



The Alabama Baptist

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May 7, 2020

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

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Photo courtesy of Shellyn Poole

Children participate in sack races during recreation time at VBS last year at The Church at Shelby Crossings, Calera.

'WORTH *the effort*'

Churches face VBS questions as summer approaches

By Lanell Downs Smith
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

CCOVID-19 meeting restrictions have left Alabama Baptist churches to face the difficult decision of whether to reschedule, postpone, cancel or restructure their Vacation Bible School programs.

Joel Tucker, minister of students, technology and events at First Baptist Church, Headland, said the decision to cancel their VBS scheduled for May 31–June 4 was based on

the uncertainty of what sized groups Alabama would permit by the end of May, the short time remaining to prepare, the health risk posed to volunteers and the financial costs of implementing the program.

'Hot topic'

"VBS is a hot topic for conversation right now among many children's pastors and VBS directors," said Patty Burns, VBS strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. "Anything and

everything you can imagine has been mentioned with most agreeing that VBS is worth the effort and they will find a way to make it happen this year."

According to Burns, churches have a variety of options to consider, including late summer, fall or winter VBS, neighborhood or backyard events, drive-thru Bible school and consecutive Sunday or Wednesday VBS programs.

(See 'Variety' page 17)

Mother's Day
IS MAY 10.

Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.

She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.

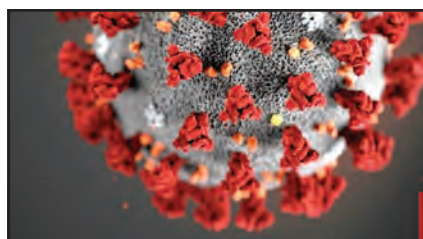
Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:

"Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all."

Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

PROVERBS 31:25-30

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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South Alabama BCM receives gift after article appears in TAB

Back in January when Beth Gardner said “yes” to picking up some new international students at the airport, she couldn’t have imagined where the semester would take her.

She couldn’t have imagined that rounding up pillows and blankets for their dorm rooms would lay the foundation for some deep relationships.

She couldn’t have imagined just how much her Baptist Campus Ministries students at the University of South Alabama would invest in incorporating those international students into their lives.

And she couldn’t have imagined some of the conversations that would happen when those international students had to return home early because of coronavirus.

Some got a Bible for the first time.

‘Live on mission’

Others are now participating in Bible studies via Zoom from their home countries.

Their time in Alabama ended faster than Gardner expected, and though it was disappointing, she said God is still at work in their lives — and it reminded her of the urgency of the gospel.

“We have to be intentional and live our lives on mission every day,” she said.

“It is amazing how giving a stu-

dent a ride to the store or having a student in your home for a meal can make such a deep impact on his or her life and even on the lives of his or her parents who can relax and know that their child is being cared for.”

Unexpected blessing

Gardner is now working to prepare for next semester’s international students, something she said has been made easier since

the story on her BCM’s ministry ran in the Feb. 20, 2020, issue of *The Alabama Baptist*.

Soon after that — the same day she talked with the university’s outreach ambassador in the study abroad program to start working on plans for gift baskets for new international students — she received an

unexpected blessing.

“The same day she contacted me ... asking me how we would fund these baskets is the same day I received an email from a church telling me about how they had read the article in *TAB* and they wanted to send us a check to help provide for the international students,” Gardner said.

“When I met with [outreach ambassador] and she mentioned that she could ask some businesses for donations, I told her that we didn’t need to worry about the money to purchase the items because a church had generously given a check to help meet these needs.” (Grace Thornton)



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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—Correction for extension centers article—

In the April 30, 2020, issue of *TAB*, the New Orleans Seminary extension center in Rainsville, Alabama, was accidentally omitted from the article noting the seminary’s list of seven centers set to close at the end of this year. The seminary communications director apologizes for the error.



MY RASHIONALE

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

jrash@thealabamabaptist.org
[@RashionalThts](https://www.instagram.com/RashionalThts)



Willing spirit, observation skills needed to learn best practices

I love to learn from the best practices of others. Sometimes the education takes place throughout a span of time watching the other person work and live life. Other times, it comes through a conversation or mutual experience.

No matter how the opportunity arises, it requires a bit of humility to submit to the mentor — even when the person doesn't realize he or she is serving in a mentor-type role.

And an ability to listen well, watch closely and connect dots makes all the difference.

Applying what others have discovered through their personal journey, sometimes the hard way, really can save the rest of us a lot of time, energy and frustrations.

For instance, my predecessor here at TAB Media, Bob Terry taught me many things during our 24 years serving together.

A recent situation brought one of those lessons back to the surface for me as I sought to understand the status of an existing project being managed by one of our team members.

I forgot to lead with the phrase he taught me: "My questions are for clarifying purposes, to help me understand. They are not an attack or meant to come across as scolding."

The difference in how the rest of the conversation goes when that phrase is included should keep me on my toes to always remember it.

A recent conversation with Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State

Board of Missions, spurred me to implement a practice he uses: "What's the next best thing to do? What do I need to do today to keep us moving forward?"

Simple yet profound.

Dr. Lance also has an amazing ability to take an extremely complex matter, boil it down to the bottom line and explain it in simple, easy-to-understand terms.

How often do we overcomplicate matters and end up causing confusion and, many times, unnecessary drama rather than staying calm, carefully dissect-

ing the information and outlining the next steps to take in a simple, straightforward manner?

And how often do change and unknown circumstances prevent us from taking even the simplest steps forward?

When Sandy Wisdom-Martin, executive director of national WMU, shared with us how WMU leaders are weathering the current COVID-19 crisis, I wondered how many times I resist God rather than running toward Him in anticipation of what He is going to do.

Her comment says it all: "It's

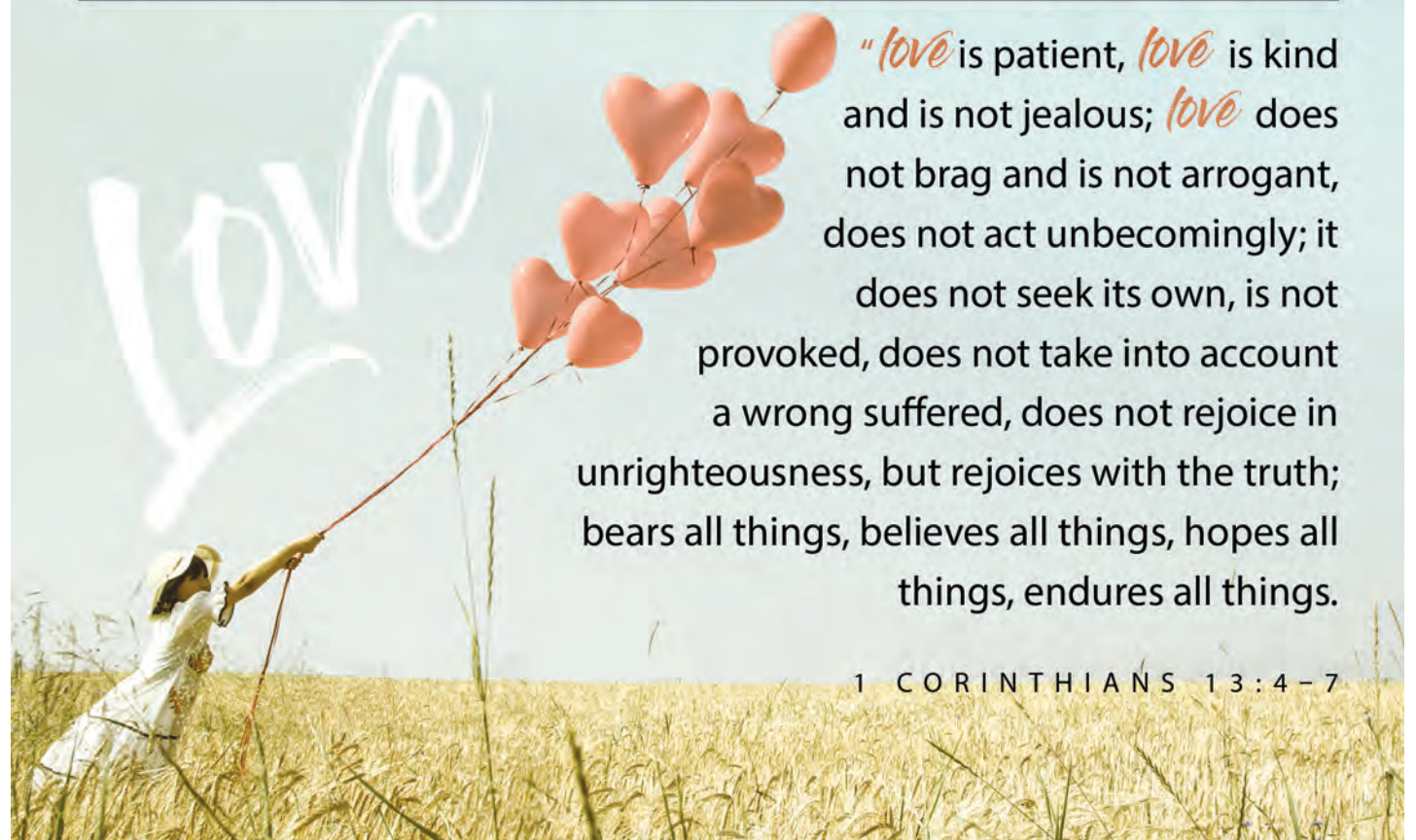
humbling to think God entrusted us with this sacred season. I know we will never go back to 'normal.' I pray daily God will reveal the 'new' and we will run toward it."

These are three recent examples of how I learned from others in less than a week's time. If I had written down every rich nugget I've scooped up from others along the way, then I could more than fill an entire issue of TAB.

And along with all the mentors, I'm also blessed to have a mom and dad who have always poured so much into me.✝

RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

Read the following Scripture through once as is. Then read it a second time and replace the word *love* with *your name*. At the conclusion, evaluate how well you are doing in representing love to the world.



"*love* is patient, *love* is kind and is not jealous; *love* does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

Your Voice



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

Recovered COVID-19 patient reflects on experience, future

By **Tommy Shapard**

Minister of Music and Worship, Jacksonville, Fla.

