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Left: Blume, a gathering for girls who have completed 5th–12th grade, is one of many WMU ministries supported by the WMU Foundation. **Below:** The WMU Foundation's Dove Endowment helped Akevia Wilson (center) — pictured here with WMU Foundation President David George and WMU's Lena Plunk — reach goals she never thought possible.



WMU photos

'Missions passion'

WMU Foundation celebrates 25 years of changed lives, boosts WMU's ministry as COVID-19 brings financial struggles

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Every day, Akevia Wilson has a class full of third graders who look to her as a role model. And many days, she gets to sit down and counsel students in other grades too because she has

a valuable resource — her story.

"I've been through most of the things these kids are going through as far as homelessness or having a tough home life," she said.

Beacon of hope

And they see Wilson — now a teacher, graduate student, wife and mother — as a beacon of hope. Wilson got back on her feet with help from Christian Women's Job Corps.

"CWJC helped me with encouragement, school, clothes,

classes, items for my son, Bible study and many other things," she said.

Behind the scenes of CWJC, there's national Woman's Missionary Union, which founded and supports the ministry through providing training, resources and encouragement for site leaders. There's also the WMU Foundation, which assists the ministry by providing grants for sites, as well as scholarships for CWJC and Christian Men's Job Corps participants.

And there's a whole crowd

of donors who have given to the WMU Foundation to help keep national WMU ministries going over the past 25 years.

Wide-reaching impact

In that time, the foundation has established more than 100 funds and endowments and engaged with more than 120 countries. It's given \$17.7 million toward women's leadership development, the ministry of state WMU chapters, the fight against human trafficking, the work of CWJC (See 'Supporting,' page 8)



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'It hurts my motor to go slow,' ABDR volunteer Craft says

Mark Craft is a household name among Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief teams.

Craft has driven from his home in Friendship Association to disaster sites all over Alabama and neighboring states since 2007.

Every location wants him to be there, but it is hard to get anyone to work with him.

"Men are slow to agree to work with him because he can get in positions no one else can, and he is on the top of the roofs. Count on it; if a tarp on a roof is not attached and flapping in the breeze, Mark Craft did not do that job," said Steve Brooks, Baldwin Baptist Association Disaster Relief coordinator with a smile.

Sharing the gospel

Craft works hard and fast. "It hurts my motor to go slow," Craft said.

He works any assignments he is given by the white hat, the person in charge of a particular Disaster Relief site.

Then he looks for additional work to do on his way back to the command center.

"I try to take a chaplain with me when I go to a house to work on a roof. I ring the doorbell, try to get the homeowners outside, introduce them to the chaplain to talk about the Lord, and I go to work."

Craft, like other Disaster Relief volunteers, desires that the love of Christ be seen as he helps others.

When Craft is working with Disaster Relief, he is not earning income with his company in Locust Fork.

When asked how he manages, he shrugged his shoulders and said, "So? I love Jesus, and I love people." (Cynthia Watts)



Photo by Cynthia Watts
Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteer Mark Craft is known for his quality work covering roofs damaged by storms.

To learn more about Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief efforts, visit sldr.org. To donate, visit sldr.org/connect/donate.

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.

TAB Media

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MY RASHIONALE

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

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Celebrating the 'gotchas,' those chosen to be part of our families

EDITOR'S NOTE — With November being National Adoption Month, we wanted to share a few personal stories from those who contribute to the work of TAB Media and The Alabama Baptist each week. We would love to hear your stories as well. Share those with us at news@thealabamabaptist.org.



Connie Pearson
Correspondent

Our granddaughter, Birti, adopted from Ethiopia in 2012, has taught our family to grasp unconditional love to a greater extent. We also more fully appreciate the value and the challenges of diversity.

And we've been introduced to Ethiopian cuisine and love to watch Birti's face light up when she's eating food from the country of her birth.



Carrie McWhorter
Content editor

My husband, Owen, and I adopted our son, Avery, in 2001, in part because of infertility issues but also because we felt a strong urging of the Holy Spirit to pursue adoption.

When our biological daughter, Stella, came along two years later, we could see God's perfect timing in bringing us all together as a family. Parenting both our children has taught us to appreciate how God gives each person unique abilities and personalities. Truly our hearts, not our genes, make us a family.



Carolyn Tomlin
Correspondent

Our granddaughter married a wonderful young man who had custody of his 5-year-old son, Chase. She later adopted Chase. During a Christmas dinner a few years ago, I asked everyone around our dining room table to share a special memory.

Before anyone could speak, our Chase quickly said, "My best Christmas memory is the one where Momma married my Daddy and adopted me. We became a family."



Lauren Grim
Creative services manager

My sister, Jennifer, and her husband, Jason, struggled with infertility for years.

But on July 6, 2012, I became an aunt when Caleb Hugh Walters was born, and my sister instantly became the mother she always longed to be.

Caleb is a sweet, athletic young boy who has blessed our family beyond measure. We are so thankful to our good Lord for bringing him into our family.

RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

What does 'preparing for rain' look like in your life?

It's been 14 years since "Facing the Giants" debuted, but the life lessons taught through the movie are still relevant today.

A friend and co-worker quoted the "prepare for rain" scene recently, and I've used it a few times since she mentioned it.

Coach Taylor: "I prayed so hard, but I still can't seem to win."

Mr. Bridges: "I heard of a story of two farmers praying to God for rain to come. Both prayed, but

only one prepared the land. Who do you think trusted God more to send the rain?"

Mr. Bridges is the character who had consistently walked the halls of the school praying over the students' lockers for six years — his own preparing for rain season.

And then he found himself encouraging and challenging the discouraged football coach, which changed a lot of lives in the end.

We can't predict exactly how God

will use us, and we certainly won't know who He will put in our path day in and day out. But we can prepare so we are ready when He puts us in the game.

On page 6, Denise George outlines biblical foundations for living in the isolated moments.

On page 4, Janet Erwin offers suggestions for expressing gratitude during this season.

How will you prepare for rain?
—Jennifer Davis Rash

Joe McKeever
Cartoonist

My wife, Bertha, and I — married all of four years now — have five children between us, three of whom were adopted.

Bertha and her late husband of 52 years, Gary, adopted Lari and Jeff.

My late wife of 52 years, Margaret, and I had two sons, Neil and Marty, then adopted our daughter, Carla, from Korea.

They're all middle-agers now and have given us a total of 14 grandchildren.

Your Voice



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

Use this 'different' Thanksgiving to reach out, try new things

By Janet Erwin
TAB copy editor

We've all heard it — this year Thanksgiving is going to be different. Our family is no stranger to different Thanksgivings.

Thanksgivings in Latvia were probably the most different ones we encountered while on the missions field. The first year we were there, missionaries from Estonia brought a turkey they were able to procure through a U.S. embassy friend, as none were available in our country.

Our second year, I was in Ger-

many for medical purposes right before the holiday and purchased a frozen turkey to bring back. The gentleman running the scanning machine at the airport couldn't believe his eyes when he saw what was in my carry-on bag. I just smiled and replied, "It's for Thanksgiving."

The next year I was ecstatic when I discovered a "turkey" in Latvia. He wasn't so plump, but we were fine with that. However, when we cut into the turkey, we discovered little meat and much buckwheat it had been stuffed with.

Since our return to the U.S.,

we've spent some Thanksgivings with internationals where we were the only Americans around the table. How rich to go around the table and share our thankfulness with each other. We've also invited a mixture of internationals from different faiths to join us in our home for this holiday.

Thanksgiving is so much more than food. It truly is a day of sharing thanks. One year, I asked everyone around the table to think of one person they'd like to thank (either living or deceased) and what they would say to that person. When we came to my oldest son, he said he'd "like to thank PawPaw" who had passed away 3 years before. Then he began to recall memories he had with him — some things I didn't know. What a treasure for me to hear this about my daddy.

As you anticipate gathering this year, some of you will be by yourself or with a much smaller group than usual.

