



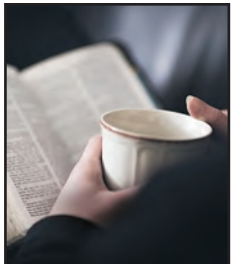
# The Alabama Baptist

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June 18, 2020

Vol. 185, No. 25  
Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

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While Baldwin Baptist Association's Gulf Area Resort Ministry isn't currently hosting summer day camps like this one from a previous year, leaders are hosting daily Facebook videos for children that includes Bible stories, puppets and other special features.

Photo courtesy of Gulf Area Resort Ministry

# Coastal MINISTRY

## Opportunities to share Christ abound in resorts, campgrounds, RV parks dotting Alabama's Gulf Coast

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

**D**an Rush said someone told him once that everyone at the beach was running away from something.

Rush didn't buy it at first. But the more he thought about it, he said he realized it was true.

"Sometimes they're just get-

ting away from everything to relax and sometimes they're trying to get away from a crisis that they will have to deal with when they get back," he said.

### Building friendships

Whatever it is they're escaping from, Rush likes to offer them a little encouragement to take home with them. In his work as a park chaplain with

Gulf Area Resort Ministry of Baldwin Baptist Association, he holds services at RV parks in the Gulf Shores area and spends a lot of time getting to know people.

"We have built friendships there and gotten to do some pastoral ministry," Rush said, noting that especially during the winter snowbird season, (See 'Open,' page 14)

## Romar Beach Church building up for sale

**R**omar Beach Baptist Church's beachfront building is up for sale, though acting pastor Chris Fowler says he hopes it will never come to that.

The church, which lost its original building to Hurricane Ivan in 2004 and dedicated its new building in 2008, is facing financial difficulties that at presstime remained unresolved.

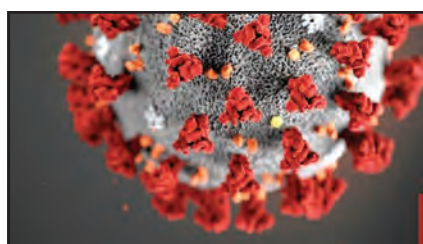
"We're in the horns of a dilemma," said Fowler, who has been on staff at the church since 2012.

When the church started rebuilding after the hurricane, the congregation of around 50 local members picked up an "unfathomable" mortgage, Fowler said.

The post-hurricane (See 'Romar,' page 10)



TAB file photo



# COVID-19

See pages 6-8 for information and updates

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Photo by Jessica Ingram

TAB Media hosted The Writing Minister workshop June 1, led by Denise George and sponsored by SonCoast Publishing.

# Writing Minister workshop held at TAB; more to come

Things didn't quite go as originally planned for The Writing Minister workshop.

First scheduled for late March, the workshop was postponed until June 1 as the threat of the coronavirus increased.

As June 1 approached, TAB decided the workshop would be held as a hybrid seminar — with most people joining the workshop via Zoom and a few participating in person where they could all safely social distance.

Led by Denise George and sponsored by SonCoast Publishing, The Writing Minister workshop equipped church staff members and ministers who are interested in writing and publishing.

"When God calls you to write, what an important ministry. When He calls you to write, He will equip you," George said. "He's right there alongside. We never write alone."

## Why ministers must write

Ministers who are called to write have a significant place in the Church, George said, noting four reasons why they should write.

**1. Ministers must write because they have the answers to guide people who don't.** People are lost and confused and need answers. People need hope.

**2. Ministers who write leave a legacy.** Books and articles have lasting power and give ministers the

opportunity to continue bearing that rich fruit after their time on earth has passed. Ministers are always among us with their writings, their hope and their knowledge.

**3. Ministers can speak through the written word to places in the world once considered closed to the gospel.** With the continued advancement of technology, the written word can spread more

quickly and more broadly across the world.

**4. Ministers must write simply because that's what their calling requires.** They write sermons, Bible studies, letters, curriculum, etc. Writing is a craft to be studied, learned and practiced. God will give

ministers the calling and passion for writing, but they'll have to work at it too.

George finds her career in writing to be more than just a moneymaker. It's a passion. It's her heart.

"Writing is about the most fulfilling, exciting career I could ever imagine," George said. "It's encouraged my whole life. It's given me a voice, and I love it."

TAB will host Traditional Book Publishing 101 — another hybrid workshop — later this summer.

The workshop was originally scheduled for July 13 but has been postponed until mid-to-late August. More information will be provided at a later date. (Jessica Ingram)



GEORGE

## 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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The crossword puzzle  
can be found on page 15.

# MY RASHIONALE

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

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



## What if we found a way to duplicate the grandparent effect?

A few weeks ago, I found a stack of letters my Granny McCaig had written me during the time I served the Caribbean as a short-term missionary with the International Mission Board.

Such a sweet treasure to uncover — I'm so thankful I tucked them away for safe keeping all those years ago.

Granny always updated me on Papa's latest "piddling" project, as she liked to say, and what yummy fresh vegetables she was cooking out of the garden.

If a cousin or neighbor had something exciting happening, then she would fill me in on the latest news.

She had an amazing way of chatting in her letter as if we were sitting in her living room carrying on a conversation.

And she always told me how proud she was of me and she was praying for me.

What a blessing to have had a grandmother — and grandfather — who invested in me, and all of us grandchildren, like she did.

I remember writing to her also, but I'm not sure I was as consistent and dependable as Granny with the letters.

Still, she kept writing and never let up, which meant a lot.

Grandma Davis also wrote me from time to time, but our best conversations were when I visited her.

She always wanted to know everything that was going on

with me and never seemed to tire of my endless stream of stories to tell.

Grandparents possess a unique way of making you feel like you are the most important person in the world.

I now watch my mom and dad and so many other friends and family members who are grandparents and smile as the tradition continues.

The ability to love and care in that secret grandparent way has not become a lost art. It prevails, and reminds me of the nurturing love we all need.

What if we found a way to duplicate the grandparent effect within all communities?

All current grandparents already investing in the lives of their grandchildren are off the hook for our experiment.

But if you are an adult without grandchildren, or if your grandchildren are old enough to participate in this experiment as well, then think about a young person or child who could benefit from an extra grandparent.

What are some simple ways you could encourage him or her? Our current social distanc-

ing restrictions means some limitations, but I'm confident we can all think of something.

It might be as simple as what my grandmothers did — show an interest, write letters, make phone calls, maybe even send emails or texts. Reach out to have conversations and spend most of the time listening to what they want to share without judgment or the temptation to tell them what they should be doing instead. Opportunities to teach and guide will happen.

Some of the most cherished memories come out of simple conversations.✝

## RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

### Seeking suggestions for how we can channel angst and point people to Christ; what would you add to the list?

More and more people are choosing to take a break from social media right now. And many are limiting their time and focus on the various platforms.

Some are cutting back on how much TV news and/or commentary programs they consume in a day.

Others have appointed one person in their family or circle of friends to share a summary of the important headlines without extra details, just the facts.

What do all of these decisions have in common?

They are all born out of a desire to protect someone's heart and mind from getting overly anxious and upset.

When TV or radio personalities share headlines, in-depth re-

ports and featured spotlights with raised voices, emotional overtones and opinions rather than straight facts, it steps out of the true news reporting realm and begins to influence those listening in some way.

This type of information sharing weighs heavily on us if we listen to it for hours every day.

A continuous social media stream of mean-spirited and ugly comments toward others also hurts our hearts.

#### Staying focused

And while some situations call for urgent and serious attention, a nonstop flow of aggressive and agitated speech could desensitize us to the important issues that need to be addressed. It could cause us to get caught up in peripheral arguments that distract from the core concern.

We should stay informed and updated on the news of the day, but we also should work to find the best outlet for discovering the facts without taking things personally and getting defensive.

Reading the news, whether in print or online, is one way to reduce emotional overtones.

Limiting the amount of media consumption of all types in a day is another.

Spending time in God's word and prayer are obvious, but sometimes it's easy to let time get away from us and not actually do it.

Focusing on others and finding ways to aid someone in need also helps dull the pain and fear of what might be swirling around us.

—Jennifer Davis Rash

# Your Voice



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

## Dealing with sexual sin: Unforgivable or witness to saving grace?

An account of Ranchland Heights Baptist Church, Midland, Texas, being disfellowshipped by the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention appeared in the Feb. 27 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*. Such an action is of grave concern to me.

First, if the paragraph that reads, “Church officials have reportedly explained their decision as one of [Phillip] Rutledge being a changed man and Rutledge not allowed to be alone with children” is true, why should the EC overrule the local autonomy of the members of Ranchland Heights Baptist Church?

Second, will the church of the Lord Jesus Christ let the world

define who God can forgive and whether a “registered” sex offender is beyond the pale of God’s grace?

Finally, what message is being sent to a sinful world concerning the welcoming arms of God for sinners who repent of their sin and start over by faith to serve God as He leads, despite past sin?

At the outset, I acknowledge that I have no personal knowledge of Phillip Rutledge, Ranchland Heights Baptist Church nor the circumstances that led to Rutledge being declared a registered sex offender in 2003. Everything related to this situation that I know has come from the account referenced above in *The Alabama Baptist*. I acknowledge that

I am not all knowing as God is.

