



# The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

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# Sabbaticals

## Vital for developing fresh vision and jumpstarting church health

By **Shawn Hendricks**  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

**A** well-known pastor in the Washington D.C. area stood before his congregation in December and told them he was tired and that he needed time away to rest and work on his relationship with God.

“I feel so distant from God,” Howard-John Wesley, pastor of Alfred Street Baptist Church, Alexandria, Virginia, told his congregation of more than 4,500 attendees, *The Washington Post* reported. “One of the greatest mistakes of pastoring is to think because you work for God, you’re close to God.”

Wesley plans to step away from all duties at the church until April. He’s not burned out, he said, but needs an “intermission.”

Wesley is not alone in his desire or need for a sabbatical, some Alabama Baptist ministry leaders say. Taking a sabbatical or extended time away from the pulpit — in addition to regularly scheduled vacation time — can be a healthy way to recharge and develop a fresh vision moving a church forward. They note for some churches, sabbaticals may involve a few weeks, a month or even three months. But they rarely go beyond that.

Keeping ministry from becoming an idol can be a struggle for pastors, said Dewayne Rembert, church planting strategist with the Montgomery Baptist Association and pastor

of Flatline Church at Chisholm in Montgomery.

Rembert acknowledged that stress and burn-out fortunately haven’t been issues for him. He credits having “the best” associate pastor, developing leaders and a commitment to taking needed time away with

family for helping him avoid those ministry hazards.

“Ministry can become an idol if you let it,” he wrote in a Facebook response to Wesley’s announcement.

“I prayed for divine balance before I said yes to this assignment,” Rembert wrote. “I don’t have to be the vessel preaching

every Sunday, teaching every Bible study or solving every problem. That’s where equipping leaders comes into play. Love them well, serve them well, [and] they will love and serve others well. If me or [the associate pastor are] burnt out, then how can we watch out for the sheep? Work out of your rest; don’t rest out of your work.”

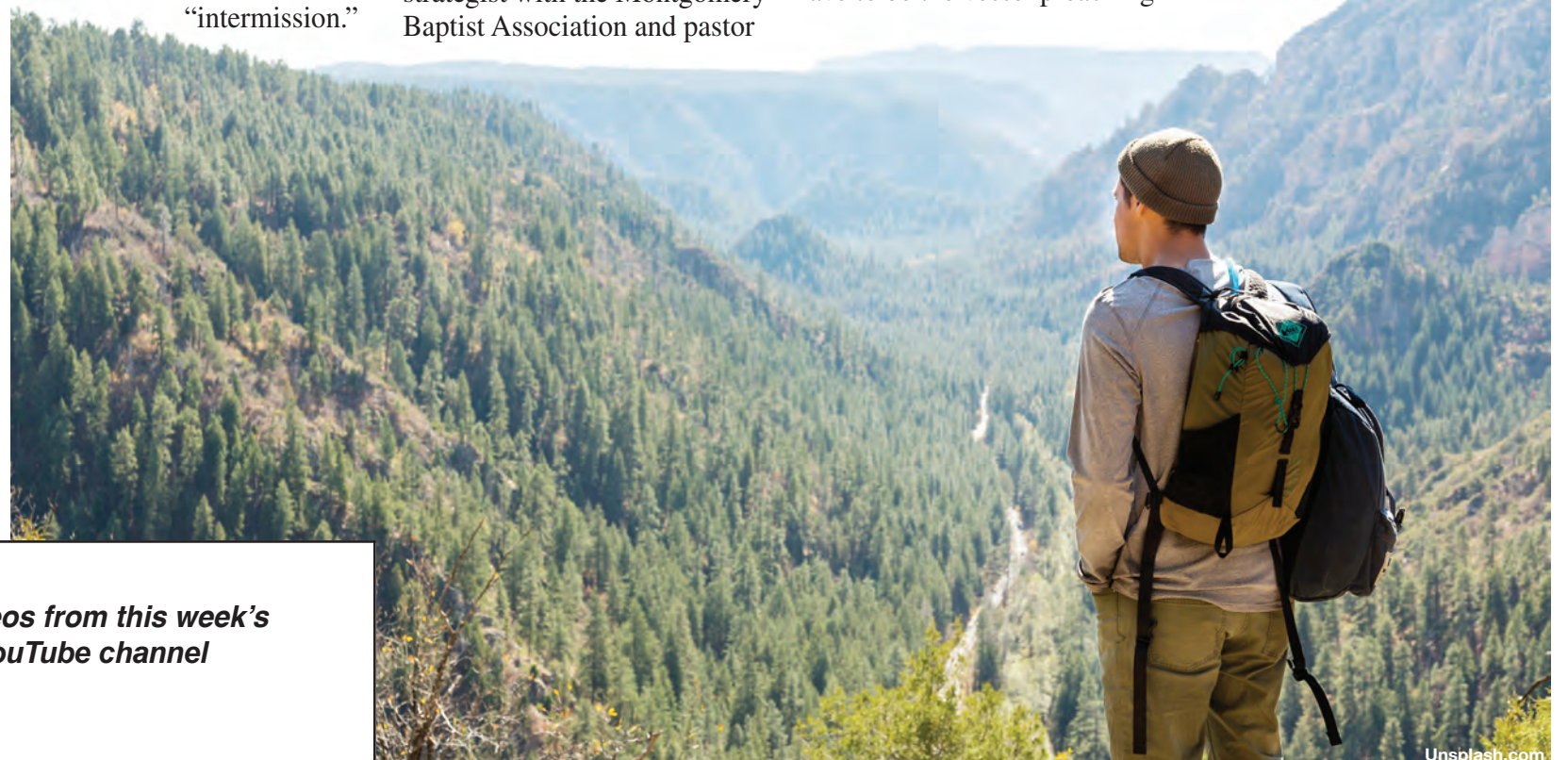
### ‘Lead better’

For Danny Wood, pastor of Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Birmingham, since 1997, taking a sabbatical every five years allows him to rest, refresh, set new goals and lead his congregation better.

Wood took a 6-week-long (See ‘Clear your Mind,’ page 11)

### SABBATICAL

*A period of time during which someone can leave their ordinary work and travel or study. From the Greek word *sabatikos*, which means “of the Sabbath.”*



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

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# Three ways writing-to-publish benefits ministers of the gospel

Writing for one's own enjoyment, such as journaling, and writing-to-publish are two distinctively different disciplines. Ministers who write-to-publish (including pastors, church staff members, missionaries, Bible study leaders, worship leaders and others called vocationally to serve Christ), not only bring God's promises to the world but bring at least three unique benefits to their own lives.

## 1. Greater communication with God through prayer

Writing-to-publish deepens a minister's prayer life. Wrestling with writing usually brings intense prayer. It involves a minister opening up heart and mind, actively listening for God's gentle whisper and asking specifically for divine direction, guidance and insight.

Prayer also means choosing the correct time for the published word to go forth. A writer's finished book manuscript will need eight months to two years in the publisher's hands before the book's final release. Only God knows the message the world will need to hear far into the future. And He sends that message at just the right time to His praying writers.

## 2. Deeper understanding of people and Scripture

Writing-to-publish brings the minister a deeper understanding of God's word. Published writing means serious research, as well as a profound understanding of Scripture and theology.

The writer also must decide the

book's intended reader — the publishing marketplace. In order to choose the correct marketplace, the writing minister must know the specific reader and what this article or book will "do" for the reader.

## 3. Valuable lessons of commitment and discipline

God might give a minister the inspired passion to write, but carefully crafting words that actually communicate comes as a lesson well-studied and hard-earned. Writing-to-publish means careful crafting, rewriting and learning to place the proper words in the proper place and in the proper order.

When writers step into the publishing arena, they'll also face tough competition. Editors regularly receive an avalanche of articles and manuscripts from good writers, and they can choose to publish

only a few. But competition need not discourage ministers, for they never write alone. They are supported and blessed by the Holy Spirit.

Writing-to-publish is hard work, but ways exist to relieve some of the confusion and answer many of the questions writers have. TAB is hosting The Writing Minister, a seminar on nonfiction writing and publishing taught by Denise George, on March 30 from 9 a.m. to noon. The seminar is open to all current and retired ministers and ministry assistants and is included as part of your TAB subscription. To register, email news@thealabamabaptist.org or call 800-803-5201, ext. 122. Limited spots are available. (Denise George)

Limited spots are available, so call or email today to register for The Writing Minister.

## TAB Media

"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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### 'Nation's Top Regional Christian Newspaper'

1999, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018  
as judged by Associated Church Press, Baptist Communicators Association, Evangelical Press Association or Religion Communicators Council



The crossword puzzle can be found on page 17.

## Do you use email? Let us know

In our planning for the what if's related to the current COVID-19 situation, we determined we can confidently say you won't miss an issue of *The Alabama Baptist*.

First, we already function with a system that is mobile and allows for our coverage to be accomplished from multiple locations.

Second, we have a cross-trained staff so if one member is or several are out sick, others are available.

And third, we email a full-color,

enhanced version of each week's issue out on Thursday, so even if the United States Post Office were to halt mail service for a few days the digital PDF version would still make it to you — assuming we have your email address.

To have your email added to the digital edition list, email subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org.

If you don't use email, then we will mail you any delayed issues as soon as possible. (TAB)

# MY RASHIONALE

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

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@RashionalThts



## Use global halting of events as opportunity to rest in Him

**B**y the time we realized March Madness for the year 2020 would not describe basketball brackets, rivalries and surreal roundball moments, the normal activities of life as we know it had practically shut down.

COVID-19 became a household term, and our homes, offices, schools, churches and devices might just be the cleanest they've ever been.

Online screenings and drive-thru testing centers emerged seemingly overnight.

Many conferences, classes and church services were canceled, rescheduled or moved online.

Airlines and hotels removed all rescheduling and cancellation fees. They even made it super easy to go online and click through the necessary items in a matter of seconds.

Leaders at all levels assessed, reassessed and worked hard to make the best decisions they could for the people for which they were responsible, as well as for the businesses and organizations they lead.

And when Alabama's first confirmed case of COVID-19 was announced March 13, the assessments narrowed to an even more laser-focused stance.

While our team at TAB Media worked to stay up on all the latest reports and announcements, we also performed appropriate assessments related to our staff and office as well.

