



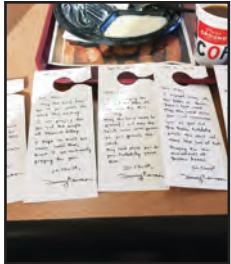
# The Alabama Baptist

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April 30, 2020

Vol. 185, No. 18  
Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

## INSIDE



St. Clair Association leader uses door hangers as new outreach option

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Birmingham's Watkins takes journey on NBC's 'The Voice'

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Theology 101 — God as a Fortress

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### What's

# NEXT?

## Turning the corner in crisis



123rf.com

## Sharing, showing love of Jesus as pandemic continues

By Margaret Colson  
The Alabama Baptist

It's not over yet. Even with all the changes Alabama Baptist churches have made recently in response to COVID-19, more challenges and opportunities are on the horizon.

In mid-March, as churches learned their doors would be closed, even temporarily, to their congregants, response was swift. Churches quickly adapted — livestreaming church services, providing

online giving options and communicating with members virtually.

### 'How do we ... ?'

Now, a month later, with some restrictions still in place and others possibly to be eased soon, churches are grappling with other basic issues, including:

#### ► How can a church minister to ill church members?

Ministering to those who are ill has been a priority for churches throughout history.

With current restrictions related to COVID-19, church leaders are finding new ways to prioritize this ministry.

When church members are ill, possibly with COVID-19, "it will be important that the church see these members as people who are suffering and not as some kind of statistic," said Gary Fenton, a leadership consultant, longtime minister and development officer for Samford University in Birmingham.

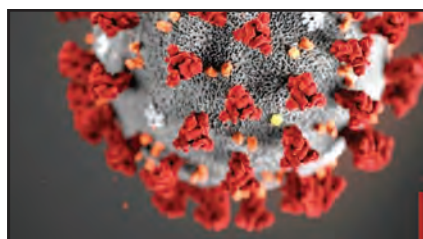
Church leaders can main-

tain contact with ill individuals and their families through simple telephone calls, handwritten notes, emails or text messages and even gift boxes.

Deb Lowery, a member of Bethel Baptist Church, Dora, and TAB financial assistant, said when her grandson, who lives with Lowery and her husband, was recently diagnosed with COVID-19, Bethel Baptist leaders prayed for the Lowery family and regularly communicated

(See 'Changing,' page 14)

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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# Being creative & serving during COVID-19 pandemic



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

**Above:** Ralph Stevens sketched TAB Media's logo in front of the TAB building in Homewood as support for CBS 42's Let's Talk Chalk campaign.



Photo by Amanda Davis

With high school graduations canceled, families are finding creative ways to celebrate 2020 graduates.



Photo by Bryan Gill

Ginger Wall helps her grandchildren Charles and Perri with writing, reading and science via FaceTime and Zoom.

**Right:** Judi Moon is reaching out to her neighborhood by writing poems and leaving them for people to pick up in her yard.



Photo courtesy of Judi Moon

**Share what you, your community or church have been doing to find creative ways to serve others. Email [news@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:news@thealabamabaptist.org).**



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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# MY RASHIONALE

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

[jrash@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:jrash@thealabamabaptist.org)  
@RashionalThs



## Understanding the full picture vital to determining the solution

**M**y friend couldn't escape the career advice coming her way. Everywhere she turned someone had the answer and it all seemed so simple — to them anyway.

The more the suggestions flowed, the less appreciative she seemed. Eventually, the circle of friends and family attempting to help her determine the next move pulled back, confused and somewhat aggravated by her inaction.

Entering the scene around the time my friend had had her fill of “you shoulds,” I knew my only role was to listen.

She had somehow shifted her focus from figuring out the next step to obsessing about why “no one” could understand her situation.

She was frustrated, overwhelmed and sad. Job after job, position after position, opportunity after opportunity ended in disappointment for her.

Each of the roles initially had potential. She always grasped them with tremendous hope and a sparkle of excitement, but somewhere along the way the spark ceased and the fire fizzled.

“They don't understand the whole story. I know they mean well, but their advice won't work for me,” she would say about those trying to help.

As my friend explained, she pulled back the curtain to her life ever so slightly.

What seemed simple and obvious to the rest of the world truly was complex and compli-

cated for my friend. She was right in that they/we couldn't truly understand her situation nor the reasoning behind the pattern of her choices.

As she talked, she seemed to see for herself, maybe for the first time, the areas that might need some attention in her life.

It took several more years, but my friend found her way.

She worked through some buried issues that had held her back for years. She found peace with God and herself.

And she discovered a place to

use her skills and share her gifts and talents with fulfillment.

What my friend doesn't realize is how much that one conversation and glimpse into her heart and soul taught me.

From that experience, I realized how many times we are tempted to “fix” another person when they seem to be struggling through a situation.

We take what we know, do a quick assessment and spit out the answer. No big deal, “here's what you need to do.”

But in most cases we really

don't have all the information nor do we understand the full picture of dynamics involved.

It takes commitment to not hurry things along when walking through a difficult time with someone else.

More people than we realize silently spar with something from the past and/or carry the weight of an intense pain, such as grief or deep disappointment.

Sharing from the depths of our heart with a trusted friend who will listen without “fixing” us lightens the load a bit and nurtures the opportunity to heal. 🌈

## SHOUTOUT FROM TAB

### Alabama native, former TAB Media correspondent nears two-year mark as editor of Georgia's *Christian Index*

**H**ow about a shoutout to our Alabama Baptist communications “missionary” to Georgia, Scott Barkley?

Scott is nearing his two-year anniversary as editor of the Georgia Baptist *Christian Index*. He's been with the *Index* for almost 17 years.

Scott grew up as part of Noah Baptist Church, Centre, and is a graduate of Jacksonville State University. He met his wife, Amy (who grew up as part of College Heights Baptist Church, now in Glencoe), at the Baptist Campus Ministries on campus.

Scott and I have been friends since 1998 when he became a correspondent for The Alabama Baptist/TAB Media.

We've followed each other's journeys and cheered each other



Photo courtesy of Jennifer Davis Rash

**Jennifer Davis Rash and Scott Barkley — 2019 SBC press room in Birmingham**

on along the way. Scott and Amy are actively involved in their four children's lives, as well as in their current church family, Cartersville

(Ga.) First Baptist Church. Kudos, my friend. We are proud of your dedicated service.  
—Jennifer Davis Rash

# Your Voice



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

## 4 things pastors don't have to do right now

By Aaron Wilson  
FactsandTrends.net

God created the local church to operate in a rhythm of gathering for corporate worship and being scattered on mission. But during this off-balance season when churches can't come together in person, pastors are having to adapt.

This creates extra work for pastors. A church that's constantly scattered takes more effort to shepherd.

Still, God intends for pastors to worship Him through rest, even during a pandemic. To help achieve this, here are four things you can cross off your to-do list as a pastor during COVID-19.

### 1. Pastors don't have to recreate the essence of a physical gathering.

As worship services have moved online, pastors are feeling the pressure to digitally replicate a typical Sunday morning experience.

But regardless of the production quality of virtual gatherings, they will never replace the power of worshipping together in person.

It's unnatural for a local church to be physically apart week after week.

Services that take place online will therefore always cause you and your people to feel like something is lacking.

This is actually a good thing as it reminds your people what they were made for and what they're missing.

### 2. Pastors don't have to analyze their online preaching stats.

Online services now allow pastors to track views, impressions, finishes, likes, comments, shares and even what turns of phrase elicited certain emojis on Facebook.

Most of this data isn't truly reflective of a sermon's impact and can be easily misinterpreted if you're not accustomed to tracking such stats.

Don't give into the feeling you must scrutinize your online sermon analytics. Preach as faithfully as you can to an empty room, take a break and then move on to the next week's message.

### 3. Pastors don't need to have all the answers.

"When will this be over? Why is it happening? What is God up to?" Because pastors have the gift of teaching, they instinctively want to help answer such questions from their people.

But in these strange times, it can be an act of worship to replace the need for answers with a simple trust in God. Don't entertain the impossible burden of trying to help your people make sense of everything that's going on.

There's freedom and worship found in a pastor saying, "I can't answer all your questions, but I can model what it looks like to trust God during this time."

4. Pastors don't have to carry the church on their shoulders. The challenges presented by COVID-19

are real and demand solutions that require creativity and resourcefulness. But as pastors tap into a spirit of pragmatism, they can start to believe the lie that it's up to them to hold the church together.

Christ boldly declared to Peter, "I will build my church," and Paul wrote that nothing in all creation would separate God's people from His love. That includes the coronavirus.

As COVID-19 continues, take time each week to reassess how you are spending your time. Look to delegate or even eliminate activities that could be fostering burnout or neglect to your health and the care of your own family.

Christ is the head of the Church. The government will rest upon His shoulders. Regardless of how it may feel, it's not all on you to hold things together.

Christ lovingly corrected Mary for being "worried and upset about many things," imploring her to make "the right choice" of focusing on what was necessary.

What might the Lord be encouraging you to shave off your list of expectations during this season of busyness so that — in the midst of a pandemic — you can make the right choices for your family and ministry?

*EDITOR'S NOTE — Aaron Wilson is associate editor for Facts & Trends. Read his full article at [tabonline.org/4-things](http://tabonline.org/4-things).*

There are things you don't really think about until you see them first hand.

I was grabbing a quick lunch at a drive-thru, and there was an elderly couple walking from an 18-wheeler parked at a nearby parking lot. They tried to order on foot, and the restaurant worker refused to serve them.

They looked defeated.

I understand in "normal times" this is a safety precaution, but we can all see that times aren't normal. Things can and should be adjusted.

I understand no inside foot traffic is allowed, but there has to be a better way for truck drivers trying to get a warm meal and not just a bag of chips from a gas station.

I paid and got my order and was able to get their attention before they made it back to the truck. They accepted my offer to get their food "legally" from my car in the drive thru, and I waited again.

This didn't take too much time out of my day, but I can only imagine they may have been searching for hours.

I'm [overwhelmed] over simple things that Christ shows you when you pay attention. Be kind. Serve others.

My heart is thankful to have met Charles and Linda from South Carolina at a "social distance."

**LeAnn Andrews**  
Birmingham, Ala.

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

“It is a beautiful sight to see when communities come together to help each other.”

CRAIG CARLISLE

*Director of Missions, Etowah Baptist Association*

During these stressful, uncertain days we need each other's prayers more than ever. Set up a weekly time for a video chat to pray with your missionaries. Keep it to a small group, and pray specifically for each other's needs. Use the time to encourage each other with stories of how you have seen God at work around you and in you.

