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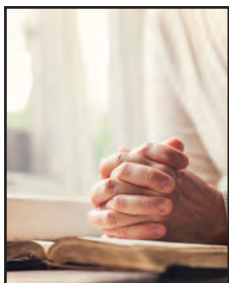
August 27, 2020

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

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Photo courtesy of Russell McCrory

High school student athletes (front, l to r) Jacoby, Ryan and Charles prepare for baptism at FBC Montgomery after giving their lives to Christ as a result of a ministry partnership between FCA and the church. Pictured with them are Jay Wolf (second from left), pastor emeritus at FBC Montgomery, and Russell McCrory, minister to students.

Winning PARTNERSHIP

Sports teams, athletes forge strong bonds with churches through outreach

By **Lanell Downs Smith**
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Russell McCrory, minister to students at First Baptist Church, Montgomery, recalls hearing the community express frustration six years ago over the behavior and actions of young people and problems in local schools.

Wanting to make a differ-

ence, McCrory approached Alabama Fellowship of Christian Athletes directors John Gibbons and Eric Armster, who helped the church form a partnership with nearby Sidney Lanier High School.

Love and support

Through that partnership McCrory realized hundreds of students were within one mile of the church who needed love and support from their community.

The church began providing pre-game meals and words of encouragement, and while student athletes were not required

to attend the spiritual events, McCrory said most did.

“We shared about the hope of Jesus Christ,” he said.

“And we used many of these messages to share about what it means to be real men who make a difference in the community and in the lives of others,” he explained.

“We walked weekly through the ‘Fruit of the Spirit’ one season and watched the guys grow each week as they embraced love, joy, peace, etc.”

As team chaplain, McCrory traveled to every game and had an effect on the players.

“When [athletes] saw some-

one from outside of their school actually with them on a road game, that was a big turning-point in the connection. They knew that I wasn’t just there to shove the Bible down their throats,” he said.

“I was there, our church was there first and foremost to love and support them. And as they saw that consistent love, they became more and more open to hear about where that love came from — Jesus.”

McCrory considers the FCA partnership one of the most meaningful ministries in which he has ever been involved.

(See ‘Building,’ page 7)



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Photo by Margaret Colson

In 2017, with Velma Sebring's family surrounding her, Jamie Baldwin, who serves in the office of Sunday School and discipleship at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, thanks God for Sebring's faithfulness in teaching Sunday School for 74 years at Center Point Baptist Church, Scottsboro.

Velma Sebring's life a testimony of faithfulness

We shared Velma Sebring's story in 2004, 2013 and again in 2017. It only seemed right to keep honoring her legacy — nearly right up until she died in June at 99 years old, she was setting records for faithfulness.

She started teaching Sunday School in 1942 at age 17, and she kept going until she was 98. The last 66 of those years were spent at Center Point Baptist Church, Scottsboro.

And over the years, she led many people to follow Christ.

"I just say, 'Lord, thank You.' And then all you can do is cry, just cry. I've enjoyed every minute of it," Sebring said when she was honored in 2017 for 74 years of teaching.

That year, Kirk Griggs, Sunday School director for Center Point Baptist, said, "Ms. Velma's faithfulness has been an inspiration to generations at Center Point. Teaching Sunday School for 74 years means 74 years of faithfulness. She is an example to me and to all of our wonderful Sunday School teachers. Perhaps most of all, she still teaches with a smile on her face and joy in her heart. She is a true jewel."

When Sebring first started teaching, she was "terrified," she said back in 2017. She had only "pretend" taught her six younger siblings on the wagon in her family barn.

But she felt drawn to ministry.

"I used to think, 'Well, maybe I will be a missionary.' Really and truly we are all missionaries," she said.

So Sebring moved from the wagon to under a tree.

"The church (Randall's Chapel United Methodist Church, Scottsboro) just had one room, so we went across the road un-

der this little tree and sat on the ground," she said in 2004. "As I remember, I think the only Bible we had was the New Testament."

She passed along her legacy to her family, including great-granddaughter Reagan Wallace, who started teaching Sunday School at 13 years old.

Over the years, Sebring invited people to Sunday School and kept inviting.

"I've never had a thought of quitting," she said. "If the Lord gives it to you, be willing to share it." (Grace Thornton)



SEBRING



The crossword puzzle
can be found on page 13.

TAB Media

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

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MY RASHIONALE

By **Jennifer Davis Rash**
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Will we ever see Walter Cronkite-style news reporting again?

Our friend and your friend Joe McKeever (pastor, author, cartoonist) joked in a recent Facebook post about a headline from the Weather Channel. It read: “NYC can expect to see wind gusts up to 70 mph.”

Joe responded, “Those things are hard to see. Someone have a camera ready.”

From there came comments that eventually led to a discussion about how news headlines are written and how they have changed through the years.

One responder wrote: “I like concise news broadcasts like Walter Cronkite used to give.”

Another added: “With no bias!”

And a third wrote: “Exactly! Or a panel full of ‘opinions’!”

I enjoyed following this conversation thread because those comments give me hope that all is not lost on a potential renewed demand for true news reporting in its purest state.

I believe it truly is possible to report straightforward facts, be fair in the presentation and trust people to handle the information responsibly. And I have to believe the true news reporters out there would love to find that opportunity again.

While it may be an uphill battle, a grassroots effort by the masses is the impetus needed to demand it.

The way for the demand to be heard is to refuse to watch, listen to or click on any information source claiming to be news

that does not own — upfront — a particular bias or agenda before sharing the side of the story they choose to report.

Reporting a side of a story not covered by other sources in and of itself can be helpful as long as the information is factual and in proper context — and the consumer understands what is happening.

The problem comes when a particular report is touted as having all the facts while claiming other sources are untruthful, when it could be that other sources are merely reporting another aspect of the same story.

Reading and listening to various sources report the same story provides a better balance to fully understand more about all parts of what is happening.

Still, it would be nice not to have to work so hard to comprehend the latest headlines.

It would be nice to experience retro-style, straightforward news reporting again, like Walter Cronkite, as the Facebook responder noted.

However, no matter what we say we want, as long as we click on headlines that appeal to our bias or intrigue us with drama

and as long as we listen to hours and hours of so-called expert panelists debate and discuss the latest political drama, we don’t have a chance at rediscovering a pure form of news reporting.

When it comes down to it, those responsible for outlining the types and styles of stories covered aren’t necessarily journalists but business people. They watch the analytics to make their decisions.

So while we may be frustrated by the way information is shared today, we are actually the ones who are telling the decision makers what we want. 🇺🇸

RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

What did Jesus really mean when He instructed us to be ‘salt and light’ in the world around us? Are we succeeding?

A new resource for helping believers make a difference in today’s culture is now available from Alabama Citizens Action Program (ALCAP).

Jesus instructs His followers to be both “salt and light” in the world (Matt. 5:13–16), and ALCAP’s executive director Joe Godfrey calls this the “Great Calling” for believers.

To think through how to fulfill this calling and become “salt and light,” Godfrey developed a downloadable video study series called *The Forgotten Command*.

Study series

The series works well as a six-week study or in a one-time retreat setting. The videos are 20 to 30 minutes in length and come with discussion questions

and personal application suggestions.

We desperately need to be reminded of the biblical principles Joe shares in *The Forgotten Command*, and his timing couldn’t be better as we head into the final two months of the current election season.

Work begins with us

The series reminds believers that we truly can influence culture for the better — but the work begins first within our own hearts.

Spouting ugliness and anger out of fear and frustration will only help destroy that which we think we are protecting.

Working through what is outlined in *The Forgotten Command* series will provide the vital centering we all need right about now.

Danny Wood, pastor of Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills, also recommends the series.

“*The Forgotten Command* is an excellent resource for any church or individual that wants to better understand Jesus’ command to be salt and light,” Wood said.

