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FORGIVEN

"As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us."

— PSALM 103:12 —

HE IS RISEN. CELEBRATE THE SAVIOR.

Easter is Sunday, April 16.

123rf.com photo/graphic by Lauren C. Grifm

Multigenerational
Coming next week ... **Travel**



COMMENT

No Need for a Veil

All three synoptic Gospels report the same event. The veil separating the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple in Jerusalem was torn in two from top to bottom when Jesus died. Matthew 27:51 and Mark 15:38 report the rip occurred at the time Jesus died. Luke 23:45 says the veil was rent in two during the crucifixion.

The entire New Testament, in fact, the entire Christian faith attributes a common meaning to the event. Through the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary's cross, God was doing a new thing that superseded what the veil represented.

For centuries the veil had played an essential part of Jewish worship. Exodus 25 begins the story of the tabernacle, a word that means "dwelling, habitation or abode." The tabernacle also was called the "Tent of Meeting," for God had promised He would meet His people there (Ex. 25: 22).

Altar of Incense

The tabernacle was divided into two parts. The larger part contained an Altar of Incense on which offerings were presented to the Lord each day. Beyond the altar shielded from view by a veil of fine twined linen was the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant rested.

It was within the Holy of Holies that God promised to meet His people (Ex. 30:6). But access was limited. Numbers 18:7 indicates that only priests could enter the sacred space. Evidently that quickly changed to only the High Priest who could enter and then only on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:2).

When Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem to be the House of God, the basic design of the tabernacle was preserved. There was a portico or vestibule followed by the Holy Place where priests offered daily sacrifices on the Altar of Incense. And behind the Altar of Incense, separated by a huge blue, purple and crimson colored veil embroidered with cherubim, was the Holy of Holies.

It is estimated the veil was about 30 feet high and 60 feet long as it was gathered on acacia wood poles, fastened with gold clamps and



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

stretched across the 30 feet of open space between the sidewalls. The same design was used in Herod's Temple at the time of Jesus.

Like the tabernacle, the temple symbolized the presence of God with His people. And like the tabernacle, only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies and then only on the Day of Atonement when an annual sacrifice was made for the sins of the people.

Practically speaking, the veil concealed the mysteries of God from His people. It was a symbol of an old covenant that focused on ceremonial cleansing. But in Jesus Christ, God was doing a new thing. As the apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:19: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself."

God was taking the initiative. He took the initiative in Jesus as the High Priest who offered the sacrifice for sin to the Father. God was taking the initiative in Jesus as the spotless sacrificial Lamb — "One who knew no sin was made to be sin that we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21).

God was taking the initiative in Jesus to make Himself known to all peoples everywhere. No longer would the mysteries of God be hidden from view behind a veil. No longer would the meeting place with God be open to only a few. God's new thing was to make His mysteries known to Jew and Gentile alike. That mystery, according to Colossians 1:27 is "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

The veil that shielded the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple was torn from top to bottom, the Bible says. It was not torn by human hands but by an invisible power. Again God was taking the initiative to offer free access to the "mercy seat" of forgiveness and that access was through the blood of Jesus shed on the cross.

The writer of Hebrews uses the words of Jeremiah 31:31-34 to point to Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection as God's new promised covenant with His people (Heb. 8).

Hebrews 9 compares what God did through Jesus Christ and to the Holy of Holies, the work of the High Priest, to the sacrifice itself.

Verse 11 contrasts Jesus' "tabernacle" — His body — to the earthly tabernacle. Jesus was more perfect than any man-made structure because He was God incarnate. He was fully God and fully human. His conception was unlike any other for He was born of a virgin who had been "overshadowed" by the Holy Spirit. He was truly unique. There was none like Him.

Verses 12-14 compare the offerings. The Jewish High Priest offered the blood of goats and calves. Jesus offered His own blood. Again this is the Jesus who is fully human and fully God, the One of whom Paul wrote, "That God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." Is it an over-stretch to say God was offering His own blood to pay the price of sin as He took the initiative to provide a new way of salvation?

Eternal redemption

Verse 12 also calls attention to how often a sacrifice for sin was made. The Jewish high priest offered the sacrifice of atonement annually but Jesus entered the holy place "once for all" because His sacrifice obtained eternal redemption.

Verse 24 contrasts the high priest entering into the Holy of Holies with Jesus entering into heaven itself.

Finally the writer compares the efficacy of the sacrifices. The sacrifices of the Jewish high priest could gain ceremonial cleansing. Jesus, as sacrifice for sin, was offered "once to bear the sins of many."

No wonder the writer asked rhetorically in verse 14, "How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

One cannot serve the living God without access to Him. That is the symbol of the torn veil. The old covenant had come to an end. Now, through Jesus Christ, God provided new access to Himself that "whoever believes in the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved."

Now humankind could come "boldly" into the "holiest" — the presence of God — through the blood of Jesus (Heb. 10:19). ✠

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

EASTER MUSIC

I am writing to urge all worship leaders to remember that on Easter morning most churches will see the largest number of people in the service than any other day of the year.

While many of them don't attend church regularly, they expect to hear music familiar to them that tells of the resurrection and promise of the Savior.

Please, directors, when you stand

before your congregation on Easter morning, remember that your congregation will include visitors and former members. They will not appreciate standing there and watching words on a screen with which they are unfamiliar. The correct use of both familiar and unfamiliar Easter worship music in the service will engage your entire congregation in praise and worship.

There will be no greater compli-

ment to any church music program than to have those leaving the service stop and tell the minister that they appreciated being able to be a part of the worship service. And who knows, they may even decide to visit again.

Iris Lundy Anderson
Mobile, 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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Flame of unity

Open Doors ministry partner says Egyptian revolution 'good' for Church

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

During what is known as the Egyptian revolution of 2011, cities like Cairo and Alexandria were described as "war zones." Violent clashes between police and protestors, who urged the end of then-president Hosni Mubarak's regime, ended in the death of 846 people. More than 6,000 people were injured.

Through a series of events, Mubarak resigned from leadership and the Muslim Brotherhood took power with new Islamist President Mohamed Morsi. But because Morsi tried to impose strict Islamic law, he was opposed and ousted in 2013.

Egyptians had hoped for something better with new leadership but ended up with something worse. Churches were attacked; Christians were threatened, discriminated against and sometimes killed; and many felt forced to flee the country for their safety and survival.

And in 2014 former minister of defense Abdel Fattah El-Sisi was elected president, which helped diminish the violence but did little for the acceptance of the Christian community.

Today Egypt ranks No. 21 on Open Doors' World Watch List of the most dangerous and highly persecuted countries in the world.

For Christians in Egypt, "those three years (of revolution) were very difficult because God was shaking the whole country," according to Michael, an Egyptian ministry partner with Open Doors, a nonprofit, nondenominational group serving persecuted Christians in more than 60 countries. But the crisis also ignited a flame of unity in the Church, he said.

During the month of March, Michael — whose name has been changed for security reasons — met with several pastors and churches throughout Alabama, Tennessee and Florida to share about the Church in Egypt. He also was a featured guest on Priority Talk Radio, Birmingham's daily live Christian radio talk show on WXJC 92.5 FM.

"The Church found a God-given peace to not fight back (when it was persecuted)," Michael shared with listeners March 17 on Priority Talk Radio.

He shared how members of one church in Egypt took the ashes from their burned-down church building and wrote on a wall nearby, "God is love" and "We forgive."

Many of those Christians were asked by the media how they could forgive while still being attacked, Michael said. "This was the time when Christians were able to testify and simply say that it's not about us but it's about



Photo by Neisha Roberts

Open Doors ministry partner Michael (right) spoke on Priority Talk Radio in Birmingham on March 17 about the Church in Egypt. Paul Brasher (left), pastor of New Hope Baptist Church, Pell City, was guest host of the daily radio program.

our God who taught us the exact model of how to love and forgive."

The revolution and tumult might have been seen by those outside the country as some of the darkest days for the Church of Egypt, but Michael said, "We don't see them as that. We see them as we were given the microphone."

He said much of the disdain toward Christians comes from misunderstanding Christianity. Many radical Muslims don't know "the reality of our message ... and get all kinds of bad ideas about the Christian faith." "They don't understand the Trinity and think we serve three gods and that our Bible is corrupt," Michael said. "So they generate rejection rather than willingness to know or learn."

Despite their dismissal of Christians, many Muslims are seeing God in a way that is a cultural norm in much of the Arab world — through dreams

and visions, he noted.

"(Believers in Egypt) have been taking a tough journey, not just over the last several years. But we realized that the last several years are not a season of distress and agony but a season of harvest," Michael said. "This is a time when many eyes are opened and seeking the gospel."

And although persecution has been painful, both physically and emotionally, in some ways it has become a blessing, Michael said.

As Christians have been neglected by the

government, turned away from jobs and ostracized in many ways by society, it has drawn the Church to a place where there's nothing left to do but pray. In November 2011 more than 45,000 Christians gathered to do just that for 12 hours straight. The prayer gathering served as a marker, at least in Michael's mind, as the beginning of a new season for the Church.

Since that time there have been several large and small prayer gatherings among Christians throughout Egypt, he said.

"This is not easy because we are faced with aggressive issues every day. We get frequent attacks on churches and suicide bombings." But Christians in Egypt should not live in fear, Michael said.

Salt and light

"If we stop sending our light out what is different about us? If we keep our hope for us and imprison ourselves in our churches what is different about us? We are called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. ... We need to join hands together and remind one another that we have a strong testimony and the solution for the desperation and hopelessness in this world ... because we are reflecting the light of our Master."