Use this time to create some new memories. Give these ideas a try if you can't be with others:

1. Write and mail thank-you notes to each member of the family or friends you'd normally be with. Ask them to save the notes until Thanksgiving Day to open. FaceTime or Zoom with them so that you can hear them read their notes and watch their reactions. Or use this day to call people you are thankful for and let them know

what they mean to you.

2. Think of the people in your neighborhood who may be alone because of the pandemic. Older vulnerable people, singles, families of essential workers and families with small children may fall into this group. Prepare an extra dessert or salad and deliver it to them in a socially distanced manner.

3. Try out family favorite recipes. If you don't ordinarily cook the entire Thanksgiving meal, now is the time to learn how to make some of your relatives' favorite dishes. Collect recipes. Video chat with them while you are preparing the meal so they can help you when you run into problems. Or try out some entirely different recipes that might become family favorites.

4. Go online and find some creative ideas of how to express thanks. For example, download a line drawing of a turkey. Cut out construction paper feathers for the turkey. Give everyone a feather to write what he or she is thankful for, then read the answers and dress the turkey.

5. Take a prayer walk with your family outside. Pray aloud as each person thanks God for what He has created and for His blessings.

Remember: The way we celebrate Thanksgiving this year is not good or bad; it is just "different."

EDITOR'S NOTE — Janet Erwin served as an International Mission Board missionary for 19 years.

Letters to the editor

Just a note of sincere thanks and appreciation of your post-election editorial in the Nov. 5 issue of TAB.

Such true words (as usual) from you that now is the time for believers, regardless of political leanings, to tone it down, build each other up and promote peace, not further divisiveness.

I also loved your editorial several weeks ago recommending people "turn off the news" for a week and take a deep breath. I beat you to it even before the last election by doing just that.

In my opinion, the mainstream news outlets are almost as divi-

sive as both political party's radical voices.

Herb Gannon
Birmingham, Ala.

I greatly appreciate the Nov. 5 front-page story about first responders.

There's a similar organization in Alabama made up of law enforcement officers specifically trained to respond to traumatic incidents. The group is Alabama Law Enforcement Alliance for Peer Support. For more information, visit alleaps.org.

Gary Cardwell
Gadsden, Ala.

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

People with a purpose

A stagnant body of water lies still, does not move, does not produce anything positive and will over time begin to stink and die. A moving body of water, on the other hand, touches everything it passes, leaving signs of life and fruitfulness.

Churches across North America today have become more organizations of people than people with a cause.

An organization of people becomes stagnant, will decline and eventually die.

In contrast, a people with a cause is always moving, leaving traces of new life everywhere it touches. ...

People of all generations want a cause. The younger generations today are exemplary in this serving for a cause environment.

But how do you move from an organization of people to a people with a cause?

First, through prayer for intentional outward focus, find the true needs of your community — not your own perceived needs but the true needs of the surrounding community.

There is a three question survey you can use in any situation for finding the true needs. Download it for free at soncare.net.

A fruitful ministry then depends on the leader (pastor) who embodies the cause, empowers the God-gifted members of His church to undertake the cause and guides the church to fully resource ministries to meet the true needs in the community.

Whatever the need in your community, God has gifted your church (people) to help meet the need.

George Yates
Church health strategist
Alabama Baptist State
Board of Missions

“Gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder.”

G. K. CHESTERTON

British writer and lay theologian (1874–1936)

O soul, are you weary and troubled?
No light in the darkness you see?
There's light for a look at the Savior,
And life more abundant and free.
Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,

In the light of His glory and grace.
Excerpt from the hymn “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus” by Helen Howarth Lemmel (1863–1961)

Thankfulness means we must have a different focus, looking beyond our pain and disappointment, present and past.

We need to see our world through eyes of hope, of belief in a better

future, with an awareness that no matter how bad things are, there is someone in greater need than we are.

As we focus on others, the seed of gratitude is planted. When we invest in others, that seed breaks open and begins to grow. The fruit of that seed is happiness.

Gratitude is the key to spiritual growth. A heart of thanksgiving is directly tied to a heart of peace.

Focusing on the things we are grateful for brings a sense of hope and joy. And ultimately, it opens the door to a deeper walk with God.

Terry Newberry
Douglasville, Ga.

I appreciate the mother who says to her little boy, “Say ‘Thank you’”

when the child is handed a gift. Such training awakens the child to untold blessings and the beauty of gratitude. Such instructions form the first steps in becoming a grateful person.

God designed us to grow in grace until true gratitude flows from inside, without the need for outward prompting. The Spirit's words through the Apostle Paul, “Be thankful,” may be taught as a command, but the deeper call is to become people who are so aware of the constant flow of grace and love from God's heart to us that our praise and thanksgiving cannot be bottled up!

The outward promptings come and go, but true gratitude flows on and on.

Bob Adams
Retired pastor

From the *Twitterverse*

@richardblackaby

Darkness is the relentless foe of light. It blinds and enslaves many who embrace it. Light must not grow weary in shining. Too much is at stake.

@ricklance

“God can use anything, anywhere, at anytime, with anyone for His glory.” — @ronniefloyd

@macbrunson

Pastors, in all honesty your people right now don't need a political pundit — they need a shepherd's heart: “Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding” (Jer. 3:15, NAS).

@Slsellers7170

Learn to see in men what God does; think of them as He does.
— Andrew Murray

@desiringGod

“For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21).

@vancepitman

When you obey God in the principles of generosity, you will be overwhelmed at the provision and the faithfulness of God!

@MattSmethurst

Genesis ends with Joseph's death. Deuteronomy ends with Moses' death. Joshua ends with Joshua's death. Gospels end with Jesus' resurrection. And that changes everything. — @TonyMerida

@DrPaulChitwood

Beginning with the Triune God, to the universe He created, our planet, God's spoken word, written word and redemptive plan, everything

about God and His work reveals order. Satan's strategy, at its essence, is to instigate chaos. Knowing these two facts aids our discernment.

@edstetzer

A divided country needs a united church.

@kylesearcy

The human spirit is resilient. When roadblocks appear, we figure out a way around them. What beneficial things are you doing that you wouldn't have done were it not for this crisis?

@lecrae

God isn't intimidated by your circumstances.

@CSLewisDaily

“The perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God.” — C.S. Lewis

Embracing the Meantime

A Christian's response to waiting

Perseverance, rest, hope help believers keep focus on God during uncertain times

By Denise George
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

People are growing restless, waiting month after month in this long and disturbing “Meantime.” Since last March, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought fear and grief due to sickness, the deaths of loved ones, stay-at-home quarantines, closed church and school doors, canceled holidays and social gatherings.

The sudden and unexpected interruption has caused an unhealthy increase in financial problems, spouse and child abuse, stress, depression and violence in homes and cities. We are weary as we wait.

And now, months into the Meantime, we cannot see its end.

We wait in confusion in this Meantime — the hours, days and months that lie between the safety of the comfortable known and the enigma of the unknowable.

As a society, we scratch our heads and ask: “How now shall we live?”

No end in sight

The Bible reminds us that the Meantime of life is nothing new and tells us how to live during those long uncertain times. According to Scripture, how do we, as Christians, live during the long wait? Scripture encourages us to:

► **Do the next thing.** God told the Israelites, captive in Babylon during the decades-long exile (ending in 538 B.C.), to be productive while they waited: “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters ... increase in number there; do not decrease” (Jer. 29:5–6).

He encouraged them to continue with life, even though uncomfort-



Unsplash.com

able, difficult and different, and to do the next thing — worship God, care for family, strive to maintain home and health, minister to neighbors, keep faith and hope.

As His message wisely advised the weary Israelites, so it advises us today: “For I know the plans I have for you ... plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jer. 29:11).

► **Rest your body.** After a wicked Jezebel threatened Elijah’s life, the scared prophet ran away, prayed to die and did not stop until he reached Beersheba. God led Elijah to the shade of a broom tree, put him to sleep and sent an angel to give him food and drink. There, he rested.

After a time of rest and physical renewal, Elijah was ready to step back into the hard work of active ministry (1 Kings 19).

