



The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

INSIDE



Disaster relief work continues on the coast after Hurricane Sally

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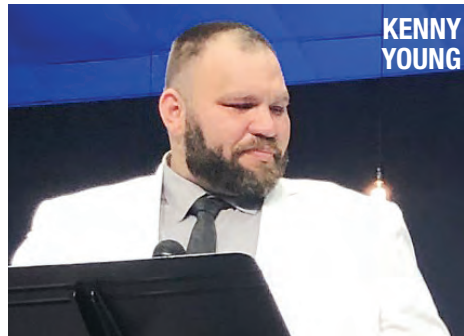


Barry Bledsoe to retire in 2021 after 20 years as president of TBFA

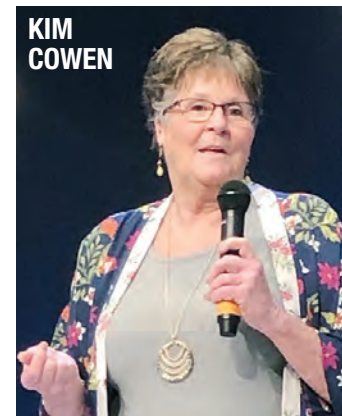
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MICHAEL RICHARDSON



KENNY YOUNG



KIM COWEN



CAROLYN DENNIS



TYLER McLAIN

Harvest EVANGELISM



HALLEY WALLER



GEOFFREY FORTIN



MARIE GAS

Photos courtesy of Rick Hagans

Addiction recovery ministry perseveres as pandemic takes toll

By Lanell Downs Smith
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

In nearly 40 years of addiction ministry, Harvest Evangelism founder Rick Hagans has never witnessed a sweeter, more honest graduation than the one held Aug. 15 at First Baptist Church, Opelika. It also was the largest group yet.

The ceremony recognized

23 men and women who completed the faith-based residential recovery program located in the east Alabama town of Lafayette.

'More honest'

"COVID-19 has forced everything to be more inward and that's been difficult, but out of that inward push, there's a sweetness," Hagans said. "Our men and women were more honest than they had ever been."

As the graduates shared their testimonies, Halley Waller recalled how she had come to Harvest's Hosanna Home for women after years

of physical, sexual and mental abuse at the hands of her father. Through the program, Waller found healing as she learned of a heavenly Father who loved and cared for her.

"I now know what having a real father feels like," Waller said. "I now know how loving and forgiving He is. Even when I fall short, He loves me anyway. That is true love."

Michael Richardson recalled turning to drugs and alcohol after losing his five-month-old daughter to brain cancer.

"My life had been nothing but trials and tribulations. I had wanted to be the best dad

in the world. [Losing her] got me on methamphetamines and alcohol, drug me all the way down to the deep."

Richardson said he found hope at His Place, Harvest Evangelism's men's recovery home.

'From the inside out'

Graduate Marie Gas said Hosanna Home "has changed me completely from the inside out. I'm alive and I'm living; I'm redeemed and I am forgiven."

During her time at Hosanna House, Gas met fellow graduate Josh McVicker. The two (See 'God,' page 15)



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Mike & Charity Waldrep



Jordan & Hannah Rowe
alaskabr.com

Alabamians move to Alaska to share love of Christ

A couple of weeks ago, we ran a story on page 1 about Alabama Baptists who have moved to Montana over the past six years to plant churches among people who haven't had much exposure to the gospel.

But Montana isn't the only state where Alabama has strong representation. There's a growing contingent in Alaska, where several families from the state have moved in recent years.

Two of them were featured during the Alaska Baptist Resource Network's week of prayer and state missions offering — Jordan and Hannah Rowe and Mike and Charity Waldrep.

The Rowes, originally from Florence, moved to Alaska in June 2019 with their two children to serve at First Baptist Church, Willow. Jordan became pastor there Oct. 1, and he asked for prayer "that God would give me wisdom and discernment and that I would be sanctified in the truth."

"We love it here," the Rowes wrote in the prayer guide. "The beauty of creation, the people and our church family. We are looking

forward to seeing what the Lord is going to do here in Willow."

They also asked for prayer for opportunities to get plugged in to their community and share the love of Christ there.

Meeting needs

The Waldreps moved to Alaska in February from Jemison, and Mike took on the role of associate pastor at Sand Point Baptist Chapel. While there, the couple focused on assisting the pastor with meeting needs in the community. They distributed Sunday School bags to children, started a Celebrate Recovery program and helped with other projects.

Then recently they moved into a role with Arctic Barnabas Ministries. As Regional Field Missionaries, the Waldreps will focus on equipping and encouraging churches in remote areas along Alaska's road system.

In the prayer guide, the Waldreps asked for prayer for "opportunities to effectively minister to churches and to reach the lost with the gospel, while maintaining a passion and desire to make the most of those moments." (Grace Thornton)

To access the prayer guide, visit alaskabr.com/wp-content/uploads/Prayer-Cal-2020-impact-alaska-v3.pdf.



The crossword puzzle can be found on page 17.

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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WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

What would help you be a better church volunteer or staff member, spouse, parent or follower of Christ? What topics or issues would be of interest to you for a workshop or seminar?

Email news@thealabamabaptist.org and let us know.

MY RASHIONALE

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

jrash@thealabamabaptist.org
@RashionalThts



Realities of living in isolation and confusion come to light

The article we ran on COVID-19's impact on families living with Alzheimer's in the Sept. 24 issue (which is also found online at tabonline.org) caught the attention of many readers, and the photo (below) shared by our friend Jennifer Whitaker moved many of us to tears.

We've shared other stories these past few months about the heartbreak and difficulties related to the pandemic-forced separations and how so many families have been pleading for some type of middle ground. One article even explained how a petition had been started to get the attention of various officials.

We've heard from readers throughout this year about their concerns and the emotional toll the pandemic has taken.

One of our TAB Media staff members also noted early in the pandemic how her father said he was willing to take the risk of getting sick and possible death to be able to continue seeing his children and grandchildren. He wasn't willing to give up the social interaction and hugs, she shared.

So many people in longterm care facilities have been confused because of the isolation. Their families hurt, too, because they know their loved one is hurting, and they haven't been able to do anything about it.

Careful health restrictions have certainly been important to a point during the pandemic, but how sad has it been to learn of people going through difficult medical situations and even death without family members by their sides?

And every family who has had a loved one in a longterm care facility or the hospital in 2020 will be forever grateful for the superhero-style care and compassion exhibited by our health care workers.

So many wonderful stories have been shared about how nurses, doctors and other medical staff have gone above and beyond to be stand-in family members for patients and residents. They keep the families informed. They take extra time to provide a human touch and social interaction, and they make sure no one breathes his or her last breath alone.

As we turn the corner into the final quarter of 2020, we applaud Gov. Kay Ivey for her Sept. 30 announcement to allow more flexible visitation policies in hospitals, nursing homes and other

longterm care facilities, including assisted living and memory care facilities.

Changes went into effect Oct. 2 to "allow loved ones to be reunited safely in these facilities across the state," Ivey said. "Each patient and each resident is allowed one caregiver or one visitor at a time unless there are compelling reasons to limit access."

Gov. Ivey's update includes extending the state's mask requirement until Nov. 8.

Her decision follows suit with what was announced June 26 by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS):

"As health care organizations enter Phase II of reopening from the COVID-19 pandemic, ... the issue of patient visitation also needs to be considered. Separate guidance has been issued for Nursing Home visitation. Because hospital patients are vulnerable to potential COVID-19 infection, CMS does

not recommend completely reopening facilities to visitors until Phase III. However, CMS also recognizes the significant toll of separation of patients from family and other loved ones.

"... Hospitals should develop plans for visitors that both consider patient and public health safety, as well as the emotional and care needs of patients and their families."

The document goes on to outline various options for visitors, as well as when visitation should be restricted. Read the full set of recommendations at tabonline.org/covid-visitation.

On Sept. 17, CMS updated guidelines for nursing homes and longterm care facilities. Those read in part:

"While CMS guidance has focused on protecting nursing home residents from COVID-19, we recognize that physical separation from family and other loved ones has taken a physical and emotional toll on residents.

"Residents may feel socially isolated, leading to increased risk for depression, anxiety and other expressions of distress. Residents living with cognitive impairment or other disabilities may find visitor restrictions and other ongoing changes related to COVID-19 confusing or upsetting. CMS understands that nursing home residents derive value from the physical, emotional and spiritual support they receive through visitation from family and friends.

"In light of this, CMS is revising the guidance regarding visitation in nursing homes during the COVID-19 [pandemic]."

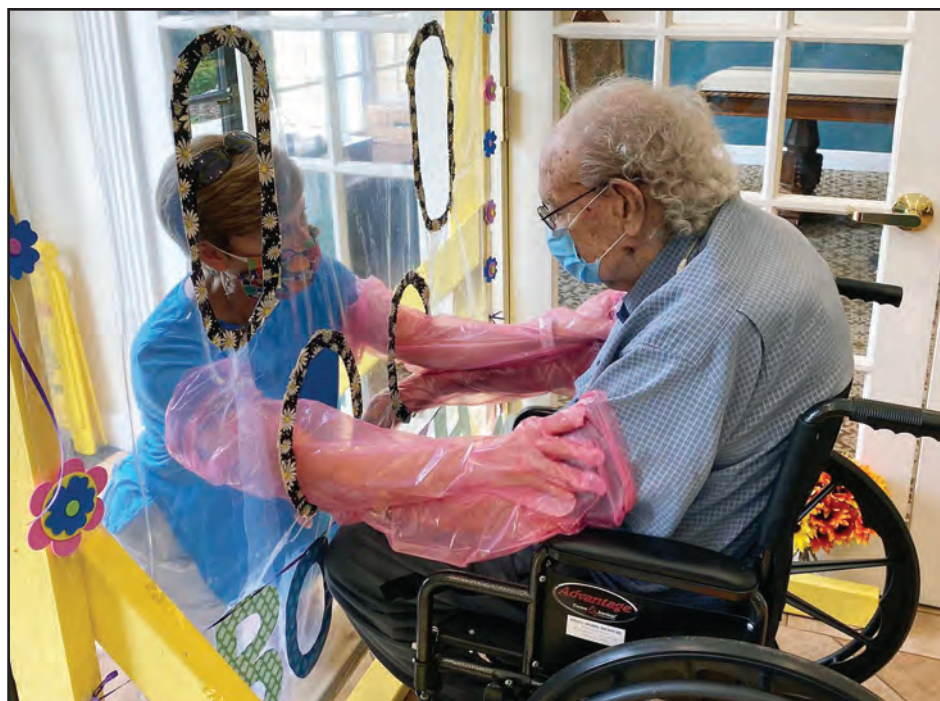


Photo courtesy of Jennifer Smith Whitaker

Byron Smith, 91, a retired Alabama prison chaplain and pastor, hugs his daughter, Jennifer Whitaker, through a plastic window at his memory care community in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Your Voice



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

Church should be lifeboat in stormy season

By **Wayne Thomas**
Phenix City, Ala.

