



The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

INSIDE



A look at mass incarceration in Alabama — eighth in a series

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



An Udmurt Russian Orthodox priest at the church in Izhevsk.

IMB photo

New challenges

Russia joins World Watch List for first time since 2011

The 2019 Open Doors World Watch List reveals disturbing revelations for the world's two most populous countries — China and India — which have seen a dramatic increase in persecution against Christians.

China's dramatic rise in 16 spots from No. 43 in 2018 to No. 27 in 2019 is one of the

highest jumps on the list.

India enters the top 10 list for the first time, as Hindu nationalists continue to fuel a crackdown on Christians and churches, promoting the widespread oppression of religious minorities.

Exponential impact

As both China and India are home to more than a billion people, even an incremental rise in persecution has an outsized, exponential impact in these countries.

The heightened power of the Chinese government is being wielded to remove any challenges to the absolute

authority of President Xi Jinping, even if those challenges are related to personal faith in a god other than the government. New regulations and government crackdowns have made open worship increasingly risky, particularly in certain regions of the country. Pastor Wang Yi's recent arrest along with some 150 Christians is a recent indicator of the expanding level of control and religious persecution.

In India non-Hindus are increasingly regarded as outsiders in their own country. In some areas this has translated to brutal violence against
(See 'Persecution,' page 9)

FBC Huntsville helps furloughed workers

First Baptist Church, Huntsville, in Madison Baptist Association, provided \$16,500 of grocery store gift cards to furloughed government workers in the area at an event hosted by the church Jan. 17.

In addition to the gift cards the church provided space for several community aid organizations to set up information booths and connect federal workers with local services.

In a Facebook video First, Huntsville, pastor Travis Collins said the church was "hosting a lot of good neighbors being neighbors." In a letter Collins said the church had used its disaster relief funds to purchase the grocery cards.

'Christ's love'

Kim Spencer, who works at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center, said in a Facebook message the gift cards were appreciated.

"FBC's generosity ... is a living, breathing example of Christ's love," she wrote.

Huntsville is home to Marshall Space Flight Center and Redstone Arsenal, which combined employ some 40,000 federal workers. The partial government shutdown that began Dec. 22 has hit the community hard, from the workers going
(See 'Federal,' page 14)

SCWC, TAB to host book expo in Birmingham

Words are powerful. They teach, they inspire, they empower. They can change people's moods in a breath. For more than 25 years the Southern Christian Writers Conference (SCWC) has embraced the power of words and encouraged writers to find their voice. And how do these writers find their voice? They write. They write devotionals, they write novels, they write children's books, they write poems, they write nonfiction. And now they are putting them on display.

This year SCWC is starting something new — a book expo. The annual conference isn't until

June, but the Southern Christian Book Expo is coming up soon. On Feb. 2, First Baptist Church, Birmingham, will host the first annual Southern Christian Book Expo from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

For more information, search for the Southern Christian Book Expo on Facebook or email cherylswwray@gmail.com.

This is an opportunity for readers to browse books written by local and regional authors, meet and have those authors sign the books, listen as authors read selections from their best works, explore the services offered by professional vendors and win door prizes.

Books for every taste and every genre — Christian living, mystery, humor, romance will be available. "We wanted to do something for those avid readers who especially love faith-based nonfiction and fiction books," said Cheryl Wray, coordinator of the SCWC. "This will be a wonderful opportunity to meet authors, buy books from local, state and regional authors and enjoy time

with others who also love to read." Around 50 authors are scheduled to attend including Julie Sparkman and Jennifer Phillips (authors of "Unhitching the Crazy Train"), Todd Gerelds (author of "Wood-lawn"), Grace Thornton (author of "Unshakable Pursuit: Chasing the God Who Chases Us"), mystery novelist and Georgia Author of the Year Deborah Malone, young adult author and Birmingham blogger Chandra Sparks, romance novelist Vanessa Griggs, poet Wynne Huddleston, humor writer Kelly Kazek, and others.

New reading list

"We've made great friends through the Southern Christian Writers Conference and wanted to expand our reach. The book expo will be the perfect time to get your reading to-do list going for the new year," Wray said.

The Southern Christian Book Expo is sponsored by the Southern Christian Writers Conference and *The Alabama Baptist*. (TAB)

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Are you on the go often? Do you prefer to receive your news content in the palm of your hand? *The Alabama Baptist* (TAB) gives you options for how you experience TAB. Along with the print issue of the paper delivered weekly to readers' doorsteps, TAB also offers a digital edition that is emailed weekly.

For more information on any of the services described, email news@thealabamabaptist.org.

weekly newsletter is distributed by email, and it is interactive with links to the top stories and easy access to TAB's social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. To sign up for TAB Preview

email news@thealabamabaptist.org.

Readers can also interact with TAB by visiting its social media sites on Face-

book and Twitter. These sites allow readers to leave comments, share content and give feedback on the news published by TAB every day. The team at TAB wants to hear from its readers.

Email news@thealabamabaptist.org and have your voice heard. (TAB)

The digital edition contains the same content as the print edition — but you can access it anywhere and anytime as long as you have email access.

TAB also offers TAB Preview, which provides a sneak peek of the weekly stories featured in TAB. The

Listen to the TAB News podcast anywhere you get your podcasts or visit thealabamabaptist.org/explore/podcasts/.



"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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1 Download the HP Reveal app from your app store.

2 Tap the icon at the bottom of the screen.

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

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

5 Each week when TAB arrives, look for the AR logo to watch the video extras through the app.



MY RASHIONALE

By Jennifer Davis Rash

President and Editor-in-Chief

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February challenge — fast from cable news networks

Are you up for a challenge? How about a fast? It's not quite the Lenten season — it begins March 6 this year — but we can go ahead and start warming up now.

My challenge to you for February is to fast from the cable news networks — all of them.

Why? To give our blood pressures a break and to remember who we really are.

February is the month of love so I'm challenging Alabama Baptists and all who are reading this to intently focus on the love of Christ and actually love like Christ during the month. We can't do that if we are constantly seething with frustration.

Stay informed and updated on the news of the day — that is important for sure — but find ways to do it without getting riled up in anger.

When TV or radio personalities share headlines, in-depth reports and featured spotlights with raised voices, emotional overtones and opinions rather than straight facts, then they have stepped out of news reporting and into editorializing.

Consuming editorialized information in bite sizes isn't a problem in and of itself, but overdosing on it without a solid break can affect us much more than we realize.

What if we could read or hear the news old-school style? Just the facts, no spin, no interpretation based on personal agendas and political posturing.

What if we could go back to

finding out what happened overnight each morning and then getting a recap of what happened during the day that night?

Granted we now live in a 24/7 breaking news culture and demands are high for up-to-the-minute news. We at *TAB* understand and work to keep up with that expectation as well. Still I'm convinced it doesn't have to change our hearts in the process.

The world needs hope and those of us who know the answer to that hope need to be focusing on showing others why they would want to embrace it. That requires attention and love.

Take me up on the challenge and see what happens. See if you can tell a difference in your spirit. Are you calmer and more patient without cable news networks? Do you show more grace and love as natural reactions? Are you less aggressive in your behaviors and able to enjoy more of your day?

It's possible you won't see many changes and that's OK too. That may mean you are able to sift through the content presented appropriately and make informed decisions without it ruining your day.

But anything that distracts us

from striving to be more like Christ and convinces us it is OK to be mean-spirited should concern us.

During the fast, consider trading the time you would have spent consuming cable news content for reading the Bible. You might also spend time talking to your family and friends about what's going on with them personally rather than hashing out the latest political headlines together.

Think of the tremendous difference we could make in only one month of prioritizing our options and choosing love. 🌈

RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

Life lessons learned on the farm — what hanging out with a few thousand chickens can teach you

A persistent push for immediate action, consistent determination and keeping the important responsibilities as top priorities — all of these are ways to describe urgency.

Maintaining and modeling a sense of urgency is important for us as believers because of our mandate to share Christ and make disciples.

It also helps those of us who want to stay sharp, be productive, streamline routines and live efficiently and effectively.

An intense focus seeking quality results regarding a crucial situation might be another way to explain it.

But no matter how you describe it, the hurry and haste associated with urgency does not equate to chaos and carelessness.



I remember moments when I've rushed around in a tizzy, attempting to make up a few minutes of lost time only to create more problems for myself. Instead of gaining time, I actually lost time because I spilled water on my project or took the wrong exit off the interstate and

got stuck in traffic or tripped and hurt myself — all from rushing rather than concentrating.

I learned this lesson the best when my dad was teaching me how to gather eggs in our family layer (chicken) house. I was 15 years old and a bit scared of both the hens and the roosters.

Dad taught me to move with a smooth, calm motion through the large housing facility filled with hundreds of individual hen houses, slipping my hand carefully but quickly into the nests to grab the eggs.

Maintaining a steady, focused pace and not over reacting to every peck or screech helped settle my feathered friends down.

It also meant fewer broken eggs and a successful contribution to the day's overall results. 🌈

Your Voice



Share your comments, letters to the editor, blog excerpts, social media posts

Overcoming darkness in a dark world

Cheryl Goss
Founder, Connecting Ministries

But the godly will flourish like palm trees and grow strong like the cedars of Lebanon” (Ps. 92:12, NLT).

I have prayed over this Scripture many years now and I always love the encouragement I receive from it.

The trees this Scripture refers to are palm trees that stood tall and lived long.

The cedars grew to 120 ft. in height and up to 30 ft. in circumference.

They were solid, strong and immovable.

Throughout my life, I have walked through many seasons of darkness,

seasons of depression, addictions and abuse.

This darkness followed me into my young adult years where I found myself at the age of 20 feeling alone and in an abusive marriage.

During my three years of marriage, I had a baby boy and I knew I wanted him to have a different life.

However, during this time I felt myself falling into a deep depression. I knew things needed to change but I didn’t know how and didn’t have the strength I needed to overcome this darkness that had consumed my life.

I did not know Christ at the time, but soon after walking through a divorce, I accepted Jesus as my

Savior. Since then, I’ve learned that Christian women also walk through darkness.

The trials and burdens of life can be withering.

Without the sun, trees are not able to flourish and grow. The same goes for you and me.

When we get stuck in the enemy’s shadow, we are not able to grow and flourish as we should in Christ.

Life pulls us in every direction. It hits us when we are down. It can leave us feeling uncertain. It overwhelms us on most days.

When we are in the trenches of everyday life, it can sometimes be hard for us to see His love and the light that can only come from Him.

There is one thing I know for sure — if we are placing our faith firmly in God, He will give us the strength and vitality to get through each day.

He will give us the strength we need to overcome that darkness.

Just like the cedars of Lebanon, we will grow in our walk, we will become strong, and we will begin to flourish.

Father, help me to flourish and grow, to become more like you.

Help me to be brave and unshakable in life’s darkness. Amen.

