



The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

INSIDE



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**SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE
SUNDAY IS JANUARY 17.**



*“I praise you,
for I am
fearfully and
wonderfully
made.”*

PSALM 139:14A

Miracles all around

Photo courtesy of Farrah Lane

Tait and Farrah Lane were encouraged by doctors to terminate their unborn daughter’s life when they found out she had indicators for Trisomy 18, a condition that causes severe developmental delays. But the couple said that wasn’t an option and today they say Sarah Catherine has ‘enriched’ their lives.

Baby once called ‘incompatible with life’ brings life to her family, others

By Grace Thornton
TAB Media

Farrah Lane was at the skating rink with her three daughters the day she got a phone call from her obstetrician that changed their world.

“He said, ‘Your child has very high indicators for Trisomy 18, and a child with Trisomy 18 usually doesn’t make it out of the womb,’” Farrah said.

She heard him say next that even if the baby was born, Trisomy 18 — a condition that causes severe developmental delays due to an extra chromosome 18 — made the baby “incompatible with life.”

She asked him what her child’s gender was, and he

told her it was a girl — but that Farrah should consider ending her pregnancy.

‘Not an option’

“I asked how I could help her, and it sounded like he was saying termination was the only option,” she said. “I said, ‘Well, that’s just not an option.’”

All of it was a lot to take in — the news itself, and the doctor’s guidance.

Farrah’s husband, Tait, said

hearing their daughter’s diagnosis was difficult.

“This kind of news has a tremendous impact on you,” he said. “But we know that our will is not always God’s will. He made her this way for a reason but also gave us to her for a reason.”

“We were going to see that through.”

The Lanes already had three healthy children, and this child was no different to them. If

(See ‘Created,’ page 6)



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Photo by Sam Evans

Rash marks 25 years at The Alabama Baptist, Inc.

For many in Alabama Baptist life, it's hard to remember TAB without Jennifer Davis Rash. And it's probably hard for her to remember life without it too.

For the past 25 years, she's been involved in pretty much every way possible — covering stories, writing columns, managing the print edition, helping move TAB into the digital world and brainstorming ways to get resources to our readers.

Rash joined the staff in January 1996 as a news writer after returning from a two-year Journeyman term with the International Mission Board serving with Caribbean Chris-

tian Publications and the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship Media Centre in Miami, Florida.

Through the years at TAB, she became news editor, then managing editor, executive editor, editor-elect and finally president and editor-in-chief. During that quarter century of work, she's earned numerous personal awards for investigative reporting, news writing, feature writing and photography as well as awards for digital, broadcast and radio/podcast work. For more than 20 years, Rash has helped lead the paper to be named among the top regional Chris-

tian newspapers in the nation.

She's served in a number of auxiliary roles, including currently serving on the presidential search committee for Samford University and as a member of the advisory board for the Center for Women in Ministry at Beeson Divinity School.

She also is currently president of the Association of State Baptist Publications.

To list everything she's done would take pages — everyone who knows her knows she has seemingly endless energy.

Rob Jackson, TAB's chairman of the board, says he was impressed when he "first met that bubbly red-head as she criss-

crossed the state covering Alabama Baptist meetings — and doing so much more behind the scenes."

But his admiration for her has "soared" since she became president and editor-in-chief, he said.

"In Jennifer, I observe a strong biblical conviction, visionary leadership and passionate desire to impact this state and world for the glory of God," Jackson said. "She loves Christ, other people and Alabama Baptists. With Jennifer at the helm, the future is bright for TAB."

Happy anniversary, Jennifer! (TAB)



TAB photo

Jennifer Davis Rash interviews Rick Evans, pastor of Dalraida Baptist Church, Montgomery, in 2002.

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



jrash@thealabamabaptist.org
@RashionalThts

‘Sanctity of human life’ more than an emphasis for TAB staff

EDITOR’S NOTE — We cherish all of our TAB Tots for sure, but one little guy gripped our hearts beyond what we could have imagined. Hear his story from his sweet and amazing mom, Lauren, who oversees the layout and design of the pages you read each week.

By Lauren C. Grim
TAB Media

He’s breathing.” That’s the first thing my husband, Myles, said to me as the doctor delivered our 1 lb. 14 oz. baby via emergency C-section the night of Oct. 3, 2018. A team of doctors and nurses swiftly whisked away “Baby Boy Grim,” as they called him, to the NICU floor there at Baptist Memorial Hospital for Women in Memphis, Tennessee.

As I lay there on the operating table I tried to process what just happened and the fact that I was no longer pregnant at 24 weeks.

We hadn’t even named our baby yet. I honestly had been putting that off for months because I had such a tough pregnancy. I knew if we named him it would be that much harder if something were to happen to him. I didn’t want the connection that a name would have given us. But as the doctor was sewing me up, we decided to name the baby Mason.

During my pregnancy, there were times when I just knew I had lost him. I went to the ER fully prepared to not hear his heartbeat on the ultrasound. But every time I thought he was gone, there he was with his heart beating away.

I had a hematoma, which is a pooling of blood between the placenta and the uterine wall. During my first appointment with a high-risk doctor, I was told to go straight to the hospital and that I could expect to stay there possibly until my due date. This was in September, and my due date wasn’t until January. I burst into tears and immediately thought of my 2-year-old daughter, Alana. I couldn’t leave her for possibly four months.

So there I was on the antepartum floor of the hospital. I had no clue how long I would be there. Six days into my stay on a Wednesday afternoon, I was working on laying out a page for *The Alabama Baptist* from my laptop while I sat in my hospital bed. I started feeling a little off, so I decided to take a nap. Then I started having contractions. Doctors and nurses tried to stop them but couldn’t. Thankfully we were already there

in the hospital, or Mason probably wouldn’t have made it.

I don’t believe it was an accident this happened on a Wednesday night, either. Many people who were aware of our current situation were at church. Mason was born at 6:08 p.m., right in the middle of prayer meeting. People at our church in Hernando, Mississippi, and even the youth group were pleading with God to spare the life of our little baby born way too soon. When news was relayed to them that Mason was born breathing, the room full of youth erupted in applause.

We were surprised Mason was born breathing on his own. Lungs are one of the last things to fully develop in babies, so breathing issues are common in micropreemies — babies born before 26 weeks’ gestation.

After two weeks of breathing on his own with the help of a CPAP machine, his body got tired and he was put on a ventilator. He stayed on a ventilator for three and a half months. And during that time, he endured more than some people experience in their lifetime — respira-

tory distress syndrome, apnea of prematurity, pulmonary interstitial emphysema, retinopathy of prematurity, blood transfusions, pneumonia, chronic lung disease, brain bleed, hernia, hydrocele, feeding tube, etc. Each day, we prayed so hard for God to let him live.

On Feb. 19, 2019, we brought Mason home after 139 days in the NICU without any medicine or hospital equipment. Today he weighs 27 lbs. and is healthy as can be. He is developmentally about 4–5 months behind other babies his age, but we are doing physical, occupational and speech therapy weekly to help him close that gap so he can reach his milestones. Mason is proof that God still performs miracles.

As Sanctity of Human Life Sunday approaches on Jan. 17, I can’t help but think of my little Mason. Even though he was born at just 24 weeks, his tiny life still had value.

Even at 1 lb. 14 oz., he ministered to people and showed them God can use the smallest of humans to speak to people’s hearts. So many told us that our story and faith touched their lives. When they see Mason, they say “there’s God’s miracle right there.” Every life matters. Even a micropreemie can have a testimony of God’s goodness and faithfulness.✝️



Photo by Lauren C. Grim
Lauren held Mason for the first time when he was 27 days old.



Photo by Lauren C. Grim
Mason breathed on his own after about 14 weeks on a ventilator.



Photo by NLA Weddings
Myles, Lauren, Alana and Mason Grim

Your Voice



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

Watch the news, but keep it in perspective

I tend to be a news junkie (that's what living overseas as a missionary for a long time will do to you). But something very interesting happened in December.

Due to an unusually busy schedule, I did not watch any news broadcast for two weeks.

When I decided to make the time to watch a few minutes of CNN and FOX News just to catch up, much to my astonishment, it was as if I had only been away from their programs for a commercial break. They were saying the exact same thing they were saying two weeks prior.

