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Suicide in Alabama



Unsplash.com

Studies show troubling picture of suicide, mental health in state, nation

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

Following several high-profile suicides in June, calls and texts to crisis hotlines spiked dramatically — something that often happens when public figures take their own lives.

What happens when suicide is not in the spotlight could be critical in helping those in our communities and congregations who are struggling.

To put the crisis into perspective, churches and individuals are often quick to talk about safety when it comes to securing church campuses and protecting children from predators. But in Alabama, the suicide rate, 15.61 per 100,000 population, is much higher than the homicide rate, 11.2 per 100,000, according to data

from the Alabama Department of Public Health.

Additionally, a report recently released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggests that mental health struggles and thoughts of suicide are more common than church leaders might realize, even among the youngest members of a congregation.

Around 1 in 3 high school students (31.5 percent) say they've experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, according to the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Additionally, 17.2 percent say they've seriously considered attempting suicide, while 13.6 percent say they've

made a suicide plan, 7.4 percent have attempted suicide and 2.4 percent were injured in a suicide attempt.

In a separate report, the CDC also looked at data from 27 states and found that more than half of people who died by suicide had no known mental health condition at the time of death. Relationship problems or loss, substance misuse and problems with physical health, money, job, legal issues or housing often were seen as contributing factors.

Though not correlated with suicide rates, the Youth Risk Behavior Survey asks students from public and private high schools about similar issues, including their sexual behavior,

substance abuse, violence victimization and mental health.

These are all issues the church might address with both adults and youth, since the connection between life issues and suicide risk may not be clear or leaders may simply be hesitant to bring suicide into the conversation.

'Taboo' topic

In 2017, LifeWay researchers found that suicide remained a "taboo" topic in many Protestant churches. The survey of 1,000 Protestant senior pastors and 1,000 Protestant and nondenominational churchgoers found that while many want their churches to be a place families and individuals dealing with suicide can turn, a disconnect still exists.

(See 'Concerning,' page 3)

On average, one person dies by suicide every 11 hours in Alabama.

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

Facing the Issue of Sexual Abuse

Mark Aderholt has become the latest example in Southern Baptists' struggle against sexual abuse and harassment. And while the International Mission Board (IMB) is on the hot seat for actions which some contend protected Aderholt for more than a decade, the issue is larger than a single person or a single church-related institution.

Aderholt served as a Southern Baptist international missionary from 2000 to 2008. In 2007 allegations reached IMB that Aderholt had engaged in an inappropriate sexual relationship with 16-year-old Ann Marie Miller in 1996–97 while he was a 25-year-old student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

According to public reports, the IMB investigation concluded that Aderholt "engaged in an inappropriate sexual relationship" with Miller, that Miller "suffered as a result" and that Aderholt "was not truthful" with the IMB "about the full extent of the relationship."

Filed away

Before the IMB board of trustees could fire Aderholt, he resigned. At that point information about his alleged offense was filed away and did not become public until after the recent Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) annual meeting at which messengers adopted a strong resolution condemning sexual abuse and harassment.

Following his resignation from the IMB in 2008, Aderholt served on the pastoral staff of Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, Arkansas, one of the largest churches in the state. When Immanuel's pastor, former Alabamian Gary Hollingsworth, was elected executive director of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, Hollingsworth took Aderholt with him as associate executive director and chief strategist. Shortly before being arrested and booked into the Tarrant County, Texas, jail July 3, 2018, Aderholt resigned from his position with the South Carolina convention.

For the past few weeks Miller and IMB have engaged in a back-and-forth debated about why IMB took no action on Aderholt and allowed him to serve in church leadership roles for more than a



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

decade after their investigation and why IMB did not report the sexual abuse of a minor to authorities.

That exchange ended abruptly July 25 when IMB President David Platt issued a public apology to Miller and thanked her for her courage in forcing others to deal with this issue.

Platt also announced "thorough, outside and independent" investigations into how IMB handled past allegations of sexual abuse and into implementation of IMB's policies of zero tolerance for such issues.

The next day SBC President J.D. Greear announced the appointment of a Sexual Abuse Presidential Study Group in partnership with the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC). The purpose of the group is to "consider how Southern Baptists at every level can take discernable action to respond swiftly and compassionately to incidents of abuse as well as to foster safe environments within churches and institutions."

Both Platt's and Greear's actions came a week after all six SBC-related seminaries shared information about steps they are taking to increase emphasis on personal integrity for those studying for the ministry.

Evidently the resolution titled "On Abuse" adopted by messengers to the June SBC annual meeting is making a difference. That resolution condemned all forms of abuse and urged abuse victims to contact civil authorities, separate from their abusers and seek protection. It also urged churches and entities to speak out against the sin of all forms of abuse.

Abuse is wrong. It is wrong in the home. It is wrong in business. It is wrong in the church. The sin must be identified and repudiated. Perpetrators must be called to accountability.

But that brings the issue back to situations like the way IMB handled the Aderholt case. When he

resigned, he was no longer their problem. The information was placed in a file and the file drawer shut.

That is not unlike a local church that never says a word about the pastor or staff member guilty of sexual abuse or harassment. The primary concern is to get the guy out of town as quickly as possible. The actions become an open secret.

Even if the next church considering the offending pastor contacts the first church for a reference, seldom is anything said about the offense. Fear of a lawsuit over an accusation not proven in court plays no small role in decisions like that.

SNAP (Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (Pastors)) has urged Southern Baptists to compile some kind of list of those found guilty of sexual abuse and sexual harassment. The usual

response is that Baptist congregational polity makes that difficult. There is no ecclesiastical body that has authority over a local Baptist church.

Therefore, no outside body can tell a local church what to do or whom to hire.

The result is no one does anything. Not IMB. Not seminaries, as we learned earlier this year. Not churches. Files are closed or destroyed and perpetrators are free to continue their patterns of abuse and harassment in other churches or denominational positions.

Victims are usually offered counseling, but little is done to prevent the abuse and ha-

arrassment in the first place.

But SNAP did not ask for the denomination to police actions of cooperating churches. SNAP asked the denomination to collect information that could be important to a church about a potential staff member if the church asked.

Making the effort

Thankfully, Southern Baptists are increasing the emphasis on personal integrity for its ministers. Thankfully, churches, entities and institutions are adopting zero-tolerance policies for abuse and harassment. Thankfully, Southern Baptists are working to make every church and every Baptist entity a safe place.

May God bless these efforts.

And may God grant wisdom to the Sexual Abuse Presidential Study Group that it will find some way to keep a record of known sexual abusers and some way to make that information available to churches and entities interested in checking the backgrounds of those they consider to serve them. 🙏

"Thankfully, Southern Baptists are increasing the emphasis on personal integrity for its ministers. Thankfully, churches, entities and institutions are adopting zero-tolerance policies for abuse and harassment."

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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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Concerning trends

How the church can address, try to prevent suicide within

(continued from page 1)

Eight in 10 pastors agreed their church is equipped to assist someone threatening suicide. However, only 3 in 10 strongly agreed, meaning more than 2 in 3 pastors acknowledged they could be better equipped to deal with suicide.

The LifeWay survey also found mixed responses from church members when it comes to questions surrounding suicide. Some churchgoers said they'd seen different kinds of support from their church following a suicide. But 55 percent said people in their community were more likely to gossip about a suicide than help a victim's family.

Additionally, even fewer churchgoers said their church leaders publicly address suicide or provide resources to help those in the midst of a mental health crisis. This includes:

- 24 percent of churchgoers who say their church has shared a testimony in the past year of someone who has struggled with mental illness or thoughts of suicide.

- 22 percent who say the church has used sermons in the past year to discuss issues that increase the risk of suicide.

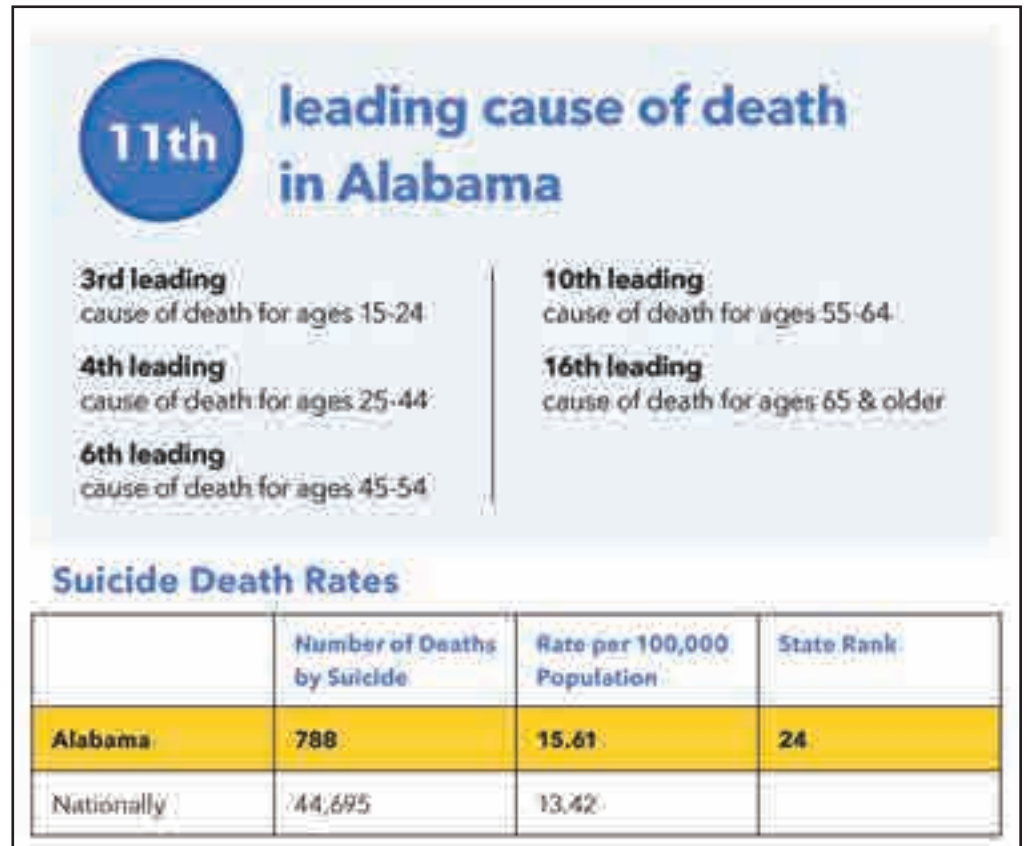
- 14 percent who say the church trained leaders to identify suicide risk factors.

When it comes to issues of mental health and suicide, researchers have seen concerning trends persist or get worse over the past 10 years.

The percentage of students who say they've experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness has increased by 3 points since 2007. The percentage of students who've seriously considered attempting suicide has increased by 2.7 points, while the percentage of those who've made a suicide plan has increased by 2.3 points.

Marked increase

Meanwhile, the prevalence of suicide among members of the general public has increased quite significantly. Suicide claimed the lives of just under 45,000 Americans in 2016 — more than 10,000 more Americans than it did in 2007



afsp.org/StateFacts

— according to additional CDC research.

Alabama lost 788 citizens to suicide in 2016 — more than double the number of suicides in 1970. Each decade has seen an increase, but the last decade has seen a marked increase. In 2005, 526 suicides were recorded. In 2016, the last year for which data is available, there were 788.

Knowing what to do if someone is depressed or suicidal is a first step in prevention, mental health experts say. For ministry leaders and individuals alike, the following advice can be lifesaving:

- In an emergency situation where someone is suicidal, call 911 or take the person to an emergency room if possible.

- If medical intervention is not available or the person seems vulnerable to suicide, call the national suicide prevention hotline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255).

- Do not leave someone who is acutely suicidal alone.

- Develop a list of mental health professionals to refer to and contact in times of crisis.

For more information and resources, including how to schedule Question, Persuade, Refer Gatekeeper Training, a 1–2-hour training for the general public that teaches participants the warning signs for suicide, go to www.alabamapublichealth.gov/suicide or www.qprinstitute.com. (TAB, BP contributed)

Trump admin. sanctions Turkish officials it says helped detain US pastor

The Trump administration has sanctioned two high-level officials in Turkey for what it says is their role in the case of U.S. pastor Andrew Brunson, who faces terrorism-related charges.

