



# The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

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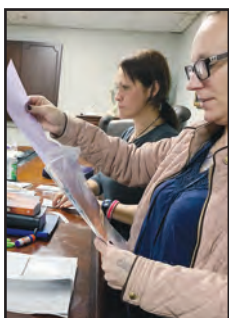
Churches use funds to 'extend hope of Christ' after debt repayment

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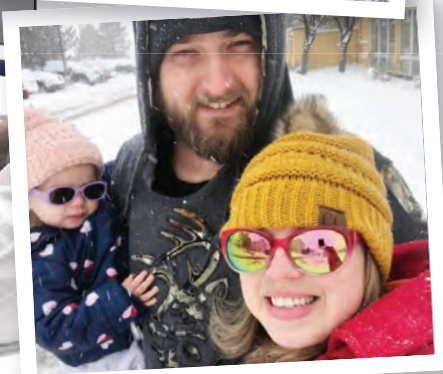


Crafting journals helps women in recovery reflect on life, learn more about God

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Photos courtesy of Brandon Vaughan



**Main photo:** Leah Vaughan hears from one of her doctors before the procedure at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles that sealed the spinal fluid leak. **Small photos:** The

Vaughan family discovered that high, drier elevations — like those of Salt Lake City — ease Leah's headaches, and God's plan was leading them to be church planters in Utah all along.

# Healing at a higher elevation

## Rare medical condition sends family on search for relief, God's calling

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

**B**randon Vaughan knew God could use anything to call him away from Tuscaloosa. But he never expected it to be a headache

that showed up about a year ago and never went away.

"Last April, after our church's homecoming service, my wife Leah went home with a migraine-type headache," said Brandon, pastor of Little Sandy Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa. "The next day, she woke up and it was worse. The day after that, she woke up and it was still there."

She's had it every second since.

And ever since, the

Vaughans have been on a journey to figure out how to make it stop.

### 'Very debilitating'

They went to a local hospital, then were transferred to UAB Hospital. At UAB, they figured out what the problem was — a spontaneous CSF leak, which meant spinal fluid was draining from her skull, causing her brain to sag.

But they said they couldn't fix it.

"It's very painful, very debilitating," Brandon said. "She can't drive or do anything that requires her to concentrate."

UAB Hospital sent them to Los Angeles to visit an expert on her condition. After numerous tests and procedures, they were able to seal the leak.

But it didn't stop the pain. "They determined that when she had been in that compromised state, she had some brain bruising and that

(See 'God,' page 6)

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

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 17.

Check out TAB's podcasts anywhere you get your podcasts or at [www.tabonline.org/podcasts](http://www.tabonline.org/podcasts) — TAB Talks, TAB News, TAB Briefs and (coming soon) TAB Stories.



Photo courtesy of WXJC Radio

TAB News cohosts Debbie Campbell (left) and Jennifer Davis Rash (second from left) sit down with Grace Thornton (third from right), Carrie Brown McWhorter (second from right) and Hannah Muñoz (right) to discuss the changes coming to TAB's podcast offerings as they continue to grow and expand.

## TAB Media podcast channel growing to include new shows

In 2018, TAB launched its first podcast: TAB News. As the podcast has grown and expanded, some exciting changes are here. This week is the debut week of the new TAB Media podcast channel.

What listeners have been hearing as the weekly TAB News podcast will now be split into two shows: TAB News, which will be the audio digest of the weekly newspaper, and TAB Talks, which will be the weekly radio show featuring a special guest or topic hosted by Jennifer Davis Rash and Debbie Campbell.

TAB Talks will be released as a podcast each Monday and TAB News will come out each Wednesday. TAB Talks also airs Saturdays at 2 p.m. on 101.1 FM.

In addition to splitting TAB News

into TAB News and TAB Talks, TAB also is launching two new podcasts: TAB Briefs and TAB Stories.

TAB Briefs will air each Friday and provide listeners with three current faith-based news and culture stories. TAB Briefs will first appear on Facebook Live on TAB's Facebook page at 8:45 a.m. each Friday, and then will be released on the TAB Media podcast channel at noon.

TAB Stories will be different from the other three podcasts, however. TAB Stories will air a few times a year and will be a long-form, in-depth feature into the life of a specific person, church or ministry.

To learn more about the TAB Media podcast channel, listen to last week's TAB News podcast at [www.tabonline.org/podcasts](http://www.tabonline.org/podcasts). (TAB)

## TAB to host The Writing Minister

The Alabama Baptist/TAB Media is excited to bring another seminar to the faith community.

On March 30, TAB will host The Writing Minister from 9 a.m. to noon. Denise George will discuss the many nonfiction writing and publishing opportunities available to today's pastors, church and ministry leaders and other ministers of the gospel.

George is founder of "The Book Writing Boot Camp" and author of

31 nonfiction books published with major traditional publishing houses.

For more information on the workshop visit [www.tabonline.org/workshop](http://www.tabonline.org/workshop). The workshop will be open to all current and retired ministers and minister assistants and will include a boxed lunch.

To register and for pricing information call Jessica Ingram at 800-803-5201, ext. 122, or email [news@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:news@thealabamabaptist.org). Only 24 seats are available. (TAB)



THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

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

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as judged by Associated Church Press, Baptist  
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Association or Religion Communicators Council

# MY RASHIONALE

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

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@RashionalThts



## What are the benefits of being a believer in Jesus Christ?

**L**ongtime writer and editor Art Toalston posed a question to a group of fellow editors recently: What are the benefits of believing, of being a Christian?

Aside from securing eternal life in heaven with Jesus, Toalston listed benefits such as an opportunity to be connected to the ultimate source of wisdom and a readily available opportunity to connect with the Creator through prayer.

Wholesomeness, which is the noble life God intended, provides another benefit and is uplifting to our soul and others as well, Toalston said.

And then there's the benefit of supernatural perception, a deeper understanding of creation, and illumination, the ability to discern good from evil.

Perseverance, purpose, peace and joy are additional benefits as well as the unity of fellow believers and the opportunity to share in something so special with others.

"We have a marvelous faith," Toalston said, challenging each of us to think on the things of God often, find solitude with Him and exude the peace only He can provide.

Toalston also encouraged us to continue memorizing Scripture all the days of our lives, to never stop reading, learning, memorizing the Word. And from there we need to share our stories with each other.

"Our stories nurture our relationships," he said. "What is a nugget that might capture your story?"

Since I shared my story with you a few weeks ago, I challenge you to think about your story and practice sharing it with others. Share it with us too.

We love sharing the stories of God's people doing God's work in Alabama, across the nation and around the world.

We hope engaging with *The Alabama Baptist* and all we offer through TAB Media offers a glimpse of hope and reminders of how much good really is happening amid the chaos all around us.

Our goal is to offer accurate

and fair reporting of news and information, helpful resources for surviving life's difficult circumstances and hope-filled encouragement and inspiration along the journey.

We pray your time spent with us is calming, peaceful and fulfilling — and that it prompts you to shine for Jesus, share His love and demonstrate the amazing grace He modeled for us.

Walking this path with you is one of our greatest honors. Thank you for trusting us and committing time to spend with us. Thank you for joining the conversation.

As we work to share the stories of how God is moving and present them in a variety of platforms, we need your help to share our story. Tell others what you appreciate about TAB Media and encourage others to engage — whether it be through the podcast channel, social media outlets, online content or legacy print edition.

Think about all the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control we can model if we focus on God's story, our stories as believers and what we can share about the benefits of following Jesus Christ. 🌈

## RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

### Is it fair to complain about how much we tend to complain about minor life inconveniences?

**H**ave you ever noticed how many people complain throughout the day? Have you ever kept up with how many times you complain in a day?

Whether we are the one complaining or the one hearing the complaints, it wears on all of us.

Even the most joyous and adaptable among us can be guilty of a form of complaining.

It might show up as pointing out how a system isn't the most efficient (eh hem, I'm guilty), a presentation wasn't polished (eh hem, guilty again) or the lines are too long (eh hem, guilty).

We all should be constantly working to polish all parts of our lives, which means those areas will need to be evaluated.

And we all need to help others improve in various areas as well.

But do we actually need to consistently share out loud every single thing that frustrates us, irritates us, causes us a bit of inconvenience or surprises us in a day?

If it does help to say it out loud in the moment, then is it possible to say it and move on, rather than letting it ruin our day?

Nagging is another form of complaining. It truly may be an attempt to be the squeaky wheel and get the goal accomplished, but nagging also weighs on people — the one being nagged as well as others hearing it.

And while it's true that venting and sharing frustrations helps us process and work through them, that's not what I mean here.

We all need those lunch dates with friends where we can talk through various things.

But all the minor inconveniences that happen in a day — is it possible to become a little more resilient in those cases?

We never know who among us will have heavy life issues pressing down on them at any given point, and in some cases their patience levels may become thin during those times.

What if we show grace to those truly facing serious issues and shouldering major life inconveniences and concerns by giving them the complaint card for the day rather than using up the card on little things that really don't matter in the big scheme of life?

And what if we learn to chuckle at the minor mishaps we encounter, remembering that we too inconvenience others from time to time. —Jennifer D. Rash

# Your Voice



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

## Downplaying religious expression to serve community

By **Brad R. Fulton**

Assistant Professor, Indiana University

**E**vangelicals make up roughly one-quarter of the U.S. population. This percentage has remained steady over the past two decades, despite the persistent decline in the percentage of Americans who identify as religious.