EDITOR’S NOTE — Cheryl Goss is a women’s conference speaker, Bible teacher, encourager, and founder of Connecting Ministries, which is hosting the Flourish Conference at Samford University’s Wright Center Feb. 15–16.

If you’re a Christian artist, you want to lead with your talent. Do not lead with your message. ... Be good enough to be noticed and that’s going to put you in a lot of places that you’re never going to go if you lead with your message.

David Garrard
Magician and minister
TAB News podcast

Evangelism works if you do it. There are people close by, those within a couple of hours of you, and the whole world waiting to hear the good news.

John Bush
Across Festivals
Montgomery, Ala.

I never want to get over the fact that Jesus saved me from a devil’s hell, God’s just wrath, and my awful sin.

Scott McCullar, Pastor
First Baptist Church,
Carbon Hill

Want to be a great leader? Then start taking some action. It truly is this simple.

John C. Maxwell
Author, speaker, pastor

My Jesus Story

But for His love ... I was reading a devotional on Psalm 118:1–7 and that got me thinking about where I’d be but for His love.

One place I’d be for sure is dead. He saved me from many dangerous situations that I had no business being in — a violent relationship, homelessness, two suicide attempts and a life of addiction to alcohol.

Another place I’d be is in hell but for His love. His forgiveness and grace is something that I cannot fathom. He looked at everything I had done and will do

in disgust but loved me so much that He forgave me anyway.

He looks at you and your life in the same way. No matter where you are in this journey — saved and redeemed, backslidden, lost, struggling with addiction and sin, miserable — whatever and wherever you are, He sees you. There is nothing you can hide from Him and He loves you anyway.

My love for Him grows every day. My prayer is I show people what it is to be loved by Jesus through my life.

Jenni Ingram, Member
First Baptist Church, Gantt

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“The church needed to meet.”

JAMES TROGLEN

*Pastor, First Baptist Church, Wetumpka,
after a Jan. 19 tornado destroyed the church's multipurpose building*

(New York's Reproductive Health Act) has expanded abortion-on-demand in New York past 24 weeks — well past when unborn children feel pain, are viable, and suffer during the course of an abortion — and up to birth. This is inhumane.

**Christina Fadden, Chair
New York State Right to Life**

We speak about those the world doesn't want to hear about — whether they are unborn children or abused women or neglected elderly or scapegoated migrants — not because we are “winning” on the issue at the moment but because we must speak, conscience to conscience, with Judgment Day in view. ... The pro-life, pro-human dignity work is a long arc, and the

more people know what we are talking about, the more will oppose it. We speak still, and, ultimately, we win.

**Russell Moore
President, Ethics & Religious
Liberty Commission of the
Southern Baptist Convention**

God has placed each of us into our particular place in life for a reason. The people who live near you or the people you work with or that you go to school with or the people in your family are not there coincidentally. He's put you there to serve His purposes by being a positive, Godly influence in the lives of your neighbors.

**IMPACT blog
FBC Hartselle**

Some Christians treat a sport such as football as a mere triviality, a distraction or even an evil. But they are wrong to do so. ...

Enjoy the Super Bowl and keep it in perspective.

Football is an opportunity to remember the God who created us in his image, who created our world as a venue for the excitement and pleasure provided by sports and competition.

God is the one who is far greater than any of his good gifts. ...

He is the one who will return one day to restore his creation, abolishing the stresses and sadness from which sports often provide relief.

**Bruce Ashford
Provost, Southeastern Baptist
Theological Seminary**

From the *Twitterverse*

@bellevuepastor

Pray. Pray when you are grateful. Pray when you are anxious. Pray when you are lonely. Pray when you need wisdom. Pray early in the morning. Pray when you need forgiveness. Pray in faith. Pray promises from God's Word. Pray without ceasing. Pray like it matters.

@paulwasher

The truth that all believers will grow in sanctification is not founded upon their strength of will or degree of dedication. It is not something that they add to their faith in order to be saved, but rather the result of God's faithfulness to finish the work He began—Phil. 1:6.

@judahsmith

Are you struggling with sin, pain, regret? You don't need more will power. You need more of Jesus.

@jasonkeithallen

The Bible has proven itself powerful to withstand centuries of sloppy exegesis. That is true. But let that not be a license for our own sloppy exegesis. Be diligent in sermon preparation.

@Ryan_Whitley

Christianity was never intended to be lived individually but communally. That is why I love the church.

@nickfloyd8

“Anyone who serves God will discover sooner or later that the greatest hindrance he has in the Lord's work is not others, but himself.” Watchmen Nee

@AlanLCross

So good. Our life is to be a response to God. A reorientation

from self to Spirit day after day. Jesus has already gone before us and is calling us to join Him.

@craiggroeschel

The longer we carry a label, the less it describes our past and more it determines our future. Drop the label and allow your identity in Christ to define you.

@bobgoff

“What often keeps us from loving our neighbors is fear of what will happen if we do. Frankly, what scares me more is thinking about what will happen if we don't.” #EverybodyAlways

@plattdavid

What a privilege. In Christ, we can actually know the Most High God. May this reality never grow old in our hearts. #praytheword



Photo by SBOM

Rick Lance is the executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM).

Leadership Lessons

For a Sunday School leadership conference held in one of our associations, I was asked to speak on the subject of leadership. What you are about to read are the simple thoughts of a fellow laborer (1 Cor. 3:9) who has sought to make a difference for Christ.

► Trying to imitate someone else in leadership is not effective. Be yourself!

► Nurture and develop the best gifts and qualities in your life, and do the same in others. Be a developer not a dictator!

► People will follow a vision with a strategy. Be a strategic thinker and a visionary!

► When dealing with people, follow the principle of good news in print and bad news in person. Be willing to have face time with others!

► Conflict in some form is always present and significant conflict is always a possibility. Be as prepared as you can be!

► Change is a constant but for most churches evolutionary change is better than a revolutionary one. Be reasonable and realistic about it!

► Ministry is not a sprint, but rather it is a marathon. Be one who can pace himself!

► Remember that our goal in life is to please God, not ourselves or others. Be faithful!

—Rick Lance

During an Extended Family for Kids (EFK) Leader Training Workshop, Laure Clemons (right) has participants imagine their lives in 10 years to begin a conversation about goals and necessary steps.

'Doing prison'

One family's experience with prison inspires a program to help others

By **Martha Simmons**
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Before the accident Laure and Jerry Clemons had a pretty good life.

They had been married for six years and were raising a blended family of three girls. A recovering alcoholic, Jerry relied on his higher power — God — and had been sober for nine years. Faith was a central element in their lives.

"We're both Christians," Laure Clemons said, "and we were walking with God."

But one day in 2001, Jerry Clemons strayed off the path. He got blackout drunk, put his keys in the ignition and drove his car straight into an oncoming vehicle, killing one person and seriously injuring another. He was so badly hurt that he was initially pronounced dead at the scene, but after being airlifted to

a local hospital he eventually healed. He started over in his recovery from alcohol addiction. Two years later he pleaded guilty to manslaughter and assault and began serving a 25-year split sentence of six years in prison followed by 19 years on probation.

'Inevitable outcome'

During those two years leading up to the sentence — the first with police investigating the accident and the second with Jerry being charged, bonded out and finally standing before the judge — the couple worked through issues of anger and guilt and doubled down on their relationship with God. While Jerry seemed resigned to the consequences of his actions, Laure still couldn't come to grips with the inevitable outcome.

"I was in denial that he was going to go to prison," Laure said. "It was unthinkable. I didn't know



Photo courtesy of Laure Clemons

anybody who had gone to prison. I wasn't raised that way. You could have knocked me over with a feather. He went straight from court to the county jail and then the state prison. Immediately our prison experience began for our family.

"I knew that we would stay married and we would stay a family," Laure recalled. "I just didn't know how. I had never done prison before."

She quickly learned that "doing prison" doesn't come with a user's manual, especially for families of the incarcerated.

A communications professional by trade, Laure was distressed at the dearth of how-to information that would help her learn how to navigate prison rules or explain to children why their daddy was behind bars. She didn't know to take care of herself financially and emotionally while her husband was gone nor what it would be like when Jerry was finally released.

What began as an effort to educate herself soon turned into her own personal mission to establish a support system for families of prisoners. In 2003, "Extended Family" was born.

The Alabama-based nonprofit offers a wide array of resources for families struggling to deal with the incarceration of a loved one, which

Clemons likens to a death in the family.

Extended Family's website — www.extendedfamilyhelp.org — features a database listing 236 agencies, services and faith-based organizations offering all kinds of help that might be needed by families of prisoners, such as food pantries, job placement, mental health counseling and re-entry help.

Resources for families

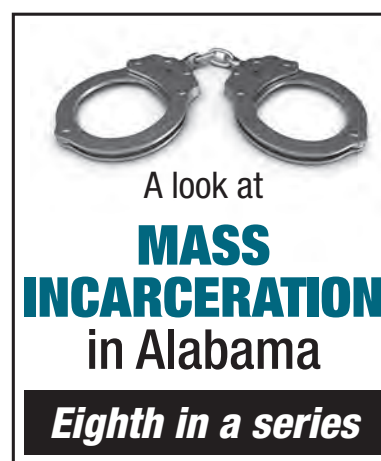
Many of the resources are in Alabama, but Extended Family has helped families of prisoners elsewhere in America and in other countries so there are links to resources outside the state as well.

"Family members of people in prison have needs in every area of life," Laure said. "Physical, financial, emotional, mental and spiritual.

For some people,

they might need to know where they can get groceries to feed their families. Others might need a job to make ends meet when the primary wage-earner goes to prison. They need to know how to deal with the mental duress, the stress, what they're allowed to wear while visiting their loved one in prison, where to find local counselors or even day-care."

The emotional toll on the family is



Faith-based Unlocking Second Chances is Feb. 19

Unlocking Second Chances is all about empowering men and women of faith to advocate for and help those who have been affected by incarceration.

The ministry gathering will be held at The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham, on Feb. 19, beginning at 6:30 p.m.

The event will feature speakers and panelists who will address focused, intentional ministry to those in prison.

Programs such as chaplaincy will be featured. Community and

church efforts to address the key factors of incarceration with the goal of reducing recidivism and changed lives will also be highlighted.

Sponsors of the event include Hope For Life Ministries, Prison Fellowship and Offender Alumni Association, Birmingham.

Promotional materials are available for churches.

For more information go to Unlocking Second Chances on Facebook or contact Jeremy Miller at 205-641-3335. (TAB)

often the hardest part to handle.

“It’s almost as if someone in your family died, but they didn’t die. Bam! They’re gone. But they’re not,” Laure said.

Laure Clemons likes to refer to former inmates not as ex-cons, but as “returning citizens,” because that’s the goal: Get the formerly incarcerated acclimated to living productively in the free world and stop the revolving door of recidivism. To that end, Extended Family conducts “Going Home” workshops in Alabama prisons for soon-to-be released inmates.

“The Going Home workshop is based on our first year of going home,” Laure said of her husband’s 2009 release from prison.

