



The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

INSIDE



Churches go 'extra mile' for Vacation Bible School

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How one 'yes' changed everything for Boaz pastor

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South Korean interns serve with Shelby Association

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Unsplash.com

LifeWay study gives closer look at Christians' Bible-reading habits

Christians say the Bible is God's word, but even among Protestant churchgoers only a third spend time reading it every day, according to a study released July 2.

The 2019 Discipleship Pathway Assessment study from LifeWay Research, conducted Jan. 14-29, found those who regularly attend Protestant churches are inconsistent in their reading and thinking about Scripture.

The study identifies Bible engagement as one of eight signposts that consistently show up in the lives of grow-

ing, maturing Christians. "This research asked churchgoers about many biblical characteristics to see which actions, beliefs and desires are present in the lives of followers of Christ," said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research. "Among them Bible reading was one of the most predictive of spiritual maturity."

A third of Americans who attend a Protestant church regularly (32%) say they read the Bible personally every day. Around a quarter (27%) say they read it a few times a week. Fewer say they only read it once a week (12%),

and close to 1 in 8 (12%) admit they rarely or never read the Bible.

Churchgoers aged 50 to 64 are more likely to say they read the Bible every day (35%) than adults under 50 (30%).

Spiritual health

In a 2016 study of churchgoing Protestant parents LifeWay Research found regular Bible reading as a child was the biggest factor in predicting the spiritual health of young adults.

The latest survey finds Bible reading as an adult has similar far-reaching effects.

Researchers also asked churchgoers if they think about biblical truths throughout the day and if they miss time with God if they go several days without reading the Bible. Nearly 7 in 10 (69%) agreed or somewhat agreed they did.

"Jesus' prayer for His followers was that they would be sanctified by the truth of God's word," McConnell said. "It's not surprising that the lives of those who spend time reading the Bible look more like Christ. ... This fits with the Bible's own description of itself as being 'living and effective.'" (BP)

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

Coming next week ...

BACK to CAMPUS

TAB to host 'Beauregard Strong' Benefit Night for Lee County tornado victims

Earlier this year *The Alabama Baptist* staff was excited to host several evenings of music and entertainment at our Servant/Leadership Appreciation Night events held across the state.

Now another evening of entertainment is planned for Aug. 2. Hosted by Providence Baptist Church, Opelika, in Tuskegee Lee Baptist Association, the event begins at 6 p.m.

An enhanced version of the lineup of comedy, music and illusion is planned, but this time the focus is to provide encouragement and financial help to those whose lives were changed forever by the March 3 tornadoes that struck the Beauregard and Smiths Station communities in Lee County.

Response to tragedy

Twenty-three people were killed that day and hundreds were left homeless. In the aftermath volunteers staged out of Providence Baptist, where Rusty Sowell is pastor, to help the hurting.

Sowell and Providence Baptist were honored recently by the North



NEW GROUND

American Mission Board (NAMB) for the church's response to the tragedy.

NAMB President Kevin Ezell also announced private donors were providing \$20,000 toward the church's effort to build a permanent memorial to those who died.

The TAB benefit night is one of the ways you can help those recovering from the devastation of the tornadoes.

Donations and gift cards will be taken at the door, and all proceeds will be used by Providence Baptist to help with the recovery and rebuilding efforts taking place across the county.

Doors open at 5:15 p.m. No reservations are necessary. The event is family-friendly for all ages.



BELL



GARRARD



JONES



WILBURN

Lineup of entertainers:

- ▶ Pianist Frank Jones
- ▶ Illusionist David Garrard
- ▶ Comedian Mickey Bell
- ▶ Gospel trio New Ground
- ▶ Comedian Aaron Wilburn

Bell said the evening will be a time to enjoy fellowship and encouragement with one another in a "fun and relaxed way."

If you wish to donate to the recovery efforts in Lee County but cannot attend the Aug. 2 benefit night visit www.providencealive.com. (TAB)



"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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"I like the way TAB challenges us as Christians to be more active in being the hands and feet of Christ. Every issue gives examples of how others are involved across our state and beyond. There also are practical ideas presented like the recent article giving insight into a pastor's wife."

Amelia Pearson
TAB board member



The crossword puzzle can be found on page 17.

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MY RASHIONALE

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

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True communication more than reading, listening; it's grasping

You've likely heard the phrase "communication happens when you hear what I think I said." In other words miscommunication happens when what you hear isn't what was said.

A communicator by trade and training, I'm constantly baffled at how often miscommunication takes place — especially in my own day-to-day conversations.

I've determined that in many cases the one speaking either shares too many details and the listener gets lost in all the words or important points are left out and the listener is forced to fill in the holes on the spot.

It also could be that people sometimes have different interpretations of certain words and descriptions according to their personal experiences. And it might be the listener imposes assumptions on the comments being made without first attempting to fully understand.

Whatever the reason the one talking can always improve the presentation of the information. I've started doing this myself with what I call inverted pyramid-style sharing.

The traditional style of journalistic news reporting is inverted pyramid — share the main point of the article first and as clear and succinct as possible. From there develop the article with all the supporting details.

By starting a conversation or presentation with the main point those listening aren't trying to guess what might be coming.

Granted it is not as much fun to share this way. There's no

drama, no build up, no mystery but it does achieve the goal with much less confusion.

It also cuts down on the listener interrupting your story with questions that would actually be answered if they would wait until you finish before asking.

When interruptions happen the story automatically gets derailed because the one talking feels rushed and could leave out essential information.

Sharing the main point first and filling in only the essential specifics afterward also cuts down on the effort it takes for

the listener to weed through what information is actually needed and keeps his or her mind from wandering because the story is taking too long.

It's like what my friend and coworker's husband says, "I just want to know what time it is. I don't need to know how the clock was made."

But even if the one sharing is longwinded we need to work hard to truly listen. It would be better to stop the person and ask if the conversation could happen later than merely nod in agreement while thinking through something else.

Another helpful step for both parties is repeating back what you think you understand and clarifying as needed.

For the one sharing the information a quick summary at the end repeating the main point or points also helps pull the listener back to the essential information needed.

So to summarize this week's column — communication only happens when the one listening truly grasps what the one sharing is attempting to say.

Talking at people doesn't guarantee they will hear us. 🌈

RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

Want more wisdom? Absorb a chapter of Proverbs a day and never stop — start back over with each new month

Proverbs 17:22–24

"A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

"The wicked accept bribes in secret to pervert the course of justice.

"A discerning person keeps wisdom in view, but a fool's eyes wander to the ends of the earth."

Proverbs 18:1–7

"An unfriendly person pursues selfish ends and against all sound judgment starts quarrels.

"Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions.

"When wickedness comes, so does contempt, and with shame comes reproach.

"The words of the mouth are

deep waters, but the fountain of wisdom is a rushing stream.

"It is not good to be partial to the wicked and so deprive the innocent of justice.

"The lips of fools bring them strife, and their mouths invite a beating.

"The mouths of fools are their undoing and their lips are a snare to their very lives."

Proverbs 19:16–21

"Whoever keeps commandments keeps their life, but whoever shows contempt for their ways will die.

"Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward them for what they have done.

"Discipline your children for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to their death.

"A hot-tempered person must pay

the penalty; rescue them and you will have to do it again.

"Listen to advice and accept discipline, and at the end you will be counted among the wise.

"Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails."

Proverbs 20:9–12

"Who can say, 'I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin'?"

"Differing weights and differing measures — the Lord detests them both.

"Even small children are known by their actions, so is their conduct really pure and upright?"

"Ears that hear and eyes that see — the Lord has made them both." (New International Version)

Your Voice



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

Danger, Stranger: Trusting in God's promises

By Bill Russell

Associational missions director, Bibb Baptist Association

The Scriptures refer to believers in Christ as strangers in the sense that we are temporary residents of this world.

We have a better citizenship ahead, but we still live in this world, a dangerous wasteland we are traveling through. Four dangers are included in Hebrews 3.

1. Immature participation. The result of not believing the Lord was the Israelites not going into the promised land. Those 20 years old and up were sentenced to die. No

doubt some of their children might have agreed with their parents but they were not condemned. Why? Immaturity. They were not mature enough to know better.

Young believers often fail just because they are young in Christ. The Bible exhorts us to grow in Christ (2 Tim. 4:15).

2. Insidious double-mindedness. Israel wanted to live in two worlds. They wanted to call Yahweh God but yearned after the flesh pots of Egypt.

There are double-minded believ-

ers today. They want to be materialistic and spiritual at the same time. They want God's forgiveness but hold on to grudges. They want God's love but do not want to love others. There are some who want to live like the world and love God at the same time. John says that is impossible (1 John 2:15).

3. Infectious pessimism. At Kadesh Barnea, God said to His people: "It's yours: the promised land, abundant life, victory." Instead of following God the people said, "We can't do it." They really meant, "We don't know if we can trust God."

Many today are in danger of living in spiritual poverty because they are infected with "I cannot" — I cannot live for God (read 1 Cor. 10:1); I cannot give (read 2 Cor. 9:7-8); I cannot serve (read Phil. 4:13). The message is clear: You can.

The danger when you say you can't is that others are also discouraged. That harms the effectiveness of God's family.

4. Infirmiting procrastination. Israel wanted to wait and ended up in the wilderness for 40 years. Too many Christians want to delay or dilute their commitment. That is one of Satan's greatest weapons.

The danger is not that true believers will lose their salvation but that they will lose their power to live the abundant life. The danger is that the Church loses its saltiness and the evangelistic power of living in the power of God's promises.

In Paul's teaching about the gifts of the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 6 he told us we should be "praying always." I'd like you to join me in praying for a different church each week.