I thought to myself, "Wow. Think of all the time I have saved over the last two weeks!"

Some of you don't watch any

news. You probably should. Some of you watch news constantly. You definitely shouldn't.

Yes, the world continues its ever-accelerating downward spiral into irrationality, immorality and insanity. Our world is truly descending into chaos.

'Fix our eyes on Jesus'

But we as Christians have been told in God's word that all these things will take place. And we have been instructed to fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith — Hebrews 12:2.

The greatest way we can be faithful to stay with God during these tumultuous days is to stay in His word and stay with His people.

Hebrews 10:25 says we are to gather together all the more as we see the day drawing near.

Let me encourage you to reduce your media intake and increase your Scripture intake. Read the Bible and devotionals together as a family.

Spend time together in prayer asking God to bring His kingdom to pass. Grow to anxiously await His soon return.

See 2 Timothy 4:8 — "Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."

Also see the parable of the 10 bridesmaids in Matthew 25.

Share the greatest news

Are your eyes fixed on Christ — or are they on the world?

Are you deeply connected with God's people — or are you wandering away from the flock?

Are you longing for Christ's coming — or are you indifferent to His return?

We have the greatest news in the world. May we learn what it is, love it, live it and celebrate it together.

Pastor Andrew Coleman
Sheridan Hills Baptist Church
Hollywood, Fla.

EDITOR'S NOTE — The Colemans served as Southern Baptist missionaries for 10 years prior to returning to his home church as pastor.

Heard George, son of U.S. Senator Walter F. George, was a member of my church when I joined in 1976. Someone, I don't remember who, told me that he regularly prayed, "God help me to help someone who can't do anything for me."

That prayer captures the essence of what Jesus taught. He even said that when we help the least among us, it's like we're doing it for Him personally (Matt. 25:31-46). When we think in those terms, serving others is not a burden but a privilege.

Neil Joiner
Vienna, Ga.

"There are far, far better things ahead than any we leave behind," wrote C.S. Lewis, long before 2020. At a time of reflection, the world is desperately seeking hope for its crushed spirits, and longing for light to find new ways of living in 2021. Despite a disastrous year, it's time to gather inspiration and go forward. We can remember the blessings — those incredible sunsets, sunrises and the mysteries of skies; the testimonies of so many health care angels; neighbors who stepped up to deliver home-cooked meals to their communities as they looked out for each other. Each of us can ask, what now is my purpose and my source of awe and inspiration?

Phawnda Moore
Author and artist

Letter to the editor

I am near the end of my pilgrimage of serving as a gospel minister, and I want to finish well.

Studying the SBC for decades now, I see a multitude of concerns and plan to share many of those with you soon. For now, I have a question: Is the SBC immune from abandoning orthodoxy?

When I was a student at Cedarville in 1970, I took a course on missions. In that course, the professor stated: "It is not a matter of 'if' a denomination or educational institution abandons orthodoxy, it is merely a matter of when."

Examples are Yale, Princeton and Harvard. Each of these institutions were established to train men for the gospel ministry.

Since then I've collected copious evidence of that fact. Christian history is littered with evidence of the same. The longer theological corruption exists unaddressed, the more difficult it is to correct.

History records, with penetrating accuracy, the reality of doctrinal precision ... and the consequence of the failure to do so.

Tom Fillinger
Cullman, Ala.

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“Eternity: Will you endure it in hell or enjoy it in heaven?”

FRANKLIN L. KIRKSEY

Pastor and author

When we choose to give more care to some of His children than to others because we value some more than others, we betray the heart of our glorious Father. To love and care for every person as one of our Father's much loved children is to do our Father's will.

Bob Adams
Retired pastor

The Christian church is under a mandate of responsibility.

It is not a mandate issued by the government and cannot be taken away by the government. It is a responsibility mandated by the God-Man Jesus Christ. We fulfill it by His power or we neglect at our own peril. It is not enough to say that we have a servant Messiah. As His

body, we are to be a servant church. Talk without action is pointless.

The mandated ministry of responsibility to “obey” Him in various forms of service in His name (i.e., His authority, power and presence) cannot be separated from the ministry of worship.

Morris Murray Jr.
Jasper, Ala.

“Christianity is not a pick yourself up by the bootstraps religion. It is a get up out of the grave faith.”

J.T. English
via Twitter

Pastors and churches in our nation today must rise up with a prophetic voice, calling people back to God and to the truth of the Bible — yet

doing so with humility, brokenness and a deep sense of compassion.

We must hold the truth of God in one hand and the love of God in the other.

Ronnie Floyd
President, Executive Committee
Southern Baptist Convention

Several years ago, our research found that church plants are getting larger and growing faster, and yet are simultaneously reaching fewer people for Christ.

As the economic community has come along and capitalism has entered into our church planting ventures, we've become better at gathering a crowd.

Excerpt from Dec. 18 blog post
at edstetzer.com

From the *Twitterverse*

@brocraige

I've said for a long time, people are looking for genuineness and authenticity in the life of the believer and in the life of the church.

@SWBTS

If you know enough of the gospel to have been saved by it, you know enough to share it.

@drtonyevans

Living by faith means choosing God's plan over the culture's plan, then watching Him work it out for your good and others' benefit.

@BethMooreLPM

Trust God to uphold our causes and restrain our enemies while we rest and worship and remember Christ's coming. We've designated ourselves as junior potters somewhere along the way and perceived God to be clay. Christ “upholds the

universe by the word of His power.” (Heb. 1:3)

@ricklance

Let us each strive to be a thermostat Christian, one who changes the climate, rather than a thermometer Christian, one who reflects the temperature.

@kswhitfield

We were created for communion w/the Triune God. Proper human functioning, including knowing & rational judgments, is contingent on a *by grace through faith* relationship w/the living God. This is why Jesus said, “those who have ears to hear, let them hear.” (Matt. 13:9)

@LutherQuots

I would rather preach the truth with too great a severity, than to ever once act the hypocrite and conceal the truth.

@AugustineQuots

Who, after reflecting on his own weakness, would venture to attribute his purity and integrity to his own strength and not God's grace?

@PaulTripp

The incarnation of Jesus humbles those who understand it, it confronts us with the depth of our spiritual need and our inability to do anything about it.

@blondeorthodoxy

Reading the women in Jesus' ancestry is always breathtaking. No broken past or pain is beyond His redemption. No shame is out of reach of His forgiveness. No believing outsider is unwelcome in His family.

@MarkDever

“To love a small sin is a great sin.” Richard Baxter.

1997 Q&A with Harper Shannon

When Harper Shannon retired as director of the office of evangelism for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, an article was published in the Jan. 30, 1997, issue of *The Alabama Baptist* about his retirement. A sidebar article featured questions and answers with him related to the future of Baptist evangelism.

Shannon died Dec. 30, 2020, (see page 11). The following is an excerpt from the 1997 Q&A feature written by David Reid, who worked in communications with SBOM at that time.

Q: What are some of the greatest threats to evangelism?

Shannon: The greatest threat is what we used to call “creeping” universalism — the idea that everyone ultimately will be saved. ... Also, the waning evangelistic fervor of the busy pastor.

Pastors have so many other things to do — good things which must be done — that they may cease to emphasize evangelism. Evangelism is a discipline which every pastor must make a priority.

A related threat is the busyness of lay people, who have so many responsibilities and commitments. You have to determine who and what will rule your life.

Q. As a former pastor, what advice would you offer to pastors serving in local churches?

Shannon: To “plow around rocks.” When a farmer is plowing and he comes up on a rock in a field, he can try to blow it up or plow around it. He might blow it up, but he might get blown up with it.

There are power structures in some churches, which can prevent a pastor from leading it forward. He can try to blow it up, but sometimes it's best to plow around it.

‘Created in His image’

Dad says daughter’s value not determined by what she can do but who she is

(continued from page 1)
the baby had Trisomy 18, the Lanes were going to do everything they could to give her a chance at life.

“I found out that 90% of babies with Trisomy 18 need heart care right off the bat, and if the defect can be repaired, then it gives them a chance,” Farrah said.