Compared with a lot of newly released inmates, she said, Jerry had many advantages: He was a sober Christian, had a supportive family and had remained married throughout the ordeal. He had a house and a car and was able to find a job.

Life after prison

To help people of faith understand how to help, Extended Family offers a “Going Home Outside” workshop for churches. The organization also created a curriculum for children of the incarcerated, “Extended Family for Kids,” which teaches coping skills to youth who have parents or other close family in prison.

Extended Family primarily relies on local government grants, private foundations and individual donations to support its work.

The Clemons don’t charge the Alabama Department of Corrections for the prison-based Going Home workshops, which have trained more than a thousand inmates over the past nine years. There’s no set fee for church workshops either. After more than 15 years in existence, this informal arrangement still seems to be working for Extended Families.

“We do a lot of ‘trust in God’ around here,” Clemons said.✚

“It’s almost as if someone in your family died, but they didn’t ... They’re gone. But they’re not.”

Laure Clemons

Wife of former inmate and founder of Extended Family

‘Christians go to jail too’

How Church can help those affected by financial, social strains of prison

By Martha Simmons
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When the judge bangs the final gavel and a convicted felon is led away, the prisoner isn’t the only one who will serve a sentence. His — or her — family will also pay the price.

In the 2015 study titled “Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families,” a team of researchers from three organizations — Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, Forward Together and Research Action Design — noted that the United States spends \$80 billion annually to incarcerate more people than any other nation in the world.

But it’s the families that pay the most, both in real dollars and in less tangible costs. Among their findings:

- ▶ 48–58 percent of families couldn’t afford to pay the fees, fines and other costs associated with a conviction.

- ▶ 68 percent of formerly incarcerated individuals were still unemployed or underemployed five years after their release.

- ▶ 65 percent of families with an incarcerated member couldn’t meet their basic needs, with 49 percent unable to afford sufficient food.

- ▶ 34 percent of families went into debt to pay for prison phone calls and visits alone.

Researchers in a separate study released in 2016, “The Economic Burden of Incarceration in the U.S.,” asserted that the actual cost of incarceration in the United States is closer to \$1 trillion.

“For every dollar in corrections costs, incarceration generates an additional ten dollars in social costs,” concluded the researchers



Unsplash.com

The United States spends \$80 billion annually to incarcerate more people than any other nation in the world. But it’s the families of the incarcerated that pay the most, both in real dollars and in less tangible costs.

from the Concordance Institute for Advancing Social Justice, Washington University in St. Louis.

With few community resources available to help get them back on their feet, former prisoners all too often wind up back in jail. A study issued in the summer of 2018 by the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics

reported that as many as five out of six state prisoners were arrested at least once during the nine years after their release. In Alabama about 31 percent of released state pris-

oners return to prison.

How can people of faith make a difference in such a huge social problem?

“There’s more ways that you can help than you realize,” said Laure Clemons, founder and executive director of Extended Family, a support system for families of prisoners and former prisoners.

“Treat that person whose loved one just went to prison as you would

someone who is grieving a loss through death,” Clemons suggested. “Take them a meal. Give them a gift of stamps so they can write to the prisoner. Ask about the person who is incarcerated and how the visits went.

Welcome them back

“Invite them into your social life. Invite their kids to the birthday parties and make sure they’re on the field trips. Listen to them. And you can always pray for them.”

It’s important to welcome the formerly incarcerated person into church, Clemons added, and to accept that they may have problems adapting to being out of prison.

Clemons also said people in the free world shouldn’t cynically assume that inmates’ professions of faith are mere jailhouse religion.

“Christians can make some terrible choices,” Clemons said. “Christians do go to prison. And many of the people behind bars spend more hours praying and studying the Bible than any of us do.”✚

Congregations interested in hosting a Going Home Outside workshop are encouraged to contact Laure Clemons at 256-927-7997, or by email at laure@extendedfamilyhelp.org.

Students serve in central Alabama during SMW

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

Make Him known. That's the charge Jesus gave His disciples, and it's the charge He gives followers today.

Living out the Great Commission is also the message students heard during Student Missions Weekend (SMW) 2019 at WorldSong Missions Place on Jan. 18–19.

The annual event coordinated by Alabama Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) brought 120 students and their leaders to Cook Springs for a weekend of worship, Bible study and ministry.

Bible study leader Chris Mills encouraged students to heed the conference theme — to find their “True North” by seeking God, following His direction and making Him known.

‘If we are faithful’

“God has given each one of us skills and experiences to help us make Him known if we are faithful to use them for His glory,” said Mills, who serves the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions as student missions mobilizer, connecting high school and college students with missions opportunities around the United States and throughout the world.

Mills challenged students to find their identity in Christ.

“Our identity determines our di-

rection,” he said. “If your identity is in Christ, He directs you. The more intimate we become with Christ, the more we want to tell others about Him.”

Mills spoke to the students on Friday night during worship and again on Saturday morning before they separated into teams and headed out to missions sites throughout St. Clair and Calhoun Baptist associations.

Morning of missions

Students served in a variety of ways. Some stocked food pantry shelves while others checked for expired or recalled products. At other sites students sorted clothing donations and organized them so clients can more easily find what they need.

During the final session Saturday afternoon students heard from college student missionaries Rachel Pate, who served in Mexico City, and Clay Graham, who served in Phoenix, Arizona.

Both encouraged students to “go,” and each said their missions experiences had changed their lives and their futures.

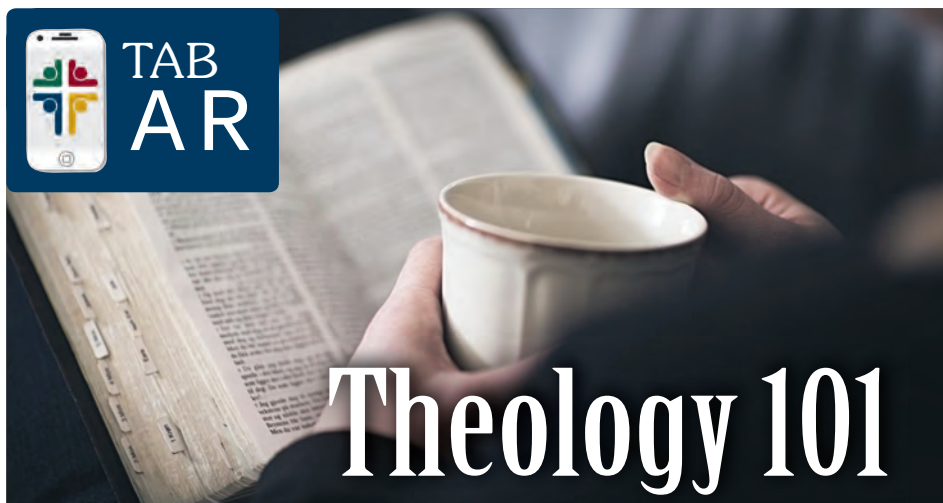
In his closing charge Mills urged students to find ways to be on mission in their schools and local communities.

“We have a purpose,” Mills said. “Our responsibility is real because heaven and hell are real.” ^{STAB}



Photo courtesy of Alabama WMU

Chris Mills, student missions mobilizer for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, challenges high school students at Student Missions Weekend 2019 to always be ready for opportunities to share the gospel.



BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Biblical Imagery

The Bible as a Mirror

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

Another common image by which the Bible speaks of itself is that of a mirror. This image is embedded in the corrective instruction of James 1:23–25: “For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer, this one will be blessed in what he does.” The “perfect law of liberty” is one way of referring to the Bible as the totality of God’s revealed truth.

True and accurate reflection

A good mirror gives a true and accurate reflection of the object it mirrors. When we see our “natural face” in the biblical mirror, the Bible gives us a true and accurate reflection of our spiritual condition prior to coming in faith to Christ and being born anew by the Holy Spirit.

The word picture of that condition does not mince words. Apart from Christ we are condemned, separated from God, without hope and dead in our trespasses.

The phrase “observing his natural face in a mirror” suggests more than a hasty glance. This wording speaks of a careful scrutiny, a prolonged gazing at the reflected image.

When we gaze into the Bible

we see a potential image, the image of what we can become when our sins are forgiven and Christ comes to dwell in us by His Spirit.

The image of what we can become and, in fact, are destined to become is nothing short of the likeness of Christ. In 2 Corinthians 3:18 this amazing reversal of images is declared in these words: “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

However, this wonderful transformation does not happen if we just glance into the mirror of God’s word and soon forget what we saw. The key is to continue in it and remember the image of what we can become. The blessing of Christlikeness occurs over time as we persist in beholding His likeness in the Bible.

To see ourselves

We must remember God’s word is a mirror in which to see ourselves, not a window through which to gaze upon others and criticize what we see in them. The mirror doesn’t give us permission to point fingers. ^{STAB}

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.



Persecution up according to 2019 **World Watch List**

Open Doors report shows 4,136 Christians were killed because of their faith in 2018

(continued from page 1)

Hindus who have converted to Christianity. The situation in India is volatile, and religious minorities in particular face extremely dangerous situations with mobs of violence breaking out and demanding death sentences.

At the top

North Korea, an authoritarian regime mandating worship of President Kim Jong-un, maintains its first place for the 18th consecutive year.

Others in the top 10, in descending order are Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya, Pakistan, Sudan, Eritrea, Yemen and Iran.

Russia, which last appeared on the list in 2011, enters at No. 41.

Christians remain one of the most persecuted religious groups in the world. While persecution of Christians takes many forms it is defined as hostility experienced as a result of identification with Jesus Christ.