**Hugh Johnson**  
IMB.org

A few days ago someone asked me what I was thinking of about the COVID-19 outbreak. My immediate response was: “I am thinking about how big God is and how small I am.”

**Roger Willmore, DOM**  
Calhoun Baptist Association

The term crisis means “a turning point for better or worse.” It comes from the Greek word, “krisis,” which literally means “decisions.” A crisis puts us at a crossroad where decisions must be made — under pressure — that will impact the course of our lives, positively or negatively, from that moment forward.

**Gregory L. Hunt, author**  
“Leading Congregations Through Crisis”

Neither the absence of sports nor the shortage of toilet paper nor the abundance of Zoom meetings, neither home-schooling nor the pounds we've added since we've been stuck at home, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in

Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:38–39, COVID-19 Translation)

**Pastor Travis Collins**  
FBC Huntsville

Churches, your pastor is now limited as to what he can do. Please do not penalize him in these days. His family still needs the income that he normally receives from your church.

**John Killian, DOM**  
Fayette Baptist Association

Spend as much time preparing for the invitation as you do the sermon. Just like you already know where you're going in your sermon, you need to know where you're going in your invitation.

**Shane Pruitt**  
North American Mission Board

## The Church in Action

The Baptist Campus Ministries (BCM) of Coastal Alabama Community College in Monroeville gave a \$500 gift to Wes and Ashley Costello, church planters in New York City through the North American Mission Board. The Costellos moved to NYC from Montgomery last summer. Wes is the housing and project coordinator at the Metropolitan New York Baptist Association. Using gifts from Alabama Baptists, the Costellos made 44 goody bags filled with a Bible, masks and snacks. They delivered the bags to residents in their neighborhood. They also used gifts to provide lunch for doctors and nurses at a local hospital. The Costellos ask that we all continue to pray for ways they can reach out to their community and have gospel conversations along the way.

**Toni Kelly, BCM Director**  
Coastal Alabama  
Community College

So grateful to God for sacrificial servants. It was awesome to see people volunteering all over the county to help those in need [following the April 19 storms]. Please continue to pray for those still without power and needing assistance.

**Tyler Eiland, DOM**  
Chilton Baptist  
Association

Many individuals and families in Lee County lack adequate food. Providence Baptist Church, Opelika, is serving as a distribution site for the Lee County EMA and the Food Bank of East Alabama.

**Providence Baptist Church**  
Opelika

## From the *Twitterverse*

### @DustyMcLemore

It's easy to acknowledge God's ability to calm the storms of life while sailing upon a calm sea, but it's quite a different reality when you're in the middle of a raging sea!

### @Bward\_13

My 4 year old: Dad, can we go to church? I'm tired of watching it on the TV. I want to actually go there. We haven't been there in a long time. Me: I know son, I know.

### @DrStevenJLawson

When you stand before God on the last day, you will need someone to represent you. Jesus Christ is an Advocate who has never lost a case. Trust Him.

### @philwaldrep

Every person in the world con-

tinues to look for satisfaction. They will not find it until they meet Jesus.

### @craiggroeschel

“Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.” — Proverbs 19:21

### @Tedashii

Loss has taught me to not take anything or anyone for granted. What's here today can definitely be gone tomorrow.

### @TrevinWax

We study the truths of God's word, so that our hearts may be engaged with our Maker and our hands and feet be moved to action.

### @tonymerida

The greatest need of the hour is a revived and joyful church. ...

Unhappy Christians are a poor recommendation for the faith. ... The exuberant joy of the early Christians was one of the most potent factors in the spread of Christianity.  
— D.M. Lloyd-Jones, 1964

### @greglaurie

We cannot control circumstances. Nor can we control what people say to us or about us. We cannot control everything that comes our way, but we can control our reaction to it.

### @shadesmtn

Paul thrived in isolation because he set his gaze on Jesus. In what ways do you need to reorient your focus this week?

### @PastorJFC

No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the Lord.

*Moving forward with*

# BOLDNESS

## Medical professionals keep the faith, trust God's sovereignty amid COVID-19 outbreak

By Shawn Hendricks  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

**C**ory Luckie usually doesn't wear scrubs to work, but the COVID-19 pandemic has turned his routine upside down. It's a new precaution the physician at Ivy Creek Family Care in Holtville has adopted amid the coronavirus crisis that continues to transform lives around the globe.

"I usually wear normal clothes, but for the past several weeks I've been wearing scrubs," he said. "So literally when I get home I strip down and get straight in the shower before I touch my wife or my 3-year-old son."

Luckie has been examining patients in the parking lot of the clinic, some of whom are experiencing shortness of breath or other symptoms of COVID-19.

To minimize risk of contamination, the patients have been asked to stay in their vehicles, which in this case doubles as an examination room, while the doctor triages the situation.

"So we'll put the mask on, eye protection on. And I'll go and listen to [the patient] ... see what's going on and figure out what we need to do from there," Luckie said.

Despite the risks that come with being in the medical field these days, Luckie, a member of First Baptist Church, Prattville, said his faith has helped give him peace amid the crisis.



Staff at Prattville Baptist Hospital gather outside to pray with the congregation of FBC Prattville

FBC Prattville Facebook photo

As he and other professionals in the medical community continue to respond to the needs of those infected by the coronavirus, Luckie said he takes comfort in knowing God is in control.

### 'Keep perspective'

"I've tried to keep in perspective that God's sovereignty reigns," he said. "He knows how this is going to end. ... I think as long as we keep that perspective, we'll be OK."

As of April 24, more than 2.7 million confirmed COVID-19 cases had been reported worldwide, with more than 192,000 deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University & Medicine Coronavirus Resource Center.

In the United States, more than 869,000 confirmed cases had been reported, with more than 50,000 deaths. Alabama has reported more than 5,200 confirmed cases with more than 180 deaths.

While clinics like the small rural one in Elmore County where Luckie works have had to take the "proper precautions," the overall pace of the work has been "business as usual," he said.

Many city hospitals have seen an influx of patients, but Luckie believes the virus outbreak has "actually had the opposite effect on outpatient clinics," since many patients have stayed home to avoid risk of contamination, he said.

The good news is that some 750,000 COVID-19 patients worldwide and more than 80,000 in the U.S. have recovered.

Still, the epidemic is far from over. Until a vaccine or proven treatment is found, people are advised to remain cautious. Luckie said a person who is not feeling well, or who has a cough or fever, should continue to stay away from stores and other public places.

"Keep time in perspective," said

Luckie, acknowledging it's understandable that some struggle with isolation during a stay-at-home period. But the results of protective measures are potentially life-saving, he said.

"Think about all of the people that you may come into contact with who are then going to go home to their mom or dad who has cancer or their husband who has really bad COPD," he said.

People, he said, should see themselves as the "base of a tree."

"Your contacts are going to keep branching and branching and branching," he said. "And until we get people to realize that, we're not going to slow this down."

Robert "Bob" Cosby is a long-time physician who has served in the military, on a cruise ship and now fills in for medical staff in the Birmingham area. He said it's times like these when people should consider their spiritual health more than anything else.

"I think the very first thing that any person should consider is their salvation, their relationship to Christ," said Cosby, who is a member of Briarwood Presbyterian Church, Birmingham.

"You don't want to wait until you're taking your last breath, or you're going in and out of consciousness on a ventilator, to wait till that point to think, 'I'll turn my life over to Christ.'"

### 'Share your faith'

And for believers, he said, the coronavirus crisis is an opportunity Christians shouldn't let slip by.

If you don't feel the motivation to share your faith with others then "your wood is wet," he said.

"Our lives are counted minute by minute," Cosby said. "If we have our faith in Christ, the most important thing we can do is share with someone else. ... We need to be bold if we believe it."

*"I've tried to keep in perspective that God's sovereignty reigns. He knows how this is going to end. ... I think as long as we keep that perspective, we'll be OK."*

**Cory Luckie**  
physician, Ivy Creek Family Care

# STEPPING

## *into the gap*

### Hospital staff 'family' to those suffering alone

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

David Johnson says he has a “really terrible singing voice.”

But as he sat recently in UAB Hospital at the bedside of a patient in his final moments — a patient who was unable to communicate his wishes — Johnson tried to think of what he would want someone to do for him as he was dying.

And he sang.

“I had the freedom to do what I wanted in that moment,” said Johnson, a UAB Hospital chaplain and member of Riverchase Baptist Church, Birmingham. “If it were me, I would want to know there was someone there who loved me.”

The possibility of dying alone has been a sobering part of the COVID-19 crisis as the death toll has climbed and the stories have spread of families not being able to be at their loved ones’ bedsides.

That goes for patients who are dying of coronavirus — and some who are aren’t.

### Same story, different ways

“As a result of COVID-19, no visitors are allowed unless someone is dying,” Johnson said.

He’s not sure if the patient he sat with had coronavirus or not — all he knew was that the patient’s family was either sick themselves or too high risk to be at the hospital and at his bedside.

It’s a story he sees over and over in different ways.

“A couple of weeks ago [in front of the hospital], I met the son and daughter of a COVID-19 patient who was dying ... and I took them up to MICU (medical intensive care unit),” Johnson said.

“They were only allowed to see their mother through a glass for their own protection,” he said. “If patients are conscious, they can speak on a phone. It’s so tough for the families.”

One way hospital staff members

all over have stepped into the gap is by spending those final moments with dying patients who are unable to have family members present. Johnson said getting to sit with patients as they die has been a privilege.

### ‘Precious time’

“I know each person I sit with has had a meaningful life and people who care about them,” he said. “It’s an honor to feel like you’re able to represent family who can’t be there and wants to be there with them.”



JOHNSON

Before Johnson became an emergency room chaplain three years ago, he and his wife, Claudia, served 28 years as missionaries to Thailand. But even with that experience and its ups and downs, the sobering parts of hospital ministry cut straight to his heart.

“There were a lot of tears during that first year of residency,” he said.

And now with a pandemic in play, the stakes somehow seem even higher — not only to him but to the people around him.

“If patients are in the hospital right now, it’s serious,” Johnson said. “There’s this sense that this is a serious thing we’re dealing with. I feel like I’ve connected with the staff a lot more. We talk a lot about issues now that we might not have before.”

He typically works the overnight shift on Saturday and Sunday nights, and when things are slower in the wee hours of the morning, weighty conversations can happen, he said.

As the crisis has continued, he’s been more vulnerable with hospital staff, and they’ve been more vulnerable with him too.

