



The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

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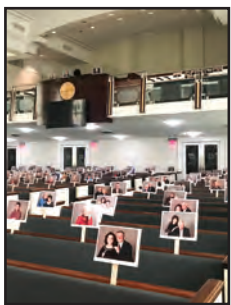
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Easter message

Alabamians sense God's hand amid destructive storms

Pastor Mike Johnson said it's a good thing he's not looking for a church right now — at the last three he served, he found himself in the path of a tornado. But when the twister rolled over his current church — Bethsaida Baptist, Boaz — on Easter Sunday and blew the steeple and front

atrium off, it was the first time Johnson had ever been inside the church when it happened. "We were actually in the basement," Johnson said. "Anytime there is a serious threat, we open it up to the community for a shelter." In light of the coronavirus, Bethsaida Baptist had asked anyone who came to bring his or her own mask, and at first they tried to "social distance" as much as possible. "It's hard to give comfort and aid when you're social distancing, so we did the best we could," Johnson said. "But when the storm got there, that

pretty much went out the window." He and his wife, Cyndi, helped hold the small group together and assured everyone they would be OK. "I experienced this incredible peace from the Lord that we were protected," Johnson said. **No lives lost in state** They were — in fact, no lives were lost at all in Alabama as tornadoes dropped all over the state April 12. The reality was more sobering in other parts of the Southeast — at least 30 people died elsewhere,

Top, right: Shoal Creek Baptist Church, Priceville, was struck by lightning April 12. **Bottom, right:** Birmingham Metro Baptist Association disaster relief team helps clean up debris at Lawler Baptist Church, near Dora.



Top photo courtesy of Shoal Creek Baptist; left photo by Tracy Riggs

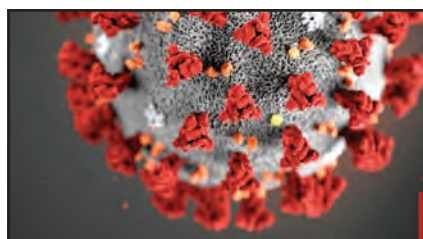
including at least 11 in Mississippi, nine in South Carolina and eight in Georgia. But other churches in the state, like Bethsaida Baptist, were also battered by the storms. Lawler Baptist Church, near Dora; Mount Pleasant Church in Spratt; Keener Baptist Church in Etowah County; and Providence Missionary Baptist (See 'God,' page 17)



Center cross remains standing following Easter storm that damaged property all around it and leveled the other two crosses in the outside display at Lawler Baptist Church, near Dora.

Photo by Tracy Riggs

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

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Photo courtesy of the Masseys

Thirty years ago, Chad and Amy Massey were married at the ages of 19 and 18, respectively, and they've battled health-related issues together since that day. The Masseys and their two children, Marissa (back) and Paige (right), report the tough times only made them stronger.

Couple celebrates 30 years of God working in marriage

When Chad and Amy Massey married 30 years ago, their wedding picture was printed on the front page of *The Alabama Baptist*. The article shared a lot of their story, from the heart condition Amy was diagnosed with a month before the wedding all the way to the spiral candles they decorated with for their big day at First Baptist Church, Jasper.

But there was one thing the article didn't share.

Growing stronger

"People had told us we probably wouldn't make it, that we were too young," Chad said. He was 19 when they got married. His bride was 18.

"My younger daughter is 19, and there's no way I'd give her permission to do that now," he joked. "I don't know what our parents were thinking, saying yes to that."

Chad — now pastor of First Baptist Church, Dawes, in Mobile —

speaks as someone who knows how much can happen in 30 years. A few years after they married, Amy's enlarged heart caused her to have a stroke, and that set her on a journey to relearn how to use her left side. Ten years after that, she received a heart transplant.

After that, they reversed caretaker roles when Chad was diagnosed with a condition that didn't allow fluid to drain from his brain. He also battled cancer.

But through it all, everything has made them "stronger and stronger," he said. "We can look back through every situation and see where God had worked in our lives."

Amy said that it all came down to their faith and a decision they made early on in their young marriage — "I think we just decided we weren't ever going to give up on each other." (Grace Thornton)



TAB photo



The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.

TAB Media

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

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A phone call marketing effort by a group named That's Good News is following TAB's articles. The caller offers a free digital version of the article and/or a free framed version in exchange for your email address and other information. This is not connected to TAB Media. Please use caution before providing any information to this group.

MY RASHIONALE

By Jennifer Davis Rash
President and Editor-in-Chief

jrash@thealabamabaptist.org
@RashionalThts



Balancing work and rest during ‘ongoing trauma marathon’

Did you sense it too? A bit of the blues showing up on Easter Monday and sticking around the rest of the week?

Maybe that dip in energy tinged with a hint of sadness is still hanging around. If so, please know you aren't alone.

It's happening with a lot of people in a lot of places, including those of us at TAB Media.

We managed to stay alert, energized and highly motivated until Easter weekend, and then we started sensing a lull like so many others.

Our team might have hit a brick wall in our production if we had not gotten ahead of it and worked out a plan for staff members to stagger taking some time away to rest and recover.

And in the same “all in,” cooperative spirit they've had from the start, working non-stop in many cases, they also are committed to making sure we pace ourselves properly so we are fully functioning for the long haul.

I'm proud of our team and how they are working together to keep all aspects of TAB Media as well as each individual team member in good shape.

As far as the recent sluggishness, it may have been a bit of “battle fatigue” following a full month of intense life adjustments, a constant anticipation of the next scary update and then those destructive Easter storms.

The dip in energy also could have been tied to the Easter weekend itself — the idea of

wondering what we have to look forward to after that all-important major target on our mostly blank calendars.

We know the first Easter sealed our ultimate Hope and each year we as believers have the privilege of celebrating Resurrection Sunday and worshipping our Lord Jesus Christ at a heightened level above any other Sunday.

We also love to share the celebration with extended family and friends. Since gatherings weren't possible this year, maybe that's why a shadow of sadness accompanied the day.

Many of us in the communications and technology businesses also have joked about how we are going to need a vacation after all of this is over. It's not a complaint because moments like this allow us to showcase what we were built for; it's our time to shine.

But we do have to be careful to pace ourselves because the temptation is to sprint into action and forgo rest and our own needed time to process.

TAB Media board member and licensed professional counselor Melissa Golden provided helps early on for our staff.

Her “Thriving in the Unknown” video series can be found in the resources section of her counseling service's website (transformationcounselinginc.com) and on YouTube.

Video 7 has been especially helpful to me — Balancing Work and Rest. “Whether your routine has become increasingly busy and chaotic, slower and less productive, or if the pace of each day is consistently unclear, this video provides tips and encouragements for resting, staying motivated and extending ourselves grace upon grace during this ongoing trauma marathon,” Golden says. 🙏

COMMUNITY PRAYER

Carbon Hill churches gather for drive-in prayer service after Easter tornado plows similar path to 2002 storm

About 50 families in Carbon Hill came together April 15 to pray for those impacted by the Easter tornado that marked a similar path from 2002.

Scott McCullar, pastor of FBC Carbon Hill, organized a drive-in prayer service in the parking lot of the high school, and several pastors participated, as did the high school principal and football coach. They also prayed over each family present (by praying over the vehicle) as well as over Pastor David Toney, whose church — Grants Chapel CME Church — was destroyed.

Grants Chapel also was hit by the 2002 tornado.

“Carbon Hill, we are going to get through this,” McCullar said. “God [is] going to do something amazing.” (TAB)



Photos by Jennifer Davis Rash

Your Voice



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

Opportunity to distinguish ourselves

By **Lonnie Burnett**
President, University of Mobile

As the nation in general, and institutions of higher education in particular, navigate the uncharted waters into which we have all been tossed, the mission of a Christ-centered university becomes more important than ever.

Just a month ago, our students were focused on completing mid-term exams and then perhaps a restful week at the beach or Disney World. When they left campus for spring break, life was good.

Almost overnight, their isolated sense of security melted away as their courses, finances, campus living arrangements, freedom of travel and, even in some cases, the health of themselves or their families, were abruptly transformed.

Now we have students spread out

literally around the world who are, at best anxious and, at worst, terribly frightened.

It is in this setting that an institution like the University of Mobile (UM) has the unique opportunity to rise to the occasion and show, not just that we can maintain a strong academic program, but also the love of Christ.

It is interesting that several companies have already starting surveying university and high school students to see how their attitudes and expectations have been affected by the current crisis.

Many are saying things like they value an institution's ability to provide caring mentoring.

They rank items like "The professors and staff care about me as a person" very high in their desired attributes.

What an opportunity for us to distinguish ourselves, and how do we do that in this time of upheaval?

I heard a pastor recently ask, "Do we give up or do we look up?"

At UM, we are making a conscious effort to show our students that, just because they are not physically on campus, they are still a part of a caring family. Our faculty and staff are going to great lengths to stay in contact with, and minister to, students.

One advantage of a small to mid-size Christian institution is that this is a manageable task.

If one of the "family" is hurting, we know it quickly and respond. In addition to our classes, we have done remote chapel services, prayer groups and Bible studies.

As hard as it is sometimes for academics to realize, at this particular moment, a student understandably might be facing pressures beyond what we can comprehend.

Finally, as the president of a Christ-centered university, it is my role to reassure our students, faculty and staff that our God is faithful.

The same God who is with us on the mountaintop is faithful while we temporarily walk through a valley. The greatest advantage institutions such as ours have is the liberty of sharing our faith and hope with those who are struggling.

I constantly think of the question that Mordecai asked Queen Esther. Who knows, but that we have been called for such a time as this?

It doesn't matter if the church building is full like last year or empty like this year, praise God that the tomb is empty and my heart is full because Christ is alive and He lives in me!

Doug Rogers
Pike Road, Ala.

God did mighty things through Paul as he sat in a jail cell. Today I see God doing mighty things through His people stuck at home.
— Philippians 4:13

Pastor John Carney
Blue Ridge Baptist Church
Elmore Association

I read a quote recently about how "faith is ... moving forward in spite of fear."

As I reflect on that quote, I can't help but think about nurses, firemen, doctors, police officers, ambulance drivers, cashiers, etc. If we will look, faith is all around us.

Jason Davis
Russellville, Ala.

Prayfully consider the words of the risen Savior, who always appears in the nick of time, "Be not afraid; It is I."

Pastor Gary Burton
Pintlala Baptist Church

Letters to the Editor

I was very touched, Jennifer, by your personal story in the My Rashionale editorial in the April 9 issue. It is, indeed, sometimes difficult to discern exactly what, how and when to properly intervene. It looks like God would not let you lose that ministry opportunity and I am so glad things fell into place.

