



INSIDE



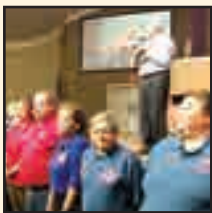
Exploring biblical forgiveness through the example that came out of Charleston

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Where do you fit?

New religious typology expands categories of the faithful, faithless

More than 80 percent of Alabamians say they are “absolutely certain” of their belief in God, yet only half attend religious services weekly. Nationally, nearly a quarter of U.S. adults describe themselves as religiously unaffiliated, yet many in this group say they believe in God and pray every day.

As the American religious landscape changes rapidly, observers are at a loss for words to describe the millions of people who don't fit neatly into categories like “religious” or “nones.” In an effort to create a more comprehensive way to talk about religion, the Pew Research Center has unveiled seven new categories for describing faith, and the lack of it, in America.

‘Fresh look’

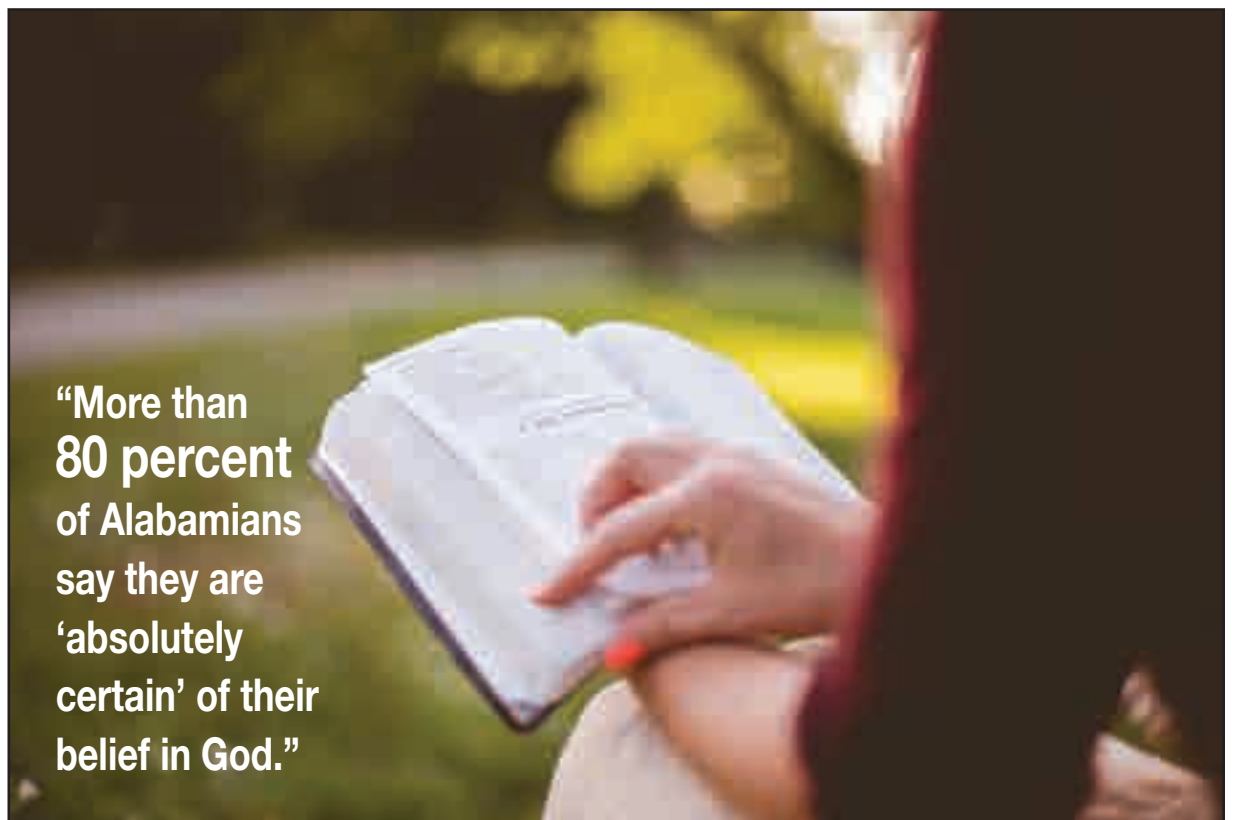
The project is titled “The Religious Typology: A new way to categorize Americans by religion.”

In it, Pew researchers ask new questions to uncover previously unseen attitudes and practices that connect Americans across traditional religious groups.

Pew even created an online quiz to help individuals determine their religious type.

“This was an exercise to get a fresh look at things,” said Becka Alper, a research associate and one of the primary researchers on the typology project.

“This analysis shows us that when you reshuffle the deck in this way, you can see that Americans have a lot in common with people



“More than 80 percent of Alabamians say they are ‘absolutely certain’ of their belief in God.”

Unsplash.com

of other religious affiliations,” Alper said.

So, instead of identifying U.S. adults by what denomination or religious tradition they belong to —

or as agnostics or atheists or “nones” — the Pew study identifies seven new categories that group people by behaviors and beliefs.

Pew identified:

► Sunday

Stalwarts as the most religious group of Americans. They actively practice their faith and are heavily involved in congregations.

► God-and-Country Believers.

They are less active in faith-based institutions but, like the stalwarts, adhere to traditional beliefs and are

more likely to be conservative on social and political issues.

► **The Diversely Devout**, who are diverse in belief and demographics and who express belief

in both the God “described in the Bible” but also in “physics, reincarnation and spiritual energy located in physical things.”

► **The Solidly Secular.** They occupy the other

end of the spectrum and are the least religious of all the categories. Largely affluent, highly educated and mostly white males, this group usually describes itself as neither spiritual nor religious. They tend to reject biblical and New Age beliefs alike.

► **Religion Resisters**, who often hold negative views of organized faith, believe churches are too influential in politics and see religion as more harmful than good. Generally liberal and Democratic leaning, they also hold beliefs “in some higher power or spiritual force (but not the God of the Bible)” and may embrace New Age concepts. They are likely to describe themselves as spiritual but not religious.

The Relaxed

► **The Relaxed Religious.**

This group believes in the biblical concept of God and many of them pray daily. However, few of them attend services or read Scripture. They are likely to hold that belief in God isn't necessary to be a moral person.

► **The Spiritually Awake**, who (See ‘Religious,’ page 3)

Pew has created an online quiz to help individuals determine their religious type. To take the quiz, go to www.PewForum.org/quiz/religious-typology.

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

Is Politics Stronger Than Faith?

On Aug. 31, 2017, a news release from Stanford University announced that according to a recent study, Americans cherish their political identity more than their religious identity.

“The self-defining characteristics that Americans hold dear include their racial and cultural heritage, the language they speak and their choice of worship,” the news release said. “But the strongest attachment, according to recent research from a Stanford scholar, is Americans’ connection to their political party.

“And the strength of that partisan bond — stronger than race, religion or ethnicity — has amplified the level of political polarization in the United States,” the release declared.

Trying to explain this finding, one of the researchers postulated that “because partisan affiliation (politics) is voluntary, it is a much more informative measure of attitudes and belief structures than, for example, knowing what skin color someone has.”

One’s identity

Perhaps, but isn’t religious affiliation also voluntary? And isn’t one’s religion supposed to be the foundation of one’s moral and ethical belief system?

The study also suggested that the frequent cycle of elections encourages partisan political participation and keeps it as a mark of one’s identity.

But the Christian faith is supposed to be a daily walking with the Lord. The Bible says believers are to pray constantly, to be living testimonies to the presence of God and to work for God’s kingdom to come on earth as it is in Heaven. That is constant, never-ending participation.

The Stanford research found that partisans appeared more motivated by their dislike of opponents than by favoritism of those who shared their political viewpoints.

Again, the finding seems at odds with the Christian faith. Jesus said, “But I tell you who hear Me, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you and pray for those who mistreat you” (Luke 6:27–28).

Unfortunately, a follow-up study by LifeWay Christian Resources seems to confirm that one’s politics may be more important than one’s religious faith.

The study released Aug. 23, 2018, concluded that Protestant “churches are divided by politics,



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

and churchgoers under 50 seem to want it that way.”

“More than half (57 percent) of Protestant churchgoers under 50 say they prefer to go to church with people who share their political views,” the study announced. It added, “And few adult Protestant churchgoers say they attend services with people of a different political persuasion.”

Forty-six percent of adults surveyed said bluntly, “I prefer to attend a church where people share my political views.” Forty-two percent disagreed and the remainder were undecided. Interestingly, older responders were less likely to be divided by politics than younger responders. Of churchgoers 65 and older, 44 percent preferred attending church with those of their same political persuasion. Of churchgoers 35–49, the preference reached 61 percent.

Those who attended church weekly were more concerned about attending with those of similar political beliefs than those who attend once or twice a month.

Among Baptists who responded to the survey, 58 percent said their political views matched the views of those with whom they worshipped. That was the highest of any religious denomination.

‘Homogenous unit principle’

Historically, Southern Baptists have been slow to embrace diversity as an important value. Racially, ethnically and economically we have been more comfortable with what is called the “homogenous unit principle.” That is, churches are best if they are composed of the same kind of people.

Much of the church growth movement of the past 30 years was based on that principle.

The result is that Baptist churches in many places are stratified by race, ethnicity and economics. Now, perhaps, political affiliation

should be added to those things that divide us.

Yet the Bible says God is making Himself a single people called the Church that is made up of those from every tribe, nation, tongue and people (Rev. 7:9). Shouldn’t the diversity of heaven be reflected in the Church on earth?

Diversity broadens perspective, understanding and even application of Scripture. That has been demonstrated in Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) life. As more African-Americans participated in SBC life, the tone and tenor of SBC statements on race changed. Concern about prison reform and mass incarceration increased.

When Latinos became a vital part of SBC life, Baptist understandings about immigration and related issues began to change.

Limited perspectives

Become involved with the hungry and one can never again say “show me a hungry family and I will go buy them groceries” as if there were no hungry people. About one-fourth of all children in Alabama live in food-insecure circumstances.