I know from the Bible that God hates sin so much that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to atone for man’s sinfulness by shedding His atoning blood on Calvary’s cross. I also know that Jesus forgave sin that the religious community deemed “unforgivable” — for instance, the woman involved in adultery. Likewise, I know that Jesus appointed leaders in His church who had committed “grievous sin” — for instance, Peter denying Jesus thrice on the eve of Jesus’ crucifixion and Saul of Tarsus, persecutor of His church, and an accomplice to murder in the stoning of Stephen. Both Peter and Paul were forgiven by God’s grace and com-

missioned to serve God in establishing churches, nurturing believers as they lived and given the privilege of writing letters that He preserved to edify His church centuries later.

In a world that is desperately in need of salvation, how will such action be perceived by unsaved persons, to whom we witness about God’s saving grace, as one among many sins of this generation that cannot be forgiven by God or His church?

Finally, after the accusers of the adulterous woman left, Jesus instructed her to “Go and sin no more.” Jesus sought Peter and told him to “Feed my sheep.” Paul was commissioned by Jesus to become an apostle to the Gentiles. Additionally, Peter’s and Paul’s letters continue to be used of God to edify His church. Instead of letting the world define who can be forgiven or not by God, we need to applaud God’s grace which is greater than any singular sin or all the sin of the entire world.

I personally would like to see the EC restore fellowship to Ranchland Baptist Church because repentance and willingness to serve God is implied by the church as reported in the article. Additionally, I would ask the EC to encourage all the leaders of all SBC churches to be vigilant to prevent any sex offenses by leaders or members so these are not conversations needed going forward.

Let’s encourage all sinners to experience the grace of God by repenting of sin, regardless of how “mild” or how “heinous” the sin might be — and to believe in Jesus Christ by faith.

**William D. Jones**  
Owens Cross Roads, Ala.

### Counterpoint:

By **Diane Langberg**  
Christian psychologist, trauma counselor, author

When churches have asked what I recommend when dealing with someone who has sexually abused children, my response is — do not allow him/her to attend church.

There is always pushback. The word grace is tossed about. But someone with such an infrastructure of deceit, feeding off the vulnerable and looking for ways to do it again, has been committing spiritual suicide. Because of that deadness, they cannot be trusted. It is foolish to think otherwise.

God says we do not even know our own deceitful hearts. Do we really think that if we permit an abuser of children into the sanctuary that we can guarantee the

safety of the vulnerable? And do we not understand that even if nothing overt occurs, that deceptive heart and mind is feeding off the little ones sitting in the pews, strengthening his/her own sin patterns while looking good?

We have not only failed the vulnerable, we have also failed victims of abuse by another who now feel vigilant and fearful in God’s sanctuary. And we have failed the abuser, for we have left him/her in their prison, practicing that which is strangling their soul. There is no grace in leaving another in the prison of practiced sin, justified by deceptions. We become complicit in their spiritual suicide.

So what are we to do? Do we leave the abuser in their sin and keep them away from the church? No, to the first question. Yes, to the second. Bring the church to

the abuser. I have worked with churches who have done this. A group of committed and mature adults meet once a week with the abuser and listen to the sermon, discuss it, check in, not only about actions and choices but also about thoughts and impulses.

Repentance is hard. It is not simply stopping a behavior. It is not words and tears. It is a slow undoing of deceptions — deceptions that allow us to feel okay about ourselves. It is however the path that follows Christ, whose central focus and motive was to always please the Father — no matter the cost. He invites us to come.

*EDITOR’S NOTE — Adapted with permission. Read the full blog post at [www.dianelangberg.com/2020/01/how-should-the-church-respond-to-abusers/](http://www.dianelangberg.com/2020/01/how-should-the-church-respond-to-abusers/).*

# “Go forward, personally engaging people with the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

J E F F I O R G  
President, Gateway Seminary

Words matter. They are incendiary or consolatory. They give, or they take away. They calm, or they stir. They encourage, or they discourage. They uplift, or they oppress. They heal, or they hurt. In light of teasing and bullying, we may like to say “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me,” but it’s just not true. Words are powerful, and they can hurt. “Death and life are in the power of the tongue ...” (Prov. 18:21).

**Todd E. Brady**  
VP for university ministries  
Union University

The gospel demands that we act in both loving compassion for the hurting through gospel witness as well as seeking justice in our le-

gal and political systems. To work for gospel advance and then never speak against the injustice in our culture isn’t Christlikeness. And to work for social reform without gospel-centered evangelism is a temporary fix at best.

So, let’s be peacemakers of the highest kind. Let’s seek peace with God and peace with men. As we toil in the strength of God’s might for this, the lost world will know Whose we are. They will see that we are true, genuine sons and daughters of God.

**James Hammack**  
Prattville, Ala.

Life is a series of transitions in which we decide to either loathe the change or learn to love yourself

more and serve others willingly. Helping another person get through his or her struggles is the best way to get through yours.

**Author Michael Alan Tate**  
“Roll Up Your Sleeves”

Christians, our allegiance is not to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party, not even primarily to the United States, but to Christ alone. ... May I encourage you to ... simply, lovingly, be the body of Christ, whether gathered or dispersed, and tend to the needs of your community in this global pandemic. It is not the first that has affected the Church of Jesus Christ, and it will not be the last.

**Nick Hamilton**  
Retired military



WMU photo

Sandy Wisdom-Martin is executive director of national Woman's Missionary Union.

## I found no words

My thoughts have been consumed with the plight of my brothers and sisters of color and the excruciating pain they experience ongoing by things infinitely worse than insensitive comments.

I found no words to adequately express the deep sorrow of my heart. I did, however, resolve I would work harder to banish the unfathomable sin of racism. Every human is imago Dei, made in the image of God. Each life is both sacred and precious, a gift from God. All are image bearers of our Creator.

We start this journey of racial reconciliation by recognizing the depth of our own depravity and brokenness before God.

Let’s get on our knees and ask the Father to examine our hearts. Does mine beat in sync with His? Not if I engage in racism, including subtle and/or silent. Study the Word.

Do my actions line up with His commands? Not if I am an idle bystander letting injustice prevail.

Do I truly love my neighbor as myself?

Let’s confess our brokenness, ask forgiveness and honestly seek to understand the hurt and pain of others.

Let’s lean into gospel proclamation because only the hope found in Christ has the power to radically transform hearts.

—Sandy Wisdom-Martin

# From the *Twitterverse*

### @drtonyevans

This is a defining moment for us as churches and citizens to decide whether we want to be one nation under God or a divided nation apart from God. If we don’t answer that question right and if we don’t answer it quickly, we won’t be much of a nation at all.

### @costiwhinn

Reminded (and convicted) this morning of how important “the way” we talk to other believers is. The Apostle John, addressing Christians who are confused about truth (including the gospel and genuine salvation), uses terms like “my dear children” (1 John 2:1) and “beloved” (2:7).

### @DustinBenge

What are Christians to do during this time? 1. Love the Lord your God (Matt. 22:37). 2. Love your neighbor (Matt. 22:39). 3. Give justice to the weak (Ps. 82:3). 4. Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17). 5. Be at peace with everyone (Rom. 12:18).

### @marcusdh3

Unseen. Unnoticed. Seemingly uninvolved. But rest assured ... He is “God with us!”

### @MattMason3

Ray Ortlund: The hope of the gospel makes us cheerfully defiant toward every disappointment that we endure in this broken world.

### @revandyfrazier

“It is hypocritical to pray for victory over our sins yet be careless in our intake of the word of God.”  
— Jerry Bridges

### @brandon\_d\_smith

The foundation of biblical-theological exegesis affirms that the unity of the Godhead (3-in-1) necessarily entails the unity of Scripture (66-in-1).

### @DrABVines

Newsflash — there will be no chanting “USA, USA” in heaven. The only chanting will be “Holy, Holy is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of this world.” Let’s not forget we are not of this world. Heaven is our home.

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

# BAPTISMS

*during COVID-19 pandemic*

## Alabamians find creative ways to keep people from waiting months for baptism

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

**W**hen 94-year-old Eunice Case knew it was time to be baptized, it didn't matter to her that a global pandemic was taking place.

Before the COVID-19 crisis hit, Paul Brasher, pastor of New Hope Baptist Church, Pell City, had been preaching at the retirement home where Case lives.

"I've known Mrs. Eunice a little while," he said. "She called me after COVID hit and said, 'I want you to know something. You were preaching a few months back, and I realized I never got baptized. It was never really emphasized in the churches I was in.'"

Case had been thinking on that, and around the same time, she was also diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.

Brasher said she told him she didn't know how much time she had left, and she wanted to do it as quickly as she could as a witness to her family.

So Brasher contacted Joe Karr, pastor of Cook Springs Baptist



Baptist Village Retirement Community Facebook screen shot

Jim Tate (left), pastor of Memphis Baptist Church, Dothan, and Chris Singleton, baptize Larry Stokes on the patio of the Baptist Village.



Siloam Baptist Church Facebook screen shot

John Nicholson, pastor of Siloam Baptist Church, Marion, baptizes Haley Drew Callahan in the Cahaba River. The church has held river baptisms occasionally over the years, but it was especially convenient during COVID-19.

Church, Pell City, a nearby church that didn't have as many stairs to the baptistry as New Hope. They met on a Wednesday afternoon with members of Case's family, sang a little, spoke a few words and baptized Case just as she wanted.

"It was really neat," Brasher said. "She called it a recognition of what had happened in her heart. It made her feel like she did what she was supposed to do."

