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Giving Thanks

IN A SEASON OF PANDEMIC

As we enter the traditional season of Thanksgiving amid a pandemic, social unrest and political divisions, how can we as followers of Christ pause and thank God for His blessings?

(See story page 13)



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'The cross is the message,' says Long of new book

Back in February, we ran a story about SonCoast Publishing, a new company started by Martine Bates Fairbanks, longtime book reviewer for TAB, and several other Alabama Baptists.

Terry Long, associational missions director for Choctaw Baptist Association, read the story, and then he clipped it out and kept it.



LONG

"I said, 'If I ever publish my book, I want them to do it,'" he said.

His book was something he'd resisted writing for a long time — the story of the time back in 2012 when he'd put up a cross on a busy roadside in Mississippi and just simply did one thing: prayed. The response was so overwhelming that he stayed 100 days.

"I saw Book-of-Acts type conversions," Long said.

When word got around that a guy was praying for people at the cross, people pulled off the road all day long to ask for prayer, he said.

He would pray for them, write down their prayer requests and have them nail them to the cross, and then he would ask them if they knew Jesus.

More than 1,500 prayers

In that 100-day period, more than 1,500 people came to the cross to share their prayer requests, and around 30 put their

faith in Christ for the first time.

The book, which finally got written this year, holds the stories of many of those people and is called "100 Days at the Cross."

Sharing stories

Long has seen the idea replicated since. As he's told those stories over the years, other churches have wanted to try it.

In December 2018, TAB shared the story of another church — Tallawampa Baptist Church, Toxey — who put up a cross and offered prayer with the help of volunteers from Calvary Baptist, Butler, and Lusk Baptist, Gilbertown.

Others have done it too.

Now that the story of those first 100 days are in book form, Long is seeing God move in new ways.

People have reached out to him to purchase copies to give to friends, and one man, after reading



it, asked if he could start meeting with Long for Bible study.

"Every single story is a moving story," Long said.

"It's not about me — it's

about the cross. The cross is the message."

The book is available at Amazon.com or by contacting Long at 205-245-4286 or tlong@alsbom.org. (Grace Thornton)

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 21.

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MY RASHIONALE

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

jrash@thealabamabaptist.org
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Serving Christ through media missions, ministry

Each of the missionary testimonies shared during last week's International Mission Board virtual Sending Celebration touched my heart, but one particular story hijacked my senses.

As an IMB staff member shared the need for a videographer to join the media team serving the East Asia affinity group, I found myself back in 1993, sitting in the pew of the old sanctuary of my home church, Mountain View Baptist Church in Phil Campbell.

During that early spring Sunday morning, a guest missionary speaker shared about her work on the IMB media team serving in Africa.

I can't remember much of what she said, but the call on my own heart is still as clear today as in that moment 27 years ago.

Of course, I stuffed the urge down deep and attempted to fight the call for several weeks leading into college graduation.

When I finally conceded, everything made sense. The engulfing peace and clarity carried me along each step of the process and continues to this day.

What an incredible experience to use my communications training on the missions field and to help share the story of what God was doing among Caribbean Baptists.

My two-plus years on the field are forever part of who I am, and I advocate for everyone to participate in missions in some form — pray, give or go, or some combination of all three.

The request for a videographer included noting how he or she will get to work with a world-class team of media professionals, support the work of missionary personnel serving in various roles and coach those not trained in communications to better tell their stories.

He or she also will get to contribute to IMB's mission of reaching the world for Christ.

From those like the now-retired media missionary I heard share back in the 90s to the yet-to-be appointed videographer, media teams have always been vital to IMB's mission.

I applaud IMB leaders for keeping media professionals among the slate of missionary appointments and look forward to continued partnership in telling the missions story.

We must be creative in the way we share missionary stories today because of security concerns, but those trained in multimedia are navigating the options with success.

Thank you for counting TAB Media as part of your communications network and allowing us to keep you informed about missions efforts in your neighborhood and around the world.

The opportunity to report on the stories is more than an assignment.

Three of us on the team served previously with the IMB. One worked for the then-Home Mission Board (now North American Mission Board).

Several team members take routine missions trips, and three are trained to serve with Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief.

Individually and collectively, we have a heart for missions and reaching the world for Christ. And it's through our media training that we serve Him. 🌍

RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

'I thank my God every time I remember you ... I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel' (Phil. 1:3-5)

Thanksgiving weekend looks and feels different in so many ways this year, but we wanted to make sure our weekly conversation with you remains consistent.

Please know how much we appreciate you and are honored to stay connected.

We love hearing from you and always want to know how we can improve on the work we do in our service to you and the Lord.

Something new

Every once in a while we try something new, such as the word search puzzle you will find on page 21. We are interested in your feedback. It helps us make decisions, so definitely let us know.

Remember when we tested out a new crossword puzzle style?

Yikes — that certainly was not a popular move on our part, so we changed it back really quick.

We do listen and work hard to find the right balance for informing about the latest news with a calm and clarifying manner, inspiring and preparing believers for discipleship, and connecting committed Christians for missions and ministry.

The pages of *The Alabama Baptist* also offer a tremendous opportunity to spend time in prayer and think about how to apply concepts, ideas and challenges in our individual lives as well as corporately through our church families.

It's always encouraging to our staff to hear from you about how a story touched your heart and life in some way.

You'll read some of these stories on page 2 from time to time, such as

the story Choctaw Association's Terry Long shares this week.

And when you read about the 2020 Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference on pages 6 and 7, be sure to notice the comment from conference president Nathan Daniels, pastor of Bethany Baptist Church, Andalusia.

Daniels said he selected the Scripture passages for the conference because they are "powerful passages that have had a transforming effect on my life and my heart."

The conference theme, Scripture passages and preachers were selected well in advance of anyone knowing exactly what life would look like in November 2020 — but, wow, did everything line up "for such a time as this."

—Jennifer Davis Rash

Your Voice



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

'We are Judson girls': Finishing with 'good grace'

By Mary Amelia Taylor
Judson College

The year 2020 has been an unexpected year, but as they have many times before in their college's history, Judson College students have adapted with graceful resilience.

The campus moved to online instruction for the final weeks of the spring 2020 semester as the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic reached our region, and Judson students and faculty adapted quickly to finish the semester well.

After the Nov. 5 announcement that classes would again be moving online as the city of Marion recovers from power outages and water issues in the wake of Hurricane Zeta, Judson students again showed their determination to adapt and finish well.

Judson senior and vice president of the college's student ambassadors, Molly Grace Register of Oneonta, emailed the student body late that evening, encouraging them with a favorite Judson story from 1947.

"One of the stories ambassadors

tell when we give a campus tour is about when Jewett (Hall) burned down (for the second time)," wrote Register. "The senior class president, Carmen Botts, sent a telegram to Dr. Riddle, Judson's president, which said, 'Will live in pup tents, if necessary, until a new Jewett is built right where the old one stood.' I think about that story often, and I have a feeling one day that people will tell stories about our class — about the girls who endured a pandemic and a hurricane, about the girls who loved their school so much they cried each time they had to leave."

"Remember," Register charged her sisters, "we are Judson Girls; we are sisters; we are children of God. Everything will work out in the end."

Referencing Luke 1:37,

Register reminded her sisters that "nothing is impossible with God" and that employing the same determination and faith in God shared by generations of "Judson Girls" could carry them through the final weeks of their semester.



Photo courtesy of Judson College
Molly Grace Register (right) and her friends attend Judson College's Big-Little Sis Banquet.



Photo courtesy of Judson College

Judson College's Jewett Hall burned down for the second time in 1947.

Since 1838, Judson College has faithfully continued its mission of Christian higher education for women, steadily persevering through a litany of outside circumstances threatening her "halls of ivy": wars, economic depressions, fires, attempts to relocate or consolidate with other colleges, natural disasters and global health crises.

God's faithfulness

The college's tenacity is both a testament to the faithfulness of God and the resiliency of the Judson community.

"The more things change, the more they often stay the same,"

said Judson President W. Mark Tew of the newest challenges facing Judson students.

"Our students have responded amazingly well this year, through first the COVID-19 pandemic and now the aftermath of Hurricane Zeta," said Tew. "Our faculty and staff have supported our students incredibly well during these unprecedented times, staying committed to providing the exceptional Christian higher education Judson has offered for more than 180 years.

"Our students are disappointed about leaving early, yes, but they will persevere. Judson women always have." 🌈

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“All I have needed Thy hand hath provided.
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!”

Christian hymn “Great is Thy Faithfulness,”

lyrics by Thomas Chisholm (1866–1960), music composed by William M. Runyan (1870–1957)

Our concerns should never overcome our trust with God. If you find yourself on a different path than God’s, turn around and repent. In repentance and rest you will be saved. I’ve experienced brokenness in my life, and God is a much better option.

Retired Rear Adm. Endel Lee
Speaking at University of Mobile
on Veterans Day

We all have a biblical mandate to make Scripture a priority in our students’ lives. ... The Bible commands us to do so. ... If we teach the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture, our students will know the difference, too. Students need to know from the beginning that the Bible is holistically consistent

in its truth and that it will never mislead them.

Leslie Bennett
Rome, Ga.

Preachers cannot give to others what they themselves do not have. The picture people have of Christ depends less on what we say and more on what people think of us as we say it. Thus, we need to be thick with the Almighty!

Morris Murray Jr.
Jasper, Ala.

Walking through the (Samford) University Center recently, I just couldn’t help overhearing this comment from one student to another: “I knew she was having a bad day, so I just called her and listened for

a while.” I don’t know if the person having a bad day was a friend or a mom or a sister or someone else within the student’s circle relationships. Somewhere in the world, a person’s day was made a little better because a Samford student “listened for a while.”

The world is better when we stop to listen.

President Andrew Westmoreland
Samford University

Not only does unstoppable gratitude please the Father, it also cleanses the heart of cynicism and littleness and sends us dancing through the wonders of salvation living.

Bob Adams
Retired pastor

From the *Twitterverse*

@ronniefloyd

Abortion is not a political issue, but it is an anti-life belief and practice that deconstructs the way a culture and its people think and view everything else in life. The Bible teaches that God creates and values all human life from the womb all the way to death. So should we.

@kferg16

Let me be a childlike follower who is foolish enough to trust God’s wisdom and the supernatural equipment of God. — @myutmost

@edstetzer

Nobody drifts toward evangelism.

@PastorGregC

Struggling with bitterness? Read Psalm 73:21–28 and be reminded that the nearness of God means more than any hurt.

@BelafaeJohnson

“Doctrine without worship is empty. Worship without doctrine leads to ignorance.”

@DrRobertSmithJr
#DoctrinethatDances

@DailyKeller

Prayer is never just an emergency flare or desperate anxious gamble. God’s attention is not based on our performance but parental love.