Otis Corbitt
Associational missions
director
Covington Baptist
Association

Do not allow anyone to tell you otherwise — if you serve as a bivocational minister, you are absolutely full time.

Mike Snow
Associational missions
director
Bethel Baptist Association

We can lovingly debate what the law should be, but there should be no debate about providing for the needs of the sojourner and sharing Christ with them.

Kaleb Wimberly
Associate pastor
FBC Enterprise

Our lifestyle and our words should not contradict each other.

D. Jay Powell.
"Be Inspired: 101
Thoughts for Every
Christian Writer"

Letters to the Editor

I am writing in reference to the article "Blessed are the meek" in the June 20, 2019, issue of *The Alabama Baptist*.

My question is why is David Platt defending himself for praying for and with the president of the United States? He should be praising God for the opportunity. After all the president made the first move. This should have been applauded.

If the church members and others (social media) had an issue with praying for our elected officials then the problems in that church are much greater than the president showing up uninvited.

Platt should never have published a letter of explanation.

There may have been some resistance but he should have ignored it.

Joseph Bishop
Roanoke, Ala.

EDITOR'S NOTE— On June 2, President Trump made an unexpected visit to McLean Bible Church in Virginia. Pastor David Platt prayed with the president from the stage, which brought both praise and criticism from members of the church and the Christian community at large and prompted a letter of explanation from Platt. Platt addressed the controversy in his Southern Baptist Convention Pastors Conference sermon June 10.

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“Hospitality is wrapped up in Christ’s call to love my neighbor.”

ANTENESHIA SANDERS

Seminary student, author and hotel employee

Before we start interacting with particular cultural issues, we need to slow down to reflect deeply on our cultural moment as well as on what the Bible teaches. But often, the impulse for us as evangelicals (all the way back to the movement’s beginnings in the early 18th century) is to try to fix things — both issues and people — even before we understand the problem.

Karen Swallow Prior and Joshua Chatraw
“Cultural Engagement: A Crash Course in Contemporary Issues”

Every Christian, every church experiences failure at some point in trying to reach others with the gospel. Maybe it feels like those out-

weigh the successes, but don’t discount the gains made even in failure. Perhaps that person didn’t respond to your message or outreach, but the seed has been planted.

The important thing to remember is never give up.

Scott Barkley
The Christian Index

I am eternally grateful for the youth pastors in my life, past and present, who have shared the hard parts of life with me. Don’t ever underestimate how large an impact you have on your students even after they’ve left your youth group.

Have the hard conversations with them. Talk about death. Talk about suicide and tragedy. Share your own heartache and pain with them so

that they can see you faithfully walk through it.

And most of all, don’t ever stop speaking the truth of God over them. There will be times that they don’t feel like it’s true. There will be times where they are sick of hearing it because the pain is too real, but keep proclaiming it with love and boldness. It will sink into their hearts and minds. Even on their deepest darkest days, they will be able to recite it back and cling to it.

Lauren House
YMLink.org

We will always stand with people across the world who take a stand for their faith.

Mike Pence
U.S. vice president

From the *Twitterverse*

@revandyfrazier

A great truth our culture needs to understand... @danielsangi: “Many who aspire to leadership fail because they have never learned to follow.” — J. Oswald Sanders

@whosyour1_

Don’t just pray for your one, you need to also tell them the good news — that they have a Savior and His name is Jesus! #WhosYour1

@jdgrear

Packed house at the Black Church Leadership and Family Conference of the @SBCCP. #bclfc19. Excitement and faith in this room is palpable. God is moving powerfully in this part of our Convention!

@ricklance

While sitting in a doctor’s office, I looked up to an advertisement on

a TV monitor and read the quote of the day: “I have had more trouble with myself than any other man.” — Dwight L. Moody. I wonder if they know anything about the man behind the quote.

@Johnbmann

Called to the ministry?
Be prepared:
▶ To work. A lot.
▶ To encounter difficult people. A lot.
▶ To do spiritual warfare. A lot.
▶ To take difficult stands. A lot.
▶ To need prayer. A lot.
▶ To need forgiveness. A lot.
▶ To know God’s presence. A lot.

@LifeWay

“Though the first several years of Joseph’s life in Egypt must have felt way outside of God’s plan, Joseph’s detour to Egypt was no de-

tour at all. God would use Egypt. ... Joseph was right where God wanted him.” — @Kelly_Minter

@baptist21

The longing for things other than Christ has ruined many.

@sendrelief

“When you become a partner in the community, the obstacles to the gospel melt away.”
— @vancepitman

@DustyMcLemore

The secret to all spiritual power, all peace and all purity is living in the presence of our Lord!

@kk4me2

When you complain about the church, know that you are the Church. You are the body of Christ and a part of it.



Photo courtesy of WMU

Sandy Wisdom-Martin is executive director of national Woman’s Missionary Union.

Working together

As Southern Baptists, we are unified by our passion to take the gospel of Christ to those who have never heard.

We work together toward that common goal through the Cooperative Program (CP), Southern Baptists’ unified plan of giving through which cooperating Southern Baptist churches give a percentage of their undesignated receipts in support of their respective state convention and Southern Baptist Convention missions and ministries.

As a child and young adult, my heart was sealed for missions. I felt God’s call on my life while serving at a Baptist camp supported by the CP. Statewide youth events helped me mature spiritually. CP-funded Baptist Student Union ministry in college was one of the greatest discipling influences of my life.

I developed as an associational WMU leader through CP-sponsored events. I also benefitted from CP-subsidized tuition at seminary and CP support as a NAMB missionary. Serving on state convention staffs, I saw firsthand how gifts to the CP meant people had the opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel. I am grateful for the CP and our shared purpose of proclaiming the hope found only in Christ.

—Sandy Wisdom-Martin

SMALL CHURCH VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL



Photo by Bill Gilmore

A ceiling-high giraffe crafted by Robert McAvoy stands in the sanctuary of Mount High Baptist Church, Warrior. McAvoy creates themed VBS displays and props for his church each year.

15-foot giraffe shows how Mount High Baptist Church goes ‘extra mile’ in VBS

It’s hard for Robert McAvoy to fathom that there was once a time when he didn’t know what Vacation Bible School (VBS) was, but if he looks far enough back he can remember it. “My wife told me she was volunteering for VBS one year and I said, ‘What is VBS?’ I’d grown up around church but had never been around VBS,” McAvoy said.

As his wife, Angela, got more involved so did he — and the more he helped out the more he was hooked.

‘Doing everything’

“Eventually she was the director and we were just doing everything,” he said.

For the past 20 years “everything” has meant spending all year building an elaborate decoration scheme for VBS at Mount High

Baptist Church, Warrior, in Sulphur Springs Baptist Association.

One year McAvoy made a train engine big enough for fourth and fifth graders to get inside and “drive.” That was probably his favorite, he said.

This year for the theme Into the Wild he made a giraffe out of cardboard covered in fabric — an animal he modestly said he

“planned to be 10 feet tall but may be a little bigger than that.”

Pastor Dan Nichols said a lot bigger was more like it.

“Our ceilings at the church are 16 feet tall and the giraffe’s ears are almost to the top,” he said. “I think he’s probably 15 feet plus some inches.”

Regardless of how tall that giraffe actually was, its imposing size was a visual of the small church’s big commitment to VBS.

In years past the church was running maybe 10 people for Sunday worship and still put on an all-out VBS for dozens of kids.

This June, with the church now averaging about 40 people on Sundays, they built out an entire savannah with 8-foot elephants, sloths hanging from the ceiling and a jeep with full-sized tires.

Other church volunteers went above and beyond with homemade animal-themed snacks like monkey cookies and penguins made of marshmallows and

Oreos. And everyone helped pack bags of candy for church members to hand out in nearby neighborhoods to promote VBS week.

They had 12 more children this year than last year — a big difference in a small community, Nichols said.

“Bible school to me was a straight-up blessing — it was just fun, and everybody went the extra mile,” he said. “It’s one of the greatest tools a church can have. It gets the whole congregation involved in evangelism.”

Sharing with others

And every year, what the folks do at Mount High Baptist they’re able to share with other churches. The year McAvoy built the train engine it got “driven” at six area churches. This summer, other churches in the association have made use of the giraffe, elephants and jeep.

“Even though we’re little the work can be great with God in it,” Nichols said. (Grace Thornton)



Photo by One Mission Students

A team of Alabama college students serving with One Mission Students helped with VBS at FBC Benecia, California. Some 80 children attended VBS each day.

VBS MOMENTS AROUND THE STATE



Photo courtesy of Heflin Baptist Church
VBS students got behind the wheel of a safari jeep to go 'Into the Wild' at Heflin Baptist Church.



Photo by Leesa Massey

Union Baptist Church, Honoraville, included an adult class that drew a large crowd each night.

Ruhama Baptist Church, Anniston, held its first VBS in 20 years, said Pastor Brian Frost (right), with Roger Willmore, Calhoun Association director of missions.



Photo courtesy of Roger Willmore



Photo by ABCH

Children at VBS at FBC Trussville raised money for Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries.



Photo by FBC Eufaula

Animals from Africa were included in the worship rally display at FBC Eufaula, courtesy of Danny Blackmon, who regularly travels to South Africa.



Photo by FBC Geneva

A student at FBC Geneva says, 'Until next year, VBS friends.'

Volunteers at The Church at Shelby Crossings, Calera, design the church's VBS materials from start to finish — from choosing a theme, to music and decorations to writing Bible and missions stories. This year's theme 'inTENTS' was built around Bible stories involving tents and encouraged participants to live 'intently' with God, said minister to families Shellyn Poole.