Past experiences of unforeseen difficult events, such as the Snowpocalypse winter storm

of 2014, the April 2011 tornado devastation in Alabama, the H1N1 flu pandemic of 2009 and other experiences through the years, provided opportunities to develop crisis management plans we still use today.

As crises emerge along the way, we always try to dust off our existing plans and put those into play while also adapting as needed to the current situation and accounting for new technology and resources available to us.

Learning from each experience makes us better and more prepared for the next event sure

to come our way. Having a crisis management and communications plan prevents panic and uncertainty because team members trust the leadership and are informed early, consistently and with clarity about what to expect and how to prepare.

Even a basic plan such as knowing who is in charge during a crisis and naming one person to handle all outgoing and incoming communications gives an advantage in focusing quickly on determining priorities.

As we find our way through the COVID-19 pandemic, I'm confident history will report

amazing stories of people of faith shining for Jesus.

Volunteers trained in medical missions and Southern Baptist Disaster Relief will undoubtedly be on the front lines.

Believers with a chaplain's heart will work to calm the masses, and people of prayer will unite across the globe to call on God to lead us through this journey.

And I believe the best of each of us will surface as we come together. Take this opportunity to calm your heart and mind and sling some Jesus all around.✝️

## SERVING WITH TAB

### The Alabama Baptist/TAB Media welcome new members of board of directors Golden, Gandy

*The board of directors for The Alabama Baptist, Inc., (TAB) met March 7 for its annual spring board meeting at TAB's office in Homewood.*

*Welcomed to the board by TAB president and editor-in-chief Jennifer Davis Rash (left) were new board members Melissa Carlisle Golden (center), founder of Transformation Counseling, Inc., in Prattville and member of FBC Prattville, and quality engineer Teddye Gandy, pastor of Pike Road Baptist Church in Montgomery County (right).*

*Current officers of TAB's board are chairman, Rob Jackson; vice chairman Gary Fenton; and secretary Chris Roberts. Serving as committee chairs are Travis Coleman, Arthur Williams and Ben Bowden. (TAB)*



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

# Your Voice



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

## During times of market volatility, remember investment basics

By David Spika  
GuideStone Financial Resources

During the last week of February, U.S. equity markets experienced their biggest one-week decline since 2008, with the S&P 500 Index falling nearly 13%. The sell-off was sparked by growing fears about the coronavirus, officially known as COVID-19.

Markets have remained highly volatile in March as the virus has continued its spread through Asia, Europe and the United States.

It can often appear that stock markets are reacting to minute-by-minute headlines.

Given that stocks had a surprisingly powerful rally in 2019 and

we are now in the 11th year of the current bull market — several years longer than the historical average — financial market volatility should be expected.

Furthermore, the stock market has historically experienced an average 10% decline during presidential election years. So the recent downturn is not out of the ordinary.

If the coronavirus, oil weakness or some other unforeseen catalyst puts significant downward pressure on corporate profits, continued selloffs in the market are likely.

What began as a supply shock driven by Chinese factory closings has the potential to evolve into a demand shock if consumers and

businesses continue to curb activity (e.g., drastically reducing travel, canceling events, self-quarantining, etc.) and spending.

We believe the widespread fear currently permeating markets has increased the potential for a recession in the next 12 months.

Market sell-offs can be dangerous for long-term investors because they can trigger fear-driven “market timing” impulses to sell out of positions. History has shown there’s a real cost to trying to time the market.

GuideStone encourages investors to remember these four basic principles:

**1. Always focus on long-term objectives, not emotions.** Especially for retirement participants, these assets are intended to serve needs for a long period of time. Make sure objectives and actions are consistent with the time horizon.

**2. Avoid making impulsive decisions.** Making changes based on short-term market moves has a higher degree of failure, as it promotes buying high and selling low. The performance of an account moving forward will be determined based on results of the financial markets in the future, not the past. Investors cannot sell yesterday’s losses or buy yesterday’s gains.

**3. Don’t count losses (or gains).** Consistent contributions to an investment account or retirement plan afford investors a systematic way of taking advantage of invest-

ment opportunities as markets ebb and flow.

**4. Maintain realistic expectations about market behavior.** Financial markets in the short term tend to fluctuate in response to social, political and economic events. However, historically, the markets stabilize and return to profitability over the long term, focusing on the underlying fundamentals.

Volatility can be unnerving, but markets have historically rewarded a long-term focus and a diversified investment approach.

Investors concerned by the market’s recent moves should look at their portfolios and ensure they are appropriately diversified. Active investors who believe they have too much equity exposure relative to their risk tolerance and long-term objectives should consider whether it makes sense to explore less-volatile asset classes.

However, this should be done in an attempt to better align asset allocation with investor goals, not in an attempt to time the market. During times of uncertainty, it is important for investors to remain committed to their long-term investing strategy.

*EDITOR’S NOTE — David Spika leads GuideStone Capital Management and serves as executive vice president to GuideStone Funds. He also sits on the executive leadership team for GuideStone Financial Resources and chairs the firm’s Faith-Based Investing Committee.*

## Letters to the Editor

Concerning your article on Sunday evening worship services in the March 5 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*, to me the model for Sunday evening worship is not biblical.

God started the sabbath at sundown the night before the sabbath with families gathering at a meal in preparation for the next day. The sabbath ends at sundown with everyone able to prepare for the new week.

We complicate things by paying little attention the evening before.

We stay out late and do little

preparation for Sunday (the sabbath). Consequently, we limp into Sunday morning.

Then we stay out late on Sunday evening and limp into work on Monday.

If we want to change what we’re doing, how about leading in rediscovering a biblical view of the sabbath and structuring our time properly.

We could structure activities for families on Saturday evening.

When God has a plan and reveals it, we should follow it.

**Richard Hitchcock**  
Trussville, Ala.

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

“As this virus brings the world to its knees, we as a church minister from our knees.”

PASTOR MITCH KIM  
Wellspring Alliance Church, Wheaton, Illinois

If the Church — with all its brokenness — would focus on showing grace, then we wouldn't be able to hold all the people.

**Terry Newberry**  
Douglasville, Ga.

Last night I picked up my Bible for a very late devotional reading. I have been reading through Genesis and came to chapter 16, and God reminded me of one of His names as revealed in Scripture, El Rio, or The God who sees me. That verse was medication to a weary soul. Last night I needed a reminder that in the midst of struggles and difficulties, I serve a God who never lets me out of His sight. He is the God who keeps His eyes on me. He sees my good times, my bad times, my joy

and mourning. This world can make you feel invisible and insignificant, but remember, God sees you. My Abba Father will not take His eyes off of me, His child. What a great comfort!

**Kevin Blackwell**  
Birmingham, Ala.

Churches seeking to provide a welcoming place for people with disabilities should begin by finding out from those with experience how they can improve. Everyone deserves a church home. Jesus asks us to care for those in need, not only those in poverty, but those in need of fellowship, friends and support. We must show those who walk through the world differently from us that we have thought about them and have

made room for them. It's not their job to pave the way. It's our job to make the way easier for them first.

**Jamie Sumner**  
Disability advocate and author of "Eat, Sleep, Save the World"

We've been able to help people see, especially believers, with an eternal perspective. The Father's hand is still in this. He's still good, and we're still under His hand. I've just been thinking through how easy it can be to complain in situations like this. But God has taught me, just as He taught the Israelites walking through the wilderness, that He's still good, He's still sovereign and there's still things to cultivate gratitude for.

**IMB worker in East Asia**



Photo courtesy of Judson College  
Mark Tew is president of Judson College in Marion.

## God gives the increase

Recently I met with a group of students to discuss the completion of a service project. I asked, "How many degrees does it take to boil water?" They looked around in silence, knowing this had to be a trick question. After clarifying whether I wanted the answer in Fahrenheit or Celsius, they replied, "212 degrees."

"Wrong," I said. "It only takes one degree to boil water — the 212th degree to be exact. None of the first 211 degrees can boil water. It always takes the 212th degree."

What followed was a wonderful discussion of how the outcome of ministry is rarely known in its fullest extent. When working to accomplish God's purposes, we will not know if we are the first, middle or last person in the process.

The ministry we start may take many years and many other contributors to bring the desired result to conclusion. Conversely, any given person may be the one who gets to see the result.

Paul told the Corinthians that neither the person who initiates nor the person who culminates is relevant: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase" (1 Cor. 3:6). Our focus must always be on God accomplishing His purposes through our lives.

—Mark Tew

## From the *Twitterverse*

### @drjamesmerritt

The #CoronavirusOutbreak gives all Jesus followers a divine opportunity to display to the world how to respond rather than react. So today I choose worship over worry. I choose faith over fear. I choose peace over panic believing in a sovereign God who gives saving grace 24/7.

### @shadesmtn

Jesus didn't create you to settle. He created you to love you and for you to enjoy relationship with Him, where you follow Him to greater opportunities and greater challenges, all for His glory and our good.

### @JackieHillPerry

In Exodus 24, Aaron saw God. In Exodus 32, Aaron made a golden calf. I asked myself, how could

someone see God, be so near to Him as to glance at His feet, and then turn around and worship a god that is no God at all. And then I remembered, I've done it too.

### @DGrantGaines

The Lord gave me the opportunity to lead someone to Christ at lunch today. I pray that God always helps me remember that the ministry that happens inside the church building's walls is just preparation for the ministry that's supposed to happen outside the church building's walls.

### @Stu\_Davidson

Are you often offended? Are you repeatedly repulsed? When your day initiates, are you already irritated? The Christ follower should be slow to speak and patient when provoked. God has given you grace

and wrapped you in matchless mercy. Remember, give grace because one day, you will need it yourself. #pastorponders #trustinhim

### @DL\_Staples

What was true for Israel is true for us. "Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children" (Deut. 4:9).

### @RobertAtCCC

"Oh God, You are my God. And I will ever praise You. I will seek You in the morning, and I will learn to walk in Your ways. ... And step by step You'll lead me, and I will follow You all of my days!" @RichMullinsSays #FollowJesus #MakeDisciples

# Dealing with depression

## West Cullman DOM experiences God's faithfulness, presence through depression journey

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

In December 2015 — three days after their son's wedding — Dennis Trimble's wife, Shirley, sat down in their recliner for a nap and never woke up again.

"She had had some health problems for a number of years, but her death was not expected," said Trimble, director of missions for West Cullman Baptist Association. "It was an extremely traumatic experience for me."

