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Love one another

Unsplash.com

Prison ministry advocates encourage Christians to befriend incarcerated

By Martha Simmons
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

It was a curious statement. “The unsaved are not a project,” asserted a devotional in the Correctional Ministries and Chaplains Association’s monthly e-newsletter. This was directed not only to those involved in prison ministry, but also to disciples and unbelievers in the free world.

“I think there are often two errors we make when engaging with unbelievers,” said Karen Swanson, director of the Billy Graham Center’s Institute for Prison Ministries at Wheaton College. “There are times when we befriend unbelievers with the goal of sharing Christ and when they don’t want to hear about Christ, we quit being their friend or we are friends with unbelievers and never share Christ.

“Both showing and sharing the

love of Christ is needed when we reach out to those in our sphere of influence who don’t know Christ,” Swanson said.

Don Metzler, president of the We Care Program, which ministers to prisoners throughout Alabama, agreed.

Loving people

“When we approach ministry with the mindset that we need to see results we tend to look at it more as a project versus loving people,” he said. “For those who have the privilege of working with the incarcerated or formerly incarcerated it is even easier to see such people as a project partly because of the space

in which they are confined.

“Obviously, this applies primarily to those currently in prison,” he said. “However, society confines even formerly incarcerated persons to a particular place, so to speak, because of all the limitations and stigma associated with their record. Whether these places are physical or perception-based it can become too easy to minister to someone and then leave when our ministry time is done.

“This leads to more of a project-based ministry unless we intentionally work to overcome that mindset by seeing each one of these men and women as someone created in God’s image.

“I think Christians often don’t realize that Jesus is already in prisons,” Swanson said. “There is a body of believers in every prison — this includes both the incarcerated and corrections staff.”

Many in the free world are just as imprisoned by unbelief as those who spend their days behind iron bars.

Lifestyle of ministry

“I believe it would benefit us and those we serve if we work to live a lifestyle of ministry instead of thinking ministry is something we need to ‘go and do,’” Swanson said. “This might mean showing love to the person working at the gas station or

(See ‘Be Jesus,’ page 7)

“For those who want to serve the incarcerated, contact the chaplain or religious program coordinator to see what is needed.

Don’t go in with an agenda. Get trained. Serving inside a correctional facility is a cross-cultural ministry.”

Karen Swanson
director, Billy Graham Center’s Institute for Prison Ministries

To watch the videos from this week’s issue, visit our YouTube channel or use the HP Reveal app on your phone or tablet and hover over the segments marked “AR.”

COMMENT

Honoring an Abba-like Relationship

For some, the reference to God as “Father” is a reference to God as “Creator.” Clearly the Bible teaches that God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them.

But for the Christian, referring to God as “Father” has a completely different meaning. Humanly speaking we know there is a major difference between “fathering” a child and being a “dad” to that child. For the Christian, God is both “Father” and “Dad.”

Jesus provided insight into that unique relationship when He most frequently addressed God as “Abba,” a term used by family members most often translated “Dad” or “Daddy.” It is a personal term, an intimate term, a term indicating knowledge and activity between the one speaking and the one addressed.

Christian believers have such a relationship with God. The Apostle John wrote, “See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called children of God; and such we are” (1 John 3:1).

The Apostle Paul added, “You have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Rom. 8:15).

This truth guides the church as the celebration of Father’s Day approaches on June 17, 2018. It is not the creative power of fatherhood that is honored. It is the personal, intimate relationship based on knowledge and involvement of a dad in the life of a child — the “Abba” qualities that bond parent and child.

Relating to children

God’s relationship to His children models how a Christian dad is to relate to his children.

Near the top of any list about God’s involvement with His children is the quality of provider. The psalmist quotes God as saying to Israel, “I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide and I will fill it” (Ps. 81:10).

In Philippians 4:19 the Apostle Paul declares, “My God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” Paul wrote out of the confidence of his own experience. He had been cared for in persecution and prosperity, in want and in plenty. While not a promise of earthly wealth, it was a promise of God’s provision no matter one’s situation.

Providing for families

Christian dads follow God’s example in providing for their families. First Timothy 5:8 says, “If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” Again, the verse does not promise that every desire will be fulfilled but at least the Christian dad places the needs of the children before his own.

Jesus used the image of the shepherd to illustrate how God guides. Jesus said, the shepherd “calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ... The sheep follow him, for they know his voice” (John 10:3–4). Later He added, “My sheep hear My voice and I know them, and they follow Me” (v. 27).

God guides in every facet of life as one hears and responds to the voice of God. The psalmist wrote that even when the child of God falls “he shall not be hurled headlong because the Lord is the One who holds his hand” (Ps. 37:23–24).

Wisdom also comes from God. Proverbs 2:6 declares, “For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.” Proverbs 1:7 adds the beginning of wisdom is “fear of the Lord.”

The Apostle Paul continued this teaching in 1 Corinthians 1:30 when he wrote Jesus “has become for us wisdom from God.” That wisdom results in “righteousness, holiness and redemption.”

In addition to resulting in the quality of life the Christian believer lives, God’s wisdom also impacts one’s vocation. In Exodus 35:31, Moses talks about God filling people “with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding and in knowledge and in all craftsmanship.”

He goes on to talk about God providing voca-

tional skills such as working with gold and silver, cutting stones, carving wood, engraving, designing and more.

Sometimes we overlook God’s wisdom expressed in the believer’s vocation as well as in the believer’s righteous lifestyle.

An “Abba” kind of relationship also involves discipline. Indulgence is not love, not in an earthly relationship and not in the relationship between God and His children. Jesus said one of the functions of the Holy Spirit is to convict people of sin (John 16:8). Sin is other than the will of God and “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

The Holy Spirit also guides into “all truth” (John 16:13). Guiding into truth and convicting of sin are forms of discipline. But discipline is more. Discipline also is action. In Hebrews 12:6 the writer picks up the words of Proverbs 3:11–12. He urges readers not to “faint when you are reproved by Him for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines.”

God also restores the wayward. God’s discipline is not done in anger. It is like the father who disciplines “the son in whom he delights” (Prov. 3:12). It is always done for constructive results. It is never done destructively.

That is why God is like the father who welcomes the wayward son back into the family as described in Luke 15.

Nehemiah described the waywardness of Israel saying, “They refused to listen and did not remember Your wondrous deeds.” He adds, “But you are a God of forgiveness, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness; and You did not forsake them” (Neh. 9:17).

Never should it be overlooked that God acts toward His people with kindness, compassion and care.

Ultimately God’s kindness is demonstrated in Jesus Christ.

Personal relationship

Titus 3:4–6 reads, “But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.”

God’s love for us was demonstrated through Jesus Christ and we return God’s love through faith in Him. That is why the believer has an Abba-like relationship with his Heavenly Father; why the relationship is personal, intimate and active.

That is the kind of relationship God desires for families and the kind of relationships the Church honors on Father’s Day.✠





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

(ISSN 0738-7741;
USPS 011-080)

© The Alabama Baptist, Inc. is published weekly except for one week in July and December by The Alabama Baptist, Inc., at 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209. Phone: 205-870-4720. Statewide phone: 1-800-803-5201. Fax: 205-879-6026. Website: www.thealabamabaptist.org. Email: news@thealabamabaptist.org or subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org. Periodicals postage paid at Hattiesburg, Miss.

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Prayer for reconciliation

Freedom March focuses on healing, redemption in Anniston

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Every day for months Jacqueline Paddio drove back and forth to work down Highway 202 from Anniston to Word Alive International Outreach in Oxford, where she serves on staff.

And every day as she passed the historical markers posted on the road, she had questions weighing heavy on her heart.

"Not being from here, I didn't know the whole history of what had happened," Paddio said.

But she knew she needed to know.

So she asked around and heard the story — the story of the Greyhound Bus that left Atlanta on May 14, 1961, taking on board seven members of the Freedom Riders, a group of people on a journey to test interstate bus segregation. When they got to the bus station in Anniston, a mob met them, slashed the bus's tires and broke the windows.

And when the bus driver stopped a little bit down the road to change the tire, the mob caught up with them, set the bus on fire and attacked the passengers.

"As I heard the story and thought about it, I just kept hearing God say we needed healing, reconciliation and restoration here," Paddio said.

She began to take that idea to others. She talked with her pastor, Kent Mattox. She met with a local Freedom Riders association that was already looking for ways to bring the community together.

And she met with Roland Brown, pastor of Golden Springs Baptist Church, Anniston, in Calhoun Baptist Association.

For more than 10 years, Brown had been working hard to reach across lines and love people wherever they are, he said. When Anniston held hearings a few years back to talk about making the bus burning site a national monument, Brown went to show his support.

And when Paddio said she wanted to do a re-enactment of the freedom ride, Brown said he wanted to be on that bus.

"Our church is one that wants to love others, to be neighbors," Brown said. "And if I can do something about reconciliation and I don't, then I'm responsible."

So he was there May 5 when the buses pulled out for the Freedom March event — along with



Photo courtesy of Word Alive

Pastors lead busloads of marchers in the Freedom March in Anniston on May 5, a re-enactment of the Freedom Riders' 1961 trip through Anniston.

several hundred other people who gathered. The group boarded buses at Word Alive, then they retraced the route of the Freedom Riders' bus starting at the Greyhound Station.

"They had set up little mile markers and encouraged us to pray along the way," Brown said. "It was emotional. The whole ride was a spiritual journey toward hope. I can't even begin to tell you how it touched my soul."

He sat in the back of the bus because he wanted to know what that felt like. He made friends along the way.

Then the buses stopped about a mile from the bus burning site.

"We stopped there, then walked and prayed and sang until we got to the place (the site of the bus burning)," Brown said. Even though it was called the Freedom

March, "it was more of a time of prayer for reconciliation and redemption than it was a march."

Byron Jackson, pastor of Greater Thankful Missionary Baptist Church, Anniston, said it was "breathtaking" to look back down the hill behind him at the united group walking up Highway 202.