All over the state during the COVID-19 crisis, churches have found creative ways to keep people from waiting months for baptism, if that's what they desired.

Clinton Branch, pastor of Old Providence Baptist Church, Goodwater, got a text in the middle of those weeks of social distancing from a young man asking if they could talk — and talk now.

### Couldn't just sit still

And Branch couldn't say no. Before the COVID-19 restrictions, the man had come occasionally to services at Old Providence. But when the church pressed pause on meeting in person, he watched the church's messages streamed on Facebook, and he found he couldn't just sit still.

"He sent me a text one day and asked if I would come by and talk to him because he had a lot of questions, and of course my answer was yes," Branch said. "I knew that he was really searching for some answers."

### Profession of faith

So Branch went over that day — a Friday — after the young man got off work, and the two men spent three hours in Bible study and conversation.

"As a result of that, he gave his life to the Lord," Branch said.

And when they talked about baptism, the young man said he didn't want to wait until the church was back meeting together again. So the following Monday, they gathered a few of his friends and family for a small baptism ceremony there at the church.

"I told him, 'If you don't want to wait, I don't want to wait,'" Branch said.

First Baptist Church, Chickasaw, also baptized a young woman who heard the gospel through the church's ministry on Facebook. Pastor Reid Guy baptized her one day at the church in a small group setting, then they played the video back during the church's livestreamed Sunday service.

In a similar setting, First Baptist Church, Silas, recently baptized 8-year-old Delton Taylor in the church baptistry after outdoor revival services there.

**"IT WAS JUST A SPECIAL, SPECIAL TIME. HE WAS ABLE TO IDENTIFY WITH THE BODY OF CHRIST, AND THAT WAS SO IMPORTANT TO HIM."**

PASTOR JIM TATE  
MEMPHIS BAPTIST CHURCH, DOTHAN



Photo courtesy of Regina Coburn

Rob Coburn, former pastor of Bethel Baptist Church, Jones, baptizes Dylan Pairrett in a 3,000-gallon fire department water tank during a drive-in service held on a baseball field near the church.

And Jim Tate — pastor of Memphis Baptist Church, Dothan — helped take the baptistry to the Baptist Village, a ministry of the Alabama Baptist Retirement Centers, when a resident wanted to be baptized but wasn't able to leave.

Tate said Marie Cook, manager of the Baptist Village, called him and "said she had a gentleman there who had been asking questions about baptism."

"He got together with Marie and Shelby Battles, a member of our church who works there, and they talked with him about salvation," Tate said. "They became convinced that he had received Christ, that there had been a demonstration of God's work in his life in that he realized he'd never followed through with believer's baptism."

### Unusual challenge

But bringing baptism to Larry Stokes was going to be an unusual challenge, Tate said.

"He's on oxygen and limited in how he's able to get around," he said.

Even so, Stokes was determined — and because of that, so were Tate and Cook. Tate talked to a local supply store, and they sent him away with a trough he could use out on the Baptist Village's patio.

Cook and Battles heated water and filled it up little by little, then they fitted Stokes with a mask and helped him into the makeshift baptismal pool.

"It was just a special, special time," Tate said. "He was able to identify with the body of Christ,

and that was so important to him."

At Bethel Baptist Church, Jones, some church members who were also volunteer firefighters came to the rescue with a giant water tank from the fire department.

### Water tank baptism

"We had a young man who had gotten saved, and he said, 'I just want to be baptized,'" said Regina Coburn, whose husband, Rob, for-

merly served there as pastor. "Because we were out of the building during the COVID-19 crisis, we thought, 'How are we going to get this young man baptized?'"

When the firefighters in the congregation mentioned the station's water tank, she pictured a dunk tank, she said — but what they showed up with was something that held 3,000 gallons of water. They filled it up right there on the baseball field where the church was conducting drive-in services, and Rob Coburn baptized the young man — Dylan Pairrett — on the first base line. As he came up out of the water, church members honked their car horns.

And when they were finished, the firefighters just pumped the water

right back into the truck.

"It was a very special day," Regina Coburn said. "And it was a very creative way to do it that worked out great."

### River baptisms

And at Siloam Baptist Church, Marion, they just made use of something they already had in their back pocket — river baptisms. For the past eight or nine years, at some point during the year they've made their way down to the Cahaba River for a baptismal service.

COVID-19 just gave them an even more convenient reason.

"It went beautifully and wonderfully well," Pastor John Nicholson said of the day they baptized two young women. "It was a joyful day for us." 🌈

**"IT WENT BEAUTIFULLY  
AND WONDERFULLY WELL.  
IT WAS A JOYFUL DAY FOR US.**

**PASTOR JOHN NICHOLSON  
SILOAM BAPTIST CHURCH, MARION**



Photo courtesy of Terry Long

Eight-year-old Delton Taylor, son of Charlie and Courtney Taylor, was baptized May 31 at FBC Silas by Pastor Randy Byrd. Delton made a profession of faith just as the coronavirus hit and had to wait to be baptized.

Mike Meadows, new pastor of North Shelby Baptist Church, Birmingham, preaches during the church's first Sunday back after COVID-19 restrictions were lifted.

# NEW PASTORS

*called during COVID-19*



Photo courtesy of North Shelby Baptist Church

## Alabama Baptist church leaders find unique ways to engage their congregations

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

**M**ike Meadows remembers driving through central Alabama about 15 years ago and thinking it was beautiful country. He told his wife he wouldn't mind if God called them there one day.

But when that call came a few months ago, it came in a way he never could've envisioned when that seed was first planted.

"It's been a season of unintentional firsts," he said.

The first week he served as the new pastor of North Shelby Baptist Church, Birmingham, people were just starting to talk about the threat of coronavirus. By the second week, restrictions were in place.

And life went into completely uncharted territory, Meadows said. "It became a question of 'how do you connect with and shepherd people during this time when you don't know who they are?'"

### Preaching to an iPhone

Dave Roberts, pastor of First Baptist Church, Rainbow City, said he asked himself that same question as he started his new pastorate. His first Sunday to preach there was the first Sunday of COVID-19 meeting restrictions.

"I told our worship leader, 'You'll

have to bear with me; I've never preached to an iPhone before,'" Roberts said.

And as he got used to preaching to a virtual audience, he also began to think through how he could get to know the people on the other side of the iPhone — his new congregation.

"I got a membership list, and after supper each night I would call three or four families and introduce myself over the phone and let them know how proud I was that we were there and that I was looking forward to serving," said Roberts, who works during the day as a full-time hospice chaplain.

It was a good way to get to know people, but beyond the phone calls, he said it started getting around that he was making the calls from the empty church office, and people started dropping by to talk.

"God has just really paved the way for us — I couldn't ask for better," Roberts said. "I've heard so many people talking about how the churches have really gotten stronger through all of this, and I'm grateful for that. I feel like that's happened for us too."

Meadows feels the same way about what initially started out as a strange way to start a new pastorate.

"For me, coming through this has been just a great blessing and

the grace of God because I've been able to walk through this crisis with people and lean on them in ways that have drawn us closer together," he said.

### Quick bonds

When COVID-19 restrictions first started, Meadows started posting daily through Facebook live, something that gave his new congregation the opportunity to get to know their new pastor more informally.

"Through those, the church has really gotten to know me, and they reach out like they've known me for years," Meadows said.

He's also been able to form quick bonds with his staff because as they've drawn together to navigate the crisis, they also have been freed from the other things in life that are normally pulling at them too.

"That's been a beautiful thing, to settle in and plan well together without other obligations," Meadows said.

Chris Kynard, pastor of Linden Baptist Church, said he's felt that dynamic where he serves too. He had only been at Linden Baptist for six weeks when restrictions were put in place, and he's leaned heavily on staff like William Faircloth, associate pastor and minister of students, to help him navigate new technological challenges and find creative

ways to engage the congregation.

"What I think has happened in this time, it's made us do things we wouldn't have done otherwise," Kynard said.

They've tried online services. They've started a Saturday Morning Kids Show that's posted on Facebook. They've started a Daily Digest, a 5–8 minute video of a staff member sharing some thoughts on a Scripture each day. They've done a Bible Hour on Facebook on Sunday mornings where people can ask any question they want about the Bible.

And they've started something else that has become an unexpected favorite — a Wednesday night service online where they take requests for both songs and prayer.

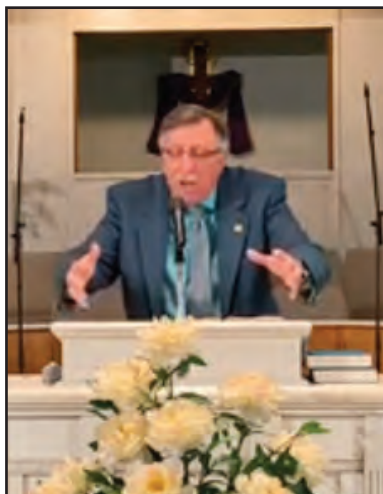
Minister of outreach and senior adults Johnny Arnett, worship leader Donnie Cobb and others sit around the piano in the choir room with Kynard and take requests for an hour.

"It's been a big surprise to us how well people have responded to that, especially those who haven't been able to come on Wednesday nights even before

the crisis happened," Kynard said.

All in all, he said it's been a great time for him and the church to grow together in unexpected ways.

