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Hustle and bustle of Christmas

As Sandy reviews her Christmas to-do list, she feels the stress building. Christmas is rapidly approaching and she still has many gifts to buy. Sandy also has big plans for baking and decorating, but she has yet to choose the perfect recipes or shop for new ribbon and ornaments. Then there's the school choir concert, the church Christmas play, four parties and a promise to spend one evening visiting a holiday lights display.

As she pulls out of her driveway to head to the shopping center, she waves at her neighbor, Jan, who recently lost her husband, Ray. Sandy recalls how much Ray loved Christmas. Sandy wonders if Jan has someone to help her decorate, which leads to thoughts of where Jan will spend Christmas.

If only Sandy didn't have so much to do, maybe she could invite Jan over for coffee and a visit. But she has to stay focused. Everyone is counting on her to make this the best Christmas ever.



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Faith and Family

Learning to live simply

Minimizing demands, expectations aides abundant living

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

In her books and speaking engagements, author Brenda Poinsett regularly encourages people to choose simple hospitality over fancy dinner parties and elaborate decorating. But even she was a little surprised by an encounter she had several years ago at a conference with two women who were having a contest to see which one could have the

most decorated trees in her home.

"They wanted to know why they were missing Christ in their Christmas," Poinsett recalled.

The competing desires to do Christmas "big" and to keep Jesus at the center of the holiday are common in American households, Poinsett believes.

"We want to rush in and cover all the bases, make every holiday more spectacular than last year. Holiness gets lost in that. We end up with an empty feeling when it's all over instead of being spiritually enriched," said Poinsett, who shares her own struggle and the lessons she learned about simplifying the holidays in her book "Can Martha Have a Mary Christmas? Untangling Expectations and Truly Experiencing Jesus."

The desire to do more doesn't just hit during the holidays, however. Year round, we see social media posts showing off a friend's latest Pinterest project. Monthly issues of glossy magazines feature well-appointed rooms and platters of goodies always at the ready.

God's blessings

As a result, "abundance" of material possessions and creative talent seems to be a gift given to everyone but us. Our focus begins to turn inward, to what we don't have rather than celebrating the blessings God has given us.

One way to avoid those negative feelings is to open your heart and open your door, Poinsett says. That means keeping life simple enough so that you can invite people to

your home with welcome instead of worry.

"For Christians, home is a mission base to invite friends and strangers in to share stories and share the gospel," Poinsett said. "People want to connect and they love coming to your home."

In contemporary life, however, many obstacles stand in the way of Christian hospitality. Much of our time is committed to work, and the rest of our time often is consumed with community and church activities. These activities drain our resources and energy, leaving us exhausted and stressed, says Anne Lawton, a licensed professional counselor with Pathways Professional Counseling, a ministry of the Alabama Baptist Children's (See 'Setting,' page 6)

COMMENT

Of Promises Delayed

Can anyone imagine the feelings of Abraham after encountering God? After hundreds of years of apparent silence God dramatically spoke to Abraham calling him from his dwellings in Haran to a place God said He would show him (Gen. 12:1–3).

Hope and anticipation must have been central among the array of emotions Abraham felt. God had promised to turn this immigrant family into a great nation. More than that, God said He would bless all the people on earth through Abraham. How could that fail to put spring in Abraham's steps? He had God's promise that his family would be special — living with God's blessings and God's protection.

Probably Abraham could hardly wait to see how God was going to keep His word. But the twists and turns of Abraham's story over the next several decades provide little confirmation that Abraham's descendants will ever be a great nation.

In Genesis 22, the writer recounts God stopping Abraham's hand in mid-strike as the patriarch attempted to offer his son, Isaac, as a human sacrifice. Again God spoke and promised that because Abraham withheld nothing from God, Abraham's descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky.

God's promise

And God said a second time that through Abraham's offspring, all the nations of the earth will be blessed.

Again hope and anticipation. But there is little in the story of Abraham's son or his grandson, Jacob, indicating fulfillment of God's promise.

David was king of Israel. His journey to leadership had been perilous but the youngest son of Jesse had ascended to the throne just as God promised him as a young lad tending sheep. In 2 Samuel 7:12–14, God made another promise to David. Speaking through the prophet Nathan, God promised, "I will raise up your offspring to succeed you ... and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father and he will be My son."



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

Psalm 89:3–4 echoes that promise, "You said, 'I have made a covenant with My chosen one, I have sworn to David My servant I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations.'"

The politically astute of that day may have thought King David was the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham. The immigrant Hebrew people had become a great nation. The Jewish empire had been expanded. Enemies had been defeated and Israel was first among the nations of that day.

But God's promise led a different direction. It was more specific. The one to be a blessing to all people would be Abraham's seed and the Anointed One, the hoped for Messiah, would be David's heir.

David must have looked expectantly at Solomon. Solomon built the first temple in Jerusalem. He governed wisely for a time and leaders of other nations paid him homage.

Unfortunately, Solomon also began the nation's journey away from God. Israel was torn apart by political rivalry. Israel and Judah both drifted away from God and both walked into oblivion. Israel was overrun by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. and Judah was led into captivity by the Babylonians in 597 B.C.

Gone was the greatness of the Jews under David and Solomon. Now Israel was a puppet nation which wore the successive yokes of the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks and the Romans. The Jews became a despised people and the royal house of David was buried in obscurity.

The fertile soil of Israel had become a dry, arid land and the tree of Jesse was now a rotting stump.

Ironically, those were exactly the conditions the prophet Isaiah described for God to keep His promises to Abraham and David. In Isaiah 53 the

writer declared the one who "took our infirmities and carries our sorrows" (v. 4) would spring up "like a tender shoot ... out of dry ground" (v. 2).

In Isaiah 11:1 the writer shared, "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse." The writer adds, "The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the spirit of counsel and of power, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord" (v. 2).

This "shoot" from the dry ground of Israel and the stump of Jesse would be Abraham's blessing to all people and David's heir to rule forever and forever.

The writer of the Gospel of Matthew argues the "shoot" from dry ground and from the stump of Jesse is Jesus whom the writer labels the "Christ," the Greek equivalent of "Anointed One" or "Messiah." Despite circumstances most would label improbable, God acted to fulfill His promises made to Abraham and David.

In the opening verses of this Gospel, the writer symbolically traces the generations of Jesus to establish beyond doubt that Jesus is both Abraham's seed and David's heir. Only if both are true could Jesus be the Long Expected One.

Matthew makes no attempt to list every generation. In fact, some are omitted. Rather, Matthew writes to show the line of descent. He uses the number 14 in each section of the generations to convey special meaning. In Jewish numerology the

number 7 represented spiritual perfection. Since 14 was twice 7, the writer was likely implying that Jesus possessed a double measure of this virtue which placed Him beyond mere mortality.

Fulfillment in Jesus

His groupings of the generations begins with the time of God's promises followed by the epoch of man's failure. The final group moves from failure to fulfillment in Jesus. As Abraham's seed, Jesus, "is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). As David's heir He "has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand — with angels, authorities and powers in submission to Him" (1 Pet. 3:22).

Through earthly eyes neither Abraham nor David ever witnessed the fulfillment of God's promise to them regarding blessing and heir. But delays in keeping promises does not weaken what God has said. God is always faithful to His promise and will make good on every word He speaks.

He did for Abraham and David and He does for you and me.✠

***"Delays in keeping
promises does not
weaken what God has
said. God is always
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and will make good on
every word He speaks."***

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TAB

THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

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

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A good surprise

Elmore Association sees continued growth in Hispanic ministry

By Grace Thornton

Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When Jim Jackson thinks of the course Hispanic ministry has taken in Elmore Baptist Association in the last couple of decades, it makes him smile.

"Initially it wasn't part of our strategy," said Jackson, director of missions for Elmore Association.

And then everything changed when a few members of Riverside Heights Baptist Church, Tallassee, discovered some Hispanic families were living in their neighborhood.

'Quite a boost'

"They took them food and invited them to church," Jackson said. "Then they found a lady who could teach Sunday School in Spanish. Then they found a pastor."

And, Jackson said, the whole thing came as kind of a surprise to him — a good surprise.

"That first Hispanic pastor was Tom Snyder, a former missionary to Honduras, and he came into the associational office one day and asked me if I had any Spanish materials," Jackson said.

He didn't.

But about two hours later, he got a shipment of materials from LifeWay Christian Resources — all in Spanish.

"Somebody must've made a mistake — a good mistake," he said with a laugh. "It was quite a boost, affirmation to me that we were doing the right thing."

And it's a thing that's still going strong, according to Carlos Lemus, director of Hispanic ministries for Elmore Association.

They recently ordained two new pastors, Yoni Martinez and Sergio Guerra, in a recent service in the place where it all started — Riverside Heights Baptist.

"God has really blessed," Lemus said.

The two new pastors — both from Gua-



Photo courtesy of Elmore Baptist Association

temala — were already actively involved in ministry in the area before their ordination and had been trained through the Spanish-language Bible Institute held at Indian Springs Baptist Church, Birmingham, on Saturdays.

But much like the development of Elmore's Hispanic ministry, the men's journey was a bit of a surprise.

Martinez, for instance, was on a path to being a Catholic priest in Guatemala when "one day he decided to turn his eyes

north and literally walk north to find out what the purpose for his life was," Lemus said. "He got to the United States, and he found Christ here."

Lemus disciplined him and he grew into a leadership role in the Hispanic church at Riverside Heights.

Guerra also grew into the leadership of that church under Snyder, Elmore Association's first Hispanic pastor, and took over the church after Snyder retired.

