



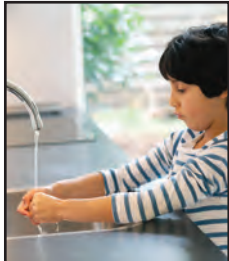
The Alabama Baptist

Toll free 800-803-5201
www.thealabamabaptist.org

April 2, 2020

Vol. 185, No. 14
Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

INSIDE



Faith & Family —
Calming children's
anxiety during
COVID-19 crisis

◆ Page 7



**Mescal's Children's
Center prepares to
open new school**

◆ Page 10



Theology 101 —
God Is Holy

◆ Page 15

'Going the extra mile'

Alabama Baptists taking steps to care for vulnerable during COVID-19 outbreak

By Margaret Colson
The Alabama Baptist

In today's tumultuous world of the coronavirus/ COVID-19, Alabama Baptists are an anchor in the storm for the most vulnerable among us.

"During times of crisis, and especially a true global crisis, it is not uncommon for the weakest, smallest, youngest and most fragile to be ignored," said Rod Marshall, president and CEO of Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries (ABCH).

Their voices, he said, "can go unheard during a global panic."

Both ABCH and Alabama Baptist Retirement Centers (ABRC) are taking decisive and compassionate action

to ensure the well-being of children, families and senior adults during the pandemic.

"With heightened, nationwide awareness of safety protocols to recognize and reduce the spread of coronavirus, we

have been taking regular, proactive measures state-wide to follow these guidelines in our homes and our offices to continue serving children and families as safely as we can," Marshall said.

Because the flu and strep throat are often annual occurrences,

house parents are proficient at containment and taking universal precautions to keep their homes safe, Marshall said.

"While this situation presents some unique challenges, our amazing social workers,



Photo courtesy of ABCH
Alabama Baptist Children's Homes is taking action to ensure the safety and health of the children in its care.



Photo courtesy of ABRC

Grateful residents at Knollwood retirement center in Roanoke are treated to 'Bingo on Wheels' since the center had to temporarily cancel bingo games for the safety of the center's residents.

house parents and foster parents are going the extra mile to protect all of the children and families in our care," he said.

Similarly, Alabama Baptist retirement centers scattered throughout the state are "taking every precaution as described in the guidelines from the Alabama Department of Public Health and Centers for Disease Control and Preven-

tion," said Paige Hudson, administrative accounting assistant for ABRC.

Spiritual well-being

Beyond ensuring the physical safety of those in their care, leaders at the two Alabama Baptist organizations are also striving to ensure their emotional and spiritual well-being.

(See 'Thinking,' page 9)

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



COVID-19

See pages 6-9 for information and updates

OUR EXTENDED ALABAMA BAPTIST FAMILY

ALABAMA BAPTIST STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS

1-800-264-1225 | www.alsbom.org
Offices: Prattville

Leadership: Rick Lance, executive director

ALABAMA BAPTIST CHILDREN'S HOMES & FAMILY MINISTRIES

205-982-1112 | www.alabamachild.org
Main office: Birmingham

Leadership: Rod Marshall, president and CEO

ALABAMA BAPTIST HISTORICAL COMMISSION

205-726-2363 | www.abhconline.com
Office: Birmingham

Leadership: Lonette Berg, executive director

ALABAMA BAPTIST RETIREMENT CENTERS

800-264-1225, ext. 329 | www.abrc.org
Main office: Prattville

Leadership: Ray Burdeshaw, acting president

THE BAPTIST FOUNDATION OF ALABAMA

334-394-2000 | www.tbfa.org
Offices: Montgomery

Leadership: Barry Bledsoe, president

SHOCCO SPRINGS BAPTIST CONFERENCE CENTER

256-761-1100 | www.shocco.org
Location: Talladega

Leadership: Russell Kliner, executive director

ALABAMA CITIZENS ACTION PROGRAM

205-985-9062 | www.alcap.com
Offices: Birmingham

Leadership: Joe Godfrey, executive director

ALABAMA WMU

334-288-2460 | www.alabamawmu.org
Offices: Prattville

Leadership: Candace McIntosh, executive director

JUDSON COLLEGE

800-447-9472 | www.judson.edu
Location: Marion

Leadership: Mark Tew, president

SAMFORD UNIVERSITY

205-726-2011 | www.samford.edu
Location: Birmingham

Leadership: Andrew Westmoreland, president

UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

251-675-5990 | www.umobile.edu
Location: Mobile

Leadership: Lonnie Burnett, president

Are you the manager of your church's subscription list?

If you are the manager of your church's subscription list — and your subscriptions are paid on a quarterly basis — we are hoping you will consider moving to online payments.

It's certainly not mandatory, but it does help us save money on printing and mailing the invoices.

And right now it allows us to process the payments in a much more timely fashion.

We are practicing social distancing and working from home in most cases, so receiving the payments and making the deposits is a slower process at the moment.

Invoices for 2020's Quarter 2 subscriptions — April through June — will be mailed soon and we know your mail processing may be delayed as well.

Please know we understand the delay and concerns.

If you are open to trying out the online payment

option, we will be glad to walk you through the process. You will be able to see your list of subscribers and can make any changes needed prior to paying the bill.

All you need is internet access, a credit card and your church account number. If you need help locating your account number, our team is ready to assist.

We think you will really like the online option once you use it and will likely choose to use that

method from here on out.

If your church moves to the online option, we will halt the mailed copy of the invoice. However, we will continue mailing printed invoices and return envelopes for all churches that prefer a hard copy. It's no problem at all.

We are glad to process payments in whatever method works best for your church, and we appreciate your loyal partnership with the ministry of TAB Media.

Thank you for taking this journey with us, and we hope you will let us know if we can be of service to you during this

most unusual season.

TAB's Haley Piersol and Sarah Gill are ready to assist you. Email subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org or call 800-803-5201, ext. 118.

PAY YOUR CHURCH'S BILL ONLINE

1. Go to tabonline.org/pay.

2. Enter your church's account number and zip code and click 'Find Account.'

3. Next, look to the left under 'For Existing Subscribers' and click 'Pay your group bill.'

4. Follow prompts for entering your credit card information.

5. Thank you for partnering with TAB Media.

***If you need help locating your church account number, email subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org or call 1-800-803-5201, ext. 118.

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

(ISSN 0738-7741; USPS 011-080)
© The Alabama Baptist, Inc.

is published weekly except for one week in July and December by The Alabama Baptist, Inc., at 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209. Phone: 205-870-4720. Statewide phone: 800-803-5201.

Website: www.thealabamabaptist.org

Email: news@thealabamabaptist.org

or subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org

Periodicals postage paid at Hattiesburg, Miss.

ANNUAL TAB SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Includes print, digital and full web access

Group Rate per issue — \$16.25
(Need at least five in your group to qualify)

Individual — \$24.95 per year with 3-year plan

JENNIFER DAVIS RASH

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Cynthia Watts
Executive Assistant

Carrie B. McWhorter
Content Editor

Debbie Campbell
Director of
Communications

Janet Erwin
Executive Editor

Linda Harrison
Director of Human
Resources

Grace Thornton
Special
Assignments Editor

Melanie McKinney
Advertising Manager

Margaret Colson
Special
Assignments Editor

Pam Holt
Sales
Representative

Hannah Muñoz
Digital Editor

Susan Stevens
Sales
Representative

Jessica Ingram
Production Manager

Annette Brown
Guest Services

Lauren C. Grim
Creative Services
Manager

Sarah Gill
Customer Relations

Amy Hacker
Creative Services
Associate

Deb Lowery
Financial Assistant

James Hammack
Digital Services
Manager

Richard Maddox
Computer Services

Haley Piersol
Digital Services
Associate

NEWS SERVICES
Baptist Press (BP), Associated Press/Religion News Service (AP/RNS), Morning Star News (MS).

POSTMASTER

Send address changes to:
The Alabama Baptist
3310 Independence Drive
Birmingham, AL 35209

ADDRESS CHANGE

Send old and new addresses, and name of church to:
Subscription Department
3310 Independence Drive
Birmingham, AL 35209
Allow two weeks.

To the best of our knowledge, all of the ads in *The Alabama Baptist* represent legitimate companies and offerings. However, one should always exercise normal business caution in responding to ads.

Full member of Alabama Press Association

Accredited member of Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability



'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.

TAB Media

THE ALABAMA BAPTIST, INC.

The Alabama Baptist
newspaper

TAB Online
website

TAB News
podcast

TAB Digital
interactive content

MY RASHIONALE

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

jrash@thealabamabaptist.org
@RashionalThts



How will you handle all the extra time to think right now?

Time to think offers the space to assess opportunities that lie ahead and unleash the creative side within us. Too much time to think also can be tortuous if we have unresolved issues lurking.

It makes sense how we often welcome the various distractions a day can bring — at least then we have an excuse not to deal with the situation, emotion or other item that needs our attention.

Sometimes we stay busy to avoid mourning and the intense pain of grief. Sometimes we seek distractions to put off an overwhelming task or decision.

In some cases, we really don't know what to do or who to ask for help. In other cases, we know exactly what the problem is and what we need to do, but we've adjusted to coping with our conviction.

At least we think we are coping — the minute our distractions cease, the issue emerges from the crevices of our minds and stares us right in the face.

And here we are again at a crossroads — deal with it for real this time or grab hold of a another distraction to numb the pain or provide an excuse.

The problem with this type of distraction-based strategy is that we are only making the issue worse. We will have to face it and deal with it at some point.

Continuing to put it off only prevents us from finding freedom from it earlier rather than later — and potentially hurts more people (or hurts them more deeply) in the process.

I'm sure you've guessed where I'm headed with this conversation with our current cleared calendars and restricted opportunities because of the COVID-19 situation.

How will we handle the extra time to think right now?

Will we take the opportunity in a positive direction and avoid grasping for new distractions, or will we determine to give in to our fears and hopelessness?

TAB Media board of directors vice chairman and longtime minister Gary Fenton shared his suggestion recently:

"Hope is both a gift and a discipline. Hope is a gift from God that is occasionally experienced spontaneously, but we are more likely to experience hope when we are intentional about what we think.

"Normally work and school responsibilities determine much of our thought life, but now that few of us are working or attending school, we have much more time to think about whatever we want.

"Our thoughts are being driven by what we feel, what we watch and what we read rather than by our responsibilities.

"To experience hope daily, watch and read less from the media. Instead, read and listen to material that stimulates hope.

"As one of my favorite authors says, 'whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things.'

