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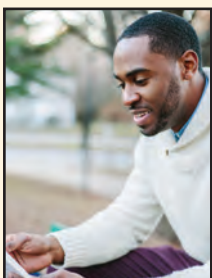
As number of international students tops 1 million, Christians have wide open doors to share

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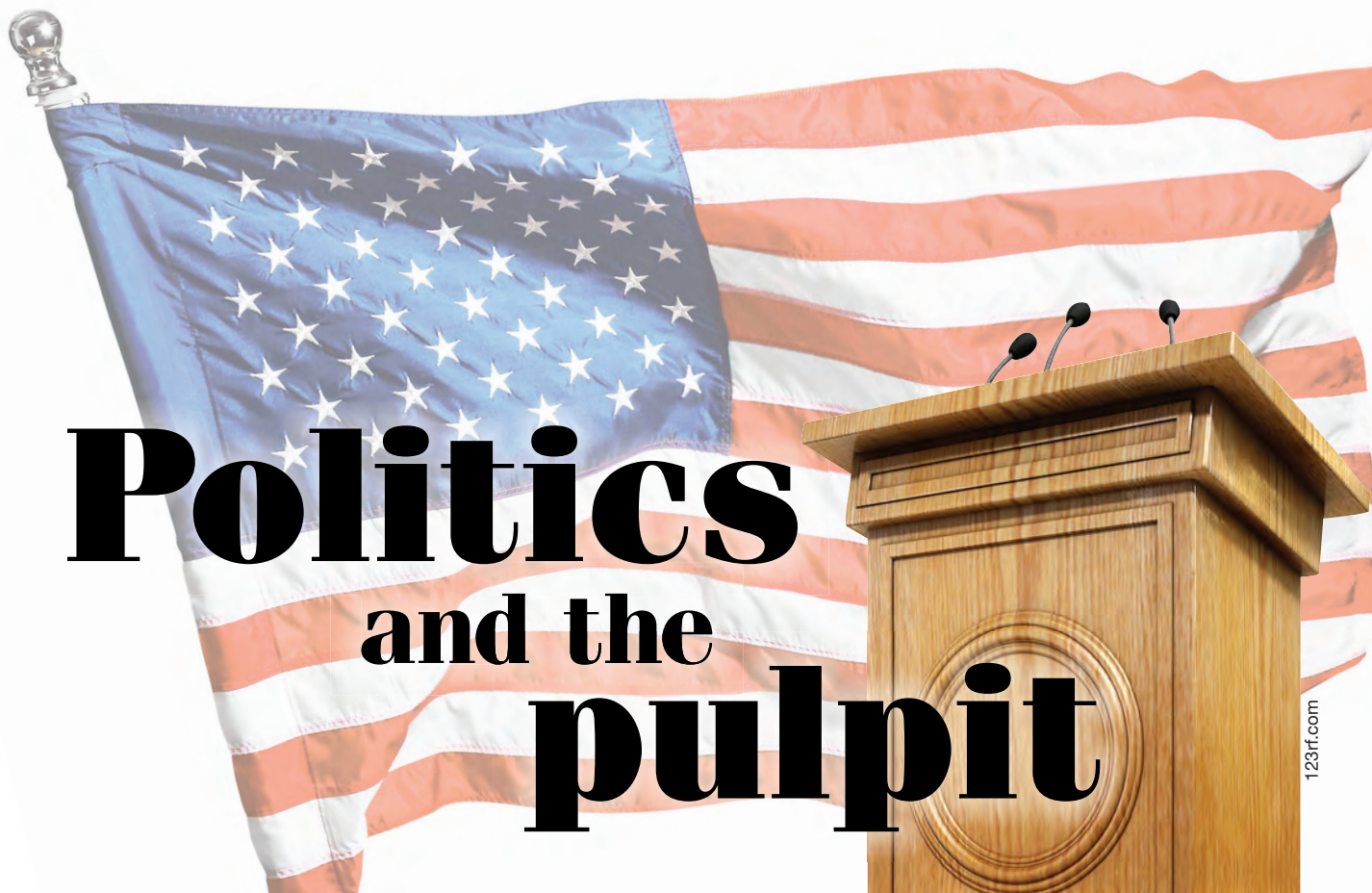
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Politics and the pulpit

Most Americans 'draw the line' at church endorsements of candidates

The longtime debate over how far is too far when it comes to churches and their leaders talking politics, specifically as it relates to endorsing or seeming to endorse specific candidates, resurfaced in the most recent presidential campaign. A handful of evangelical pastors stepped out to publicly endorse then-candidate Donald Trump.

While pastors of different faith groups follow varying strategies related to endorsing or not endorsing and while candidate Hillary Clinton also received endorsements from clergy, Southern Baptists have traditionally treaded carefully in this area.

But could the conversation be changing?

President Trump sparked discussion on the topic following his "totally destroy" comments at the Feb. 2

National Prayer Breakfast related to the Johnson Amendment.

The Johnson amendment, named after Lyndon B. Johnson when he initiated the measure as a U.S. senator, was enacted in 1954 and prohibits 501(c)(3) groups from participating in partisan politics.

It forbids churches, universities and charities from endorsing or opposing candidates or contributing to their campaigns. The amendment does, however, allow churches to engage in voter education initiatives.

Violates tax-exempt status

Violation of the measure risks the tax-exempt status these groups enjoy.

And this has been the routine for many, if not most, Southern Baptist churches for more than 60 years.

Two polls in recent years also indicate the majority of Americans

don't want their pastors or churches endorsing candidates.

A LifeWay Research survey conducted in September 2015 showed 79 percent of Americans think it is inappropriate for pastors to endorse a candidate in a church meeting. In addition, 75 percent say churches should not make endorsements.

A mid-2016 Pew Research study showed 66 percent of Americans oppose church endorsements.

Only 45 percent of black Protestants and 37 percent of white evangelicals surveyed said they thought it was OK for churches to endorse political candidates.

"Most Americans draw the line at church endorsements of specific candidates," wrote Gregory A. Smith with Pew Research. "[This] is roughly stable with other readings taken over the past eight years."

As far as discussing politics in general the Pew survey showed 49 percent said they should stay away from political topics altogether while 47 percent of Americans thought churches should be able to express their views.

Legislation debated

The question of how much pastors can and should say will be debated with the newly introduced legislation that would hand pastors back the right to speak politically.

The legislation — introduced in the U.S. House and Senate on Feb. 1 by House Majority Whip Steve Scalise, R-Louisiana, and Sen. James Lankford, R-Oklahoma — would amend the Johnson Amendment.

Lankford, a Southern Baptist, said in introducing his bill, "The federal (See 'Debate,' page 3)

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COMMENT

‘Look What They Did to Amos’

The seminary student pastor was distraught. It had been a rough weekend at the church he served. Accusations had flown and harsh, stinging words had been said. He feared his days were numbered as pastor and was surprised, even shocked, by the sudden turn of events.

The young man hurried to the office of Clyde T. Francisco, renowned Old Testament professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, in a former generation. It was Francisco's teaching that had inspired the young pastor to preach from the Book of Amos and the pastor was sure his professor could help him understand the plight in which he now found himself.

Francisco listened carefully as the young man explained how he had been so moved by the study of Amos that he decided to preach a four-week Sunday morning series from that Old Testament book. He had energetically preached the truths of the Scripture, he assured his professor, but the reactions of the people was not what he expected. By the end of the fourth week the congregation was practically up in arms because of what he said.

Important to the story is to remember that the Book of Amos offers a biting indictment of the culture, practices and people of Israel — including their worship. The theology of the day concluded Israel's abundant prosperity was a clear indication of God's blessing. Leaders apparently believed the fact of poverty for some was clear evidence of their unrighteousness while the rich were righteous.

Amos challenges that conclusion. He declares that observing proper forms of worship is not sufficient for a right relationship with God. Religion that does not result in the right treatment of the poor and helpless is worthless, he proclaims.

One commentary notes that the Book of Amos teaches greed can destroy our thinking and living and make us indifferent to others; beliefs must be measured against God's Word not against popular preaching; and proper observance of religious practices are of no value if they are not accompanied by practical righteousness in dealing with others.

Francisco listened attentively as the young pastor shared how he had applied Amos' teachings to the community where he served and to the church



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

itself. Then, leaning back in his chair, the professor asked, “Well what did you expect? Look what they did to Amos.”

The prophet Amos and the young pastor both paid a heavy price when they applied the teachings of God's Word to the practices of those around them.

That true story came to mind as reports mounted of opposition to Russell Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) of the Southern Baptist Convention. Moore made a splash among Christian evangelical leaders and conservative politicians when he took the reins of ERLC in June 2013.

His articulate, reasoned approach to issues earned him hearings among Southern Baptists as well as in the nation's halls of power.

Political issues

But during the run-up to the election for the United States presidency, Moore alienated some of his former champions by his opposition to Donald Trump. He argued that character mattered in a president and after the infamous Access Hollywood tape aired, chided evangelicals who he said were giving up their witness to win an election.

Critics said Moore was politicking. Moore retorted he was trying to speak prophetically from Scripture to an important decision in American life.

Either way Moore's comments resulted in opposition. Louisiana Baptists voted in their annual convention meeting to investigate ERLC to see if Moore and the SBC entity represented generally held viewpoints of that state convention. At least one former SBC president said his church was considering changing the way it supports

SBC work because of Moore's statements.

Several other church pastors across the nation made similar statements.

This is not an effort to cloak Moore with a prophet's mantle or to imply anything negative about his critics. Rather this most recent incident demonstrates how difficult it is to ask an entity to apply biblical principles to public issues in behalf of Southern Baptists. Equally difficult is to ask an entity to speak to Southern Baptists about their positions and practices in light of biblical principles.

As Southern Baptists we have asked Moore and ERLC to do both.

A cursory reading of the history of ERLC, formerly known as the Christian Life Commission, shows the variations of SBC reactions. As long as the entity reflects majoritarian opinions we are fine but let it say something that challenges what most people already believe and we go after their very existence.

Challenge or reinforce?

That history may indicate we really do not want ERLC to challenge us with biblical principles. Rather we want them to use biblical principles to reinforce what we already believe.

Yet our history illustrates how wrong popularly held beliefs of Southern Baptists can be. How can we forget the painful confrontation between biblical principles and Baptist practices during the racial crisis of the 1960s and 70s?

The history also may indicate we have not yet learned how to live together in a faith family when there are disagreements. Instead of trying to learn from one another we seem bent on destroying those with whom we differ. Sometimes we appear incapable of talking about theological issues or social positions without attacking the personhood of those holding varying views.

Amaziah, Israel's high priest, told Amos to get out, to go back where he came from and to stop preaching his message in Israel. My seminary pastor friend received a similar message. If some have their way, then Moore might be added to that list.

Baptists in churches and conventions would be better served it seems if we learned to talk with one another about differences. God might use such conversations to give us additional insights and better understandings. Perhaps God would increase our appreciation for the complexity of issues and how God is working through others as well as through us.

Perhaps God would increase our humility to help us understand a majority does not override the teaching of God's Word or that concern about self rather than concern about others raises questions about one's relationship to the Father.

Somehow, somehow we must learn to live together in the family of God even when we disagree with one another. ✠

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

I read your article concerning human trafficking in the Feb. 2 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*. Such activity must be shut down and the persons responsible jailed for a considerable length of time.

Getting the churches involved was mentioned but the Baptist churches can't even clean up their own sorry record of clergy, youth ministers and others sexually abusing children in their trust and then denying it exists, cover-

ing it up or blaming the victims.

Sam Yates
Hayden, Ala. ✠



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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Debate over political involvement

Legislation would reverse tax-exempt restrictions on churches

(continued from page 1)

government and the IRS should never have the ability to inhibit free speech.

"The First Amendment right of free speech and right to practice any faith or no faith are foundational American values that must extend to everyone whether they are a pastor, social worker or any charity employee or volunteer," he said in a written release.

Rep. Jody Hice, R-Georgia, a former Southern Baptist pastor, said as a co-sponsor of the proposal, "[T]he IRS has used the Johnson Amendment to silence and threaten religious institutions and charitable entities.

"As a minister who has experienced intimidation from the IRS firsthand, I know just how important it is to ensure that our churches and nonprofit organizations are allowed the same fundamental rights as every citizen of this great nation," Hice said in a written statement.

Some supporters of the legislation believe pastors and churches — and not the federal government — should be the ones to decide what they say from the pulpit regarding elections while also believing pastors and churches should not make endorsements. Announcing support for a political candidate could harm the gospel outreach and ministry of the church, they say.