"At the president's direction, the Department of Treasury is sanctioning Turkey's minister of justice and minister of the interior, both of whom played leading roles in the arrest and detention of Pastor Brunson," White House press secretary Sarah Sanders announced at her press briefing Aug. 1.

Under the sanctions, any assets the Turkish officials have in the U.S. will be frozen.

The Treasury Department said in a statement that Turkey's Minister of Justice Abdulhamit Gul and Minister of Interior Suleyman Soylu leads governmental organizations that are "responsible for implementing Turkey's serious human rights abuses."

Court denies appeal

The moves follow reports that a Turkish court on July 31 denied Brunson's latest appeal on charges of espionage and "committing crimes on behalf of terror groups without being a member," which the Trump administration says are false.

The 50-year-old evangelical pastor from North Carolina was

moved from prison to house arrest July 25, but President Trump and other administration officials said they were not satisfied with that development. Trump has called for Brunson to be released.

After Trump and Vice President Mike Pence threatened sanctions, Turkey presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said July 31: "We advise our American friends to avoid steps which might harm the relations between Turkey and the U.S. by making this issue a topic of internal politics, and which might lead to a new crisis of trust."

Sanders said later in the briefing that Trump had discussed

Brunson's detention "on several occasions" with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

'Jailed unjustly'

"I think you can see in the actions that the president has made today that he's not happy with Turkey's decision" to not release Brunson, Sanders said.

Sen. James Lankford, R-Okla., praised the step in a tweet, saying, "As a nation, we owe it to those who are being jailed unjustly to hold their Turkish perpetrators accountable."

Brunson's next court date is scheduled for Oct. 12. He faces up to 15 years in prison if convicted. (RNS)

Bethel Association's building ministry has nationwide impact

By Jessica Ingram
The Alabama Baptist

In 2016 the members of Antioch Baptist Church in Hannibal, Missouri, felt their hearts break as their church burned to the ground. In 2018 a team from Bethel Baptist Association dedicated a week of its summer to help the church rebuild and heal. The Bethel Baptist Builders (BBB) traveled to Hannibal from June 11–15 to begin construction on the new building's walls and roof.

"Their church building held many memories, and they were devastated when the building burned," Janelle Baker, a member of the BBB team, said. "But they prayed and decided to move forward to rebuild."

Baker said the BBB team prayed that as the walls went up, healing would begin for the members of Antioch.

'Fruitful history'

This year's trip is another chapter in the fruitful history of BBB. Since 1986, BBB has been traveling far and wide to help churches and ministries with their construction needs.

As BBB helps churches across the country, volunteers from those churches begin serving with the team. Each year the number of volunteers grows and becomes more widespread.

Volunteers came from across generations and across the map to lend a hand in Hannibal. They had 124 people volunteer their vacation time to help Antioch Baptist, ranging in age from 10 months to 89 years old. They even had two women, ages 80 and 83, drive more than 14 hours to participate in the missions trip. People traveled from Arkansas, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Texas and as far away as California to help the BBB team.

"Our goal is always to finish. But at the end of the week, no matter where we stop, it is exactly where the Lord intended us to be," co-director of BBB Danny Baker said. "Obstacles may occur, but we just leave it in God's hands. We were able to put up walls, rafters and roof with decking."

Everyone on the team played a critical role, whether it was working construction, leading a children's Bible study or preparing home-cooked meals. No matter the project or job, the team wanted to show the hope and love of God through its work.

"Putting Scripture in action is



Photo courtesy of Bethel Baptist Association

A team from Bethel Baptist Association dedicated a week of its summer to help Antioch Baptist Church in Hannibal, Missouri, rebuild and heal after the church building was lost in a fire.

what we do," said Lorie Walker, a member of BBB team.

The team is already excited about what God will do during next summer's trip. Entire families — dads, moms, children, youth, grandparents — reserve this same week in June every year as a time to help the BBB.

"Each trip is always unique, but all have the same purpose, which is to show the love of Christ with our hands," Walker said. "We minister in many different areas such as carpentry, cooking, sewing, children's ministry and even hair cutting. We may use a hammer and nails, pan and spoon, crayons and markers, scissors and clippers, needle and thread, bottles of water, a friendly smile or

just a listening ear. Whatever tool we may use, it is always with the love of Christ that we use them."

Team members also know Who is really in charge of each trip, said Eugene Corley, BBB director.

God's plan

"Our team knows that it is all about what the Lord has planned for us," Corley said. "When things happen, the Lord already has a plan in place for us, whether it is for a place for us to go, for the next person to be in charge or to lead a crew. Whatever needs that arise, He is getting us ready for the next chapter. We never know what is around the next corner but we all know He is preparing us." ☞

TAB takes top honors for niche publication, writing

The Alabama Baptist (TAB) won four awards in this year's Alabama Press Association (APA) Better Newspaper Contest.

"We appreciate the affirmation of *The Alabama Baptist* these awards represent," TAB Editor Bob Terry said. "This year the paper won writing awards for news, feature and editorial. That demonstrates *The Alabama Baptist* provides readers quality coverage that competes favorably with the best secular writing in the state."

"*The Alabama Baptist: Celebrating 175 Years of Informing, Inspiring and Connecting Baptists*" won first place in the category 'Best Niche Publication — Newsprint or Glossy.' The four-color, fully illustrated book published in hardback and paperback details the origin and history of TAB, from wars and political upheaval, to cultural changes and technology shifts.

"We are especially excited that the 175th anniversary book telling the story of *The*

Alabama Baptist won first place," Terry said. "This volume has now taken top honors in state, denominational and national competitions. We are glad we can offer this outstanding book to the people of Alabama."

Also garnering awards: TAB writer Grace Thornton won first place in the 'Best Feature Story Coverage' category for her story "Uncle Cudjo." TAB correspondent Margaret Colson won third place in 'Best News Feature Story Coverage' for

"Pray for Mount Zion."

In the 'Best Editorial' category, Terry placed third for his editorial "Racism is wrong."

The APA Better Newspaper Contest is an annual awards competition for members of the APA. TAB competes in Division C, non-daily newspapers with a total paid circulation of 4,001 and above.

The awards were presented July 21 at the 2018 APA Summer Convention at Perdido Beach Resort in Orange Beach. (TAB)





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"Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds." Psalm 36:5

Called to communicate

Women serving 'in seats of influence' share about their faith in the workplace

By Margaret Colson
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Just as Jesus affirmed first-century women, calling them to confess Him as Lord and to tell the good news of the gospel, He continues to call women in the 21st century to communicate His gospel story to the world.

Many women communicators today are answering that call, serving in denominational "seats of influence," a term Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) President J.D. Greear used in his post-election press conference during the SBC meeting in Dallas.

From a national agency to a children's home and from a state paper to a seminary campus, four women — Carol Pipes, LifeWay Christian Resources; Stella Prather, Arkansas Baptist Children's Homes and Family Ministries (ABCHomes); Jennifer Davis Rash, *The Alabama Baptist*; and Amy Whitfield, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary — are representative of women serving in key roles as Southern Baptist strategic communications leaders.

For more than three quarters of a century collectively, these four women have made their mark on Southern Baptist communications, living out their divine communications callings as they craft messages, make decisions, lead staffs, plan strategically, develop budgets, mentor colleagues, manage crises and more.

In today's technological world where every person with a laptop computer or smartphone is, in effect, a communicator, strategic denominational communications takes on an even greater urgency.

"Quality communication is paramount in today's world as we seek to cut through the noise and connect with those inside and outside of our denomination," said Pipes, LifeWay's director of corporate communications. "Effective communication is key to strengthening partnerships, connecting mission to ministry, building life-changing relationships and inviting people into a transformational faith journey."

Vital for partnership

Southern Baptist polity and cooperation make effective communication a non-negotiable, said Rash, editor-elect, *The Alabama Baptist*.

"With Southern Baptist polity of local church autonomy merged with cooperative efforts to partner in large-scale efforts added to the mix, effective, trustworthy communication is truly the only way to survive long term," she added.

"Effective communication cuts down on

confusion, keeps the members appropriately informed in a timely manner and allows for enhanced opportunities to resource the members toward our ultimate goals as Southern Baptists — to share the gospel of Jesus Christ; to love the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul and strength; and to love our neighbors as ourselves."

Women in Scripture

All along the way, today's women communications leaders find inspiration through the women who come to life on the pages of the New Testament: Martha, Mary Magdalene and the Samaritan woman.

Martha's "bold proclamation" of Jesus as Messiah "profoundly affected" Whitfield, director of communications at Southeastern Seminary. "While Martha is often most known for her interaction with Jesus about following her sister's example of 'choosing the good part,' I am most moved that she went on to become the only woman documented

in Scripture to confess Christ as Messiah in John 11," she said. "In her greatest moment of grief after losing her brother, she showed tremendous faith in a bold proclamation."

Having also worked for LifeWay and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in her ministry, Whitfield acknowledges that there are times when she is the only woman in the room for a meeting or event, "but

I have been fortunate to be encouraged and affirmed in my participation," she said, just as Jesus encouraged and affirmed women in His days on earth.

Rash is inspired by Jesus' resurrection, she said. "I love the passage in John where the resurrected Jesus called on Mary Magdalene to go and communicate His resurrection message. It provides clarity for me that Jesus saw women just as capable as men to share the gospel."

"As far as we can tell, Jesus did not look around for a man first but purposefully picked Mary Magdalene to be the initial person to get the privilege of sharing His important message."

Another woman to share Jesus' message was an anonymous, despised woman, known in Scripture as the Samaritan woman. After meeting Jesus, the Samaritan woman went back into town to tell the people, including men, about her encounter with Jesus in John 4. "Many ... believed in Him because of the

woman's testimony," said Prather, director of communications, ABCHomes. "The Lord used her story to make a difference. I believe He too can use the stories and communication I am privileged to tell."

Although every ministry opportunity comes with its fair share of challenges, women serving as denominational communications leaders find their greatest fulfillment in living out their callings faithfully, they shared.

Sometimes that commitment to the call might include the unexpected. "I still remember a mentor, a boss who took out the trash. It wasn't that person's job, but it needed to be done," Prather said.

Both large and small tasks are part of the mix of serving in a Christian context, believes Whitfield. "Be willing to accept small tasks as part of the team and to accept big tasks as a way to expand your gifts," she said.

Through the years, Rash has learned, "If you are truly sensing God's calling, then stay focused on Him and the work He has for you to do."

"It isn't always easy, but I am driven by the opportunity and challenge to help believers in Christ learn from each other — to sharpen each other, as Scripture says — while also sharing calmly and clearly so we can attempt to be the best versions of the people God made us to be," Rash said.

Grateful that she has "truly felt support, love and empowerment through most of my career and faith journey," Rash finds fulfillment as she helps "resource and empower the staff of *The Alabama Baptist*."

Pipes, too, is grateful for those who serve alongside her in Christian communications, saying, "My colleagues at LifeWay inspire me to bring my best every day."

Prather and Rash learned the importance of such mutual support, encouragement and sharpening soon after college graduation, when the two met as each served on the missions field — Rash, serving with the International Mission Board in a com-

munications-related role, and Prather, serving with the Home Mission Board (now the North American Mission Board) in college student and resort ministry. After her missions work, Prather landed an opportunity in public relations with the Florida Baptist Convention. Her passion for storytelling, honed during that first experience in denominational communications, has only intensified through the years.

"I tell people all the time that I have the best job in Arkansas because I have the privilege of telling the story of how Arkansas Baptists are making a difference in the lives of children and families in crisis," said Prather, the mother of two boys.

"We work for the King of kings. Our communication in telling His story should be of utmost importance."

Wife and mother Whitfield, who admits that "work-life balance is always a challenge," echoes Prather's passion for storytelling. "I love getting to tell stories of people on mission. Our school's mission is to equip students to serve the church and fulfill the

Great Commission.

"When I tell the story of our institution and the stories of our students, I get to share one small part of what God is doing in the world."

'One great story'

"Everything we do points to one great story," Whitfield said, "so it is vital that our messages are honest and compelling."