But as the Lanes started looking into that kind of heart repair surgery, they kept hitting the same surprising wall over and over.

“I spoke with surgeons here in our area and all over the United States, and they all said the same thing — that we would just have to wait and see how the baby did,” said Farrah, who grew up in Heflin and now lives outside Atlanta.

She and Tait began to see a pattern — surgeons would tell them they would have to wait several months to see if surgery was a good option. But as the couple researched, they heard stories of other babies who waited for just that — and during the waiting time, their hearts and lungs had become too damaged for surgery to help.

It was an impossible situation, Farrah said. “They really write these babies off.”

But then she heard of Dr. James Hammel, a surgeon in Omaha, Nebraska, who was known for his willingness to operate on newborns with Trisomy 18. As they prayed about what to do next, they felt continued confirmation that they should go see him.

“We were always trying to pray for answers. We knew it was going to be hard, but we knew we had to



Photo courtesy of Farrah Lane

Sarah Catherine is Farrah and Tait Lanes’ fourth child. She was diagnosed with Trisomy 18 in the womb, and the doctor recommended her mother consider ending the pregnancy, as most babies with Trisomy 18 don’t make it out of the womb. Sarah Catherine defied those odds and is now 19 months old.

do everything we could for her, no matter what,” Farrah said.

They made the trip to Omaha at 22 weeks gestational age, consulted with Hammel and got a birth plan together.

They came back home with a heart monitor and checked for the baby’s heartbeat every night, knowing they could lose her at any moment.

But the heartbeat stayed strong. At 37 weeks, the doctor brought Farrah to the hospital so he could monitor the situation. And on June 6, 2019, Sarah Catherine was born weighing 4 pounds, 8 ounces.

Twenty-eight hours later, she had surgery to close the neural tube de-

fect from her spina bifida, a condition that 6% of babies with Trisomy 18 have.

Rallied to pray

Then when she was six days old, she had her first heart repair surgery, and though things initially went well, she coded after. People all over rallied to pray for Sarah Catherine.

Cherry Street Baptist Church, Atlanta — where Farrah’s mother grew up and uncle and aunt still attend — stopped choir practice to pray for her.

Miracles all around

She recovered — another miracle.

She spent 60 days in intensive care, then the whole family loaded up and drove the 1,000 miles home with a baby on oxygen. To them, that was a miracle too — most babies with Trisomy 18 have to be taken home by medical transport.

It was miracles all around for the Lanes.

The first doctors they’d seen had given them very poor odds that their daughter would be born alive, and if she was born alive, then a 1-in-10 chance she would make it to her first birthday.

Sarah Catherine did both.

“This kid is amazing — she’s 19 months,” Farrah said. “It boggles the mind that people want to give up on these babies.”

The youngest Lane has had two more surgeries since the two she had just after birth. She is learning to communicate more all the time and shows more of her personality every day, Farrah said.

The other three Lane daughters

“This kind of news has a tremendous impact on you. But we know that our will is not always God’s will. He made her this way for a reason but also gave us to her for a reason. We were going to see that through.”

Tait Lane
Sarah Catherine’s father

To learn more about Sarah Catherine’s story, visit the Lanes’ blog at carryingsarahcatherine.wordpress.com.

“The value is not in what she can do or what she can become but in that she is His creation, created in His image.”

Tait Lane
Sarah Catherine’s father

— Claudia, Caroline and Charlotte — are thriving too. They love their sister well, bringing her play food for her place at the table when they have meals.

“They can’t stand for her to not have food at her place when they do,” Farrah said, noting Sarah Catherine has a feeding tube.

They also say they want to be NICU nurses, Farrah said. They set up NICU suites with their dolls, make tubes from yarn and O2 tanks from construction paper and call Dr. Hammel on their “phones” to see if they can bring their babies in for a heart repair.

“Our girls show tremendous compassion and love,” Farrah said. “Sarah Catherine has shaped their lives and enriched their lives.”

Through Facebook, the family has

also gotten to connect with, minister to and encourage a whole community of Trisomy 18 parents scattered all over the world.

“That’s been an unexpected blessing,” Farrah said. “We’ve been able to share in the joys and the heartaches with them.”

Tait said since day one, they’ve seen Sarah Catherine’s life as a miracle and a God-given opportunity.

“The value is not in what she can do or what she can become but in that she is His creation, created in His image,” he said. “This is her story. We’re just along for the ride.”

To learn more about Sarah Catherine’s story, visit the Lanes’ blog at

carryingSarahCatherine.wordpress.com.

To view more photos, visit tabonline.org/Sarah-Catherine. 🌈



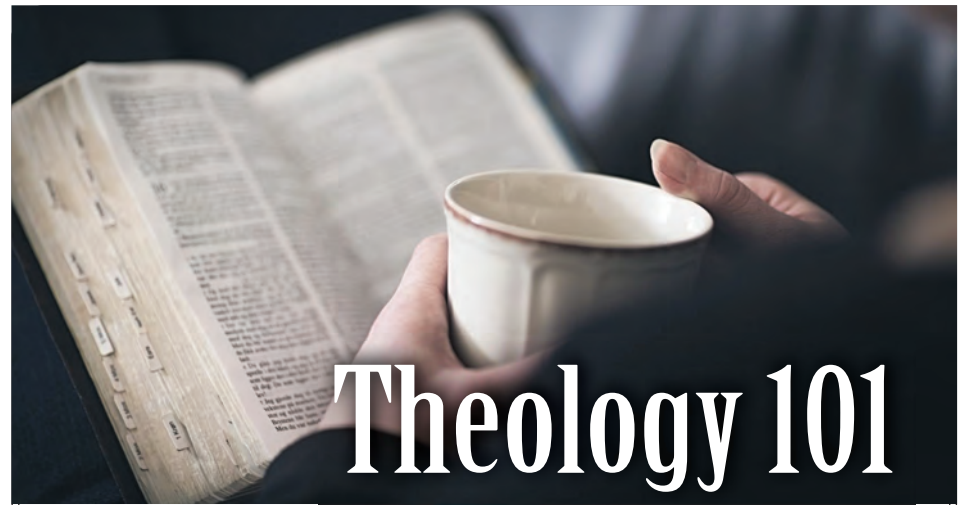
Photo courtesy of Farrah Lane

Sarah Catherine, born with Trisomy 18 and given a miniscule chance of survival outside the womb, is now 19 months old and is showing more of her personality every day.



Photo courtesy of Farrah Lane

Sarah Catherine’s three sisters, Claudia (left), Caroline (back, center) and Charlotte (right), have shown ‘tremendous compassion and love’ to their baby sister, Farrah said. Sarah Catherine has ‘shaped and enriched their lives.’



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

New Year’s Reflections

Be It Resolved

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

Governing bodies, committees and other formal groups often pass resolutions as expressions of their opinion or intention. Individuals also often fashion New Year’s resolutions. Unfortunately, even if these personal commitments are wise and practical, they all too often have a short life span.

In relation to a believer’s life in Christ, there are important resolutions each of us should consider. Several Bible personalities can point us in the direction of some of these as we enter a new calendar year. This week we begin with Daniel in the Old Testament.

Daniel’s personal goal

When Daniel became a captive, the king of Babylon decreed that he and his three friends should be given “a daily provision of the king’s delicacies and of the wine which he drank” (Dan. 1:5). In the face of that imperial decree, Daniel “purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank” (Dan. 1:8).

Daniel’s firmness of purpose was a personal resolution. It might have been that he and his friends saw their refusal to indulge in the food and drink from the king’s table as a step in the direction of withstanding other temptations from the Babylonian culture.

On the positive side, Daniel might have had the insight that the easy way of accepting the king’s provisions would lead him

away from a firm dependence on the living God to supply his daily needs.

Whatever the case, from Daniel’s decision we might distill as a fitting resolution that of leading undefiled lives in devotion to God. Our resolution might read: “Be it resolved that I shall seek to maintain a pure and God-pleasing life.”

With a bit of reflection, we might allow this resolution to find expression in several ways. For example, we might renew the resolve not to defile our bodies through neglect, hurtful habits or other mistreatment, but to treat them as a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Again, we might resolve not to defile our personal walk with God through neglect of His word and personal prayer times, but rather seek to be blessed as those “pure in heart who will see God” (Matt. 5:8). We might also make it our resolve not to defile our relationship with friends and family through careless acts or thoughtless words.

