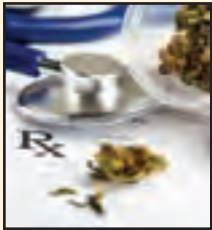




INSIDE



Alabama allows cannabinoil oil by prescription but other uses are still banned

◆ Page 4



Bolivian Christians ask for prayer as government restricts activities

◆ Page 8



Church uniquely equipped to help grieving people find hope, healing from loss

◆ Page 11

‘Serially persecuted’

Restrictions on Christians in China set to increase in February

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

One of northern China’s largest churches has been destroyed and new rules are set to go into effect in February that appear to escalate the communist government’s clampdown on the nearly 100 million Christians in the country.

Golden Lampstand Church, Linfen, Shanxi — a multimillion dollar facility where more than 50,000 worshipped — was demolished Jan.

9 by explosives placed in underground worship halls, according to ChinaAid, an international nonprofit dedicated to promoting religious freedom and human rights for Christians in China. ChinaAid said the church was “serially persecuted” and called for international attention to the actions of Chinese authorities.

“The repeated persecution of Golden Lampstand Church demonstrates

that the Chinese government has no respect for religious freedom or human rights,” ChinaAid Founder and President Bob Fu said. “ChinaAid calls on the international community to openly condemn the bombing of this church building and urge the

Chinese government to fairly compensate the Christians who paid for it and immediately cease these alarming demolitions of churches.”

Golden Lampstand Church, like (See ‘Rules,’ page 9)



GREAT WALL OF CHINA

IMB photo



Alabama Baptist churches will be receiving a complimentary copy of the book “The Alabama Baptist: Celebrating 175 Years of Informing, Inspiring and Connecting Baptists” in the mail thanks to generous donations from Montgomery’s Baptist Health, Birmingham’s Brookwood Baptist Health and Samford University.

COMMENT

How Ethical Is the Clergy?

It may not be surprising to learn that non-Christians have a lower view of the clergy than self-identified Christians. What may be surprising is how low an opinion of clergy both groups hold.

According to a late 2017 study released by Gallup, only 25 percent of non-Christians rated the honesty and ethics of clergy as very high or high. That was far behind other professions such as nurses (83 percent), grade school teachers (71 percent), pharmacists (63 percent) and medical doctors (62 percent) to mention only some.

Non-Christians ranked clergy behind newspaper reporters (31 percent) but the same as local politicians (25 percent).

Obviously the perception of clergy is not high among non-Christians. That may not be surprising since nonbelievers may not have much personal contact with Christian ministers. Their image of God's vocational servants may be formed more by news reports than firsthand experience.

If that is the case the reports of clergy sexual abuse, religious "hucksters on the airwaves" and the negative depiction of clergy in media may have all contributed to this negative image. Few films and fewer news stories chronicle the self-sacrificing service of most ministers for the good of their parishioners and communities.

Survey results

One would expect self-identified Christians, those who should have firsthand experience with ministers, to indicate a high appreciation for the honesty and ethics of clergy. Unfortunately that is not the case.

Fewer than half of the self-identified Christians in the Gallup survey (48 percent) rated the honesty and ethics of ministers as very high or high. Again these are the people who interact with ministers and still the ratings are low.

More self-identified Christians said nurses (82 percent), military officers (74 percent), grade school teachers (65 percent), medical doctors (65 percent), pharmacists (62 percent) and police officers (59 percent) have very high or high ethical standards.



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

When the two groups were combined, 42 percent of Americans view honesty and ethical standards of clergy as very high or high. That is the lowest rating in the 33 years Gallup has polled on this issue.

The highest score ever given clergy for honesty and ethics was in 1985 when 67 percent of respondents rated them very high or high. Since that time the trend has been mostly downward. After 9/11 clergy received a bump up — 64 percent. That rating fell the next year to 52 percent after the sexual abuse scandal in the Roman Catholic Church made headlines.

A positive rating for ministers' honesty and ethics fell below 50 percent in 2013 and has continued downward to the present 42 percent.

At the same time the percentage of those saying the honesty and ethics of the clergy is low or very low has almost tripled. In 1985 only 4 percent of Americans expressed that view. Now that percentage has grown to 11 percent.

Ministers may never be able to change the opinions of those whose paths they seldom cross but something can be done and should be done about the views of self-identified Christians. That this group expresses so little confidence in the honesty and ethics of their ministers is a tragedy that deserves focused attention.

In 1 Peter 5:3 the Apostle Peter writes to pastors, urging them to "be examples to the flock." He urges pastors not to do this from selfish moti-

vation. He warns them against acting greedily for money or to lord authority and power over others. Peter tells them they should "be eager to service," understanding that rewards come ultimately from Christ in glory.

In many places the Bible outlines the kind of example ministers are to be. For instance, 1 Corinthians 4:2 declares, "It is required of those who have been given a trust to prove faithful." That "trust" could be a position of leadership and influence. It could be responsibility for money. It might be privileged information. Whatever it is, the minister is not to use the information selfishly but is to be faithful to the one who gave the trust whether it is a group or an individual.

Jesus addressed the issue of trust in Luke 16:10 when He said, "Whoever can be trusted with very little can be trusted with very much and whoever is dishonest with very little will be dishonest with

much." Honesty and ethics do not apply only to momentous situations. They are demonstrated most clearly in everyday experiences.

Writing to young minister Timothy, the Apostle Paul urged him to set an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity (1 Tim. 4:12). There must not even be a hint of sexual immorality Paul adds in Ephesians 5:3a.

Near the end of his life King David reflected on his relationship with God. He concluded, "I know, my God, that You test the heart and are pleased with integrity" (1 Chron. 29:17). Later

that thought is expanded by the prophet Micah when he writes, "He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you: To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

Characteristics pleasing to God

Anyone who has walked very long with God knows there is no room to be "puffed up" (1 Cor. 13:4) about one's ability, position or anything else. Honesty, integrity, humility, loving mercy and seeking justice — these are characteristics pleasing to God for vocational ministers and laypersons alike.

Integrity, honesty and ethical behaviors are required for all who follow God. That applies to leadership, to personal relations, to finances, to sexual conduct and more.

Perhaps the Apostle Paul summed it up when he wrote to the church in Corinth, "Men ought to regard us as servants of Christ" (1 Cor. 4:1). When that is the case the honesty and ethics of the servants of Christ will go without saying.✠

"Integrity, honesty and ethical behaviors are required for all who follow God. That applies to leadership, to personal relations, to finances, to sexual conduct and more."

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

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‘Open proclamation of truth’

Evangelicals for Life conference brings message of human dignity to DC

By **Carrie Brown McWhorter**
The Alabama Baptist

Evangelical Christians emphasized a myriad of human life issues, including protecting the unborn and ministering to their mothers, adoption, foster care, service to the disabled and ministry to refugees, as they gathered in Washington for the third Evangelicals for Life conference.

The three-day conference, held Jan. 18–20 and hosted by the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) and Focus on the Family, is structured around the annual March for Life. This year’s march, the 45th, was held Jan. 19 on the National Mall. President Donald Trump delivered a live address to the rally via satellite from the White House Rose Garden, making him the first sitting president to do so.

Ahead of the Evangelicals for Life conference, keynote speaker Russell Moore, ERLC president, said the conference “exists as a platform for the reborn to stand for the unborn,” but in his Jan. 18 keynote address Moore introduced a variety of human life issues, including human trafficking, abuse of the elderly, immigration and racial injustice.

On these issues, Moore said many in contemporary American society base their choices on the situation.

“Most of the people who are, right now as we are speaking, pressuring girlfriends, wives (or) daughters to go to the abortion clinics probably aren’t pro-choice in terms of an opinion poll,” he said. “(It) doesn’t matter what their opinion is. When they have a problem as they see it, then they’re able to say, ‘this situation is different,’ ‘this situation is special.’”

Moore said those who are “screaming at immigrant communities,” “staying quiet in the face of racial bigotry” or “covering up abuse of vulnerable women and children” are saying the same thing: “I’m special. This doesn’t apply to me.”

What Scripture says

Scripture calls followers of Jesus to an “open proclamation of the truth,” Moore said. “The people of God need to be the people who are speaking, calling things what they are.

“In a world that wants to say ‘embryos’ and ‘fetuses’ and ‘products of conception,’ we have to be the people who say ‘children.’ In a world that wants to say ‘nursing home populations,’ we have to be the people who say ‘our fathers,’ ‘our mothers,’ ‘our grandfathers,’ ‘our grandmothers,’ ‘our fellow human beings.’

“In a world that wants to say ‘those strip



lifesitenews.com

Evangelical Christians gather for the annual March for Life in Washington on Jan. 19. President Donald Trump delivered a live address to the rally via satellite from the White House Rose Garden, making him the first sitting president to do so.

clubs over there,’ we have to be the people who say ‘women bearing the image of God who are being trafficked and abused.’ In a world where people want to say ‘these problem people who are coming from somewhere else,’ we have to be the people who say ‘those created in the image of God and deeply loved by Him.’ We have to be the people who tell the truth,” Moore said.

Other speakers on the open day’s schedule, including U.S. senators James Lankford of Oklahoma and Ben Sasse of Nebraska, spoke

about pro-life legislative efforts. Focus on the Family President Jim Daly and others spoke about adoption and foster care. Other topics included the work of pregnancy resource centers, service to the disabled and ministry to refugees.

Featured speakers

Speakers on the conference schedule included: Joni Eareckson Tada, popular author and disability advocate who is quadriplegic; Rich Stearns, president of World Vision U.S.; Ann Voskamp, well-known author; Benjamin Watson, tight end for the NFL’s Baltimore Ravens; and Jenny Yang, vice president of advocacy and policy at World Relief.✝

For more information and videos from the conference, go to www.evangelicals.life.

“The people of God need to be the people who are speaking, calling things what they are. In a world that wants to say ‘embryos’ and ‘fetuses’ and ‘products of conception,’ we have to be the people who say ‘children.’ ... In a world that wants to say ‘those strip clubs over there,’ we have to be the people who say ‘women bearing the image of God who are being trafficked and abused.’”

