



The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

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Main photo by Grace Thornton, small photos courtesy of James Carson

Main photo:
James Carson, 97-year-old WWII vet, stays in 'active service' at Warrior Creek Baptist Church.
Right, from top:
Carson (second from right) with buddies in 1943; Carson (right) being promoted to captain in 1968; Heidelberg, Germany in 1945.



'A HUGE HEART'

Blount County veteran never stops fighting, serving in God's army

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

James Carson said the processing sergeant looked him up and down when he showed up at Camp Shelby for training.

"I'm only 5 foot 2, and I weighed 110 pounds at the time," Carson said.

The sergeant noticed and said there was no way he'd be

sending the young man to the front lines.

"He told me he was going to send me to radio school, and I told him I didn't know anything about Morse code or anything like that," Carson said.

But the sergeant told him he'd learn, and eight weeks later, the Blount County boy came out of training as a high-

speed radio operator headed for World War II with the Army's 69th Infantry Division. His ship made it to England just a few days before the Battle of the Bulge broke out, and his job was to get the equipment ready and stick close to the colonel.

"They sent us to the combat zone, and I stayed there until the end of the war," said

Carson, noting he served under General George S. Patton until he was killed in 1945. "When the war ended in 1946, I was assigned occupation duty."

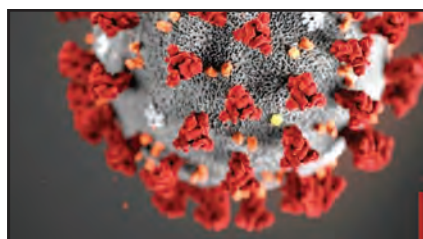
And when he came back home to Alabama, he never forgot where he'd been, or who he'd become — a man ready to fight for what he loves.

(See 'Caring,' page 11)

**Memorial
Day is
May 25.**



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COVID-19

See pages 6-9 for information and updates

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 17.

Why do we use TAB instead of The Alabama Baptist now?

As you may have noticed, the overall ministry of The Alabama Baptist is transitioning to being called TAB Media.

Why? Because the ministry has gradually expanded during the past 20 years to become much broader than the weekly newspaper, which has had a few names but is best known as *The Alabama Baptist*.

The name TAB Media encompasses the weekly print newspaper that has been published for more

than 177 years; TAB Online, at tabonline.org, which includes an archive of articles and columns dating back to 2000, special resources and the new Business and Ministry Directory;

the TAB Media podcasts: TAB Talks, TAB News, TAB Briefs and the seasonal TAB Stories; and TAB Digital, the interactive content delivered to inboxes weekly, such as TAB Preview, the new TAB Highlights and the digital edition of the weekly newspaper.

The graphic below illustrates the different platforms of TAB and how they all fall under the umbrella of TAB Media.

“The legacy of TAB is and will continue to be the award-winning newspaper, but we also want to

adapt to new ways of providing content in order to serve all Alabama Baptists at the highest level,” TAB Editor-in-Chief Jennifer Davis Rash said. “Using the name TAB Media allows us to stay connected to our flagship publication — *The Alabama Baptist* — with the abbreviation of it (TAB) and adding Media conveys the full spectrum of how we now communicate through a variety of platforms.”

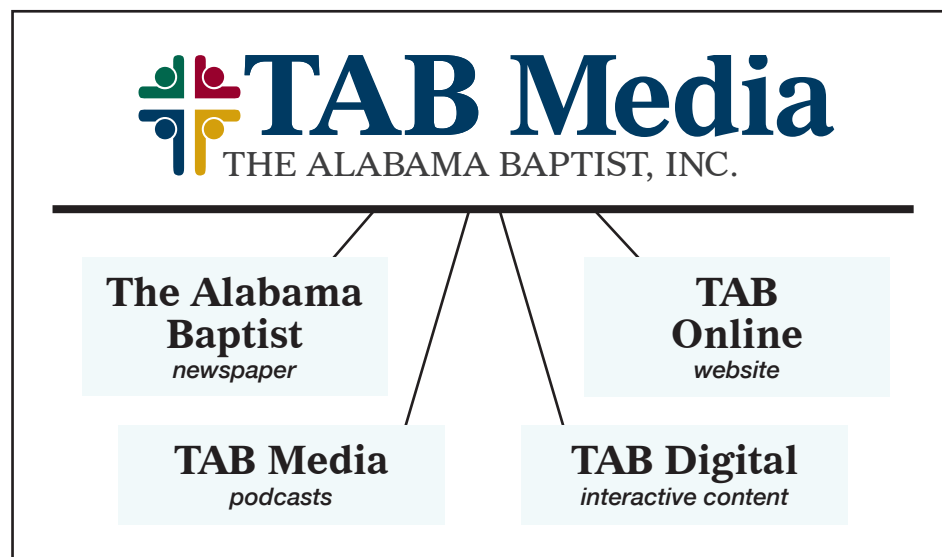
The broader TAB Media description also provides room to grow as technology continues to expand, she said. “Continually polishing our systems, learning and growing and adapting as a ministry and business

is important for several reasons,” Rash said. “We want to always strive to be the best we can be for our readers. But also, branching into new areas presents the opportunity to reach a new audience with the good news of the gospel.

“Informing, inspiring and connecting believers so we all are focused on reaching the world for Christ is our ultimate purpose.”

So whether you call us The Alabama Baptist, TAB Media or TAB, you are correct and we are still who you’ve always known. (TAB)

TAB Media refers to the various platforms that now make up the ministry that includes The Alabama Baptist newspaper.



Back to Campus special issue

Shout out to **The Baptist College of Florida in Graceville** for being the first college to book an ad in TAB’s special Back to Campus issue coming this summer.

TAB Media

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

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MY RASHIONALE

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

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Open letter to Ahmaud Arbery's mom Wanda Cooper-Jones

Dear Ms. Cooper-Jones,

It's been about two weeks now that I learned of the tragic shooting death of your son, Ahmaud Arbery.

I sat in stunned silence attempting to grasp what the newscasters were saying as I watched the accompanying video.

Nothing about the confrontation made sense to me, even following updated news reports showing someone who looked like Ahmaud exploring a house in the area under construction.

I've continued to read news updates, trying to understand what could be missing from the story.

Surely it's not possible for a person to be so angry, fearful and downright mean to see another human jogging in the neighborhood and decide to grab a gun, jump in a truck to hunt down the jogger and then confront him — two armed men against one unarmed man — with no official authority nor proven reasoning, just a hunch.

How can that be? And to have the audacity to then claim self-defense?

What would any of us do if attacked in a manner like that? We would all fight back.

And then to learn you've been dealing with this since Feb. 23, that no initial arrests were made and that it took more than two months before serious action was taken — and reportedly only after the video of the shooting was released to news media on May 5.



Ahmaud Arbery and his mom Wanda Cooper-Jones

Watching your interviews with various media outlets drew me to you. The depth of your grief alongside the calmness of your spirit speaks volumes.

I can't begin to imagine what these past three months have been like for you, nor can I truly ever understand the pain for the African-American community as a whole, but I do want you to know I join the hundreds of thousands, and possibly more like millions, of Christians who care and are grieving with you.

Please know there are people among all races and ethnic groups who denounce what took

place and are lifting you and your family up in prayer.

You have been on my mind each day since I saw your face and learned your name.

I've prayed for comfort and a peace that can only come from our Lord Jesus Christ.

As a Christian who also is a white American, I am horrified by what happened to Ahmaud and the countless others who have been persecuted, abused and/or killed merely because someone's heart was filled with hate toward a person's particular skin tone, ethnicity or faith.

The Bible clearly states in Gen. 1:26–27 and Gen. 9:6 that mankind was created in the image of God — all mankind.

And the Scripture is abundantly clear in how we should live and treat each other, think Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12) and greatest commandment (Matt. 22:36–40).

My heart aches for you, Ms. Cooper-Jones, and I commit to continue praying for you.

I also will work to change the hearts of those blinded by hatred — first, by diligently and consistently examining and cleansing my own heart so I am fully submissive to the Lord and the work He wants to do.

From there, I will work to encourage fellow believers to do the same, so we all are focused on Him, striving to seek His face and growing more like Him every day.

The more we look like Jesus, the more natural it becomes to serve others before ourselves. And a bright light dispels the darkness — as well as the evil that lurks along with it.

**Your sister in Christ,
Jennifer Davis Rash**

MEMORIAL DAY SALUTE



The staff and board of TAB Media remember those who paid the ultimate sacrifice for our country and the freedoms available to us today.

As we mark Memorial Day on

May 25, take some time to think about the more than 1 million Americans who have died in battle since the American Revolution.

And remember the grieving families of those who have died in mili-

tary service in recent years.

Also, think on how you are showing appreciation to our military casualties on a daily basis.

Are you living a life worthy of the sacrifices that were made? 

Your Voice



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

Dear church family: A pastor's reflection on crisis

By Pastor Nathan Sims
First Baptist Church, New Brockton

As I sit to write this letter today, so many different thoughts and questions are going through my mind.

The million-dollar question seems to be, "When will we be able to go back to church?" But two other thoughts that have consumed my mind, particularly over the past two or three days, have been what God is doing during this time and what the future life of our church will be when the coronavirus pandemic is behind us.

I have been absolutely amazed at what God has been doing during this time. For one, my heart has

been blessed by our First Baptist Church, New Brockton, family.

I chose not to do the Facebook videos (devotions, Sunday services, etc.), with the exception of one on Resurrection Sunday with Pastor Kerry Mitchell of Calvary Baptist Church, Enterprise, because of the large percentage of our people who do not have internet and/or Facebook.

But as I have made my brief doorstep visit with you each week, I have been so encouraged by hearing your stories of how you have enjoyed the Bible study material provided each week and what you have learned from the material.

My heart also has been tremen-

dously blessed by your giving.

For the most part, our tithes and offerings have stayed consistent each week.