But churches living by the “homogenous unit principle” of the same race, ethnicity, economic status and political outlook have trouble looking critically at issues because of limited perspectives. Certainly these churches have something to teach, but they also may have something to learn from Christian brothers and sisters outside their cultural bubble.

Since God’s kingdom illustrates the value of diversity, then God’s church should reach beyond its comfortableness to connect and learn from those who are different from us. After all, in the gospel there is no Jew or Greek, rich or poor, male or female, slave or free.

Not even Republican or Democrat.

The Stanford study said there is no indication the growing political divide in America will wane anytime soon. The study predicted political divide will be the greatest cause of polarization in the nation. In other words, politics will be stronger than religion.

I pray that will not happen. I pray that Christians of every stripe will embrace the diversity of God’s kingdom; that the transforming power of the gospel will bind the people of God together to see with God’s eyes, to hear with God’s ears (Matt. 13:16).

When Christian believers embrace the richness of the gospel and its invitation into the kingdom of God, then the Christian faith will be more important than politics. ✠

LETTERS
TO THE EDITOR

See page 13



"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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Religious typology

Typology 'a new lens' with which to view U.S. religious life

(continued from page 1)

hold some New Age views and many of whom do not believe in the biblical concept of God. Few attend religious services on a weekly basis.

One fact uncovered in the research is that none of the new types are exclusive to a particular denomination. About two-thirds of Sunday Stalwarts say their religious faith is the single most important source of meaning in their lives.

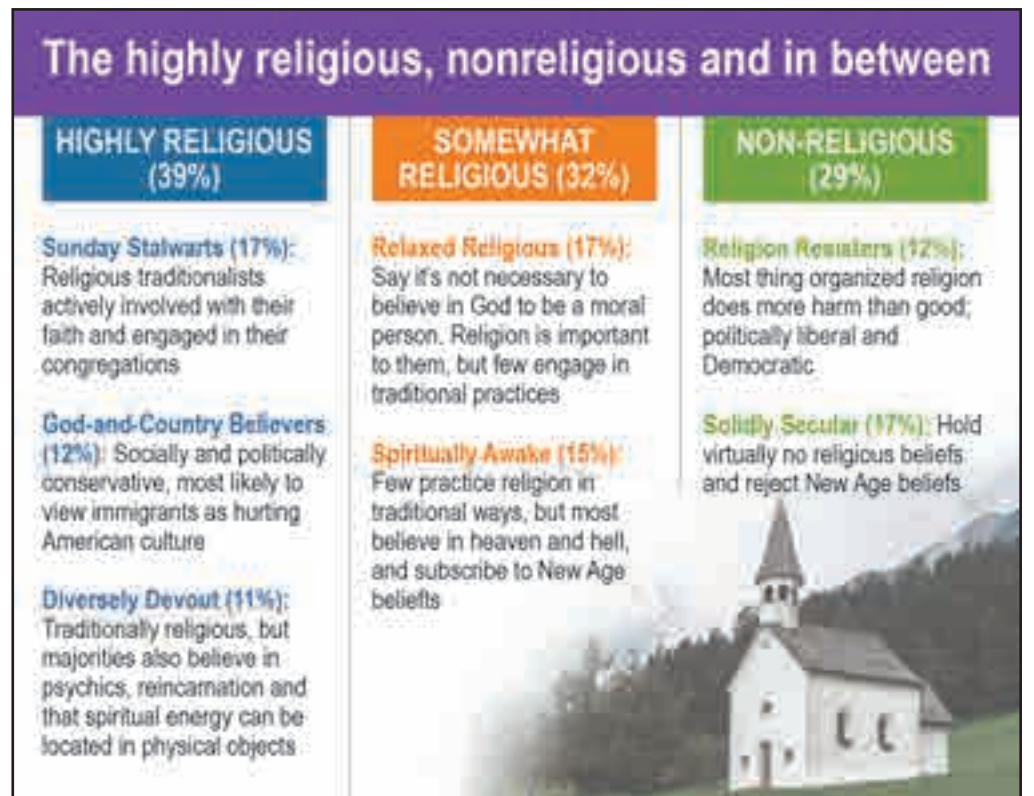
"This shows that members of widely disparate religious traditions sometimes have a lot in common: Sunday Stalwarts, for instance, are largely Protestant, but also include Catholics, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and others."

But Sunday Stalwarts also are influenced by New Age beliefs, with about 3 in 10 people in this group saying they believe in psychics and a spiritual energy in physical objects in the natural world. Virtually none of the Relaxed Religious or the Solidly Secular hold such beliefs.

Political ideology

Political ideology was not used to create the new categories. However, Republicans make up a majority of Sunday Stalwarts and God-and-Country Believers, and Democrats comprise the large majority of Religion Resisters and Solidly Secular.

The question of morality also provided guidance in creating the categories, the Pew report said. The question "Can you be moral without believing in God?" separates the highly religious from the other groups. For the three highly religious groups, belief in God is a prerequisite for being a good person.



Source: Pew Research Center; graphic by Lauren C. Grim

By contrast, most in the somewhat religious and nonreligious groups hold that it is not necessary for a person to believe in God to be moral and have good values.

Pew researchers said the religious typology offers a new lens with which to glean new insights into religious and public life in the U.S. Unlike other surveys which compare groups by commonly understood categories, such as Catholics, Jews and Muslims,

the typology allows comparisons between groups of people with similar characteristics, regardless of religious affiliation. Therefore, religious tradition, or lack thereof, does not affect placement in a typology group.

The 16-question quiz developed by Pew helps individuals determine their type and see how they compare with others. To take the quiz, go to www.PewForum.org/quiz/religious-typology. (BNG, TAB contributed)

Illegal gambling in Houston County to end after agreement reached between casino owners, state

Illegal gambling in Houston County will end after casino owners reached a settlement with the state.

Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall announced the agreement Sept. 6. Under the terms of the settlement, the Houston Economic Development Association (HEDA) — a nonprofit organization in Houston County — agreed to cease its illegal gambling operations at Center Stage. Marshall filed a lawsuit against the casino and the Houston County Commission in October of last year.

"It is my duty as Attorney General to enforce Alabama's laws, and to prevent individuals and organizations from offering illegal gambling in our state," Marshall said in a press release. "As a result of the

State's suit, HEDA has agreed to remove the games in question and has agreed to change its operations to comply with the law."

Games in question

The games in question include illegal table games, illegal electronic games of chance and electronic bingo. Under the terms of the agreement, the table games must go immediately and the other games must be gone by the end of the month. Center Stage can continue to offer bingo that is legal under the laws of Alabama, according to Marshall's office.

The state has sued other businesses in the effort to shut down illegal gambling operations at the facilities. In October

2017, Marshall announced lawsuits in Greene, Houston, Lowndes, Macon and Morgan counties. Marshall asked circuit courts in those counties to grant preliminary injunctions to stop unlawful gambling operations. Marshall also asked the courts to declare the casinos public nuisances and permanently bar them from operating games with the electronic machines, including electronic bingo machines.

The Houston County case is the second case settled by Marshall's office. On Oct. 26, 2017, the Morgan County Circuit Court sided with the state when it ordered River City Entertainment to shutter its doors and cease offering illegal gambling.

Lawsuits in Greene, Lowndes and Macon counties are still pending. (TAB)

'I Can Only Imagine' nominated for People's Choice Award

"I Can Only Imagine," the faith-based movie based on the real story behind MercyMe's hit song of the same name, has been nominated for an E! People's Choice Award (PCA) in the Family Movie category.

Voting will continue through Sept. 14. Fans can vote at www.PCA.eonline.com or via Facebook and Twitter. The official rules allow for multiple votes per day (see the official rules for details).

The top five vote getters in each category will be named finalists and move on to a second round of voting scheduled for Sept. 24–Oct. 19 with special Turbo voting periods Sept. 13–14 and Oct. 4–8 when votes count twice. The winners in each category will be named during the E! People's Choice Awards show on Nov. 11.

The People's Choice Awards is the only live award show where winners are selected by popular vote of the people, accord-

ing to the description in a press release.

"I Can Only Imagine," the only faith-based film nominated in the PCA Family Movie category, spent two weeks at No. 3 in theater box office receipts after opening March 16.

Erwin Brothers film

The film was directed by Birmingham-based filmmakers Jon and Andrew Erwin. It tells the story of Bart Millard, lead singer for MercyMe, and his rocky relationships with his abusive dad, who came to Christ before his death from cancer. His father's conversion inspired Millard to write the popular song.

A post on the film's Facebook page urges, "Help us by using your voice to vote for 'I Can Only Imagine!' We are grateful to be able to share the message of hope and redemption amongst so much talent and prestigious awards." (TAB)

Regional disciple-making workshops set for central Alabama, Southeast

Committing to live a disciplined life of studying God's word and making disciples is not a new concept but it is one that needs a jumpstart from time to time.

Several Alabama Baptists and others have found successful resources and routines for sticking with a disciplined, disciple-making life. One of those resources is D-Life, authored by Alabama pastor Bill Wilks and produced by Alabama curriculum provider Life Bible Study.

Upcoming regional boot camps to learn about and be trained in D-Life are taking place in Alabama, Georgia and North Carolina.

▶ Trussville, Alabama — Sept. 16, 4 to 7:30 p.m. — NorthPark Baptist Church (visit northparkbc.org/events/ to register or call 205-352-4010 for more information).

▶ Cartersville, Georgia — Sept. 29, 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. — Tabernacle Baptist Church (visit www.livethedlife.com to register or for more information).

▶ Greensboro, North Carolina — Nov. 3, 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. — Lawndale Baptist Church (visit www.livethedlife.com to register or for more information).

To learn more about D-Life, visit www.thealabamabaptist.org and search for "D-Life." (TAB)

Someone You

Should Know

By Leigh Pritchett

Correspondent, *The Alabama Baptist*

Mike Shaw

Mike Shaw, 70, of Pelham, has been in ministry 52 years. He is pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church, Pelham, where he was pastor for 35 years. He currently is interim pastor of First Baptist Church, Helena. A former president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention, Shaw is on the board of directors of The Alabama Baptist and board of trustees at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

MINISTRY DESCRIPTION: Preacher

CHURCH NAME:

First Baptist Church, Pelham, Shelby Baptist Association

LIFE VERSE: "But God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)



SHAW

Q: Describe where you focus your greatest ministry efforts?