“In typical Joe Godfrey style, the content is biblical, historical and relevant to today’s environment. The length of each video session and the depth of the accompanying discussion guides make it an ideal curriculum for any Bible study group.”

Download the individual videos, discussion guides and other relevant resources at alcap.com/the-forgotten-command.

—Jennifer Davis Rash

Your Voice



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

How to pray for schools, students this year

By Pastor Daniel Camp
South Garland (TX) Baptist Church

For students, parents and teachers, this will be a school year unlike any other. In a time when people are quick to share their opinion, believers should be quick to pray.

This year, there are children who will have their first day of kindergarten on Zoom. Their backpacks full of school supplies will spend weeks collecting dust in the corner of the bedroom. After months of talking to their parents about “when I get to go to school,” they’ll start the year learning from home. Believers should pray for those children.

This year, there are parents who will wonder whether they should bother taking a first-day-of-school photo, who will leave their child’s

first-day-of-school outfit hanging up in the closet with the tags still on, who will cry first-day-of-school tears that are far more bitter than sweet. Believers should pray for those parents.

This year, there are teachers who spent hours decorating classrooms that will remain vacant. They won’t meet their students in person for weeks — if they ever do — and they will only see the smiling faces of children on their computer screens. Believers should pray for those teachers.

There are children who have spent all summer longing to play with friends, who don’t understand why the school playground is roped off. These children feel isolated and alone, and believers should pray for these children.

There are parents who have become full-time tutors, having sacrificed their own pursuits to stay home with their children. They miss the routine and the freedom of pick-up and drop-off. They miss asking, “How was your day at school?” Believers should pray for those parents.

There are teachers who are learning on the fly. Their lesson plans are changing every day, and so are their teaching methods. They’re trying their best to understand what to do. Believers should pray for those teachers.

There are children who are closer to college than kindergarten, whose visions of prom and graduation have become murky. There are parents whose calendars are devoid of recitals and football games, who don’t know what to look forward to right now. There are teachers who are pondering early retirement and wondering if this is all worth the hassle.

There are some who are disappointed and some who are excited. There are some who are angry and some who are hopeful. There are some who are afraid and some who are eager. What they all have in common is a longing for a normal year.

Believers cannot give them that. But we can give them our prayers. And in Jesus’ name, we should.

EDITOR’S NOTE — This article was adapted from a Facebook post shared by Pastors for Texas Children.

TAB staff members help double our reach

I passed out papers to my Bible study group and talked about our ministry. One of the people in my Bible study group is a Baptist pastor. Their church provides it for people who aren’t able to pay for it. I also invited people to like TAB Media on Facebook.

Amy Hacker
Creative services associate

I purchased a subscription to the paper for a dear, sweet lady who lives in a nursing home. My hope is she will share it with several other ladies in the facility, and we’ll be able to share the good news with a lot of folks. You never know how God will work.

Annette Brown
Guest services

I shared about TAB and how to subscribe with my D-group.

Susan Stevens
Outside sales rep

I invited several friends to like TAB’s page on Facebook.

Jennifer Davis Rash
President and editor-in-chief

Letters to the Editor

Why would a supposedly Christian newspaper laud Disney Plus’ “Hamilton” when the reviewer points out some 40 profane words and scenes suggestive of sexual conduct? An exposé, perhaps, to warn parents and others to stay away?

In the ever popular “diversity” declaration, can one imagine the outrage if non-Blacks played the part of George Washington Carver or Dr. Martin Luther King?

“Hamilton” is incorrectness carried to the limits and misleads

the uninformed (including foreigners visiting our U.S.A.).

And to add to the “political correctness,” an effort was made by the play’s creators to not “distance between a contemporary audience and this story.”

Correct history is not to entertain the culture of the moment but to speak the truth. For the life of me, why would this paper devote over half a page to this nonsense?

L.E. Gosa
Fayetteville, Ala.

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“ I firmly believe a great many prayers are not answered because we are unwilling to forgive someone. ”

D . L . M O O D Y

American evangelist and publisher (1837–1899)

There’s no human system that doesn’t bear the fingerprints of the fall. We should therefore expect God’s word to confront, at some point, the fallenness that’s injected into every human system, every political party, every ideology.

Pastor Matt Mason
Birmingham, Ala.

The very idea of the gospel is that we would be one. The world would know that we are Christians because of our oneness and because of our love.

Issues of justice, diversity and reconciliation are not extra add-ons that the church can opt out of as a matter of personal preference. They are an essential part of the gospel.

It’s going to take intention-

ally multiethnic and multicultural churches to bust through the chaos and confusion of the present moment and redirect our gaze to the revolutionary gospel of reconciliation.

Pastor and author John Perkins
“One Blood”

I do not believe that God sent COVID-19, but I do believe we need to stop complaining and asking “why” and start asking “what” — what do I need to do right now, what do I need to learn, what do I need to change, what do I need to prepare for? We won’t return to the old normal. We will have to learn a new normal, and we don’t know what that will be.

Cynthia Watts
Birmingham, Ala.

Following Jesus has to make it onto your schedule and into your practices or it will simply never happen. Apprenticeship to Jesus will remain an idea, not a reality in your life.

Author John Mark Comer
“The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry”

In Gethsemane, the holiest of all petitioners prayed three times that a certain cup might pass from Him. It did not. After that, the idea that prayer is recommended to us as a sort of infallible gimmick may be dismissed.

Author C.S. Lewis
“How to Pray: Reflections and Essays”

From the *Twitterverse*

@larrydrobertson

I hate hypocrisy. I hate it in politics. I hate it in the world of journalistic entertainment ... or as some like to call it and believe it to be, the “news.” I hate it in the church. Most of all, though ... I hate it in me.

@1MissionStudent

No matter where you are in life or what your “job” is, you are first and foremost a missionary! Let’s be sure to devote ourselves to Christ in all we do.

@BethMooreLPM

I just cannot recommend Jesus enough.

@scottdawson

Praying for a school year that’s not filled with the surprises we faced last year. Here’s to a boring, daily

routine for teachers and students!

However, I do hope you: Laugh each day. Learn each day. Love each day. Live each day.

@DustyMcLemore

Amid sports, activities, etc., let’s not neglect the spiritual formation of our children! The days between kindergarten and their wedding day are some of the most important preparation days of their lives! #TheChosenPath

@drtonyevans

When God delays, He always delays for a purpose. Trust Him.

@garyfenton07

Without gratitude, it is impossible to develop generosity as a habit. Without gratitude, generosity becomes an occasional action that

will be repeated only when you feel enough guilt. With gratitude, generosity becomes a virtuous habit that is easy to continue.

@drjjwilliams

It’s good and wise to stay in our lanes. No one is omniscient. No one. We should not waste time trying to be an expert on everything. We will find ourselves becoming an expert in nothing. Pick a lane. Stay there. Master it. And educate those not in our lanes. That’s fruitful.

@ChristineCaine

Make sure you take some time to look after your heart and soul. We all need to be restored, refreshed, renewed and replenished, regularly. “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers” (3 John 2).

Anxiety is gripping our world like never before. If you turn on the TV, radio or social media, you will see something to cause fear, panic, doubt or dread inside.

It can be paralyzing if we allow our minds to consume this information all of the time.

Now is the time to change what is infiltrating our minds. These 10 Scriptures can help when anxiety comes stomping your way:

1. “For God has not given us a spirit of fear; but one of power, love and a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7).

2. “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Ps. 34:18).

3. “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:28–29).

4. “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” (Isa. 41:10).

5. “Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up” (Prov. 12:25).

6. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight” (Prov. 3:5–6).

7. “When anxiety was great within me, Your consolation brought me joy” (Ps. 94:19).

8. “And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

9. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Phil. 4:6).

10. “Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:7).

God’s word is living and active (Heb. 4:12), so put it to work.