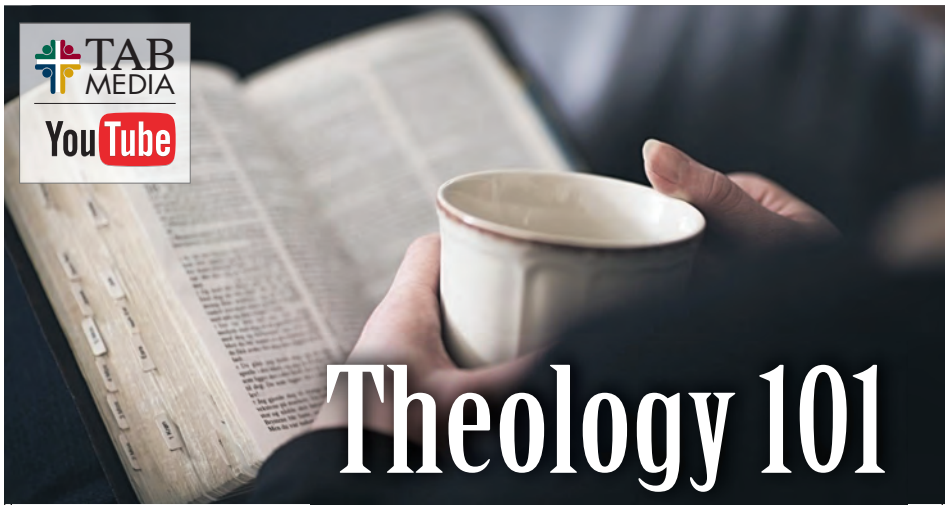
"God has definitely blessed us," he said. "It's just been amazing."✠



Screen grab from FBC Rainbow City's Facebook page  
Dave Roberts, pastor of FBC Rainbow City, preaches his Easter sermon April 12.



Screen grab from Linden BC's Facebook page  
Chris Kynard, pastor of Linden Baptist Church, sings and plays at the piano during a service online where they take requests for both songs and prayer.



# Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

## Christology Through Figures

# Bridegroom

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

Having considered in prior weeks the figures of Word and Lamb to speak of Christ, we could almost miss the figure of bridegroom if we did not look closely at the words of John the Baptist. When he began preaching in the wilderness, people speculated about whether or not he might be the long-awaited Messiah. John's response was straightforward: "I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before Him" (John 3:28).

He then explained further his connection with Christ by using the figures of a bride and a bridegroom. He called himself "the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him" and "rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice." John was identifying Christ as the cause for his own rejoicing.

### Bride of Christ

Elsewhere in the New Testament, believers in Christ are collectively termed the "bride of Christ," the heavenly bridegroom. In today's customs, we would say John the Baptist was the best man and the Church is betrothed or engaged to this bridegroom.

In the customs of that day, the marriage itself was associated with a marriage supper. So we would say the figure of Christ as the bridegroom suggests the Church is in a period of awaiting the heavenly marriage supper that is yet to come, according to Revelation 19:7-9. We read in that passage that when Christ returns

for His bride, the Church, it will be a time of blessedness for believers, characterized by gladness and rejoicing. God Himself will join the rejoicing in keeping with the words spoken by Isaiah: "As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you" (62:5).

### Watch for the time

In His parable about the wise and foolish virgins, whom we would term today as bridesmaids, Jesus envisioned the coming of the bridegroom for the marriage supper as a time when the bridesmaids would go out to meet Him.

Jesus in His parable issued a command to those who comprise the bride of Christ: "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming" (Matt. 25:13).

The figure of Christ as the heavenly bridegroom has the practical application that all who comprise His bride, the Church, are to live in daily expectation that He is coming for His bride at an unknown but appointed time. Christ's own words about this blessed hope are, "Look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near" (Luke 21:28). ☦

*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.*



# Union Chapel pastor helps others find new life in Jesus

Ask B.J. Mills what's different about his life now that he knows Jesus, and he laughs — he laughs big.

"Everything," he said. "Everything looks different. I look at the sunshine and say, 'Thank You, Jesus,' and I get up in the morning and don't take that breath for granted."

When Mills was 23, he went to jail for manufacturing crystal meth. Four years later, he walked into a revival at First Baptist Church, Detroit, where guest speaker Tim Meherg was preaching about how Jesus could set people free — really free. He said he remembers it like it was yesterday.

"He was preaching about Someone who loved me no matter where I had been or what I had done," Mills said. "I fell under conviction that night and went to the altar and went to the Lord. No longer did I live under that weight of what I'd done."

### Surrendering to ministry

That was in 2007, and ever since, "God has done nothing but manifest Himself in my life in a great way," Mills said. He started doing anything he could to serve at his church, from cleaning the toilets to mowing the grass. Then in 2010, he surrendered to pastoral ministry, studied at North Mississippi Baptist Bible Institute and became pastor

of Union Chapel Baptist Church, Beaverton.

And he started walking back down the road where he'd been, but this time with a purpose. He got involved in jail ministry, and he started helping people meet Jesus and find a new life.

### 'Love like Christ'

"Our church is made up of people from broken lives and the jail ministry," Mills said. "We want to reach out and love like Christ does. We've seen a lot of souls saved; a lot of people come to know Christ."

And his wife, Brandy, and 16-year-old daughter, Kayleigh, are a big part of that ministry. The couple just celebrated their 20th anniversary, and all three go to revivals and serve in the community together.

"God didn't only restore me; He restored my wife and my daughter," Mills said.

The three live in a double-wide trailer on a hill they call Mills Hill, a hill with a cross prominently displayed. It's their sanctuary, he said, and they want to help others find theirs too.

"Jesus changed my life completely, and my life is His," Mills said. "If I could say anything, it's this — God can use anybody. It doesn't matter their past. He'll meet you right where you are." (Grace Thornton)



Photo courtesy of B.J. Mills  
B.J. Mills (center), his wife, Brandy, and 16-year-old daughter, Kayleigh, go to revivals and serve in the community together. They live in a double-wide trailer on a hill they call Mills Hill, a hill with a cross prominently displayed. It's their sanctuary, Mills said, and they want to help others find theirs too.

# Alabama Baptists among 61 missionaries commissioned

Alabama Baptists Eric and Heather McDonald were among 61 missionaries commissioned by the International Mission Board in a virtual Sending Celebration on June 9.

The missionaries represent churches in 15 states and will be serving in all nine of the IMB's affinities.

The McDonalds are being sent by Ransomed Community Church, Florence, to serve in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Heather sensed God's call to international missions before her husband Eric heard the call of the Lord, so she prayerfully waited for the Lord to work in Eric's heart.

## Waiting for the call

"Life as a husband, father and firefighter was comfortable until I realized God hadn't called me to be comfortable," Eric said. "After



IMB photo  
Eric and Heather McDonald were among hundreds of Southern Baptists gathered around computers and tablets to watch a video of the recently approved missionaries' testimonies

endless prayers, countless trials, seven children and medical school, I wrestled with God and told Him I wasn't a missionary."

Heather felt differently. After a missionary family visited their church and shared about their ministry, she knew the Lord was calling them on a similar jour-

ney. "I just had to wait on [Eric] to catch up," she said.

Ten years later, God gave both Eric and Heather a desire to serve in Africa.

Sending Celebrations, live and virtual, provide a forum for Southern Baptists to commission new missionaries and hear their call to missions. (IMB, TAB)

## Sweet Water Baptist Church honors graduates



Photo courtesy of Sweet Water Baptist Church

Sweet Water Baptist Church, in Bethel Baptist Association, honors its nine 2020 high school graduates May 31 during the morning worship service. Pictured are (front row, l to r): Anna Logan Smith, Liza Grace McManus, BreAnna Ramsey, Maggie Thompson, Lindsey Davis, Alli Megginson, (second row, l to r) Pastor Tom Belcher, Brodie Echols, Tyler Huggins and Braiden Broussard.



TAB file photo

## Romar Beach members praying for God's will

(continued from page 1)  
structure is a five-story worship and conference center anchored to bedrock to withstand a category 5 storm.

Through the years, the church "broke even," he said, but now they are facing accusations of uncleared debt.

"At this point we're kind of in limbo," Fowler said. "We're trying to find out what the resolution of these things are, and if they come out in our favor, we hope to keep worshipping here."

## Vacationers' church

The church, which currently has three staff members, sees somewhere between 10,000 and 12,000 guests — mostly vacationers — come through its doors for worship services each year.

The church witnesses between 200 and 300 professions of faith from church visitors.

In typical years, they

also host between 4,000 and 5,000 in the two floors of their building built as a retreat center space, though the pandemic has cut back that number this year.

"This year we've lost 13 groups since Easter," Fowler said. "That's the primary income of the church."

Right now, the church building is zoned for sale as a worship facility and is listed at \$6.5 million.

Fowler said he's not sure what the options are for commercial sale.

"We know that there are restrictions," he said.

Church members are praying for God's will to be done for the church, he added, whether that be to stay where they are or continue worshipping somewhere else.

"We love where we are ... but we want what He wants for Romar," Fowler said. "The most important thing is making disciples. We just want to make the right decisions." (TAB)



Burning Bush Cowboy Church Facebook photo

The chuck wagon of Burning Bush Cowboy Church, Troy, sits ready to serve. Many of the state's 19 cowboy churches cook Dutch-oven chuck wagon meals like roast beef, stew, chili, cornbread, beans and cobbles as a way to serve their communities and share the gospel.