Next week Theology 101 will glean thoughts from some New Testament examples of those who made important and meaningful resolutions. 🌈

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.



Love, hope and peace

Bible Gateway shares top online searches for Scripture passages in 2020

In the midst of a strange and stressful year, people turned to the same place they have for decades in their search for answers.

The internet. But once online, many looked to a much older source: the Bible.

The website BibleGateway.com allows users to read and search the text of multiple translations of the Bible.

According to Bible Gateway's Year in Review, the site saw unusual spikes in related searches around the first COVID-19 lockdowns in the spring, the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police and the protests that followed in the summer, and the U.S. presidential election this fall.

10 times more

Users searched for Bible verses related to politics, social issues, the end times and — perhaps not surprisingly — pandemics at least 10 times more this year than they did in 2019, ac-

ording to the website.

It's not unusual to see current events reflected in the website's search results, according to Bible Gateway content manager Jonathan Petersen.

"People are trying to find answers in situations that are difficult to see the answers. They do tend to turn to the Bible for whatever answers they can find," Petersen said.

Searches for terms such as racism, justice, equality and oppression multiplied by more than 100 after Floyd's death in police custody.

Search results for those terms include such verses as Proverbs 21:15: "When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers," and Isaiah 1:17: "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the

fatherless; plead the case of the widow."

Pandemic was the second major search theme Bible Gateway identified this year, including searches

for what the Bible has to say about such topics as disease, pestilence and plague. Those searches spiked sharply in March, according to the website,

when many places across the United States enacted measures to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Prior to the U.S. presidential election in early November, the site saw a surge in searches related to politics — such as praying for government and obeying government authority.

Some things, even amid uncertainty, never change, though.

The most-read verses on Bible Gateway have re-

mained the same for years: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16) and "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope" (Jer. 29:11).

The site's top two most-

searched terms have also remained unchanged: "love" and "peace," but "hope" moved up the list to No. 3 in 2020, according to the website.

'Looking for hope'

"You could say people are looking for hope more this year than they have in the previous couple years," Petersen said. (RNS)



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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 or call: 205-274-9232.

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.

OTHER POSITIONS

ASSOCIATIONAL MISSIONARY

Shelby Baptist Association, Columbiana, Alabama, is searching for the next associational missionary to lead the association. For more information, please go to <https://shelbybaptist.org/job-opportunities/>.

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Looking to God



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Christians worshipping at home during pandemic spikes hymn database

In 2020, we celebrated holidays at home amid the COVID-19 pandemic. We worked at home, attended school at home, even attended worship services at home.

Many Christians also turned to hymns for comfort at home, according to Hymnary.org.

Users of the online database doubled as the novel coronavirus closed many church buildings this spring, and the website now is nearing 40 million page views for 2020, its highest ever.

“I do think that this time we’re in when everything is turned upside down makes

everybody search for meaning, opens them up to the presence of God, looking for ways to express their spirituality, so there are more people searching for such things,” said Harry Plantinga, a professor of computer science at Calvin University and founder of Hymnary.org.

In need of resources

“There are also just the people who aren’t going to church to worship.

“They’re worshipping at home, and they need the resources.”

Hymnary.org is an online hymn and worship music database for worship lead-

ers, hymnologists and music lovers, featuring more than 1 million hymns.

Plantinga founded the website in 2007, which now is funded through the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Over the past year, Hymnary.org saw a jump in users in March and April as many churches moved online to slow the spread of COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus. By the end of 2020, nearly 8 million users had accessed the site, up 20% from the year before, according to the website.

Donations to Hymnary.org

have nearly doubled, as well, according to Plantinga.

Seeking comfort

“In this time of uncertainty and fear, Christians around the globe turn to Scripture and turn to song for comfort. We remember that our help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth,” according to the website.

Hymnary.org also offered a number of resources for churches and home worshippers during the pandemic. Among them: a list of 10 hymns with testimonies of comfort for times of trouble, including “Precious Lord,

Take my Hand,” written in the early 1930s by Pilgrim Baptist Church, Chicago’s Thomas Dorsey, considered the father of black gospel music, after the death of his wife and newborn son.

It’s not on the list, but the most popular hymn on the database as the year draws to a close is “Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty,” an 1826 song by Reginald Heber that defiantly proclaims God’s holiness “though the darkness hide thee.”

Among trending hymns, “How Great Thou Art,” was in the top 15, along with several Christmas hymns. (RNS)

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3 stories

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AP photo/Andrew Harnik

As churches gathered Jan. 6 on campuses and online for Wednesday services, prayer for America was on the minds of many. Earlier in the day, violence broke out in Washington as a joint session of Congress met for a ceremonial counting of electoral votes and the final step in affirming the election of Joe Biden as the 46th president. A crowd claiming the results are fraudulent gathered outside the U.S. Capitol, then stormed inside. Read more at tabonline.org/capitol-protest. (TAB)

Judson College spring semester 2021 OKed

Judson College trustees met Dec. 31 and greenlighted the 2021 spring semester following a successful end-of-the-year effort to raise financial support.

Judson College President Mark Tew issued an appeal on Dec. 15 for unrestricted cash donations to help the college begin and finish the 2021 spring semester.

The first goal of \$500,000 was surpassed on Dec. 28. Total gifts and pledges are nearing the \$1.5 million goal set by the college.

In a Dec. 28 interview, Tew said Judson officials are encouraged by the response.

Due to the anticipated rise in COVID-19 cases following the holidays, the spring semester will begin Jan. 20. Trustees also are planning for a fall 2021 semester. Read more at tabonline.org/judson-goal. (TAB)

Ridgecrest Conference Center sale finalized

LifeWay Christian Resources has finalized the sale of Ridgecrest Conference Center and Summer Camps to the Ridgecrest Foundation, a group dedicated to using the property as a Christian camp and conference center.

The new nonprofit ministry, Ridgecrest Foundation, was formed and funded by a group of Christian businesspeople and individuals who love Ridgecrest. LifeWay President and CEO Ben Mandrell said the individuals involved have a high view of Scripture and are committed to evangelism and disciple making.

Youth camps like FUGE, Student Life and CentriKid will continue at the conference center.

LifeWay officials cited changes in organizational strategy, rising costs and uncertainty due to COVID-19 as reasons to sell. (LifeWay)

Headline news

from around the Southeast

Florida

Instead of its usual Christmas production, Bell Shoals Church in Tampa, Florida, released a half-hour film, "Nothing Wasted," focused on the truth "that God is truly able to redeem the seemingly worst of circumstances." The film focuses on the life of Bruce Roberts, Bell Shoals' next generation pastor, who experienced a tumultuous childhood before making his faith profession in college. The film can be viewed on YouTube or Facebook.

Georgia

Moved by families in need amid COVID-19, Georgia native Trevor Lawrence, who recently completed his stint as Clemson University's quarterback, and his fiancée Marissa Mowry have established a relief fund to provide direct assistance to families in Georgia's Bartow County and two communities in upstate South Carolina, *Georgia Magazine* reported. "We believe as Christians it is

our responsibility to love and serve those around us, especially during this pandemic," Lawrence said. For more information, visit communityfoundationnwga.org/lawrence-mowry-fund.

Louisiana

Disaster relief chaplains distributed 1,955 Bibles and shared the gospel with 1,428 people from late August until late September in areas of Louisiana impacted by Hurricane Laura. They saw 297 professions of faith. Additionally, in the hurricane's aftermath, volunteers ministered in practical ways — preparing 413,846 meals, offering 10,640 showers and completing 1,485 chain-saw jobs, 185 temporary roofing jobs and 137 debris removal jobs, the *Baptist Message* reported.

Mississippi

As COVID cases surge, churches in Mississippi are grappling with difficult decisions. Highland

Colony Baptist Church in Ridgeland, Mississippi, experienced an outbreak in the fall and temporarily shut down. Since then, Pastor Jay Richardson, hospitalized for five days with the virus, said, "I've made the decision that unless it's a very, very unique situation, we're not going to shut this church down anymore," explaining that not worshipping together hurts members emotionally and spiritually, the *Clarion Ledger* reported.