He asked that Christians around the world not pray for persecution to end, because all "those who want to live in righteousness will be persecuted. We don't want to pray for the persecution to stop."

"We need prayers for our perseverance, to spend the rest of our journey focused on God's kingdom and inspired by the Holy Spirit on a daily basis so that every Christian, in spite of pressure and attacks, will continue to shine." ¶

**"We don't want
to pray for the
persecution to stop.
We need prayers for
our perseverance."**

**Michael
Egyptian ministry partner
with Open Doors**

A young boy participates in a beeping Easter egg hunt in 2016. Hundreds of visually impaired and disabled kids in Alabama attended the five hunts.

Shining Light



Photo by David Leong/AAPVI

Alabama Baptist programs share love of Jesus Christ with visually impaired

By Martha Simmons
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

From beeping Easter eggs to Braille Bibles, Alabama Baptist programs work “to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6) to the blind and visually impaired.

Retired minister Jack Kinley, who operates Vision Tape Ministry out of his home in Phenix City, first became active in working with the visually impaired in 1976.

“I’m visually impaired myself,” he said, having been medically discharged from the Army in 1949 as a result of a concussion that left him blind in one eye.

He became involved in the national Blinded Veterans Association and established the first chapter in Alabama.

“I realized there was a lot of material available for visually impaired and blind people through the National Library Service (for the Blind and Physically Handicapped) and other secular organizations. But I couldn’t find much for visually impaired and blind people who were Christians.”

Kinley and his late wife, Gwen, established Vision Tape Ministry by acquiring or creating their own cassette tape recordings.

“To begin with it just consisted of a couple of tapes every other month, Bible studies and Christian music and materials we were allowed to reproduce from other Christian organizations,” he said.

They started small, distributing the

tapes in Alabama, then expanded to blind veterans and their families.

“Then we decided to let it be known for other visually impaired and blind people. One by one, as people gave us contacts, it just seemed to mushroom. We got calls from all over the country. We offered them free to anybody and were able to mail them under a Free Matter for the Blind permit. We didn’t want to start begging for money.”

Growing ministry

“And we started putting it out to the National Library Service for the Blind and Handicapped,” Jack Kinley said.

“As the years went on we changed the format of the tapes. It got to where we were putting on Christian music, Bible study I did myself. My wife did Gwen’s Corner, a potpourri of things that visually impaired and blind people did have available. She would read articles out of various publications.”

Jack Kinley said his daughter took up where his late wife left off.

“Now my daughter does Judy’s Journeys and records articles, simple recipes that blind and visually impaired people can make.”

Visual Tape Ministry has never charged for this service, despite sending tapes all over the world, nor has Jack Kinley made fundraising appeals to support it. When speaking about the ministry to groups over the years, he said, “I have mentioned the tape ministry and people just supply the money. The Lord’s always taken care of it.

There’s just about enough money.”

The demand for the cassette tapes has declined, as cassette players have become obsolete, at least in the United States, Jack Kinley said. Friends who find working cassette players in their homes or thrift stores bring them to him, who often ships them off to foreign countries where CD-players are not as widely available.

“My wife and I went on a couple of trips to Nigeria to work in the Blind Training Centers. We helped them become more independent. We took Braille Bibles and taught them how to read in Braille. We also still send tapes over there, to the Philippines and other countries,” he said. “Vision Tape Ministry expanded to an overseas ministry where we send the tapes to missionaries and Americans who know the ones locally who can understand English. In those countries, they’re still using tape players. If I can find them, like the old Walkmans, I send them over.”

Jack Kinley concedes that switching to CDs or posting the recordings online would increase the reach of his ministry, but, he said, “I’m 88 years old now and I just don’t want to start something new.”

Beeping eggs

Back in 2005, North Shelby Baptist Church, Birmingham, member David Hyche wanted to find a way for his young daughter, Rachel Hyche, blind since birth but very independent at less than two years old, to enjoy the church Easter egg hunt.

Hyche, an agent with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), learned online about how to make Easter eggs that beep, allowing blind children to find them by sound. David Hyche, a self-described “explosives guy,” sought help from friends in local police bomb squads and ATF coworkers to construct 40 of the beeping eggs, which cost \$11.50 per egg to build.

The first hunt had only a few blind children participating but the program grew steadily since then, with five hunts in 2016 drawing hundreds of blind and disabled kids in Alabama alone.

The International Association of Bomb

Technicians & Investigators (IABTI) now sponsors The Rachel Project nationally. “The IABTI adopted this as their charity and it has spread all over the country. We get six to eight new cities every year,” David Hyche said.

“Last year a teacher of Native Americans contacted us and we were able to send Easter egg components up to Washington to the bomb squad up there — they were able to put them together for the reservation. It’s pretty far-reaching.”

David Hyche also is working on a project to allow more disabled to get in on the hunt next Easter. “I made a vibrating egg. We tested it at the Helen Keller School for the deaf and blind (in Talladega) and they loved it. They’re very expensive but we’re going to try to make 20 or 30. Trying to reach out to the severely multidisabled kids.”

Variety of missions

Rachel Hyche, now 12, is too “grown up” to participate in the egg hunts but helps the younger children, David Hyche said.

North Shelby Baptist continues to support a variety of missions for the blind and visually impaired, including multisensory Bible stories and puppet shows where a story of Jonah and the whale is brought to life by opening a can of tuna. The church also provides Braille Bibles and hymnals to Baptists who can’t afford them.

It’s important that churches work to provide religious resources because the majority of agencies and organizations serving the blind are secular, David Hyche said.

Expanding the mission

“It is often very difficult for blind or visually impaired individuals to find religious, specifically in our case, Baptist materials,” he said. And even though his daughter has outgrown hunting Easter eggs herself, he continues to work with many others to expand the mission.

“I have the world of the blind and the world of my work in law enforcement, and to bring the two together is really cool,” David Hyche said.

“It’s amazing when God puts something like that in front of you.” ✠



Photo by David Leong/AAPVI

David Hyche learned online about how to make Easter eggs that beep, allowing blind children to find them by sound.

Celebrate Easter — April 16

RESOURCES for visually impaired

TAPE MINISTRIES

▶ **Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions** — Mails weekly cassette tape recordings of the upcoming LifeWay Sunday School lesson and selected articles from *The Alabama Baptist*. Contact Sheila Rikerd at srikerd@alsbom.org or 334-613-2249.

▶ **Vision Tape Ministries** — Cassette tapes mailed free on request, containing a variety of sermons, lessons, devotionals, music and articles. Contact Jack Kinley at 334-297-6432 or jjay0520@bellsouth.net.

BRILLE HYMNALS AND BIBLES

▶ **North Shelby Baptist Church, Birmingham, Vision Impairment Ministry** — Braille Baptist hymnals available to churches and individuals; financial assistance is available. Contact North Shelby Baptist at 205-995-9056.

▶ **Lutheran Braille Workers** — The largest Christian ministry in the world that provides Braille and specialized large print Bibles free of charge for the visually impaired. Contact 1-800-925-6092 toll free or 909-795-8977 or email lbw@lbwinc.org.

▶ **Helping Hands Braille Ministries/Source of Light Ministries International** — Braille Bibles and other documents produced from data entry, scanning or computer disk. Call 706-342-0397, ext. 115, or email helpinghands@slmin.org.

▶ **Gospel Light Foundation for the Blind** — Braille Bibles and other publications provided by agencies and organizations on this resource list: glfb.org/resources.html.

BEEPING EASTER EGG HUNT

▶ **The Rachel Project** — Contact David Hyche at bhamaapvi@bellsouth.net.

Compiled by Martha Simmons

Easter symbols

Easter season provides opportunity to teach kids about new birth

By Carolyn Tomlin
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Alabama parents and those who work with children in our Baptist churches have many opportunities to teach about new birth and resurrection during the Easter season. Our stores are filled with cuddly toy lambs, rabbits and chicks that remind us of spring. Pastries of hot-cross buns and pretzels line bakery shelves. And the traditional Easter lily carries its own unique fragrance.

These are only a few of the representations associated with Easter. Perhaps as adults we are familiar with these signs but do our children know the reason for these symbols? Do they know the ancient roots going back to the death and resurrection of Jesus? Look at a few of the traditional symbols of Easter and what they represent:

The egg, chicks and rabbit symbolize new life in Christ. Since ancient times the egg has been associated with the spring season. Some people see the egg representing the tomb from which Jesus emerged when He rose again. When the chick breaks through the eggshell and hatches, this is a representation of new life.

Easter lily

The fragrant Easter lily with its pure white blossoms symbolizes the purity of Jesus. The miracle of a bulb is a fascinating topic. A dried-up, unattractive object is planted in the soil. God sends the rain for moisture and the sun for nutrients. Within a few months a small green shoot appears — still no indication of what is to come. In time a stalk, leaves and buds appear. Then the miracle happens. The most aromatic fragrance one can imagine fills the air. The lily symbolizes new life and the resurrection of Christ.

Throughout the Bible the gentle lamb is mentioned numerous times. The King James Bible lists the singular form “lamb” 105 times, the possessive form “lamb’s” twice and the plural form “lambs” 81 times.

A lamb is known to be a humble, tender and gentle animal. The lamb represents Jesus, the Lamb of God. John 1:36 reads: “When he (John) saw Jesus passing by, he said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God.’”



Photo courtesy of Carolyn Tomlin

In Bible times crucifixion on the cross was a punishment for a harsh crime and an instrument of execution. The cross symbolized Jesus’ victory over death. During the Easter season many churches display a cross and Easter lily in the worship center.