"There were so many people from different

locations and backgrounds coming together for the same purpose," he said. "It was powerful to see how all of us could come together. It was beautiful."

Jackson said the day was "an amazing event."

"It was a great opportunity for me to connect with white pastors in the area because prior to us coming together for the work of this event, there hadn't been much work done across the racial barrier," he said.

But now he, Brown and others are good friends.

Working together

"Mine and Roland's relationship started before this, but we were able to learn how to work together and how to lead the people we pastor to work together," Jackson said. "He's been a great addition to my life and the march event brought us closer."

Eric Snider, pastor of First Baptist Church, White Plains, in Anniston, said he got involved in the march because he wanted to do more than just preach about racial reconciliation.

"I wanted to make it more than an academic lesson," he said. "The march was a healing experience. It was really something special."

Not just that — it reminded him of the time when all racial strife will ultimately be healed, Snider said. "In a bunch of ways, it was kind of like heaven — when every tribe, language and people will come together." ✠



Photo courtesy of Word Alive

Word Alive Pastor Kent Mattox (right) assists a man at the Freedom March.

To learn more about the event,
visit thefreedommarch.org.

‘God is our source,’

Top 6 things music/worship ministers should learn as early as they can

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Rick Stone said he feels like he had a definite advantage in his music ministry — a father who was in the same line of work for 60 years.

“I’m still learning. I’m still a student,” said Stone, worship pastor at Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville.

But because of his father’s influence, he’s felt the responsibility over his 40 years of music ministry to pass along what he does know to the next generation, just as it was done for him.

Jim Van Matre, worship pastor at First Baptist Church, Gulf Shores, said he feels the same way. “It’s so important for worship ministers to learn these things as early as they can,” he said.

Here are some of the most important things Stone and Van Matre said they would like to pass along:

1. Remember that loving Christ is the end. Music is just the means to the end.

The focus should always be on Jesus, Stone said.

“Our call is to minister the unsearchable witness of Christ and our medium is music,” he said. “What I encourage all worship leaders to do is to use music to get people to love and adore Christ and live for Him. The music is a means to an end.”

You don’t have to do “dog and pony” shows all the time — just point people to Jesus, he said. “The people are hungry for the presence of God and His majesty.”

Stone said he mentors younger ministers to make even their rehearsals a worship experience.

“Be genuine, be real, be passionate in your calling,” he said. “Be a hot-hearted minister for the glory of God.”

2. Never make the work of the church a substitute for your personal communion with God.

Great worship is based on the knowledge of God’s Word and that comes from time spent alone with Him, Stone said.

“The more we know Jesus and know the heart of God, the deeper our worship is.”

‘Open to a fresh work of God’

Worship pastors can sometimes get in the habit of using a formula week in and week out and forget that God might want them to go in a new and fresh direction, he said.

“God is our source. He is our inspiration and if we are not open to a fresh work of God, we may miss it,” he said.

3. Remember the weight of responsibility you bear.

Music gets people’s attention and that means worship offers a chance to have an impact on them, Stone said.

Leave them with a hunger for Jesus, not for more music, he said.

“People are very influenced by what worship leaders do on the platform. There is built-in authority and influence,” he said.

“What they say and what they sing is extremely formative in the life of the church.”

That’s why Stone said he has always felt the weight of responsibility that lays on him, both in his own ministry and in mentoring younger leaders.

“We need to be careful what comes out of our mouths and how we conduct ourselves,” he said.

Worship leaders also need to guard their relationship with Christ closely, Stone said.

“Platform personalities are prime targets of Satan — he will target these people because of their public ministry,” he said.

And if they aren’t careful, worship leaders can be exalted to a level that isn’t



Photo courtesy of Rick Stone

Rick Stone, worship pastor at Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville, wants to pass along as much as he can to the next generation.



Photo courtesy of Jackie Strickland

Jim Van Matre, worship pastor for FBC Gulf Shores, directs the choir.

healthy, Stone said. “Remember that you’re not a star — you’re a servant.”

4. Know your audience.

When it comes to choosing music, Van Matre said it’s important to remember that you have an entire congregation with multiple age groups represented.

And your audience is different from that of other churches, he said.

Ministers sometimes fly to visit big, growing churches in other cities, then come back and try to replicate the same formula in their church, Van Matre said. “They never kneel down at their spot in the world and say, ‘What do you want to do with us uniquely for the glory of Christ?’”

Worship pastors should pray for God’s vision, select music that fits the different segments of their congregation, then blend those into a service that is uniquely their church, Van Matre said.

Have balance, he said. Represent your community and don’t try to be anyone else.

“We serve a diverse God,” Van Matre said.

5. This may sound obvious, but pick good music.

“Pick gripping, heart-stirring music,” Van Matre said. “Don’t pick passive, boring stuff that people won’t remember.”

There is no passive singing in the Bible, he said. “Pick the music that will point them to God and stay in their minds.”

6. Love people — the pastor included.

“Ministry isn’t about music; it’s about people,” Stone said. “I tell all the guys I mentor, ‘Ask God to make you a servant.’”

Remember that your role is to lead people to Jesus, he said.

‘Servant ministry’

“Your ministry is a servant ministry. Support the other ministries of the church,” Stone said. “Pray with the education minister, the student leaders, the pastor.”

And honor the role of pastor even if your relationship is a struggle, he said.

“I train my guys, ‘You may have a pastor who is mean-spirited or egotistical, but he has the office of the pastor and we are to honor that office and respect that office,’” Stone said. “Ask the spirit of God to give us the capacity to love and respect that man.”

Overall, serve people in music ministry but don’t let your identity be dictated by their compliments or criticism, he said. “The desires of people can change overnight. We need to let our worship be driven by God and get back to seeing God for who He is.” ✝

What's the best way to introduce a new song to your congregation?

FROM RICK STONE, WORSHIP PASTOR AT WHITESBURG BAPTIST CHURCH, HUNTSVILLE

The best way (for us) to introduce a new song to the congregation is through the choir. Why?

1. When the choir sings the song in corporate worship, all attention is on the choir. There are no other distractions present.
2. The choir has rehearsed the new song beforehand, so the song is presented well musically and the lyrics are enunciated clearly.
3. The words are on the screen to reinforce the message of the song.
4. More times than not, if a choir can sing a new song, the congregation can sing it also. The song lends itself to group singing.

Of course a song can be introduced via solo, ensemble or even an orchestra. It's good to place the words on the screens for these also.

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How do you approach mentorship?

FROM DON CAMPBELL, MINISTER OF WORSHIP AND DISCIPLESHIP AT THE BAPTIST CHURCH AT MCADORY, MCCALLA

I think it's important to share the experience that one has had — to be able to say, "You don't have to make this mistake because I have made it many times." It's about time and transparency. You have to be willing to spend time with someone and explain to them why you do certain things and what your thinking is. It's not just the "how," it's the "why" as well.



CAMPBELL

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You might find these on their bookshelves

- ▶ **"Worship Leaders, We Are Not Rock Stars"** by Stephen Miller
- ▶ **"Worship: The Ultimate Priority"** by John MacArthur
- ▶ **"Real Worship: Playground, Battleground or Holy Ground?"** by Warren Wiersbe
- ▶ **"Enter His Courts With Praise! Old Testament Worship for the New Testament Church"** by Andrew E. Hill
- ▶ **"Worship"** by David Jeremiah

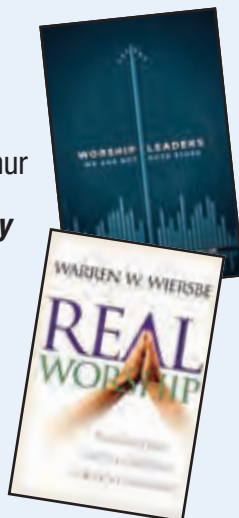


Photo courtesy of Adam Edwards

Chris Lombardo (left), student worship pastor for NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville, is mentored by Charlie Martin (right), NorthPark's worship pastor.

Team effort

NorthPark's worship pastor invests in culture of mentorship, learning

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Chris Lombardo started out at NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville, four years ago. He was 17 and in his last semester of high school, and some of the mentors in his life suggested he give an internship at the church a try.

"I had some maturing to do — still do," said Lombardo, who now serves as the church's student worship pastor. "But it's been a really cool process for me to be mentored by and learn from Charlie. He's put up with a lot of my problems."

Charlie Martin, NorthPark's worship pastor, said that's exactly why he believes it's important to invest in younger worship leaders — to walk alongside them as they learn, and learn from them too.

"Chris has really had a tremendous impact in developing a very awesome worship culture with our students," Martin said. "I try to glean off of his connections with millennials and the younger generation. I want to learn how I can connect. And hopefully I'm able to help him with instruction on the baby boomers."

It's a team effort, he said — something they do together.

And it's an effort that has grown into a worship intern ministry for high school, college and seminary students, something Martin launched two years ago to start investing in future leaders even sooner.

"You try to target those kind of student leaders who have that passion and respect," he said. "The purpose behind it is to equip leaders for the work of ministry. That's

my responsibility as a pastor, so I take that very seriously."

Through the three-month program, students serve in some type of worship ministry in the church — lighting, video, audio or even children's worship — and have the opportunity to observe and gain training from more seasoned volunteers.

Then every Tuesday the small group of interns meet with Martin after school to talk about how that week's service went and help plan the next week.

'It's a joy for me'

"It's a laid-back, fun environment. We talk about what they learned from worship each week and we talk about worship as a daily lifestyle. I try to challenge them in those areas," he said. "It's a joy for me."

Sometimes there's ice cream and there's always good conversation, Martin said. They also go through a book each semester. This semester it's "Worship Leaders, We Are Not Rock Stars" by Stephen Miller.

And over the course of the internships, Martin and others try to teach technical skills while hammering home the theology of worship and how it impacts worship ministry.

Kenley Gibson, a 10th grade worship intern working with the choir, said her involvement in the intern ministry has been an extremely helpful process for her.

