



The Alabama Baptist

Toll free 800-803-5201
www.thealabamabaptist.org

April 4, 2019

Vol. 184, No. 14
Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

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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."



Photo courtesy of Cookie Baker

Cookie Baker (third from right) presents a Bible to a Panama City, Florida, homeowner devastated by Hurricane Michael in October 2018. Baker is just one of many disaster relief volunteers who dedicates her time to the recovery efforts when disaster strikes.

‘Calming presence’

There's a 'place for everyone' in local, national disaster relief efforts

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Cookie Garner Baker says she could tell a tornado was coming. The sky looked strange as she helped an older lady get in her car and head home from her church in Manchester, Tennessee. “I got in my car too and just as I made the turn at the end

of the road behind the church the tornado came down the road I had just been on,” she said.

In seconds it destroyed lives without mercy, she said — it picked up a house, threw it into the backyard of the church and killed a 12-year-old boy in the process.

“It was devastating,” Baker said.

But some people who were a “calming presence” showed up soon after — disaster relief chaplains.

“I can’t really recall anything specific they said or did, it was just the fact that they were there,” she said. “It was

their presence that I remember more than anything else.”

That day in 2002 changed her. She had been through a crisis before — she and her husband were stranded in their flooded Mobile neighborhood for three days during Hurricane Camille in 1969.

God’s call

But no chaplains showed up when that happened, nor any other disaster relief help for that matter. And it felt different when they did in 2002.

“God started calling me to be that same sort of presence for other people in crisis,” she said.

She trained as a chaplain in Tennessee, then eventually moved back home to Alabama and trained in a lot of other areas too. She’s served by assisting in team administration, manning shower trailers, serving food with a mass feeding unit and performing chaplaincy work.

“We get to be a presence, to be a shoulder to lean on,” she said. “A lot of times the people we meet are not Christians and we get to tell them that all this stuff is temporary — the hope we have in Jesus will never be taken away from us.”

(See ‘Importance,’ page 11)

Southern Christian Writers Conference contest ready for your submissions

Providing inspiration and instruction for aspiring and published writers of faith, the Southern Christian Writers Conference (SCWC) has brought writers together since 1991.

SCWC offers an annual workshop and other writing events, and is recognized as one of the best conferences in the nation. SCWC added *The Alabama Baptist* as an official partner in 2018.

The upcoming workshop will be June 7-8 at First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa. Along with inspirational speakers and breakout sessions, the winners of the SCWC Writing Contest will be announced at the conclusion of the event.

Works of nonfiction, fiction and poetry by SCWC members (indi-

viduals who have attended at least one workshop in the past two years or who are registered for the 2019 workshop) may enter.

Works eligible for the 2019 contest must have been published between May 1, 2018, and April 30, 2019. They must fit into one of the following five categories: (1) Nonfiction Magazine Article, (2) Newspaper Article, (3) Short Story (fiction), (4) Poetry or (5) Letter to the Editor.

You may submit no more than one entry in any one category. Short stories and poems must have been published in a newspaper or magazine or have been included in a published (but not self-published) book. The publications in which the entries appeared may be either religious or

secular and either printed or online.

To enter the contest send a photocopy of the entire work as it appeared in the publication and a photocopy of a page (such as the table of contents or cover) that shows the publication's title and date. An accompanying letter must show your name and tell what category (Magazine Article, Newspaper Article, Short Story, Poetry or Letter) you are entering.

The deadline (postmark) for entering the contest is May 10, 2019.

Send entries to: SCWC Writing Contest, P.O. Box 1106, Northport, AL 35476.

For more information visit southernchristianwriters.com or email scwritersconference@gmail.com. (SCWC, TAB)

The Alabama Baptist podcast, radio show expand our reach

The opportunity to expand the content of *The Alabama Baptist* to the airwaves through a radio show and podcast has broadened our reach to new audiences statewide, nationally and internationally.

Hannah Muñoz, TAB's digital editor, oversees both the radio show and podcast. She works with staff as well as our production partners to produce the weekly shows.

You can find the TAB News radio show on Birmingham's WXJC 101.1 FM and 850 AM each Saturday at 2 p.m. or at <http://player.listenlive.co/42691>. The pre-recorded show is a 30-minute conversation led by co-hosts Jennifer Davis Rash and Debbie Campbell. Guests join Rash and Campbell in the studio or by phone each week to discuss a specific topic.

Muñoz then takes the radio show and an audio digest of the next week's issue of *The Alabama Baptist* and assists our production partner Square Core Media with all the elements for producing the podcast.

The audio digest is a roughly 30-minute abridged version of the main news articles, features, in-depth reports, Theology 101 and the Sunday School commentaries.

In some cases the writers read their own articles; in other cases TAB staff members read the copy.

And some weeks we have special guests read one of the articles. For instance, Sydney Basden, who has served as a communications intern with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions this semester and will graduate from the University of Alabama in May, will appear in the April 4 episode.

Pastors, ministry leaders and other friends also help us with the articles from week to week. The TAB News podcast is released each Tuesday morning and coincides with that week's publication.

It can be found on iTunes, iHeartRadio, Stitcher or anywhere you get your podcasts as well as at www.thealabamabaptist.org/explore/podcasts. (TAB)



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

(ISSN 0738-7741; USPS 011-080)
© The Alabama Baptist, Inc.
is published weekly except for one week in July and December by The Alabama Baptist, Inc., at 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209. Phone: 205-870-4720. Statewide phone: 800-803-5201.
Website: www.thealabamabaptist.org
Email: news@thealabamabaptist.org or subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org
Periodicals postage paid at Hattiesburg, Miss.

ANNUAL TAB SUBSCRIPTION RATES
Includes print, digital and full web access

Group Rate per issue — \$16.25
(Need at least five in your group to qualify)
Individual — \$24.95 per year with 3-year plan

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To the best of our knowledge, all of the ads in *The Alabama Baptist* represent legitimate companies and offerings. However, one should always exercise normal business caution in responding to ads.

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


'Nation's Top Regional Christian Newspaper'

1999, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017
as judged by Associated Church Press, Baptist Communicators Association, Evangelical Press Association or Religion Communicators Council



(augmented reality)

- 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.



Thanks to our sponsors

A special thanks to Alfa Insurance, Auburn AV, The River and The Baptist Foundation of Alabama for sponsoring a night of light-hearted Christian entertainment for the Wetumpka community on March 30.

MY RASHIONALE

By **Jennifer Davis Rash**
President and Editor-in-Chief

jrash@thealabamabaptist.org
@RashionalThts



Seen any good temper tantrums lately? We have.

The well-dressed businessman slammed the door to his Mercedes minivan as he sprinted out of the driver's seat.

Armed with camera, notebook and angry audible sighs, he stomped toward the empty truck in the parking lot.

Within seconds he had captured the images he needed and the tag number. Next on the list, open the truck door and lay down on the horn.

The scene was confusing to those who witnessed it. The truck was parked in a business parking lot during working hours. Why not go to the front door of the business and ask for the owner of the truck? Why summon him in this manner?

Reportedly, the gentleman discovered some damage to his front lawn, which bumped up against the service road beside the parking lot where the truck was parked. He determined the truck had done the damage.

Was that the case? We aren't sure because we never heard the end of the story, but it is a real scenario that happened in March.

While we don't know the end of the story, we do know that rather than maintaining a level head, determining facts versus assumptions and having a reasonable conversation with the owner of the trucker, the nicely dressed man had a come apart in front of several strangers.

It was not his most flattering moment.

The owner of the truck, how-

ever, managed to calmly listen to the gentleman's heated accusations and refrained from defending himself or launching into his own argument.

He calmly said that if he indeed was at fault, then he would make it right. He didn't argue, deny or lash out at the businessman.

The man with the truck grabbed a pen and jotted down his name and contact information. The exchange squelched the tirade from moments earlier.

Bystanders were intrigued by the steadiness of the man with the truck who turned to go back to the job he was there to do.

No venting, no debriefing, no outward frustration — I'm guessing there was internal frustration but he didn't let it show, especially not like the other man.

He stood steady with an incredibly calming peace.

Even if he had damaged the other man's lawn, why not argue back about the way he was being treated?

"I felt like he needed to experience a little bit of Jesus today," the man with the truck said.

And with that he was back to work — steady, calm and with a smile on his face.

Of course, those of us who witnessed this exchange are still talking about it, just like I'm sharing it with you here.

And the life lesson is obvious: A heart, mind and soul filled daily with God's word and time in prayer produces what we saw with the peaceful man.

A life stretched too far without proper care and consistent recentering with the Lord leaves us vulnerable to that moment that breaks us.

None of us are immune; any of us could become the man stomping around a random business parking lot in a huff, losing all sense of proper perspective. 🙏

RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

Possibilities are endless with team members willing to serve however needed, maximize their potential

Headsets, microphones and studios have become part of life for *The Alabama Baptist* staff. And it's not only the editorial team but also those who traditionally have worked more in the business side of *TAB*.

For instance the photo here shows advertising's Melanie McKinney (left) and financial administrator Linda Harrison during the recording of the audio digest of *TAB*'s March 28 issue.

Some voices from the *TAB* team will be heard every week on the audio digest, which is the second half of the *TAB* News podcast (see story, page 2). Others take turns and a few are still to be debuted.

We also love having guest pre-



Photo by Hannah Muñoz

senters and look forward to including you sometime.

One voice you will hear each week is Jerry Batson's for Theology 101. You also will be hearing some of the Sunday School commentary writers going forward.

This expanded area of our ministry is certainly stretching all of us. We are learning new technology, software and concepts. We are adding extra responsibilities to our daily and weekly to-do lists. And with it all we are discovering new levels of what we can do together.

As advocates of cross training and team awareness of each area of work, the *TAB* team is working hard to not only perform individual assignments well but also assist others with confidence and understanding.

Each team member's creativity, contribution to the effort and willingness to serve however needed has been fun to watch unfold. (Jennifer Rash)

Your Voice



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

10 ways to positively influence grandchildren

By **Steve Pearson**
First Baptist Church, Hartselle

Cellphones, iPads and smart watches claim too much of our time these days. But humans are created for relationships and none are more special than those between grandparents and grandkids. Technology magnifies the significance of face-to-face interactions, including the following:

1. Pray for each one by name every day. You can do this. We have 14 (counting the one due in July), and I rarely miss a day of at least briefly mentioning each one to the Lord.

2. Sit around a table and enjoy conversations with them during and after a meal. You'll hear quotes you will never forget and your shared

laughter will be priceless.

3. Look for "teachable moments." That's what Jesus did. Never just say "no." Always explain a better option.

4. As soon as they enter your home or you enter theirs for a visit, behave like a pet acts when his beloved owner comes home from work. It's so easy to act this way with grandkids!

5. Always give firm, wrap around hugs. Let them know you will stop at nothing to protect and care for them if they ever need you.

6. Communicate your expectations for their behavior while in your home. Kids need parameters to feel secure and appreciated.

7. Teach them something fun,

like how to catch fish or play the piano. As long as they get to learn by doing it alongside you, the process can be fun and the memories can last a lifetime.

8. Talk about God in casual conversations. Waiting for that "perfect moment" may never come. The key is to be honest and sincere when talking about your own experience with God. When given enough uninterrupted time, kids will often open the door to spiritual discussions.