For some, like me, COVID-19 is personal. It almost killed me.

On the night of March 25, I was hospitalized. The admitting doctor informed me that I had the worst COVID lungs she had seen to date. My situation was grave.

Unsuccessful calls by the doctor to my wife at 4:30 a.m. eventually led me to record brief videos for family and friends, sending them personal words of love and gratitude.

I accepted the realization that my life was now in the hands of brilliant doctors and nurses as well as in the arms of God who was already present, welcoming me, holding me and staying with me to see me through to the other side.

I received incredible medical care

that day, which prevented the use of the ventilator. In less than 24 hours, I was stabilized and moved to recovery. My admitting doctor later informed me, “You are an absolute miracle case.”

As a follower of Jesus, the Great Shepherd who healed the sick and protected the poor, I have the responsibility to frame this global health crisis in a manner that better reflects a pastoral concern for everyone who is hurting and struggling. I believe people of faith have an obligation to offer comfort and hope in the midst of mounting grief, fear and need.

In Luke, while eating a meal with the local outcasts, Jesus pushes back in response to the self-righteous Pharisees and scribes who questioned His association with a group of despised individuals.

To illustrate a radical kind of at-

tention to the marginalized few, He tells two parables about a singular lost sheep and one lost coin, underscoring the merciful reach of God.

Jesus speaks about a kind of agape love in the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:3–6) that shows compassion on the part of the shepherd who understands his responsibility to protect the vulnerable one. The shepherd takes a calculated risk, leaving behind the larger herd of 99. In the parable of the lost coin (Luke 15:8–10), the woman does everything possible to restore her purse of coins, working diligently and doing whatever it takes to find one coin.

In both parables, Jesus aims to re-focus the Pharisees and the scribes on the importance of the amount of attention given to the disoriented and the missing, the few and the least valuable.

The shepherd and the woman did not display a spirit of dismissal, judgment or scorn. Instead, Jesus emphasizes their intense devotion to what others might downplay or dismiss — a focused response grounded in love and mercy requiring the larger group to wait and remain vulnerable.

Jesus concludes that when this kind of difficult, surgical work occurs, the community and all of heaven rejoice.

If we are called then to live out and enact the same kind of work that shines God’s love in this world, should we, too, not commit ourselves to the pastoral work for the

small percentage of people who become seriously ill due to the coronavirus? Should we not take every measure to protect them from the brunt of the virus?

Simultaneously, should we not also find ways to help those who have a lost coin, who now hunger and have little or no income? Should we not advocate for financial assistance and loan forgiveness for the the small business owner and the unemployed during this worldwide crisis? Should our faith communities not search for ways to contribute to assisting individuals and nonprofits that are working on behalf of our poorest and most vulnerable neighbors?

Radical times call for radical measures. For Christians, COVID-19 should be first and foremost an issue that calls for responses that are “both/and,” not “either/or.”

For starters, let us refuse to engage in divisive rhetoric or to spread false information. Let us not diminish the dangers of the virus. Let us not ignore a financial crisis that is crippling the lives of fellow citizens.

We need to be examples of how people of differing perspectives can work together in order to fight for the sick and their families and to protect and support the most vulnerable among us.

When we do, we will be able to say, “Rejoice with us. We have found each other.”

EDITOR’S NOTE — To read Shapard’s full article and learn more about his experience with COVID-19, go to tabonline.org/covid-reflection.

Letters to the Editor

When so many areas of our lives are “discontinued” and put on hold, it is comforting and familiar to receive my valuable *The Alabama Baptist* paper each week.

Teresa Noell
Anniston, Ala.

It is always encouraging to see what additional aspects of coverage on so many meaningful people, events and situations

are found in each and every edition of *TAB*. I have yet to be disappointed and am always appreciative of the combined efforts of the staff to set forth in each edition such qualitative output.

Gratitude only consists of nine letters, but their combination spells a ton of appreciation from this reader!

Morris Murray Jr.
Jasper, Ala.

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“Tell the story of what God is doing.”

RONNIE FLOYD

President and CEO of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee

The Bible says that a universe groaning under a curse doesn't seem to make any sense to us (Heb. 2:8). It's only when we look to Christ, crucified and returning, that we can see the Word that holds everything together (Col. 1:17).

Russell Moore
President, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, SBC

I hate COVID-19. But I am unsure about how much I dislike what it has done for the Church. We are learning more about ourselves. Christians are growing. Faith is flourishing. In reality, nothing is lost.

Kevin Parker, Editor
The Baptist New Mexican

I don't have all the words of pastors or church leaders, but I do believe the simple sign I saw in a Burger King drive thru: "It will be okay!" My prayer is that this will humble us for the future, and our compassion for others will not fade away.

David Willis
Montgomery, Ala.

Obviously, the virus has shattered a lot of lives, and left many others weakened and mourning. But it will be sometime before we all process the enormity of what is happening right now.

For some people, the Great Lockdown is simply going to be a momentary interruption in their lives

— an interesting time that will maybe inspire some heartwarming stories and shared moments.

For many others, it will be the moment everything spiraled out of control, and they will spend the rest of their lives lamenting what they lost. They were so close to ... whatever.

And for still others, it will be the moment everything clicked. Whatever their plans were before, suddenly something has opened up that might never have occurred to them in their past lives, and a new world suddenly breaks into view.

Hoping you're all well and full of anticipation.

William Thornton
Southside, Ala.

Your generosity is at work in our community! Last night, some of our Change Maker volunteers were able to bring dinner to the staff working on the COVID-19 floor of Jackson Hospital [Montgomery]. Thank you to our volunteers for stepping in to serve and thank you for giving to make it happen.

Vaughn Forest Church
via Twitter

My grandmother spent a month with me some years ago.

We were about to move to Texas to attend Southwestern Seminary, and she was concerned about what we would have to eat.

We bought a bushel of apples and made apple pies, but she also taught me to can apples for pies later on.

I was about to discard the peels after we made apple butter and apple jelly when she stopped me and said we'd boil those and make apple juice.

We used everything but the seeds and stems, and she probably would have liked to have planted those.

I thought at the time that this was because she came up during the depression days where everything counted.

That memory has come to my mind several times over these last weeks during quarantine.

What we are experiencing I believe and hope will remind us how fortunate and blessed we have been all our lives.

Technology enables us now to work, attend school and even worship services and stay in touch with friends and loved ones.

We can order groceries, pay our bills and even speak to a doctor via teleconference without leaving home.

May God give us all wisdom and a greater appreciation for all our blessings.

Teresa Maddox
Millbrook, Ala.

From the *Twitterverse*

@makingyourDAYna

"If you want a safe, carefree life, stay away from Jesus."
#SecretChurch20

@haines_matt

These #SecretChurch20 crashes help us in a small way to understand the hunger that some of our brothers and sisters in persecuted contexts have for God's word and don't have the access we do here.

@myarnell

"The community of faith does not need brilliant personalities but faithful servants of Jesus and of one another." — Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Life Together"

@pastorjaycbc

To have peace in the midst of a pandemic, we must not be dull of hearing. We must not hear God's

voice through His Word in unbelief. Father, help us grow beyond the ABCs of the Christian faith.

@TrevinWax

I love the psalms of ascent. They're brief — but like little bits of dynamite that blow up our self-centered worlds and lift our eyes to God and His purposes.

@baptistpress

"We need to think and plan carefully so we don't endanger people simply because we let our guard down and believe that the coronavirus crisis had passed."
— @kenbraddy

@bryantwright

Today I am praying for government leaders by name, from the president to county officials in the executive, judicial and legislative

branches. They need our prayers. Whatever they decide in navigating COVID-19 brings criticism and second guessing. Please pray for God's wisdom and strength for them.

@davesnyder82

Time may hurt you. People may hurt you. Seasons may hurt you. Yet, remember the joy of Jesus. He is and will always be the perfect remedy for your pain. Allow yourself to sleep well tonight, knowing that you are loved by the glorious and risen King.

@trillianewbell

I want the faith and peace of Daniel ... steadfast in prayer. I read Daniel 6 tonight and was unexpectedly moved to tears. The king's decree made me worship. Thought I'd share just in case anyone else would be encouraged by it. You won't regret rereading these familiar verses.

Tips for protecting

YOUR SMALL BUSINESS



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Thinking positively, acting realistically important for moving through pandemic

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

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted business leaders across the country in unprecedented ways, but the crisis is going to make them stronger, according to finance expert and radio host Dave Ramsey.

Ramsey and fellow financial commentators Daniel Tardy and Ken Coleman recently offered economic tips and encouragement specifically to small business leaders struggling to stay afloat amid the coronavirus crisis that has forced many into quarantine.

For small business leaders, Ramsey said in his radio show, “the great news is you will never again return to the same shape you were before because you’re going to be bigger, think bigger and be better than you’ve ever been.”

‘Learn to love’

“You’re going to learn how to love your people deeper than you ever have,” said Ramsey, CEO of Ramsey Solutions and author of “Financial Peace University.”

“You’re going to learn how to fight more than you ever fought. You’re going to learn how to scratch and pivot and take something to the market quickly and easily from work-at-home people,” he said.

Tardy, who is executive vice president of business and leadership for Ramsey Solutions, acknowledged that may not mean much right now to small business leaders who are going out of business or having to lay off employees.

Some leaders, he said, may be thinking, “that’s great for all of the

people whose businesses are going to survive this, [but] we’re having to shut this thing down.”

For those leaders, Tardy acknowledged it will take time, but they’ll eventually rebound after this difficult season.

Your purpose

“Here’s the thing, you might lose your business. You might lose some team members,” he said. “Your business might look very different on the other side of this, but you’re still going to be here. And you’re going to figure out how to relaunch, how to rebuild, how to come back stronger.”

“Your purpose is who you are and what God put you on this planet to do,” Tardy noted. “Your platform has been shaken, but just like when a tornado comes through a city and knocks down houses, the city doesn’t go, ‘Well let’s stop putting houses back there.’ You’re going to come back.”

Ken Coleman, best-selling author and radio host of the Ken Coleman Show, which is part of the Ramsey Network, said the best way for leaders to combat this complicated crisis is to identify what they can and can’t control.

