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INSIDE



Bible Reading Marathon stays strong for more than a decade in Alabama

◆ Page 3



'Mystery worshippers': Who they are and how they can help churches

◆ Pages 4-5



UMobile President Mark Foley retires, leaves legacy of 'influence'

◆ Page 6

Volunteers participate in a weekly kids club held at Sheffield Homes, a multihousing complex in the Shoals area where Bryant McGee, multihousing strategist for the area, has helped start a 'missional community.'



'MISSIONAL communities'

Photo courtesy of Bryant McGee

Multihousing ministries reach 'spiritual black holes' across Alabama

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

According to the North American Mission Board (NAMB), 57 percent of Americans live in multihousing communities — apartment complexes, trailer parks, condo communities and so on.

In Tuscaloosa that number reaches closer to 65 percent, mainly because of the universities in the area, according to Eric Boykin, missional strategist for Tuscaloosa Baptist Association since 2013.

Since taking on the role in Tuscaloosa, Boykin has seen God open doors for more than 30 multihousing ministries — something near to his

heart since he was raised in Section 8 housing and adopted at age 9.

Across the state of Alabama, Boykin explained, 50 percent of those who live in a regular-sized single family home are connected to some kind of evangelical church. But according to NAMB, only 5 percent of those who live in a multihousing community are connected to a church.

'Where the lostness is'

"What that means is ... if you live (in a multihousing community in Alabama) you are 10 times less likely to go to church than if you lived in a home," Boykin said. "That's significant. Especially since 65 percent of our city lives in these kind of com-

munities. They are spiritual black holes. This is where the lostness is."

To reach those spiritual black holes of the state Boykin and his team at the association formed a strategy for starting what they call "missional communities," where they strive for "something spiritual" happening in the area.

But he's not doing it alone. Boykin has gathered and trained a network of volunteer leaders — made up of pastors, single people, mothers, students, retirees — and meets monthly with them in locations across the county where they pray together, share strategies, compare notes and "see what they can do to work on the outreach together."

NAMB also provided Tuscaloosa

Association with 25 student missionaries in 2014 to live onsite and work in communities in Tuscaloosa every day to build intentional relationships with the hopes of starting missional communities.

Established communities

Some of the missional communities already established are at Green Village and Wood Village, both trailer parks, as well as Section 8 apartment complexes, The Links & Greens at Tuscaloosa.

In January 2015, Boykin helped implement the missional community strategy across 11 metro areas of the state — including Mobile, Montgomery, Auburn and Huntsville.

(See 'NAMB, SBOM,' page 7)

COMING NEXT WEEK

Southern Baptist Convention

annual meeting preview



COMMENT



Preparing for Worship

Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy hill," asked David in Psalm 24:3.

The answer offered was, "He who has clean hands and a pure heart" (v. 4).

David later writes a pure heart can only be made by the work of God (Ps. 51:10). But an indication of a pure heart is "clean hands."

For Jews, laws about the clean and the unclean were a vital part of their theology. The God who delivered them from slavery in Egypt declared, "Therefore, be holy because I am holy" (Lev. 11:45). That made laws about what was clean and unclean an inescapable part of Jewish covenant theology. Being "clean" was a necessity of Jewish law.

The Psalms of Ascent (120–134) repeatedly emphasize the graveness of ascending the Lord's mountain. One was going into the presence of God. It was God's holy hill, God's sanctuary. It was a sacred destination.

One did not simply barge into the presence of the Holy God. One had to prepare for such an experience. One had to be "clean" or free from external impurities.

Even in Jesus' day pilgrims to Jerusalem often bathed in the Pool of Siloam immediately before ascending the road of stairs that brought them to Temple Mount. After their baths they would don clean clothes brought specifically for the moment when they stood before the temple of God to present their offerings and sacrifices.

The experience was to be a time of awe-inspired reverence much like Moses experienced when he stood before the burning bush. No one took their encounter with God lightly. All had to prepare.

Ideally physical preparation also impacted spiritual preparation. As one went through cleansing rituals, the focus of one's heart turned toward God. Spiritual awareness heightened. Expectation grew. Alertness to the presence of God increased.

In various Jewish writings the rules for cleanliness were meticulously recorded. Unfortunately over time concern became more focused on whether one had kept the laws regarding out-



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

ward cleanliness than on the inward expression of a pure heart.

Perhaps that is why the New Testament concentrates on moral impurities arising from within rather than on external issues. Jesus challenged the whole system of clean-unclean when He told the Pharisees, "Nothing outside a man can make him unclean by going into him. Rather it is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean" (Mark 7:15).

Purified from sin

In 1 John 1:7, the apostle John wrote "the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin." That was the answer to the inward problem of humanity. Two verses later John makes the same point as if to emphasize it. He writes, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

As David had written centuries earlier in Psalm 51, only God can create a pure heart. John explains that the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary was God's way of paying the price for sin so all who believe on Jesus may be declared clean and pure.

Interestingly, James, the half-brother of Jesus, picks up the Old Testament words when he urges readers to: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands ... and purify your hearts" (4:8). The way that is done is to "humble yourself before the Lord and He will lift you up," says the writer (4:10).

Like pilgrims of old, those who would meet

God today must prepare for the experience. Worship is still intended to be an encounter with the holy. It is not a casual experience. It is not to be taken lightly.

An old proverb says: "We only prepare for what we think is important." That is true in all parts of life including worship. In worship we are not meeting an old buddy or some long-lost pal. We are interacting with the Creator God, the Redeemer God, the One who is the destination of life's journey and the One who sustains us on that journey.

Worship is a time to encounter the God in whose love and mercy we have staked our hope for eternity. How shameful to treat God as if He were no more than an idle afterthought. Worshipers still need a time to turn their hearts toward God and to prepare for an encounter with the divine.

Preparation begins internally. Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well that those who worship God must do so "in spirit and in truth" but how many Christians deal with their own spirit before gathering for worship?

More often we rush into a service content to be present without really expecting to meet God in those moments.

Internal preparation involves humbling ourselves before God. He is God. Worship is all about Him. It is not about the pastor, not about the music and certainly not about us. God is God and He alone is due worship and praise.

Listening is another part of internal preparation. Solomon cautions not to be hasty to make a speech before God (Eccles. 5:2). Yes, worship includes sharing our hearts with God through prayer but also it includes listening to God to learn what His agenda might be for us in the worship encounter.

Internal preparation may involve adjustments — adjustments to schedules, activities and priorities. It is hard to worship when one is exhausted from the previous day. It is hard to worship when one has given no thought of the Lord before arriving at a service. It is hard to worship when one is more interested in what happens following the service than with what happens in the service.

There are those rare times when worship happens in spite of lack of preparation. More often those who are unprepared miss times of genuine interaction with God because their spiritual awareness is not able to sense what God is doing among His people. That is why some leave a worship service awed by their encounter with God and others are just glad the service is over.

Again only those who think worship important will prepare for it. They will prepare their spirit, their focus and their sensitivity toward God.

Do you think worship is important? If so how will you prepare for worship this week? ☩

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

THE LOCAL CHURCH

I had the chance to observe life in local church. Sometimes we all overlook important needs and theological truths. One of these times occurs when churches require a new pastor or staff member to wait one full year before receiving vacation time. Many times a minister who has earned three

or four weeks of vacation is cut back to one or two. This practice is widely accepted in the business world but should not be applied in the church.

The theological truth I refer to is the truth that the Church is "universal" as well as local. When a pastor or minister moves from one local church to another, he is not changing "compa-

nies."

If thinking biblically then you should say instead that he is moving from one branch office to another. Every local church is a part of the universal Church. A minister
(See 'Letters,' page 10)



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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Photo courtesy of Linda Adams
Elvira Spivey begins reading at Genesis 1:1 to kick off the Troy Bible Reading Marathon on May 1. This was the 10th Troy Bible Reading Marathon.



Photo courtesy of Greg Rogers
Mike Perren, of New Beginning Family Worship Center, Northport, reads at the Tuscaloosa Bible Reading Marathon held at First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa.

Sharing God's Word

Bible Reading Marathon stays strong for more than a decade in Alabama

By Anna Keller
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

In what has become a tradition in cities across Alabama, churches around the state came together to participate in the 2016 Bible Reading Marathon in early May. Leadership teams coordinated with area churches in each city to gather a long list of volunteers. Those volunteers took turns reading the Bible aloud in public venues, sharing the Word of God to gatherers and passersby in a meaningful and memorable way.

