



The Alabama Baptist

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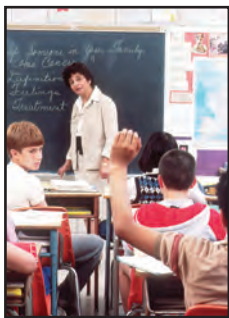
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Proposed amendment would change state school board, K–12 standards
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Photos courtesy of Chris Parker

Above: Freedom Church, which officially launched Jan. 26 in Phoenix, is a church plant supported by the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering. **Right, top and bottom:** Chris Parker (gray shirt), a church planter from Alabama who serves as pastor of Freedom Church, Phoenix, leads two people to faith during a grilling outreach ministry in a Walmart parking lot.

‘Major impact’

Easter offering supports church planters from Alabama, makes ‘eternity look different’

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

When Chris Parker looks at the grill his church owns, he thinks about a couple who gave their lives to Jesus over a plate of food in the Walmart parking lot.

“In 2019, NAMB (North American Mission Board)

helped us purchase a grill that had been fabricated into a trailer,” said Parker, a church planter in Phoenix sent out by Northport Baptist Church.

His congregation, called Freedom Church, was planning to use the grill around town as a way to meet new people.

“On one particular Saturday, we were grilling on the outskirts of the Walmart parking lot,” he said. “People had been stopping to get food and to chat. Eventually, a couple stopped and had more than just questions about who we are and what we do. They had

questions about Jesus.”

After talking for a little while, they decided to give their lives to Jesus right there in the parking lot, Parker said.

‘Investing in us’

The NAMB funds that helped purchase that grill “had a major impact — it made eternity look different,” he said. “Freedom Church is very appreciative of the support we have in NAMB. Without them, we would not be able to do many of the things we do. They have helped us by being there when we have questions, equipping us with needed

resources and investing in us financially.”

That financial backing comes from funds generously given by Southern Baptists through the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering (AAEO) for North American Missions. Every dollar given through the offering “goes to train and resource thousands of missionaries involved in church planting and compassion ministries who share the life-transforming gospel of Jesus Christ across the United States, Canada and their territories,” according to NAMB. (See ‘Freedom Church,’ page 14)

To watch the videos from this week’s issue, visit our YouTube channel “TAB Media.”

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Editors challenged to build trust, report both good and bad news

The most important value that Southern Baptist editors offer their readers is trust, said Bob Smietana, editor-in-chief of Religion News Service.

The keynote speaker for the 2020 annual meeting of the Association for State Baptist Publications (ASBP) held Feb. 10–13 in Tucson, Arizona, said, “Real stories about real people experiencing God in a real way are powerful.”

Discussing the theme, “Good News/Bad News: All News Is God’s News,” Smietana told the more than 30 Southern Baptist journalists, “Telling good news is much more dangerous than bad news” because journalists often fail to fact-check good news stories. Sharing

examples of stories of good news that later were discovered to be in error, Smietana said, “We [sometimes end up promoting] people whose claims are not true. ... We want good news to be true. It’s so perilous.”

‘Transparency is better’

Beyond reporting good news, Southern Baptist journalists also have a responsibility to report bad news. “Every reporter is an investigative reporter,” he said. Reporting “just the facts” is the best approach to take, he said. When determining whether to report an alleged bad news story, journalists can ask, “Is

this a story? Is this a story we want to do? Is this a story we have time to do?” Even when a journalist or a denominational leader may not want to report a bad news story, Smietana said, “Transparency is better.”

ASBP annual meetings have been a staple of the organization which was launched in 1895 as the Southern Baptist Press Association. The first meeting was held in May 1896 in Chattanooga, Tennessee, with 15 editors present.

California editor Terry Barone said the meeting “is always a highlight because of networking with fellow editors/communicators and SBC agency communications personnel.”

In closing the meeting, 2019–2020 ASBP President David Williams, editor of the *Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist*, passed the ASBP gavel to Jennifer Davis Rash of The Alabama Baptist/TAB Media, who will serve as 2020–2021 ASBP president.

“ASBP has a rich history with editors of state Baptist publications,” Rash said. “I am honored to lead the organization as it moves into its future with all the challenges and opportunities facing state Baptist publications today.”

To read the full wrap-up of the meeting visit www.tabonline.org/ ASBP. (Margaret Colson)



Photo courtesy of Kevin Parker
TAB editor-in-chief Jennifer Davis Rash is passed the gavel as she is named the new president of ASBP.



The crossword puzzle can be found on page 17.



“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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Jesus experienced deep sorrow too; He understands

Have you ever wanted something for someone more than he or she wanted it for him- or herself? Or maybe you could see the amazing potential in a person who was wasting opportunity after opportunity?

It's hard enough to watch when it revolves around basic contributions to society, the community, a church family or the workplace. It's almost unbearable when it comes to a person's self-destructive behavior.

The reasons people get caught in a spiral of self-destruction could fill up a bookshelf. Why they stay there adds another bookshelf.

We all have the potential for low moments and seasons — and I'd venture to say we've all been there at some point.

But what allows some to pull out of the blues in a reasonable amount of time while others nosedive to a depth seemingly beyond reach?

The experts say that until a person is ready for help and admits he or she needs help, then there's really nothing anyone else can do — the concept of "hitting rock bottom."

It truly is heartbreaking to step out of the way in order to let the person hit rock bottom so he or she can then reach back up for help, but those trained in this area insist it is the right move.

One minister and counselor said until the person truly and consistently experiences the consequences of the action, or inaction, he or she most likely

won't be serious about getting the help needed.

In other words, as long as we bail our loved ones out each time, fix the problem or give them another pass, they are less likely to draw the line and decide to seek a change.

But again, it's so hard to watch those we love suffer.

We can see so clearly what needs to happen and might even offer to help with each step, but for some reason those simple steps look much more daunting and impossible to those in the middle of the chaos.

The easier and more comfortable move is to remain in the cycle of destruction — it actually feels normal and familiar.

So many times mental health issues are at play as well, and those must be handled by a professional.

And while I don't have specific answers for exactly what to do in these situations, I do know Jesus experienced what it feels like "to be sorrowful and troubled" (Matt. 26:37).

"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with

me," He said to three of His closest prayer partners as recorded in Matthew 26:38.

Jesus understands, and as Hebrews 4:15 tells us, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."

God doesn't promise life will be easy, but He does promise to help us walk through it — if we will let Him.

Are you ready for something different? Then why waste another day? Let's get started.✝

RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

Long periods of heavy rain and dreariness remind me to better appreciate the beauty of a sunny day

Many of us in the South have been joking about building an ark and forgetting what sunshine feels like during the recent unusual periods of intense rain.

I even mentioned how I'm finally getting to break in the rain-boots I purchased a year or so ago during a drought we thought would never end.

Many areas have experienced serious damage from the relentless floodwaters.

Words like "historic" and "unprecedented" are being used to describe the flooding in the Southeast.

And Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee governors all called for a State of Emergency in response to the flooding.

The situation is serious for a lot of people, but for others of us



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

it is more a matter of inconvenience — at least so far.

We are discovering where the roof needs to be patched. Traffic is a nightmare with all the rain.

It's messy getting in and out of our cars to go from place to place.

But about the time we think we can't take any more, the clouds disappear and the sun pops out.

Sure it may only last a day before the rain returns, but there's a break, a bit of relief.

What we do with the breather is up to us.

Will we smile, take a deep breath and soak in the sunshine — allowing our souls to be refreshed and our energy to be renewed?

Or will we complain that the beautiful day won't last and the rain will return soon — creating a spirit of anxiety and negativity that zaps our energy and pushes us deeper into discouragement?

Look with anticipation for those glimpses of sunshine — aka hope — and you might be surprised what you find.✝

Your Voice



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

Children on mission: Encouraging imagination

By Janet Erwin

Executive editor, The Alabama Baptist

My love for the International Mission Study, an annual focus of Woman's Missionary Union (WMU), often finds me teaching a variety of ages at my church, Shades Crest Baptist Church, Birmingham. This year I was surrounded by children in grades one through six learning about Rohingya refugees in Myanmar.

In preparation for the study, I discovered some photos online depicting refugee life for children. One of the photos showed boys who had stolen a box and turned it into a car that later was sold to help purchase food for the family.

After talking about the photos, I divided the children into two groups and distributed their "materials" — boxes, pieces of cardboard, paper, sticks, washed

plastic containers, etc. Their task was to learn what it was like to create toys out of these scraps alone — no scissors, glue or string. They quickly tackled that assignment of identifying with refugee children in this way.

At the completion of the study, some of the children asked to take their creations home, along with the remainder of the scrap materials.

I urged them to take what they wanted and to remember to pray for the refugee children as they used these leftover scraps.

Their enthusiastic response took me by surprise, yet the children validated what I had thought, read and heard about the need for children to tap into their God-given creativity rather than constantly be tethered to technology. What I witnessed that night reinforced my beliefs, and I grieved over what chil-

dren of today are missing out on.

Think about it. What did you play with before the era of technology? What did you create toys from?

My boys grew up on the missions field riding bikes, climbing trees, building a clubhouse out of a wooden shipping crate and creating their own board games when they tired of purchased games.

Neuroscientist Adele Diamond and psychologist Deborah Leong say, "The best kind of play costs nothing and really only has one main requirement — imagination."

So what are we waiting for? As parents, grandparents or teachers, we need to help our children trade cell phones and iPads for cardboard boxes, paper, paint, crayons, modeling clay, sticks, blocks — simple items that grow their imaginations.

Let's raid our recycling bin and create a play box. Let's go outside, enjoy God's creation and thank Him out loud for it. Let's devise creative activities to use with children at church to help them remember what the Bible says and relate to global missionary stories.

EDITOR'S NOTE — TAB Executive Editor Janet Erwin served as an International Mission Board missionary for 19 years. She also was editor of Woman's Missionary Union's monthly magazine, Missions Mosaic, for 12 years. She leads missions classes at her church and is a popular guest teacher.

I am preparing to teach on spiritual brokenness, a term or experience that might be a fresh concept for many. Here are three good definitions:

► The process whereby God brings us to the end of ourselves and into greater love, trust and submission toward Him. — **Rick Ferguson**

► The spiritual state by which one is disarmed of one's self-dependence and pride, therefore leaving one disabled and in desperate need of help, thereby making one a viable conduit for the glory of Christ.