Let us use this pandemic-pause to rest and refuel our bodies, emerging from our lengthy Meantime with physical renewal, ready

to step back into the hard work of active ministry.

► **Be expectant and productive with hope.** When suddenly our plans for tomorrow come to a standstill and we must enter a time of quarantine, we are given time to stop and think.

For Christians, this is a good time to turn away from the meaningless, temporary pleasures that have crept into our lives and to deeply contemplate all things eternal.

Ecclesiastes tells us that God has set eternity in our hearts (3:11). We are spiritual beings who need God. How often the frantic activity of life drowns out His gentle whisper. Prayerful solitude, confession of wrongdoing and close communion with Christ revive tired hearts.

Facing isolation

Noah, Moses, Job, Joseph, Daniel, Jonah, John the Baptist and others in Scripture faced the frightening Meantime. Before beginning His public ministry, Jesus spent 40

days and 40 nights in isolated wilderness — waiting (Matt. 4:1).

The long Meantime of harsh imprisonments gave the Apostle Paul needed time to pray, listen intently to God and pen life-giving letters to early Christians. While exiled on Patmos, John produced the Book of Revelation.

Meditation and prayer

When we turn to God in meditative prayer, pondering His promises while studying His Word in the quiet solitude of our souls, we grow spiritually.

In our waiting, we become productive, somewhat like the expectant mother waiting for her child to develop cell by cell in the secret place. She waits contented, knowing that deep within her, something miraculous, though unseen, is happening. God is at work creating a new life.

In our waiting, we become productive, expectant with hope as we trust God in faith.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that “faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see” (Heb. 11:1).

In this time of weariness, fear, grieving and waiting, may we internalize Paul’s words to the early Roman Christians: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:13).

May we embrace this confusing Meantime, trusting in God and knowing for sure that, even now, He is at work in our lives.

EDITOR’S NOTE — Denise George is the author of more than 30 books and teaches The Writing Minister workshop. ✝



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Strongholds of Truth

The Bible, the Written Record of Truth

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

Two weeks ago, Theology 101 began an emphasis on truth. We looked last week at Christ as the embodied or incarnate truth. We noted Christ declared Himself to be the person of truth, saying, “I am the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6).

On another occasion, Christ said of the Scriptures, “These are they which testify of Me” (John 5:39). This week we turn our thoughts to the Bible, God’s inspired Word, as the enduring sourcebook of truth.

Over many centuries, holy men of God, inspired and guided by God’s Spirit, compiled a written record of the truth God revealed about Himself using dreams, visions, types, figures, events and inspired prophets.

The compilation of the books of the Bible and their endurance across the centuries has given believers a trustworthy and truthful written record of God’s revealed truth. This week Theology 101 seeks to look at the inspired Scriptures as a believer’s authoritative source for God’s revealed truth about Himself.

Trustworthy

When Jesus spoke to the Father in the lengthy prayer recorded in John 17, He prayed specifically for His disciples, saying, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (17:17).

Just as Christ expressed confidence in God’s word as truth, so His followers across the ages have believed the Bible is without any


mixture of error, being totally true and trustworthy. It is a Christian’s sourcebook of divine truth.

The witness of 1 Peter 1:22–25 is a mighty testimony to the truthfulness of the written word of God. Through obeying the truth of this Word as incorruptible seed, sinners purify their souls unto sincere love for one another from pure hearts (v. 22).

By this Word which lives and abides forever, unbelievers are born again (vv. 23–25a). The truth of the Bible is the good news that has been proclaimed across the ages (v. 25b).

Divine revelation

All Scripture is an inspired testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation. We might say the Bible is the written Word that bears testimony to the living Word.

With truth for its matter and Christ for its subject, the Bible as the word of God is “living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). 

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.



Choctaw Association leaders partner with pastors in Peru

Terry Long’s plans to go to Peru in July ended the same way many people’s travel plans did this year — with an empty plane seat.

It was sad for Long, associational missions director for Choctaw Baptist Association. For the past several years, he and others have gone to the South American country to partner with local pastor Manuel Castello and help spread the gospel in the region.

“We’ve come alongside him and encouraged and taught and trained,” Long said.

And as they’ve done that, they’ve found a group of pastors and laypeople eager to learn.

This year’s topic was one that Castello thought was particularly needed — how to have a biblical marriage.

“Pastor Manuel asked for training on that because there’s so much superstition built into their culture that doesn’t fit well with a biblical picture of marriage,” Long said.

Adapting to online

That was the plan, and then COVID-19 happened. But even though they didn’t get to hold the conference in July, Castello came back this fall and asked Long if he would be open to having a virtual conference.

And Long said yes.

“Over three days, we honed in on the permanence of marriage, how to work through your problems and not run out on your marriage and how to forgive each other,” he said. “We also talked about God’s purposes for marriage, how a husband can love a wife her way and how wives could build up their husbands.”

Renewal of vows

And on the last night — with several dozen couples and their families present to watch — Long led them through a candlelit renewal of their marriage vows.

“It blessed me — they took it so seriously,” Long said.

The partnership with pastors in Peru is one he said he’s grateful for. He and others who have gone with him

from Choctaw Baptist Association in recent years have been able to see people there catch a vision for sharing the gospel in new ways. A godly marriage is the latest way they’ve learned to model for others that life in Christ looks different.

“We have seen people saved along the way, and it’s been such a blessing to be a part of,” Long said.

To read more about missions partnerships like this one, see the story on page 9. (Grace Thornton)

To read more about missions partnerships like this one, see the story on page 9.



Photo courtesy of Terry Long

Terry Long (center) stands with a class of pastors and laypeople in Lima, Peru, who had just completed a training conference in 2019. This year, Long wasn’t able to return to Peru for a similar conference on marriage because of COVID-19, but he was able to do the conference virtually instead.

Supporting ministries

Partnership, donor support essential to success of missions during COVID-19

(continued from page 1) and CMJC, scholarships, disaster relief work and the operational needs of national WMU.

That's what the foundation is celebrating this year, according to David George, president of the WMU Foundation — the lives that have been changed and the people who gave to make that ministry possible.

"The work of the WMU Foundation could not be done without the continued support of the many faithful individuals and churches who support God's mission and WMU through us," George said. "We are grateful for all that God has accomplished over the last 25 years and are excited to see what He has in store for the future."

Sandy Wisdom-Martin, national WMU executive director, says that even though national WMU and the WMU Foundation were founded more than a century apart, it's hard to imagine one without the other.

Helpful partnership

"In partnership together, we are able to impact all states across the U.S. and 39 countries," she said.

That partnership is especially helpful in a year like 2020 when national WMU is facing unprecedented financial difficulties,

Wisdom-Martin added.

"Support of WMU through the WMU Foundation is even more critical this year — COVID-19 has hit our vibrant ministry with a force unequal to anything we've seen in recent decades with a sharp decline in sales, which is our primary source of revenue," she said. "Grants and gifts from the WMU Foundation touch every aspect of WMU ministry. As we seek to make disciples of Jesus who live on mission, the efforts and support of the WMU Foundation will reverberate throughout eternity."

George says that's definitely the vision.

That's why the foundation has been working hard to support the ministries of national WMU since Dellanna



WMU Foundation photo
The WMU Foundation staff — (from left) David George, president; Amy Cook, director of operations; Maegan Dockery, marketing manager; Janis Ezell, design and marketing specialist; and Courtney Simpson, web and social media coordinator — celebrate the foundation's milestone anniversary.

O'Brien, executive director of national WMU from 1989 to 1999, helped create the foundation 25 years ago.

"I was blessed to know Dellanna and learn the full extent of her vision before she passed away," George

said. "Her input, her passion and her philosophy have directed my steps over the past 19 years — to be the foundation for all of WMU. I am honored to have had this privilege."

The foundation's goal this year is to reach \$2.5

million in giving, increase monthly giving by 25% and help the Touch Tomorrow Today endowment of every state WMU reach \$25,000.

Passionate donors

George said the "missions passion" of donors helps to achieve the Great Commission.

