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STATE EVANGELISM CONFERENCE



Christian apologist Alex McFarland, who serves as director of the Center for Christian Worldview and Apologetics at North Greenville University in Tigerville, South Carolina, prays over participants at the Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference on Feb. 28.

Photo by Neisha Roberts



Defending the FAITH

'We need to help world get ready to meet Jesus,' overcome intellectual barriers

By Grace Thornton and Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Alex McFarland has spent the past 25 years sitting down with people who don't believe in God and asking them, "Why?"

"Some are unchurched. Others are de-churched — they have grown up in church and have an evangelical background but have intellectual bar-

riers to knowing Jesus," he said.

But McFarland, director of the Center for Christian Worldview and Apologetics at North Greenville University in Tigerville, South Carolina, said there's often a common thread. "Emotional pain is usually the catalyst for intellectual doubt," he said.

It can be: "My dad was a deacon and he abused us, how can that be?"

Or it could be: "We were a good church-going family and my mom got cancer; we fasted, we prayed and she still died."

The questions begin emotionally, but as life progresses they lead into intellectual questions, McFarland said. "This is true for even the most well-known atheists."

That's why apologetics, the discipline of defending the faith through reason, is so important — Christians

need to be ready to answer those intellectual questions, McFarland said.

And that's the message he brought to those participating in the Feb. 27 opening session of the two-day Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference held at First Baptist Church, Pelham.

'Will be held accountable'

"We need to help the world get ready to meet Jesus," McFarland said as he developed his message from 1 John 2. "Let tonight be a regrouping of your priorities."

"The Word of God says, 'Don't love the world.' ... We better be about the things of the Lord because we are going to face Him one day. ... How many unsaved people are you praying for by name?"

The ultimate indictment is to love

darkness more than light, he said, noting that "even as born-again believers we will be held accountable for what we did with what we had. We know Christ is the one and only Savior."

But "the mindset, the spirit of the anti-Christ is to deny that Jesus is the one and only unique Son of God, the Savior," McFarland said. "To say He is 'a' way and not 'the' way is the mind of the anti-Christ."

In a postmodern world, people believe everyone is entitled to their own set of facts, he said, noting four realities of ministry in the 21st century:

► The number of people with recurring spiritual doubts will continue to grow in the western world.

It is intellectual skepticism, he said.

► Those with spiritual doubts (See 'Fruitful,' page 5)

COMMENT

Truly Memorable Experience

First Baptist Church, Pelham, was a rocking place Monday evening, Feb. 27. Baptists from across Alabama had gathered there for the annual Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference. The First, Pelham, church choir, clad in black, sang praise songs backed up by the pulsating beat of drums, guitars, keyboards and a piano.

The music was visceral and people responded. Across the auditorium hundreds stood with hands extended upward. Some swayed to the penetrating rhythms. It was obvious that most in the audience were captivated as they enjoyed the worship experience.

But the opening sentences of the first speaker changed the tone of the whole event. New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary President Chuck Kelley declared that Baptists are down in membership, down in worship attendance, down in small group participation such as Sunday School and down in baptisms.

These are not blips on an otherwise upward graph, he assured, but well documented downward trends reflecting several years of Southern Baptist life.

"If I were speaking as a professional religious sociologist," Kelley said, "I would say we are in decline and we are never coming out of it."

'Evangelism Resurgence'

One could have heard a pin drop in the auditorium as Baptist leaders from across the state were suddenly confronted with the need for an "Evangelism Resurgence" — the theme of this year's conference.

Kelley quickly added, "But God is not nervous" about this situation.

For the rest of the two days speaker after speaker focused on ways to turn around the downward trends. By the time the meeting ended participants were celebrating how God continues to call people to Himself through salvation and how He brings victory into the lives of believers.

Speakers did not wring their hands in despair or scold others for not caring about sharing the gospel. Instead speakers emphasized the building blocks of Christian discipleship.



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

Christian apologist Alex McFarland emphasized the need for Christians to be able to "give an account for the faith that is within you." McFarland was substituting for Josh McDowell who had to cancel because of unplanned surgery.

In addition to being intellectually prepared to respond to questions by skeptics, various speakers emphasized believers being Christlike. There ought to be a difference between a life in Christ and a life without Christ, said one speaker. Unfortunately, studies by Pew Research and Barna indicate little or no difference between believers and nonbelievers related to family, social conscious and moral practices.

Another speaker urged listeners to start with family and friends when sharing the gospel. That emphasis reminded one of the growth of the gospel in China. When missionaries were forced out of China in 1949 the estimated number of evangelical Christians was less than 500,000. Thirty years later when Christian churches began reopening the world was shocked to learn the number of Christians was more than 4 million.

Later analysts concluded the removal of western missionaries allowed the gospel to grow along natural Chinese patterns of family and friends. Today the number of Chinese Christians tops 100 million by some estimates. During the Feb. 13-16 meeting of the Association of State Baptist Papers, editors learned more than 10,000 people a day are coming to faith in China.

Oh that God would grant such a revival in the United States.

Using the Book of Nehemiah another speaker urged participants to step forward to personally accept responsibility for an evangelism resurgence. It does no good to be intellectually prepared to share the gospel and to have a target audience of family and friends if one is not willing to personally share Jesus.

The Tuesday evening service will live long in the memory of all who were there. Gaither Vocal Band member Wes Hampton, of Birmingham, left many speechless as the haunting words of his songs affirmed God's presence in the most difficult circumstances.

His music and that of praise and worship leader Rick Stone was outstanding.

When Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) Executive Director Rick Lance introduced closing speaker Kenny Grant, he described him as "someone you may not have heard about but someone whom you will hear about in the future." He was right. Grant, an African-American pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Savannah, Georgia, was simply amazing. His insights and application of Scripture left many wondering why they had not seen such obvious truths as Grant pointed out.

Grant, a former Marine Corp drill instructor at Paris Island, even turned the audience into a choir as he climaxed his sermon by leading the congregation in singing the Gaither classic "He Touched Me."

But what usually is the climax of the service was not. As the choir of Enon Baptist Baptist Church, Morris, sang "Say Amen" various people walked across the stage holding signs of problems they faced in life. The signs ranged from being molested by a stepfather to alcohol abuse to cancer and other life challenges.

After showing their problems, each turned the sign over showing the outcome: molested girl is the daughter of the Most High King; an addict

redeemed and set free; cancer healed; and some live for the glory of God despite having medical conditions that could claim their lives at any time.

Power of God

The audience stood and applauded as the people shared their testimonies on the front and back of the signs they held. It was such a clear reminder of the power of God who is not "nervous" about circumstances that threaten us; such a clear example of telling others what God has done in one's life; such a clear illustration of sharing with the ones nearest you.

Every session of the conference was outstanding but few conferences have such memorable services as the Monday and Tuesday evening sessions of this year's meeting. Director of SBOM's office of evangelism Sammy Gilbreath and all who planned the conference deserve great thanks for providing Alabama Baptists such an inspirational experience. †

"Every session of the Evangelism Conference was outstanding but few conferences have such memorable services as the Monday and Tuesday evening sessions of this year's meeting."



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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Open to the gospel

Alabama Baptist plants church in Maine; entrusts ministry to New Englander

Twelve years ago, Augusta, Maine, was the only capital city in America without a Southern Baptist church.

That's why Chris Johnson and his family left where he was serving as youth minister at First Baptist Church, Albertville, to become a North American Mission Board (NAMB) church planter there in 2005.

"It's a very secular, unchurched area of the nation," Johnson said. "We expected to find people cold and hard to the gospel, but instead what we found were people who were open, just nobody was telling them."

So as God moved in hearts, Johnson planted Kennebec Community Church (KCC), Augusta.

"Mission teams from all over Alabama from Birmingham to Boaz came to help us get the church started," he said. "Over the course of the seven years we were there, three families from churches in Alabama moved up there to help us."

And funds from NAMB and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering provided half of the finances needed to keep Johnson's ministry going.

"We had story after story of people coming to Christ who had never walked through the door of a church before," Johnson said.

And several years in, someone else walked through the door who would become a major part of God's continuing story for the church — Dan Coleman.

A New Englander and preacher's kid, he had grown up on Cape Cod in Massachusetts and come to know Christ there.

In college he had taken a summer ministry internship working with youth, but he returned to Boston feeling guilty that he was pointing people to a God with whom he had no relational depth. Because he was attending a Bible college the assumption of vocational ministry surrounded him. Coleman's assumption was that something drastically needed to change.

"I've had all the understanding, none of the relationship, and I'm finally ready to be done with just playing this game," he concluded.

One night he wandered to the school's soccer field where he played for the school's team, looked up at the heavens and decided to live as if God were real.