Morris Murray Jr.
Jasper, Ala.

Thanks for your great work. Read your My Rashionale in the

April 9 issue and am reminded of the many times the Spirit moved and I stopped doing what He was leading me to do. Very practical insight for those of us who are called to make Jesus our Lord.

God bless as He uses you, your skills and your love.

John G. "Jack" Green
Birmingham, Ala.

EDITOR'S NOTE — To read the April 9 editorial, visit tabonline.org and search for My Rashionale.

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“See today as basic training for His future plan.”

NEAL HUGHES

Director of missions, Montgomery Baptist Association

Optimism is the belief that everything will be all right which often minimizes both suffering and compassion. Authentic hope is the confidence that God's kingdom will prevail and this empowers the people of God to have genuine compassion and to enthusiastically and energetically meet human hurt and need.

Gary Fenton
Birmingham, Ala.

While we are washing our hands, let's make sure we are washing someone else's feet.

Pastor Tony Evans
Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship, Dallas

Be gentle.

That non-essential business that was ordered to close? It may not be

essential to you, but it's essential to the owners. Closing their doors was harder than the blood, sweat and tears they put into opening it.

So be gentle.

That mom upset about the playground closing? That was the 30-minute break in her daily schedule she looked forward to most. That 30 minutes reenergized her for the next four hours. Now she doesn't know how she will make it through the day.

So be gentle.

Your colleague that keeps sharing memes; making light of the situation? They are taking it seriously. They are scared. They are grounding themselves through humor, the only way they know how.

So be gentle.

The father with a cart overflowing with food? He's not hoarding. He's likely picking up groceries for his family, his elderly mom and his sick neighbor.

So be gentle.

We understand the importance of staying home, but we don't understand what others are going through.

So be gentle.

Social distancing doesn't mean turning our backs on one another.

Daniel Wiggins, DOM
Pleasant Grove Association

The Coronavirus — we've been praying for an awakening ... America just got woke up.

Pastor Rusty Sowell
Providence Baptist Church,
Opelika

From the *Twitterverse*

@MontgomeryFBC

FBC (Montgomery) cooked, packed and transported over 100 meals to nurses at Jackson Hospital's COVID unit and Baptist East's respiratory therapy and lab units. Let's continue praying and finding ways to encourage our health care heroes!

@CSLewisDaily

"I don't believe that good work is ever done in a hurry." #CSLewis

@desiringGod

"The situations that we wish were most different are likely the places that others are watching us most closely."

@bryantwright

Now that we have experienced a most unique Easter with COVID-19,

what's next? 2 Corinthians 5:17 ...

How do we live with the hope of Easter after Easter? Look to Jesus. After Jesus miraculously rose from the dead, He walked and talked with His friends for over a month.

... Jesus communicated two profound commands which overflowed with both hope and challenge: Wait and Go.

@DrDavidLAllen

It's important to remember, when you seem to be overwhelmed, you are really overshadowed ... by His wings.

@DrPaulChitwood

As worldwide travel is slowed and, in many instances, frozen, remember to pray for your @IMB_SBC missionaries as they remain our witness for Christ among the nations. Uninterrupted for 175 years.

@brocraige

"Your leadership effectiveness is never the result of one heroic act, it's always the sum of small faithful choices done every day." — Daniel Sangi ... I'm so grateful for the leadership of our pastors, staff and church leaders in @EtowahBaptist.

@jimmiehale

"During the COVID-19 scare, we are witnessing the transformation of our society right before our very eyes" — JHM executive director Michael Coleman

@BeesonDivinity

"God knows our pain and suffering. He sympathizes with us in our earthly tribulations. He understands our feelings of forsakenness and loneliness — even as we struggle through this global pandemic." — Dean Doug Sweeney

The Church in Action

Have you heard of The Red Ribbon Mission? It involves hanging a red ribbon in front of your home as a statement of faith and trust.

The red ribbon symbolizes the power of the blood of Jesus. Christ's saving blood was foreshadowed by the Israelites in the Bible who painted their door posts with lambs' blood as an act of faith that the plague of Egypt would pass them over. We have faith in God and trust that He's still in control and has the master plan during this worldly chaos.

Red ribbons can be placed anywhere (mailbox, porch, front door, etc.) and can lead to gospel conversations with our neighbors. God is still in control. Trust in Him and point others to Him.

Jon Jeffries
Minister of education and families, North Shelby Baptist Church
Birmingham

Shout out to the roundtable that Pastor Chris Johnson has been leading at First Baptist, Albertville.

He interviews one or two ministers in our area to learn about the ministries and they share about the ministries that their churches are involved with in their communities. They give information on how to watch or listen to different church services in our area, for instance.

Marshall Baptist Association

Thank you to everyone who partnered with Helping Hands of Hope to deliver food to our community and our county. Your service has been a blessing to many during this time of need.

AMD Ray McKenzie
Elmore Baptist Association

TECHNOLOGY

Useful for reaching Gen Z, others during social distancing

COVID-19 opens avenues for ministering, connecting with Generation Z

By Lanell Downs Smith
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

The coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic has pushed some churches to think outside the box and reconsider how they use technology to reach the community. For seekers in the range of Generation Z, these changes have been right on time.

Reaching Generation Z presents a challenge to those of earlier generations but according to Sean McDowell — author, speaker and apologetics professor at Biola University — wisdom and understanding as recommended in Proverbs 24:3 can help parents and church leaders influence this generation for Christ.

Born between 1995 and 2010, Generation Z members comprise roughly 25% of the current population and range from early elementary age to those just entering the workforce.

Understanding Gen Zers is crucial, McDowell said at the 2020 Alabama State Evangelism Conference in

February. Keeping a positive attitude, remembering that everyone has a unique story and realizing that generations share more in common than they have differences can open the doors of ministry.

As digital natives, this generation “puts technology in the same category as air and water,” he said. Approximately 79% have symptoms of emotional distress if their phone is taken away.

Relationships are key

Gen Zers are racially diverse and most have a “post-Christian” worldview, with less than 4% holding a biblical worldview.

Technology shapes them, McDowell said, blurring their view of concepts like family and gender that were fixed for previous generations. The constant stimulus of technology, specifically social media, leaves Gen Z feeling overwhelmed, as if they can never escape their problems, he said.

“We have to be prepared and willing to deal with the brokenness



Photo courtesy of Lanell Smith

(L to r) Brett Kunkle, Sean McDowell and David Evans participate in a panel discussion at the Generation Z luncheon held at the State Evangelism Conference in February.

manifesting itself today,” McDowell said. “The key is to build relationships with them, so we are there to listen, encourage, discipline and love them. Much of the stress is exacerbated because students don’t have healthy relationships.”

According to David Evans, author and senior pastor of Springfield Baptist Church in Springfield, Tennessee, efficient use of technology and social media has always been necessary, but many churches are just now beginning to realize what a tremendous tool it can be.

Expanded use of social media has helped to engage young people. Evans said his church has seen increased engagement through social media platforms as well as an explosion of online giving and a shift toward younger-aged giving through online contributions.

‘Lack of community’

Evans added that the positive outcomes go hand-in-hand with the fear, isolation, depression and anxiety that have manifested during the quarantine. Those challenges can help mature believers relate to the loneliness felt by many Generation Z members.

“The lack of community and seeing people’s faces along with the lack of intimacy is a huge struggle now,” Evans said. “Although social media is playing a wonderful part in

Youth Group at Home during COVID-19

As soon as Andy Blanks realized youth groups weren’t going to be able to meet for a while, he knew he wanted to help keep Wednesday nights going.

So he launched something called Youth Group at Home — a livestreamed message that students could watch at home on Wednesday nights at 7, then get on a Zoom call with their youth group and leaders to discuss.

“We wanted to do something to meet a need,” said Blanks of his ministry, YM360. At first, it was only meant to be four weeks, but when the shelter-in-place order was extended, he decided

to keep going for at least another month.

Blanks, a member of Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Birmingham, said he hopes it’s a help for youth ministries all over, especially smaller churches whose youth volunteers or bivocational youth ministers are already stretched thin during the COVID-19 crisis.

‘Thoughtful discussion’

“Whatever we can do to help, it’s truly a privilege,” he said.

Alison Matthews, student ministry assistant at Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham, said Youth Group at Home has been

great for their students.

“Like all churches, this pandemic has altered how we do church and ministry,” she said. “During this season of not meeting together in person, we are incredibly grateful for Andy Blanks and YM360. By using Youth Group at Home, our students have been able to hear timely, gospel-centered messages that have then led into thoughtful discussion.”

To access the live feed on Wednesday nights at 7 or to access recordings from previous weeks, visit youthgroupathome.com. (Grace Thornton)

connecting generations, we have to understand that we are trading intimacy for technology, convenience and expedience. Nothing replaces human interaction.”

Evans noted that increased reliance on social media has multiplied the traffic of communication and relationships far beyond the level of stress humans are created to process. The current situation puts believers right in the middle of understanding the technological stressors common to Generation Z.

“In Genesis God said it was not good for us to be alone,” Evans said. “Face-to-face interactions take all that noise out so we can focus on one to three relationships at a pace we can handle. I believe all generations are starting to feel what it’s like to be Generation Z social media individuals.”

A culture of individualism has pushed Gen Z towards a “post-truth” mindset with the belief that everything in life can be conformed to their preference. Many are psychologically numb, feeling as if they can have whatever they wish, however they want it, with whomever they choose.

‘God is good’

“Our task is to help them see their Christian faith makes sense of everything,” McDowell said. “Not only is it true, but God is good, and Christianity is good.”

According to Brett Kunkle, founder and CEO of Maven, an apolgetics ministry, awareness of the issues that technology and sexuality present to Gen Z members is vital. Kunkle said technology is isolating, leading to loneliness with a lack of accountability and presenting a vision of sexuality in contrast to the biblical view of relationships.

“We have to equip them by expanding the way we think about [technology], giving them better categories,” said Kunkle. “It is not good or bad, moral or immoral. It’s always moving, and we need to help them see that by using it, it can shape and influence them.”

Wise management of technology is important, Kunkle said. Alternatives like books, games, and family time coupled with smart phone boundaries help to mitigate technology’s impact on the generation.

“We are the parents,” Kunkle said. “We are in control and can set standards to create the culture by showing them we are different, and we flourish because of it.”

David Evans agreed and said parents have a duty to disciple Gen Zers.