Years ago, when Pipes served the summer before college graduation with World Changers, a ministry that provides missions experiences for students, she first sensed God calling her to serve Him through communications. "I realized I loved writing for and about the Church. I especially love sharing stories of how God is working in and through the lives of His people," she said. Today, her commitment to that calling directs her. "My hope is every word I speak, every sentence I publish would honor God, stand for truth and help build Christ's church," she said.

"What an honorable task we have to be communicators for our convention." ✝



PRATHER



WHITFIELD



RASH



PIPES

"Everything we do points to one great story, so it is vital that our messages are honest and compelling."

Amy Whitfield
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

Empowered to excel

Judson College holds its 180th commencement

Sixty-seven graduates were recognized June 23 at Judson College's 180th commencement.

Families and friends joined graduates in historic Alumnae Auditorium for the conferring of associate degrees in nursing and bachelor of arts, bachelor of science and bachelor of social work degrees.

The commencement speaker was David Wilson, president of Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland. Wilson's address centered on the transformative, transferrable power of education for graduates and for people in their spheres of influence.

Using his own story of his experience as a first-generation college student from a sharecropping farm in rural Marengo County, Wilson, who now holds four degrees from Tuskegee and Harvard universities, stressed graduates' responsibility to transfer the "magic of education" to others.

"Just as (education) has changed your life," Wilson said to graduates,

"it has empowered you to become a change agent in the lives of others and the world. You are now prepared to transform your community, your city, your state, your country and your world. You are prepared, by your own words and deeds, to become a model touched by the magic of education, a model of excellence to your family in your profession, in your leadership in the community and in your personal example."

Wilson received an honorary doctorate of humane letters during the ceremony in recognition of his devotion and service to higher education, of his com-



Photo courtesy of Judson College

Families and friends joined graduates in historic Alumnae Auditorium on June 23 for the conferring of associate and bachelor degrees to 67 Judson College graduates.

mitment to "raising awareness of the beauty, challenges and potential of the Black Belt region of Alabama" and of the "vision and leadership skills he has applied not only to earning his own degrees but to showing others a path to education and a life of meaningful service."

Rosalie Hall Hunt, missionary, historian and author, received the Algernon Sydney Sullivan Award in recognition of her "distinct virtues of heart, mind and conduct that are practically applied to daily living and demonstrated in a spirit of love for and helpfulness to other(s)."

Hunt's faithful friendship to Judson

College also was celebrated. Her ground-breaking biographies "Bless God and Take Courage: The Judson History and Legacy" and "The Extraordinary Story of Ann Hasseltine Judson: A Life Beyond Boundaries" revived and preserved the story of Ann Jud-

son, the woman for whom Judson College is named.

Other award recipients include:

Laura Schrock Crawford, assistant professor of English: Lula and Alton Holley Award for Excellence in Classroom Teaching, an annual faculty award determined by vote of graduating seniors.

Courtney Tillman, Flat Rock: Algernon Sydney Sullivan Student Award in recognition for her "nobility of character as expressed through spiritual qualities in daily living."

Supporter of Judson

Lillie Hobson, Kinsey: J.C. Faulkner Award given to honor an "outstanding student and ... enthusiastic supporter of Judson College."

Lauren Hurt, Huntsville: Bible Award, an annual award presented to the senior exhibiting the most "outstanding Christian spirit" and rendering "Christian service to her college" during her tenure as a Judson student.

Sara Jean Lane, Conyers, Georgia: Scholarship Award, an annual award presented to a senior with an excellent academic record at Judson.

In special memory of the late David E. Potts, former Judson president and chancellor, a chair draped with his robe and medallion occupied a place on the stage during the ceremony. (Judson)



Photo courtesy of Judson College

In special memory of the late David E. Potts, a chair draped with his robe and medallion occupied a place on the stage during the ceremony.

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Christians in Iran seized from their homes

TEHRAN, Iran — Three Christians and a pastor were arrested in an attempt to intimidate the Christian community in Iran, according to advocacy group Middle East Concern (MEC).

Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani was arrested earlier this year for "propagating house churches" and promoting "Zionist Christianity." Nadarkhani and the others, all converts from Islam, face long prison sentences away from their families, sources said.

"Please pray that the Lord will comfort and strengthen those arrested and their families and that the Christian community in Iran will trust the Lord and not be intimidated," MEC's statement read.

Iran is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees the right to change one's religion and the freedom of religion.



MS photo

Evin Prison in Tehran

Furthermore, Article 23 of the Iranian Constitution states that "the investigation of individuals' beliefs is forbidden, and no one may be molested or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief."

Iran ranked 10th on Christian support organization Open Doors' 2018 World Watch List of the 50 countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. (MS)

Pastor in hiding after extremist attacks

RAIKASHIPUR, India — Brandishing hockey sticks and a gun that was fired on house-church grounds, masked Hindu extremists assaulted Christians in Pratapgarh District.

After the July 2 assault that terrorized families and sent nine of about 50 injured Christians to the hospital for treatment, influential Hindus pressured police to file charges against the Christians, the church pastor said.

A partially blind girl identified as 12-year-old Rishu was severely beaten with sticks on her back, hands, legs and elsewhere on her body and a 10-year-old boy sustained a head injury that required seven stitches during the attack at the worship site, where about 100 Christians had gathered, pastor Ram Kumar Gautam said.

The 50 people not injured managed to flee for their lives, he said. He added that more of the injured church members would have obtained hospital treatment, but were afraid of further violence.

The pastor said the assailants were members of the Hindu extremist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Bharatiya Janata Party, accompanied by a few villagers.

India ranked 11th on Christian support organization Open Doors' 2018 World Watch List of countries where Christians experience the most persecution. (MS)

Christians harassed with false charges

NEW DELHI — Three evangelists in India have been accused of fraudulent conversion though no formal charges have been filed.

Church leaders believe the accusations are rooted only in the desire to harass the Christians, who came together in the Khajuwala area in May to proclaim Christ to villagers.

Pastor Kasiram Meghwal, evangelist Sahiram Nayak and Pastor Vijender Singh were arrested May 20 and obtained bail. They were jailed again May 24 under a statute against "outraging religious feelings." Their plea for bail was denied.

Singh said they held a Sunday worship service inside the prison May 27 and told the convicts about Christ. (MS)

New option for 'reading' TAB

TAB podcast will deliver content in popular format for listening

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Edna Harden is visually impaired. She can see light, but that's all.

But she's got quite the talent for crocheting. Over the years, she's made hundreds of pieces for the children at Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries.

And while she's worked, audio materials have been her lifeblood.

"I'm a big reader. I enjoy anything Christian reading," said Harden, a member of Antioch Baptist Church, Bynum, in Calhoun Baptist Association. "I read by listening to tapes, CDs or digital recordings every single day."

She's listened to the Bible all the way through more than 200 times. And over the years, she's also listened to *The Alabama Baptist* (TAB) through a ministry that provided the paper every week in audio form.

It was a ministry that lasted more than 30 years before going on hiatus in 2017. Now TAB is launching a new audio ministry through podcasting Aug. 19, and Harden is interested in the opportunity to rediscover TAB again in this new format.

Jennifer Davis Rash, TAB's editor-elect, said the paper is "excited to be in a position now to offer this expanded coverage."

The podcast will provide the content each week in a radio-show-style format for listeners to download and listen to at their convenience. A host will guide the show, along with several readers and guests who will be invited in to talk about some of the story topics in depth.

Each week's episode will be available on Tuesdays for download from universal podcast hubs like iTunes and Stitcher as well as TheAlabamaBaptist.org. Rash said she hopes it will reach homes in Alabama and beyond — and one audience TAB definitely hopes to accommodate is the visually impaired.



"It is important to us at *The Alabama Baptist* to provide our content in as many ways as needed to get to all Alabama Baptists, which includes the visually impaired," she said. "We recognize that many believers within the Alabama Baptist family are not able to read newsprint."

For some, getting a PDF version is a good option, because the size can be increased on a device's screen as needed. But that doesn't work for everyone, she said.

"An audio file like what the podcast will



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offer is the best solution for staying connected to the news and information provided by *The Alabama Baptist*," Rash said.

Pam Coffey, a member of Vestavia Hills Baptist Church, Birmingham, in Birmingham Baptist Association, said it's definitely the best solution for her.

Coffey had been listening to the tapes since 1984, and even though she has a scanner that will read newsprint to her, it's a little bit clumsy reading around photos and graphic elements.

"I've really missed it since the tapes stopped coming," she said. "I loved all of it — the feature articles, the editorials and the Sunday School lessons. I'm really excited about it coming back as a podcast."

Jack Kinley, a retired pastor and member of Crawford Road Baptist Church, Phenix City, in Russell Baptist Association, said he agrees that an audio version would be a great help to a lot of people.

Kinley, 90, said he's fortunate because as a disabled veteran, the government furnished him with a costly device that magnifies written materials on a large screen for him to read.

"I think a lot of our visually impaired or blind people, even if they have some sight, they don't have access to a machine like that," he said.

And even with a little bit of vision in one eye and access to that sort of device, Kinley said trying to read through a magnifier can be exhausting after a while.

"I enjoyed getting *The Alabama Baptist*

on tape," he said. "I could sit in my recliner and listen to it. I think having a way to listen to it again would be an advantage for me and other people who have visual impairments."

In the old days of the audio ministry, volunteers would read the paper aloud each week on a recording taped at the Baptist Building in Montgomery. The master tape was then duplicated by another set of volunteers, and copies were mailed to as many as 100 recipients.

Those volunteers "were always very faithful to the task," said Doug Rogers, director of communications and technology services for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM).

Laying groundwork

But as the SBOM prepared to move to its new building in Prattville, "we discussed the space limitations we would have, along with the need to recruit new volunteers because we wouldn't expect our senior adult volunteers to make the weekly trip to Prattville," Rogers said.

As he talked with Rash and learned of TAB's desire to start a podcast soon, he and others at the SBOM decided it was time to let people know the tape ministry era was drawing to a close.

"I'm excited that something with this history and significance has helped lay the groundwork for the TAB podcast," Rogers said. "I believe God will use it to bless not only the original audience of the blind and sight-impaired, but many others as well."

VBS brings children from across denominations



Photo courtesy of Wayne Harrell

Several denominations were represented at the Vacation Bible School held at Eutaw Baptist Church in Bigbee Baptist Association. Children from across the community spent five days learning about Jesus, sharing the gospel and enjoying crafts, music and food. The week's missions emphasis was St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and more than \$1,500 was raised for St. Jude through the children's offerings during the week. "I think that was remarkable," Wayne Harrell, deacon at Eutaw Baptist, said. "If you've never attended one of these community Vacation Bible Schools, grab one of your grandchildren and see what all the fun is about."

Each week's podcast episode will be available on Tuesdays for download from TheAlabamaBaptist.org as well as most universal podcast hubs like iTunes and Stitcher.

A father helps his son, Conner, pet a therapy dog at an event for special needs families at Shiloh Baptist Church, Saraland. Ever since Pastor Robert Lutz's family embarked on a journey raising special-needs children, the church has been actively involved in reaching out to families with special needs.

'Powerful ministry'



Photo courtesy of Shiloh Baptist Church

Saraland pastor's three special-needs children change the way church does ministry

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Robert Lutz is quick to say that the road his family has walked is one of miracles — and not the kind you would expect. For starters, it was a miracle that he and his wife, Belinda, got to adopt their first two children back in 2005, he said.

"God had been working in our hearts toward adopting, specifically from Russia," said Lutz, pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church, Saraland, in Mobile Baptist Association. But as they walked through the process, they hit some snags.

They learned that the wait time was getting longer and longer, a fact that wasn't just inconvenient — it could shut things down. The accreditation of their adoption would expire soon — June 1 of that year — and if they didn't finalize the adoption before then, it might be difficult to get approved again.

Miracles happened

They also learned that if they found out they were expecting a biological baby during the adoption process, all the paperwork would be annulled.

But then miracles happened, Lutz said.

The process, which usually took months, took 12 days for them. The court granted the adoptions one day before the deadline.

"We tell them all the time, 'God really wanted you in our home,'" Lutz said.

And when they got back home to Alabama with Braden and Denae, they found out Belinda was pregnant.

"We got three children within a seven-month window," Lutz said.