A: Sharing the gospel with people; helping believers to develop into disciples.

Q: Who was or is one of the most influential people in your faith life? Why?

A: I'd have to say that looking back, my parents were the most influential on my faith life. Then there were three men who played a huge part of who I am today. One was Ralph Feild; he was pastor of First Baptist in Center Point. A lot of books in my library came from his library. The other one at Center Point was Jack Lemmond. He is the one who encouraged me to go to New Orleans to seminary. He had just graduated from there. Jack and his wife Tiny were like another set of parents to me. Dr. Hudson Baggett asked me to serve on the board at *The Alabama Baptist*. I learned so much as a minister from Dr. Baggett.

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

A: I had been at (First Baptist) Pelham about 10 years. We were landlocked. We had only a small place. We had built so much on the land we owned that we couldn't build anymore because we wouldn't have a place to park. We had a tornado come through Pelham in 1990. Land became available (after that). Then began the greatest adventure of my ministry — to relocate a church that had been in one place for a long time. We relocated the church. We called it Vision 2000. We moved onto the property in February 2000.

In 1990 we had no idea that we would be able to move that quickly. God is still using that property to draw people. I am grateful for the opportunity I had to lead in that (relocation).

Q: What has God been teaching you lately?

A: God has been teaching me lately we just need to wait on the Lord and sometimes we can wait too long. Isaiah (in Isa. 40:31) is counseling us to wait upon the Lord. There's (also) a time to take action. God told Joshua to get up and go take the (Promised) Land. We should never use waiting on the Lord as an excuse not to do something. We need to be praying and seeking. And when He tells us what to do, we need to do it.

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

A: It would have to be that we have to act in faith. Sometimes when we act in faith, we have to take a risk. If we don't take the risk, we miss out on a blessing.

Q: Have you ever read a book or heard a song that changed the way you think about God and faith? What was it and what did you learn from it?

A: My favorite song is "Broken and Spilled Out." Jesus went to the cross and was broken and spilled out for us. We need to be willing to take what we have, break it and spill it out for Jesus.✠

REFLECTIONS



'I forgive you'

Shocking power of biblical forgiveness transforming hearts, lives in Charleston

By Denise George
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

On Sunday, Sept. 15, 1963 — 55 years ago — dynamite planted by white supremacist terrorists exploded at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, a historic African-American church in Birmingham, a tense, violent and racially segregated city.

The blast killed four young girls and injured 20 church members. The city erupted in riots, leading to the shooting deaths of two black teens that evening. Photographers captured and televised sensational images of death and destruction, shocking the nation and leading to the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

During the following half-century, every racially charged incident resulted in exploding racial violence in city after city: Newark, Memphis, Los Angeles, Miami, Cincinnati, Ferguson and others. Destructive riots became the predictable pattern.

Fifty-two years later, on June 17, 2015, white supremacist Dylann Roof walked into a Wednesday night Bible study at the Emanuel A.M.E. Church, an African-American Church in Charleston, South Carolina. Bible study teacher Myra Thompson welcomed him warmly.



Photo by Neisha Roberts

Sixteenth Street Baptist Church

Forty-five minutes later, during the closing prayer, Roof pulled out a Glock .45, shooting and killing nine church members, including Myra Thompson and church pastor Clementa Pinckney. Roof admitted he hoped to start a nationwide race war, purposely choosing Charleston and the historic Emanuel A.M.E. Church as its point of origin.

Public forgiveness

Forty-eight hours later, at Roof's bond hearing, Myra Thompson's husband,

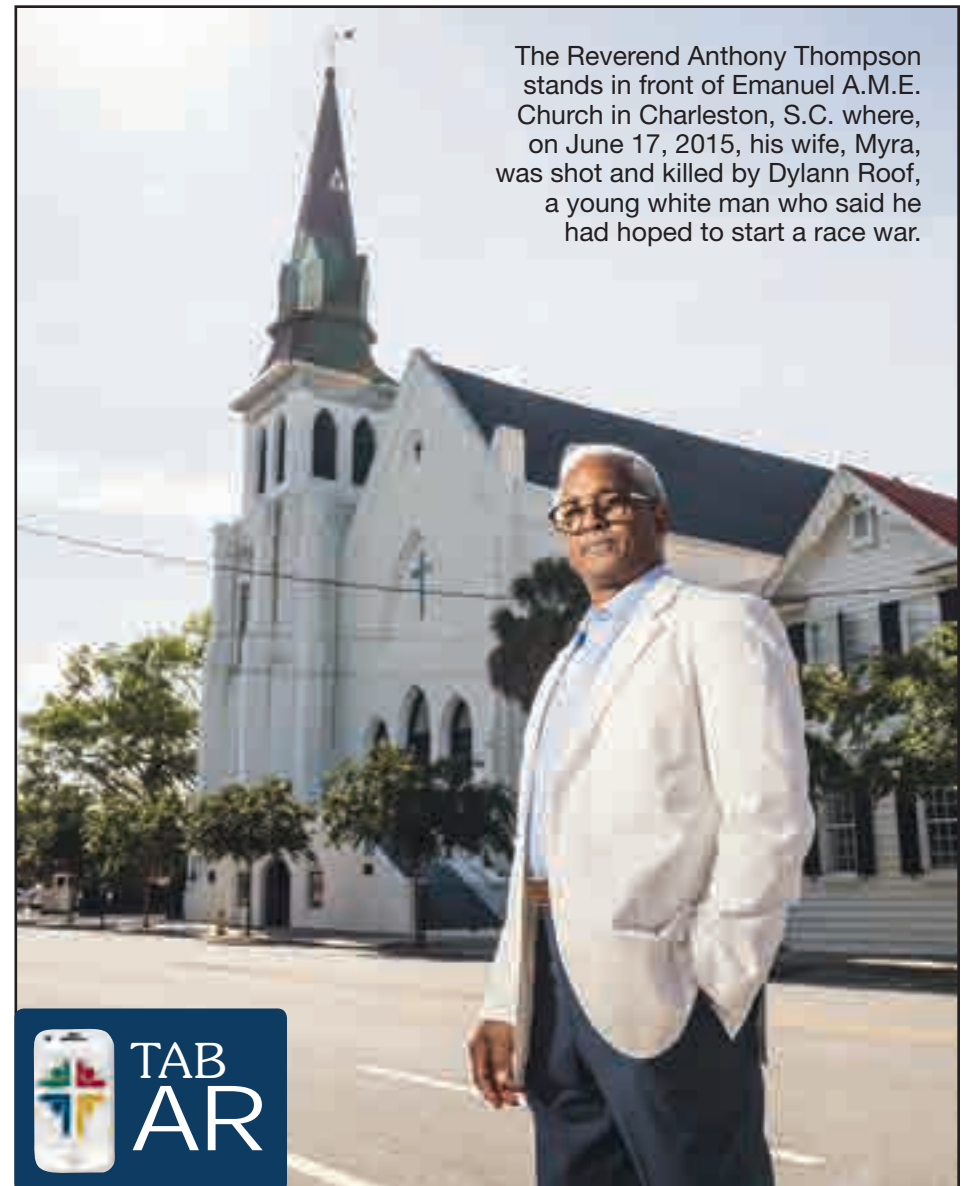
Anthony, as well as several other victims' family members, confronted the young man and publicly forgave him.

"I forgive you," Anthony Thompson told Roof. "And my family forgives you."

Then Thompson added: "But we would like you to take this opportunity to repent. Repent. Confess. Give your life to the One who matters the most: Jesus Christ, so that He can change it and change your attitude. And no matter what happens to you, then you'll be

okay. Do that and you'll be better off than you are right now."

After the massacre, Roof and the rest of the world waited for Charleston to respond with expected racial mayhem and brutality. But Charleston reacted differently,



The Reverend Anthony Thompson stands in front of Emanuel A.M.E. Church in Charleston, S.C. where, on June 17, 2015, his wife, Myra, was shot and killed by Dylann Roof, a young white man who said he had hoped to start a race war.



Photo by Nathan Bell

erupting not with predictable violence but with unanticipated grace. Because of the acts of biblical forgiveness, black and white residents came together, offering each other love, forgiveness and compassionate acts of kindness. After many tragic years of broken bonds between Charleston's black and white residents, more than 15,000 people, black and white, joined hands across Charleston's Ravenel Bridge, making a clear statement about the powerful results of biblical forgiveness. It proved an incredible human connection that bridged a gap between two diverse and often warring cultures.

Social media captured the city's shining examples of brotherly love and united hearts, races and faiths. The grieving families showed not only Roof but also a glob-

al audience the full power of the gospel.

Monuments and memory gardens were created and people around the world began to ask deep theological questions in an effort to understand this life-changing type of forgiveness.

'All he did was unite us'

When Joseph Riley, Charleston's mayor at the time, witnessed firsthand the city's surprising and peaceful response, he stated: "A hateful person came to this community with some crazy idea he'd be able to divide. But all he did was unite us and make us love each other even more."

Such is the shocking power of practiced biblical forgiveness.

In this day of racial unrest and violence, our nation can learn something valuable from Charleston, a city long overshadowed by an ugly past history of racism, injustice and fear. The practice of biblical forgiveness is transforming people's hearts, attitudes and lives in Charleston, proclaiming the power of God's word to a watching world.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Denise George, author/co-author of 31 books, recently worked with Reverend Anthony Thompson on writing "Called to Forgive: The Charleston Church Shooting, A Victim's Husband, and the Path to Healing and Peace" (to be released by Bethany House in June 2019). Denise is married to Timothy George, founding dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in Birmingham.

Understanding biblical forgiveness

Q: Are some crimes so heinous that God requires no forgiveness from us?

A: Biblical forgiveness forgives all crimes, no matter how atrocious.

Q: Does biblical forgiveness mean that we dismiss, condone or excuse an offender's actions?

A: No. While we might excuse an accident, biblical forgiveness does not dismiss, condone or excuse an intentional hurtful act. Because we blame

the offender, we can choose to forgive the offender.

Q: Should we forgive if the offender shows no remorse or fails to say, "I'm sorry"?