"Let's change our thoughts and make hope a permanent fixture in our soul. By the way, the quote is from a really good book that I think you will want to read."✝

RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

Feeling a touch of sadness for our graduating high school seniors but also confident in their resiliency

You know how much Jason and I adore our nephews and nieces — I'm sure the heightened level of our connection comes because we don't have children of our own.

We have been so excited about our first seniors in the bunch — nephew Jacob and niece Taylor, as well as our bonus niece — Adaia.

The main concern until recently was how many graduation tickets each would receive and which family members would make the cut.

Now those concerns seem so minute and like a lifetime ago.

Everything connected to the final three months of a high school senior's career came to

a screeching halt with little time to process that the memory books of the Class of 2020 would likely have several blank pages in them.

No prom, no spring sports, no last of this or last of that, no special traditions, no closure — all the moments that make up those final days of high school for the graduating senior gone with no notice.

Many schools are working to provide some of the special events at a later date, but it won't be the same for them as what the traditional senior year schedule would have held.

My sister-in-law Amanda (Jacob's mom) mentioned how tough it's been for the students, who didn't know the last day they

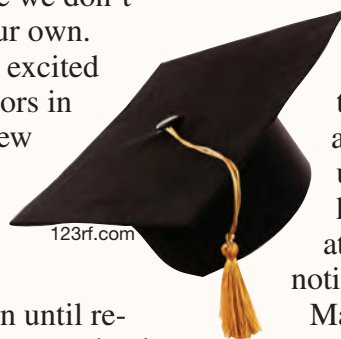
were all in class together would end up being their real last day together. The students are working through that realization as they process everything.

But even with the disappointment and sadness our high school seniors are working through right now, I know they are resilient and will come out stronger on the other side.

They also get to claim a story none of the rest of us have or most likely will have. They will be the only class at the future high school reunions to have the COVID-19 connection.

The Class of 2020 will forever be attached to the coronavirus pandemic — and oh the stories they will have to tell.

—Jennifer Davis Rash



Your Voice



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

'Gospel Above All' must be top priority of SBC churches

By **J.D. Greear**

President, Southern Baptist Convention

In one sense, [canceling the Southern Baptist Convention's 2020 annual meeting] was a difficult decision for us. (See 'SBC,' page 13.)

Gathering regularly to hear about the great things God is doing in the present and to seek His face together for the future is an essential part of who we are as a convention, and we will be saddened to forego this opportunity in June.

But in another sense, this decision was easy. Our purpose in coming together is to support one another in gospel missions and to better catalyze our collective missions efforts. This year, the best way to accomplish that is by not meeting together.

I don't need to tell you how many of our churches are hurting right now. Or how most of our communities are experiencing unprecedented need. In this extraordinary hour, pastors need to be focused on their people, and churches need to be focused on their communities.

Pausing from these efforts to make a costly trip to Orlando just doesn't seem like the right thing to do. In this moment, keeping the gospel above all means staying where we are to minister to those who need us.

Let me encourage you to consider reallocating resources that might normally have been spent on getting to the convention to minister to people in crisis. At The Summit Church we have decided to take the money we were going to spend on sending

messengers to Orlando and use it to help bivocational pastors and church planters meet payroll over these next several weeks. I am calling on other churches to join us in this if they are able.

The Apostle Paul tells us in Galatians that fulfilling the law of Christ means bearing the burdens of our brothers and sisters, shouldering their loads alongside them.

Let me also encourage you to consider ways your church might bless your community in this difficult season.

You might consider making a donation to your local pregnancy resource center, for example, since they tell us that during times like these, abortion rates go up. You might donate to the many food banks helping feed children who are in need because of school closures. You might reach out to local organizations that focus on the marginalized and the vulnerable and simply ask, "What can we do to help?"

The church is God's demonstration community, a body that visibly depicts the love of God for the world. As our community hurts, let's bear their burdens with them.

The work of the SBC can go on without the meeting. Why? Because the headquarters of the SBC is not in Nashville or Orlando, nor is our primary impulse for ministry what happens on the convention floor.

The headquarters of the SBC is the local church. Our strength is in our pulpits and pews. Our ministries

will still go on. While we may be quarantined, the Great Commission is not.

Our gospel is more relevant and necessary than ever. The gospel literally means "good news," and good news is best when life is the darkest.

As other idols of this world prove hopelessly insufficient, our gospel offers a hope higher than the heavens, a hope deeper than any recession, a hope that outlasts death itself. That's why it must remain above all.

What's more, our gospel teaches us exactly what to do in times like these. We serve a Savior who ran toward tragedy, not away from it. When we were dead in our sins, He left heaven to enter our suffering, take it upon Himself and deliver us from it. That means we who know Him and love Him will, in a moment like this one, move forward in faith, not backwards in fear, toward self-sacrifice, not self-preservation.

Historically, we know the church is at its best in times like these. It's when the power of the gospel really begins to shine through. This is an extraordinary gospel moment.

How we conduct ourselves in this moment will demonstrate to the world what we actually believe about the gospel. Our theology is about to be on display. So let's make sure to be faithful witnesses.

We may be living through a very new day. But God promises that He gives new mercies for new challenges. He never runs short on supply; the shelves of His heavenly riches are never empty, and His angels never get sick.

Let's call on Him for grace to meet this challenge. ✠

Letters to the Editor

I was saddened to read in the March 19 issue of *The Alabama Baptist* of the death of Sigurd Bryan, one of my professors at Samford University many years ago.

In addition to being a great biblical teacher, he personified the Christian faith that he taught.

Robert Wilkerson
Birmingham, Ala.

It was a sad/glad experience to read of the death of Sigurd Bryan. Having studied under

him many years ago, I'm sure there is a mixture of sadness/gladness among all of us who were fortunate enough to have experienced his teaching and humble, loving spirit.

In fact, although his first name was "Sigurd," due to his humble and loving spirit, he was more affectionately known by us as "Sacred" Bryan.

Heaven has surely been sweetened by his presence.

Morris Murray Jr.
Jasper, Ala.

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“And it came to pass... It didn't come to stay. So hang in there.”

PASTOR LEE WALTON

Union Baptist Church, Thomson, Ga.

Biblical revelation clearly and consistently affirms that human life is formed by God in His image and is therefore worthy of honor and dignity (Gen. 1:27; 9:6);

God alone is the Author of life and He alone numbers our days, from the moment of conception until natural death (Job 14:5–7; Ps. 39:4);

The Bible commands us to honor our parents and the aged (Ex. 20:12; Lev. 19:32; Eph. 6:2);

Messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Columbus, Ohio, June 16–17, 2015, affirm the dignity and sanctity of human life at all stages of development, from conception to natural death; We call on our churches and all believers to care for the elderly among

us, to show them honor and dignity, and to prayerfully support and counsel those who are providing end-of-life care for the aged, the terminally ill and the chronically infirmed.

Excerpts from SBC Resolution of the Sanctity of Human Life

The internet allows us to check facts before spreading them. When we fail to do so, we hurt our own credibility and mislead others.

Steve Stewart
Decatur, Ala.

As a leader, during this crisis, it's important to follow Mordecai's advice to Esther: “And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” In other words, look at your current

position as God's sovereign placement for you to courageously lead those God has placed in your care.

Ed Stetzer
Author and pastor

As committed Christ followers, we can use our influence to make a positive impact on the Kingdom during this crisis. ... Take every opportunity to share the gospel so people may come to saving faith in Christ. If you are stuck at home, think of just one person a day to reach out to and give a joyful witness to the transforming power of God at work in your life.

Sandy Wisdom-Martin
Executive director
National Woman's
Missionary Union

The Church in Action

What a blessing to deliver cases of hazmat suits and masks to Athens-Limestone Hospital from Limestone Baptist Association Disaster Relief. Praying they don't need them but glad to make them available. Pray for our hospital staff as they serve our community during this season.

Kevin Ward, Associational mission strategist
Limestone Association

Need free Wi-Fi to do your homework? All you have to do is have someone drive to Central Baptist Church and park in our main parking lot (closer to the sanctuary windows has a stronger signal). No social distancing needed — just log on from the privacy of your car. The network name is Central-BaptistFree in 2.4G or 5G depending on your device. There is no password required.

During these hard times we all need a helping hand. This is just a small way we are serving our community. We love our community!

Central Baptist Church
Phenix City

Many of our churches, especially the ones with larger buildings, make a habit of leaving the outside lights on, shining on the facility. I suggest that each and every one of us turn on the porch lights at our churches.

In times as dark as these, we absolutely must be reminded that the church is to be the light in our communities!

I'm headed out to my church building in just a few minutes to make sure our lights are on.

Pastor Brad Campbell
Siloam Baptist, York,
Associational missionary,
Bigbee Association

From the *Twitterverse*

@myarnell

Many seminary students are now going to return virtually to theological studies. Many of these are pastors who have been stretched to the limit by ministering to family and church. Let's pray for them as they seek a new rhythm.

@megannlively

At a gas station today, an older gentleman got in line behind me. I smiled, said hey. His entire face erupted into the biggest grin, not ashamed of the teeth he was missing. He told me my smile was the nicest gift he'd received in a long time. I told him he was also a gift to me.

@HayleyCatt

I keep thinking what a shame it would be if we spent all this time at home #FlatteningtheCurve and

came out on the other side of this unchanged. God has allowed the entire planet to come to a standstill. Let's not miss what He wants to teach us or waste the time He's given us.

@DustyMcLemore

My dad used to tell me how Americans came together during WWII to make materials to fight the war. We have an invisible enemy now. Let's come together USA! #turntoGod ... He's got this!

@bobbyjones

Our faith is always a response to God's faithfulness. He always makes the first move. #WaitForIt

@chelsealbc

Our shepherd is promised and will rescue and care for His people. #WhoIsThisJesus

@LifeWayWomen

“Therefore don't worry about tomorrow because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt. 6:34). #KnowHisWord20

@Christopherson3

Christians, if you don't know the names and contact info of your neighbors, how will you serve them in the upcoming most difficult weeks? #ThisIsOurMoment

@philwaldrep

Heavenly Father, I know that no earthly power, problem or struggle is too big for You. I trust You and rest in You today. The battle is Yours, not mine. Thank You.

@QuotesGospel

“Pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” — C.S. Lewis

Keep your church active



Unsplash.com

Ministry to fellow church members, community does not have to stop during crisis

By Denise George
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Coming together for church — for worship, fellowship, prayer and Bible study — is the very heart of the Southern Baptist congregation. We want assembly, and we need face-to-face, hand-to-hand human interaction as an active, loving congregation.

In 1930, in a time of unusual uncertainty and stress, German Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer stated: “A Christian who stays away from the assembly is a contradiction in terms.”

Downsides of closures

What happens to congregations when the nation’s churches close due to the COVID-19 virus crisis?

