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**WHAT YOU
say
VS. WHAT YOU
believe**

Nearly one-third of 'evangelicals' don't follow generally held beliefs

Almost half of adults in Alabama who identify as Christian call themselves evangelicals, but a recent LifeWay study suggests that their beliefs may not match up with those generally held as important to the evangelical movement.

"There's a gap between who evangelicals say they are and what they believe," said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research, based in Nashville.

Alabama consistently ranks as one of the "most religious states" in national surveys. A 2014 study by Pew Research found that 90 percent of adults in Alabama say religion is "very important" (77 percent) or "somewhat important" (13 percent) in their lives. Ninety-four percent of respondents said they were "absolutely certain" (82 percent) or "fairly certain" (12 percent) of their belief in God. Among the 86 percent of Al-

abamians who claim Christianity, 49 percent call themselves evangelical.

Nationwide, about 1 in 4 Americans say they are evangelical Christians. Most of them are white, live in the South and identify as Republican. On the whole they are less educated than the general population. Many go to church every week.

But they are not always sure what they believe.

Core beliefs

A survey of U.S. adults conducted in November 2017 by LifeWay Research found that fewer than half of those who identify as evangelicals (45 percent) strongly agree with core evangelical beliefs. Though some research studies define "evangelical" by self-identification or by what church they identify with, LifeWay



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categorizes an individual as having evangelical beliefs only if they strongly agree with four statements:

▶ The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe.

▶ It is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior.

▶ Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin.

▶ Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God's free gift of eternal salvation.

Using that criteria, LifeWay Research found that only 15 percent of Americans are evangelicals by belief. By contrast, 24 percent of Americans self-identify as evangelicals.

The study reports that evangelicals by belief go to church more often, once a week or more, than self-

identified evangelicals. Both groups tend to be older, with 31 percent of Americans 65 and older identifying as evangelicals but only 19 percent of that age group holds evangelical beliefs.

Among people 18 to 34, only 22 percent identify as evangelicals and 10 percent hold evangelical beliefs.

Other findings

Another takeaway from the study is that evangelicals by belief are more ethnically diverse than self-identified evangelicals.

From the standpoint of belief, 58 percent of evangelicals are white, 23 percent are African-American and 14 percent are Hispanic. Five percent claim another ethnicity.

By contrast, 70 percent of self-

(See 'Term,' page 3)



COMMENT

Join Us for Our Birthday Celebration

Make sure Feb. 6 is marked on your calendar. That is the day we officially mark the 175th birthday of *The Alabama Baptist* and we want you to be a part of the celebration.

The place is Marion, Alabama, the original site of the state Baptist paper and home for many “firsts” in Alabama Baptist life. Judson College began there in 1838. So did Howard College (now Samford University) in 1841 and *The Alabama Baptist* in 1843.

Judson College will host the birthday celebration, but Siloam Baptist Church in Marion and Marion Military Institute (MMI) also are cooperating as are some of the town’s other attractions.

The celebration would make a wonderful outing for anyone interested in knowing more about Baptist history.

Local history

The day begins with an emphasis on local history. The interior of Siloam Baptist Church is much like it was when the church was built in 1849. At that time the church was the largest Baptist congregation in the state and one of the largest west of the Appalachian Mountains.

Many people have forgotten that when the Southern Baptist Convention organized in 1845, the convention’s Home Mission Board was headquartered in Marion. The city was then known as “the Athens of the South.” The original desk of the first leader of the Home Mission Board is still on display at the church as are many other historical artifacts.

MMI has agreed to open its campus so visitors can visit the chapel Howard College students used before the school relocated from Marion to East Lake in the Birmingham area in 1887. Several other objects related to Howard College also will be on display. MMI sits on the old Howard campus.

Another highlight will be Reverie, a historic Greek Revival mansion built circa 1858 which now serves as a historic house museum. The home offers glimpses of life in that historical period. And, of course, you will want to see the



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

campus of Judson College and see the good things happening there.

All of this is before the celebration officially begins with a worship service in the Judson chapel at 11 a.m. Judson is a college for young women, and Jennifer Davis Rash, editor-elect of *The Alabama Baptist*, will be the featured speaker. The service also will feature the Judson choir.

After lunch, participants will be treated to presentations from the authors of the new book “*The Alabama Baptist: 175 Years of Informing, Inspiring and Connecting.*” Elizabeth Wells, retired archivist for Samford and primary researcher for the book, will share about Marion’s vital role in beginning and sustaining *The Alabama Baptist* state paper.

Grace Thornton, an award-winning journalist and lead writer for the book, will share information about the four editors of *The Alabama Baptist* during the 100 years the paper has been an entity of the Alabama Baptist State Convention.

Participants will have opportunity to ask questions following each presentation.

A prayer emphasis acknowledging God’s blessings on the ministry of the state Baptist paper will be included. The prayer time will include a time to seek God’s guidance for this ministry as it continues to bind Alabama Baptists together through communications.

The prayer emphasis also will include a presentation from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission acknowledging the 175th anniversary of *The Alabama Baptist*.

Not many 175-year-old ministries can still visit the building in which they were founded but *The Alabama Baptist* can. The building now sits on Judson’s campus, and participants will have opportunity to visit the structure and read the historical marker in front of the building placed there by the state of Alabama.

No birthday party would be complete without a birthday cake and this one is no exception. Participants will be invited to sing Happy Birthday to *The Alabama Baptist* and then enjoy birthday cake and punch. Program personalities will be available during this time to visit with participants.

For those unable to complete all the historical tours in the morning, second chance tours will be offered for Siloam Baptist Church and Judson College.

Cost for the day is only \$15 with advanced registration. That covers the tours, the birthday celebration, lunch and a \$5 discount for the new book telling the story of *The Alabama Baptist* for 175 years. This is the first book devoted to recounting how God has used and blessed this ministry over the years. The book will be available for purchase during the event. Registration the day of the event will be \$20.

Memorable occasion

The birthday celebration promises to be a memorable occasion. I hope you will attend and bring a friend. As mentioned above, the event would make a great outing for Baptist church groups and anyone interested in Baptist history. The tours alone are worth more than the cost of the whole day’s activities.

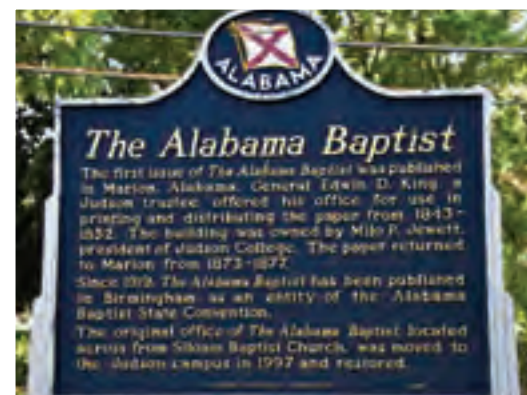
Mark your calendar. Make your plans and come to Marion, Alabama, on Feb. 6. Tours begin at 9 a.m. The program is expected to finish about 3 p.m. 🌿



Original building of *The Alabama Baptist*

**FOR MORE INFORMATION
OR TO MAKE YOUR
ADVANCED REGISTRATION**

**Contact Linda Harrison at
lharrison@thealabamabaptist.org
or call at 1-800-803-5201.**





"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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What is sexual harassment?

Recent Barna study illustrates lack of clear definition

By **Carrie Brown McWhorter**
The Alabama Baptist

Charges of sexual misconduct by high-profile figures in politics, journalism, entertainment and other industries have filled the news lately, with accusations ranging from inappropriate touching to rape. With so many allegations flooding the media, some may wonder what actions constitute sexual harassment. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) defines sexual harassment in the workplace as "unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature" that affects one's work and/or work environment. More than 12,000 complaints are filed with the EEOC each year.

While most states have laws against sexual assault and battery, sexual harassment itself is not illegal, though sexual harassment in the workplace does violate federal laws against sex discrimination and victims can sue for civil penalties.

Outside the workplace, Americans see a wide range of behaviors inflicted by one adult toward another as sexual harassment, according to a recent Barna survey.

In a web-based poll conducted Oct. 19–25, 2017, Barna asked respondents to identify specific acts they consider to be harassment. Overwhelmingly, respondents said sexual harassment is most often about being touched or groped or being forced to do something sexual.

Responses also included someone making sexual comments about someone's looks or body, sharing intimate photos or videos of someone without their permission, having someone expose themselves to you or being shown sexually explicit photos that you do not wish to see. Each of these responses was more likely to be given by women, though these were top responses by men as well.

More than half of women added other be-



The Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) resource, "Preventing Sexual Misconduct in Your Church," is available at alsbom.org/safe. For more information, contact SBOM's Lee Wright at 1-800-264-1225 x 241.

123rf.com

haviors to the list, including pinching or poking, pushing against you in public transport, persistence in asking someone out on a date after being told no and following a person.

Though half of those surveyed said they had not encountered sexual harassment, 29 percent said they had been, 23 percent said they knew someone well who was sexually harassed and 15 percent said they had witnessed sexual harassment. Among those who report experiencing sexual harassment, women were three times more likely than men to say they have been harassed (42 percent to 16 percent).

Harassment often unreported

Recent allegations also suggest that many cases of sexual harassment and sexual assault go unreported for months, years or even decades. Many cases may never be reported. Here again, the Barna survey seems to support

that, as only one-third of those who indicated that they had personally been harassed, had witnessed harassment, or know someone who has been harassed reported those experiences. The primary reason given — victims and witnesses feared they would not be believed (30 percent) or that they would be retaliated against by the offender (25 percent).

Sexual harassment is ubiquitous yet people are still hesitant to report, said Barna Group editor-in-chief Roxanne Stone. Americans also agree on what counts as unwanted sexual behavior, she said, which may lead to a turning point in reporting.

"In the past few months, we've seen behavior that historically may have been excused or consciously ignored now being called out as the harassment it is. Perpetrators are being held accountable to those behaviors in a massive court of public opinion. And many are facing true consequences," Stone said.

Stone also noted #metoo, a social media campaign to increase awareness about sexual harassment and sexual assault, and said the conversation surrounding the movement must continue, calling out churches specifically.

