



The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

INSIDE



Vaughan family begins ministry in Utah

◆ Page 2



Samford's Andrew Westmoreland announces 2021 retirement date

◆ Page 10



Kings honored for decades of music ministry

◆ Page 11

'SLOW-MOTION WAR'

Violence against Christians in Nigeria escalates yearly

By Martha Simmons
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

With every passing year, the body count grows larger, and tales of violence — rapes, beheadings, mutilations, kidnappings, torching of homes and fields — become more gruesome.

Such is the nature of what some experts call a “slow-motion war” being waged against Christians in Nigeria.

'Giant of Africa'

Even though the population of Nigeria — Africa's most populous and economically important country — is almost evenly split between adherents of the Christian and Muslim faiths, Nigerian Christians are subjected to far more violence that is directly related to their faith, according to a recent report published by the Fam-

ily Research Council.

FRC reports that more than 12,000 Christians have been killed in the last five years — 1,202 of them just in the first half of 2020. The recent escalation is evident in headlines from Christian persecution-monitors like Morning Star News:

► **May 29:** “Christians killed in Kaduna State, Nigeria, as herdsmen threaten kidnapped missionary. Fulanis demand either conversion to Islam or ransom for abducted pastor's release.”

► **June 3:** “Civilians apprehend Muslim Fulani suspects in killing of five Christians in Nigeria. Assailants shoot dead store owner, four others.”

► **June 9:** “Nine Christians killed in gun and machete attack in North-Central Nigeria. Seven others kidnapped.”

► **July 22:** “Muslim Fulani herdsmen kill 11 Christians in attack in North-Central Nigeria. More than 50 members of Baptist, Catholic and



NIGERIA



MS photo

Militants from the Nigeria Islamic State in West Africa Province prepare to execute aid workers in Borno, Nigeria.

ECWA churches slain since June 12.”

► **July 23:** “Islamic extremist militants in Nigeria execute five men as warning to Christians, video shows. Three Christians among those killed.”

► **July 28:** “Pastor, 5-year-old boy among 10 Christians killed in herdsmen attacks in Nigeria. Residents in southern Kaduna State terrorized.”

Persecution 'bull's-eye'

“Nigeria is actually the bull's-eye of Christian persecution in the world, but few

are aware of it,” International Christian Concern reports.

“Hundreds of thousands of Christians have lost everything and are living as refugees.”

ICC reports that Christian farming villages are repeatedly attacked and tens of thousands have died during the past 20 years.

While the source of conflicts (See 'Christians,' page 7)



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Photo courtesy of Brandon Vaughan

Leah and Brandon Vaughan (center) and their children (l to r) Wesley, Laura and Allison enjoy a visit to Yellowstone National Park, just a few hours from their new home in Logan, Utah, where the family began a new ministry earlier this year.

Vaughan family begins ministry in Utah

Back in March, we shared the story of Brandon Vaughan and his wife, Leah, a couple who feel God used incredible measures to call them from Tuscaloosa to the West.

Leah had been experiencing massive, debilitating headaches, and regardless of what doctors tried, she couldn't get any relief. That is, until one day Brandon realized she seemed to do better in places with higher elevation, and they started experimenting.

One thing led to another, and they traveled out to Utah — and as their son put it, “we got our mom back.”

That led them to start thinking about moving out there permanently.

“We thought at first that we would have to come here as church planting missionaries, simply because there aren't a lot of Baptist churches in this area,” said Brandon Vaughan, former pastor of Little Sandy Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa. “This would require up to two years of raising support in a COVID-19 world, all the while Leah would be in pain. But the Lord worked it all out in an amazing way.”

In 2019, while in Los Angeles on a medical missions trip, they got connected with nearby Lighthouse Baptist Church, which had helped plant Grace Baptist Church in Logan, Utah. Months later, when

Lighthouse's pastor heard Vaughan was looking to move West, he called and told him Grace Baptist was in need of a pastor.

It was a good fit. And the night the family loaded up the moving van in Tuscaloosa, they were able to swing by Little Sandy's revival.

'Amazing' moment

“I was able to stand up in front of the church and tell them what the Lord had done, thank them for the memories and tell them that we loved them,” he said. “The amazing thing about this moment is that it was exactly one year to the day that Leah came down with this headache — April 14.”

Leah isn't 100%, but “her quality of life is infinitely better here, and we know that we are in God's will,” Vaughan said. “We love our church family here in Logan and look forward to what God has in store for the future.” (Grace Thornton)

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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 13.

MY RASHIONALE

By **Jennifer Davis Rash**
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Are Nigerian Christians right? Are we looking the other way?

All week I planned to write about Grandparents Day — for the grandkids out there, it's Sept. 13 — but I can't let go of the horrifying news out of Nigeria. Check out pages 1, 6 and 7 to understand the full extent.

The information itself is not breaking news, but that fact makes it even more heartbreaking to me.

It's been happening for years, and I'm not sure we completely grasp the reality of it.

More than 12,000 Christians have been killed in the last five years in Nigeria alone — 1,200 of those during the first half of this year.

While Christians in the United States experience various religious liberty violations and criticism in some cases, we know nothing of the types of unspeakable tragedies Christians in many other parts of the world suffer day in and day out.

True persecution is happening in places like North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia and Libya as well as Nigeria.

Nigeria is No. 12 on Open Doors' 2020 World Watch List, and look what's taking place. It's not even in the top 10.

Organizations like Open Doors USA and Voice of the Martyrs work to keep us updated on what is happening around the world and provide suggestions for how we can help and pray for persecuted Christians.

We at TAB Media also regularly report on persecution taking place around the world in

our Persecuted Church column (found this week on page 9).

While the information comes in the form of a news report, we do hope you are taking the knowledge to another level and using it as a guide for prayer.

Our brothers and sisters around the world need us lifting them up daily. The leaders we hear from typically ask for prayer for wisdom, strength, peace and assurance they are not alone. They never ask for harm to be done to those persecuting them.

They want to shine for Jesus

amid the horrible darkness surrounding them. They understand the only true solution is to win the blind to Christ.

Still, no one should have to live in such intensely difficult circumstances.

Is it possible to stop the bloodshed once and for all? Probably not totally because of the evil that will always exist in this world, but an act of solidarity by believers around the globe would go a long way in making a noticeable difference.

Religious freedom advocates say religious news outlets like

TAB Media are really the only ones reporting on what one researcher called "an emergency."

I'm not sure why that is the case, but instead of spending time trying to figure out the why, what if we look for ways we can help stop the slaughter?

Maybe it means a phone call to your U.S. representative or senator to discuss what efforts are in place to help. Maybe it means chatting with your local newspaper editor to ask if he or she would consider coverage on persecution in other countries. Let the editor know TAB Media is glad to share our content. 🇺🇸

NEWS UPDATE

Upcoming state convention annual meetings 'postponed' in Mississippi and Tennessee, adapted in Georgia

The upcoming annual meetings of Tennessee and Mississippi Baptists have been "postponed" due to the coronavirus pandemic. Alabama Baptist leaders plan to make a decision soon.

Directors of the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board, officers of the Tennessee Baptist Convention and the convention's committee on arrangements voted 84 to 1 on Aug. 27 to "postpone indefinitely" the annual meeting scheduled for Nov. 8–11, according to the *Baptist and Reflector*.

It is the first time in the 146-year history of the convention that an annual meeting will not be held.

The vote was taken during a special called Zoom meeting and was based on a recommendation of both the convention officers

and the committee on arrangements earlier in August.

