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INSIDE



In their own words
— **Tim Akers on serving as pastor during pandemic**

◆ Pages 6–7



FBC Birmingham celebrates new year by reading entire Bible aloud

◆ Page 8



Serving bivocationally
— **Seeing God's faithfulness amid challenges**

◆ Page 9



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Children's ministry leaders find ways to help children be missional in their homes and communities.

Engaging children

Church leaders find ways to keep youngsters involved

By Grace Thornton
TAB Media

Tracie Griggs says one of her biggest burdens this year has been this — for parents and grandparents to know their children can still be missional even when life isn't normal.

Griggs, minister to children at Twelfth Street Baptist

Church, Rainbow City, is one of many who has had to switch gears over the past few months due to COVID-19 restrictions and precautions.

Think of others

“The natural instinct in a pandemic is to isolate with your own people,” she said. “I prayed that the Lord would show us ways that instead of isolating we could still think of those around us and encourage our kids to think outside of themselves about how they could share Jesus with their neighbors.”

To get the ball rolling, she made Wednesday Mission

Challenge videos for them to watch online every week, and one of the first things she did was encourage kids to paint a Bible verse on a big rock and leave it at a local park where someone else could see it.

“I told them to put it somewhere on the trail where people could read that verse and be encouraged,” Griggs said.

It wasn't long before they began to see photos popping up on Facebook of the rocks with comments that people had seen them and were reminded that God was in control.

(See 'Volunteers,' page 11)

Unlikely pairing brings ministry to football players

By Grace Thornton
TAB Media

Debe Rodgers says she prayed for God to send her a ministry for years. But as the church she'd grown up in — Chisholm Baptist Church, Montgomery — dwindled in size over the decades, she began to wonder what in the world that ministry could be.

Community work

“I'd been at Chisholm Baptist since I was 7, and I could sing a little and play the piano or organ, but I felt like I needed something to do, something out in the community,” she said.

The community around Chisholm Baptist had changed through the years, and the church had changed too.

As members had moved away, the once-thriving church had shrunk to about 20 members.

(See 'Kingdom,' page 14)



Photo courtesy of Debe Rodgers
Debe Rodgers holds up the signed jersey Lee High School players gave her for her birthday.



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Photo courtesy of John Hayes

Rick Stone, an Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteer from Valleydale Church, Birmingham, oversees the removal of downed trees in Fultondale. The area was struck by an EF-3 tornado in the overnight hours of Jan. 25.

Disaster Relief teams respond to Fultondale EF-3 tornado

The yellow, blue and white hats of Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers have shown up often in the pages of *The Alabama Baptist*, many times at work in their home state of Alabama.

That's because Alabama is no stranger to storms — and, in turn, volunteers are usually some of the first ones to show up and help.

Disaster Relief teams are hard at work again after an EF-3 tornado plowed for more than nine miles through Fultondale just north of Birmingham late Jan. 25. This comes just a few months shy of the 10th anniversary of the April 27, 2011, tornadoes that killed 238 people and left nearly 2,000 injured across central Alabama.

The recent tornado plowed a path of damage a quarter-mile wide. One person died and 20 were injured. Chainsaw teams were able to access the area Jan. 27 to begin helping homeowners with cleanup.

“There are places where things are

wiped flat,” Mark Wakefield, Alabama’s lead strategist for Disaster Relief, said of the damage.

John Hayes, an 18-year Disaster Relief veteran and area coordinator, said teams were using Walkers Chapel Baptist Church, Fultondale, as a command base, with associational teams from around the state coming in to help.

‘Piles of rubble’

“The problem is that in the area that was hit, about half of the houses are gone, just piles of rubble,” Hayes said.

There isn’t much they can do to help with cleanup there at this time, he said, but in other areas where homeowners don’t have insurance to cover tree removal and cleanup, they were able to get in there and get to work.

Chaplains also were on the scene helping people deal with trauma.

“The organization, communication and cooperative effort is typical for Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief,” said Cynthia Watts, TAB Media executive assistant and Disaster Relief chaplain.

