



# The Alabama Baptist

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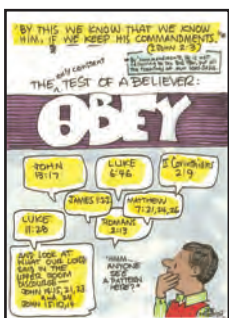
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**National Religious Freedom Day is January 16.**

123rf.com

# Protecting religious freedom

## Americans' support for religious freedoms strong in 2020

By **Martha Simmons**  
Correspondent, TAB Media

**W**hen the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty initiated its annual Religious Freedom Index in 2019, the intent was to ask

the same questions each year in order to provide “a consistent year-by-year picture of American perspectives on religion, culture and the law.”

Then along came 2020, which was anything but consistent. Still, a look at the 2020 results provides insight into what Americans value as 2021 begins.

In its 2020 study, Becket researchers asked 1,000 Americans from all walks of life not only the same 21 baseline

questions from the Index’s inaugural year, but also included some 50 additional questions on the COVID-19 pandemic, racial justice and the 2020 election. The Becket Fund is a nonprofit institute seeking to protect the free expression of all faiths.

### Three themes emerged

Three themes emerged from the 2020 survey, according to the report released in November:

▶ Americans weather

storms anchored by faith

▶ Religious identity cannot be quarantined

▶ Leadership gaps surfaced in defending racial justice and religious freedom.

In a year when Americans seem to disagree on just about everything, more than 60% of respondents agreed that “religion and people of faith are part of the solution to the issues facing our country,” the report said. That view was (See ‘Religious,’ page 12)



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Photo by Keith Colson

Margaret Colson, TAB Media special assignments editor, celebrates her graduation at home in Georgia.

## TAB Media's Colson earns D.Min. from New Orleans Seminary

Margaret Colson, TAB special assignments editor, already had her heart turned toward churches in crisis before the COVID-19 pandemic ever hit.

In December 2017, she started working on her doctor of ministry at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, focusing on crisis communications for churches.

"I realized that every church, at some point in its life cycle, will experience crisis," she said. "Crisis is not a matter of 'if' but 'when.' A crisis places a church at a crossroads where it can move forward triumphantly, with a fresh outpouring of Christian ministry and witness, or retreat in shame and despair, besmirching its mission for Christ."

### Crisis communication

For a church to get through a time like that successfully depends in large part on effective communications, Colson said. And she soon discovered that few, if any, resources exist to help church leaders with that.

Not too long after that, the pandemic became an "every-church

crisis," she said. "Many churches began to understand, maybe for the first time, how crisis can descend on a church, sometimes without warning, and how devastating that crisis can be if not handled well."

That only made Colson more

passionate about her topic, which became a book called "At the Crossroads: A Crisis Communications Guide for Churches." She said its goal is to provide a practical, timely and theologically sound answer to the question, "How can a church experience crisis and emerge victoriously?"



Photo by Keith Colson

"Effective communications can help

take a church from where it is — in crisis — to where God wants the church to be — on mission for Him," Colson said. "I am eager to see how God uses this resource to help churches emerge on the other side of crisis, not only alive, but also, quite possibly, more energized and committed to its mission."

Colson's D.Min. became official Dec. 18 with New Orleans Seminary's December graduation. (TAB)

## TAB Media

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

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The crossword puzzle  
can be found on page 13.

# RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

**By Jennifer Davis Rash**

President and Editor-in-Chief



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@RashionalThts

## Anticipating renewed hope, energy as we welcome 2021

I recently flipped back through the 51 issues of *The Alabama Baptist* published in 2020 and chuckled when I reread the Jan. 2 editorial — “What will history write about our version of the 20s?”

Meant at the time as a simple challenge to reboot our lives by flushing out the chaos and clutter so we could enter the new — and at the time seemingly exciting — decade, 2020 certainly took the “what will history write” question to a level I never anticipated.

Still, the idea of learning from the past and entering a time of serious reflection and renewal remains pertinent.

What did we learn from our friends and family a century ago in the 1920s when “pedal to the metal” living and constant demands to push the limits drove Western society right into the middle of its worst nightmare — the Great Depression?

What did we learn from ourselves a hundred years later in 2020, as we claw our way toward the hope of a new year without a global pandemic, intense anxiety and a divided society of people?

If we are honest, then we know the answer — Jesus.

But we also know we struggle

daily to totally trust and let Him have full control.

We fret about the what ifs and sometimes let our personal situations cloud our view of what God could be doing in the big picture of life.

Brokenness, pain and suffering are all real and should be acknowledged and addressed.

Ignoring the areas of life that hurt only makes matters worse.

Showing compassion to those who are suffering and avoiding the temptation to judge others — you know, the whole until we’ve walked in their shoes concept — not only serves the other person better, but it also

keeps our hearts focused in the right direction.

And checking our own hearts before pointing fingers will likely surprise us in what we find.

It almost always results in an adapted response, one that seeks to understand and find consensus with a touch of love, grace and kindness.

Will we ever all agree on right and wrong? Can we convince everyone else to think like us?

Is it possible to develop a plan that ensures the days ahead work out exactly like we want?

Of course, we know the answer to all three is no, but for

some reason we spend lots of energy trying to make them so.

What if we shifted our strategy and spent the time we have left focused on Jesus and what He would have us do rather than being frustrated or discouraged by what we see happening around us?

It might mean He leads us to become actively involved in our community in a way to model better behavior, to help at-risk kids find a successful and independent future, or to show how unity can take place even among people who don’t agree.

God might use us to change the world for the better, simply by pointing people to Him.✠

## Sticking with the tried and true — ‘Rashional Thoughts’; retiring recent years’ editorial title of ‘My Rashionale’

It’s hard to believe, but it was a little more than a decade ago (November 2010) when we launched the “Rashional Thoughts” column and blog.

And within days, the title caught on, so much so that I knew it would forever be my brand. My Twitter and Instagram handles are even @rashionalthts, and we post the weekly columns online at both [tabonline.org](http://tabonline.org) and [rashionalthoughts.com](http://rashionalthoughts.com).

When I stepped into the edi-

tor’s chair on Jan. 1, 2019, I wanted to expand the editorial offerings with two brief editorials each week.

In order to maintain the softer “life as life happens” approach of “Rashional Thoughts” and also provide space to deal with more difficult subjects, we created “My Rashionale” as the second column.

However, what we’ve noticed in the two years since making this move is that I’ve made a natural shift toward merging the two columns and their purposes. It’s actu-

ally hard to distinguish between the two now.

We’ve wondered if there’s a need to continue with two column titles. Plus, “Rashional Thoughts” still wins out as the most recognizable of the two — and I love how well it fits.

So, “Rashional Thoughts” is now the official title. I promise to continue the quick-read style (and maybe even offer an “ir-Rashional” thought on occasion).

—Jennifer Davis Rash

# Your Voice



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

## Let's work to restore broken families to health and unity

By **Chris Palusky**

President and CEO, Bethany Christian Services

**N**ews reports [in December] told of a 2-year-old boy who was left at a Mississippi Goodwill donation center with a bag of clothes and a note that said, "His mother cannot care for him anymore."

Many were quick to blame the child's mother out of frustration and outrage. That's a natural response, but I urge you to take a different approach to this boy's story.

The love we instinctually feel for a child in need is beautiful, and ... the child does deserve a loving, safe home and family.

But my question is: Why isn't

our first instinct to find and help his parents so they can have a chance of providing that to him?

When a parent gives up a child, it's often an act of desperate love, a hope that their child will have a better chance at life than they have.

In a refugee camp in Sudan I once visited, a young mother standing outside of her mud house held up her baby and begged me to take him with me.

Even in our country, family separation is a devastating reality often caused by circumstances outside of parents' control.

Children sometimes enter foster care because a crisis at home threatens their safety or well-being. They

may have experienced abuse, neglect or been exposed to violence.

But the vast majority of kids in foster care come from families navigating poverty, injustice, addiction, medical issues or the unforgiving grind of parents working two to three jobs to make ends meet.

### Impossible decisions

Their parents have often been forced to make impossible decisions. Some have to leave their children at home unattended so they can keep their jobs, pay their bills and keep food on the table.

Add to that the stressors we're all facing in 2020: A global pandemic has infected millions of people in the U.S. and shut down businesses, schools and child-care facilities.

Thousands have been displaced from their homes by natural disasters like hurricanes and wildfires, and the country is still recovering from the economic recession. Many parents are struggling to cope without a network of support.