Photo by Shellyn Poole

This year's missions project raised funds to purchase tents to be used by the Texas Baptist River Ministry for VBS and Backyard Bible Clubs and to help with ministry support to immigrants along the Texas-Mexico border.



Photo by Neal Hughes

VBS students at Pintlala Baptist Church, Hope Hull, prepare for craft time. Various Montgomery Baptist Association churches held a week-long, one-day or mid-week VBS, according to associational mission strategist Neal Hughes. Several salvations were reported throughout the summer, Hughes added.

'The heart of God'

Lewis calls Christians to three actions in pursuit of peace, reconciliation

We cannot give what we do not have — that's the reality of the Christian life, said Dhati Lewis, pastor of Blueprint Church, Atlanta, and vice president of Send Network with the North American Mission Board.

"And if we cannot show the reconciling power in the body of Christ," he asked, "what can we give to a world that's divided?"

Christians are called to pursue reconciliation, Lewis said, preaching from Matthew 5:9 — "blessed are the peacemakers" — at the Southern Baptist Convention Pastors Conference in Birmingham on June 10.

"We can't just be promoting what we're against; we've got to start promoting who we are for," he said. "It is when we recognize who He is and whose we are that we recognize that we are the King's kids and we join in the family business which is about peacemaking. It's about reconciling."

When followers of Christ bring reconciliation to broken relationships it's then they begin to carry on the work of Jesus, Lewis said.

He called Christians to do three things in pursuit of peace:

1. Reflect personally.

As humans we don't naturally come to a relationship objectively — everyone has his or her own history, hunches and negative generalizations about other people, Lewis

said. It's important to know what those are.

2. Empathize corporately.

"Find environments and places where we can hear the stories of other people," Lewis said. "Let's hear each other's story and leave the door open for reconciliation."

3. Pursue reconciliation.

When something happens in the national community that could cause division in the church, Lewis' church tackles that conversation head on — but always with the purpose of reconciliation.



LEWIS

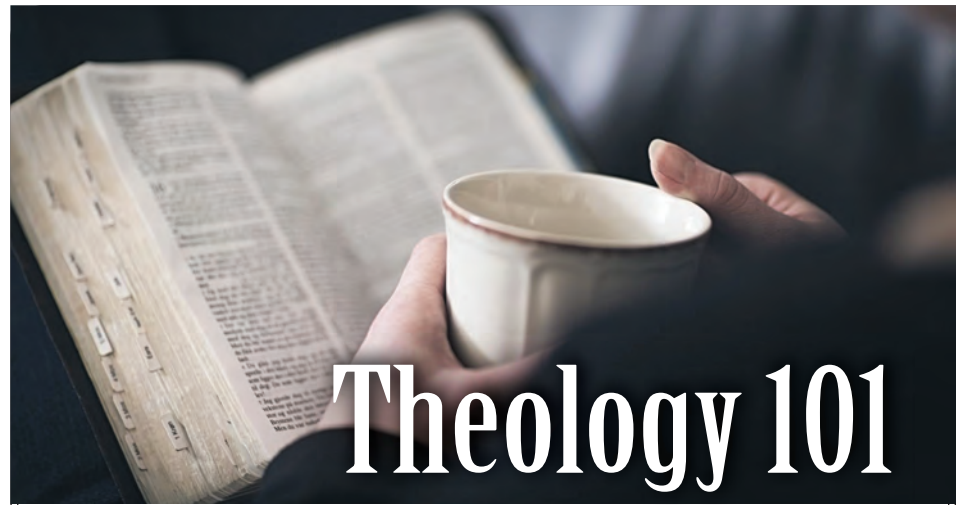
"We're going to come and wrestle as a church and

we run to the tension," he said, because if peacemakers are called to make peace, that means they have to work in the places where there is tension.

"We want to be advocates. We want to be pursuing the heart of God to reconcile," Lewis said. "Justice without reconciliation is what the Bible calls hell. If we only get justice those who have not been reconciled to Christ will spend eternity in hell. The goal of the Christian isn't justice; the goal of the Christian is reconciliation."

With that in mind Christians should work toward reconciling with each other so they can take that reconciliation to the world, he said. "My prayer for us is that one day we would really be able to embrace this ... and truly represent Christ." (Grace Thornton)

2019
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pastors
conference



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Images of a Christian

Christians as Children

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

In prior weeks Theology 101 focused on images as ways of gaining understanding about spiritual truths. In doing so we gave thought to the sad fact that humans, created in the image and likeness of God, nonetheless became distorted images of our perfect Creator. Further we considered the Bible's witness to Christ as the perfect, unmarred image of the invisible God who came in the flesh. We ended that series with the truth that ultimately Christians will have the marred image fully restored when Christ returns.

In coming weeks we will let the Bible suggest some common images by which to describe Christians as we are being transformed into the likeness of Christ. These common images can be windows through which to see ourselves with greater clarity.

Children of God

One of the most common biblical images of the people of God is that of children.

In the Old Testament God's covenant nation is referred to as the children of Israel. In the New Testament believers in Christ are termed children of God. For example, John 1:12, in referring to Christ, declares, "As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name." Similarly, Romans 8:16 promises, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

God's love is the motivation for

sinners being considered as children, declaring with exultation, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1).

Always growing

Normally common to children is the experience of growth. Babies become children, children become teenagers and teenagers become adults. The image of believers as children suggest that all of us are to be growing — growing in grace, growing in likeness to Christ and growing into responsible living and working.

Children are not carbon copies of other children. Having the same parents still results in distinguishing characteristics of siblings. Identical twins can be distinguished by those closest to them. Fingerprints are different. Subtle distinctions are found in facial features, hair color and dispositions.

As children of God Christians are to be distinct. We are not identical. Talents and gifts differ. Motivations vary. We bring our differences into the body of Christ, the Church, so varieties of ministries can be accomplished in and by the family of God.✝

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.



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One day, one dollar at a time

Mission:Dignity helps faithful servants who are struggling financially

Rick and Betty Hall of Eclectic have a multitude of stories about the small churches they served throughout Eastern Alabama over the course of three decades.

In the Halls' last church five people attended on the first Sunday. No one had lived in the parsonage for 36 years and there were only 34 people within a mile of the church. Attendance grew to almost 40 during the eight years the Halls were there. The members learned how to give to missions, and it became the top per-capita giving church in their local association to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering.

Rick and Betty both worked a variety of jobs to pay their bills. "Most country churches expect a pastor to do everything — visitation, hospital calls, turning the lights on. But most of them can't pay much, if anything," Rick Hall said.

Faithful servants

When they retired Rick and Betty had no savings to fall back on but heard about Mission:Dignity, a ministry of GuideStone Financial Resources that assists retired Southern Baptist ministers and their wives who have faithfully served God's people and now find themselves struggling to meet even basic needs.

Like the Halls many of those who receive financial assistance from Mission:Dignity served small, rural churches that paid only modest salaries and couldn't afford to contribute to their pastors' retirement.

Mission:Dignity currently helps almost 1,800 people with extra money needed for housing, food



Rick and Betty Hall

BP photo

and vital medications. It has also ensured a well-deserved dignity, independence and, often, the ability to continue serving. It has made a huge difference in the lives of those who receive help.

Rick Hall confessed one month there was \$3.27 in the bank when the Mission:Dignity check came in. "Our Social Security pays the bills, but the Mission:Dignity gift pays for our groceries. We can't tell you how many times we have thanked the Lord for your help," he said to GuideStone. "Many months, we would not have bought grocer-

ies home without your assistance."

More than \$7 million is distributed annually with most of the funding coming from the direct gifts of individuals, Sunday School classes and churches. One hundred percent of gifts provide well-deserved monthly grants with nothing used for operating expenses. An endowment established many years ago covers the administrative costs of the ministry.

'Great blessings'

"One of the great blessings of our ministry is knowing that so many of the good and godly pastors and their wives we serve are able to have a measure of security

and, yes, dignity in their declining years thanks to the individuals, churches and Sunday School classes who give to Mission:Dignity," said GuideStone President O.S. Hawkins.

"We are thankful that we can be Christ's hand extended to these Southern Baptist pastors and their widows who sacrificed to serve His churches throughout their ministries."

Free resources

For churches, Sunday School classes and others interested in supporting Mission:Dignity, GuideStone provides free bulletin inserts, promotional posters and a DVD with several brief testimonies of people assisted by Mission:Dignity.

The materials are undated and can be used anytime. The free resources can be ordered at MDSunday.org.

Individuals wishing to donate, or wishing to refer potential recipients, to Mission:Dignity can do so through MissionDignity.org.

The ministry — now beginning its second century of service to Southern Baptist pastors — has been a blessing, Rick Hall said.

"We just want to thank you so very much. We know that God cares for us, and the assistance from those who give to Mission:Dignity is one way He has helped us. It's amazing and we can't thank you enough." (GuideStone)

For more information visit MissionDignity.org.

"Our Social Security pays the bills, but the Mission:Dignity gift pays for our groceries. We can't tell you how many times we have thanked the Lord for your help. Many months, we would not have bought food without your assistance."

Rick Hall
retired Alabama Baptist minister



ONE MISSION: The Great Commission ONE PROGRAM: The Cooperative Program MANY MINISTRIES: Great Commission Ministries

BIBLICAL CHURCH REVITALIZATION FOCUS OF UPCOMING CONFERENCES

The more State Missionary Daniel Wilson speaks to pastors about the need for church revitalization, the more he sees a common thread.

"The temptation is to look for quick fixes to turn around declining and divided churches when slow, patient, loving, Biblical pastoral leadership is what is needed," Wilson said.

Wilson's conversations with pastors and church leaders across the state led him to plan the upcoming series of "Biblical Church Revitalization" conferences, taking place in four locations August 12-15.