9. When they need a word of correction, deliver it in a way that conveys your unconditional love for them. Your method of accomplishing this one may look different from mine. Just intentionally remember that your love for them is unconditional.

10. Always, always, always take great care never to do or say anything hypocritical in their presence. This one is a biggie. Kids can discern hypocrisy quicker than a mama bear senses danger for her cubs. Hypocrisy will damage your credibility with them and lead to a gradual loss of respect for authority in general. It will result in confusion in their trusting minds as well as lead to cynicism. We already have too much of that in adults these days!

EDITOR'S NOTE — Adapted from a post in the Impact blog of First Baptist Church, Hartselle, www.fbchartselle.org/impact.

We felt that "for such a time as this" Children's Honor Choir just might be the method of hope from God that the residents hit hard by (Hurricane Michael) could use.

Karen Gosselin
Music specialist
Alabama Baptist
State Board of Missions

It is a great joy to serve in this capacity. ... I am allowed to serve in this capacity on your behalf. It will help me accomplish that task knowing that I'm in your prayers. I will cherish those.

Mark Tew
President
Judson College

Pray for our churches and leaders [in Mozambique] who are ... seeing this as an opportunity to reach out to their neighbors with kindness, compassion and the love of Jesus.

Jeff Palmer
Executive director
Baptist Global Relief

It's through the reporting and storytelling that [Christian communicators] do ... that can serve as catalysts for advocacy.

Sam Brownback
U.S. ambassador at large
for international religious
freedom

Letters to the Editor

Like others, I am tired of people saying I am judgmental when I simply in love and kindness share what God says about any moral or ethical issue.

Speaking the truth in love is not being judgmental, it is being truthful.

I'm tired of being judged as judgmental.

Gimme a break!

Jerry Wilkins
Lakewood Baptist Church
Northport, Ala.

I look forward to *The Alabama Baptist* remaining viable past my lifetime. I appreciate our new president and editor in chief, Jennifer Rash.

Her vision for capturing 21st century readers may cause an increase in the cost of *TAB*, but it causes me to increase subscriptions to our leadership and church family. Thank you for the print and digital improvements!

Lawrence H. Phipps
First Baptist
Gulf Shores, Ala.

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“ Even in the ... ‘Bible Belt’ Christianity is being pushed to the margins.”

KEVIN EZELL

President, North American Mission Board

On the roughest day of their life, they can land somewhere safe, comforting and loving.

Michael Smith
Chief Operations Officer,
North Alabama
Alabama Baptist Children’s
Homes & Family Ministries

Some churches have stopped having revivals and say they are not effective in our day. I have been pastoring for 40 years and I believe revivals still work if the pastors and churches will prepare and pray and work for success.

Recently our church had a revival meeting. At the first of the year we challenged our people to get one person on their heart who is not a Christian, to pray for them during

2019 and to commit to try to share the gospel with them sometime during the year.

We saw God move in a wonderful way [during our revival] with 18 professions of faith and baptisms and several other additions to the church. The revival spirit is still going on with decisions and baptisms almost every service. To God be the glory great things He has done. There is still power in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Pastor Mike Goforth
Sardis Baptist Church
Boaz, Ala.

[California Gov. Gavin Newsom] has claimed a moral imperative for his decision about the death penalty. He said, “The intentional

killing of another person is wrong.” ... It’s time for him to apply his moral standard consistently and set aside laws permitting abortion in California.

Jeff Iorg
President
Gateway Seminary

The American people should rest assured that this administration — and this State Department, and our USAID — will do all we can to safeguard U.S. taxpayer dollars and protect and respect the sanctity of life for people all around the globe. ... American taxpayer dollars will not be used to underwrite abortions.

Mike Pompeo
U.S. Secretary of State

From the *Twitterverse*

@JohnAShepherd

People are looking for “a better place,” which means a lot of them will end up in a worse one ... There is no “better place” than this, not in this world. And it is by the place we’ve got, and our love for it and our keeping of it, that this world is joined to Heaven. Wendell Berry

@MichaelCatt

If you’re older in ministry, find ways to hang out w/ younger pastors. Don’t try to dress, act like them. Try to learn from them, pray for them, invest in them. Be a Paul to a young Timothy. If you’re too busy to invest, you’re too busy.

@ChristianPost

(Opinion) Is our obsession with leaving this world and transporting to Heaven the same message Jesus taught on the Kingdom in the

Gospels? Are we talking about the same concept? I believe we may have a Kingdom conundrum on our hands and don’t know it.

@pastorkja91

Disobedience can cause you to miss an open door of opportunity. Remember God still can open up a door.

@ccameroncollins

Proud of the women at my alma mater @SamfordU @BrockBusiness for starting the first undergraduate student organization focused on connecting women with careers in finance and economics. They couldn’t have a better mentor than Dr. Sara McCarty!

@drjamesmerritt

Here’s a thought to ponder. Belief always determines behavior.

Wrong belief will lead to wrong behavior. Then wrong behavior will be used to justify wrong belief. We see this more and more in the culture and the church.

@SEBTS

Remember that the Word of God is a treasure for your heart, not a tool for your ministry. #SEchapel

@bcmlink

Praising God for word from @BCMAtUAB of 2 students making professions of faith during campus outreach events this morning! #ReachEveryStudent

@philwaldrep

The desire to learn is a sign of spiritual maturity. Every person should practice learning something new every day. What can you learn today?



BP photo

J.D. Greear is president of the Southern Baptist Convention and pastor of The Summit Church, Raleigh-Durham, N.C.

April 7 is CP Sunday

A lot can be lost in a single generation. The writers of Scripture often warned the leaders of Israel unless they rehearsed the works of God to their children and grandchildren, a generation would arise who “knew not the Lord or His ways” (Judg. 2:10).

Southern Baptists have a lot to pass on to the next generation, and one of the most important principles is the concept and practice of cooperative missions, a strategy that has yielded one of the greatest gospel impact movements in history.

The Southern Baptist Convention enables and equips us to send our people out in ways that we simply could not do alone.

When we give through the Cooperative Program (CP) we are giving to a powerful and proven method for supporting the Great Commission.

All churches ought to be learning more about cooperative missions and giving more through the CP. Because it is our denomination’s primary source of missions funding we need to put our money where our mouth is.

If we care about reaching the nations we need to show it by equipping our Southern Baptist entities to keep sending to the nations.

—J.D. Greear

Baptisms

Cooperative Program Receipts

FOR CHURCHES

Alabama Baptist leaders 'grateful for all who support missions through the CP'

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

Sharing the love and light of Christ. That's how Jay Wolf, pastor of First Baptist Church, Montgomery, in Montgomery Baptist Association, describes his church's commitment to giving through the Cooperative Program (CP).

"We are convinced that using the time-tested and immensely effective channels of our Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) teammates generates the maximum 'Kingdom bang for our Kingdom buck,'" Wolf said. "It's this simple: We can do so much more together."

Since 1925 the CP has been "the greatest ministry and missions funding mechanism available to Southern Baptists," said Bobby DuBois, associate executive director for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM). "It enables churches of all sizes to cooperate together in doing the work of ministry outside the local church."

And Alabama Baptist churches of all sizes give generously — to the Myers Mallory State Missions Offering, to North American missions through the Annie Armstrong

Numbers in this report were provided by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. To contact them, call 1-800-264-1225.

The next three issues will have the breakdown of giving by individual churches grouped by associations.



2018 CHURCH RECEIPTS

Cooperative Program	\$37,976,892.89
Lottie Moon Christmas Offering	\$12,137,302.82
International Mission Board	\$246,271.12
International Mission Board Designated	\$851.95
World Hunger	\$563,030.57
Annie Armstrong Easter Offering.....	\$6,171,860.81
North American Mission Board	\$20,355.44
Associational Missions	\$1,792,158.17
Children's Homes & Family Ministries	\$2,741,173.69
ALCAP	\$163,344.39
American Bible Society	\$967.88
State Causes	\$87,766.11
State Missions.....	\$61,233.29
Myers-Mallory State Missions.....	\$1,254,731.33
SBC Causes	\$11,430.98
Disaster Relief	\$422,954.20
All Other Designated	\$4,156,312.73

Total Receipts for 2018.....\$67,808,638.37

Easter Offering, to global missions through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and to state, national and international causes through special offerings all year long.

Rick Lance, SBOM executive director, added giving through the local church is an expression of Alabama Baptists' commitment to the gospel. "All local churches have as a mandate the Great Commission which should ever nurture and ignite every Alabama Baptist's desire to make disciples by sharing the gospel and seeing new believers baptized."

DuBois called Alabama Baptists "pace setters in missions support," noting that Alabama Baptist churches consistently rank at or near the top of multiple giving categories among state conventions.

Alabama is at the top of the list for SBC support as well. Alabama's

50/50 commitment to SBC causes means that half of CP dollars given in Alabama flow through the SBOM to cooperative missions efforts supported by the SBC.

Knowing where a church's money goes is important, Wolf said.

'Producing Kingdom fruit'

"There are many different ministries seeking financial support and some of them are excellent, but others are ineffective and some are actually complete counterfeits," Wolf said. "From the effective use of our giving to the assurance of integrity of our financial expenditures, it makes a lot of common sense to support our Baptist teammates who are producing a tremendous amount of Kingdom fruit with the funds received."

In 2018, Alabama CP receipts totaled nearly \$38 million.

Those funds support global and national ministries and SBC seminaries and missions efforts, DuBois said. The funds also allow missionaries to stay on the field doing what they are called to do instead of spending their time raising financial support, he added.

The portion of CP dollars that remain in Alabama allow the SBOM and other Baptist entities to help local churches develop and implement strategies to assist in their ministries.

That's why completing the Annual Church Profile (ACP) is so important, DuBois said.

"By providing annual information related to the broad categories of membership, baptisms, Sunday School enrollment/attendance, discipleship, music, missions participation and giving, churches help Alabama and Southern Baptist entity leaders evaluate and identify the trends developing in local churches so that ministry methods can be developed to assist churches," he said.

In the following weeks *TAB* will publish data on giving and baptisms for each church in Alabama categorized by association. Churches who did not complete a report or who filed an incomplete report will see zeroes in their listing.

DuBois hopes churches will check their report and make certain their numbers are recorded accurately. But more importantly he hopes churches will become more aware of how their giving is making an impact across the life of Southern Baptists, a sentiment shared by Lance.