@trillianewbell

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8). Unchanging. In a world constantly changing, aren’t we so happy to know this?! Not only the security of it but also the expectation of our actions and what we believe about God. Thankful.

@adamgreenway

“In our society, people have un-

limited opinions with limited information.” — Pastor @GreggMatte of @HoustonFirst at @_SBTC #sbt-cAM20. #PointToPonder

@revandyfrazier

“You know your attitude, language and actions are influenced heavily by those you spend the most time with, right?” This is something we tell our kids, especially when they exhibit a negative change in behavior. This is what many adults should also keep in mind right now.

@brocraige

“When God says He will do a thing, there is no power on earth or in perdition that can keep Him from doing that which He has promised to do.” — Dwight L. Moody

@ricklance

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

How to be thankful in hard times

The Bible never ties thankfulness to a certain circumstance or a particular kind or amount of blessing.

Though if you’re like me, that’s not how you think about or live out thankfulness personally.

And the holiday season can be a terrible time for so many. In fact, suicides peak around the holidays.

Maybe it’s a stressful time for you as well. So let’s get basic about thankfulness.

“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thess. 5:18).

Ouch ... all circumstances. That’s hard to escape.

As it’s so clear a command that doesn’t leave much wiggle room to avoid thankfulness, I want to lay out several ways to be thankful even in hard times.

Here we go.

► Realize God is not done with you yet (Phil. 1:6).

► Death has no power over us in Christ (1 Cor. 15:52–53).

► God knows and satisfies our longing of Him (Matt. 5:6).

► Set your eyes on the things above. You’ll be with Christ soon (Col. 3:1–4).

We have much more ahead of us than we do behind. In other words, most of our existence will be in our eternity.

So why do we let the hard times here and now overcome the overwhelming joy of knowing and being known by Jesus?

Why do we let verbal and even physical persecution diminish the everlasting joy of Christ in us?

What if we stopped and, instead, found daily joy in the God of our salvation?

James Hammack
theropetab.com

ALABAMA BAPTIST PASTORS CONFERENCE

One another

Let Jesus' love, example be the guide, speakers urge in video messages

By **Grace Thornton**
The Alabama Baptist

Jimmy Scroggins said he's had conversations with several pastors lately who say that as soon as they can create an exit ramp to transition out of the ministry, they're going to leave.

These days, it's just too hard. Too divided. Too exhausting.

So in his message to the Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference on Nov. 16, he encouraged pastors to remember that the churches Paul invested in also faced problems both inside and outside the church.

Be encouraged

"These kinds of things could make you cynical as a pastor or as a leader, or you could do what Paul is teaching us to do here — get some encouragement from Jesus," said Scroggins, lead

pastor of Family Church in West Palm Beach, Florida.

Preaching from Philippians 2:1–11, he urged them to choose humble love.

"Our churches should be little oases of love and harmony in the middle of a world that feels like it's tearing itself apart," Scroggins said.

Because of COVID-19, this year's Pastors Conference was held virtually instead of at Taylor Road Baptist Church, Montgomery, as originally planned. During the conference, eight speakers, including Scroggins, unpacked passages on the theme of One Another.

Nathan Daniels, ABPC president and pastor of

Bethany Baptist Church, Andalusia, said they are "powerful passages that have had a transforming effect on my life and my heart."

Kevin L. Smith, executive director of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/

Delaware, said they're vital Scriptures, especially in the times Christians are living in right now. He said churches often tend to prioritize two of the three things that are weighty in the

Christian life — the need to contend for the faith and the desire to live a godly life — and ignore the third: the command to strive for love and unity.

"I don't think many Christians believe unity and loving one another is worthy of the same kind of energy as the other two," Smith said. "We need to do a better job of forbearing with one another. The things we fall out over, the things we break relationships over, the things we will question someone's Christianity over are horrible."

Striving for unity brings God glory, he said.

Daven Watkins, pastor of First Baptist Church, Pelham, said that starts with



DAVEN WATKINS

Screen grab

serving others as Christ did.

Preaching from John 13:1–17, he talked about how Jesus modeled meaningful ministry in washing the disciples' feet and how Christians can be empowered to serve in the same spirit by spending time with Him.

"Meaningful ministry is joyfully demonstrating the sacrificial love of Christ by serving others," Watkins said. "Sometimes, friend, if we're honest with ourselves, life, ministry, a pandemic, chaos, suffering — all of these things can rob us of our joy."

But Jesus came to bring an unspeakable joy, he said. "It's a joy that the world can't waste away. It's a joy that tragedy cannot topple. It's a joy that cancer can't

cripple, that surroundings cannot stifle. It's an everlasting joy, a joy that Jesus deposits in us. And as we minister to others, He pulls out of us His joy."

Crawford Loritts, senior pastor of Fellowship Bible Church in Roswell, Georgia, said Christians

must actively choose to lean into Jesus and this kind of joy.

'Rejoice always'

He shared Paul's admonition to "rejoice always" from Philippians 4:4, noting that when Paul wrote that book, he himself didn't have much to rejoice about — imprisonment was his reality.

"Our will must direct our emotions," Loritts said, especially in a year where



KEVIN L. SMITH

Screen grab



JIMMY SCROGGINS

Screen grab

To view the Pastors Conference sermons, sponsors and other resources, visit albaptistpc.com.



CRAWFORD LORITTS

pastors more than ever are just one text message, email or phone call away from getting the wind knocked out of their sails. “Joy has to be independent of our circumstances.”

Draw near to Christ

Charlie Dates, pastor of Progressive Baptist Church, Chicago, Illinois, said pastors need to draw near to Christ and hold fast to the truth.

“Even when days are dark and grim, we hold on

to what we believe,” he said, noting that they have that solid foundation in the all-sufficient ministry of Jesus Christ as found in Hebrews 10.

From that place of confidence, Christ’s followers can watch out for each other, Dates said. “Sometimes it’s the sharp edge of the Christian personality that prods another Christian toward love and good works,” he said.



CHARLIE DATES

In Scripture, it’s clear that “Christian character is seen in our concern for one another, that the demonstration of our real membership in the local fellowship is the way we take care of each other,” Dates said.

Ben Bowden, pastor of First Baptist Church, Enterprise, said sometimes caring for each other even involves church discipline. It’s biblical and loving, even though in recent years it’s become an unpopular topic, he said.

“When I came to know Christ, I started ferociously reading my Bible, and I saw some inconsistencies when I looked at the church,” he said. “In the Bible, I saw this idea of covenantal church membership and the idea of compassionate, gracious, loving church discipline. And I saw almost no churches faithfully living this out.”

The purpose of church discipline is to lovingly restore members who are in a covenantal relationship, Bowden said. In the Bible and in church history, congregations did this together for the purpose of helping each other stay true to Christ. But over the years, the church changed — it stopped prioritizing holding each other accountable inside the church and began focusing more on pointing fingers at the sinfulness of the culture.

Bowden encouraged churches to have a renewed commitment to the four steps of church discipline put forth in Matthew 18:15–17 — confront alone, then confront with others if needed, then tell it to the church if necessary, and finally excommunicate the members if they don’t respond to loving accountability.

“We need to ask the question, ‘what does it look like to actually carry this out faithfully?’ The way that Jesus demands, the way that history tells us, the way we ought to biblically and faithfully carry out covenantal church membership and compassionate church discipline,” Bowden said.



BEN BOWDEN

Danny Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, said it’s important to keep the church body free of sin that hinders the Great Commission.

Preaching from 3 John, he said it’s important for pastors to encourage the spirit of men like Gaius and Demetrius — men who lived for God and for the sake of the gospel — and discourage the spirit of Diotrephes.

“Diotrephes was a man with a harmful agenda,” Akin said. “The presence of men like that is a death knell to the Great Commission in your church because they’re not looking up to the Lord Jesus Christ and His agenda but

looking at their own selfish desires and their agenda.”

Juan Sanchez, pastor of High Pointe Baptist Church in Austin, Texas, said one way to keep a church on the same page is to focus on cultivating a culture of prayer.



JUAN SANCHEZ

“Prayer is God glorifying. It admits our need and glorifies Him as a great Provider,” he said.

Pray often

Preaching from James 5:13–16, Sanchez encouraged pastors to have churches marked by prayer.

“We need to model prayer in our gatherings,” he said.

An example, he said, might be praying Psalm 146 for someone who might be walking through a season of suffering.

“It is alarming that Christians can gather on a Sunday morning and all they do is hear a sermon and sing,” he said. “Those things are important, but there are more responses to who we are in Christ

than just singing and preaching. Prayer is vital to our church’s life.”



DANNY AKIN

“Sometimes it’s the sharp edge of the Christian personality that prods another Christian toward love and good works.”

**Charlie Dates
pastor, Progressive Baptist Church, Chicago, Illinois**

‘Joyfully sent’

Alabama couple among most recently commissioned IMB missionaries

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

When Beau and Heidi were in college, they learned there are people who have zero access to the gospel.

“We grieved that our great God was not receiving the worship He deserved among all nations because we know He is so worthy,” Heidi said.

And as they grew at Lakeview Baptist Church, Auburn, through missions classes, trips to Asia and reaching international students at their university, God began to stir in their hearts to move their family overseas one day, Beau said.

They, along with their two children, are being “joyfully sent” by Lakeview Baptist to be International Mission Board missionaries in Southeast Asia, Heidi said — “to reach the lost and equip believers so all nations, tribes, peoples and languages will one day praise God around His throne.”

The couple, along with 77 other new Southern Baptist missionar-

ies, were appointed during a virtual Sending Celebration Nov. 18. The celebration — originally intended to be held in Montgomery as part of the Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting — was moved online in light of COVID-19.

“While we wish we could’ve been in person ... in Montgomery, Alabama, as originally planned, we are excited that technology offers us this opportunity to gather to celebrate our newest Southern Baptist missionaries,” said Paul Chitwood, IMB president.

He thanked Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State

Board of Missions, and all Alabama Baptists “for partnering with us in this sending celebration and for your generosity in supporting these new missionaries and all those who are already serving overseas.”

“We are excited that 79 new missionaries are being sent tonight,” Chitwood said. “Thanks to your generosity through praying and giving, we are able to send and sustain these missionaries.”

To watch the IMB Sending Celebration and for more information on current needs for missionaries, visit imb.org/send.



Screen grab

Recently commissioned missionaries Beau and Heidi, of Lakeview Baptist Church, Auburn, will serve in Southeast Asia. The region boasts a population of more than 615 million souls, representing 2,626 indigenous people groups.

Heading into Lottie Moon Christmas Offering season (see pages 10–11), the IMB’s offering goal is \$175 million in honor of its 175th anniversary of sending Southern Baptists like Beau and Heidi to the nations with the gospel.

Lance, who opened the celebration with prayer, said the Great Commission “is not on pause, and it’s certainly not in quarantine.”