“We have a job to throw in other stabilizers, to help them,” Evans said. “Church leaders can be spiritual stabilizers. Nothing replaces parental discipleship.”

McDowell added that older generations can use technology as a tool to connect with Gen Z. Asking questions and enlisting their help creates buy-in and helps to foster relationships.

“Technology is a tremendous tool for our time,” Evans said. “The

Christ-centered

CULTURE

UM student ‘shout outs’ show strength of campus community

A survey of University of Mobile students evaluating the online delivery of classes due to the COVID-19 pandemic reveals more than whether the technology worked, or faculty successfully revamped their courses for the new format.

It shows the importance students place on their personal connections with faculty and staff at the Alabama Baptist university.

“Honestly, I’m just thankful for the kindness of all the faculty and staff. In the midst of all this chaos, they have been so loving and encouraging,” a student wrote in the anonymous survey.

Given space to offer a “shout out” for anything they thought worked particularly well, students overwhelmingly cited the ways faculty and staff checked on them, prayed for them and were available to support them through personal challenges as well as with coursework.

The shout outs reveal a Christ-centered culture where community and connections are important.

“Charlotte Hester is my Foundation of Music Theory professor and she prays for us every time we meet for class. It really means a lot that she will stop in the middle of a sentence and say, ‘Hey guys, let’s pray,’” a student wrote.

The associate professor of music education in the university’s Alabama School of the Arts said she prays with students “because our hearts need the presence of a mighty God in a chaotic world.”

University of Mobile President Lonnie Burnett said the university’s “Know and Be Known” motto highlights the strength of a small campus with an enrollment just under 2,000, where students are known by their professors and where professors know their calling goes beyond teaching.

“The great advantage of a university of our size is that the faculty and staff can communicate effectively with all our students. This has never been more evident or necessary than during the last few weeks. Likewise, our Christ-centered focus makes it natural to want to minister to students,” Burnett said.

Student comments illustrate how that culture of Christ-centered community makes a big impact. Here is a small sampling of the many “shout outs” that University of Mobile students shared on the survey:

▶ “Mrs. Counselman, my English professor, texted me to make sure I was doing okay, and that she was praying for me. It was very thoughtful!”

▶ “Dr. Walter did a Zoom call with our class just to check on us, and he asked us individually how we were doing. I really appreciated that!”

‘I needed that’

▶ “My music theory professor, Mr. Dunn, emailed me to check on me. I needed that.”

▶ “Dr. Jones has done a wonderful job keeping us updated and has been very understanding with peoples’ personal issues during this time of uncertainty.”

▶ “It’s hard for all of us, not just students. We were all affected by it, and the fact that they continue to work and to make sure we’re okay is amazing! So shout out to all my professors for being able to do this and continue through this rough journey. God has called them into this area, and I’m glad to see them still striving to make sure all of the students are taken care of!” (UM)



University of Mobile photo

UM’s motto is ‘Know and Be Known’ and the college is holding true to that as faculty check on students during COVID-19.

Roman roads helped to spread the gospel. Technology is like the Roman road part two. We can reach the globe faster than ever in history. We need to disciple [Generation Z] and send them out to reach the world.”

‘Be the church’

Evans advised churches and families to learn from the pandemic, implementing balance among church attendance, social media and activities, intentionally discipling young people to go out and be the gospel.

Most Generation Z members are value driven, Evans said. Churches

can utilize this opportunity to engage them in servant evangelism by guiding them to help deliver groceries to the homebound or perform service projects in the community.

“The church can be the church, even during this time,” Evans said. “If we are unwilling to stand up during this time, just like [Gen Z] can sniff out false advertisement, they will sniff out a fake church. We can use this time to serve our community where they are.”

For more tips on reaching Generation Z, visit www.seanmcdowell.org or www.maventruth.com.✝

Being Jesus'

'HANDS & FEET'

Alabama Baptists keep children fed while schools closed

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Matthew Reams said that for him and his wife, Dani, it was just a reflex to help feed the county's children when the schools there closed for COVID-19. The couple had opened their restaurant, Triple R Café, in 2017 as a ministry.

Before they opened it, they "had been praying about a way to get closer to the community God had called us to serve," said Reams, pastor of Sardis Baptist Church, Rockford.

And when the coronavirus crisis hit, Triple R Café pared down to one goal — keep all the kids in Coosa County fed.

"Our first thought was, 'These kids are used to eating every day; we've got to do something,'" Reams said.

So partnering with Ed's on Main in Goodwater and a nonprofit organization called Empowered to Conquer, Triple R Café shut down its regular operations and started serving hot lunches for children.

Churches stepping in

"We just want to be the hands and feet of Jesus," Reams said.

He's not the only one. Churches all over the state — even those whose pastors don't run restaurants — have been stepping in to help fill the gap left when their local school cafeterias closed because of COVID-19 concerns.

Before the crisis, one in four children in Alabama struggled with hunger, according to Feeding America. That's only increased as hunger in general across the state has risen. Food-related calls to 211 — the state's hotline for health and human services — jumped from 423 in March 2019 to 2,545 in March of this year, according to al.com.

June Barrett, coordinator of child nutrition for the Alabama State De-

partment of Education, said churches who are interested in becoming a food distribution site can start by visiting the state's summer food program website, breakforaplate.com. There, they can search by location to see what organizations in their area are coordinating feeding efforts, and then reach out to them to learn how to become a distribution site.

Some area schools may still be distributing meals too, and if that's the case, you can contact the school directly, she said.

If there are no sponsors in your area, Barrett recommends reaching out to Ben Guthrie at bguthrie@alsde.edu to find out how best to help where you are.

"There's no cookie-cutter way to help — it's different in every area," Barrett said.

"But if a church wants to help and gets trained, anyone can help."

That opportunity doesn't end with the COVID-19 crisis either, she said. There's a need for distribution sites every summer.

"To the churches wanting to help feed the children and be involved in the child nutrition program, thank you," Barrett said. "Whenever those needs arise, people need to know where they can come and feel safe to be cared for, from a meal standpoint."

David Hobson, director of missions for Mud Creek Baptist Association, said helping the Jefferson County Board of Education distribute meals in their area has provided a "great opportunity to show our community that they are loved and that

one thing they can be sure of in a very unsure time is that the churches in their community love and support them."

Four churches in the association — Union Hill Baptist, Rock Creek; Dogwood Grove Baptist, Adger; Smithville Baptist, Oak Grove; and Pine Ridge Baptist, Bessemer — came together to distribute nearly

1,000 meals in recent days.

Mike Stevens, pastor of Union Hill Baptist, said it was a blessing to see the churches come together to help feed children. He's "thankful for the heart" of the county's employees to "go above and beyond to love on" the families in the community.

"We will get through this season by the grace of Jesus Christ, and I'm confident the Lord

is using these times to draw people to salvation," Stevens said.

Lydia Sebert, site director for Dogwood Grove Baptist, said church members there "were so thankful to be given a purpose and opportunity to serve in such difficult and unprecedented times."

The program allowed the church to reach out, meet people in the community and form relationships that otherwise wouldn't have been formed, she said.

'Security in chaos'

"This feeding program gave our community and church members more than just food. It gave everyone a sense of security in the midst of chaos, a place to feel safe and a constant in their disrupted lives," Sebert said. "We were so thankful for the opportunity to act as the hands and feet of Jesus."✠



Photo courtesy of Mud Creek Baptist Association

Four churches in Mud Creek Association partnered to distribute nearly 1,000 meals to children.

Dinner ministry adapts to meet current needs

Daniel Ingram says he can't recall the name of the preacher, but he remembers the message.

"A couple of years ago, we had a revival here and the speaker talked about doing something, not just sitting there," said Ingram, a member of Southside Baptist Church, Greenville.

He couldn't forget it. And over the months that followed, he started talking to some of the men in his small group, and a vision developed.

It was simple — "How about we feed people?"

The group of men was already in charge of cooking Wednesday night supper at the church, so they thought — why don't we just do that for the community? And with that, Shepherd's Table ministry was born.

'Show love'

It started as a dinner served on the last Monday night of the month to anyone who needed it. Then in March, in partnership with First Baptist Church, Greenville, they provided lunches for local schoolchildren who would miss meals because they weren't in school.

And then when the COVID-19 crisis hit, they switched gears again — this time to distribute grocery bags to anyone who might need it.

At Southside Baptist, they are praying and talking about increasing their format to dispense food more often to meet the need during the coronavirus outbreak. They don't have any criteria for who can receive a bag of food, "it's just given," Ingram said. "We just wanted to show love for the community."

The ultimate goal is to build relationships and share the gospel as they meet the community's physical needs, he said. "We're just trying to reach people. I feel like through this whole thing, that God is at work." (Grace Thornton)

For more information about how to get involved in your area, visit breakforaplate.com or email bguthrie@alsde.edu.

COLLABORATING

to meet community needs

COVID-19 shutdown leads to outreach opportunity for Midfield churches

By Caleb Yarbrough
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

For many low-income students in Midfield, the meals provided through their school are vital. For these students, school closures like the ones recently implemented due to COVID-19 concerns could easily lead to food insecurity.

When public schools in the Birmingham suburb closed in response to the recent worldwide coronavirus outbreak, school officials wanted to find a way to continue providing subsidized meals to the many students who relied on them each school day.

School lunch distribution

Midfield school Superintendent Shun Williams reached out to David Austin, pastor of United Fellowship Community Baptist Church, Midfield, and asked him if his church would consider serving as an overflow space, an additional facility where students could go to receive food and supplies during the pandemic.

Originally, United Fellowship Community Baptist received only left-over food and supplies normally being distributed by the school through their official channels, but the church quickly became the main connection point for food distribution.

“The first day we fed eight children. The second day we fed 64. The third day we went over 100. It just grew,” said Austin.

The COVID-19 crisis has given God's people an opportunity to show the world “what the Church looks like. This is ministry. This is meeting the people where their need is.”

Pastor David Austin
United Fellowship Community Baptist Church, Midfield



Photo by Tracy Riggs

After serving lunch to around 200 students each weekday, United Fellowship Community Baptist Church, Midfield, and other church partners distribute food, toiletries and other supplies to those in need throughout the Midfield community.

Now about 200 students are being served lunch at the church each weekday, from noon to 1 p.m.

And each afternoon after serving lunch to local students, United Fellowship Community Baptist and other church partners like Bluff Park Community Church in Hoover, distribute food, toiletries and other supplies to those in need throughout the Midfield community, including seniors and disabled individuals who might otherwise go without.

