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'Relational honesty'

Relationship with God needs time to listen, 'just like friendship'

By Grace Thornton
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Doug Webster said he got an email recently that disturbed him a little bit. "The sender, a leader of an interdenominational group of pastors, sent out a blog encouraging pastors to spend 15 minutes on Sunday reflecting on the Scriptures."

And Webster wondered — if spending 15 minutes in the Scripture they're preaching on Sundays is a struggle for pastors, then what's happening with the people in the pews?

"I realized I must be way underestimating the issue," said Webster, professor of divinity at Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, who has spent a lot of time studying and writing on the topic of personal devotion, worship and meditation.

It's time to be honest, he said — honest with ourselves and honest with each other.

"Our relationship with God, it's just like friendship. We can't say

we have good friends if we aren't putting the time into listening to them," he said. "Our devotion to God is personal, and He speaks to us through His Word. If we say that we have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, that's just words unless we are listening and engaged in the relationship."

Speaking through His Word

So how do we have that kind of "relational honesty" when it comes

to our worship and what we say we believe?

Webster said it's all about investing — really investing — in the habit of personal worship.

"When we talk to people about carving out 15 to 30 minutes a day to read the Bible and pray, we're approaching people not with candy but with the reality that

it is a discipline and that they have to be willing to put in the time," he said.

Keith Hibbs, director of the office of worship leadership and church

"We need to understand God's perspective on how we deal with our daily life."

**Keith Hibbs
state missionary**

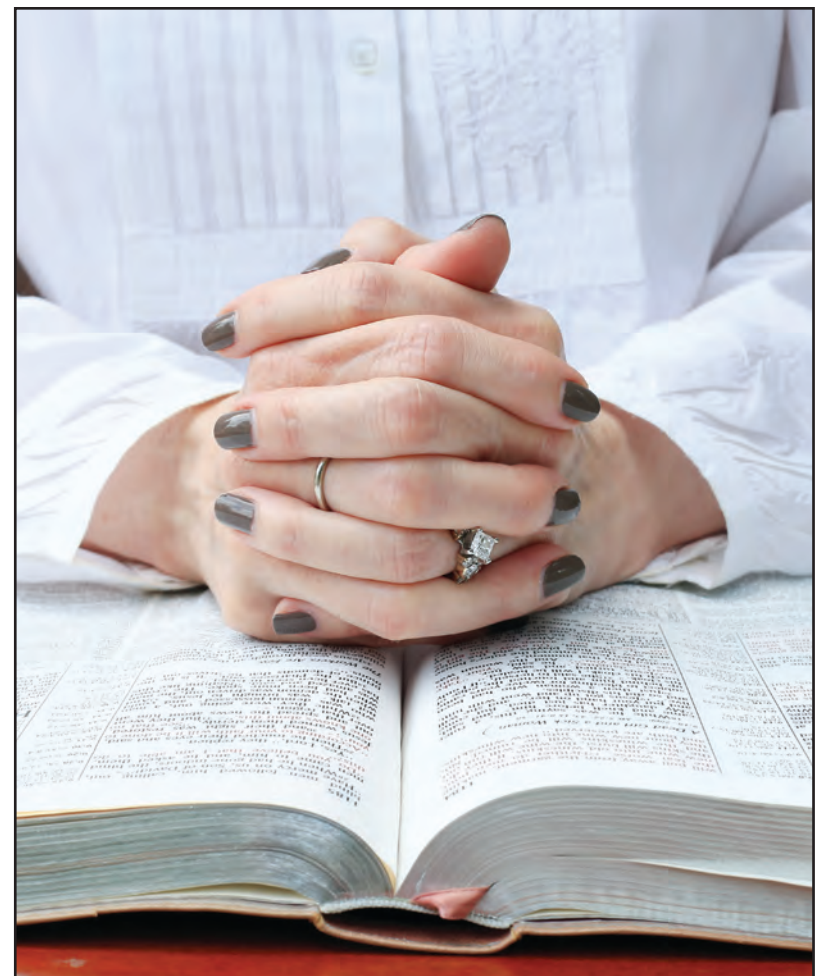


Photo by Neisha Roberts

music of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said consistency and daily discipline is vital to the life of the Christ-follower.

"The Christian life is a day-to-day, minute-to-minute thing and we need to be on our knees and in Scripture daily," he said. "We need to understand God's perspective on how we deal with our daily life and you just can't get that in Sunday morning worship time."

Hibbs said he equates it to learning how to play a musical instrument — "You learn a lot more in 15 minutes a day done consistently than in three hours one day."

Webster said it doesn't matter what time of day you do it so long as you set the habit.

"Some people are morning people and some people are night people. It's not important when you do it, just that you set aside time that you can be quiet with the Word," he said.

Daily discipline vital

There's so much available in the way of commentaries and resources these days, Webster said — "The Bible in one hand and a commentary in the other is a great way to start."

He said the habit of personal prayer and Bible study and worship was hard-wired into him from a young age by his family's practice of reading and praying together.

(See 'Morning,' page 5)

Using Psalms in quiet time good place to start

Doug Webster said he likes reading all of Scripture, but if he had to pick a place to start, or a place that he keeps coming back to, it's the Psalms.

"I liken them to an ocean," said Webster, professor of divinity at Samford University's Beeson Di-

vinity School in Birmingham. "You can never exhaust the ocean."

More than a tourist

And you can be a tourist at the ocean, or you can be someone who loves and appreciates it on a deep, long-term level, like his son, who

works every day as an ocean lifeguard.

"I'm always disappointed when I realize that many people are only familiar with Psalm 23," Webster said. "The Psalms are Jesus' prayer book, and we (See 'Thinking,' page 5)

COMMENT

Freedom of Worship or Freedom of Religion

Debating the difference between freedom of worship and freedom of religion may seem like a waste of time. The terms have been used almost interchangeably throughout the years. When President Franklin D. Roosevelt outlined the famous four freedoms all peoples of the world should enjoy, freedom of worship was among them. (The other three were freedom of speech, freedom from want and freedom from fear).

When President Ronald Reagan met with Pope John Paul II in 1987, they talked about freedom of worship.

It is unlikely, however, that what either Roosevelt or Reagan meant by freedom of worship is anything like Russian President Vladimir Putin's definition in laws recently imposed in Russia.

On July 20 new laws made it illegal to worship or evangelize anywhere but in a church building or other recognized religious site. One can be arrested and fined for conducting worship in one's home or sharing one's faith with someone in a home or public setting.

The same applies to online communication. It is now illegal even to invite a friend to a worship service via email in Russia.

'Yarovaya Package'

The new regulations are part of anti-terrorism laws called the "Yarovaya Package." Some question whether that is the true motivation. A few observers are saying the laws are an overt effort to curb minority religions in favor of the Russian Orthodox Church. But whatever the reason, the new laws are an "attack on freedom of expression, freedom of conscience and the right to privacy," declared Human Rights Watch.

Legal scholars opposing the new restrictions say the new laws directly contradict the right to "manifest ... religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching" both in public and private as outlined in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe of which Russia is a participant.

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) said it "strongly condemns" the measures which "make it easier for Russian authorities to repress religious communities, stifle peaceful dissent and detain and imprison people."

Russia, according to Putin, provides freedom of worship in buildings of officially recognized churches. Russia does not allow religious freedom.



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

Religious freedom is a more expansive term than freedom of worship. One writer observed religious freedom begins with the individual right to believe. It includes the right to act in accordance with one's beliefs, to evangelize, to change religions, to have schools and other charitable organizations sponsored by the religion and to participate in the public square.

Russia is not alone in denying religious freedom to its people. USCIRF recently released its 2016 report on religious freedom. Nine countries — Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan — were highlighted for egregious violations of religious liberty during the past year.

Ten other countries — including Russia, Cuba, Turkey, India and Indonesia — also were cited for major violations of religious liberty and that was before the new Russian laws.

Some of the countries tolerate religious minorities as long as adherents keep to themselves. But if anyone dares to evangelize or speak out on a public issue or convert to another religion or call attention to themselves or their religion, the government reacts with full force.

USCIRF reported in August that 74 percent of the world's population lives in countries that violate religious freedom. The large populations of China, India and Indonesia contribute to that percentage. The number of countries listed as violating religious freedom was almost 1 in 4.

The United States is not listed among the nations limiting religious freedom but concern is building over whether this nation is drifting away from its historical commitment to freedom of religion and toward a narrower freedom to worship.

For example in California the state Legislature came close to denying private religious colleges and universities the right to act on their religious beliefs. California Senate Bill 1146 sought to eliminate exemptions for religious schools that accepted students receiving financial aid from the state. Had the bill been adopted it would have

"eliminated faith-based decisions when it comes to admissions, housing and perhaps even employment," said John Jackson, president of William Jessup University in Sacramento, California.

Schools acting on their religious beliefs on issues such as same-sex "marriage" or transgender behavior would have felt the full wrath of a disagreeing state government. That is not religious liberty. Thankfully the offending section was dropped from the bill before final passage.

Individual religious liberty also is being challenged. Air Force Major Steve Lewis had an open Bible on his desk at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The Bible was open to the closing chapters of Philippians. A group known as Military Religious Freedom Foundation objected. In a letter to Lewis' commanding officer the open Bible was called an "egregious constitutional and DoD (Department of Defense) regulatory violation of such a brazen display of

sectarian Christian triumphalism and exceptionalism."

The letter called the open Bible an "outrageous display of callous and bold Christian primacy."

This is not an attack from a Madalyn Murray O'Hair type character. The writer of the letter, Michael Weinstein, once served as assistant general counsel to the White House office of administration during the Reagan Administration.

Weinstein wrote that because

Lewis' desk belonged to the government, religious books and symbols should not be allowed.

While Lewis voluntarily removed the Bible from his desk during the review, he has been cleared to place the Bible back on his desk if he chooses to do so.

'Frightened' by Bible

According to news reports, Weinstein claimed to be representing more than 30 Air Force personnel who were frightened by the sight of the open Bible. The impression seems to be that private religion is acceptable but any public evidence of religious belief, such as a Bible on one's desk, is not.

How is that religious liberty?

Granted, rules for military personnel are different from regular societal regulations but it is a stretch to equate an open Bible on one's desk to "Christian triumphalism and exceptionalism."

Ultimately religious liberty is not granted by governments. It is a God-given right to every individual created in God's own image. Any government — Russia, China or our own — must tread softly when it attempts to take away what God has granted. ✠

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"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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'Thoroughly confusing'

Sponsor calls Alabama lottery bill 'dead'

By Maggie Walsh
The Alabama Baptist

The lottery bill for the 2016 special session is dead," announced the measure's sponsor, Sen. Jim McClendon, R-Springville, on Aug. 26

after the Senate voted against agreeing with the House changes to the bill (SB3).

The House changes included defining the lottery as paper tickets, an attempt to prohibit electronic lottery terminals, and earmarking 1 percent of lottery proceeds to rural fire departments.

It was the narrowed definition of the lottery that drove the 7-23 vote that signaled the demise of the bill, several legislators said.

Joe Godfrey, executive director of the Alabama Citizens Action Program, celebrated the defeat of the gambling legislation.

"As we suspected, when the House amended the bill to exclude casinos that is not what the pro-gambling people wanted," Godfrey said. "There were different motives for voting 'no,' but at this point we are celebrating the defeat of pro-gambling legislation in Alabama."

The lottery bill's ride through the special session was riddled with unexpected twists and turns, including confusion over when the deadline was to get the bill on the Nov. 8 ballot. McClendon and Sen. President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston, both claimed Aug. 24 — the previously announced deadline for the

November general election ballot — that they had until Aug. 26 to get the measure on the November ballot, causing mass confusion as conflicting opinions surfaced. All speculation, however, became irrelevant once the Senate voted down the changes to the bill.

In a roller coaster of votes and motions just before midnight Aug. 25, the bill fell short of passing by two votes in the House. The victory was short-lived by lottery opponents, however, as supporters won a reconsideration motion as well as a second vote, pushing the lottery bill through. The bill's House sponsor, Rep. Alan Harper, R-Northport, made the motion to reconsider.

Rep. John Knight, D-Montgomery, said after the two votes, "I've been here a while, but you are thoroughly confusing me now."

And the rest of Alabama was right there with him.

On the second vote three representatives made the difference for the 64-35 vote — Darrio Melton, D-Selma; Kelvin Lawrence, D-Hayneville; and David Sessions, R-Grand Bay.

That sent the bill back to the Senate — where it had already passed Aug. 19 — for either a concurrence, or agreement, vote or a conference committee since some changes had been

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people wanted. ... At this
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legislation in Alabama."**

Joe Godfrey
ALCAP executive director

**To contact your senator
or representative, go to
capwiz.com/state-al/home/.**



made to
the bill in the House.

Marsh said there was not enough time left in the special session to start over and get a lottery bill passed.

Both the House and Senate voted to adjourn until Sept. 6, at which point there will be three days left in the special session to find a solution to the \$85 million Medicaid shortfall.

When they reconvene Sept. 6, the Senate is expected to address the BP bill (HB36) that the House passed earlier in the session. This bill would issue bonds estimated at about \$639 million and apply \$850 million in BP payments to pay off the bonds. The bond proceeds would partly be used to pay off state debt, which would free up about \$70 million for Medicaid, according to al.com.