Tennessee

Long Hollow Baptist Church in Hendersonville, Tennessee, is experiencing revival as 99 people were baptized in a Dec. 20 Sunday service, followed by many others subsequently being baptized by Pastor Robby Gallaty in their bathtubs at home and others being baptized in a special Dec. 22 church service. Gallaty points to the impact of people's testimonies in what he's calling "a movement of God that I've never experienced."

NEWS

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

▶ Longtime pastor and Alabama Baptist leader **Harper Shannon** died Dec. 30 of complications from progressive dementia. He was 89.

Shannon retired from full-time ministry in January 1997 after serving 12 years as director of the office of evangelism at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. He served as president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention from 1977 to 1979.



SHANNON

Shannon was a graduate of Howard College (now Samford University in Birmingham) and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

When he was elected director of evangelism, he was serving as pastor of First Baptist Church, Huffman. He earlier served as pastor of First Baptist Church, Dothan; Eastern Hills Baptist Church, Montgomery; First Baptist Church, Ghent, Kentucky; and Harmony Baptist Church, Pleasant Grove (now First Baptist).

Shannon also served in various other positions through the years, including as a trustee of the Home Mission Board (now North American Mission Board), vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention and SBC Pastors Conference, president of the Birmingham Minister's Association, trustee for Baptist Medical Centers and director for the Alabama Baptist Retirement Centers.

Shannon is survived by his wife, Elsie; two children, Ken and Grace; and two granddaughters.

▶ **Dewey Corder**, pastor of Central Baptist Church, Trussville, died Dec. 25. He was 80.

He served Central Baptist for more than 20 years. Corder was a past president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention and previous longtime pastor of First Baptist Church, Trussville. He also served as pastor of Eastern Hills Baptist Church, Montgomery from 1982 to 1989.



CORDER

Corder is survived by his wife, Jackie; two

sons, Chris and Casey; daughter Cori; and seven grandchildren.

▶ **Michael "Mike" Stancil**, pastor of Fulton Bridge Baptist Church, Hamilton, died Dec. 26 after a six-week battle with COVID-19. He was 49.

Along with his work through the church and in the community, Stancil also served a stint on the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

He is survived by his wife, Michelle; daughter, Lexi; and son, Josh.

▶ **Larry Hicks**, associate pastor for pastoral



STANCIL

care at First Baptist Church, Athens, died Dec. 11. He was 74.

Before becoming part of the church's staff in 2002, Hicks had taught a couples' Sunday School class for many years. During that time, he worked at Monsanto Chemical Company in Decatur. He said his personal mission statement for his life was "to use every opportunity to bring honor and glory to the Lord Jesus."

Hicks was preceded in death by his wife of 53 years, Linda. He is survived by his son, Wayne; daughter, Susan; and three grandchildren.

▶ **Jerry Edwin Freeman**, pastor of Bell Springs Missionary Baptist Church, Falkville, died on Christmas Eve from complications of COVID-19. He was 73.



FREEMAN

Freeman served in the Army and fought during the Vietnam War. He also worked for the City of Cullman for more than 35 years in various positions, including building inspector, chief building official and executive assistant to the mayor. But his calling was the ministry — he served as a pastor for 48 years.

Freeman is survived by his wife of 49 years, Donna; daughter, Sarah; son, Timothy; and three grandchildren.

▶ **Larry D. Johnson Sr.**, pastor of Sunny Eve Baptist Church, Anniston, died Nov. 29. He was 79.

Over the years, Johnson served as pastor of other churches in addition to Sunny Eve Baptist, including Fairview No. 1 Baptist, Ragland; Dailey Street Baptist, Piedmont; Webster's Chapel Baptist, Wellington; Pleasant Ridge Baptist, Anniston; New Bethel Baptist, Jacksonville; Hatcher Avenue Baptist, Jacksonville; and New Bethel Baptist, Collinsville.

He also served in the U.S. Army.

Johnson is survived by his wife, Guylene; daughter, Sabra; sons, Larry Jr. and Michael; 11 grandchildren; 10 great-grandchildren.

▶ **Calvin Roger Brooks**, pastor of Fairview Heights Northside Baptist Church, Anniston, died Dec. 24. He was 58.

A native of Calhoun County, Brooks had a deep love for southern gospel music and had been a part of several quartets and trios. He served as a pastor of other area churches before coming to Fairview Heights Northside, including Patton Chapel



HICKS

Baptist Church, Lincoln, and Family Fellowship Baptist Church, Munford. He also worked for the Anniston Army Depot.

Brooks is survived by his wife of 40 years, Tammy; daughters, Freda and April; and six grandchildren.

▶ **Robert A. Bradley Jr.**, a longtime International Mission Board missionary from Alabama, died Dec. 29 after a short battle with cancer. He was 81.

Bradley was called to the ministry as a young man and ordained within days of his 26th birthday. He earned a bachelor's degree from Samford University and a master's degree from UAB.

He began his ministry serving as pastor of Brantleyville Community Church; Central Baptist Church, Oakman; West Jefferson Baptist Church, Quinton; and the now-closed Flat Creek Baptist Church in Walker County.

In 1978, he and his wife, Barbara, answered the call to serve overseas. After being appointed by the IMB, the couple served their first 16 years in Hong Kong and Macau. Then they were assigned to Tel Aviv, Israel, for four years; Rome, Italy, for one year; and Munich, Germany, for almost three years.

After he retired from the IMB, he served as pastor of Chisholm Baptist Church, Montgomery.

Bradley is survived by his wife of 55 years; son, Robert A. "Brad" III; daughters, Belinda and Robyn; 10 grandchildren; and six great-grandchildren.

▶ **Fred Wolfe**, longtime pastor of Cottage Hill Baptist Church, Mobile, and founder of Luke 4:18 Fellowship, Mobile, died Jan. 3 of COVID-19 complications.

Throughout his ministry, Wolfe was active in Southern Baptist Convention life. He served in key roles, including chair of the SBC Executive Committee, president of the SBC Pastors Conference and as a trustee of the Home Mission Board (now North American Mission Board). In 1994 he was nominated for SBC president.

Wolfe's pastoral career took him from a series of churches in North Carolina, Texas, Georgia and his native South Carolina to Alabama.

Wolfe was a graduate of the University of South Carolina in Columbia and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He was awarded an honorary doctor of divinity from Mobile College (now the University of Mobile).

Wolfe was preceded in death by his wife, Patricia Anne. He is survived by sons Mark and Jeffrey; six grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren.

EDITOR'S NOTE — More information is available at tabonline.org/obituaries.



BRADLEY



WOLFE



JOHNSON



BROOKS



The word “pandemic” is, unsurprisingly, the 2020 word of the year for Dictionary.com. Probably one of the runners-up is the word “unprecedented.” Those words adequately describe 2020 in many ways.

Yet for Alabama Baptists and other evangelical believers, those words fail to describe how our Lord has been at work despite the global virus that has impacted almost every life on the planet.



By Rick Lance
State Missionary

For me, the word “Kingdom” is a better descriptor for what has happened in 2020. Despite a viral pandemic, churches have been adept at adapting. Pastors and other church leaders have had the Kingdom on their minds and in their hearts because the Great Commission has not been in quarantine.

Due to the pandemic, Alabama Baptists did not have the opportunity to meet in person for our 2020 annual meeting. The online State Missions Celebration did serve as a way to highlight the things that God has been doing among us during this unusual period. By the way, that celebration is available for viewing at alsbom.org/convention.

Our Convention theme was to be Matthew 6:33. For believers, this is among the most familiar verses in the Bible.

Matthew 6:33 reminds us that the Kingdom of God is our **Perspective**. It is our worldview. We are to see through the eyes of Christ, eternally not temporally.

This verse calls us to remember that the Kingdom of God is our **Pursuit**. The word “seek” in Matthew 6:33 is a present tense verb, meaning we are to go after

something that is most important. People today often speak of their passion. They might

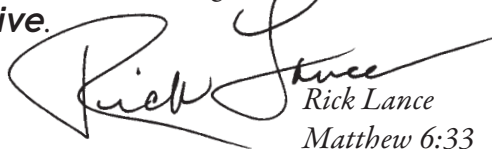
express that they have a passion for this or that. We really ought to point to our pursuit: the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Consider also that Matthew 6:33 reminds us of our **Priority**. We are to seek first His Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is not to be placed somewhere on our top ten list. It is our only agenda.