# Laid back by design

## Cowboy churches thrive in Alabama, reach out through chuck wagon ministry

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

Maybe 15 or 16 years ago, Phillip Gilliland went over to his daughter-in-law's barn for what he thought was going to be a small gathering.

When he got there, he found about 70 people gathered for food, a steel horseshoe-making demonstration and a Bible study based on that visual illustration.

"This group of guys was going around from farm to farm, ranch to ranch about once a month doing this kind of thing, and my daughter-in-law's barn was the third or fourth stop," Gilliland said. "When I saw what they were doing I told her, 'they don't realize it, but

what they've got here is a church.'"

From those first gatherings, the Cowboy Church of Marshall County was born in Albertville — Ala-

bama's first cowboy church. After that, a cowboy church was started in Colbert County that now runs about 500 people in attendance every week.

And it kept spreading.

Now across the state, 19 cowboy churches are affiliated with the American Fellowship of Cowboy Churches (AFCC), many of which are also part of a local Baptist association.

"It caught on pretty big here," said Gilliland, pastor of Trading Post Cowboy Church, Woodville, and a field staff member for the AFCC.

It also caught on so big with Gilliland that he moved from the only place he'd ever lived to help start Trading Post.

"I was 59 years old, and I'd never

moved in my life," he said.

The church — planted by the Cowboy Church of Marshall County — is now a decade old.



Burning Bush Cowboy Church Facebook photo  
Cowboy churches all over the state of Alabama use chuck wagon meals as a means of outreach ministry.

***"We try to find a way to remove barriers to people coming to church. We receive people like we believe Jesus did. Nobody has to dress a certain way."***

**Pastor Phillip Gilliland**  
Trading Post Cowboy Church, Woodville

Its services, like other cowboy churches, are laid back by design. They meet in a barn (or a barn-like building, have coffee and donuts and start 10 minutes late just because everyone's busy talking and hasn't gotten settled yet.

### Removing barriers

"We try to find a way to remove barriers to people coming to church," Gilliland said. "We receive people like we believe Jesus did. Nobody has to dress a certain way, and we don't pass an offering plate — we just leave a cowboy hat in the back for people to leave an offering if they want to."

As a result, they've seen a lot of people "who don't know Genesis from Revelation" come to church and find Jesus, Gilliland said. "It's

a great experience to get to do what we do."

The state's cowboy churches — which have a strong presence in north Alabama but also are scattered in places like Childersburg, Clanton and Troy — also have a thriving chuck wagon ministry. With help from the sponsorship of local businesses, they take their chuck wagons anywhere people need food. In recent weeks, they've set up in places like thrift store parking lots to serve hot meals to thousands — meals like stew, chili, roast beef, cornbread, beans and cobbles.

"We are able to do a lot of outreach with the wagons," Gilliland said. "Our members are passionate about this ministry and getting to cook for others."✝



Photo courtesy of Trading Post Cowboy Church

Phillip Gilliland (right), pastor of Trading Post Cowboy Church, Woodville, and church member Jim Bolton baptize Kevin Willis in a horse trough outside the church. That type of baptism fits in well with the cowboy culture, Gilliland says.

# 3 stories you should know



Moody Police Department Facebook screen shot

FBC Moody hosted the funeral service of Moody Police Sgt. Stephen Williams on June 8. Williams was killed June 2 while responding to a 911 call at a local hotel. Two individuals have been charged with capital murder in Williams' death. Williams is the second Alabama law enforcement officer killed in the line of duty in 2020. (TAB)



## Faith-based DC justice march draws critics

A June 7 "Faith+Works" march organized by Washington-area churches drew criticism of pastors who were marching but not gathering in person for worship.

Marchers carried signs calling for racial equality rooted in Christian Scriptures. David Platt, pastor-teacher at McLean Bible Church in Virginia and former president of the International Mission Board, promoted the march via Twitter, "March+Pray+Sing with other followers of Christ from churches across the District today at 2 p.m. #faiththatworksDC."

Platt received criticism from some following his promotion of the march due to the fact that McLean Bible Church is currently foregoing in-person worship services for on-line services due to the COVID-19 pandemic. (AP)

## NAMB trustees review giving, baptism stats

In an online meeting June 8, trustees for the North American Mission Board heard reports of how missionaries and staff are meeting needs and responding to crises amid the global COVID-19 pandemic.

NAMB president Kevin Ezell told trustees that revenue appears to be trending toward a 20% decline in giving to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering and at least a 10% drop in the portion of Cooperative Program funding designated for NAMB — an estimated \$16 million in revenue decline in the current budget year. Addressing declining baptism numbers, Ezell said churches are working to turn the numbers around.

Outgoing NAMB trustee chairman Danny Wood, pastor of Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills, also predicted baptisms would increase. (BP)

## — NEWSBRIEFS —

### Prominent pastor and author Keller announces cancer diagnosis

Bestselling author and popular speaker Timothy Keller, founder and former senior pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, announced June 7 that he has been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.

Keller, 69, said via Facebook that he is currently asymptomatic and feels "great," and that he will soon begin receiving chemotherapy treatment. Keller did not disclose his prognosis in his announcement. (RNS)



KELLER

### Herman 'Buck' Cowan, former pastor of Shady Grove, Bessemer, dies at 91

Former Alabama Baptist pastor Herman L. "Buck" Cowan died May 12. He was 91.

During his 40 years of ministry, he served as pastor of several Alabama Baptist congregations including Shady Grove Church, Besse-

mer; Oak Grove Church, Springville; and Pleasant Valley Church, Pell City.

Cowan was preceded in death by his wife of 51 years, Dorothy Jean, and his son, Bobby. He is survived by his wife of 22 years, Frances; daughters, Donna and Julia; son, David; 11 grandchildren; and 18 great-grandchildren. (TAB)

### Faith leaders speak out on racism, protests across nation

Christian leaders are speaking out on racial injustice following the killing of George Floyd at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer.

"This is a time when our country needs to come together. Nobody disputes that what happened to Mr. Floyd was a travesty. Nobody disagrees that the men who were responsible for that should be held accountable," said Franklin Graham, president of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and Samaritan's Purse. "I think the most important thing is prayer."

Kevin McCall, founder of Crisis Action Center in New York City, emphasized the value of non-violent protests while denouncing looting and vio-

lence as an affront antithetical to the cause.

"To simply say 'I'm not racist' is to be passive," said LaTrelle Easterling, leader of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church. (RNS)

### IMB's Meador retires after more than 45 years of service

Clyde Meador, who most recently served as executive adviser to the president at the International Mission Board, has retired — or, more accurately, re-retired — on June 12 after more than 45 years of service to Southern Baptists.

Meador and his wife, Elaine, began their missionary service in Indonesia in 1974. He served through the years as a missionary and missions field leader in Southeast Asia, Central Asia, South Asia, the Pacific and Oceania. He's worked closely with four IMB presidents as a top adviser, serving two stints as the organization's interim president.

The Meadors first retired on May 13, 2016, and returned for a second stint with the IMB on Sept. 26, 2018. (IMB, TAB)

— SBC NEWS —

# World Changers closing celebration to be held in Northport July 24–26

A closing celebration for World Changers will be held July 24–26 at Northwood Hills Baptist Church, Northport.

The event will include times of fellowship and worship and a Saturday evening celebration of World Changers’ 30 years of ministry, said Rusty Selman, pastor of Northwood Hills.

“Two of the main forces that drove this ministry to accomplish all that God used it for were people and relationships,” Selman said. “This weekend is an opportunity to gather and celebrate all that God has done with friends and co-laborers.”

World Changers began in 1990 when a group of 137 youth and adults spent a week in Appalachia doing construction work and sharing the gospel in the neighborhoods where they worked.

For the next three decades, World Changers partnered with government agencies across the country to provide free labor to improve homes in mostly low-income neighborhoods. Many municipalities formed lasting relationships with the ministry’s leaders and relied on World Changers as a way to stretch their budgets for community improvement.

For volunteers, World Changers offered a unique missions experience that blended construction work with real-world, relational evangelism.

LifeWay Christian Resources assumed operations of World Changers in 2011 through a partnership with the North American Mission Board, but announced on May 1 that World Changers would be discontinued.

The work of World Changers will continue through the efforts of multiple faith-based nonprofits with historic connections to the ministry, including Metro Changers in Alabama.

All former staff, summer staff and coordinators are invited to attend the closing celebration.

“We would love to see all national staff, coordinators and summer staff and their families join us for this time of celebration,” Selman said.

Registration for the event is open at northwoodhillschurch.com/World-Changers-Celebration. The website includes details of the weekend, including lodging options and worship opportunities for July 26. (TAB, BP)



The inaugural group of World Changers in 1990 poses for a photo. BP photo

# Persecuted church

## Iran releases jailed Christians but convictions continue

TEHRAN, Iran — Convictions of Christians continue in Iran, even as several believers have been released due to the COVID-19 crisis.

Roughly 85,000 people in Iran have been released from prison due to the pandemic, sources said. However, the release of Christians as part of the regime’s efforts to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus was pragmatic and not an indication of a change of policy by the Iranian government, rights advocates said.

The novel coronavirus hit Iran hard economically, and released Christian converts experience an additional layer of suffering, as it is harder for those targeted by the government to find jobs, according to a Middle East specialist at Christian Solidarity Worldwide.