Caris Snider
carissnider.com

FBC Montgomery's Jay Spivey encourages members of the Sidney Lanier High School football team during a 2019 pre-game breakfast.

To play or not to play?



Photo courtesy of Russell McCrory

Fall sports face challenges; athletics remain opportunity for gospel influence

By Lanell Downs Smith
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

All summer, athletes and fans anticipate the fall sports season. But this year, coaches and schools face difficult decisions as they ponder if, when and how to resume sports programs amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Several NCAA conferences, including football powerhouses Big Ten and Pac-12, have canceled fall sports.

The SEC plans to kick off football season Sept. 26 with a 10-game, conference-only schedule designed to promote flexibility as the pandemic situation develops. Sun Belt Conference schools plan to begin play with eight conference games over Labor Day weekend.

Alabama high schools are facing similar decisions. For example, Choctaw, Barbour, Sumter and Greene County schools elected not to have football and volleyball this fall, and Barbour County canceled all athletics for the entire 2020–21 academic year.

Robin Mears, executive director of the Alabama Christian Education Association, said most ACEA programs opted to play only required games and to spread them throughout the season.

But many other high schools are moving ahead with traditional fall sports, navigating practice and game obstacles.

Crenshaw County Schools Superintendent Dodd Hawthorne said the health of students and staff is their No. 1 priority.

“When you have student athletes or coaches with symptoms, you have to send people home from practice and possibly not have practice for a while. We make sure we disinfect every day and try to social distance as best as possible, but when you’re playing athletics, especially football, it’s a challenge.”

Other athletic contests pose similar challenges, Hawthorne said. Health screenings, gloves and face coverings are required for gate and concession volunteers; spectators are required to wear face coverings and observe social distancing.

Frustrating time

Ryan Neiswender, professional athlete and Fellowship of Christian Athletes alumnus, said coaches and athletes need encouragement during this uncertain and frustrating time.

John Gibbons, Alabama FCA director, added that now is the time for churches to ask, “How can we

support you?” Volunteering to help with equipment sanitation or feeding teams during practice or on game day are great places to start, Gibbons said.

Hawthorne noted what schools need most is prayer, but churches can also help by donating disinfecting supplies.

Quieting criticism will be extremely helpful too, Mears said.

“Try to be supportive and not too critical,” he said. “Some argue that we shouldn’t be playing [sports.] Try to be supportive of how the students view this because they are trying to do something they may never have another opportunity in life to do. Our goal is not really the game but rather the development of the entire person spiritually, mentally, physically and emotionally.”

One school at a time

Russell McCrory, minister to students at First Baptist Church, Montgomery, encourages churches to partner with at least one local school. He suggests churches start small, remain humble and consistent and engage the whole church by sharing what’s happening with the students.

“Even though COVID-19 is changing things up, I’ll continue as chaplain of the [Sidney Lanier High School] team, wearing a mask when required and supporting them from the sidelines,” McCrory said.

“We’ve been able to join summer

practices and cheer on the team as they prepare for the season. Our members plan to prepare meals and bring them to the church to be boxed up, rather than gathering in a small kitchen as we have in the past. And we’ll continue to offer words of encouragement to the team over these meals.”

Character development

Brandon Matthews, college ministry coordinator for Bush Baptist Church, Troy, serves Troy University students and said even with COVID-19 limitations, there’s a need for churches to connect with student athletes.

“We’re in a unique period of time where a lot of conveniences and idols have been exposed,” Matthews said. “This [pandemic] has presented an opportunity for evaluating where we find our joy.

“I’ve had multiple conversations where athletes ask, ‘Are we going to have a season this year?’ All the anxiety and confusion have led to

opportunities to point people to Jesus.”

Matthews added that with some schools delaying sports programs, student athletes need Christians to pour into their lives, now more than ever.

“Athletics is one of the greatest character development tools we

have,” Matthews said. “There is going to be a need, especially among young men, to be invested in by other men.”



Photo courtesy of Russell McCrory
The 2019 Sidney Lanier High School team enjoys a home-cooked meal in FBC Montgomery’s student center.

Listen to TAB Talks featuring an interview with Alabama Fellowship of Christian Athletes director John Gibbons and professional athlete and FCA alumnus Ryan Neiswender at tabonline.org/athletes.

Building bridges to reach student athletes, coaches

(continued from page 1)

“It’s changed me more than I could have ever imagined,” McCrory said. “It’s given me more of a heart for the lost, for the poor, for the beaten down. It’s helped me understand that just because something isn’t happening to me, it might be happening to someone else.”

Clay Crum, pastor of First Baptist Church, Luverne, said serving as Luverne High School team chaplain has helped him build bridges to reach student athletes.

“Sometimes they’ll come to church, but more than that it gives us an opportunity to build some rapport and to lay the groundwork for them to talk to us,” Crum said.

FBC Luverne supports the school by hosting “Fifth Quarter” events after home football games, providing food, devotions and fellowship for the team, and through prayer walks and donations of supplies.

Shoal Creek Baptist Church, Deatsville, partners with Holtville schools, where church staff members Gene DeVaughn and Tony Scarbrough lead a weekly devotion and serve as chaplains to the football, baseball and softball teams.

Fostering relationships

DeVaughn, associate pastor of education and youth for Shoal Creek Baptist, said the church collected backpacks and supplies for students, and over time the support fostered a relationship of trust, opening doors for church members to speak into the lives of area stu-

dent athletes and coaches.

DeVaughn has seen both groups make professions of faith in Christ.

“We are completely open and honest about the gospel,” DeVaughn said. “A lot of times [athletes] don’t go to church. If they have questions about spiritual things, we’re the only guys they know, so of course they come to us.”

And DeVaughn said the whole church has connected to offer support, hosting athletic banquets and serving at senior breakfasts.

Schools need support

Those efforts will look different this year due to COVID-19, but DeVaughn said schools still need support through prayer and practical measures.

“It’s hard enough in a given year, but especially now. Schools are trying to keep our kids safe,” DeVaughn said. “We can pray for coaches as they make some very hard decisions.”

Brandon Matthews, college ministry coordinator for Bush Baptist Church, Troy, agreed, noting the way to help schools is to be intentional and available.

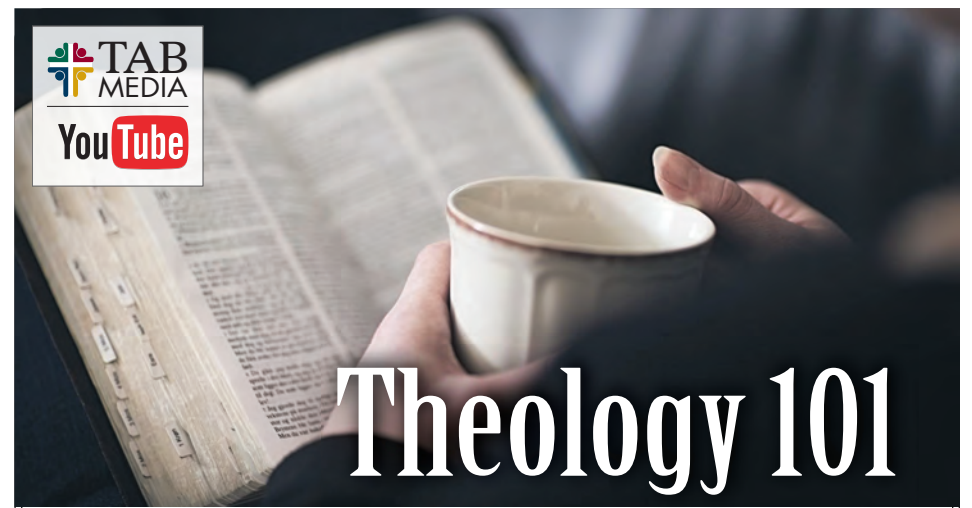
“Have a ‘heart posture’ willing to serve these kids, these athletes,” Matthews said. “We as a church have the answer to all this, through Jesus Christ. What an opportunity to really go in there and teach [students] the truth and to live out the gospel in front of them.