Reflect upon Matthew 6:33 intensely, and you will remember our Lord’s **Promise**: “All of these things will be added to you.” This means everything we need to be Kingdom focused is promised to us.

Yes, the pandemic has been devastating. People have died. Businesses have closed. Churches have had to go online. Yet the Kingdom of God marches on!

My prayer for 2021, personally and for Alabama Baptists, is that we have a renewed Kingdom focus leading to much Kingdom fruit.


Rick Lance
Matthew 6:33

UPCOMING EVENTS

WHO’S YOUR ONE? RALLY AND WORKSHOP WITH JOHNNY HUNT

January 24-25

Visit evangelizeal.org/events for more information or to register and for latest information about whether this event will be virtual or in person.

ONLINE CHURCH TAX CONFERENCES

Led by State Missionary Lee Wright

Monday, January 25, 10 am to noon. Special emphasis: Special Tax Rules for Ministers and Housing Allowance

Tuesday, January 26, 10 am to noon. Special emphasis: Contribution Rules

Visit pinnaclealabama.org for more information or to register.

CONNECT WITH THE COMMISSION: GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS WEBINAR

Tuesday, January 26, 10-11 am

Led by State Missionaries Daniel Wilson, Ken Allen and Terry Long and Church Health Specialist George Yates

Visit pinnaclealabama.org for more information or to register.

DISCIPLESHIP NETWORK OF ALABAMA VIRTUAL GATHERING

Thursday, January 28, 1-4 pm

Featuring Scott Sullivan, Discipleship Catalyst, Georgia Baptist Mission Board

Visit disciplealabama.org for more information or to register.

The in-person Bible Drill Retreat on January 29-30 has been cancelled, but virtual tools are being offered for you to use with your students.

Visit kidzlinkal.org/bible-drill-retreat for information.

BIVOCATIONAL MINISTERS RETREAT

Saturday, February 20, 9:30 am-3:30 pm ONLINE

Featuring Tim Henning, Bill Wilks, Jacky Connell and Kevin Blackwell

Visit alsbom.org/bivo for more information or to register.

HUNGER SUNDAY

February 21

Visit alsbom.org/hunger for more information and promotional resources to assist you with collecting a hunger offering in your church.

Study group downplays social costs of gambling

By **Dianna L. Cagle**
TAB Media

A recent gambling study says revenues from gambling — if expanded in the state — could reach \$700 million and bring Alabama 19,000 jobs but the committee’s report minimizes gambling’s social costs, critics say.

“The committee, while acknowledging the negative impacts of expanded gambling in the state, seems to downplay the social and fiscal costs and over-estimates the fiscal ‘benefits’ to the state,” said Joe Godfrey, executive director of Alabama Citizens Action Program (ALCAP), who is analyzing the 800-plus page report released Dec. 18 by Gov. Kay Ivey’s Study Group on Gambling Policy.

Former Montgomery mayor Todd Strange, who served as chairman of the study group, said their research estimates a state-run lottery would bring in around \$200 million initially.

He estimated that casino-style gambling — everything from slots to table games to card rooms — would be a \$300–400 million revenue stream and sports betting would begin at \$10 million.

All of those together would add up to \$500–700 million annually,

the group estimates. With a 4.9 million population in Alabama, Strange estimated 2.3 million “would likely play.” The group’s evaluation determined that less than 3% of those who would play are estimated to be problem gamblers, with .6% compulsive gamblers.

How to regulate

“Gambling will work in the state of Alabama,” Strange declared, stressing governance should be “a single authority that can regulate and administer and enforce” with the highest ethical standards. The group recommended a corporation run by a board of trustees and approved by the Alabama Senate.

While Alabama is one of only a few states with no lottery, the Poarch Band of Creek Indians runs casinos in Atmore, Montgomery and Wetumpka (operating under federal law).

Strange also admitted the “bulk of revenue generated by potential casinos will come from residents within a 50-mile radius of each casino,” Godfrey said, meaning “no new dollars” would enter the state. Local citizens “will shift their spending away from other purchases in order to gamble,” he said, noting most lot-

tery ticket outlets would be in lower-income neighborhoods.

“Because of this, sales tax revenue will drop, hurting the State Education Trust Fund Budget, which gets \$0.04 of every sales tax dollar, as well as hurting local municipalities and counties which receive additional portions of the sales tax dollars,” Godfrey said.

“When people spend money gambling instead of buying goods and services, small businesses will also be negatively impacted.”

Godfrey recalled images of Atlantic City, New Jersey, after casinos were legalized: “Local restaurants and other small businesses across the streets from the big, flashy casinos closed and boarded, except for pawn shops and ‘fast cash’ and ‘title loan’ businesses which opened in large numbers.”

Churches will be inundated with people seeking help to pay bills or aid in fighting a gambling addiction, Godfrey predicts. “Tax-payers will be affected when taxes have to be raised to cover the lost income and

revenue that always results from expanded gambling.”

“Legalized gambling, whether a state-sponsored lottery or state-sanctioned casinos, or a combination of the two, has failed to raise the standard of living in every state where it has been initiated,” he said.

Godfrey reminded Alabama citizens of the promises made by the Birmingham Race Track that schools would never want for money if the citizens of Jefferson County would just pass a constitutional amendment legalizing the track.”

Speaking for the study group, Strange said “the advantages outweigh the disadvantages” and the costs are “manageable.”

For expanded forms of gambling in Alabama to be legalized, an amendment would have to be approved by three-fifths of the members of the House of Representatives and Senate. That amendment would then be placed on a ballot for state voters.

Gov. Ivey formed the study group in February 2020 with an executive order. 🇺🇸

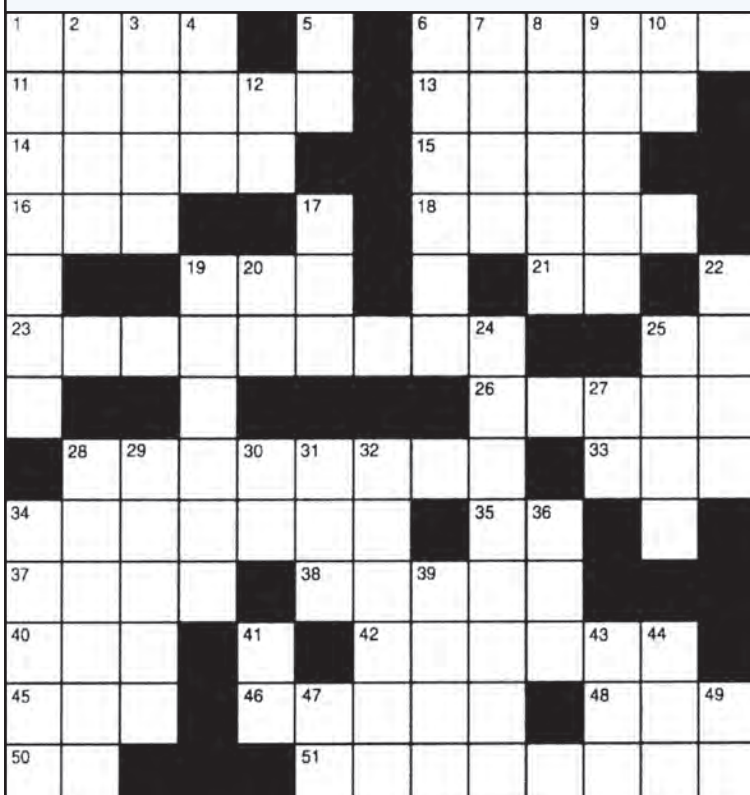


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To read the full report, visit tabonline.org/gambling-report.