The marathons in Alabama were held in Birmingham, Tuscaloosa, Montgomery, Troy and Ozark. The event kicked off May 1 and culminated on the National Day of Prayer on May 5.

"I think it's a fabulous event — it's a great comfort to all of us," said Jessie Chestnut, a member of Bethel Baptist Church of Collegeville, Birmingham, and one of this year's Birmingham Bible Marathon directors. "It's a fantastic thing for people to do, both believers and nonbelievers, and it's a great outreach and outlet."

The Birmingham Bible Reading Marathon has been going strong for more than a decade and was held at the familiar Southside Baptist Church, Birmingham, attracting a diverse group of participants. About 80 area churches participated in the event in some capacity. Volunteers with no church affiliation also were included in the event. The marathon is an open event that invites churches of all denominations to participate.

'To honor God'

Sheila Wright, a member of Liberty Park Baptist Church, Birmingham, served as co-chair of the Birmingham marathon this year. "Since the reading is without commentary, it is the only event that I know of where believers of different denominations, cultures, races and backgrounds can come together in per-

fect unity to honor and glorify God," she said. "And since we read outside instead of within the walls of the church, we have an opportunity to share God's Word with those passing by who otherwise may not hear it."

This year's closing event in Birmingham was a special one, with the final hour of the marathon consisting of readings from Psalms. The readers were accompanied by a violinist and guitarist, and there also was a volunteer signing the Bible to the deaf as someone read aloud. To conclude the marathon, a "shofar" — an ancient horn used for Jewish religious ceremonies — was blown, and Scott Guffin, pastor of Liberty Park Baptist, led the group in a prayer.

Meanwhile in Tuscaloosa, a much newer event was underway. It was their second year to participate in the Bible Reading Marathon, which was held in front of the First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, chapel.

Greg Rogers, coordinator of the Greater Tuscaloosa Bible Reading Marathon and a member of Vineyard Community Church, Tuscaloosa, said, "About five years ago my son and his wife told me about the Bible Reading Marathon in Birmingham, and I was intrigued that they were able to coordinate a 90-hour public reading of the Bible.

"I continued to find out information as to how to coordinate the event and we decided to start with the first one last year."

The 2015 event in Tuscaloosa began without all the volunteer reading slots being filled, but by the end of the event, people from 40 congregations participated.

This year a new element of the marathon was a National Day of Prayer event held across the street from the Bible Reading Marathon location. As the Bible Reading Marathon concluded, prayer time at the Tuscaloosa County Courthouse began, creating a segue into the National Day of Prayer.

Also in its second year, the Montgomery Bible Reading Marathon kicked off its 2016 event with a prayer breakfast May 5. During the meal, Mayor Todd Strange invited participants to make their way to the steps of the Capitol for the marathon.

The Montgomery event, which took place May 5-8, was organized by His Vessel Ministries, a local nondenominational group that provides Christ-centered teachings through events like Bible instruction, discipleship trainings and special events.

Humbling moment

Jo Hancock, director of His Vessel Ministries, said, "The Word of God is the most powerful thing of which we have access. Reading the Word aloud fills the atmosphere above us with this power and covers us with an ambiance of peace. As one reader from last year's Bible Reading Marathon commented, 'Hearing the spoken Word of God echoing down Dexter Avenue was a very humbling moment that I will remember forever.'"

Ozark's Bible Reading Marathon has been taking place for more than a decade. Held on the grounds of the Dale County Courthouse, approximately 16 churches and religious organizations participated.

Kimberly Bartley, ministry assistant at Dale Baptist Association, said, "It is a chance for us to share the Word of God with our community, and we believe it is more important right now than ever before."

Troy's Bible Reading Marathon was in its 10th year and included a celebration of music with five groups and individuals singing. Nearly 400 readers from area churches, both Baptist and others, participated in the Troy marathon. The event concluded at noon on the National Day of Prayer with music by Sheila Jackson and a special address from Luke Lane, pastor of First Baptist Church, Troy. ☩

'Mystery worshipper'

First-time visitors evaluate churches, provide unbiased answers on worship experience

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

What is the experience of a first-time visitor really like at your church? Is it easy to find a parking spot? To locate the restrooms? To get the children to the nursery before worship begins?

These are questions that are hard to answer objectively from the comfort of our Sunday morning routine. However, they are important ones for newcomers. The job of a "mystery worshipper" is to provide unbiased answers that churches can use to turn first-time visitors into committed members.

"We want them to fully experience what it's like to find a parking spot, get in the right door, engage with greeters and the congregation and take part in worship," said Melanie Smollen, president of Faith Perceptions, a Missouri-based consulting firm that utilizes mystery worshippers as part of its work with churches. "Churches hire us because they want to know if they welcome people and help them get connected or if the church experience feels geared more toward insiders."

Different backgrounds

Mystery worshippers come from a range of backgrounds. Some are Christians who have moved to a new community and are looking for a church home. Others come from a faith background but have stopped attending church. Some have no interest in faith at all. Though Faith Perceptions works only with Christian churches, Smollen makes it clear to those she hires that the church's theology is not the concern.

"What we want to glean is how the guest was treated. Were people hospitable? Was it easy to follow along during the service? We are not interested in hearing that the preacher spoke on gay 'marriage' or abortion. That's not appropriate for the research we are doing," Smollen said.

Key questions

During a visit a mystery worshipper will evaluate a church on several key questions: "What was it like when you entered the building? Overall how friendly would you say the church was to you during your visit? Was it obvious where the children's ministry was located and that it was clean, secure and well-staffed? Would you return to this church?"

The answers give churches a better perspective on how they are making a personal connection with visitors, Smollen said.

In the business world this is called market research, which might cause some uneasiness in church circles. However, in churches, just like in the business world, first impressions are critical, said Ron Donnini, president and CEO of The Malphurs Group (TMG), a ministry consulting firm based in Texas that also hires mystery worshippers.

"Each church has its own personality and gets about five minutes to make a first impression. Then you're stuck. Can you change that? Yes. But it's still there and it is a barrier to people attending the church," Donnini said. "What we find is that most church people walk in and don't notice things that are out of place, the clutter, the smells — all kinds of things. A secret church visitor sees all of that."

A church's welcoming presence actually starts before a guest comes on Sunday, a fact overlooked by many churches, Donnini said.

"Lots of churches talk about first impressions, but they are talking about once a person walks through the door. Often church leaders are not thinking about digital presence, parking or navigating the campus," Donnini said. "A high percentage of people searching for a church are going to go online first and see what the church has to offer."

Though there are websites that publish unsolicited mystery visitor reports, both Faith Perceptions and TMG only use mystery worshippers as part of their consulting work with churches. The goal is not to find "bad stuff" but rather to collaborate with church leadership to figure out how the church can better fulfill its mission. Usually the mystery guest evaluation is just

one part of a larger report on the church's ministries that highlights both strengths and opportunities to improve, Smollen said.

"Most churches have blind spots, which we consider opportunities to improve," she said. "Our goal is to uncover them so the

church can create a more inviting, welcoming experience that makes visitors want to come back."

Identifying strengths and weaknesses and then developing a strategic plan to move forward is necessary for church growth, said Reggie Ogea, associate dean of professional

doctoral programs and professor of leadership and pastoral ministry at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Ogea also has served in local churches and with the Louisiana Baptist Convention during his four decades of ministry and now regularly serves local churches in an interim pastor role. Though much of what he does in that role

might be comparable to what a consultant does in the business world, those terms might not fit in church life, he said. The idea is the same, however.

"There are times when churches have a critical need to look at their future. They often need to look at a new strategy, so I come alongside the leadership and provide a different voice and a lot of experience to help them figure out their new direction."

Outside perspective

Someone with an outside perspective often can be more forthright with church leadership and help them tackle problems head on, Ogea said. Churches that are willing to do that kind of work will be better able to attract and keep new members because the church as a whole is healthier.

"What I see today more than anything else is that change is all around us, and yet it's amazing how little we want to change inside a Baptist church," Ogea said. "The churches who are willing to look outside their own little world, listen to those experienced voices and plan strategically are the ones that are going to grow both spiritually and numerically." ✠

"Each church has its own personality and gets about five minutes to make a first impression."