"When God's people find their missions passion, they make a difference in the lives of so many by helping move the ministry of WMU forward, providing support to those in the midst of natural disasters, equipping women in leadership and so much more," he said. "Our partnership with these faithful people is the reason the WMU Foundation has so much to celebrate for our 25th anniversary."

For more information, visit www.wmufoundation.com/25thanniversary.

For more information, visit wmufoundation.com/25thanniversary.



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Photo courtesy of Jay Stewart

Andy Sparks (left) of FBC Ashville leads a Practically Speaking English class at Dubrava Baptist Church in Croatia. The conversational language classes combine topics of interest with the gospel message.

Places to 'dig in'

Long-term international missions partnerships are a ripe field for Alabama churches

By Lanell Downs Smith
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Rhoda first heard the gospel message during an English camp hosted by Dubrava Baptist Church in Zagreb, Croatia, and their missions partner First Baptist Church, Ashville.

Initially drawn to the spirit of the missions team and the local church, Rhoda was perplexed by the authority Baptists place in Scripture.

Struggling between the call of faith and her questions, she remained in contact with the Croatian church for more than two years before finally accepting Christ.

Results take time

Rhoda's story is typical in the predominantly Roman Catholic culture of Croatia. Missionaries Eric and Julie Maroney have seen about a seven-year average between contacts hearing the gospel and accepting Christ.

"Sometimes it takes months or even years for there to be results," said Scotty Goldman, director of the office of global missions for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

But even when visible

fruits of a missions partnership are slow to materialize, Goldman said long-term partnerships like the one between First, Ashville, and the Dubrava church can reap a bountiful harvest.

"For those who have long-term partnerships, returning to the same place year after year communicates to those with whom we are sharing a commitment to see their lives changed," Goldman said.

Jay Stewart, pastor of First, Ashville, said the church reached out to Goldman in 2015 to connect with a long-term missions partner. Goldman introduced Stewart to the Maroneys, who were serving stateside as Julie received cancer treatments.

Initially based in Split, Croatia, the Maroneys worked in administrative missions for Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Hungary. The couple moved to the more

centrally located Zagreb in 2014 and joined church plant Dubrava Baptist Church, the only evangelical congregation serving a population of 250,000 in the Dubrava area.

Eric now is director of Christian Initiative for Development, a locally registered non-government organization in Croatia through which he and Julie represent Southern Baptist churches in America.

Stewart said raising awareness within his Alabama congregation of the spiritual darkness in Eastern Europe stretched him as a leader and deepened the church's reliance on God for outcomes.

"We expect immediate, tangible results from missions efforts. We had to learn that there are places where you just have to dig in and pray for the people, continuing to faithfully do what God has called us to do until we see results," Stewart said.

Missions teams from First, Ashville have visited Dubrava twice since forming the partnership, teaching Practically Speaking English classes, which combine topics of interest with the gospel message and create opportunities to build relationships that lead to gospel conversations.

The initial partnership

with the Maroneys has expanded through the years to include one with Dubrava Baptist Church, which works with two church plants near Zagreb.

Inches not miles

"With about 2,000 Baptists and a total of about 7,000 evangelicals in the entire country, progress is often measured in inches rather than miles," Maroney said.

As churches connect across radically different cultures and contexts, both can grow their understanding of God and His kingdom, Maroney said.

"I know that those who have come over [on missions trips] have truly been blessed through personal spiritual growth, just as much, if not more, than they have been a blessing to those they have ministered to in the church and beyond," Maroney said.

And at First, Ashville, Woman's Missionary Union leaders Christina Puckett

and Rachel Broadhead have plans to incorporate the partnership into missions education classes for kindergarten students through teenagers by adding videos and pictures of the Maroneys and the Dubrava Church, along with maps of Croatia.

Goldman said the SBOM office of global missions stands ready to help churches connect so they can partner with missionaries.

"There are still missionaries on the field who have few partnerships," he said. "Most will say they need more hands-on help. This is especially true in those areas where the risk may be a little greater.

"We have new missionaries headed to the field three or four times a year. The need continues for churches to partner with these who have been called."

EDITOR'S NOTE — Some names changed for security reasons.



Photo courtesy of Jay Stewart
Dubrava Baptist Church continues to grow and has planted two churches with help from missions partners.



Photo courtesy of Jay Stewart

Missionary Eric Maroney hands a certificate to a graduate of the Practically Speaking English class. Members of a missions team from FBC Ashville participated in the ceremony.

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3 stories you should know



Photo by Brooke Glassford

Two Alabama State University students were baptized at Strong Tower at Washington Park, Montgomery, on Nov. 9, including Kristel Tshabalala, an ASU student from Zimbabwe. The students are part of the Real Talk Campus Ministry, led by Baptist Campus Ministries campus minister Zach Beasley (above, right). Read more about campus ministry at ASU and Alabama's other historically black colleges and universities at tabonline.org/alabama-hbcus. (TAB)

Global simulcast looks at future of missions

Participants from 48 states and 30 countries connected with IMB leaders, missionaries and a panel of experts Oct. 29 to address the global, cultural and spiritual realities that are impacting the future of missions.

The two-hour simulcast was broadcast in five languages: English, Spanish, American Sign Language, Korean and Mandarin. Participants also engaged with the new IMB: Advance the Kingdom app.

Total registration for the event topped 5,200. Participants gave more than \$38,000 to the IMB during the event, which will be used to support and sustain missionaries.

Go to imb.org/futureofmissions to learn more about the new IMB: Advance the Kingdom app or to view key conversations from the event. (IMB)

Nevada voters approve marriage amendment

Nevada voters on Nov. 3 approved a state constitutional amendment that recognizes marriage as between couples, regardless of gender.

The "Marriage Regardless of Gender Amendment" repeals a 2002 Nevada law which defined marriage as between a male person and a female person, according to Ballotpedia. The measure states that religious organizations and clergypersons may refuse to solemnize a marriage.

Opponents of the bill said it was unnecessary since same-sex unions are legal nationwide as a result of the U.S. Supreme Court's 2015 Obergefell decision.

As of November, Nevada was one of 30 states with this type of amendment and was the first to repeal their constitutional amendment, Ballotpedia reports. (TAB)

Headline news from around the Southeast

Georgia

The Homeless Move Team, a group of 30 Truett McConnell University students, goes out weekly to take sandwiches, cookies and water to the homeless community in downtown Athens, Georgia, *The Christian Index* reported. "We pray for safety and opportunities to share the gospel before heading out," said student Cam Lee, who helped create the team. Even in difficult or uncomfortable moments, "We are called to plant the seeds of the gospel," she said.

Florida

For more than 30 years as pastor at Corinth Baptist Church in Lake Park, Georgia, Henry Cannington ministered to church members. Today, in his new role as associational mission strategist for Taylor Baptist Association in Perry, Florida, Cannington is a "pastor to pastors." Cannington said, "What excites me so much was that

before I was just in my church. But now I can have an effect on 18 churches," the *Florida Baptist Witness* reported.

Louisiana

Sixty-two percent of Louisiana voters approved the Love Life Amendment on Nov. 3. The constitutional amendment reads: "To protect human life, nothing in this constitution shall be construed to secure or protect a right to abortion or require the funding of abortion." Louisiana's House and Senate approved the amendment in 2019, followed by endorsement from the Louisiana Baptist Convention Executive Board and a messenger-adopted resolution supporting the constitutional change, the *Baptist Message* reported.

Mississippi

A Mississippi couple is suing Simpson County School District because they say their 9-year-old

daughter was told she could not wear a mask with the phrase "Jesus Loves Me." The district requires students to wear masks to try to reduce the spread of COVID-19. The parents are asking a federal judge to declare the district's policy banning "political, religious, sexual or inappropriate statements" on masks as unconstitutional.

