



The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

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Nathaly Corcoran (second from left) and Pastor Alan Floyd cut the ceremonial ribbon with project managers Bill Glisson (right) and Morris Moore.

The house love built



Photo by Jeff Tesney

‘God-sized’ project at Mobile church shows Christ’s love to local family

By Susan Withrow Murphy
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Woven into the fabric of church life at Cottage Hill Baptist

Church, Mobile, is Love Where You Live, a church-wide ministry where members regularly show the love of Christ in practical ways throughout the community.

The church took LWYL to a whole new level to celebrate its 75th anniversary, planning a “God-sized” project that also attracted participation from non-members as well as those in the Mobile business community.

The project is having a life-changing impact on the lives of a local family with special needs children.

‘Amazing things’

“About 2,300 people of all ages volunteered 24,000 hours of service to our community through LWYL last year,” said Lonnie Lundy,

pastor of evangelism at Cottage Hill Baptist. “Our church members give of their time and talents to many organizations in Mobile each year, including the Women’s Resource Center, Azalea Trail Run, Camp Whispering Pines, The PASCO Home, Mission of Hope and AHEPA to name a few.”

Cottage Hill Pastor Alan Floyd had a vision to create the largest LWYL project in the church’s history last year to include participation from members of all

three campuses: Cottage Hill, Downtown and Church of the Island (Dauphin Island).

As the staff began praying and working on a plan to build a home for a family who could most benefit, amazing things began to happen.

A church member donated the land for the home, and God began bringing together people with a heart for the project by giving of their time, talents and resources.

More than 900 people do-

More than 900 people donated thousands of hours to this labor of love.

nated thousands of hours to this labor of love.

Cottage Hill member and disaster relief volunteer Bill Glisson came onboard to participate in the day-to-day work along with another longtime church member who is a Mobile homebuilder.

And Morris Moore, a retired homebuilder who joined the church in 2018, was eager to get involved when he learned about the project.

‘Absolute blessing’

Glisson and others are part of an ongoing Cottage Hill LWYL construction team that performs much needed repairs and renovations around the community as well as across state lines.

The team members were grateful recipients of an anonymously donated trailer and tools well before the 75th anniversary home building project. The well-stocked trailer was a godsend, a necessity for the six-month LWYL home building project.

“What an absolute blessing,” said Glisson. “We had (See ‘Made,’ page 15)



Photo by Jeff Tesney

Volunteers gather to celebrate the ribbon-cutting of the home.



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Photo courtesy of Mount View Baptist Church

Mark Milwee, pastor of Mount View Baptist Church, Trinity, packs meal sacks for children to receive along with their Bible study and craft packets to use at home during virtual Vacation Bible School.

Technology gift helps church reach out during COVID-19

Back in February 2019, Mark Milwee thought getting a video camera was a good move for his church. So he and fellow staff member David Phillips went to a Technology in Ministry (TIM) workshop and applied for the grant that came along with it.

“We didn’t know at the time what a dramatic difference that was going to make,” said Milwee, pastor of Mount View Baptist Church, Trinity.

In 2018 and 2019, TIM — a joint partnership between the Center for Congregational Resources at Samford University and TAB Media — offered consulting and a financial grant to churches that could use a technology boost. Mount View

was one of six churches in Muscle Shoals Baptist Association and 40 churches statewide that received a grant.

And even though Milwee’s church was excited about it from the beginning, when the COVID-19 crisis happened, he and other staff members realized just how much God had used the grant to prepare them for what was to come.

“When that transpired, we started

putting our service on YouTube and Facebook every week,” Milwee said. He also started his own YouTube channel, posting more than 50 teaching videos.

One young man came to Christ this summer after one of the videos he saw touched his heart.

“It was worth it all just for that one,” Milwee said.

But they didn’t stop there. The church, which has a thriving children’s ministry, decided to try something they’d never done before to reach their community — virtual Vacation Bible School. With church member Penny Phillips directing, volunteers prepared packets that families could drive

through and pick up and then participate along with others online.

“We averaged 72 who came by and picked up a packet each night,” Milwee said. “We provided a meal for the children and sent a packet home with them that had Bible study and craft material and also something for the rec time.”

All in all, the camera “has been a tremendous blessing to our church,” Milwee said. (Grace Thornton)



Photo courtesy of Mount View Church

Penny Phillips, VBS director, prepares packets for families to pick up and use during virtual VBS.

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 17.

MY RASHIONALE

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

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Reporting, reviewing stats tedious but important for evaluation

Gov. Kay Ivey's plea for Alabamians to fill out the 2020 census forms (see page 13) has me thinking about stats and analytics and why the numbers matter.

The constantly flickering meter at census.gov/popclock/ shows the current world population topping 7.67 billion. Statistical information reported by worldpopulationreview.com indicates a similar number.

Both reports agree China tops the list of individual countries with around 1.4 billion people, and India comes in second with 1.3 billion people.

A far third is the U.S. with more than 330 million people, give or take 100,000.

Of those 330 million in the U.S., about 4.5% — 14,525,579 — are members of Southern Baptist churches, according to the latest Annual Church Profile report released June 4.

Nearly 900,000 Southern Baptists are in Alabama, and according to population estimates and projections coming out of the 2010 Census data, Alabama's population currently hovers near 5 million.

Assuming all numbers are close to accurate, roughly 18% of Alabamians claim to be Southern Baptist, down from 25% a decade or so ago.

And with Southern Baptists' membership numbers down nearly 2 million from our denomination's high of 16.3 million reported in 2006, that means the national denominational decline is down a full percent as well since U.S. popula-

tion numbers in 2006 landed at a little more than 297 million.

Dropping 1% in 14 years may not sound like much, but that is nearly a quarter of all SBC members. A continual decline at that rate officially takes the denomination to extinction well before the end of this century.

Opportunity to update

And with all that has happened in 2020 related to the COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing guidelines, can you imagine trying to obtain accurate data for this year's church numbers?

Southern Baptists' historical data may forever be unfairly skewed for 2020, but we also may look back to find this year providing the opportunity needed to update and simplify analytical reporting for churches.

Ronnie Floyd of the SBC Executive Committee expressed concern in a June 4 Baptist Press article about the fact that 25% of churches affiliated with the SBC declined to provide any statistical data for 2019. He also noted frustration with the length of time it took to obtain reports.

"It is past time for us to re-

think and re-innovate the SBC Annual Church Profile process," he said. "In our high-tech world, our processes cannot have this much lag time. It simply cannot take this long and be this complicated."

Will simplifying the process help with participation?

I'm sure it will to some degree, but if Alabama's super simple process for filling out the 2020 Census form is any indication — only 60% of Alabamians have completed it so far — I'm not sure it will be a magic bullet.

Still, studying the numbers helps us know how we are doing with our purpose as faithful believers, and Floyd and others must try to find the best solution for gathering those facts.

Why such a decline?

A straight-line decline for more than 50 years should sound an alarm, something several ardent researchers and ministry leaders in the SBC have been attempting to do in various ways for many years.

We will share more in upcoming issues of TAB on the denominational decline. In the

meantime, we all can think on what's at play.

Did we get so caught up in growing the numbers for numbers' sake that we forgot to focus on making disciples?

Have we spent most of our energy recruiting church members rather than sharing Christ with those who don't know Him and helping individual believers grow in their faith?

Do we use the church statistical data to judge each other unfairly and thus push people away?

Have we overcomplicated and overextended what it means to be part of a church family?

In his 1997 book "What's So Amazing About Grace?" author Philip Yancey noted, "In the 1950s and 1960s, mainline denominations moved away from proclaiming the gospel toward a more political agenda, and the pews began to empty, cutting membership by half.

"Many of these disaffected churchgoers sought out evangelical churches, where they heard messages more directed to their spiritual needs. It would be ironic indeed if evangelical churches repeated the error." ✝

CELEBRATING

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AUG. 23

**HELP US DOUBLE OUR REACH,
SHARE TAB WITH A FRIEND.**

Your Voice



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

In-person gatherings and the road back to normal

By Pastor Rob Paul
Huffman Baptist Church, Birmingham

At Huffman Baptist Church, where I serve as pastor, we have started the road back to normal. Some think we should flip a switch and be back to normal immediately.

Others are not even ready to start the journey. I am somewhere in between.

The road back to normal will require prayer. It also will require:

1. Caution. So much about COVID-19 is unknown. Even within the scientific community there is no consensus. With an abundance of

caution, our leadership enacted an extensive protocol for returning to gathered worship.

2. Compassion. In my church, a third of our membership is not ready to return to gathered worship. One-third is ready to return, but they have concerns. We must have compassion for those who cannot return and for those who are not ready to return.

3. Humility. We will make mistakes. I will make mistakes. None of us have ever traveled this road. And to continue the metaphor, some of us have trouble asking for directions. Lord, help me to be willing to admit when I got off at the wrong exit.

4. Grace. Because leaders will make mistakes, the rest of us need to show grace when they do.

5. Cooperation. Remember that those who are shepherding your church are making decisions with your best interest at heart.

6. Patience. Enjoy the journey. Even in the pain and discomfort, God is teaching us something. Be patient. Some will want to anesthetize the pain. ... I'm thinking there may be more lamentation than true celebration until we get back to "normal."

7. Evaluation. At our church, we will return to normal in measured phases so that we can evaluate. We want to be good neighbors and good citizens. We do not want to make decisions that put people at risk unnecessarily. And we certainly don't want to be the epicenter of a new outbreak.