And as these pastors are leading churches and even more Hispanic men are being trained at the Bible Institute, ministry in the area continues to grow, Lemus said.

Potential for more

In addition to the church at Riverside Heights, a Hispanic congregation meets at Thelma Baptist Church, Wetumpka.

But Elmore Association has the potential to have "at least three missional churches here" for Spanish speakers, Lemus said. Most in the area are from Guatemala, but some also are from other language groups, such as Mayan.

"There is a large population of Hispanics there in Tallassee and Thelma (Baptist) is doing an excellent job there," Lemus said, noting that the association is always looking for ways to expand the ministry. "Praise God we are multiplying. We're not closing churches, we are opening churches." ¶

**"Praise God we are
multiplying. We're not
closing churches, we
are opening churches."**

**Carlos Lemus
director of Hispanic ministries
Elmore Baptist Association**

Ministry Tips



USING SOCIAL MEDIA WISELY

By Pastor Greg Hyche

Ladonia Baptist Church, Phenix City

As a pastor, make every effort to be sincerely humble when posting successful ministry events on social media. Social media platforms are excellent

tools for outreach and announcements. However, social media also can lead us to coveting other ministries and not being content with where the Lord has placed us.

Posting successful ministry events should focus on the person and work of

the Lord, not for others to see how excellent in ministry we have become. We must remember to be humble and take to heart the words found in James 4:10: "Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will exalt you." ¶

Living simply to live abundantly



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Overcrowded, fast-paced lives prevent being present in moment

By Anne Lawton, MA, LPC
Pathways Professional Counseling

What does it mean to practice simplicity in our lives? In our current culture, is it even possible? With 24/7 media access, live streaming and the ability to stay connected, how do we practice simplicity in order to live abundantly?

I recently had the privilege of traveling to Mexico to assist local pastors with health fairs and in the construction of a church building. While there, we were able to worship with believers in Spanish. I do not speak Spanish, yet I have rarely experienced such rich worship in the Spirit as we gathered in the simplest church building I have ever visited. There was no electricity or instruments; there were dirt floors and cinder block walls. Talk about simplicity. In these simple surroundings, the goodness of the Lord was present. When our focus is Christ, not materialism or busyness, our hearts can find contentment.

The people of the church in Cabo, Mexico, have few possessions, yet great, great joy. Their life is full of abundance in Christ.

I see in them simplicity and abundance all at the same time. In the United States, we have many earthly comforts that sometimes distract us from remembering the Lord is simply enough.

In Philippians 4:11–13, Paul reminds us of the importance of contentment: “I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.”

To live simply requires a heart that is grateful rather than discontented. It goes against our flesh to be grateful and content with what we already have in our lives, both physically and relationally. Simplicity is a counter-cultural discipline that has to be practiced and learned. However, when we

practice the discipline of simplicity, we often free our time, resources and energy to focus on Kingdom priorities, which include being available to love others as Christ loves us.

Practicing simplicity

How might we practice the discipline of simplicity? Noted author Ann Voskamp says, “Simplicity is ultimately a matter of focus.” As we cultivate our relationship with the Lord through time spent in His Word and talking to Him through prayer, our focus becomes clear. We desire to prioritize Christ in our thoughts, conversations and relationships.

We might be able to encourage friends as we fellowship and spend time with one another. We also might prioritize spending time with nonbelievers in our everyday life in an effort to point them to the love of Christ. Regardless, it is about our time being intentional and our focus being on bringing glory to Christ in all we do.

As believers we know His presence is far more precious than anything we can purchase; yet we are inundated with messages of the dominant culture that run contrary to this biblical truth. It is evident by turning on the television and watching commercials that materialism is an idol in our society. The drive for bigger and better things is all around us.

While there is certainly a time and place for buying what is needed and sometimes what is wanted, there also is importance in asking God for His wisdom and His patience when making purchases.

Being mindful and purposeful with our spending also is an important discipline to practice. As a believer plans for wise spending and adheres to a budget, there may be money remaining that can be used to bless others.

In being a good steward of our financial resources, we have the opportunity to help meet others’ needs around us, further bringing glory to God.

Importance of rest

In our fast-paced, technology-driven culture that does not value rest, it is challenging to live a simple life. But even our heavenly Father rested from creation and included Sabbath in the Ten Commandments.

What does it mean to spend this 1 day out of 7 in worship and in rest? Perhaps we begin by setting aside running errands when possible and putting our cellphones down to fellowship with others and with the Lord. Our children may not remember all of the talks or lectures, but they will remember the way we spend our time and notice when we make the Lord a priority in our days and weeks.

So what does it mean to live simply to live abundantly? As a therapist, I know the value of having margin in your life in order to be fully present. For us to have that margin, we must examine and remove these things, idols and schedules that are overcrowding our lives.

Pray and ask the Lord to help you find a place of contentment and rest in Him so that you can practice simplicity in your own life. Let us not forget the message from the Church in Mexico who do not have much in way of “things,” but who live abundant lives, full of the richness of Christ.✠



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Ways to cultivate simple living in your home

1. Limit children’s exposure to television, Internet and radio commercials that encourage materialism.

2. Encourage children to delay a new toy until a birthday or Christmas.

3. Plan a local or international missions project in which the entire family can participate.

4. Deliver food baskets to local families or volunteer to help in a soup kitchen.

5. Demonstrate that you value people and experiences over material possessions. Your children may not remember the words you say, but they will notice how you spend your time and what you make a priority.

6. Plan a lemonade or hot chocolate stand to raise

money for a local ministry or for orphans and widows. Involve children in all aspects of the fundraising, including giving the money.

7. Ask for donations for children in foster care rather than receiving birthday gifts.

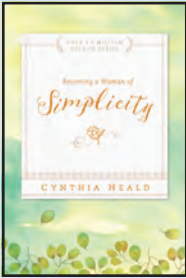
8. Collect gently used items to donate to a local charity.

9. Schedule evening meals around the table together and make them a priority.

10. Find great joy in teaching your children skills that might enable them to lead a simple life in the future. Some examples include gardening, cooking, sewing, playing musical instruments, woodworking and projects around the house.

(Compiled by Carrie Brown McWhorter)

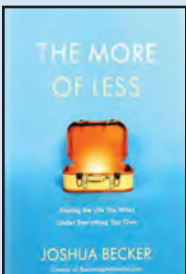
Helpful resources



“Becoming a Woman of Simplicity”
by Cynthia Heald

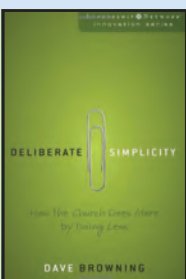
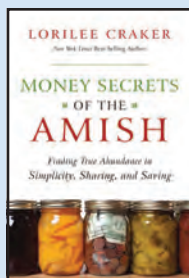


“Real Simplicity”
by Randy and Rozanne Frazee



“The More of Less: Finding the Life You Want Under Everything You Own”
by Joshua Becker

“Money Secrets of the Amish: Finding True Abundance in Simplicity, Sharing and Saving”
by Lorilee Craker



“Deliberate Simplicity: How the Church Does More by Doing Less”
by Dave Browning

Disciplines of simplicity

Achieving ‘Christlikeness’ difficult with unnecessary weights

By Jan Johnson

Excerpt from “Abundant Simplicity: Discovering the Unhurried Rhythms of Grace”

People marvel that the apostle Paul could be content while chained in a prison cell for years. This former Pharisee probably lived in filth and darkness, ridicule and loneliness. At best his movements were restricted under house arrest by the Romans.

But it’s just as bewildering that Paul was content in times of plenty. When he stayed with rich folks such as Philemon or Lydia, he didn’t envy them or think, “Jesus was poor. Don’t they know that?” When he moved on from their homes to less opulent situations he didn’t think, “I sure do miss all that great food and the beautiful home.” He was truly content with whatever he had.

Contrary to what we usually think, having plenty does not make us content. Instead, a taste of plenty makes us want a little more than what we’ve got. When offered an increase in salary, who among us would say, “No thanks. I’m content with what I have. I don’t need a thing.”

Self-indulgence grows when we give in to excess, often by spending money or eating certain foods. We repeatedly give in until that activity becomes a settled behavior and we’re unable to resist gratifying even the smallest whim. Giving in to small, seemingly benign, culturally acceptable temptations leads to enslavement. People of faith are not exempt; those in whom the Word of God has been sown may find that the “care of this word ... and deceitfulness of riches” choke out the life of God in them (Matt. 13:22).

For example, I’ve always wondered how King David could commit adultery with Bathsheba and murder her husband when he lived such a faithful life overall; he was a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam. 13:14). But while reading his whole story again recently, I saw that this evil didn’t come out of nowhere. For David’s entire adult life he practiced polygamy in violation of God’s law, marrying six wives and keeping numerous concubines (2 Sam. 5:13; 1 Chron. 3:1). Every time he took a wife or concubine, he gave into the enslavement of that



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inner voice: “I must have her.” Committing adultery (and having to cover it up) was the next logical step.

Self-indulgence is self-destructive. It destroys integrity one good intention at a time and eats away at the capacity to think about loving God and others. Self-indulgence invites us to be not only in the world as Jesus was, but also of the world with characters and habits that look just like everybody else’s (John 1:10; 9:5; 17:11; 1 John 2:15–16).