Despite being portrayed as hyper-religious and persistent proselytizers, my research indicates that some evangelicals actually downplay

religious expression when working with religiously diverse and secular groups. As a scholar of religion and politics, I wanted to learn more about how white evangelicals engage with religious diversity and an increasingly nonreligious U.S. society.

So I teamed up with sociologists Wes Markofski and Richard L. Wood to conduct in-depth field research with multifaith initiatives in Boston, Atlanta, Los Angeles and Portland, Oregon.

Our study focused primarily on white evangelicals living in urban and suburban settings, where the majority of white evangelicals live. Cities are also where the largest, fastest-growing and most influential evangelical churches are located.

We studied evangelicals within a variety of multifaith collaborations, including policy advocacy organizations and volunteer initiatives like Serving the City in Portland.

As we explain in the journal *Sociology of Religion*, we found that in such religiously diverse and secular contexts, evangelicals tend to downplay religious expression. For example, we found that when the 26,000 evangelicals from 500 churches volunteered with Portland's Serving the City initiative, they adopted a self-imposed "no-proselytizing" policy as they helped with cleaning up parks, refurbishing schools and conducting clothing drives.

One suspicious school principal with strong views on church-state separation eventually became supportive of the evangelicals' involvement. He noted that "they are not in the hallways passing out tracts, they're not proselytizing, but they're simply asking, 'What do you need? And how can we help?'"

We observed evangelicals adopting a similar approach in various parts of the U.S., including places considered more progressive and secular like New England and the West Coast as well as the South, where Christianity plays a more prominent cultural role.

Furthermore, the findings from our fieldwork extend to politically centrist and conservative evangelical organizations — not just a politically liberal subset of evangelicals, from whom a secular approach might be more expected.

Scholars point to several reasons why some white evangelicals are inclined to temper religious expression in certain contexts, even as faith remains central to their identity and politics.

Religion scholar Peter Schuurman explains that some do so to avoid stigma. In many urban settings, evangelicals represent the intolerant "other" against which many progressive social movements position themselves. Downplaying religious expression could help them gain trust and reshape public perceptions.

Researcher Heidi Unruh believes evangelicals are just being pragmatic when they downplay their faith in mixed settings. Avoiding areas of disagreement allows them to pursue shared goals without compromising their religious beliefs.

While their reasons might be varied, as the U.S. becomes increasingly secular but also divided along religious lines, it is noteworthy the approach some white evangelicals are taking to bridge these divides.

*EDITOR'S NOTE* — Adapted from the article "Evangelicals downplay religious expression when working with secular groups" at [theconversation.com](http://theconversation.com). Read the full article at [tabonline.org/downplay](http://tabonline.org/downplay).

### Using humor effectively

**A** lady remarked a few months ago how much she enjoyed the pastor's good humor in the pulpit. I remembered how someone else in a different place responded to a worship survey: "The pulpit is no place for levity. The pastor should refrain from joking."

I'm sure there's truth in both observations. The pulpit is not a place for stand-up comedy. The responsibility of sharing God's word is a heavyweight indeed.

On the other hand, Solomon insisted laughter is good medicine (Prov. 17:22). Medical professionals agree we need a daily dose of laughter to counter the anxieties of our age. And we have a notable example.

Theologian Elton Trueblood wrote "The Humor of Christ" in

1964. He insisted many of the sayings of Jesus were actually Aramaic "punchlines" provoking laughter as a teaching tool.

Public speakers know that humor and stories, or anecdotes, are what people most often "take away" from presentations, and thus linking these to scriptural principles can make a speaker more effective.

But a good lesson to remember about humor is it can be misinterpreted and can be hurtful.

Self-deprecating humor is generally safe, and if used wisely, can be appropriate and effective in our presentations and conversations.

**Pastor Michael J. Brooks**  
**Siluria Baptist Church**  
**Alabaster**

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

“This is the time to just let our light shine and love our community.”

PASTOR PHILLIP DUNN  
First Baptist Church of Mount Juliet, Tennessee

Do you hesitate to be a fully devoted follower of Jesus because you are afraid it will turn you into a stuffed shirt? Never fear. Unbalanced religion may turn you into a stuffed shirt, but not Jesus. In fact, the more you follow Jesus, the more the rabble rousers in the world want to be with you. This happens not because you join in their way of life but because you are a breath of fresh air to them. Mere religion is like stale wind from an ancient grotto, but a life of faith in Jesus vibrates with aliveness.

**Bob Adams**  
Retired pastor

We have to get over this idea in the evangelical world that calling

into ministry is a mystical experience that is experienced by a select few “Navy Seal Christians” in the body of Christ. The call to leverage your life for the Great Commission was included in the call to follow Jesus.

**J.D. Greear**  
SBC President

In 1519, Spanish conquistador Hernando Cortes arrived in present-day Veracruz, Mexico. As legend has it, Cortes began to train, coach and motivate his 500 soldiers and 100 sailors for what would lie ahead, and then he ordered them to do the unthinkable — burn the boats. As doubts arose within his men, Cortes knew this drastic measure would need to be taken in order to ensure

their commitment to seizing a treasure no army had taken for 600 years. There was no escape route for when the battle became difficult. They had to press on. The standard had been set, and they were eliminating any temptation or means of something less. They won this treasure because they had to. ...

The risk seems great as one approaches the shore looking onto a vast battlefield, but the reward, my friends, is living in the most fulfilling place this side of eternity ... — the satisfying, peace-filled, confidence that comes from knowing you are living in the purpose and will of God for your life.

**Brodie Croyle**  
Executive Director  
Big Oak Ranch

## From the *Twitterverse*

### @MattMoore89

I converted to Christianity as an adult. I have what some call a “powerful” testimony. But do you know what else I have? A lot of baggage. A lot of regrets. A lot of sin-inflicted scars. If you converted early in life, don’t bemoan your “boring” testimony. Be grateful.

### @NOBTS

“At the end of the day we will be esteemed as either wise people or foolish people based on one factor ... it’s one simple thing. You’ve heard the word of God, did you obey it?” — Jamie Dew #NOBTSChapel

### @WVGovernor

I truly believe that every human life, born or unborn, is a gift from God. It was a no-brainer for me to sign the Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act today. This new

law will protect babies who survive an attempted abortion procedure. #WV #WVGov

### @bcmink

Spring break is coming up soon! Join us in praying for students who are serving during the break. Also pray for students who are working, vacationing or resting over the break. Pray that no matter what they’re doing, it is productive and Christ glorifying!

### @MattDanielsBCM

“The church needs to stop being a people of convenience and start being a people of conviction.” — Reginald Calvert

### @Blackwell\_Kevin

The test of any work of evangelism is not what is seen at the mo-

ment or in the conference report but in the effectiveness with which the work continues in the next generation. — Robert Coleman

### @danwhitejr

Fundamentalism is not what we believe, it’s how we hold our beliefs.

1. Absolutism in knowledge
2. Self-righteous in spirit
3. Combative in dialogue
4. Us vs. them in orientation
5. Demonizing other groups
6. Policing ideological borders
7. Using shame to control/ ostracize

### @DrMattQueen

“If we do not start with what is primary, we are not likely to achieve what is secondary, for this is a resultant. ... The call to be a fisher of men precedes the call to wash feet.” — D. Elton Trueblood



SBOM photo

Rick Lance is executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

## Calling or hiring?

When I hear certain expressions, I cringe. Sometimes I have to hold my tongue when I hear people say, “We just hired a new pastor,” or when I hear a pastor say, “We hired a new minister on our staff.”

Pastors and others called to Christian ministry are just that — called, not hired. What is the difference?

If the ministry is just like any other vocation — that one is “hired” to do a job — then the word “hired” is appropriate.

Pastors and ministers are called of God first and then called to a specific ministry later. It begins with a calling and, if properly understood, ministry continues to be a calling.

If we are called to ministry, we should have a ministry description — terminology we employ at the State Board of Missions.

Without equivocation, I recommend it to churches.

A calling is far more than a hiring. Almost all vocations are honorable and needed, but we cannot allow ourselves to see the ministry as a hiring.

Hired hands do not equal called people.

Live out your calling, and never act like a hired hand. The words we use to describe the ministry should be focused on a calling that claims our lives.

—Rick Lance

# 'God is in control of our suffering'

## Vaughan family 'honored and humbled' to see how journey fits into God's eternal purpose

(continued from page 1)  
caused some minor damage,"  
Brandon said.

They referred his wife to Mayo Clinic, who also said they couldn't help. From there, she was transferred to a renowned head pain clinic in Michigan.

"We were there for three weeks," he said. "They threw everything and the kitchen sink at her pain, and it didn't even touch it."

They sent her home basically hopeless, he said.

"This condition is very rare, so they don't know much about it, but by the numbers they said it may possibly go away in the next three to five years or it might never go away," Brandon said.

### Something clicked

So they loaded up to drive back to Alabama, and as they drove,

The Vaughan family poses at Little Sandy Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa — where Brandon serves as pastor — just a few months before Leah's headaches began.



Photo courtesy of Brandon Vaughan

her pain got progressively worse. As they got within a few hours of home, Brandon had to pull over often because Leah was so sick. He realized that had happened the last time they came back from Michigan too.

And something in his head clicked.

