



INSIDE



Churches can reach communities by offering literacy programs

◆ Page 3



Army's promotion of transgender ideology 'misguided,' ERLC's Walker says

◆ Page 5



Faith and Family: Dealing with disappointment — traumatic and/or disappointing situations

◆ Pages 7-10

Impact of religion

Republicans, Democrats split on whether religion has positive, negative effect on country

Do churches and other religious organizations have a positive impact on the way things are going in the United States?

Americans are divided on that point, according to a Pew Research Center survey released July 10 that shows they align along predictable party lines.

Overall, a majority of Americans (59 percent) see religion as a positive, compared to 26 percent who say it has a negative impact on the way things are going in the U.S., according to Pew. Those numbers have held fairly steady in surveys since 2010.

Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of Republicans or those who lean Republican said churches and religious organizations have a positive impact, with 14 percent saying that impact is negative, according to Pew.

Meanwhile, Democrats are split:

Half of those who are or lean Democrat believe religious institutions have a positive impact, according to the survey, while 36 percent said they have a negative impact.

59 percent of Americans believe religion is having a positive impact on the way things are going in the U.S.

Pew Research Center

And those divides become stronger as one's political ideology becomes stronger, particularly among Democrats, according to the data.

Liberal Democrats are about as likely to say religious institutions have a negative impact on the way things are going in the U.S. (44 percent) as they are positive (40 percent).

But more conservative and moderate Democrats said such organizations have a positive effect on the country (58 percent, compared to 29 percent who say it is negative).

A majority of all Republicans — 75 percent of those who identify as conservative Republicans and Republican-leaning and 68 percent of those who are moderate and liberal Republicans — said religious institutions have a positive impact.

"While party plays a role, really what matters a great deal is people's own religiosity and whether they belong to a denomination or not," said Carroll Doherty, Pew's director of political research.

White evangelical Protestant Christians were most likely (80 percent) to view religious institutions positively, along with majorities across Protestant and Catholic denominations, according to the study. Comparatively, Americans unaffiliated with a religion were more likely to say religious institutions had a negative (46 percent) impact than positive (34 percent).

Other views

Those views also were much more negative among Americans who never or seldom attend religious services and among those who have a postgraduate degree.

The Pew survey also found Republicans increasingly said colleges and universities have a negative impact on the U.S. (58 percent, up from 45 last year). Also, the partisan gap in views on the news media has widened, with 85 percent of Republicans reporting a negative view of the media's effects, compared to 46 percent of Democrats. (RNS)



123rf.com photos/Graphic by Maggie Walsh

COMMENT

Believing and Belonging Without Behaving

The headline phrase above was popularized by British sociologist Grace Davie. It is used to describe people who profess a religious faith but whose practice indicates otherwise.

Most recently, the catchy phrase was used to describe the dramatic increase of religious faith in Russia and the 18 countries in Central and Eastern Europe. However, the term might be equally applied to Christians in the United States.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the Orthodox Christian faith has experienced a dramatic resurgence in popularity. Being an Orthodox Christian is equated with national identity in several Central and Eastern European nations such as Russia, Serbia and Greece. That is part of the reason that 10 of the 18 countries in this region count large majorities of Orthodox Christians among their population and 57 percent of the total population of the area identify as Orthodox Christians.

Support of the basic teachings of the Orthodox Church are strong in these countries. A recent study by the Pew Research Center indicated 91 percent of Orthodox Christians in the area believe in God. Fifty-four percent described the Bible as “the Word of God.”

Heaven and hell

Orthodox Christians also reported a strong belief in heaven and hell. Belief in heaven was affirmed by 61 percent of respondents and belief in hell by 58 percent.

Religious practice is another matter. Although 9 out of 10 believe in God, only 1 in 10 attend church on a weekly basis. About 1 in 4 pray on a daily basis (28 percent) and fast during holy times such as Lent (27 percent).

Still fewer read the Bible outside of church at least monthly (17 percent) and a similar percentage share their faith or views about God with others at least monthly (17 percent).

Pew researchers noted the difference in religious practices between Orthodox Christians in



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

Eastern and Central Europe and those of other religious groups who hold similar beliefs. The conclusion was that for the Orthodox, behaving did not always reflect “believing and belonging.”

In the United States one finds similar patterns. For example, 89 percent of respondents here reported belief in God in a 2016 Gallup study. That number was up from 86 percent in previous years but the general trend has been slightly downward since the 1950s and 60s, when up to 98 percent of respondents said they believed in God.

Likewise, belief in the Bible as the Word of God is down since 1976, Gallup reported. That year 83 percent of respondents called the Bible either literally true or the inspired Word of God. According to the May 16, 2017, report, only 71 percent of respondents now affirm that belief.

Unfortunately, the percentage who reject the Bible as God’s Word has doubled during that time frame from 13 percent to 26 percent.

Belief in heaven and hell is strong in America, Pew Research reports. Among all respondents, 72 percent believe in heaven and 58 percent believe in hell.

When that is broken down by faith groups 88 percent of evangelical Christians believe in heaven and 82 percent believe in hell.

Interestingly historically African-American Protestants have a stronger belief in heaven than do evangelicals — 93 percent to 88 percent.

Obviously believing and belonging is strong, but what about behaving?

Gallup estimates weekly church attendance at about 39 percent of Americans. Other studies indicate between 47 percent and 51 percent attend church at least monthly.

A 2016 article in *The Atlantic* magazine argued that about 25 percent of the one half of Americans who attend church at least monthly

are attending more regularly than in the past. The article’s conclusion was that something is going on in church attendance with a growing number attending more regularly.

At the same time, a 2013 Pew study found nine African nations where more than 80 percent of Christians attended church on a weekly basis. That study placed U.S. attendance at 47 percent of Christians.

Concerning reading the Bible a 2014 Pew study found 79 percent of Christians said reading the Bible was an essential or important part of their Christian identity. Yet that same study found only 63 percent of evangelical Christians reported reading the Bible outside of church at least weekly.

It is incongruous that about 25 percent more Christians called reading the Bible part of their Christian identity than actually read the Bible on a weekly basis.

Only 35 percent of all respondents reported reading the Bible at least weekly and 45 percent reported seldom or never reading the Bible.

When it comes to sharing one’s faith, 4 out of 5 believe it is a Christian’s responsibility. However, only 2 out of 5 report having ever attempted to do so. A Pew study did note the growing presence of a Christian witness online, where 50 percent of religiously unaffiliated adults reported seeing postings about faith in God online.

Again the studies show believing and belonging strong. Unfortunately, behaving in ways consistent with believing and belonging is not so strong.

Loving God and others

The apostle John wrote in his first epistle, “Let us not love with word or with tongue but in deeds and truth” (1 John 3:18). His words were about loving others but they apply equally to loving God.

We can believe all the right things and belong to the right church, prayer groups or what have you. But unless that love for God is lived out in “deed and truth” it is just empty, meaningless words.

Believing and belonging is supposed to result in behaving. When they don’t — whether in the Orthodox faith or for an evangelical Christian — then our own hearts condemn us because we have known to do good and have chosen not to do it.

May God forgive us when that happens.✠

“We can believe all the right things and belong to the right church, prayer groups or what have you. But unless that love for God is lived out in ‘deed and truth’ it is just empty, meaningless words.”

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

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When reading is a struggle

Churches can reach communities by offering literacy programs

By Beverly Sansom
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Have you ever been to a foreign country whose language you did not know? Remember how awkward you felt and perhaps how you compensated so others would not suspect your insufficient skills?

Low-level readers face this awkwardness every day. Most adults who are struggling readers hide it very well. They do not want to be embarrassed. More than 36 million adults in the U.S. are functionally illiterate. They are in the neighborhood around your church. Some may be sitting in your Bible study classes or church services.

We define someone as functionally illiterate when their reading, writing or computational skills make it difficult for them to function in everyday life. This person performs under a fifth grade level. It is difficult for the functionally illiterate to fill out a job application, read memos from work, decipher notes from a child's teacher, help their child with homework and read the Bible.

Cycle of despair

Low-level readers often harbor one or more of these feelings: fear, powerlessness, being unlovable, failure, despair and depression. They often withdraw from society and give up easily. It is not unusual for them to have a poor self-image and feelings of inferiority. This can perpetuate itself in a cycle of despair, which can result in dysfunctional behavior and characteristics. Low-level readers usually have limited social and cultural experiences.

There are ways the local church can support struggling adult readers. For example, if they attend services or Bible study, train church leaders not to call on anyone to read aloud unless agreed upon in advance privately. Do not "read around in a circle." It is not unusual for illiterates to drop out of church when public reading is required. Following the written order of service or singing new hymns is challenging.