Disciplines of simplicity invite us to “lay aside every weight” that hinders us (Heb. 12:1). Sometimes those weights aren’t bad things. This was evident

in Paul’s life. Before he burst forth that intentional, determined declaration, “I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection” (Phil. 3:10), he first explained he had laid aside the helpful weights of his rich heritage — the fact that he was circumcised on the eighth day, a Hebrew of Hebrews and so on (Phil. 3:4–6). Formerly these blessings were a “profit” but he came to consider them a “loss.” Once he had cast them aside, he

was ready for the treasure of knowing God.

If we choose to journey with God carrying unnecessary weights, God will let us do it. God does not force us to lay unnecessary burdens down. But transformation into Christlikeness is much more difficult when we’re encumbered by multiplicity of words, cluttered schedules, decathlon vacations or the cellphone surgically attached to our ear.

Practice restraints

Disciplines of simplicity are powerful because they move us away from self-indulgence just for today: don’t buy this one thing; don’t sign up for one more activity; don’t mention this last accomplishment to anyone. Even when we practice these restraints only temporarily, they still train us not to grab what we want now.

In the midst of our discomfort during these little experiments, something beautiful happens within us: the enormous river barge of our life that’s flowing toward self-indulgence is turned around and begins to move upstream toward self-giving Christlikeness.

EDITOR’S NOTE — Taken from “Abundant Simplicity: Discovering the Unhurried Rhythms of Grace” by Jan Johnson. Copyright 2011 by Jan Johnson. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press, P.O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515, USA. www.ivpress.com.

“Self-indulgence is self-destructive. It destroys integrity one good intention at a time and eats away at the capacity to think about loving God and others.”

7 tips for simplifying Christmas

Focus on making family, faith your priority this holiday season

By Brenda Poinsett
Excerpt from www.brendapoinsett.com

1. Decide what's most important.

Make a list of what your family does to celebrate Christmas. Ask family members which preparations and events are meaningful to them. Arrange list items in order of importance and ask them to consider eliminating those at the bottom. As the family members discuss changes that could be made, you may be amazed that some of the things you were knocking yourself out for really aren't important to the rest of the family.

2. Share the load.

Ask family members to help you prepare for Christmas. Divvy up the tasks. Using the talent of family members can make them feel special. One woman had her 10-year-old daughter design their family Christmas card. The girl drew the original and then they photocopied the card. Then she and her brother addressed and stamped all the cards. When my sons were little, I gave them jobs to do and paid them in multiples of dimes (to make it easy to divide). I had them give half of what they earned to Jesus (an offering for international missions). We put the collected dimes in paper stockings and placed the stockings in the church offering plate.

3. Cut back on décor.

Is it really necessary to have several Christmas trees in your house? Must you decorate every room in the house, including changing the kitchen clock to one with



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Santa on it? Is your goal to win decorating awards or to have a meaningful Christmas? If it is the latter you want, then you need just enough decorations to indicate that something special is happening and to provide a warm ambiance. One tree and lots of candles will provide that.

4. Prune your gift list.

Even if you can afford to buy gifts for numerous people, it still requires time and effort to buy, to wrap them and to sometimes return them. Simplify your Christmas list so you will have fewer to buy and to wrap. You'll enjoy the process more and find

you can really focus on making the recipient happy. If you regularly exchange gifts with certain individuals, don't wait until December to tell them you would rather not exchange gifts. Bring this up earlier in the year, say in July, and discuss it before gifts have been bought.

5. Save time by being practical.

I wanted to spend time with my young adult sons and I also wanted to buy them gifts they would like. There wasn't time to do both so I chose time over gift-pleasing efforts. I arranged a "date" with one son at a time and took him shopping. I told him how

much I had to spend for his gifts and let him decide how we would spend it. We shopped together, did a lot of conversing while we looked and he made the final selections. I took the gifts home and wrapped them, and when each opened their gifts, he said, "What a surprise! And it's just what I wanted!"

6. Learn to say 'No thank you.'

There's no rule written anywhere that says you have to accept all the party invitations that come your way. Select a few significant activities — ones that will enhance your celebration — and decline the other activities. This is especially important if you have young children. Their Christmas will mean more if they have parents who are present in body and spirit.

7. Plan simple activities.

Many people see getting together with others as one of the things they appreciate most about holidays but they don't have to be elaborate affairs. Plan a soup party. Friends and family love the informality of a homemade soup party. You can ask your guests to bring various kinds of breads, crackers and cheeses. Soup also is a stretch in case you add extra guests at the last minute.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Brenda Poinsett is a teacher, speaker and author of several books, including "Holiday Living: Using Year-Round Holidays to Build Faith and Family" and "Unwrapping Martha's Joy: Creating a Mary Christmas in Your Heart and Home." For more tips and resources on simplifying holiday celebrations, visit www.brendapoinsett.com. ¶

Setting limits allows us to hear, see needs of those around us

(continued from page 1)
Homes & Family Ministries.

For families with children, this is an especially challenging part of life because parents have a hard time saying "no" to children's activities. Lawton encourages parents to look at the positive sides of occasionally saying "no."

"Although setting limits may be hard, doing so frees us up to say 'yes' to other things like taking meals to a neighbor, helping an elderly couple with chores, devoting more quality time together as a family or praying more intentionally for others," Lawton said. "When we do not allow our

calendar to be overscheduled, we are free to hear and see the needs around us. We have time to be fully present in the moment and fully present with people."

The result? A Kingdom mindset where the focus is on sharing Christ in word and deed, Lawton said.

Ideal model

Jesus Himself provides the ideal model of a simple life, writes Joshua Becker, author of "The More of Less: Finding the Life You Want Under Everything You Own." And in His teaching, Jesus frequently warned of the trap of

placing our hope in material possessions and physical comfort rather than our spiritual life. As demonstrated in Jesus' encounter with the rich young official, materialism is a trap that has the power "to distract us from what could bring us real happiness and meaning" in life, Becker writes.

Becker attributes the American tendency toward accumulation of things to three universal motivations: the desires for security, acceptance and contentment. These desires are not bad, he says, but it is wrong to believe that material things will satisfy those needs.

"We need to recognize what's

inside us that's driving our purchasing decisions, because only then can we rob materialism of its power," he writes.

Nurturing relationships

For example instead of seeking security in "lots of stuff," Becker suggests nurturing loving relationships with other people. Instead of seeking acceptance by having the "same stuff" as everyone else, he suggests reconsidering one's personal definition of success. And instead of seeking contentment by "adding to your stuff," Becker suggests "appreciating what you have and giving

away what you don't need."

Simplifying in order to live abundantly seems a contradiction, but it is at the heart of the Christian life, according to a March 2015 blog post by Ed Stetzer at ChristianityToday.com.

"Abundant life is not about what we have. It's not about what we get. It's not about what we claim," writes Stetzer, executive director of the Billy Graham Center for Evangelism at Wheaton College in Illinois. "Ultimately, abundant life is about what we receive as a gift from the Lord and to live knowing we are stewards of the blessings of God." ¶



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Angelology

The Nature of Angels

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

With the Bible as our sourcebook of truth, we look to it to give us understanding about the nature of angels. Our starting point is to note that angels are created beings. They have not always existed from eternity in the sense that God is eternal. There was a point of beginning for angels.

A poetic passage in Psalm 148 calls for the whole created universe to join in praising God. Included in that universal call to praise are “all His angels” (v. 2). After naming various components of this gigantic praise choir, the exhortation is, “Let them praise the name of the Lord, for He commanded and they were created” (v. 5).

In a similar way, Nehemiah 9:6 refers to heaven and all its hosts, which includes angels, saying, “You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens with all their host.” The intent of the Bible is clear — God created angels. However, the Bible does not say they were created in the image and likeness of God, as is the case with humans.

‘Ministering spirits’

As created beings, angels also are spiritual in nature, not possessing earthly bodies of flesh and bone. Hebrews 1:4–14, in exalting Christ above the angels, refers to angels as “ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation” (v. 14).

However, while by nature angels are nonphysical, the Bible tells of multiple occasions when God allowed an angel to take human form in order to appear to selected human beings and speak to them in human language. Something of this same idea is expressed in the admonition of Hebrews 13:2: “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.”

However, we are not to conclude that angels continued to have physical form in the sense that Christ took upon Himself both a human nature and a human body, then returned to heaven in that body’s resurrected and glorified form. Bodily form for some angels apparently

was a temporary matter for a specific purpose on earth.

Being spiritual in nature, angels have their abode primarily in heaven, where they engage in heavenly activities such as voicing praise to God and ministering at His throne. With heaven as their home base, angels are associated with “the heavenly Jerusalem” as “an innumerable company” (Heb. 12:22).

Invisible beings

As created spiritual and heavenly beings, angels also are invisible, except on those specific occasions when they appeared in human form. Such was the notable occasion when an angel “descended from heaven ... and said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen’” (Matt. 28:4–5). In his book about angels several years ago, Billy Graham captured the idea of angels as invisible spiritual beings in a book title, “Angels: God’s Secret Agents.”

Opinions may vary about whether angels are active today in invisible ministries or even on occasion taking human form to assist a human being. That being so, we can properly glean from the Bible’s witness to the reality of angels’ existence in an unseen realm. In short, what we can perceive by our physical senses is not the totality of what is real. Hebrews 11:1 makes reference to faith being “the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen.” Biblical faith embraces the reality of an unseen realm in which unseen angels operate. More about this next week. ✠

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.



Grace Church Websites offers help to ‘small’ congregations

Members of Trueworship Tabernacle used to walk their Corpus Christi, Texas, neighborhood, passing out fliers about upcoming events.