Family reunification is the most important goal for children in foster care. Yet, according to the most recent statistics from the Children's Bureau, the proportion of children exiting care who were reunified with their parents fell to an all-time low at the end of fiscal year 2019. Only 55% of the over 400,000 children in foster care at the end of fiscal year 2019 were seeking family reunification, and just 47% of the children who exited foster care achieved it.

How should we respond to the fact that thousands of families were separated this year not because parents failed their children but because broken systems did?

We can start by acknowledging the complex challenges that have overwhelmed families and left them in a desperate state with few good options. Then we must help parents get the support they need for a second chance at staying together with their kids. Separated families can be reunited and restored.

We must remember that we're meant to be Jesus' hands and feet, not the Savior Himself. While there is family brokenness in the world, we as Christians are called to enter into the mess and work to restore families to health and unity. We are called to provide a network of support for these families — not break them apart when they have the opportunity to thrive.

### Coming alongside

Christian churches have long championed adoption, and that's a good thing. But followers of Jesus should also come alongside struggling families, helping them stay together and flourish so that adoption isn't needed. It's not an either/or proposition but a both/and. Adoption and family preservation are two sides of the same coin.

God's plan is for children to thrive in a family, ideally their strong and stable biological family. Reunification provides a path toward healing and belonging for children and families. We can celebrate children finding permanency with adoptive families. But we must also celebrate families who stayed together. (RNS)

## Ministry goals for the future

**M**any of us get so tied down into the mundane, routine, daily tasks we must perform that we miss out on God's plans for ministry.

We must create time in our schedules to see what God has for us. Proverbs 29:18a says, "Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained."

Will Mancini, in his book "God Dreams: 12 Vision Templates for Finding and Focusing Your Church's Future," says that we are "to lead with a vivid picture of your church's future" and that "a lack of a clearly defined vision

will cut your church's effectiveness in half."

This is scary. Nobody wants to be less effective. What is your vision for the next year of ministry? What is your vision for the next 3 to 5 years of ministry?

We get the privilege of leading God's church in unprecedented days! Will we lead well with a clear, crisp vision? What's the vision God has given you for ministry in your context?

**Josh Meadows**  
Family life pastor  
Spring Valley Baptist Church  
Springville, Ala.

Share online or email [news@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:news@thealabamabaptist.org)

## Encouraging words for difficult times

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.”

The familiar words of Psalm 23 reveal important truths that can help us find comfort in fearful times. ...

Walking through the valley of the shadow of death is inevitable. It’s not a pleasant truth, but critical for us nonetheless. The same way we enjoy the serenity of life’s hilltops, we must also expect frequent treks through life’s treacherous valleys. It is in those inescapable valleys that we find potential sources for fear.

The mistake we tend to make is thinking we can circumvent the valley, that we can avoid the sources of fear. We forget that together with all of the wonderful promises of God is the promise that “in this world you shall have tribulation” (John 16:33). ...

Fear is a choice. The psalmist emphatically declared, “I will fear no evil.” He is determined that while in the valley, he will not succumb to fear.

In an age dominated by social media, reality television and the opinion-driven nature of cable network news, we have access to content that constantly reminds us just how deep in the valley we are. What if we chose to limit our time on the numerous media outlets available to us? Might we experience less fear? ...

Faith in God’s abiding presence is the only true remedy for fear. And when we embrace this truth, there is an unfailing source of comfort available to each of us that comes from knowing that no matter what difficulties we face, there is no need to fear because we are not alone. God is with us. (BP)

**Pastor Bryan Price**  
Love Fellowship Baptist Church  
Romeoville, Illinois

“Faith never knows where it is being led, but it loves and knows the One who is leading.”

OSWALD CHAMBERS

*“My Utmost for His Highest”*

I know we’re in a busy season, and maybe you’re thinking of creating healthy boundaries at work. Maybe you think it’s impossible. I certainly do/did. But here’s an easy trick for the next time someone comes to you with a task. Say this: “Thank you so much for thinking of me. Let me check my schedule and get back to you.”

Then you can come back and say: “I’m in!” or “Thank you for reaching out to me, but I just can’t do that.”

It gives you time to think without feeling peer pressured into saying yes. Because if you’re anything like me, you’ll just say, “Yes.” It’s like I have some big, “I’ll help” sticker on my chest. And I love helping. I’m great at it. But sometimes it’s

not great for me, and my sanity and mental health are more important than being sure those things get done.

**Katie Allred**  
Church Communications  
Facebook group

In the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses commanded Joshua to gather people together in order that they might learn. After Nehemiah built the walls, he gathered together the people for teaching and learning.

Jesus Himself grew up in a culture that greatly valued education. He was the Master-Teacher and is referred to as such 42 times in the New Testament.

Teaching, therefore, belongs to the essence of the church. All

Christians are born again into the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18–20). And that requires chronic learning as to how best to do so in each and every culture and generation. In some sense, therefore, it seems that all Christians are or should be ordained — regardless of their ordinary vocational pursuits.

After all, as Elton Trueblood wrote, our “other vocation” is our daily work and walk in the pathways of following Jesus Christ: making disciples, baptizing them and teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” (Matt. 28:19–20). Is this reality, in the words of Trueblood, “sometimes overlooked or neglected?”

**Morris Murray Jr.**  
Jasper, Ala.

## From the *Twitterverse*

### @sPeytonHill

“The Lord is near to the broken-hearted and saves the crushed in spirit” (Ps. 34:18).

### @jt\_english

Community is indispensable to discipleship, but it is not synonymous with discipleship. Wrong question: Are you in community? Better question: Are you learning about the way of Jesus in your community?

### @KuyaKevin

“Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms.” — C.S. Lewis

### @brocraig

“This is really the very height of preaching, when men make themselves nothing and Christ everything.” — Dwight L. Moody

### @louiegiglio

Suffering isn’t God trying to hurt us. Suffering is God trying to help us and refine us in the very best way.

### @kristenpadilla

“Do not call everything a conspiracy these people say is a conspiracy. Do not fear what they fear; do not be terrified. You are to regard only the Lord of hosts as holy. Only he should be feared; only he should be held in awe” (Isa. 8:12–13).

### @EdLitton

Assurance, which leads to boldness, is the work of the Holy Spirit. Believe Him and trust His working today in you and through you for the glory of Jesus Christ.

### @LutherQuotes

I would rather preach the truth with too great a severity than to

ever once act the hypocrite and conceal the truth.

### @shane\_pruitt78

You can’t be “on fire” for Jesus and cold toward His church at the same time.

### @revandyfrazier

“The morning is the gate of the day and should be well-guarded with prayer.” — C.H. Spurgeon

### @MattMason3

John Owen: “There is not the meanest, the weakest, the poorest believer on earth that Christ does not value more highly than all the world besides.”

### @PaulTripp

The glory song of the angels at Christ’s birth is a call to us to confess our need, trust his grace, surrender to his lordship and join the celebration of his glory.

# Creating a culture

## D-Life disciple-making program nurtures lifestyle of studying the Word

By Grace Thornton  
TAB Media

**B**ill Wilks wouldn't have guessed that 2020 would've been the year he found himself sitting around with a group of men in his garage, chairs six feet apart, bundled up in coats with the garage door open.

But in a pandemic year when gathering in groups is more complicated, it works.

And that's just the thing about D-Life — because it's discipleship the way Jesus designed, it just keeps working in any setting where people try it, Wilks said.

### Simple model

Wilks, pastor of NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville, started the D-Life model about seven years ago when he began meeting with five other staff members each week to talk about what they were reading in the Bible.

Their goal: to get through the entire New Testament together in a year and then to split into separate groups, add in more people and do it all over again.

It was such a simple model it worked, Wilks said — simple to facilitate and simple to replicate.

Fast forward to this month, and Wilks is leading two more D-Life Boot Camps in Alabama to teach others how to start a culture of making disciples at their church



Photo courtesy of Bill Wilks

Members of Bill Wilks' D-Life group meet in his garage to observe social distancing guidelines while continuing their discipleship training. Hundreds of churches use D-Life to create a culture of discipleship in their congregations.

and in their personal lives.

In recent months and years, they've led boot camps across the Southeast to train people how to be effective disciple makers by studying the Bible with friends, coworkers and neighbors.

### 'Practical and fruitful'

"It's growing; it's spreading," Wilks said. "Almost every church that signs up keeps going for multiple years. It's a process that's just so practical and fruitful."

The goal, he said, is to help people realize that discipleship isn't

a program of the church — "it's a lifestyle."

"Inviting people to church is good, but if they say they already have a church, then we don't have anything else to try," he said. "What if we started with 'come be a part of my life'? It becomes 'let's hang out and let me disciple you' instead."