### Testing a theory

"I thought, 'There's got to be something to this,'" he said. "So I started researching. It's very rare, but there are people out there who have similar head conditions to my wife who are greatly affected by elevation."

Michigan's elevation is about 1,000 feet, while Alabama sits almost at sea level. In his mind, they had nothing to lose by testing the theory, so one Sunday night the family packed up the car and went to Mount Cheaha, the highest point in the state at about 2,400 feet in elevation.

"It was so amazing to me," Brandon said. "When we were at the



Photo courtesy of Brandon Vaughan

The Vaughan family spends time on Mount Cheaha, the highest point in Alabama at 2,400 feet above sea level, as Brandon tests out his theory that high elevations provide Leah with relief from her constant headache pain.

bottom of the mountain, her pain level was at an 8 out of 10. She was just miserable. But by the time we got to the top, she was at a four."

At the top of Mount Cheaha, Leah was able to do things she hadn't done in months, and she slept every night they were there. Afterwards Brandon, encouraged by what they'd found, decided they should see what happened if they went even higher. They planned a

vacation to the mountains of North Carolina.

"On sunny days there, she felt better, but every time a front moved through, she'd just feel awful," he said. "So we realized it was the barometric pressure, and in the South that could change every other day."

### 'Got our mom back'

So they decided to try something else — they went out to Salt Lake

*"When I understood this is God's way of divine direction, I felt honored and humbled to think that God had designed a plan and had a purpose just for me. It helps me to get up each morning knowing my pain is not wasted, and [I'm] excited to see what the next chapter brings."*

Leah Vaughan



*Sometime in the next few weeks, Brandon Vaughan will pass the baton to Little Sandy Baptist's new pastor, and that pastor will commission him as the church's missionary to Salt Lake City.*

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

Pixabay.com

City, around 4,300 feet in elevation but a drier climate than the Southeast.

"It's like she was a different person," he said. "Her pain was not completely gone, but almost. It's like my kid says — 'We got our mom back.'"

They got something else too — a visit from a missionary serving in the Salt Lake City area.

"He happened to hear about our story on Facebook and realized we were within [driving distance] of him," Brandon said. "He drove an hour and a half in a snowstorm to tell us about the great

need for church planting in Utah. They've actually got places surveyed around Salt Lake City right now looking for Baptist preachers to come and plant churches."

Then Brandon knew they had

some decisions to make. On more than one occasion during the eight years he had served at Little Sandy Baptist, he had told the congregation that God would have to drag him "kicking and screaming" for

him to leave the church.

"It looks like He accepted that challenge," he said.

The Vaughans did their homework and prayed over their situation, and it wasn't long before they knew Salt Lake City was exactly where God wanted them.

"It's been one of the hardest things we've ever been through. We had no idea when my wife

went to bed one night with a headache that it would be a life-changing event," Brandon said. "On my end, it's been hard to watch her suffer and not be able to do anything at all."

But through it all, the family's key word has been "purpose" — they've been looking for what God is doing in the midst of their suffering.

And now what He's doing is becoming crystal clear, Brandon said.

### God provides

"We left Michigan thinking it was hopeless, and lo and behold now we know my wife has a condition that only gets better in this specific environment in this specific place," he said.

And that specific place needed church planters.

"It's been amazing to see God lead and provide," he said. "We've already had dozens of churches say, 'OK, when you get ready, we're going to take you on monthly support.'

And of all the money we've had to spend on medical bills and travel expenses, I haven't had to pay a dime out of my pocket; God's just provided."

Leah said that for the past year,

she's felt like she is "pretty much a 32-year-old shut in."

"It's discouraging to feel like dead weight to your family," she said. "But when I understood this is God's way of divine direction, I felt honored and humbled to think that God had designed a plan and had a purpose just for me. It helps me to get up each morning knowing my pain is not wasted, and [I'm] excited to see what the next chapter brings."

*"It's exciting. I guess in situations like this you can either feel cheated or feel chosen, and we just give honor and glory to God."*

Brandon Vaughan

Sometime in the next few weeks, Brandon will pass the baton to Little Sandy Baptist's new pastor, and that pastor will commission him as the church's missionary to Salt Lake City.

"It's exciting. I guess in situations like this you can either feel cheated or feel chosen, and we just give honor and

glory to God," Brandon said. "Sometimes you make plans and God makes other plans. God is in control of our suffering. There's peace knowing there's eternal purpose." ✝



Photo courtesy of Brandon Vaughan

Leah Vaughan recovers after the procedure that sealed her spontaneous CSF leak — a spinal fluid leak — at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles.

# 'God has been generous'

## Churches use funds to 'extend hope of Christ' to community following debt payment

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

**W**hen Josh Burnham became pastor of Bethel Baptist Church, Odenville, four years ago, he realized they needed to get rid of something — and quickly.

"We'd had a debt since 1998 that was not overwhelming us, but definitely limited our desire to reach the nations for the gospel," he said.

So one Sunday, Burnham got up in the pulpit and issued a simple challenge.

"I said, 'If God has been generous to you, let's be generous as we give,'" he said.

And through that call, Bethel Baptist paid off about \$800,000 in debt in less than three years.

But they didn't stop there.

The next month, instead of paying their normal debt payment, they took that money and looked for a way to use it to show love to the community.

"Creatively, I thought it was symbolically important to take every penny of that next building payment, which would've been last November," Burnham said. "We wanted to celebrate what God had done and give it away. We had things we could've used it for, but we didn't want it to stay within the walls of the church. We wanted all of it to go to reaching St. Clair County, [the state] or the nations."

He had heard of other churches who had blessed their community by

paying off medical debt, but when he reached out to a local organization, he discovered a campaign was already in place to take care of that in the Birmingham area.

### 'Heart of the church'

So Burnham looked to the local school system and uncovered another way to show love to their community — to pay off the schools' debt for the students on a free or reduced lunch.

"We wanted to connect the idea that we've paid off our debt, let's help pay off the debts of others because

Jesus has [paid] our debt," Burnham said. "We did it just because we felt like God was leading us to do it, no strings attached."

They didn't expect anything in return, but they began to receive notes from principals and others in the community saying thanks.

"It ended up being a way the community saw the heart of our church — that we love them, that we want to see St. Clair County

come to faith in Jesus Christ because He is what they're longing for," Burnham said. "God isn't asking us to give to hoard for His kingdom — He's asking us to give to make a difference. We want to see Kingdom growth. For us, this is a small reminder of where our emphasis should be."

Not too far down the road, Valley View Baptist Church, Leeds, felt God leading them to do something



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

Pastor Wesley Braswell (right) and other leaders of Valley View Baptist Church, Leeds, celebrate paying off the church's loan with a note burning Feb. 23. Since paying the debt, the church has used the extra money to support gospel ministries.



Unsplash.com

Churches are paying off their debt and using the extra money to pay off debts in the community and provide gospel hope to those in need.

similar. Back in the fall, the congregation paid off the loan they took out in 2015 to renovate their fellowship hall.

"The completion of payment comes a full year ahead of the initial payment schedule," said Pastor Wesley Braswell, noting they celebrated during their worship service Feb. 23.

### 'Need to bless others'

Some of the money they put into the debt payoff came from the sale of a parcel of land across the road from the church. But they did something else with the proceeds from the land, too — they gave more than \$11,000 to support six local, regional and international organizations.

"We felt like God had blessed us with that land and blessed us with the sale of that land, so we needed to use those proceeds to bless others," Braswell said. "Our mission statement is 'Building relationships with our community to discover hope in Jesus Christ.'"

With that in mind, they gave funds

to some organizations they felt were working to accomplish the same mission — the International Mission Board, Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries, two other children's homes in the area, a local crisis pregnancy center and Leeds Outreach, a ministry providing food and other resources for those in need.

"We want to provide hope to those around us, to extend the hope that is only found in Christ," Braswell said. "We felt it important to use a portion of those proceeds to do that, and we wanted to follow in obedience to the Lord." ✠

**"... Let's help pay off the debts of others because Jesus has [paid] our debt."**

**Pastor Josh Burnham  
Bethel Baptist Church, Odenville**



# Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

## The Doctrine of God

# The Doctrine's Importance

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

Christians have historically confessed the Bible to be the inspired written record of God's self-revelation. That being so, what we mortals can know about God is best learned from our Bibles. Without this authoritative source, we would be left to our own imaginations and deductions which would likely result in portraying God after our own likenesses.

Thus, the authoritative and accurate window through which to see God and understand Him is the Bible. It is the appropriate seedbed from which to harvest our highest thoughts about God. With this as the primary premise, we begin this week to explore the biblical doctrine of God.

What a person believes about God or doesn't believe about God is of ultimate importance in time and eternity. Thus, to seek to understand what the Bible reveals about God is not merely a casual quest to be pursued leisurely when nothing else is pressing for our attention and time.


The Bible's witness about God begins with its opening verse, one that draws our attention immediately to God as Creator (Gen. 1:1). If we understand that the Bible is primarily God's self-revelation, then He wants us to recognize and confess Him as the Creator of "the heavens and the earth."

Since the created order is the handiwork of God, the Bible teaches us that by means of creation we can know certain truths

about God. One of the best-known declarations of this fact is Romans 1:20: "For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead."

