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# Reuniting families

## Lifeline provides parenting class for parents of children in foster system

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

Allison Bright and her family started fostering children about three years ago, and it didn't take long before she got upset.

"I just lost hope in a lot of how I saw the foster system working," said Bright, a member of First Baptist Church, Trussville. "I was upset for the children we had in our home."

She had watched birth parents get right up to the brink of getting their children back then not quite make it. She had hoped along with her foster children they would get to go back to their

families and then they didn't. "We became so disappointed," she said.

### Parenting class

And then Bright and her husband learned about Families Count, a ministry of Lifeline Children's Services that provides a six-week parenting class for moms and dads of children in the foster system.

"First and foremost it's Christ-centered. It introduces these parents to Jesus, and

family reunification is just the icing on the cake," Bright said.

That kind of ministry was just the hope she was looking for in the midst of the brokenness she encountered. With help from volunteers at her church she began coordinating a Families Count ministry at First, Trussville.

Traci Newell, Lifeline's education coordinator,

said Bright and others are seeing God heal struggling families in miraculous ways.

"We're seeing moms and dads come to know Christ, and we're seeing parents really connect with churches on an ongoing basis," she said.

The idea for Families Count first took shape six years ago after Lifeline's staff had noticed some disturbing trends (See 'Many,' page 14)



To watch the videos from this week's issue, visit our YouTube channel "TAB Media."

# Annual Southern Christian Writers Conference will be held June 7-8 at FBC Tuscaloosa

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

SCWC was founded by David and Joanne Sloan, and at the end of last year's conference they passed leadership down to their daughter, Cheryl Sloan Wray, and their son, Christopher Sloan. The Sloan grandchildren and great-grandchildren also help out.

SCWC offers an annual workshop and other writing and book expo events. SCWC added *The Alabama Baptist* (TAB) as an official partner in 2018.

## 'Expanded opportunities'

"We are enjoying the partnership and hope to assist Cheryl and Christopher with expanded resources and opportunities as they build on the incredible foundation provided by David and Joanne," said TAB editor-in-chief Jennifer Davis Rash. "The heart and spirit

behind what SCWC represents and permeates will track perfectly with the mission and vision of TAB as well as our staff members who all have incredible hearts for Christ and community."



EVERSON

The 2019 workshop will be June 7-8 at First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa.

Bestselling novelist Eva Marie Everson and Iron Stream Media CEO John Herring will be the keynote speakers for the workshop.

Everson has written 36 novels, Bible studies and books on Christian living. Herring leads the work taking place at New Hope Publishers, Iron Stream Books, Ascender Books and New Hope for Kidz imprints. Herring will speak Friday night and Everson will speak Saturday.

Workshop participants will have the opportunity to meet with book agents Bruce Barbour, Tessa Hall and Karen Moore in one-on-one with sessions and lead workshops

along with publishers Ellen Maze and Angela Broyles.

Other workshop topics are blogging with Javacia Bowser, social media and websites with Marlin Caddell, screenwriting with Wayne Franklin, travel writing with Verna Gates, devotions with Jennifer Gerelds, Bible studies with Katy Kauffman, spiritual disciplines with Christopher Sloan, nonfiction with David Sloan, working with editors with Laurie Stroud, writing for magazines with Cheryl Wray and fiction and editing with Maze.



HERRING

Attendance is limited to the first 200 registrants. The pre-registration deadline is May 31.

Registration will include all the workshop sessions, two meals, access to free one-on-one sessions with agents and publishers, access to the book room and a hospitality room.

For more information visit [www.southernchristianwriters.com](http://www.southernchristianwriters.com), email [scwritersconference@gmail.com](mailto:scwritersconference@gmail.com) or call 205-563-9382. (SCWC, TAB)

# TAB placing new focus on group subscriptions

*The Alabama Baptist* (TAB) has undergone quite a few changes throughout the past several months. All of those changes have been focused on and motivated by TAB's desire to provide relevant content and top-notch customer relations for subscribers.

One major update has been the transition to our new billing and circulation management partner, Cambey & West.

Cambey & West has a long history

of assisting faith-based publications with their circulation management and TAB is excited to add them to the family as we look forward to new days of improved customer service, growth and expansion.

## 'Efficient service'

The many features provided by Cambey & West allows TAB to continue the longtime tradition of quick response and efficient service.

"Group subscriptions have always been a vital part of TAB," said TAB director of communications Debbie Campbell. "Partnering with Cambey & West allows us to use the latest technology to provide fast, efficient service for our customers

while maintaining that one-on-one relationship."

The TAB staff will be consistently reviewing partner groups and helping them find the best way to communicate with their members and engage with TAB.

TAB will also send each group manager his or her group list once a quarter for review to make sure everyone who wants to receive the paper is on the list and anyone who no longer needs to be on the list has been removed.

Send any subscription questions or changes to the subscription department at [subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org) or 205-870-4720, ext. 104. (TAB)



## Graduation gift idea

Consider Mike Tate's book, *The White Shirt: Find Your Peaceful and Life-giving Career at Any Stage of Life*, as a gift option for upcoming graduates. Tate partners in ministry with TAB.



THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

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

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Group Rate per issue — \$16.25  
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Individual — \$24.95 per year with 3-year plan

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Baptist Press (BP), Baptist News Global (BNG), Religion News Service (RNS), Forum 18 (F18), Morning Star News (MS).

## POSTMASTER

Send address changes to:  
*The Alabama Baptist*  
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Birmingham, AL 35209

## ADDRESS CHANGE

Send old and new addresses, and name of church to:  
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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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1999, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018 as judged by Associated Church Press, Baptist Communicators Association, Evangelical Press Association or Religion Communicators Council

# MY RASHIONALE

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

[jrash@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:jrash@thealabamabaptist.org)  
[@RashionalThts](https://www.instagram.com/RashionalThts)



## Why not check out the SBC meeting while it is close by?

It's true that most messengers attending the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) are on staff at a church or association or are involved in denominational service of some type. And the registered guests tend to be family members of the ministry leaders and/or laypeople from area churches.

While the experience is much more than a business meeting those in ministry and denominational service are the target audience. I mean who can know all the players, the politics, the issues and the lingo except those involved and invested in denominational life. Am I right?

Still I would encourage all members of Baptist churches to experience an SBC annual meeting at least once — if nothing else for a glimpse at the full picture of the denomination. And what better opportunity for Alabama Baptists to watch it all in action than June 11–12 when the meeting comes to the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex (BJCC)?

Join in for whatever your schedule will allow — one session, a full day or several days. Experience the Pastors Conference and national Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) events June 9–10. And if you are up for some door-to-door evangelism then think about joining the hundreds of volunteers coming in for Crossover on June 8.

A favorite among convention-goers each year is the massive exhibit hall — and Birmingham's will be the second largest in the history of SBC annual meetings. So where should you start?

First, mention to your pastor or church administrator you are interested in serving as a messenger if a slot is still available. A church official will take care of this step for you if all works out for you to be a messenger. If not then no worries. You can register as a guest onsite when you arrive.

Second, determine how many hours or days your schedule will allow you to attend. From there research all the activities happening during that timeframe and select what you would like to attend at what time. Find the activities and times at [www.sbcannualmeeting.com/sbc19/](http://www.sbcannualmeeting.com/sbc19/)

events. The exhibit hall will be open June 10–12 from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Definitely check it out.

Third, determine your travel plans and lodging if you are staying overnight. Hotels close by are likely sold out by now, but there should be options outside the downtown area. If you aren't familiar with how to navigate the roads around the BJCC now that there's a missing chunk of the interstate visit [5920bridge.com](http://5920bridge.com).

Finally, pack some snacks and a water bottle like you might do at a theme park to avoid long lines and sometimes pricey

lunches or plan to eat outside the normal meal times for quicker service. Food vendors and coffee options are available inside the convention center as well as a few restaurants within walking distance.

While parking and finding your way to the annual meeting activities will take a little effort the experience could be a field trip of sorts if you work with fellow church members to go together. If you have any questions about logistics or would like to talk through the options for your schedule feel free to contact us at *TAB* and we will do our best to assist. 🌈

## WHAT'S NEW AT TAB?

### We decided to add Instagram to *TAB's* social media presence — check us out @alabamabaptist and @RashionalThts

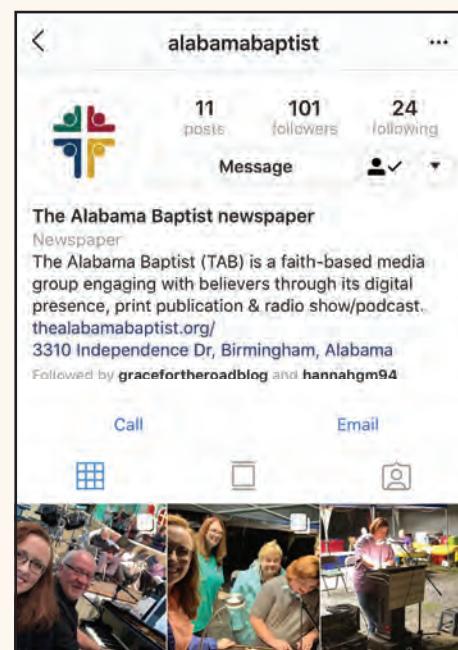
It's a new piece to the developing puzzle here at *TAB* — an Instagram account.

While *TAB* has had a social media presence for more than a decade the staff purposefully restricted the social media to Facebook and Twitter — until now.

*TAB's* Facebook page provides summary accounts and links to the various news and feature articles covered in the print publication as well as online-only content. It also provides a community space for those who interact with *TAB* to have a continuous conversation.

The Twitter account (@alabamabaptist) focuses mainly on news posts, features and the latest updates to breaking stories.

*TAB* on Instagram will go a different direction and show behind-the-scenes footage of the team.



The Instagram posts will include images and video clips of what is happening with staff members on location during coverage assignments.

The posts might also show funny or unusual things happening at the office. And they might share special moments in the lives of staff members.

We want you to get to know our team and see what all goes into making *TAB* a reality as well as experience some of the more interesting times along with us.

We also decided I should post on Instagram using my Twitter handle @RashionalThts.

What will that look like exactly?

I'm not sure yet but I'm planning to explore what does and doesn't work. Be sure to let me know if you have suggestions. And follow @alabamabaptist and @RashionalThts if you are on Instagram.

—Jennifer Davis Rash

# Your Voice



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

## Six challenges to rural church revitalization

By Rob Paul  
www.robpaul.net

There are several challenges to rural church revitalization. Each of them can and must be overcome for the rural church to experience revitalization.

### 1. Resilience

Rural churches can be slow to die. Members may not recognize or be willing to admit that something needs to change. And it may take the pastor several years to convince them.

### 2. Chaplaincy mindset

This is the idea that the best thing a pastor can do for a struggling rural church is to love them while they die. But I am convinced that God has a more noble purpose for his church than this.

### 3. Location

Rural churches are by definition located in the country. No one just drives by. But the address of a rural church is not an accident. God has placed the church in its location for a reason. God has also placed the members of the church in the body according to his design, and he has placed the people around the church for a reason. Don't underestimate the potential. Don't underestimate the power of the gospel!

### 4. Population shifts

A generation ago, the homes within three miles of the church building were owner occupied, single-family dwellings. Some farmed the land around their homes. Others worked in the nearest towns. The families of the community had lots of children

and much in common. But those children went off to college and never came back. The jobs in town moved away too.

### 5. Cultural context

Because of the population shift the cultural context has changed. The people around the church do not look like the people inside of the church. They don't act like the people inside of the church. They don't think like the people inside of the church. Churches in this setting must learn to think like cross-cultural missionaries because that's what they are.

### 6. The church name

Today's new churches have cool names. Life Church. Mosaic Church. Vertical Church. Summit Church. On the other hand, many rural churches have ancient names (Antioch, Mount Moriah) that may sound confusing to people who are not already part of the church culture. I am not suggesting these names need to change but they can present a challenge.

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Rob Paul is a church revitalization strategist with more than three decades of experience serving established Southern Baptist churches in pastoral ministry. This article is adapted from the second in a series of blog posts addressing revitalization in the rural church. Read the full list of rural church revitalization challenges at [robpaul.net/ten-challenges-to-rural-church-revitalization/](http://robpaul.net/ten-challenges-to-rural-church-revitalization/).*

Leading is both explaining and interpreting the vision and equipping and empowering the organization to pursue the vision with passion.