It seemed like a whirlwind.

But it wasn't long until things got challenging in a different way — they found out that two of the three children had special needs.

Their oldest son, Braden, now 15, has a rare genetic abnormality that only four people in the U.S. have. Their oldest biological son, Andrew, now 12, was born with 5P- (five P minus), another rare genetic disorder.

And a few years later, they had a fourth child — a little girl named Casey who would have the most severe special needs of all of their children.

"When she was born, she had a really unique cry — it sounded like a cat," Lutz said. "That's the telltale sign of 5P- or Cri du Chat Syndrome (Cat Cry Syndrome)."

She had the same rare condition as Andrew, but at 8 years old, she is unable to

walk or talk. Andrew's issues are mostly tactile and sensory.

When he took the pastorate at Shiloh Baptist a decade ago, they already had two children with special needs, but in the couple of years that followed, they added Casey and learned more about Braden's rare disorder.

Called by God

"I remember getting in the pulpit and telling our church that God had called me to be their pastor but He had also called us to walk this journey as a special-needs family," Lutz said. "And I told them that as our church, they would be on this journey too."

The church's response, he said, has been "super gracious" for the long haul. Through trial and error, they've gotten to know how to best minister to special-needs children.

One of those ways has been through a system where they pair a "buddy" with each child. For children with less severe needs, that can be a friend their own age who can include and watch out for them. For children with more severe needs, a buddy could be a student or an adult trained to help them.

The ministry has been great for the Lutz family, but it hasn't stopped there.

Because of the way the Lutz children

pioneered the church's ministry to special-needs children, other families with special needs found a warm welcome at Shiloh Baptist.

Thomas Wright, executive director of missions for Mobile Association, said the church's response has been a catalyst for great things in the community.

"The Shiloh church family was aware calling a pastor with special-needs children would require new awareness and ministry," Wright said. "Each person needs to hear and understand the gospel in order to respond, no matter the severity of the physical and mental challenges. Making adjustments in facilities and presentation have allowed for many creative events and activities that meet tremendous physical and spiritual needs."

One of those events is a twice-a-year festival for special-needs children and their families.

Around 60 special-needs children — along with several hundred family members and volunteers — gather each time for the event.

Shiloh provides a controlled environment where the children can enjoy games, horseback rides, hayrides, inflatables, even zip lines. Just like at church, special-needs children are paired with buddies. A nurse is on hand for any health emergencies that might arise.

A good experience

And then Lutz gathers all the parents together for a meal. While they eat, he talks to them for a few minutes about ways they can help a church experience be better for them and their children (see sidebar).

"But the biggest thing is just for them to be around the table with other parents of special needs children," he said.

A powerful ministry has been birthed out of the family's hardship, Wright said.

"The Lutz family provides a great testimony of converting physical challenge into compassionate ministry with eternal consequences," he said. "Special-needs children and adults can be overlooked due to the required time, patience and emotional investment."

The demands can be overwhelming, Wright said. "Robert and Belinda understand how to bring needed support and biblical ministry to parents, siblings and special needs children." ✨

Pastor, father of special-needs kids gives advice on how to help make church a good experience

Robert Lutz said that one of the things he has learned through his family's journey with three special-needs children (see story, this page) is that many families in his shoes don't know the best way to go about talking to churches about their special-needs child.

"One of the things I tell them is to call a church ahead of time to find out if they can provide what their child needs in order to be there," said Lutz, pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church, Saraland. "If I were to call a church and explain our situation and they don't have the resources in place to handle it, I'd rather know now than after I get there and have a bad experience."

It's not a bad mark on the church if it doesn't have the resources in place — it's just important that they and the family communicate well, he said.

There to help

For example, in another church where Lutz served, a family attended with a little boy who had autism.

"He was an escape artist and would sometimes manage to get out of his classroom and would come into the church and yell," he said.

The church was used to it, and the family of the child knew that everyone there was their church family and was there to help and support them through it all, Lutz said. "It's important to know if a church is

OK with your needs before you go."

Another question to ask is if a church has a special needs class or someone who can be a buddy for the child.

"Most churches, if they have a special-needs ministry, opt to do a buddy system where someone is paired with the child and attends their class with them," Lutz said.

Another way to lay the groundwork for a good experience is to be willing to give the church information about your child, he said. "People are sometimes scared of what they don't know."

"Find out what they've done for other special-needs families," he said. "All this can make it easier when you're visiting a new church." (Grace Thornton)

Ready to date?

Helping teens enter the dating world is part of family discipleship

Teenage dating

Kayley and Kaitlyn are 14-year-old twins. Kayley has matured a lot in the past year. Active in her church youth group and several activities at school, she has taken on many responsibilities and shown good judgment in her decision-making.

She always has seemed more deliberate in her choices than her sister, who everyone considers the fun-loving one.

Kaitlyn is outgoing but also impulsive. She seldom thinks before she acts.

Both girls recently have started talking about boys they like, and they want to go out to a movie with the boys and some other friends. They call it a double-date and seem very excited. Mom and Dad aren't sure. Are their girls really ready to date?

By Michael Bozeman, M.A.C.E., MA, ALC
Pathways Professional Counseling

Is my teenager ready to date? What are the appropriate boundaries I should set in place? What should I know about their boyfriend/girlfriend? How do I talk with my child about this topic?

These are just a few questions that every parent should be prepared to answer when they are making decisions about allowing their teenager to date. There are many books written on this subject. There are plenty of blog posts out there for parents to get direction from an "expert." The problem is, when it comes to allowing your teenager to date, every situation is unique. It is unique because there is no cookie-cutter approach to teenagers. They all are very unique in the way God has made them, and no two families operate in the exact same way.

There is one thing that I know for sure: the Word of God is the truth and nothing can change that. As we seek to follow Christ, we should cling to the truth and allow it to be the driving force behind all the decisions we make.

This is true for parents as well as their children. Parents just have the awesome opportunity to point their children to truth as they seek to make decisions in their life.

How do I know my teen is ready?

This question is much harder to answer than one would expect. It should not come with age necessarily but rather from the maturity level of each teenager. It also is important for parents to recognize that dating looks much different in today's culture than it did when today's parents were kids.

Sexual promiscuity is growing, even among Christian teens. Many teenagers also do not receive the moral guidance necessary to help them in their decision-making. This is why it is so important that parents really know

the person their teenager decides to date.

It also is crucial that parents know the other parents as well. Group dating is a great way for parents to feel more at ease with sending their teenager out on their first dating experience.

If your teen shows common sense and sound moral judgment, dating could be a great experience in their developmental process. They can learn how to relate to the opposite sex in a very positive and healthy way, thus leading them to understand the qualities that they are looking for in a marriage partner.

Potential dangers of teen dating

In his book, "Handbook on Counseling Youth," Josh McDowell defines several dangers in teenage dating:

- ▶ Danger of isolating oneself from friends
- ▶ Danger of forgetting other important relationships (i.e. family)
- ▶ Danger of dating for the wrong reasons (for example: to impress others, get back at someone or cause jealousy)
- ▶ Danger of becoming so date-conscious that you discount other people because you do not see them as potential dates
- ▶ Danger of feeling trapped
- ▶ Danger of

getting hurt and/or hurting someone else

▶ Danger of mistaking emotional and physical attraction for real love

▶ Danger of letting sexual desires get out of control

McDowell goes on to say that "far too many teens, especially those that begin dating early, are woefully unprepared for the dangers of dating, and as a result, expose themselves unnecessarily to the worst that the dating experience has to offer."

Knowing and understanding these dangers will help parents as they seek to have honest conversations with their teens about the subject of dating. It also will allow them to witness negative behaviors that may come when their teen begins dating.

Parents must be willing to have awkward conversations with their teenagers. When I am sitting across from a teenager struggling with issues that have come out of a dating relationship, many times it is evident that the teen and his or her parents have not had much-needed conversations.

Many of my friends who are in the trenches working with teenagers on a daily basis report similar observations.

"Too many parents are unwilling to talk with their teens about this topic. It's uncomfortable. The teens want nothing to do with it.

(See 'Talk,' page 11)



'God has a plan'

Fellow Alabama Baptists share their dating lessons learned in life

Teenagers and young adults have more ways to meet and communicate with potential dates than ever before, but the essentials of healthy dating relationships have not really changed.

We asked Hannah Muñoz, customer relations specialist at *The Alabama Baptist*, to share her perspective as a young adult in the dating world. The recent Samford University graduate and member of the Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham can relate to the challenges teens and young adults face when it comes to dating.

TAB: What or who helped you decide who to go out with?

HM: After a long-term, long-distance relationship during high school and col-

lege, I didn't know how to date people, where to meet people or what God's plan even was for my life in terms of romantic relationships. I decided to try a dating app, but got guidance from friends on which pictures to share and how to describe

myself in the bio section. I didn't go to meet someone until I thought I had a good idea of the type of person they were, for my own safety, and when I did plan a date, I usually kept it within a time limit in a busy area, like at a Chick-Fil-A during my lunch break.

TAB: How did faith play a role in your decisions?

HM: Faith has played an important role in deciding both who I date and how I date. I met several people through the dating app I used and always made sure that the topic of Christianity was brought up. Usually

it came up pretty early on, especially because I mentioned in my bio on the app that I worked for a Baptist newspaper and graduated from a Baptist school. Other times I would bring it up when I mentioned that in my free time I enjoyed spending time with my friends from church or when describing my family. It is important to me to find someone who also is a Christian when it comes to dating.

TAB: What do you wish you had known then that you know now?

HM: I've learned a lot in the short time that I've been dating after graduating from college, but two things stick out to me. The first is one that so many of us know, but it might take a few times of hearing it to really believe it. God has a plan for everyone and it's different for each of us. Some may get married right after high school or shortly after graduating from college, but that isn't true for everyone. If that doesn't describe you, don't be discouraged. God didn't forget about you. He

still has a plan for your life and if you seek Him first, that plan will come into fruition in His timing. The good news is that this doesn't just apply to dating, it applies to everything in your life.

I've also learned that the singles ministry at church isn't a dirty word or something to be ashamed of. It's not something to get in and out of in the shortest amount of time. Find a church with a singles ministry that you enjoy and get to know the people around you. They're going through the same life experiences as you. It is a great way to meet new people, make close Christian friends and even do fun events and get to know your city better. (TAB)

"God has a plan for everyone and it's different for each of us. Some may get married right after high school or shortly after graduating from college, but that isn't true for everyone. If that doesn't describe you, don't be discouraged. God didn't forget about you. He still has a plan for your life and if you seek Him first, that plan will come into fruition in His timing."



MUÑOZ

Other voices

One thing I wish I had known before I started dating is ...



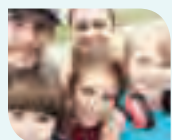
"How much more important my relationship with my family is compared to others in my life."

Kimberly Beach, associational WMU director for Tuscaloosa Baptist Association



"The value of a godly relationship and not compromising! The best things are built on strong foundations!"

Colt Hudson, pastor, Mount Enon Baptist Church, Midland City



"The closer I could be to God the Father, the better and stronger all of my relationships would be. That trying to have a dating relationship with someone that didn't share my desire to continually submit myself to God, and who might not have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior, only put my witness and myself at risk."

Justin Tidwell, deacon, Six Mile Baptist Church, Brierfield

Resources for teens

► **"The Truth About Dating, Love, and Just Being Friends"** by Chad Eastham

► **"10 Things for Teen Girls"** by Kate Conner

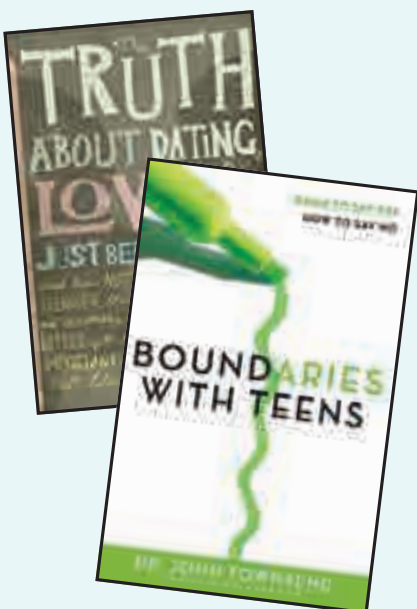
► **"Dateable: Are You? Are They?"** by Hayley Morgan DiMarco and Justin Lookadoo

► **"The Guy's Guide to God, Girls, and the Phone in Your Pocket: 101 Real-World Tips for Teenaged Guys"** by Jonathan McKee

Resources for parents

► **"Boundaries with Teens: When to Say Yes, How to Say No"** by John Townsend

► **"Praying the Scriptures for Your Teenagers: Discover How to Pray God's Purpose for Their Lives"** by Jodie Berndt



Compiled by Carrie Brown McWhorter

Talk to your teen

It is important for parents to have those awkward conversations with teens

(continued from page 9)

Often attempting to discuss it will lead to the teens being sullen and non-responsive," said Eric Sexton, a former youth pastor who now serves as collegiate minister with the Etowah Baptist Association.