"This conference will be an encouragement to pastors who are in divided or struggling churches," Wilson said. "It will also encourage pastors to remain steadfast in their calling to shepherd their churches and to patiently remain committed to the Biblical responsibilities given to pastors and churches."

In order to provide that encouragement, Wilson turned to a leader known for emphasizing the Biblical principles for revitalizing a church rather than jumping straight to pragmatic approaches and stylistic changes.

Brian Croft is the pastor of Auburndale Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky., and the Senior Fellow of the Mathena Center for Church Revitalization at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He's also the founder of Practical Shepherding Ministries, an organization he describes as "a gospel-driven resource center for pastors and church leaders equipping them in the essential, yet often overlooked, practical matters of pastoral ministry."

Wilson noted that Croft has pastored the same "normative size" Baptist church for more than 15 years, a term that focuses less on whether a church is considered small or large and more on what is the norm for



most of our churches.

"I believe Brian's story of loving hard-to-love church members, slowly leading change in an established church, and remaining steadfast in the midst of difficult church circumstances needs to be told," Wilson observed.

"In short, Croft can relate to where most of our pastors and churches are because he pastors an average size congregation and has weathered the storms that are common to pastors."

Four identical one-day Biblical Church Revitalization conferences will be held, beginning each day at 8:30 a.m. and concluding at 2 p.m., on **August 12 at Lindsay Lane Baptist Church in Athens, August 13 at Samford University in Birmingham, August 14 at the State Board of Missions in Prattville, and August 15 at the University of Mobile.**

The event is free and lunch will be provided, but reservations are required to help with planning for meals and materials.

For more information or to register, please visit alsbom.org/bcr. For more information about church revitalization resources, please contact State Missionary Daniel Wilson, 1-800-264-1225, ext. 343; (334) 613-2343; dwilson@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.

AUGUST

- 6 **Church Financial Issues**, Dale Baptist Association Office, Ozark, Linda Hicks, ext. 263
- 8 **Church Financial Issues**, SBOM Office Facility, Prattville, Linda Hicks, ext. 263
- 10 **Discipling New Hispanic Believers**, SBOM Office Facility, Prattville, Annel Robayna, ext. 270
- 12 **Biblical Church Revitalization**, Lindsay Lane, Athens, Daniel Wilson, ext. 343
- 13 **Biblical Church Revitalization**, Samford University, Birmingham, Daniel Wilson, ext. 343
- 13 **Church Financial Issues**, CrossPoint, Trussville, Linda Hicks, ext. 263
- 14 **Biblical Church Revitalization**, SBOM Office Facility, Prattville, Daniel Wilson, ext. 343
- 15 **Biblical Church Revitalization**, University of Mobile, Mobile, Daniel Wilson, ext. 343
- 17 **Called Conference**, Glynwood, Prattville, Monica Thompson, ext. 227
- 18 **Read The Alabama Baptist Sunday**
- 18-25 **Royal Ambassador Week**, Monica Thompson, ext. 227
- 20 **Church Financial Issues**, Northbrook, Cullman, Linda Hicks, ext. 263
- 22 **Church Financial Issues**, Tuskegee Lee Baptist Association Office, Opelika, Linda Hicks, ext. 263
- 22 **Uplink on the Road**, Dawson Memorial, Birmingham, Scooter Kellum, ext. 280
- 29 **OneDay for Worship Leaders**, Hunter Street, Hoover, April Brewer, ext. 279

SEPTEMBER

- 2 **Labor Day**
- 3 **The Heart of Leadership: Becoming a Leader People Want to Follow**, SBOM Facility, Prattville, Debbie Dickey, ext. 218
- 5 **Get Acquainted Day**, SBOM Office Facility, Prattville, Rita Goldman, ext. 249
- 8 **Single Adult Sunday**, Eileen Mitchell, ext. 221
- 8-15 **Week of Prayer for State Missions and Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering**, Laura Glass, ext. 226
- 12 **Personnel Management**, SBOM Office Facility, Prattville, Lee Wright, ext. 241, or Linda Hicks, ext. 263
- 12-13 **Alabama Singing Men Retreat**, Shocco Springs, Talladega, Keith Hibbs, ext. 217
- 12-13 **Alabama Singing Women Retreat**, Shocco Springs, Talladega, Cindy Parrish, ext. 230
- 15 **Anti-Gambling Sunday**, Keith Hinson, ext. 289
- 16 **Preparing for Retirement**, Mobile Baptist Association Office, Mobile, Linda Hicks, ext. 263
- 17 **2019 Singin'**, University BC, Huntsville, Eileen Mitchell, ext. 221
- 17 **Preparing for Retirement**, Canaan, Bessemer, Linda Hicks, ext. 263
- 18 **Preparing for Retirement**, SBOM Office Facility, Prattville, Linda Hicks, ext. 263
- 19 **Preparing for Retirement**, Decatur First, Linda Hicks, ext. 263
- 26 **Personnel Management**, Birmingham First, Lee Wright, ext. 241, or Linda Hicks, ext. 263

OCTOBER

Cooperative Program Month Minister Appreciation Month

- 4-5 **International Friends Retreat**, WorldSong, Cook Springs, Debbie Adams, ext. 275, or Chris Mills, ext. 379
- 8 **Abundant Living for Adults 55+**, Prattville First, Eileen Mitchell, ext. 221
- 10-12 **Interlink Marriage Retreat**, Camp Baldwin, Elberta, Scooter Kellum, ext. 280
- 11-12 **Fall Missions Festival for Children**, WorldSong, Cook Springs, Amanda Armstrong, ext. 223
- 18-19 **Fall Missions Festival for Children**, WorldSong, Cook Springs, Amanda Armstrong, ext. 223
- 22 **Fall Missions Festival for Adults**, WorldSong, Cook Springs, Laura Glass, ext. 226
- 24 **Senior Adult Choir Celebrations**, Hunter Street, Hoover, & Dalraida, Montgomery, Keith Hibbs, ext. 217
- 25 **Senior Adult Choir Celebrations**, Tillman's Corner, Mobile, & Summerville, Phenix City, Keith Hibbs, ext. 217
- 25-26 **Church Security Training**, Northbrook Baptist Church, Cullman, Mark Wakefield, ext. 267

‘Pieces of the puzzle’

How one ‘yes’ changed everything for Boaz pastor

Sometimes God weaves stories in ways you never would have guessed. Michael Goforth says he’s seen it happen — in his family and on a global scale.

It all started with giving an evangelist a ride to the airport back in the early 1990s when Goforth was pastor of First Baptist Church, Arley.

Sharing the vision

“We had hosted an evangelist from Texas in revival, and on my way to take him to the airport he invited me to go with him and a team from South Carolina to Romania,” Goforth said.

The country had recently come out from underneath communism and the missions team just had a team member drop out — one

spot had just opened up.

Goforth said yes.

And that one “yes” kicked off something he never dreamed. He kept going, started leading teams and after moving to Sardis Baptist Church, Boaz, in 1999, shared the vision with them too. Through the years in Romania, they carried out evangelism and helped 14 churches either construct buildings or add on.

Not only that — Sardis Baptist expanded its mission to other places including the Dominican Republic, hurricane-hit Florida, Maine, Michigan, West Virginia, New York, Mississippi, Ohio and the Amazon Basin.

That last one is something special, Goforth said. Some Sardis Baptist members were so moved by the needs



Photo courtesy of Michael Goforth

Michael Goforth (center) with Michael Muresan (left), pastor of Campia Turzii, and church elder Gabi Borza. Goforth traveled to Romania to preach at Campia Turzii’s 100th anniversary.

in the Amazon that they started a nonprofit organization called Amazon Hope, which boats teams in to areas unreached by the gospel.

“We’ve been tied up in missions in Romania and other places for years and years — the church has been very supportive of it,” Goforth said.

Deep relationships

Along the way as those relationships grew deep, he added a son-in-law — Paul Marin, a young Roma-

nian man who married his youngest daughter. They were married eight and a half years and had two children before Marin was killed in a car accident in Oneonta. Their third child was born two weeks after he died.

“Paul was a wonderful Christian young man and he became a deacon here at Sardis — great husband and dad,” Goforth said.

Goforth’s daughter, Holly, has since remarried, and Amazon Hope’s new boat bears Marin’s name as it heads down the Amazon toward the unreached. More than 700 people professed

faith in Christ this year as a result of teams boated in on the Paul Marin.

“Our lives are a big picture of God weaving our

“Our lives are a big picture of God weaving our lives with both bad and good to bring Him glory.”

**Pastor Michael Goforth
Sardis Baptist Church**

lives with both bad and good to bring Him glory,” Goforth said. “It’s amazing to see.”

And in early June Goforth preached the 100th anniversary service of one

of the churches at which Sardis Baptist worked — Campia Turzii in northwest Romania. It was his 26th trip to the country.

“It’s amazing to see how God puts pieces of the puzzle together,” he said. “It’s just spread.” (Grace Thornton)



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3 stories you should know



Photo courtesy of Dawson Missions Ministry

Volunteers with the missions ministry of Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham, packed 300 bags with school supplies for children served by Kids Connection, a ministry center that provides clothing, shoes, coats and other necessities to families who need help and to foster families in Birmingham. Kids Connection volunteers also pray with families and provide age-appropriate spiritual resources to children and families served by the ministry.

Widow in Uganda flees after receiving threats

A widow in central Uganda fled her home after receiving threats from local Muslim leaders when she arranged for a pastor to bury the body of her husband, sources said.