"I've definitely learned a lot about my personal spiritual gifts, and it's been great to be able to grow and learn more about how I can use those gifts to further the Kingdom," she said. ✝



Across ALABAMA'S Associations

BALDWIN

▶ **Barry Lee** is the new pastor of **Montgomery Hill Church, Stockton**. ▶ **Mike Bowman** is the new pastor of **Lagoon Church, Gulf Shores**.

BARBOUR

▶ **Mike Shafer** is the new pastor of **Bethlehem Church, Clayton**. He is married to Deniece.

BESSEMER

▶ **Shady Grove Church, Bessemer**, will celebrate homecoming June 24, 11 a.m. Lunch will follow. There will be a special singing by Redeemed at 1 p.m. Patrick Buckner is pastor.

COFFEE

▶ **Goodman Church, Enterprise**, will hold VBS on June 24–29, 5:30–8:30 p.m. Bruce Williams is pastor. ▶ **Basin Church, Elba**, will hold VBS on June 24–29, 5:30–8:30 p.m. Sam Self is pastor.

WINSTON

▶ **Charlie Daniel** is the new student pastor at **First Church, Arley**. He previously served as interim student pastor for First, Arley. He is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in student ministry. Roger White is pastor.



DANIEL

CHOCTAW

▶ **Jonathan Mosley** is the new associate pastor at **Red Springs Church, Gilbertown**. Joey Gambrell is pastor.

US Supreme Court sides with Colorado baker in same-sex wedding cake case

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of a Christian baker in Colorado who refused to design a cake for a couple's same-sex wedding. The controversial case was widely seen as a standoff between religious liberty and sexual liberty.

In a 7–2 opinion delivered June 4, a high court majority that included conservatives and liberals ruled the Colorado Civil Rights Commission violated the religious free exercise clause of the First Amendment by penalizing Masterpiece Cakeshop owner Jack Phillips for declining to design and decorate a cake for the wedding of two men.

'Hostility'

The commission demonstrated "religious hostility" toward Phillips in its action, the justices said in a decision on one of multiple court cases involving wedding vendors who oppose using their talents in support of same-sex "marriage."

ST. CLAIR

▶ St. Clair Association has welcomed **Argo Church, Trussville**, and **North Valley Church, Odenville**, into the association. John Maddox is pastor of Argo. Junior White is pastor of North Valley. Chris Crain is director of missions. ▶ **Emma Kirkemier** of **First Church, Ashville**, was the national Acteens panelist at the national WMU annual meeting during the 2018 Southern Baptist Convention in Dallas. Jay Stewart is pastor of First, Ashville. ▶ **Allen Bain** is the new pastor of **Pleasant Valley Church, Pell City**. ▶ **Dennis Tinsley** is the new student pastor at **Cropwell Church, Pell City**. Dan Moran is the transitional pastor.

TENNESSEE RIVER

▶ **First Church, Scottsboro**, will host humorist Billy Bob Bohannon on June 24, 11 a.m.

TUSKEGEE LEE

▶ **Greg Pate** is the new pastor of **Salem Macon Church, Notasulga**.

WALKER

▶ **Hermon Church, Jasper**, will celebrate its 100th anniversary June 24, 10:30 a.m. Past and present church leaders will be honored during the service. Lunch will follow. Jeff Wiggins is interim pastor.

COOSA RIVER

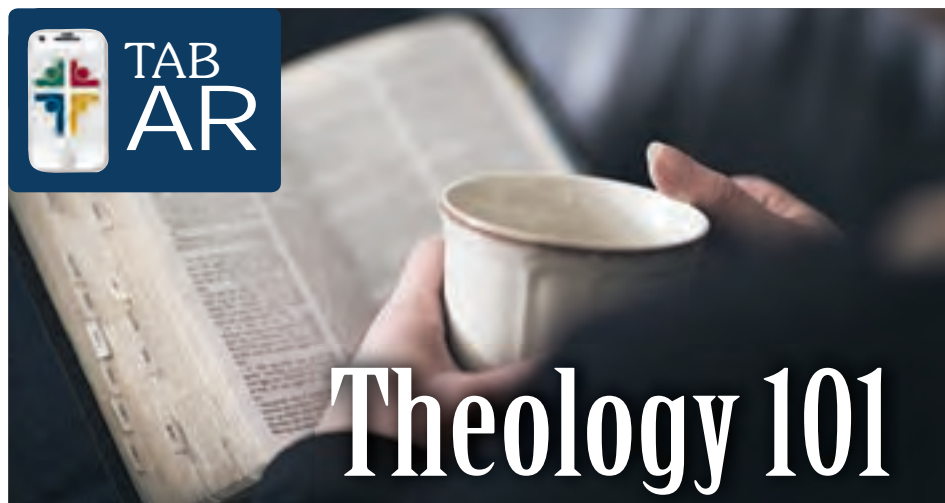
▶ **Justin Milliken** is the new pastor of **Hepzibah Church, Talladega**. He previously served in Georgia. He and his wife, Bridget, have three children. Also, **Tyler Neloms** is the new student pastor at Hepzibah Church. He is pursuing a master's degree from Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.✝

Religious freedom advocates praised the high court's decision while many experts also noted the ruling primarily focused on how the civil rights commission handled the case. "This is a decision that is solely about process, but it leaves some of the larger questions open for resolution down the road," said Anthony Michael Kreis, a visiting assistant professor at Chicago-Kent College of Law.

In his majority opinion, Associate Justice Anthony Kennedy said the commission did not treat Phillips' case "with the religious neutrality that the Constitution requires."

"Phillips was entitled to a neutral decision-maker who would give full and fair consideration to his religious objection as he sought to assert it in all of the circumstances in which this case was presented, considered and decided," Kennedy wrote.

Associate Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sonia Sotomayor dissented. (RNS, BP)



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Christology Through Imagery

Door of the Sheep

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

In the same passage that describes Christ as the good Shepherd, He also is described as "the door of the sheep" (John 10:7) or simply as "the door" (v. 9), both statements being His own self-designation. The setting for this image was a sheepfold, an enclosure in which sheep could be enfolded for safety during the night. The sheepfold could have been a natural enclosure such as a cave. It might have been a constructed fold made of stacked stones. Common to either type of sheepfold was a singular entrance-way or door, either the mouth of the cave or opening in the wall of the stone enclosure. Sheepfolds were often large enough to accommodate several flocks whose shepherds led them through the door at night for their safety.

Since hinged doors with locks were not part of a cave opening or stone enclosure, a shepherd might become the human door by bedding down across the opening. Intruders would awaken him if they sought to enter, just as a sheep seeking to stray through the door would rouse him. Drawing upon the common awareness of sheepfolds, Jesus spoke of Himself as the door. What does this imagery suggest to us about Christ's person or work?

God's greatness

Theologians often use some big words to express the greatness of the Lord, words such as omniscience (He knows all), omnipotence (He is all-powerful), omnipresence (He is everywhere present), immutability (He is unchanging) and infallibility (He does not make errors). To these, the imagery of Christ as the door of the sheep suggests another big word: exclusivity. Noteworthy is the fact that Jesus used the definite article to refer to Himself as "the" door, not just a door. He is the exclusive or only door. In a later well-known passage Jesus again invested significant truth in the threefold use of the indefinite article when He claimed, "I am the way, the

truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). The exclusivity of Christ as the door to the Father runs counter to a culture of inclusiveness, nondiscrimination and openness. While in many areas of human relationships these qualities are to be sought and cherished, when it comes to how a person comes into God's family, Christ was expressly exclusive. In His Sermon on the Mount, He called to the crowd, "Enter by the narrow gate," then explained, "narrow is the gate and difficult the road that leads to life, and few find it" (Matt. 7:13–14).

Protective ministry

As the door of the sheep, Christ's work has a protective dimension to it. The shepherd stretched across the opening of the sheepfold fulfilled the role as protector from intruders who might harm or steal the sheep. He expressed His protective ministry in these well-known words: "My sheep hear my voice, I know them and they follow Me. I give them eternal life and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one" (John 10:27–30).

As the door of the sheep, Christ is not only the way into the Father's flock, He also is the way through which the flock finds spiritual nourishment.

He put this dual work this way: "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture" (John 10:9).✝

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.



On the decline



ADOC 2017 Annual report/ designed by Lauren C. Grim

Alabama's incarceration rate follows national trend downward

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

Alabama's incarceration rate continued a four-year declining trend in 2017, mirroring a decline in the prison population nationally.

The 2017 annual report of the Alabama Department of Corrections (ADOC) noted a 15 percent overall reduction in the state prison population during fiscal year 2017 running from Oct. 1, 2016, to Sept. 30, 2017. During that period, 27,803 inmates were in the state's jurisdictional population, which includes all inmates sentenced to the ADOC and those housed in ADOC facilities, community corrections, federal, other states and county jail custody. The state's in-house population, which includes only inmates housed in a facility owned and operated by ADOC, was 21,213 during fiscal year 2017. Alabama's prison population reached a high of 32,523 in 2013.

In the report, ADOC Commissioner Jefferson Dunn noted sentencing reforms as the primary reason for the decline.

Pew Research released an analysis on U.S. incarceration rates in May, citing new

data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), the statistical arm of the Department of Justice. The BJS data indicates the U.S. incarceration rate is at its lowest level in 20 years, writes Pew editor John Gramlich.

At the end of 2016 there were about 2.2 million people behind bars in the U.S., including 1.5 million under the jurisdiction of federal and state prisons and roughly 741,000 in the custody of locally run jails. That amounts to a nationwide incarceration rate of 860 inmates for every 100,000 adults ages 18 and older, according to Pew's analysis.

The nation's incarceration rate peaked at 1,000 inmates per 100,000 adults during the three-year period between 2006 and 2008. It has declined every year since then and is now at its lowest point since 1996, when there were 830 inmates per 100,000 adults.