“Reach out to coaches, be extremely intentional because there are things they need help with.”



Photo courtesy of Russell McCrory

Sunday School members at FBC Montgomery prepare and serve a meal for athletes at Sidney Lanier High School. The church works with the students through a partnership with Alabama Fellowship of Christian Athletes.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

The Holy Spirit in Figures

Oil

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

The association between oil and the act of anointing is deeply rooted in the Bible. In the Old Testament, prophets (who spoke for God), priests (who interceded with God) and kings (who ruled for God) were anointed to their offices with oil. The anointing was a symbolic act of setting the individuals apart for their special offices.

A connection between an anointing with oil and the presence of the Holy Spirit can be seen in 1 Sam. 16:13 in the case of David’s anointing to the kingship of Israel: “Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward.”

In the beginning of His public ministry, Jesus returned to Nazareth where on a Sabbath day, He applied to Himself a prophetic word from Isaiah. Jesus began His declaration with the announcement, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me” (Luke 4:18). He then elaborated that His anointing had in view preaching, healing, proclaiming and liberating.

Much later, the Apostle Paul made the connection between anointing and the Holy Spirit in his second letter to the Corinthians: “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” (1:21–22).

What distinguished those who were kings, priests and prophets from other men in Israel was their anointing with oil, which signaled the special role they were then to have in their nation’s life.

Believers in Christ all received the Holy Spirit at the time of conversion. In fact, stated negatively, the Bible says that if anyone does not have the Spirit, he does not belong to Christ (Rom. 8:9). The indwelling of God’s Spirit distinguishes Christians from all other people. As 1 John 2:20 says, “But you have an anointing from the Holy One.”

Humility

As anointing oil set apart Israel’s kings, priests and prophets from all others, so the indwelling of God’s Spirit sets Christians apart, not to foster feelings of superiority but to humble us that God would send His Spirit to dwell in our hearts. The Holy Spirit is God’s seal of our belonging to Him.

As Jesus’ anointing with the Spirit enabled Him to serve God’s purposes, so the Holy Spirit is our enabling power to serve God in whatever He calls us to do.

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.



3 stories

you should know



Facebook photo

James Younger (right), a Dallas boy whose father says is content as a boy, may face transgender therapy after a judge gave full conservatorship to the child's mother, who says the boy desires to dress and live as a girl. News reports say Dallas District Court Judge Mary Brown on Aug. 10 reversed her earlier ruling that upheld joint conservatorship for both parents, who divorced in 2015 when James and his twin brother were 3. Read more at tabonline.org/james-younger. (BP)

Barna: Young believers seek other vocabulary

Young adults and teens prefer the term “sharing faith” over “evangelism,” according to recent research by Barna.

Changes like this occur in language over time — including references to faith — often because younger generations move away from some parts of vocabulary used by their parents and grandparents, according to Barna.

Young adults and teens also expressed discomfort with the words “convert” and “winning souls.”

Few respondents of any age had negative attitudes toward the terms “missionary” and “missionary work.”

However, missionaries interviewed by Barna said they must use caution with these terms in countries where sharing the gospel is viewed negatively or outlawed. (TAB)

LifeWay study examines pastoring after adultery

A new survey of U.S. Protestant pastors by LifeWay Research finds a wide disparity in opinions when it comes to how long a pastor who has committed adultery should be away from the pulpit.

More than a quarter of pastors (27%) said a pastor who commits adultery should withdraw from public ministry permanently; 16% believe an offending pastor should stay gone for at least a year.

Only 6% believe less than a year is a sufficient period of withdrawal from public ministry.

Two percent believe a fellow pastor who has an affair does not need to take any time away.

Three in 10 pastors (31%) say they aren't sure what the appropriate time frame would be.

Read the full report at tabonline.org/pastors-adultery. (TAB)

Headline news

from around the Southeast

Georgia

To protect churches and other businesses from claims and lawsuits related to COVID-19, Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp signed Senate Bill 359, the “Georgia COVID-19 Pandemic Business Safety Act,” into law effective Aug. 5. In order for an entity, defined by the bill to include “religious and educational organizations,” to not be liable, the entity must follow detailed actions outlined by the state, *The Christian Index* reported.

Florida

Nancy Hinson Sullivan, wife of John Sullivan, retired executive director-treasurer of the Florida Baptist Convention, died Aug. 12. The 83-year-old was known for her love for ministers' wives, and in 1992, she set up an endowment fund, now called the Nancy Sullivan Endowment Fund, to underwrite costs related to the luncheon held for ministers' wives at the

SBC annual meeting, the *Florida Baptist Witness* reported.

Louisiana

On Aug. 17, Sen. John Kennedy, R-La., wrote to Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards, asking that he rescind the capacity cap currently on places of worship and extend the same Phase 2 capacity rules guiding protesters and “essential businesses,” according to a *Baptist Message* article. Places of worship should be exempt from mandatory capacity limits and their pastors and leaders entrusted to choose the best course of action for their congregations, Kennedy stated in his letter.

Mississippi

As college campuses begin fall semester 2020, leaders in college ministries are glad the students are coming their way. “I have come to

learn that BSU (Baptist Student Union) is not a building or a place but a people united around a common love for the Savior and for each other, and there is always room for one more!” stated Jordan Curry, a senior at Delta State University in Cleveland, Mississippi, in *The Baptist Record*.

Tennessee

Celebrating its 185th anniversary this year, Tennessee's *Baptist and Reflector* is one of the longest continuously published newspapers (both secular and religious) in the country. The paper, in both print and digital form, “belongs to the thousands upon thousands of loyal readers over the past 185 years who wanted to read about what God is doing in our state and around the world,” wrote editor Lonnie Wilkey, adding, “Our desire is to continue to provide a quality print publication for as long as possible in addition to our stories on the website.”

Alabama news

ALABAMA-CRENSHAW ASSOCIATION

▶ **Michael Keith Thomas** — pastor of **Joquin Baptist Church, Goshen**, died Aug. 14. He was 68.

After high school, Thomas started work with Goshen Farmers Co-op, where he was a manager for more than 40 years. He also served in the National Guard in the 1970s. In 2008, he became pastor of Joquin Baptist and served bivocationally.

He is survived by his wife of 49 years, Sally; son, Chris; daughters, Tammy and Jennifer; and six grandchildren. (TAB)



THOMAS

AUTAUGA ASSOCIATION

▶ **James Taylor** is the new pastor of **Camellia Baptist Church, Prattville**. Taylor is a native of Opelika and a graduate of Auburn University and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He most recently served as pastor of First Baptist Church in Clay, Kentucky, and has served in ministry in Ohio and Georgia. Taylor and his wife, Hilary, have four children. (TAB)

BLOUNT ASSOCIATION

▶ **Randy George Burtram** — pastor of **Pleasant View Baptist Church, Holly Pond**, for the past 22 years — died Aug. 18. He was 63.



BURTRAM

Before serving at Pleasant View Baptist, Burtram served for seven years at 25th Avenue Baptist Church, Center Point; six years at New Prospect Missionary Baptist Church, Horton; and three years at High Mound Missionary Baptist Church, Horton.

He is survived by his wife of nearly 43 years, Kathie; daughters, Randa and Meagan; and five grandchildren. (Grace Thornton)

▶ Almost everyone who contracted COVID-19 at a mid-July revival at **Warrior Creek Baptist Church** in the Strawberry community is over the virus, according to Pastor Darryl Ross.

One family still received a positive result when last tested, but they are doing fine, Ross said.

More than 40 church members contracted coronavirus at the revival, which is held every July. It usually runs all week, but the church shut it down this year on Thursday when Ross heard one of the men attending had tested positive. By Friday night, many church members were showing symptoms.