**Gary Fenton**  
Senior advancement officer at Samford University and retired pastor

We honor our military heroes who have served our country and many who have paid the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom. May God bless and protect those who are serving on active duty now.

**Larry Felkins**  
Associational mission strategist  
Chilton Baptist Association

Churches are busy during the summer. What a wonderful time to share our faith at VBS and other summer events at your church.

**David Miller**  
Associational mission strategist  
Walker Baptist Association

There has to be a way to serve all of humanity without killing humanity.

**Alveda King**  
Pro-life activist and author

## Letters to the Editor

A partial or full television fast is a great challenge. I highly recommend it. I've been fasting from network television for many years. When I am in other places and am exposed to television commercials, shows, movies, etc., I am relieved that those influences are not constantly infiltrating my home.

**Leigh Pritchett**  
Pell City, Ala.

I loved your recent fast on 24-hour (cable) news — see “My

Rationale” editorial from page 3 of the Jan. 31, 2019, issue.

My wife, Linette, and I have realized the negative impact of all the “If it bleeds, it leads” negativity and conflict on our lives.

I have been listening to many history books and podcasts lately. Can you imagine if the Vietnam War, the Cuban missile crisis, Watergate or the potential nuclear crisis during Reagan's era had been 24-hour news?

**Lee Wright**  
Montgomery, Ala.

Share online or email [news@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:news@thealabamabaptist.org)

“It’s an exciting time to learn about the Great Commission.”

HEATHER KELLER  
WMU missions consultant for Acteens

God has a plan for us in our mature years to keep using us for His glory. ... Senior adults have lessons they can offer the younger adults.

God can use you to mentor and/or disciple others who are younger in their Christian walk. So adjust, adapt and be flexible with how God uses you. He gives the gifts and does not expect us to do what we can’t do.

**Randy Hagan**

**Associational missionary  
Coosa River Baptist Association**

Many evangelicals were raised to think about other religions through one lens: Satan’s handiwork. This line of thinking might resonate in the warm confines of our churches’ echo chambers, but

it is totally useless in the public square. It provides absolutely zero guidance for how to “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven,” as Christ says in the Gospel of Matthew.

**Kevin Singer**  
**Co-director  
Neighborly Faith**

The book “Disciple Her: Using the Word, Work, & Wonder of God to Invest in Women” by Kandi Gallaty is helpful in discipling anyone but is directed toward women. Gallaty walks you through all the steps in leading a 3–5 member discipleship group. It is insightful to see a plan that

begins only using Scripture and a journal, not relying on purchasing any other curriculum to complete. It has built-in leadership development and costs nothing but time, energy and commitment. If your church had one woman read and use this content, you could see an impact in your church.

**Donna Wright**  
**Mobile, Alabama**

Lord, teach me to listen, search for — even hunger for — opportunities to purposefully love unselfishly, simply because I love You. May Your love be my default as I learn to sound more like You.

**Rhonda Rhea, author  
“Messy to Meaningful: Lessons from the Junk Drawer”**

## From the *Twitterverse*

### @RobertAtCCC

“Jesus said, Go and make disciples ... not make converts to your own thoughts and opinions!”  
@myutmost #MakeDisciples

international missionaries even if they want to go. I’m not sure pastors [and] disciplers discuss this enough with high school students [and] their parents.

### @jeremydmorton

Being a believer/pastor often requires that we swim against the modern, secular tide. It is difficult. But it would be even more difficult if we gave up our biblical conviction. John 16:33

### @dsethbrown

Journalism is our process. But our real product is trust. I believe that’s our role in Southern Baptist life ...

### @edstetzer

God does not bless an ungodly means to accomplish a godly end.

### @Rgallaty

There is a difference between a quiet time with God and an unhurried quiet time with God. I have to remind myself that the goal is not to journal, pray and finish a Bible reading plan. The goal is to know God more.

### @sPeytonHill

The huge debt compiled from attending some colleges, even excellent Christian universities, negatively impacts the ability to send

### @trillianewbell

For every racist, evil statement I read or receive, I think of the

countless loving and neighborly ones I experience. It doesn’t erase or negate the other, but it does remind me that the Lord can and is working. There’s work to do and God is not done.

### @DrPaulChitwood

The missions fields of the world are populated with ladies who first heard the Holy Spirit’s call to the nations in their church’s Acteens ministry. @IMB\_SBC celebrates this [50-year] anniversary with @NationalWMU

### @rayortlund

“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Isa. 41:10). What a promise in Christ! This will get us through a scrape or two!



Photo courtesy of Shocco Springs  
Russell Klinner is executive director of Shocco Springs Conference Center.

## Christ in the center

Recently our leadership team developed a Shocco tag line — “The Christ-Centered Gathering Place.”

We were trying to simplify our message into a few short words to fill in the gap for those who have never heard of us. Ultimately our tag line came from a discussion surrounding what the word Shocco actually means.

According to legend, the word Shocco is a Native American term meaning “the gathering place.” Rooted in our name “Shocco” and rooted in our desire to reflect Christ, this simple statement summarizes who we are.

We provide a great facility with recreation, lodging, meeting space, food, amenities and many other services, but in all we do we aspire to be a reflection of Christ.

This summer thousands of people will visit our campus. My prayer is that they see not just an amazing facility but a reflection of Christ through each of us.

I am also reminded this doesn’t just apply to Shocco or my job here as director. It is life. As a Christian, Christ-centered should be our personal tag line.

What is your tag line?  
—Russell Klinner

# Baptisms Cooperative Program Receipts

## FOR CHURCHES (PART 7)

More than 100 churches participate in Alabama Baptist life outside associations

No Association	Baptism	CP	Designated	No Association	Baptism	CP	Designated
Adger		\$0.00	\$1,174.97	New Bethel		\$0.00	\$1,000.00
Anchor		\$10,900.00	\$0.00	New Covenant		\$1,100.00	\$0.00
Anchored in Truth		\$0.00	\$0.00	New Covenant		\$400.00	\$0.00
Argo Christian		\$1,080.00	\$1,346.00	New Grace		\$0.00	\$0.00
Atwood		\$0.00	\$0.00	New Harmony		\$0.00	\$0.00
Azalea City Fellowship		\$0.00	\$0.00	New Haven		\$652.00	\$0.00
Bethany		\$0.00	\$0.00	New Hope-South Avondale		\$0.00	\$0.00
Bethel		\$0.00	\$0.00	New Life		\$0.00	\$0.00
Bethel South		\$0.00	\$500.00	New Life Baptist		\$558.00	\$558.00
Bethsaida		\$0.00	\$0.00	New Selmont		\$0.00	\$0.00
Birmingham		\$0.00	\$3,500.00	Oak Hill Community		\$0.00	\$0.00
Brannon Springs		\$0.00	\$0.00	One Accord		\$1,931.90	\$300.00
Calvary		\$0.00	\$0.00	Open Door		\$0.00	\$0.00
Capstone		\$2,300.00	\$0.00	Papertown		\$0.00	\$0.00
Cedar Grove		\$0.00	\$0.00	Parkway		\$0.00	\$0.00
Cham Sa Rang Korean		\$260.00	\$0.00	Patterson Road		\$0.00	\$0.00
Christ Fellowship		\$30.00	\$30.00	Pine Grove		\$0.00	\$1,250.00
Christ First Ministries		\$1,100.00	\$0.00	Planted Oaks		\$0.00	\$0.00
Christway		\$0.00	\$0.00	Plum Grove		\$125.00	\$0.00
Church of the Valley		\$1,287.00	\$0.00	Point of Grace		\$1,200.00	\$0.00
Cleveland First		\$4,852.62	\$1,940.00	Redeemer		\$1,000.00	\$1,200.00
Community		\$0.00	\$0.00	Reformation	5	\$647.53	\$150.00
Community Center		\$0.00	\$0.00	Reformation		\$18,863.00	\$0.00
Covenant	4	\$6,023.74	\$1,336.00	Renovate		\$0.00	\$0.00
Covenant Community		\$0.00	\$0.00	Rice's Chapel		\$1,830.30	\$0.00
Cross Roads		\$0.00	\$0.00	Ridgecrest Community		\$0.00	\$0.00
CrossHope Chapel		\$0.00	\$0.00	RiverEast		\$0.00	\$0.00
Crosspoint Christian		\$0.00	\$0.00	Riverside Community		\$0.00	\$0.00
Crossroads		\$0.00	\$0.00	Safe Haven		\$0.00	\$2,400.00
Crossroads Community		\$0.00	\$0.00	Saved By Grace		\$0.00	\$0.00
Dewey Heights		\$0.00	\$0.00	Second Community		\$0.00	\$0.00
Dothan Country Fellowship		\$0.00	\$2,270.71	Skyline		\$0.00	\$600.00
East Chapman		\$0.00	\$919.59	Summit Crossing		\$0.00	\$0.00
Faith		\$0.00	\$0.00	South East Lake		\$0.00	\$0.00
Fall City		\$0.00	\$0.00	Church of Encouragement		\$0.00	\$0.00
Fellowship		\$0.00	\$0.00	The Cornerstone	1	\$100.00	\$0.00
Fellowship		\$5,428.49	\$0.00	The Neighborhood		\$0.00	\$50.00
Fort		\$50.00	\$0.00	The Refuge		\$0.00	\$0.00
Freedom		\$0.00	\$0.00	The Vineyard		\$0.00	\$0.00
Good Hope Delta	0	\$150.00	\$800.00	Trace Crossing		\$0.00	\$0.00
Good News		\$0.00	\$0.00	Trinity		\$500.00	\$0.00
Gospel Center		\$0.00	\$0.00	Union Grove		\$0.00	\$0.00
Grace Bible		\$0.00	\$0.00	Union Hill		\$56,550.00	\$5,525.00
Grace Community		\$0.00	\$0.00	Weatherly Heights		\$0.00	\$3,245.00
Grace Community		\$0.00	\$0.00	West Side		\$0.00	\$0.00
Grace Covenant		\$17,332.60	\$1,700.00	Whitesville		\$0.00	\$1,045.00
Greater Fellowship		\$0.00	\$0.00	Williams First		\$0.00	\$1,125.00
Heritage		\$0.00	\$0.00	<b>No Association Totals</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>\$148,948.44</b>	<b>\$42,881.61</b>
Heritage Fellowship		\$0.00	\$0.00				
Huntland Missionary		\$0.00	\$0.00				
Iglesia Hispana La Esperanza		\$0.00	\$0.00				
Korean (Southside)		\$0.00	\$0.00				
Lamb		\$0.00	\$0.00				
Life		\$12,696.26	\$0.00				
Lifeline		\$0.00	\$0.00				
Living Faith		\$0.00	\$0.00				
Living Stones Temple		\$0.00	\$0.00				
Messiah		\$0.00	\$0.00				
Mobile First		\$0.00	\$8,916.34				
Mountain View		\$0.00	\$0.00				
Mt Pleasant		\$0.00	\$0.00				
Mt Pleasant		\$0.00	\$0.00				
Mt. Tabor		\$0.00	\$0.00				
Muscoda		\$0.00	\$0.00				
My Father's House		\$0.00	\$0.00				
Myers Hill		\$0.00	\$0.00				
New Beginning		\$0.00	\$0.00				

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

To view the full report visit [www.tabonline.org/givingreport2018](http://www.tabonline.org/givingreport2018).

## Shades Mountain Baptist Church leads all three missions giving categories in 2018

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

Leading the state in all three missions giving categories doesn't happen often. Churches have only hit that mark five times in the past 40 years, according to Bobby DuBois, associate executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

But of the five, Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Birmingham, was responsible for three — most recently in 2018. Last year Shades Mountain logged its third time to lead the state's 3,250 Baptist churches in gifts through the Cooperative Program (CP), the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for international missions and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American missions.

For more information about CP giving, visit [alsbom.org/cp](http://alsbom.org/cp).

It's "certainly an accomplishment worth celebrating," DuBois said.

It's the first time it's been done in 25 years — and Shades Mountain did it then too, in 1993. Since 1990, Shades Mountain has annually led Alabama Baptist churches in giving through the Cooperative Program — 26 of the 28 years.

DuBois congratulated Shades Mountain on its commitment to missions and thanked the church's pastoral leadership for generating a culture of generosity within the congregation.