Fultondale First Baptist Church, which was badly damaged in the 2011 tornadoes, is also getting to serve as a light to its community this time, collecting gift cards, cash and other supplies for neighbors in need. (Grace Thornton)

TAB Media

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

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 17.

Correction

The Jan. 28 article “‘Southwood Chouse’ provides home, ministry space” incorrectly stated Tommy Strickland previously served as pastor of Hepzibah Baptist Church, Talladega. He actually served as music/education pastor.

RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

By Jennifer Davis Rash

President and Editor-in-Chief



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Tribute to Rash family patriarch — hard worker, deep thinker

Known for his kindness and quiet demeanor, Cecil Rash was a dedicated family man with an impeccable work ethic and calm presence.

That's the way we wrapped the biography section of my father-in-law's obituary in late January.

During the graveside service, we also shared about his long-time and ever-growing relationship with Christ and years of faithful service to his church — First Baptist Church, Cairo, Georgia, for the past 25-plus years and Sheridan Hills Baptist

Church, Hollywood, Florida, for more than 20 years prior to that.

Cecil and Sue Rash's commitment to Christ and involvement in church for their entire married life rubbed off on their three children — and eventually served as a model for me too.

Sheridan Hills Baptist Church is where I met Jason during my two-year missions term serving the Caribbean through the International Mission Board.

When I met Jason in the mid-1990s, his parents had already made the move to south Georgia, but Jason always had stories to share. So when I did meet

them, I felt as if I had always known them.

In telling me about his dad during those early days, Jason always described him simply as a great dad.

And in delivering the eulogy for his dad a few days ago, Jason said, "I wish you could see the exclamation points I put on my paper after this sentence: He was a GREAT dad."

A somewhat generic term in many cases, but Jason's emotional emphasis of "great" for his dad revealed layers and layers of reasons and experiences — something we all deeply understood without needing extra words.

And while his presence is piercingly absent in the family home, Cecil also will be missed by many in the city of Cairo. He loved Cairo — which happened to be where he spent his formative years prior to college, as well as where he retired — and worked hard to keep it moving forward.

The 85-year-old, single-screen Zebulon theater in town was one of Cecil's favorite projects, so it only seemed fitting that

the marquee pay tribute to him the same day immediate family gathered at the graveside.

And just like all of you have most likely experienced at some point in your journey, the church family stepped in to do what it does best during times of grief — provided prayer, food, phone calls, notes, flowers, plants and listening ears.

COVID-19 restrictions prevented visits from friends like we were used to in the past, but our combined church families from four states surrounded and embraced the family.

The Rash family's current pastor and former pastor in Cairo, both dear friends, also ministered to the family consistently — and continue to do so — even while balancing so many other needs in their church families.

As we work on all that comes following the death of a family member, I am reminded of the various gifts and skill sets each family member brings and am encouraged to watch us work together as a team.

Cecil would undoubtedly love the group effort taking place. And while he likely wouldn't actually say much out loud, he would be proud of Sue and his children and grandchildren. He would think they were all pretty great themselves. 🌸



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

The single-screen Zebulon theater in Cairo, Georgia, raised money during the 2020 shutdown by renting the marquee space for special messages. Officials at the theater knew how much Cecil Rash loved the Zeb and this idea, so they made sure he also had a chance to be spotlighted.

Your Voice



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

Looking back at 2020 with optimism, hope

By **Russell Klinner**
Executive director, Shocco Springs

As I sit here reflecting on the year, to say 2020 was challenging would be a grievous understatement on my part.

Our organization and society as a whole have faced a global pandemic, societal unrest, political division, economic uncertainty, reduced in-person gatherings, school closings and a shortage of toilet paper to name a few.

Without a doubt, 2020 will have a lasting impact on our lives from this point forward. Much like air travel is measured as pre-9/11 and post-9/11, this is a defining moment for us as an organization and for the world around us.

The impact of 2020 on our future has only just begun to reveal itself.

As difficult as 2020 was, I am optimistic about the lasting impact 2020 will have on the ministry of Shocco. Two specific fronts come to mind.

First, I feel there is a renewed

desire to physically come together in our general society as a whole, but especially among the body of Christ. As we have all learned, Zoom meetings cannot and will not ever replace the opportunity to sit across the table and break bread with friends and loved ones.