A butterfly reminds us of new life and birth. The butterfly goes through a complete metamorphosis — a Greek word meaning “transformation” or “change in shape.” The four stages of the butterfly are the egg, larva, pupa and adult. This transformation is symbolic of what occurs when Christ enters our life.

Throughout the centuries the meaning of the cross that marks the hot-cross buns is uncertain. Support is given to a 12th century monk who may have been the first person to mark the bun with a cross. Baked on Good Friday the hardened bread honors the upcoming Easter. Traditionally the “cross” was made with a knife point or extra dough on the unbaked loaf. Today simple icing makes the shape of the cross.

Arms crossed in prayer

A mixture of flour, yeast and other ingredients form a pretzel — a food eaten during Lent. The pretzel was twisted to resemble the arms crossed in prayer and

numerous stories exist as to its beginning. A familiar one: In 610 A.D. a monk from Europe used scraps of dough and formed them into strips to represent a child’s arms folded in prayer. The three empty holes present the Christian Trinity.✠

Hot-cross buns family activity

1. Use a simple yeast bread recipe or ready-made dinner rolls.
2. Purchase a tube of decorating icing.
3. Guide the child into making a cross on top of each roll.
4. Talk about the meaning of the cross.
5. Write appropriate Scripture on cardstock and encourage the child to memorize the brief verse.
6. As you work together play recordings of favorite hymns associated with Easter.

Compiled by Carolyn Tomlin

**“This is the day the
Lord hath made;
we will rejoice and
be glad in it.”**

Ps. 118:24

ALABAMA

UPDATES

PEOPLE, CHURCHES MAKING NEWS ACROSS THE STATE

Burton marks 45 years as pastor of Pintlala Baptist Church

From day one, Gary Burton didn't want to be anywhere else. He knew he was where God had called him and it's a calling that hasn't wavered in 45 years. And Pintlala Baptist Church in Montgomery Baptist Association is thankful for his commitment, as Jan. 13 marked his 45-year milestone.



BURTON

According to Neal Hughes, Montgomery Association director of missions, "There are only five Alabama Baptist pastors who can presently state such a distinguished tenure. We, at the Montgomery Baptist Association, owe a debt of gratitude to Gary for his senior statesmanship through the years."

Reflecting on his years of ministry at Pintlala Baptist, Burton said he's seen the culture become a more challenging atmosphere for serving the Lord.

"I think the local church is not as central in importance as it once was."

The solution to reaching the lost amid the current climate? "Provide relationships with substance," Burton says.

"When the Body of Christ is healthy, genuine and authentic friendships are formed."

Through the years Burton said he's most thankful for the "opportunity to know families that span generations."

"I think sometimes younger ministerial candidates want a church that's ready-made instead of investing in a church for the long haul," he said, noting the importance of being effective and not just hanging on.

Prior to Pintlala Baptist, Burton served as an associate pastor for Wilkes Baptist Church. He also served as a weekend pastor of McCall Creek Baptist Church, Meadville, Mississippi.

Burton holds a bachelor's degree from Samford University in Birmingham and a master of theology degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

He and his wife, Jerrie, have two children, five grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. (Maggie Walsh)

Dale Association's DOM steps down after more than 18 years

Eighteen and a half years ago, Kenneth Hale showed up to work in Dale Baptist Association at almost exactly the same time Jim Hill came on board as pastor of Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Ozark.

"We got there one day apart," Hale said.

So it's fitting that after years of seeing God at work in their association, Hale is retiring as director of missions (DOM) — and handing the reins over to Hill.

"We are so, so blessed to see all the Lord has let us do together," Hale said, noting that his years as DOM have been marked with a sense of associational unity and cooperation. In the past 18.5 years, Hale has seen the association's churches rally around an annual women's retreat and men's swamp cookout.

"That has been a tremendous blessing — we present the gospel and have folks saved there every year," he said.

Hale also led Dale Association in recent years to

build a new office and ministry center, both of which are totally paid off.

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said Hale has been "an exemplary leader for his association and beyond."

"He has truly gone beyond the call of duty in assisting church leaders in their local church ministries," Lance said. "Although Kenneth is retiring from this director of missions role, I know he will be active in ministry in other ways in the days to come. We wish him the very best."

Even though Hale officially retired at the end of March, he is still helping out as the association transitions to Hill's leadership at the beginning of May.

After that, he's "walking into a new phase of ministry," Hale said.

"My goal is to do something bivocationally, whether that's supply preaching, interim pastor work or teaching a Sunday School class," he said. "I'm just going to preach and do what the Lord lets us do."

He and his wife, Carol, will celebrate 50 years of marriage in December. The couple has two children, seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. (TAB)



HALE

Dusty McLemore celebrates 25 years as pastor of Lindsay Lane

From leading a 32-member church as a bivocational pastor to leading that same church as full-time pastor as it has grown to more than 2,000 members, Dusty McLemore has seen quite a transition in his 25 years serving Lindsay Lane Baptist Church, Athens.

Born and raised in Athens, McLemore accepted Jesus as his Savior in 1979. He earned his bachelor's degree from Heritage Bible College in Dunn, North Carolina, and served as a deacon and Sunday School teacher at Round Island Baptist Church, Athens.

On April 12, 1992, Lindsay Lane Baptist called McLemore to serve as bivocational pastor of its 32 members. By 1994, Lindsay Lane Baptist had blossomed to 200 members and that's when McLemore began serving full time.



MCLEMORE

McLemore said the Lord has taught him "the principle behind church growth is that people reach people" and that "a shepherd must smell like his sheep."

He was awarded the Alabama Baptist Troy L. Morrison Leadership Award in 2001 and served as president of the 2009 Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference. He also serves on the board of regents for the University of Mobile.

Of his 25 years at Lindsay Lane Baptist, McLemore said, "My time has been so rewarding and humbling. To witness the hand and favor of God move upon this church in such an exponential way has truly been amazing. ... To witness the people catch the vision of the Great Commission and reaching and ministering to one another has been a pastor's dream."

He and his wife, Patsy, have two children and seven grandchildren. (Neisha Roberts)

Someone You Should Know

By Leigh Pritchett, Correspondent, *The Alabama Baptist*

Paulette Watson



WATSON

New Hope Baptist Church, Berry Sipse Baptist Association

FAVORITE VERSE: 2 Chronicles 7:14

FAVORITE HYMN: "Just a Closer Walk with Thee"

HOBBIES: Reading

FAMILY STATUS: Widow for six months after 50 years of marriage to husband, Darrell; sons, Darren (wife Lori), Dale (wife Kristy) and Donnie (wife Andrea); eight grandchildren

Paulette Watson, 69, of Berry has seen her mission as "just serving God and giving Him the praise and glory." And serve she has — as a Vacation Bible School worker and Sunday School teacher. Plus, for 37 years, she was Sunday School secretary, giving up that post only recently. Watson retired as a garment worker after almost 40 years.

Sunday School secretary. I filled in for a while and then just took it over.

Q: What did your ministry work demand?

A: Being there every Sunday. Being responsible for the money and counting the people that were there on Sunday mornings. I gave up that job in September 2016.

Q: What influences in your life pointed you to Christ at the beginning of your faith journey?

A: Going to church. I was raised in a Christian home by my parents. The church people also influenced my life. I came to know the Lord during a revival when I was 11 years old. After I took that first step, He has carried me all the way through my life.

Q: When and how were you led into your ministry work?

A: Different ones had asked me if I would take the job of

Q: What did you get from your ministry work?

A: A blessing. It was a blessing to me.

Q: How have family members supported you?

A: They have stood behind me all my life. They are always willing to let me go to church and to take me if I need a way.

Q: What difference has Jesus Christ made in your life?

A: All the difference in the world. He has brought peace and joy to my heart.†

If you know of a person who should be featured as "Someone You Should Know," send his or her name, a contact number and the reason you think he or she should be featured to: Someone You Should Know, c/o The Alabama Baptist, 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209 or news@thealabamabaptist.org.

DR teams assist after storms

A few rounds of storms hit Alabama on April 5 causing significant damage to areas of Henry County. Twenty-five homes were damaged by a tornado that reportedly hit around 12:30 p.m. and downed trees caused damage and power outages.

Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief teams were on the ground and by the end of the day April 6 volunteers from Columbia and Coffee Baptist associations completed four debris removal/chainsaw jobs. Volunteer teams returned April 10 to provide more assistance. (TAB)



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Soteriology

Salvation as Conversion

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

Jesus is on record as having declared, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3). The early preaching of Christ’s apostles also sounded the note of conversion. Their message was, “Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

When Paul and Barnabas gave testimony about the salvation of Gentile believers, Acts 15:3 says they described “the conversion of the Gentiles and they cause great joy to all the brethren.” So Scripture teaches us to think of salvation as conversion.

We speak of persons who believe the gospel as Christian converts and speak of missionaries as those who are seeking to make converts to Christianity. The idea in the term “conversion” is that of “turning.” As applied to salvation the term refers to turning unto the Lord from moral evil or religious idolatry.

The sacred testimony to the conversion of the early Thessalonian Christians is given in terms of their turning: “How you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9).

Incidentally we might glean from that testimony the importance of its sequencing, in that they “turned to God from idols,” not that they turned from idols to God. When they turned to God, they found strength and resolve to turn from idols. The forsaking of idolatry resulted from the positive choice to turn to God. They did not first turn from idols in order to qualify themselves as worthy to turn to God. Rather, the power of a new devotion made it possible to put away their old ways.