The Mississippi Baptist Convention's 100-member board learned of the postponement plans during the Aug. 25 in-person, socially distanced meeting, according to the *Baptist Record*.

The annual meeting was scheduled for Oct. 27–28. An alternate date has not yet been determined. The last times the Mississippi convention did not convene annual sessions were during the Civil War, in 1862 and 1863, the *Baptist Record* reported.

Alabama to announce soon

In Alabama, the executive committee of the State Board of Missions has been monitoring the situation and plans to make a decision no later than mid-September.

During an Aug. 14 regularly

scheduled meeting held over Zoom, the trustee body of the State Board authorized the executive committee to determine how to handle the currently scheduled Nov. 17–18 annual meeting.

Louisiana and Florida leaders also plan to make final decisions about their upcoming annual meetings in the coming weeks.

Georgia Baptists plan to hold an adapted form of an annual meeting on Nov. 9 from 1 to 6 p.m. with a maximum of 400 people at Ingleside Baptist Church, Macon, and following social distancing guidelines, according to the *Christian Index*.

For states not holding an annual meeting this year, current state convention officers will continue in their positions until their successors have been elected. (TAB)

Your Voice



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

Lemonade: God's gifts of 2020

By George Yates
SBOM church health strategist

What makes a successful lemonade stand? It takes much more than a thought. Before the lemonade can be sold, a table and materials for a stand must be available. Someone had to manufacture the product that made that stand. Promotional signs must be made. Someone must manufacture a poster board and markers to write with. Cups, pitchers, ice, lemons and sugar must be purchased. Somewhere a lemon

farmer is growing a large orchard of trees to produce the lemons. A treatment plant is cleaning the water and sending it through miles of pipe to the homeowner. Every person in that list has a part in the success of the lemonade stand. [Similarly,] teaching sound theology is only the beginning for creating an environment for succeeding in fulfillment of the Great Commission. In each local congregation, this type of environment — valuing and empowering each person's God-given talents with on-

going opportunities to flourish individually and corporately — is needed. Until we do so, we will continue to have declining, unhealthy environments feeding off the outside culture rather than influencing that culture. It is not taking in information that creates a disciple. Even Jesus' disciples' true growth came when they were sent into the world. Their true growth came as He invited them to get actively engaged through practicing His teachings. These disciples continued growing in spiritual maturity not only while Jesus was with them but throughout their entire lives. Read the Book of Acts with an eye for their learning experiences.

A person growing in spiritual maturity will develop mental, emotional and spiritual health, will desire to restore and build healthy relationships inside and outside the church, and will move toward his or her God-given creativity in fulfilling God's purpose. God has not given us a box of lemons in 2020. He has given us a world of opportunities. Go and make some lemonade! Change the environment; change the culture.

Letter to the Editor

How exciting to read in *The Alabama Baptist* of the innovative method of presenting VBS to the children at Mount View Baptist Church, Trinity. Thank you, Pastor Mark Milwee and VBS director Penny Phillips, for using not only available technology but finding a way to minister during these difficult days of social distancing due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We serve an amazing God who can give direction no matter what roadblocks get in our way. With many churches having difficulty recruiting VBS workers, this outreach could be used at any time in churches no matter the size. The influence of the biblical material in the home could be key to reaching families for Jesus Christ. Iris Wiggins
Hartselle, Ala.

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“Authentic community is not geographical but is spiritual.”

GARY FENTON

Retired pastor

Personal discipleship is not easy. In fact, it's hard because we can't follow Jesus well unless we are willing to give up some things and to make some personal sacrifices.

Author Gary Hardin

“Discipleship for the Rest of Us: Lessons on Following Jesus from Mary Magdalene”

Jesus showed no partiality to those He hung out with. He knew no bias. He was the original diversity champion. For some in the ancient world this caused a problem, and in the Gospel of Luke it says, “All who saw it began to grumble and said, ‘He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner’” (19:7).

Part of developing our faith and our own healing is expanding our

circle. The very act of treating other people as equal is redemptive. Through our acceptance of all people, we emulate the acts of Jesus and live the concept that all people are made in the image of God. When we become more accepting, we also begin to satisfy the human need to help. Filling this need brings us joy.

Author Bruce Hartman

“Your Faith has Made You Well: A Radical New Way to Create Hope and Peace”

Being a Christian is more than just an instantaneous conversion — it is a daily process whereby I grow to be more and more like Christ.

Billy Graham

We're not called to faith in Christians. We are called to faith in Christ. If “Christian leaders” can cause us to shrink back from Christ, our faith was in leaders, not in Jesus. Everyone will fail to be Jesus but Jesus.

Beth Moore
via Twitter

I have reached out to preachers and politicians across Alabama and America as well as our local director of missions asking that we start prayer and fasting from 7:00 p.m. on Nov. 2 until the polls close at 7:00 p.m. on Nov. 3. Please be much in prayer about supporting this effort.

Russell Bamberg
Brent, Ala.

From the *Twitterverse*

@Blackwell_Kevin

My level of joy cannot be dependent upon my ministry success. It must be completely based upon the fact that there is an empty tomb in Jerusalem. My victory, my joy is in Jesus, and He is alive.

@BeesonDivinity

It's finally here! Today (Aug. 25) is the day we have been anticipating since March. Students, rain or shine, we are excited to have you back on campus. #WhyBeeson #HodgesChapel — “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His faithful love endures forever.” Ps. 107:1

@shadesmtn

How can you and I not be willing to give a greater level of commitment and exert a greater amount of sacrifice and energy to the One who died for us?

@drjjwilliams

A basic point my [doctoral adviser] @DrTomSchreiner taught me as his student was to work hard to represent fairly and accurately scholars with whom I disagree and to engage critically their views as if they are in the room as I write. This is indeed a hard but an important exercise to learn.

@bellevuepastor

The best way to receive encouragement is to encourage others. When you encourage others, God will encourage you. “Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing” (1 Thess. 5:11). You always reap what you sow.

@PaulTripp

Heart change is not the result of the exercise of human persuasion

or power, but rather the result of the intervention of divine grace.

@brocraigc

“Knowledge may become good or ill according to the use which is made of it.” — Charles Spurgeon

@MattMason3

If you look away from self to Jesus Christ for forgiveness, you're joined to Him. Believe on Christ and your checkered past is forever buried in a grave just outside Jerusalem. And because He rose, you rise.

@DrDavidLAllen

I tell my students every semester: Make sure your ambition and your ability do not carry you beyond where your character can sustain you.

The more pastors I talk to, the more concern there is for a spiritual falling away of members as a result of the last several months. Here's my personal and very humble take on what is happening.

For years, we've held church attendance (even spotty) as the gold standard of being a Christian. I think this is especially true in the deep South Bible Belt.

We've failed to disciple and train our people to feed themselves the word of God, spend time every day in communion with God through prayer, actively share the gospel through witnessing and hunger after God through fasting.

For several months, COVID-19 took away the one thing that many self-proclaimed Christians held, again, as the benchmark of good Christianity.

All that remained was the foundation of the spiritual disciplines, and when our house of Christianity isn't built on a solid foundation, it falls like stacked cards when even the smallest wind blows.

Our personal daily walk with Christ cannot be neglected because when everything else is stripped away, it will determine how long we survive.

Pastor Daniel Atkins
via Twitter

All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone.

Blaise Pascal (1623–1662)

When we are so focused on the love of God that it flows from us, we don't easily take offense because we are too full and too pleased with God to care when others revile us on Christ's account.