Tennessee

When Tennessee Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers arrive in Oklahoma on Nov. 15 to respond to recent ice storm damage, these "volunteer-state" volunteers will celebrate the milestone of having responded to 250 recorded disasters in their 42-year history, the *Baptist and Reflector* reported. Through the years, disaster relief volunteers "have worked to share the good news of Jesus Christ with those who are going through a disaster," said Wes Jones, Tennessee Baptists' disaster relief specialist.

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

▶ Retired pastor and former director of missions for **Marion Baptist Association Daniel Knight** died Sept. 18. He was 78.

Knight served as pastor of several churches in Alabama during his ministry including Cedar Grove, Sulligent; New Hope, Winfield; Mulberry Springs, Sulligent; Calvary, Warrior; and Pleasant Grove, Hamilton. He also served several churches in northwest Alabama as interim pastor. He was DOM of Marion Baptist Association from 1988 to 2003.



KNIGHT

Knight was active in Baptist life throughout his ministry and was instrumental in starting and building Primera Iglesia Bautista, a Hispanic mission Church in Hamilton.

Knight is survived by his wife, Jean; two sons, Eddy and Stephen; four grandchildren; and one great-grandchild.

▶ **James C. Nichols** — pastor of **Mount Olive Baptist Church, Hackleburg**, for the past 44 years — died Nov. 2. He was 75.



NICHOLS

Before accepting the call to Mount Olive Baptist in 1976, Nichols had served as pastor of another church in Marion Baptist Association, Mount Zion Baptist Church, Hamilton.

He is survived by his wife, Eva; son, Timothy; one grandchild; and one great-grandchild.

ALABAMA CRENSHAW ASSOCIATION

▶ **Donnie Dickens** is the new pastor of **Rock Hill Baptist Church, Honoraville**. He and his wife, Jennifer, have five children.

BALDWIN ASSOCIATION

▶ **Joshua Doss** is the new pastor of **Hamilton Baptist Church, Robertsdale**. He formerly was pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church, Lacey's Spring. He and his wife, Kaylie, have three daughters.

COOSA RIVER ASSOCIATION

▶ **Chris Theilacker** is the new student minister at **First Baptist Church, Sylacauga**. Rick Patrick is pastor.

FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION

▶ **Hopewell Baptist Church, Pinson**, had a lot to celebrate Nov. 1 — 150 years of ministry and 25 years with **Pastor Bill Evans**.



Photo by Lonette Berg

At the church's special anniversary service, Evans preached and Ernie Carroll, director of missions for Friend-

ship Baptist Association, presented certificates on behalf of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission and the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Commemorative magnets and a brief history of the church compiled by Betty Moore were distributed, and photos of the old church building and the new building were displayed.

The celebration "was a blessing," Moore said, adding that many people who weren't able to be present because of COVID-19 joined by watching the live stream through Facebook.

The Hopewell congregation also honored Evans with a tea that day and presented him with a money tree and other gifts.

MARSHALL ASSOCIATION

▶ **Randall Stoner** says there's "never been a dull moment" in his 18 and a half years as director of missions for **Marshall Baptist**



STONER

Association. When he retires Dec. 31, he says he'll miss the daily calling to help lead the association's 100-plus churches to rally together for the Great Commission.

"I love working with people, building relationships and working with church members," he said. "It's exciting to have the opportunity to help churches grow and start new works."

One of those new works has been the start of several cowboy churches in the area, a ministry that's thriving and growing.

Stoner says he and his wife, Vicki, also treasure the friendships they've made and the lives they've gotten to be a part of through shared

meals, baptisms, funerals, weddings, dedications of buildings and gatherings at the Marshall Baptist Retreat Center.

It's been a great season in his 47-year ministry, he said. Before coming to Marshall Association, he served as pastor of churches in Texas, Florida and Alabama, including Willowbrook Baptist Church, Huntsville, and Wayside Baptist Church, Alexander City. He hopes to continue preaching after he retires.

TUSKEGEE LEE ASSOCIATION

▶ The congregation of **Farmville Baptist Church, Auburn**, celebrated its 185th anniversary along with homecoming in a "joyous" celebration on Oct. 11.

"We are a very blessed congregation," said Marianne Foster, church administrator. The celebration included singing, worship, a meal on the grounds and a message from a former pastor, Jim Mitchell. The church also received a resolution from the state in honor of the occasion. David Bradshaw is pastor.



Photo by Marianne Foster

WEST CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

▶ **Selma Association** is now named **West Central Baptist Association**. **Tom Stacey** is associational missionary. ▶ **Michael Liles** is the new pastor of **Orrville Baptist Church**. Liles and his wife, Traci, have two daughters. (Alabama news compiled by TAB Media staff)

Persecuted church

Ugandan boy kidnapped by witch doctor, killed as sacrifice

KACHIRIBONG, Uganda — A boy was killed as a human sacrifice in Uganda after a woman opposed to the boy's Christian father sold the boy to a witch doctor.

Sulaiman Pulisi, a former iman who became a Christian, said his son, Abdulmajidu (then 11), and daughter (then 13) disappeared from home in Kachiribong village two years ago.

Police rescued the daughter in September after the girl confided in a Christian shopkeeper.

The Muslim witch doctor, Isifu Abdullah,

had used the girl as a sex object and sacrificed the brother.

Sania Muhammad and other radical Muslims sold children of converts from Islam to Abdullah, one of 3 million witch doctors in Uganda.

Muhammad and Abdullah have been arrested.

A child care ministry official said up to 25 child sacrifice cases are reported annually. In rituals, witch doctors use blood, tissue and organs of sacrificed children, believing they give protection or good fortune.

Muslims constitute 12% of Uganda's population. Uganda's constitution prohibits religious discrimination. (MS)



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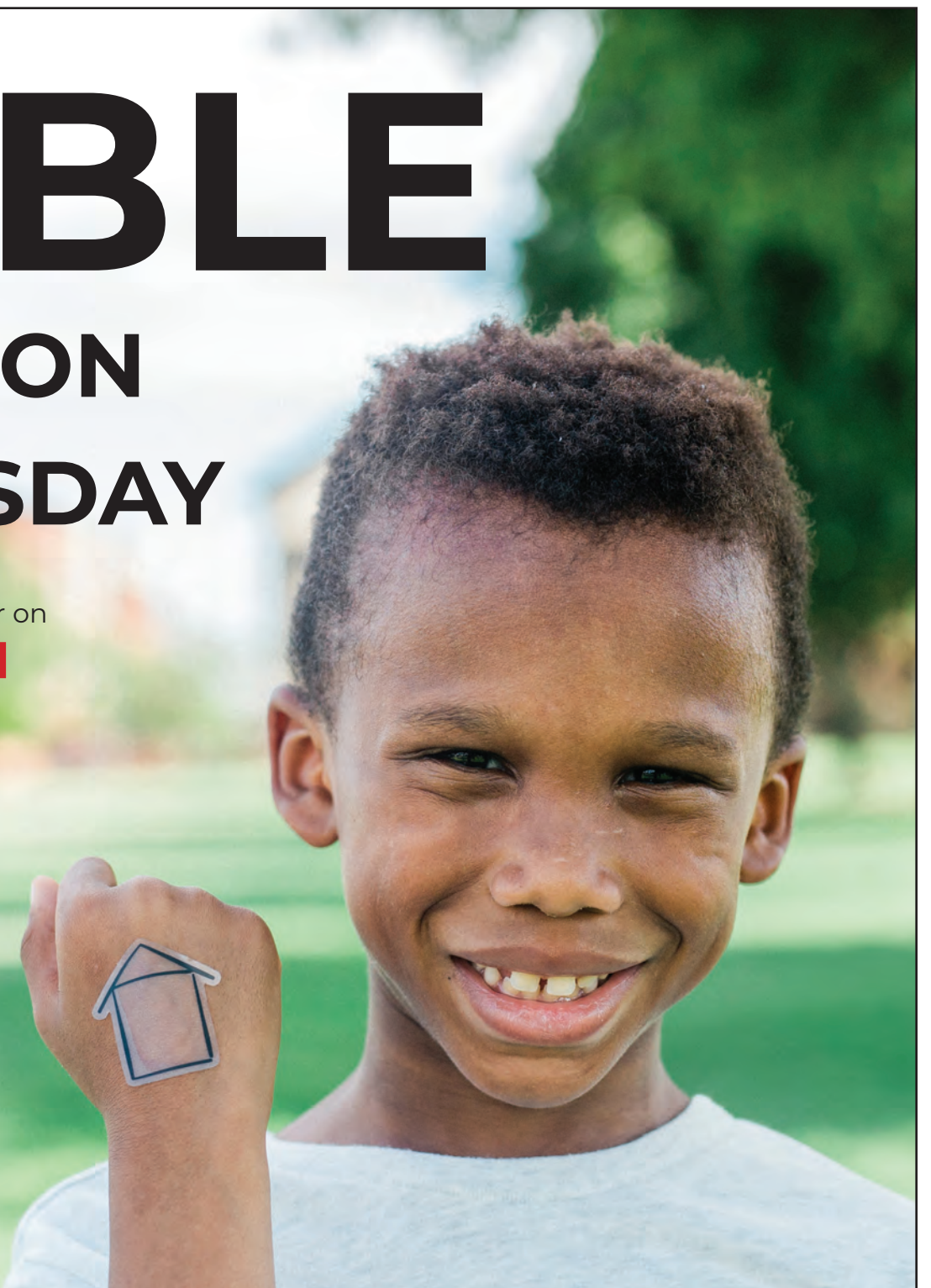
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 1