**Ron Donnini
president and CEO
The Malphurs Group**

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“Set Your Fields on Fire” is available in e-book and print at Amazon and other major retailers. The first chapter of the book is available for preview at brilliantdisguises.blogspot.com.

Evaluating church

Alabama author explores ‘mystery worshipper’ business in award-winning novel

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

The mission of the Church is to reach the lost. But who steps in to help when the local church is losing its way?

That question is at the heart of “Set Your Fields on Fire,” a novel by Alabama author William Thornton that was recently awarded Grand Prize in the Aspiring Author’s Contest from WestBow Press and the Parable Group.

After reading an article about mystery church worshippers, Thornton was inspired to explore the business through a fictional team of evaluators.

“I was kind of flabbergasted that that kind of thing was going on, but it kind of made sense. I thought it would be interesting to write a story from the perspective of those who do this kind of work, to turn these characters loose in a church and let

them do their stuff,” Thornton said.

The novel follows a team of undercover church evaluators who take on a job that turns out to be more than any of them expected.

Thornton always saw the story as a comedy, using names like “Alterman” for the change-inspiring leader of the team and “Templeton” for his partner.

Humorous situations

The characters also find themselves in many humorous situations as they investigate the church’s facilities and get to know the ins and outs of the church’s ministries. However, the characters are zealous about faith and the mission of the church, as evidenced in a speech Alterman gives his team before sending them out to do their job.

“The average worshipper isn’t a worshipper,” Alterman says. “He’s got time to

binge watch whole TV series on Netflix, but no time to read ahead in the Sunday School book. ... He’s got a closet full of clothes, the best car, and he’s planning his vacation, but he’s got no money for missions because he’s maxed out on three credit cards. ... Part of our job is reminding them of what (worship) should be.”

The title of the book, inspired by a gospel song written by blue-grass legend Bill Monroe, parallels the significance the characters place on the church’s mission, Thornton said.

“It’s a fire and brimstone sort of hymn that says, ‘If you don’t from sin retire, He will set your fields on fire.’ The idea is that you better get right (with Jesus), now is the time, which dovetails with these

characters. The Church today doesn’t talk a lot about Jesus with His winnowing fork in His hand, burning up the chaff. This group, though, they believe worship is serious business.”

Examining worship

Thornton, who teaches the 70 and older adult men’s Sunday School class at Southside Baptist Church in Etowah Baptist Association, believes that as well. He hopes the book challenges readers to examine their approach to worship.

“If you grew up in church and go every Sunday, the routine of it all may overwhelm why you’re doing it. In the book

Alterman reminds his team that we were created to worship, created to glorify God. I hope people find the book entertaining, but I also want to get across that glorifying God is serious and too often we don’t take it seriously enough.”

“Set Your Fields on Fire” is Thornton’s third novel. In all his books the main characters are Christians. Thornton said that while he sees believers as a big audience for his books, he hopes that people of other faiths or of no faith also will be amused by his stories while also learning a little more about what Christians believe and what goes on in the life of the church.

“If someone comes to the book and has no idea about any of this, hopefully it will lead them in

this direction (toward faith) or at least help them see people who go to church as more than caricatures.”

For Thornton, who works as an East Alabama reporter for Alabama Media Group, which includes *The Birmingham News* and *al.com*, writing fiction is a way to talk about issues of faith in a different way. The publishing world is not an easy one to break into, but Thornton said the future of his fiction-writing career is in bigger hands.

“I trust the Lord that He’s going to make a way,” Thornton said. “He’s already opened a lot of avenues that I did not see coming.” ✝



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Photo courtesy of Samford University’s MTI

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Photo by Dan Anderson/University of Mobile

Students, faculty, staff and friends give Mark and Marilyn Foley (far left) a painting by associate professor of art Phillip Counselman called 'Lyon Chapel and the Rusty Cross' that depicts campus landmarks Lyon Chapel and 'I Am the Vine,' an iron sculpture of a cross co-created by Foley, during a lawn party April 29. The City of Mobile also proclaimed the same day as 'Dr. Mark and Marilyn Foley Appreciation Day.'

'Servant leader'

Foley retires as president of University of Mobile, leaves behind legacy of 'influence'

By Kathy Dean
Special to The Alabama Baptist

As his last official act May 14 before retiring as president of the University of Mobile (UMobile), Mark Foley will hand out diplomas, shake the hands of 285 graduates and tell each one, "Now go change the world."

It's a challenge Foley first issued in 1998 when he was named the third president of Alabama's youngest Baptist college during a critical point in the school's history. For more than 18 years, Foley preached the importance of influence and using that influence in the name of Jesus Christ to change the world.

As the last days of his presidency wind down, the accolades continue to pour in. The UMobile board of trustees named him "president emeritus" and announced the former College Park Baptist Church building adjacent to campus will be named in his honor. The official naming of the building will take place once the capital campaign is completed and the building is acquired for campus expansion.

'Appreciation Day'

The City of Mobile proclaimed April 29 as "Dr. Mark and Marilyn Foley Appreciation Day." At a lawn party on campus the same day, students, faculty, staff and friends gave the Foleys a painting by associate professor of art Phil Counselman that depicted campus landmarks Lyon Chapel

and "I Am the Vine," an iron sculpture of a cross co-created by Foley. In November 2015 messengers to the Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting passed a resolution in his honor.

At the 11th annual UMobile Leadership Banquet on April 28, after introducing incoming president Tim Smith to an audience

of university supporters, Foley related a favorite story about a World War II private who took a stand in his foxhole, declaring that the enemy would not get past him.

"That foxhole is passion. That foxhole is commitment ... that foxhole was an idea, one perpetuated by a university that Marilyn and I have had the privilege of serving for over 18 years," Foley said. "A university where

we teach young men and women, future professionals, to be as good as you can be — better than most — and when you work, you earn respect. And when you have that respect, you have the opportunity to influence. And it is the influence, ladies and gentlemen, that I have been after for all these years and I still pursue. I want to influence, through these men and women, ultimately a nation."

Foley's administration extended beyond 18 years — far longer than the average college president's tenure of seven to eight years. He announced in October 2015 that he was ready for the Lord to show him his next assignment.

Under his leadership, the university

integrated a Christian worldview into all aspects of academics, campus life and university operations; doubled the capacity of on-campus housing by adding 354 beds and building three residence halls; invested \$44.8 million in capital projects; began offering online academic programs; emphasized Christian service through programs such as Project Serve university-wide day of service; created the Center for Performing Arts; and earned national rankings.

Christian worldview

Fred Wilson, chairman of the UMobile board of trustees, said, "One of the most encouraging and inspirational things about being on the board is Dr. Foley's very, very consistent Christian worldview as a basis

for making every decision I've ever been involved with.

"When he came, he brought stability and confidence. He's leaving the university on a solid platform that the next administration can really grow on," Wilson added.

Kayla Litton, past president of the Student Government Association and a graduating senior, said Foley "is a great leader because of the stability that he brought to UMobile during a time when it greatly needed a leader with strength and grace. He has been an excellent example of a servant leader.

"Dr. Foley gave his all to the students, faculty and school for the duration of his time here and has followed through with his plan to change lives to change the world," she said. ☩



FOLEY

Mark Foley (left) oversees the 11th annual University of Mobile Leadership Banquet on April 28. Bret Baier (right), chief political anchor for Fox News Channel, was this year's speaker.



Photo by G.M. Andrews/University of Mobile



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Knowing God

God Is Purposeful

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

Last week we thought about knowing God as provident, both in a general sense and a special one. The underlying and guiding principle in divine providence is that God is purposeful. God desires that we know Him as purposeful, so He has revealed Himself as such. God is pursuing His ultimate purpose to gain for Himself an eternal family who will enjoy and worship Him both now and forever. God's active providence in the world goes hand in hand with the pursuit of His purposes.

Faith acknowledges that above and beyond life's mysteries, God is at work pursuing His purposes for His creation and for our lives. We get glimpses of His purposefulness in His covenants and promises to Israel, as well as in prophetic messages conveyed through His prophets.

That God dealt in a special way with Israel was indicative that He had in mind a plan in which a chosen people were to play a vital part. God furnished a wider view of His purposefulness in the mission and message brought by Jesus. Jesus came because God was in pursuit of His plan to gather a forgiven and redeemed community to be His very own.