Russell Moore
president, Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

Medical marijuana

Alabama allows cannabinoid oil by prescription but other uses are still banned

By Martha Simmons
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Support for legalization of marijuana has reached record highs, according to a recent Gallup poll, with 64 percent of Americans saying its use should be made legal.

Gallup conducted more than 1,000 telephone interviews in October 2017 in all 50 states, finding that marijuana legalization now has the highest level of support in nearly a half-century of tracking the issue. Moreover, that support is now bipartisan.

“Democrats and independents have historically been much more likely than Republicans to say marijuana should be legalized,” Gallup researchers said. “In 2009, Democrats were the first partisan group to see majority support for legalization, followed by independents in 2010. This year for the first time, a majority of Republicans express support for legalizing marijuana; the current 51 percent is up nine percentage points from last year.”

Earlier in 2017 a Quinnipiac University National Poll of more than 1,000 Americans showed similar public sentiment in favor of legalization, with 60 percent of respondents saying that marijuana use should be legal in the United States, and 94 percent in favor of medical marijuana use as prescribed by a doctor.

Further, Quinnipiac reported that 73 percent of those interviewed oppose enforce-

**24 states
allow
medical
marijuana.**



123rf.com

ment of federal anti-marijuana laws in states where cannabis has been legalized, framing it as a states' rights issue.

The growing support cuts across most socioeconomic categories. Quinnipiac researchers noted, “Republicans and voters over age 65 are the only listed party, gender, education, age or racial groups to oppose legalized marijuana.”

Despite more relaxed views on the topic, there remains plenty of room for debate.

“Opponents of medical marijuana argue that it is too dangerous to use, lacks FDA approval and that various legal drugs make marijuana use unnecessary,” according to

procon.org, a nonpartisan, nonprofit website that presents research, studies and pro-and-con statements on questions related to whether or not marijuana should be a medical option.

Opposing opinions

“They say marijuana is addictive, leads to harder drug use, interferes with fertility, impairs driving ability and injures the lungs, immune system and brain. They say that medical marijuana is a front for drug legalization and recreational use.”

On the flip side, according to procon.org, “Proponents of medical marijuana

argue that it can be a safe and effective treatment for the symptoms of cancer, AIDS, multiple sclerosis, pain, glaucoma, epilepsy and other conditions. They cite dozens of peer-reviewed studies, prominent medical organizations, major government reports and the use of marijuana as medicine throughout world history.”

Rising approval ratings track with state-level implementation of laws permitting medical marijuana use and/or decriminalizing recreational pot, despite federal prohibitions against it:

▶ Eight states and the District of Columbia have the most expansive laws for the recreational use of marijuana.

▶ Fourteen states and the U.S. Virgin Islands have decriminalized the possession of cannabis.

▶ Twenty-four states allow medical marijuana.

▶ Sixteen states — including Alabama — have legalized only cannabinoid (CBD) oil.

▶ Marijuana is completely illegal in only three states (Idaho, Kansas and South Dakota), American Samoa and the U.S. Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

The Washington D.C.-based Marijuana Policy Project (MPP), a pro-cannabis lobbying group, said 18 state legislatures are expected to tackle some sort of legalization bills in the next year.

Do growing public support and incremental changes in state laws foreshadow full marijuana legalization across the United States? Maybe, but don't expect Alabama to lead the way, according to MPP.

“Alabama has some of the harshest marijuana penalties in the country,” according to MPP. “Possession of even a single joint is punishable by up to a year of incarceration.” There is “little momentum for change in the legislature,” the pro-pot lobbying group concluded.

Marijuana in Alabama

Nevertheless, Alabama has taken baby steps toward legalization for at least medical purposes, having passed in 2014 the act called “Carly's Law,” which allows for a clinical study at the University of Alabama at Birmingham to study the effects of non-psychoactive, marijuana-derived CBD oil on children with debilitating seizures. The law was named after the toddler Carly Chandler of Birmingham, who suffers from a rare genetic disorder causing frequent, severe seizures, and passed both chambers of the legislature unanimously.

In 2016, Alabama state legislators followed up with “Leni's Law” to decriminalize CBD oil so that patients with sei-

Seminary president predicts marijuana's 'human toll'

As legal recreational marijuana sales began in California on Jan. 1, Gateway Baptist Theological Seminary President Jeff Iorg bemoaned the increased “human toll” the drug is likely to have on America's most populous state.

“Whatever economic gains the legalization of marijuana will supposedly produce will be offset by the human toll on damaged relationships, loss of productivity in the workforce and the cost of expanded social programs to deal with the fallout of this bad social experiment,” he said. “It's another step in the wrong direction for a culture bent on self-medication as a solution to personal struggles.”

California voters approved recreational

marijuana legalization in November 2016. The law permits adults 21 and older to possess as much as an ounce of marijuana and grow up to six marijuana plants at home, according to CNN. The law took effect at the beginning of 2018, with various media outlets reporting long lines at some of the approximately 100 shops that have obtained permits to sell the drug recreationally.

Legal sanction

California joins Alaska, Colorado, Nevada, Oregon and Washington as states where recreational marijuana is sold with legal sanction from the state. It has been approved but is not yet sold legally in Maine and Massachusetts.

Medical marijuana use has been approved

by 29 states and the District of Columbia.

All marijuana use remains illegal according to federal law, though two drugs approved by the federal Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) contain a chemical found in marijuana, according to a 2016 DEA report.

The DEA classifies marijuana as a “Schedule I” drug — signifying it has no accepted medical use, is not accepted by experts as safe for use under medical supervision and has a high potential for abuse. The Obama administration announced in 2016 it would maintain that classification, supporting its decision with release of 400 pages of marijuana-related materials, including citations of more than 200 published studies. (BP)

zure disorders and other serious medical conditions to legally use the substance.

Since then, bills have been presented seeking to more broadly legalize medical marijuana or to eliminate criminal penalties for first-time offenders with under an ounce of pot, but those measures never made it to a floor vote in the Alabama Legislature.

On the local level, an effort to authorize Mobile Police Department officers to issue citations instead of arresting people for minor drug offenses died in 2017 amid controversy about whether it constituted an effort to “decriminalize” pot.

Cities elsewhere in the nation have instituted similar policies, sometimes citing ACLU studies showing that blacks are arrested more frequently and punished much more severely than whites for using or possessing pot, even though blacks and whites use marijuana at an almost identical rate.

Changing landscape

While Alabama policy-makers and legislators debate the next step, if any, for marijuana, the landscape is changing in neighboring states, according to the MPP.

Mississippi, which like Alabama legalized only the use of CBD oil, is 1 of 22 states that have decriminalized marijuana possession for personal use. First offense possession

of about an ounce of pot is punishable by a \$250 fine instead of jail time and a civil summons as opposed to arrest.

Florida has legalized medical marijuana for its permanent and seasonal residents and has issued proposed regulations for marijuana treatment centers.

Georgia lawmakers in 2017 greatly expanded the list of conditions for which doctors may now prescribe CBD oil. In October the Atlanta city council unanimously approved a measure to end jail time and lower fines for those caught with an ounce or less of pot. ☼

“[Opponents of medical marijuana] say marijuana is addictive, leads to harder drug use, interferes with fertility, impairs driving ability and injures the lungs, immune system and brain. They say that medical marijuana is a front for drug legalization and recreational use.”

procon.org

ALABAMA

UPDATES

PEOPLE, CHURCHES MAKING NEWS ACROSS THE STATE

Taylor celebrates 40 years as pastor of Mountain View

Sammy Taylor was 26 when he took his first pastorate — Mountain View Baptist Church, Phil Campbell, in Franklin Baptist Association. He answered the call expectantly.

But he had no idea he would stay 40 years and end up being the longest tenured pastor in the association’s history.

On Jan. 14, Mountain View Baptist honored him for four decades in the ministry there.

“It’s been an amazing journey,” Taylor said. “I’m blessed to serve.”

A lot has happened in the time since Taylor and his wife, Judy, came to the church. He’s watched youth grow up and get married, have children and even grandchildren. He watched the church build a new building in 1995, pay it off in 2010 and then saw it destroyed in April 2011 by the tornadoes that ripped across the state. But they built again and they have no plans to slow down now.

Neither does Taylor.

“The Lord has blessed us; we’ve had a good ministry over the years,” he said. “We’re just going to carry on.”

Terry Welborn, worship leader, said Mountain View Baptist “couldn’t ask for a better pastor.” (Grace Thornton)

Alabama minister retires after 43 years of service

In 1975, Mike Stephens started his ministry as a bivocational music director in a little country church. And ever since then, he’s told the churches he served that he could do whatever they needed.

“I sang gospel music for about 10 years and did bivocational music for about 20 years,” Stephens said. And in 1996, he felt the call to preach and took his first pastorate.

But he didn’t stop singing.

“Even after I began serving as a bivocational pastor, I always sang in the choir too,” Stephens said.

And for the past five years, he’s been doing that at Salem Macon Baptist Church, Notasulga, in Tuskegee Lee Baptist Association. Before that, he served at Catoma Baptist Church, Montgomery, and several other churches.

But that phase of ministry drew to a close Jan. 14. The congregation of Salem Macon Baptist threw him a retirement dinner to honor the occasion.



TAYLOR

“I enjoyed all of it,” Stephens said of his 43 years in ministry. “God did amazing things.”

He and his wife, Nancy, will continue to live in Montgomery and he will continue to supply preach as needed. Stephens has three daughters, six grandchildren and one great-grandchild. (Grace Thornton)

Shaw serves, assists churches as they ‘look for a pastor’

For 35 years, Mike Shaw saw First Baptist Church, Pelham, as his base for missions.

But since he retired from the pastorate there in 2014, he’s found a new way to help reach Shelby County and the surrounding area — he’s done the best he can to prepare churches in transition to call a new pastor.