Churches can proactively reach out to low-level readers by providing tutoring for a child whose parents are unable to help them at home. The church also can begin adult literacy classes. The local church can become a tutoring and literacy center to reach out to its members and the community. Such a ministry meets felt needs

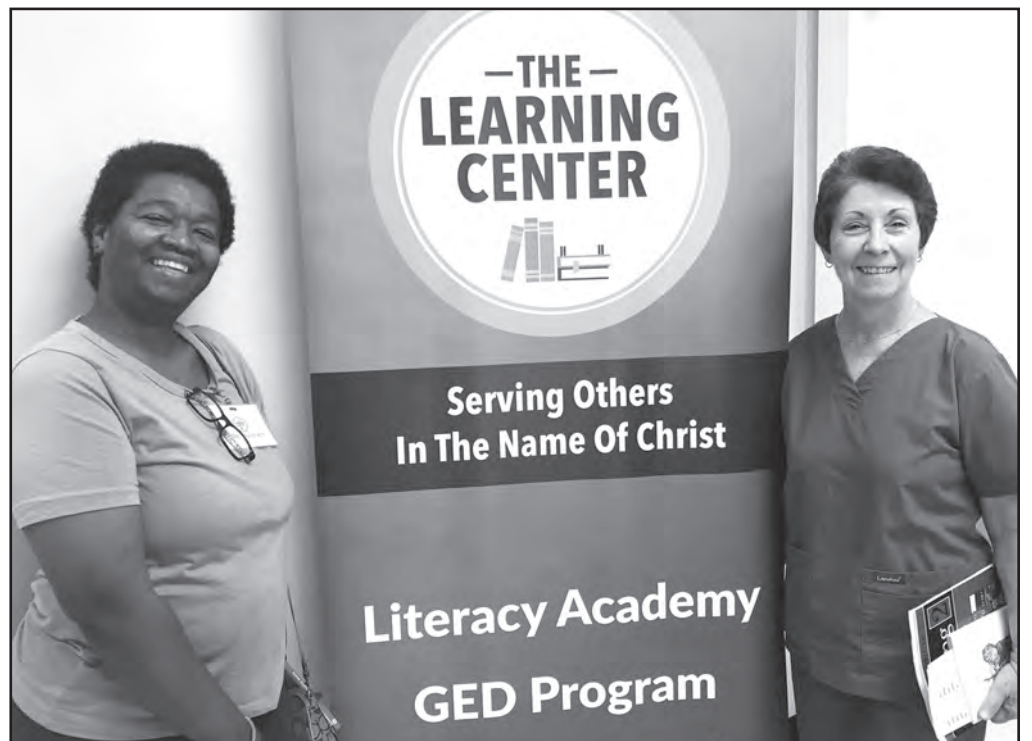


Photo courtesy of Ryann Mitchell

Alicsina (left) has been meeting with Susan, a tutor at The Learning Center, for almost four months. Her desire is to obtain her GED so she can prove to her children that, with hard work, you can overcome obstacles and do the seemingly impossible.

and conveys the love of God. Faith-based ministries use the Bible as a reading source. This opens the door for life changes which go beyond the temporal.

Beginning a church-based literacy program requires several steps. First pray and then survey the community needs. One may search online for census data that reveals the county literacy rate.

Second gain the church's approval and support of leadership. A literacy ministry needs a broad base of ownership. It can't just be "Sara's thing." It will need modest funding, space allocation and volunteer directors/tutors. Funding is needed for training tutors and purchasing student and tutor books. The "Laubach Way to Reading" series from

New Readers Press is an excellent and economical resource.

Training of interested volunteer tutors needs to be scheduled.

Interest needs to be generated in the community through flyers in public places with a simple message. It also is possible to place

a sign outside a church saying, "Need to improve your reading? Call (insert church phone number) to begin." Free radio or TV spots are another possibility.

Literacy center

Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham, recently opened a literacy center. Susan and Alicsina have been meeting for almost four months. Alicsina is excited and proud of the work she's doing and how much she has accomplished during their time together. Her desire is to obtain her GED so she can prove to her children that, with hard work, you can overcome obstacles and do the seemingly impossible.

Susan got started as a tutor because her church was opening The Learning Center. She had a desire to help people and wanted to make a difference. She always leaves encouraged by her time with Alicsina — who never lets them start a lesson without prayer. Their relationship has become a ministry to her and is as beneficial to Susan as it is to Alicsina.

'To the least of these'

Churches have an opportunity to see lives changed by reaching out to the functionally illiterate in their community with sensitivity and practical resources.

These words from Jesus are an impetus: "I was in prison (also could be the prison of illiteracy) and you came to Me ... whatever you have done to the least of these, you have done it unto Me" (Matt. 25:39-40). ☩

The Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions is sponsoring a literacy missions conference at its office July 27-28.

For more information contact Kristy Kennedy at kkennedy@alsbom.org or 1-334-613-2311.

For online details and registration, visit <https://alsbom.org/event/alabama-baptist-literacy-missions-conference-2017/>.

Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

By Joanne Sloan

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



'Mother of Methodism' influenced generation of mothers

Susanna Wesley (1669–1742) is known as the “Mother of Methodism.” Her sons — John and Charles Wesley — were founders of the denomination. Her Christian example and faithful teaching greatly influenced not only her children but also generations of mothers.

This year is the 275th anniversary of her death.

Susanna was born Jan. 20, 1669, in London — the youngest of 25 children born to Samuel Annesley and his second wife, Mary White. She grew up reading books from her father's library.

On Nov. 11, 1688, she married Samuel Wesley, an Anglican minister, poet and writer.

During their 44-year marriage, they experienced numerous hardships. She was sick most of her life and debt, disease, poverty and death of nine of their

19 children were misfortunes they faced. Twice their homes burned and they lost everything. Samuel went to jail twice because of debt. Once he left Susanna and the children for a year over a dispute about who should be the King of England. He spent much of his time and finances on his writing about the book of Job. Despite difficulties, Susanna remained faithful to God.

Susanna taught her children at home under strict rules. They had no formal lessons until the day after their fifth birthday. On the first day of their education they were expected to learn the alphabet. Everyone except two did so. The children attended classes for six hours a day. All were schooled in the classics, including Latin and Greek.

When she was young, she promised the

Lord that for every hour she spent in entertainment pursuits, she would spend equivalent hours in prayer and in Bible study. But raising and teaching her children, working in the gardens, milking the cow and managing the household gave her no time for entertainment.

So she decided to give the Lord two hours in prayer.

She found a way to pray: when her children saw her with her apron over her head, she was not to be disturbed because she was praying.

Susanna was a writer — penning letters, meditations, scriptural commentaries and longer commentaries on the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments.

Her husband died in 1735. She lived with her children the rest of her life,

staying with John the last year, who conducted her funeral service after her death July 23, 1742.

She suffered severely with arthritic gout before her death. Her last words were “My dear Savior, art Thou come to help me in my extremity at last?”

She was buried in London's Bunhill Fields, the same location where author John Bunyan and hymn writer Isaac Watts are buried.

Glorifying God

Susanna once said, “I am content to fill a little space if God be glorified.” Her remarkable life as one of history's greatest mothers glorified God in an extraordinary way.

John Wesley said of his mother: “I learned more about Christianity from my mother than from all the theologians of England.” ✝



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According to the June 15, 1844, issue of *The Alabama Baptist*:

It was reported that Bishop Andrew of the Baltimore Methodist Conference had been asked to resign by a vote of 110–68. Andrew's violation was that he acquired slaves after his elevation to the office of bishop. Southern members called the action “the knell of unity of the Methodist church.” (*TAB*)

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Maryland pastor works to save 'Annie's Church'

BALTIMORE — Southern Baptist Pastor Ryan Palmer is confident he'll save his historic Seventh Metro Church, Baltimore, from a developer attempting to buy the property for pennies on the dollar through a city auction.

Seventh Metro has historical significance as the site of Southern Baptist missionary Annie Armstrong's baptism in 1869 and is commonly referred to as "Annie's Church." The late missionary is the namesake of the North American Mission Board's annual Annie Armstrong Easter Offering.

The City of Baltimore auctioned the church in 2016 through a contested system that allows the city to place tax liens on homes and businesses — including tax-exempt churches — to recover outstanding water bills.

At issue for Seventh Metro are a \$6,000 water bill and the tax lien auction procedure, both of which Palmer is contesting.

"It is uncognizable that 20 people could incur a \$6,000 water bill meeting two hours a week on 52 Sundays and midweek Bible study," Palmer said. "We are not only contesting the water bill but we are also contesting the unlawful practice that is going on here in Baltimore."

In the meantime, a California developer identified as Christopher Bryan has already bought the debt and has bid \$53,000 on the property assessed at \$1.4 million, the *Baltimore Sun* reported in May.

"Truthfully we have every confidence that we will be able to redeem the property," he said. (BP)

Refugee doctor receives human rights award

BANGKOK — Cynthia Maung, a doctor who has spent nearly 30 years treating refugees who fled "oppression and repression in Myanmar," was presented with the 2017 Baptist World Alliance (BWA) Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award during the global organization's Annual Gathering in Bangkok, Thailand, on July 5.



MAUNG

Maung was hailed as a "woman of faith" who "draws heavily on her Baptist heritage," committing herself "selflessly to the welfare of the poor and oppressed," according to BWA.

In 1989 she and six volunteers established the Mae Tao Medical Clinic in a dilapidated building in Mae Sot, which lies on the border of Myanmar and Thailand. The clinic, which has since moved to a more secure location, has grown to more than 600 staff treating up to 150,000 patients per year, including locals, migrant workers and refugees.

Maung and her staff helped to bring a malaria epidemic under control and treat outbreaks of pneumonia and other diseases. They often tend to trauma victims of gunshots and landmines and offer maternity care and HIV counseling.

Maung was named one of *Time* magazine's Asian Heroes in 2003. (BWA)

CP giving nearly 6 percent above projection

NASHVILLE — Year-to-date contributions to national and international missions and ministries received by the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee are 5.96 percent above the year-to-date SBC Cooperative Program (CP) Allocation Budget projection. They also are 2.05 percent above contributions received during the same time frame in 2016, according to Executive Committee President and CEO Frank S. Page.