These two ideas about conversion are so closely joined that we might conclude they happen simultaneously. One cannot genuinely happen without the other. Repentance and faith combine to constitute a genuine saving response to the gospel.

The apostle Paul described his preaching of the gospel in Ephesus with similar meaning, saying, “I kept back nothing that was helpful but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews and also to Greeks repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:20–21).

So we understand Christian conversion to involve both “turning to” and “turning from.” We might give the short definition of conversion as a personal decision to respond to the gospel by turning in sincere repentance from sin and unbelief and placing one’s personal trust in Christ for salvation.

Example of repentance

The ideas of repentance and faith are so closely intertwined that we find biblical passages that speak of salvation by mentioning faith alone, as well as passages that mention repentance alone, for example, in Acts 16:31: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.”

An example of repentance came from the lips of Christ Himself when He commissioned His followers with these words: “Thus it is written and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations” (Luke 24:46–47). Some have coined such phrases as “penitent faith” and “believing repentance.” The biblical assumption is that true repentance involves trust in Christ and true faith in Him involves repentance. It’s the combination of the two that equals Christian conversion. †

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.



in Loving Memory

of Alabama Baptist leaders, friends

Clayton Carl Bath Former Alabama Baptist interim pastor Bath dies

Clayton Carl Bath, who served as interim pastor of several Alabama Baptist churches, died March 18. He was 85.

A native of Wyoming, Bath followed in his father’s footsteps and studied chiropractic medicine. He served in the United States Army during the Korean War as a medic.



BATH

After his time in the military he earned an undergraduate degree from Tennessee Temple College (now Tennessee Temple University) in Chattanooga and a master of theology degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Bath served several churches in Mississippi with his longest tenure, 20 years, at Port Gibson Baptist Church in Mississippi. After moving to Dothan in 2004, Bath served as interim pastor of several churches including Smyrna Baptist Church, Dothan; Webb Baptist Church; Cedar Springs Baptist Church, Ashford; and Mount Ararat Baptist Church, Webb.

He was a member of Bethel Baptist Church, Dothan, at the time of his death.

Bath is survived by his wife, Eleanor; two children; and six grandchildren. (Neisha Roberts)

John William Rigby Former Alabama pastor, evangelist Rigby dies at 85

John William Rigby, former Alabama Baptist pastor and evangelist, died Feb. 28. He was 85.

A graduate of Trinity College in Clearwater, Florida — where he also received an honorary doctorate of divinity — Rigby served as pastor of Philadelphia Baptist Church, Smiths Station, for more than 27 years.

He also served as an evangelist for 10 years in addition to his other pastorates in Alabama and Georgia, spending a total of 65 years in ministry.

Early in his ministry, Rigby simultaneously served as pastor of Shady Grove Baptist Church and Richland Baptist



RIGBY

Church, both in Brundidge, preaching every other Sunday at each church. During that time, he helped both churches develop Sunday School programs. He also served as pastor of West End Baptist Church, Valley, before entering into full-time evangelism in 1973. He was then called to Philadelphia Baptist, his longest pastorate.

After retiring in 2010, Rigby served as interim pastor of Beaver Creek Baptist Church, Phenix City; North Phenix Baptist Church, Phenix City; and Georgetown Baptist Church in Georgia.

He is survived by his wife of 64 years, Margie; two children; four grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren. (Maggie Walsh)

Fred C. Woodall Longtime Alabama Baptist pastor Woodall dies at 69

Fred C. Woodall, who served as pastor of churches for more than 43 years, died Feb. 27. He was 69.

A native of Opelika, Woodall served with the United States Air Force during the Vietnam War. He later earned his bachelor’s degree from Florida Baptist Theological College (now Baptist College of Florida) in Graceville and was ordained to the ministry in 1974.



WOODALL

He served as pastor of several churches in Alabama including Union Grove Baptist Church, Opelika; Sardis Baptist Church, Abbeville; Liberty Baptist Church, Opelika; Elam Baptist Church, Tallassee; and Eastside Baptist Church, Union Springs.

He also helped plant Purpose Baptist Church, Opelika, which began meeting in a barn but grew and is now a Tuskegee Lee Baptist Association church.

Woodall also served as pastor of churches in Georgia.

But between and throughout his ministry as a pastor, Woodall sought to win souls in unique ways. He started Truth for Truckers, a ministry based in truck stops. He also founded Much More Ministries in 2001, an outreach through the rodeo circuit mainly to bull riders. In the 10 years that Woodall participated in the ministry, 479 people gave their life to Christ.

He was a member of Eastside Baptist Church, Union Springs, at the time of his death.

He is survived by his wife of 52 years, Jean; two children; and three grandchildren. (Neisha Roberts)

Could changing culture affect attitudes toward pastors?

Most of the time when Kevin Johnson meets people, he doesn't tell them right away that he's a pastor. "I usually keep the pastor identity in my back pocket," said Johnson, pastor of First Baptist Church, Florence, in Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association.

It's not because he's ashamed, he said — he just wants them to feel comfortable in hopes that he will get the chance to share Jesus with them. "I usually hold the pastor card as long as possible so that they will not be intimidated or act different," Johnson said.

When he finally tells them, he gets a variety of responses. Some are surprised, some withdraw and others open up more, he said. "Unfortunately our culture has given preconceived ideas of pastors and therefore we often are judged before we are introduced," Johnson said. "That is why I try to connect with them first so that it might dilute any preconceived ideas they have concerning a pastor."

Johnson isn't alone in knowing he's got an uphill battle when it comes to public opinion of pastors. A recent study by Barna Group, titled "The Credibility Crisis of Today's Pastors," showed that American adults are varied in how they view the leader of the local church.

About a quarter have a "very positive opinion of pastors in general," the study showed. A slightly larger percentage reported a "somewhat negative" or "very negative" view.

Another quarter didn't give them or their influence much thought.

The level of respect that Americans have — or don't have — for pastors is an important marker for churches in an age where church attendance is declining, Barna reported.

And Arnold Hendrix, pastor of First Baptist Church, Atmore, in

Escambia Baptist Association, said he can see the change happening quickly.

"I remember as a child growing up in a Christian home, everything changed when the preacher was around," Hendrix said. "His presence called for somberness and reverence."

Even the unchurched would change the way they acted when the preacher was around, he said. "I guess us kids behaved this way out of respect and maybe a little fear. I don't see that at all happening today."

That reality is both good and bad, Hendrix said — bad because it doesn't seem pastors are respected as having a divine calling.

"Probably the media and the moral failures of some prominent preachers in recent times has contributed to this, as well as those preachers who do not live up to the biblical standard for pastors," he said.

'Regular people'

But the difference doesn't have to be all bad, he said.

"It's good because we get to see and interact with people as they are. We are 'regular people.' People don't put on a show in the pastor's presence any more — churched or unchurched people," Hendrix said.

And pastors, he said, hopefully don't put on a show either.

"This means that often we can make an honest connection with people, establishing a dialogue and a relationship with them not based on pretense or hypocrisy but on who they really are," he said.

Johnson said living in that reality is a way pastors can adapt to the culture — not to become like it but to meet it where it is with the gospel.

"We must adapt to the changing times but stay true to God's Word," he said. "One thing I realize is that culture has changed immensely but God has not."

And according to the Barna study, a large percentage of U.S. adults still believe pastors are of "some benefit" to the public. That number is even higher if they have a personal connection with a pastor.

"This leaves significant room for pastors to continue to make a positive difference, in spite of the seeming crisis of credibility plaguing their occupation," Barna said.

Johnson said personal connection and positive difference is what he's after.

"God expects the same from the pastors He calls today as He does from the ones He called in years past," he said — and that's to show the love of Jesus to people who need Him. (TAB)

"We must adapt to the changing times but stay true to God's Word."

**Pastor Kevin Johnson
FBC Florence**

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Baptist NEWS BRIEFS

COMPILED FROM WIRE SERVICES

Chicago church sues over zoning rights

CHICAGO — Immanuel Baptist Church, Chicago, has filed a federal lawsuit over the city's enforcement of a zoning ordinance that won't allow the congregation to purchase its building near the University of Illinois-Chicago campus.

The church and the law firm representing them, Mauck & Baker, contend that the ordinance is in conflict with the federal Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA) by requiring stricter parking standards for religious assemblies than for other organizations.

Immanuel Baptist has met in its current location since 2011. The church was set to close on the purchase of the building in summer 2016 but the lender would not close on the sale without confirmation from the city.

Immanuel Baptist's space at 1443 W. Roosevelt Road had been rented by another church previously. Churches are a permitted use in the zoning and the city's building department gave Immanuel an occupancy permit in 2011. City officials assured Pastor Nathan Carter the sale wouldn't be blocked despite the church's use of street parking.

However, the sale was blocked and the church's ensuing lawsuit, filed in February, was a "last resort," Carter said. "We've been courteous and kind throughout the process and not adversarial, seeking to bend over backwards to meet their demands. We have our alderman's support." (BP)

GuideStone receives top investment honors

DALLAS — Two top investment industry honors have been awarded to GuideStone Financial Resources for its Defensive Market Strategies Fund — Institutional Share Class.

The fund was named by industry analyst Lipper as the best of 425 similar funds over a three-year period and best of 322 similar funds over a five-year period in Lipper's Flexible Portfolio Funds category. This marks the seventh and eighth times in six years that Lipper has awarded GuideStone one of its top honors. (BP)

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Special milestone

FBC Weaver honors Martha Waldrip, who has played both piano and organ for the church for 50 years, with a special service and lunch event earlier this year.