to give to causes they believe in on #GivingTuesday. This year, our goal is to

RAISE \$650,000

through this effort (including up to \$325,000 in matching gifts from a group of generous donors) to help provide a place to call home for children and families in need across Alabama.

To help spread the word and encourage others to give after you make a donation, show your support by drawing a house on your hand (as shown here) and post a picture to social media. Be sure to use the hashtags **#GivingTuesday** and **#ABCH650** when you share your picture!



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CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR

First Baptist Church, Tallassee, is searching for a full-time senior pastor. Those interested should send a resumé to: PSC c/o FBC Tallassee, 1279 Friendship Road, Tallassee, AL 36078 or email to: julie@fbctallassee.com.

WORSHIP LEADER

Shady Grove Baptist Church in Bessemer, Alabama, is seeking a part-time worship leader. Must read and understand music. Call Pat Buckner at 205-601-3615 or submit resumé: shadygrovebcl@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC MINISTER

York Bluff Baptist Church in Sheffield, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational music minister. This person should be mature in the faith, theologically sound, musically sound, organized and passionate about growing a multi-generational music ministry. Resumés and videos may be emailed to: kim@yorkbluffbaptist.com. The deadline to receive resumés is Monday, Nov. 30.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR/ MINISTER OF MUSIC

First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Alabama, is seeking a full-time candidate to lead our worship ministry. Please submit resumés to: office@fbcwoodstock.org.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR FAMILIES & YOUTH

Linden Baptist Church, Linden, Alabama, is seeking a full-time minister of families and youth. Send resumés to: admin@lindenbaptist.org or Linden Baptist Church, P.O. Box 480776, Linden, AL 36748.

BIVOCATIONAL MINISTER OF YOUTH

York Bluff Baptist Church in Sheffield, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational minister of youth. This person should be mature in the faith, theologically sound, creative, mission-minded and someone who is a disciple maker. A music background and college education is preferred. Resumés may be mailed to: kim@yorkbluffbaptist.com. The deadline to receive resumés is Monday, Nov. 30.

BIVOCATIONAL CHILDREN'S MINISTER

York Bluff Baptist Church in Sheffield, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational children's minister. This person should be a creative, organized, self motivated/disciplined young adult. This person should be team-oriented and good with children. Resumés may be emailed to: kim@yorkbluffbaptist.com. The deadline to receive resumés is Monday, Nov. 30.

PART-TIME CHILDREN'S MINISTER/DIRECTOR

Valley View Baptist Church in

Leeds, Alabama, is searching for a part-time children's minister/director. To apply, please mail your resumé to: 7254 President St., Leeds, AL 35094 or email to: jennifer.freind@valleyviewbaptist.com.

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Jesus shared on roadside for a town 'short on hope'

About a year ago, God started dealing with Wayne Roberts about getting outside the walls of his church. It wasn't long before he knew just the place he should be — the main intersection in his hometown of Union Springs.

So every Saturday morning for the past six months, he and his wife, Susan, along with other volunteers, gather there at the corner with a sound system. They sing, play worship music, share

messages and offer prayer to passersby. Volunteers who aren't at the microphone hold signs that say "Jesus loves you" and "If you want prayer, turn in here." One of those volunteers

is Gene Bridgman, Roberts' pastor at local Eastside Baptist Church and director of missions for Bullock Baptist Association.

Roberts says they just want to offer hope to a city that's short on it. They've made a lot of friends, and they've seen several people come to faith in Christ, he said.

He plans to try the same thing in Atmore soon and would love to see it replicated in other cities.

"The atmosphere in the city has changed," he said.

"We're just humbled to be a part, and we want to see that happen in other places too."

To get in touch with Roberts, call 334-614-4744.

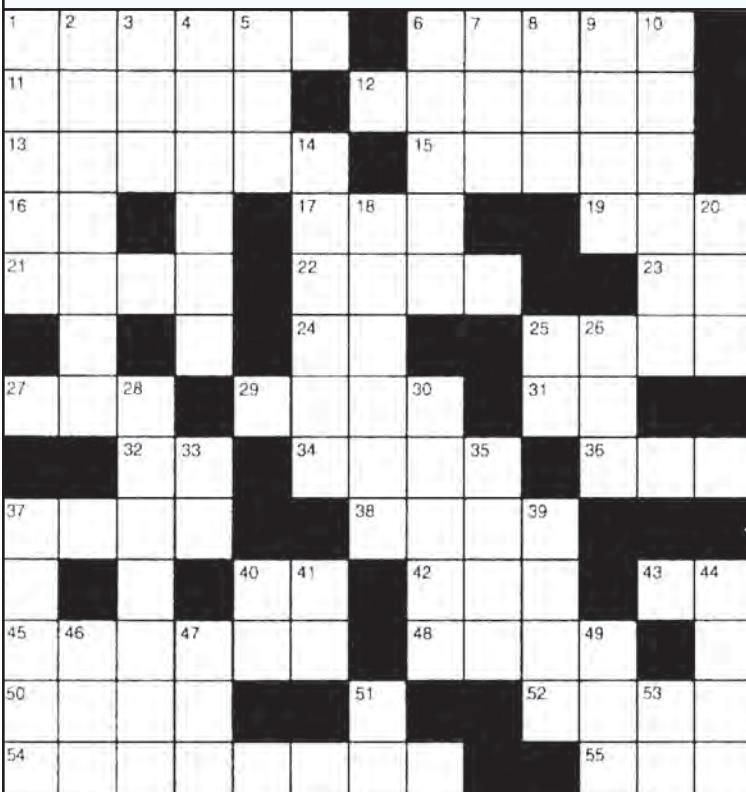
(Grace Thornton)

"The atmosphere in the city has changed. We're just humbled to be a part, and we want to see that happen other places too."

Wayne Roberts member, Eastside Baptist Church, Union Springs

Christian Crossword

By Udena McKee Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

- Led the Israelites over the Jordan river. (Josh. 4:1)
- Queen of the _____. (Matt. 12:42)
- A crown of gold round _____. (Ex. 25:11)
- Disciple and successor of Elijah. (1 Kings 19:16)
- Marked with bands.
- Part of the small intestine.
- Overdraft. (abbr.)
- Born in his ____ house. (Gen. 14:14)
- The ____es saw a man coming forth out of the city. (Judg. 1:24)
- ____ thou return unto the ground. (Gen. 3:19)
- Loose outer garment worn by ancient Romans.
- He built there an altar, and called the place ____-bethel. (Gen. 35:7)
- The Lord your God, ____ it is that fighteth

- Spiral or twisted form.
- Who heard ____ words of God. (Num. 24:4)
- Whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be _____. (Prov. 29:25)
- ____ an earring of gold. (Prov. 25:12)
- Los Angeles. (abbr.)
- Thus you ____ify the word of God. (Matt. 15:6)
- One who excels.
- If a man have long _____. (1 Cor. 11:14)
- Past participle of lie.
- The men of Bethel and _____. (Neh. 7:32)
- Where golf ball is placed.
- Give ____ this day. (Matt. 6:11)
- City where the Philistines took the ark. (1 Sam. 5:1)
- First home of Adam and Eve. (Gen. 2:8)
- A native of Thailand.
- What hast thou ____? (Gen. 4:10)

- A good king of Judah. (2 Chron. 29:1)
- A male cat.