They and potential employers are often harassed, eventually forcing them to leave the country. The recent releases are largely image control by the Iranian government, he added.

Iran was ranked No. 9 on Christian support organization Open Doors’ 2020 World Watch List of the countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. (MS)



Morning Star News photo

# News near you

### FRANKLIN ASSOCIATION

▶ **Joel Davis** will be the new student pastor of **First Baptist Church, Russellville**, starting July 5. For the past two years, he has served as pastor of Westside Baptist Church, Talladega. He has also served as pastor of Refuge Baptist Church, Lincoln, and as student pastor at First Baptist Church, Moody, and Argo Baptist Church. Davis is currently working on his undergraduate degree at Leavell College of New Orleans Seminary. He and his wife, Emily, have two children. Chase Dowdy is pastor.



DAVIS

### MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION

▶ **Russell Zwerner** is the new pastor of **Capitol Heights Baptist Church, Montgomery**. Before this pastorate, he had served for several years in interim, associate and senior pastor positions. Zwerner earned a bachelor’s degree from the University of South Florida as well as a master of divinity with a specialization in expository preaching and a doctorate of ministry from New Orleans Seminary. He is currently a doctoral fellow at the seminary. He and his wife, Anne, have three children.



ZWERNER

### SAND MOUNTAIN ASSOCIATION

▶ **Roger Graham** is the new pastor of **Henagar Baptist Church**. Before coming to Henagar, he served as pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church, Gadsden, for more than four years and Nazareth Baptist Church, Rainsville, for nearly 25. He

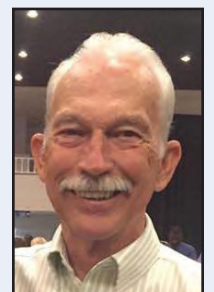


GRAHAM

also served as music and youth minister at Broadway Baptist Church, Rainsville. He has a bachelor’s degree in music education from the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa and a master of divinity from New Orleans Seminary. He and his wife, Ginger, have five children and one grandchild.

### ST. CLAIR ASSOCIATION

▶ **Ted St. John** is the new pastor of **Providence Baptist Church, Ragland**. ▶ St. Clair Association welcomes **New Haven Baptist Church, Ashville**, which recently completed a year of watch care. **Gary White** is pastor of New Haven Baptist, and **Danny Courson** is associational mission strategist for St. Clair.



ST. JOHN

### OTHER

The **Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions** is offering online trainings and webinars on various ministry topics. Find upcoming events and video of previous events at alsbom.org.✝

A youth group from a past year leads a poolside worship service for guests staying in a Gulf Coast-area RV park as part of Baldwin Baptist Association's Gulf Area Resort Ministry.

# 'Open doors'



Photo courtesy of Gulf Area Resort Ministry

## Beach ministries, churches capitalize on stream of vacationers for gospel ministry

(continued from page 1) people will often stay for months at a time. "There are a lot of senior adults and health problems come up sometimes," he said. "We've been able to be there in a bigger way than just between closing and opening prayers of a service."

But the services are a part of Rush's role that he loves, too. Before he and his wife, Kathy, moved to the area from Illinois, he had served more than 30 years in pastoral ministry there.

Now for the past five years he's been shepherding the little flock that gathers every Sunday morning when he and Kathy bring food and fresh brewed coffee to the RV park.

"We have a mini congregation there," said Rush, who

also works as a glass blower at the Coastal Arts Center of Orange Beach. They also hold Wednesday night services and extra activities like movie nights.

### 'Not watered down'

"It's been fun," he said. "I tell people whether they're there for a weekend or longer, we want to share something with you that hopefully will encourage you when you get back. And it's not watered down — we preach the gospel. And there are always a few people who say, 'I really needed that.'"

During the COVID-19 crisis, they — like other congregations — had to adapt. They did a drive-in service at the campground for Easter and set up a stage using picnic tables. They started

streaming services online as well.

"The first few weeks were mostly friends and acquaintances whose churches were closed, but now we're seeing more people in the campgrounds," he said.

Nate Diehl, GARM director, said resort and beach ministry on the Gulf Coast gives him, Rush and many others the chance to connect with people they might never have the opportunity to in other settings.

"Whether it's students on work-related, internship-type things or whether it be vacationers coming from all over the place, we have the opportunity of planting a seed that's going to go far beyond Baldwin County," Diehl said.

"That's definitely an exciting aspect of this type of ministry."

In the winter months ministry in the parks like what Rush does is a big focus for GARM. In the other seasons, ministry on the coast involves a lot of volunteers and different types of outreach.

One example is how at the recent Shrimp Festival, teams came in and helped with snacks and games for children and used creative ways to engage people with the gospel.

### Opportunities to serve

"There's a lot of opportunity and open doors for people to serve," Diehl said. "We have youth groups that come into the area and serve as their missions trip for the summer. Around 90% of our volunteers are coming in from outside the area."

Dauphin Island Baptist

Church in Mobile Baptist Association also hosts a lot of out-of-town youth groups who come to help with local ministry.

"For more than 40 years, we've been hosting youth groups in the summer," Pastor Chris Schansberg said.

Around 600 to 700 students come each summer to help area churches with Vacation Bible School and to

do canvassing and outreach. They also help area ministries with food distribution and lead worship services at rehab centers.

While there, they stay at Dauphin Island Baptist's Resort Ministry and Conference Center, which can host up to 200 guests at a time.

"Those groups have done a lot of good through the years," Schansberg said. 🇺🇸

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Photo courtesy of Gulf Area Resort Ministry

Dan Rush (right) demonstrates glass blowing, a skill that helps him earn a living while he does chaplaincy work in RV parks on the Gulf Coast.

# Seeing God at work

## Daleville's Vision Baptist Church ministers to multicultural congregation

When Daniel Yong-taek Bang was at the Council of Korean Southern Baptist Churches meeting at the 2019 Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Birmingham, he bumped into someone who changed his path — quickly.

"I met Pastor Lim there, and he was about to retire," Bang said of Song Bin Lim, who founded Vision Baptist Church, Daleville, 17 years before.

At the time, Bang was serving as pastor of a Ko-

rean church in Alexandria, Louisiana. God had led him there from serving in a similar capacity in Kentucky.

### Picking up the baton

But it seemed God had another stop in mind for Bang that he wasn't aware of — Alabama.

"We started talking about moving here after the annual meeting, and things started going fast," he said. "Just about a month and a half later, I was here."

Nearly a year later, Bang is seeing God at work in the multicultural congregation. It's made up largely of Korean Americans, some of whom have American spouses. Many of their children are bilingual.

Bang said he wants Vision Baptist to be a place where all feel welcome.

He preaches in Korean with English subtitles on the screen at the front. They also have both languages on the



Photo courtesy of Vision Baptist Church

The multicultural congregation of Vision Baptist Church, Daleville, consists of largely Korean Americans who work hard to make everyone, including Americans who don't speak Korean, feel welcome.



Photo courtesy of Vision Baptist Church

Vision Baptist Church is a multicultural congregation that worships in Korean and English.

screen during the singing.

Jim Hill, associational mission strategist for Dale Baptist Association, said worshipping there is "always invigorating" when he has a chance to join them for services.

"The songs are displayed

on the wall in both Korean and English, and we sing together. It is awesome," Hill said.

And as for Bang, he's doing a "marvelous job" carrying on the legacy of the church, Hill said.

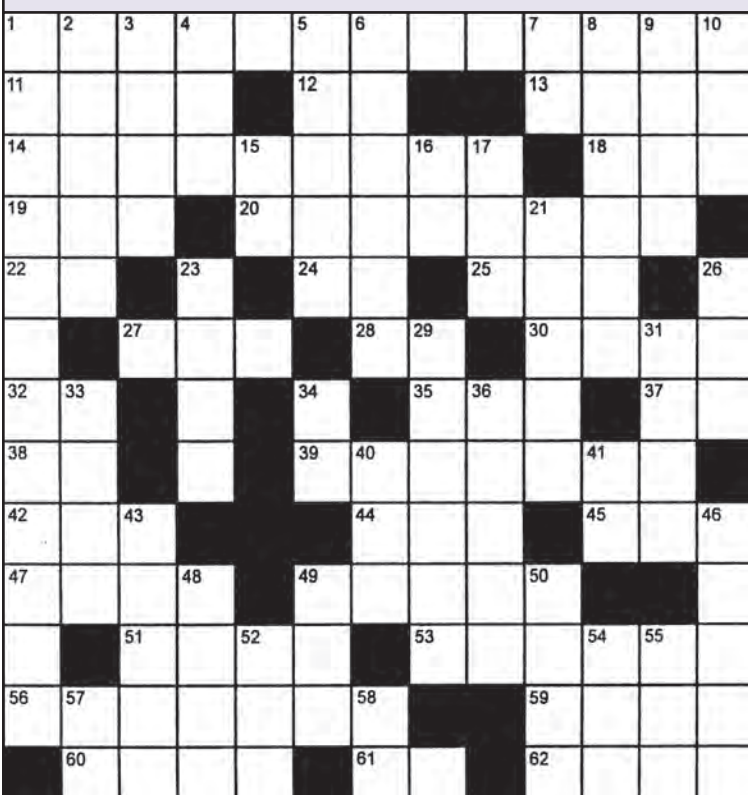
Bang said they had to

make some adjustments during the COVID-19 crisis, but they're back meeting together again now.