Of course to experience the fullness of God's blessings, we must know more than God's power and divinity as shown from His creating work. We must come to know Him where He has most fully revealed Himself, namely in the person and work of Christ, who became the visible image of the invisible God.

As we focus on the most central theme in theology, the doctrine of God, we note the very term "theology" itself is formed on the Greek word for God (theos) with a suffix (-ology) that together indicate a study of God.

While many topics are appropriate for the discipline of Christian theology, none is more basic than the inquiry into what we believe about God Himself. Admittedly, the study of an infinite God is a daunting task for mortal minds. While we cannot wrap our finite minds totally around our infinite God, we can gain insights that inform and inspire us. 

*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.*



# Outreach program plants gospel seeds, teaches character to youth

Several days a week, Esther McMath is better known as one of the "tie-dye sisters."

"That's what the kids call us," said McMath, who directs RPM (Redemption's Promise Ministry) Outreach in Escambia County.

Through the program, 1,600 students from kindergarten through eighth grade participate in an optional class where they learn about character qualities and Bible stories.

"It's been a gift to this area, to the children of this area," said McMath, a member of First Baptist Church, Flomaton. "The teachers tell us they can see it making an impact."

About 15 years ago, McMath's friends Daniel and Cindy Johnson started RPM, modeling it after the release time program in public schools in nearby Geneva County.

Here's how it works: Students whose parents have signed them up for the 30-minute optional program can check out of school once a month and go to RPM's 40-foot-long mobile classroom, which they bring with them and park just off school property.

The ministry's volunteers come from churches of all denominations across the county, are background checked and follow all the school rules in order to keep the children safe. And to be identifiable to the children, they wear tie-dyed shirts.

"The majority are retired teachers and educators and people who have been teaching Sunday School and Vacation Bible School for a number of years," McMath said, noting it's a group effort among local churches.

The trailer is housed at Little Escambia Baptist Church, Flomaton.

"We come to the schools once a month, which means we take each child six times between September and March," McMath said. "We have a five-year curriculum planned

that we go through and teach different character traits like self-control, orderliness, responsibility, love and patience."

At larger schools, they may go three days in a row to reach all the children registered. At each school, they have about 80% enrolled, and of those, McMath estimates around half aren't involved in church.

During the session, they are involved in action songs, videos, stories and activities. This month,

they're wrapping up year five of the curriculum, so they will start back over in the fall with the creation story.

"It's all centered around character education," McMath said. "We use the Bible to do that because it is the highest standard of character."

And they get to share the gospel. When the children first come into the trailer, they have questions about the

cross in the picture on the wall, and then the leaders tell them the story of Jesus.

"The children love it, and they love having people they can trust. They have a lot of grannies and grandpas at RPM," she said.

Wendell Ray, elevating mission strategist for Escambia Baptist Association, said the ministry meets a big need.

"Character is a great need in our country and world," he said. "When the RPM trailer stops just outside the edge of school property, it opens the door for children and families from diverse backgrounds and conditions to hear a message of hope and character from godly people."

McMath said it's all about planting seeds of the gospel.

"We just want to share truth with them," she said.

For more information, contact McMath at [esther@rpmoutreach.org](mailto:esther@rpmoutreach.org). (Grace Thornton)



Photo courtesy of Esther McMath  
Esther McMath teaches children in RPM Outreach about generosity.

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

# Sharing Christ in Crisis



## Statewide Training Opportunities

- March 14:** Admin
- March 21:** Child Care
- March 28:** Communications
- March 28:** Shower & Laundry Unit
- April 2-4:** Chaplaincy
- April 3:** Mass Feeding
- April 3:** Cleanup/Recovery
- April 3-4:** Chainsaw

To register, visit [sbdr.org](http://sbdr.org) or contact Ana Raymundo, (334) 613-2356, [araymundo@alsbom.org](mailto:araymundo@alsbom.org).

All sessions take place at the Disaster Relief Center, 118 Jesse Samuel Hunt Blvd. in Prattville (I-65, exit 186).



This ministry is made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program and to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering.

# ‘God has just blessed it’

## Loss of sister sparks heart of ministry, leads to women’s group, growing conference

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

**P**am Wooldridge said she’s not in any way a violent Southern woman, but on that particular day in 1999 as she was getting ready for work, she took her hairbrush and threw it on the floor as hard as she could.

“I’ll tell you the truth — I got angry,” she said.

Her sister, Dianne Cooper, had died a few months before, and the loss had hit Wooldridge hard.

### ‘Grew together’

“It’s hard to tell you how close we were. We were just exceptionally close and did so many things together,” she said. “Also our faith was so important to us. It seemed that as we got older, we just grew more in our faith together.”

But then Cooper lost her battle with breast cancer.

“After Di died, I was just kind of at a loss. I missed my sister, my friend, my buddy,” said Wooldridge, a member of Siloam Baptist Church, York. “There were some tough days, as many

people go through when they lose someone.”

The day she threw the hairbrush was one of those days. She had told God she wasn’t sure what to do to get through her grief, and she felt Him say something she had sensed Him saying before — to start a women’s group.

And that made her angry.

“I didn’t know anything about how to do that,” Wooldridge said. So she threw the hairbrush and said, “and even if I did, I wouldn’t know what to call it.”

She said immediately the name “Di’s Hope” came to mind.

“I knew at that moment that it was God. He was telling me what to do, that I should start a women’s group,” Wooldridge said.

And that’s exactly what she did. She gathered up some friends and conveyed what God had laid on her heart — it wasn’t about keeping her sister’s memory alive but about ministering to other people. They started meeting once a month, and the mission just grew.



Photo courtesy of Pam Wooldridge

Pam Wooldridge (front, fourth from right), a member of Siloam Baptist Church, York, organized a women’s group called Di’s Hope in honor of her sister, Dianne Cooper, who died from breast cancer.

At the beginning, their primary project was raising money for Relay for Life through barbecues they organized twice a year. Di’s Hope became Sumter County’s top fundraiser for Relay for Life until the organization canceled their events there.

But that didn’t stop the group’s fundraising efforts. They kept hosting barbecues and used the money to help any man, woman or child in the area who might need it. They also took on other ministries, like providing meals for students at the University of West Alabama through a campus ministry there.

### ‘A mighty God’

And not too long after Di’s Hope got started, another opportunity presented itself too — a local woman who had started a women’s conference a few years before was moving away and asked them if the group could take over the event.

They agreed, put their heads together and planned a conference that year that drew 30 women.

“We thought that was

awesome,” Wooldridge said. “We knew it was not us, it was God. It showed us there was interest in this, that there are women who need a boost to keep us all going.”

Two decades later, they’re still conducting the annual Sumter County Women’s Conference sponsored by Di’s Hope on the last Saturday in January. Around 85 women attend each year.

“God has just blessed it,” Wooldridge said.

And as for the Di’s Hope group, she said it was a godsend.

“It gave me something

to focus my mind on to once again realize what a mighty God we serve, but that was just the beginning,” she said. “God has

**“[Pam Wooldridge] has dealt with tragedies in her own life but always gives God the glory.”**

**Brad Campbell  
director of missions  
Bigbee Baptist Association**

just worked in this. It’s been amazing to watch and to walk through it.”

Brad Campbell — director of missions for Bigbee Baptist Association and Wooldridge’s pastor —

said Wooldridge is a “blessing to everyone, whether it’s her Sunday School class, her Di’s Hope group or to me, her pastor.”

She is dedicated to helping others and is a “prayer warrior,” he said. “She has dealt with tragedies in her own life but always gives God the glory for His love and guidance.”



Photo courtesy of Brad Campbell

For more than two decades, Di’s Hope has sponsored the annual Sumter County Women’s Conference on the last Saturday in January. Around 85 women attend each year.

# Pastor launches directory connecting services, ministries to families in need

A pillar of the Christian walk is the need to “serve the underserved,” said Gary Furr, pastor of Vestavia Hills Baptist Church.

According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation 2019 Kids Count Profile, Alabama ranks 44th in the country in overall child well-being. The Alabama Coalition for Healthy Mothers and Children (ACHMC)

wants to do something about that.

Launched by Furr, ACHMC is dedicated to building a network of resources to support families in need in Alabama.

“We need more cooperation,” Furr told those in attendance at the ACHMC Help Alabama app preview luncheon hosted by Samford University’s Center for Congregational Resources in January. “We aren’t competitors. We’re all against the things that are hurting people. We’re all on the same team.”

## One-stop shop

The goal of the Help Alabama app, which is now available in both the Apple and Google Play stores as well as online at [www.achmc.com](http://www.achmc.com), is to offer a one-stop shop for families looking for assistance. The Help Alabama app is a directory of services ranging from clothing, food, health-care and transportation ministries to counseling, churches and employment and legal services — both faith-based and secular.

The directory is not about competition between services and ministries, Furr emphasized, but about helping those in need.

“We never wanted to cre-



Photo by Jessica Ingram

Gary Furr (standing, right), explains the digital directory to companies and ministries offering assistance to families in need at the Help Alabama app preview luncheon at Samford University.

**To learn more about the Help Alabama app, listen to the TAB Talks podcast at [tabonline.org/podcasts](http://tabonline.org/podcasts) or anywhere you get your podcasts.**

ate competition for people doing things already,” he said. “We want to help the people doing things do them more effectively. It’s about crossing disciplines and connecting people.”

Furr said it was his three granddaughters who inspired this project.