'Challenging issue'

"Leaders in every level of society — from entertainment to the marketplace to politics to churches — must honestly wrestle with this challenging issue and what it means for their institutions," she said. "Pastors and spiritual leaders, especially, must be ready to talk with their members: to hear the stories of the victims, to offer counseling services, to speak from the pulpit on the respect and humanization that gender equality really requires. Churches, with a message of brotherly and sisterly love, have an opportunity to be leaders in this disorienting conversation." ✠

Term 'evangelical ... has lost some of its meaning'

(continued from page 1)

identified evangelicals are white; 14 percent are African-Americans; 12 percent are Hispanic; and 4 percent claim another ethnicity.

The term "born again," which has often been used as a synonym for self-identified evangelicals, appears to be more appealing than the evangelical label to African-American Christians. African-Americans also are the most likely to have evangelical beliefs (30 percent). Whites (13 percent), Hispanics (13 percent) and those from other ethnicities are less likely (9 percent). African-Americans (30 percent) and whites (26 percent) are more likely to say they are

evangelical than Hispanics (18 percent) or those from other ethnicities (11 percent).

"For many African-Americans, the term 'evangelical' is a turn-off, even though they hold evangelical beliefs," McConnell said. "The term 'evangelical' is often viewed as applying to white Christians only. And that's unfortunate. It's lost some of its religious meaning that actually unites these groups."

The survey also found an increasing number of Christians are rejecting the evangelical label. Only two-thirds of those labeled evangelical by belief self-identify as evangelicals, according to LifeWay. (TAB)

Pastors' spouses often feel lonely, survey reveals

By Martha Simmons

Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this" (1 Cor. 7:28).

If Paul had had his way, disciples — both male and female — would have followed his example and stayed free of the bonds of matrimony in order to focus on pleasing God instead of their spouses. Resigned to the reality of human nature, however, Paul laid down some general recommendations about marriage among the faithful but did not address the particular challenges of being a preacher's spouse.

More than 2,000 years later, there's still no instruction book to guide pastors' spouses, and a recent survey by LifeWay Research points out mixed blessings for those who are

married to ministers. Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research, said the survey of 720 spouses indicated they felt both blessed and stressed. "Despite their challenges, most pastors' spouses say they are happy," he said.

The survey focused mainly on spouses of a senior pastor or solo pastor at Protestant churches, including Baptist (29 percent), nondenominational (15 percent), Methodist (9 percent), Lutheran (9 percent), Assemblies of God (7 percent), Presbyterian (4 percent), Pentecostal/charismatic (3 percent), Church of Christ (3 percent) and Church of God (2 percent). Ninety percent of respondents are married to pastors who work at least 35 hours per week; 53 percent have children at home; 9 percent have seminary degrees; 51 percent have spent at least 20 years as a pastor's spouse; and 86 percent have responsibilities at their church, including 19 percent who are on the church's staff. More than half of respondents work outside the spouse's church and, of those, a quarter work for a church, ministry or other nonprofit. Most are women (96 percent) and also feel a strong call to ministry (81 percent).

Pastors' spouses often feel lonely, held to an impossible standard and like they're "living in a fishbowl," the survey revealed.

"Many also feel isolated with few close friends other than their spouse,"

LifeWay reported. "Sixty-two percent, for example, say they can count on their spouse 'a great deal' when they feel under stress. Fewer say they can depend a great deal on other family members in their household (14 percent), other relatives (12 percent), friends at church (10 percent), friends outside church (12 percent) or other ministers' spouses (9 percent)."

Church members' attitudes and behavior have a lot to do with their minister's spouse's isolation. "Half say they

don't confide in people at church because they've been betrayed in the past," LifeWay reported. "About half (55 percent) also say they don't have enough relationships where they can be themselves.

"Seventy-nine percent say their congregation expects their family to be a 'model family,' while 86 percent say they are expected to

have a model marriage."

Younger spouses and those with children at home reported more financial stresses and trouble in church relationships than their older counterparts, LifeWay reported.

Other key challenges identified in the survey:

- ▶ 72 percent say their spouse has experienced resistance in the church.

- ▶ 69 percent say they have few people they can confide in.

- ▶ 68 percent worry about having enough money for retirement.

- ▶ 59 percent say church commitments limit family time.

- ▶ 49 percent say, "If I were honest at church about my prayer needs, they would just become gossip."

Positive feelings

Nevertheless, spouses reported feeling positive about many other aspects of their lives:

- ▶ 74 percent think their lives are close to ideal.

- ▶ 93 percent believe their spouse is a good fit for the present church.

- ▶ 90 percent think ministry has had a positive effect on their family.

- ▶ 85 percent say, "The church we serve takes good care of us."

- ▶ 83 percent enjoy their ministry work.

- ▶ 79 percent are satisfied with their role in ministry. ✝

To read the full report, visit <http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Pastor-Spouse-Quantitative-Long-Report-2017.pdf>.

Bane or

Pastor's wife is key figure in life

By Martha Simmons

Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Bane or blessing: Life as a preacher's wife can bring a bit of both, according to a recent survey by LifeWay Research. To move the needle over to the "blessing" side of the dial, however, it takes a team effort of not just the ministry spouse, but also the pastor and the congregation.

Joe McKeever, an Alabama native who spent 42 years serving as pastor of six Southern Baptist churches and now writes and cartoons about church matters, wrote, "No one in the church family is more vulnerable than the pastor's wife. She is the key figure in the life of the pastor and plays the biggest role in his success or failure. And yet, many churches treat her as an unpaid employee, an uncalled assistant pastor, an always available office volunteer, a biblical expert and a psychological whiz."

McKeever quoted Zechariah 13:6 in describing the pastor's wife's dilemma: "What are these wounds? I was wounded in the house of my friends."

The minister's wife, McKeever said, "is the most vulnerable person in the building. That is to say, she is the single most likely person to become the victim of malicious gossip, sneaky innuendo, impossible expectations and pastoral frustrations." And most of the time, McKeever added, she must suffer these slings and arrows in silence.

In a recent interview, Mark Dance, director of LifeWay Pastors, and his wife, Janet, who speaks to some 1,500 preachers' wives each year, talked about the LifeWay Research project sponsored by Houston's First Baptist Church, the North American Mission Board (NAMB) and Houston physician Richard Dockins.

The data, though not always positive, offers some solace, in that a minister's wife can see she's not alone in how she feels. "To be able to look at these numbers and say, 'You know what? I'm not a freak of the ministry,' that a lot of these other women are having some of the same feelings that I'm having, some of the same struggles,

some of the same joys," Janet Dance said, "I think that's huge, for us to be able to feel comfort in that."

If the needs of the minister's wife and family aren't taken care of, the whole ministry can suffer.

"A lot of a pastor's wellbeing is based on his wife's wellbeing because they are so connected," Janet Dance said. "How she feels about the ministry, how she feels about their specific ministry that they're currently in. A lot of those attitudes and feelings are going to be expressed at home and can either ease stress for him or cause greater stress for him. That sounds like I'm saying that they should have a good wellbeing for his sake but it's not quite that simple. It's

more for the sake of the ministry and God's work."

Fewer than one third of survey respondents planned quality time with their spouses (the ministers), and more than 1 in 3 agree their children resent how much time their spouse spends in ministry.

"Everybody's busy. In the ministry, the ministry is busy. I think that planning that is so crucial," Janet Dance said. "I know that in a busy life if we don't plan it, it's probably not going to happen on its own."

Balancing time between congregants and family can

be difficult, Mark Dance acknowledged, but pastors must learn "to say 'no' with confidence. Pastors deal with that struggle. That tug of war was mentioned by several spouses — 1 out of 3 felt caught in that tug of war between church and family."

Unreasonable expectations

Trying to live up to unreasonable expectations causes many heartaches for pastor's spouses, said Lisa Keane, a clinical director with Pathways Professional Counseling. Keane has worked with many pastors' wives who expressed the same feelings pointed out by the survey data. "I don't think any of this is surprising at all," Keane said of the research. "It's a pretty common thread of what they've experienced.

"Most pastors' wives feel like they're living in a pressure cooker," Keane said. Her clients come to her for help in "adjusting to the stress they feel, all the way down to

"A lot of a pastor's wellbeing is based on his wife's wellbeing because they are so connected."

**Janet Dance
wife of Mark Dance,
director of LifeWay Pastors**

55 percent [of pastors' spouses] say they don't have enough relationships where they can be themselves.

LifeWay Research survey

blissing?

of pastor, plays biggest role in his success or failure, McKeever says

clinical depression and clinical anxiety.”

Often that help comes in the form of pastors’ wives “working on what God’s expectations are versus what people in the congregation’s expectations are, making sure they’re not trying to meet unrealistic expectations for what people might set out for them.”

As an example, Keane told of a wife who was expected to follow in the footsteps of the previous pastor’s spouse, leading the youth and teaching Sunday School and the like. But that minister’s spouse “didn’t even like kids that much” and it created unnecessary strife for the wife and the church.

Different gifts

“Every wife comes with a different set of gifts and we need to honor those gifts and allow them to use those gifts,” Keane said. “We have to remember that spouses also have to take care of their own families. For a lot of moms, there’s not a lot of room to do much more.”

Spouses shouldn’t suffer in silence — they should talk to their husbands and also find friends with whom they can communicate. “They need to make sure they have open honest communication with their spouse about what they’re experiencing, how they’re feeling,” Keane said. “They need to be willing to set boundaries on time and resources. And they need to find local individuals or even online resources to connect with other people in similar situations.”

In addition to not setting or trying to live up to unrealistic expectations, spouses and congregants need to realize that nobody is perfect, according to Keane.

“Realize that everybody is human. ... Mistakes will be made,” she said.

Kathy Litton deals with these issues as a national consultant for NAMB’s ministry to pastors’ wives. Litton lives in Mobile with her husband Ed Litton, pastor of Redemption Church. Both lost former spouses in car accidents. Kathy has been a minister’s wife twice, for 26 years to the late Rick Ferguson and since 2009 to Ed.

Kathy Litton said the survey results reflect her own journey as a pastor’s wife plus those of “hundreds of conversations I have had with other wives.”

Although all humans, both clergy and laity, fall short of the grace of God, unreasonable expectations often set pastors and their families up for failure.

“Eugene Peterson has said, ‘Every congregation is a congregation of sinners. As



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if that weren’t bad enough, they all have sinners for pastors.’ When we fully grasp that we all need the gospel, it puts us all on equal footing and then true community and fellowship can happen,” Kathy Litton said. “Unfortunately, I think the isolation is often created by those who don’t understand and apply the gospel to the community of the church.