"We had to slow down due to the current circumstances, but we're still doing what we should do," he said. (Grace Thornton)

## Christian Crossword

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### Across

1. With \_\_\_ and with singing. (Neh. 12:27)
11. Sit on My right \_\_\_\_\_. (Heb. 1:13)
12. Go up to \_\_\_\_\_. (Josh. 8:1)
13. Let nothing \_\_\_\_\_. (Es. 6:10)
14. Shihon and \_\_\_\_\_. (Josh. 19:19)
18. Tender loving care. (abbr.)
19. Airport code for New Delhi, India.
20. Behold the \_\_\_ of the Lord. (Luke 1:38)
22. Kansas. (abbr.)
24. Height. (abbr.)
25. Standing room only. (abbr.)
27. Shout for \_\_\_\_\_. (Ps. 65:13)
28. \_\_\_ will we sing. (Ps. 21:13)
30. His \_\_\_ begotten son. (Heb. 11:17)
32. \_\_\_ in peace. (Mark 5:34)

35. Airport code for Lisbon, Portugal.
37. Architectural-Engineering. (abbr.)
38. Ibidem. (abbr.)
39. Found young \_\_\_\_\_. (1 Sam. 9:11)
42. Verse. (abbr.)
44. I have. (contraction)
45. And \_\_\_ it up. (Rev. 10:10)
47. Month on Hebrew calendar.
49. To spread with a greasy substance.
51. The \_\_\_ leaped. (Luke 1:44)
53. Kill the \_\_\_\_\_. (Num. 35:27)
56. The angel \_\_\_\_\_. (Luke 1:26)
59. The \_\_\_ day. (Acts 25:6)
60. One \_\_\_ for all. (2 Cor. 5:14)
61. \_\_\_ king of Bashan. (Ps. 135:11)
62. Eleventh letter in Hebrew alphabet.

### Down

1. Magnify Him with

2. Right \_\_\_ of fellowship. (Gal. 2:9)
3. Daughter of \_\_\_\_\_. (Gen. 36:2)
4. Airport code for New Delhi, India.
5. \_\_\_ thy wife shall bear thee a son. (Gen. 17:19)
6. \_\_\_ in the earth. (Gen. 6:4)
7. \_\_\_ we confess our sins. (1 John 1:9)
8. A holy \_\_\_\_\_. (1 Pet. 2:9)
9. To cover with a thin layer of gold.
10. Airport code for Salt Lake City, Utah.
15. \_\_\_ Lord God! (Ezek. 11:13)
16. Touchdown. (abbr.)
17. Her Majesty's Ship. (abbr.)
21. And he \_\_\_\_\_. (Mark 2:14)
23. Is \_\_\_ of the Spirit. (John 3:6)

26. Cereal grass.
29. Mount of \_\_\_\_\_. (John 8:1)
31. The first and the \_\_\_\_\_. (Rev. 22:13)
33. \_\_\_ your parents. (Eph. 6:1)
34. I \_\_\_ the Son of God. (Matt. 27:43)
36. A model of perfection.
40. To intend or direct.
41. Symbol for element sodium.
43. \_\_\_, we know. (John 3:2)
46. Heaven and the \_\_\_\_\_. (Gen. 1:1)
48. A \_\_\_ thing. (Dan. 2:11)
49. They shall \_\_\_ His face. (Rev. 22:4)
50. That could keep \_\_\_\_\_. (1 Chron. 12:38)
52. I \_\_\_ thee. (2 Kings 4:24)
54. \_\_\_, though I walk. (Ps. 23:4)
55. Expenses. (abbr.)
57. Anno Domini. (abbr.)
58. And \_\_\_ a voice. (Matt. 3:17)



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# Little church in the woods sees God's goodness

Nine years ago, when Wesley Hampton's family was looking for a pretty place to take some family photos, they ended up on the front porch of Church of the Forest, Houston.

His daughter was 2 at the time, and the church was pretty — that was all there was to it. And at that point, he wasn't in the ministry in a big way — he preached here and there, but he also worked full time for the Winston County Road Department.

## 'The Lord led us'

Hampton had no idea that a few years later, he would be pastor of the little church in the woods.

"A lady in my office at the road department went to the church, and when their pastor left, she asked me about coming to preach," he said.

He did, and over time, he said he "kept praying about

it, and the Lord led us in that direction."

Church of the Forest is on the North Alabama Hallelujah Trail, a list of 32 churches that are at least a century old, still stand on their original sites, are accessible to the public and still hold services. Round Mountain Baptist Church, Cedar Bluff, is also on the trail, as is Helton Memorial Chapel Missionary Baptist Church, Stevenson.

It's a pretty church with a lot of history behind it, Hampton said — a few decades ago it even made it on the cover of *National Geographic*. But for him, even though the building is special, it's never been about the building.

"We just want to serve the Lord," he said. "We want to see souls saved and the Spirit work."

When Hampton first started preaching there about six years ago, about six

*For more information about the North Alabama Hallelujah Trail, visit [northalabama.org/trails/hallelujah](http://northalabama.org/trails/hallelujah).*



Church of the Forest is on the North Alabama Hallelujah Trail — a list of 32 churches that are at least a century old, still stand on their original sites, are accessible to the public and still hold services. northalabama.org

people came regularly. But as the years have passed, the church has had times where 15 to 20 children attended alongside members in their 90s. Currently, they run between 25 and 40 on a Sunday morning.

"God's good — He's really good to us, really blessed

us," Hampton said. He said he especially feels blessed that God would allow him to be a part of what's happening there.

## Watching God work

"I ran from the ministry for about five years," he said.

But God is showing their community a lot of His goodness, Hampton said. "To see Him work like that in a small church is amazing. We're a small country church, and we just obey the Lord — that's all we do." (Grace Thornton)

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be not dismayed, for I am your God."*

ISAIAH 41:10



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# SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For June 21

## Explore the Bible

By Jay T. Robertson, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



### COMPASSION DEMONSTRATED Proverbs 3:21–35

#### Confidence Gained (21–26)

The Book of Proverbs teaches there are two roads in life: the road of foolishness and the road of wisdom. When God saves you, He delivers you from the road of foolishness and unrighteousness and sets you on the road of wisdom and righteousness.

Solomon exhorted his son to faithfully guard sound wisdom and discretion. Sound wisdom refers to good judgment that results in practical success in life. Discretion refers to competence to formulate and execute a wise course of action no matter what comes your way.

Never take your eyes off these God-given qualities.

Sound wisdom and discretion are indispensable for godly living. They will be life for your soul and adornment for your neck.

In other words, these qualities will transform you internally and enhance your reputation as they lead to a fruitful life that glorifies God.

As you consistently acquire wisdom while you walk with God through life, the Lord will guide and guard you. This does not mean Christians will never face difficulty or danger. It does mean Christians are eternally secure in their relationship with God no matter what they face. You will be able to lie down and sleep knowing the Lord is watching over you. Neither will you need to fear sudden danger or the ruin of the wicked because the Lord is at your side.

#### Kindness Expressed (27–30)

God's grace in the believer makes him or her more and more like Jesus through progressive sanctification. God will sanctify the person He has justified. As you are transformed to become more like Jesus, you will demonstrate compassion and express kindness. These verses teach that if you meet someone with a need, do everything you can do to meet that need quickly and with compassion. If your neighbor has a need and you can meet it, do not turn him away or delay in helping.

A person being transformed by God's grace will not scheme to harm his neighbor. This proverb causes us to consider Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37, where He explained that the more important question is not who one's neighbor is but rather what it means to act neighborly, showing kindness to anyone in need.

The person walking on the road of wisdom should not falsely accuse anyone. By God's grace, do not be the kind of person who quarrels with people for no particular reason.

This proverb utilizes legal terminology and therefore relates to the judicial system of ancient Israel. This is not a prohibition against seeking justice for legitimate causes. This proverb directs an individual not to seek legal action when there is no just cause.

The ninth commandment (Ex. 20:16) states we are not to give false testimony against our neighbor. Jesus exhorted His disciples to go the second mile and demonstrate kindness even to their enemies (Matt. 5:38–48). God's people are expected to treat others with kindness.

#### Blessing Secured (31–35)

In these proverbs, Solomon lays out attitudes and actions the people of God need to avoid. He admonishes believers not to be envious of violent people who gain their wealth by ungodly means. A selfish person does not demonstrate kindness and compassion toward others. If you align yourself with violent and deceitful people, you become repugnant to God. God detests those who are selfish and unkind toward others, but He is a friend to the upright.

Every human being is either on the road of wisdom or the road of foolishness. It is important to know which of the two roads you are journeying on because each road has its own destination.

The Lord blesses the home of the righteous, gives grace to the humble and grants favor to the wise. But He brings righteous judgment upon the wicked and the unwise. ✠

## Bible Studies for Life

By Roy E. Ciampa, Ph.D., S. Louis and Ann W. Armstrong  
Professor of Religion, Samford University



### THE TESTIMONY OF OUR HOPE 1 Peter 2:4–15

Peter highlights how God has brought us into a place and roles of tremendous honor. But living in light of this new identity will sometimes result in forceful opposition, and we must beware of responding by lashing out against our real or perceived enemies.

Rather, we are called to act in ways that glorify God and enhance His reputation so observers might ultimately find themselves worshipping God thanks to His work within us.

#### When we hope in Christ, we are never put to shame. (4–6)

Peter, whose name means "rock," has studied various Old Testament passages about "stones." He quotes Isaiah 28:16, where God affirms He is laying a cornerstone in Zion. He is alluding to the cornerstone of the Temple, the most important building in Zion. Christ has become the new temple (John 2:19) and is the living stone Who was rejected by people but chosen and precious to God. Believers in Christ are "living stones" in God's new temple (see also 1 Cor. 3:16–17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:20–22), and members of a holy priesthood that offers sacrifices to God through our Lord. We may be mere "sojourners and exiles" in this world (v. 11), but we live in light of the knowledge that we are God's holy servants, priests and temple, and exist to lead others to worship God along with us. While we may be "rejected by men" just as our Lord was, like Him we will not be put to shame on the last day. God glorified Christ through His resurrection, and we know our own destiny also is one of honor rather than shame.

#### Others may reject Christ, but we stand confidently because of who we are in Christ. (7–10)

Picking up where verse 6 left off, verse 7 spells out that God honors those who believe. Those who don't believe are described in Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 8:14.

They are like builders who rejected the stone that turned out to be the perfect cornerstone (Ps. 118:22) and are completely discredited. In their disobedience they stumble over and are offended by the stone (Christ) as anticipated by Isa. 8:14.

Returning to those who believe, Peter uses language drawn from Exodus 19:6 to provide a list of prestigious titles for Israel that now apply to believers in Christ: chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, people belonging to God.

This marvelous new identity qualifies us to proclaim the virtues of the God who has graciously brought us into the light (alluding to Gen. 1 and Isa. 9:2), made us His people and shown us unexpected mercy (alluding to Hos. 2:1, 23).

#### Our lives can lead others to glorify God. (11–15)

In v. 11, Peter shifts back to our identity as sojourners and exiles in this world. As we live among people who do not know and love God, we seek to exemplify such good and honorable behavior that others would turn from defaming us to recognizing that God is worthy of praise and worship for the way He has intervened in our lives and has been working to transform us through Christ.

Here Peter is repeating Jesus' teaching (see Matt. 5:16).

When Peter commands us to be subject to every human institution, he points out that such authorities are expected "to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good." As in our Lord's experience, they don't always do so.

Whether any government or leader praises or punishes those who do good, we are called by God to pursue that which is good and refrain from all evil, with the hope that our critics might be silenced, or better yet, find themselves glorifying God.

In any case, we know it is the divine King to whom we are ultimately accountable. ✠



# Media reviews

MOVIES/TV

## 'A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood' makes timely entrance on Hulu

By Michael Foust  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

A movie about Fred Rogers began streaming on Hulu in June, and it couldn't come at a better time in U.S. history.

Rogers was the soft-spoken, always-kind children's television host of "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood," which ran on public television for 31 years and taught children about life but also about the fruit of the Spirit — even if he never quoted Scripture. He taught children to listen to one another, to be kind to one another and to treat others the way you want to be treated. He taught them to love.

The 2019 film "A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood" — now streaming on Hulu — tells the story of Rogers through the eyes of a cynical magazine writer, Lloyd Vogel, who lands an interview with Rogers with the assumption he is a phony.

The tables quickly turn when Rogers displays kind-

ness to Vogel and even pursues a friendship, rightly believing the journalist has hidden hatred in his heart that needs to be healed.

The film stars Matthew Rhys as Vogel and Tom Hanks as Rogers and is one of the most uplifting films you'll ever see — especially during our divided times.

After all, Rogers, as an ordained minister, was modeling the words and actions of Jesus. He viewed his television series as a ministry.

What if we applied Mister Rogers' lessons to our current crisis? What if we listened patiently before we spoke, as Rogers does so often in the film? What if we assumed the best of people — and not the worst? What if we put the needs of others before our own?

Even if you don't have Hulu, the film can be rented for a nominal price on major platforms. (I subscribed to Hulu as part of the Disney Plus/ESPN+ package, which gives you three platforms for the price of two.)

The film is rated PG for



'A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood'

Photo courtesy of Sony

some strong thematic material, a brief fight and some mild language.

Also streaming this month:

### Adults/teens

▶ **"E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial"** (Netflix) — It's the classic Steven Spielberg film about a boy who befriends an alien. The film is filled with life lessons, including ones about friendship, love and the wonders of childhood. I watched a sanitized version with my children recently, and we also had a worldview discussion about aliens. Rated PG for language and mild thematic elements.

▶ **"Garth Brooks: The Road I'm On"** (Netflix) — It's a two-part documentary about one of the most successful singers in the history of country music. His wife, Trisha Yearwood, is also featured. Rated TV-G.

▶ **"Spelling the Dream"** (Netflix) — It's an 80-minute documentary that follows competitors and examines the success of Indian Americans at the Scripps National Spelling Bee. Rated TV-G.

▶ **"I Still Believe"** (Hulu) — A Christian singer demonstrates the true meaning of love when his wife develops cancer. It's based on the true story of Jeremy Camp and his first wife, Melissa. Rated PG for thematic material. It landed on Hulu in May.

### Children

▶ **"All Dogs Go to Heaven"** (Netflix) — A con artist canine gets a second chance at life when he develops a friendship with a little girl. Because of some intense scenes, this one may not be for small children. Rated G. Animated.

▶ **"The Liberty Story"** (Disney Plus) — It's a

1957 documentary about the Revolutionary War and the founding of the United States. Due to scenes depicting violence, it may be best for older children.

▶ **"Schoolhouse Rock, Season 1"** (Disney Plus) — If you're a child of the 1970s or 80s, then you likely learned a lot about U.S. history and government with these catchy cartoons and jingles. Streaming June 19. Animated. 🇺🇸

## Meet the reviewer

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



'A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood'

Photo courtesy of Sony

# PLAYING WITH HEART

## Doolittle prioritizes faith throughout baseball career, trusts God in hard times

By Bill Sorrell  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Imitating the way players ran and walked made teammates think Todd Doolittle was a pretty funny guy, but imitating Jesus has made him an example to others.

“I ask God every day to open up my heart and let Him lead me in the direction I need to be going,” said Doolittle, a former professional baseball pitcher in the Florida, now Miami, Marlins organization. “Getting into (pro) baseball brought me closer to the Lord.”

From Meridian, Mississippi, Doolittle became a Christian when he was 13, led to Christ by his mother, Debbie Bresnahan. He was baptized at Northcrest Baptist Church there.

### Underestimated

At 5’10” and 175 pounds, Doolittle said he was underestimated as a young player.

“It was a tough thing. You get looked at as a small guy, ‘You can’t do this, you can’t do that.’ Some-



Photo courtesy of Tim Grubbs

times it hurt when guys picked on me. I always had a big heart,” Doolittle admitted.

But playing with heart made others take notice, said Doolittle, a right-hander who pitched to his strengths.

### Student athlete

Doolittle was all-state and a four-year starter at West Lauderdale High School in Meridian. He was 13–0 as a senior with a 0.97 ERA, 126 strikeouts and team MVP. At Meridian Community College in 2002 and 2003, Doolittle led the team in wins, strikeouts and innings pitched.

And finishing his college career playing for the Mississippi State Bulldogs, Doolittle’s skills were evident once again. As a senior in 2005, he started 14 games and ended with a 5–8 record, 3.72 ERA and 66 strikeouts. He was SEC Player of the Week twice, selected as a Louisville Slugger National Player of the Week and named to the SEC All-Tournament Team.

After playing for Mississippi State, Doolittle signed a free agent contract with the Marlins. He played eight seasons in professional baseball from 2005 until 2012. He had a 29–23 overall record, including 3–2 in Triple-A with New Orleans, the Marlins’ affiliate in the Pacific Coast League, with an ERA of 2.93 in 24 games. His career ERA was 3.03 and career strikeouts were 454, with 42 saves.

But throughout his baseball career, Doolittle prioritized his faith, which expanded as he attended baseball chapel and formed closer relationships with teammates, he said.



Photo courtesy of Tim Grubbs

Pitcher Kris Harvey was Doolittle’s teammate and roommate at Jacksonville, the Marlins’ Double-A affiliate in the Southern League, in 2010.

### Good example

Harvey said Doolittle set a good example through his actions and the way he lived his life.

Another Jacksonville teammate, pitcher Jay Buente, said he was impressed with Doolittle’s strong faith by the way he put his trust “in the Lord and not in the game.”

One of Doolittle’s biggest trials came in March 2009 when he had surgery on his throwing arm. Questions entered his mind: Was he going to be out of baseball? Was he going to be released? Was he going

to have to sit out a year? Would he even come back?

His faith and his arm got stronger through rehab, and he returned later that season.

“To be able to throw a pitch every day was very important,” Doolittle said. “I have had some ups and downs ... a lot of downs. It was

tough. I learned to be humble.”

Through the hard times, he learned to trust God more.

“It’s a big thing. You put your trust in Him [praying] that His will be done. He has a plan for everybody. There is nothing I can do that is going to change that plan

for me,” Doolittle said. “I have faith knowing whether I have success or failures [if I] continue to trust in Him things are going to work out.”

**“He has a plan for everybody. There is nothing I can do that is going to change that plan for me.”**

Todd Doolittle

To read Todd Doolittle’s story in its entirety, visit [tabonline.org/ToddDoolittle](http://tabonline.org/ToddDoolittle).