Recurring chant

The recurring chant in the State House on Aug. 26 from legislators was "I've never seen anything like this," referring to the wild ride of SB3.

If passed, SB3 would have established a statewide and Powerball lottery and directed 10 percent of lottery proceeds to education after the \$100 million, which was allotted for Medicaid. Gov. Robert Bentley claimed the lottery would generate \$225 million in revenue, an estimate that

Andrew A. Yerbey, senior policy counsel for the Alabama Policy Institute, called "unreliable and untruthful."

Godfrey urged Alabamians to contact their legis-

lators to urge them to vote in favor of HB36 "so that gambling will not be needed to solve the Medicaid problem in our state," he said.

Henagar makes 'bad decision' to go 'wet,' Godfrey says

Residents of Henagar voted Aug. 23 to allow private alcohol sales in town — a change from the last 161 years of its existence.

With a total of 388 (57 percent) votes to go "wet" and 290 (43 percent) votes to stay "dry," Henagar joins more than 50 other towns in the state that now sell packaged beer and wine at private vendors.

At press time there were no official details about the approved measure in Henagar.

David Hairston, pastor of Henagar Baptist Church, participated in a "Vote NO to alcohol sales" yard sign campaign prior to the vote.

Spreading the word

"We really think (legislation) tried to get it going without us knowing about it," Hairston said. "But once we did know, we didn't have a lot of time or money but tried to contact all

the local pastors and asked them to talk about it (in their churches)."

The "Vote NO" signs themselves even saw opposition, with several being stolen and several vandalized with the word "yes" sprayed over the original "no."

"We're very sad," Hairston said of the vote's outcome. "We try hard to present a good moral stance in our community. We hate that it's so convenient for our local young folks to get (alcohol)."

Joe Godfrey, executive director of Alabama Citizens Action Program (ALCAP), told *The Alabama Baptist* he was disappointed "that another community has been misled into believing that alcohol will raise their standard of living."

"The fact is that the social costs far outweigh the revenue from alcohol sales, but no one ever wants to talk about that," Godfrey said. "Our culture continues to become more and more ad-

dicted to alcohol and governments continue to become more and more addicted to the revenue it produces without counting the costs."

'Wealth of information'

ALCAP's website has a "wealth of information" on the risks of alcohol and many communities often download and use the resources to help promote "dry" counties and cities, Godfrey said.

"It took Henagar over 161 years to decide they wanted to allow alcoholic beverages to be sold. I hope it doesn't take them that long to realize what a bad decision that was and reverse their vote," he said.

Meanwhile in Lexington, in Lauderdale County, voters recently rejected the alcohol referendum, voting 259-227 in favor of keeping the town "dry." Trinity, in Morgan County, also voted to go "wet" with 296 "yes" votes and 247 "no" votes. (TAB)

Tuskegee Lee Baptist Association Disaster Relief (DR) volunteers pray together at a worksite in Louisiana. Alabama Baptists deployed DR teams to Louisiana on Aug. 19.

REACHING the *HURTING*



Photo courtesy of Mark Wakefield

Alabama Baptist volunteers serve immediate needs in Louisiana, share gospel along way

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

It's a common scene after a natural disaster — miles-long lines at Walmart and thousands of people walking around with what disaster relief volunteers call “the million miles stare” as survivors search for items to replace the necessities they have lost.

It's happening in Louisiana, where residents withstood record-shattering rainfall of between 4 and 26 inches in different areas throughout a four-day period in mid-August. More than 15 parishes were affected and at least 13 people were reported dead at press time.

Most of those with “the stare” just need someone to share their story with, according to Mark Wakefield, disaster relief and chaplaincy ministry strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM).

Ministering in the aisle

One Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief (DR) chaplain, who also was running a state DR shower unit in Baton Rouge,

Louisiana, ran into many residents with just that look at the store and was able to minister to them right there in the aisle, Wakefield told *The Alabama Baptist*.

Dozens of Alabama Baptist DR volunteers deployed to Louisiana and ministered in different ways (through mud-out teams, administrative roles, chaplaincy, shower units, laundry units and incident management roles) beginning Aug. 19.

Alabama Baptists deploy

At press time the first round of teams were finishing up their week in the Baton Rouge area and a new set of teams was scheduled to arrive Aug. 28, Wakefield said.

The incoming volunteers include eight chaplains, several mud-out teams, two incident managers and two administrative workers — all from Tuskegee Lee, Cleburne, Marshall, Colbert Lauderdale, Chilton and Sand Mountain Baptist associations. The teams will be stationed at Istrouma Baptist Church, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Volunteer teams from Columbia, Bald-

win and Tuskegee Lee Baptist associations were on-site the first week of relief efforts. Two laundry units from Mobile Baptist Association and three shower units also were in place and operational at press time.

State DR teams have committed to at least four weeks of service, Wakefield said.

Other DR teams from Baptist state conventions of Arkansas, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Kansas-Nebraska, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia also were on the ground serving in multiple capacities at press time.

National Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) and the WMU Foundation have assisted survivors by sending a \$6,000 grant from the HEART (Humanitarian Emergency Aid for Rebuilding Tomorrow) Fund to First Baptist Church, Lafayette, Louisiana, for use in relief efforts.

Andrea McKenzie, minister of missions and college students at First, Lafayette, said, “We're helping about 40 families who are affected. Their homes were not in a flood zone and they do not have flood insurance. Their neighborhoods had never flooded before but now they have several inches of water in their homes.”

The HEART Fund grant will be used to purchase items for the 40 families and also will be used to purchase gift cards that

other families can use to buy necessities for cleanup and rebuilding efforts.

Judith Edwards, WMU Foundation board member, said, “When we learn of disasters we sometimes feel all we can do is pray. By giving to the HEART Fund, even those of us who cannot physically help can still reach out to the hurting in Christ's name.”

David George, WMU Foundation president and member of Shades Crest Baptist Church, Hoover, said, “There are immediate needs like food and shelter now, but there will be many additional needs in the days and weeks ahead.”

To assist in the weeks to come, Providence Baptist Church, Opelika, began collecting bottled water, bleach, baby diapers, baby formula and baby wipes to send to Alabama's neighbor state.

Pastor Rusty Sowell said a former church

member, who now serves as a pastor near Hammond, Louisiana, requested these immediate need items.

“We'll be collecting items as long as there's a need,” Sowell said, noting that at press time there were several hundred items that had been donated and would be delivered in early September.

Being a part of the DR effort is “the heart of who we are,” Sowell said of his congregation. “We're to meet people at their point of need, and their greater need at this moment is just basic needs.”

Happy Hill Baptist Church, Heflin, also



Photo courtesy of Bill King

Robert Vickery, minister of music at High Hope Baptist Church, Auburn, cleans out a home in Louisiana.



Photo by Alan Cross

Belongings, some salvagable and some not, line the dry streets in 15 of Louisiana's parishes. Some areas saw up to 26 inches of rain fall throughout a four-day period in mid-August, shattering previous rainfall records.

**To listen to a sermon related to disaster relief, listen to
‘Total Loss’ by Ty Parten, pastor of Thomasville Baptist Church,
at www.thomasvillebaptist.org/sermons-2/.**

collected goods (secondhand clothing, school supplies, household goods and cleaning supplies) through Aug. 31 before delivering to Livingston Parish and Baton Rouge.

Siloam Baptist Church, Marion, sent a team of three volunteers along with the Baldwin Baptist Association team. The Siloam Baptist volunteers have made contact with former Alabamians who now serve a church in Baker, Louisiana.

Tuskegee Lee Baptist Association Director of Missions Bill King said the association's mud-out team along with two chaplains were deployed mid-August, and the association likely will send out more teams in the coming weeks.

Working with local businesses

Bessemer Baptist Association partnered with a local car dealership, Town and Country Ford, to collect cleaning supplies, various tools and baby diapers, wipes and formula. They collected the items at the dealership through Aug. 31 and at press time planned to deliver the items to Addis, Louisiana, in the following days.

If the first several days of relief efforts are any sign of what's to come, then "the Lord will get the credit," Wakefield said, "as the job will get done and people will be taken care of."

He shared a story about a man who accepted Christ after he heard the gospel from an Alabama Baptist DR volunteer at a shower unit.

Another volunteer gave out pocket calendars with the gospel message in Spanish to first responders in the area to hand out. The first responders gave them to the first people they encountered on their shift and they happened to be a Spanish-speaking group — and one person came to the Lord because of it, Wakefield said.

When Alabama Baptists give through the Cooperative Program or directly to Louisiana Flood Relief through SBOM, Wakefield said, "it's making a difference in people's lives." ☛

Church member sees Scripture change her life; reads Bible through once every 4 to 6 weeks

By Grace Thornton
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Over the course of her life, Judi Moon's Bible reading habits have changed.

She's probably not alone in that.

But one thing about the trend in her time in the Word that might not fit the norm is the degree to which it's increased over the years. And that's because the more she read, the more she saw it change her life, she said.

"As I spent more and more time with God on a consistent basis, morning and evening, it just did me so much good," said Moon, a member of Agape International Church, a part of University Baptist Church, Huntsville. "It changed me in giving me ideas to share with people, it enriched my own life, it helped me deal with difficult times and it helped me pay attention to God."

Habit of reading

It started back when her five children were young. While they were getting ready for school, she'd sit at a table in her bedroom, read her Bible and pray for their day. It was a habit that held for years.

But then when her first husband, David, passed away, she cocooned, she said. It stayed that way for a while.

But one day through a friend, God showed her He still had something for her life.

"So I began searching His Word to find out how He wanted me to live and who He wanted me to be," Moon said.

And that began her life's journey to know God and what His Word says as

much as she possibly could.

These days she reads her Bible through once every four to six weeks, reading for an hour or two in the morning, an hour or two at night and any other time she has a few minutes during the day.

Difficult times

And that habit has gotten her through many a difficult time.

After David died, she married Loyd Moon, a missionary to Brazil, and moved there with him. Then she lost him to Alzheimer's.

She walked with an adult daughter through a mental illness diagnosis.

She got a tough diagnosis of her own — nerve damage from shingles, something that debilitated her and changed her ability to live her life the way she wanted.

"But God gave me verses in those times, and I knew He was with me," Moon said.

It's kept her going through years of teaching English as a Second Language, leading an Alzheimer's support group, ministering as a trained mediator and writing a book about grief that's coming out soon.

Moon's pastor, Gary Swafford, has known her for many years and said she is an example of a lifestyle of being immersed in God's Word and shar-



Photo by Neisha Roberts

ing it with anyone on any occasion.

"She has saturated her life with the Word of God over and over and over again. There's no telling how many times she has read the Bible through," he said. "She intentionally relates to people for the purpose of following the prompting of the Holy Spirit to bring the Word of God, using it as a witness for Jesus. And she brings a word to anyone with whom she's speaking. Because of that, she's a blessing to many people."

Dedicated follower of God

But not only that, Swafford said, she has become a dedicated follower of God, listening to His voice and where He leads and learning through the difficult things that have happened in her life.

"He has not spared her from challenges. I think the fact that she has faced the challenges of life while being in His Word has made her able to become a better servant of Jesus because of whatever challenge she has gone through," Swafford said. "She's able to just say, 'Lord, I'm Yours.'" ☛



MOON

Morning or evening doesn't matter, just open Word

(continued from page 1)

"I was raised in a home where the Word was authentically read and listened to," he said. "Every day in our family of four, someone opened with prayer, someone read Scripture, someone read 'Daily Bread' and someone else prayed at the end, a little more extensively for whatever was on our minds and hearts."

Regular reading

So at a young age, Webster began to read and study on his own too.

"I started reading the Bible early in the morning and taking notes," he said.

It's a habit he still keeps up today, as does Hibbs.

"One of the things I like to do is a character study, on someone like Simon Peter," Hibbs said. "I'll look through all the Scripture at the narrative of his life and trace his journey in terms of his growth, how he grew to understand who Jesus was and how Jesus

changed him through his lifetime."

Then, he said, he'll try to put himself in that character's place.

Incorporate music

He also likes to read the Psalms (see story, page 1) and incorporate music into his personal worship by either listening to worship songs or turning off the radio and

singing songs that have been on his heart that week.

"The most effective corporate worship is the worship individual members have in their own worship time during the week," Hibbs said. "There's no way that a Christian can be effective and grow if there is not personal worship and reflection and personal study of Scripture." ☛

'Thinking, reflecting on Psalms'

(continued from page 1)

really should read more of them and appreciate the depth that God has given us there."

Keith Hibbs, director of the office of worship leadership and church music for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said he loves coming back to the Psalms over and over too.

"I spend a lot of time sitting and thinking and reflecting on Scripture, specifically Psalms," he said. "It's no secret that a lot of worship leaders really delve into the Psalms, but there's so much that it offers to everyone."

For more of Webster's reflections on the Psalms, visit douglasdwebster.com. (TAB)

To give an offering to help Louisiana flood survivors, visit www.sbdr.org/louisianafloodrelief.

To give to the HEART Fund for disaster relief, visit www.wmufoundation.com or mail donations to WMU Foundation HEART Fund, 100 Missionary Ridge, Birmingham, AL 35242.