As he walked through grief, he was well supported by the people around him, he said. But as time went on, he began to realize that what he was going through was something more than grief. By the time he made it to the following summer, he didn't want to answer the phone or leave the house.

### Unable to go on

"It had reached the point where I would clean up and dress and get ready to go out the door for one of my church visits on Sunday morning and get to the front door, put my hand on the handle and not be able to turn it," Trimble said. "I was basically becoming a recluse. It wasn't that I didn't want to do anything in ministry, I was just mentally and emotionally unable to do so."

Before that time, he had thrived in ministry and being around

people. His son saw the change and finally encouraged him to go visit their family physician.

"When I went to see him, he talked to me about what grief is and the stages of grief and then he talked to me about what depression is," Trimble said. "And as he described depression, I said, 'That's where I am. That's exactly what I'm experiencing.'"

### 'Great Comforter'

What he was experiencing is what Lisa Keane, director of clinical counseling for Pathways Professional Counseling, describes as a feeling much greater than simply feeling sad.

"Depression is pervasive, affecting almost all areas of your life," Keane said. "It can sometimes be recognized as a lack of interest or enjoyment in tasks that typically bring joy, down to an inability to function through daily tasks due to feeling so low."

It also can cause weight loss or gain for no reason, sudden fatigue, difficulty putting thoughts or words together, chronic pain, digestive issues or even feelings of suicide.

And it can happen to anyone at any time, Keane said.

"Depression is not an indicator of spiritual health or faith," she said. "Depression can be the result of a situation, circumstances or trauma, but regardless of the source of pain or difficulty, a chemical imbalance



Photo courtesy of Dennis Trimble

Dennis Trimble, director of missions for West Cullman Baptist Association, struggled with grief and depression after the unexpected death of his wife.

has been created that could result in depression."

Sometimes the triggers of depressions are difficult to pinpoint, but regardless of the cause, depression is a physical and emotional condition, Keane said. Faith can certainly play a part in helping someone manage his or her depression or heal from trauma, but the medical condition needs attention too, just like other physical illnesses.

"God is our Great Comforter, the One who hears us and helps us in times of trial and suffering," Keane said. "But just because someone is dealing with depression does not mean his or her faith is not deep enough or strong enough. It simply means we live in a sinful, fallen world where sickness exists and can affect anyone. No one is immune."

That's where Trimble found himself — locked in a battle with a physical condition. It was one that ran in his family — his grandmother and his father also had struggled with depression. Trimble's physician prescribed him medication,

and that started him on a journey to find the right treatment plan.

"The medication worked initially. I was able to get back on the job," Trimble said. "But as the months progressed, the symptoms of depression began to return."

His doctor continued to adjust the dosage, but by December — a year after his wife's death — he had reached rock bottom. He talked with his pastor and told him he was thinking about leaving his position at the association.

### Peaks and valleys

"I knew I wasn't doing the work I needed to be doing," he said.

But instead of agreeing that Trimble should quit, that pastor and other pastors gathered around him. They encouraged him to start seeing Renay Carroll, a Pathways counselor who sees clients every Monday morning at the West Cullman Association office.

"I became one of her clients, and that began to help," Trimble said.

Through the next several years, he went through several peaks and

*"I wouldn't want to go through it again, but at the same time I wouldn't take all the money in the world for what I've learned about God and His faithfulness and His presence at work in my life."*

Dennis Trimble  
director of missions, West Cullman Baptist Association

valleys. At one point he “tanked lower than ever before.”

His association’s churches rallied around him, told him they loved him and gave him a six-week sabbatical at one point to spend time healing. And as he met with Carroll, and as his doctor and later a psychiatrist worked with his medication, he finally found a combination that worked.

“When I first met with the psychiatrist, she said, ‘I’ve got lots of tools in my toolbox and at some point, we’ll find the tool that will work for you,’” Trimble said. “It was the first real hope I had to hold onto that I could come out of this.”

### God’s grace is sufficient

They did find the right combination, and for more than a year now, “it has tremendously helped,” he said. “There are still moments when I wake up in the morning and have just a momentary thought that I really don’t want to get out of bed today. But I’m able to quickly shake that off and move on with my day.”

Trimble said he believes his depression is a condition he’ll have to treat the rest of his life.

“It’s an ongoing medical condition,” he said. “Just like you need to take that blood pressure pill, you need to stay on your depression medication to help your brain operate like it should and keep the depression under control.”

But no matter what his journey has looked like, he affirmed God’s grace is sufficient — and his relationship with God has gotten stronger because of what he’s been through.

“I tell folks that I would never, ever want to go back to where I was because in the very depths of it, I wouldn’t turn on any lights at night. I wouldn’t even go to bed. I’d just stay in my recliner,” Trimble said. “In those moments, those nights when it was so dark not only physically but emotionally and mentally, in ways I can’t explain, I could just feel the presence of the Lord surrounding me, letting me know that He was not through with me.”

The Psalms mean more to Trimble now, as does the Book of Job, he said.

“I wouldn’t want to go through it again, but at the same time I wouldn’t take all the money in the world for what I’ve learned about God and His faithfulness and His presence at work in my life,” he said. 🌿



Unsplash.com

## What should I do if I have symptoms of depression?

**F**or Dennis Trimble, depression remains a daily battle (see story, page 6). But he also knows he’s not the only one.

“I know there are other Christians and ministers who go through that,” he said.

It’s possible, though, that many Christians struggling with depression don’t get the help they need because of the way the condition is sometimes perceived, he said. “There’s a stigma that if you have depression, you’re not the Christian you’re supposed to be, you’re not walking in the relationship with God that you ought to walk.”

Lisa Keane, director of clinical counseling for Pathways Professional Counseling, said the first step is realizing that depression is a physical condition.

“God created us in mind, body and spirit, and all three are impacted by depression,” she said. “It is so important that people who are experiencing depres-

sion see it as a medical condition so they can be treated for it appropriately but also so that they don’t heap shame on themselves thinking if they could ‘just have more faith’ or ‘be stronger’ they wouldn’t be struggling.”

### Taking steps

If you find you’re facing symptoms of depression, Keane recommends taking these steps:

#### ► *Talk to a doctor.*

“As a therapist, if someone comes to see me expressing clear signs of depression, I always suggest they see their doctor for a physical to make sure there is not an underlying medical reason for the onset of depression,” Keane said. “Their doctor also can talk to them about medication options if that is indicated too.”

#### ► *Find a good therapist.*

Therapy also can be incredibly helpful because a therapist can help you define more of what is going on, Keane said. Then he or she can develop a plan to combat and man-

age your depression and help you work on any factors that might be contributing to your depression.

If you are worried a friend or family member might be struggling with depression, be willing to talk to him or her about it, Keane said.

“Openly ask how they are doing and let them know you are concerned,” she said. “Use specific examples of why you are concerned and encourage them to talk to a professional. It is important that we talk openly about what is going on with us.”

One possibility is to check with your local Baptist association. More than 40 associations around the state have partnerships with Pathways Professional Counseling — a sister ministry of Alabama Baptist Children’s Homes & Family Ministries — to provide counseling to pastors, ministers and others in need of someone to talk to. (Grace Thornton)

# Tony Evans and son issue challenge to 'Kingdom men'

By **Carrie Brown McWhorter**  
The Alabama Baptist

Speaking to packed houses, pastor and author Tony Evans and his son, Jonathan, challenged men from throughout north Alabama to live up to their responsibilities as "Kingdom men."

"We're just challenging men to rise up to their biblical responsibility to be the men that God has called them to be," Tony said. "We call them being 'Kingdom men' — men who represent God's values in history."

"The culture has disintegrated and a lot of that is due to men not being what God has created them and ordained them to be," he said, speaking to The Alabama Baptist/TAB Media before the event.

## 'Specific challenge'

Tony spoke on back-to-back nights, hosted first by Limestone Baptist Association at Lindsay Lane Baptist Church, Athens, on March 5 and then by Union No. 3 Church at The Venue in Gadsden on March 6.

Speaking to men is always exciting, Tony said. "That gives us a specific challenge and specific focus in a needed area."

And during the two hours each night, Tony and Jonathan Evans issued the challenge. Jonathan began his time by recalling an important lesson he learned while playing in the NFL.

"The coach had chosen those who were on the field," Jonathan said. "We had been called to play the

game, we had a playbook to follow and [the coach said] we were 'called to greatness.'"

When his football career ended, God reminded him that he had been "called to nothing less than the greatness of God," he said, a challenge he directed to the audience.

"He's placed you here to play a specific position in the advancement of His Kingdom," Jonathan said. "You've been called to greatness as long as you hold Him up as the greatest."

To be a Kingdom man means to take God seriously, not to take Him casually, Tony said, taking the stage in the second hour of the event. "To fear God means He overrules you. It means you submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ because you have a boss in heaven. He has the final say so."

Generations of children don't have roots because they don't have fathers living their God-given responsibility in the home, Tony said.

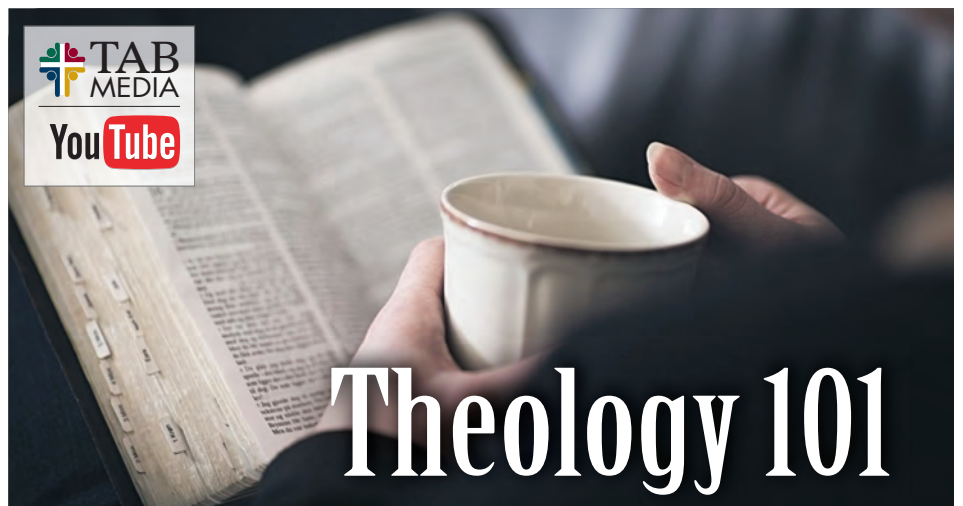
"You can't have a society where the men have gone AWOL," he said, comparing absent fathers to the abominable snowman — "their footprints are everywhere, but you just can't find them. ... God is looking for men willing to say, 'as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.'"