“Then people tend to keep the pastor and his wife at arm’s length. Yet he, his wife and his kids desperately need the same Jesus the church family does,” she said “Neither of them should think otherwise. When we get that, we can live in honest, vulnerable community together, no more pretending and performing.”

Authenticity is key.

Process of sanctification

“When our churches are free to be honest and open about their humanity and flaws in the pew or in the pulpit, the power of the gospel is on great display in our lives,” Kathy Litton said. “Jesus is glorified because we are all in the process of sanctification, which is a messy but beautiful process for the pastor and the congregation. People without Christ are looking for

authentic people of faith as never before.”

Ministers also must prioritize their wives’ needs. “I know these men love their wives and are immensely grateful for their partnership,” she said, “but the demands on him can overwhelm his capacity to give her care. Yet his first calling was to her and not his church. Her health is imperative.

“I would encourage husbands to be aware of how their wife is doing in her role. He needs to lean in by listening to her and shepherding her heart. Is she lonely? Is she over-serving? Is she in a dry place? Has she been wounded? He can then step into her struggles and together they work toward solutions or avenues that will address her issues. In doing this they will leave one of the most profound footprints a minister and his wife will ever leave their family, a church or the community — a healthy, honest, growing marriage.”

Southern Baptist ministers’ wives may have support they have not accessed, Kathy Litton added.

“Many state conventions and associations have made tremendous strides in providing resources and events to ministry wives,” she said, adding, however, that “care and nurturing to ministry wives are best delivered

at the local level where context is shared and similar. Obviously, this is happening in some places more than others.”

Ministering to ministry wives

Unfortunately many ministry wives aren’t accessing the help that is available, Kathy Litton said. “Sadly, in my experience it is extremely challenging to get wives to participate — primarily because of the tremendous time demands placed on their lives — as more than half of ministry wives work outside the home.”

One option for these busy spouses, she suggested, is an online blog called “Flourish,” written by ministry wives for ministry wives: www.flourish.me.

And while there is troubling data to contend with in the ministry spouses survey, Kathy Litton identified some silver linings, especially the number of wives who felt their own call.

“The result on calling was a pleasant surprise — nearly 80 percent of wives felt a personal call to ministry,” she said.

“I was encouraged by that and increasingly see the generations coming into our ministry context as more able to passionately articulate a personal call.” ✠

'In All Things Pray' opens 2018 for Southern Baptists

The month-long prayer emphasis "In All Things Pray" opens 2018 on the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) calendar, encouraging churches to pray corporately for 60 minutes at least weekly in January.

Standing on Acts 1:8 and 2 Chronicles 7:14, "In All Things Pray" encourages 10 minutes of Scripture reading, public leadership and worship; 20 minutes of vocalized prayer requests; and 30 minutes of guided prayer in each hour-long service, event organizers said.

"We are hopeful churches will use the 10–20–30 corporate prayer model in at least one of their weekly gatherings during January," said Roger "Sing" Oldham, SBC Executive Committee vice president for convention communications and relations. "The 10–20–30 model is very interactive and is ideal for a midweek prayer service."

Oldham represents the Executive Committee on PrayerLink, a national organization of prayer ministry leaders that helped the Executive Committee develop this year's prayer focus.

"We think people will be refreshed by spending a complete hour in focused prayer," Oldham said, "and encouraged at how quickly a one-hour time of prayer will pass, perhaps spurring them on in their personal times of prayer at home."

Four categories of prayer concerns drawn from Acts 1:8 are offered among resources at InAllThingsPray.net for suggested use, all or in part.

Family and friends

Target this group by creating a prayer list of family members to pray for daily. Using the CrossRoads Prayer Evangelism ministry referenced at InAllThingsPray.net, encourage congregants to list five friends and track their prayer and outreach targeting the individuals. Ask church members to write on note cards the names of unchurched and lost

family members, bring the cards to the altar and place them before the Lord.

Church and community

Lead church members in praying specifically for evangelistic events on the first half of the church's 2018 calendar, such as Vacation Bible School, revivals or special music programs. The church's continued health, ministry teams and committees are among other suggested prayer concerns.

The United States and its peoples

Read 1 Timothy 2:1–6 aloud during the morning worship service and encourage prayer for the nation. Mention the names of elected officials during the pastoral prayer. Ask the Lord to call from within your congregation members who will serve as pastors, missionaries and church planters. Pray for the different ethnicities living within the nation and for the racial reconciliation that is possible only through salvation in Jesus Christ.

The world and its people groups

During the pastoral prayer, petition the Lord on behalf of those within the congregation who may be sensing a call to international ministry. Ask the Lord to give International Mission Board trustees and leaders divine wisdom and guidance in challenging Southern Baptists to be on mission with God. Ask for wisdom and mercy for international missionaries working in dangerous locations.

PrayerLink is composed of prayer coordinators from Southern Baptist entities and the Executive Committee, Woman's Missionary Union, state Baptist conventions and Southern Baptist ethnic and language fellowships. PrayerLink collaborates with groups represented in its membership to foster a Great Commission prayer mindset among Southern Baptists and other Christ-followers and to promote Great Commission prayer ministries for Southern Baptist churches. (BP)

Additional resources and promotional materials are available at InAllThingsPray.net.

Across ALABAMA'S Associations

MONTGOMERY

► **Trinity Memorial Church, Montgomery**, will host Squire Parsons in concert Jan. 12, 7 p.m. Stanley Holt is pastor.

DEKALB

► **Ruhama Church, Fort Payne**, recently ordained Johnny Johnson as a deacon. Chris Murdock is pastor.



JOHNSON

NORTH JEFFERSON

► **Cardiff Church** has closed. There

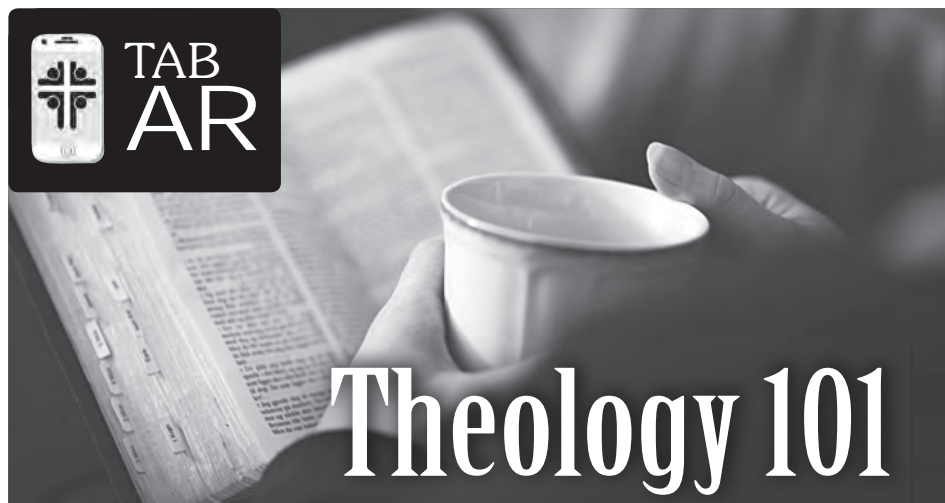
was no pastor at the time of its closing.

SOUTHEAST ALABAMA

► **Malvern Church** will hold a Gospel Sing on Jan. 13, 6 p.m. The Giles Family and Walter Wilson will perform special music. Refreshments will follow the service. Hosea Parker is pastor. ☛

Correction

While New Bethel Church, Warrior, does contribute to the Cane Creek food bank, the pre-K class mentioned in the Dec. 21 "Labor of love" article is from Bethel Church, Dora.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

God's Self-Revelation

Revealed in Holy Scripture

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

If we grant that God has revealed something of Himself in nature, in us as His human image-bearers and most fully in His incarnate Son, we still need the lens of Holy Scripture through which to see accurately and understand fully to what extent God has revealed Himself in these ways. At the outset we must acknowledge that while we can know God as He had revealed Himself, we cannot know Him fully. This inability to know God fully has been described in the technical sense as "the incomprehensibility of God."

This phrase is not intended to say that God cannot be known, only that the Creator cannot be fully or exhaustively known by the creature. Given His self-revelation, we confess that we can know God truly but not totally. Part of the reason for such incomprehensibility is our finiteness and part of the reason is God's infinity. Such is the sense of Psalm 145:3: "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable." In a similar vein Psalm 147:5 declares, "Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; His understanding is beyond measure."

Knowledge of God

Given the inspiration of Holy Scripture, what it tells us about God is absolutely true. It is, however, not exhaustive. God is greater than even inspired words can tell and illumined human minds can receive. There is, however, a positive side to God's incomprehensibility. For one thing, we will never run out of things to learn about God. Throughout our lifetimes and for all eternity believers will be able to go on increasing in their knowledge of God. The realization that God is greater than our thoughts of Him caused the psalmist to exclaim, "How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand" (Ps. 139:17–18a).

What we can know about God's self-revelation is captured in Holy Scripture. God chose to reveal Himself to His

covenant people Israel through historical events interpreted and recorded by inspired prophets. Their prophetic consciousness enabled them to grasp God's self-revelation through historical events, as well as through direct encounters with God mediated in visions and dreams and on occasion by verbal expressions, as expressed in Exodus 33:11 that "the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend" or the claim of Isaiah that he saw the Lord and then heard the voice of the Lord (Isa. 6:1–8).

Know God Himself

God's self-revelation in Holy Scripture is given not only that we should know facts about God but more importantly that we know God Himself. If I should say, "I know George Washington," the most I could mean is that I know some facts about the father of our nation. I could not say truthfully that I know him unless I had lived when he lived, met him, spent time with him and talked with him.

God's communication with the prophet Jeremiah is to the point: "Thus says the Lord: 'Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight,' declares the Lord" (Jer. 9:23–24). God delights when we know Him better and better. Why not make this a goal in the new year? ☛

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.



Attention: Church sound teams

Most popular frequency for wireless microphones in churches no longer available

By Anna Keller
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Church sound teams, listen up — and you may need a different mic frequency to do so. Recently the U.S. government auctioned off most of the 600 MHz frequency band to private companies and now T-Mobile is in control of most of that band of frequencies.

By July 2020, and earlier in some areas, people must cease using this band or face financial penalties.

Many, if not most, wireless microphones in churches use the 600 MHz band.

“The auctioned frequencies in the 600 MHz range is probably the most used band,” said Gary Gunn, a wireless microphone expert at Vision2 Marketing in Nashville.

