



The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

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



Photo courtesy of James Spann

'Weathering Life'

Stormy childhood, passion for meteorology influences James Spann's career, faith

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

James Spann says his father never told him he loved him. "To this day, I don't know if he did," he said.

But one thing he knows for certain — when Spann was 7, his dad opted out of fatherhood and walked away,

leaving him as the man of the house.

"I know what it's like to be broke," he said, noting that his dad never made a child support payment. "And I know what it's like to be hurt."

But Spann also knows what it's like to have something else, something no other person in his life seemed to have — a fascination with the weather.

"Some people are just born with that, and I was one of those people," he said. "I was fascinated with storms, and I

loved watching clouds. It was a God-given desire."

The storms in his personal life would set him on a path to meeting Jesus at Calvary Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, when he and his mom moved there from Greenville during his fifth-grade year.

'Natural knack'

And the other kind of storms would set Spann on a path that would shape his career. As he grew up into adulthood, God continued to cultivate his faith and his talents for analyzing the weather.

As James Spann grew into adulthood, God continued to cultivate his faith and his talents for analyzing the weather. Spann is now chief meteorologist at ABC 33/40 in Birmingham and is widely known for trademark suspenders that come out when the weather gets rough.

"When I was in high school, I got the opportunity to work for a radio station, and I worked there through my college years," he said.

One day in 1978 he got a call from a TV station asking if he would be interested in doing some work with the weather.

"I had no formal training back then, but I thought, 'If they're going to pay me to talk about the weather, that sounds good,'" he said.

Over time, Spann's natural knack for the weather became clear, and he only strengthened (See 'Trademark,' page 11)

Thank you for partnering and serving in ministry with us as part of God's family

Whether you are a “cover to cover” reader or one who flips through reading the headlines and the occasional article, we are glad you are partnering with the ministry of *The Alabama Baptist* newspaper and the overall TAB Media group.

You are important to us and in our minds each day as we make decisions on content choices, what resources to promote and provide, and how best to communicate the difficult news that sometimes has to be shared.

Through our weekly content and resources, we strive to strengthen and build up individual believers, congregations as a whole and the full circle of those in Baptist life.

We reach out to experts in various fields of study to help us develop the educational pieces, and we love telling the stories of everyday heroes all around us.

Your voice matters to us too, so be sure to let us know of concerns



Photo by Jerry Wilkins

Jerry Wilkins — author, minister and retired associational missions director of Tuscaloosa Association — enjoys a recent afternoon reading the latest issue of *The Alabama Baptist*.

or questions you have. You always have a seat at the table and we would love to hear from you.

We will do our best to work through any concerns with you. It truly is OK to ask why something appeared in the paper or the reasoning behind how a situation was covered. We are glad to have that conversation any time.

Also be sure to share calls, emails, letters and other messages

of encouragement and support. They always make our day.

We love when friends from across the state and nation drop us a line or send a fun photo, like the one shown with this article from Jerry Wilkins, retired associational missions director of Tuscaloosa Baptist Association.

An author and minister, Wilkins writes for us from time to time and specializes in communications strategies in personal relationships and ministry efforts.

He emailed us a “Happy New Year” message and the photo above last week while stretched out reading the paper — and we loved it.

It meant a lot to hear from him. He not only subscribes to *TAB*, but he also was reading the paper the same day it arrived. And he thought enough of us to take a few minutes to say hello.

Another good friend, Jim Oakley of Centreville, reaches out often as well after reading My Rationale or another article in the paper.

So many more of you are always good to stay connected and send notes of encouragement or mention something when you see us. It truly does make a difference and we wanted to say thank you. (TAB)

Do you have a
Jesus story
that you would like
to share with us?

Email us at
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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 17.

Special thanks to Theology 101 reader, writer



Photo by Hannah Muñoz

Jerry Batson is a voice you hear each week on the *TAB* News podcast. 2020 marks the seventh year Batson has been writing the Theology 101 column for *The Alabama Baptist*. Now Batson also provides video and audio of each week's theme for our YouTube channel and podcast. Special thanks to Jerry Batson for everything he does to support the newspaper.



“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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MY RASHIONALE

By Jennifer Davis Rash
President and Editor-in-Chief

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@RashionalThts



Strive to shift complaint sessions into problem-solving moments

Did you hear about ... ? It's a pretty common phrase used in all parts of society — and sometimes its intent truly is of concern or to celebrate a milestone moment with others.

However, many times it serves as the opening of a conversation that turns negative quickly and is more about hashing out the juicy details of a situation met with disapproval by those passing the information along.

When I've been part of these conversations, I'm tempted to dredge up old hurts caused by the group or person being discussed. It's easy to want to share past stories of missteps that reinforce disapproval of whatever fresh situation has occurred.

At the same time, it's true that processing difficult situations — aka venting — is an important step in dealing with frustrations, complications and conflicts.

But what is a fair amount of time for venting? And can we learn to talk out what is upsetting us in one setting and then let it go from there?

Is it possible to maintain proper and healthy processing methods with a safe person to productively work through a situation in order to move forward and not let the conversation turn into a complaining session?

I believe it is possible, but it takes prayer, discipline and individual intentionality.

It also takes a plan.

Step 1 might be that we all agree to only use the phrase

“Did you hear about ... ?” when sharing something positive to celebrate or a true concern.

For instance, did you hear about my friend Sarah completing another marathon? What a great accomplishment!

Did you hear about how well David is doing in his new pastorate? They really love him there.

Did you hear that our good buddy Dan Ireland died on Christmas Eve? We sure miss him in Alabama. Please continue to pray for Polly and the entire family.

Step 2 might be that when a conflict occurs, only the people involved in the situation are allowed to talk through it and about it — and the goal in talking about it is resolution.

And if a specific conflict occurs between individuals, the two individuals talk it out together rather than talk about each other to other people.

Step 3 might be that when someone attempts to pull us into a conversation about a situation and breaks the goals of Steps 1 and 2, that's when we use the deflection method with our response.

We let them finish what they are saying initially and then respond with something positive about the situation or change the subject entirely.

We could say, “Oh, that makes me think of ...” and change the direction of the conversation.

Or we could say, “I know that has to be so frustrating. I wonder what we can do to help figure it out.”

From there, shift the discussion to positive options, toward solving the issue rather than letting the conversation turn into a negative complaining session. 🌈

ALANA

HENRY

REESE

MASON

Sanctity
OF
Human Life

SUNDAY IS JANUARY 19.

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

EPHESIANS 2:10

Your Voice



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

5 social media trends churches should know about in 2020

By Chris Martin

Social media manager, LifeWay Christian Resources

Being an effective social media manager means doing more than just sitting on Facebook and Twitter all day. It requires keeping up with trends and changes in trends so that necessary changes to strategy can be made.

Changing strategy to keep up with trends isn't about being "trendy" or "cool" as much it is about being effective. When social media managers aren't aware of what content is working well or how social media platforms have changed their rules, they are not able to do their job as well.

So here we are in 2020. What is changing and what is staying the same in the social media landscape?

Here are five basic trends that churches ought to note:

1. Every platform is increasingly different.

One of the most common mistakes I see is treating every social media platform the same. Back in the early 2010s, this strategy worked. Social media platforms were still so new, and many of them had not yet developed their distinct identities. As a result, the same content worked on Facebook, Twitter and elsewhere.

Today, every social media platform has its own sort of subculture,

and what works on each platform will vary. The dimensions for images and video are different. Recognize these things and create content specific for each platform.

2. People are moving from public spaces to private spaces.

Social media has always been about public connections with friends or strangers around the world. These days, private social media spaces are starting to get a lot more attention. Features like Facebook Groups, Instagram direct messages and apps like Snapchat all continue to grow in popularity.

What this means is churches should be ready and willing to use features like Facebook Messenger and Facebook Groups to communicate with church members and those in the surrounding communities about needs, events and other items. This trend has been gaining traction for a couple of years now, and it will only continue to grow through 2020.

3. Facebook ads continue to be effective.

For a long time, Facebook ads have been the most effective form of paid advertising in the social media world for most people. Why? Facebook knows more about its users than any other social media platform. Say your church is organizing an event for mothers of young children. You can create a Facebook ad targeted to mothers of young children who live within a 25-mile radius of your church, and you can even run it on Instagram as Instagram is owned by Facebook. That is far more effective than any other kind of social media ad.

4. TikTok is huge, but not worth a church's time.

TikTok is a short-form video social media platform used primarily by teenagers and young adults. While it is growing quickly in terms of users and cultural influence, I don't think churches need to be worried about creating content here.

5. YouTube is still the biggest social media platform in the world, so use it well.

According to Pew Research, about 73% of U.S. adults and about 90% of Americans ages 18–24 use YouTube. You may not think of YouTube as a social media platform, but it is, and it is the largest social media platform in the world. It is also the second largest search engine in the world behind Google, which is technically part of the same company as YouTube (Alphabet).

YouTube can be hard for churches, especially churches that do not have video equipment to record sermons or other kinds of video content, but I have found it to be an area of tremendous opportunity.

Creating and maintaining a good social media strategy does not need to be a top priority for churches. It may be weird to read that sentence from someone who works in social media and cares deeply about it. But it's just true.

The local church needs to first focus on the incarnational ministry it does with people in its community before it worries about putting together a great Instagram strategy.

However, churches should work to use the gifts God has given them in all spheres, and social media is an important avenue of communication that cannot be ignored. It is important. It is difficult. But it is not ultimate. (BP)

Better than the REA

Let there be light! The Rural Electrification Act (REA) of 1936 changed the countryside. The goal of getting power to rural America endeared Franklin Delano Roosevelt to the nation's farm families.

It was a big deal in the New Deal. Only 10% had electricity then. Now rural electric cooperatives have strung 2.5 million miles of lines. Think an extension cord reaching from the earth to the moon five and a half times. They serve over 42 million folks.