Wondering how it works? Through an app, D-Life offers a year-long reading plan that has participants read one chapter of the Bible each day on their own, then come together once a week in small groups to discuss it.

When they meet, one person facilitates. Another leads a prayer. A third retells the story that's assigned for the week, a story they will have all read in their personal time in the Word. A fourth person will read it from the Bible to see if anything was left out.

### Starting a movement

Each group chooses its own time and place for meeting up. It can be anywhere — a restaurant, a coffee shop or a chilly garage, Wilks said. The only thing the D-Life model asks is for the meeting to happen out in the culture somewhere, not at a church.

Then when the groups grow to eight or so people, they split and start new groups. That keeps them growing and multiplying, Wilks said.

That can start a disciple-making movement and help revitalize churches too.

"If you're going to revitalize your church, how are you going to do that without building a disciple making culture? If you can build that culture, you can begin revitalization," he said.

And once people adapt a disciple-making lifestyle, they can take it anywhere, Wilks said. "It doesn't matter where you go to church, once we train you to be a disciple maker, then if you moved to Alaska, you could begin a D-life group and immediately begin making and multiplying disciples."

*"It's growing; it's spreading. ... It's a process that's just so practical and fruitful."*

**Bill Wilks**  
pastor of NorthPark Baptist Church and founder of D-Life

**South Alabama  
D-Life Boot Camp**  
First Baptist Church,  
Fairhope  
Jan. 16, 9 a.m.-2 p.m.

**Central Alabama  
D-Life Boot Camp**  
NorthPark Baptist  
Church, Trussville  
Jan. 23, 9 a.m.-2 p.m.

To register, visit  
[livethedlife.com/bama](http://livethedlife.com/bama).

**“Bill and I are truly passionate about making disciples and sharing this tool that has been life changing for us.”**

**Rondie Wilks**  
co-founder of D-Life and wife of Pastor Bill Wilks  
of NorthPark Baptist Church

Stan Albright, director of missions for Coosa River Baptist Association, said when he was pastor of First Baptist Church, Oxford, it was evident that D-Life played “a significant role in the spiritual awakening and growth of our church. It resulted in multiple baptisms. We’ve had almost 40 baptisms after launching D-Life.”

As the years have gone on and Wilks has led boot camps across Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, Texas, Arkansas and other states, he’s seen groups multiply and people grow in their faith over and over.

And as he’s taught, his wife, Rondie, has been right there with him, teaching it to women’s groups and doing retreats for pastors’ wives.

“Bill and I are truly passionate about making disciples and sharing this tool that has been life changing for us,” she said. “We believe

it is truly a process that cannot fail because it’s no one’s program — it’s the process that Jesus modeled for us. He came up with it. What a privilege we have in this mandate, this commandment — ‘make disciples.’”

Anyone can attend a D-Life Boot Camp. And this year, leaders are taking precautions due to the pandemic.

Wilks said social distancing and other recommended protocols will be observed during the boot camps.

Tables will be spaced apart and lunch will be served boxed-meal style. Tables and meeting rooms will be well-sanitized in

preparation for group meetings, he said. D-Life leaders also request that participants bring and wear face masks.

D-Life materials are produced in partnership with Life Bible Study, an imprint of Iron Stream Media. For more information or to register, visit [livethedlife.com/bama](http://livethedlife.com/bama).



Photo courtesy of Bill Wilks  
Rondie Wilks helps with training at D-Life Boot Camps by teaching women to lead groups.

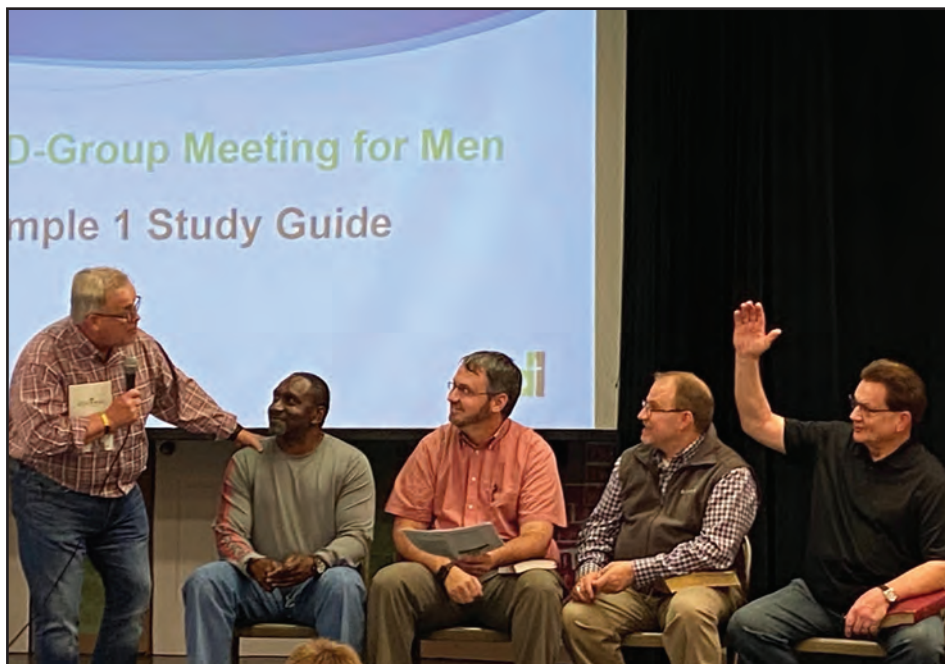
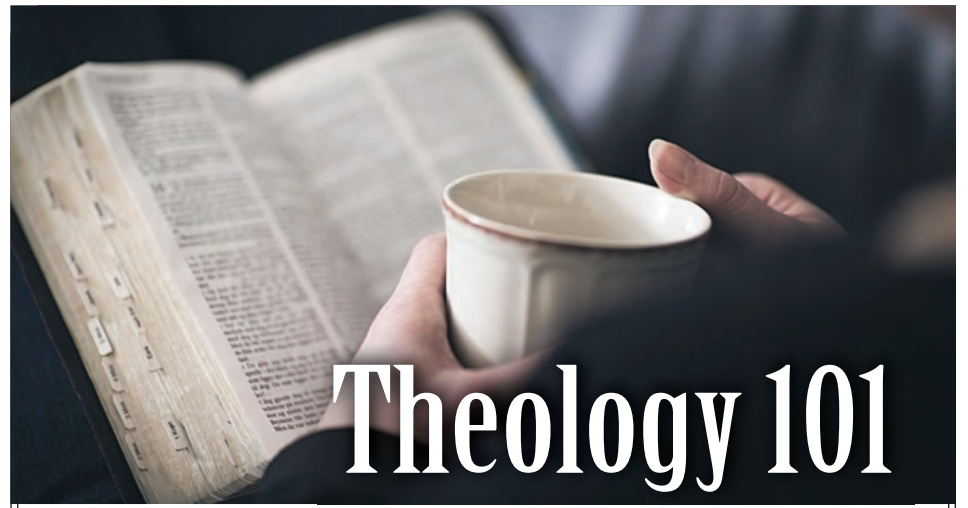


Photo courtesy of Bill Wilks

Bill Wilks (left) leads participants in a mock D-group during a pre-pandemic D-Life Boot Camp at Glenview Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas. Two D-Life Boot Camps, one in Fairhope and one in Trussville, are scheduled this month.



# Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

## New Year's Reflections

# From One Year to the Next

By **Jerry Batson, Th.D.**  
Special to TAB Media

These early days of January are transitional, as we learn to abandon the habit of dating items with 2020 and begin to use 2021.

The name given this first month of the year is derived from the Roman god Janus. He was imagined with a double-faced head by means of which he could look two directions at the same time, with one face able to see backward and the other to see forward. After the manner of its namesake, January is an apt time for all of us to look back, as well as to look ahead.

The Apostle Paul wrote of this two-directional looking in Philip- pians 3 when he testified, “One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (vv. 13–14).

### Looking back

In looking back on the year just ended, no doubt many of us can think of things we’d like to forget.

The backward look is probably a mixture of pride, gladness and gratitude mingled with a measure of regret, sadness and disappointment. In the negative column, there may be a lingering sense of incompleteness or even failure.

Perchance the backward look serves as a reminder that our faith is not as strong as we would like, our love not as consistent as it could be, our service not as self-forgetting as it ought to be, our attitudes not always as Christlike

as He desires them to be. Like Paul, there may be a place for forgetting those things which are behind as we face forward to the year ahead.

On the positive side, lest tempted to rest on our proverbial laurels or experience a sense of having arrived, we might need also to forget last year’s successes after having been properly grateful.