“It’s been a precious time. My prayers going in are different every day than they were before,” Johnson said. “God is here, in everything He’s here, and I feel that — I do.”

## UNA grad, nurse: Gospel opportunity in quarantine

Lexie Green was still a few months shy of her two-year anniversary as a nurse at Ochsner Medical Center in Kenner, Louisiana, just outside of New Orleans, when she found herself serving in the Intensive Care Unit in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A few weeks into the crisis, which has struck the New Orleans area particularly hard, Green started feeling poorly herself. Her supervisor sent her home when Green discovered she was running a fever. She later tested positive for COVID-19.

“I think it’s the sickest I’ve ever been in my life,” Green said by phone from her rental house where she continues to recover.

The weeks leading up to her diagnosis had been some of the most trying of her life, and to help her deal with the anxiety and stress, Green, whose full name is Alexa, began creating a video diary.

“I originally made the videos to help me cope with everything,” Green said. “Every time I talked to my family, I didn’t want to burden them with the things I was seeing. So, I just started recording myself talking and praying and talking to God.”

Green, who grew up in Double Springs and attended the University of North Alabama (UNA), continued speaking into her video diary

when she learned she had contracted the disease.

In quarantine, Green found a gospel opportunity.

“When I got sick, it was the first time I had seen everything on social media,” she said. “There was so much negativity, but I wanted to share some of my story and share hope.”

She pieced together some of her videos and posted them to Facebook.

“I have been completely overwhelmed by the response, in a good way. I never expected it to touch so many people, which I

think is the Lord working,” Green said. “I’ve had several people, even people I don’t even know, message me to say that they had either been struggling in their faith or were having a very difficult time. They said the video encouraged them to seek out God and reminded them of His faithfulness and His love for them.”

Having this sort of impact, being able to serve and help people, is precisely what Green envisioned when she selected nursing as her vocation.

“I feel like one of the gifts the Lord has given me is the gift of mercy ...,” Green said. “[This career] was an opportunity to use my gift of mercy to practically share the love of Christ.” (BP)

Read more of Lexie Green’s story and find a link to her video diary at [tabonline.org/lexiegreen](http://tabonline.org/lexiegreen).



Alexa ‘Lexie’ Green was working with COVID-19 patients when she came down with the disease herself. She shared a video diary on social media as an opportunity to share the hope she receives through her relationship with Jesus Christ.

Photo courtesy of Lexie Green

# BEARING LONG-TIME FRUITS

*for families*



Unsplash.com

## Parents can learn from experienced home-schoolers during time of crisis

By **Caleb Yarbrough**  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic has closed most public and private schools across the country, leaving more than 55 million students in the U.S. stuck at home, most through the end of the current school year.

While these school closures are temporary, as the saying goes “necessity is the mother of invention,” with advocates of home education hopeful that for some parents, short-term exposure to home-schooling will bear long-term fruits for families.

In 2019, about 2.5 million K–12 students were home-schooled in the U.S., according to the National Home Education Research Institute. The widespread school closures means this number essentially increased more than twentyfold overnight as nearly every student in America is currently participating in some form of home education.

As a result, millions of parents have been forced to adapt quickly to the new normal of schooling at home.

### Encourage and reassure

To address the current demand for home-schooling resources and information, the Texas Homeschool Coalition, a nonprofit organization for Texas’ more than 100,000 home-school families, recently partnered with actress and home-school proponent Sam Sorbo to launch [coronavirushomeschooling.com](http://coronavirushomeschooling.com).

“You don’t need a Ph.D. Just be a parent and you will be fine,” the site’s homepage encourages. Through the site, parents can sign up to receive daily emails that include free digital downloads and

links to projects, activities, encouragement from other home-school parents and instructional videos.

While most people view home-schooling as an alternative to public or private schools, Sorbo believes parents are the chief instructors of their children; therefore, every child is “home-schooled” — whether that means having a parent as their primary educator or as someone they can ask for help with their home-work.

When she began home-schooling her own children, Sorbo said she

did so because she concluded that it was the responsibility of her and her husband to educate their children. Now she is using her experience to help others.

“Coronavirus is now offering us this opportunity to recalibrate a little bit,” she said. “We developed [coronavirushomeschooling.com](http://coronavirushomeschooling.com) to come alongside parents and encourage them and reassure them that it’s just not as hard as they’ve been led to believe.”

Jamie Gaddy manages [homeschool.com](http://homeschool.com), one of the original online communities for home-school families on the internet.

Besides compelling parents to be more active in their children’s education, Gaddy said that as families are stuck at home, many are spending more quality time together and connecting in a way that is usually disrupted by various distractions and obligations.

Currently two camps of home-schoolers exist, according to Gaddy, crisis homeschoolers and existing homeschoolers.

### ‘Be flexible’

For families who were not actively home-schooling until recently, Gaddy said the challenge is figuring out how best to go about home education, including best practices and time management. She also encourages parents who have not previously home-schooled their children to relax, find their groove

and understand that home-schooling “doesn’t have to look like school at home.”

“Maybe you do an hour in the morning and [an] hour after lunch. Maybe an hour before bed or whatever is needed.

“But be flexible,” she said. “I think that is the name of the game right now. And find what

works for your family,” she added.

For families who have already prioritized home-schooling, she said the greatest challenge is being unable to leave home for activities and learning experiences that are usually important aspects of the curriculum.

### Family time

During this time when all families are spending lots of time together, Gaddy challenges parents to explore ways of making learning fun and engaging.

“OK, you need to study fractions? Well, let’s get away from

the desk and go to the kitchen and break out the measuring cup,” Gaddy explained.

Malinda McGill, a Birmingham-area mother of three daughters, said she began educating her children at home long before they knew they were being taught.

“I have been home-schooling since day one, and I truly mean it. I began reading and conversing with my oldest child when she was born,” said McGill.

### ‘Become inventive’

She said her family first decided to home-school because of the freedom it provided for more academic and cultural experiences than could be fit into a regular school schedule.

Today her family’s primary motivation for home-schooling is that it allows them the opportunity to disciple their daughters and educate them according to a Christian worldview.

The current pandemic has caused all families, McGill’s added, “to reconsider how we spend our time in all areas,” she said.

“Regarding education, I think some parents have been given new confidence in parenting and educating their children and have seen that there are so many resources available to learn about God’s world, and that learning is an organic experience that does not always have to take place at a desk or inside a textbook,” said McGill.

And though many families will not continue to home-school once the coronavirus crisis ends, McGill hopes “some will begin to see in a new way the value of open space and time for exploring, even for being bored enough to become inventive.” ✝

## Home-school resources

- ▶ [homeschool.com](http://homeschool.com)
- ▶ [coronavirushomeschooling.com](http://coronavirushomeschooling.com)
- ▶ [rainbowresource.com](http://rainbowresource.com)
- ▶ [readaloudrevival.com](http://readaloudrevival.com)
- ▶ [humilityanddoxology.com](http://humilityanddoxology.com)
- ▶ [pambarnhill.com](http://pambarnhill.com)
- ▶ [kateshomeschoolmath.com](http://kateshomeschoolmath.com)

Compiled by Caleb Yarbrough

*Drive-thru*

# MINISTRY

## Churches serve congregation, community in creative, socially distanced ways

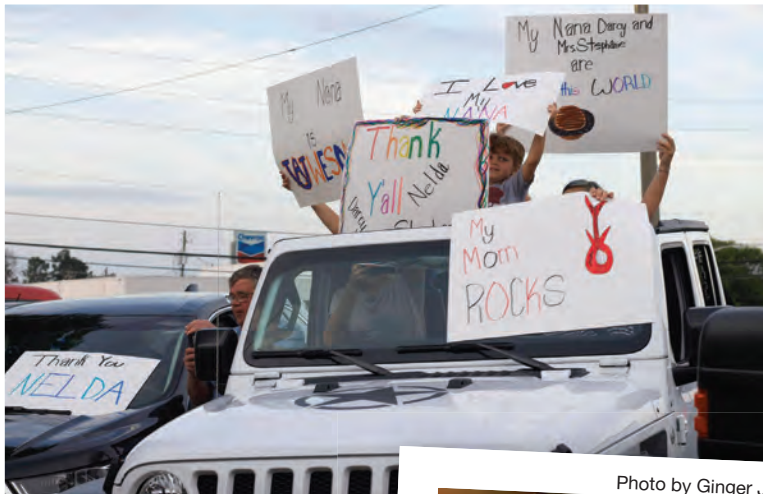
Across the state, churches have been defining what ministry and service look like during this time of COVID-19 and social distancing.

First Baptist Church, Prattville, held a drive-in prayer service at Prattville Baptist Hospital where they prayed for hospital staff and patients from cars.

Pike Road Baptist Church held drive-thru communion for its members.

Mount Hebron Baptist Church, Spruce Pine, hosted a drive-thru prayer opportunity at the church, and members of 7th Street Baptist Church, Bessemer, participated in a “prayer drive” through the community. (TAB)

FBC Prattville



FBC Prattville Facebook photo

Photo by Ginger Johnson

Mount Hebron Baptist Church



Photo courtesy of Mount Hebron Baptist



Pike Road Baptist Church



7th Street Baptist Church

Photo courtesy of Ben Chandler

# Teach children kindness while social distancing

By Carolyn Tomlin  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Our world has changed. Businesses are shut down. Schools have closed. Churches provide drive-in or virtual services. In just a few short weeks, our lives have been turned upside down.

Due to the coronavirus outbreak, the world is practicing social distancing, sheltering in place and donning masks and gloves when outside the home.

But with these changes come opportunities ... opportunities for teaching children important traits to help others and serve God.

During this time, one characteristic of a person who loves Christ is showing kindness to others. Best taught by example, children look to parents and church leaders in finding ways to help.

Stephanie Hartsell, minister to children and preteens at Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills, said her church encourages everyone to “live sent” — including children.

“For children, one of the main ways they can do this is to show kindness to those who are not kind to them,” Hartsell said. “Jesus’ crucifixion, David sparing Saul’s life when he had the opportunity and Joseph forgiving his brothers are three of the main stories I point children and families to when we are teaching about kindness.”

### Live on mission

Use this time when children are home to show examples of kindness. These simple ideas help children to become kind, generous people — one good deed at a time.

**1. Stay connected.** Use Zoom to connect as a Sunday School class or missions organization. Children can talk to their friends, engage in discussion of the lesson and stay

connected. For children who do not have access to a computer, teachers can mail materials and worksheets to them.

As a teacher, ask each child to relay an act of kindness he or she has performed during the last week. How have they helped someone? How did this make them feel?