Campaigning not allowed

Scalise said Feb. 1 during a press conference at the U.S. Capitol, "The IRS has hung like a cloud over the free speech rights of so many organizations, threatening to take away their tax-exempt status if they disseminated a message that was important to their congregation. That's not the role of government. That's not the kind of separation of powers that exists in the Constitution to allow people to express their religious beliefs."

Lankford added that the legislation does not permit churches and 501(c)(3) organizations to participate in political campaigning.

The bill simply protects political activities that are within the boundaries of the "organization's regular and customary activities so long as the activities carry out the organization's tax-exempt purpose," according to the Family Research Council, a conservative advocacy group.

A number of religious leaders also were present for the introduction of the legislation, including Pastor Jim Garlow of Skyline Church, San Diego, California, who cited Barna Group statistics showing that 90 percent of pastors believe the Bible talks about political issues but only 1 out of 10 feel comfortable speaking about them.

Hernan Castano, who serves as pastor of a minority church in Houston, Texas, told those present at the press conference that he understands persecution. He was 1 of 5 Houston-area pastors whose sermons were subpoenaed by the mayor with the threat of fine or prison time, according to *The Christian Post*.

The move was in response to their oppos-



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ing Houston's LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) nondiscrimination ordinance, which opened bathrooms and locker rooms for use on the basis of gender identity rather than biological gender.

"We need to repeal the Johnson Amendment because I have seen the faces of pastors ... (and) the fear of their heart holding them back from speaking truth," Castano said. "I have seen them hold back from what will make a difference for their own people."

While many support the move to reverse the restrictions in the Johnson Amendment, others fear it could warp the character of churches.

"It's not going to bring civility or a moral compass to government but it would do a lot to diminish the moral compass of churches," said Bill Stanfield, the CEO of Metanoia, a faith-based nonprofit that provides housing, job

creation, community improvements and other ministries in North Charleston, South Carolina.

Metanoia has long practiced keeping its partnerships with local and federal government organizations separate from its religious underpinnings, Stanfield said. Some of its asset-based, community-driven work is funded with federal housing grants, which is allowed under the law. It's also acceptable to appeal to public officials to seek government partnerships when attempting to address solutions to systemic challenges in communities.

"Churches and organizations ought to be engaged around issue-based advocacy and say we want our public officials to think about these particular issues in particular ways," he said. "But that's different than saying we like a certain mayor and that you ought to vote for that person." (*TAB* BNG, BP, *The Christian Post*)

Lay preacher fired for beliefs receives settlement

A Christian public health expert and lay preacher fired from Georgia's Department of Public Health in 2014 settled a lawsuit with the state Feb. 9 for \$225,000, according to *The Christian Post*. Dr. Eric Walsh said he lost his job because of his belief that homosexuality is a sin and that evolution is a "religion created by Satan."

Walsh's views first came into question when he was public health director for the city of Pasadena, California, and was invited to be the commencement speaker for Pasadena City College's class of 2014. Some students who dissented with his religious views objected to the invitation, leading to his withdrawal from the ceremony and to

being placed on leave from his job, the *Post* reported.

While on leave, he applied for the district health director position with the Georgia Department of Public Health and said he was upfront about his faith and the controversy surrounding him. They hired him then terminated him by email the day before he was to start his new job.

"This is a clear and resounding victory for religious freedom," said Jeremy Dys, senior counsel for First Liberty Institute and counsel for Walsh. "We are grateful that the state of Georgia agreed to settle the case and acknowledge the right of their employees to express their religious beliefs." (*TAB*)

‘Mind-blowing’ opportunity

As number of international students tops 1 million, Christians have wide open doors to share

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

The minute the college student got to his family’s home, Chris Mills knew he was going to have to help her.

“We were having a party at our house and on the way there she got in a fender bender,” he said of the student, who had come to the U.S.

from a different country to study. “She didn’t know what she was supposed to do so she left the scene.”

Mills had the opportunity to come alongside her and help her navigate that situation, calling the police and figuring out what she needed to do next.

“She was very appreciative of that but it also gave me the opportunity to be a part of her life in a different way,” he said.

She began to attend Mills’ Sunday School class.

“A couple of days before she was going to fly back to her country we filled up the baptistry and baptized her on a weekday,” he said. “I believe hospitality was something that helped her to be more open to

the gospel than perhaps she would’ve been otherwise.”

And Mills, state missionary with a focus on collegiate ministry for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said she represents a massive influx of students into the U.S. from hard-to-reach countries — students who have likely never heard about the hope Christ offers.

The number of international students at U.S. colleges and universities recently topped 1 million for the first time, according to the 2016 Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange.

Simultaneously Saudi Arabia rose to the third largest sending country, beating out South Korea to earn its spot in the top three behind China and India. Of Saudi Arabia’s 27 people groups, 26 are unreached, according to J.D. Payne, pastor of church

multiplication at The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham.

Not only that but “India is home to the largest number of unreached people groups in the world. China is No. 2,” he

“I believe hospitality was something that helped her to be more open to the gospel.”

Chris Mills state missionary focusing on collegiate ministry



123rf.com

writes on his blog at jdpayne.org. “Do we see the possibilities? Will we be wise stewards in this moment? The Divine Maestro orchestrates the movement of the peoples.”

Mills said it’s an unprecedented opportunity.

“God is certainly bringing the nations to our doorstep and He’s bringing them from places that are often extremely difficult to get Westerners into, not to mention that it would be at great financial cost,” he said. “The fact that God has brought these people to us here, a place where we can easily have spiritual conversations with them — it’s mind blowing.”

And not only are doors wide open here to share — students who put their faith in Christ while here are taking the gospel back to their country, Mills said.

“We have a unique opportunity to see God work and see the Great Commission being fulfilled by Americans reaching international students who are calling America home for a season and then are going back to their homeland — to places we can’t get to,” he said.

Chance to make a difference

Brad Bensinger, Baptist campus minister for Troy University, said he sees that as a tremendous chance to make a difference.

“Many students and scholars come to Alabama universities each year to study and teach. They will then return home and share all that they have learned,” he said. “Our prayer and responsibility is that they have had the opportunity to hear the gos-

pel and a chance to receive salvation.”

Troy itself is at the forefront of that opportunity — it ranked No. 33 on the list of Top 40 Master’s Colleges and Universities Hosting International Students compiled by Open Doors data.

“Connecting with one student can open the door to encounter their friends,” Bensinger said.

‘Love on them’

He told the story of Charles and Ruth Walker, members of First Baptist Church, Troy, who have done “a tremendous job” over the years of connecting with one student and then slowly bringing in their friends.

“They invite them to their home, feed them, take them places and just continually love on them,” Bensinger said. “They are also involved with the ESL class that First Baptist started this school year that meets at the Baptist Campus Ministries (BCM).”

BCM also tries to provide a lunch each year for the incoming class of internationals at Troy. The Walkers participate and have connected with students through this event, he said.

Mills said those are all great examples of how to grab hold of the opportunities God has brought to Alabama’s doorstep.

“God has really opened up some doors and we’re not sure how long they’re going to be open, but when we are faithful to enter them He is revealing Himself to these students and they are coming to know Him as Lord and Savior,” he said. †

Hospitality key to reaching internationals

Reaching international students with the gospel can be summed up in one word — hospitality.

That’s what Chris Mills, state missionary with a focus on collegiate ministry for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, says.

Looking for ways to do that? He and Brad Bensinger, Baptist campus minister at Troy University, offer some suggestions:

► Open your home.

“As Southerners and Christians, hospitality is something that we’re pretty good at,” Mills said. “We can take that and extend it toward the international students around us by hosting them for normal meals or even holiday parties.”

Doing life

When Americans live in other countries for longer than just a tourism trip, “we want to do life there and do the things that the people there do,” he said. “You learn so much more about a

culture by doing life with them and we can offer that same opportunity to them here.”

► Help them meet basic needs.

Students need many things when they first arrive, Bensinger said, “so trips to Walmart, to the bank and other places can be very helpful.”

Helping them learn English, either through one-on-one conversation or teaching English as a Second Language classes can be useful too, he said.

► Be their hosts in the community.

Do you live in the Florence area? Take that University of North Alabama student to the U.S. Space and Rocket Center. Live near the coast? Take a student at one of the area colleges or universities to the beach, Mills said.

“Do the things with them that you would do with your family,” he said. “In my opinion that’s the best way to do international student ministry — to love them and let them know you are their close friends and family here.” (TAB)



Photo courtesy of Susan Bartholomew

Students talk with members of the Hueytown community as they go door to door inviting them to Integrity Baptist Church, a church plant in the area, during Student Missions Weekend 2017.

‘Heart-changing weekend’

Students spend time participating in Bible study, worship, local missions projects

By **Carrie Brown McWhorter**
The Alabama Baptist

High school students from across the state were challenged to be “Jesus with skin on” and saw firsthand what that means at Student Missions Weekend 2017 (SMW).

The goal of SMW is to expose students to missions and ministry through Bible study, worship and participation in local missions projects, said Malory Ford, missions and ministry consultant for students and young women at Alabama Woman’s Missionary Union (WMU), which coordinates SMW. The two-day event is held each January at WorldSong Missions Place in Cook Springs. This year’s SMW was held Jan. 20–21.

Firsthand experience

Throughout the weekend, students heard stories of life on the missions field in places including the Middle East, Africa and Europe. They also saw firsthand what church planters are seeking to do in Alabama.

Sam, a former International Mission Board journeyman missionary to Europe and North Africa whose name has been changed for security reasons, shared his story with the students on Friday night and Saturday morning. He spoke about his own missions calling, daring students to consider their time off from school as an opportunity.

“Spend your summers doing something worthwhile, something that impacts eternity,” he said.

He also acknowledged the difficulties students face in an age where information is constantly available, pointing to 2 Corinthians 4:4 as a warning that Satan will blind unbelievers to the truth of the gospel.

Knowing the truth

“Information comes at us all the time and we don’t always know the source,” he said. “How can we know the truth? Study God’s Word.”

On Saturday students and their leaders served in two missions locations in communities in Birmingham. Groups in Fair-

field picked up trash and did yard cleanup. Groups in Hueytown did cleanup projects and went door to door to invite community members to Integrity Baptist Church, a church plant in the area.

Candace McIntosh, executive director of Alabama WMU, said, “My heart just smiled as I drove away from the church on Saturday. Everywhere I looked I saw students being the hands and feet of Jesus to Integrity [Baptist] and the community that surrounded it.”

Integrity Baptist Pastor Morris Johnson explained to the students about the church’s history and God’s provision of a permanent location in Hueytown. The name of the church describes the Christian lifestyle, Johnson said.

“If you walk with integrity, God will make a way,” he told the students. “We ought to live in a way that God can use us anywhere, anytime.”

“Do what God calls you to do, not what your friends call you to do. You never know the path God might take you down.”

**Michael Stephens
estimator, Saunders Bradford
Building Company**

Hope Stephens, missions and ministry consultant for children at Alabama WMU, and her husband, Michael, told the students how they had come to be involved at Integrity Baptist and in the Fairfield community. Michael Stephens cautioned students that their lives are a witness all the time, one way or another.

“Do what God calls you to do, not what your friends call you to do,” he said. “You never know the path God might take you down.”

Students need reminders that they are not alone in their schools and communities as

believers and that they have truth to speak to people, Ford said. Opportunities like SMW provide that encouragement and fellowship with other students who are seeking to live their lives for the Lord.

“The whole point of the weekend is for students to take the missions lifestyle home,” Ford said.

That’s what Sarah, a student from Birmingham, likes most about SMW.

Serving others

“This is my second year and I love meeting new people and having fun but I really like helping and serving others,” she said.

That’s what the weekend is all about, McIntosh said.

“Student Missions Weekend offers the opportunity for students to come away from their everyday life and hear how God is using believers just like them to demonstrate the love of Christ to those who do not know Him. Then they get to go be the Church, serving others and sharing the gospel,” she said. “It’s a heart-changing weekend.”

Pursue conference: Find your place in God’s plan

By **Caleb Jones**
Intern, The Alabama Baptist

Every college student is faced with the question: “What do you want to do with your life?” Some students know exactly what they want to do after college, some change their major multiple times trying to decide and most fall somewhere in between.

God’s purpose

“We [at Pursue conference] want college students, young adults and others to see that they have purpose. Then we also want to challenge them to really find their place in God’s purpose,” said Chris Mills, state missionary with a focus on collegiate ministry for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM).

On Feb. 17–18, at First Baptist

Church, Montgomery, SBOM is hosting its annual Pursue conference and this year’s theme is “My Place in His Purpose.”