As part of the celebration, listeners heard testimonies from missionaries headed to each affinity group, or groupings of peoples who share similar languages and cultures.

IMB personnel also shared some of the current top needs for missionaries, such as someone to share the gospel through a sports business in Central Asia and someone to do videography in East Asia.

To kick off the service, two Alabama groups also led in musical worship.

A combined effort by the Alabama Singing Men and Alabama Singing Women — in a video edited together by Josh Spivey, worship pastor at Thorton Road Baptist Church, Montgomery — sang “No More Night,” and a virtual choir led by Michael Adler, worship pastor at Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Birmingham, sang “Total Praise.”

The video of the service is available at imb.org/send, along with Beau and Heidi’s video testimony (in the Southeast Asia section) and others not included in the service due to time constraints.

Downloadable prayer cards for the new missionaries are also available at the IMB website.



Screen grab

Two virtual choirs from Alabama led in musical worship prior to the IMB Sending Celebration on Nov. 18. The Alabama Singing Men and Alabama Singing Women (above) sang ‘No More Night,’ and a choir from Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Birmingham, sang ‘Total Praise.’ View the service at imb.org/send.

State Board's DuBois retiring; Jackson named to role

The Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions Executive Committee members and trustees approved retirement resolutions and made personnel changes during a virtual meeting on Nov. 16.

Personnel changes included naming Mike Jackson as the new associate executive director.

Resolutions were adopted honoring the retirement of Bobby DuBois and Barry Bledsoe.

DuBois has served as a staff member with the State Board since October 1990 and as associate executive director since 2000.



DUBOIS

Before naming a new associate executive director, an internal examination of the position allowed State Board leaders to reshuffle ministry assignments to best outline the role of the associate executive director for the future and allow for consistency in the human resources and accounting services area of work.

Johnson promoted

Jo Ellen Johnson, a



JOHNSON

certified public accountant, who most recently served as accounting services coordinator for the State Board, will assume the responsibilities that fall in her area of

work as the new director of financial services and human resources.



JACKSON

Jackson's role as associate executive director will be as the chief operations officer and second chair to executive director Rick Lance.

Jackson has served with the State Board since September 2004, most recently as director of the office of LeaderCare and church health.

Ken Allen, formerly a church health strategist in the office of LeaderCare and church health, is now director of that office.

Doug Rogers, director of the newly named communications and Cooperative Program office (formerly known as communications and technology services), also has been promoted to team leader of the missions support team.

A resolution also was approved in honor of Barry Bledsoe, who will retire April 1, 2021, after 20 years as president of The Baptist Foundation of Alabama.

Review the full report of the meeting and the full text of the resolutions honoring DuBois and Bledsoe at tabonline.org/november-ec. (TAB)



BLEDSOE

In lieu of annual meeting, Alabama Baptists gather for online celebration

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Rick Lance said when he read the story of the demolition of the Silverdome in Pontiac, Michigan, he was captivated.

"There was an explosion, there was a lot of smoke, but when the smoke cleared, the stadium was still there," said Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

The steel was so strong that it was not easily destroyed, he told viewers of the Online State Missions Celebration Nov. 17.

"I think our churches need to be like that — so strong, built on the foundation of Jesus Christ, that come pandemic or whatever, when the smoke clears we're still there."

During the hourlong celebration, Lance encouraged Alabama Baptists to keep moving forward in ministry even in these tough times and thanked them for their continued cooperation in the Great Commission.

The celebration was held instead of an in-person Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting this year because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The annual meeting was also originally slated to include an International Mission Board Sending Celebration, which also moved to a virtual experience held Nov. 18.

During the online gathering, Lance highlighted five missional initiatives of Alabama Baptists' ministry through the SBOM:

1. Spiritual preparation.

Mike Jackson, now SBOM associate executive director, explained that this initiative "helps us understand that we are to be spiritually prepared

to experience renewal." He encouraged Alabama Baptists to invest in their walk with Christ and in prayer and to reach out to SBOM staff for resources.

2. Reaching/baptizing/discipling with a focus on students.

Baptist Campus Ministries across the state are working to reach the 300,000 college students that call Alabama home as they study. Zach Beasley, campus minister at Alabama State University, said though they've had to get creative in how to do ministry, God is moving in the lives of students.

"We've seen students go from really dark places in their life to walking in Jesus' marvelous light," Beasley said.

Mike Nuss, director of the office of collegiate and student ministries, said lives are being changed all over the state in that way among middle school, high school and college students.

3. Revitalizing/planting/replanting churches.

Lance said this initiative promotes "healthier Great Commission churches all over Alabama."

Jarman Leatherwood, a church planter with SBOM and pastor of the House of Hope and Restoration in Huntsville, said Alabama is home to 5 million people, 3 million of whom don't have a church.

"It's because of your prayers and cooperative spirit that we get to join in with God in the work that He's doing," he said.

4. Calling out the called.

To illustrate this initiative, Scotty Goldman, director of the office of global missions, interviewed three Alabama natives now serving as church planters in Montana — Chris Baker, Darryl Brunson and Morris Hill. They all moved

their families to Montana when God placed a "special calling" on their lives, Goldman said.

5. Biblical stewardship.

Candace McIntosh, executive director of Alabama Woman's Missionary Union, shared that her heart is "full of gratitude" because Alabama Baptists have already contributed \$830,000 toward this year's \$1.2 million goal for the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering, which will be collected through Dec. 31.

Top CP givers

Lance also honored this year's top Cooperative Program givers:

► Largest gift — \$883,981.53, Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Birmingham

► Second-largest gift — \$831,906.80, First Baptist Church, Trussville

► Highest gift per resident member — \$427.24, Fairfield Highlands Baptist Church, Midfield

► Highest percentage given to CP — 20.05%, Delta Baptist Church in Carey Baptist Association. 🇺🇸



Screen grab

You can view the Online State Missions Celebration at the Facebook page of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions or at alsbom.org.

LOTTIE MOON CHRISTMAS OFFERING PREVIEW

Taking the gospel to the nations

Lottie Moon Christmas Offering allows Alabama family to follow God's call to Kenya

Kenya looks a lot different than Alabama, but Eric and Heather McDonald are happy to call the African country their new home.

The reason is simple — they knew God had told them to use their medical skills to take the gospel to the nations, and Africa is the place where He opened the door for them to do that.

The couple arrived there recently with their seven children, six travel partners and around 75 pieces of luggage. A couple of months into their new lives as International Mission Board personnel, they remain hopeful, content and sure of God's calling on their lives.

'God is so faithful'

"Learning to live in an unfamiliar culture is a full-time job, but God is so faithful," said Eric McDonald, whose home church is Ransomed Community Church, Florence. "Life looks very different, but God has shown us that different is not bad, it's just different."

Eric, a medical doctor, and Heather, a registered nurse, will eventually serve as health care professionals at the Baptist hospital in Kigoma, Tanzania. For now, they are living in Kenya while they study the language.

"The kids are thriving," Eric McDonald said, noting they have begun school, both virtually and in person, and are making friends in the area surrounding their home.

He says his whole family has

IMB missionaries Eric and Heather McDonald take a break from packing up their home to pray with their seven children. They recently moved from Alabama to Kenya where they will study language and culture before beginning health care work in Tanzania.



IMB photo

already visited local churches and met with people in their village homes.

"We are growing our community every day and enjoying investing in those that are around us," Eric McDonald said.

This new season of ministry they're beginning is thanks to Southern Baptists' gifts through the Cooperative Program and to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions, named in honor of Moon, a missionary

who gave her life to take the gospel to China more than a century ago.

One hundred percent of the LMCO goes straight to missionaries who are making disciples and multiplying churches among unreached people groups.

The national offering goal this year is \$175 million, and the Alabama goal is \$12,250,000.

A big reach

The gifts have a big reach — over the years, thousands more

IMB personnel like the McDonalds have also been able to move their families to other parts of the world to share the gospel with those who haven't heard it yet.

Right now, about 3,600 IMB workers are scattered across the globe engaging unreached people with the hope of Jesus. They're seeing lives being changed and churches planted, and it couldn't happen without the generosity of Southern Baptists.

This LMCO season of giving

**The Week
of Prayer
for International
Missions is
Nov. 29–Dec. 6.**

.....

A Great *Multitude* + You

.....

imb

LOTTIE MOON
CHRISTMAS
OFFERING®

National goal: \$175 million
Alabama goal: \$12,250,000

begins with the Week of Prayer for International Missions, set this year for Nov. 29–Dec. 6. The week will highlight stories of missionaries who, like the McDonalds, are supported by the LMCO. (See story, this page, for more information.) All of them benefit from the offering, and all of them need prayer support to stay strong in the work God has called them to do.

Prayer needs

Eric McDonald asked for prayer too, specifically that his family will settle in and represent Christ well.

“After visiting local churches and doing some home visits in the village, the need for language and culture learning is even more evident,” he said. “We are so thankful to be sent by churches and an organization that believes people should hear the gospel in their heart language.”

He asked for prayer that they would learn the language and culture well to effectively share with people in a meaningful way.

He also asked for prayer for their transition, that they “will be solidly rooted in the faithfulness of our heavenly Father to remember our calling to be here — even when times are hard.”

“Finally, pray for our marriage and family as a unit that we will not only be supportive and loving to one another, but also that we will be a light in the community and that God will prepare the hearts of those that we run into,” Eric McDonald said. (IMB, TAB)

Week of Prayer for International Missions

Here’s a preview of missionary stories highlighted in this year’s Week of Prayer for International Missions, set for Nov. 29–Dec. 6:

Day 1

In the area where the McDonald family lives (see story, page 10), hundreds of thousands of young boys sleep on the streets — marginalized, abused and arrested. But International Mission Board missionary Kristen Lowry and the staff at the Naivasha Children’s Shelter in Naivasha, Kenya, are investing their lives to bring healing, restoration and the hope of Jesus to as many of these boys as they possibly can.

Day 2

After living in Croatia for more than 22 years, IMB missionary Eric Maroney understands why some describe life and ministry as difficult in this part of Europe. People there are often skeptical of evangelical churches. But Maroney is seeing God move through a gospel-centered radio show that thousands tune in to listen to each week.

Day 3

For a long time now, Doug Derbyshire has been going to places in Thailand that have no Christians and using his skills as a medical doctor as a way to share the gospel. He’s seeing God move among people in desperate need of hope.

Day 4

It takes IMB missionaries a lot of effort to get to the Akawa* people — a two-hour flight into the Amazon rainforest followed by a more-than-seven-



IMB missionaries Charlie and Shannon Worthy hold evangelistic camps in Italy to build relationships and share the gospel.