A: Biblical forgiveness requires no response from the offender in order to forgive.

Q: Must we forgive an offender if we don't feel forgiving?

A: Emotional feelings have nothing to do with the choice of biblical forgiveness. We

make the decision to forgive as an act of our will.

Q: Must the offender provide restitution in order to warrant our forgiveness?

A: No. We can forgive without receiving anything from the offender.

Q: Must the offender be required to accept the victim's forgiveness in order for forgiveness to be complete?

A: No acceptance (or response) is needed from the offender. (Denise George)



WMU photo

Alabama native Margaret Roland, once pregnant, single and on drugs, found direction in life through Christian Women's Job Corps — and now seeks to help others as a local coordinator for the WMU ministry.

Changing lives

Christian Women's Job Corps graduate helps transform others in North Alabama

When Margaret Roland talks about the life-changing impact of Christian Women's Job Corps (CWJC), she speaks from personal experience.

Roland, now a CWJC site coordinator in Florence, previously was a CWJC participant seeking to gain practical skills to better equip her for life.

She was among more than 130 women and men who gathered for training and fellowship at the Aug. 1–3 Christian Women's Job Corps/Christian Men's Job Corps (CWJC/CMJC) National Meeting hosted by national Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega.

"I grew up in poverty," Roland reflected candidly. "By the time I was 13, my mother kicked me out of the house. That opened up the door to drugs and homelessness. ... At the same time, I still was able to graduate from high school."

Although she made a profession of faith in Christ at age 16, she said she didn't understand the need to change her lifestyle to match her newfound faith.

By age 19 she was pregnant and single with little hope for a stable or successful future.

'Here's your reason'

Asking God to give her a reason to quit using drugs, Roland said her pregnancy became that motivation. "God was like, 'OK, here's your reason to stop.' That's when I quit doing the drugs. I wanted to be a better mother for my child than what I had growing up."

At the same time, Roland said she began visiting area churches "searching for God more on a deeper level." That led to a church member introducing her to CWJC.

Going through the program twice at the CWJC site in Guntersville, Roland acknowledged that she still struggled at times.

She eventually moved to Florence, got a job at an area hospital and discovered that through her CWJC classes, mentoring and Bible studies, she had "gained the tools that I needed to succeed."

Working at a hospital as a phlebotomist for five years, "I was able to save up enough money to work on my credit to be able to buy a home," Roland recounted.

"Once I was able to sign the contract on

my home is when I decided that I wanted to help other women overcome the same obstacles that I have. That's when God started putting Christian Women's Job Corps on my heart. That was in 2016 and now we are going into our second year of classes."

One of the primary goals of CWJC/CMJC is to "equip men and women for life and employment," said Lena Plunk, WMU's ministries consultant for mobilization and national CWJC/CMJC coordinator.

Roland is "a picture of the continual cycle of change that can happen in the lives of those this ministry serves," Plunk said.

"Her life has been changed and she now wants to share that change with others in hopes that their lives are also transformed

through Christ," Plunk said. "This is a pattern that has the potential of being ongoing and reaching the lives of many other people for years to come."

For Roland, one of the most inspiring aspects of CWJC "is seeing what all gets poured into this ministry from the volunteers, the instructors, the mentors, the site coordinator — the work, the tears, the prayers — all of that has impacted me on another level. Having someone believe in me and not giving up on me as a participant has got me to where I am.

"It has strengthened my relationship with Jesus and just being able to be more successful."

Roland admits she doesn't feel "qualified" to serve as a mentor and leader, yet

God uses her anyway. "The more I feel that way, the more I see that God does not always call the qualified," she said. "Seeing that I can relate to the participants on a whole different level has given me the ability to keep going."

Relating to others

As a site coordinator, Roland enlists church and community leaders to provide such resources as Bible study, mentoring, job readiness and computer skills to encourage and benefit participants in the program.

Encouraging other individuals and churches to consider hosting CWJC or CMJC ministries, Roland said, "If your heart is in helping others, this is a ministry to get plugged into."

It's simply a matter of being available "to give a hand up to someone in need" — just as someone did for her. (Trennis Henderson/national WMU)

For more information about Christian Women's Job Corps and Christian Men's Job Corps, visit www.wmu.com/jobcorps or contact Lena Plunk at lpjunk@wmu.org.

CWJC is 'road map' for helping people

Why travel from South Africa to attend a ministry training conference in Alabama? For Patricia Ihlenfeldt, the answer is "to be encouraged and re-focused and reenergized."

Ihlenfeldt, director of the women's department of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, said participating in the Christian Women's Job Corps/Christian Men's Job Corps (CWJC/CMJC) National Meeting hosted by national Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega on Aug. 1–3 allowed her "to network and to tell people our story" as well as "invite people to come and see what the Lord is doing" in South Africa.

Reaching women

In South Africa, a country where income equality is a significant issue, Ihlenfeldt said it is a challenge to reach out in Christian love to the community. CWJC has provided a way to reach and empower women, she said.

"My desire has always been to equip local women in local church communities to use the facilities and the skills

they have to empower and to encourage and to make a difference and to improve the quality of life of people in their community," she said.

Ihlenfeldt was first introduced to CWJC in 2008 through a ministry partnership with North Carolina Baptist churches. South Africa currently has three CWJC sites, including one that works primarily with refugees.

In addition to teaching business skills, discipleship and life skills such as baking and sewing, Ihlenfeldt said one unique program is making "Good News dolls" which she described as "a tool that we've been using in our country to teach our children to share the gospel. The dolls are made in different colors with different cultural dresses and hair. We've been selling the dolls and ensuring some kind of employment for those refugee women" while providing them a sense of dignity, worth and purpose.

Affirming the ministry impact of CWJC, Ihlenfeldt added, "You have a desire to help

people, but you don't always have the tools or the know-how of where to actually start. That's what appealed to me about Christian Women's Job Corps in that there is a road map which you can use as to how to proceed with a ministry."

National WMU has 191 certified CWJC/CMJC sites in the U.S., Mexico and South Africa plus 12 international sites where leaders are unable to disclose the locations because of

security concerns.

"Within the United States, we have sites in 25 states," said Lena Plunk, WMU's ministries consultant for mobilization who serves as the national CWJC/CMJC coordinator. "In 2017, we served 3,830 people collectively" through high school equivalency diploma preparation, English as a Second Language classes, computer classes, Bible study, mentoring and job readiness skills. Alabama has 16 certified sites. (Trennis Henderson)

For more information, visit www.AlabamaWMU.org/cwjc or contact Alabama WMU at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 292.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Stewardship

Stewardship of Possessions

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

Stewardship is one way of expressing the appropriate response Christians owe God for His spiritual and temporal blessings. The term stewardship brings to mind the role played by trusted servants in a household when masters of the house entrust to them the oversight and management of the household. We refer to such a servant as a steward. Hence, stewards in biblical times were managers for the affairs or interests of their master. A well-known Old Testament steward was Joseph who became in Egypt the overseer of Potiphar's household (Gen. 39:4-5). Jesus made reference to such household managers in several of His parables, such as the one about an unjust steward who squandered his master's goods (Luke 16:1-8). On another occasion Jesus commended the faithful and wise steward as an illustration of the kind of faithfulness God expects of His children while awaiting Christ's return (Luke 12:42-48).

The requirements of good stewards furnished a down-to-earth way by which to emphasize God's expectations of His children. The Bible identifies various qualities of good stewards. For example, faithfulness is a prime requirement for a good steward. At the conclusion of His question "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household," Jesus pronounced a benediction upon a faithful steward, saying, "Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes" (Luke 12:42-43).

The Lord made faithfulness a prime requirement of stewards in His parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30. The servant in the parable that received five talents and the one given two talents were both commended in the same words, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things; I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord" (vv. 21, 23).

Later, the expectation of faithful-

ness is expressed in the straightforward statement of 1 Corinthians 4:2, "It is required in stewards that one be found faithful."

It is not by chance that Christians often associate stewardship with financial faithfulness. In Jesus' parable the talents were not as we would think today of some special ability, but the talents Jesus referred to were sums of money. Hence, it is only a short step to take in connecting faithful stewardship with faithfulness in the management and use of money.

Managers of what God entrusts to us

In our better moments we remember that all we have is due to God's generosity and providence. We are not the ultimate owners of anything, only the managers of what God entrusts to us. The observation of 1 Timothy 6:7 is true all the time in all places for all people: "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out."

If then, our possessions are a matter of God's graciousness and generosity, as they are, our role is that of stewards of "the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10). And it is required of such stewards that we be faithful in handling possessions in ways that glorify God, advance His good news and build up the body of Christ.

While the age-old practice of tithing is commendable, faithful stewardship of possessions does not end with what we do with the 10 percent. Christians are still stewards who must manage faithfully the other 90 percent in ways that honor God and bless others.

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.



Central Alabamians come together for Afternoon of Praise

Singers and musicians from 22 congregations across Central Alabama gathered Aug. 19 for the 6th annual Afternoon of Praise (AOP).

The choir and orchestra had been practicing since February to provide a beautiful and moving time of praise and worship.

With more than 100 members, the choir and orchestra filled the stage and orchestra pit to capacity. The choir was conducted by Richard Kingsmore. The worship services took place in Talladega's historic Ritz Theatre.

AOP began as a vision of Susannah and Dave Herring, said Valorie Cooper, media relations coordinator for AOP. "It was a vision to bring the community together, build community and serve our community. There is definitely a sense of family within the choir and orchestra. Participants have made new friends and become part of a larger faith community. There is always a sense of fun and joy at every practice session. And at every Afternoon of Praise, the theatre is filled with a sense of faith, hope and joy. We hope each attendant walks away encouraged and inspired, and with the feeling of being part of a larger and more closely knit community."

There is definitely a sense of family within the choir and orchestra. Participants have made new friends and become part of a larger faith community. There is always a sense of fun and joy at every practice session. And at every Afternoon of Praise, the theatre is filled with a sense of faith, hope and joy. We hope each attendant walks away encouraged and inspired, and with the feeling of being part of a larger and more closely knit community."