Justin Law, associate minister to college students at First, Montgomery, said, “The whole purpose of this weekend is recognizing what your desires and passions are and using them for the glory of God. We want students to develop a missions mindset to share the gospel wherever they are called to work whether that’s as a business person, teacher or whatever else they might be.”

Three speakers will headline the conference: David Boudia, Olympic gold medalist diver; J.D. Payne, pastor for church multiplication at The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham; and Caleb Crider, instruc-

tional design leader for the International Mission Board and co-author of “Traidcraft: For the Church on Mission.” There also will be a panel of professionals who will talk about being on mission in their everyday lives and more than 30 breakout sessions.

The Digital Age — whose members were formerly in the David Crowder Band — will lead worship.

“[The goal of the conference] is two things: first that people commit their lives to Christ, and secondly to see students to commit to go on mission while they are still in college or after they finish college,” Law said. “We want them to respond with obedience and (be) developing a missional lifestyle.”

**For more information,
visit pursueal.org.**

Baptists

Baptist tradition characterized by freedom, central focus on Bible

By **Kenneth B.E. Roxburgh**
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Baptists are the largest denominational grouping of Christians in the United States. This includes the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), which in 2015 reported 46,499 churches and 15.5 million members. It is still the largest Protestant denomination by far although it is at the lowest level since 1993. Weekly worship attendance only numbers 5.67 million Sunday worshippers.

Statistics issued by the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), which exclude SBC figures, reported a membership of churches throughout the world who are members of BWA as being 36,692,191 at the end of 2014.

But who are these Baptists? Are all Baptists alike? Are there distinct features that bring Baptists together and help us to understand what it means to be a Baptist in the 21st century?

Baptists are a rooted people: rooted in the Word of God, rooted and grounded in the love of God and the community of Christ, nourished by both. Baptists today represent diversity of age, education, socioeconomic status and a variety of different theological perspectives. Right from the beginning of Baptist life in England, and then within Colonial life, two separate and very distinct groups called General (Arminian) and Particular (Calvinistic) Baptists developed, each with their own theological understanding of the plan of salvation.

General Baptists held to an Arminian understanding of salvation, that God offered the good news of the gospel to all, and that those who responded to His invitation were among the “elect.” They also believed Christ died for each and every individual who has ever lived in the world. They held to a “general atonement” for sin.

Particular Baptists believed that only the “elect,” those chosen by God from eternity, would be saved and that Christ only died for them. Similar differences exist within the SBC today. The old debate between Arminian Baptists and those more influenced by the theology of John Calvin remains alive and kicking.

Is diversity wrong? Are all parts of any great family meant to be like “identical twins” or “triplets” or “quadruplets?”

Tension of liberty, loyalty

Despite the frustration, despite the fact that diversity is threatening to some Baptists, the very passion which we have for freedom is a major reason why there is so much diversity in Baptist life. We are called to be “Free and Faithful Baptists,” a phrase which captures the tension of liberty and loyalty, of change and continuity.

Baptist tradition has often been characterized by freedom. The freedom of individuals to come to personal faith in

God; the freedom of the Church from state control; the freedom of local churches to form their own life and mission apart from denominational control; and, above all, the freedom of access to the Bible and freedom of interpretation of the Bible.

Perhaps the greatest problems facing Baptist churches today in terms of understanding Baptist identity is that many people in the congregations were nurtured in other communions (or none) and are therefore unfamiliar with Baptist heritage, life and thought. For many the crux of Baptist identity is believer’s baptism. They do not realize there is much more to a Baptist perspective than that of immersion in water.

Developed out of Anabaptists

Baptists have their origin among the Anabaptist movement in 1609 in Amsterdam, when a group of English believers followed their conscience and adopted believer’s baptism, rejecting their earlier infant baptism. They moved back to England and many of them were part of a larger group who immigrated to the Americas in the 17th century seeking freedom of religion.

Baptists claim a commitment to the Bible as their final authority in all matters of faith and life; affirming the Reformation emphasis on grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone and Scripture alone. They further identify with the evangelical tradition, emphasizing the power and proclamation of the gospel to a lost world.

Live individually, corporately

Freedom for Baptists is not simply a matter of freedom of individual conscience. As individuals Baptists are part of local churches where they seek to discern the will of God for their lives. Baptist churches are linked to other congregations in local Baptist associations and are part of state and national conventions.

The freedom of the individual local Baptist congregation to order its affairs under the guidance of the Holy Spirit must be seen in the context of its commitment to others within the covenant community of Baptists, so that with “all the saints” they seek to discern the mind of Christ.

At the center of Baptist identity is their focus on the Bible. When the early Anabaptists met in Zurich, Conrad Grebel wrote, “After we took Scripture in hand too and consulted it on many points, we have been instructed somewhat.”

This typifies the Baptist way of seeking to give to Scripture an authority which understands it as revealing matters relating to “faith and practice: whereby the members of a congregation live their lives individually and corporately.

The ultimate authority of Baptists is, however, to Jesus Christ who alone is Lord of the Conscience and Head of the Church and who reveals His will to His people

through the Scriptures. Jesus Christ, as the Living Word, reveals Himself through the written Word. And by the Holy Spirit, Christians are encouraged and enabled to look into its pages and discern Christ’s will for their lives in the 21st century. Baptists have always insisted on freedom of access to the Bible and freedom of interpretation of the Bible, because it is the only means of arriving at the mind of the Lord Jesus.

John Smyth, one of the earliest Baptists at the beginning of the 17th century in England, encouraged his congregation to covenant themselves together as those who wanted to “walk in all His ways made known or to be made known unto them according to their best endeavours whatsoever it should cost them, the Lord assisting them.”

That is why Baptists study the Bible week by week in Sunday School, during mid-week Bible studies and listen to sermons during worship. They are hungry to know the will of God and seek to live their lives according to His purposes.

Southern Baptists used to speak of the importance of “soul freedom,” affirming the sacredness of individual choice.

Yet Baptists have often been accused of being excessively individualistic. Baptist commitment to the freedom of conscience of the individual before God must be held in creative tension with the commitment which they have made to the community of the Church.

Baptism means, not simply, that people are committing their lives to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord but they are “baptized by one Spirit into one body” — the local church. The freedom of individual conscience must take notice of the conscience of others. Baptists are sisters and brothers in Christ within the family of faith.

‘Walk with each other’

Many Baptist churches in Alabama have church covenants. Baptists understood their identity in light of the covenant which God makes with His people to form them into a community which, as one early Baptist congregation said, would help us to “to walk with each other and with God” and “to watch over each other” in love.

One reason Baptists hold church conferences is so the congregation might together seek to discern the mind and will of Christ in choosing pastors, electing deacons and making financial decisions. Baptists stress the notion of community because as the body of Christ they are all ministers of the grace of God to one another.

One further aspect of Baptist freedom is that of religious freedom, which explores the relationship between Church and State. This can often become controversial. It obviously does not mean Christians oppose political involvement. In the early days of Baptist life in England and the Colonies, Baptists were often persecuted by the State.

However, when they were allowed political freedom they worked for a position where no one denomination or even religion was given a preferred place within the nation. Baptists have historically called for the freedom of religious worship for all — both Christians and non-Christians.

The nature of God teaches us that He has created each of us as individuals with freedom to choose and that no one should never be coerced into a particular belief.

George Washington Truett — pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas, in 1920, speaking in Washington during an SBC meeting — voiced the conviction that Baptists have always been in the vanguard of calls for freedom, civil as well as religious. Baptists, Truett affirmed, were the traditional champions of “absolute liberty.” This tradition can be

found in the writings of Thomas Helwys, one of the earliest Baptists in England, at the beginning of the 17th century. Helwys argued “the magistrate is not by virtue of his office to meddle with religion or matters of conscience to force or compel men to this or that form of religion or doctrine but to leave Christian religion free to every man’s conscience ... for Christ only is the King and Lawgiver of the Church and conscience.” He wrote a book called “A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity” and for this he was imprisoned and died there.

Helwys argued that freedom of conscience and religion meant “men’s relationship to God is between God and themselves; the king shall not answer for it, neither may the king judge between God and man. Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews or whatever, it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure.”

Leon McBeth, former professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, called this book “the first Baptist treatise devoted exclusively to religious liberty.”

This clarion cry of religious freedom also is found in the writings of Isaac Backus in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. He spoke for all Baptists who had gone before him and all who would come after him. He argued that “true religion is a voluntary obedience to God.” This is one reason why Baptists do not baptize infants who have no ability to choose for themselves, but expect individuals to choose for themselves the way of discipleship through faith expressed in believer’s baptism.

EDITOR’S NOTE — Kenneth B.E. Roxburgh is professor of religion at Samford University in Birmingham and serves as pastor for preaching and teaching at Southside Baptist Church, Birmingham.✠

WHO
are the
evangelicals?

Part 7 of 8

‘Leading in complexity’

Faith leaders face challenges in today’s culture

One of the greatest challenges spiritual leaders face today is that the culture is pushing them to the margins, according to David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group.

“We’re viewed as the people who do the marriages, the people who might have an interesting sermon once in a while, but we don’t have really that much (that is)

meaningful to say about life and how to live it,” he said.

A very small sliver of the population — 8 percent of adults — say they want to hear pastors’ views on issues such as abortion, gun control, taxes, climate change or same-sex “marriage,” according to Barna’s “The State of Pastors” study, released Jan. 26.

The study, commissioned by

Pepperdine University in Malibu, California, collected data from more than 14,000 pastors hailing from 40 Protestant denominations and included information from surveys of U.S. adults as a whole and millennial adults specifically.

Pastors are “leading in complexity,” Kinnaman said. “There is a huge amount of skepticism and indifference to today’s faith leaders.”



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But Kevin Blackwell, executive director of Samford University’s Ministry Training Institute in Birmingham, said they can’t shy away from preaching truth.

“Pastors don’t speak on political issues because they want to, they speak on these subjects because they have a biblical mandate to do so,” he said. “Many of the hot-button issues in America today are issues of morality in which the Scriptures are not neutral.”

A pastor has to keep delivering the truth — but it’s important to do it in love, Blackwell said.

Love apparently can make a difference in the data, according to a different set of data compiled in the survey. A quarter of Americans surveyed reported that they have a “very positive” opinion of pastors, with another 48 percent saying they had a “somewhat positive” opinion.

Two-thirds also believe pastors present at least some benefit to their communities. And 48 percent said their personal experience of pastors was more favorable than the media’s portrayal of faith leaders: 33 percent likened the pastors

they know to Eric Camden, the likable pastor-dad on the TV show “7th Heaven.” Fifteen percent compared their experience of pastors to Fred Phelps, the controversial founder of Westboro Baptist Church, Topeka, Kansas.

Other notable findings

▶ The average age of pastors has jumped 10 years over the past 25 years, from 44 to 54 years old. “This is a critical issue if we’re going to have the ranks of young leaders filling the pipeline of spiritual leadership today,” Kinnaman said.

▶ The number of female pastors has tripled over the past 25 years. They now make up 9 percent of senior pastors, although many lead smaller churches and earn less pay than their male counterparts.

▶ Nearly all pastors (98 percent of those in mainline Protestant denominations and 97 percent of pastors in nonmainline denominations) say the Church plays an important role in racial reconciliation, but only 51 percent list it among their church’s top 10 priorities. (TAB, RNS)

Average pastor only few years below retirement age

The average age of pastors is getting grayer — about 10 years grayer — than it was 25 years ago, according to a recent Barna Group study called “The State of Pastors.”

Today’s average pastor is only a few years below the minimum retirement age, something David Kinnaman, Barna’s president, said is significant.

“In 1991 when George Barna wrote his book, ‘Today’s Pastors,’ the typical pastor was 44 years [old]. And now, just 25 years later, the typical pastor is 54 years old,” Kinnaman said. “This is a critical issue if

we’re going to have the ranks of young leaders filling the pipeline of spiritual leadership today.”

Staying longer in pulpit

The study, which was conducted in partnership with Pepperdine University and interviewed more than 14,000 pastors, found that only 1 in 7 was under the age of 40, according to The Christian Post.

Thom Rainer, president of LifeWay Christian Resources, noted in an earlier report that pastors are staying longer in the pulpit for two reasons, the most notable of which is financial concerns.

“Like their peers in the secular

world, the Great Recession took its toll on their retirement accounts,” Rainer said. “Even worse, too many did not prepare financially for retirement at all.”

Another reason is Boomers’ perceptions of old age, he said. “Most view old age beginning in the early 70s rather than 65.”