“I am exceptionally worried about the world my grandchildren are growing up in,” he said. “I want them

and their peers to be successful. If we in Alabama could make childhood the best it can be, we will raise healthy adults who will impact their community.”

Furr recently sat down with Jennifer Davis Rash and Debbie Campbell to discuss the Help Alabama app on TAB Talks. Listen at [tabonline.org/podcasts](http://tabonline.org/podcasts) or anywhere you get your podcasts. (Jessica Ingram)

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### CHURCH POSITIONS

#### PASTOR

Durant Chapel Baptist Church seeking full-time pastor. Submit resumé to: Durant Chapel, 9551 Co. Rd. 138, Bay Minette, AL 36507, or office@durantchapel.com.

#### PASTOR

Brindlee Mountain Baptist Church is seeking a full-time pastor. Send resúmes to: Brindlee Mountain Baptist Church, 3422 US Hwy 231, Laceys Spring, AL 35754, or email to: [fcochran56@gmail.com](mailto:fcochran56@gmail.com).

#### PASTOR

York Bluff Baptist Church is seeking a full-time pastor who will lead the church under God’s direction to be a lighthouse in the Shoals area. An energetic, tireless worker who inspires the church to serve in the same way. Relevant ministerial experience is preferred. Send resumé to: Pastor Search Committee, York Bluff Baptist Church, 301 N. Atlanta Avenue, Sheffield, AL 35660.

#### BIVOCATIONAL MINISTER OF MUSIC

Pineview Baptist Church is looking for a part-time minister of music who not only has gifts for music and leading worship but has a heart for the lost and broken. The ideal candidate is someone who can lead a praise team with a mixture of hymns and contemporary music. Please send cover letter and resumé by March 31 to: Pineview Baptist Church, 10291 Highway 5, Brent, AL 35034.

#### BIVOCATIONAL YOUTH DIRECTOR

First Baptist Church, Union Grove, is seeking a bivocational youth director. Send resúmes to: FBCUG, P.O. Box 125, Union Grove, AL 35175.

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### FOR SALE

#### CHURCH BUS

48-passenger, 1994 Prevost H3-40 for sale. New batteries, good tires. \$12,000. 256-543-7300.

### MINISTRIES

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The TAB Media podcast channel offers three regular podcasts — TAB Talks, TAB News and TAB Briefs — along with TAB Stories, a special occasion, long-run podcast. Listen anywhere you get your podcasts or visit [www.tabonline.org/podcasts](http://www.tabonline.org/podcasts).

# MAKING A LASTING IMPACT

For years, Kerry and Tarrie Love discussed the need to have wills in place, but they didn't seem to have an avenue to do so until they learned about PhilanthroCorp. They shared, "We found their team of experts to be so great to work with! They were patient with our lack of knowledge, and made sure that they explained all of our options . . . Going through the estate planning process taught us a lot. We learned a considerable amount about charitable trusts . . .

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To learn more, call Susan Wylie from PhilanthroCorp at (719) 955-2125, or text "legacy" to (719) 917-0045 to request a time for PhilanthroCorp to call you.



Alabama Baptist  
**CHILDREN'S HOMES**  
& Family Ministries



## GRACE gifts

Memorials are listed below (the name of the deceased is bolded).

**Edwards, Pete**, Selma: Ken & Betty Schroeder  
**Holman, Bob**, Hueytown: Concord BC of Bessemer  
**Howard, Betty**, Birmingham: Marjorie Kay Nix  
**Langham, Bobby Joe**, Monroeville: Eastwood BC of Monroeville  
**McKinley, Tony L.**, Jackson: Eureka BC of Franklin  
**Ousley, Charles**, Maplesville: Delta Kappa Gamma, Alpha Beta Chapter  
**Rieben, Ray Ellis**, Bay Minette: Durant Chapel BC of Bay Minette  
**Roberts, Kenneth**, Selma: Ken & Betty Schroeder  
**Sertell, Jean**, Birmingham: Mr. & Mrs. J. Wray Pearce

**Shelton, Robert**, Leeds: Buddy & Ann Black  
**Sherrill, Kelly Johnson**, Birmingham: Mr. & Mrs. J. Wray Pearce  
**Walton, Tom**, Irondale: Buddy & Ann Black  
**White, Carolyn, Brunswick**, Ohio: Durant Chapel Baptist Church

Honors are listed below (the name of the honored is bolded).

**Craig, Tom & Dottie**, Birmingham: Buddy & Emily Kirk  
**Gibson, J.D. Family**, Butler: Sarah Gibson  
**Gibson, Joe & Teresa**, Butler: Sarah Gibson  
**Gibson, Samuel G., Sr.**, Berea, KY: Sarah Gibson  
**Goggins, Bob & Margaret**, Leeds: Bible Class of FBC Leeds  
**Kilpatrick, Marsha**, Opelika: Buddy & Emily Kirk

## THANK YOU!

Thank you to everyone who made a Grace Gift to Alabama Baptist Children's Homes. To learn more about Grace Gifts or how to make one, visit [alabamachild.org/give](http://alabamachild.org/give) or call 205.982.1112.

# 3 stories you should know



Facebook photo

The Church at Lockeland Springs in Nashville was just one of the structures that suffered damage when a series of tornadoes tore through middle Tennessee early March 3, killing at least 25 people at press time.

Disaster relief teams were assembled as soon as the storms cleared, and many undamaged churches opened their doors to those in need of shelter. 'In the face of tragedy ... we still find a way to come together as people and make sure that we're identifying with the body of Christ,' said Mark Davis, director of missions for Stone Association in Tennessee. (BP)

## Supreme Court hears La. abortion law case

The U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments March 4 in a Louisiana case that could restrict access to abortions.

The case, *June Medical Services LLC vs Russo*, centers around a Louisiana law that requires doctors who perform abortions to have admitting privileges at a hospital within 30 miles of the abortion facility. The measure is almost identical to Texas legislation that the Supreme Court struck down in 2016, deeming it too restrictive, but it's the first major abortion case the court has heard since the appointments of justices Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh.

Defenders of the Louisiana law argued before the court that admitting privileges serve as a basic health screening critical for the protection of women's health. (TAB)

## Trewick elected chair of GuideStone board

Renée A. Trewick was elected March 2 by GuideStone Financial Resources trustees to serve as board chair — the first time in the 175-year history of the Southern Baptist Convention an African-American woman has served in such a role.



TREWICK

Trewick, a vice president at insurance firm Marsh USA in New York, said she was "humbled" by her election.

An active Southern Baptist, Trewick served as vice chair of the GuideStone board in 2019. Her other Southern Baptist service includes serving on the executive board and finance committee of her local association. (BP)

## — NEWSBRIEFS —

### Bryant Wright named president of newly announced Send Relief



The International Mission Board (IMB) and the North American Mission Board (NAMB) announced Bryant Wright as the new

president of Send Relief on March 2. Wright was the founding pastor of Johnson Ferry Baptist Church, Marietta, Georgia, where he served for 38 years prior to his retirement on Dec. 15, 2019.

The announcement comes two weeks after NAMB and the IMB announced plans to collaborate on national and international compassion ministry under the banner of Send Relief.

As the president of Send Relief, Wright will report both to NAMB President Kevin Ezell and IMB President Paul Chitwood.

"Bryant Wright is a model Great Commis-



WRIGHT

sion leader," Chitwood said. "He has been heavily involved in that work, both with NAMB and IMB, for many years. I look forward to seeing how God will use him to lead Southern Baptists to continue to help the hurting and share hope with the lost." (IMB/NAMB)

### Duke's celebration of life to be held March 14 at FBC Montgomery



The celebration of life service for Lamar Duke, church planting strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM), will be held March 14 at 2 p.m. at First Baptist Church, Montgomery. Duke, who joined the SBOM staff in 2013, died Feb. 11.

"Lamar Duke was a treasured friend and missions colleague," said Rick Lance, SBOM executive director. "His positive spirit was contagious and appreciated by so many who knew him." (TAB)



DUKE

### Coronavirus concerns lead SBOM to halt global student missions trips



The Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) issued an official statement March 5 canceling international student missions trips because of concerns about the global coronavirus outbreak.

"Based upon the current situation, the [SBOM] has determined that the better part of wisdom is not to endorse any international missions trips by students and others, until further notice.

"The focus of the student summer missions will be upon the partnership projects we have in North America (the United States and Canada). An intentional focus will be on serving in Alabama and the rest of the southern part of the United States."

The International Mission Board (IMB) recently convened a coronavirus task force "to specifically address the implications (of COVID-19) for its personnel and partners, including church missions teams." The task force has launched a web page at [imb.org/COVID-19](http://imb.org/COVID-19).

Following a chapel service at Southwestern

# News near you

## BALDWIN ASSOCIATION

▶ **Styx River Baptist Church, Robertsdale**, will host the fifth annual soap box derby March 21 on County Road 68 at Styx River Bridge. Races begin at 10 a.m. Car specifics and other information available at [styxriverbaptistchurch.org](http://styxriverbaptistchurch.org).

## BETHLEHEM ASSOCIATION

▶ **Caleb Boss** is the new associate pastor of youth and children at **Mexia Baptist Church**. He previously served as a ministry interim at East Brent Baptist Church, Pensacola, Florida. Boss holds a bachelor's degree from The Baptist College of Florida in Graceville, Florida, and is currently pursuing his master's of divinity from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Elizabeth, have one child.