Thank you for your faithfulness and willingness to give. At this point, all of our staff has been paid each of the weeks we have not been able to meet together, along with our other ongoing expenses. You have made this possible.

On a personal note, however, one of the ways I have spent some of my "down" time during this season has been to watch some other friends of mine on the internet and Facebook.

I have allowed my heart and soul to be fed and refreshed as I have been able to just listen and to take in some personal Bible study and preaching on my own.

The future life of our church looks bright and promising. I am convinced in my heart of hearts that God is setting us up afresh and anew for the days and years ahead.

I am already trying to imagine what our worship will be like when we gather together again. We are going to sing like we have never sung before. And think about the new opportunities we are going to have to "Touch our Neighbors" and to "Touch the Nations."

I have absolutely no idea what these opportunities may look like, but I truly see our church family being used of God like never before to reach people with the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Why has the Lord placed each of us on the Earth "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14)? Why has He called you and me to live through this pandemic?

I cannot answer that, but I know the One who can. I know He has promised that in each situation He allows, He will work "for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

God allowed this shutdown amongst a generation who has nearly all but forgotten the definition of Sabbath rest; this cannot be a coincidence.

We have been forced to rest; we must decide what to do with it. His word promises again and again that spiritual rest (not the vegging out watching Netflix "rest") will lead to restoration if we will seek Him through it, so let us be intentional with this time the Lord has given/forced upon us during this season.

God willing, this pandemic will end eventually, and we will go back to the "real world." When this happens though, let's continue to live a little slower, commit to a little less, find our security in our Father over our finances and seek Him above all else because all other ground is truly sinking sand.

We will all surely be glad to move on from COVID-19, but let's take a few of the lessons about rest along with us when we do.

Alex Lewis
Birmingham, Ala.

Letters to the Editor

I recently read that the LifeWay trustees voted to consider the sale of Ridgecrest. I was fortunate enough to serve on staff in the summer of 1964, and it changed my life. I hope and pray that this will not happen because I believe it is a place ordained by God.

Mike Thigpen
Guntersville, Ala.

The staff of TAB Media has done such a wonderful job of keeping us informed on important issues, as well as keep-

ing positive information before us to help keep us from getting depressed during these trying times.

The content, the subject presentations and the timeliness have been superb. We have been spoiled and have come to expect that from TAB Editor-in-Chief Jennifer Davis Rash. Thank you!

I just wanted to tell you so and hopefully give you some support with upbeat feedback on the jobs you all are doing.

Bob Henderson
Tuscaloosa, Ala.

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“Give yourself grace. ... There was no seminary class for writing out a re-entry plan.”

CHANDLER VANNOY

Brand manager, LifeWay Leadership

I don't know of a person who isn't outraged over [the killing of Ahmaud Arbery]. But check the social media posts of our African American brothers and sisters in Christ and the overall message is something different from before.

They're asking for the help of Caucasian Christians to speak out and help put a stop to these tragedies. When you're with others who look like you and hear something disparaging people of color, say something. At those times when their viewpoints or the weight they place on a topic like racial reconciliation is dismissed, don't let it be.

The conclusion that a black man jogging down the middle of a street in broad daylight must be a burglary suspect doesn't happen in a

vacuum. It builds due to things said, but also things unsaid.

Scott Barkley
Editor, *The Christian Index*

The Church is at a crossroad. We are being pressed at every hand for a decision. Time is running out on us. Which way, Church?

Do we keep traveling down the same easy, broad path we've been on far too long and lose this great opportunity, not to mention our beloved land?

Or do we take another road — the road on which our Lord is traveling, the road He now beckons us to take in following Him into a world of fearful, suffering, sin-sick humanity, to embrace with love and grace those who are wandering aimlessly

in this life like sheep without a shepherd?

Rob Jackson
Associate professor of Christian studies, University of Mobile

Taking time to express appreciation changes the life of the recipient and gives a deep-seated joy to the giver.

David Jeremiah
Pastor and radio host

We believe God is always in control. He is with His faithful ones, and victory is always in His hands. So help us, God, to be faithful to your calling and leading and direct your servants' steps.

Abraham Liu
Clemson, S.C.



BP photo
Jeff Iorg is president of Gateway Seminary in Ontario, California.

Stewards and donors

Right now, some churches are discovering their past strategy of depending on donors instead of building stewards is producing devastating results.

Churches who depend on donors have a get-rich-quick mentality. They depend on fundraising, including frequent mass appeals, to finance their ministry. These gifts often evaporate during difficult or crisis times.

Churches who build stewards have a get-strong-slow perspective. They teach people to give, save and spend (yes, in that order) to develop financial strength over a lifetime.

The convictions practiced as a result of stewardship development are the reason many families — across the economic strata — are weathering the current pandemic without panic. Churches full of these families are doing the same.

One benefit of a crisis is a forced re-examination of core strategies, methods and approaches — particularly the ways we manage money.

One of my hopes is churches will come out of this crisis with a renewed commitment to teaching and practicing biblical stewardship. This is time invested, not time wasted.

—Jeff Iorg (originally published by Baptist Press)

From the *Twitterverse*

@JL_Wood

Quiet time with God is necessary. While taking time to be with everyone else, make sure you don't neglect your time to be alone with Him.

@MattMason3

Christian perfectionism is a denial of the reality of indwelling sin. Christian defeatism is a denial of the reality of the indwelling power of the Spirit. Both have disastrous effects on our lives.

@BillyGraham

“There is a great identity crisis among students today. Who am I? What is the purpose of life? Where did I come from? Where am I going? The Bible has a direct answer to this great big philosophical question.” #BillyGraham

@stevedurkac

It is not the grasp of theology that lifts a downward spiraling life, it is spiritual regeneration. It is in fixing our eyes upon the Savior and filling our heart with His assurances that we begin to change course and find focus on the upward path.

@scottdawson

The biggest flaw in ministry today is that we usually notice a person's charisma over their core character. A person's gifting as a speaker may intrigue your intellect and please your emotions. Only Christ's anointing can cause the sermon to penetrate the heart.

@Kathrynclang

Avoid getting caught up in the much doing. Avoid getting tangled

in the not doing. Get to where you are called to be by knowing, understanding and living your unique heartseed focus.

@DustinBenge

Sleep is a daily reminder from God that we are not God.
— John Piper

@CSLewisDaily

Do not waste time bothering whether you “love” your neighbor. Act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love them.

@toddgray4

“Every saved person this side of heaven owes the gospel to every lost person this side of hell.”
— David Platt

UNA Baptist campus minister Matt Daniels meets via Zoom with students sent home from campus due to the coronavirus pandemic. BCM leaders feel a 'sense of urgency for the gospel' as they equip students from afar, Daniels said.

Being

MISSIONAL AT HOME



Photo by Matt Daniels

BCM leaders encourage college students that gospel 'mission goes on' wherever they are

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Steve Thompson said he never thought the day would come when he heard his students say they were sick of their computer screens. But at Auburn University, where Thompson serves as Baptist campus minister, that's the sentiment now — and students all across the state are right there with them.

But in the midst of all the Zoom small groups and virtual game nights, something meaningful is happening — students are getting even bolder in sharing their faith, Thompson said. And he and other Baptist campus ministers are just trying to do what they can to help “keep them on task” and help them remember that “the mission goes on even when we're not together.”

Share your hope

To do that, the state's Baptist campus ministers met together virtually and developed a resource called The Big 5: Action Steps to Share Your Hope in Jesus, posted at bcmlink.org.

The five steps are:

1. Have intentional conversations.

That means call or FaceTime someone and talk about Jesus, said Matt Daniels, Baptist campus minister at the University of North Alabama.

“Maybe it's somebody in your house you need to sit down with and have this intentional conversation with,” he said. “This isn't a text message, Snapchat, anything like that. This is a real, relational, heart-to-heart, truthful conversation.”

2. Start where you are.

Jacob Freeman, Baptist campus minister at the University of Montevallo, said this action step “encour-

ages you to push the computer away, set your phone down for just a minute and ask God to open your eyes to the people around you.”

Look for places where you already have connections with people who need to know the hope of the gospel, he said. That could be family members, coworkers or people you know in the community.

3. Show concern.

Once you have those people in mind, identify some needs you can meet, then break those down into goals you can meet every day, said Beth Gardner, a campus minister with Metro Mobile Baptist Campus Ministries.

“You can get creative on how you want to contact people, but the important thing is connecting with them. And I do think that creating a list is going to really help you to be intentional and hold you more accountable,” she said.

4. Extend invitations.

Chris Mills, student missions strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said “we're called to be hospitable people.”

“It's been said that the secret weapon of gospel advancement is hospitality,” he said. “It's about engaging and doing life with others.” That could mean inviting them to a Zoom Bible study or church service and talking to them about it afterward.

5. Redeem social media.

Kim Andrews, a campus minister at the University of Alabama, encouraged students to use social media as platforms for the gospel.

“Consider what would really be engaging for you and your followers,” she said, noting one idea is to

record a video of you sharing the story of how Jesus changed your life.

You also can use your Instagram story to post questions that help you gauge how people are doing, questions like “If you could describe your day in a color, what would it be and why?” or “How can I pray for you?”

Mills said the “focus is to challenge students to connect and engage during this season.”

He said he's already been encouraged at how that's happening at Auburn University at Montgomery, where he also currently serves as interim Baptist campus minister. One student there, Ashlee, invited a friend to join her small group on Zoom, and after the meeting was over, the friend stayed on and continued talking with Ashlee and

another student.

And after that conversation, she made a commitment to follow Christ, Mills said.

Not only that — Ashlee has seen her whole calling for the next few months change.

Evangelism bears fruit

“Ashlee was scheduled to serve overseas this summer,” Mills said. “That project was canceled, and one area Ashlee was excited about in the project was learning how to be more intentional in evangelism. That desire has challenged her to be more intentional, and she has been blessed to see God bring fruit from her labor.”