In the Barna study, a large number of pastors reported doing well spiritually, physically and relationally. But data also showed that the longer pastors were in ministry, the more likely they were to experience doubt, the Post reported. (TAB)






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Keeping children safe

Basic policies can help prevent child abuse in church

By Michael J. Brooks
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Unfortunately we can't stop all child abuse in the world but we must try to prevent it in our churches," said John Murphy, agent for GuideStone Financial Resources, the retirement and insurance agency for Southern Baptists.

Murphy was one of several presenters at the Considerations for a Safe Children's Ministry conference at North Shelby Baptist Church, Birmingham, on Feb. 4. The event was sponsored by Shelby Baptist Association, the Shelby County Sheriff's Department and the Shelby County Law Enforcement Chaplains Association.

Erin Woods, children's minister for the Church of the Highlands' Chapel at Grants Mill, Birmingham, used the acronym BANNN to explain the basic policies and procedures for her church.

The "B" stands for bathroom.

"We don't want any preschooler to be in the bathroom with a single adult," she said. "If the child needs help, another adult should be at the door as an observer and helper if needed. This prevents any misunderstanding when a child needs assistance."

The "A" stands for appropriate affections. Woods cautioned that though children need a lot of affection, child-care workers in the church must be judicious.

Gaining trust

"The predator gains trust from the children often with hugging and stroking," she said. "Our workers use 'high fives,' fist bumps and side hugs but no snuggling or cuddling or lap-sitting. Of course the church has always had members with genuine and good hearts who've done these things, but we've established a policy for everyone in order to prevent anyone from taking advantage of our boys and girls."

The first "N" is for name tag. The Grants Mill church has devised a name tag system that is computer-generated so every child has an affixable tag with name, allergies and a number and letter code that is given to the parent or grandparent who brings them. In this way the church prevents unauthorized people from picking up children after activities.

"We also fill out accident reports if there's a bumped head or a scratch and have the parent sign it," she explained.

The second "N" is "no pictures."

"We have church photographers take pictures occasionally for promotional purposes but we always get a release form from parents," Woods said.

"Other than this workers are not to take any pictures of the children. We believe it's inappropriate to post photos of someone else's kids on social media. And we tell our workers to put their phones on the shelf when they're teaching. We only have an hour and a half to pour as much of God into these

young lives as we can and we don't need to waste it using our phones for pictures or texting."

The final "N" stands for "never alone."

"At Highlands we follow the two-adult rule and we don't count teens under 16 as adults," Woods said. "A 16-year-old can volunteer as an adult. We still ask another adult to step in and help when preschoolers go to the bathroom and need help. Older children usually don't need bathroom help but we have a monitor who lets the children go to the appropriate restroom one at a time."

Social media

Deputy Heather Parramore, investigator for the Shelby County Sheriff's Department, said predators often use social media to find lonely children and try to build a relationship.

"They pick kids with problems and try to make them feel better," she said. "They can be 1,000 miles away but they try to build a friendship, asking the children to send inappropriate pictures of themselves."

"Sometimes the predator is local and can even be a person known to the child and the family," she noted. "The predator

may give gifts to open the door to relationship, and then threaten, blackmail or bribe the child not to reveal any secrets."

Parramore said parents must monitor computer use and never let children use the computer behind locked doors.

"Trust your instincts," she said. "Stop contact with someone you suspect. Encourage your child to talk to you about the relationship and don't hesitate to contact law enforcement."

Murphy cited statistics supporting the fact that most predators are not caught quickly.

"Most abusers have molested scores of children before they're stopped and this happens because of our reluctance to report," he said.


"Most predators have no visual profile; they have a behavioral profile. They try to isolate children and build trust. That's why we must be wise in assigning workers in our churches."

Background screening

Murphy said Brotherhood Mutual, the insurance agency for GuideStone, is handling some 300 sexual abuse claims every year.

He said screening all staff and volunteer workers is a must and the screening should be repeated every two or three years.

"Ninety-five percent of all predators have never been backgrounded," he said. "This can be our first line of defense in the church, along with the six-month rule. No workers should be assigned before having been members for at least six months."

Murphy said the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions will sponsor a statewide training for children's volunteers Sept. 19 at Canaan Baptist Church, Bessemer. Presenters will include workers from MinistrySafe of Fort Worth, Texas. 



Faith leaders eager for Trump to fill position

WASHINGTON — With religious persecution intensifying worldwide, a number of religious leaders, scholars and human rights advocates are encouraging President Donald Trump to fill the position of Ambassador-at-large for International Religious Freedom within the first 100 days of his presidency.

In previous administration changes it has taken an average of 353 days to nominate someone for the position but according to the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative more than 7,000 people will be killed for their faith in that span of time.

The initiative sent a letter to President Trump signed by 715 human rights and religious freedom advocates, according to The Christian Post. "There is mounting evidence that countries that maintain broad, plural and inclusive religious freedom are less prone to violence, less likely to export terrorism and more likely to grow their overall economy," said Elijah Brown, executive vice president of 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative.

The letter cited a few examples of persecution worldwide including the continued killing of Christians, Yazidis and others by the Islamic State.

"By nominating an Ambassador-at-large for International Religious Freedom in your first 100 days you can signal your commitment to people of faith and freedom of conscience in a way that requires no new taxes and no new legislation while strengthening highly effective offices," the letter reads. (TAB)

School district prohibits Christian group's flyers

EVANSVILLE, Ind. — A school district in Indiana has banned a local Christian group from distributing flyers after an atheist organization demanded its schools stop "promoting" the group, according to The Christian Post. The Warrick County School Corporation conceded that they would stop the group, Pearls of Purity Girls, from sending out flyers in the wake of a complaint from the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) in January.

Pearls of Purity, a Christian organization based in Evansville, Indiana, "encourages both the parents and girls to live a life of purity in body, mind and heart," the Post reported.

Brad Schneider, Warrick County Superintendent, told FFRF in a letter that their distribution of the flyers didn't equate to endorsement of the group's message. But, he said, the content of the flyer itself was objectionable and should not have been approved, so in the future steps would be put in place to keep that from happening again.

"You have my word that flyers of this nature will not be distributed in the future," he wrote. "The Warrick County School Corporation enjoys a great working relationship with our community and we will continue to work with them to promote events and activities that are good for kids." (TAB)

Evangelical leaders oppose refugee ban in letter

WASHINGTON — Prominent Southern Baptists Danny Akin and Ed Stetzer are among 100 evangelical leaders who signed a letter published in a full page ad in *The Washington Post* on Feb. 8 opposing President Donald Trump's ban on refugees.

The letter expressed "deep concern" about the ban, adding, "Our care for the oppressed and suffering is rooted in the call of Jesus to 'love our neighbor as we love ourselves,'" according to The Christian Post. The ad was sponsored by World Relief, an evangelical refugee resettlement organization. Trump's Jan. 27 executive order banned refugee resettlement for 120 days, barred Syrian resettlement indefinitely and limited the number of refugees to be resettled in the U.S. to 50,000. This number includes the 32,000 already resettled under former President Barack Obama at the end of his presidency.

Akin is president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, and Stetzer serves as executive director of the Billy Graham Center for Evangelism at Wheaton College in Illinois. For the full list of signatories, visit welcomerefugees-worldrelief.nationbuilder.com. (TAB)

'Behind the Badge'

Officer morale, public perception among struggles of police officers, study says

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

The challenges of modern-day policing are significant, but Alabama law enforcement officials say their commitment to the safety of their communities remains top priority.

"I can honestly say these are the most challenging times I've seen in my 32-year career," said Birmingham Police Chief A.C. Roper. "The tenuous nature of law enforcement can affect an officer's morale but we have to remember we are committed to a cause that's greater than us. Unfortunately too many of our officers across the nation are dying in service to that call."

Roper said it is easy to forget that more than a million officers serve throughout the United States. National issues combined with local concerns affect morale, he said. "Our officers are concerned about the attacks on the nobility

of our profession and the national criticism when an officer does something wrong," Roper said. "They are concerned about their safety and concerned about support for their efforts."

Officer morale is a concern across the nation, as reported in "Behind the Badge," a Pew Research Center study conducted May 19–Aug. 14, 2016, and released in January 2017. The

nationwide survey of police officers examined several issues related to attitudes about law

enforcement and found significant differences between officer and public perceptions of the job.

In overwhelming numbers (86 percent), officers said high-profile incidents between blacks and police have made their jobs harder.

Black officers were more likely than white officers to see the deaths of blacks during encounters with police as signs of a broader problem. White officers were more likely to see these deadly en-

counters as isolated incidents.

Conflicting attitudes are just part of the job, however, according to the survey.

Fifty-eight percent of officers surveyed said they nearly always or often feel proud about their work yet 51 percent said it nearly always or often makes them feel frustrated. A majority of officers (55 percent) report experiencing both verbal abuse and expressions of thanks in the course of their daily duties.

Lt. Stacy Bates, public information officer for the Huntsville Police Department, said morale in his department is positive overall, which he credits to community support of the department. Community policing efforts have made a difference.

"We have been engaged in community policing efforts for years and we think that helps avoid some of the issues that cities across the nation are facing," Bates said.

Community involvement and citizen police academies let local residents know why the police do what they do and allow officers to get to know the citizens and their problems, as well as open discussions about how both groups can work to resolve the issues.

"All of this type of stuff together really helps to keep a positive relationship between the police and the community," Bates said.



123rf.com

Of particular note in the Pew study are the sharply different views held by police officers and the public when it comes to issues of policing and public safety.

Real-life experience

Most Americans say they understand the risks and challenges of officers face but the police disagree. Only 14 percent of officers say the public understands these risks very or somewhat well, while 86 percent say the public doesn't understand them too well or at all.

For example, many citizens do not realize the police are often the first ones called on to deal with the mentally ill.

"There are no 24-hour-a-day mental illness response agencies so citizens have no option but to call

the police," Roper said. "Funding has been cut significantly for social service agencies so they are unable to provide the level of service that's needed, which puts our officers on the front lines."

Roper calls this an "over-reliance on police officers" and said socio-economic issues like poverty, the breakdown of the family unit, high unemployment rates in many communities and lack of education often "fall in the laps of our police officers."

While community education efforts are helpful, no simulation experience can fully show what an officer may be faced with on any given day.

"Until you are actually put in the situation where you have to make the quick and very serious decisions that an officer has to make, you don't completely know what it's like," Bates said.

More than 90 percent of officers surveyed said it is at least somewhat important to have a detailed understanding of the people, places and culture in the area where they work in order to be effective at their jobs.

Communities need to partner with their local police department and take ownership of their neighborhoods as well, Roper said.

"We can't be successful without good community support," he said, including support from the faith community.

"We truly need the faith community to step out of the walls and engage as individuals or through resourcing other support agencies," Roper said. "We need the Church to be the light that God has called it to be. Our officers need their prayers because prayer makes a difference." ✠

To read the full "Behind the Badge" report, visit www.pewsocialtrends.org.

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Across ALABAMA'S Associations

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► **Maytown Church** will host the University of Mobile RamCorps instrumental ensemble and The Sounds of Mobile vocal ensemble in concert Feb. 19, 5 p.m. A love offering will be taken. For more information call the church office at 205-786-5359. John Killian is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM

► **The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham**, and **Shepherds Fold** will host David Ring as guest motivational speaker March 2. Matt Mason is pastor. ► **Mulga Church** and **Fishing for Christ Ministries** will hold A Night with Randy Howell, 2014 Bassmaster Classic champion, March 1, 6:30 p.m. Crantford Hicks is pastor.

COOSA RIVER

► **Robert Klotz** is the new pastor of **First Church, Talladega**. His first Sunday will be Feb. 26. He previously served as pastor of Perdido Church. He also served at churches in Louisiana and Georgia. He holds a bachelor's degree from Leavell College in New Orleans and a master's degree from New Orleans Seminary. Klotz and his wife, Heather, have two children.



KLOTZ

CALHOUN

► **Oak Bowery Church, Ohatchee**, will host The Kingsmen in concert Feb. 24, 7 p.m. For more information call 256-892-3711. Sam Fordham is pastor.