► The church may cease to function as a corporate body, a gathered assembly, and may become less important in people’s minds as they no longer gather in formal services. They may even begin to undervalue the necessity of Christian assembly.

► Church members may form new habits about worship, opting to stay at home long after the crisis passes. New church-going habits are formed. Samuel Johnson stated: “The chains of habit are too weak to be felt until they are too strong to be broken.” The more often a habit is performed, the more it gets physically wired into the human brain. Every time a person acts in the same way, the pattern becomes strengthened in the brain.

► Without regular person-to-person caring contact, some members may be unintentionally ig-

nored, especially those whose needs are urgent: the sick, homebound, elderly, impoverished and the mentally challenged. They may come to believe the congregation no longer cares about them or their families.

► Congregations may reduce or stop weekly tithes and contributions. Even a single Sunday of closing for bad weather can seriously damage a church’s fiscal health. A long-term crisis may mean some churches must close their doors forever.

How can pastors, church staff and congregations keep churches and members alive and healthy? Here are some practical suggestions:

1. Communicate the temporary nature of this situation to church members. The nation has faced past emergency measures, such as war times and seasons of flu, which are temporary and will pass. Assure them that God can be trusted. He is still in control in times of national crises.

Stay connected

2. Pray for the pastor, church staff and church members. Pray for individuals, their families and communities. Start online prayer chains, making members aware of each other’s urgent needs.

3. Use technology to keep in constant touch with church members, checking on older members, new parents, pregnant women and the

mentally or physically disabled.

Call, email, text, send notes, employ FaceTime, Instagram, etc. Also check on people in the community, allowing them to view a caring church in action even when the church building is closed.

“By scheduling regular family worship at home, families will be ready to return to church when the crisis passes.”

Denise George

4. Help others stay home to stop the spread of the virus. Use drive-thru shopping (pharmacies, grocery stores, etc.) to purchase needed items, and then deliver them to those who can’t or shouldn’t get out.

5. Maintain regularly scheduled worship times at home. Take time

to pray, study the Scriptures, sing hymns and worship as a family. By scheduling regular family worship at home, families will be ready to return to church when the crisis passes.

6. Share your cash and/or supplies with members who are without funds. Many are surviving paycheck to paycheck, experiencing expensive health care needs or losing jobs after business closings. If you have extra food/supplies, leave them at the door of someone who needs them. Find online stores, create an account and pay for/order supplies to be delivered to the needy — including food, cleaning supplies, hand sanitizer, soap, baby formula, over-the-counter medicines, etc. If possible, reach out in caring ways to your city’s homeless population.

7. Provide theological resources online for your congregation: sermons, Bible studies, pastoral encouragement, etc. For those who don’t use computers, print and mail the material.

8. Practice good hygiene and responsible personal/family health/sanitary care to avoid spreading the virus to others.

If a family member is sick, quarantine the entire family under one roof. Support the government’s recommendations.

During the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic, the nation called on churches, schools, beaches, playgrounds, dance halls, theaters and other venues to close their doors, recommending social distancing. Some churches refused, for a time moving their worship services outside. But in the end, churches supported the nation’s protective policies to keep Americans safe.

Once the crisis had passed, the churches opened their doors again and resumed corporate worship gatherings.

Consider the opportunity

Surely, a national health crisis is the perfect time and opportunity for an active church to support the nation’s leaders, take seriously the recommended precautions and get involved by reaching out in unique ways to help the elderly, sick, homebound, children, pregnant women and others, showing the community that though the building is closed due to COVID-19, the church — the congregation and leadership — are loving and even more active in times of crisis.✝

Calming children's ANXIETY during coronavirus spread

Be calm, honest when children ask questions; find intentional ways to have fun

By Lisa Keane and Kristin Lowrey
Special to The Alabama Baptist

We all are experiencing closings, postponements and cancellations due to the current public health crisis caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19).

While medical health professionals offer advice on how to handle the virus, we want to provide some guidance about how to talk to children about all that is going on.

Discuss appropriately

Let's first start by focusing on how you as an adult are handling your emotions around this crisis.

3 health tips to teach kids

1. Sneeze or cough into tissues (and throw them away) or sneeze or cough into your elbow. This helps keep germs from traveling and making other people sick.

2. Wash your hands with soap and water at the same times you usually do, like after going to the bathroom, before eating and after blowing your nose. When you wash your hands, remember to count slowly to 20. (Parents can help by singing the ABCs or "Happy Birthday" with their children the number of times it takes for 20 seconds to pass. This helps children remember to wash for a sufficient amount of time.)

3. Keep your hands out of your mouth, eyes and nose.

Source: Harvard Health Blog

Make sure you are not streaming and reading too much news, especially that children can see and hear.

Also maintain calm as much as possible when around your children. Don't make phone calls that are not necessary where you discuss the virus and the current state of affairs. Save those for when children are away or in bed.

Children are naturally curious. They are going to want to know what is going on.

Here are some helpful guidelines and tips to follow when talking and interacting with your children:

► **Be honest but age appropriate:** It's okay to let children know a virus or germ is going around that we want to try and stay away from by washing our hands. Acknowledge with them that they have been sick before, and just as you were with them then, you are there to take care of them if they get sick this time. Be honest, simple and concrete.

► **Give children something to do:** Remind them they can wash their hands and help clean your home. Having something they feel they have control over will help with anxiety.

Spend time intentionally

► **Establish intentional connection time:** When times of uncertainty hit, our children need us more emotionally. Find time to play together, talk and do things they find enjoyable and connecting. You will be surprised how you can hear your child's heart when you spend intentional time with them.

► **Avoid the brush off:** Children have heard so much about this virus and all that is going on right now. They have probably dreamed up some ideas themselves. Listen



123rf.com

to them without judgment, and let them express their feelings without fear of being told their feelings are ridiculous. It is okay to then talk about the facts, but sometimes they just need to be heard without interruption.

► **Use this as a time to pray:**

Help your children to channel their anxiety through prayer. Pray with them or have them repeat after you as you ask God to heal those who are sick and to calm any fears they might be experiencing.

Ultimately, set aside extra time for your children during this time of uncertainty. Be available. Be present. Put down your phones, turn your TVs off and be with your children. Stick to your schedule as much as possible and look for fun activities to get their minds off of

all that is happening. Your calm, engaged presence could be just the antidote to your children's worries.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Faith & Family is a bimonthly look at important spiritual, cultural and relational issues facing today's families. For more articles on contemporary topics like these, go to PathwaysProfessional.org/blog.

Lisa Keane (MAMFC, LPC-S, NCC, Registered Play Therapist Supervisor) is clinical director of marriage and family and Kristin Lowrey (MSW, LICSW, PIP, Registered Play Therapist Supervisor) is clinical director of children and adolescents for Pathways Professional Counseling, a sister ministry of Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries.



Members of Grace Baptist Church, Sumiton, provide hot meals and grocery bags for children in need due to the closing of schools. It's the church's way to connect with the community in the days and weeks leading up to Easter.

Resurrection celebration



Photo courtesy of Grace Baptist Church

Demonstrating meaning of Easter to community during COVID-19 outbreak

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Andy Frazier said he's in the same boat as a lot of other pastors — one way or another, Easter is going to look different for his church this year.

But even though it's different, it's "not the end of the world," said Frazier, pastor of Grace Baptist Church, Sumiton. "We still celebrate the Resurrection every day."

And as for Easter itself, they will either stream their service online, offer a drive-in worship experience in the church parking lot through an FM transmitter or celebrate Easter later, once it seems safe for his church to meet again.

"We're in the same boat a lot of people are in — things are changing every day, so it's hard to make concrete plans until we get a little closer," Frazier said.

But another thing that's changing every day is the way his church is adjusting its evangelistic focus.

Serving neighbors

Last year, Easter offered the chance for his church to get in to the community through an egg hunt and lunch on Palm Sunday. The event helped them get to know their neighbors and invite them back for the Easter service the following week.

But this year, the church is talking with its neighbors every day as it serves as a food distribution site for Walker County in the midst of the COVID-19 outbreak. The Walker County Board of Education and two nonprofit organizations, the Walker Area Foundation and Raising Arrows, are collaborating to provide

hot meals daily for children, the elderly and others in need, along with nonperishable items. They had been distributing those meals from another church in the area, but when a member there contracted coronavirus, the county called Grace Baptist.

"We got that call one day with about 15 minutes notice, and we said yes," Frazier said. "We've been doing it ever since, serving about 125 hot meals and distributing 50 to 75 grocery bags every day. We plan to continue for at least the next week."

According to Ed Stetzer, executive director of the Billy Graham Center, changes like that are one of many ways the church can be the hands and feet of Jesus during the pandemic and show what the gospel looks like outside the church.

"This includes how we treat one another, how we respond to adversity and how we both show and share the love of Christ to the unchurched," Stetzer wrote for *Christianity Today*. "God has given us an amazing opportunity to live out our faith in our communities."

Practical ways to do that can include things like:

- ▶ Providing child care for health-care workers whose kids are out of school.
- ▶ Preparing meals for children and families in need.

- ▶ Walking a dog for elderly neighbors.

- ▶ Offering to pick up food and supplies for those most at risk.

- ▶ Regularly calling and texting those in your neighborhood to check in.

- ▶ Offering words of hope for those dealing with anxiety and depression.

- ▶ Supporting local businesses through ordering out as you are able.

- ▶ When you have to go shopping, inquire with workers as to how they are and tell them you will be praying for their safety.

And as for the upcoming holiday, it "might be that this Easter the church will be more powerful scattered throughout our communities than gathered in our buildings," Stetzer wrote.

James Merritt — pastor of Crosspointe Church in Duluth, Georgia, and the host of the broadcast ministry "Touching Lives" — wrote in a recent *Facts & Trends* article that churches should start inviting people now to join them for online services on Easter.

"People are starving for communication, and they want to be connected," he wrote. "If you haven't already, ramp up now to have the largest online Easter gathering your church has ever had (because you probably will)."

Sharing that invitation on social

"It might be that this Easter, the church will be more powerful scattered throughout our communities than gathered in our buildings."

Ed Stetzer
executive director
Billy Graham Center

media is one way to do that. Calling your neighbors or leaving information on their doors is another way to let them know.

Also, be sure to check on how they are doing and ask how you might serve them.

Gospel outreach

"Engage them in a conversation by asking them if there's anything they need, like a grocery store run," he wrote, noting that people are more open to meeting their neighbors right now than they have been in a long time.

"There's never been a better opportunity than now to reach out to your neighbors and impress upon your congregation to do the same," Merritt wrote. "We must help them understand that we may not be able to go to church, but we are the Church."