The number of inmates in the U.S. has also gone down in recent years, though not

as sharply as the incarceration rate (which takes population change into account). The estimated 2,162,400 inmates who were in prison or jail at the end of 2016 were the fewest since 2004, when there were 2,136,600 inmates.

Alabama ranks 5th on Prison Policy Initiative's list with 987 incarcerated persons for every 100,000 residents.

The U.S. still incarcerates a larger share of its population than any other country. According to Prison Policy Initiative (PPI), an advocacy group that supports criminal justice reform, the U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world based on data from 2014 to 2016. PPI's analysis reports a U.S. incarceration rate of 693 people for every 100,000 residents.

The nation with the second highest incarceration rate in the world after the U.S. is Turkmenistan, a country that Human Rights Watch calls one of the world's "most repressive and closed countries" for its ruthless punishment of any political or religious expression that opposes the government.

According to PPI's 2016 report of world

incarceration rates, Alabama ranks 5th in the United States with 987 incarcerated persons for every 100,000 residents, behind the District of Columbia, Louisiana, Georgia and Oklahoma.

According to data analysis by World Prison Brief, rates in Western Europe are less than a quarter of the U.S. rate. In England there are 142 inmates for every 100,000 people, while Germany incarcerates 77 people for every 100,000 residents.

'The big picture'

PPI co-founder Peter Wagner in a report titled "Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2018" argues that mass incarceration reform must include conversations between federal and state officials on issues of sentencing, money bail reform and racial, ethnic and income disparities in the criminal justice system.

"The big picture is important," Wagner says, noting that many criminal justice reforms of the past simply move people from one part of the system to another. "Ending mass incarceration means shrinking the size of the entire 'pie' and not just rearranging where people are held within it." ❖

'Be Jesus with skin on to those we meet every day'

(continued from page 1)

grocery store, giving an encouraging word to someone we see at work who is struggling or numerous other ways that we can be Jesus with skin on to those we meet every day."

Thinking beyond the bars is especially important in Alabama, which in 2014 had the third-highest rate of incarceration in the United States. That means the influence of crime and punishment extend far beyond the boundaries defined by concrete walls and razor wire.

Get involved

"There are many needs of those impacted by crime — the incarcerated, formerly incarcerated, their families and children, victims, etc.," Swanson said. "Each group has many needs which can be met by lay people. Often, the needs of

the non-incarcerated — helping people transition from incarceration and needs of their families and victims — go unmet."

How can Christians from all walks of life — not just ministers or chaplains — better serve the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated?

"I suggest starting within your own congregation. Are there individuals, families who have been impacted by crime? What are their needs?" Swanson said. "Be a welcoming church to those who have been incarcerated — not adding to their shame. Not just welcoming, but a place they feel they belong. Help them assimilate, serve and grow in their faith.

"Then focus on those in your community. Is there a jail? What is needed at the jail? What is needed to help individuals transition back into society? Are there ways to

help invest in children to keep them out of the prison pipeline? There is also advocacy, which needs to be done to help our legal system become just. You may want to find out what is available in your community and what is needed to meet the needs of those impacted by crime," Swanson said.

Christians who feel called to work directly with prisoners have a number of options to get started. "For those who want to serve the incarcerated, contact the chaplain or religious program coordinator to see what is needed," Swanson advised. "Don't go in with an agenda. Get trained. Serving inside a correctional facility is a cross-cultural ministry."

In Alabama, We Care hosts a number of annual events inviting those interested in prison ministry to participate in short-term outreaches, Metzler said.

For those ready for a full-fledged commitment, We Care has numerous openings for full-time chaplains, who are not required to have a ministerial degree, Metzler said. We Care also sponsors a nine-month internship for young adults starting each fall.

Reality of 'second prison'

Another way to get involved is the annual Read-a-Thon, a summertime fundraiser in which participants read and solicit sponsors, competing for prizes and raising funds for We Care.

However one chooses to become involved, it is critical that churches understand that the problems associated with incarceration are not locked up behind the bars of the state prison or local jail.

"The reality is that the majority of those currently serving time will one day leave prison. The question

becomes, 'What then?'" Metzler said.

"Unfortunately in this country a person who has ended a prison sentence then faces what is known as a second prison due to the 48,000 legal barriers that go into effect," Metzler said. "This could be anything related to housing, jobs, places they are allowed to go or countless other aspects of life that are now governed.

"The family of God can play a huge part in assisting and walking alongside men and women after they are released from prison," Metzler said.

"Through our love and care and helping formerly incarcerated individuals to navigate the challenges they face, we as the body of Christ can change the direction of a life, which can impact a family, a community, a town, a city, a state, a country and even the world." ❖

Where do you tithe?

Churchgoers say they tithe, but not always to church, LifeWay Research survey shows

Generous giving supports ministries of all types, but must tithes and offerings always go in the church offering plate?

Most churchgoers say no, according to a recent survey by LifeWay Research.

“For many churchgoers, tithing is just another term for generosity,” said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research.

Most churchgoers believe they are commanded to give and many believe in the idea of tithing, which is often understood as giving away 10 percent of a person’s income.

Eighty-three percent of those surveyed, which included 1,010 Americans who attend services at a Protestant or nondenominational church at least once a month and 1,000 Protestant senior pastors, agreed when asked, “Is tithing a biblical command that still applies today?” Churchgoers in the South (85 percent) as well as the Northeast (74 percent), as well as African-American (87 percent) and white (80 percent) churchgoers were most likely to say tithing applies today.

More than half (54 percent) of

churchgoers say they give at least 10 percent of their income to the church. That includes 37 percent who say they tithe and 17 percent who say they give more than 10 percent. One in 5 (20 percent) give regularly but less than 10 percent. A similar number (17 percent) say they try to give but aren’t always consistent. Eight percent say finances make it hard for them to give. Two percent do not give to their church.

‘Giving matters’

“Even those who can’t tithe believe that giving matters,” said McConnell. “Most churchgoers say they give — even if it’s a struggle.”

The survey also found that churchgoers who attend services more often are likely to tithe. Fifty-seven percent of those who attend services at least once a week say they give at least a tithe, but only 28 percent of those who go to church only once or twice a month were likely to tithe.

When it comes to where that money can go, Protestant churchgoers were flexible. Almost half (48 percent) say funds can go to a Christian ministry. A third say tithes can go to another church (35 percent) or an individual in need (34 percent).

How do you define a tithe?

AMONG PROTESTANT PASTORS WHO SAY TITHING IS A BIBLICAL MANDATE



LifeWay Research graphic

Some churchgoers (18 percent) say their donations to a secular charity can be part of their tithe. That includes more than 4 in 10 Lutherans (44 percent) and a third of Methodists.

Baptists (12 percent) and Assemblies of God/Pentecostal churchgoers (13 percent) are less likely to say donations to a secular charity can be part of their tithe.

Fewer than half of churchgoers (47 percent) say only giving to the church counts for tithing.

As part of the study LifeWay

Research asked Protestant senior pastors how often they talk about tithing.

Tithing sermons

Two-thirds say they preached about tithing at least once in the past year. Nine percent had preached on tithing in the last month. Twenty-eight percent had done so in the past six months, while 31 percent had preached on tithing between six months and a year earlier.

Five percent had preached in the last two years. Six percent

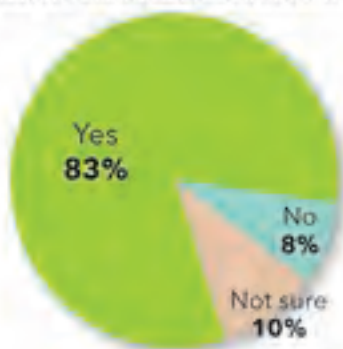
had preached three or more years ago about tithing.

One in 5 has never made tithing a primary focus of a sermon, though they and churchgoers seem to agree for the most part that 10 percent of one’s income is a goal to strive for when measuring giving.

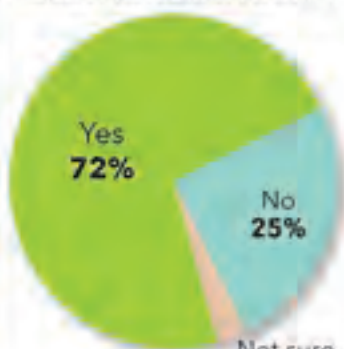
“Both pastors and churchgoers see giving as a vital part of their faith,” said McConnell. “They don’t always agree on how much a churchgoer should give. But most seem to see 10 percent as an ideal to strive for.” (BP)

Is tithing a biblical command that still applies today?

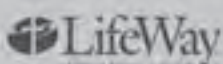
AMONG AMERICAN CHURCHGOERS



AMONG PROTESTANT PASTORS



Note: Some totals do not equal 100% due to rounding.



LifeWayResearch.com

LifeWay Research graphic/edited by Lauren C. Grim

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Denise Carrigan Coats

Woodmont Baptist children's minister dies at 62

Denise Carrigan Coats, children's minister at Woodmont Baptist Church, Florence, died May 24 after a battle with cancer. She was 62.

A member of Woodmont Baptist since 1993, she served as director of the church's King's Kids Preschool until 2004, when she became the church's children's minister.



COATS

Chad Hess, pastor of Woodmont Baptist, said Coats' love for children was "remarkable."

"Denise didn't just believe the gospel, she surrendered her life to share the gospel," Hess said.

"Over the past few months, as she struggled with cancer, she taught us all what persevering in the faith and ministry looked like," he said. "I am humbled to have known her and to watch her live so courageously to minister to children."

Coats is survived by her husband, Tony; three

children; and two grandchildren. (Grace Thornton)

Anis A. Shorosh

Alabama Baptist evangelist, speaker, apologist dies

Anis A. Shorosh, longtime Alabama Baptist evangelist, speaker and apologist, died May 13. He was 85.

Shorosh served as a pastor in Jordan from 1959 to 1966. He then served for 50 years as an international evangelist in more than 80 countries and authored 10 books. Shorosh's ministry, the Anis Shorosh Evangelistic Association, focused on reaching out to Muslims and Christians worldwide.