Daniels said the COVID-19 crisis has pushed his BCM students to dig deep.

“The students have been engaged and seeking the Lord through all

of this. They've been asking good questions,” he said. “They're exploring what they believe and why they believe it.”

For instance, they've always heard “nothing catches God by surprise,” but now they're wrestling with what that really means and how it impacts their daily life, Daniels said.

“They're also learning what it means to be healthy and missional in their homes,” he said.

'Urgency for gospel'

One student got bold enough to talk to his parents about their faith, and in response, they challenged him to lead a family Bible study.

“So now we're talking through what that looks like,” Daniels said.

Another student had decided during their BCM “Who's Your One?” event in the fall to reach out to a particular neighbor, and when he saw that neighbor outside recently, he turned around, went back and shared the gospel with him.

“After that conversation, the student came back with some questions about how to share with him more effectively, and we've been trying to equip him,” Daniels said. “That's what we want in general — to equip students to be evangelistic in a social distancing world. Our students have loved it. There's been a really good response so far.”

Across the state, BCMs are doing that equipping through weekly Zoom teaching, worship gatherings and small groups. They're also continuing to meet online for accountability and to encourage each other.

“One thing it's done for us is spark a sense of urgency to be super intentional with the days we have,” Daniels said. “It's created a fresh sense of urgency for the gospel.”

For more information about BCM or The Big 5, visit bcmlink.org.

Gathering again

Following Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey's decision to lift attendance limits on public gatherings after May 11, many churches announced their plans for the next few weeks.

Those meeting on campus announced measures to keep congregants at the required social distance, procedures for cleaning and sanitizing areas following or between services and schedules for activities other than worship. But not all are ready to gather again.

Parker Memorial DeArmanville Campus, Anniston, met for worship on May 17 and designated its fellowship hall as a mask-required space for senior adults and other high risk members. The worship service was livestreamed from the sanctuary to the fellowship hall and the gym, designated as an overflow room.

Due to building limitations and ongoing construction projects, **Crossroads Community Church, Elmore**, announced plans to meet for outdoor services beginning May 31 and continuing into June, weather permitting. In addition to Sunday morning worship, a preschool and children's service for families is scheduled for Sunday nights and a youth service for Wednesday nights. Participants are encouraged to bring a blanket or chairs.

London Baptist Church, Castleberry, plans to continue drive-in worship until June 7.

Providence Baptist Church, Gallion, is waiting a little longer to gather in person. The community near the church had three COVID-19 deaths in the week prior to May 17.

Making the most of the

CIRCUMSTANCES

Taylor Road pastor sees conversions, encouragement during COVID-19

By Lauren Pratt, SEBTS
Special to The Alabama Baptist

In a season of social distancing, many believers are finding creative ways to engage the lost around them. Daniel Atkins, pastor of Taylor Road Baptist Church, Montgomery, is seeing firsthand how virtual conversations are leading to life-changing conversions.

Atkins believes one of the biggest lessons he's learned about evangelism during COVID-19 is that you have to make yourself available for these times.

He learned this lesson firsthand recently when a member of his church reached out to him about his fiancé (from a long-distance relationship) who was not a believer.

The man asked Atkins to share the gospel with her over a FaceTime call among the three of them. As Atkins walked through the gospel, the man, who had grown up at Taylor Road Baptist, suddenly realized he had been living a lie.

That day, both he and his fiancé were transformed by the gospel and gave their lives to Christ.

Tears of repentance

That's not the only salvation story Atkins has witnessed in recent weeks.

Another man called to tell him after their virtual service one Sunday, he became overwhelmed at his need for Christ. In the privacy of his closet and through tears of repentance, he surrendered his life to Christ.

It's stories like these that fuel Atkins in his preaching ministry and spur him on to continue ministering to his community.

The coronavirus has certainly presented challenges for pastors and church staff as they navigate uncharted waters, moving to virtual small groups and church services.

However, Atkins' encouragement to those in ministry is to keep going, even on the most difficult days.

"It's very discouraging some days, but it's worth it in the end."

Atkins' testimony to life change



ATKINS Taylor Road Baptist Church screenshot

in his community serves as a reminder to trust that the Lord is still at work even when obstacles seem ever-present.

Recently, he and his staff have been calling each member at Taylor Road Baptist Church. However, it's not just the staff who are reaching out. Atkins has been impressed by the way church members have cared for each other and for him and his family during this time as well.

"I've never been more loved at a church than I am here," he said. "I really feel that because it's not just [that] they're expecting me to call them. They're calling me and my wife to check on us and our kids. It's very reciprocal."

Moreover, giving among church members continues to remain steady, including giving to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering and the Cooperative Program.

The involvement among members at Taylor Road is particularly striking when considering the state of the church when Atkins first came in 2016.

Taylor Road had been experi-

encing a decade of financial and congregational decline, and Atkins was hesitant to enter into a pastorate there.

"I'll never forget I was sitting in my old study at my old house in South Carolina, and I was wrestling with it, reading through the book of Joshua," Atkins recalled. "The Lord basically spoke to my heart and said, 'I'm going to do something at Taylor Road, and you can either hear about it up here, or you can be there to watch it firsthand.' For me, that was the confirmation."

During a time of uncertainty, the Lord continues to breathe life back into the congregation.

The church is continuing to keep its office open from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m., conduct virtual home groups on Sunday evenings and broadcast weekly sermons on a local public television station.

With the move to broadcasting the weekly sermon comes the potential for significantly more viewers than before, which means opportunities for more people to hear the gospel.

"You don't know where that seed's going to land, and so we've been very intentional about doing an invitation even online."

Pastor Daniel Atkins
Taylor Road Baptist Church

"You don't know where that seed's going to land, and so we've been very intentional about doing an invitation even online and offering contact information to people who made a decision," he said.

Atkins, a 2011 graduate of South-

eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, recalled how his seminary education changed his outlook on the Great Commission.

"It gave me a more robust, gospel worldview and an emphasis on the mission of God to all people in all places. That's why I'm so passionate about making the most of our online circumstance right now because you don't know where that gospel is going." ✠

PROTECTING

our most vulnerable Alabamians

How Christians can serve those most at risk while keeping them healthy, safe

By Denise George
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

After many weeks of obeying “shelter in place” laws, staying home, children out of school, not meeting friends in restaurants for meals, not attending worship services in our church buildings and leaving our places of employment to work at home, Alabamians are gradually re-joining society and getting our lives somewhat back to normal.

On April 28, Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey presented her “safer at home” plan. “We look forward to easing back into our routines with caution,” she said. “This is a step in the direction of getting things back to normal.” But such a task will be “challenging,” she added.

People are tired of staying at home and are ready and restless to resume life.

But the virus isn’t slowing down. On April 30, the day Alabama’s new guidelines went into effect, the Unit-

ed States saw 26,512 new cases of COVID-19 and 2,552 more deaths, according to the CDC.

As of May 15, Alabama’s death toll from COVID-19 was more than 470, according to the Alabama Department of Public Health.

Even though Alabama is keeping many precautions in place, the new guidelines are proceeding gradually to prevent future infectious outbreaks.

As followers of Christ

One of the greatest challenges Christians face as we try to resume some sense of normalcy is how, in the midst of COVID-19, we can protect our most vulnerable members of society — those most at risk from the disease.

While Congress is considering broad national proposals for protecting our nation’s most vulnerable, we can do many things on an individual level as we seek to follow God’s word and as we strive, as followers



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of Christ, to serve others during this pandemic.

How Christians can serve the most vulnerable:

► We can educate ourselves, researching COVID-19, learning how it spreads, its symptoms, suggested

treatments, etc., then share our findings with others most at risk.

► We can investigate national, state and local resources, helping put the sick and vulnerable in touch with those organizations and agencies that can help.

Joy, comfort while recovering from COVID-19

Do you have a COVID-19 story to share?
Email news@thealabamabaptist.org.

It’s been six weeks since Melody Maxwell contracted COVID-19, and she’s still spending most of her time in bed.

It’s been painful and exhausting. It’s been lonely. But most of all, she said it’s been an opportunity for her to lean into the God “who sustains us even in difficult times.”

Maxwell’s COVID-19 story started in mid-March on a Baptist women’s trip to New York City.

“The situation with the virus started getting more serious while we were traveling,” she said. “I returned home on a Satur-

day and had a sore throat and cough on Sunday.”

Maxwell was able to get tested that day, but before the results came back she was pretty sure she had the virus.

“I felt terrible all over and was very exhausted,” said Maxwell, a former Alabama Baptist

who now serves as a church history professor at a Canadian Baptist seminary, Acadia Divinity College in Wolfville, Nova Scotia.

She also had headaches, low-grade fever, a cough, chest tightness, shortness

of breath, minor lung pain, crushing fatigue and a loss of her sense of taste.

“At one point I went to the emergency room because I was having some trouble breathing,” Maxwell said. “They checked me over and determined I was OK and simply needed to wait the virus out.”

These days she is resting a lot but getting closer to normal.

“The whole experience hasn’t been easy. It’s difficult to be sick and alone, especially for so long,” Maxwell said. “I’m also thankful to



MAXWELL

be part of a faith tradition where lament is accepted. Although we don’t do a lot of lamenting in our churches, the Psalms are full of lament. I’ve been praying some of these Psalms and calling out in pain and lament to God. I’ve also been reassured by verses about God’s comfort and presence in the midst of difficulty.”

‘Generous church’

Maxwell said she’s also thankful for friends and fellow church members who have taken care of her even though they couldn’t be physically present. Sometimes that’s meant just send-

ing her a funny video to lift her spirits; other times it’s meant cooking her a meal.

“I have been grateful for very generous church members who have looked after me. ... They have checked my mail, bought me groceries and put gas in my car,” Maxwell said. “I especially appreciated people who didn’t just ask what I needed but brought along extras like ice cream or flowers to lift my spirits. I would have never asked for these things, but they brought some joy in the midst of a difficult time.” (Grace Thornton)

▶ We can obey Alabama's guidelines at each phase of reopening to help slow and stop the spread of the virus, even though it is often personally inconvenient and disrupts our own healthy lives. Scripture urges us to "serve one another humbly in love," not using our freedom "to indulge the flesh" (Gal. 5:13).

▶ With so many people out of work, we can help family and church members, friends and neighbors by offering financial assistance so they can afford healthy food, keep up with regular bills and avoid daily financial anxiety. Scripture tells us to "share with the Lord's people who are in need ..." (Rom. 12:13).

▶ We can agree to practice frequent hand-washing and mask wearing and to use common sense to avoid infecting society's most vulnerable.

Check on the vulnerable

▶ We can check on the vulnerable, the sick, those with special physical/mental/emotional/spiritual needs. Whether through phone calls, Facebook, email and other technology, we can make sure they are well, safe and have their most urgent needs met as we take seriously God's word to "use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace ..." (1 Pet. 4:10).

▶ For those struggling financially, we can provide face coverings, soap, hand sanitizer, etc. We can order meals for families, having them delivered from restaurants that continue to offer food for take-out or delivery.

▶ We can pray constantly for those at higher risk of sickness, telling them we are lifting them up to the Lord in prayer, encouraging them to pray, be hopeful and stay vigilant in their struggle to care for themselves, their children and other family members.

▶ We can pray diligently for and express our appreciation to those who must continue to serve the public, even at risk to their own health: doctors and nurses, other medical facility staff members, sanitation workers, postal carriers, caregivers, nursing home employees, food suppliers and many more.

Find more information about recent state health guidelines and resources for helping vulnerable Alabamians at tabonline.org/vulnerable. 🌿

Huge blessing

FROM GOD

NorthPark hosts missionaries fleeing Philippines lockdown

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

For more than nine years, David and Cindy Crim have served in the Philippines, where David is senior pastor of the International Baptist Church of Manila and coordinates the missions strategy of the Hawaii-based Two-Thirds World Network.

Through the years, IBC Manila became a multi-ethnic, multi-national church with a network of mission churches across the city and the nation.

Then the novel coronavirus hit, turning the Crims' world upside down and landing them in an efficiency apartment on the campus of NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville.

"Manila, Philippines, began locking down in early March, including hospitals," Crim said. "I was scheduled to begin radiation therapy for prostate cancer and discovered it would be some time until anything other than emergencies or COVID-19 would be treated. So we began looking for opportunities in the [U.S.] for the treatment. We were already familiar with a urological clinic in Birmingham. Upon contacting them, they agreed to accept me as a patient. We then began looking for a place to stay in Birmingham and found a list of missionary housing through the WMU website. The good folks at NorthPark were gracious to offer their missionary apartment, which is just perfect for the two of us.

"This is a huge blessing from God," he said. "We are very appreciative of NorthPark's hospitality and generosity. We can't wait to worship with them."

Stephen Hall, NorthPark's executive pastor, said the church created the one-bedroom efficiency apartment on its property a little more than a year ago to host traveling missionaries. A missionary family now serving in Italy stayed there last summer. When Hall received Crim's email, his "yes" was immediate.

"We received an email from

David, right when things worldwide were about to be locked down due to the pandemic," Hall said.

"They had to leave Manila quickly and arrived here on a Friday night about 9 or 10 p.m. They got out of Manila right at the last minute."

Cindy Crim said the situation in the Philippines was headed rapidly to-

ward lockdown.

"We were already quarantined by government orders," she said. "A lot of panic buying had started, there was news the airport was closing and grocery supplies were already scarce. I woke up early on the morning of March 18, feeling a real impression from God that we needed to check on the availability of David's radiation treatment."

'Fear and panic'

"By late morning, we heard from the doctor saying all treatments except emergencies and COVID-19 were suspended. Later that day, we received news the airport would remain open for a few more days. So we had a very short time — less than 48 hours — to make preparations to leave. We left early morning, March 20."

David said the atmosphere in Manila was filled with "fear and panic," with markets running out of staples. It's only gotten worse, he said.

"Since leaving, our church leaders have informed us the lockdown

there has been very strict. Only one person in the family can leave the house, and that person must have an approved pass from the local government just to buy groceries or medicines. ... This has intensified the frustration and uncertainty among the people. Many people are losing jobs. ... It is a very bad situation."

'Stir a hunger'

The Crims had hoped to make their stay in the missionary apartment brief, but delays in beginning David's radiation treatments and the time needed for recuperation and a brief visit with family could stretch their time here to four to six months.

They'll be welcomed into the NorthPark family in the interim, Hall said.

"Due to shelter-in-place restrictions, we haven't gotten to spend a lot of time with them," Hall said. "We look forward to introducing our church to them."

The Crims see God at work in a myriad of ways throughout the pandemic.

"Using online tools, such as Zoom, I am still able to disciple young women," Cindy said. "They have been faithful to individual, one-on-one meetings, as well as small group Bible studies. Actually, more women are involved than before the pandemic.

"We see God using this pandemic to stir a hunger in their hearts for Him and His word."

David added, "We see God at work in our leaders and church planters in the Philippines, who have stepped up their leadership and care for the church families.

"We have also seen an increase in participation in worship. Our online worship viewership is about four times that of our weekly attendance before the lockdown," David said. "There seems to be a growing softness of heart and at least an increased interest in spiritual matters." 🌿



David & Cindy Crim ibcmanila.org



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CARING FOR THE CHURCH

97-year-old 'firecracker' still faithfully ministering in church, local community

(continued from page 1)

At 97, he still does his military calisthenics every day, and he often still walks around the fence of his land, which backs up to Warrior Creek Baptist Church, Holly Pond. He was the first one to get to the church when he peered through the trees and spotted it burning in August 2018, and he tried his best to put out the fire himself with a fire extinguisher.

His pastor, Darryl Ross, called him a "firecracker."

He said they call Carson "Little Jim," but they know his influence is anything but little.

"He has a huge heart for the church," Ross said. "For him

it's all about the church, it's all about helping, and it's all about love."

It wasn't always that way though, Carson said. Before the war, he grew up with his mother taking him and his brothers to Warrior Creek Baptist, and though

the church was special to him, its faith wasn't his own yet. When he shipped out for war, a Sunday School teacher at Warrior Creek gave him a metal-plated New Testament meant to shield his heart if he kept it in his pocket.

'Great journey'

He'd find it would save him after all one day, but not in the way she thought.

"I went my own way for a while, but I found my way back when I met my wife, Dot," Carson said. "She was a Christian, and I became one too. It's been a great journey."

And now it seems nothing will steal Carson's joy, Ross said.

"I've never seen the man down. He always cheers me up. You can't be in a bad mood around Little Jim," he said. "Even when the church burned, he was in tears, smiling at me with a thumbs up

Learn more about the Cost of Freedom Veterans Museum on the museum's website or call Gene Bishop at 256-738-4791.



Photo courtesy of James Carson
James Carson (left) meets up with WWII buddy Carl Fritch at the Alabama column of the World War II Memorial in Washington in 2008, 62 years after they had last seen each other.

saying, 'We're going to be OK.'"

Carson said the fire was tough on the church, but their faith has made them stronger, and they're growing bigger all the time.

God's plan

They've also been able to build back without going into extra debt — largely because of the way God prompted Carson to urge the church to invest in a larger insurance plan more than 20 years ago. They had tornadoes in mind when they did it, but God knew what was coming, he said.

Ross said he's seen that sort of thing happen over and over — God using Carson as a tool to take care of His church. Through the years, he has served as a deacon and treasurer and in countless other roles. He makes a point to encourage the young men in the church, and some sit with him every Sunday in the service.

"That's just Little Jim," Ross said. "There's nobody else in the world like him. He's one of a kind."

Every year, Carson signs up to help with Vacation

Bible School, and not with snacks or crafts — with recreation, Ross said. "They play Wiffle ball and kickball, and he's out there chasing balls and throwing them back."

Stopping just doesn't seem to be an option for Carson. When he returned from the war, he went to college, then taught agriculture and worked at Redstone Arsenal and with another company until he retired. But then his son, Michael, tempted him into another job — at 81 years old.

"Michael was working in the Alabama State Defense Force, and the sergeant major retired and left an opening in the personnel office at the airport. So Mike asked me about taking over the duties of the sergeant major," Carson said. "I told him I was 81, and he said, 'But you're in good health, and it's not a bad job.'"

That was enough for Car-

son. He performed that job for more than seven years, then retired again in 2010 at almost 90.

But even then, he couldn't stop. That year, he and other veterans got together and opened the Cost of Freedom Veterans Museum in Arab. It's open on Fridays and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

"We have a lot of stuff, some of it donated, some of it on loan," Carson said. "We have things from the Revolutionary War through all the wars up to the present."

That includes some of his own gear, and it also includes some from his family.

His grandfather fought in the Civil War, and he also has the telegram sent to his grandmother when one of his uncles was killed in World War I.

Carson will be glad to give anyone or any school group a tour, and Ross said Carson's uniform still fits him perfectly.

"It's still ironed just right," he said.

He said Carson continues to march in full cadence when he takes up the offering at church, and much like

70 years ago, he still knows how to support the people around him.

"He sits on the first row to my right every Sunday, and when we have the fellowship time, he's the first one up to shake my hand and thank me," Ross said. "And I always think, 'No, Little Jim, thank you. You fought for our country, and you fight for our church.'"

"Even when the church burned, he was in tears, smiling at me ... saying 'we're going to be OK.'"

Pastor Darryl Ross, Warrior Creek Baptist Church



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3 stories you should know



AP Photo/Risto Bozovi

People wait outside the Christian Orthodox monastery of Ostrog, Montenegro, on May 12, prior to protests in the country on May 13 demanding the release of eight Serbian Orthodox Church priests jailed for leading a religious procession despite coronavirus-related bans on such gatherings. Tensions between the government and the Serbian Orthodox Church have increased since passage of a law church officials say would strip the church of its property. (AP)

Pass the plate? Not yet, as churches rethink routines

Eight hundred church leaders from across the country recently took part in a virtual discussion on the impact of COVID-19 on churches.

Hosted by the Florida Family Policy Council, topics touched on during the event included how churches will transition back to in-person meetings, the church as a community rather than a building and giving.

When churchgoers return to First Baptist Church, Orlando, they will be required to wear facial coverings and the church will not be passing around an offering plate.

David Uth, pastor of First, Orlando, said buildings are not essential for the church to “be a church.”

John Stemberger, president of the FFPC, added, “This could be the churches’ finest hour. It really could be, if we respond with grace and respond with wisdom.” (AP)

Cruz urges DOJ to watch for discrimination in NYC

Texas Sen. Ted Cruz urged the Justice Department to monitor New York City after Mayor Bill de Blasio singled out members of the city’s Jewish community after a large number attended a funeral.

De Blasio’s statements came in response to an April 28 gathering in Brooklyn of thousands of Hasidic Orthodox Jews for the funeral of Rabbi Chaim Mertz.

“My message to the Jewish community, and all communities, is this simple: the time for warnings has passed,” De Blasio wrote on Twitter April 28. “I have instructed the NYPD to proceed immediately to summons or even arrest those who gather in large groups. ...”

Calling De Blasio’s actions “dangerous,” Cruz has questioned whether or not New York City’s Jewish community was “singled out.” (AP)

— SBC NEWS —

SBC entities facing COVID-19 pandemic-induced cuts

By Margaret Colson
The Alabama Baptist

Southern Baptist groups, including state conventions, seminaries and national entities and auxiliaries, are implementing budget and staff reductions in response to the economic downturn resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Information related to state conventions was covered in Part 1 in the May 14 issue. This week’s information focuses on national entities, seminaries and auxiliaries.

Seminaries

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary announced a 30% budget reduction. Gateway Seminary announced a slight budget reduction of 2.1% in the 2020–2021 budget approved by trustees on April 28. Southwestern, New Orleans and Southeastern seminaries have postponed budget adoptions. Midwestern Seminary noted this statement on its website: “We will be proactive in managing the 2019–2020 budget and will seek to steward funds in light of new needs and ministry opportunities presented to us.”

International Mission Board

International Mission Board President Paul Chitwood shared with *The Alabama Baptist* on May 7 that revenue totals for March and April dipped \$2 million below budget.

“Moreover,” he said, “we have made a significant investment in evacuating and relocating IMB personnel from certain places around the globe for a host of reasons related to the pandemic. These were unbudgeted expenses that are coming in at about \$2 million.”

Because of “this combined negative impact of \$4 million,” the IMB has cut spending and established a hiring freeze for most stateside staff positions.

North American Mission Board

With a goal of keeping all missionaries on the field, the North American Mission Board has reduced its overall budget by 40%, reported Mike Ebert, NAMB’s executive director of public relations. He stated funds going to church planters and other missionaries as well as funds ear-

marked for evangelism have not been reduced.

All NAMB missions trips have been canceled through the end of June, and travel is on hold until the end of the summer. Missions trips and travel will be reevaluated prior to their scheduled dates to be reinstated. NAMB has also put into place a hiring freeze.

GuideStone

GuideStone Financial Resources is “on a strong footing to weather the current crisis,” stated Roy Hayhurst, GuideStone’s director of denominational and public relations in an April 30 press release. That strong footing is the result of preparation through the past several years that anticipated an economic downturn.

Staff members are working from home and trying to cut or delay discretionary spending. The organization, which receives no Cooperative Program allocation for its services to Southern Baptists, has not laid off any employees, though some positions vacated through natural attrition may be left unfilled temporarily, the press release stated.

— ALABAMA NEWS —

Altoona pastor, Trussville fire marshal dies at 45

Jeff Fore — pastor of Fridays Crossing Baptist Church, Altoona, and Trussville's fire marshal died May 4. He was 45.

Fore earned a bachelor's degree in fire science from Columbia Southern University in Orange Beach, completed the executive fire officer program of the National Fire Academy and graduated from the police academy.



FORE

In addition to his fire marshal role, he also was assistant chief at Trussville Fire and Rescue and served as a firefighter and paramedic.

Before becoming pastor at Fridays Crossing Baptist, he also served as pastor of Mount Carmel Baptist Church, Oneonta.

Fore is survived by his wife, Julie, and daughters, Bentley Grace and Anyston Olivia. (Grace Thornton)

Horton marks 10 years as pastor of Elkdale Baptist, Selma

Cory Horton says his "greatest joy" of serving as pastor of Elkdale Baptist Church, Selma, for the past decade is "watching church members grow in their walk with the Lord."

Horton celebrated 10 years at the church May 2.

Before coming to Elkdale, Horton served at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega.

During his time at the Selma church, he has led

the congregation verse by verse through more than 19 books of the Bible.

He's also helped lead the church to adopt an Acts 1:8 missions strategy.

Horton credits the longevity of pastoring Elkdale to "the faithfulness of God, strong leadership from staff and deacons as well as the wonderful loving congregation." (TAB)



HORTON

TAB's weekly newspaper, website, special issue garner EPA awards

The TAB Media team earned several honors from Evangelical Press Association for work done in 2019. The awards are:

- ▶ Award of Merit for overall periodical
- ▶ Award of Merit for tabonline.org
- ▶ Fourth place for publication redesign
- ▶ First place in general article, medium for

"'Snowflake' babies" in the May 9, 2019, issue by Grace Thornton

▶ Third place in editorial for "Is it really fair to claim 'it isn't fair' in the life of a believer" in the July 25, 2019, issue by Jennifer Davis Rash

▶ Third place in table of contents for pages 2 and 3 of the special issue magazine "Fruitful" by Lauren Grim. (TAB)



Persecuted church

Two young Christian women in Uganda beaten for faith

BUGIRI DISTRICT, Uganda — Two young Christian women were beaten in separate attacks in eastern Uganda.

Radical Muslims attacked Lydia Nabirye, 23, in Luwooko village April 7. Attackers told Nabirye she was beaten for converting Muslims. Nabirye, daughter of Church of God evangelist Paul Kai-kiya, had told a Muslim woman about Jesus. That woman received Jesus as Savior and was threatened by her family. The woman came to live with Nabirye's family, who was sheltering six other converts.



Photo by Morning Star News

In Odwarata village, former Muslim Sylvia Shamimu Nabafa, 27, was hospitalized after her family beat her Feb. 16 for becoming a Christian. Weeks earlier after hearing radio sermons, Nabafa accepted Jesus. She secretly attended church but was seen by a Muslim neighbor who told her father. Nabafa was five-months pregnant at the time of the attack, but the baby was not harmed.

Uganda's constitution allows religious freedom and proselytizing. The country is considered majority Christian, with the minority Muslim population highly concentrated in eastern Uganda. (MS)

— SBC NEWS —

Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission has suspended travel and events and "worked diligently to identify any and all spending that can be reduced, delayed or frozen," said Daniel Patterson, ERLC executive vice president.

No employees have been laid off as a result of the pandemic but recently vacated positions will not be filled, with responsibilities from those roles reassigned among current staff, he said.

"The ERLC will continue to be diligent in managing the current operating budget with the greatest wisdom and care in the hope that these measures will enable the ERLC to carry out the mission the Southern Baptist Convention has entrusted to us with faithfulness and effectiveness."

LifeWay

LifeWay Christian Resources announced a series of budgetary freezes, cutbacks and staff reductions April 29.

"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," Ben Mandrell, LifeWay CEO explained, adding, "LifeWay is mitigating these losses as much as possible through various expense reduction plans, including staff reductions and cuts in non-employee expenses. Additionally, LifeWay will likely use money from its reserves to cover a portion of the lost revenue."

Effective May 1, LifeWay reduced staff, froze all hiring and discretionary spending and suspended salary increases and matching 401K contributions for all employees.

In making these reductions, LifeWay committed to providing a comprehensive package of benefits to those impacted by the reductions, including severance pay where applicable. Additionally, members of LifeWay's executive leadership team gave up one month's salary beginning in May.

LifeWay expects to cut \$25-\$30 million of recurring expenses from its operating budget.

LifeWay also will begin a feasibility study of its corporate office building in downtown Nashville, which LifeWay moved into in November 2017.

Part 2 of 2

To read the story in its entirety, visit tabonline.org/SBC-cuts.

Woman's Missionary Union

National Woman's Missionary Union has been in the process of "right-sizing" its organization for several years, said Julie Walters, WMU communications specialist.

"After two years of back-to-back downsizings, our staff and budget have been reduced by approximately 30%. Salaries have been frozen for three years, and all vacated positions are vigorously evaluated to ensure roles are in place to advance WMU's mandate of making disciples of Jesus who live on mission."

The missions organization has suspended travel until further notice and it has canceled events. Moving forward, WMU leaders will "need to consider budget reductions," Walters said, but no details have been determined.

Sandy Wisdom-Martin, executive director of national WMU, said, "My heart aches for all in leadership in the Southern Baptist family who are making gut-wrenching decisions. ... 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." (Jennifer Davis Rash contributed)

Someone You Should Know

BETTY BROOKS

By Leigh Pritchett
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Betty Brooks, 87, of McCalla knows her mission is to serve. For 40 years, she has taught Sunday School and still prepares lunch for 15–23 family members each Sunday. She retired as a contract manager after 30 years with the Bell System. She attends Samford University’s Ministry Training Institute through Bibb Baptist Association.

Q: Describe where you focus your greatest ministry efforts.

A: Teaching Sunday School. I feel responsible completely for the group of people in that class, if they are sick or have a need. Sometimes, someone will call (me) and just want to talk. The Sunday School class is always right there to minister to them.

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

A: In the first part of my life, (it) was my mother. I was raised in a poor family. I had a daddy, but my mother made sure we had what we needed and (she) taught us to do right.

And then it was a previous pastor. His name is Ben Corley. He worked in the mines and was injured. He wasn’t supposed to live. He is in a wheelchair. He is there for you. You can watch him and think, “If this man can do it, so can I.” This man’s faith — when you see his faith — you’ve got to have faith that the Lord is there because this man cannot do it on his own.

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

A: The turning point in my life was when I moved to Woodstock and that was in 1961. We got here at 3 a.m. and at 9 a.m., I told my

daughter we needed to find a church. When we came to this little church (FBC Woodstock), there were so many opportunities; it has been such a blessing to me. God sent me here. That was a turning point, from being one of many to being what God wanted me to be.

Q: What has God been teaching you lately?

A: I need to be evangelizing more. And I told Bro. Bill (Russell, Bibb Association director of missions, who teaches the MTI class she attends) a lot about this. Our last course was about evangelizing. We have been praying about it. ... I am not out in a field where there are a lot of lost people and I need to be. I have been praying for God to send me to lost people.

Q: If there was one thing you could tell young people about faith, what would it be?

A: I would tell them that

they need to have more faith when they’re younger. If God was there before, He still is. It took me awhile to have as much faith as I have now. If I had had this much faith when I was 19, I would have been better off.

If they just have the faith when they’re young, they won’t make so many mistakes. You’re not thinking much about faith when you are a teenager. Faith is an important thing.

Q: Does your church have any special traditions that mean a lot to you? What are they?

A: We still have these traditions that I live by — Easter sunrise service, homecoming and Thanksgiving outreach (meal deliveries).

There is a younger generation out there and these traditions don’t mean a lot to them.

Q: Have you ever read a book or heard a song that

MINISTRY: Serving others and the church by serving as church clerk, working in the Master’s Kitchen ministry to feed the hungry, being in the women’s ministry, organizing senior excursions and assisting her pastor, Steven Hicks



CHURCH NAME: First Baptist Church, Woodstock, in Bibb Baptist Association

LIFE VERSE: “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” (James 4:17)

changed the way you think about God and faith? What was it and what did you learn from it?

A: My favorite song is “God on the Mountain” — “for the God on the

mountain is the God in the valley.” When we are on the mountain, we need God, just like we need Him in the valley. (The song took on new meaning when her husband had cancer.)

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Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Theology in Unusual Terms

Maranatha

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

Previously, we have looked at an Old Testament place name (Ebenezer) and an Old Testament personal name (Ichabod) in order to seek theological truths that attach to or flow from these words and the events surrounding them.

This week we look at a term lifted from the Aramaic vocabulary and inserted in the Greek New Testament. The word is “Maranatha.” It is found untranslated in the King James Version of 1 Cor. 16:22, “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha.” In translation, the term expresses the prayerful and joyful exclamation, “O Lord, come!” The next to last verse in the Bible expresses this same sentiment, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20). This prayerful request follows immediately on the promise the ascended Christ gave His servant John, “Surely I am coming soon.”

‘God is our hope’

Regarding the place name Ebenezer, the basic truth about God is that He is our Helper, as expressed in the meaning of that name, “Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.” The name Ichabod reveals the basic truth that God is our glory, as deduced from the meaning of this name, “the glory has departed.”

This week the basic truth we take from the Aramaic term Maranatha is God is our hope. Titus 2:12–13 exhorts us to live soberly, righteously and godly in

the present age, “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

The force or emphasis in the meaning of Maranatha is not on the timing of Christ’s return but on its certainty.

As time-bound creatures we might say it has been 2,000 years or so since Christ’s promise to return. However, from heaven’s viewpoint, in which a thousand years are as a day and a day as a thousand years, it has been but a couple of days since that promise was given.

Live in expectation

The practical force of a Maranatha faith is that we live each day in the expectation that Christ could return before sunset.

That possibility fills life with hope and serves as an impetus for holy living and faithful serving in the time we have before His coming for us or before our departure to join Him.

“We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:2–3).

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.



Air force chaplain keeps ‘true gospel faith front and center’

Shannon Smith says that it doesn’t matter where Rick Montoya is — even if the place is small, he has a big influence.

He knows this starting from when he grew up attending special youth events with Mount Hebron (now Crossroads Community Church), Elmore — Montoya was the assistant youth group leader then. Through the years, they kept crossing paths — Montoya as an air force chaplain, Smith as an Air Force Security Forces officer.

And then back in August 2019, when Montoya began his educational assignment at Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base, he showed up at Deatsville Baptist Church, where Smith had been serving as bivocational pastor since the beginning of the year.

“I’d had about six months under my belt as a pastor, and I’d done some things right and done some things wrong,” Smith said. “Rick helped steady me. He’s been an incredible mentor.”

Smith said he’s doubly in awe of how God brought Montoya to his rural church, which draws about 40 each Sunday.

In the past, Montoya has been the spiritual leader for thousands of military personnel. He’s been stationed in Virginia, Colorado, Turkey, Mississippi, Idaho, Florida, Germany and Alabama.

In his next assignment, Montoya — newly promoted to the rank of

Colonel — will be the senior chaplain for Joint Base San Antonio in Texas. That includes personnel at Lackland AFB, Randolph AFB, Fort Sam Houston and Camp Bullis — around 80,000 full-time employees.

“It’s fun,” Montoya said. “It’s a lot to manage, but you don’t do it by yourself — you have others to help carry the load.”

‘Massive missions assignment’

God’s also given him preparation along the way, he said. He started out as an enlisted Airman before moving into ministry, and he’s walked through some hard times in his personal life through the years. He’s had a range of ministry opportunities, including serving as a chaplain to the Port of Mobile through Mobile Baptist Association.

And now caring for the spiritual welfare of the people protecting our nation is Montoya’s “Jerusalem,” he said — the place he understands the most. He’s grateful he gets to do what he loves while staying true to who he is as a Christ follower and Southern Baptist.

Smith said Montoya is the perfect person for this “massive missions assignment.”

“Rick’s the kind of guy who can keep our true gospel faith front and center while managing and taking care of a diverse group of chaplains with different belief systems and value sets that are reflective of the overall military,” he said. (TAB)



Air Force Chaplain Corp Facebook photo

Rick Montoya (third from right), a member of Deatsville Baptist Church and recently pinned Air Force colonel, is headed to his next assignment this summer — command chaplain for Joint Base San Antonio in Texas.

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GOOD NEWS For You!



Share **YOUR** stories of how God is at work in your church and community on our Facebook page or at alsbom.org/goodnews.

During recent days, numerous Alabama Baptist pastors have shared on Facebook how God is blessing their congregations during these unusual times. Here are just a few of the good news testimonies we found:

"Our staff has called, written and contacted every church member on roll during the quarantine. So very proud of our team who love and serve the church family!" –**Alan Floyd, COTTAGE HILL BAPTIST CHURCH** (Mobile Association)



"I mailed a copy of the 'three circles' – a visual way of sharing the Gospel – to a man who had been visiting our church. I had witnessed to him in person, but he had not been ready to turn to Christ. After the virus shutdown, we talked further by phone about how the coronavirus pandemic was an example of the consequences of sin and the brokenness of the world. This time, he was ready to turn to Christ. Over the phone, he prayed to trust Christ. The Gospel can overcome social separation." –**Tim Henning, NEW BEGINNINGS FELLOWSHIP, TRUSSVILLE** (St. Clair Association)

"One of the dads in our church led his daughter to the Lord, and she came by to tell me. It was a great time." –**Mike Goforth, SARDIS BAPTIST CHURCH, BOAZ** (Marshall Association)

"A 23-year-old young man made a profession of faith, and another couple made a rededication of their lives to Christ." –**Derrall Marshall, SHADOW LAWN BAPTIST CHURCH, EIGHT MILE** (Mobile Association)

"On May 6, I had the pleasure of baptizing a 94-year-old resident from The Village at Cook Springs. Recorded services and Bible studies, including through Zoom, are going well. Our food ministry is meeting great needs in our area. The Gospel is being presented. The Lord is moving!" –**Paul Brasher, NEW HOPE BAPTIST CHURCH, PELL CITY** (St. Clair Association)

"We have had good numbers for our online services and continue to pass out food and supplies to 35 to 40 area families who are in need." –**Richard Hall, PAINT ROCK MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH** (Tennessee River Association)

"Cameron, a 27-year-old man, had been coming to church for about a year. Right after we went to online-only services, he became a Christian. During the invitation, I had asked anyone who would trust Christ to type 'Jesus' in the Livestream comments or text me. He did." –**Ben Hayes, DADEVILLE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH** (Tallapoosa Association)

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.

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UPCOMING FREE WEBINARS VISIT [ALSBOM.ORG/EVENTS](http://alsbom.org/events) TO REGISTER

LEADERSHIP AND MINISTRY IN CHALLENGING TIMES Tuesday, May 26, 10-11 a.m.

TOPIC: Weathering the Storm with Limited Resources
Join Executive Director Rick Lance and State Missionaries Ken Allen, Daniel Edmonds, Mike Jackson and Jim Swedenburg for this free webinar on this very timely matter.



THEMANCHURCH.COM TRAINING WITH RICK BURGESS Thursday, May 28, 6:30-8 p.m.

Learn how to use the new men's ministry resource, Themanchurch.com, from speaker, author and radio host, Rick Burgess. Join us for this free webinar to hear how to develop a growth strategy for men in your church.

CHURCH TAX CONFERENCE FOR SMALL CHURCHES Tuesday, June 16, 10 a.m.-Noon

Do you need a W-2 if the pastor is the only paid employee? Do you have to complete the form 941? Can the minister take 100% of his income as housing? How does a small church of 100 or less differ from a large church in tax issues? These questions and more will be answered at this free webinar led by State Missionary Lee Wright in the Office of LeaderCare & Church Health.





LUNCH AND LEARN Thursday, June 25, 12-1:30 p.m.

This free monthly webinar is designed to allow you to interact online with a nationally-known leader in disciple making during your lunch hour, followed by an additional 30 minute Q&A with the Alabama hosts. This session will feature Alan Briggs, pastor, author and network leader for making disciples who can make disciples.

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

COVID-19 pandemic challenges the Church, economy in Uganda

By Pastor Peter Mugabi
General Secretary, Baptist Union Of Uganda

To a large number of people it was completely unexpected when the president of Uganda issued a country-wide lockdown March 18. This took place in phases beginning with asking people to stay home to eventually banning public gatherings including church services.

Unprecedented time

The unprecedented time of temporary closure announced by the president took a great toll on a mass of people.

Hundreds had not stocked enough food for the quarantine, and many traders that make about 75% of their sales on a daily basis were left in suspense of what was to be of their businesses.

Church leaders are

dealing with trauma and cases of anxiety among the church congregation as well as their own families. The

people, especially those who dwell in rural areas, are in a state of confusion and probable misunderstanding of the pandemic mainly because they receive second-hand information about COVID-19.

This second-hand information has created misconceptions of the disease that has been associated to witchcraft. Many people in the rural areas do not own

information devices and therefore mostly listen to what their neighbors share, which results in misunderstandings and confusion among the people.

However, despite all the tragedies, many churches have had prayer days and fasting during this period. Members of the churches

have strengthened their relationships with God in their homes.

This time also has tested and challenged us to seek the supreme Lord Jesus Christ, whose power, love and mercy we need more than ever during this time.



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Christian Crossword

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Across

1. I am the brother to dragons and a companion to _____. (Job 30:29)
5. ____ the son of Abdiel. (1 Chron. 5:15)
8. Festive.
12. An invasion.
13. Leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent ____ him. (Amos 5:19)
14. For this ____ is Mount Sinai in Arabia. (Gal. 4:25)
15. But let him ____ in faith. (James 1:6)
16. To marry.
17. Outer layer.
18. The man took a golden earring of half a ____ weight. (Gen. 24:22)
20. Trainee.
21. A brother offended is harder to be ____ than a strong city. (Prov. 18:19)
22. In that day when I ____ up my jewels. (Mal. 3:17)
23. The churches of ____ salute you. (1 Cor. 16:19)
25. Governing board.
28. Possesses.

Down

29. The dogs came and licked his _____. (Luke 16:21)
30. Meadow.
32. Era.
34. Now the coat was without _____. (John 19:23)
35. For My yoke is _____. (Matt. 11:30)
36. A scarf.
37. Roller or ice.
39. Cooled.
42. Blaze.
43. Illuminated.
44. ____, Elah and Naam. (1 Chron. 4:15)
45. Who shall ____ us away the stone? (Mark 16:3)
46. What ____eth thee, Hagar? (Gen. 21:17)
47. To break suddenly.
48. Children, ____ your parents in the Lord. (Eph. 6:1)
49. Yea, thou shalt ____ thy children's children. (Ps. 128:6)
50. To leer.

4. Midwest state. (abbr.)
5. ____ was a keeper of sheep. (Gen. 4:2)
6. In whom are ____ all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Col. 2:3)
7. ____ is finished. (John 19:30)
8. God sent him forth from the ____ of Eden. (Gen. 3:23)
9. Terror, consumption and the burning _____. (Lev. 26:16)
10. And it shall come to pass in the ____ days. (Isa. 2:2)
11. Rabbi, thou ____ the Son of God. (John 1:49)
16. Blind, or broken, or maimed, of having a _____. (Lev. 22:22)
17. And they baked unleavened ____ of the dough. (Ex. 12:39)
19. All the Chaldeans, Pekod and Shoa and _____. (Ezek. 23:23)
20. Tricky.
22. A ____ heart doeth good like a medicine. (Prov. 17:22)
23. ____ sinful nation, a

24. A pouch.
25. Who shall ____ him up. (Gen. 49:9)
26. Washing.
27. For all the promises of God in Him are _____. (2 Cor. 1:20)
29. The last ____ of that man is worse. (Matt. 12:45)
31. I ____ become a fool. (2 Cor. 12:11)
33. Almost.
34. This is My beloved ____, in whom I am well pleased. (Matt. 3:17)
36. The lapwing, and the _____. (Lev. 11:19)
37. A sloppy person.
38. Cabbage.
39. Yet they had a ____ for the mattocks. (1 Sam. 13:21)
40. Epochal.
41. To deceive.
42. I am full of tossings to and _____. (Job 7:4)
43. But wild beasts of the desert shall ____ there. (Isa. 13:21)
46. Even ____ Christ forgave you, so also do ye. (Col. 3:13)
47. Even ____, come, Lord Jesus. (Rev. 22:20)

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For May 24

Explore the Bible

By Robert E. Jackson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



ACCEPTING Romans 14:1–13

Stop Judging (1–4)

The church of Rome included both Jews and Greeks. Amazingly, people of various cultures, ethnicity, status and even genders worshipped together. However, this fact doesn't mean that everything was always harmonious.

Paul discusses a conflict between the “weak” in the faith, probably converts from Judaism, and those “strong” in the faith, more likely the Gentile believers.

Those who were “weak” were not inferior Christians but believers who clung to their Mosaic dietary laws.

On the other hand, the dominant Gentile group celebrated its freedom to eat anything. This conflict is a matter of adiaphora or “gray issues” that are neither commanded nor prohibited in the new covenant.

Thus, Paul addresses both groups and urges them to change their attitudes towards one another: the strong must stop looking down on the weak, and the weak must stop condemning the strong. God is the judge.

Today, we also deal with “gray issues.” For example, my dad (who was a pastor) allowed me to go to school dances. A member of our church was furious with this decision and exclaimed, “Your son is on the devil’s path going to dances.” I thank the Lord that I am saved by faith in Jesus Christ and not upon whether I danced or didn’t dance.

We see similar disagreements concerning which translation of the Bible should be used, the type of instruments played in worship, being in a social club and so forth.

These disputes do not involve doctrine but practice. We, too, must avoid judging other Christians’ practices based upon our religious convictions.

Honor God (5–8)

Another area of tension between these two groups is over “sacred” days. Some Jewish believers de-

sired to keep the holy days, festivals and a strict interpretation of the Sabbath.

Gentiles, however, did not. A key to this dispute is understanding the ultimate goal in every religious practice is to honor God.

In this passage, Paul teaches it is OK for Jewish followers to adhere to their strict laws as long as they are honoring God.

Similarly, Gentile believers are free to overlook these holy days as long as they honor the Lord.

I remember a time when no one mowed their lawn, played sports or shopped on a Sunday. Today, I see Christians cutting their grass after church, running to the store and even playing ball on a Sunday.

Admittedly, I still do not cut the grass, wash the car and so forth on a Sunday. However, I certainly do not condemn my brother or sister for practicing their freedom in Christ.

The important issue according to Paul is honoring God in what we are doing or refusing to do. Whether we live or die, we do it unto the Lord.

Remove Obstacles (9–13)

Paul concludes this section by reminding believers we will each stand before the judgment seat of God. Each person will be required to give an account of his or her life.

Put simply, leave the judgment of one’s practices to Him. Our conduct in life that does not contradict biblical truth is a matter just between God and ourselves. Otherwise, we may become a stumbling block within the church (v. 13).

We must determine to remove any obstacles or stumbling blocks for other Christians by our judgmental accusations of the way they live out their Christian faith. Instead, let us make sure our Christian practices bring glory to the Father.

In conclusion, I will keep “shaking both legs,” while some of you only “tap your foot.” Let’s not judge one another. 🙏

Bible Studies for Life

By James Riley Strange, Ph.D.

Professor of New Testament, Samford University



YIELD Philippians 2:1–5, 12–15

Last week we read from the letter that contains Paul’s harshest language. Today we turn to the letter many consider his warmest. The Philippian Christians have a “partnership in the gospel” with Paul (1:5), they sent Epaphroditus to help him in prison (2:25) and they have supported him with monetary gifts (4:10–18). Nevertheless, some of these believers are divided from one another (1:27; 2:1–4; 14–15; 4:2–4).

In response, the imprisoned Paul calls for humility and unity. Hence, a willingness to yield is the fifth in our series of traits that can mend and strengthen relationships among Christians.

The passages we are studying fall on either side of verses whose imagery and rhythm are so pronounced that some scholars think Paul is quoting a hymn (2:6–11). Whether or not he composed the language, Paul uses Christ’s obedience — His willingness to empty and humble Himself (vv. 7–8) — as an example for the Philippians to follow. Later, Paul will hold himself up as an example of someone who gave up his high status “because of Christ” (3:3–17).

Humbly look out for the needs and interests of others. (1–4)

The point of verse 1 is that there is indeed “encouragement in Christ ... consolation of love ... fellowship with the Spirit ... affection and mercy” (CSB). “Make my joy complete” is a rhetorical flourish, for the true goal is for the Philippians to “think the same way” by adopting “the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus” (v. 5). The language in these verses and in 4:2 is quite similar, which suggests Paul is addressing two believers in particular: Euodia and Syntyche.

Jesus is our example of humility and submission. (5)

We can answer the question, “What would Jesus do?” because we know what He did. Although

He was “in the form of God,” He gave up “equality with God” through obedience, even to the point of dying on the cross.

Based on the first clause of verse 7, many refer to the “self-emptying” theology of verses 6–11. Christ did not exalt Himself; rather, He emptied Himself of all status. In the end, “every knee will bow ... and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father” because “God highly exalted him.”

Jesus said something similar in the Gospels: do not seek to outrank your brothers and sisters in order to impose your will on them. Rather, humble yourself to them now — submit yourself to God now — so God will exalt you when you see Him face to face.

Live humbly without grumbling, complaining or arguing. (12–15)

The word “therefore” at the start of verse 12 explains why Paul gives us verses 6–11. Christians tend to focus on this “hymn” because of what it teaches about Christ (doctrine), but Paul uses it to encourage people to behave rightly toward one another (exhortation). The problem becomes clear in verse 14: some Philippian Christians, maybe Euodia and Syntyche, are doing things with “grumbling and arguing.” As we learned in previous lessons in this series, God is the source of the trait we’re talking about. God makes it possible for us to yield to our brothers and sisters.

Hence, although complaining can result from the sin of arrogance, the antidote is not for us to change our behavior or our attitudes — not on our own, in any case. Rather, as with all sin, God supplies the cure. He “is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose” (v. 13; compare 1:6). God changes both our wills and our work to conform to Christ’s.

Thanks be to God that He who requires change makes change possible. 🙏



Media reviews

MUSIC

Childhood experiences foundational for Rathke's faith, service

By Tracy Riggs
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Singer-songwriter Mike Rathke sees some powerful significance in dates associated with his just-released EP “The Dawning Fire” — significance he sees as confirming God’s hand has been in the album all along.

It started when Rathke looked at his phone the first morning of studio recording. In the busyness of preparation, Rathke hadn’t noticed the date. Quickly checking Facebook, he saw a post that reminded him of his salvation anniversary — 22 years to the day since he accepted Christ and bought a Bible for the first time.

“It didn’t even dawn on me that first day in the studio was going to be ... on the anniversary of my salvation,” Rathke said. “I thought, ‘Wow. That’s so awesome God would orchestrate those events for that weekend to happen that way.’”

God’s fingerprint

The two days were a flurry of activity, getting all the songs for the EP recorded. After the final track was laid down, a friend texted, asking if Rathke realized he had recorded one of the tracks, “Oh, Lord, You’re Beautiful,” on the 37th anniversary of the death of the song’s writer, Keith Green.

“It was one of the moments where you stand back and say, ‘Man, God, thank You for Your fin-

gerprint on this weekend.’... I take a lot of stock in that because when God says something to you and you hang on to it, even when the circumstances don’t look like it’s going to be coming any time soon, He comes through and says, ‘Here I was directing your steps the whole time.’”

‘Follow Him’

Looking back, it is obvious that God was directing Rathke, even when he had no idea it was hap-

pening. He grew up in a poor family in Kansas, attending Sunday School at a local Baptist church when he was a child. There he got a basic understanding of the gospel, but due to his mother’s mental illness, they stopped go-

ing to church when he was 9 or 10 years old.

As his mother’s condition got worse, he and his siblings left home. Rathke began staying with friends at 12 years old. But even during those hard years, Rathke recognized God is faithful — he always had a roof over his head.

In high school, Rathke went through a rebellious phase and drifted further away from God. However, after he dropped out of school, God intervened.

“It all kind of came to a head. I was around 19. I was working for a cemetery of all places. I was mowing grass and listening to my headphones while I was working. For



Mike Rathke

Photo courtesy of Janet Bozeman

some reason, the Holy Spirit started to compel me to come close to Him. I would find myself listening to sermons on the radio. ... Through that the Lord really began to convict me, and I felt this strong urge to buy a Bible. I felt like He didn’t want me to say the sinner’s prayer again but that He wanted me to take up my cross and follow Him.”

On the way home from work, Rathke bought his first Bible and started reading it, starting with Ezekiel. Even though he had no idea what he was reading, God used that time to instill in him a love for the Word.

Rathke later discovered his biological father, whom he didn’t meet until he was 19, was a devout Christian and had prayed for him daily. “I have no other explanation for why the Lord called me except that there was somebody ... praying for me every day,” Rathke said.

Rathke had taught himself how to play the guitar while staying with a friend who had a guitar. At 14, he bought his first guitar with \$20 he had gotten for his birthday. Though

he spent a lot of time playing throughout his teen years, this passion didn’t really take off until he got into church. He started playing on his worship team, led worship and then went to Christ for the Nations Institute to study in the school of worship.

Now working full-time for Prazor, a Christian music streaming app, Rathke has the flexibility to tour and record as God opens the doors. He leads worship for the team at Prazor and also is a

guest worship leader at local churches whenever he gets the opportunity.

‘In His time’

“The biggest takeaway from this whole experience has been God is faithful and He’ll do what He says He’s going to do. Just hold on. Whatever the circumstances are, just hold on. Be faithful. Serve Him. Serve His Church wherever you’re at, and the Lord will open up doors in His time.”

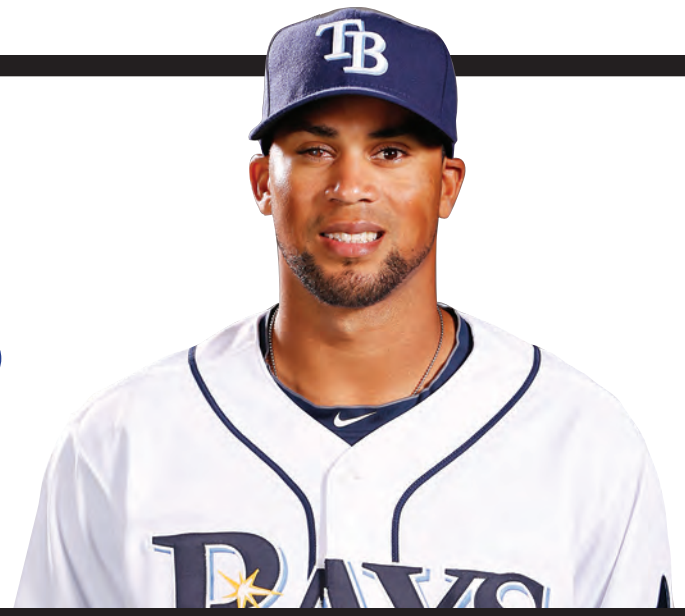
To learn more about Rathke and his music, visit mikerathkemusic.com.

To learn more about Mike Rathke and his music, visit mikerathkemusic.com.

“The biggest takeaway from this whole experience has been God is faithful and He’ll do what He says He’s going to do. Just hold on.”

Mike Rathke

'WALK BY FAITH'



Professional baseball player has clear faith after incident left him blind in one eye

By Bill Sorrell
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Juan Sandoval has never lost sight of what is most important in life despite being blind in his right eye.

In February 2006, Sandoval and his then-fiancé, now wife Erisa, and other family members were eating dinner in his hometown of Bonao, Dominican Republic, before returning to the United States for Major League Baseball spring training with the Seattle Mariners.

A drunk man began arguing with the restaurant security guard. Shots were fired, and three pellets hit Sandoval's right eye.

Growing stronger

Rushed to the hospital for seven hours of surgery, doctors saved his eye but could not save his vision.

Baseball was on hold.

"I didn't know what was going to happen in my career. I couldn't do

any physical activity. The only concern was to be healthy and at least to have a normal life," said Sandoval, a right-handed pitcher whose recovery would take more than a year.

Sandoval began to see clearly the truth of 2 Corinthians 5:7, "We walk by faith, not by sight."

"If you don't have faith, you have nothing. I put my faith in the Lord. With the accident I didn't have a doubt about it. I knew I could keep playing," said Sandoval, who was a strong believer before but admitted his faith had grown stronger as a result of the injury.

Missing the 2006 season, Sandoval returned in 2007, pitching for the Mariners' Double-A Southern League team, the West Tenn Diamond Jaxx and the Tacoma Rainiers in the Triple-A Pacific Coast League.

"It was amazing. Whenever I came back to the field, I could do

everything. I was surprised. Everybody was surprised. I'm still pitching. I feel like a normal person, a normal player. I do everything everybody else does in the clubhouse, on the field and off. It was the Lord. I put my faith in the Lord. I think that has been the key," Sandoval explained.

'Play for Christ'

The biggest problem he has had in baseball since the injury has been catching ground balls because of depth-perception.

"You need both eyes," he said.

But he looks at his baseball career as part of a larger picture.

"I play for Jesus Christ. He is the One. I thank God because He has blessed me in many ways. To be wearing the uniform still is a real blessing. Baseball is what I do for a living. This is what I do to feed my family. This is what I love. This is a job like everybody else. There are more important things in my life outside baseball. My God gave me all those things."

Sandoval is still playing because of God's purpose.

"I believe God works in mysterious ways," he explained. "We don't understand why something happens [but] He has a plan," Sandoval said. "I understand everything happens for a reason. That is why I am happy every day.

"You never know what is going to happen. There are many people in the hospital, in jail, who don't have their freedom, their health. I have everything. Why do I want to be sad? Why not enjoy that?"

Through his career, that began in 2002 in the Seattle Mariners'

Rookie League, through this past season with Oaxaca in the Mexican League, Sandoval has impacted teams and teammates.

He played for two Southern League affiliates in Alabama, the Huntsville Stars in 2008 and the Montgomery Biscuits in 2013.

He has been on spring training rosters for Milwaukee, Philadelphia and Tampa Bay, and he played at the Triple-A level with Nashville and Durham.

After playing in the Mexican League from 2014 to 2019, Sandoval now waits to find out where he will play when baseball resumes after the coronavirus pandemic.


One day he wants to be an architect, but for now, he continues to persevere in baseball.

'What I'm here for'

"I have learned that if I want something, I go for it," Sandoval said. "I'm tough to take down."

Scripture reassures and encourages Sandoval, especially the passages talking about Jesus. He always keeps them in sight as reminders of what it means to follow Christ.

"Christians are people who follow Jesus, no matter what church you go to or where you are coming from or what language you [speak]," Sandoval said.

"There are no words to describe what Jesus means. I don't think it's about words. It's about actions. I can tell you as many words as I want right now, but I think our actions, the way you move around, the things you do or don't do, how you go to people, different life situations, that is when you realize, 'this is what I am here for.'" 



Photos by Skip Milos / Tampa Bay Rays

To read Juan Sandoval's story in its entirety, visit tabonline.org/JuanSandoval.