His advice to hesitant parents?

"Do it anyway."

Sexton said conversations between fathers and sons and between mothers and daughters may be the best way to go. The conversation also should be held in an attitude of love.

"It is important to communicate to the teen how precious they are and how you as the parent want to know what they are looking for in dating. Waiting to have this conversation when they want to date someone specifically is waiting too long. Ultimately, as parents we need to be discipling our children. That means talking about relationships of the opposite sex, marriage and intimacy. Failure to do this will make communicating about this topic difficult," Sexton said.

Other youth pastors and ministry volunteers I spoke with also mentioned the pitfalls that can easily come when teens begin dating before they are ready to do so. They talked about how many teens almost seem to practice divorce many times in their high school and college years, as they have many different boyfriends or girlfriends and each breakup acts as a divorce. They even talked about how dating within the youth group is costly because when it ends it almost always takes



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one or the other away from the church.

This is not to say that there is not a place for teenagers when it comes to dating. Dating done in a God-honoring, appropriate way can be very positive. It can yield a more confident individual who has learned positive ways to associate with the opposite sex.

Guiding teenagers through their first dating experiences is yet another way parents disciple their children. Always be willing to point your teenager to truth. Disciple them in their

walk with Christ, understanding that they are in a daily battle with the enemy who desires to use any means necessary to bring about destruction in their life.

The truth from God's Word will always expose the lies the enemy is selling your teenager. Be encouraged that the Lord has chosen you as their parent and tasked you with an awesome responsibility to point them to this life-giving truth.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Michael Bozeman is a former youth pastor and current associate licensed counselor serving central Alabama with Pathways Professional Counseling, a sister ministry of the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries. ✝



First dates: 3 tips for parents of teens

1. Encourage your teenager at the appropriate time to begin dating in a group setting. This will ease them into dating and help them as they develop in their maturity. This also will reduce the pressure that comes from being alone with the opposite sex.

2. Draw clear boundaries when it comes to the rules of dating. Do not let your teen question what is expected when it comes to their dating relationships. Your teen should know your family's rules

when it comes to dating. This will help them in their decision-making process.

3. Make it a point to know your teen's boyfriend/girlfriend as well as their family. This should be a nonnegotiable when it comes to deciding if your teen is ready to date. Make it a point to spend time with them and their family. Parents should always know who they are allowing to speak into the life of their child.

Source: Michael Bozeman, Pathways Professional Counseling



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In dating as in life, remember to encourage teens to see their identity in Christ

By Eric Sexton
Collegiate/Student Ministries Director
Etowah Baptist Association

For parents, talking to their teens about dating can be daunting. It can be compared to riding a rollercoaster that begins with dread and concludes with yelling and someone feeling sick. For the believer, there is no part of the Bible that talks about teenagers going on a date. So what are parents to do?

Before beginning the conversation, parents must ask where the teen's identity is found? More specifically, is the teen's identity found in Christ? The answer to this question comes in the context of discipleship between the parents and their teen. Parents cannot abdicate discipleship to the youth minister or pastor. As parents they have the greatest responsibility of discipling their child.

If parents are discipling their teen, then they are already discussing topics like dating, values and sexuality. But they are discussing them in the context of a foundation and identity in Christ.

When parents disciple their kids, they provide them a strong biblical worldview. They are giving them a good foundation for

an identity in Christ. A teen's identity will guide his or her decision making.

In the book of Daniel, there is no information about Daniel's parents. The book begins with Daniel and his three friends as teenagers who had been forced from their homes and sent to Babylon. The Babylonians wanted to indoctrinate and assimilate them into the culture.

But Daniel's identity was as a follower of God. He would not defile himself by eating the king's food. His identity in God informed all the decisions he made. He had been disciplined as a young man and had a strong biblical foundation.

When parents are discussing dating with their teens, it must be in the context of discipleship and identity. So in the context of parental discipleship, let's dive into

how to talk about dating with teenagers. The two areas to look at are holiness and the purpose of dating.

As Christians, we are called to be holy. Holiness should be pursued. First Peter 1:15-16 says, "But as the One who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy."

Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7,

"For this is God's will, your sanctification: that you keep away from sexual immorality, that each of you knows how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not with lustful passions, like the Gentiles, who don't know God. This means one must not transgress against and take advantage of a brother or sister in this manner, because the Lord is an avenger of all these offenses, as we also previously told and warned you. For God has not called us to impurity but to live in holiness."

It is important that teens understand that God calls them to live lives that are holy. Part of that call is to flee sexual immorality. Parents need to communicate that Jesus died so that they might live in holiness and in good relationship with God.

This applies to their relationships with the opposite sex. Not that the Christian life is all rules and regulations, but if teens are pursuing a life of holiness, then they will understand why they can't date a non-believer (2 Cor. 6:14). Understanding holiness will help teens see why their bodies are

to honor God (1 Cor. 6:19). Understanding their pursuit of holiness will help teens see why boundaries are important and why they must flee sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6:18).

And ultimately what is the purpose of dating? It is to find a husband or wife (Gen. 2:24). How does one find a spouse? By pursuing holiness and healthy Christ-led relationships.

Listening and patience

How does one know if their teen is ready to date? To determine this, it requires an open dialogue between parents and teen. It means having uncomfortable conversations. It means listening and patience on both sides.

Fortunately parents do not have to go at this alone. God has sent His Holy Spirit to guide His people. As believers, we have access to prayer, and parents should be daily interceding, both for their teen and their teen's future spouse. As you encourage your teen, you must pursue God as well. When parents are pursuing the Lord, they can trust in His sovereignty. 

"But as the One who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy."

1 Peter 1:15-16

'Matter of prayer'

Central Park Baptist gives building to another church to carry on mission, school

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

About 35 years ago, the members of Central Park Baptist Church, Birmingham, made a decision — they wanted to stay put when they thought others might leave.

"The community around the church was changing, so for the church, change was inevitable too," Levan Parker said. "They knew a lot of churches would be leaving, and they decided they wanted to stay and minister to the community."

They wanted to do this through a Christian school — they believed it could stabilize families in the community. And they asked Parker to be the headmaster.

"They thought a school with a Christian worldview could be a tool of ministry to help boys and girls, men and women to live out the Great Commission in their lives," he said.

And for the past 35 years, as the community around them changed,

Central Park Christian School (CPCS) reached students from 25 countries, six continents and all different religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. Its students have gone on to study at Yale, West Point, Vanderbilt and Columbia and to teach at other institutions. One is a basketball coach in Germany.

And some students found faith too. One young Muslim student professed faith in Christ while at CPCS, Parker said.

"It was amazing to see how much God did with a little," he said. "That kind of thing is what the church envisioned 35 years ago, and it came to fruition."

God is faithful

But in recent months, members of Central Park Baptist began to see that they might not be able to sustain the ministry anymore.

Scott LeCroy, who grew up and was baptized and married at Central Park Baptist, said the congregation had slowly decreased in size until there was too much square

footage and not enough people. The group of 15 or so members was reaching deep in their pockets, but there just wasn't enough to continue keeping up the buildings and funding the school.

So on June 24, after 108 years in the community, Central Park Baptist held its last service and gifted its buildings and the school to Rock City Church, a growing congregation with multiple worship sites. About 400 people came that day to thank God for what He had done there.

LeCroy said the story of how they came to that decision shows the same thing as the story of the school's impact.

"It shows how God was faithful to answer our prayers," he said.

Back in 2014 the church began looking for a solution. They tried looking at several options, all of which involved turning over their buildings to a local ministry — and none of which worked out. One time they even turned it over to a ministry, and that ministry gave it back.

"We continued finding a way to make it work, because we wanted to keep the school running, and we didn't want to have to just board up the place," LeCroy said.

But keeping the school and church going ran about \$18,000 a month, and after a while, it wasn't sustainable anymore, he said. Looking forward into the 2017–2018 school year, he didn't know if they could commit to the teachers' salaries or the 200-plus students.

The leadership had concerns and Parker was looking everywhere for options, LeCroy said. "But our school's custodian, Vanessa Phillips — she's a real prayer warrior, said, 'You need to stop looking for somebody to take this place. The Lord is going to send you somebody.'"

Passing it on

Three weeks later, Michael McClure, pastor of Rock City Church, showed up at Central Park Baptist asking if he could rent the place for his growing congregation,

whose lease at Boutwell Auditorium was running out soon.

McClure "is from the Central Park area, so this is home to him," LeCroy said. "Dr. Parker gave him a tour, and at the end, he was asking if he could rent the space. And Dr. Parker told him, 'You don't understand — can we give this to you? That's what we'd like to do.'"

So that's what they did, and Rock City generously gave \$150,000 to pay out the school-teachers' contracts through the end of the summer. They took on CPCS as one of their ministries and are looking at keeping on longtime teachers who are interested in staying.

"Our first collective emotion was relief," LeCroy said. "It was such a matter of prayer for us. It has really been a test of faith. We are relieved we don't have to close — there are a lot of empty church buildings on this side of town. And we feel God's affirmation that we did the right thing — He brought us the right folks to hand off to."

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–Commerce) and a master's degree specializing in English from the University of Arkansas (1978).



2018 marks 375th anniversary of Anne Hutchinson's massacre

Anne Hutchinson (1591–1643) was the most famous and controversial English woman in colonial American history. A spiritual Puritan adviser, she was the leading figure in the Antinomian Controversy, which placed her against the established Puritan clergy.

This year is the 375th anniversary of her death.

She was born in Alford, England, to Bridget Dryden and Francis Marbury, a dissenting Anglican minister and school-teacher. She was baptized on July 20, 1591. Anne's father gave her a good education including instructing her in theology and conscientious dissent.

Anne married merchant William Hutchinson in 1612. After moving back to Alford, they traveled to St. Botolph's

to hear the preaching of John Cotton. After Cotton's suppression for his Puritan views, he emigrated to the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1633.

The next year, 43-year-old Anne left England with her 48-year-old husband and their 10 surviving children. The couple had 15 children.

They became established in Boston and joined the First Church there, where John Cotton preached.

She became a host to women who met at her house weekly, where during a religious revival, she provided commentary on Cotton's sermons. Soon about 80 people attended her lectures.

She accused local ministers (except for

Cotton and her brother-in-law John Wheelwright) of preaching a "covenant of works" instead of a "covenant of grace."

Thus began the Antinomian Controversy (1636–1638), later called the Free Grace Controversy. Antinomianism is a belief that those who are saved by grace are not under the authority of moral law.

With Cotton and Wheelwright, Anne believed that redemption was God's gift to his people, and human effort could not earn it. She spoke against the Puritan "legal" ministers who taught that a moral life was sufficient grounds for salvation.

A ministerial synod cleared Cotton of heresy — but not Hutchinson. She was put on trial in 1637 and convicted of heresy.



HUTCHINSON

The General Court of Massachusetts banished her and her supporters from the colony. In November 1638 her Boston church excommunicated her.

Roger Williams, founder of the first Baptist church in America, convinced the Hutchinsons to settle in Providence, Rhode Island. They moved to Narragansett Bay and founded Portsmouth.

In August 1643 the Siwanoy Indians massacred Hutchinson and five of her children. Susanna, who was nine, was taken captive.

Today Hutchinson is remembered as a courageous woman devoted to religious liberty.