He held degrees from New Orleans Seminary; Luther Rice Seminary in Lithonia, Georgia; and Oxford Graduate School in Dayton, Tennessee.

Shorosh was preceded in death by his son, Steven. He is survived by his wife, Nell; three children; seven grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren. (TAB)



SHORROSH



Screen capture from ABC News

The June 3 eruption of Volcan del Fuego, or Volcano of Fire, in Guatemala has left farmland covered in concrete-like lava and resulted in 75 deaths at press time.

Alabama evangelist ministers to pastors after Guatemala volcano

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Johnny Tucker gets choked up when he thinks about Pastor Tomas, or Pastor Max, or any of the other church leaders he's known over the years in Guatemala.

When Volcan del Fuego — or Volcano of Fire — erupted in Escuintla, Guatemala, June 3, it killed at least 75 people, with the death toll still rising.

Twenty-three of those were Pastor Max's family members.

"It breaks my heart," said Tucker, a longtime Alabama Baptist pastor and evangelist who founded International Missions Association 42 years ago. "The thing that makes it so bad is that they've lost their church buildings, their homes, their family members and the ability to even provide for their families."

If they go back home to the base of the volcano, farmland is covered in concrete-like lava. "And how do you even go back when you've lost 23 family members?" Tucker asked.

When Fuego erupted, Tucker was 14 miles away preaching at a Sunday church service on a different mountain. When he and his missions team stepped outside, they thought it was drizzling. Then they noticed the black dots all over their clothes.

"The ash had gone 37,000 feet in the air and was dropping all over us," he said.

They had gone there originally

to build houses at the base of that mountain — a job they finished well. But they scrambled to help as much as they could at the base of Fuego too. Tucker collected money through Facebook and was able to assist the pastors he knew, like Pastor Max and Pastor Tomas.

Sitting in the aftermath

He gets emotional when he thinks about sitting with Pastor Tomas and his three children and the rest of his family — a precious group of believers who had no idea what to do next.

"They were safe — we rented a facility for them and gave them plenty of money to survive on," Tucker said. "But he doesn't know how to go back, when to go back or what their next step should be."

Thanks to the generosity of friends and ministry partners, Tucker was able to leave funds

in the hands of trusted, established ministries such as Grace Ministries, an organization run from Grand Bay.

And Southern Baptist partner Baptist Global Response is assessing damage and providing relief to victims.

But even with that in mind, Tucker is still overwhelmed with the vast destruction and human need.

"We gave everything we had and did everything we could," he said. "And we still look back and say, 'Lord, we had nothing to offer in the face of such great need.'" ✝

To donate to victims of the Volcan del Fuego in Guatemala, visit www.gobgr.org/donate.

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Alabamians among recent seminary graduates

Alabama Baptists graduated with degrees at the master's level or higher from Southern Baptist seminaries and divinity schools in May 2018.

The Alabama Baptist was provided the following list of graduates by the schools.

► Beeson Divinity School:

Master of Divinity — Julie Donovan, Auburn; Cecelia Chang, Hoover; Wesley Douglas, Vincent; David Gannon, Dothan; Blake Harris, Birmingham; Cam Thomas, Goodwater; Tiffany Vincent, Trussville; Cris Harper, Birmingham

► Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary:

Master of Divinity in Christian Ministry — Jared Gavin Burleson, Satsuma

Doctor of Ministry, Doctor

of Philosophy — Wayne Britt Green, Eclectic

► Southern Baptist Theological Seminary:

Master of Divinity — Michael Harris, Madison; Andrew Frederick Schmitt, Tallassee; Steven Slade Stinson, Enterprise

Master of Arts in Biblical Counseling — Rebekah Faith Butler, Birmingham

Master of Arts in Worship Leadership — Thomas Clay, Muscle Shoals

Master of Arts in Missiology — Sarah Lovett, Auburn

Master of Arts in Theological Studies — Daniel Gray Tackett, Birmingham

Doctor of Philosophy — Dustin B. Bruce, Monroeville; Jon English Lee, Montgomery

Doctor of Ministry — Harvey Ashley Edwards IV, Tuscaloosa;

William "Bill" McCall, Bessemer

► New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary:

Master of Arts in Discipleship — Kyle David Coots, Rainsville

Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry — Matthew Tyler Pope, West Blocton

Master of Arts in Worship Ministries — Christopher Mark Capasse, Loxley

Master of Arts in Christian Ministry — Ryan Kindred Cork, Tuscaloosa

Master of Divinity — Jason Allan Leight, McCalla; Timothy Dale Morgan, Mobile

► Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary:

Master of Theological Studies — Travis Lane DeWitt, Enterprise

Master of Arts in Counseling — Candace Marie Heurion, Livingston

Master of Divinity — Jacob D. Rainwater, Mobile

Doctor of Ministry — Kevin C. Wilburn, Mobile

► Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary:

Master of Arts in Christian Education — Meghan Elizabeth Clayton, Decatur

Master of Theological Studies — Robert Lee Burgess, Hoover (TAB)

EDITOR'S NOTE — There were no Alabama graduates with master's degrees or higher in May 2018 from Gateway Seminary, according to the school.



TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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CHURCH POSITIONS

ASSOCIATE PASTOR FOR WORSHIP & MUSIC

Concord Baptist Church, a vibrant and growing church in Anderson, S.C., is seeking an associate pastor for worship and music. This person must have the calling, gifting, training and heart to lead a large and diverse ministry of worship. We are excited about our future! For a job description and/or to submit a resumé/profile, please contact jjames@concordbaptist.com. Please also visit concordbaptist.com for more information about our congregation.

BIVOCATIONAL MINISTER OF MUSIC/YOUTH

Hopewell Baptist Church, Bessemer, is seeking God's man as a bivocational minister of music and/or youth minister. Contact Jim Parker, 205-568-9500.

MINISTER TO STUDENTS

Vestavia Hills Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, is seeking a man or woman to be our next full-time minister to students. We are a suburban congregation of 850 members, dually aligned with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Southern Baptist Convention. The minister to students' primary responsibility is to disciple youth into a transforming relationship with Christ by modeling a life with Christ and developing ministry

programs that cultivate spiritual growth. The minister to students also is responsible for coordination of the church's college ministry and participates with other ministerial staff to provide pastoral care and leadership in congregational activities. Minimum master of divinity required with prior full-time experience in student ministry. Send resumé with an introductory letter, referrals or recommendations to: vhbc@vhbc.com with subject line "Minister to Students Resumé." More information about the church may be found at www.vhbc.com.

YOUTH PASTOR

Raimund Heights Baptist Church in Bessemer is looking for a part-time youth pastor to work with a small group of young people. Send email with resumé to: tnc4him.2@hotmail.com.

STUDENT MINISTER

Full-time student minister position available at First Baptist Church, Alexander City, AL 35010. Please send resumé to: spsc@fbc-ac.org.

YOUTH MINISTER

Babbie Baptist Church is seeking a full-time youth minister. The youth minister will oversee the communications/evangelism/discipleship training/events and activities of the youth ministry. For detailed job description, visit our website: babbiebaptist.com. Interested persons must send a resumé with references and work

experience to: Babbie Baptist Church, 19863 Babbie Rd., Andalusia, AL 36420, or email to: babbiebaptist@centurylink.net.

MINISTER TO CHILDREN & FAMILIES

First Baptist Church in Huntsville is seeking a full-time minister to children and families. More information is available at fbchsv.org/employment. Resumés and inquiries may be sent to: search@fbchsv.org.

OTHER POSITIONS

PIANIST

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(augmented reality)

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1 Download the HP Reveal app from your app store.

2 Tap the [] icon at the bottom of the screen.

3 You will see pulsating dots, which indicate the app is searching for a target. Once it finds a target the dots will turn to a bull's-eye. The bull's-eye will remain until the augmented reality image loads.

4 Look for *The Alabama Baptist (TAB)* augmented reality logo (example shown above). Hold your device over the logo and watch the paper come to life.

5 If the image is slow to load at any point, then it may be your data speed or Wi-Fi strength. Change locations and try again.

6 Each week when *TAB* arrives, look for the AR logo and hold your device over the noted articles to watch the video extras.

Someone You

Should Know

Lawrence Phipps

By Leigh Pritchett
Correspondent
The Alabama Baptist

Lawrence Phipps, 63, has been in ministry 43 years. Educated at Auburn University and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, he is pastor of First Baptist Church, Gulf Shores; leader of It's Life Ministry LLC; and an officer of the board and member of the board's executive committee of The Alabama Baptist.

MINISTRY DESCRIPTION: Reaching people and helping churches reach people; serves as a pastor and ministry leader

CHURCH NAME: First Baptist Church, Gulf Shores, in Baldwin Baptist Association

LIFE VERSE: "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." (Matt. 6:33)

Q: Describe where you focus your greatest ministry efforts.

A: My greatest focus is reaching people and helping churches understand what it takes to reach people. That also is the focus of It's Life Ministry LLC, an international ministry I lead that helps churches, associations, conventions and organizations reach, recover, retain and raise up believers to be reproducing Christians. I have co-authored a book with Daniel Edmonds on organizing small groups to reach people. Plus, I have written an evangelism equipping ministry and a 100-day guide to follow up with those who are being reached.

Q: Tell about a "turning point" in your life and how God was involved.

A: I remember a time early in ministry when the church where I was pastor was not doing well. One night just prior to going to bed, I prayed, "Lord, I need your help." The next morning I went to the church early (about 6:30). A businessman — not a church member — was parked in the alley. He and I got out of our cars and I asked, "Tom, why are you here?" He replied, "God sent me here to help you." He gave me a few words of wisdom and I listened and responded. A revival began in my life and ministry the next Sunday which has never ended.

Q: If there were one thing you could tell your younger self about faith, what would it be?

A: My favorite advice to younger pastors is to get into the Word every morning before you do anything else.