— **Mike Leake**

► Agreeing with God about the true condition of our heart and life, as He sees it. It is a lifestyle of unconditional, absolute surrender of our will to the will of God — a heart attitude that says, "Yes, Lord!" to whatever God says. Brokenness means the shattering of our self-will, so that the life and Spirit of the Lord Jesus may be released through us. It is our response of humility and obedience to the conviction of the Word and the Spirit of God.

— **Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth**

Can you affirm how God may have used an experience of brokenness as defined/described above to, as my late husband Rick said, "bring you into greater love, trust and submission toward Him"? What fruit was borne in your life because of brokenness?

Kathy Ferguson Litton
Redemption Church
Saraland

Letters to the Editor

Jennifer Davis Rash's editorial "Drawing a line down the middle of your story" in the Jan. 30, 2020, issue reminds me of my own story.

I was around 33 years old when I began pastoring First Baptist Church, Columbus, Mississippi. I served at Columbus from 1974 to 1986.

Now some 33 years later, after leaving that church for another,

they are inviting me to become their interim pastor. God is so kind to me.

Joe McKeever
Jackson, Miss.

Wow! Thankful for Jennifer Davis Rash's Rashional Thoughts column.

Mary Faye and Jerry Ridley
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Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“If you want an evangelistic church, you have to live an evangelistic life.”

ED STETZER

Executive director of the Billy Graham Center for Evangelism at Wheaton College

One of the things that got Jesus into trouble is ... He spent too much time and energy identifying with persons who were not persons of power, not persons of class and responsibility.

Pastor Kelly Miller Smith Jr.
FBC Capitol Hill
Nashville, Tenn.

With every privilege comes responsibility, and the greater the privilege, the greater the responsibility.

Pastor Joe McKaig
Decatur Baptist Church

Why do bad things happen to people who love God deeply? I don't know. But Immanuel is a reminder that the greatest prize of the gospel is not that we get what we want or

that life is always OK. No, the greatest prize of the gospel is God Himself. God is with us.

Pastor Micah Fries
Excerpt from “Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?” in *LifeWay Voices*

Lessons learned from Kobe Bryant's untimely death:

1. People die. (Heb. 9:27)
2. Money can't stop it. (Matt. 19:16–30)
3. Tomorrow isn't promised. (Prov. 27:1)
4. Life is fragile. (James 4:13–15)
5. Put your trust in Jesus. (John 14:6)

Pastor Stuart Davidson
Eastern Shore Baptist Church
Daphne

You see the effects of the gospel at work when we share a meal, bump into each other at Kroger, walk side by side in a memorial march or a Christmas parade, sit with each other in worship, and plan events that are intentionally focused on the unity that is ours in Christ.

Pastor Frank Lewis
Nashville (Tenn.) FBC

Gospel above all means a greater love for the gospel mission than absolute uniformity in every non-essential. It means a charity toward each other that respects, gives the benefit of the doubt and refuses to tolerate slander.

J.D. Greear
SBC President

From the *Twitterverse*

@jdanielatkins

It's heartbreaking to see the body and bride of Christ slander one another all week on Twitter and think that [on Sunday morning] many will fully believe their worship is acceptable to God.

@bellevuepastor

When it comes to grace, everyone wants it but few are willing to give it to others. “Bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you [forgive]” (Col. 3:13, NASB).

@kristenpadilla

In a growing post-Christian, secular society, Christians increasingly will need to hold hands across the aisle if the gospel of Jesus Christ is to go forth. That's what I learned

at Beeson and it has had an indelible impact. I remember Timothy George saying we want to spread our arms as wide as possible under the tent of orthodoxy. I learned also that labels were rarely helpful and not often true. I learned that there's more that unites us in the apostolic faith as expressed in the creeds than that which divides.

@kevinbumgarner1

“God says you're released from the cares of the world to focus on Him.” — Scott Odom, Johnson Ferry Baptist Church @scottodom7

@sendrelief

It doesn't matter where we are in the world — people need the hope of the gospel. Now, @NAMB_SBC and @IMB_SBC are meeting needs and changing lives together, through Send Relief.

@joeyhanner

Social media is not the place to insult or attack others. If you have a problem go to the source. #peacemaker

@SBCExecComm

“Whatever problems we have that need to be addressed, they need to be addressed in the right way by the right people, whether that is privately or publicly. Whatever is separating us — and deterring us from the Great Commission — must and needs to be dealt with now.” — @ronniefloyd

@plattdavid

We are faced with a question when we wake up each morning: will we live according to the wisdom of the world or according to the wisdom of God? #praytheword



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

Bring on the heat, please

It may not feel like it today, but summer is coming! For most people the anticipation of summer brings thoughts of relaxing vacations at the beach, fresh tomato sandwiches on the porch or a cold watermelon by the pool.

Without a doubt, the sweet (or sweat if you prefer) season of 95 degrees and 95% humidity is on its way.

During the 10 weeks of summer, we will host more than 20,000 guests — 65% of our guests in 20% of the year. Three months from now, our campus will be overrun with young adults experiencing an environment that is atypical of their normal life.

At Shocco they separate from the constantly plugged in lifestyle and tune in to God.

Shocco's environment leads to eternal spiritual change for all those who come on to this campus. As we diligently lay out the schedule, plans and details for summer, I ask you to pray with us — right now.

Pray for current and incoming staff. Pray for our guests and their leadership. Pray that through the impact God allows us to have alongside our many partner churches and organizations, He will be glorified and souls will be eternally changed by what occurs on our campus this year.

—Russell Klinner

Not just for cyborgs

Artificial intelligence a part of daily life



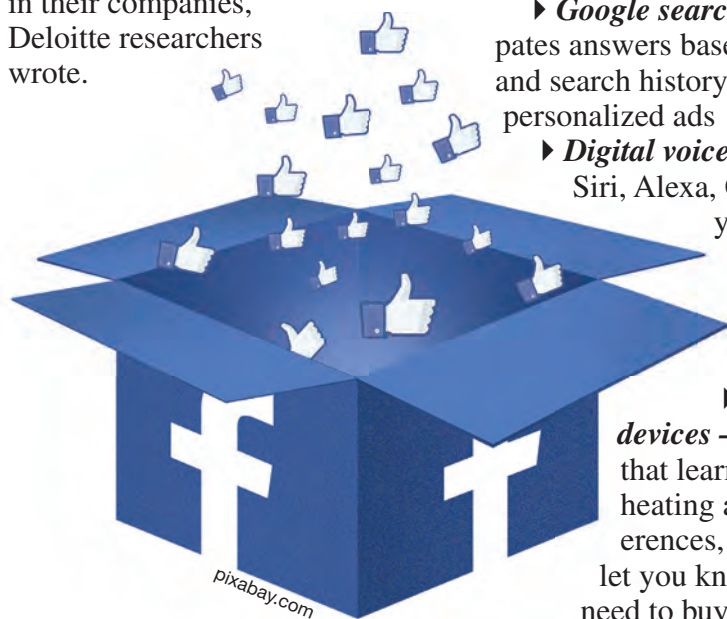
Americans may not realize it, but most are using artificial intelligence regularly

By Martha Simmons
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Artificial intelligence. To many, the phrase summons up science-fiction images of soulless, disembodied computer brains plotting to take over the world. To the more tech-savvy, artificial intelligence — or AI — is merely a technological tool to be employed in the inexorable march to the future.

If you don't really know what AI is, you're not alone. In a 2017 survey, the multinational professional network Deloitte found the great majority of American senior business executives don't have enough grasp of the topic.

"The survey began with 1,500 senior executives, but most were still gaining an understanding of the technology and were not familiar with its application in their companies. Roughly 17% (250 respondents) were familiar with both the concepts and their applications in their companies," Deloitte researchers wrote.



If executives running companies employing thousands of workers don't truly "get" what AI is and how it impacts the future of their industries, it's no wonder most regular folks consider it a rather alien concept.

Nothing alien

But nothing about artificial intelligence is alien — it is a ubiquitous, and some might say insidious, part of daily life. Here, according to *Forbes* magazine, are 10 examples of AI-driven technologies many of us employ every day:

- ▶ **Facial recognition** — Unlocks your cell phone and protects it from being used by anyone else
- ▶ **Social media** — Personalizes your newsfeed, determines which posts you see first, gears advertisements to your interests based on your "likes" and posts
- ▶ **Emails and direct messages** — Spelling and grammar checking, spam detection, anti-virus protections
- ▶ **Google searches** — Anticipates answers based on location and search history, targets you with personalized ads
- ▶ **Digital voice assistants** — Siri, Alexa, Cortana and even your TV remotes learn your voice to provide answers and accomplish tasks
- ▶ **"Smart" home devices** — Thermostats that learn your habits and heating and cooling preferences, refrigerators that let you know when you need to buy milk

▶ **Commuting** — Maps, directions, traffic and weather alerts, alternative routes and even self-driving cars

▶ **Banking** — Fraud detection, account alerts, check deposits by phone, unusual or out-of-town purchase alerts

▶ **Amazon** — The retail giant's algorithms know what you like and encourage you to buy again

▶ **Streaming services** — Hulu, Netflix and others use your past viewing history to suggest what other programs, genres and actors you might want to watch.

While modern users may employ AI as a matter of convenience, they may also find themselves unemployed as a result of artificial intelligence in the not-so-distant future, according to a 2017 study conducted by Oxford and Yale scientists.

"Researchers predict AI will outperform humans in many activities in the next 10 years, such as translating languages (by 2024), writing high school essays (by 2026), driving a truck (by 2027), working in retail (by 2031), writing a bestselling book (by 2049) and working as a surgeon (by 2053).

Outperforming humans

"Researchers believe there is a 50% chance of AI outperforming humans in all tasks in 45 years and of automating all human jobs in 120 years, with Asian respondents expecting these dates much sooner

than North Americans," according to the scientists' report. Yet for all the headlong rush into smart technologies in recent years, the idea behind them is nothing new.

Computer pioneer Alan Turing began exploring the concept of "thinking" machines 70 years ago, and the term "artificial intelligence" was coined in 1956 by Turing's contemporary, John McCarthy, who defined AI as

"the science and engineering of making intelligent machines."