Lauren Byars serves as student ministries director at Bluff Park Community Church. A friend of Austin's since they met as classmates at Samford University's Bee-

son Divinity School in Birmingham, Byars contacted him recently to determine if he had a connection with Midfield's schools as Bluff Park had organized supplies and wanted to distribute them to those in need in surrounding communities.

'Learning their names'

“After I got the phone call from the superintendent, I hung up, and it was maybe two minutes later that I got a text message from Lauren,” said Austin. “She was like, ‘I know you are serving in a low-income area. Is there anything that you need from me? How can we help?’”

Following that conversation, Bluff Park Community Church began providing supplies to be distributed across Midfield — meeting the needs of the community's residents. Byars has also been volunteering each Wednesday, distributing sack lunches to students alongside Austin and other volunteers.

“I think my favorite aspect of serving this community is learning their names. To some people the Midfield community could be perceived as numbers,” said Byars. “These chil-

dren have names. They have great value and worth. I love seeing their faces light up when I call them by name or talk to them about school, sports or the beautiful day that they just walked in to get their lunch.”

'Smiles on kid's faces'

Lewayne Custard is a Beeson student and pastor of Panola Church of God in Panola. A friend of Austin and Byars, he has been a regular volunteer at United Fellowship Community Baptist during the recent ministry project.

“The kids are always memorable,” he said. “It's been a joy being around the kids and seeing the smiles on their faces as they come to receive whatever we have for them that day.”

The challenges and uncertainties resulting from the current pandemic have brought to mind many questions for many people, which is an occasion for believers to be Christ to their neighbors by serving their physical, as well as spiritual needs, Austin said.

And for him, the most refreshing byproduct of the current crisis has been the way it has brought together churches and ministers across the Birmingham metro area.

“Everyone is checking on everyone. ... In the time of this crisis, we have pulled together, and we are collaborating versus competing which is great,” said Austin.

Continued effort

And it's an effort that will continue. According to Austin, United Fellowship Community Baptist will continue to host students for lunch and provide supplies to the Midfield community each weekday throughout the summer and throughout the coronavirus crisis.

The COVID-19 crisis has given God's people an opportunity to show the world “what the Church looks like,” Austin said. “This is ministry. This is meeting the people where their need is.”

Birmingham woman's fitness group offers faith, fellowship

By Lanell Downs Smith
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Females in Action (FiA) is connecting Birmingham women in faith, fellowship and fitness with the first FiA region in Alabama. The two peer-led workout groups continue to exercise together and encourage their members in spite of coronavirus social distancing requirements by conducting sessions via Zoom.

'Better together'

More than 40 women attended FiA's Birmingham launch in September, and both groups are still going strong with almost 120 women cycling through at least one workout session during the region's first three months.

"You don't have to be some expert when you join a session," said Beth Phillips, region leader. "FiA really pushes 'you do you.' You would be amazed at what your body is capable of doing and what you're able to accomplish when you've got other women who are there for the same purpose."

Phillips and co-leader Amberly Burrows formed the groups after witnessing the benefits their husbands received through F3, a similar faith-based workout group for men. Since then, the groups have grown by word of mouth and social media sharing.

Birmingham groups usually meet every day except Christmas day with locations at Liberty Park Middle School in Vestavia Hills and Veteran's Park in Hoover.

While COVID-19 meeting restrictions remain in place, the groups have met via Zoom on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, with a workout and "Coffeteria" conversation and prayer session on Saturday mornings.

Phillips said hosting the meetings by Zoom has allowed some women to attend who couldn't before due to scheduling conflicts and online meetings encourage families to workout together.

According to Burrows, women

come to FiA for fitness, but faith and fellowship keep them coming back for more.

"The relationships we have built and are continuing to strengthen are incredible," she said. "I never would have met some of Birmingham's finest ladies had it not been for FiA."

Workouts close with the circle of trust which includes prayer, a devotion or words of encouragement. Groups host a Slack channel dedicated to prayer requests.

"We've already had some pretty intense situations within our FiA Birmingham community, and it's been amazing to see these ladies step up and take care of each other. We truly are better together," Burrows said.

Phillips said her favorite aspect of FiA is the encouragement the ladies receive as they cheer each other on during the workouts.

"We have so many ladies who are across the board as far as fitness levels go. To be able to see the improvement that they make, to see them realize they can do it, is the best part about it. Hearing them holler out encouragement and knowing that as a

group we've only known each other a short time but we've been able to make these connections and these friendships that is now our FiA community."

'Circling up and praying'

Burrows said FiA Nation is hosting nationwide Zoom meetings on Friday mornings and online meetings have allowed women to connect with groups across the country.

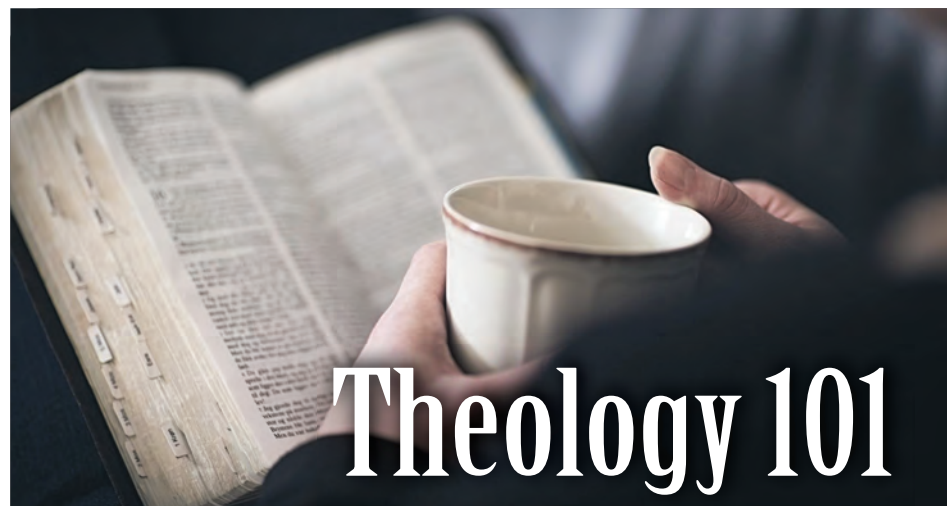
"[The COVID-19 pandemic] has opened us up a little more," Burrows said. "One of our members was able to share medical masks with a FiA sister. People are just a little more aware of the needs of others right now. Our desire is to get back with each other. There's nothing like circling up and praying with your arms around someone else at the end of the workout."

To learn more about FiA Birmingham, check out FiA Bham on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter. 🙏



Photo courtesy of Amberly Burrows

Each FiA workout ends with a circle of trust and prayer, devotions or a word of encouragement.



BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

The Doctrine of God

God as King

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

This week we continue to let another common image serve to express the Bible's revelation about God. From last week's use of the image of father we move this week to that of king. Living in a country where democracy is our form of government, we do not have firsthand involvement with the role of a king.

Even though we cannot draw upon personal experience with a king's rulership, we can profit from the idea of God as King. Psalm 24:7-8 admonishes, "Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle."

To the chanting of the Psalmist we might add the declaration of Jeremiah: "The Lord is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King" (Jer. 10:10).

Kings typically rule over kingdoms. The Bible reveals to us that as King, God has a kingdom. Out of His up close and eternal association with God the Father, Christ His Son taught His followers to acknowledge in prayer to God, "For Yours is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever" (Matt. 6:13).

In a similar manner, Christ embarked on His ministry of declaring God's good news, saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15).

Kings might be referred to as

potentates, sovereigns or rulers. The implication is that kings are unrivaled in their position and authority. While earthly kings may be toppled or replaced, God is the everlasting King. Long ago, the Psalmist, in talking with God in prayer, confessed this truth, declaring, "Your Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations" (Ps. 145:13).

The imagery of God as King presents Him as glorious, everlasting, powerful and sovereign.

Even so, as King, God remains also very personal to those who come to declare as did the Psalmist long ago, "God is my King" (Ps. 74:12).

Although being all-powerful, God is not overpowering so as to force Himself upon anyone. He waits patiently for each of us, one by one, to choose to bow to His spiritual rule. When we come under God's spiritual rule, we learn the blessed truth that His kingdom "is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).

"Now to the king eternal immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever" (1 Tim. 1:17). 🙏

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.



‘Only God could have done this’

Along with Pastor Chad Holder (not pictured), Pastor Dowand Malone (left) and DOM Eddy Garner (right) have seen what God-glorifying things can happen when churches work together.



Photo courtesy of Eddy Garner

Colbert-Lauderdale Assoc. churches merge, give building space to growing congregation

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Chad Holder said the bricks, chandeliers and pews that make up a church building can be very special to people — and he understands why.

“God has been there in that place, and He has met people there, and that is special,” he said.

But sometimes the time comes when God might be ready for a church to move to a new set of bricks and pews to start a new history and a new season, he said. That’s what happened recently for Sheffield’s York Terrace Baptist Church and First Baptist Church.

‘God was at work’

The two congregations merged in early March to become York Bluff Baptist Church. Holder — who

had been serving as interim pastor of York Terrace — became the interim pastor of the new church. And they voted together to call the former First Baptist building home.

That just left one big question — what to do with the facilities of York Terrace Baptist, a place that was special to a lot of people.

But there was something already happening where those bricks and pews were concerned — God was at work, said Dowand Malone, pastor of the local Greater Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church.

Malone’s church had been growing rapidly for the past

few years and had been meeting in a donated building, but it was starting to outgrow it. Last year alone, they added 75 new members.

“We needed a bigger place,” he said.

And over time, as the merger was discussed, everyone involved began to sense that maybe York Terrace’s building should be Greater Fellowship’s new home.

Eddy Garner, director of mis-



Photo courtesy of Eddy Garner
Chad Holder, interim pastor of York Bluff Baptist, preaches at the celebration service held in early March.

sions for Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association, said it was “neat to see how it all came together.”

“As the York Terrace people and the First Baptist people talked about it and prayed about it, they wanted a Southern Baptist ministry to be in that building,” Garner said.

So in February, Greater Fellowship received a new building and a new family too — Colbert-Lauderdale

Association voted for them to come under watch care. On the first weekend in March, all three churches held a celebration service together — and they gave Greater Fellowship the keys.

Great relationships

Malone said the churches have formed great relationships. At the end of the joint service, people were hugging and loving on each other, he said. “It’s really been helpful for both churches.”

He and Holder have become close friends. The day Greater Fellowship brought its truck to move into the York Terrace building, their church staff was moving out — and both groups of volunteers would take a load of Greater Fellowship’s stuff in and come back out carrying York Terrace’s stuff to load up.