### Looking ahead

In looking forward to the new year, we might do well to adopt some of the characteristics with which the apostle looked ahead in his life. We possibly need the power of a concentrated commitment that says, “One thing I do” (Phil. 3:13).

We might also look ahead with an attitude of eager striving, such as Paul expressed in that same verse as “reaching forward to those things which are ahead” or in the next verse as, “I press toward the goal” (Phil. 3:14).

While the forward look could have its mixture of uncertainty, anxiety and foreboding, it can also be one of anticipation, challenge and hope.

May God be with us all as we move from one year to the next.

*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.*



# January Bible Study

## Denomination-wide study of 1 John focuses on living out faith in ways pleasing to God

By Lanell Downs Smith  
Correspondent, TAB Media

**W**hen LifeWay Christian Resources planned the January Bible Study for 2021 two years ago — well before COVID-19 — the needs of a new year beginning amid a global pandemic were not factored into the decision.

Even so, the study, “John’s Epistles: Living with Assurance,” based on 1 John, delivers much-needed direction for the new year by uncovering false doctrines about the identity of Jesus and illuminating the impact His identity has on a believer’s everyday life.

### ‘Always relevant’

“The beauty of God’s word is that it is always relevant,” said Dwayne McCrary, LifeWay team leader

for ongoing adult Bible study curriculum. “Had COVID not taken place, John’s epistles would still have a great deal to say to our fallen world. World events like COVID just make us more aware of the relevance of God’s word in our lives.”

The study of 1 John, and of all God’s word, is appropriate for all the times believers will face, including a pandemic, said Bryan Mosley, pastor of Mount Olive Baptist Church No. 2, Union Grove, in Marshall Baptist Association.

“This study of John’s epistles is especially appropriate because it talks about living out your faith

in ways that are pleasing to God,” Mosley said. “Right now, as the church is looking for new ways to spread the gospel in light of social distancing, how to live in these times in a way that pleases our Lord should be

on the forefront of our minds.”

Each year, Marshall Baptist Association presents a preview of the upcoming LifeWay January Bible study, giving pastors the

opportunity to examine the curriculum.

Due to COVID-19, Mosley led this year’s preview of John’s epistles as a round-table discussion rather than the planned lecture. And while pandemic-

related concerns kept some pastors away this year, Mosley said the informal setting fostered more conversations about how to apply the text directly to one’s everyday life.

### Practical applications

“John examines living out one’s faith. Being able to discuss this in light of today’s challenges might actually be more beneficial than just listening to a lecture on the subject,” Mosely said.

LifeWay January studies generally alternate between Old and New Testament texts, balancing genre types and considering the scope and also the sequence of ongoing curriculum.

The 2021 study of 1 John focuses on practical applications of a person’s understanding of Jesus. John’s epistles uncover two common false doctrines related to the identity of Jesus — the beliefs that He was thoroughly human but not God and that He was completely God and not human.

“False teachers with an incomplete understanding of Jesus as both human and deity have sought to mislead believers and continue to seek to do so today,” McCrary said.

According to Mississippi pastor and cartoonist Joe McKeever, believers often deceive themselves about God. A focus on the truths of 1 John reveals the good news that Jesus is the “best of all saviors — all God, all man,” he said.

The study helps believers relate to the common

struggles they share with the early church, McKeever said. The epistles offer modern-day Christians an eyewitness account of Christ’s teaching and the chance to receive His teachings through the accounts of those who heard it firsthand.

“Nothing steadies us for handling life’s storms like knowing God’s word,” said McKeever. “He is the rock, our shelter in the midst of the storm, and His word is our ‘sure foundation.’ These epistles constantly reinforce this.”

### Adaptable across ages

McKeever, an Alabama native, will lead churchwide studies of the emphasis in January at Cloverdale Baptist Church in Grand Bay, Jan. 10–11, and at West Jefferson Baptist Church in Quinton, Jan. 24–27. All ages are invited to attend, and McKeever, who sketches people in every church where he teaches, hopes children and teens also will choose to attend.

The study is conducive to small groups of all ages and can be taught in socially distanced groups as well as small virtual groups.

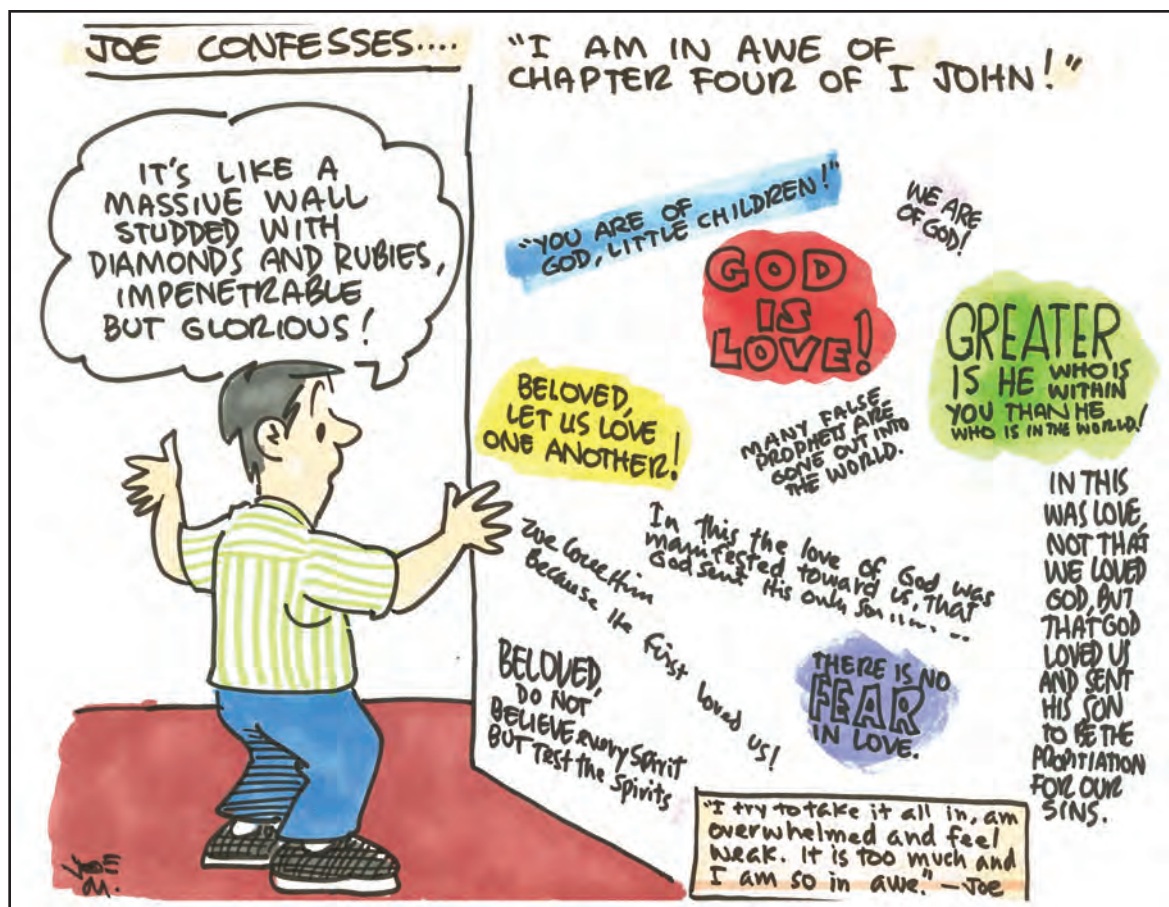
Resources for the study include print and electronic editions of the personal study guide and leader guide,

which also contains handouts, digital presentation backgrounds, clip art and posters as part of a redeemable download. Additional free resources also are available.

More information is available at [lifeway.com/jbs](http://lifeway.com/jbs).

**“The beauty of God’s word is that it is always relevant.”**

**Dwayne McCrary**  
LifeWay team leader  
for ongoing adult  
Bible study curriculum



**A free download of McKeever's cartoons is available at [tabonline.org/resources](http://tabonline.org/resources).**

# Glimpse at how Alabama Baptist churches adapted during 2020

By Cole Shiflet  
and Selah Vetter  
Special to TAB Media

Community is at the heart of what a church does, but church in 2020, and likely continuing into 2021, meant meeting online or sitting six feet apart in the sanctuary.

The COVID-19 pandemic tested the strength of each church community like never before. Churches faced an unprecedented season of hardship as they adapted to new health guidelines in order to keep their congregations safe.

From corporate worship to communion, churches were forced to adapt to the situation and experience church in a new way.

