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

With Nike providing uniforms and shoes for his Montgomery high school, JaMychal Green got home from school one day and found five boxes of basketball shoes.

"I was real excited. I started to jump around and I hit my head in the ceiling underneath the doorway and I just blacked out," Green said.

Now the owner of about 100 pairs of shoes, Green still loves sneakers.

And the 6-foot-9-inch power forward has had big shoes to fill this season for the Memphis Grizzlies. Green led the Grizzlies in games played, 78 of the 82 regular-season contests. He has been a constant in a season where injuries and trades have made Memphis' roster consist of 28 different players, an NBA record.

For the former University of Alabama (UA) player, being in the NBA is a dream come true.

"Being here is my biggest blessing. I just soak it in and take it a day at a time and thank God every day. Without God none of this would be possible. If it were not for Jesus, a lot of things in my life that are happening, a lot of blessings, would not happen," Green said.

"Jesus means the world to me. I have always needed Jesus. Throughout my whole life, through the ups and downs, God was always by my side."

Green's high school career at St. Jude Educational Institute in Montgomery was award-winning. With a high school career of more than 2,500 points, he led St. Jude to Class A state championships in 2006 and 2008. He was Alabama's Mr. Basketball in 2008, the same year ESPN ranked him the No. 1 power forward nationally.

Getting to the NBA

Wanting "to carry" UA to be both "a basketball and football school," Green stayed in-state. He was named to the All-SEC Freshman team and was first-team All-SEC in 2011.

Waived by San Antonio twice and the Los Angeles Clippers, Green, undrafted out of college, began to change his work ethic while in the D-League.

"I had to lock in and really focus on improving my game and getting better and (change) my attitude. It (NBA) is a tough league. A lot of things won't go your way. You have to learn how to fight through adversity," he said.

"I have had plenty of obstacles. ... I know when

things are going bad there is always going to be a brighter day. Something good is going to come your way. You have to be strong."

A 10-day contract in February 2015 began Green's affiliation with Memphis. He has had more than 20 games with 10-plus points during the 2015-16 season.

Green, 25, meets the challenges of the NBA through prayer.

"I leave it in God's hands. I ask Him to lead and guide me and show me the way. I believe that whatever happens, happens for a reason. I try to stay close to God, read my Scriptures, get a better understanding and just pray and talk to Him."

His father, mother and sister each regularly send Scripture verses to encourage him. At UA, he wrote Scripture on his shoes.

They, along with his grandmother, are spiritual role models, he said.

Green was baptized at Bell Resurrected Baptist Church, Montgomery, when he was "5 or 6." His mother is an associate minister at the church and his father teaches Sunday School and is a deacon and Sunday School supervisor.

Green said, "I thank [my family] for keeping me in the Word. I have a great support system (including) my aunties and uncles. ... Whenever I am down, they always have Scriptures and prayer for me. That takes me a long way."

Philippians 4:13 is his

favorite verse: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Vince Carter, Memphis guard/forward, said Green's willingness to learn and his high intensity are vital to the team.

"He is a very humble guy. He has an appreciation for the game. That is something I really like about him. A lot of younger guys feel privileged when they step into this league. I don't think he was privileged. He had to fight and earn his way in the league. A guy like that is willing to sacrifice ... for the good of the team," Carter said.

"At the same time, he plays hard enough and is willing to do anything for the team. He has definitely earned the minutes and success he has had."

Green's key to success is keeping God first, he said.

"I am not a perfect person. Everyone sins. I still sin. I am trying my best every day to get closer to God, to try to better myself. I never lose faith. You have got to have faith dealing with God. You have got to believe in God. If you don't, your blessings will go away. A lot of things wouldn't be possible without Him." 🌟



Photo by Joe Murphy/NBAE via Getty Images
JaMychal Green

RELIGION

in *America*

Compiled from Wire Services

Tennessee Gov. Haslam vetoes Bible bill

NASHVILLE — Tennessee's Gov. Bill Haslam vetoed a bill April 14 that would have designated the Bible as the official state book.

"As you know, last year the attorney general opined that designating the Holy Bible as the official state book of Tennessee would violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the federal Constitution and Article 1 and 3 of the Tennessee constitution, which provides that 'no preference shall ever be given, by law, to any religious establishment or mode of worship,'" Haslam said, explaining why he vetoed House Bill 615.



HASLAM

"In addition to the constitutional issues with the bill, my personal feeling is that this bill trivializes the Bible, which I believe is a sacred text. If we believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, then we shouldn't be recognizing it only as a book of historical and economic significance.

... I strongly disagree with those who are trying to drive religion out of the public square. All of us should and must bring our deepest beliefs to the places we are called, including government service."

According to The Christian Post, Hedy Weinberg, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Tennessee who had previously called on Haslam to veto the bill, praised his decision in a statement.

"We applaud Gov. Haslam for his leadership in sending a clear message that Tennessee values and respects the religious freedom of all Tennesseans. Religion thrives when it is left in the hands of families and faith communities. Publicly elected government officials cannot use their official positions to favor one religious belief over another. The governor's veto of this unconstitutional legislation ensures that religious freedom can flourish in Tennessee," she said. (TAB)

Should Pakistan be among 'countries of concern'?

WASHINGTON — Tajikistan recently made its debut on the United States' list of Countries of Particular Concern (CPC) but noticeably absent was Pakistan.

John Kirby, spokesperson for the U.S. State Department, released the latest list April 15 in a White House briefing.

Also remaining on the list are Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

The CPC falls under the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act and helps spotlight countries and conditions that require the international community's attention, Kirby said. Countries on the list are among the worst religious freedom violators.

"Today and every day, as you know, we are committed to working with governments, civil society organizations and individuals to achieve our shared interest in promoting peace and stability through, in part, the promotion and protection of all human rights including religious freedom," he said.

While no explanation was given as to why Pakistan did not make the list, it does mean a recommendation by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom was ignored, according to The Christian Post.

According to Open Doors USA, Pakistan is currently the sixth worst country in the world for Christian persecution. (TAB)