There are some things from our pre-pandemic days that we need to leave behind and many things from the pandemic that we need to continue.

Many of our churches that were inwardly focused have rediscovered what it means to serve our neighbors.

Churches that thought of their building as a meeting location have discovered that their address is a ministry point.

We have discovered that technology is an incredible asset. And we have discovered that Jesus is enough!

TAB staff members and supporters help double our reach

I have invited my friends and family to follow and engage with us on our many social media platforms.

Jessica Ingram
TAB event coordinator

I helped two of our readers get set up with their credentials for the tabonline.org website so they have full access.

Jennifer Davis Rash
TAB editor-in-chief

I learned that one of our church members could no longer afford a subscription because of his fixed income, so I am gifting an annual subscription to TAB to him.

Reader and TAB advocate
Phil Campbell, Ala.

Hey, readers! Share how you are helping us double our reach by calling 800-803-5201, ext. 118 or emailing support@thealabamabaptist.org.

Who won't return to church?

It is one of the most common questions we get from church leaders: When will all the members return to in-person services?

Leaders do not like my response: Never. It is a reality that church leaders and members are hesitant to accept.

Here are the five most common dropout groups:

1. The decreasing attendance members
2. The disconnected church members
3. The church-is-another-activity church members
4. The constant-critic church members

5. The cultural Christian church members.

Church leaders and church members, however, should not fret about these losses. You may feel the pain of the losses; that is normal. But God has a plan for your church to embrace the new reality to which you are headed.

Head into His future with confidence. God's got your church. And He's got you.

It's cliché, but the best days are likely just ahead.

Adapted with permission from churchanswers.com. Read the full post by Thom Rainer at tabonline.org/the-wonts.

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“Troubles are often the tools by which God fashions us for better things.”

HENRY WARD BEECHER

American clergyman and social reformer

Please pray for the despair and anger that many are feeling to be channeled into service and sacrifice for others. Pray that God will use the brokenness being felt by millions to soften hearts to receive both physical and spiritual help.

**Send Relief missions partner
Beirut, Lebanon**

When we face adversity, Jesus wants His love and hope to spill out of us. The only way this can happen is if we draw close to Him. His love fills us to overflowing and changes the way we respond to life and those around us.

**Katie Minter Jones
Musella, Ga.**

One of our greatest responsibili-

ties as leaders in Christ's church is to clearly communicate what discipleship looks like and how one fits in the process of following Jesus.

If we don't communicate what our ministry is about or how discipleship happens, then those in our ministry will fill in the gaps we leave, and both you and those you lead will be frustrated with the results.

**Cody Hensley
Pastor to students and
families, Glynwood Baptist
Church, Prattville**

The greater part of our happiness or misery depends upon our dispositions and not upon our circumstances.

Martha Washington

You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream.

Author C.S. Lewis

It's more satisfying and fulfilling to do a difficult thing that's right than an easy thing that's wrong. When your conscience speaks, listen.

**Sports analyst Tony Dungy
Former NFL coach**

That growing sense of entitlement ruins church leaders every time. When we stop believing that amazing grace has saved "a wretch like me," we begin to act like God owes us His blessings.

**Chris Crain
via Facebook**

Support our educators

We are in the midst of truly difficult days. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to bring disruptions in ways we are simply not prepared for.

One area the pandemic is causing unique disruption is in our local schools. I know this first hand because my sweet wife, Shelby, is a third grade teacher.

Mrs. Curlee's world is scattered and confusing right now, and yet she is hard at work preparing, adapting and growing.

All of our teachers are being tested like never before, but here's what I see — passionate, innovative and caring teachers and educators who need our support more than ever.

Our students will take their cues from us. If we complain and fuss about all the challenges ahead of us, our young ones will do the same.

But if we lean into God's grace, practice neighborly concern for one another and "go the extra mile," then the upcoming school year will be successful in spite of the challenges before us.

James 5:16 says, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working." I believe this in the very core of my being!

Superintendents, board members, teachers and school staff members, know that I am praying fervently for you. I trust you to make wise decisions based on the best information you have at the time.

I pledge my support, and the support of my church, to you all as we work together to see our students through this upcoming year.

Dear neighbors, I hope you'll join me in doing the very same.

**Pastor Ben Curlee
Lineville Baptist Church**

From the *Twitterverse*

@haines_matt

There's getting things done and there's doing things the right way, and sometimes those two things are far apart from one another. Wisdom is knowing how to do both.

@benmandrell

Send your pastor an encouraging text to stoke the fire for preaching. August is normally a wind-in-your-back month, but this year is different. It's a challenge to stay motivated week in, week out. He's likely feeling weary.

@richardaross

You will probably live one-fourth of your life AFTER you turn 65. If you adore King Jesus, your heart's desire will be His kingdom and glory. "The righteous still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green" (Ps. 92:14).

@scottywardsmith

I've never regretted 1. assuming the best about people; 2. overlooking as much as possible; 3. offering more encouragement than advice and criticism; 4. remembering the log in my eye will always skew how I see my pain, disappointments and other people.

@MichaelCatt

My concern is the American church isn't ready to tackle the new needs in the valley. In the midst of multiple crises, we've not prayed for power to address the pains and needs in the valley. #sermonnotes

@designsforhope

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope" (Rom. 15:13).

@DrJIPacker

The Puritans were and remain an example of folk who lived slowly enough to think deeply about God.

@billygraham

"Happy is the person who has learned the secret of being content with whatever life brings him and has learned to rejoice in the simple and beautiful things around him."

@desiringgod

Boldness without gentleness betrays the unrelenting kindness of God. Gentleness without courage betrays the God who never compromises.

@richardblackaby

Society tends to prefer lies it agrees with rather than truths it doesn't like.

MARITAL STRESS

during COVID-19 pandemic

As a picture of the gospel to unbelieving world, marriages are worth protecting

By Lanell Downs Smith
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Consider this common scenario: Mary's day begins like an empty cup. If she fills the cup with a little water for every stressor experienced throughout the day, she may pour in water for a poor night's sleep, an accident the puppy had on the carpet or the fact her spouse awoke in a sour mood. She will add more water because traffic delays made her late to work and even more because a coworker kept coughing near her during a meeting.

With an already full cup of water, Mary struggles through the day, returning home to find her spouse left dirty dishes in the sink "for her to clean." There's no more room for water in the cup, so Mary loses it with her spouse, who also had a trying day.

'Broken world'

Melissa Golden, licensed professional counselor with Transformation Counseling, said the "cup analogy" is a good picture of how the stressors of COVID-19 have impacted some marriages. With "cups" already full from the trauma of the pandemic, Golden noted that for some couples, marital conflict may just be a matter of which



123rf.com

"straw breaks the camel's back" or which "splash of water overflows the cup."

"In addition to all of the regular stressors of living in a broken world and being a sinner trying to live life with another sinner, COVID-19 has added many stressors to our plates, including disruption of our routines, fear, doubt, limitations, strong opinions, 'decision fatigue,' limitations on simple daily routines, separation from support and community and more," Golden said.

Rhett McKenzie, a licensed professional counselor with Pathways Professional Counseling, said his marriage counseling caseload increased significantly as he watched levels of stress, anxiety and depression increase among his clients since the start of the nationwide quarantine.

Issues magnified

"When emotions run high, we tend to take it out on those closest to us, which tends to be our spouse (for those who are married)," McKenzie said. "When we have been

cooped up for months with the same people, then things that might not have been issues before are now magnified, and small issues become much bigger issues."

Rise in divorce

In 2018 the United States registered approximately 782,000 divorces according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and some experts forecast a post-pandemic rise in marriage splits.

An April survey of divorce lawyers by the American Academy of Marital Lawyers revealed that 58% of lawyers surveyed had received requests to begin divorce proceedings. Results of a July survey indicated that number had grown to 83%.

According to AAML President Susan Myres, most early pandemic divorce requests stemmed from marriages that were struggling before the pandemic.

By the end of July, couples cited reasons for seeking divorce that included "the impact of being together 24/7 as a result of stay-at-home orders," "clients have more time to think about their situation" and the "craziness of this pandemic is leading people to more insanity."

Increased frequency and intensity of conflict within the relationship signal the need for help, McK-

**"MARRIAGE IS ONE OF GOD'S FAVORITE SANCTIFYING TOOLS,
AND SEEKING TO BE DEPENDENT ON HIM TO TEACH US HOW
TO BE MORE GODLY SPOUSES AND BEING MOLDED INTO THE IMAGE
OF CHRIST WILL HELP US, OUR SPOUSE AND EVERYONE AROUND US."**

R H E T T M C K E N Z I E

licensed professional counselor, Pathways Professional Counseling



123rf.com

enzie said. Unresolved conflict over the same issues is a good sign that communication and conflict resolution have broken down, he added.

And mitigating the trauma of COVID-19 begins with an understanding of how the mind and body react to the pandemic, Golden said. She suggests resources like Transformation Counseling's video series "Thriving in the Unknown" as a way to help.

Trauma can affect the mind and body of the individuals in a couple, Golden noted. Fear, doubt, debilitating physical symptoms, depression, anxiety, relationship disturbances and other symptoms may accompany trauma.

In some cases, destructive coping skills like thoughts of self-harm may occur. Such thoughts are strong warning signs of serious concerns that need to be addressed. And in no situation is physical, spiritual, mental or sexual abuse acceptable, she said.

'Sanctifying tool'

Keeping in mind marriage as a symbol of the relationship between Christ and the Church can help in stressful times, McKenzie added.