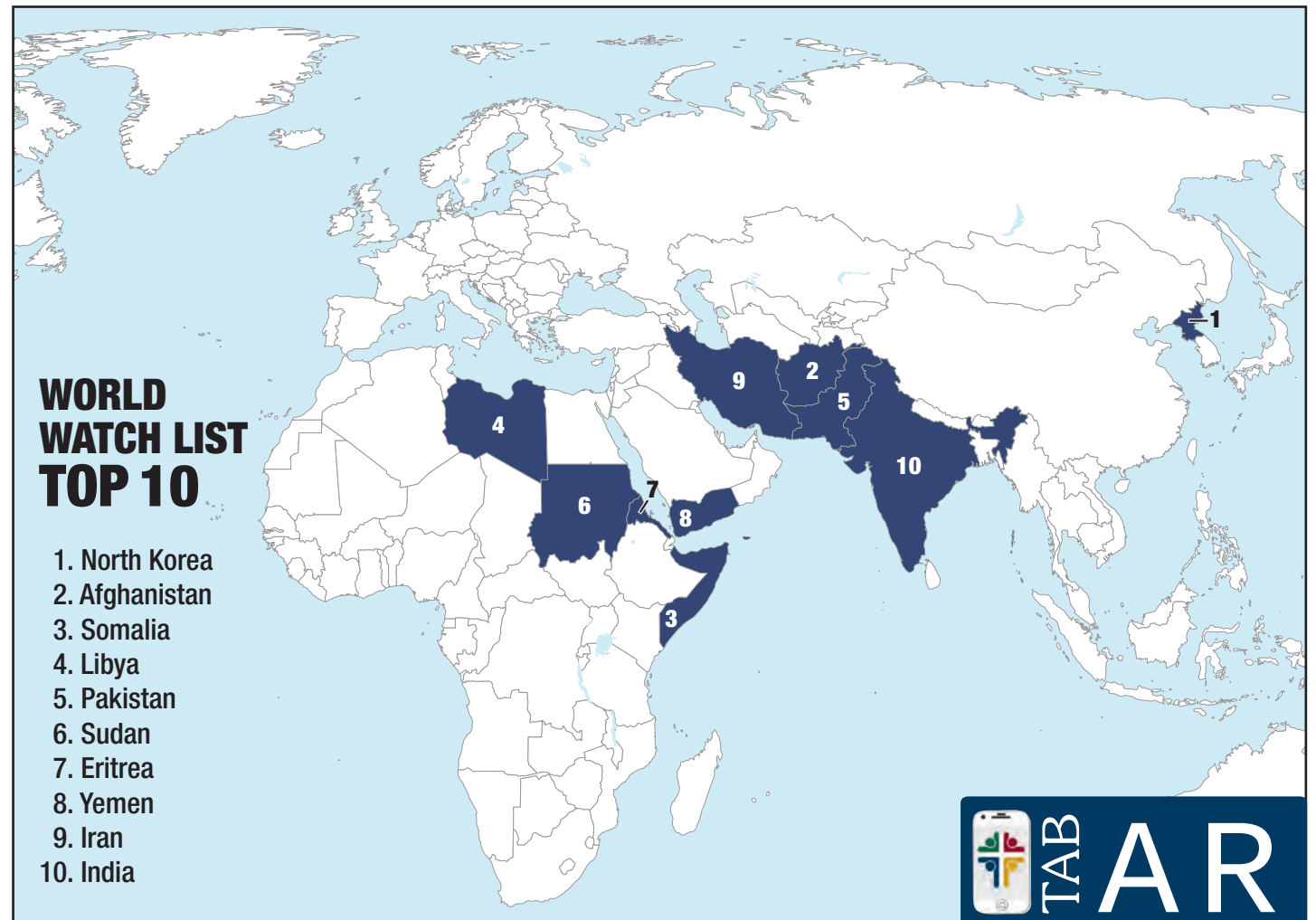
Christians throughout the world continue to risk imprisonment, loss of homes and assets, torture, beatings, rape and even death as a result of their faith.

Worldwide the number of Christians suffering high to extremely high persecution is 14 percent more in 2019, Open Doors reported.

Dying for Christ

During the reporting period for this study, in the top 50 countries on the World Watch List, 4,136 Christians were killed for faith-related reasons; 2,625 Christians were detained without trial, arrested, sentenced and/or imprisoned for their beliefs; and 1,266 churches and other Christian buildings were attacked — an increase in all three areas from the 2018 World Watch List.

In addition to persecution driven by communist authoritarianism, “Islamic radicalism continues to dominate and influence all spheres of life for Christians,” Open Doors



freemaps.com; graphic by Lauren C. Grim

USA President and CEO David Curry said at a Jan. 16 press conference announcing the findings.

“The distressing impact of billions of people living in an environment in which the government oppresses freedom of religion is unraveling day by day as millions of Christians are being attacked, imprisoned or killed,” Curry said.

“Religious freedom is the first freedom,” he said. “If you don’t have the right to make up your own mind, are you really free at all?”

Numerically the 245 million persecuted Christians counted in 2019 are about 14 percent more than the 215 million persecuted Christians counted back in 2018.

Globally one in nine Christians is highly persecuted — an increase from one in 12 in 2018. Each day of 2018, 11 Christians were killed.

Most of the killings — 3,731 — were in Nigeria, which ranks 12th on the list.

Pakistan and the Central African Republic round out the three countries where Christians experience the most physical violence.

Persecution against women and the spread of radical Islam across sub-Saharan Africa join authoritarianism as notable trends driving persecution worldwide.

Africa is a major epicenter of violence against Christians, with groups loyal to the Islamic State (ISIS) growing.

Among a few improvements for Christians in 2019, Iraq ranked number 13 this year after an eighth-place spot in 2018, evidence of the territorial defeat of ISIS. Malaysia improved from 23rd to 42nd.

Continued support

North Korea, despite its first-place rank for the 18th consecutive year, freed three imprisoned Korean-American Christians in 2018, including a pastor convicted erroneously as a spy.

In light of “ominous persecution trends,” Curry pledged Open Doors’ continued support of persecuted Christian believers throughout the world, and said the organization will “advocate on their behalf for human rights we take for granted in America.” (RNS, BP)

To view the full 2019 World Watch List and accompanying resources, visit OpenDoorsUSA.org.



TAX HELP FOR MINISTERS

By Sydney Basden
SBOM Intern



Tax season is here: a time when churches must prepare forms such as W-2s for employees and should provide givers with written acknowledgments of tax-deductible tithes and offerings. In addition, the filing of annual tax returns by ministers and other taxpayers is due by April 15.

The Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) provides conferencing and other resources for churches and ministers dealing with tax-related deadlines.

During January, State Missionary Lee Wright taught annual Church Tax Conferences, helping more than 200 churches prepare to file W-3s, 941s and other tax documents required to ensure a church can keep its tax-exempt status.

"Churches, ministers and other employees can be held liable if taxes are filed incorrectly," Wright said. "Fines to employees individually or to the church can be 225 percent of the amount not reported. Also, churches can be at risk for losing tax-exempt status, which would likely prompt many churches to close."

One issue that will impact many ministers is the loss of the Employee Unreimbursed Business Expense as tax-deductible on Schedule A of Federal Form 1040.

Wright explained that ministers are no longer able to deduct unreimbursed church expenses on annual tax returns.

Wright will lead the following identical Minister's Tax Conferences, each lasting from 9 a.m to noon. There is no cost to attend, thanks to the gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.

- 2/5: SBOM Facility, 1404 Fairview Ave., Prattville
- 2/12: Woodward Avenue Baptist Church, 801 Woodward Ave., Muscle Shoals
- 2/14: Tennessee River Baptist Association, 27149 John T. Reid Pkwy., Scottsboro
- 2/19: Northport Baptist Church, 1004 Main Ave., Northport
- 2/21: Calhoun Baptist Association, 1130 Woodstock Ave., Anniston
- 2/28: First Baptist Church, 700 E. Three Notch St., Andalusia

"When we think of stewardship, we often only think of tithing, but I think taxes are a part of that too," Wright said. "Churches and ministers need to be good stewards of all God has given them."

For more information, please contact State Missionary Lee Wright at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 241, or (334) 613-2241, lwright@alsbom.org or go online to alsbom.org/ministerstaxconference.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS Event and location is followed by SBOM contact person and extension.
For more information on these events, call 1-800-264-1225 or (334) 613-2 + the extension, or visit alsbom.org.

- FEBRUARY
- 5 **Minister's Tax Conference**, SBOM Office Facility, Prattville, Linda Hicks, ext. 263
 - 8-9 **Bivocational Minister/Spouse Retreat**, Shocco Springs, Talladega, Mike Jackson, ext. 210, or Linda Hicks, ext. 263
 - 9 **Children's Missions Explosions**, Mt. Zion, Huntsville, & Prattville First, Amanda Armstrong, ext. 223
 - 10 **Racial Reconciliation Sunday**, Keith Hinson, ext. 289
 - 11-17 **Focus on WMU Week**, Kathryn Helms, ext. 325
 - 12 **Minister's Tax Conference**, Woodward Avenue, Muscle Shoals, Linda Hicks, ext. 263
 - 14 **Minister's Tax Conference**, Tennessee River Baptist Assoc. Office, Scottsboro, Linda Hicks, ext. 263
 - 15-16 **Parish Nurse Training I**, Shocco Springs, Talladega, Kathryn Helms, ext. 325
 - 16 **Children's Ministry Day**, Trish Jackson, ext. 224
 - 17 **Hunger Sunday**, Jim Swedenburg, ext. 283
 - 19 **Minister's Tax Conference**, Northport BC, Northport, Linda Hicks, ext. 263
 - 21 **Minister's Tax Conference**, Calhoun Baptist Association Office, Anniston, Linda Hicks, ext. 263
 - 21-23 **Alabama Church Planting Basics**, Southeast Alabama Baptist Association Office, Dothan, Lamar Duke, ext. 332
 - 22-23 **Pursue Conference**, Eastmont, Montgomery, Mike Nuss, ext. 276
 - 22-23 **Together at the Springs**, Shocco Springs, Talladega, Eileen Mitchell, ext. 221
 - 23 **Renew...a day away with friends**, NorthPark, Trussville, Laura Glass, ext. 226
 - 25 **Church Revitalization/Replant Conference**, Dawson Memorial, Birmingham, Daniel Wilson, ext. 343
 - 25 **Pastors and Wives Banquet**, Dawson Memorial, Birmingham, Lori McGough, ext. 245
 - 25-26 **State Evangelism Conference**, Dawson Memorial, Birmingham, Amy Nelson, ext. 258
 - 26 **Ministers' Wives Luncheon**, Dawson Memorial, Birmingham, Kathryn Helms, ext. 325
 - 28 **Minister's Tax Conference**, Andalusia First, Linda Hicks, ext. 263
- MARCH
- 1-2 **COMPLETE... A gathering for teen girls**, Birmingham First, Kathryn Helms, ext. 325
 - 1-3 **Children's Honor Choir Tour**, Panama City, Florida & Enterprise, Alabama, Karen Gosselin, ext. 318
 - 8-10 **Alabama Baptist Conference of the Deaf**, Coosada BC, Coosada, Kristy Kennedy, ext. 311
 - 3-10 **Week of Prayer for North American Missions and Annie Armstrong Easter Offering**, Laura Glass, ext. 226
 - 7 **Uplink on the Road**, SBOM Office Facility, Prattville, Scooter Kellum, ext. 280
 - 7-8 **Public Safety Chaplaincy Training**, Shocco Springs, Talladega, Mark Wakefield, ext. 267
 - 8 **Uplink on the Road**, SBOM Office Facility, Prattville, Scooter Kellum, ext. 280
 - 8-10 **Parish Nurse Training II**, Shocco Springs, Talladega, Kathryn Helms, ext. 325
 - 10 **Daylight Saving Time Begins**
 - 10-13 **Alabama Association of Baptist Secretaries Conference**, Shocco Springs, Talladega, Lee Wright, ext. 241
 - 12 **2019 Singin'**, Eastmont, Montgomery, Eileen Mitchell, ext. 221
 - 17 **Substance Abuse Prevention Sunday**, Keith Hinson, ext. 289
 - 21-23 **Spanish Alabama Church Planting Basics**, Tuscaloosa County Baptist Association, Northport, Lamar Duke, ext. 332
 - 22-23 **Adventure Weekend**, Shocco Springs, Talladega, Monica Thompson, ext. 227
 - 26 **Ministry Safe Workshop**, Heritage, Montgomery, Lee Wright, ext. 241, or Linda Hicks, ext. 263

Coleman Philley, senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Katy, Texas, and his wife Jennifer and son Josiah were among Southern Baptists participating in the March for Life on Jan. 18.