Frazier said that's the message they've been trying to convey at Grace Baptist, and they've seen church members stepping up to help. One way that's happening is by using creative ways to make sure people are connected.

"We're having online options for services and small groups, but we're also calling our members who are not tech savvy to make sure they're included and involved," Frazier said.

For instance, members who have tech capabilities have been conference calling their elderly friends and neighbors so they can listen in to services through their phone.

"We're just doing the best we can to be the Church during this time," Frazier said.

Easter, he said, will simply be an extension of that. ✠

Thinking outside the box

Senior adults, children in care getting extra attention during pandemic

(continued from page 1)

“We provide a caring home for our residents and consider them family. Many do not have family to lean on; therefore, we are here to offer comfort, guidance and support during trying and uncertain times. It is always our goal to be the hands and feet of Christ and to show compassion in times of need,” Hudson said.

Some children in the care of ABCH, while not understanding the scope of the COVID-19 crisis, “feel anxious about this crisis, but are also enjoying extra time

to play. We recognize that it is very important that we do not create anxiety for children during this time,” said Michael Smith, ABCH chief operations officer for north Alabama.

Don’t create panic

Even as ABCH leaders take extra measures to prevent virus spread, Smith said house parents must do so in a way that does not create panic for children.

“We are practicing good hygiene, limiting group activities and generally using this as a time to do more

family activities. Board games and family movie nights are good examples of how to turn this difficult time into a memory-making experience,” Smith said.

At Friendship House in Oxford, house parents Josh and Heather Hill, not knowing how long school would be canceled, have “tried to think outside the box to do things that are fun but also educational,” said Michelle Glassford, ABCH director of communications. All activities are wrapped into a new daily routine that helps children thrive.

Senior adults also enjoy leisure activities. With local group shopping excursions and all group activities currently canceled at ABRC’s senior living campuses across the state, leaders there have found new ways to have fun with their residents.

LaJuana Holloway, manager at the Knollwood retirement center in Roanoke “got creative,” Hudson said. “Our residents absolutely love bingo and were sad that it had to be canceled temporarily.” The answer? Knollwood employees “took bingo to the residents to cheer them up,” she said.

With the timeline of the virus and the safeguards related to it unknown, leaders at both the children’s homes and the retirement centers ask Alabama Baptists for prayer.

‘See God’s hand’

“First and foremost, we ask for prayer for our residents to see God’s hand in these circumstances and for good health,” Hudson said.

Daily ways to pray for ABCH can be found on the



Photo courtesy of ABCH

ABCH house parents are using the social distancing time to enjoy more family activities like board games and family movie night. They want to turn this time into a ‘memory-making experience.’



Photo courtesy of ABRC

Knollwood retirement center in Roanoke has gotten creative with activities for their residents. Other ways to minister to senior adults are cards and care baskets with snacks and books.

website www.alabamachild.org. Overall, “Please pray safety and protection over each child and family in our care, our direct care staff and our administrative teams who provide support. Please pray for our house parents and foster parents as they seek to ease the anxiety many of our children are feeling and provide them with healthy outlets to talk and share,” Glassford said.

Financial support is an ongoing need as COVID-19 response continues.

“We are counting on all of our ministry supporters, including Alabama Baptist churches, to continue to support us financially, especially during these challenging times,” she said.

For senior adults in particular, cards are “a wonderful way to minister,” Hudson said. Addresses for each of

the retirement centers are listed on the website www.abrc.org.

‘Brighten their day’

“Also, care baskets with snacks, activity books and/or basic necessity items would be most welcome and would certainly brighten their day due to activities and outings being canceled and postponed. These could be dropped off at the front desk anytime,” she said.

Responses such as sending cards, packing care

baskets, praying and giving are all examples of “true religion,” Marshall believes. “James 1:27 reminds us that true religion is to care for the vulnerable during their times of distress. Perhaps there is no better time to be salt and light in a bland and dark world than during a global crisis.”

“Perhaps there is no better time to be salt and light in a bland and dark world than during a global crisis.”

**Rod Marshall
president and CEO, ABCH**

THIS EASTER, YOU CAN HELP CHILDREN *just like Alexis*

“Can you pray for me?”

Alexis* was in third grade, but when she came into our care, she was so malnourished, that everyone thought she was in kindergarten. Her family struggled to have resources to provide regular meals, and when they did have food to eat, it was never very nutritious.

When she first came into our care, Alexis also lacked self-confidence of any sort, which is not uncommon, given her background. She had felt unwanted and unloved. She felt like she could never do anything right. Slowly though, things started to change as Alexis learned about God and experienced His love from our Dothan house parents. Every night, they would read Bible stories to the children, talk about these stories, and pray together.

One night after Bible stories, Alexis told her house mom she really wanted to accept Christ as her Savior. They got down on their knees, and Alexis asked her, “Can you pray for me?” After the years of neglect she’d been through, she didn’t think her words would be good enough for God to hear.

Her house mom gently explained that it was important that the prayer needed to be from her and that God would always hear her prayers. And not only that He *could* hear, but that He *wanted* to hear her say that prayer. That night, Alexis realized she was truly loved and nothing would ever change the Father’s love for her. She went on to say a prayer and ask Jesus Christ to be her Lord and Savior.

Only a short time later, Alexis was placed with a loving family member who is now caring for her.

Though her time with us was short, it was life-changing.



Alabama Baptist
CHILDREN'S HOMES
& Family Ministries

**Name and photo has been changed for privacy purposes.*

You and your church can continue to help change the lives of children and families across Alabama. There are three ways you can make a gift:



CALL
(888) 720-8805



GIVE ONLINE at
alabamachild.org/give



MAIL a donation to:
2681 Rocky Ridge Lane
Birmingham, AL 35216

‘Jesus is your hope’

Mescal’s Children’s Center prepares to open new school to bring education, gospel to Kenya

When Dolphine’s mother died, they buried her in a hump in the front yard.

And 3-year-old Dolphine didn’t understand.

“She would go every day and lay on the hump in the yard and cry, wanting to know where her mother was and why her mother wasn’t coming back,” said Brett Borden, who serves on the board of Mescal’s Children’s Center of Hope, located in Kenya.

Dolphine’s daily routine did not sit well with Dorothy, a woman from the same community. When she found out the little girl’s family was no longer able to take care of her and her brother, she loaded them up in the car, and an orphanage was unofficially started.

It started with humble beginnings but an incredible heart, said Borden, a member of Lineville Baptist Church in Carey Baptist Association.

“Dorothy couldn’t stand to see the children in her village fighting for food on the streets,” he said.

Neither could her mother, Ruth Owuor.

Can’t help but help

Owuor came to the U.S. in the 1990s, but she never forgot the thousands of orphaned children she left behind in her country.

Over time, she started a business and sent money home to care for the children. Her family kept taking them in, keeping them in her house in Kenya.

And along the way, Owuor named the growing orphanage after a woman from Lineville Baptist — Mescal Griffin, the church’s long-time Woman’s Missionary Union director.

Owuor had met Griffin’s daughter at another local church, and when Griffin died, she attended the funeral. As she heard person after person share testimonies of



Photo courtesy of Brett Borden

Brett Borden (left) has formed a special bond with Moses, a boy brought to Mescal’s Children’s Center of Hope by a tribal leader. Moses is now at the top of his class at the center.

how Griffin impacted their lives, she knew she’d found a name for her shelter.

And Mescal’s Children’s Center of Hope was born. Over time, the ministry assembled an American board and purchased land to build the facility that’s there today.

Today, many people from the Lineville area are invested in the ministry of Mescal’s — people like Borden, who says he can’t help but

get involved in the lives of children like Dolphine and Moses, a young hearing-impaired boy somewhere around the age of 12.

‘Influence for Christ’

“We don’t know his exact age because we don’t know who he is,” Borden said. “His teeth scans say he’s between 11 and 13.”

He was brought to Mescal’s by a tribal leader, and

he and Borden — who is trained in special education — developed a tight bond.

“He took to me instantly because I was able to communicate with him,” Borden said. “He wrote me a letter that said, ‘I want to be a teacher so I can influence people for Christ in Kenya.’”

Before coming to Mescal’s, Moses had faced a rough life, but now he’s at the top of his class. The opportunity to learn has turned his life around.

In fact, all the children at Mescal’s will receive a blessing soon when it comes to education — a new school is set to open on the campus.

“It will go from pre-K to eighth grade, and it will have a music lab, a computer lab, a library and other things,” Borden said. “The school is Christian-based and will always be Bible-first education to know Jesus is your hope.”

For more information, visit mescalskids.org. (Grace Thornton)

**Don’t let
SOCIAL DISTANCING
become spiritual distancing.**



*“Fear not, for I am with you;
be not dismayed, for I am your God.”*

ISAIAH 41:10



FM 101.1 AM 850
BIRMINGHAM
WXJCRADIO.COM

THE MOST POWERFUL BIBLE
TEACHING SIMULCAST IN AMERICA



**TAKE IT ON
YOUR PHONE.
IT’S JUST TEN
QUESTIONS.**

COMPLETE YOURS AT
MY2020CENSUS.GOV

PAID ADVERTISEMENT



3 stories

you should know

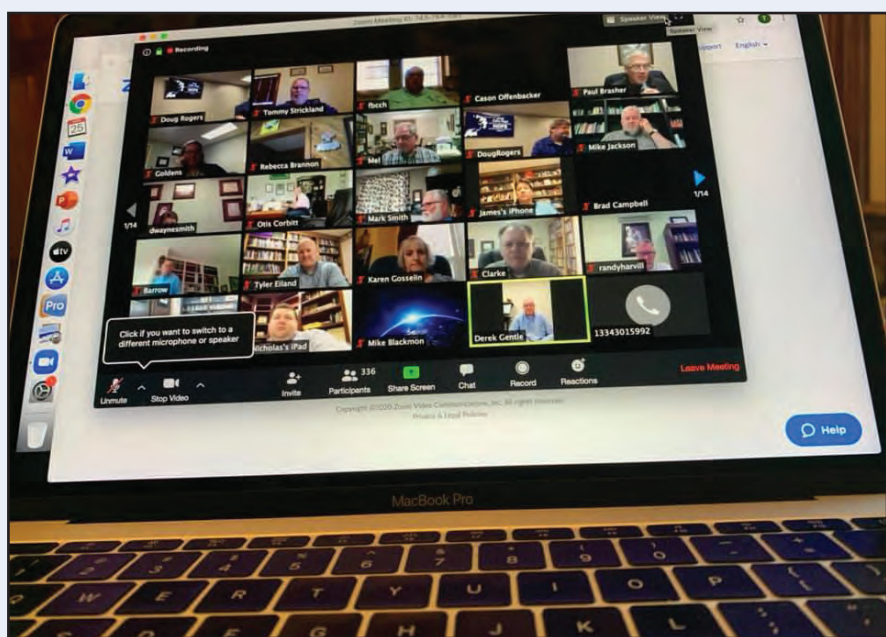


Photo by Tommy Strickland

More than 450 Alabama Baptists joined leaders of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) on March 25 for a time of prayer via a Zoom video conference. SBOM Executive Director Rick Lance opened the call with an acronym for HOPE (Help, Opportunity, People, Encouragement) which guided four distinct prayers led by state leaders. Tim Cox, pastor of Liberty Baptist Church, Chelsea, closed the session with a final prayer. (TAB)

Federal, state tax filing deadlines extended

Both the IRS and the state of Alabama have extended the dates for filing income taxes as part of efforts to stem the financial pain from the coronavirus pandemic.