As Hebrews 10:25 reminds us, online gathering is not going to replace in-person worship. God calls us to assemble together, and there is nothing that can replace in-person, corporate worship of Christ our Savior.

Value others

Second, my prayer is that as Christians we continue to grow in our ability to see the world as Christ does, valuing all the opinions, ideals and cultures of others — regardless of race, gender or political affiliation — while keeping the gospel first and foremost. Ephesians 4:1–6 says, “We are one in Christ with no dividing wall of hostility.”

Shocco’s ministry to provide a place for all people to gather in person and experience God in a unique way is now, more than ever, vital to the world around us. Our ministry has a unique opportunity to be an example to the world of what genuine Christlike service looks like rooted in love.

I will emphatically walk away from 2020 with confidence in our guests and supporters and the staff of Shocco. I see Christ’s provision for us as they give selflessly on all fronts to sustain our ministry.

From our staff serving in roles that weren’t specifically assigned to them to financially giving back to this organization, I have watched our stakeholders unify around the ministry of Shocco. This gives me hope and confidence that no matter what lies ahead in the coming months, together with Christ at the helm, Shocco will succeed in the ministry God has for us.

With this in mind, I want to simply say, “Thank you.” The board of trustees and staff are deeply appreciative to Alabama Baptists for using our facilities, praying for us, partnering financially, making contributions of time and talent and especially with gifts through the Cooperative Program.

Although I think we will end the year with a net effect on assets of -\$800,000, apart from God’s provisions and plans that number should be -\$2 million. God has provided.

As we ready ourselves for 2021, I pray that we let the refining nature of 2020 draw us closer to Christlikeness, displaying a renewed confidence in God, each other and the ministry of Shocco.

God Provides

“But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19).

For many years I have preached this verse, and many times over, God has proven Himself faithful.

[Recently], as I wrote my tithe check, I prayed this verse. We knew we had a [sewer] plumbing problem but not to this magnitude.

I thanked God for His provisions and the opportunity to financially support His work each week. I closed my prayer with “whatever happens this week, I will praise You and trust You to provide.”

God answered that prayer in a way I did not see coming.

The final bill for sewer repair was \$1,100. My youngest son walks in, hands me a wad of cash and said, “Dad, I was asked to bring this to you and tell you it’s from friends who love you.”

As I counted the cash, my eyes began to flow with tears. In my hand was \$1,100.

God doesn’t always foot the bill in this manner, but He certainly knocked me off my feet today!

Pastor Tommy Strickland
Ridgeview Baptist Church
Talladega

(Read the story of the Strickland’s “chouse” at tabonline.org/chouse.)

Letters to the Editor

In response to the findings from Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey’s Gambling Study Group (reported in the Jan. 14 issue of The Alabama Baptist), the group’s report ignores reality.

Copious research demonstrates that the poorest elements of society are those most damaged by playing the lottery.

Many, perhaps most, of Alabama’s legislators would claim to

be Christians. The word of God speaks clearly to this issue: Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who chases fantasies has a needy heart. (Prov. 12:11 from the Masoretic text of the Old Testament).

The lottery is the ultimate fantasy and those promoting it are also chasing a fantasy!

Tom Fillinger
Cullman, Ala.

“Irresponsibility with information unravels the impact of a Christian’s witness.”

MARY JO SHARP

Christian apologist and author

Christian churches resolve to be places focused on the truth. Yet half of pastors hear the spread of assumptions about [conspiracy theories] often. This is a startling disconnect.

Scott McConnell
Executive director
LifeWay Research

When difficult times come now, I try to remember the lesson I learned as a child — focus on the simple things because they are truly the best things. It doesn’t make the difficulties disappear, but it does change my perspective so I

can deal with them in better ways. ... “If anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things” (Phil. 4:8b).

Amy Hacker
theropetab.com

I believe the key word for churches in 2021 is: Rebuild. Pastors, church leaders and leaders of our Baptist bodies around the world will have to start rebuilding, day by day and inch by inch.