The church was able to resume holding in-person services Aug. 16. (TAB)

LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN ASSOCIATION

▶ **Briggs King** is the new pastor of **Pleasant**

Valley No. 1, located in the Blanche community. A 59-year ministry veteran, Briggs has served churches in Alabama, Mississippi, West Virginia and Indiana. (TAB)

MARSHALL ASSOCIATION

▶ **Brent Porter** is the new student pastor at **First Baptist Albertville**. Brent and his wife, Jaquie, have three children. (TAB)

PLEASANT GROVE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Vial Fontenot** is the new pastor of **Big Hurricane Baptist Church, Brookwood**. Fontenot retired from full-time ministry in March 2019 after serving for many years as minister of missions and ministry at First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa. (TAB)

STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS

▶ **The Alabama Baptist Discipleship Conference** scheduled for September has been postponed until 2021 because of COVID-19. For more information about the conference, visit aldiscipleshipconference.com. (TAB)

UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

▶ The **University of Mobile** welcomed incoming students on the first day of class with the President's Commissioning, a tradition in which new students touch the Great Commission Globe to begin their college career.

Students, parents, faculty and staff gathered on the front lawn of Weaver Hall on campus to watch the commissioning of new students on Aug. 17.

"We're back from the longest spring break ever," said UM President Lonnie Burnett during a brief address. "I am just thrilled to see students on our campus." (UM)

Sad end to Marilane Carter disappearance

The search for Marilane Carter came to a sad conclusion Aug. 18 when her body was found inside her car in a rural area near West Memphis, Arkansas.

Authorities located Carter's vehicle inside a shipping container on private property. The preliminary cause of death is asphyxiation due to carbon monoxide poisoning. Foul play is not suspected.

Leewood Baptist Church, where Carter's husband, Adam Carter is pastor, confirmed her death in a Facebook post on Aug. 19: "It is with very heavy hearts that we share that Marilane Carter has passed away," the post stated. "Please keep Pastor Adam and the children in your prayers."

Her family also released a statement on findmarilane.com: "These have been the longest weeks of our lives, as we tried to cling to hope that Marilane was still alive. Thank you to all who have offered words of encouragement, prayers, tips, help and support during this very difficult time," the statement said. "We experienced firsthand the extreme love of friends and strangers. ... Marilane was dearly loved by family and friends. The all-out effort to find her is a testimony to that."

A 2008 graduate of Samford University's Beeson Divinity School, Carter, 36, leaves behind her husband and three young children, as well as her parents, siblings and extended family. (TAB)



CARTER

Persecuted church

Churches raided, arrests made after refusing to join government association

XIAMEN, China — Police raided a Christian house church in early May, injuring worshippers filming the raid with cell phones. It was the second time the church has been targeted.

Xingguang Church apparently was raided for refusing to join the Chinese Communist Party's Three-Self Patriotic Association. Lack of membership makes a church "illegal." The church was first raided April 19.

Also in April, Zhao Huaiguo, founder of Bethel Church in Hunan province, was arrested for not joining the association.



Wikipedia

The Chinese government has banned Christian online services, removed crosses and defaced thousands of churches.

Reported plans also include rewriting the Bible to purge passages incompatible with government values.

China is No. 23 on Open Doors' World Watch List 2020 of places where it is most difficult to be a Christian.

In addition to the persecution of Christians, China is holding millions of Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and other Muslims in an estimated 1,300 concentration camps in Xinjiang, according to reports by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. (TAB)

PRAY

FOR

medical providers



123rf.com

Health care workers need compassion, grace as they serve during pandemic

By **Scott James**
Birmingham pediatric physician

In the midst of a pandemic, medical providers around the world need believers to approach the throne of grace on their behalf.

Here are just a few of the ways you can pray for us.

1. Wisdom

Many of us are in the position of having to make significant, timely decisions based on incomplete and rapidly evolving data. For medical professionals who are trained to be evidence-based, this can be a nerve-wracking situation leading to uncertainty and fear.

Please pray that we would be wise in how we respond to the evidence at hand and discerning as we move forward to implement best practices for our patients and our communities.

2. Clarity

With so many incoming streams of information and with the need to adapt to new evidence as it arises, there is a very real danger that muddled and conflicting messages may confuse those we are trying to inform.

Pray that medical providers would seek to be clear, balanced and unified in the guidance we provide.

3. Compassion

In high-stress situations, compassion and empathy are often the first casualties. Emotional distancing

and task-oriented interactions are common coping mechanisms for those of us who are consistently close to grief, distress and crisis. They are also deadly to the soul.

Pray that God would give grace to medical providers; pray that we would extend Christlike compassion as we care for hurting souls, not just broken bodies.

4. Stamina

We are tired. Even if we are not currently in an epicenter, this is exhausting work — physically, mentally and emotionally. Many of us are working extended hours with skeleton crews.

This pace is difficult to maintain, yet any semblance of a finish line is still a ways off on the horizon.

Please beg the Lord to grant health care workers uncanny stamina for the days ahead. Pray He would help us find new rhythms of work and rest that will sustain us and prevent burnout.

5. Family

As we press further into this important work, many of us entertain fearful thoughts about how it will

affect our family, friends and loved ones. Most acutely, we are worried about infecting them. For those of us who continue to encounter significant exposures, many have proactively self-quarantined for their protection.

Even if we're not physically isolating ourselves from our families, the stress of the workload

itself is pulling many of us away from them.

This separation just adds another level of emotional

“Pray that God would give grace to medical providers; pray that we would extend Christlike compassion as we care for hurting souls, not just broken bodies.”

Dr. Scott James

turmoil to an already difficult situation. Pray for our families.

6. Dependence

If it is not already abundantly clear, none of us can do this on our own.

As determined and resilient as health care workers are, if we think we'll be able to roll our sleeves up and muscle through this on our own, we are sorely mistaken. We need you. We need your support, your encouragement and your responsible choices. Pray that we can depend on you.

More importantly, we need God. We need His grace to sustain us and to enable us to share His love as we tend to His people. Pray that we would depend on God.

Thank you for carrying us

in prayer as we seek to care for patients with an ability and insight that only He can provide. May He bring this pandemic to a quick end and draw many to Himself.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Scott James serves as an elder at The Church at Brook Hills. He and his wife, Jaime, have four children and live in Birmingham, where he works as a pediatric physician. He is the author of “The Expected One: Anticipating All of Jesus in the Advent” and “Mission Accomplished: A Two-Week Family Easter Devotional.”

This article originally appeared in the ERLC's Light Magazine titled “Ministry in Uncertain Times: A Special COVID-19 Issue.” To view the free online edition, visit erlc.com/light.



“Celebrating Over 25 Years”

“When our church decided to purchase a digital sign we were referred to Danny at Reliable Signs. He brought a demo out to view on location and helped us determine what would provide the most value. He also insisted that we pray on site before he left. We viewed this purchase as a way to spread the message of Christ to every person who drives by and we couldn't be happier with the results so far. The sign looks amazing and we get tons of compliments. I would highly recommend Danny and Reliable Signs to anyone who has interest in purchasing a digital sign.”

Brad Rooker, Deacon
First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Woodstock, Ala.



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Tips for churches as they hone online presence

By Michael J. Brooks
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the U.S., many churches pivoted to livestreamed worship services, and many are likely to continue offering online options through 2020 and beyond.

That's why quality audiovisual technology is an important consideration in the age of COVID-19, according to Keith Hibbs, director of the office of worship

leadership and church music for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

"I've consulted with more than 500 churches in my time at the State Board of Missions," Hibbs said in a recent SBOM Tech Talk. "I've seen the value of quality equipment used correctly. When congregations try to cut corners with audiovisual equipment, they almost always have to redo it the next year."