American society is navigating tumultuous seas, and its people are tossed to and fro by swirling waters of conflict. Friends, families and neighbors are dividing themselves and fighting for control of the helm of the ship.

Some make their choice by listening only to one source of information. Many assume their supposed enemy's motives are malevolent and will ultimately sink the ship.

Others watch and wonder if there is a lifeboat to rescue them from the madness. They are hoping for another

choice. Could it be the Church?

The Church is called by Jesus to be different. He draws distinctions between the Church and the world.

One unique attribute of the Church is love. Some may recoil and claim the church does not have a monopoly on love. However, biblical love is distinct from our modern understanding of it. Jesus tells His followers to not only love those who love you but also to love those who despise you. He wants His followers to have care and concern for those who oppose them.

Biblical love is also sacrificial,

humble and unconditional. It is shown in Jesus' choice to die for all of mankind. Followers of Jesus should demonstrate love of all people because they are fellow humans created in the image of God.

The Church is called to be unified and of one mind. Unity does not mean everyone in the Church should behave like automatons. The Church should be a place where diverse individuals are welcome to share their unique talents and spiritual gifts to serve a common goal: the Great Commission. Each member contributes as a part of the larger body listening to the head — Jesus.

People are looking for the biblical Church. They need a refuge from a sinful world. They need to see Jesus.

The American Church often is not a biblical sanctuary. Instead, it simply delivers more of what the world is serving in the guise of religion. It does not need to remain that way.

Followers of Jesus can choose to apply the Scriptures rather than only repeating them. They can return to prayer, humility and thoughtfulness as they consider decisions. They may choose to refrain from vilifying others made in God's image who arrive at different decisions.

Jesus did not come to win victories for any political party or figure. He came to fulfill the Father's will that mankind be reconciled to Him. Only when the Church looks to Jesus for direction can the love, unity and single mindedness take hold and the beacon of safe harbor shine.

Quotes from 'The Rope'

In a world where the persecuted church (people who literally face death) still gives everything to meet together physically, ... the gathering of the church is a big deal. The love of our brothers and sisters and encouragement we can give to them in that gathering (and elsewhere as well) is one of the main ways the world will know we are in Christ.

James Hammack

The Bible has some strong words to say about our tongue and the consequences of what we say. James 3:8 says, "It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison." ...

It is our choice to speak death or life to someone. We have that choice. Sometimes the best response is no response. Proverbs 17:27 says, "A truly wise person uses few words; a person with understanding is even-tempered."

So the next time you receive the unexpected "gift" of a fire-fueled message, stop and take the time to pray. Ask God to help you understand where the other person is coming from and the best way to respond. You will never go wrong when you speak life to someone.

Amy Hacker

—From *theropetab.com*

Letters to the Editor

In the Aug. 26 issue of TAB, Jennifer Davis Rash wrote in her editorial that she wanted authors to "own up front a particular bias or agenda," presumably so readers would be forewarned.

I wonder if that is merely ventilating a frustrated dream or if there is some intent to do something about it.

The fact of the matter is that we all have multiple biases and agenda, some well-hidden even from ourselves. It would take an enormous amount of work to ferret out all these, and then the available truth would be so vast as to make it impractical to divulge.

Some basic things could be un-

covered using a pre-publication interview or online survey, if people were willing to tediously answer all the necessary questions truthfully.

My experience with surveys is that they result in greatly misleading information because answer options do not allow suitable correct responses.

Bob Cosby
Birmingham, Ala.

I love the news from around the Southeast and the continued update on the persecuted church. Excellent.

David George
President, WMU Foundation

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“ Show your appreciation for those who work among you, set an example for you in the Lord and instruct you. ”

1 THESSALONIANS 5:12, ISV

Trials are nothing new in the human domain. The COVID-19 pandemic is only another flavor of difficulties and struggles which dot the framework of living. There is good news, however.

The Greek word “poikilos” (“various, manifold”) is used in 1 Peter to refer to life’s difficulties (1:6) and to God’s grace (4:10). In other words, for every type/flavor of “trials” we encounter, there is a matching type/flavor of God’s “grace” to make it more bearable and meaningful.

William Barclay puts it this way: “Our troubles may be many-coloured, but so is the grace of God; there is no colour in the human situation which that grace cannot match. There is grace to match ev-

ery trial and there is no trial without its grace.” No wonder then the superlative significance of the classic Christian refrain: “Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come; ’Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.”

Morris Murray Jr.
Jasper, Ala.

My employer recently made us all get tested due to two people having tested positive for COVID-19. “This is stupid. I don’t have it,” I thought. But I got swabbed, and I am positive. I feel like I always do — no symptoms at all. I don’t look sick. I’m fine on the outside, but on the inside, there is a virus I can’t see or feel.

And then it hit me: You may look like a Christian, but are you? You may act like a Christian, but are you? People, you may look fine on the outside, you may feel fine. But if Christ isn’t on the inside, you are sin sick. One day, you will face a test not with a horrible nose swab but with Jesus Christ Himself. Will He find you positive as a child of God?

Pastor Kevin Morrison
Bethabara Baptist Church
Northport, Ala.

The SBC’s greatest evangelistic problem is not that more of us don’t witness to our neighbors. Our greatest problem is that more of us don’t look and live like Jesus.

Chuck Kelley

From the *Twitterverse*

@jdanielatkins

Why do we have to nitpick and be so divisive about everything? I’m tired of it. We’re trying to lead our churches through a pandemic and minister to our communities. Stop.

@brocraige

Conducting three funerals this week. Real or imagined, deaths, in my circle of friends and influence, seem to have increased during these days. I’m reminded of John Flavel’s statement: “A grave with Christ is a comfortable place.” Thanks be to God.

@PriscillaShirer

Sisters and brothers, be careful not to interpret familiar, expected or popular things as automatically being holy things. Let’s ask the Spirit to cleanse our spiritual palate, pique our spiritual senses and

give us discernment to know what’s really Him and what’s just not.

@dailyspurgeon

The reason why the Church of God exists is not her ecclesiastical regulations, her organization, her formularies, her ministers or her creeds, but the presence of the Lord in the midst of her.

@BurkParsons

I am always surprised by Christians who seem surprised by the wickedness and hypocrisy of the world.

@JackieHillPerry

One of the appeals of idolatry is that with it, creating our own version of god means we can tame it. A created thing can only do what we allow it to do, unlike the true

God who isn’t manageable. He can’t be put on a shelf or told to hush. We want to worship what we can control.

@BillyGraham

“Most people yearn for one thing more than anything else: inner peace. Without it they have no lasting happiness or security.”

@jburnham549

You will never kneel before the throne unless you first bow at the manger. Lord, give us humility.

@JohnPiper

“It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb. 10:4). With one sentence the entire Old Testament religious system is turned into a shadow of a coming Reality.

Ways to honor your pastor

October is Pastor/Clergy Appreciation Month. How will you and your church show your gratitude to your pastor this month? Here are some ideas.

Share your skills and time.

- ▶ Babysitting
- ▶ Auto maintenance and repair
- ▶ Home repairs, maintenance and projects
- ▶ Decorating, painting and wallpapering
- ▶ Haircuts and beauty treatments
- ▶ Medical, dental and chiropractic care
- ▶ Lawn and garden upkeep
- ▶ Legal, estate and financial services
- ▶ Tutoring or lessons for children.

Provide fun, food and fellowship.

- ▶ Prepare a meal or baked goods for them (ask about favorite meals or certain foods to avoid).
- ▶ Give your pastor gift cards for restaurants, fast food or coffee shops.
- ▶ Invite your pastor and family to your home or a restaurant for a meal.
- ▶ Invite your pastor and family to go fishing, sailing, camping, hunting, to the gym, concerts, plays or sporting events. Offer to cover some or all of the costs.
- ▶ Offer your pastor’s family sports, concert or event tickets.

Pray faithfully for your pastor. Pray for:

- ▶ Intimacy with God
- ▶ Spiritual protection
- ▶ Emotional and physical well-being
- ▶ Genuine friendships
- ▶ Financial provisions
- ▶ Helpful mentors
- ▶ Quality study and prayer times.

Need more ideas? Go to blessyourpastor.org for additional resources.



Disaster Relief volunteers Jerry Lonideir of Dale Association (left) and Jeffrey Wallace of South Carolina cut a large tree away from a home in Bon Secour during cleanup after Hurricane Sally.

Photo by Cynthia Walker Watts

Southern Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers touch lives during Sally cleanup

By Cynthia Walker Watts
The Alabama Baptist

The torrential rain from Hurricane Sally sounded like bullets hitting Betty's roof as violent winds rattled the windows of her home. Betty was alone inside as she watched her tall, straight banana trees fold into an upside down "U" shape.

Suddenly the huge tree which had shaded her home was suddenly uprooted and slammed onto her roof like

a child throwing a toy during a temper tantrum. The house shook, and so did she as she grabbed her cane and walked across the house to assess the damage.

However, as the winds were wailing, she repeatedly recited Psalm 91: "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty."

Call for help

And after the storm, she called Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief Command

Center at First Baptist Church, Gulf Shores. Her request was processed, and the "J Team," as they are affectionately called — Jeffrey Wallace of Pageland, South Carolina; Jared Holt of Tuskegee Lee Association; and Jerry Lonideir of Dale Association — loaded up their chainsaws and skid steers and headed to Betty's house.