More than half a century later, humans are now beginning to wonder if the machines have finally outsmarted their makers. Machines can already beat humans at all manner of computations and strategy

games like chess. They are now performing surgery and flying airplanes.

Perhaps the key is not to define "artificial intelligence," but to contemplate what makes for true human intelligence. Machines can be taught to paint in the style of Van Gogh, but mimicry isn't the same thing as creativity, engineers point out. Ethics and emotion also are key aspects of human intelligence.

"Human empathy and kindness are an important part of intelligence," writes Eliza Kosoy, a researcher in MIT's Center for Brains, Minds and Machines.

"In this domain, I doubt AI will ever outsmart us." ❧

"Researchers predict AI will outperform humans in many activities in the next 10 years."

2017 study conducted by Oxford and Yale scientists

Faith & AI

Faith leaders explore ethics, morality of growing artificial intelligence usage in US

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

Some 70 years ago, the question that kept computer pioneer Alan Turing up at night was, “Can machines think?”

Today, we still don’t know the answer to that question, though most of us are surrounded by devices that understand instructions, process commands and even anticipate our next need.

Christian ethicists wonder about the ethical implications of such technology.

“No issues keep me awake at night like those surrounding technology and artificial intelligence,” said Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC).

Artificial intelligence — or AI for short — has vast implications for humankind’s future, Moore believes.

“It is critical that the church be proactive in understanding AI,” Moore said. “It’s also critical that the church insist AI be used in ways consistent with the truth that all people possess dignity and worth, created as they are in the image of God.”

Prompted to take action

To that end, the ERLC last year released a statement signed by more than 30 leaders and experts across the fields of economics, public policy, business, technology, ethics, biblical theology and medicine.

The statement (published in full at www.tabonline.org/AI) lays out the ethical issues surrounding AI in an effort to prompt evangelical Christians to action.

Humans, not machines, are created in the image of God, the statement asserts, and technology must not be placed on equal footing with human identity, worth, dignity or morality.

“Only humanity will be judged by God on the basis of our actions and that of the tools we create,” the

statement reads. “While technology can be created with a moral use in view, it is not a moral agent. Humans alone bear the responsibility for moral decision making.”

It’s a fairly recent phenomenon that faith leaders are addressing the social and ethical challenges embodied in this rapidly advancing technology. While artificial intelligence can certainly be

used for good — such as medical advances, Bible translation, education and research, and connecting people of faith throughout the world — it also brings new opportunities for evil.

Child pornography is now available at the touch of a button. Robots are used as sexual partners. Facial recognition technology tracks Christians in anti-Christian countries in order to persecute them, such as in China, where registered churches are required to allow cameras in services to monitor congregants. Personal information is collected and used to defraud individuals, propagandize, destabilize governments, distort truth, and promote criminal, terrorist and immoral/unethical enterprises.

Even the uplifting memes circulated on Facebook may be used by foreign governments to divide and conquer U.S. citizens.

Faith leaders warn Christians not to just shrug and think that artificial intelligence is something that doesn’t personally affect them.

“AI is everywhere in our society and is often working behind the scenes,” said the ERLC’s Jason Thacker. “As Christians, we need to be prepared with a framework

to navigate the difficult ethical and moral issues surrounding AI use and development. This framework doesn’t come from corporations or government because they are not the ultimate authority on dignity issues, and the church doesn’t take its cues from culture. God has spoken to us in His word and as His followers, we are to seek to love Him and our

neighbors above all things (Matt. 22:37–39).”

Thacker has authored a new book, “The Age of AI: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity,” set for release in March, focused on applying God’s word to the issues of AI’s impact on our bodies, sexuality, work, economics and privacy.

The ERLC’s efforts are part of a growing national effort to bring ethical and moral considerations to the technological table.

Many such movements are starting in the nation’s tech centers.

Emerging debate

AI and Faith, for instance was organized two years ago “to bring the fundamental values of the world’s major religions into the emerging debate on the ethical development of artificial intelligence and related technologies.” What started as a Seattle-based consortium of organizations, individual AI professionals and ethicists, theologians and philosophers is now expanding to other parts of the U.S. and the world.

In another Silicon Valley-based effort, Seattle Pacific University formed the “AI and Faith Research Group” composed of a theologian,

ethicist, philosopher, neuroscientist educator and a computer scientist “to explore how Christian faith informs the way that we interact with the rapidly changing world of AI.” The group’s facilitator, Michael Paulus, contends a larger need exists for more theological reflection on technology.

“Everyone is thinking about recent AI developments,” he said. “AI raises so many hopes and fears about the future. Christian hope can offer a lot more than these tech hopes and fears. What we’re really hoping for in all of this is to create a better future.”

‘Hyperconnected yet lonely’

The isolation, sinful thinking and behavior wrought by modern technology is cause for alarm, California pastor John Jay Alvaro wrote in 2019.

“Our connected technologies (social media, online commerce, smart phones, cryptocurrency, transhumanism, etc.) threaten our primal, sacred bonds. We are hyper-connected and still so lonely. Our humanity is under siege by anti-human forces at work in our technologies,” Alvaro wrote.

The algorithms that drive AI, Alvaro contended, “seek efficiency and profit” at the expense of human unpredictability and freedom. “Every simple conversation on Facebook becomes a screaming match. Twitter constantly bums us out. Amazon is getting too good at reading our minds with its perfect suggestions for our endless consumption,” he said. “None of this is accidental. You are being manipulated by forces deeply embedded in our connected technologies. The goal is to keep you scared, anxious, disconnected and always hungry for more,” Alvaro said. “That way, we keep buying stuff we don’t need trying to solve a crisis deeper than we want to admit.

“It turns out being lonely is painful, and all the iPhones in the world cannot solve that crisis.” 🙏



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SBC Executive Committee addresses heavy agenda

Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee (EC) members may have anticipated wrapping up their Feb. 17–18 meeting in Nashville before lunch on the final day but they ended up eating their Chick-fil-A boxed meals from their seats in the auditorium.

The agenda filled with heavy topics resulted in longer discussions and multiple executive sessions.

Along with routine reports and recognitions, EC members voted to disfellowship a Texas church, determine their role in the current controversy over the upcoming SBC Pastors Conference and establish a plan to answer questions regarding the work of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC).

Church disfellowshipped

As recommended by the SBC Credentials Committee, the EC voted to disfellowship Ranchland Heights Baptist Church, Midland, Texas, whose senior pastor Phillip Rutledge is a registered sex offender.

Rutledge, who began pastoring the church in June 2016, was convicted in 2003 of aggravated sexual assault against two girls, ages 11 and 12, respectively.

Church officials have reportedly explained their decision as one of Rutledge being a changed man and Rutledge not allowed to be alone with children.

The church is the first disfellowshipped for sexual abuse reasons and the first since messengers to the 2019 SBC Annual Meeting in Birmingham revised the function of the Credentials Committee. The committee can now receive reports of a church's suspected departure from Southern Baptist polity, doctrine or practice and can make recommendations to the EC regarding a possible disfellowship.

Only a handful of churches have ever been disfellowshipped from the SBC including Georgia's Raleigh White Baptist Church in 2018 (racism) and California's New Heart Community Church in 2014 (homosexual behavior).

Pastors Conference

The agreement between the EC and the SBC Pastors Conference (PC) in recent years has been for the EC to cover \$100,000 for meeting hall space in the same location as the SBC annual meeting, which starts the following day.

However, the speaker and musical guest lineup announced recently by SBC PC president David Uth, pastor of First Baptist Church, Orlando, for the 2020 conference has stirred debate among Southern Baptists.

First, Orlando, offered to cover the fee prior to the EC meeting, but the EC's vote only addresses the space being allocated and normal costs covered if Uth amends the program.

The original deadline for Uth to report back to the EC was Feb. 24, but EC officers granted Uth an extension until March 30 at his request so the church can enter a period of 40 days of prayer and fasting before making the decision.

"I am not comfortable deciding something of this magnitude so quickly. Instead, I'm asking our church family to pray with me through this decision," Uth said in a statement emailed

to Baptist Press on Feb. 20.

EC chairman Mike Stone's statement included a request for others to join in praying while also noting "our commitment is firm regarding use of the convention hall for the presently proposed program."

ERLC study task force

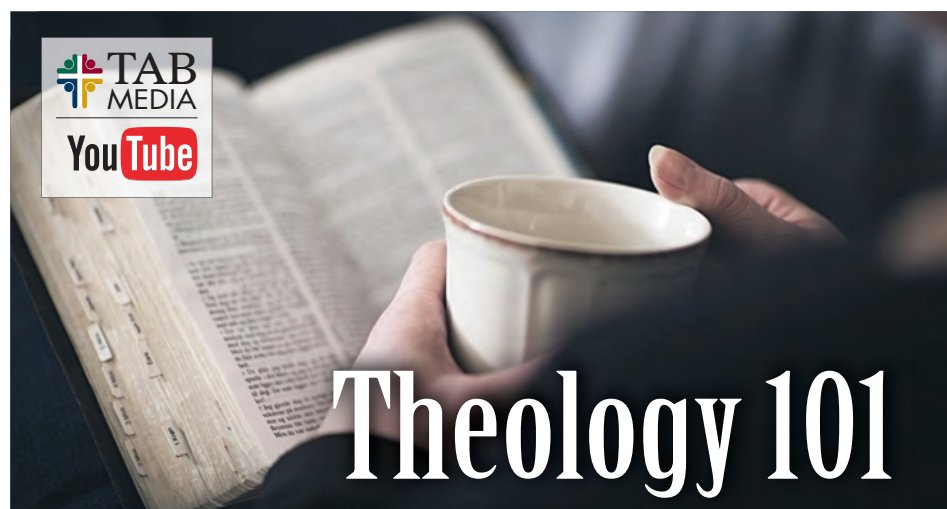
The EC also voted to create a study task force to evaluate whether the activities of the ERLC have had an impact on Cooperative Program (CP) giving. The request for an inquiry came from the SBC CP committee.

The ERLC board of trustees responded with a Feb. 20 open letter calling the task force "unwarranted, divisive and disrespectful" and instructed the entity leaders "not to comply" with the inquiry.