Leave the paper on the porch, Twitter unopened and Facebook unimportant. The year 2000 changed me. Dr. John Bisagno spoke in Montgomery to pastors. I was convicted and made the Bible the priority of my day. Since 2000, I have read (the Bible) through at least once every year. Sundays are no different. I get up early and open Scripture to listen to God. I do not begin with the Scripture I will be preaching from on that day. However, there are many times that God will show me something that directly relates to what I will be saying.

Q: Does your church have any special traditions that mean a lot to you? What are they?

A: The great tradition of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ has been seeing great numbers come to a saving knowledge of Jesus. Many churches have left that tradition, forgot that tradition or are de-emphasizing that tradition. It is my joy to preach in a church that is returning to that tradition. It is exciting to be called to visit churches and help them re-develop that tradition. Several years ago, God led me to write "It's LIFE." It was based on the tradition of Acts — a book (in the Bible) that is filled with gospel presentations and more than 50 references to people witnessing, being saved or being baptized. I know that the greatest traditions are the biblical traditions for the church.✠



PHIPPS

Former FBC Auburn students go 'home' for choir reunion

By Jeremy Dale Henderson
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Dale Peterson, 69, doesn't think this story should be about him. He may have been the one up there directing, as always, but the college choir reunion held at First Baptist Church, Auburn, over Memorial Day weekend was this time organized mostly by church member Cathy Summers and Morris Driggers, the church's associate pastor for music.

"I wish you would talk to other people," Peterson said, pointing at some of the 80 or so former college choir members catching up with each other around the pipe organ before breaking for barbecue May 26.

The thing is, when you talk to other people, they all just point right back at him.

Peterson served as minister of music at First, Auburn, from 1973 to 2014. He's currently the church's minister of music emeritus. The college choir was his passion during his 41 years of service, and that passion was contagious.

Every five years since 1993, folks who sang under Peterson's direction while students at Auburn University pilgrimage back to the church for two days of choir practice and a Sunday morning reunion concert.

Plenty have done it three, four or five times in a row. They come and make a weekend of it. They're hooked. They would come every year if they could, maybe twice a year. They are already talking about 2023 on Facebook.

To Peterson, that degree of devotion to keeping the methods and mission of the college choir alive in the age of praise teams and PowerPoint makes perfect sense.

"People had an experience that was meaningful to them," Peterson said. "Part of it is because it takes them back to another time, but part of it is they want to try to experience the enjoyment of the worship experience that they had."

Coming back

He's sure there must have been choirs in other churches in other college towns that inspired that same kind of nostalgia.

"But," he added, "I'm not sure it's to this high of a percentage of people who participated here and come back."

What makes it different? Sure, the barbecue is great. And the stories about hauling the robes around in a casket named Ralph on choir tour get more hilarious every year.

But everyone comes back twice a decade from all over because they know that at practice on Friday night and Saturday morning and definitely come Sunday at 10:59 a.m., Dale Peterson is going to demand that they belt out the best "When I Survey The Wondrous Cross" the angels have ever heard.

'We love the Lord'

"We come together each time because we love Dale and we love the Lord," said Teri Easterling, a member of Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church, Hueytown, who graduated from Auburn in 1974 and sang in Peterson's first college choirs at First, Auburn.

Easterling has attended every single reunion.

"Morris Driggers read us the words to a song Friday night with lyrics that said,

'Welcome home, you belong here.' And all of us were about to tear up, because it felt like we were home."

Kate Higgins said she definitely felt that way. Of all the baby boomers and Gen Xers who came to give God their best during the 12-song concert Sunday morning, Higgins traveled the farthest.

She lives in Los Angeles. She's a voice-over artist. She does stuff for Disney. She's Barbie on that "Life in the Dreamhouse" series of Netflix. For anyone with

kids or grandkids under five, she's Starla on "Blaze and the Monster Machines." A song she sang for one of Nintendo's latest Mario video games was one of iTunes' most downloaded songs when it was released in October 2017.

Higgins broke into voice acting because she could sing so well — in part because Peterson demanded she sing well. Higgins grew up at First, Auburn. She was in the youth choir, then the college choir from 1988 to 1992. The church she attends these days in Los Angeles is an episcopal church.

It's just not quite the same, she said. "Singing this kind of music, especially where I live, is very hard to find," she said.

"To get the variety of the styles of music here? There's just nowhere else to do it. I don't know any churches really anywhere that sing this kind of music. Most of it is recorded music, and they have the words up on the thing. So to sing in a choir, to sing music from the 1500s to the present, is a rare opportunity."✠



Photo by Jeremy Dale Henderson

Dale Peterson, minister of music for FBC Auburn from 1973 to 2014, leads the choir May 26. Every five years those who sang under his direction as students at Auburn University go back for a reunion concert.

Signal loss

FBC Huntsville learns TV broadcast still has value in today's culture

In the age of livestreaming webcasts, televised worship services may seem old fashioned, but First Baptist Church, Huntsville, recently found out these broadcasts remain very important to loyal viewers.

On May 6 the congregation's 10:30 a.m. Sunday morning telecast suddenly went off the air. It happened again on Mother's Day.

"It just broke down completely," said Pastor Travis Collins.

The cause: A new hotel has been built in the line of sight between the church and WHNT News 19 about a mile away.

"And here we had been saying how cool it was this boutique hotel was coming in near us as part of the renovation of downtown Huntsville," he said. "Then come to find out ..."

The new construction obstructed the dedicated wireless path between the church and the TV station, interrupting the signal for more than 7,000 households that tune into the broadcast every Sunday.

Viewers were quick to let the church know there was a problem.

Quick response

Phone calls, emails and social media posts expressed concerns and complaints about the interruption, and the church responded swiftly.

"Our apologies," First, Huntsville, posted on Facebook. "Our

Live TV Broadcast was unavailable today. We invite you to listen to our worship today via our website."

Frustrated television viewers also were invited to download Collins' sermon delivered that morning, but they expressed their disappointment at not being able to watch.

"Sure miss when it is not on!!!!!" one said in a Facebook comment. Another added they "hope things get taken care of

soon. Meanwhile I will watch the livestream. This is something I look forward to."

The church posted the following day explaining the problem and assuring viewers the church was "working on the best solution to get around this new obstacle."

Collins said the situation has taught him that the broadcast remains very popular in the city and the surrounding region, which was not his original evaluation upon coming to the church as interim in 2014 before being called as pastor.

"Why still do it?" Collins thought then. That attitude has changed. He's become a big believer in the church's telecast.

Not only has Collins received letters and emails about the weekly broadcast, he hears comments from people who do not even live in Huntsville about how much they look forward to the televised service.

"I have been stopped by people of all ages and all ethnicities say-

ing 'we watch First Baptist every Sunday,' he said. "I had a guy stop me at the Atlanta airport and say, 'I travel to Huntsville once a month and always watch First Baptist when I'm there.'"

"This has convinced me" about the value of the television broadcast, he said. "I think there is still a market for worship on TV."

For other congregations questioning whether there is value in a televised service over a livestreamed one, Phil Cooke,

a media consultant and author of "Unique: Telling Your Story in the Age of Brands and Social Media," says yes.



COLLINS

Cooke argues in online articles that television can present a church's message to larger, more diverse audiences than can livestreaming to fragmented viewerships.

"Ask a nonbeliever about a major Christian figure today and chances are those with TV ministries are the most likely to be named," Cooke writes.

"Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, Billy Graham, Brian Houston, Andy Stanley, T.D. Jakes, Jack Graham and others are known around the world because of their exposure on television."

Responsive audience

TV audiences remain large despite the buzz around the Internet. And television audiences are still among the most responsive to broadcast content, he said.

"I've personally seen letters and emails from people whose lives have been transformed simply because they clicked on a Christian program and decided to watch," Cooke said. (BNG)



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"I've personally seen letters and emails from people whose lives have been transformed simply because they clicked on a Christian program and decided to watch."

Phil Cooke
media consultant and author

Colbert-Lauderdale camp honors legacy gift with new pavilion

Earle Trent Assembly (ETA) leaders welcomed a new addition to its grounds on Sunday, April 29.

The new Marcia L. Wagoner Pavilion will host outdoor worship, recreational activities and shelter from inclement weather as part of ETA's camp site.

The pavilion's name honors Marcia Wagoner, a longtime member of First Baptist Church, Sheffield, who left her estate to ETA.

Physical education

Wagoner studied physical education in college, making her namesake at the association's campsite well-suited.

The pavilion is equipped with electricity, basketball goals and volleyball net inserts, along with storage for chairs and other equipment for worship services.

Eddy Garner, director of missions for Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association, said the ceremony honoring Wagoner and revealing the pavilion was a huge success.

Camp Director Pat Gallagher's efforts toward the ceremony and



Photo courtesy of Eddy Garner

Eddy Garner (left), director of missions for Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association, and Jim Warren (right), former director of missions, participate in the April 29 ceremony.

ETA overall are to be commended, Garner said.

Former Colbert-Lauderdale Association Director of Missions Jim Warren shared the history of ETA at the event.

Camp friend Jimmy Holland shared the impact the camp had on his life as a young Royal Ambassador and how the new

pavilion would influence lives of local community members in the same way.

Caretakers of Wagoner gave a history of her life, followed by a responsive reading and a prayer of dedication over the pavilion.

Garner said he is excited for what's to come through the camp's newest structure. (TAB)

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For June 17

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

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

CELEBRATED
2 Samuel 5:9-12, 6:12-19

Recognized (5:9-12)

Once David's monarchy was firmly established, his headquarters were moved from Hebron to Jerusalem. The Lord orchestrated an alliance between David and the Phoenician king, Hiram of Tyre, an alliance that ensured strong building collaboration for the palace and later for Solomon's temple. The armies of Israel defeated the Jebusites and removed them from their mountain stronghold, but David recognized that the Lord God of Hosts granted Israel the victory.