‘More interference’

“The problem is that the units will not stop working but will start having more and more interference.”

Although it means investing in new equipment, Gunn said he encourages churches not to continue in what will soon be an illegal system.

“It is only a matter of time until more of the frequency spectrum will be sold off, so investment in new digital wireless mic systems seems to be the best answer at this point,” he added.

“I would highly recommend that churches look to a reputable sound com-

FAQs

▶ **Is my church’s sound equipment affected?** If your church has purchased any wireless unit in the past 10–15 years, you likely have at least one unit in the 600 MHz band as it’s been the most popular band for several years.

▶ **What other bands are available?** The best option is the 450–599 MHz range.

▶ **How can you tell which frequency band your church’s mics are using?** Check for a sticker stating the mic’s frequency, which all wireless microphone transmitters and receivers are required to have.

▶ **How long do we have to update our equipment?** All equipment must be updated by July 2020 and sooner in some areas. (Anna Keller)



123rf.com

pany for evaluation of their wireless needs.”

Churches and other organizations who don’t move away from using the 600 MHz range will potentially face a fine that could reach into a six-figure range, according to Michael Thompson, president of Thompson Sound, Inc.

Thompson recommends sticking within the 450–599 MHz range.

‘No guarantee’

There are other bands available but Thompson predicts the 800–900 MHz bands will be the next to be sold off by the FCC. Plus some cellphone providers use

the 800–900 MHz bands, he explained.

“Customers must recognize that they do not ‘own’ any frequency, and just because a wireless unit has operated for a period of time with no problems, there is no guarantee that it will continue to operate interference free in the future,” Thompson said. ☩



John A. Broadus, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary — which was founded in Greenville, South Carolina, in 1858 before moving to Louisville, Kentucky, in 1877 — was referred to “as an affable beggar” in a June 25, 1877, article in *The Alabama Baptist*. “But really no beggar at all for he merely makes a few pointed suggestions that some worthy young men at the seminary need help and some help always comes,” the article stated. The article emphasized the need in the South for “a zealous, educated and orthodox ministry.”

Author Higgs to speak in Montgomery

Liz Curtis Higgs, a beloved author and speaker, will be at Eastern Hills Baptist Church, Montgomery, on Jan. 25–26 for the church’s women’s conference.

During the conference, Higgs will speak on the topic of one of her books, “It’s Good to Be Queen: Becoming as Bold, Gracious and Wise as the Queen of Sheba.”

Over the course of her ministry, Higgs has written 37 books and spoken at more than 1,700

conferences in all 50 states and 15 countries.

She delivers messages that are “biblical, encouraging, down-to-earth and profoundly funny, helping both sisters and seekers embrace the truth of God’s amazing, unchanging grace,” according to her website.

For more information about the event or to purchase tickets, visit www.ehbconline.com/event/womens-conference.



HIGGS

(Grace Thornton)

Theologian RC Sproul dies at 78

Theologian R.C. Sproul, who founded Florida-based Ligonier Ministries and authored dozens of books, has died at age 78. Sproul died Dec. 14, 2017, from respiratory complications of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and the flu.

An ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church in America and co-pastor of St. Andrew’s Chapel in Sanford, Florida, Sproul was a respected Bible teacher and preacher. He was known for his worldwide radio broadcast, “Renewing Your Mind,” as well as books such as “Everyone’s a Theologian” and “Defending Your Faith.” He served as chancellor of Reformation Bible College in Sanford, which was founded in 2011 as an extension of Ligonier Ministries.

In a Dec. 1, 2017, tweet Sproul wrote about his belief in eternity: “When God writes our names in the ‘Lamb’s Book of Life,’ He doesn’t do it with an eraser handy. He does it for eternity.” (RNS)

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Importance of Listening

Listening well is part of critical conversations, professional counselor says

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

Most days Darius comes home from school chattering nonstop about his day, so his mom noticed one day when instead of stopping in the kitchen for a snack, he went straight to his room.

She hesitantly knocked on his door and

entered to find him sitting on his bed, a sullen expression on his face. It was obvious something had happened and equally obvious Darius was not going to initiate a conversation. What should Mom do?

Scenarios like this play out in homes every day. Children and adults alike have bad days — they're just part of life. But individuals process these situations differently, according to Rod Campbell, a licensed professional counselor with Pathways Professional Counseling, a ministry of Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries.

"Some people need lots of time to think things through before they are ready to talk," Campbell said. "For others, especially those wired to be auditory processors, talking something through might be an integral part of figuring out their own feelings and thoughts on a matter."

For parents, being sensitive to their child's individual gifting and needs is critical. In other words, "be present, supportive and available but let them lead the way," Campbell said.

Basic principles of counseling can help parents as well. Elisabeth Nesbit Sbanotto, lead author of "Skills for

Effective Counseling: A Faith-Based Integration," writes that the goals of counseling are not to give advice, fix things or to help counselees "feel better." Instead, counseling is about helping another person see their strengths and set short- and long-term goals based on their strengths and needs.

Campbell agrees.

"Listening is the real key here. As parents, we are so often motivated to provide solutions or intervene to end suffering. Instead, think of yourself as a consultant. Don't focus so much on 'fixing' the problem as on helping your child dig through the mess to make sense of it," he said.

For example, a child who has been embarrassed may express anger. Listening to the story will help a parent see the hurt underneath the anger and respond appropriately to the feelings. The best words express compassion toward the hurting heart: "That must have hurt your feelings." or "Oh, no! I bet that was so embarrassing!"

Communication is first

"Think in terms of bearing one another's burdens," Campbell said. "You can't stop your child from going through difficult times, but they do not have to go through them alone."

Communication must be the first step and communication is different from problem solving, Campbell said. Communication is about sending and receiving clear messages. Problem solving asks "What now?" When faced with a difficult situation, focus on communication first and problem solving later, he suggests.

"It is very important in relationships that we not rush through the communication phase and become so focused on the problem solving that we miss an opportunity to connect with one another and even miss that part where we agree on what the problem actually is prior to trying to solve it," Campbell said.

Questions can help the communication process move along more effectively, and Campbell said the best questions are those that invite the speaker to explain more fully and explore the situation more completely, such as:

- ▶ Can you tell me more about []? I'm not sure I understood that part.

▶ How can I help?

▶ How did you feel while that was happening?

▶ What ideas do you have about how to go forward from here?

"Any questions that start with the word 'why' or that are phrased in a way that seem to require justification for actions or an explanation of behavior tend to shut down communication," Campbell said.

Asking good questions

For instance, "Help me understand. What was it that hurt you about what she said?" might be a really good question to ask, Campbell said. But "Why did that hurt your feelings?" might not be as helpful, especially depending on the tone of voice and body language with which it is asked. The first question invites the speaker to examine their own heart and give further voice to their feelings while the second example can very easily sound as though the speaker is being required to defend their experience.

"One of my favorite rules of counseling is 'If you have enough information to ask a question, you have enough information to make a statement.' So first, the best questions aren't questions at all but are instead short statements which indicate you are listening and trying to understand," Campbell said. "Statements like 'That must have hurt you,' 'That is so sad' or 'That sounds like it was so discouraging' can be the most helpful responses a parent can employ.

Those statements indicate that the parent is listening, is trying to understand and has empathy for the child in the current situation."✦

BELIEVERS:

A quick tip

Art of conversation

Fear the art of conversation is a dying art. Notice what people are doing in the waiting room, restaurant or even at home in the family room. They are either watching TV or looking at their devices. Very seldom are they having a conversation.

Yet conversation is the DNA of all relationships. Without conversation, marriages disintegrate, children become aloof and isolated, misunderstandings on all levels abound and evangelism is limited.

Here are some suggestions for rediscovering the art of conversation.

1. Follow the example of Jesus.

He was the master of the art of conversation. John 4 is a classic example as He engaged the woman at the well. Notice how He turned the conversation to eternal matters. A lack of conversation skills limits our ability to share the gospel.

2. Parents, the skill of conversation is taught in the home. It may be more caught than it is taught.

3. Do whatever it takes to have meals together. Mealtime is prime time for conversation — no media devices allowed at the table and no TV on.

4. The key to good conversation is learning how to ask the right questions. This comes with practice. And no one word answers allowed.

— Chip Warren, ministry leader ✦





True 'face time'

123rf.com

Decline in conversation skills hurts relationships in today's digital culture

By **Carrie Brown McWhorter**
The Alabama Baptist

University of Mobile (UM) professor Buddy Landry likens technology's impact on human behavior to a hammer — it all depends on how you use it.

"Technology is like any other tool — it's neither good nor bad in and of itself. A tool like a hammer can be used to build a Habitat for Humanity home, or it can be used to harm someone. Right or wrong, good or evil is not about the tool but about how it's used. The same goes for tech," said Landry, associate professor and chair of the department of marriage and family counseling at UM.

Technology offers a range of communication tools we carry around with us daily — smartphones, tablets, social media apps and the Internet to name a few — and like all tools, they have potential, but the potential is in how we choose to use the tool, not in the tool itself.

'Spoken' words

By most formal definitions, a conversation must include the exchange of ideas via "spoken" words. Increasingly, however, people engage with each other via electronic media — by messaging apps, text or email — in written instead of spoken words. Even if conversation is defined more broadly to include electronic communication, this kind of engagement does not allow participants to observe body language, to hear tone of voice or to interpret another's facial expressions.

The resulting loss is significant relation-

ally, writes Tony Reinke, author of "12 Ways Your Phone is Changing You."

"A good conversation involves listening and timing, and that is pretty much taken away with internet communications because you are not there with the person," he writes. "Our online habits change our relational habits: both become clipped and superficial, and we become more easily distracted and less patient with one another."

In her TED Talk "Connected, But Alone?" social science researcher Sherry Turkle shares common practices she has observed in today's tech-saturated world: college students shopping online during classes, parents texting at the dinner table, co-workers who send an email

rather than step across the hall to someone's office, groups of friends sitting around together, all eyes glued to their phones.

Turkle believes these habits are increasingly hurting our ability to relate to others and to ourselves, especially within families.

In her book "Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age," Turkle writes,

"We can share so much more with our families — videos, photographs, games, the whole wide world. And we can be 'with' our families in new ways — in some ways, never apart."

"To join in conversation is to imagine another mind, to empathize and to enjoy gesture, humor and irony in the medium of talk."