Donating proceeds

All money received from ticket sales was given to The Red Door Kitchen, Samaritan House and Fresh Start Recovery Ministries. AOP has become the largest annual contributor to The Red Door Kitchen, which provides a noon meal to more than 100 people in need each weekday. Samaritan House provides nonperishable food, toiletries and clothing to those in need. Fresh Start Recovery Ministries provides a Christ-centered and structured reintegration and spiritual development program to

men in recovery who need a fresh start in life.

"The donation made to Fresh Start from the Afternoon of Praise will be used to aid the indigent clients who enter the program with nothing," said Tee Jay Wilson, founder and director of Fresh Start Recovery Ministries. "A large percentage of our clients come to us straight from jail with just the clothes on their backs. We use the donations to provide them with toiletry items as well as any other necessities they may need. Any money left over goes into the program for food, housing, transportation, etc."

Over the years, the annual praise experience has become an important part of many people's lives.

"I look forward to the Afternoon of Praise ev-

ery year," said Tina Wheeler, member of Southside Baptist Church, Talladega. "It is a reunion of my faith friends from many different churches and denominations across this fine city that I call home. ... I am honored to be a small part of it."

Skip Kitchens, member of Grace Church (formerly Liberty Crossings United Methodist Church), a United Methodist Congregation in Vestavia Hills, said, "This year was my fifth straight opportunity to play in the orchestra for AOP in Talladega. Learning the music and rehearsing with the wonderful choir and orchestra in Talladega is like a long worship service to me. I feel close to God with this music."

"Afternoon of Praise was a huge success this year," said Cooper. "The 2:30 p.m. experience sold completely out and the 4:30 p.m. experience was at two-thirds capacity. The sound and the spirit at each was phenomenal. Each year, AOP is a unique expression of faith, hope and love in and for our community." (TAB)

Missed this year's performance?

Mark your calendars now for the 7th Afternoon of Praise on Aug. 18, 2019.



Photo courtesy of Afternoon of Praise

With more than 100 members, the choir and orchestra filled the stage and orchestra pit to capacity. The choir was conducted by Richard Kingsmore. The worship services took place in Talladega's historic Ritz Theatre.



Across ALABAMA'S Associations

AUTAUGA

▶ **White Pond Church, Marbury**, will hold a homecoming service celebrating its 106th anniversary Sept. 23, 9:45 a.m. with Zion's Way. Former pastor Ken Lenoir will be the guest speaker. Lunch will follow. Donnie Burns is pastor.

BETHEL

▶ **Bethlehem Church, Linden**, will celebrate its 150-year anniversary at its homecoming service Sept. 23, 10:30 a.m. Don Newton will preach and Mitzi Gates will bring special music. A covered-dish lunch and time of fellowship will follow the service. Daniel Gandy is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM

▶ **Melanie Sanford** recently announced her retirement from **Hunter Street Church, Hoover**, after serving for more than 20 years as preschool minister. Her family came to Hunter Street in 1995 when she began serving as the Weekday Education program director. Sanford and her husband, Bill, have two children and one grandchild. Buddy Gray is pastor.

CHILTON

▶ **Liberty Hill Church, Clanton**, will hold a homecoming service celebrating its 160-year anniversary Sept. 23, 10 a.m. Bert Tippett will be the guest speaker. Lunch will follow the service. Kent Dodson is pastor.

CLARKE

▶ **Bashan Church, Thomasville**, will hold a revival Sept. 24-26, 7 nightly. Joe Godfrey will be the guest speaker. ▶ **Adam Marcus** is the new worship pastor at **Pineview Church, Thomasville**. He and his wife, Cala, have one child.

ETOWAH

▶ **Gary Cardwell** is the new transitional pastor at **First Church, Glencoe**. He retired from Etowah Association as director of missions in 2017. He and his wife, Carol, have two children and two grandchildren.

MADISON

▶ **Sherwood Church, Huntsville**, will hold a retirement lunch honoring Pastor Don Paris on Sept. 30, 12:30 p.m. Paris will retire at the end of September. He has served at Sherwood since April 2010.

MONTGOMERY

▶ **Hunter Station Church, Montgomery**, will hold its 81st anniversary service Sept. 16, 10 a.m. Buddy Liles will bring special music and former pastor Jim Whorton will preach. A covered-dish meal will follow the service. Earl Wise is pastor.

WALKER

▶ **Friendship Church, Jasper**, will hold a homecoming and centennial celebration Sept. 23, 10 a.m. A covered-dish lunch will be served at noon. A singing will follow at 1 p.m. Donnie Elliott is pastor.✝



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Selma and Cahaba associations minister at local rodeo



Photo by Tom Stacey

Cahaba and Selma Baptist associations joined together to minister at the 23th annual Marion Rodeo this summer. Bruce Adams (second from right), member of Ocmulgee Baptist Church, Selma, in Cahaba Baptist Association, provided free balloon art, and Tom Stacey, director of missions for both associations, handed out gospel tracts alongside wife, Teresa (second from left), and daughters, Tamara (left) and Trisha (right).

Helping is healing

Couple who lost son spreads spirit of giving to Alabama

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

The front of the sanctuary of Lindsay Lane Baptist Church, Athens, was overflowing with first responders. “We love you guys; we just wanted to pray over you,” Pastor Dusty McLemore said to the crowd of firefighters, police officers and EMTs gathered at the altar earlier in the year. “We appreciate so much what you and your family give back.”

It was a touching moment for the church, and McLemore said he hoped the special service was beneficial to the community too. It was an intentional effort to show appreciation and build bridges. “We had wanted to do something like this for a while,” he said.

On a mission

The ball really got rolling when Michael Kilbourne and his wife, Randi, rolled into Athens in an RV from Columbia, South Carolina. They were on a mission — to help others. And if anyone had a heart

for first responders, it was them. Their 20-year-old son Brandon, a volunteer firefighter, was killed in August 2017 by someone mis-handling a firearm. It changed the couple’s whole life.

“In the process of trying to grapple with that reality, a friend of mine gave me the advice, ‘If you’re going to heal, you have to help others,’” Kilbourne said.

So he took that idea and ran with it. The Kilbournes decided they would spend a year doing nothing but giving — and encouraging others to do the same. They started a nonprofit called Vision of Giving designed to support the ministry of the local church and encourage them to give generously.

And with that mission in their hearts, they got in the RV for a cross-country tour.

“It was birthed out of the desire for my wife and our family to try



Photo courtesy of Lindsay Lane Baptist Church
Lindsay Lane Baptist Church, Athens, honors first responders during a special service.

to find a better place to heal,” he said. His other sons, Brandon’s twin Austin and 18-year-old Connor, travel with them when they can.

“We just want to come alongside churches and serve,” Kilbourne said. “Helping others is a healing thing.”

What the family does at every place is different. Depending on what’s needed, they are ready to donate their volunteer time and financial resources and also speak a word of encouragement. No matter what they do, it’s always aimed at helping the church’s ministry, he said. And at every place, they are amazed at what God does.

That was true from the very first

stop they made in Knoxville, Tennessee.

“We were serving the homeless underneath a freeway bridge, spending the evening talking and spending time with them,” Kilbourne said. “A woman showed up where we were with a food truck, and she was noticeably upset.”

Soon a leader approached Kilbourne and said, “I think you’re the right person to talk to her.”

Kilbourne balked at first, wondering what he had to offer, but as he and the woman began to talk, he learned her son had died the same way his had.

God had plans

“We knew then that God had definite plans for us in this,” Kilbourne said.

As the family has traveled on, they have made stops at churches from Michigan to Kansas. In June, they stopped at Golden Acres Baptist Church, Phenix City.

And just before that, at the end of May, they stopped in Athens. While at Lindsay Lane Baptist, Kilbourne bought lunch for the local fire department and helped the church get the first responder service together.

During the service Kilbourne challenged each person in the congregation to do three things — donate one hour of time serving others, connect with Vision of Giving through their website and tell them their story.

The Kilbournes are “easy to work with, flexible, sincere and they have compassion for people and a passion for serving,” McLemore said.

Kilbourne said Vision of Giving “was born out of a realization that what this world needs more of is people helping others in their time of need.”

“In one of the darkest times for my family, we found light and peace in the form of helping others,” he said. “We will continue this mission for the rest of our lives.”

For more information or to contact Vision of Giving, call 803-462-4733 or visit visionofgiving.org.

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Sumiton church pares down to Great Commission

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

When Grace Baptist Church, Sumiton, reached out to Andy

Frazier a few years ago, they were in new territory. They had been a church for more than 40 years, and they had never had to have a pastor search committee before.

The church's founding pastor, Doug Tate, had recently resigned because of health issues.

"During his time there, the church had experienced wonderful growth in an awesome facility in a great location," Frazier said. For decades, the Sumiton area was steady if not growing, and the church was a vibrant part of the community.

But more than a decade ago, Grace Baptist faced some conflict and other things that brought on a decline. And in 2015 the church that used to run nearly 400 had around 30 members keeping up a large building with six figures' worth of debt.

They were starting to ask big questions about their future, Frazier said.

So after some conversations that started with "What now?" and ended with "I'll pray about it," Frazier accepted the call

to be Grace Baptist's pastor. He told them he wouldn't take a salary, at least for a while, while the church was working on its debt. And together they would look at what they needed to do to turn things around.

"We've got to make some

changes, and who knows if it's going to work," he told them.

But now, three years later, they're debt free and running 150 on Sunday mornings. They're growing as disciples and personally making other disciples.

"We're a healthy congregation," Frazier said. "The only thing we're doing is emphasizing the Great Commission to make disciples. We're just doing things slow and steady and trying to do it right so it sticks."

Daniel Edmonds, director of the office of Sunday School and discipleship of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

(SBOM), called Grace a "wonderful story of church revitalization."

"Andy is highly regarded by pastors that know him as a Kingdom disciple and disciple maker," Edmonds said. "He has put a strong emphasis on reaching families and discipling parents to disciple their children as well as other adults. He is a genuine, lead-by-example follower of Christ."

Frazier said he feels God prepared him for his time at Grace Baptist by putting him in some revitalization positions in smaller churches over the years. And he enjoys getting his hands dirty — with work and with the

mission. In his "other" job, he's a farrier, shoeing horses and interacting with their owners.