History bears out that God enables His people to recognize and rejoice in His faithfulness. Throughout God's Word, believers have recognized God's faithful presence and provision. Abraham called the place where Isaac was spared "the Lord will provide" (Gen. 22:14). Jeremiah called Israel's God "the Lord our righteousness" (Jer. 23:6) and confessed God's faithfulness in the midst of Judah's downfall (Lam. 3:23). Paul encouraged the congregation at Philippi with these words: "My God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). Renowned missionary Hudson Taylor stated, "God's work done God's way will never lack God's supply."

Before we can honor or celebrate God's presence and provision, we must recognize and acknowledge Him. Unfortunately we often boast in our achievements but blame God in our afflictions. May God grant us spiritual eyes to see how He is at work (see John 5:17, 19).

Honored (6:12-16)

God is holy and He enables and requires holiness from His people (Lev. 11:44-45). The Ark of the Covenant had been mishandled ever since it was removed from the tabernacle (1 Sam. 3). Eli's sons took it

into battle, resulting in the loss of the Ark, the battle and their lives. The Philistines captured the Ark but suffered while it was in their possession, so they returned it to Israel on a cart (1 Sam. 4-6).

Israelites also transported the Ark by cart, resulting in Uzzah's death for touching it. David distanced himself from the Ark, leaving it in the keeping of Obed-edom. Though David was angry with God over Uzzah, the Holy One exacted justice by punishing Israel's blatant disregard for God's instructions regarding the ark (Ex. 25:14-15; Lev. 16:2; Num. 3:31-32; Deut. 31:24-26).

David discovered that God blessed Obed-edom while the Ark was there, so he brought the Ark to Jerusalem. To honor God with sacrifice he dressed in a linen ephod and offered multiple sacrifices. In celebration he danced with reckless abandon as an act of worship before the Lord, whose presence was represented by the Ark. His wife Michal pretentiously thought his behavior was unbecoming a king (6:16, 20) yet David's intent was to honor the King of glory.

God receives honor when we worship Him in obedience. Saul lost his kingdom because of his inability to obey the Lord. In 1 Chronicles 15 (a parallel to 2 Sam. 6), David instructed Israel to obey God's Word, with only consecrated Levites carrying the ark on poles. Uzzah's costly lesson had been learned: Obedience is not optional.

Celebrated (6:17-19)

In addition to honoring God through obedience, David celebrated the Ark's arrival in Jerusalem in a variety of ways. He constructed a tent to house the Ark, he offered sacrifices of praise to God and he gave food to each participant. David clearly understood that loving God is demonstrated by loving one's neighbor. As the writer of Hebrews exhorts, "Don't neglect to do what is good and to share, for God is pleased with such sacrifices" (13:16).✠

WHY CAN'T WE FIX IT?
Deuteronomy 5:32-33; Galatians 3:10-12, 19a, 24-25

The heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart. Jeremiah expressed it in this way: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9).

The issue is so serious that human beings cannot extricate themselves from their situation.

God established a standard for us to live in relationship with Him. (Deut. 5:32-33)

The Ten Commandments are familiar to all of us. Deuteronomy 5 is the second time when the Ten Commandments are recited in Israel.

The first rendition is found in Exodus 20, right after the Exodus, at the base of Mount Sinai. Between that first giving of the Ten Commandments and this one, we have a span of 40 years characterized by one failure after another.

As we read this passage Scripture seeks to inform, but even more to transform, to invite us to enter into the story of God and Israel and the story of Christ and the Church, and therein to find our own story.

Yet we are aware that in our strength we cannot live up to the standards of God's law.

We sin and are incapable of meeting God's standard. (Gal. 3:10-12)

Into this story of despair comes another message from Paul. Paul knows from his own experience that you cannot keep the law in your own strength.

Indeed in Romans 7 he confesses, "I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (v. 15). However, the message of the gospel is good news — that Christ has come to deliver us from the curse of the

law and from the condemnation of sin, to liberate us so that we may live a life of liberty through the Spirit.

The law gave a temporary provision until Christ came. (Gal. 3:19a, 24-25)

Paul speaks of the law, our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith.

In wealthy Greek and Roman families, a *paidagogos* was a slave entrusted with the care and discipline of a child when the child was not in school, until the child reached the age of adulthood. The metaphor suggests the authority of the law is transitory, lasting only until the fruition of the promise, until Christ came so that we might be justified by faith. Under faith in Christ one no longer needs the law in this disciplinarian function; one is freed from the requirements of the law.

Paul is trying to prevent the Christians in Galatia from boasting about their achievements: their race, their nationality, their religious identity or adherence to some feature of spirituality.

If Paul were speaking to us today, perhaps he would remind us that our identity does not lie in the number of people on our membership roll, the amount of money people have given to our church so far this year, the number of baptisms, the number of people on missions trips or participants in our music or youth programs. Our spiritual identity is rooted in Christ and our desire is to live a life which is pleasing to Him.

Christianity argues that our relationship with God is based upon a covenant and not a contract. We do not have to do anything to achieve the grace of God. It comes to us as a gift of grace, freely given and received by faith.

In the words of one hymn writer: "There's nothing more that I can do, for Jesus did it all."✠

Christian Crossword

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Across

1. To carry something.
4. Call thy land ___ ah. (Isa. 62:4)
8. Shish___ob.
10. Seen his star in the _____. (Matt. 2:2)
11. Him only shalt thou _____. (Matt. 4:10)
13. To go on a ____.
14. Also.
15. Thy word ... I will ____ it. (Ps. 119:105-106)
18. Anna. (var.)
19. Just a little bit.
20. Samuel ran unto _____. (1 Sam. 3:5)
21. Printer's measure.
23. That my joy might ____ in you. (John 15:11)
25. Gives medicine to.
27. In the country of _____. (1 Kings 4:19)
29. Praises.
31. A little while, and ye shall not ____ me. (John 16:16)
32. To tie a rope off.
33. As he ____ pure.

(1 John 3:3)

34. Not B.C.
35. They ____ the ship aground. (Acts 27:41)
36. To exist.
38. Give ____, all ye inhabitants. (Joel 1:2)
39. Parent Teacher Association. (abbr.)
40. A two-year college degree.
41. Medical specialty. (abbr.)
43. To rest.
45. Better ... he were ____ into the sea. (Mark 9:42)
46. Or the ____, be not darkened. (Eccles. 12:2)
47. I have fed you with _____. (1 Cor. 3:2)
48. Professional engineer. (abbr.)

Down

1. To sit or _____. (Two words)
2. For there are set ____ of judgment. (Ps. 122:5)
3. Mommy. (var.)
4. Thou shalt not ____

false witness. (Ex. 20:16)

5. What cannibals do.
6. Teach Judah the ____ of the bow. (2 Sam. 1:18)
7. Light. (abbr.)
8. When I ____ silence. (Ps. 32:3)
9. Or touch the _____. (Ex. 19:12)
12. Length of time.
13. To perform something.
16. Cut off his right _____. (Luke 22:50)
17. Lord of lords, and ____ of kings. (Rev. 17:14)
22. Cast the ____ on the right side of the ship. (John 21:6)
24. When fowls came Abram drove them _____. (Gen. 15:11)
26. Ephlal begat _____. (1 Chron. 2:37)
27. Office of Strategic Services. (abbr.)
28. ____ men that were lepers. (Luke 17:12)
29. Thy word is a ____ unto my feet. (Ps. 119:105)
30. That we may ____ with him. (John 11:16)
31. Jesus ____.
32. So shall thy ____ be filled. (Prov. 3:10)
35. Egyptian sun god.
36. Rolled ____ the stone. (Matt. 28:2)
37. Jesus also suffered without the _____. (Heb. 13:12)
38. Estimated time of arrival. (abbr.)
40. Snake.
42. New Testament. (abbr.)
44. Not a.m.





TV/MOVIES

Media reviews

'I Can Only Imagine,' 'Paul: Apostle of Christ' lead June new releases

By Michael Foust
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Several movies released earlier this year are set to hit the home entertainment market in June, giving families who didn't see them the first time a chance to watch.

"I Can Only Imagine" (PG) arrived on digital platforms June 5 and in a Blu-ray/DVD/digital combo package June 12, while "Paul: Apostle of Christ" (PG-13) was set to release digitally June 12 and on Blu-ray/DVD/digital June 19.

These films are among the most inspiring movies I've ever watched, but don't take my word that these are stellar movies. Moviegoers gave "I Can Only Imagine" a rare A+ in CinemaScore's exit polling and "Paul: Apostle of Christ" an A-.

"I Can Only Imagine" recounts the childhood, teen and young adult years of singer Bart Millard (of the band MercyMe), who grew up in an abusive home but saw his father come to Christ late in life. His father's conversion inspired Millard to write the popular song "I Can Only Imagine." Jon and Andrew Erwin, the brothers behind the films "Woodlawn" and "Mom's Night Out," directed it.