Sherry Turkle
social science researcher

But this connectedness has resulted in more and more interactions taking place online. Families even tell Turkle they like to have arguments through text, email or chat because it "helps them express themselves more precisely."

Turkle says the result of this migration to online communication is a "crisis in mentorship" when it comes to teaching children how to relate to others.

"We need family conversations because of the work they do — beginning with what they teach children about themselves and how to get along with other people. To join in conversation is to imagine another mind, to empathize and to enjoy gesture, humor and irony in the medium of talk."

Family conversations also teach children how to listen, an important skill, Turkle writes.

"It is in family conversations that children have the greatest chance of learning that what other people are saying (and how they are saying it) is the key to what they are feeling. And this matters. So family conversations are a training ground for empathy," according to Turkle.

The difference is in communicating versus conversing, Landry said.

"We can use words to communicate ideas electronically but often something is lost in translation," Landry said. "How many of us

have sent an email or text and it has been taken the wrong way or part of the message has been misinterpreted?"

Communication research suggests that much of the give and take of conversation happens nonverbally through the volume and cadence of our voice, facial expressions and body position, Landry said. That's one reason emojis have become popular — words alone aren't capturing what we're trying to communicate.

Tech dependent

"We recognize that there's a presence, an immediacy about an interaction that has a personal nature to it which is lost when we're not face to face. It's hard to deny the humanity of the person you're interacting with when they're right there in front of you," Landry said.

Being tech savvy is one thing, Landry said. Being tech dependent is another.

"People have trouble putting it down," he said. "In church, at the doctor's office, in classrooms and at the dinner table, technology is something that has become part of our lives and a part of many people's identity."

What is the solution? Landry said it's simple but not necessarily easy. Families must make it a priority and a practice to establish regular times when technology is off limits, such as certain hours of the day or tech-free weekends.

"Protect those times and dedicate them to true 'face time' with family and friends," he urges. "God created us for relationship with Him and with others, and authentic personal relationships are developed through time spent in direct personal interaction in each other's presence." ✝

Spread of D-Life

Disciple-making model helps Alabama Baptists study God's Word

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

As far as Stan Albright can tell looking through his church's 181-year history, they've never had a year like the most recent one — not even close.

"Best we can tell, 36 is the most we've ever baptized," said Albright, pastor of First Baptist Church, Oxford.

But in 2017 they baptized more than 80.

"It's been an amazing time for our church," he said.

And as he looked at the things that made a positive impact, it really came down to two, he said — the goodness of God and the spread of D-Life.

"D-Life has been a major contributor," Albright said.

D-Life is a disciple-making model started by Bill Wilks, pas-

tor of NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville, and produced by Life Bible Study headquartered in Birmingham. It offers a year-long reading plan that has participants reading one chapter of the Bible each day on their own, then coming together once a week in small groups to discuss it.

When they meet, one person facilitates. Another leads a prayer. A third retells the story that's assigned for the week, a story they will have all read in their personal time in the Word. A fourth person will read it from the Bible to see if anything was left out.

Each group chooses its own time and place for meeting up.

And right now, First, Oxford, has more than 200 people meeting weekly in 40 groups.

"They are learning how to study

God's Word in a way of communication and fellowship," Albright said. "People who have never read through the Bible before are learning things about God's Word and being able to apply it to their lives in ways they never have before."

Not only that, they are inviting their friends, and they're introducing it to other churches, Albright said.

"We know of at least five other congregations that have started D-Life whose first exposure was out of one of our D-Life groups," he said. "I can't say enough about how it's been a major inspiration in the life of our church."

Wilks said that more than 50 churches in Alabama have started using D-Life to equip their congregations for lifestyle

evangelism. And it doesn't stop there — churches in 28 states and six countries have started using D-Life methods too.

Two upcoming workshops led by Wilks will offer training for any churches interested in starting D-Life groups in their own congregations:

► Central Alabama Boot Camp, held at Samford University in Birmingham, Jan. 20

► South Alabama Boot Camp, held at University of Mobile (UM), Feb. 24

Both are statewide workshops and are sponsored by Life Bible Study, *The Alabama Baptist*, Samford's Ministry Training Institute, UM, Birmingham Baptist Association, Mobile Baptist Association and Passion Tree. ☛



For more information, visit www.livethedlife.com or contact Bill Wilks at 205-228-0030.

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PASTOR

Calvary Baptist Church in Belmont, Mississippi, is seeking a full-time pastor. We are members of the SBC seeking the man God has prepared to lead us in His will. Please submit resumés to: cbcpastorapp@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Bethel Baptist Church, Highway 5, Brent, Alabama, is searching for a bivocational pastor. Please send resumé to: Bethel Baptist Church, c/o John D. Russell, 298 Tabernacle Rd., Brent, AL 35034, or email to: russellcatering@bellsouth.net.

PART-TIME MUSIC DIRECTOR

Lakeview Baptist Church, Oxford, Alabama, is seeking a music director. This is a paid, part-time position. They will supervise the planning and leading of our worship services in an energetic, blended

style. Their primary additional responsibility will be to lead the choir ministry and choir rehearsals. Interested persons should send a resumé to: lburell@cablone.net and/or contact Lem Burell at 256-846-2807.

MINISTER TO STUDENTS

First Baptist Church of Oxford, Alabama, is seeking a full-time minister to students. Our student ministry is a thriving ministry focused on reaching, equipping and sending students for the glory of Christ. This ministry position covers grades 7 through college. Please send resumés to: the Personnel Committee at: 95 E. Oak St., Oxford, AL 36203, or you may email resumés to: stan@firstbaptistoxford.org.

DIRECTOR OF STUDENT MINISTRY

Redeemer Community Church in Oneonta, Alabama, seeks a full-time director of student ministry. This individual will be responsible to lead a student ministry for 6th–12th grade. Email resumés and references to: matt@redeemeroneonta.org.

MINISTER TO CHILDREN

First Baptist Church of Oxford, Alabama, is seeking a full-time

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OTHER POSITIONS

BUSINESS ADMINISTRATOR

North Shelby Baptist Church is accepting resumés for the full-time position of business administrator. Responsibilities include overseeing the operations and maintenance of the facility and the financial activities of the church. Candidates should have knowledge of church operations, supervisory experience, physical facilities management, as well as experience and education in business management. Qualified candidates can send their resumé to: administrator@northshelbybaptist.org.

CHURCH SECRETARY

Sherwood Baptist Church in Huntsville, Alabama, is looking for a church secretary. If interested, email resumés to: pruetjib@aol.com or mail to: Personnel Committee, Sherwood Baptist Church, 6600 Old Madison Pike

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

'Annual event ministry'

Calhoun DOM prepares for 10th year of revival-style preaching in Japan

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

For many pastors, when it comes to preaching through a translator on a missions trip, most of the preparation happens in the moment — it's just a lot of self-reminders to slow down and take breaks.

But for Roger Willmore, it's a much more intense situation.

"In Japan, they are very meticulous about the translation," said Willmore, director of missions for Calhoun Baptist Association.

And because of their attention to detail, he's getting ready to turn in the full text of sermons he will be preaching there at Keswick Conventions for the entire month of February.

The translators need a month to prepare the Japanese versions, Willmore said. And once he's in Japan, he will spend at least an hour per sermon with his translator preparing for the speech itself.

"The Japanese take correctness and accuracy and relevance very,

very seriously," he said. "The translators work very hard to know the correct translation, the tone and the aim."

Japan has had a special place in his heart ever since he preached his first Keswick Convention there 10 years ago.

Keswick meetings, which started nearly 143 years ago in England, are revival-style meetings that follow a certain format and emphasize key points of the faith, points like the assurance of cleansing from sin and the power of the Holy Spirit.

The convention's ultimate purpose is the total dedication of life to God, Willmore said.

Respect for age

He was introduced to the Japanese Keswick leaders by the late Stephen Olford, who trained pastors in expositional preaching.

When the Japanese Keswick leaders first saw Willmore in 2008,



WILLMORE

Roger Willmore preaches with a translator at a past Keswick Convention in Tokyo, Japan.

they started chattering among themselves.

"I asked my translator what they were talking about and he said they were talking about how young I was. They thought I was too young to preach there," Willmore said. "I was 55."

It's a culture that has a great respect for age, he said.

"My acceptance and credibility there was almost solely because of Stephen Olford's recommendation," Willmore said. "He was so beloved and respected."

And in the years since, the people of Japan have captured Willmore's heart, he said. The upcoming February experience will be his 10th trip to Japan.

While there, he will speak at

Keswick Conventions in Okinawa, Toukoku, Osaka, Tokyo and Kobe, the place where missionary Lottie Moon died as her ship headed back from China to the United States.

Significant event

"The Keswick Conventions have been in Japan for more than 50 years and are a significant annual event ministry in the country," Willmore said.

Selected sermons from all of the speakers are edited and compiled into a book of sermons called "The Keswick Week," he said. Those books are then widely distributed and the video sermons are aired on television.

"The desire of the Keswick leaders is to saturate the country with

the biblical messages given at the Keswick Conventions," Willmore said. "One Keswick Convention has a significant ripple effect."

He saw the need for that ripple effect the first time he stood in the middle of Tokyo's 37 million people and felt the crush of a heartbreaking reality.

"Only eight-tenths of 1 percent of their population is evangelical Christian," he said. "When I see the masses, the question comes to mind — where are they going? The reality is that nearly all of them are slipping into a Christless eternity."

That stuck with Willmore. "I have a genuine burden for them," he said. "And because of that, I keep going back." ✠

University of Mobile holds December commencement ceremony for graduates

As the chimes of Lyon Chapel rang across campus, University of Mobile (UM) awarded diplomas to 100 graduates during commencement ceremonies Dec. 16, 2017.

More than 1,200 family and friends gathered in front of Weaver Hall on the Dr. Fred and Sue Lackey Great Commission Lawn to celebrate the accomplishments of those receiving master's, bachelor's and associate's degrees.

Alabama State Rep. Rusty Glover delivered the commencement address, urging graduates to exhibit a strong work ethic and to share their faith.

"You are so blessed, and there is so much you can offer the world. The best gift you can give is to share the love of Jesus Christ through your testimony," said Glover, a retired history teacher and author who has represented the 34th District in the Alabama Senate since 2006.