Christian Crossword

By Joann Horn Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

- To request earnestly.
- Except ye ____, ye shall perish. (Luke 13:3)
- What __ thee, Hagar? (Gen. 21:17)
- Daybreak.
- To cook.
- Talking horse.
- Army Transport Service. (abbr.)
- The __ of Kish ... were lost. (1 Sam. 9:3)
- Could.
- Father of Jr.
- As the __ cometh out of the east. (Matt. 24:27)
- Greeting.
- Sackcloth and __. (Luke 10:13)
- Neither be __ of other men’s sins. (1 Tim. 5:22)

- He __ the more afraid. (John 19:8)
- Disturb.
- Middle French. (abbr.)
- Medicinal plant.
- Person afflicted with sores.
- The serpent beguiled me, and I did __. (Gen. 3:13)
- Avenge.
- TV brand.
- Ready for sudden action.
- Thy disciples __ and drink. (Luke 5:33)
- Interject to express uncertainty.
- Thy brother __ against thee. (Luke 17:3)

Down

- Moral story.

- Children not accused of __. (Titus 1:6)
- Exclamation of sorrow.
- Opposed to “no.”
- __, thou that destroyed the temple. (Mark 15:29)
- My joy might __ in you. (John 15:11)
- Having itching __. (2 Tim. 4:3)
- I __ toward the mark. (Phil. 3:14)
- The __ shall serve the younger. (Rom. 9:12)
- New York. (abbr.)
- Tea time. (abbr.)
- No room in the __. (Luke 2:7)
- He rode upon a __. (Ps. 18:10)
- Yesterday __ the seventh hour.
- (John 4:52)
- Holy __. (Rom. 16:16)
- Robes.
- Cure.
- Housewife. (abbr.)
- __ the word. (2 Tim. 4:2)
- Artery in the heart.
- Lung disease.
- Christ is __. (Col. 3:11)
- Guard.
- Thither.
- Day of the week. (abbr.)
- Keep thyself __. (1 Tim. 5:22)
- Mom.
- Red or Dead.
- Whereas thou __ been forsaken and halted. (Isa. 60:15)
- Lieutenant. (abbr.)
- Technical Sergeant. (abbr.)

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For January 17

Explore the Bible

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.

Dean of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



COMPASSIONATE

Luke 6:27–38

We interrupt our sequential study of Luke's gospel account to emphasize Sanctity of Human Life Sunday. It was this week in 1973 that the U.S. Supreme Court determined that the choice to kill a living human being in utero was protected as a constitutional right to privacy (14th Amendment). In the intervening years, Southern Baptists have marked the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* with a celebration of the dignity and sanctity of human life as God's image-bearing special creation.

Our related Scripture passage comes from the "Sermon on the Plain," often compared to and contrasted from Matthew 5–7 (the "Sermon on the Mount"). The focal verses record Jesus teaching His disciples to be compassionate and to extend mercy to others. We advocate for the dignity of all human life.

Love All (27–31)

"Love your enemies" (v. 27). That's not in the Torah! Moses teaches me to love God with all my heart, my soul and my strength (Deut. 6:5). He teaches me to love my neighbor as myself (Lev. 19:18). In fact, Moses even teaches me to love strangers like I love myself (Lev. 19:33–34). But "love your enemies?" Yes, Jesus demonstrated how to love those who opposed Him.

Who are your enemies? An earlier part of this sermon provides the answer: "Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you, insult you and slander your name as evil because of the Son of Man" (v. 22). Jesus is not referring to enmity caused by our own careless words, misunderstood motives or sinful actions. Peter is careful to delineate suffering for Christ from suffering as a result of sin: "Let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer or a meddler" (1 Pet. 4:15).

Here and elsewhere, Jesus tells His followers to expect adversity: "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20). Peter writes: "If you are ridiculed for the name of Christ ... let those who suffer according to God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator while do-

ing what is good" (1 Pet. 4:14, 19). Regardless of our treatment, we must love our adversaries enough to share the gospel with them.

With a Pure Heart (32–36)

"Love your enemies" (v. 35). Jesus explains that the purpose for doing this is to reflect the Father's grace and mercy. "You will be children of the Most High. For He is gracious to the ungrateful and evil" (vv. 35–36). Jesus calls us to extend mercy because the Father is merciful.

Saul of Tarsus sought the death and imprisonment of Christians. After meeting the risen Lord Jesus, he received God's transforming, redeeming love: "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us ... while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son" (Rom. 5:8, 10). When we love our enemies, we demonstrate that God's love through Christ has captivated our attention and our affections.

And with Mercy (37–38)

The following verses reverberate with "echoes of mercy" and "whispers of love" ("Blessed Assurance"). Jesus instructs us to withhold judgment, for God is our judge. Condemnation is not ours to dispense, though we know unbelievers are already condemned (John 3:18). Generosity in giving and forgiving reflects the Father's generous heart to all who receive His forgiveness by faith. These are the echoes of mercy.

To reflect the image of God, we must find creative ways to demonstrate love for neighbors, love for strangers, love for political rivals and love for our oppressors. Jesus foretells an accounting that nations will face regarding treatment of "the least of these" — the hungry, thirsty, naked, stranger, infirmed and imprisoned (Matt. 25:31–46). Ways we can love compassionately include: adoption advocacy, foster care, homeless ministry, prison ministry, health care, hospice and grief ministries.

Jesus calls us to show compassion for all humanity — from conception to the grave.✠

Bible Studies for Life

By Will Kynes, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Biblical Studies, Samford University



CREATED FOR A PURPOSE

Jeremiah 1:4–10

Though we may be tempted to associate both our own value and that of others in society by worldly accomplishments, the Bible declares for humanity both a deeper and higher calling that all share and yet all are called to live out in different ways.

As the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever."

God has a purpose for every life. (4–5)

The creation account shared in Genesis 1 climaxes with God's creation of humanity, male and female, in the "image of God" (Gen. 1:27).

Like the statues of themselves that ancient Near Eastern kings would erect throughout their domain to declare their sovereign power over it, as bearers of God's image, humans are commanded by God to "be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28).

Here is the purpose God has for every human — to proclaim His glory by bearing His image throughout creation.

God, therefore, values every person, as all are created in His image.

Some, such as the prophet Jeremiah, however, are "set apart" for special purposes in the service of that greater purpose that all share to spread God's glory across the earth.

Even before Jeremiah is born (Ps. 139:13–14; Luke 1:41), he is called to contribute to that common human purpose by being a prophet, not only to Israel, but to "the nations."

How can you contribute to proclaiming and demonstrating the world-encompassing glory of God in whatever specific calling you may have received?

God is with us to carry out His purpose. (6–8)

Like Moses (Ex. 3:11; 4:10) and many other prophets who receive a direct calling from God, Jeremiah objects that he is not up to the task.

Speaking for God is an intimidating undertaking. But the Lord will not allow Jeremiah to use his youth as an excuse (1 Tim. 4:12).

His deficiencies, whatever they may be, will not hinder his pursuit of his God-glorifying life purpose because the Lord will be with him.

God equips us with what we need to carry out His purpose. (9–10)

But the Lord provides more than His presence. He also equips Jeremiah to execute his calling by giving Jeremiah the words to say.

Like the other prophets, he will declare, "Thus says the Lord," and by reporting those divine declarations, Jeremiah will determine the fate of nations (v. 10).

Though the Lord equips Jeremiah specially for his distinct purpose, this passage suggests that God will provide all believers for the variety of purposes they may receive.

A similar principle is behind Jesus' promise to His disciples that the Holy Spirit will teach them what to say when they are accused before synagogues, rulers and authorities (Luke 12:11–12).

The incorporation of diverse callings into the singular purpose of glorifying God is evident in Paul's teaching of the value of all the parts in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12), in which he declares, "There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work" (1 Cor. 12:6).

Or as Paul puts it elsewhere, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10).✠





Media reviews

Pixar's 'Soul' is mixed bag for Christian families

By Michael Foust
TAB Media

The phrase “family-friendly,” as every parent knows, is subjective. The film your neighbor says is fine for the children might not be so family-friendly in your home.

Such is the case with the new Pixar movie “Soul” (PG), which tells the story of a super-talented young musician, Joe, who is on the verge of a big career break when he unexpectedly dies.

Joe wasn't ready to die, however, so when his soul enters the “Great Beyond” — that's what it's called in the movie — he runs back down the eternal staircase and ends up in the “Great Before,” the place where souls get their personalities before going to Earth.