The 'must'

We recently experienced the Easter season and with it a renewed focus on Jesus' resurrection. In heaven's explanation delivered by angels about the resurrection, an emphasis was placed on the divine necessity for it. Speaking to the first eyewitnesses visiting the empty tomb, the angelic message called for those eyewitnesses to remember what Jesus had said: "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and the third day rise again" (Luke 24:7). In that message was the "must" — God's purposefulness.

We might think of divine providence as the hidden force at work achieving divine purposefulness, both in an individual believer's life and in God's

overarching goal of fashioning a people for His own possession in time and into eternity. As His purpose relates to our lives as Christians, God intends to conform us to the likeness of Christ through spiritual growth now and final transformation or completion when Christ returns. It is this vein that 1 John 3:2 affirms: "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be but we know that when He is revealed we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

Still to come

In addition to God's purpose for His redeemed people, the Bible points to His wider purpose affecting the whole created order. The Bible speaks in 2 Peter 3:10 of a future day of the Lord "in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up." However, as we know, the Bible does not end on that sad and fearful note. Rather it ends with a vision of "a new heaven and a new earth" in which a holy city descends from God "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

The glad sequel to the vision of God's ultimate purpose for a new heaven and new earth is spelled out in a loud voice from heaven, which was heard to say, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God" (Rev. 21:1-3). †

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.



NAMB, SBOM help implement strategies, provide funds for multihousing outreach

(continued from page 1)

But again, it's a team effort. NAMB and the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) have each provided \$25,000 to implement the strategy and fund one part-time missionary in each of the 11 metro locations. Each missionary is a multihousing strategist (MHS) for that area, Boykin explained.

Training up leaders

MHS's are trained at a "Learning Lab" to see how the strategy has been implemented in Tuscaloosa and participate in the monthly network gathering.

The end goal of the strategy is that each one of these missionaries will plant four missional communities in multihousing communities in the year — or 44 missional communities across the state by the end of the year.

In each missional community, leaders teach those who participate in a Bible study or other small group outreach how to study the Bible for themselves, Boykin said.

Much like an International Mission Board strategy, Boykin explained, "We ask three questions: What does the Scripture say? What does it mean? What does it matter? We ask those three questions after studying the Bible together. We want (residents) to be able to do this themselves as opposed to needing a pastor or a Sunday School teacher to come in and lead them. We don't want them to depend on someone outside."

So what's the secret to success in reaching multihousing communities in Tuscaloosa, and now other areas?

It takes organization, prioritization and prayer, Boykin said.

"First of all we cannot reach people with a program," Boykin said. "These are people. So we do ministry to focus on people by using the acronym PEOPLE:

P — Pray with fervency.

E — Engage the culture.

O — Open the Word.

P — Prepare key leaders.

L — Launch sustainable ministries. (Bible studies, kids club, English as a Second Language classes)

E — Exit with care. "Find the 'Lydia' of the community so they can be equipped and lead the ministry ... building sustainability to the ministry."

Support from NAMB and SBOM has made it possible for Boykin to share this strategy in even more areas across the state, starting with multihousing ministry luncheons — informational meetings held this spring in Opelika, Gadsden, Dothan, Birmingham, Bessemer, Montgomery, the Shoals area, Mobile, Baldwin County and Huntsville.

At the Shoals area luncheon, held April 19 at Highland Park Baptist Church, Muscle Shoals, Boykin shared with more than 15 leaders and volunteers about the multihous-

ing community strategy and had Bryant McGee, missions intern at Highland Park Baptist and MHS for the Shoals area, share how he's been a part of starting two large missional communities in the past year.

McGee, a junior at the University of North Alabama in Florence, said, "We've been working at Sheffield Homes (a Section 8 area of town) ... and have seen 50 people come to Christ. It's just been awesome."

McGee orchestrates a team of volunteers who host a weekly kids club at Sheffield Homes, noting that an average of 43 kids participate in the club.

"Multihousing ministry could be anything but our main goal is to make something that will last," McGee said. "I report to Eddy

Garner (director of missions for Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association, who then reports to Boykin) and I train people to take up the roles. A lot of my workers are high school and middle school students who are taking on teaching roles, recreation roles and craft roles."

Rick Barnhart, director of SBOM's office of associational missions

and church planting, who participated in the luncheon, suggested that church leaders consider planting "persons of peace" into communities they are trying to reach.

Persons of peace

"Be the person of peace and be the instrument in the community to lead," Barnhart said. "Find students ... that want to live the life of Christ out and be missional all around the state. Commission them to be missionaries ... in their apartment complexes."

Above all else, when trying to reach multihousing communities, "don't go in there and do a one-time event," Barnhart said, "because you'll ruin the opportunity for folks to come in the future."

Boykin agreed.

"If you're going to make a difference, it's not about the pictures or leaving a gift. It's about loving them and staying there. It's a process. There's a lot of struggle in those communities. There's not going to be a quick fix. We've got to dig deep."

And Highland Park Baptist plans to dig even deeper at Sheffield Homes. Because there's been such a strong foundational relationship, the church plans to open a preschool in the complex in the future.

But starting an outreach is not about growing the church, Pastor Brett Pitman said.

"Your church exists for the Kingdom," he said. "Your church was birthed at a certain point and it's going to die at some point. They won't last forever. We've got to do everything we can to advance the Kingdom."

And for Boykin, seeing missional communities flourish is "one of the most exciting things to be a part of in ministry," and working with NAMB and SBOM in this one-of-a-kind relationship is "just a win-win-win for everybody." †

The next scheduled Learning Labs will be June 8-9 and Sept. 21-22 in Tuscaloosa. For more information, contact Eric Boykin at eric@tuscaloosacba.com.

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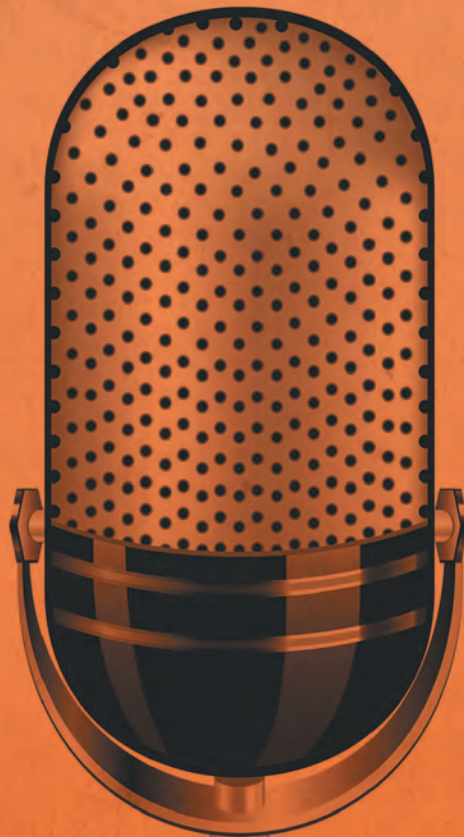
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Alabama joins 9 other states in banning fantasy sports sites

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Online fantasy sports operators DraftKings and FanDuel will no longer do business in Alabama after Alabama Attorney General Luther Strange said the sites were illegal under state law.

Both companies have entered into settlements with the State of Alabama to cease operations in the state effective May 2. The settlements come in response to the attorney general's determination that the online games constitute illegal gambling under Alabama's gambling statutes. Strange issued cease and desist letters to the two companies April 5.

"I am pleased to report that fantasy sports operators DraftKings and FanDuel have complied with my order that they halt paid contests within the State of Alabama," said Strange in a statement April 29.

"As attorney general it is my duty to uphold Alabama law, including the laws against illegal gambling. The daily fantasy sports operations violate state law because a player stakes something of value on a contest of chance in order to win a prize," Strange said. "While there is a measure of skill involved in creating a fantasy sports roster, in the end contestants have no control over the performance of the players on their rosters. This activity is illegal under Alabama law."

Joe Godfrey, executive director of Alabama Citizens Action Program, praised the attorney general's actions.

"We commend the attorney general for enforcing the anti-gambling laws of Alabama and hope that he will continue to do so," Godfrey said.