“I firmly believe that the most critical time in the life story of any church is when they are looking for a pastor,” Shaw said.

So for him, serving as an interim pastor is a chance to “bring everybody together and focus not so much on what has happened in the past but what God can do in the future,” he said.

Just after leaving First, Pelham, Shaw filled in for a pastor while he was on sabbatical, but after that time he moved on to helping churches in their season of pastor search.

First he served Riverside Baptist Church, Helena, then West End Baptist Church, Clanton, and later First Baptist Church, Vincent.

And in November 2017, Shaw joined the leadership of First Baptist Church, Helena. To kick off their season of search, he’s preaching a sermon series on “The Church” and bringing in Mike Jackson, director of the office of LeaderCare and church health at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, to prepare church leaders to train the pastor search committee.

“We’re excited about what God is doing,” Shaw said. (Grace Thornton)

Longtime Alabama pastor celebrates 60 years in ministry

Coley Myer Holloway recently marked 60 years serving as pastor of Alabama Baptist churches.

Holloway and his wife, Nancy, began their ministry journey Dec. 8, 1957, and have remained a faithful ministry team throughout the years. Holloway, 82, currently serves as pastor of Liberty Baptist Church, Pansey.

The couple’s journey has taken them

across Southeast Alabama and has included the following churches:

Haleburg Baptist Church, Columbia; Mount Gilead Baptist Church, Dothan; First Baptist Church, Slocomb; Parkview Baptist Church, Eufala; Cowarts Baptist Church; Bay Springs Baptist Church, Dothan; and now Liberty Baptist.

In reference to his long tenure in ministry, Holloway said, “To God be the glory, great things He has done. ... I’ve had a great time.” (TAB)



HOLLOWAY

North Shelby’s Murphy retires after 23 years

Nearly 23 years ago, a new church plant in Shelby Baptist Association called Allan Murphy as its pastor. Before he came, a small group of people and an interim pastor were meeting for worship at a local shopping center.

But it wasn’t long before the congregation grew and moved into a vacant building. That site would later host four other congregations under North Shelby’s care, including a Vietnamese congregation that meets there now.

These days, North Shelby Baptist Church meets on Double Oak Mountain. Membership tops 900. And on Jan. 31 when Murphy retires, the church will say goodbye to the only full-time pastor it’s ever known.

“We’ve had a lot of blessings over the years, a lot of opportunities to grow and develop,” he said of the church.

Murphy, who was ordained at 19, first served at Shady Grove Baptist Church, Selma, then as pastor of Bethel Baptist Church, Georgiana, and Sardis Baptist Church, Greenville. He also served Philadelphia Baptist Church, Birmingham.

He earned a bachelor’s degree at Samford University in Birmingham and a graduate degree at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

Before coming to North Shelby Baptist, Murphy and his wife, Mary, and their four children served as International Mission Board missionaries. The couple has four grandchildren. (TAB)



SHAW



MURPHY

Across ALABAMA'S Associations

RUSSELL

► **Concord Church, Salem**, presented certificates of license to its student pastor Noah McGuire (left) and worship leader Brent Nowell (center) on Jan. 14. Bud Passmore (right) is pastor. ► **Golden Acres Church, Phenix City**, is sponsoring Merge Summer Camp for children at Shocco Springs Conference Center on July 16–19. Email gabcdaniel@att.net for more information. Children's pastor Daniel Cook is leading the effort and Ray Cummings is pastor of Golden Acres.



Photo courtesy of Bud Passmore

BIBB

► **Four Points Church, Centreville**, will hold the 2018 We Believe Bible Conference on Feb. 2–4. The topic will be "The Doctrine of Man — Who Am I?" covering Genesis 1:27. Registration will be Feb. 2, 10 a.m.–noon. The first session will be Feb. 2, noon–4 p.m. The conference will continue Feb. 3, 8 a.m.–5 p.m. and Feb. 4, 8:30 a.m.–4 p.m. Jim Parker,

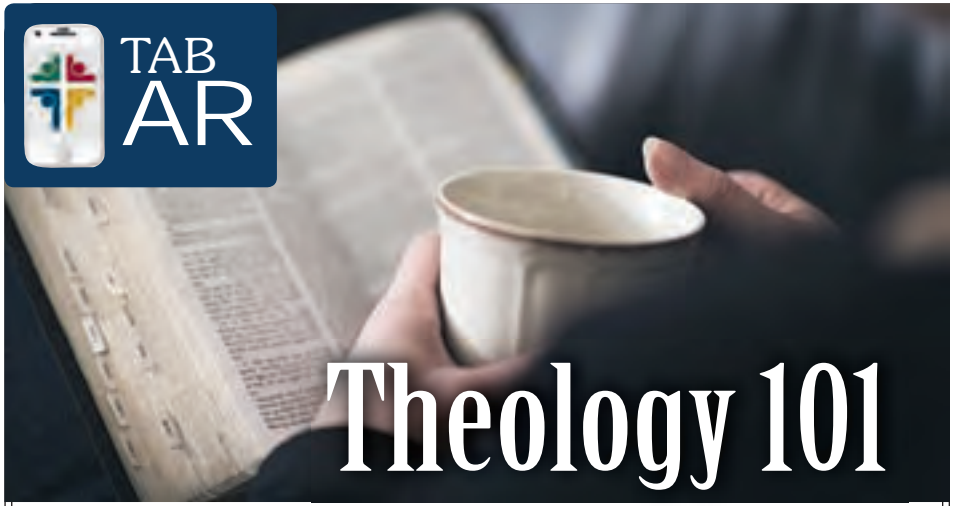
Steve Headrick and Brad Lowery will speak. Meals will be provided. To register visit www.fourpointsbaptistchurch.com. For more information call 205-926-7775 or email 4pointsbaptistchurch@gmail.com. Stan Huguley is pastor.

OTHER

► The **Alabama Preschool Children's Ministers Organization (APCMO)** will hold a retreat Feb. 28–March 2 at Springhill Suites at The Wharf Orange Beach. Danielle Bell, minister to children at Dawson Memorial Church, Birmingham, will speak. The retreat is titled "One Life: One Story to Tell." APCMO is an educational support group for preschool and children's professional/ministerial salaried members of Alabama Baptist churches. For more information call 251-943-6600. Joyce Alexander is APCMO president.✚

— Correction —

An article on adoption in the Jan. 18 issue reported the number of foster children served by the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries (ABCH) incorrectly. ABCH serves 500 of the 5,000 total children on average in foster care in Alabama per year.



TAB
AR

Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

What's New?

A New Commandment

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

Two weeks ago we began thinking about what God has made new. He made an Old Covenant with Israel but in Christ has made a New Covenant with believers. The heart of the Old Covenant was seen in its commandments and ordinances. When we think of that covenant of commandments, we usually think immediately of the Ten Commandments, which lie at its heart. Of course, God through Moses gave Israel many more than 10 commands. In fact, it is traditionally stated that an ancient rabbi identified 613 commandments associated with the Old Covenant. When Jesus gave His famous summary of Old Covenant commands in response to being questioned about which command in the law was the greatest, He reduced the multiplicity of old commands into the two-part summary declaration, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:36–39). The heart of the new commandment is love, both for God and for others.

Then on the night He observed the last Passover meal with the disciples, Jesus became even more pointed about the second part of the new commandment, saying, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:34). In His earlier instruction about loving others, Jesus gave as the standard loving one's neighbor as you love yourself. This was the standard set forth in Leviticus 19:18: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." In the Last Supper summary of that part of the new commandment, Jesus gave a new model and a higher motive. The model moved from how we love ourselves to how Jesus loves us. The motive for doing so is stated to be His love for us. We love others because He first loved us.

As we continue to live into the New Year, we can profit greatly by reflecting on Jesus' love as our model and motivation. How does He love us? It takes several ideas even to begin to grasp the dimensions of this model and motivation. Jesus loves us with a love that is constant.

The testimony in John 13:1 is that when Jesus entered the upper room for His last Passover with the disciples, "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end." As with the Twelve, so with us: nothing we do or have done can cause Him to stop loving us. He loves us with love that is sacrificial and self-giving. How unwavering and constant is our love to others? Jesus loves us unconditionally. We do not have to get better in order to be loved by Him. Do we love as Jesus loves us or do we expect people to change in some way before we love them?

Love others

Since Jesus loves us selflessly and sacrificially, His new commandment tells us this is how we are to love others. During the evening of the Last Supper, Jesus showed the disciples love in a very practical way: He washed their dusty feet as they reclined at the table. Is our love demonstrated in practical deeds of kindness to other? Does it go beyond mere verbal expressions?

The New Commandment under the New Covenant tells us to love others in the manner that Jesus loves us: constantly, selflessly, sacrificially, unconditionally and practically.✚

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.



Blue Springs holds note burning service



Photo courtesy of Richard Richie

Blue Springs Baptist Church, Somerville, in Morgan Baptist Association holds a note burning service Jan. 14 during the 11 a.m. worship service. Retired former pastor Ralph McCollum delivered the sermon and a covered dish lunch was held afterward. The 172-year-old church paid the debt on the addition of space that includes a fellowship hall, office space and children's area. Pictured are (l to r) Danny Humphries, chairman of deacons; Buddy Beaver, building committee member; Pastor Richard Richie; former pastor McCollum; and Roger Cain, building committee member.

Teaching children Scripture

Bible learning is lifelong process that should be taught to children early

By Carolyn Tomlin
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

While watching a group of children in a Bible drill, I was amazed at how fast they could locate the books of the Bible as well as specific verses. They also could recite them from memory.

Silently I wondered how many adults in the audience could have done the same.

A marvel like this didn't just happen. Their parents, grandparents, Sunday School teachers and missions leaders made this a priority. Learning the Bible is a lifelong process and, like other important values we teach children, it should begin early.

Why should we teach children Scripture? Does it make any difference? How does knowing the Bible provide faith and Christian strength in the world in which we live?