We have seen flexibility and agility become imperative for effectiveness over these past months. While maintaining this attitude

and practice, each of us will need to rethink progress and growth. Rebuilding requires us to begin where we are and start again.

Ronnie Floyd
President and CEO
SBC Executive Committee

Faithful financial stewardship is one channel through which all of us can serve God at some level. That being so, we do well to recall that Psalm 100:2 admonishes, “Serve the Lord with gladness.”

Jerry Batson
Theology 101
Jan. 28, 2020

From the *Twitterverse*

@kyleworley

The gospel makes dead people alive. And then after that... It makes bad people better. These two things aren’t mutually exclusive: The gospel that justifies is the gospel that sanctifies.

@BarnabasPiper

If you get behind in your Bible reading plan this year, don’t quit. Just make it a read through the Bible in 14 or 18 or 20 months. There’s nothing magical about finishing in a year. There is something *incredible* about reading the whole Bible.

@dailyspurgeon

He does not save us because we are righteous but because He is gracious. He will not deliver us because there is something good in us but because there is everything good in Himself.

@scottdawson

It is time for the Church to rise. Jesus saves. Bodies healed. Marriages restored. Addictions removed. The past filled with forgiveness. The present filled with peace. The future filled with Hope. Jesus changes EVERYTHING.

@RevKevDeYoung

The difference between heaven and earth is not that God is sovereign over one and not the other. The difference is that every command is fulfilled with cheerful obedience in heaven and that is not the case on earth. (Matthew 6:10)

@newsomblake

I’m growing more and more concerned about what I’m observing in the habits and practices of Christian leaders on social media: that we as leaders are losing our pursuit of God in the pursuit of social me-

dia friends, follows and fandom. Lord help us!

@newheightsky

It is not enough to know facts about Jesus. You must willingly repent of your sins and trust in Jesus. @PSChadBurdette

@EdLitton

To do the work of mercy today, you must see how much you need mercy today.

@challies

“It is not enough for the preacher to declare to all men that God loves them — the preacher must love them too if he would make them believe in the divine love for them.” (J.R. Miller)

@vancepitman

No man is greater than his prayer life. — Leonard Ravenhill #deeply-convicting #prayer #ouch

Remembering Hank Aaron

As a 16-year-old boy growing up in Atlanta, Georgia, I had a dream job; I was a [visiting team] bat boy for the Atlanta Braves.

One day, I arrived at the stadium and realized I had left my baseball cleats at home. I took the tunnel over to the Braves clubhouse. I found the Braves bat boy, who was a friend. I asked if he had an extra pair of cleats I could borrow. He offered me his spare pair. But they were size 8, too small for me. “I need a pair of 10s,” I said.

Someone was standing behind us, overheard our conversation and said, “I have a pair of 10s you can borrow.”

It was Hank Aaron! He took me over to his locker and loaned me a pair of his shoes to wear for the game that night.

I like to tell people, “I can fill Hank Aaron’s shoes!” I did ... one night ... for about four hours. After the game, I shined them and took them back.

To this day, it remains one of my best memories. He did not have to do that, but he did. He probably knew what it would mean to me.

The night I wore Hank Aaron’s shoes was a rare glimpse of an extraordinary man. It was a very private moment, not witnessed by fans or reporters. It was a genuine act of kindness.

We live in a world filled with acts that are often anything but kind. Although Hank Aaron is admired and honored today, he suffered countless acts of unkindness and bigotry.

But I saw with my own eyes the man behind the legend. I saw a celebrated, legendary black athlete demonstrate an unheralded act of kindness to a young, white teenager.

Today I pay tribute to Hank Aaron, the man as well as the legend. Be like Hank; be kind!
—Mark Tolbert

(Read Tolbert’s full tribute at tabonline.org/hank.)

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FIFTH IN A SERIES

In their
OWN WORDS:

Alabama Baptists and the COVID-19 pandemic

Tim Akers on serving as a pastor during the pandemic

By **Tim Akers**

Pastor, Crossroads Baptist Church

My name is Tim Akers. I met my wife, Donna, at the University of North Alabama. We've been married for 32 years, and we have three children and three grandchildren.