BOSS

## BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

▶ **Mark Clifton** is the new interim director of church revitalization for **Birmingham Metro Baptist Association**. He will begin March 15. Clifton also serves as transitional

pastor of McElwain Baptist Church, Birmingham. Clifton will continue serving with the North American Mission Board, where he has been the senior director of replanting since 2014. Clifton and his wife, Jill, have two children and three grandchildren.



CLIFTON

## BLOUNT ASSOCIATION

▶ **Pleasant View Missionary Baptist Church, Holly Pond**, will host its third Sunday night singing March 15 at 6 p.m., featuring Children of the Promise. For more information call 256-796-5986. Everyone is invited. Randy Burtram is pastor.

## COFFEE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Newbia Baptist Church, Elba**, will host its spring revival March 22–24. The Sunday service will be held at 6 p.m., and the Monday and Tuesday services will be held at 7 p.m. Cliff Quincey, pastor of New Home Baptist Church, Enterprise, will be the guest speaker. Everyone is invited. For more information call 334-308-7510. Will Jordan is pastor.

## CONECUH ASSOCIATION

▶ **Evergreen Baptist Church** will celebrate its 175th anniversary March 15 at 10:30 a.m. Special guests will include Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions; Rod Marshall, president of Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries; Lonette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission; and Debbie Campbell, director of communications

at The Alabama Baptist/TAB Media. A covered dish lunch will follow the service. Mark Whittington is pastor.

## DEKALB ASSOCIATION

▶ **Broadway Baptist Church, Rainsville**, will host Bill King as Brother Billy Bob Bohannon for the Merry Makers meeting March 19 at 11 a.m. Kevin McCreless is pastor.

## LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN ASSOCIATION

▶ **Lookout Mountain Baptist Association** will host the Hubert Cox Memorial Singing School at the Baptist Building on March 23–27 at 6 p.m. each night. Instruction in reading shape notes, harmony, directing and choir principles will be taught. Beginners are encouraged to attend. Everyone is invited. Dewitt Cox is associational music director, and Lloyd Borden is associational mission strategist. ▶ **Mount Bethel Baptist Church, Gaylesville**, will host special speaker Scott Lloyd on March 22 at 11 a.m. He will speak on substance abuse. Everyone is welcome.

## SELMA ASSOCIATION

▶ **Fairview Baptist Church, Selma**, will host the second annual turkey rodeo March 21. Lunch and prizes will be offered at noon. Registration forms are due to the church office March 20 by 12:30 p.m. For more information call 334-874-9446.

## OTHER

▶ **Samford University** will host the Alabama Singing Men in concert March 23 at 7 p.m. at the Wright Center. Tickets available at [tickets.samford.edu](http://tickets.samford.edu).

## — NEWSBRIEFS —

Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, on Feb. 27, Chitwood said missions work



Unsplash.com

in areas at the epicenter of the virus have "almost been totally shut down."

IMB suggests churches frequently monitor travel advisories in order to make wise and

prayerful decisions about upcoming missions trips. (IMB)

## Alabama Baptist youth minister retires after 46 years in ministry

John Jaye knows God can change a heart at any age. But he has always loved the opportunity to impact the hearts of teenagers before they get older and more resistant to change.

Jaye, who recently retired as minister to students at Northside Baptist Church, Jasper, spent almost all of his 46 years of ministry in youth-related work.

He had grown up with parents who coordinated a lot of the youth activities at his church, and that made an impression.

"I just grew up in that culture, and I felt God calling me to ministry at 13," Jaye said.

But at first he said no. He went to college and started studying civil engineering, but after his sophomore year, he realized he couldn't shake God's call on his life.

He transferred to Mobile College (now the University of Mobile), completed seminary and served at six churches through the years, including more than 21 years at First Baptist Church, Jasper, and almost 13 years at Northside Baptist. Along the way, his roles included some work in administration, education and recreation, but his primary calling was always to work with students.

"I love working with teenagers as much today as my first day in youth ministry," Jaye said. (Grace Thornton)



JAYE

## Villagers in India beat Christians, destroy local food supply



Not finding the Christian evangelist they planned to attack at home, worshippers of village deities in central-eastern India beat his mother, wife and 11-month-old son.

Podiya Tati's mother, Jimmey Tati, suffered a broken hand and injuries to her back and legs when she was struck with wooden rods in the Feb. 20 attack. The assailants said they would kill her son when he returned, sources said.

Tati said his 11-month-old son was in his wife's arms as they beat her and the baby was struck.

In vulgar language, the indigenous animists asked them why they went to church and did not participate in the village's religious festivals, he said. Tati, who said he became a Christian after healing prayer cured him of tuberculosis, attends a church in another village eight miles away.

India is ranked 10th on Christian support organization Open Doors' 2020 World Watch List of the countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. (MS)

ONEMISSION:TheGreatCommissionONEPROGRAM:TheCooperativeProgramMANYMINISTRIES:GreatCommissionMinistries

# MINISTRY SAFE WORKSHOP

JOIN US ON APRIL 7, 2020, IN DECATUR, ALABAMA.

GuideStone® knows that protecting children, youth and other vulnerable populations from the devastating consequences of sexual abuse is of the utmost importance to your ministry. **Which is why we are working with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, First Baptist Church Decatur and MinistrySafe to present the upcoming Ministry Safe Workshop.**

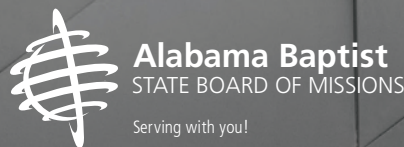
This one-day event will properly equip your ministry team with the tools and resources they need to help prevent acts of abuse.

**Will you join us for this important opportunity to learn how to keep your ministry aware and children safe?**

WHEN: **Tuesday, April 7, 2020 • 9:30 a.m. - 3 p.m.**

WHERE: **First Baptist Church Decatur (123 Church Street N.E.)**

FOR COST AND REGISTRATION INFORMATION: **alsbom.org/ministrysafe**



**ADVENTURE WEEKEND  
MARCH 20-21, 2020  
1ST-6TH GRADE BOYS  
SHOCCO SPRINGS/ADVENTURE CAMP**

//////  
A unique and challenging adventure for boys to experience "living on mission" through worship, obstacle course and games. Our boys will be challenged to develop a missional mindset, to prepare them for joining God's work in our state, country and world. ////

Options include dorm with two meals, or tent camping with no meals, one meal, or two meals.

**Check-in begins Friday at 5 p.m.** ////



**CAMP PASTOR: Dustin Scott**  
Dustin serves as the Pastor of Student Ministries at Hillcrest Church in Pensacola, Fla., where he oversees middle school, high school and college ministries at both Hillcrest campuses. Over the past 18 years, Dustin has had the privilege of serving churches in Alabama, North Carolina, and now Florida. His experience includes preschool, children, student and college ministries. Dustin has been married to April for 15 years and together they have two sons, Hollis and Marek.

Registration and contact information: [alsbom.org/ra](http://alsbom.org/ra) (334) 613-2227



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

# Importance of journaling

## Crafting journals helps women in recovery reflect on life, learn more about God

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

**K**ristie Johnson said she's not really sure what came over her the day she walked up to someone on staff at the Lovelady Center and asked if she could teach a class on how to create journals.

"It started when I was making Christmas cards with the ladies, and I thought it would be easy to teach them how to use recycled paper and junk mail to make some journals too," said Johnson, a member of NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville.

### 'A God thing'

She volunteered to do just that, and the staff at the Lovelady Center — a ministry that helps women restore hope after serving time in prison or going through other difficult life situations — asked if she could expand the idea just a bit.

They wanted her to teach

a six-week course on the importance of journaling.

She voiced a reluctant yes — she had always loved scrapbooking, but journaling had always been her least favorite part.

"I went into research mode and found all this stuff about why we should journal, [how] it reduces [stress] and how it could heal your brain, and I haphazardly threw a class together in two weeks," Johnson said.

It might have felt thrown together, but it turned out to be a God thing, she said. She can sum up everything she taught them in an acrostic she wrote using the letters in the word "journal":

J — Jot down whatever comes to mind.

O — Open your heart.

U — Untie your emotions.

R — Read what you've written.

N — Notice your attitude.

A — Admit the truth.

L — Learn from it all.

"Journaling helps you



Photo courtesy of Kristie Johnson  
Kristie Johnson (standing), a member of NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville, teaches a six-week course on the importance of journaling at the Lovelady Center.

release your emotions and stress, and you can heal and learn how to protect yourself from those things," Johnson said. "You can pick up patterns in your emotions and figure out a battle plan for how to deal with them in the future."

### Armor of God

As she went through the different ways to journal, she also taught the women Scrip-

ture, how to put on the armor of God and how to express their emotions to God.

"They need to be equipped to deal with the stuff they are writing down once they get it out on paper," Johnson said.

She also used the handmade journals themselves to teach the women about who they are and how God sees them.

"I tell them, 'This junk

mail and old envelopes we're using to make these journals is garbage, and sometimes we think we're junk, garbage, worthless, no good to anybody. But I'm going to show you [something] different,'" Johnson said.