Steve Heartsill, managing editor for Royal Ambassadors (RA) and Children in Action (CA) publications, said there is no better way to understand the mission of God than to learn it firsthand.

"Since WMU (Woman's Missionary Union) was founded in 1888, we have taught children the importance of personal Bible study," he said. "When parents and



123rf.com

missions leaders point their GAs (Girls in Action), RAs and CAs toward the Bible, they help them understand God's call upon their lives in context and in a personal way."

When families make studying the Bible a priority, children see that their parents are involved. It's a home where "do as I do" not "do as I say" is a way of life.

A widely held belief is that parents are their child's "first and best" teacher. When parents set an example of reading and studying God's Word, this image continues through adulthood. A good way to involve younger children is through "Bible Thoughts" provided by WMU.

The following ideas are only a few ways WMU suggests to bring the Bible to today's children and to make it a tool for daily living. By finding creative and fun ways to study the Scriptures, children look forward to Bible study.

Ideas for teaching the Bible

► **Craft box.** Provide each child with his or her personal art supplies — for instance a plastic shoebox filled with colored non-permanent markers, colored paper, glue sticks, scissors, sticky note pads and simple craft items.

► **Small group Bible drill.** It's more fun if several children participate. Learn the correct commands, such as "attention," "salute" and "find." Call on different boys and girls to read the verse.

► **Learn a verse a day.** If a child learns one verse a day, that's 365 new memory verses at the end of the year. How can you make this a daily learning project that will be an exciting approach to knowing the Bible?

Try including a verse and reference on a sticky note in a lunchbox, on a bathroom mirror, in a jacket pocket, inside the refrigerator, on a cereal box or anywhere the child daily checks.

Type a verse on a beautiful nature scene as a screensaver for their computer or tablet. This will be the first image they see when they log on the computer.

► **Find the hidden verse.** Print verses on cardstock and hide them throughout the house. See how many cards can be found in a given number of minutes. Read each verse and work on memorizing them.

► **Paper plate spinner.** Use a paper plate, a spinner cut from cardboard and a brad to make this game (see photo above). Write references of verses you are memorizing on the edge of the plate. As the spinner points to each reference, say the verse.

► **Memory verse bank.** To make a bank, cover a large coffee can or other container

SONGS FOR CHILDREN

- *I am Climbing Jacob's Ladder*
- *Deep and Wide*
- *This Little Light of Mine*
- *I Have the Love of Jesus Down in my Heart*
- *Zacchaeus*
- *B-I-B-L-E*
- *The Wise Man and the Foolish Man*
- *Climb, Climb Up Sunshine Mountain*
- *Jesus Loves Me*

Source: Carolyn Tomlin

with paper. Cut an opening in the plastic top. Using items from the craft box, let your child draw designs on the bank. Then print or type each verse. As the child memorizes the verse, place the slip of paper in the bank.

► **Timeline of verses.** Using a roll of butcher paper, write the date and the reference of verses learned. Use this as a progress chart.

► **Matching verses and references.** Using a Styrofoam board, write Bible verses on cards and pin them to the left side of the board. Write references on the right. Use a ribbon and pushpins to connect the correct verse with the reference. Change often.

► **Bible trivia.** Choosing Bible characters, print cards with a description of the person on one side and the correct answer on the back. For example: This baby was hidden in a little basket and placed on the Nile River to protect him from Pharaoh. What was his name? Moses.

► **Bible songs.** Setting Bible stories to music helps kids remember biblical truths. Check out "Cedarwood Kids" on YouTube or "Sing to the Tune" from WMU. †

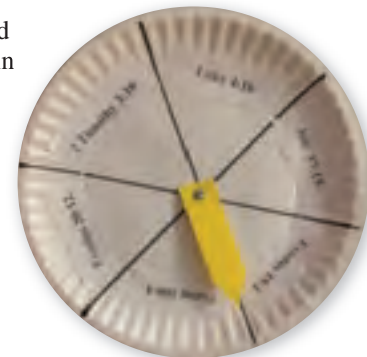


Photo by Carolyn Tomlin
Make a paper plate spinner to help with Scripture memorization.

EXAMPLES OF BIBLE THOUGHTS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

- *All that the Bible says is from God (see 2 Tim. 3:16).*
- *I will sing to God (see Ex. 15:1).*
- *Give thanks to God and praise Him (see Ps. 100:4).*
- *Love your father and mother (see Ex. 20:12).*
- *Look at the wonderful things God made (see Job 37:14).*
- *God made me (see Ps. 139:14).*
- *Jesus went to church (see Luke 4:16).*

Source: WMU "Bible Thoughts by Concept Areas"

Bolivian Christians ask for prayer as government restricts activities

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

Churches in Bolivia have issued a call to prayer and fasting in the wake of new restrictions on religious freedom imposed by the country's socialist president.

A Baptist World Alliance (BWA) news release encouraged Baptists worldwide to support the Bolivian church's call to prayer.

"Global Baptists are encouraged to join Bolivian Christians who have declared Sunday, Jan. 21, a day of prayer and fasting. They are also urged to make representations to Bolivian diplomatic missions in their respective countries on BWA concerns on the new law," the BWA statement read.

In a statement to Bolivia's legislative assembly, BWA general secretary Elijah Brown said he has heard from key Bolivian leaders as well as from leaders across Latin America of their concerns related to newly passed Article 88 of Bolivia's penal code.

Authorized Dec. 15, 2017, the new law includes an article to stop the activities of both criminal groups and religious organizations, lumping both together in the wording of the law, according to Evangelical Focus, a media initiative of the Spanish Evangelical Alliance.

The organization's translation of Article 88.11 reads: "Whoever recruits, transports, deprives of freedom or hosts people with the aim of recruiting them to take part in armed conflicts or religious or worship organizations will be penalized 7 to 12 years of imprisonment."

Christians in Bolivia fear the new law could ban not only preaching but even the act of inviting someone to a Christian event.

Silencing 2 million

"The new penal code would silence the around 2 million evangelical Christians representing approximately 19 percent of the total population. The legislation would affect other religious groups as well, such as Roman Catholics," Evangelical Focus reported on its website.

In his statement, Brown expressed concern "that the ambiguity of these laws could lead to unintended restrictions on religious freedom and to the direct persecution of churches and individuals of faith. My concern is not just for Baptists alone but for all who might find themselves unable to live according to the dictates of their conscience."

Affirming his support for the



Flickr Photographer Dimitry B.

The Plaza Murillo in La Paz, Bolivia, is where the country's seat of government rests. Bolivian President Evo Morales has enacted new laws restricting religious freedom in the predominantly Catholic nation.

prayer effort, Brown noted Bolivia's rich history of freedom of religious expression and urged modification or repeal of the new law.

Winds of change

Historically, according to the U.S. State Department, the Bolivian constitution has protected religious freedom and in practice the government generally has enforced these protections.

However, since his election in 2005, Bolivian President Evo Morales, a socialist and the Andean country's first indigenous president, has pushed constitutional reform with an emphasis on Bolivian national identity, including placing more restrictions on Christian churches and promoting an animist worldview that emphasizes spirituality in the natural world.

Though Bolivia's constitution places presidential term limits, Bolivia's Constitutional Court lifted those restrictions in late 2017, despite a 2016 national referendum in which Bolivians voted against lifting term limits. The more restrictive laws were enacted shortly after the court's decision.

The new regulations leave Christian leaders wondering what forms of ministry have been crimi-

nalized and which are acceptable.

"Will they denounce us if we bring a group of people to a Christian camp? Will I no longer be able to preach the gospel on the streets?" asked Pastor Miguel Machaca Monroy, president of the Coalition of Evangelical Churches in the capital city of Sucre.

Other groups are concerned about the new laws too. Evangelical Focus reported that journalists also have denounced the new law, fearing it will restrict freedom of speech and freedom of media. *Christianity Today* reported that doctors are concerned about wording that expands punishment of "recklessness, negligence (and) malpractice" in all careers.

'Emergency alert'

Evangelical leaders in Bolivia urged the government to work toward solutions without the use of violence, and the National Association of Evangelicals in Bolivia said it will "maintain the emergency alert of the evangelical people in Bolivia, and as a consequence, events, gatherings, prayer meetings and meetings of spiritual intercessions for our country will be organized in all cities and places where there are evangelical Christian churches and organizations," as reported in *Christianity Today*.

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in Loving
Memory

of Alabama Baptist leaders, friends

Earl Hall

Former Alabama Baptist pastor dies at 96

Earl Hall, pastor emeritus of Heritage Baptist Church, Montgomery, and former pastor of Normandale Baptist Church, Montgomery, died Jan. 8. He was 96.

His 73-year ministry "changed the spiritual landscape of the city of Montgomery," according to Teman Knight, pastor of Heritage Baptist, who called him a "hero of the faith."

Hall impacted many during his 25 years at Normandale then 23 years serving "in retirement" at Heritage, Knight said.

Hall began his ministry at Mount Calvary Baptist Church, Tarrant, in 1938 and served several other churches in Alabama before becoming pastor of Normandale Baptist in 1961. Those churches included First Baptist Church, Odenville; Cook Springs Baptist Church, Pell City; First Baptist Church, Winfield; and First Baptist Church, Opp. He also served several years at Campbellsburg Baptist Church in Kentucky.

Hall held a bachelor's degree from Samford University in Birmingham and a master's degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Samford also presented him with an honorary doctor of divinity in 1966.

He was preceded in death by his wife of 73 years, Ethel. He is survived by three children, five grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. (Grace Thornton)



HALL



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Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

By Joanne Sloan

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



Seminary founder, preacher was 'completely devoted to Christ'

B.H. Carroll (1843–1914) was a Southern Baptist pastor, denominational leader, educator and author. He organized Baylor Theological Seminary and led in founding Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, both in Texas.

This year marks the 175th anniversary of his birth.

Benajah Harvey Carroll, 1 of 12 children of Benajah and Mary Eliza Carroll, was born Dec. 27, 1843, in Carroll County, Mississippi. His father was a farmer as well as a Baptist minister. The family moved to Arkansas in 1848 and 10 years later to Burleson County, Texas.