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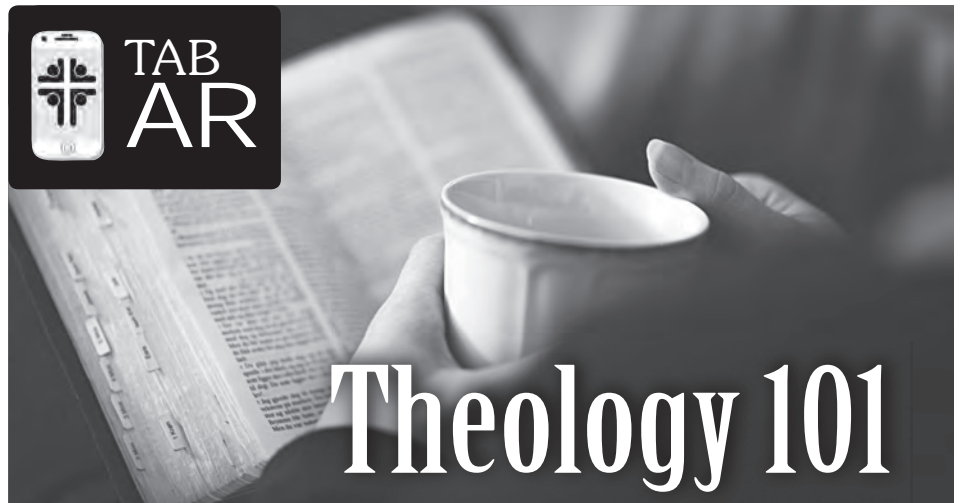
► **Donnie Dickens** is the new bivocational pastor of **Catoma Church, Montgomery**. He previously served as pastor of Bayside Church, Lillian. He also served at churches in Alabaster and Georgia. He is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree from New Orleans Seminary. Dickens and his wife, Jennifer, have five children.

WEST CULLMAN

► **Martha Hayes**, wife of Edwin J. Hayes, retired pastor of First, Cullman, died Jan. 14. She was 71. Martha Hayes was a published author of Sunday School lessons for LifeWay Christian Resources and contributed to the day of prayer resource for Alabama Baptists. A graduate of Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, Hayes taught 5th- and 6th-grade Sunday School for 50 years. She also taught in the Mother's Day Out program for 15 years. She is survived by her husband of 52 years, three children and seven grandchildren.✠

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Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Anthropology

Image and Likeness of God

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

Students of the Bible have spent many hours and used much ink in the attempt to express an answer to the question concerning human resemblance to God. In what ways do we possess likeness to God who made us? Since the Bible reminds us that God is spirit, then our likeness to Him is not found in our physical bodies. God is not mirrored in the human physical form. Our answer must lie beyond outward appearances. We must search for the answer by looking inward. Divine resemblance has to do with our immaterial or spiritual makeup.

This week's study draws our attention to some of the ways often put forward to explain what it means to be in God's image and likeness. First we humans possess the ability to think and reason. We possess a rational nature that is elevated above all other living creatures. While some of us at times may appear to lack such sensibility or at least choose to kick it out of gear, we do possess the possibility of rational thought.

Connected closely with this capability is the human ability of putting thoughts into words in order to communicate among ourselves and with God. While other animals may possess some means of communicating among their own kind, it is not so sophisticated or advanced so as to be exercised in verbal expression. Of unparalleled value is the fact that humans can think about God and even communicate with Him.

Another facet of Godlikeness in us humans is the ability to think morally so as to make judgments between right and wrong, as well as to develop standards for acceptable behavior. The fact that the Bible is filled with God's commandments and prohibitions tells us He operates out of a perfect sense of what is right or wrong.

Again we mortals sometimes choose not to order our behavior according to our best understanding of what is moral, however we do normally possess the capability of differentiating between ac-

ceptable and unacceptable behavior. We commonly think of this as the possession of conscience or moral awareness. This ability makes us like God, who has set standards for acceptable human actions in His commandments that begin with "thou shalt not" or "thou shalt." To be sure, some of our human standards for distinguishing between good and evil are flawed. Much that orders our behavior may come to us from society's norms or from family and community values, but we are aware of some inner monitor that serves to approve or disapprove of certain actions or attitudes.

Religious communion

A third consideration of what makes us after the divine pattern is the capability of engaging in religious communion with God, something members of the animal kingdom do not and cannot do. We can think of this as the ability to experience God in worship and prayer. In so doing, we might say that "like calls unto like." Before disobedience drove a wedge in their fellowship with God, the first human pair knew what it was like to walk and talk with God in the cool of the evening (Gen. 3:8).

Another aspect of human likeness to our Creator God is that we also are creative, although not in the absolute or original sense as God when He spoke the world into existence. Creative similarity is seen in art and music creations, literary productions, medical treatments and other scientific advances. While no means exhaustive, these possibilities are suggestive of what it means to be made in God's likeness and image.✠

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.



FBC Tallasahatchie sews for children



Photo courtesy of Charlene Cleveland

The Women on Mission group of First Baptist Church, Tallasahatchie, in Alpine, are ministering to the 75 foster children in Talladega and Coosa counties by sewing bags for the children to keep their personal items in as they are moved from home to home. The group also is quilting baby blankets for foster infants. 'We are a small church in the Coosa River Association [but] we are a busy little church,' said Charlene Cleveland, the church's Woman's Missionary Union director. Craig Hamm is pastor.

Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

2017 marks 200th anniversary of missionary born into slavery

By Joanne Sloan

Joanne Sloan, a member of First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, has been a published writer of articles and books for 30 years. She has a bachelor's degree double majoring in history and English from East Texas State University (now Texas A&M-Commerce) and a master's degree specializing in English from the University of Arkansas (1978).



Alfred Francis Russell (1817–1884) — the 10th president of Liberia from 1883 to 1884 — was born into slavery before becoming a missionary, planter and politician.

This year is the 200th anniversary of his birth.

Russell was born Aug. 25, 1817, in Lexington, Kentucky, the mixed-race son of Amelie “Milly” Crawford, an African-American slave, and John Russell.

Alfred Russell and his mother were freed in 1833, along with his cousin, Lucy Russell, and her four children.

Soon the free slaves emigrated with almost 200 other colonists to Liberia under the sponsorship of the American Colonization Society (ACS).

ACS, which was established in 1816, supported the migration of free African Americans to Africa. Its efforts led to the founding of Liberia in 1822 on the coast of West Africa. Liberia became an independent nation in 1847.

Alfred Russell and his family were among the last of 1,400 settlers to Liberia. He and his family arrived in Liberia on July 11, 1833. Around 146 people survived the voyage but 30 children died on the journey.

The pioneers suffered harsh conditions such as local diseases, poor climate, shortage of supplies, little food, inadequate housing and no medical services. Three of his cousin's children died from the local fever. Alfred Russell also had the same

disease which resulted in an injury in one of his legs. He used a crutch the rest of his life.

In 1855, Russell wrote of his family's struggles in Africa: “It was so long before we could find Africa out, how to live in it and what to do to live, that it almost cost us death, seeking life.”

At the age of 19, Russell became a Methodist missionary. He served in various posts throughout Liberia for 17 years and later became an Episcopal priest.

Russell was a successful businessman who always employed native laborers.

An early advocate for coffee cultivation in Liberia, he had around 8,000 coffee trees on his 200 acres along the St. Paul

River in Montserado County in 1852. Later he became a major sugar cane grower.

His political career also began in the 1850s when he served in the Liberian Senate for two decades, all while continuing his missionary service.

In the 1881 presidential contest, Anthony Gardiner won the election as Liberia's president. Russell won the vice presidency.

When poor health forced Gardiner to resign in January 1883, Russell succeeded him as president. But because he, along with Gardiner, had been blamed for Liberia's losing much of its territory to Britain, Russell was not nominated for president the next term.

He died April 4, 1884, only three months after he left office.✠



RUSSELL



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Most religious states

Mississippi remains the most religious state in the U.S., with 59 percent of its residents classifying themselves as ‘very religious’ in 2016. Alabama is the second most religious at 56 percent and Utah is third at 54 percent.



10 MOST RELIGIOUS

| STATE | VERY RELIGIOUS |
|----------------|----------------|
| Mississippi | 59% |
| Alabama | 56% |
| Utah | 54% |
| South Dakota | 53% |
| South Carolina | 52% |
| Arkansas | 52% |
| Louisiana | 50% |
| Tennessee | 50% |
| Oklahoma | 49% |
| Georgia | 47% |

10 LEAST RELIGIOUS

| STATE | VERY RELIGIOUS |
|---------------|----------------|
| Vermont | 21% |
| Maine | 23% |
| Massachusetts | 25% |
| Rhode Island | 27% |
| Nevada | 27% |
| Alaska | 27% |
| Oregon | 27% |
| Connecticut | 28% |
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Alabama among states with lowest percentage of LGBT-identifying residents

By Michael C. Smith
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Alabama is among the states with the lowest percentage of adults who identified themselves as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender), according to new research from Gallup.

Gallup found that 3 percent of Alabama residents polled in 2015 and 2016 identified as LGBT, tying for 47th among the 50 states. That's a 0.2 percentage-point increase from 2012.

Vermont tops the ranking at 5.3 percent, followed by Massachusetts (4.9), California (4.9), Oregon (4.9) and Nevada (4.8).

The District of Columbia's LGBT percentage (8.6) exceeds that of any of the states.

States with the lowest percentage of LGBT-identifying residents include South Dakota (2), North Dakota (2.7), Idaho (2.8), Arkansas (3) and South Carolina (3).

These findings are based on combined 2015 and 2016 data from more than 400,000 interviews. Consistent with Gallup research showing national increases in the percentage of adults

| U.S. adults identifying as LGBT by region | | |
|---|---------|---------|
| REGION | 2012-13 | 2015-16 |
| Pacific (Calif., Ore., Wash., Hawaii, Alaska) | 4.2% | 4.9% |
| New England (Maine, N.H., Vt., Mass., R.I., Conn.) | 4.3% | 4.5% |
| Middle Atlantic (N.Y., N.J., Pa., Md., Del., W.Va., D.C.) | 3.7% | 4.2% |
| Rocky Mountain (Mont., Ariz., Colo., Idaho, Wyo., Utah, Nev., N.M.) | 3.3% | 3.8% |
| East Central/Great Lakes (Ohio, Mich., Ind., Ill.) | 3.5% | 3.8% |
| Southeast (Va., N.C., S.C., Ga., Fla., Ky., Tenn., Ala., Miss.) | 3.2% | 3.6% |
| West Central (Wis., Minn., Iowa, Mo., N.D., S.D., Neb., Kan.) | 2.9% | 3.4% |

Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index

identifying as LGBT (up from 3.5 percent in 2012 to 4.1 percent in 2016), the vast majority of states and the District of Columbia (42 out of 51) also reported increases. However, most of the state-level

To read the complete Gallup report, visit www.gallup.com/poll/203513/vermont-leads-states-lgbt-identification.aspx.

changes are not statistically significant.

At 3.6 percent, the Southeast region (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia) has the sixth-highest percentage of LGBT-identifying adults among the eight U.S. regions. That's a 0.4 percentage-point increase from 2012-13.

The Pacific region, which includes the West Coast, Alaska and Hawaii, has the highest percentage at 4.9. The Pacific region also had the largest percentage-point increase (0.7 points) from 2012-13 to 2015-16. This change bumped it ahead of the New England region (4.5 percent), which reported a 0.2-point increase.

The Middle Atlantic and Rocky Mountain regions also reported large increases (each 0.5 points). The West Central region continues to have the lowest percentage of people who identify as LGBT but also showed a relatively large gain from 2.9 to 3.4 percent.

According to Gallup, a variety of factors influence changes in the portion of adults identifying as LGBT over time.

Gallup research documents ongoing increases in the social acceptance of LGBT individuals in the United States. Growing public acceptance can affect and likely increase the willingness of LGBT individuals to identify as such on surveys.

Millennials' acceptance

Nationally virtually all of the increases in LGBT identification during the past five years are among millennials. Their coming of age at a time of greater social acceptance toward LGBT individuals may contribute to disproportionate increases in LGBT identity across states. As the youngest millennials reach 18 and enter Gallup's national adult surveys, their influence on the national survey estimates increases proportionally.

According to Gallup state-level rankings, the portion of adults identifying as LGBT clearly relates to the regional differences in LGBT social acceptance, which tend to be higher in the East and West and lower in the South and Midwest. States ranked in the bottom 10 for LGBT identification are dominated by those in the Midwest and South.

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No Man Left Behind helps churches reach men in pews

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

Men are fighting a battle every day to be the godly men, husbands and fathers they are meant to be. No Man Left Behind training seeks to help them fulfill that calling.

No Man Left Behind is a two-day training designed for leaders and ministry teams who are committed to reaching men in the context of the local church. Bethany Baptist Church, Andalusia, will host No Man Left Behind training Feb. 17-18. The conference begins at 6:30 p.m. on Friday night and ends at 4 p.m. on Saturday.