Down

- A dress or shirt ruffle.
- Shortest book of the Old Testament.
- Hannah prayed for a _____. (1 Sam. 1:11)
- To crowd together.
- Indian tribe from western United States.
- His ____ was in his hand. (1 Sam. 17:40)
- Her mouth is smoother than _____. (Prov. 5:3)
- ____ them to fasten the curtains. (Ex. 26:6)
- ____ shall ye say to David. (1 Sam. 18:25)
- Your steps will not be _____. (Prov. 4:12)
- Where Joseph found his brothers. (Gen. 37:17)
- Full of sorrow.
- Jonadab told Amnon to pretend to be _____. (2 Sam. 13:5)
- Symbol for calcium.
- United States of America. (abbr.)
- Job's friend.
- To fill with joy.
- Symbol for Argon.
- Thou hast not ____ unto men, but unto God. (Acts 5:4)
- A tract of open land.
- Your Father knoweth what things ye have ____ of. (Matt. 6:8)
- Account of. (abbr.)
- Part of the psyche.
- All of a man's ways ____ innocent to him. (Prov. 16:2)
- ____ is a tree of life to those who take hold of her. (Prov. 3:18)
- Give me children, or else I _____. (Gen. 30:1)
- That which was torn by beasts I brought ____ unto thee. (Gen. 31:39)
- Mother.
- Before them there were ____ such locusts. (Ex. 10:14)

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For November 22

Explore the Bible

By Robert L. Olsen, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



GOD EXPECTS Isaiah 58:1–12

True State (1–5)

Turning from the sections on the suffering servant, in this section, Isaiah confronts the people of Israel regarding their religious practices.

The people of Israel were performing many religious rituals for God to hear their prayers. However, their rituals were empty, devoid of any true spiritual purpose or function.

They were fasting but not with the proper attitude in their hearts. They were mistreating their fellow Israelites, exploiting their employees and fighting with each other. The people were then upset that God didn't hear their prayers. What was the point of performing all these religious practices if God wouldn't listen to them? Unfortunately, Christians today can be very similar to the Israelites in Jesus' day.

God is not beholden to us based on our external actions. God looks at the heart and if we do our actions for the wrong motive, God knows and judges accordingly. How then are we supposed to live and think?

A common theme in the Gospels is Jesus condemning the religious people for doing acts for the wrong reason. As Christians, we do what is right not because we want something from God but because it shows our belief and trust in Jesus. We are to have compassion and serve God because we love Him, not because we can receive things from Him.

Many people today think if they attend church regularly and tithe that God in some way will bless them with prosperity and health. Then they are surprised when things don't work out the way they want them to. This reveals an improper motivation and treats God as if He is a genie who owes us. This is a mischaracterization of God and the gospel.

True Worship (6–10)

Here God tells the Israelites what He expects of them. Instead of performing empty rituals, do what God has commanded. Help the poor by giving them food and clothing; take care of your own family; help those who have been mistreated. These are

actions that please God. Were the Israelites to do these things, God would hear their prayers.

The key for Christians today then is to do what God commands. One way the world knows we are Christians is how we care for one another. The church should take care of her people, and Christians should take care of their families. If we don't do this, it shows that we do not take our beliefs seriously.

In modern America, people are less and less likely to interact with others, choosing to remain in isolation from each other. The lack of fellowship is becoming a fact in American life and according to studies, it is leading to an increase in loneliness.

In this environment, Christians can represent the Church well by showing the world what it is like to live in harmony with one another because of our love for Christ (see John 13:35).

True Satisfaction (11–12)

Isaiah points out that if the Israelites did what they were commanded, things would go well with them and they would be satisfied. Of course, the same applies to us today.

However, we must not think that "satisfaction" means getting what we want. Sometimes Christians think true obedience with the proper attitude leads to us getting what we want. God never promises to give us what we want apart from wanting God's will. Christians are supposed to pray according to God's will and God will give us what we need.

What we need is really what is to our benefit, even if it is not what we want. God knows what is best for us, even if it seems unpleasant.

Paul sought to do God's will and ended up in prison for it, eventually being executed. He was not given a nice house and lots of money. Following Christ led him to death, but it was God's will.

We must remove from our mind the idea that God's will somehow means physical blessings. It always results in spiritual blessings. These often do not come as we expect, but they are always for our benefit. 🌿

Bible Studies for Life

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COMMITTED TO HIS WORSHIP Psalm 99:1–9

Our family is a storytelling family. Before they went to be with the Lord, my grandparents would regale us with stories of their childhood years. Tales of blackberry picking, brothers getting sick after sneaking into their father's chewing tobacco, tire inner tubes turned into giant slingshots — these and a thousand other stories were the mainstay of our family gatherings.

My parents also have passed on the stories of their younger years. My father has us all fairly well convinced that in his day, a quarter was all it took to pay for two hamburgers, two fries, two milkshakes, a double feature and, I believe, the down payment on a new Studebaker.

What stories will we tell generations to come about a year like 2020? We will surely laugh about some inconveniences: wearing masks and standing on social-distancing stickers, wondering if we would ever find toilet paper again.

But 2020 has also been a year full of moments we won't laugh about: canceled graduations and delayed weddings, lost jobs, lonely funerals and the deaths of so very many people. These are the moments when holding onto faith can be the most difficult.

Our spiritual ancestors in Israel faced their own moments when hope seemed to recede ever more distantly beyond the horizon. One particularly grave moment occurred when the Assyrians, that terrifyingly brutal empire found in northern Mesopotamia, began to push its way westward toward the promised land. One nation after another fell until finally even the northern kingdom, Israel, was destroyed.

It is quite fascinating to note that just at this very moment, this moment when hopes for survival in Judah seemed most dim, Judah's psalmists began to compose a new kind of song. With the Assyrian kings and their kingly gods breathing down their necks, the Judean poets began to praise the God of Israel as the one true king, the king of all the universe.

Praise God for His holiness and great power. (1–3)

Psalm 99 is but one example of this sort of defiant psalm celebrating Jehovah's kingship. The phrase in verse 1 that is often translated as "the Lord reigns," is better rendered as, "the Lord is king." We might push this phrase a bit further in context and say, "It is the Lord who is king." Other contenders for the throne might emerge now from Assyria, in yesteryear from Egypt, in days to come from Babylon, but the only one true king is the God of Israel.

Praise God for His justice, fairness and righteousness. (4–5)

Verses 1–3 of Psalm 99 emphasize the kingliness of God. He is enthroned between the cherubim, the earth shakes at His presence, He is exalted over the nations. Verses 4–5 emphasize another aspect of God's character: He is not only powerful, He is also just. As verse 4 says, "The King is mighty, He loves justice."

To be sure, the God of Israel is separated from the gods of the nations by His power; He reigns over creation in a way the nations could hardly conceive for their gods. Just as importantly, the God of Israel is a God intensely concerned with His creatures; He is a God who insists upon justice and kindness among those who follow Him.

Praise God for His answers. (6–9)

As if to underscore the basis for the psalmist's confidence in the God of Israel, verses 6–9 turn to moments in the past when God answered those who were willing to trust Him.