They asked me to come along as chaplain to comfort her as all the commotion and activity happened outside. Often a work team will include a chaplain, especially if the homeowner is older and alone.

Betty described her life to me and how she felt during the storm. She again recited parts of Psalm 91.

"I will say of the Lord,

'He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.' That's the protection psalm," she said. "Just like Psalm 23: The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want for anything."

'My angel'

I was so impressed to watch three men working seamlessly to cut the huge tree into manageable pieces for the skid steers to move to the road.

Hour after hour, the tree sections were moved to the street. Jerry came to tell me they would be on the roof working on a leak and placing a tarp.

In just a few moments, Betty jerked with surprise and concern that someone was on top of her house.

I explained that it was OK.

Jerry was sweeping off debris and doing some repairs.

She began to relax and said, "He will call upon me, and I will answer Him" (Ps. 91:15).

After the Disaster Relief volunteers completed the work, Betty hugged each one and thanked them for getting the tree off her house and stopping the leak.

She hugged me and thanked me for being with her that day.

"'For He will command His angels concerning you' (Ps. 91:11), and you have been my angel today," she said.

The J team and I climbed into our vehicles and caravanned to the next house. With over 400 job requests just from this command center, the work continues.✝



Photo courtesy of Cynthia Walker Watts

Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers (from left) Ron Mitchell, Laura Vante, Wanda Emfinger, Toni Long and Cynthia Watts work in the ABRD Command Center at FBC Gulf Shores.

"HE WHO DWELLS IN THE SHELTER OF THE MOST HIGH WILL REST IN THE SHADOW OF THE ALMIGHTY."

P S A L M 9 1 : 1

Church friends share Sally story

By Tracy Riggs

Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

On Sept. 14, while Hurricane Sally was still a storm off in the Gulf of Mexico, eight longtime friends who all attend Deerfoot Baptist Church, Trussville, set off for a much anticipated trip to Gulf Shores — never dreaming they would find themselves in the direct path of the storm.

The “Crazy Eight,” as they called themselves, included Jack and Judy Hill; Nick and Olga Hill; Arnold and Jo Self; Linda Taylor; and Bob Baner.

The group arrived late Monday afternoon, Taylor’s birthday.

“We’re going to have some stormy time in Gulf Shores but [we thought], it’s going to go on to New Orleans and let us have a good time,” Taylor recalled.

All day Tuesday, the group kept an eye on the weather, but did what Baptists normally do on these trips — ate and played games. But by Tuesday evening, they knew Sally’s course had shifted toward Gulf Shores.

As the winds picked up, the stilted house began to sway. Chairs and beds shook. Water sloshed in the toilets, and the wind whistled shrilly through door and window cracks. They could hear debris hitting the house.

And the vacationers once again did what Baptists do — Nick Hill read aloud Bible verses about God’s protection and

weathering the storm, and they prayed.

It was clear when Sally made landfall.

“I grabbed my husband’s hand because it was so loud,” Judy Hill said. “The house was creaking, and we could hear screeching. We could hear [debris] flying.”

And when the wind stopped, it was like turning a fan off, Taylor said. “That was the most scary part, I think. We had gotten used to hearing that wind all night, and then it was gone,” she said.

Following the storm, the group found ways to cope with the widespread power outage.

They helped their neighbors — California residents who came to Gulf Shores to escape the fires on the West Coast — cook their food. They collected water from a swimming pool to flush toilets and wash hands. They played more games.

And when they sent three of the men to survey the damage, “like Noah sent the dove out in the Bible,” said Jo Self, they saw the damage around them and how blessed they had been.

“This made our faith stronger. We all knew that God had each of us protected,” Taylor said.

Even with all that happened, the group was glad they went.

“There’s nothing like the fellowship of Christian friends in spite of the storm,” Judy Hill said.

Read the full story of the Crazy Eight’s storm experience at tabonline.org/crazy-eights. 🌈

“This [experience] made our faith stronger.”

Linda Taylor

Starting from SCRATCH

Alaska Baptist Disaster Relief grows with Alabama’s help

By Grace Thornton

The Alabama Baptist

In Alaska, disaster relief looks a little different than it does in Alabama. It’s less cutting up trees, more dealing with earthquakes and forest fires and helping villages that flood when the ice melts and comes down the river.

But the factor that interested Gary Bearce in starting up a disaster relief team in the state is the same reason volunteers do disaster relief in Alabama — people are hurting and need to hear the love and hope of Jesus.

“I’ve been in this job for four years, and we started from nothing,” said Bearce, who retired from denominational work in Alaska so that he could focus on getting the disaster relief team going.

Strong partnerships

And that effort is “connected in a big way” to Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief, he said. “We deeply appreciate the partnership we have with Alabama Baptist State Convention.”

In 2019, Mark Wakefield, Alabama’s lead strategist for Disaster Relief, went up to Alaska to lead a training for chaplains. The team didn’t have heavy equipment yet, but they knew there was always a need for spiritual care after a disaster.

Then with the help of funds provided by other state conventions and work from volunteers, the team got together a laundry and shower trailer they could take to disaster sites as a point of entry to the front lines for their



Photo by Sam Evans

Gary Bearce helped start Alaska Baptist Disaster Relief and assists other state teams as he can, most recently serving in cleanup and recovery in Louisiana following Hurricane Laura.

chaplains. There was only one problem — they didn’t have a way to pull it.

And around that time, Wakefield saw Bearce again at a meeting and asked if they had any needs. Bearce hesitated at first, but when Wakefield pressed a little, he admitted they had a big need for a truck.

Wakefield came back to Alabama and talked with leadership at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, and in early 2020, they were able to provide Alaska with a truck to pull their trailer.

“It gives us the chance to minister to those on the front lines as well as talk with homeowners and share the love of Christ,” Bearce said. “Getting there with that trailer as soon as possible is critical to our efforts.”

They have partnered with the Salvation Army, providing showers and laundry alongside them as they cook meals for the community.

They’ve also partnered with other organizations like Samaritan’s Purse and local first responders and line crews who work to help affected communities.

“Partners are vital,” Bearce said.

And as Alaska Baptists grow their team, they’re able to do more and more. Bearce recently spent time with Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers and others working in Louisiana after Hurricane Laura and got to learn more about doing need assessments and handling heavy equipment.

Bearce said he hopes in the future he will be able to bring teams from Alaska to help in the lower 48 states when there’s a need.

He also knows they’re constantly preparing in case Alaska gets another once-in-a-lifetime major earthquake, which the state has experienced in the past.

“We have small earthquakes almost every day, and they’re a reminder that another big one could be coming,” he said. 🌈

For more information about Alaska Baptist Disaster Relief, visit abcdr.org.

Linda Jones (left), co-founder of Alabama Childhood Food Solutions, a faith-based nonprofit sponsored by 38 churches in Central Alabama, and Cindy Adams prepare food for distribution.

Feeding hungry children



Photo courtesy of Jim Jones

Faith-based ministry partners with churches to help food-insecure families

By Carolyn Tomlin
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Before Jim and Linda Jones founded Alabama Childhood Food Solutions, their commitment to feeding hungry children began thousands of miles from home.

As professional nurses, the couple dedicated their vacation time each year to medical missions. Traveling to five continents on 25 international missions trips, they realized there were hungry children everywhere.

However, they didn't need to travel across the world to find those who were food insecure — they were right in central Alabama.

In fact, one in four children, or approximately 200,000, in Alabama go to bed hungry each night.

They have no way of buying food and fear they will be taken away from their parents if they ask for help.

Filling a need

“We discovered the percentage of hunger is the same in Alabama as many countries in South America and Africa — 25%,” Jim said. “Food insecure means that children and families do not know where the next meal is coming from or if they will have anything to eat.”

Returning home from an international trip, Jim and Linda prayed and thought they could help fill the need in central Alabama. With Sylacauga as their home base, their first experience was to fill 40 plastic bags with food and distribute them from the trunk of their car. That was in 2012.

Today, ACFS is a faith-based

nonprofit sponsored by 38 churches in Central Alabama including Double Oak Community Church, Mount Laurel; Marble City Baptist Church, Sylacauga; and Alpine Baptist Church.

ACFS partners with the Community Food Bank of Central Alabama and Feeding America. From a warehouse in Sylacauga, ACFS serves people in seven counties, including Talladega, Coosa, Shelby, Calhoun, Clay, Randolph and Chilton.

Most of the area is rural and people often drive 20 miles or more for groceries.

“It's God's food, and my job is to give it to those in need,” Jim said.

“ACFS is the hands, feet and heart of God” and “we share food to the hungriest” in nearby communities, Linda added.

Every dollar raised by ACFS goes to purchase food. All work is volunteer, and no one receives a salary.

A donation of \$25 can feed a child for five weekends. The criteria to get food from ACFS is “being hungry” in Central Alabama, the couple said. Their organization can purchase food at \$.16 per pound,

providing up to six meals for \$1.

The couple recalls taking food to a woman's home, opening the refrigerator to place it inside and finding nothing except ice. A grandmother asked for food for her 4-year-old granddaughter but asked nothing for herself.

COVID-19 has changed the world and the need for food. ACFS has seen a 20% increase in requests

during the pandemic, due to loss of employment, illness and school closings. Families who never before had to ask for food are now waiting in long lines just to feed their children.

In March, ACFS fed 2,020 kids each week with a weekend backpack and gave a few hundred families a generous box of food once a month.

Since then, more than 40,000 weekend bags of

food have been shared; nearly 800 families now receive food every month.

ACFS shares with kids, single parents, seniors, grandparents raising grandchildren, homeless families and veterans. In a recent week, they shared more than 53,000 pounds of food with people in need.

Oct. 11 is SBC Global Hunger Sunday,

an opportunity for Southern Baptist churches to raise awareness of hunger needs.

However, Alabama Baptists designate the third Sunday in February for the Hunger Offering emphasis, which will fall on Feb. 21, 2021.

For more information, go to tabonline.org/hunger-offering.

They use two vans with refrigerated trailers and a “Feeding Little Tummies Bus” to get food to the hungry.