Hibbs said churches have had to reconsider many

common practices — and he views that as a positive.

"We've been forced to evaluate our worship practices, and this is good since we can get stuck in our routines," Hibbs said. "We've become more creative in our worship too. We've learned some new techniques in media, and I think we've developed more gratitude for the 'routine' ministries we used to enjoy."

Hibbs said God has equipped churches with "willing helpers" in these days of livestreaming and videocasting as well.

Brian Harris of Dogwood Media Solutions, a media and marketing firm in Montgomery, agreed.

Engaging viewers

Churches are gifted with people willing to serve, Harris said, and churches, regardless of size and budget, can install good equipment "without breaking the bank."

Harris advised churches to "dig in" for what has come out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Things are different when people worship at home," he said. "There are many distractions, so our content must be engaging."

Hibbs said some churches include a testimony or missions report as a way to en-



Unsplash.com

gage the audience. And Harris noted that worship leaders could ask for a response from viewers, such as a comment or even a picture of their family at worship.

Nick Wells, also of Dogwood Media Solutions, said audio is most often misunderstood in broadcasting.

"The video can be a little unclear and not be too distracting, but if people can't hear, we'll lose them," he said. "We recommend someone monitor Facebook, if that's the broadcast venue, to be sure the quality is good. There is a difference between 'house' sound and broadcast sound."

Equipment costs can be scary, Wells said, but

churches need to be honest about costs and not skimp on quality.

Churches must be aware of copyright compliance for livestreaming too, Hibbs said. For example, if Face-

book or YouTube detects copyright violations on the use of prerecorded music during a livestream,

they can stop the broadcast, a process called "striking."

Related concerns

Doug Rogers, SBOM director of communications and technology services, said churches can use Christian Copyright Licensing International to legally use music and tracks, depending on the license agreement.

"We want to be people of integrity and follow the laws as written," Rogers said.

Church worship leaders also must be aware of the real numbers of viewers on social media, Harris warned.

"Facebook counts a three-second view as a participant, so the person included in their report might not have viewed but a short time," he said. "And we must remember we're a user and the venue is a product, so we have no control over the ads they place."

Churches concerned about ads can pay for subscription services like Vimeo, he noted, which offers more control for users.✝

Watch the full SBOM Tech Talk and see links to tech resources at vimeo.com/439328961.

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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CHURCH POSITIONS

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MUSIC MINISTER

Trinity Memorial Baptist Church, Montgomery, is seeking a music minister. Please contact Brett Lanham, 334-782-5284, if interested.

YOUTH MINISTER

First Baptist Church, Elba, is seeking applications for a part-time youth minister. Please respond by email to: kedmondson@troycable.net or call the church office, 334-897-2246.

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PRESCHOOL SUNDAY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

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

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.

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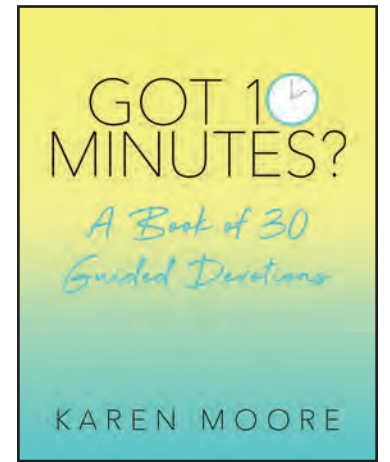
August 29, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Journey Church, 435 Sheila Blvd., Prattville

Due to health and safety guidelines, seating is limited.



GOT 10 MINUTES?



By Karen Moore

Special to The Alabama Baptist | ©2020 Karen Moore | got10minutesforgod.com

A Call for Help

“Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.”

P S A L M 9 0 : 2 (N K J V)

Devotional Moment

Where do you go when life gets you down or when you can't seem to figure out what to do from here? Chances are good that as a believer, you go to God. You go to Him and ask for help, and that's exactly what God wants you to do.



MOORE

It's not always easy for human beings to approach God though. We're not absolutely sure if He'll welcome our

presence or have compassion on our circumstances. Perhaps our uneasiness is a good reminder that we need

more time with God. We need to know Him better, so we understand how much He loves us.

One Christian writer said this about trusting in God for His help: “This is one of the simplest teachings

of faith, namely, to understand that Almighty God will be your companion,

will stand by you, help you and see you through. No other idea is so powerful in developing self-confidence and trust as this simple belief when practiced. Simply affirm, God is with me; God is helping me; God is guiding me.”

God is with you today. He will help you every time you turn your face toward Him.

Go with love and confidence to seek His guidance.

help. Please stick by me as I go through the day and guide me into those things that will help me fulfill Your loving purpose for my life. Amen.

anyone who needs to draw closer to God to receive His help. Pray for that person.

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.

Action Step

Listen with a compassionate heart to those around you today. Make a note in your journal of

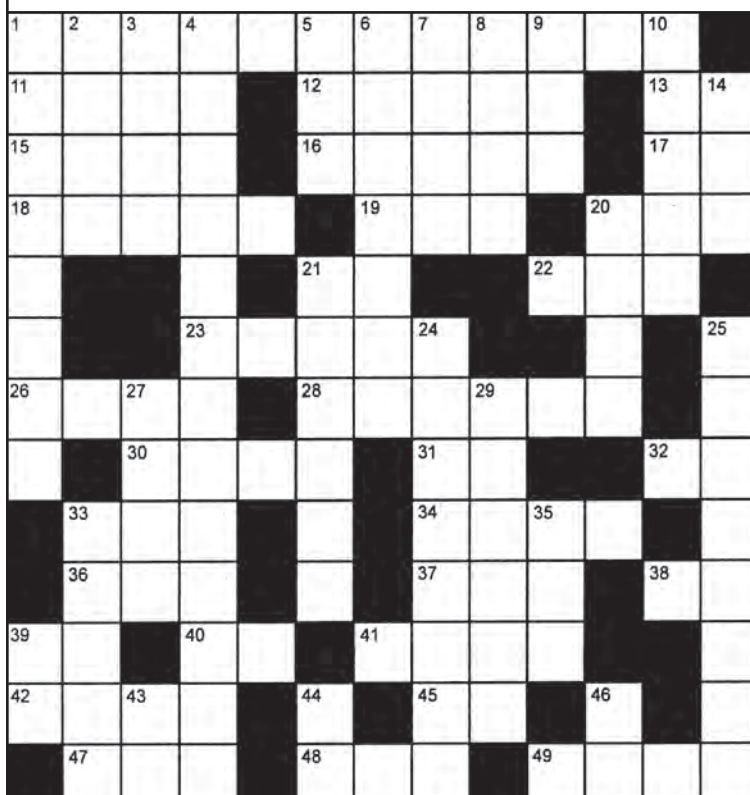
Prayer

Lord, I feel like I'm always coming to You for

“God is with you today. He will help you every time you turn your face toward Him.”

Christian Crossword

By Faith Wade Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

1. I am the ___ and the life. (John 11:25)
11. First garden.
12. Shiphai, the son of ___. (1 Chron. 4:37)
13. I stand ___ the door. (Rev. 3:20)
15. Ye do well that ye take ___. (2 Pet. 1:19)
16. Abstain from ___ offered to idols. (Acts 15:29)
17. ___ not steal. (Mark 10:19)
18. Set in ___. (Titus 1:5)
19. Positive votes.
20. What you do at meals.
21. Short for Ezra.
22. Taxi ___.
23. A Hebrew refrain found often in Psalms. (Ps. 4:2)
26. Uncle's mate.
28. The captain's

- name. (Jer. 37:13)
30. His ___ are open unto their prayers. (1 Pet. 3:12)
31. Rosemary's nickname.
32. I am not come ___ destroy. (Matt. 5:17)
33. Benjamin's nickname.
34. Joseph's uncle. (Gen. 33:1, 2)
36. ___ thou not unto his words. (Prov. 30:6)
37. Allow.
38. They shall ___ comforted. (Matt. 5:4)
39. Pronoun.
40. A fool hath no delight ___ understanding. (Prov. 18:2)
41. The harvest is ___. (Joel 3:13)
42. Not fat.