## Shifting online

When the pandemic struck in mid-March 2020, many churches moved to livestream options, but some were not prepared with equipment and resources.

Rural churches were among those struggling with accessibility to stream or post their services online.

Pastor Chuck Goodwin of Shiloh Baptist Church, Wadley, has a congregation

mostly from the nearby rural, farming community. Not everyone could view services online because of limited internet connection.

"I recorded a message and put it on Facebook," Goodwin said. "We are a rural community so there is not a lot of internet access for about half of the members. Some of them weren't able to see any of it."

In more accessible areas like Birmingham, churches were able to adapt more quickly.

"Prior to COVID, our church did not livestream our services," said Dennis Blythe, executive pastor of The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham. "Ever since the very first Sunday after things got crazy, we made online gatherings available. It was pretty basic and streamlined."

While churches in all areas eventually worked out routines for the pandemic year, some church leaders are concerned this era of a digital church will cause members to continue watching services online instead of attending in person, even after the pandemic.

"I think there is a scare

about their membership coming back," Goodwin said. "It's really easy to get in the habit of not going. While I'm a fan of social media, there's nothing like being in the four walls of that church and having fellowship with your brothers and sisters. I just hope that people realize that."

## In-person again

As many churches found ways to gather again safely, attendance remained lower than normal through the end of the year.

The Church at Brook Hills member Sam Plott is one who returned as soon as in-person services started back.

"There was a mandatory mask requirement and social distancing, of course, but everything else felt somewhat normal," he said. "I appreciate how considerate Brook Hills is to those at higher risk by offering a continued livestream service."

Online services also allowed churches to reach an expanded audience.

"I believe the Lord used [the pandemic] to show us that church isn't just a building with four walls," Goodwin said. ☞



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# 3 stories

## you should know



Photo by Luke In/IMB

A man walks past the Lennon Wall, a popular tourist spot in Prague, Czech Republic. People come to the wall to write messages of love and take selfies, said IMB photographer Luke In. “The message on the wall says, ‘all you need is love’ ... but that love has to be God’s sacrificial love to change this world,” In said. “Hopefully, in 2021, John will not need his face mask anymore and his wall would say instead, ‘all you need is Christ!’” (IMB)

### SBC’s Greear to speak at 2021 March for Life

Southern Baptist Convention President J.D. Greear will join a lineup of speakers including Tim Tebow, Benjamin Watson and Jim Daly at the 48th annual March for Life on Jan. 29 in Washington, D.C.

Greear will be the first SBC president to speak at the event. Other SBC leaders have addressed the crowd in the past, including Richard Land as president of the Christian Life Commission (now Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission) as well as Virginia pastor and former International Mission Board President David Platt.

The March for Life has taken place in Washington on or near Jan. 22 since 1974, one year after the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision legalized abortion in the U.S.

Read more about this year’s march at [tabonline.org/21-march](http://tabonline.org/21-march). (BP)

### Transgender athletes subject of legislation

Rep. Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii, a Democrat, and Republican Rep. Markwayne Mullin of Oklahoma, have sponsored bipartisan legislation that would keep transgender athletes from competing in college women’s sports.

The bill could halt federal money to organizations allowing athletes to participate in programs that do not match their “biological sex at birth,” *The Hawaii Tribune-Herald* reported Dec. 12.

The bill — Protect Women’s Sports Act of 2020 — is based on Title IX, a 1972 law forbidding gender-based discrimination in schools receiving federal funds.

Gabbard said Title IX is “being weakened by ... states who are misinterpreting [it], creating uncertainty, undue hardship and lost opportunities for female athletes.” (TAB)

## Headline news

### from around the Southeast

#### Florida

Understanding personally what it’s like to be in need, layperson Domingo Gaspar has led his family into a lifestyle of serving others and sharing the gospel. A member of Fellowship Church in Immokalee, Florida, Gaspar, his wife and four daughters served more than 100 meals to community residents on Thanksgiving and participated in a Christmas outreach event, the *Florida Baptist Witness* reported. “Everything we do is to proclaim the name of Jesus,” Gaspar said.

#### Georgia

Shorter University recently presented its 2020 Distinguished Alumni Awards. C. Thomas Wright, executive director of missions in Alabama’s Mobile Baptist Association, received the Distinguished Alumni Award; Candi Himes, senior executive assistant to Shorter University’s president, received the Distinguished Alumni Ser-

vice Award; and Brinston Morris Mitchell, who serves in several roles at Alexander High School in Douglasville, Georgia, received the Distinguished Young Alumni Award. The awards were presented by university President Don Dowless.

#### Louisiana

In addition to COVID-19 and multiple 2020 hurricanes in Louisiana, Alex Felter lost his job in January. Still, Felter, a 2012 Louisiana College graduate, said 2020 has been one of his best years yet as he saw his graphic design passion become a full-time career. “I could see God working through the whole thing,” he said. His artwork won at two 2020 Louisiana festival competitions, Louisiana College reported.

#### Mississippi

Student athletes from William Carey University provided lunch to Hattiesburg, Mississippi,

police officers and firefighters recently to show appreciation. The effort was part of a service project sponsored by the Athletic Student Leadership Council called, “Serving those who serve us.” WCU students delivered lunch at three fire stations, and police officers stopped by the WCU Office of Advancement to pick up their plates, WCU University News reported.

#### Tennessee

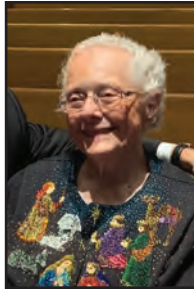
Changing its name from Little Hope Baptist Church to Living Hope Baptist Church was the first step toward church transformation in Clarksville, Tennessee. Since Derek Smith became pastor in December 2009, the church has adapted its music, ministered in the community, built a new facility and established a new racially diverse campus. In the past 11 years, church attendance has grown from 120 to about 900 pre-pandemic, the *Baptist and Reflector* reported.

# Alabama news

## OBITUARY

► **Audrey Cowley** — a retired International Mission Board missionary and namesake of a scholarship for Missionary Kids at Samford University — died Dec. 11. She was 93.

Cowley and her husband, Bill, served in Nigeria for 23 years before Bill began a 16-year tenure (1977–1993) on the Samford religion and speech faculty. Cowley served as the campus minister at Jefferson State Community College, and in 1979, she became treasurer of national Woman’s Missionary Union.



COWLEY

The Bill and Audrey Cowley MK Scholarship was named in their honor in 2014. (Read more about their ministry and the scholarship at [tabonline.org/cowley](http://tabonline.org/cowley).)

Cowley is survived by her husband of 66 years; daughters, Carol and Karen; four grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

## COLBERT-LAUDERDALE ASSOCIATION

► **Isaac Brown** is the new pastor of **Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, Killen**. Isaac is married to Caroline, and they have two children. Isaac previously served as youth pastor at First Baptist Church, Greenhill. ► **Chris Aday** is the new senior pastor of **Lee Heights Baptist Church, Florence**. He is a graduate of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and has nearly 20 years of ministry experience. He and his wife, Kelley, have six children.



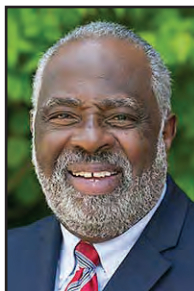
BROWN

## SAMFORD UNIVERSITY

► **Beeson Divinity School** recently announced the establishment of two new scholarships in honor of longtime Alabama Baptist ministers.

The **Robert Smith Jr. Scholarship** will honor Smith for his more than 20 years on faculty at Beeson and his more than 50 years of preaching ministry.

Smith holds the Charles T. Carter Baptist Chair of Divinity at Beeson, where he teaches Christian preaching. He has preached in many Alabama Baptist churches, as well as at the annual meeting of the Alabama Baptist State Convention and the SBC Pastors Conference. The scholarship will provide significant financial assistance to outstanding applicants who are called to preaching ministry, said Gary Fenton, Samford advancement officer.



SMITH

Beeson also announced the endowment of the **Robert E. Gladney Jr. Scholarship** in recognition of Gladney’s ministry to Alabama Baptist

churches. Gladney recently retired as executive pastor of Central Baptist Church, Decatur, having previously served similar roles at Spring Hill Baptist Church, Mobile; Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham; and First Baptist Church, Jackson, Mississippi.

Individuals and churches may contribute to these scholarship funds. More information is available at [tabonline.org/scholarships](http://tabonline.org/scholarships).



GLADNEY

## MADISON ASSOCIATION

► When the congregation of **Bethlehem Baptist Church, Hazel Green**, had looked forward to celebrating their 100th anniversary, they’d never imagined it happening in a year like this.