Image of God



BP photo by Karen McCutcheon

Pro-life advocates gather at March for Life following defeat of anti-abortion bill

Southern Baptists joined tens of thousands of other Americans in demonstrating their pro-life convictions during the annual March for Life on Jan. 18 in Washington.

Many of those in attendance carried signs that read, "All people are created in the image of God."

Thirty-five students from Montgomery Catholic Preparatory School and several other Alabamians were chosen by organizers to lead the march as participants walked across the National Mall to the steps of the Supreme Court, the school said on its website.

The March for Life has been held every year since 1974, one year after the Supreme Court legalized abortion throughout the country

in the Roe v. Wade decision Jan. 22, 1973.

The rally included addresses from President Donald Trump, vice president Mike Pence and his wife Karen, legislators, a former abortion doctor and an ex-Planned Parenthood clinic director.

'Founded on love'

In a video message Trump told those gathered that the pro-life movement is "founded on love and grounded in the nobility and dignity of every human life."

"We know that every life has meaning and every life is worth protecting," he said. "As president I will always defend the first right in our Declaration of Independence — the right to life."

Coleman Philley, senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Katy, Texas, said

the march "provides an opportunity to support a holistic, biblical view from birth all the way to the last seasons of life."

While local churches may wonder how they can contribute to the pro-life cause, "coming out here gives a tangible sense" so Christians can return to their local churches and "be re-motivated to stay true" and support the sanctity of human life.

Kaitlyn Wester, a member of The Summit Church, Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina, said, "Every human life is important."

"I think [the march] is a really important thing to be a part of and wanted to show my support," she said of her first time to attend the event.

Evan Lenow, associate professor of ethics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, said of his first time at the march, "I think it's important to me to be able to go back to my students

and say, 'This is what is happening in our world around us. This is how people are trying to influence their elected officials.'

"And hopefully in the future maybe we can have some more students come up here and participate," Lenow said. "Or maybe even as they go and lead their churches after they graduate from Southwestern, they bring people from their congregations up here."

Senate bill fails

The March for Life came one day after the U.S. Senate failed to pass the No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act, which would make permanent the long-standing prohibitions on federal dollars for most abortions and place new restrictions on the procedure.

Alabama Sen. Richard Shelby (R) voted in favor of the bill. Sen. Doug Jones (D) voted against it.

Democratic Sens. Bob Casey and Joe Manchin voted for the funding ban,

while Republican Sens. Susan Collins and Lisa Murkowski voted against the measure, which was defeated 48-47.

Shortly after the failed vote U.S. Rep. Bradley Byrne (R-AL) issued a statement critical of the Senate's action.

"Standing up for the unborn and opposing abortion is a core Alabama value, and today's vote shows the urgent need for more pro-life Senators," Byrne said.

Rep. Martha Roby (R-AL) praised marchers on social media, writing, "I am grateful for their commitment to this important cause, and I stand with them in the fight."

Rep. Gary Palmer (R-AL) and Rep. Robert Aderholt (R-AL) also announced their support of pro-life efforts.

A contingent of those who participated in the Evangelicals for Life conference Jan. 16-17 sponsored by the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention took part in the March for Life in Washington, D.C. and the rally that preceded it on the National Mall. (BP, TAB)



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3 stories you should know



Photo by Doug Rogers

The Impact Building, a multipurpose building at FBC Wetumpka, was damaged beyond repair when an EF-2 tornado hit the city's historic downtown around 3 p.m. on Jan. 19. The church's historic sanctuary sustained roof damage, but it and the church's main sanctuary and educational space remain intact. Read the full story of the tornado damage and Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief efforts following the storm at www.TheAlabamaBaptist.org. (TAB)

Flourish conference to feature Higgs, Harper

BIRMINGHAM — Things can get overwhelming in the trenches of everyday life. That's why Connecting Ministries is inviting women from all over the state to be a part of its Flourish conference Feb. 15–16 at Samford University's Wright Center in Birmingham.

The conference will feature speakers Liz Curtis Higgs and Lisa Harper and will focus on flourishing in the love and light of Christ.

Connecting Ministries is a non-profit ministry founded by Cheryl Goss aimed at encouraging all women — regardless of denomination, generation or background — in their faith by helping them claim the story God has given them and learn how to find and use their passions and gifts.

Tickets are available at connectministries.org. (TAB)

Nat'l CP giving under YTD budget projection

NASHVILLE — Contributions to Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) national and international missions and ministries received by the SBC Executive Committee (EC) in December 2018 were 4.5 percent below the projected budget for the first quarter of the current fiscal year, according to a Jan. 4 news release from SBC EC Interim President and Executive Vice President D. August Boto.

CP allocation receipts for SBC work for the month of December totaled \$14,779,341.27. Designated gifts received amounted to \$3,753,123.64.

The December total is \$2,184,745.29 below the \$48,500,000 YTD allocation budget projection to support Southern Baptist ministries globally and across North America. (BP)

— NEWSBRIEFS —

World Vision ousted from Pakistan



ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — Pakistan, a predominantly Muslim country known for persecuting religious minorities, has expelled 18 aid organizations including World Vision.

The expulsions will affect more than 11 million aid recipients in the country that suffers in health care and education, entailing an estimated loss of more than \$130 million in annual aid.

World Vision worked to secure help for those served by its life-saving and poverty-reducing programs before it pulled out of Pakistan.

Catholic Relief and the Irish Catholic aid group Trocaire are among the 18 groups expelled, including nonreligious nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) addressing various humanitarian and social justice issues. Another 20 are at risk of expulsion, and nine others were ousted in late 2017.



Unsplash.com

A total of 27 NGOs were expelled in December 2017, but World Vision was among 18 who appealed the decisions. Pakistan changed NGO registration procedures in 2015. (BP)

LifeWay announces closing of stores



NASHVILLE — In light of “an accelerated rate of erosion” at “brick-and-mortar” stores, LifeWay Christian Resources President Thom Rainer has announced that some LifeWay stores will be closing.

Rainer made the announcement in a Jan. 15 email that went out to all LifeWay employees.

“We prayed and hoped that our investments in and commitments to the LifeWay stores would prove fruitful. That just has not been the case,” he wrote.

The number of stores to close and the timing of those closures has not been announced. Rainer said sales have declined since September and a “strategic shift is required for moving more and more of our resources to a dynamic digital strategy.” Rainer wrote.

LifeWay operated 174 bookstores in 2017, according to the latest figures published in

Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Annuals.

The last time LifeWay's sales exceeded its total operating expenses was 2009, when LifeWay reported a \$3 million increase in “unrestricted net assets from operations,” according to the SBC Annuals.

Since then total operating expenses exceeded sales each year. The margin by which operating expenses exceeded sales grew from \$2.3 million in 2010 to \$35.5 million in 2017. (BP)

Alabama-Crenshaw DOM sees God at work during first year at association



Jack Anderson has been director of missions for Alabama-Crenshaw Baptist Association for a little more than a year now. In the time since he retired from LifeWay Christian Store in Montgomery, he's made roughly 150 visits in his association's churches.



Unsplash

News near you

BESSEMER

► **Jason Dollar** recently resigned as pastor of **Rock Mountain Lakes Baptist Church, McCalla**, to begin working in the office of Christian Medical Ministry of Alabama at Briarwood Presbyterian Church, Birmingham.

BETHLEHEM

► **Southside Baptist Church, Monroeville**, will host its “I love my church” banquet Feb. 10, 5 p.m. Billy Bob Bohannon will be the special guest. Mike Crowe is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM

► **First Baptist Church, Chalkville**, will host a concert featuring The Kempters on Feb. 10, 10:30 a.m. Ken Daniel is pastor.

CLARKE

► **Scott Manns** is the new pastor of **Bassett Creek Baptist Church, Grove Hill**. He previously served as pastor of Midway Church, Thomasville. He also has served at other churches in Alabama and North Carolina. Manns holds a master’s degree from Liberty Baptist Theological Semi-



MANNS

nary in Lynchburg, Virginia. He and his wife, Marcia, have six children.

GENEVA

► **Maple Avenue Baptist Church, Geneva**, will host its monthly 39ers CLUB on Feb. 12, 11 a.m. The Staffords will present a musical program. For reservations call 334-684-9617. Teddy Ward is interim pastor.

ELMORE

► **John Sparks** is the new pastor of **Bethlehem East Baptist Church, Tallassee**. Sparks has served as interim pastor of Bethlehem East Baptist since November. He also has served at River Road Baptist Church, Tallassee; Center Baptist Church, LaFayette; and First Baptist Church, Uriah; as well as churches in Georgia and Louisiana. He and his wife, Donna, have one child.

LIMESTONE

► **Clements Baptist Church, Athens**, celebrated its 25-year anniversary Dec. 2.

Pastor Tim Anderson preached for the service. Joe Teal, from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented the church with a commemorative certificate.

The church held a large celebration for its 20th anniversary and is planning a large celebration for its 30th anniversary in five years.

LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN

► **Lookout Mountain Baptist Association** will host Evangelism Now!, an evangelism training opportunity Feb. 3, 1:30 p.m. The training will be held at Mount Vernon Missionary Baptist Church, Collinsville. Terry Burke is pastor of

Mount Vernon Missionary Baptist. Lloyd Borden is associational mission strategist.

MARSHALL

► **Union Grove No. 1 Missionary Baptist Church, Albertville**, celebrated its 125th anniversary Dec. 16.

Former pastor Mike Springfield was the guest speaker for the service. Jo El-



Photo courtesy of Union Grove No. 1 Missionary

len Kash presented “Celebrating the Past — Committed to the Future,” an overview of the church’s history. The old church bell was rung near the end of the presentation.

Johnie Sentell, from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented the church with a certificate.

The church displayed a large photo collection of events throughout the years. There also was a special display of church building photos from the 1950s to the current building’s dedication in 2007. A cake featuring the building photos was served at the luncheon.

“The celebration was great. Around 200 people attended,” Kash said.

The church recognized former pastors, past and present members, deacons, those involved in the music program and the church’s oldest member, Rhunell Amason. Dortheen Davis was recognized for holding the longest membership at the church at 74 years. Richard Thomas, the cemetery custodian for 31 years was also recognized. Whitt Hibbs is pastor.✝

— NEWSBRIEFS —

And he said it’s been nothing short of pure joy.

“It’s the culmination of a 40-plus-year dream,” Anderson said. “When I first went into ministry in 1972, I dreamed of going into denominational work.”