“The best way to solve complexity is with simplicity,” he said. “And it looks really gnarly, but you’ve got

to put everything out on the white board and everything on the tables and say, ‘What can I control?’”

This means they must look at the most urgent decisions to protect their business — and that includes making “gut-wrenching” decisions about their team. He also cautioned business leaders against making decisions that could later hurt their business.

While having to lay off team members is “the hardest part of leadership,” Coleman said, “don’t get sucked into the temptation of taking a loan that could hurt you long term and actually threaten the business viability long term.”

And that may mean “taking a hit to your heart by having to make some tough decisions about your people in order to put you in a position where you can reopen,” he said. “And I think that’s a really tough situation right now.”

Over-communication with your team is important, Ramsey noted.

‘Unbelievably generous’

“Treat them like adults,” he said. “They want to know the truth, everything that is going on ... really what’s going on. They’re not children. You don’t have to hide news from them.”

And when you do this, he noted, you’ll be surprised at how “unbe-

lievably generous they are if you over-communicate with them.

“The team will all jump in together and surprise you with their generosity for each other to get you through your cash crunch if you get to that point,” said Ramsey, who said some of his leaders have offered to skip a paycheck if necessary. “We are not to that point. But we’re already emotionally preparing everyone.”

Tardy added, “the team will act like family if you treat them like a family.”

Be there for customers

“And as a family, hey, we’re going to win together and we’re going to lose together,” he said. But leaders have to prioritize during tough economic times.

“You’ve got to be thinking about how I can keep revenue going,” he said. “That’s the oxygen to your business. How can I keep the team morale up? How can I communicate with the team, and how do we get through this with the entire team?”

This means thinking about your critical expenses and “tightening your belt” where you can, he said.

Business leaders should also focus on the needs of their customers and look for ways they can “show up” for them, build customer loyalty, adapt their product and find ways to add value to the situation now.

“How can you give them something that’s valuable?” Tardy said. “How can you encourage them?”

“And over the course of a year, there will be a point where that stuff will monetize,” he said. Focus on those things, and “you’re most likely going to get through this unscathed.”



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LOVE & SUPPORT

from the community

Wheelhouse Salon owners aim to serve staff amid coronavirus pandemic

By Caleb Yarbrough
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

It's hard to cut and style hair while social distancing, so no one understands the toll COVID-19 has taken on small businesses more than Johnny Grimes and his wife, Courtney, owners of Wheelhouse Salon, with three Alabama locations in Birmingham, Homewood and Huntsville and a fourth in Austin, Texas. All four locations closed in March due to the coronavirus pandemic.

While Johnny Grimes is hopeful his salons will be able to reopen soon, he is keenly aware of the daily struggles of the 60 employees who rely on Wheelhouse for their livelihoods. Three Wheelhouse locations have received federal aid to help with payroll, but Grimes said support from their patrons has been "amazing."

In response to the closing of its brick and mortar locations, Wheelhouse Salon began selling gift cards for future services at a 10% discount via its website. The salon also launched a Shopify store where patrons can support the business by purchasing various hair products online. In the Birmingham metro area, online orders can be picked up from Wheelhouse, or the salon offers free next-day delivery.

"Those are the two main ways that our community has been able to support us, and we've been overwhelmed with the community's outpouring of love and support for us," Grimes said.

The "single most important" focus right now, he said, is bringing in



Photo courtesy of Creature Builds

enough money to pay for the health insurance of Wheelhouse's staff.

"We've been closed [during the COVID-19 safe-at-home restriction period]. So essentially we're having to pay 100% for two solid months. ... Everything that we're doing from selling products to selling gift cards, for the most part, is going to paying their health insurance so that it doesn't get canceled," Grimes said.

'Survive and thrive'

David Parks, director of the Global Center at Samford University's Beeson Divinity School, was the Grimes' youth minister when he served at Crossroads Baptist Church, Hueytown, in the 1990s.

Parks remains a close friend of the couple and in a March 25 blog post,

he shared why he was "passionate about seeing Wheelhouse both survive and thrive."

"Anyone who teaches missions today, as I do, understands how important it is for us to have business owners who not only see the work itself as a gift from God but desire to use the profits (or use the business to raise funds) to bless the nations for the sake of the gospel," Parks wrote.

In addition to Parks' connection to the Grimes family, he shared his connection to P.J. Santiago, a stylist at Wheelhouse's Birmingham location and graduate of Beeson Divinity School.

"In 2012, I began working at Beeson part-time," Parks said. "My focus was raising support to return to Malaysia. P.J. was in my first mentor group that year. ... When he found out that I was raising support to return to the missions field, and that we were kind of struggling to get back to Asia, he began supporting us financially.

"Here's the thing. He was poor. How do I know? I did say he was a

seminary student, right? I actually didn't even ask him to support us. He just did it. Out of his poverty, he gave," said Parks. "I didn't forget."

Citing Wheelhouse's support of orphan and widow care organizations like Altar84 and HelpOneNow, Parks said he wants to see the business survive because of his love for missions.

'Force to be reckoned with'

"It's great when individuals give to the cause of missions, but a business that continually generates money to be used for the cause of Christ is a force to be reckoned with," Parks wrote.

"My wife and I are believers and at the heart of what we want to do is to serve people," Grimes said.

"We know that the single greatest impact that we can have in the world is the 60 people that we are around and that work for us on a daily basis. So, we are committed to taking care of their needs no matter who they are, what they believe (or) what they look like."

When it comes to meeting the spiritual needs of Wheelhouse's staff, the Grimes have committed to gently chipping away at spiritual barriers that may be keeping individuals from coming to know Christ instead of trying to bulldoze them.

"That approach takes a little bit of time. But I've also found that approach is much more effective," Grimes said.

"We're not kicking doors open. We're just going to love and serve. And we believe God will faithfully open doors." He believes when Christians actively love their neighbors, especially in trying times, God uses that to "soften hearts."

"We want to share the love and support that we get through Christ. We want to be that vessel to our people," said Grimes. ✝

For more information on Wheelhouse Salon or how to support them, visit wheelhousesalon.com.

"We want to share the love and support that we get through Christ. We want to be that vessel to our people."

Johnny Grimes
owner, Wheelhouse Salon

GUARDING AGAINST CYBERCRIME

during tax season

Phone, text, email fraud common; be cautious when dealing with personal information

By Susan Withrow Murphy
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

The coronavirus has made an impact on every part of Americans' lives in 2020, including our tax returns. Tax season has been extended by three months, creating more time and opportunity for criminals to take advantage of unsuspecting taxpayers. Guarding against cybercrime in the digital age is an ongoing battle throughout the year, but the months prior to Tax Day (now July 15) may require a little extra vigilance on our part.

"If anyone contacts you [claiming to be] from the IRS, be wary," said Richard Lindsey, certified public accountant and president at Lindsey & Waldo, an accounting firm in Mobile. "Always be skeptical."

Warning signs

Lindsey warns against "phishing" (pronounced "fishing") scams — fraudulent emails or texts that entice recipients to reveal credit card numbers, passwords or other sensitive personal information. Some texts and emails include embedded links that redirect users to a fraudulent website. Opening attachments can install what is known as malware, malicious software, including computer viruses, that steal or cause damage to data or systems when opened on your phone or computer.

"Do not click on an email that says it's from the IRS," said Lindsey.

"The IRS will never initiate contact about a bill or refund via email."

Although scammers' communications can appear extremely professional looking, careful examination will often provide telltale signs that something is "off." Look for these warning signs:

- ▶ The sender's return email address does not match the address in your email address book.

- ▶ Verify the sender's email address is legitimate. If you think the sender might have changed emails, call or initiate an email to the address you have on file to verify the sender.

- ▶ There are misspellings in a website address (URL) or incorrect grammar usage in the body of the email. We all make mistakes, but these also are red flags.

- ▶ The email contains suspicious links. Never click on a link contained in an email you are not expecting. Even if you receive an email from a familiar source, first verify the URL of an embedded link. Hover the cursor over the link without actually clicking on it to see if it matches the sender. If you aren't certain but it looks important, consider placing a phone call to someone within the organization to confirm authenticity.

- ▶ Beware of telephone phishing scams. The easiest way to avoid a



If you believe you have been the target of a scam involving your tax returns, email phishing@irs.gov.

123rf.com

phone scam is to allow a call with an unfamiliar number to go directly to voicemail. Engaging with an unknown person on a received call increases exposure to fraud. Adding important numbers to phone contacts such as insurance agents, financial services or other businesses you engage with regularly offers a heads up about who's calling.

"If you receive a phone call from the IRS, hang up the phone," said Lindsey. "If the IRS needs to communicate with you, they will first do so through postal mail."

And while it is important to be generous, be wary of giving money before doing your homework.

- ▶ Before donating to charities, learn how much of your gift actually goes toward the mission of the organization.

- ▶ Visit the charity's website to learn about the specific breakdown of the use of donations. For example, how much of the funds are used

for administration versus feeding the poor? Do they make available an IRS Form 990 to show financial accountability?

- ▶ Find reviews online where other donors have discussed specific organizations. The Federal Trade Commission recommends researching an organization to determine its viability before making a donation. Credible research sites for nonprofits include give.org, guidestar.org, charitywatch.org and charitynavigator.org.

'The more you know'

In short, Lindsey said, file your tax return as soon as possible to give scammers less time to steal personal information and create fraudulent returns; be on guard and think first before acting on emails or responding to phone calls; and do your research before contributing money to charity.

"It helps to know how scammers strike," said Lindsey. "The more you know, the more friends you could help in the future."

"If anyone contacts you [claiming to be] from the IRS, be wary. Always be skeptical."

Richard Lindsey
certified public accountant, president at Lindsey & Waldo



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Guarding

AGAINST COVID-19 SCAMS

Unlike toilet paper, no shortage of scams during coronavirus crisis

By **Martha Simmons**
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Feeling fearful, broke and lonely as a result of the current coronavirus crisis? That's just where the scammers want you.

From your personal safety to your bank accounts, your video chats with your grandchildren to your cell phone, crooks are using the emotional effects of the crisis to take advantage of unwitting victims.