"I enjoy getting to be around a lot of people who are unchurched and lost, people I wouldn't normally get to be around," he said. "I get some deep ministry opportunities from my job, and it has allowed us to be able to serve at the church and not burden them with paying my salary."

For churches who might need a turnaround, Frazier said he suggests taking some time to evaluate everything you do.

"Anything that isn't mission critical, don't do it," he said.

It's amazing what God can do when things are tough, Frazier said. "We feel so honored to be a part of what He is doing. The great things that are happening can only be explained by God blessing our feeble efforts." ✠



FRAZIER

For more information about Grace Baptist, visit gracebaptistchurchsumiton.com. For resources or coaching to help your congregation with church revitalization, call the SBOM at 1-800-264-1225.

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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

CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Maple Avenue Baptist Church in Geneva, Alabama, is seeking a full-time pastor. Send resumés to: 1009 W. Maple Avenue, Geneva, AL 36340, or email to: maple000@centurytel.net.

PASTOR

First Baptist Church of Foley is seeking a full-time pastor. Please send resumés to: Sharon Collins at scollins@fbcfoley.com or P.O. Box 307, Foley, AL 36536.

PASTOR

FBC of Spanish Fort is a traditional conservative church in search of a pastor to preach God's inerrant word and guide us as we spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. Please send resumés to: firstbaptistosf@bellsouth.net.

PASTOR

York Terrace Baptist Church is seeking a full-time pastor who will lead the church under God's direction to be a lighthouse in the Shoals area. An energetic, tireless worker who inspires the church to serve in the same way. Relevant ministerial experience is preferred. Send resumé to: Pastor Search Committee, York Terrace Baptist Church, 1401 E. 30th Street, Sheffield, AL 35660.

PART-TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC

Montevallo First Baptist Church, Montevallo, Alabama, is searching for a paid, part-time minister

of music. They will supervise the planning and leading of our worship services in an energetic, blended style. Their primary additional responsibility will be to lead the choir ministry and choir rehearsals. Interested persons should send a resumé to: mfbcbellsouth.net or mail resume to: MFBC, P.O. Box 46, Montevallo, AL 35115.

YOUTH/STUDENT MINISTER

Calvary Baptist in Russellville, Alabama, is seeking a full-time youth/student minister. Inquiries send resumés to: Wade4Calvary@icloud.com.

YOUTH MINISTER

Westwood Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama, is seeking a part-time youth minister. For more information, contact Pastor Steve Potts (phone: 205-798-3341, email: stevepotts@westwoodbc.net).

STUDENT MINISTER

First Baptist Church of Chalkville seeking student minister. 20 hours per week. Emphasis on outreach to grow existing groups using Biblical-based program and activities. Email resumés to: gloriastuckey20@gmail.com.

STUDENT MINISTER

FBC Silverhill is presently searching for a part-time student minister to lead 7th grade-college. Info@Silverhill.org or P.O. Box 246 Silverhill, AL. 36576. 251-945-5182.

PART-TIME MINISTER OF YOUTH

Montevallo First Baptist Church is searching for a part-time minister of youth. Please send resumé to: Montevallo First Baptist Church, P.O. Box 46, Montevallo, AL 35115 or email to: mfbcbellsouth.net.

OTHER POSITIONS

KEYBOARD PLAYER

New Beginnings (Graysville) is looking for an experienced keyboard player. Needed for Sunday AM, Sunday PM and Wednesday PM services. Please send resumés to: secretary@nbccbaptist.com.

PIANIST

First Baptist Church, Union Grove, is seeking a pianist. Send resumés to: FBC Union Grove, P.O. Box 125, Union Grove, AL 35175, ATTN: Personnel Committee.

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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 through the app.



Rashional

THOUGHTS



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SNAPSHOTS OF LIFE WHEN LIFE HAPPENS

Stepping out in confidence

The weeks leading up to my arrival on the missions field in the early 1990s were filled with the normal activities of packing, researching the area where I was headed and saying goodbye to friends and family.

While it was only a two-year missions position, the decision to go was major for me. I had turned down several tempting job opportunities following graduation from the University of Alabama in May of that year and said yes to serving the English-speaking islands of the Caribbean.

The position definitely matched my training and educational experience in communications, but my exposure to the world outside the Southeast — and missions work in general — was pretty limited.

The internal battle was fierce. Fear of the unknown, moving outside my comfort zone, conceding to uncertain living conditions and a deep feeling of inadequacy in working alongside career missionaries surfaced daily. But each time anxiety threatened to convince me to bail on the plan, the peace that drew me to the decision in the beginning returned and washed over the fears.

Sometimes there isn't a logical explanation, but when God calls, draws and directs, we know what we need to do.

And so I answered and many stood with me. Churches raised money to assist with the needed resources and committed to pray as I served. My pastor, Sammy Taylor, and home church, Mountain View Baptist in Phil Campbell, prepared me for service and made sure I never forgot they were home holding the ropes while I was on the field.

My friends and family supported, prayed and stayed connected through the two years. My mom researched the types of clothes and other items I would need and made sure I had plenty of options. My dad put me to work with him on the farm between college graduation and leaving day — for a therapeutic mental break.

By Jennifer Davis Rash
Editor-elect

When I left Phil Campbell 25 years ago this month (September 1993) I had no idea what would happen next. God taught me so much about life, others, missions and ministry. He certainly expanded my world and drew me to Him like I had never experienced before. The years since then have brought a whole lot of life — good, bad and everything in between — and through it all God has been faithful, providing the peace, confidence and strength I needed at every point.

As I enter the next season of the journey with the coming new position at *The Alabama Baptist*, I step with excitement, anticipation and confidence not only because of the clarity of the call and a peace from the Lord but also because of your love, support and willingness to help me grow. 🙏



Dealing with apathy in everyday life

By Grace Thornton
Excerpt from Back to Campus
Aug. 16 issue of The Alabama Baptist

Before students can get their faith to affect their worldview and their choices, they have to care. That's a struggle that Jacob Freeman, a Baptist campus minister at the University of Montevallo, said he encounters on a regular basis.

"Probably one of the biggest challenges facing our students is apathy," he said. "Entertainment is so readily accessible that we can have our attention captured at all moments, day and night. We often find things like cell phones, Netflix and video games fulfilling, at least to the point where it becomes 'enough' to get us by."

It's so simple to plug in electronics and unplug from real life, Freeman said.

"It's true that these devices aren't necessarily evil in and of themselves," he said. "However, when we allow them to create in us apathetic hearts and lazy hands, and we neglect the call of God to be present

and active in reality, they turn into destructive idols."

Freeman said he sees students putting a lot of effort into things that don't matter and little effort into the things that matter greatly.

"My advice to students is the classic answer to all questions about faith — commune with God through prayer, Scripture and a local body of believers," he said. "Ask God to deliver you from idolatry and addiction. Let the word of God mold your desires and capture your attention. Be involved in the real lives of those in your church. These three areas will help guide our hearts, minds and feet onto a productive pathway, one with eternal significance."

Beth Gardner, Baptist campus minister for the University of South Alabama, added, "When our lives seem out of control, we need to stop and ask ourselves if we are daily submitting our lives to God."

What to do when you don't like reading the Bible

By Savannah Sturgeon
Relevantmagazine.com

Ask yourself, would God call you to a life so busy that you don't have time to read His word? Do you see Bible reading as a time-consuming task rather than a life-giving habit? Try starting small. Read smaller passages every day or every other day. And as you get in the habit of reading Scripture again, you may be surprised at the influence even the smallest passages can have on your daily life.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This is an excerpt from the article of the same title that ran Aug. 4 on relevantmagazine.com. Savannah Sturgeon is the founder of the weekly devotional site called TheGoodFruit.org.

Praying in faith is not having enough confidence to convince God to do what you want Him to do. Praying in faith is having enough confidence in God to accept His will even when it isn't what you asked for.

Rob Paul
Church revitalization consultant

@scottdawson

What will you do today to make a lasting impact on someone? It doesn't need to be a million dollar gift, preaching to thousands or creating a modern day Picasso. It could be a gentle smile, a thoughtful note or a helpful hand. Above all — tell someone Jesus loves them.

@jdanielatkins

Lack of communication is a problem in any organization but sometimes a failure to listen is just as big of a problem. People will hear what they want to hear and not what was said or intended. I guess James knew this when he said we should be quick to listen & slow to speak.

@BillyGraham

"Make it your goal to seek His blueprint for your life — and then to follow it." #BillyGraham

My JESUS Story

By Jenni Ingram
Member, First Baptist Church, Gantt

Have you ever heard the phrase “I have Jesus in my heart”? I know I have and I have said it. Do you ever marvel at all God has created and how He created it — even you? Have you ever considered your heart? Do you find it odd that it is in the center of your chest and everything functions because of it? Even your brain can’t function without the lifeblood from the heart.

Just as our body needs the lifeblood from the center of our being, our soul needs the lifeblood from the heart of Jesus. When I was little, I thought of the heart as the thing you could see drawn on the older girls’ notebooks. Then

my daddy had a heart attack, and I got to see pictures of a real heart. This made the concept of having Jesus in there really confusing. How did He get in there? How did He get out to be with us in church?

I guess this is really where my questioning of spiritual things began — I was 10. Now 37 years later, I am still questioning, but so many things have been made clear to me. I no longer believe that Jesus is born every year at Christmas, nor is He crucified over and over again during Passion Week. Just as I have matured, so has my faith and my relationship with the Father.

Being a new believer is not a handicap, it’s an adventure. Just as we all have to mature, so does our relationship. As it matures, Jesus grows in our hearts until we are perfect replicas of Him, living in His presence. This is my prayer for every one of us. May God richly bless you. ✝



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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR



GENUINE CHRISTIANS?

In its July 12, 2018, issue, *The Alabama Baptist* published annual statistics on both the state and national Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) relevant to growth and revenue. Data reveals a decline in membership but millions in offerings.

So, what does this say about us Baptists? Are we being good stewards of God's resources? *Christianity Today* in a Feb. 27 article disclosed that smaller churches spend six hours or less weekly using church facilities while the remaining 162 hours per week buildings are sitting empty. Small churches with 1,000 members or less make up the vast majority of churches nationally.