Sharifa Kasozi Nakamate has been a Christian since October 2018. On July 11, Islamist leaders gave her one day to recant her Christian faith or leave her homestead, she said. Among those who gave Nakamate the ultimatum was her son. Nakamate sought refuge at church and has since relocated to another area.

Uganda's constitution and other laws provide for religious freedom, including the right to share one's faith and convert from one faith to another. Islam is a minority religion in the country, with most Ugandans professing Christianity. (MS)

Christians, Muslims are most persecuted

Christians and Muslims are persecuted in more countries than any other religious group, according to a decade-long Pew Research Center study of religious restrictions around the world.

The analysis found high levels of persecution in 42% of countries studied and an overall rise in social hostilities involving religion.

Christians and Muslims, the largest and most widespread globally of any groups, experienced government and/or social religious persecution in 143 and 140 countries respectively, Pew researchers found.

The most harassment for both groups occurred in the Middle East-North Africa region. The Asia-Pacific region showed the second highest levels of Christian persecution. Europe came in second in persecution of Muslims. (BP)

— NEWSBRIEFS —

Coleman retiring as pastor of FBC Prattville after 30 years

Travis Coleman said when he gets in his car it always goes in the direction of First Baptist Church, Prattville.

It's not hard to understand why — he's been going there almost every day for 30 years.

Coleman has led the church since he and his wife, Arlinda, answered the call to serve there in 1989. He had gotten his first job in ministry 15 years before that — Sept. 1 will make 45 years of full-time Christian work.

And the years have passed far faster than Coleman ever would have imagined they could, he said.

"I thank the Lord for my wife and children and grandchildren — they've been so supportive of my calling and commitment to ministry," Coleman said. "During this time I've also been blessed to serve alongside some wonderful

church leaders and staff members. That's a tremendous blessing."

And Coleman said he's thankful for a church that is committed to missions and always growing in its passion to make disciples. He said it's been "humbling" to see God's grace and blessing there over the past three decades and in various other roles around the state, such as serving as president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention in 2014–2016.

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, called Coleman a "consummate Christian statesman."

He "has served the Lord in an exemplary way as pastor, associational and state convention leader," Lance said. "He has influenced so many people through his ministry of preaching and as a pastoral leader. I count him as a close friend and confidant. He is a blessing to my life and many others as well."

Coleman will be honored with a retirement banquet Aug. 4, then his last day at First, Prattville, will be Aug. 11. He plans to continue to serve churches in transitional pastor roles. To contact him email TravisArlinda@knology.net. (Grace Thornton)



COLEMAN

Augie Boto to retire from SBC Executive Committee



D. August "Augie" Boto has announced he will retire from the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee (EC) effective Sept. 30.

Boto, 68, is EC executive vice president and general counsel. Boto joined the EC as a member in 1995 and has served the organization in several capacities, including most recently as EC interim president and CEO from April 2018 until EC president and CEO Ronnie Floyd assumed office May 20.

Prior to joining the Executive Committee staff Boto served in county and state government in Texas and helped start the Texas Fellowship of Christian Prosecutors.

Boto said he plans a short sabbatical period but expects "the Lord will have other things for me to do with and for Southern Baptists, for they are 'my crowd.'" (BP)



BOTO

News near you

BALDWIN ASSOCIATION

▶ **Greg Hagan** is the new pastor of **Magnolia Springs Baptist Church**. He previously served as winter pastor at Gulf Breeze RV Resort in Gulf Shores. He also has served at churches in Indiana, Illinois and Kentucky. He and his wife, Ranae, have three children and two grandchildren.



HAGAN

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION



DYMOND

▶ **Lee Dymond** is the new missions pastor at **Hunter Street Baptist Church, Hoover**. He previously served as Baptist Campus Ministry director for Auburn University at Montgomery for more than 12 years. He and his wife, Holly, have two children.

CLARKE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Ulcanush Baptist Church, Coffeerville**, will host a homecoming service and revival Aug. 4-7. The homecoming service will be

held Aug. 4 at 11 a.m. Lunch will follow the service. Revival services will be held Aug. 5-7 at 7 p.m. Mike Gunn will be the guest speaker. Jesse Griffith is pastor. ▶ **Clarke Baptist Association's** disaster relief team will host a fellowship and prospect supper Aug. 9 at 6 p.m., at Union Baptist Church, Grove Hill. Christina Morgan, Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief (ABDR) state coordinator for administration, and Doug Vance, ABDR unit director, will be the speakers. All team members and anyone interested in learning more about disaster relief are invited.

COFFEE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Lee Street Baptist Church, Enterprise**, celebrated its 50th anniversary June 2.

Former pastor Larry Foster was the guest speaker and special music was sung by the church choir, Roxie Doster and former music director Linda Johns.

Charter members — Virginia Wood, Joanne and Lomax Sellers, Jane Owens and June Buxton — were presented certificates. Church member Chuck Perry presented a plaque from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, and member Randolph Hudson presented a plaque from Coffee Baptist Association.

“Everything went well,” said Wood. “It was a wonderful day.”

Lunch followed the service. Slade Stinson is pastor.



Photo by Lonette Berg

COOSA RIVER ASSOCIATION

▶ **Village Street Baptist Church, Sylacauga**, will host a homecoming celebration Aug. 11 from 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. It will break at noon and resume at 1 p.m. Crystal River will be the guest singers. All members, family members, friends and former members are invited. David Turner is pastor.

FRANKLIN ASSOCIATION

▶ **First Baptist Church, Russellville**, will host its 152nd homecoming celebration Aug. 11 at 10:30 a.m. Former interim pastor Danny Knight will be the guest speaker, and Denise Davis Arnold will bring special music. A covered dish luncheon will follow the worship service. Gene Balding is interim pastor.

SULPHUR SPRINGS ASSOCIATION

▶ **Bethel Baptist Church, Dora**, will host a singing featuring the Holy Destiny Quartet on Aug. 11 at 6 p.m. John Foles is pastor.

TALLAPOOSA ASSOCIATION

▶ **Ronnie Boulware** is the new pastor of **Wayside Baptist Church, Alexander City**. He began June 1. He previously served as pastor of Antioch East Baptist Church, Greenville, for 15 years. He also served four other churches in Alabama. Boulware is a graduate of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He and his wife, Kim, have three children and one grandchild.✝



BOULWARE

— NEWSBRIEFS —

FBC Hayden breaks ground on new multipurpose building



After two years of fundraising First Baptist Church, Hayden, broke ground on a new building July 14.

The 5,000-square-foot addition will

be used as a place to greet guests and enjoy fellowship with church members. The building will also contain a memorial wall and a coffee service as well as an elevator to provide easier access to the auditorium for those who struggle with stairs.

“This is the first step in a long series of steps for updating and meeting the space needs of our various ministries,” said Pastor Keith Hudson. “We needed space for our folks to gather and meet with one another before our services. And we have included space for our ‘God’s Storehouse’ ministry, which provides one week of groceries for as many as 300 people each



Photo courtesy of FBC Hayden

month. We are grateful to God for bringing us to this place and look forward to where He will take us in the future.” (TAB)

SBC Credentials Committee meets, elects EC member Bramlett chair



The Credentials Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) held its initial meeting July 22 by video conference, electing Stacey Bramlett as its chair. Bramlett is one of three members of the Credentials Committee nominated by the SBC Executive Committee (EC). She has been a member of the EC since 2016, serving as EC secretary from 2017 to 2019.

The Credentials Committee was repurposed during the 2019 SBC annual meeting to make inquiries and recommendations for action regarding instances of abuse, racism or other issues that call a church’s relationship with the SBC into question. (BP)



BRAMLETT

Pickens County Sheriff Abston resigns, pleads guilty to fraud



For the past four years former Pickens County sheriff David Abston legally kept the leftover funds used to purchase food for prisoners but was breaking other laws.

It was discovered Abston was using the West Alabama Food Bank account of the church where he is a member — Highland Baptist Church, Gordo — to purchase reduced-price food meant for the poor to feed prisoners instead of purchasing food from appropriate sources.

Sheriffs get state reimbursements to feed prisoners and Alabama law (until recently) allowed sheriffs to keep leftover funds for personal use. The Legislature changed the law in May.

During the four years Abston was given more than \$400,000 in food allowance money from the state government, according to the prosecution, but only paid some \$80,000 for the food.

He pleaded guilty in federal court July 23 to wire fraud and filing a false tax return.

Abston, who served as sheriff for 32 years, resigned June 14.

All parties have declined to comment. (TAB)

South Korean interns serve with Shelby Baptist Association

Hugh Richardson said for him, it was an obvious yes. Every summer Shelby Baptist Association has a handful of interns, mostly local students.

But this year Chris Mills, student missions mobilizer for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM), asked if they would like to host two student interns from South Korea.

Richardson and other staff members “jumped at the chance,” he said.

And so now, for the next several weeks, Asun Kim and Sumin Park are partnering with them to carry out ministries from Vacation Bible School and evangelism to construction and work in the association’s community gardens.

‘Unique opportunity’

Mills called it a “unique opportunity” for Alabama Baptists to partner with students from other places in the world.

“Especially considering the Korean population and opportunities to connect with Korean ministries, this partnership is strategic,” he said. “I am encouraged by



Photo courtesy of Shelby Baptist Association

Asun Kim (left) and Sumin Park, Shelby Baptist Association summer interns from South Korea, work in one of the association’s community gardens, which the association began in 2018.

Shelby Association taking advantage of this opportunity and I’m looking forward to hearing about how God uses these students to impact the community.”

Kim, who served in Missouri last year, said her summer missions opportunities have given her the chance to see God at work all over the world — and to be a part of serving Him.

“In Korea, I only thought about studying God and feeling God. But now I feel how blessed it is to serve the local people in Christ’s name,” she said.