Serving with the Rangers

At the age of 16, Carroll enrolled at Baylor University, then located in Independence, Texas. When the Civil War began in 1860 he enlisted in the Texas Rangers. Two years later he joined the

17th Regiment of the Texas infantry and served until the war ended.

Since the Civil War interrupted his college career, Baylor University granted him the bachelor's degree.

Following a struggle with skepticism for many years, he underwent a conversion in the fall of 1865. He attended a Methodist meeting, and as he was leaving the church a light from heaven flashed upon his mind, bringing with it the Scripture from Matthew 11:28 — "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He seemed to see Jesus before him, inviting him to come to Him. "In a moment I went, once and forever, casting myself unreservedly and for all time at Christ's feet," he wrote, "and in a moment the rest came, indescribably and unspeakable, and it has remained." He soon knew he would become a preacher. He wrote about



CARROLL

his conversion in his famous sermon, "My Infidelity and What Became of It."

He joined the Baptist church in Caldwell, Texas, and was ordained in 1866.

That year he married Ellen Virginia Bell. They had nine children. After Ellen's death, he married Hallie Harrison in 1899. They had one son.

Carroll began his preaching career after the Civil War, serving at several Texas churches. In 1870 he started his pastorate at First Baptist Church, Waco, where he served until 1899. That year he was elected correspond-

ing secretary for the Texas Baptist Education Commission.

From 1872 to 1905, he taught theology and Bible classes at Baylor University, which had then relocated to Waco, Texas, in 1886. Carroll organized Baylor Seminary in 1905.

When Southwestern Seminary's charter was granted on March 14, 1908, he became president and served until his death.

Powerful voice

Carroll was known for his oratorical skills.

He had a powerful and pleasing voice. His intellect was legendary as was his gift of memory.

A prolific writer of 33 volumes, his most popular work is "An Interpretation of the English Bible."

He was completely devoted to Christ. Before his death, Carroll summoned Lee Scarborough, whom he wanted to be his successor as president of Southwestern Seminary.

He said to him, "Lee, lash the seminary to the heart of the Savior."

Carroll died Nov. 11, 1914, and is buried in Oakwood Cemetery in Waco.✠

Rules place new restrictions, oversight on religious teachings

(continued from page 1)
many house churches in China, opted out of registration, which brings government monitoring. ChinaAid said officials often prosecute churches that fail to register, and some of Golden Lampstand Church's leaders have been imprisoned for serving at their church.

The destruction of Golden Lampstand Church is the most recent in several church demolitions that have taken place in the past year. A Catholic church in the province of Shaanxi was demolished and another Protestant church in the northwestern Xinjiang region shut down, according to reports in December 2017 by World Watch Monitor, a news site that reports on Christian persecution.

ChinaAid also reported that a Christian church in China's Henan province was destroyed in May 2017. Parishioners who tried to stop the demolition were beaten and 40 were detained, according to reports.

The Chinese government's actions come ahead of new rules set to go into effect Feb. 2 that place



A cellphone image captured by a passerby shows the explosion of Golden Lampstand Church, Shanxi, China, on Jan. 9, BBC reported. The church was home to 50,000 worshippers.

new restrictions and oversight on religious teachings. The rules increase existing restrictions on unregistered religious groups to specifically ban teaching about religion or going abroad to take part in training or meetings. They also place new oversight on religious gatherings, the construction of religious buildings, the establishment of religious colleges and

online discussions of religious matters.

Tight rein

One Christian missionary to China said he was forced to leave chat groups with high school and college friends because he was known to be a Christian. Fines for violations increase under the new rules as well.

The official Chinese news agency Xinhua reported that the new rules specifically mention security threats from religious groups. The ruling Communist Party of China is officially atheist and claims to protect freedom of religion while keeping a tight rein on religious activities, including allowing only officially recognized religious institutions to operate.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has spoken out against foreign infiltration through religion, Reuters reported. And in November 2017, *The Washington Post* reported that local officials told thousands of villagers in southeastern China to take down pictures of Jesus and put up a photo of Xi instead. *The Post* noted that "a social media account in Jiangxi province's Yugan county said villagers had 'willing-

ly' removed 624 posters showing Christian religious sayings and images and replaced them with 453 images of Xi," a move reminiscent of the adoration expected

China is 42nd on the newly released Open Doors 2018 World Watch List, which ranks the 50 countries where it is most difficult to live as a Christian.

for China's first communist leader, Mao Zedong, whose picture was in every home.

ChinaAid said the recent moves are prompting Christians to worry that the central government will begin ordering the mass destruction of church buildings nationwide and pave the way for escalated persecution. World Watch Monitor has reported cases

of Christian leaders who disappeared, were imprisoned and tortured, or harassed.

China is 42nd on the newly released Open Doors 2018 World Watch List, which ranks the 50 countries where it is most difficult to live as a Christian.✠

Upcoming Judson College conference to feature Richter

Judson College in Marion will hold its annual Pastors Conference on Jan. 30 with Alabama Baptist Pastor Tom Richter as the guest speaker. The conference will be from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and will focus on "Following Jesus in Everyday Life."

Richter will share his perspective on discipleship passages in Scripture, guiding conference participants as they consider discipleship theory and the practical application of God's Word. He currently serves as the pastor of First Baptist Church, Cullman.

Before moving to Alabama, Richter served as pastor of New Hope Christian Church in Ja-

maica, Queens, New York, for 14 years. He also was a featured speaker at this year's Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions State Evangelism Conference.

Judson College will cover the cost of the conference including lunch for any Alabama Baptist minister who wishes to attend. Each conference participant also will receive a complimentary copy of John Ortberg's book, "The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People."

To reserve a space by Jan. 26, contact Cynthia White at cwhite1@judson.edu or 334-683-5107. (Judson)



RICHTER



First female Bishop of London appointed

LONDON — On Dec. 18, 2017, Sarah Mullally was appointed the 133rd Bishop of London, the third most powerful job in the Anglican church. Mullally is the first woman to hold the position.

A former nurse, Mullally became a priest in 2006 after spending more than 35 years in the National Health Service. She was formerly the Bishop of Crediton, in Devon, in southwest England.

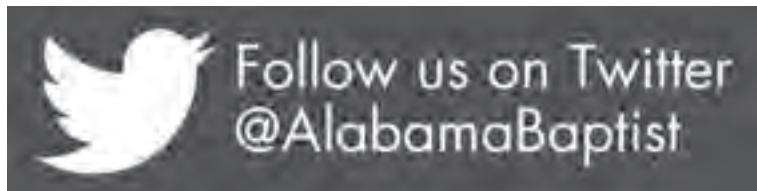
In a news conference in St. Paul's Cathedral, Mullally said the church in London reflects the diversity of the church as a whole, adding she is "very respectful of those who, for theological reasons, cannot accept my role as a priest or a bishop." (TAB)

Anglican priests turn to trade unions for support

LONDON — Increasing numbers of priests in the Church of England are turning to trade unions for support, citing the stresses of the job.

Recalling his own days as a parish priest, Justin Welby, archbishop of Canterbury, said he felt more stress in that role than he did in his previous job as an oil executive.

To find counsel and support, priests are joining Unite, one of Britain's largest unions, which has a specialist faith worker branch. Almost 1,500 priests plus a few rabbis and imams joined the union in 2017 — an increase of 16 percent in 12 months. (RNS)



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SENIOR PASTOR

Hillview Baptist Church is seeking a senior pastor. Resumé may be mailed to: Hillview Baptist Church, 800 Heflin Avenue East, Birmingham, AL 35214, or email: hillviewbaptist.hbc@gmail.com. Current interim pastor: Dr. George King.

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.

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Grief support

Church uniquely equipped to help grieving people find hope, healing from loss

By Michael J. Brooks
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Around the holidays or anniversaries or even when you least expect it, grief can hit hard. And Steve Sweatt says the church is uniquely equipped to help grieving people find renewed hope and healing from loss.

“A loss is separation from a person, place or thing we value,” said Sweatt, a licensed professional counselor in his 21st year as clinical director of Community Grief Support in Homewood, as he spoke to the monthly meeting of Shelby Baptist Association’s Pastors Fellowship on Jan. 2.

That loss could be anything from losing a job to losing a spouse to death or divorce, he said.

“Grief is an involuntary response to loss,” Sweatt said. “Grief can manifest itself in unique ways. Sometimes a person may be prodded by a memory, a shared place, an article of clothing or a song and break down in tears.”

Mourning is what we do with our grief or how we give expression to it and it is more intentional, he said.

Having structure

“Structure is important in mourning,” he said. “A person dealing with spousal loss, for example, might take on new responsibilities with grandchildren or volunteer for a specific ministry at their church. Hobbies can help or an exercise program. These are intentional activities to help manage grief.”

Steve Sweatt (right) stands with Charlie Dale, pastor of Indian Springs Baptist Church, Pelham, who also serves as president of the Shelby Baptist Association’s Pastors Fellowship.



Photo by Michael J. Brooks

Sweatt said social support is important in mourning too because grieving people need access to a network of caring friends.

That’s where the church comes in. “Of course, the church is ideal for providing this network,” he said. “There are probably numbers of people in most congregations who have experienced similar loss and can offer friendship and encouragement.”

Sweatt said a grieving person needs three kinds of friends.

“First we need friends who listen understandably,” he said. “They let us bring up all the emotions we feel without being judgmental. Having a friend like this is truly a gift from the Lord, and talking to our friends about our love for those we’ve lost is a healthy thing. And true friends let us talk about our anger too. This gets the ‘bile’ out of our system and we can feel better.”

Sweatt said the old adage is true — “a grief shared is a grief diminished.”

The second kind of friend is one who helps with material aspects of loss, he said.

“A widow or widower might need financial counsel if the spouse took care of the money, for example,” he said. “Some people in loss have no idea how to handle tax returns, and some don’t know about minor home repairs. Good friends can offer counsel in this regard. I sometimes refer to this group as a ‘grief garden’ since they help us with the maintenance of life.”