One farmer said, "We never knew how good it was to have light until we got it." Couldn't the same thing be said about Jesus? We never knew how wondrous He is until He lit our lives.

John the Baptist got a heads up about the Jesus light. John "was not the light but came to bear witness to the light."

Jesus was God's World Lightning Act to offer "the true light, which gives light to everyone" He was "life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1). His light is better than the REA.

Today we bask in the Jesus who shines to dispel sin's darkness. Genuine life begins when the Jesus light is birthed in you. No more darkness for you when He flips your switch. He reaches every dark heart that wants His power.

Shine, Jesus, Shine!

Darryl Wood
Retired pastor

“ [The invitation is] a holy and public opportunity to cooperate with God’s Spirit in calling people to Christ. ”

PASTOR STEPHEN RUMMAGE

Quail Springs Baptist Church, Oklahoma City

How much more will I enjoy traveling the world when I understand the might, the mind and the love of the One who created it?

Jessica Ingram
theropetab.wordpress.com

As Christians ... our New Year’s celebration is not in futility. Instead, we ... celebrate a new year with exciting opportunities to see more clearly God’s plan for our lives. We celebrate the promise that we will know Him better this year — we are being transformed from glory to glory. We rejoice as we expectantly look and wait for a deeper understanding of Christ. We anticipate new doors to be opened in service of Him as we carry His image ev-

erywhere we go. We long for a new power in our involvement in the Great Commission and Great Commandments. ... This new year is not one in which we will drift aimlessly, but we will walk each day purposefully. ... The best is yet to come for believers in Christ Jesus!

Rob Jackson
University of Mobile

Take a second to imagine if every believer in East Asia had a thorough understanding of the gospel, a passion to share the gospel and a strategy for making disciples of all nations. It’s hard to imagine the results!

Will you pray for IMB workers around the world who are training

believers to reach their own people with the gospel? Will you also pray that national believers will continue to grow in boldness to share their faith and for churches to commit to evangelism and church planting?

Through your annual giving through the Cooperative Program and the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, you are joining the work in East Asia and around the world.

IMB worker in East Asia

What we would call orthodox and biblical views of marriage are, and will continue, to be a dividing line based on how people see the Scriptures.

Ed Stetzer
Author and pastor



Photo courtesy of J.D. Greear

J.D. Greear is president of the Southern Baptist Convention and pastor of The Summit Church.

SBC 2020 priorities

The 2019 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) saw thousands of Southern Baptists gather in Birmingham. As we did, and as God worked through and among us, I couldn’t help but remember that the gospel truly is what unites us and brings us together.

As we look forward to our 2020 annual meeting in Orlando, June 9–10, I want to share several areas I’m particularly excited about:

1. Gospel Above All
2. Diversity in the SBC
3. Who’s Your One
4. Send Every Member
5. Caring Well for the Abused
6. Engaging the Next Generation in Cooperative Mission.

I want to see 15,000 messengers in Orlando, a new wave of evangelism that turns the tide on declining baptism numbers and a wave of sending in the SBC that leads us to those days of multiplication and growth that characterized the first centuries of the church, when a group of Jewish fishermen — without resources, conventions, money or public platforms — turned the world upside down.

I’ll see you in Orlando!
(Read Greear’s full letter to Southern Baptists at tabonline.org/Greear-SBC2020.)

—J.D. Greear

From the *Twitterverse*

@dandaring

What every Christian can do:

- Pray for peace.
- Pray for our country.
- Pray for our troops.
- Pray for wisdom for our president and military leaders.
- Pray for the people of Iran.
- Pray for Israel and the peace of Jerusalem.
- Obey James 1:19 and be slow to tweet.

@SamRainer

Church: Jesus is our sole authority. Jesus is our sole message.

@itsmejwb

Simple word of wisdom that was helpful for me a while back dur-

ing a trying time in my ministry and always stuck with me: “If you were as bad as they say you are, you wouldn’t have a job. If you were as good as you think you are, you wouldn’t be in this situation.”

— @matalexander

@macbrunson

The world is full of people snapping their fingers at waitresses or bellowing at airline counters, hacked off employees or belligerent bosses. It’s the winsome, gracious person who walks through slammed doors that has the greatest influence in the end.

@kevinwilburn

If our lives are prayerless it’s not

because of a lack of time. It’s a lack of priority and often a tendency for our self-dependence.

@DrPaulChitwood

What do a former police officer, elementary school teacher and megachurch staffer have in common?

1. All are Southern Baptist.
 2. Each is now sharing Christ among the nations as IMB missionaries.
 3. I spent yesterday with them and can’t quit thanking God for them today.
- Who will go?

@livingforjc

Point people to Jesus!

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

Developing healthier sleep habits

Lack of sleep puts people at greater risk for developing serious health problems

By Denise George
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Sadly, too many Alabamians are not getting enough sleep. Lack of sleep puts Alabamians at greater risk for developing chronic health conditions, heart attacks, coronary heart disease, strokes, asthma, pulmonary disease, cancer, arthritis, depression, chronic kidney disease, obesity and diabetes.

The National Institutes of Health states that adults need between seven and eight hours of solid sleep during a 24-hour period. A recent national sleep study shows that only 61.2% of Alabama's residents sleep at least seven hours per night. Out of the nation's 51 states, Alabama ranks No. 48 in sleep deprivation.

Researchers blame Alabama's lack of regular shut-eye on the higher than usual rates of obesity, blood pressure and diabetes.

Within the past six years, adult obesity in Alabama has increased 13% (from 32.0% to 36.3%); adult diabetes has increased 19% (from 11.8% to 14.1%); and premature death, cardiovascular and cancer deaths rank high.

Why is sleep so important?

The National Sleep Foundation defines good sleep quality as:



123rf.com

▶ sleeping 85% of the time one lies in bed

▶ going to sleep within 30 minutes of retiring

▶ waking up no more than once at night.

Sleep affects both physical and mental health. When asleep, the body's immune system strengthens, skin and tissue renew, blood pressure drops, muscles relax, energy is restored and the brain cleanses itself by

removing toxins that have built up during the day.

Lack of adequate sleep can dam-

age the brain, leading to early memory loss or Alzheimer's disease.

What causes most sleep problems?

Most people occasionally have trouble sleeping due to stress, travel, jet lag, illness or other temporary interruptions.

A sleep disorder, however, is different, and can be caused by insomnia, sleep apnea, restless legs syndrome, narcolepsy and/or circadian rhythms disorders (see sidebar).

How lack of sleep affects health, work and ministry

One-third of U.S. adults get less than the recommended amount of sleep, leading to car crashes, work-related accidents and mistakes, the inability to handle stress or strong emotions, slower reaction time, weight gain, memory problems, strained relationships and disruptions in mood, energy and efficiency.

Many pastors and church leaders suffer sleep deprivation due to sleep interruptions to attend to worries about congregation and church concerns, pastoral emergencies and extra time needed to accomplish overwhelming work responsibilities.

One study shows that pastors of effective churches sleep only 6 hours per day.

How can Alabamians develop better sleep habits?

▶ Visit a medical doctor who may recommend an Alabama sleep center for sleep disorders.

▶ Establish a regular bedtime and sleep-wake schedule. Aim for 8 hours in a 24-hour period.

▶ Refrain from eating, drinking (especially alcohol) and smoking before bedtime.

▶ Avoid caffeine after noon.

▶ Create a sleep-promoting bedroom that is dark, cool, comfortable and noise-free (use a white-noise machine, soft music or ear plugs to block unavoidable sound).

▶ Avoid late afternoon naps.

▶ Stop all exercise 3 hours before bedtime.

▶ Reduce eye exposure to bright light. Turn off television and computer screens long before attempting to sleep.

▶ Pray, asking God to relieve your mind from stress and worry.

▶ Diffuse, inhale or massage into skin (only therapeutic grade) 100% pure essential oils to enhance sleep.

Find part 1 of the series at tabonline.org or in the Oct. 24, 2019, issue of *The Alabama Baptist*. 📖

Staying fit for active ministry

Parts 2 & 3

Definitions of common sleep disorders

▶ **Insomnia:** the inability to sleep, often caused by stress, health conditions, medications, anxiety, depression, overconsumption of caffeine, etc.

▶ **Sleep apnea:** a serious (and treatable) disorder in which breathing temporarily stops during sleep, causing frequent waking.

▶ **Restless legs syndrome:** the irresistible urge to move legs (or arms) while resting.

▶ **Narcolepsy:** dysfunction of the brain that controls sleeping and waking, causing uncontrollable daytime sleepiness and sudden "naps" during activities, work, driving, etc.

▶ **Circadian rhythm sleep disorders:** A poor quality or lack of sleep caused by a person's biological clock, responsible for regulating the 24-hour sleep-wake cycle.

Compiled by Denise George

Who are the most sleep-deprived in Alabama?

▶ **Alabama's men** (39.3%) are more sleep deprived than the state's women (38.7%).

▶ **Alabamians** between the ages of 45–54 years (47% of the state's population) sleep fewer hours than other ages.

▶ **Alabama's students** are sleep-deprived due to stress, financial concerns and time management. The lack of sleep interferes with concentration in class and can produce long-term consequences for chronic diseases.

Source: CDC/Compiled by Denise George



Unsplash.com

Developing healthier prayer habits

Regular time in communion with God vital for Christian walk, spiritual health

Denise George
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

According to the 2018 Annual Church Profile, more than 900,000 of Alabama's 4.8 million people belong to churches affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention.

A Pew Research study suggests most adults in Alabama who claim to pray daily are Christian (95%) and more than half of them are evangelical Protestant (56%).

Baby Boomers and those in Generation X pray daily more often than those of other generations. And women, those who are married and those who have no children under age 18 living at home tend more toward daily prayer than those in other groups.