### Setting goals

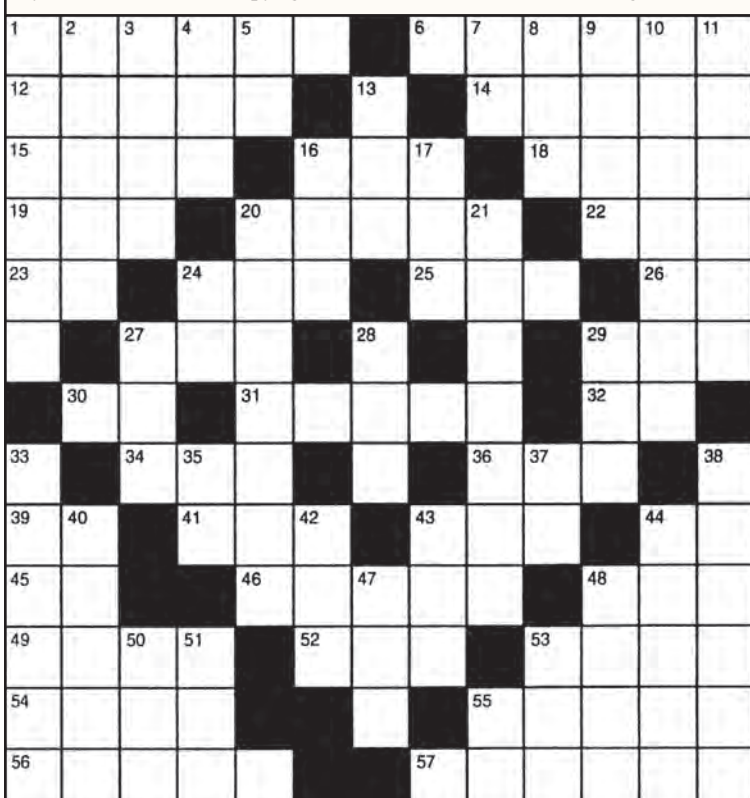
She tells them they can feel worthy again, and she helps them set goals for the future — goals like finding a job or writing their daughters letters every week. Then she helps them formulate a plan for how to achieve those goals.

"It was just fun, good to get to know them," Johnson said, noting she was starting her second round of the six-week course in March — and some of the women had already asked if they could retake the course.

"I opened up and shared with them, we cried together, we laughed together," she said. "I hated to see it end. I could do this every day." ✝

## Christian Crossword

By Martha Wall Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



### Across

- Compassionate. (James 5:11)
- Pleasant and mild.
- Musical saga.
- Mount. (Esther 6:8)
- Inquisitive.
- Behold.
- \_\_\_ weigh the path. (Isa. 26:7)
- Taken in adultery in the very \_\_\_\_\_. (John 8:4)
- Seat of affection. (Phil. 1:7)
- Eccentric joker.
- Left hand. (abbr.)
- Introducing new angle. (Matt. 5:22)
- Words of a talebearer \_\_\_\_ as wounds. (Prov. 26:22)
- His banner over \_\_\_\_ was love. (Song of Sol. 2:4)
- A memorial of \_\_\_\_\_. (Matt. 26:13)
- For each.
- Invitation to

- partake. (Isa. 55:1)
- Herein is a marvelous \_\_\_\_\_. (John 9:30)
- Hath translated \_\_\_\_ into the kingdom. (Col. 1:13)
- High priest. (1 Sam. 1:9)
- He that hath an \_\_\_\_\_. (Rev. 2:7)
- Either.
- This \_\_\_\_ thing I do. (Phil. 3:13)
- Woman's name.
- Any one of God's children. (abbr.)
- In regard to.
- Merrily.
- There's more.
- Goliath's hometown. (1 Sam. 17:4)
- Part of clay, part of iron. (Dan. 2:41)
- Pagan city. (Isa. 37:13)
- Resound.
- Friendly

- expression.
- Where your treasure is, \_\_\_\_\_. (Matt. 6:21)
- \_\_\_ of gold in pictures of silver. (Prov. 25:11)

### Down

- Levels of intonation.
- Period.
- Snug habitat. (Ps. 84:3)
- Root out of \_\_\_\_ ground. (Isa. 53:2)
- Each. (abbr.)
- Wordless question.
- East of Eden. (Gen 4:16)
- Describing metal or mettle.
- Takes for granted.
- Often a treasured communication.
- Satan's affirmative. (Gen. 3:1)
- Place.
- Historical time.
- Feeling pain.

- A great sadness.
- Exist.
- Gardening tool.
- Reward: death. (Rom. 6:23)
- To destroy them, and had cast \_\_\_\_\_. (Esther 9:24)
- God does not \_\_\_\_\_. (Isa. 49:15)
- Look.
- Associate in arts.
- Scratches.
- A measure to \_\_\_\_ even unto you. (2 Cor. 10:13)
- If any man \_\_\_\_ of this bread. (John 6:51)
- Beverage.
- Not fresh.
- A charged subatomic particle.
- Their feet run to \_\_\_\_\_. (Prov. 1:16)
- An article.
- Aaron's resting place. (Num. 20:25)
- An evil creature.
- Spanish. (abbr.)

# SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For March 15

## Explore the Bible

By Robert E. Jackson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



### INSUFFICIENT Romans 2:17–29

#### Hypocrisy Revealed (17–24)

Throughout the book of Romans, Paul shifts back and forth between the Gentiles and the Jews. You recall we discussed that many Gentiles reject God's self-revelation in creation; they are without excuse.

The Jews, however, have more excellent knowledge available to them producing a false sense of pride and superiority. Paul presents a mirror of truth for the Jews to self-evaluate.

Rhetorically, Paul asks questions that expose their hypocrisy to the law. The orthodoxy (right teaching) of the Jews is not in question. However, their orthopraxy (right practice) left much to be desired. Put simply, they did not practice what they preached. By neglecting to live out the truth, they both dishonored and pushed people away from God.

Reading this passage should cause us to reflect on our lives. As Christians, we are often tough on people who do not keep the truth found in the Scripture. While we need to stand for truth, we need to examine our own hearts.

Like the Jews, do we preach one thing while our hearts are longing to act on what we speak against? Is there hypocrisy within the Church that is keeping people away from our Lord?

As I examine my own life, I realize it is impossible for me to follow the law perfectly. I sin and fall short of God's glory. This realization humbles me and cancels any claims of self-righteousness.

#### Obedience Required (25–27)

Jewish superiority is also seen in circumcision that sets them apart physically from other races. The rabbis taught that "all the circumcised have part in the world to come." In other words, they taught circumcision assured salvation.

Paul rejects this common teaching by explaining that this symbol is valid only if the law is kept. Circumcision should be an outward sign of an inward commitment to

God. A Jew's circumcision is invalidated by a person who does not follow the law.

On the other hand, Gentiles who have a heart towards God are partakers in the covenant. Hence, one's heart, not the cutting of the skin, is indicative of a right relationship with God.

Even today, some members of the church adhere to ecclesiastical rules while their hearts are far from God. Judgment awaits all people who say they love Christ but refuse to obey what He commands.

#### Heart Recognized (28–29)

This section is shattering for the Jewish people. Paul argues that a descendant of Abraham, who wears the badge of circumcision, is not necessarily a Jew. True Jews have nothing to do with a pedigree or a mark on their bodies. Instead, Jews are composed of all people whose hearts are circumcised by the Holy Spirit.

Remember, while humans look at the outward appearance, God looks at the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). Specifically, people who are not racially related to Jews but who have a changed heart are authentic Jews in God's sight.

Conversely, Jewish people whose only claim to God is external rules and circumcision miss out. Paul explained that real followers are marked by a heart dedicated to God.

Charles Spurgeon is correct in a communion hymn he wrote:

*If now, with eyes defiled and dim,  
We see the signs but see not Him,  
O, may His love the scales displace,  
And bid us see Him, face to face!*

In sum, both Jews and Gentiles need Christ. Just as the Jews are challenged to gaze in the mirror of God's truth to see their true heart condition, so must you look introspectively at your life.

Church membership, attendance and tradition are good things, but insufficient in themselves. Again, God is looking at your heart. What does He see in you? 🌈

## Bible Studies for Life

By James Riley Strange, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of New Testament, Samford University



### SALVATION Romans 3:20–28

This week we examine another word commonly used by Christians. It is notable that "salvation" does not appear in today's passage. Instead, we find terms that Paul associates with the process of salvation: righteousness/justification, redemption/ransom and atoning sacrifice/propitiation.

Two challenges emerge to understanding this passage. The first is that in the early chapters of Romans, Paul frequently shifts between imagined conversation partners. In 2:1–16, for example, Paul writes as if speaking to a Gentile; in 2:17–29, as if speaking to a Jew. In chapter 3, apparently, he is speaking to a third hypothetical person. Knowing Paul does this helps to make sense of his complex argument.

Second, we face a translation challenge. For example, in our English Bibles, "justify" and "make righteous" translate the same verb; "justification" and "righteousness" translate the same noun; and "justified" and "righteous" translate the same adjective. This challenge is evident throughout today's passage. See the examples in verses 20 and 21 ("will be justified" and "the righteousness of God") and verse 26 ("righteous" and "he justifies"). These terms refer to being made "right" with God. Similarly, "faith" and "belief" translate the same noun, while "have faith" and "believe" translate the same verb. Many translations explain that "through faith in Jesus Christ" also can be read "through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ."

In the passage for today, Paul is responding to the Scripture he quoted in verses 9 through 20.