In 1987, Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis pardoned her, revoking the order of banishment by Governor Endicott 350 years earlier.

ALABAMA

UPDATES

PEOPLE, CHURCHES MAKING NEWS ACROSS THE STATE

Reeves marks 25 years at First, Saks

Randall Reeves grew up around music ministry. Some might even say it's in his blood. His dad led worship at the little country church he grew up in for 60 years, and it was in that church that God sought out Reeves and saved him.

During college he worked as a band director at Brookwood High School in Tuscaloosa and served as the interim music minister at Cottondale Baptist Church, in Tuscaloosa Baptist Association.

"During that time the Lord began dealing with me about surrendering to full-time ministry," Reeves said. "He was also dealing with the music search committee. They asked, and I said yes." Forty-three years later, he's been faithful to God's call on his life and has celebrated a milestone at First Baptist Church, Saks, in Anniston.

On July 18, Reeves celebrated 25 years as music minister at First, Saks.

He holds a bachelor's and master's degree from the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. He previously served at Calvary Baptist Church in Shreveport, Louisiana, and White's Chapel Baptist Church, Gadsden (now The Church at Wills Creek).

Reeves couldn't describe his time at First, Saks, as any-



REEVES

thing other than a blessing and a success.

"When I came the music program had a solid base with a lot of talented people who desired to serve the Lord through music. My initial goal was to begin a church orchestra, continue to build the adult choir, as well as a graded choir program, and begin a handbell choir. The Lord has blessed so that all these goals have been met," Reeves said. "With God's grace and the support of this wonderful church family we have weathered every storm that Satan brought our way."

First, Saks, celebrated Reeves on July 29 with a special service and luncheon.

Reeves and his wife, Elaine, have three children and five grandchildren. (Jessica Ingram)

Morris celebrates 50 years in ministry

Fifty years ago Mack Morris surrendered to the Lord's call into full-time ministry while attending Maple Avenue Baptist Church, Geneva. And since that day, he has been charging full speed ahead toward God's will for his life.

Morris graduated from the University of Mobile and the Southern Baptist Center for Biblical Studies in Jacksonville, Florida, where he received a master of arts degree in biblical studies and a doctor of ministry degree.

Morris has served as pastor of Woodridge Baptist Church, Mobile, since 2000. He also has served at White House Fork Baptist Church, Bay Minette; Bethel Baptist

Church, Citronelle; First Baptist Church, Tillman's Corner; Heritage Baptist Church, Dothan; Old Spanish Fort



MORRIS

Baptist Church (now Faith Family Fellowship), Spanish Fort; and Jubilee Baptist Church, Daphne.

Through the years, Morris has faithfully followed God's call to lead churches as pastor, but he also has served as a leader among Alabama Baptists.

He has served the Mobile Baptist Association as moderator and served on the executive committee of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

"Morris has been and continues to be a leader among Southern Baptists in growing churches, reaching people for Christ and giving to missions," said Morris' secretary Cindy Smith. "Over the course of his calling, churches under his leadership have baptized over 2,500 people. Bro. Mack is greatly loved and valued by his congregation. We are grateful and blessed to have him at Woodridge."

Morris will be honored Aug. 12, 10 a.m. at Woodridge Baptist with a special service and reception in the church's fellowship hall from 2 to 4 p.m.

Morris and his wife, Kathy, have three children and two grandchildren. (Jessica Ingram)

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Taylorville Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, is seeking a full-time pastor. Send resumés to: 7201 Moundville Lane, Tuscaloosa, AL 35405, or email to: Kcollins@taylorvillebaptist.org.

PASTOR

Riverside Baptist Church is looking for a pastor. Send resumés to: Riverside Baptist Church, ATTN: Earl Collier, 3130 Dauphin Island Parkway, Mobile, AL 36605 or call 251-680-1298.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

In need of bivocational pastor for small church in Chilton Association. Send resumé to: Cane Creek Baptist Church, c/o Betty Ray, 58 County Rd. 250, Clanton, AL 35046.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Seeking bivocational pastor for a church with average attendance of 100. Send resumés to: Old Union Missionary Baptist Church, 2640 County Road 70, Nauvoo, AL 35578. Contact information: 205-522-4884 (Carmilla), 205-544-1802 (Zac).

ASSOCIATE PASTOR OF WORSHIP

First Baptist Church, a vibrant and growing church in Zachary,

Louisiana, is seeking an associate pastor of worship. Must be able to lead a large and diverse ministry of worship; traditional and blended/contemporary services. Must be able to lead a large choir, praise team, band and media/tech team. Email resumés to: dharrell@fbcz.org.

MINISTER OF MUSIC & YOUTH

Sisters Baptist Church is seeking to fill the full-time staff vacancy of minister of music and youth. We are a conservative Southern Baptist church. Serious applicants may send their resumés with a cover letter to: office@sistersbaptist.org or to: 1807 E McCarty St., Sandersville, GA 31082.

SENIOR ADULT MINISTER

First Baptist Church, Pelham, is seeking a dynamic, spirit-filled part-time senior adult minister. Send resumé to: 2867 Pelham Parkway, Pelham, AL 35124 or email: pat@fbcpelham.org.

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 ex-

cited 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.

YOUTH PASTOR

Southside Baptist Church, Russellville, Alabama, searching for youth pastor. Send your resumé to: Southside Baptist Church, ATTN: Joseph Medina, P.O. Box 60, Russellville, AL 35653.

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- 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** Each week when *TAB* arrives, look for the AR logo to watch the video extras.



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SNAPSHOTS OF LIFE WHEN LIFE HAPPENS

'Hooyah' says it all

I struggle to remember the various team names of my nephews and nieces, but I'm convinced I will never forget the Wild Boars youth soccer team from Thailand's Chiang Rai province — a group of kids we first heard of a few weeks ago.

The extraordinary survival story captured the heart of a global audience. Twelve boys and their coach — the Thai cave boys — became our nephews, sons, grandsons and neighbor's kids.

Rescuers showcased crisis management at its best. Everyone involved was committed, invested and going to see the operation through until the end. They knew their individual assignments and worked to deliver their best. Deep concern for the boys, compassion for the families, sheer determination and pure hope unified the people. The Thai Navy Seal team was beyond impressive, and the members' "#Hooyah" response to the mission said it all.

Hooyah is a word used in the U.S. Navy to build camaraderie and morale. It became a rallying cry for the Thai rescuers and all those around the world praying for the safe return of the boys and their coach.

Media reports indicate individuals in the community found ways they could be productive and helpful. Some made sure food was available. Some used their own vehicles to transport those leading the effort. Some even voluntarily cleaned the portable toilets — imagine the selfless nature of the sweet people who determined that is where they could best serve.

This story offers several important reminders.

► Despite our political, reli-

gious, economic and other differences, the world can come together in times of crisis. Media reports allowed all of us to remain front and center, be informed, understand the situation and know how to pray.

► Forgiveness and grace are powerful. During the crisis with their children, in the midst of what had to be many moments of fighting off their greatest fears, the

parents reached out to Coach Ake through the message they sent him in the cave. "Don't blame yourself. ... The mums and dads, none of them are angry at you," the letter to the coach said. The parents made sure he knew they were concerned about his safety.

Recently we heard that the Thai cave boys, with the exception of 14-year-old Adul Sam-on, the lone Christian on the team, were ordained in the Buddhist tradition.

This news reminds us of one more important truth — the desperate need for the gospel in Thailand, Southeast Asia and every corner of the world. May we be ever mindful that rescue from earthly dangers is good news, but rescue from our sins for eternity is the greatest news of all. 🙏

By Jennifer Davis Rash
Editor-elect



RASHIONAL Extras

Lessons learned on slopes of high places

By Hannah Hurnard

Excerpt from "Hinds' Feet on High Places"

Lifting my eyes, I look across the valley at the Brumbach falls and see the water pouring itself down in an extraordinary ecstasy of self-abandoned giving — and I know now that is my Lord's message to me.

I have asked [H]im to help me to understand the language of this book of nature. And the first message and lesson [H]is creation utters is this one. It is so clear that I do understand it. It speaks of love's eternal, ecstatic joy in ceaseless, blissful giving.

1. The first characteristic of true love is humility: the pouring of oneself down lower and lower in self-effacement and self-denial. The message of running water always is, "Go lower. Find the lowest place. That is the only way to true fulfillment."

2. The next characteristic of love is giving. The poured-out life gives life and pow-

er to others. The more love gives, the more it fulfills itself. "For it is Love's prerogative to GIVE and GIVE and GIVE."

3. The third characteristic of love is service. The Brumbach falls, in the act of giving themselves, serve the whole valley and far beyond it. The water means a supply of irrigation, electricity and light for many, many abandoned to the goal of giving oneself to others, and going down lower, is the joy and ecstasy of love. ...

One cannot get a mighty and powerful fall of water if there is only a low place and a short way for it to fall. It is the "high places" of faith and obedience which make the falls of love possible!

Editor's Note — Excerpt from Hannah Hurnard's "Hinds' Feet on High Places," which was published by Living Books, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. (Carol Stream, Illinois), 1975.

Doing a little camping out on this Warren Wiersbe quote this morning and thought I'd share: "God is reigning today. He has not abdicated His throne and turned the universe over to the enemy. It is true that much that goes on in this world is contrary to His will; but where He does not rule, He overrules, and His purposes are going to be fulfilled. After all, He is the Lord — the God omnipotent, all powerful."

June Mathews
Facebook post

@LoganCannon95

Sad that we can't have civil conversations about things without it turning to shouting and insults.

Keeping great talent really can mean the difference between a business succeeding or failing. In this volatile global marketplace, happy loyal employees are your biggest competitive advantage. If you want performance at scale: Select the right people, provide them with the proper training, tools and support and then give them room to get the job done.

Brigette Hyacinth
Author, "The Future of Leadership"

@johnmarkclifton

The characteristics identified in dying churches. Number 8. Focus more on caring for the church facility than caring for the community. Simply put — it's easier to change a furnace filter at the church then tackle the maze of human needs in the apt complex across the street

@amareno4him

The world is a whole lot of drama. We are almost depressed until we find something else that we love beyond ourselves, because we were created for selfless living.

@BethMooreLPM

@LifeWayWomen #LPROOF18

@DailyKeller

A broken person is a much more attractive leader to God, than a proud person.

@GaryFenton07

Leadership is not pushing or pulling, it is empowering.

Across ALABAMA'S Associations

To submit news items, email news@thealabamabaptist.org or call 205-870-4720, ext. 112, at least three weeks prior to the event.

BUTLER

► **Ebenezer East Church, Greenville**, will hold a homecoming service Aug. 12, 11 a.m. Sunday School will begin at 10 a.m. Lunch will be served at noon. The church also will hold a revival Aug. 13–15 at 7 nightly. Rick Evans will be the guest speaker. Tim Skipper is pastor.

MADISON

► **Darryl Craft** is the new senior pastor of **Whitesburg Church, Huntsville**. Craft previously served as pastor of Temple Church, Hattiesburg, Mississippi. He also has served at Capshaw Church and at churches in North Carolina, Tennessee and Oklahoma.



CRAFT

He holds a doctorate and master's degree from Southwestern

Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, and a bachelor's degree from the University of Alabama in Huntsville. He and his wife, Vicki, have three children and three grandchildren. Craft is expected to begin at Whitesburg in mid-September.

COOSA RIVER

► **First Church, Talladega**, along with other churches across Alabama, will be a part of the 6th annual Afternoon of Praise on Aug. 19 with performances at 2:30 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. The concert will benefit The Red Door Kitchen, Samaritan House and Fresh Start Recovery Ministries. For more information visit facebook.com/afternoonofpraise. Robert Klotz is pastor.

DEKALB

► **New Harmony Church, Albertville**, will hold a singing Aug. 19, 10:30 a.m. Triumphant Quartet will perform. Lynn Darnell is pastor.

MORGAN

► **Lebanon Church, Falkville**,

will hold a revival Aug. 12–15. Sunday services will be at 10:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday–Wednesday services will be at 7 nightly. Michael Mason will be the guest evangelist and Sheryl Lee will lead music. Randy Ashley is pastor.