The task force's findings are due on or before the EC's September meeting in Nashville.

(Compiled from reporting by TAB's Jennifer Davis Rash and BP)

Find full coverage of the SBC Executive Committee meeting held Feb. 17–18 in Nashville at bpnews.net.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

What's New?

A New Song

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

Just as last week's topic about new mercies has a very personal dimension, so this week's topic about a new song comes to us in the Old Testament out of a personal testimony. That testimony of the psalmist takes three verses of Scripture for its expression. It is found in Psalm 40:1–3: "I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock and established my steps. He has put a new song in my heart — praise to our God; many shall see it and fear and will trust in the Lord."

Assuming David to be the one who testified of God's deliverance, we can understand his later promise in Psalm 144:9, "I will sing a new song to You, O God; on a harp of ten strings I will sing praises to You."

Frequent mentioning

When we think of Psalms as Israel's praise book, it is not surprising that the thought of singing should be frequently mentioned. For example, Psalm 104:33 expresses a commitment to singing as a lifelong practice, declaring, "I will sing to the Lord as long as I live." Psalm 96:1 calls for others to join in a new song, admonishing, "Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! Sing to the Lord all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless His name." Every Christian has rea-

son to sing a new song.

A future dimension to singing a new song is set forth in the vision described in Revelation 5:8–9 of four living creatures and 24 elders of whom it is said, "And they sang a new song, saying: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals; for You were slain and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.'"

Future assurance

This future assurance will mean for many that they will be able to do more perfectly what they already do beautifully and with skill. For some of us, it will mean that we will be able to do something that at the present time we cannot do very well.

All God's children will be able to join the singing of a new song. Likely, no one will be off-key nor mumbling the tune halfheartedly.

Thus, whether we look back to the distant past or forward to the future yet to unfold, we encounter this week's topic about a new song with joy.✠

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.



Working together

Birmingham and Bessemer associations partnering for expanded gospel ministry

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Barry Cosper remembers the first time someone pointed out to him that Jefferson County had five Baptist associations.

It was nearly six years ago, and the late Mike McLemore — then executive director of missions for Birmingham Baptist Association (BBA) — asked the question, “Do we really need five?”

“My immediate response was no,” said Cosper, associational mission strategist for Bessemer Baptist Association, which is one of those five.

That got the wheels turning. The two associations began to talk about whether they could do more for the Great Commission if they worked together.

And starting in September 2018, the two associations decided to dedi-

cate two years toward seeing what it would be like to work together. It’s not a merger, Cosper said — both associations are maintaining their identity and autonomy. But to reflect the partnership’s greater reach, Chris Crain — BBA’s current executive director — led BBA to begin using the name Birmingham Metro Baptist Association (BMBA) at the beginning of 2019.

‘Sharing life’

Michael Ethridge, BMBA director of operations, said the arrangement — which they’re calling a “missions partnership” — is designed to provide both associations the opportunity to determine if a permanent arrangement is needed.

As part of the partnership, Cosper has an office at BMBA and is a part of Tuesday staff meetings. He also has an office at The Baptist Church at



Photo courtesy of BMBA

Pastors from both Birmingham Metro Baptist Association and Bessemer Baptist Association churches meet together for a ministers conference.

McAdory, McCalla, so he can be in the Bessemer area during the week.

Though both associations’ finances remain separate and Bessemer Association still controls its own money, BMBA employees are now taking care of Bessemer Association’s financial administration and record keeping. That means not only are they sharing some practical cost-cutting strategies, they’re also planning shared ministries, like disaster relief, leader coaching and Vacation Bible School training.

As the two associations have worked toward a possible permanent arrangement, Ethridge, Crain and

Cosper have been meeting with Bessemer pastors and visiting Bessemer Association churches to talk about the possible change and get to know the churches, Crain said.

Addressing challenges

Ethridge said that from the beginning, they’ve been working on the partnership with the guidance of Rick Barnhart, director of the office of associational missions and church planting for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. Barnhart has been able to help the leaders identify and address challenges as they’ve moved through the process.

Their goal after getting input from church leaders and consultants during the trial period is to vote on a more permanent arrangement at the associations’ meetings in October. If the move is approved, both associations will work together to create and adopt new governing documents and policies. The current thinking is both associations will share equally in any identity give-and-take in order to form an effective model designed to meet current and future challenges.

Crain said he is aware that discussions with associational leaders are openly taking place in other parts of the state, and he believes effective partnerships could mean much for Kingdom work.

“Strategic partnerships are not for mere survival,” he said. “Partnerships that work best are for the purpose of advancing the gospel better. If we cannot make a bigger impact and do things more efficiently together, we should forget about the partnership. I believe we can and will do better together.”

Is associational partnership right for you?

Not all Baptist associations are considering formal partnerships with other associations, but some are wondering if such an arrangement could work for them.

Financial need is often a driving force behind these kinds of arrangements, but many factors must be considered, said Rick Barnhart, director of the office of associational missions and church planting for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

1. Proximity and size.

Practically, does working together make sense? For instance, if you’re considering a partnership like Birmingham and Bessemer associations (see story, this page), does distance make sharing an office helpful? Or if you’re considering merging associations with

only one lead role, is the geographical area or number of churches too big for him to maintain relationships with all the churches in a way that’s beneficial for everyone?

2. Philosophy.

Does your association’s philosophy and theological preferences match up with the association or associations you’re considering partnering with?

3. Location.

Are your churches rural and the other association’s churches in an urban area? It might still work, but you’ll want to think through whether or not it will meet everyone’s needs.

4. Timing.

Don’t plan to wait until an associational missionary retires to make this kind of change, Barnhart said. Whether a partnership or a merger,

both (or all) associational missionaries should be involved in building the strategies and involving the churches.

5. Good communication.

Once you decide to give it a try, make certain you communicate well with your churches about what’s happening. For instance, if what is happening is a missions partnership, not a merger, be sure everyone is on the same page and understands the process and expected outcome.

6. Guidance.

Consulting can help. Barnhart said his office can help you think through the benefits and challenges your specific associations might face. For more information, call him at 334-613-2220. (Grace Thornton)

Someone You Should Know

MARILYN SPURGEON

By Leigh Pritchett
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Marilyn Spurgeon firmly believes that Kingdom work continues beyond the age of 90. After 60 years of teaching and volunteering in various capacities in church — and spending many, many hours in the church’s prayer room — this Florence woman still feels the call to serve.

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

A: It started out that I got an unwanted letter from a young preacher boy in our youth group. I feel like that letter charted the course of my life from that point until now. In that letter, he pointed out what I was doing that wasn’t right for a Christian young lady and what I could do about it. I was enraged. My girlfriend and I were dating boys who would not go to church with us. After church on Sunday evening, they were waiting and we would go

MINISTRY:
Calling, sending cards to and contacting homebound individuals



CHURCH NAME:
Highland Baptist Church, Florence, in Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association

LIFE VERSE: “Fear thou not; for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” (Isa. 41:10)

with them. The preacher boy pointed out this was not a good practice for me and, certainly, what I was doing would weaken my witness for Christ.

I thought about that a lot after I was able to put my rage away. The next young man who came into my life was Charles Howard Spurgeon. He asked me for a date and I said, “I cannot go on a date with you unless you go to church.” He didn’t attend church but agreed to go. He started going to everything. We were married 64 wonderful years. And God blessed us with two wonderful daughters, Carol (deceased) and Margaret. Margaret just goes out of her way to take care of me.

Q: What has God been teaching you lately?

A: In this season of my life, I’m experiencing declining physical and mental abilities. I’m finding that I’ve had to change in the ways that I’m able to serve the Lord. This has been a very difficult adjustment for me. A while back in my quiet time, I was reading out of Psalm 92. In Psalm 92:14, it says, “They shall still bring forth fruit in old age.” I

underlined in my Bible the word “still.” It’s in God’s word, and I believe it. Through reading His word and the Holy Spirit working in my life, I find strength in that verse. God not only gave me that verse, but He has given me a way to do it. As John 15:5 says, if I abide in Him, He will abide in me, and I will have the guidance and strength to bring forth fruit. 🌿

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

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



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Please note that the deadline to request these is May 15!





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What is Amendment No. 1?

Proposed amendment would change state school board, K-12 standards

By **Carrie Brown McWhorter**
The Alabama Baptist

A proposed state-wide amendment on the March 3 primary ballot would change the way Alabama's K-12 schools are led at the state level, but "common core" language omitted from the ballot summary has many in the state concerned.

Changes to structure

Appearing on Alabama ballots as Proposed State-wide Amendment Number One, the amendment proposes several changes to the structure of the state board of education. If the amendment passes, state board of education members will no longer be elected and the state school board will be abolished. Instead, nine representatives will be appointed by the governor to

a renamed "Alabama Commission on Elementary and Secondary Education."

The state superintendent of education would become the secretary of the commission and would be appointed by the commission. The state senate would approve all appointments to these new positions.

But if voters say yes to the amendment, this newly formed commission also would be tasked with adopting "course of study standards that ensure nationwide consistency and the seamless transfer of students from within and outside of the state, in lieu of common core."

Common core

This language about standards and common core is not included on the ballot, but it's what some groups

are most worried about in the proposed amendment.

"What we have learned about this amendment is of great concern," said Joe Godfrey, executive director of Alabama Citizens Action Program (ALCAP). "The wording of Amendment No. 1 appears to be deceptive. The bill indicates that support for this amendment will do away with 'common core,' but those words are not capitalized. The reality is that the amendment will constitutionally lock Alabama schools into following the 'national standards,' which are 'Common Core' standards."

Godfrey said the appointment of school board members is also a concern because the people of Alabama are being asked to give up their right to elect state school board members and instead "give politicians the responsibility" of selecting those members.

"This can be good as long as the politicians in charge are of high character, but if someone is elected who does not share the values of Alabama citizens, it could have a devastating impact," Godfrey said.

The state school board is tasked with adopting learning standards for elementary and secondary students (grades K-12), approving textbooks local schools can use, approving teacher preparation programs at the state's colleges and universities and approving changes to certification programs.

Develop programs

The language of the proposed amendment also calls for the commission to develop "comprehensive" programs for educator certification, professional development, assessment and accountability.