Park said serving as a missions volunteer “warms her heart.” This summer was her

first visit to the United States.

“I am deeply grateful to many people here for their hospitality and care since I first stepped here,” she said, noting that one of her favorite things to be a part of was UNITE, the association’s student missions week. She said she loved engaging with students, working alongside them and leading them in Bible study.

Rebekah Parr, ministry evangelism catalyst for Shelby Association, said Park and Kim have been a blessing.

“They’ve been so sweet, and willing to do whatever we need,” Parr said. (Grace Thornton)

Etowah Baptist Association revives 71-year-old preaching conference

Etowah Baptist Association (EBA) will host “School of the Prophets” on Aug. 18–19 at First Baptist Church, Gadsden.

In keeping with this year’s theme, “Take Heed, There’s Hope,” speakers will preach through the seven letters to the churches featured in Revelation 1–3.

Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, will

speak Aug. 18 at 6 p.m.

Monday’s session begins at 10 a.m. and will feature Jonathan Akin, youth leader engagement director at the North American Mission Board; Mike Glenn, pastor of Brentwood Baptist Church in Tennessee; Mac Brunson, pastor of Valleydale Church, Birmingham; Kevin Smith, executive director of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware; Andrew Hébert, pastor of Paramount Baptist Church,

Amarillo, Texas; and Micah Fries, pastor of Brainerd Baptist Church, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Chosen Road will lead worship.

A handwritten note from James Russell Hamilton in the “School of the Prophets” file at the EBA office indicates the first conference was held in 1948.

The upcoming conference will be the first in 23 years. (TAB)

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

For information on placing a classified ad call 205-870-4720, ext. 102 or email ads@thealabamabaptist.org.

CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR

Parkview Baptist Church in Eufaula, Alabama, is taking resumes for the senior pastor position. Please email resumes to: john.robinson@westrock.com. Contact information is John Robinson, 706-573-5102.

PASTOR

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

PASTOR

Big Hurricane Baptist Church, located in Brookwood, Alabama, has been a beacon in the community for nearly 200 years. The church is prayerfully seeking a bivocational/part-time pastor with a Christ-like spirit to lead and teach a small but loving and faithful congregation. If interested please contact Larry Holloway at 205-799-2438.

BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC MINISTER & PIANIST

Southside Baptist Church, Monroeville, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational music minister and a pianist. Send resumes to: P.O. Box 9, Monroeville, AL 36461 or email to: sbch@frontiernet.net.

BIVOCATIONAL MINISTER OF MUSIC

New Hope Baptist Church in Romulus, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational minister of music for two (morning and evening) blended Sunday services. If interested, send resumes to: Lillian Roberts at lily.l.roberts@gmail.com, or directly to the church at 16598 Romulus Road, Buhl, AL 35446, ATTN: Minister of Music Search Committee.

MINISTER OF SENIOR ADULTS

Meadow Brook Baptist Church in Birmingham is searching for a part-time minister of senior adults. Responsibilities include leading, caring and guiding all senior adult programs and activities. Interested candidates may send resumes to: cjones@meadowbrookbaptist.org.

YOUTH MINISTER

Cottage Hill Baptist Church (Bessemer Association) is seeking candidates to restart the youth ministry. Please email resumes to: lorettamcconnell@gmail.com.

CHILDREN & FAMILY MINISTER

Locust Fork Baptist Church in Locust Fork, Alabama, is seeking a full-time children and family minister. A complete job description with requirements is available upon request. Resumes must be submitted by Aug. 8 by email to: locustforkbaptiststaffing@gmail.com or mailed to: LFBC Personnel Team, P.O. Box 97, Locust Fork, AL 35097.

OTHER POSITIONS

HOUSEPARENT

If you want to make a significant difference in the lives of at-risk youth, the Baldwin County Sheriffs’ Boys Ranch is seeking a missions-minded, married couple for a relief houseparent, live-in position. Benefits include housing, salary, insurance and paid vacation. Inquire at 251-989-6392. Apply to join our team at <https://boysandgirlsranches.org/employment.html>.

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Someone You

Should Know

By Leigh Pritchett

Correspondent, *The Alabama Baptist*

Morris Murray Jr.

Morris Murray Jr., of Jasper, has been in ministry 40 years, serving as pastor or associate pastor in Alabama, Louisiana and Texas churches. He holds degrees from Samford University and Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He also offers free Bible study resources through email at morrismurrayjr42@gmail.com.

MINISTRY DESCRIPTION: Minister of music and outreach

CHURCH NAME: Samaria Baptist Church, Jasper, in Walker Baptist Association

LIFE VERSE: “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way.” (Romans 14:12–13)



MURRAY

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

A: Dr. Harper Shannon, former pastor of Huffman Baptist Church, Birmingham, immediately comes to mind. It was my privilege to once serve as his assistant, and from him I learned how to preach expository sermons and engage in in-depth Bible studies. Plus, my wife, Betty, always walks and demonstrates from the heart what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

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

A: I was in a car accident many years ago and almost died. From this accident God began to speak to me and call me into

various facets of Christian ministry (pastoring, leading worship music, teaching in college and seminary, counseling).

Q: What has God been teaching you lately?

A: God keeps teaching me the amazingly multicolored truth that periodic setbacks, failures and various forms of trials should not be viewed as reasons or occasions in which to whine and complain. Rather they represent opportunities in which and from which to learn the numerous flavors of God’s grace in ways that could not have been learned apart from those challenges. 🌈

Morris Murray has more than 20 free Bible study resources available by email including commentaries on Hosea, Ephesians and Jude and topical studies on anger, preaching, spiritual gifts and salvation. Contact Murray at morrismurrayjr42@gmail.com.

Strong Tower clinics provide medical care

Sometimes getting a tooth fixed can help you hear more clearly — at least that’s what Terrence Jones says.

That’s why his church — Strong Tower at Washington Park, Montgomery — partnered recently with other churches and the North American Mission Board (NAMB) to bring a mobile dental clinic to the area.

“When you have dental problems it affects so much of your life. You have pain, headaches — and because it can affect your heart it can even kill you,” he said. “So when you can take care of that for someone you see people’s demeanor change.”

His hope is that with needs met people would be more open to hearing about the hope they need even more — the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jones, the church’s pastor, said the dental clinic — now in its third year — got started when he was speaking at a church planter meeting at The Church at Liberty Park, Vestavia Hills, and one of the members there — Karen Ott — came up to him with an idea.

Meeting needs first

“She heard our story and wanted to be a part in any way she could,” Jones said. “She threw out the idea of us having a health fair, something to help the community — anything where we can meet tangible needs that give us an opportunity to share the gospel with people.”

He knew the community had some major health needs, especially dental

ones that Medicaid didn’t cover.

“We saw this need, and the Lord made it work,” Jones said.

Ott worked together with Jasmine Turner of Strong Tower to coordinate, and the dream became a reality.

The first year it was a health fair, and last year the dental clinic was added.

This year volunteers from Liberty Park, together with dentists from Strong Tower and NAMB’s dental trailer, set up shop for three days at

Bethel Missionary Baptist Church in Montgomery.

Volunteers shared the gospel as they performed \$38,000 worth of dental work — 99 extractions and 21 fillings — along with 40 eye exams and 25 medical exams.

Altogether they accomplished a lot. But the bigger number, Jones said, is that two people gave their lives to Christ and attended Strong Tower the following Sunday.

So many people came through that as hard as they worked, the team still had to turn almost 100 people away, Jones said.

“It was a blessed time but there were just so many needs,” he said, adding that they’re already working to bring back the dental clinic “sooner rather than later.” (Grace Thornton)



JONES



Dr. Chase Price (right) and dental assistant Alex Obaugh, both volunteers from Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, examine a patient at a mobile dental clinic held at Strong Tower at Washington Park. The church partnered with other churches and the North American Mission Board to host the clinic.

Photo by Brooke Glassford

SPEAK Conference Challenges Students and Student Ministers Alike



“We practice everything except godliness, and we expect to be godly,” said Tom Richter, pastor of Cullman First Baptist Church, in his challenge to more than 600 students and their leaders at the SPEAK conference, held July 19-20 at Eastmont Church, Montgomery.

The night before, D. A. Horton, pastor of Reach Fellowship in Long Beach, Calif., presented the Gospel to the students, reminding them that when people are complacent in their sins, it’s hard to realize that there’s a problem. “An idol will never love you back,” he noted, but God will.



More Than This leads worship.

Florida Baptist Convention, and the band More Than This of Gadsden, took to heart the task of proclaiming the Gospel and challenging students.

“I was challenged by D. A. Horton. What he said wasn’t new to me, but it was a good reminder to help me think about how my walk with Christ is actually going,” said Kylee Christianson, a senior from Montgomery. “Tom’s message also helped open my eyes to how much time

“As a student pastor, this event is planned with you in mind,” Mallory said. “The setting feels more personal since it’s planned specifically for Alabama Baptist churches.”

SPEAK is one of many events planned each year through YMLink, the youth ministry arm of the Office of Collegiate & Student Ministries. Other upcoming events include the Called Conference, August 17 at Glynwood, Prattville; Uplink on the Road, August 22 at Dawson Memorial, Birmingham; and the Interlink Marriage Retreat, October 10-12 at Camp Baldwin, Elberta.



Mallory, a member of the YMLink planning team, is excited about the connection YMLink provides between the State Board of Missions and Alabama Baptist students and their leaders.

“It’s easy to feel isolated in student ministry, but YMLink offers true fellowship among fellow churches fighting the same battles as you seeking to advance the Kingdom of God,” Mallory said. “The goal is to equip your ministry to effectively make disciples who will make more disciples.”