Watch a video of Tony Evans speaking at Lindsay Lane Baptist Church at [vimeo.com/395943286](https://vimeo.com/395943286). View photos from the Gadsden event at [tabonline.org/TonyEvans](https://tabonline.org/TonyEvans).



Photo by Travis Frontz

Tony Evans speaks on 'Becoming a Kingdom Man' at The Venue in Gadsden on March 6. Evans and his son, Jonathan, also spoke in Athens on March 5.



## Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

### The Doctrine of God

## God's Essential Being

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

The very essence of God's being as He has revealed Himself in the Bible has numerous attributes. These are qualities or characteristics that refer to God's essential being. For example, in His very being God is eternal. God has always been and always will be. The eternity of God is a faith confession based on the Bible's testimony. What God is, He has always been. What He is, He will always be. From eternity past and into eternity future, God is unchangingly the same.

In His very essence, God also has revealed Himself as triune or existing as the One true God in three persons — Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In light of this three-ness, our understanding of God's essential being obviously goes beyond the limits or logic of finite mathematics, in which three-ness and oneness would seem contradictory when describing the same object. However, Jesus gave witness to the unity of the divine trinity when He commissioned His followers to baptize future believers "in the name [singular] of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). Biblical faith properly confesses that God is one in His essence or being and at the same time three in His personhood.

In His essential being, God also is spirit. This fundamental truth is set forth in the terse declaration of John 4:24, "God is Spirit." Even so, in the miracle of the incarnation, God "became flesh and

dwelt among us" in the person of His Son (John 1:14).

Taking our clue from multiple biblical references, we also are to understand that in His essential being, God is holy. This means He is set apart or other than what is earthly, creaturely or sinful. This otherness of God was captured in His instruction to Moses that he was to say to his generation, "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2). This truth was at the heart of the heavenly chorus in Isaiah's vision in which the seraphim cried, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts" (Isa. 6:3).

To these attributes we might also add that God is infinite or unlimited. His wisdom, power and presence are not circumscribed or limited. He is almighty, all-knowing and everywhere present.

Of course, given the greatness of God, a listing of His attributes could make for a massive list. Such a compilation would include among His divine attributes His goodness and greatness, His loving and caring, as well as being gracious and merciful.

No wonder we often sing, "Praise God from Whom all blessings flow." 🙌

*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.*



# ‘Survivor and a champion’

## God’s intervention and grace saved child, family in Nazi Germany, brought her to Alabama

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

**R**osemarie Reinhard Musso was 6 years old when she was told she was going to be hanged.

“It was horrifying,” said Musso, who was born in a small German village right at the beginning of World War II.

Her father had already dodged death at least once. Because he was the lone dentist in the town, Nazi officers brought Jews to him for dental work.

“The Nazis would take the Jews out of the concentration camp and make them do forced labor at the coal mine near us, and because of the malnutrition, their teeth started rotting,” said Musso, sharing her story with Samford University’s Legacy League on March

5. “The Nazis would put them on the truck, bring them to my father and tell him to pull their teeth with no anesthetic.”

Her father would say derogatory things to the Jews and tell them to get out of his office and down to the basement because he didn’t have room for them. Once there — and with the Nazis confident he wasn’t sympathetic to the Jews’ plight — the officers would leave, and Mus-

so’s father would treat them with anesthetics, give them food to eat and try to make them comfortable for a little while.

### Orders rescinded

“My father was even able to help some Jews escape,” Musso said.

But that all caught up with him — twice. The first time when he got the summons that he was to be executed, he got on his bike and rode straight to a baroness that he had treated for gum disease.

“He showed her the summons and said, ‘Can you help me?’ She immediately got on the phone and called a friend of hers who was a high-ranking general and said, ‘You’re wanting to execute the only dentist who has been able to help me with the gum disease that I have,’” Musso

said. “She had been to other dentists in Germany and Switzerland, and no one could help her except my father. She said, ‘You can’t execute him because I need him.’”

Soon after, he got word that his execution orders had been rescinded.

But as the war went on and Musso’s father continued to help the Jews, he got word again that he was to be executed, along with his wife and eight children.



Photo by Deidre Ruth  
Kathy Clay (left) interviews Rosemarie Musso about her life story, which begins in Nazi Germany.



Photo by Deidre Ruth

Rosemarie Musso speaks about her childhood in Nazi Germany to those gathered for Samford University’s Legacy League meeting on March 5. Musso eventually moved to Birmingham where she found Christ and the ability to forgive.

“It was legally set for us to be hung,” Musso said. But God intervened in a miraculous way, she said — on the day of their hanging, American troops came into their village, and some of Musso’s father’s dental patients ran toward the troops and asked them to go save her family.

“The troops immediately came with tanks and armor to our home and saved our lives,” she said.

### ‘God dealt with me’

The war was over and God had saved Musso’s life, but growing up in WWII had traumatized her emotionally. She hated Hitler, harbored fear and associated God’s feelings toward her with the heavy hand of her strict father.

Much later, she moved to Birmingham and became an attorney, and a friend invited her to church.

“God dealt with me and I stayed in the church,” Musso said. “I started reading the Bible myself, and God started dealing with me. I was in my 50s when I got saved, but it was

100% turnaround. The day after I got saved, I was preaching to everybody.”

### ‘Father forgive them’

And in the years that followed, God worked another miracle in her heart — forgiveness.

“It took me about 10 years to be able to forgive Hitler, but when I did, I forgave him and my father at the same time, and that set me free,” Musso said.

She tells her story in her book “Father Forgive Them: The Four Laws of Forgiveness.”

Katie Hughes, vice president for programs for Samford’s Legacy League, called Musso “a survivor and a champion.”

“Through all of the challenges, Rosemarie has allowed God to be her guide,” she said.

Legacy League’s next event is April 30 featuring Emmy Award-winning Broadway actress and singer Liz Callaway. For more information, visit [samford.edu/legacyleague/events](http://samford.edu/legacyleague/events).✝

**“It took me about 10 years to be able to forgive Hitler, but when I did, I forgave him and my father at the same time, and that set me free.”**

**Rosemarie Reinhard Musso**

*Famous Christians from previous centuries*

# Heroes of the Faith

**By Joanne Sloan**

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



## March marks 150th anniversary of birth of 'Streams in the Desert' author

**L**ettie Burd Cowman (1870–1960), an American writer and missionary, is best known for her devotional book “Streams in the Desert.” She was one of the co-founders of the Oriental Missionary Society (OMS). This month is the 150th anniversary of her birth.

Cowman was born to Isaac and Margaret Burd on March 3, 1870, in Afton, Iowa. She met her future husband — Charles Cowman, a telegraph operator — when she was 13. They married six years later in 1889.

On Aug. 11, 1900, Charles had a definite call to be a missionary in Japan. The Cowmans and their missions partners founded OMS.

In February 1901, they left for Japan. By 1903, they had opened two Bible training institutes. These schools had day classes and evangelical services at night.

In 1913, the Great Village Campaign was started. Its goal was for every person in Japan to hear the gospel.

Between 1912 and 1918, OMS sent groups of Christians to every home in Japan, distributing Bibles and Christian literature.

Charles' health declined in 1917. He and Lettie returned to America. In January 1918, they received news that the gospel had been shared with

about 60 million Japanese people.

Lettie began writing “Streams in the Desert” while caring for her husband. It was published in 1925 under the name of Mrs. Charles Cowman. She often said, “I did not write ‘Streams.’ God gave me ‘Streams.’”

The book continues to be one of the most popular daily devotionals and has been compared to the success of Oswald Chambers' “My Utmost for His Highest.”

After her husband died in 1924, she found a note addressed to her: “Go on with my unfinished task.”

In 1928 she became the third president of OMS. Until then its work had been in Japan, Korea and China. Lettie felt a calling to proclaim the gospel to other nations. In Eastern Europe the work expanded into such countries as Poland and Czechoslovakia. Then missionaries reached Cuba, Mexico and Columbia. OMS is now called OMS International.

During her missionary work and afterward, Cowman continued writing. Following “Streams,” she wrote 10 other books including “Springs in the Valley,” “Missionary Warrior” and “Praise Changes Things.”

She died on Easter — April 17, 1960.†



**COWMAN**

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# ‘Clear your mind’

## Sabbaticals foster healthy pastors; healthy pastors foster healthy churches

(continued from page 1) sabbatical in 2017. He noted his church also offers sabbaticals — in addition to regularly scheduled vacations — to other ministerial staff after they serve an initial 10 years, and then they can take one every five years after that.

What is Wood’s philosophy when it comes to sabbaticals?

“Don’t work on anything,” he said. “[My philosophy] is you just need a break. ... For the sabbatical, the main purpose of that is to refresh and

recharge your battery.

“We just really encourage the people to do something with your family,” he said. “Get some alone time for yourself and let it be a great time of recharging your battery and come back refreshed. That’s really the main purpose for that.”

The key is planning and preparing at least a year in advance, said Wood, noting sabbaticals can be implemented in any size church with proper preparation.

This allows time to develop a plan regarding who

will cover the responsibilities while the leader is away and for the church to set a budget for travel and associated expenses.

### Personal growth

For Wood, in addition to rest and spending time with family, he was able to set some personal challenges and goals, attend a ministry conference and come back with clearer vision on moving the church forward.

“There may be some things you’re looking down the road on as a church,” said Wood who is celebrating his 23rd anniversary with Shades Mountain Baptist in March. “This just gives you the opportunity to get away. You don’t have sermon preparation, you don’t have all these other things pulling at you and you clear your mind, and there’s that refreshing that takes place. You begin to think clearer.”

While pastors of all church sizes battle to maintain a life beyond their ministry duties, social media and cell phones have only compounded the demands for a pastor’s time, said Mike Jackson, director of LeaderCare and church health for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

“Sadly, [pastors] are bombarded 24 hours a day, 7 days a week,” he said. “And some ministers don’t know how to turn their devices off at a certain time.”

And many churches don’t make it easy for a pastor to take time away, he noted.

“Some churches are high maintenance,” he said. “They want their pastor at their beck and call 24/7 ... Many times, the pastor is that go-to person, and he has to determine, am I going to be available 24/7, am I going to take some down time?”