To become trained in disaster relief and find out about opportunities to serve, visit www.alsbom-gm.org.

Talking to teens about confusing topics like gay 'marriage,' sex, drug use, politics and war can be difficult and confusing even for parents. But talking about sin and other issues is vital for open communication, according to Pathways Professional Counseling social workers.

Teaching children to seek God's WISDOM



Photo by Neisha Roberts

Keeping lines of communication open with teens vital for difficult topics

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

As the homeschooled daughter of a pastor, LeeAnn was taught from an early age that Christianity involved rules — lots of them. Sexual purity was an important one.

"I never heard my mom say the word 'sex,' but I was always told to 'stay pure until I was married.' I wasn't even sure what that meant for a long time," she said.

When LeeAnn married, she struggled with changing her perspective on sex.

"Suddenly this shameful, dirty thing I was told to avoid at all costs was supposed to be the best thing ever. My whole life's way of thinking was supposed to change immediately with the words, 'I do.' It wasn't easy," she said.

LeeAnn is taking a different approach with her own children. She talks openly with them about sins of all kind, not just sexual ones, and how sin affects a person's life. They talk about repentance and how God is working in their lives. And yes, they talk about sexual purity in light of God's plan for intimacy within a marriage.

Awkward conversations

Some conversations are awkward, but LeeAnn knows she and her husband are preparing their children for the decisions they will someday have to make by teaching them to seek God's wisdom first.

"I want my husband and me to be the place they hear truth first. I want to be the safest place for them to talk, explore,

learn, question, make mistakes and grow," LeeAnn said.

It is never too early to talk to children about contemporary issues and what the Bible says about our response to them, especially in a world where news headlines are often dominated by the consequences of sinful choices.

Discussions about abortion, gay rights, pornography, drug abuse, violence and coarse language are common in the places kids spend time, including on social media, and we cannot insulate our children from them, said Kristin Lowrey, a social worker with Pathways Professional Counseling.

Finding a Christian voice

Like LeeAnn, Lowrey grew up in a conservative Christian home where she did not feel comfortable asking questions. Lowrey said she got a lot of information from her peers, not all of which was accurate. Today technology also offers a tremendous amount of information on topics like sex, pornography and self-expression. Even if kids are looking for a biblical perspective, finding an authentic Christian voice can be difficult if not impossible.

Though not always easy, keeping the lines of communication open is critical for parents, especially when awkward issues are concerned, Lowrey said.

"When children have questions, they are going to seek answers. It's important for the information to come from a reliable source and to be given in a way that the child can handle it," Lowrey said.

Take the mass killing at a gay nightclub in Orlando or ordinances about transgender rights to use public restrooms. It can be easy to assume that children do not know about these news events. That assumption is often wrong and even hurtful, Lowrey said.

"Kids always know more than we think they do. If we assume they don't know things, we are skipping over a lot of questions they probably have and hurting them by not providing our perspective," she said.

Another benefit of keeping the lines of communication open is that the more willing parents are to have difficult conversations, the more likely children will be to come to them when they have hard questions.

That was the experience of Payton LeFoy, a member of Union No. 3 Baptist Church, Gadsden, in Etowah Baptist Association. Her mom's openness allowed her the freedom to ask questions, even if they were uncomfortable ones.

"Her honesty made me not scared to talk to her about things. Whether I made good decisions or not, I knew I could go to her and not feel judged or belittled. In hindsight, I feel it helped me make better decisions as a teenager," LeFoy said of her mom.

For some Christian parents, discussions about spiritual matters such as salvation can be as difficult as discussions about contemporary issues. Parents sometimes

fear giving kids the wrong information or creating a false assurance of salvation. While parents should not rush children to commit to Christ, answering their questions with care and understanding are im-

portant, said Mark Bethea, pastor of Argo Baptist Church, Trussville. Asking questions is one way to discern their readiness to accept Jesus. Allowing the child to pray in his or her own words is another (see story, page 7).

Being cautious

"There is no biblical sinner's prayer or formula to do to be saved," Bethea said. "Leading a child through a formula prayer when they don't understand what they are saying may be easier short term, but leading a child to confess before God has worked in their heart is why we must be cautious and patient."

When conversations take a turn toward the un-

comfortable, parents may feel less than qualified to engage in the conversation, especially if they still feel guilty about past sins or struggle in their personal relationship with Christ, but such conversations can be empowering to children and teenagers.

Lowrey said, "We can talk about difficult issues without just focusing on the wrong choices. We all sin, but our goal is to help our kids understand that Jesus' love is bigger than that. If we insulate children, they don't learn how to handle the world. Our job is to prepare them to be Christians who can live in this world and stand up for their values in a respectful, kind and loving way." ☕

"When children have questions they are going to seek answers. It's important for the information to come from a reliable source and to be given in a way that the child can handle it."

**Kristin Lowrey
social worker**

Pathways Professional Counseling specializes in parenting support, play therapy, family counseling and more. For more information, visit pathwaysprofessional.org.

Guidelines for talking to kids about salvation

By Pastor Mark Bethea
Argo Baptist Church, Trussville

When a child expresses readiness to follow Christ there is great responsibility and great opportunity. Though there is no formula for a prayer of salvation, when children ask questions about salvation, we should respond in the following ways:

1. With Joy.

Jesus welcomed the little children unto Him even against the caution of the other disciples and teachers. When children express interest in becoming a Christian, it is a joyous and wonderful desire of their heart. We should never discount it, deflect it, discredit it or deter them from coming. Joyfully entertain their questions, look at Scripture together and share your own story with them.

2. With Care.

Children are impressionable. Asking them a question such as, "Do you want to avoid going to hell?" or "Do you want to spend an eternity with Jesus?" will certainly elicit the response you desire and could easily point them to saying the sinner's prayer. It is good to be cautious and make sure the child understands what they are getting into. They will not be able to fully understand everything about sin, the gospel, redemption and the Bible, but they can understand their need for a Savior. It is a decision that does not need to be rushed.

3. With Questions.

When asking questions and having conversations with children, let them talk. Listen to their hearts. It is easy to try to feed them the right answers to questions, but simply asking questions such as, "Who is Jesus?" "What did Jesus do?" "What is sin?" and "What does it mean to be baptized?" are all helpful questions to ask as a child begins to learn about following Jesus. Again, they do not have to have perfect answers, but through their answers there are plentiful discipleship opportunities to show and demonstrate every person's need for the gospel.

4. With Attentive Ears.

Listen to their questions. Listen to their answers. Use what you learn from their words to help teach, train and disciple based on their understanding.

5. With Understanding.

If we are going to train, teach and disciple children we must know the gospel ourselves. We need to understand our need for a Savior, our situation because of sin and what baptism means. We need to understand the gravity of our decision to follow Jesus and how it shaped our own lives. If it has done nothing to change our lives, it will be difficult to share with a child what their decision actually means.

6. With Prayer.

We may be cautious about using the sinner's prayer with a child, but we must not shy away from praying with the child and for the child. It is good for them to pray and for us to pray over them. Pray that God would begin a good work in them and that they would be attentive to listen and heed His Word. Pray for endurance and protection as they begin to move forward in their Christian faith.

7. With Intention.

The conversation does not end with a prayer and a pat on the back. Be intentional about following up and continuing the conversation. If you are not the parent, do not hesitate to follow up with the parent to let them know you have been praying for them as well. Discipleship is an ongoing process, and as easy as it would be to have a conversation and call it quits, be intentional about continuing the discipleship process as you are able.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Mark Bethea serves as the bivocational pastor of Argo Baptist Church, Trussville, in Birmingham Baptist Association, and as the acquisitions and digital editor for New Hope Publishers in Birmingham. His book, "30 Days of Hope for Peaceful Living," along with other helpful articles can be found at marklbethea.com.

Raising kids for His glory

Parents' goal should be teamwork, counselor says

By Lisa Keane, MAMFC,
LPC-S, RPT-S, NCC
Pathways Professional Counseling

Oh the joys of parenthood. It never fails to amaze me how many decisions there are in the world of parenting. What should we feed our child? How soon should we start this or that? The decisions are endless.

As parents face each new decision, conflict is bound to arise. Sometimes the smallest of issues can develop into an all-out battle between spouses.

Parents seeking to find a compromise should take an honest look at their own family history, communicate with each other and spend time praying together.

An individual's parenting history greatly influences how that person will parent his or her own children. As a parent, you must be willing to evaluate your own upbringing and communicate your feelings about your childhood experiences.

Different styles

Another thing parents can do is research different parenting styles and their outcomes. In most parenting literature there are four common parenting styles. It is important to remember that all of these parenting styles fall on a continuum and we rarely fit exactly into one type.

► **Authoritative** parenting is a more balanced style of parent-

ing where parents are attentive. Authoritative parents are focused on strengthening their relationship with their child and on teaching their child appropriate behaviors. Authoritative parents clearly communicate their expectations and when children meet these expectations they earn rewards. When the expectations are not met there are reasonable consequences. There is a balance between relationship and rules.

► **Authoritarian** parents are very strict. They focus on rules, often at the expense of the parent-child relationship. If a parent says "because I said so" more than a few times a week in response to their child's inquiries about family rules, that parent may be a more authoritarian parent.

► **Permissive** parents focus on the relationship, often at the expense of the rules. Permissive parents often see their children as "able to do no wrong." Permissive parents may have poor self-esteem and are often uncomfortable with their own personal limitations and challenges.

► **Uninvolved** parents neglect both the relationship and the rules. Their children are perhaps the most unfortunate in that often they

will be neglected both emotionally and relationally.

While all parents must decide which approach they will take, most research suggests that an authoritative approach to parenting generally produces well-adjusted children who have healthy relationships.

Ultimately your goal is to work together with your spouse to parent your child in a way that glorifies God. As parents, our job is neither to raise perfect children nor to be perfect ourselves. Our

job is to point our children to Christ in the way we love and guide them.

As parents, we must seek God in our decision making and not only

work to communicate with our spouses but to communicate with God about the decisions we have to make. Seek out God's guidance together and pray for the wisdom only He can provide.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Lisa Keane is the clinical director for Pathways Professional Counseling, a ministry of Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries. This article first appeared in an October 2013 issue with the Faith and Family series.

Resources like those provided in this story are available through the Faith and Family series in The Alabama Baptist.

Billy Graham answers 6-year-old boy's question 'Where did God come from?'

Where did God come from?" It's a question many people may ask, whether you are a little boy or a 45-year-old woman.

It was the same question a 6-year-old boy asked of world-renowned evangelist Billy Graham, founder of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

Graham answered the boy in a column in the *Kansas City Star*, "God has always existed and He always will, because He had no beginning and He will have no end."

Easy for you to say, Mr. Graham. One might be able to understand God's eternality, but "something" has to come from "somewhere," right? At least that's what most people would identify with.

Graham recognized this common thought and went on to explain to the boy, "I know that's hard for us to understand because everything around us had a beginning and some day everything will die or come to an end. But that's not true of God."

'No beginning or end'

"He has no beginning or end; He alone is eternal. As the Bible says, 'Before the mountains were born or You brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting You are God' (Ps. 90:2)."

Graham also explained God's infiniteness and greatness, both things humans will never understand fully.

In the column Graham also

noted how the eternal nature of God is important because it shows the limits of mankind.

"We are limited but He is not, so why not put our lives into His hands," Graham wrote.

Because God's eternal nature never changes, Graham noted how God's love for man also never changes.

"The proof is that He came down from heaven and became a human being: Jesus Christ. He did this so we could be forgiven of our sins and go to be with Him in heaven forever."

Simple to understand? Probably not for most people. Worth trying to accept and trust? Most definitely, according to Graham, because Jesus is the best gift there is, he said. (TAB)

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.

BESSEMER

► **Shady Grove Church, Bessemer**, will hold revival services Sept. 11-14, 6 p.m. John Foster will speak Sunday; Ed Cruce will speak Monday; David Jones will speak Tuesday; and Randy Atkinson will speak Wednesday. Pat Buckner is pastor.

CHILTON

► **Dylan Henderson** is the new student pastor of **Mulberry Church, Maplesville**. He holds a bachelor's degree from Blue Mountain Bible College in Blue Mountain, Mississippi, and is pursuing a master's degree from New Orleans Seminary. He is married to Heather. Andy Mims is pastor.



HENDERSON

18. The first presentation will be at 5 p.m. and the second will be at 6:15 p.m. For more information call 334-894-6216. Kerry Mitchell is pastor.

GENEVA

► **Maple Avenue Church, Geneva**, will host the 39er's CLUB luncheon Sept. 13, 11 a.m. Contact your table hostess to make or cancel your reservation by Sept. 6. If you would like to be a part of the 39er's CLUB and have never participated call the church office at 334-684-9617. Quinton and Amanda Hall will perform special music. Steve Wegmann is interim pastor.

MADISON

► **Murphy Hill Church, Toney**, will hold its annual fall gospel singing Sept. 11, 6 p.m. The Kelly's Quartet from Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, will be featured. A love offering will be received. Mike McFarlen is pastor.