If God delivered in the past, He surely would do so again in the present. It is when times seem darkest, when we face times like those before us now, that the psalmists call us to raise our eyes above the horizon of our present struggles, to raise our eyes and find hope in the God we know is truly in control of the world around us. 🌿



Media reviews

MUSIC

Christian artist Ayiesha Woods sees God's hand throughout her career

By Tracy Riggs
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Love God, Love People, Serve God, Serve People” is both a business and family motto for Grammy- and Dove Award-nominated artist Ayiesha Woods.

Family is a priority for Woods, who is also a wife and mother of four. Holding her infant son, who had just had a set of immunizations earlier in the day, she recently spoke with TAB Media about how her life motto permeates everything she does, both with her family and her music.

“It’s important to us that our children have that same mentality, that same mindset. If they want to be successful in life and achieve greatness, they have to learn that it comes through service. It’s important to my husband and myself. It’s a way of life for us so, therefore, it’s a way of life for our kids as well.”

That said, Woods still has to work at balancing family and ministry.

“Every day is an opportunity to work on that balance,” she said. “I thank God because my husband is as much involved with the ministry and music as he can be. We are raising our kids to be involved in every aspect.



Ayiesha Woods

Photos by Joseph Hillery

“Some days are easier than others. Some days present greater challenges. But God in His grace seems to bring us through every time. I’m still trying to find that balance. We’re a work in progress.”

Influenced by her “papas” (grandfathers) on each side, music has always been a big part of Woods’ life. Whenever she spent time with her grandparents, her papas broke out instruments, including a guitar, piano and accordion, which entertained the grandkids.

“I was always challenged to learn more and explore with my musicianship. I think that’s why I have a basic knowledge of a number of percussive instruments,” Woods said.

Showing more depth

She started writing songs at an early age, but they were all about experiences other people were having. In her late teens she had a change in direction and started

writing about her own life. Her songs began showing more depth.

In 2002, Woods was studying music business. One day when she got home from school, her mother nonchalantly told her that a guy named TobyMac had called. Her mother didn’t know who he was, but Woods did.

‘A God setup’

“What?! I was shocked,” Woods said.

That led to a couple of days of waiting by the phone. TobyMac finally called back and said he was playing in Dallas, where Woods had the opportunity to meet him in person. He had heard her independent project while on vacation in Jamaica and was interested in signing her to a contract.

“It was definitely a God-thing, a God setup, for him to get his hands on my project. ... We’ve been connected ever since,” Woods said. “He’s a really, really great guy, and

I thank God for connecting us.”

Her seventh album, “Full Circle,” released in October, features TobyMac on the song “G.O.A.L.S.”

When TobyMac got involved, Woods’ music career started to flourish.

In 2007, she was on a break for a couple of days while touring with TobyMac, staying at their manager’s house, when she was awakened out of a deep sleep by her manager yelling.

Woods said she thought something was wrong. “I jumped up out of bed because I thought maybe there was a medical emergency.”

Humbling experience

He then told her she had been nominated for a Grammy. Not yet fully awake, she thought she might be dreaming, Woods said.

After processing what he’d said, Woods thought, “This is crazy. You don’t go into [the music industry] thinking, ‘Hmmm, let me see if I can be nominated for a Grammy or a Dove.’ ... When it did happen, it was a humbling experience for me.

“I got two tickets. My mom and I went. Sitting there seeing all of these musical geniuses, all these huge stars, it was like, ‘How am I here?’ It was a great experience.”

Looking back on her beginnings as an artist, Woods said, “I would probably tell myself to have a little tougher skin because it’s not a walk in the park. It’s not for the faint at heart.”

But one of the main lessons Woods has learned throughout her life and music is “to live in the moment and know that come hell or high water, God’s got us,” she said.

“We often question His plan; we often doubt Him. In retrospect, we’re like, ‘Oh, man! He was working something out all along!’”

EDITOR’S NOTE

Reviews of films, books, music or other media that appear in TAB are intended to help readers evaluate current media for themselves, their children and grandchildren in order to decide whether to watch, read or listen. Reviews are not an endorsement by the writer or TAB Media.

To find out more about Ayiesha Woods’ ministry, go to ayieshawoods.com. To book a concert or for her to lead worship for your church, find “Booking” on the site.

Sisters in Christ

SALT encourages young women to impact their community and world

By **Trennis Henderson**
WMU National Correspondent

Kristi Moore has vivid memories of growing up in Mission Friends, Girls in Action and Acteens at her home church of First Baptist, Amarillo, Texas.

Those experiences “really immersed me into this missions atmosphere,” she said, crediting her involvement in Woman’s Missionary Union-related programs with “creating and molding my heart to love missions and to love service in the community.”

When she moved back to Amarillo after college, Moore longed to be part of WMU again, but a missions group option wasn’t available at First, Amarillo, for her young adult age group.

As a former National Acteens Panelist, a dream was born to help start a young women’s WMU group, but her plan didn’t materialize right away. Instead, she put her energy into volunteering with high school Acteens on Wednesday nights. After getting married and becoming a mom, she shifted to teaching first grade GAs.

Whispers from God

But her dream persisted. Eight years later, “I still felt God whispering like, ‘Kristi, you need to start this younger WMU group’ and then I heard Him get a little louder in my head,” she said. By the summer of 2019, “He was really just shouting at me,” she admitted.

Contacting Angie Graves, First, Amarillo’s WMU director, Moore recalled, “I told her I felt like God

was leading me down this road and she was just ecstatic. And it was really easy from that point on. The church was excited that someone was leading this and they basically said, ‘Whatever you need, we will do.’ So, we just started pretty fast. We really started planning in August and then our first meeting was a few months after that.”

Intentional about missions

Graves said identifying someone to organize such a group “has been my prayer since becoming director because there was a gap” in actively involving that age group in missions support and discipleship.

“I think it will help those young women get a better understanding of what other people are going through,” Graves said. “It can also help them be more intentional about teaching their children about how they can help others and how they can be a missionary in their own hometown.”

With those goals in mind, SALT was launched as a Women on Mission group for young women from their mid-20s to early 40s. While the new group got off to a great start with the support of church and WMU leaders, some challenges were still ahead.

When the group’s inaugural gathering in early 2020 attracted 34 women, no one anticipated the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in the coming months. Although meetings moved online and in-person missions projects were put on hold for several months, the group has continued to seek out creative ways to maintain its missions focus.



Photo courtesy of Kristi Moore

Members of SALT, a young women’s missions group at First Baptist Church, Amarillo, Texas, write notes of encouragement to college students going on an international missions trip. SALT members plan and participate in hands-on service projects designed to benefit their community and world.

SALT, based on Matthew 5:13, encourages participants to be spiritual salt and light in their community and world.

Describing the group’s focus as “purposeful and meaningful,” Moore said, “We’re driven with the foundation that we’re sisters in Christ, and we all are yearning and desiring to practice servanthood and missions.”

The group’s basic strategy involves meeting together every other month to pray, study missions and plan future service projects. The following month, they go out into the community to serve such groups as homeless women and children, battered women, orphans, widows, veterans and the elderly.

“It’s been a wonderful experience,” Moore said. “I’ve had a lot of good feedback from it.”

During the time they were unable to meet and serve in person, SALT members sent handwritten notes of encouragement to 80 church members who are homebound or

in nursing homes, as well as 161 inmates in area prisons. Those projects provided an outlet for them to continue to serve the community from their homes, Moore said.

“Our group’s purpose is still shining through even in this cloud of COVID that’s over everyone’s lives,” she said. “I think there’s this need, especially in 2020, for younger people to take a stand and to show Christ’s love because our world can seem so dark and gloomy.”

‘Come together’

Reflecting on SALT’s transformation from dream to reality, Moore said it is humbling to help her peers “come together for the sole purpose of being Christian missionaries in our own city.”

Urging other young women and local churches to pursue similar goals, she said, “Just have the courage and listen to the Holy Spirit. If He is calling you to start a younger WMU group, then just go for it and take the leap.”

“I think there’s this need, especially in 2020, for younger people to take a stand and to show Christ’s love because our world can seem so dark and gloomy.”

Kristi Moore
founder and leader of SALT