A peek into this writer's email spam folder found dozens of coronavirus-related pitches sent during a two-week period attempting to strike fear in the reader's heart and snake their way into her pocketbook.

'Wide range'

Offers included free cell phones, pandemic survival kits, surgical masks, oxygen equipment, personal loans up to \$100,000, home security systems, guns, free apps to install on your cell phone and computer, and money for food and unemployment.

All one has to do to take advantage of such offers — whether originating by email, phone or social media — is to give up some personal information, click on a link, pay a small fee or trust that the purveyor of much-sought-after goods will actually ship you the stuff you just paid for with your debit or credit card. Then BAM! You've been had.

"Throughout the country, U.S.

Attorneys' Offices have received reports of individuals and businesses engaging in a wide range of fraudulent and criminal behavior," the U.S. Department of Justice reported.

Some examples include:

- ▶ Robocalls making fraudulent offers to sell respiratory masks with no intent of delivery

- ▶ Social media scams fraudulently seeking donations or claiming to provide stimulus funds if the recipient enters his or her bank account information

- ▶ Sales of counterfeit or fake testing kits, cures, 'immunity' pills and protective equipment

- ▶ Fraudulent offers for free COVID-19 testing to obtain Medicare beneficiary information that is used to submit false medical claims for unrelated, unnecessary or fictitious testing or services

- ▶ Seeking donations fraudulently for illegitimate or nonexistent charitable organizations

- ▶ Medical providers obtaining patient information for COVID-19 testing and then using that information to fraudulently bill for other tests and procedures.

To avoid being victimized, the Federal Trade Commission offers this advice:

- 1. Hang up on robocalls.** Don't press any numbers, even if the caller claims it will allow you to speak to a live operator or remove your number from call lists.

- 2. Ignore online offers for vacci-**

nations and home test kits, as there currently are no products proven to treat or prevent this virus, and no FDA-authorized home test kits.

Always fact-check

- 3. Fact-check information before you believe it or share it.** Visit "What the U.S. Government is Doing" at usa.gov/coronavirus for links to federal, state and local government agencies.

- 4. Know who you're buying from.** Online sellers may claim to have in-demand products, like cleaning, household and health and medical supplies when, in fact, they don't.

- 5. Don't click on links from sources you don't know** as they could download viruses onto your computer or device.

- 6. Don't open emails claiming to be from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or other experts.** Instead, visit the websites of the CDC and the World Health Organization for the latest information.

- 7. Do your homework when it comes to donations,** whether through charities or crowdfunding sites. Know where you are donating to. Don't let anyone rush you or convince you to offer donations

in cash, by gift card or by wiring money.

The Department of Justice is stepping up enforcement activities in the face of fraud related to the coronavirus pandemic.

"The Attorney General has directed all federal law enforcement, litigating divisions and U.S. Attorneys to coordinate and work closely with

state and local authorities to ensure that misconduct is reported as quickly as possible and that all appropriate enforcement tools are available to punish it," the DOJ stated on its website.

People who think they have been victimized by a scam or suspect an attempted fraud are urged to report it to:

- ▶ National

Center for Disaster Fraud Hotline at 866-720-5721 or email to disaster@leo.gov

- ▶ FBI at tips.fbi.gov

- ▶ For cyber scams: ic3.gov/default.aspx

Scam investigations

DOJ also is working with other federal agencies and state and local law enforcement to investigate and prosecute illegal hoarding and price-gouging in the sale of critical and scarce medical supplies, pharmaceuticals, equipment and materials. 🇺🇸



Pixabay.com

For links to more information about scams and prevention, visit tabonline.org/scams.

you can help youth find

HOPE

in this unique season

Each one of us has been impacted by the Coronavirus, and your gifts in this season are helping kids like Samantha* find the hope and help they need.

A few weeks ago, the Department of Human Resources (DHR), contacted us about needing a home for a teenage girl named Samantha. Her mother has a terminal illness and could no longer provide proper care for her. Samantha also has some special needs, and it was proving hard for DHR to find a home for her. Once we got their call and learned about Samantha, we also learned that sadly, she had been sleeping at their office for about a week. We immediately began working to find Samantha a home within our care.

YOUR GIFTS ARE HELPING PROVIDE HOMES FOR AT-RISK KIDS LIKE SAMANTHA DURING THIS UNIQUE SEASON.

That same day, she moved to one of our homes!

Our campus director there recently shared, "Samantha is thriving here. Our house parents have been great at showing her love and helping her adapt. She has immediately become part of our family." This Easter, we introduced Samantha to two new things she loved—dyeing Easter eggs and doing crafts. Her house parents have been great at giving her activities that are both fun and give her a true sense of accomplishment!

Our children and foster families are in a season like no other, but they are also in the arms of a loving Father who will carry them through.



Alabama Baptist
CHILDREN'S HOMES
& Family Ministries

**Name and photo changed for privacy purposes.*



You can help children and youth just like Samantha find stability in a loving, Christ-centered home during this unprecedented season.



CALL
(888) 720-8805



GIVE ONLINE at
alabamachild.org/give



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



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Theology in Unusual Terms

Ebenezer

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

How many of us have ever joined the singing of the hymn “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing,” voicing the part of the second stanza that says, “Here I raise mine Ebenezer; hither by Thy help I’m come” yet wondering about the meaning of this rather strange term “Ebenezer”?

Historical marker

After a successful encounter with the Philistines, the Israelites experienced God’s positive answer to Samuel’s prayer for divine help in a time of need. That answer took the form of mighty thunder that sent the Philistine army into such confusion that they retreated out of fear for what they perceived to be the anger of Israel’s God.

In the aftermath of their deliverance, Samuel placed a memorial stone as a reminder of the event. He called the name of the stone Ebenezer, saying, “Hitherto hath the Lord helped us” (1 Sam. 7:12).

The Ebenezer stone would be for Israel a perpetual reminder of a desperate time when God made the difference between defeat and victory.

The meaning attached to Samuel’s Ebenezer stone invites us to recall and reflect on times in our lives when God demonstrated His faithfulness to intervene and help.

God’s redemptive intervention and divine dealings are valued times in our own stories.

Looking back on our own Ebenezer moments, we can recount several truths about God.

When God makes the difference in life’s difficult moments, we learn something about His providences and, hopefully, about His purposefulness.

By divine providence the timing of the thunderstorm served God’s purpose of providing deliverance for His people. As has often been noted, God may not show up or act at the moment we desire, but He is always on time in keeping with His purposes.

Behind God’s timing is His unfailing faithfulness and helpfulness. Contrary to what we might be inclined to think, He is never too early nor too late in His timing. God’s actions also are guided by His loving kindness and abundant mercy.

Present trust

If we look closely enough, we can mark those times in the past when we can confess, “Hither by Thy help I’m come.” Such remembrances act as memory keys to trigger present trust.

Few things can strengthen faith more effectively than memories of an experience in which God made the difference between failure and success, emptiness and fullness, or aimlessness and purpose.✝

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.



Childhood accident provides opportunities to share hope

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

LeAnn Sanders Shelton remembers the day she lost her left arm.

She was 4, and she ran around the back of her grandmother’s house and collided tragically with her cousin on the riding lawnmower.

“Somehow I fell and was run over,” she said.

Shelton remembers throwing her arm up to cover her face. She remembers her brother helping her get lose from the mower blade. But she doesn’t remember what it felt like before then — what it felt like to have two arms.

Give hope

“Starting out it wasn’t easy,” she said. “I had to relearn everything.”

But it wasn’t long before Shelton’s determination took her bravely into her new normal. At 5, she started playing baseball on a boys’ team — her town didn’t have girls’ softball yet. Two years later, when softball arrived, she joined the team.

“From then on, I played and got in a routine I was really good at,” Shelton said. At Pickens County High School, she was a star pitcher, outfielder and a leading hitter, and in 2013, she was inducted into the Dixie Softball Hall of Fame.

She recently released her story in a book called “Red Stitches,” because she says softball helped hold her together after she lost her arm.

“I want it to give hope to anyone who has experienced a loss of any kind,” Shelton said, adding that she

hopes it will be a “lighthouse” for people looking for purpose.

“You have a purpose no matter what you’re going through,” she said. “Through having faith you’ll find that purpose.”

That message has become a ministry for Shelton, now a wife and mother of a 7-year-old son. She’s traveled around sharing it, and she’s been intentional to reach out to others she thought could use it.

When she heard about 13-year-old Bethany Hamilton — whose story was portrayed in the movie “Soul Surfer” — losing her arm in a shark attack in 2003, she got in touch with Hamilton to encourage her that everything would get better.

She also got in touch with Heaven Harris, a Sylacauga teen who lost her arm in an ATV accident in 2015, to help her relearn how to play softball with one arm.

“After she got better, she came to my house, and we practiced and practiced,” Shelton said. “She was a good pitcher and lost her right arm, so she had to relearn everything.”

Larry Shelton — her pastor at Arbor Springs Baptist Church, Reform, and a cousin by marriage — said LeAnn is the perfect person for Harris to learn from.