SELMA

► **Sister Springs Church, Tyler**, will host the Selma Association Senior Fest on Sept. 13. Registration will be at 9:30 a.m. and the program will begin at 10:15 a.m. Lunch will follow at

11:15 a.m. Comedian Billy Bob Bohannon will be featured. Jonathan Jenkins is pastor. Tom Stacey is director of missions.

SHELBY

► **Oak Mountain Church, Pelham**, will celebrate homecoming Sept. 11, 10:25 a.m. Doug Foster and the church choir will lead an open mic singing service. A covered-dish lunch will follow. For more information call Jim Martin at 205-567-5684. James Blair is pastor. ► **Wilsonville Church** will host a Walk Against Traffic 5K on Sept. 10, 8 a.m. For more information and to register call Tina Wiles at 205-937-1603. Steve Thomas is pastor.

SULPHUR SPRINGS

► **Daniel "Dan" Nichols** is the new director of missions of **Sulphur Springs Association**. He previously served as pastor of Walkers Chapel Church, Fulton-dale. He also served at Pine Haven Church, Bessemer; Bellview Church, McCalla; Open Acres Church, Montgomery; Mount Calvary Church, Birmingham; and Adamsville Church. He holds



NICHOLS

an associate's degree from West Coast Bible College and Divinity School (now West Coast Bible College and Seminary) in Waco, Texas; a bachelor's degree from Samford University in Birmingham; and a master's and doctorate degree from International Seminary in Apopka, Florida. He and his wife, Johnnie, have one child and two grandchildren.

ST. CLAIR

► **Kevin Blackwell** is the new interim pastor of **North Valley Church, Odenville**. He also serves as assistant to the president for church relations and executive director of the Ministry Training Institute at Samford University in Birmingham. He and his wife, Lorie, have four children. ☼



BLACKWELL

ALABAMA UPDATES

PEOPLE, CHURCHES MAKING NEWS ACROSS THE STATE

SBOM's Wakefield takes helm of state's Disaster Relief

Mark Wakefield has taken on the role of disaster relief and chaplaincy ministry strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM), effective Sept. 1. In this role he will coordinate all Disaster Relief efforts for the state and oversee the work of chaplains.

Wakefield joined the SBOM staff in January 2013. He has served as a Southern Baptist Disaster Relief chaplain since 2005 and as a chaplain for Lawrence County Sheriff's Office, Moulton Police Department, Alabama State Troopers and Lawrence Medical Center. In total he's served in emergency-related roles for 30 years.

Wakefield said he is thankful to step into his new role at SBOM because great leaders like Mel Johnson and Tommy Puckett before him have "built a great organization."

He previously served as associate pastor of Moulton Baptist Church. He also ministered at Wear Baptist Church, Moulton; Providence Baptist Church, Town Creek; Pleasant Valley Baptist Church, Hartselle; and Old Spanish Fort Baptist Church, Spanish Fort.

Wakefield holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Mobile, a master of divinity degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS) and a doctorate, also from NOBTS.

He and his wife, Debbie, have a daughter and one granddaughter. (TAB)



WAKEFIELD

Want to see your news in The Alabama Baptist?

Email your information to news@thealabamabaptist.org; fax it to 205-879-6026 or call 1-800-803-5201. Church announcements should arrive three weeks prior to the event.



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REMEMBER TO SAY 'THANK YOU'

"Remember to say 'thank you'" still rings in my ears to this very date. During my early formative years, my parents were always insistent on me expressing gratitude for any gift or an act of kindness extended to me.

I have sought to follow that axiom as I have traveled through life. I am certain that there have been lapses — times during which I mindlessly forgot to speak words of gratitude, but generally speaking I have tried to make the "thank you" admonition an integral part of my life.

This statement is not meant to be a veiled sense of bragging. Rather, it is a tribute to my parents. I hope I instilled the same kind of thinking in my children as well. As far as I can tell, they are practicing the "thank you" axiom in their lives and for that I am grateful.

As I've marked yet another anniversary with Alabama Baptists as a state missionary, I want to offer a heartfelt word of gratitude for our partnership in missions. Alabama Baptists are my faith family, and I am deeply gratified to be a member of such a Christ-centered and Bible-believing people.

You are very important in

my life as well as in the lives of our other state missionaries. We are all honored to serve the Lord alongside you in these challenging times.

As I attended the most recent meeting of the SBC, I had some moments to reflect upon the contributions of Alabama Baptists beyond our own borders.

Let me thank you,



By Rick Lance
State Missionary

Alabama Baptists, for your continued giving through the Cooperative Program. Almost 10 cents of every dollar the SBC receives comes from Alabama. We are not the wealthiest state, nor are we a state convention with mass numbers of megachurches. We are not the largest state convention, but we are among the most generous people.

In thanking you for your giving through the Cooperative Program and to the special offerings, I do so not intending to say that Alabama as a state convention is better than other state conventions. Every state convention is different, and every one of them has to determine priority needs as they evaluate the situation in their state, in North America and around the world.

As one of the three oldest state conventions (established in 1823), we have numerous commitments in our state which seek to serve the cause of Christ in Alabama and around the world alongside our larger SBC family.

As Alabama Baptists, we want to be faithful to the cause of Christ in ways that strengthen the base of support and extend our witness around the world. Believe me, that affirmation is on my mind and in my heart as a state missionary. That is the compelling motivation of all state missionaries.

"Thank you" are easy words to say, but a life of gratitude is a challenging way to live. I pray that the teachings of parents, from years ago, continue echoing in my heart and in life as I seek to live for Christ and serve alongside my faith family called Alabama Baptists.

We have so much more to do in the days to come, and I want to thank you in advance for all you will do for the cause of Christ. My favorite expression these days is "Press on!"

As we live faithfully for the Lord, let us be grateful for the opportunity to do so.

John 17:18, 20:21

A NEW WAY TO SUPPORT STATE MISSIONS

In mid-September, Alabama Baptists will have the opportunity to participate in the Week of Prayer for the inaugural Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering.

The offering will provide support for five strategic Great Commission priorities in our state: Alabama Woman's Missionary Union, disaster relief, church planting, church revitalization and global missions. On the next page, you will see a full-page promotion of the week of prayer and the offering.

We hope your church will consider participating in praying for these five vital ministries and that you, as an individual Alabama Baptist, will prayerfully consider financial support of the offering through your local church.

Numerous resources are available through your State Board of Missions and Alabama WMU, including videos, bulletin inserts, prayer guides and more. To order resources or learn more, check online at myers-mallory.org.

Resources may also be requested by phone at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 226, or (334) 613-2226.



Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering

STATE GOAL: \$750,000

**WEEK OF
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SEPTEMBER 11-18, 2016

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WHY I BELIEVE IN THE COOPERATIVE PROGRAM



McGUIRE

THE COOPERATIVE PROGRAM: AN ANSWER TO THE PRAYER AND THE MISSION

The Prayer: "I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" ~ John 17:20-21 (NIV).

The Cooperative Program in a limited way is a concrete expression of our Lord praying for us. By our cooperating together, it surely demonstrates a spirit of desiring to be in agreement. We recognize that what we have been called to is much greater than ourselves or any individual body of believers. By our Lord praying that we would be one even as He and the Father are one, He is asking at the very least for our full cooperation in order that the world would see Himself as the Christ. Though the world may not know anything of the Cooperative Program, they experience our unity by the multiplied resources used by God to get the message to their ears.

The Mission: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.



And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" ~ Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV).

As followers of Christ, we have a great call on our lives that demands our allegiance to Christ and each other. The Cooperative Program in a limited way is a concrete expression of meeting that demand. Instead of churches and ministries being in competition for resources to expand Christ's kingdom, we give in cooperation to maximize our stewarding God's gifts. The results have been nothing short of miraculous.

By taking the Great Commission seriously and cooperating in its fulfillment — specifically through the Cooperative Program, as Southern Baptists we have realized and financed both international and North American missions, six seminaries, many ministries, along with our state conventions and Southern Baptist Convention — disciples are being made in the name of Christ!

I believe in the Cooperative Program, because I believe in the Christ of The Prayer and The Mission.

— **Dee McGuire**, pastor, Greensboro Baptist Church, Hale Association

ONEMISSION: The Great Commission ONEPROGRAM: The Cooperative Program MANY MINISTRIES: Great Commission Ministries

Alabama Church Planting Basics, Thursday-Saturday, September 22-24, 2016, at West Mobile Baptist Church, 7501 Airport Blvd., Mobile: The "nuts and bolts" or ABCs of what it takes to plant a church from the planter and the core group/leadership/launch team's perspective.

CHURCH PLANTER ENRICHMENT OPPORTUNITIES

We encourage every planter to attend and bring as many of his team as possible.

When the participants walk away, they will have in hand the structure on which to hang their vision, values, focus group, strategy, etc.

This training has proven to be helpful to established church pastors as well. Sessions will begin at noon Thursday and conclude at 4:30 p.m. Saturday. The cost for the three-day training is \$25 (\$100 for non-Alabama Baptist churches). Registration is required.

By Lamar Duke
State Missionary



LAST CALL

Church planters and wives or anyone interested in church planting are invited to this event. Speaker Jeff Christopherson has a passion to see a Kingdom-centered church planting movement happen in North America. He has seen firsthand what can happen when a church gives itself away through rapid multiplication. Jeff serves as vice president of the North American Mission Board for the Send Network. He is author of *Kingdom Matrix: Designing a Church for the Kingdom of God* and *Kingdom First: Starting Churches That Shape Movements*. Jeff and his wife, Laura, live in Alpharetta, Ga., and have two children.

The first 200 planters/pastors who register will receive a copy of *Kingdom First*, Jeff's latest book.



Jeff Christopherson

Full schedule as follows: 4:30 p.m., registration and fellowship time; 6 p.m., dinner; 6:30 p.m., worship led by Ingrid Brown; 6:45 p.m., inspirational message by Jeff Christopherson; 7:15 p.m., wives session, Susan Lovett, and planters session, Jeff Christopherson; 8:30 p.m., adjourn and pick up children.

The cost is \$25 per couple or \$15 per person.

To register or for more information about these events, please visit plantalabama.org/events.

Church planting is supported by Alabama Baptists' generous gifts through the Cooperative Program and to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering.

For more information about church planting among Alabama Baptists, please contact State Missionary Lamar Duke, lead church planting strategist, at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 332, or (334) 613-2332, lduke@alsbom.org.

Alabama Church Planter Network Dinner, Sunday, November 13, 2016, Eastern Hills Baptist Church, 3604 Pleasant Ridge Rd., Montgomery:

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THIS 16-MONTH CALENDAR (Sept. 2016–Dec. 2017) has State Board of Missions events and emphases already printed with plenty of room for you to add your church's events.

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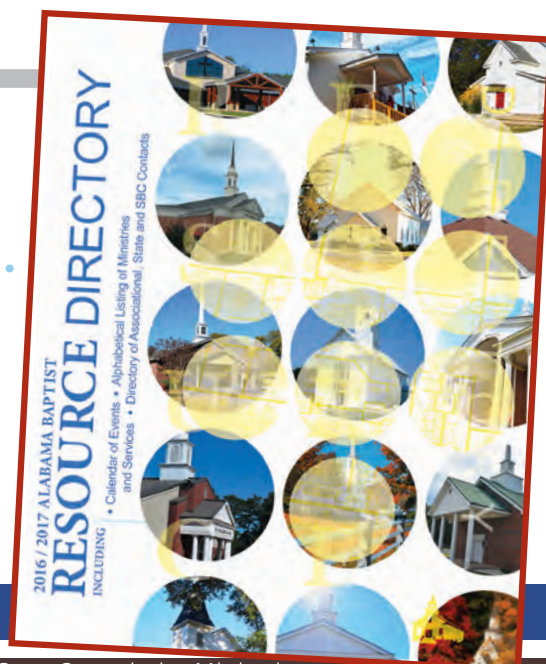
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Be sure to include your name, church name, mailing address and number of guides needed **up to 20**.



ALABAMA BAPTIST STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS

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



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SEPTEMBER 13, 2016:
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Cost: \$10 per person (includes lunch)

Psalm 96:1-2 says, "Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day" (NIV).

Join Frank Jones as he leads senior adults from churches all over Alabama in two different locations to sing hymns to the Lord! You may have been singing

the hymns since you were a child, but each time you sing them, your praise to God is new again.

To register or learn more, visit alsbom.org/senioradultsingin.

For other information, please contact State Missionary Eileen Mitchell, at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 221, or (334) 613-2221, emitchell@alsbom.org.

NOMINATIONS SOUGHT

The Troy L. Morrison Leadership/Church Health Awards will be given to those individuals who have demonstrated evidence of leadership that has advanced the church in four key areas: kingdom growth, ministry advancement, missions involvement and numerical growth.

The recipients will be from three categories – New Work (church less than ten years old), Established Work (church older than ten years), and Bivocational (church where pastor holds dual employment).

Nominations may be made by visiting alsbom.org/TLMLeadershipawards. Or you may contact our office for a copy (see contact info below).

Send your nomination form to ≈ Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions ≈ Office of LeaderCare & Church Health ≈ **Attn: Debbie Dickey** ≈ 2001 East South Blvd. ≈ Montgomery, AL 36116

The deadline for receiving nominations is September 21, 2016.