There, in the Great Before, Joe is confused for being someone else and is given the job of “mentoring” souls. (Think: Big Brother/Big Sister.) He is paired with a notoriously difficult soul — No. 22 — who has the attitude of a moody teenager



'Soul'

Photo courtesy of Pixar

and who supposedly made her previous mentor, Mother Teresa, cry.

Joe's job is to help No. 22 find her “spark” — that is, her talents and goals in life.

The film then takes an even crazier turn during a mishap that places the duo on Earth in the wrong bodies: No. 22 in Joe's body, and Joe in the body of a cat.

This unfortunate event, though, ends up being a blessing for the duo: No. 22 (Tina Fey) finds her spark and talents, while Joe (Jamie Foxx) — by watching himself interact with others — realizes his life was not meaningless.

Parable about life

The plot, of course, is hogwash from a biblical perspective.

But as a parable about life, “Soul” can teach moviegoers a lot. Here's why: Much

of the plot takes place not in the Great Beyond or Great Before, but on our planet.

And although Joe's job is to mentor No. 22, she ends up educating him. She

teaches him to slow down and enjoy the simple blessings of life. She (and others) also helps Joe discover an important truth that has a biblical foundation: Everyone is unique and special.

Finally, Joe learns his life's goal — to play in a well-known band — doesn't bring true happiness.

The story urges us to be content — a message straight out of Scripture.

To be sure, the message in “Soul” is incomplete, and Christian parents will need to fill in the blanks. Still, it's a good conversation-starter about God's purpose for life. “Soul” contains no coarse

language, sexuality or violence, yet it's a complicated film for families because of its mixed bag of worldviews. After all, “family-friendly” can have different meanings. “Soul” launched Dec. 25 on Disney Plus.

Also worth watching:

▶ **“The Last Champion” (VOD)** — A disgraced athlete returns to his small hometown years after he was stripped of his wrestling gold medal due to drugs. There, he meets an old friend — and her pastor-father — who teaches him about redemption and second chances. It's one of the best family films of 2020. Due to minor language (OMG, 2; and a—, 2) and a fight scene, this PG-13 film is best for older children and teens.

▶ **“Hardy Boys” (Hulu)** — Brothers Frank and Joe Hardy move to the small town of Bridgeport, Connecticut, following the surprising death of their mother. There, they discover

the truth about their mom's death and set out to find out who murdered her. The series, based on the books, remains in family-friendly territory, with no sexuality or graphic violence, and only minor language (I caught only a total of two coarse words, h—, after watching multiple episodes.) Due to the plot, this series may be best for older children and teens. Rated TV-PG.

▶ **“The Croods: A New Age” (Theaters, VOD)** — The Croods family meets another family, the modern-living Bettermans, sparking a clash of cultures. It's a hilarious film with no coarse language and no sexuality (minus the grandma donning a two-piece warrior outfit). The film's conclusion begs the question: Does every technological advancement make our lives better? Rated PG for peril, action and rude humor.

▶ **“Real Right Stuff” (Disney Plus)** — It's a 90-minute documentary that spotlights the Mercury 7 astronauts who helped America catch the Russians in the space race. The film includes radio broadcasts, interviews, home movies and other never-before-seen material. Rated TV-PG.

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.

Meet the reviewer

Michael Foust covers the intersection of faith and entertainment as a media reviewer for The Alabama Baptist. He also is the husband of an amazing wife and the father of four young children.

Laundry labor of love

WMU volunteers serve disaster recovery area in North Carolina

By Trennis Henderson
WMU National Correspondent

Washing piles of muddy clothes and cleaning bathrooms may not sound like the most glamorous missions project available — but it’s a labor of love for Woman’s Missionary Union volunteers from Robeson Baptist Association in Lumberton, North Carolina.

Working behind the scenes at the Baptist Rebuild Center in Lumberton, women from several area churches regularly do laundry; put fresh mattress covers on rows of bunk beds; clean sinks, showers and commodes; sweep and mop floors; and sort and deliver donated food items.

The Rebuild Center, a ministry of North Carolina Baptists on Mission, is equipped to house and feed up to 200 volunteers from across the state and beyond. The volunteer teams continue to help area residents rebuild from two devastating hurricanes that hit the region: Matthew in 2016 and Florence in 2018.

“As the volunteers would come, we wanted it to be a clean, inviting, comfortable place for them,” explained Deborah Taylor, president of WMU of North Carolina.

She noted that the volunteers typically work long hours removing moldy insulation; installing new wiring, plumbing and roofing; hanging drywall; and painting.

Offering encouragement

Taylor, whose husband, Alan, is the mission strategist for Robeson Baptist Association, contacted area churches and WMU groups about adopting the laundry and cleaning ministry.

“We saw that there were people who were trained a lot better than me in painting and pulling insulation out of houses and rebuilding those floors,” Taylor said. “But they still needed food, they still needed their clothes washed, especially after being out in the field all day and



WMU photo by Pam Henderson

Deborah Taylor (center), president of Woman’s Missionary Union of North Carolina, leads a prayer time with volunteers at the Lumberton Rebuild Center. WMU members from Robeson Baptist Association in Lumberton provide laundry and cleaning services for those involved in hurricane rebuild projects.

coming in with the mud. And so I called and asked our ladies, ‘How about if we do this?’ ... I felt like that was the little bit that we could do.”

That “little bit” has grown into a well-organized ministry that involves various WMU groups taking responsibility for laundry and cleaning duties on different days of each month. The rebuild teams put their dirty clothes in bags that the WMU volunteers collect. As they wash, dry and fold the loads of laundry, they also attach thank you notes and Bible verses to the bags and pray for each of the workers.

“We knew that they were gone all day working,” Taylor pointed out. “It’s a joy to see when they come back in and pick up their clean laundry and read those Bible verses and be encouraged through that too.”

Amid all the projects the volunteers tackle at the Rebuild Center, “the laundry has kind of become our home,” Taylor said. “I believe that God has given each of us gifts and that we use those gifts at differ-

ent times in different places.

“I’ve tried to help our youth and our ladies to see that when we’re washing those clothes, we may not know who José is or who Jimmy is or James or where they have been,” she added, “but we know that they have been in touch with someone from our community, someone who had a need.”



BAUGHAM

Jay Baugham and his wife, Ashley, have served since spring 2019 as the site coordinators at the Baptist Rebuild Center in Lumberton. While they often host hundreds of volunteers each month, the coronavirus pandemic has significantly reduced those numbers this year. Volunteers still are needed to help complete extensive repairs due to hurricane-related devastation ranging from roof damage to massive flooding.

Local partnership

As they coordinate logistics on behalf of volunteer teams, “one of the great partnerships that we have locally is the WMU,” Baugham affirmed.

“They play a key role in how the

Rebuild Center can actually operate.

“Our focus here at the Rebuild Center is to house volunteers, churches, just really any organization that would want to come and work,” he explained. As workers are oriented and assigned to dozens of work sites throughout the area, “we get to see hands-on how God can work in these volunteers.”

Sharing the gospel

Beyond the coordination and construction, Baugham emphasized that the ministry’s primary goal is sharing the gospel with the families they serve. Workers at each job site are committed to “praying with that family and praying for that house and praying for that community so then when we do leave and we do finish that project that the Spirit of the Holy God will be there and that when the family moves back into that home that they feel the presence of God. That’s what it’s about.

“We’ve seen some families come to Christ just because of the volunteers that come down and pour into their lives and do what they need,” he reflected. “It’s just been amazing to see.”

Another major project the Baughams have coordinated through the Rebuild Center is distributing USDA “Farmers to Families” produce boxes. Each week, the center’s parking lot is abuzz with activity as staff and volunteers load hundreds of boxes of fresh produce into waiting trucks and vans. Area churches and organizations, in turn, distribute the fruit and vegetables to people in their communities who are stuck at home due to COVID restrictions or other limitations.

“You know, there’s no glory in cleaning bathrooms, but here it has actually been a glorious thing,” said Sara Lovett, a member of Robeson Association’s WMU leadership team. “It’s been a blessing that we could all come together and do this kind of work together to help others.”✠