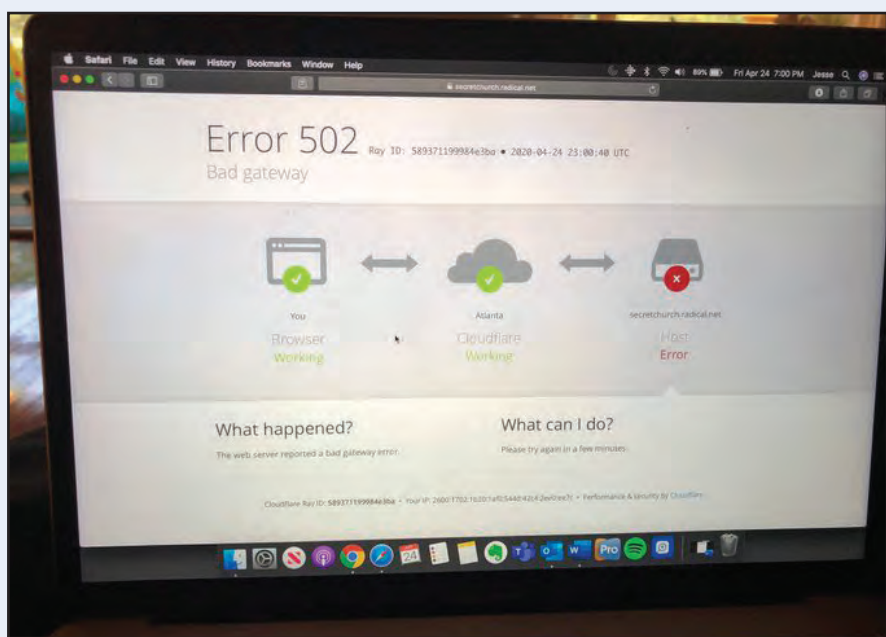
“I’ve watched her grow up and watched her determination ... on the ball field but also in life,” Larry Shelton said. “From doing woodwork to changing her son’s diapers, it’s amazing how she accomplished things by just figuring out ways to do it. She’s always had a will to never give up.”✝



LeAnn Sanders Shelton

Photo courtesy of LeAnn Sanders Shelton

3 stories you should know



Screenshot from Twitter

The April 24 simulcast of 'Secret Church' was reportedly the target of cyberattacks that prevented more than 50,000 participants worldwide from logging in, organizers said. The six-hour event focuses on Bible study and prayer for the persecuted church and is led by David Platt, pastor of McLean Bible Church in Vienna, Virginia. This year's theme was 'God, Government and the Gospel.' Information on the event and how to watch is at secretchurch.radical.net. (TAB)

Lawmakers in Poland defer abortion bill

Polish lawmakers on April 16 postponed a final decision on proposals to impose a near-total ban on abortion and criminalize school sex education in the predominantly Catholic country.

Lawmakers voted 375–68 to send the proposed abortion law to committees for further discussion, a process that could take months or even years.

Also a draft bill that would criminalize sex education in schools was sent to committees.

There was no decision on when, or whether, the draft laws would be reintroduced for a final vote.

Poland has some of Europe's strictest anti-abortion laws, only allowing pregnancy terminations after rape or incest, if the mother's life or health is threatened or if there is a fetal abnormality. (AP)

Send Relief packs care packages for workers

Health care workers and first responders in New York City and New Orleans are among the recipients of care packages packed by Send Relief volunteers and delivered to facilities in April.

Thousands of care packages containing hygiene products, snacks and handwritten notes were packed by Send Relief volunteers in Denver; Ashland, Kentucky; and Alpharetta, Georgia. The project was organized to encourage health care professionals and to demonstrate how individuals, families or local churches can serve their communities.

Send Relief provides several response guides that churches, families and individuals can use to meet needs in their communities. Those resources are available at SendRelief.org/covid-19-information. (BP)

— NEWSBRIEFS —

CARES Act updates, modifies IRS' charitable giving guidelines



As part of the CARES Act, the largest economic stimulus package in U.S. history signed into law March 27, the federal tax code was amended, allowing for additional deductions for charitable giving.

Beginning with the 2020 tax year, the Internal Revenue Service will allow "partial above the line deduction for charitable contributions," according to the text of the act. Above the line deductions are deductions subtracted from gross income to figure adjusted gross income. Below the line deductions are deductions made after AGI is figured — either itemized deductions or a standard deduction.

The new rule allows these taxpayers who utilize a standard deduction (below the AGI line) to deduct up to \$300 of eligible charitable contributions from their gross income (above the AGI line), lowering their AGI amount.

For example, this means a taxpayer may deduct up to \$300 in tithes to his or her local church while still taking the IRS' standard deduction.

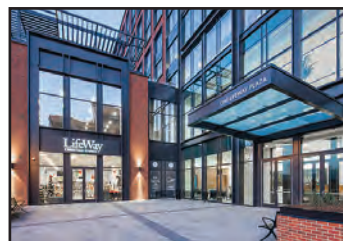
Additionally, exclusively for the 2020 tax year, the new law allows taxpayers to deduct eligible charitable contributions up to 100% of their AGI — up from the 60%, which has been the limit since 2017. (TAB)

LifeWay announces cutbacks, hiring freeze to cope with drop in programs



LifeWay Christian Resources is implementing a series of budgetary freezes, cutbacks and staff reductions in response to the economic crisis resulting from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

LifeWay CEO Ben Mandrell cited a steep and steady decline of sales — down 24% in key channels compared to the year prior — since mid-March, as well as uncertainty in the ability to host camps and events this summer as primary reasons for the actions LifeWay is taking.



LifeWay photo

"LifeWay stands to lose tens of millions of dollars of revenue that the organization would normally generate over the summer months from camps, events, VBS and ongoing curriculum sales," Mandrell said. "LifeWay is mitigating these losses as much as possible through various expense reduction plans, including staff reductions and cuts in non-employee expenses."

LifeWay will reduce staff, freeze all hiring and discretionary spending, and suspend salary increases and matching 401K contributions for all employees.

In addition to these measures, the members of the executive leadership team will give up one month's salary beginning in May.

These temporary expense reductions go into effect May 1, 2020.

In April, LifeWay announced they are exploring options for the sale of Ridgecrest Conference Center and Summer Camps in North Carolina. The cutbacks and layoffs also come a year after LifeWay announced the closing of all its retail stores. The last LifeWay store closed in November 2019.

Read more about LifeWay's announced cuts at tabonline.org/lifeway-cuts. (TAB)

— ALABAMA NEWS —

Alabama churches advised to continue online, drive-in services a little longer

Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey announced April 28 that Alabama will follow a “safer-at-home” plan through May 15, allowing many retail businesses to open at reduced capacity but recommending that churches continue online and drive-in services since prohibitions on gatherings of 10 or more people remain in place.

The new order continues social distancing requirements in nonwork situations and prohibits gatherings where participants cannot maintain consistent 6-foot distance between themselves and others. The gatherings include church services, weddings and funerals, as well as concerts, festivals and sporting events.

Ivey said getting back to worship services is “essential” and called on her pastor, Jay Wolf, of First Baptist Church, Montgomery, to report on recommendations compiled with other pastors and religious leaders.

“We simply want to honor the Lord, help and protect God’s people, and do what is right and responsible,” Wolf said in his report. “The process for reopening churches for large in-person gatherings must proceed ... in a measured fashion.”

Wolf said in-person corporate gatherings and in-person small groups are “not currently advis-

able” because “to reopen at this juncture could facilitate outbreaks of infections that could tragically harm our neighbors and set Alabama’s progress back.”

Instead, Wolf said the task force recommends using technology, innovative service projects and the “highly effective” drive-up worship services to “continue doing God’s work of connecting people.”

Close contact service providers like barbers and hair stylists, along with gyms, athletic facilities, theaters and bowling alleys, also remain closed under the safer-at-home order. Restaurants are limited to takeout, curbside service and delivery.

Alabama State Health Officer Scott Harris said the Alabama Department of Public Health strongly recommends

people wear face coverings when they’re out with people they are not related to and if they cannot maintain a 6-foot distance from others.

Ivey said employers should take reasonable steps to disinfect office spaces and allow for spacing of employees.

Find links related to the new Alabama guidelines at tabonline.org/safer-at-home. (TAB)



Screenshot

FBC Montgomery Pastor Jay Wolf addresses the media on recommendations for churches under new Alabama guidelines.



Morningstar photo

Persecuted church

30 year old in India tells others about Jesus, beaten unconscious

HYDERABAD, India — A mob of 60 animists beat a Christian man unconscious March 12 in India, reportedly for telling others about Jesus Christ.

The brutal attack, in Kodalmetla village in the eastern state of Odisha, left 30-year-old Kama Sodi in a coma. It was the second attack on his family. Animists, who worship gods of their tribal religion, at-

tacked Sodi and his wife, Bhimeshwari, the previous night as they prayed with their children, ages 3 and 6. Attackers vowed to kill the family and told

Sodi they would spare his life if he renounced Jesus. Sodi refused.

A local pastor said villagers were upset because some community members became Christians after Sodi told them about Jesus.

Sodi’s pastor helped arrange for his treatment at a government hospital. Doctors said he might not recover, but his wife said “by God’s grace” Sodi awoke two days later.

India ranks No. 10 on Open Doors’ 2020 World Watch List of countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. (MS)

— NEWSBRIEFS —

SBOM releases guide for churches as they prepare to reopen campuses



The Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions has released a guide to help churches transition their worship services back to in-person gatherings as smoothly as possible when the time comes.

The 10-page downloadable resource, also available online, outlines five key areas for consideration (facilities, leadership, worship, ministries and finances), along with questions to consider and possible solutions to common concerns related to those five areas.

“Extra care must be given to make people feel comfortable after this time of stay-at-home orders and continued social distancing,” the introduction to the online document states. “Added precautions should be taken to ease the worries and concerns that our people will have.

“Doing all you can in advance will show your

concern and care for your congregation and the community. Remember to follow the guidelines of federal, state and local leaders and agencies as you reopen your facilities.”

As the national discussion surrounding reopening public life ramped up in late April, a top concern of many churches in this season is caring well for senior adults, one of the populations most vulnerable to COVID-19, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Aaron Meraz, director of GuideStone Financial Resources’ Mission:Dignity program said almost one-third of Southern Baptist church attendees are senior adults above the age of 65, as are many teachers and volunteers.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott has suggested churches should “strongly encourage” the at-risk population to participate remotely and that churches should “designate an area inside the facility reserved for the at-risk population or offer a service for at-risk population attendees only.”

Mark Dooley, state director of evangelism for the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware, said “each situation is going to be unique,” and senior adults should be given room to make the decision they are most comfortable with. (TAB, BP)



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News near you

SALEM-TROY ASSOCIATION

► **Ross Lankford** is the new pastor of **First Baptist Church, Troy.**

He preached his first sermon as pastor via livestream on March 22. He previously spent 14 years as associate pastor at First Baptist Church, Pensacola, Florida. Before moving to Florida, he served at Fultondale First Baptist Church for a total of 13 years — first as student minister and later as pastor. Lankford holds degrees from Samford University and Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham. He and his wife, Jeanna, have two children. ✝



LANKFORD

'Practical & relevant'

Virtual disciple-making forum 'encourages and equips' believers to spread gospel

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

What do cauliflower, podcasting and Amazon Prime have in common — and how does the answer affect disciple making?