FBC Weaver pianist/organist celebrates 50th anniversary

By Anna Keller
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Martha Waldrip isn't the type to seek out the spotlight. But when you've been playing music for churches for more than seven decades, some recognition becomes inevitable.

Waldrip, 83, who has played both piano and organ for First Baptist Church, Weaver, for the past 50 years, was honored by the church with a special service and lunch event Jan. 29 with about 200 in attendance.

"We had a covered dish lunch, a big cake — everything was decorated really beautifully," Waldrip said. "Several former music directors from the church came and it was a really special day. I thoroughly enjoyed it, even though I'm not used to stuff like that. I don't seek out the limelight."

It was Dennis Wood, the church's chairman of the deacons, who initiated the event after

overhearing Waldrip tell another church member that January 2017 would mark her 50th anniversary at First, Weaver.

Fixture in the church

"I thought we needed to recognize this lady, because she's not the type who would (make a big deal) about this milestone," Wood said. "People like Martha become fixtures in the church. They're always there, always in their place. I think we miss the boat when we don't honor people like that. We're getting better at it and I think it's paying off in a lot of ways, and it's an example to the younger ones about the elders who have served and raised them in church."

Waldrip is certainly worth celebrating, especially considering she was initially self-taught at piano and only had one organ "lesson" before playing that instrument during a Sunday service.

Roma Lightsey, Waldrip's niece, said, "She learned how to play the

piano by ear, when she was very young, and she played by ear for a few years before she even took any lessons. She's been playing piano for her church since the age of 10."

Waldrip can trace her passion for music back to a prayer her mother had before Waldrip was born.

Waldrip said, "(My mother) started praying for a little girl who could play the piano for church." As a child Waldrip was always interested in piano and learned to play a few hymns by ear, which is when she began playing for her church in Sylacauga. "Then when we could afford a piano and we could afford lessons, I took two 30-minute lessons a week. Each lesson was 50 cents. My mother baked and sold chocolate meringue pies to pay for them."

Learning the organ

When she was in 10th grade, Waldrip recalls, the church's organist (who also was her piano teacher) was going to go on vaca-



Photo by Roma Lightsey

tion and asked Waldrip to cover for her on the organ. The high-schooler had never touched an organ.

"She said, 'Let me tell you what to do,'" Waldrip explained. "'You play the melody on the bottom keyboard with your right hand. You play with your left hand on the upper keyboard. You play the bass notes with your left foot. Your right foot plays the expression pedal — loud and soft.' I practiced and played for the service and continued playing from there."

In addition to being dedicated

to the church through the music she brings each week, Waldrip has been plugged in to serving in numerous other ways. Through the years she's served as Bible school director, Woman's Missionary Union director, taught different grades of Sunday School for 55 years (she's still a teacher) and served on countless committees.

As for her plans for continuing to play piano and organ?

"I just love it and quitting was never an option for me," she said. "When the Lord is through with me, He'll let me know." ❖



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Across ALABAMA'S Associations

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BESSEMER

► **The Baptist Church at McAdory, McCalla**, will host Bessemer Association's 2017 Vacation Bible School (VBS) clinic April 18, 6-8 p.m. VBS team leader Chuck Dunning has prepared the clinic. Bill McCall is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM

► **Ridgecrest Church, Trussville**, will partner with Gone For Good to host a community shred event April 22, 10 a.m. to noon. All documents for shredding will be handled securely by Gone For Good employees. Nonperishable food items for Serving You Ministries will be collected. For more information call the church office at 205-661-3722. Ric Camp is pastor. ► **Cynthia Walker Watts** is the new director of children's ministries at **First Church, Birmingham**. Her first day was April 1. Watts earned a bachelor's de-

gree from Samford University in Birmingham and served in youth and/or children leadership capacities at First Church, Dothan; Heritage Church, Montgomery; Eastern Hills Church, Montgomery; and churches in Florida. She and her husband, Stanley, have two children and four grandchildren.



WATTS

CLEBURNE

► **Chulafinnee Church, Hefflin**, will hold a Sunday School revival on April 30, 9:45 a.m. with guest speaker Daniel Edmonds, state missionary who serves as the director of the office of Sunday School and discipleship for the

State Board of Missions. Philip Morris is pastor.

JUDSON

► **First Church, Headland**, will celebrate its 150th anniversary April 23, 9:30 a.m. This will be an extended service. Cecil Sanders is pastor.

RUSSELL

► **Smiths Station Church** will host Russell Association's Senior Singing on April 27, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Lunch will be served at noon. Director of Missions Marty Holley will speak. Register for lunch by April 20 by calling Joycelyn Carrell at 334-298-3581. To perform special music call Carrell. David Kees is pastor.

LIMESTONE

► **Clements Church, Athens**, will celebrate Harvest Sunday on April 30, 9:30 a.m. Evangelist Junior Hill will speak. There will

only be one service. Tim Anderson is pastor.

MUD CREEK

► **Snowtown Church, Dora**, will host The Johnson Brothers Quartet in concert April 30, 5 p.m. as the fifth Sunday night singing. Bob Thomason is pastor.

ST. CLAIR

► **McEntyre Church, Ashville**, will host a 75th anniversary celebration April 30, 11 a.m. with guest speaker Chris Crain, director of missions for St. Clair Association. Dinner and singing will follow featuring Redemption Trio. Bobby Joe Winningham is pastor.

TALLAPOOSA

► **Calvary Heights Church, Alexander City**, will host The Kempters in concert April 23, 6 p.m. A love offering will be taken. Skip Cook is pastor. ☛

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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

CHURCH POSITIONS

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

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 DVD's to the church office, attn: search committee.

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).

STUDENT PASTOR

Chapel Hill Baptist Church, Northport, Alabama. Accepting resumés for full-time student pastor. Send to: jnichols@chapelhillbc.org or to: Student Pastor Search Committee, 8790 Highway 43 N., Northport, AL 35473.

CHILDREN'S MINISTER

Calera Baptist Church, Calera, Alabama, is seeking a part-time children's minister to lead/grow our children's ministry of 60+ children. Email resumés to: info@calerabaptist.org.

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A Certain Trumpet

Sermons by Alabama Baptists

The Beatitudes series — Matthew 5:3-12

'Blessed are the gentle' (v. 5)

There is never a time when I study the Beatitudes that I am not taken aback by the profound depth of the message Jesus preached. Every word hangs with huge implications for the people of that age and us. Before we begin our examination of the text, let us back up a few verses to make sure we fully understand what is taking place.

In Matthew 4:18-22 we can see Jesus called some of the disciples to follow Him.

Next we see Jesus moving all over Galilee teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the Kingdom and healing every sickness among the people (4:23). I want us to pay attention to this phrase "kingdom of God/heaven" because Jesus will refer to it many times throughout this sermon. In fact 4:17 tells us Jesus' message was simple — "Repent because the kingdom of heaven has come near."

In 4:24 we see news had spread about Him throughout Syria: "So they brought to Him all those who were afflicted, those suffering from various diseases and intense pains, the demon-possessed, the epileptics and the paralytics. And He healed them." Sounds like the people Jesus was ministering to were the poor and outcasts of their society.

Verse 25 gives us an idea of the nationalities of the people: "Large crowds followed Him from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and beyond the Jordan."

Hungry and thirsty

Jesus was speaking to the people who spent most of their lives in poverty and mourning, or perhaps they were hungry and thirsty for something that could satisfy their deepest need. It's doubtful if anyone would have invited them to the synagogues because of their uncleanness. I am sure they thought God had nothing for them, that they were simply cursed. That is until Jesus came and said these same people, outcasts in society, were in fact blessed by God.

The word "makaroi," or "blessed," could mean "happy" but I believe that is misleading. It is much deeper. The Complete Word Study Dictionary de-



By Jim Collins

Jim Collins is pastor of Evergreen Baptist Church and holds a master of divinity degree and doctor of ministry from New Orleans

Baptist Theological Seminary. Collins and his wife, Laura, have two children. They served as Southern Baptist missionaries to Mexico from 2003 to 2007.

finer this word as "one who is in the world yet independent of the world. His satisfaction comes from God and not from favorable circumstances." D.A. Carson taught that the word meant "God's approval." Max Lucado called it "the applause of heaven."

Approved by God

It is fair to say that many of the people who heard those words were cast aside by the "religious ones." But here Jesus declares before them that they could be blessed. They could be approved by God. I can hear the laughter of the religious ones in the crowd as Jesus proclaimed these words. I can imagine the arguments they were mentally preparing to prove these people could not be blessed. Isn't it amazing that Jesus, despite of who we are or what has happened to us, can declare His goodness over us? We can find that peace in our hearts by knowing God sees us differently. I believe this amazing grace is what causes followers to become devoted to God.

We can come to understand this devotion by looking at the word "praeis." Some translations have it as "gentle" while others call it "meek." John G. Butler, in his Analytical Bible Expositor, defines meekness as "the condition of God's people in their respect of God and submission to God in contrast to the world that blasphemes God and rebels against God." The mindset of many people during the time of Christ and today is that meekness equals weakness. However, to humbly bow under

the mighty arm of God is what truly gives us strength. We can be free from harmful emotions that want to dominate our time and energies.

The similarities between Psalm 37:11 and Matthew 5:5 cannot go unnoticed — "But the humble will inherit the earth." What I find more compelling is that the theme of Psalm 37 is about trusting the Lord in times of wickedness. When it seems like the whole world has turned against you, it is our response to trust in our Lord's caring hands. The tough times that you and I go through do not catch our Lord off guard. He has given us the moment to trust Him and He will see us through it. We can bask in the fulfilling relationship in Christ knowing we are loved by God.