The IRS is extending the federal income tax filing deadline from April 15 to July 15, U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin announced March 20. The shift gives Americans three months more than usual to file their income tax returns for the 2019 tax year, without incurring interest or penalties.

Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey and the Alabama Department of Revenue announced March 23 that the state income tax filing due date also is extended from April 15 to July 15.

Alabama taxpayers also can defer state income tax payments due on April 15 until July 15 without penalties and interest. (TAB)

IMB postpones visits by volunteer groups

International Mission Board (IMB) senior leaders have directed IMB missionary personnel around the world to postpone hosting any volunteer groups through June 30.

The March 25 announcement said the decision will be reviewed May 1 to evaluate whether the June 30 timeframe should be extended.

IMB President Paul Chitwood said that while missionaries are continuing their work across the globe, the organization is considering health concerns and complying with guidance from the U.S. State Department.

While the directive affects only IMB workers, Chitwood said the IMB "strongly recommends that Southern Baptist volunteer teams postpone any travel during this time, particularly overseas travel." (IMB)

— NEWSBRIEFS —

Samford professor creates COVID-19 data dashboard for state tracking



Samford University's Department of Geography and Sociology has developed a pandemic data dashboard — Coronavirus COVID-19 in Alabama.

Geography professor Jonathan Fleming created the geographic information systems (GIS) project and updates it several times each day using data from multiple sources. Professors will use the new resource as a classroom tool emphasizing to students their discipline's vitally important role in the world as it also keeps them up to date with the best available information about the pandemic, said Jennifer Speights-Binet, chair of Samford's geography and sociology department.

View the dashboard and related info about the spread of coronavirus in Alabama, at www.tabonline.org/COVID-dashboard. (Samford)



Screenshot

SWBTS launches 8-week online courses for seminary students



Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS) is launching eight-week courses for online students beginning April 27.

The effort is part of a plan to help students expedite their theological education and is not a response to the coronavirus pandemic, according to Adam Greenway, SWBTS president.

The first three course offerings are Old Testament I, New Testament I and Baptist Heritage. In the coming year, the seminary will offer six eight-week terms, with an expanding number of courses to be offered.

The courses are open to all students. During the term, students will have several opportunities to engage with residential professors through synchronously live Zoom sessions.

Registration is open to current students. Prospective students should contact the office of admissions to learn how to become a student.

Information about all of Southwestern Seminary's online programs is available at swbts.edu/online. (BP)

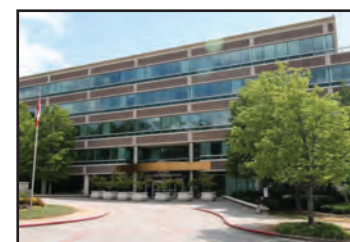
NAMB implements cutbacks, freezes to shore up budgets for missions



The North American Mission Board (NAMB) is implementing a series of budgetary freezes and cutbacks designed to keep missionaries on the field during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

NAMB president Kevin Ezell said the steps announced March 19 are designed to allow missionaries to weather the impact the coronavirus pandemic could have on church finances.

The freeze covers all discretionary spending at NAMB's Alpharetta building and for NAMB missionaries and staff serving throughout North America. NAMB resources will be focused exclusively on mission-critical ministry needs and supporting church planters and ministry personnel. In addition, NAMB events have been postponed until May 31. (BP)



BP photo

— SBC NEWS —

2020 SBC annual meeting canceled due to uncertainty about pandemic

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) annual meeting scheduled for June 9–10 in Orlando has been canceled for the first time in 75 years.

The decision was made March 24 in a unanimous vote of a body composed of SBC officers, the SBC Executive Committee (EC) and leaders of the SBC's boards and institutions.

The annual meeting is not being rescheduled. All ancillary meetings that would have been held in the convention space also have been canceled, as has the 2020 SBC Pastors Conference.

SBC President J.D. Greear described the decision as necessary in light of the ongoing health crisis and the uncertainty of when it might end.

"We are a people committed to keeping the gospel above all," Greear said, "and our sole purpose in coming together is to support one another in that mission. ... This year, our unusual circumstances mean we can best meet that goal by not meeting together."

Ronnie Floyd, president and CEO of the SBC EC, said continuing uncertainty over whether and when large groups would again be able to gather prompted the move to cancel.

Floyd called the decision "the right thing to do" because "churches need to focus on minis-

tering to their communities and to those who have been impacted by the COVID-19 global pandemic."

The last time the SBC annual meeting was canceled was 1945, during World War II, when the United States government banned meetings of groups larger than 50 people.

That year, the SBC was preparing to celebrate its 100th anniversary but instead skipped a year.

The 2021 SBC annual meeting is scheduled for June 15–16, 2021, in Nashville.

The SBC president has authority to convene a special meeting with the concurrence of the other

officers of the SBC and the EC, but no such action is being taken at this time.

Holding the SBC annual meeting either online as a virtual meeting or at various satellite locations is not an option under the SBC's governing documents, which require all business at the annual meeting be conducted by "messengers present and voting in person."

With the cancellation of the annual meeting, SBC officers will remain in office until their successors are elected at the next annual meeting. Members of many committees will remain in office as well. Trustee terms for various SBC entities depend on the entity's charter. (BP)

"We know it is the right thing to do."

Ronnie Floyd
president and CEO
SBC Executive Committee

Persecuted church

Christians attacked, kidnapped in Bangladeshi refugee camp

COX'S BAZAR, Bangladesh — Rohingya Christians were attacked and a pastor and his teenage daughter kidnapped during violence in the world's largest refugee camp.

The 59 assailants were ethnic Rohingya Muslims who like the Rohingya Christians had fled to Bangladesh to escape ethnic cleansing efforts in Myanmar (formerly Burma). Human Rights Watch estimates there are about 1,500 Rohingya Christians among more than 700,000 predominantly Muslim Rohingya.

The late January attacks in Kutupalong refugee camp in Cox's Bazar District hospitalized 12. They reportedly were

relocated to a United Nations transit center.

The status of the pastor and his 14-year-old daughter who were abducted is unclear. The pastor's wife believes her husband has been killed and her daughter forced into marriage with a Muslim man.

Burma is No. 19 and Bangladesh No. 38 on Open Doors' 2020 World Watch List of countries where Christians experience "very high persecution." (MS)



Photo by John Owens, VOA

News near you

DEKALB ASSOCIATION

► **Keith Wrenn** is the new director of missions of **DeKalb Baptist Association**. Wrenn has been a pastor for 30 years, most recently at Bethlehem Baptist Church, Headland. He holds degrees from Samford University in Birmingham and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He and his wife, Melanie, have four children and five grandchildren.



WRENN

LIMESTONE ASSOCIATION

► **David Carter**, children and young families pastor for **First Baptist Church, Athens**, died

March 22 at the age of 57.

Carter had served since 2006 at First, Athens, where he was known as "the Storyman." Before that, he served at Heritage Baptist Church, Huntsville; First Baptist Church, Grant; and Dogwood Community Church, Decatur. He created the Hosanna Drama Ministry, and he also served as the Guntersville Fellowship of Christian Athletes director and as the president of expectation ministries, directing The Big G.I.G. Student Conferences.

Carter died of a heart attack while riding his bike around the neighborhood to say hello to all the First, Athens, children social distancing due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Carter is survived by his wife, Reneé, and daughters Haley, Hannah and Hope. (Grace Thornton)

SHELBY ASSOCIATION

► **Robbie Weems** is the new pastor of **First Baptist Church, Vincent**. He preached in view of a call to five people plus an online audience. The church's vote took place in person, over the phone



CARTER

and with "drive-thru" voting. Weems previously served as pastor of Clearview Baptist Church, Pinson. He and his wife, Wyndy, have two children.

OTHER

► **James Broox "J.B." Thompson** died Jan. 22. He was 88.

Thompson was a longtime pastor, serving churches in Birmingham, Bessemer, Jasper and Walker County. He was preceded in death by his son, James. He is survived by his wife, Bettie; three children; seven grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren.



THOMPSON



WEEMS

EDITOR'S NOTE — Please check with the host church or association to confirm an event is still taking place before attending. Due to the circumstances, TAB will not print any event announcements until further notice.

Ministry works to bring hope, jobs by teaching life skills, work ethic

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Six years ago, John Bowman found himself arresting the same guys over and over for the same thing.

He had worked for the Montgomery Police Department (MPD) for two decades, and that year — 2014 — he was given his own precinct.

“I was responsible for the crime there, and it was a revolving door of the same individuals,” Bowman said.

He wasn’t sure how to make it stop, but one day he ran into Michael Coleman, who founded Hope Inspired Ministries (HIM) in 2012.

HIM — a ministry that started in First Baptist Church, Montgomery, and expanded to the Birmingham area and Lowndes County — prepares low-skilled and chronically unemployed men and women to find and keep employment.

A changed life

Bowman tucked that information in his mind, and it resurfaced one day when he was at Montgomery Municipal Jail talking to some men getting ready to reenter society.

“One guy had been arrested 40 times,” he said. “I said, ‘Why don’t you try this program out?’”

Bowman didn’t think about that conversation again until Karen Boan from HIM called and said the man — Christopher — had shown up at HIM. She asked Bowman to be Christopher’s mentor.

“That’s how I got involved with the mentorship program,” Bowman said.