But sabbaticals do not just benefit a pastor’s personal

well-being and health, Jackson said, pointing out that sabbaticals are more than just another week off.

“I know the mindset of many of our churches: ‘Well, we already give him vacation,’” he said. “I understand that. But at the same time sabbatical is a little different.”

The key is educating churches on how sabbaticals can benefit the church, Jackson said — that a sabbatical is a break in addition to regular vacation.

### ‘Hand-in-hand’

Healthy pastors equal a healthy church, he said.

“If you’ve got a healthy minister, you’re going to have a healthy church,” he said. “Those two sort of go hand-in-hand.”

For more information on resources for pastoral care, contact Jackson at [mjackson@alsbom.org](mailto:mjackson@alsbom.org).

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# 3 stories you should know



Photo by Tracy Riggs

Deaf Christians from around Alabama met March 6–8 in Birmingham for the 2020 Alabama Baptist Conference of the Deaf (ABCD).

The event was hosted by the Birmingham Community Deaf Church. Cameron House (center), a Deaf church planter, pastor and missionary who recently helped start Deaf Church at DC, was the guest speaker for the event. A gallery of photos from the event is available at [tabonline.org/ABCD](http://tabonline.org/ABCD). (Tracy Riggs)

## AL Baptist colleges respond to COVID-19

Samford University and University of Mobile (UM) have announced changes to their spring schedules out of concern about the spread of COVID-19.

Samford announced March 11 that it would shift classes to online-only instruction beginning March 16. On-campus instruction could resume as early as April 6, Samford said.

UM announced March 12 that it would extend spring break until March 20. UM officials said they would announce any further changes on March 18. Judson College is on spring break through March 20.

Many Alabama colleges have shifted to online-only instruction in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. To read the latest news of how churches, ministries and others are responding, go to [www.tabonline.org/latestnews](http://www.tabonline.org/latestnews). (TAB)

## Gov. Ivey's gambling study group meets

A group commissioned by Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey to study gambling in the state held its first meeting March 5.

The Governor's Study Group on Gambling Policy includes leaders in health, business and politics. Ivey said the group is charged with gathering the "facts" about gambling in Alabama and exploring how an expansion of gambling would impact the state.

Alabama is one of only a few states with no lottery. Operating under federal law, the Poarch Band of Creek Indians runs casinos in Atmore, Montgomery and Wetumpka. Electronic bingo operators have been in constant battle with the state over the legality of their operations. The study group is expected to issue its final report by the end of the year. (TAB)

## — NEWSBRIEFS —

### Longtime Alabama Baptist, Samford religion professor dies at 96



Beloved religion professor and lifelong Alabama Baptist Sigurd Bryan died March 8. He was 96.

Bryan served Samford University as professor of religion from 1956 to 2002, seven of those years as chair of the department.

"Sigurd Bryan was a one-of-a-kind Bible teacher," said Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions executive director Rick Lance in a Facebook post. "He made biblical characters come to life and made an indelible impression on my life."

Adam Greenway, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, posted: "Saddened to learn of the passing of one of my favorite [Samford] professors, Dr. Sigurd F. Bryan. He loved the Bible and genuinely cared about students. Grateful to have studied with him."

Bryan graduated from Samford in 1946. He



BRYAN

also held a divinity degree and doctor of theology degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. (TAB)

### Practicing Christians in US decline by half since 2000, Barna study says



The number of practicing Christians in the United States has dropped by nearly half in the past two decades, according to a recent Barna analysis.

In 2000, 45% of Americans surveyed qualified as practicing Christians: they identify as Christian, agree strongly that faith is very important in their lives and have attended church within the past month. In 2020, just one in four Americans (25%) is a practicing Christian, according to research collected for Barna's State of the Church 2020 project.

Barna's research indicates that in roughly the same 20-year period, the growth of the atheist/agnostic/none segment of American society has nearly doubled in size, from 11% in 2003 to 21% in 2018.

The report shows weekly church attendance is declining in every generation, with the decline in

attendance for Elders, those born before 1946, and Boomers, those born between 1946 and 1964, outpacing the drop in attendance of Gen Xers, those born between 1965 and 1983.

The share of Americans who read the Bible at least several times a week (roughly one third of respondents) has not changed significantly since 2011. However, a more dramatic shift occurs among those who have never read a Bible, jumping a full 10 percentage points in the last eight years.

The analysis is based on data collected from nationwide random samples of nearly 100,000 adults conducted over a 20-year period. Read the full report at [www.tabonline.org/barna](http://www.tabonline.org/barna). (TAB)

### University of Mobile named 2020 Military Friendly School



University of Mobile (UM) has been named a 2020 Military Friendly School by Viqtory, a service-disabled, veteran-owned ranking site.

The site measures an organization's commitment, effort and success in creating sustainable and meaningful opportunity for the military com-

# News near you

## BALDWIN ASSOCIATION

▶ **First Baptist Church, Foley**, will host the Associational Bible Drill on March 29 at 2 p.m. For more information email [tspradlin@fbcfoley.com](mailto:tspradlin@fbcfoley.com). Clint Landry is pastor.

## BESSEMER ASSOCIATION

▶ **Canaan Baptist Church, Bessemer**, will host “The Songs & Stories of Brent Vernon” — a live concert event for the whole family — April 5 at 6 p.m. Vernon is a singer-songwriter, ventriloquist, author and illustrator.

## CHEROKEE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Shiloh Baptist Church, Leesburg**, will host Master Peace Quartet on March 29 at 10:30 a.m. Master Peace Quartet will then perform at **Unity Hill Baptist Church, Centre**, on March 29 at 5 p.m.

## COLBERT-LAUDERDALE ASSOCIATION

▶ **First Baptist Church, Florence**, will host the **Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association** Vacation Bible School Clinic for LifeWay’s Concrete & Cranes theme March 31 at 5:30 p.m. Dinner will be followed by a worship rally and breakout sessions. Register by visiting [www.clbaptist.com/2020-events](http://www.clbaptist.com/2020-events)

or calling 256-383-7021. Kevin Johnson is pastor of First, Florence, and Eddy Garner is director of missions for Colbert-Lauderdale Association.

## COOSA RIVER ASSOCIATION

▶ **Hepzibah Baptist Church, Talladega**, will host Darrell and Dawn Ritchie in concert March 29 at 5 p.m. A love offering will be taken. Justin Milliken is pastor.

## GENEVA ASSOCIATION

▶ **New Prospect Baptist Church, Marl, in Samson**, will host its ladies retreat March 28 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. The theme is “A Mother’s Love” with guest speaker Shannon Piland. A love offering will be received, and a salad luncheon will be served. Elbert Smith is pastor.

## LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN ASSOCIATION

▶ **Lookout Mountain Baptist Association’s** men’s ministry will host a breakfast meeting March 29 at **Mount Zion Baptist Church, Collinsville**, at 7 a.m. A current missions projects update and a missions message will be presented. All men and boys are invited. John Yarbrough is associational men’s ministries director, and Lloyd Borden is associational missionary. Howard Holland is pastor of Mount Zion Baptist.

## MORGAN ASSOCIATION

▶ **Blake Monroe** is the new student pastor at **West Hartselle Baptist Church**. He and his wife, Rebecca, have two children.



MONROE

## MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION

▶ **Russell Zwerner** is the new pastor of **Capitol Heights Baptist Church, Montgomery**. His first Sunday will be March 29.



BURNS

He and his wife, Anne, have three children. ▶ **Deandre’ Burns** is the new youth and family pastor at **Flatline Church at Chisholm, Montgomery**. He comes to Flatline Church from a position in California. He and his wife, Sheree, have three children.



ZWERNER

## SELMA ASSOCIATION

▶ The **Selmont Baptist Church** Reunion will be held March 28 at 11 a.m. at the Tyler Community Club. Potluck at noon.

## ST. CLAIR ASSOCIATION

▶ **McEntyre Baptist Church, Ashville**, will host a singing featuring The Redemption Trio on March 29 at 2 p.m. Everyone is invited. Bobby Winningham is pastor.

## OTHER

▶ **Judson College** in Marion will celebrate the inauguration of Mark Tew as its 23rd president April 3 at 10 a.m. in Alumnae Auditorium. A reception will follow. Tew was named Judson’s president in March 2019.✝

## — NEWSBRIEFS —

munity. UM “provides the small classes, personal attention and quality environment where current or former military service members and families thrive,” according to the ranking at [www.military-friendly.com](http://www.military-friendly.com).



UNIVERSITY  
of MOBILE

Schools must meet or exceed benchmark standards in six categories — academic policies and compliance, admissions and orientation, culture and commitment, financial aid and assistance, graduation and career, and military student support and retention — in order to be named a Military Friendly School. (UM)

## Ministry support organizations offer free COVID-19 resources to churches



The first case of COVID-19 in Alabama was reported March 13, and as churches are evaluating their next steps, several organizations are offering free coronavirus response training resources in the wake of the pandemic.

LifeWay Christian Resources is offering a

free training course, “How to Prepare for the Coronavirus at Your Church,” to pastors and church leaders. The course includes videos and checklists and walks leaders through developing and implementing a response plan to a disease outbreak, as well as how to alter ministry and meeting practices as a safety precaution, according to Todd Adkins, director of LifeWay Leadership. The resources are available at [MinistryGrid.com/coronavirus](http://MinistryGrid.com/coronavirus).

The Humanitarian Disaster Institute (HDI) at Wheaton College in Illinois also has released new resources to help churches and church leaders prepare for and respond to the coronavirus outbreak, including a planned webinar series. Additional resources can be found at [wheaton.edu/hdi-covid19](http://wheaton.edu/hdi-covid19).

For more resources and ongoing coverage of how churches and ministry leaders are responding to the COVID-19 situation, visit [tabonline.org/latestnews](http://tabonline.org/latestnews). (TAB)



Screengrab from wheaton.edu

## ABCH’s Women of Compassion select first campus project to fund



Alabama Baptist Children’s Homes & Family Ministries (ABCH) launched a new initiative — Women of Compassion — to allow women to make a direct impact on children and families in need. Members — women who reach the ministry’s giving requirement — “will make possible together what they couldn’t do alone,” according to the ministry’s website. Members get to vote on one of five to seven projects for the following year.

Recently, the women gathered for the annual membership luncheon and voted to fund bathroom renovations at the Friendship House in Oxford.