For more information call or email Debbie Dickey, ministry assistant, 1-800-264-1225, ext. 218, or (334) 613-2218 or ddickey@alsbom.org.

Leadership Awards



AT THE BAPTIST BUILDING, 2001 E. SOUTH BLVD. IN MONTGOMERY

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» Tour the Baptist Building » Spouses welcome » Lunch provided

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Register by calling or emailing Sheila Rikerd, **1-800-264-1225, ext. 249, or (334) 613-2249, srikerd@alsbom.org**, or go online to **alsbom.org/gad**.

NOMINATIONS SOUGHT FOR OUTSTANDING 2016 MISSION VOLUNTEER

The Office of Global Missions of the State Board of Missions would like to honor an Outstanding 2016 Mission Volunteer. YOUR HELP IS NEEDED.

Please think about lay people you know whom you feel are worthy of such recognition, and let us hear from you. We realize that there are many who could fit this requirement; however, for this purpose only one individual (or couple) will be selected.

Your recommendation will make a difference. The following information is required if a person (or couple) is to be considered:

1. The name, address and phone number of the person (or couple) being nominated.
2. The name, address and phone number of the nominee's pastor, the church to which he/she/they belong and their association.
3. A list of volunteer mission service: their Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and Uttermost where he/she/they have participated during the past five years, including locations and dates. (If the nominee(s) has not served in at least three of the Acts 1:8 areas, please do not nominate that person.)
4. Statements supporting your nomination as **Outstanding 2016 Mission Volunteer** (why you feel he/she/they should be recognized in this manner).
5. Your signature with address, phone, church and association.

To access an Information Sheet and Nomination Application, go online to a18c.org/volunteeroftheyear.

If you do not have web access, request your Information Sheet and Nomination Application by contacting Ministry Assistant Angie Williams at **1-800-264-1225, ext. 373, or (334) 613-2373, awilliams@alsbom.org**.

Requests may also be made by mail to Global Missions Office, Attn: Angie Williams, P.O. Box 11870, Montgomery, AL 36111-0870.

Please note: No phone calls or e-mail recommendations and/or endorsements accepted! Nominations must be received, not postmarked, no later than Monday, September 19, 2016.

PASTOR DEACON/ SPOUSE RETREAT

**FRIDAY AND SATURDAY
SEPTEMBER 23-24, 2016
SHOCCO SPRINGS**

Begins with check-in at 4 p.m. Friday.
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/pastordeaconspouseretreat

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



FLASHPOINT

DISCIPLE-MAKING CONFERENCE

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FLASHPOINT Disciple-Making Conference is coming to Wright Center at Samford University, 800 Lakeshore Dr., Birmingham on Friday and Saturday, **01 • 13-14 • 2017**. **FLASHPOINT** is a meeting for people who are interested in making disciples Jesus-style! Best practices, tools and resources will be offered by some veteran disciple-makers including Robby Gallaty, senior pastor, Longhollow Baptist Church, Hendersonville, Tenn.; Craig Etheredge, lead pastor, First Baptist Church, Colleyville, Texas; Ken Adams, pastor, Crossroads Church, Newnan, Ga.; and David Fedele, children's pastor, First Baptist Church, Colleyville, Texas. These are just some of the leaders who will be leading sessions at FlashPoint in Birmingham.

Explore both the strategy of leading our churches and ministries to become disciple-making and gaining the skills needed to be disciple-makers ourselves.

ONLINE INFO: birmingham.flashpointconference.com.

Learn about registration costs for individuals and groups, how to register, recommended hotels, more about the speakers and much more.

discipleFIRST 

This event is made possible in part by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.

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

ALABAMA BIBLE DRILL 2017

MAY THE WORD BE WITH YOU

THURSDAY AND FRIDAY, JANUARY 27-28, 2017
SHOCCO SPRINGS

Worship Leader: Jeff Slaughter

Join us at the 2017 Bible Drill Retreat as we explore the importance of having the Word of God with us. Jeff Slaughter with Brentwood-Benson Music, who wrote scores of songs for LifeWay Christian Stores Vacation Bible School curriculum, will be leading worship. Conferences will be designed for children, youth, high school drill participants and leaders. Participants will be learning God's Word and the importance of it in their lives. Leaders will have the opportunity to learn more about Bible Drill and how it can be an effective ministry in their churches. Bible Drill in a Box, a make-and-take conference that provides more than 35 activities to use in classrooms, will be offered for each church.

Reservations/Costs: 1-800-280-1105

Registration/other info: alsbom.org/bibledrills

For more information, please contact State Missionary Belinda Stroud, bstroud@alsbom.org, or Ministry Assistant Julie Smith, jsmith@alsbom.org, at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 255, or (334) 613-2255.

**alabama association
of baptist secretaries
conference**

AABS
55th
Annual Conference

Sunday – Wednesday, March 5-8, 2017
Shocco Springs

Theme: Blessed to be a Blessing

Scripture: And I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.
~ **Genesis 12:2b (ESV)**

General Conference Leader:

April Pearson

Worship Leaders: Todd Holcomb & Anthony Lindsey

Website: alabamabaptistsecretaries.com

Facebook page: Alabama Association of Baptist Secretaries

Make plans now to join us for a time of spiritual, professional and personal growth through worship, study, fellowship and educational breakout sessions.

For more information, please contact AABS President Sonya Burtis at (256) 796-5346.

FOCUS on One Mission

Tuesday, September 13, 2016

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

THEME: **Lead Like Jesus**

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.

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

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alsbom.org/leaderconnect.

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

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

SENT

HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE

2016 Alabama Baptist State Convention
Annual Meeting

November 15-16 at Eastmont Baptist Church,
4505 Atlanta Highway, Montgomery, AL 36109

Tuesday morning: President's Address from Travis Coleman, Jr.
Tuesday evening: Message from Robert Smith, Jr., and music from 3 on a String
Wednesday morning: Convention Address from Greg Corbin
Plus great fellowship and two days of celebrating all God is doing in Alabama and beyond!

HOTEL GUIDE The following hotels have offered special rates to those attending the State Convention Annual Meeting. Remember to ask for the Alabama Baptist State Convention rate when you call. Rates listed do not include taxes. This information is provided as a service and is not intended to be a recommendation of any kind. If you have problems making a reservation or securing the posted rate is at any of these hotels, please contact Charleen Hobbs at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 231, or chobbs@alsbom.org.

HOST HOTEL:

Drury Inn & Suites

1124 Eastern Blvd, 36117 (I-85, exit 6)

334-273-1101

Free hot breakfast (Belgian waffles, scrambled eggs, biscuits & gravy, sausage and more); free hot food and cold beverages daily, 5:30-7 p.m., and soda/popcorn in lobby daily, 3-10 p.m.; free Wi-Fi

➔ **Rate: \$109** (king or 2 queens)

Reservations: 1-800-325-0720 or visit drury-hotels.com ➔ **Rate Code: Group # 2268369**

Deadline: Wednesday, October 12, 2016

I-85, exit 1, or I-65, exit 172 (Downtown)

Doubletree by Hilton, Downtown Montgomery

120 Madison Avenue, 36104

334-245-2320

Free parking, breakfast and Wi-Fi

➔ **Rate: \$109** ➔ **Rate Code: ABC** **Deadline:** October 14, 2016

Hampton Inn, Downtown

100 Commerce Street, 36104

334-265-1010

Free breakfast, parking fee waived ➔ **Rate:**

\$109 (king or 2 queens), \$119 (king or 2 queens studio suite) ➔ **Rate Code: SMB**

➔ **Deadline:** Wednesday, October 26, 2016

I-85, exit 4

Hilton Garden Inn Montgomery East

1600 Interstate Park Drive, 36109

334-272-2225

Breakfast cooked to order (\$10.95) and free parking ➔ **Rate: \$104** ➔ **Rate Code: ASB**

Homewood Suites by Hilton

1800 Interstate Park Drive, 36109

334-272-3010

Full hot breakfast buffet, parking and Wi-Fi, kitchens and sleeper sofas in every suite, pet friendly (fee applies) ➔ **Rate: \$109**

➔ **Rate code: ABC**

➔ **Deadline:** Tuesday, November 1, 2016

I-85, exit 6 (East Blvd.)

Holiday Inn Express

5135 Carmichael Road, 36106

334-270-9199

Rate: \$99, includes breakfast buffet ➔ **Rate code: ASB** ➔ **Reservations:** 855-914-1442

I-85, exits 9 and 11 (EastChase)

Hampton Inn & Suites - EastChase

7651 EastChase Parkway, 36117

334-277-1818

Free hot breakfast buffet, parking, Wi-Fi, mini refrigerator and microwave in every room

➔ **Rate:** \$109 (king or 2 queens), \$119 (king studio suite) ➔ **Rate Code: CHXABC** or use ALABAMA STATE BAPTIST CONVENTION

Holiday Inn Express - EastChase

9250 Boyd Cooper Parkway, 36117

334-271-5516

Free hot breakfast, high-speed internet access and self-parking ➔ **Rate: \$109**

➔ **Rate Code: BSC** ➔ **Reservation Link:** <http://bit.ly/BSCHIE2016>

Deadline: Sunday, October 30, 2016

Staybridge Suites - EastChase

7800 EastChase Parkway, 36117

334-277-9383

Free breakfast buffet (7 days a week), free full dinner (M-TH nights 5:30-7:30 p.m.), parking and Internet ➔ **Rate: \$119** ➔ **Rate Code:** Ask for Baptist State Convention

I-65, exit 164 (Hope Hull)

Fairfield Inn and Suites Montgomery Airport South

7560 Mobile Highway, 36106

334-281-6882, ext. 702 (Debbie Bozeman)

Breakfast included, free parking and Wi-Fi

➔ **Rate: \$89** ➔ **Rate Code:** Ask for Baptist State Convention

Hampton Inn, Airport South

60 Wasden Road, 36043

334-280-9592

Free breakfast, Wi-Fi and parking

➔ **Rate: \$94** ➔ **Rate Code:** Ask for Baptist State Convention

For complete information about the convention, including an interactive hotel guide, please visit alsbom.org/convention.

WHY I'M EXCITED ABOUT THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR STATE MISSIONS AND THE MYERS-MALLORY STATE MISSIONS OFFERING

It was my privilege to have Martha Myers as one of my friends, having served as

her pastor. How appropriate her name would be joined with Kathleen Mallory's for us to raise the money to do the mission work for



Alabama Baptists. I will lead Dalraida Baptist Church to give very liberally and sacrificially to this offering. – **Rick Evans**, pastor, Dalraida Baptist Church, Montgomery

I am a member and serve at First Baptist Church, Selma, Miss Kathleen Mallory's home church. She gave us a desire to pray for missions and to give to missions sacrificially from your heart. I pray that Alabama Baptists will come together to pray for state missions and invest together for the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering. – **Anna Speir**, president, Alabama WMU



We're excited to be a part of the Alabama Baptist State Convention. I encourage you to be in prayer that the Lord would use this offering for His glory, so that the state of Alabama would be reached for the cause of Christ. – **Kevin Blackwell**, assistant to the president, Samford University



Fall Senior Adult Retreat

October 10-12, 2016
Shocco Springs

God with Us

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This is a great occasion to spend time with friends and meet new ones.

In addition to gorgeous scenery, good teaching, uplifting music and encouraging worship, there's always fun, food, games and entertainment.

Start planning now.

It all begins with lunch on Monday and ends with lunch on Wednesday. The cost per person will depend upon choice of lodging.

COST/RESERVATIONS:

1-800-280-1105 or go online to shocco.org

ONLINE INFO:

alsbom.org/senioradultretreat

For other information, please contact State Missionary Eileen Mitchell at

1-800-264-1225, ext. 221,
or (334) 613-2221,
emitchell@alsbom.org.

NORTH ALABAMA CHURCH LIBRARY CONFERENCE

November 5, 2016

Central Baptist Church
2801 Hwy 31 S., Decatur

READ, WHITE & BLUE

This is the 16th annual training event for North Alabama librarians and others who wish to attend. There is no cost to attend, but registration is necessary. Conferences will cover all areas of library work plus church history, card making for ministry, and training in both Concourse and Atrium. Lunch will be provided at which time an author will be guest speaker. Registration begins at 8 a.m., followed by general session at 8:25 a.m. and conclusion by 3:30 p.m. There will be a book swap and lots of free items.

Online info:

alsbom.org/churchlibrary

To register or for other information, please contact Eva Nell Hunter at (church)
(256) 353-5912,
(cell) (256) 303-7739,
eva_hunter@att.net
or library@cbcdecatur.org.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Approaching Labor Day

Toward a Theology of Work

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

The calendar suggests the timeliness of interrupting the series of studies about the personhood of Christ in order to approach Labor Day by refreshing our minds about the Bible's teaching concerning work in the lives of believers. So we turn our thoughts to some basic aspects of a theology of work.

A good place to begin is at the beginning, that is, with God's creation of humankind as recounted in Genesis. From the beginning God intended that humans would work. Before sin entered the picture amid the perfections of the Garden of Eden, God intended that the man whom He had created would work in that garden. The record says it simply, "Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it" (Gen. 2:15).