And it just snowballed from there. He became im-

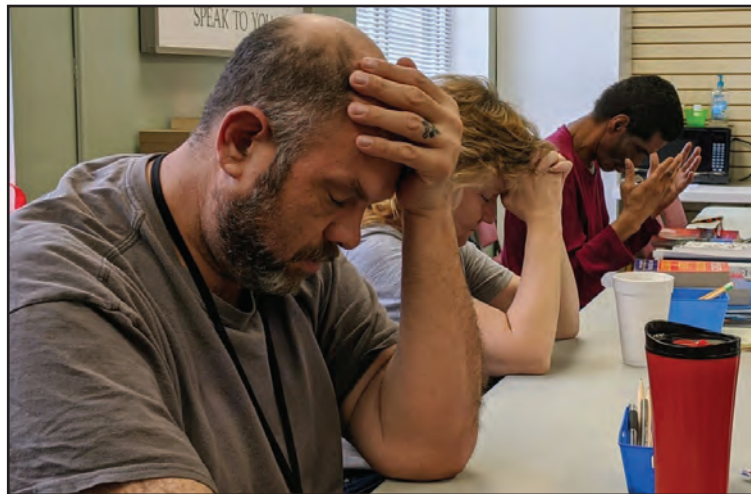


Photo courtesy of Hope Inspired Ministries

Hope Inspired Ministries — which shares the hope of the gospel and prepares chronically unemployed men and women to find and keep employment — is looking to expand in the state.

mersed in the program, which takes men and women through a nine-week course to prepare them to earn a living and become productive members of society. For six weeks, they learn marketable skills such as computer and finance, then for three weeks they work an unpaid internship for a local business.

It changed Christopher’s life. Bowman was able to help him see that every time he’d gotten arrested, he had been intoxicated. Bowman helped him get into a recovery program for chemical abuse, and through that and

what Christopher learned at HIM, he secured a job at a local restaurant.

The ministry “plays an incremen-

tal part of changing lives, which in essence changes a city,” said Bowman, who recently retired as deputy chief of MPD and became executive director of HIM. “I saw this firsthand over the past six years in Montgomery while I worked at the police department. I used to tell people that the police department is just a cough syrup for a

problem, but Hope Inspired

Ministries is a cure.”

Neal Hughes, director of missions for Montgomery Baptist Association (MBA), said HIM has been a huge resource for the River Region.

“Not only have they been able to effect change in the urban culture of Montgomery, the team has partnered with the Montgomery Baptist Association to start a work in Lowndes County,” Hughes said, noting that HIM would be sharing a ministry building owned by MBA there. “Their relationship with local businesses and churches, as well as the city and county judicial systems in our area, has been tremendous. They have brought hope and jobs for many seeking souls willing to enter and complete the HIM program.”

More partners

Bowman said HIM is looking for more churches and individuals to partner with the ministry both in Montgomery, Birmingham and Lowndes County and in other parts of the state where they don’t have a presence yet.

For more information about how to get involved with HIM, contact Bowman at 334-649-4330 or jbowman.him@gmail.com. 🌟

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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

CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Macedonia Baptist Church, Gadsden, is prayerfully seeking a full-time pastor. Send resumé to: macedoniapastorsearch2019@gmail.com or mail to: Macedonia Baptist Church, 2040 Macedonia Road, Gadsden, AL 35801.

PASTOR

New Friendship Baptist Church of Somerville, Alabama, is seeking a new pastor. The church is located in rural Morgan County just beyond the rapidly growing small town of Priceville. While the congregation is aging, there is also much potential for growth and expansion. If interested, please send resumé to: New Friendship Baptist Church, P.O. Box 76, Somerville, AL 35670.

MINISTER OF MUSIC

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.

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.

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.

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.

BIVOCATIONAL YOUTH PASTOR

Bethany Baptist Church, Crane Hill, is seeking a bivocational youth pastor. Send resumé to: Bethany, 1612 County Road 201, Crane Hill, AL 35053 or email resumé to: office@bethanybysmithlake.com.

BUSINESS

FOR SALE NEW & USED STAIR LIFTS

Lift chairs, power wheelchairs, car lifts, scooters and walk-in-tubs. We service Alabama 1-800-682-0658.

SIGNS

NEED A NEW CHURCH SIGN?

Reliable Signs Services, a full-service sign company located in Alabama for 25 years, is ready to help you grow your church sign ministry. From digital message signs to traditional signs. Reliable Signs handles the design, fabrication and installation statewide. www.reliablesigns.com. 1-800-729-6844 or 205-664-0955.

TRAVEL/VACATION

AFFORDABLE BEACHSIDE CONDOS

Gulf Shores and Orange Beach, Alabama. Rent direct from Christian family owners. Lowest prices on the beach for over 25 years. Call Donna: 251-656-4935, Don: 251-752-2366, Eddie: 205-556-0368 or www.gulfshorescondos.com.

LOG CABIN RENTAL

Lake Guntersville area, beautiful view and fully furnished. Discounts to ministers. Log on to www.paradisevista.net to see pictures. Call for reservations at 205-540-3600.

MINISTRIES

TAB PODCASTS

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.

TAB DIGITAL

The Alabama Baptist digital edition comes with all subscriptions. To update your email address contact subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

The Doctrine of God

God Is Holy

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

In the past two weeks, Theology 101 has examined several aspects of God's attributes and actions. This called for a plurality of terms, such as His trinitarian person as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, along with His nature as spirit rather than material form, as well as His omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. To these we added His divine actions of creating, blessing, calling, forgiving and disciplining, as well as commanding and promising, choosing and calling, empowering and commissioning. The vocabulary necessary to approach an understanding of God's essential being and variety of actions in keeping with those attributes is indeed wide ranging.

A holy God

If we were to attempt to express the essential truth God has revealed about Himself in the Old Testament and limit that expression to a single term, our best conclusion would be the assertion that God is holy.

This week we focus on the meaning of the holiness of God.

Holy describes something or someone that is set apart from other things or beings. To be holy is to be distinct from common objects or persons. For example, God pronounced the seventh day of creation to be holy. He intended it to be unique when compared with all other days of the week.

That which the Old Testament declared to be holy, such as a high priest or a Sabbath day, was to be

unlike other people or days.

A helpful way to think about the holiness of God is to think of His otherness. God is other than what is earthly or creaturely. He is other than what is commonplace or ordinary. God is other than what is limited or temporary. He is other than what is time bound and spatially constricted. He is certainly other than what is finite or sinful.

In short, God is holy — a truth revealed consistently throughout the Old Testament.

A holy people

The practical and personal implication, as well as the divine commandment, from this truth about God is that we also should be holy. The long-standing and classic witness to this fact in the Old Testament is Leviticus 19:2: "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy."

The New Testament endorsement or reinforcement of this truth concerning the people of God is set forth in 1 Peter 1:15: "As He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct."

Our personal question must therefore be: "Are there evidences that I am other than the world's precepts and practices?"

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.



Bible translations in the works for people who inspired 'Frozen 2'

When you hear the word "frozen," what's the first thing that comes to mind? For me, it isn't temperature. I think of two royal sisters, a talking snowman and reindeer. Lots and lots of reindeer. (Some say they're even better than people.)

But now when I hear "frozen," I also think of the Sámi people.

The Northudra, a fictional indigenous group depicted in Disney's "Frozen 2," are actually based on the real-life Sámi. (Which is not short for Samantha, much to a talking snowman's chagrin.)

More than 75,000 Sámi (or Saami) people are scattered across parts of Russia, Sweden, Finland and, of course, Norway. Located in northern Europe, Norway is surrounded by water and is covered with mountains, glaciers and fjords. The breathtaking scenery and unique terrain form the backdrop to the Sámi's way of life, a culture that dates back thousands of years.

Some things never change for the Sámi people, including their traditional livelihoods of fishing, selling handmade crafts and hunting.

Reindeer herding remains one of the most important aspects of the Sámi's culture; it provides transportation and materials for clothing, traditional crafts and food.

Unique languages

Of the approximately 7,300 languages in use around the world today, 10 languages are unique to the Sámi. They share similarities, but each language has its own writing system. For example, if you want to call for your favorite reindeer in Northern Sámi, you would say, "boazu!" But if you found yourself in a region that spoke Inari Sámi,

then "puásui" would be the correct choice. Thanks to organizations like the Norwegian, Finnish and Swedish Bible societies working together, Bible translation work is underway for some Sámi languages.

Speaks to the heart

Almost 75% of Sámi speak Northern Sámi, which makes it the largest language group in this population. Northern Sámi has a complete Bible in its language, and a new version was published in 2019. Lule Sámi has a complete New Testament. Inari Sámi and Skolt Sámi both have portions of the New Testament. Other

Sámi languages are in various stages of Scripture translation, and some like South Sámi and Kildin Sámi don't have any Scripture.

The Bible is God's word to us — something that everyone should be able to understand in a language and form that clearly speaks to his or her heart. What's worse than being

lost in the woods with only reindeer for company? Being lost in the dark without being able to understand the love and light of Jesus.

You can bring light and hope to the Sámi. Here are some prayer points:

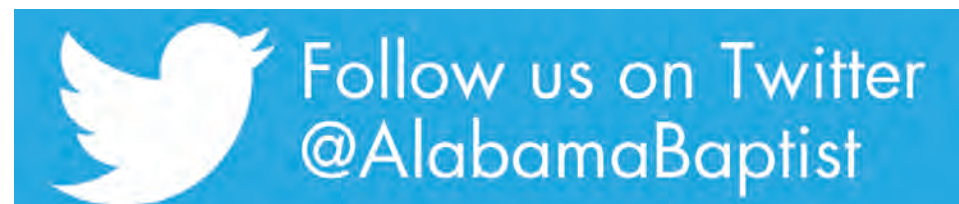
▶ Praise God for entertainment and technology like movies that help us venture into the unknown and learn about people and places around the world.

▶ Pray the Sámi would recognize God's love for their languages and culture.

▶ Pray the Sámi who have Scripture will grow in faith.

▶ Ask God to raise up translators who long to see the Word translated into the remaining Sámi languages that still need Scripture. (Wycliffe)

"What's worse than being lost in the woods with only reindeer for company? Being lost in the dark without being able to understand the love and light of Jesus."



ENCOURAGING RESOURCES

FROM YOUR STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS



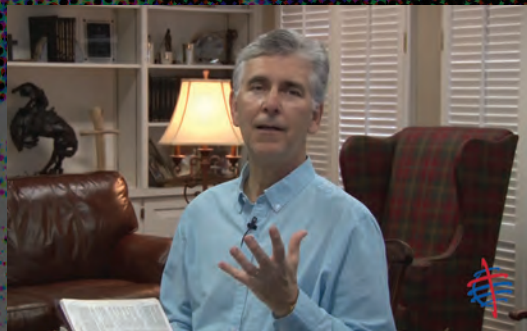
EVERY MONDAY
A fresh video greeting from State Missionary and Executive Director Rick Lance via alsbom.org, social media and email (*subscribe by visiting alsbom.org/email*)



EVERY WEDNESDAY
Online Call to Prayer via Zoom at 10 a.m.