Why is daily prayer important?

When believers pray regularly, they obey God's commands to "devote yourselves to prayer" (Col. 4:2) and to "pray continually" (1 Thess. 5:17).

Jesus taught believers to pray and He set before them numerous prayer examples, often personally withdrawing Himself to pray (Luke 5:16). Jesus also commanded His disciples to "always pray and not give up" (Luke 18:1).

When prayer is regular, the believer maintains a healthier relationship with Christ.

Prayer is the believer's lifeline to God and is as important to the

believer as breathing is to the physical body. Daily prayer provides believers opportunities to confess their sins, receive forgiveness and guidance, plead on behalf of others, overcome temptation, accomplish God's work and determine God's will for their lives.

In our society today, however, even believers who know that daily connection with the Lord through prayer is essential to their spiritual health have become so busy they often forget to meet God regularly in prayerful quiet and solitude.

People can become so consumed by hectic schedules, unanticipated crises, management of home and work that sometimes the time and energy to pray seem nonexistent.

SBC churches can encourage Alabamians to pray

Alabama pastors and church leaders can appeal to those groups who claim to pray less regularly, including Alabama's younger and older Millennials, men, those making \$30,000 or more in annual income and those with higher levels of education. They can reach out to those who claim to pray least regularly, including the divorced/separated, the widowed, the never married, those cohabiting and parents with children under 18 years of age.

Pastors and church leaders can teach and encourage believers to pray in several ways by:

- ▶ Preaching about the importance of prayer from the pulpit us-

ing Scripture about prayer as well as Jesus' own personal prayer examples;

- ▶ Emphasizing special times of prayer during worship services;
- ▶ Focusing a series of Bible study classes on prayer, appealing to all ages and groups in the church;
- ▶ Teaching young church children to pray so prayer becomes an essential and natural part of their lives;

- ▶ Organizing church-sponsored conversations about prayer with individual groups of people: men, young people, widows/widowers, single adults, parents, etc.;

- ▶ Enlisting special guests to speak about prayer in church-sponsored events and encouraging the church body and the unchurched community to attend;
- ▶ Inviting members to regularly pray for their pastors, church leaders, members and communities, asking God to grant them spiritual encouragement, wisdom, scriptural faithfulness, strong marriages, good family relationships, physical safety, rest and good mental/emotional/spiritual health;

- ▶ Praying together regularly as a church staff and letting members know their church leadership takes prayer seriously;
- ▶ Opening and closing all church meetings with prayer;
- ▶ Encouraging pastors to pray,

giving them needed quiet, solitude and retreat time to set aside especially for prayer and spiritual health;

- ▶ Inviting members at the end of each worship service to meet with prayer counselors to pray about special personal needs in private rooms without interruption;

- ▶ Putting legs to prayers. After praying about specific church and community needs, assigning groups of volunteers to minister practically to these people;

- ▶ Mobilizing church members to pray for family, friends and fellow church members every day and telling those people they are being prayed for;

- ▶ Suggesting and providing good books on prayer to the congregation, establishing book reading groups to gather and discuss what they learned about prayer;

- ▶ Setting up a prayer room in the church where believers can pray individually and/or together, and including a basket/box where they can place specific written prayer concerns/requests.

Alabama's pastors, church leaders, and congregations can help believers develop and maintain a close relationship with God and with each other when they purposely emphasize and strongly encourage daily personal and communal prayer, keeping Alabama's believers in good spiritual health and in a growing relationship with Christ.✝



Unsplash.com

"DEVOTE YOURSELVES TO PRAYER, BEING WATCHFUL AND THANKFUL."

Colossians 4:2

Union Hill members 'travel' US in yearlong challenge

At the beginning of 2019, Bill Barnett wouldn't have expected his church's ministry plans to include Wisconsin cheese. But he had long felt it was time for the congregation of Union Hill Baptist Church, Oneonta, to take a journey, and that's one of the places it took them.

"I was asking the Lord about what our theme should be last year, and I decided to focus on Jesus — preaching through the Gospels chronologically," Barnett said.

And while they walked through the life of Jesus, they also walked another journey together.

"I wanted to encourage our people to practice the Scriptures and live out the Christian life in seven ways," he said.

Challenging the church

So at the beginning of 2019, he challenged church members to commit to growing in their personal prayer, Bible reading, worship, Sunday School, evangelism, giving and exercise.

"We had a really good response to that last January," he said.

Each week throughout the year, they turned in response cards, and Barnett tallied them up.

Each number represented a mile, and he charted that on a big map of the U.S., drawing a path from state capital to state capital.

"It was a distance of a little over 18,000 miles," Barnett said.

But the visual didn't stop there. As they journeyed through each state, they focused on it, praying for North American Mission Board missionaries there. That's where the cheese came in.

"When we went through Wisconsin one Sunday, we had some cheese bites after the service," Barnett said. "The emphasis on each state highlighted the missionaries there and helped us see that the people we pray for and give to support are real people. We did that throughout the year to help us keep our focus."

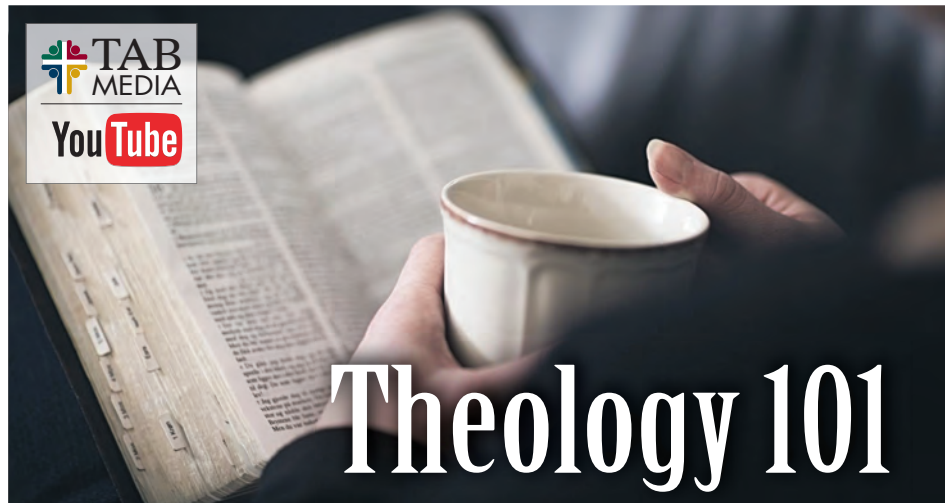
The intentional emphasis helped push them toward their Lottie Moon Christmas Offering goal of \$21,000, and it helped get the entire church involved, including children and youth. The church's missions leaders taught about the missionaries in their groups as well.

The whole effort helped the Union Hill congregation understand the harmony of the Gospels and work in harmony as a church, Barnett said. "We had great participation, with everyone feeling like week to week we're doing something that matters. And it changed us in so many ways. Reading your Bible every day matters — it changes your life. And seeing missions come to life changes you, too." (Grace Thornton)



Photo by Bill Barnett

A yearlong emphasis at Union Hill, Oneonta, challenged members of all ages to read the Bible, pray for missionaries and practice other spiritual disciplines. Time spent in various activities was converted to miles and tracked on a U.S. map.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

What's New?

A New Commandment

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

In these opening weeks of a new year, Theology 101 is giving consideration to themes described in the Bible as new. Last week the topic was the New Covenant. This week's topic is the New Commandment. This commandment came from the lips of Jesus when He said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:34).

Mention of a new commandment implies the existence of an old one. When it comes to loving one another, the Old Commandment as found in the Old Covenant stated, "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord" (Lev. 19:18).

The obvious difference between the Old Commandment about loving others and the new one has to do with the manner or pattern for that love. The Old Commandment used self-love as the measure or manner for loving one's neighbor. The New Commandment changes the pattern for loving others to that of Jesus. As He loves us, so we are to love others.


If Jesus is the pattern to be followed in loving others, then we must explore how He loves us. First of all, His love is sacrificial love. If we would behold the love of Christ, we must focus on the cross. He loved us even unto death. This self-giving love sets

the standard so high it is almost out of reach for us mortals. For us, self-love often gets in the way of sacrificial love.

Sacrificial love can prove somewhat costly for us. It may well cost us our comfort, our time, our energy and our resources. Left to ourselves, our human nature tends to be grasping rather than giving, hoarding rather than sharing.

An action word

The fact that loving others is a divine commandment means that it is something we can choose to obey. Love in the Bible is an action word, not merely a feeling word. Loving others does not have to wait for warm feelings or moving emotions. Since love is something we do rather than something we merely feel, we can act in obedience to the New Commandment regardless of whether or not we are experiencing loving sentiments. Of course, feelings of love make actions of love much more attractive and somewhat easier. Nonetheless, the commandment about loving one another always remains in effect whatever the inner sentiments might be.

God's people do well to move into a new year with a new resolve to obey the New Commandment. 

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.



'Meet human need, plant gospel seed'

Montgomery Association launches mobile food pantry in River Region 'food desert'

By Susan Withrow Murphy
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Residents of Lowndes County will find it easier to get regular, nutritious meals thanks to a new "rolling store" whose mission is to help eradicate hunger in rural south-central Alabama.

The Love Loud River Region (LLRR) Rolling Food Pantry bus took its maiden voyage in November to serve the state's poorest-of-the-poor, including some 10,000 Lowndes County residents who live in a so-called "food desert."

Only one grocery store exists in the 700-square-mile county. But now, thanks to the Montgomery Baptist Association (MBA), its ministry partners and United Way, plans are underway to expand food distribution throughout the River Region.

"Some of our grandparents may have seen rolling food stores dur-

ing their childhood," said Neal Hughes, director of missions at MBA. "Few people in Lowndes County have cars so they must pay someone to take them to the store, leaving them little money to buy food or pay bills. The LLRR Rolling Food Pantry allows people in the food desert to shop with dignity."