But even with the COVID-19 pandemic happening, there was a “very sweet spirit” at the celebration Dec. 13, church member Betsy Spencer said. “We look forward to the next 100 years.”



Photo courtesy of Charlie Howell

**DOM** Charlie Howell (left) and Pastor Lon Ostrzycki

McClure, minister of worship. Former Pastor Joel Carwile was the special speaker.

At the celebration, Charlie Howell, executive director of missions for Madison Baptist Association, also presented a certificate on behalf of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission.

The church — led by Pastor Lon Ostrzycki — plans to extend the celebration into 2021 with special services on April 18, Aug. 8 and Oct. 31.

(Alabama news compiled by TAB Media staff)

# Persecuted church

## Ugandan pastor killed after radio broadcast comparing faiths

ADUKU, Uganda — Muslim extremists in Uganda killed a pastor Oct. 31 following a radio broadcast in which he compared Christianity and Islam.

David Omara, 64, was a well-known pastor of Christian Church Center and a radio preacher.

He was the father of eight children between the ages of 30 and 10.

Immediately after the broadcast in Aduku, Omara received a call from someone “appreciating his presentation.”

The caller requested to meet Omara, said son Simon Okut.

When Omara and Okut arrived at the meeting place, six people dressed in Islamic attire emerged from bushes and attacked Omara. The assailants beat him with blunt objects and strangled him.

Okut escaped.

Okut quoted one of Omara’s attackers as saying, “This man ought to die for ... saying Allah is not God but an evil god collaborating with satanic powers.”

Uganda’s laws and constitution provide for religious freedom, including propagating one’s faith and converting from one faith to another.

Muslims make up more than 12% of Uganda’s population. (MS)



## WMU ministry reaches ministers’ wives online

As the COVID-19 pandemic stretched on in 2020, people began to be concerned about the stress pastors were facing — and rightly so, said Candace McIntosh, executive director of Alabama Woman’s Missionary Union.

But she had a burden for another group too — the pastors’ wives.

### Encouraging via Zoom

“They’re walking alongside their husbands and carrying the burden with them,” she said.

So she — along with Pam Lance, wife of Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, and Alabama WMU’s Trish Jackson — began do-

ing monthly Zoom calls for pastors’ wives.

It’s something that has proved to be a big encouragement to many, McIntosh said, and they’re looking to add more women to that connection time in 2021.

“We’ve always had a heart to minister to these wives,” she said, noting that in the past they’ve been able to hold the Ministers’ Wives Luncheon and other events where pastors’ wives can connect. “It’s just that now it’s a little more with everything that’s going on.”

To be a part of the Ministers’ Wives Fellowship’s monthly Zoom call, fill out the information form at [alabamawmu.org/ministerswives](http://alabamawmu.org/ministerswives). (Grace Thornton)

# Religious leaders, elected officials 'miss mark'

(continued from page 1)  
endorsed not only by people older than 65, but also Generation Z, the cohort age 23 and under.

Sixty percent of respondents agreed that religious faith is a fundamental part of some people's identity and that religious exercise extends into all manner of public places, such as school, work and social media. Gen Z and black respondents were particularly supportive of the right to free religious expression in the workplace.

Becket suggests that such attitudes have led directly to church and state conflicts related to the pandemic.

## Identity marker

"Seeing religion as an identity also helps explain views on religious worship during the pandemic," Becket researchers wrote.

"State and local governments across the country walked into lawsuits brought by religious plaintiffs when they failed to treat houses of worship and religious schools equally in their pandemic reopening policies. A majority of respondents said that houses of worship should be treated with at least the same priority for reopening as businesses."



Unsplash.com

While the survey found that Americans "cared deeply" about both racial justice and religious freedom, they are disappointed in the amount of leadership from elected officials and religious communities in addressing those issues.

More than four out of five respondents who said faith was important also think that religious organizations should have a role in advocating for racial equality and justice. Nearly half said that role should be a major one.

"However, less than half said that their faith community had done a good job of responding to these same issues," researchers wrote.

Researchers went on to say, "the American people seem similarly dissatisfied with their elected officials'

performance in protecting religious freedom," Becket reported. This attitude was particularly true of people of faith who were also registered to vote.

When asked who in government does the best job

of protecting religious freedom, respondents said:

- ▶ Courts — 27%
- ▶ Other — 21%
- ▶ President — 19%
- ▶ State governments — 18%
- ▶ Congress — 15%

## Leaning on faith

While 2020 brought many challenges influencing this year's Index results, one key indicator remained stable, researchers said, noting that "religious freedom continues to garner support across demographics."

As Americans deal with unprecedented challenges, Becket noted, they continue to lean on faith.

"Our findings present a picture of Americans rely-

ing on religion and religious freedom to deal with the challenges of 2020, both reactively and proactively.

"Americans rely on religion and religious freedom as they face difficult circumstances. They also rely on religion and religious freedom to change those circumstances and move forward. We saw evidence for this versatility of religion and religious freedom in contexts of societal unrest, the coronavirus pandemic and issues of racial justice.

"In these areas and others, religious freedom and religion contribute to Americans' resiliency through the challenges of 2020."✝

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### CHURCH POSITIONS

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Union Hill Baptist Church, Oneonta, Alabama, is seeking the man God has been preparing to lead our church forward. Dr. Sid Nichols is currently our interim pastor and helping our church move forward after the sudden loss of our long-time pastor of 26.5 years, Bro. Bill Barnett. Please consider the possibility of moving this stable, strong congregation forward. Send resumés or questions to: 2919 County Highway 39, Oneonta, AL 35121, or email to: [sparks@unionhillbaptist.org](mailto:sparks@unionhillbaptist.org) or call: 205-274-9232.

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description and application at [fbcprattville.org/apply](http://fbcprattville.org/apply).

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Associate pastor of worship and students (full-time with housing). Also, church secretary/receptionist (part-time, 12-15 hours/week). Jerusalem Baptist Church, Hammond, La. (approximately 60 miles from NOBTS campus). Send resumés for either position to: Dr. Phil Weaver, [dr.phillipeweaver@gmail.com](mailto:dr.phillipeweaver@gmail.com).

#### FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP MINISTER

Liberty Hill Baptist Church, Clanton, Alabama, is seeking a full-time minister of children/youth family discipleship. Send resumés to: [search@libertyhillonline.org](mailto:search@libertyhillonline.org).

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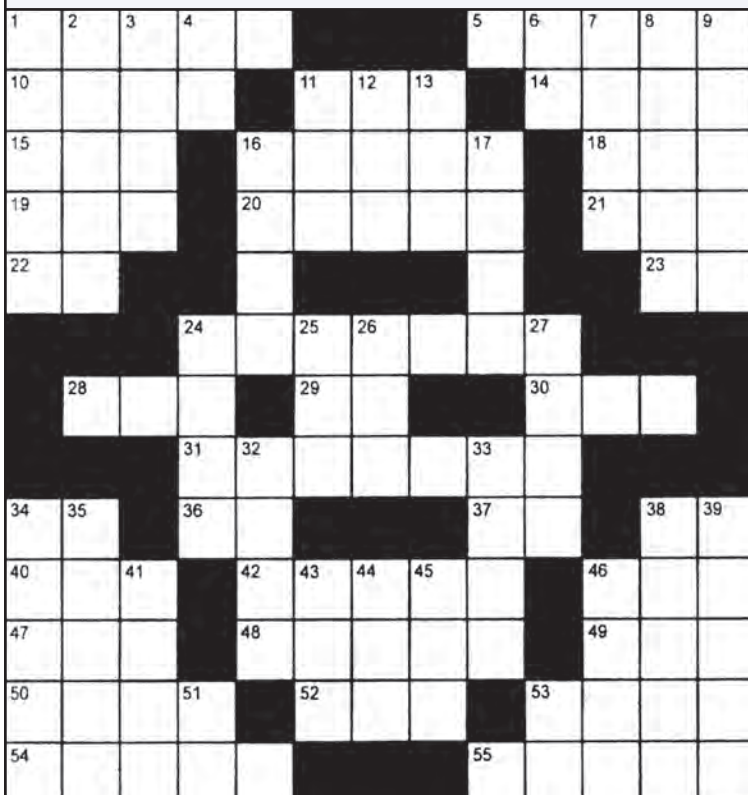
# Spot the Differences



Differences: scribe's hair, brick shading/lines, mask sign, scroll name, scroll sign, scroll name, dots on robe

## Christian Crossword

By Janet W. Adkins Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



### Across

1. Where she is nourished for a time, and \_\_\_\_\_. (Rev. 12:14)
5. I am ... a \_\_\_\_ woman. (2 Sam. 14:5)
10. \_\_\_\_ and Thummim. (Ex. 28:30)
11. Father of Kish and Abner. (1 Chron. 26:28)
14. Grain storage building.
15. Scottish cap.
16. Jacob served \_\_\_\_ years for Rachel. (Gen. 29:20)
18. Edge.
19. Pull out the m \_\_\_\_ out of thine eye. (Matt. 7:4)
20. \_\_\_\_ in me, and I in you. (John 15:4)
21. Madame Peron.
22. Concerning.
23. Half an em.
24. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, \_\_\_\_, Amen.