A link to the meeting is available at alsbom.org, via SBOM social media channels, and through Rick Lance's weekly emails

EVERY THURSDAY
A brief "Message of Encouragement" video from pastors, associational missionaries and other Alabama Baptist leaders, posted on our website and via social media

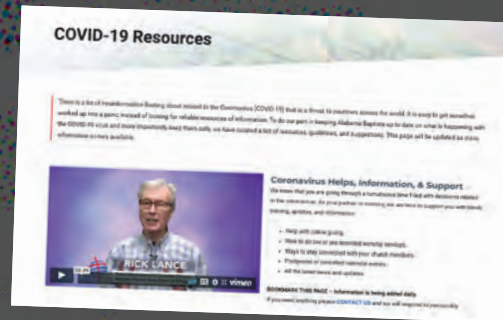


24/7
Blogs, helpful links, videos and other resources at alsbom.org/coronavirus

ALSBOM Facebook COVID-19 Resource Group for resource sharing among Alabama pastors and leaders

Need someone to talk to or just to pray with?

Call 1-877-4-AL-PRAY and an Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief Chaplain will be available by phone.



Your state missionaries stand ready to serve you in any way we can. Visit alsbom.org/staff and click on the name of the person you would like to contact for their phone number and email.

Old church gets new members, 7 'gloriously saved'

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

It's been more than five and a half years since a pastor was last called to Helton Memorial Chapel Missionary Baptist Church, Stevenson.

That's why Jack Tucker got a call on a Sunday morning in March.

"I'm not an ordained minister, but Helton Memorial is special to me," Tucker said. The 120-year-old church was his wife's family's church before they got married. "There are a lot of good memories there."

So that Sunday morning, when he was getting ready to go to his own church — Trinity Baptist Church, Scottsboro — and got a call to fill in at the last minute at Helton Memorial, he said yes.

'I'd be there'

"One of the ladies in the church told me the pastor they had lined up wasn't able to make it," Tucker said. "I get that call once every six months or so. I told them I wasn't sure what I'd

say, but I'd be there."

He was used to speaking to an older congregation at the small church, but when he arrived that morning, seven adults and around 15 children and youth greeted him.

Laid on his heart

"God laid on my heart that morning to speak about how to handle anger in a biblical way, so I did," Tucker said.

And as he finished up, one of the women at the church asked him if he would mind giving an altar call.

So he did that too.

And during the minutes that followed, one after another, the altar filled with both young people and adults desiring prayer, wanting to know Jesus and wanting to join the church.

Through the years, Tucker said the faithful members there have been doing the "planting and watering." And a group from the association came and conducted Vacation Bible School there last summer, which was the first introduction some of



Photo courtesy of Jack Tucker

Jack Tucker (back) baptizes seven people during a service at Helton Memorial Chapel Missionary Baptist Church, Stevenson. Three of the seven weren't planning to be baptized, but they decided to follow Jesus during the service and asked to be baptized that day.

the young people had to the church.

"But even so, it absolutely shocked me," Tucker said. "After that service, I called Dwight and told him what had happened and told him they might need to set up a baptism service and somebody to come do it. I told him I could do it if he wanted."

Dwight Everett, director of missions for Tennessee

River Baptist Association, also has been filling the pulpit regularly at Helton Memorial for a while now.

"It's a sweet church," he said.

'Not done working'

Through the years as the congregation has shrunk in number and faced difficulties finding a pastor, he wondered if they would shut their doors.

"And then something like this happens," Everett said. "It's like God said, 'I'm not done working there. You don't know my plans.'"

On March 15, Everett brought a portable baptistry, and Tucker baptized seven people. Three of them didn't come planning to get baptized — they decided to follow Jesus during the service and asked to be baptized too.

Seeking discipleship

"One of them, a high school-aged girl, just wept," Everett said. "She was gloriously saved."

He's working now to find someone to disciple the new believers who have joined the historical church tucked away in the mountains. Tucker hopes that person might be a new pastor.

"The church has persevered, and God has blessed them with these new souls," he said. "There have been a lot of people from the association who have been faithful to go and preach there, but I'm praying God will send them a pastor." ✝

Christian Crossword

By Lee Esch Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

- Mount ____; Moses died here. (Deut. 34:1)
- He hath spread a ____ for my feet. (Lam. 1:13)
- Mine entrance.
- Above the top.
- Boat paddle.
- He ____ witness unto the truth. (John 5:33)
- Gentle.
- First one.
- Samuel's mentor. (1 Sam. 3:1)
- Still on the market.
- We have seen His star in the _____. (Matt. 2:2)
- Ancient Greek storyteller.
- Returned to.
- Time period.
- Affirm.
- Optimum. (for short)
- There shall come a ____ out of

- Jacob. (Num. 24:17)
- Company top dog. (abbr.)
- Arguable.
- ____ Oakley.
- Why beholdest thou the ____ that is in thy brother's eye? (Matt. 7:3)
- ____ yourselves therefore to God. (James 4:7)
- When thou wast under the tree, I saw thee. (John 1:48)
- From the beginning of the ____ God made them male and female. (Mark 10:6)
- I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a _____. (John 1:32)
- Gasoline.
- Digit.
- To stuff.
- Jail unit.
- For Christ is the

- ____ of the law. (Rom. 10:4)
- Part of the eye.

Down

- Alaska city.
- Why, what ____ hath he done? (Matt. 27:23)
- ____ the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. (Acts 16:31)
- Fort ____; California Army base.
- Midday.
- He that hath ____ to hear, let him hear. (Matt. 11:15)
- Threesome.
- ____ in Me, and I in you. (John 15:4)
- One of the 12 tribes of Israel.
- Private old age fund. (abbr.)
- Far. (prefix)
- I will be ____ in the Lord. (Ps. 104:34)
- Navy sailing vessel
- initials.
- Atmosphere.
- I have ____ thee an open door. (Rev. 3:8)
- Spoken.
- Peel.
- A term of contempt. (Matt. 5:22)
- Level.
- Bill or check.
- Tested.
- I ____ daily with you teaching in the temple. (Matt. 26:55)
- Written by Moses. (abbr.)
- Little fellow.
- But Christ ____ and in all. (Col. 3:11)
- Mouthful.
- Nightlight.
- ____ the Terrible.
- Precious stones.
- Chlorofluorocarbon. (for short)
- Feel regret.
- Slippery fish.
650. (Roman numeral)

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For April 5

Explore the Bible

By Robert E. Jackson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



FREE Romans 6:1–14

Dead to Sin (1–7)

In the previous chapter, Paul said that an increase of sin means a greater multiplication in grace (5:20). People might question, “Perhaps I should sin more so more grace will be released?”

In essence, they wonder that since they “have salvation” can they live anyway they wish?

Paul emphatically answers, “Certainly not!” Christians were once dead in sin (Eph. 2:1), now we are dead to sin.

Our baptism is a reminder that we have died, been buried and raised again with Christ. Because we died with Christ, sin has lost its power over us.

Not that we cannot and will not sin, but in dying with Christ, our old nature has been crucified.

The Holy Spirit, who lives within us, changes our longings. We no longer ask, “How much can we get away with and still be a Christian?” Instead, being freed from the slavery of sin creates a longing within us to be pleasing to the Lord. Praise be to God, our death with Christ guarantees that we live with Him.

Humanity’s sinfulness is often revealed in times of crisis. While some people want to hoard hand sanitizer and toilet paper, we as God’s people exhibit an unexplainable peace. Why? We know He who holds the future has also freed us from the slavery of sin.

Alive in Christ (8–11)

Today is an excellent opportunity to show how we are alive in Christ by exhibiting His peace in these difficult days. We are able to display this peace because our Savior died, rose again and conquered death. He cannot die again; therefore, the consequence of sin (death) no longer has power over us.

This Scripture does not mean we are immune to temptation and sin. However, it does mean we have been delivered from its reign. Furthermore, Jesus is alive and lives for the glory of God (Rom. 6:10). Paul is touching on a deep concept that involves the mystery that Jesus

is both God and also Son. In His Sonship, He lives to God and even intercedes for us to God. The essence of this statement is that the only way we can live to and for God is in Christ.

How does this look? Transformation has occurred in our lives, in our passions and pursuits, and in our “want to.”

Our hearts are set on heavenly things and we are not stressed out, worried and consumed by the same things as the world.

We are forgiven and we have calmness in our lives. Alive to God means He sees us not as we are in ourselves but as we are in Christ.

Tools of Righteousness (12–14)

Since we are dead to sin, we must not allow sin to control us as it has in the past. God has freed us from the bondage of sin, but we have a human responsibility to act upon this freedom. When we dabble in sin, we allow evil to have control over an aspect of our lives. In turn, we become an instrument or weapon of wickedness.

The Greek word translated weapon can also be used to reference a sacrifice. Paul, therefore, encourages us to reject sin and instead offer ourselves as a tool or sacrifice to God. As previously mentioned, neither our temptations nor abilities to sin are removed from us. Believers are still “in the flesh” as well as “in Christ.” We still struggle.

Paul encourages believers who have been freed from sin to stop living like slaves. Sin cannot rule over followers of Christ because it no longer has lordship over them. How can we live up to these righteous demands? Through Jesus Christ and the grace He offers.

In a world filled with confusion and panic, we must offer ourselves as tools of His righteousness. Rejecting the dominion of sin in our lives brings about hope for a watching world and glory to God who offers grace to everyone who believes. ✠

Bible Studies for Life

By James Riley Strange, Ph.D.

Professor of New Testament, Samford University



ETERNAL LIFE Revelation 21:1–8; 22:1–5

This is our last lesson on six terms commonly used by Christians: “holy,” “lost,” “salvation,” “faith,” “sanctified” and “eternal life.” Eternal life does not appear in these passages from Revelation. The idea, however, is there.

Jesus gave us the best-known reference to eternal life in John 3:16. The key to understanding it lies in the words “will not die.” Because those who believe in God’s Son do die, this “death” that believers do not suffer must be something else: a separation from God; a refusal to accept God’s righteousness; an exclusion from God’s presence.

“Eternal” life is the opposite of these things. It refers not only to quantity (never ending), but also to quality: being at one with God (“atonement”); being made right with God (“righteousness”/“justification”); existing in God’s presence.

The part of John’s vision we are reading focuses on the future, but this much is clear from the Gospel of John: Jesus says eternal life begins now.

Read Revelation 1–2 and 20–22 to understand the continuity of John’s vision.