The Joneses share any surplus with other churches. Randy Kissic is in charge of the food ministry at Sycamore Baptist Church in Talladega County. Once a thriving cotton mill town, much of the industry has left, and vacant buildings are everywhere.

“Our church had a soup kitchen until the pandemic hit,” Kissic said.

Relying on donations

“Instead of a soup kitchen, we had to start giving out food items to hungry families. Our church doesn't provide money, but we rely on donations from members. ACFS has given us excess food or we couldn't have provided for our people. These donations may come as gallon cans or bulk items.

“This summer, they gave us fresh fruit and vegetables. ... Using social media, we announced on Facebook and set up a distribution center at church.”

Vanessa Colley has seven children in her care, all of whom came to her as babies and toddlers.

“ACFS helps me feed ‘my’ children,” Colley said.

People often ask why she has taken on this responsibility, to which she replies, “God brought me to it. He will see me through it.”

Jim Jones often quotes Mother Teresa, who was known to feed the hungry: “If you can't feed a hundred, then feed just one.”

For more information about ACFS, go to alabamachildhood-food.com.

‘Kingdom opportunity’

Barry Bledsoe announces retirement in 2021 after 20 years as president of TBFA

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Barry Bledsoe jokes that his favorite topic is most people’s least favorite. “It includes both money and dying, and people don’t like to talk about either,” he said. “But both are facts of life. Both are realities. And talking about them can make a big difference in the kingdom of God.”

For two decades — when he retires April 1, 2021, it will be 20 years exactly — Bledsoe has been at the helm of The Baptist Foundation of Alabama. While there, one of his biggest goals has been to help Alabama Baptists think more positively and proactively about the two topics they like the least.

“Never in my life have I been as passionate about anything as I have about this Kingdom opportunity,” he said.

And it shows. In his time as TBFA president, Bledsoe has led the foundation to secure about \$280 million in estate commitments, the bulk of which is earmarked for Baptist causes. His vision for the role was to get Christ followers all over the state to think of their last act as an act of stewardship — to consider leaving part of their estate, whether large or small, to go toward ministry and missions.

‘Untapped resource’

“When you connect the dots, it’s a natural thing for a believer to do,” he said. “There’s an unbelievable untapped resource available for Kingdom ministry through mature believers seeing that last act of

planning final affairs as a biblical stewardship decision.”

He acquired his vision one day when he realized he and his wife, Judy, hadn’t looked at their end-of-life plans as a biblical stewardship decision. God laid on his heart that everything they owned — not just the paycheck they tithed — belonged to God.

‘Tip of the iceberg’

“My belief is that there are tens of thousands of Barry Bledsoes sitting in the pews — people who are trying to be good stewards but never thought about this being a stewardship decision,” he said. “So far, we’ve only served around 1,000 families. This is just the tip of the iceberg as far as the opportunity that’s available.”

To help families plan — both for giving and for providing for their families — Bledsoe has built a world-class staff ranging from CPAs to attorneys. They travel around the state meeting with people to help them plan how to steward their assets after they’re gone, whether that be through the Foundation itself or not.

“This is really important to us; we just want to serve the church so the church can equip its people,” Bledsoe said. “We’re not trying to build assets of the Foundation; we’re trying to connect people with resources to fuel Kingdom ministries wherever they choose.”

It’s a model he’s been able to share with other states too. His vision is for churches all over to be equipped to help their members



Photo courtesy of Barry Bledsoe

Barry Bledsoe says the realization that he and his wife, Judy, hadn’t originally looked at their own end-of-life financial plans as biblical stewardship led him to better see the purpose in his role as president of The Baptist Foundation of Alabama.



TBFA photo

Barry Bledsoe has led The Baptist Foundation of Alabama since 2001, securing millions in Kingdom commitments and building a world-class staff.

make good end-of-life decisions.

“Why wouldn’t the church be the place that helped families make sure they are taking care of their families in this arena and being a steward should they choose to do so? It’s so natural for people to want to do that, and they don’t know who to trust to help them,” Bledsoe said. “The church can step into that space.”

That would help people care better for their families but also fuel the future of missions and ministry, he said. If 1,000 families can amass \$280 million for the cause of Christ, imagine what 15,000 or 20,000 could do.

“It’s a huge opportunity and responsibility for the next leader because I do think the best days are ahead by far,” he said.

A search committee is in place with hopes of naming a candidate for Bledsoe’s position by the end of the year.

Rick Lance, executive director of

the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said Bledsoe’s legacy “is one of integrity, innovation and insight.”

‘Man of integrity’

“He has helped to establish The Baptist Foundation of Alabama as a preeminent leader of state convention foundations,” Lance said. “He is a man of integrity who leads people to be the same. His honesty with people and his fidelity to the cause of Christ are admirable. He has led TBFA to be the gold standard of excellence in every aspect of the ministry.”

Bledsoe says the vision was never his; he’s convinced it was always God’s, “because it wasn’t on my radar when I first came to TBFA.”

“I’ve been blessed to be a tool in the hand of a mighty God who’s got some ministries to fund out there,” he said. “That’s how we feel at the Foundation — we’re just tools in the hand of the Lord.”

For more information about TBFA, visit tbfa.org or tabonline.org/tbfa.

Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

2020 marks 275th anniversary of Hannah More's birth

Hannah More (1745–1833) was an English writer, abolitionist, educator and philanthropist.

This year is the 275th anniversary of her birth.

On Feb. 2, 1745, Hannah More was born to Jacob and Mary Lynch More near Bristol, England. Her father taught her Latin, mathematics and French.

He set up a school for girls and another for boys, and More taught at the girls' school. While there, she wrote pastoral plays based on rural life. "The Search After Happiness," written in 1762, had sold more than 10,000 copies by the mid-1780s.

At 22 years old, More became engaged to William Turner, a wealthy man. He postponed their wedding three times, and after six years terminated the engagement. More

subsequently suffered a nervous breakdown.

Turner induced her to accept 200 pounds (Sterling) a year as compensation, which allowed her to become independent at a time when most women weren't.

More traveled to London where she became a prominent member of the Blue Stockings Society, a group of women involved in intellectual pursuits.

She met playwright David Garrick and the great lexicographer Samuel Johnson.

Writing for the stage

More traveled annually to London and wrote three plays for the stage: "The Inflexible Captive," "Percy: A Tragedy" and "Fatal Falsehood."

In the 1780s, More, a member of

the Church of England, withdrew from London society and embraced serious evangelical views. She published "Sacred Dramas," which ran through 19 editions.

In 1787 she joined the Clapham Sect, a group of abolitionists that included William Wilberforce. In 1788 she published, "Slavery, A Poem," when Wilberforce campaigned for Parliament.

Most historians agree she was the most influential woman in the British abolitionist movement.

More wrote several ethical books after moving to Somerset, England, in 1785 with her sister Martha. They include, "Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education," "Practical Piety" and "Moral

Sketches." More wrote "Cheap Repository Tracts" from 1795 to 1798. They were a huge success, selling more than 2 million copies by March 1796. The tracts urged the poor to trust in God, and to practice such virtues as contentment, sobriety and industry.

Philanthropist

Encouraged by Wilberforce, More did philanthropic work for the poor in Mendip, Somerset. She set up 12 schools there by 1800, where the study of the Bible and the catechism were taught.

Philanthropists from many places made pilgrimages to visit More when she was an octogenarian. Her mind was sharp until two years before her death at age 88.

More died Sept. 7, 1833, and is buried at the Church of All Saints, Wrington, Somerset.✝

By Joanne Sloan

Joanne Sloan, a member of First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, has been a published writer of articles and books for 30 years. She has a bachelor's degree double majoring in history and English from East Texas State University (now Texas A&M University-Commerce) and a master's degree specializing in English from the University of Arkansas (1978).



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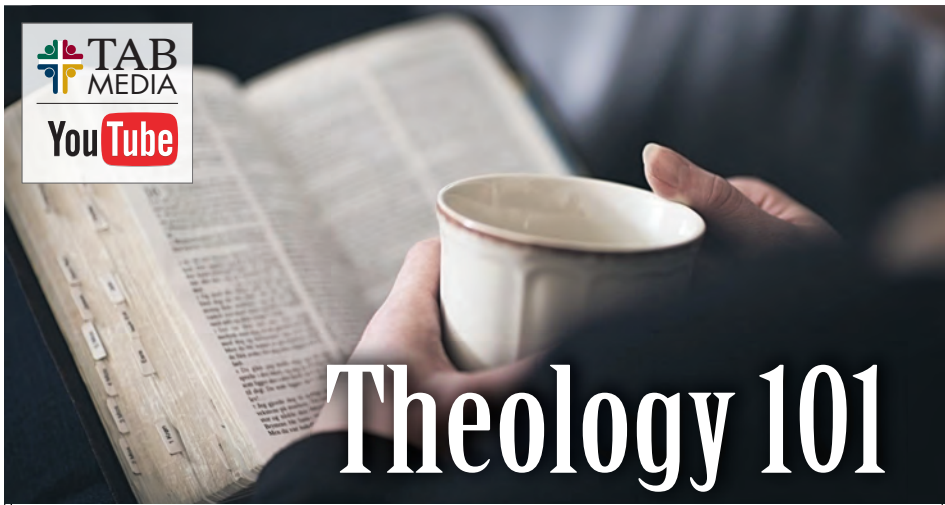
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BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Biblical Mysteries

Christ and the Church

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

In the oft-read passage of Ephesians 5:25–33, the ideal marriage is set forth as an earthly reflection of the Church. Toward the end of this analogy we read the summary declaration, “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church” (v. 32). Once again, we remind ourselves that biblical mysteries refer to truths previously hidden or unknown fully, but which God in His time has chosen to disclose. One of these is the relationship between Christ and the Church.

Basic to this relationship is the fact that Christ loves the Church, having given “Himself for her” (v. 25). A bit later the passage tells us that Christ “nourishes and cherishes” the Church (v. 29).

Body of Christ

The Church in its broad sense as the body of Christ is composed of multiple local churches. Should we be inclined to criticize any aspect of the Church, we must first recall that Christ our Savior loves and cherishes what we would criticize. Similarly, should local church members become disenchanted with their church, they do well to remember that Christ loves and cherishes local churches in spite of imperfections or deficiencies. We must never dislike what our Lord likes.