'Essentially starving'

Lowndes County ranks among Alabama's most food insecure counties, according to Feeding America, the nation's largest hunger relief network. The county's residents are primarily African-American and Hispanic, with one-quarter living below the poverty line. More than 20% of residents are elderly and nearly 60% are children, many living in government-subsidized housing.

Lack of transportation and access to grocery stores result in many Lowndes County residents subsisting

primarily on snack food purchased from mini-marts.

"Residents have some food but are essentially starving," said Hughes. "The food they're eating has little nutritional value. The incidences of obesity and diabetes is high in these areas."

Prior to the LLRR Rolling Food Pantry, church partners were bagging groceries to deliver to residents in rural areas, but the practice was labor intensive and reach was limited.

"We knew we had to find a way to go from place to place throughout Lowndes County," said David Fleming, director of leadership development for Montgomery Baptist Association. "It reminded me of when my mother was a little girl during the Depression. When she used to wait for the rolling store to come by her house. We want to help relieve the suffering of people living in desperate times and places."

Fleming wrote a grant for funding from United Way and was awarded \$15,000. With the funds, a school bus was purchased and retrofitted with shelving. Chairs, tables, an awning, a ramp and dietary educational materials also were purchased.

The shelves are filled with food, purchased for 15 cents per pound from the Montgomery Area Food Bank.

While clients shop in the bus, volunteers will serve



Photo courtesy of Robin Crowe

Using a United Way grant, Montgomery Baptist Association purchased and retrofitted a school bus with shelving and filled it with food. Chairs, tables, an awning, a ramp and dietary educational materials also were purchased for the ministry.

samples of delicious, healthy dishes and offer recipes clients can prepare at home.

In November the bus took two trips, serving 100 families in both rural and urban areas. One of MBA's ministry partners is Sylvester Hardy, pastor of Jonathan's House of Prayer in Hayneville. Hardy also serves as one of the bus drivers for the rolling food pantry.

"Our church has been partnering with the Montgomery Baptist Association, delivering

food to residents in our county for about a year," Hardy said. "I was skeptical at first about the bus being put into service, but to my surprise, the opportunity for clients to shop for themselves seems to give them a sense of pride, and it opened up doors for ministering to them in a way we never ex-

perienced when taking food to their homes. They seem much more open to fellowship."

Serving varied needs means partnering with other ministries. In January, Hope Inspired Ministries will collaborate with the food distribution bus team to offer information on vocational training, obtaining a GED, life skills and employment-related topics. All clients of the rolling food pantry are referred to area churches.

'Tool and inspiration'

Montgomery Baptist Association has slated the rolling food pantry to serve as a resource for local churches. Twelve volunteers can run the entire process, and a commercial bus license is not required.

"The bus is a tool for churches in our association, and hopefully, an inspiration for churches in other associations," said Hughes. "It costs only \$200 to feed 50 families of four — \$1 per person. With the bus, we can meet human need and plant the gospel seed." ✠



Photo courtesy of Robin Crowe

The Love Loud River Region Rolling Food Pantry bus launched in November to serve some 10,000 Lowndes County residents.



Women's Conference

Saturday, January 25, 2020
Southside Baptist Church Andalusia
Doors Open: 8:30 AM
Conference: 9 AM - 2 PM

Speaker: Page Hughes
Worship Leader: Beth Dean

Tickets are \$10 each and includes lunch if purchased by January 20.
Tickets purchased after January 20 will be \$12 each and will not include lunch. Tickets may be obtained by contacting Shirley Smith (334-488-4715) or the Church Office (334-222-4300; southside@sbcandalusia.com).

Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

2020 marks 125th anniversary of death of distinguished Baptist leader

John Albert Broadus (1827–1895) was a distinguished Baptist scholar, pastor, teacher and denominational leader.

This year is the 125th anniversary of his death.

He was born to Edmund and Nancy Broadus on Jan. 24, 1827, in Culpeper County, Virginia. He was educated at home and in a private school. When he was almost 16, he accepted Christ.

He enrolled in the University of Virginia in Charlottesville in 1846 to prepare for the ministry.

In 1850 he received his M.A. degree, was ordained as a minister and married Maria Harrison. They had

three daughters before Maria died in 1857. He remarried two years later.

He became an instructor in Latin and Greek at the University of Virginia and pastor of the Charlottesville Baptist Church in 1850. After one year, he resigned as a teacher to devote to full-time ministry as a pastor.

Broadus held a revival in Charlottesville in 1858. Eighteen-year-old Lottie Moon, who became the famous Southern Baptist missionary to China, attended. Moon experienced a “religious awakening” and Broadus baptized her.

In 1859 he became a member of the first faculty of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary when it opened in Greenville, South Carolina. For the next 36 years, he was professor of New Testament interpretation and homiletics.



BROADUS

When the seminary closed during the Civil War, Broadus preached and also served as chaplain in Lee’s army in northern Virginia.

When the seminary reopened after the war, it struggled to survive. Broadus and founder and first president James Boyce worked diligently to keep it open.

The seminary moved to Louisville, Kentucky, in 1877.

Broadus became the second president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1889 and served until 1895.

Broadus authored many books. His “On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons” (1870) had 26 editions and is a classic. “Lectures on the History of Preaching” (1876), “Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew” (1886) and “Commentary on the Gospel of Mark” (1905) are among his influential books.

He died March 16, 1895, and is buried in Cave Hill Cemetery in Louisville.†

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).



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Trademark suspenders

Spann works to save lives from dangerous weather, difficult childhoods

(continued from page 1)
it with a degree from the meteorology department at Mississippi State University. Decades later, he's now chief meteorologist at ABC 33/40 in Birmingham and is widely known for trademark suspenders that come out when the weather gets rough.

And it does get rough sometimes.

Burned in Spann's mind are the 62 tornadoes that took 252 lives on April 27, 2011. He's currently in the process of memorizing all 252 names.

'It's motivating'

"It's motivating for me," he said.

In general, that's how he lives — trying to prevent storms from wrecking lives.

That's why he's so passionate about children's ministry too.

"A lot of kids in the world are struggling; their home situation is not good," said Spann, who

leads children's worship every week at Double Oak Community Church, Birmingham. "When my dad left, I didn't have a lot of self-worth. I want these kids to have a good experience, to

begin discipling them and let them know that they have God-given gifts and a purpose."

Sandy Stephenson, Double Oak's children's minister, said Spann teaches in a way children can understand and remember.

"He also serves every

year at our Vacation Bible School, planning large group time and putting together videos," she said. "He's not afraid to be silly and downright goofy if it will make the kids laugh and want to come back the next day."

Children's Homes

Another ministry that is dear to Spann's heart is the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries. He's served on their board of trustees through the years.

"I can see where back when my dad left, the easiest thing for my mom to do would've been to drop me off at the Children's Home," Spann said. "So I have a heart for the work they do there."

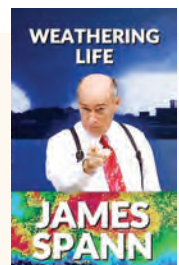
He says it's through God's grace and mercy that his path has led him to where he is today.

He's chronicled some



Photo courtesy of James Spann

Each year, James Spann serves during Vacation Bible School at Double Oak Community Church in Shelby Association, where he helps with large group time and putting together videos.



For more information about James Spann's book, visit jamesspannbook.com.

of that in a book called "Weathering Life," which talks about his life and faith and documents what it was like to work through some of the major weather events of his time.

"I hope it's got some encouragement for people who might be struggling, to say, 'You can still make it,'" he said.✝

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." Luke 9:23

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Puerto Rico remains on alert following two major earthquakes on Jan. 7 and dozens of small quakes that have struck the island since Dec. 28. One person was killed in the Jan. 7 quakes, and dozens of houses and buildings were demolished. Electricity was out on at least two-thirds of the island and water was out in many areas still recovering from Hurricane Maria in 2017. Local pastors and volunteers in cooperation with NAMB's Send Relief are providing aid. (TAB)

CP giving ends first quarter 2.58% ahead of last year

Cooperative Program (CP) gifts received by the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee (EC) in December 2019 totaled \$14,940,016.37, which was \$160,675.10 more than was received in December 2018.

As of Dec. 31, CP gifts received by the EC totaled \$47,511,312.90, which exceeded last year's first quarter contributions by 2.58%.

In the last three months of 2019, Alabama Baptists contributed more than \$4.55 million dollars to the CP, up more than \$240,000 from the same period in 2018.

Ronnie Floyd, EC president and CEO, said giving is important because it moves forward the "vision of reaching every person for Jesus Christ."

CP monthly reports are at cpmissions.net/CPReports. (BP, TAB)

Methodists propose split over LGBTQ issues

United Methodist Church leaders from around the world and across ideological divides unveiled a plan Jan. 3 for a new conservative denomination that would split from the church in an attempt to resolve a decades-long dispute over gay "marriage" and gay clergy.

The proposal envisions an amicable separation in which conservative churches forming a new denomination would retain their assets. The new denomination also would receive \$25 million.

The proposal was signed in December by a 16-member panel, who worked with a mediator.

The panel was formed after it became clear the impasse over the denomination's views on LGBTQ issues was irreconcilable. The next step could come at the church's General Conference in May. (AP/RNS)

— NEWSBRIEFS —

Birmingham's Lyric Theater to host Joy 2020 Women's Conference

Connecting Ministries will present the Joy 2020 Women's Conference on Feb. 21–22 at the Lyric Theater in downtown Birmingham. Friday's session will be held from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m., and Saturday's session will be from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Sheila Walsh will be the featured speaker. Walsh is a book and Bible study author and co-host of the TV program "Life Today," airing in the U.S., Canada, Europe and Australia.