"We are grateful for all Alabama Baptist churches who support missions through the CP," Lance said. "Our state convention has continued as a faithful, perennial CP pacesetter in the SBC family. May it always be so."✝

CHURCH REPORT FOR 2018

TOP CHURCHES IN GIFTS

2018 MYERS-MALLORY GIFTS

1. Montgomery First, Montgomery \$31,005.78
2. Prattville First, Autauga \$25,778.23
3. Enterprise First, Coffee \$25,585.75
4. Golden Springs, Calhoun \$20,966.47
5. Mount Zion, Madison \$18,382.57
6. Huntsville First, Madison \$15,475.00
7. Shades Mountain, Birmingham \$15,000.00
8. Athens First, Limestone \$14,788.61
9. Trussville First, Birmingham \$13,393.33
10. North Shelby, Shelby \$13,034.00
11. Selma First, Selma \$12,650.00
12. Alexander City First, Tallapoosa \$12,367.43
13. Guntersville First, Marshall \$11,306.00
14. Headland First, Judson \$10,269.50
15. Eastern Hills, Montgomery \$10,221.95
16. Clanton First, Chilton \$9,904.58
17. Pelham First, Shelby \$9,628.00
18. Fort Payne First, DeKalb \$8,042.00
19. Pell City First, St. Clair \$7,977.33
20. Fairhope First, Baldwin \$7,794.00
21. Ashville First, St. Clair \$7,603.11
22. Glynwood, Autauga \$7,382.00
23. Leeds First, Birmingham \$7,228.00
24. Shoal Creek, Elmore \$7,209.20
25. Five Points, Tuscaloosa \$7,160.00

2018 ANNIE ARMSTRONG GIFTS

1. Shades Mountain, Birmingham \$185,000.00
2. Montgomery First, Montgomery \$147,742.01
3. Hunter Street, Birmingham \$103,514.55
4. Trussville First, Birmingham \$99,678.95
5. CrossPoint, St. Clair \$84,422.28
6. Whitesburg, Madison \$78,219.27
7. Prattville First, Autauga \$67,365.93
8. Northport, Tuscaloosa \$65,347.20
9. Lakeview, Tuskegee Lee \$63,053.27
10. Highland Park, Colbert-Lauderdale \$55,387.71
11. Golden Springs, Calhoun \$52,871.99
12. Boaz First, Marshall \$48,211.62
13. Athens First, Limestone \$42,842.00
14. Andalusia First, Covington \$39,964.76
15. Pell City First, St. Clair \$39,489.45
16. North Shelby, Shelby \$39,105.00
17. Valleydale, Birmingham \$38,800.00
18. Mount Gilead, Columbia \$38,698.85
19. Headland First, Judson \$38,111.00
20. Dawson, Birmingham \$36,604.00
21. Calvary Dothan, Southeast \$35,451.77
22. Huntsville First, Madison \$35,069.01
23. Enterprise First, Coffee \$32,363.00
24. Willowbrook, Madison \$31,043.55
25. Redemption Church, Mobile \$30,000.00

2018 LOTTIE MOON GIFTS

1. Shades Mountain, Birmingham \$422,170.00
2. Montgomery First, Montgomery \$390,906.01
3. Opelika First, Tuskegee Lee \$314,588.02
4. Whitesburg, Madison \$294,808.00
5. Lakeview, Tuskegee Lee \$227,390.84
6. Mount Zion, Madison \$210,051.77
7. CrossPoint, St. Clair \$185,645.88
8. Trussville First, Birmingham \$182,830.59
9. Hunter Street, Birmingham \$176,298.41
10. Willowbrook, Madison \$160,487.76
11. Dawson, Birmingham \$136,604.56
12. Calvary Dothan, Southeast \$135,189.06
13. Prattville First, Autauga \$108,894.44
14. Athens First, Limestone \$108,250.33
15. Huntsville First, Madison \$99,021.00
16. Boaz First, Marshall \$94,488.30
17. Highland Park, Colbert-Lauderdale \$88,488.62
18. Spring Hill, Mobile \$83,901.07
19. Golden Springs, Calhoun \$83,519.50
20. Northport, Tuscaloosa \$82,878.00
21. Pell City First, St. Clair \$82,297.64
22. Tuscaloosa First, Tuscaloosa \$81,656.00
23. Taylor Road, Montgomery \$79,667.25
24. Central, Morgan \$77,746.91
25. Decatur First, Morgan \$77,123.13

Launching your child into adulthood

Teaching children responsibility at an early age eases transition into independence

By Kelly Arant
M.ED., NCC, LPC
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Proverbs 22:6 tells us to “Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.” I would like to place the emphasis on the word “train.” Children do not come into the world knowing how to transition into adulthood. Our job as parents is to teach them. The key is to start training early.

‘Self-care and sufficiency’

Lindsey Hutton, in her article, “I Did it All by Myself! An Age-by-Age Guide to Teaching Your Child Life Skills,” writes, “Teaching your child life skills is not only important for self-care and sufficiency, it also allows him to feel empowered, works on socialization and reasoning and helps develop healthy self-esteem.”

Simple tasks such as putting their toys away or putting their clothes in a bin can be incorporated into children’s daily routines as early as age two.

As they grow age appropriate skills should be introduced so that by the time children are ready to go to college or live on their own they know practical life skills such as:

- ▶ Money management
- ▶ What to do in case of an emergency
- ▶ Cooking for themselves
- ▶ Waking themselves up on time
- ▶ Doing their own laundry
- ▶ Filling their own car up with gas
- ▶ Advocating for themselves
- ▶ Grocery shopping
- ▶ Making doctor’s appointments.



Flickr.com

A parent’s job during the launching years remains the same as it has always been: to nurture qualities that support the development of a resilient, responsible, productive and socially and emotionally competent young person.

Psychologist Jim Taylor suggests three key words to keep in mind when thinking of launching a child into independence: responsibility, accountability and curiosity.

1. Responsibility

This leads us to ask: What is my responsibility as a parent? What is my child’s responsibility? Parents are responsible for giving their children love and respect, showing confidence in their children’s capabilities, teaching them

they have control over their lives and providing guidance with the freedom to make their own decisions.

2. Accountability

In addition to teaching our children responsibility, holding them accountable is also key to having children successfully launch from the nest. It is hard to watch and to allow our children to fail. However, learning to fail is a necessary part of becoming a productive, healthy adult.

3. Curiosity

Finally, in our attempt to raise independent adults we need to encourage our children to be curious and to explore. This may be hard for some. As parents we want to keep our children safe and provide security. We must slowly begin to let the “leash” out and allow our children try new things, fail and start again.

Failure to launch is sadly a true

phenomenon that many families are trying desperately to navigate. If as parents we begin early to provide our children a safe and secure foundation, and then train them in the areas of responsibility, accountability and curiosity the transition won’t be so hard.

EDITOR’S NOTE — Faith & Family is a monthly look at important spiritual, cultural and relational issues facing today’s families. For more articles on contemporary topics like these, go to PathwaysProfessional.org/blog.

Kelly Arant is a mom of two grown children and a nationally certified licensed professional counselor serving in central and north Alabama with Pathways Professional Counseling, a ministry of Alabama Baptist Children’s Homes & Family Ministries.✝



Someone You

Should Know

Jordan Milar *By Leigh Pritchett*
Correspondent, *The Alabama Baptist*

Jordan Milar, 24, of Huntsville serves as contemporary worship leader and administrative assistant at his church. The University of North Alabama alumnus is a vocalist, pianist and guitarist.

MINISTRY DESCRIPTION: Administrative assistant and worship leader in contemporary service

CHURCH NAME: Sherwood Baptist Church, Huntsville, in Madison Baptist Association

LIFE VERSE: “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” (Jeremiah 29:11)

Q: Describe where you focus your greatest ministry efforts.

A: Facilitating worship through music; serving daily all the people who visit or call the church office; helping in the youth ministry to disciple young people in their walk with Jesus.

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

A: I had rough teenage years struggling with a lot of sins. When I went to college I was in a fraternity that had a mandatory Bible study. I had gone to church all my life. I knew the answers. In this Bible study I asked a question and the guy leading the study asked to take me to lunch to discuss it further. He invested in me. For two years he would take me to lunch and talk about things. After two years I went on Beach Project. It is an evangelism camp. That was a turning point. I didn’t become a Christian then, but I became a Christian the next semester. Now my prayer every morn-

ing is a simple prayer from Bobby Richardson, who played for the New York Yankees: “Dear God, Your will. Nothing more; nothing less; nothing else. Amen.”

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

A: The song “It Is Well with My Soul.” ... That song was just words. To go back two years later and read those words as a Christian; to know that the writer lost all his family and was able to say, “It is well”; to know there was no way I could come back from all that I was doing. Psalm 46:1 says, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.” No matter what terrible things happen to this country, to this world, when you plant your faith in our Father it will be good. 🙏



MILAR

Persecuted church

More than 200 Christians killed in continued escalating attacks throughout Nigeria

Christian deaths are spiraling in Nigeria as militant Fulani herdsmen and Boko Haram terrorists escalate their attacks, according to reports from religious liberty watchdog groups active there.

As many as 280 people were killed in Christian communities in several attacks spanning February through mid-March in Nigeria’s Middle Belt, according to varying reports from Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Morning Star News and International Christian Concern. Militants destroyed hundreds of homes and displaced residents.

The latest attacks surround the Feb. 26 re-election of Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari over challenger Atiku Abubakar, who has challenged the election results in court.

Open Doors ranked Nigeria 12th in its 2019 World Watch List of the 50 countries where it is most dangerous to live as a Christian. Of the 4,136 Christians killed in 2018, Nigeria accounted for 3,731, Open Doors said.

In related news:

▶ The pastor and 10 members of a prominent church in China, Early Rain Covenant Church, remain jailed three months after the government invaded their worship and arrested 100 of them because of their Christianity.

China is reportedly harassing Christians, Uyghur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists and others amid increased international pressure to uphold religious freedom in the Communist country where worship of President Xi Jinping is mandated.

▶ Another prominent unregistered church in China, Shouwang Church in Beijing, which draws more than 1,000 congregants, was raided by Chinese police recently and officially banned from gathering to worship.

Shouwang members refused to sign a document pledging to never attend the church again, and leaders said the church will continue to worship by adjusting meeting times and locations. (BP, *Christianity Today*)

Siluria pastor leads prayer for love, wisdom

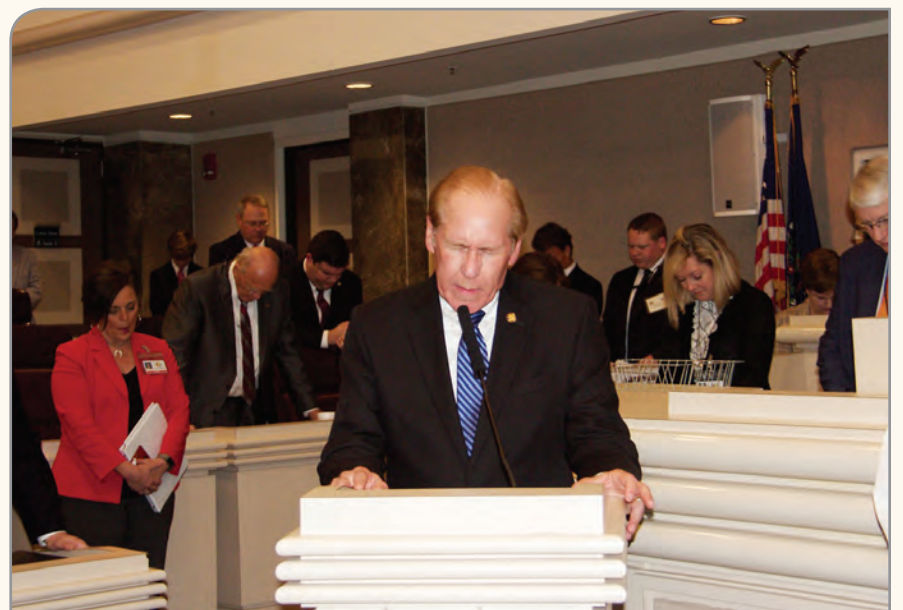


Photo courtesy of the Alabama House of Representatives

Michael Brooks, pastor of Siluria Baptist Church, Alabaster, leads the Alabama House of Representatives in prayer on March 19, the opening day of the regular session. ‘I asked for God’s wisdom for our legislators as they worked,’ Brooks said. ‘I also noted that our state is known as a place of the Civil War and civil rights and that in this, our 200th anniversary, the Lord would help us be committed to love for one another and justice for all.’