But in March, the small, multicultural church got a new website. Six months later its online postings helped boost attendance at its “Youth Car Wash and Enchilada Sale” as well as its “Hallelujah Night” on Halloween.

“It has been a really great tool as far as witnessing to the community and bringing people into the church,” Pastor Ahmad Haywood said.

In February, TicketNetwork executive Don Vaccaro started Grace Church Websites to meet a need he discovered while talking to his friend, Boise Kimber, pastor of First Calvary Baptist Church, New Haven, Connecticut.

“We had purchased a website for over \$1,000 and the persons that we purchased the website from, they disappeared,” Kimber said.

After a discussion with Vaccaro, a Southern Baptist, Kimber’s church now has a free website. It became the role model for the company the two men launched.

More than 670 participating churches and nonprofits, many of them predominantly black or Hispanic, have new sites.

‘Digital divide’

“A lot of people could not afford to buy the domain and some of the churches are rural churches,” Kimber said. “We are certainly dealing with the digital divide and trying to open the doors for more advancement for people who are in need.”

The websites have similar templates — including an “about us” page, a listing of service times and a contact page. Some churches make regular changes to the sites, adding calendar dates for choir rehearsals and Bible study conference calls. Each site also includes links to Grace Church Websites and TicketNetwork, which hosts an online exchange for buyers and sellers of tickets to sports and entertainment events.

But other churches haven’t used their sites as much and still have avatars displaying a

gray silhouette rather than the actual photos of leaders of the church.

Websites in general are not always a one-stop way of adding people to a church’s pews. Researcher Scott Thumma of the Hartford Institute for Religion Research said there is “still neither overly robust nor effective use by a majority of congregations” of the Internet and social media.

“Smaller churches, including minority ones, are less likely to use and/or have technology,” he said. “So a company that targets smaller churches and especially minority ones is really doing a great service for those that need it the most.”

A 2015 Faith Communities Today survey, which is to be released early 2017, indicates that about 80 percent of some 4,400 congregations have websites, a 10 percentage-point increase from 2010. Thirty-one percent offer online giving, which raises annual per capita giving in those congregations by \$114 per person.

Vaccaro, whose TicketNetwork offices are based in South Windsor, Connecticut, estimates that Grace Church

Websites — which originally had a goal of 300 nonprofit websites — will have 1,000 participants by the end of March 2017.

He said his company has a 12 percent black workforce and he wanted to expand outreach to the urban community.

“Now the congregations all own those websites and what they seem to do is involve other folks in the church with updating them, understanding digital arts better, understanding some of the process flows of how video is delivered online,” he said.

Vaccaro said more than 10,000 unique visitors a day connect with the sites overall, and he estimates that it cost his company about half a million dollars to create the system and provide hosting and routine maintenance. He has committed to host the websites for at least five years.

“I wanted to bring churches back a little bit in prominence because they really do deserve that in our society,” he said, noting that he feels they’ve become an “underdog” even though they often are the ones needy people approach in tough times. (RNS)

**About 80 percent
of some 4,400
surveyed churches
have websites.**

**Faith Communities
Today survey**

US Department of State urges travelers to ‘exercise vigilance’ during holidays

Americans should be careful when traveling to Europe over the holidays this year, as the U.S. Department of State warns that radical groups may be planning attacks.

“Credible information indicates the Islamic State (IS), al-Qaeda, and their affiliates continue to plan terrorist attacks in Europe, with a focus on the upcoming holiday season and associated events,” warned the Department’s alert released to the public Nov. 21.

In the past year, IS has committed acts of terrorism in Belgium, France, Germany

and Turkey and has vowed to continue such attacks in the West, according to The Christian Post.

The warning urged travelers to “exercise vigilance when attending large holiday events, visiting tourist sites, using public transportation and frequenting places of worship, restaurants and hotels.”

It also noted that officials in Europe continue to fight against terrorism, conducting raids and stopping terror plots, and that U.S. leaders continue to work alongside them in the international fight against such attacks. (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.

ALABAMA-CRENSHAW

► **Chapel Hill Church, Rutledge**, will host The Kempters in concert Dec. 10, 6 p.m. A love offering will be collected. Neal Kelley is pastor.

BARBOUR

► **First Church, Eufaula**, adult choir will present "Under a Starry Sky" on Dec. 18, 5 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. Kenneth Bush is pastor.

BESSEMER

► **The Baptist Church at McAdory, McCalla**, worship choir and orchestra will perform "This is Christmas" on Dec. 11, 11 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. The church also will present an outdoor live dramatic presentation, "Don't Be Afraid," on Dec. 16-18, 6-8 nightly. This ride-along journey will begin with the Savior's birth and travel through six scenes, ending with the resurrection. At the end of the journey a cowboy sitting by a campfire will share the difference between fear and faith. For more information call the church office at 205-477-8265. Bill McCall is pastor.

BETHEL

► **Aimwell Church, Sweet Water**, will host Shannon Knight in a Christmas concert Dec. 18, 10 a.m. Lunch will be served after the concert. Please bring your favorite covered dish. A love offering will be collected. Don White is pastor.

BLOUNT

► **Pleasant View Missionary Church, Holly Pond**, will hold a watch night service Dec. 31, 8 p.m. Point of Honor will perform special music. Refreshments will be served at 10 p.m. The church will pray the old year out and the new one in. For more information call 256-796-5986 or 256-590-4468. Randy Burtram is pastor.

COFFEE

► **County Line Church, Enterprise**, will hold "A Night in Bethlehem" on Dec. 17, 5 p.m. There will be a live nativity to reflect the night Jesus was born. A time of fellowship and Christmas caroling will follow the service. For more information call 334-347-6082. Danny Wiggins is pastor. ► **Coffee Association** collected 11,524 Christmas shoeboxes for Samaritan's Purse Operation Christmas Child with Saint Luke United Methodist Church. The boxes came from churches throughout Coffee County. John

Granger is director of missions.

COOSA RIVER

► Welcome back to TAB's church partnership plan, **Ridgeview Church, Talladega**, and Pastor Tommy Strickland. We've missed you and are glad to be coming into your members' homes each week again.

CHILTON

► **Michael Cheatham** is the new bivocational pastor of **Pilgrim Rest Church, Plantersville**.

He previously served as interim of Pilgrim Rest. He also served as pastor of Pleasant Hills Church, Clanton. He is currently enrolled at New Orleans Seminary. He and his wife, Janet, have two children and two grandchildren. ► **James Watkins** is the new pastor of **West End Church, Clanton**. He will begin serving in January 2017. He previously served as pastor of First Church, Leroy, for 25 years and was recently awarded the Troy L. Morrison Leadership/Church



CHEATHAM



WATKINS

Health Award for established work. He is an Alabama Athletic Association certified volunteer baseball coach. He holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Montevallo and a master's de-

gree from New Orleans Seminary. He and his wife, Karen, have two children.

GENEVA

► **Steve Wegmann** is the new pastor of **Maple Avenue Church, Geneva**. He previously served as interim pastor. He and his wife, Susan, have three children and one grandchild.

MARSHALL

► **Sardis Church, Boaz**, will present "Christmas, We Remember, Rejoice, Worship" with its celebration choir and Tim Parton on Dec. 10, 6 p.m. For more information call the church office at 256-593-7762. Mike Goforth is pastor.

MOBILE

► **Vaughan Gardner** is the new pastor of **Trinity Church, Wilmer**. He previously served as pastor of Pleasant Hill Church, Eclectic. He holds a bachelor's degree from Mississippi College in Clinton and a master's degree from New Orleans Seminary. He and his wife, Virginia, have four children, 13 grandchildren and one great-grandchild.



GARDNER

NORTH JEFFERSON

► **Crossroads Church, Warrior**, will present a walk-through living nativity Dec. 14-16, 6-8 nightly. There will be refreshments and entertainment in the fellowship hall. Michael Jones is pastor. ☞

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RELIGION in America

Compiled from Wire Services

Bloomington mayor renames 2 holidays

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. — An Indiana city recently renamed two holidays in an effort to be more inclusive, and its mayor is getting some flak as a result. In the decision made in Bloomington, Good Friday was renamed "Spring Holiday" and Columbus Day was renamed "Fall Holiday," according to The Christian Post.

"We are terrifically proud of our diverse workforce at the city," Mayor John Hamilton announced in a memo to city employees Nov. 21, according to the Bloomington *Herald-Times*. "That diversity makes us stronger and more representative of the public we proudly serve. These updated names for two days of well-merited time off is another way we can demonstrate our commitment to inclusivity."

But Hamilton has received some negative responses for that move, with people from across the country expressing their opinions on social media. Bloomington — a city of a little more than 84,000 — has long been regarded as a liberal city, according to the Post. (TAB)

Pa. football coach asked to stop team prayer

SCRANTON, Pa. — An atheist group's complaint recently brought an end to a Pennsylvania high school football coach's 30-year tradition of praying with his team before games.

The Wisconsin-based Freedom From Religion Foundation, an atheist legal group, filed a complaint with the school district in June, claiming to be speaking on behalf of a local resident, according to The Christian Post. The group claimed that Jack Hennes, head football coach of the Dunmore High School Bucks, effectively endorses religion "on the district's behalf" when he "organizes, leads or participates in team prayer."

Dunmore Superintendent John Marichak replied to the group's complaint in an Oct. 31 letter: "We directed Coach Hennes to be sure that he should not partake in any such behavior," he wrote, according to the *Scranton Times-Tribune*. (TAB)



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ALABAMA UPDATES

PEOPLE, CHURCHES MAKING NEWS ACROSS THE STATE

Covington Assoc. partners to provide counseling

To reach Covington County with the love of God in a practical way, Covington Baptist Association and Pathways Professional Counseling teamed up in the mid-2000s to offer counseling services at the associational office in Andalusia.