For more information or to get tickets visit connectingministries.org. (TAB)

Christians, religious minorities reportedly bullied by police in India

Police in northern India's Uttar Pradesh (UP) state work in tandem with Hindu extremists to treat Christians and other religious minorities especially harshly, sources said.

"The UP police force is very different from the rest of India," Dinanath Jaiswar, a volunteer with

legal advocacy group Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF)-India, said. "They are very brash in their dealings with Muslim and Christian minorities, and there have been several cases of violence in police custody, but by God's grace we have tried our best to reach them on time, and even while in the clutches of the enemy, God protects His people."

From April 2017 to February 2018, India's National Human Rights Commission registered 365 cases of judicial and custodial deaths in Uttar Pradesh, according to *The Indian Express*. The next highest amount was 127 cases in West Bengal state.

Most cases reported against police stations in several Uttar Pradesh districts fell under the categories of torture, infliction of injury and grievous hurt, according to the National Crime Records Bureau.

"It has become a trend that a batch of Hindu extremists barge inside Christian homes and accuse them of proselytizing Hindus to Christian-

ity," Jaiswar said. "When Christians deny the accusations and restrain them from disrupting the prayers, they use the police force to take Christians into custody."

ADF-India personnel in Uttar Pradesh are often called to rush to police stations to try to intervene before any charges are filed, ensure that Christians are safe and work to release them as soon as possible, he added.

India is ranked 10th on Christian support organization Open Doors' 2019 World Watch List of the countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. The country was 31st in 2013, but its position has been worse each year since Narendra Modi of the Bharatiya Janata Party came to power in 2014. (MS)

How long is the sermon? Study ranks US branches of Christianity

The major branches of Christianity in the U.S. have sharply different traditions when it comes to sermon length.

That's among the findings of an analysis by the Pew Research Center — billed as the first



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News near you

BIGBEE ASSOCIATION

▶ **First Baptist Church, Livingston**, will host a men's and boy's breakfast Jan. 26 at 7:30 a.m. Thomas Fletcher is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

▶ **Hunter Street Baptist Church, Hoover**, will host the Discipleship Network of Alabama gathering Jan. 23–24. This gospel-centered discipleship meeting is for church staff members who oversee adult disciple making in the church. Online registration and more information is available at www.disciplealabama.org. Buddy Gray is pastor.

BLOUNT ASSOCIATION

▶ **Pleasant View Missionary Baptist Church, Holly Pond**, will host its third Sunday night singing Jan. 19 at 6 p.m. featuring Bama Blu-Grace. For more information call 256-796-5986. Randy Burtram is pastor.

CALHOUN ASSOCIATION

▶ **First Baptist Church, Piedmont**, will celebrate its 150-year anniversary Jan. 26 at 10 a.m. Former pastor Philip Cooper will be the guest speaker and Kelly Garner will bring special music. Michael Ingram is pastor.

CHILTON ASSOCIATION

▶ **Chilton Baptist Association** will host the 2020 Vacation Bible School Church Director Clinic on Jan. 28 at 7 p.m. at the association office. ▶ **Mulberry Baptist Church, Maplesville**, will host Royal Ambassador Racer Day on Feb. 1. The workshop will take place from 8 to 11 a.m. with the race beginning at 1 p.m. Breakfast and a light lunch will be served. Registration is due by Jan. 24. Andy Mims is pastor.

CLEBURNE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Cleburne Baptist Association** will host a Vacation Bible School overview Jan. 26 from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. at the association office. Larry Vinson is associational missionary.

COOSA RIVER ASSOCIATION

▶ **Marble City Baptist Church, Sylacauga**, will host the Vessel of Honor Women's Conference on Jan. 25 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Allison Wilks from One Step Ministries will be the guest speaker. Register online at www.marblecitybaptist.com/events. Mac McCaleb is pastor.

COVINGTON ASSOCIATION

▶ **Southside Baptist Church, Andalusia**, will host a women's conference Jan. 25 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Doors will open at 8:30 a.m. The guest speaker will be Page Hughes, and Beth Dean will lead worship. Tickets purchased after Jan. 20 will not include lunch. For more information or to purchase tickets contact Shirley Smith at 334-488-4715 or call the church office at 334-222-4300. Mike Flowers is pastor.

JUDSON ASSOCIATION

▶ **First Baptist Church, Headland**, will host

Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief training Jan. 30–Feb. 1. Sign up at www.sbdr.org/event/disaster-relief-training-saba. Cecil Sanders is pastor.

MADISON ASSOCIATION

▶ **House of Hope and Restoration Church, Huntsville**, will host an Alabama Baptist Church Planting Basics workshop Jan. 23–25. Sessions begin Thursday at noon and will conclude Saturday at 4:30 p.m. Visit www.plantalabama.org/events for more information and to register. Registration is required. Jarman Leatherwood is pastor.

TALLAPOOSA ASSOCIATION

▶ **Tallapoosa Baptist Association** will host a discipleship conference Jan. 25 from 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the association office. Brad Holloway will be the guest speaker. The goal of this conference is to make church members courageous disciple makers and teach them to do the same with others. Email office@tallaspoosabaptist.org or call 256-825-4441 by Jan. 23 to RSVP. James Smith is director of missions.

OTHER

▶ **The Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM)** will host the Secret of Teams Conference on Jan. 30 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Special guest Jay Vineyard will share what great teams know and do to improve results while honoring and developing people. The conference is for all pastors and ministry staff and will be held at the SBOM offices in Prattville. Register online at alsbom.org/events.✝

— NEWSBRIEFS —

of its kind — of 49,719 sermons delivered in April and May 2019 that were shared online by 6,431 churches.

According to Pew, the median length of the sermons was 37 minutes. Catholic sermons were the shortest, at a median of just 14 minutes, compared with 25 minutes for sermons in mainline Protestant congregations and 39 minutes in evangelical Protestant congregations. Historically black Protestant churches had by far the longest sermons, at a median of 54 minutes.

Pew said sermons at the black churches lasted longer than mainline Protestant sermons even though, on average, they had roughly the same number of words.



Unsplash.com

Prominent pastors have pondered the question of a sermon's length, including Hershael York, dean of the school of theology at Southern Baptist

Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. York offered an answer in 2016: "You can

preach as long as you hold [the congregation's] attention."

In addition to sermon length, the new Pew analysis delved into an examination of words and phrases most commonly used by preachers from the different Christian traditions.

It found that the word "hallelujah" appeared in sermons from about 22% of the historically black Protestant churches, and those congregations were eight times more likely than others to hear that word.

Sermons from evangelical churches were three times more likely than those from other traditions to include the phrase "eternal hell." (AP/RNS)

Planned Parenthood's latest report shows increase in abortions



Planned Parenthood Federation of America's (PPFA) 2018–2019 annual report released Jan. 6 showed the organization performed 345,672 abortion procedures in 2018, an increase of nearly 13,000 abortions from the previous year.

Lila Rose, president of the pro-life organiza-

tion Live Action, responded to the recent data reports from Planned Parenthood in a tweet saying that the number of abortions creates the highest death toll since 1991.

Planned Parenthood is responsible for approximately 40% of reported abortions in the U.S., according to Live Action News.

Abortions made up 4% of the organization's total medical services for the 2018–2019 fiscal year. Planned Parenthood received more than \$616 million in government reimbursements in 2018. From 2008 to 2018, government funding to PPFA increased by 70%.

"We learned two tragic facts from Planned Parenthood's newly released annual report," said Live Action spokesperson Alison Centofante. "The number of children Planned Parenthood killed in the womb is at a record high and, shockingly, so is the amount of money it received from taxpayers." (BP)



Pixabay.com

Pastor preaches without shoes on 'holy ground'

Bill Faircloth says he's been asked the question more times than he can count.

"I understand the need to know, and I too might ask the same of another pastor," he said.

It's simply this — "Why do you preach barefoot?"

Sometimes they ask, "Preacher, do your feet hurt?" Others sometimes joke, "Preacher, do we need to buy you a larger pair of shoes?"

But at Liberty Baptist Church, Thomasville, where Faircloth has served as pastor for the past 18 years, they're used to it. He's preached that way the entire time he's been there.

But it started even before that.

"It was some 30 years ago while I was pastoring a wonderful church between Shreveport and Texarkana," he said. "It was there in my office as I was studying Moses at the burning bush. I was convicted at that mo-

ment that if any place should ever be holy, shouldn't it be when the pastor is proclaiming the truth of God?"

From that day on, Faircloth has held to the personal conviction that preaching the gospel should be a sacred act of worship for him.

"The plain truth is, I was convicted by my Lord — this is what He decided for me. This is where I 'stand,'" he said.

An appreciation

His son, William, who serves as associate pastor and youth minister at Linden Baptist Church, said he grew up with it just being normal, but as he's gotten older, he appreciates the conviction behind it even more.

"He was saved when he was 32 — he was a TV repairman, and by his testimony he says he was a crook, he would rip people off. But Jesus saved him," he said. "He sees that pulpit as holy ground." (Grace Thornton)

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

Place a classified ad for \$1 per word. For more information call 205-870-4720, ext. 102, or email ads@thealabamabaptist.org.

CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR

Woodridge Baptist, a large SBC church in west Mobile, is prayerfully seeking God's leadership as we search for our new senior pastor. Located in heavily populated west Mobile, Woodridge is positioned for revival and explosive growth. If God leads, please submit resumé with references to: WoodridgePST@gmail.com or Woodridge Baptist Church, ATTN: Kerry Woods, Chairman Pastor Search, 2700 Schillinger Road S, Mobile, AL 36695.

PASTOR

Vincent First Baptist Church is currently seeking a full-time pastor. If interested, please send resumé to: Vincent First Baptist Church, P.O. Box 43, Vincent, AL 35178 or beckygreene15@yahoo.com.