As of June 30, gifts received for distribution through the CP Allocation Budget through the first nine months of the convention's fiscal year (October to September) totaled \$150,193,673.05. This total is \$8,443,673.05 above the \$141,750,000.00 year-to-date budgeted projection to support Southern Baptist ministries globally and across North America. (BP)

Army's advance of transgender ideology 'lamentable, misguided'

The U.S. Army has implemented new training that requires soldiers to accept the presence of people with the physical traits of the opposite sex in barracks, bathrooms and showers.

The Army is thereby threatening the religious freedom of service members and playing a role in promoting falsehoods about what it means to be male and female, said a policy director for the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC).

The mandatory training follows the 2016 repeal of the prohibition on transgender men and women serving openly in the armed forces. Then-Secretary of Defense Ash Carter set a deadline of July 1, 2017, for implementing the new policy. New Secretary of Defense James Mattis, however, announced June 30 a six-month delay in enlisting transgender people.

Mattis' action does not affect current service members, and the Trump administration has shown no indication it intends to reverse the policy established under President Barack Obama, according to "The Weekly," an email digest of news and opinion published by ERLC.

Religious liberty concern

Andrew Walker, ERLC's director of policy studies, said the Army leadership's acquiescence "to the demands of transgender activists is misguided."

"Most problematically, the Army is complicit in advancing a worldview that tells fundamental



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distortions about what it means to be a man or a woman," he said in written comments.

"The Army's actions overlook the protests of dissenting soldiers uncomfortable with the idea of sharing private spaces with members of the opposite sex, which also pose risks to religious liberty.

"It is unfortunate and lamentable that a venerable institution such as the U.S. Army is now trafficking in radical proposals about human nature," Walker said. "While Southern Baptists want to show love and extend dignity to those who identify as transgender, the Army is wrong to make soldiering a place for political correctness."

Details about the mandatory training were reported by James Hasson, a former Army captain and Afghanistan war veteran, according to the July 7 edition of "The Weekly."

An estimated 15,500 transgender people are serving on active

duty or in the guard or reserves, according to The Williams Institute, a pro-LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) think tank, "The Weekly" reported.

Affirming God's design

In 2014 messengers to the SBC's annual meeting approved a resolution regarding transgender identity that "affirm[ed] God's good design that gender identity is determined by biological sex and not by one's self-perception."

The resolution "regard[ed] our transgender neighbors as image-bearers of Almighty God and therefore condemn[ed] acts of abuse or bullying committed against them." It also said, "[W]e continue to oppose steadfastly all efforts by any governing official or body to validate transgender identity as morally praiseworthy."

In addition, the resolution said, "We invite all transgender persons to trust in Christ and to experience renewal in the gospel." (BP)

Gov. Ivey disbands Bentley's task forces, councils

Less than a week after *TAB* inquired about the status of the former gambling task force set up by then-Gov. Robert Bentley, Gov. Kay Ivey signed Executive Order 3 disbanding it along with 17 other task forces, commissions and councils established by Bentley.

"I am choosing to tackle some of the issues that have previously been sent before a task force," Ivey said in a July 12 news release.

"Since the first day I took office, I have been committed to efficiency in government. ... [R]emoving these groups, many of which have either completed their work or have become inactive, is just a part of that process." (*TAB*)

Retired Pastor Max Youngblood recommends

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Confidence in U.S. institutions inches up, recent survey says

By Maggie Walsh
The Alabama Baptist

A recent Gallup survey has us here at *The Alabama Baptist* jumping for joy (or maybe just exchanging enthusiastic high fives).

According to a study released June 26, Americans' confidence in 16 key U.S. institutions is on the rise, including a significant rise in confidence in newspapers. From June 2016 to June 2017, Americans' confidence in newspapers jumped 7 percent and now sits at 27 percent.

Other statistically significant jumps in confidence were reported in public schools (6 percent) and organized labor (5 percent).

Overall, Americans' confidence in the nation's major institutions has edged up this year after registering historical lows over the past three years, Gallup reported.

The major institutions included in the survey were newspapers, public schools, banks, organized labor, the U.S. Supreme Court, the criminal justice system, Congress, television news, big business, small business, the police, the church or organized religion, the military, our medical system, the presidency and news on the internet. This year was the first for the small business and news on the internet categories.

Nearing historical average

"The average percentage of Americans expressing 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of confidence in the 14 (traditionally polled) institutions is at 35 percent, up from 31 percent in 2014 and 32 percent in 2015 and 2016," Gallup reported.

With this year's uptick, the report read, Americans' confidence in key U.S. institutions is close to the historical average for the 14 institutions Gallup has asked about since 1993 (37 percent). The high point for public esteem was 43 percent, which held steady from 2001 to 2004.

Confidence in church or organized religion saw no change from 2016, remaining at 41 percent.

Overall, U.S. adults have the most confidence in the military (72 percent) and small business (70 percent).

"Confidence levels drop off substantially after these two, with only one other institution — the police — getting a combined 'great deal' or 'quite a lot' of confidence rating over 50 percent," the report noted.

Both ends of the spectrum

Conversely, two institutions have confidence ratings below 20 percent — Congress (12 percent) and news on the internet (16 percent).

Gallup contributed the upward edge in overall confidence to Republicans, who seem to be "paralleling the increased GOP optimism [noted in previous studies] with the way things are going in the nation."

Those with Republican leanings increased their overall confidence levels from 30 percent in 2016 to 37 percent this year, whereas Democrats have roughly the same level of overall confidence (34 percent) in the polled institutions.

"The uptick in Republicans' average confidence resulting from the election of President Trump was not offset by a decrease in confidence among Democrats, leaving the population, as a whole, more confident than in previous years," Gallup reported.

"Despite this increased (overall) confidence, Americans are still skeptical of most of the major institutions that make up U.S. society," the report read. "The dismal level of public confidence in Congress ... highlights what Americans themselves say is the nation's most important problem: a dysfunctional government that has lost much of its legitimacy in the eyes of the people it serves." ¶



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Doctrine of Sin

Sin as Perversion

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

As noted last week, some of the Bible's terms for sin sound heavier and harsher than others, even though all sin is serious in God's estimation. One of the heavier terms for sin is "perversion."

When the angel of the Lord rebuked Balaam for his treatment of his donkey, the angel announced, "Behold, I have come out to stand against you, because your way is perverse before Me" (Num. 22:32).

Proverbs 12:8 says, "A man will be commended according to his wisdom, but he who is of a perverse heart will be despised."

In addition to speaking of a perverse heart, the Bible in warning against some influential persons in Egypt, spoke of them as bringing into the land "a perverse spirit" (Isa. 19:14).

In preaching on the Day of Pentecost, Peter exhorted his hearers, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation" (Acts 2:40).

The idea behind the terms rendered as "perverse" is that of being bent, twisted, distorted or warped. Perversion occurs when something that is good is twisted or distorted into something evil.

Paul confronted Elymas the sorcerer in strong language, saying, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?" (Acts 13:10)

We might rightfully say that perversion is both the cause and result of sin. A perverse heart manifests itself in acts of sin, even as habitual or repeated acts of sin lead to developing a perverse spirit. Thus sin as perversion brings with it a defiling influence.

A repeated warning in the Bible is one having to do with perverse speech. The good gift of speech can be diverted into hurtful uses like foul language, coarse joking, gossiping and lying.

Ephesians 4:29 admonishes, "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth." And Colossians 4:6 counsels,

"Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt." Inasmuch as speech is a window into the heart, perverse speech betrays a perverse heart.

Another biblical warning is against the perversion of justice. God, who is absolutely just, demands that people reflect justice. One manifestation of perverted justice is the taking of bribes.

Exodus 23:8 commands, "You shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous."

In the same vein, Proverbs 17:23 declares, "A wicked man accepts a bribe behind the back to pervert the ways of justice."

A specific perversion of justice condemned by God relates to the treatment of the poor. Exodus 23:6 admonished God's chosen people, "You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his lawsuit."

When we use the term "perversion" in relation to sin, many think immediately of the perversion of sexuality. Having created humans as male and female, God saw this, as well as all else He had made, as being "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Sin as perversion has the character of taking what God calls "good" and distorting it.

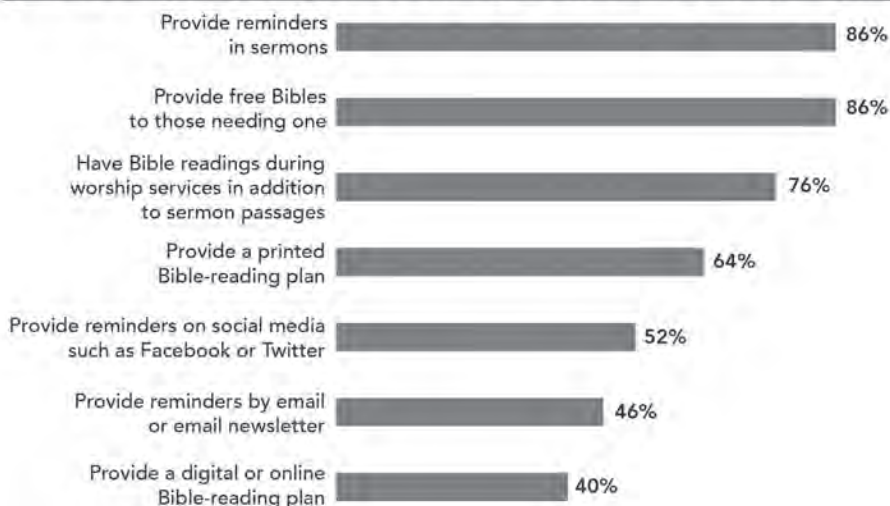
Perverted sexuality carries such labels as "adultery," "fornication" and "homosexuality." In its extreme manifestations, sin as perversion results in calling evil "good" and good "evil." In its least extreme, it results in behaving as if some sins have somehow come to find favor with God since the writing of the Bible or have fallen off His list of sins against which He warns us. ¶

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.