IMB photo

Volunteers from Emmanuel Baptist Church in Blackshear, Georgia, prepare for a baptism in an Akawa village in Peru. An Akawa man (left) thanks the Lord for sending missionaries to share truth in his village.

hour boat ride. But since 2018 they’ve been taking the gospel there, thanks to Southern Baptists’ gifts to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering.

Day 5

IMB missionaries leave home knowing what it could cost them, and over the organization’s 175-year history, about 60 missionaries and children have lost their lives due to violent circumstances. But thousands continue to count the cost and serve, and the result is many are coming to faith in Christ.

Day 6

For more than 17 years, the Worthy family has invested in the people of Italy and become a part of the culture. They say that’s important to build relationships that can lead to heart-level conversations and discipleship.

Day 7

It took 20 years to establish a gospel presence among one Muslim unreached people group of 10 million in South Asia, but IMB missionaries Ralph and Lovie Adair* are celebrating how God recently opened those doors.

Day 8

All over the world, IMB missionaries say thanks for Southern Baptists’ continued prayer and financial support during the COVID-19 pandemic. Though much has changed, ministry has continued in new ways during this time, and people have found new life in Christ.

*Names changed for security reasons. (TAB)

Prayer guides and videos with these stories and more are available for individuals, groups and churches to download or order for free. For more information visit imb.org/lmco.

UPCOMING EVENTS

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS AND LOTTIE MOON

CHRISTMAS OFFERING

November 29-December 6

Visit alsbom.org/lottiemoon for more information.



South Asia



IN PERSON: MAKING HIM KNOWN IN SOUTH ASIA

Saturday, December 5, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.,
First Baptist Church
Prattville

Join us for the South Asia Missions Spotlight, where South Asia missionaries will be sharing their stories, their ministry and how Alabama Baptists can be involved.

Learn more information and register at alsbom.org/southasia.

ONLINE: CONNECTING WITH THE CORE: DISCIPLE MAKING

Tuesday, December 8, 10-11 a.m.

Join State Missionary Daniel Edmonds, Alabama Baptist pastors Robert Mullins, Andy Frazier and Mark Gainey, and the Office of LeaderCare & Church Health for this session which will engage pastors in moving

members to the core of every church: disciples who make disciples that serve the Kingdom and bear fruit that remains. Register at

PinnacleAlabama.org under Upcoming Training.

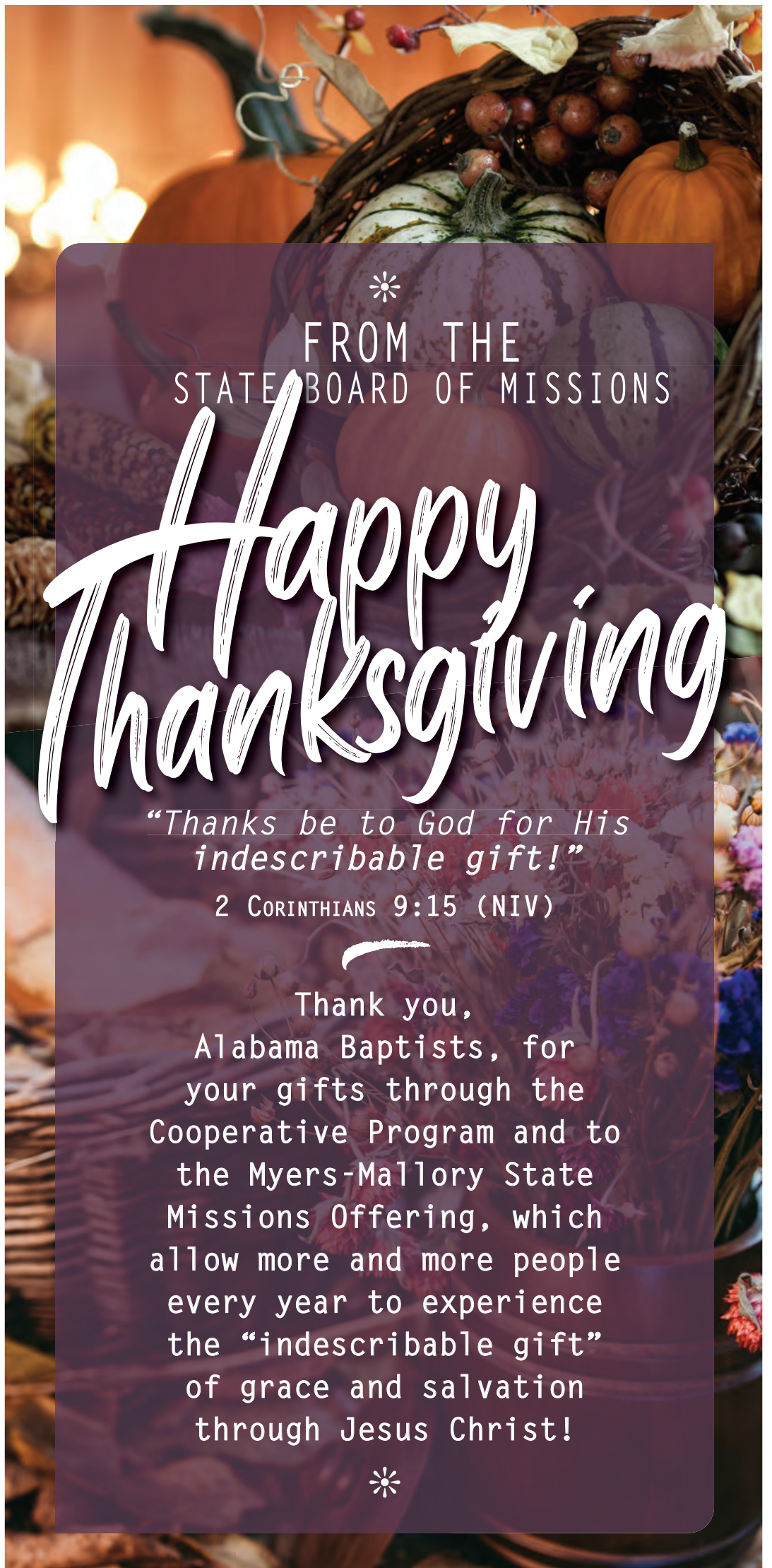


ONLINE: EARLY BIRD TAX CONFERENCE

Thursday, December 10, 10 a.m.-Noon



What tax changes will be taking place in the new year? In this webinar, State Missionary Lee Wright will help answer questions to get you started out right. If you have questions about this webinar, you may contact Lee Wright at lwright@alsbom.org or 334.613.2241. Register at PinnacleAlabama.org under Upcoming Training.



FROM THE STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS

Happy Thanksgiving

"Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"

2 CORINTHIANS 9:15 (NIV)

Thank you, Alabama Baptists, for your gifts through the Cooperative Program and to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering, which allow more and more people every year to experience the "indescribable gift" of grace and salvation through Jesus Christ!



Photo courtesy of Shelby Baptist Association

The Shelby Baptist Association Christmas Gift Shop allows families in need to browse shelves stocked with presents for children. Gifts are sorted by age and gender.

Christmas shop helps brighten holidays

Every year for the past 25 years, about 30 people have decided to follow Jesus through Shelby Baptist Association's Christmas Gift Shop ministry.

This year's shop opens Nov. 30 — and already they've had eight people make that decision.

"We offer two opportunities for people to speak with a chaplain — first when they're interviewed, and then again when they shop," said Rebekah Parr, ministry evangelism catalyst for Shelby Association.

Selection process

Starting in September, the association interviews people who express a desire to have help with their children's Christmas presents. Then after Thanksgiving, those people are able to come by appointment and "shop."

Each room in the building — provided each year by Calera Baptist Church — is decorated with presents according to age and gender.

Shopping day

Parents are able to select a few toys of varying price along with some necessities, a Bible and a stocking personalized for each child.

In recent years, the shop has been able to help around 500 kids.

"Usually we also have hot cider and coffee, but this year it's bottled water and prepackaged snacks because of COVID-19, and we're screening people at the door," Parr said, noting that anyone who needs to will be able to shop with a volunteer walking them through the store via video on an iPad from their car. (Grace Thornton)

Christians can rest in promises of God during unsettling times

By Denise George
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

As traumatic and unsettling as the past year has been for most of us, it is only temporary. This, too, will pass.

While all global residents must endure the temporary times, and while they can produce much discomfort, Christians possess an ability to see from an eternal perspective, keeping their eyes focused on Christ, God's Word and God's promises in Scripture.

Believers in Christ have the assurance that God is in control of all earthly matters, and that sometimes we humans cannot fully understand why He allows things to happen.

But Christians also can trust in an all-powerful, all-loving and always-present God, who keeps His word and makes good on His promises.

And Christians can know with assurance that the eternal things of God will never pass away.

Hope in Christ

Scripture assures us of certain promises, and we can rest upon those promises. God's Word gives us peace and hope in times of turmoil.



Unsplash.com

Here are some of those promises:

▶ God will never leave us and will always be present in our lives (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5; Deut. 31:6). We are never alone or without Him.

▶ God's love always surrounds us, and nothing in this world or beyond can separate us from His eternal love (Rom. 8:38–39).

▶ God maintains control over all world affairs. Nothing happens without His permission. He is all-powerful and omnipotent, and He keeps His promises (Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:19–21; Jer. 10:12). And when He

allows us trials and burdens in this life, He promises to bring good from them all (Rom. 8:28).

▶ God promises us so much more than temporary comfort and ease. He promises all who believe in

Him the gift of eternal life — a permanent and "forever home" with Him (John 3:16–17; 1 John 5:13–14; John 5:24; John 14:3).

▶ God gives us promised hope for a

grand, everlasting reunion with all those we've loved and lost — loving relationships that will be free from pain and will continue for eternity (Rev. 21:4). The late Billy Graham writes: "Heaven is a place of perfect happiness — and one of its greatest joys will be our reunion with those we love."

Look to eternity

While we must now live in the present commotion, confusion and chaos of coronavirus, we can set our minds and hearts on eternity, giving thanks to God for all things (1 Thess. 5:18). As believers in Jesus Christ, we can focus on and be thankful for the eternal, hope-filled promises God gives us, promises that will last forever, not just for a season. 🌿

"Scripture assures us of certain promises, and we can rest upon those promises."



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CELEBRATING

during a pandemic

Fall, Christmas church programs shift outdoors, online out of caution

By Lanell Downs Smith
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

The COVID-19 pandemic continues, and many churches have adapted holiday events to provide the hope of the gospel amid social distancing, masks, meeting restrictions and the fear of in-person gathering.

Bethel Baptist Church, Dora, for example, historically offers a fall festival, hayride and community supper.

But this year they hosted a drive-thru harvest festival Oct. 31, complete with a car-side “cake walk,” treat bags and Bible scenes narrated on 87.9 FM radio.