**2. Think of others.** Encourage parents to help children reach out to neighbors while social distancing. Are elderly or handicapped people living nearby who need groceries? Offer to place an order and then leave it on their doorstep.

Could your child deliver the newspaper to their door?

**3. Share your love.** Using colored markers, draw a happy picture and leave it on a neighbor’s porch or on the door. Or draw an illustration and tape it to a window near your street. Put a smile on the faces of those who pass by.

**4. Involve children in helping people.**

If you’re cooking, encourage children to mix ingredients, stir and help clean up. If arranging a bouquet of flowers, let them pick and arrange the gift. Take the children when you deliver the food or gift. With social distancing, call ahead and leave it at the door. Encourage your children to talk about a time when someone did something kind for them.

**5. Give to those in need.** During this pandemic, many people are without jobs. Food banks and nonprofits are seeing an increase in requests. Make a list of food items a local food bank could use.

Do you have any of these items? Are you able to purchase them? If so, take your child with you as you drop off the donations. Pray together for those who receive the groceries.

In these unusual times, social distancing has boundaries but kindness has no limits. ✝



Unsplash.com

To read this story in its entirety, visit [tabonline.org/kindness](http://tabonline.org/kindness).

Danny Courson, associational mission strategist for St. Clair Baptist Association, ministers to pastors by leaving associational door hangers at their churches with personal notes of encouragement written on the back.

# Supporting & encouraging pastors

## St. Clair Association leader uses door hangers to stay in touch, connect with churches

By Lanell Downs Smith  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When Danny Courson began serving St. Clair Baptist Association as its associational mission strategist in 2019, he knew he needed to find a way to connect with his churches. Courson found that connection through prayer and door hangers.

“I was just kind of overwhelmed at the number of churches and the way they are spread out over the county,” Courson said. “I was trying to figure out how I was going to maintain contact with so many pastors, especially the 75% of our pastors who are bivocational.”

Courson soon realized he would be traveling a great deal to meet the needs of all those churches and so he began leaving personal notes and praying for the churches he passed on his way.

Door hangers with the association’s logo and a reference to Matthew 28:16–20 were designed with a blank space where Courson could write a personal message for each pastor and the congregation.

So prior to the coronavirus-related church closures, when Courson was scheduled to preach in a church on

Sunday, he would spend time on Saturday praying and writing notes for churches.

Then he would visit surrounding churches early on Sunday morning to leave his note. Pastors would find his messages when they walked through their church’s door.



COURSON

The strategy was effective, he said. Some bivocational pastors are difficult to reach, and the door hangers were a low-tech way for Courson to encourage them.

“Sometimes we get so caught up in technology, we forget that old fashioned methods work well. Cards and letters are still very

much appreciated, and in our current situation, they could be used a lot more,” he said.

Courson continues to pray specifically for the needs of each community. Some, he said, have seen businesses close, so he prays for the economy.

### Reaching the community

“I pray for the lost in the community and that God will open doors,” said Courson.

“I pray for [churches] to reach their community and that churches will be able to make connections outside their existing fellowship and

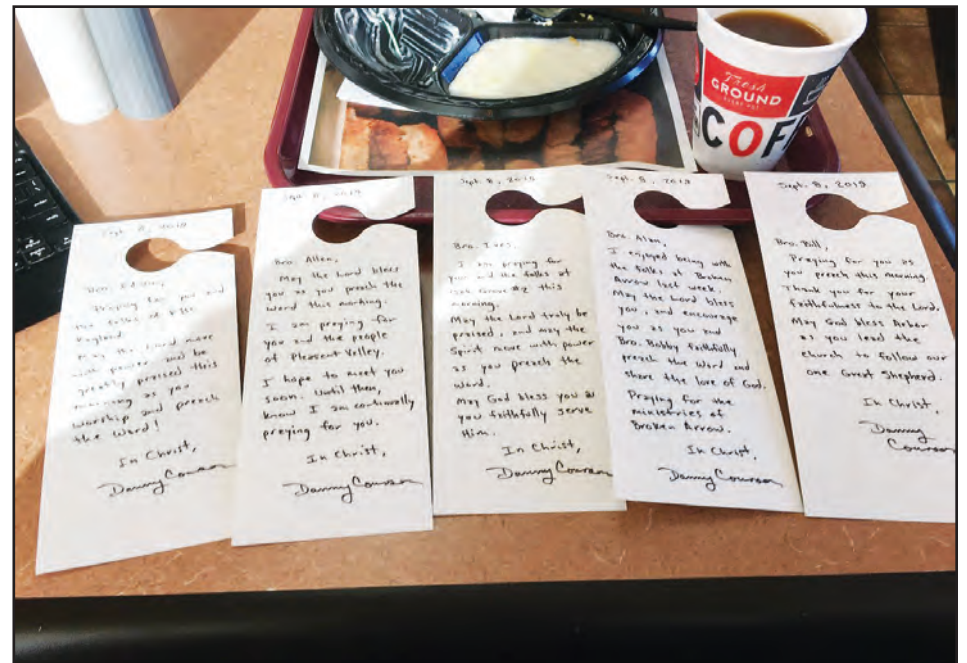


Photo courtesy of Danny Courson

draw more people into their congregation.”

Courson said he’s seen churches become more connected through his efforts.

“I’ve got more pastors who are now calling me and asking for advice,” Courson said. “It’s definitely helped to draw people in, and they see they are not just out there by themselves. They want to know more about the association and how they can be a part of it.”

### ‘Prayer for St. Clair’

In addition to the door hangers, Courson has implemented a social media campaign called “Prayer for St. Clair.” He encourages churches to pray for the lost, for existing churches and ministries, for more workers and for associational leadership.

Through the campaign, Courson said he’s seen his churches begin to pray for their sister churches. St. Clair pastors are reaching out to encourage one another and several of them are now planning revivals and missions projects together.

“I wanted [churches] to recognize that we are Kingdom partners and we need to support and encourage one another,” Courson said. “And that’s happening.”

Nicholas Gandy, pastor of Friendship Baptist Church, Springville, began leading his congregation to pray for their sister churches in 2019.

He would provide contact information for sister churches in a weekly prayer bulletin and encourage church members to send personal notes of encouragement.

“This has brought a good spirit and helps us to step back and realize we are part of a much bigger picture,” Gandy said. “This is not about me or about Friendship. This is about Jesus and His kingdom. We want to be supportive of other churches in our association and even outside our Baptist world. We want to have good partnerships with other churches.”

As a result of his efforts, Gandy said community churches have asked him to pray for them also, creating a network of prayer and partnership across denominational lines.

“It helps our people to not be so focused on themselves and to not judge all success and failure based on what we’re doing, but to realize we are part of a much bigger story,” said Gandy.

As churches and associations continue to navigate the path to serving their communities through the COVID-19 virus, Courson said he

expects to see methods like his being used more than ever.

Throughout the crisis, he’s been able to drive around and drop off notes for pastors.

“That’s something where there’s no contact and a way I can continue to encourage them,” Courson said. ☞

**“I wanted [churches] to recognize that we are Kingdom partners, and we need to support and encourage one another.”**

**Danny Courson**  
associational mission strategist, St. Clair Baptist Association



Photo courtesy of Danny Courson

In addition to providing encouragement, the door hangers also connect churches with their local association.

# Birmingham's Levi Watkins takes a journey on 'The Voice'

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

Levi Watkins had a spark — and Blake Shelton heard it. But he didn't expect to find a 14-year-old behind the microphone when he turned his chair around during Levi's blind audition on the NBC reality show, "The Voice."

He called the young man's performance of Train's "Hey, Soul Sister" an "incredible vocal."

"I missed the second half — I was starting to black out a little bit," Shelton joked, and when the song was over, he jumped out of his chair cheering.

The other judges, Kelly Clarkson, Nick Jonas and John Legend, told Shelton he was lucky to have snapped Levi up. Jonas, surprised at how developed Levi's voice was, asked if he had a musical family.

The answer is yes.

And it's because of that — in more ways than one — that Levi was on that stage that day. His parents, Jim and Amy Watkins, have both performed music over the years, and all four of their sons have grown up singing and playing instruments.

The whole family is talented, but there was something about the youngest they thought might lead him one day to a career in the entertainment industry.

They noticed the spark way before Shelton did. And that led them to a family decision to let Levi try out for "The Voice."

But before they sent that first audition video, they had a lot of conversations about why they would do it.

"For Amy and me, what it boiled down to was we saw great gifts in Levi," Jim Watkins said. "Though he's still a very young person and has developing to do, we feel like he's got a lot of potential."

It's a very unconventional thing for their family, Jim Watkins said. With their other sons, they've been able to support, encourage and teach them how to steward their skills in academics or team sports.

But with Levi, the question was — how do you prepare a young man who might have a career in entertainment one day if he chooses?



Photo courtesy of Jim and Amy Watkins  
Levi Watkins (center) went on the trip of a lifetime with his parents to Hollywood to be part of NBC's reality show 'The Voice' and experience a taste of life in the entertainment industry.

"The thought of that is sobering — we don't feel like it's a great environment," Jim Watkins said, noting that he and his wife had both had positive and negative experiences in that world through the years.

So they decided that, if Levi could make it through to Hollywood, it would be a great opportunity to give him a crash course together as a family. At 14 years old, they would need to be with him 24/7 — it's the law there, Jim Watkins said. "What better way for him to see what this is about than with us beside him every step of the way?"

While they were there for the blind auditions in September and then again for the coaching, battle round and knockout round in January and February, Levi made a lot of great friends.

## 'Cannot boast in myself'

"I can't think of any person we met there who was not just a really lovely person that we enjoyed being with and had a lot in common with," Jim Watkins said. "But there were a lot of things that we did not have in common with them, so those conversations were great for Levi. He was able to see and grow in relationships with people he connected with and loved and cared about, but [who]

were probably lost."

Jim Watkins said it gave his son an even deeper compassion for the bigger world outside their fairly homogenous zip code in Alabama.

"We were able to go back every night to the hotel and have conversations about what we experienced that day, the things we saw that were different," he said. "We were so grateful for this whole process. I think he has come away from this with a really holistic perspective about what is this industry, who he is and how he might fit into anything like this."

Levi still has a lot of things to think about when it comes to the future. For one, he's got other interests too, like endocrinology — he's a type 1 diabetic. And he's only just turned 15 this month.

His voice is still maturing, and he's still learning, his parents say. He had only just tried out for the student worship team at The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham, a few weeks before he found himself staring at the backs of the four judges' chairs on "The Voice."