The Friendship House is part of ABCH’s Shelter Care program — which provides temporary homes for children whose families are in crisis. Children live in the homes while their families, social workers and the courts decide on a permanent plan to best meet the children’s needs.

For more information on joining Women of Compassion visit, [alabamachild.org/main/give/woc](http://alabamachild.org/main/give/woc). (ABCH)

# Pursue 2020 challenges students to remain faithful, missional

Hundreds of college students from campuses across Alabama were challenged to remain faithful in times of uncertainty and to live life as the hands and feet of Jesus now rather than later at Pursue 2020, held Feb. 21–22 at First Baptist Church, Montgomery.

Mike Nuss, director of the office of collegiate and student ministries at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) which coordinates Pursue, said the event encourages students to seek a missional lifestyle.

“College students need to be continually reminded that to follow Christ is to be on mission with the Great Commission every day, and that means more than a missions trip or project — it means living your life daily for the gospel,” Nuss said.

## Finding purpose

This year’s program included several missions speakers, including Paul Chitwood, president of the International Mission Board.

“What does God want from you?” Chitwood asked in the Feb. 21 mainstage session. “Would you dare to ask that question, to whisper a prayer, ‘God what do you want from me?’”

Throughout the conference, other speakers shared how they had answered that question.

Dr. Matt Phillips, a Montgomery obstetrician and president of Life on Wheels, spoke about finding his purpose by helping women in crisis pregnancies choose life.

Terrence Jones, pastor of Strong Tower at Washington Park, Montgomery, shared how God had used him to reach his friends in college.

Authors Jay and Katherine Wolf spoke about advocating for the disabled after a stroke left Katherine with



Photo by Emily Jones

Hundreds of college students from across Alabama gathered Feb. 21–22 at FBC Montgomery for Pursue — an annual two-day conference organized to encourage college students and high school seniors to seek a missional lifestyle.

partial blindness and mobility impairments.

From the mainstage and in breakout sessions, speaker after speaker told similar stories, sharing testimonies of how unexpected detours led to opportunities to serve.

In breakout sessions students heard about church planting, evangelism strategies, medical missions and outreach to refugees, along

with sessions on dealing with depression, doubts and sexual sin.

## Giving back

Students also gave more than \$4,200 for the Rural Women’s Hospital in Pakistan.

To view photos from Pursue 2020, visit [www.tabonline.org/Pursue20](http://www.tabonline.org/Pursue20). (Carrie Brown McWhorter)

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Fellowship Baptist Church of Gardendale, Alabama (3228 Teresa Drive), is prayerfully seeking a minister of music. Send resumé to: Fellowship Baptist Church, 3228 Teresa Drive, Birmingham, AL 35217, or email: [bobbyjshipp1@gmail.com](mailto:bobbyjshipp1@gmail.com).

#### CHOIR DIRECTOR

First Baptist Church, Leeds, Alabama, is seeking a part-time choir director to lead a traditional worship service. Position would also coordinate with current contemporary praise team for second service and work with our choir for special events. Email resumé to: [rbras699@aol.com](mailto:rbras699@aol.com).

#### MINISTER OF YOUTH

First Baptist Church, Leeds, Alabama, is seeking a full-time youth minister. Position would also assist in pastoral duties. Email resumé to: [rbras699@aol.com](mailto:rbras699@aol.com).

#### BIVOCATIONAL YOUTH DIRECTOR

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

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The TAB Media podcast channel now offers four podcasts: TAB Talks, a radio show featuring a special guest or guests that comes out on Mondays; TAB News, an audio digest of the weekly newspaper that comes out on Wednesdays; TAB Briefs, which will offer three current faith-based news and culture stories and comes out on Fridays after debuting first on Facebook Live at The Alabama Baptist newspaper on Facebook; and TAB Stories, a seasonal, long-form, in-depth feature into the life of a specific person church or ministry. Listen to the TAB Media podcasts anywhere you get your podcasts or at [www.tabonline.org/podcasts](http://www.tabonline.org/podcasts).

#### TAB DIGITAL

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](mailto:subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org).

# 'To save a wretch like me'

## Recovered alcoholic returns home to Priceville to serve as pastor of Shoal Creek

By Catherine Godbey  
The Decatur Daily

Mahlon LeCroix lifted the sleeve of his shirt and revealed the AA tattoo inked on his left upper arm.

"They said, 'You're an alcoholic and you've got to admit you're an alcoholic,' so I tattooed it on me because I wouldn't believe it, even though I had lost my house, my job, my car and went to jail because of drinking," LeCroix said of the Alcoholics Anonymous tattoo. "If God can change the life of a wretched man like me, a man the world pretty much locked up and threw away the key, God can do it for anybody."

The 39-year-old Athens native, who went to rehab three times, spent a year-and-a-half in two halfway houses and underwent a transformation, returned to north Alabama in December to bring his message of hope, recovery, love and redemption to Priceville as the pastor of Shoal Creek Baptist Church.

### 'The greatest thing'

"Some people get upset when I call myself a drunk. But, most of my life, that's what I was, the drunk down the road. I know where I've been, and I know what I've done. I'm not proud of it. I tell people about the bad stuff so I can tell them about the greatest thing that ever happened to me — being saved by God," LeCroix said.

His long, winding journey with faith began in Athens, where he grew up going to church — several, actually.

"Jokingly, I tell people I've been sprinkled, splashed and dunked. I came from a split home and had several stepfathers, so wherever they went to church we'd go. I've been Presbyterian, Methodist, Charismatic and Baptist," LeCroix said. "I believed in God and would tell people I was a Christian, but I didn't live it. I didn't get saved until I was 27."

After graduating from Athens High School, he stopped attending

church and only went on Christmas and Easter for his mother.

A lover of science, LeCroix attended Calhoun Community College, studied surgical technology and worked at Parkway Medical Center as a surgical assistant.

There, his drinking steadily increased from one or two drinks after work to three or four a night to going to the hospital hungover every day.

"My hands would tremble. One day, I remember thinking, 'The only way to stop the trembling was to have another drink.' I began drinking all day. I lived in a state of blackout for a year. I don't remember much at all. My mind was gone. My wife tells me I would stay on the floor of the house for weeks. I was a raging alcoholic," LeCroix said.

He lost his job, his car, his home and was separated from his wife and newborn son. Thoughts of taking his own life entered his mind.

"I didn't want to live anymore because, as hard as I tried, I couldn't quit drinking," LeCroix said.

Desperate, alone and feeling hopeless, LeCroix turned to the place he remembered being happy as a child — the church. It was a Wednesday night when he walked into Fairview Baptist Church — the place where he would be licensed into the ministry and ordained.

"When I walked in, I was drunk. I was never not drunk then. But, because that little country church in Limestone County opened their doors to me, my life changed," LeCroix said. "I remember praying with the pastor and telling Christ, 'I don't have nothing to give you. If you want my life, you can have it, I don't

want it. If you can make something out of it, make something out of it.'"

With the little money he had, LeCroix bought a Bible and commentary and began studying one chapter at a time.

"I would read a chapter in the Bible and then I would read a chapter in the commentary to understand it. It was like, oh, that's what this means. That's how I started doing devotions. I was enjoying learning, and people were actually getting something from me. For the first time in a long time, I felt useful again. I believed God could use me," LeCroix said.

To support his battle with addiction, LeCroix moved to Opelika, where he lived for a year at Harvest Evangelism, a residential recovery center for men.

There, he woke up at 5 a.m., learned how to live a sober life, worked on being a father and husband and led daily devotions.

"Everyone had a rotation of doing devotions. A lot of guys didn't want to do devotions. I didn't have nothing else, so I volunteered to do their devotions. I wanted to learn more. My year there gave me a desire to do a ministry to help addicts and alcoholics," LeCroix said.

### Renewing vows

Before leaving Harvest Evangelism for The Baptist College of Florida in Graceville, LeCroix and his wife, Ashley, renewed their vows. During the ceremony, he washed her feet and promised to serve and support her.

At college, LeCroix, the man of science, medicine and physical proof, found reasons to believe in Christianity.

"I always knew there was a God, I just didn't get into all the Christianity part of it. I thought it was like mythology," LeCroix said. "At college, I saw there was evidence for it all. How can Paul go from being the most ruthless, evil person against Christianity to overnight becoming the greatest champion? That makes no sense unless he saw the resurrected Christ. How does a blackout drunk become a pastor?"

LeCroix was ordained as a deacon, taught Sunday School classes and filled in for the preacher before being called to pastor at Beulah Anna Baptist Church in Florida. Most recently, he served at Pleasant Ridge Baptist in Walton County, Florida, where the congregation grew from 40 people to more than 120 in two years.

### 'I felt God pulling me'

Leaving Florida, where LeCroix helped coach football and tennis at the middle school and became part of the community, for north Alabama, where people remembered LeCroix as he was before becoming saved, was a difficult decision.

"Coming back was hard because I had all those memories. I was comfortable in Florida because people didn't know who I used to be. Here, they do. That's been a struggle for me. But I felt God pulling me back here and where God calls, I will follow," LeCroix said.

In December, LeCroix moved to Priceville with his wife and children, Sam and Maggie.

LeCroix hopes to get involved in the community and expand the church's outreach programs.

"We are here to serve on and love on the community. That's it. We want to tell the community about the amazing things God is doing," LeCroix said. "People love football here. When you see Alabama or Auburn win a game, you go tell somebody. Well, why not tell somebody about what God's doing in your life and what he is doing at your church." (Reprinted with permission)



Photo by Dan Busey/The Decatur Daily  
Mahlon LeCroix returned to north Alabama as pastor of Shoal Creek Baptist Church, Priceville.

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



## NEW FORTIFY EVENT DESIGNED FOR TEEN GUYS

During my first year as a state missionary I was often asked, "Do we have a conference for teen guys?" Neither the men's ministry nor the student ministry offices hosted such a conference at the time. There were camps and other opportunities for guys to be part of, but nothing to speak only to the heart of a young man.

That's how FORTIFY was born. With the help of fellow state missionary Scooter Kellum and a host of ministers from around Alabama we developed this one-day conference aimed directly at our teen guys who are bombarded with mixed messages about what it means to "be a man" in our 21st century post-Christian society. It's our goal to help these young men to rise above society's confusing messages about masculinity and equip them with a biblical approach to their identity.