It’s been a partnership all the way around, Holder said.

“Our mindset and our message are going to be, ‘We don’t care what you look like or where you come from — you’re al-

ways going to be welcome at York Bluff and welcome at Greater Fellowship,” he said. “Find the one where you feel most comfortable, but you’re always welcome at both.”

York Bluff has already seen growth since the merger — in the first weeks they met, they had more in attendance than both the previous congregations combined. They’ve had to go online because of COVID-19, but Holder said he’s looking forward to the day they can pick up meeting together right where they left off.

“The spirit of the people has been amazing,” Holder said. “Only God could have done this.”

He said he would encourage any church that might feel God is leading toward a merger to step boldly into what they believe God is calling them to do.

‘More than imagined’

“If God doesn’t want you to leave, that’s great — stay right where you are,” he said. “But if He does, follow Him beyond the things it’s hard to leave — things like bricks and chandeliers. Ask God what He wants done and don’t be afraid to do it.”

Garner said the entire process has been a “wonderful picture of what can happen when churches work together.”

“I’ve been dreaming about this for five or six years, and God did more than I could have ever imagined,” he said.

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3 stories you should know



BP submitted photo

Tate Springs Baptist Church, Arlington, Texas, hosted a nationwide Easter Egg Hunt via Minecraft and saw numerous responses to the gospel. The church partnered with the National Esports Association to stage the egg hunt and had a total of 600 people participate. The church found that most players were between 8 and 12 years old, and Pastor Jared Wellman estimated that 60% were outside the church's zip code. Before the event, Tate Springs sent an email to all registrants with an explanation of the gospel and offered to send anyone interested a free Bible. (BP)

LifeWay cancels June camps due to concerns

LifeWay Christian Resources has canceled FUGE, Student Life, Student Life for Kids and CentriKid camps scheduled for June due to concerns stemming from the COVID-19 outbreak.

World Changers projects scheduled for June are also canceled.

Ben Trueblood, director of students at LifeWay, said camp organizers have been closely monitoring the coronavirus situation and are receiving guidance from government and health authorities in making decisions.

A decision has not yet been made about camps scheduled for July and August, Trueblood said.

Numerous public events scheduled for the summer across the nation have been canceled or postponed out of concerns for public safety. (BP)

DOJ takes side of church in 1st Amendment suit

The Department of Justice (DOJ) took the rare step April 14 of weighing in on the side of Temple Baptist Church in Greenville, Mississippi, where local officials tried to stop Holy Week services broadcast to congregants sitting in their cars in the parking lot.

Greenville city leaders argue the services violate stay-at-home orders. Church officials believe they have been singled out for their religion. The church is pursuing a lawsuit saying their First Amendment religious freedoms were violated.

The DOJ sided with the church arguing the city appeared to be targeting religious conduct by singling churches out as the only essential service (as designated by the state) that may not operate despite following all CDC and state recommendations regarding social distancing. (AP)

— NEWSBRIEFS —

28 states complete EveryCampus prayer walks, more in progress



Amid the current coronavirus pandemic, EveryCampus is organizing prayer walks on college and university campuses. At press time, 28 states had completed all the prayer walks.

For states with shelter-in-place ordinances, EveryCampus has virtual options for "prayer walking" from home.

According to EveryCampus, students and volunteers have prayed for those who have been affected by the coronavirus outbreak on their campuses and the administrators who have had to make difficult decisions as a result of the pandemic. The top priority, however, has been placed on praying for God to use recent events to bring about revival.

In Alabama, 62 campuses, including Samford University, Judson College, University of Mobile, University of Alabama, Auburn University and University of Alabama at Birmingham, had completed prayer walks as of April 14.

Fourteen other Alabama institutions have adopted the EveryCampus prayer walk initiative

but have yet to complete it, and 10 schools have yet to adopt the initiative.

For more information on EveryCampus, visit everycampus.com. (TAB)

Judson announces Tommie Louise Caudle Scholarship for Fall 2020



Judson College has announced a new full scholarship opportunity for freshman and transfer students enrolling at Judson College in Fall 2020. The scholarship is made possible by a significant estate gift of the late Tommie Louise Caudle, Judson College class of 1942. Caudle's generosity has made a limited number of full scholarships available to first-time Judson students majoring in religious studies and expressing a call to Christian ministry. The Caudle Scholarship will cover a student's tuition, room and board and an allowance for books and fees after gift aid from federal, state or other sources is applied to the student's account.

Caudle was a lifelong member of First Baptist Church, Sylacauga. She died Aug. 2, 2019, at the age of 100.

For more information, visit www.judson.edu/caudle-scholarship or call 334-683-5170. (JC)

Student files lawsuit against Liberty University for remaining open



A student at Liberty University, an evangelical Christian school in Virginia, has filed a class-action lawsuit against the school alleging students were put at "severe physical risk" when the campus reopened in March despite the pandemic, and accusing administrators of profiting from the crisis by refusing to fully refund students.

Liberty issued a statement arguing it is the law firm representing the student that seeks "to profit from a public health crisis," not the school.

"Liberty University has tirelessly attempted to balance the needs of students, employees and the community as it has navigated through the unprecedented health challenges presented by COVID-19," the statement read. "We have ... taken into account the economic impact and legal rights of all parties involved. Each of [the] changes in operations and modes of delivery has been required by governmental officials." (RNS)

— ALABAMA NEWS —

Bible-reading marathons across the state adapting plans for participating

Because of the COVID-19 crisis, Bible reading marathons across the state are having to consider doing things a little differently this year. Some are considering postponing or taking a year off; others have decided to have participants sign up for passages to read at home.

Here are current plans, with more information to come.

► **Birmingham** — Hosting an “at home” read through the Bible. Sign up for a passage at tabonline.org/Birmingham and read at home anytime on May 7, the National Day of Prayer. For more information call Ninfa Austin at 205-602-7056 or Sheila Wright at 205-213-0508.

► **Heflin** — Plans to be determined later — possibly postponing to a later date.

► **Montgomery** — Sign up for a passage at hisvessel.org and read at home anytime during the day or night on May 7.

► **Oneonta** — Hosting an “at home” reading.

Email Terri Nelson at terrilnn@gmail.com to sign up for a passage and read anytime during the day May 7. Participants also are encouraged to pray and engage in a devotion together as a family from noon to 1 p.m.

► **Ozark** — Plans to be determined later, depending on gathering restrictions in early May.

► **Troy** — Plans to be determined later.

► **Tuscaloosa** — Hosting an “at home” Bible reading power hour May 3 from 2 to 3 p.m. Participants sign up for a passage online and read it aloud first, then spend the rest of the hour reading aloud any passage they choose with their family. Participants also are encouraged to read aloud from their patio or front steps, if they choose. To sign up, visit tabonline.org/Tuscaloosa.

► **St. Clair County** — This was going to be their first year, but with COVID-19, they have decided to postpone till next year. (TAB)



Photo courtesy of Hannah Muñoz
Hannah Muñoz, TAB's digital editor, participates in the 2019 Bible Reading Marathon in Tuscaloosa. TAB staff took part in last year's readings all across the state.

Persecuted church

Pastor arrested after rebuking COVID-19 in name of Jesus

HYDERABAD, India — A Christian pastor was arrested by Nepali police after an internet video showed him rebuking COVID-19 in the name of Jesus Christ.

Authorities claimed those comments about COVID-19 were misleading. They arrested Pastor Keshab Acharya, 32, on March 23 after a YouTube video of Acharya's comments was posted. He had been using YouTube as a ministry platform since 2015.

Following the posting, the pastor received a call from a person asking for prayer. The pastor agreed to let the person come to his home in Pokhara, in Nepal's Gandaki Pradesh Province. Instead, four members of the police force arrived and took him into custody.

On the YouTube video, the pastor not only tells the virus to die, but he also rebukes it in the name of Jesus.

Nepal is mostly Hindu, and 16% of the population is Buddhist.

Nepal ranks No. 32 on Open Doors' 2020 World Watch List of countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. (MS)



Screenshot from YouTube

News near you

ELMORE ASSOCIATION

► **Thelma Baptist Church, Wetumpka**, celebrated its centennial anniversary March 15, prior to the major restrictions related to COVID-19.

Donny Barber, who grew up at Thelma Baptist and currently serves as pastor of Antioch Baptist Church, Weoka, was the guest speaker. Video testimonies of church members including the oldest member, Earlene Goodman (who is 102 years old and also a charter member of the church), were shared during the service.



Photo courtesy of Ralph Foster

Minister of music Bill Lee led worship and guest Tim Lovelace sang in the service as well as during a concert following the fellowship lunch. Displays included the original communion table, photos and memorabilia in the Heritage Room. Ralph Foster presented the church with a plaque from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission.

“The celebration made a profound impact on long-time members as well as new ones,” Pastor Doug Chappelle said. “It was a special day.”

MOBILE ASSOCIATION

► **First Baptist Church, Theodore**, will begin its 125-year celebration in May. The church is celebrating 125 years with 125 weeks of special events. Each week will feature part of the church's history with pictures, memorabilia, guest speakers, special music, etc. Visit firsttheodorebaptist.com or email theodorefbc@bellsouth.net for more information or to submit content for the celebration. David Gill is pastor.

OTHER

► **WorldSong's Missions Adventure Camp** programs are planning to continue this summer. Early-bird registration for Missions Adven-

ture Camp summer programs at WorldSong has been extended to May 4. Registration for camp may be found at WorldSongRetreat.org/camp.

“We are prayerfully looking toward the summer and moving ahead with our plans for Missions Adventure Camp,” said Candace McIntosh, executive director of Alabama WMU. “Lord willing, we will be able to offer this opportunity for your children to experience Christ and His mission on the beautiful



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

campus of WorldSong Missions Place.” ► **The Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions** will continue to host the Online Call to Prayer via Zoom

every Wednesday at 10 a.m. The prayer time, which began March 25, is open to everyone — pastors, staff, church members and all who can participate.

Find the link for the prayer gathering each week at alsbom.org or tabonline.org/events. ☪

For Easter Sunday, a few members of FBC Fort Payne surprised Pastor Marshall Henderson with a full sanctuary. Filling the pews were photographs of the roughly 185 families pictured in the church's most recent directory.

Packing the pews



Photo by Myla Walworth

Church members surprise pastor with creative encouragement on Easter

By Sarah Jacoway Chastain
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When Marshall Henderson, pastor of First Baptist Church, Fort Payne, walked into the sanctuary prior to the Easter service, it was packed. And almost all church members were already in “their” pews.