We will live in a perfect place with God forever. (21:1–5)

John’s vision ends in the way Genesis began, with the creation of heaven and earth.

This new creation, however, will not suffer degradation as the first did, for rebellion against God will end. The sea, which God subdued but did not destroy in Genesis 1:1–10, is now gone.

Recall that in the Bible, the sea is often a terrifying element that God defeats. Its absence signals the end of enmity between God and His creation.

John’s vision is not of disembodied souls living in the sky but of God making His dwelling on the new earth with His people. The sages of Proverbs knew that God’s divine wisdom lived among His people (Prov. 1:20–33; 8:1–36), and in John’s Gospel, “the Word

became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:14). John the Revelator sees that God will one day dwell finally and fully with us.

Our eternity is based on our relationship with Christ. (21:6–8)

John saw this lake in 19:20 (see also 14:10). Those who “conquer” first appear at the conclusion of the letters in chapters 2–3.

The call is to remain faithful in the face of persecution, but as we learn in verse 8, other ways exist to show lack of faith.

John learns that faithfulness means not merely to confess what we believe; it is also visible in every moral decision we make.

We will reign with Christ forever. (22:1–5)

On the new earth, the new Jerusalem is the new Eden, with its flowing river branching into four rivers (Gen. 2:10–14) and the tree of life (Gen. 2:9; 3:22).

That it is made of precious metals and stones (21:18–21) has two implications.

1. It is more beautiful than we can imagine.

2. What we regard as precious now will be construction material then. We will no more adorn ourselves with gold and jewels there than we wear asphalt and concrete here.

Adam and Eve — and all their descendants — were not to live forever and so were expelled from Eden (Gen. 3:22–24). John learns that the expulsion is going to be reversed. God’s servants will live eternally, both endlessly and fully in God’s presence. Just as God first created people to “have dominion over” creation (Gen. 1:26–28) and to “till and keep” the garden (Gen. 2:15), they will also reign in the new Jerusalem with God and with Christ the Lamb. This is not merely about having power; it is about our wills finally and fully conforming to God’s will.

Thanks be to God that despite our past, this is the future He has prepared for us. ✠



Media reviews

MUSIC

J.J. Weeks

The Sound of Freedom
Radiate

It's difficult to find a complaint in this project combining J.J. Weeks' powerful but accessible vocals with contemporary Christian music legend Ian Eskelin's celebrated songwriting and production chops.

This six-song EP combines a solid selection of slower tempo ballads and pop-heavy power praise. "Here With Me" is some-



thing special, a soul-bearing showcase of Weeks' range and his faith: "Forgive me for the question — am I all alone? ... Even when it's hard to see, you're here with me."

We Are Messengers

Power
Curb

The pride of Monaghan, Ireland, We Are Messengers was pushing 100 million streams before their sophomore album. "Power" will have them on their way to twice that in no time, and for good reason. The 12-song effort moves from upbeat and poppy to slow and soul-

ful with echoes of Imagine Dragons throughout.

Lyrical-ly, their message is still God's message. The title track refrain? "We got that Holy Ghost power, we keep our eyes fixed above." (Jeremy Henderson)



Finding her voice

Elizabeth Grace making an impression, working on debut album

By Tracy Riggs

Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Making it in the music business takes time and hard work, but there are still stories of being "discovered" — and that's part of 20-year-old Christian music artist Elizabeth Grace's story.

Grace, who lives in Birmingham, released her debut single "Like Myself" last year, and it quickly climbed the charts, reaching No. 3 on Billboard's Hot AC/CHR list and spending seven weeks at No. 1 on The Hot Chart.

Always musically inclined, Grace began piano lessons at a young age and soon realized she could play by ear. However, until about two years ago, only a few knew she could sing.

"I was really shy and really awkward, very introverted," she said.

It took her proud mom begging her to sing and play at her home-school graduation ceremony before others realized her gift. She sang "Hills and Valleys" by Tauren Wells, and afterwards classmates and friends told her how great her voice was. They also asked if she was recording anything.

Surprised reactions

"I didn't even think I could sing that well," Grace said.

She kept practicing music by being active with a group of singer-songwriters at her church, but getting into the music business was "just a God-thing," she said.

Grace uploaded a cover of a Sarah Reeves song to Instagram. Jeff Owen of Tenth Avenue North heard it and invited her to Nashville. That led to interest from several record companies.



Elizabeth Grace

Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Grace

Signing with Dream Records was a turning point, she said.

"It felt very surreal for me because this something I never expected to happen in my life. I never anticipated going into music," she said.

Now she's in Nashville once or twice a month working on her new album with other songwriters, including Owen, producer/songwriter Justin Amundrud and another Birmingham native, singer/songwriter Ray Ervin.

When Grace isn't playing the piano or working on her songs, she works in a coffee shop part-time, hangs out with friends and plays video games. But there's not a lot of time for those activities, as most of her time is dedicated to music.

To date she has released six singles as an indie artist and has been featured on Ervin's single "The Ones." Grace will be releasing a second single with Dream Records this

summer and her debut album is set to be released in early October.

Despite her busy schedule and newfound fame, Grace's main goal is still to help others. She went through many times when she wondered what her purpose was — or if she even had a purpose.

Connecting through music

During those times Grace, whose home church is New Life Church, a pentecostal congregation in Birmingham, clung to music and to John 13:7: "Jesus replied, 'You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.'"

And through this journey, Grace said she has become more self-reflective and wants to help others know they aren't alone.

Her encouragement for fans is this: "Never be afraid to ask for help, whether that's from a therapist or a pastor or even me. ... Don't stay trapped in your own mind." 🌈

God's glory shown through crisis

Livestreamed baptism in Rome allows gospel to go out in midst of crisis

By Reid Karr
International Mission Board

In Italy, the coronavirus has hit particularly hard, infecting more than 74,000 people and killing more than 7,500.

As in other parts of the world, the numerous social restrictions enacted to combat the virus are of course having a significant impact on religious and church meetings of any kind.

Churches have had to cancel services and find creative ways to meet and have community.

Modern technology has been a huge blessing and help for many seeking corporate worship.

Finding truth

On Sunday, March 8 in Rome, Italy, the evangelical churches Breccia di Roma San Paolo and Breccia di Roma centro (downtown) were to meet together to celebrate the baptism of Akille De Chirico.

Akille was adopted as a young boy from Ethiopia into an Italian family. Akille spent his childhood

in a home where the gospel was taught and lived, and he followed his family to church where the gospel was faithfully preached.

For Akille, however, Christianity was just one religion among many and had no claim to absolute truth.

Akille began attending the church plant Breccia di Roma San Paolo in September 2018.

The Lord built on the foundation of his many years of exposure to the gospel and opened his eyes to the exclusive truth claims of the good news of Jesus Christ.

Akille made the decision to follow his profession of faith in Jesus with believer's baptism.

The evening before his baptism, however, the government implemented new regulations that forbid all religious meetings and ceremonies. The churches simply could not meet for the baptism.

Relatives had traveled in from out of town and were themselves worried about getting home with new travel bans.



IMB photo

Reid Karr is a church planter in Europe. He lives in Rome, Italy, with his wife, Stephanie, and three daughters. Though COVID-19 is halting work and normal life across the globe, nothing will stop God from moving.

While the churches planned to respect the government regulations, they did not want to forego the opportunity to celebrate the new life Akille has in Christ and the testimony of his baptism.

Church leaders made the decision to move the baptism to his house. He would be baptized in the bathtub and those present would witness a visible demonstration of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Thankful for technology

While a handful of church members and relatives gathered at his house, others participated in the service thanks to a livestream of the celebration.

Approximately 40 church members streamed the baptism live, and to date approximately 1,500 people have viewed the baptism online.

The churches are thankful for the technology that permits them to celebrate the gospel in unusual circumstances, such as the corona-

virus outbreak. Akille's baptism, and its broadcast, is an example of God bringing glory to Himself during this crisis.

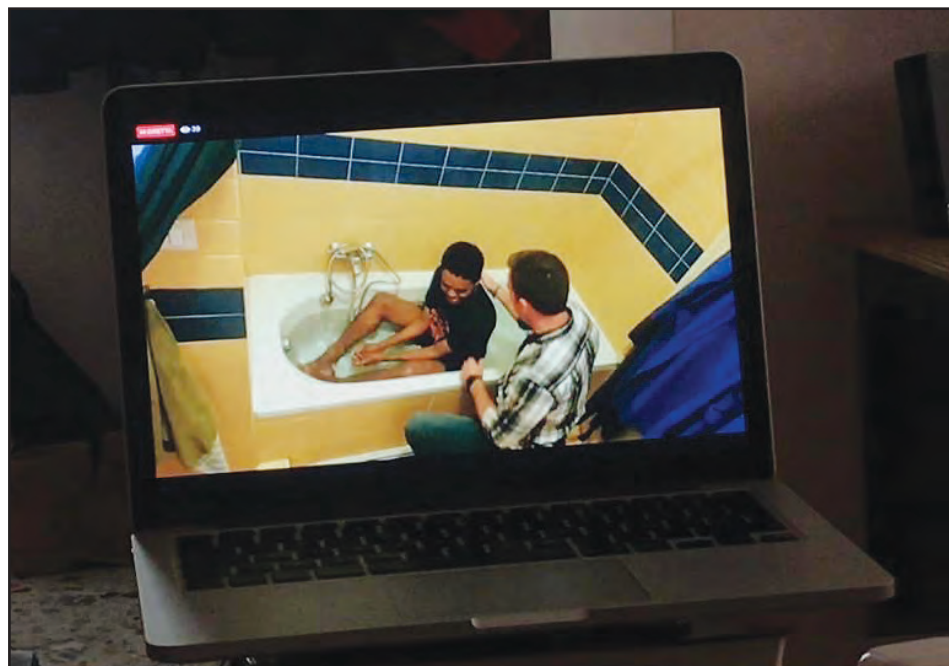
To God be the glory

Adopted into a loving family here on earth, Akille has now also been adopted into a heavenly family by an eternal and loving God.

Coronavirus or no coronavirus, church members and hundreds more witnessed Akille's baptism that visibly testifies to his eternal adoption and his new life in Jesus Christ.

To God be all the glory, and may He continue to be at work through the church to bring more to a saving faith in Christ. (IMB, TAB)

EDITOR'S NOTE — As of March 27, the World Health Organization (WHO) reports 509,085 confirmed cases of coronavirus disease and 23,334 deaths worldwide due to COVID-19. 🙏



IMB photo

IMB church planter Reid Karr baptizes new believer, Akille De Chirico. The baptism took place in De Chirico's home when the church was not able to meet due to the coronavirus outbreak. Church members watched the baptism online via livestream.