MONTGOMERY

► **Josh Wootton** is the new pastor of **Eastern Hills Church, Montgomery**. He previously served at Hebron Church in Mississippi. He and his wife, Jennifer, have two children.



WOOTTON

► **First Church, Montgomery**, and **His Vessel Ministries** will hold a conference titled Empowered ... for Purpose and Influence on Aug. 25, 9 a.m.–3 p.m. Jennifer Kennedy Dean and Jo Hancock will be the guest speakers. Jay Wolf is pastor. ✝

Gospel spread at Lake Guntersville



Photo courtesy of Marshall Baptist Association

Marshall Baptist Association volunteers braved the heat to spread the gospel at the 2018 Lake Guntersville Hydrofest. At a tent near the activities volunteers handed out sunscreen and gospel tracts. 'This is just another way that we can make contact with our neighbors who might not know Jesus as their personal Savior,' said Randall Stoner, director of missions for Marshall Association.

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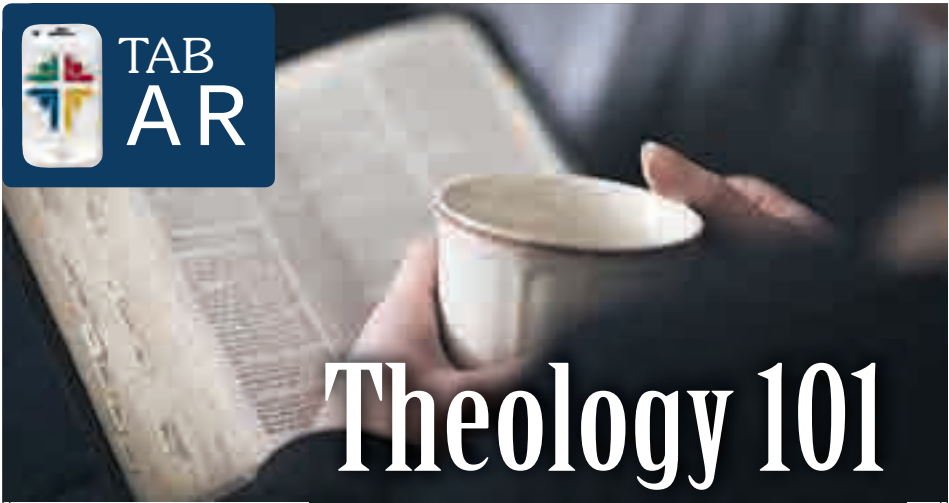


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07/2018



TAB
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Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

The Scriptures

Divine Revelation

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

The opening words of the Baptist Faith and Message statement cited last week, "The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired," continues with the additional statement, "and is God's revelation of Himself to man." So along with the conviction that the Bible is divinely inspired we add the companion conviction that it also is God's self-revelation. This confession sets forth the conviction that God Himself is the main subject matter of the Bible. It is His Holy Word about Himself. Therein, He has been pleased to reveal Himself to people of faith. The very term revelation carries at its core the meaning of something disclosed that was previously unknown or only imperfectly, partially or inaccurately known. Thus believers conclude that knowing God is not a process of human discovery but one of divine disclosure. Without His revelation God would remain hidden.

Christians historically have thought of God's self-revelation in two broad categories: general revelation and special revelation. General revelation refers to ways God makes Himself known universally such as through nature, history and conscience. Special revelation refers to how God makes Himself known redemptively. We can surmise His existence through general revelation and thereby know something about God, such as His divine nature and eternal power (Rom. 1:20).

However, we can only know God in personal experience through His special revelation given through sending Christ the living Word whom we meet in the pages of the written Word which is the only truthful and trustworthy source of knowing God and His plan for His creation. God's final and complete self-revelation in Christ is to be found in the totality of Christ — His person, words, work, as well as His life, death, resurrection, ascension and promised return.

The ultimate purpose of divine revelation is more than making intellectual

awareness possible. It includes the establishing of a personal relationship between believers and our Creator. God's ancient promise to His chosen people Israel is to the point: "I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people" (Lev. 26:12). Divine revelation is more than the disclosure of truth; it is the communication of life in which believers pass from death unto life, a life that knows God and experiences fellowship with God. As the songwriter expressed it, He walks with us and talks with us and tells us that we are His own.

Personal Fellowship

It was at this very point of personal fellowship with God that Christ prayed the evening before His crucifixion, saying to the Father, "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent" (John 17:3). Only through knowing Christ in a saving relationship with Him do we really know God. Thus, 1 Corinthians 1:9 attests, "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ our Lord." It is as Jesus said to some who refused to trust Him, "If you had known Me, you would have known my Father also" (John 8:19b).

The fact of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures assures us that it is a book that can be trusted. It also compels us to view the Bible as a book to be treasured, for only therein do we find the way to know God and enjoy fellowship with Him in time and eternity. 🌿

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.



SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For August 12

Explore the Bible

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

RESOLVED
2 Samuel 21:1–6, 10–14

History matters. In order to understand the context of this chapter, the reader must revisit Exodus 34 and Joshua 9. Through Moses, God warned Israel not to enter into treaties with the inhabitants of the Promised Land. Joshua inadvertently did so with the Gibeonites through their deceit. During Israel’s conquest of the land the Gibeonites pretended to be from a distant land. They approached Joshua about making a covenant with Israel. Joshua failed to seek God’s direction but instead simply took the tribe at their word and cut a covenant in the name of Yahweh. Only afterward did Israel discover they had been deceived. The Gibeonites would live, and they would be perpetual servants in Israel.

The Cause (1–3)

For three years in a row, the land did not produce adequate crops. David recognized that this physical famine had an underlying spiritual cause. Why were the people of God experiencing this lack of food? David asked the Lord and He provided an answer. During his reign, King Saul took it upon himself to rid the land of the Gibeonite tribe. Saul broke the covenant, and the land was suffering the consequences of his ignorant zeal.

David’s desire was to honor God and honor His people. In order to do so, David would have to provide justice for the Gibeonites. Saul had broken a covenant vow made between Gibeon and Israel in the name of Yahweh. What would be proper recompense for this people group?

The Request (4–6)

The Gibeonites’ request was simple. They had no plan to ask for financial compensation. They certainly did not want other Israelites to die for the sins of Saul. Instead,

their solution was to request that seven men of Saul’s family face the death penalty.

“That’s unfair!” Before entertaining that thought any further, consider the principle of “lex talionis,” the law of just punishment, or “the punishment fits the crime” (see Lev. 24:19–20). Descendants of Gibeon were killed under Saul’s instruction, though his ancestors had vowed to preserve the Gibeonites (Josh. 9:19–27). Retribution required a like sentence. The offending party, the late king Saul, would forfeit seven of his descendants for his crime against Gibeon. David granted the request, though he spared Mephibosheth out of respect for Jonathan.

The Resolution (10–14)

The Gibeonites hanged seven men of Saul’s family on a hilltop on the first day of the barley harvest. This public execution brought restitution to Gibeon and in time would bring resolution to God’s judgment on the land. In fact, God anticipated this act of contrition. After three years of famine, God brought a harvest of barley, usually reserved for horses and the poor, as provision for His people.

David resolved the matter with the interment of Saul and Jonathan’s bones in the tomb of Kish, Saul’s father. The Gibeonites had their resolution. Saul’s family had its resolution. God’s judgment upon the land was resolved.

Since the time of Adam, sin has required a death sentence. God’s warning to Adam was that death would accompany disobedience: “dying, you will die” or “you will certainly die” (Gen. 2:17). We have offended our holy Creator. Every sin of every soul is worthy of the wrath of God. Yet God “who is rich in mercy” (Eph. 2:4) has brought resolution through the death and resurrection of Christ. For all who place their faith in Christ the death penalty has been paid. Jesus has conquered sin and death. “It is finished” (John 19:30).✝

Bible Studies for Life

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

PROTECT
Nehemiah 5:1–13

The work of God can be sidetracked in many ways, but in this chapter a serious socioeconomic crisis impinges on the work of God in Jerusalem. Nehemiah has the wisdom to address it and bring closure. The resourcefulness of his leadership is remarkable. He deals with the crisis firmly, speedily and with a heart of compassion for lives that have been affected.

The service of God calls for encouragement. (1–5)

The main work of building the walls was nearing completion. It had involved God’s people in arduous activity. Many of the workers were physically, emotionally and financially exhausted. They couldn’t keep going. They began to express their frustration to Nehemiah. We read that both men and women raised a great outcry.

As the work progressed, people left their homes and fields to rebuild the city walls. They had left their normal activities for two months and the sacrifice was cutting deep into their finances. Furthermore, the region had experienced famine, and food had become scarce and expensive to buy. Greedy merchants were inflating their prices and some people had mortgaged their fields, vineyards and homes to raise money to survive. God’s law was being broken and it was their fellow citizens who were breaking it.

Pledges made against loans were being called in and people were having to sell their own children to cover their debts and maintain the essentials of life. Women were foremost among those affected.

The community of faith reflects honor for God. (6–11)

For Nehemiah such inhumane conduct called for immediate action. He recognized the work of God cannot condone social

injustice. He expresses his anger in verse 6 but realizes that anger alone is not sufficient. Action must be taken. The action is to call the people together, those who have been affected and those who are responsible. He listens to the cries of the oppressed and challenges those responsible with failing to act justly and with dishonoring God. A community of faith ought to love and not rob their fellow members. The effect is immediate; those who acted unjustly are silenced.

Into the silence, Nehemiah calls the people to walk in the fear of God. The God of covenant love also was an awesome God, not to be trifled with, not to be taken for granted, but revered for His holiness. Those who fear the Lord are those who reflect His love, pursue His will and obey His commands. So in line with the Hebrew prophets such as Micah and Amos, Nehemiah tells them to stop the money-lending and give the money back, including the exorbitant interest that they had been charging.

In a remarkable and totally honest way, Nehemiah tells the people that he has been engaging in the lending of money, though not at terrible rates of interest, but even he will return anything that he has made at the expense of his sisters and brothers within the community. He indicates that this was not a time for tentative suggestions but for decisive action, and he takes the lead.

Repentance leads to renewal of discipleship. (12–13)

True repentance will always demonstrate itself in living a renewed lifestyle of love towards God and in right relationships with our fellow human beings, especially those of the community of faith. Yet if we are honest, there is no place where Christianity collides as dramatically with the reality of the human condition as when we start talking about love, the greatest of all the commandments.✝

Christian Crossword

By Rebecca Souder Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



- Across**
- 1. Greek letter.
 - 3. Being the ___ of his glory. (Heb. 1:3)
 - 11. One who inherits. (2 words)
 - 13. Greek monogram for Jesus.
 - 14. Pint. (abbr.)
 - 15. And the ... ___ of his person. (Heb. 1:3)
 - 16. To whom shall we ___? (John 6:68)
 - 17. Either/___.
 - 18. Headquarters. (abbr.)
 - 19. New Hampshire.
 - 20. ___ saith the Lord.
 - 21. Kansas University.
 - 22. New wine will ___ the bottles. (Luke 5:37)
 - 24. His servants ___ him. (John 4:51)
 - 25. That is. (Latin abbr.)
 - 26. French coin.
 - 28. Thirty silver ___. (Matt. 26:15)
 - 29. Greek vowel.
 - 30. Better.
 - 32. Prefix meaning “wood.”