"Before then, he had only played a few times, and that was in front of the Brook Hills student group," Amy Watkins said, noting that in the seventh and eighth grade, they had encouraged him to serve on the tech team first before auditioning for a "forward facing" role on the

worship team. "We wanted to help him keep a right perspective and still be his cheerleader and nurture his gifts."

But even without much experience, Levi looked right at home on that great big stage in Hollywood, though he's quick to say that's not how he felt.

"Oh, I was nervous," he said.

But he's also quick to say he loved every minute of it. After his blind audition, he won his battle against Jamal Corrie singing One Republic's "Counting Stars," then lost the knockout round against Joei Fulco with Waylon Jennings' "I Ain't Living Long Like This," though the judges told him he gave a "perfect" performance.

"It was really cool to get all the coaching and performance knowledge that I gained throughout the

course of the show," Levi said. "I enjoyed using the gifts that I have on that stage. Using what God has given me out there was really fun. It was also really, really nice to meet all the new people. All the contestants got to be really close."

## Opportunity to grow

Levi said he saw it as an opportunity to live out his faith in front of others and grow at the same time.

"I tried to approach it from the standpoint of, 'I have this platform, how can I use it well?' and then steward the platform that I've been given through this experience," Levi said. "I tried to think about things like 'What influence can I have on people? What good influence can I give?' It's helped me see that I cannot boast in myself in this at all because it's not my gift that I've created or given to myself, it's something that God has blessed me with."

Wes Sullivan, Brook Hills' associate student minister, called Levi "humble and kindhearted."

"He's a light-hearted kid, and so genuine," Sullivan said, adding that Levi is a joy to have around. "In the band, he doesn't come across as the kid who was on 'The Voice.' He carries himself well and represents Christ well." 🙌



Photo courtesy of NBC Universal

# 3 stories you should know



Photo by Doug Rogers

Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief (ABDR) teams from several associations were at work in central Alabama the week of April 20th following severe storms that moved through Coosa, Tallapoosa and Pike counties on April 19 toppling trees and downing power lines.

ABDR deployed a laundry and shower unit to Rockford Baptist Church on April 22. The Montgomery Baptist Association food bus, Rockford Baptist Church and the Triple R Cafe provided food. (TAB)

## Churches see decline in giving since March

Giving has dropped in 65% of evangelical churches since March, according to a new “State of the Plate” survey released April 22 by the National Association of Evangelicals.

The survey found that a third of churches — 34% — reported a drop in giving of 10–20%. About 1 in 5 churches (22%) said the decline was between 30% and 50%. Almost a tenth of churches (9%) reported a drop of 75% or more in giving to their congregations.

Just 8% of churches said giving had increased, and 27% reported steady offerings.

The survey of 1,091 mostly Protestant churches in the U.S. was conducted April 8–20 and asked church leaders how COVID-19-related shutdowns had affected their church’s giving. (RNS)

## LifeWay trustees to put Ridgecrest up for sale

Trustees of LifeWay Christian Resources have approved a recommendation from LifeWay’s executive committee to authorize the potential sale of Ridgecrest Conference Center and Summer Camps.

The unanimous vote came during a virtual meeting held April 23.

Despite the 100-year-old conference center and camps operating at a profit in recent years, LifeWay CEO Ben Mandrell called the decision “painful” but “necessary.”

Ridgecrest hosts 70,000 guests annually, and camps for boys and girls operate at near capacity during the summer months. But Ridgecrest, like other camps and conference centers, faces an uncertain summer schedule due to COVID-19.

If sold, Ridgecrest would join Glorieta Conference Center as a former LifeWay property. (BP)

## — NEWSBRIEFS —

### Seven NOBTS seminary extension centers to close; one in Alabama



Four of the five extension centers of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS) in Alabama will remain open, but one in Alabama plus six others in the Southeast will close, following a recent vote by the seminary’s executive committee.

The seminary’s Alabama extension centers remaining open are located in Birmingham, Huntsville and Tuscaloosa — which offer both undergraduate and graduate-level courses in theological education — as well as Montgomery, which offers only graduate-level coursework. The Rainsville center will close.

In a virtual meeting April 14–15, NOBTS trustees voted to close the centers in Rainsville; Lafayette, Louisiana; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Tampa, Florida; Warner Robins, Georgia; Pensacola, Florida; and Jacksonville, Florida. The centers, which have experienced declining enrollment for several years, will close in December 2020.

Teach-out plans will be developed for students affected by the closure to help them finish their degrees.

The extension centers offer the opportunity to earn degrees without relocating to New Orleans.

“The use of extension centers allows NOBTS and Leavell College to provide quality training close to where the student feels called to serve. Therefore, students are not forced to leave their church or ministry calling to attend seminary,” said Norris Grubbs, NOBTS provost. (TAB)

### Advocates call for shutting down lotteries amid COVID-19 stresses



Lottery ticket sales soared in Texas as families received their stimulus checks, according to an April 23 report by *The Houston Chronicle* — a result anti-gambling advocates were trying to avoid when they called on state leaders to shut down lottery gambling for 30 days.

The aim of the federal stimulus package is to provide Americans with the resources to pay for

essentials not to play the lottery, said Les Bernal, national director of Stop Predatory Gambling in an April 20 letter sent to all governors and attorneys general of states with lotteries.

Many individuals play the lottery with the aim of improving their financial situation — especially in times of “desperation,” Bernal said.

A recent study by Stop Predatory Gambling found that lotteries are a major cause for more than 60% of Americans having less than \$1,000 in savings before the pandemic struck.

“Building assets and the accumulating and investing of savings, are the keys to financial peace,” said Bernal. “Creating wealth by the accumulation and investment of savings is the direct opposite of what state lotteries represent and encourage.”

Bernal also spoke to members of Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey’s Gambling Policy Study Committee during an April 20 videoconference. Bernal and John Kindt, professor emeritus of business administration at the University of Illinois, addressed the economic costs of expanding legalized gambling. Ivey formed the study group in February to gather information on the expansion of gambling in Alabama. (TAB)



Unsplash.com

## — ALABAMA NEWS —

**Union Hill, Oneonta, holds internet revival following prayer focus**

On March 15, Pastor Bill Barnett challenged members at Union Hill Baptist Church, Oneonta, to join him in 42 days of prayer and fasting for the crisis that lay ahead. The result of that, he said, was the church's first internet revival.

The church's revival was planned for April 26–29, and evangelist Frank Shelton, who has served in outreach and chaplaincy at several Olympic Games, was scheduled to speak. As it became clear the traditional revival would not be possible, Barnett began to consider other options, and the internet revival concept was born.

Shelton recorded a message for the church to stream on the morning of April 26. That evening, Union Hill hosted a drive-in service featuring Ryan Whitley, pastor of CrossPoint Church, Trussville.

Barnett then hosted three nights of interview-style videos featuring Josh Niblett, Hoover High School head football coach; Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions; and Robert Jeffress, pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas. Each of the speakers shared a message and an invitation to respond to the gospel.

The internet revival offered opportunities that might never have been available had the church gone the traditional route, Barnett said.

"It's God's answer to 42 days of prayer and fasting for revival when the church is social distancing," he said.

To view the revival videos, visit the church's website, [unionhillbaptist.org](http://unionhillbaptist.org). (TAB)

**FBC Selma pastor celebrates 10 years at church**

Jerry Light Sr. said he didn't even know where Selma was when the city's First Baptist Church approached him about being the pastor. But the lifelong Georgian answered the call 10 years ago and found Selma to be a wonderful city, similar to what his Atlanta suburb once was — a place where people knew each other and waved and spoke as they went about town.



LIGHT SR.

"Selma has taken me back to that, and I love that," he said.

Light values the strong relationships he's found in the community, as well as the church's rich history. It was instrumental in the early days of Woman's Missionary Union, and it supplied the only layman ever to serve as a Southern Baptist Convention president. That layman — a lawyer — was able to guide the convention through a turbulent time. "It's a historic church, and it's played a role in so many ways," Light said.

But what he personally loves most about serving as pastor of First, Selma, is the opportunity to live and work in the city's missions field, meeting needs and better positioning the church to share hope.

"I love spending every day in that way," he said. "It's such a privilege to be here." (TAB)

# Persecuted church

**Nigerian Christians killed in violent ambushes by Fulani herdsmen**

JOS, Nigeria — Two Christians were decapitated April 13 in Nigeria in ongoing violence by Muslim Fulani herdsmen.

The two Catholics were ambushed in Ologba village, Benue state. They were traveling between villages to visit friends.

Two days earlier, armed herdsmen killed a Christian farmer in Maiduna village, Plateau state. The farmer was a member of the Church of Christ in Nations.



CIA map

In 24 months in Daffo District of Plateau state, more than 40 Christians have been killed, 7,000 displaced and 11 communities destroyed.

Herdsmen also have besieged Benue state in the past four years, killing, kidnapping and torturing Christians. In March, the Islamic militants killed 16 Christians in the villages of Chongu, Mbanyiar, Abaji and Mbanyiar.

On Jan. 30, Christian Solidarity International issued a genocide warning, urging Nigeria's government to take action.

Nigeria ranks 12th on Open Doors' 2020 World Watch List for "very high persecution" of Christians. (MS)

## — NEWSBRIEFS —

**SWBTS ends archaeology program, addresses Dead Sea Scrolls authenticity**

Citing financial constraints associated with COVID-19 and an "institutional reset," Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS) announced April 6 it was discontinuing its archaeology program.

SWBTS's current "institutional reset" is a result of the institutional plan President Adam Greenway, who became president in February 2019, laid out during the seminary's spring 2019 board of trustees meeting.

The plan is to "recalibrate and to reposition our seminary in every way to strengthen the core of what we do," according to a SWBTS press release from the spring 2019 meeting.

SWBTS is the only evangelical institution in the world to award a doctoral degree in archaeology. When the program ceases in May, five

faculty members will be terminated and more than 25 graduate students will face academic uncertainty, according to *Christianity Today*.

The seminary also addressed the authenticity of the Dead Sea Scrolls fragments in its collection in an announcement made the same day.

In 2010, under the leadership of former president Paige Patterson, SWBTS purchased what were believed at the time to be fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls, ancient Jewish writings containing Scripture that were discovered over a 10-year period beginning between 1946 and 1947.

The current administration at SWBTS stated it has little confidence in the authenticity of the alleged Dead Sea Scroll fragments currently in the institution's possession.

"Given that significant institutional resources were expended on the acquisition and promotion of the likely fraudulent fragments, it is not prudent for the seminary to spend further precious funds on them," the seminary said.