Photo courtesy of University of Mobile

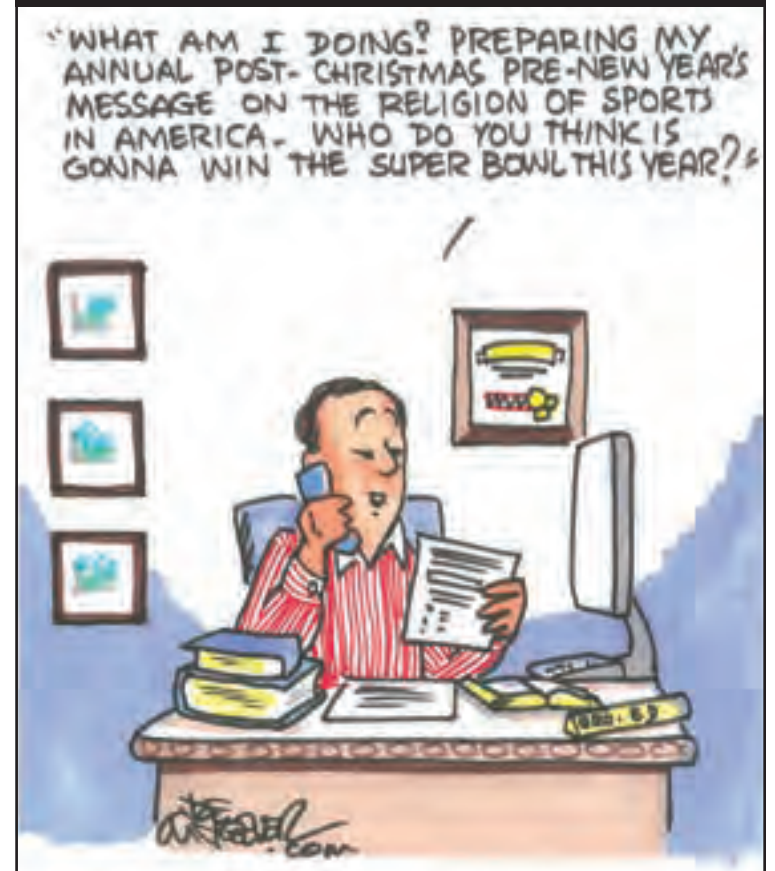
UM President Dr. Timothy L. Smith presented diplomas and congratulated the new graduates. Jane Finley, a retiring professor in the School of Business, carried the ceremonial mace at the head of the procession of faculty and graduates.

During the recession, graduates carried on the university's Great Commission Tradition, touching the granite Great Commission Globe as they passed. The action signifies their readiness to enter the world and fulfill their professional calling. It is a two-part tradition that begins for new students during President's Commissioning, when they touch the globe as they start their college journey.

J.R. Krivsky was among the graduates. He earned a bachelor's degree in worship leadership and will move to Texas for a position as associate worship pastor at North Richland Hills Baptist Church near Fort Worth. Krivsky said the practical experiences offered at UM prepared him for his new role.

"I'm able to do what I feel called to do," he said. "I can focus on leading people in worship." (UM)

REFLECTIONS



Demonstrating love *in* action

Montgomery church sets out to learn sign language, welcome deaf community

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

One Sunday as Pastor Paul Gourdine was preaching at Engaged Christian Church, Montgomery, he looked out and saw a touching sight — a lady in the congregation was translating the sermon into sign language for someone there who was hearing impaired.

“I had two thoughts — the first was that we needed to make sure that the deaf person felt comfortable and welcomed,” Paul Gourdine said. “The second was that we needed to make sure the person doing the sign language didn’t burn out.”

So he did something big — he challenged the whole church to learn some of the young man’s heart language.

Involving the church

“On Sunday mornings, we’ve been teaching the church to say ‘how are you doing,’ ‘I’m fine,’ ‘you’re welcome’ and other phrases,” he said. “Most of the kids who attend children’s church can sign the alphabet. We want to at least be able to greet them. We’re doing that so that these individuals don’t feel bypassed.”

And he didn’t stop there — he challenged the congregation to dig deeper and take some classes.

His wife, Mecco, was 1 of 6 who did.

“Our instructor, Loretta Hatchett, has a heart for this,” Mecco Gourdine said. “This is her ministry, this is her gift — she cares for hard-of-hearing individuals.”

That showed up in how Hatchett led the classes offered by the church — “she was tough on us,” Mecco Gourdine said with a laugh. “She walked in and just started talking with us in sign language from the beginning — there was no speaking.”

And as time went on, Hatchett challenged them with another project — to have a Christmas program that included the deaf community.

“She said, ‘I know some individuals who don’t even attend church because they don’t feel included or accepted,’” Mecco Gourdine said. “She suggested that maybe we could invite them for a silent dinner.”

So Engaged Christian Church did. On Dec. 17, 2017, they had a Christmas program with a sensitivity toward the hearing impaired. While the choir sang, a group of six stood up in front and signed the song. When the children sang, they incorporated sign language into their music.

And one of those songs — “Behold the Lamb” — was led by Scout, the hearing-impaired young man who had sparked Paul Gourdine’s vision in the first place.

“All of this would’ve been worth it just for Scout,” Mecco Gourdine said.

But on that morning, 35 hearing impaired people came, all invited by Hatchett.

“We were grateful for their presence,” Mecco Gourdine said. “We were just as excited as they were to have them there.”

And after the morning service, the church held a silent dinner for its 35 guests.

“We wanted to demonstrate love in action,” Paul Gourdine said. That’s been their



Photo by Joshua Agee

Sign language instructor Loretta Hatchett (left) interprets for the deaf as Pastor Paul Gourdine speaks at Engaged Christian Church, Montgomery.

goal ever since the church was planted in 2016 — they’ve engaged the community in a variety of ways. They ran an eye clinic that helped 1,000 patients. They provided the local high school with refrigerators to keep students’ medications cool. They regularly feed the homeless.

“Our purpose is to share the message of Jesus Christ, so we’re excited about this new way to do that,” Mecco Gourdine said of the dinner. “It was worth it just to hear them say when they were walking out the door that they had a good time and would be coming back.”

Neal Hughes, director of missions for Montgomery Baptist Association, said he’s seen it demonstrated over and over again that the word “engaged” is intentional for the church.

“They absolutely from the get-go engaged the community, and they have constantly looked for new ways to do that,” Hughes said of the church, which now meets in the former McGehee Road Baptist Church building. “Paul Gourdine is a visionary leader and he leads the church to meet human needs and plant gospel seeds.”

The deaf in the area have a place to call home now, he said. “It is a much-needed ministry and God has blessed it.”

Deaf church in Birmingham still going strong after six decades

For 60 years now, there’s been a church in Birmingham whose services are a little more silent than most.

But the gospel has resonated loudly in the hearts of its members and it continues to be a light to the community, according to Pastor Cromwell Josey.

In March 1957 the church was started at Woodlawn Baptist Church (now Liberty Park Baptist Church) by Neal Peyton, who served as its minister to the deaf. The deaf there wanted a preaching service in their language, and Peyton began signing that on Sundays.

In the coming decades, it moved several times and switched from being a signed service to an interpreted service, then back to being a signed service again. Now it is housed at the Mountain View Building on the campus of Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham and is called the Birmingham Community Deaf Church (BCDC).

“We’re all just a family,” Josey said, according to an article in *Vestavia Voice* in March. “The deaf are scattered.”

But at BCDC, they come together. (TAB)

Upcoming events for the deaf

January 12–14

Deaf Men’s Zone at Shocco Springs Conference Center in Talladega, a deaf men’s retreat with a guest speaker in ASL (voice interpreted for hearing guests). **For more information, visit www.deafmenzone.org.**

March 2–4

Alabama Baptist Conference of the Deaf at First Baptist Church, Oxford, an annual conference for deaf ministries and churches all over Alabama to gather for fellowship, workshops, meals and worship services. **For more information, visit www.abcdeafdotorg.wordpress.com.**

July 23–27

Deaf Camp at Children’s Harbor in Alexander City, a weeklong children’s and youth camp for the deaf, HH (hard of hearing who move back and forth between hearing and deaf communities) and CODAs (children of deaf adults). **For more information, visit www.deafcampa2017.org.** (TAB)



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SNAPSHOTS OF LIFE WHEN LIFE HAPPENS

Seeking a renewed prayerful heart

During this past holiday season, my Uncle Wayne shared a bit about his recent journey through an in-depth study of prayer.

He's in his 70s and has been a believer for a long time but the experience of the past two years has renewed his joy and restored his heart in a way he said he has never felt.

I couldn't help but be captivated by the emotion and authentic sense of closeness to our Lord he expressed.

The freshness of the Word as he reads Scripture, the new authors he has discovered and the books on the topic of prayer he has read have all given him a renewed excitement for communicating with God.

Assessing prayer life

As I processed what he shared, I was challenged to evaluate my own prayer life and asked myself questions such as:

- ▶ What does prayer look like in my life?
- ▶ Do I honestly and sincerely pray for every situation or person in which I say I will pray?
- ▶ Am I able to truly put concerns in the Lord's hands first and then follow how He leads or do I try to help in my own way first and then pray as a last resort?
- ▶ Do I slow down to watch how God works in the situations going on around me?
- ▶ Am I in tune enough to notice what God is doing and how He uses us if we are available?
- ▶ Do I thank Him and praise Him even in the storms?
- ▶ What about the concept of praying without ceasing? Is that really possible? What does it look like?

Seriously, have you ever tried

to pray without ceasing? It is hard work.

I experimented with the concept one day, praying for every face I saw, every name that popped in my email inbox, every voice I heard on the phone, everyone that came to mind.

And wow was I exhausted at the end of the day.

Granted, I didn't pray long prayers but even spending the energy to pray for every single person and situation that passes through your day is an interesting exercise.

It definitely keeps you from fretting over unnecessary items, forces you to weed out frivolous thoughts and conversations and makes you aware of the many, many needs around you.

It also made me aware of just how many things I fail to pray for on any given day.

So as I'm making my goals for 2018 and hitting the ground running following the holidays, I'm working to keep focused, sincere prayer among my "must do" items each day — and remembering what Paul teaches us in 1 Corinthians 3, "only God gives the increase."✝



By Jennifer Davis Rash
Editor-elect



Signs of success in a believer's life

By Pastor Paul Gourdine
Engaged Christian Church, Montgomery

Pele said, "Success is no accident. It is hard work, perseverance, learning, studying, sacrifice and most of all, love of what you are doing or learning to do."