He served different places along the way, including more than 22 years as minister of education and activities at Southside Baptist Church, Montgomery, and most recently as interim and then bivocational pastor of Bradleyton Baptist Church, Grady, in Alabama-Crenshaw Association, for five years.

“Through it all, I’m amazed at two things — that the Lord chooses to use any of us, and that He chooses to use me,” Anderson said.



ANDERSON

The association of mostly rural churches is growing all the time in its passion for missions, he said. In 2018 they were the largest per capita giver to the backpack project in Kentucky, and they also go regularly on missions trips, both national and international.

“It’s been a good year,” Anderson said. “And we’re looking forward to what God will do this year too.” (Grace Thornton)

Chinese Christians face threats, arrests



SICHAUN PROVINCE, China — As China continues to hunt down and arrest members of a house church in Sichuan Province, many of the 100 or more Christians arrested reportedly pledged in advance to persevere even until death.

Gina Goh, Southeast Asia regional manager for International Christian Concern, said many leaders of Autumn Rain Covenant Church counted the cost and pledged faithfulness in advance of arrests at homes, workplaces and on the streets that have continued since Dec. 9, 2018.

“I think a lesson we can learn from them is they continue to say that, ‘No matter what may come, we will continue to serve the Lord. We will continue to stand strong in our faith,’” Goh said.

Those arrested are being beaten, tortured and denied food and restroom accommodations, Goh said, according to accounts and photos from four believers released on house arrest or

police surveillance. Among abuse, Christians were dragged, stepped on and tied to chairs and had handfuls of hair pulled from their scalp.

The continuing arrests are the latest in government persecution of Christians that has escalated under President Xi Jinping’s ramped up efforts to “Sinicize” religion, bypassing religious freedom that is guaranteed in the country’s constitution.



freevectormaps.com

Xi’s religious restrictions enacted in 2017 and tightened in February are preempting China’s constitution.

“They basically want to crack down on (Autumn Rain) to serve as an example to smaller churches,” Goh said. Autumn Rain has several locations that comprise a membership of a thousand or more, she estimated.

The international community should continue to advocate for religious freedom in China, Goh said. And individual Christians, she noted, should support American missionaries trying to help and encourage those persecuted. (BP)



Photo courtesy of Debbie McDaniel

FBC Huntsville provides \$16,500 of grocery store gift cards to furloughed government workers affected by the partial government shutdown at an event hosted at the church Jan. 17.

Federal workers connected to area assistance providers

(continued from page 1) without paychecks to the local businesses that depend on them as consumers.

Hundreds of workers attended the event to find out about options for assistance.

More than a dozen local organizations — from the United Way, the Food Bank of North Alabama and local credit unions — were set up to provide information.

Derrick Stokes, a NASA employee and father of four young children, said he was there “just seeing what’s out there.”

Another NASA contractor, Andrea Tobias, said she had run out of her savings.

Maintaining normalcy

Jody Singer, director of the Marshall NASA Space Flight Center, was at the church and said the event was about helping employees maintain as normal a life as possible during the partial government shutdown.

“I know these times have been challenging for you and your families,” Singer said to the crowd gathered at FBC Huntsville. “We want to make sure we less-

en the burden on you.”

Singer said she didn’t know how long the furlough will continue, but hoped it would come to an end soon.

Guaranteed back pay

On Jan. 17, President Donald Trump signed the Government Employee Fair Treatment Act of 2019, a bill that guarantees back

pay for furloughed workers once the government reopens. For government contractors the pay situation is uncertain.

In a Jan. 11 press release U.S. Rep.

Mo Brooks, whose district includes Huntsville, expressed his support of legislation to provide back pay.

“It is wrong to make federal employees and their families go without pay because Washington politicians do not uphold promises,” Brooks said.

“Those employees who take federal jobs expect to be paid the amount their employer and they mutually agreed to.

“It would be morally wrong for the federal government to not uphold their end of the bargain,” he said. (Carrie Brown McWhorter)

“We want to make sure we lessen the burden on you.”

**Jody Singer
director, Marshall NASA
Space Flight Center**

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR

First Baptist Church of Vernon, Alabama, is searching for a senior pastor. Please submit your resumé to: office@vernonfirstbaptist.org.

PASTOR

Camellia Baptist Church, 201 Woodvale Rd, Prattville 36067 prayerfully seeking God’s choice for a full-time pastor. All applicants should have previous senior pastor experience and have earned a master of divinity. Resumes with photo, may be mailed Attn: Pastor/Search. www.cbcprattville.org.

PASTOR

Young, energetic candidate needed to help small church grow in Marshall County. Seminary desired, but not required. Salary small, outside job needed. 3-bedroom parsonage, not utilities. Call Jeff at 256-582-1301 or e-mail butler.bob.120@att.net.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Wayside Baptist Church is looking for a bivocational pastor. Send resumé to: Chris Baker 2935 Campground Road Alexander City, AL 35010 or email to search4pastor@gmail.com.

WORSHIP LEADER

First Baptist Church in Oxford, Alabama, is seeking a full-time worship pastor to lead dynamic, blended worship. This person must be a self-starter, have strong organizational/administrative skills and be able to give leadership to a complete music and media ministry. Please send resumé to: stan@firstbaptistoxford.org, or mail to: First Baptist Church, ATTN: Worship Search Team, 95 E. Oak Street, Oxford, AL 36203.

MINISTER OF WORSHIP

Sisters Baptist Church is searching for a minister of worship. Sisters is a conservative Southern Baptist church in central Georgia. The position involves planning and leading worship services, as well as the other music ministries of the church. He will work closely with the pastor and other staff members. Resumes along with a cover letter may be sent to: SBC Search Committee, 1807 E. McCarty St., Sandersville, GA 31082 or office@sistersbaptist.org.

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@bbc-dora.com, or mail resumé to: Music Search Committee, Bethel Baptist

Church, 7000 Bethel Road, Dora, AL 35062.

BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC MINISTER

Hopewell Baptist Church is seeking a bivocational music minister. Send your resumé to: eedhart@yahoo.com or Hopewell Baptist, P.O. Box 423, Hanceville, AL 35077. ATTN: Ed Hart.

PART-TIME MUSIC DIRECTOR

Beulah Baptist is seeking a part-time music director. Mail resumé to 5500 Lee Rd 270, Valley, AL 36854 or email to Ltodd3549@charter.net. For more information call 334-705-0538.

FULL-TIME ASSOCIATE 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 missions opportunities. Send resumé to: ATTN: Southside Baptist Church Search Committee, 1213 West Bypass, Andalusia, AL 36420 or southside@sbcandalusia.com.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR TO STUDENTS

Bellevue Baptist Church, Gadsden, Alabama, is seeking an individual with experience to provide full-time leadership and ministry to students and student families. This person must be a self-starter, with strong organizational and administrative skills. He will work closely with the pastor and other staff members. Resumes may be sent to: Personnel Committee, Bellevue Baptist Church, 150 Nockalula Drive, Gadsden, AL 35904. Resumes may also be sent to: financebellevue@gmail.com.

PART-TIME YOUTH MINISTER

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

BUSINESS ADMINISTRATOR

North Shelby Baptist Church, 4100 Belcher Drive Birmingham, AL 35242, is accepting resumé for the full-time position of business administrator. Responsibilities include overseeing the operations, maintenance and financial activities of the church. Candidates should have knowledge of church operations and physical facilities management

as well as supervisory experience and education in business management. Qualified candidates can send their resumé to administrator@northshelbybaptist.org.

MINISTER OF OUTREACH & MISSIONS

FBC Vincent, Alabama, seeking part-time minister of outreach and missions. Will work with the pastor giving coordinating leadership to current mission endeavors. Design/organize/facilitate an outreach ministry to Vincent/Harpersville area. Minimum 20 hours per week. Send resumé to admin@fbcvincent.org.

OTHER POSITIONS

ASSOCIATIONAL MISSION STRATEGIST

St. Clair Baptist Association is receiving resumé for the associational mission strategist (AMS). Cutoff date to receive resumé will be Feb. 15. Please send resumé to: St. Clair Baptist Association, c/o Jimmy Hopkins, P.O. Box 160, Ashville AL 35953.

BUSINESS

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Pressing on

Warrior Creek sees God work in the midst of rebuilding after church fire

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Darryl Ross says it's kind of hard to explain what happened — it's like God reached down and stopped the fire from spreading at exactly the spot they needed to be able to save their old sanctuary.

"Our old sanctuary was about 10 feet from the new sanctuary," said Ross, pastor of Warrior Creek Baptist Church, Holly Pond, in Blount Baptist Association.

The new sanctuary was engulfed in flames back in August 2018 and reduced to a pile of ash — a heart-breaking tragedy for the close-knit congregation. But in the walkway between the two buildings, the fire just stopped.

'It was just Him'

"You can walk down that hall and it's just jet black from the smoke and the ash, but you open the door going into the old sanctuary and there's no smoke dam-

age, no water damage, not a single shingle melted on that building," he said. "And it's very close to the building that burned down. It was just Him."

When fire marshals came to inspect the buildings, Ross said their eyes were as big as half dollars.

"Everything had just gone perfectly," he said. "For one, when the new sanctuary burned it fell in not out. The fire marshals would say, 'You know this isn't normal,' and I would say, 'I sure do.' It's like you can see where God put His fingers on the roof and stopped the fire."

Because of that miracle the church has been able to meet in its old sanctuary, built in 1937 using pine from the grounds, he said.

"It's a little cramped, but we're doing great," Ross said.

The church runs between 100 and 120 on Sundays and the church seats roughly 100. But in mid-January they got the walls and rafters up on the new sanctuary, which they hope to complete



Photo courtesy of Daryl Ross

The walls and rafters went up on the new sanctuary at Warrior Creek Baptist Church, Holly Pond, in mid-January, and they hope to complete the building by summer revival in July.

by summer revival in July.

"When everybody saw the walls up they lit up like Christmas," Ross said. "We're excited."

Strong spirit

James Carson, who along with his wife, Dot, has been an active church member for 22 years, said the spirit at the church has been strong ever since the fire.

"We haven't missed a Sunday of meeting yet," he said. "Even the Sunday after the fire, before we were able to get in the old sanctuary

for worship, we were able to take the chairs from there and meet out under the oak trees."

Ross said he feels the congregation is even closer knit than they were before the fire, united through the tragedy and united around what God has planned for their future.

"We're giving God the glory," he said. "We're going to press on and see what God has in store. On the day of the fire I told everyone He had a plan. Nothing catches Him off guard." 🌈



Photo courtesy of Warrior Creek Baptist Church

The new sanctuary at Warrior Creek Baptist Church, Holly Pond — which stood just 10 feet from the old sanctuary — was engulfed in flames and destroyed in August 2018. The congregation has continued meeting in the old sanctuary since the fire.

Churchgoers share views on keeping Sabbath, vary on when, how to rest

According to Genesis, God created everything in six days before resting on the seventh. But around a quarter of churchgoers say they don't follow His example, according to a study released by LifeWay Research in December 2018.