SWBTS left open the possibility of pursuing legal action "to seek restitution of payments made by the seminary, as authorized by the prior administration." (TAB)



Wikimedia Commons

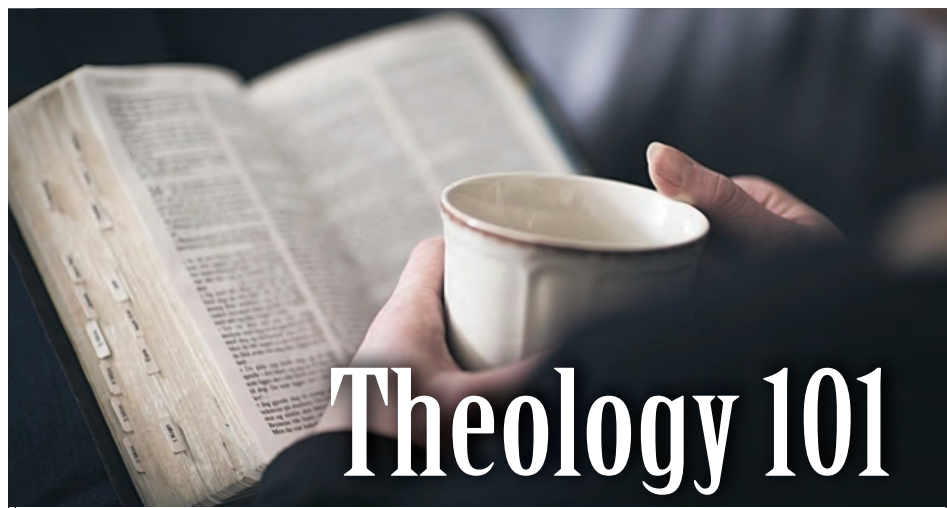
# News near you

**BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION**

► The **Birmingham Metro Baptist Association** Ministers Conference is now being offered through Zoom. If you would like to participate in the weekly conference, email [marisat@bmbaonline.org](mailto:marisat@bmbaonline.org). Chris Crain is executive director.

**OTHER**

► The **Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM)** hosts an Online Call to Prayer via Zoom every Wednesday at 10 a.m. The prayer time is open to everyone who can participate. Find the link for the prayer gathering each week at [alsbom.org](http://alsbom.org) or [tabonline.org/events](http://tabonline.org/events). The SBOM also is offering various online trainings and webinars which can also be found at [alsbom.org](http://alsbom.org). ☞



# Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

## The Doctrine of God

### God as a Fortress

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

Previously, the common images of God have been personal images, namely, a father and a king. This week, the imagery is that of an impersonal object — a fortress.

We commonly think of a fortress as a sturdy structure not easily torn down, broken through or destroyed. Thus, a fortress serves as a stronghold in the face of enemy attacks. As Christians, we understand how life can come under attack from Satan or circumstances. Martin Luther used this imagery in his hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.”

King David used similar imagery upon being delivered from the hand of his enemies, declaring the Lord his rock and fortress, his strength as well as his stronghold and refuge (2 Sam. 22:2–3).

#### Our strength

At some point David enlarged this imagery in a song of testimony that we know as part of Psalm 18. In its opening words, David declared, “I will love You, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold” (vv. 1–2).

The prayer at the beginning of Psalm 31 also employs similar imagery: “Be my rock of refuge, a fortress of defense to save me. For You are my rock and my fortress” (Ps. 31:2–3).

In times of need God stands willing to be a spiritual and emo-

tional fortress of defense. God looks to be for us a rock, a firmly fixed stone jutting out of troubled waters to which life can be tethered or upon which our feet can be securely planted.

Another prayer of the psalmist, formulated in a time he felt overwhelmed, can often serve us well in our own times of need: “Lead me to the rock that is higher than I” (Ps. 61:2).

#### Our safe place

Pondering these Old Testament passages, we see immediately that the idea of God as a fortress travels in company with similar images, such as a stronghold, a shield and a refuge. These images imply a time of peril, vulnerability, uncertainty or fear during which a person needs more than human protection and comfort. Such is God’s offer to His people.

In our part of the country where tornadoes in the spring-time are somewhat common, we often hear a forecaster’s advice that it is time to find your way to your safe place. As believers, we sometimes need to find our safe place. As a spiritual fortress, God is the safest place to which we can turn. 🌈

*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.*



# CHANGING

world

## Coronavirus concerns will linger in ‘new normal’ but need for ministry will remain

(continued from page 1)

by text messaging during the quarantine period.

One of Lowery’s TAB colleagues, Debbie Campbell, along with her husband Don, delivered masks, food items and paper towels to her during the 14-day quarantine period. The personal delivery “meant so much to me during our lock-up time,” Lowery said. “That is what the body of Christ is supposed to do.”

#### Sharing in suffering

Personal delivery of essential items is at the heart of the Boxes

of Hope ministry, launched recently by a church in New Jersey. The pastor there learned of a church family affected by COVID-19 and gathered a box of groceries and other items for the family. He wanted the family to know they were not alone in their suffering, he said. Since that first box was delivered to one family, the ministry has expanded to multiple states, where it partners with local churches to deliver Boxes of Hope throughout the communities.

“Boxes of Hope is a tangible way for us to stretch out a hand to those that are affected either through illness, quarantine or just the uncertainty of this time. The world all around us may change, but God’s love remains the same, and this is the hope that we have to share,” the ministry’s website, [getboxesofhope.com](http://getboxesofhope.com), states.

Beyond prayer, electronic communication and delivery of essential items to minister to the ill, Lowery suggests church members send notes of encouragement through the postal system or “if

they feel comfortable and are not afraid, some church members could go stand outside the house and pray for the member who is sick or even hold up a sign for the sick person to see through the window, letting them know they are loved.”

#### ► How can a church minister to elderly church members?

Churches are also finding creative ways to minister to the elderly, a high-risk group, during the pandemic. Some congregations have set up telephone call lists, in which church members regularly call elderly church members to ask about their well-being, determine if the

elderly person has any needs and to pray.

Bethel Baptist’s pastor John Foles and his wife have been visiting elderly church members, “standing outside in their yards and talking and praying with them. That speaks volumes to me, especially since the elderly need to feel connected with their pastor and church

family,” Lowery said.

Honor 6:2 is one approach in which book boxes are sent to senior care facilities, hospice centers, hospitals and people who are sheltering in place.

#### Sending hope in a box

The idea is tied directly to Ephesians 6:2, which calls on Christians to honor their fathers and mothers. Iron Stream Media, based in Birmingham, and Woman’s Missionary Union (WMU) are partnering in this ministry.

“Honoring the elderly is an act of obedience to our heavenly Father,” said WMU Executive Director Sandy Wisdom-Martin on the ministry’s website, [honor62.com](http://honor62.com).



123rf.com

John Herring, CEO of Iron Stream Media, added, "Our elderly family members and friends were there for us. Now, out of love and respect, we have an opportunity to honor them."

**► How can a church conduct a meaningful funeral service and be present for the grief-stricken?**

Restrictions limiting public gatherings to 10 or fewer people have changed the ways churches and funeral homes minister to grieving families.

Smaller services, often held at the graveside, have become the new norm, said Chad Holder,

a manager at Morrison Funeral Home in Tusculum and interim pastor of York Bluff Baptist Church, Sheffield. So have livestreamed funerals.

Retired pastor Travis Coleman has officiated two graveside services recently. With permission from local officials, friends and fam-

ily lined up in their cars to show their support for the family. After one service, people honked their horns and the family members turned to wave at everyone.

Holder said most funeral arrangements are now made virtually, and his funeral home allows only two funerals each day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, with thorough cleaning between services.

Some families are opting for a private service now and planning for a more public celebration of life at a later date, he said.

Holder said he views funerals as a "ministry, not as a task to be performed. Funerals serve the needs of the immediate family and public. ... I want to be with our people when they're grieving."

Not being able to hug or even shake hands has been difficult for Holder and other ministers.

But those who cannot attend a funeral in person can still minister to the grieving family, Holder said.

He encourages people to send flowers, cards and letters to the funeral home, which will then deliver these expressions of love to the family. He said people also can arrange for restaurants to send meals to a grieving family. Tangible gestures such as mowing grass or doing other yardwork also are appreciated.

**► How can a church maintain its ministry and witness to its community?**

"Right now, the things that you do today, will impact how ultimately you will recover tomorrow," Christian missiologist Ed Stetzer, recently said in a Baptist Press interview.

**Showing love**

The hope, he said, is that when the crisis is over and the nation reemerges from it, Christians will be remembered for their love and courage. COVID-19 brings a crucial moment for churches, he believes.

"This is the time to show and share the love of Jesus." 🙏

*"The world all around us may change, but God's love remains the same, and this is the hope that we have to share."*

Boxes of Hope

**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.

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**Christian Crossword**

By Jody Ellis Copyright 1994 Barbour Publishing Inc.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
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38			39	40		41		42	43	
44			45			46				47
48		49		50				51	52	
				53				54		

**Across**

1. First book of New Testament.
7. In like manner also, that women \_\_\_ themselves in modest apparel. (1 Tim. 2:9)
12. Solomon's son was Rehoboam, \_\_\_ his son. (1 Chron. 3:10)
13. Alcoholics Anonymous. (abbr.)
14. Train station.
15. Ice skating arena.
16. Unto \_\_\_, my own son in the faith. (1 Tim. 1:2)
18. Save Caleb the son of Jephunneh the \_\_\_. (Num. 32:12)
20. And Zanoah, and Engannim, Tappuah, and \_\_\_.
22. He left the \_\_\_ cloth and fled from them naked. (Mark 14:52)
23. Grain storage place.
25. That the \_\_\_ men be sober. (Titus 2:2)
27. Artist's stand.
30. Upon the great \_\_\_

of his right foot.

- (Lev. 8:23)
32. Anger.
34. Facts.
35. For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our \_\_\_. (Isa. 33:22)
36. Doctor. (abbr.)
37. Iowa. (abbr.)
38. Executive order. (abbr.)
39. A \_\_\_ without blemish. (1 Pet. 1:19)
42. Sow the fields and \_\_\_ vineyards. (Ps. 107:37)
44. Tin symbol.
45. Imitate.
47. Yes. (Spanish)
48. Teaspoon. (abbr.)
50. Hammer.
51. Direction.
53. Latter-day Saints. (abbr.)
54. Whereby the world that \_\_\_ was perished. (2 Pet. 3:6)

**Down**

1. Follows 1 across.
2. \_\_\_ the Arbathite. (1 Chron. 11:32)
3. Tasting the most of

tin.