While this is not an unusual sight in a typical Baptist church on Easter or for that matter in any church on Easter, it was unusual for Easter 2020.

Henderson had preached to an empty sanctuary the prior three Sundays. Even the pianist, soloists and music minister had to leave after their parts were over.

So how did the congregation of First, Fort Payne, find a way for

Henderson to see each of the individuals in the pews as he preached?

Church member Cindy Lowe noted how empty the church looked while watching online. And the pastor looked so lonely, she added.

So she and Myla Walworth decided they would pack the pews with all ages — and with an idea sparked by a Facebook post from another church, they got to work “secretly,” Walworth said. “Just the two of us.”

First stop was a local business

that took the most recent church directory and printed individual 8x10 photos of the roughly 185 families in the directory.

“They were excited to be a part of our project and worked hard and got it done extremely fast,” Walworth said.

Then the real fun began — figuring out how to put those pictures in the pews.

They tried taping them, but that didn’t work well, Lowe said, so she and Walworth left to shop for more supplies. When they returned Walworth’s husband, Roger, who happens to be the church music minister, was playing the trumpet in the sanctuary.

“We were busted,” Lowe

said. “We told him our plan and he got involved.”

After a few different attempts, Roger Walworth decided on carpenter shims and they worked. The shims fit perfectly in the small groove at the top of the pew and wouldn’t cause any damage.

The crew was now ready to place all the people.

Myla Walworth sings in the choir and knows where everyone she can see from the choir loft sits so she

took on the main sanctuary seating.

Lowe and her husband, Larry, sit in the balcony so she tackled the balcony.

The photo version of the church members even ended up being socially distanced since they were placed so they could “see” around each other.

After all the members were in their pews, Lowe and the Walworths decided to place the staff including the pianist and organist in their proper places on the stage.

They also included the former pianist who has an honorary place at the piano, and the support staff was placed on the front row. Pastor emeritus Pat McFadden also was “seated” on the front row in support, not his usual seat but symbolic for the purpose.

Myla Walworth said it took about six hours to get everybody in his or her proper place.

It was now showtime — and the big reveal.

As Henderson came into the sanctuary to record part of the Sunday service, he had no idea what he was going to see.

Myla Walworth said she wished she had a video of his face. “He couldn’t stop laughing. He just walked up and down the aisle looking at all the pictures.” Lowe added

that he kept saying, “This is great.”

“It completely caught me off guard,” Henderson admitted. “It was such a friendly thing to do.”

Lowe noted, “We all laughed and just soaked up the happiness that it seemed to give us all.”

‘What makes the church’

“Our prayers were that everyone would be blessed by being able to ‘go to church’ since we all miss it so much,” she said. “We certainly didn’t think about it going any further than the church so when others found out and began to spread the word, it seemed to have blessed even more than we ever thought. But isn’t that what God does?”

Reflecting on recording the services, Henderson said, “What we are doing now is no substitute for corporate worship. Hopefully we are encouraging our people and ... making them feel connected in a time of social distancing.”

Myla Walworth added, “Even though our church building is empty, we feel like this picture-perfect pew project of love is symbolic that we the people are what makes the church, not the building. We also want to encourage our pastor and staff as they tape our church services. ... They can look out at the congregation and see all of us.”



Photo by Sarah Jacoway Chastain

Photographs of the staff, including the pianist and organist, were put in their proper places on the stage.

“Even though our church building is empty, we feel like this picture-perfect pew project of love is symbolic that we the people are what makes the church, not the building.”

Myla Walworth
FBC Fort Payne

Important time of believer fellowship

2020 Alabama Baptist Conference of the Deaf held in Birmingham

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

The weekend event, hosted by the Birmingham Community Deaf Church, welcomed Deaf believers of all ages, races and degrees of hearing, and included everything from a traditional business meeting to worship services to fun and fellowship.

Cameron House, a Deaf church planter, pastor and missionary who recently

helped start a Deaf church at Gallaudet University, was the speaker for the event. Frank Griffin, assistant professor of American Sign Language at University of North Carolina at Greensboro, led many of the teen activities, including Bible study.



Photo by Travis Frontz

Matthew Dixon teaches Deaf children about King David at Junior ABCD on Saturday.

ABCD officers for 2020–2021 were elected: Jeff Farmer, president; and Mark Moore, vice president. Paul Pitts, treasurer; Jin

Mayer, secretary; and Priscilla McNealy, assistant secretary, were elected to remain in current positions.

Topics discussed at the

annual meeting included avoiding burnout through a “spiritual welfare check” and focusing on God rather than other modern-day “idols,” including family, work and electronics.

‘Encourage to come’

Conference participants enjoyed Sunday School led by Griffin and worship, where House spoke, on March 8 at Birmingham Community Deaf Church.

The 2021 ABCD will be held March 5–7, 2021, at Dauphin Way Baptist Church, Mobile.

“If there are deaf people or interpreters in your church, please encourage them to come,” said Linnea Elliott, 2018–2020 ABCD president. “It’s just like sending deacons to deacons’ retreats or teens to youth conferences. The deaf people are important



Photo by Travis Frontz

Cameron House, a Deaf church planter, pastor and missionary, leads ABCD participants in worship through sign language before speaking about putting God first from 1 Corinthians 10:21.

too, and they need to spend time with other Deaf/Hard of Hearing Christians once or twice a year.”

Information about next year’s conference will be updated on ABCD’s Facebook page and albcd deaf.org.

Southern Baptist resources on how to help deaf

churches can be found at DeafChurchPlanting.web.com, DeafGO.com, DeafGOBible.com, SBCDeaf.org or contact arandolph@brentwoodbaptist.com.

A gallery of photos from the event is available at tabonline.org/ABCD. (Tracy Riggs)

Christian Crossword

By Diana Rowland Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

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Across

- Therefore the law ____ slacked. (Hab. 1:4)
- And ____ drove thence the three sons. (Josh. 15:14)
- Eli, and ____ sabachthani. (Matt. 27:46)
- The Lord will not ____ good. (Zeph. 1:12)
- As with the taker of _____. (Isa. 24:2)
- Thither cause thy mighty _____. (Joel 3:11)
- Teman, and ____, Zephi, and Gatam. (1 Chron. 1:36)
- ____ Jones, financial company.
- Thou hast had pity ____ the gourd. (Jon. 4:10)
- Even to the ____ of them. (Jon. 3:5)
- They that observe lying vanities _____. (Jon. 2:8)
- They that ____ thy bread. (Obad. 7)
- And be thou like a _____. (Song of Sol. 2:17)
- ____ the second year of Darius. (Hag. 1:1)
- And ____ not to Beer-sheba; for Gilgal shall surely _____. (Amos 5:5)
- What shall we ____ unto thee. (Jon. 1:11)
- They shall lay hold ____ bow ... against thee, ____ daughter of Zion.

- (Jer. 6:23)
- Even ____, will judge between the ____ cattle. (Ezek. 34:20)
- Unto the ____ of the earth. (Mic. 5:4)
- And will ____ at all acquit the wicked. (Nah. 1:3)
- For I ____ with you. (Hag. 2:4)
- Came unto ____ unto ____ people. (Judg. 18:27; reverse order)
- ____ accept thy person? (Mal. 1:8)
- Hast thou not heard long _____. (Isa. 37:26)
- ____ have laid hands on their substance. (Obad. 13)
- Who ____ not daily. (Heb. 7:27)
- He shall ____ with his teeth. (Ps. 112:10)
- Behold, I ____ against thee. (Nah. 3:5)
- Now the Lord ____ prepared a great fish. (Jon. 1:17)
- The son of Naum, which was the son of _____. (Luke 3:25)
- Call me _____. (Ruth 1:20)
- ____ was a man subject to like passions. (James 5:17)
- It hath consumed ____ of Moab. (Num. 21:28)
- As a man wipeth a ____.

- (2 Kings 21:13)
 - Whosoever sins ye _____. (John 20:23)
 - What do ____ imagine against the Lord? (Nah. 1:9)
- ### Down
- Mine ____ hath done them. (Isa. 48:5)
 - I have overthrown ____ of you. (Amos 4:11)
 - He whom thou ____ is cursed. (Num. 22:6)
 - For while they be folden together ____ thorns. (Nah. 1:10)
 - They of Persia and of _____. (Ezek. 27:10)
 - And ____, the firstborn ____ Judah. (1 Chron. 2:3)
 - Yea, I am their _____. (Job 30:9)
 - And now, behold, I ____ thee this day. (Jer. 40:4)
 - There was one _____. (Luke 2:36)
 - And so is this nation before _____. (Hag. 2:14)
 - And His brightness was ____ the light. (Hab. 3:4)
 - Alcoholics Anonymous. (abbr.)
 - Children’s game.
 - Kanga’s son in “Winnie the Pooh.”
 - And I will appoint over them four _____. (Jer. 15:3)
 - Adam, Sheth, _____. (1 Chron. 1:1)

- Go up ____ the mountain. (Hag. 1:8)
- Duke Elah, duke _____. (Gen. 36:41)
- For ____ the harvest. (Isa. 18:5)
- And ____ on the east side. (Jon. 4:5)
- She called his name Ben _____. (Gen. 35:18)
- Which is the ____ of our inheritance. (Eph. 1:4)
- In his hand for very _____. (Zech. 8:4)
- Plead with your _____. (Hos. 2:2)
- This is ____ ephah that goeth forth. (Zech. 5:6)
- Take some of the ____ of oil. (Lev. 14:15)
- How shall I make thee as ____? (Hos. 11:8)
- Stopped their _____. (Zech. 7:11)
- Lest he ____ thee to the judge. (Luke 12:58)
- The land is ____ the garden of Eden. (Joel 2:3)
- Not spare continually to ____ the nations? (Hab. 1:17)
- The priests thereof teach for _____. (Mic. 3:11)
- Mine eye also is _____. (Job 17:7)
- Medical doctor. (abbr.)
- Howl, O Heshbon, for ____ is spoiled. (Jer. 49:3)
- When the king of ____ saw it. (Josh. 8:14)

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

GOOD NEWS

For You!



To share **YOUR** stories of how God is at work in your church and community, visit alsbom.org/goodnews.

FIRST BAPTIST CHICKASAW: Lead Pastor Reid Guy began his ministry there in August 2019 when the church was very near to closing its doors. During the quarantine, the church has begun livestreaming services, and the response has been overwhelming. Many more are watching than had been previously attending, and FBC has reconnected with a good number of missing members. They baptized a young lady who heard the Gospel through their ministry on Facebook. When asked how he was doing, Pastor Reid replied, "Brother, I'm drinking from a fire hydrant!" and says that they will continue webcasting the Gospel even after the pandemic is over. Only God can use a virus to breathe new life into a dying church!

LAKWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH, PHENIX CITY: The church's attendance has increased to five times its normal size during livestreaming worship, which will continue after the quarantine has passed. On a recent Sunday, the church had its largest offering during the seven years of Pastor M.R. Hamilton's ministry at Lakewood. Brother M.R. shared that the church has been using Google Classroom for Sunday School which has been well received as evidenced by increased participation.

COTTAGE HILL BAPTIST CHURCH, PLEASANT GROVE: Church attendance is growing with increased online attendance during the past three Sundays of 35, 45 and 61. New members have joined, and Pastor Jim Parker expects an increase in in-person attendance after the quarantine ends. Giving is actually up from before COVID-19, and the church is being blessed in other ways as well.

HODGESVILLE BAPTIST CHURCH, DOTHAN: Pastor Mark Redmond notes that the older members of the congregation don't have Facebook and only two have email. Therefore, he sends his sermon outline each week by USPS mail to everyone in the church. He encourages them to read it at 11 a.m. Sunday so that they can feel the unity of doing so at the same time. Since the church family couldn't celebrate Easter in the traditional way, Mark has been telling people that Easter isn't just a day on the calendar, but it's an experience with the risen Jesus. All Christians have had an Easter experience when the stone was rolled away from their hearts. "When was your day?" he asks.

COOSADA BAPTIST CHURCH, COOSADA: Pastor Jim Graham reports, "I think the best news is that we've reached new people. For example, one of our church members was able to get his boss to join our online service, and they've done so each week. Personally I've had two new couples join our weeknight small group."

FREE UPCOMING WEBINARS
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VIRTUAL DISCIPLE-MAKING FORUM
(Three Sessions)

Monday, April 27, 1-2 p.m.

Discussion with Daniel Im, author of *No Silver Bullets* and senior associate pastor at Beulah Alliance Church, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Monday, April 27, 3-4 p.m.

Discussion with Ken Adams, lead pastor at Crossroads Church in Newnan, Ga., and founder/director of Impact Discipleship Ministries

Tuesday, April 28, 10 a.m.-Noon

Discussion with Scott Kindig, pastor of Kingdom Initiatives at Community Bible Church in San Antonio, Texas

LEADERSHIP AND MINISTRY IN CHALLENGING TIMES
Thursday, April 30, 10-11 a.m.

In the second in a series, hear from and dialogue with Executive Director Rick Lance and state missionaries in the Office of LeaderCare & Church Health in this interactive webinar designed for pastors, church leaders and associational missionaries.

EVANGELISM IN A TIME OF SOCIAL DISTANCING
Thursday, April 30, 1-2 p.m.

Join Matt Queen, evangelism professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, as he offers insights and leads a discussion on this important topic.

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Remember - visit alsbom.org/coronavirus and our COVID-19 Resource Group Facebook Page for a variety of helpful resources!

'God turns tragedy into triumph if we'll allow it'

(continued from page 1)
Church in Cherokee County all sustained damage. Shoal Creek Baptist Church, Priceville, also was struck by lightning and suffered steeple and roof damage.

The next morning saw Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers hard at work all over the state alongside church members and community members. A disaster relief team out of Birmingham Metro Baptist Association (BMBA) helped clean up around Lawler Baptist, a role BMBA Executive Director Chris Crain said they were "humbled" to fill.

"I have been familiar with the great work of Lawler Baptist Church for many years," Crain said. "Our

BMBA disaster relief team and area coordinator John Hayes are willing servants who want to share Christ during times of crisis. I am praying that the Lawler Baptist family will get through this storm and coronavirus stronger than ever."

Cross still standing

Lawler Baptist's damage has been widely shared on social media because of one striking image in particular — the center cross in the church's outside display of three crosses remained standing when the crosses on each side were blown over in the storm.

Johnson said the correlation of the storms with Easter miracles isn't lost on him



Photo courtesy of Mike Johnson

Bethsaida Baptist Church, Boaz, sustains damage following the April 12 tornado that struck the area. Pastor Mike Johnson, his wife Cyndi and several from the community remained safe in the church basement during the storm.

and his congregation either. All three storms came during the Easter season.

A devastating storm hit Albertville in 2010 when he was pastor of First Baptist Church there, and though the church wasn't damaged, much of the city around it was. Even so, God protected, he said.

"We were sitting there with debris everywhere, but the church itself was fine. It gave us a point from which we could coordinate ministry to the whole city," he said. "The thing that strikes me the most — we had just been prayer walking the neighborhoods for Easter revival, and even though some

of the houses were picked up and moved, not a single person was harmed. You could see the protective hand of God."

The following April, after he had accepted a call to serve as pastor of Boone's Chapel Baptist Church, Prattville, the church's building was almost totally wiped out by a tornado.

"But from there, we were able to reinvent the church. It had been running 150, and now I think it runs around 800," Johnson said.

From all that, he's learned one thing over and over — God is in control, and He has a purpose.

What God's doing

"God uses the tragedy and turns it around into triumph if we'll allow it, just like I believe He's doing with coronavirus and just like He's doing with these storms," Johnson said. (TAB)

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Louisville Baptist Church, Louisville, Alabama, seeking full-time pastor. Submit resumé to: Rhonda Henson, P.O. Box 38, Louisville, AL 36048 or rhenson_rn@yahoo.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.

SIGNS

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Dora-area churches partner to feed community affected by Easter storms

Kristi Turner said it took a little while to figure out how they could best serve their community some food when they can't draw a crowd.

But with a few masks and grills and volunteers practicing social distancing, Good Hope Baptist Church and New Temple Baptist Church came together to serve 200 hot dogs and burgers to people in the Dora community affected by the Easter storms. They also served the utility company employees working tirelessly to restore power.

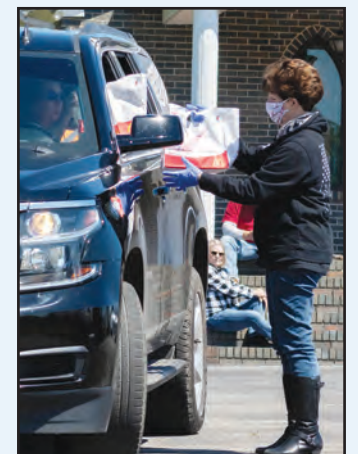
"You feel so helpless when something like this happens," said Turner, whose husband, Kerry, is pastor of Good Hope Baptist. "We're just trying to spread a little hope."



Churches in the Dora and Bagley areas partner to feed those impacted by the Easter storms.

J.J. Creel, pastor of New Temple Baptist, said it was a chance to show love to the community and "be the hands and feet of Jesus" when the needs are so great.

It also was an opportunity to show how churches can work together. The food was provided by Sulphur Springs Baptist Association. (TAB)



Photos by Tracy Riggs

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For April 26

Explore the Bible

By Robert E. Jackson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



SAVED Romans 10:5–15

Confess and Believe (5–10)

Israel, as God's elect nation, missed that righteousness is attained only by faith. Paul quotes Moses to emphasize the inability of humans to achieve righteousness through the law. The Jews did not and could not meet the laws' perfect demands; therefore, they need the Savior. Furthermore, when properly taught, the law points people to Christ and His grace.

Paul states people do not need to ascend to heaven to discover salvation; the Lord has come down to earth. Moreover, people do not need to search the depths for deliverance; Christ descended into the abyss and rose again. Therefore, salvation is both near and possible for all people. The Scripture says you must confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead and you will be saved. A driving force of Paul's life is to proclaim this truth.

The verb "proclaiming" is in the present tense, meaning Paul and his companions continually share Christ and invite people to respond in faith. Salvation is not merely an intellectual assent to the gospel; salvation is evidenced by a transformed heart. However, salvation is reflected in outward conduct. Both the heart and mouth are connected. When someone confesses and believes, he or she becomes a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17) with continual belief and justification as byproducts flowing from his or her life.

Whoever (11–13)

The Jews were persnickety in their election. Not only did they miss the fact that salvation is available through faith, but they also underestimated the vastness of the scope of salvation. To them, their "special" position with God left no room for Gentiles. They understood that salvation is available to God's chosen people who fulfill the law through their own efforts.

Paul, however, emphasizes that salvation is available to anyone who

believes. Jews and Gentiles are saved the same way, through faith in Jesus. God chooses to richly bless with salvation, everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord. People from every tongue, tribe and nation have access to God through faith. I find great comfort and confidence in this truth. Everyone I meet, in whatever circumstance, can experience God's hope because "whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Tell All (14–15)

Paul uses rhetorical questions to build to the necessity to tell others the gospel. After all, no one can call on Jesus when he or she hasn't believed or heard. If the gospel is available to everyone, then everyone must have an opportunity to hear the news that Jesus saves. Who will go? Those who are sent. Don't miss the point that Jesus is sending all believers (see Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 1:8).

Sometimes, to our detriment, we read this passage only to involve vocational missionaries and preachers. We thank God He calls some people to serve vocationally in the ministry, but this fact does not excuse any Christian of his or her responsibility of proclaiming Christ. All believers are set apart by God and sent. In other words, we, along with pastors and missionaries, must be busy fulfilling the Great Commission.

Our churches must be investing our prayers, financial resources and energy to carry the gospel to our world. I find it interesting that hot, smelly feet are stated to be beautiful. Think about it — they may be dirty after a journey to tell others about Jesus, but they are glorious to those who eagerly await to hear the good news. Time is short. People are dying without Christ every day. If we don't tell today, it may be too late.

On that day, when we stand before our Savior, I pray He looks at you and me and draws attention to us as He states, "look at their beautiful feet." ✠

Bible Studies for Life

By James Riley Strange, Ph.D.

Professor of New Testament, Samford University



LOVE John 15:9–14

As we deal with a worsening pandemic and its effects, these lessons become less academic. We know we rely on God and that God's word is an incomparable gift. We renew our commitment to live out its precepts with God's help.

This week we begin a series of six lessons on the messiness of relationships with fellow believers. Christians are not immune to difficult affiliations and strained bonds. After all, Jesus had to command His closest circle of disciples to love one another.

The study looks at six traits we can practice in order to heal our relationships and prevent further rifts. The word "practice" is key, for these traits require deliberation and repetition. All of them are rooted in the love that Jesus told His followers to show to one another, so we begin with love.