James Hammack
theropetab.com

'UNIQUELY HORRIFYING'



Map by World Watch Monitor

Nigerian Christians say genocide building in their country while world looks the other way

By Martha Simmons
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

During hurricane season in Alabama, TV meteorologists often refer to the “Butterfly Effect,” a chaos theory example of how a butterfly flapping its wings off the coast of Africa can set off a chain of events leading to a hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico.

The current humanitarian crisis buffeting Nigeria — Africa’s largest nation — is nothing so benign, and religious freedom experts say other countries would do well to pay attention before the ill winds blow their way.

Constitutional right

Religious freedom is constitutionally guaranteed in Nigeria, home to the world’s sixth-largest Christian and fifth-largest Muslim populations. Still, the West African

country has emerged as a Ground Zero of Christian persecution.

Despite their roughly equal populations, Nigerian Christians are being targeted more and more frequently and with savage violence by radical Islamist groups.

Religious freedom advocates say little attention has been paid to the carnage outside of religious news media, and they want the rest of the world to wake up to the building storm of Christian genocide.

“This is a genocide in the making, and we need to stop it before it’s too late,” said Lela Gilbert, a senior fellow for International Religious Freedom at Family Research Council and a fellow at the Hudson Institute’s Center for Religious Freedom.

“What’s going on in Nigeria is uniquely horrifying,” Gilbert said. “It is a bloodbath. This is real, lit-

eral massacres. Not just with guns but with machetes. It’s increasing. It’s getting worse. It’s an emergency.”

In a July report she wrote for the FRC — “The Crisis of Christian Persecution in Nigeria” — Gilbert described a “horrifying acceleration” of murders, rapes, mutilations and kidnappings.

More than 1,200 Nigerian Christians have been killed in just the first half of 2020, Gilbert wrote, adding, “This is in addition to 11,000 Christians who have been killed since June 2015.”

July especially bloody

As awful as those numbers are, the second half of 2020 is shaping up to be just as bad for Nigerian Christians.

A report issued July 22 by Lord David Alton, a former member of the British Parliament and cofounder of the nonpartisan Movement for Christian Democracy, said that at least 27 people were killed and dozens injured within a 24-hour period in several separate attacks staged between July 19 and 20.

Despite the obviously escalating carnage, the world is largely turning a deaf ear to Nigerian Christians’ cry for help, religious freedom advocates say.

That inattention serves to embolden the attackers, as indicated in a July 22 video posted on YouTube in which Islamic extremists executed five blindfolded, kneeling Nigerian men after this announcement:

“This is a message to all those being used by infidels to convert Muslims to Christianity,” one of

the executioners says in the Hausa language, translated by Morning Star News, a news service focusing on Christian persecution. “We want you out there to understand that those of you being used to convert Muslims to Christianity are only being used for selfish purposes.

“And that is the reason whenever we capture you, they don’t care to rescue you or work towards securing your release from us; and this is because they don’t need you or value your lives. We, therefore, call on you to return to Allah by becoming Muslims. We shall continue to block all routes [highways] you travel.

“If you don’t heed our warning, the fate of these five individuals will be your fate.”

Gilbert’s frustration about the inattention and resultant inaction at an international level is evident in both her report and her recent interview with TAB Media.

Gilbert credited the current White House administration with being “genuinely concerned” about the situation.

“But time and again, when proposals for specific actions and constructive projects are discussed and proposed, they seem to vanish into thin air, too often somewhere in the U.S. State Department’s massive bureaucracy,” she said.

“Of course, at least part of this has to do with predictable partisan sensitivities,” Gilbert added, “and particularly during a highly polarized political atmosphere, which is also complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic.” ✝

>> FAST FACTS <<

Christians in Nigeria

▶ 80 million Nigerians are Christian, making it the country with the world’s sixth-largest Christian population.

▶ Muslims and Christians are almost equally represented in Nigeria, although the country’s most powerful political figures claim affiliation with Islam.

▶ Religious identity tends to be regional, with Islam dominating the north of the country and Christianity predominant in the south.

▶ 14 million Nigerian Christians are Baptist.

▶ Baptists have been in Nigeria since 1850, when the first missionary was sent by the Southern Baptist Convention.

▶ Most Nigerian Baptists belong to churches under the Nigerian Baptist Convention, formed in 1914 as an outgrowth of SBC missionary work. NBC operates 10 theological training centers, as well as schools and hospitals. (compiled by Martha Simmons)

Christians in Middle Belt bear brunt of violence

(continued from page 1)
is complex, tribal and historical, religious freedom advocates are adamant that while some Muslim Nigerians also are suffering from widespread violence, it is the Christians who are bearing the brunt of violence. Militant attackers seem to more openly affiliate with radical Islamists who seek to kill Christians or force them to convert to Islam.

Role of Islamist militants

Two main groups of Islamic extremists are responsible for most Nigerian Christian bloodshed, according to Open Doors USA's World Watch List 2020: Boko Haram and Hausa-Fulani militant herdsman.

"Christians in the northern region and in the Middle Belt suffer from violence perpetrated by Islamic extremist groups," Open Doors states. "Such violence often results in loss of life, physical injury, as well as loss of property.

"As a result of the violence, Christians are also being dispossessed of their land and means of livelihood — and Christians with a Muslim background also face rejection from their own families."

Whether Christians are being targeted primarily because of their faith or are merely caught up in tribal and territorial disputes is the subject of disagreement among local and international governments.

In its "Nigeria 2019 Religious Freedom Report," the U.S. Department of State painted a complicated picture of a country wracked by deadly conflict:

"According to local and international media, in May the discovery of two dead boys at the border between a Christian village and a Hausa Muslim community in Plateau state sparked ethnic-based riots

against Hausas, resulting in from five to as many as 30 deaths.

"In August and September, local media reported [that] armed, ethnic Igbo Christian criminal gang members posing as Fulani Muslim herdsman killed two priests ... in an attempt to incite religious conflict. According to international media, on April 14, Muslim Fulani herdsman killed 17 Christians who had gathered after a baby dedication at a Baptist church ... including the mother of the child."

While refraining from calling violence against Nigerian Christians state-sponsored persecution, the State Department did place Nigeria on the Special Watch List last year for having engaged in or tolerated severe violations of religious freedom.

International attempts to straddle the fence rather than taking direct action frustrate Lela Gilbert, who authored the recent FRC report. Gilbert predicts that the world will one day soon recognize the current Christian persecution in Nigeria as a genocide, but by then it will be too late.