Among Protestant Pastors:

In what ways, if any, do you encourage your congregation to read the Bible on their own?



Notes: None of these 1%
Not sure <1%
Respondents could select all that apply.

Dealing with disappointment

Traumatic and/or disappointing situations

Facing life-changing trauma

Two months ago, Casey and her daughters, Taylor and Sam, were in a horrific traffic accident. A car ran a red light and crashed into their vehicle.

All three were injured but Sam's were the worst — a brain injury that left her unable to talk or speak. Taylor is struggling with memories of the accident and guilt that Sam has suffered so much. Her Instagram is filled with pictures of her sister and quotes about life but Taylor avoids visits with Sam at the rehab facility.

Casey has her own guilt about the accident. Why didn't she see the oncoming car? What if she had taken a different route that day? Why not her instead of Sam? Casey and Taylor are struggling but they generally avoid talking about the accident. What can Casey and Taylor do to move forward from this tragedy that has changed their family forever?

How do we cope with aftermath of tragedy as Christians?

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

Trauma is often associated with veterans of war or victims of violent crime, but research tells us that "ordinary" life events, including illness, divorce, accidents and the death of a loved one, also can bring on strong feelings that negatively affect daily life.

"No matter if it is the loss of a loved one, loss of a relationship or loss of feelings of control or safety, grief and disappointment can affect people in unhealthy ways," said Lisa Keane, clinical director of marriage and family for Pathways Professional Counseling, a ministry of Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries (ABCH).

Coping with these emotions can be a long and difficult process physically, emotionally and spiritually, said ABCH counselor Rod Campbell.

"It is an unfortunate truth of my job that I spend a tremendous amount of my week sitting with wounded and broken people," Campbell said. "They attend sessions needing to share their stories with someone

who will listen attentively and offer support. Their stories tend to begin in positive or even hopeful ways like a new relationship, a new job, a promotion, the birth of a new child or grandchild or some other new stage of life that's full of promise. Then the story begins to change."

Spiritual questions

In the aftermath of life's unraveling, Campbell said, individuals speak of disappointment, regret, hurt, unmet expectations and bewilderment. Then the spiritual questions come.

"I start getting asked the big questions of life, like: 'Where did I go wrong?' 'What did I do to deserve all this pain?' When you add these questions to the pain and stress of the event itself, it is easy to see how many people find themselves overcome by anxiety, depression and disillusionment," Campbell said.

Believers in Christ often feel like

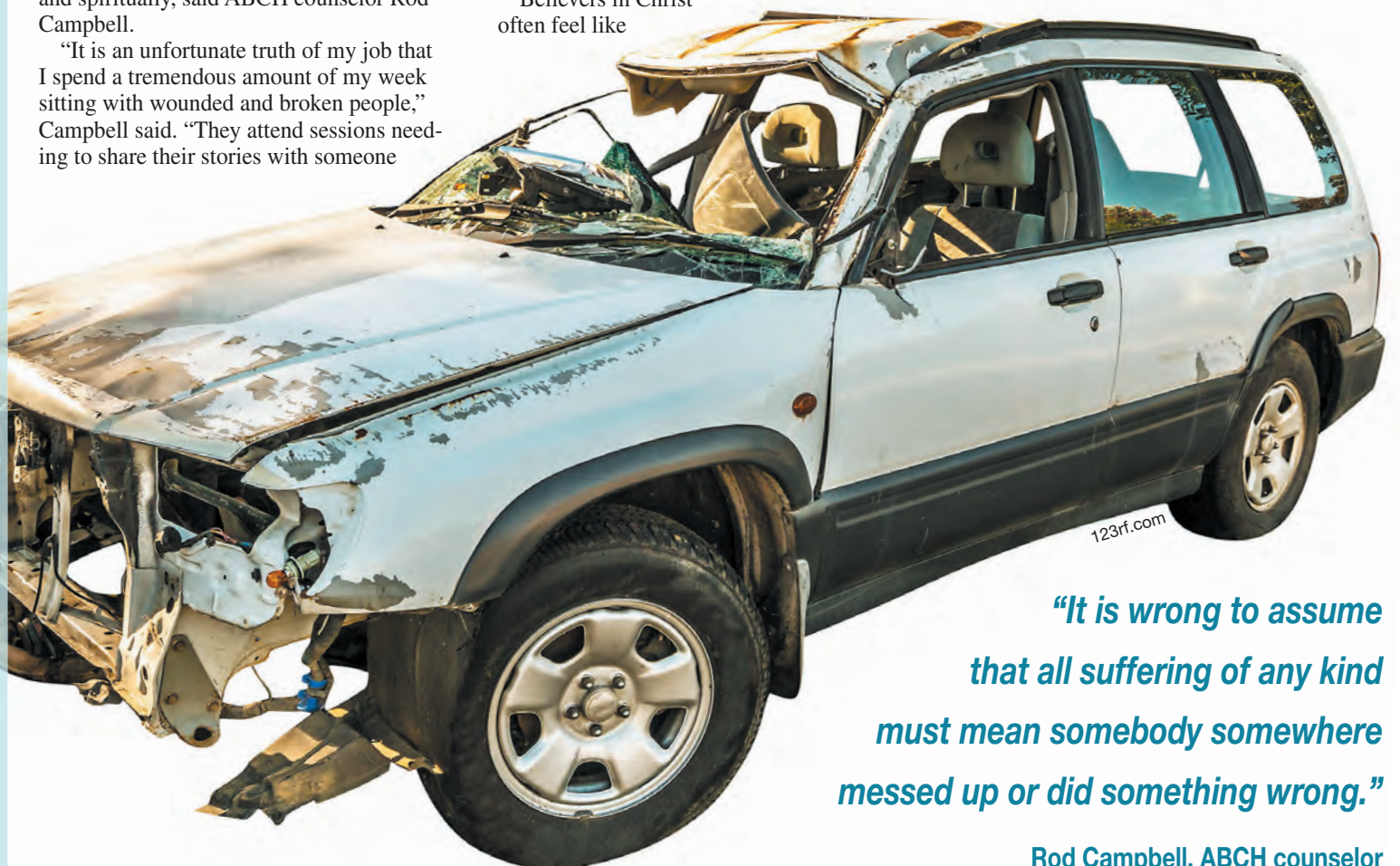
their tragedy is the result of something they have done, Campbell said. They search for some misdeed, mistake or sin they can blame for their pain. They ask, "Where did I miss God's will?"

Campbell calls this "backwards math." "Obviously, many of us struggle with sin in our own lives or potentially are impacted by the sin in others' lives, and it is wrong to assume that all suffering of any kind must mean somebody somewhere messed up or did something wrong and is being punished for it," Campbell said.

Tragedy is part of the common human experience. How the pain of a tragedy affects an individual is much more complicated.

Take someone who loses a home to fire. The physical experience of watching the house burn or seeing the charred remains

(See 'Counseling,' page 8)



"It is wrong to assume that all suffering of any kind must mean somebody somewhere messed up or did something wrong."

Rod Campbell, ABCH counselor

Practical steps

Ways you can make meaning of painful situations in life

Reframe the positive characteristics in you, such as strength and resilience, which have come out of the trauma. Remind yourself of the biblical truth that God is with you regardless of your circumstances.

Take care of yourself through healthy coping skills.

Find a trusted person, friend or therapist to talk with and tell your story. You may find yourself needing to tell your story many times.

Give yourself permission to feel all your feelings, even the hard ones. It's normal to be sad, upset and even angry with God and other people.

Find ways to share your story in ways that will be helpful to others.

Support causes that allow you to raise awareness or assistance for those who also may be experiencing the same trauma or hurt. ✠



123rf.com

Sources: Lisa Keane, MAMFC, LPC-S, Registered Play Therapist Supervisor, NCC; and Kristin Lowrey, MSW, LICSW, PIP, Registered Play Therapist Supervisor

Counseling helps with emotional, spiritual needs

(continued from page 7) brings great sadness, as does the loss of treasured possessions. But even as the process of relocating or rebuilding begins, questions creep in: "Why did it take so long for the fire department to come?" "If only I had been home." "What could I have done differently?"

Thinking about alternate scenarios or questioning one's previous actions cannot change the current situation. In the aftermath of tragedies, such questions may exacerbate the loss of safety and security we already feel and remind us of our vulnerability.

It is normal and natural to feel more anxious, nervous, irritable and even angry following a loss or tragedy, Keane said. When these feelings persist or intensify to the point they interfere with daily life and relationships, professional counseling may help an individual better cope with their pain.

Professional help

"If you are having trouble sleeping or having bad memories that constantly interrupt your thoughts, it's a good idea to talk to a professional," Keane said.