4. When Joseph had \_\_\_ the body. (Matt. 27:59)
5. For John the Baptist came neither \_\_\_ bread nor drinking wine. (Luke 7:33)
6. Or ministry, let us \_\_\_ on our ministry. (Rom. 12:7)
7. Why make ye this \_\_\_ and weep? (Mark 5:39)
8. But thou shalt utterly \_\_\_ it. (Deut. 7:26)
9. And Chepharhaammonai, and \_\_\_ and Gaba; 12 cities with their villages. (Josh. 18:24)
10. If ye fulfill the \_\_\_ law according to the Scripture. (James 2:8)
11. New Testament. (abbr.)
17. Even out of the \_\_\_ of Gibeah. (Judg. 20:33)
19. Concerning \_\_\_, persecuting the

church. (Phil. 3:6)

21. Let your \_\_\_ be known unto all men. (Phil. 4:5)
24. Thou \_\_\_ thy people like a flock. (Ps. 77:20)
26. Estimated Time of Arrival. (abbr.)
28. Eleazar \_\_\_ son. (Ex. 6:25)
29. Though thou exalt thyself as the \_\_\_. (Obad. 4)
31. Princes shall come out of \_\_\_. (Ps. 68:31)
32. Four. (Roman numeral)
33. He hath caused the arrows of his quiver to enter into my \_\_\_. (Lam. 3:13)
35. It is not for kings, O \_\_\_. (Prov. 31:4)
40. Ampere. (abbr.)
41. Emitted blood.
43. Therefore also I have \_\_\_ him to the Lord. (1 Sam. 1:28)
46. Opposite of question. (abbr.)
49. Ma and \_\_\_.
52. Inquiry. (slang)

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

# INTRODUCING STATE MISSIONARY BRIAN HARPER

## From Global Church Planting to Returning to Church Planting in Alabama

EDITOR'S NOTE: State Missionary Brian Harper joined the staff of the State Board of Missions as lead church planting strategist April 1. Here he shares about the journey that brought him back home to Alabama.



### What a joy to return to Alabama and serve in church planting with the State Board of Missions!

My wife, Laura, and I met at Samford University in the 80s and sensed God calling us to the nations. We served in Ecuador among college students before returning to study at Beeson Divinity School and planting the Hispanic congregation at Dawson Memorial Baptist Church.

After completing my master of divinity degree, Laura and I, along with our two kids, went to serve with the NAME affinity (North African and Middle Eastern peoples) through the International Mission Board for 10 years. Afterward, we served on the West Coast with Saddleback Church and the North American Mission Board.

Seeing the great spiritual need in New York City we moved there, where I faced a serious illness that led us to recuperate and serve in Alabama.

When we became empty nesters – our son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren live in Canada while our daughter serves God overseas – I felt called to be a missions pastor in Tallahassee, Fla. While there, we saw a new Hispanic work start and two other new church plants get strengthened. That experience led me to realize my passion is for church planting.



As a church planting strategist and state missionary arriving back in Alabama, my first task is to learn and see what the Lord is doing during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the dozen or more church plants that are actively supported by the SBOM, many people are coming to Christ, being discipled one-on-one via Zoom and joining and growing in small groups.

The majority of Alabama is totally lost or unchurched and in need of the Gospel of true hope for themselves and their community. Church plants provide a new avenue for the



By Brian Harper  
State Missionary

Gospel in many communities that need to hear of Christ's great sacrifice for everyone.

Our desire is to see church planters raised up to plant and replant churches throughout Alabama – so that every community and culture would have access to the

Gospel and to a community of faith that would nurture them into mature and service for our Lord.

During this time of COVID-19 and the eventual arrival of the post-COVID-19 era, God will be raising up laborers for the harvest fields from our churches as many have been unsettled and are more open to seek and find eternal hope and security.

Our role is just to be useful in the hands of the Master while we look to the harvest. Our role as Alabama Baptists and Southern Baptists is to “ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” (Matthew 9:38, NIV)

Years ago, when Laura and I arrived in North Africa, we saw millions without hope and access to the Gospel. We realized that the Father had seen the fields white for harvest and was calling, but many were not stepping out in obedience. God moved in our time there to see many come to serve. Today, my prayer is that God would raise up an army of Gospel-bearing church planters for all the peoples of Alabama and beyond.

For more information about church planting in Alabama, contact State Missionary Brian Harper at (334) 613-2332, bharper@alsbom.org.

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**CHURCH TAX CONFERENCE FOR SMALL CHURCHES**

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Remember - visit [alsbom.org/coronavirus](http://alsbom.org/coronavirus) and our COVID-19 Resource Group Facebook Page for a variety of helpful resources!

# Someone You Should Know

## TEDDYE GANDY

By Leigh Pritchett  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Pastor Teddye Gandy, 58, of Montgomery, is a graduate of Southern University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and received a diploma and an advance diploma in Biblical Studies from the Ministry Training Institute of Samford University in Birmingham. He is employed by Aptiv, LLC as a customer qual-

ity engineer. He serves on the boards of The Alabama Baptist/TAB Media, Montgomery Baptist Association and Community of Hope, which is an Outreach ministry of Montgomery Baptist Association.

**Q: Describe where you focus your greatest ministry efforts.**

A: Discipleship, evangelism and outreach, Mont-

gomery Baptist Association and member churches and pastors. My heart is really to just reach people with the love of God in our neighborhood, city, county, state and the world.

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

A: My mother taught us to trust and follow God. The tangible evidence of her faith and in God's faithfulness continues to be a foundation of my faith.

My wife Juanda has and is a major influence in my faith life. She helps me to see where God is working and where He wants us to cooperate with Him.

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

A: That's a long list. The most recent was my call into pastoral ministry almost four years ago and the call to be the pastor of Pike

**MINISTRY:** Co-vocational pastor

**CHURCH NAME:** Pike Road Baptist Church in Montgomery Baptist Association

**LIFE VERSE:** "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." (Gal. 5:1)



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

Send his or her name, a contact number and the reason you think he or she should be featured to:

**Someone You Should Know**  
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or email: [news@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:news@thealabamabaptist.org)

Road Baptist Church over a year ago. Both involved God's very presence leading me to answer in faith and obedience or deny Him in disobedience and rebellion. I chose (and continue to choose) to answer in faith.

It has been a marvelous spiritual journey that has required me to grow and expand my understanding of ministry to the Lord and His people.

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

A: Keeping Him as my first and only love and not ministry to Him. To keep my relationship with Him first and fresh, not just serving Him. Revelation 2:4.

**Q: If there were one thing you could tell your younger self about faith, what would it be?**

A: Accept the calling of God early. I saw and heard Him calling to me many times before I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. Of course, I came in a crisis.

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

A: "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty." I heard this song when I was 8-9 (years old) and it always made me see God as "more than!" To reverence and praise Him for being the God of all creation. 🙏

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# SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For May 3

## Explore the Bible

By Robert E. Jackson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



### MERCY

**Romans 11:17–32**

#### Be Humble (17–21)

Paul gives an awesome picture of God's working, utilizing horticulture as an illustration. Once an olive tree lost its vigor, one solution was to cut off the unproductive branches and graft in some wild olive shoots. Israel, as God's sovereignly chosen people, failed to produce fruit when they refused to come to Jesus in humble faith. Therefore, like an old olive tree, Jewish "branches" were broken off while "wild branches," representing the Gentiles, were grafted in their place.

Obviously, some of the Gentiles were impressed with their new position leading them to exult over Israel. The word "boast" (v. 18) is the same word used when a gladiator boasted over his defeated foe. Believers must not be like a gladiator. Instead, Christians must rejoice in God's mercy with humility.

Think about it — Gentiles, in their own power, are impotent in grafting themselves in; it is solely an act of God's grace. Thus, the Gentiles must not think they are "superior" to the Jews but instead realize God reached out to them in undeserved favor. Paul cautions Gentiles not to take this position lightly. Since God cut off some of the natural branches, He will not hesitate to cut off wild branches as well. In other words, no room exists for complacency in the Christian faith. Salvation should never be taken for granted; it is wholly dependent upon God and His grace. Christians have no room to be arrogant towards unbelievers.

#### Be Thankful (22–24)

Paul highlights both the kindness and severity of God. These contrasting attitudes are fascinating and held simultaneously. People who reject Him in unbelief, represented by the branches cut off, can only look forward to His wrathful judgment.

On the other hand, believers who continually respond in faith will see the goodness of the Lord as their portion. Believers must be ever thankful for salvation and never presume on God's grace.

When I was a child, I received the MMR vaccines (measles, mumps and rubella), which are supposed to protect me for life. Salvation is not a single event like those inoculations.

True, His kindness/salvation began with a single moment when you responded in faith to Christ. However, those people who truly believe continually walk in a relationship with God and will not be cut off. Furthermore, in the miracle of grace, Jews can be grafted in again by believing and continuing to believe. We need to rejoice in our salvation and realize that God's mercy remains open to anyone who will repent and believe.

#### Be Aware (25–32)

Until now, Paul talks about the "remnant" of Israel who will be saved and then moves on to address the fate of the entire nation. Currently, Israel is experiencing a hardening of their hearts until the time of the Gentiles is complete. Paul, however, says God is not through with Israel. The "fullness" of the Gentiles (v. 25) may reference the number that are to be saved or the fulfillment of the Gentile contribution to the Kingdom.

Regardless of the meaning, Paul says after the Gentile period "all Israel will be saved" (v. 26). There are seemingly more interpretations of this verse than opinions at a Baptist business meeting. In my understanding and in my hope, a day is coming when a glorious awakening will sweep Israel, resulting in multitudes of Jews coming to faith. Regardless of the interpretation, God uses the current hardening of the Jews as an opportunity for the evangelization of Gentiles, and as a Gentile, I say amen.

The time of the Gentiles, conversely, will lead to the restoration of the Jews. God is working in all things to bring about His eternal purposes. Paul wants all Christians to be aware of His mercy. He is bestowing mercy upon Gentiles, and He will show mercy to Israel. The gospel continues to be offered to all people, and God extends grace to all people who place their faith in His Son. 🌈

## Bible Studies for Life

By James Riley Strange, Ph.D.

Professor of New Testament, Samford University



### ENCOURAGE

**Acts 9:26–28; 11:21–26**

This is our second lesson in a series about six traits that can heal and strengthen relationships between Christians. Last week, we began with the quality from which all others grow: love. We learned love is measured in actions more than in the intensity of emotion. Today we talk about one such loving action: encouragement. It is an underrated virtue.