Alabama joins nine other states — Arizona, Hawaii, Iowa, Louisiana, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, New York and Washington — in banning payouts from these online games. Residents of the excluded states can have accounts but cannot receive prizes, according to terms of use at both sites.

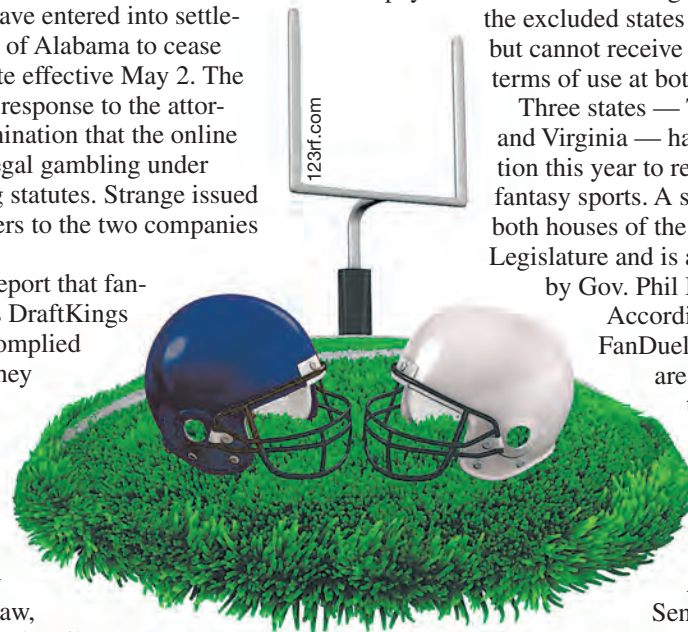
Three states — Tennessee, Indiana and Virginia — have passed legislation this year to regulate online daily fantasy sports. A similar bill has passed both houses of the Mississippi state Legislature and is awaiting a decision by Gov. Phil Bryant.

According to a statement on FanDuel's website, 30 states are advancing legislation that would allow fantasy sports operators to conduct business in those states. Bills introduced in the Alabama House and Senate have been postponed and will not be brought

up again this legislative session. However, in a statement on its website FanDuel stated its intent to "clarify the law in Alabama with the aim of bringing our contests back to the state at some point in the future."

Godfrey said legislators should not try to legitimize any form of gambling.

"We hope the legislators will not bow to pressure from out-of-state companies," Godfrey said. "This is gambling, something that the people of Alabama have said they don't want." ❖



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Carl Estes

Former Calvary Baptist pastor dies at 67

Carl Estes, former pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Warrior, for 24 years, died April 12. He was 67.

Estes earned his degree from Howard College (now Samford University) in Birmingham.



ESTES

Prior to serving as pastor of Calvary Baptist, Estes served as pastor of Union Baptist Church, Warrior. He was on the Sulphur Springs Baptist Association board, served as a messenger from the association to the Southern Baptist Convention and was an Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteer through Calvary. Throughout his life he served on several Sulphur Springs Association committees.

He is preceded in death by his daughter, Tonie, and is survived by his wife of 46 years, Iris, and two children. (Hannah Muñoz)

LETTERS

(continued from page 2)
of the gospel is employed not by the church, but by God, right? The church, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, calls a minister. We believe his call comes from God and not from the church. The church is simply following instructions given to them by God Himself, right?

This being the case, if a minister is required to wait a year it seems the minister is deprived of vacation he has earned by his many years of service in the Church under God's employment. If he is required to wait a full year each time he changes churches, it would seem the local church thinks it is not "one" with other

churches but separate from them. That's wrong theologically and is a philosophy adopted from the world.

The need we overlook is the need for a time of vacation. Think of how a minister's family suffers each time a minister moves to a church with this policy. The family must give up weeks of vacation time earned and greatly needed simply because the minister was obedient in changing "branch offices."

Jerry Wilkins
Director of missions emeritus
Tuscaloosa Baptist Association



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TAB CLASSIFIEDS

CHURCH POSITIONS

CHURCH ADMINISTRATOR
First Baptist Church, Enterprise, Alabama, is in search of a church administrator. All those interested in applying can email their resumé to: fbceapplicant@gmail.com. If you have any questions about the position, you may email those inquiries to the same address.

WORSHIP MINISTER

New Beginnings Community Church in Graysville is currently searching for a worship minister. This position is a part-time position. All interested parties, please email your resumé to: secretary@nbccbaptist.com.

BIVOCATIONAL MINISTER OF MUSIC

Turnerville Baptist Church, Mobile County. Contact Bro. Jason Meaux at jmeaux@turnervillebaptist.org.

PART-TIME YOUTH MINISTER

Cypress Shores Baptist Church is seeking a part-time youth minister. If interested, please send resumé to: Cypress Shores Baptist Church, 4327 Higgins Rd., Mobile, AL 36619.

YOUTH/CHILDREN'S

MINISTER

Southside Baptist Church, Princeton, Kentucky, is accepting resumé for a full-time youth/children's minister. Bachelor's degree, seminary training and experience is preferred. Email: youthsearchteam@southsidebaptist.com or mail: Southside Baptist, ATTN: Youth Search, P.O. Box 684, Princeton, KY 42445.

DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN MINISTRIES

Northwood Hills Baptist Church in Northport is receiving resumé for our part-time paid position. This person will be responsible for programming, enlisting volunteers and connecting with visiting families. Resumé accepted through June 1. Job description, additional information or to submit a resumé, please email Rusty Selman at: office@northwoodhillschurch.com or call the church office at 205-339-3196.

OTHER POSITIONS

WEEKDAY EARLY EDUCATION MINISTRY DIRECTOR

Foley First Baptist Church is seeking a weekday early education ministry director. This individual must hold a B.S. or B.A. degree in early childhood education or elementary education

and is required to pass a criminal background check/National Child Abuse Registry check. Experience with preschool and/or elementary age children is required. Resumé may be emailed to: mtyer@fbcfoley.com or mailed to: First Baptist Church, ATTN: Daycare Committee, P.O. Box 307, Foley, AL 36536.

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A Certain Trumpet

Sermons by Alabama Baptists

Church Discipline Series

Worship – Romans 12:1-2

Worship” is an often used, frequently misunderstood and constantly debated word among evangelicals today. Discussions and arguments arise among believers regarding the meaning, timing and even the expression of worship. Since it is clearly evident throughout the Word of God that believers are expected to be involved in worship, let us go directly to Scripture and see what questions may be answered regarding this important word.

Romans 12:1-2 states, “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Why do believers worship?

According to this passage, the answer to that question is based on the mercies of God. In the first 11 chapters of the book of Romans, the apostle Paul presents the truth of our need for salvation because of the gravity of our sin. Believers are reminded how much God loves us and has done for us. His mercies are deep and overflowing. He meets our desperate need to be right with Him.

Not only does He set us free from the bondage of sin and shame, but He also gives us eternal life with Him through His Son. Do not idly glance over these mercies as if you have heard them all before. Consider the truth that you were once in darkness but now walk in the light. You were lost but now are found. You were a slave but now are free. When we focus on the mercies of God poured out upon us we become overwhelmed, leading to worship.

What is worship?

When asked this question, many believers today refer to the act of attending a worship service or singing worship songs. While these actions may certainly be involved in worship, they do not fully express the meaning of worship described in this passage.

By Michael Mynatt

Michael Mynatt, pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church, Enterprise, earned degrees from William Jewell College in Liberty, Missouri; Midwestern Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri; and Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He and his wife, Leslie, have two daughters.



Look at the phrase “your spiritual service of worship” and think about its meaning. First it tells us that worship is personal, indicated by the word “your.” It is your responsibility, not someone else’s. God poured out His mercies upon you personally; therefore your worship should be as personal as your relationship with your heavenly Father.

Additionally worship is spiritual not just physical. Worship is so much more than the designation of an hour on the calendar but involves your heart, mind, soul and strength. Worship is truly a communion with your Holy God in such a way that involves every aspect of your being. Finally worship is service, which leads to the next question.

How do believers worship?

This passage says it is by presenting your body as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God. Often believers make the words “holy” and “acceptable” the sole focus of this particular phrase. It is true that the Old Testament outlined specific instructions regarding sacrifices; they were to be spotless and without defect. Moreover, God commanded His people to be holy and that command is still applicable to believers today. Therefore we understand that holiness is required.