Those were the first questions Daniel Im posed to the participants of the state's first Virtual Disciple-Making Forum held April 27–28 via Zoom.

"These three things are examples of how quickly things are shifting in our society today," said Im, author of "No Silver Bullets" and senior associate pastor at Beulah Alliance Church, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Cauliflower has become so popular that in a short span of time, Green Giant went from harvesting five acres of cauliflower a week to 30 acres of cauliflower a week. And several years ago, podcasting wasn't widespread, and neither was Prime membership — but now many American households are subscribers to both.

Path of freedom

In a world that's changing, it's important to determine between fads and the realities that are sticking around, Im said. One reality he thinks won't change anytime soon is the gig economy — the fact that 35% of the nation now earns money through self-employment or a side hustle.

"The gig economy promises a life of freedom and flexibility," he said.

That reality matters to disciple making, Im said. For example, people who want control of their lives

are reminded in times like the COVID-19 crisis that they aren't in control, and they will hear with different ears what it means to have the peace of Christ holding their lives in His hands.

Im talked about how the gig economy, while offering opportunity, can speak lies to those who work in it. It tells them that if they'll just work a few more hours or sell a few more things,

they can have what they want.

"It's a grind and hustle to keep up," Im said. "It's a fool's game because you're never going to catch up. Only following Jesus, that's the path of true freedom."

The forum, co-sponsored by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, featured Im along with Ken Adams, lead pastor at Crossroads Church in Newnan, Georgia, and founder/director of Impact Discipleship Ministries, and Scott Kindig, pastor of Kingdom Initiatives at Community Bible Fellowship in San Antonio, Texas.

All three men had been slated to speak at the state's first disciple-making conference April 27–28, but the conference was moved to September 28–29 when social distancing measures were put in place in light of COVID-19.

Robert Mullins, pastor of Crossroads Community Church, Elmore, said he and the rest of the Disciple-Making Ministries of Alabama team decided it work to also offer an online forum on the original dates.

"We had the dates on the

calendar and the relationships with the speaker/leaders, so we decided to see if they would be interested in having the Virtual Disciple-Making Forum," he said. "They all agreed, and the results were fantastic. We are so glad we went ahead with doing the forum digitally on Zoom."

Razor focus

Mullins said he thought the forum was "practical and relevant."

"The speakers all challenged us to examine our lives and ask the question, 'Are we making disciples like Jesus commanded?' The Q&A portions of the forum were specifically helpful in the fact that the participants were able to interact and ask specific disciple-making questions of the leaders," he said.

"The information given allowed people to walk away from the forum encouraged and equipped."

During his session, Adams encouraged participants to get razor-focused on their main purpose. In the midst of COVID-19, "the mission of making disciples has not been postponed, it has not been shut down," he said.

Disciple makers should learn from Jesus, who never got derailed or detoured by the things happening around Him, he said. "You have to make the Great Commission a priority. You can live your life by pressure or priority. Decide that you want to live your life by the priority of the mission."

In this season, look for people who are hungry — "guys who have a desire to want to grow," he said.

"Then carve out the time in your own life to spend time with them."

Kindig said when disciple makers follow Jesus' pattern, they will begin to see generations of disciples coming behind them.

"I know we can't walk around with 12 people, but you can take the people around you," he said.

It's important to pass them information, but it's also vital to get to know them and care for them emotionally, show them love and walk with them as they learn to go out and replicate that, Kindig said.

In many ways, though there are challenges, COVID-19 offers new opportunities to do that, he said.

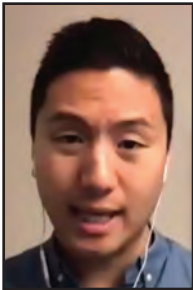
"I'm able to get people in (discipleship) huddles now

that I was never able to before because they were too busy," Kindig said.

Being able to meet on Zoom also makes it possible to redeem a block of time that before would've required a two-way commute to meet up with someone. And it allows discipleship of parents who might be able to meet virtually from their home after their children are in bed, he said.

"I think God has given this to us as a gift," Kindig said. "We have something that's multipliable and scalable, and I think we need to see this as a gift from Jesus."

The Alabama Baptist Discipleship Conference in September will feature the same three speakers. For more information, visit aldiscipleshipconference.com.



IM



ADAMS



KINDIG

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Church 'watches God move' after posting livestream in wrong place

Kyle Johnson said even though he's in his mid 30s, his knowledge of Facebook Live was still limited when his church moved online in March.

"I've never done much with it," said Johnson, pastor of Union Hill Baptist Church, Cottonwood.

The day he got on Facebook to launch his first livestreamed daily devotional, he thought he was posting it in his church's group, which wasn't public. But turns out he was posting it on his personal page, and as he realized his mistake, he also realized something else — it was reaching a much broader group of people.

New faith

"I was amazed by the amount of people I knew, [some] who have in the past really shut down any gospel conversation I tried to have with them," Johnson said, noting that he kept on posting the devo-

tionals there from then on. "They started watching, and it just kind of blew up in a week's time."

At the end of that week, five people had professed new faith in Christ, and several families had asked to join the church.

"God took something that seemed like just a clumsy

mistake on my part and really humbled me with it," Johnson said.

"He's put us in this position where He's flooded social media with the gospel, and we're just seeing a lot

of people respond. We're having 10 to 15 conversations a week with lost and unchurched people who are seeing the devotionals and wanting to talk and understand what the gospel means."

And other people in his church are getting involved in that too.

Team effort

Cory Solomon, Union Hill's youth pastor, has helped get the tech stuff in order so it can be leveraged in even more ways. And Amy McNeill, the

church's children's minister, has been leading on-line devotionals, as have several members of the youth group — Natalie McCord, Kevin

Dixon and Annabelle Spooner.

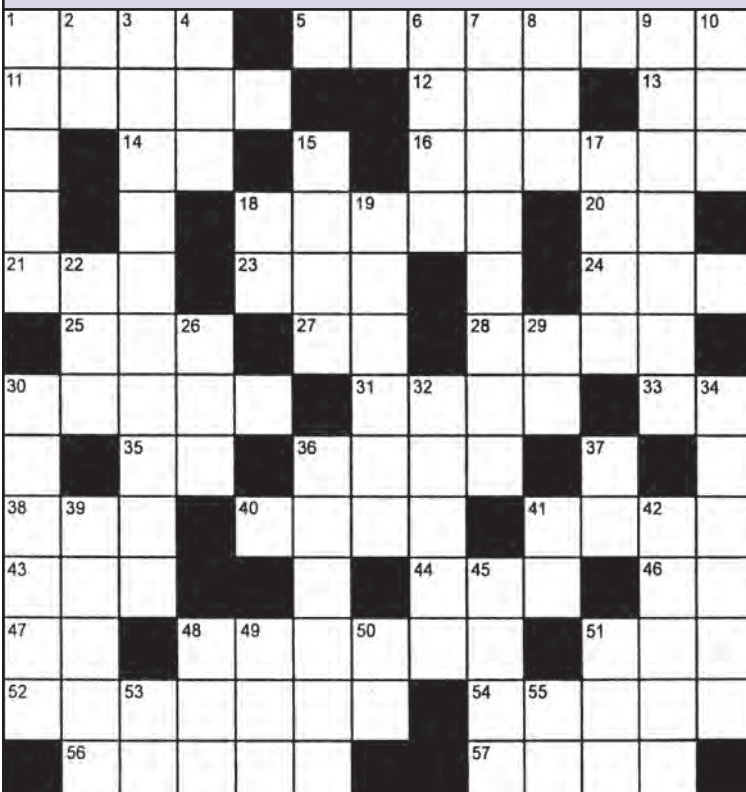
"We've been seeing a huge response from that as well," Johnson said. "It's been cool to watch God move in that way." (Grace Thornton)

"God took something that seemed like just a clumsy mistake on my part and really humbled me with it."

**Pastor Kyle Johnson
Union Hill Baptist Church,
Cottonwood**

Christian Crossword

By Pat Horning Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

- We ought to ___ God rather than men. (Acts 5:29)
- Son of Rachel. (Gen. 35:24)
- Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great ___. (Luke 4:38)
- Edible cereal grass.
- Fa, so, ___.
- Suffix indicating plural.
- Odorous.
- One of the 12 spies. (Num. 13:6)
- And hath raised up ___ horn of salvation. (Luke 1:69)
- Narrow beam of light.
- Rod for billiards.
- A time to rend, and a time to ___. (Eccles. 3:7)
- Pig pen.
- Los Angeles. (abbr.)
- Large rodents.
- Son of Jacob.

- (Gen. 30:13)
- Change direction.
- South Dakota. (abbr.)
- Give, and ___ shall be given unto you. (Luke 6:38)
- Simple.
- Light brown.
- ___ unthankful lepers healed. (Luke 17:17)
- Then shall the lame man ___. (Isa. 35:6)
- Or if he shall ask an ___, will he offer him a scorpion? (Luke 11:12)
- Cardiac Care Unit. (abbr.)
- Louisiana. (abbr.)
- North America. (abbr.)
- Put up thy sword into the ___. (John 18:11)
- Average amount.
- Reject.
- Come ye yourselves ___ into a desert place. (Mark 6:31)

- Loud.
- Inner surface of the hand.

Down

- Let us ___ the sacrifice of praise. (Heb. 13:15)
- ___ ye holy; for I am holy. (1 Pet. 1:16)
- In ___ give thanks. (1 Thess. 5:18)
- Expression of affirmation.
- I put my hook in thy ___. (Isa. 37:29)
- Merry gathering.
- Already eaten.
- Period of bad health.
- Negative vote.
- Pull.
- But many that are first shall be ___. (Mark 10:31)
- Cubic centimeter.
- Purge out therefore the old ___. (1 Cor. 5:7)
- And the Lord opened the mouth of the ___. (Num. 22:28)
- Nevertheless.
- Arkansas. (abbr.)
- ___ to the voice of my supplications. (Ps. 86:6)
- Build.
- To ___ from evil is understanding. (Job 28:28)
- Remember his ___ no more. (Prov. 31:7)
- Blessed is ___ that cometh in the name of the Lord. Matt. 21:9)
- Once more.
- Halle ___ jah.
- Sound an ___ in my holy mountain. (Joel 2:1)
- Roughen and redden.
- Science. (abbr.)
- Owens.
- Newspaper ___.
- Comrade.
- Do, re, mi, fa, ___, la, ti, do.
- Ma and ___.