- 33. ___ all things by the word of His power. (Heb. 1:3)
 - 36. Thy throne, O God, ___ for ever. (Heb. 1:8)
 - 37. A division of Scripture.
 - 38. ... art my ___. (Heb. 1:5)
 - 39. Grain of bread.
 - 42. A more excellent ___ than they. (Heb. 1:4)
 - 45. Greek porch.
 - 46. Greek goddess.
 - 47. Show you a more ___ way. (1 Cor. 12:31)
 - 49. Storekeeper. (abbr.)
 - 50. ___ hospitality one to another. (1 Pet. 4:9)
 - 51. He that hath an ___ let him hear. (Rev. 2:7)
 - 52. Kind of worshippers the Father ___. (John 4:23)
 - 53. He looked for a ___. (Heb. 11:10)
- Down**
- 1. Ma’s mate.
 - 2. Hated ___. (Heb. 1:9)
 - 3. Vegetables.
 - 4. Loved ___. (Heb. 1:9)
 - 5. Anger.
 - 6. Right hand of the Majesty on ___. (Heb. 1:3)
 - 7. ___ art my Son. (Heb.1:5)
 - 8. Nova Scotia. (abbr.)
 - 9. Hath in these last days ___ unto us. (Heb. 1:2)
 - 10. Walks proudly.
 - 12. His Majesty. (abbr.)
 - 18. Hemoglobin. (abbr.)
 - 20. The word of ___. (James 1:18)
 - 23. True.
 - 24. Sent forth to ___ for them who shall be heirs of salvation. (Heb. 1:14)
 - 27. Drink this ___. (1 Cor. 11:26)
 - 28. Sitting upon ... a ___. (Matt. 21:5)
 - 29. And the ___ ... of his person. (Heb. 1:3)
 - 31. Recipient.
 - 34. Come nigh unto Damascus about ___. (Acts 22:6)

- 35. Dust ... became ___. (Ex. 8:17)
 - 40. My ___ is easy. (Matt. 11:30)
 - 41. Emergency service. (abbr.)
 - 43. The ___ is laid the root. (Matt. 3:10)
 - 44. Master of Ceremonies. (abbr.)
 - 45. I will ___ thy son. (Ex. 4:23)
 - 48. ___ there be light. (Gen. 1:3)
 - 50. United Kingdom. (abbr.)
-

WHAT ARE YOU READING?



123rf.com

Alabama Baptists share about what they are currently reading

SHIRLEY CROWDER

Pianist, Valley View Baptist, Leeds
“Life Lessons from Ancient Prophets”
by Dr. Howard A. Eyrich

Wow! Dr. Howard Eyrich has a wonderful way of explaining biblical truth from these OT Prophets as he uses easy-to-understand examples to help you know how to apply those truths to your life today. This is an absolute must read for pastors, elders, deacons, lay leaders ... all Christ-followers. These lessons are great reminders for those who have been Christ-followers for many years and for new Christ-followers. 🌟

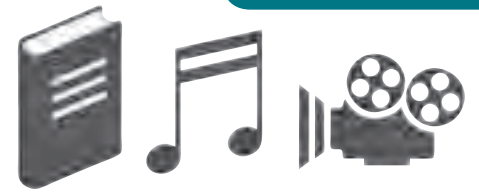
Tell us what you are reading, a quick summary of what it is about and your response to it so far.

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You may also mail your information to:
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TAB AR

Media reviews



MUSIC

Point of Grace

Beautiful Name
LifeWay, 2018

Point of Grace — maybe you’ve heard of them. But save for the original song “The Power of Love” (and its great chorus), you won’t be hearing any new music from the CCM Magazine mainstays on the “Beautiful Name” album, making it now six years since the trio released an original album. But I’m not complaining — any album that opens with an acapella version of “The Doxology” is fine in my book. Member Shelley Breen said the group has planned a hymns and worship project since forming in 1993. It was worth the wait. “Beautiful Name” is a 10-track, 43-minute bullseye, with the heroines of harmony taking aim at centuries-old classics like “Holy, Holy, Holy,” “Blessed Assurance” and “He Leadeth Me.” But there’s plenty of modern praise and worship standards, as you might have guessed from the title, which draws its name from the 2017 Hillsong Worship hit “What a Beautiful Name,” the album’s third song.



Christafari

Original Love
Lion of Zion Entertainment, 2018

Original Love” is more of the tight, near-perfect roots reggae that has earned Christafari a degree of mainstream respect extremely rare for Christian artists. You wouldn’t think that a band so committed to its calling as self-proclaimed “musicianaries” would consistently top its particular genre’s Billboard charts. Christafari does, even though plenty of their lyrics aren’t just biblically based, they’re straight from the Bible. The 14-song album, which includes a fantastic cover of Hillsong Worship’s “What a Beautiful Name,” is the group’s second No. 1 reggae debut in as many years, and there’s a reason. Recommended.



Matthew West

All In (Re-release)
Sparrow, 2018

What’s better than owning one copy of Matthew West’s chart-topping “All In”? Owning two copies. The re-release of the 2017 smash comes with five additional tracks, all new versions of five of West’s latest recordings and all acoustic takes on the signature sound that has earned West critical acclaim in both CCM and mainstream musical circles.

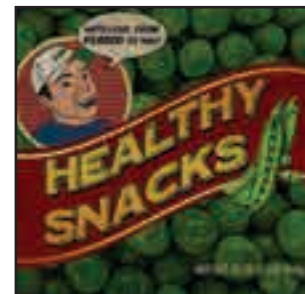
The songs from “All In” that West double downs on are the title track “Jesus & You,” “The Beautiful Things We Miss,” “Mercy Is A Song” and his No. 1 hit “Broken Things,” the original version of which already has nearly 10 million streams on Spotify. Overkill? West fans won’t think so.



PEABOD

Healthy Snacks
Centricity, 2018

At first it sounds like Eminem doing a Weird Al impression or Weird Al doing an Eminem impression. For a second, you roll your eyes and want it to stop. Then you don’t want it to stop. Then you kind of start dancing. This is pure ear candy hip hop, the catchiest CCM release of the year. There’s a reason the video to “Shoot from the Hip” has nearly 200,000 views in two months. And when your hit song may not even be the catchiest on your debut album, you know you’re doing something right. Lyrically, “Healthy Snacks” is a veritable millennial word bank, articulated with rare wit, brimming with positivity. “Healthy Snacks” is all about entering into joy because it’s good for your soul, just like healthy snacks are good for your body,” Issac Peabody, whose stage name is PEA-BOD, writes. “At a surface level, I just wanted to have as much fun making music as I could. On a deeper level, the joy throughout the album comes from knowing Jesus and understanding the gospel. My hope is that people listening to the album would have a ton of fun with these songs and that they would also embrace the joy that comes with knowing Jesus.” 🌟



Meet the reviewer

Jeremy Henderson
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'He knows the plan'

Lookouts' first baseman Rooker says faith guides him

By Bill Sorrell
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

In Brent Rooker's first year in professional baseball, he was on a road trip with his Fort Myers, Florida, team but his uniform was not. Having left it behind, Rooker had to scavenge for extra uniforms.

"It wasn't a really good impression on the new team I was with," Rooker said. "Having to go to your manager the third or fourth week you are with them and say, 'Hey, I left all my uniforms, I am going to have to wear a different number in the lineup tonight' is not a fun thing."

Rooker is now a first baseman for the Chattanooga Lookouts, the Double-A affiliate of the Minnesota Twins who drafted him in the first round and No. 35 overall in the 2017 Major League Draft.

Rooker was the Southeastern Conference (SEC) Male Athlete of the Year in 2017 at Mississippi State, the first in school history. He was the first SEC player to surpass 20 home runs, 30 doubles and 75 RBI in a single season and the second player from Mississippi State (Rafael Palmeiro was the first) to be named a National Player of the Year by Collegiate Baseball Newspaper. In 2016 he led the Bulldogs to the SEC championship with a .324 batting average, 11 home runs and 54 RBI.

"That was pretty special, the work that the team put in to come back from finishing last in 2015 to win the league in 2016," Rooker said.

Rooker, 23, comes from an athletic family. His father, Terry, played baseball at the University of Memphis and his mother, Lynne, played on the Tigers' tennis team. His younger brother, Josh, finished his freshman season as a catcher on the Memphis baseball team. His younger sister, Alden, who just completed her junior year at Evangelical Christian School in Memphis, has committed to play soccer at Arkansas State.

Faith has always been important.

"I grew up in church. I grew up in a Christian school. My parents have always been Christians. My dad has always been a huge influence in my life. ... He has always been the Christian man I want to model myself after," Rooker said.

Rooker is committed to his own spiritual development as well, which includes reading the Bible.

"Nothing is more important than staying in the Word, having that in your life at all times, having that truth spoken to you," he said.

"Baseball is a trying sport. There is a lot of failure, a lot of frustration. Your faith is huge. You lean on your faith to help put those failures behind you and move forward."

Chattanooga manager Tommy Watkins calls Rooker a "tremendous baseball player" and a positive influence on his teammates.

Watkins said Rooker's walk-out song, "Where I Belong" by Christian band Building 429 is part of his testimony.

"You can tell he's a believer from his walk-out music," Watkins said.

Rooker said he is learning patience as he works toward his major league baseball dream.

"I get frustrated when things are not going how I want them to," he said. "Obviously, I have a specific path laid out for my career that I would like to follow, but I know that is not always going to happen. I have got to learn to sit back and take things how they come and ... continue to trust the Lord's plan for my life."

He takes encouragement from Jeremiah 29:11.

"He knows the plan that He has for my life. Those things are going

to come true whatever those plans may be. If I can trust in the fact that those are going to be best for my future, whatever they are, it is going to put me at peace and allow me to handle whatever situations come."

Rooker knows he has a platform and hopes to use pro baseball as a platform to spread the gospel.

"People are baseball fans. People watch you on a daily basis. That gives you a platform to show your actions and show the love of Christ through how you act and how you handle situations."

The goal to play in the big leagues keeps Rooker working hard, but in the meantime he enjoys the opportunity to play the sport he loves.

"It is great to be able to do something that I love to do. Being able to play baseball every day is a huge blessing." 🙏



Brent Rooker

Photo courtesy of Chattanooga Lookouts



Most faith groups say US is on wrong track

WASHINGTON — A new poll conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) and *The Atlantic* shows white evangelical Christians are the most optimistic religious group in America when it comes to politics.

The poll found that 61 percent of evangelicals say the United States is headed in the right direction. By comparison, 64 percent of the overall public — including majorities of other Christian groups as well as religiously unaffiliated Americans — believes the country is seriously off track.

The survey, conducted in June 2018 from among 1,000 people, asked questions about voting and political engagement. But it also broke down respondents' answers based on religious affiliation: white evangelical, white mainline Protestant, non-white Protestant, Catholic and religiously unaffiliated.

The PRRI poll showed 77 percent of white evangelicals view Trump favorably or mostly favorably, the highest percentage since the 2016 election. By comparison, 17 percent of non-white Protestants, a group made up of African-Americans and Hispanics, viewed Trump favorably or mostly favorably.

As a group, white evangelicals also were the least likely to view America's changing racial demographic makeup positively. Fifty-two percent of white evangelicals said they felt negatively about the prospect that non-whites would become the majority of the population by 2043. By comparison, all other religious groups in the survey viewed the changing demographics in mostly positive terms. (RNS)

Oklahoma legalizes medical marijuana

OKLAHOMA CITY — Oklahoma has adopted what some call the nation's most permissive medical marijuana law, leaving some evangelicals concerned the drug could gain an increased hold on the state.

By a 57-43 percent margin, Oklahoma voters approved State Question 788, which legalizes medical marijuana without specifying the ailments for which it may be prescribed. The law took effect July 26.

Several Southern Baptists spoke out against the measure, including U.S. Sen. James Lankford, Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma Executive Director Hance Dilbeck and Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission President Russell Moore.

Lankford, a Republican, expressed concerns over the impact of increased marijuana use, and said, "I just don't know anyone who can say with a straight face, 'The best thing for our families is to get more parents and grandparents to smoke marijuana.'"

The District of Columbia and 30 states now have laws legalizing medical marijuana to some extent. Nine states and the District of Columbia have legalized recreational marijuana.

Marijuana remains illegal under federal law. (BP)

Christians sue to continue home groups

PITTSBURGH — A Christian couple in Pennsylvania has filed a lawsuit after being ordered by government officials to stop using their private property to host Bible studies or other religious events. The 35-acre property owned by Scott and Terri Fetterolf is a working farm and hosting religious activities is not its "principal use," according to the lawsuit filed this week in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania. However, officials from Sewickley Heights Borough, near Pittsburgh, ordered the Fetterolfs not to host religious activities, they allege.

Government officials are threatening the couple with fines of \$500 per day plus court costs and attorney's fees for having Bible studies at their home and conducting religious retreats for church leaders and seminary students, the lawsuit states.

The couple was served a Notice of Violation/Cease and Desist Order last October and notified that their activities could come under zoning restrictions such as those applicable to "places of worship," while parties, political fundraisers and other secular activities had not been banned. (TAB)