Yet all too often we see ourselves as unacceptable sacrifices that have been abused, neglected and worn down by the burdens of this life, both physically and spiritually. The resulting discouragement can make holiness seem an impossible standard. Undeniably holiness is God’s standard and we must examine ourselves

in the light of that standard. Sin is not acceptable to our Holy God, nor will it ever be. However, discouragement results from focusing on our own attempts at holiness, not from the mercies of God poured out upon us. Remember, Scripture tells us God has already given us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). It is already ours. Therefore we are instructed to present ourselves as living sacrifices not just holy ones.

Living requires life. As believers we are dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:11). Jesus is life; in Him is life and it is abundant (John 14:6; 1:4; 10:10).

As a result our worship leads us to total surrender in body, mind, attitudes and actions as an act of worship to our holy, life-giving God. That presenting of yourself is your spiritual service of worship.

What is the result of worship?

There will be a transformation, a change that occurs, by the renewing of your mind. Do not miss the overwhelming significance of this passage — your very way of thinking is transformed during your worship. There is no denying that your mind and thoughts affect every aspect of your life. How much more will this be true when your mind is renewed by God Himself?

As a believer you have not only the life of Christ but also the mind of Christ. That is yet another of the mercies poured out upon you. By the mercies of God a life that is surrendered in holiness is an acceptable sacrifice to God and is your act of worship. Consequently, your life can be a place of continual worship. Of course this does not mean trials will never be experienced. Neither does it mean that suffering will never happen, but it does mean in the midst of those trials you will prove the good, acceptable and perfect will of God to yourself and those around you.

In conclusion this leads to the final question: Are you a worshipper? This can only happen “if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, [then] you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9). It is at this point of salvation that true worship begins. †



CHILTON

► Mineral Springs Church, Clanton, will host its fifth annual Men’s Day Steak Out on May 21. Active and retired service men and women will be recognized throughout the day and vintage military service vehicles and equipment will be on hand for viewing. At noon there will be a car show and the ribeye steak dinner will begin at 5 p.m. Lacy Gunnoe, active Air National Guard KC 135 tanker pilot, will speak at 6:30 p.m. Mineral Springs Church also will host the 14th annual Lay Lake Open bass tournament May 28 to benefit student missions and ministry. The event will begin at safe daylight and the live weigh-in will be at 3 p.m. For more information and to register for either event visit www.msbc.org or call 205-646-3480. Jason Green is pastor.

MOBILE

► Billy McQuarter is the new pastor of Azalea Church, Mobile. He previously served as associate pastor for Cross Point Church, Mobile. He also served at Vine and Branches Church, Castleberry, and Cedar Creek Church, Mount Vernon. McQuarter holds a technical degree from Bishop State Community College in Mobile. He and his wife, Sandy, have one child.

SHELBY

► Mike Shaw is being named pastor emeritus of First Church, Pelham. The church will honor him in its three worship services May 15, followed by a reception from 2 to 4 p.m. Shaw served as pastor of First, Pelham, for 35 years. After retiring in 2014 he served as interim pastor of Riverside Church, Helena. He also served as president and first and second vice president of the Alabama State Convention as well as on several committees, in multiple positions for Shelby Association and is currently a board member for *The Alabama Baptist*. Daven Watkins is pastor. †



SHAW

To submit an announcement for Across Alabama's Associations, email news@thealabamabaptist.org or call 205-870-4720, ext. 112, at least three weeks prior to the event.

“And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle?” 1 Cor. 14:8



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NMLS #207518



Speakers equip senior adults to share Christ at Sr. Adult Evangelism Conference

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

More than 400 senior adults from around the state gathered May 2 at Taylor Road Baptist Church, Montgomery, for the Senior Adult Evangelism Conference, sponsored by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM).

Participants heard messages from Don Cass, retired evangelism director for the Southern Baptist of Texas Convention; Bob White, executive director of Georgia Baptist Convention; and David Burton, evangelism director for Florida Baptist Convention and founder of David Burton Ministries. Special music was provided by Karen Peck & New River, of Gainesville, Florida.

White shared a message titled "Safe and Secure in Christ" based on 1 Peter 1:3-5.

Safe and secure

"No man is able to pluck you out of your Father's hand. You are safe and secure, as a Christian, in Jesus Christ. If that's your condition today, I'm going to see you one of these days in heaven.

"The security of the believer ... is sound theology and it takes a load (of worry) off our mind."



Photo by Doug Rogers

Don Cass, retired evangelism director for the Southern Baptist of Texas Convention, speaks at the Senior Adult Evangelism Conference.

Along the same lines of salvation, Burton shared a message about the saving blood of Jesus.

Each participant was given a small red stone to represent the blood of Jesus as Burton explained, "Without the shedding of blood there's no forgiveness of sin. "I use this stone in a lot of ways. Let it remind you of the blood. Let it be a constant reminder of what Jesus did for you. ... If you're at a restaurant, maybe you can give it away. ... I encourage you to use them as a witnessing tool. The stone reminds you of what Jesus did for others 2,000 years ago.

"[Jesus] says, 'I want everyone to know Me.' But the only way that everyone is going to hear this good news about the blood of Jesus is if we tell them about this good news."

Sammy Gilbreath, director of

SBOM's office of evangelism, said the conference is meant to be a time of fellowship for senior adults but also a time to challenge and equip them to share their faith.

Cass shared a message based on John 3:16, suggesting, "If you know nothing about the Bible, start with this verse. If you know everything about the Bible, return to this verse."

A telling Bible verse

"The verse is great because of what it tells us about God. ... It's great because of what it tells us about the gospel. ... It's great because of what it tells us about ourselves."

Gilbreath said the "conference was very well received and interactive. ... It was everything we hoped and prayed for." ✝

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For May 15

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

BOLD
Acts 9:36-43

The 'Final' Rest (36-37)

At this point in Acts, Luke turns to the ministry of Peter. Since Peter is to have a vital role in the early Church, it is important to demonstrate that God is working through him. Peter healed a paralytic named Aeneas through the power of Christ in Lydda and this led to the people of the town becoming followers of Jesus. Often God used miracles to show His power and lead people to Him. Even today, there are many stories of missionaries throughout the world who experience miracles that lead to a demonstration of God's power against the power of the local spirits. This demonstration leads to the people accepting Christ as their Savior. We should not be surprised when God operates through miracles, but we shouldn't feel that we need to see God do miracles.

The Request (38-39)

Since Peter was in a nearby town, when Tabitha (Dorcas) died he was called to come visit. Perhaps they thought he would be able to perform a miracle and raise her from the dead or perhaps they just wanted him to comfort them. When Peter arrived, the widows showed him all the clothes Tabitha had made for them. This is a point that should not be overlooked. In those days, widows had little financial help. Since they depended upon their husband for their provisions, if he were dead they would be in a vulnerable position. Tabitha was a faithful follower of

God and she proved this by her actions. She made clothes for those who could not afford them.

Tabitha obviously had a gift for sewing and she used it to help others and bring glory to God. Each Christian has gifts they can use for God's glory. If someone likes to cook, they can cook for other people. If someone is gifted at construction, they can do work for the glory of God. The idea that some abilities are more important than others diminishes God's gifts in us.

The Restoration (40-41)

Peter prayed and commanded Tabitha to arise. The resurrection of the dead is the greatest of all miracles. The fact that Peter was able to do this is very important because it affirms his ministry as an apostle. There needed to be some way for hearers to recognize that what the apostles said and did was from God.

Surely God still uses miracles and some denominations believe that if you have enough faith you can perform miracles like these of Peter. However, we believe if He chooses to perform miracles, wonderful, but if He does not it is not because of our lack of faith.

The Results (42-43)

When Peter healed Tabitha, many of those who saw it and heard of it believed the gospel. This is common throughout Scripture; when a great event happens, people listen to the gospel. It is a good example for us today. John Newton, the man who wrote "Amazing Grace," was a slave trader. Once he became a Christian he fought slavery because he realized how evil it was. It was his belief in Christ as his Savior that prompted his change in behavior.