For reasons he didn't understand during his sophomore and junior years of college, Coleman kept going back to Maine. He did an



Photo courtesy of Chris Johnson

Chris Johnson stands in front of an ice cream truck that Kennebec Community Church, Augusta, Maine, bought and used to give away free ice cream from 2005 to 2008. Johnson was a North American Mission Board church planter there during that time. He currently serves as pastor of First Baptist Church, Albertville.

internship with a church that sent one of their coeds, Amanda, to the Boston Bible College. Within weeks of her freshman year, they were dating. The next September they married and lived at first with her parents in Maine.

"I was drawn to Dan because he is very funny," Amanda Coleman said. "He was a follower of Jesus and that is where he was going to take his life. I really wanted to be a part of that."

They accepted a ministry opportunity in Winslow, Maine, that didn't gel for them. They tried to leave Maine but God kept them there.

When they left Winslow they looked for a church to attend and found KCC. Within a year, Dan Coleman was an associate pastor responsible for helping plant other churches.

"We could sense that God was calling them to come in and serve with us," Johnson said. "And he was from Massachusetts which was a huge plus in

the eyes of ministry here."

A year later Johnson returned to Alabama to take the pastorate of First, Albertville, and handed the keys of KCC to Coleman. Five years later KCC averages more than 900 participants in its three Sunday services and baptizes more than 100 annually.

"After we left and handed things off, they

have built upon the ministry and taken it to a whole other level," Johnson said.

And Dan Coleman's vision isn't just for Augusta. He wants KCC to lead in reaching not just central Maine but New England too.

But he had plenty of fear when he assumed the pastorate six years ago. He wasn't sure it would work and he was afraid of preaching every week. He has since developed a personable preaching style he describes as having a "depth of simplicity" and that style clearly resonates with people. Though not intentionally seeker friendly, Coleman knows many are hearing Bible stories for the first time.

Fostering a network

Another significant ministry role Coleman fills is that of church planting catalyst for NAMB in the region. Coleman assists churches in discovering places to plant churches and helps recruit church planters. The goal is to foster a network of church planting churches.

For a time the church met in small venues while conducting up to three services per Sunday. When a former Catholic church came on the market NAMB assisted with funds for renovation and the down payment and now carries the mortgage on the building. (*TAB*, NAMB)

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STATE EVANGELISM CONFERENCE

Joel Carwile, pastor of First Baptist Church, Athens, encourages participants at the Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference to be sure to share the gospel starting with your own family.

'Leave an eternal echo'

Annual conference focuses on 'Evangelism Resurgence' across state

By Maggie Walsh and Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

Once you've been touched by the Master Creator, you're forever changed. And that change should prompt action, Kenny Grant said.

"Ordinary people come in contact with extraordinary Christ and are transformed," said Grant, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Savannah, Georgia, at the Feb. 27-28 Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference. Take the story of the demon-possessed man in Mark 5, for instance.

"This man is a hard case in a hard place," Grant said. His spiritual desecration, social isolation, mental domination, emotional desperation, physical mutilation, moral degradation and total devastation caused everyone to run from him — everyone but Jesus.

"Jesus sailed through a hellish storm to get to this man," Grant said, and once the man felt "the grip of grace" he was changed. And in verse 19, Jesus tells the man to do one thing: "Tell them how much the Lord has done for you."

Grant emphasized, "If you've been redeemed it seems like the very least you can do is tell somebody."

Under the theme of "Evangelism Resurgence," about 500 participants were inspired and challenged through sermons, songs and a good dose of the Holy Spirit during the conference held at First Baptist Church, Pelham.

Growing through evangelism

Chad Burdette, pastor of Macedonia Baptist Church, Ranburne, believes "any single church in the state of Alabama can grow through evangelism."

But in order to do that, he said, pastors are going to have to get real about what is going on in churches.

"When are we going to quit designing church services to fit our needs instead of praising Him?"

It comes down to understanding our

brokenness, a reality that hit Burdette years ago when he was addicted to prescription drugs and alcohol. And it wasn't until he crashed into a wall — literally — that he began to realize something needed to change. While he was in a drug rehabilitation center in Georgia, he reached the end of his rope.

"I was sick and tired of being sick and tired but I was reminded of the One I was told about and I believed in the power of prayer and a risen Savior."

In the same way, the Church has to cry out to Jesus with a fresh awareness of its own brokenness.

'We need to welcome Jesus'

"We need a breakthrough," Burdette said. "But we cannot pray for a breakthrough unless we're broken ourselves. Resurgence must begin in the local church before it can hit the community. ... If we want a resurgence, if we want a movement, we need to welcome Jesus."

James Merritt, pastor of Cross Pointe Baptist Church, Duluth, Georgia, reminded participants that everyone has a funeral. And everyone "can make an eternal impact ... and leave an eternal echo" through their legacy.

Sharing from Acts 20 and pulling from Paul's instruction to the elders of the early Church, Merritt suggested three ways to be on mission for the Lord and to leave an "eternal echo" — by serving God's people, speaking God's truth and sharing God's grace.

"Everybody's been called to testify the good news of God's grace," Merritt said. "We're all called to different vocations but we're all called to the same task. Nothing in life will have a greater, longer-lasting impact than when you share about the grace of God you have experienced."



Photo by Neisha Roberts



BURDETTE



GRANT



MERRITT

Take the grace that Joel Carwile, pastor of First Baptist Church, Athens, experienced in his own family, for instance. Carwile shared the faith story of his parents — his father accepted Christ just months after Carwile became a pastor, a salvation that answered a 19-year prayer effort by Carwile's mother.

'We must be the watchmen'

Drawing from Ezekiel 33:1-9, Carwile likened his mother's faithfulness in praying and sharing the gospel with his father to the life-saving warning mentioned in verse 7. The passage talks about how God renewed Ezekiel's call as a watchman whose primary role was to hold others accountable and warn them of the deadly consequence of turning from God.

"We must be the watchmen of the hour," Carwile said. "You and I are called to be watchmen because God will bring a sword to our land. ... All we're required to do is tell. God does the saving. We need to change some of our scorecards for what success is. "Do you want an 'Evangelism Resurgence?'" he asked. "Start at the house (with your family) ... and don't give up."

In the broken world in which we live, however, we're so easily distracted by our frustration from any number of things, said Larry Robertson, pastor of Hillsdale Baptist Church, Clarksville, Tennessee. But is it worth it?

'We're offended'

"My sermon has no points but my sermon has a point — I want to submit to you today as my only point that we're offended, but we're offended at lesser things.

"We're deeply offended when someone takes a symbol of our faith and desecrates it. But I ask you how offended are we at the artwork of Satan to desecrate not a symbol of God but a substantive image of God — a living breathing human thing?"

"How offended are we at the lostness of our neighbors? When's the last time we

looked at somebody and saw beneath the layers of life choices and brokenness and pain and just knew in our hearts that this is not the way things are supposed to be?"

That is why we have been saved, he said, to share Jesus with others so He can transform them into His likeness.

"What offends you more — those external things or the fact that a person is the image of God, the 'imago Dei,' disfigured by sin?" Robertson challenged.

"If we don't open our hearts and our minds, we'll never open our mouths."

We'll never open our mouths, however, if our relationship with the Lord is fractured like the Church in Jerusalem's was during Nehemiah's day.

Blake Newsom said, "[The Church in Jerusalem] had sinned against God and breached and broken their relationship. ... They were dealing with the aftermath of their sin and struggling to maintain the mission God had given them — to glorify God to the nations around them."

Worldly influences

In the same way today "we as a people of God are in danger of losing our identity as a holy people. ... The world influences us more than we have influenced the world. We have forgotten our mission," said Newsom, pastor of Dauphin Way Baptist Church, Mobile.

But Newsom said believers can see in Nehemiah three ways to reclaim their identity and mission — by casting a greater vision, having a deeper burden and feeling an urgent response to the mission God has entrusted to us.

"The Church has too often been on the defense. It's time to hit back. We need the men of God to stand up and say, 'I'll rebuild the walls, God. Who's with me? No one? That's OK, I'll go by myself to rebuild it.' And we'll wait to see the things God can do when we get a greater vision and a deeper burden that flows into an urgent response." ✠



NEWSOM



ROBERTSON

Fruitful disciples 'need' social, apologetic savvy

(continued from page 1)
increasingly defy categorization.

"What we are witnessing is largely ignorance of the Word of God," he noted.

► Familiarity with apologetics is a necessity. The most fruitful evangelizers and disciples will be Christians who have both social and apologetic savvy.

► Building reciprocal, authentic relationships — though time-consuming — is the key to helping lead people into an authentic, saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

"We've got to invest in people with no expectation of return. We've got to befriend people."