Children of God

From the very beginning God had a plan for you and me. We can see early on in Scripture there was something special with His relationship with mankind. He invited them into His presence and gave them the duties of ruling and filling the earth. It wasn't long before Adam and Eve rebelled against God. Then God removed them from the garden and cursed the earth where they would live. I believe that from the very beginning God had a plan. He knew mankind would fail Him but out of His love He gave us a way to return to Him through Jesus Christ. Through faith in Jesus we have become children of God (John 1:12) and co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17).

Sharing the message

From the moment the Holy Spirit fell on the believers in the upper room on the day of Pentecost the Church has been commissioned to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth. The gospel invites the kingdom of God into the lives of the believer. With His rule in our hearts we can proclaim peace to the weary and freedom to the captives. We can help those who are outcast find their way in His fellowship. We must carry His message of the kingdom until He returns, for only by faith in Him will we be able to see things as they should be.✠

Bible Reading Marathons to be held in 6 cities

Alabamians will gather again soon at civic locations around the state to read the entire Bible over their cities in conjunction with the National Day of Prayer on May 4.

To get involved, check out the details for the various Bible Reading Marathons:

► **Birmingham** — Starting Thursday, May 4, 9 a.m. and ending Sunday, May 7, 5 p.m. Held at Kelly Ingram Park Pavilion at the corner of 5th Avenue North and 16th Street downtown.

For more information, visit libertypark.org/biblemarathon.



► **Montgomery** — Starting Thursday, May 4, 8:30 a.m. and ending Sunday, May 7, 8:30 a.m. Held at the State Capitol building. For more information, visit hisvessel.org/bible-reading.

► **Oneonta** — Starting Thursday, May 4, 8 a.m. and ending Sunday, May 7, 8:30 a.m. Held at the Blount County Courthouse. For more information, visit the Facebook page: Oneonta Blount County Bible Reading Marathon.

► **Ozark** — For more information, call Dale Association at 334-774-2713.

► **Troy** — Starting Sunday, April 30 with music and prayer at 6 p.m. and Bible reading at 7 p.m. ending May 4, noon. Held in downtown Troy in the gazebo on the square. For more information, call Salem-Troy Association at 334-566-1538.

► **Tuscaloosa** — Starting Sunday, April 30, 3 p.m. and ending Thursday, May 4, 9 a.m. Held in front of the chapel of FBC Tuscaloosa, at 721 Greensboro Avenue. For more information, visit hope4mycity.com. (TAB)



On March 26, 1995, Allan Murphy was installed as pastor of North Shelby Baptist Church, Birmingham, according to *The Alabama Baptist*. Murphy had recently returned from serving as a church planter in Curacao Netherlands Antilles. He had been serving abroad with the Foreign Mission Board (now International Mission Board) since the late 1980s. (TAB)

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

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1 Peter 1:3

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UM professor shares gospel through music in China with BGEA

By **Samantha Moats**
University of Mobile

For more than 100 years the Billy Graham family has held deep ties with Christians in China, particularly in Huai'an, so the opportunity to travel with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) in February was especially meaningful for Kenn Hughes. Hughes, University of Mobile (UM) professor and trombonist, traveled with BGEA for the 2017 Music Celebration there.

"I'm thankful for people who love to share the good news of Jesus Christ and grateful to be part of an incredible movement in China," he said.

Hughes once served as music director for the Dove Award-winning group Denver and the Mile High Orchestra, and while in China the group reunited with Hughes to perform at three separate BGEA services.

During the celebration Billy Graham's grandson, Will Graham, served as a speaker. One service was held at Huai'an Christian Church and two others were held at Xuan'De (Hudson Taylor Memorial) Church, Zhenjiang, China.

Thousands of Chinese Christians were present for the services and, according to Hughes, many Chinese made decisions to become Christians.

"It was a great experience to witness hundreds of lives receive Christ through the evangelistic services," Hughes said.

While in China, Hughes also was given the opportunity to collaborate with the Shanghai Dis-



Photo courtesy of the University of Mobile

University of Mobile's Kenn Hughes (third from left) at Xuan'De (Hudson Taylor Memorial) Church, Zhenjiang, China, with Will Graham (fourth from left) and Denver and the Mile High Orchestra.

neyland Band that performs five days a week in the park.

"A friend of mine in Orlando heard I was going to be in Shanghai with BGEA," Hughes said regarding the opportunity.

Disneyland Band

That friend is Bob Franklin, who is responsible for the inception of performing groups at Disney World in Orlando, including Future Corps that performed in Disney's Epcot theme park.

For two months in early 2016, Franklin spent time putting together the Shanghai Disneyland Band and working with musicians there. So when he discovered Hughes would be in Shanghai,

Franklin contacted the band. They invited Hughes to work with them and collaborate on musical approaches to American music.

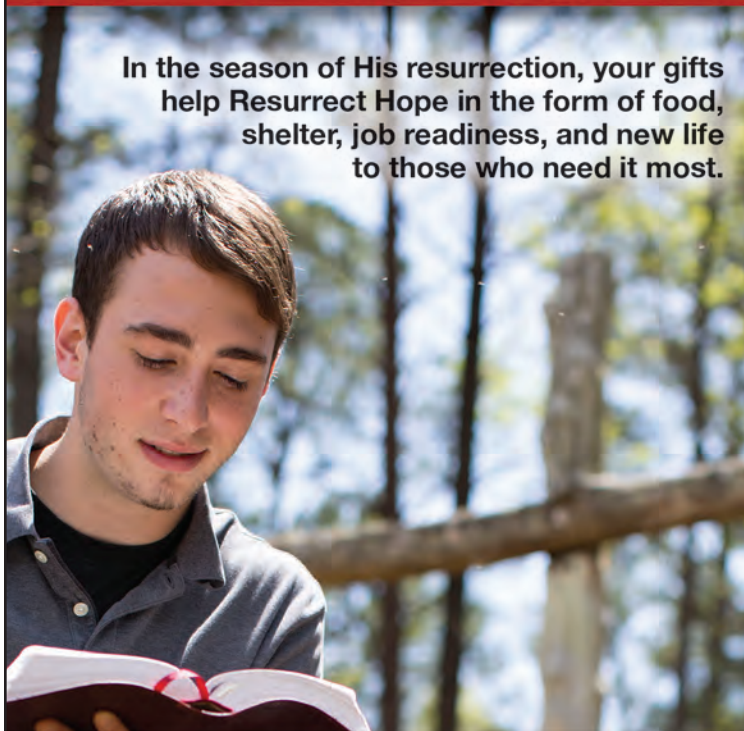
In addition to teaching at UM, Hughes is the director of RamCorps and professor of other instrumental studies for the Alabama School of the Arts at UM. RamCorps performs more than 120 concerts a year in various venues across the country.

The group also has performed internationally under Hughes' direction, playing in places like Sochi, Russia, during the 2014 Winter Olympics. The ensemble also performed alongside other Christian artists aboard the MSC Divina for the K-Love Cruise.✝

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For April 16

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

WHERE IS JESUS? Matthew 28:1-15

The Grave Opened (1-4)

All four of the gospels definitively portray Jesus as dead and buried. We know from Luke that women had followed Joseph of Arimathea to the burial place on Friday, seeing where the tomb was. This is a vital detail in the Gospels because some skeptics have argued that the women went to the wrong tomb, finding it empty, when Jesus was really dead in another tomb. Since they had followed Joseph, however, they knew where Jesus was buried.

While this might seem like unimportant information, it is crucial to the gospel story. If Jesus was not dead, then He could not have risen from the dead, which is the most important event in history.

The Risen King Announced (5-10)

This passage is affirming that Jesus is not dead but alive. This is the foundation upon which our Christian faith rests.

As Paul states in 1 Corinthians 15:12-19, "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ... And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins."

If Christ did not rise from the dead, He has not fulfilled His promises which means we can have no assurance that any of His promises will come true. Furthermore, it indicates that death is not defeated, meaning we will all die and have no resurrection.

Without the resurrection, we have no eternal life.

It also is important to recognize that the women who encountered Jesus worshipped Him, affirming His deity.

There are people who deny that the Bible teaches Jesus is divine. But in the Bible, Jesus receives worship which only

God can receive. If Jesus were not God it would have been blasphemous for people to worship Him, but since He receives worship, it affirms His divinity.

This is an important aspect of Christian theology because only God can save us. If Jesus were not God, then He could not truly save us. Jesus is worthy of our worship.

The Cover-Up Concocted (11-15)

If word got out that Jesus had risen from the dead, then more and more people would become His followers, which would reduce the power of the priests and undermine their authority. Therefore they paid the soldiers to lie about what happened.

The idea that Jesus' followers stole Him is not the only attempt to explain the empty tomb. Some actually believe in what is called the "swoon theory," which states that Jesus never really died but just appeared to be dead — after hanging on a cross, having been whipped and stabbed in the side with a spear. Then the coolness of the tomb allegedly refreshed Him enough to where He could remove the large rock in front of the tomb and leave.

Conversely there are some today who assert that Jesus really did die but then say the disciples just hallucinated and thought they all saw the risen Christ at the same time.

If these views sound absurd, it is because they are. These excuses are harder to believe than the actual miracle of the resurrection.

The best evidence points to the historical resurrection of Christ. In fact it is difficult to explain why the disciples and early Christians behaved the way they did unless they had actually seen the risen Jesus like Scripture says.