Intense anger or sadness, feelings of deep shame and/or withdrawal from social connections also are symptoms that someone might be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a diagnosable mental health disorder. PTSD often comes when a person feels they are not getting better and they are no longer able to control their symptoms.

Getting help is not a sign of weakness but rather a step toward healing. Living with continual self-blame, shame, guilt, disappointment or fear does not fit with the abundant life promised in Scripture, writes Heather Davediuk Gingrich, author of "Restoring the Shattered Self: A Christian Counselor's Guide to Complex Trauma." Counseling that focuses on both the emotional and spiritual needs of the hurting can be beneficial to coping with the disappointment that often follows difficult circumstances, she writes.

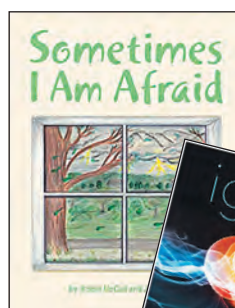
"Christian counselors are in a unique position to not focus solely on alleviating their clients' symptoms, but to envision the potential inherent in their clients as men or women whom God has created for His purposes." ✠

Resources for helping yourself, others cope during difficult times

Preschoolers:

▶ "Sometimes I Am Afraid" by Robin McCall and Joye Smith

▶ "Always Remember to Pray" by Robin McCall



Students:

▶ Ignite (CD): An Experience to Spark Compassion for People Who Hurt



Adults:

▶ "The Care Effect: Unleashing the Power of Compassion" by David Crosby

▶ "Your Pain Is Changing You: Discover the Power of a Godly Response" by David Crosby

▶ Resources recommended by Project HELP, a national Woman's Missionary Union initiative to help those experiencing the aftermath of trauma. More information about Project HELP and additional resources on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are available at WMU.com.

Compiled by Carrie Brown McWhorter



'Trees

Isaiah 61:3

unsplash.com

of righteousness'

With God's help, believers can exchange beauty for ashes during times of suffering

By Rod Campbell, MAMFT, LPC-S
Pathways Professional Counseling

When we're talking about enduring pain, suffering, disappointment with God and other significant life trials, I get very frustrated by plans that promise to "relieve your pain and misery" or "remake your life" in some simplistic 1-2-3 format.

There is no simple approach to dealing with life's difficulties. In fact, the process is often deeply painful.

Isaiah 61:1-3 offers us four important truths that help us understand and experience times of trials in a healthy and healing way.

1. Everyone experiences difficulties. Notice the first verse and those who are mentioned. The people in need of good news are the poor, the brokenhearted, the captives, the prisoners and all who mourn.

Bad things happen

All of these conditions point back to Adam and Eve's original sin and the fallen world in which we live.

However, there is no indication that any of these people are in these positions exclusively due to sin.

Though it is important to be certain that our own sin is not causing pain to ourselves or to others, we live in a world

where bad things will happen. Mourning, broken hearts and suffering are part of life.

We need to be quick to offer grace to ourselves and to others, accepting the truth that we can go through suffering that is not of our own causing.

2. Coping with trials and suffering takes time. A common mistake among well-intentioned Christians is to push an individual or themselves to move too quickly past their pain.

Trials and suffering take time to work through. The loss of a job, loss of a spouse, loss of a dream or any other major loss must be grieved. No matter how much we would like to "see the silver lining," we cannot rush the process.

When dealing with our own grief and pain or when attempting to support and care for loved ones in their times of suffering, we must give time and space for God's work to be done in our hearts or in the hearts of others.

3. God is always at work. These verses are Messianic in content — they are about both the work of Christ in His earthly

ministry and His work as mediator, reconciling God to man. The actions in these verses are taken by God toward man. Reconciliation with God brings "beauty for ashes" and healing to those who mourn.

The healing work that happens in the lives and hearts of Christians as they go through times of trial is the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the individual.

We are responsible for how we process our grief and for whether we seeking help from others. And certainly we have responsibility as believers to help support others in the body of Christ

who are wounded or in a time of struggle.

But we do ourselves and others a disservice when we forget the all-important role of the Holy Spirit in the healing process.

We have within us the indwelling Spirit of God at work to bring change and healing to our hearts and minds. We must cultivate within ourselves the ability to rest in

that work and trust in it with all our hearts.

4. Times of suffering are part of our story, and our story is part of God's story. At the end of Isaiah 61:3, we are told that those who have mourned and those who have been in despair "will be called trees of righteousness."

This means times of suffering are intended to accomplish significant spiritual growth in us.

We only learn to trust God in deep and meaningful ways when we have been required to walk through incredibly difficult times. In order to survive, we must trust only Him and trust Him completely.

The big story

However, we are only part of the story. The difficulties we face — times of trial, of grief, of loss and mourning — are all part of our individual stories. But our stories are only small parts of the big story.

Look at the last phrase of verse 3. All the things described in the first two verses will happen, and Christ will bring healing and blessing in all these situations so that we will bring glory to God.

In times of trial, we find comfort in the knowledge that what is happening to us, in us and through us is a part of God's great plan that ultimately brings glory to Himself.

In our next installment in this series, we will take a look at practical ways to avoid disappointment in relationships.✝

"Trials and suffering take time to work through. The loss of a job, loss of a spouse, loss of a dream or any other major loss must be grieved. No matter how much we would like to 'see the silver lining,' we cannot rush the process. ... We must give time and space for God's work to be done in our hearts and in the hearts of others."

Making meaning out of the bad

How do you turn major losses or disappointments in life into something good?

By Lisa Keane
MAMFC, LPC-S, Registered Play Therapist Supervisor, NCC
and Kristin Lowrey
MSW, LICSW, PIP, Registered Play Therapist Supervisor

Recently the news has been filled with sad stories of traumatic events. From terrorist attacks that take unsuspecting lives to the overwhelmingly sad diagnoses of children with terminal illnesses, bad news seems to be all around us.

The sadness these reports evoke make many of us wonder how others go on after a traumatic experience. What would we do if we were in the shoes of the suffering? How do you turn major losses or disappointments in life into something good?

Before becoming a counselor, I am not sure I had a concept of what that would even look like. I often thought fatalistically that people must just shut down and quit when they experience big hurts or traumas. But what I have seen firsthand is that the human spirit is resourceful and resilient if given the right tools and circumstances.

Research tells us that personality traits such as optimism and extraversion, positive emotions and social support can help someone heal following a trauma or loss. Research also shows that making meaning out of difficult situations leads to lower risks of depression and better well-being in the long term.

By no means does making meaning of something bad mean that the trauma does not affect you or that you are saying the loss or disappointment is OK. Instead it is knowing that good can come out of horrible, terrible things and that God is working all things together for our good and for His purpose (Rom. 8:28).

But how does someone accomplish this? If you have experienced a traumatic situation, what steps can you take to begin the process of recovery?

First there must be an assessment of what has happened and acknowledgement of how it has affected you. A person cannot move forward on their journey if they are living in denial or if they are not effectively dealing with their emotions about what has happened.

In the aftermath of trauma, a person must allow themselves time to grieve what has happened. Only after this acknowledgment can a

person move forward in a healthy way.

Fortunately you don't have to grieve alone. Coping with grief may take the form of counseling sessions or discussions with a trusted friend or minister. There is great power in sharing our stories with someone else, a trustworthy adviser who

might be able to help us see a different perspective. Journaling, or writing down your thoughts, feelings and reflections, also can be a powerful personal tool for coping with trauma.

The next steps to work through

are absolution and acceptance. In many situations, one person has wronged another, such as when a spouse cheats or when a person is a victim of crime.

In some situations, the trauma is a result of poor choices by an individual. In both cases, forgiveness is a powerful step in healing that leads to acceptance and moving forward.

Life-changing

There is no amount of counseling, prayer or talking that will change what has happened or make it go away. Traumatic situations change a person's life. They become part of the individual's life story. They may even change the way a person views the world, people or even God both positively and negatively.