'We remember Rwanda'

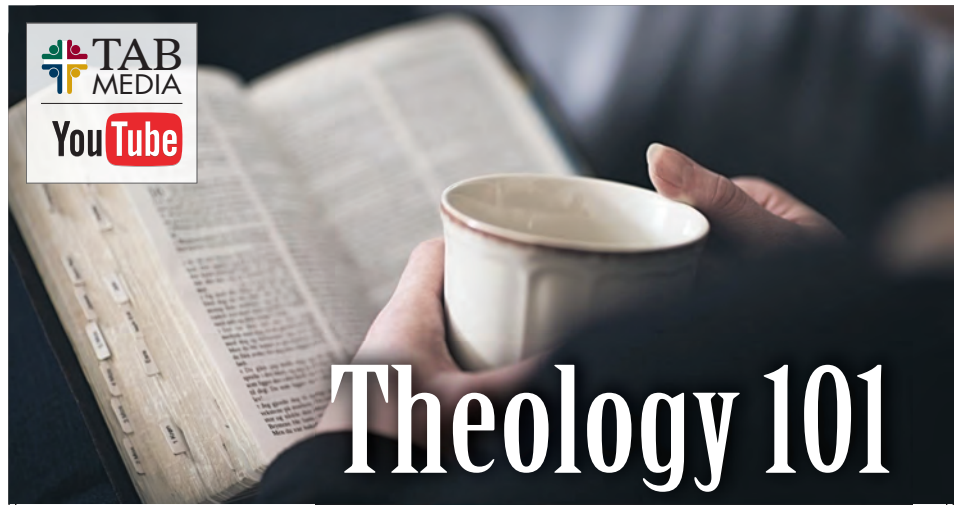
"All too well we remember Rwanda, where we failed to stop a genocide in which one million were slaughtered. Not too long ago, we finally recognized that a genocide took place in Iraq — several years too late. May this not happen again," she wrote. "May our international Christian communities continue to work together to inspire and cajole our governments to bring this terrible carnage to an end — once and for all. And may our prayers — as well as demands — continue for immediate international action to stop the bloodshed."✝

Two main groups are responsible for most Nigerian Christian blood: Boko Haram and Hausa-Fulani militant herdsman.

Open Doors USA

"As a result of the violence, Christians are also being dispossessed of their land and means of livelihood."

Open Doors USA



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

The Holy Spirit in Figures

Fire

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

In addition to wind, water and oil, another feature associated with the Holy Spirit is fire.

At the outset of His mission, Jesus was proclaimed by John the Baptist: "He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matt. 3:11). The association of fire with the Holy Spirit also was prominent at the conclusion of Christ's earthly ministry, in the fulfillment of His promise to follow His ascension with the sending of the Holy Spirit. With the coming of the Spirit, "There appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:3-4).

Pondering some of the properties of fire yields several insights into the work of the Holy Spirit.

For example, through the ages fire has had an illuminating function. In biblical times, fire was found on a lighted torch or in an oil lamp. Jesus made reference to this when He noted, "No one, when he has lit a lamp, puts it in a secret place or under a basket, but on a lampstand, that those who come in may see the light" (Luke 11:33).

Part of the ministry of the Spirit is to illuminate our minds to understand spiritual truth.

Along with furnishing light, fire also served to provide warmth in a day when electricity and furnaces were not known.

To his shame Peter took advantage of fire to warm himself in the court of the high priest as described in John 18:18: "Now the servants and officers who had made a fire of coals stood there for it was cold, and they warmed themselves. And Peter stood with them and warmed himself."

We often describe a sensitive and compassionate person as one who has a warm heart. The Holy Spirit in believers should make us warmhearted.

Eliminating impurities

Used in a controlled environment, fire possesses purifying or purging capabilities. The impurities or dross of metals, for example, were eliminated by means of fire. In a spiritual sense, Isaiah in his vision had a heightened sense of his impurity.

In his sorrow over his condition, the prophet envisioned one of the seraphim taking a live coal from the fire and touching it to his mouth, saying, "Behold this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin is purged" (Isa. 6:6-7).

Part of the Spirit's ministry is purifying our hearts to enable us to serve Christ effectively.✝

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



AP Photo/Eric Gay

Hurricane Laura made landfall Aug. 27 along the Louisiana-Texas state line as a Category 4 storm, causing flooding, downed trees and power outages and spawning tornadoes in several states as it moved inland. Those wishing to assist may contribute to Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief at sbd.org/connect/hurricanerelief/. ABDR will be working with convention partners in affected states to minister where needed. More information is available at tabonline.org/laura. (TAB)

NAMB launches new resources on race

The North American Mission Board has launched a free resource, “Undivided: More than a Hashtag,” to assist church leaders and their congregations as they navigate conversations about race.

The resource is a follow-up to the initial resource titled “Undivided: Your Church and Racial Reconciliation.” The materials look through the lens of Galatians 2 to help churches seek racial and ethnic unity among their people.

The video series includes five sessions with input from several Christian leaders, including Derwin Gray, founding and lead pastor of Transformation Church in Indian Land, South Carolina, and Vance Pitman, lead pastor of Hope Church in Las Vegas.

Download the resource at undivided.net. (NAMB)

LifeWay trustees hear financial report

Trustees of LifeWay Christian Resources unanimously approved a \$210 million budget Aug. 25 for the 2020–2021 fiscal year that includes reductions of 17% year over year.

LifeWay President and CEO Ben Mandrell estimates a \$21.7 million net loss in the 2019–2020 fiscal year due to loss of revenue related to cancellation of camps and events.

According to the report to trustees, LifeWay’s cash position remains strong and the organization has nearly completed paying off leases from stores.

Mandrell told trustees he sees a future that includes an acceleration of online products and services from LifeWay, as well as a laser focus on church leaders.

Read the full report at tabonline.org/lifeway-budget. (BP)

Headline news

from around the Southeast

Georgia

When officials with Fulton County Schools, the fourth largest school system in Georgia, needed assistance in distributing food to children at risk, they reached out to the faith community, including the North American Mission Board and at least two Atlanta-area Southern Baptist churches. “We are in the community, and we are a resource for the people around us,” said Regina Rogers, coordinator of evangelism and missions at Elizabeth Baptist Church, Atlanta, which participated in the distribution, the *Christian Index* reported.

Florida

Cramped living conditions, backbreaking hours packaging vegetables and fruits in enclosed areas and lack of personal protective gear have placed the South Florida migrant community at high risk of a COVID-19 outbreak. To address that need, Michael Daily, director of church and community

ministries for Miami Baptist Association, is leading the association’s Good News Care Center to bring much-needed physical assistance and the hope of the gospel to migrant camps, the *Florida Baptist Witness* reported.

Louisiana

A leisurely Sunday morning drive changed the spiritual destination for Jaicoven Johnson and his family. Their drive took them past Family Church in Kenner, Louisiana, where the family was intrigued by the joy displayed by church members who had gathered outside. Johnson’s baptism on Aug. 16 was the first for the church, which was formed in March as a merger between two area churches, according to a *Baptist Message* article.

Mississippi

Mississippi Baptist churches seeking ways to encourage and support schools in their local area

may find prayerwalking an effective ministry, according to Tammy Anderson, executive director of Mississippi WMU and Women’s Ministries of Mississippi. Anderson recommended several resources for prayerwalking in a recent interview with the *Baptist Record*. Those resources are available at mbcb.org/womans-missionary-union/prayer/.

Tennessee

With a couple of major tornadoes as well as COVID-19 in their home state, Tennessee Baptist Disaster Relief workers had put in 9,045 volunteer hours by the end of July, compared to a total of 5,915 hours during all of 2019. The work has slowed a bit in the past few weeks, giving the TBDR volunteers an opportunity to catch their breath before possibly being called out to respond in hurricane relief efforts, Tennessee’s *Baptist and Reflector* reported.

NEWS

Alabama news

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► **NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville**, held a note burning Aug. 23 to celebrate paying off one of the church's two building loans. Pictured are Stephen Hall (left), executive pastor, and Bill Wilks, senior pastor.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

ELMORE ASSOCIATION

► **Crossroads Community Church, Elmore**, will host the fifth annual Passiontree Pastors Roundtable on Oct. 26 and Disciple-Making Pastors Conference on Oct. 27. Gary Maze of Jackson, Mississippi, will be the guest speaker for both events. Because of COVID-19, only 36 spots are available for the Monday roundtable and dinner. For that event, sign up at passiontree.org/roundtable. For the Tuesday conference, register by emailing Daniel Edmonds at dedmonds@alsbom.org. Robert Mullins is pastor.

PINE BARREN ASSOCIATION

► **Vredenburgh Baptist Church** will not hold its annual homecoming service on Sept. 27 due to COVID-19 concerns.

OBITUARIES

► Former Southern Baptist missionary **James Harris "Jim" McGriff** died Aug. 15. He was 74.

McGriff was a first lieutenant in the U.S. Army and a Vietnam veteran. He also served as a missionary in Guatemala and Belize. For decades, he and his wife, Carol, led a thriving radio ministry to the K'ekchi' people of Cobán, Guatemala, and he also wrote discipleship materials in the K'ekchi' language.

McGriff earned degrees from the University of Alabama and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He was a member of Crossroads Community Church, Elmore.

He was preceded in death by his daughter, Dawn. He is survived by his wife of 50 years, Carol; son, Brantley; and daughter, Keeley. (TAB)

► **Zemery Don Reece**, a longtime Southern Baptist missionary to Nigeria, died Aug. 22. He was 88.

Reece and his wife, Gwen, were appointed by the Foreign Mission Board (now International Mission Board) in 1959 and spent 35 years serving the Nigerian people in various ways, including church development, education leadership, relief work and pastoral development.

They also served as house parents for mis-

sionary children, many of whom consider them a second father and mother.

For his relief work during the Nigerian Civil War, Reece was given the chieftaincy title Onotu of Amai. He concluded his work in Nigeria as mission director of the Baptist Mission of Nigeria.

After the Reeces retired, they were active members of First Baptist Church, Boaz, and Reece also served as an Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteer.

He earned a bachelor's degree from Berea College in Berea, Kentucky; a master of divinity from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky; and a master of arts in educational supervision and principalship from Eastern Kentucky University.

Reece was preceded in death by his son, Bryan. He is survived by his wife, Gwendolyn; son, Kevin; daughter, Paige; and three grandchildren. (TAB)



REECE

► **Charles R. Bullock**, longtime pastor of Clinton Baptist Church, died Aug. 22. He was 69.

In addition to serving 22 years as pastor of Clinton Baptist, he also founded Lighthouse Christian School. Bullock also was a dairy farmer and served in the U.S. Air Force.



BULLOCK

He is survived by his wife of 50 years, Janet; two daughters, Stacia and Cynthia; and 10 grandchildren. (TAB)

WMU receives grant from WMU Foundation

The WMU Foundation gifted national Woman's Missionary Union a \$45,000 grant in an effort to help offset the loss for 2020 through the coronavirus pandemic.

Throughout 2020, national WMU, headquartered in Birmingham, was affected by the pandemic. With many churches unable to gather on campus for extended periods of time, fewer churches purchased WMU resources, one of the organization's primary means of support.

National WMU is supported through the sale of magazines and products and from investments and charitable contributions through the WMU Foundation.

National WMU is not a part of the Cooperative Program allocation budget and receives no funds from the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering or Lottie Moon Christmas Offering.

"While the WMU Foundation exists to support all WMUs around the world, we always want to look for ways to help the organization that created us," said David George, WMU Foundation president. "That is why we are thrilled to be able to dip into our current year operating revenue to make this gift to national WMU a reality.

"Though this \$45,000 gift will not solve all of national WMU's financial needs, we hope it can serve as a way to strengthen its organization during these difficult times."

The WMU Foundation manages a variety of funds and endowments, which fund women's leadership development, anti-human trafficking efforts, scholarships for missionary kids and those pursuing missions careers and much more.

More information is available at wmufoundation.com. (WMU Foundation)

Persecuted church

Kenyan family who fled violence in Nairobi attacked again for faith

ISIOLO, Kenya — Muslim extremists beat a Christian woman unconscious in Isiolo, Kenya, and attacked her brother and sister in ongoing persecution of the family for their faith.

Twenty-one-year-old Fozia, whose surname was withheld from news reports to protect her family, was hospitalized for two days. Her siblings also sustained injuries in the attack.

After a police report was filed, two of the seven assailants were arrested and released on bond. The attackers issued threats against Fozia's family if the

woman doesn't withdraw her case.

In 2019, Fozia's family relocated to Isiolo from Nairobi to escape nearly 10 years of attacks from Muslims of Somali descent. The family had fled from Somalia to Nairobi 16 years ago.

Somalis generally believe all Somalis are Muslims by birth; any Somali who becomes a Christian can be charged with apostasy, punishable by death. Somalia's constitution establishes Islam as the state religion, according to the U.S. State Department.

Somalia is No. 3 and Kenya No. 44 on Open Doors' 2020 World Watch List of places where it is most difficult to be a Christian. (MS)



CIA map

Samford's Andrew Westmoreland announces 2021 retirement date

With “a complete sense of peace,” Samford University President Andrew Westmoreland announced Aug. 28 his plans to retire from the presidency effective June 30, 2021.

Westmoreland, who has led the institution since 2006, shared the news with Samford’s board of trustees at a called meeting on Aug. 27, and then sent out the public announcement to students, employees and alumni via email the next morning.

Significant date

“Forty-five years ago today, Aug. 28, 1975, I attended my first class as a college freshman. As a first-generation college student, I was confused and anxious — and with no idea that, as my career unfolded, I would

remain within the mysterious world of higher education for a lifetime,” he wrote in the message.

“I’ve said so often that, despite my many flaws, I am a better person because of my association with Samford. Jeanna and I agree that serving here is the greatest honor of our lives.”

Westmoreland’s tenure as Samford’s president has been marked by enrollment growth, new and enhanced campus facilities and a growing national reputation for academic quality.

The university also has raised more than \$400 million in philanthropic gifts.

Westmoreland said “mountains of work must be accomplished this fall and next spring,” and he plans to be fully engaged until the arrival of a new president.

Topping his list of what

he has treasured most while serving as a college president are the personal relationships on campus.

First, developing the student contacts and connections, and a close second, the joy of hiring wonderful people, he said.

“I have enjoyed trying to do my best to encourage them to succeed,” he said.

Westmoreland came to Samford following 27 years of service in higher education, including eight as president at Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, Arkansas.

What’s next?

After retirement from the presidency, Westmoreland plans to reside in Birmingham and serve in a part-time capacity as executive director of Samford’s Frances Marlin Mann Center for



Screen grab from Zoom interview Aug. 28

Samford’s Andrew Westmoreland (left) chats with Jennifer Davis Rash over Zoom shortly after announcing his retirement plans Aug. 28. Watch the interview on the TAB Media Group YouTube channel.

Ethics and Leadership.

A search for Samford’s next president will begin immediately.

Trustees Tim Vines, CEO of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama, and Beth Thorne Stukes, a corporate and civic leader from Jasper, will serve as co-chairs of the search committee.

The full slate of committee members was being finalized at press time.

The trustees will further

discuss the presidential search and other business at their meeting on Sept. 11.

Samford board of trustees chair Bill Stevens said, “As we begin this transition in the university’s leadership it is important to remember Samford is stronger today than at any time in its 179-year history.

“We all are immensely grateful for the tremendous service of President Westmoreland.” (TAB, Samford)



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Serving together

‘Match made in heaven’: Wiley and Edith King near 70 years of music ministry

When Edith King was growing up, her father didn’t have much — but he had a vision.

He made arrangements for her to receive piano lessons, and it wasn’t long before she found herself sitting at the piano on Sundays at Joquin Baptist Church, Goshen.

It also wasn’t long before her path crossed that of a young man seven miles away who had his own musical talent.

At Patsburg Baptist Church, Luverne, Wiley King’s family sang often as the King Family Quartet, and they needed a pianist.

That’s where teenage Edith joined them — sometimes even as lead singer.

Married since 1953

And it wouldn’t be long before Wiley decided it was a ministry match made in heaven.

The two married in 1953 after her freshman year of college.

After the first two years of their marriage, the Kings were forced to part for a little while.

Wiley was sent to Japan with the Air Force for two years, and Edith came back with their son, Philip, to stay with her parents in Goshen.

But not too long after, Wiley made the decision to head back to family and ministry.

He got a helicopter maintenance job at Fort Rucker, and the couple started a long life of music ministry together.

First, they served for 12 years at Park Avenue Baptist Church, Enterprise, with Edith on the organ and Wiley leading music.

Music-related roles

Then in the years that followed, they both served in music-related roles at different churches and organizations all over the area. Along



Photo courtesy of Wiley and Edith King

Wiley and Edith King began serving in music ministry together as teenagers and haven’t stopped. The couple was recently honored by Pastor Nathan Sims and FBC New Brockton.

the way, Edith also taught piano lessons for 30 years.

Eventually, they made their way back to Park Avenue Baptist together.

Then in 2013, First Baptist Church, New Brockton, asked Edith to be its pianist. Wiley followed her as worship leader a few years later.

“After 67 years of mar-

riage, and 86 years of age, their legacy of faith and worship continues until the Lord declares otherwise,” said Nathan Sims, pastor of First, New Brockton, which honored the couple for their faithfulness in August.

“Oh, that all lives could be so well lived.” (TAB)

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

Place a classified ad for \$1 per word. For more information call 205-870-4720, ext. 102, or email ads@thealabamabaptist.org.

CHURCH POSITIONS

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Sulphur Springs Baptist Church in Lawrence County is seeking a bivocational pastor and a bivocational music leader. Email resumés and references to: jrhmh@gmail.com or call 256-974-0552.

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MINISTRIES

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UPCOMING ONLINE TRAINING:

CHOIR AFTER COVID

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 10-11 A.M.

Join State Missionary Keith Hibbs and several worship leaders from around the state in a panel discussion about how to implement a return to choir rehearsals and worship service participation utilizing proper safety protocols. Topics will include prep time, reestablishing relationships, differences in pre-COVID and post-COVID service participation and lots of Q and A. Panelists include Ryan Leffel (Woodmont BC, Florence), Frank Jones (Hunter Street BC, Hoover) and Thomas Smith (Providence BC, Opelika).

CONNECT: PATHWAYS THAT LEAD TO CONNECTION

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 10-11 A.M.

The webinar will focus on the process of moving a church toward greater overall health through four key connections: Connect with the Creator through renewal and worship; Connect with the Community through Sunday School/small groups; Connect with the Core through disciple making, mentoring and leadership development; and Connect with the Commission (and Acts 1:8) by reaching out to individuals, the local culture and beyond. Join the Office of LeaderCare & Church Health and other state missionaries for this great opportunity to be introduced to a biblical process for moving through and beyond the NEW REALITY.

DISCIPLESHIP LUNCH & LEARN

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 12-1:30 P.M.

Set aside your lunch hour for a great time of virtual learning with the Alabama Disciple-Making Lead Team and pastor/author, Dean Inserra. Dean is the pastor of City Church in Tallahassee, Fla., and also wrote the powerful book, *The Unsaved Christian*. Dean's session will be from noon to 1, followed by another 30 minutes of Q&A hosted by your Alabama leaders.



Wednesday, September 16, 10-10:20 a.m.

Join your Alabama WMU, state missionaries and other leaders from around the state for this brief but important time of prayer, focused on state missions. This event coincides with the suggested dates for churches to observe the *Week of Prayer for State Missions, September 13-20*, and the *Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering*.

Spot the Differences

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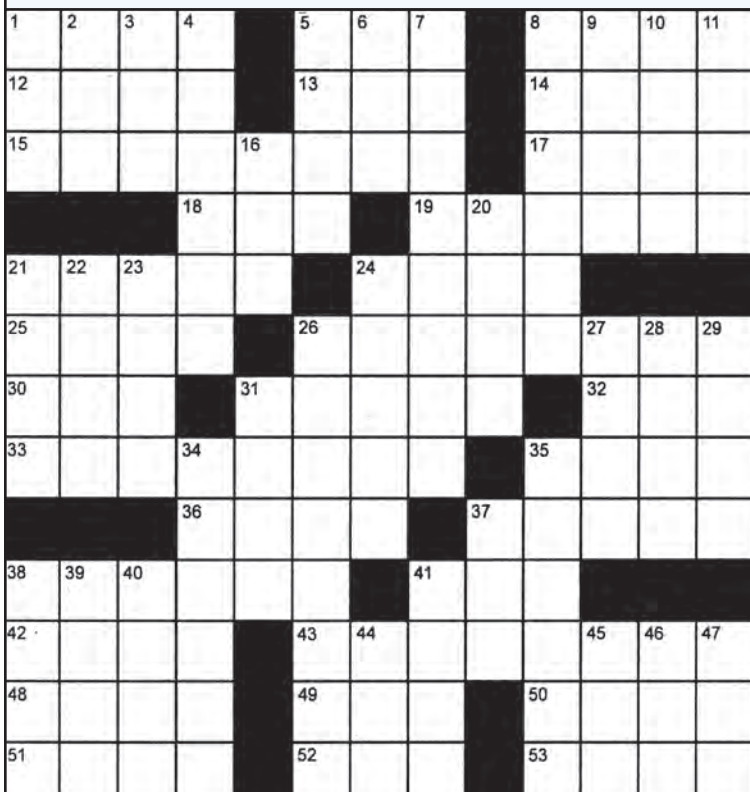
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Differences: Man's hair, pastor's lapels, woman's hair, birds in sky, woman's handles, church door handles, football mask, cowboy's spots, clown's pants, worker's pants, worker's dots, woman's dots, woman's hair, birds in sky.

Christian Crossword

By Evelyn M. Boyington Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

- In the beginning was the _____. (John 1:1)
- I ____ rather be a doorkeeper. (Ps. 84:10)
- Two of every ____ shalt thou bring into the ark. (Gen. 6:19)
- One of the Great Lakes.
- Come down ____ my child die. (John 4:49)
- Between blood and blood, between ____ and plea. (Deut. 17:8)
- God hath ____ the body together. (1 Cor. 12:24)
- Thou shalt ____ this law before all Israel. (Deut. 31:11)
- He loved them unto the _____. (John 13:1)
- Figures of speech.
- Signs, good or evil.
- To glance at quickly.

- Be ye ____ one to another. (Eph. 4:32)
- He that sweareth to his own hurt and ____ not. (Ps. 15:4)
- Last book of the Bible. (abbr.)
- Blackboard or roofing tile.
- Confederate commander.
- In any place.
- Russian emperor.
- The very hairs of your ____ are numbered. (Matt. 10:30)
- Your fathers ____ are they? (Zech. 1:5)
- Middle.
- To hasten.
- Entrance.
- Twirling.
- He loved Rachel ____ than Leah. (Gen. 29:30)
- Give ____ to my words. (Ps. 5:1)
- Applaud.
- I am alive for evermore, ____.

- (Rev. 1:18)
- Tint.
- Electrocardiograms.
- Down
- They are ____ with the showers. (Job 24:8)
- Unrefined mineral.
- Edge.
- Rely.
- Thou shalt kill of thy _____. (Deut. 12:21)
- They ____ all plain to him. (Prov. 8:9)
- King David did ____ unto the Lord. (2 Sam. 8:11)
- ____ up, O well. (Num. 21:17)
- Butter substitute.
- A quantity of paper.
- Urchins.
- Dashes.
- Great ____.
- Vegetable.
- Manner.
- Let not thine heart ____ sinners. (Prov. 23:17)
- Broken pottery.
- His leprosy was ____.

- (Matt. 8:3)
- He is God; there is none ____ beside him. (Deut. 4:35)
- His anger did ____ perpetually. (Amos 1:11)
- ____ a little, and there a little. (Isa. 28:10)
- Karite tree.
- To bleach.
- Thou shalt by no means come out _____. (Matt. 5:26)
- That I may ____ Christ. (Phil. 3:8)
- Mother.
- Esau, who is _____. (Gen. 36:1)
- Dreadful.
- Weigh silver in the balance, and ____ a goldsmith. (Isa. 46:6)
- For this cause ____ ye tribute also. (Rom. 13:6)
- Kind, breed.
- Old horse.
- Gallons per second. (abbr.)

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For September 6

Explore the Bible

By Robert L. Olsen, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



GOD CONFRONTS Isaiah 1:10–20

The Book of Isaiah is one of the most quoted and referenced books of the Old Testament in the New Testament. It also contains more references to the Messiah than any other book in the Old Testament.

Isaiah was a prophet for a long period of time in Judah, the Southern Kingdom (800s B.C. through the middle of the 700s B.C.). In fact, he was a prophet during the reigns of four kings of Judah.

Empty Rituals (10–15)

Isaiah begins prophesying at a time when the people of Israel were superficially religious. The leaders of Judah were guilty of performing sacrifices in ritual only, not internalizing the purpose of the sacrifices. As a whole, these events had become meaningless.

Instead of performing sacrifices as a way to show true sorrow for their sins, the people of Judah were following God's law of sacrifice as a matter of course only. This practice was so detestable that Isaiah likens the people to those of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The problem these Israelites had is like many Christians today. They believed that just performing the sacrifice was what was required for forgiveness of sin. However, throughout the Bible, God indicates that the actual sacrifice is secondary to the condition of the one performing the sacrifice (see Hosea 6:6).

Sometimes Christians believe that by following the commandments of the Bible they are owed something, that God is obligated to do what they ask in prayer or to give them good things or good circumstances.

But this is not how God operates. Many religions around the world teach something to the effect that if you do what "a god" or "the gods" want, good things will happen. This is not how Christianity works.

True Followers (16–17)

Instead of following empty rituals, Isaiah shows that God wants the Israelites' actions to match the

desires of God. Sacrifices are not to be performed so that the Israelites may go about their business, doing whatever they please. Instead, a true believer, one who is truly seeking the Lord, will act in a way that matches God's desires.

Modern Christians need to be careful of not falling into similar routines as the Israelites did. Going to church, reading the Bible daily and praying before meals are not to be done just to check a box to fill out a checklist of dos and don'ts. They are to be done with a heartfelt desire to please God and grow spiritually.


Repentance Required (18–20)

It is a wonderful thing that God does not love us based on what we can do for Him. If we had to perform a checklist of activities to be in God's good graces, we would undoubtedly fail. As Romans 3:23 says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

In many religions, a "god" has a balance sheet where he keeps track of how many good things versus bad things a person has done. The problem with these systems is who can tell what the balance sheet says? How does one know if he or she has done more good things than bad? It leads to ignorance of where the religious person stands before God, which leads to despair.

The good news about Christianity is God loves us even though we have sinned (Rom. 5:8). All that is required of the Christian is to repent and believe in Jesus. The Bible is clear that salvation is not found in external acts like animal sacrifice or baptism.

Salvation is found in belief in Jesus Christ, as Acts 16:31 affirms. This was true in both the Old Testament and New Testament. God forgives sins based upon repentance (1 John 1:9). And through repentance, Isaiah writes,

"Though your sins are scarlet they will be as white as snow; though they are crimson red, they will be like wool." 

Bible Studies for Life

By Jeffery M. Leonard, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Biblical Studies, Samford University



PLACE GOD FIRST Exodus 20:1–6; Psalm 16:1–4a, 9–11

Most of us have wrestled with the question of what we would save first if our house caught on fire. We might think about saving what is worth the most money: the gold bullion hidden in the closet, the Rembrandt hanging in the dining room — those sorts of things. Or we might think about saving something less valuable on the open market but a great deal more valuable to us: a family heirloom, old pictures, birth certificates, etc.

Nowadays, we might save our computers first because so much of our lives is stored on them. Stepping back, though, we know all these sorts of things are just trivialities. What we would save first is our family. Every possession we've ever owned could go up in smoke if we could just get our loved ones out.

Thinking about what we would save in a fire is a good way of getting at what is most important to us. It is a thought experiment that helps us return to first principles and gain some clarity about what really matters. It is interesting to see how often characters in the Bible encounter moments when they recognize their own need for getting back to what is most important. These are moments when it becomes necessary for them to pause, regroup and relearn old lessons. When these moments happen in the Bible, they almost always happen in the wilderness.

Moses only truly discovers who he is when he goes to the wilderness of Midian (Ex. 2–3). Elijah retreats to the wilderness when he is wavering in his prophetic call (1 Kings 19). Paul withdraws to the Arabian wilderness soon after his conversion (Gal. 1:17). Even Jesus goes to the wilderness to prepare Himself for the trials of public ministry (Matt. 4). Most famous of all is the 40-year wilderness sojourn of the children of Israel. The wilderness was the place where they, too, had to learn what was most important.

God is to be first because He alone is God. (Ex. 20:1–6)

Although the first five books of

the Bible are often referred to as "the law," the first 70 chapters of the law contain very little law at all. Where the law really debuts is with Exodus 20 and its Ten Commandments.

Not to be missed is the way this famous chapter begins: "I am the Lord, your God." This simple statement is the foundational idea that all of the wilderness experience was meant to drive home.


The Lord is God; of course, no image made by humans could capture His glory. The Lord is your God; of course, we should serve Him and Him alone.

God is to be first because He alone is good and completely trustworthy. (Ps. 16:1–4a)

The Israelites would not leave the wilderness until they had finally embraced this foundational idea: "I am the Lord your God." But why did it take so long for them to do so? It was primarily because of their unwillingness to embrace the next words of Exodus 20:2: "who brought you out of the land of Egypt." The nation did not doubt God was great; they doubted whether He was good.

When they struggled to find food and water in the desert, they needed to learn the words of the psalmist, "Apart from You, I have no good thing." They needed to turn to God in trust, echoing the psalmist's prayer, "Keep me safe, my God, for in You I take refuge."

God is to be first because He alone is the way to eternal life. (Ps. 16:9–11)

First principles are foundational. They are the kinds of beliefs that give birth to and nourish all the other ideas we hold dear. The Israelites learned in the wilderness that God was great and God was good. And once this foundation was laid, other truths seemed obvious. A good God promised to care for His children not only in this life but also in the life to come. A great God had the power to make this promise hold true. 



Media reviews

MOVIES

Netflix's 'Speed Cubers' is intriguing, mind-blowing and inspiring

By **Michael Foust**
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

I received my first Rubik's Cube when I was about 10. The U.S. was in the midst of the "cube craze" and children from coast to coast were wanting one, even if they knew they'd probably never solve it.

That was me. I played with my Rubik's Cube for several days, realized I wasn't a genius, and went back to playing with my Millennium Falcon.

After all, everyone knows it takes hours upon hours to solve a Rubik's Cube, right?

Well, no. In fact, a new Netflix documentary spotlights a unique group of talented people who can solve a Rubik's Cube in not hours, or minutes, but seconds.

Called "The Speed Cubers" (TV-PG), the 40-minute film will make you question everything you assumed about the Rubik's Cube and even the human brain. Consider: The current world record for solving a basic Rubik's Cube (which "cubers" call a "3x3") is 3.47 seconds — roughly the time it will take you to read a couple of sentences. Of note: A Rubik's Cube has 43 quintillion combinations. That's crazy, yes, but it's even crazier to watch it.

The film focuses on Australia's Feliks Zemdegs and the United States' Max Park, two of the best cubers in the world. Zemdegs mastered the Cube as a child and gained worldwide fame for setting multiple world re-

records. Park, who is autistic, is the younger of the two and admired Zemdegs as a child.

Park first gained worldwide attention thanks to a YouTube video showing him solving a 4x4 Cube, one-handed, in 47 seconds.

"Speed Cubers" is mind-blowing but also inspiring. That's partially because cubers are performing feats no one in the 1980s thought possible. (The world championship time in 1982 was 22 seconds — 18 seconds slower than today.)

Mostly, though, the film is inspiring because of its focus on the friendship between Zemdegs and Park — two very different men who have bonded over their common hobby. Cubing made Zemdegs world famous and opened multiple doors, yet he remains humble. Each time Park sets a new record, Zemdegs contacts him to offer congratulations. For Park, cubing offered a much-needed outlet to improve his social skills, his parents say.

"Without a doubt, Feliks is going to be Max's hero forever," Park's father says.

The film is rated TV-PG for minor language (p---ed, h-ll and OMG).

Also streaming this month:

Adults/teens

▶ **"Les Misérables"** (Netflix) — The 2012 musical about a former inmate who turns his life around after a



'Speed Cubers'

Netflix

Catholic priest shows him mercy is a story filled with Christian themes, although it also has some sensual content (ClearPlay offers a filtered version). Rated PG-13 for suggestive and sexual material, violence and thematic elements.

▶ **"Tiny Creatures"** (Netflix) — Squirrels, mice, hamsters and other small creatures of the wild are followed in this Netflix original documentary series, filmed in eight distinct American ecosystems. It's a fascinating look at some of the often-overlooked parts of God's creation. Rated TV-PG (for fear).

▶ **"E.T. The Extra Terrestrial"** (Peacock TV) —

A young boy befriends an alien, then helps him return home in this classic Steven Spielberg film about friendship and the wonders of childhood. Rated PG for

language and mild thematic elements (ClearPlay and VidAngel offer filtered versions).



▶ **"Jurassic Park" trilogy** (Netflix) — These ground-breaking films from 1993, 1997 and 2001 raised an interesting question: What would happen if dinosaurs were reintroduced in the

modern world? After watching the movies, you'll hope it never happens. All are rated PG-13 for science fiction terror, violence and language (ClearPlay and VidAngel offer filtered versions).

▶ **"The Greatest Showman"** (Disney Plus) — P.T. Barnum brings together some of society's outcasts for a never-before-seen troupe show at the circus. This popular musical includes great lessons for the church about family, friendship and reaching out to the downtrodden. Rated PG for thematic elements including a brawl (ClearPlay offers a filtered version).

Children

▶ **"The Magic School Bus Rides Again: Kids in Space"** (Netflix) — Ms. Frizzle and her class visit the International Space Station to learn about space. They also get chased by a giant tardigrade.

▶ **"The One and Only Ivan"** (Disney Plus) — A gorilla named Ivan befriends a baby elephant, Stella. Together, they try to escape captivity. This film, based on a popular book, was scheduled to release in theaters but went straight to Disney Plus due to the pandemic. Rated PG for mild thematic elements.

▶ **"Mr. Peabody & Sherman"** (Netflix) — A time-traveling anthropomorphic dog, Mr. Peabody, adopts and raises a young boy, Sherman. Animated, filled with adoption themes. Rated PG for some mild action and brief rude humor.

Also for children: "The Peanuts Movie" (Disney Plus), "Dora and the Lost City of Gold" (Prime and Hulu), "Dolphin Tale" (Peacock TV) and "Beauty and the Beast" (Disney Plus).

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.

'Stay faithful, stay confident'

After losing both parents, free agent linebacker Finch honors family, faith

By Bill Sorrell
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Sharif Finch made a promise to his parents, and during the most difficult time of his life he kept it.

Pursuing that promise in 2018, Finch made the roster of the Tennessee Titans after playing at Temple University in Philadelphia. But during training camp, Finch's father, Gregory, died of a heart attack.

"Losing my dad while trying to make this team as an undrafted rookie was probably the hardest time of my life," said Finch, 24.

His mother Wendy died of breast cancer in May 2015. Finch, the youngest of 22 children, said losing his father was tough but he never questioned God's will.

"Adversity is going to come, and you have to persevere through it," Finch said. "It's all in God's hands. God gives the toughest battles to His strongest children."

Finch said his faith has gotten him through the difficult times.

Believe and follow

"No matter how it may seem, there is life on the other side. This is God's plan, not yours. Believe in the Lord and follow the path," Finch said.

Constant prayer, doing things the



Photo by Joe Labolito/Temple University

In 2018, Sharif Finch made the roster of the Tennessee Titans after playing at Temple University. But while trying to make the team as an undrafted rookie, Finch's father died. That was 'probably the hardest time of my life,' Finch said.

way God would want him to and reading the Bible daily are all parts of Finch's routine.

"I talk to the Lord, stay faithful, stay confident and ask God to show me how to do things and live the right way," he said. "I want to do things the way He would."

Born in Queens, New York, Finch grew up in Richmond, Virginia. He said he's been in church all his life and found a faith com-

munity with fellow Titans players, attending team Bible studies during the week. Teammates say his spiritual commitment shows.

"You can see that light being shined for sure," said former Titans teammate Ryan Succop. "It's a blessing to be on a team where you have that."

Finch influenced others during his time with the Titans. Another believer on the current Titans ros-

ter, defensive tackle Isaiah Mack, said he looks up to Finch.

"He is strong in his faith. I can only look up to that. It makes me want to be like him. He is a very good person and backs up what he says," Mack said in a 2019 interview with TAB Media.

Kept promise

And Finch is a pretty good example on the field too.

"Sharif is an explosive player. It [was] a wonderful time playing with him," Mack said. "In pass rushing, he is a huge-effort guy. He is always getting to the ball. Seeing him run to the ball makes you want to run to the ball. It's contagious."

With the 2020 NFL season scheduled to kick off Sept. 10 with its traditional Thursday night opener, Finch, a free agent this year, is still hoping to make a roster. He's worked out with the Cleveland Browns and the Las Vegas Raiders.

In dedication to his parents, Finch wears two sets of dog tags with their names and pictures and an inscription, "Everything is for you."

And that promise Finch made?

"I am out here every day trying to persevere and achieve my goals and dreams of being an NFL player and provide for my family," he said. "I keep my promise to my parents." ✠

"I TALK TO THE LORD, STAY FAITHFUL, STAY CONFIDENT AND ASK GOD TO SHOW ME HOW TO DO THINGS AND LIVE THE RIGHT WAY. I WANT TO DO THINGS THE WAY HE WOULD."

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