### 'Missions culture'

"At the State Board of Missions we recognize the key role of the pastor in missions giving by a local church," he said. "Shades Mountain has, over the past four decades, been blessed with two of the best in Dr. Danny Wood and Dr. Charles Carter. They have succeeded in developing a missions culture that encourages members to be sacrificial in their support of missions — both giving and going."

For the two other years — 1986 and 1989 — Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham, led the state in all three categories.

### Other churches

And throughout the years other churches have led in one category or another too, DuBois said. First Baptist Church, Montgomery, regularly shows up at the top in giving through the two missions offerings. Others are First Baptist Church, Trussville; Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville; Crosspoint Baptist Church, Trussville; Hunter Street Baptist Church, Birmingham; and First Baptist Church, Opelika.

"The same is true in those other churches — there's a strong commitment to missions support, and pastors lead their churches in that respect," DuBois

said. "We are most grateful for their faithful financial support of missions."

He said he also wants to emphasize all Alabama Baptist churches who support missions giving are "critical" in helping the state's Baptist churches be pacesetters across the Southern Baptist Convention.

Most do not have the resources of the churches that consistently top the list, but they sacrificially give in support of missions, DuBois said. As he thanks the churches who give leadership to the three categories he said he wants to say thank you to each and every church for playing its vital role in the Kingdom through sacrificial giving.

"It is this spirit of cooperation — working together — that makes our convention strong. As a family we are celebrating together," he said. "Alabama Baptists are extremely blessed to have such strong churches and pastors among our fellowship, and we thank God for each of them."

For more information about CP giving, visit [alsbom.org/cp](http://alsbom.org/cp).

# SBC 1941 memory

## Birmingham couple's wedding had to be quick so pastor could find a good seat

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

It's been nearly 78 years since Betty Durham Bryant's wedding day, but she promises she can still smell the biscuits and bacon cooking the morning of her wedding. The memory that she didn't get a bite of them stays burned in her mind.

It was a big day — May 17, 1941. She (at the time simply Betty Durham) and Leonard Bryant had decided on the spur of the moment to make it their wedding day.

While Betty was home from Auburn University on a school break a few months earlier she met Leonard at the boarding house her parents ran in Birmingham. He'd come there to live in the city. His parents ran a farm in the Oneonta area and that's how he knew B.F. Dykes, pastor of First Baptist Church, Oneonta.

### A big day

Betty and Leonard both had the day off work, and they had seen Leonard's sister have a lovely wedding the week before in Dykes' living room. They had decided they wanted to do the same thing.

But they soon would find out

Dykes had a big day planned too.

It was the next-to-last day of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) annual meeting, which had been happening that week at Municipal Auditorium (now Boutwell Auditorium) in downtown Birmingham. The crowd had packed it out every day, to the point that Betty Bryant says she had tried at one point to go but had left because she felt claustrophobic.

That's what Dykes was trying to avoid — he was planning to be there early to get a seat.



“Southern Baptists were coming to Birmingham,

and he was not going to miss a minute of the convention,” said the Bryants' daughter, Catherine Allen, who told the story to *The Alabama Baptist*.

Dykes planned to stay at his brother's house in the Avondale neighborhood for exactly that reason — to get there faster. He wasn't planning to fit a wedding into his schedule. But Leonard Bryant told Dykes that Avondale was more convenient for them anyway since they were in Birmingham. Why couldn't he just do it there in his brother's living room? Dykes finally agreed.

So at 7 a.m. that Saturday, right as



Photo courtesy of Catherine Allen

On May 17, 1941, Betty Durham and Leonard Bryant decided on the spur of the moment to get married. B.F. Dykes, pastor of FBC Oneonta, performed the ceremony in his brother's living room in Avondale so he could get to the SBC annual meeting in downtown Birmingham early to get a good seat.

the sun was coming up, the couple rolled up at Dykes' brother's house in Avondale with the bride's mother and uncle.

That's when Betty smelled the biscuits.

“The innocent young bride thought it was wonderful for their minister to have arranged a wedding breakfast for them. She was starved,” Allen said. “Mr. Dykes met them at the door as he swallowed his biscuit and buttoned his suit coat. In the living room he led them to say their vows. Then he showed them out — no breakfast for them. He returned to his place at the family table and no doubt was soon out the door.”

It was a little bit of a violation of propriety, Allen said with a laugh, but she can understand why he didn't want to be late. She said she's sure Dykes had a great day at the convention — he heard Texas pastors George W. Truett of First Baptist Church, Dallas, and J.M. Dawson of First Baptist Church, Waco, among others.

And the Bryants enjoyed a great life.

The newlyweds left their sunrise ceremony and drove across town to their new apartment to start unpacking. They chose a church together — First Central Baptist Church, Tarrant City, and then later Ruhama Baptist Church, Birmingham.

### Start of a new family

That breakfast-less wedding during the Southern Baptist Convention started a new family — they bore five children and were married for 34 years before Leonard Bryant died in 1975.

“Mama is now 98 years old still living in Birmingham. She told her family the story,” Allen said — particularly the fragrance of biscuits in the oven and bacon in the skillet that morning so many years ago.

Do you have a story connected to the 1941 SBC annual meeting held in Birmingham? If so we would like to hear it. Contact us at [news@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:news@thealabamabaptist.org).



Photo courtesy of Catherine Allen

Betty Bryant (front, center) celebrated her 98th birthday in January 2019 surrounded by all five of her children: (back row, l to r) Len Bryant, Mark Bryant, Johnny Bryant, (front row) Alice Lenahan (left) and Catherine Allen (right).

## SENIOR ADULT EVANGELISM CONFERENCE

# Impacting God's kingdom

## Senior Adult Evangelism Conference encourages complete surrender, fearlessness

By Jessica Ingram  
The Alabama Baptist

**Y**ou're the one God placed there." Roy Hill said. "You still have an opportunity to have an impact in their life," said Hill, pastor of First Baptist Church, Satsuma.

He's right. I bet across the state stories abound of people impacted by the senior adults in their lives — whether grandparents or mentors. And I'm one of them.

I was led to Christ by my grandparents at 8 years old.

### Having an impact

Even though that happened nearly 17 years ago I still see the passion they express for Christ and for sharing the gospel every time I'm around them. Postcards from missionaries cover their refrigerator; prayer lists lie on the coffee table where my grandmother has

spent time covering each concern in prayer.

That's the impact senior adults can have in God's kingdom. And I was reminded of that as I sat in the back of the sanctuary at Lakeside Baptist Church, Birmingham, on May 6 during the 2019 Senior Adult Evangelism Conference.

Hill started the conference speaking on the "God of my momma."

"The God of my momma is a God who has made all the difference," Hill said. "I am thankful the God of our father, the God of our parents is still on the throne."

Preaching from Joshua 24, Hill emphasized the importance of the declaration in verse 15 — "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord."

"I believe that the Joshua 24 generation is in the room today," he said. "There have been some wonderful things that have happened in

Alabama Baptist churches because of the Joshua 24 generation."

Somewhere between Joshua 24 and Judges 2 "another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what He had done for Israel" (Judg. 2:10), and Hill said the world is back in this same place today.

"I do believe the Judges 2 generation is staring us in the eyes today. A generation that doesn't know the Lord nor the things He has done."

It is up to the Joshua 24 generation to show them the God of our mommas, Hill said.

And what can the Joshua 24 gen-

eration do to impact the Judges 2 generation in our midst, he asked. Start a revival.

### 'Great praying'

"A great revival starts with great praying," Hill said. "Maybe today you have a child or grandchild you know needs Jesus. It can start at the altar or at the kitchen table."

Tom Richter, pastor of First Baptist Church, Cullman, preached on daily surrender as shown by Mary, the sister of Lazarus, as she bathed the feet of Jesus in expensive perfume.

"Mary's act of obedience to her Lord in a respectable culture looked like a waste from every perspective but one: Jesus," he said. "But Mary wasn't satisfied with respectable Christianity. She gave it all at Jesus' feet. She gave the best she had. What about you? What's your heart for evangelism? For missions?"

Just as Mary broke open her bottle



HILL



## SENIOR ADULT EVANGELISM CONFERENCE

of perfume at Jesus' feet, every Christian should surrender his or her life daily to Christ.

"How much perfume is in this room?" Richter asked the congregation. "How much of it has been broken open at the feet of Jesus?"

The broken bottle looks differently for everyone — especially for the many senior adults gathered.



RICHTER

"For some of you the best you have is your grandchildren, and it could cost you," Richter said. "It could mean you're looking at your grandchildren over Skype instead of holding them. But it's for the advancement of God's kingdom."

Just like no screw top was atop the jar of perfume Mary poured on Jesus' feet, no screw top exists on the jar of the Christian life. It must be broken open. It must all be surrendered to the living Lord, Richter said.

"That's why you engage in evangelism. You aren't telling [loved ones] the teachings of a dead prophet," he said. "You are telling them about meeting the living Lord who's been looking for them."

Daven Watkins, pastor of First Baptist Church, Pelham, encouraged those gathered to be fearless.

### 'Cling to Christ'

"Your fearlessness is bound in God's faithfulness," he said. "If you know the identity of Jesus you will cling to Christ at all times, above all things."

Preaching from Mark 6:45–56 — when Jesus walked on water — Watkins pointed to four ways Christians know they can be fearless.

**1. Jesus is our God who comes to our dilemma despite the distance.**

"The three and a half miles, the raging wind, the torrential rain, the lack



Photo by Tracy Riggs

Bob Smith, music evangelist and minister to seasoned adults at FBC Trussville, leads worship with a combined choir at the 2019 Senior Adult Evangelism Conference on May 6 at Lakeside Baptist Church, Birmingham.

of firm footing — none of it was a problem for Jesus when His disciples called for Him," Watkins said. "There is no need to fear because Jesus is on His way."

**2. Jesus is God in the flesh.** "For Jesus is not a lesser god ... He is fully God and fully man," Watkins said. "When you see Jesus treading on the waves in the sea your only conclusion must be that He is God in the flesh," Watkins said, referencing Job 9:8, which proclaims, "He alone treads on the waves."

**3. Jesus is the God who invites us to come.** In Matthew's retelling of Jesus walking on water he tells of Peter walking out to Jesus. "Everything was good as long as Peter was locked and loaded on



WATKINS

the Lord," Watkins said. "But when he was distracted by the wind and the waves just for a moment he began to drown."

Jesus offers believers today the same opportunity, Watkins said. "Jesus is the God who always issues the invitation for us to come and see what He is doing," he said. "As long as we're focused on the Lord we can do great things for the Lord. But when we get distracted we start to flounder. But Jesus still uses us and forgives us."

**4. Jesus has the power to immediately heal.** And He has the power to immediately save, Watkins said.

"There are some things money can't fix. There are some things Congress can't fix," he said. "But there's nothing Jesus can't fix. Have faith in God who watches over His own. He reigns on His throne."

"May God use you to boldly, unapologetically go tell the good news of Christ," Watkins concluded. "The American church has been silent far too long. It is time for us to speak out fearlessly about the identity of Jesus."



Photo by Tracy Riggs

Sammy Gilbreath, director of the office of evangelism for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, joins worship leader Bob Smith in a song.

So to all of those who may feel like they don't have much to offer Kingdom work anymore: Trust me, you matter and you have tremendous impact. Never stop chasing after Great Commission work. ✠

**"The American church has been silent far too long. It is time for us to speak out fearlessly about the identity of Jesus."**

Pastor Daven Watkins  
FBC Pelham

View the full gallery of photos from the conference at [www.tabonline.org/senioradult](http://www.tabonline.org/senioradult).

# Persecuted church

## Pakistani mother cleared of blasphemy charges, joins her daughters in Canada

**A**sia Bibi, a Christian woman acquitted of blasphemy after spending eight years on death row in Pakistan, has left for Canada to be reunited with her daughters. Pakistani officials and others involved in the case reported Bibi's move May 9.

Bibi was convicted of blasphemy in 2009 after a quarrel with a fellow farmworker. The Supreme Court overturned her conviction in October 2018 and she had been in protective custody since then.

Wilson Chawdhry of the British Pakistani Christian Association told The Associated Press he received a text message from a British diplomat saying "Asia is out." A close friend of Bibi also confirmed she had left the country. Her lawyer, Saiful Malook, said she had already arrived in Canada.

British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt tweeted his pleasure at Bibi's departure.