"Marriage is one of God's favorite sanctifying tools, and seeking to be dependent on Him to teach us how to be more godly spouses and being molded into the image of Christ will help us, our spouse and everyone around us," McKenzie said.

As a symbol of the gospel to the world, marriages are worth fight-

ing for and protecting, Golden said. Christ offers love, joy, comfort, healing, restoration, sufficiency and provision, even in difficult times.

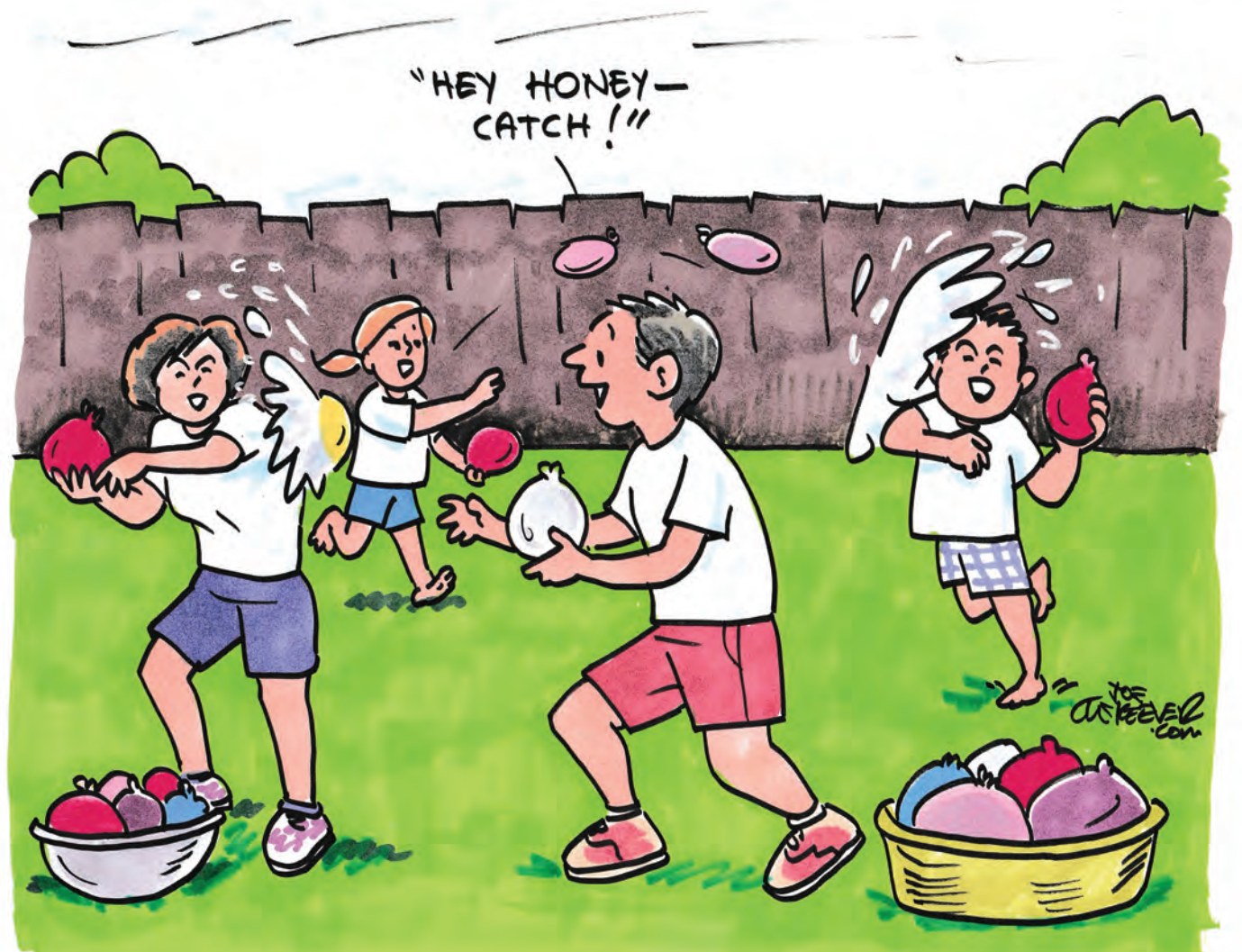
"If we, as individuals and as couples, will commit to persisting in our seeking of the Lord, I believe the trauma of COVID-19 will fail in comparison to what the Lord can do in our marriages during 2020."

To watch "Thriving in the Unknown," visit tabonline.org/thriving.

To watch "Thriving in the Unknown," visit tabonline.org/thriving.

Tips for working through RELATIONAL STRESSORS of COVID-19

- ▶ **Look upward, inward and outward.** Take inventory of what's going on inside you, between you and God and within your relationships.
- ▶ **Seek a professional to walk alongside you.** Many insurance plans offer benefits for marriage and individual counseling.
- ▶ **Prioritize your marriage.** Work on enriching your relationship.
- ▶ **Subscribe to or follow organizations** like iMom, AllPro Dad, Focus on the Family, Dating Divas, etc., which offer a variety of helpful articles, podcasts and videos.
- ▶ **Aim for balance.** Offer grace to your spouse and yourself.
- ▶ **Prioritize your health.** Strive to drink plenty of water, exercise regularly, eat healthy foods, sleep seven to eight hours per night, volunteer to serve others and connect with loved ones.
- ▶ **Play.** Add more fun to your life with virtual game night, backyard water balloon fights or themed date nights.



FOURTH IN A SERIES

In their OWN WORDS:

Alabama Baptists and the COVID-19 pandemic

Tiffany Mims on being a nurse who cared for COVID-19 patients— 'The Lord was making my path go the way it needed to go'

By **Tiffany Mims**
Special to The Alabama Baptist

My name is Tiffany Mims. I live in Millbrook with my parents and attend HisWay Community Church in Prattville.

I've been a registered nurse for 10 years. I worked at Baptist Medical Center South in Montgomery in the emergency room for two years, and I've been in a family care office for the past eight years.

It's been about four months since we started hearing the majority of things about the pandemic, and like everybody else, I was very anxious at the beginning. In our office, we looked at the numbers every single day, and we could see the number of COVID-19 cases rising all the time. It became quite scary.

I went through a phase of feeling guilty because I saw other nurses and doctors working on the frontlines in New York and Washington. I was praying about it, and the Lord gave me an opportunity to actually work in our community with COVID patients one-on-one. I got pulled from my clinic to go to Elmore Community Hospital in Wetumpka to care for patients there for three months.

I went from being anxious to feeling much more at peace. The Lord was making my path go the way it needed to go. I didn't need to fly to New York to take care of people. I could stay right here in my own community and do the same thing.

Life in the hospital

At the hospital, we had two different halls. One hall was shut off from regular patients and that was our COVID unit. Then we had "normal" sick patients on a different hall so



Photo courtesy of Tiffany Mims

Tiffany Mims (center) says her family, parents Tracy and Terrell Mims (left) and sister and brother-in-law Taylor and Daniel Carter (right), acknowledged early in the pandemic, 'You come with germs, and we accept you as you are.'

they were separated. We had to put on a gown, mask, sometimes a face shield if you didn't wear glasses — which I do, so I didn't have to worry about that — and gloves every time we walked into a patient's room. And then as we came out, we took all of that gear off and washed up. Then, if they called five seconds later, we did it all over again.

The majority of our patients have been elderly from nursing homes. Most of them actually have not been super-duper sick. They had to evacuate a lot of the nursing homes so they wouldn't contaminate the rest of the nursing home population.

We got a lot of people, some who didn't even show symptoms at all. Some did have mild symptoms like cough and fever, but most of them got better in a week.

Still, we had to hold onto them

until they were negative for two different tests.

A couple of our patients were there for almost two months, so we really got to know each of these patients for a long amount of time, much longer than you would your normal patients.

Close calls

We had a couple of close calls where people were really, really sick, and we thought they were on the verge of dying. We just continued

treatment, which, for COVID, there's no specific treatment. We were treating symptoms and underlying conditions like pneumonia.

We see a lot of death on a daily basis in the medical field. We've had multiple patients who scared us, thinking that they were on the brink of death, and they came back and made a full recovery and were able to go back home or to their nursing home.

It was nice to be able to not have that dreadful part where people are dying on their own or you're the person holding their hand as they die because their family can't be there. To be able to send them back so that when this is all over they can see their family was special.

For us, staffing was a challenge. We had two people pulled from my office, which was doing a little less business because people were scared to go see the doctor because of COVID. We got pulled to the hospital, but even that sometimes was not enough, so we were taking care of more patients than normal.

A few of us were doing the work of a lot of people. I was getting more hours at the hospital than I was getting at the clinic, and a pay raise came with that. I was able to get a blessing of financial security to help my family maintain a normal pattern of life.

Of course, I always am concerned

"Everything that I do in my life, I try to take as lessons to move forward and be a better human and to follow the Lord in a better way."

Tiffany Mims

“I went through a phase of feeling guilty because I saw other nurses and doctors working on the frontlines in New York and Washington. I was praying about it, and the Lord gave me an opportunity to actually work in our community with COVID patients one-on-one.”

Tiffany Mims

about getting sick. That’s a natural thing with being a nurse. This is my daily life.

But thinking about bringing sickness home to my family was more scary to me than getting sick myself. My mom has asthma, so I made sure I followed all the extra precautions, like getting my scrubs off and getting in the shower before I see anybody else, spraying everything down, leaving clothes outside.

I’m concerned about spreading things to the community and to those I love.