The third kind of friend is one who “disrupts” us, Sweatt said.

“This friend knows when we need to get out of the house or go shopping or walk in

“Grieving people who have a faith dimension in their lives have added resources for healing.”

**Steve Sweatt
clinical director,
Community Grief Support**



Unsplash.com

the park,” he said. “I call this ‘coming up for air.’ Grieving people sometimes brood alone and may turn to alcohol or drugs in their loneliness. There are, of course, healthier ways to deal with loss.”

Help from those who care

Sweatt said a pastor or other caring Christian might initiate conversations with a grieving person who is “isolating” by staying away from others.

“A caring friend might say they’ve noticed this isolation and offer to find a person to talk with so that the grieving person can get better,” he said.

“This is a significant ministry within the spiritual family as we live together and care for one another.”

Sweatt said a final way the church can help is to accentuate the “metaphysical” aspect of life.

“Grieving people who have a faith dimension in their lives have added resources for healing,” he said. “We call it ‘benefit finding’ when a grieving person can say and find

comfort in ‘he’s not suffering anymore now’ or ‘she made a profession of faith before she died.’ And praying, meditating, singing and serving the Lord in some tangible way are all healthy and healing activities.”

Sweatt said the grieving process probably isn’t something grieving people completely leave behind; instead it becomes a part of their lives to learn how to deal with in constructive ways.

“Another word used in this work is ‘habituation,’ and this means the loss survivor has learned about the process of grieving and learned how to cope,” he said. “It’s healthy for

those with losses to be able to talk about the loss, to name their departed loved ones, to talk about the things they remember and to express how they felt then and how they feel now. This brings us closer to the point of mastering our pain.”

Sweatt said he and other members of his organization are available to talk with church groups cost-free about the ministry of grief support. ✝

For more information, call 205-870-8667 or visit communitygriefsupport.org.

“First we need friends who listen understandably. They let us bring up all the emotions we feel without being judgmental. Having a friend like this is truly a gift from the Lord.”

**Steve Sweatt
clinical director, Community Grief Support**

Processing sexual abuse

Alabaster Baptist shares pain of past, hope of Christ

By Michael J. Brooks
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When Rita Lee was young, she faced a lot of abuse. “My dad was an alcoholic and mostly absentee,” said Lee, a member of Siluria Baptist Church, Alabaster. “He was verbally abusive to my brother but he often hurt our mother physically. My mother developed some mental challenges because of this and we didn’t live with her for a time.”

The children were sent to a relative’s home — and the abuse got worse.

By the time Lee reached adulthood, she had a past littered with emotional and physical abuse and repeated attempted sexual attacks. She said she struggled with the presence of God while living in abusive homes.

‘Anchor’ in hard times

“I used to watch Billy Graham crusades on TV,” she said. “I was eight or nine when I told mother after seeing a program that I wanted to go to heaven. She prayed with me and I was saved. But it was when I became a teenager that I finally got it, when I realized that God really cared about me. I began to see that He was my anchor in difficult times.”

Lee said another pivotal factor in her life was the ministry of a man named Hope.

“That was really his name,” she said with a laugh. “Mr. Hope was a layman at the local Church of God. He drove a bus and picked up the ragamuffin kids in our neighborhood and then he taught the Bible to us. One day he described the agony of Jesus on the cross, and Mr. Hope began to weep. I learned there were some good men in the world, and God cared about me by sending Mr. Hope to teach us.”

Lee said another milestone was sharing her faith with her dad.

“My dad thought he’d done so many terrible things that God wouldn’t forgive him. But he

committed his life to the Lord in the hospital and I sang ‘Amazing Grace’ at his bedside.”

Lee said she also brought a brother and sister to Christ and has continued to try to be a witness to her children and grandchildren. She said it’s painful to relive her childhood abuse but she feels

compelled to share her experiences to benefit others.

In an effort to do that on a broader scale, she recently published her autobiography, “Every Sparrow That Falls,” which grew out of a journal she worked on for 20 years as she processed through the abuse.

‘Deep brokenness’

“I wrote especially for others — and there are many — who carry with them a deep brokenness because of experiences with abuse and dysfunction of one kind or another,” she said.

In addition to the testimony of what she faced and her growing realization about God’s care, Lee said she hopes the book will inspire other caring adults to be watchful and to intervene.

“I know that there are many other children who even today are going through some unspeakable circumstances and carry with them some secrets they’re afraid to tell,” she said. “I hope those who read this book will keep their eyes open to this and have the courage to step in where it’s needed.”

For more information, visit everysparrowthatfalls.com.



LEE



What if you could successfully equip everyone in your ministry for a lifestyle of disciple-making. This is the purpose of D-Life. D-Life is an organic, simple and intentional process for equipping all believers for a lifestyle of making and multiplying disciples.

The Alabama Baptist, Life Bible Study and several others are sponsoring a D-Life Boot Camp training opportunity for Alabama Baptists:

South Alabama D-Life Boot Camp
February 24, 9 a.m.–2 p.m., University of Mobile

To register or for more details, visit www.livethedlife.com or contact Bill Wilks at 205-228-0030.

Baptist NEWS BRIEFS

COMPILED FROM WIRE SERVICES

Lottie Moon gifts ahead of previous year

RICHMOND, Va. — Southern Baptists’ contributions to support international missions through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering (LMCO) are 4.1 percent ahead of the same time frame as last year, according to a report by Rodney Freeman, International Mission Board (IMB) treasurer and vice president of Support Services.

At the end of 2017, IMB had received \$15,221,629 so far for the 2017–18 campaign, which began Oct. 1, 2017. This total is \$600,027 (4.1 percent) ahead of the 2016–17 LMCO receipts.

The LMCO campaign year historically ran from June 1 to May 31, but that did not align with IMB’s fiscal year, which runs Jan. 1 to Dec. 31. To help alleviate confusion, IMB finance leaders, in conjunction with the board of trustees, proposed to align the fiscal year and the LMCO campaign to Oct. 1 through Sept. 30. Messengers voted to approve the fiscal year change during the 2017 SBC annual meeting in Phoenix. Therefore, gifts contributed from Oct. 1, 2017, to Sept. 30, 2018, will apply to the 2017–18 LMCO. (IMB)

GuideStone announces new location in Dallas

DALLAS — GuideStone Financial Resources plans to relocate in late summer 2018 to 115,000 square feet of new leased offices about 10 miles north of its current facility.

The financial services arm of the Southern Baptist Convention has occupied its current home in Dallas’ Uptown district since 1989. GuideStone’s headquarters building has been sold but will be leased back until the move can be completed.

The move to Pinnacle Tower in the North Dallas area will occur as GuideStone celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2018. It has been based in Dallas since its founding in 1918. (BP)






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— Zachery Smith, worship pastor, Northport Church of God

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According to the Feb. 22, 1855, issue of *The Alabama Baptist*, the Alabama Baptist Bible Society announced plans to establish a Book Depository in Selma for Bibles and religious books. Satellite depositories would be set up across the state and agents would be employed to travel the state selling Bibles, religious books and denominational literature. The proposal was called “a matter of first importance.”



Rashional

THOUGHTS



@RashionalThts

jrash@thealabamabaptist.org

SNAPSHOTS OF LIFE WHEN LIFE HAPPENS

Review, reboot, recenter

Search the hashtag #resolutionfail and you may break one of your resolutions if it is to spend less time on social media. The never-ending list of entertaining tweets consumed an hour of my — eh hem — research time.

For example, @JustSomeGuy8675 posted on Jan. 1: “My #NewYearsResolutions were to avoid Twitter and to start eating breakfast. Woke up at noon, checked Twitter and had two coffees. Best of luck to the rest of you! #resolutionfail”

On Jan. 3 @tpfeifer posted: “Oh the irony of driving past a gym as cars circle the lot to get a parking spot close to the door. #resolutionfail.”

But despite all the jokes made about New Year’s resolutions, January does provide a natural opportunity for evaluation.

At *The Alabama Baptist* (TAB), we take time in early January to select our best work from the past year for awards competitions.

Without looking back and assessing we might not remember to celebrate when we got it right nor appreciate the moments when we made a difference.

The evaluation time also provides us opportunity to improve our work going forward.

And with each evaluation process I always find an article, column or letter to the editor that reminds me of something important in my spiritual journey, work experience or life in general. It’s never the first time I’m reading that particular nugget of information, but it isn’t in the forefront of my mind until I see it again.

If this is true with issues of TAB, then I have to believe it happens in our Bible reading, job descriptions, wedding vows and

those moments when we spill our guts to friends and stay up all night evaluating our lives.

Are we guilty of reading through these documents — or thinking about all that was shared in a heart-to-heart conversation — only once and determining the content is seared forever in our minds and hearts, never to be overridden or forgotten? Or maybe we only skim the information and feel confident we understand it and will stay true to it.

To remain on the right path with clarity, focus and purpose, periodic review and reflection are necessary.

As I self-evaluate and attempt to recenter each January, I am amazed at the clutter and unproductive habits I’ve allowed in my life over the previous 12 months. I realize the importance of pulling weeds from my life to avoid becoming enslaved to the clutter pressing down on me.

So I commit to reboot and start again — determined not to repeat the negative parts of last year, hopeful to add more positive results in the coming year and grateful for the reminders God scatters along the path. 🌱

By Jennifer Davis Rash
Editor-elect



Absolute necessity of Scripture memory

By Pastor Scott Slayton
Chelsea Village Baptist Church, Chelsea

Make an appointment with yourself every day to work on your Scripture memory.

As you are consistent with this over time, you will see a myriad of ways the Lord uses it to conform you to the image of His Son and to help you live a life that bears fruit for His kingdom.

Here are seven reasons you need to store God’s word up in your heart:

1. To know God

The Bible’s first verse introduces Him, and the whole of Scripture is a testimony to His character, glory, love for His people and plan to redeem a people for Himself.