Currently the state school board consists of eight

members elected by voters in their districts, plus the governor, who serves as ex officio president of the board.

Alabama is one of only six states in the U.S. that elects state school board members, according to the website Ballotpedia. In a majority of states (26 states out of 50), members of the state board of education are appointed by the governor and approved by a legislative body.

The Alabama Association of School Boards and the Alabama Policy Institute both issued statements in May 2019 supporting the amendment.

Several education groups in the state are not taking a position on the amendment, including the Alabama Education Association and the School Superintendents of Alabama.

To read more about Alabama's Proposed Amendment No. 1, including several comments on the bill, go to www.tabonline.org/A1.

To read more, visit www.tabonline.org/A1.



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Plain language summary of ballot measure

A amendment 1 does three things.

First, it renames the State Board of Education the "Alabama Commission on Elementary and Secondary Education" and provides that commission members are appointed for up to two terms by the

Governor and approved by the Senate rather than elected by the public.

Second, it changes the title of the top public education official in the state and provides that this official's appointment would be approved by the Senate.

Third, it requires the Com-

mission to adopt education standards in place of "common core."

EDITOR'S NOTE — *The plain language summary of the statewide ballot measure can be found at www.sos.alabama.gov/alabama-votes/voter/ballot-measures/statewide.*

3 stories you should know



WSFA 12 News photo

As rain kept drenching Alabama and the southeastern U.S., Gov. Kay Ivey declared a State of Emergency on Feb. 18 to aid in recovery from recent flooding. Communities across the state have been affected by the continued rains. In the west, the Welcome to Demopolis sign was more than halfway underwater at press time because of flooding on the Tombigbee River, and to the east, families in Etowah County were leaving their homes in search of higher ground. (TAB)

Graham says UK events will go on as scheduled

Franklin Graham said he is seeking alternative venues for a United Kingdom tour this year after all eight venues reneged on plans to host the evangelist, saying his views on homosexuality are incompatible with the values of the British people.

The venues cancelled Graham's scheduled appearances in June, which is Pride Month in the United Kingdom.

Graham said he does not preach against homosexuality but only calls it out as sin. He called the cancelled contracts an attack on religious freedom and freedom of speech.

Graham said he has the support of many church leaders in England.

According to Graham's website, all training courses scheduled with the larger events will take place as originally planned. (RNS, TAB)

Girl, 14, in Pakistan forced to marry, convert

A high court in Pakistan has validated the marriage and forced conversion to Islam of a 14-year-old Christian girl, heightening fears that it will encourage others to commit such crimes, sources said.

Huma Younus was taken from her home on Oct. 10 while her parents were away and was forced to marry the man who abducted her, her attorney said. The family challenged Huma's marriage and forced conversion under the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2013, which declares marrying a person under 18 years old an offense punishable by up to three years in prison. Sources said the law is poorly implemented.

The attorney said the hearing before the High Court in Sindh Province on Feb. 3 lasted only five minutes. Another hearing is scheduled for March 4. (MS)

— NEWSBRIEFS —

'Conservative' network for Baptists launched to discuss focus of SBC

Organizers say thousands of Baptists have joined a new group that seeks to address questions about race, social justice and gender issues in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).

The Conservative Baptist Network launched Feb. 14 with a website and press release. Brad Jurkovich, pastor of First Baptist Church, Bossier City, Louisiana, and spokesperson for the group, told podcast host Janet Mefferd on Feb. 18 that more than 3,000 people had joined the network during the weekend following its launch.

Jurkovich said supporters of the Conservative Baptist Network want the Southern Baptist Convention to be "healthy and strong," but they are concerned the denomination is "starting to go down a road many are not comfortable with."



Conservativebaptistnetwork.com

In its press release, the network said "a significant number of Southern Baptists are concerned about the apparent emphasis on social justice, critical race theory, intersectionality and the redefining of biblical gender roles."

Another issue on the minds of pastors is patriotism, Jurkovich said: "As Southern Baptists can we not love both Jesus and America? Is it no longer okay to be a pastor and a patriot?"

The network will help pastors and churches "navigate the waters" of patriotism, religious liberty and freedom of conscience, he told Mefferd.

Jurkovich is the only person publicly identified as part of the group's leadership, though the website features videos of support by Chuck Kelley, president emeritus of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and several leaders of Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary in Cordova, Tennessee.

The network announced a formal launch event June 8, the evening before the opening session of the 2020 SBC Annual Meeting in Orlando. Between now and June, the network will offer resources, he said, such as articles to help churches. (TAB)

Retired Pickens Association DOM dies on Valentine's Day at 83

Gary Farley, retired director of missions for Pickens Baptist Association, died Feb. 14. He was 83.

Farley first came to Pickens Association in 1997, and during his two decades of service there, he made an impact in a variety of ways. He nurtured greater cooperation between white and African-American churches, started a thriving ministry in the new federal women's prison in Aliceville and helped churches rebuild after a rash of church arsons in 2006.

Farley also served as a commissioner on the board for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. He was a specialist in the sociology of rural and small churches and wrote hundreds of articles and book chapters addressing topics from Baptist theology to help for bivocational pastors. He retired from Pickens Association in 2017 but continued to be involved in ministry.



FARLEY

News near you

AUTAUGA ASSOCIATION

► **First Baptist Church, Prattville**, will host the Royal Ambassadors Race-off on March 13. Practice will be held from 5 to 6 p.m. with registration from 6 to 6:45 p.m. The race will begin at 7 p.m. and a pizza dinner will be served. Peyton Hill is pastor of First, Prattville, and Mel Johnson is the Autauga Association missions strategist.

CALHOUN ASSOCIATION

► **Calhoun Baptist Association** will host Vacation Bible School Training on March 17 at 6 p.m. at Hill Crest Baptist Church, Anniston. Supper will be provided. Mike Johnson will be the guest speaker. Training will cover both LifeWay's Concrete and Cranes theme and the Rocky Railway theme. RSVP by calling 256-237-5171. Roger Willmore is director of missions for Calhoun Association, and Stephen Anthony is pastor of Hill Crest Baptist.

CHILTON ASSOCIATION

► **Chilton Baptist Association** will host a Vacation Bible School clinic March 5 at 7 p.m. at Collins Chapel Baptist Church, Jemison. The clinic will focus on the Concrete

and Cranes theme. Classes will be offered for preschool through sixth grade classes along with missions, music and snacks. Tyler Eiland is director of missions for Chilton Association, and William Kee is pastor of Collins Chapel Baptist.

CLEBURNE ASSOCIATION

► **Macedonia Baptist Church, Ranburne**, will host the Church Safety and Security Conference on March 10 from 6 to 8 p.m. Mark Wakefield, disaster relief and chaplaincy ministries strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, will be the speaker. Larry Vinson is associational missionary for Cleburne Association, and Morgan Bailey is pastor of Macedonia Baptist.

COVINGTON ASSOCIATION

► **Victory Baptist Church, Andalusia**, will host a homecoming celebration March 1 at 10:30 a.m. Eugene Meadows will be guest speaker, and Judd Holderfield will lead music. A covered dish meal will be served at noon in the fellowship hall. The meats for lunch will be provided by the church. The church is asking that those attending bring side dishes, but bringing a dish is not required.

MADISON ASSOCIATION

► **Madison Baptist Association** will host a children's missions expedition for children first through sixth grade on March 7 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Pleasant Springs Baptist Church, Huntsville. Lunch will be provided, but participants must register by Feb. 28 at 256-797-1524. The event's missions project is collecting hats, gloves and scarves for Christmas backpacks and

Operation Christmas Child, or children's underwear and socks for the Romania missions trip. Charlie Howell is executive director of missions of Madison Association, and Pat Helton is pastor of Pleasant Springs Baptist.

MARSHALL ASSOCIATION

► **Marshall Baptist Association** will host the Jump Start Vacation Bible School (VBS) clinic March 10 from 6 to 8 p.m. The clinic is open to all VBS directors. The clinic will be held at the Marshall Association office, and a light dinner will be served. Call 256-582-2882 to RSVP. Randall Stoner is director of missions.

MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION

► **Montgomery Baptist Association** will host Concrete and Cranes Vacation Bible School training at Heritage Baptist Church, Montgomery, on March 3 from 6 to 8 p.m. Email ewilkinson@mgmbaptists.org by March 2 to register. Neal Hughes is director of missions of Montgomery Association, and Teman Knight is pastor of Heritage Baptist.

SELMA ASSOCIATION

► **Valley Grande Baptist Church** will host a revival March 1-4. Services begin Sunday at 9 a.m. and will continue nightly at 6 p.m. Kevin Blackwell, executive director of the Ministry Training Institute at Samford University, will be the guest speaker with special music each night. Clarke Skelton is pastor. 



BLACKWELL

— NEWSBRIEFS —

Farley is survived by his wife of 58 years, Jacque; four children, five grandchildren; and one great-grandchild. (Grace Thornton)

Gunmen kill 24, injure 18 people near Burkina Faso church in Africa



Gunmen in Burkina Faso killed 24 people, injured 18 others, kidnapped another 3 and looted local shops near a Protestant church on Sunday, Feb. 16.

A pastor was among those reportedly killed in the attack.

Officials stated that approximately 20 attackers separated men and women near a Protestant church in Pansi before killing Christians and Muslims and setting fire to the church building. Human rights advocates are concerned that attacks against civilians, including Christians, in the West African nation are increasing "at an alarming rate," said Corinne Dufka, West Africa's director for Human Rights Watch.

In the week prior to the latest attack, also in Yagha province, a retired pastor was killed and another pastor was abducted by gunmen, according to an internal security report for aid

workers seen by The Associated Press.

Burkina Faso is ranked No. 28 in Open Doors' World Watch List 2020 of the world's most dangerous places to be a Christian. That ranking is a rise of 33 spots from 2019. Christians in Burkina Faso say they are in a fight for survival, according to Open Doors. (AP)

Montgomery evangelist marks 50 years in gospel ministry

Terry Veazey said he was a shy teenager and a "weak" vessel for God to use. And when he gave his life to God's ministry at a youth camp, he never dreamed that 50 years later, he would've gotten to preach the gospel to roughly 30 million people. And that doesn't include the people reached by his radio ministry.