No Man Left Behind takes a 3-D approach to men's ministry: Develop, Disciple and Deploy. The No Man Left Behind strategy does not require new programs or curriculum but instead takes advantage of

what a church is already doing and gives church leaders tools to assess, plan and implement their vision for men's ministry. The result is an environment where the Holy Spirit inspires men to engage in life-on-life discipleship, according to facilitators Brett Clemmer and Steve Hutton of Man in the Mirror, the men's ministry who conceived No Man Left Behind 3-D.

Workshop topics focus on both short-term and long-term goals and include time for discussion and planning, which is why organizers suggest that at least two men from each church attend the conference. In addition to training materials and planning tools, teams will receive a one-year subscription to online training to assist in implementation of their strategy.

The end result is renewed vision and passion and a custom-

ized game plan for engaging and discipling men in the church, Clemmer says. Churches that have implemented the No Man Left Behind model report that on average they see a 48 percent increase in attendance at church among men and 84 percent more

men involved in discipleship.

Registration, which includes materials and meals on Saturday, is discounted for pastors and is open online at <https://nomanleftbehind.org/event/andalusia-al-no-man-left-behind-3d/>.

Men's leaders, laymen and pas-

tors all are encouraged to attend the interdenominational training. The event is co-sponsored by Iron Works Ministries of Covington County. For more information, contact Bryan Richardson at 407-472-2119 or visit www.maninthemirror.org. †

Franklin Graham receives backlash for immigration stance

Baptists in Puerto Rico have withdrawn support for Franklin Graham's Feb. 10-12 Festival of Hope evangelistic rally in San Juan in protest of the evangelist's endorsement of anti-immigration policies espoused by President Donald Trump.

The executive minister and the president of the Baptist Churches of Puerto Rico issued a statement Feb. 4 saying Graham's endorsement of Trump's policies

are "contrary to the values of the Kingdom."

The Baptist leaders said Trump's immigration policies "attack the life of our neighbor." Therefore the organization's board of directors decided to withdraw their support "for reasons of conscience." Individual churches and pastors remain free to make up their own mind about whether to participate.

Graham recently defended Trump's executive order blocking

refugees from Syria and immigrants from seven predominantly Muslim nations deemed high risk from entering the country, saying for him it is "not a Bible issue."

"We want to love people ... [but] a country should have order and there are laws that relate to immigration and I think we should follow those laws," Graham said in a *Huffington Post* article published Jan. 25. "We need to be very careful." (BNG)

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Union Grove Baptist Church in Jemison, Alabama, is seeking a full-time senior pastor. Compensation and benefits are negotiable. Please submit resumé to: ugbcpulpitcommittee@gmail.com.

PASTOR

Saraland Baptist Church in Saraland, Alabama, is seeking a full-time pastor. Send resumé to: P.O. Box 749, Saraland, AL 36571 or contact Autrey Key at 251-675-6681.

PASTOR

Southside Baptist Church is prayerfully seeking full-time pastor. Send resumé to: Pastor Search Committee, 1101 Cherry St., Talladega, AL 35160 (www.southsidetalladega.org).

ASSOCIATE PASTOR OF EDUCATION AND FAMILIES

New Hope Baptist Church, located in southern Lauderdale County, Mississippi, in the Clarksdale community, is an actively growing church. We are prayerfully seeking to fill a new full-time staff position of associate pastor of education and families. Those who are passionate for God and passionate about developing and ministering to church families, please email a resumé to: nhbcasocpastorsearch@gmail.com.

MINISTER OF MUSIC

Edgil Grove Baptist Church of Jasper, Alabama, is currently

accepting resúmes for part-time position of minister of music. Please send all resúmes to: jjlmdx@hotmail.com. Salary negotiable.

PART-TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC/WORSHIP

Small, rural Southern Baptist church (www.BlueSpringsBaptist.com) in south Somerville/Florlette (Morgan County), Alabama, seeks individual to lead blended style music for Sunday morning and evening worship, weekly choir practice and children's music specials. If interested, please send letter, resumé and additional inquiries to: BroRichie@att.net.

BIVOCATIONAL WORSHIP LEADER

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

BIVOCATIONAL WORSHIP PASTOR

Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, Moulton, Alabama, is receiving resúmes for a part-time bivocational worship pastor. Resúmes and inquiries may be sent to: joycesouthside@aol.com.

BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC DIRECTOR

Calvary Heights Baptist Church, Alexander City, Alabama, is receiving applicants for a part-time, bivocational music director. Resúmes and inquiries may be sent to: CalvaryHeightsBaptist@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC DIRECTOR

Calvary Baptist Church, Scottsboro, Alabama, is receiving applicants for a bivocational minister of music director. Resúmes and inquiries may be sent to: cbcmusic16@gmail.com.

MINISTER OF MUSIC/ SENIOR ADULTS

Covenant Baptist Church, a traditional Southern Baptist church in Collierville, Tennessee, seeks a full-time minister of music/senior adults to provide leadership to the total music ministry of the church to include preschool and children's choirs; youth, adult and senior adult choirs; and leadership in senior adult ministry. Send a cover letter and resumé to: Personnel Committee, Covenant Baptist Church, P.O. Box 1165, Collierville, TN 38027-1165 or to: drsam@mycbcc.org. Applicants also must provide a DVD of a recent service you have led or a link to a video of a recent service.

MUSIC DIRECTOR

Part-time music director needed. Please send resumé to: Search Committee, Refuge Baptist Church, 3098 Red Hill Rd., Talladega, AL 36078.

MINISTER TO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Westmeade Baptist Church, Decatur, Alabama, is currently seeking a full-time minister to children and families. Please send resúmes to: scotty@westmeadebaptist.org.

BIVOCATIONAL CHILDREN'S MINISTER

Forest Avenue Baptist Church in Jackson, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational children's minister. Please send a resumé detailing ministry experience with references to: fabchurchjackson@gmail.com.

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A Certain Trumpet

Sermons by Alabama Baptists

The Beatitudes series — Matthew 5:3-12

'Blessed are poor in spirit' (v. 3) — Real Happiness, Eternal Joy

The poor in spirit are blessed, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs" (Matt. 5:3).

In 2015, I had the privilege to visit the Holy Land for the first time. The church where I serve graciously sent me to Israel as a pastor appreciation gift. Wow. What a blessing. It makes us happy to receive wonderful gifts. It makes us happy to take wonderful trips. But the "new" eventually wears off of gifts. We must return to work from great trips and that happiness fades. Can there be real lasting happiness and eternal joy?

People everywhere are searching for happiness. They try all sorts of things to make them happy but it doesn't last. Even our own Declaration of Independence says we have certain inalienable rights and one is "the pursuit of happiness." But happiness is not just something we should pursue but something we should obtain. And not just on a temporary basis but permanently and eternally.

As we begin a series on the beatitudes, I have been privileged to write this sermon on the first one. Let's begin by defining the key word, "blessed."

"Blessed" is translated from the Greek word "makarios" which means "happy." "The Beatitudes" is the title given this passage in Matthew 5:3-12. The word "beatitude" comes from the Latin word also meaning "happy." Most people define happy as being temporary and joy as more permanent. But look at how Noah Webster defines "happy" in his dictionary published in 1828.

Definition of happy

The American Dictionary of the English Language defines happy as "being in the enjoyment of agreeable sensations from the possession of good; enjoying pleasure from the gratification of appetites or desires."

The pleasurable sensations derived from the gratification of sensual appetites render a person temporarily happy, but we only can be called really and permanently happy if we enjoy peace of mind in the favor of God. To be in any degree happy we must be free from pain both of body and of mind. To be



By Tony Holcomb

Tony Holcomb is pastor of Beulah Baptist Church, Boaz. He has been in ministry for more than 34 years — 12 years as a

minister of music and 22 years as pastor, five of which was on the missions field leading a church plant in Montana. He is a graduate of Snead State Community College in Boaz, Samford University in Birmingham and Trinity College of the Bible in Newburgh, Indiana. He and his wife of 35 years, Shan, have one daughter, Mary.

very happy, we must be in the enjoyment of lively sensations of pleasure, either of body or mind.

In Noah Webster's definition we see happiness can be permanent but only in God. Oh how we need dictionaries like his today. How can we have this permanent happiness? The answer is in the happy passage of the Beatitudes.

'Poor in spirit'

While in the Holy Land, I had the great blessing of visiting the Church of the Beatitudes. This beautiful church surrounded by gardens sits on the hill of the traditional site of "The Sermon on the Mount." Here Jesus proclaimed to a great crowd of people just who could truly be happy. He began with the "poor in spirit." Jesus said, "Blessed (or happy) are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." That must have gotten their attention. Many of the listeners were no doubt poor and seeking happiness and real meaning in life. But what did He mean by "poor in spirit"?

A paradox

Many have difficulty understanding this verse. It seems to be a contradiction or paradox. How could the poor in spirit be happy? Imagine how you would feel being shipwrecked. There you are clinging to a life raft in the middle of nowhere

contemplating your desperate situation. Suddenly the Coast Guard rescue ship comes over the horizon headed toward you. Think of the relief and happiness you would feel when being pulled aboard that rescue boat. It's humbling, recognizing your inability to save yourself; your need for rescue is being "poor in spirit."

Need for Jesus

Real happiness, real joy, real purpose and real fulfillment can only be found in Jesus Christ. And for us to find Jesus we must recognize our need for Him. The only way we can be saved from this sinful world is to know we need to be rescued then get on the rescue boat when it comes by. Being "poor in spirit" is recognizing our desperate situation. It is seeing the utter hopelessness of our sinful self and crying out to God for rescue. The answer to the crowd's need for rescue and real happiness stood before them on that mountain. Did they recognize Him and cry out to Him for salvation? Only if they were poor in spirit, recognizing their hopelessness, then feeling his outstretched hand pull them into the ark of safety.

Ark of safety

The rescue boat, the ark of safety, is Jesus Christ. He pulls us on board when we are poor in spirit, drowning in our sin and crying out to Him. He pulls us into the Church of the Living God — the kingdom of heaven — in which we cannot fall overboard or be snatched out. What real and permanent happiness we have when we are rescued by Christ and brought into His kingdom of heaven forever.

As I sat on the mount basking in the temporary happiness of a great gift and a great trip, I was reminded of my eternal happiness in knowing personally the One who preached the sermon on the mount that day. He is the One who rescued me from my sin 44 years ago and He knew then that I would be sitting where others "poor in spirit" sat so long ago and received the same real lasting happiness that continues to this day.

Even now I continue to bask in the eternal happiness of knowing Jesus and being in His kingdom.✠

Alabama Men's Hall of Fame taking 2017 nominations

The Alabama Men's Hall of Fame is calling for nominations by March 15 for its induction class of 2017.

The Hall was established by the State of Alabama in 1987 to recognize men native to or identified most closely with Alabama who have made significant contributions on a state, national or international scale. The Alabama Men's Hall of Fame is housed at Samford University in Birmingham.

To date, 65 men have been inducted into the Hall of Fame. Some inductees include: Martin Luther King Jr., George Washington Carver, Braxton Bragg Comer, Admiral Raphael Semmes, Wernher Von Braun and many more.

A form for nominations and a list of the current Alabama Men's Hall of Fame members are available on the Alabama Men's Hall of Fame website.

The formal induction ceremony is held each year in Birmingham during September. This year the induction ceremony and luncheon will be Sept. 20.

All nominees must have been deceased for at least two years. Nominations must be postmarked no later than March 19 and should be mailed to: Alabama Men's Hall of Fame, Samford University, P.O. Box 292307, Birmingham, AL 35229.

For more information, contact the board's executive secretary, Annette Green, at 205-492-3936. (TAB)



In 1889, *The Alabama Baptist* reported that messengers to the Alabama Baptist State Convention meeting in Selma voted to establish a five-woman group — called the Central Committee — to promote missions causes among women of Alabama Baptist churches.

The action came despite strong opposition from some pastors who argued Southern women did not want to engage in the public forum.

The convention vote complied with a request by the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) asking all states to appoint Central Committees to promote missions.

Mrs. L.A. Hamilton was the first president. The following year the Central Committee became the Alabama Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) affiliated with the SBC WMU Auxiliary. (TAB)

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

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Paying for EDUCATION

Financial aid makes higher education affordable

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

Planning ahead is important in most things but it is especially helpful when it comes to paying for post-secondary education or training.

More than 85 percent of undergraduate students rely on financial aid. Still experts believe more than \$2 billion dollars of aid goes unclaimed in the United States each academic year.

That's a lot of money left on the table that could help Alabama students pursue an advanced degree or technical certification, said Kristina Scott, executive director of Alabama Possible, a nonprofit organization that seeks to reduce poverty and its impact in the state.