Before Christians begin to spout the answers, they

need to establish friendships, he told *The Alabama Baptist* prior to his slot on the evangelism conference program.

"The evidence is clearly on our side and it really is compelling textually, historically, psychologically and biologically. From many compelling vantage points we can defend that the Bible is real, that the gospel is authentic," he said. "But we have to build relationships in order to have the opportunity to share the answers to the questions."

Great relationships, McFarland said, are built on three things — trust, honesty and respect.

"I believe with all my heart we have to invest in people with no expectation of return. If people are your project, they can spot that a mile away," he said. "Do we want them to turn to Christ and be saved? Of course we do. But we have to live out our faith authentically, not just deliver a debate and walk away."

'Invest our lives'

It's going to take time and it's not going to be convenient, he said. "But what better way to invest our lives than on behalf of Jesus?"

Then when the questions come, the foundation is laid, McFarland said.

Since 1997, McFarland has been writing, speaking and traveling on topics of defending the faith. And as he's spoken

at more than 200 colleges, he's written in a journal the questions students asked each time.

He compiled those questions — and the way he would answer them — in a book called "The 10 Most Common Objections to Christianity."

Scientific questions

"For 20-somethings and younger, the questions are about science," McFarland said, noting that often students come in armed with a professor's claim that God's existence can't be proven.

Other questions frequently asked, he said, deal with the reliability of Scripture or topics like "how could a good God send somebody to hell?"

These are not easy questions but compelling information exists to answer them, McFarland said.

"The good news is we truly live in the golden age of apologetics," he said. "In the 1950s there were two apologetic books in print in America, one by C.S. Lewis and one by Edward John Carnell. Now it seems there are two released every week."

Resources

He recommended that every Christian have "More Than a Carpenter" by Josh McDowell on their bookshelf as well as "The Case for Faith" by Lee Strobel.

"The Billy Graham Christian Worker's Handbook" also contains "a lot of good apologetics" and is available as a free downloadable PDF, McFarland said. "It is kind of an A to Z on everything from adultery to AIDS to doubt and immorality. It helps you have a biblical view on all areas of life."

But before you go out and read Graham or Lewis, McFarland said the best place to start is simply the Bible.

"That should be our No. 1 starting point — to be thoroughly biblically literate," he said. "You can answer three-quarters of people's questions if you know the Bible well. And we can't really call ourselves followers of the Living Word if we're not really reading and immersing ourselves in it." ✝

For more information, visit alexmcfarland.com.

Christlikeness is key to evangelism, NOBTS President Kelley says

By Caleb Jones
Intern, The Alabama Baptist

Kicking off the 2017 Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference (SEC) with a challenge for Christlikeness, Chuck Kelley said, "Everything (in regards to the Christian life and evangelism) is based on the assumption that life with Christ is different than life without Christ."

Kelley, president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, pulled from 2 Corinthians 3:18 for his sermon.

"Christlikeness is the key (to evangelism) and without that no evangelism strategy will bear fruit," he said. "We will not be able to make a mark on this world unless we look like Christ."

"Only by being known by who we are in Jesus ... will one be able to make an impact in the lives of others," Kelley said Feb. 27 at First Baptist Church, Pelham.

Discipleship

He said Christlikeness in regards to discipleship means:

- attentive obedience,
- reserving time to build discipleship,
- personally digging into the Word,
- building a healthy budget for discipleship and



Photo by Neisha Roberts

Chuck Kelley, president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, shares with conference participants that 'no evangelism strategy will bear fruit' without Christlikeness.

► working Jesus into everyday conversations.

Trying to live in Christ-likeness is the first step to having a heart for evangelism, Kelley said, but Christians also need to have "an anxiety for the lost and make losing the lost a tension point in the lives of our churches today."

A key factor in proper evangelism is actually telling people about Jesus, he added.

"Don't lose the lost; go after them." ✝

For a copy of the slideshow and information from Kelley's sermon, contact the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions office of evangelism at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 258.

Ministers' wives encouraged at SEC to 'be persistent'



Photo by Maggie Walsh

Allison Wilks of One Step Ministries encourages ministers' wives to 'be persistent and not lose heart' at the Ministers' Wives Luncheon on Feb. 28 during the Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference. "Nobody in this room needs to get told that [ministry is] exhausting. ... But God doesn't want us to lose heart even when we're tired. Even in that He promises us and assures us of strength and renewal," she says, sharing the story of the persistent widow in Luke 18. The annual luncheon is hosted by Alabama Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) and seeks to be a time of rest and restoration, according to Alabama WMU Executive Director Candace McIntosh.

Sharing through music

Gaither Vocal Band member Hampton says he's 'blessed' to sing good news

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

For Gaither Vocal Band member Wes Hampton his calling to ministry came in an unlikely location — an anatomy and physiology class at the University of Alabama at Birmingham more than 17 years ago.

"I almost audibly heard God say, 'I don't want you to do this.' I was in pre-med classes at the time," he said.

Hampton said he had always loved music and it was his parents who introduced him to a wide variety of musicians at a young age. He listened to artists like Larnelle Harris and Steve Green — two of his favorites — as well as Whitney Houston, Billy Joel and Phil Collins.

But as a youth you'd never catch him singing, he said. It wasn't until high school that his parents did catch him and encouraged him to join the church choir.

After that he began to enjoy singing, he said, and realized he was gifted musically.

God's calling

He joined a quartet at church, attended Trevecca Nazarene University in Nashville, got married and was working on his bachelor's degree when he found himself in that career-changing anatomy and physiology class back in Birmingham.

"I didn't feel led to be a worship leader. But I didn't know what God was calling me to do," Hampton said. "I joined the staff at The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham

and enjoyed it and loved my job but felt God calling me to do more."

While working hard to start a career as a solo artist and learning to be content where God had placed him, an opportunity opened up to audition for the Gaither Vocal Band. It took seven weeks of auditioning and the last audition consisted of singing at Billy Graham's final crusade in New York City. That was 12 years ago and Hampton has been touring with the band ever since.

Award-winning

In 2006 he won the *Singing News* Horizon Individual Fan Award and on Hampton's first project with the band in 2007, "Give It Away," the Gaither Vocal Band won two Gospel Music Association Dove Awards. Hampton's first solo album, "A Man Like Me," was released in 2010 and was nominated for a Dove Award.

But because Hampton and his wife, Andrea, have four sons, he works to balance life and ministry in a healthy way.

Andrea Hampton homeschools their children and works as a family and marriage therapist while also being what Wes Hampton describes as a vital support to him and his career.

He travels with the band during the spring and fall to about 65 locations a year and then has the summer off. When he's not touring with the band Wes Hampton uses his time to work as a solo artist — from Birmingham to Brazil to Norway and anywhere in between.

Most weekdays he's able to be home



Photo by Neisha Roberts

Gaither Vocal Band member Wes Hampton, of Birmingham, sang throughout the Tuesday sessions of the Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference held at First Baptist Church, Pelham, on Feb. 27–28.

with his family in Birmingham, he said, something he's determined to do no matter how hectic his schedule gets.

Hampton's upcoming solo project, set to be released in May, will be a compilation of hymns and inspirational songs.

He said it's the stories he hears from listeners that keep him going year after year.

"I love the power of the gospel and I love to hear when people tell me, 'You sang that

song and it got me through' fill in the blank. I hear story after story of people's lives that have been touched through music."

And while he gets to impact and bless others with his voice, he said he counts himself blessed to make a living sharing the gospel through music.

"I love to sing and I love to connect with people. I'm passionate about it and I do it because I love it." ¶

Glorifying God at heart of State Evangelism Conference music



Photo by Neisha Roberts

Enon Baptist Church, Morris, members along with the church choir, bring a powerful end to the State Evangelism Conference as they sing 'Say Amen' and hold signs about God's goodness.

Music featured at the Feb. 27–28 Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference provided a little bit of everything — and praising God was the focus of it all.

Words of worship flowed from participants' lips as they sang, "Every praise is to our God. Every word of worship with one accord. Every praise, every praise is to our God."

And then there was, "In Christ alone, my hope is found. He is my light, my strength, my song" and "My chains are gone, I've been set free. My God my Savior has ransomed me." Participants also sang some classics like "I surrender all. I surrender all. All to Thee my blessed Savior, I surrender all."

Rick Stone, worship pastor at Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville, served as the praise and worship leader for the conference. As

he prepared music for the event he said he was thinking of the many characteristics of those who would be at the conference.

Connecting age groups

"It will be made up of young and old and those that are still searching and those that are mature in their faith," Stone said. "I wanted the music to connect to all the age groups. ... We wanted to lift up the Lord Jesus and let Him be the common denominator."