What are we doing as a faith to meet the needs of the homeless, abused families, indigent, the aged, veterans and drug rehabilitation? Where is our consciousness when reaching out to our fellow man?

I implore you to assert yourselves and work toward better and more Christian use of your tithe and donation dollars. Perhaps try reading 1 Peter 4:10, "as each

has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace."

James W. Anderson
Talladega, Ala.

PRISON POPULATION

Thanks for your excellent article on people in our prisons in the June 28 issue — "Could people of faith be the answer?". It is indeed sad that we are treating people in prison as our modern-day lepers and untouchables.

I realize that evangelism, missions, disaster relief, women's rights and poverty are issues that need to be addressed, but we also need to minister to prisoners. Keep up the good work that you are doing.

Jerrell L. McNutt
Grovettown, Ga.

'BABY'S RIGHT TO LIFE'

On Jan. 22, 1973, the Supreme Court, by a vote of 7-2, issued a ruling in *Roe v. Wade*, that legalized the abortion of babies. Since that date more than 60 million babies have been aborted in this country, an average of more than 1 million per year.

The ruling was issued by seven

justices who were appointed by a president and confirmed by senators, all elected by us.

Since 1973 seven presidents and numerous senators have been elected or reelected without any serious effort to reverse this barbaric ruling.

To the contrary, abortion has become so acceptable that it is now a major part of a political party's platform, relabeled as a "woman's right to choose," with no consideration for the baby's right to life guaranteed by our Constitution.

In his endorsement of Tom Minnery's book, "Why You Cannot Stay Silent," Dr. James Dobson wrote: "One of the tragedies of our time has been the silence of many Christians, some of them in positions of national leadership, while the culture slides progressively into moral decay."

I doubt many would argue these words are not truer today than when printed a few years ago.

Wayne Parker
Pike Road, Ala. ✠

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U.S. News & World Report

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For September 16

Explore the Bible By Kyle Beshears Associate Dean and Assistant Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile

TRUE LIFE Galatians 3:1-14

At one point the churches in Galatia tracked with Paul. They joyfully received his gospel and were liberated from spiritual death, not through their own efforts but through faith in the work of Christ alone. The Holy Spirit indwelt them to obey, not to merit righteousness but to live in light of Christ's righteousness. But then they lent their ears to a false gospel (Gal. 1:6-10).

Suddenly, instead of working from justification, they began working for justification. Paul challenges them to return to the gospel by reminding them of their conversion, demonstrating how Abraham was saved by faith and noting that obedience to the law cannot save them.

The Spirit Confirms It (1-5)

How did the Galatians receive the Holy Spirit? Was it by faith alone or by working really hard to get themselves together so the Spirit could indwell them? Their answer, of course, was by faith alone. The same goes for us. The Spirit works through us to conform us to the image of Christ (Rom. 8).

So often, we find ourselves in the same boat as the Galatians, especially in American culture where independence that allows us to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps and success is valued. We can easily slip into a lifestyle where we act as though we have the ability to diagnose our problem, prescribe the solution and fix ourselves.

We think that we need to "get right" before we stand before God. Nothing could be further from the truth. Absent the Holy Spirit, we are jobless and deeply indebted, with the insane delusion that we can come out from under liability. Yet absent the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, we are wholly unable to save ourselves. With the Holy Spirit, however, we are redeemed

from our debt to a life filled with grace.

Abraham Believed It (6-9)

Paul reminds the Galatians that this same point also applied to Abraham, who merely believed in God's covenant promises and was considered righteous. Abraham did not work toward his justification but was justified by his faith alone.

Don't believe Paul? Then just think about the timeline of Abraham's story. Was he justified before or after the law? The answer, of course, is before because the law wouldn't arrive until generations after Abraham.

The Galatians placed the cart before the horse, and it crippled their ability to press forward in the Spirit. Abraham was blessed by faith and we can experience the same.

The Curse Demands It (10-14)

Why can't we be blessed through our Spirit-less works? Why can't we pull ourselves up by the bootstraps to stand before God? The answer is simple; the moment we try is the very moment we fail. Even if we think we've kept the law, we've still broken it in our hearts (Matt. 5:21-30).

Part of the reason God gave the law is to demonstrate how far we have fallen. The law is not a list of dos and don'ts; it is a mirror that reveals our sin. The law is a standard of righteousness that we can never attain, let alone maintain. It doesn't bring us blessing but cursing.

How then can we ever achieve the holy standards of God? We can't and that's the point. While we can't, Jesus could.

Praise be to God that His Son took the curse for us even though He was able to keep the law. In faith, Christ takes on our curse and awards us His righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21). This is the great exchange of the gospel — our curse for His righteousness, made possible by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.✠

Bible Studies for Life By Jeffery M. Leonard, Ph.D. Assistant Professor of Religion, Samford University

GRACIOUS HOSPITALITY 1 Peter 4:7-11

Alongside the lessons biblical passages intend to teach, there are sometimes lessons they may not have intended to convey.

In Acts 27, for example, Luke's real intent is to chart God's sovereign purpose in taking Paul and the gospel to the heart of the Roman empire. Along the way though we also learn a great deal about ancient seafaring practices. Sailing from one port to another rather than directly across the Mediterranean, wintering in safe harbors, jettisoning cargo to lighten one's load in a storm, using ropes to undergird a ship — all of these are practices we learn about from Acts 27 even if they were not the focus of the evangelist's primary message.

Genesis 18 allows for a similar opportunity to read between the lines of the text. In this famous chapter, God and two angels approach the patriarch Abraham as he is resting at the door of his tent. Only we readers know that the three visitors are actually God and two angels. Abraham initially regards them merely as three men; it will only be later in the story that he comes to realize the identity of his visitors. Yet consider the way Abraham greeted these three men.

He begs them to stop at his tent so they can rest and enjoy just a morsel of bread. But Abraham's idea of a morsel is a sight to behold! He tells his wife Sarah to take three measures of flour, roughly 150 cups, to make bread for the guests. To this he adds an entire calf and a full complement of fixings. Most importantly, he does all of this for what he at this point considers to be merely three ordinary men.

Though the real point of Genesis 18-19 will be to learn about God's impending punishment on Sodom and Gomorrah, as we read between the lines, we learn a great deal about the extraordinary commitment to

hospitality that ruled the lives of patriarchs like Abraham.

Prayer lays the groundwork for our love and hospitality. (7)

One passage in the New Testament that places a similarly heavy emphasis on hospitality is 1 Peter 4. Here we learn about the vital role hospitality plays both in solidifying the bonds of unity inside the Church and reaching out to those outside the Church.

Addressing Christians already facing persecution, Peter begins by impressing upon his readers the need to live lives that are sober-minded and self-controlled. Lives characterized by the opposite of these qualities, excess and license, would only undermine their prayers for divine protection against those who would wish them harm.

Constant love leads to a lifestyle of hospitality. (8-9)

To sober-mindedness and self-control, Peter adds an encouragement to love one another. Love covers a multitude of sins, he urges. And when Peter turns to the specific example of how his readers can show love to one another, he emphasizes the need for believers to show hospitality to one another. The author of Hebrews, likely referring back to Abraham, tells us that by showing hospitality some people have hosted angels without knowing it (Heb. 13:2). Peter's encouragement is less dramatic but no less important: through our hospitality, we live out our love for one another.

God enables us to love and serve others. (10-11)

Peter closes this section of his letter with an admonishment that each of us use the gifts God has given us to serve others. While we are not all called to be teachers or leaders, we are all called to serve. As we put other's needs before our own and show them hospitality, we extend God's love and grace to those both inside and outside the Church.✠

Christian Crossword

By Connie Holman Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

- Your _____ shall be desolate. (Ezek. 6:4)
- They had made themselves _____ to David. (1 Chron. 19:6)
- Overshoe.
- _____ and void.
- Lose his life for my sake shall find _____. (Matt. 16:25)
- Affectedly shy.
- Thicker parts at ends of side walls.
- Being _____ freely by his grace. (Rom. 3:24)
- _____, ego, superego.
- _____ for me and my house. (Josh. 24:15)
- Hoax.
- Being _____ by the Holy Ghost. (Rom. 15:16)
- _____ the son of Nun. (Num. 13:8)
- Behold, all things are become _____. (2 Cor. 5:17)
- Pass through the fire to

_____. (2 Kings 23:10)

- Anger.
- Crack in a container.
- Behind a vessel.
- _____ the son of Abdiel. (1 Chron. 5:15)
- A _____ of dragons. (Jer. 9:11)
- Child.
- With the same measure that ye _____. (Luke 6:38)
- I _____ set my bow in the cloud. (Gen. 9:13)
- Wing of building.
- Primp.
- _____ Syndrome.
- For God _____ loved the world. (John 3:16)
- Which is _____ in the Scripture. (Dan. 10:21)
- _____ gave His only begotten Son. (John 3:16)

Down

- _____ the son of Jeroboam. (1 Kings 14:1)

- Aquatic plant.
- Light _____ rule the day. (Gen. 1:16)
- I stand _____ the door. (Rev. 3:20)
- Behold, it is a _____ people. (Ex. 32:9)
- Potipherah priest of _____. (Gen. 46:20)
- No room for them in the _____. (Luke 2:7)
- There went _____ a decree from Caesar Augustus. (Luke 2:1)
- I was by the river of _____. (Dan. 8:2)
- Winter coasting vehicle.
- Third note of musical scale.
- Nahor's wife. (Gen. 11:29)
- Have charge of, manage.
- Scuffle.
- They did all _____, and were filled. (Matt. 14:20)
- Every 14 days.
- Yet to come.
- Able to reproduce.
- Mend a stocking.
- Limestone.

- There were seven _____ of fire. (Rev. 4:5)
- Second note of musical scale.
- Great man.
- I will not put my hook in thy _____. (2 Kings 19:28)
- Even (contraction).
- When ye pray, _____ not vain repetitions. (Matt. 6:7)
- Thy servants have _____ pasture. (Gen. 47:4)
- What?



WHAT ARE YOU READING?