Seven in 10 churchgoers take their Sabbath on Sunday. A few take it on Saturday (5 percent), Friday (1 percent) or Monday (1 percent). For 23 percent, there is no day of rest.

A 2015 LifeWay Research survey found 85 percent of pastors at evangelical and historically black churches say they unplug from their ministerial duties at least once a week.

More than half of Protestant

churchgoers (56 percent) say taking a day of Sabbath rest each week is a biblical command that still applies today. A quarter disagree and 19 percent aren't sure.

Biblical command

"Almost half of church attendees aren't sure if one of the Ten Commandments still applies today," McConnell said. "Perhaps the most important biblical teaching on the Sabbath came when Jesus said, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.' Clearly God didn't need the rest when he modeled it, but humans need to recharge regularly."

Churchgoers in the South (58 percent) are more likely to see the biblical command of a Sabbath rest as ap-

plicable today than their counterparts in the Northeast (46 percent).

Baptist and nondenominational churchgoers (60 percent each) are more likely to say the Sabbath is still applicable than those at Assemblies of God/Pentecostal congregations (45 percent).

Going to church is the primary way most churchgoers say they observe a Sabbath.

Nearly 8 in 10 (79 percent) of those who observe a Sabbath say attending a religious service is part of their Sabbath-keeping.

Two-thirds (65 percent) say they do so by spending time with family.

Fewer say avoiding paid work (33 percent), taking a nap (30 percent) or

avoiding labor or chores of any kind (25 percent) are part of how they observe a Sabbath day.

More variety

A small number say they avoid shopping (11 percent), refrain from attending paid events or entertainment (6 percent) or refrain from media of some kind, like TV, radio or social media (3 percent).

"There is more variety in how people observe the Sabbath than when they observe it," McConnell said. "But there are far fewer people avoiding things on the Sabbath, like paid work and chores, than those who say they keep the Sabbath by doing things, like attending church and spending time with friends." (BP)

**PASTORS, STAFF
& WIVES BANQUET**

WITH ALEX McFARLAND
"Strategies For
REACHING MILLENNIALS"
Monday, February 25
4:30 p.m.
Registration required.
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This event is made possible by gifts of Alabama
Baptists through the Cooperative Program.

You're invited to come early to the Evangelism Conference for the **CHURCH REVITALIZATION/REPLANT CONFERENCE**, 1:30-4 p.m. Monday, **February 25**, featuring Mark Clifton, senior director of replanting at the North American Mission Board. The conference is free, but registration is required at alsbom.org/crconference. The first 300 to arrive will receive a complimentary copy of Mark's book, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches*.

Mark Clifton



'Thank you'

Birmingham Metro Baptist Association hosts missionary appreciation luncheon

By Jessica Ingram
The Alabama Baptist

Thank you. Gracias. Danke dir." Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, closed the Birmingham Metro Baptist Association's (BMBA) Missionary Appreciation Luncheon with expressions of thanks in just a few of the languages represented in the room.

More than 50 missionaries from across the globe attended the luncheon at The Club in Birmingham, along with pastors and representatives from many of the state entities.

Around the tables missionaries shared stories of spirit-filled church services in South Korea, raved about the

delicious mango sticky rice in Thailand and marveled at technological advancements.

Following lunch Herman Pair, pastor of First Baptist Church, Sandusky, kicked off the program with a moment of comedic relief. "It's always good to laugh," he said.

**"As it is written:
'How beautiful are
the feet of those
who bring good
news.'"**

Romans 10:15

Toni Wall, marketing specialist for BMBA, quoted Romans 10:15 and gave a word of thanks to the missionaries.

"Thank you for giving your lives to the Lord and being willing to cross cultures whether across the nation or the world," she said.

Frank Jones shared through song as he played the piano.

"The greatest message we have to share with the world

is Jesus loves us," Jones said.

Chris Crain, new executive director of missions of BMBA, gave the keynote address.

"No matter our specific calling — whether as a missionary or as someone who picks up a briefcase and goes to work in an office — we are all called by God to share His word," Crain said.

Potential for growth

Crain said Christians must do three things to be witnesses for His kingdom: See the potential, solve the problem and serve a purpose.

"By the year 2050 there will be 2.5 billion more people on the earth," Crain said. "What I see is potential. Potential for the growth of God's kingdom."

As Matthew 9:37 says, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few."

That is the problem, Crain said. "And I want to thank you for being the few."



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

Chris Crain, executive director of missions for the Birmingham Metro Baptist Association, gives the keynote address at the missionary appreciation luncheon hosted by BMBA at The Club.

Finally Christians must serve a purpose and that purpose is spreading the good news of the gospel.

Encourage and equip

"I desire to encourage, equip and engage those in our area for the cause of the Great Commission," Crain said.

Crain concluded like so

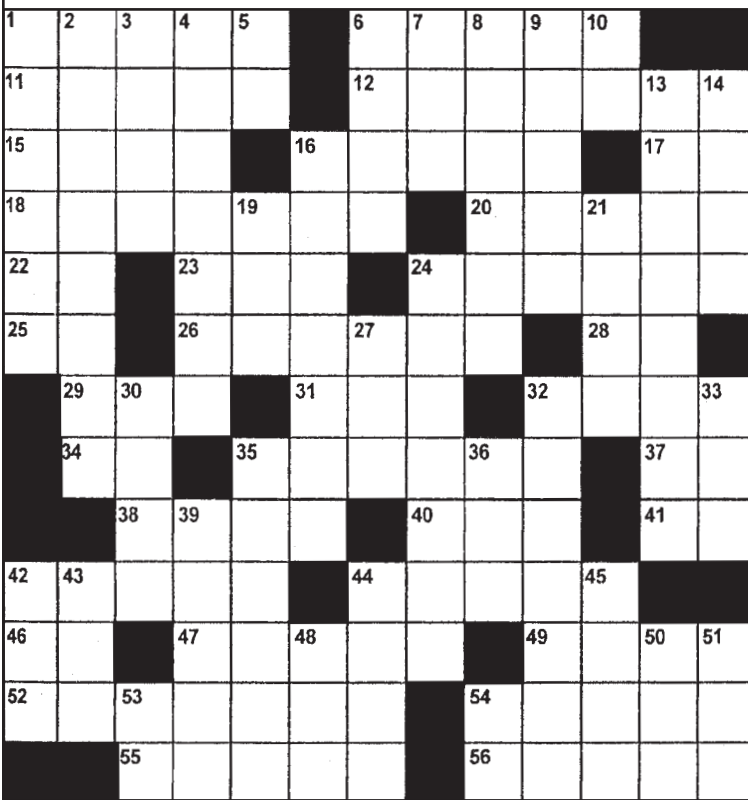
many others who spoke during the luncheon: with a word of thanks to the missionaries who moved across the globe to advance the cause of Christ.

"You, harvesters, are very skilled at what you do" Crain said. "Thank you for all you've done for the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ."✝

Looking for the answers to this week's crossword? Those are now on page 2 so we can make the puzzle clues larger and easier to read. Happy puzzling!

Christian Crossword

By Diana Rowland Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

- Now the Lord said unto _____. (Gen. 12:1)
- Are not ____ and Pharpar rivers of Damascus? (2 Kings 5:12)
- Abraham ... _____ the wood. (Gen. 22:3)
- Athenian woman who believed. (Acts 17:34)
- In charge of King Ahasuerus' women. (Esther 2:3)
- The Lord sent him to meet Moses in the wilderness. (Ex. 4:27)
- Infant's first word for daddy.
- Joseph's wife. (Gen. 41:45)
- The works that are done _____ the sun. (Eccles. 1:14)
- I am, you are, he _____. (1 Sam. 4:14)
- Eli heard the noise of the _____. (1 Sam. 4:14)
- Joshua sent men from Jericho to _____. (Josh. 7:2)
- Descendants of Eri. (Num. 26:16)
- Sarah shall bear unto thee _____ this set time. (Gen. 17:21)
- Not bow down thyself to them, _____ serve them. (Ex. 20:5)
- I _____ the marathon.
- Place of 12 wells of water. (Ex. 15:27)
- _____ ye therefore. (Matt. 28:19)
- The sons of Aaron, took either of them his _____. (Lev. 10:1)

- They went forth _____ go. (Gen. 12:5)
- King of Greek gods.
- Cut off his right _____. (Luke 22:50)
- God said, _____ shall not eat of every tree. (Gen. 3:1)
- Bright _____. (Joel 2:5)
- Strong people set in battle _____. (Joel 2:5)
- And, _____, the angel of the Lord came. (Luke 2:9)
- Melts.
- Upon the great _____ of their right feet. (Lev. 8:24)
- For it is the _____ of _____ flesh. (Lev. 17:14, two words)
- Ahian and Shechem and _____. (1 Chron. 7:19)
- Led him away to _____ first. (John 18:13)
- An _____ the hole. (two words)

Down

- Gallio was the deputy of _____. (Acts 18:12)
- Thou shalt be a _____. (Gen. 12:2)
- Why do the heathen _____? (Ps. 2:1)
- The Lord is the _____ of all such. (1 Thess. 4:6)
- _____, myself and I.
- And _____ bare Jabal. (Gen. 4:20)
- Candy or ice cream _____. (1 John 1:7)
- Loves.
- Mary Poppins was one.

- Pass over through _____. (Deut. 2:18)
- Joseph's brothers didn't know his _____. (Beetle Bailey's call.)
- Dresses. (verb)
- The fowl of the _____. (Gen. 1:26)
- The sun _____ of Ahaz. (Isa. 38:8)
- And the _____ of pure gold. (1 Kings 7:50)
- You get this at a beach.
- Leak out slowly.
- Flighty, capricious.
- _____, Larry and Curly.
- The tents of _____ in affliction. (Hab. 3:7)
- Give _____ to his commandments. (Ex. 15:26)
- Hast thou _____ of the tree? (Gen. 3:11)
- So that it went _____ with Moses. (Ps. 106:32)
- The noise of them that sing _____ hear. (Ex. 32:18; two words)
- Pointed tools for piercing holes.
- Broken the bands of your _____. (Lev. 26:13)
- Order _____ carte. (two words)
- Benjamin's son. (Gen. 46:21)
- Cleanseth us from all _____. (1 John 1:7)
- Do, re, mi, _____. (1 John 1:7)
- Syllable to sing when you don't know the words.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For February 3

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

ACCEPT IT Genesis 37:5–11, 19–27

Rule Over Us? (5–11)

The story of Joseph is by far the longest and most masterful narrative in Genesis, if not the entire Bible. As the story begins God providentially brings about Joseph's rejection so that Joseph might ultimately be used to deliver his people. God choreographed Joseph's rejection in two ways: first by his father favoring Joseph over his brothers, and second by God giving Joseph a vision of his own future exaltation. Human sin and divine revelation combined to produce a hatred and rejection that ultimately created a way of salvation.