My parents were a little concerned at first, but they said, “If we get sick, we’d rather it be from you than from somebody else.” I said, “That is not how that works! Let me be concerned about these things!” At first I was scared to hug them or anything else like that but they said, “No, really, I need a hug. I need you

to continue living your life and not be extraordinarily concerned. We’ll get through whatever happens.”

So I take precautions but we’ve been able to breathe a little bit easier as time has gone on. They say, “You come with germs, and we accept you as you are.”

Trusting God

I continue to lean into the Lord. When we’re anxious — and He tells us not to be anxious, but He knows it’s a natural reaction for us — we can still lean into Him and go to Him for peace and comfort. We know that He is sovereign, and He’s in control.

That’s a comfort to me, knowing that I don’t have to be in control of everything. I know God is still in control, and that’s powerful to me.

Everything I do in my life, I try to take as lessons to move forward and be a better human and to follow the Lord in a better way.

I hope all these unforeseeable things that happen in life continue to help me lean on the Lord and walk in His ways and live my life to His glory and make other peoples’ lives hopefully better too.

I’m super thankful for the online community that churches have embraced. Our church was already posting stuff on Facebook routinely before COVID hit, but we really embraced using Zoom and Facebook as an outlet for us to all get together.

Everybody had impromptu meetings as well and embraced social

media in a way that we hadn’t in the past to be able to spend more time with each other.

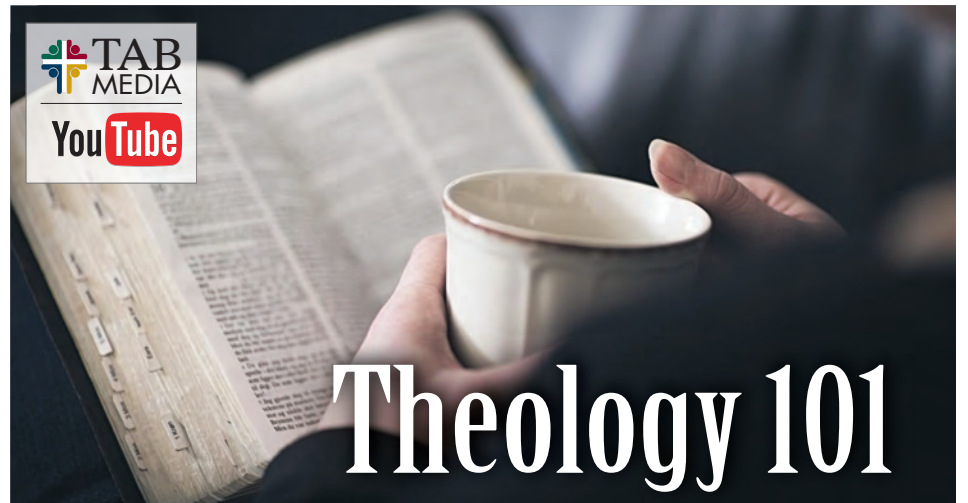
I’m thankful we live in an age where we can do those things — that we’re not just locked away from one another and can’t be together. That’s been a major blessing through the church to be able to continue to interact when you can’t meet in person.

EDITOR’S NOTE — As told to Margaret Colson. In *Their Own Words* is an oral history of Alabama Baptists during COVID-19. The interview has been edited for clarity and space. 🌿



Photo courtesy of Tiffany Mims

Tiffany Mims dresses in protective gear to see patients at Elmore Community Hospital in Wetumpka.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

The Holy Spirit in Figures

Water

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

Last week we addressed the use of wind in association with the Holy Spirit to suggest truths about the Spirit. This week the association of the Spirit with water suggests other truths.

A good starting point is a prophetic passage from Isaiah that says, “For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring” (44:3). The connection of water with the person of God’s Spirit is obvious.

‘Let him come to Me’

Jesus made a similar connection in the Gospel of John when He stood and cried, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (7:37–38).

The immediate connection with the Holy Spirit and water follows with the explanation, “But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (7:39).

What then might we draw from the biblical connection between water and the Holy Spirit?

1. A divine thirst-quenching is available through the Spirit’s ministry to believers. No doubt all of us can recall times when we were gripped by physical thirst for a drink of water. God

stands ready to pour His Spirit upon His spiritually thirsty children.

2. A life-sustaining dimension to the Spirit’s work resides in a Christian’s heart. We humans cannot live very long without drinking water; dehydration is not to be ignored. Attempting to live the life Jesus came to give while ignoring the person and presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts is to be beset with “spiritual dehydration.”


3. A fruit-producing possibility is associated with the Holy Spirit’s active presence in our hearts as God’s children. Some of us may recall forgetting to water a house plant or a flower bed, only to discover in time that the plants withered and possibly died. Dead plants cannot bring forth fragrant and attractive flowers. Part of the purpose for the Spirit indwelling and filling a believer’s heart is that attractive fruit will not flourish apart from Him.

The psalmist long ago knew where to turn when thirst beset him: “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Ps. 42:1–2). Can we say that? 🌿

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.



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



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SUNDAY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Children

Nothing Less, Saturday, August 22, 9-10:30 am

Safety First, Sunday, August 23, 2-3:30 pm

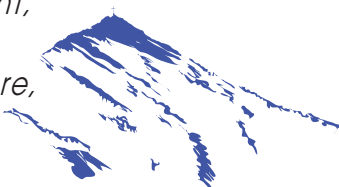
Preschool

Choosing the Best Curriculum for Your Preschool and Children's Ministries, Tuesday, August 25, 6:30-8 pm

All Around the Room, Thursday, August 27, 6:30-8 pm

Using Sensory Boxes to Teach Biblical Content, Saturday, August 29, 8:30-10 am

Preschool Sunday School Is Not Just Childcare, Sunday, August 30, 2-3:30 pm



DISCIPLESHIP

Lunch and Learn with Kie Bowman, Thursday, August 27, 12-1:30 pm

MISSIONS DISCIPLESHIP LEADERCONNECT

WMU Directors and General Leaders, Saturday, August 22, 9-10 am

All times CST

*For webinar descriptions or to register, visit **PinnacleAlabama.org**.*

These training opportunities are free and made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.

great commission
conversations

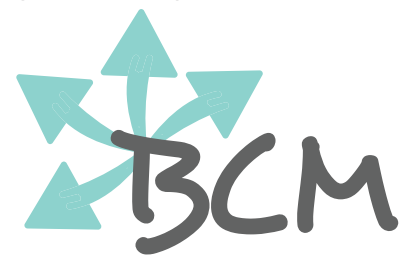

Alabama WMU's Great Commission Conversations are 30-minute online Zoom gatherings featuring dialogue and prayer with missions partners from North America and around the world. Great Commission

Conversations are a unique way to connect personally with those serving on the mission field and to learn more about their work. Join us to hear how God is moving in North America and across the globe. Visit **AlabamaWMU.org** to sign up for our next session on **Tuesday, August 25, at 10 a.m. or 8 p.m.**

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August 29
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 Journey Church,
 435 Sheila Blvd., Prattville

Due to health and safety guidelines, seating is limited.

Important to continue annual church bylaws review

By **Michael J. Brooks**
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Church bylaws should be reviewed annually even in routine seasons, but 2020 showcases why the review should include assessing items for the “what if,” said Jim Swedenburg, director of the office of Cooperative Program and stewardship development for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

For instance, do the bylaws allow for church administrators to make decisions without a vote of the church in times of emergency?

In a recent webinar for church leaders sponsored by SBOM, Swedenburg, along with state missionaries Mike Jackson and

Lee Wright, shared tips on “Dealing with Documents in Days of Difficulty.”

Wright, coordinator of the SBOM office of church compensation services, noted “Robert’s Rules of Order (11th edition) does

have a ‘motion to ratify.’ This asks for congregational approval of previous action, such as emergency spending, re-opening facilities or calling staff.”

Though he normally doesn’t advocate for that procedure, Wright said many churches have had groups,

such as deacons or the personnel committee, make quick decisions in the past few months in the absence of congregational business meetings.

“It’s a good idea to present [these motions] when business meetings resume,” Wright said.

Swedenburg said the Robert’s parliamentary guidelines do allow for electronic meetings with “simultaneous communication” as long as that option is included in the church’s bylaws.

“What this means is that participants need to be able to hear and to respond,” he said. “This could be done with a conference call or video conference. Zoom allows participants to call into a meeting if they don’t have a computer or a smartphone, but email would not meet the requirements of ‘simultaneous communication.’”

Swedenburg said his office is happy to receive bylaws from churches for quick review and comments before the church consults an attorney. He also has policy samples to share with interested congregations.

Making adjustments

Handling the pastor/staff search process during the COVID-19 pandemic also has been difficult in recent months.

Jackson, director of the office of LeaderCare and church health, said the typical weekend meeting for the congregation to greet the prospective pastor is often not possible now due to coronavirus concerns.

“Pastors build on relationships in ministry, and this typically begins during the call process, so we are disadvantaged under the current situation,” Jackson said.



Unsplash.com

Another area that has surfaced during the pandemic is thinking about how documents are worded.

When the U.S. Supreme Court issued a decision June 15 declaring that longstanding non-discrimination protections in federal workplace law covers “sexual orientation” and “gender identity,” religious leaders wondered how it would impact religious freedom.

The ruling was an interpretation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in response to three anti-discrimination cases brought before the court, Swedenburg explained.

“Title VII forbids sexual discrimination in hiring but doesn’t mention sexual orientation discrimination,” he said. “The new majority ruling accepted precedent from the [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission] and stated that sexual orien-

tation and gender identity is a protected class.

“There are some serious unanswered questions, which may be defined by lower court action, [but] Title VII applies to organizations with 15 or more employees, so the majority of Alabama Baptist churches won’t be affected by the initial ruling.”

Swedenburg said some in society label churches as “hate groups” due to biblical

faithfulness, which can be disturbing to the Church.

“We’re not hate groups and must always respond in love,” he declared. “But we also must protect our congregations in our hiring practices. Now we need to be more specific in job descriptions.”

“What we must do is point to our core beliefs, as in ‘The Baptist Faith and Message 2000,’ and explain lifestyle expectations for those we bring on board for leadership.”

The SBOM provides resources outlining sample bylaws and policies for churches wanting to implement policies to match the church’s core beliefs.

Those resources are available at alsbom.org/safe.

For more information about any of these topics, call 800-264-1225.

The pastor/staff search process during the COVID-19 pandemic has been a difficult process for churches this year.

Mike Jackson
director, office of
LeaderCare/church health
State Board of Missions

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be not dismayed, for I am your God.”*

ISAIAH 41:10



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3 stories you should know



AP Photo/Felipe Dana

U.S. officials say help is on the way following the Aug. 4 explosions in Beirut that left at least 200 reported dead and thousands injured.

The U.S. sent medical supplies, food and water, as well as emergency medical response personnel. Southern Baptists' compassion ministry Send Relief has partners in the area who are on the ground responding to many of the immediate needs, including providing bottled water, food boxes, clothing and other supplies. (AP/TAB)

MacArthur's church sues state of California

A suburban Los Angeles mega-church has filed a lawsuit to continue holding indoor services after California issued a second lockdown order to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Pastor John MacArthur and Grace Community Church in Sun Valley have accused state officials of violating the California Constitution by "unequally" restricting their free exercise of religion during the pandemic while allowing large racial justice protests to go unchecked.

A Los Angeles County order issued July 29 limits indoor gatherings at houses of worship to 100 people or 25% of the building's capacity, whichever is lower. Singing has also been banned for indoor services.

The church reopened its doors to several thousand worshippers in late July. (RNS)

San Francisco-area church meets successfully

By Pastor Alan Cross
First-person account

It is legal to meet for worship in California. But, to do so, churches must follow the regulations put in place to limit the spread of the coronavirus, which involves meeting outside with masks and with distancing.

How a church does that is up to them, but it is possible, as we have discovered.

During a recent Wednesday evening youth group meeting, the police showed up in response to a complaint from a neighbor who thought we were violating a regulation on church gatherings.

The officer arrived to see our youth group meeting safely outside, socially distanced and wearing masks. He commended the group and its leaders and told them to proceed. It was a non-incident.

Headline news from around the Southeast

Georgia

Free testing for COVID-19 at Greenforest Community Baptist Church in Decatur, Georgia, will continue through August, according to a report in *The Christian Index*. The church, which began offering the testing soon after the pandemic shutdown, has provided more than 7,000 tests to date. Also, with hunger needs exacerbated by the pandemic, the church has redoubled its efforts in food distribution, feeding more than 1,000 on Aug. 6.

Florida

With 25,338 baptisms in 2019, the Florida Baptist Convention is leading the way among Southern Baptist state conventions in number of baptisms. The Journey church in Orange City, Florida, was one of 30 congregations in the Sunshine State to baptize more than 100 new believ-

ers in the past year. "One church can change the spiritual climate of a community," said Pastor James Hilton in a *Florida Baptist Witness* article.

Louisiana

Louisiana College, a Baptist college in Pineville, welcomed freshmen to campus Aug. 12, with orientation activities filling the afternoon, the *Baptist Message* reported. LC students completed their spring semester online, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As fall semester gets underway, move-in times have been staggered to ensure social distancing in residence halls and across campuses. Masks are required to enter buildings.

Mississippi

A water trough, pickup truck and parking lot provided a unique setting for young Hayden Can-

non to be baptized at Bay Springs Church in Mississippi this summer. The church had held drive-in parking lot services for several weeks because of COVID-19, *The Baptist Record* reported. When Cannon asked to be baptized, Pastor Ed King suggested the parking lot. "Hayden agreed and it was a great day," King said.

Tennessee

First Baptist Church, Nashville, Tennessee, is getting an early jump on caroling season, with a new ministry called "COVID caroling," in which a group of FBC members visit homes and other places to sing worship hymns and praise songs from the driveway or in proximity to the doorstep. As reported by the *Baptist and Reflector*, the ministry seems to be meeting its objective of creating happiness and a spirit of worship during the COVID-19 crisis.

Alabama news

— MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION —

Retired Eastern Hills' associate pastor Armstrong dies at age 81

Larry Edward Armstrong — retired associate pastor of education and administration at Eastern Hills Baptist Church, Montgomery — died Aug. 5. He was 81.

A native of Kentucky, Armstrong was raised as a minister's son. He earned a bachelor's degree in history and religion from Samford University in Birmingham. He went on to earn a master of divinity and master of religious education.



ARMSTRONG

Throughout his 48 years of ministry, Armstrong also served on staff at several other churches in Alabama and Kentucky.

In 2007 and 2010, the Alabama Baptist Education/Music Association presented Armstrong with the educator of the year award.

Armstrong is survived by his wife of 58 years, CeCelia; daughters, Traci and Holly; son, Trent; six grandchildren; one great-grandchild and one on the way. (TAB)

Wolf retires, named pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church, Montgomery

When Jay Wolf looks back over his decades at First Baptist Church, Montgomery, he sees a “beautiful panorama of God’s gracious blessings.”

Since he became pastor of First, Montgomery, in 1991, the church has added 8,000 new members, baptized 2,500, built and renovated buildings and sent many missionaries to the nations.

Over the years, Wolf has served in various leadership roles across the state convention and Southern Baptist Convention, including vice chairman of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions and a trustee of the International Mission Board. Wolf also has been well known as a leader for racial reconciliation in Montgomery.

After he preached his final sermon as pastor Aug. 16, he became pastor emeritus.

“If the pastor is compared to the quarterback on the team, I’m shifting over to the coaching staff and the cheerleading squad,” he said, noting that he and his wife, Mary Ruth, plan to stay involved in the church’s ministries. That includes tutoring at-risk children in Montgomery and encouraging the church’s array of ministries around the world.

Rick Lance, SBOM executive director, said Wolf’s ministry has “reached far beyond the context of the greater Montgomery area.”

Wolf led the church to be “a mission factory” but also managed to stay a very personal pastor for the congregation, Lance said.



WOLF

“Although Jay is the pastor of a large church, he has an intimate knowledge of most every member of the congregation and their families as well,” he said. “Throughout his almost 30 years as pastor of FBC Montgomery, he has baptized multiple thousands of people. Jay is an excellent personal witness, and his preaching is highly evangelistic.” (Grace Thornton)

— WALKER ASSOCIATION —

Sue Martin celebrates 25 years of service to Walker Baptists

David Miller says he’s the third Walker Baptist Association director of missions (DOM) that Sue Martin has “trained.”

“She’s a walking encyclopedia of Baptist life, especially Baptist life in our county,” he said.

And September marks the 25th anniversary of Martin keeping the finances, missions trip plans and other logistical needs straight for Walker Baptists.

“She’s a great resource for our association,” said Miller, who followed Lucky Teague and Don Black before him as DOMs.

Black hired Martin, who was looking for a part-time job after being a stay-at-home mom. Her husband, Bill — pastor of New Canaan Baptist Church, Jasper — had heard about the job opening at a meeting and mentioned it. A quarter century later, she’s still there.

“I see myself as a resource person,” Martin said. “I try to help people connect with what they need. My motto is ‘do everything to the glory of God.’ It’s been a blessing to be a part of the association’s ministry.” (Grace Thornton)



MARTIN

AL governor urges census participation

Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey delivered a stern warning to Alabama residents in late July regarding the U.S. Census and the impact an undercount could have in the state over the next 10 years.

“To put it plainly, 60% just won’t get it,” Ivey said.

“We remain at serious risk of losing representation and critical federal funding if we don’t achieve maximum participation.”

Data from the census shows that almost 61% of Alabama residents have completed their 2020 census forms as of Aug. 11.

Nationwide, the completion rate stands at around 64%.

On Aug. 3, Census Bureau Director Steven Dillingham announced the agency will end its count Sept. 30 in order to meet the original Dec. 31 deadline for reporting the count.

In 2010, Alabama’s participation rate was 72%.

Ivey said in April that if Alabama’s count falls shy of that rate in 2020, the state will likely lose a representative in Congress, as well as millions of dollars in community funding.

“Census results are vital to our collective future,” said Kenneth Boswell, Alabama Counts! chairman and director of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs.

Alabamians can participate in the 10-question census online at my2020Census.gov, by phone at 1-844-330-2020 or by paper form. (TAB)



Image courtesy of alabama2020census.com

Persecuted church

Christian widow, mother of 4 found dead, mutilated in Indian village

CHHATTISGARH, India — A Christian widow persecuted by tribal Hindu villagers was found dead and mutilated in a wilderness in Chhattisgarh, India.

Bajjo Bai Mandavi, 40, was seen May 25 collecting firewood near a wilderness two miles from her village. A driver spotted Bajjo’s remains May 29.

Family members and Christian leaders believe Bajjo was raped and murdered and left in the wilderness, where animals scavenged her body. Other sources insist Bajjo died from an animal attack.

Bajjo leaves behind four children — ages 6, 8, 12 and 17.

Since Bajjo became a Christian three years ago, she had been denied access to the village’s common water source, was shunned by most villagers, including her brother, and received death threats.

Upset that Bajjo had left their blend of Hindu and traditional tribal rituals, the villagers met four times to discuss action against her.

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



CIA map



AIM *for* HOPE

AN ALABAMA BAPTIST CHILDREN'S HOMES SPORTING CLAY EVENT

FRIDAY
OCT
16



at Orvis Shooting Grounds at Pursell Farms

Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries (ABCH) presents our third annual "Aim for Hope"—a benefit to help raise awareness and support for children and families we serve across Alabama. All shooters will receive an arrival gift, play through a sporting clays course with 100 clay targets, and enjoy breakfast and lunch with our morning shoot, or lunch and afternoon hors d'oeuvres with our afternoon shoot. This sporting clay course will provide a challenging and enjoyable experience for all shooters, ranging from novice to experienced. The course offers 15 uniquely designed stations which have been created to simulate a variety of true field shots from different hunting scenarios. **New for this year**, participants will have the opportunity to take part in a live auction during lunch.

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Memorials are listed below (the name of the deceased is bolded).

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Thank you to everyone who made a Grace Gift to Alabama Baptist Children's Homes. To learn more about Grace Gifts or how to make one, visit alabamachild.org/give or call 205.982.1112.

Made with love

Single mom with special needs children receives home built by Cottage Hill volunteers

(continued from page 1) the tools and transportation we needed to do the project.”

God continued meeting needs as they arose. Lundy met with a non-member for a spiritual discussion one day over lunch. Within a short time, a roofing company hired the man. On the job only one week, he let the company management know about the LWYL project, and they donated the roofing materials for the home — and the labor.

“God brought our church members and people we had never met before, including those from the business community, to give us just about everything, from electrical to plumbing to furniture,” said Mike Breland, CHBC executive pastor.

‘In Your hands’

The staff had no idea who would ultimately end up with the house, but they committed the decision to earnest and continual

prayer, asking God to lead them to the people of His choosing.

Though several were nominated, a few months into the project it became clear that Nathaly Corcoran, mom of 11-year-old twins Blake and Sebastian, was God’s clear choice to receive the home.

Kerrie Benson, a church member and executive director of Dance Without Limits, a studio for differently abled children, nominated Corcoran’s family. The boys attend Benson’s dance studio and are students at Augusta Evans School in Mobile.

When Benson told Corcoran she had nominated her family for a new home, Corcoran’s first thought was, “I put it in your hands, Jesus.”

Blake and Sebastian were diagnosed with autism at age four. “They have inspired me to do all I can to make a better living for them,” said Corcoran. “Keeping them safe is an ongoing challenge, and with their trouble communicating, life is always a walk of faith.”

Overwhelmed

In addition to solo mothering of autistic twins with her closest family living in Peru, Corcoran is a student at University of South Alabama. She’s on track to graduate with a bachelor’s degree



Photo by Jeff Tesney

The home given to the Corcoran family, was built and furnished by Cottage Hill Baptist Church volunteers, local businesses and community members through the Love Where You Live ministry.

next spring while also working full time as a certified dental assistant in a local oral surgeon’s office.

She has applied to graduate school hoping to enroll in a physician’s assistant program.

When Corcoran received the news that she and her boys would receive the home, she was overwhelmed.

“Unbelievable! Who would ever expect to receive a house?” she said. The small family moved into their furnished home in January this year after church members put on the finishing touches, even making accommodations in the home for the boys’ special needs. The touches are designed to create a space that eases the load for mom and offers Blake and Sebastian a calm and safe environment.

“God has done amazing things to help me meet my goals for the boys,” said Corcoran. “The house gives us so much peace. We are so grateful to Him and to everyone who poured their hearts into making this place.”

Greater blessing

Though the Corcorans were blessed in receiving the house, those who built and supplied the home may have received the greater blessing, according to Mike Breland, who managed the project and coordinated with the business community.

“These individuals and business owners will never know the impact they are having on this family,” said Breland. “Their generosity will forever change their lives.”

“These individuals and business owners will never know the impact they are having on this family. Their generosity will forever change their lives.”

Mike Breland
executive pastor, Cottage Hill Baptist Church

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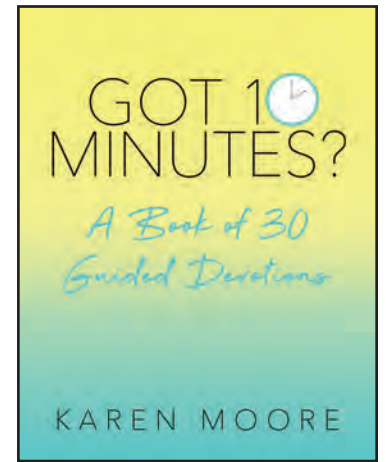
State Goal: \$1,200,000



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GOT 10 MINUTES?



By Karen Moore

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Meet God Each Morning

“Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.”

L A M E N T A T I O N S 3 : 2 2 – 2 3 (N I V)

Devotional Moment

When we make a mess out of things and are painfully aware of what we’ve done, we hope others will be compassionate as we clean up the mess. It doesn’t always happen.

Compassionate hearts are often not available when we are in the greatest need of them.

The good news is that God keeps on loving us, keeps on forgiving us and looks at us with a heart of

compassion. He knows who we are and what causes us to fail. He knows the traps we fall into so easily. He knows, but He does not condemn us.

For the sake of His Son, His compassions are made new every morning.

Hallelujah! That means as we rise from our slumbers and make our way to meet the Lord each morning, He is ready to hear us and help

us because His compassions never fail. In fact, His compassions are made new every

morning. So scrub your face, put on a smile and spend time with your Savior.

He will help you clean up your messes and teach you what it means to have compassion for others. It’s a win-win kind of day.

Prayer

Lord, I am awed at Your willingness to pick me up each time I fall down. I am grateful You have compassion on me and that You want good things for my life. I pray to be a better person in Your eyes today. Amen.

Action Step

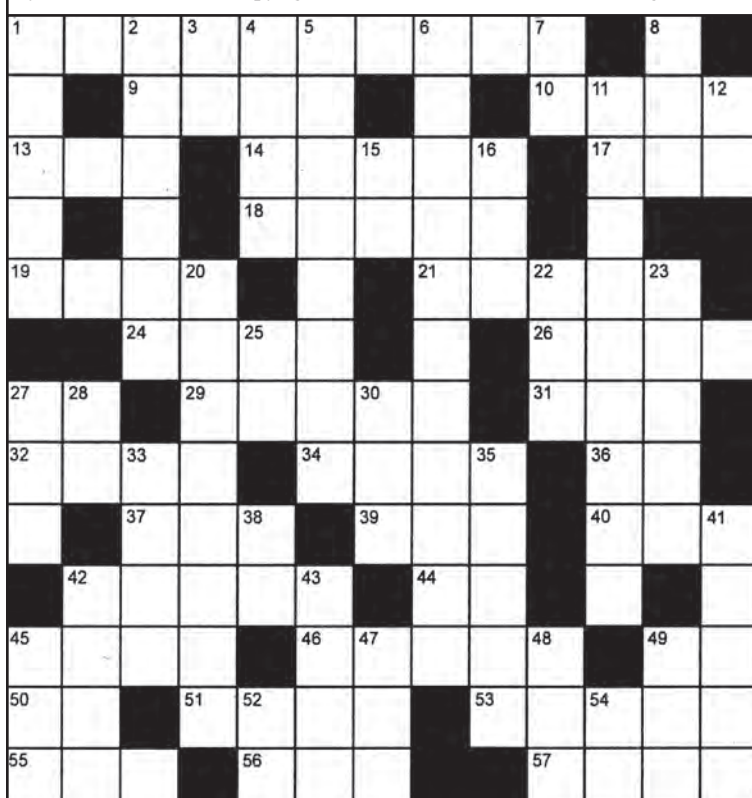
Read the news today and take note of one story that shows someone being compassionate. Then look for a story where someone has shown no compassion. Pray for the people in each story.

EDITOR’S NOTE
— Karen Moore is the author of over 100 inspirational and devotional books. She loves to spend time with God every morning. Contact her at Got10Devotions@gmail.com.

“As we rise from our slumbers and make our way to meet the Lord each morning, He is ready to hear us and help us because His compassions never fail.”

Christian Crossword

By Faith Wade Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

- Last book of the Bible.
- A thing offered unto an _____. (1 Cor. 8:7)
- Boaz and Ruth’s son. (Ruth 4:21)
- Cozbi, daughter of _____. (Num. 25:15)
- Alpha and _____. (Rev. 1:8)
- _____ and drink. (Acts 10:41)
- _____ and Dimonah and Adadah. (Josh. 15:22)
- Sendeth _____ on the just and on the unjust. (Matt. 5:45)
- A tenth part of the _____. (Num. 18:26)
- _____ found grace. (Gen. 6:8)
- The province of _____. (Dan. 8:2)
- Dad.
- _____ himself in water. (Num. 19:19)
- Cast the _____. (John 21:6)

- Who Cain murdered. (Gen. 4:8)
- Linen _____. (1 Kings 10:28)
- Not a she.
- _____ there be light. (Gen. 1:3)
- _____ them about thy neck. (Prov. 6:21)
- The beginning and the _____. (Rev. 22:13)
- _____ Peter.
- Symbol for nickel.
- Papa and _____. (Matt. 2:19)
- An _____ of the Lord. (Matt. 2:19)
- Opposite of “out.”
- _____ I my brother’s keeper? (Gen. 4:9)
- Exalt His _____ together. (Ps. 34:3)
- Shut the _____ mouths. (Dan. 6:22)
- The number of lepers Jesus healed. (Luke 17:17)
- What Gideon

- was checking for. (Judg. 6:37)
 - Children’s teeth are set on _____. (Ezek. 18:2)
- ### Down
- One of these never touched Samson’s head. (Judg. 16:17)
 - Mary was one. (Luke 1:27)
 - Edward’s nickname.
 - God hates a proud _____. (Prov. 6:16–17)
 - Under the shadow of the _____. (Ps. 91:1)
 - The feast of _____. (Ex. 34:22)
 - Negative.
 - Meadow.
 - Where Jesus was born.
 - Deuteronomy. (abbr.)
 - Printer’s measure.
 - _____ the son of Abdiel. (1 Chron. 5:15)
 - Jesus healed his son. (John 4:46)

- The _____ Commandments.
- Hast thou _____ of the tree? (Gen. 3:11)
- Alcoholics Anonymous. (abbr.)
- Frying _____. (Lev. 7:9)
- Jewish month.
- Head covering.
- They removed from _____. (Num. 33:10)
- North side of Bethemek, and _____. (Josh. 19:27)
- Go ye in _____ all the world. (Mark 16:15)
- He saw _____ smoke rising. (Gen. 19:28)
- Identical.
- I will praise thy _____. (Ps. 54:6)
- Welcome _____. (Ps. 54:6)
- _____ Testament.
- God, that cannot _____. (Titus 1:2)
- Suffix.
- Newspaper.
- Doctor of optometry. (abbr.)

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For August 23

Explore the Bible

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



RELATIONAL FOUNDATIONS Song of Solomon 2:15–3:5

Preventative Care (2:15)

Foxes are pests that wreak havoc in vineyards. Here they represent some hindrances that are threatening to spoil the relationship of this engaged couple. The imagery of “vineyards” in this verse most likely refers to the couple’s relationship of betrothal followed by marriage.

Other plant-eating animals such as deer and bears could cause damage to vineyards, especially when the vineyards were in bloom. The tender leaves and clusters of buds that would grow and ripen into delicious grapes would develop in time if the vines were not damaged. Vineyard owners often constructed rock walls around their vineyards to keep out unwanted animals, but foxes were cunning and difficult to keep out.

The intention of this verse is to warn the groom and bride not to overlook potential issues that could threaten the long-term health of their marriage. They cannot afford to allow small but destructive matters to go unaddressed.

We tend to sweat the small things. God is teaching us that we need to practice Barney Fife theology: “We need to nip it in the bud.” If small issues are not identified and worked through biblically, they can merge with other small concerns. Eventually they blow up and cause great damage to the marriage. Christians need to be vigilant and erect safeguards to protect their marriages.

Build Trust (2:16–17)

Both the bride and the groom have chosen an exclusive relationship with each other. The language in verse 16 is of desire and delight, confidence and assurance. “My love is mine, and I am his.” He belongs to me, and I belong to him. They share a mutual understanding and confidence. They have an exclusive and intimate love for one another.

The shepherd-king also “feeds among the lilies.” He enjoys the delights, love and pleasures she has to offer. She gladly gives herself to this man as a gift because he has given himself to her. A biblical relation-

ship is always two givers. It is not a giver and a taker, nor is it two takers. The husband gives himself without reserve to his wife. She, in return, is set free to give herself to him without reservation or hesitation.

In verse 17 the couple longs for marital union and sexual consummation. Because they belong to each other, they want each other with no barriers standing in the way.

Thinking ahead to what they will enjoy, the Shulamite woman invites Solomon to come into her with the agility, strength and beauty of a gazelle or young stag.

For a proper interpretation of her words in 2:17, we cannot forget the words she spoke to her female attendants in 2:7. She had told them: “Do not stir up or awaken love until the appropriate time.” She declared that sexual intimacy must be reserved for the appropriate time according to God. The appropriate time does not include the betrothal period but comes after the marriage ceremony.

While she had strong physical desires for Solomon, she also desired to be able to present herself to him in purity on their wedding night.

Restraint Required (3:1–5)

In 3:1–4, the Shulamite woman is dreaming on the night before her wedding. The dreams are filled with symbolic meanings relating to her anxiety about giving up her purity. Still, she longs to be sexually intimate with her future husband.

Overcoming fear, she arises and seeks her groom in the dark streets of the city. Her love for her groom was creating strong sexual yearnings within her. This strong desire for her future husband was a God-given yearning; however, the desire had to be reserved for the appropriate time.

Our lesson concludes with the bride repeating her warning not to “stir up or awaken love until the appropriate time.” The unmarried are warned about pursuing physical intimacy before marriage. Becoming sexually active before marriage is a sin and deprives people of enjoying God’s intended gift.✠

Bible Studies for Life

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



WE STRENGTHEN ONE ANOTHER Ephesians 5:8–21

We can help one another stand against the sinful ways of the world. (8–14)

In this passage the Apostle Paul teaches us about pursuing a life that pleases the Lord. In Ephesians 5:1 he told us to “be imitators of God” as His “beloved children” and in verse 2 that we should do so by walking in love “as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us.”

God is often associated with light (see Ps. 18:28; 118:27) and 1 John 1:5 says, “God is light.” So when Paul commands us to “walk as children of light,” he is still reminding us to be imitators of God.

Paul clarifies in verse 9 that light produces “all that is good and right and true,” and so we must pursue those things.

The darkness refers to the shameful things people do when they think no one can see them and hold them accountable (v. 12). We have encountered the light in Christ and so must live as people who have been brought into the light (v. 13).

We have been made alive and illuminated by Christ’s resurrection life (v. 14) and so must live transformed lives.

We can help one another make wise use of our time. (15–17)

Wisdom is identified as a key divine attribute in Scripture (see Job 12:13; Luke 11:49; Rom. 11:33; 1 Cor. 1:21; Eph. 3:10). And when Paul tells us to walk “as wise” we may understand that we are still dealing with the imitation of God (who is all wise).

Wise people recognize that time is a precious gift, not to be wasted but used to pursue the will and priorities of our Lord. This world would have us use our time in ways that result in our own pleasure and comfort and personal advantages. God has more redemptive priorities for our time.

The church is a community where we encourage and help each other to wisely use our time in light

of the fact that we are people “on mission,” recognizing that the spiritual battles around us depend on the wise use of our time for the advancement of the gospel and of God’s kingdom purposes.

We strengthen one another as we’re filled with the Spirit and live in mutual submission. (18–21)

The command to “be filled with the Spirit” in verse 18 is followed by a series of participles in verses 19–21 (speaking, singing, making melody, giving thanks, submitting).

Some think the actions listed in the participles indicate how we become filled with the Spirit. Others think they indicate what happens once we are filled with the Spirit. In this case, the participles probably indicate more precisely what Paul meant when he said, “be filled with the Spirit” (what are called “epexegetical” participles).

Paul is clarifying that he wants us to speak to each other in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, to sing and make melody to the Lord together, to give thanks and to submit to each other. The concrete behaviors that Paul lists are not reduced to being valued merely as steps to achieving a spiritual state (or as things we don’t need to pursue because they will happen automatically), but are the concrete behaviors Paul had in mind in commanding us to be filled with the Spirit.

We need the church because we are transformed when, together, we worship the Lord, learn to express our praise and thanksgiving from our hearts together and learn how to submit to each other.

Although “submission” has a bad connotation for many today, it is essentially about deferring to each other. It is about following Christ’s example to “do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves” (Phil. 2:3). We need the church and God’s Spirit to learn this new way of living.✠



Media reviews

TV/MOVIES

NBC's new streaming service Peacock is worth watching – and it's free

By Michael Foust
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

America's one millionth streaming service launched in July, but this one has a unique element that makes it stand out from the rest: It's free. Sort of.

Of course, NBC's new Peacock TV streaming platform (at PeacockTV.com) really isn't the nation's one millionth service, but it sure seems that way with multiple companies — including Apple (Apple TV), Disney (Disney Plus) and MGM (Epix) — launching platforms all within the last year.

Peacock stands out from the rest thanks to an ad-supported free tier and a not-too-expensive premium tier that costs \$4.99 a month. (NBC offers a 7-day free trial too.)

I spent a couple of hours perusing the platform and was impressed with what I found.

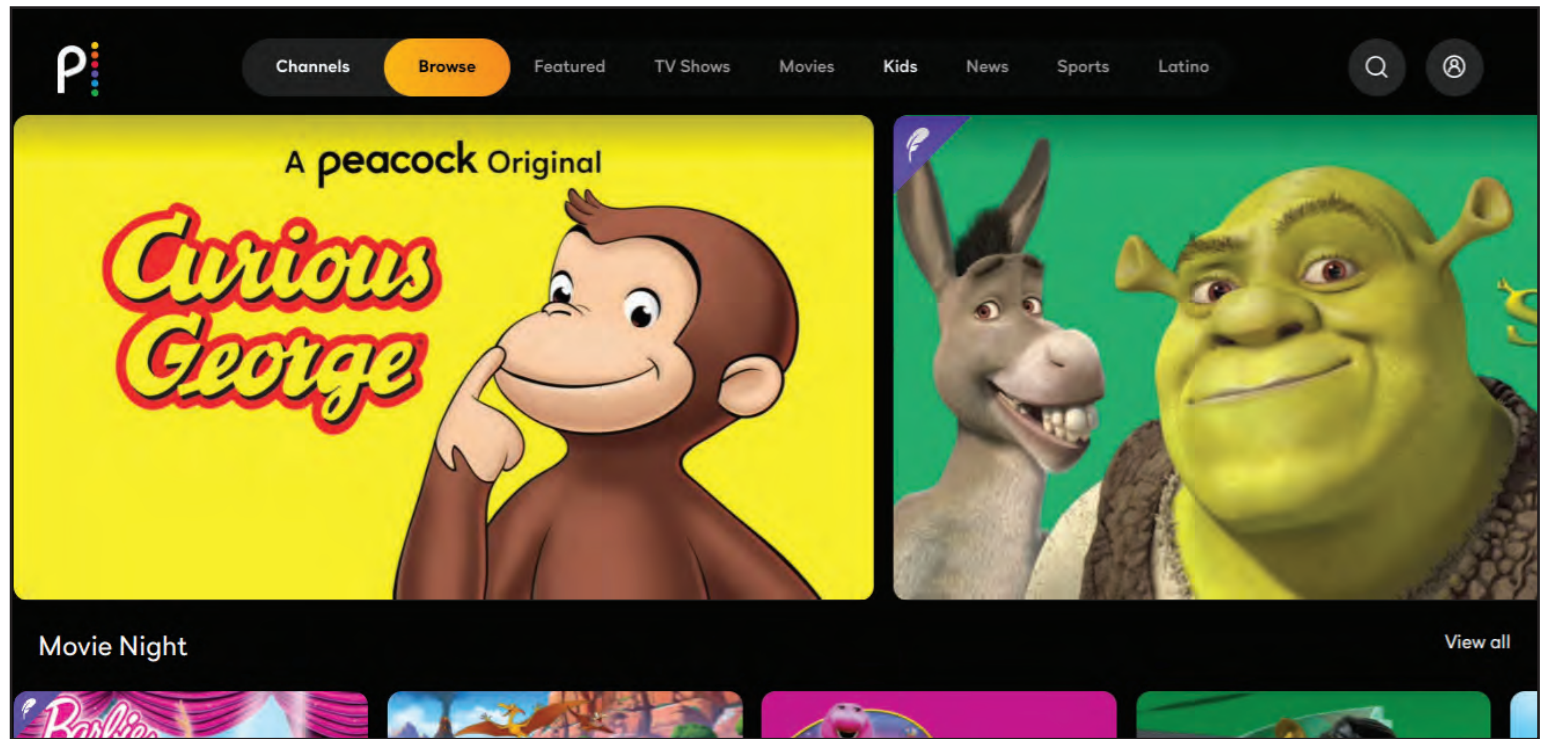
Free content

Let's start with the free stuff.

For families with children, Peacock offers several original programs, including "Where's Waldo?" and new episodes of "Curious George." It also has "3-2-1 Penguins" and "American Ninja Warrior Junior."

If you enjoy watching old-time television, then try "Johnny Carson," "Unsolved Mysteries," "Leave it to Beaver," "Murder She Wrote" or "Columbo."

For fans of classic Hitchcock films, there's "Rear Window," "Vertigo" and "The Birds."



If reality programming contests are your thing, then try "America's Got Talent" and "American Ninja Warrior."

The free side also has documentaries ("1968" and "I Am Ali"), popular movies (the first "Jurassic Park" trilogy and "The Sting") and sports (documentaries and current-day sports news).

The pay side has several titles worth a look, including "Everybody Loves Raymond" and "Law and Order."

Peacock is a platform that has something for every member of the family.

Unfortunately, it's not yet available on Roku or Amazon Fire. For now, the best option is to hook a laptop up to a television or just stick with tablets and smartphones.

Also worth watching this month:

► **"The Red Sea Miracle II"** (various platforms, all ages) — It's the latest "Patterns of Evidence" documentary from filmmaker and adventurer Tim Mahoney. In "Red Sea Miracle II," he explores various theories

for the Hebrews' crossing of the Red Sea. (Don't worry: He always sides with Scripture.) It's an excellent movie that builds your faith while giving you a crash course on archaeology, biblical studies and theology. Visit

PatternsOfEvidence.com to learn how to watch it.

► **"Anne Frank: Parallel Stories"** (Netflix, teens and adults) — This excellent documentary entered the Netflix platform in July and tells the story of the

holocaust through the eyes of Anne Frank and five survivors. Frank, who died in 1945, penned diary entries that were later published. All five survivors are interviewed; one saw Frank in a camp. Rated TV-14, it includes Holocaust images and one coarse word (s—t).

► **"Greyhound"** (Apple TV, teens and adults) — It's one of the most faith-centric mainstream movies ever made. Greyhound follows the story of Captain Ernest Krause (Tom Hanks) and the sailors of the warship Keeling as they hunt for German submarines during World War II. Krause's strong Christian faith is a major theme. Alas, the film has one f-bomb (timestamp is 21:46 if you need to skip it), but only 3–4 other coarse words and no misuses of God's name. That's minimal for a PG-13 war film. It also doesn't include any gore or excessive violence.

► **"Xavier Riddle and the Secret Museum"** (PBS, all ages) — Launched by PBS in 2019, this children's animated series follows three kids (Xavier, Yadina and Brad) as they travel back in time to meet well-known people of history (the Wright Brothers and Abigail Adams, among them). Parents may want to monitor the content though. (I have found only one episode, about anthropologist Mary Leakey, I didn't like.) TV-G.†

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.



'Truly a God story'

Tennessee couple's four years of prayer walking in Japan lead to constant reminders of His work

By Stella McMillian
International Mission Board

When International Mission Board (IMB) worker Jack Wattanawongsawang and his wife Prinna moved to Fukuoka, Japan, at the end of 2016, one of the first things they began to do was prayer walk.

They'd leave their apartment, pick a direction and just start walking. Along the way, they'd pray for God to lead them to the people He had prepared for them to meet, and for God to direct them to the places He'd prepared for them to go.

And then, they'd pray one more thing. They'd pray specifically for God to open a door for them to share the gospel with an entire family and for that whole family to put their faith in Christ.

After years of ministry in Japan, a country where less than half a percent of the population are evangelical Christians, they'd learned that social persecution was a challenging barrier to the gospel.

"There's a saying in Japan that the nail that sticks out gets hammered down," Jack said. "Becoming a Christian is that. You become a nail that sticks out from your family and from society. So you get hammered down.

"That makes it really hard to accept Christ alone."

This past March, the couple celebrated God's answer to four years of prayer as they watched Hatsuko and her granddaughter, Momoka, profess their faith in Christ publicly through baptism. The new believers were far from alone. They were following in the steps of the rest of



IMB photo

Members of the church in Fukuoka, Japan, pray for their community.

their family who had all put their faith in Christ over the last several years.

"This is truly a God story that no one could have planned," said Prinna. "Our whole church family was filled with joy."

God first began working in the life of Momoka's brother, who met a Christian when he was in college. That believer led him to faith in Christ and helped him understand the Bible, but after graduation they lost touch.

Reaching the community

Prinna and Jack met the family because Momoka's mother, Yuko, began attending a cooking class they were teaching at a community center not far from their house.

They began partnering with a local church plant to use the cooking

class to build friendships and share the gospel. Jack invited the pastor from the church plant to attend the class, and he did.

When the pastor met Yuko, she told him her son was a Christian because of a friend he'd made in college, and she'd always wished she could meet that friend. It took just a few more minutes of conversation for them to both realize that the pastor was that friend — he'd introduced her son to Christ and then years later planted a church in Fukuoka.

Prinna invited Yuko to the church, and Yuko and her husband both began attending with their son. As believers invested in them and encouraged them to study the Bible, the Holy Spirit began to work on their hearts. Four months after they first visited the church plant, Yuko and her husband both accepted Christ. The pastor baptized them in the ocean last August.

Momoka was skeptical of her parent's new faith at first. But it was hard to ignore how much gentler and kinder her father had become. He even told her he loved

her, something he had rarely done before his encounter with God.

The pastor began coming over to Yuko's house to study the Bible with Yuko and Momoka. That's when Hatsuko, Momoka's grandmother, first began to understand the gospel. She would listen along to the Bible studies because she lived with her daughter's family.

God used Scripture and the love of local believers to show Momoka and Hatsuko He cared for them and He was worth surrendering to. Their baptisms this past March were celebrations of more than just their salvations alone. They were celebrations of God's amazing grace to draw a whole family to Himself through the faithful witness of a local church.

"How much we believe God can do is the key. Do we really believe He can save people?" Jack said. "He said He will do it, and He will. Are we begging Him that He would lead us to see His plan and connect the dots and see all that He has prepared?"

'Lead us to the people'

When Jack and Prinna first began prayer walking four years ago, it was often just the two of them. They had no idea how God would answer their prayers.

Today, they still prayer walk through Fukuoka, but they're not alone anymore. They walk alongside the church God led them to partner with, which now includes three generations of a family who are a constant reminder to them that He is always at work.

"Lead us to the people that you have prepared for us. Lead us to people who will be saved and become our family. Open the door for us to share the gospel. Save whole families, save whole communities. That's always our prayer," said Jack.

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

"Open the door for us to share the gospel.

Save whole families, save whole communities.

That's always our prayer."

Jack Wattanawongsawang, IMB worker