123rf.com

Alabama Baptists share about what they are currently reading

TYLER EILAND

Pastor, Verbena Baptist Church

Transforming Presence: How the Holy Spirit Changes Everything—From the Inside Out by Daniel Henderson

We've all heard the jokes about Baptists having an underdeveloped doctrine of the Holy Spirit. They never seem to be funny because they sometimes hit too close to home. "Transforming Presence" provides a balanced and biblical discussion of the role of the Holy Spirit for daily Christian living. Henderson unpacks 10 practices that lead to an empowered Christian life through the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit. The phrase "must read" is often overused but it would be an accurate description for this book. Every Christian will find it helpful as they seek to honor Christ through a Spirit-empowered life. ✠

Tell us what you are reading, a quick summary of what it is about and your response to it so far. Email news@thealabamabaptist.org or visit www.thealabamabaptist.org/submissions/what-are-you-reading/ and fill out the form. You may also mail your information to: 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209.



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TAB AR

Media reviews



Phil Wickham

Living Hope
Provident, 2018

Phil Wickham is the complete package. Nine albums into a career that shows no signs of slowing down — and after his 2014 vocal cord surgery thankfully went off without a hitch — the California native has perfected the craft of soulful, hook-heavy worship ballads that manage to move congregations on a weekly basis. The title track from "Living Hope" is the latest, greatest example. The song has already been streamed more than 4 million times on Spotify and been covered by Bethel's Bethany Wohrle, Shane and Shane and others. But it's hard to go wrong with any of the other 12 offerings on "Living Hope," such as the fantastic "Wild River," and its moving, grace-celebrating chorus: "Your mercy flows like a wild, wild river / Your love is strong like the raging sea / God all Your goodness goes beyond all measure / Your grace like a flood pouring out of me."



Mac Powell and the Family Reunion

Mac Powell and the Family Reunion
Independent, 2018

After more than two decades, a handful of Grammys and more Dove Awards than you can count, Third Day is hanging it up. But not front man Mac Powell. With Mac Powell and the Family Reunion, the Alabama native has resurrected the solo country act he introduced to critical (and even secular) acclaim in 2012. Powell's third album is a 10-track offering of family-friendly country, light on theology, heavy on fun. Lyrically, the opener "Back Again" sets the tone, tapping classic country tropes a plenty by dropping state names and celebrating interstates. Also classic? The sound. The crunchy riffs and use of steel guitar



hearken back to a day when mainstream country was actually distinguishable from pop music. And of course, Powell's rich, trademark vocals — what more can I say? If you like good country music, or if you just like good music in general, you'll like this.

Riley Clemmons

Riley Clemmons
Capitol Christian Music Group, 2018

Four songs off Riley Clemmons' self-titled debut are currently featured on a popular Spotify play-

list called "Positive Pop," which tells you two things: they're positive lyrically and they're good enough to make it on a popular Spotify playlist. And there's eight more where those came from. The record starts strong with "Hold On," a finger-snappin' gem catchy enough for a commercial. The chorus: "Hold on / When the rope you've been holding is down to a thread. / Hold on / To the air in your lungs when you've got nothing left / ... I found my faith dancing through the fire / By the grace of God I'm a survivor." And that may not even be the album's most infectious track. But what makes the 18-year-old's eponymous introduction stand out is that she has pipes that not only belie her age but also the genre. She can candy coat it when she needs to and raise the roof when she wants to. I'm looking forward to more from her.



Caitie Hurst

How Could I Be Silent
Centricity, 2018

There's a reason the title track off Caitie Hurst's debut is No. 2 on the Christian Contemporary Hit Radio Indicator chart. Hurst's pop chops rival anything currently riding the mainstream airwaves, Taylor Swift included. Some have criticized a few of the seven tracks, all written by Hurst, for being too polished, which given the genre seems strange; tight melodies, tight production — that's what you want in a pop song, right? If there's anything raw on the album, it's the lyrics — in a good way. "Answers" asks honest, age-old questions about why God permits pain: "When all I want is answers, / But all you want is faith / Faith that can conquer fear." ✠



Meet the reviewer

Jeremy Henderson reviews music for The Alabama Baptist. He is co-host of *Rich and Jeremy in the Mornings on Wings 94.3 FM* and editor of *The War Eagle Reader*.



news@thealabamabaptist.org



Photo by Tammy Bain/North Platte Telegraph

After receiving a dad's forgiveness for the vehicular homicide of his missionary son and family, Tony Weekly was sentenced to 180 days in prison.

Forgiveness and hope

Trucker who killed missionary family of 5 finds mercy

A grieving father's Scripture-laden plea for mercy led to a lenient 180-day jail sentence for the truck driver who killed a missionary family of five in an auto accident last year.

Cedric Pals told Keith County (Nebraska) District Judge Richard Birch he has experienced "unrelenting anguish" since learning July 31, 2017, that his son, Jamison Pals, had been killed in an automobile collision along with his wife Kathrynne, both 29, and their three children Ezra, Violet and Calvin, ages 3, 2 and 2 months.

But "in spite of the anguish, there were other words that came to me — words like forgiveness, mercy and hope," Pals said, according to the *Keith County News*.

Tony Weekly, 55, pleaded no contest to six felony counts of vehicular homicide for slamming his semi into the Pals' Dodge minivan in an Interstate 80 construction zone while distracted by a jumbo drink and talking on his hands-free phone.

The crash also killed Terry Sullivan, 56, of Denver, who was driving a separate vehicle and died the following day.

At the time of the crash, Jamison and Kathrynne Pals were on their way home to Minneapolis from missionary training in Denver. They had planned to begin serving as missionaries in Japan in October 2017.

They were part of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, the congregation pastored for many years by author and speaker John Piper. Bethlehem cooperates with the Baptist General Conference.

Citing the Model Prayer's petition for God to "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our

debtors" (Matt. 6:12), Cedric Pals told Weekly in court July 20, "I can honestly say, Tony, both families have forgiven you. I know how much God's forgiven me. How could I not forgive you?"

"In Luke 6, Jesus says, 'Be merciful, just as your Father in heaven is merciful,'" Pals said. "I am not in a position of authority to extend mercy to you, Tony. However, I can request mercy for you." Then he turned to the judge and requested mercy.

Pals added, "Were it not for hope, I do not believe I would be in this life anymore. The grief is real but it is temporary. The hope is just as real but it is eternal. ... I'll just leave you with those three words: forgiveness, mercy and hope."

Family members, jail inmates in court that day and other attendees wiped tears from their eyes as Pals spoke.

Despite the prosecutor's request for a two- to three-year prison sentence, Birch sentenced Weekly to 180 days, including 30 days already served, and two years of probation for each victim. The judge said he gave significant weight to the family's wishes.

Thinking of suffering

Weekly told the court he has spent every day since the crash thinking about the suffering he caused. Some days, he said, "I can't go to work."

After the sentencing, Weekly and Pals hugged outside the courtroom, the *Telegraph* reported.

Cedric Pals' wife Kathy told media she was comfortable with the sentence. "I think the suffering [of knowing] that you killed six people is enough," she said.

Weekly began his prison sentence Aug. 3. (BP)

**"I know how much
God's forgiven me.
How could I not
forgive you."**

**Cedric Pals
grieving father**



Pastor and family burned alive in attack

BARKIN LADI, Nigeria — A pastor and his family were burned alive Aug. 28 by gunmen suspected of being Fulani herdsmen.

The *Christian Post* reported that Adamu Gyang Wurim, his wife and three children and as many as three others were murdered in the attack.

Daily Post Nigeria reported that the perpetrators burned down Wurim's church and razed as many as 95 homes in the Plateau State of Nigeria. A witness said that gunmen came in large numbers and surrounded the pastor's home.

Thousands of Nigerian Christians have been killed in the last year and many other believers have lost their churches, homes and loved ones, according to a report from the Christian Association of Nigeria and church denominational leaders. The Fulani herdsmen, a community of nomadic cattle farmers, have been blamed in many of the attacks.

The Nigerian government typically views the attacks as clashes between farmers and cattle herders, though others maintain the attacks by the majority Muslim Fulani community are an effort to eliminate Christianity in the region.

Nigeria ranks as the 14th-worst nation in the world when it comes to persecution of Christians, according to Open Doors' 2018 World Watch List. (TAB)

Suicide bomb attack on church thwarted

CAIRO — An attempted suicide bombing Aug. 11 at a Christian church outside Cairo was foiled by Egyptian security forces, state media reported.

A suicide bomber was denied entry to the Coptic Virgin Mary Church in the suburban town of Mostorod, just north of the capital. The bomber died after detonating an explosive belt on a bridge outside the church, the state-run *Al Ahram* newspaper reported. Reports said no one else was harmed in the attack.

The attempted bombing targeted worshipers gathered to celebrate the annual Assumption of the Virgin Mary.

Egyptian Copts, which make about 10 percent of the Egyptian population, are the largest Christian community in the Middle East and have long been the target of violent attacks. In 2017, ISIS claimed responsibility for bombings at two Coptic churches that resulted in at least 45 deaths.

Despite religious freedom provisions in the Egyptian constitution, Christians in Egypt face routine discrimination in the Muslim-majority country. Egypt ranks 17th on Open Doors' 2018 World Watch List of countries where its most dangerous to follow Jesus. (TAB)

Christians sentenced to prison in Iran

BUSHEHR, Iran — An Iranian court has sentenced 12 Christians to one year in prison for holding worship meetings, evangelizing and inviting others to accept Christ as their Savior.

The Iranian Christian news agency Mohabat News reported that Payam Kharaman and 11 other Christians, who were arrested in Bushehr in April 2015, were sentenced for the crime of promoting what the Iranian authorities call Zionist propaganda that goes against the Islamic Republic's Shia Muslim-controlled system. *The Jerusalem Post* reported that Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have criticized Iran for its sweeping violent crackdown on Christians, specifically for the convictions and sentences of those "targeted solely for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedoms of religion and belief, expression and association, through their Christian faith."

Iran is 10th on Open Doors' 2018 World Watch List. Open Doors estimates that as many as 800,000 Christians are living in Iran, almost double the number estimated in 2016. The U.S. State Department lists Iran as a "country of particular" concern for ongoing, systemic and egregious violations of religious freedom. (TAB)