"Paul: Apostle of Christ" is part biblical fact and part bibli-

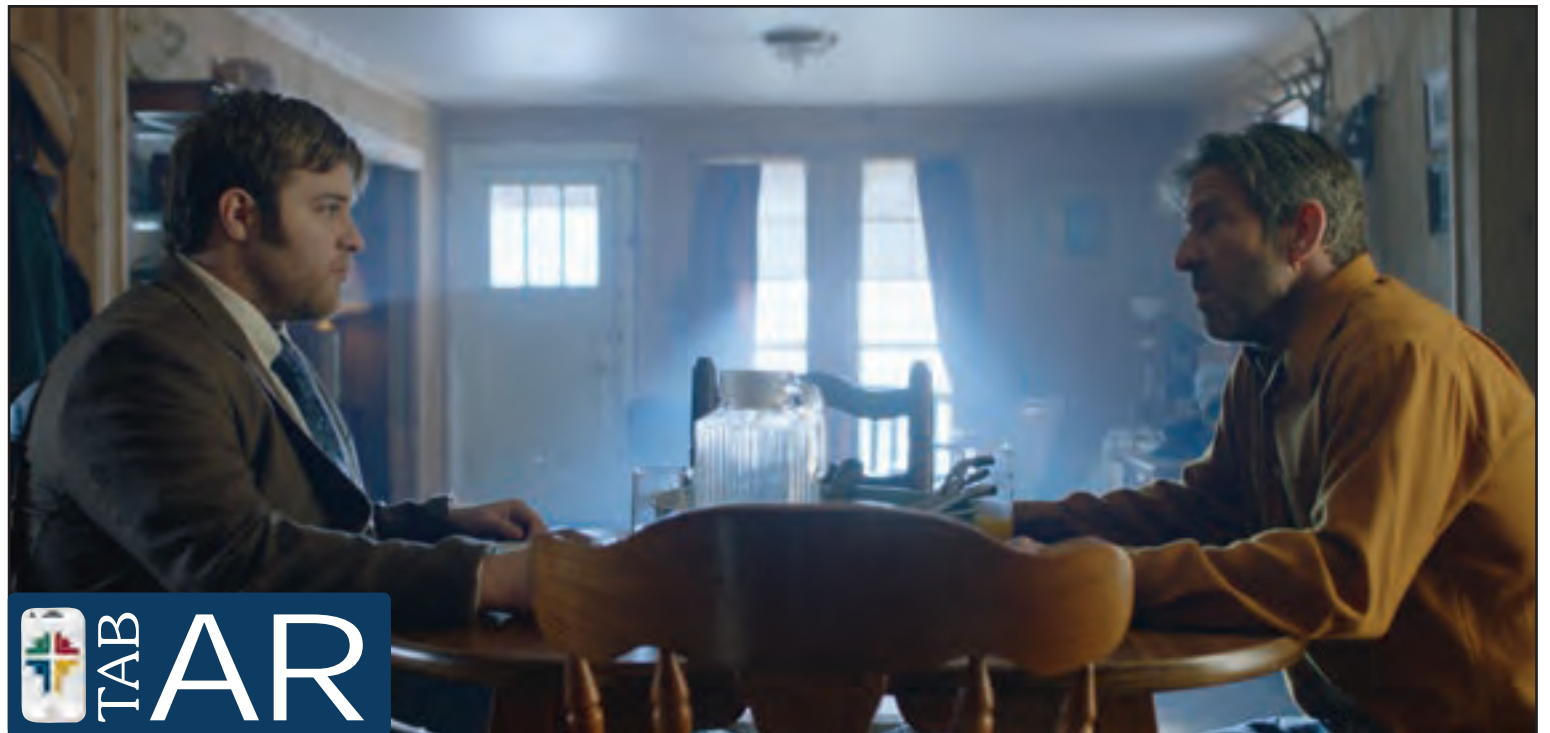


Photo courtesy of Lionsgate and Roadside Attractions

Bart Millard, played by John Michael Finley, and Arthur Millard, played by Dennis Quaid, have a confrontation in 'I Can Only Imagine.'

cal fiction, telling the story of the Apostle Paul's final days in prison as Christians throughout Rome are persecuted. It's a fascinating peek at the early church, with famous biblical characters such as Luke, Priscilla and Aquila making an appearance.

Caution is advised for young viewers of both films. In "I Can

Only Imagine," the scenes involving Bart and his father are intense. Paul shows us persecution, including Christians being burned alive and used as torches.

Also worth watching this month:

► **"A Little Help with Carol Burnett"** — This original Netflix series stars the legendary actress as her adult guests seek life advice from children. For example, actress Lisa Kudrow ("Friends") asks the panel what they'd do if they double booked a lunch commitment. (Would they cancel one of the commitments? Should they ask both people to come to the same lunch?) The series is rated TV-G, although some of the jokes are a little adult-oriented and one of the episodes (Episode 2) includes a man who had cohabitated with a woman. (Episode 2 also includes outspoken Christian Candace Cameron Bure.)

► **"Little Women"** — Based

on Louisa May Alcott's classic novel, this adaptation aired on the BBC in 2017 and on PBS in May, and it is now available on Blu-ray and DVD. It tells



the story of four daughters living in Massachusetts whose father is away fighting in the Civil War. If you like clean period dramas, then you'll probably enjoy this one. No sexuality or language.

► **"Bobby Kennedy for President"** — Also on Netflix, this four-part

documentary follows the rise of Robert F. Kennedy, who escaped the shadows of his brother and seemed destined for the Democratic nomination of 1968 until an assassination ended his life. Kennedy was known as a liberal although some of his beliefs would be embraced today by the Right. Netflix's worthless ratings gave the series a TV-MA label — the same rating they apply to R-type content — but it contains no sexuality and only mild language. We do see

photos of Kennedy's dead body. The series is fine for most teens and maybe some tweens.

► **Kids' programming on PureFlix and Dove Channel** — If you've given up on Netflix, Amazon Prime and Hulu, then give these faith-oriented streaming services a try. Each has their strengths. PureFlix has series such as "Greatest Heroes and Legends of the Bible," "Friends and Heroes," "Character Builders" and "Torchlighters," while Dove Channel offers "Greatest Heroes and Legends," "Davey and Goliath," "321 Penguins" and "Hermie." Of course, each also offers faith- and family-friendly content for adults. Visit PureFlix.com or DoveChannel.com to learn more. 🙏

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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.



Missionary Kempton Turner (right), moved from East St. Louis to Houston, Texas, to escape violence and gang threats. Little did Kempton know that 25 years later, God would call him back to that very city to plant City of Joy Fellowship Church to reach, baptize and guide the broken to Jesus. NAMB photo

‘Heart for the people’

Hope shines in despairing city of East St. Louis

The worst thing we can do is ignore this place,” said Andrew Theising, a professor at Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville. The quote comes from a discussion with St. Louis Public Radio about the East St. Louis riots that took place in July 1917. Lives and buildings were destroyed during the horrific events and even now, 101 years later, the city is still trying to recover.

This is the home — and missions field — of Kempton and Caryn Turner and their five children.

A native of East St. Louis, Illinois, Turner grew up on the streets where he now serves as a church planting missionary and pastor of City of Joy Fellowship. The church was launched Sept. 18, 2016, with one mission: restoring hope to the city through Jesus Christ.

“Because I was raised here, I’ve got a real heart for the people,” Turner said. “It’s a small city. It’s a dangerous, poor place, 85 percent fatherlessness. The houses, the buildings and the roads show the desperate place that East St. Louis is in. The people know struggle.”

‘Ripe for the gospel’

Though the decline in population started here years ago with the riot, recent years have seen the numbers dwindle from around 60,000 to 26,000.

“Jobs and police officers have left this city,” Turner said. “Downtown is kind of like a ghost town, but it’s ripe for the gospel. The Lord hasn’t forgotten this city.”

Every Wednesday a group of men from City of Joy Fellowship are up before the sun, praying for the city and worshipping the Lord. The prayers ring out over a people facing poverty, gang violence, environmental contamination and continued decline.

Recognizing that teenagers here are in need of community and a safe place to gather, Turner and the team at City of Joy host a youth night on Tuesdays where they train young people how to serve others and hold down a job.

Their desire is to show teens that they care and are invested in their well-being and future.

One-on-one interaction

“A young lady named Allison came to our church rejecting Jesus,” Turner said.

“After a few months of hearing the gospel and spending time with a few women one-on-one, she surrendered her life to Jesus.

“She is the real deal, zealous about spreading His gospel and love!”

Home renovation is another practical way City of Joy is connecting with their community.

“All we need is a way to start a conversation,” Turner said.

Dubbed R3, the outreach ministry is focused on community development, house restoration, business restoration and employment.

The goal is to work house by house throughout the city until each square foot has been covered in repairs and improvements as well as prayer.

Indeed, the church is appropriately named. With prayers, planning and consistent efforts, they are working toward bringing the joy of Christ into every home in East St. Louis.

“Gifts through the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering are going to help us rebuild the community of East St. Louis,” Turner said.

“We want to see God spiritually invade this city. We want to see a supernatural awakening in this city turning multitudes of souls to Jesus Christ.” *(Missions Mosaic, NAMB)*



Boko Haram sex, labor camp hostages rescued

BORNO, Nigeria — Nearly 150 children and adults enslaved by Boko Haram terrorists for sex and labor have been rescued from a remote camp in Borno state, Nigeria’s defense leaders said June 4.

“The rescued hostages, comprising 15 men, 58 women and 75 children revealed ... that the Boko Haram terrorists had sexually violated the females and used them as sex slaves,” the military said in a press briefing after the June 3 rescue. “The men were not spared, as they were regularly engaged in forced labor while in the captivity of the terrorists.”



The captives were rescued during counterinsurgency operations in the Bama village of Modu Kimeri and transferred to the Bama Internally Displaced Persons Camp for care, the military said. Other details of the freed hostages, such as the length of their captivity and their hometowns, were not disclosed. (BP)

US urged to help curtail violence in Nigeria

WASHINGTON — The United States has a responsibility to act to curtail extremist violence in Nigeria, said religious freedom and human rights advocates from both countries in a Capitol Hill briefing. The June 5 event, sponsored by International Christian Concern, focused on a West African country that is by far the largest population-wise on the continent and is plagued by religious- and ethnic-based violence especially from Islamic forces.

Among the 25 most populous countries in the world, Nigeria has the highest level of social hostilities, according to a 2017 study by the Pew Research Center.

Nigeria ranks behind only Iraq and Afghanistan on the 2017 Global Terrorism Index produced by the Institute for Economics and Peace. (BP)

NZ Anglicans to bless same-sex unions

NEW PLYMOUTH, New Zealand — The Anglican Church of New Zealand has paved the way for the blessing of same gender relationships.

The church’s governing body, the General Synod/Te Hinota Whanui, approved an amendment to church policy that would “create a framework to allow for individual clergy to be authorised (sic) to conduct services blessing same-sex relationships.” The changes also would protect clergy and bishops who authorize or refuse to authorize those services of blessing. The vote was reported by the Anglican Taonga, the news agency of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia. (TAB)

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