45. New Hampshire. (abbr.)
 47. England. (abbr.)
 48. A man shall ___ a pit. (Ex. 21:33)
 49. Have no other ___ before me. (Ex. 20:3)
- ### Down
1. Solomon's son. (1 Kings 11:43)
 2. Mushi, Mahli and ___. (1 Chron. 23:23)
 3. The ___ is the Word of God. (Luke 8:11)
 4. Be not children in ___. (1 Cor. 14:20)
 5. Abraham's sacrifice. (Gen. 22:13)
 6. Aaron's son. (Num. 3:32)
 7. Bodies of ___. (Job 13:12)
 8. Small children.
 9. ___ and outs.
 10. And she bare him

- ___ . (Ex. 6:23)
14. Total. (abbr.)
20. In lowliness of mind let ___ esteem others. (Phil. 2:3)
21. Elijah's companion. (2 Kings 2:11)
24. He that is an ___. (John 10:12)
25. Book of wisdom written by Solomon.
27. Help in time of ___. (Heb. 4:16)
29. Israel's favorite son. (Gen. 37:3)
33. ___ himself in water. (Num. 19:19)
35. ___ it up. (Rev. 10:10)
39. I will raise ___ up. (John 2:19)
43. Opposite of “out.”
44. Edwin's nickname.
46. ___ forth into Galilee. (John 1:43)

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For August 30

Explore the Bible

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



RELATIONAL INVESTMENT Song of Solomon 5:6–16

The Cry for Companionship (6–8)

Solomon and his bride were now husband and wife, but for some undisclosed reason he was not there with her. His absence is not explained in the passage, but eventually he came to the door of her room and knocked trying to enter (5:2). She did not immediately open the door, and by the time she decided to open the door he had gone away.

Old Testament scholars are divided as to whether the words “turned and gone away” are literal or figurative. Was the husband’s absence actual or had the couple grown emotionally distant? However one decides to interpret the passage, the point is clear. Their relationship had become strained, and they needed to work together to strengthen it.

She was heartsick when she realized that her hesitation to open the door had caused her husband to leave. After discovering her husband had left the palace, she dressed and went out to find him.

She encountered guards who protected the city, and they mistreated her.

How can the behavior of the guardians of the wall be explained? Some interpreters believe this passage describes a dream the bride was having. If this interpretation is correct, the bride is having a nightmare. Dreams are often a projection of subconscious fears or desires.

Desperate to find her husband, she enlisted some “young women of Jerusalem” to help her locate her missing husband. She required these young women to take an oath to search for her husband and if they found him, to let him know she was “lovesick.”

She was serious about finding her husband and repairing the damage in their relationship. Their separation, whether actual or emotional, made her feel sick.

Godly marriages are designed by God to be a portrait of the gospel. Godly marriages should be charac-

terized by mutual moral, emotional and spiritual support. We demonstrate our love for Christ by the way we express biblical love to our spouse.

The Call for Remembering (9)

The young women did not immediately agree to search for her husband. Instead, they posed two questions for her, the first here and the second in 6:1.

The question in verse 9 is what is so special about this man that you would want us to go to him for you? In doing this, they asked her to come to terms with her love for him.

Having given herself to her husband in marriage, she had opened herself to great emotional hurt. She felt isolated and emotionally distant. But the solution to her problem was not to be found in something either they or he could do for her. It was to be found in herself.

She must recognize that she gave herself to him for a reason, and that she was in fact deeply in love with him. In her eyes he was better than all other men.

The Crux for Celebrating (10–16)

These verses are an admiration song, the longest in the book sung by the bride in praise of her husband. In responding to the young women, she rediscovered her love for him.

She gave a detailed description of her husband from head to toe. She unashamedly expressed her love for him as she recounted his physical qualities. Her sadness was gone and her love for her husband was rekindled.

She concluded her description of her husband in verse 16 as her “love” and her “friend.” Love here referred to romantic, sensual love.

But notice, their marriage consisted of more than just physical desire. He was her friend. They had a relationship that was physical, emotional and spiritual. A godly marriage is truly something worth celebrating! ✠

Bible Studies for Life

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



WE STAND TOGETHER IN SPIRITUAL BATTLE Ephesians 6:10–20

The theme of imitating God was introduced in Ephesians 5:1 and reinforced when Paul said our lives should reflect love (5:2–7), light (5:8–14) and wisdom (5:15–6:9), all attributes of God (as is the oneness stressed in 4:2–6).

That theme also is found here: God is “the divine warrior” who puts on armor and goes to battle to defend or deliver His people from powerful enemies (see Joshua and Psalm 35:2). Success in our spiritual battles depends on standing together and holding fast to the commitments identified by Paul as God’s armor.

We are in a spiritual battle. (10–13)

Our spiritual battle can only be won in the power of God. We are often preoccupied with concern about people with opposing commitments or agendas. The Ephesians might have considered the Roman emperor or unbelieving Jews as their primary enemies. But those who consist of flesh and blood have little power compared to the spiritual powers who oppose Christ and His kingdom.

To defeat them and their agendas, we need an even greater power: God’s strength, symbolized in His armor. To remain standing, unvanquished, on “the evil day” we need divine help (see also Matt. 6:13).

The evil day is probably a reference to the climactic time of utmost trial and temptation experienced on an individual or community basis.

God equips us and protects us completely. (14–17)

Paul explains what he meant when he said we should put on God’s armor. Each piece of armor is identified with a virtue or reality associated with God or the gospel: The soldier’s belt is identified with truth, his breastplate with righteousness, his shoes with gospel readiness, his shield with faith, his helmet with salvation, his sword with the Spirit and/or God’s word. Spiritual warfare isn’t pursued by carrying out some magical practices but by a

God-empowered radical commitment to truth; righteousness; eagerness to share the gospel of peace; faith; salvation; the Spirit; and God’s word.

Note that the virtues listed were all highlighted earlier in the letter: truth (1:13; 4:15, 21, 25; 5:9), righteousness (4:24; 5:9), peace (2:14–15, 17; 4:3), faith (1:15; 2:8; 3:12, 17; 4:5, 13), salvation (1:13; 2:5, 8; 5:23), the Spirit (1:13, 17; 2:18, 22; 3:5, 16; 4:3, 4, 30; 5:18) and God’s word (1:13; 5:26).

These verses are filled with allusions to Old Testament and early Jewish texts that talk about God’s armor. Isaiah 59:17 talks about God putting on righteousness like a breastplate and putting on a helmet of salvation.

Since God Himself put on His “helmet of salvation,” that isn’t about securing our own salvation (which God didn’t need to do). Rather it’s about bringing salvation to others, as God did for Israel and for us (for more on Paul’s imagery here, see Isaiah 11:5; 49:2).

What might the darts of the enemy look like? Since truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation and the word of God are proper weapons in the battle (God’s armor), they are also the very things that our spiritual enemies want to undermine. Our spiritual enemies promote dishonesty, immorality, conflict, disbelief, apostasy and false teaching (the antitheses to God’s armor) to accomplish our spiritual defeat and undermine God’s purposes for the Church.

We are to pray for one another as we stand in battle. (18–20)

Paul stresses the importance of prayer and supplication to win our spiritual battles, and he suggests prayer, the Word and the Spirit are closely related: The word of God is the sword of the Spirit, and it is in the Spirit that we are to pray. Paul realized that he needed prayer and supplication to fulfill his missionary calling. To fight and remain standing in the midst of our spiritual battles, we must support each other in prayer as we engage those battles each day. ✠



Media reviews

MOVIE

Short film 'Tutwiler' documents growing doula ministry at Alabama prison

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

Women are the fastest-growing prison population in the country. And each year, thousands of women go behind bars — pregnant.