FORTIFY will be held on **April 18**, 10 am to 3 pm at Journey Church, 435 Sheila Blvd. in Prattville.

FORTIFY is designed for teen guys in grades 7-12 and would be ideal for fathers and sons, student ministries, Sunday school classes, and D-Groups, to attend.

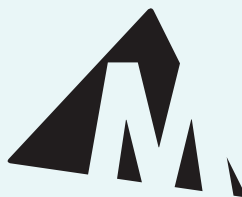
**By Larry Hyche  
State Missionary**



The mainstage topics that will be addressed include Biblical Manhood, and Authentic Christianity. Breakout sessions will focus on Boundaries in Technology, and Sexual Purity.

*To register or learn more information, including cost and schedule, visit [alabamamen.org/fortify](http://alabamamen.org/fortify). Registration deadline to guarantee a t-shirt is April 6.*

Questions?  
Contact  
Larry Hyche at  
(334) 613-2280,  
[lhyche@alsbom.org](mailto:lhyche@alsbom.org).



## APRIL 26 IS COOPERATIVE PROGRAM DAY

**Visit [CooperativeProgramResources.org](http://CooperativeProgramResources.org) for ideas and materials to help you celebrate the Cooperative Program in your church.**

**For more information, contact State Missionary Jim Swedenburg, [jswedenburg@alsbom.org](mailto:jswedenburg@alsbom.org), (334) 613-2283.**



COOPERATIVE PROGRAM

**Stronger Together**



# Someone You Should Know

## JESSIE GARRISON

By Leigh Pritchett  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Jessie Garrison, 79, of Pell City has spent 44 years helping children and teens fill their hearts and minds with God's word. She has coached many in Bible drill and has seen several finish in the top five in

the state competition. The 2019–2020 Bible drill season will be her last.

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

**A:** The most influential person in my life was Lester Bryant. He took me under

his wing. He was discipleship training director at St. Clair Baptist Association. He saw my love of Bible drill and discipleship. He wrote me a letter on his death bed and wanted me to come and talk to him. He wanted me to take over discipleship. I told him I could

not do what he had done, and he said, "I know God has a purpose for you. God will equip you all the way."

**Q: What has God been teaching you lately?**

**A:** One of my recent devotions was Psalm 118:24: "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." (The devotional) suggested I say that verse three times every morning. He is encouraging me to pray more, worry less. It has been a hard choice ... to realize that maybe it's time to be a prayer warrior for Bible drill next year (instead of a coach).

**Q: Have you ever read a book or heard a song that changed the way you think about God and faith? What was it and what did you learn from it?**

**A:** The book that stands out to me is "Survival Kit for New Christians." This book came out when I was in my 40s. It taught about



**MINISTRY:**  
Long-time Bible drill coach, Operation Christmas Child supporter and missions volunteer

**CHURCH NAME:**  
New Hope Baptist Church, Pell City, in St. Clair Baptist Association

**LIFE VERSE:**  
"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose." (Rom. 8:28)

the indwelling Holy Spirit. I'm not alone; He has a purpose for me. The Holy Spirit never leaves me, although sometimes I have not let Him work in me. He never leaves me, and He never will.✝

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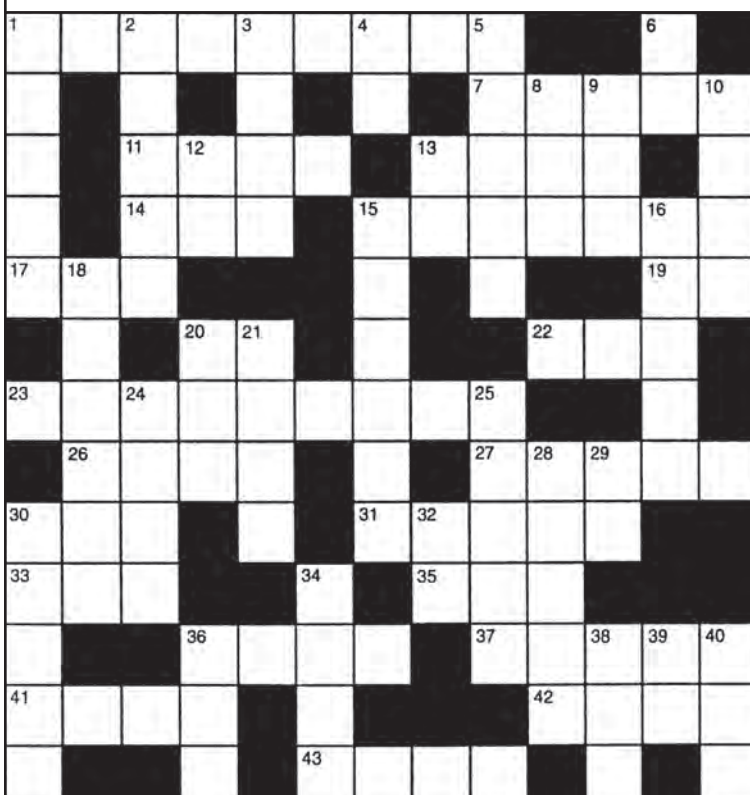
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## Christian Crossword

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### Across

1. A name of Christ. (Rev. 1:8)
7. \_\_\_ not ye against the Lord. (Num. 14:9)
11. We ought to \_\_\_ God rather than man. (Acts 5:29)
13. Why do the heathen \_\_\_? (Ps. 2:1)
14. Though they be \_\_\_ like crimson. (Isa. 1:18)
17. Many will \_\_\_ in that day. (Matt. 7:22)
19. Direction on the compass.
20. Academic degree. (abbr.)
22. I will \_\_\_ My tabernacle among you. (Lev. 26:11)
23. He hath given \_\_\_ unto all men. (Acts 17:31)
26. Two men \_\_\_ up into the temple to pray. (Luke 18:10)

27. \_\_\_ of me. (Matt. 11:29)
30. A charge for a professional service.
31. Condescend.
33. Internal Revenue Service. (abbr.)
35. Whom \_\_\_ ye that I am? (Luke 9:20)
36. \_\_\_ found grace in the eyes of the Lord. (Gen. 6:8)
37. Israel came by the way of the \_\_\_. (Num. 21:1)
41. In His favor is \_\_\_. (Ps. 30:5)
42. God doth \_\_\_ with man. (Deut. 5:24)
43. Abstain from all appearance of \_\_\_. (1 Thess. 5:22)

### Down

1. \_\_\_ them that curse you. (Luke 6:28)
2. We beheld His \_\_\_. (John 1:14)
3. Seeth his brother

4. Trust \_\_\_ the Lord with all thine heart. (Prov. 3:5)
5. Come boldly unto the throne of \_\_\_. (Heb. 4:16)
6. \_\_\_ that overcometh. (Rev. 3:5)
8. The self as distinguished from others.
9. Girl's name. (abbr.)
10. Lead astray.
12. Ye will not believe, though it \_\_\_ told you. (Hab. 1:5)
13. Prefix meaning "again."
15. It \_\_\_ upon the earth 40 days and nights. (Gen. 7:12)
16. \_\_\_ into His gates with thanksgiving. (Ps. 100:4)
18. How ye ought to \_\_\_ every man. (Col. 4:6)
20. A roll.

21. Many of them also which used curious \_\_\_ brought their books together. (Acts 19:19)
24. You are the God who \_\_\_ me. (Gen. 16:13)
25. Behold, He calleth \_\_\_. (Mark 15:35)
28. Joseph was sold into \_\_\_. (Gen. 37:36)
29. Is there any taste in the white of \_\_\_ egg? (Job 6:6)
30. The whole body \_\_\_ joined together. (Eph. 4:16)
32. Used to form plurals.
34. He hath \_\_\_ everything beautiful. (Eccles. 3:11)
36. The kingdom of heaven is like a \_\_\_. (Matt. 13:47)
38. Suffix meaning "belongs to."
39. Old Testament name for God.
40. To glide on water or snow.

# SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For March 22

## Explore the Bible

By Robert E. Jackson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



### JUSTIFIED Romans 3:21–4:3

#### Through Faith (3:21–24)

Paul is clear that both Jew and Greek are guilty of breaking God's law. The depth of human sinfulness makes it impossible for us to extricate ourselves.

Left on our own, no one will be justified before God. The good news is sinful humans can be declared righteous before God through faith in Jesus alone. Using a metaphor of a court trial, Paul states that by faith, people are justified. In justification, Jesus' righteousness is granted to us.

In other words, God knows you are guilty, but because of His perfection and your faith in Jesus, He looks at you and treats you as innocent. Justification by faith means we are in a right relationship with Christ because He has imputed His righteousness to us just as if it were ours. Salvation then is an undeserved gift; Christians are saved by grace through faith.

#### In Jesus (3:25–26)

People often say, "A loving God will not judge anyone." In truth, a loving God must be just. Suppose you witness someone murdering a close family member. You drag the person to the judge who hears the case and then says, "I am a loving judge, I set this man free." You would scream for justice. This judge, because he is not just, is a mockery to all that is good.

To demonstrate His righteousness, God justly punishes the wicked. Not only is justification presented as a legal declaration, but also humans are justified because of the propitiation or appeasement of the atoning sacrifice of Christ. How can a just God overlook our sins? The sacrifice system is the answer.

Jesus is the perfect sacrifice whose blood was spilled and whose life was voluntarily offered in our place. This costly sacrifice enabled our sins to be "passed over." Furthermore, Jesus redeems or purchases the captive's freedom by paying the ransom Himself. On the cross Jesus cried, "tetelestai,"

meaning it is finished. This word also can mean paid in full. He bought you and freed you from slavery. The word also connotes a power in proclamation; once God sets you free, you cannot be sold back into slavery ever again.

In sum, Jesus is the only solution to our sin problem. He alone is the just Justifier who paid the price for our sins once and for all. Praise His holy name!

#### For All People (3:27–31)

Since people are saved through faith in Jesus, no place for boasting exists among God's children. Neither Jews nor Gentiles have done anything to deserve God's grace.

Salvation, then, is a gift available to all people who accept justification from the hand of a merciful God.

If we are saved by grace through faith alone, does this mean the law is nullified? Paul says absolutely not. Obedience to the law is concerned with what we can do for ourselves. The way of grace is concerned with what God can do and has done for us. Loving gratitude, not boasting, is the attitude of Christians.