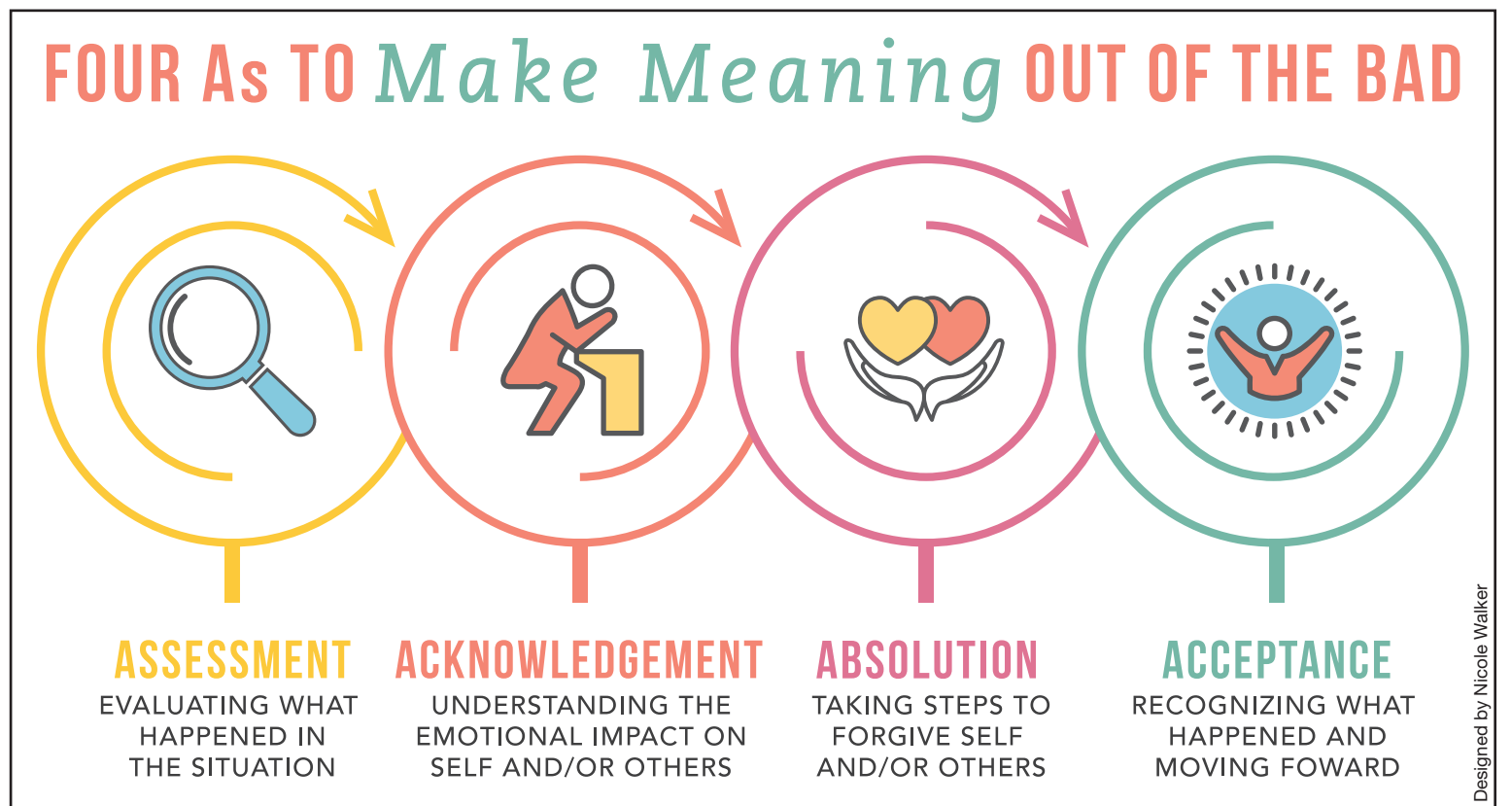
Take encouragement in knowing

a traumatic event does not have to control you or define who you are in the future.

Recovery requires a willingness to examine honestly and objectively how a trauma or disappointment has changed us. In doing so, we can make sure not to carry baggage of past hurts forward in our lives. That doesn't mean there will be no distress or feelings of being upset.

Feelings will ebb and flow throughout the recovery process, even after you have made some meaning out of your hurt.

However, research and experience tell us there is great validity in embarking on the journey of making meaning out of disappointment or loss. By doing so, we are protecting ourselves and moving toward greater levels of healing and growth.✝





(augmented reality)

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- 5** Hold your device over a page or image in *The Alabama Baptist* (TAB) marked as augmented reality and watch the paper come to life.
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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.

ALABAMA-CRENSHAW

► **Brantley Church** will celebrate its 125th anniversary and homecoming Aug. 6, 10:30 a.m. Lunch will follow the morning service. Pastor Wesley Hatcher will bring the message.

BIRMINGHAM

► **Scott Guffin** has resigned as pastor of **Liberty Park Church, Vestavia Hills**, effective Aug. 6 after 13 years to become executive director of Christian ministry for Samford University beginning Aug. 14. Christian ministry is a new department in the school of the arts. He and his wife, Beth, have two children.

BESSEMER

► **The Church at McAdory, McCalla**, will hold the senior adult fellowship "J.O.Y." on July 25 at noon. Lunch will begin at 11 a.m. Joseph Hopkins, dean of the school of the arts at Samford University, and his wife, Suzanne, will perform special music. Bill McCall is pastor.

COFFEE

► **Newbia Church, Elba**, will host The Cavaliers in concert Aug. 5, 6 p.m. A love offering will be collected. For more information call 334-897-1680. Will Jordan is pastor.

COOSA RIVER

► **First Church, Tallasahatchie, in Alpine**, will celebrate

homecoming July 23, 10:45 a.m. Keith Pugh, pastor of discipleship and care at Alberta Church, Tuscaloosa, will speak. Richard Robertson, of Alexandria, will perform special music. First, Tallasahatchie, also will hold revival services July 24-26, 7 nightly. Rick Deerman, pastor of Mignon Church, Sylacauga, will speak each night. For more information call 256-626-0880.

MARSHALL

► **Mike Johnson** is the new pastor of **Bethsaida Church, Boaz**. He previously served as pastor of Eastside Church, Birmingham. He also has served as pastor of Boones Chapel Church, Prattville; First Church, Albertville; New Hope Church, Pell City; Central Church, Albertville; and churches in Montana. Johnson holds a bachelor's degree from Samford University and a master's degree and doctorate from Atlantic Coast Theological Seminary in Daytona Beach, Florida. He and his wife, Cyndi, have two children and three grandchildren.



JOHNSON

MORGAN

► **Fifth Avenue Church,**

Decatur, has sold its church building, relocated and changed its name to **New Beginnings Church, Decatur**. Clyde Ledlow is pastor.

EAST CULLMAN

► **First Church, Fairview**, Brotherhood held its 13th Annual Kris Banister Memorial Golf Tournament on June 3. All proceeds from the tournament went to the Decatur campus of the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries (ABCH). Since its inception, the tournament has raised more than \$100,000 for ABCH. David Chambers is pastor.

MONTGOMERY

► **Michael Trull** is the new pastor of **Thorington Road Church, Montgomery**. He previously served as pastor of First Church, Scottsboro. His first day will be Aug. 13. He and his wife, Crysta, have three children.

MUD CREEK

► **Snowtown Church, West Jefferson**, will hold a 5th Sunday night singing July 30, 5 p.m. Ray Charles and Lamar Winsett will perform special music. Bob Thomason is pastor.

NORTH JEFFERSON

► **Mount Zion Church, Warrior**, will host Wes Hampton from the Gaither Vocal Band in concert July 30, 6 p.m. For more information call 205-647-1938 or email mzbcsecretary@att.net.

Sammie Reid is pastor.

TUSCALOOSA

► **Nate Young** is the new executive pastor of **North River Church, Tuscaloosa**. He previously served as Baptist campus minister for the University of Alabama (UA). Young holds a bachelor's degree from UA and a master's degree from Southwestern Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He and his wife, Carrie, have two children. Scott Reynolds is pastor of North River.



YOUNG

WINSTON

► **New Prospect Church, Haleyville**, will hold its 22nd Annual Revival Celebration on July 23-25. Sunday's services will be at 11 a.m. with Sammy Taylor, pastor of Mountain View Church, Phil Campbell, and 5 p.m. with Ricky Mann, pastor of Hines Memorial Church, Bear Creek. Monday-Tuesday services will be at 7 p.m. Fred Luter, pastor of Franklin Avenue Church, New Orleans, will speak Monday. A concert with Gold City Quartet, of Gadsden, will be Tuesday. Ron Horton is pastor of New Prospect. †

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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

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MINISTER OF MUSIC

First Baptist Church, Talladega, Alabama, is seeking a part-time minister of music to lead blended worship services (20 hours/week). Send resumés to: First Baptist Church, P.O. Box 696, Talladega, AL 35161. Attn: Music Search Committee or email to: fbcpublications@bellsouth.net.

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Samford excavation in Israel sheds light on ancient lamp workshop

Excavations at the village of Shikhin in Israel are revealing new details of life in an ancient Jewish lamp workshop.

Samford University professor James Riley Strange directs the collaborative Shikhin Excavation Project with associate director Mordechai Aviam of Kinneret College's Institute for Galilean Archaeology.

Strange, Aviam and a team of students and volunteers have worked on the site for six seasons. Their recent excavations in May and June uncovered part of the house and workshop of an oil lamp maker.

Although the house was typically simple — with packed earthen floors and, probably, mud plaster on the walls — it held a unique surprise. In an area thought to have been a courtyard, the team discovered a special kiln for firing oil lamps and other small vessels, with two complete, identical oil lamps and a small bowl still inside.

Many kilns from various periods have been discovered in Israel — all of them used to fire jugs, storage jars, cooking pots and other large vessels.

These usually measure more than 16 feet in diameter. The kiln in the Shikhin potter's house, the



Photo by Jill Marshall

Team members hold up a tarp to block the evening sun so final pictures can be taken of the excavated lamp shop.

first of its kind found in Israel, measures less than three feet in diameter, with a central pillar made of stone and brick that supported an upper floor.

That floor was pierced with holes to allow the heat from the fire below to bake the fragile vessels.

Bronze coins

Eleven bronze coins were found in a small pot near the kiln.

The latest coin, dating to the middle of the second century A.D., helps date the period of oil lamp production at Shikhin and

allows the excavators to suggest that the potter's house and the rest of the village was abandoned about that time.

Because oil lamps were intended for daily use, they were ubiquitous in houses of the ancient world.

In the Roman period, lamps were made in two (upper and lower) stone molds and the upper one was usually decorated.

On the lamps and molds from Shikhin, one commonly sees clusters of grapes, pomegranates, rosettes, tendrils, leaves and occasionally objects such as vases or amphoras.

One of the most beautiful Shikhin molds is decorated with a ring of pomegranates and vines.