Today's passage comes from the Last Supper in John, which lasts five chapters (13–17). At the beginning, not long after washing the disciples' feet, Jesus gave the disciples "a new commandment:" "just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another" (13:34). Now He returns to that idea.

Read chapters 13 through 15 for context.

Love for others is to be grounded in God's love. (9–10)

Jesus begins chapter 15 by saying He is the true vine, His Father the vinedresser and His disciples the branches. They must, therefore, abide (or remain) in Jesus in order to "bear fruit." What is this fruit? It is mutual love for one another.

We can't generate this love on our own. Rather, we draw it from Jesus, who is the conduit of God's love to us. God, after all, is love (1 John 4:7–8).

Love for others is to imitate Jesus' love for us. (11–12)

As with love, we are not the source of this joy. Neither are our circumstances its cause. This is why Paul could call on the Chris-

tians of Philippi to "rejoice in the Lord always," regardless of what was happening (Phil. 4:4–8). Joy that emerges only from good circumstances is incomplete joy. Jesus completes our joy by supplying His joy.

Now Jesus repeats the "new commandment" of chapter 13. The disciples' model for love is Jesus Himself, who "loved them to the end" (13:1).

He demonstrated this by washing their feet like a household slave (compare 15:15).

Love for others means sacrifice. (13–14)

Here Jesus reveals the greatest demonstration of love: "to lay down one's life for one's friends." Because Jesus died on the cross, many understand Him to be talking about a sacrificial death.

Very few people, however, will have cause to act out love in this way. Are we all, therefore, doomed to show lesser love? No, for the phrase can also mean to live sacrificially for one's friends, which Jesus also did.

With that understanding, we can now agree that Jesus' command really does apply to us in two ways: neither must we die for friends in order to lay down our lives for them, nor can we dismiss the commandment as hyperbolic or as applying only to the Twelve.

It also is clear this love Jesus commands is not affection alone but also acts of service. Why? Because the command to love includes Christian brothers and sisters for whom we have little fondness, or none. It includes those who have wronged us.

I am sure that acts of service have multiplied during this time. I have begun to open my online Samford classes by asking students what deeds of kindness they have done and what deeds have been done to them. Their responses warm my heart.

May sacrificial acts of love become our new normal, and may they remain when COVID-19 no longer threatens. ✠



Media reviews

MOVIES/TV

April's family-friendly lineup includes free Christian streaming options

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

If your only definition of streaming is “Netflix,” then April is a great time to try something new.

That’s because multiple family-friendly services — including four of the best ones — are offering free streaming options while we’re all stuck at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Among these are VidAngel, Minno, Focus on the Family’s Focus@Home and the Christian History Institute’s RedeemTV.

Streaming options

VidAngel — the most popular option of these four — allows parents to skip objectionable content in Netflix and Amazon Prime titles. (A subscription to one of those is needed.) For example, my family recently watched *Back to the Future Part III* without the coarse language. Filtering can be customized. VidAngel also has original content, including the excellent show *The Chosen*, a series about the life of Christ. VidAngel is free through the end of April. Visit VidAngel.com.

Minno, an outstanding Christian streaming platform for children, is offering free “Church at Home” resources for parents. This includes child-friendly videos, Bible lessons, activities and a sampling of Minno’s platform. Visit GoMinno.com and click on “Church at Home” on the top-right.

Focus on the Family

launched its own streaming platform, Focus@Home, in early April. It includes the animated series *Adventures in Odyssey* and *McGee and Me*, and video series and feature films such as *Last Chance Detectives* and *Mully*. It is free. Visit FocusOnTheFamily.com/streaming.

Finally, the Christian History Institute and Vision Video launched RedeemTV — a treasure trove for fans of documentaries and historical drama. It includes the *Torchlighters* series, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* animated film, the *Bonhoeffer: Agent of Grace* live-action

film and many other titles. It is free. Visit RedeemTV.com.

Binge-watching continues to be a popular activity during the pandemic.

Why not turn it into a family-friendly, Christ-centered one, too?

Also worth watching:

▶ **“I Still Believe”** (home video) — “I Still Believe” (PG) was in theaters for one weekend when the pandemic hit. With theaters closed, Lionsgate rushed it to “premium video on-demand.” The faith-based film tells the true story of Christian singer Jeremy Camp’s marriage to his first wife, Melissa, who passed away after being diagnosed with ovarian cancer. It’s on all major on-demand platforms for a rental price of \$19.99 — or roughly the price of two movie tickets. It’s one of the most inspiring films I’ve seen.



‘The Chosen’

IMDB photo

▶ **“I Am Patrick”** (home video) — “I Am Patrick” never made it to theaters. It tells the true story of Patrick, the fourth-century missionary who took the gospel to Ireland. The docudrama mixes expert interviews with reenactments. It’s now available on DVD at IAmPatrick.com. (Buyers also get a digital copy.)

▶ **“Snoopy in Space”** (Apple TV) — It’s a 12-episode series featuring my favorite animated characters of yesteryear: Charlie Brown and the gang. Snoopy and Woodstock travel to the International Space Station and then to the moon; children laugh at their antics while learning about space.



My children loved it. (Apple is giving a free one-year subscription to Apple TV with the purchase of certain devices, including iPhones.)

▶ **“Elephant”** (Disney Plus) — “Elephant” is a new Disney nature film that

landed on Disney Plus in early April. It follows two elephants, Shani and her son Jomo, as they venture across Africa. Meghan Markle narrates it.

▶ **“Dolphin Reef”** (Disney Plus) — “Dolphin Reef” tells

the story of Echo, a young Pacific bottlenose dolphin. Natalie Portman is the narrator. Both films are new to U.S. audiences. This Disney nature film also released in early April.

▶ **“Despicable Me”**

(Netflix) — A supervillain named Gru changes his outlook on life — and on evil — after adopting three girls. (And after stealing the moon.) It’s a hilarious animated film with great messages about childrearing, adoption and the blessings of family. It also has a not-so-subtle lesson borrowed from Scripture: People can change. Rated PG for rude humor and mild action. 🌈

Meet the reviewer

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

'Duck Dynasty': SAMFORD'S PRIDE

From Samford to the Steelers: the long and complicated journey of Devlin Hodges

By Al Blanton
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

The field is a fickle place. Sometimes you can dominate it. Other times, it can dominate you.

On a day in late December, the commentators on ESPN's NFL Live are mentioning him in the same breath with the AFC-leading Baltimore Ravens. The same day his name beelines across the ticker on FS1 — "Hodges will likely be the starter" the words read. Staccato mentions of his name will emanate from the mouths of radio personalities all across Rust Belt, America. Tomorrow, he could be an afterthought.

Such is the case for life in the NFL, where only 11 players on each team can claim the coveted position of "starter" and every day you have a target on your back. On average, an NFL starting quarterback (QB) is around 6-foot-3 and 225 pounds and has typically played in college for Power 5 behemoths like Oklahoma, Michigan and Florida State. But for a large part of this season, one of those quarterbacks was a diminutive 6-foot-1, 210-pound graduate of Samford University in Birmingham. His name is Devlin Hodges.

For a while, it seemed as though Hodges might never get a chance to suit up for an NFL team. This past September, he stood on the field at Samford — the wind blowing through the majestic

southern college during a women's soccer game — and contemplated his future. The Pittsburgh Steelers had shaved him off their roster and Hodges was back home in Birmingham, filling his oddly blank calendar with people who could offer sage advice, old coaches and the like who could sift through the dust and help him find a way back into football.

Record breaker

Samford head football coach Chris Hatcher smiled when he saw his former player that night. As Hodges' college coach, Hatcher had witnessed every inch of his 14,584 passing yards — a record in Samford's division. He'd been there when the trophies hailing his achievements came rolling in, had lent his ear when the NFL Draft decided, like others, that Hodges was too small or simply not good enough or lacked big game experience to

want him and had celebrated when the Steelers signed him as a free agent.

Now the two men were meeting up at a soccer game to talk about what's next for Hodges. He was only four months into his professional career when he was released by the Steelers. If something didn't happen soon, it might all come to a crashing halt.

Neither Hodges nor Hatcher believed it would. "In his mind and my mind, too, it was too early to give up," Hatcher said. "It was a matter of what's the next step to get back to the NFL."



Photo courtesy of Samford University (Photo by Marvin Gentry)

Devlin Hodges leads the Samford University Bulldogs against Florida State University. In his time as quarterback, Hodges threw for more than 14,500 yards and won the Walter Payton Award — the equivalent of the Heisman Trophy in his division.

Other options were viable, too. Hodges could try out for an XFL team, play in Canada, get a "real job." But perhaps the thought of hanging up his cleats wasn't really on his radar. It was football or bust.

Less than a month after Hodges and Hatcher exchanged that heavy dialogue, Hodges trotted out onto the turf at Heinz Field in Pittsburgh, wearing the same black-and-yellow togs once lionized by famous players before him. The former record-setting Samford quarterback was now a Pittsburgh Steeler, for real.

Hodges ingratiated himself with members of the team such that they started calling him by his "Duck" nickname. Hatcher gave Hodges the nickname after he heard about the national duck calling championship Hodges won as a child.

"Lots of times as a QB, if your nickname's Duck, that's usually not a good thing," Hodges told TribLive. "But I've come to realize I think it's something that fits me."

Hatcher told TribLive, "'Devlin'

was just hard for me to say all the time. ... So he got talking about (his duck-calling skills) ... and I said, 'Man, I just am gonna start calling you Duck.' And it kinda stuck."

Duck mania

Eventually, Hodges found himself starting for the Steelers and he was 3-0. By then, Duck mania had reached a fever pitch.

A video was even posted on Duck Commander's Twitter page featuring Si Robertson from the TV show "Duck Dynasty": "Hey, I used to be a Saints fan, but ... the Steelers have got a Duck for a quarterback. Go get 'em, Duck!" Robertson said.

But in the NFL, there is no rest for the weary — or the winners. The team struggled in the next several games and missed the playoffs.

That's the story as told from Pittsburgh. But Birmingham provides a different side to the tale. A campus and a coach, is swelling with pride as a former Samford player makes his bones in the NFL. 🦆



Photo courtesy of the Pittsburgh Steelers

During his rookie season last year, Steelers quarterback Devlin Hodges appeared in eight games and started in six of them.

To read Devlin Hodges' story in its entirety, visit tabonline.org/DevlinHodges.

A special thank you to WXJC Radio, our partner in producing TAB News, which airs Saturdays at 2 p.m. TAB News is also the first part of the podcast released each Tuesday along with the audio digest of that week's issue.



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