While Pathways has this same partnership with several associations, it is “one of the very few psychological and emotional help resources in Covington County,” said Otis Corbitt, Covington Association’s director of missions.

An extension of the association’s Christian Service Centers, three professional Pathways counselors (Tommy Smith, Alisha Lewis and Jen Napper) provide services on Mondays and Wednesdays during the day and on Tuesday afternoons, something an associational board member suggested so that clients don’t have to take off work or school in order to speak with a counselor.

Pathways is a ministry of the Alabama Baptist Children’s Homes & Family Ministries. Through the partnership Covington Association is able to “touch well more than 100 families a year through this ministry,” Corbitt said.

Prior to the Pathways partnership, the association has offered some sort of counseling services since the 1980s, Corbitt said, and an in-house counselor was on staff from 1998 to 2003.

The counseling service is a part of the association’s “ministry strategy pillar” and is a way to “bring the love of Christ and grace of God to people who are in need spiritually, relationally or emotionally,” Corbitt said.

“We’ve found that people are reluctant to bring up deep spiritual or emotional issues with their pastors. They want help but they really don’t want it to be with the church family. ... So this fills the need for that. ... It’s a vital part, although not seen, of our ministry. But counseling doesn’t need to be visible, it just needs to be effective.” (Neisha Roberts)

Lookout Mountain Assoc. churches ‘give like crazy’

Though they are small in membership and served by bivocational pastors, the churches that make up Lookout Mountain Baptist Association “give like crazy,” according to Lloyd Borden, the association’s director of missions.

More than half of the association’s churches gave once again during the 12th annual benefit concert for Alabama Baptist Children’s Homes & Family Ministries (ABCH) held Nov. 5 at Pleasant Valley No. 1 Baptist Church, Gaylesville. This year saw \$8,600 collected for the Alabama Baptist foster care and adoption ministry.

DeWitt Cox, music director for the association, helped organize the event featuring musical guests The Partain Family of Fort Payne.

Steve Sellers, church relations manager for ABCH, shared a short message during the event and Ronald Berry, pastor of Pleasant Valley No. 1, said “the whole event was wonderful.”

Borden noted the association also held its October food drive for ABCH and 14 of the association’s 17 churches participated and donated canned and boxed food items, which was donated to the ABCH location in Oxford in mid-November.

“Our churches are very small but ... we’re a very giving group. They do it because they have the Spirit of the Lord in them,” Borden said. (Neisha Roberts)

Decatur church suffers serious damage in fire

Smoke from the fire that consumed part of a church in Morgan Baptist Association could be seen for miles before it was put out Nov. 30.

Light of Life Church, Decatur, lost its kitchen and classrooms in the blaze, and it planned to meet for Dec. 4 services at Bellview Baptist Church, Decatur, at press time. Church members told local news sources they plan to rebuild.

The cause of the fire was under investigation at press time. (TAB)

Sharing biblical truths

Practical tips for teaching children about Christ at Christmas

By Denise George
Special to The Alabama Baptist

It’s the time of year where Christian families are overwhelmed with advertisements for the latest and greatest toys and gadgets, stuck in traffic jams between honking cars with frustrated drivers, made to wait in long department store checkout lines, bombarded with costumed department store-hired Santa Clauses shouting “Happy Holidays” and swept up into a whirlwind of senseless holiday happenings that have little or nothing to do with the Christian celebration of Christmas — the coming of Christ. How, in the midst of loud, frantic and meaningless activity, can Christian parents wisely use this season to teach their children about Christ and biblical truths? Here are some practical suggestions:

1. Teach children about the joy of giving by making or purchasing small useful gifts for sick people in hospitals, church members confined to their homes, nursing home residents, etc.

Plan special outings to visit hospitals, nursing homes and homebound church members. Do be sure to call ahead and make an appointment though.

2. As a family talk about giving and receiving fewer, less expensive Christmas gifts.

Plan together how to give the saved money to those who desperately need it.

3. As a family consider sponsoring a third-world child through an organization like Compassion International.

This enables your children to send and receive letters from the sponsored child throughout the year. Study together the child’s heritage, the country where he lives, his faith and his family and friends. Send the child a special Christmas gift (www.compassion.com).

4. Donate money and time and involve your children in hands-on work at local programs that feed hungry people in your community, church and state.

5. Explain to your children the differences in how Christians celebrate Christmas and how secular society celebrates the holidays.

Plan some new Christmas traditions for your family that teach and encourage a biblical celebration of the birth of the Savior.

6. Read together Matthew 28:18–20 and teach your children about the Great Commission.

Contribute to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions through your church. Help support local missionaries through the North American Mission Board as they evangelize, disciple and tell people about the Lord Jesus Christ.

7. Decline purposeless holiday party invitations and choose instead to spend time together as a family.

Read spiritually informative books. Take brief walks through your neighborhood, pausing to pray for the families who live in each house. Attach a world map to the wall, pinpointing countries, people and missionaries who need special prayer. Pray sentence prayers around the family table before mealtime, allowing each member to voice a brief prayer. Take turns reading Scriptures in various translations.

Using construction paper and popsicle sticks, make puppets of biblical characters included in the nativity and let your children entertain the family with Christmas story puppet plays. Sing favorite traditional Christmas carols and make up praise songs to sing to God. Invite special family members and friends to join you in some of your family devotions, including their names in your family prayer times. Watch morally/spiritually edifying Christmas movies together, complete with popcorn and hot chocolate. Write down prayers that express your family’s thanksgiving and gratitude to God for His Son, Jesus, who came into the world to reconcile us to Himself.

8. Have family members reaffirm their unconditional love for each other by writing a letter to each person.

List the person’s qualities you like and appreciate. Describe special times spent together and the good memories each brought. Write a prayer to God for the person, listing your loved one’s special needs and asking for God’s blessings on his/her life. You may download, print and personalize a free, specially designed PDF Christmas card for your children by emailing cdwg@aol.com. Put “Children’s Christmas card download” in the subject line.

Find more practical tips to prepare your family’s hearts for celebrating Christ’s birth in the Dec. 1 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*.

EDITOR’S NOTE — Denise George (www.denise-george.org) is author of 30 books including “Johnny Cornflakes: A Story About Loving the Unloved,” a heartwarming, true Christmas story for the entire family, published by Christian Focus. Denise is married to Timothy George, founding dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in Birmingham. ✝



123rf.com

Alabama Baptists assist tornado-damaged areas

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

While the storm system that blew through the Southeast in November was a welcomed provider of rain for some in extreme drought areas, it was an unwelcome guest for others who were hit by 130-mph winds and damage from at least two EF-2 tornadoes.

In the early morning hours of Nov. 30, areas across the state were hit hard by the sweeping storm system that killed three people and injured several. Alabama Power reported 2,400 power outages statewide as the system moved west to east. A tornado was spotted crossing Interstate 22 in Marion County, 16–20 structures were destroyed in Jackson County and 50–60 homes were damaged in DeKalb County, among other areas in Colbert, Cullman, Franklin, Madison, Marshall, Morgan, Pickens and Winston counties.



Photo courtesy of Todd Panter

Wears Chapel Baptist Church, Huntsville, volunteers serve a meal to county workers.

Gov. Robert Bentley issued a statewide state of emergency Nov. 30.

According to Mark Wakefield, disaster relief (DR) and chaplaincy ministries strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, Rosalie Baptist Church, Pisgah, withstood significant damage to its building. At press time members planned to meet in an undamaged part of the church for Sunday services Dec. 4.

Sand Mountain Baptist Association DR volunteers were deployed to serve the area, and assistance also came from DeKalb and Tennessee River Baptist associations. Volunteers worked on chainsaw crews and helped tarp roofs where needed.

Alabama Baptist DR volunteers from Muscle Shoals and Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist associations assisted in the Ashridge area of Winston County and volunteers from East Cullman, West Cullman



Photo courtesy of Mark Wakefield

Rosalie Baptist Church, Pisgah, was hit by what the National Weather Service reported as an EF-2 tornado Nov. 30.

and Walker Baptist associations assisted in Arley.

Morgan Baptist Association DR volunteers were deployed to assist their area and Shady Grove Baptist Church, Danville, which was damaged by the storm, and other volunteers were on standby at press time.

Wears Chapel Baptist Church, Huntsville, opened its doors to those in need, providing residents a safe place to charge cellphones and use the restroom.

According to Todd Panter, assistant to bivocational pastor Tim Payne, the church teamed up with the parent-teacher organization (PTO) of Central School in Huntsville, located next door

to the church. The PTO group cooked meals in Wears Chapel Baptist's kitchen through Dec. 3 with food provided from church members, local businesses and others.

"Some of our church members are then delivering the meals to those who cannot get to the church," Panter said. "We also are serving meals in our fellowship hall to county workers and others. It's a joint effort."

Wears Chapel has exemplified what Alabama Baptists across the state are doing.

"We all have to step up and do what's needed when something like this occurs. ... It's been a great group effort," Panter said. ☞

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

For information about placing a classified ad, contact the advertising department of The Alabama Baptist at 205-870-4720, ext. 102, or ads@thealabamabaptist.org. Copy deadline is two weeks before publication.

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New Market Baptist Church is searching for a pastor. Please send resumé and a DVD of a recent sermon to: New Market Baptist Church, P.O. Box 128, New Market, AL 35761 or nmbcpsc15@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL WORSHIP LEADER

Silver Run Baptist Church, Seale, Alabama. Submit resúmes to Cheryl Boutwell at justshert@gmail.com.