“We decided to do a journey through the Bible,” said Bethel Pastor John Foles. “It started with Adam and Eve and went all the way to the cross, with John the Baptist sharing the gospel.

“We came to the conclusion that this may be a better, different way to do it,” said Foles, who noted more than 1,000 participated.

“This was a way that people who

were nervous [about COVID-19 exposure] could still participate and feel safe.”

Seeing good results

Despite pandemic challenges, churches like Bethel are seeing good results through modified events. And as the Christmas season approaches, churches continue to find creative adaptations of traditional celebrations.

Scott Underwood, worship pastor at First Baptist Church, Florence, shared on the TAB Talks podcast that his church has changed its Christmas plans a few times since the pandemic began.

“It seems like every time we come up with something, then there’s some hiccup or there’s some issue that we haven’t thought about,” Underwood said. “The biggest thing for us was what we could realistically accomplish with our folks, with our finances and with the time.”

First, Florence, usually engages a professional artist to present a con-

Hear more ideas about planning for Christmas at tabonline.org/podcasts.



hopeisaliveshow.com

Musicians practice for ‘Hope is Alive,’ an hour-long TV Christmas special produced and presented by Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Birmingham. The show will air on Birmingham’s WBRC FOX6 on Dec. 6 at 5 p.m.



Photo courtesy of Bethel Baptist Church/Angela Washington

Clint Stewart, with help from a furry friend, depicts Daniel in one of several drive-thru Bible scenes hosted at Bethel Baptist Church, Dora, on Oct. 31.

cert alongside the church choir and band. Uncertainty over the feasibility of holding a concert led to making Christmas a “destination” rather than an “event.”

This year the church will decorate its entire city block, and on Dec. 4–6 guests can enjoy live music, carolers and a living nativity, along with the sites and decorations of downtown Florence.

Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Birmingham, switched gears early in the pandemic to offer a unique, in-home worship experience.

By August, it seemed clear that audiences couldn’t come inside the church for the annual production of “Christmas by Candlelight.”

So Michael Adler, Shades’ wor-

ship arts pastor, shared on the TAB Talks podcast how he found a way to bring the Christmas story to life inside living rooms instead.

The Shades worship team created “Hope is Alive,” a one-hour televised Christmas special designed to help viewers feel “known, heard and understood” through the gospel story, said visual arts director Ethan Milner, also part of the TAB Talks interview.

‘Dramatically different’

Filmed at the historic Alabama Theatre and on nostalgic, custom-built living room sets, the video special features Nashville artists Drew and Ellie Holcomb, as well as artists and actors from Birmingham.

“People need to be uplifted, and we hope to offer something a little different and to try and offset the depression and discouragement people are feeling.”

Larry Byrd
marketing committee member, FBC Birmingham

A variety of familiar and adapted Christmas songs, coupled with carolers and storytelling, encourage viewers to remember the hope of the season.

“We looked at how to make it really dramatically different and not just film what we would normally do,” Adler said. “Everything we did with Drew and Ellie affirmed that we were united in that one thing: don’t despair. Hope is alive, and hope has come in the form of Jesus Christ.”

Airing live on Dec. 6 at 5 p.m. on WBRC FOX6, the performance will be available afterward for streaming on LifeWay’s Digital Plus platform.

The broadcast also will offer viewers the opportunity to support local children in need by giving to Christian Service Missions’ Christmas for Kids project, Adler said.

And at First Baptist Church, Bir-

mingham, a contemporary band will introduce the sounds and themes of Christmas during a drive-thru outreach event called “First Light,” on Dec. 10–12 starting at 6:30 p.m.

Story of God’s love

Joe Hopkins, minister of music, said guests will observe prophets proclaiming the coming of Christ, choirs singing praises, actors in the nativity and the story of God’s love expressed through Jesus Christ, portrayed in a projection on the side of the church.

Counselors will be ready to explain how to receive Christ and to pray with guests, he noted.

Larry Byrd, marketing committee member at First, Birmingham, said, “People need to be uplifted, and we hope to offer something a little different and to try and offset the depression and discouragement people are feeling.”

Suggestions for

CHRISTMAS PROGRAMS

Tips for how to ‘do Christmas’

After nearly a year of waiting to see what will happen with COVID-19, churches may want to hold on to what feels normal when it comes to planning Christmas programs.

For those still working through how to “do Christmas,” here are some tips to help meet needs during this unique season:

▶ Don’t be afraid to let the past go and try something new. Ask, “If we didn’t have Christmas traditions, what would we do?”

▶ Know when it’s okay to rest and focus on family. Build opportunities for families to worship together — as small experiences or supporting livestream offerings from other churches.

▶ Leverage where you are and engage the community. Consider making the town square the gathering place for Christmas events.

▶ Reach outside the church to

engage volunteers. Invite nonbelievers to help and pour into them while working together. In this season of “isolation fatigue,” many are eager to share their gifts.

▶ Learn from what other churches are doing and ask

for tips on using technology.

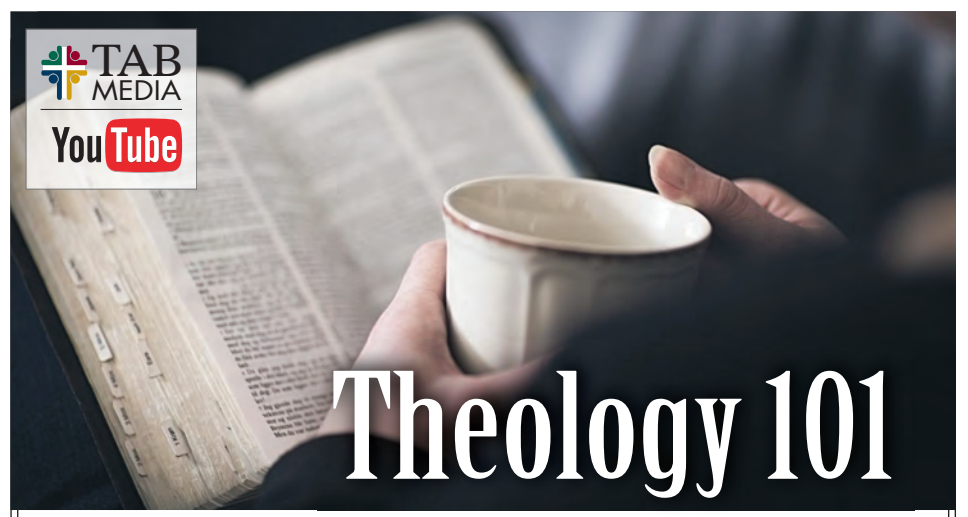
▶ Look to the art department of local schools.

▶ Search for ideas online. YouTube has video tutorials for utilizing technology.

(Tips shared on TAB Talks podcast on Church Christmas Music)



hopeisaliveshow.com



BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Thinking About Truth

The Holy Spirit: The Spirit of Truth

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

On the evening before His crucifixion, Christ had much to say to His disciples in what has become known as His Upper Room Discourse, recorded in Chapters 14–16 of the Gospel of John. In that discourse, Christ made four distinct references to the Holy Spirit by referring to the Spirit as the Paraclete.

The structure of this Greek term speaks literally of “one called alongside of.” The root meaning of the term conveys ideas such as advising, helping, exhorting, comforting, strengthening, interceding and encouraging. As a noun, the term is simply rendered “Helper” in the New King James Version. The manner of His help depends on each context in which Christ used this designation for the Holy Spirit.

‘Another Helper’

In the first Paraclete passage, Jesus identified the Holy Spirit as “another Helper,” whom He termed “the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees Him nor knows Him” (John 14:16–17).

In the third Paraclete passage, Jesus explained further, “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me” (John 15:26). So, for the second time, Christ referred to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth.

In the fourth Paraclete passage Christ gave His promise to send His followers the Helper, whom

He again referred to as the Spirit of truth whose mission would be to glorify Christ by taking His truth and showing it to His followers, thus guiding them into all truth (John 16:13–14).

Any claim to having received some insight or guidance from the Holy Spirit must square with the words of Christ and the written word of God.

Divine truth

To these passages from the Gospel of John, the First Epistle of John adds the summary declaration, “It is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth” (5:7).

The Holy Spirit enables Christ’s followers to recall His teachings, as well as to discern those teachings from counterfeits.

Not only does the Spirit of truth enable the recollection of divine truth, He also enables believers of that truth to walk a straight path according to it.

The digest of truth to take away from this session of Theology 101 is that the Spirit of truth always guides us unto Christ, the Person of truth, and does so according to the Bible, the Word of truth.

Jerry Batson is a retired Alabama Baptist pastor who also has served as associate dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University and professor of several schools of religion during his career.



3 stories

you should know



Photo by David Crowe

Pastor Bill Morris (left), 87, of Central Coosa Cowboy Church, in the community of Hanover near Sylacauga, baptizes his brother Jack Morris, 85. Assisting is Larry Brown, a deacon at Central Coosa Cowboy Church. Following the baptism, Bill Morris declared he and his brother 'double brothers,' according to David Crowe, director of missions for Central Baptist Association. (TAB)

Restrictions on religion rise across the globe

The number of restrictions on religion continues to rise in countries around the world, according to a recent analysis by Pew Research Center.

In 2018, laws, policies and actions by government officials that impinge on religious beliefs and practices reached an all-time high since Pew Research Center began tracking these trends in 2007.

The increase from 2017 to 2018 was relatively modest, but it contributed to a substantial rise in government restrictions on religion over more than a decade in the 198 countries included in the study.

The increase reflects a wide variety of events around the world, including a rise in the use of force to coerce religious groups.

Read more at tabonline.org/government-restrictions. (TAB)

Alito calls out fellow justices on restrictions

Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito told the Federalist Society on Nov. 12 that the nation's high court allowed blatant discrimination to stand in at least two cases limiting church activity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Alito referenced the July case of a Nevada church limited to 50 attendees when casinos were allowed 50% capacity and the May case of a California church limited to 25% capacity or no more than 100 attendees.

In both cases, Alito was in the minority when the Court voted 5-4 to let the restrictions stand.

Alito acknowledged the pandemic has taken a "heavy human toll" but said the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment protects religious liberty, not "blackjack" or "slot machines." Read the full article at tabonline.org/alito. (BP)

Headline news

from around the Southeast

Georgia

Georgia Baptists recently celebrated the life and ministry of Pastor Andy Merritt, who died Oct. 11 due to COVID-19 complications. As associate pastor and then pastor at Edgewood Baptist Church for decades in Columbus, Georgia, Merritt started a ministry for women in crisis pregnancies, *The Christian Index* reported. Edgewood deacon Linwood Spires estimated "over 50,000 babies here locally have been saved by that one ministry."

Florida

Nearly 700 Florida Baptist churches have delivered sustenance, hope and love while distributing 6,680,015 meals valued at \$28,692,764 to communities facing hunger, unemployment and health issues during the COVID-19 pandemic, the *Florida Baptist Witness* reported. As a result, these churches have reported 1,055

professions of faith, said Myles Dowdy, Florida Baptists' missions and ministries lead catalyst. The food distributions will continue throughout the remainder of the year.

Louisiana

Nathan Davis, pastor of First Baptist Church, Coushatta, Louisiana, accepted the "Who's Your One" evangelistic challenge by sharing the gospel with someone especially close to him — his daughter, McKinley, the *Baptist Message* reported. The pastor prayed all year his daughter would place her faith in Jesus Christ, and on Sept. 28 she made her profession of faith. The pastor baptized his daughter on Oct. 25.

Mississippi

Covington County Sheriff's Office in Collins, Mississippi, celebrated the baptism of 17

inmates in mid-October. The group of inmates baptized included four women and 13 men. "We hope this is a new start and will change the lives of these and many more," a Facebook post from the office said. Close to 2,000 people reacted to the social media post, and hundreds of people commented, celebrating the inmates on their decisions.

Tennessee

When Tennessee Baptist Mission Board leaders decided to hold a virtual summit this year, rather than the typical annual meeting, Scott Shepherd, TBMB worship and music specialist, decided to put together a virtual choir, the *Baptist and Reflector* reported. Six weeks and about 150 hours later, his task was complete and the special musical video presentation with 96 participants aired online. By Nov. 18, the video had been viewed more than 5,500 times.

Alabama news

BALDWIN ASSOCIATION

► **Baldwin Baptist Association** messengers welcomed three churches into full membership at their 2020 annual meeting. The three churches are: **Oasis Church, the Wharf:** Barry Britt, pastor; **Exalt Community Church, Daphne:** Sean Odom and Jamie Ketchum, co-pastors; and **The Point Church, Elberta:** Josh Heisler, pastor.

DALE ASSOCIATION

► **Bethel Baptist Church, Newton,** celebrated its 150th anniversary Oct. 11 with a special service and dinner on the grounds. Jim Hill, director of missions for Dale Baptist Association, spoke, and the Byrd Family provided music. Ellen Dewberry, a commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented a certificate, and a brief history of the church was distributed. Mike Griggs is pastor.



Photo courtesy of Ellen Dewberry

GENEVA ASSOCIATION

► Jimmy Helms was born and raised at **Union Baptist Church, Hartford.** He remembers people coming to church in mule-drawn wagons and how his grandfather used to drive around picking up people in his old truck to bring them to church.

Union has a long, rich history in the community, and Oct. 11, they gathered for an outdoor service



Photo courtesy of Ellen Dewberry

(pictured here) to celebrate 125 years since its founding. Former member David Williford, who also grew up in the church, gave the message. The choir sang, and Ellen

Dewberry, a commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented a certificate. Bryan Carpenter is pastor.

MORGAN ASSOCIATION

► When **East Highland Baptist Church, Hartselle,** held their first service in 1970, they sang “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms.” To remember where God has brought them, they sang it again Nov. 1 as they celebrated their 50th anniversary.

During the special service, Pastor Walter Blackman — who has been there for nearly half of the church’s history — preached, and Mary Shaneyfelt briefly talked about the history of the church. Joe Teal, a commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, also presented a certificate.



Photo courtesy of Joe Teal

Before the service, the children planted a tree representing the growth of the church, and a time capsule was buried. A framed quilt and a curio cabinet with church memorabilia were on display, and those present received a bookmark and a history booklet with recipes from church members.

“We were pleased with the participation, especially considering we are still dealing with COVID-19,” said Bettye English, chair of the anniversary committee. “We had our largest crowd since COVID began.”

WINSTON ASSOCIATION

► **Don Smith** says every year brings gratitude for what God has done and is continuing to do. That’s the way he feels when he looks back over his 44 years in ministry.

And when he thinks back over the past five years as director of missions for **Winston Baptist Association,** he thanks God for that opportunity. He recently announced that he plans to retire Dec. 31.

“The friendships made will always be cherished,” he said. “Pam and I have always felt welcomed by each church in the association.”

Before coming to Winston Association, Smith served for 13 years as an associational missionary at Sequoia Baptist Association in Visalia, California. Before that, he served as pastor of two churches in Washington state.

After he retires, Smith plans to live in Grant and continue supply preaching and interim ministry “as long as God opens the doors.”

(Alabama news compiled by TAB Media staff)



SMITH

Suit says app stores promote gambling

Two federal lawsuits filed Oct. 21 against Apple and Google seek refunds for Alabamians who downloaded gambling apps that plaintiffs say are illegal under Alabama law.

The cases were filed in Alabama’s Northern District Federal Court and seek refunds for two Alabama purchasers, in addition to “a reasonable sum of money” for bringing the cases to court.

The suits — which have the potential for class action — were brought against Apple and Google by two Shelby County residents.

The residents purchased game apps and paid money for additional playing time.

The suits target games that initially offer free “coins” to play slots, blackjack, roulette, poker, keno, bingo and other games.

A loss decreases the number of coins, while a win increases the coin total.

When players run out of “coins,” they use real money to buy more coins to keep playing.

One plaintiff spent \$165 in more than a year to play Slotomania; the other spent \$250 in six months to play Jackpot Party and Goldfish Casino Slots. The suits contend that paying to win more playing time constitutes gambling under Alabama statutes.

The suits list 200 games available in Apple’s App Store and Google Play Store that have this gambling feature.

The Alabama cases are somewhat unique in that they target the platform providers — Google and Apple — which receive a 30% cut of revenues from the games.

The suits further contend that Apple and Google have the ability to restrict such games to states where gambling is legal. (Compiled from news reports)

Persecuted church

Christian flogged in Iran; pastor and wife flee country after prosecution

RASHT, Iran — An underground Christian was flogged in Iran and the pastor of a legally recognized church has fled the country.

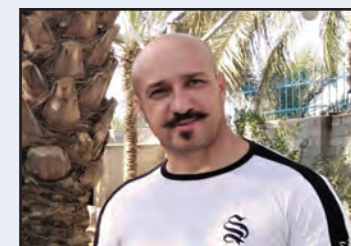
Mohammad Reza (Youhan) Omidi received 80 lashes Oct. 14 for drinking communion wine. Alcohol is forbidden for Muslims in Iran, which doesn’t recognize conversion from Islam to Christianity.

Omidi was flogged for the same thing in 2013. Fellow house church members Mohammad Ali (Yasser) Mossayebzadeh and Zaman (Saheb) Fadaee also have been sentenced to flogging.

In addition, Omidi was imprisoned two years for house church activities deemed

“acting against national security,” followed by two years of internal exile.

In late summer, Victor Bet-Tamraz, 66, pastor of a legally recognized church, and wife



Morning Star News photo

Shamiram Issavi, 64, fled Iran after his appeal was rejected and her sentence was to begin. He had received 10 years for talking to

Muslims about Christ; his wife received 5 years for house church activities.

Iran is No. 9 on Open Doors’ 2020 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian. (MS)

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

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS and Lottie Moon Christmas Offering

November 29-December 6 alsbom.org/lottiemoon

In addition to the prayer guide provided by the International Mission Board, here are some field personnel from Alabama who are serving around the world. Please take a moment and lift each one of these up in prayer!



Sunday

Wallace and Dee
Europe



Monday

Greg and Laura
North Africa and Middle East



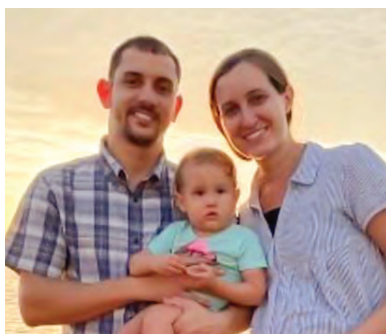
Tuesday

Eric and Heather
Sub Saharan Africa



Wednesday

Jeff and Caitlyn
South Asia



Thursday

Olivia and Matt
Southeast Asia



Friday

Kelly and Will
Central Asia



Saturday

Mark and Mia
East Asia



Sunday

Charlie and Robin
Americas



To learn how your church can connect personally with international field personnel, contact Scotty Goldman, sgoldman@alsbom.org, (334) 613-2387.

For more information about field personnel from Alabama serving around the world, please visit a18c.org.

This resource is made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.

Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

2020 marks 175th anniversary of Sarah Hall Boardman Judson's death

Sarah Hall Boardman Judson (1803–1845) was an American missionary, writer and translator. She was the second wife of Adoniram Judson, the first foreign missionary from America, who served in Burma.

This year is the 175th year of her death.

The oldest of 13 children, Sarah was born on Nov. 4, 1803, to Ralph and Abiah Hall in Alstead, New Hampshire. The family later moved to Salem, Massachusetts.

Time at home

Although she briefly attended a female seminary, she educated herself at home and spent much time caring for her siblings. She published poetry in two Christian magazines.

When she was 17, she joined the First Baptist Church of Salem and

became a Sunday School teacher.

She felt a call to missions as a teenager.

In 1823, she met her heroine, Ann Judson, the first wife of Adoniram Judson. (Ann died in 1826.)

Serving in Burma

On July 4, 1825, Sarah married Baptist missionary George Boardman. One week after their wedding, they sailed to Burma (now Myanmar).

They arrived in Calcutta, India, in 1825 and remained there until 1827 because of the Anglo-Burmese War. After arriving in Burma, their missionary work began in Maulmain.

Since George wanted to evangelize the Karen people, they started a station at Tavoy. A year later, a revolt occurred, and they returned to Maulmain.

The Boardmans had three children: two died young and George Dana Boardman became a Baptist minister in Philadelphia.

In 1830, still weak after a serious illness, Sarah traveled with her feeble husband on his last journey to the Karen people.

From his cot, he witnessed more than 50 people being baptized. He died on Feb. 11, 1831. After his death, Sarah continued her missionary work at Tavoy.

Three years later she married the widowed Judson on June 10, 1834. They experienced a happy marriage, with Sarah balancing family and missionary responsibilities.

Eight children

They had eight children, three of whom died in infancy.

Sarah translated Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" and the New Tes-

tament into the Peguan language.

She wrote a hymnbook and volumes of Scripture questions for Sunday School classes. She also helped Judson with his translation work.

Final years

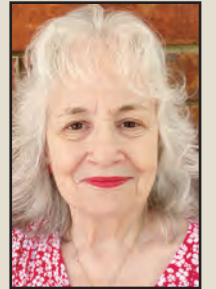
In December 1844, after the birth of their last child, Sarah contracted a chronic disease. Physicians thought a voyage to America would help her.

Traveling with her family, she died on Sept. 1, 1845. She was buried on the island of St. Helena, where Napoleon had spent his last days in exile.

Judson's third wife, Emily Chubbuck Judson, published a book in 1848 about Sarah's 21 years of extraordinary missionary work. ✝

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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Closed Christmas and New Year's Days

Crisis in Armenia: Helping those displaced by conflict

By Margaret Colson
The Alabama Baptist

The bombs started falling in once peaceful communities. People — mostly women, children and the elderly — began running for their lives as their homes were destroyed. Fathers, brothers and sons stayed behind to defend their land.

On Sept. 27, a longstanding land conflict boiled over between Armenia and Azerbaijan as Azerbaijani military launched air raids and artillery attacks on the region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The result has been an unfolding humanitarian crisis, with as many as 150,000 Armenian refugees seeking food, shelter and life's necessities.

Vazgen Zohrabyan, pastor of Abovyan City Church in Armenia, and Sergey Rakhuba, president of Mission Eurasia, recently spoke with TAB Media about the crisis.

'Reach out and help'

"We were shocked. No one was expecting that [the conflict and subsequent humanitarian crisis] would take place now. Here we are. We have this big challenge, but this is also a big opportunity for us to reach out to the people and help them," said Zohrabyan.

Because missionaries from his church had served in Nagorno-Karabakh just a week before the fighting broke out, "Pastor Vazgen became the nationally known leader in Armenia," Rakhuba said.

Today, the Armenian pastor tries to coordinate refugee relief efforts throughout his country, which has a population of about 3 million.

Churches have become "the main source of life and hope in the society," Rakhuba said.

A social media message posted by Zohrabyan reached some 2,000 Armenians seeking refuge in his

city of about 40,000 people, nearly 200 miles away from the conflict.

His church of about 200 has helped those refugees find shelter, with about 50 refugees being housed in the church building itself.

Other churches throughout Armenia are also taking in thousands of refugees.

Desperate situation

As Zohrabyan speaks with the refugees, he begins to understand their desperation.

"A family who reached our church from the war zone couldn't speak for a day," he said. Zohrabyan was expecting two cars of refugees, but only one car arrived. "We asked, 'Where is the other car?'"



Photo courtesy of Mission Eurasia

More than 150,000 refugees have been displaced by the recent conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

They couldn't answer; they couldn't speak. The next day they explained that a drone hit the first car, and the people in the car were killed, and they saw it all."

Mission Eurasia seeks to help meet the most urgent needs of refugees, primarily food and shelter, Rakhuba said. Also as the weather turns colder, clothing is

an urgent need. Armenian churches are doing what they can do in crisis relief, he said, but "Armenia is not a wealthy country. It is strong; it is faithful; it is a Christian-based country, but they need help."

Aid efforts

Mission Eurasia is helping train volunteer counselors and is distributing copies of the Gospel of John and the New Testament, along with a prayer guide.

Rakhuba is calling on Christians worldwide to join aid efforts. For more information on how to help, including a link to TAB Media's conversation with Zohrabyan and Rakhuba, visit tabonline.org/armenia.

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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

CHURCH POSITIONS

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.

PASTOR

First Baptist Church of Charleston, a rural, mission-minded church in Southeast Missouri, is seeking a full-time pastor. Our conservative congregation has a growing music program, as well as active programs for our youth and young and senior adults. Salary and benefits negotiable based on experience and education. Resumé, cover letter and/or recommendations should be sent to: fbcharlestonmo@gmail.com or 301 South Main, P.O. Box 442, Charleston, MO 63834. Resumé deadline is Jan. 31, 2021.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Joquin Baptist Church located between Luverne and Troy on Highway 29 is seeking a bivocational pastor. Please send resúmes to: Joquin Baptist Church, 95 Joquin Road, Goshen, AL 36035.

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: shadygrovebclc@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. Resúmes and videos may be emailed to: kim@yorkbluffbaptist.com. The deadline to receive resúmes 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 resúmes to: office@fbwoodstock.org.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR FAMILIES & YOUTH

Linden Baptist Church, Linden, Alabama, is seeking a full-time minister of families and youth. Send resúmes 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 seek-

ing 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. Resúmes may be mailed to: kim@yorkbluffbaptist.com. The deadline to receive resúmes 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. Resúmes may be emailed to: kim@yorkbluffbaptist.com. The deadline to receive resúmes 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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MINISTRIES

TAB DIGITAL

In addition to the print edition, *The Alabama Baptist* also releases a weekly digital edition of the newspaper to every subscriber's email. The digital edition now comes with all subscriptions. The digital edition has the same content as the print edition — including full color on all pages — and can be accessed anytime as long as you have internet. To update your email address contact subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org.

Thanksgiving Word Search

L H A R V E S T P L O T X E S L M Z S C
 U F G A E O A E M P W V F G G O X V D E
 F Y C E N M C F I C M Y N M M Y R L E N
 K V Y H C A O L O N E I T A S E C C E T
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 A O N P P R A I S E T H E L O R D N L R
 H E I D I A T S F R S B Y B N U A G U P
 T E I M U A C F Y W E O A B R T H R F I
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 C L V E N O B H S I W E C I O J E R B M
 B I E S Y A D G N I V I G S K N A H T L

- Acorn
- America
- Apple pie
- Autumn
- Be thankful
- Carve
- Casserole
- Celebrate
- Centerpiece
- Cornbread
- Cornucopia
- Cranberry sauce
- Dessert
- Enduring love
- Extol
- Football
- Friends
- Grateful
- Gratitude
- Ham
- Harvest
- Holiday
- Home
- Leftovers
- Native Americans
- Pecan pie
- Pilgrim
- Praise the lord
- Pumpkin pie
- Rejoice
- Rolls
- Salvation
- Sing for joy
- Sweet potato
- Thank offerings
- Thanksgiving Day
- Turkey
- Wishbone
- Wonderful deeds

Christian Crossword

By Udena McKee Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

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40			41				42		43
44			45		46				
		47						48	
49					50			51	

Across

1. To crush.
4. The Spirit __ truth. (1 John 5:6)
6. What all homes in the South have.
8. Wind direction.
10. __ did that which was right. (1 Kings 15:11)
11. If I be __, then my strength will go. (Judg. 16:17)
13. A Protestant denomination.
15. Land from which the Lord brought Abram. (Gen. 15:7)
16. Verse or rhyme.
18. A mental disorder.
20. Behold the __ of God. (John 1:29)
21. __ Moses lifted up the serpent. (John 3:14)
22. The days that Adam lived were __ hundred and thirty years. (Gen. 5:5)
23. __ else!
24. The mother of all living. (Gen. 3:20)

Down

27. Fragrant shrub.
30. Location.
32. Seaman apprentice. (abbr.)
34. Thou shalt make __ covenant with them. (Ex. 23:32)
35. When the Lord smelled the pleasing __. (Gen. 8:21)
36. Male cat.
37. Judah is a __'s whelp. (Gen. 49:9)
39. Curve.
40. And when he had spit __ his eyes. (Mark 8:23)
41. He __ meet them. (2 Sam. 10:5)
43. A particular thing. (legal term)
44. King of Bashan. (Num. 21:33)
45. Seth lived __ hundred and five years. (Gen. 5:6)
46. Drone.
47. Thou shalt have good __. (Josh. 1:8)
48. Consumed.
49. So Absalom __

50. With regard to.
51. Golf peg.

Down

1. One who endangers success by meddling.
2. Ye shall be __ gods. (Gen. 3:5)
3. Melchizedek, king of __. (Gen. 14:18)
4. Abraham's son. (Gen. 16:11)
5. But Sarai was barren; __ had no child. (Gen. 11:30)
6. Away, hence. (archaic)
7. A hundred. (comb. form)
9. How much less man, that is a __? (Job 25:6)
12. American Rental Association. (abbr.)
14. Flower cluster.
15. Even those who by reason of __ have their senses exercised.

- (Heb. 5:14)
17. Paddle for canoe.
19. Person who has access to confidential information.
25. But __ covereth the mouth of the wicked. (Prov. 10:6)
26. Groups of animals.
28. Have ye __ brother? (Gen. 43:7)
29. Bruise.
30. To weep with convulsive heaving.
31. An elementary child's flute.
32. This __ unto the Lord. (Ex. 15:1)
33. Morning time.
36. Handyman's necessity.
38. And __ the vine were three branches. (Gen. 40:10)
41. First king of Israelite nation. (1 Sam. 9:17)
42. Mantras.
47. __ Joseph died, being a hundred and ten years old. (Gen. 50:26)
48. One. (Scottish)

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For November 29

Explore the Bible

By Robert L. Olsen, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



GOD RESTORES Isaiah 65:17–25

We now come to the end of the Book of Isaiah, which focuses on hope and judgment.

In this section, Isaiah focuses on a time in the future where those who love the Lord will face no more trials and live in peace. However, scholars are uncertain if this time refers to the millennium or the final judgment and eternal state to come. Regardless, the important thing to focus on is the fact that believers will be taken care of by their heavenly Father.

A Place of Joy (17–20)

The new heavens and new earth that God will create will be filled with joy, not pain and suffering. History is filled with overwhelming suffering and destruction and while we remain relatively free from persecution in the U.S., we need to remember that our brothers and sisters in Christ are persecuted throughout the world.

Yet in their suffering, they can teach us how to persevere by looking forward to what God has planned for us (see John 14:1–4).

One of the reassurances of Christianity is we know that God works all things, including suffering, for the good of those who love Him (see Rom. 8:28), and ultimately, we will spend eternity with Jesus which gives us strength to press on when we are faced with adversity.

A Place of Prosperity (21–23)

While we are living in this glorious new earth, we will experience prosperity. Our work will not be tainted by sin.

Many Christians think work was created by God as a form of punishment, that we are to work because of Adam's sinful act in the garden. But Adam was to work before his fall. Work is not punishment, but a wonderful blessing from God.

If we think about work — growing crops, repairing broken things, reading and planning — these are not bad in and of themselves.

They can be laborious and dif-

ficult, causing us to get injured or wearing us down both physically and mentally. But God Himself works, as Jesus tells us in John 5:17, which means it cannot be sinful.

In fact, many of us can find joy in our work, and we are living out our calling by glorifying God in our work. He has given us gifts and abilities to be used for His glory, and in many cases, these will continue into the new earth. However, our work then will not be toilsome but joyous.

A Place of Peace (24–25)

In the last section of Chapter 65, Isaiah reminds us that the new heavens and earth will be filled with peace, with an absence of war. The imagery used by Isaiah shows antagonistic relations being healed — the wolf will get along with the lamb, and the lion will no longer eat an ox but straw instead. All forms of animosity will be plowed over, and in its place will be peace.

In our current rocky times of political unrest, it gives us great hope to think we will eventually spend eternity with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Since this is the case, we need to live lives that bring glory to God.

We need to trust and hope in Him and not look to our circumstances to bring us joy and meaning.