#### Including Abraham (4:1–3)

Paul points to Abraham to illustrate the abstract idea of faith. The Jews only had to look to the father of their faith to see faith in action. Abraham believed God implicitly. Paul proves he wasn't justified by works but rather because he gave his entire life believing in God's promise.

Simply put, Abraham was the embodiment of faith. William Barclay states, "Abraham entered into a right relationship with God not because he did all kinds of legal works but because he cast himself, just as he was, on God's promise." Like Abraham, all Christians are justified by grace through faith alone.

In my life, this truth leads to an overwhelming sense of amazement of a God who loves me this much to justify me through the death of His only Son. 🌿

## Bible Studies for Life

By James Riley Strange, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of New Testament, Samford University



### FAITH Hebrews 11:1–6

This week we discuss the word "faith," a word that any ancient Greek speaker would have used regularly. The noun often referred to being persuaded of the truth in a rhetorical argument.

Like many words that became part of early Christian vocabulary, it took on a more specialized meaning in the Greek Jewish Bible, where it often translated the Hebrew word for "steadfastness" or "faithfulness." Non-Jewish Romans mostly used "faith" to mean being rightly persuaded, whereas Roman Jews could understand it to mean trustworthy character and conduct. God was faithful, and Israel was expected to be faithful in return.

Christians applied these notions to Christ and the church: Christ was faithful, and the Church was to be faithful in return. That faithfulness, however, was rooted in faith in and trust of God and in what He accomplished through the faithful obedience of Jesus Christ.

Jesus spoke about faith and early Christian writers wrote about the role faith plays in God's salvation. Today we read a famous passage from one of those writers.

Recall the translation challenge we talked about last week. Because English has no verb for "faith," our Bibles most often use the verb "believe" (see v. 6, for example). But as we shall see, "believe" does not carry the richness of the biblical idea of faith.

Read Hebrews 10:19–12:2 for context. Some Christians must have been abandoning their faith out of fear of persecution. The author exhorts them to remain faithful.

#### Faith leads us to believe and rely on God. (1–3)

Translations of verse 1 vary because some Greek words can mean more than one thing. Hence, some translations talk about faith as evidence, as if in a courtroom, and others emphasize human conviction.

We usually find these options: "Now faith is the [substance, reality or assurance] of things hoped for, the [evidence, proof or convic-

tion] of things not seen." What is clear is that because of faith, we do not have to see things to be convinced of their substance.

In verse 3, the author reviews a past event: God made the visible creation through His invisible word. Starting in verse 8, the author talks about the future: through His invisible promise, God will bring the faithful to the not yet visible "homeland" (v. 14).

#### Faith responds with worship of God. (4)

Genesis 4 suggests God "regarded" Abel's sacrifice over Cain's because Cain did not "do well," but offers no clarification.

The author of Hebrews says Abel's sacrifice was more acceptable (literally "greater") because of his faith. The key comes at Hebrews 11:6 — it is impossible to please God without faith.

We find this idea in Jewish texts and in Jesus' teachings: God wants more than righteous behavior; He wants our intentions to match our conduct (see Matt. 5:21–48). The implication is Cain did not match his sacrifice with an intention to be faithful to God.

#### Faith responds with obedience that pleases God. (5–6)

Obedience becomes explicit starting in verse 8. In 5–6 it is implicit.

Many Jewish interpreters read the unique language of Genesis 5:24 to mean that Enoch did not die but was taken bodily into heaven. This was evidence he had pleased God.

Indeed, although the Hebrew Bible says that Enoch "walked with God" (Gen. 5:22–24), the Greek translation that our author read says that Enoch "pleased God." Certainly, the faithful Israelites of Hebrews 11 are presented as examples of obedience.

According to Hebrews, therefore, faith combines conviction, character and conduct. And it is one of God's gifts (1 Cor. 12:9). That is, the God who requires faith makes it possible for His children to be faithful. Thanks be to God. 🌿



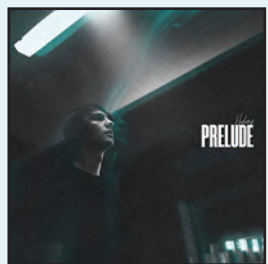
# Media reviews

MUSIC

## Hulvey

*Prelude*  
Reach Records

Drawing inspiration from Reach Records artists Lecrae and Andy Mineo, Hulvey is coming hot, as his fellow artists might say. The only problem with “Prelude” is that it’s too short. The five-song EP is a put-it-on-repeat collection of great beats and godly rhymes.



The last track, “Ready or Not,” will have you bobbing your head. If Christian

hip-hop is having the moment *USA Today* says it is, then Hulvey is about to join it.

## Anna Benton

*Seasons*  
Independent

Three years ago, south Georgia worship leader Anna Benton pushed pause on recording her debut album — becoming a foster parent has a way of reprioritizing things. But it apparently also has a way of fueling great original songwriting. It only takes a few seconds to tell that “Seasons” is special. The trumpets are a dead giveaway. The opening

title-track on the four-song EP quickly goes kind of country, in a good way, but those trumpets just keep tracing arcs through the melody — it’s just different. It’s good. It’s fun. It’s worshipful. (Jeremy Henderson)



# Be true to what you believe

## Staying ‘grounded in faith’ helps AGT winner on fame journey

By Tracy Riggs  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Darci Lynne seems like a typical teenager — friends, social media, school and church are part of her daily life. But Darci is definitely not an average high schooler.

At 12 years old, Darci performed on season 12 of “America’s Got Talent” as a singing ventriloquist. After her stage audition, she got the “golden buzzer,” which sends a performer straight to the live shows.

She continued to advance through the competition and was crowned the winner of the show’s 2017 season, receiving the most votes ever for a finale performance. She later came in second on “America’s Got Talent: The Champions.”

Darci will bring her “Fresh Out of the Box” tour to the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex (BJCC) on March 28.

### Big dreams

Darci’s path to stardom has always included big dreams. Before ventriloquism, she was passionate about gymnastics and dreamed of going to the Olympics.

When Darci mentioned to her parents that she wanted to learn ventriloquism, her mom’s response was firm: “We don’t have time for this. You have too much on your plate,” said Darci, quoting her mother.

Darci persisted, however, and “begged and begged and begged” for a puppet. Her reluctant parents thought the interest would be a “passing fad” but surprised Darci with a puppet on her 10th birthday.



Darci Lynne

Photo courtesy of Nicole Green

Darci Lynne will perform at the BJCC Concert Hall on March 28. For more information, visit [darcilynne.com](http://darcilynne.com).

“It definitely wasn’t a passing fad,” Darci said with a laugh.

Darci said she was painfully shy as a child, so her parents put her in pageants and music programs to build her confidence in front of people. But even with that training, it took a while to get over her nerves during her act. Now performing in front of audiences of thousands, Darci said she wishes she had known then what she knows now: “You’ve got this, girl. You’ve practiced. You’re good enough, and it doesn’t matter what they think.”

Darci typically performs two weekends a month, flying with her puppets to each venue. Still, touring can be difficult sometimes, she said.

“We travel so much, and it’s hard to be away from my best friends and my family and my doggy ... I also had to [change to] home-school this year, so that was tough.”

But, she said, “I wouldn’t trade

any of it because of what I get to do. I still love meeting my fans and hearing their stories — that’s really amazing. People ask me why I like to perform so much — it’s because I like putting smiles on people’s faces and making their days better. That’s the biggest reward for me; it’s better than any award show I’ve ever won.”

Church also is very important to Darci, whose family is active at Church of the Servant, a Methodist congregation in Oklahoma City.

“My faith and staying true to my roots and true to what I believe has really been helping me stay grounded,” she said.

### ‘Be yourself’

In her short professional career, Darci has learned not to change for other people.

“You don’t have to be what everyone expects,” she said. “You just need to be yourself and stay true to yourself.”

Former NFL and AAF player Nick Novak now is a placekicker for the Los Angeles Wildcats of the XFL, a new professional football league that began play in February.

# 'NOW I BEGIN'



Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Wildcats

## XFL kicker 'never loses faith' in God's plan throughout ups and downs of career

By Bill Sorrell  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

**N**ick Novak has experienced a lot of beginnings in his football career, which may be why the Latin mantra "nunc coepi" has made an impression on him.

The phrase, which means "now I begin," is a saying used often by Decatur native Philip Rivers, who just moved from quarterback for the Los Angeles Chargers to free agent.

Novak played with Rivers when the team was still in San Diego and

Rivers' mantra stuck with Novak.

"[It basically means] you can't hang your head no matter what happens good or bad. Start over. If something great happens on the field, always give glory to God and move on to the next opportunity," Novak said.

### 'I thank God'

"Now I begin" parallels Novak's professional career too.

Signed as a free agent by the Chicago Bears in 2005 after a First-Team All-Atlantic Coast Confer-

ence career at Maryland, Novak spent time on eight NFL rosters, played in NFL Europe and in the United Football League. In 2019, he played with the Birmingham Iron, an Alliance of American Football team, until the league folded after a single season.

Now Novak is a placekicker for the Los Angeles Wildcats of the XFL, a new professional football league that began play in February.

His resiliency to keep playing comes from his faith.

"God gave me that characteristic

to keep bouncing back. He blessed me, not necessarily kicking a football, but He gave me a work ethic and set in my mind to be the best that I can be as a kicker and to spend 20-something years doing it. First and foremost I thank God for that," Novak said.

Novak played with the Chargers more than any team, three stints. He was there in 2010, 2011-14 and in 2017 after the move to Los Angeles.

A back injury forced the Chargers to put him on injured reserve in 2017, and he sat out professional football in 2018.

Wherever he's been, he's connected with other Christians in the community. That was true in Birmingham, which helped when the season ended abruptly.

"There are always ups and downs in our profession. You learn what you are made of, what your mind can handle, what your body can handle," Novak said.

### 'Most important thing'

Athletics often presents adversity, but adversity is not necessarily a bad thing, Novak said.

"[Adversity] helps you raise your game and come back even stronger the next time," he said.

And a relationship with Christ is the most important thing during times of adversity, Novak said.


"In our profession, it is important for us to bounce back and be there for each other and be a great teammate," he said. "In this season of our lives, the next most important thing is to try to win the next game. I never lose faith." 



Photo courtesy of Birmingham Iron

In 2019, kicker Nick Novak played with the Birmingham Iron, an Alliance of American Football team, until the league folded after one season. His community of believers in Birmingham helped encourage him when the season ended.