When people see lives changed because of the gospel, it can have an impact. We need to remember what Christ has done in us and be willing to tell others so they can see the power of God in our lives. #

Bible Studies for Life By Jim Barnette, Ph.D. Samford University and Brookwood Baptist Church, Mountain Brook

REDEEMED FROM DEVASTATING FAILURE
Luke 22:54-62; Acts 4:8-13

We have all denied Jesus. (54-62)

The story of Peter denying Jesus three times in the courtyard is distinctive because for eight verses of Luke's passion account the focus is not on Jesus, but on Peter. Three times Peter denies that he knows Jesus, then the rooster crows. Then Peter remembers Jesus had prophesied that he would deny Him (Luke 22:31-34).

Jesus is unceremoniously hustled along to the high priest's house to await His trial. It is true that Peter follows "at a distance" but at least he has the courage to follow unlike the other disciples. Arriving at the palace he sits down among a crowd warming themselves at a fire. In this atmosphere his resolution weakens. The servant girl sees Peter in the firelight and peers at him closely. She had seen Peter with Jesus either at the arrest or earlier in the Temple. The accusations are that Peter was with Jesus or that he was "one of them" — guilty by association. The third time an added reason for suspicion is stated: Either his dress or his accent gives him away as a Galilean. The rooster crow reminds Peter of Jesus' prophecy. The act is done and Peter repents with bitter tears.

God's Spirit empowers our witness. (8-12)

Peter and John now stand where their master had stood — before the Sanhedrin. They are accused of having employed unauthorized methods of healing (see Deut. 13:1-5). The accusation gives Peter a perfect opening to witness before the Jewish authorities, which he uses to the full in the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter's speech is a compressed version of what the apostle has already proclaimed both on Pentecost and at Solomon's Portico (see

Acts 2:22-40; 3:12-26). Peter declares his action as a "good deed" done to a sick man who is now healed. The true focus of Peter's message is indicated by his use of the word "healed," which in Greek means "saved." The apostle is using the event of physical healing to point the listeners to the spiritual, eternal healing that is to be found only through Christ.

The sharp contrast between "Jesus ... whom you crucified" and "Jesus ... whom God raised from the dead" makes clear that these authorities are not aligned with God's purposes. To reject Jesus, Peter warns, is to reject the cornerstone of Israel's promised salvation. The Jewish rulers can no longer be excused for their ignorance. This is their second chance and to reject Peter's proclaimed word this time is to forfeit their participation in the true Kingdom.

Our bold witness points others to Jesus. (13)

The rulers' estimate of Peter and John as untrained, uneducated laymen reflects the spiritual pride of the "theological professionals." Here were apostles who had not been trained in the rabbinical schools. Yet they spoke with such authority that the rulers were amazed. Those who heard Peter and John discerned the only explanation for this otherwise inexplicable boldness and eloquence of men who enjoyed no rabbinical education: "They recognized that they had been with Jesus." Luke makes it clear that, having been with Jesus, they also had empowerment from the Holy Spirit. The rulers fail to recognize Peter is an inspired prophet and the filling of the Spirit had elevated the untrained apostle's rhetorical abilities. Lest we forget the Spirit can elevate our own gifts as we bear witness to the Christ who can use anyone for the furthering of His kingdom. #

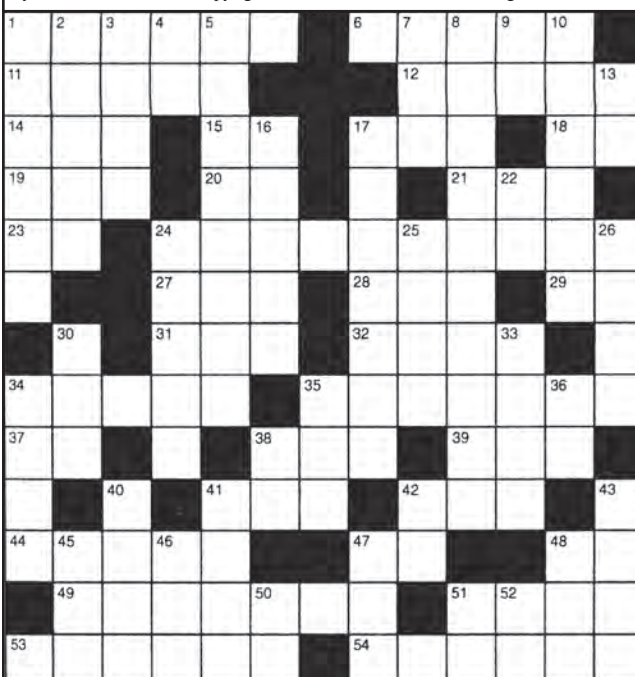
VOICE YOUR OPINION

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

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

Christian Crossword

By Pamela Jensen Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

- ___, O isles, unto me. (Isa. 49:1)
- Nor ear ___. (1 Cor. 2:9)
- ___ one another. (1 Thess. 5:11)
- Ten ___ of vineyard. (Isa. 5:10)
- The ___ commandments. (Ex. 34:28)
- Called the altar ___. (Josh. 22:34)
- Joan of ___.
- Connecticut. (ZIP code abbr.)
- Tasmania. (abbr.)
- ___ be it. (Josh. 2:21)
- Bow thine ___ to my understanding. (Prov. 5:1)
- He called the name of that place Beth-___. (Gen. 28:19)
- But ___ ... receiveth us not. (3 John 9)
- Agricultural. (abbr.)
- ___ to teach. (2 Tim. 2:24)
- Each. (abbr.)
- Sign for Jesus.
- Christ is the ___ of the

- church. (Eph. 5:23)
- They which ___ in Asia. (Acts 19:10)
- Scottish painter Sir Henry ___.
- Electrical engineer. (abbr.)
- A ___ without blemish. (Lev. 5:15)
- Local mean time. (abbr.)
- To give help.
- Hebrews. (abbr.)
- Bowels did ___. (Gen. 43:30)
- Errors excepted. (abbr.)
- Utah. (ZIP code abbr.)
- Love one ___. (Rom. 13:8)
- Dwell at ___. (Ps. 25:13)
- Difficult experience that tests character.
- God will ___ my soul. (Ps. 49:15)

Down

- Written a ___ unto you. (Heb. 13:22)
- Model of perfection.
- Confess our ___. (1 John 1:9)
- Territorial force. (abbr.)
- In his ___. (Ps. 18:24)
- Give ___ to my prayer. (Ps. 55:1)
- Good and ___ before God. (1 Tim. 5:4)
- Railroad. (abbr.)
- A ___ from Caesar. (Luke 2:1)
- Saint. (abbr.)
- Ye everlasting ___. (Ps. 24:7)
- ___ believed God. (James 2:23)
- ___ Lord God! (Ezek. 11:13)
- I ... called ___ upon thee. (Ps. 88:9)
- Fencing sword.
- They were ___ asunder. (Heb. 11:37)
- Stand in ___. (Ps. 4:4)
- I was ___ with silence. (Ps. 39:2)
- Thou shalt ___ me thrice. (Matt. 26:34)
- Short for "radiation."
- Right. (abbr.)
- Rhode Island. (abbr.)
- Kingdom of heaven is at ___. (Matt. 3:2)
- American National

- Theatre and Academy. (abbr.)
- ___ healeth the broken. (Ps. 147:3)
- A single article.
- Incline thine ___ unto me. (Ps. 17:6)
- My beloved is like a ___. (Song of Sol. 2:9)
- They ___ in vision. (Isa. 28:7)
- The ___ of edifying. (Eph. 4:29)
- House of Lords. (abbr.)
- Mr. Sullivan.
- Architectural engineering. (abbr.)



TOP 10

downloaded songs from iTunes

CHRISTIAN & GOSPEL



- 1. Slow Down**
By Nichole Nordeman
(The Unmaking)



- 2. Trust In You**
By Lauren Daigle
(How Can It Be)



- 3. Good Good Father**
By Chris Tomlin
(Good Good Father)



- 4. Tell Your Heart to Beat Again**
By Danny Gokey
(Hope In Front of Me)



- 5. Break Every Chain**
By Paxton Ingram
(Break Every Chain)



- 6. Breathe**
By Jonny Diaz
(Everything Is Changing)

- 7. Eye of the Storm**
By Ryan Stevenson
(Fresh Start)

- 8. The River**
By Jordan Feliz
(The River)

- 9. Just Be Held**
By Casting Crowns
(Thrive)

- 10. God Is On the Move**
By 7venth Time Down
(God Is On the Move)

Source: popvortex.com at press time

Citizen Way



Photo courtesy of Fair Trade Services

Bigger picture

Citizen Way provides truth, direction to audiences

By Leann Callaway
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

For the contemporary group Citizen Way, the songs on their sophomore album, “2.0,” have reshaped their mindset and renewed their passion to share the gospel through music.