PART-TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC

First Baptist Church of Childersburg is seeking a part-time minister of music. Please submit your resumé to: First Baptist Church, 200 8th Ave. SW, Childersburg, AL 35044, or email to: fb-childersburg@mindspring.com.

MINISTER OF CHILDREN/PRE-SCHOOL

Full-time, benefits. Parkview Baptist Church, Decatur, AL. Send resumé to: jenny.russell@parkviewdecatur.org.

BIVOCATIONAL YOUTH MINISTER

New Hope Baptist Church, 6573 Hwy 145, Meridian, MS, is an actively growing church. We're prayerfully seeking a bivocational youth minister to engage and be passionate about our youth. Please email resumé to newhopebcyouth-ministersearch@gmail.com.

MUSIC MINISTRY ASSISTANT

First Baptist Church of Boaz is seeking a part-time (25 hours a week) music ministry assistant. Experience with Word, PowerPoint and Publisher. Some music reading helpful. Send resumé to: First Baptist Church Boaz, Attn. Tommy Pierce, P.O. Box 337, Boaz, AL 35957 or tpierce@fbcboaz.org.

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OTHER

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS

The Fayette County Baptist Association is looking to hire its next director of missions to serve the people of Fayette County, Alabama. The FCBA is represented by 29 churches in northwest Alabama in a mostly rural setting. The person that we are searching for needs to feel a call to associational missions with preferably more than 10 years experience in ministry. Please send resúmes to: DOM Search Committee, 18010 Highway 18 E, Berry, AL 35546.

CUSTODIAN/MAINTENANCE

Seventh Street Baptist (Cullman) is hiring to fill a part-time custodian/maintenance position. \$12/hr. Expectations are all janitorial duties along with basic maintenance skills. Please send resúmes to: 708 7th St. SW, Cullman, AL 35055.

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- 5** Hold your device over a page or image in *The Alabama Baptist* (TAB) marked as augmented reality and watch the paper come to life.
- 6** If the image is slow to load at any point, then it may be your data speed or Wi-Fi strength. Change locations and try again.
- 7** Each week when TAB arrives, open the app and hold your device over the augmented reality articles.

in Loving Memory

of Alabama Baptist leaders, friends

Jon Appleton

Former pastor, state missionary dies

Jon Appleton, former pastor of First Baptist Church, Opelika, and former state missionary, died Nov. 27. He was 82.

Appleton held degrees from Samford University in Birmingham, Auburn University and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Prior to serving as pastor of First, Opelika, Appleton was pastor of churches in Gadsden and Kentucky. From there he served as director of campus ministry for the Alabama Baptist Executive Board (now Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions) from 1968 to 1975 and then served as pastor of First Baptist Church, Athens, Georgia, until his retirement in 1999.

He is survived by his wife of 60 years, Virginia, and one daughter. (TAB)

Banding together

How you can help share gospel worldwide

By Grace Thornton
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

The gospel is good and there are scores of people in the world who haven't heard it yet. That's "the whole reason the International Mission Board (IMB) exists," said David Platt, IMB president. "It's the whole reason this coalition of churches is working together to send and support missionaries around the world."

And that's why the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is banding together this year to aim for a national goal of giving \$155 million to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering (LMCO). Alabama Baptists are looking to make up \$12 million of that goal.

Continued growth

The offering, which was started in 1888, continues to grow each year with 100 percent of LMCO receipts going straight to fund missionaries serving on the field.

Giving totaled \$165.8 million in 2015, the highest in the history of the offering.

The offering and the work it

benefits are highlighted each year through a week of prayer for international missions, held this year Dec. 4-11 with the theme "The Gospel Resounds."

Need for gospel

According to IMB, in China alone nearly 1 million people each month are dying without

a personal relationship with Christ. In other parts of the world, millions of Syrian refugees are more open to the gospel message than they ever have been. Throughout the world there are people groups that have lived and died without ever being contacted by someone with the gospel.

That makes the work of Southern Baptists through LMCO vital, Platt said.

"Right now, because of your giving, there are missionaries go-

ing up and down the Amazon and proclaiming the gospel to remote tribes," he said.

"Right now, people in European cities who are being attacked continually by terror are also hearing the hope of the gospel because of your giving. Right now, as a result of your giving, there are brothers and

sisters spreading the gospel across West African villages, sub-Saharan countries, Middle Eastern cities, South Asian fields, Central Asian mountains and Southeast Asian islands. Your faith is literally resounding around the

world for the glory of God."

Funding missionaries

The average cost of keeping an IMB missionary on the field is:

- ▶ \$58,200 a year
- ▶ \$4,850 a month
- ▶ \$1,119 a week
- ▶ \$159 a day

LMCO gifts go directly to offset the expenses incurred by life on the missions field, from transportation to rent to medical needs.

To help promote the offering, IMB has made resources available on its website, including videos, posters, sermon information and materials for children and students.

For more information, visit www.imb.org/lottie-moon-christmas-offering.

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Chrismon Tree

A Chrismon, first developed by Frances Kipps Spencer in 1957, is a Christmas ornament based on a Christian symbol. All Chrismons are symbols from the Bible and from other signs that early Christians used to identify one another. Many churches today celebrate the Advent season by decorating a Chrismon Tree to tell the story of the life of Christ — with the goal of focusing believers' hearts on God's great gift to the world during the Christmas season — Jesus Christ. The third set of ornaments are featured below and the final set will be showcased in the Dec. 15 issue.



IHS: First three letters of Jesus' name in Greek letters.



Lamp: Represents God's Word, wisdom and knowledge.



Intertwining circles: Represents the Trinity — Father, Son and Holy Spirit.



Lyre: Symbolizes joy.



Jerusalem cross: Represents five wounds of the Lord.



Manger: Symbolizes Luke 2:7, "And she gave birth to her first born son and laid him in a manger."



Keys: Represents keys to the Kingdom (Matt. 16:19) and symbols of spiritual authority.



Nativity: Represents the birth of Jesus.



Lamb: Symbolizes Jesus as the Lamb of God.



Orb: Symbolizes Christ over the world.

(Compiled by TAB)



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Attending religious services lessens likelihood of divorce, new study says

The old adage "the family that prays together stays together" is statistically sound, according to a new study by a Harvard University professor.

Couples who attend religious services are 47 percent less likely to subsequently divorce than other couples, according to a study on religious service attendance, marriage and health by Tyler J. VanderWeele, an epidemiology professor at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health in Boston.

While a number of previous studies have shown that those who attend religious services are about 30 to 50 percent less likely to divorce than those who do not, critics say it is possible the numbers are skewed because people contemplating divorce may be more likely to stop attending church.

Further correlations

VanderWeele said the Harvard study was able to control for that possibility by looking at the timing of changes in religious service attendance.

In addition to greater marital stability, the study found a correlation between church attendance and better health outcomes including longer life, lower incidence of depression and less suicide.

VanderWeele speculated that attending religious services re-



Unsplash.com

inforces the idea that marriage is something sacred. Religious teachings also censure divorce and discourage adultery, one of the strongest predictors of divorce.

Religious institutions offer various types of family support, and studies find that people who attend church are generally happier and have a greater sense of meaning in life, factors generally associated with greater marital satisfaction and lower divorce.

"Religion is, of course, not principally about promoting physical health or decreasing the likelihood of divorce but about communion with God," VanderWeele said. "However, it turns out that the pursuit of this goal also has profound implications for

numerous other aspects of life, including health and marriage."

VanderWeele said religion might be understood "as the pursuit of complete human well-being: physical, mental, social and spiritual."

"Religion is about both communion with God and the restoration of all people to their intended state of complete wholeness and well-being," he said. "The evidence suggests that it can indeed accomplish both."

"The family that prays together stays together" phrase is attributed to Patrick Peyton, a Roman Catholic priest who used it as a slogan for his Family Theater of the radio program that ran 22 years and at one point reached 5 million weekly listeners. (BNG)

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 11

Explore the Bible

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

CONQUEST

Joshua 6:12–25

Should a Christian ever take the life of another human being? Murder is clearly prohibited in the commandments, but what about a policeman protecting the life of a defenseless individual? What about a corrections officer tasked with executing an inmate sentenced with capital punishment? What about a soldier, airman, sailor, guardsman or marine going to war? The apostle Paul indicates that those tasked with armed force responsibilities endure hardship (2 Tim. 2:3–7) and do God’s work (Rom. 13:3–5). Even Jesus commended the faith of a Roman centurion who respected chain of command (Matt. 8:5–13).

This week's lesson addresses the issues of war and the fulfillment of promises. Centuries before Joshua, God had promised a land to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). Earlier in the book of Joshua, two spies encountered a prostitute named Rahab, promising safety to her and her family when the Israelite army would attack Jericho. Rahab and her kin were spared as a result of her confession of faith (2:9-13).

Patient Obedience (12–14)

Jericho saw a daily parade. The Israelite army served as a protective detail around the priests transporting the Ark of the Covenant. God had already indicated to Joshua the land was theirs. Now it was their responsibility to follow His commands and take the land.

The following is from an imaginary journal of an imaginary Israelite soldier regarding the real life activities of a real life military campaign:

“Day one ... the Lord instructed us to march around the city. It took us a while, and it was so tempting to cry out, but we remained silent. The trumpet blasts helped keep us in tempo for marching. Maybe we

will take the city tomorrow. Day two ... see day one. Day three ... in parade formation again ... just like a military exercise. Hurry up and wait. Doesn't all this marching give away the element of surprise? Day six ... spent the last three days doing what we did the first three days."