Christ's death, burial and resurrection assure eternal life for those who believe. This truly is good news. †

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

HE IS RISEN Luke 24:1-8; 36-40

Each Gospel tells a distinctive resurrection story. Luke gives us the famous story of the two disciples who meet Jesus while walking to a town called Emmaus.

Today we learn what happens on either end of the Emmaus road: the empty tomb and Jesus' appearance to "the eleven" in Jerusalem. We will see for ourselves the first proclamation of the risen Lord, the first disbelief and the first time the eleven see Jesus alive after His crucifixion. To put today's lesson in its context, read Luke 23:50-24:53.

The empty tomb points to the resurrection of Jesus. (1-6a)

In the last part of Chapter 23 we learn the Jewish man Joseph of Arimathea asked for the body of Jesus, prepared it as best he could and buried it in a rock-cut tomb. In Jesus' day, the entrance would have been quite low, requiring anyone entering to stoop or crawl (v. 12).

It was typical to seal a tomb like this with a large, wheel-shaped stone. This tomb was one of several that were cut into the sides of the limestone hills outside the walls of Jerusalem, probably to the west.

The women disciples who followed Jesus in Galilee and who came down to Jerusalem with Him (23:49; 24:5) take it upon themselves to return to the tomb after the Sabbath day to anoint the body with spices and ointments (23:56). We know this part of the story: they find the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. They are terrified, naturally.

The question two men in white clothing ask points out a first century Jewish understanding: the dead do not belong among the living (they are buried outside the towns) and the living do not belong among the dead (think of the Gerasene de-

moniac). Even though the women witness Jesus' burial, they are looking for Him in the wrong place.

Jesus foretold His resurrection. (6b-8)

It is the wrong place to look for Him because He is not there. Not only do the women have the empty tomb as evidence, they have Jesus' prediction of the resurrection, which He spoke to them and the other disciples while they were still in Galilee (9:22).

That finally is enough for them but it isn't enough for the eleven, all males. When they hear these women disciples proclaim the Lord risen, they treat the good news like "an idle tale" and they do not believe.

Do not let that escape you: with the possible exception of Peter, the eleven disciples are the first nonbelievers. They must see Jesus alive in order to believe.

The disciples saw Jesus after His resurrection. (36-40)

They get their chance when Jesus appears to them in Jerusalem after meeting the two on the road. Like the women, they are "startled and terrified," despite what Jesus has predicted. Jesus must offer His resurrected body to them and eat some fish before they will believe.

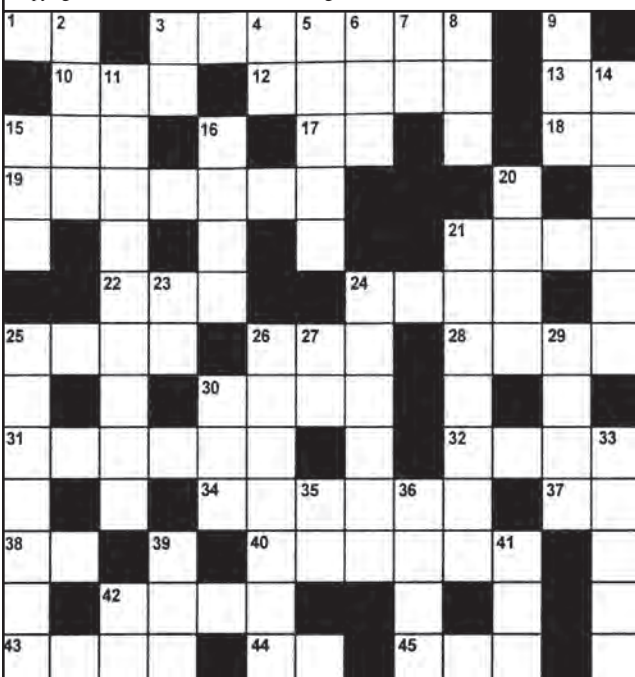
Very few believers have had the luxury of encountering the risen Jesus like these disciples did. As the risen Jesus says in John 20:29, "Blessed are those who have not seen and who have come to believe." But think about this: because the women and the eleven did what Jesus told them to do in 24:49, we are here today.

Thank God for their faithfulness. Now we too proclaim so others may repent and receive forgiveness for their sins.

Christ is risen (let the reader respond, "He is risen indeed"). †

Christian Crossword

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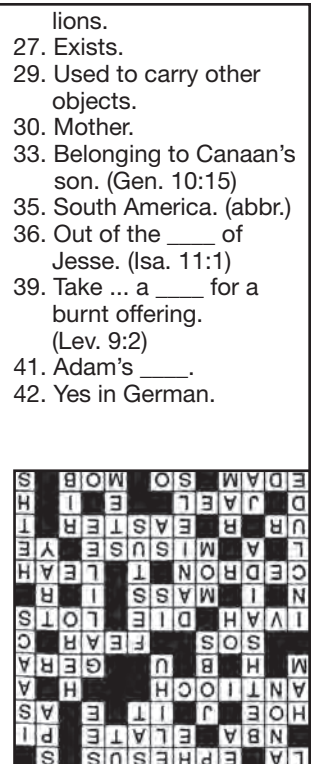


Across

- Los Angeles. (abbr.)
- Paul came to _____. (Acts 18:19)
- National Basketball Association. (abbr.)
- To make joyful.
- 3.14159265.
- Tool for weeding.
- This is the way, walk ye in _____. (Isa. 30:21)
- Even _____ Christ forgave you. (Col. 3:13)
- They ... traveled as far as ... _____. (Acts 11:19)
- Ehud the son of _____. (Judg. 3:15)
- Distress signal.
- _____ not.
- Where is the king of ... _____.? (2 Kings 19:13)
- Ready ... also to _____ at Jerusalem. (Acts 21:13)
- Cast _____ between me and Jonathan.

Down

- Unknown author. (abbr.)
- Each. (abbr.)
- Art thou _____ that should come? (Matt. 11:3)
- _____ and Semachiah
- (1 Sam. 14:42)
- Catholic service.
- Over the brook _____. (John 18:1)
- Jacob called Rachel and _____. (Gen. 31:4)
- Mistreat.
- You. (biblical)
- _____ of the Chaldees. (Gen. 15:7)
- Intending after _____ to bring him forth. (Acts 12:4)
- _____ came out to meet Barak. (Judg. 4:22)
- Holland cheese.
- God _____ loved the world. (John 3:16)
- An unruly crowd.
- were strong men. (1 Chron. 26:7)
- Jesus ... wearied ... _____ thus on the well. (John 4:6)
- Western state. (abbr.)
- All flesh shall _____. (Luke 3:6)
- A relaxing pool.
- Now Philip was of _____. (John 1:44)
- Belonging to Abraham's son.
- _____ is the father of Canaan. (Gen. 9:18)
- A person may have many _____ in his life.
- We would call Samson a _____. (John 7:41)
- Exclamation.
- Porcius _____. (Acts 24:27)
- To make part of a group.
- Belonging to the man who did not fear the



WHAT ARE YOU READING?



Alabama Baptists share about what they are currently reading

Jennifer Davis Rash

The Alabama Baptist, www.rashionalthoughts.com

“The Sender: A story about when right words make all the difference” by Kevin Elko and Bill Beausay

Admittedly a fan of leadership books in general, I was certain to like Kevin Elko and Bill Beausay’s “The Sender.” But what I didn’t anticipate was the wave of emotions I would experience while bonding with the characters in the story.

My friends Diane Covin and Larry Byrd of The Sterling Group shared the book with me, noting they thought I would enjoy it — and they were right. Not only does the book have valuable leadership and personal motivational tips based on Scripture but it also presents practical and strategic concepts in clear, everyday, manageable steps — not necessarily easy but simple. It all comes down to our choices each day, the authors explain.

And despite the adversities that come with life, we can still choose to fight rather than be defeated and flourish on the other side.

University of Alabama Head Football Coach Nick Saban said in his recommendation of the book that “Dr. Kevin Elko has certainly contributed to our success in providing a new twist on focus, attention to detail, teamwork and grit.”

Elko’s background and work with numerous college and professional football coaches and teams leaves no surprise that the main character in “The Sender” is a football coach.

Maybe my love for football, especially SEC football, made the book even more endearing or maybe it was because of the engaging storytelling ability of co-author Beausay. Then again it could be because the story was set in Alabama, specifically the Birmingham area. And while all of those reasons certainly made the book appealing, I’m pretty sure my strongest attachment to the story resulted from 10-year-old Max’s amazing attitude and influence on people despite his heart-wrenching battle with cancer. My precious niece, Belle, would have turned 10 this coming May. Max’s resolve, joy, peace and overall character remind me of Belle.

Pam Holt

The Alabama Baptist

Series of books on American history by Rush Limbaugh

I’m reading with my great-grandson the Rush Limbaugh books of American history through the tales of Rush Revere. We’ve just started on the first book, “The Brave Pilgrims.” The second is “First Patriots” and then “American Revolution.”

Rush Revere has a talking horse named “Liberty” so this brings in an interesting character to follow in the stories.

Revere is a school teacher in our times but has the ability to go back in time to bring history to life for the students and for the readers of the books.

As an adult reading with a child, I’m finding myself looking forward to the next page and the history told in a marvelous way through both Revere’s eyes and the eyes of a child who is just learning history in an awesome adventure book. Looks as if we have many adventures to learn well into summer. ☛

Media reviews

MUSIC


KARI JOBE

“The Garden”

Sparrow Records, 2017

Thirty-six-year-old Kari Jobe is the worship pastor at Gateway Church, Southlake, Texas. So congratulations to Gateway Church because having someone like Jobe at your disposal must be something.