"One of the biggest barriers to post-secondary education is that students and their parents don't know about the availability of financial aid for both 2- and 4-year education programs," she said. "Whether you want to work in an



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advanced manufacturing plant or get an English degree, the financial aid form is the key."

FAFSA

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is the primary way both public and private colleges and universities determine a student's eligibility for financial aid and put together

an aid package to cover costs.

A financial aid package may consist of money from federal, state and local sources. Federal funds come in the form of grants, loans and work-study opportunities. Many students in Alabama qualify for the Pell Grant, the largest federal grant program available to undergraduate students. In order to qualify

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“One of the biggest barriers to post-secondary education is that students and their parents don’t know about the availability of financial aid for both 2- and 4-year education programs.”

Kristina Scott
executive director, Alabama Possible

for a Pell Grant, which does not have to be paid back, a student must demonstrate financial need. Those who qualify for the 2017–18 academic year will be awarded \$5,920 to use for their studies.

Sources of money

A financial aid package also may include money from state sources, college or university funds, and/or scholarships from nonprofit or private organizations. Regardless of the sources of money, the FAFSA gets the process started, which is why several organizations in Alabama have joined forces to encourage students to complete the form during their senior year of high school. The campaign is called

“Cash for College Alabama.”

“Everyone should fill out the form,” Scott said. “Nationally the U.S. Department of Education reports that 9 out of 10 students who fill out the FAFSA attend college the following fall.”

That number is important, especially in Alabama where increasingly jobs require some kind of advanced training beyond high school.

“For so many years you could graduate from high school and go get a job in a factory on an assembly line or in a field or a mine and you could make enough to support your family. Now the jobs that pay a wage so you can support your family are jobs that (See ‘Misconceptions,’ page 18)

SPOTLIGHT ON CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION



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SPOTLIGHT ON CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Misconceptions keep students from applying for financial aid

(continued from page 17) require post-secondary education,” Scott said.

That’s not to say that well-paying jobs require a four-year degree or higher. It’s actually just the opposite.

Numbers from the Alabama Department of Education suggest that for every job in the future that requires a master’s degree or higher, there will be seven jobs that require a one-year certificate or two-year degree. Jobs in health care top the list of fastest-growing jobs but team assemblers, automotive technicians, mechanics and construction helpers are in high demand as well.

Financial aid is available to pay for training but students have to apply for it.

One reason many students don’t apply for financial aid is the common misconception that aid calculations are based solely on parental income, Scott said.

Variety of factors

Many factors are taken into account, like how many other kids in the family are in college, the age of the student’s parents and the parents’ income. Some factors don’t matter at all in the calculations including how much a family’s home is worth, how much parents have saved for re-

“If we embrace a college-going culture, we have an opportunity for families to have bigger incomes and communities to be better off.”

Kristina Scott
executive director, Alabama Possible

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tirement and the student's grades.

Today's FAFSA is completed online using income tax data from two years prior, which means students don't have to wait on current year tax returns to fill out the form. Another beneficial change is that FAFSA filers can securely connect to the IRS website and automatically pull in data from tax forms.

Upcoming deadline

"It's a rare occasion of government agencies talking to each other and it's so much more secure than students carrying their parents' tax returns to school," Scott said.

The upcoming March 1 deadline is important because students

who complete the form before the deadline have the best chance at receiving need-based financial aid from colleges and universities, Scott said.

Scott said Alabama employers are seeking skilled workers to step into jobs that increasingly utilize technology skills. Training students for these jobs is a benefit to both families and communities, Scott said.

"If we embrace a college-going culture, we have an opportunity for families to have bigger incomes and communities to be better off," she said. "But we have to figure out how every student can be college material and we must also broaden our definition of what college is." ✚

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1. FAFSA stands for Free Application for Federal Student Aid.
2. The FAFSA is the form required at all colleges — public and private — that accept and award federal aid.
3. The FAFSA provides your college financial aid officers with the information they need to create your financial aid package.
4. The FAFSA can be completed online at www.fafsa.ed.gov.
5. The majority of colleges also use the FAFSA to determine who qualifies for state and institutional need-based aid.
6. You can file your FAFSA as early as Oct. 1 of the year prior to your first year in college.
7. The 2017–2018 FAFSA requires 2015 tax data.
8. There is no income cutoff to qualify for federal student aid. You can submit the FAFSA to schools you are considering.
9. Application and acceptance to the college is not required to put the school on your list.
10. FAFSA questions and concerns should be directed to the financial aid office of the school you attend or are planning to attend, not to the U.S. Department of Education.

For more information about the FAFSA, go to www.cashforcollegealabama.org.

Source: www.fafsa.ed.gov



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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For February 19

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

FAITH THROUGH TRIALS
Ruth 1:6-18

The Book of Ruth offers light in the midst of a dark time in Israel's history. Following the deliverance from Egypt and the conquest of the Promised Land by the mighty hand and outstretched arm of God, Israel faced waves of spiritual renewal and apostasy. Judges concludes with little hope for Israel in the final statement: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever he wanted" (21:25).

Note the timing of Ruth: the time of the judges. Note the name of the man whose family is central to the story: Elimelech, whose name means "my God is King." Note his sons' names: Mahlon and Chilion, meaning "sickly" and "weakly." Note the irony of their hometown: famine in the "house of bread" (Beth-lehem). Who could have imagined a series of events, which begins with bleakness and then gets worse? Famine strikes. They leave their inheritance to feed the family. Elimelech dies. Mahlon marries outside the family and dies. Chilion marries and dies. Is it any wonder Naomi wanted to be called "bitter" Mara after 10 years of suffering?

A Desperate Return (6-10)

Naomi prepared to return home since word was out that God provided food (lechem, or bread) once again for the people of the tribe of Judah. With nothing left to show for the last 10 years of her life, Naomi looked to return home. Her daughters-in-law began the trek, but she had nothing to offer them.

A Bitter Plea (11-14)

Naomi had no means of providing for her widowed daughters, so she pled with them to turn back and return home to their fathers' homes. Levirate marriage, the provision of a husband's brother to

produce an heir, was not possible because Naomi had no other sons to give Ruth and Orpah (Deut. 25:5-6). The next closest kinsman could redeem the widow, but who would redeem a Moabite? God had clearly excluded Moabites from gathering in the congregation of His people (Deut. 23:3). Note that throughout the story, the narrator refers to her as "Ruth the Moabitess" (1:22; 2:2, 6, 21; 4:5, 10).

Orpah listened to the pleas of Naomi. They embraced, they wept, they said their goodbyes and then Orpah kissed Naomi and went home. However, Ruth "clung" to Naomi, the same verb translated "bonds" in Genesis 2:24. Perhaps for this reason ministers often recite the next section in Christian weddings, though the original promise came from a daughter-in-law to her mother-in-law.

A Lifelong Promise (15-18)

"Do not persuade me to leave you." Whereas Naomi experienced only bitterness from all her loss in Moab, Ruth found hope. The god of Moab often required a sacrifice, sometimes the sacrifice of an infant. By contrast, Israel's God was the Author of Life. Without knowing it Naomi and her family had introduced Ruth to Yahweh.

"Wherever you go I will go, and wherever you live I will live." Ruth committed to Naomi for the long haul. Naomi was now her family. Basically she said, "If you leave me, I'm coming with you."

"Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God." Throughout this story, Ruth was the Moabitess. Here, she turned her back on her Moabite heritage and on Chemosh, the fertility god of the Moabites. She confessed her commitment to the God of Israel. "May the Lord (Yahweh) do this to me ... if anything but death separates you and me." In desperate times she found hope in both God and Naomi. †

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

PRACTICING JOY
Philippians 4:4-9

Live a life of joy and graciousness. (4-5)

This concluding exhortation is much like those found elsewhere in Paul's letters (see 1 Cor. 16:13; 2 Cor. 13:11; 1 Thess. 5:12-24). Paul begins with "rejoice," here repeating Philippians 3:1 exactly. "Rejoice in the Lord," with the addition of the adverb "always" (see 1 Thess. 5:16). The adverbs "always" and "again" tell us much, especially that this is not just typical or to be passed over as a nice Christian platitude, but crucial to the whole of this letter. Joy — unmitigated, untrammelled joy — is, or at least should be, the distinctive mark of the believer in Christ Jesus.

Paul encourages the Philippians to let their "gentleness" be evident to all including those who oppose them. The Greek word for "gentleness" denotes generosity toward others and is a characteristic of Christ Himself (see 2 Cor. 10:1). Verse 5 concludes with, "The Lord is near," though some have wondered in what sense He is near. Is this reference to space or time? The words are reminiscent of Psalm 145:18: "The Lord is near all who call upon Him." In this sense Paul is saying the Lord is near us whenever we need Him. However, numerous passages depict Paul's hope for Jesus to return sooner than later. Given the context, it is likely Paul's words reflect both meanings: Christ is always near for us to call upon when we need hope and comfort and this hope is strengthened all the more by the joyful expectation of Christ's return.

Live a life of prayer. (6-7)

The way to peace is through prayer and petition. The Greek for "prayer" denotes commitment to the discipline of prayer and "petition" refers to prayers brought forth

with personal details. We are to pray "with thanksgiving," as gratitude for past mercies strengthens our trust for future ones. This practice will "grant us a peace that will guard our hearts." In a striking paradox Paul describes this peace with a military term: The peace of God "will stand sentry" over our hearts, or will "garrison" our hearts.

When we give our hearts to Christ in salvation, we experience "peace with God" (Rom. 5:1). But here Paul deepens our understanding of peace among the saints. In spite of trials on the outside, within our hearts we can have quiet confidence in God's protection and providence.

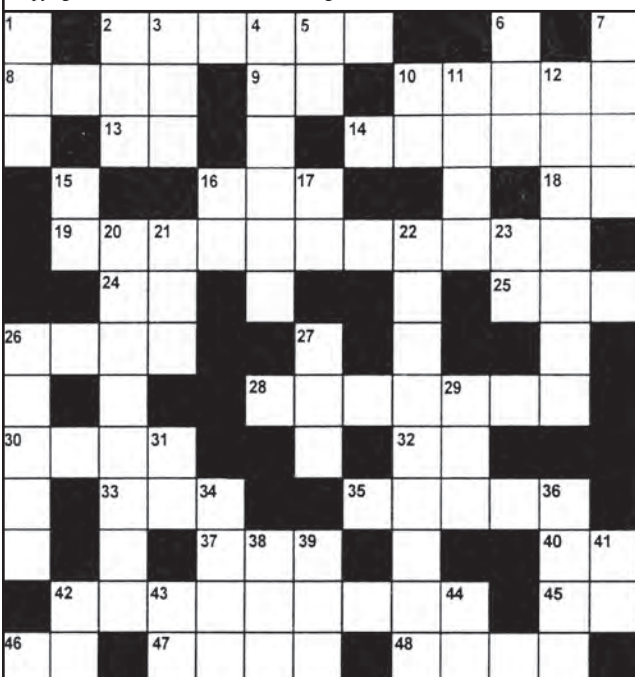
Live a life of right thinking. (8-9)

Paul's final appeal is to "think about" various admirable qualities, all of which are appropriate to those whose minds are guarded by Christ. These traits were familiar and appreciated by pagan Greek moralists. Use of such lists not only of virtues but also of vices was a common practice for Paul (see Rom. 1:20-32; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21). Paul's affinity for such lists stems from his Hebrew roots, as the Jewish community had composed such lists for generations. In this Philippian passage the qualities are probably those Paul had in mind but did not specify earlier when he prayed for the Philippians to "approve what really matters" (Phil. 1:10).