The songs are designed to offer testimonies of hope and healing in the midst of life’s struggles and storms.

While dealing with the painful and personal issues of miscarriage, lead singer Ben Calhoun and his wife felt led to put their thoughts and emotions into the song “When I’m With You.” This song is deeply resonating with listeners around the country and has reached No. 16 on the Adult Contemporary Chart.

“With this album we wanted to emphasize that the old has gone and the new has come based on 2 Corinthians 5:17,” Calhoun said. “It was a tough season dealing with so many changes and losing our son. The songs that have come out of this season are very personal and have really gotten me through a tough time. I hope they will encourage others as well and remind them that they are not alone.”

Along with Calhoun, the group is made up of his brother, Josh Calhoun, and their friend David Blascoe.

While performing concerts around the country band members focus on providing clear direction to students and young adults by emphasizing the truth of the gospel.

“My dad is a pastor, and he has reminded us about the importance of surrendering your life to the authority of the Lord and allowing Him to lead you,” Ben Calhoun said. “That’s what we are doing on this journey. We get to be a part of the bigger

picture and a part of what God is doing. We get to experience things that we could never do on our own strength, but through His power we get to see lives being changed.”

After wrapping up the Rock & Worship Roadshow Tour, Citizen Way hit the road with MercyMe for a spring tour. In addition to maintaining a busy touring schedule, Ben Calhoun also teaches music at Judson University in Chicago.

“Our main goal and greatest desire is to point people to Jesus,” he said. “That’s why our group name is based on Philippians 3:20 and John 14:6. Every song is based on Scripture and creates an opportunity for people to experience a relationship with Christ.

“We love having opportunities for our group name to provide a bigger picture and represent the family of God. We are citizens in the kingdom of God, following in the way of Jesus.” †



“We love having the opportunities for our group name to ... represent the family of God.”

Ben Calhoun
lead singer, Citizen Way



Photo courtesy of VPBOWERS.com

Tom Belza

'Every Day Tom'

BayBears infielder Belza tries to 'show people Christ'

By Bill Sorrell
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When Tom Belza was in grammar school in Louisville, Kentucky, teachers would give a "Shining Shamrock" badge to someone who personified Christian values and attitudes.

For several years in a row, Belza won it.

"I really think that is what I am trying to do as a person now. I don't need a little shamrock badge," said Belza, an inactive infielder with the Mobile BayBears, the Southern League Double-A affiliate of the Arizona Diamondbacks. "I'm always looking to be a better person. That is what it all comes down to. That is my ultimate goal, to be somebody that other people look up to and feel like they can trust."

Belza, 26, who is currently on the disabled list from a recent injury, wants to be an example of faith by the way he carries himself and by the way he acts.

"I'm trying to show people Christ. I'm wanting people to see the Lord but at the same time not forcing it upon them."

He was raised by Christian parents who took him and his two brothers to church.

Leaving Loveland, Ohio, after graduation from Moeller High School in Cincinnati, Belza went to Oklahoma State University (OSU) in Stillwater to play baseball. Being 12 hours away from family and dealing with "certain things" around him including temptations, "made me look to Christ," he said.

In Christ he found "someone you can always count on and you can always talk to. He means everything. He is someone to fall back on."

Cincinnati Player of the Year

An injury made him question if baseball would be in his future.

"I blew my elbow out when I was 13. I really relied on my family and Christ at the time to help me through that. That was one of those things where I was like, 'I don't know if I am going to be able to play again.'"

But he did play again and excelled.

At Moeller, he was All-Ohio his senior year. His school-record .556 batting average broke former Moeller player Ken Griffey Jr.'s record. As a senior,

he was Cincinnati Player of the Year, first team all-state, Louisville Slugger honorable mention All-American, and Greater Catholic League Player of the Year.

Belza, whose team won the 2007 Connie Mack World Series, hit two home runs, 12 doubles and six triples his senior season and he stole 20 bases and had 25 RBI.

Freshman All-American

At OSU he led the Cowboys in batting average two years, hitting .386 as a freshman that topped the Big 12 Conference and .346 as a sophomore. He was a Freshman All-American and second team All-Big 12 in 2008. He led the Cowboys to two NCAA regionals, Stillwater in 2008 and Clemson in 2009. He made the all-tournament team both seasons.

Drafted in the 43rd round in 2010 by the Diamondbacks, Belza has played on seven minor league teams, including 18 games with the Reno Aces in the Triple-A Pacific Coast League (2013 and 2015).

With Visalia in the High-A California League in 2013, he hit .300 with 10 homers and 63 RBI. He has played in Mobile in 2014, 2015 and this season.

In 2014, Belza was a Southern League All-Star and batting champion runner-up. He had 126 hits including 21 doubles, five triples, one home run, 31 RBI and an on-base percentage of .387. In 2015 he hit .229 with 13 doubles.

His consistency has earned him a nickname.

"We call him Every Day Tom — EDT," said former Mobile teammate Archie Bradley, who now pitches for Arizona. "He is the same guy every day. He doesn't change his approach. He puts in the same amount of work, if he gets an out or gets hits."

Belza prays during National Anthems and never misses baseball chapel.

"I go to baseball chapel every time it is offered to us. I think they do a great job with the services that they provide us. It is a blessing," he said.

Belza also finds fulfillment through community service projects such as going with players to soup kitchens, leading camps for little leaguers and participating in Big Brother, Big Sister activities. ☞

Report shows religious freedom deteriorating worldwide

Religious freedom remains under "serious and sustained assault" around the globe, according to a new annual report from the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).

"At best, in most of the countries we cover, religious freedom conditions have failed to improve," USCIRF chairman Robert P. George said May 2. "At worst, they have spiraled further downward."

The independent government advisory body recommended that the State Department add the Central African Republic, Egypt, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Syria and Vietnam to the U.S. government's list of the world's worst abusers of human rights and religious freedom. Of the 17 countries USCIRF says are of "particular concern," only 10 have been recognized by the State Department.

The official list remained unchanged for nearly a decade until April's rare addition of Tajikistan, a Sunni-majority country where a severely restrictive 2009 law allows the government to crack down on all independent religious activity, particularly that of Muslims, Protestants and Jehovah's Witnesses. Officials there use concerns of extremism to justify monitoring and suppressing acts of worship: in the past year, police there have forced thousands of women to remove their headscarves and detained hundreds of thousands of bearded men.

Religious prisoners

"The incarceration of prisoners of conscience, including religious prisoners, remains astonishingly widespread," George said. He pointed to China, which has imprisoned some opposed to a state campaign to remove crosses from churches, and Iran's majority-Shiite regime where Sunnis, Christians and Baha'is have been persecuted, imprisoned

and even sentenced to death on dubious unrelated charges. And in Pakistan — which USCIRF recommended for recognition as a country of particular concern but, for the 14th year in a row, has been not been listed officially — more people are on death row or serving life sentences for blasphemy charges than in any other nation in the world.

Tip of the iceberg

As much attention as was given to the refugee crisis in Iraq and Syria, for which USCIRF largely recycled its recommendations this year, it's only the tip of the iceberg.

"I don't think we can account for everything we've seen simply by reference to the refugee crisis in the Middle East," George said, noting oppressive conditions for minorities in East Asia, where a Vietnamese religious freedom activist was imprisoned the day after meeting with a USCIRF ambassador. "The American public needs to understand that this truly is a battle for ideas. Protecting our interests really does mean advancing our values, including our belief in religious freedom."

Other areas of focus in the report included rising anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim bigotry throughout Europe, the continuation of a "brutal legacy of persecution against Burma's Rohingya Muslims" and the "negative trajectory" for Christians, Muslims and Sikhs living in India. While Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rhetoric has been positive in the Hindu-majority country, a USCIRF delegation was effectively denied visas in March.

Good news was scarce but there may be hope. The report commended Nigeria, Cyprus and Sri Lanka's new government for progress in promoting religious freedom and harmony. While Nigeria remains on USCIRF's list of countries of particular concern, Cyprus and Sri Lanka were let off the hook. (RNS)