There’s a reason she’s won multiple Dove Awards (and been nominated for a Grammy) since her 2009 solo debut and it’s evident once again on this album. Released in February, “The Garden” is an 11-song atmospheric masterpiece (with a beautiful cover to boot) that pairs elements of personal praise with the feel of corporate worship. It also blends traditional instrumentation with synth beats.



The opening title track is a spine-tingler that will stick with you for a while. So is the final song, “The Cause of Christ.”

If you can keep your head from bowing while a voice like

Jobe’s reaches for heaven with refrains of “You crush all my fears with Your perfect love” and “I surrender all for the cause of Christ,” something may be wrong.

ELEVATION WORSHIP

“There Is a Cloud”

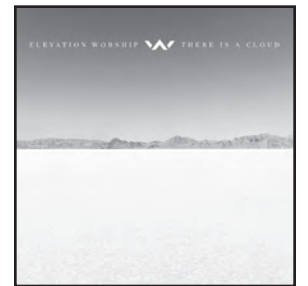
Provident Music Group, 2017

You may want to warm your voice up before popping in “There Is a Cloud” or at least have some herbal tea and honey nearby because every song on the wonderful latest album from Elevation

Worship is perfectly singable — all 17 of them. That’s nearly an hour and a half of great hooks, great lyrics and great spirit from one of the finest praise acts going, which formed (and maintains) its chops in the sanctuary of Elevation Church, Charlotte, North Carolina.

The album was recorded live at the church during a September 2016 revival; despite the polished production, it genuinely feels like you’re right there with them.

And hey — next month, you can be. Elevation Worship performs May 11 at the Birmingham Jefferson Civic Center’s Legacy Arena along with Jesus Culture and Lauren Daigle. ☛



Meet the reviewer

Jeremy Henderson reviews music for *The Alabama Baptist*. He is co-host of *Rich and Jeremy in the Mornings on Wings 94.3 FM*, editor of *The War Eagle Reader* and attends *Parkway Baptist Church, Auburn*.



news@thealabamabaptist.org

Vimeo video-sharing website rejects ex-gay Christian group’s video library

An ex-gay Christian group has had all 850 of its videos removed from Vimeo after the video-sharing website gave the group an ultimatum and said it was “inciting hatred,” according to *The Christian Post*.

Vimeo accused the group Pure Passion Ministries of having a “demeaning” viewpoint and instructed its parent ministry, Mastering Life Ministries, in mid-March to take down the offensive videos or lose its Vimeo channel.

“Your statement equating

homosexuality to ‘sexual brokenness’ betrays the underlying stance of your organization,” the Vimeo statement said. “To put it plainly, we don’t believe that homosexuality requires a cure and we don’t allow videos on our platform that espouse this point of view.”

David Kyle, founder of the interdenominational Mastering Life Ministries, said the group refused to “remove videos that are saving lives,” calling that a “sin against God and against

those who desperately want hope.”

Vimeo also has targeted other organizations that have refused to celebrate LGBT activism, such as the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality.

It also has removed the content of Restored Hope Network, another group of ministries reaching out to homosexuals looking for healing, according to *The Christian Post*. (TAB)



Successful technique

'Bubbling' strategy sees 5 Christians grow to 10,000

Dan serves in an area of Southeast Asia where "nobody had been and nobody wanted to go."

And the missions group he worked with didn't want him to go there either.

"During appointment week I learned I was not allowed to go to that location," the Gateway Seminary alumnus said, "so I went to language school in a different location and was eventually able to demonstrate all the reasons for denying me were not valid."

He eventually was told he could go there if he wanted, but there was no support at all in that location and there would be no help.

He was undaunted and went anyway.

"I had to find a job because Christian workers are not allowed there," he said. "I'm also the only white face in any direction for nine hours."

In fact he was in some danger because the area was predominantly Muslim. A slight misstep could lead to his arrest.

As he looked for a place to stay, someone introduced him to a man who had a room to rent. That man turned out to be a highly respected government official.

As they became friends the connection gave Dan some protection. There were other advantages too.

"Moving into his home meant I really learned the language," he said. "I was totally immersed in the culture."

Over time he began building relationships that opened opportunities to share the gospel. However, he didn't see any results at all for seven years.

"If I witnessed to someone, they would go home to their family to discuss the possibility of accepting Jesus as their Savior. And the family would tell them 'no,'" he said. "No decisions can be made at all unless the family is consulted."

He saw the same thing happening over and over again.

'You get up every time'

"Those first years were rough," he noted. "But when you get slammed to the floor, how many times do you get up? If you have a call from God, you have no choice. You get up every time. Every single time."

Dan explained there were no good patterns for evangelism when he began.

The personal evangelism techniques of working with individuals one-on-one had been successful in his United States assignments, but they didn't

work at all there. As he began a second term of service, he decided to try something new.

"I would go to a house, meet the entire extended family and build relationships," he said. "That strategy made a dramatic difference. I started with a group and ended with a group. That's biblical. I was not fishing for one fish. I was fishing for a whole bunch of fish."

From an initial five Christians, the number of converts grew.

'Generational growth'

"A lot of local young people travel around for experience," he said. "They stay with a local family and they also bring their witness with them. Think

generational growth. One small group splits to another. I call it 'bubbling.'"

Eventually the numbers of small congregations grew to 50. Now — after 18 years in the country — there are about 500 groups with participation of about 10,000 Christians.

"We do leadership training for about 300 people at a time," Dan said. "There is a basic leadership course, as well as a more in-depth curriculum."

He explained that although most claim the Muslim faith in the area, there is low participation. And people are curious about Jesus.

"We say nothing bad about their prophet or their book," he said. "We just tell them there's one verse in their book that tells them to read the Gospels. The most important question they ask is, 'Why did Jesus have to die?'"

Access to social media leaves plenty of room for discussion about their newfound faith.

"They are very up front during Ramadan," he said. "One new Christian posted 'I love the blood of Jesus.'"

That enthusiasm often leads to people being arrested for talking too much about Jesus.

He recounted the story of two men who — with trepidation — decided to go outside their village and talk about Jesus.

The men met someone in that village who invited them to their home for tea. The patriarch — a crippled man — looked them in the eye and asked them if they knew Jesus.

"They came home so excited," he said. "They experienced the joy of meeting brothers and sisters in Christ. And that's only encouraged them to go to other villages. That's bubbling."

EDITOR'S NOTE — Name changed for security reasons. (BP)



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PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Pastor, college student tricked, beaten in India

BEGUSARAI, India — Police in eastern India obeyed Hindu extremists' orders not to interfere as they beat a pastor and a Bible college student, leaving the pastor with internal injuries.

The extremists lured Assemblies of God Pastor Ajay Kumar and a trainee to a marketplace in Begusarai on March 17 by saying they wanted to learn more about Jesus, Kumar said. When they arrived the Hindus instead offered the pastor money to officiate the wedding of a Christian and Hindu. The Christians suspected the Hindus were trying to entrap them with the appearance of Christians taking money to fraudulently convert people.

When they refused, the extremists beat them, and when a policeman ran toward the site of the assault, the extremists told him to "remain out of this and to let them handle the Christians in their own way," Kumar said.

When senior police officials arrived they arrested the two Christians rather than the assailants, Kumar said. Police detained them until after midnight before releasing them on bail. (MS)

Iranian Christians imprisoned for faith practices

TEHRAN, Iran — A convert from Islam found out in mid-March that an Iranian appeals court decided in December 2016 to uphold his five-year prison sentence for crimes related to practicing his faith.

On Dec. 11, 2016, the court upheld an April 2015 ruling that found Ebrahim Firoozgi guilty of "actions against national security, being present at an illegal gathering and collusion with foreign entities" — all standard charges leveled against converts to Christianity in Iran — and sentenced him to five years in jail.

Also in Iran the appeal of three men sentenced to 80 lashes for drinking communion wine has been further delayed, according to Christian Solidarity Worldwide. The three Christians — Mohammadreza Omid, Yasser Mossayebzadeh and Saheb Fadaie — have entered their sixth month in limbo waiting for the results of their appeal. (MS)

Displacement camps refuse food to Christians

ABUJA, Nigeria — Christians fleeing terrorist group Boko Haram in Nigeria are being kept from getting food and other aid at a number of displacement camps, according to Open Doors USA.

More than 2 million have fled from their homes since the brutal group began terrorizing the country eight years ago. Camps began to crop up all over the country but as they were handed over to Muslim organizations in some areas, Christians became the brunt of discrimination, local bishop William Naga said, according to The Christian Post.

"They will give food to the refugees but if you are a Christian they will not give you food," he said. "They will openly tell you that the relief is not for Christians."

Nearly 1.8 million people in Nigeria are currently starving, according to Open Doors USA, and in these situations Muslims are reportedly getting preferential treatment. (TAB)

Christians in Pakistan stand firm in prison

LAHORE, Pakistan — Two Christians imprisoned on terrorism charges were reportedly told that if they renounced their faith and converted to Islam they would be acquitted, according to The Christian Post.

After two churches were bombed in 2015, two suspected terrorists were lynched and 42 Christians were arrested. A prosecutor was caught on video telling the 42 that if they converted to Islam he could "guarantee their acquittal" though he later tried to deny it. One of the imprisoned men, Ifran Masih, responded by saying he would rather be hanged than embrace Islam, the Post reported.

According to International Christian Concern, a Christian persecution watchdog organization, the situation "represents the discrimination and injustice Christians face because of their faith" in Pakistan. (TAB)