One of the problems many people in our society have is they look to politics to bring them meaning and purpose, which is why so many people are angry. It will not be this way forever.

In Chapter 66, Isaiah speaks of the coming judgment that will precede the new heaven and earth. Here, those who have not trusted in Christ for their salvation will be separated from God forever, in eternal punishment (see Isa. 66:24).

This should fill us with hope, but it should also spur us on to share the gospel so that as many people as possible have an opportunity to hear it, respond and avoid their eternal demise.✠

Bible Studies for Life

By Jeffery M. Leonard, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Biblical Studies, Samford University



COMMITTED TO HIS MISSION Romans 10:9–17

On the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee is a small and unpretentious archaeological site called Kursi. Kursi is not much to look at — the ruins of a Byzantine monastery and a few mosaics and that's about it. But a visit to Kursi is not so much to see what's there as it is to remember what happened there.

Kursi is the spot where Jesus encountered the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5). Here on this dangerous "other side" of the sea, Jesus cast a legion of demons out of this man and into a nearby herd of swine. Once, the man had been too violent to be restrained by fetter or chain. Once, he had lived among the tombs, howling day and night and gashing himself with stones. Now, the man sat before Jesus "clothed and in his right mind."

Led no doubt by those who had lost their swine, the townspeople begged Jesus to go away. The demoniac begged Jesus too, but rather that he might be allowed to go away ... with Jesus. Shockingly, Jesus' answer was no; he would not let the man come. Instead, the man was instructed to go home and tell everyone all God had done for him.

It is easy to assume this was the end of the demoniac's story. Left by Jesus on the seashore, the man must surely have drifted off into the mists of history. If we read the Gospels carefully though, we know this is not the case. Jesus returned to this region again later in His ministry (see Matt. 15:29–31), and this second time, the townspeople came out in droves begging Jesus to stay and not to go. What made the difference? It was the demoniac. This man whom Jesus had healed had become the first missionary. Before Philip and Peter and Paul would do their great work in Acts, it was this unnamed Gentile demoniac who first reached out to other Gentiles with the gospel.

The message of salvation is summed up in confession and belief in Christ. (9–10)

Although the Apostle Paul's

letter to the Romans is often viewed as Paul's great defense of salvation by faith alone, an ever-present subtheme in the letter is his concern for the relationship between Jews and Gentiles. Paul is at pains to argue in Romans that Jews come first in the order of salvation (9:4–5).

But Paul also argues that a door has now been opened for Gentiles to gain salvation as well. Even pagan, idol-worshipping Gentiles can now come to God. How? Paul insists, "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."

The message of salvation is for all people. (11–13)

Outreach to the Gentiles was a powerful subtheme in the ministry of Jesus too. Though He ministered mainly to Israel, Jesus kept planting seeds for future ministry to others as well. Stories like the Good Samaritan, the woman at the well, the Syrophenician woman and the centurion's servant foreshadowed the mission that would reach out to Gentiles as well as Jews.

In Romans, Paul picks up the torch of this outreach and signals that now the time has come when both Jews and Gentiles will be accepted on the same basis by the same Lord.

We are to share the message of salvation. (14–17)

In the remainder of Romans 10–11, Paul wrestles with the fact that, at least in his day, it seemed that almost the only people coming to faith were Gentiles. Paul's own countrymen, the very people to whom Jesus had directed the bulk of His ministry, were not.

Paul's confidence is that though this might be the case at the present moment, it would not always be the case. One day, he insisted, both God's first people, Israel, and the rest of His people among the Gentiles would worship the same God together in faith.✠



Media reviews

MUSIC

Singer-songwriter Melanie Penn shares about God's goodness

By Tracy Riggs
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

In a very chaotic, broken world that can skew towards skepticism and cynicism about people and life circumstances, I want to write songs that remind us of God's goodness, bringing that childlike view of purity and clarity to lives," says Melanie Penn, a New York-based singer-songwriter. "I hope that any song I write helps someone do that."

Penn released her fifth album, "More Alive, Vol. 1," in September.

Penn has been writing about hope throughout her career. Singing her first solo in church at age six, she knew then that she loved singing and performing. She has studied classical music and concentrated on voice. After moving to New York City, she performed musical theater and had a part in the Broadway touring company of "Grease."

In her 20s, Penn decided she wanted to try writing songs.

"Though it was kind of late for starting as a songwriter, I dipped my toe into songwriting, and the rest was history," Penn said.

Though her songs have never been typical pop songs about dating, love and breakups, as she has matured in her faith her songs have matured as well, with



Melanie Penn

Photo by Michelle Mosqueda

more and more about living the Christian life.

"I love it when non-Christians find my music. I think that the ideal world is to bridge that gap. I like to present songs that anyone can access," Penn said.

Throughout her career, she has written songs about finding help in times of trouble. Calling them "hopeful anthems," she looks for themes in the world and tries to talk about joy, then finds a way to tell that story in song.

Trouble has visited Penn recently though. In January she found out her father has stage 4 cancer. She lives in New York City, which has been one of the major hotspots of COVID-19. However, due to these personal struggles, she has been able to write songs addressing the troubles the world is facing.

"No matter what you think about what's going on, I think we can agree that the media will always play up the negative and panic. I became so hungry for an alternate narrative that I decided I was going

to write songs that have more truth than what I'm getting from the media," Penn said. The songs "One Word," "You're Not Absent" and "Grace" were all written during the pandemic.

After spending time with her parents in Virginia, Penn is back home in New York City as her father is doing well with treatment. Living there might seem difficult as a Christian artist.

"However, there are a lot of gospel-believing people here," Penn said. "I think the body of Christ in New York is very committed to the city and ... is a very powerful force for good. I love being a part of that."

Christmas songs

Penn's album "Immanuel" tells the Christmas story through the eyes of its characters.

"I never had any intention of writing Christmas songs. I have no explanation on how it happened," Penn said. "Sometimes, as an artist,

you'll get an idea and realize that this idea didn't come from inside. You can either accept that opportunity or reject it and be too busy for it. At that time, in 2016, I saw that opportunity and accepted it.

"God gave me that project to write, and I think it will go on after me."

Favorite Bible verse

Though Penn has been relying on Isaiah 45 and 46 to get through recent struggles, she has a favorite Bible verse — Ecclesiastes 11:6: "Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well."

"Am I doing the right thing? Should I be a singer? Should I be an accountant? Am I being impractical?" Penn said she asks herself. "I'm always hoping I'm on the right path, but I think at the end of the day, what the Lord wants from us is to be contributing to the world. Then the Lord decides what is going to take root and flourish. Our job is to contribute as much as possible."

Penn has struggled with the idea of releasing music during a pandemic.

"People are at capacity in terms of what they are giving their attention to. But I really felt that I shouldn't back away from releasing music during this time. It's a reminder that artists are still out there creating beautiful things.

"The job of the artist in this time is to keep creating and presenting art to the world.

"Thirty days from now, all this could look different. But God is in control of all of this, and I think God is doing things that we can't even see that are for our good." 🙌

For more information about Penn's work visit melaniepenn.com.



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.

'He is always going TO PROVIDE'

UWA assistant women's soccer coach Morgan Brown acts with grace and wisdom

By Bill Sorrell
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When Morgan Brown has one of those days when nothing seems to be going right, she remembers an important truth she's learned in her faith journey.

"The Lord is never going to put you in a situation you can't handle," said Brown, assistant women's soccer coach at the University of West Alabama. "He is always going to provide."

That's true in small ways, like a bonus check from a previous job that came just in time to buy a new tire for her car. And it's true in big ways — like acquiring her coaching job at UWA.

After graduating from the University of North Alabama in 2018, Brown was working at a fast food restaurant and trying to figure out her next move.

She received a text from Hollie Loud, former assistant women's soccer coach at both West Alabama and North Alabama. Loud told Brown about Graeme Orr, head women's soccer coach at West Alabama, and a position on the UWA coaching staff.

Brown interviewed for the job and got it. "Within a week, my whole life changed," she said.

But the real change happened a



UWA photo

Morgan Brown has been the assistant women's soccer coach at University of West Alabama since summer 2019.



UWA photo

Morgan Brown

few years earlier when Brown accepted Christ during her sophomore year at UNA.

The Pleasant Hill, Ohio, native did not grow up attending church regularly, but when teammates invited her to Lifesong Church in Sheffield, she went. At a New Year's conference in Tennessee, she got her first Bible and put her mathematical brain to work trying to understand biblical truths.

She began to spend Sunday nights at Lifesong, singing and worshipping Jesus, and one Sunday night, she committed her life to Christ.

Following Christ

"I prayed, 'God, I don't believe in You. I don't know what else to do.' At that time, I remember a guy coming up to say, 'I feel called to pray over you.' Three or four girls on the team prayed over me for understanding and what a weight came off my shoulders — freedom," Brown said.

She began to learn more about following Christ and living on mission. She went to outreach beach projects in Florida the following two summers, learning all she could the

first year and helping others learn the second year. She followed those experiences with a summer 2018 missions trip to Antigua, where she helped teach soccer camps and led Bible study.

The joy she saw in the Antiguan Christians moved her, Brown said.

"They had old Bibles, taped together," she said. "But you could tell they loved the Lord and sang their hearts out in worship and thanked Him. That was very humbling."

Since becoming a Christian, Brown has learned to grant grace to others, especially those who feel Christians are judging them.

"That is not our responsibility," she said.

Mollie Clay, a former West Alabama athletic trainer who now works in New Orleans, helped disciple Brown in her personal faith, as well as in practicing her faith on the job as a coach of young players.

"As with any job, (in coaching) there are many opportunities to indulge frustration and impatience

rather than slow down and choose to be compassionate," Clay said. "I attempted to help her take a step back from whatever issue we were facing and try to act with grace and wisdom rather than following whatever emotion was strongest at the time."

Patience and compassion

Clay said she has watched Brown grow in patience and compassion, and serve sacrificially as a coach.

"Morgan has this innate diligence and toughness. She can power through anything. I believe that's a gift," Clay said.

"But seeing Morgan show vulnerability and admit she needs help has truly been the biggest area of growth I've seen in her."

When Brown became a coach, she thought she would change players' lives, but she learned that's not the case.

"I've learned more from them than they have ever learned from me," she said.

Brown noted she has intentional conversations and shows patience with her players, trying to guide them toward positive decisions.

But she knows she is still young in her faith and has a lot of growing to do. She has read Christian authors like C.S. Lewis and even took a class, "Introduction to New

Testament History," her senior year at UNA to learn more about the history and context of Scripture.

Brown also reads the Bible her mother gave her and continues to learn, especially Scripture she desires to memorize.

"I look at older people and see what they have done, hear their testimony, just their whole life," she said. "One day I will be there and I can share that with people like grandkids, family members and friends." ✝



BROWN