#### We are declared righteous by Christ, the One who is righteous. (20–22)

When Paul says "all," he means both Jews and Gentiles. Both are in wrong relationships with God. Neither can make themselves right with God by observing the law laid out in Scripture. All must be made right through "the law of faith" (v. 27).

That faith is understood in two ways:

Jesus Christ's faithful obedience to die on the cross, and Jews' and Gentiles' faithful response to that death and resurrection. No distinction occurs between Jews and Gentiles on this point.

#### We are redeemed by Christ and brought back to God. (23–24)

Paul spells out the problem and God's solution. "All" people, whether Jews or Gentiles, have sinned. Consequently, all equally and freely receive God's grace (see vv. 29–30). The word "redemption" in some translations also can be "ransom." This grace is not payment for services rendered to God, nor is it purchased. God simply grants what is needed.

#### Through our faith in Him, Christ atoned for our sins. (25–28)

Paul says God put Christ forward as an "atoning" or "propitiating" sacrifice (we find both translations). "Atone" means what it looks like: to be made "at one" with God. "Propitiate" comes from a Latin word that means to please a god. The implication here is that Christ's faithful obedience pleases God (see Rom. 5:18–19; compare Phil. 2:8–10), as does our faithful obedience to Christ. Through both Christ's and our own obedience, we receive God's justification, God's righteousness. That is, we have no justification/righteousness of our own (v. 20). We can be unified with God only when He unifies us through Christ.

This is something we teach our children from an early age, just as our parents taught us. Why then do we keep reminding ourselves of this truth? Perhaps because just as we do not always trust God's grace, so we sometimes forget that we can't make ourselves right with God. Sometimes we would rather trust our own efforts than God's grace.

God Himself has solved what at first appears to be unsolvable. All need salvation, and through Jesus Christ, God offers salvation to all. Amen? Amen. 🌈



# Media reviews

**MOVIES/TV**

## Powerful romantic film 'I Still Believe' leads March family-friendly lineup

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

**A** new faith-based film by the Erwin Brothers, "I Still Believe" (PG), hits theaters March 13, telling the inspiring and emotion-laden romantic story of Jeremy Camp's marriage to his first wife, Melissa. The two fell in love in college and then married, although Melissa soon was diagnosed with an aggressive form of ovarian cancer that later claimed her life.

Melissa, though dying, grew in her faith until the very end. And Camp, though grieving, never left her side.

After her death, Camp penned the popular song, "I Still Believe."

The film has drawn comparisons to "I Can Only Imagine," the 2018 Erwin Brothers' movie that opened at No. 3, earned a rare A+ CinemaScore rating from moviegoers and grossed more than \$83 million — the highest-grossing film ever released by the Erwin Brothers.

The stories are very different. "I Can Only Imagine"

spotlighted the relationship between an estranged father and son. "I Still Believe" is a romance — and one of the best ones in that genre you'll ever watch.

It stars K.J. Apa as Camp and Britt Robertson as Melissa Henning and promotes themes often missing from modern-day romances: self-sacrifice, chastity and till-death-do-us-part commitment.

### Definition of love

After all, it's a romantic movie that promotes the biblical definition of love.

"That's the thing I'm the most excited about," co-director Andrew Erwin said. "It's a love story that is so palpable and just real, and kids are mesmerized by it. Instead of it being a feelings-based, how-do-you-make-me-feel love, it's a commitment to walk through the fire together."

It's a squeaky-clean romance with no language or sexuality, and it just might be better than "I Can Only Imagine."

No spoilers here, but I can say this: "I Still Believe" is



Photo by Jason LaVeris/Lionsgate

### 'I Still Believe'

a powerful movie that every teenager and young adult in America needs to see. It also contains a gospel-centric message that every church can support.

Gary Sinise and Shania Twain play Camp's parents.

Also worth watching this month:

► **"I Am Patrick" (theaters)** — It's a feature-length docudrama

about one of the most famous missionaries in the history of Christianity. Patrick risked his life to take the gospel to Ireland, and his ministry bore gospel fruit that can still be seen today. The film separates fact from fiction and weaves a riveting, inspiring story. It will be in theaters two nights only: March 17–18.

► **"Heavenquest: A Pil-**

**grim's Progress" (home video)** — It's a film that tells the "backstory" to John Bunyan's famous novel. No, Bunyan didn't write "Heavenquest," but its story and allegory

make it a worthy companion. "Heavenquest" tells how Evangelist — who is a supporting character in Bunyan's book — became a servant of the one true King. The film is now on home video

platforms. Unrated, it contains a few scenes that may not be appropriate for small children.

► **"A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood" (home video)** — Lloyd Vogel, a journalist for *Esquire*, learns to heal and forgive after interviewing Fred Rogers of "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood." The film is based on a true story and stars Tom

Hanks, who is excellent in his role as Rogers. Rated PG for some strong thematic material, a brief fight and some mild language, though none is spoken by Rogers.

► **"When Calls the Heart" Season 7 (television)** — The Hallmark Channel story of Hope Valley continues for another season, as Elizabeth raises Little Jack while juggling two suitors, Nathan and Lucas. Meanwhile, Jesse and Clara plan their wedding. Hallmark Channel's "When Calls the Heart" is a drama the whole family can enjoy. 🇺🇸



'I Still Believe'

Photo by Michael Kubeisy/Lionsgate

## 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.

# ‘Let’s do it’

## Steve and Kathy Sheldon’s ministry highlights WMU as pillar of missions

By **Trennis Henderson**  
WMU National Correspondent

It may be challenging to find any ministry couple in Pennsylvania more committed to the role of Woman’s Missionary Union (WMU) in missions support and discipleship than Kathy and Steve Sheldon.

For the past 35-plus years, the Sheldons have invested their lives in families, churches and communities in their home state of Pennsylvania. Much of their ministry focus has revolved around engaging churches and associations in missions on the local, state, national and international levels — and the primary missions tool they have utilized is involvement in WMU missions discipleship programs.

### ‘Pivotal part’

“One of the things I found very early in my pastoral ministry was one of, if not the deepest foundation in Southern Baptist churches, is missions — and the pillar of missions is WMU,” Steve said. “I knew if I was going to have a strong missions church that reached its community and reached the world, we needed to work through WMU organizations. That was very pivotal for all the churches we’ve been a part of.”

“Every church we have served in has had WMU or I’ve introduced it to them,” Kathy said. “It’s really been important to me and to Steve because it’s a way to introduce missions to every age group, and through that, to our future missionaries.

“I just think [WMU] is a wonderful way for them to be introduced to what is already happening and what their opportunities are, either locally or internationally,” she added. “There’s just so many different situations they could be involved in. In the churches, we’ve tried to do that as far as missions trips, as far as missions projects locally and to involve every age group. I think that’s a big factor in WMU.”

The Sheldons’ strong commitment to missions and all things WMU started early in their ministry journey. After being stationed in San Diego while Steve was in the U.S. Navy and then serving in churches in Kentucky while he was studying at Campbellsville College (now University) and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the Sheldons returned to their home state in 1984 “and have been serving in Pennsylvania ever since,” Kathy said.

During that time, she served 11



Steve and Kathy Sheldon have ministered for more than 35 years in their home state of Pennsylvania. Working through WMU missions organizations has been ‘very pivotal for all the churches we’ve been a part of,’ Steve said.

years as president of Pennsylvania/South Jersey WMU while Steve served as a pastor and director of missions, including 23 years as pastor of Bux-Mont Baptist Church, Hatboro, Pennsylvania, in suburban Philadelphia. He recently retired as pastor of Wrightsdale Baptist Church, Peach Bottom, Pennsylvania, and they moved back to their hometown of Waynesboro.

During her years as state convention WMU president, Kathy drew on the resources and experiences she gained as a member of national WMU’s executive board. “As I served with national WMU, I wanted to bring back to the state everything I learned at our board meetings,” she said. “As new products or new opportunities were introduced, that is what we would bring back and share.”

As a result of those efforts, she said, “I feel like it has introduced more churches to WMU but our challenge is endless ... because of the changeover with pastors in churches.”

For Steve and Kathy, that involvement has led to missions opportunities from Kazakhstan to Chile. “The very first missions trip we went to was to Kazakhstan in the Soviet

Union with 300 other individuals from across the United States,” Kathy recalled. “It was a two-week experience, and it was eye-opening and very heartfelt when you realize how very blessed we are.”

Steve emphasized that their commitment to supporting and promoting the work of WMU “really is a missions mindset.”

With Kathy frequently taking the lead in urging missions engagement on the local church level, “she wound up the WMU director in every church we served,” Steve reflected. “As far as missions was concerned, we would never say no. If an opportunity came, we were going to find a way to do it and we worked together on that because that was our byword: ‘Never say no. Let’s do it.’”

### Home and global missions

Encouraging other congregations to actively pursue a missions mindset fueled by WMU involvement and resources, Steve said, “You can deepen the commitment of your people by the missions organizations, by being a part of your local, state, national and international missions. The stronger we can be at home with missions, the better our mission globally is.”



WMU photo by Pam Henderson

Steve and Kathy Sheldon served eight years at Wrightsdale Baptist Church, Peach Bottom, Pennsylvania, before he retired last year as pastor. “We’ve always encouraged the WMU organizations across the spectrum of ages,” Steve said.