"Fantastic news that Asia Bibi appears to have left Pakistan safely," he tweeted, adding he was about to meet U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo "to talk about persecution of Christians around the world."

### Controversial law

The case has brought international attention to Pakistan's controversial blasphemy law which carries an automatic death penalty. The mere suspicion of blasphemy against Islam is enough to ignite mob lynchings in the country. Blasphemy allegations have also been used as intimidation.

A three-judge Supreme Court panel in January ruled there was no

compelling reason to overturn the court's earlier acquittal.

The judges accused those who charged Bibi with blasphemy of committing perjury, but said they would not be tried because of the sensitivity of the case. The judges upheld the blasphemy law.

Pakistan is ranked 5th on Christian support organization Open Doors' 2019 World Watch List of the countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian.

### In other news:

► The Maranatha Full Gospel Church in the eastern India town of Arrah was vandalized the night before Easter services.

Pastor Anil Juit arrived the morning of April 21 to find a large hole in the back wall of the building and a burned heap of Bibles, religious books, instruments and mats the congregation used to sit on during worship.

Local media portrayed the burning as part of a robbery but nothing was stolen, the pastor told Morning Star News. He said graffiti on the outside of the building suggested

the vandalism was the work of Hindu radicals.

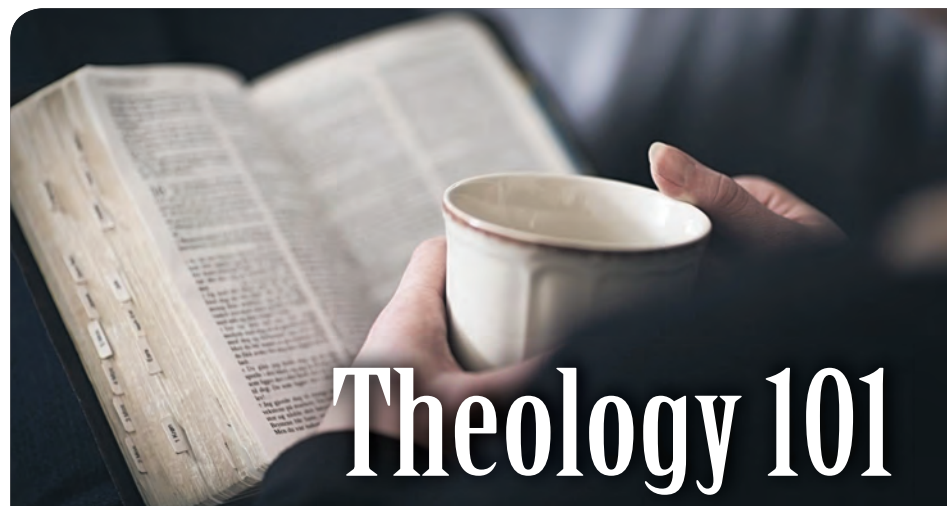
The church has used the once-vacant building of the Holy Savior Church of Arrah for its services for five years with permission from the district superintendent of the Methodist Church in India, he said.

Juit said he suspects media coverage of the church's Good Friday services led to the attack. He and the 70 members of the congregation remained for Easter worship.

India ranks 10th on Open Doors' 2019 World Watch List. (RNS, MS)



BP photo  
Asia Bibi has been in hiding since October 2018 when a Pakistani court acquitted her of blasphemy charges.



## Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

### Eternal security

## Divine Union, Divine Anchor

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

**I**n this series about eternal security we have thought about eternal salvation in terms of a divine birth, a divine gift, a divine grip, a divine seal and a divine guard. This week we focus on two additional analogies: an unbreakable union and an unshakeable anchor.

When one comes to personally trust Christ as Savior a double union is established. The frequent New Testament expression "in Christ" is one aspect of this union. We might say when we believe in Christ we believe into Him. Hence being a Christian is a matter of being in spiritual union with Christ or having one's life hidden in Him as Colossians 3:3 states: "Your life is hidden with Christ in God."

The other aspect of this double union is expressed by the phrase "Christ in you," called in Colossians 1:27 "the hope of glory."

### 'Not quickly broken'

As believers we are in Him and He is in us. This doubly forged spiritual union secures salvation for us. The proverbial observation in Ecclesiastes 4:12 states, "a threefold cord is not quickly broken" but the twofold cord of salvation God provides to repentant sinners cannot be broken at all and so binds us to Christ eternally.

When it comes to salvation what God has joined together nothing can separate. Romans 8:38-39 puts it in these words: "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor

principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

### Steadfast hope

The additional analogy of an anchor further enforces the thought of a believer's security in salvation. An anchor prevents a ship from drifting away during a storm as Acts 27:29 reports about the ship that transported the Apostle Paul to Rome. In that storm four anchors were dropped lest the ship run aground on the rocks.

The metaphor of an anchor appears in Hebrews 6:19 as a way of thinking about the steadfast hope Christians have. This hope is anchored in God in whom exists no possibility of lying or misleading. Biblical hope is not a bridge over uncertainty but is the strong conviction the God of hope is always true to His promises.

Our confident assurance in God's promises about eternal life is our strong, unbreakable and secure link to a heavenly future where Christ dwells in ascension power and glory. 🏹

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.





Photos courtesy of University of Mobile

This academic year alone Voices of Mobile will have presented 150 concerts, including appearances in Cuba, Romania and England. During the course of 16 years Roger Breland (center) and the ensemble have presented 2,000 concerts across 12 nations and recorded 16 albums.

# ‘Live what you sing’

## UM’s Breland travels 4 million miles to sing the one song that matters

**W**hen Roger Breland took the first step down the road toward a career in Christian music he had no idea what a long journey it would be.

In 47 years he traveled more than 4 million miles across 47 countries, presented more than 12,000 concerts and produced 100 albums. His 31 years with TRUTH, one of the first internationally successful contemporary Christian groups, helped launch the careers of artists such as Avalon and 4Him.

### Bottom line

He spent another 16 years on the road with Voices of Mobile, an ensemble he co-founded with Al Miller, dean of the Alabama School of the Arts at University of Mobile (UM). They led an expansion of the university’s music program that includes the school’s first doctoral degree in musical arts.

Along with faculty whose expertise ranges from opera to worship leadership they have prepared thousands of graduates to pursue their professional calling as musicians, educators, worship leaders, music industry pro-

fessionals and more.

Now with his touring career drawing to a close Breland’s lifetime of accomplishments was recognized May 11 when UM awarded him the honorary doctor of humane letters.

When Breland accepted his honorary doctorate Voices of Mobile was on the platform with him, singing a song he finds most appropriate for a lifetime of music and ministry: “God is Able.”

The honorary doctorate from UM joins other accolades for Breland. He and TRUTH were inducted into the Gospel Music Hall of Fame in 2000 and he holds an honorary doctorate from Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia.

But his greatest accomplishment isn’t found in the number of miles traveled or concerts performed.

It’s in the message he has taught students in the Roger Breland Center for Performing Arts in the Alabama School of the Arts at UM.

“There’s really only one song to sing, and that is the song that will honor God. We want to do that with excellence,” Breland said. And it’s not enough, he tells them, to simply believe the words of the song.

“The bottom line for people who live our life on the platform in ministry is not that you believe what you sing,” he said. “The most important thing is that you live what you sing. I want students to know that what they do involves so much more than music.”

UM Interim President Fred Wilson said Breland’s “obedience to taking the message of Christ all over the world with music” reflects the heart of students and faculty across the university to serve Christ.

“We’ll really never know the impact it’s had this side of heaven,” Wilson said. “Voices of Mobile and other ensembles have taken the message of Christ, as well as the message of Univer-

sity of Mobile, to congregations around the world.”

Breland’s career began with serving small rural churches in Alabama during his college years. Following graduation from Troy University he served as choral director at Opp High School and minister of music at First Baptist Church, Opp. His full-time church ministry began as minister of music at Spring Hill Baptist Church, Mobile, then he formed TRUTH.

### Influence on students

In 2002 he joined UM as artist-in-residence, served as co-founder and director of Voices of Mobile and was named dean and later executive dean of the Roger Breland Center for Performing Arts.

UM graduate Andrew Goodwin said Breland practices what he preaches. Goodwin is among several alumni who form the male vocal group Veritas that toured internationally with Sandi Patty and performs in churches and concert halls across the nation.

“I would not be who I am today if it were not for the influence Dr. Breland has had on my life. He has had the single greatest impact on my career as an artist and taught me the impor-

tance of the ‘small things.’ Everything I know about being a successful musician, teacher, husband, father, leader and friend I learned, not from listening to, but from watching Dr. Breland,” Goodwin said.

When Voices of Mobile wraps up its final tour July 7 the group will have presented 150 concerts this academic year alone, including appearances in Cuba, Romania and England. During the course of 16 years Breland and the ensemble have presented 2,000 concerts across 12 nations and recorded 16 albums.

Collin Clardy, who currently serves as assistant director of Voices of Mobile and is pursuing a master’s in theology, will take over as director in mid-July.

This fall Breland will make the transition to executive director of Voices of Mobile and work toward establishing the Roger Breland Endowed Scholarship to help the next generation have the advantage of a Christ-centered higher education.

In his new role he will assist in fundraising for scholarships and special projects while continuing to assist in the Roger Breland Center for Performing Arts. (UM)



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- 17-21 MAC for Girls
- 17-21 MAC for Teen Girls
- 24-28 MAC for Girls
- 24-28 MAC for CITs (teen girls only)

### JULY

- 1-3 Mini MAC for Girls, Boys and LEADERS **NEW**
- 1-3 Mini MAC for Teen Girls
- 5-6 Family MAC (one-night option)
- 4-6 Family MAC (two-night option)
- 8-12 MAC for Girls and Boys
- 8-12 MAC for CITs (teen girls and boys)
- 15-19 MAC for Girls and Boys
- 15-19 MAC for CITs (teen girls and boys)
- 22-26 MAC for Boys
- 22-26 MAC for Teen Boys
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# CROSSOVER BIRMINGHAM

## Wednesday, June 5

6:30 pm - Kickoff Rally and Training with

### JOHNNY HUNT

at The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham

(Visit [CrossoverBHM.org](http://CrossoverBHM.org) for simulcast locations)

## Saturday, June 8

8:30 am - Training

10 am

## Evangelistic Visitation Across 7 Associations

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- SHELBY - ST. CLAIR
- SULPHUR SPRINGS

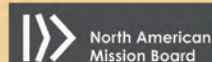


For information about specific locations and to register, visit [CrossoverBHM.org](http://CrossoverBHM.org)



Alabama Baptist STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS

This conference is made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.



# ‘Renewed commitment’

## SBC Pastors Conference messages to explore Beatitudes and Kingdom character

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

Danny Wood says in recent years he’s been hit hard by headlines of church leaders failing to live up to the integrity of the Word.

So when he was tasked with developing the 2019 Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Pastors Conference he decided the theme — Kingdom Character — would face that head on.

“To help us advance the kingdom of God we need to have Kingdom character,” said Wood, Pastors Conference president and pastor of Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Birmingham.

### Prior to SBC meeting

The conference, held in conjunction with the SBC annual meeting in Birmingham, will start Sunday, June 9 at 6 p.m. and run until about 9 p.m. Then Monday, June 10, it will run from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

While the event’s aim is to encourage pastors it is open to the public.

“My hope is that it would give us a renewed commitment to living out the gospel, that we would be committed to seeing our lives transformed with the character of Christ,” Wood said. “We are seeing Satan getting more and more active — his desire is to see pastors fail. We need to finish strong and cross the finish line, and to do that we’ve got to maintain Kingdom character so we can live out the gospel and reach this world for Christ.”

Speakers’ messages will be based on the Beatitudes, and Wood said he prayerfully selected pastors he felt embodied the Beatitudes about which they would be speaking.

“I felt God gave me a great list of men to contact,” he

said. “We’ve got 10 speakers, and five of them have never spoken at a Pastors Conference before so there will be a lot of new voices there too.”