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Pastor Rick Patrick of **FIRST BAPTIST SYLACAUGA** (Coosa River Association) reports the blessing of nine new members joining the church by "walking the virtual aisle" on Facebook during the COVID-19 crisis. On March 29, a single adult joined. On April 5, both a retired couple and a young couple joined. On April 12, another young couple joined, along with their two teenagers, who are candidates for baptism. Church members voted them into the fellowship by using the comment stream to share their amens, words of welcome and hand raising emojis.

Before the pandemic, **VALLEY GRANDE BAPTIST CHURCH** (Selma Association) was already broadcasting worship services on a local radio station. Now many in the church family gather faithfully around radios each Sunday morning to hear a pre-recorded broadcast. **Clarke Skelton, senior pastor**; Randy deBrabant, minister of music and senior adults; and other church leaders are using Facebook Live as a new way of staying connected with the church and community. "We have posted sermons, music, Bible studies and discipleship opportunities," Clarke explains. "One of God's blessings is receiving comments, likes and shares of our videos from people in the community, across our state and nation, and even around the world" Valley Grande's drive-in worship has reached a few families in the community who don't have a church home. Remarkably, Clarke shares, "Our people have mailed in their tithes and offerings, brought them by the church office and given online so faithfully that our giving in March and April exceeded January and February. God is at work in new and wonderful ways even during these difficult days."

Pat Powell, full-time pastor since 2017 of **GORDO FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH** (Pickens Association), is serving in the fight against COVID-19 as a chaplain in the Alabama National Guard. He was activated to duty in mid-April. According to Pat: "I am serving in Montgomery, providing moral support and religious services to members of my unit and others as they serve the citizens of our state." His wife, Suzanne, reports: "Pat has always had a heart to serve our country and entered the National Guard just last year at age 44. We decided that if we wanted to add something new and different to the days God has given us, why not now? We weren't getting any younger." Pat is pictured with their dog, Cooper, on the day of leaving home for Montgomery.



Preparing for What's Next

Your Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions has developed a document that will help you ask the right questions, consider helpful suggestions and access a variety of resources as you begin to prepare for the process of reopening your church facilities. It is available as a PDF to download and/or view by visiting alsbom.org/reopen.

A NIGHT OF EVANGELISM AND ENCOURAGEMENT, FEATURING PHIL WINNINGHAM
Monday, May 11, 6-7 p.m.
 Visit alsbom.org/events for link to join online

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LEADERSHIP AND MINISTRY IN CHALLENGING TIMES
Tuesday, May 12, 10-11 a.m. – Topic: Mental Health
Tuesday, May 19, 10-11 a.m. – Topic: Pastoral Care

CHURCH INSURANCE: PROTECTING PEOPLE AND PROPERTY
Tuesday, May 19, 10 a.m.-Noon

DISCIPLE MAKING LUNCH AND LEARN
Thursday, May 21, Noon-1:30 p.m.
 Interact online with pastor, author, speaker and coach Joel Malm, followed by a 30 minute Q&A session with the Alabama hosts.

THE TRUTH ABOUT TRUTH
Thursday, May 21, 1-2:30 p.m.
 Join Richard Howe from Southern Evangelical Seminary and Matt Burford, state missionary and apologeticist, in this candid conversation about how we can deal with varying truth claims, equip ourselves to evaluate our world, and use that training to reach people for Christ.

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Variety of options for restructuring, rescheduling VBS

(continued from page 1)

Churches like Ridgeview Baptist in Talladega are waiting to finalize their VBS plans. Like others, their decisions hinge upon what social distancing measures and limitations on group gatherings are in place at that time, said pastor Tommy Strickland.

In the interim, associational leaders are inspiring VBS volunteers and encouraging churches to be ready.

‘Think outside box’

“We are trying to help our churches by encouraging them to think outside the box,” said John Thomas, Southeast Alabama Baptist Association mission strategist.

Thomas said some of the churches are considering a virtual VBS.

Heritage Baptist Church, Montgomery, plans to host a nontraditional VBS program. Tentative plans include a three-day June event in at least five neighborhoods, a July missions VBS at Forest Park Ministry Center and VBS programs on five Wednesday nights

throughout July and August.

“Instead of having hundreds of children on our church campus for one week, we are using a multi-site approach with a smaller number of children at each site over a several week period,” said Jennifer Foster, Heritage minister to women and children. “Our plans for this year are different, but our purpose is still the same ... reaching kids and families with the gospel in Montgomery and beyond.”

Mount Zion Baptist Church, Huntsville, has rescheduled its traditional VBS program for late June. Beth Henderson, Mount Zion’s preschool minister, said the church has scheduled alternative dates and is considering hosting two half-day programs each day if needed to minimize group size.

Because VBS may strain resources already affected by diminished giving due to social distancing, Sand Mountain Baptist Association VBS director Jenna Hodge has asked churches to consider postponing to



Photo by Neal Hughes

Students at Pintlala Baptist Church, Hope Hull, prepare for craft time during last year’s Vacation Bible School.

the fall or hosting a one-day VBS.

While meeting restrictions have kept associations from holding their usual training events, many VBS directors have hosted virtual trainings with Facebook Live or Zoom to communicate information, offer “how-to” tips and foster enthusiasm.

Stay connected

“We have tried to keep in touch with our churches through our associational VBS Facebook page, emails

and postcards,” said Strickland, VBS director for Coosa River Baptist Association.

Many resources also are available for churches as they plan. The SBOM children’s ministry website, kidzlinkal.org/vbs, includes Zoom discussions, free downloadable materials and videos.

LifeWay offers tools and a free ebook, “4 Ways to Do VBS This Summer,” to help churches sort through possible options. The site, tabonline.org/4ways, presents four options for presenting this year’s VBS theme “Concrete & Cranes”: traditional, neighborhood, alternate or “at-home” VBS.

Burns said Facebook groups like SBOM’s “VBS

AL: Tips & Training” or “VBS 2020 ‘Concrete and Cranes’” are good sources for videos, articles and links to other resources.

Hodge said social media efforts are reaching people who wouldn’t normally come to church, and she has heard of smaller churches floating plans to host VBS with sister churches this year — indications that VBS will happen in some form.

“My biggest concern for VBS this year is being able to find opportunities to build new relationships,” Burns said. “Follow up is always important, but this year I think we’ll need to work even harder at connecting with guest families.”

‘Saw a need’

Burns remains optimistic that Alabama VBS programs will continue to thrive in spite of this year’s challenges.

“The first VBS back in 1898 was born out of the heart of a woman who loved the Lord and saw a need. She showed up for the first VBS with her Bible and a few kids,” said Burns. “Much has changed since that day and I believe that we’ll come to the other side of this COVID-19 crisis to see some wonderful new and creative ways to do VBS.”

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For May 10

Explore the Bible

By Robert E. Jackson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



SACRIFICES Romans 12:1–2, 9–18

Offer Yourself (1–2)

Paul doesn't command but instead urges believers to offer themselves to God. This means He desires willing worshippers. Furthermore, He looks for people who will offer their lives as living sacrifices. This sacrifice is unique in that life, not death (as animal sacrifice in the Old Testament), is involved. Christ-followers choose to live daily as an instrument of His holiness, which is acceptable and pleasing to Him. Paul stresses that believers are not to conform to the standards of this world.

As Christians, our goals are different, our definition of success is different and our lifestyle is different. Sadly, some professing Christians look and act just like this evil age.

Don't they understand their lives are acts of worship? Christians are to be transformed or "metamorphosed" by the renewal and continual renewal of the mind.

Similar to a caterpillar who metamorphosed into a butterfly, true Christians will display evidence of a life change; our thoughts and actions will reflect God's will — what is good, what is pleasing and what is perfect. A beautiful truth is Christians are being transformed into the image of Christ and thereby desire to fulfill His will.

Live Authentically (9–13)

The product of the renewed mind is summarized beautifully in verse 9: "Let love be without hypocrisy." Familial love among religious groups appears to be unique to Christianity. God is our Father, and we are united in a way that others only see within a family unit. True family members of God live authentically.

Believers have a holy hatred for evil and "cling to" what is good. Christians not only love but also "lead in honoring one another" (v. 10). When others are not honored and selfishness comes into play, the body of Christ is harmed.

Unfortunately, I have seen many church fellowships rupture because people fought to get their way. Authentic Christians possess a bigger

perspective; they rejoice in hope and respond in humility. Because of this hope, afflictions are met with patience or steadfast endurance.

Moreover, Christians are persistent in prayer, suggesting both consistency and intensity. This vertical dimension does not change the horizontal responsibility as believers "pursue" vigorously to share resources and homes with others.

In the early church, Christians traveled and often needed lodging. Far too often, we see our homes as our "castles" instead of a gift from God for us to open up to people in need. In sum, let us be authentic and love, honor, serve and give to one another.

Be at Peace (14–18)

In this final section, Paul tells Christians to actively ask God to bless people who persecute us (v. 14). I don't know about you, but this teaching is tough. Additionally, true love focuses on the other person. When others receive good news, we should rejoice with them instead of feeling sorry for ourselves because we didn't receive the same blessing. We must love enough to weep with others when they are hurting, even if things are going great in our lives.

Christians should not be proud or snooty but be willing to hang out with people who are not in the same socioeconomic/cultural class.

In love, Christians live in peace with all people. This peace means, in part, that we do not repay evil to anyone. Followers of Christ live differently so that others take note and desire what we have, who is Christ Jesus. Our goal is to be peaceful in a world that irritates, attacks and belittles.

This task is not easy, to say the least. Nevertheless, as authentic believers, we must be instruments of this peace so that our watching world might be drawn to the Prince of Peace.

How is all of this possible? Verse two reminds us to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind." To God alone be all the glory! ✠

Bible Studies for Life

By James Riley Strange, Ph.D.