MINISTER OF MUSIC/YOUTH

First Baptist Church, Leeds, Alabama, is seeking full-time congregational minister of music/youth minister with other ministerial duties as assigned by senior pastor. Email resumé to: rbras699@aol.com.

MINISTER OF STUDENTS

Meadow Brook Baptist Church, Birmingham, is prayerfully seeking a full-time minister of students. Send resumé to: 4984 Meadow Brook Rd., Birmingham, AL 35242 or email to dvaughan@meadowbrookbaptist.org.

STUDENT PASTOR

Thorington Road Baptist Church is looking for a full-time student pastor. Please send resumé to: michael@trbaptist.org.

OTHER POSITIONS

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS

The Coosa River Baptist Association is an association of 66 churches in Talladega County. The DOM serves as mission strategist, leader of the associational body and ministers to the churches and pastors of the association. Ministry experience in the local church with active participation in associational ministry required. College/secondary education preferred. Email cover letter and resumé to: DOMsearchteam@crba.org.

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In addition to the print edition *The Alabama Baptist* also releases a weekly digital edition of the newspaper to every subscribers' email. The digital edition now comes with all subscriptions. The digital edition has the same content as the print edition — including full color on all pages — and can be accessed anytime as long as you have internet. To update your email address contact subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org.

SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN BOOK EXPO

The second annual Southern Christian Book Expo will be held at Lakeside Baptist Church, Birmingham, on Feb. 1 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Books for every taste and every genre will be available including Christian living, mystery, humor and romance. Spend time browsing books written by local and regional authors, meet and have those authors sign books, listen as authors read selections from their best works, explore services offered by professional vendors and win door prizes. The 2020 Southern Christian Book Expo is sponsored by the Southern Christian Writers Conference and The Alabama Baptist/TAB Media. For more information, search for the Southern Christian Book Expo on Facebook or email scwritersconference@gmail.com.

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Every subscription to *The Alabama Baptist* now comes with complimentary access to TAB Online, the website of The Alabama Baptist/TAB Media. The website includes more than 40,000 archived articles dating back to the early 2000s, contact forms where readers can submit letters to the editor, news and story ideas, and a portal where subscribers can manage subscriptions. TAB Online also features a donate option, special resources, exclusive online classified ads and a staff directory. TAB Online can be accessed via thealabamabaptist.org or tabonline.org.

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Pastors who feel out on a limb get help from PassionTree

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

Robert Mullins was happy to have answered God's call to become a lead pastor, but he was surprised at one aspect of leading a church: He missed camaraderie with other pastors.

"When God called me in 2012 to be a lead pastor, I had been a youth pastor for over 20 years," Mullins recalled.

"I found that I missed the camps and retreats with other youth pastors. The Lord encouraged me to do that with lead pastors and senior pastors. There's no risk with Jesus ... so we did it."

A few years later, the PassionTree Network, a resource for disciple-making pastors, was born.

Combating pastors' loneliness and isolation is a key goal of PassionTree, says Mullins, who now serves as pastor at Crossroads Community Church, Elmore.

"Pastoring can be lonely. Pastors often feel like they don't have the network

they need. Sometimes the church can be one of the most hurtful and lonely places there is, especially for a pastor."

PassionTree brings pastors together in discipleship relationships that Mullins says is more of a movement than an organization.

"It's been very organic," Mullins said. "Now it's morphed into a network of some 150 ministers and pastors learning how to make disciples and encourage one another."

He likens the work of PassionTree to Jesus' efforts with His disciples: Strengthening their faith and training them to take up the cross so that they could go out into the world and make more disciples.

Lifelong relationships

"How can you make disciples if you haven't been disciplined yourself?" Mullins asked.

That approach is what draws bivocational and full-time ministers, staff pastors and senior pastors, and pastors of churches of all sizes



Photo by Martha Simmons

PassionTree founder Robert Mullins (left) speaks to pastors from across the state recently about his mission to provide community and resources for disciple-making pastors.

to the network, according to the group's website, passiontree.org.

PassionTree emphasizes "doing life together," and the group facilitates partnerships between pastors to help individuals become stronger in ministry and more accountable personally.

Daniel Edmonds, director of the office of Sunday School and discipleship for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, strongly

supports PassionTree.

"PassionTree is a network for pastors that encourages disciple making in keeping with the Great Commission," Edmonds said.

"God said it was not good for man to be alone, and I think loneliness is even worse for pastors. Robert Mullins has done a critical work in combating loneliness or isolation by bringing pastors together for encouragement, relationships and accountability. It is a growing network, and I encourage pastors to reach out to Robert and be blessed by the PassionTree Network."

Although Crossroads Community Church serves as PassionTree's sending organization, the network extends beyond Southern Baptists.

"It's not necessarily Baptist," Mullins said. "We have a lot of other folks from other denominations and non-denominational churches to come to our events."

PassionTree links pastors to one another with events such as retreats, roundtable discussions, videoconferencing and coaching.

"It's all about relationships," Mullins said. "When we go on retreats to the

mountains, agendas are not allowed. When we gather, we say to 'Rest, Renew and Relate.' We want you to come to one of our events and leave refreshed."

Only seven pastors took part in the first retreat in North Carolina in 2014, before the network even had a name.

In fact it was 2016 before the network became known as PassionTree, which Mullins said grew out of a Christian music group he belonged to in college and his subsequent creative artwork of the spiritual image.

Mullins, who serves as vice president of the 2020 Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference, hopes that as more pastors are disciplined through this ministry, they will in turn disciple still more pastors, thereby multiplying the effect.

'Go and teach'

He concedes the organization is still very young though.

"This year was the first year we even got on social media," he said, noting there are no grand ambitions to hit a particular numerical target. "As God grows it, that's where we

want to go."

Similarly, PassionTree seeks to help ministers focus on their true calling, rather than membership

and attendance and tithing statistics.

"Jesus said clearly to go and make disciples. Go and teach others what I have taught you to do," Mullins said. "We are called to be fishers of men. That should take all the pressure off the pastors out there. You don't have to build a megachurch. You just have to make disciples."

"That's kind of revolutionary." 🌿

For more information about PassionTree Network, go to passiontree.org.

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Is anything going to be new about the new year? Is there going to be anything new about your life and about my life? I would hope so. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul writes about us being a new creation. That is, we're born again, of course, but we continue to become new in Christ. We walk in the newness of life.



I trust that this new year will be a different kind of year, a turning point in some way, whether in spiritual disciplines or life purpose or some other way. I do know this, that in every year, every month, every week, every day, as well as every hour and every minute, we ought to be Kingdom focused.

Therefore, my verse for this year is Matthew 6:33: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all of these things shall be added unto you." (NASB)

Let's be Kingdom focused in this new year!

Rick Stuebe
Matthew 6:33

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.

JANUARY

- 17-18 **Student Missions Weekend**, WorldSong, Cook Springs, Kaley Stephens, ext. 278
- 19 **Sanctity of Human Life Sunday**, Keith Hinson, ext. 289
- 21 **Church Tax Conference**, Eastern Shore, Daphne, Lee Wright, ext. 241
- 23-25 **Southeast Youth Conclave**, Chattanooga, Tenn., Scooter Kellum, ext. 280
- 23-25 **Alabama Baptist Church Planting Basics**, House of Hope and Restoration Church, Huntsville, Jeff Mann, ext. 332
- 23-24 **Discipleship Network of Alabama**, Hunter Street, Hoover, Daniel Edmonds, ext. 285
- 28 **Church Tax Conference**, Calvary, Dothan, Lee Wright, ext. 241
- 30 **The Secret of Teams: What Great Teams Know & Do**, SBOM Facility, Prattville, Mike Jackson, ext. 210
- 31-2/1 **Alabama Bible Drill Retreat**, Shocco Springs, Belinda Stroud, ext. 255
- 31-2/1 **Activators Training**, WorldSong, Cook Springs, Laura Glass, ext. 226
- 31-2/1 **Renovate 2020 Johnny Hunt Simulcast**, Boones Chapel, Prattville; Valley Church, Coker; Willowbrook Church Madison Campus, Huntsville; Larry Hyche, ext. 268

FEBRUARY

- 1/31-2/1 **Activators Training, WorldSong**, **Listed on January calendar
- 1/31-2/1 **Alabama Bible Drill, Shocco Springs** **Listed on January calendar
- 9 **Racial Reconciliation Sunday**, Keith Hinson, ext. 289
- 11 **Minister's Tax Conference**, FBC Decatur, Lee Wright, ext. 241
- 13 **Minister's Tax Conference**, Birmingham Metro Baptist Association, Birmingham, Lee Wright, ext. 241
- 16 **Hunger Sunday**, Jim Swedenburg, ext. 283
- 18 **Minister's Tax Conference**, Mobile Baptist Association, Mobile, Lee Wright, ext. 241
- 20 **Minister's Tax Conference**, Eastern Shore Baptist Church, Daphne, Lee Wright, ext. 241
- 21-22 **Pursue**, First Baptist Church, Montgomery, Mike Nuss, ext. 276
- 21-22 **Bivocational Minister/Spouse Retreat**, Linda Hicks, ext. 263
- 22 **Renew...a day away with friends**, Westwood Baptist Church, Alabaster, Amanda Armstrong, ext. 223
- 23-24 **State Evangelism Conference**, Heritage Baptist Church, Montgomery, Lori McGough, ext. 258
- 23 **Disciple Making Ministries Dinner**, Heritage Baptist Church, Montgomery, Daniel Edmonds, ext. 285
- 24 **Reaching Gen Z**, Heritage Baptist Church, Montgomery, Lori McGough, ext. 258
- 24 **Ministers' Wives Luncheon**, Heritage Baptist Church, Montgomery, Kathryn Helms, ext. 325
- 24 **Sharing Hope Conference for Pastors and Leaders (Hispanic)**, Heritage Baptist Church, Annel Robayna, ext. 270
- 27 **Minister's Tax Conference**, Calvary Baptist Church, Dothan, Lee Wright, ext. 241
- 28-3/1 **Children's Honor Choir Tour**, North Alabama area, Karen Gosselin, ext. 318

MARCH

- 1-8 **Week of Prayer for North American Missions and Annie Armstrong Easter Offering**, Laura Glass, ext. 226
- 5-6 **Ministry Evangelism Retreat**, Shocco Springs, Talladega, Kristy Kennedy, ext. 311
- 5-6 **Uplink on the Road**, State Board of Missions, Prattville, Scooter Kellum, ext. 280
- 6-7 **COMPLETE...A gathering for teen girls**, Eastern Hills Baptist Church, Montgomery, Kathryn Helms, ext. 325
- 7 **Central Alabama Spring Library Workshop**, Shoal Creek Baptist Church, Deatsville, Marty Woodhall, (334) 569-3854
- 8 **Alabama Association of Baptist Secretaries Conference**, Shocco, Lee Wright, ext. 241
- 12 **2020 Singin'**, Cottage Hill Baptist Church, Mobile, Eileen Mitchell, ext. 221
- 12 **Who's Your One District Training**, Stapleton Baptist Church, Stapleton, Bailee Dixon, ext. 258

Access to ultrasounds can decrease abortions

Julie McLendon says she can sum it up this way — it gets people to the point of decision even faster.

Back in April 2019, the North Jefferson Women's Center (NJWC), a Sav-A-Life ministry, received a new ultrasound machine provided by the Psalm 139 Project, a division of the Southern Baptist Ethics &

Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC).

McLendon, executive director of NJWC, said when people come into their center, they sometimes already have their minds made up to terminate the pregnancy.

"It's a huge eye opener for them to see the baby and hear the heartbeat," she said. "It's the moment when they begin to pause

from that determination of terminating the pregnancy and decide to carry the baby to full term."

McLendon noted that 60% of the time when a woman or couple sees their child on an ultrasound, they decide to continue the pregnancy instead of getting an abortion.

"We can help bring them to that even quicker with

this new technology that can find a heartbeat as early as five and a half weeks," she said. "Having the most current machine has allowed us to find earlier pregnancies and allows us to show life at conception much earlier. It's been a huge blessing."

For the past 16 years, ERLC has donated ultrasound units to clinics across the country through the Psalm 139 Project. So far, the project has funded and placed 20 machines, including the one at NJWC.

Practical way to help

The machines are fully funded through direct monetary gifts and through the Cooperative Program, Southern Baptists' unified giving plan to support national and international ministry causes.

Bobby Reed, chief financial officer of the ERLC,

said the project is a very practical way for those passionate about the sanctity of human life to get involved and make a real difference.

"A lot of times people who become passionate about it, their follow-up question is 'Well, what can I do?'" Reed said. "One way to be involved in valuing human life is to be involved in the Psalm 139 Project."

Individuals can invest personally in saving lives and in ministering to mothers like those who come into McLendon's center. The money donated to the project goes directly to funding a machine placement and therefore, to saving lives.

But the lives that are to be valued also reach beyond the womb, Reed said. "It also goes to the orphan or the foster child who needs a home. There's a dual messaging there. Not only does that center help babies who are in their mother and need life, but they're also helping moms who are scared for their very lives." (TAB, BP)

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— Beth Gillem, Sign Committee Member

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Christian Crossword

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Across

- Grisled and ___ horses. (Zech. 6:3)
- They removed from ___. (Num. 33:28)
- The ___ that is in the land of Assyria. (Isa. 7:18)
- Villages in the plain of ___. (Neh. 6:2)
- My son was dead and is ___ again. (Luke 15:24)
- Rodent.
- David ... escaped to the cave ___. (1 Sam. 22:1)
- ___ the son of Enan. (Num. 1:15)
- Two ___ more hereafter. (Rev. 9:12)
- ___ with zeal as a cloke. (Isa. 59:17)
- Insensitive.
- Lowest speed.
- The ___, he is unclean unto you. (Lev. 11:6)
- What ___ have ye? (Luke 6:32)
- I am ___. (Isa. 41:4)
- Assistance.

- ___ that seek me early shall find me. (Prov. 8:17)
- Whose ___ is in his hand. (Matt. 3:12)
- ___, the son of Peleth. (Num. 16:1)
- The ___ hear his voice. (John 10:3)
- A sect.
- Methods.
- He ___ them all. (Ps. 147:4)
- ___ his garments. (2 Sam. 13:31)
- The wicked man travaileth with ___. (Job 15:20)
- Sharpen every man his ___. (1 Sam. 13:20)
- Not in the ___ of the letter.
- Took ___ by the hand. (Matt. 9:25)
- There were ___ besides unto them. (Jer. 36:32)
- A wave of the ___. (James 1:6)
- One little ___ lamb. (2 Sam. 12:3)

- Son, go work ___. (Matt. 21:28)
- God ___ them in the firmament. (Gen. 1:17)
- A snake.
- ___ yet I say unto you. (Matt. 6:29)
- Given me to ___. (Eph. 3:2)
- Idle ___. (Luke 24:11)
- ___, that great city Babylon. (Rev. 18:10)
- Edge.
- St.
- ___ on the land. (Mark 6:47)
- A ___ adorneth herself. (Isa. 61:10)
- Eye, ___, nose and throat doctor.
- Greek letter.
- He that findeth his life shall ___ is. (Matt. 10:39)
- Doth the ___ fly by thy wisdom? (Job 39:26)
- A fastener.
- Confusion.

Down

- In a very ___ day. (Prov. 27:15)
- Put off thy ___. (Ex. 3:5)
- I ___ not want. (Ps. 23:1)
- A plain man, dwelling in ___. (Gen. 25:27)
- A short essay.
- Wash their hands and their feet ___. (Ex. 30:19)
- Let the sea roar and the ___ thereof. (Ps. 96:11)
- His ___ in the east. (Matt. 2:2)
- She conceived and bare ___. (Gen. 4:1)
- They look and ___ upon me. (Ps. 22:17)
- Golfer's aide.
- Between ___ and ___. (Deut. 17:8)
- ___ shall bring forth a son. (Matt. 1:21)
- ___ thee two tables of stone. (Ex. 34:1)
- The ___ number of them. (Num. 3:48)
- Thou shalt ___ greater things. (John 1:50)
- The people ___ down to eat. (Ex. 32:6)
- "I ___." (Wedding)

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For January 19

Explore the Bible

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.
Dean of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



GOD VALUES LIFE Deuteronomy 5:17, 19:4-13

Deuteronomy records a series of messages delivered by Moses to the second generation of adults coming out of Egypt. The first generation died in the wilderness as a result of their rejection of God's directions and Moses as God's spokesman.

This next generation would receive the commandments (Deut. 5) and they would be instructed to be intentional about passing on these commands of God to their children (Deut. 6:4-9). Our lesson begins with the commandments.

The 20th century saw the cheapening of human life on an unprecedented scale. The rise of atheistic Communism and social Darwinism saw the rejection of humanity as God's image-bearers and the worth of individuals reduced to evolved primates.

Since the growing mindset was that human beings had no inherent value, eugenics and physiological experimentation — condemned when the Germans did it — became socially and politically acceptable.

A decade after ending public school-sponsored prayer and Bible reading, the biblical position that human life begins at conception (Ps. 139:13-16) was rejected by the U.S. Supreme Court in January 1973.

Over the past 47 years, more than 60 million Americans have been legally terminated by American doctors — most before they were born.

This silent holocaust is 10 times greater than the Jewish holocaust. And this does not even account for abortions and euthanasia globally.

Murder Prohibited (5:17)

God's commandment is clear: "You will not murder." Classical Hebrew has several verbs which can mean "kill," including words for execution for a capital crime, wartime death and accidental manslaughter.

The permanent prohibition in this verse could be translated as: "You shall never murder." This commandment is the first of five consecutive prohibitions affecting other human beings: never murder, never commit adultery, never steal, never bear false witness and never covet.

The intentional taking of a human

life is never victimless; humans die, whether we see the evidence or not.

Grace Extended (19:4-10)

This commandment allows room for follow-up questions: What about war? What about the death penalty? These are legitimate questions which arise in a discussion about abortion and euthanasia.

First, we need to recognize that in the Old Testament, God initiated punishment for taking another human life (Gen. 9:5-6). Second, Jesus and the Apostle Paul address the reality of death due to war (Luke 14:31) or punishment for criminal activity (Rom. 13:4).

What about accidental death? The Mosaic law provides stipulations for a person who unintentionally causes the death of another human being. Certain "cities of refuge" were established in the event of such an occurrence, like when an ax-head flies off the handle and strikes down another man. The unintended killer could preserve his own life by fleeing to a city of refuge.

If the elders of the city determined the death to have been an accident, then the man seeking refuge would be safe in the city. Even in the law, God revealed Himself as gracious (Ex. 34:6) and He expected His people to extend grace through the cities of refuge.

Justice Expected (19:11-13)

If it was determined that a man seeking refuge actually committed murder, then justice would be served. He would be handed over to "the avenger of blood," whose responsibility it was to punish the man for his crime. Once again, we see the character of God revealed here (Ex. 34:7).

In Christ's death and resurrection, we see the grace and the justice of God displayed together. Someone must die for the sins we commit. After all, when we break one part of the law we have broken the whole law (James 2:10).

By contrast, God extended His grace by offering forgiveness to all who believe in Jesus, repent of sin and trust Him as Lord. ✠

Bible Studies for Life

By Dr. Jim Barnette, Professor, Samford University
Senior Pastor, Brookwood Baptist Church



HOW CAN GOD USE ME WHEN OTHERS SUFFER? Isaiah 58:3-11

Outward religious rituals by themselves are not the way to please God. (3-5)

Self-proclaimed religious people were presenting their complaints to God. They were fasting, yet God did not seem to be paying any attention to them. They were depriving themselves of food in order to gain things from God, but the ritual was not working. Nor will such ritual ever work in finding God's favor.