To learn more, please visit ymlink.org for information about upcoming events and access to resources including blogs and podcasts..

Planned by a team of Alabama Baptist student ministers, SPEAK is intentionally tailored to meet the needs of students and student ministers in our state.

SPEAK is an annual conference sponsored by the Office of Collegiate & Student Ministries at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM). Every year, hundreds of students from across the state gather to be challenged and encouraged and have fun along the way.

State Missionary Scooter Kellum, the SBOM’s student ministry strategist, has three main goals for SPEAK: present the Gospel clearly, equip students to share the Gospel, and inspire them to reach others for Christ.

This year was no different. Speakers Horton and Richter, along with Billy Young, the lead catalyst for Next Generation Ministries at the

I spend on things other than God, yet I still expect to grow closer to him. That’s really something I’m planning to work on.”

But this event wasn’t created just to challenge students. Planned by a team of Alabama Baptist student ministers, SPEAK is intentionally tailored to also meet the needs of student ministers and leaders in our state.

That fact is what sets SPEAK apart from many other youth conferences, said Cleve Mallory, Eastmont’s student pastor.



D. A. Horton presents the Gospel to students at SPEAK.

Churchgoers split on visibility, compartmentalization of faith

Spiritual topics aren't a part of regular conversations for many Protestant churchgoers, but most seem at least somewhat confident others know they're a Christian, according to an online survey conducted in January 2019.

They may be wrong, said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research.

"In an increasingly secular culture fewer people assume you are a Christian," McConnell said. "Disciples now must decide if their identity in Christ is important enough to them to bring up in conversations."

Overall 39% of Protestant churchgoers disagree with the statement, "Spiritual matters do not tend to come up as a normal part of my daily conversations with other Christians."

More than a third (35%) agree and 26% aren't sure.

Fifteen percent strongly assert matters of faith are a part of their regular conversations with fellow believers.

Females (17%) are more likely than males (11%) to strongly indicate regularly having such conversations.

Hispanics (19%) and African Americans (18%) are more likely than whites (13%) to strongly affirm that matters of faith come up in their daily conversations with other Christians.

Evangelical Protestants (17%) and black Protestants (15%) also are more likely than mainline Protestants (7%) to have such daily conversations.

'Acknowledge Jesus'

The youngest adult churchgoers (18-34) are least likely to strongly indicate spiritual matters are topics of daily conversations with other Christians (9%).

Nearly two-thirds of Christians (62%) disagree with the statement, "Many people who know me are not aware I am a Christian" (with 36% of those strongly disagreeing). Overall 20% agree and 18% neither agree nor disagree.

"Far more people identify as a Christian on a survey than they do among their acquaintances," McConnell said. "One in 5 churchgoers is missing the truth found in Matthew 10:32 that acknowledging Jesus before men is tied to whether Jesus will acknowledge us before His Father."

Most Protestant churchgoers believe God is relevant to every part of their life and identity.

Two-thirds (66%) disagree with the statement: "Many aspects of who I am have nothing to do with God" (with 44% of those strongly disagreeing).

Overall 16% agree and 18% aren't sure.

"While most churchgoers avoid compartmentalizing their faith it can be challenging to walk with God in every area of life," McConnell said.

"The majority of churchgoers indicate there are more aspects of who they are that can be better connected to God." (BP)

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Christian Crossword

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Across

1. Johoiada was leader of the _____. (1 Chron. 12:27)
7. A serviceman who did not return from war may be one of these.
9. To forbid.
10. Learn to ____ well. (Isa. 1:17)
11. Abraham would be called this today.
13. Remember what ____ did. (Deut. 25:17)
16. A wise guy.
18. Speak unto ... Israel, that they ____ forward. (Ex. 14:15)
20. He will ____ a wild man. (Gen. 16:12)
21. Familiar form of you in German.
22. ____ the son of Ner. (2 Sam. 3:25)
23. Parts of a play.
25. Sons of Zeruah, Joab, Abishai and _____. (2 Sam. 2:18)
27. Saint. (abbr.)
28. Extol him ... by his name _____. (Ps. 68:4)
29. Compass direction.
31. All the ____ and strangers.

Down

34. Judah and _____. (Jer. 9:26)
36. For example. (abbr.)
37. Thou shalt not ... _____. (Lev. 19:13)
39. Elevation. (abbr.)
41. The name thereof is called _____. (Ezek. 20:29)
44. ____ and Caiaphas being high priests. (Luke 3:2)
46. Captains over _____. (Deut. 1:15)
47. 1,001 in Roman numerals.
48. Carried them captive to _____. (2 Kings 15:29)
49. From ____ to Beer-sheba. (Judg. 20:1)
1. Belonging to Nabal's wife. (1 Sam. 25:3)
2. Anti-aircraft. (abbr.)
3. Ribonucleic acid. (abbr.)
4. Not working.
5. Upon the great ____ of their right foot. (Ex. 29:20)
6. South America. (abbr.)
7. The sound a kitten makes. (Luke 2:1)
12. The beginning of his

- kingdom was _____. (Gen. 10:10)
14. Sarah died ... and ____ came to mourn. (Gen. 23:2)
15. King Saul's father. (1 Sam. 10:21)
17. Fruit drinks.
19. Obstetrician. (abbr.)
24. Chemical Engineer. (abbr.)
26. And Leah ... called his name _____. (Gen. 30:13)
30. ____ are laborers together with God. (1 Cor. 3:9)
32. ____, id, superego.
33. The young men of _____. (Ezek. 30:17)
35. Made silver shrines for _____. (Acts 19:24)
38. Passing through the valley of _____. (Ps. 84:6)
40. An Eastern monk.
41. To ____ or not to be.
42. Manuscripts. (abbr.)
43. The ____ is withered away. (Isa. 15:6)
45. Which taketh away the ____ of the world. (John 1:29)
46. Their cry came up ____ God. (Ex. 2:23)

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For August 4

Explore the Bible

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



ENDURING

2 Timothy 3:12-17; 4:1-8

Persecution Coming (3:12-13)

Paul wrote that everyone who wants “to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” Persecution awaits every believer who resolves to adorn his confession with a genuine godly life in the midst of contradictions coming from every side because he refuses to compromise the faith.

Instead he faces the foe and challenges him to combat. The genuine believer must boldly defend the faith against every attack and courageously assault the fortress of unbelief.

Persecution is an ever-present reality for many believers today. Persecution will continue and increase because the wicked will never desist but will increase in wickedness. These evil men and imposters were described in verses 2-9, and they “will become worse, deceiving and being deceived.”

They will proceed from bad to worse both morally and spiritually. Deception is their weapon. While some people in the church fall for this deception we need to remain firm and steadfast.

Get Equipped (3:14-17)

Paul exhorted Timothy to pursue a course which was the very opposite of the false teachers and their followers. Timothy was to continue in what he had learned and firmly believed. Note that learning was not enough. What has been learned must be applied to the heart by the Holy Spirit so that one can firmly believe the truth in such a way that one’s life is transformed.

Timothy was to continue in these things because of the trustworthy character of those who had instructed him. He had been taught the Word by Paul (3:10-11) and by his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (1:5). He was also to continue in these things because of the excellence of the sacred writings on which these doctrines were based. The sacred writings lead to salvation.

Paul wrote in verse 16 that all Scripture owes its origin and con-

tents to the breath of God. The human writers were powerfully guided and directed by the Holy Spirit. As a result what they wrote was not only without error but also was of supreme value to humanity.

This truth is known as plenary verbal inspiration which means every word in the Bible has been breathed out by God through the personality of the human writer. No book is like the Bible.

The sacred writings also lead to sanctification. Paul declared that all Scripture is “profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness.” The Bible teaches what’s right, what’s wrong, how to get right and how to stay right.

As we study the Bible and apply its truth in our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit we become more like Jesus Christ. Verse 16 emphasizes the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. The Bible contains everything we need to grow in likeness of Christ.

The sacred writings equip us to serve (3:17). As we appropriate the word of God in our lives we become more like Jesus and we are equipped for every good work the Lord will call us to pursue.

Preach His Word (4:1-4)

Although many will fall away from the truth Paul exhorted Timothy to preach the word of God faithfully, for he will give an account to God and Jesus for what he preaches. He was to preach the Word consistently and pastorally. He was to show the people where they were wrong, tell them to stop and encourage them to obey Scripture.

Finish Well (4:5-8)

Paul exhorted Timothy to endure by being faithful to Scripture. While many were allergic to theology and irritated by doctrine he was to finish well by persevering for the gospel in the face of persecution. Fight the good fight for the Lord will reward His faithful servants.✠

Bible Studies for Life

By Roy E. Ciampa, Ph.D., S. Louis and Ann W. Armstrong
Professor of Religion, Samford University



ACT WITH COURAGE

2 Chronicles 15:1-9

This week’s lesson reminds us of the power of godly encouragement.

Remain courageous in following God. (1-7)

God sent the otherwise unknown prophet, Azariah son of Oded, to encourage King Asa in the immediate aftermath of the battle discussed in last week’s lesson.

Azariah’s message finds its scriptural support in texts like Deuteronomy 4:29, Jeremiah 29:13-14 and Isaiah 55:6. Those texts are essentially paraphrased in the words of verse 2: “The Lord is with you when you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you, but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you.”

God is always eager for us to come back to Him and to remain in faithful relationship with Him.

Azariah reminds Asa that the truth of this theology is reflected in Israel’s experience. Wandering away from the Lord had brought disaster but turning back to the Lord had brought relief and the restoration of a healthy relationship with God.