Several speakers with Alabama ties are scheduled:

▶ Robert Smith Jr., the Charles T. Carter Baptist Chair of Divinity at Samford University’s Beeson Divinity School, Birmingham

▶ Ed Litton, pastor of Redemption Church, Mobile

▶ Jay and Katherine Wolf, founders of Hope Heals and son and daughter-in-law of Jay Wolf, pastor of First Baptist Church, Montgomery

▶ David Platt, pastor of the Washington, D.C.-area McLean Bible Church and former pastor of The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham

Also in the lineup of speakers are:

▶ Andrew Brunson, a

church planter and pastor who was imprisoned for two years in Turkey

▶ Dharti Lewis, pastor of Blueprint Church, Atlanta, and vice president of Send Network with the North American Mission Board

▶ Ben Mandrell, pastor of Storyline Fellowship, Denver

▶ Russell Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the SBC

▶ Jimmy Scroggins, pastor of Family Church, a West Palm Beach, Florida-based church with 11 campuses

▶ Martin Young, senior minister of Rising Brook Community Church in Staffordshire, United Kingdom.

In addition to the main speakers the conference will offer several roundtable discussions including:

▶ *Blessed are the Peacemakers*, a talk on racial reconciliation that will include black and white pastors from the Birmingham area who came together after the

shooting at the Riverchase Galleria on Thanksgiving Day 2018.

Noe Garcia, a Hispanic pastor who leads North Phoenix Baptist Church in Arizona, will also speak about racial reconciliation in his church.

### Global persecution

▶ *Blessed are the Persecuted*, a discourse on different kinds of persecution around the world, including Brunson’s story from Turkey and stories from Nik and Ruth Ripken, who have traveled globally to understand the plight of persecuted Christians. Jack Phillips, a Colorado cake artist who was sued after he declined to bake a cake for a same-sex wedding, will share his story.

The Pastors Conference will be held in the Legacy Arena of the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Center.

For more information about the Pastors Conference visit [sbcpc.net](http://sbcpc.net).



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# Many parents reunited with children thanks to Families Count classes

(continued from page 1)

in foster care, Newell said. About half of children in foster care nationwide return to their families, but about a third of those re-enter the foster system within three years of going home.

As she and others looked around for resources to help they found no Christ-centered intervention programs available. Lifeline was providing great training and support for foster parents, but birth parents weren't getting the same help, Newell said. That wasn't OK with her.

So they began to address the gap in services and came up with the idea for Families Count. It would be a Christ-centered program among the list of options for parents who needed to fulfill their court-ordered parenting classes. Families Count would offer incentives like free transportation, child care if needed and a meal beforehand.

And best of all the classes wouldn't be offered by Lifeline — they would be offered by the local church, Newell said.

"In the process of reunification these parents are being told by multiple agencies what to do. We didn't want them to see just another agency," she said. "Remove the agency and insert the church, and something really powerful happens. People respond to these church volunteers in a way they'd never respond to a group of social workers."

## One-on-one mentorship

Each participant in the class is given a mentor, which allows a volunteer to invest in a parent one on one. Transportation to and from classes gives volunteers an opportunity to get to know the parents, and the meal accomplishes the same thing while also modeling how a family mealtime should look.

Brenda Akridge, who teaches Families Count classes at First, Trussville, with her husband Mike, said many of the parents have never eaten a meal as a family before.

"There are so many things we take for granted," she said. One of those is how to cuddle a baby. Another is how to get on a child's level to talk to him or her.

"That was revolutionary for three of the women in our group," Akridge said. "They just haven't had role models to teach them these things."

Even more revolutionary is the way the gospel has opened their eyes, she said. "One man said he had never felt love the way he felt it in the church building."

## Made in God's image

Another man's whole demeanor changed after he read Genesis 1:27 and learned the truth that he was made in God's image.

"We saw life change in him from the first week to the second because of that verse," Akridge said.

Jenny Bailey, coordinator of Families Count at The Church at Liberty Park, Vestavia Hills, said one couple who came to their first Families Count class got marriage counseling, decided to follow Christ and were baptized.

"They are just about to get their kids back this summer," she said. "It's been awesome to watch their process and the healing we've seen in their family and individual lives."

The classes have been life changing for the participants but also for the church, Bailey said.

"It's an opportunity to reach people for Christ who are coming to your front door, and many are lost — they're hurting and they're very open and

receptive to hearing the gospel," she said. "They may have heard the idea of Jesus, but many have never had a Bible or heard Scripture the way it's being presented."

Deona Durham said the Families Count program at her church — Eden Westside Baptist, Pell City — has opened the congregation's eyes to the struggles families face in the community. More than 100 families have taken classes at Eden Westside since the church started hosting the program in 2016.

"Many families have been reunified with their children as a result of Families Count," she said. "Families within the church that are struggling also have prospered from the parenting classes. As a church we want to be a place that welcomes people no matter what they have been through."

Newell said that's the hope of the Lifeline staff — that Families Count would be a holistic ministry to parents with an overarching goal of getting them plugged into churches.

"The Lord has given us a vehicle to engage with these birth parents," she said. "What we're seeing is the Lord at work."✠



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# Hillsong United brings worship experience to Birmingham

After a 3-year break Hillsong United filled the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex's Legacy Arena with millennials and families May 2 for the fifth stop on its North American tour.

More a worship service than a concert — even with the lasers and multicolored lights — the Australian-based group had the crowd on its feet and singing along as they played new songs and old favorites like “Oceans” and “From the Inside Out.” At times the voices in the audience rivaled Hillsong’s in volume.

Lead singer Joel Houston greeted the crowd with a hearty “Roll Tide” in a distinct Australian accent, but came back to unity in Christ.

“Sports brings us together



Photo by Tracy Riggs

After a 3-year break Hillsong United filled the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex's Legacy Arena with thousands of people poised to worship during its concert May 2.

but also divides us. We're a church; we're a family. I think it's better if we're on the same team," he said.

The Australia-based, multiplatinum group's mission is to write songs that awaken churches and individuals to the fact we are redeemed

and called into the story of God. God makes wayward notes into something more beautiful than they were in the first place, he said. Houston focused on those facing depression and encouraged them to just keep going.

“I’m going to play a few wrong notes; I’ve already played some,” Houston said. “God will make it beautiful. He’s always redeeming, fixing, restoring.”

Houston said he went through a dark time and had the feeling his performing days were over and he would never stand on stage again. He wrote the song “As You Find Me” about that difficult season, he said.

“Does it ever feel that the harder you try, the more you mess it up or is it just me? Sometimes we lose confidence. It’s OK to not have it all together. Don’t compare. We’re all human,” Houston said. “[God] doesn’t make mistakes. He hasn’t made a mistake on you.”

The group took some time to pray for those “in a fight.” Hands raised all across the arena to indicate

the need for prayer and the time concluded with a resounding “Amen” from the crowd.

## Tour continues

Though Houston and Taya Smith are Hillsong’s main singers, 11 musicians and vocalists swapped instruments and roles throughout the evening while words for the songs scrolled on screens around the stage. Key members of the group played a more subdued set on a small stage in the middle of the arena towards the end of the evening.

The concert also featured opening acts Amanda Lindsey Cook and Mack Brock.

Hillsong’s May schedule includes several concerts in Florida before the tour moves to Canada and the West Coast. (Tracy Riggs)

## Famous Christians from previous centuries

# Heroes of the Faith

By Joanne Sloan

Joanne Sloan, a member of First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, has been a published writer of articles and books for 30 years. She has a bachelor's degree double majoring in history and English from East Texas State University (now Texas A&M-Commerce) and a master's degree specializing in English from the University of Arkansas (1978).



## 2019 marks 100th anniversary of death of ‘Grace Greater Than Our Sin’ writer

Julia Harriet Johnston (1849–1919) was a Presbyterian teacher, book author and hymn writer. She wrote more than 500 hymns, including her most famous — “Grace Greater Than Our Sin.” This year marks the 100th anniversary of her death.

### Familial influences

Johnston was born on Jan. 21, 1849, to Robert and Jane Grey Johnston in Salineville, Ohio. Her family moved to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and lived there until she was six.

Then the family moved to Peoria, Illinois, where her father was pastor of First Presbyterian

Church. She spent the rest of her life in Peoria.

After accepting Christ, Johnston started teaching Sunday School. She taught and served as Sunday School superintendent for more than 40 years.

She also worked 20 years as president of the Peoria Presbyterian Missionary Society. She started writing at the age of nine and was influenced by her mother and grandmother who were both poets.

She authored books about Christian missions and missionaries. But Johnston is best known for writing more than 500 hymns.

Her most beloved hymn is “Grace Greater Than Our Sin.”

In 1910 she wrote the hymn, which was published in 1911. It is a commentary on the fifth chapter of Romans, focusing on Romans 5:20b: “But where sin abounded grace did much more abound.”



JOHNSTON

Johnston had a passion to tell others about God’s grace. The word “grace” appears 38 times in the hymn.

The first stanza emphasizes God’s grace that takes away all sin through the death of Jesus.

The second stanza compares sin to the “sea waves cold” which “threaten

the soul with infinite loss.”

The next stanza refers to the blood of Christ that makes the sinner as “pure and bright as snow.”

The fourth stanza offers an invitation to the sinner: “Will you this moment His grace receive?”

### ‘God’s grace’

The refrain following each stanza is the most important part of the hymn: “Grace, grace, God’s grace. / Grace that will pardon and cleanse within. / Grace, grace, God’s grace. / Grace that is greater than all our sin.”

Johnston died March 6, 1919, in Peoria and is buried in Springdale Cemetery.✝



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# Lessons from the family table: Why sharing meals matters

By **Carolyn Tomlin**  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

An old French proverb states: “The more things change the more they stay the same.” Although it may not apply to everything in life it’s important when it comes to sharing meals together as a family.

Recall the Norman Rockwell prints where two, three or more generations gathered around a table filled with healthy food. The artist captured expressions of happiness, respect and joy in simply being together. By the 21st century this setting became the exception rather than the rule.

## Modern families

Instead of gathering around the table for the evening meal modern families often find themselves in drive-thrus, waiting in line at fast food restaurants while connecting with someone by cell phone.

However, a recent Gallup Poll reports family dining is still a part of everyday life for the majority of U.S. parents. 53% of adults with

children younger than 18 say their family shares dinner together at home six or seven nights a week.

According to a study by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, children who eat at least five meals per week with their family are at lower risk of developing poor eating habits, weight problems, or alcohol and substance dependencies and they tend to perform better in school than those who frequently eat alone or away from home.

Family mealtimes help parents become more aware of what is going on in the lives of their children. A healthy relationship of love and respect between parents and children grows and creates a constructive approach to a wholesome lifestyle. Three additional

benefits of sharing family meals include:

### 1. Developing communication skills

During family meals children and adults exchange ideas. Not only does this time promote family togetherness, but children also learn good communication skills that will continue throughout life.

“We have a practice that everyone has to bring something new they have learned to the table,” said one father, Tom. “This can be about literature, world or local news, historical events ... anything they have read or researched recently.”

### 2. Nurturing closer sibling relationships

Richard Wakefield, a pastor in Missouri, believes sharing meals

together gave his children a sense of closeness as they grew older.

“Our time together at the table paid off. Now as adults I see this in their love for each other,” said Wakefield. “As they ate they talked. We encouraged them to take the lead and they knew mom and dad were ready to listen. Of course, as they became older, we had to allow for sports and school activities. But it had to be a very good excuse to miss our evening meal around the table.”

### 3. Connecting parents and children

Lessons learned around the family table create warmth and security for children and teens. This feeling carries over into adulthood when children have families of their own.

Sharing time together as a family generates many rewards. Shared family meals can encourage a wholesome lifestyle, help children develop communication skills, bring siblings closer and nurture stronger bonds between parents and children.

Family mealtime is a tradition worth the effort. 



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# 3 stories you should know



Photo by Carrie Brown McWhorter

Cleburne Baptist Association hosted Untitled Skateboards May 3–4 in Heflin. The Christian skateboard team led by professional skateboarder Jud Heald (right) performed a demonstration of skateboard skills at area schools on Friday. On Saturday the team performed, and Heald and team member Josh Barclay (left) shared their testimonies along with a gospel presentation. ‘It’s a pleasure to use your gifts for the glory of the Lord,’ Heald said. (TAB)

## *Pope says priests, nuns must report abuse*

A new law issued by Pope Francis on May 9 requires all Catholic priests and nuns worldwide to report clergy sexual abuse as well as superiors who covered up abuse.

The new Vatican law provides whistleblower protections for anyone making a report to church superiors and requires all dioceses around the world to have a system in place to receive the claims confidentially. The new law also outlines procedures for conducting preliminary investigations when the accused is a bishop, cardinal or religious superior.

The Catholic church has been hit hard by allegations of sexual abuse of children and priests and accusations that officials have sought to protect perpetrators. The law is retroactive, meaning cases from years past can be reported. (TAB)

## *UM names long-term interim president*

The University of Mobile board of trustees has named history professor and executive dean Lonnie Burnett as interim president of his alma mater.

Board Chairman David Conner made the announcement following a trustee meeting May 10.


Noting Burnett was the unanimous choice of the trustees, Conner said the interim appointment is effective May 28 and will continue for a term of 16 months. Then board chairman Fred Wilson was named temporary interim president after President Tim Smith resigned Feb. 25 for personal reasons. (UM)



BURNETT

## — NEWSBRIEFS —

### *Debate on gambling, abortion ban continues in Alabama Legislature*

 A bill to exempt daily fantasy sports from state prohibitions on gambling passed the Alabama House of Representatives May 8 in a 74–22 vote.

House Bill 361 would allow daily fantasy sports websites like FanDuel and DraftKings to operate legally in the state. The games allow participants to place bets in online sports-related contests and win money based on individual and team performance in real-life games.

The bill’s sponsor, Rep. Kyle South (R-Fayette), says daily fantasy sports are games of skill not chance, a position contrary to past statements from the office of the Alabama Attorney General that the paid games constitute illegal gambling under Alabama’s Constitution.

Senate Bill 220, which would take the issue of whether Alabama should establish a lottery to a statewide vote, is progressing in the House. The bill passed the Senate on April 25.

The House Economic Development and Tourism Committee adopted a substitute bill May 9 which changes the distribution of net lottery

revenues specified in the Senate version. If the committee approves the bill, it will go to the full House for a vote. If the House version passes and the two versions can be reconciled, the proposed constitutional amendment would be on the ballot in March 2020.



Photo by Wikimedia

A Senate vote on House Bill 314, which would criminalize performing an abortion in Alabama, was delayed May 9. The Senate version included exceptions for cases of rape and incest but those exemptions were stripped during Senate debate.

The bill’s sponsor, Rep. Terri Collins (R-Decatur) has said she opposes such amendments. The exceptions were stripped from the bill without a roll call vote, prompting a challenge from Senate Democrats.

Three bills related to human trafficking, House bills 261, 262 and 264, are pending House action, and a fourth bill, House bill 260 is still pending committee action. (TAB)

### *Longtime pastor, musician Roland Wayne Davis dies at age 84*

 Roland Wayne Davis, former Alabama Baptist pastor, died April 30. He was 84.

Davis, a Moundville native, gave his life to Christ during Youth Week at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega. He graduated from Samford University in Birmingham and was ordained to preach by Moundville Baptist Church after he returned from the Army in 1957.

In his 61-year ministry, Davis served churches all over Alabama. He spent the longest time — 25 years — as

pastor of Liberty Hill Baptist Church, Clanton. After retiring from Liberty Hill, he served as pastor of Maple Springs Baptist Church, Clanton,

where he helped the church rebuild after a fire. Davis also served as pastor of a church in



TAB photo

# News near you

## BALDWIN ASSOCIATION

▶ With a packed house, **Lagoon Baptist Church, Gulf Shores**, celebrated its centennial anniversary April 28. The theme verse for the celebration was Matthew 5:16: “In the same way let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”



Photo by Dalton Campbell

Andy Wood, assistant professor of church leadership at University of Mobile, was the guest speaker.

Old photos and videos with the narrative of the church’s history were shown.

Dalton Campbell from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented the church with a certificate.

“Everything flowed together as the people celebrated the faithfulness of God. We look forward to what God has in store,” Pastor Mike Bowman said. ▶ **Clint Landry** is the new pastor of **First Baptist Church, Foley**. He previously served at First Baptist Church, Arab. He and his wife, Suzanne, have three children.

## BETHEL ASSOCIATION

▶ **Calvary Baptist Church, Linden**, will host a revival May 26–29. Donnie Guy will be the guest evangelist and Bob Thames will lead music. Sunday services will begin at 6 p.m., and Monday through Wednesday services will begin at 7 p.m. Samuel Smith is pastor.

## CHILTON ASSOCIATION

▶ **Mulberry Baptist Church, Maplesville**, will host a presentation by Creation Ministries International on June 2 at 11 a.m. Andy Mims is pastor.

## COFFEE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Lee Street Baptist Church, Enterprise**, will celebrate its 50th anniversary June 2 at 10 a.m. Former pastor Larry Doster will be the guest speaker. Lunch will follow the service. Slade Stinson is pastor.

## COOSA RIVER ASSOCIATION

▶ **Cragdale Baptist Church, Talladega**, will hold a homecoming service May 19. Crystal River will be the guest singers. Lunch will be served as part of the celebration. Sam Walker is pastor.

## FAYETTE ASSOCIATION

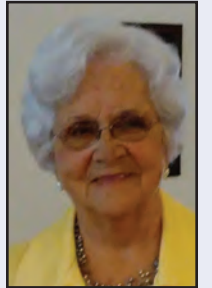
▶ **Jamie Owens** is the new pastor of **Ashcraft Corner Baptist Church, Kennedy**. He and his wife, Brianna, have two children.

## GENEVA ASSOCIATION

▶ **Bethesda Baptist Church, Slocomb**, will host a homecoming celebration May 19 at 11 a.m. Former pastor Dicky McAllister will be the guest speaker. Lunch will follow the service. Carlisle Weed is pastor.

## LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN ASSOCIATION

▶ **Patricia (Pat) Wadsworth** was honored recently by **Mount Zion Baptist Church, Collinsville**, for 50 years of faithful service as church pianist. This recognition was celebrated as family and friends gathered to commemorate her 83rd birthday.



WADSWORTH

## MARION ASSOCIATION

▶ **Mount Olive Baptist Church, Hackleburg**, will host Archie Watkins and the Inspiration Quartet on May 31 at 7 p.m. The doors will open at 6 p.m. A love offering will be taken. James Nichols is pastor.

## TUSCALOOSA ASSOCIATION

▶ **Grant’s Creek Baptist Church, Fosters**, celebrated 191 years of ministry with a special homecoming service May 5th. The celebration began with a special music service during the usual Sunday School hour. Former music minister Jim Hinton, who served at Grant’s Creek Baptist in 1977, led the music in the worship hour with Pastor Scott Garvin bringing the message. A covered-dish meal followed in the church’s Christian Life Center. ▶ **Dax Lancaster** is the new pastor of **Cornelius Chapel Baptist Church, Buhl**. He and his wife, Kari, have three children.✚



Photo courtesy of Grant’s Creek

## — NEWSBRIEFS —

Kentucky while studying at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He was known for his sense of humor and for being a student of the Bible. He was also a musician and in the 1970s he wrote a song about his wife, Carolyn, called “Seven Years With a Wonderful Woman” that country singer Charley Pride recorded.

Davis is survived by his wife; son, Anthony; daughter, Andrea; five grandchildren; and one great-grandchild. (Grace Thornton)

## Georgia’s ‘Unholy Tour’ to educate officials on trafficking’s toll in state



Human trafficking is a multi-billion-dollar enterprise worldwide and second only to drugs in terms of criminal enterprise in Atlanta, with Georgia’s capital ranked as the top city for commercial sexual exploitation of children in the U.S.

Tim Echols of the Georgia Public Service Commission wants to make sure legislators and the public stay aware of the issue. Echols and the Georgia Baptist Mission Board’s Public Affairs department will co-host the Unholy Tour

on May 23 to educate pastors, ministers and church leaders on the reality of human sex trafficking in Georgia.



Photo by Scott Barkley

Attendees will board a bus and travel to the areas of Atlanta known for human trafficking. Speakers from various organizations share how they help combat the problem. Many of them have a personal connection and even been rescued themselves from being trafficked.

Doug Gilmer, an agent with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, recently called the Interstate 20 corridor from Atlanta to Birmingham “the most trafficked section of interstate in the entire nation.” (BP, TAB)

## ‘Alive from New York’: Rally for life draws large crowd to Times Square



Alabama Baptists were among one of the largest ever pro-life events on May 4. The event took place in the

heart of New York City’s Times Square.

Estimates of 20,000 people gathered for “Alive from New York,” a Focus on the Family event to celebrate the sanctity of human life in response to New York state’s new abortion law that allows abortion of viable babies right up until the moment of birth.

The crowd heard speeches from special guests and abortion survivors and viewed a live 4D ultrasound presented on the massive digital screens overlooking Times Square and live-streamed by Focus on the Family.

Abby Johnson, the former Planned Parenthood director whose story was told in the pro-life film “Unplanned” amplified her unborn baby’s heartbeat for everyone to hear as she underwent the 4D ultrasound.

The event highlighted human development in the womb and encouraged advocacy for women facing unplanned pregnancies and the preborn. (BP)



Twitter photo



# DEAF MINISTRY

**THE ALABAMA BAPTIST CONFERENCE FOR THE DEAF (ABCD)** took place at Coosada Baptist Church (Elmore Baptist Association) on March 8-10, 2019.

The event, attended by approximately 150 adults and youth, allowed the Deaf in Alabama to spend a weekend in fellowship and community, while also growing in their personal walks with Christ. The weekend focused on being the branches connected to the vine, as mentioned in John 15:5.

State Missionary Kristy Kennedy said ABCD was open for both the Deaf and those interested in Deaf ministry. She said the event has been "basically a family reunion" for her since she began attending eight years ago.

The weekend conference highlighted the need for Deaf ministry across Alabama, which is home to more than 50,000 Deaf people.

The Alabama Baptist State Convention has only three affiliated churches that were planted to specifically reach Deaf people. In addition, 20 other churches have ministries for the Deaf. In an average week, 200 Deaf persons attend one of these churches each week.

Kennedy said the need for mentoring and discipleship in the Deaf community is strong, and she is always looking for people who have a desire to reach the Deaf with the Gospel.

One such person is Faryn Fryer. Fryer, a sophomore at the University of Alabama, was a

first-time attendee at ABCD. She first became familiar with sign language in high school when her home church (First Baptist Church of Columbiana) needed interpreters for the Deaf who had recently begun attending.

Since then, Fryer has signed worship services, prayers, baptisms and a few sermons. She said she attended ABCD to connect with the Deaf community and see friends she worked with at Deafquake, the State Board of Missions' Deaf camp for children and youth.

"I enjoyed ABCD because it allowed me to learn

By Sydney Basden  
SBOM Intern

about the goals of Deaf Baptists in Alabama," Fryer said. "It gave me the opportunity, as a hearing person, to learn how to be a better ally and support for them."

According to Kennedy, the Deaf remain one of the most unreached people groups in the United States because they are hard to locate. She said events like ABCD and Deaf ministries throughout the state give these individuals the opportunity to know the Gospel, find community and be disciplined.

For more information on Deaf ministry among Alabama Baptists, please contact State Missionary Kristy Kennedy at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 311, or (334) 613-2311, [kkennedy@alsbom.org](mailto:kkennedy@alsbom.org).



## MARK YOUR CALENDARS

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

### JUNE

- 5 **Crossover Birmingham Training**, various locations, Amy Nelson, ext. 258
- 6 **Small Church Tax Conference**, CrossPoint, Trussville, Linda Hicks, ext. 263
- 6-7 **Missions Adventure Camp for Mom & Me (One Night)**, WorldSong, Cook Springs, Amanda Armstrong, ext. 223
- 6-8 **Missions Adventure Camp for Mom & Me (Two Nights)**, WorldSong, Cook Springs, Amanda Armstrong, ext. 223
- 8 **Crossover Birmingham**, various locations, Amy Nelson, ext. 258
- 9-10 **WMU, SBC Celebration/Annual Meeting**, Birmingham, Candace McIntosh, ext. 222
- 10-14 **Missions Adventure Camps for Girls & Teen Girls**, WorldSong, Cook Springs, Amanda Armstrong, ext. 223
- 11-12 **Southern Baptist Convention**, Birmingham, Debbie Oliver, ext. 242
- 16 **Father's Day**
- 17-21 **Missions Adventure Camps for Girls & Teen Girls**, WorldSong, Cook Springs, Amanda Armstrong, ext. 223
- 20 **Small Church Tax Conference**, SBOM Office Facility, Prattville, Linda Hicks, ext. 263
- 24-28 **Missions Adventure Camps for Girls & CITs**, WorldSong, Cook Springs, Amanda Armstrong, ext. 223
- 25 **Church Administrative Guidelines**, SBOM Office Facility, Prattville, Lee Wright, ext. 241, or Linda Hicks, ext. 263
- 30 **Citizenship & Religious Liberty Sunday**, Keith Hinson, ext. 289

### JULY

- 1-3 **Mini Missions Adventure Camp for Girls, Boys & Leaders**, WorldSong, Cook Springs, Amanda Armstrong, ext. 223
- 1-3 **Mini Missions Adventure Camp for Teen Girls**, WorldSong, Cook Springs, Amanda Armstrong, ext. 223
- 4 **Independence Day**
- 4-6 **Family Missions Adventure Camp (Two Nights)**, WorldSong, Cook Springs, Amanda Armstrong, ext. 223
- 5-6 **Family Missions Adventure Camp (One Night)**, WorldSong, Cook Springs, Amanda Armstrong, ext. 223
- 8-12 **Missions Adventure Camps for Girls, Boys & CITs**, WorldSong, Cook Springs, Amanda Armstrong, ext. 223
- 8-12 **Northwest Alabama Baptist Lad (1st-3rd Grade) & Dad Camp**, Earle Trent Assembly Baptist Camp, Florence, Monica Thompson, ext. 227
- 8-12 **Super Summer Alabama**, Samford University, Birmingham, Scooter Kellum, ext. 280
- 11 **Acts 1:8 Connections Celebration**, Lakeview, Birmingham, Scotty Goldman, ext. 387, or Barbara Owen, ext. 334
- 11 **Church Financial Issues**, Woodward Avenue, Muscle Shoals, Linda Hicks, ext. 263
- 12-13 **Children's Choir Summit**, Shocco Springs, Talladega, Karen Gosselin, ext. 318
- 15-19 **Missions Adventure Camps for Girls, Boys & CITs**, WorldSong, Cook Springs, Amanda Armstrong, ext. 223
- 15-19 **Mix MusiCamp@Shocco**, Shocco Springs, Talladega, Keith Hibbs, ext. 217
- 15-19 **Missions Adventure Camp for Girls, Boys & CITs**, WorldSong, Cook Springs, Amanda Armstrong, ext. 223
- 16 **Church Financial Issues**, Tennessee River Baptist Association Office, Scottsboro, Linda Hicks, ext. 263
- 18 **Church Financial Issues**, Northport BC, Northport, Linda Hicks, ext. 263
- 19-20 **SPEAK, Eastmont, Montgomery**, Scooter Kellum, ext. 280

# Church membership declining while anxiety on the rise

As recent polls put U.S. church membership at an all-time low and anxiety at an all-time high, some Southern Baptist leaders say the numbers are a wake-up call to Christians' deep need to take the Great Commission personally.

A Gallup Poll published in April 2019 found around 50% of Americans self-reported as members of a church, synagogue or mosque in 2018. That's a sharp drop from around

70% in 1999, a number that had stayed fairly steady in prior decades.

The decline matches up with the nation's "steep increase" of "nones," people who don't identify with any religion, according to Gallup.

## Failure to see value

But Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research, is quick to add that it isn't just the "nones" who are dropping off in church membership — it's the people who still self-

identify as religious too.

"The Gallup study shows the declines in church membership have also occurred among those with a religious preference," McConnell said. "This is evidence that church membership has declined in value. In some cases it is due to churches putting less emphasis on becoming a member, and in other cases it is the churchgoers who fail to see its value in practice."

Today as church membership is declining, something else is on the rise in its place — worry, stress and anger.

According to another recent Gallup Poll, those numbers hit all-time highs in 2018 with Americans' Negative Experience Index at a 35 — three percentage points higher than it had ever been. Younger Americans are more likely to feel that anxiety.

Ronnie Floyd, president and CEO of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, said in his opinion the religious and emotional poll data correlate and it's a tragedy.

"To me there is no surprise

that as church membership and attendance decrease, the levels of stress, worry and anger in our country increase," Floyd said. "In fact a closer look at the data tells us the people who have the highest levels of stress, worry and anger are the same younger generations who are leaving the church."

Kevin Ezell, president of the North American Mission Board (NAMB), said though the data on church membership may be simply a clearer picture of what's been happening for years, he still agrees the numbers "have a lot to say to churches."

"These surveys should concern us because the spiritual measurement meters in the United States are not headed in a positive direction," he said.

"This news should cause us as pastors, churches and believers to look closely at what we are doing and make sure we are about the business of declaring the gospel of Jesus and doing it with love and compassion," Ezell noted.

Ezell said he talks every week with NAMB missionaries who are on the front lines of trying to reach the culture described in poll data.

"They see the challenges," he said. "They know the spiritual confusion and apathy that's out there. But at the same time they are seeing God work in people's lives, and they are seeing an openness to the gospel."

## 'Personal command'

This news from the field combined with news from the polls, he said, reminds him of some important things.

"As individuals I hope this news reminds us that the Great Commission is a very personal command for each one of us," Ezell said. "It's not something you can delegate or pay someone else to do on your behalf. We will see a cultural shift back toward Jesus when we see individual believers engaging friends and family members with the truth of the gospel." (BP)

Pastor Charles Lewis recommends Jimmy Dixon

**The Benefits of a Reverse Mortgage**

- Get cash
- Erase mortgage payments
- Start a growing line of credit
- Purchase a home

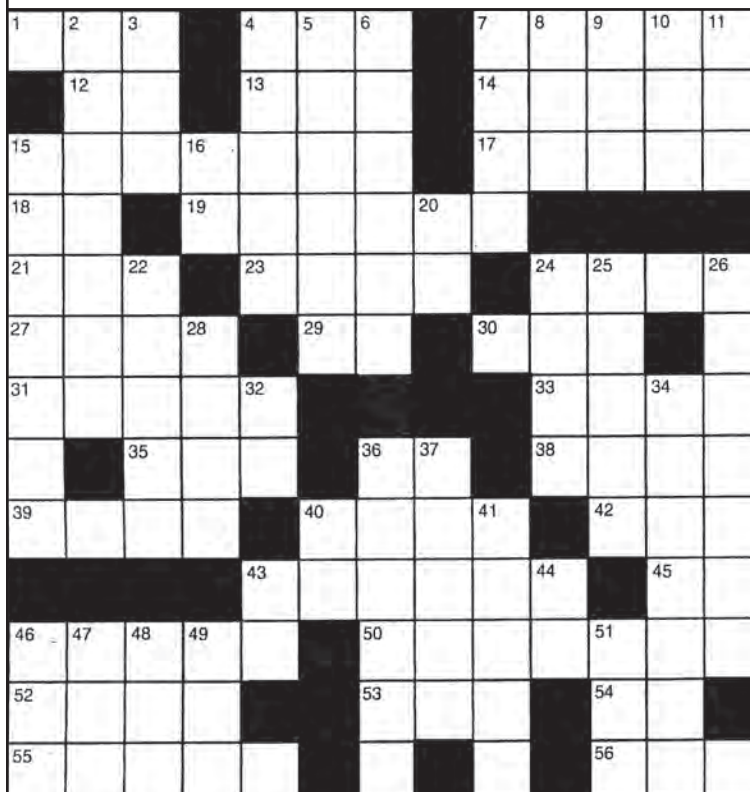
Contact Jimmy Dixon  
205-567-4800  
jdixon@mcgowinking.com

Like *The Alabama Baptist*, Jimmy covers our state helping seniors improve the quality of their lives.

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 Janet W. Adkins Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



### Across

1. Bachelor. (abbr.)
4. Limb.
7. Toi sent \_\_\_ his son. (2 Sam. 8:10).
12. Sea level. (abbr.)
13. Greek letter.
14. A land of oil \_\_\_, and honey. (Deut. 8:8)
15. Till there stood up a priest with Urim and \_\_\_ . (Neh. 7:65)
17. Milk source.
18. Egyptian sun god.
19. Midpoint.
21. Elf.
23. Gloomy.
24. Ye \_\_\_ Antique Shoppe.
27. Extremely.
29. Direction.
30. Wing.
31. Fool.
33. Extra duty drill instructor.
35. Brown.
36. Added to a letter.
38. Man's name.
39. Ogle.
40. Sounds of laughter.
42. And Adam called his wife's name \_\_\_. (Gen. 3:20)
43. He leadeth me \_\_\_ the still waters. (Ps. 23:2)

45. That I will give you the rain of your land \_\_\_ his due season. (Deut. 11:14)
46. I will extend peace to her like a \_\_\_. (Isa. 66:12)
50. And took upon him the form of a \_\_\_. (Phil. 2:7)
52. By mouth.
53. A son of Gad. (Gen. 46:16)
54. Symbol for beryllium.
55. That he may dip the tip of his finger in \_\_\_. (Luke 16:24)
56. They shall say no more, The \_\_\_ of the covenant. (Jer. 3:16)

### Down

2. For I am not \_\_\_ of the gospel of Christ. (Rom. 1:16)
3. Chartered Life Unwriter. (abbr.)
4. Bearing weapons.
5. African animals.
6. Second and third days of the week. (abbr.)
7. Journal. (abbr.)
8. Ancient.
9. Make free, disencumber.
10. Hail.
11. Meridian. (abbr.)

15. Not important.
16. Master of Ceremonies. (abbr.)
20. Emergency room. (abbr.)
22. Having a tendency.
24. Margarine.
25. Long-handled spoon.
26. Distinguished.
28. Second person possessive.
32. Tennessee. (abbr.)
34. Practicer of divination.
36. The peace of God which \_\_\_ all understanding. (Phil. 4:7, modern sp.)
37. More bashful.
40. Blessed be \_\_\_ that cometh in the name of the Lord. (Ps. 118:26)
41. And we were driven up and down in \_\_\_. (Acts 27:27)
43. British. (abbr.)
44. Electron volt. (abbr.)
46. And the second \_\_\_ shall be an emerald, a sapphire and a diamond. (Ex. 28:18)
47. And \_\_\_ also the Jairite was a chief ruler about David. (2 Sam. 20:26)
48. Large tub.
49. Eel. (Old Eng.)
51. Arab cloak.

# SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For May 19

## Explore the Bible

By Robert E. Jackson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



### PREPARES

**Mark 14:3–11, 32–36**

#### Misunderstood (3–5)

As Jesus was in the home of Simon the leper a woman poured expensive oil on Jesus' head. This expensive perfume could be sold for almost a year's wages.

To put this gift in perspective, can you imagine someone in Alabama spending \$40,000 on a rare perfume only to empty it — a year's income gone in an instant? Some of us would whisper, "This extravagance is a waste. Think what we can do with this money."

From this perspective we understand the reaction of some in the crowd. What the people misunderstood is Jesus is the object of this precious offering. The question is "how much is too much devotion to Christ?"

Perhaps a little bit of expensive perfume is okay, but to break open an entire jar on Jesus seems too extravagant. This kind of thinking is a misunderstanding of the time and person.

The hour of Christ's departure is at hand and He is the Lord who is worthy of all praise, glory and honor. The God-ordained time to display extravagant love to the Messiah was at hand. If this woman delayed it would be too late.

#### Honored (6–9)

Instead of rebuking this woman Christ commends her for doing "what she could" (literally translated "what she had she did"). In other words, much like the widow with the two coins, she gave all she had (Mark 12:41–44). This woman apparently pours out everything she has on Jesus. Christ honors this kind of radical devotion.

Furthermore Jesus connects her act with His imminent death. Therefore, the woman pouring out costly perfume foreshadows Jesus pouring out something even more costly — His blood on the cross. Neither the perfume nor Jesus' blood is a waste.

Jesus honors this woman's extrav-

agant sacrifice by declaring her act will be remembered through the ages as the gospel is proclaimed.

#### Betrayed (10–11)

In stark contrast to this woman is Judas. While this woman shows an act of extraordinary adoration one of Jesus' disciples is seeking to profit from the Messiah. Did Judas care about the poor? No. Matthew and John state that Judas was only concerned with stealing money for himself (Matt. 26:15; John 12:6). A woman gave her all while a disciple took what he could.

Judas, controlled by Satan, went to the chief priests with a plan to betray Jesus for silver. Much as the woman's precious gift will always be remembered, so will Judas' acts of treachery and betrayal never be forgotten. We must realize that everyone who betrays Christ will ultimately fail and face judgment.

#### Committed (32–36)

After participating in the Passover meal Jesus led His disciples to Gethsemane (literally olive press) for prayer. In this place, where large stones were put upon the olives to squeeze out the oil, Jesus experiences the weight of what would soon be placed upon Him — the sins of the world.

This weight is so heavy Jesus falls to the ground in deep distress. Exactly where olives are pressed Jesus is pressed with excruciating agony so heavy that sweat is "squeezed out" like drops of blood (Luke 22:44).

What was this weight? My sins and your sins. He who knew no sin was about to become sin so we might be made right with God (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus overcomes this intense agony by intense prayer as He commits Himself to the Father's will.

As we end today's study in Gethsemane let us pause and thank Jesus for willingly bearing the weight of our sin. Furthermore let us model our Savior in our prayers — "not what I will but what You will."✝

## Bible Studies for Life

By James Riley Strange, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of New Testament, Samford University



### HATE YOUR FAMILY

**Luke 14:25–35**

Today we again address the cost of discipleship (see Luke 5:11, 28; 9:1–6, 23–27, 46–48; 57–62; 10:4) and again we hear Jesus make startling demands in light of familial duties, particularly the commandment to "honor your father and mother" (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). The theme is present in all of the Gospels, but Luke places added stress on the idea. For example, in Matthew's parallel passage (Matt. 10:37–39), Jesus says someone ought not to "love father or mother more than me." In Luke, Jesus uses more distressing language.

#### Following Jesus requires total devotion. (25–27)

As with last week's lesson Jesus states this teaching on the way to Jerusalem, a journey that occupies about a third of the Gospel of Luke. The mention of the large crowds "traveling with" Jesus in verse 25 reminds readers that the coming passion colors everything between chapters 9 and 19.

Perhaps it is the looming crucifixion and resurrection that cause Jesus to admonish His followers to "hate" father and mother, spouse and children. This language should be read in light of Luke 12:50–53, where Jesus talks about the way households will divide when some decide to follow Jesus. We know of second-century Roman families that divided over the issue of which deity to follow: Israel's God or Rome's many gods.

The key to what Jesus means by "hate" comes at verse 27: it refers to the willingness to give up something precious. The phrase "even one's own life" must be read in light of the next sentence. It is a call for neither self-hatred nor a desire to die. To "carry a cross" means to bear one's own means of execution. This image tells readers to be ready to die at the hands of the Roman government for the sake of following Jesus. That is a

foreign notion to many of us but in other times and places our brothers and sisters in Christ have risked — and still risk today — government sanction.

#### Count the cost

#### of following Jesus. (28–33)

In these parables of the builders and the warrior king Jesus addresses the possibility — really the probability — of negative reactions against faithfulness to God. They range from social ostracism to abuse in the courts to forced apostasy and execution. One might accuse Luke of using bad sales tactics if he wants Theophilus and other nonbelievers who are teetering on the edge of conversion to devote themselves completely to Jesus.

What he is after is what Jesus wanted: commitment that took full account of the potential cost of discipleship. Of course Jesus' own disciples were not fully aware of what they faced, for Judas betrayed Jesus, Peter denied knowing Him and all 12 abandoned Him at the arrest. Eventually all but Judas did indeed take up their crosses to follow Him.

#### Maintain a devotion to Jesus in spite of difficult or dangerous repercussions. (34–35)

Jesus does not explain this image of tasteless salt, but surely He is talking about people fulfilling their God-given purposes. God calls some to particular vocations (think of Paul). He allows others to choose their paths. To all who through their commitment become Jesus-followers He gives the commission of Micah 6:8: "To do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God."

For some Christians that commission will bring them face to face with a hostility that will test their resolve. Let us pray for our brothers and sisters so tested and let us renew our devotion to follow Christ no matter the cost.✝



# Media reviews

**MOVIE**

## Marvel's 'Avengers: Endgame' examines the desire to be master

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

**A**vengers: Endgame" has earned more than \$2 billion since its release April 24 and is on its way to becoming the highest grossing movie of all time.

The culminating movie in a 22-film Marvel Cinematic Universe series is popular

with audiences of all ages and interests, which brings up two interesting questions for Christian families.

### ► Is the movie for Christians?

The God of the Bible is never mentioned — at least not in a good way — but His attributes are at the center of the plot. That's because the villain Thanos wants to be all-powerful and all-knowing.

Thanos' evil desire borrows a page from Scripture.

Before he was the prince of evil Satan was a heavenly being (Isa. 14:12) who was cast out because of his desire to be God. Later Adam and Eve sinned because of their desire to be like God (Gen. 3:5).

### Wicked desires

Of course those wicked desires exist within us too. We want to be the mas-

ter. We want the power. We want to be God. By definition that's what sin is. When we sin we might as well be shouting at God: Your commandments are wrong. I'm in charge.

That's why we need a Savior.

### ► Is the movie for children?

"Endgame" is rated PG-13 but some of its marketing is directly aimed at kids. For example, McDonald's released 24 different "Endgame" Happy Meal toys, meaning you'll have



Photos courtesy of Marvel Studios

to spend a lot of cash (and consume a lot of calories) to complete your child's set. By comparison 2018's "Incredibles 2" Happy Meal series included only 10.

### Corporate partners

Then there are the "Endgame" tie-ins with Coca-Cola, General Mills cereals and nine other corporate partners in a record-

breaking corporate deal to ensure your child knows all about the movie and is begging to see it — even though he or she may be 4 years old and can't even spell "PG-13."

I can't answer this question for your family, but I can give you the information needed to make an informed decision. Even better I'll list the content in a generic spoiler-free format, thus assuring you won't learn anything about the plot.

Ready? Here we go.

The violence and disturbing content in "Endgame" is slightly less than that in its predecessor, "Infinity War," but is still quite violent compared to a PG-rated animated film. We see a character get an arm and then his head cut off (mostly off-screen). We watch a sword fight that results in a character's throat getting slashed (we do see blood). We witness a machine gun

fight. We watch missiles destroy a building. We see a character tortured (it's not bloody). Of course we see tons of punching and kicking although it's largely bloodless.

"Endgame" includes more strong language than "Infinity War." We hear h-ll (6), s--t (5), a-- (5), OMG (3), stand-alone misuse of "God" (3), GD (2), d--n (2), p--ssed (1), SOB (1), and misuse of "Jesus" (1). An alien spouts a word that sounds like the f-bomb. The film contains no sexuality. 🇺🇸



# 'A new dawn'

## App replaces Bibles lost, left behind by refugees in African refugee camp

**O**n a recent Sunday morning dozens of South Sudanese refugees gathered inside a tent at Imvepi Refugee Camp to thank God for enabling them to found a new church.

The new Pentecostal church was partly made possible by a new app that links preachers to Bible transla-

tions and theological resources from which they can prepare sermons and teach congregants about their faith.

"It's a new dawn for refugees," said Pastor Chol Mayak, 48, a father of four who recently attended a training on the app. "We are going to train other refugees so that they can open more churches and spread the gospel across the camps."

The eVitabu app was developed by Jonathan Haddock and Michael Berry, who are members of Canterbury Baptist Church in the United Kingdom. The app was launched in 2018 by the African Pastors Fellowship. The group provides pastors with durable solar-powered Android tablets that have the app pre-installed, turning the device into an engine for spiritual and pastoral growth.

The digital library has done much to replace the reference books many South Sudanese churches lost to the



Screen captures from African Pastors Fellowship

A man uses the eVitabu app on a tablet while teaching.

tumult of the country's civil war. Mayak, of the Soul Pentecostal Church, fled Yei, a town in South Sudan's southwest, after government forces attacked setting fire to his church and his congregants' homes. All of the church's Bibles were lost along with the pastor's books. He has been unable to continue with his ministry since.

### Life-changing

Alex Sokiri, who recently planted a church in Morobi refugee camp, was able to do so only after being trained on how to use the eVitabu app.

Sokiri and his wife, Harriet, lost

all their possessions after militants raided residents of Kajo Keji in South Sudan in July of 2016. "It was hard to encourage people who were disturbed and traumatized because of the civil war," he said. "There were no Bibles in the camp and we had lost everything in South Sudan. I told members of our church to continue to pray so that God opens a way."

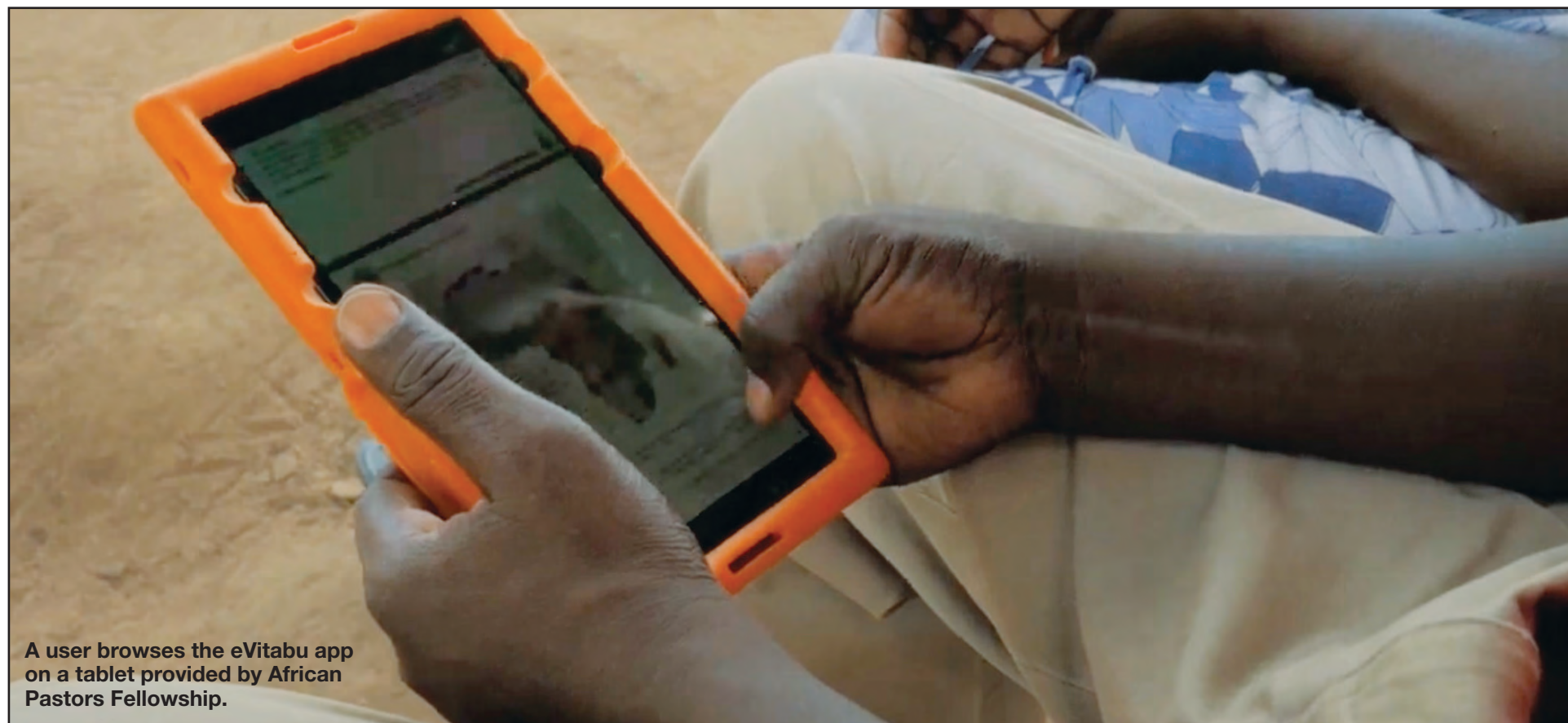
Sokiri can browse and download from the library for the lessons he uses to teach and support other pastors and congregations in the camps.

"The app provides information on how to plant a church, offer counseling and farming. It's changing the lives of refugees." (RNS)

## How to pray:

▶ Pray South Sudan will see an end to the tumult and violence.

▶ Pray the pastors and churches at Imvepi Refugee Camp will continue to seek comfort and peace in Christ and spread His love to those around them. (TAB)



A user browses the eVitabu app on a tablet provided by African Pastors Fellowship.

A special thank you to WXJC Radio, our partner in producing TAB News, which airs Saturdays at 2 p.m. TAB News is also the first part of the podcast released each Tuesday along with the audio digest of that week's issue.



## WEEKDAY MORNINGS ON WXJC

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