The believers are to "think on these things," not embrace them thoughtlessly. They are to consider them, reflect on them and meditate on them. "Learned and received" refers to passing along a tradition. This body of teaching is to be preserved and practiced because they give identity and continuity to the Christian community. We are to "bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). Perhaps this is why Jesus added to the Hebrew Shema, or prayer, the practice of loving the Lord "with all your mind" (Deut. 6:4-5). †

Christian Crossword

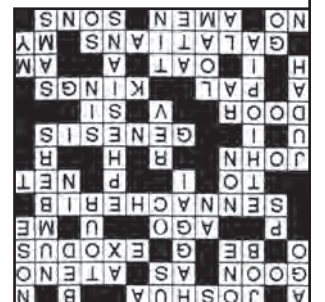
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Across

- 2. Charge ____, and encourage him. (Deut. 3:28)
- 8. Terrorist.
- 9. Ye shall be ____ gods. (Gen. 3:5)
- 10. I ____ pleasant bread. (Dan. 10:3; 2 words)
- 13. To ____ or not to ____.
- 14. Second book of the Bible.
- 16. Past.
- 18. He shall cry unto _____. (Ps. 89:26)
- 19. The Lord saved Hezekiah ... from ... _____. (2 Chron. 32:22)
- 24. Ascending up ____ Jerusalem.
- 25. I will let down the _____. (Luke 5:5)
- 26. ____ the Baptist.
- 28. First book of the Bible.
- 30. Rolled back the stone from the _____. (Matt. 28:2)

- 32. Yes. (Spanish)
- 33. Buddy.
- 35. Old Testament books of the Bible.
- 37. A grain often used for cereal.
- 40. I ____ that I ____.
- 42. O foolish _____. (Gal. 3:1)
- 45. ____ Lord and ____ God.
- 46. Made himself of ____ reputation. (Phil. 2:7)
- 47. So be it.
- 48. These are the three ____ of Noah. (Gen. 9:19)
- 10. Implement for cutting down trees.
- 11. Organized travel.
- 12. Fourth book of the Bible.
- 15. Postscript. (abbr.)
- 16. ____ angel of the Lord. (Luke 1:11)
- 17. Ocean. (abbr.)
- 20. Behold, a man of _____. (Acts 8:27)
- 21. Prefix for "not."
- 22. Tenth book of the New Testament.
- 23. That I am ____ the Father. (John 14:10)
- 26. A son of Leah. (Gen. 35:23)
- 27. Last book of the Bible. (abbr.)
- 29. ____ no more. (John 5:14)
- 31. Egyptian sun god.
- 34. Rich soil.
- 36. Belonging to Sam.
- 38. They ... ____ the sacrifices of the dead. (Ps. 106:28)
- 39. A metal.
- 41. ____ name is Legion. (Mark 5:9)
- 42. ____ thy way; thy son liveth. (John 4:50)
- 43. Note on the scale.
- 44. Yet ____ as by fire. (1 Cor. 3:15)



Want to know GOD?

By Jenni Ingram
Member, First Baptist Church, Gantt

I have learned some important lessons in this life and I would like to share one with you. Never say “never.”

For example, don’t ever say, “I’ll never be fat;” “I’ll never be poor;” “I’ll never speak to them again.”

Trust me. If you make that statement, then you will do it.

You may not ever qualify to be on reality television for your size but I believe you encounter a situation that makes you larger than what you are comfortable with. You may not ever intend to speak to that person again but I’m sure if they were any kind of friend at all you will begin to miss that relationship. It’s all a matter of perspective.

I believe God allows us our free will so that we can make decisions that will make us unhappy and uncomfortable. Why would a loving God do that? Well ultimately it is to create in us a pure heart and seek Him and a loving relationship with Him diligently. Maybe it also is an opportunity to show our obedience to Him.

That fractured relationship? It’s an opportunity to forgive. We are told in Col. 3:13: “Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

There are opportunities in every thing that happens in life. If you’re happy and blessed, then praise God and share the blessing. If you are lost and surrender your heart to God, then give praise and spread your testimony.

If you are sad or in trouble, then ask for prayer. If you are burdened, then turn to the burden bearer, Jesus. He is with us, ready to love and serve us. Oh and that “never” statement? There is one you can trust — He will never leave you. ☩

“I’ve sat on stage and watched Laura minister with song to those who are hurting, and I know the story of her life will help to heal many more who are struggling with their own brokenness.”

Steven Curtis Chapman
artist, author

Helping the hurting



Laura Story

laurastorymusic.com

Upcoming Laura Story concert to benefit scholarship fund at Samford

Award-winning artist Laura Story will be coming to Birmingham on March 9 for a concert at Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills. Story’s chart-topping hits include “Blessings,” “Indescribable” and her new single “Open Hands” featuring Mac Powell of Third Day.

Sponsored by the Samford Legacy League, the concert’s proceeds will go toward scholarships for students with significant financial need and challenging circumstances.

Book inspiration

Story was awarded a Grammy for Best Contemporary Christian Music Song in 2012 for “Blessings” which inspired her first book, “What If Your Blessings Come Through

Raindrops,” a collection of daily devotions. In her most recent book, “When God Doesn’t Fix It: Lessons You Never Wanted to Learn, Truths You Can’t Live Without,” Story shares her journey of faith during her husband’s illness.

‘Minister with song’

Grammy Award-winning artist and *New York Times* bestselling author Steven Curtis Chapman said of Story, “I’ve sat on stage and watched Laura minister with song to those who are hurting, and I know the story of her life will help to heal many more who are struggling with their own brokenness. Together our family has been ministered to by

her vulnerability and willingness to walk in the valley and still say ‘God, I Trust You.’”

Since 2005, Story has served as the worship leader at Perimeter Church in Atlanta where she lives with her husband, Martin, and their three children, Ben, Griffin and Josie.

The concert will begin at 7 p.m. VIP tickets, which include premium seating, a pre-concert reception and a photo with Story, are available.

For tickets or more information, visit samford.edu/legacyleague or call the Samford University Box Office at 205-726-2853. (Samford Legacy League)

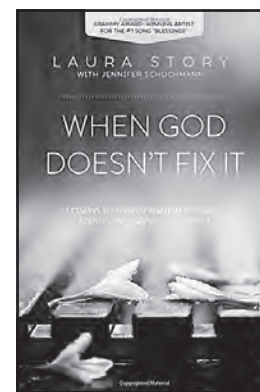


Photo courtesy of the University of Mobile

UM ‘Sacred Swing’ concert set for March 25

The Alabama School of the Arts Jazz Band at the University of Mobile will present ‘Sacred Swing’ on March 25.

The high-energy concert will feature a mixture of well-known hymns, spirituals and gospel music, including ‘Amazing Grace,’ ‘Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,’ ‘When the Saints Go Marching In’ and ‘As David Danced.’

The Jazz Band will perform at 7 p.m. at Ram Hall on the school’s campus. For more information or tickets, visit itickets.com. (UM)

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Hand-in-glove faith

Generals pitcher wants his faith to be evident

By Bill Sorrell
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

On game days Ryan Yarbrough, named the Southern League's Most Outstanding Pitcher in 2016, follows a routine that ends with a question mark.

He gets to the ballpark extremely early, stretches in a certain order and drinks a Red Bull.

"I ask a teammate a question that I consistently do. I always feel like I misdressed. I always feel like I am forgetting something. 'Hey man, am I missing some clothing?' I don't want to make a fool of myself. They are like, 'No, you're good man.'"

Although Yarbrough often questions his attire, no one questions his ability.

A lefthander for the Jackson Generals, Yarbrough helped them win the 2016 Southern League Championship Series for the first time since 2000, was a mid-season and postseason All-Star, had a 12-4 record with a 2.95 ERA and was a part of a trio of Jackson award winners that included Tyler O'Neill and Jackson manager Daren Brown.

As hand in glove, so is Yarbrough's faith.

"Christ and sports go hand in hand. It gives you the opportunity to go out there and spread the Word. There are opportunities to meet people in our community at every level through the Generals' events. It's being a good person in the community," said Yarbrough, 24.

Evident faith

When hurricanes hit Florida, Yarbrough, who is from Lakeland, Florida, put roofs on houses. He also went to Pennsylvania to a work camp. He wants his faith to be evident.

"From talking to me, the values I preach, going by how you treat people, I would want people to say, 'Wow, he seems like a good person, a good Christian man,'" he said.

Yarbrough became a Christian through the influence of his parents and his grandmother.

"My mom led me to Christ. It was definitely big in our household — how we should go about things, what is right to do in certain situations, how to treat people. My core values are definitely based off what she taught me."

Along with faith values, his parents instilled a joyful attitude.

"That is just how I was raised. My parents were

always in good moods. There is no reason to get down in the dumps, especially when you are on the baseball field all day. I am doing the thing I love with Christ by my side and knowing that He is always there for me."

Jackson center fielder Ian Miller said Yarbrough "always brought a positive attitude when things were going good or bad. Through injuries, complete games, great performances and bad performances, he was the same positive person through performance and spiritual mindset."

Yarbrough's parents talked to him about going to church — the family attends Resurrection Catholic Church, Lakeland — and told him to "trust everything to God."

"I have always needed Him. I don't know anybody who can say that they never needed Jesus. He has always been there every day. You have questions answered and when you need some support, He is always there for you. He died for us. It really makes an impact on you," he said.

John Yarbrough sometimes sends his son a text with what has become Ryan Yarbrough's favorite verse, Psalm 46:10: "Be still and know that I am God."

"It's something my dad always taught me. When-

ever we have been going through something tough, he would say, 'Be still.'"

Yarbrough's testimony includes passing the same message to others as was given to him. During this past season, he pitched 128.1 innings in 25 games. He allowed 112 hits and struck out 99 during the regular season. He was twice named Southern League Pitcher of the Week.

Yarbrough started his college career at Santa Fe College in Gainesville, Florida. He transferred to Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, as a communications major and is two classes from graduating.

His 89-to-92 mph fastball is a pitch that "everybody knows is going to come. Being able to get guys out is pretty cool, a pretty good feeling," he said.

One of Ryan Yarbrough's career highlights was winning the Southern League.

"No one expected us to play this well. Going out there and winning a lot of games is special," he said.

The championship season also allowed Yarbrough to share values that he has learned: "God is all around us all the time." ✠



Photo courtesy of Cody Cunningham/Jackson Generals

Ryan Yarbrough



Sudanese court sentences missionary to prison

KHARTOUM, Sudan — A Czech missionary who also works as a journalist was sentenced to more than 20 years in prison by a Sudanese court Jan. 29 for taking video of government authorities persecuting Christians.

Petr Jasek was found guilty of espionage, allegedly for spreading rumors aimed at undermining the State, conducting nongovernmental organization work without a permit, taking pictures of military areas and entering Sudan illegally, The Christian Post reported.

The espionage charge alone carried a 20-year sentence.

Security officers at the airport in Khartoum took Jasek into custody in December 2015 after finding his video and written materials about the conflict in the Nuba Mountains. The Sudanese government has been accused of targeting civilians in rebel-controlled areas of that conflict, according to the Post.

He also was accused of releasing reports showing the persecution of Christians.

A local pastor, Hassan Abduraheem Kodi Taour, and a young Darfuri man, Abdulmonem Abdumawla, each received a 10-year prison sentence for aiding Jasek with espionage. All three received additional smaller sentences for the other charges.

The Czech Foreign Ministry said a deputy foreign minister will travel to Sudan soon to attempt to negotiate Jasek's release. Czech officials say Jasek was in Sudan to help local Christians, according to the Post. (TAB)

'Pregnant people' phrase to be more inclusive

LONDON — The British Medical Association (BMA) has asked its doctors to refrain from calling pregnant women "mothers" in order to be sensitive to transgender people, according to The Christian Post.

BMA, a 160,000-member trade union and professional association, wrote the directive in a 14-page booklet on using inclusive language, instructing its members in hospitals and general practice to call mothers-to-be "pregnant people" from now on.

"A large majority of people that have been pregnant or have given birth identify as women," the booklet states. "However, there are some intersex men and trans men who may get pregnant. We can include intersex men and trans men who may get pregnant by saying 'pregnant people' instead of 'expectant mothers.'"

The change was compared to substituting the word "police officer" for "policeman" and "flight attendant" for "stewardess," according to the booklet. References to gender, it stated, should be avoided unless relevant to a medical discussion.

Dr. Anthea Mowat, BMA senior executive, wrote on the union's website that the changes are about "treating each other with dignity and as equal members of an integrated community." (TAB)

Norway church sanctifies same-sex 'marriage'

OSLO, Norway — Starting Feb. 1, Norway's Evangelical Lutheran Church began granting church weddings and blessings to same-sex couples, breaking with centuries of tradition.

The 83-29 vote in favor of the change came Jan. 30, overturning a long-held position upholding the traditional view of marriage, according to The Christian Post. Pastors will have the right to choose whether to perform such weddings.

The Church's annual conference agreed to the change in April 2016 but did not determine the specifics at the time. New service rules will reportedly include gender-neutral language and remove words like "bride" and "groom," according to the Post.

Rolf Magne Haukalid, one of the opponents of the Norwegian church sanctifying gay "marriage," said while many are celebrating, some are grieving the change.

"For my part and the thousands who I represent here, the disappointment, sorrow and uncertainty is great," Haukalid said. "Disappointment and sadness because today we are introducing a doctrine that a unified diocese called 'heresy' in 1997. This goes against the Bible and Jesus' word on marriage." (TAB)