And through a variety of styles and songs, "our worship must be grounded on the Word of God," Stone said.

Frank Jones, of Frank Jones Ministries, played pre-session music each day and accompanied Stone. Wes Hampton (see story, this page), a member of the Gaither Vocal Band, sang throughout the

Tuesday morning and afternoon sessions and led a mini-concert during the Tuesday evening session.

The choir from the host church, First Baptist Church, Pelham, brought the congregation to their feet numerous times during the Monday night session and the choir from Enon Baptist Church, Morris, supplied a powerful closing session Tuesday night.

'Song of redemption'

Before and after each speaker Monday and Tuesday, participants were able to sing in worship or listen to a guest musician. And that, Stone said, was a good thing because as believers "we all have a song to sing. It's a song of redemption. It's a song of joy." (Neisha Roberts)



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Anthropology

Partners with God

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

Anthropology may be understood as the part of Christian theology that concerns the beginning, nature and destiny of humans. As to our beginning, we have taken note of human beings as God's direct creation in His own image and likeness as well as the biblical revelation that all of us have that divine resemblance distorted or marred.

Even so God loves us and desires that we bring Him glory. To the end that He be glorified God provided perfect redemption through Christ. Just as God intended at the beginning that man would be in partnership with God as he tended the garden God had made (Gen. 2:15), so as redeemed sinners we are still to experience the dignity of being partners with God.

At our collective best we can be in partnership with God in tending and preserving the rest of His creation, subduing it with a sense of stewardship and exercising dominion over it without abusing, exploiting or destroying it. This week we explore some further aspects of this remarkable truth that God created us to be partners with Him. What higher role can we aspire to than to be God's fellow workers?

'Be fruitful, multiply'

In the beginning God's instruction was that humans, as His image-bearers, partner with Him in filling the earth with descendants. The inspired record states: "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it'" (Gen. 1:27-28). Gender was one of God's good creation gifts to humankind that enables us to bear and raise children.

As bearers of God's likeness humans are partners with God in making Him known in all the earth. The explanation given for humans, like Paul and his companions engaging in missionary and evangelistic outreach, is simply put

in 1 Corinthians 3:9: "For we are God's fellow workers."

We also are partners with our Creator God in that a part of our likeness to Him is that humans also possess creativity. Evidence of this God-like capability shows up in works of art, music, literature, scientific advancement and medical achievements. Of course God's creative ability is of a different and higher order.

He created out of nothing all that exists. We create by using what He has made. The corollary of this is that we can be God's partners in helping and healing others, as well as inspiring and uplifting them.

Joining with God in prayer

In addition we partner with God through prayer. Of all the creatures God made only human beings have the high privilege of joining with God in prayer. No fish, fowl or beast ever engages in prayer for their needs or those of others.

As the redeemed children of God we have the high honor of speaking with Him through prayer. We petition; God responds. We intercede; God answers. While God could do as He pleases without our partnership in prayer we become aware that many things He would like to do, He has determined to do only in answer to believing prayer. The Bible frequently invites us to come to God as a beloved child would approach an earthly father. Often divine intervention awaits human asking. It is as the Bible says: "You do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:2). †

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.



SBOM holds tax preparation conferences to help ministers

By Michael J. Brooks
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

The greatest area of difficulty in a minister's tax filing is his or her dual status, according to Lee Wright, state missionary in the office of LeaderCare and church health at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM). A minister is an employee for federal income tax purposes and self-employed for Social Security taxes, Wright explained.

During the five conferences on tax preparation for ministers Wright conducted in February, he said ordained ministers should:

- ▶ be given a W-2 form from the church rather than a 1099,
- ▶ report any employee unreimbursed expenses the minister has on Schedule A,
- ▶ note additional miscellaneous income such as honoraria on Schedule C
- ▶ and determine Social Security and Medicare taxes on Form SE.

Wright said churches can provide health insurance premiums as a tax-free benefit for the minister as long as the plan is a group plan. The health plans offered by GuideStone Financial Resources are an example of group plans. This is true even if the minister is the only full-time employee in the church, he said.

A second major concern for ministers is the housing allowance, Wright said, noting ministers should continue to claim this benefit for now. The amount of salary des-

ignated as housing can be made at any time, just not retroactively, and can be as much as the fair rental value of the minister's house furnished plus utilities, he said.

"Even then the minister must have documentation to show that the allowance was spent on housing expenses," Wright noted. "Any unused housing should be reported as ordinary income."

For bivocational ministers it is acceptable to claim housing on all their church compensation within the aforementioned guidelines, Wright said.

The housing allowance is exempt from federal income tax but is subject to the full 15.3 percent self-employment tax, he said.

A third area of concern is exclusions from tax, Wright noted.

"The church can provide group term life and disability insurance without tax implications," he said. "And life insurance proceeds and inheritances aren't taxable either."

Wright said a minister's best source of tax saving is retirement savings and noted Form 8880 as a form to consider.

A fourth area of concern is having an accountable reimbursement plan, Wright said.

"This plan means the minister turns in regular receipts and is reimbursed by the church so that these expenses aren't counted as salary and aren't subject to a 2 percent reduction if listed as miscellaneous business expenses on Schedule A." †

To keep up with any changes related to ministers and filing taxes, follow SBOM at www.alsbom.org and on Facebook and Twitter.

Trussville's NorthPark hosts more than 500 men



Wild Game Feast

Photo by Ryan Christmas

More than 500 men — 529 to be exact — attend a Wild Game Feast at NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville, on Feb. 26. The men's ministry of the church prepared and cooked for days in order to provide enough wild game and fried catfish for the group. Those attending also participated in a time of worship and heard from Matt Rogie, who spent 22 years as an Army helicopter pilot and now serves with his wife, Stacie, as missions mobilizers with Team Expansion.

CHRISTIAN CAMPS & RETREATS

‘Place of refuge’

Cottonton Baptist Church uses new campground to reach people with gospel

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

If you build it they will come.” This famous line from “Field of Dreams” inspired Kevin Costner’s character, Ray Kinsella, to build

a baseball diamond in the middle of his Iowa cornfield.

While that was Iowa, Robert Rhodes, pastor of Cottonton Baptist Church, recently had his own “Field of Dreams” moment.

Even though Rhodes was not completely sure of the purpose,

he felt the Lord leading the Russell Baptist Association church to purchase a wooded area right down the street from the church building. He initially thought the property would be used to help local foster children because Rhodes himself was a foster child

and his family has hosted more than 100 kids in his lifetime.

‘Supernaturally woven’

However, after purchasing the land Rhodes felt led to have the church develop it into a campground instead in order to ad-

vance the spread of the gospel.

“I had a vision that we would be able to slip Jesus into the fun we were having through the camp,” Rhodes said. “But the Lord had plans for the gospel to be supernaturally woven into every aspect of the camp, especially in the obstacle course.”

The obstacle course contains about four or five different challenges, and each challenge represents a little piece of the gospel and explains everyone’s need for it, he said.

The course leads up to the grand finale zip line, which represents a truth about our walk as Christians, Rhodes explained.

“The truth is that even though

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Shocco Springs

Upcoming events

- ▶ **Alabama Baptist Conference of the Deaf (March 10–12)** — For children or adults. Partial conference rate available.
 - ▶ **South Central Conference (SCC) Prayer Summit (March 24–26)** — Featured speaker: SCC President Elder Benjamin Jones.
 - ▶ **Spring Senior Adult Retreat (April 10–12)** — A time of enrichment and encouragement for senior adults. Conference theme: “Fulfilled,” based on 2 Timothy 4:5.
 - ▶ **Transitional Pastor Training (April 10–12)** — For interim pastors serving during a transition period.
 - ▶ **Intentionally Moving People Across Cultures Together (IMPACT) Conference (April 20–22)** — Sessions on how Christians should express their faith amid diversity.
- For more information about any of the events, visit shocco.org/events-calendar. (TAB)



Photo courtesy of Cottonton Baptist Church

Cottonton Baptist Church hopes its camp can be a place for people to come, slow down and rest while getting to experience Christian fellowship and hear the gospel.

Christians surrender their lives to Christ, they will still face challenges. But the Lord will help us overcome our fears and then we can enjoy the journey with Him. We share this with the people on the course and then they zip down.”

Along with the obstacle course and zip line, the campground also houses a pavilion, treehouse, volleyball

courts and areas for canoeing and kayaking, among other things. Tent camping also is available, complete with showers and bathrooms.

“The whole camp is a place for people to come, slow down and rest while getting to experience

the Christian fellowship and the gospel,” Rhodes said.

Rhodes’ vision with the camp-

For more information, visit www.cottontontbaptist.org or call 334-855-4726.