Professor of New Testament, Samford University



FORGIVE Matthew 18:21–28, 32–33

This week we read what Jesus has to say about forgiveness, the third in our series of Christian traits that repair broken relationships.

The setting of today's passage is significant. This is Jesus' last teaching before He journeys to Jerusalem (Matt. 19:1), where He will be crucified, as He has just predicted (Matt. 17:22–23). Between now and then, Judas will betray Him, His disciples will abandon Him and Peter will deny knowing Him. Yet the risen Lord will meet these abandoners and deniers back home in Galilee, as He promised (Matt. 26:32).

Christians experienced persecution in parts of the Roman Empire as early as the A.D. 60s, during the reign of Nero, but before that itinerant missionaries like Paul also suffered. I think Matthew knew that for the sake of protecting their families, Christians were tempted to abandon the faith and deny Jesus.

By recording this story — and the disciples' failures — Matthew implied, "As God forgave you through Christ, so Christ forgives your failures. Return to God."

God's forgiveness of sinners and Christ's forgiveness of the disciples become models for our forgiveness of one another.

Read 18:15–35 for context.

Forgive — and keep forgiving. (21–22)

Jesus has just taught about dealing with wrongdoing within the church. Peter follows up with a question: besides the formal process, how often must I forgive someone who has wronged me? Jesus says, "Seventy times seven," that is, 490 times (some translations say "77"). Both Peter and Matthew's first readers would have understood this number symbolically. As seven symbolizes completeness, "seventy times seven" means something like, "a complete completeness ten times over."

When we forgive our fellow believers, we need to remember that a brother or sister may wrong us

repeatedly. So we must forgive repeatedly. Our brother or sister may need to forgive us in the same way.

One important exception prevails: Jesus is not instructing people to stay in abusive relationships.

Remember that God forgave you. (23–27)

Jesus' parable of the unmerciful slave shifts the topic from forgiveness of wrongs to forgiveness of debts (see 6:12). The amount the slave owes the king is astronomical: a talanton was worth more than 15 years of wages for a laborer. Again, the symbolism of the number would have been understood: we cannot repay our debts to God.

The immensity of what we owe God is surpassed only by the magnitude of His mercy.

Forgive because God forgave you. (28, 32–33)

The amount owed to the slave is high (a denarius was typical payment for a day's work) but a fraction of what the king forgave him. Not only does he show no mercy in turn, he also makes it impossible for the man to earn the wages to pay him back. It turns out the merciless slave is not interested in what he is owed. No, he wants to harm the person in his debt. Because his behavior is antithetical to the king's, he reveals that the king's mercy had no lasting effect on him.

This is the key lesson of the parable. Yes, God is merciful, but Peter knew that, as did Matthew's readers. They needed to learn that God's mercy is meant to transform the one who receives it.

God extends forgiveness to us, but not only for our own benefit. If I turn to God merely to escape hell or only for the promise of heaven, I show where my true interests lie. God's mercy toward me, a sinner, changes me here and now so that as best I can, I live now as I will live one day. Let us forgive one another because God has forgiven us, and because, by forgiving, we become more like God. ✠



Media reviews

ENTERTAINMENT

Christian comedian Swanberg faces crisis season with trademark humor

By Tracy Riggs
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When the COVID-19 crisis struck, comedian and motivational speaker Dennis Swanberg faced several challenges.

In the past when he was home three days straight, his wife of almost 41 years, Lauree, would often ask, “Don’t you need to speak somewhere?” to which he would reply, “I sure hope so.”

‘What really counts’

Like other entertainers, Swanberg, aka “The Swan,” is not only adjusting to being home but also to the cancellation of more than 20 shows. The crisis could have caused major anxiety.

However, Swanberg, basing his life on Psalm 37:4 and Proverbs 3:6, declared to his family, “I don’t know what’s going on or what’s about to happen ... [but] I’m good. I’m good if we all have to live in the same house together. I’m good if I have to get me a little rental house. ... As long as I have my family, my relationships that are so important ... that’s what really counts.”

Through the years, the popular speaker has

“I don’t know what’s going on or what’s about to happen ... [but] I’m good. ... As long as I have my family, my relationships that are so important ... that’s what really counts.”

Dennis Swanberg

touched thousands of lives, mixing “wisdom with wit and humor to get [his] foot in the door to share the message of Christ.”

Twenty-five years ago, Swanberg left the pastorate to speak full-time and received varied support.

Swanberg asked his wife if she thought he could do it. A simple, “I think you can do it,” sealed his decision.

But others, including his mother, had different ideas.

“You stay right there,” Swanberg recalled her saying. “You’re a preacher, and you know it.”

His father was more supportive — to a point. He said, “Well, I think you’re funny,” paused, and then said, “[But] I wouldn’t buy a ticket to hear you.”

After a commissioning service held by his church, First Baptist Church, West Monroe, Louisiana, Swanberg was ready to begin his journey. He had only one event booked at that point but knew God would provide.

And God did.

Calls never stopped

Without knowing Swanberg had resigned his pastorate the day before, James Dobson played a recording of Swanberg on his radio



Photos courtesy of Chad Swanberg

Dennis Swanberg

show. The calls started coming in and have never stopped.

The list of dignitaries who have hosted Swanberg is long.

He once ate dinner with Billy Graham and imitated the evangelist in front of those gathered. Swanberg said Graham said, “You could take over!”

Another time Swanberg shared the stage with President George Bush. Ahead of the event, Secret Service agents emphasized that Swanberg should not touch or approach the president.

“I was nervous because I’m a touchy, feely person,” Swanberg said.

The president came on stage, hugged Swanberg and said, “Man, Swan, I need some new jokes; give

me some new material.” Swanberg said he looked at the nearby agent and said, “Buddy, I’m not touching him; he’s touching me!”

And the guy who makes others laugh gets plenty of material from his own experiences.



SWANBERG

Once while in Atlanta, Swanberg had a cheeseburger delivered to his room. After watching the evening news, he put the tray in the hall for pickup. Suddenly the door closed behind him.

“I was locked outside my room ... in my little skivvies,” he said. “I’m going, No, NO, NO!”

He waited in vain for someone to show up and no phone was available, so Swanberg was forced to take the elevator “in front of God and everybody, like Johnny Bench in a Sears

catalog” to the lobby and ask for help.

“I boldly said to the lady behind the counter, ‘Ma’am, I locked myself out of my room.’”

Swanberg said he was both surprised and relieved when it didn’t faze her.

And when she asked for ID, in typical Swanberg style, he quipped, “Have you not seen enough?”

Cheer people up

Though engagements have paused for this season, Swanberg has plenty of light-hearted media options — books, DVDs and CDs — to cheer people up in difficult times.

His most popular video, “Bengy and the Zipper,” is available on YouTube and has almost a million views.

To find out more about Swanberg, book him or browse his online store, visit dennisswanberg.com.



Unsplash.com

Alabama to Alaska: Trusting God on journey to The Last Frontier

By Maggie Jones
University of Mobile

A 5,000-mile drive, cabin explosion and lack of a job did not keep Luke Jones from following God's calling on his life — to move from Alabama to Alaska. The University of Mobile graduate was confident in one thing — that God had called him to be obedient, to trust even when he could not understand.

It all began in January of 2016 with a meeting in Mobile.

Jimmy Stewart, evangelism and church development director at the Alaska Baptist Resource Network, had traveled to Mobile to visit his daughter and look for students who were studying to be worship leaders.

He knew UM had an excellent worship leadership degree in the Alabama School of the Arts because two of Jimmy's children are alumni of UM's music department.

Heart and vision

Luke was a senior worship leadership major when Andy Wood, assistant professor of worship leadership, arranged a meeting for him with Jimmy.

Luke heard Jimmy's heart and vision for Alaska and knew the Lord was calling him there. Jimmy had

a vision for putting young worship leaders in churches to try to reach lost young people, as well as for leading the Baptist churches of Alaska to reach the modern culture.

Jimmy told Luke, "If you will come to Alaska, I will find you a job."

So a few weeks after graduating with a bachelor's degree in worship leadership, Luke drove 5,000 miles from his hometown of Birmingham to Wasilla, Alaska, hoping to interview with a church there.

Just two days after Luke's arrival, Jimmy was injured in an explosion at his cabin. The only person Luke knew in Alaska, the person who was supposed to help him find a job, was in the hospital fighting for his life.

"I had to trust God more because at this point I was on my own," Luke said. "Growing up as a missionary kid, I was given a great example of what it truly means to trust God in all circumstances."

Thankfully, Jimmy survived and,

after a long road of recovery, is doing well. As for Luke, a month of working as an interim worship leader at First Baptist Church, Wasilla, led to a staff position as minister of worship arts.

After a quick trip back to Alabama to marry his hometown sweetheart,

Meredith, they began their life together in Alaska. Three and a half years later, Luke continues to lead worship at First, Wasilla. He also consults for the Alaska Baptist Resource Network to teach and train other churches on how they can raise the bar in their worship ministries.

"Even though the process of getting to Alaska was a bit unhinged, I can see God's hand in everything that led me here. I was confident in my call to go because God gave me an unexplainable peace," said Luke.

"Watching people grow in faith, confidence and musical ability as we've pushed for greater excellence in everything we do has been a huge blessing," he said.

Luke expressed his gratitude for the faculty and staff who poured into his life while he studied at UM.

"I had people who really gave me the tools I needed to follow God's calling on my life," he said.

'He will lead me on'

Luke learned the practical skills he needed to lead worship and teach others from many UM professors, in particular, Steve Bowersox, chair of the department of worship leadership and assistant professor of worship.

"Dr. Bowersox not only taught me skills in worship technology and how to begin modernizing a traditional church, but he also inspired me to have the tenacity to follow through when things get hard," Luke said.

The lessons Luke learned at UM have encouraged him to seek excellence while working with churches of all sizes in Alaska.

"When I felt God calling me to ministry, I didn't know where that call would take me, but I know He has led me this far and He will lead me on," Luke said.

"Satan has certainly tried to keep me from following God's call to Alaska, but he has not been successful. I know this is where I am supposed to be even when I don't understand why or how God will work it out," he said. 🙏



Photo courtesy of UM

Luke and Meredith Jones