Because true believers are part of the Church as Christ’s earthly body, to be negative or opposed to one’s church is to hate one’s “own flesh” (v. 29). We sometimes hear

of people who say they hate their bodies. While we probably know what they mean, we must never find ourselves hating Christ’s body, of which we are a part. We do well to love what Jesus loves. And He loves the Church.

Spiritual nourishment

As the body of Christ, a church gets its spiritual nourishment from Christ. In the context of the church, we receive this divinely supplied nourishment. Sometimes fasting from regular food has both a physical and spiritual purpose. However, fasting from spiritual nourishment is never positive. If Christ prepared His spiritual table in the setting of the church, we must not neglect to hear and respond to the dinner bell. When the church gathers, we must choose to be present at the table.

God’s hidden truth about the church that is now revealed includes the glorious future awaiting the Church. Christ will yet “present her to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (v. 27). What a day that will be!

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.



‘Our soldiers need you,’ says DOM Corbitt about chaplains

Otis Corbitt says years ago, God put a passion for soldiers in his heart. And over the years, he has seen God’s purpose in that.

For the past three years, he has served as senior chaplain for the Alabama Army National Guard, and in September 2019, he got promoted to full colonel. In those roles, he has been a mentor to the state’s 31 Army National Guard chaplains, ministered directly to soldiers and served as an advisor to Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Sheryl Gordon.



CORBITT

And even before this most recent assignment, he’s had a longtime, dedicated chaplaincy ministry — in 2010, he did a yearlong tour in Iraq.

“It’s been a great blessing and a

great responsibility,” said Corbitt, who also serves as director of missions for Covington Baptist Association.

Corbitt will retire Oct. 31 from the Alabama Army National Guard — it’s required when you turn 60.

But he’ll continue to serve in his role with Covington Association.

He asks pastors all over the state to consider becoming a chaplain — it’s a great missions field, he said, and chaplains can be “hard to come by” in some parts of the state.

“As chaplains, they will touch lives that will never come in our churches,” Corbitt said. “We need to get more Southern Baptists out there. There are positions available now — our soldiers need you.” (Grace Thornton)

“They will touch lives that will never come in our churches.”

Otis Corbitt

director of missions, Covington Baptist Association



3 stories you should know



Facebook photo/Morning Star News

In Nigeria's Katsina state, teenaged twin sisters Hassana and Hus-saina Garba were kidnapped from their home beside the Evangelical Church Winning All worship building in Kwakware village on Sept. 18. Their father, a church elder, was shot in the attack but was not killed, sources said. Four Christians in Kaduna state, Nigeria, were killed and several kidnapped on Sept. 6 by suspected Fulani herdsmen. (MS)

Rainer book deal draws ire of LifeWay trustees

LifeWay Christian Resources first filed suit then changed course in a grievance against its former president and CEO Thom Rainer.

LifeWay trustees filed a lawsuit on Sept. 28 against Rainer for violating a non-compete clause in his transition agreement that forbids him from working with competitors for 12 months after his retirement. Rainer earlier announced a publishing deal with Tyndale.

But on Sept. 30, LifeWay trustees announced they had decided not to proceed with the suit and will seek to resolve the dispute without litigation.

Read more at tabonline.org/rainer-suit. (RNS)



RAINER

GuideStone trustees to seek next president

GuideStone Financial Resources trustees have appointed a search committee to begin considering a new president for the organization.

The move comes at the request of GuideStone President O.S. Hawkins, though no timeline has been set regarding Hawkins' eventual retirement.

Hawkins assumed the presidency of GuideStone in 1997 and will continue providing leadership to GuideStone for 2021 and perhaps longer if needed, according to trustees.

GuideStone is sponsor of the largest faith-based mutual fund family in the U.S. Read more at tabonline.org/hawkins. (BP)



HAWKINS

Headline news from around the Southeast

Georgia

The Atlanta Braves recently honored Howard Koepka, church consultant for Georgia's Noonday Baptist Association, as a "hometown hero" for his work in food distribution to the needy, *The Christian Index* reported. "This man rose to the occasion in uniting nonprofits and other organizations in Cobb County to provide food to those in need," a video by the Braves organization explained. "He led the charge in communicating and coordinating with more than 60 churches, school systems, government agencies and nonprofits in making and distributing much-needed food."

Florida

In spite of the COVID-19 pandemic, Camp Connexion, held in June at Pickett Lake Camp in Branford, Florida, experienced its highest attendance in its 13-year history with 126 campers in grades 2-6. Fourteen campers made decisions

for Christ, and four were baptized at the camp, the *Florida Baptist Witness* reported. This year's camp resulted in no reports of COVID-19 cases following the four-day, three-night experience.

Louisiana

Thirty-six Louisiana Baptist churches whose facilities were destroyed by Hurricane Laura have received much-needed financial gifts to help in recovery efforts. The emergency financial gifts were possible because of donations to Louisiana Baptists' state mission offering, as well as funds given by state convention partners in the South, special offerings from churches and contributions by individuals, Louisiana's *Baptist Message* reported.

Mississippi

Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers are continuing to respond to the devastation caused by back-to-back hurricanes that battered

the Gulf Coast as well as the Florida Panhandle. Hurricane Laura, which made landfall in late August, and Hurricane Sally, which made landfall in mid-September, left behind a swath of suffering. Mississippi Baptists are serving alongside other Disaster Relief volunteers from multiple state conventions to provide physical assistance as well as a spiritual witness, *The Baptist Record* reported.

Tennessee

One Faith Christian Center, a small church in Memphis, Tennessee, is making a big impact as it connects with inner-city communities. The church baptized about 50 new Christians last year and is having similar success this year, Tennessee's *Baptist and Reflector* reported. In its outreach efforts, the church has sponsored numerous evangelism events and partnered with local schools. Reflecting on the fruit of his church's efforts, Pastor Barron Martin said, "I give God all the glory."

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

▶ **Charles Reece Woods** — retired associate pastor of First Baptist Church, Albertville, and founder of The Great Physician's Clinic — died Sept. 16. He was 86.

Woods grew up in Holly Pond and went on to earn a bachelor's degree from Howard College (now Samford) in Birmingham and a master's degree in church music from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

He served as a minister of music in Dothan, Montgomery, Huntsville and Hueytown before being called to First, Albertville, in 1970. He served as a minister of music, youth and senior adults over his years of service there and later as a deacon. He was president of the Alabama Singing Men in 1985 and 1986 and received the Retired Minister of the Year Award from Samford University in 2004. Woods also founded The Great Physician's Clinic to provide free dental care and medical services that have helped thousands of people in need. Many people heard and responded to the gospel while receiving care at the clinic.

Woods is survived by his wife of 65 years, JoAnn; son, Charles Jr.; daughter, Melissa; and four grandchildren.



WOODS

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

▶ **Brian Lee** said **Shades Crest Baptist Church, Bluff Park**, has been “a wonderful place to serve” as pastor. After seven years there, he retired Aug. 30.

“I am honored to have been able to partner with them in ministry,” he said. “The staff is superb, and the people are very committed to the church.

I can only hope that I was able to provide at least some of the blessing to them that they provided for me and my wife.”

He and his wife, Clella, came to Shades Crest in 2013 from Lafayette Baptist Church, Fayetteville, North Carolina, where he had served as pastor since 1988. Since retiring, the Lees have moved to Tennessee and are

“waiting to see what the Lord brings our way that is ours to do.”

DALE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Holmes Baptist Church, Arifton**, will host a Family and Friends Day and pastor recognition on Oct. 18, at 10:30 a.m. A meal will follow. Wayne Williams is pastor.

MADISON ASSOCIATION

▶ A century ago, **Mable Hill Baptist Church, Ardmore**, began its journey, and it “continues to be a beacon of light, hope and celebration until this day,” said C. Mac McCutcheon, speaker of

the Alabama House of Representatives, as he presented the church with a resolution Sept. 13.

Mable Hill — whose pastor, Mike Clark, has served at the church for 22 years — celebrated its 100th anniversary that day with a special service that featured Compassion Trio from Hazel Green and a church history presentation by Tony Bafford.

McCutcheon congratulated them on a “rich history” that includes sharing the gospel across 18 states and three continents and being recognized at the state level for baptisms. Charlie Howell, director of missions for Madison Baptist Association, also presented a certificate on behalf of the association, and Ken Allen of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions presented certificates on behalf of the SBOM and the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission.



Submitted photo

NORTH JEFFERSON ASSOCIATION

▶ **Sammie Reid** said even as a child, he thought one day God might call him to be a pastor. Now as he's retiring, he's looking back over 54 years of living out that calling, the past 35 of which have been at **Mount Zion Baptist Church, Warrior**.

“It's been a great experience — the people have made it that kind of experience,” said Reid, whose last Sunday at Mount Zion was Oct. 4. “Everywhere I've been, every church I've served, the people have been so good and kind and gracious to me.”

Before serving at Mount Zion, he also served

at Zola Baptist Church, Mount View Baptist Church and Gethsemane Baptist Church, all in the Hayden area. He's been known throughout the years to have his sermons outlined and written as much as a year in advance.

Roger Willmore, director of missions for Calhoun Baptist Association and a longtime friend of Reid, called him a “consistent and faithful” pastor.

“His ambition was to be the best pastor he could be and to bloom where he was planted. I have always respected him for that,” Willmore said. “He is a true shepherd who faithfully and consistently feeds and leads his people.”

Reid said he has a heart for small churches and would love if this next season could include some interim or bivocational work.



REID

UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

▶ **The University of Mobile** will host “Campus & Community Night” on Oct. 18 at 5 p.m. on the lawn in front of Weaver Hall. The free outdoor family-friendly evening is open to the public and will feature live music from the Alabama School of the Arts and a message from Dauphin Way Baptist Church Senior Pastor Blake Newsom. Food will be available for purchase from food trucks on site from 5 to 6 p.m. RamCorps, Sofree, REP, D5 and Exit 13 will perform live. Voices of Mobile and Ignite Worship will lead a praise and worship concert from 6 to 7 p.m. Newsom will speak during the concert. More information is available at umobile.edu/communitynight.

(News compiled by TAB Media staff)

Persecuted church

Religious freedom in Sudan improving, USCIRF report says

WASHINGTON — The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom reports that Sudan's transitional government has, in the past year, improved religious freedom in that country.

In April 2019, a revolution ended the 30-year regime of President Omar al-Bashir. The transitional government has done the following:

- ▶ Drawn an interim constitution giving freedom of religion and belief to all. Islam is not listed as the primary source of law.
- ▶ Repealed punishment for non-conformity

to Sunni Islam, banned female genital mutilation and ended flogging for blasphemy.

- ▶ Designated Dec. 25 as a national holiday.
- ▶ Agreed to monitor human rights abuses and religious freedom violations.

However, properties confiscated from churches by the al-Bashir government have not been returned, no new permits have been issued for churches and blasphemy is still punishable by imprisonment.

Sudan is No. 7 on Open Doors' 2020 World Watch List of places where it is most difficult to be a Christian. The recently released USCIRF report states the U.S. still deems Sudan a “state sponsor of terrorism.” (TAB)



LEE

FOURTH IN A SERIES

Total withdrawal

Pandemic limits recovery group meetings, exacerbates addiction issues

Social distancing guidelines and limits on in-person gatherings affected life for most Americans, but those in addiction recovery felt a tremendous impact.

“The concept of social distancing makes [those with addiction] even more vulnerable because it interferes with many of the support systems that can help them to reach recovery,” said Dr. Nora Volkow, director of the National Institute of Health’s National Institute on Drug Abuse in a video blog conversation in April. “There is tremendous concern about these two epidemics colliding with one another.”

The pandemic made it more difficult for addiction patients to access treatment and medication, as many clinics reduced the number of patients they could take care of, Volkow said.

The drug addiction epidemic in the U.S. is broad, Volkow said.

“It’s gone from prescription opioids to heroin to synthetic opioids like fentanyl. And what we have observed ramping up over the past two or three years is

an increase in fatalities from the use of psychostimulant drugs,” Volkow said.

She noted the number of deaths from methamphetamine has increased five-fold over a period of six years and deaths from cocaine are going up.

“The reality is that people are now dying not just from opioids, but from mixtures of drugs and stimulant drugs, most notably methamphetamine,” Volkow said.

Complex condition

Addiction is a complex condition, described as a brain disease by the American Psychiatric Association. Addicts compulsively use and abuse substances despite the harmful physical, social or emotional consequences.

“They keep using alcohol or a drug even when they know it will cause problems,” the APA website states. “People with a substance use disorder have distorted thinking, behavior and body functions. Changes in the brain’s wiring are what cause people to have intense cravings for the drug and make it hard to stop using the drug.”

An addict’s community makes a difference too. The number one treatment help for a drug addict is to get away from the people they use drugs with, according to Shane Tidwell, certified recovery support specialist for Recovery Services of Marshall County.

Support groups like Alcoholics Anonymous and Celebrate Recovery can help addicts form new social groups through 12-step programs and gatherings with fellow addicts. However, group meetings became difficult with COVID-19 restrictions.

Gary Warner, who has been involved with Celebrate Recovery since 2013 and now is Celebrate Recovery ministry leader at McElwain Baptist Church, Birmingham, said fellow addicts are “crashing left and right during this time. ... Most people who have an addiction, it’s either gotten worse or it’s gone full-blown.”

Support needed

Warner noted that for security reasons, some support groups won’t meet online. Many that do require headphones and being in separate rooms for privacy. Many addicts don’t have the necessary technical equipment.

“They are lost, and they don’t know what to do about it,” Warner said. “They need people who can support them.”

Support starts with understanding, experts say. People with little knowledge of the science of addiction tend to automatically exhibit certain feelings toward those with a history of addiction.

Those outside the recovery community often believe willpower should be enough to overcome addiction, Tidwell said. But addicts and recovery clini-

cians know that’s not true. “Addiction is not a moral failing,” Tidwell said. “Addiction is a disease, but it is preventable and treatable.” (TAB)

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123rf.com

Shoes, friendships result from walks

By Lanell Downs Smith
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Ramblin' Rick" Hagens walks across one state every summer, collecting pledges for each mile to buy shoes for children in Mexico.

On these walks, Hagens has made countless friends who became lifelong supporters of Harvest Evangelism, of which he is founder. While the coronavirus pandemic postponed his scheduled walk through Idaho this summer, not even COVID-19 could keep one of his journeys from impacting the lives of those



Photo courtesy of Rick Hagens
Rick Hagens has made countless friends who support the addiction recovery ministries of Harvest Evangelism.

encouraged his friend to spend a few months at Harvest Evangelism.

"Charlie was a preacher, not an addict, but I believe you can live with depression or with addictions when someone loves you, and you know that you're loved and that you will be loved," Hagens said. "Charlie spent three months with us, and it changed his

life. He went back to Minnesota and preached for another 10 years."

Walker died in 2018 while entering the pulpit to preach. This year his wife, Nadine, donated five boxes of Walker's "church clothes" to

the men at His Place.

Hagens said the clothing blessed several of the men with little access to "dress-up clothing."

"One of our guys had on one of Charlie's jackets [at graduation]," Hagens said. "Charlie was a precious friend."

Now Hagens walks not only for shoes but also to motivate other Christians toward "taking a step and becoming a part of history."

"I said, 'God, there's people who wouldn't normally go to church. Let me meet them.' God put me where I met them, and when I go to church and share these stories it brings comfort to people who realize they can walk across the street or meet someone in Walmart." 🌈

Opening doors

Through the years Walker preached in Alabama and Hagens returned to Minnesota, often preaching more there than he did at home. Hagens said he eventually helped Walker open a men's addiction recovery home in Minnesota.

Some 15 years ago, Hagens said Walker experienced a dark time of depression, and Hagens



Photo by Kenny Young

Graduates of His Place, the men's recovery ministry of Harvest Evangelism, celebrate one year of sobriety and life change following their Aug. 15 graduation ceremony at FBC Opelika.

God redeems AND FORGIVES

Graduates share testimonies of lives changed

(continued from page 1)
fell in love and were married Aug. 16, after completing the year-long program.

Tyler McLain recalled how God used His Place to completely turn his life from drug addiction to a heart for ministry — he's registered to attend Summit International School of Ministry in the fall.

Financial support for Harvest Evangelism has dwindled during the pandemic, and Hagens said some friends of the ministry urged him to close one of the homes.

"It's cheaper to bury them than it is to house them," Hagens reflected. "I told the crowd [at graduation], 'You just heard 23 testimonies. Who do you want to send to Hell, the men or the women? Who do you want to put

back on the street or in an abusive situation?"

"I believed God would be faithful and He has."

Tempting options

Hagens noted 24 graduates should have been at the ceremony.

Another program participant had just two weeks left in the program when he received his COVID-19 stimulus check and elected to leave His Place.

"He left on Saturday and they found him dead on Wednesday with a needle in his arm," Hagens lamented. "It just breaks your heart. We see it far too often."

In fact, Hagens has seen more addiction cases than ever this year due to pandemic restrictions.

"Addicts don't do well by

themselves," Hagens said. "During COVID, they've gone from functioning to catastrophic because they've used more [drugs] and have experienced more emptiness in their lives.

"There's no small group or Sunday School, no Celebrate Recovery," he said. "There are more drugs available and they're cheaper now than they were 10 years ago."

Overcomers

"But John wrote in exile that you can overcome the enemy by the blood of the Lamb and the word of your testimony, when you love not your life unto death," Hagens said. "That's what we tell people: You can overcome the enemy."

To learn more about Harvest Evangelism, follow Hagens on Facebook at tabonline.org/rick-hagens. 🌈

To learn more about Harvest Evangelism, follow Hagens on Facebook.

ONEMISSION: The Great Commission ONEPROGRAM: The Cooperative Program MANYMINISTRIES: Great Commission Ministries



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Registration and more information is available at onemissionstudents.org/OneNight.



UPDATE ON STATE CONVENTION AND PASTORS CONFERENCE

The 2020 Annual Meeting of the Alabama Baptist State Convention, scheduled for November 17-18 in Montgomery, **will not be held this year.** Watch *The Alabama Baptist*, email, social media and alsbom.org/convention for details about an online one-hour State Missions Celebration, Tuesday, November 17 at 2 p.m., and a virtual IMB Sending Celebration that same evening. Also, visit albaptistpc.com for information about the virtual Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference taking place all day Monday, November 16.

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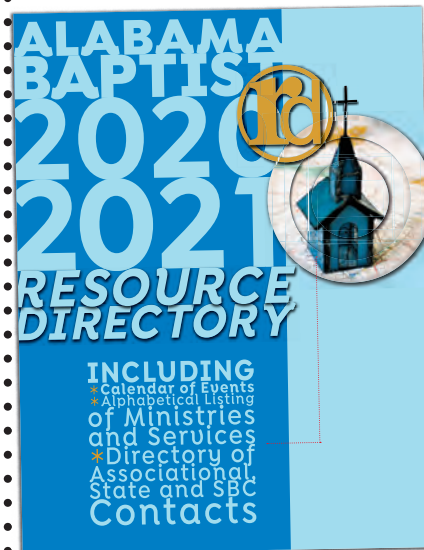
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Tips for re-recruiting church volunteers going forward

By Michael J. Brooks
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When it comes to finding willing workers for church programs, the next few months may be especially tough, according to Ken Braddy, director of Sunday School at LifeWay Christian Resources.

“We’re in a post-COVID time as we regather, and many of our churches will need to re-recruit workers and possibly find new workers to replace those who can’t come back,” Braddy said.

Pray first

Braddy hosted the inaugural “Adult Ministry Meet-up” webcast from Nashville on Sept. 3, assisted by LifeWay team leader Dwayne McCrary.

Braddy shared tips on “finding all the volunteers you will ever need.”

“Of course, we begin with prayer,” he said. “This isn’t just a formula we revert to. When Jesus said to

ask God to send workers to the harvest fields, the word He used means ‘beg because of lack or need.’ Our prayer for workers is pleading before the Lord for harvesters.”

Braddy also suggested churches recruit workers with a vision rather than a job description.

“I certainly believe in job descriptions,” he added.

“People need to know their assignments. But it’s better to instill a vision. A middle-school boys teacher, for example, might need to hear the long-term goal of making these young men into mature Christian men, husbands and fathers.”

Braddy said all recruitment should be time-specific.

“Most people think we’re

recruiting them forever,” he explained. “But not everyone needs to do their jobs forever. I suggest recruiting from August to August, or whatever the church year is, and then talking about the

possibility of remaining when the year is ending.”

He noted churches must provide resources to potential workers so they know they’re not alone, answer their questions and overcome

their objections.

“Can you name an industry that doesn’t provide training for workers to learn new skills?” Braddy asked rhetorically. “We must be diligent to assure our team that we won’t fail to provide what they need.”

Read more tips for recruiting volunteers at tabonline.org/volunteers.

“We ought always to be thinking of new people to help us in ministry.”

Ken Braddy
director of Sunday School, LifeWay Christian Resources



ONE another

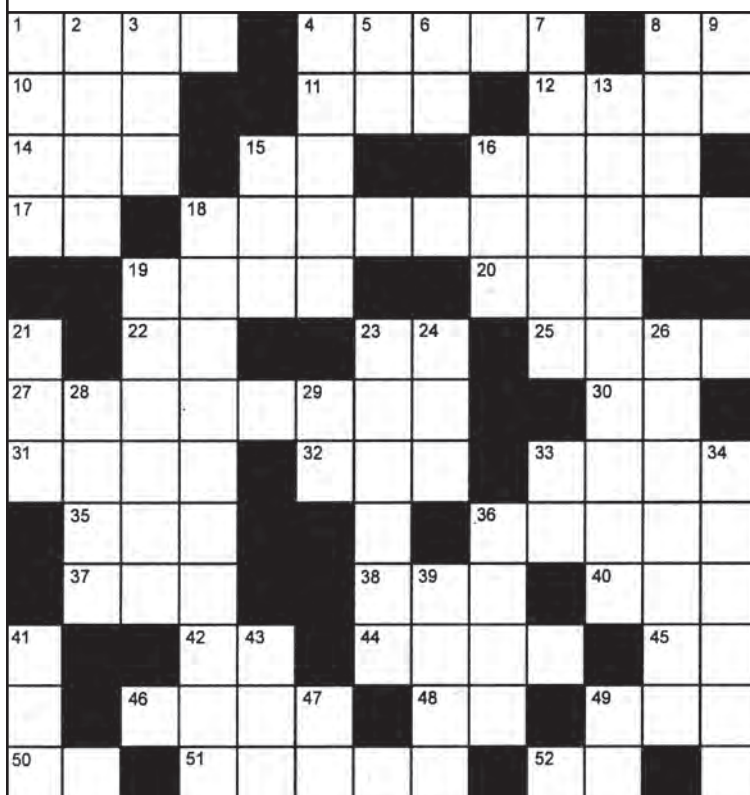
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MONDAY, NOVEMBER 16

The 2020 Pastors Conference will be completely virtual. Sermons will premiere online Nov. 16 at albaptistpc.com.

Subscribe to the Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference on YouTube to receive notifications when the sermons premiere.

Christian Crossword

By Janet Adkins Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

- For God cannot be tempted with _____. (James 1:13)
- The voice of doves _____ing upon their breasts. (Nah. 2:7)
- From. (French)
- Feather scarf.
- Grow old.
- Highest point.
- He shall pour _____ upon it. (Lev. 2:1)
- Prayer book. (abbr.)
- Father, forgive _____. (Luke 23:34)
- North Dakota.
- He that goeth about as a _____ revealeth secrets. (Prov. 20:19)
- Let God be _____, but every man a liar. (Rom. 3:4)
- Absence. (abbr.)
- Egyptian sun god.
- He had sent messengers to _____ king of Egypt. (2 Kings 17:4)
- Now the first lot

- came forth to Jehoiarib ... the fourth to _____im. (1 Chron. 24:7-8)
- So can no _____ both yield saltwater and fresh. (James 3:12)
- Citizens band radio.
- Spanish aunts.
- Prefix meaning “before.”
- Ye shall not fulfill the _____ of the flesh. (Gal. 5:16)
- Liquified natural gas.
- Then _____ and the other apostles answered, we ought to obey God. (Acts 5:29)
- Steamer. (abbr.)
- Hubbub.
- Before. (poetic)
- Each. (abbr.)
- It is a _____ thing that the king requireth. (Dan. 2:11)
- Part of speech. (abbr.)
- Naum, which was

- the son of _____. (Luke 3:25)
- Return unto _____. (Mal. 3:7)
- _____ boweth down. (Isa. 46:1)
- What shall we _____? (Acts 2:37)
- _____ women shall take hold of one man. (Isa. 4:1)
- Representing 3.14159.

Down

- Black wood. (poetic)
- Faith is made _____. (Rom. 4:14)
- Adjective suffix.
- Thou preparest a _____ before me. (Ps. 23:5)
- Symbol for the element Silver.
- Exist.
- Belonging to a notable harlot.
- Greek community.
- Former.
- And I will _____ them with the sword.
- The name of his city was _____. (Gen. 36:39)
- Beverage.
- I am purposed that my mouth shall not _____. (Ps. 17:3)
- Absent without permission.
- Ship’s stern.
- Indian nobleman.
- They were afraid both _____ and other. (Jer. 36:16)
- Ye _____ days and months. (Gal. 4:10)
- Greases.
- News service.
- French article.
- _____ clef.
- Skin opening.
- Condemn to everlasting punishment.
- Receive him not, neither _____ him God speed. (2 John 10)
- Tavern brew.
- Roman numeral four.
- At intervals of two.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For October 11

Explore the Bible

By Robert L. Olsen, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



GOD PROTECTS Isaiah 31:1–9

False Hope (1–3)

The Assyrians had been running roughshod over the lands of the Middle East. This empire was so great that eventually it would extend from the Persian Gulf all the way to Egypt itself. Israel was in the path of Assyria since this small nation was situated in such an important location, the land bridge connecting the Middle East to Egypt. All major empires had to pass through Israel to get to Egypt, a major power in the area. Egypt liked having Israel as a buffer state and often was open to an alliance with them.

The Assyrians were threatening the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah would be next. Israel looked to Egypt for help, but God, through Isaiah, confronted Hezekiah and warned him not to trust in Egypt.

This is exactly what Moses warned against in Deuteronomy 17:16, when he said for Israel not to turn to Egypt for help specifically regarding acquiring horses.

It is easy for us to criticize Hezekiah. In hindsight we can see how Israel was not to trust in other nations but rather trust in God for their help. Yet we are often guilty of doing the same thing. How often do we look to our bank account or our job for security? We may trust in our ability to get things done.

But time and again in the Bible, God tells us to trust in Him first and foremost. Proverbs 3:5–6 tells us to trust in the Lord with all our heart, not in our own ability or financial security. Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:33 to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness instead of trusting in riches and circumstances. So while we may look back at Hezekiah and think him foolish for his desire to secure Egypt's help, we need to look in the mirror and see if we are doing the same — trusting in something other than God for our security.

True Faithfulness (4–5)

Isaiah tells the readers that God

Himself will do battle for His people and shield Jerusalem. In fact, Isaiah says God will “pass over” Jerusalem and rescue it. The use of the verb “to pass over” is surely intentional by Isaiah as it calls to mind the Passover, the last of the plagues God sent on Egypt in order to free His people from captivity. It is no accident that Isaiah uses this considering the attempt of Hezekiah to ally with Egypt, the country that once held Israel captive. The Passover was the culmination of 10 plagues on the Egyptians as God judged Egypt and freed His people. Why would the Israelites want to go rely on Egypt, when they could rely on the One who defeated Egypt?

The Israelites' should have trusted God, but their faith wavered. But God did not abandon them. The same is true for us today. God calls us to trust Him in every aspect of life. Our job as Christians is to seek to glorify God in how we live, how we work, raise a family, respond to authority, deal with sickness, etc. But even when we fail to live up to God's standards, God remains faithful to His promises, and we are called to repent and turn back to God (see 1 John 1:9).

Repentance Demonstrated (6–9)

God confronts the Israelites about their idol worship, trusting in useless human creations of stone and wood, as if these can save them. God then confirms that He will defeat the Assyrians, promising that it is He who will bring victory, not Egypt.

God is no different today. He is true to His promises, and we can look forward to their fulfillment. Knowing this should bring us great encouragement and help us in our daily walk with God.

Our ultimate hope is in Christ and that He has died for us, forgiven our sins, so that we can be made right with God, living for Him now, but also in eternity. This should give us great comfort.✠

Bible Studies for Life

By Jeffery M. Leonard, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Biblical Studies, Samford University



HONOR ALL RELATIONSHIPS Exodus 20:15–17; Psalm 37:1–6

While the original settings of most the Psalms have been lost to the annals of history, there are a few whose place in the life of ancient Israel can still be recovered. One such psalm is Psalm 15, a work that once served as an “entrance liturgy” for worship at the temple.

Imagine yourself as a pilgrim in Bible times, making your way up to the Temple Mount for worship. As you prepare to enter one of the temple's many gates, you are met with the challenge from a temple guard that forms verse 1: “O Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill?” What answer should you give? What response will elicit the “You may pass” that forms the psalm's final verse: “Those who do these things shall never be moved”? The answer lies in the psalm's middle section.

These verses list the qualifications for those whom God deems worthy to enter His presence. But what a fascinating list. Each and every one of the psalm's descriptions of those who can visit the Temple Mount is an ethical qualification. Nothing is said of crossing the right theological t's or dotting the right doctrinal i's.

Worthy worshippers are those who walk blamelessly, do what is right, speak truth from their heart, utter no slander, do no wrong to a neighbor, cast no slurs, despise the vile but honor God-fearers, keep their oaths, lend to the poor without interest and take no bribes.

It is not that right doctrine is not important; it is that right conduct is equally important. Amos tells us God despises the praise of those whose worship is devoted but whose lives are marked by oppressing the poor (5:11, 21–24).

James says even demons have right doctrine, but their right doctrine is not enough (2:19).

Even Jesus Himself, when asked what was the greatest commandment, was careful to attach “Love your neighbor” to “Love the Lord your God” (Matt. 22:37–39).

God wants His people to believe the right things, but He also wants them to do the right things.

Be a person of integrity in both your actions and speech.

(Ex. 20:15–16)

The eighth and ninth commandments are examples of God's insistence that the people called by His name act righteously toward others. He commands, “You shall not steal,” and, “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.” Both commands are directed at moments when our love for neighbor is put to the test by our own selfishness. We want something, so we are tempted to take it. We want the personal benefit of seeing one person succeed or another fail, so we are tempted to be untruthful in our words.

Find contentment in what God provides. (Ex. 20:17)

The 10th commandment digs even deeper into this matter as it goes beyond our actions (stealing) or our words (false testimony) to our very thoughts and desires. A person who honors God is satisfied with the blessings God has given him or her. They do not gauge their own blessings by comparing them with the blessings others have received. They work hard and act wisely, but they do so to honor God and care for those around them, not to satisfy their craving for what others have.

All we desire rests in God. (Ps. 37:1–6)

Psalm 37 offers kind counsel to those who are tempted to let material desires get the better of them, to those apt to let desire for something relatively unimportant now crowd out concern for what is most important ultimately. The psalmist urges us not to be consumed with the actions or even the apparent successes of those who do wrong. Those brief moments of flourishing will pass away soon enough. Instead, we should wait on and delight in the Lord. We should trust Him to give us what we need when we need it.✠



Media reviews

COMEDY

Michael Jr. to perform interactive virtual comedy shows

By Tracy Riggs
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

A unique virtual comedy performance is taking place in October with comic, actor, author and inspirational speaker Michael Jr.'s online Laugh Your Mask Off Tour.

"It's going to be strategically inspiring," Michael Jr. said. "For sure, we need to laugh these days, but people need to be inspired. ... People laugh [and] your heart just naturally opens up. If the heart is open, it's a great time to make a deposit of some inspiration that can help people in these times."

Wanting more time with his family, Michael Jr. began considering a virtual event a year-and-a-half ago, well before COVID-19 restrictions canceled live performances. So when the pandemic arrived, his "digital comedy shows [were] already in position to go."

Michael Jr. had filmed a special to be released in theaters for one night but wasn't able to follow up with it. When stay-at-home orders began, he met with fans virtually but found that comedy and Zoom were not compatible.

Creating a hybrid

Using the two ideas, he decided to create a hybrid. The special was divided up, and between film sections he will interact with the audience via Zoom, with game-play possible through an interactive app. The result is a fun evening of laughter.

During the pandemic, Michael Jr. said he learned that he likes being at home with his wife and five children. He loves everyone being

together, telling stories and playing games. He added, "It's fun to watch [my children] clean. I just have them clean up all the time!"

Change of mindset

It's a different pace than the comedian was keeping before, he admitted — he got his big break on "The Tonight Show" with Jay Leno — and it's a different life than his early years of comedy.

In the beginning it was "all about getting laughs from people," Michael Jr. said.

"When I made people laugh, it meant that they accepted me. ... About 13 years ago, I had a change of mindset. Instead of asking how could I get laughs ... I started asking the question, 'How can I give the audience an opportunity to laugh?'"

Focusing on answering that question, everything changed. "Once I

understood how I was accepted by God, I didn't really need the acceptance of men as much."

Michael Jr. prioritized finding ways to give. Urged on by friends and family who wanted to be involved, he started a nonprofit, redblueprint.org, which enables him to go to prisons, shelters and halfway houses to provide an opportunity for those who rarely laugh. His documentary, "Comedy: The Road Less Traveled," shows his impact at some of these venues.

He has influenced others through comedy. He recently received a letter from a man who was extremely depressed because his wife fled

"People laugh [and] your heart just naturally opens up. If the heart is open, it's a great time to make a deposit of some inspiration that can help people in these times."



Photos courtesy of Michael Jr. Productions

Michael Jr.

the country with their daughter. The man put plastic sheeting on the floor, got his gun and turned on YouTube while he had a final drink.

The video he played was one of Michael Jr.'s. He laughed a little but still planned to finish what he had started. But then the comedian's words caught the man's attention.

"In the middle of my stand-up comedy, I [had] said, 'I want you to understand that wherever you are, there's probably been some setbacks. But your setback is only a setup for a punchline you're going to deliver. The setback is like a slingshot — the further you've been set back, the further you can reach.'"

"He realized he's got so much to live for," Michael Jr. said.

"If I had only done comedy in that moment, who knows what the outcome would have been."

He said the words weren't really intentional.

"I don't know what it is; I don't have a plan," the comedian said.

"I'm just sensitive to what that audience needs. That's what I'm going to do with the Laugh Your Mask Off tour, especially because there's a lot of people hurting right now.


"If they decide to participate in [this] tour, I'm going to be sensitive enough to listen to what might be needed."

Laugh with neighbors

The virtual nature of the events means everyone can enjoy the show from the comfort of their own living rooms. But Michael Jr. hopes neighbors will get together and enjoy the show together.

"They might meet someone they never knew before and ... if they meet face-to-face, they have that laughter in common," he said.

Even if someone isn't able to "attend" the tour, Michael Jr. encourages everyone to find some clean comedy.

"Consume some laughter. Allow yourself to take a break from all the bad news and just get caught up in some laughter because it truly is — Proverbs 17:22 — 'good like a medicine.'" 

For more information about Michael Jr. and the Laugh Your Mask Off Tour, go to MichaelJr.com or laughyourmaskoff.com.

'Fire' for the gospel

12-year-old uses cancer journey to testify about eternal hope only found in Jesus

At 12 years old, Malachi Russell had a list of 17 people — one person for each month he was expected to live. They were his “ones.” During his battle with cancer, Malachi had heard about the Who’s Your One movement — a challenge to Christians to pray for and share the gospel with one person in their circle of influence — and he took it personally.

“To be honest, we really didn’t know (about the list) until after the fact,” Roger Russell, Malachi’s father, said. “It wasn’t one of those things he carried around like a badge. But he heard the challenge and, gosh, for him, he just took it seriously because he saw the finish line in front of him. He knew 17 months. He knew what was going on in his body. He knew everything that was happening. He just literally went through the list of people he knew that needed Jesus and wrote them down.”

Some of those 17 people accepted Jesus after the rare form of cancer took Malachi’s life on Sept. 10, 2019. And during a celebration of his life at Malachi’s school, more than 100 others gave their lives to Christ as well.

Malachi’s “fire” for the gospel started with what seemed to be a common pain in his leg. He loved sports, particularly soccer. He played for his middle school team, and it was during the season when he first started complaining about leg pains.

‘Everything I could’

“I’m thinking growing pains,” Roger said. “He could have pulled something. So we just told him to take some ibuprofen and go to bed.”

Things shifted when the family took a day trip to celebrate Mother’s Day, and Malachi’s pain seemed to be particularly frustrating for him. It changed his gait, the way he ran.



BP photo submitted by the Russell family

Malachi Russell (center) is pictured along with his parents, Kim and Roger Russell. The Russells were devastated to learn about their son’s cancer diagnosis when he was 12, but Malachi centered the rest of his young life around the gospel.

And it prompted the family to take him to get an X-ray. While there, some of Malachi’s answers to the doctor’s questions raised red flags, and the doctor pulled Roger aside to talk.



MALACHI

“I went down to the office and sat down,” Roger said, “and he just looked at me and said, ‘There’s two to three small masses in the base of his spine, and we need you to take him today.’”

Less than 48 hours later, Malachi was on the operating table. A group of about 30 members from Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, Georgia, accompanied the family in the waiting room — something Roger was grateful for once he got the post-op report.

“I remember the doctor looking at me and saying, ‘I got everything that I could get. But I tried to protect the chance that he may walk,’” Roger said.

Then the doctor’s next words dropped on him like a hammer.

“He just said, ‘The likelihood of

this being cancer is pretty high.’”

Two days after the surgery, they received confirmation. Malachi had a rare form of cancer. Those diagnosed with it have an average lifespan of 17 months. But Malachi’s focus was not on the diagnosis but on Jesus and the time he had left to share the gospel.

‘So bold’

Once, when asked about his rationale for so aggressively sharing Jesus with people instead of being sullen about his condition and fate, the 12-year-old boy’s response sounded like that of an old man with seasoned spiritual wisdom.

“The Lord has given me so many chances to share the gospel, and I’m going to take every chance I can,” Roger recalled him saying.

“Malachi was just so bold,” said Kim Russell, his mother. “I think it was kind of one of the gifts of cancer. It brought an awareness of life and death. You get a cancer diagnosis, and it’s like, what do you have to lose?”

As Malachi and his family battled cancer, the young man seized every opportunity God provided to share his faith, whether during ambulance rides, doctor’s appointments or at physical therapy.

‘Strategically placed’

“The Lord put so many people in our path,” Kim said. “So while it was a terrible experience, we just took it as if we were on mission and that the Lord was strategically placing us with people that we would never have met otherwise. We did not want to miss or waste the opportunity that He had given us.”

Eventually, Malachi’s cancer spread to his brain. It left him bound to a wheelchair, even after some progress in physical therapy. Soon his body started failing him. For a period of 10 days, his heart would stop for several moments and restart.

“The Lord sustained him for about 10 days,” Kim said. “It was very frustrating, if I’m just being really honest, because it was torture on us.”

For much of that time, however, Roger’s brother, Malachi’s uncle, was there witnessing the outpouring of love from the Russells’ church family.

“He saw everything,” Kim said. “After Malachi went to heaven, Roger’s brother surrendered his life to Christ. What we thought was dragging it out was actually God drawing Roger’s brother to salvation.”

Malachi’s favorite verse was engraved on his tombstone. In John 15:5, Jesus says: “I am the vine, you are the

branches. He who abides in me will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing.”

The verse is followed by an emphatic message: “Testify!” It’s perhaps the most succinct way the Russells could have summarized their son’s life. (Reprinted with permission from Baptist Press)

To read more and find videos of Malachi’s story, visit namb.net/resource/malachi.