Another finely made fragment of an oil-lamp was decorated with ethrogs: citrus fruits used at the festival of Sukkot or Booths.

Four years ago, a Shikhin team discovered a fragment of an oil lamp decorated with a seven-branched menorah with palm fronds on either side of it.

For decades, the design and decoration of the oil lamps has been known from the southern region of Judea following the destruction of the Second Temple (70 A.D.) and the Second Jewish Revolt (135 A.D.) but it is now clear that similar oil lamps also were manufactured in Galilee. (Samford)

Samford nursing school receives \$2.3 million grant

Samford University's Ida V. Moffett School of Nursing in Birmingham has received more than \$2.3 million to help make graduate nursing education more affordable for currently practicing or teaching nurses committed to careers in nursing education.

Samford's \$2,347,221 Nurse Faculty Loan Program (NFLP) grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration is the second largest in the country and 1 of only 4 nationally that exceeds \$1 million. This is Samford's 15th year to receive funding for the program.

NFLP grants are designed to help ease a national shortage of nursing educators, according to Jane Martin, nursing school senior associate dean and project director of the grant. Students who receive loans for master's

or doctoral degree programs can have up to 85 percent of the loan forgiven in exchange for service as full-time nursing faculty members at an accredited school of nursing.

Largest grant in state

The NFLP was approved by Congress in 2002 and Samford was 1 of the first 55 nursing schools from across the U.S. to receive funds. Samford's NFLP grants now total more than \$11.4 million and 585 students have benefitted from NFLP awards at Samford and are serving as nurse educators across the country.

The 2017-18 grant is expected to help more than 150 students from 15 states in Samford's doctoral nursing education program. Samford received the largest of five grants in the state of Alabama. (Samford)

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WHEN: Sunday, July 30 at 7 PM

WHERE: CrossPointe Church
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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For July 23

Explore the Bible By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D. Dean, Office for Global Engagement, University of Mobile

GOD'S LOVE Psalm 136

Our psalm this week addresses God's love and mercy. This antiphonal psalm may have been sung by two choirs or by a song leader with a choral response.

The fundamental, never-changing truth of God's covenantal lovingkindness sets the base for the melodic, progressive description of God's character and actions above it.

For our musicians reading this lesson, I am imagining something like Charles Gounod's "Ave Maria" set over Bach's Prelude number 1 in C major. For our non-musician readers, it would be like "Heart and Soul" on the piano: four-chord progression on the bottom of the piano with the melody higher up.

As a child without a relationship to God through faith in Jesus, I viewed this psalm as redundant, monotonous and boring. We would read this as a responsive reading. No thought, no heart, no worship was involved as we read "for His mercy endureth forever" over and over (and over) again.

In Creation (1-9)

Verses 1-3 focus on the character of God. He is worthy of our thanks because He is good. God is the standard of good, the creator of good and the judge of goodness. Whatever reflects His glory is good. Whatever rejects or steals His glory is evil. The phrases "God of gods" and "Lord of lords" communicate supremacy, the superlative in the original language. Yahweh is the greatest God and He is the Master of all masters. Yahweh rules the supernatural realm.

Yahweh also rules the natural realm, His material creation. Verses 4-9 summarize God's work of creating the habitations of the heavens and the earth, and then populating the heavens with sun, moon, planets and stars.

God demonstrates His "chesed" in who He is and in what He does. Depending on the version, this term translates as "mercy" (KJV), "faithful love" (NLT), "steadfast love" (ESV), "lovingkindness" (ASV, NASB), "gracious love" (ISV) and "love" (HCSB, NIV). Why are there so many translations for a single word? Perhaps a better question is this: How does one translate a single word to encapsulate the essence of who God is and what God does?

In Conquest (10-22)

In Egypt, God brought judgment upon the Pharaoh and all the Egyptian gods (Ex. 12:12). In the exodus God parted the sea and allowed them to pass on dry ground. In the wilderness God sustained them though they murmured and complained. In the Promised Land, God gave them victory over those who rejected the one true God. In our time God is still at work. Jesus said the Father is always at work (John 5:19). We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Rom. 8:37).

In Compassion (23-26)

When it seemed that Yahweh had abandoned His people in Egypt, He remembered them in their lowly circumstances. When the enemy seemed to have the upper hand, God silenced His foes with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. When the people longed to return to slavery so they could have more variety in their diet, God provided food for them daily. His love never failed them, nor will it fail us.

As a maturing follower of Christ now, I see the echoing confession of God's faithful love differently than when I was a kid. Instead of monotony, I hear the response crescendo with each passing verse. What begins as a simple pulse grows louder and louder, crying out the faithfulness of God with passion and gratitude ... "Give thanks to the God of heaven. His love is eternal." †

Bible Studies for Life By Kenneth B.E. Roxburgh, Ph.D. Professor of Religion, Samford University

A FRESH START John 18:15-18, 25-27; 21:15-19

Following Jesus is no easy achievement. There is pain, longing, disappointment and hurt as we stutter and stumble, wander and digress, delay and procrastinate in our endeavor to be His disciples.

I suspect Peter felt like that as he passed through one of the traumatic experiences of his whole life when he denied his Lord and went out in the darkness of doubt and despair and "wept bitterly."

Followers of Jesus can fail Him. (18:15-18, 25-27)

Peter had been the recipient of great privileges. His close contact with the Lord over three years had enabled him to experience much of the presence and power of Jesus at work in the world.

He had seen the glory of God shining in the face of his Savior and had just sat around the very first communion service. Spiritually he was on a high and when Jesus said to him in Luke 22:31, "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat ... you will deny me three times," his immediate reply in verse 33 was filled with confidence: "Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you."

In this story we find a description of his failure. Frightened of identifying himself with Jesus, Peter stands out of the immediate area where Jesus is located and "warms himself" beside a fire in the presence of the enemies of Jesus.

When challenged about his identity, he refuses to speak of his Savior and with oaths and curses on his lips he denies the Lord.

Then suddenly, as if on cue music began to play, "the cock crowed" and Peter remembers the Lord's words of warning. Luke tells us that as he turns to look at the Savior, Peter discovers that Jesus "looks

straight at Peter ... and he went outside and wept bitterly."

Jesus forgives our failures. (21:15-19)

No matter how great our failure may be, no matter how far we feel we have slipped from following Jesus, the grace and mercy of God comes to us and forgives the past and restores our relationship with the Lord.

Jesus makes sure that not only does Peter know he is forgiven but he restores him publicly so the other disciples will encourage him to lead them into the future on the day of Pentecost.

Peter's brokenness was the harbinger of blessing and new wholeness of life in the Spirit. So it will always be with God's people for in our sin we sense our failure but face to face with the Savior we are assured of His mercy and love.

There are many incidents in the past, either recent or distant that we may well recall today and the memory of our failure may cause us pain.

John tells us that when Peter came on shore there was a charcoal fire where Jesus was cooking breakfast. The only other occasion when this word is used in the New Testament is of that other fire where Peter warmed himself and denied Jesus.

In receiving forgiveness it is important to go back to that buried hurt, that fear of failure and deal with it. Covering up never achieves anything.

What we are seeing here is a deep unhealed wound being gently exposed and dealt with in mercy, love and grace to enable it to find healing. Hymn writer Herbert Howard Booth expressed the healing power of grace like this:

*"Grace there is my every debt to pay,
Blood to wash my every sin away,
Power to keep me guiltless day by day,
In Christ for me." †*

Christian Crossword

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Across

- The fear of the Lord is the beginning of _____. (Prov. 1:7)
- _____ the kine to the cart. (1 Sam. 6:7)
- _____ Domini.
- To use oars. (2 words)
- I shall be a _____ forever. (Isa. 47:7)
- In all the region of _____. (1 Kings 4:11)
- Tasted the water that was made _____. (John 2:9)
- Registered Nurse. (abbr.)
- Pierced themselves through with many _____. (1 Tim. 6:10)
- Keepers at _____. (Titus 2:5)
- David did _____ the shew bread. (Matt. 12:4)
- Los Angeles. (abbr.)
- The end is not _____ and by. (Luke 21:9)
- "Entertainment Tonight's" popular name.
- The mouth of the righteous speaketh _____. (Ps. 37:30)
- Shem, _____ and Japheth.

(Gen. 5:32)

- To forbid something.
- He will hate the _____, and love the other. (Matt. 6:24)
- Exclamation of satisfaction.
- And _____ not his sisters here with us? (Mark 6:3)
- Charged particle.
- Did all eat the same _____ meat. (1 Cor. 10:3)
- Gathered the good but cast the _____ away. (Matt. 13:48)
- He was _____ at that saying. (Mark 10:22)
- 2,000 pounds.
- Tax department. (abbr.)
- Neither _____ there any rock like our God. (1 Sam. 2:2)
- Detached Service. (abbr.)
- This is my beloved _____. (Matt. 3:17)
- Universally. (prefix)

Down

- Sportsmen's group. (abbr.)
- The Lord ... will prosper

thy _____. (Gen. 24:40)

- _____, M, _____. (2 words)
- In the _____ of this world. (Matt. 13:40)
- Opened the prison _____. (Acts 5:19)
- Eastern time. (abbr.)
- Shout unto God with the voice of _____. (Ps. 47:1)
- Charged particle.
- He chose David ... from following the _____. (Ps. 78:70,71)
- Expression of pain.
- Thrust through with a _____. (Heb. 12:20)
- Symbol for radon.
- Continue in faith ... and _____. (1 Tim. 2:15)
- The Greeks _____ after wisdom. (1 Cor. 1:22)
- A grain.
- Of whom the world _____ not worthy. (Heb. 11:38)
- When they had sung an _____. (Matt. 26:30)
- What a ghost says.
- A Pharisee might say: "I _____." (2 words)
- The beast shall make _____ against them.