28. \_\_\_\_ did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord. (1 Kings 15:11)
29. Eldest son of Judah. (Gen. 38:3)
30. Chalice.
31. God shall \_\_\_\_ them. (Deut. 7:2)
34. Address word. (abbr.)
36. Per. (abbr.)
37. Exist.
38. Cubic. (abbr.)
40. The ungodly shall not stand ... \_\_\_\_ sinners in the congregation. (Ps. 1:5)
42. Moses said, Why \_\_\_\_ ye with me? (Ex. 17:2)
46. Sea eagle.
47. \_\_\_\_ boy!
48. So he bringeth them unto their desired \_\_\_\_\_. (Ps. 107:30)
49. Food from a tree.
50. \_\_\_\_ your heart, and not your garments.

- (Joel 2:13)
52. Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto \_\_\_\_ virgins. (Matt. 25:1)
53. Legwear.
54. The \_\_\_\_ dwelt therein in times past. (Deut. 2:10)
55. Thou madest him a little \_\_\_\_ than the angels. (Heb. 2:7)

### Down

1. Is under \_\_\_\_s ... until a time appointed of the father. (Gal. 4:2)
2. Angry.
3. Silent actor.
4. Printer's measure.
6. Exists.
7. Dreadful.
8. In her mouth was an \_\_\_\_ leaf. (Gen. 8:11)
9. Out of man.
11. Bird's beak.
12. King of Midian. (Num. 31:8)
13. Scarlet.
16. The next day we arrived at \_\_\_\_s.

- (Acts 20:15)
17. Glacial snow.
24. The strangers shall \_\_\_\_ away. (Ps. 18:45)
25. Religion. (abbr.)
26. A son of Gad. (Gen. 46:16)
27. It is a \_\_\_\_ thing that the king requireth. (Dan. 2:11)
32. Every.
33. Israel pitched beside \_\_\_\_-ezer. (1 Sam. 4:1)
34. The \_\_\_\_ is laid for him in the ground. (Job 18:10)
35. A symbol.
38. A little oil in a \_\_\_\_\_. (1 Kings 17:12)
39. Under. (German)
41. Indian princess.
43. Headwear.
44. I have.
45. O king, he shall be cast into the \_\_\_\_ of lions. (Dan. 6:7)
46. Sufficient. (arch)
51. Data management. (abbr.)
53. \_\_\_\_ everyone that thirsteth. (Is. 55:1)

# SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For January 10

## Explore the Bible

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.  
Dean of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



### PREPARED Luke 3:7-18

Luke's account provides the political context of the promised land into which Jesus was born. In Chapter 1, Luke highlights Herod the king, patriarch of the Herods. The familiar Christmas story of Luke 2 mentions two political figures: Caesar Augustus and Quirinius. To mark the inauguration of Jesus' ministry in Chapter 3, Luke mentions seven political leaders. Even Annas was more a power broker — former high priest behind the current high priesthood — than a religious leader. Caiaphas was not a descendant of Aaron, so he too was a political figurehead, not a consecrated Levitical priest.

John was ministering in the real world, not in a spiritual vacuum. Political agendas prevailed, injustice was a way of life and the pluralistic government had little patience for the Torah-honoring, monotheistic majority. For centuries, the Jews experienced political and economic oppression under the Babylonians, Medo-Persians, Greeks and, in recent times, the Romans. The people of God were desperate for their Messiah to take the throne of David, and John was fulfilling his prophetic role as the forerunner preparing the way of the Lord.

### Warning (7-9)

John's role, like the Old Testament prophets before him, was to call people to repentance. He warned them of the coming wrath of God as justice for their disobedience and their presumption of God's grace. Many were observant practitioners of their religion and traced their lineage back to Abraham. They assumed there was no need for personal repentance, since they were children of the covenant. John called them to prove that they were living in repentance.

One of our great concerns among Baptists ought to be presumption upon God's grace. We give unbiblical counsel: "It's easier to ask forgiveness than to ask permission." We presume that the doctrine of eternal security, oversimplified as "once saved, always saved," is a license for sinful actions and attitudes.

### Response (10-14)

Luke highlights the responses of three groups: crowds, tax-collectors and soldiers. Representatives of each group asked John: "What should we do?" John gave an answer that was specific to each group. The crowds were likely Jewish, and he called them to repent of selfishness by sharing their excess possessions with the poor. Tax-collectors often charged taxes and fees beyond what was legal, so John called them to repent of that practice. The soldiers among them may have been Gentiles, yet John called them to repent of their abuse of power and to be content with their income. Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor — all were called to show fruit of their repentance in order to be baptized.

We have much to learn from this interaction. John called the religious and the irreligious to repentance. Martin Luther postulated that for Christians, all of life is repentance. By contrast, many leaders today are more concerned with marketing techniques and stewardship campaigns than calling people to repent of their sin and surrendering their lives to Jesus Christ our King.

### Division (15-18)

John the Baptist was not the Christ, though some mistook him to be so. Intertestamental writers assumed that the promised son of David would be a political and/or economic savior, reestablishing Jewish self-rule or a theocracy under their Davidic king.

John knew that he was not the one; instead, he fulfilled the forerunner role, prophesied in Isaiah 40. John demonstrated humility throughout his short ministry. He expressed his unworthiness to serve even as a lowly house slave for the Messiah and stated he should be baptized by Jesus (Matt. 3:14). When John received a report that Jesus was baptizing more people than he was, John responded with: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

Repentance, faith and humility — these attributes ought to characterize followers of Jesus today. 🌿

## Bible Studies for Life

By Will Kynes, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of Biblical Studies, Samford University



### WEATHERING THE BLUES Psalm 31:1-8

Noting the "happy-clappy" tendency of contemporary Christian worship, Carl Trueman once asked, "What do miserable Christians sing?"

Psalm 31 provides an answer.

Here, the psalmist honestly confesses his spiritual depression, his loneliness and anxiety. Rather than ignoring or hiding these emotions, he battles through them to find hope in God.

His honesty pulls God down into his situation, so that God can lift him out of it.

### Problems and concerns can weigh us down emotionally. (1-2)

The psalmist begins by asking God to hear his prayer and deliver him, but only later does he describe the distress he is facing.

Sorrow has consumed him, body and soul (vv. 9-10), as his friends and neighbors have abandoned him to his enemies, who plot to take his life (vv. 11-13).

With nowhere else to turn, he has taken refuge in the Lord, pleading with Him to be his "rock of refuge" and "strong fortress."

### Take your concerns to God. (3-4)

The psalmist then affirms his faith that God is precisely what he had just asked God to be — a rock, fortress and refuge.

In fact, he builds his petition that God lead, guide and protect him on these characteristics of God, which he presents as established facts. In effect, he pleads with God to act toward him in accord with His revealed character.

Coaxing God to intervene on the psalmist's behalf "for the sake of [God's] name" has the same rhetorical effect.

In other words, the psalmist is declaring that his affliction gives God an opportunity to demonstrate His character as a powerful and caring God, thereby bringing glory to His name.

In the prophetic books, both the

prophets and God make this same argument.

Jeremiah pleads, "For the sake of your name do not despise us; do not dishonor your glorious throne" (Jer. 14:21).

God declares, "For My own name's sake I delay My wrath; for the sake of My praise I hold it back from you" (Isa. 48:9; cf. Ezek. 20:9, 14, 22, 44).

The way the psalmist's trust envelops his worry is reflected in the New Testament. In 1 Peter we read, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your cares on Him, because He cares about you" (1 Pet. 5:6-7).

As for the psalmist, here also God's might provides comfort.

Jesus, however, emphasizes His own humility, as He delivers an invitation into His care, "Come to Me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

"Take up My yoke and learn from Me, because I am lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

"For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

### Trust God to carry you through. (5-8)

Jesus demonstrated this type of complete trust in God as He quoted this psalm on the cross: "Into your hands I commit My spirit" (see also Luke 23:46).

Jesus' victory over death is the supreme testimony to God's character as a "faithful God," who will "deliver" those who put their trust in Him (v. 5), rather than one of the "worthless idols" in which we may be tempted to put our hopes (v. 6).