The description of Israel’s time of distress in verses 3-6 probably refers to the period of the Judges, a time when the people suffered from a lack of knowledge of God’s law and a lack of priestly or other consistent leadership (2 Chron. 11:14-15 and 13:9 suggest the northern kingdom of Israel had recently experienced something similar).

The book of Judges makes it clear when they did turn to the Lord, He provided them with relief. Of course many times people’s faithfulness to the Lord does not result in what others would normally call success or blessing. Azariah was authorized to promise Asa that faithful perseverance on his part would indeed be rewarded by the Lord in the short term (v. 7).

We always need the courage to be faithful to the Lord. It helps when God sends others who encourage us to do just that.

Our courage in following God can inspire and encourage others. (8-9)

Asa was encouraged by the words of Azariah. Verse 8 emphasizes Azariah as a prophet and his message as a prophecy.

Both points were understood in the previous verses without being explicitly mentioned. Neither of the two words (“prophet” or “prophecy”) would have made the point clearly enough.

But we are being intentionally reminded of the importance of this prophetic ministry in the life of Israel, presumably because the ministry of Israel’s prophets served as a direct reminder of God’s presence in and constant concern regarding Israel’s life.

A primary purpose behind the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles was to encourage the exiled nation by reminding them of God’s promises and continuing presence in the life of Israel and Judah even when things were heading in the wrong direction.

The exiles could be reassured God had not given up on them and He would return to them again if they would only turn back to faith in Him.

Asa was encouraged by the prophetic word given by Azariah and that encouragement led him to carry out even bolder leadership.

Rather than growing complacent with the downward drift of the nation he stepped up his game and did all he could to lead his people to greater love for and faithfulness to the Lord.

The strengthening of Asa’s faith led to greater confidence among all those who saw what God was doing in and through him.

As verse 9 tells us, many from various tribes of Israel chose to come under his leadership “when they saw that the Lord his God was with him.”

We see the ripple effects of faithfulness to the Lord: one takes strength from the encouragement of another and then others are encouraged in turn.✠



Media reviews

MUSIC

Rend Collective

Good News
Sparrow

It's the latest release from the Christian folk band from Northern Ireland and easily one of their best. With a unique Irish sound the album shines



with such toe-tapping tunes as "Life Is Beautiful" (my favorite), "I Will Be Undignified" and "Resurrection Day." "Counting Every Blessing" has received plenty of Christian radio airplay, but it's not even the best song. Rend Collective is known for its theologically heavy lyrics. The album doesn't disappoint in that category either.

For King and Country

Burn The Ships
Curb

Not long ago Joel and Luke Smallbone of the Christian pop group For King and Country were known better as the brothers of Rebecca St. James. But they've since made an impressive name for themselves. The album includes the powerful song "God Only Knows" (Echosmith's Sydney Sierota is heard on the radio remix) and the wake-you-up energetic tune "Joy." But there are plenty of other good ones, including the upbeat songs "Burn the Ships" (the cover title) and "Amen" and the slower "Pioneers." The digital album is free on Amazon Prime. 🌿



'Beautiful musical moments'

Wes Hampton wants to introduce a new generation to hymns

By Michael Foust
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Singer Wes Hampton is on a mission to introduce a younger generation of Christians to the music he, his parents and his grandparents sang as children.

You know: *hymns*.

Hampton, the well-known tenor in the Gaither Vocal Band, grew up in rural West Tennessee singing hymns in a Baptist church.

Hymns aren't as popular as they once were though so Hampton has a plan to get a new generation hooked. His new solo album, titled simply "Hymns," has 10 tracks, including some of the best-known hymns of history. He already is planning a sequel.

'Beautiful moments'

"I just don't want hymns to get lost," said Hampton. "There's such great theology, such great truth and some beautiful, beautiful musical moments in them too. The new generation is not really hearing many hymns."

Hampton acknowledges that the demographics of a Gaither Vocal Band concert trends toward older adults. But "more and more" young people are coming to the shows, he said.

"I want younger people especially to hear these songs," he said. "They might be brand new songs to them. Maybe they will like them and play them in their cars and then their kids will hear them."

This doesn't mean Hampton isn't a fan of contemporary music. He



Wes Hampton

weshampton.com

said Phil Wickham's song "Living Hope" "just blew (him) away." Hampton's "Hymns" album even includes a modern hymn, "How Deep the Father's Love."

But songs like "Be Thou My Vision," "Great is Thy Faithfulness" and "How Great Thou Art" — all on the album — aren't as well-known to the younger audience.

Outside of music Hampton is sharing another of his passions: cooking.

Hampton began cooking after he was married in 1998, learning about the craft while watching Food Network shows. He loved it.

"I remember thinking, 'This is really relaxing.' ... My hobby became cooking."

He took his father-in-law's ad-

vice and put together a cookbook, "Wescipes," which is available at his solo concerts and Gaither Vocal Band shows as well as online. Incredibly the cookbook accounts for two-thirds of his sales.

"Cooking is just my love language," he said. "Whether [the result] is a disaster or not it's fun for me." 🌿

Meet the reviewer

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

For more information, visit www.WesHampton.com.

In GOD'S HANDS

Blind wrestler's dream of winning title comes true

By Bill Sorrell
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Jay Spencer set his sights on winning an Alabama state wrestling championship and four years later he saw his vision come true.

The irony of those idioms is not lost on Spencer's fans. The 160-pound athlete who recently graduated from Huntsville's St. John Paul II High School is legally blind but that didn't stop his perseverance in the sport he loves.

Spencer became the first wrestler in his school's history to win a state championship. His words after winning — "Don't let what anyone thinks about you change how you think. As long as you believe you can do something then you



Photo courtesy of James Dowd

Diagnosed with Leber congenital amaurosis 10 at age 3, Jay Spencer lost his vision but not his perseverance in wrestling and in spiritual matters.

can" — made their way to ESPN's SportsCenter.

Spencer described winning as an "amazing feeling."

"I finally did it. I can reset now. It was overwhelming relief. Going into the season I knew I could win. If I didn't it was because of mental barriers," he said.

Last year he finished fourth in the state in the 152-pound class.

Giving 100%

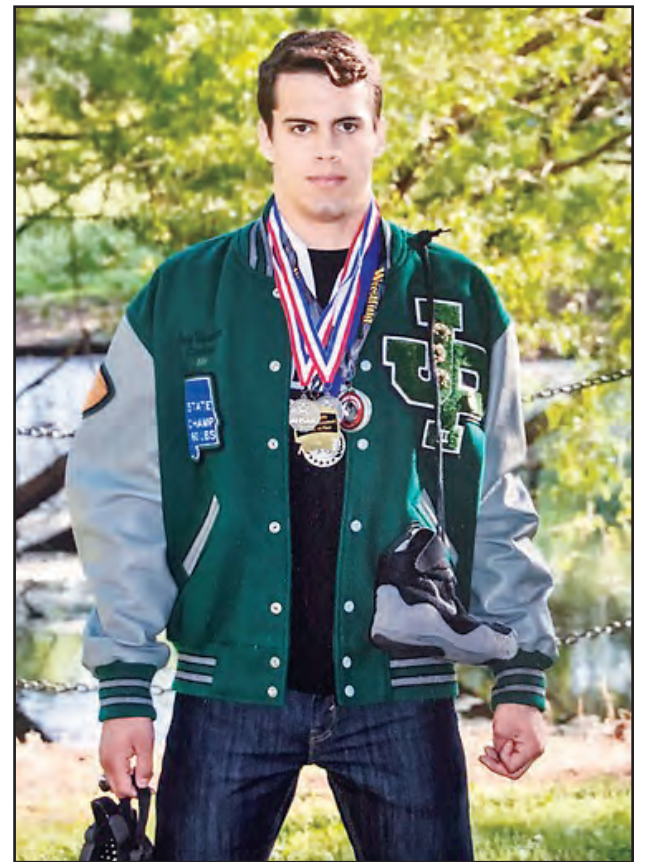
Patrick McCarron, a freshman at Valley Forge Military Academy and College in Wayne, Pennsylvania, who wrestled for St. John Paul II in 2018, said he knew Spencer would win because he always gives 100%.

"Jay is very inspiring to those with disabilities. Jay never let his lack of vision be an excuse for him not to do something. He made sure to work as hard if not harder than everyone else so he can be above mediocre. It is paying off. I think it was fantastic Jay got recognized on ESPN. He definitely deserves all the attention."

Spencer's coach at St. John Paul II, James Dowd, agreed.

"Being on ESPN and receiving the amount of views he has gotten was a blessing to showcase Jay's message of working hard to achieve your goals," Dowd said.

Faith has been important throughout Spencer's life. At age 3 he was diagnosed with Leber con-



Jay Spencer

Photo courtesy of James Dowd

genital amaurosis 10, an eye disorder that affects the retina, the specialized tissue at the back of the eye that detects light and color. Though he has vision at the corner of his left eye, Spencer has no memories of having full sight.

That could change, however.

Spencer has been part of a trial testing a gene-editing procedure on his condition. Having been part of a clinical trial, he will be one of the first patients to receive the treatment, according to his mother, Gina Spencer.

"The possibility of being sighted again could very well change the trajectory of his life," she said.

Asking God for help

Spencer said his parents have always told him when hard times come to ask God for help and strength. He has read in the Bible of God performing miracles "out of the goodness of His heart." Now a medical miracle may be on the horizon but Spencer knows his vision and his future is in God's hands.

"My dad has been telling me my purpose is going to be to help people in similar situations," Spencer said. "My purpose is going to be to help people by how I reach out to others." ✠

"My dad has been telling me my purpose is going to be to help people in similar situations. My purpose is going to be to help people by how I reach out to others."

Jay Spencer

recent graduate of St. John Paul II High School, Huntsville