Adam had the assignment to be the tender and keeper of that garden. What happened when disobedience entered the picture was that human work outside the garden would entail sweat and toil, according to God's declaration. "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground" (Gen. 3:19a). God's original intention that people work took on a different character. It would become laborious and exhausting in order to be fruitful.

Principles about work

In the New Testament we learn several principles about work. The most basic of the principles is that God's creative intention was that humans should work in order to supply their basic needs. Later, God stipulated in the fourth of the Ten Commandments that His people should honor the seventh day by keeping it holy, but He also included a companion commandment, "Six days you shall labor" (Ex. 20:9). Not to work is to be disobedient.

Of course the underlying and very practical assumption is that a person has the mental and physical ability to work, along with the opportunity or availability of a place to work. The striking dec-

laration of 1 Timothy 5:8 clearly tells us that Christians who have the ability to work and the opportunity to do so but choose not to work has denied the faith and are themselves "worse than an unbeliever." Work is part and parcel of God's intention for us.

Another principle is that believers should work for the sake of their testimony before others. From the just cited passage in 1 Timothy it is easily seen that believers who choose not to work besmirch their Christian testimony by choosing to identify themselves with the world of unbelievers. Lazy and trifling believers ruin their witness in a world where many unbelievers are committed to hard work.

Be fruitful

A third principle is that believers should work in order to be able to give to the needs of others. Ephesians 4:28, in admonishing Christians to forego stealing, calls for a believer to labor, "working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have something to give to him who has need." Titus 3:14 sets forth the same idea, "Let our people also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses that they may not be unfruitful."

In this Labor Day season, let us reflect anew on the dignity of honest work, keeping in mind that God Himself chose to send His Son into a working class family and that honest work, as well as all life's activities, is enfolded in the sweeping admonition of 1 Corinthians 10:31, "Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." ✠

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.



HATE CRIMES rampant

Violence against Christians rising in India

At least 134 incidents of violence against Christians in India were carried out in the first half of 2016 alone, compared with 147 incidents in 2014 and 177 in 2015, according to a recent report.

The Evangelical Fellowship of India's Religious Liberty Commission (EFIRLC) notes that cases chronicled from Jan. 1 to June 30 were "just a fraction of the violence on the ground."

Of major cases of violence against Christians across 21 of India's 29 states, the report places Uttar Pradesh as leading the list with 25, followed by Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh with 17 and 15 respectively.

Physical violence, arrests on false allegations and stopping church services were frequent crimes, with attacks on churches, vandalizing and threats also recurring.

EFIRLC's report points out that local units of the Bajrang Dal, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Akhil Bharatiya Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram and other Hindu extremist splinter factions affiliated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh were the groups most often behind the violence.

Though anti-Christian violence is assumed to be more widespread across the north Indian states, Tamil Nadu in the south rose to No. 4 on the list with 14 incidents.

Some of them were brutal. A pastor from Kambam in Theni District of Tamil Nadu was attacked during a worship service Jan. 17. Hindutva (Hindu nationalist) activists attacked his head with a heavy, sharp object, leaving him to what they supposed would be his death. Emergency treatment for profuse bleeding saved his life.

Harassed, threatened

In many incidents Christians were accused of conversion by force or allurement and charged under so-called Freedom of Religion Acts after they were harassed, threatened and thrashed. The acts, popularly known as anti-conversion laws, declare conversion by force, allurement or fraudulent means to be criminal. Radical Hindu groups commonly use them to falsely implicate Christians.

In Dhar District of Madhya Pradesh, for example, Balu Sastya and his wife, Bhuri, both blind, were called to pray for a sick person. When they had gathered at the house of the sick person along with 11 others, a mob of more than 50 people with sticks and stones surrounded the house.



BP photo

The increase in targeted violence against Christians in India in the past year has been 'startling,' says EFIRLC general secretary Vijayesh Lal.

When police arrived the extremists filed a complaint against Sastya and others, accusing them of attempting to convert gullible villagers by promising them physical healing. Sastya, his wife, and their 3-year-old son had to spend two days and three nights in jail before they were released on bail.

Related to city, state elections

The escalation of anti-Christian violence was consistently related to city and state election times according to the report.

According to EFIRLC general secretary Vijayesh Lal, "While Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh have a history of anti-Christian policies and violent non-state agencies targeting the community, there has been a startling rise in such targeted violence in Uttar Pradesh, which faces elections early in 2017, and in the southern state of Tamil Nadu."

EFIRLC's report includes detailed and alarming accounts of several other incidents of violence against Christians.

Lal issued the following recommendations in the report:

► Enact a comprehensive hate crimes legislation to safeguard the rights of religious minorities.

► The Ministry of Home Affairs should provide trainings on human rights and religious freedom standards and practices to the state and central police and judiciary.

► Although maintenance of public order is a state responsibility, the central government should issue an advisory to the state governments to repeal the anti-conversion laws.

► The government should ensure an active Commission for Human Rights and Commission for Minorities is operational in every state, and that members of each commission are appointed by transparent and nonpartisan procedures.

► Prevent and pursue, through the judicial process, all violent acts against religious and tribal minorities and Dalits. (MS)

Leed's Cedar Grove Baptist member rides across US, shares Jesus along the way

By Hannah Muñoz
Intern, The Alabama Baptist

I prayed with people on the Golden Gate Bridge," Charles "Ronny" Burleson said of his recent United States and Canada motorcycle ministry trip. "What a journey it was." Covering 12,369 miles, the June 26 to Aug. 4 trip included landmarks like the Grand Canyon, the Hoover Dam, Las Vegas, San Diego, the Avenue of the Giants, the Mexico-United States border, the coast of California, the Yukon, Prince George's County in Maryland, Salmon Glacier, Niagara Falls and a majority of the continental U.S. as well as Alaska. His favorite sight was watching the sun rise over the Grand Canyon.

"I took thousands of pictures," he said. "I held a camera with one hand and my handlebars with the other."

But while Burleson, director of FAITH Riders motorcycle ministry at Cedar Grove Baptist Church, Leeds, loves to ride, this wasn't just a scenic route for him. "I went to share the gospel," he said. "I prayed with people all over the country and experienced so much."

Along the way God placed people in Burleson's path where he could share his story, faith and encouragement. Some people shared needs that Burleson prayed for on the spot. Others provided help,



Photo by Ronny Burleson

Ronny Burleson, director of FAITH Riders motorcycle ministry at Cedar Grove Baptist Church, Leeds, 'rode across America with Jesus,' he said, after finishing his 12,369 mile journey.

such as shelter and food.

Burleson said he was well received by almost everybody he encountered. "I only ran into one irate person," he said. "But then I prayed with waitresses who would pay for my meal."

He met people from Alabama across the country as well as other bikers and families that he continues to keep in touch with.

Lifelong dream

The journey itself was a dream he'd had his entire life, he said. When he received his first motorcycle at age 13 and saw a show on a man who travelled the country on his motorcycle, a desire was

created to "do the same one day."

"At that time I had no idea that this motorcycle would be used as a tool for the glory of our Lord and Savior," Burleson said.

The door finally opened in 2015 when he noticed a need in the church to repair the sanctuary. Cracks in the ceiling and several other things needed to be repaired structurally. While promoting his upcoming trip, he asked people to pledge a donation to the church for each mile he travelled.

Members of Cedar Grove Baptist pledged more than \$13,000 toward the church repairs, which will begin when the church has raised the complete amount required to fix the sanctuary, according to Joanne Brady, administrative assistant at the church.

During the ride Burleson had a tracking device placed on his bike. "For safety reasons obviously," he said, "but also to allow people who had pledged to feel like they were a part of the journey with me."

Burleson was the only one on the trip, but he knew he was not alone. "I have God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit with me all the time."

Even with "bad weather and terrible roads," Burleson was grateful to have gone on his "trip of a lifetime."

Experience God's beauty

"I experienced so much of God's beauty," Burleson said. "To see what I have seen brings goose bumps all over my arms. God blessed me with a safe and joyous trip."

"It was a wonderful journey," he said. "How great it was to see so many things our Lord has created. But the truly wonderful part about the trip was the people He put in my path along the way. God had everything laid out perfectly. It was simply amazing."



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- Be as concise as possible



Jack Paul Joyner

Retired East Cullman DOM dies at 84

Jack Joyner, retired director of missions (DOM) for East Cullman Baptist Association, died Aug. 17. He was 84.

Joyner served as pastor of Vernant Park Baptist Church, Foley; Brushy Creek Baptist Church, Greenville; and Antioch Baptist Church, Lafayette, before serving as DOM for Butler, Wilcox and finally East Cullman Baptist associations, serving with the latter for 22 years before retiring in 1997. He also served as president of the Alabama Baptist Conference of Directors of Associational Missions from 1992 to 1993.

He held a bachelor's degree from the University of South Carolina in Columbia and two master's degrees from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He was a member of Good Hope Baptist Church, Cullman, at the time of his death.

He was preceded in death by his wife of 54 years, Mana, and daughter, Angela. He is survived by three children and two grandchildren. (Hannah Muñoz)



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Sexual identity

‘Born this way’ argument not supported by science, psychiatrists say

A report by two Johns Hopkins psychiatry scholars debunking myths about homosexuality and transgenderism has been cited by a pastor who specializes in mental health care issues as a valuable aid for ministry to those struggling with sexual identity.

“The article represents some of the most clear-headed thinking that I have read on the volatile subject of sexual identity,” said Tony Rose, who chaired Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee President Frank S. Page’s Mental Health Advisory Council. “The tenor of the authors is worthy of being imitated.”

‘Primary concern’

“I am in agreement with the article’s stated primary concern — the unusual amount of traumatic mental and emotional health experiences found among the population of humans who struggle with sexual identity issues,” said Rose, pastor of LaGrange Baptist Church, LaGrange, Kentucky. “The Church could learn from this model of compassion and seek to meet this observable need.”

Titled “Sexuality and Gender: Findings from the Biological, Psychological and Social Sciences,” the three-part report in the fall edition of The New Atlantis

journal by Lawrence Mayer and Paul McHugh, both of the psychiatry department at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore, Maryland, draws on more than 200 peer-reviewed scientific studies and argues:

► The idea that sexual orientation is “an innate, biologically fixed property of human beings — the idea that people are ‘born that way’ — is not supported by scientific evidence.”

► The “elevated risk” among homosexual and transgender individuals “for a variety of adverse mental health outcomes” cannot be explained fully as the result of “social stressors” like discrimination and harassment.

► The idea that gender identity is “an innate, fixed property of human beings that is independent of biological sex” is not supported by scientific evidence.

Mayer, the report’s lead author, writes in the preface that he “strongly support[s] equality ...

for the LGBT community” and that the report “is about science and medicine, nothing more and nothing less.”

McHugh previously has expressed public skepticism regarding the effectiveness of gender reassignment surgery in improving the mental health of people suffering from gender dysphoria — the condition of not feeling at home in one’s God-given body in terms of gender.

Rose said “pastors should take the time to read this article for several reasons. One reason is to observe the skill of serious research from an objective perspective. It appears the authors worked hard to keep personal preference

from getting in the way of their research findings.”

Alan Branch, a Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary ethics professor whose book, “Born This Way?,” draws similar conclusions to Mayer and McHugh.

“A careful review of research on homosexuality will demonstrate that the Church should not

change its biblical stance that sex is designed by God to be experienced in a heterosexual and monogamous marriage,” Branch said.

“Christian mercy demands both that we stand firm on the biblical stance while showing mercy to those who desire to overcome homosexual temptation and live as a faithful disciple following biblical sexual ethics. But mercy does not mean we compromise what God’s Word says. If God’s Word is true, compromise would be the most unmerciful thing we could do.”

He added, “The ‘born this way’ claim is an inaccurate and truncated description of findings to date.”

Among other conclusions of Mayer and McHugh’s report:

► Studies of identical twins “make clear that genetic influences cannot be the whole” cause of same-sex sexual attraction, though genetic factors likely play a role.

► Without further research, “the idea that sexual abuse may be a causal factor in sexual orientation remains speculative.”

Mental health problems

► “Compared to the general population, nonheterosexual and transgender subpopulations have higher rates of mental health problems such as anxiety, depression and suicide, as well as behavioral and social problems such as substance abuse and intimate partner violence.”

► “Almost nothing is well understood when we seek biological explanations for what causes some individuals to state that their gender does not match their biological sex.”

► “There is little scientific evidence that gender identity is fixed at birth or at an early age” or that an individual can possess the brain of one sex and the body of another.

‘Drastic interventions’

► It is “especially troubling” that “drastic interventions” like hormone therapy and gender reassignment surgery “are prescribed and delivered to patients identifying, or identified, as transgender,” including children.

► “The majority of children who identify as the gender opposite their biological sex will not continue to do so as adults.”

Mayer and McHugh close their report by arguing, “Everyone — scientists and physicians, parents and teachers, lawmakers and activists — deserves access to accurate information about sexual orientation and gender identity.”

“While there is much controversy surrounding how our society treats its LGBT members, no political or cultural views should discourage us from understanding the related clinical and public health issues and helping people suffering from mental health problems that may be connected to their sexuality.” (BP)

“The majority of children who identify as the gender opposite their biological sex will not continue to do so as adults.”

Excerpt from recent ‘Sexuality and Gender’ report

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State schools can keep gender-based restroom policy; federal judge issues stay

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

Alabama schools can keep their current gender-based restroom policies, at least for now.