Photo courtesy of Cottonton Baptist Church

Cottonton Baptist Church has hosted two camps, one for boys and the other for girls, where kids are able to engage in Bible studies and enjoy all the activities the camp offers.

ground is to change the culture by reaching kids.

Hosting camps

“We live in a time where families are falling apart and so many people are hurting, and so we are offering the campground as a

place of refuge,” Rhodes said.

So far the church has hosted two camps, one for youth boys and the other for girls. Each camp lasted a few days and kids were able to engage in Bible studies, have times to be open and vulnerable with their leaders and enjoy

the activities the camp offers.

Rhodes said the camp has been a tremendous blessing to his church and the community and is open to anyone interested in using it. Churches or groups can rent the campground for the day or weekend.✝

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Associate Professor of Evangelism
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Across ALABAMA'S Associations

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

COLUMBIA

► **Billy Womack** is the new pastor of **Smyrna Church, Dothan**. He earned his associate's degree from Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, and is working to earn his bachelor's degree. He and his wife, Paige, have one son.

GENEVA

► **Maple Avenue Church, Geneva**, will host the 39er's CLUB on March 14, 11 a.m.–noon. Linda Wimes, director of HIS Prison Ministry of Dothan, will be guest speaker. If you have been involved in the 39er's CLUB contact your table hostess to make or cancel your reservation. If you would like to attend but have never been before, call

the church office at 334-684-9617. Steve Wegmann is pastor.

RUSSELL

► **Ladonia Church, Phenix City**, will host a women's ministry spring conference March 11, 9 a.m.–1:30 p.m. Paige Paquette, assistant English professor at Troy University, will be guest speaker.

Amber Swift will lead special music. For more information call 334-298-4587. Greg Hyché is pastor.

SHELBY

► **First Church, Pelham**, will host an organizational meeting for Church Security Team Alliance on

March 11, 9:30 a.m.–noon. The conference is open to all churches and will provide a platform for teams to share ideas, policies and procedures for church security. For more information call Spruce McRee at 205-908-3850. Daven Watkins is pastor. †

— Correction —

In the March 2 issue, "Alabama Baptist pastor retires after 58 years of service," Franklin Delano Sims' number was listed incorrectly. His number is 205-527-4017 and he is available for pulpit supply.

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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Immanuel Baptist Church in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, is accepting resumés for a full-time pastor. The candidate selected will have five years senior pastor experience, seminary training, expository preaching style and be able to attract and appeal to all age groups. We currently have an elderly congregation and no other ministerial staff. We have underused, debt-free, excellent facilities and a good location. Candidates with the above qualifications can email resumés to: immanuel38464@bellsouth.net. Our website is myimmanuel.net. Please include current sermons on websites or send DVDs to the church office, Attn: Search committee.

PASTOR

Parrish First Baptist Church (SS avg. 100) is currently accepting resumés for a senior pastor. Please email resumés or inquiries to: searchcommittee@parrishfbc.com or mail to: P.O. Box 49 Parrish, AL 35580.

PASTOR

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

PASTOR

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

BIVOCATIONAL WORSHIP LEADER

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

BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC/WORSHIP LEADER

Friendship Baptist Church in Springville, Alabama, is accepting resumés for a bivocational music/worship leader. Email resumé to: friendshipbaptist411@gmail.com or contact Alicia at 205-629-5402 for more information.

PART-TIME WORSHIP LEADER

Calvary Baptist Church is seeking an enthusiastic individual who loves Jesus and expresses that love through leading its ministry of congregational music. The worship leader is responsible to the pastor for assisting the church in planning, conducting and evaluating worship. Interested individuals please send a resumé to: tweeks.calvary@gmail.com.

YOUTH MINISTER

Seeking part-time youth minister.

If interested, please send resumé to: fbcchalkville@att.net or mail to: FBC Chalkville at 2100 Old Springville Road, Birmingham, AL 35215.

OTHER POSITIONS

ASSOCIATION MISSIONARY

Beech River Baptist Association is seeking an associational missionary who will assist 42 churches, located in three West Tennessee counties, to partner together in order to impact the world for Christ. Email resumés to: richard.reb@gmail.com or send them to: Associational Missionary Search Committee, P.O. Box 498, Lexington, TN 38351. Resumés will be received until April 30.

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

A Certain Trumpet

Sermons by Alabama Baptists

The Beatitudes series — Matthew 5:3-12

'Blessed are those who mourn' (v. 4) — Tears of Joy

I remember very vividly seeing my friend, Bobby, walk the aisle as the invitation was given at the conclusion of a Sunday evening service. That night he prayed to receive Christ as his Savior. As I approached him in the receiving line, I noticed he was crying. I couldn't understand why he would cry. Was he not happy with his decision? My mother later explained Bobby's reaction: "Those were tears of joy."

The second Beatitude runs contrary to the pattern of thought of the first century culture in Palestine and in our culture today. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matt. 5:4). It seems ridiculous — "Happy are those who mourn?" Why would anyone think mourning is a key to happiness?

Note the progression in the statements of Jesus. The first Beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven," was to recognize a deep need in our lives. That need is to recognize our sin and our need for a Savior. The second Beatitude speaks to our need to mourn over our condition of sin.

It is important to note that in Jesus' day the Pharisees practiced what we could call "pharisaic righteousness." This righteousness was based on the external qualities of person. But the qualities Jesus mentions in the Sermon on the Mount are qualities of the internal being. This is true righteousness in the kingdom of God.

The meaning of 'mourn'

What does Jesus mean by "mourn?" The word "mourn" used in the text means to be saddened and to grieve over something or someone. In essence, the use of "mourn" in the text is to have a sense of anguish over sin. This, according to Jesus, is a characteristic of a blessed life.

There are many instances in life which cause us to mourn. One is caused by personal loss. All of us know this type of mourning such as the separation from a loved one by death. Another type of personal loss is the type of loss one experiences as by a storm such as a hurricane or tornado. We also mourn in the experience of a wayward child or hurting for others such as a family member or friend.

A second instance in life which

By Chip Starnes

Chip Starnes has served as pastor of First Baptist Church, Bay Minette, for nearly 10 years and served 15 years as a pastor prior to that. He holds degrees from Mississippi College in Clinton, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham. He and his wife, Darlene, have two children.



causes us to mourn is caused by the sin, sorrow and suffering we see around us in the world. This brings sorrow for the hurt experienced in our world. With all we are exposed to in the information age we are in danger of becoming desensitized to the hurts and pains of this world. Yet every now and then, and for some more often, we see the reality of the hurting, the homeless, the starving. It breaks our heart and we mourn for them. Remember when Jesus wept over the world? He wept over the death of Lazarus as recorded in John 11. We also read in Luke 19:41-44 that Jesus wept over a lost city. He wept over the multitudes and over their lost condition.

A third instance in life which can cause us to mourn is grief over our own sin against a Holy God. It is this grief and mourning over our sin that our Lord is speaking of in Matthew 5:4. Surely our own sin before God should cause us to mourn over our sinfulness. Just as we have become desensitized to the world's problems and sins, we have become desensitized to our personal sin before God.

True repentance

Jesus is instructing us to mourn over our sinful condition and seek His comfort. Mourning over our sinful condition is to lead us to true confession and repentance. True confession is not the mere mental assent that we have done wrong. Confession means seeing and agreeing with God how our sins have harmed us and others. It is pouring out our shame and deep sorrow to the Lord over our misdeeds. It is repenting

of our evil ways and turning around and doing what's right and good, and it's seeking reconciliation with others and our God. As the Bible says: "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret; but worldly sorrow brings death" (2 Cor. 7:10).

C.E. Tanner says, "True repentance is when, by the convicting power of God's Holy Spirit, the sinner finally has a sense ... of godly sorrow for the condition of sin in his or her heart, and comes empty-handed and undefensive, without pretension or ceremony, and from a sincere heart says, 'I'm sorry' to the only One who can truly claim offense at sin; Holiness Himself, the God of the Ages ... who alone can forgive and redeem and regenerate and reconcile."

When Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn," He is referencing personal repentance and a contrite heart before Holy God for our sin. There is forgiveness and mercy in Him when we come with repentance and contrition. When we do, we will find forgiveness and His comfort.

Our Comforter

Notice the result of mourning over our sin and repenting of our sin. "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted." Do we not long to be comforted by God? The word "comfort" is from the same word in the Greek language Jesus used to describe the Holy Spirit as the Comforter — the One who comes alongside us. When we mourn, He comes along beside us. He consoles, strengthens and encourages us.

God's comfort in our lives is readily available for all who seek Him. Author Bob Benson said, "When life caves in, you do not need reasons, you need comfort. You do not need answers, you need someone. Jesus does not come to us with an explanation, He comes to us with His presence."