DO YOU KNOW A PERSON WHO SHOULD BE FEATURED AS
Someone You Should Know?

Send his or her name, a contact number and the reason you think he or she should be featured to Someone You Should Know, c/o *The Alabama Baptist*, 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209, or to news@thealabamabaptist.org.

God moves at Tinsel Road Baptist; church grows from 7 to 200 people

Back in 2004 when Ralph Henderson went to preach one Sunday at Tinsel Road Baptist Church, Hartselle, in Morgan Baptist Association, the church had seven members and \$37,000 in debt.

“They said, ‘Preacher we don’t have much to offer,’ and I told them not to offer anything — I would give them 30 days to help out and we would see where God led,” Henderson said.

He was an associational minister at the time and the church belonged to a different denomination, one that had a more legalistic way of doing things. Over time it had dwindled down to those seven faithful members.

‘Complete shift’

“But they had a complete paradigm shift,” he said. “Those seven people began to pray and I asked, ‘Do we want to grow?’ We talked about what it looks like to grow and change.”

And they began to pray and invite

their friends, and God started blessing the church. They paid off their debt and started packing the pews. They built a new building with education space and paid it off.

Now they have more than 200 in worship.

“It’s a joy to watch the faces,” Henderson said.

“God has changed Tinsel to a church that opens up. It’s amazing to see.”

It’s all because of God and the way He’s answered their prayers, he said. He told story after story of how God worked in their hearts — a Sunday School teacher who

would come to the altar every Sunday to pray over her class, a group who would meet every Monday for prayer.

And a pastor who prayed for direction — and saw God shut down his vocation at a local plant so that he could go full time at the church.

“It changed my life,” Henderson said. “We’ve all changed. Seven people got a hold of God and it changed the church. It’s all Him.” (Grace Thornton)

“It changed my life. We’ve all changed. Seven people got a hold of God, and it changed the church.

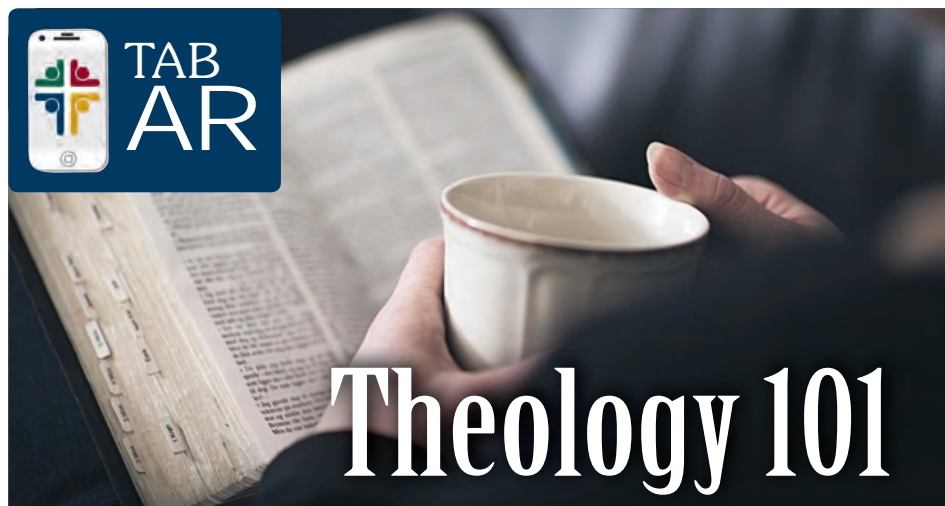
It’s all Him.”

**Ralph Henderson
pastor, Tinsel Road Baptist
Church**



Screen grab from YouTube.com

Pastor Ralph Henderson preaches at Tinsel Road Baptist Church, Hartselle, a church that has seen God use a lot of prayer and a little hard work to grow it from a congregation of seven members with \$37,000 in debt to a congregation of more than 200 members with a new church building and educational space.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Insights through questions

A Question of Distinctiveness

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

This week’s question is one Christ put to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount: “What do you do more than others?” (Matt. 5:47). The question puts practical application to the matter of Christian living in a non-Christian world and leads us to think about what sets Christians apart.

In the background of this question is God’s grace which should cause believers to rise above the ordinary in matters of loving, serving and helping, causing us to stand out as lights in a dark world.

Of course, such distinctiveness is not for drawing attention to ourselves but instead to point to the grace of God.

Rather than blending in or fitting in with the moral climate around us our distinctiveness as mirrored in attitudes, actions and words should be like light shining in a dark place. If light were like darkness it would prove useless.

Matter of loving

In the context where Jesus raised this penetrating question He called attention to several areas in which Christians should be doing more than the ordinary.

Leading into the question Christ brought up the matter of loving.

Rather than loving only one’s friends and neighbors He called on His followers to love one’s enemies (Matt. 5:44). Having received God’s extraordinary love we are expected to be more than ordinary in loving others.

In the same lead-in verse to this

week’s question Christ also called attention to the matter of praising or blessing those who might be speaking evil of us, saying, “Bless those who curse you.”

Praising others in sincerity can be a powerful witness not just to family, friends and fellow Christians but to others as well. It may be easier to praise a close friend, but what about a stranger or disgruntled church member?

Doing good

Christ went on to introduce His question by bringing up the very practical matter of doing good: “Do good to those who hate you.” It is easy to do good to others when they are doing good to us. Doing good to an enemy is a Christlike strategy for turning enemies into friends.

In a fourth command Christ introduced the matter of praying for those “who spitefully use you and persecute you.”

Praying for family and friends may come easy, but how often do we make intercession for those aligned against us?

This week’s very practical question for practical theology seeks to make us ponder how we are doing in the practice of loving, praising, doing good and praying. ✝

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.



Importance of volunteers

(continued from page 1)

Baker's trip to Panama City earlier this year to participate in relief work after Hurricane Michael was her 50th trip since she first trained as a disaster relief chaplain.

Mark Wakefield, disaster relief strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said the work of volunteers like Baker creates a massive impact.

Making a difference

"There's an opportunity to make a difference on so many levels," he said. "If someone comes to Christ through disaster relief work it is because of everybody from the admin to the local associational coordinators to the people who keep equipment up and running.

"Some of them put in many, many hours. They are really behind the scenes and it just couldn't get done without them."

Baker said she's enjoyed every role she's tried, but as she's gotten older administration has been an increasingly good fit.

"Sometimes people think they can't do disaster relief work because they can't pull brush or do cleanup work and I want them to know there's still a place for them in disaster relief," she said. "If you've got the heart, we've got a place for you."

Now is the perfect time to get trained and prepared to help the next time disaster strikes nearby. Alabama Baptist disaster relief is offering trainings around the state in March and April. To find one near you, visit sbdr.org or call 800-264-1225, ext. 267. 🇺🇸



Spring Break disaster relief

Below: From March 23 to 28 students from Gadsden State Community College, Jacksonville State University and University of Montevallo serve with Etowah Baptist Association's disaster relief team in Marianna, Florida.



Photo courtesy of Cookie Baker



Photo courtesy of Madison Baptist Association

Right: Jacksonville State University Baptist Campus Ministries students help clean up in Southport, Florida.

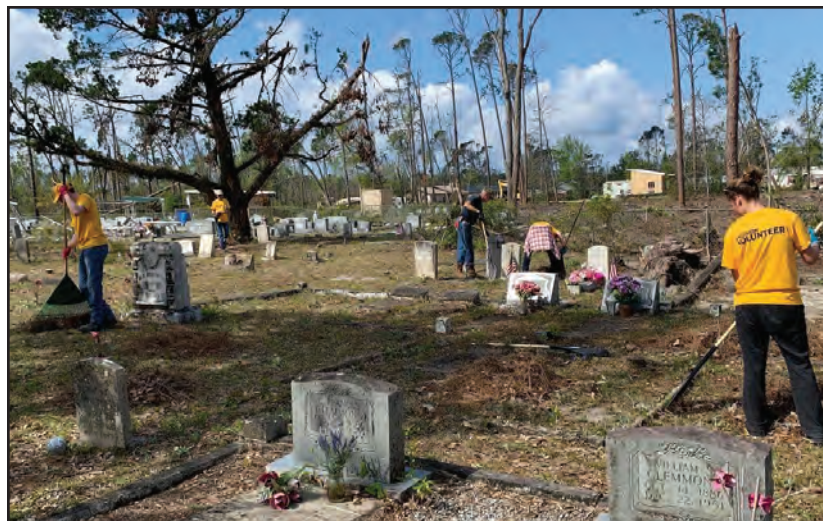


Photo courtesy of Jacksonville State University Baptist Campus Ministries

Above: Students from University of Alabama at Huntsville, Calhoun Community College and Athens State University serve with Madison Baptist Association's disaster relief team in Marianna, Florida, during their spring break March 16–22.

Geneva Assoc. active part of Yellow Shirt Army

In 2018, Geneva Baptist Association's disaster relief team was revitalized — and just in time.

The association's team jumped in at full speed to assist with cleanup and recovery in Florida after Hurricane Michael slammed into the Gulf Coast in October 2018.

Then following the March 3 tornadoes that hit several Alabama counties, including Geneva, the team helped friends and neighbors with cleanup.

"We've done more than 300 hours of volunteer labor, helped 30 families and 11 communi-

ties," said Tim Folds, disaster relief coordinator for Geneva Association and pastor of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, Slocomb.

'Never be the same'

Some of those places "will never be the same, but we want to do the best we can to help them move on," Folds said.

That same attitude was expressed by volunteers from other Alabama Baptist associations who spent hundreds of volunteer hours helping with storm cleanup.

"Our volunteers were constantly deployed for more than four

months," said Mark Wakefield, disaster relief strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. "They just kept going and going. I'm very proud of them."

Opportunities to serve flooded areas of Tennessee and Nebraska are in the works, Wakefield said, and more volunteers are being trained to join Alabama's Yellow Shirt Army, including more in Geneva Association, Folds said.

"We want to be equipped and ready to shine for Jesus," Folds said. "We want to meet their specific needs. We count it a privilege to be able to do that." (Grace Thornton)

Kimberlee Norris and her husband, Gregory Love — both attorneys — started MinistrySafe to help churches take proactive steps to prevent any future sexual abuse crises.

Protect your church

SBOM sponsors workshop on preventing sex abuse

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

After an article describing sexual abuse in Southern Baptist churches came out in the *Houston Chronicle* in February it wasn't long before Kimberlee Norris' phone started ringing.

Crisis ministries

She got dozens of calls from senior pastors, all asking how to deal with sexual abuse situations in their churches. The numbers, faces and tragedies depicted in the article hit home.

Norris, a Texas-based attorney who is an expert in legal standards of care related to child sexual abuse, has been providing crisis response to ministries and churches nationwide for years. She and Gregory

Love, her husband and fellow attorney, started MinistrySafe to help churches be proactive by taking steps to prevent this type of crisis from ever happening.