U.S. District Judge Reed O’Connor granted the motion Aug. 21 for a preliminary injunction by Alabama and other states staying the May 13 Obama administration’s transgender restroom order. The order required schools nationwide to allow student access to restrooms and locker rooms of their gender “identity” rather than birth sex.

In an Aug. 22 press release, Attorney General Luther Strange wrote, “The court decision is a victory for parents and children all across Alabama. I joined the multistate lawsuit against the Obama administration ... to prevent Alabama schools from being forced to surrender their restroom access

policies to social experiments in Washington.

“The court’s (ruling) allows local schools to resolve issues pertaining to transgendered students without fear of litigation from the Department of Justice or loss of funding from the Department of Education,” Strange wrote in a letter to the Alabama State Board of Education on Aug. 22.

‘Considerable discretion’

“It is my understanding that principals and teachers in Alabama have considerable discretion in how to accommodate transgender students, with each case resolved in consultation with an affected student’s parents. That is the way it should be.”

The Aug. 21 ruling said the Obama administration overstepped its reign with the May order under the 1972 law banning

sex discrimination in schools.

The 1972 law states in part: “facilities provided for students of one sex shall be comparable to such facilities provided for students of the other sex,” which O’Connor went on to explain in detail in his 38-page order.

“It cannot be disputed that the plain meaning of the term sex” in that law “meant the biological and anatomical differences between male and female students as determined at their birth,” the judge wrote.

“Without question, permitting educational institutions to provide separate housing to male and female students, and separate educational instruction concerning human sexuality, was to protect students’ personal privacy, or discussion of their personal privacy, while in the presence of members of the opposite biological sex.”

'Pornography is the new tobacco' and that's a good thing, according to Center on Sexual Exploitation

As more research links pornography to psychological and physiological damage, advocates hope it will soon generate the same national antipathy as smoking cigarettes.

"Pornography is the new tobacco and that's good news," Haley Halverson of the National Center on Sexual Exploitation said Aug. 3 during a Family Research Council policy lecture. "Pornography is pervasive and popular today — there's no denying it and it's a really serious problem we have to address. But so was smoking in the 1950s. It was popular, everybody did it — it was considered glamorous. But as the harms became more apparent ... both the general public and elected officials demanded a public health approach to the problem."

Coalesce around effort

Halverson predicts in the same way Americans agreed tobacco was harmful, public figures and lawmakers will soon coalesce around an effort to reduce porn consumption.

In April, Utah Gov. Gary Herbert signed a resolution to declare pornography a public health crisis. The resolution called for new edu-

cation and research initiatives to shape future policy changes aimed at reducing pornography exposure and addiction. The measure noted new technology created an environment for universal availability of pornographic material, even for children — and porn "perpetuates a sexually toxic environment."

During the Republican National Convention in Cleveland in July, delegates unanimously adopted an amendment to the party platform to call pornography a public health crisis that is destroying lives.

"Pornography, with its harmful effects, especially on children, has become a public health crisis that is destroying the life of millions," the amendment stated. "We encourage states to continue to fight this public menace and pledge our commitment to children's safety and well-being."

On Aug. 1, presidential nominee Donald Trump signed a pledge to make enforcing existing laws against pornography a top priority of his administration. The pledge from Enough Is Enough, a non-partisan organization, states the president should also consider appointing a special commission to explore porn's short- and long-term effects. Those who sign the pledge

also agree to work with corporations on porn-reduction initiatives and to support other policies that shield children from porn.

Presidential nominee Hillary Clinton refused to sign the pledge. Clinton said on principle she agrees with the effort but her campaign will not sign any pledges during the election season.

Halverson said, "This is not a partisan issue. This is an issue that everyone, whether they are concerned about the human dignity, the value of family, the impact that it has on women, can all come together and agree."

A 2014 study found evidence that excessive porn use physically shrinks the human brain. In parts of the brain controlling motivation levels and decision-making, researchers found a reduction in brain matter for heavy porn users. The discovery alarmed scientists,

especially since other research shows more Americans view porn than ever before and begin at an early age. Twenty-seven percent

of Millennials viewed porn before hitting puberty and nearly two-thirds of American males 24-years-old and younger actively seek out porn at least once a week.

Barna Group research found porn use quickly desensitizes the brain's pleasure receptors and addicts move to more hardcore and sexually violent content to satisfy urges. Of

the 50 most popular pornographic videos on the Internet, 88 percent contained some form of physical violence against women.

"People are exposed at such an early age that they are getting their sexual education from pornography," Halverson said. "This might be the first thing they learn about sex — that is sex is violent and women like it." (BP)

"Pornography is pervasive and popular today. ... But so was smoking in the 1950s."

**Haley Halverson
National Center on Sexual Exploitation**



(augmented reality)

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- 7** Each week when TAB arrives, open the app and hold your device over the augmented reality articles.

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CHURCH POSITIONS

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Pisgah Baptist Church, Pisgah, Ala., is seeking God's will for a full-time pastor. Please send resumé to: Pastor's Search Committee, P.O. Box 10, Pisgah, AL 35765.

PASTOR

Semmes First Baptist Church, Semmes, Alabama, is accepting resumé for full-time pastor. Please send resumé to Semmes First Baptist Church 4070 Wulff Rd, E Semmes, AL 36575 (Mobile County) or email to semmesfirstbaptist.net or gabstrucks@gmail.com or phone 251-367-1000.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Catoma Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a bivocational pastor. Send resumé to: Pastor Search Committee, Catoma Baptist Church, 4300 Old Selma Rd., Montgomery, AL 36108.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Hopewell Baptist Church, Hanceville, Ala., accepting resumé for

bivocational pastor. Mail to: 1827 1st Avenue N., Apt. 704, Birmingham, AL 35203. Email to: HopewellPSC@gmail.com. Deadline: September 30, 2016.

BIVOCATIONAL MINISTER OF MUSIC

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

BIVOCATIONAL MINISTER OF YOUTH

Montevallo First Baptist Church is receiving applicants for a part-time, bivocational minister of youth. Resumé and inquiries may be sent to: mfbc@bellsouth.net.

BIVOCATIONAL YOUTH MINISTER

Grant Street Baptist Church in Bessemer, Alabama, is searching for a part-time or bivocational youth minister. Primary responsibility is to shepherd grades 6-12. Email resumé to Pastor Jeff Hughes at jhughes42295@gmail.com or to Personnel Committee at

personnel@grantstreetbaptist-church.org.

STUDENT MINISTER

The Baptist Church at McAdory in McCalla, Alabama. Minister to students grades 7-12. Send resumé to: Personnel Committee, 4954 Eastern Valley Rd., McCalla, AL 35111.

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS

The Columbia Baptist Association, Dothan, Ala., is accepting resumé for the position of director of missions. Resumé may be submitted to Search Team Chairman Allen Singley at broadlen@gbdcdothan.org or mail to 2400 Forrester Road Dothan, AL 36301.

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Church ANNIVERSARIES

Wadley's Union Motley Baptist marks 125 years

Union Motley Baptist Church, Wadley, celebrated its 125th anniversary and annual homecoming in a joint service June 5.

During the 10 a.m. service Pastor John Roberts brought the message and Sonja Adams, Alabama Baptist Historical Commission representative, presented a plaque to the Carey Baptist Association church honoring its years of dedicated service. Special music that morning was performed by the Godin family, a Phenix City-based family of 10 children who all play multiple instruments in bluegrass and southern gospel styles.

A special aspect of the day, according to church secretary Sheila Bice, was the replica of Union Motley Baptist building on display for participants. The replica was built by church member Wayne Cotney.

Round Mountain celebrates 125th anniversary

Although its 125th anniversary Sunday followed the same format as any other Sunday morning at Round Mountain Baptist Church, Cedar Bluff, it was still a day to celebrate. The decision of a teenage girl to accept Christ on June 5 marked the day and made it "a good day," said Pastor David Davenport.

Southern gospel group Willing Vessel was a special feature of the anniversary service. And Wendell Dutton, director of missions for Cherokee Baptist Association and Alabama Baptist Historical Commission (ABHC) representative, kept the celebration going by presenting a certificate to the church on behalf of ABHC the following Sunday, June 12.

Compiled by the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission and TAB

Want to see your news in *The Alabama Baptist*?

Email your information to news@thealabamabaptist.org, fax it to 205-870-4720 or call 1-800-803-5201. Church announcements should arrive three weeks prior to the event.

Adults born in 90s less likely to be sexually active as young adults than previous decades

People born in the 1990s are less likely to be sexually active in young adulthood than were their counterparts born in the three previous decades, according to research published this month in the Archives of Sexual Behavior.

Analysts are divided on whether the data indicates a rise in intentional commitment to chastity.

University of Texas sociologist Mark Regnerus, whose book, "Premarital Sex in America" was cited in the research, said the findings do not justify the conclusion "that intentional chastity is on the rise." Meanwhile, Ascend, the organization formerly known as the National Abstinence Education Association, lauded the data as suggesting young adults "recognize that casual sex can compromise their life goals."

General Social Survey

Drawing on self-reported data collected in the General Social Survey from 1989 to 2014, re-

searchers Jean Twenge, Ryne Sherman and Brooke Wells found that 15 percent of 20- to 24-year-old Americans born in the 1990s reported having no sexual partners after turning 18. In contrast, just 6 percent of individuals born in the 1960s gave similar reports when they were 20-24.

When researchers controlled the data for age and time period studied, they discovered young adulthood sexual activity decreased progressively for persons born each decade between the 1960s and 1990s.

Young adults born in the 1990s were "more than twice as likely to be sexually inactive as adults than 1960s-born Gen-X'ers, and 41 percent more likely than 1980s-born millennials," the researchers wrote.

The report's authors offered a variety of potential explanations for their findings. Among them:

► Young adults are living with their parents longer and delaying marriage until later in life, "both of

which may delay sexual activity."

► The so-called "hookup culture" may be leading young adults to engage in forms of sexual contact other than intercourse, which they are not reporting to researchers who ask about "having sex."

'Safety strategy'

► "The HIV epidemic and associated public health messaging may have impacted later generations more, with more delaying sex and/or reducing their number of partners as a safety strategy."

► Abstinence-focused sex education and virginity pledges, like the one associated with the True Love Waits sexual purity campaign, may delay young adults' initial sexual experiences.

The research was published online Aug. 1 under the title "Sexual Inactivity During Young Adulthood Is More Common Among U.S. Millennials and iGen: Age, Period and Cohort Effects on Having No Sexual Partners After Age 18." (BP)

Some church membership loss natural, expected

By Thom S. Rainer
President and CEO, LifeWay Christian Resources

On the surface the issue looks hopeless. Your church will lose four categories of church members; and you can do absolutely nothing to stop it.

Of course, this membership

and attendance loss is in every organization where resident membership is part of belonging.

Churches are no exception. Here are the four categories:

1. Members who die.

I went through the membership roll of a previous church I served as pastor. I discovered nearly 40 members on the roll were deceased. Of course, those deceased church members were not able to attend worship services.

2. Members who move out of the community.

I know some churches have this strange category of members called "nonresident members." There really should be only a few types of members who are granted such status. Those in the military and those in college are two good examples.

3. Members who are disabled and unable to attend.

Of course, these are not members we take off the membership roll. But they have some type of physical condition that precludes them from attending.

4. Members who are homebound or in care facilities.

Like those who are disabled, this category of members is not lost to membership but to attendance.

For clarity, the "loss" of these church members is an attendance loss for all four, but typically a membership and attendance loss for the first two.

The reason I am stating the obvious is to help you church lead-

ers understand the impact of such losses. The impact is measured by a number we call the Natural Attrition Rate (NAR). It is a simple calculation. Add all of the four categories above for a full year. Now take your average worship attendance and divide it by the total of the four categories.

Members lost to natural attrition/average worship service attendance = NAR. So a church with an average worship attendance of 300 that loses 15 members to natural attrition has an NAR of 5 percent (15/300 = 5 percent).

Calculating NAR

I recently surveyed a number of church leaders and asked them to calculate their NAR. With thanks to the pastors I emailed and the Church Answers mentoring group, I was able to discern a median NAR of 6 percent (my approach was not a scientific study). Congregations with many senior adults and churches in a military community tend to have a higher NAR.

A church with an average attendance of 200 and an NAR of 6 percent will thus lose 12 members each year before church dropouts and church transfers.

If your church is experiencing declining attendance, a large portion of it may be because of natural attrition. And though you as church leaders can do nothing about natural attrition, it is information you need to know for planning, budgeting and strategy. (LifeWay)

Linden Baptist hosts city school's teachers, administrators



Photo courtesy of Linden Baptist Church

On Aug. 4, Linden Baptist Church in Bethel Baptist Association hosted its annual 'Teacher Appreciation Day' and welcomed 82 teachers and administrators from city schools and Marengo Academy for a luncheon and other entertainment. Pastor Billy Harris said the church continues to host the event to help 'promote unity, promote goodwill, to show our love, our affirmation' and to tell them 'what you do is very important.'