What the writer is saying is there is a formula that equals success and that formula is perseverance + learning + studying + sacrifice + love = success. When we commit to immersing ourselves to the things we are dedicated to, success has no choice but to be produced.

But the Bible gives a different mathematical equation found in John 3:2: "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth."

Translation — Walking in obedience to God + God's desire to see you prosper +

being in good health + your soul prospering in life = God's favor on you for the rest of your life.

You may never acquire a huge house or an expensive car or even make six figures but those things aren't the real signs of success in a person's life.

The real signs of success in a person's life are having people around you who love you whether you are wealthy or poor, having people who respect you with a suit on or overalls, having people who will come see about you whenever they hear something is wrong.

Real success in life is walking in God's plans and all of the other benefits of walking in obedience to God will come; but if they don't, they don't take away or add to the fearfully and wonderfully made person God says you are.✝

The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.

—**Author George Bernard Shaw**

The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said.

—**Author/businessman Peter Drucker**

We live in a world where common sense is not common.

—**Rick Lance, executive director, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions**

A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way and shows the way.

—**Author and leadership coach John C. Maxwell**

Impacting culture today

We've railed about our culture.

We've complained and complained about our culture but none of us are doing anything about it.

If you want to change culture, start telling your testimony.

We need more people sharing Jesus, talking about Christ, praying aloud than we do people railing against culture.

—**Stuart Davidson, pastor of Eastern Shore Baptist Church, Daphne**

When someone comes to you with bad news, it can be awkward. You want to be a good friend, but most people don't know what to say. ...

Oftentimes, we think it's a good idea to add a silver lining to the problem. ...

What we fail to realize is that it doesn't matter if you don't know what to say. All you really need is to be present and thank them for trusting you.

—**James Clear**

Excerpt from his article 'Make Your Life Better by Saying Thank You ...' at jamesclear.com

God is always the main character in our story.

Sometimes we get so consumed with all the details and demands of life that we forget why we're here and what our most important task is. ... My life, my story, is most of all an opportunity to point to the Lord.

—**Teri Lynne Underwood**
FBC Florence member

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For January 7

Explore the Bible By Jay T. Robertson, Ph.D. Assistant Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile

A CHANGED FAMILY Acts 16:22-34

Acts is the unfolding story of the people of God, filled with the Spirit of God, engaging in the mission of God. In Acts 16 we see Paul and Silas sharing the gospel in Philippi, a Roman colony and leading city in the district. Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great, had seized the city in the fourth century B.C., and it came under Roman domination in 168 B.C. and was enlarged in 42 B.C. The Roman influence was heavy in Philippi.

What do a wealthy businesswoman, a demon-possessed slave girl and a jailer have in common? In Acts 16 we see God save each of them by His grace. They become the charter members of the church in Philippi. Let's examine the conversion of the jailer.

The Situation (22-24)

After God saved the demon-possessed girl and exorcised the demon, her supernatural ability to secure financial gain for her owners was gone. Her owners dragged Paul and Silas into the marketplace, brought them to the magistrates and accused them of advocating customs contrary to the Roman way of life. The magistrates had Paul and Silas beaten and thrown into prison. The jailer put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in stocks. Paul and Silas suffered for proclaiming the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Opportunity (25-28)

These are convicting verses. As Paul and Silas suffered for doing what God had called them to do, they remained faithful. They turned the prison into a worship gathering. Their worship was God-centered, Word-driven and gospel-saturated. They did not base their theology on their circumstances; they evaluated those circumstances in light of what they knew to be true about God.

In the midst of their worship, God caused an earthquake that resulted in the prison doors being opened and everyone's bonds coming unfastened. The jailer woke up and saw what had happened. He was about to take his own life, fearing he had allowed his prisoners to escape. He knew a Roman soldier who allowed a prisoner to escape, no matter the cause, paid with his own life. But Paul cried out to him and assured him that all of the prisoners remained.

The Conversion (29-32)

The jailer secured the prisoners and then brought Paul and Silas out from the other prisoners and asked them the question burning in his heart: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" His question expressed the deep longing of his heart to be right with God. Having heard the testimony of the demon-possessed girl and the gospel Paul and Silas had apparently shared in the prison, he believed Paul and Silas had the answer.

To the jailer's simple and direct question the missionaries gave an equally simple and direct answer: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." To "believe in the Lord Jesus" means first to believe He is who He claimed to be (John 20:31). Second it means to believe in what Jesus did (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

The gospel was not preached to the jailer alone but also to the rest of his household. The missionaries "spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house." This husband and father's conversion led others in his home to believe the gospel and be saved as well. Making disciples should always begin in one's home.

The Transformation (33-34)

The jailer cared for Paul and Silas and fed them a meal. He and the people in his home were baptized. Genuine salvation always leads to genuine transformation. No one truly meets Jesus and stays the same. ☞

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

JESUS PROVIDES Mark 6:34-44

The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle of Jesus recorded in all four Gospels. This dramatic event highlights Jesus as the New Moses. Just as Moses provided food for His people in the wilderness, so Jesus will do the same — and more.

Jesus knows our needs and has compassion. (34-37)

Jesus and the disciples had wanted to get away for some "alone time," so they set off on a boat for a journey of four or five miles. However, the crowds "from all the towns" ran ahead and arrived at the destination before the boat did. Jesus' compassion for them as "shepherdless" recalls frequent images in the Old Testament for the failure of Israel's leaders, as with the wilderness generation (Num. 27:17), the nation under Ahab (1 Kings 22:17) and especially the plundered nations in Ezekiel 34:1-10 when the "false shepherds of Israel" were leading the people astray. The good news is that Jesus, the Davidic "Shepherd Messiah," will act on His compassion and lead all of His followers out of this world's wilderness to greener pastures.

"You give them something to eat" is emphatic in the Greek. The addition of the pronoun gives the command the force of "I mean you." The disciples are astonished, and their question about purchasing bread is disrespectful in tone. They did not have significant funds at their disposal to buy food for all. The disciples' words of frustration echo the cry of Moses in the wilderness: "Where can I find meat to feed all these people?" (Num. 11:13).

Jesus' seemingly insensitive demand of His disciples reveals His confidence in the disciples as under-shepherds. That confidence is undergirded by His power to provide all they need for the task with plenty

left over for themselves. Seen in this light, the great feeding is an encouraging word for weary disciples who are overwhelmed by the demands of ministry.

Jesus provides for all our needs. (38-44)

Notice that Jesus does not ask the disciples to do the impossible in their own power. He asks them, "What do you have?" How often is He asking us the same question when we are doubting our capacity to make a difference in a situation?

Our modern thinking might suppose that the fish was the main course, but in this time circular loaves of bread about eight inches in diameter and an inch thick constituted the main course of every meal. The dried fish served only as a condiment. Prior to the disciples distributing the food, Jesus as host blesses the bread. The series of verbs — "took," "gave thanks," "broke," "gave" — is precisely the same as in Mark 14:22 when Jesus blessed the bread at the Last Supper. The only deviation from a normal Jewish blessing of food was that Jesus looked upward toward heaven, rather than downward as tradition prescribed. In this intimate moment Jesus looks toward His Heavenly Father, pointing the crowd and ourselves to the source of all providence.

Clearly Mark, the writer, is pointing us to Jesus, who invites us to partake of the bread and the cup in remembrance of His providing us with eternal sustenance through His death and resurrection. The feeding miracle, along with the Lord's Supper, are a foretaste of the heavenly banquet to which the Messiah shepherd leads His flock. But until then, our calling is to lead other sheep to the Good Shepherd. The key is to trust that God will take what we do have and use it to usher in His kingdom. When we see a need we can step in and help with the resources our Lord has given us. He will do mighty things through what we do have. ☞

Christian Crossword

By Lee Esch Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

- Thou ___ the Christ. (Matt. 16:16)
- Ruler of old Russia.
- He ___ unto his own. (John 1:11)
- ___ Dolorosa, Jesus' route to Golgotha.
- A Midwestern state.
- His ears are ___ unto their prayers. (1 Pet. 3:12)
- New Testament letters.
- In the beginning was the ___. (John 1:1)
- A word peculiar to the book of Psalms.
- Morning dampness.
- A ship's distress call.
- Ye have made it a ___ of thieves. (Matt. 21:13)
- Quench all the fiery ___s. (Eph. 6:16)
- Opposite of on.
- He that hath the ___ hath life. (1 John 5:12)
- In the days when the judges ___. (Ruth 1:1)
- A distinctive quality that characterizes a person.
- Abraham caught one in the thicket. (Gen. 22:13)

- ___ ye one another's burdens. (Gal. 6:2)
- ___, and it shall be opened. (Matt. 7:7)
- Whether it be good or ___. (2 Cor. 5:10)
- Pig pen.
- ___ the Lord in the air. (1 Thess. 4:17)
- Drew the ___ to the land full of great fishes. (John 21:11)
- A form of "to be."
- Puppy's bark.
- The ___ of one crying in the wilderness. (John 1:23)
- Rant.
- In that hour Jesus ___ in Spirit. (Luke 10:21)
- Similar.
- Jacob's brother. (Gen. 25:26)
- Adam's helpmeet.
- Kept in one's grasp.
- Separate systematically.
- A tribe of Israel.
- A tenth part. (plural)
- Sun. (Spanish)
- Filled with reverence.
- Demolished.
- Bovine.
- The chosen twelve.
- Israel's enemies converged at ___m. (Josh. 11:15)
- All the ___ of the earth. (Isa. 45:22)
- Sorrowful.
- Battle.
- Neither purse, ___ scrip. (Luke 10:4)
- "___ my back, please."
- King Saul was buried beneath one of these trees. (1 Chron. 10:12)
- Enjoyment.
- Deliver us ___. (Matt. 6:13; 2 words)
- Catch.
- "___ your vegetables."
- Arid.
- Expert.
- ___ shall not live by bread alone. (Matt. 4:4)
- Lock's companion.
- Dwelling at Jerusalem
- Jews, ___ men. (Acts 2:5)

- The ___ are gathered and burned in the fire. (Matt. 13:40)
- They ___ I not. (Matt. 6:28)
- Abraham's wife, S___.
- Gather leaves.
- Mexican coin.
- Israel's enemies frozen over.
- This priest had seven sons, S___ . (Acts 19:14)
- Adam's home.
- Cease.
- Glass container.