Churches should be the safest place children can be — both to be safe from abuse inside its doors and to feel safe to report abuse outside its doors, Norris told those gathered March 26 for a workshop on sexual abuse sponsored by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) at Heritage Baptist Church, Montgomery.

"If we don't address this

issue we become the easy in for everyone who has the wrong motive," Norris said. "Not only that — it can be mission killing. The only thing worse in public perception is if you murdered someone."

"If we don't address this issue ... it can be mission killing. The only thing worse in public perception is if you murdered someone."

**Kimberlee Norris
MinistrySafe**

there are enough convicted sex offenders in the U.S. for there to be more than one per every square mile — but even that's a low estimate, Norris said, because less



Photo by Doug Rogers

than 10 percent of offenders ever encounter the criminal justice system.

It makes sense that this issue would be something the church would face, she said — it skips no demographic. Not only that, the church and youth sports are "the most permeable entry points" for abusers seeking access to children, Norris said.

"We can't stop it everywhere, but we can say, 'Not with my kids, not on my watch, not in the name of Jesus in my ministry program,'" she said. "That's the best we can do."

Addressing our systems to keep children safe takes effort, but keeping children safe is worth any inconvenience, she said.

Safer ministry

MinistrySafe offers a five-step process to making your church's children's ministry safer (see story, page 13) as well as in-depth workshops on how to identify and protect your church.

For more information call Lee Wright at the SBOM at 334-613-2241, contact Norris at 817-737-7233 or visit ministrysafes.com.

It's not just adults — peer-to-peer abuse is real too

It might be hard to imagine a child abusing another child, but it does happen — especially if the one acting out the abuse has been abused in the past too.

Setting rules

It can happen when there is an imbalance of power (one child is older, larger or has more social status).

With the exception

of high school ministry Kimberlee Norris of MinistrySafe recommends not having children together in a ministry setting that has an age range of more than three years.

She also recommends putting rules in place like the "one kid, one stall" rule in the bathroom, having adults patrol bathrooms and not sending young children to the bathroom alone.

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Understanding the grooming process

1. Gaining access.

Potential abusers groom both the child and the gatekeeper (other adults they work or serve with) to gain trust.

“They need trusted time alone with that child, and you’re not going to give time alone with your child to anyone you don’t deem trustworthy,” said Kimberlee Norris of MinistrySafe.

Gifts and activities

Often abusers come across as charismatic, trustworthy people. They’re also skilled at figuring out what a child needs or wants and communicating with them. This could mean giving gifts or having “kid magnet” activities at their home, like video games for young boys.

2. Selecting a child.

They often look for a child who is unconnected, on the fringe or

in need — possibly a child who is looking for someone to trust, like a child without a father figure. A child who is very physically affectionate is also more at risk than a child who isn’t because they already accept more physical touch.

3. Introducing nudity and sexual touch.

Abusers will test barriers and slowly erode them. This can be through playful touch like wrestling or tickling, telling dirty jokes or creating a culture where nudity is acceptable or cool (like skinny dipping).

4. Keeping the victim silent.

Abusers will use secrecy, threats and shame to keep victims quiet. This could be anything from “if you tell, you’ll get in trouble” to “this could wreck our youth group.” (Adapted from MinistrySafe information)

What can churches do?

Preventing sexual abuse: A 5-part safety system

Here are five procedures churches should have in place:

1. Ensure your staff and volunteers attend sexual abuse awareness training.

This helps your employees and volunteers know the “why” behind the policies you adapt (see No. 4) and it gives them eyes to see and ears to hear grooming behaviors (see story, this page).

2. Use appropriate criminal background checks.

This isn’t a silver bullet and it isn’t all you need, but background checks are a necessary component of your children’s program or ministry. The depth of the check should match the degree of access to children, and these checks should be periodically refreshed, not just done once. Look for red-flag offenses, such as providing alcohol or porn to minors (this can be grooming behavior), exhibitionism or even simple assault. Sometimes child sexual assault cases are charged as simple assault instead. Perpetrators may have a story about how they got into a fight with a roommate when they were young and are ashamed of it. Don’t accept a person’s self-reported



Photo by Doug Rogers

Church and ministry leaders gather at Heritage Baptist Church, Montgomery, on March 26 for a workshop on sexual abuse sponsored by the SBOM and led by Kimberlee Norris of MinistrySafe.

story of what happened as the absolute truth.

3. Apply skillful screening processes.

These are a critical component of an effective system. Train your staff to assess risks appropriately.

Communicate to applicants that your ministry screens heavily and monitors behavior. MinistrySafe offers long lists of helpful information for asking good interview questions and identifying risky responses or evasive answers. (For example, in response to the question, “Have you ever abused a child?” instead of answering with a simple, “No,” the

interviewee says, “I would never abuse a child.”)

You can also look for red flags in an application like gaps in time between listed employment.

4. Put tailored policies and procedures in place.

Policies are what you do not what you say you do. Don’t make exceptions for anyone. There’s no one-size-fits-all for what your procedures should be — they should be tailored to fit your church’s ministry. But they should include some basics like the two-adult rule (no adult left alone with a child), bathroom policies (such as having an adult stand in an open doorway and provide accountability when children are going to the bathroom) and the six-month member rule (a minimum time period someone must be a church member before volunteering in the children’s ministry).

5. Enforce monitoring and oversight of volunteers and employees.

Do what you say you’ll do when it comes to keeping an eye on your people. Perform periodic reviews and provide accountability. (Adapted from MinistrySafe information)



WEEKDAY MORNINGS ON WXJC

ADRIAN ROGERS JIM DALY DAVID JEREMIAH
ROBERT JEFFRESS CHARLES STANLEY MICHAEL YOUSSEF
TONY EVANS JAMES DOBSON CHARLES MORRIS
JOHN MACARTHUR ALISTAIR BEGG J VERNON MCGEE

AND AFTERNOONS LIVE



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'There you pray'

Morton emphasizes importance of commitment to prayer

More than 500 people gathered in the sanctuary at Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham, on Feb. 26 to hear Jeremy Morton, co-pastor of First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Georgia, preach on the importance of prayer.

"I'm embarrassed at how many times I've skipped prayer time, but by God's grace I long to be a man of prayer ... for the future of the kingdom of God," Morton said.

In solitude

Prayer is the most important discipline, habit, pattern and priority of the Christian life, Morton said. "The best of your life, of your family, of your ministry will not come to be until you come to be a passionate man or woman of prayer,"

Morton preached out of Mark 1:35-37, Jesus' solitary prayer.

"The disciples were busy looking for Jesus, but Jesus was in solitude looking for God," Morton said. "May we prioritize this most important discipline in our lives."

What is it that keeps us from prioritizing our prayer life? According to Morton, it's time.

"We are addicted to busy. Busy is popular. We don't like to admit when we aren't busy," Morton said. "And when we get busy we get stressed, fatigued and irritable."

But Jesus still found time to pray. And Jesus was in higher demand than anyone in all the earth.

"Jesus was busy," Morton said. "And Jesus was calm, energized, patient, present and focused where His feet were. He wasn't looking over the need in front of Him. He addressed it with a spirit of attentiveness."

In chapter 1, Mark includes just the facts, the big picture. He's telling the highlights of a really, really important story, Morton said. "It drills down one typical day in the busy life of the Lord Jesus Christ," Morton said. "Late into the night the focus of Jesus' ministry is healing people. Jesus is busy all day ministering."



MORTON

in our lives? Morton asked. "We must get up. We must go to a special place. And there we pour our heart out to our Father. ... There you pray."

Do Christians fight for solitude with God? Do they seek alone time with God and honor and treasure it? "If Jesus needed to be refilled after pouring Himself out, what about me?" Morton asked. "Apparently Jesus knows there are certain fights ... we

will never be able to win apart from prayer."

Churches are filled with people doing it in their own strength, Morton said. "Where's the touch of God? Where's the power of God? Little is much when God is in it. Prayer is the way we bring our little to the Lord."

Strength and support

Prayer is the Christian life support. It gives strength to face the day, strength to face the challenges and trials of life.

"We must give ourselves to disciplined prayer. Morning prayer, evening prayer, prayer time carved out. Put it in your calendar," Morton said.

"Whatever you are doing, wherever you are going, whatever you are becoming, it will never be the best it can be until it is bathed in prayer," Morton said. (Jessica Ingram)

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"All the sick, all the demon-possessed of that city came to Jesus. It says, 'The whole town gathered at the door.'" Morton said, referencing verse 32.

"I'd understand if He wanted to sleep in the next day ... but what does Jesus do? According to verse 35 Jesus got up 'very early,' went to a place of isolation and there He prays," Morton said.

How do we prioritize this most important discipline

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

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MINISTER OF MUSIC

Westview Baptist Church, 809 Damascus Hwy, Enterprise, AL 36330 is prayerfully seeking resumés for a part-time minister of music. Please send resumé to church address, marked ATTN: Personnel Committee. For additional inquiries call 334-494-2336.

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Seeking bivocational worship leader. Big Hurricane Baptist Church, Brookwood, Alabama. Contact: 205-553-3889.

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Farley Community Church in Huntsville, Alabama, is seeking a dynamic, spirit-filled person to serve as our full-time youth minister. Christ-focused discipleship is at the heart of all of our ministries. A bachelor's degree from an accredited institution or seminary and previous youth ministry experience are required. Please submit resumés to: personnel@farleycc.org.

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Belgreen Baptist Church is seeking pianist for Sunday morning worship. Paid position. Contact matthew_payne@bellsouth.net.

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'Sharpen each other'

SBC Women's Leadership Network launches; will hold first event at SBC annual meeting

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Kathy Litton says it began as a conversation, and then another, and then another.

It gained some traction at the 2018 Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) annual meeting in Dallas with a resolution on the dignity and worth of women, and it got some momentum when several dozen women leaders gathered together for a summit at the same meeting.

And now the idea of mobilizing women leaders across the SBC has materialized in the launch of the SBC Women's Leadership Network, a "collaborative community of women from the Southern Baptist Convention family who long to lead in diverse ways to significantly impact the kingdom of God," according to its website.

The group will hold its first event at this year's SBC annual meeting in Birmingham on June 11 at 7 p.m. in the ballet rehearsal room on level 1 of the BJCC Concert Hall.

Litton is director of planter

spouse development for the North American Mission Board, and her husband, Ed, is senior pastor of Redemption City Church, Mobile.

Women for the gospel

Litton also is on the network's steering committee and she said their hope is the network will be a place "where we really sharpen each other."

"We want to influence women in our local church, leaders at all levels and strengthen our denomi-

"[I am] praying for a new era in the SBC, one in which all people — male and female — would exercise their God-given gifts for that mission."

J.D. Greear
President, SBC

nation's reach for the gospel," she said. "We're working on content for the site. We want to train and coach and instruct each other. We have a lot of women to draw from — we just have to administrate all that and collect it."

So far the network has a blog and a podcast, and Litton said the concept is growing as they go. More than 500 women have already joined the network's Facebook group — it's labeled "closed" but it's open to anyone who wants to request to join. It's



Canva.com

The idea of mobilizing women leaders across the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) has materialized in the launch of the SBC Women's Leadership Network. The initiative gained some traction at the 2018 SBC annual meeting with a resolution on the dignity and worth of women, and it got some momentum when several dozen women leaders gathered together for a summit at the same meeting.

just to have a small gatekeeping element that allows leaders to keep the group true to its intended purpose — for SBC women leaders to have a safe place to converse, Litton said.

The website notes in its purpose that the network doesn't "intend to address or discuss denominational issues" or "entertain various perspectives of women's roles either in the home or the church."

'Where it takes us'

The network's leadership team includes Litton and 13 other women who serve as leaders in local churches or at the denominational level.

The site also notes that team members "are loyal Southern Baptists and convictionally complementarian," upholding the Baptist Faith & Message 2000.

The group is endorsed by SBC President J.D. Greear and a host of other pastors and leaders across the convention. Danny Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theologi-

cal Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, is one. Litton's husband is another.

Greear said he is "praying for a new era in the SBC, one in which all people — male and female — would exercise their God-given gifts for that mission. The SBC Women's Leadership Network is one more step along the way, and I'm excited to see where it takes us."

For more information visit sbcwomen.net.

For more information visit sbcwomen.net.

"A collaborative community of women from the Southern Baptist Convention family who long to lead in diverse ways to significantly impact the kingdom of God."

SBC Women's Leadership Network website



SBC WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP NETWORK

Photo courtesy of SBC Women's Leadership Network

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**Photo has been changed for privacy purposes*

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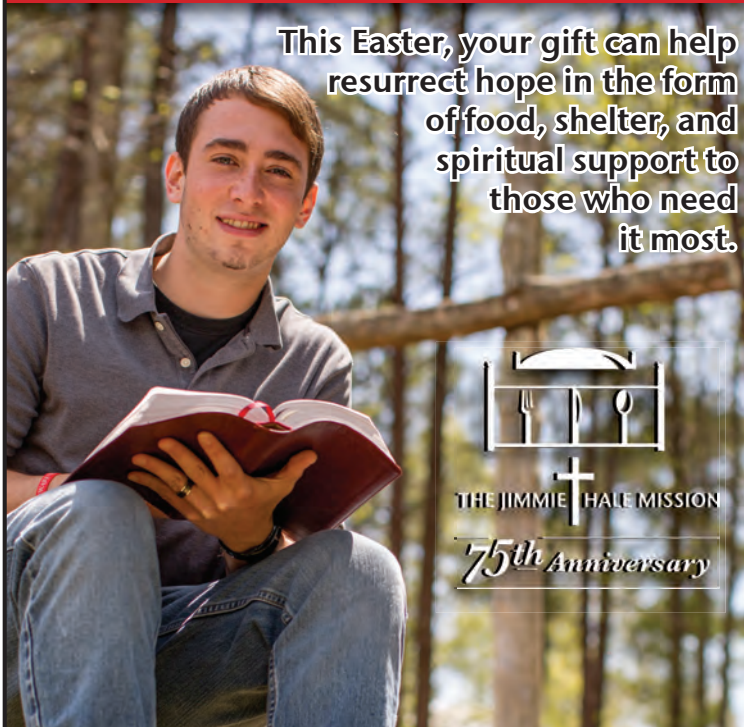
Harrison, Clayton, Hueytown: Concord BC of Bessemer
Johnson, Nell, Locust Fork: Patricia & Fred Hollis
Necaise, Caroline Roe, Theodore: County Line BC of Pine Hill
Nutt, Deborah, Pensacola, FL: Eureka BC of Franklin
Quick, Bobby, Hueytown: Concord BC of Bessemer
Rush, David, Sr., Dickinson: County Line BC of Pine Hill, Sue Maness
Trawick, Norvie Lee "Slim", Castleberry: Eureka BC of Franklin

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Eldridge warns against 'tyranny of convenience' in Christian walk

Modern life is all about convenience — instant food, instant communication, instant entertainment; the list could go on.

But according to David Eldridge, pastor of Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham, “one of the things we must crucify is the desire to have convenience as the idol of our lives.”

Tenets of faith

The Christian life isn't convenient. Building a relationship with God isn't instantaneous and winning people for Christ doesn't always happen in an instant.

“The tyranny of convenience” has interrupted the Christian walk, Eldridge said.

Preaching from Luke 5 at the 2019 Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference

held at Dawson Memorial Baptist on Feb. 25, Eldridge



ELDRIDGE

described two key tenets of the Christian faith: Jesus is the only source of forgiveness, and Christians are called to

preach to the lost.

When Jesus healed the paralyzed man in Luke 5, His first words to him were not “Get up and walk” but instead “Your sins are forgiven” (v. 20).

There was no need for the high priest and a sacrificial offering, Eldridge said. “Jesus is turning everything upside down with His

ministry,” Eldridge said. “Jesus said, ‘I am the sacrificial lamb. I am the temple. I am the Great High Priest.’”

Christians, saved by God's grace, are commanded to share that good news with the lost, but “there is an inconvenience in the task,” he said.

Just as the people in Luke 5 removed the tiles in the roof to get the paralyzed man to Jesus, Christians should be removing the tiles in unbelievers' lives and pointing them to Christ.

“Behind every profession of faith is someone who carried that paralyzed person and pointed them to the sufficiency of Christ,” El-

dridge said. “Who carried you? Who moved those tiles for you?” (Jessica Ingram)

**2019
STATE EVANGELISM
CONFERENCE**

Brayden (BB) Butler is right. His healthcare team is among the best in the nation! While practicing a motocross jump, BB fell and suffered a brain bleed. It would take half a year and surgeons, physicians, nurses and therapists to help him recover. Fortunately, for BB and thousands of other children, Children's of Alabama is ranked among the top hospitals for children by *U.S. News & World Report*.

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3 stories

you should know



Photo by Van Payne/NRB

The filmmaking team behind 'I Can Only Imagine' and 'Woodlawn' have launched Kingdom Studios, a new faith-based movie studio funded by the Hollywood company Lionsgate. The venture is the first-of-its-kind within the Christian movie industry. 'We're not here to launch a movie. We're here to launch a movie studio,' Birmingham-based Christian filmmaker Jon Erwin told an audience at the National Religious Broadcasters convention in Anaheim, California.

US expands overseas abortion funding ban

The U.S. will strengthen and expand a policy withholding federal funds from overseas groups that offer or promote abortions, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said March 26.

Called the Mexico City Policy, it was crafted during the Reagan administration and renewed under President Donald Trump requiring nongovernmental overseas aid and health organizations to abandon abortion procedures and counseling in order to receive U.S. funds designated for family planning.

"The American people should rest assured that this administration — and this State Department, and our USAID — will do all we can to safeguard U.S. taxpayer dollars and protect and respect the sanctity of life for people all around the globe," Pompeo said. (BP)

Medical marijuana bill filed in Ala. statehouse

A bill in the Alabama Legislature would expand medical marijuana laws in Alabama.

The legislation, titled the Compassion, Access, Research and Expansion (CARE) Act, was filed March 20 by Rep. Mike Ball (R-Dist. 10) of Madison. The legislation would allow residents 19 and older to obtain cannabidiol (CBD) oil for treatment of specified medical conditions, including cancer, chronic pain and depression.

Ball was the sponsor of two earlier bills that became Carly's Law, authorizing study of CBD as a treatment for patients, and Leni's Law, which decriminalizes the usage of CBD for patients with debilitating medical conditions. The new bill calls for establishing a state commission to oversee the law's implementation. (TAB)

— NEWSBRIEFS —

FBC Pinson uses home-baked goods to reach out to its community

First Baptist Church, Pinson, decided recently it was time to introduce themselves to the community again. And what better way to do that, said Pastor David Awtrey, than with home-baked goods?

As part of their Baking for Business outreach they took cakes, fudge, muffins and cookies to more than 40 local businesses ranging from Taco Bell to insurance agencies to vape stores.

At each one they got to know the workers, shared the gospel if possible and asked if they could pray with the employees.

"We heard the good, the bad and the ugly about church," Awtrey said. "There were people who said they had been hurt by church and would never come again. But there were also people who couldn't believe we were doing



Unsplash.com

that, just going out and trying to love the community. We were really well received for the most part."

In many cases employees were grateful for the gift and the prayer, he said, adding that First, Pinson, wants to be Jesus to the community, to be a place where they can come and experience real love.

"We just wanted to open the door and say, 'Hey we're here for you and we would love for you to come visit,'" Awtrey said. (Grace Thornton)

Midwest disaster relief recovery begins as additional flooding looms

Historic flooding in the Midwest has caused at least \$3 billion in damages in recent weeks and state disaster relief leaders are organizing a strategy to help in what will be a long-term recovery process.

Record snowfall combined with heavy rains led to the flooding and more runoff from melting snow is expected. Southern Baptist Disaster Relief leadership said a long deployment to provide relief is anticipated.

Volunteers in Iowa have already begun mud-out work, and Southern Baptist chaplains in northern Missouri have been providing emotional and spiritual support for families as they waited for floodwater to recede before they could go back to their homes.

Several deaths have been attributed to the flooding, and hundreds of homes and farms have been destroyed. (BP)

Judge says lawsuit can go forward with aborted baby as co-plaintiff

A Madison County judge has recognized the legal rights of an aborted baby under an Alabama law approved by voters in 2018, paving the way for the baby's father to sue the makers of the pill used in the abortion and the abortion clinic who gave it to the baby's mother.

Madison County Probate Judge Frank Barger



Screen grab from Fox News

News near you

COFFEE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Newbia Baptist Church, Elba**, will host its spring revival April 7–9. The Sunday service will begin at 6 p.m., and Monday and Tuesday services will begin at 7 p.m. Kenneth Hagler will be the guest speaker. For more information call 334-308-7510. Will Jordan is pastor.

SOUTHEAST ASSOCIATION

▶ **Bluff Springs Baptist Church, Ashford**, will honor Homer Davis on April 14 as he celebrates 70 years of ministry. Homer has served as a pastor, church planter, director of missions and interim pastor. He holds degrees from the University of Alabama and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Lunch will be served after the celebration service. Mike Shihrah is pastor.



DAVIS

ETOWAH ASSOCIATION

▶ **Brad Mullinax** is the new pastor of **James Memorial Baptist Church, Gadsden**. He previously served as pastor of Neriah Baptist Church, Buena Vista, Virginia; pastor

of evangelism and discipleship at Oasis Church, Monroe, Virginia; and church planter and pastor of River Church, Madison Heights, Virginia. He holds a bachelor's and master's degree from Liberty University and Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary and Graduate School in Lynchburg, Virginia. He and his wife, Bethany, have three children.



MULLINAX

GENEVA ASSOCIATION

▶ **Maple Avenue Baptist Church, Geneva**, will host its monthly 39ers CLUB on April 9 at 11 a.m. Patrick Dyess will be the guest speaker. For reservations call 334-684-9617. Teddy Ward is pastor.

MADISON ASSOCIATION

▶ **First Baptist Church, Madison**, will be one of many churches hosting the National Day of Youth Ministry Training on Sept. 21 from 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Deadline for early registration is April 21. The event will feature TED Talk-style training from eight leading voices in youth ministry: Doug Fields, Josh Griffin, Heather Flies, Mark Oestreicher, Kara Powell, Karl Romeus, Chap Clark and Katie Edwards. For more information or to register visit trainmyvolunteers.com.

MORGAN ASSOCIATION

▶ **Shoal Creek Baptist Church, Decatur**, celebrated its 175th anniversary on March 10. Former pastor Harold Fanning and evangelist Junior Hill were the guest speakers for the celebration. Congregational singing was led by current minister of music Joe Holmes and the

church's praise team, former minister of music David Hopkins and former interim minister of music Neil Steele.

Jerry Armor presented the church with a certificate from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Sen. Arthur Orr delivered a resolution by the Alabama Legislature, and Mayor Melvin Duran brought congratulations from the City of Priceville.

Interim pastor Jackie Kay gave closing remarks and the benediction was delivered by former pastor Gary Linville.

"Our people worked hard to make this a special day for thinking about the history of the church and all God has done and how His glory still shines," church member Maxine Hembry said.



Photo by Jerry Armor

SHELBY ASSOCIATION

▶ **Southside Baptist Church, Alabaster**, will host southern gospel men's ensemble Redeemed on April 7 at 5 p.m. A fellowship will follow. Everyone is welcome. J.D. Davis is pastor of the church.

WINSTON ASSOCIATION

▶ **First Baptist Church, Arley**, will present "The Day He Wore My Crown," a dramatic musical concert about the resurrection story April 10 at 7 p.m., April 13 at 6 p.m. and April 14 at 6 p.m. For more information call 205-384-4667. Roger White is pastor. ✝

— NEWSBRIEFS —

issued a decree in February stating "Baby Roe" is a person and may be named as co-plaintiff in a wrongful death suit filed by father Ryan Magers against the Alabama Women's Center for Reproductive Alternatives, its employees and a pharmaceutical company who manufactured the abortion medication.

In November 2018, Alabama voters approved the Alabama State Abortion Policy Amendment, which made it state policy to "recognize and support the sanctity of unborn life and the rights of unborn children, including the right to life." (TAB)



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No tax relief for churches; Congress ignores latest request on filing returns

Congress has failed, to this point, to heed the latest urgent request from a coalition led by the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commis-

sion (ERLC) to rescind a provision in federal law requiring churches to file tax returns for the first time in American history.

Sen. James Lankford of Oklahoma and Rep. Mark Walker of North Carolina are among members of Congress seeking to halt a measure requiring churches to file tax returns.

The provision requires houses of worship and other nonprofits to pay a 21 percent tax on employee benefits such as parking and transportation. The measure, which took effect Jan. 1, 2018, will cost the charitable sector an estimated \$1.7 billion over 10 years.

In November the ERLC led a 33-member coalition that urged congressional leaders to repeal the section before the end of the year, but the effort fell short. The House voted 220–183 in December to reverse the provision, but the Senate did not have the votes to approve the measure. (BP)

Proposed bill would expand Stand Your Ground law to Ala. churches

A bill that would add churches to Alabama's 2006 Stand Your Ground law has been reintroduced into the

Alabama Legislature. The Stand Your Ground law permits the use of deadly force as a defense against perceived threats.

The Alabama Church Protection Act, filed by State Rep. Lynn Greer (R-Dist. 2), of Rogersville, would allow churchgoers to defend themselves with guns at church.

Previous bills adding Stand Your Ground rights for churchgoers have stalled in the Legislature, but Birmingham attorney Eric Johnston, president of the Southeast Law Institute, believes the law is a good idea.

"Small churches don't have the budgets to have a policeman," he said. "All he's saying is you authorize someone in the church to have a weapon."

The bill reads: "This bill would provide that a person is not criminally liable for using physical force, including deadly force, in self-defense or in the defense of another person on the premises of a church under certain conditions." (TAB)



Photo by Wikimedia



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Stronger Together

A light in the darkness

Woman won to Christ by Mobile Baptists at Mardi Gras returns 12 years later

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Charles Gibbs said it can be discouraging sometimes. In his 23 years of doing street evangelism at Mardi Gras in Mobile he hears the same questions on repeat in his mind in moments of weariness: Does it do any good? Did the people who made decisions for Christ really mean it?

But this year those questions got silenced when Je'Mekia Dale showed up and asked for his wife, Vanita, by name.

'Overjoyed'

Back in 2007, Vanita Gibbs met Dale — then 16 — and shared the gospel with her. She accepted Christ.

And now 12 years later, after being discipled and growing in her faith at a local church, Dale decided to come back with a tent of her own and share with others.

She came back to the spot where she'd met Jesus all those years before.

And much to her amazement Vanita Gibbs was still there.

"I'm overjoyed — my heart jumped for joy when I saw her," Vanita Gibbs said. "All day long I watched as she talked with women on the street and led them to Christ. It's just God's story and for me it was a huge confirmation."

Charles Gibbs, pastor of West Mobile Baptist Church, said he felt the same way — that it was a year of confirmation. It didn't stop with Dale — it only started there.

Three women who had prayed to receive Christ at

their tent at a past Mardi Gras brought their children by this year, and one of the women brought her husband too. He and all the children

prayed to receive Christ.

"We don't do it for the confirmation — we do it out of obedience," Charles Gibbs said.

But the confirmation is definitely encouraging, he said.

This year, like previous years, the Gibbsses came together with other Mobile Baptists and volunteers from as far away as Georgia and North Carolina to "shine a light" into the darkness of Mardi Gras.

They've shared the gospel with creative outreach tools like balloons, sketch boards

and rope tricks, using them to illustrate the life of Christ and the need for redemption. This year alone nearly 50 people said they wanted to follow Christ with their lives.

Thomas Wright, executive director of missions for Mobile Baptist Association, said he and his wife, Donna, have been there for most of the last 14 years and have seen God at work.

Surprisingly many who hear the gospel there hear it for the very first time, he said.

"This year three revelers approached the tent to receive a power band bracelet. Donna walked through the

colored beads explaining the gospel of Jesus. Two of the three accepted Jesus," Wright said.

At the event teams share Jesus with "hundreds of people and many years see upwards of 300 decisions," he said, noting that it was impactful for the more than a dozen Mobile Association churches who participated too.

"Evangelistic ministry events help people interact with many unbelievers and hone gospel presentation skills," Thomas Wright executive DOM Mobile Baptist Association said, noting that it was impactful for the more than a dozen Mobile Association churches who participated too. "Evangelistic ministry events help people interact with many unbelievers and hone gospel presentation skills," Wright said. "The experience helps churches take those outreach skills into their community all year long."



GIBBS (LEFT) AND DALE

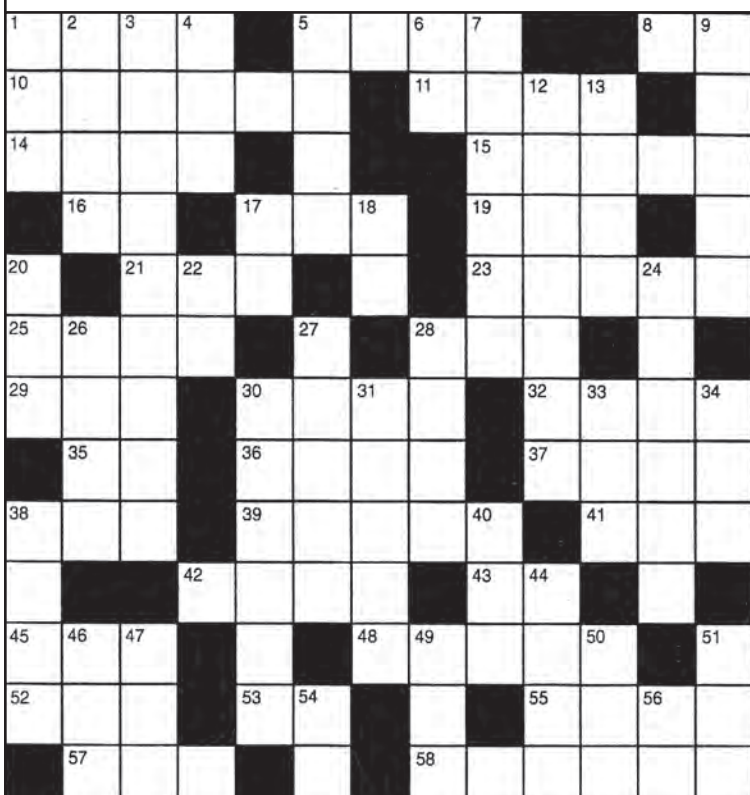
"Evangelistic ministry events help people interact with many unbelievers and hone gospel presentation skills."

**Thomas Wright
executive DOM
Mobile Baptist Association**

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 Udena McKee Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

1. If one went unto them from the _____. (Luke 16:30)
5. Sixth month of the Hebrew calendar. (Neh. 6:15)
8. Give tribute unto Caesar, or _____? (Luke 20:22)
10. A rod of an _____ tree. (Jer. 1:11)
11. He made him to suck honey out of the _____. (Deut. 32:13)
14. A good _____ is rather to be chosen. (Prov. 22:1)
15. Satan ... smote Job with sore _____. (Job 2:7)
16. Month. (abbr.)
17. American Medical Association. (abbr.)
19. Vase or vessel.
21. The absence or reverse of.
23. God set them in the heaven to give _____. (Gen. 1:17)
25. _____ up thy strength. (Ps. 80:2)
28. Legislator. (abbr.)
29. A favorite.
30. His enemy came and sowed _____s. (Matt. 13:25)
32. The shepherds who _____ my people. (Jer. 23:2)
35. Direction.
36. To give off or out.
37. A fine grit stone for sharpening.
38. Do you submit to _____ rules. (Col. 2:20)
39. And all the _____ of the land. (Lev. 27:30)

Down

41. To find fault.
42. Behold, I send an angel before _____. (Ex. 23:20)
43. Wind direction.
45. _____ no man any thing. (Rom. 13:8)
48. There came two angels to _____. (Gen. 19:1)
52. _____ consider how great this man was. (Heb. 7:4)
53. Elkanah went to _____mah. (1 Sam. 2:11)
55. _____ your heart and not your garments. (Joel 2:13)
57. It shall bring forth _____ fruit. (Ezek. 47:12)
58. Condemned, especially to hell.

17. The weight thereof was _____ hundred and thirty. (Num. 7:13)
18. Arizona. (abbr.)
20. Child shall play on the hole of the _____. (Isa. 11:8)
22. Either/_____. (1 Sam. 1:2)
24. Wife of Elkanah. (1 Sam. 1:2)
26. Do not _____ the Lord your God. (Deut. 6:16)
27. Fiber.
28. Third son of Adam and Eve. (Gen. 4:25)
30. To fasten or restrain.
31. Last _____.
33. Variant of aeon.
34. Degree. (abbr.)
38. Iron sharpeneth _____. (Prov. 27:17)
40. I shall keep it unto the _____. (Ps. 119:33)
44. But I am a _____, and no man. (Ps. 22:6)
46. They also may without the word be _____. (1 Pet. 3:1)
47. Man had nothing, save one little _____ lamb. (2 Sam. 12:3)
49. Remember the days of _____. (Deut. 32:7)
50. Sons of God saw the daughters of _____. (Gen. 6:2)
51. Strange or different.
54. Morning time.
56. Nebraska. (abbr.)

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For April 7

Explore the Bible

By Robert E. Jackson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



INCLUDES Mark 7:25–37

The Humble (25–30)

After a busy time of performing miracles, teaching, ministering to the ever-growing crowds of people and dealing with constant scrutiny from religious leaders, Jesus traveled to the region of Tyre and Sidon. Jesus' fame had spread so rapidly secrecy was becoming virtually impossible.

Hearing of Jesus a Gentile woman came to Him and begged for her daughter's healing. Jesus' answer offered a glimmer of hope. His words, "first let the children eat," imply after the Jews have "eaten" the Gentiles will have an opportunity. Jesus doesn't stop at this statement but continues with a common Jewish denigration of Gentiles and calls her a dog. Let the shock of this slur sink in for a minute. Even if this slur is a test for this Syro-phenician woman it is not what we would expect our Lord to say.

Understanding the cultural context in which Jesus spoke these words is helpful. Jews viewed dogs as unclean while Gentiles often saw dogs as beloved family pets. Perhaps with this picture in mind the mother doesn't respond in anger but exclaims that pet dogs are allowed to eat crumbs that fall from the table of messy children.

In other words, in humility she will gladly be a dog if her daughter can receive one crumb from Jesus. By faith she realizes that even a morsel from Christ can heal. Jesus grants her desire and heals her daughter.

Not only should we follow Jesus' example and show compassion to all people regardless of race, but we also must ask God for greater humility and faith like this woman.

The Outsider (31–35)

Jesus continued His travel through the predominantly Gentile area of the Decapolis. Everywhere Jesus traveled people brought their sick.

People with physical disabilities were considered unclean and often treated as sinners and outcasts. One such outcast, a deaf man who could hardly talk, was brought to Jesus.

Jesus' healings follow no formula. He healed the Syro-phenician's daughter with a declaration, but here Jesus pulled the man aside privately and healed him. He touched the ears, spit, touched the tongue and exclaimed, "be opened."

Jesus is the Messiah who is Lord and heals as He chooses. However, Jesus is consistent in reaching out to sinners, misfits and outsiders.

What about you? Our world is filled with outcasts who are seeking compassion and love. Above all things multitudes of people are "outsiders" because they are spiritually deaf and blind. Time is short. Will you share Jesus with them? Only He can open their blinded eyes and unstop their deafened ears.

The Exuberant (36–37)

Jesus is the sovereign Lord of all, but humans have a responsibility to respond to Him. Before we cast stones at the people's disobedience we should realize how difficult it would be to keep these sensational healings quiet.

Let's face it — we often slip with small secrets. Would we remain silent if we witnessed an astonishing healing? In reality we witness miracle after miracle. I once was spiritually blind but now I see! I was lost but now I am found! I was dead in my sins and now I am alive forever!

Have you experienced the change Jesus brings in your life? Have you seen Him touch the lives of other people? How can we remain silent? Why aren't we spreading the exuberant news of Jesus and the supernatural transformation He offers? Jesus' acts of compassion are so astonishing that we must not keep them to ourselves. ✚

Bible Studies for Life

By James Riley Strange, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of New Testament, Samford University



FULL CONTENTMENT Ecclesiastes 11:7–10; 12:12–14

For today read all of chapters 11 and 12, the teacher's final commentary on the true source of what is good and the true goal of living.

Enjoy the life God has given but remember the coming judgment. (11:7–10)

Chapter 11 contains three parts. All offer variations on the theme: Because the future is uncertain one should live well today. As we shall see living well entails giving generously and working diligently.

In verses 1–6 of chapter 11 the metaphor of casting bread upon the waters expresses not knowing whom our good deeds will touch. The coming darkness (v. 8) — we do not know what lies in store for us other than we will die as all creatures do — should not intimidate us into holding our wealth rather than giving to those in need. The idea of getting back our bread probably refers to the judgment mentioned in verse 9.

As the teacher says in verse 3 we can know some things critical for living, such as when the rains come. Other knowledge, such as a tree lying where it falls, are not as important.

The point is this: Spending too much time in observation can keep us from acting. Because we cannot know the work of God we need to do what is in our control — our own work.

We do not know which of our actions will result in good, but we must do them.

Verses 7–8 remind us the teacher thinks life is worth living despite its brevity and the weariness of human toil. Everything that happens — the sweetness of life and the days of darkness (probably a reference to old age) — is "mere breath" (your translation may say "vanity"). It is fleeting.

Verses 9–10 advise young people life is most enjoyable during youth,

but two caveats exist. I mention the latter first: youth is also fleeting so enjoy it while you can. Second, in youth we should not pursue pleasures that result in judgment.

Reverent obedience of God is the way to enjoy the life He has given. (12:12–14)

Before reaching the final conclusion the teacher reinforces his advice to the young by talking about the fears that come with growing old (12:1–8). His many images may be metaphors for aging and death which all humans must face.

In the 12th century a Jewish commentator thought verses 9 through 14 were added by an editor and some modern scholars agree. The voice switches to the third person and verse 8 repeats Ecclesiastes 1:2 forming a frame around nearly the entire book.

Throughout the book the teacher has ruminated on the brevity of human existence and our inability to control the things that happen to us. We may amass wealth but we can lose everything. We may fear God and be wise, but we can still suffer and die.

There is no reward in this life for doing good deeds, and other than a few mentions of judgment, the teacher has little to say about life after death.

We might expect someone with this attitude to conclude people should live as they please. The book of Ecclesiastes, however, never says such a thing.

For the teacher one should fear God and keep His commandments, not for reward or to avoid punishment, but because it is good.

This is an important reminder for followers of Christ — those of us who proclaim the resurrection and eternal life with God for those who live in faith.

We too say, "Righteousness is good because it is good. It is good because it is what God wants." ✚



Media reviews

MOVIES

‘Breakthrough’ film leads April’s family-friendly spotlight

By **Michael Foust**
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

How deep is a mother’s love? That’s just one of the questions explored in the new faith-based film “Breakthrough” (PG), which opens in theaters April 17.

The film ranks among the best faith-based movies I’ve seen, but also it’s simply a great movie that holds its own against the leading inspirational mainstream films ever made.

Miraculous survival

“Breakthrough” tells the true-life story of a Missouri teenager named John Smith who falls through an icy pond and is under water for 15 minutes before he is pulled to the surface.

Without a pulse he is taken to the hospital and considered dead when his mother begins praying over his body.

He regains a heartbeat — 45 minutes after he fell in the pond — and recovers.

The film stars Chrissy Metz (“This Is Us”) who is outstanding as John’s

mother Joyce; Topher Grace (“Spider-Man 3”) as her pastor Jason Noble; and Dennis Haysbert (Allstate commercials, “24”) as John’s physician Dr. Garrett.

DeVon Franklin produced the movie with NBA star Steph Curry and Samuel Rodriguez of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference serving as executive producers.

It is the first and last faith-based film released by Fox 2000 Pictures which will shut down as a result of the Disney-Fox merger announced in March.

The movie’s miraculous plot will have its doubters, but the story has the medical documentation to support it. Mainstream newspapers and television stations covered the real-life drama when it took place in 2015.

“The number one take-away is that prayer works [and that] love wins,” Franklin told a panel of Christian media members in March. “When you think about it, why would Joyce pray that hard? It’s because of her love. And I think that’s just so powerful.”

The movie has no sexu-



Photo by Allen Fraser



‘Breakthrough’

ality and only minor language. It is rated PG for thematic content including peril.

Check these out too

Also worth watching this month:

► **“The Pilgrim’s Progress”** — This animated film re-tells the famous story by John Bunyan of a man named Christian who journeys from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. It stars John Rhys-Davies (“Raiders of the Lost Ark,” the “Lord of the Rings” series), Ben Price and singer Kristyn Getty as the narrator. It is in theaters for two nights only: April 18 and 20.

► **“Jesus: His Life”** — This eight-part History Channel series examines the life of Christ through the eyes of people who knew Him: Joseph, John the Baptist, Mary the mother of

Jesus and others. It mixes drama with interviews from 20-plus religious leaders.

Unfortunately a couple of the experts question the biblical account, but thankfully the evangelical voice is represented. Among the evangelical scholars: Asbury Seminary’s Ben Witherington, who sides with Scripture every time. “Jesus: His Life” concludes the Monday before Easter.

► **“An Interview with God”** — A depressed journalist named Paul Asher lands the interview of a lifetime with God, who agrees to **three one-on-one sessions, 30 minutes apiece.**

Now on Netflix, **“An Interview with God” was one of the best and most thought-provoking faith-themed films of 2018.** It’s not perfect but it stands out for its acting and plot. Brenton Thwaites (“Pirates of the Caribbean”) plays

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.

Asher and David Strathairn (“Lincoln”) plays the role of God. It is unrated.

► **“Popular Mechanics for Kids”** — Two teenagers travel the world to explain science and technology to children. Topics covered include the Arctic, the International Space Station and slime. More than 40 episodes of this entertaining and educational series are streaming on PureFlix.com.✚



‘The Pilgrim’s Progress’

Photo courtesy of Fathom Events

‘Loved and safe’

Church’s foster care initiative empties local shelter, embraced statewide

What started as a pastor’s burden for orphans has impacted the lives of hundreds of at-risk children and their families as well as Mississippi’s child welfare system.

In 2015, as Tony Karnes of Michael Memorial Baptist Church, Gulfport, Mississippi, was prepar-

ing a sermon he took to heart James 1:27, which implores Christians to “visit orphans ... in their affliction.”

Karnes subsequently visited the Harrison County Children’s Shelter, which “was filled with children,” some who had been taken from their homes due to neglect or abuse.

Some of the children in the shelter, which was intended for short-term stays, had been there for months because no foster homes were available, Karnes said. He returned to the church with a vision for recruiting 100 Harrison County families to be licensed as foster homes and to “rescue” some of those children from the shelter.

About 50 church families volunteered, but the state’s time-consuming foster home licensing process could span a year or longer.

So Karnes and church members developed and proposed to child pro-



Submitted photo

Adoption has been a family adventure for the Griffin brothers — Hallel (center), 10; McGuire, 19; and Asher, 8 — since their parents adopted Skylar-Rose (left), now 4.

tective services a streamlined three-month foster care licensing process that included online classes and one Saturday of training. Rescue 100 became the program’s named based on Karnes’ original goal.

‘Walk in faith’

Being a foster parent “teaches you, it stretches you and you learn to transition and accept changes, and it will move you out of your comfort zone,” said church member Anna Griffin.

The second foster placement for Griffin and her husband Scott was a 2-and-a-half-year-old girl whose stay was long-term. But the Griffins made

it permanent adopting Skylar-Rose, who is now 4. They also have three biological sons, ages 8, 10 and 19.

You don’t know how the story’s going to unfold,” Griffin said. “You just walk in with faith saying, ‘I don’t know how all this is going to turn out. All I’m going to do is let them see the gospel lived out in my home and let them feel loved and safe in a way that they’ve never known.’

“And whether they stay in your home forever or they go home, they’ve known the love of God and that’s better than not knowing it ever.” (BP)

How to pray:

► Pray for more families in Mississippi and across the country to consider fostering and adopting children.

► Pray the children in shelters and foster care will be taken care of and will know they are loved and cherished by God. (TAB)



WLOX photo

Harrison County Children’s Shelter