As the Father saw the Son's affliction, knew His anguish and delivered Him from the ultimate enemy — death — so He showed the wonders of His love to the psalmist (v. 21), and so He will to those who trust in Him today.

As the psalmist concludes, "Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord" (v. 24). 🌿



# Media reviews

**BOOK**

## Former Fortune 500 CFO shares how he saw the Light

By Tracy Riggs  
Correspondent, TAB Media

Though education prepares us for life in a general sense and specific courses get us ready for certain careers, God can easily override experience with His plans.

Bruce L. Hartman, author of the book “Spend a Year with Jesus: Finding Jesus and a New Life,” is a prime example of that.

Though now a published author, Hartman flunked English in college and had to take a summer course to earn his credit.

When he decided to leave the corporate world and pursue a master of divinity degree, which is almost all writing, he was terrified.

Hartman did pass the remedial writing class, but it still took him six hours to write his first two-page paper.

### Educational journey

“The person who taught me how to do this was the theological school’s librarian. It was like having a Marine drill instructor teaching you,” Hartman said. “I never got good at writing. My professors said that the content was wonderful, but ‘You have to learn how to write.’”

Hartman got a little better as he finished a doctoral degree.

“One of the things I discovered were editors,” Hartman said. “You have to find the right editor. ...



Photo courtesy of Bruce L. Hartman

**Bruce L. Hartman**

[Some] editors wanted to tell me what to say and [my current editors] are more interested in telling me how to say it.”

Going into ministry wasn’t an easy decision for Hartman, who worked as a CFO for Fortune 500 companies such as Foot Locker and Yankee Candle. His decision to quit that world and return to school was huge.

“I don’t think anyone goes into ministry willingly,” Hartman said. “You’re caught up in a life. I was caught up in a life with kids, a wife, a house, two dogs. ... You’re in that life.”

The previous 10 years though, Hartman had noticed a shift — he started feeling and noticing different things about life.

At 1:15 a.m. on May 5, 2019, he was unable to sleep and took a walk, ending up under a streetlamp.

“It’s so vivid. I remember the crack in it. [In front] of the crack was light from the streetlight and behind was darkness,” he said.

“After I walked through that, I realized I had to change, and I realized I couldn’t pray any more. I don’t think there was a more dev-

astating moment in my life than knowing that.”

But Hartman did pray, and that prayer was answered. He worked another four months and then, with his wife’s blessing, entered divinity school the next January.

“Spend a Year with Jesus” came out of Hartman’s personal experience with the changes a year of thoughtful reflection can bring.

He decided to read the Bible instead of watching news or reading the newspaper for a year. He discovered at that year’s end, he was very different.

Ten years later, Hartman was writing a weekly blog, which led to the idea of writing a book that would help people grow by pondering their relationships with Jesus over the course of a year.

The devotional has a unique focus: It’s based on thinking about a biblical concept for a week and recording changes in thoughts and beliefs over that time.

Each weekly entry features one page with an inspirational photo, the topic and a Bible reference. The facing page includes the text of the verse, one paragraph pertaining to it, and three related questions.

### Weekly devotional exercise

The idea is to read the devotion at the beginning of the week and record the answers to the questions in a journal. Then, after pondering the concept for six days, write the

answers to those same questions again. Another recommendation is to periodically (once a month or once a quarter) write down personal feelings and thoughts about Jesus.

“The goal is to take a person from Point A to being stronger in his or her relationship with Jesus through these images, by the verses, by the reflection and by answering the questions,” Hartman said.

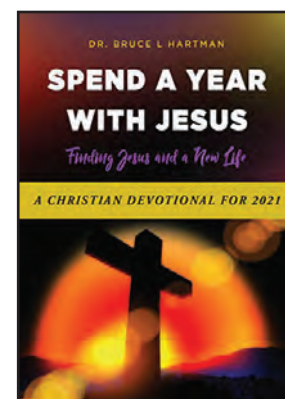
### Individual encounters

“I don’t want to be the person that dictates what God is saying. I want to be that person who facilitates what God is saying. As I was writing it, I was always thinking about snowflakes, and that no

two are the same. Why would we expect each person to be the same? It’s about encouraging each person to have his or her own personal encounter with Jesus.”

The 2021 edition is available now. Though the pandemic has been a major concern during the past year, Hartman said the new edition does not deal with COVID-19 concerns directly.

“There will be huge problems in front of you all the time,” Hartman said. “Being Christian doesn’t mean that life got easy. Being Christian means that God will help you with difficult times in life. Jesus is permanent; life is temporary. ... I tend to focus on what counts — this relationship with Jesus.”



### 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.

*“Jesus is permanent; life is temporary ... I tend to focus on what counts — this relationship with Jesus.”*

Bruce L. Hartman  
author

# Food insecurity

## Baylor initiative feeds 270,483 children in 43 states amid global pandemic

If the coronavirus outbreak has proved anything, it's that hunger and poverty must be addressed through creative and collaborative efforts between government, private-sector and faith-based individuals and organizations, according to Jeremy Everett, executive director of the Baylor University Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty.

"Hunger and poverty are too big for any one organization to address. This is going to take our best and brightest leaders and our most engaged activists and churches and nonprofits to address," he said.

While that concept isn't new to COVID-19, Everett and his colleagues witnessed just how powerful the partnership approach can be when the collaborative's Emergency Meals-To-You program delivered 38.7 million meals to more than 270,000 pandemic-impacted children from March to August 2020.

The initiative began as a 2019 effort to deliver food to households in Texas. About 475,000 meals were served to 4,000 students. With the onset of the pandemic, the U.S. Department of Agriculture asked the Baylor Collaborative to broaden the program nationwide. The expanded effort reached 270,483 children in 43 states, Baylor reported.

Participating groups went to great lengths to deliver meals to children whose regular access to school lunches had been interrupted by the pandemic, Everett said.

"Some of the schools were on the Arctic Circle, which were reached by helicopter or by barge," he said.

Native American children living in the Grand Canyon were reached by mule.

To scale up its effort, the collaborative established or expanded al-



A mother expresses gratitude for the food assistance that has helped her family through the pandemic. BNG photo

liances with private companies and public groups. The USDA provided \$200 million to finance the operation, Everett said. "Our team built a whole new system utilizing existing programs, government assets, the postal service, UPS and others."

### Takes teamwork

School social workers were instrumental in many locations by tracking down families whose children could qualify for the program.

"That gave rise to everybody utilizing their skills and their gifts and their sectors' unique abilities in getting meals to these kids," Everett said. "These are people and companies that had to work together in very difficult circumstances to overcome so many problems."



An Alabama mother shares thanks for the food that has sustained her family. BNG photo

The takeaway is that hunger can be lessened with the right funding and teamwork, he added. "Heck, yeah, we can end poverty and hunger if we choose to. We can do things even greater than feeding the 5,000 if we work together."

But the pandemic has increased

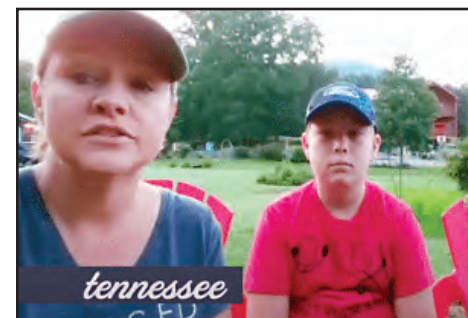
the stakes and difficulty of efforts to combat food insecurity, he warned. "Hunger has doubled since the beginning of the pandemic."

Food insecurity — defined as a disruption of food intake due to financial need — currently stands around 23%, the same level reached before the federal stimulus briefly reduced food insecurity to about 18% nationwide, he said.

Distance learning has exacerbated hunger by depriving children of school lunches and by forcing parents either to miss work or pay for child care.

Low-wage jobs, limited work

hours and layoffs also contribute, Everett said. "I think of it as an equation: unemployment plus underemployment plus income volatility plus the pandemic equals hunger."



A Tennessee family communicates gratitude for the food assistance that came just when they needed it. BNG photo

A bright spot is that the Christmas season usually inspires higher levels of individual and congregational giving and volunteerism, all of which are needed to address food insecurity.

"All those food drives you see, they are a good thing," Everett

said. "That is tangible food. Anything we can do right now to provide food is important." (Reprinted with permission from Baptist News Global, baptistnews.com)

**"All those food drives you see, they are a good thing. That is tangible food. Anything we can do right now to provide food is important."**

**Jeremy Everett, executive director  
Baylor University Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty**