



INSIDE



Teach children compassion, generosity, gratitude during Christmas season

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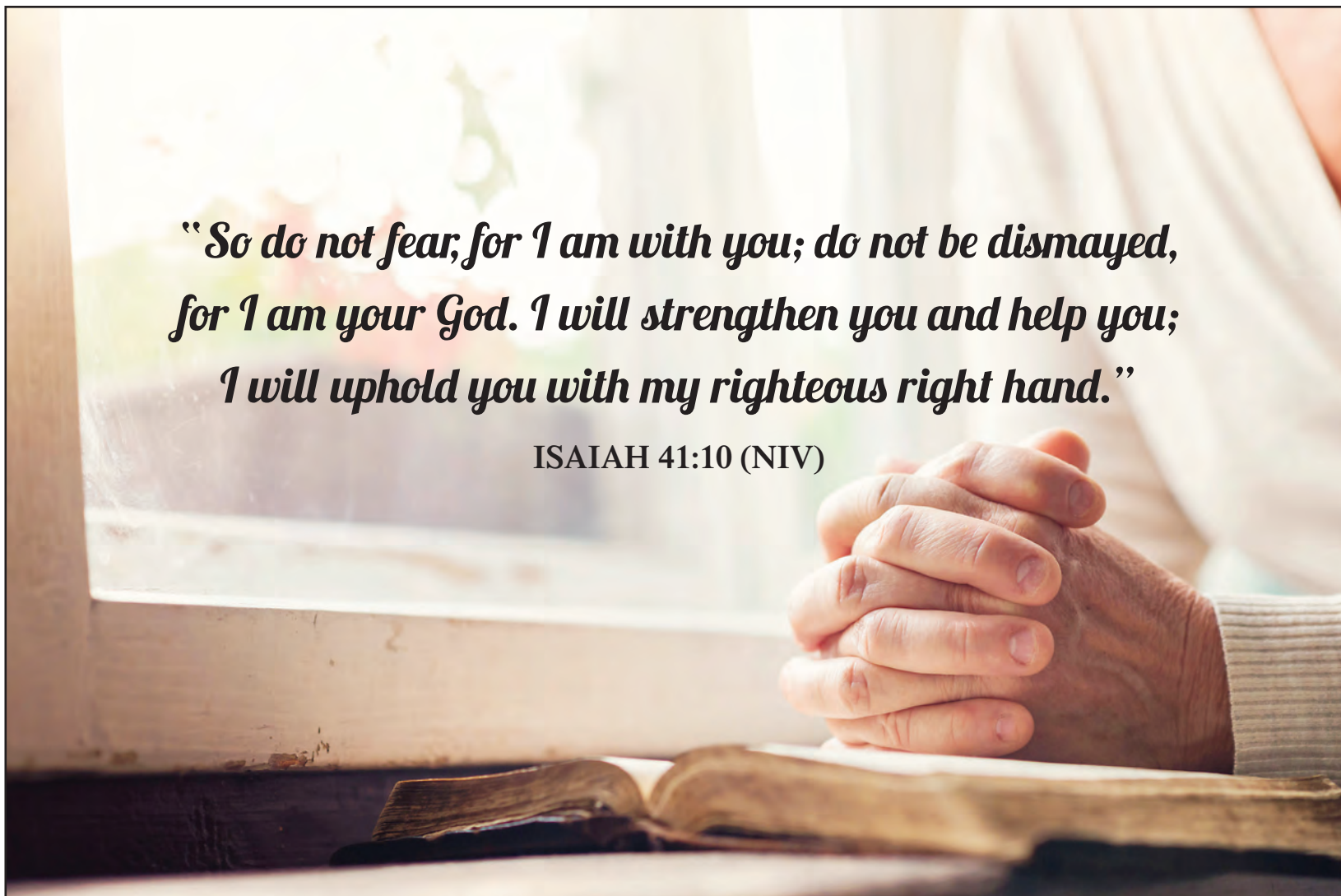
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“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

ISAIAH 41:10 (NIV)

123rf.com

‘Fear not’

Most popular verse of 2018 offers words of consolation for troubling times

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

The most shared, bookmarked and highlighted Bible verse of 2018 is a verse of reassurance and comfort, which doesn’t surprise those who provide help in troubling times.

According to the YouVersion Bible app, the most popular Bible

verse of 2018 is Isaiah 41:10: “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (NIV).

Lisa Keane, director of clinical counseling for Pathways Professional Counseling, said the verse’s popularity doesn’t surprise her. Research by the National Institutes for Health suggests that nearly 1 in 5 Americans suffer from an anxiety disorder, and people have an innate desire to be consoled, she said.

“God created us to want and need to feel safe. It’s one of the basic needs that Maslow discovered early on in psychology,” she said. “We need to feel safe before we can at-

tend to other needs and tasks, and when we don’t feel safe or when we feel afraid, we search for safety and comfort.”

Comforting words

Isaiah 41:10 offers that, she said, so it makes sense that if people are searching online for comforting words, those from Scripture would be a good choice. Words like “don’t be afraid,” “I am with you” and “I will hold you up” offer peace in the tragedy of the nonstop news cycle, she said.

“Just this morning I was reading stories of great loss due to wild fires, of political angst around the world and of tragic losses of life in a senseless shooting. With headlines

like these it can often feel like we are swimming in a sea of negative stories that inundate us with feelings of not being safe or that something terrible is going to happen to us any minute,” she said.

In October, John Thomas, associational mission strategist for Southeast Alabama Baptist Association (SABA), saw tragedy come to his corner of Alabama when Hurricane Michael’s fierce winds blew through the Wiregrass region. He has no doubt the words “do not be afraid” are needed by many believers and even unbelievers during the storms of life, whatever those might look like.

“Scripture speaks to that, that (See ‘Rise,’ page 3)

COMMENT

Which Advent Do You Celebrate?

Signs of Christmas are everywhere. Christmas decorations glow from public buildings and private homes. Christmas music greets shoppers in grocery stores and department stores alike. The sparkling lights of Christmas trees glimmer through the windows of countless homes.

Christmas ties and Christmas sweaters are proudly sported by young and old as Christmas cards are addressed and Christmas presents wrapped.

It is Christmas, or Advent as the season has been called by Christians of many different theological stripes for centuries. Advent is a Latin word meaning “coming.” And that is what happened on that first Advent. In Jesus, a baby born to the Virgin Mary, God “became flesh and dwelt among us,” as the Apostle John wrote (John 1:14). God came to us in human form because “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Journey to Bethlehem

That is the event Christians celebrate this season of the year. We look back to a journey to Bethlehem by Joseph and Mary. We rejoice at the sound of the angels singing “Glory to God in the highest” after appearing to lowly shepherds gathered around a campfire. We marvel at the wise men led by a star across hundreds of miles and weeks of travel.

We picture the holy couple sheltered in a stable, probably a small cave, and Mary giving birth to the Christ child, wrapping Him in clothes brought for the occasion and placing baby Jesus in a feeding trough meant for farm animals.

That is the story about which choirs sing, which is recounted in plays and books and retold in innumerable Christian homes on Christmas mornings. It is Advent past, the Advent of history. And the Advent of history is the primary attention of most people during the Christmas season.



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

But there is another Advent to celebrate as well. That is the Advent of Jesus coming into the life of a believer through personal saving faith. That is Advent present. Again the words of the Apostle John, “For God did not send His Son into the world that He might condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him” (John 3:17).

In the unexplainable economy of God, His love expressed through Jesus reached down to where humanity was perishing and offered rescue. In Romans 3 the Apostle Paul quotes Psalm 14 when he declares, “There is none righteous, not even one” (v. 10). In verse 23 the Apostle Paul adds, “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”

In Romans 10:13 the Apostle declares, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

To those who are perishing, the love of God reaches down to transport them to the heights of eternal life. Hear the words again: God so loved; He gave; should not perish; everlasting life; through Him (Jesus); whoever believes.

The key to that transformation is belief — a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It is a belief that opens one to a present Advent of Christ — the coming of Christ into a believer’s life.

Present, personal Advent

Ironically it is only those who experience a present day Advent who can truly celebrate the first Advent. Without the understanding provided by a present coming of Christ into one’s life, the first Advent remains only history. To the unbeliever it may seem like some kind of magical tale filled with fantasy.

But with the understanding of a present, personal Advent, one can see the glory of the “Word made flesh.” One can see His glory “as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). One sees the

“Word was with God and the Word was God” (John 1:1).

In the same way, the historical Advent empowers a present Advent. Without the first “coming” there would be no opportunity for a present Advent for anyone. So the historical Advent is inexorably linked to every person’s present Advent and every person’s present Advent is inexorably linked to the historical Advent.

But there is still more.

Both Advent past and Advent present look forward to a future Advent — the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in power.

The return of the Lord Jesus has been a key teaching of the Christian faith since its beginnings. In Acts 1:11 angels promised, “This Jesus ... will come in just the same way as you

have watched Him go into heaven.” The angels’ words only confirmed what Jesus Himself earlier told the disciples. After alerting them to His departure, Jesus promised, “I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am there you may be also” (John 14:3).

This future Advent will not be as a “suffering servant” but as a “conquering king.” And those who have experienced a present Advent and who have believed the historical Advent,

will rejoice in this final Advent as they are invited into the presence of the creator God for ever and ever because of faith in the Lord Jesus.

‘Christ in you’

Perhaps the Apostle Paul summed up that whole idea when he wrote in Colossians 1:27 that “Christ in you” is “the hope of glory.” No longer is that truth hidden, writes the Apostle. Now it is clear to all. Hope for glory in eternity is a present Advent for the believer — a coming of Christ into one’s life. “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

And that involves the first Advent when “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son,” when the “Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

Advent past. Advent present. Advent future. Which of these do you celebrate this Christmas season?

Hopefully you understand the love God poured out to all in the first Advent. Hopefully you have “believed” and invited Jesus into your life. Hopefully you know the reality of a present Advent. If so, then you can join in the hope that reigns in all believers as we look toward a future Advent and say, “Come Lord Jesus.” ✠

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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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'Intensive personal evangelism'

24-day outreach event sees fruit on college campuses, big harvest at UAB

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Jessica Franklin says she's been a Christian for a long time, and over the years she's had the opportunity to plant a lot of seeds and help people grow in their relationship with Christ. But she had never led anyone to faith before. So when it happened during a recent 24-day evangelistic emphasis at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), "I bawled my eyes out," she said.

Franklin, student president of Baptist Campus Ministries (BCM) at UAB, was one of dozens of BCM students taking part in Engage24 across Alabama's campuses in October.

The event began several years ago as a national grassroots effort by BCM groups to help students focus on sharing Christ with students on their campus, said Mike Nuss, director of the office of student ministries for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM).

It was originally designed to be a one-day, 24-hour effort, but after the first year of trying it that way, Alabama BCM groups expanded it to 24 days of "intensive personal evangelism," Nuss said.

And during those 24 days, Franklin and others fanned out across UAB's campus, engaging students in conversations by doing spiritual surveys. Some students just humored them, Franklin said. But others seemed hungry for the message.

Joe was one of those people.

"He was an international student from China, and I could tell he was really interested in what I had to say," Franklin said.

He told her that his family was a different religion, one that frowned upon Christianity, so he didn't know much about it at all.

"I went through the salvation story and asked him if he had heard it before, and he said he hadn't," Franklin said. "That shocked me, that here in Alabama there are people who have never heard it."

She asked Joe if he was interested, and he said he was. They prayed together, and in the weeks since then, Franklin has talked with him regularly and helped him get involved in the BCM's Chinese ministry.



Photo courtesy of Bill Morrison

University of Alabama at Birmingham freshman Ariana Ramos (left) does a spiritual survey with a student on campus as part of a 24-day evangelistic emphasis.

She said she can see that he's different. "I could tell the Holy Spirit has taken over in his heart."

And she's different too.

"That day as Joe and I talked I felt God move in me in a way I had never felt before," she said. "God showed me that it has nothing to do with me — it is all Him."

Work of God

Bill Morrison, senior campus minister at UAB, said he saw God move in that way over and over through the students and local churches who partnered with them for Engage24.

Leading up to the event, SBOM and local church staff members came in to train BCM students in cross-cultural evangelism, and during the 24 days, they held several outreach events on campus in addition to conducting spiritual surveys. Across the state more than 20 students professed Christ during Engage24 — and 16 of those were at UAB.

Morrison said that over the course of the 24 days, he watched as students got more and more bold in sharing their faith.

"We had some students that this was their first experience of sharing their faith," he said. "At the beginning they would hang close to the group, but as the days went on, they would fan out and boldly approach students to share."

Ariana Ramos, a UAB freshman, was one of those.

"God had laid on my heart that I really needed to be more bold about my faith and to just use my words and take a step away from ministering through the shelter of church," she said. "When I came to UAB and found out about Engage24, I thought that would be the perfect opportunity to learn how to do that and put it into practice."

Ramos said she originally thought people would be closed off to the message, but she found quickly that many were willing to listen.

"It took my fear away," she said.

Rise in number of Bible app users equals more engagement

(continued from page 1)
people cry out to God even though they may not know Him yet," Thomas said. "There's an inward thing in all of us to seek Him, to seek our Creator. This verse certainly speaks to people reaching out, looking for hope, looking for answers."

Even those who are not sure about a personal relationship with Jesus might believe there's a supreme being that offers strength

in hard times, Thomas said.

"There's some comfort, some kind of assurance in that," he said. "And for the believer, there is reassurance. The world is in a mess, but there is hope."

In a world where crisis and tragedy seem to be constants, believers have to think differently, Keane said.

"As believers we have to train our minds to focus on what is true and not just what we feel," she

said. "I may not feel safe in this world when I am flooded with images of unrest, natural disasters and death. But what I know to be truth is that God is in control. He is with me and upholds me even in the midst of certain anxiety."

The ever-increasing use of apps like YouVersion, which has been installed on more than 350 million devices worldwide since its introduction 10 years ago and continues to see annual increases

in Bible engagement through its various features, is a hopeful sign, Keane said.

"People are searching for truth, and as a counselor I find this encouraging that they are searching the Word of Truth," she said.

"But it also tells me we are a people who are hurting and scared. We need to come alongside those who are anxious and help them find the truth from Isaiah too."

Teaching children at Christmas

Teach children compassion, generosity, gratitude during Christmas season

By Denise George
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Some years ago on a Sunday before Christmas our pastor at the time, Charles Carter, preached a sermon at Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills, about the urgent financial needs of Southern Baptist missionaries serving Christ in the world's remote places.

His words deeply touched the tender heart of our 10-year-old daughter, Alyce. During Sunday lunch she made an unexpected suggestion — “Instead of buying Christmas gifts this year, let's give all that money to the missionaries.”

We liked that idea and affirmed her sense of compassion and generosity. Instead of buying family gifts that Christmas we sent the money to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions.

It proved the best Christmas our family ever had and taught us lessons we have always remembered.

Numerous opportunities

While society, so caught up in a holiday spending frenzy, can often influence our children to become selfish and ungrateful and to care little about others, the Christmas season gives Christian parents and grandparents numerous opportunities to

teach children to be compassionate, generous and grateful.

How? Here are some suggestions.

1. Model for your children compassion, generous giving and appreciation.

Children watch parents and grandparents as they themselves model these virtues. At 10, I watched my grandmother show compassion and generosity to a dirty, barefoot girl who came by her house selling worn dishrags.

Simple act of kindness

“How did you know exactly what I needed?” she asked the child.

My grandmother bought the dishrags, paying the asking price for each one. And then she gave the child a handful of extra coins.

“This money is just for you,” she said and smiled.

More than half a century later I still remember her simple act of kindness to this poor child.

2. Schedule regular family devotional times.

Read and discuss stories of biblical characters that practiced generous and selfless giving and compassion (see sidebar, page 5).

3. Talk about compassion, generosity and gratitude.

Give each family member the opportunity to respond to this question: “What are you most thankful for today?”

4. Pray together.

Children watch parents and grandparents as they themselves model these virtues.

Expressing gratitude will become a mindset and lifestyle for your children when they can learn to be thankful for all things both big and small.



Unsplash.com

Thank God for His Son Jesus and His eternal gifts of love, grace, forgiveness and salvation through Christ. Thank God for everyday gifts that can often be taken for granted: extended family, good friends, a heated home, a comfortable bed, a handmade quilt, hot bath water, food, etc. Expressing gratitude will become a mindset and lifestyle for your children when they can learn to be thankful for all things both big and small.

5. Frequently list your family's blessings.

Follow that with prayers of gratitude.

6. Ask God to provide opportunities to show His love to others during the Christmas season. Put feet to the prayers by donating clothes, food, money and toys to organizations that provide for the poor. Provide writing/art materials and encourage your children to make Christmas cards for loved ones.

7. Read the Christmas story together from Luke 2.

And when you do focus more on Christ and less on gifts.

8. Teach children to find joy in giving.

Provide supplies for them to craft simple gifts to give others. Offer your assistance and promote giving gifts of service instead of material gifts. For instance, encourage your child to:

- ▶ Write a note expressing thanks to a teacher.
- ▶ Play with or read a book to a younger sibling.
- ▶ Bake cookies to give to a friend or neighbor.

Pray for others

- ▶ Pray special prayers for those who are sick or lonely during the holidays.
- ▶ Volunteer at a soup kitchen, visit children in the hospital or visit an elderly person who is homebound and help him or her with simple chores.
- ▶ Make a special Christmas card to give your pastor, thanking him for lovingly



Unsplash.com, edited by Lauren C. Grim

shepherding you and your church congregation.

► Consider and pray for those who serve in the military and their families at home, children who have no family, the world's hungry people, those without homes or financial resources for basic survival, etc.

Importance of gratitude

9. Teach children to show gratitude when receiving gifts.

Shakespeare's King Lear described the child of every parent's nightmare when he said, "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child!" Raise up a grateful child with simple encouragements, such as:

- Teach your child to say "thank you" when he receives a gift.
- Encourage him or her to pen a hand-written thank you note to the gift giver.
- Role play a gift-receiving situation and teach your children how to accept gifts graciously. Give different roles to family members and act out appreciative ways to receive a gift, compliment or kind service from another.

10. Spend time with your children this holiday season.

► Find unique and fun ways to celebrate Christ's birth. My children enjoyed making stick puppets and act-

ing out the nativity scene, putting up simple Christmas decorations, playing games and singing carols as a family.

► Plan special occasions to share activities and events your children will long remember. Visit your local library and select good Christmas books and movies to read and watch as a family. Get together with friends, go out to dinner, attend a Christmas play, take part in special church and community functions, etc.

► Teach them the difference between

temporary gifts and eternal gifts. For example, children will outgrow a new doll or fashionable clothes but they will long remember and be blessed by the loving times a parent or grandparent spends with them taking a walk, reading a book, telling a story, making meals, etc.

In these simple ways during this Christmas season, we can teach children the art of genuine appreciation, generos-

ity and compassion that will follow them throughout their lives.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Denise George is author of 30 books, including the true Christmas story, "Johnny Cornflakes: A Story About Loving the Unloved." She is married to Timothy George, founding dean of Beeson Divinity School, Samford University.✝

Put feet to the prayers by donating clothes, food, money and toys to organizations that provide for the poor.

Stories from Scripture that teach compassion, generosity and gratitude

MATTHEW 2

Wise men bring gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the infant Jesus, paying homage to the newborn King of the Jews.

MATTHEW 14 AND MARK 8

Jesus feeds thousands of hungry people with five loaves of bread and two fish.

MARK 12

A poor widow puts two small coins — everything she had — into the offering box.

LUKE 1

Elizabeth welcomes Mary, who was pregnant with Jesus, into her home for three months.

LUKE 5

Friends carry a paraplegic on a stretcher to Jesus.

LUKE 7 AND JOHN 12

A woman anoints Jesus' feet with perfume and tears.

LUKE 10

A good Samaritan helps a wounded man on the road.

LUKE 1

Mary and Martha welcome Jesus into their home and feed Him.

JOHN 13

Jesus washes His disciples' dirty feet.

ACTS 9

Tabitha helps others by sewing clothing for the needy.

ACTS 28

Paul is welcomed on the island of Malta after his shipwreck.

(Source: Denise George)



Alabama behind bars

Per-inmate spending has increased, but staffing remains low and conditions are poor

By Martha Simmons
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

On any given day in Alabama nearly 106,000 men, women and children are either incarcerated or under some sort of active probation, parole or other community supervision.

Using 2016 statistics the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics and the nonprofit, nonpartisan Prison Policy Initiative break it down this way:

- ▶ 40,900 in an Alabama state prison or jail
- ▶ 3,500 in federal prison in Alabama
- ▶ 870 juveniles in custody
- ▶ 60,700 on probation or parole

If Alabama were a country instead of a state, its incarceration rate of 946 per 100,000 population would be the fifth-highest in the world, preceded only by four other U.S. states:

1. Oklahoma
2. Louisiana
3. Mississippi
4. Georgia

Alabama's incarceration rate is significantly higher than the United States as a

whole, which holds the dubious distinction of being the No. 1 incarceration nation in the world.

Keeping that many people behind bars carries a big price tag.

Varying costs

Local jail costs vary from one county to another and depend on how local officials manage their own jails. For instance some Alabama sheriffs have been found to be pocketing for their personal use state funds left over from feeding prisoners. It's legal: The state pays sheriffs \$1.75 per state inmate per day for food, and Alabama law allows sheriffs to keep any leftover money. One Alabama sheriff made headlines this year for saving enough "extra" food fund money to buy a beach house. Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey has taken steps to stop the controversial practice and change the Depression-era law.

A clearer picture of incarceration costs at the state prison level is accessible in the system's annual report. In fiscal year 2017 the Alabama Department of Corrections reported state prison system expenditures

of more than \$460 million. That's an average price of \$52.07 per inmate per day, or about \$19,000 per year.

While low compared with the rest of the nation the 2017 spending is significantly higher than a couple of years earlier. In its "The Price of Prisons" report, the Vera Institute of Justice reported the national cost per inmate averaged \$33,274 in 2015, with Alabama the lowest at \$14,780 and New York the highest at \$69,355.

More troubling, there are twice as many inmates in Alabama's adult prisons than they were built for, and not nearly enough correctional officers to keep things under control.

As a consequence Alabama's correctional facilities are overcrowded, understaffed and dangerous:

- ▶ Alabama's prison homicide rate is more than 30 per 100,000 — six times the national average and twice that of the next-highest state.
- ▶ Alabama's prison suicide rate is 37 per 100,000, more than twice the national rate.

These conditions have sparked national headlines, investigations and court rulings:

▶ In 2016 the U.S. Department of Justice opened an investigation into widespread violence and sexual abuse in the men's prisons.

▶ In 2017 a federal district court judge cited Alabama state prisons with providing inmates "horrendously inadequate" mental health care.

▶ In 2018 the Alabama Department of Corrections filed court documents asserting the need for twice as many correctional officers as are currently employed

to address safety concerns.

Citizens who think these problems remain safely locked behind bars are ignoring reality.

At least 95 percent of all state prisoners will be released from prison at some point, according to the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Cycling out

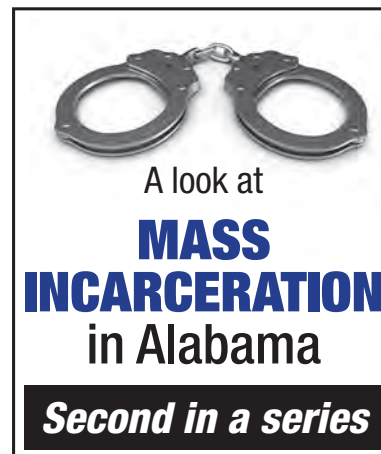
In Alabama about half of the total state prison population is cycling out of correctional facilities each year and that many more new inmates are taking their place. Some 14,200 inmates were released from Alabama prisons in fiscal year 2017, many of them bringing along the emotional baggage of years spent in an underfunded, overcrowded and violent environment.

Some will have supportive family, church and community members to embrace them upon their return. Perhaps they learned a trade in prison that makes them more employable. They have support systems in place that allow them to be hopeful and earn their place in society.

But for many others it's a different story. Some newly released prisoners are just as mentally ill or drug-addicted as they were before entering prison, if not more so. Many will have problems finding jobs or affordable housing, rendering them and their families homeless. Some ex-offenders return to the free world having lost everything, including the love of their families.

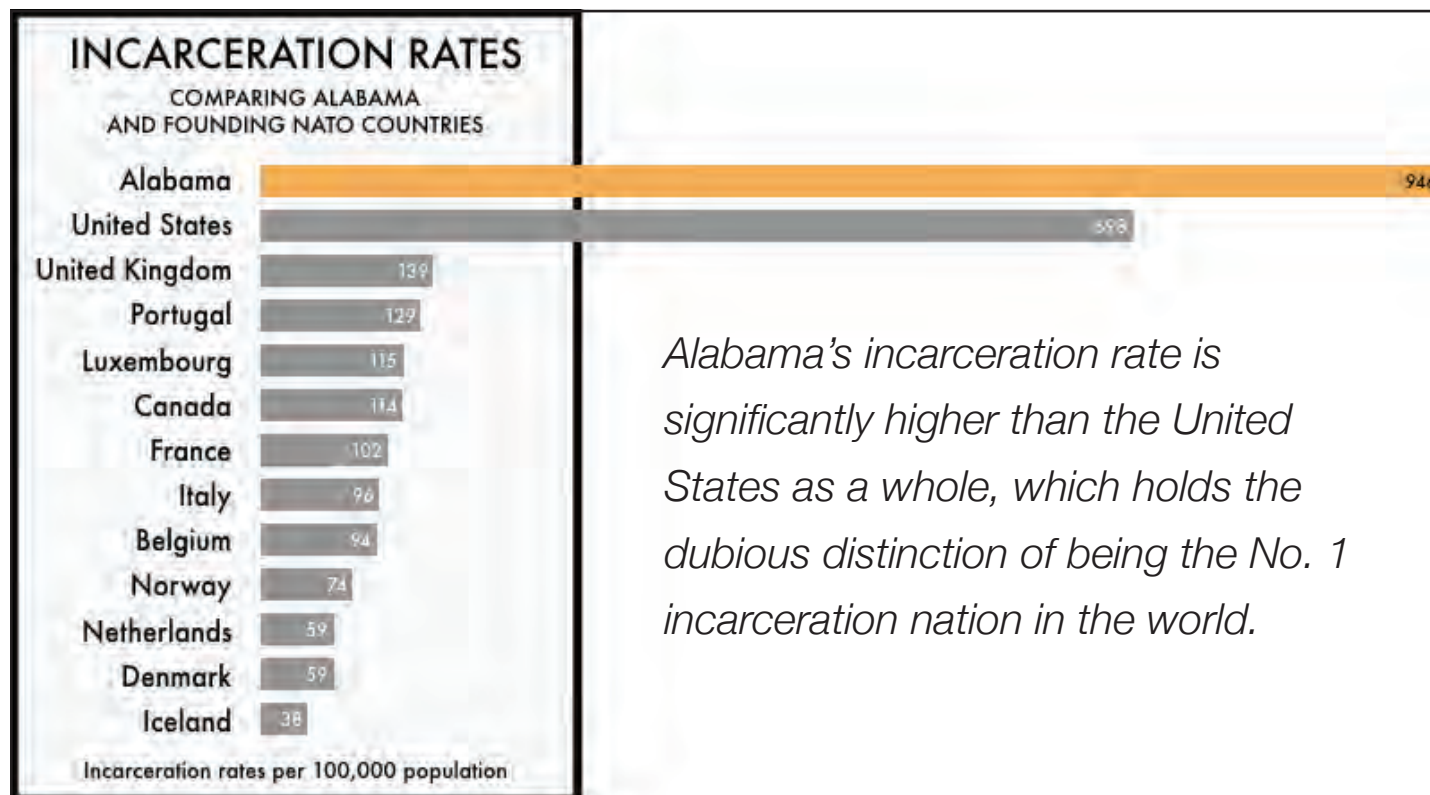
For about a third of the inmates released from Alabama state prisons, the challenges and temptations prove insurmountable.

They will most likely return to old ways and eventually go back to prison, perpetuating the cycle.†



**At least 95 percent
of all state
prisoners will be
released from prison
at some point.**

**Federal Bureau
of Justice Statistics**



Alabama's incarceration rate is significantly higher than the United States as a whole, which holds the dubious distinction of being the No. 1 incarceration nation in the world.

Source: <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/global/2018.html>

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS — FY2017 ANNUAL REPORT

A look at racial makeup of prison populations throughout history

When Alabama's first state prison opened in Wetumpka in 1841, 99 percent of the inmates were white immigrants. They were forced to build by hand the buggies, wagons, saddles, harnesses, shoes and rope that would be sold to free customers in the outside world.

Slaves, not having any legal rights to a trial, were left to their owners to punish, so they were not among those imprisoned by the state.

During the Civil War all but the most hardened convicts were released to serve in the Confederate Army. During Reconstruction and afterwards Alabama laws were changed to allow convicts to be leased outside the prison facilities, a scheme that proved more profitable as inmate labor was put to work rebuilding the railroad system destroyed by war.

However, the post-Civil War inmate population was 90 percent black, and many recently freed slaves once again found themselves in captivity and working without compensation.

Throughout the ensuing decades inmate labor was employed in such private industries as brick-making, cotton mills, coal mines, sawmills and turpentine stills, as well as a sprawling prison farm and cattle ranch.

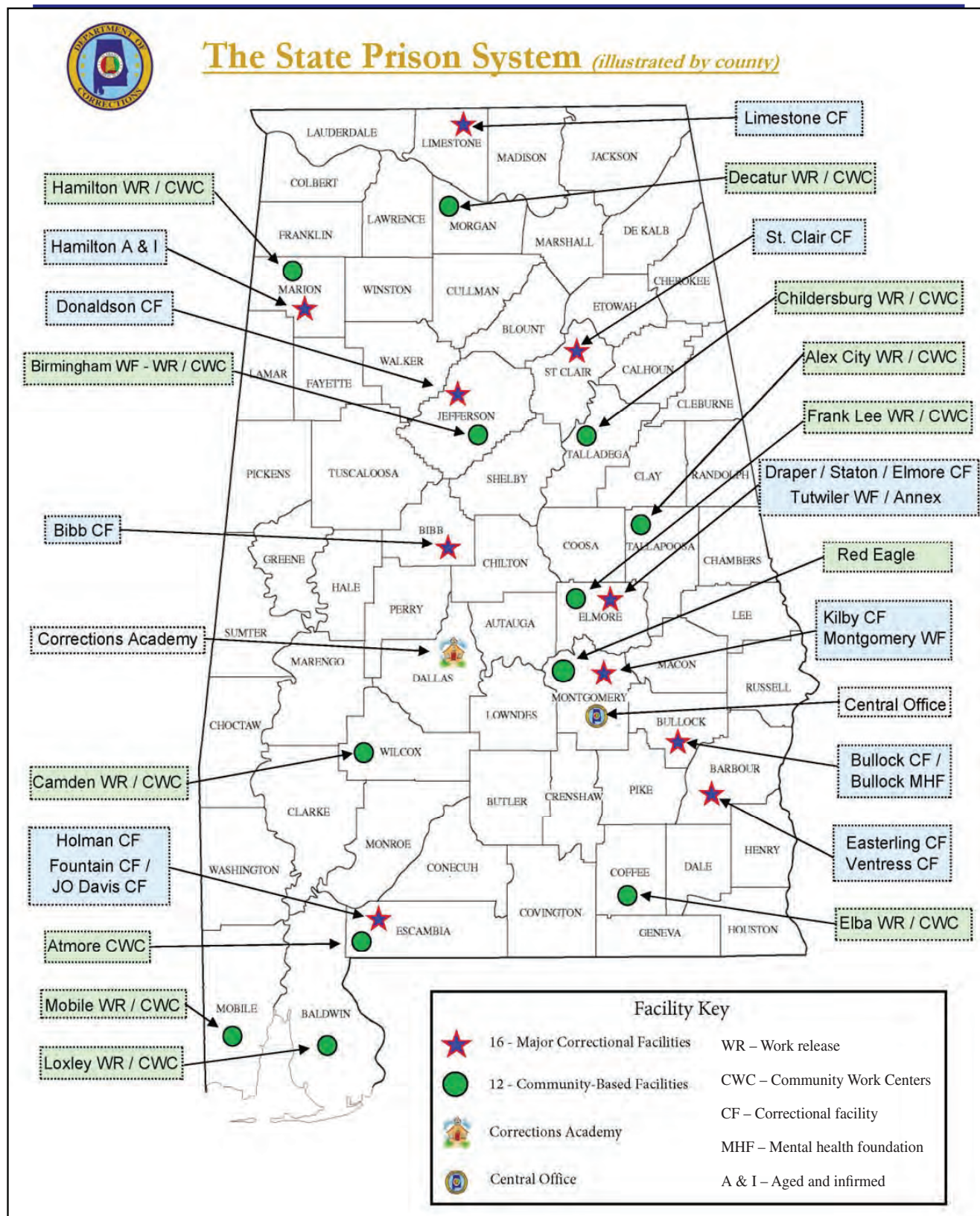
While today's inmate population is more racially balanced, many civil rights organizations still see mass incarceration, inmate leasing and the over-representation of African-Americans in the criminal justice system as another form of slavery. The Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) traces that narrative in its recently opened exhibit in Montgomery, "The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration." (For more information, visit <https://eji.org/legacy-museum>.)

The EJI was founded by Bryan Stevenson, whose best-selling 2014 book, "Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption," details the story of Walter McMillian, a Monroeville black man held on death row for six years for a crime he didn't commit, the murder of a young white woman. With Stevenson's help in navigating the appeals process, McMillian was released from prison in 1993.

Eerily similar to the fictional classic novel "To Kill a Mockingbird," also set in Monroeville, Stevenson's nonfiction account is being made into a movie starring Michael B. Jordan, Jamie Foxx and Brie Larson. Filming on "Just Mercy" began in Montgomery this summer and is set for release in early 2020. (TAB)

For more information on the history of Alabama state prisons, visit <http://www.doc.state.al.us/History>.

The State Prison System (illustrated by county)



Note — For purposes of this graphic, Tutwiler / Annex, Fountain / JO Davis and Bullock / Bullock MHF are each considered one facility

Professionalism—Integrity—Accountability

Source: <http://www.doc.state.al.us/docs/AnnualRpts/2017AnnualReport.pdf>

Alabama State Prison System by the Numbers

Costs

- ▶ Expenditures — \$460,200,691
- ▶ Average daily cost per inmate — \$52.07

End-of-year offender populations

- ▶ Total under DOC jurisdictional control — 27,803
- ▶ Demographics:
 - ▶ Male — 25,342
 - ▶ Female — 2,461
 - ▶ Black — 15,034
 - ▶ White — 12,628
 - ▶ Other — 141

System at a glance

- ▶ Major correctional facilities — 16
- ▶ Community-based facilities — 12
- ▶ Contracted prison beds at year end — 350
- ▶ Total staff at year end — 3,192
- ▶ Security staff at year end — 2,146
- ▶ Inmate-to-correctional officer ratio — 14.3:1
- ▶ Average monthly in-house inmate population — 22,146
- ▶ Overall recidivism rate — 31.5 percent

Source: Alabama Department of Corrections FY2017 Annual Report

Former Sand Mountain pastor sees God pave way for ministry center

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Donny Johnston says that about two and a half years ago God gave him a new vision for how to help the people around him.

"The Lord just took me out of the pastorate and gave me a vision for local missions," he said. "He gave me a burden for hurting people here in our area, in our communities."

So with that burden driving him Johnston began to work alongside Chris Guinn, associational mission strategist for Sand Mountain Baptist Association, to do whatever he could to meet needs in the area.

"After a few months of doing that I began to tell some folks about what was going on, and we had a church that stepped up and donated us some property," Johnston said.

For two years he and other volunteers worked out of the back of a 53-foot semi-truck trailer that Grider Trucking in Section had loaned them, using it as a makeshift care center. As people came in Johnston always tried to work with the church closest to the person to help get their needs met and connect them with a local body of believers.

"The Lord has just blessed us in a lot of ways," he said. "Being in this ministry, we've been able to help families with food, wheelchair ramps, home repairs and transportation back and forth to doctors."

And in November their presence got

an even bigger boost. The Helping Hands Outlet Store and Mission Center opened in its brand-new building at 86 Gin Road in Dutton. Not only that — they're already expanding. With donated materials they've started building an additional storage space.

"Several of our churches in the Sand Mountain Baptist Association have partnerships with us, and we couldn't have done it without them," Johnston said. "We're looking forward to being able to help meet the needs of more people."

Along the way Johnston said he has seen people renew their faith or make decisions to follow Jesus. He's also seen the homeless get a roof over their heads — two men have been given campers to live in and gotten help in securing jobs.

"I love seeing people's lives changed," he said. "The Lord is using it, the Lord is working with it and He gets the glory from it. It's just been a blessing."

Guinn said Johnston's work has been making an impact for quite a while now.

'Positive thing'

"Donny is a servant, and he's the guy that I always call first if I know of a need," Guinn said. "A lot of our churches have been supporting him, and it's been a really positive thing for us and our area. He's been doing a lot."

For more information, call Sand Mountain Association at 256-451-3750. ☞



Photo by Donny Johnston

The Helping Hands Outlet Store and Mission Center helps meet needs in Sand Mountain Baptist Association.

Repton's Belleville Baptist Church celebrates bicentennial

More than 175 people gathered at Belleville Baptist Church, Repton, in Conecuh Baptist Association, on Oct. 28 to celebrate the church's bicentennial anniversary.

"It was a wonderful day," church member Mary Jo Pierce said. "The church was packed."

The guest speaker was Herbert Brown, whose family has been connected to Belleville Baptist since the 1820s.

James Jackson Jr. presented the history of Belleville.

Special music

Stanley Bullock, accompanied by his wife Diane on the piano, shared special songs. Jonathan Ryland played a violin solo for the offertory.

Lonette Berg, from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented the church a framed certificate.

There was a group photo made and lunch was served following the service. A slideshow of old photos played before the service and during lunch. There also were old church minutes and bulletins on display along with a Bible and book that belonged to one of the church's founders, Alexander Travis.

There was a singing following lunch featuring Stanley Bullock, Marie Osland, Katheryn Howell, Autrell Brantley, Jerri and Joey Rodgers with son Drayton, the Springfield Methodist Church group, and violin and banjo pieces by Ryland.

Richard Oswald is pastor. (Jessica Ingram)



BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

The Christ of Christmas

They Shall Call His Name Immanuel

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

Having previously considered the titles Son of David and King of the Jews, Theology 101 this week takes us to another title related to Christ at His birth — that of Immanuel. The designation of Immanuel had its roots in the prophetic message of Isaiah when he pointed to a sign that God would give, namely, "The virgin shall conceive and bear a Son and shall call His name Immanuel" (7:14). When an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph at the time Joseph was pondering Mary's pregnancy and planning not to take Mary as his wife, the angel announced that Mary's pregnancy was brought about by the Holy Spirit. After quoting the prophecy of Isaiah about Immanuel the angel went a step further to explain the meaning of Immanuel as "God with us" (Matt. 1:20-23). This fact is underscored in Colossians 1:19, "God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him."

So far as the biblical record reveals, people did not use Immanuel as a name in the usual sense of the word. "Immanuel" was a way of thinking about the nature of Christ rather than a name in the traditional sense of a proper name used to address Him or speak of Him. We do not think of people reporting of Christ that "Immanuel has entered our village" or that "Immanuel told many parables." So our attention is drawn to what this name signifies about the person or nature of Christ.

Personal union

The designation of Christ as Immanuel pointed to a special coming of God in the person of His Son. It bespeaks the incomparable idea of the personal union of a real human nature with a real divine nature. The theological term for such a union of natures is incarnation. To be sure, his union of two natures is a divine paradox. The Christ of Christmas was a real union of divinity and humanity. The divinity assumed humanity but did not overpower it. The

humanity was real but did not diminish or detract from the divinity. Thus we read in the Gospels that because He was fully God, Christ miraculously fed thousands by multiplying a small lunch. However, on another occasion He was hungry because He was fully human. We read of another paradox about Christ, namely that because He was truly human He could grow or advance in wisdom (Luke 2:52), but on occasion because He was fully God He was able to know immediately what someone was thinking (John 2:24-25). Christians through the centuries have thought of Christ in terms of "one person, two natures."

'God with us'

Since Christ came as "God with us" He was able to perfectly reveal God. In John 14:9-10 when Philip asked to be shown the Father, Christ replied, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?" Hence to call Christ Immanuel was to acknowledge that God was henceforth with His people in a personal way. That presence being launched in the incarnation of Christ was later to be permanently perpetuated in the coming of the Holy Spirit who would indwell every individual believer.

To this present hour the designation of Christ as Immanuel has special importance for every Christian in that "Christ in us" is the realization of "God with us," truths made possible by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. ☞

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.



Finding happiness

Find your happiness by addressing some of the causes of unhappiness

Unhappy at Christmas

“It’s the most wonderful time of the year.” At least, that’s what the song says. But Andrea feels anything but wonderful.

She has a long shopping list and two appointments before picking up the kids at school. Her husband, Dan, just called to tell her that a coworker’s unexpected absence means he will have to work late for the next few days.

Andrea was counting on Dan to help her pull their boxes of holiday decorations out of storage so she can start decorating like everyone else on their street. She knows it’s not Dan’s fault, but her stress level is increasing just like her to-do list.

Where are the happy feelings she usually has at this time of year? Is it already too late to overcome the unhappiness she is experiencing?

By **Abbie Rich, LMSW**
Pathways Professional Counseling

The world says that in order to be successful, you must have a lot of money. The Word says that your treasures will be found in heaven (Matt. 6:20). Today’s culture says to do what makes you feel good. God says to serve and surrender to Him (Rom. 12:1). Society says you find happiness in material things, social acceptance and pleasurable experiences. Our Creator says happiness is found in the joy of the Lord (Ps. 16:11).

Who do you choose to believe? Where do you find your happiness? Happiness is a state of mind, and we are challenged every day to wake up and choose how we will respond to our circumstances. Many find it difficult to respond positively, which often leads to unhappiness.

Perhaps finding happiness is best discussed by examining some of the causes of unhappiness.

The need to control

As humans we desire control in all aspects of our lives because that is what makes us feel comfortable. Who has not felt unhappy when things did not go

as planned? A strict schedule, a well-planned trip or a special dinner — it could be anything really that doesn’t work out the way we had hoped. One thing we must learn to relinquish is the constant desire for control. God has a plan — don’t sweat the small stuff. Unfortunately this is easier said than done.

One way to promote healthy coping in situations where we feel like life is out of control is by trying to keep the right perspective. For instance, when something disappointing happens ask yourself, is this worth ruining my day?

Reminding ourselves that God has a perfect plan is another healthy response that can help change our mindsets when we feel powerless. A family member of mine was recently sharing with me about an experience

in which she had to go into the gas station to pay for her gas. She was frustrated and just wanted to be home from a

long drive. She ended up in heavy traffic because of an auto accident, but she was able to praise the Lord that He protected her from being involved in that accident, which had occurred only shortly before.

Daily stress

Another top cause of unhappiness is the overwhelming feeling of stress that comes from our daily lives. Too often we must choose between sleep, health, work and getting things done around the house. We often feel there are not enough hours in the day.

When we experience stress there is a physiological and emotional response in our bodies. One way we can cope with stress is by learning to prioritize caring for ourselves in mind, body and spirit. We must take time to rest in God’s perfect peace, treat our bodies as a temple and fellowship with loved ones. This can give us the boost we need to continue fulfilling the purpose God has for us on this earth instead of leaving us in a state of overwhelming stress.

Romans 15:13 is an encouraging prayer for those who feel stressed: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

(See ‘Trust,’ page 11)



Resurrected joy

God's great grace revealed in sorrow; resurrection overcomes unhappiness

By **Dustin Bruce, Ph.D.**
University of Mobile

In a Genesis 3 world unhappiness, at least to some degree, befalls us all. Looking to Scripture one finds unhappiness most often expressed under the term “sorrow.” Stretching from Genesis to Revelation, the Bible records numerous stories of the people of God experiencing tremendous sorrow. In Ecclesiastes 2:23 the preacher speaks to the predicament of all humankind, when he says “all his days are full of sorrow.”

Rightly understood, sorrow represents an intrusion into God's perfect creation. Adam and Eve were not created to experience such negative emotions. After the fall, however, sorrow became the constant companion of humanity. Though the word is not used, Adam and Eve surely experienced great sorrow at the loss of their son, Abel, at the hands of his brother, Cain. As sin destroyed, sorrow descended.

In another way of looking at it, the presence of sorrow reveals God's great grace to us. The experience of sorrow only makes sense in the context of love. Yes, Eve would experience pain in childbirth, but she would still experience the joy of motherhood. In a fallen world, sorrow became a tax paid on love. My family and I



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experienced this recently upon finding out our daughter had a condition that threatened her vision in one eye. For a while sorrow became my constant companion as I lamented the problems and limitations this condition could bring to my daughter. Such unhappiness only makes sense in the context of the relationship I share with my daughter. The sorrow I feel stems from the love I have.

Scripture often makes the connection between sorrow and love. The first occurrence of the word in Scripture comes after Joseph, whose identity remains hidden, asks his brothers to bring Benjamin back to Egypt as a test of their honesty. Jacob refuses to allow Benjamin to go with them, citing the loss of Joseph and Simeon, and suggesting that losing another son “would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol” (Gen. 42:38).

Following their namesake the nation of Israel continually experienced sorrow. Jeremiah spoke of Rachel “weeping for her children” and refusing to be comforted (Jer. 31:15). Isaiah spoke of times when “everyone wails and melts in tears” (Isa. 15:3). David cried out “How long, [O Lord]?” as he references the sorrow in his heart (Ps. 13:2).

Significantly the Bible does not limit the experience of sorrow to men and women, but speaks anthropopathically of God expressing sorrow as well. Though Scripture teaches that God possesses perfect foreknowledge and does not change, biblical authors often used human terms to metaphorically convey truth about what God is like. Scripture primarily speaks of God as experiencing sorrow as a response to human sin and disobedience. Prior to the flood God feels regret and grief over humanity's wickedness leading Him to judge the world with near total destruction. Psalm 78:40 speaks of God being “grieved” by His people while in the desert. Isaiah 63:10 similarly speaks of God's “Holy Spirit” being grieved by the rebellion of the people of Israel. Like the sorrow of humanity, God's experience of sorrow sits within a context of love for the people He created and, in the case of Israel, covenanted with.

‘Man of sorrows’

Love would also provide the context for God's very entrance into human sorrow. In the incarnation God the Son took on human flesh and in so doing took on a life of sorrow. The prophet Isaiah, in one of the greatest Old Testament passages pointing

to the Messiah, even decried the Christ as “a man of sorrows” (Isa. 53:3). In his humanity Jesus experienced the greatest of sorrows. In the famous passage following the death of Lazarus, this truth may be seen clearly when Scripture records that “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). Furthermore Jesus agonized over His coming crucifixion, suggesting to His disciples that His soul was “very sorrowful, even to death” (Matt. 26:38). In love Christ overcame His sorrow and willingly drank the cup the Father sent Him to drink.

Everlasting joy

In taking on human flesh the Son of God experienced the depths of human sorrow in order to secure everlasting joy. The night before He was crucified Jesus sat with His disciples and warned them of the intense sorrow that was to come. “Truly, truly, I say to you,” He told them, “you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy” (John 16:20).

In veiled language Jesus warned His disciples that the sorrow of His death would soon be upon them. In less than 24 hours they would lament as their Lord was crucified. An unimaginable and overwhelming sorrow would soon overtake them.

This sorrow, however, would not be the last word. “You have sorrow now,” Jesus spoke, “but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you” (John 16:22). With resurrection would come joy. By raising Him from the dead, God would deal not just with sin but also with sorrow. Incrementally but inevitably the resurrected Christ declared victory over sin and sorrow.

Love would no longer be the context for both sorrow and joy. In the resurrection joy would overwhelm sorrow and point to the day when God Himself “will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4).

EDITOR'S NOTE — Dustin Bruce is associate vice president for spiritual formation and assistant professor of Christian studies at the University of Mobile.

10 tips

to help promote happiness

1. Relax in God's grace.
2. Know what counts and doesn't count.
3. Never stop growing.
4. Let it go.
5. Understand God is on your side.
6. Don't sweat the small stuff.
7. Make a choice to rejoice.
8. Focus on your purpose, not the problem.
9. Give thanks in all circumstances.
10. Know you were made for something greater than yourself.

Source: Abbie Rich,
Pathways Professional Counseling

Trust God in difficult situations

(continued from page 9)

God is greater than any of our stressors. We must learn to trust this truth even in the difficult moments.

Comparison traps

As people who desire the acceptance of others, it is in our nature to compare ourselves to the people around us or to those we see in the media. How often do we wish we had as much money as our neighbor or hair as beautiful as our favorite actor? "It's not fair," we think to ourselves or share with our friends. Playing the comparison game is like playing a game that is impossible to win. If we are constantly comparing ourselves to others we will never be content with our own lives.

Instead of comparing ourselves to others and settling into disappointment, we are called to find ourselves in the Creator. We can remind ourselves that He made us perfectly in His image and provides us with blessings beyond all measure.

Instead of asking God why He handed you the cards you have been dealt, thank God for making you unique and focus on using the gifts He has given you to praise Him. In doing this, we can find peace in our situations rather than self-pity.

EDITOR'S NOTE — *Abbie Rich is a counselor and Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW) who serves through Pathways Professional Counseling in Mobile and Frisco City.*

When we are depressed

Persistent feelings of unhappiness may need intervention

Self-esteem, stress and lack of control are three common, worldly causes of unhappiness. In addition to these it is also important that we talk about depression — not just feeling down because we had a hard day or putting off chores because we are tired, but true clinical depression.

Hear me when I say it is okay to not be okay. There are people who will support you through difficult times, so please find someone to talk to. Whether a pastor, friend or counselor, find someone with whom you can share. Scripture says "Two are better than one. ... If either of them falls down, one can help the other up" (Eccles. 4:9–10).

Instead of ruminating on your thoughts, ask for help from someone equipped to provide you with the encouragement and support you need. There are ways to shift our thoughts and to fight against the desire to withdraw, and there are ways to promote a healthy chemical balance in the brain.

The biblical figure Job had every reason to be unhappy. Job had "no peace, no quietness" and "no rest" (Job 3:26). He struggled to understand why God would allow him to experience such pain, just as we often do when going through a hard time. The devil is here to steal, kill and destroy, but we can defend against his tactics to hurt us with God's living truth.

We may never know why we go through



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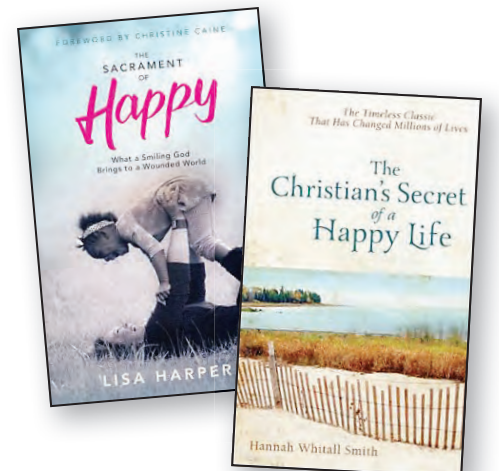
such struggles, at least on earth, but we can be confident that God's plan will always be greater than our own. James 1:2–3 says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance."

Instead of letting our circumstances determine our happiness, we can turn our test into our testimony knowing that God already knows the outcome. (Abbie Rich)

If you or someone you know is experiencing unhappiness or depression, there is someone out there to help you learn to cope with the trials you are working through. Pathways Professional Counseling has counseling offices in 40+ offices across the state of Alabama. Call Pathways Statewide Intakes at 1-866-991-6864 to be connected to a professional counselor near you.

Helpful resources

- ▶ *The Sacrament of Happy: What a Smiling God Brings to a Wounded World* by Lisa Harper and Christine Caine
- ▶ *31 Days to Happiness: Searching for Heaven on Earth* by David Jeremiah
- ▶ *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life* by Hannah Whitall Smith
- ▶ *A Different Kind of Happiness: Discovering the Joy That Comes from Sacrificial Love* by Dr. Larry Crabb
- ▶ *The Year of Living Happy: Finding Contentment and Connection in a Crazy World* by Alli Worthington



Host an online WorldCrafts party, support Children's Homes

The Christmas shopping season is underway, and there's a new way to shop with a cause, thanks to a partnership between WorldCrafts and Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries (ABCH).

This year, by hosting a one-month online WorldCrafts party, you or your church can support the ministries of ABCH, according to Emily Swader, WorldCrafts team leader for national Woman's Missionary Union.

WorldCrafts, WMU's global fair trade division, offers items made by artisans from all over the world with the goal of providing sustainable work for people in poverty. From necklaces and scarves to olive wood nativity sets, WorldCrafts industries keep women in business in 25 countries, even rescuing some from exploitation.

"Each of our artisans has the opportunity to earn an income with dignity and to hear the offer of eternal hope," Swader said.

The new partnership with ABCH broadens WorldCrafts' reach even more, she said. With every purchase made through your online party, 20 percent of the proceeds go to support the work of ABCH, which provides safe homes for children in need.

Sandy Wisdom-Martin, national WMU executive director, said it's a natural fit for WorldCrafts.

"Most faith communities are aware of the foster care crisis in our country," Wisdom-Martin



Photo courtesy of WorldCrafts

WorldCrafts offers items made by artisans, like the one pictured here from India, from all over the world with the goal of providing sustainable work for people in poverty.

said. "Many people have a desire to assist foster children but don't know how or where to get started. This initiative through WorldCrafts can help create connections between churches and families and their local Baptist children and family ministry."

WorldCrafts' partnership with ABCH is part of a larger initiative kicked off in February to support the work of the Baptist Coalition for Children and Families, encompassing Baptist children's ministries in 19 states.

Michelle Drashman Glassford, ABCH director of communications, said ABCH serves about 500 children every year, primarily through foster care, campus care, shelter care, college care and family care ministry for homeless mothers and their children.

"Our vision is to see hope and wholeness for children and families through knowing God," she said, noting that the WorldCrafts partnership could help achieve that vision. "We definitely could not do what we do without the support of so many individuals, churches, businesses and volunteers all across the state." (Grace Thornton)

For more information or to host your own online party, visit worldcrafts.org/abch.



Harold 'Hal' Arnold

Professor, pastor, counselor dies at 60

Harold "Hal" Arnold, a longtime bivocational pastor, counselor and professor, died Nov. 16. He was 60.

Arnold had served as pastor of Pisgah Baptist Church, Marion, in Cahaba Baptist Association, since 2006. He also served as head of the psychology department of Judson College in Marion.

Arnold had served in various bivocational pastorates since 1980. Before coming to Judson he also held teaching positions at the University of Mississippi in Oxford and at Blue Mountain College in Mississippi. A licensed professional counselor, he had 25 years of counseling experience.

He earned a bachelor's, master's and Ph.D. from the University of Mississippi.

Scott Bullard, interim president of Judson College, called Arnold's work "selfless ministry."

"We are indeed so grateful for his life of service to so many, especially to Judson students, alumnae, faculty and staff," Bullard said.

Arnold is survived by his wife, Paula, and daughter, Jennifer. (TAB)



ARNOLD

Find tips for dealing with grief during the holidays at www.thealabamabaptist.org.

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ALABAMA UPDATES

PEOPLE, CHURCHES MAKING NEWS ACROSS THE STATE

Cleburne AMS to retire

Larry Riddle has been in ministry 47 years, but he says the last 10 years spent as associational mission strategist (AMS) for Cleburne Baptist Association have been some of the best years of his ministry life.

"It's been wonderful for me, and I hope it's been as meaningful for the folks and the churches," said Riddle, who will retire Dec. 31.

Riddle has served with a heart for missions and people and "has been a blessing to the people of Cleburne County and beyond," said Vickey Weathers, administrative assistant for the association.

Riddle began his pastoral ministry at Delta Baptist Church, in Carey Baptist Association. He went on to serve as

pastor of several churches in Calhoun Baptist Association, including New Haven Baptist Church, Anniston, where he served from 1982 to 1990 and again from 1996 to 2008.

All the while he served in missions all over the world, including in Korea, Philippines, Nicaragua, Honduras, Tanzania and Mexico. He has preached revivals, built churches and supported pastors in their work. In Cleburne Association he has assisted with two church plants and seen churches grow in missions giving under his leadership.

"That's not because of me," he said. "The Lord was just at work and did some great things."

Riddle and his wife, Donna, plan to do a little traveling, but he said he looks forward to doing supply work and spending time with his family, which includes three children and eight grandchildren.

"I don't know how many years it's been since I've had a Sunday off, but I don't want to quit." (Carrie Brown McWhorter)



RIDDLE

Pathways, associations partner to provide counseling statewide

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

In 1996 the leaders of Pathways Professional Counseling had a vision — they wanted to be in reasonable driving distance of everyone in Alabama.

Fast forward to today, and Pathways — a ministry of Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries (ABCH) — has partnerships with 30 Baptist associations across the state, providing counseling services to associational mission strategists (AMS), pastors, ministers and others in need.

How does it work?

The association provides office space, a small financial investment and limited clerical support, and Pathways provides the services of a professional counselor who works from a biblical worldview, according to Rod Marshall, ABCH president and CEO.

"Pathways currently serves thousands of individuals each year," he said. "Especially in our associational partnerships, most of those individuals and families are referred to us by pastors."

'Additional ministry tool'

The partnerships serve as "an additional ministry tool for pastors" and an additional resource the association can offer to local churches and church leaders, Marshall said.

Randy Makemson, AMS for East Cullman Baptist Association, said it has "opened doors for needful ministry" in his association, offering professional Christian counseling to church leaders and members going through a gamut of life situations.

Wendell Ray, elevating mission strategist

for Escambia Baptist Association, agreed.

"I personally have utilized both of our counselors," he said. "One major emphasis of our association is to encourage leaders. It is very fulfilling to be able to provide counseling that we can trust to these leaders and their families."

Statewide coverage

Pathways' professional counselors "truly give people a path and way to wholeness, not just some advice," Ray said.

Ross Hickman, Pathways president, said the partnership helps Pathways meet its ministry goals too.

"To achieve statewide coverage without the partnership of the associational offices would not be sustainable over the long term," he said.

It's a partnership that's changing lives, Hickman said. "We have seen many come to a saving knowledge of Christ during their time with us, and we have heard many pastors from around the state remark they are so thankful for the ability to refer members of their congregations to Pathways, knowing a faith-based professional counselor will be working with their loved ones."

Marshall said that because of the partnership, Pathways is in some ways the most visible portion of the "family ministries" part of what ABCH does.

"By serving local churches through local associations, we are both giving back to those who are our greatest stakeholders and we are living out our commitment to be true to our heritage and identity of a Baptist entity, serving on behalf of Alabama Baptists to families and children throughout the state," he said. ✝

For more information visit pathwaysprofessional.org.



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REFLECTIONS



Serving God

Alabama nursing fellowship sees God move in Dominican Republic, invites others to join

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

From stretching the medications to assembling a team with just the right skill sets, Regina Mobbs says God's hand was in every detail of her team's trip to the Dominican Republic in October.

"It was wonderful," said Mobbs, who led the Alabama Baptist Nursing Fellowship (BNF) team. "We could see Him orchestrating everything."

For the two months leading up to their trip the 11 team members from all across the state fasted and prayed, she said, and God answered. The team — including nurses, medical assistants and ultrasonographers — saw 785 patients, working out of three empty houses that were used as clinic and pharmacy space.

God gave them everything they needed, all the way down to good

weather, said Mobbs, a member of Lifepoint Church, Decatur, in Morgan Baptist Association. "There was no grass in between the houses, and it could've been sloppy muddy if we [had] had rain."

They also saw 45 people pray to receive Christ.

For Mobbs it was a special trip, but it was also the fulfillment of a promise she made God years back.

"I went to nursing school when I was 30, and I told God if He would help me get through it and I could get

my license, I would serve Him anywhere He chose to send me," she said.

Heart for BNF

Mobbs graduated in 1997, and in the years since she's been on 15 international trips to 13 countries and done medical missions in four states.

"I feel honored that He's chosen to use me, to use the skills



Photo courtesy of Regina Mobbs

Alabama Baptist Nursing Fellowship member Shay Southward (second from right) teaches CPR to a group of women in Haiti.

that He has equipped me with medically and the heart He's equipped me with spiritually," she said. "My heart for Alabama Baptist Nursing Fellowship is just to make that known — to help people in all fields of medicine experience that gift of serving God. You do it with the intention

of blessing someone else, but you're always blessed more than you give."

Alabama BNF — a ministry of Alabama Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) — currently has members all across the state as well as organized chapters that offer missions and ministry proj-

ects in their areas, said Candace McIntosh, Alabama WMU executive director.

"The Baptist Nursing Fellowship provides a place of common heart, thought and desire to serve the Lord through their calling as a health-care professional," McIntosh said. "Alabama BNF provides a place for these professionals to encourage and pray for one another while giving them a place to serve the Lord together as well."

Continuing education

Alabama BNF also provides continuing education opportunities at an annual retreat and training for faith community nurses through a partnership with the Center for Faith and Health at Samford University in Birmingham. There's also a scholarship available through Alabama BNF for student nurses.

Mobbs said she would love to see the organization grow.

"It is called BNF but we welcome anyone in the health profession who desires to share their love for Jesus," she said.✠

For more information about Alabama BNF visit alabamawmu.org/bnf.

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

CHURCH POSITIONS

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WORSHIP LEADER

Bethel Baptist Church, Dora Alabama, is searching for either a full-time or part-time worship leader to lead blended worship services. Please email resumé to: secretary@bbcdora.com or mail re-

sumés to: Music Search Committee, Bethel Baptist Church, 7000 Bethel Road, Dora, AL 35062.

BIVOCATIONAL MINISTER OF MUSIC

First Baptist Church of Anderson seeking bivocational music minister. Please contact: Lindsey Dabbs, secretary, at 256-247-3871. Send resumé to: Anderson FBC, P.O. Box 67, Anderson, AL 35610, or email: fbcanderson@gmail.com.

FULL-TIME ASSOC. PASTOR TO STUDENTS/MISSIONS

Southside Baptist Church, Andalusia, Alabama, is seeking an individual with experience to provide full-time leadership and ministry to students and student families, as well as leading and working with the membership of Southside Baptist for providing local, state, national and international mission opportunities. Send resumé to: ATTN: Southside Baptist Church Search Committee, 1213 West Bypass, Andalusia, AL 36420 or southside@sbcandalusia.com.

BIVOCATIONAL YOUTH MINISTER

Oak Grove First Baptist Church is seeking a bivocational youth

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OTHER POSITIONS

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- 2 Tap the [] icon at the bottom of the screen.
- 3 You will see pulsating dots, which indicate the app is searching for a target. Once it finds a target the dots will turn to a bull's-eye. The bull's-eye will remain until the augmented reality image loads.
- 4 Look for The Alabama Baptist (TAB) augmented reality logo (example shown above). Hold your device over the logo and watch the paper come to life.
- 5 Each week when TAB arrives, look for the AR logo to watch the video extras through the app.



Photo courtesy of Bailey Hill

Chatom Baptist Church collects various supplies to assist hurricane relief in Emerald Beach, Florida.

Chatom Baptist loads up trailer for hurricane relief

Back in October, as Hurricane Michael barreled toward Florida, Bailey Hill was watching it from his office in Chatom.

"I kept it pulled up in the corner of my screen, and all day long, I'd just stop and pray for the people who were going to be affected," he said.

And when it hit, Hill — minister of music at Chatom Baptist Church in Washington Baptist Association — said their mission was simple.

"At Chatom Baptist, our motto is 'all things to all people.' We knew in this case, we had to be the hands and feet of Christ to the people there who were hurting," he said.

So Hill organized #GoEm-

erald, an effort to gather supplies like water, generators and baby supplies for the people of Emerald Beach, Florida. He got the word out through social media and his church's app, and he partnered with the local schools to collect supplies.

And when the day came to go down there, they were able to pack a trailer full to take to Emerald Coast Fellowship in Lynn Haven, Florida.

"On our way down, about 15 minutes out, you could begin to see the devastation. It was heartbreaking," he said. "A lot of them lost everything, and we just wanted to help however we could. None of that is for our glory — it's all for the glory of God." (Grace Thornton)

Choctaw Association churches pray for people at 14-foot cross

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Six years ago Terry Long felt God asking him to do something out of his comfort zone.

"I had been praying that God would use me to spark a revival," he said.

A bivocational pastor in Mississippi at the time, Long decided to put up a cross at a busy intersection in his county, and for 100 days straight he prayed at the cross all day.

"God had confirmed it was about Him and not about me," he said. "I was terrified. But people came from everywhere."

When word got around that a guy was praying for people at this cross, people pulled off the road all day long to ask for prayer, Long said. He would pray for them, write down their prayer requests and have them nail them to the cross.

Moving stories

And he would ask them if they knew Jesus.

"I saw Book-of-Acts type conversions," Long said. In that 100-day period more than 1,500 people came to the cross to share their prayer requests, and around 30 put their faith in Christ for the first time.

"Every single story is a moving story," he said. "It's not about me



Photo by Terry Long

Members from Choctaw Baptist Association churches pray for people as they come to nail their prayer requests to the cross standing in front of Piggly Wiggly in Butler.

— it's about the cross. The cross is the message."

And when Long, now associational missions director for Choctaw Baptist Association, preaches revivals, he tells those stories of the 100 days at the cross.

"So a few churches around here know those stories," he said.

And one of them — Tallawampa Baptist Church, Toxey — decided they wanted to try it too.

Under the leadership of Pastor Leon Ross they got permission from Piggly Wiggly in Butler to put a 14-foot cross on the highway just outside the store. For a week Tallawampa members

manned the cross every day, praying for people as they came by to nail their requests to the cross.

"We had people come by who were contemplating suicide, who were homeless or were needing food," Ross said.

But most of all, they heard requests from people whose families were hurting, he said. "Divorce, drugs, depression — the family is under attack, and people were praying for healing."

'Real blessing'

After Tallawampa's week was over, two other churches each picked it up for a week — Calvary Baptist, Butler, and Lusk Baptist, Gilbertown. And even though no one is manning the cross now, it still stands with hammers and nails for people to take their prayer requests to the cross.

Ross said he and his wife often drive by it, make sure none of the requests have fallen off and take a few minutes to pray for the requests.

"It's been a real blessing for us and a real opportunity for our church to see the needs in the community," he said.

Long, who also serves as an evangelism strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said he is "excited for them and their step of faith."

"They had a lot of good response and touched a lot of lives," he said. ✝

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Church ANNIVERSARIES



New Hope Baptist Church celebrates 150th anniversary

On Oct. 28, New Hope Baptist Church, Skipperville, in Dale Baptist Association, celebrated its 150th anniversary.

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, was the guest speaker for the special service. Ron Jackson and the church choir both shared special music. Jimmy Riley played the fiddle and Andy Martin played piano.

Former pastors and their wives were recognized, and the pastors shared memories from their time at the church. They also recognized those that were married, baptized and ordained at New Hope Baptist. They recognized the oldest member, Bill Grantham, and the youngest member, Sophie Barefield.

Certificates were presented to the church by Lance and Ellen Dewberry from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission.

Memorabilia such as hymnals, photos and church minutes were on display.

"The anniversary committee met for 14 months planning the celebration," Pastor Jud Waldrop said. "Everything came together better than expected." (Jessica Ingram)

Salem Baptist Church marks 150-year anniversary

Not too long ago the members of Salem Baptist Church, Arton, grieved the loss of a church landmark — a huge live oak tree.

On Nov. 4 the church celebrated its 150th anniversary and planted a new tree that will grow alongside the church for many years to come. Jim Hill, associational mission

strategist for Dale Baptist Association, spoke at the dedication of the new tree. Dale Huff was the guest speaker for the service. The church's men's ensemble and Sara Cain brought special music for the service, and Allie Campbell played "Amazing Grace" on the violin. The celebration included a video featuring Salem Baptist members who served in the military.

Ellen Dewberry presented the church with a certificate on behalf of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Past photos of events, pastors and members were

on display for the congregation to view.

"It was a great day," said church member Don McCall. "Old friends coming back made for a wonderful spirit."

Harold Peters is pastor. (Jessica Ingram)

New Vision Baptist Church celebrates 25 years of ministry

The crowd in the sanctuary grew large as former and current members of New Vision Baptist Church, Prattville, and members of Pueblo de Dios, a mission congregation of New Vision Baptist, gathered together on Nov. 4 to celebrate the church's 25 years of ministry.

Randy Tucker, pastor of Prattmont Baptist Church, Prattville, was the guest speaker. Carlos Lemus, pastor of Pueblo de Dios and Mel Johnson, lead mission strategist for Autauga Baptist Association also spoke briefly.

Ralph Foster from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented the church with a certificate.

"It was a wonderful day with a sweet atmosphere," said church member Melanie McDaniel. "There were sweet memories of the past."

J.B. Burt is pastor. (Jessica Ingram)

Moffett Road celebrates 75-year anniversary

On Nov. 18, Moffett Road Baptist Church, Mobile, celebrated its 75-year anniversary.

Former pastor Terry Cutrer, former youth pastor Craig Walker and James Jones, pastor of Forest Hill Baptist Church, a church plant of Moffett Road Baptist, were the guest speakers for the service.

The adult choir, children's choir and Sisters-in-Song ladies ensemble brought special music for the service.

Jerrold Hare, from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, and Chuck Davis, from Mobile Baptist Association, presented the church with certificates.

A brief history of the church and a list of the church's pastors were printed in the bulletin.

A history room also was created for the celebration. It included displays on wed-

dings, music, missions, youth and children, and a memory tree with the names of church members who are now deceased.

Lunch followed the service.

"It was a wonderful day where you could feel the love. It was great seeing people come back together," anniversary committee chairperson Sheila Bolin said. (TAB)

Docena Baptist celebrates centennial anniversary

Leading up to Nov. 11 members of Docena Baptist Church in Birmingham

Baptist Association, worked on the buildings and grounds in preparation for the church's centennial celebration.

On Nov. 11 those workers were recognized during the special service.

Pastor Mike Woodham also preached from Acts 2. "We need to expect something from God when we go to church," he said.

Congregational singing was led by former music director Lisa Metcalfe.

Lonette Berg, from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented Docena Baptist with a certificate recognizing the anniversary.

The church gave out tote bags with special pens, fans and calendars inside. There also was a photo album put together with old photos from the church.

"It was a great day seeing the church full of old friends," church member Pat Metcalfe said. (Jessica Ingram)

Beulah Baptist reflects on 25 years of ministry

Members of Beulah Baptist Church, Dadeville, in Tallapoosa Baptist Association, gathered on Nov. 11 to celebrate the church's 25-year anniversary.

Tina Lynch, Randall McClendon, Belinda Taunton, the Beulah Boys and the Beulah Praise Team shared special music.

Calvin Milford, from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented the church with a commemorative certificate.

Tim Davis read a historical sketch written by Clairine Phillips in the 1950s. Three members — Ricky Phillips, a lifetime member of Beulah Baptist; Ed Nelson, a member for 20 years; and Daniel Futrell, a new member of Beulah — shared what the church has meant to them.

Lunch followed the service.

"It was a really good day," Pastor Tim Davis said. (Jessica Ingram)



Photo by Ellen Dewberry



Photo by Lonette Berg



Photo by Ralph Foster



Photo by Lonette Berg



BALDWIN

► **Bayside Church, Lillian**, will hold its Christmas program Dec. 16, 6 p.m. Tom Harris is pastor.

BIGBEE

► **Bigbee Association** recently welcomed **First Church, Clinton**, into its association. Bigbee Association unanimously voted to invite First, Clinton, into the association at its annual meeting Oct. 16 after the church spent a year under watchcare. First, Clinton, began in June 2003 but was not a member of an association. Last year the church approached Bigbee Association and asked about becoming a member of the association. Bigbee Association is now comprised of 18 churches in Sumter and Greene counties. Brad Campbell is associational missionary for Bigbee Association. Jason Stephens is pastor of First, Clinton.

COFFEE

► **New Haven Church, Elba**, will hold its Christmas cantata, "Good News from Home," on Dec. 16, 10 a.m. A finger-food fellowship will follow the service. For more information call 334-301-5205. Shane Thompson is pastor. ► **New Home Church, Enterprise**, will present its children's Christmas musical Dec. 16, 6 p.m. For more information call 334-347-3646. Clifford Quincey is pastor.

MONTGOMERY

► **Teddy Gandy** is new pastor of **Pike Road Church**. He previously served as an elder and minister for the church. He and his wife, Juanda, have two children and one grandchild.

MUD CREEK

► **Liberty Church, Bessemer**, and **Smithville Church, Bessemer**, will host a community Christmas tree lighting at Oak Grove Memorial Park on Dec. 16, 5 p.m. Snacks and hot chocolate will be available, and Smithville will perform its live nativity. Jerry Mitchell is pastor of Liberty Church, and Mike Simpson is pastor of Smithville Church.

TUSCALOOSA

► **Taylorville Church, Tuscaloosa**, will hold The Star of Bethlehem Live Nativity on Dec. 15-16, 6-8 p.m. It will include drive-thru scenes with live characters and animals. Vans and buses welcome. For more information call 205-758-0868 or email office@taylorvillebaptist.org. Randy Pate is pastor. ✝

Email your information to news@thealabamabaptist.org or call 1-800-803-5201. Church announcements should arrive three weeks prior to the event.

Collegiate campus 'missions field'

Christmas break a great opportunity to reach out to your church's college students

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

For students, college is a season of "firsts" — and it's important that churches stay right in the middle of that, Chris Mills said.

"Encouragement from their home church leaders can help them stay grounded in their faith as they navigate this new chapter," said Mills, student missions strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Ministry ideas

As your church prepares to welcome home students on Christmas break, what are some things you can do to encourage them to get plugged in and stay plugged in?

One simple thing you can do is host a welcome party, Mills said. Jonathan Lancaster, associate

pastor of First Baptist Church, Boaz, said his church tries to throw a party like that every December as students are returning.

"When our students from away come back, we try to involve them and plan some activity with them to give them an opportunity to be together," he said. "We have a lot of students who have family in the church, and they're going to be here anyway — we want to make sure they're not forgotten."

For First, Boaz, Christmas is a great time to reconnect — but they hope it's simply an extension of their effort to try to stay connected all year long, Lancaster said.

"We try to do little things, like text them or give them a call every now and then during the school year," he said. "We have some ladies who do care packages for us and will get all the names of the students who are

away at college and send them to them."

Mills said care packages and notes are a great way to stay in touch. He said it's so important to stay in touch with students all year long, as a home church can be a big influence if it leverages that opportunity.

'Go and visit'

"Go and visit your students," he said, suggesting that you offer to meet them at their school's Baptist Campus Ministries to learn about the ministry opportunities there.

Mills also said social media is a great way to keep up with them.

And when they're home for Christmas, "spend some time with them one-on-one or in small groups debriefing their semester," he said.

Another possibility that Mills suggested was to set up opportunities for returning students to serve in the community or on missions trips outside of the local church.

Lancaster said his church has done that in the past, as well as inviting returning college stu-



Photo courtesy of Jonathan Lancaster

Every Christmas break FBC Boaz welcomes its college students back home by hosting get-togethers.

dents to be a part of the church's Christmas musical.

"We just want to do whatever we can to make sure there's not a disconnect there," he said.

Walk alongside them

Mills encouraged churches to spend time finding the opportunities God has given them to keep students connected.

"Imagine the impact that a student can have on their campus as they seek to boldly live out their faith," he said. "What a blessing to be able to walk alongside students on the collegiate campus 'missions field' — let's pray for them and find our place in encouraging them to live boldly for the sake of Christ." ✝



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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 16

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

FAMILY?
Genesis 29:16-30

Jacob's Proposal (16-20)

Uncle Laban brought up the subject of wages with Jacob: "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing?" This introduction of wages was followed by an ominous revelation.

Laban had two daughters, Leah, the older, and Rachel, the younger. The older-younger sibling conflict introduced here is ominous, reminding Jacob of the misery between him and his older brother Esau. Jacob's past was catching up with him.

Laban's older daughter, Leah, had "weak" eyes. Her eyes lacked a fire or sparkle or glow. On the other hand, Rachel, the younger daughter, was a knockout in Jacob's estimation. And we are told that Jacob loved Rachel so passionately he was willing to work seven years for her hand in marriage. The going dowry price was three or four years, but Jacob's seven years seemed like only a few days because of his love for Rachel.

Rachel was the true love in Jacob's life, despite the fact that he would father children by Leah and the two wives' female slaves. Even on his deathbed Jacob commented about his sorrow when Rachel had died. His heart for Rachel never waned.

Laban's Deception (21-24)

For the first time Jacob was the object of deception. The similarity between what Laban did to Jacob and what Jacob had done to Isaac is remarkable. Jacob was getting his just desserts.

It is clear from Scripture that Jacob's deceptive schemes for obtaining the blessing did not meet with the Lord's approval. Through Jacob's scheming God's will had been accomplished. The writer, however, is intent on pointing out that the schemes were not of God's design.

Instead of the one woman he loved, Jacob found himself married to two women and also involved with their female slaves.

Twelve sons and one daughter would be born to the four women. Through Leah and her slave Zilpah, eight of the twelve tribes would come. Though unloved by Jacob, Leah would be the mother of Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun. Despised Leah was the hereditary mother of the kingly tribe of Judah and the priestly tribe of Levi. Her offspring included Moses, David and Jesus Christ. God's work goes on and even thrives amid human failure.

Jacob must have wondered if God was still the God of Jacob. The divine stairway was still there, and the Lord was keeping him. Jacob, however, did not escape the consequences of his own sins. God had brought the arch-deceiver into the life of the great patriarch-deceiver so that Jacob's sin might be displayed before his eyes.

His nemesis was an instrument in the hands of God to shape and transform Jacob's heart. Jacob was going to be changed over a period of time. He would become Israel, a prince of God.

Seven More Years (25-30)

When Jacob awoke to the morning glow of the sun illuminating his tent, Jacob was horrified to discover that he had actually married Leah. She was now his wife. There was no reversing the consummation. The deceiver had been deceived. He must have felt betrayed, embarrassed and angry.

He confronted Laban. "Why then have you deceived me?" The verb "deceived" is the same stem used to describe Jacob's deception of Esau when he stole Esau's blessing (Gen. 27:35).

Having been deceived, Jacob agreed to work for Laban another seven years for Rachel. He was allowed to marry her after one week, but he was still indebted to Laban for seven more years.✠

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

MARY'S TRUST
Luke 1:26-38

God in His initiative of divine grace chooses a young unmarried woman from an obscure village to be the mother of the Son of God. Mary's response is that of a model believer. Phillips Brooks' hymn "O Little Town of Bethlehem" declares that "the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight." This is even more true of Mary, mother of our Lord. Our hopes and fears are all reflected in her trusting response to God's mighty gift.

Rely on the presence and grace of God. (26-30)

The gospel witnesses and the ancient creeds confess that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin by the miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit. In this way God made a new beginning in human history. God Himself originated a particular human life — Jesus of Nazareth — by a new act of creation. Our Savior did not arise out of the continuity of human history. Rather God came to the rescue by offering us His Son who stepped out of eternity and into our frail and desperate world. In a wonderfully related way a person becomes a Christian by the operation of the Holy Spirit in new birth. The same God who can create by a virgin birth can intervene in human life today by offering "whosoever" the chance to be spiritually reborn.

Nazareth was a small village of about 1,500 people in Jesus' time. The village was located in the hill country of southern Galilee near the Valley of Jezreel. Why would God choose this obscure village, which was looked down upon by the people of Galilee ("Can anything good come out of Nazareth?") and which was of such low standing that it was not included in the lists of towns of Galilee? Because God uses the humble and lowly to do great

things. As He did then He does so today with ordinary people doing unlikely acts for His glory.

Trust the plan of God. (31-34)

Gabriel told Mary to name her son "Yeshua." The name "Jesus" comes from the Greek; but Mary would have heard Gabriel's words in Aramaic. "Yeshua" means "God saves" or "God delivers." Gabriel told Mary that her child would be "great." One day her son would teach the disciples what that word meant when He said, "whoever wishes to be great among you, he will be your servant" (Matt. 20:26).

Gabriel prophesied the Lord God will give Jesus the throne of His ancestor David and He will reign over Israel forever. The angel's words echo the great covenant the Lord God made with David in 2 Samuel 7 where David is told his throne and kingdom would last for all time. The parallels between this Old Testament passage and Luke 1 indicate that Luke sees in the birth of Jesus the fulfillment of the hope that a descendant of David would someday arise, as promised in Genesis 49:10 and Isaiah 9:1-7.

Trust the power of God. (35-38)

Unlike the question of Zechariah in Luke 1:18, Mary's question — "How can this be?" — carries no connotation of unbelief. Since Mary is only engaged to Joseph and is therefore still a virgin (v. 27), her question is a natural one. The angel explains that her pregnancy will result from the Holy Spirit, and for this reason her child will be called the Son of God. As evidence for this extraordinary promise Gabriel informs Mary of Elizabeth's pregnancy. In response Mary offers her classic statement of trust: "I am the Lord's servant! Let it happen as you have said." Such are the words of faith and submission that all God's people should voice.✠

Christian Crossword

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Across

- Brought him to an _____. (Luke 10:34)
- The house was filled with the ____ of the ointment. (John 12:3)
- Clip.
- Deliver thyself as a ____ from the hunter. (Prov. 6:5)
- This is now ____ of my bones. (Gen. 2:23)
- Greek letter.
- Of birds. (prefix)
- Very. (French)
- Went by plane.
- Lunatic.
- Again he ____ the same sacrifices. (Heb. 10:11)
- Iowa. (abbr.)
- Rhode Island. (abbr.)
- We remember the leeks, and the _____. (Num. 11:5)
- Leah was ____ eyed. (Gen. 29:17)
- Teachers organization.
- And Bezaleel the son of _____. (Ex. 38:22)
- God shall send them ____ delusion. (2 Thess. 2:11)
- And John bare ____, saying, I saw the Spirit. (John 1:32)

Down

- Each. (abbr.)
- And she (Shuah) conceived, and bore a son; and he called his name _____. (Gen. 38:3)
- I will not be an _____. (Isa. 3:7)
- The disciples asked him again of the same _____. (Mark 10:10)
- Naum, which was the son of _____. (Luke 3:25)
- God. (Spanish)
- Then enquired he of them the hour he began to _____. (John 4:52)
- The blind receive their sight, and the ____ walk. (Matt. 11:5)
- Between. (combining form)
- 1/1000 inch.
- Plutonium, arsenic. (chem. symbols)
- Scottish denials.
- Isle in England.
- For whoso findeth me ... shall ____ favor of the Lord. (Prov. 8:35)
- Also called Tabitha. (Acts 9:36)
- First number.
- My strong habitation whereunto I may continually _____. (Ps. 71:3)
- Spat.
- Part in a play.
- To do again and again: ____ ate.
- They shall give unto the priest the shoulder ... and the ____ (pl.). (Deut. 18:3)
- Response of disgust. (archaic)
- Belonging to a son of Peleth. (Num. 16:1)
- Let his ____ that he hath hid catch himself. (Ps. 35:8)
- Adjective suffix.
- A pair.
- If any of you do ____ from the truth. (James 5:19)
- I will ____ evil beasts out of the land. (Lev. 26:6)
- Born.
- The Lord God planted a ____ eastward in Eden. (Gen. 2:8)
- Distant.
- Deletes.
- My ____ cometh from the Lord. (Ps. 121:2)
- Jacob's twin.
- Woman's name.
- Or if he finds lost property and ____ about it. (Lev. 6:3)
- But the tongue can no man _____. (James 3:8)
- Man's name.
- Because thou didst ____ on the Lord. (2 Chron. 16:8)
- For I am ____ strait betwixt two. (Phil. 1:23; 2 words)





Media reviews

TV/MOVIES

Awe-inspiring 'Blue Planet II' leads December streaming lineup

By Michael Foust
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

King David likely would have enjoyed watching nature documentaries on television. After all he's the one who told us "the heavens declare the glory of God" (Ps. 19:1) and that mountain peaks and seas are in God's hands (Ps. 95:4-5).

I'm guessing he'd particularly enjoy watching the new BBC documentary "Blue Planet II," which examines ocean life. That's because an amazed David wrote that God's sea creation was "vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number — living things both large and small" (Ps. 104:25).

Rarely seen creatures

"Blue Planet II" — a seven-episode series initially released in 2017 — is now streaming on Netflix, giving us a peek at some of those rarely seen "large and small" creatures David was referencing. It is a follow-up to the popular 2001 documentary "Blue Planet."

The latest "Blue Planet" series includes the distinguished voice of host and narrator David Attenborough along with a stellar soundtrack from composer Hans Zimmer to give it an otherworldly feel. Of course it also includes a

few references to evolution, but that doesn't get in the way of incredible cinematography that will leave you wondering: How'd they get that shot?

The oceans, Attenborough tells us, cover 70 percent of the planet and "yet they are still the least explored."

"Hidden beneath the waves, right beneath my feet, there are creatures beyond our imagination," Attenborough says as he stands on a boat.

Among my favorite creatures in the series is the cartoon-like tusk fish, which lives among Australia's Great Barrier Reef and travels each day to the edge of the reef to hunt for clams. Once it finds one, the tusk fish carries the clam in its mouth back to its home, where it bangs the shell against a rock dozens of times until it cracks, revealing the meat inside. It's a scene worthy of a "Finding Nemo"-like film — except it's real life.

The observation of God's creation drove David to worship. That should be true of us as well.

Also streaming this month:

For adults/teens

► **"Nailed It! Holiday!" (Netflix)** — Ordinary people try to recreate edible masterpieces in this wacky and hilarious reality program. Rated TV-PG.



Photo courtesy of BBC

'Blue Planet II'

► **"Avengers: Infinity War" (Netflix, Dec. 25)** — "The Avengers," "Guardians of the Galaxy" and "Black Panther" come together to fight evil. The good news: "Infinity War" doesn't have the low-brow humor of the Guardians films. The bad news: It's still quite violent, with some language. Still, it's a fun movie and it has themes — including the lust for power — that can spark discussions. Rated PG-13 for intense sequences of sci-fi violence and action throughout, language and some crude references.

► **"I Survived I Kissed Dating Goodbye" (Amazon Prime)** — Joshua Harris, the author of "I Kissed Dating Goodbye," talks about what he thinks he got right and what he thinks he got wrong in his popular book. This faith-based documentary began streaming in November.

► **"Valkyrie" (Amazon Prime)** — German officer Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg (Tom Cruise) plots to kill Hitler in this 2008 thriller. It raises ethical questions that college and seminary students debate every day. Rated PG-13 for violence and brief strong language.

For children

► **"Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs" (Netflix)** — A young boy invents a machine that turns water into food. Chaos ensues. This 2009 animated film is a favorite in my home. Rated PG for

brief mild language. (A character says h-ll hole.)

► **"Astro Boy" (Netflix)** — A scientist creates a robotic boy to replace his deceased son. Because of the theme and to mild violence, it may be more appropriate for older children. Rated PG for some action and peril. (Note: the movie has a few potty terms and references to "stupid" and "idiot," but I have never heard any coarse language.) Animated.

► **"Mowgli: Legend of the Jungle" (Netflix)** — This is Warner Brothers' live-action version of the "Jungle Book" story. It originally was set to be released in theaters, but after Disney's own version of the story became a box office hit, Warner Brothers sold its movie rights to Netflix. (Yes, there

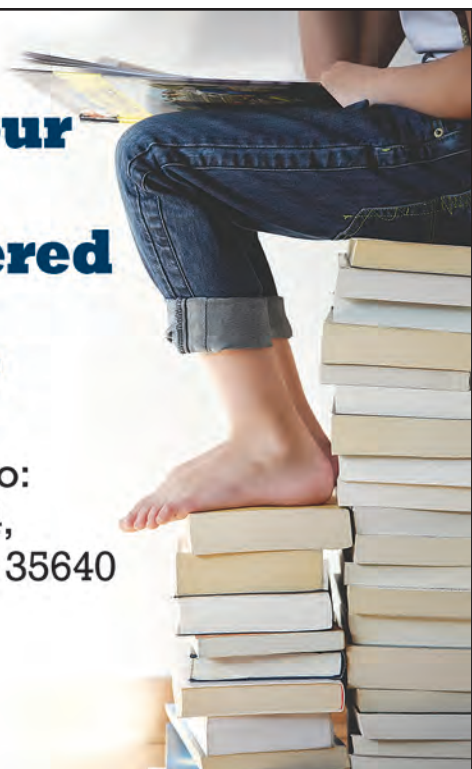
were going to be two "Jungle Book"-type films in theaters.) I'd recommend screening this one before showing it to small children. Rated PG-13 for intense sequences of action violence, some bloody images and thematic elements.†

Meet the reviewer

Michael Foust covers the intersection of faith and entertainment as a media reviewer for The Alabama Baptist. He also is the husband of an amazing wife and the father of four young children.

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Joshua Harris from 'I Survived I Kissed Dating Goodbye'

Photo courtesy of Exploration Films

Faith, family, football

Tennessee Titans punter keeps priorities in order

By Bill Sorrell
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Brett Kern may make a living playing football, but it was a game of softball that changed his life.

During an intramural co-ed softball game at the University of Toledo he tagged a young woman sliding into home plate. Kern looked at his roommate and said, "I am going to marry that woman someday."

He wasn't joking. Kern and his wife Tiffany celebrated their 10th anniversary this past summer, just one of the blessings God has bestowed on the Pro Bowl punter for the Tennessee Titans.

"I am thankful to wake up every morning to my beautiful wife. We have three beautiful kids," Kern said. "That the Lord sent His Son to die on the cross for us so we can have eternal life with Him is [also] a beautiful thing. My goal is to share His light. I want people to see the Lord through what I do."

Saved at six years old, Kern, 32, rededicated his life to Christ while he and Tiffany were dating. He said he has been growing ever since.

For the last two years Kern has been going through the Bible-in-a-year plan. That daily reading is teaching Kern "to put my full trust in the Lord in everything, not just 99 percent but that final 1 percent. The Lord wants us to put our trust in Him 100 percent."

He also reads the devotional book by Sarah Young, "Jesus Calling" before work each day.

"I have been through that book about five times. It's amazing

how each year different things impact you in different ways and what the Lord is trying to put on your heart or trying to show you as you get in the Word and spend time with Him."

'Play for the Lord'

Some of Kern's favorite verses are Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight."

For Kern it is faith first, then family and football.

"I play for the Lord. He is the One who blessed me to play this game. He has given me the talent and ability to do this. It would be a sin not to give it all I have for Him. The Lord has blessed me immensely to kick a football, and He has blessed me in other areas."

Kern's 10-year career punt average is 45.8 yards. His longest career punt was 79 yards against Indianapolis on Dec. 28, 2014. In 2017 he went to his first Pro Bowl after a career-high 49.71-yard average. His longest punt last season was 74 yards.

Prior to the 2018 season he had 760 punts for 34,773 yards.

Mental approach

"Brett is one of the best punters in the league," said Titans placekicker Ryan Succop. "He had an amazing season last year. He has been so good every year he has been here."

Other Titans teammates agree.

Wide receiver Luke Stocker said Kern's mental approach is important.

"Where he places it and drops it, it's very technical. Him being mentally strong and if he has a bad kick

here and there, he can overcome that to get the next kick and put his punt spot-on-the-money for us. I see that as a big strength of his," said Stocker.

Kern calls himself a perfectionist, which he says is both a great attribute and his worst enemy.

"That is the reason why I have done well but ... trying to battle that day in and day out is something that I am always turning over to the Lord," he said.

Along with punting, Kern wants to make a spiritual impact on players. Through the way he treats players, the music he listens to and what he says, he wants others to see His light.

"We are not perfect and we sin, but trying to shine His light the best I can, I want

people to see something different and what makes me tick," said Kern.

Succop calls it a blessing to work with Kern. They encourage each other, study the Bible together and push each other while being there and praying for each other. They also clown around together.

"It's cool to come to work with guys you really enjoy being around. That makes things that much better. ... We have different personalities that mesh well together."

While people's perceptions of NFL players is that they find value and worth in material things, Kern takes pride in not getting wrapped up in that.

"Knowing this is my calling and this is where the Lord has me, I am supposed to be different and shine His light." ✠



Brett Kern

Photo courtesy of Tennessee Titans

RELIGION
in America
Compiled from Wire Services

Sanctuary churches react to migrant's arrest

DURHAM, N.C. — The Nov. 23 arrest of an undocumented lay minister from Mexico has the nation's sanctuary churches doubling down on security protocols to protect those living within their facilities.

Samuel Oliver-Bruno left CityWell Church in Durham, North Carolina, where he had taken sanctuary for 11 months, for fingerprinting at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). When he arrived at the USCIS office, he was taken into custody by agents from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Oliver-Bruno is expected to be deported back to Mexico.

Thirty-six U.S. churches are providing sanctuary for some 52 undocumented people, according to Church World Service, a multid denominational Christian ministry that works on immigration and other social justice issues.

Since 2014 no undocumented immigrant taking sanctuary in a church has been arrested on its premises. However, when those undocumented people have stepped out of church sanctuary, they have promptly been jailed and deported.

Church leaders expressed alarm because Oliver-Bruno's arrest appeared to be a coordinated effort between ICE and USCIS.

Noel Andersen, national grassroots coordinator for Church World Service, said he doesn't remember another such incident.

"USCIS is supposed to assist immigrants in becoming citizens, not set them up for deportation," Andersen said. (RNS)

Christmas imagery complaints increase

WASHINGTON — A watchdog group who claims to advocate for religious freedom in the United States Armed Forces (USAF) says the organization is receiving twice as many calls as usual regarding Christian Christmas imagery used at bases, especially in Muslim countries.

In a Nov. 29 article, *Newsweek* magazine reported that over Thanksgiving weekend, a Bible-shaped cake inscribed with Bible verses was served at an event for service members, families and coalition partners at Al Udeid Air Force Base in Qatar. An Air Force public affairs officer posted a picture of the cake online. After complaints to the Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF), pictures of the cake were deleted.

MRFF also posted a letter on its website from an unnamed Muslim recruit at another Air Force base in an unnamed Muslim nation who said his commander ordered him to don a Santa Claus costume at what he was calling the base Christmas party. After MRFF spoke with base leadership, the party was renamed "holiday party" and the order to wear the suit was rescinded.

The MRFF is an advocacy organization whose stated goals are to "ensure that members of the [USAF] receive the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom to which they are entitled." The organization's founder describes the group's target as "a small subset of fundamentalist Christianity." (TAB)

ETS meeting includes 190 Baptist presenters

DENVER — Some 190 of 750 presentations at the Evangelical Theological Society's (ETS) annual meeting were offered by scholars with ties to Southern Baptist churches, Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) entities and colleges that partner with Baptist state conventions.

The 2,700 participants at the Nov. 13-15 meeting in Denver marked the second highest ETS attendance ever, the society told Baptist Press, who conducted the informal count of Baptist presenters. Professors from all six SBC seminaries presented papers at ETS, with many focusing on the meeting's Holy Spirit theme.

Southern Baptists involved in ETS leadership include David Dockery, president of Trinity International University in Deerfield, Illinois; Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky; and Gregg Allison, professor at Southern Seminary.

The 2019 ETS annual meeting is Nov. 19-21 in San Diego, California. (BP)