You will never know the comfort of God's forgiveness in your life until you have mourned over your personal sin by repenting with a contrite heart. Contrition and repentance are followed by happiness when you receive God's forgiveness and His comfort. When you do, then you too will experience tears of joy. †

in Loving
Memory
of Alabama Baptist leaders

John Price

FBC Orange Beach pastor dies

John Price, pastor of First Baptist Church, Orange Beach, died Feb. 24. He was 62.

Price found the Lord and was baptized at Sardis Baptist Church, Boaz. It also was where he was ordained and married.

He earned his bachelor's degree from Samford University in Birmingham and his master's degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Prior to his 17 years at First, Orange Beach, Price served as pastor of Creek Path Baptist Church, Guntersville; First Baptist Church, Level Plains, in Enterprise; and East Gadsden Baptist Church, Gadsden. His friends and family say he was the "embodiment of laying down one's life to serve and love others for the sake of the gospel."

He served in various associational roles and most recently was leading his congregation through the recovery process of a fire that occurred Jan. 31.

Price is survived by his wife of 40 years, Wanda; four children; and 13 grandchildren. (Neisha Roberts)



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It was evident Southern Baptists who funded the hospital wanted it to be a place where patients could pray and worship. In the main lobby there was a chapel as well as offices for the chaplain and his secretary. Prayer rooms and visitor lounges were available on every patient floor to provide opportunity for rest, fellowship and prayer. (TAB)

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

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Alabama Baptist
CHILDREN'S HOMES
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Want to know GOD?

By Jenni Ingram
Member, First Baptist Church, Gantt

Have you ever heard the phrase “you’ve got great timing” when something or someone came through for you at just the right moment? This made me ponder God’s timing.

My husband and I were recently faced with a life-changing decision and we were sure we were standing in God’s will even though we had some concerns nagging us. That is until we read our nightly devotion one evening and realized we may be jumping the gun.

In “Every Day in His Presence” by Charles F. Stanley, the question was, “Are you trying to earn God’s grace or convince Him to bless you with some heart’s desire?”

That made us stop and realize we had prayed for our desire and not meditated on His will and His timing.

So we stopped praying for our desire and concentrated on Him. That is when we realized those concerns we had were actually God trying to get us to see we weren’t in His will at all.

The more we studied the more we saw we were on the precipice of making a horrible choice.

God will let you know His will but you must be in the right place with Him and you must be willing to let go of yourself to allow Him to fill you. This is what we did and I think it worked well for us.

First we sought the forgiveness of all of our sins including our selfishness.

Second we praised Him for stopping us and seeking us out.

Third we asked Him to show us His way and provide us with patience to wait for His timing. Then we opened our Bibles and let the Spirit fill us. ✝

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Photo courtesy of the University of Mobile

NBC Nightly News correspondent Tammy Leitner (center) interviews Erika Samuels (second from right) and Philip Streit (right) in UM’s new health care center for the Feb. 26 news segment.

UM reunion story gains national audience

An unexpected, emotional reunion captured on video at a ribbon cutting ceremony at the University of Mobile (UM) and seen nationwide days later on NBC Nightly News is truly a story of God at work, according to Erika Samuels and Philip Streit.

“This chance reconnection could only have been orchestrated by our Heavenly Father,” said Samuels, a senior at UM’s School of Nursing. “This story resonates with so many because it speaks of God’s saving grace, mercy and love.”

At the ribbon cutting ceremony Feb. 21 for UM’s new Center for Excellence in Healthcare Practice, the two subjects of the story were in attendance — Samuels was in her UM nursing uniform and UM

School of Nursing alumnus Streit, now a nursing administrator at Providence Hospital in Mobile, was in scrubs.

Samuels also was featured on a video about the new labs. When her name flashed on the screen Streit realized this was his former patient, one who had touched his heart 15 years ago.

“I was your nurse,” he told her.

It all came streaming back to both of them — Samuels, the 21-year-old whose car had been hit by a drunk driver, and Streit, the recent UM nursing school graduate who held her hand and picked the broken windshield glass from her hair.

Samuels said, “I proudly carry the torch and I pray that I can touch someone’s life the way that he has touched mine.” (UM)



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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For March 12

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

IS JESUS FULLY GOD? Matthew 17:1-13

Presence (1-6)

The transfiguration is an important event as it is recorded in three Gospels immediately following Jesus' statement about some of the disciples not tasting death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.

This suggests the transfiguration is a demonstration of Jesus coming in His kingdom, presenting Christ as He truly is.

It also is proof that Christ fulfills the Old Testament, while Moses represents the law and Elijah represents the prophets.

In the presence of Moses, Elijah and the transfigured Christ, Peter asks if he should set up shelters for the three.

However, while Peter is speaking, God the Father interrupts him stating Jesus is His beloved Son and Peter should listen to Him.

It suggests that for Peter, as well as Christians today, Jesus is the one on whom we should focus.

Many people today believe obeying the law leads to eternal life.

However, it is impossible to uphold the law and James says if anyone disobeys the law at any point they are guilty of breaking all of it.

This is why the good news of the gospel is that Jesus is the one who fulfilled the law taking the punishment we deserve for breaking it.

Trusting in Christ as the solution to our sin is the only way we can be reconciled to God.

Purpose (7-9)

Jesus often told His listeners to keep silent about His miracles.

Why wouldn't Jesus want people to know what He did?

Jesus wanted people to determine for themselves who He was not based on a

preconceived notion of what the Messiah would do.

Many in Jesus' day expected the Messiah to overthrow Roman occupation and set up an earthly Kingdom that would rule over Israel's enemies.

This is not why Jesus came the first time.

However, Jesus told His disciples to tell others about this event after the resurrection because it would help to affirm the resurrection and confirm Jesus as the Messiah.

Perspective (10-13)

Malachi states that Elijah is going to precede the coming of the Lord.

Seeing Elijah probably made the disciples ponder this prophecy.

If Jesus is the Messiah as the transfiguration indicates, then how is Elijah "turning the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers" (Mal. 4:6)?

Jesus reminds them that John the Baptist has fulfilled this role as Elijah (see Matt. 11:14).

Moreover just as John the Baptist was killed, Jesus also was going to experience death at the hands of the political leaders.

The disciples had a hard time understanding this because a suffering Messiah was outside their understanding.

It is important for believers today to have a proper understanding of who Jesus is and what it means to be one of His followers.

There are people today who believe if you follow Jesus you will be healthy and have monetary blessings.

This belief does not represent the Jesus of the Bible.

The Jesus of the Bible promises His followers will suffer and be persecuted but He also says the cost is worth it because it leads to eternal life. †

Bible Studies for Life By James Riley Strange, Ph.D. Associate Professor of Religion, Samford University

VICTORIOUS HOPE Matthew 8:5-13

Today's reading comes soon after the Sermon on the Mount and it falls in a section of six miracles.

In fact the healing of the centurion's servant is only the second miracle in the Gospel of Matthew, and it should be read in the context of the first (read all the way to 9:8). In the first miracle — the famous cleansing of the leper — Jesus touches him.

In today's passage Jesus heals from a distance.

Both stories emphasize the role of faith in healing: the leper has faith Jesus can make him clean and the centurion has faith Jesus can make someone else well.

Both stories also demonstrate Jesus' willingness to heal.

Jesus desires to heal us. (5-7)

Rome did not station troops in Galilee during Jesus' lifetime so this centurion may have mustered out of the army. This means he is probably living on an estate near Capernaum with a household that includes slaves.

The word rendered "servant" in most translations of verse 6 refers to a kind of slave. A different word appears in verse 9.

Jesus' response can be read as a question, "Shall I come and cure him?", perhaps expressing surprise that a Gentile — and one of high rank — would ask a local Jewish preacher and miracle worker to heal his slave.

Faith in Jesus' authority is necessary for us to have hope. (8-9)

If Jesus does indeed ask this question, then the centurion turns the tables. His response says, "I am the unworthy one."

The response also treats Jesus as a person of high rank who can expect His

commands to be followed. In this case the centurion personifies the illness as a being whom Jesus can order to leave.

Jesus gives us hope when we believe and trust in Him. (10-13)

Jesus is surprised again. This man is probably a pagan which means he worships the Roman gods and maybe the Persian god, Mithras, who was quite popular with soldiers. This man believes Jesus can command the sickness to leave his servant and it will happen. He approaches Jesus with a hope that prompts Him to act.

Jesus' response to the centurion foretells the mission to the Gentiles that will begin after Jesus' resurrection (see Matt. 28).

It's important to remember that in Matthew no one considers Jesus to be a charlatan. Those who oppose Jesus agree He can perform miracles but question the source of His power (12:24-32). This pagan, who ought to be blind to Jesus' divine power, recognizes it while many of Jesus' own fellow Galileans will not.

It also is important to remember Jesus does not indicate all Jews are destined for the "outer darkness," for all of His disciples are Jews.

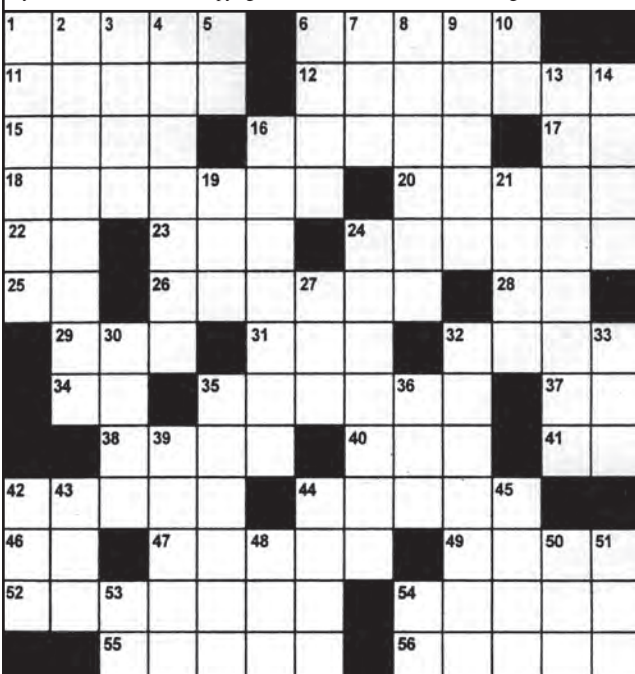
The Book of Acts also documents how Jews in Jerusalem first responded so strongly to Peter's preaching and how Paul was Jewish. Jesus' words do show that sometimes God's children let their own notions about how God works blind them to the very work of God. We are no more immune from this mistake than the "heirs of the Kingdom," whom Jesus mentions.

Let us then open our eyes to the places where — through Jesus — God is at work in the world.

And let us take on hope that will prompt us to act on behalf of those who need to be healed by Jesus. We know of course that this need takes many forms. †

Christian Crossword

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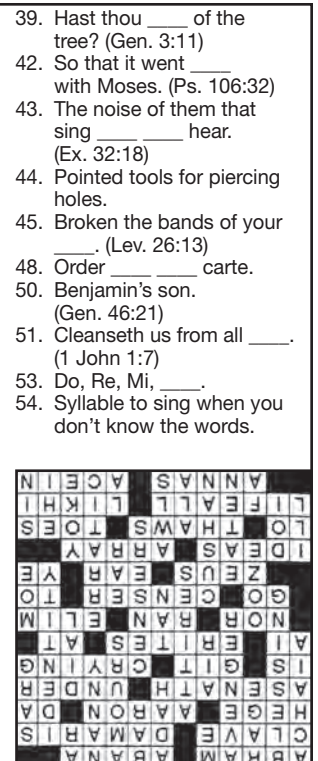


Across

- Now the Lord said unto _____. (Gen. 12:1)
- Are not _____ and Parpar rivers of Damascus? (2 Kings 5:12)
- Abraham ... _____ the wood. (Gen. 22:3)
- Athenian woman who believed. (Acts 17:34)
- In charge of King Ahasuerus' women. (Esther 2:3)
- The Lord sent him to meet Moses in the wilderness. (Ex. 4:27)
- Infant's first word for "Daddy."
- Joseph's wife. (Gen. 41:45)
- The works that are done _____ the sun. (Eccles. 1:14)
- I am, you are, he _____.
- Dialect for "get."
- Eli heard the noise of the _____. (1 Sam. 4:14)
- Joshua sent men from Jericho to _____. (Josh. 7:2)
- Descendants of Eri. (Num. 26:16)
- Sarah shall bear unto thee _____. (Gen. 17:21)
- Not bow down thyself to them, _____ serve them.

Down

- I _____ the marathon.
- Place of 12 wells of water. (Ex. 15:27)
- _____ ye therefore. (Matt. 28:19)
- Sons of Aaron, took either them his _____. (Lev. 10:1)
- They went forth _____ go. (Gen. 12:5)
- King of Greek gods.
- Cut off his right _____. (Luke 22:50)
- God said, _____ shall not eat of every tree. (Gen. 3:1)
- Bright _____.
- Strong people set in battle for _____. (Joel 2:5)
- And, _____, the angel of the Lord came. (Luke 2:9)
- Melts.
- Upon the great _____ of their right feet. (Lev. 8:24)
- For it is the _____ of flesh. (Lev. 17:14)
- Ahian, and Schechem, and _____. (1 Chron. 7:19)
- Led him away to _____ first. (John 18:13)
- An _____ the hole.
- _____ (Acts 18:12)
- Thou shalt be a _____. (Gen. 12:2)
- Why do the heathen _____? (Ps. 2:1)
- The Lord is the _____ of all such. (1 Thess. 4:6)
- _____, myself, and I.
- And _____ bare Jabal. (Gen. 4:20)
- Candy or ice cream _____.
- Loves.
- Mary Poppins was one.
- Pass over through _____. (Deut. 2:18)
- Joseph's brothers didn't know his _____. (Gen. 46:21)
- "Hey, _____." (Beetle Bailey)
- Dresses. (verb)
- The fowl of the _____. (Gen. 1:26)
- The sun _____ of Ahaz. (Isa. 38:8)
- And the _____ of pure gold. (1 Kings 7:50)
- You get this at a beach.
- Leak out slowly.
- Flighty, capricious.
- _____, Larry and Curly.
- The tents of _____ in affliction. (Hab. 3:7)
- Give _____ to his commandments. (Ex. 15:26)



WHAT ARE YOU READING?



Alabama Baptists share about what they are currently reading

Pastor Jim Auchmuty

FBC Roebuck Plaza, Birmingham

“Waiting for a Song in the Night: The Trauma of Pastoral Termination” by Eli Landrum

I commend “Waiting for a Song in the Night: The Trauma of Pastoral Termination” by Eli Landrum, former pastor and more recently retired from a 20-year editorial tenure at LifeWay Christian Resources in Nashville.

Skillfully written in a confessional but nonaccusatory style, it offers both preventive and remedial insights for neophytes; salty, old gray beards; and those who serve as resource personnel for pastors.

Eli and I go back to the '60s. He is a dear friend and I think he has done all clergy a service with his exceptionally well written book that speaks with insight and compassion on an ongoing issue. Copies may be obtained from Parson's Porch Books (423-475-7308, www.parsonsporch.com) and other locations.

Jennifer Davis Rash

The Alabama Baptist and www.rashionalthoughts.com

“So You Love a Prodigal: What You Can't Do, What You Can Do, Why You Can't Quit” by Rita Aiken Moritz

I'm only one-third of the way through Rita Aiken Moritz's “So You Love a Prodigal” and I'm anxious to consume every word. I can already tell Rita's transparency about her own pain, the lessons she's learned along the way and a consistent thread of biblical truths make the book a “must read” for anyone who has, is or will experience a broken heart.

Before I begin reading a book I typically flip through all the chapter headers and skim the subheads, sidebars, pull-out quotes, etc. My skimming of this book indicates I will learn and grow from every chapter. The chapter “Who's to Blame?” reminds us that the choices a prodigal makes is not our fault but is related to the condition of his or her own heart.

Several chapters deal with practical ways to and not to respond “when the roof falls in.”

And the chapter where Robert Smith Jr., beloved preacher and the Charles T. Carter Baptist Chair of Divinity at Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, shares how God moved him to forgiveness of the man who killed his son — there are no words to do it justice. Just be ready for God to move as you read. ☞

Tell us what you are reading, a quick summary of what it is about and your response to it so far. Email news@thealabamabaptist.org or send us a message on Facebook. You may also mail your information to: 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209.

Transparent with God

Songwriter shares pain but also God's hope through song

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Sometimes there are no answers and even when there are, they aren't always easy, Staci Frenes said.

“For me the past five to seven years have been a season of very difficult challenges,” she said. “It was a number of life-altering changes all in a row and we weren't expecting any of it.”

She lost her home to the housing market crash.

On the heels of that she lost her dad to cancer and her brother to a sudden heart attack. Then her teenage daughter announced she was gay.

“I started imagining life as a river, moving water that we don't know what's going to come around the next bend,” Frenes said. “For me it had become a big twisting, curvy, tumultuous ride and I'm only just starting to be able to come up for air.”

And for Frenes processing life equaled songwriting.

“I really felt a nudge in my spirit that this was the time to begin writing,” she said, noting she wanted to write songs “that reflected not only my own despair and pain and confusion but also the incredible hope and presence of God in all of it.”

She wanted it to be raw and real, she said.

“I didn't want to wrap up every song with a pretty bow but instead write songs that say ‘this is what it's like to be human,’” Frenes said. “I was inspired by the Psalms and how David was so honest. One minute he was crying out in anguish and the next minute praising and exalting and magnifying God.”

That's exactly what it's like to be human, she said.

“We trust that God is good but we feel the pain.”

That's the truth she said she aimed to portray in her ninth independent album, “Unpathed Waters, Undreamed Shores,” which was recently released.

“To me it really is a beautiful record that represents the soundtrack of my life and that season,” she said. “I'm still learning the songs in my life and still digesting the truths that they convey.”

One song Frenes said has particularly resonated with listeners is called “Storm,” a track she wrote for her young adult children as they try to navigate life for themselves.

“It's the struggle of wanting to pray, ‘Oh, God — keep them safe,’ but at the same time knowing that it's in my own struggles that I developed the deepest character traits and relationship with God,” she said. “I want my kids to be kind and compassionate and to have grit and mercy and patience. And I realize those things get developed in the storms.”

So in the song Frenes tells her kids that she wishes them storms — beautiful storms.

“I wish for them the kind of storms that wreck them and make them more beautiful

Photo courtesy of Bozeman Media



Staci Frenes

than before,” she said. “It's a hard song to write as a mom, but if we never go through storms we never become the people we were meant to become.”

In her own life Frenes said she started this album in a place of deep sadness, but as she wrote the songs she realized how much comfort could come from the freedom of being transparent with God.

“He is the Comforter; He is our peace,” she said. “But it's almost like we can't experience that from Him until we're honest about where we are.”

For more information, visit www.stacifrenes.com. ☞

“He is the Comforter; He is our peace. ... But it's almost like we can't experience that from Him until we're honest about where we are.”

Staci Frenes
singer/songwriter

Bible stories in comics

'The Kingstone Bible' offers creative way of learning Word

Art Ayris, CEO of Kingstone Media, said for years as he worked with at-risk kids, struggling to find the right materials to help them learn the Bible.

"Working as a pastor, I was very strong with the Bible, so when I began creating Christian comic books, we began to see huge responses to what we were putting out, both domestically and internationally," he said in a recent interview with *Christianity Today*.

He said he remembers going to an apartment complex once with some of the comics, thinking a few people might grab a copy, and it was "like a shark-feeding frenzy." Another woman who served as a missionary in Papua New Guinea said she had put the comics out on her coffee table and "literally everybody was all excited to read them."

"There's something compelling about the rich imagery of art," Ayris said.

And that's how "The Kingstone Bible" was born, a three-volume work with artwork from veterans of both Marvel and DC Comics. It's the most ambitious graphic novel biblical adaptation to date, according to *Christianity Today*.

It joins a niche but steady market that has seen decades of Bible stories adapted to comics, from VeggieTales to "The Cross and the Switchblade."

"The Kingstone Bible" is aimed at the preteen and young adult audience, said Ayris, who served as editor for the project.

"I read an article in 2009 by a Vatican archaeologist who found all this artwork in the catacombs, and he basically said it's all just a big advertisement trying to get people to repent. And when I would go to Barnes & Noble, I'd see all these kids spread out all over the floor reading graphic novels," he said. "So we really felt, with this big problem of biblical literacy, that this would be an effective way to communicate the whole biblical narrative."

Difficult topics

The book deals with adult themes like murder and genocide accurately but not in an over-the-top way, Ayris said. He told *Christianity Today* that it took several years of marketing and making changes to the art to get the product on the shelves of LifeWay Christian Stores and other Christian bookstores.

"We had to do a careful balancing act throughout," he said. "All of our artists have done work for

Marvel or DC, where they don't necessarily have these kinds of restrictions. I had to kind of rein them in a bit without sacrificing the real biblical content. I'm really proud of where we ended up."

Ayris said he's done evangelism before in jails, schools, hospitals, overseas and in a lot of other places, and one thing he's always seen is that evangelism needs a connection point to have an opportunity for engagement.

"And since a lot of people really don't understand the Scriptures, this is one way of reaching those folks," he said.

And it's a good method of teaching, he said. "We are really big believers in marrying graphics with the text."

Text gets stored in the brain's short-term memory but images go in its long-term memory, he said.

"There's a lot of research showing that people can recall much more information and gain a better overall understanding of content if you give them both images and text together as opposed to either text or images separately."

For example, he said, one woman who works at one of Ayris' ministries adopted a young girl from a dysfunctional family situation and she brought her to church with her. Along the way the girl got a graphic Bible, Ayris said.

The pastor made a reference to an obscure story from the Old Testament and asked the church if they knew the answer.

"The deacons who'd been at that church for 50 years had no clue," Ayris said. "Nobody knew the answer — except for this girl because she'd read it in her graphic Bible."

There's also an efficiency with the format, he said. "You can convey large amounts of information in a very short period of time. So when you read a novel you can do pages and pages that are just description of a specific place or situation. But in a graphic novel one panel can cover what might've taken several pages to describe."

Every page has the Scripture reference on the bottom so that it's not a Bible replacement but a Bible supplement, he said.

"Somebody who's never read the Bible before can take 'The Kingstone Bible' and they can take away a good understanding of the Bible's major stories, narratives and doctrines: the character of God, the history of Israel, how it points to Christ in the future, how God feels about sin and how He responds to disobedience," Ayris said. (TAB)



Graphic courtesy of Kingstone

The Kingstone Bible Volume 1 cover

RELIGION

in America

Compiled from Wire Services

Target hits 2-year low; some point to bathrooms

MINNEAPOLIS, Minn. — Target, the 1,800-strong chain store, saw a two-year low in its 2016 fourth-quarter earnings, which some say was caused in part by heavy boycotting over its transgender bathroom policy implemented in April 2016.

Brian Cornell, Target chairman and CEO, told *The Christian Post* there was "unexpected softness in our stores," and shares sunk 12.1 percent in one day on Wall Street, according to Reuters.

Conservative organizations like 2ndVote campaigned throughout 2016 that families stop shopping at Target because of its new bathroom policy. The organization argued that allowing shoppers to choose which bathroom they use according to their gender identity left females "exposed to the dangers of sexual predators," *The Post* reported.

2ndVote Executive Director Lance Wray accused Target of "pushing a radical agenda over common sense and safety," noting that the conservative organization's #AnywhereButTARGET campaign "sent a clear message" to Target.

Target has defended its policy by insisting that it is aimed at helping people feel comfortable, *The Post* reported.

To return to the pre-2016 earning levels, Target's Cornell said the store is looking at "long-term, sustainable growth," revealing that the retailer will invest in lower gross margins to become more competitively priced, *The Post* reported. (TAB)

Facebook apologizes for suspending account

WARSAW, Ohio — After a Christian video blogger's account was frozen by Facebook over a post about homosexuality, Facebook has come back and apologized, saying that it made an "error."

The page of Elizabeth Johnston, an Ohio mother who homeschools her 10 children, was suspended Feb. 9 because of a comment she had posted more than six months ago about the Bible's condemnation of homosexuality.

Johnston runs a popular page and blog called "The Activist Mommy," and the comment, which didn't use name-calling, was in response to a user's argument on her page that Christians are hypocrites for their views on homosexuality.

Facebook sent Johnston a message informing her that her post was removed because "it didn't follow the Facebook Community Standards," according to *The Christian Post*. Facebook also froze her account for three days.

After she was able to log back in, she explained to followers what had happened and included the #FacebookCensorsBible hashtag. Soon after, Facebook removed that post and suspended her account a second time.

After widespread media coverage, Facebook apologized Feb. 23. "Our team processes millions of reports each week and we sometimes get things wrong. ... We are sorry for any inconvenience this may have caused," a Facebook spokesperson wrote. (TAB)

Most agree with Trump on bathroom policies

ASBURY PARK, New Jersey — Most Americans agree with President Donald Trump on the transgender bathroom issue, that the issue shouldn't be the federal government's to decide, according to a new survey from Rasmussen Reports.

The survey found that 49 percent of American adults are opposed to letting transgender students use the bathroom of the opposite biological sex if they choose, according to *The Christian Post*.

But only 28 percent believe the federal government should be responsible for making related policies. Another 28 percent say it should be the states' decision and 36 percent say it should be up to the local government.

Russell Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, said he is glad to see Trump's decision to rescind the policy the Obama administration put in place.

"I'm very glad to see the Trump administration revoke these guidelines," Moore said. "Children are not pawns of the State to be used to advance the latest fashionable 'right side of history' cause." (TAB)