Final Preparations (15–19)

The Sabbath day was different than the rest. During the first six days, the army marched silently around the walls of the city. One time around and the parade ended. On this day, they continued their march: once, twice, three times ... what are they doing? Seven times? And then came the noise. The men shouted, the trumpets blasted and the walls fell. Regardless of Kathleen Kenyon's conclusions, the archaeological evidence affirms the collapsed ancient walls of Jericho (see Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, s.v. "Jericho").

Obedience Rewarded (20–25)

Israel captured a city that had trees they did not plant, wells they did not dig and homes they had not built. Most of the spoils of war were destroyed as a symbol of God's sovereignty over the land. By God's grace, He granted the Israelite army victory in this first of many battles with the Canaanites.

Why did the people of Jericho have to die? They rejected the authority of the one true God, and they worshipped His creation instead. In their case, they worshipped the moon, for which the city was named. As a result, they were “set apart to the Lord for destruction.” Any human being set apart for destruction could not be redeemed (Lev. 27:29).

Why did Rahab and her family get to live? God has always had a plan of redemption for all peoples, and He redeemed a remnant for Himself from the people of Jericho. Rahab was 1 of 4 Gentile women in the genealogy of Jesus (Matt. 1:5). Salvation is always by His grace and for His glory.✠

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

GOD'S WORD FILLS MY HEART
Psalm 119:9-16

**God's word will keep us
from sin. (9–11)**

The second stanza of Psalm 119 is the only one to open with a question. The psalmist asks how a young person can stay on the path of purity. Some Jewish scholars translate “a young man” as “a lad,” and they see this term reflecting the similarities of this Psalm to Wisdom Literature. Often in Proverbs, a “lad” or innocent young man needing instruction in the ways of righteousness is introduced. From the heartfelt prayers of the surrounding verses, it would appear that the young man is the psalmist himself. If so, he is praying more than he is preaching or instructing.

The question is answered in the very next breath: one keeps on the path of purity by obeying God's word. While "word" can refer to Scripture, here it also designates God's communication to us beyond written words. Thus the psalmist encourages us to be open to both God's past and future revelation. The psalmist confesses his wholehearted concentration on God's word and prays that he not be allowed to stray from His commandments. The writer has hidden away in his heart what the Lord has said. In other words, he has memorized it so that he might not sin against the Lord.

Verse 11 is reminiscent of Jeremiah 31:33 where God promises to write “instruction on the people’s hearts.” Hence the blessing that God is willing to teach us directly and personally. We always have more to learn about God’s way, and what a grace to us that He is always willing to reveal more to us.

God guides us to understand His Word. (12-13)

The Psalmist is quite aware that obedience to the Word is entirely a gift of God, as indicated by the phrase “teach me Your

statutes.” The word “statutes” refers to the binding force and permanence of Scripture, as of laws “engraved for the time to come as a witness forever” (Isa. 30:8). “Ordinances are better known in the Old Testament as “judgments,” that is, the decisions of the Righteous Judge about practical human situations. Scripture, then, provides the authoritative ethic by which humans interact and serve obediently.

The phrase “blessed are You, O Lord” appears at the exact center of the stanza. This word of gratitude sets the stage for the rejoicing found in the following verses. Indeed, “delighting” in Scripture is central to our spiritual growth.

**Rejoice in what God teaches
us in His Word. (14–16)**

A persistent theme throughout this Psalm is the “delight” these sayings bring. The first reference to this occurs in verses 14 and 16, and they set the tone for much that will follow. Later Scripture is compared to riches it outshines, including silver and gold (vv. 72, 127 and 162). The word “testimonies” harkens back to when the Israelites placed the book of the law beside the Ark of the Covenant “that it may be there for a witness against you.” The testimony of Scripture holds us accountable, and it also is a faithful and true witness to God’s glory. Thus “Thy testimonies are my delight” (v. 24).

“Precepts” is a word drawn from the vocations of an officer or overseer, someone who is responsible to analyze a situation and take action. Reflective of the word “ordinances” in verse 13, “precepts” highlights the practical instructions the Lord bestows and commands. The word “meditate” in verse 15 connotes careful reflection on God’s Word. God’s law requires more than surface reading or rote memorization; it demands intentional contemplation. Such spiritual discipline is vital for our living up to the high expectations of Holy Scripture.✠

Christian Crossword

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Across

1. Pronoun.
4. Essential.
9. Genetic initials.
12. Wrath.
13. ____ the Netophathite.
(Jer. 40)
14. "Having Bethel on the west, and ____ on the east." (Gen. 12:8)
15. "Let thy cattle gender with a ____ kind."
(Lev. 19:19)
17. "Let us ____ before the Lord our maker."
(Ps. 95:6)
19. "Take thine ____, eat, drink, and be merry."
(Luke 12:19)
20. Component of teen's "uniform." (pl.)
21. "The street" on the Left Bank.
23. Evangelist's family.
26. Prophet who interceded for Judah. (2 Chron. 28)
27. "Claudius commanded all Jews to depart from ____," (Acts 18:2)
28. Saturate in liquid.
29. Brit. Isl. off Normandy.

30. Tumors.
33. Cathode. (abbr.)
34. Santa ____.
36. Slave.
37. Layer.
39. "His meat was ____ and wild honey." (Matt. 3:4)
41. Belonging to Shakespeare.
(with "the")
42. Actress Peggy.
43. "Jubal, father of all such as handle the ____ and organ." (Gen. 4:21)
44. "Otello" is one.
46. Those who bring about.
49. "The Lord shall ____ the bough." (Isa. 10:33)
50. "O ____, where is thy victory?" (1 Cor. 15:55)
52. Sup.
53. Fine point. (abbr.)
54. "____ into his gates."
(Ps. 100:4)
55. Former Ford model.

Down

1. "Your life is ____ with Christ in God." (Col. 3:3)
2. A son of Bela. (1 Chron. 7)
27. Address.
31. Sermon.
32. "I will exalt my throne above the ____." (Isa. 14:13)

3. Extreme.
4. Usually a sentence from a Bible chapter.
5. ___ dixit.
6. Article.
7. Twelve-step group. (abbr.)
8. "Who ... can be ___ unto the Lord?" (Ps. 89:6)
9. Belonging to the son of Zorobabel. (Luke 3)
10. Negative vote. (var.)
11. Brother.
12. Escape.
13. Masculine name.
14. Bodily swelling.
15. Of a limited area.
16. Chief of David's captains. (2 Sam. 23)
17. "Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of ___," (Luke 16:20)
18. "Be ye not unequally yoked" (2 Cor. 6:14)

35. "My servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I ____." (Job 42:8)
38. A city of Benjamin. (Josh. 18)
40. Middle East. rep.
41. Brand well known to hockey players.
43. "____ mercy upon me, O Lord." (Ps. 6:2)
44. "For if God ... spared not the ____ world." (2 Pet. 2:4-5)
45. American author.
46. Siamese.
47. Tattle, with "on."
48. Reg.
51. TLC giver.



Media reviews

BOOKS

A Baxter Family Christmas

Karen Kingsbury. New York: Howard Books, 2016. 249 pp. (Hardback).

Who doesn't love Karen Kingsbury's books? They are open and inviting, like an old friend's house. Even the cover of "A Baxter Family Christmas" makes you want to step into the picture — up on the front porch and into the warmth of the family that lives inside.

If you are familiar with Kingsbury's books, you have probably met the Baxter family. After 22–23 (counting this one) books featuring this family, Kingsbury has the characters well developed, their individual stories and family dynamics brought to life — so much so that Kingsbury reports being asked often how the family is doing.

This story begins with a crisis brought on by a decision by John Baxter, the patriarch of the family, to invite a special but not totally welcome guest to the family's Christmas celebration. The decision backfires on him, making him wish he hadn't issued the invitation. I won't spoil the story for you, but the story and its ending are satisfying, as expected in a Kingsbury book.



"Names for the Messiah" is a short book based on Isaiah 9:6, the passage that announces Jesus as the "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Each of the four chapters focuses on one of these names, filling in the historical and cultural background from Jesus' day and pointing out how Jesus fulfilled the prophetic words in Isaiah.

In speaking of Jesus' position as Wonderful Counselor (I checked, and most translations leave out the comma — a bit of a surprise to me), Brueggemann writes of His wisdom, "It takes an uncommon wisdom to interrupt the foolish practice of business as usual" and "the teaching of Jesus attests to the possibility of God that the world has long since taken to be impossible."

While probably not appropriate for family devotions — it is pretty esoteric — "Names of the Messiah" would be a good choice for adults looking for a group study or personal advent devotional.

Duo Jenny & Tyler come to Birmingham

If you're the type of listener who enjoys a musical mixture of Bing Crosby, Simon and Garfunkel and The Swell Season, then the Christmas album released Nov. 4 by Jenny & Tyler may be for you.

The folk-pop husband and wife duo worked with producer Ben Shive (Rend Collective, Brandon Heath, Andrew Peterson) to release "Christmas Stories," featuring eight Christmas classics and one original song, "Christmas-time," written by Jenny Somers, Tyler Somers and Trent Monk.



Jenny Somers said, "Christmas Stories' is our attempt to rekindle

the wonder of Christmas. It's how we felt when we were kids waiting impatiently for Santa, reliving the Christmas story and listening to our parents' holiday albums."

'Reason to pause, reflect'

Tyler Somers added, "The older you get, the more difficult it seems to be truly amazed by something. We recorded this album to give ourselves a reason to pause and reflect, get back to that child-like wonder."

And if you're in Birmingham and want to hear Jenny & Tyler live, you'll have a chance at Peterson's 17th annual Behold the Lamb of God Christmas Tour where Jenny & Tyler will be a featured guest.

The tour will make its way to Valleydale Church, Birmingham, on Dec. 9, 7 p.m. Doors will open at 6 p.m. (TAB)

For tickets or more information, visit valleydale.org or call 1-800-965-9324.

The Angel of Forest Hill

Cindy Woodsmall. New York: WaterBrook, 2016. 196 pp. (Hardback).

It seems that Cindy Woodsmall is the queen of Amish Christmas books; "The Angel of Forest Hill" is her fifth. This was a good story, but a very simple one about a young girl who was sent to raise the children of a widower. Can you guess what happened? In a way, it reminded me of the old Seinfeld TV series — "A show about nothing."



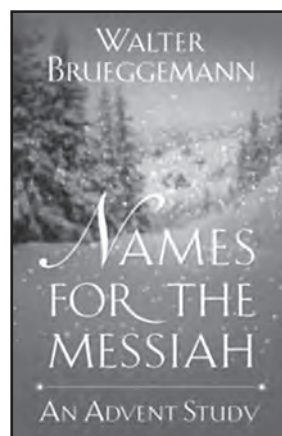
Before you conclude that I am panning the book though remember how much fun it was to watch the cast interact on Seinfeld. It really didn't matter whether it was about anything or not. But then, I wouldn't call "The Angel of

Forest Hill" fun. Like most Amish stories, it was a little dark, heavy and slow moving but it did hold my interest. The book was well written and worthy of a read, especially if you are a fan of Amish stories.

Names for the Messiah: An Advent Study

Walter Brueggemann. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016. 96 pp. (Paperback).

My church is celebrating advent this year with the traditional advent wreath and candles, and I am thrilled about it. I love Christmas and I especially love the anticipation of the weeks leading up to the Christmas season. This book by Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann would be a meaningful addition to the advent season.



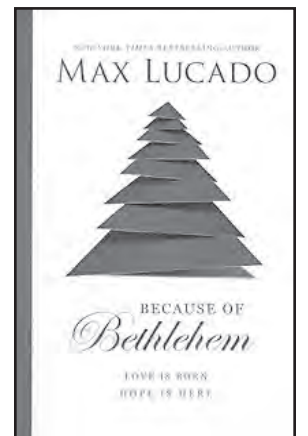
Because of Bethlehem

Max Lucado. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2016. 198 pp. (Hardback).

"Because of Bethlehem" is pure Lucado — bright imagery and short, sometimes staccato sentences that pack a punch and are filled with hope and inspiration. While Lucado can be counted on to stay true to the Bible, there is not a lot of deep theology or exegesis here, but there is the reminder of what we have because of Bethlehem.

Lucado points out early in the book that God has a face, and it is Jesus. "Jesus entered the world not like a human, but as a human," he writes. "He took on your face in the hope that you would see His." It gets even better as the book continues (although I'm not sure it gets any better than that), but the best passages are too long to reproduce here.

If you want to be uplifted, inspired and brought right to the throne in time for Christmas, this book will do it for you. ✝



Meet the reviewer

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



Martine@kingdomresearch.org

If you have a book you would like reviewed, mail a copy to: P.O. Box 1504, Hartselle, AL 35640.



Photo by Lonnie Wilkey

Kim McCroskey (right), pastor of Roaring Fork Baptist Church, Gatlinburg, Tennessee, describes the destruction to Joe Sorah (left), of the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board staff. In the background is Wes Jones, Tennessee Baptist Disaster Relief specialist.

Leaders not discouraged

Tennessee Baptists work to overcome devastating fire

By Lonnie Wilkey
Editor, Baptist and Reflector

Though the wildfires that swept through the Tennessee community Nov. 28 destroyed or damaged three Baptist churches, leaders are not discouraged.

Of the three churches affected by the fire, Roaring Fork Baptist, Gatlinburg, was destroyed, losing its sanctuary and all of its other buildings. Pastor Kim McCroskey noted that while the buildings are gone, the Church (the people) remains.

"We're hopeful. We will persevere and we will rise out of the ashes," he predicted. "For whatever reason God let it happen. We'll rebuild and will be better than ever for His glory."

The pastor noted that at least six people in his church lost homes in the fire.

Until they are able to rebuild, Roaring Fork will meet at Camp Smoky, owned by Sevier County Association of Baptists. As an example of how the association's churches are pulling together, members of Millican Grove Baptist Church, Sevierville, were at the camp Nov. 30, cleaning the building that Roaring Fork will use, said Robert Nichols, director of missions for the association. "Tragedies bring people together," Nichols said.

Request for prayer

First Baptist Church, Gatlinburg, lost its youth building and about a dozen members lost their homes, including Gatlinburg mayor Mike Werner and city manager Cindy Ogle.

Pastor Larry Burcham asked for prayers for the situation. "Prayers are vitally important," he said. "That's what we need more than anything right now."

In a later interview with Baptist Press (BP), Bur-

cham noted the "people here are very tenacious and they're obviously in touch with reality enough that this hurts and it's discouraging. But yet they believe God's still with us as well, walking with us through this situation."

Variety of assistance offered

Wes Jones, Tennessee Baptist Disaster Relief (TBDR) specialist, was able to present checks to McCroskey and Burcham on behalf of TBDR to help them in the short term. Help also will be provided to Banner Baptist Church as well. Jones and others went to the church that lost its fellowship hall and sustained some damage to its other two buildings, but were unable to connect with the pastor or other church leaders.

National Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) and the WMU Foundation have awarded a \$5,000 grant from the HEART (Humanitarian Emergency Aid for Rebuilding Tomorrow) Fund to help area ministries aid victims.

The grant, to be dispersed through Smoky Mountain Resort Ministries and Sevier County Associational WMU, will help meet the immediate physical needs of local residents who lost their homes.

Tennessee WMU groups have been collecting donated items for those affected by the fires, but the grant will offer the opportunity for ministries in the area to carry gift cards and give them out on the spot as needed, said Vickie Anderson, executive director of Tennessee WMU. "It provides a very tangible way that we can help."

The WMU Foundation is accepting donations to the HEART Fund for disaster relief survivors online at wmufoundation.com or by mail to WMU Foundation HEART Fund, 100 Missionary Ridge, Birmingham, AL 35242. (TAB contributed)

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Court sentences men to death for Christian killings

LAHORE, Pakistan — Two years after a Muslim mob burned a Christian couple to death in a brick kiln, a Pakistani court has sentenced five men to death for the murders.

The couple, 26-year-old Shahzad Masih and his pregnant wife, Shama, were falsely accused of desecrating a copy of the Quran in 2014, according to The Christian Post.

A mob of believed hundreds of Muslims took part in the crime, and at least 103 were arrested and charged, according to the Post.

But the court acquitted 90 on Nov. 23, including the owner of the kiln and the man accused of being behind the claim that the couple desecrated the Muslim holy book.

Eight others were given two-year prison sentences for their part in the murders.

A date has not yet been set for the death sentence of the five.

"The five people awarded the death sentence were involved in dragging, beating and burning the couple while the other eight played a supportive role, according to the judgment," said Riaz Anjum, the lawyer representing the victims' family, according to *The Express Tribune*. (TAB)

Muslim extremists target Coptic Christians

AL-NAGAMEESH, Egypt — Dozens of Coptic Christians in northern Egypt are rebuilding their lives after Muslim extremists attacked them Nov. 25 on suspicions they were converting a meeting hall and community center into a church building.

After noon prayers in Al-Nagameesh village in Sohag Governorate, a group of Muslims set ablaze the community center for the elderly where the Christians often gathered. They then moved on to the village, where they looted and attacked more than 10 homes and a handful of businesses, all Coptic-owned, with Molotov cocktails and stones.

The fire gutted the events hall and left other buildings in ruins, according to human rights activists. Four Copts were slightly injured in the attack.

The attack came three months after parliament passed a law regulating the building of churches in Egypt. The Egyptian government celebrated the law, but human rights advocates said it merely codified discriminatory standards between Muslims and Christians in Egypt for building houses of worship. (MS)

Muslim herdsmen kill 12 Nigerian Christians

GIDAN WAYA, Nigeria — Muslim Fulani herdsmen killed at least 12 Christians in Nigeria in late November in what Christian leaders call a campaign of ethnic and religious cleansing.

Area resident Joshua Aku said the attacks began in Pasakori on the evening of Nov. 23, when herdsmen killed the Pasakori village head, Ayuba Gwafan, in an armed assault that lasted an hour.

The heavily armed herdsmen then killed six other Christians on the Gidan Waya-Kagoro highway, Aku said. The herdsmen returned Nov. 25 to attack Mile One village on the outskirts of Gidan Waya and started killing villagers and destroying their houses. At least five Christians were killed in this attack. (MS)

Christian TV channels now illegal to air in Pakistan

LAHORE, Pakistan — Pakistan's television regulatory body has now made it illegal to air Christian TV channels in the nation, a move that affects 11 stations and has already seen at least six cable operators arrested.

All but 2 of the 11 stations are operated from outside the country, but the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) is cracking down on the networks that continue to air them, according to The Christian Post. The two local Christian stations — Isaac TV and Catholic TV — also have been shut down by PEMRA.

Pakistan is home to about 2.8 million Christians. (TAB)