The only way for us to know God is for Him to ... disclose Himself to us. He has done this generally in creation. Romans 1 says we can look at the world which God has made and see something of God’s power and glory — yet it is in the pages of Scripture we see God the most clearly.

2. To fight against sin

When we face temptation, God’s Word convicts us of the foolishness of succumbing to it. When we face a difficult ethical decision, God’s Word shows us which way we need to go. This only happens, however, as we read, study, memorize and meditate on God’s Word.

3. To grow in godly character

When we bathe our minds in Scripture, it changes the way we think and the way we live.

4. To understand sound doctrine

5. To share the gospel

6. To help other Christians

7. To be encouraged when times are hard

One sad morning when I did not know what the future held, the Bible reminded me that whatever I was about to face was in the hands of the sovereign God who loves me, sent His Son to die for me and who works all things together for the good of His children.

Execution over emotion. Emotion overwhelms you. Passion is connected to purpose and task.

Minkah Fitzpatrick
University of Alabama defensive back
(According to ESPN on Jan. 8 prior to National Championship game)

Prayer is indeed a dialogue as we speak with [the Lord] and as we linger in His presence to hear the small, still voice He speaks in our lives.

Pastor Johnny Hunt
“The Need for Intercessors”
“Living in the Light” devotional book

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

Peter Drucker
Author and businessman

God deserves excellence in all we do. We will thrive when we strive for excellence in our worship, work and witness for God.

Pastor Bill Wilks
NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville

We have a lot of lost church members today. One of Satan’s names is Deceiver and one of his deceptions is about man’s soul.

You don’t have to go to heaven and you don’t have to go to hell, but you can’t stay here.

Allen Scroggs
Director of operations
Timothy+Barnabas ministry

Report the facts. Rhetoric tends to overcome what are the true facts. Report the truth and not so much outside noise, then folks can make their own decisions.

Steve Marshall
Alabama attorney general

Scott Slayton (see entry above) recommends the Scripture memory app **ScriptureTyper** to help with memorization.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For January 28

Explore the Bible

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

INCOMPLETE PICTURE Acts 18:24-28; 19:1-7

A Partial Witness (18:24-26)

Acts is the unfolding story of the people of God, filled with the Spirit of God, engaging in the mission of God. In these verses we see Paul setting out on the third missionary journey to proclaim the gospel and strengthen the disciples. While he was moving through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, a Jew named Apollos came to Ephesus.

Apollos was a well-educated man from Alexandria, Egypt. He appears to be a believer. He accurately taught the way of the Lord. He was an eloquent man, a man of words and ideas. He was competent in the Scriptures. He was fervent in spirit. He taught the truth passionately and boldly.

Apollos taught about Jesus accurately, being a disciple of John. He accepted John the Baptist's message that Messiah was coming. He even believed that Jesus was the Lamb of God (John 1:29) and the Messiah. He unpacked the Scriptures that pointed to Jesus. But he did not understand the new covenant baptism practice established by Jesus. Aquila and Priscilla needed to explain baptism "more accurately" (v. 26).

This godly couple would have taught him how, in Christian baptism, the triune God places His name on His people (Matt. 28:19).

Priscilla and Aquila took the eloquent Apollos aside privately and explained the way of the Lord more accurately. This is a good model of how to correct a brother as well as how to receive the correction. They did not rebuke him publicly. Apollos, far more educated than Priscilla and Aquila, had a teachable heart. He listened to their instruction and adopted their position. This is a reminder that we should never think we are beyond the need for further instruction in God's Word, no matter how long we have

been a Christian or how many seminary degrees we may hold.

A Complete Witness (18:27-28)

The believers in Ephesus wrote a letter of recommendation for Apollos to the saints in Achaia (Corinth). When Apollos arrived there, he was a great help to the people who had been saved by the grace of God. Apollos watered what Paul had planted, but Paul was quick to point out the real hero behind their success: "God gave the growth" (1 Cor. 3:6). God greatly used Paul and Apollos in the lives of the young believers in Corinth.

Apollos had a powerful evangelistic ministry in Corinth. He explained how the Messiah must suffer and rise and that Jesus was the Messiah. Apollos' thorough knowledge of the Old Testament equipped him to be an effective evangelist to the Jews in Corinth.

An Incomplete Faith (19:1-7)

While Apollos was ministering in Corinth, Paul arrived in Ephesus, the major stop on his third missionary journey. He encountered some disciples of John who had an incomplete faith. They resembled Apollos in some ways but the differences outweighed the similarities.

Paul observed something in their behavior that led him to ask them some important clarifying questions. After hearing their responses, Paul shared with them about the Holy Spirit, baptism and the Christ. After proclaiming the gospel to these 12 men, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Paul then laid hands on them and they experienced the Holy Spirit's presence and power.

These disciples of John had not heard of the fulfillment of John's ministry — the coming of the Holy Spirit into the lives of believers. Now they experienced a complete faith, including faith in Jesus as the Messiah and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. ✠

Bible Studies for Life

By Jim Barnette, Ph.D.
Samford University and Brookwood Baptist Church, Mountain Brook

I AM A CHILD OF THE KING Galatians 4:1-7

In Galatians 3:26-29, Paul explains to the Church that there is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. All believers are one in Christ Jesus. And because we are now the true children of Abraham, we are heirs of God's promise.

In Galatians 4:1-7, Paul drives home this point with a twofold metaphor. First he references a minor child who will one day be heir but who is not free to exercise the status he actually has until the legal age. Second he uses the example of a slave who is adopted as a son with full rights of freedom.

Before Christ, we were on the outside looking in. (1-3)

In spite of the darkness of the world before Christ, God had in view a future time for our deliverance from the law. Christians, like an immature child, were under control of the law, but even worse, Christians were in a state of slavery to "the elemental spirits of the universe" (vv. 8-9). The point of verse 3 (and vv. 4-7) is that Gentiles as much as Jews are under bondage. By "elemental spirits," Paul is referring to those transcendent cosmic powers that oppress humanity. The evil powers had commandeered God's good law, just as they had taken over God's good creation. As a result, all people were under the same oppressive slavery.

We are adopted by Christ into His family. (4-5)

"The fullness of time" was set by God Himself; it was not the result of developments in human history.

"God sent His Son": The liberating event was God's in Christ. It was not a matter of human beings adopting a new attitude or resolving to follow spiritual prin-

ciples. In sovereign freedom God acted at the time and in the manner of God's own choosing. "God sent His Son" points to Christ's pre-existence, deity, incarnation and saving mission. "Born of a woman" speaks to the historical event of Jesus' birth. For Paul the reality of Jesus' humanity was vitally important for us. One who was not like us could not redeem us. One who did not share our humanity could not become Our Savior.

"That we might receive adoption": For Paul human beings are not "naturally" children of God but become God's children by the free grace of God's act in adopting former slaves into His family.

We experience the benefits of God's family through His Holy Spirit. (6-7)

As His adopted children now the redeemed can call to "Abba," using Jesus' distinctive word for His heavenly Father. "Abba" is the childlike "Daddy" in Aramaic, denoting intimate love and assured freedom — as against the strictures of oppressive legalism.

To conclude, the result is to be a son not a slave — and if a son then an heir, made so by the grace of God. Such is His tenacious and tender love in spite of humanity's treatment of His Son. Martin Luther commented that if he were God and the world had treated him as it had treated God, he would have kicked our planet to bits. We can give thanks that Luther was not God.

Instead, in what the great preacher Phillips Brooks called "the stubborn obstinacy of well-placed affection," God came to us in Jesus. This amazing mystery is best summarized in the words of John the Beloved Apostle: "So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son." ✠

Christian Crossword

By Valerie Barrett Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

- The ___ said unto the younger. (Gen. 19:31)
- The kingdom of ___ king of Bashan. (Num. 32:33)
- He had ___ in the grave four days. (John 11:17)
- A greeting.
- Hear I ___ you, ye sons of Levi. (Num. 16:8)
- A faithful ___ is health. (Prov. 13:17)
- Nothing: ___ ro.
- Lord shall ___ to me another son. (Gen. 30:24)
- ___ the son of Nathan. (2 Sam. 23:36)
- With the ___ of the sword. (Gen. 34:26)
- Bored a hole in the ___. (2 Kings 12:9)
- Even ___ the tongue is a little member. (James 3:5)
- ___, the beloved physician. (Col. 4:14)
- For, ___, the wicked bend their bow. (Ps. 11:2)
- Blessed are ye that ___ beside all waters. (Isa. 32:20)
- Achar, the troubler of ___. (1 Chron. 2:7)

- Went forth to ___ into the land. (Gen. 12:5)
- ___ that time the Lord said. (Deut. 10:1)
- ___ the son of Kish. (1 Sam. 10:21)
- Speak anything ___. (Dan. 3:29)
- And ___ her brother said unto her. (2 Sam. 13:20)
- The dove found ___ rest. (Gen. 8:9)
- Filled with the ___ of the ointment. (John 12:3)
- And if thy oblation ___ a meat offering. (Lev. 2:5)
- ___ sinful nation. (Isa. 1:4)
- Brought them unto ___ to see. (Gen. 2:19)
- Which perished at ___ dor. (Ps. 83:10)
- An abbreviation for the third book before the New Testament; also an old, ugly woman.
- ___ it in their hearts. (Jer. 31:33)
- Offerings of the Lord made ___ fire. (Lev. 24:9)

Down

- Their faces shall be as

- (Isa. 13:8)
- God said unto Moses ___ (Ex. 3:14; 2 words)
- They smote him under the fifth ___. (2 Sam. 4:6)
- Shall this man be a ___ unto us. (Ex. 10:7)
- Jemuel, and Jamin, and ___. (Gen. 46:10)
- I will now put forth a ___ unto you. (Judg. 14:12)
- Whether poor ___ rich. (Ruth 3:10)
- Baldness is come upon ___. (Jer. 47:5)
- I will break the ___ of your power. (Lev. 26:19)
- Feathers with ___ gold. (Ps. 68:13)
- But ___ ministered before the Lord. (1 Sam. 2:18)
- In his word ___ I hope. (Ps. 130:5)
- One ___ for the Lord. (Lev. 16:8)
- This great fire will ___ us. (Deut. 5:25)
- As he was about to ___ into Syria. (Acts 20:3)
- The vision of ___ the son of Amoz. (Isa. 1:1)
- A shortened name for

- the ninth book of the Old Testament.
- Let this ___ be under thy hand. (Isa. 3:6)
- The Lord ___ will be a refuge. (Ps. 9:9)
- Of Manasseh, ___ the son of Susi. (Num. 13:11)
- And there went over a ferry ___. (2 Sam. 19:18)
- It hath consumed ___ of Moab. (Num. 21:28)
- My son, ___ my voice. (Gen. 27:8)
- O ye sons of ___. (Ps. 4:2)
- And all that handle the ___. (Ezek. 27:29)
- ___: and he smelleth the battle afar off. (Job 39:25)





Media reviews

MOVIE

‘Paddington 2’ director Paul King reflects on clean humor, family films

By **Michael Foust**
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Filmmaker Paul King didn’t have to be persuaded to direct the 2015 film Paddington. He essentially campaigned for it.