(Rev. 11:7)

- Alcoholics Anonymous. (abbr.)
- The centurion loosed Paul from his _____. (Acts 22:30)
- Offers to buy at auction.
- Joshua the son of _____. (Josh. 1:1)
- Ibidem. (abbr.)
- Wherein shall go no gallery with _____. (Isa. 32:21)
- Look upon mine affliction and my _____. (Ps. 25:18)
- Impersonal pronoun.
- The unclean spirit had him. (Mark 1:26)



Victory in Jesus

MercyMe seeks to encourage, equip audiences with new album

By Leann Callaway
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

With the songs on their latest album “LIFER,” MercyMe hopes to encourage and equip audiences to live for what matters most and make a difference for eternity.

“This new album is all about living in victory and what that really means — that our victory lies in what Christ has already done for us,” said bass player Nathan Cochran. “Our victory lies in who Christ is and who we are because of Him. It’s a follow-up to our last album, ‘Welcome to the New,’ which focused on grace and identity.”

By partnering with Cracker Bar-

rel Old Country Stores, a deluxe edition of the album is currently available at all of their locations nationwide and features three bonus tracks, including “His Eye Is On The Sparrow.”

While touring across the country, the group emphasizes the album’s theme by sharing verses about God’s design for creation and the importance of living with passion and purpose, as read in Genesis 2:7, 1 Timothy 6:12 and Psalm 146:2.

Since their debut in 2001 the group has garnered numerous

achievements and awards, including multiple American Music Awards and Dove Awards. In spite of their success, the group has remained focused on shining the spotlight on Christ.

Through their music and message, band members hope to connect audiences to Christ’s love, forgiveness and grace while sharing personal stories of struggles, pain and redemption.

“When you write a song, you are always thankful for the impact it has on people,” Cochran

said. “We’ve been grateful for the impact these songs have had on so many people. We’re continually getting stories about people walking through struggles and finding hope, regardless of the situation they are in, by being reminded about what Christ has done for us on the cross. It’s the most important and most powerful message we can share about, because it’s going to impact people for eternity.”

‘Christ is bigger’

“We’ve all gone through rough seasons in our own lives and wanting to be like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and have the courage to say that we know that God is able to deliver us but even if He doesn’t, we’re still not going to surrender or bow down because Christ is still worthy. That’s not always an easy thing to say but it’s certainly how we want to live and how we want to encourage others because Christ

is bigger than anything we could face and our hope rests in Him.”

This summer MercyMe will headline a string of outdoor concerts alongside recording artists Jeremy Camp and Natalie Grant.

Lead singer Bart Millard said, “Our desire is that the message of the gospel resonates with people and helps them realize that God loves them unconditionally and is calling them to pursue a personal relationship with Him. During concerts we emphasize that salvation is not based on works but what Christ has already done on the cross.

“There is nothing anyone can do to make God love them more than He already does. All you have to do is accept His invitation and respond by resting in the finished work of the cross. It’s the simplicity of the gospel and who you are in Christ — realizing why you can show grace to other people because grace has been shown to you.” †



Photos courtesy of The Media Collective



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Grounded in faith

Lookouts infielder uses baseball for God's glory

By Bill Sorrell
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Ryan Walker kept his eye on the LSU Tigers during the College World Series in June, as did a lot of people. His younger brother, Eric, was a starting pitcher for the Tigers with 78 strikeouts over his freshman season.

But the elder Walker, a utility infielder for the Chattanooga Lookouts, has a lot of eyes on him, too — and that's something he says he wants to use for the glory of God.

Through 60 games this season, he has scored 29 runs and had 58 hits including eight doubles, five triples, two home runs and 22 RBIs. He has batted .265 with a .381 on-base percentage, a slugging percentage of .388 and seven stolen bases.

He helped the Lookouts finish first in the North Division the first half, assuring a playoff spot in September.

But to Walker, that's not as important as being consistent in his faith and who he is, on and off the field.

"You realize wherever you go, you can always be the same as long as you are grounded in your faith," he said. "I have realized that every move you make, you have a little bigger platform. It's one of those things that is exciting and you realize how much you can influence."

Walker was drafted by the Twins in 2013 and played for Cedar Rapids in the Midwest League and Fort Myers in the Florida State League before joining the Lookouts.

Chattanooga pitchers Mason Melotakis and Nick Burdi said Walker adds a lot to the team.

Melotakis called him the "ultimate utility guy,"

saying you could put him anywhere and he "can get the job done."

But Burdi said it goes further than that — Walker brings a "strong, kind of mellowed-out environment for us."

"His faith is pretty cool to see," Burdi said. "He is one of the guys I have been with since I signed. You see him carrying himself that way and it's good to see when you have someone that inspired in their walk."

Walker was baptized at Lake Arlington Baptist Church at age 9 and influenced spiritually by his parents, Dean and Tammy Walker, whom he calls

role models. But Walker became more involved in his faith toward the end of his college career at the University of Texas at Arlington.

"Going to college was definitely a great experience to grow in every aspect," said Walker, who was active in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes his first two years.

"We are not here to hit a round ball and make that play," he said. "We are here to spread the gospel and tell the good news. In baseball, it's how we live our daily life and what you involve yourself in. I know that is my goal."

Walker said his faith is challenged daily but he has a lot of support.

"We have a pretty good group here," he said. "We pray together. We have Bible studies."

With the daily grind, Walker has to work hard to make time to read the Bible.

"That is one thing I try to do better every year, daily being in the Word. It's easy to get in the routine," he said. "We will have an early morning game and you are tired. There are a lot of excuses you go with. But the heart wants what you feed it." ✠



Ryan Walker

Photo by Meeks and Norris

"We are here to spread the gospel and tell the good news.

**In baseball, it's how we live our daily life and what you
involve yourself in. I know that is my goal."**

Ryan Walker
utility infielder, Chattanooga Lookouts



Author of 10th-century Scripture identified

CAMBRIDGE, England — The author of a 10th-century collection of Scriptures has been identified as the same scribe who wrote the earliest known complete copy of the Hebrew Bible.

The finding could influence future translations of the Hebrew Scriptures, or Old Testament, according to a news release from Tyndale House, Cambridge, which published the research.

The ancient text, known to scholars as Codex L17, contains only Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings and 2 Kings. Researcher Kim Phillips wrote in an article in the Tyndale Bulletin that he determined the author was the scribe Samuel ben Jacob, or "Samuel, son of Jacob," and it was written around the year 975.

Samuel ben Jacob also wrote The Leningrad Codex, the earliest known complete copy of the Hebrew Bible, completed in the year 1008 and the basis for many modern biblical translations.

Using digital images of the codex published by the National Library of Israel, Phillips said he was able to identify the scribe based on similarities in the lettering patterns between these texts and another partial text by Samuel that he discovered in 2015.

Scholars said the find is important, though they don't expect anything earth-shattering to change as a result.

"It's always important to have an early manuscript, but the specific significance remains to be seen," said David Kraemer, director of libraries at the Jewish Theological Seminary. (RNS)

Kenya's government to employ school chaplains

NAIROBI, Kenya — Religious leaders in Kenya have welcomed a government move to recruit chaplains for all public high schools as a measure intended to improve discipline and staunch unrest.

The leaders say such a move would help promote good morals. "This is a welcome move and we encourage it," said Anglican Bishop Joseph Kagunda of Mount Kenya West Diocese. The bishop said the presence of chaplains at two schools this past year helped reduce discipline problems.

"We have also learned that the students open up more to the chaplains than their teachers," Kagunda said.

The chaplains will be recruited, hired and paid by the government. Kenya, which is 83 percent Christian and 11 percent Muslim, has no state religion in its Constitution.

Roman Catholic Bishop Paul Kariuki Njiru of the Embu Diocese said hiring well-trained chaplains who are pastors or priests would bear fruit.

"We have been blaming the youth but we have not accompanied them in the development of values and virtues," Njiru said.

Unrest at Kenya's high schools has been blamed on lax discipline, drug abuse, parents' neglect and administrators' high-handedness, among other factors. In 2016 a total of 483 infractions were reported, with more than 200 being arson-related. (RNS)

Canadian families at risk over 'gender identity'

TORONTO, Ontario — In Canada's Ontario province, the government now has the right to seize children from families who don't accept their child's chosen "gender identity" or "gender expression," according to The Christian Post.

The Supporting Children, Youth and Families Act of 2017 passed 63-23 and requires child protection agencies and other foster and adoption service providers to take into account a child's sexual orientation and gender identity when making decisions, the Post reported.

"I would consider that a form of abuse, when a child identifies one way and a caregiver is saying no, you need to do this differently," said Minister of Child and Family Services Michael Coteau, who introduced the bill. "If it's abuse and if it's within the definition, a child can be removed from that environment and placed into protection where the abuse stops."

But Jack Fonseca, senior political strategist for Campaign Life Coalition, said the passage of the bill heralds in an "era of totalitarian power by the state, such as never witnessed before in Canada's history." (TAB)