Those who were fasting saw it as a transactional cause and effect rather than a personal, sacrificial relationship with the Almighty God.

All of this was being done in the pharisaic spirit of Luke 18:12. Indeed, these exilic Hebrews were acting like the Pharisees whom Jesus lambasted centuries later.

Such empty rituals with wayward motivation were nothing more than paganism in pious clothing. Before we condemn these Hebrews, let us confess with open eyes that we can fall into such paganism in one garb or another.

"Bowing your heads like a reed" exposes how their routine acts of self-centered piety were as meaningless as bowing one's head in a robotic religiosity. Without cultivating our own sanctification, our spiritual lives can degenerate to hollow tipping of our hats to the Sovereign God who deserves so much more from us.

God commands us to help others in need of justice. (6-7)

In response to the wayward fasts of the Hebrews, now the Lord clarifies "the fast that I choose." This passage presents His different idea of fasting: to rescue the oppressed and provide for the needy.

The four verbs in verse 6 all have to do with liberation. We are to help the deprived break through the layers of oppression that have robbed them of hope.

The images of restorative ministry in verse 7 encapsulate the ministries of the sheep in Jesus' parable in Matthew 25. All of our acts of worship should lead to liberation of

suffering souls. This passage is a clarion call to eschew self-serving

religion and to reflect the self-sacrificing love of God, revealed most fully through His Son.

If God's people want to deprive themselves, let them do it for the sake of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized, but not for their own gain.

The loving God's nature is to give Himself away to human beings who can never begin to repay Him.

We are called to emulate this very motive so that the hopeless of the world can see the love our God has for them.

Our obedient response to what God desires leads to His blessing. (8-11)

God's people are called to put away contempt for other people. "Remove ... the moving of the finger" (literally the "sending" of the finger) is likely similar to crude gestures that we see in our own society.

If persons will live out God's example of self-giving love to others, then the satisfaction they have been seeking will be theirs.

Four elements are mentioned here: light, healing, guidance/healing and God's presence.

When we make our spiritual lives ends in themselves, the results are the opposite of these four: darkness, sickness, defeat and separation. "The glory of the Lord will be your rear guard" is a reference to the pillar of cloud and fire in the wilderness that guided the children of Israel after the exodus from Egypt (see Ex. 13:21; 14:20).

The phrase "your righteousness" is important because it combines two foundational ideas of this entire passage of Isaiah. On the one hand, it points to the righteousness of the Lord, the One who delivers His righteousness by saving His people in accord with His ancient promises.

On the other hand, the possessive pronoun highlights the righteousness of God's people when they follow His way of true religion, which serves others with the motive and the goal of leading them to new life in Jesus Christ. ✠



Media reviews

MOVIES/TV

The Bible Project offers ‘approachable way’ to dive deeper into Scripture

By **Carrie Brown McWhorter**
The Alabama Baptist

Reading through the Bible is a challenging undertaking. Seeing the big story of how the Old Testament and New Testament work together to point to Jesus while addressing questions about the context, culture, history and geography of 66 different books can lead the average reader down confusing paths — and all too often readers simply give up.

‘Gets you excited’

The creators of The Bible Project want to help. Introduced in 2014, The Bible Project is a multimedia resource for individuals, teachers and anyone looking to dive deeper into Scripture in an approachable way.

The goal of The Bible Project is to emphasize the Bible as a unified story and to do so in a way that appeals to a broad audience and different learning styles, said Michael McDonald, director of strategic relationships for The Bible Project.

“Our hope is that when you watch one of the videos, it doesn’t act as a replacement for Scripture but gets

you excited about reading the Bible,” McDonald said.

It’s an approach that’s gaining traction, especially among viewers ages 18 to 45 who have grown up in a tech-saturated world.

“We primarily started as a YouTube channel,” McDonald said. “YouTube’s audience skews toward 18- to 35-year-old males, and especially in the Christian West, that’s also the folks churches are having a hard time reaching.”

Available on a variety of platforms, including Vimeo, YouTube, The Bible App and The Bible Project website, videos cover a broad scope of subjects, from an examination of a single book of the Bible to an in-depth exploration of a theme throughout Scripture. The videos are animated, but the quality is Hollywood-studio level in both content and presentation, McDonald said.

“From young to old, viewers find their way onto Facebook or YouTube,” he said. “A lot of churches play the videos in Sunday gatherings. So animation doesn’t mean it’s just for kids.”

The Bible Project now includes



TheBibleProject.com

‘The Bible Project — Exodus’

more than 130 videos and 200 podcasts, plus Bible reading plans and an online class for moms — all focused on the gospel and all completely free.

“Everything we do is free,” McDonald said. “We try to figure out who is under-resourced or under-served and how we can equip and serve them in their path toward discipleship.”

A new video is released every 2–3 weeks, no small feat considering the months of planning and work that goes into their creation. But the nonprofit, crowdfunded studio has reached a big audience. It has more than a million subscribers worldwide and has garnered more than 100 million views in more than 200 countries across all its media channels.

Last year The Bible Project introduced its first digital devotional study, “Gospel Wisdom for Moms,” a study of Luke and Acts.

The new project is similar in format to any online class, with Scripture readings, content and videos included within each lesson. Each devotional takes 30–60 minutes, but a participant can do as little or as much as time allows within each unit. The materials are available for

download for those who prefer print.

“We talked to a lot of moms as we designed this course, and their feedback was unanimous — they’re busy, they find it hard to get a moment of peace and they often feel that focusing on their faith is a struggle. This tailored devotional is free, it’s super easy to use and — most importantly — we’ve packed loads of personally enriching material into short bursts of time that make this digestible,” McDonald said.

‘That’s our heart’

Another feature of The Bible Project is a one-year Bible reading plan. The Scriptures are divided into 16 sections and organized in semi-chronological order. As readers come to a new book of the Bible, they’ll be directed to a short video about the book’s design and message and tips on what to look for as they read.

The daily reading plan is just one more way to help people connect with Scripture, McDonald said.

“That’s our heart — that people will not feel so separate from the Bible,” McDonald said.

More information about The Bible Project is available at thebibleproject.com/explore.



TheBibleProject.com

The Bible Project is a multimedia resource for anyone looking to study the Scriptures more thoroughly. It offers videos, along with Scripture readings and other content. Some materials are available for download for those who prefer print.

'A HUGE BELIEVER'



Tennessee Titans center shows Christ to teammates in way he 'carries himself'

By **Bill Sorrell**
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

At 10 years old, Ben Jones' life changed forever.

His father, Steve, who owned a forestry company, died in a helicopter crash along with the pilot in Bibb County, a few miles from the family farm, on Oct. 5, 1999.

Steve was 37 and idolized by his sons, Ben and Clay.

"His thing was to treat everybody the way you wanted to be treated. He treated everyone fairly no matter who they were or if he had never met them before," Ben said.

'Live by my faith'

Now a center for the Tennessee Titans, Ben learned many lessons from his father, like work hard daily and try to be the best you can be. And he came away from the experience with spiritual lessons as well.

"It made me a believer at a young age. I have a strong Christian background. I have a strong family. I live by my faith every day," said Ben,

who grew up in First Baptist Church, Centreville, where his dad served as a deacon.

Ben said his mother, Vickie, introduced him to Jesus and many along the way, including his wife, Alex, friends, family members and chaplains, have been important to his faith journey.

Rededication

Drafted No. 99 overall by the Houston Texans in the fourth round of the 2012 draft after playing at the University of Georgia, his dad's alma mater, Ben rededicated his life to Christ in 2015 and was baptized at an NFL Christian retreat four years ago.

He joined the Titans in 2016 and is now in his eighth pro season. Teammates see how important his faith is to him.

"I know he loves Jesus. You can see that in the way he carries himself. You couldn't ask for a better teammate," said Titans punter Brett Kern.

Titans long snapper Beau Brinkley calls Ben a "huge believer."

"We always see him in chapel up front, al-

ways giving his opinion. We are all together in this growing path, growing in faith. To have him, Ryan (Succop, Titans placekicker) and countless others who all come to chapel over the years and with the group getting bigger, we're thankful the good Lord is in our locker room and here to stay."

Ben was a star baseball player in high school. He was first baseman and pitcher for Bibb County High School with a school-record 48 RBIs in 2007 and a career batting average of .345. *The Tuscaloosa News* selected him a West Alabama baseball all-star and the *Mobile Press Register* named him to its baseball Elite 18 team.

But Ben loved football and ended his high school career ranked in ESPN's list of top 150 players. Rivals.com ranked him the No. 7 offensive center nationwide in 2008. At Georgia, Ben wore No. 60 in honor of his father who wore that number while playing high school football. He earned All-SEC honors, ESPN All-American, the Vince Dooley Most Valuable Player of the Year Award and was named to the Bulldogs' Team of the Decade.

Ben is a leader on and off the field, Brinkley said.

'Natural born leader'

"Ben is a natural born leader," he said. "Obviously at center you have to know everything. He does a great job on that (offensive line)."

And faith helps him persevere, Ben said.

"Stand strong. That is what faith is all about," said Jones. "When you have God, you stick to it through the hard times. He is always there."✝

"Stand strong. That is what faith is all about. When you have God, you stick to it through the hard times. He is always there."

Ben Jones
NFL center, Tennessee Titans



Photos courtesy of Tennessee Titans

After playing at the University of Georgia, Ben Jones was drafted by the Houston Texans in 2012, then joined the Tennessee Titans as a center in 2016 after rededicating his life to Christ at an NFL Christian retreat in 2015.