"It's been an exciting time," he said of his work as an evangelist and revivalist. A member of Eastern Hills Baptist Church, Montgomery, Veazey has preached in approximately 75 countries on four continents. The first half of his ministry was more "addition" — evangelism, crusades and school assemblies. The second

half has been one of "multiplication," he said — training church leaders in other countries to go make disciples.

"To think that God could take a shy, introverted person like me and use me to reach so many people is nothing but a work of God," he said.

Veazey said he can see how God prepared him for this role as he looks back across his life. He grew up in a military family and traveled all over Europe, moving 13 times before he graduated from high school.



VEAZEY

"Moving like that and going to new places was good preparation for being an itinerant evangelist," he said.

He and his wife, Georgia, also lost their 4-year-old son more than 30 years ago in a drowning accident.

"God used that," Veazey said. "It's given me a better ability to understand hurting people, and in the Third World countries where I've preached, many people have lost at least one child."

For more information about Terry Veazey Ministries, visit terryveazey.com. (Grace Thornton)

Freedom Church in Phoenix just one example of AAEO gospel fruits

(continued from page 1)

The national goal for this year's offering — which carries the theme "It's All About the Gospel" — is \$70 million. Alabama's goal is \$6.25 million.

This season of giving begins with the Week of Prayer for North American Missions, set this year for March 1–8. The week will highlight stories of missionaries who, like Parker, are supported by the AAEO:

▶ Dave and Mary Elliff say it's like starting from scratch — they often meet people in Seattle who have never heard of Jesus. But they're seeing God at work in their neighborhood, where a lot of people embrace mystic beliefs.

▶ Five years ago, only two Hispanic Canadian Baptist churches existed in the entire province of Ontario, Canada, where J.D. and Andreina Faso-lino serve. They're now seeing God reach the province's Hispanic population through a new church plant.

Sharing hope

▶ Kirk Kirkland served as an associate pastor for seven years but couldn't shake the burden to plant an inner-city church. Now he and his wife, Karen, serve among the people of Cincinnati, Ohio, sharing hope with the broken.

▶ Jonathan Santiago says he wishes people could see what he sees. The media has long forgotten Puerto Rico's 2017 hurricane, but the devastation is still real. He and



Photo courtesy of Chris Parker

Children play giant Jenga at Freedom Church's launch day Jan. 26. The celebration also had other games like cornhole as well as a food truck provided by NAMB.

his wife, Yesenia, are working every day to help the people there find help and hope.

▶ Pittsburgh has been experiencing a renaissance

missions development program that enables college-age students to serve in a NAMB Send City for six to eight weeks.

"Our Send Cities are 32 of the highest populated areas with the greatest need for the gospel," said Jeremy Aylett, NAMB's Send City Missionary in San Diego. "Millions of people, for example, live here in San Diego, and the reach of this city extends around the world."

'It changes you'

Parker is one church planter who has experienced the benefits of GenSend. Two of his former students from Alabama spent time in Phoenix last summer helping him with outreach ahead of the launch of Freedom Church, and he said it helped the church's ministry and gave the students a deep missions experience.

"It's those kinds of experiences when you go, it changes you — you don't have the choice to ever be the same again," he

said. "They're (now) really wrestling with God's call on their life and whether or not Phoenix is a part of that."✝

It's all about the gospel

Week of Prayer for North American Missions: March 1–8, 2020

Alabama goal: \$6.25 million
National goal: \$70 million

North American Mission Board

ANNIE ARMSTRONG
EASTER OFFERING
FOR NORTH AMERICAN MISSIONS

as technological and medical companies are beginning to thrive. Rob and Annabeth Wilton want to help make spiritual renewal a part of that change.

▶ Mojic Baldandorj immigrated

to the U.S. specifically to revive Maranatha Mongolian Church in Denver and reach out to the large community of Mongolian immigrants living there.

He and his wife, Munkho, have joyfully watched many come to Christ in the past two years.

▶ Students learn how to live life on mission and support church plants across North America through GenSend, NAMB's

For Annie Armstrong Easter Offering information and resources for your church, visit anniearmstrong.com.

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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.

BIVOCATIONAL YOUTH PASTOR

New Beginnings Baptist, Graysville, Alabama, searching for a bivocational youth pastor. Please send resumé to: nbccbaptist@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL YOUTH DIRECTOR

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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. To update your email address contact subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org.

Break every chain

Former inmate returns as prison chaplain, brings message of hope, forgiveness

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Frank Gossett started drinking when he was 8. He was doing drugs by 11. And every day, his father told him he would never amount to anything.

“I grew up in the Birmingham area with a dad who was an alcoholic,” Gossett said. “He told me all the time that I was worthless.”

Gossett was on a fast track to prison, and that’s exactly where he ended up. In fact, it’s where he’s still supposed to be.

But these days he walks through the halls of the prison jingling the keys to the doors that once locked him up.

“I like to say that jingling is me putting the devil on notice that he doesn’t have a hold on me anymore,” said Gossett, who now carries out prison ministry in the very place he served time.

The first time he arrived as an inmate was not long after his wife committed suicide at 28, and he tried to take his own life with drug overdoses, blaming himself for her death.

“At the time, I was selling drugs but had gotten on crack cocaine really bad. When I went to prison the first time, it was for theft of property to support my drug habit,” he said, a habit that at the time cost him \$200 to \$300 a day.

Gossett didn’t stay long on his first conviction, but the second one got him 25 years.

“When I was arrested and booked into the county jail, I weighed 118 pounds,” he said. “I was doing so many drugs at the time.”

He was spiraling, but someone found him at the bottom, he said — a fellow inmate who told him about Jesus.

“He was doing two life sentences for the same charges as me — theft of property,” Gossett said. “He led me to Jesus, and I gave my life to the Lord.”

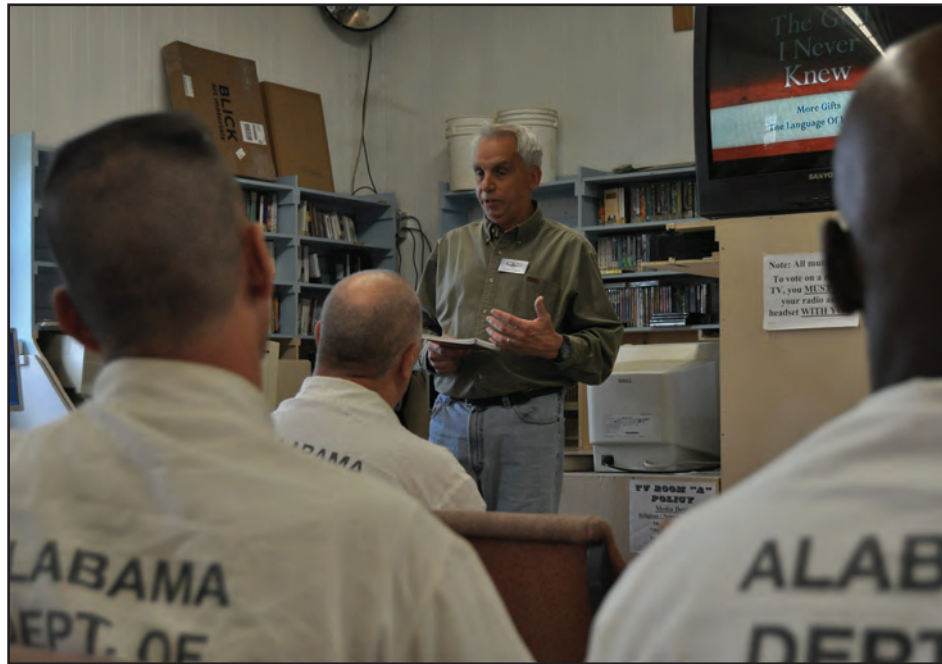


Photo courtesy of Frank Gossett

After being redeemed from a life of addiction and incarceration, Frank Gossett launched Breaking Every Chain, his personal ministry, and became a chaplain with the We Care Program, a prison ministry headquartered in Atmore.

Feb. 5 marked 12 years since that day — and 12 years clean and sober.

“God took my addiction away that day,” he said.

Gossett got involved in seminary classes offered at the prison and learned to study the Bible. He started preaching anywhere they would let him — in the yard, in the chapel, anywhere.

“What’s amazing about that is I quit school when I was younger because I didn’t like getting up in front of people and speaking,” he said.

From there, God worked more miracles, Gossett said. The prison staff put him up for an early release program he didn’t think he qualified for. He got out after serving just shy of five years, then graduated from a halfway house ministry in Atmore.

Overcoming the past

He became involved in church, and a connection he made there offered to help with starting his paperwork to ask for an official pardon. But the person helping him found something out — remaining indict-

ments against him that he didn’t know about.

“I had an outstanding felony and misdemeanor indictment,” he said. “That would’ve put me in prison for the rest of my life.”

So he did all he knew to do — he collected letters of recommendation and gave them to the prosecuting attorney, and as she read his letters, she said, “I’m a Christian too, and I’d like to help you if I can.” She spoke to the first judge, and he gave Gossett fines and restitution.

As they waited for the other presiding judge to arrive, the two talked about Jesus at her invitation. In the end, the second judge also sentenced Gossett to fines and restitution — a total of around \$18,000.

That was Aug. 7, 2011. Exactly two years later, he got a full pardon in Montgomery, which gave him all his rights back. And in the time in between, God sent person after person

his way who felt impressed to help him financially as he struggled to pay his debt while working part-time at a grocery store. He paid his restitution in three months, and he began raising funds to become a chaplain with the We Care Program, a prison ministry headquartered in Atmore.

He calls his personal ministry Breaking Every Chain.

“It surprises me every day to see the things God has done and the things He continues to do,” Gossett said. “The greatest things that have happened in my life were things I wasn’t really pursuing or asking God for.”

That includes his wife, Kathryn, whom he married in 2013 after the two met doing ministry in church. While serving as an assistant chaplain at Bullock Correctional Facility, he saw around a dozen men baptized every week. He recently participated in We Care’s annual prison revival, Renew Hope, at two prisons in Florida and 31 men gave their life to Jesus.

Gene Bridgman — director of missions for Bullock Baptist Association and pastor of Eastside Baptist Church, where Gossett and his wife attend — said Gossett’s faith is genuine and God is using him greatly.

Making a difference

“He and his wife, Kathryn, their faith is real, and their commitment to other people is real,” said Bridgman, noting that Gossett often fills in for him in the pulpit. “It’s made a difference in our church; it’s made a difference in people’s lives, and I think it’s going to make a difference in our area.”

Bridgman said he’s been impressed by the way Gossett wanted to go back into the prisons as a chaplain immediately after being released.

But Gossett said he just can’t help but want to take hope to the place where he once needed it most.

“I had a guy tell me one night, ‘I’ve got to tell you that when I see you with the keys to the locks that once contained you, it gives me hope,’” he said. “That’s why my ministry

is called Breaking Every Chain. You can’t get so far down that God can’t pick you up.”

For more information, visit facebook.com/breakingeverychainministry. If you would like Gossett to speak to your congregation, call him at 251-348-3890.✝

“The greatest things that have happened in my life were things I wasn’t really pursuing or asking God for.”

**Frank Gossett
Breaking Every Chain**

For more information, visit www.facebook.com/breakingeverychainministry.

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WEEK OF PRAYER FOR NORTH AMERICAN MISSIONS and Annie Armstrong Easter Offering

March 1-8

(or choose any time that works best for you during the Easter season)

alsbom.org/annie

In addition to the prayer guide provided by the North American Mission Board, here are some missionaries and church planters from Alabama who are serving across our state and nation. Please take a moment and lift each one of these up in prayer!



Sunday

Jesse and Stefani Powell
Church Planting Catalysts
Phoenix



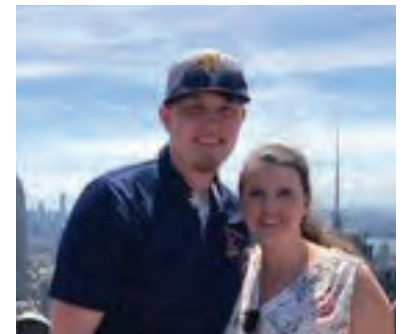
Monday

Morris and Barbara Hill
Church Planters
Montana



Tuesday

Jordan and Hannah Rowe
Northern Lights Missions
Tok, Alaska



Wednesday

Wes and Ashley Costello
Church Planters
New York City



Thursday

Jamie and Rachael Reynolds
Missions and Ministry
Catalysts
Three Forks Baptist Association
Hazard, Kentucky



Friday

Steven and Amy Castello
Church Planters
Boston



Saturday

Diane Smith
Mission Service Corps
Missionary
Calhoun Baptist Association
Anniston, Alabama



Sunday

**Alabama's more than
80 church planters
serving across our state**



It's all about the **gospel**



To request a prayer guide to help you pray for our Alabama Baptist church planters, contact Lynn Graham, lgraham@alsbom.org, (334) 613-2244. For more information about missionaries from Alabama serving around the world, please visit a18c.org.

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

IMB, NAMB partnering together under Send Relief umbrella

The International Mission Board (IMB) and North American Mission Board (NAMB) are forming a partnership under the Send Relief umbrella.

“This will be an easier way for Southern Baptists to do what Southern Baptists do — love the hurting, help the hurting and share the gospel,” said IMB President Paul Chitwood, who signed the partnership agreement a few hours prior to the Feb. 18 announcement.

The work previously done by Baptist Global Response also will be part of the new Send Relief effort.

SBDR relationship

While associational level and state convention level disaster relief efforts — branded as Southern Baptist Disaster Relief (sldr.org) — have had a somewhat strained relationship with Send Relief’s disaster response efforts, Chitwood and Ezell said they consider SBDR as partners. Chit-

wood said SBDR will be included in the partnership through grants and seats on the Send Relief advisory committee.

“Southern Baptists are generous people ... but our systems can be very complex and hard to engage,” he said.

NAMB President Kevin Ezell added, “One name, but they (IMB) do what they do and we (NAMB) do what we do while branded under one name.

“We are extremely excited — one mission, one focus, one website, sendrelief.org.”

With the new partnership also comes a public relations and fundraising role (president) to serve as the face of Send Relief.

The Send Relief president

will be announced March 2 and will report directly to Chitwood and Ezell. Two vice presidents will serve under the Send Relief presi-

dent, one representing the national work and one representing the global work.

Picture the structure like a bow tie, Ezell said. “The Send Relief president is the knot while Paul is at the top of one corner and I’m

at the top of the other corner, and the vice presidents are at the bottom corners under their specific areas.”

Funding for the position will be split 50–50 between IMB and NAMB.

“The ultimate purpose is simplicity,” Ezell added. “We want every SBC church to do compassion ministry locally, nationally and internationally.” (Jennifer Rash)

“We are extremely excited — one mission, one focus, one website, sendrelief.org.”

**Kevin Ezell
President, North American Mission Board**

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Christian Crossword

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Across

- Among all nations, for His _____. (Rom. 1:5)
- Concerning His ____ Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 1:3)
- _____ a servant of Jesus Christ. (Rom. 1:1)
- Is become like the garden of _____. (Ezek. 36:35)
- _____ deep sleep fell upon Abram; and _____, an horror. (Gen. 15:12)
- Son of Helem. (1 Chron. 7:35)
- The woman which hath _____ husband is bound. (Rom. 7:2)
- For I _____ in the law of God. (Rom. 7:22)
- And be not conformed _____ this world. (Rom. 12:2)
- So they _____ both together. (John 20:4)
- Favorite name for a dog. Disk operating system. (abbr.)
- For Christ _____ the end of the law. (Rom. 10:4)
- And when he _____ with us at Assos. (Acts 20:14)
- Who also were in Christ before _____. (Rom. 16:7)
- They _____ fools. (Rom. 1:22)
- I know both how to be

_____ (Phil. 4:12)

- And when king _____ and Israel vowed _____ vow. (Num. 12:1, 2)
- Drive out the inhabitants of _____. (Judg. 1:31)
- Two _____ shall there be in one board. (Ex. 26:17)
- _____ if _____ be found _____ his hand. (Ex. 21:16)
- Who are _____ note among the apostles. (Rom. 16:7)
- To point carefully.
- Wert grafted _____ among them. (Rom. 11:17)
- The night is _____ spent. (Rom. 13:12)
- By a foolish nation I will _____ you. (Rom. 10:19)
- For a voice declareth from _____. (Jer. 4:15)
- So, as much _____ in me. (Rom. 1:15)
- I have _____ my cause. (Job 13:18)
- Do, re, mi, fa, so, _____, ti, do.
- He received the _____ of circumcision. (Rom. 4:11)
- Put _____ stumbling block or _____ occasion. (Rom. 14:13)
- And _____ and Tekoa. (2 Chron. 11:6)
- Neither could any man _____ him. (Mark 5:4)
- Then said _____, _____, I

come. (Ps. 40:7)

- The rings and _____ jewels. (Isa. 3:21)
- Let us draw _____ with a true heart. (Heb. 10:22)
- _____, and Chelal, Benaiah. (Ezra 10:30)
- But sin that dwelleth in _____ (Rom. 7:17)
- And the _____ everlasting life. (Rom. 6:22)
- And _____, had bought sweet spices. (Mark 16:1)
- Being a wild _____ tree. (Rom. 11:17)
- Make _____ friendship ... and _____ snare to thy soul. (Prov. 22:24, 25)
- Out of the _____ wherein is no water. (Zech. 9:11)
- I _____ a debtor. (Rom. 1:14)
- Sing _____ Thy name. (Rom. 15:9)
- Country in Southeast Asia.
- Sons of Judah. (Num. 26:19)
- _____. Haldeman, Nixon aide.
- Prochorus, and _____, and Timon. (Acts 6:5)
- Who shall _____ into the deep? (Rom. 10:7)
- Why is thy countenance _____ ... but sorrow _____

heart. (Neh. 2:2)

- Geuel the son of _____. (Num 13:15)
- And the lapwing, and the _____. (Deut. 14:18)
- Sir, come down _____ my child die. (John 4:49)
- And thinkest thou this, O _____. (Rom. 2:3)
- I will break also the _____ of Damascus. (Amos 1:5)
- Naaman, _____, and Rosh (Gen. 46:21)
- Nickname for Donald.
- Above the _____ of the seas ... young men _____ spoiler at noonday: _____ have. (Jer. 15:8)
- Mete it with an _____ ... had _____ lack. (Ex. 16:18)
- Hattush, and _____, and Bariah. (1 Chron. 3:22)
- Stand _____ therefore in the liberty. (Gal. 5:1)
- The churches of _____ salute you. (1 Cor. 16:19)
- Thou art to pass over through _____. (Deut. 2:18)
- Do, _____, Mi.
- Whosoever shall call on the _____ of the Lord. (Rom. 10:13)
- So we, being many, are _____ body. (Rom. 12:5)
- Into the _____ of lions. (Dan. 6:7)
- General Motors. (abbr.)
- No man dieth _____ himself. (Rom. 14:7)

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For March 1

Explore the Bible

By Robert E. Jackson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



COMPELLED Romans 1:1-7, 13-17

The Gospel Described (1-7)

Paul is compelled to write this letter to a church he didn't know personally. Nevertheless, he desires to influence, encourage and strengthen this strategic church located in the greatest city and empire of his day.

As a servant of Jesus Christ, Paul isn't called and set apart for fame, power, money or recognition. Instead, God chose him by grace to make known the gospel to Jews and Gentiles. The Greek word for gospel (euangelion) shows an excitement over the announcement of this good news.

The power of the gospel is not found in human lineage but in the Spirit who confirms Jesus' deity and raised Him from the dead.

A central component of the gospel is the cross, which was an instrument of shame, torture and death. The gospel demands that people who follow Christ must take up their cross and follow Jesus. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was right when he said, "When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die."

These words seem incomprehensible to most of us in American Christianity. Our self-focus and materialism leave us uncomfortable with the thought of denying ourselves of anything.

Paul not only embraced this gospel but also was elated to proclaim God's grace to all in Rome.

The Gospel Debt (13-15)

Because the power of the gospel changes lives and nations, Paul longs to go to Rome. Jesus set Paul apart to preach to all types of people, and Rome is the perfect melting pot to share the gospel.

Interestingly, various languages of the world sounded like "barbar" to the "educated" Greeks. Therefore, the people who spoke these different languages were called Barbarians.

Paul writes with intensity that he is obligated to share the gospel with everyone; he has been entrusted with this good news and would be a poor steward if he did

not preach Christ. Paul's realization of grace and the truthfulness of the gospel provided an inner compulsion to share Jesus Christ. Paul owes a great debt to his Savior and Lord; therefore, his work was never done.

Until his dying day, Paul was fighting the good fight and running the race.

While it is difficult for me to imagine how Paul could live with such a burden, perhaps it is harder for me to grasp why so many professing believers live complacently without any sense of obligation to share Jesus. We, too, have a great gospel debt.

The Gospel Declared (16-17)

Far too often, we desire to be the greatest rather than the least of these. We can be ashamed of the command to come, serve and die.

Not Paul. He willingly gave his all to follow Christ. He was not ashamed of the gospel that involves a cross, suffering and death.

Why should he be when he realized this gospel was the power of God for salvation to anyone who believes, beginning with the Jews. The power of the gospel transforms death into life.

What the law could not do, the gospel does. Sinners, who cannot be made righteous by works, can discover the power unto salvation and experience the righteousness of God. Verse 17 is a key verse in our understanding of justification by faith alone.

Righteousness begins with faith and ends with faith. To be justified is not to be "made" righteous, but to be "declared" righteous.

In sum, the gospel unleashes the power to change people who accept it by faith. God declares people who respond to this good news as innocent before Him. Praise the Lord! The transforming power of the gospel changes lives.

The beauty of the gospel compels believers to spend their lives sharing this good news with others.

When is the last time you have shared this gospel with someone who needs to hear it? 🌈

Bible Studies for Life

By James Riley Strange, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of New Testament, Samford University



HOLY Isaiah 40:25-31

Today we begin a series of six lessons on words and phrases commonly used by Christians. We will examine how some biblical authors use these words and allow what we learn to shape how we use them.

Today's word is "holy," which some Christians use to refer to objects or people with an almost magical quality. The term, however, has a straightforward meaning: something set aside for a special use.

Hence, God can make people or objects holy, but so can people. For example, food that people set aside for use in the temple is "holy" (Lev. 27:30), to be consumed only by priests in their service to God. Similarly, a holy person is someone whom God has selected for a task.

Sometimes the word "holy" (Hebrew kodesh) is used of God, in which cases our translators often render it "Holy One," as in today's passage. In these instances, "holy" refers to God's incomparability: God is completely unique. He is distinct in every way from all other beings.

In their original context, the opening verses of Isaiah 40 were spoken to the exiles of Judah in Babylon. The setting is in the 6th century BC, perhaps between 545 and 539, the year King Cyrus of Persia defeated the Babylonian Empire.

In verses 1 and 2, the imperatives are plural as God tells the council of angels to announce comfort to the exiles. They have served the term of their punishment, and it is time for their restoration. The theme of God's incomparability starts in verse 12, where God Himself speaks.

God is without equal as our Creator. (25-26)

In these verses, Isaiah is speaking. Compare verse 25 to verse 18 (remember, the words "you" are plural). The expected answer to the rhetorical question is, of course, "No one": none can be

compared to God; none is equal to the Holy One. Verse 26 asks the exiles to lift up their eyes to contemplate the stars (remember Gen. 15:5), which in some ancient cultures were gods. In some religious beliefs, these gods existed before the Creator God was born. God reminds the exiles that it is He who created the stars, which are not gods but luminaries in the sky. He calls them by name; each one exists because He brought it into being (Gen. 1:14-19).

God is without equal in His knowledge. (27-28)

By the time King Cyrus allowed the exiles ("Jacob" and "Israel") to restore Jerusalem and the temple, two generations had passed. Infants who were born in 586, the year the exile began, were now grandparents.

Some exiles must have thought they were hidden from God, that is, God must have either forgotten about them or God knew about them but simply disregarded them. The Holy One reminded them that although they might "faint and grow weary," the One who created the ends of the earth never would. The everlasting God knew them; God understood their plight.

God is without equal as our Sustainer. (29-31)

No mortal is immune from exhaustion, not even the young and physically fit. Isaiah uses the metaphors of flying, running and walking to remind the exiles that they have put their trust in a God whose strength never fails. It is He who renews their strength.

So it is with us when we think that we surely must be hidden from God's sight and hence from His mind. So it is when we think we will faint from lack of strength to endure.

Through Isaiah's comfort to Judah's exiles, God reminds us that He who created us knows us and sustains us. Therefore, let us also wait for the Lord to renew our strength. 🌈



Media reviews

MOVIES/TV

Entertaining 'Lego Masters' leads March streaming lineup

By Michael Foust
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

My house has more Legos than, well, ... food and clothes.

Perhaps that's not surprising, since I have two boys who are crazy about "Star Wars" and superheroes — two themes that dominate the Lego aisles at the big box stores. My kids have built more Lego toys than I can count, and I've spent more money on them than I care to know.

Positive vibes

So when Fox's "Lego Masters" debuted in February, my children immediately wanted to watch.

The show — which can be streamed on Hulu — features 20 contestants divided into 10 teams competing for a cash prize, a trophy and the title of "Lego Master." Will Arnett, the voice of Batman in the Lego animated movies, hosts the show, while Amy Corbett and Jamie Berard — two designers at the Lego Group company — serve as judges.

The series is entertaining, mostly family-friendly and different from other reality shows too.

Instead of spotlighting sabotage and infighting, "Lego Masters" focuses on the positive: a father and son team who loves to work together, a newlywed husband and wife who bond around Legos and so forth. Rather than calling each other names, teams on Lego Masters often cheer for one another. Crazy, huh?

This positive vibe extends to the judges, who offer the contestants constructive criticism rather than put-downs and snarky remarks.

In the season premiere, the teams raced to build a section of an amusement park. (They had 16 hours to come up with an idea and construct it.) The results were incredible, even if a few didn't fully function.

The show includes very minor language (I caught a d--n and maybe one h-ll) and a very diverse cast (one of the men wears a flower in his hair).

But if you can overlook those caveats, "Lego Mas-



'Lego Masters'

Fox photo

ters" is a fun series to watch.

Also worth watching this month:

Adults/teens

► **"Run the Race"** (Hulu, Prime) — It's a Christian film about two teenage brothers who view athletics as the ticket out of their small town. But when separate

medical incidents sideline them, one of the brothers faces a crisis of faith. Rated PG for thematic content and some teen partying.

► **"Night on Earth"** (Netflix) — It's like a "Planet Earth" filmed in the dark. "Night on Earth" uses the latest camera technology to show us what animals do at night when no one's watching.

► **"Jeopardy!"** (Netflix) — Three "Jeopardy!" series

enter the Netflix platform in February: "Celebrate Alex Collection," "Cindy Stowell Collection" and "Seth Wilson Collection."

► **"Faith, Hope & Love"** (Netflix) — A widower and a single woman enter a contest to try and save her dance studio. This faith-centric movie comes with a few caveats (such as revealing outfits) but has a good message. Rated PG for some thematic elements.

Children

► **"Shop Class"** (Disney Plus) — Teams of young builders are challenged to design, build and test unique creations in each episode. A panel of experts will evaluate and test the teams' work based on creativity and functionality, with the

last team standing declared champions.

► **"A Shaun the Sheep Movie: Farmageddon"** (Netflix) — Shaun and his farm friends protect a kind alien who landed near their barn. It's the sequel to the hilarious film "Shaun the Sheep Movie" and uses stop-action animation. Rated G.

► **"Toy Story 4"** (Disney Plus) — Sheriff Woody goes on a road trip with his new owner, Bonnie, but gets sidetracked when he meets an old friend, Bo Peep. Rated G.



'Shaun the Sheep'

Aardman Animations and Studiocanal photo

Meet the reviewer

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

Penetrating the darkness

IMB workers see Light break through Scotland's gray skies

Patrick and Erin Schwartz have become accustomed to the darkness that often clouds Scotland's beauty. According to the World Weather Information Service, Scotland only has around 100 days of sunshine each year. That leaves most days rainy or cloudy.

Patrick says their family has missed the sunshine they enjoyed in New England, but after a few months back in the U.S. on a stateside assignment, they are ready to return to Glasgow this spring.

Having lived there for three years, it now feels like home.

Patrick explains that one of the biggest blessings from their first term as International Mission Board missionaries was connecting to a local church in Scotland — Refuge Glasgow. This family of faith has

provided a church home for them and their two daughters, McKinley, 6, and Rowen, 1.

"While we were certainly glad to come alongside them in the work of the gospel, we felt like we received the greater blessing," Patrick said. "The church has become a backbone for what we are trying to do in our community. It is a visible expression of Christ's love."

Erin has focused much of her ministry on connecting with other mothers at McKinley's school and in her neighborhood, which she describes as very diverse.

"We didn't realize how diverse Glasgow would be. Half the kids in McKinley's school speak Arabic and come from Muslim backgrounds," Erin says.

One mother Erin met is Meiyang. Their friendship in Glasgow grew,



IMB photo

Patrick and Erin Schwartz, from Massachusetts, now call Glasgow 'home.' They have recently completed their first term as IMB missionaries in Scotland, where they serve with their daughters, McKinley and Rowen.

and though they often talked of spiritual things, Meiyang was not interested in Erin's initial invitation to study the Bible. However, after asking Erin why she always looked so peaceful, Meiyang asked if she could visit their church.

'Faith in Jesus'

"Over the course of the year, Meiyang grew in her knowledge and understanding of God and what it means to follow Jesus," says Erin. "I had the privilege of watching the Lord work in her heart and life and walking alongside her as she repented of her sins and placed her faith in

Jesus." In December 2019, Meiyang publicly confessed her faith in Jesus and was baptized.

Patrick and Erin are grateful for Meiyang's involvement at the church and are hopeful that others in her family will come to faith as well. They also feel very blessed that they have been able to see the fruit of their work in a country where people do not often respond to the gospel.

Drug use and violence in Glasgow remain on the rise, and the dark skies of rainy days reflect the spiritual darkness of the country. But Erin and Patrick see the light of Christ penetrating the darkness. (IMB)



Neist Point Lighthouse on the Isle of Skye in Scotland