"Tutwiler," a PBS documentary short film, takes viewers into the Julia Tutwiler Prison for Women in Wetumpka — the only state women's prison in Alabama.

Long considered one of the worst women's prisons in the United States, a 2014 federal investigation found more than one-third of Tutwiler's staff had sex with inmates, according to the film.

In one scene from the film, Wendy Williams, deputy commissioner for women's services at the Alabama Department of Corrections, says that following the U.S. Department of Justice's investigation, ADOC has made a concerted effort to "change the culture."

Investing in mothers

ADOC is investing in Tutwiler with help from the nonprofit Alabama Prison Birth Project, which began providing support to pregnant women in Tutwiler in 2016.

Services include maternal education, access to doulas

— individuals who provide emotional assistance, often to pregnant women — and resources like a lactation room.

In one of many touching moments in "Tutwiler," there is palpable excitement at the prospect of the prison leaving behind its past and becoming an example for other prisons across the country.

APBP provides nutritious meals to pregnant women as well as resources aimed at leading incarcerated mothers to build a foundation, helping them parent well and bond with their children when they are released.

Alysia Santo is a writer at

The Marshall Project, a nonprofit journalism organization that specializes in reporting on criminal justice reform. She is the film's producer and reporter.

"It's really rare that a prison allows reporters in, especially allowing reporters in with cameras, but they are really proud of their doula program, and they believed that they could spark change in other prisons," Santo said.

Santo first heard about the APBP's doula program while reporting on the Minnesota Prison Doula Project.

Recognizing Tutwiler from recent reports of the prisons' mistreatment of inmates, Santo contacted ADOC and requested to

document the prison's doula program.

The Marshall Project collaborated with PBS' Frontline and director Elaine Sheldon to produce "Tutwiler."

Sheldon and Santo spent nearly 40 days in Alabama working on the film, and half that time was spent inside the prison, where the crew was provided "nearly unrestricted access" to the doula program.

The result is a touching short film that accomplishes the creators' objectives.

"Our goal for this film was to show these women are more than their prison sentence. We wanted to humanize and shine light on an issue so rarely seen. We want viewers to see these women as mothers, sisters, daughters," Sheldon explained.

Separation

Previous films on expectant mothers in prison have focused on "in-prison nurseries," which Santo said are rare. "Tutwiler" also includes a look at Adullam House, a faith-based children's home in Wetumpka that takes care of many of the babies born at Tutwiler.

"What happens to most women is, if they enter prison pregnant, they give birth and are separated from



pbs.org

their child. By focusing on Tutwiler, we were able to show the experience most women actually have when they enter prison pregnant," Santo explained.

"I hope the film helps viewers understand that people who are incarcerated are regular people who go through all the same emotions that everyone else does," she added.

While doing research for the film, Santo said she discovered nearly all the pregnant women incarcerated at Tutwiler are serving time for drug-related charges.

"I hope people think about what that means," she said. "This is how we deal with people who have an addiction — even if

they're pregnant."

"I hope people can look at them and see the strength, and not just think, 'Well,

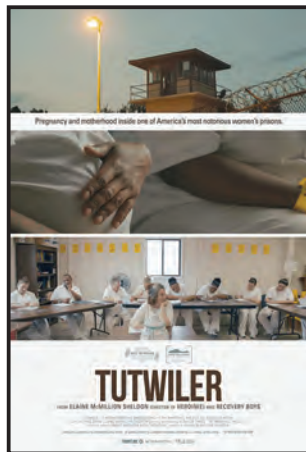
what did they do to get there?' — which is the easy way to think — and say, 'Wow, I can see myself in this woman' or 'I can't imagine what that would be like. They must be pretty incredible people.'

"Because they are, and I hope that comes through for people," Santo declared.

The film also highlights the toll incarceration takes on the children and families of inmates.

"There are children who are wondering where their mom is, and that carries through into their lives. It can also create a cycle of incarceration," Santo said. "The director of women's services, Wendy Williams, told us at one point they had three generations of women in the prison at the same time. When you incarcerate people, it really trickles down to the whole community."

Read more about the documentary "Tutwiler" and faith-based efforts to help children of inmates at tabonline.org/tutwiler.



TUTWILER

Read more about faith-based efforts to care for children of inmates at tabonline.org/tutwiler.

Unexpected blessing

Persian refugee pastors grow in faithful teaching, make new connections

By Sarah Alexander
International Mission Board

How can a persecuted believer trust again after being betrayed by those closest to him? How can a person rightly understand suffering when his culture is awash in prosperity gospel teaching? How can a pastor carry the weight of leading when he doesn't know how to study Scripture?

These are challenges that Christian workers Mary and Andrew Flint face every day as they seek to encourage growth among Persian refugee churches.

Recently as they reflected on the first half of 2020, they realized that amid the noise of a global pandemic, God has been quietly answering their prayers for unity, strength and biblical integrity among Persian pastors and their small churches.

"We labor for a people group from a country where we are not able to enter and live," Mary said.

"Most of our connections with this group are with those who have become refugees due to extreme persecution for their faith. As you would expect, this type of persecution results in many of these refugees having a difficult time trusting people, especially people from their native land."

Once they flee their home country, the Persian believers become refugees and are forced to live in rural areas where Westerners are not able to live. Sometimes the



IMB photo

Globally, Persians number close to 43 million people in 29 countries.

refugees wind up being the only Christians in their small cities.

Where families or groups of believers exist, small churches are able to form.

Gospel challenges

"Most of the pastors of these churches are refugees themselves, simply lay people, not trained theologians. Sadly, poor theology often creeps into these churches via satellite TV or books written promoting a prosperity gospel," Mary said.

"One of our biggest prayers over the last five years has been that these fellowships would learn to correctly handle God's word. In addition, we've prayed that these

leaders would openly communicate with each other and unite as a body scattered across the country."

In early 2020 the Flints and their team invited Persian church leaders to attend a training focused on expository teaching.

Pastors were given opportunities to practice studying Scripture, pulling truths from what they were reading and then teaching one another.

'The really cool part'

"The really cool part came for us during the first month of lockdown. One of the refugee pastors took the initiative to begin a weekly Zoom chat with other refugee pastors across the country. His words were, 'I want it to be a time to strengthen the theology in all the churches' ... and that is what they have done," Mary said.

The leaders meet most weeks to pray and talk about the best ways to communicate Scripture and how to minister to their congregations.

"What a huge blessing to see the

fruit from 'entrusting [the gospel] to faithful men who will be able to teach it to others,'" Mary said.

Another unexpected blessing during the pandemic has been the way Persian pastors have connected to churches in the U.S.

Southern Baptist volunteers, who in past years visited Central Asia and served alongside Persian believers in outreach projects, have invited Persian pastors to teach online for their congregations and have included them in virtual prayer meetings.

Picture of global church

"It's a beautiful picture of the global church reaching out and strengthening each other across the waters," Mary said.

"This would not have been so readily thought of had churches in the West not been limited to [online] meetings for their weekly gatherings. We praise God for how He is strengthening His Church in this time."

► The Flints have asked U.S. churches to pray for the Persian refugee fellowships, particularly that God would call pastors and that the leaders would preach God's word accurately.

► Pray Persian believers will reach beyond their small circles to share Christ in their cities and with people of other ethnicities.

► Pray also for believers who are considering the call to return to their home country, where they will likely face harsh persecution.

Mary said the prayers and encouragement of U.S. Christians buoys the hearts of Persian refugees, who often feel forgotten.

When churches reach out in support, "it's a sweet picture of the body working together."

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

"What a huge blessing to see the fruit from 'entrusting [the gospel] to faithful men who will be able to teach it to others.'"

Mary Flint
IMB worker

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