In the passages we read today, we will see the effects of encouragement during the early decades of the church. In spite of hostile reactions from many in those days, the gospel spread from Jerusalem into the Roman world and beyond its borders. As we shall see, one trait that drove that success was encouragement.

We meet "Barnabas," a Cypriot Jew named Joseph, in Acts 4:36–37 when he sells a plot of land and donates the money to the apostles. We are told the apostles nickname him "Son of Encouragement" or "Son of Exhortation." This is a paraphrase of the probable meaning, "Son of a Prophet" (Aramaic: bar="son of;" nebi="prophet," a person who speaks for God). "Son of" denotes one who possesses the trait that follows.

#### Encourage acceptance.

**(9:26–28)**

Read 9:1–31 for context. Barnabas puts all of these meanings into practice when he encourages the Jerusalem disciples to accept Saul as a fellow believer. They don't trust Saul, despite the reports of his experience of the risen Lord and despite the attempt on his life in Damascus. We don't know why Barnabas is convinced of Saul's authenticity. We do know, however, that Barnabas is acting like Jesus, who persuaded Ananias to help the blinded Paul in verses 15 and 16. Barnabas is willing to take a risk and, on his own, confirm what God has done in Saul's life.

For his part, as he did in Damascus, Saul preaches boldly in Jerusalem. The disciples send him to

his hometown of Tarsus when his life is threatened again.

#### Encourage growth. (11:21–24)

Begin reading at 11:1. The church in Jerusalem sends Barnabas north to Antioch, maybe because, like some who are successfully preaching there, he too is from Cyprus. In verse 23, as his nickname suggests, Barnabas "encouraged" or "exhorted" those in Antioch to faithfully proclaim the Lord Jesus, despite the possibility of persecution. As a result, "a great many people were brought to the Lord."

Notice that Barnabas is described as "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith." Like many in the Book of Acts, he does not do God's work only because of innate traits. He submits his will to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

#### Encourage service. (11:25–26)

Having spoken on Saul's behalf in Jerusalem, Barnabas now collects Saul from Tarsus and brings him to Antioch, where the two disciples work for a year. One could argue that Barnabas' faithful encouragement is one of the reasons that Antioch became a hub of the Pauline mission.

According to Acts, Saul and Barnabas first travel from Antioch south to Judea, to deliver a monetary offering to believers suffering during a famine (27–30). Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, the first missionary journey also launches from Antioch (13:1–3) as do the second and third (15:3–41; 18:22–23).

Like love, encouragement/exhortation comes from God, and God multiplies its effects. Hence, it is not up to those who seem to have the gift of encouragement to do all the encouraging. As the world deals with COVID-19, can you think of a person or a ministry that needs your encouragement? Do not hesitate to encourage by word or by gift. As this Son of Encouragement did so long ago, let us submit to the Holy Spirit's guidance. Let us, likewise, pray for those whom we encourage. 🌈



# Media reviews

**ENTERTAINERS**

## How to support performers, artists during entertainment shutdown

By Tracy Riggs  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

**W**e usually take them for granted ... the performers, the entertainers, the artists who show us a different way of seeing the world. We may even complain about ticket prices or how their shows push “merch” (merchandise) and how expensive it is. But we love them and can’t imagine a world without their talents.

When social isolation restrictions first came into play to stop the spread of COVID-19 in the U.S., these “non-essential” shows were some of the first things to go, with many entertainers canceling shows until at least mid-May.

But what has it been like for those whose bills get paid by sharing their talents in front of crowds and how have they also been affected in non-monetary ways?

Chonda Pierce, a comedian known as the “Queen of Clean,” said, “Mandated social distancing, lockdowns and other life-altering changes caused by the coronavirus have folks stressed, depressed and struggling with faith in God.

“People could use some laughs and I want to spread around much-needed hope,” she said.

“Over the years, laughter has been good medicine that has helped me navigate personal pain, tragedy, grief and depression.”

Pierce — who hosted a comedy event on Facebook Live called “The Quarantined Comics” — is just one of many live entertainers who are finding creative ways to help others during this time.

Jesse Joyner, speaker and jug-

gler, taught a live juggling class on Facebook, is hosting his church’s live online Kid’s Club twice a week, and is streaming after-dinner piano dance parties from his living room.

“It’s actually been pretty therapeutic for me during this challenging time,” Joyner noted.

### A bit of anxiety relief

Aaron Wilburn, songwriter and comedian, presented a live stream concert on April 27 with guest Lee Black.

Magician David Garrard has been “posting a simple trick each day on social media and following up the next day with the explanation ... hoping to provide a little relief from the fear and anxiety folks are experiencing.” He also recorded “Kentucky Performing Arts at Home” with friends and Vegas superstars, Lance Burton and Mac King.

“There are surely folks who think of what we do as unnecessary and a frill — something easily done without,” Garrard said. “And there is some truth in that sentiment. At the same time, entertainers can bring laughter and joy that, to quote my mentor and friend, the late Grady Nutt, can be ‘the hand of God on the shoulder of a troubled world.’”

And while the current restrictions allow the entertainers to spend more time with family and work on new projects, being off the stage and off the road is hard, they say.

Robbie Maxwell of New Ground Ministries, a gospel music trio, said, “It has been a huge change — this is what we have known for over 25 years. Singing is our lifestyle.”

Joyner said, “It’s a challenge, but



David Garrard

Photo by Michael Messing

I will say this: The Lord has always provided. He is providing now, and He will provide in the future,

“Your Father knows that you need them. But seek His kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well” (Luke 12:30–31).

“The Lord is reminding me to put Him and His kingdom first,” Joyner said. “Any lost income is just money. And the Lord will provide for our every need.”

Garrard added, “This is one of those times when you find out if you believe what you say you believe.”

### ‘God is always with us’

“For years I have told boys and girls (and anyone else who would listen) that no matter what happens to us or around us, God is always with us. We are simply trying to lean and live into that amazing promise of God’s presence.”

Wilburn said, “I learned as a child in Alabama when the storms came, the rain fell, and the lightning and thunder showed its power that I could sleep when mom and

dad told me it will be alright.

“I have learned in the years I have lived, that my Lord has said, ‘I am with you always’ ... so I can rest,” he said. “It will be alright.

“I have determined not to spend a lot of time worrying, knowing I have no control over this situation,” Wilburn noted. “God has been my source, and will be.”

Maxwell offered a similar message of not letting the situation get her down: “We will be back soon — stronger than ever — carrying His Word in song. I can’t wait.”

## Ideas for helping entertainers weather COVID-19 restrictions

- ▶ Encourage them.
- ▶ Sign up for online classes.
- ▶ Purchase vouchers for future shows.
- ▶ Buy merchandise.

Source: Jesse Joyner



Chonda Pierce

Photo courtesy of Chonda Pierce

# Live out your faith

## IMB workers in Taiwan make gospel conversations, evangelism a family activity

By Stella McMillian  
International Mission Board

**T**hough it seems like the COVID-19 epidemic has brought much of the world to a standstill, God is always at work. Believers everywhere are finding ways to love and serve those around them, including two International Mission Board (IMB) families in East Asia who recently saw God give their children opportunities to boldly proclaim the gospel.

Taiwan, where they serve, has so far been able to stem the spread of COVID-19 without resorting to quarantines or lockdowns like many other countries. Recently, IMB personnel were able to gather for an evangelism training.

After the training, 10-year-old Holly was ready to practice what she'd learned. Her family headed to a local park alongside the Daltons, another family from the training, to see who God might place in their path.

### Sharing truth

Holly had never shared the gospel before, and she felt nervous as her dad, Bill, started a conversation with an elderly man they met.

The man seemed kind and he said he'd like to hear what Holly had to share. So she began to explain the gospel.

He soon stopped her and called to his wife, "Come over here! You should hear this!" When his wife joined them, he asked Holly to start

from the beginning again. This time, Holly explained the gospel in full.

When she finished, her dad helped her answer their questions. He asked the couple if they'd ever heard what Holly had shared — the truth that they were sinners in need of a Savior, and God had sent His son, Jesus, to be that Savior.

### 'God's kingdom'

"No. No one's ever shared this with me before," the man responded. "So, what do we do now?"

"You have to put your whole faith in Jesus, and you have to follow Him," Holly responded.

The couple wasn't ready to make a decision, but the man reached out to Bill again several days later. He told Bill that even before they met in the park, he'd felt compelled to consider things he'd brushed aside as a younger man. He was once again thinking about the meaning of life and his eternal destiny. Holly's willingness to boldly share the gospel with him confirmed he needed to keep seeking truth.

Holly said that even though sharing her faith made her nervous, God taught her He would always help her.

"[God taught me] that Jesus is with you, and that you don't need to be afraid," she said. "We're trying to get more people into God's kingdom, and that's a good thing."

Though the man hasn't decided to follow Christ yet, Bill said he



Chiang Kai Shek Memorial in Taipei, Taiwan

IMB photo

was still encouraged to see God open doors.

"It was just simply encouraging to us to see that God was working in the kids and He was working in the city," Bill said. "It was a good reminder that there are people of peace God is preparing."

The Daltons, the family that joined Holly's family in the park, was similarly encouraged to see their children living out their faith.

Eleven-year-old Spencer, their oldest son, partnered with Holly's younger brother, Caden, for the afternoon. Spencer did most of the talking, while 7-year-old Caden helped by distributing informational cards and always adding "Jesus loves you."

At the training, everyone had been encouraged to try and share the gospel with at least one person. Caden and Spencer set their own goal of sharing with at least five people. Together they shared with 10 different people before the day was over. Two made professions of faith.

Jan, Spencer's mom, said she was especially encouraged to see how the time and energy they put into

language and cultural acquisition had prepared their kids to take part in ministry.

"They were ready and eager," said Jan. "So often we have this picture in our heads of the type of person we want to share with, but they didn't. If anyone wanted to listen, they would share."

As Christian workers in East Asia, both families appreciate opportunities to minister together with their kids. Specifically, Jan said she has a goal of raising her children to "serve the Lord with joy and gladness" wherever life takes them.

### Open doors for gospel

Though serving the Lord certainly looks different than anyone could have expected in this current season, Jan said she was thankful her family continues to have opportunities to love and serve East Asians.

The Great Commission isn't limited by age and can't be disrupted by a global pandemic. No matter what, God will continue to open doors for the gospel to go forth.

*EDITOR'S NOTE — Names have been changed for security reasons.*

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Bill  
IMB worker

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