Favoritism had become a generational sin in Jacob's family. Isaac loved Esau more than Jacob. Rebekah loved Jacob more than Esau. Jacob loved Rachel and her children more than Leah and her children. Now Israel loved Joseph more than his other sons. Just the sight of Joseph wearing the special robe from his father ignited his brothers' hatred.

To add fuel to the fire God revealed in two dreams to Joseph that his family would bow before him and he would rule over them. When Joseph told his brothers about the first dream they hated him even more. When Joseph told his parents and brothers about the second dream Jacob rebuked him. Jacob could not conceive a future without him being the head of the tribe. Joseph's brothers were jealous of him because of their father's favoritism and his divine dreams. As a result they no longer considered Joseph a brother but rather an enemy.

What Happens to Your Dreams Now? (19–24)

Joseph obeyed his father and went to check on his brothers as they were caring for the flock. As Joseph approached Dothan his brothers

spotted him. The sight of him 64 miles from home, away from his father's protection, inflamed his brothers' hatred of him. They planned to kill Joseph and throw his murdered body into a cistern unburied, the supreme dishonor. But Reuben, Jacob's oldest son, intervened. Reuben's command in verse 22 is in the second-person plural: "You all shed no blood." Reuben's command to cast Joseph into the cistern unharmed was a ploy so that he could return later and rescue him.

When Joseph arrived they stripped him of his robe. The same wording is used in Leviticus 1:6 to describe the skinning of an animal. Like a bunch of wild animals his brothers jumped Joseph and ripped the robe from him. They dumped him into a cistern so deep that he could not climb out. They left him to die. With Joseph out of the picture they would never have to bow before him and serve him. This dreamer's dreams would never come to pass.

What Do We Gain? (25–27)

Joseph's brothers sat down to eat. They calmly ate while they listened to Joseph's pleas for mercy. His cries for mercy would echo in their souls over the years. Their plan was to eat, move on and leave Joseph to die. But the hidden hand of providence countered their scheme as a caravan unexpectedly appeared.

The Ishmaelite traders were made up of descendants of Abraham through Hagar and Midianites (Gen. 25:1–2) who were residents of the Arabah with whom the Ishmaelites had intermarried. The point is that both groups were outside the covenant. Joseph was sold to non-covenant people. Judah recommended selling Joseph to the Midianites for 20 shekels of silver. While Judah and his brothers were motivated by jealousy and hate, God was at work delivering Joseph for a greater purpose. 🌈

The story of Joseph is by far the longest and most masterful narrative in Genesis, if not the entire Bible.

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

WHEN SUBSTANCES TAKE OVER Ephesians 5:15–21

Walk wisely. (15–17)

The opening words here are closely related to Colossians 4:5, where Paul writes, "Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity." In Colossians, however, the Christian's behavior is related to the impression it makes on others. Here the behavior applies more to internal relationships, especially the worship of the community.

The path taken by "wise" believers is to be understood in light of its Old Testament background, where wisdom is not an intellectual achievement but rather a discerning knowledge of God and an avoidance of all that displeases Him (see Job 28:28; Ps. 1:1–6; Prov. 4:5). The verb for "redeeming" or "making the most of" one's time was a market term

for being alert to seize an opportunity at a bargain. It was a word that every reader of the epistle would understand. Paul is saying, "Be alert in these days to seize the opportunity at making the right choice. Given our state of depravity we are fortunate that God has given us the capacity to make right choices!"

The word for "will" basically means "the Lord's wish." When the believer faces multiple choices about his or her conduct, the believer is to make the decision on the basis of discerning what the Lord wishes for him or her to do.

Live under the control of the Holy Spirit, not the control of anything else. (18)

Pagan religion developed the attitude that salvation is debauchery — release from inhibited feelings by intoxication. Even the more ethical Epicureans nevertheless sought

such release (1 Cor. 15:32). Some of this loose spirit was being brought into churches, as drunkenness at the Lord's Supper in Corinth indicates. "Be filled" calls the reader back to Ephesians 1:23, 3:19, and 4:13 where the Church is described as the fullness of God.

To be filled with the Spirit is the functional equivalent of being in Christ or having Christ in us. This fullness of God the Father and Christ the Son is mediated to the Church by the Holy Spirit.

Let the control of the Holy Spirit govern how you live and act. (19–21)

One hallmark of the Spirit's filling is the desire to give vocal expression of devotion "to the Lord" by way of hymns and spiritual songs.

Three different types of songs are described here, and all three forms were used in early church worship. "Psalms" is based on a verb that

originally meant "to stroke" and was related to the playing of a stringed instrument. Hence the word "psalm" came to be used for a song that was sung to an instrumental accompaniment. "Hymns" is a word used for songs of praise to the Sovereign God. Traces of such hymns appear in the New Testament in passages including Philippians 2:6–11, 1

Timothy 3:16 and 2 Timothy 2:11–14. "Songs" were pieces that were more subjective in nature, telling of personal testimony or perhaps telling the story of some biblical hero.

Through these forms of musical expression Christians edify one another and offer thanks to God for His countless blessings. Paul has a congregational assembly in mind here. This recalling of corporate worship serves as a bridge linking the ethical teaching of these verses with what follows regarding the Church's submission to Christ. 🌈

"Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Ephesians 5:19–20

The crossword has moved! It is on page 17 this week and can now be found on the page before the Sunday School lessons each week. Happy puzzling!



Media reviews

MOVIES

Documentary spotlights perilous combination of teens and Instagram

By Michael Foust
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Not that long ago I was young and hip. I knew about the latest trends, the latest songs, the latest gadgets. It was my life.

But the process of growing older and having children changed that. My interests and hobbies also evolved.

Thus when my 10-year-old and 7-year-old sons

came home a year ago and began doing “Fortnite” dances, I asked what any middle-aged man would ask: What’s Fortnite? Google took care of that.

I had a similar reaction recently when I watched a

new documentary, “Social Animals.” It follows three real-world young people as they post nearly everything about their lives on Instagram.

Yes, I know about Instagram. Yes, I even have a mostly ignored Instagram account. But I didn’t fully grasp the negative impact it is having on young people today.

The 87-minute film — which is streaming on all major platforms — is an eye-opener for parents raising children in a selfie-obsessed culture.

Launched in 2010, Instagram is the preferred social

media platform for today’s teens. Unlike Facebook and Twitter, which are text-heavy, Instagram is image-driven. The user takes a picture and posts it. A written message is optional. The goal is to get the most “likes.”

“Social Animals” tells the story of Kaylyn, a high schooler who is hyper-obsessed with her looks and has half-a-million followers; Emma, a teenager who had to change high schools because she was bullied on Instagram; and Humza, a New York City photographer who illegally scales tall buildings and bridges to capture the perfect, like-worthy Instagram shot.

Their stories are told without narration or commentary, but that’s not needed. By the time the credits roll you’re convinced that Instagram — without strict boundaries — is bad for a young person’s mental and social health.

Inner beauty

Girls primp and pose for the picture-perfect, model-like shot.

“I look awful!” one says to the other while deleting the “bad” pictures.

In between the stories of Kaylyn, Emma and Humza, we hear from other teens who use Instagram.

“I took a shower, I blow dried my hair, I curled my



‘Social Animals’

Photo courtesy of Social Animals

hair, I did my makeup and it took about an hour and a half just to get ready for a selfie,” one of the girls says.

Another girl uses a special app to erase acne in her pictures.

It’s a world where inner beauty means nothing and looks are everything. It’s a world where “likes” and “followers” determine one’s meaning in life.

Scripture tells us that “charm is deceptive,” “beauty does not last” and each person is “wonderfully made” (Prov. 31:30, Ps. 139:14). But you wouldn’t know that by scrolling Instagram.

“Social Animals” was directed by Jonathan Ignatius Green, who said some par-

ents even watch it with their teens.

“I think our biggest goal is to stir a rich conversation,” Green told me. “[Social media] is powerful. It impacts our entire world — not just

teenagers, but adults, too. Hopefully the takeaway is, ‘Hey, I need to take a look at this and maybe reflect on my own

behaviors on social media and my own motivations for doing some of these things.’”

“Social Animals” does include some rough content, so it’s probably not for everybody.

But its core message — and its implicit warnings — should be heard by today’s families.

Content warning: Social Animals is unrated; treat

For more
information visit
socialanimalsfilm.com.

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.

it like a PG-13-type film. It includes no nudity but does show girls in swimsuits. It also has some coarse language, including some strong language. For more information, visit SocialAnimalsFilm.com.

Kutter Callaway, assistant professor of culture and theology at Fuller Seminary, wrote a discussion guide. Download it from socialanimalsfilm.com.

Lasting impact

Students take the gospel to East Asia, come back thinking 'missionally at home'

Keith Wieser said when he looks across his church and identifies the highest-impact individuals, the ones who are highly evangelistic disciplers, they have some unifying factors. One of them is that they've spent time in East Asia.

"They come back and their perspective on their life and on the world is completely changed," said Wieser, who serves as pastor of Resonate Church, a Washington state-based church with campuses in Idaho and Oregon. "They see lostness where they had just seen regularity, and they see themselves as missionaries more than when they left."

During the past three years more than 80 students have participated in Resonate's partnership with International Mission Board workers in East Asia.

"We put them into a college campus and by being in that context, their lives are radically changed," Wieser said. "To be able to say 'I'm here for a specific reason for a short time' develops that courage muscle. As they try stuff there the receptivity of college students begins to create an optimism that gets carried home with them. It builds a courageous spirit



IMB photos

Going to East Asia opens students' eyes to lostness in a way that transforms how they view their lives back home, said Keith Wieser, pastor of Resonate Church, a Washington state-based church with campuses in Idaho and Oregon.

How to pray:

► Pray for IMB workers and their field partners in East Asia to impact lostness by reaching and mobilizing Asian university students.

► Pray for God to raise up more workers through strategic partnerships.

(Source: IMB, *Missions Mosaic*)

and that permeates their identity."

It also makes a lasting impact on the East Asian students they meet while there. "We've seen 13 college students decide to make a decision for Christ," Wieser said. "There are four house churches that have been started in the past year or so."

Double blessing

All this started in 2014 when Wieser and his wife, Paige, went on a trip to East Asia and saw the incredible opportunities there to reach the region through its university students. The Wiesers came back and told the stories. Eight Resonate members decided they wanted to re-

locate their lives to East Asia.

Wieser wanted to make a habit of sending students there to get their feet wet in missions. It was a double blessing as it bolstered students' hearts to come back and think missionally at home, while supporting their partners on the field.

The students see they are empowered to start something for the Kingdom and start to see their world as a place where they were sent as a missionary.

"Going to East Asia not only opens their eyes to the lostness, it shows them that they can do something about it," Wieser said. (*Missions Mosaic*, IMB)



A member (left) of Resonate Church based in Washington State shares a meal with a young East Asian man. During the past three years, Resonate has sent more than 80 students to partner with IMB workers and other teams in East Asia.