A child of the 70s, King remembers lying on the living room rug as a child and watching the stop-action Paddington TV series, laughing at the lovable bear’s clumsy antics.

So when he learned several years ago that a Paddington film was in the works, he launched what he now describes as a “one-

person campaign” to become director.

“I just had a feeling of how it could work,” said King, whose sequel, “Paddington 2,” opened in theaters Jan. 12.

“I started writing letters and I managed to get a meeting with one person and then their boss and finally I got a meeting with [producer] David Heyman. ... I tried to explain why this young director that he really didn’t know was the only person who

should be making ‘Paddington.’”

At the time King was a 30-something filmmaker with only a handful of lesser-known projects to his credit, but Heyman nevertheless gave him the role. It’s safe to say it turned out well. It was one of the Top 40

grossing movies of 2015 at \$76 million in box office receipts and was widely praised, receiving a score of 98 percent fresh at RottenTomatoes.com, where 80 percent of moviegoers said they liked it.

The Paddington movies are based on a series of children’s books by Michael Bond, who passed away last year at age 91.

King served as a co-writer on both films.

In “Paddington 2,” our heroic bear is searching for the perfect present for Aunt Lucy’s 100th birthday when he sees a pop-up book in a store and embarks upon a series of odd jobs to buy it. But when the book is stolen, it’s up to Paddington and his family, the Browns, to find the thief.

Making a sequel can be “tricky,” King said.

“[Paddington] hadn’t done much in the wider world [in the first film], and so we really wanted to send him out into the community and see how his goodness stands up against the big, cynical city,” King said. “And [we’d] see whether he could change the world with his kindness, or

For more information, visit Paddington.com.



Photo courtesy of StudioCanal

whether his kindness would be sort of crushed by this reality and cynicism.”

King calls himself a fan of Charlie Chaplin films, Pixar movies and the Wallace and Gromit clay animation series — all projects that feature innocent humor that can make the whole family laugh.

One of his goals was to make a film featuring a similar type of clean humor, he said.

Jokes for everyone

“There’s a great tradition of these sort of quality movies where the jokes are for everyone,” King said, adding that he wanted “Paddington 2” to be the type of film “that can bind the whole family together.”

Although Paddington the bear is funny, he also has positive traits children can model.

“Paddington is brought up by his Aunt Lucy and she has these kind of really phenomenal values, of looking for the good in other people,” King said. “He always has a very kind and polite attitude. One of the things he does that is very special is he doesn’t judge a book by its cover.”

“Paddington 2” is rated PG for some action and mild rude humor. 🍌

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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'He is our strength'

Pastors draw close to God as tribal churches are attacked

When Hindu extremists in India told Pastor Karma Oraon they would not stop beating him until he worshipped the monkey god, he felt Christ close to him, he said.

"In those moments when they were kicking and beating me, I felt that even if I die now the Lord will make the ministry I leave behind fruitful,"

Oraon told Morning Star News. "We are just a few gathering in the name of Jesus. He is our strength."

His small flock of eight people was meditating on Scripture on Christmas Eve in Harmu village of Ranchi District, Jharkhand state, when twice as many Hindu nationalists brandishing wooden sticks intruded, shouting, "Praise Bajrang Bali." Bajrang Bali is another name for the popular monkey god Hanuman.

Oraon said attackers told the congregation, "All the Christians in this area beware. There is no place for Christianity here." They then dragged him outside, beat him and expelled him from the village, he said.

Chotu Munda, 21, said he was beaten when he tried to rescue the 34-year-old pastor and female church members who had also tried to separate the assailants from Oraon. The pastor noted, "They scolded the sisters in very vulgar language for coming to help rescue me."

That night at 10 p.m., Oraon went to a police station, but officers refused to register a case against the assailants or even receive his complaint, he said.

"I never had an experience of opposition when I preached gospel or visited families to pray for the sick. But I seek inspiration from my Lord; people have crossed every limit to humiliate Him and crucify Him, but He patiently bore their torture for my

sake, for my sins," Oraon said. "I strongly feel the presence of my Lord Jesus in all this. Had He not granted the strength to endure, I could have never overcome from what happened."

In a separate incident in Jharkhand state, another group of Hindu extremists beat tribal Christians while they worshipped — also reviling them for leaving their indigenous religion for Christianity.

About 60 Hindu nationalists stormed into a house church on Christmas Day in Behratoli village, Ranchi District, where 16 Christians had gathered to celebrate Christmas.

The attackers told Pastor Rakesh Tirkey they didn't want to see any Christians in the area, he said, adding that they snatched away his Bible, tore the pages to pieces, spit on it and kicked it. But when they tried to light a match to set the torn Bible on fire, they were unable to ignite it, he said.

When Tirkey went to a police station to file a report, officers refused to accept his complaint, the pastor said.

Tirkey became a Christian eight years ago. Then an alcoholic with declining health that no doctor was able to relieve, he was healed after putting his faith in Christ, he said.

"It was then I decided that the Lord has

given me good health, so I will dedicate it to my Lord's work, and as long as I live, I will serve Him," he said. "Now I am leading a life full of joy."

Pastors in the region told Morning Star News that religious freedom in Jharkhand is in danger. The rise of Hindu nationalism has led to attacks throughout the country. India ranked 11th on Christian support organization Open Doors' 2018 World Watch List of countries where Christians experience the most persecution, up from 15th the previous year, and ahead of Saudi Arabia, Nigeria and Egypt. (MS)



MS photo
A tribal activist carries a black flag to protest the rise of Christianity and 'Western culture' in Jharkhand state, India.



Reports of Christians targeted, killed continue

OMUKU, Nigeria — The deaths of nearly 150 Christians have been reported in targeted attacks on religious minorities in Nigeria, Cairo and India in recent weeks, according to various reports from religious liberty advocates and news agencies.

Among the latest attacks, unidentified assailants killed between 14 and 16 Christians leaving a midnight New Year's Eve service Jan. 1 in Omuku town in Rivers State, Nigeria, the BBC and Nigerian Independent news reported Jan. 2. The gunmen fired at random and at close range, according to police who said the violence might have been related to rivalry among gangs in Nigeria's oil-producing regions in the Middle Belt.

Also in Nigeria's Middle Belt, suspected Fulani herdsmen killed four Christians and injured 10 others during a celebration two days before Christmas in the Southern Kaduna village of Nimdem, religious freedom advocate International Christian Concern (ICC) reported Dec. 26, 2017.

The gunmen attacked around 10 p.m. on Dec. 23, Pastor Gideon Mutum told ICC, "during an interdenominational carol that comes every Christmas with Bible quiz, drama, songs and preaching." It was not clear whether the attack occurred inside a church building.

Among deadly attacks elsewhere, a masked gunman killed two Christians on Jan. 1 outside their business in Cairo, the London *Daily Express* news reported. The double murder followed the killing of nine people, including eight Coptic Christians, as they left St. Menas "Mar Mina" Coptic Orthodox church south of Cairo on Dec. 29.

In the largest and deadliest of the attacks, raiding Fulani herdsmen killed more than 100 Christians during several raids in Adamawa State, Nigeria, on Dec. 4-11. (BP)

Indian officials ban prayer assemblies

PATHAKPUR, India — A pastor in northern India was told his church should not assemble for prayer and worship anymore because the police cannot guarantee protection of its members.

Pastor David Amarnath of Pathakpur village in Bhadohi District, Uttar Pradesh state, was summoned to a police station after Hindu extremists stopped his church's worship in December 2017. Officers told Amarnath and his fellow church members to "refrain from all Christian activities," the pastor said. Police officials said they would not be able to protect church members from Hindu extremists closely tied to government officials.

The Indian constitution guarantees the right to freedom of religion. However, observers believe Hindu hardliners within the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party are moving toward transforming India from a secular republic into a Hindu state. Reports of violence against religious minorities are frequent.

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

Nigerian student arrested after conversion

KARU, Nigeria — A Nigerian university student who converted from Islam to Christianity has been arrested by state security forces, as has the man who introduced her to Christianity.

World Watch Monitor reported that Nabila Umar Sanda, 19, a student at Karu's Bingham University, which is owned by one of Nigeria's major churches, Evangelical Church Winning All, was arrested Jan. 8. Her friend, Simput Dafup, a 33-year-old Christian, was arrested that same day, and both are still being held in an unknown location.

Speaking to the press in Jos, local church leader Jeremiah Datim said he had followed governmental procedures to report Sanda's conversion but the arrests happened shortly after those meetings.

Nigeria ranks 14th on Open Doors' 2018 World Watch List of countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. (TAB)

"In those moments when they were kicking and beating me, I felt that even if I die now, the Lord will make the ministry I leave behind fruitful."

Pastor Karma Oraon