Media reviews

MOVIES

In case you missed it, here are the best family-friendly films of 2017

By Michael Foust
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

It's never easy making a "best-of" list for an entire year. It is a little easier if you narrow it down to family-friendly films, so here are my favorites of 2017. An asterisk (*) notes a film that might not be appropriate for young children.

► **The Case for Christ*** — An award-winning newspaper journalist sets out to disprove Christianity and is surprised with what he discovers. Based on the life of Lee Strobel. *Rated PG for mild thematic elements, including medical descriptions of crucifixion, and incidental smoking*

► **Cars 3** — An aging Lightning McQueen tries to make a comeback against a field of newer and faster cars. Animated. *Rated G.*

► **Despicable Me 3** — Gru, our favorite villain-turned-hero, considers turning back to villainy after he is fired from his job and meets his long-lost brother. Despite the potty humor, this one has some good life lessons. Animated. *Rated PG for action and rude humor.*

► **Dunkirk*** — The British live to fight another day in World War II thanks to one of the largest military evacuations in human history. This one's not appropriate for children, even if it is one of the least violent war movies of the modern era. *Rated PG-13 for intense war experience and eight instances of coarse language.*

► **Is Genesis History?** — Del Tackett interviews more than a dozen scientists and scholars as he examines the science behind the creation account and the flood. *Unrated.*

► **Leap!** — An orphan who dreams of



Photo courtesy of PureFlix

The Case for Christ is about an award-winning newspaper journalist who sets out to disprove Christianity and is surprised with what he discovers.

being a ballerina escapes to Paris and enrolls at a world-famous dance school. The film's "follow-your-heart" theme doesn't stand up to biblical scrutiny, but the rest of the film is nevertheless fun. Animated. *Rated PG for some impolite humor and action.*



► **The LEGO Batman Movie** — Our caped crusader has always been a loner, but in this animated film he sets out to prove that he doesn't need anybody. Animated. *Rated PG for rude humor, some potty language, and action sequences.*

► **The LEGO Ninjago Movie** — A masked high school-aged superhero discovers that the town's hated villain is his father. Animated. *Rated PG for some mild action and rude humor.*

► **The Man Who Invented Christmas***

— Author Charles Dickens is running out of ideas (and money) until he conceives a character named Scrooge and writes "A Christmas Carol," which helps popularize the holiday among the masses. *Rated PG for thematic elements and some mild language. I counted one coarse word (a--) and several instances of "bloody."*

► **The Resurrection of Gavin Stone** — The phrases "good comedy" and "faith-based film" usually don't mix, but this movie fills both roles. When a washed-up actor tries out for a role in a church play, the outcome is hilarious — and inspiring. *Rated PG for thematic elements but no language or sexuality.*

► **Same Kind of Different As Me*** — A homeless man impacts the life of an international art dealer — and helps save his marriage too. *Rated PG-13 for thematic elements, including some violence and language. The film has about four coarse*

words: h-ll (1) and the n-word (3).

► **The Star** — The Nativity story as told through the eyes of animals. Genuinely funny. Animated. *Rated PG for some thematic elements.*

► **Wonder*** — A boy with facial deformities enters middle school after being homeschooled his entire life. Perhaps the best anti-bullying film ever made. *Rated PG for thematic elements including bullying and some mild language (a handful of OMGs and one misuse of "Jesus" by a bully).*



► **Star Wars: The Last Jedi*** —

The saga of Rey, Finn, Kylo, Luke and Leia continues. It's one of the best Star Wars films ever. (I've got it at No. 4). *Rated PG-13 for sequences of sci-fi action, violence and some instances (6) of coarse language.*

► **Steve McQueen: American Icon** — Actor Steve McQueen never found purpose — until he found Christ. One of the best documentaries you'll ever see. *Unrated. No language or sexuality.*

Meet the reviewer

Michael Foust covers the intersection of faith and entertainment as a writer and podcast host for Heirloom Audio. He also is the husband of an amazing wife and the father of four small children.

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Relying on God's strength

Georgetown player 'lost his leg but gained his soul'

By Bill Sorrell
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

All Kody Kasey was supposed to do was block a player on a routine punt return during the 2014 homecoming game of Georgetown College in Kentucky.

But something went horribly wrong.

"I got hit at the right spot at the wrong time," he said. "Instantly I went dizzy. I had no idea what was happening. Everything was twirling and twirling and I start falling backwards."

He hit the ground in slow motion, he said. Even the guy he was blocking stopped for a second.

Everyone knew the injury was bad.

But in the months to come, Kasey would find out it was worse than he could've ever imagined in that moment.

At Georgetown Community Hospital, he learned that his tibia and fibula had snapped. A titanium rod was inserted to stabilize his right leg. It would be the first of nine surgeries.

"After the first one, my mind was, 'I am going to get this done and I am going to be back on the field next year, no problem,'" Kasey said. But a six-month checkup brought bad news — no bone growth and an infection was killing tissue and skin.

"That was frustrating. After almost a year you would think your bone would grow to be healed completely," he said.

After the sixth surgery, doctors told him he could continue surgeries and perhaps have a gimp leg the rest of his life or he could go another route — amputation.

"At 19 or 20 years old, those are the last words you want to hear," Kasey said. "It was hard taking that in. It took a lot of prayer, and throughout this time I was growing in my faith. I really had to rely on God's strength to get me through this."

Taking God's Word to heart

Kasey said while he was in the hospital, God talked to him through His Word.

"He kept revealing things to me. One of the verses that kept popping up was Romans 12:12 — 'Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.'"

He took those words to heart.

"I began to pray, seeking direction," he said. "Growing up, I was in a very religious Catholic family. I thought I had a relationship with God. I knew God. My relationship with God was not where it needed to be. My injury got to the point where I real-

ized I couldn't do everything on my own and I gave my life to Christ. Christ found me. It was not by mind and strength alone, it was God's."

On Nov. 16, 2015, at Grant Medical Center in Columbus, Ohio, Kasey's leg was amputated below the knee.

"He lost his leg but gained his soul," said Godwin Igwebuike, a defensive back at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, who grew up with Kasey in Pickerington, Ohio. "God has completely transformed him from lukewarm to on fire for Christ. He's an inspiration to me, both as an athlete and man of God."

About two months later, Kasey was fitted with a prosthesis made of a strong and flexible carbon fiber. He walked out of the hospital the day he got it and was told by doctors how rare that is.

"God gave me the opportunity for mobility again," Kasey said. "It felt so great to get walking." Rehab was one step at a time — balancing exercises, weightlifting, treadmill.

Georgetown head coach Bill Cronin said Kasey was determined to come back. "I thought he would come back to be a student coach," Cronin said. "We would find a role. But in his mind he was coming back to play."

And play he did.

On Sept. 1, 2016, Kasey suited up for the first time since he broke his leg.

"The first time I stepped on the field was a feeling of overwhelming joy," he said. "I didn't play that game.

I didn't care. It was the fact that Jesus gave me the strength to overcome and be on the field, all to bring glory to Him."

Two weeks later, he played against Cincinnati Christian.

"My faith is everything. It has got me through. I wouldn't be here today without it," Kasey said.

During the 2016 season he made "big tackles" against Kentucky Christian and a "highlight-of-the-year" 41-yard kickoff return against Bluefield College, which is in West Virginia. This season he has "quite a few" tackles on kickoff-team coverage.

"He maintains mental strength to persevere (toward) his dreams," Cronin said. "I pray that others could learn something from his persistent determination and desires. I thought that was his greatest thing, to see him inspire others."

Kasey's faith is genuine, Cronin said. "He is a kid who has strong beliefs. ... You can draw inspiration from it. It doesn't matter the situation, Kody is going to find the positive." ✠



Photo by Richard Davis/Richard Davis Photography

Kody Kasey (center)



Hindu extremists beat pastors in India

HYDERABAD, India — Berating and slapping two pastors into signing an apology letter before police, a mob of about 70 Hindu extremists stopped a planned three-day gospel meeting in Chhattisgarh state, India, minutes before it was to begin, sources said. The pastors are Vijay Jogi and Santosh Rao. About 1,000 people had gathered at the Railway Grounds in Charoda, Durg District on Nov. 16, according to Morning Star News.

As in the previous 20 years, church leaders had obtained prior permission from both the railway and the railway police to conduct the event, a campaign that in past years has seen many people turn to Christ, Jogi said. The Hindu activists said they were offended by Bible verses quoted in pamphlets for the event and said church leaders needed permission from the sub-judicial magistrate in order to hold their meetings. Police officials agreed with the activists.

"There is very little hope for Christians in a situation like this," Rao said. Christians in Charoda are living in fear and have not filed any case against the Hindu extremists or police, other sources said.

Since Prime Minister Narendra Modi took power in 2014, the hostile tone of his National Democratic Alliance government against non-Hindus has emboldened Hindu extremists in several parts of the country to attack Christians, religious rights advocates say. (MS)

Christian persecution remains high in Sudan

KHARTOUM, Sudan — A depleting pool of clergy has not stopped Christian work in Sudan. A local pastor identified only as James told Mission Network News that the Church in Sudan is still strong despite escalating persecution in the Islamic-majority country, including the killing and jailing of church leaders and the destruction of church buildings.

James added that "some foreigners were deported from Khartoum" and "the pastors who shared the Bible and teach the Bible, they are few." James said that while Christians and Muslims live peacefully together, the government's agenda is to make Sudan a one-religion nation under Islam. He believes big challenges await pastors such as himself who refuse to back down from preaching the gospel.

In June several evangelical leaders — including Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, and Franklin Graham of Samaritan's Purse relief organization — signed a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson speaking out against the treatment of believers in Sudan.

James urged Christians around the world not to forget and to pray for the believers in Sudan, asking God to strengthen and encourage them. He also called for prayers for unbelievers in the country to turn to Jesus.

Sudan ranks 5th on Open Doors' World Watch List of countries where Christians experience the worst persecution. (TAB)

Christians beaten, falsely charged, jailed

NEW DELHI, India — Seven Christians in India have been booked on charges of hurting religious feelings after Hindu extremists savagely beat them when they gathered to pray for a sick man at his home, sources said.

Police in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh state charged the six Christian men and one woman Dec. 4 with "deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings" after a mob of about 20 Hindus led by members of the Hindu extremist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh entered the house and attacked those present. The six Christian men were taken into custody, while the woman was not immediately arrested because of the absence of female police required to detain her, sources said.

India ranked 15th on Christian support organization Open Doors' 2017 World Watch List of the countries where Christians experience the most persecution. (MS)