TOP 10

*best-selling Christian books
at press time*

FICTION

- 1. The Divided Family**
By Wanda E. Brunstetter (Barbour)
- 2. The Shack**
By William Paul Young (Windblown)
- 3. Traces of Guilt**
By Dee Henderson (Bethany)
- 4. The Courtship Basket**
By Amy Clipston (Zondervan)
- 5. Redeeming Love**
By Francine Rivers (Multnomah)
- 6. The Wonder of Your Love**
By Beth Wiseman (Thomas Nelson)
- 7. Seek Me With All Your Heart**
By Beth Wiseman (Thomas Nelson)
- 8. The Missing Will**
By Wanda E. Brunstetter (Barbour)
- 9. Rosemary Cottage**
By Colleen Coble (Thomas Nelson)
- 10. Brush of Wings**
By Karen Kingsbury (Howard)

NONFICTION

- 1. The 5 Love Languages**
By Gary Chapman (Moody)
- 2. Jesus Calling (Hardback)**
By Sarah Young (Thomas Nelson)
- 3. Be Still and Know: 365 Daily Devotions**
By Broadstreet Publishing Group (Broadstreet)
- 4. Fervent**
By Priscilla Shirer (B&H)
- 5. The Total Money Makeover**
By Dave Ramsey (Thomas Nelson)
- 6. Boundaries**
By Henry Cloud and John Townsend (Zondervan)
- 7. Worry-Free Living: Trading Anxiety for Peace**
By Joyce Meyer (Faithwords)
- 8. The Battle Plan for Prayer**
By Stephen Kendrick and Alex Kendrick (B&H)
- 9. Jesus Calling (Deluxe Edition)**
By Sarah Young (Thomas Nelson)
- 10. The Daniel Prayer**
By Anne Graham Lotz (Zondervan)

Source: Christian Book Expo

'Rise up'

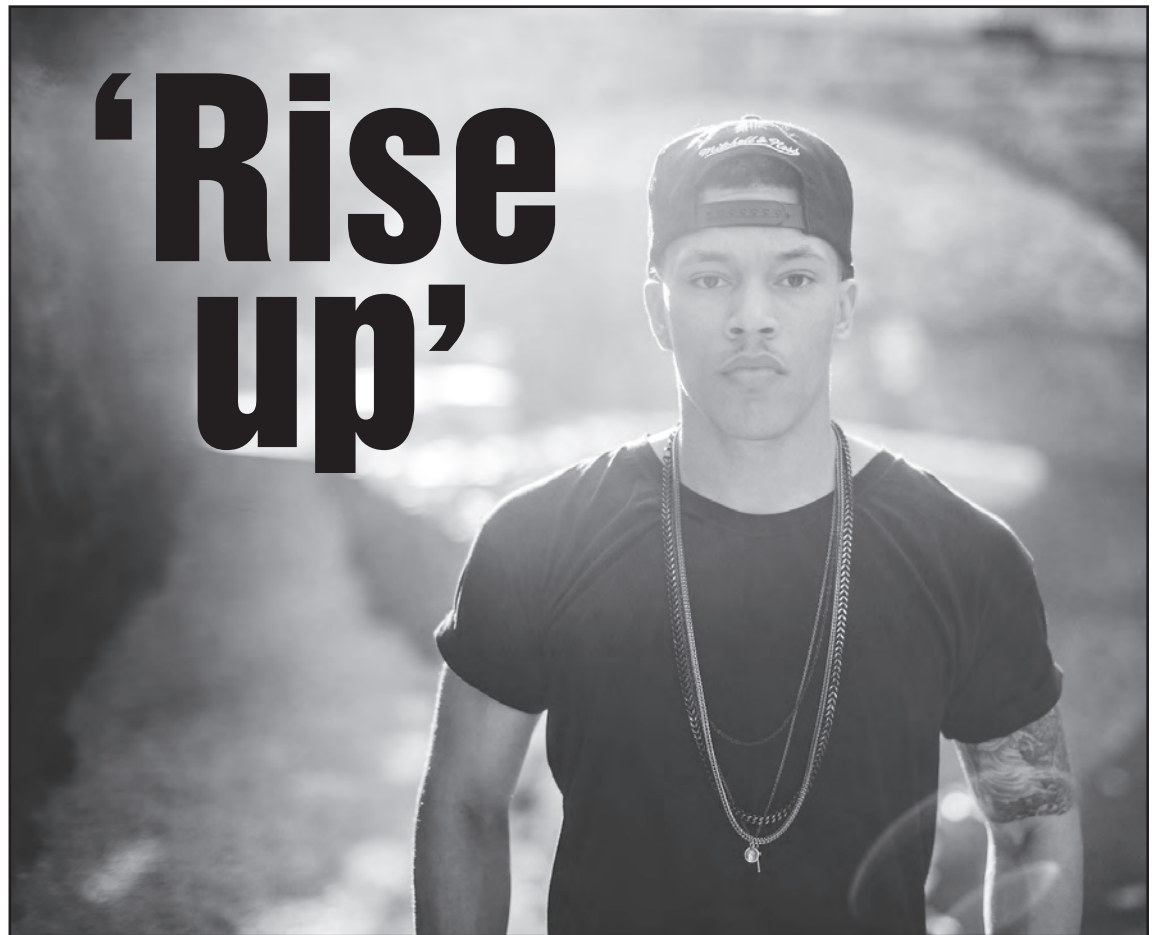


Photo courtesy of Reach Records

Trip Lee

Christian rap artist challenges students to 'take action'

By Leann Callaway
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Through his music and message, Christian rap artist Trip Lee wants to encourage, equip and engage students with the truth of the gospel.

Named by *Christianity Today* as "1 of 33 millennials shaping evangelicalism," Lee realizes the importance of reaching teenagers for Christ because of the transformation that took place in his own life during those pivotal years.

"I remember being unsure of what being a Christian was about, because everyone I knew said they were a Christian," Lee said. "I knew people who loved Jesus and said they were Christians, and I knew people who really didn't care about Jesus and said they were Christians."

"It was confusing for me, so I assumed that I was a Christian from a young age because I repeated a prayer that I recited from a children's pastor. But in reality, I might as well have been reciting a newspaper. They were empty words to me, because I didn't understand the meaning behind them."

"But when I had the gospel explained to me as a teenager and I understood the implications on my life, I had an incredible desire to know God and point other people to His Word. I had already started rapping and after my life began to change I wanted to use my music to communicate truth and point people to Jesus. I started to rap about stuff that matters. I signed my record deal when I was a senior in high school and my first record came out right after I graduated."

Sources of inspiration

Despite battling chronic fatigue syndrome, Lee keeps a busy touring schedule and also serves as a teaching pastor at Cornerstone Church, Atlanta.

"My songs come from all different places," Lee said. "Life experiences inspire these songs — the ups and downs of life, along with the hope that I have in Jesus in the midst of circumstances and challenges. Battling chronic fatigue syndrome has

really made life difficult the past few years. I try to be open about the brokenness and difficulties, but I also share about being really hopeful because of the sweet victory I have in Jesus and knowing that this isn't how it will always be. I want to use my experiences to encourage others."

By sharing his personal struggles with audiences, Lee wants to offer hope and encouragement while leading others to Christ.

"I think that music is such a gift from God," Lee said. "I want to combine these songs with a message that challenges people and makes them think about their life and relationship with Christ. God made us and put us in the big story that He is telling. During concerts, I hope to encourage people of all ages to rise up and live out their story for God."

'Next chapter'

"Years ago I met a guy at a concert who had been an atheist and was angry at God. He heard the song 'Looking for Love' which is about true love being found in God, and he said the song changed his life because he realized that God is love. After that he looked at the Scripture reference that went along with the song, which is 1 Corinthians 13, and accepted Christ."

In an effort to encourage others and share his story, Lee has written two books: "The Good Life" and "Rise: Get Up and Live in God's Great Story."

"The only thing that satisfies is a relationship with Jesus, and that's such an important lesson to learn early in life," Lee said. "Our culture tells us young people they have plenty of time ... so a lot of teenagers think they will just wait until they are older to do something great for Him. [But] God has called young people to rise up and take action. No matter what age they are, they can do great things for Him."

Lee joined other speakers and panelists such as Russell Moore, Andy Stanley and Gabe Lyons for the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission's National Conference in Nashville that began Aug. 25. For more information, visit www.erlc.com.



Jeff Fisher

Screen grab from 'I Am Second' video

'I know I have a Father'

NFL Coach Fisher found 'something' he was missing

St. Louis Rams head coach Jeff Fisher had it all — a Super Bowl ring as a player with the Chicago Bears, the most career wins of any Tennessee Titans coach ever and an established career in the game that he loved. But he was missing something, he said during an "I Am Second" video interview. That "something" was the Lord.

He'd grown up in church and had a bad taste in his mouth, so to speak, about religion.

No guilt

He didn't have a lot of free time as a National Football League coach and that made it easy to not feel guilty about not attending church.

"One of the more difficult things is the time," Fisher said of his career. "Either you are going 100 miles an hour or you are sleeping. There is nothing in between."

It wasn't until 2010 that he realized he needed Christ in his life, Fisher said in the video.

It was through the assistance of a friend that Fisher found the answers he'd been trying to find on his own. While driving on Fisher's farm, he and his friend pulled over on a bridge and began talking about life and faith.

"I just kind of pulled over, pulled over on the bridge and ... (my friend) said, 'Do you really hon-

estly believe that Jesus Christ is the Lord and your Savior?' And I went, 'Yeah.' But then he was like, 'Do you really believe it?' I said, 'Yeah.' And he goes, 'What does that mean?' And I couldn't answer."

From there the friend continued to talk with Fisher about Christ and that day he said he "accepted the Lord in my heart for my lifetime, there on that bridge."

Fisher said prior to that day, "There was something missing. But in my world there is never time to figure out what it is, in fact, missing. I was losing an opportunity to be (a good dad) and that was difficult for me. The answers were not there. They just were not there."

Less stress

But after accepting Christ, Fisher said his stress lessened and he began to rely on his relationship with the Lord.

"It's not a weird thing. It's not a born-again thing, it was a peaceful, really, really cool movement where I just felt that I was no longer the dad anymore," Fisher said. "I actually had become a son, and it makes things much easier from a day-to-day perspective. I could handle those responsibilities because I know that I have a Father that is looking after me, that has got my best interest in His heart." (TAB)

"I actually had become a son, and it makes things much easier from a day-to-day perspective. I could handle those responsibilities because I know that I have a Father that is looking after me, that has got my best interest in His heart."

Jeff Fisher
head coach, St. Louis Rams



Russia 'slipping back to what it was before'

MOSCOW — A Russian "anti-extremism" law that went into effect in late July may have a bigger impact on Christians in the country than extremists.

The law was reportedly created to combat the Islamic State, The Christian Post reported, but many religious liberty advocates believe it instead targets Christian denominations unaffiliated with the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Faith McDonnell, director of religious liberty programs at the Institute on Religion and Democracy in Washington said, "The law doesn't do that much to defend from terrorism and only prevents Christians and others who are not Orthodox from preaching and proselytizing."

Under the new law, missionaries from other countries will not be able to speak at churches without a work permit from Russian authorities, religious activities even in homes are not allowed and a discussion about God with nonbelievers is considered a missionary activity and punishable by law, according to The Christian Post. "Every citizen is required to report religious activity to the authorities or face punishment him or herself," the law states.

The law also grants state security agencies access to private communications, authority to monitor Christian proselytizing online and also forces telecom companies to store phone conversations, texts and videos for six months and forward that data to the government.

McDonnell said, "Russia is slipping back to what it was before." (TAB)

Lutherans, Catholics 'on way to unity'

NEW ORLEANS, La. — Nearly 500 years after Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the Castle Church door, the largest Lutheran denomination in the United States has approved a declaration recognizing "there are no longer church-dividing issues" on many points with the Roman Catholic Church.

The "Declaration on the Way" was approved 931-9 by the 2016 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Church-wide Assembly held in New Orleans.

ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton called the declaration "historic" in a statement released by the denomination following the Aug. 10 vote.

"Though we have not yet arrived, we have claimed that we are, in fact, on the way to unity. ... This 'Declaration on the Way' helps us to realize more fully our unity in Christ with our Catholic partners but it also serves to embolden our commitment to unity with all Christians," Eaton said.

The declaration comes as the Lutheran and Catholic churches prepare to kick off a year of celebrations to mark the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation.

Most notably, the "Declaration on the Way" includes 32 "Statements of Agreement" where Lutherans and Catholics no longer have church-dividing differences on issues of church, ministry and the Eucharist. It also lists remaining differences between the two churches and next steps on addressing them. (RNS)

Lutheran Church in Norway loses 15,000 members

OSLO, Norway — More than 15,000 members left the Lutheran Church in Norway in mid-August after the Church created an online portal allowing people to verify their membership status, including signing up and dropping membership.

Lutheran Church officials attributed the exodus of members to those who had already decided to leave the Church long ago, according to The Christian Post. Church attendance in Norway has been on the decline for 10 years, falling by almost 1 million during that time. The Church currently has 3.8 million members.

Church council leader Kristin Gunleiksrud Raaum said of the loss of members, "We will continue to have a broad and open national church. But no one should be a member of a religious community against their will, and therefore I am glad that this self-solution is in place." (TAB)