After we were married, I worked as a computer programmer for about seven or eight years. I felt the Lord calling me to full-time ministry. We went to seminary, and while at seminary, we felt a call to missions.

We served with the International Mission Board for 16 years in Ukraine. We came off the field with the voluntary retirement incentive and moved back to Alabama.

I've been pastor for four years at CrossRoads Baptist Church, Rogersville, in Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association. Our oldest son lives in Muscle Shoals. Our daughter has just returned from Mongolia, where she was teaching English as a second language. Our youngest son is attending William Carey University.

Before the pandemic, CrossRoads was averaging about 100 people in worship. When we got word about the pandemic, our emotions swayed to extremes. When the governor decided to lock down our state, we stopped having services.

We didn't know what to do. Even though I have a computer background, I had no idea how to do



Photo courtesy of Tim Akers

Pastor Tim Akers says his congregation at CrossRoads Baptist Church, Rogersville, has been meeting safely with COVID-19 precautions in place.

livestream. I listened to some other pastors and got some ideas from them. The Sunday after the lockdown, I was the guy who did the livestream for the first time in my life for our church members. It was scary, not knowing how this was going to work. Were people really listening?

Seeking God's wisdom

The church members were very gracious to me. We just had to pray about the right thing to do. I had no clue about how to communicate with my church members. Every day was

a new day of praying and asking for wisdom from God.

I did what I'd already been doing with our shut-ins, keeping in contact with them by phone; I couldn't go visit them.

I also took the church roll and went down the list, calling church members one by one: "How are you doing? Are you OK? Do you need groceries?"

I made sure our deacons were on standby to help.

When the governor lifted the lockdown, the praise team and I moved back into the church and socially distanced ourselves. I asked the praise team to sit in our seats so I would at least see somebody when I was trying to encourage the church. After some time, people started trickling back into our services.

Probably the hardest thing was having a church member who went to heaven during that time. When I went to the hospital to be with the

family, I was put in a room and told, "As soon as they come out, then you'll be able to be with them." It was just me in a room, praying for them and waiting for them to come out. It was very hard to see someone grieving and not being able to hug that person to show comfort.

At the end of August, I tested positive for COVID-19. The only thing I could trace it back to is my daughter and I went to a grocery store; we had on masks and gloves, and we sanitized our hands. But the next day, on Sunday morning, I had a low-grade temperature and a sore throat. My wife recommended I get tested, and I tested positive. I'm fine now. No one else in my family tested positive.

It was a trying time to be a pastor, to be the leader, to encourage people, and yet, I had to tell them "I'm positive." The church did well; the leadership took care of that. We had other guys to come in and preach and help during that time.

Since then, we have had three more church members test positive but not because of contact at church or with other church members. So far, we continue to have services with safe distancing.

Pastor and father

When we heard the pandemic was spreading, I experienced a range of emotions. Our daughter was in Mongolia. As dads, we always want to be the one to help our children, and I had no way of helping her. Praise the Lord, she was able to come back to the U.S.

Our oldest son has asthma. We didn't want to expose him because he already was somewhat high risk; we were trying to protect him.

As a pastor, I know what the Word says. I know that God's in control, and His plans are better than ours.

"I know that God's in control, and His plans are better than ours. And in my heart I felt the urgency of sharing the gospel because people are getting sick and also Christ could be returning soon."

Pastor Tim Akers, CrossRoads Baptist Church, Rogersville

And in my heart I felt the urgency of sharing the gospel because people are getting sick and also Christ could be returning soon.

The church members, after that initial shock, began to come back and began to serve and help other people in the community. I think the pandemic has really rejuvenated us as a church to say, “We need to be about the Father’s business, and we need to continue to share the gospel with urgency.”

Through livestream, we have more people who have been contacted with the gospel. We thought livestream in the past would be for shut-ins, but others are watching our service also.

We recognize as a church that this is an important ministry. Even if everything returns back to normal, we’ll continue the livestream because there are still people out there who, for various reasons, are not able to come to church, and that is a way they can connect. We need to look at different avenues God is opening to connect with people.

We had a couple of teenagers who made professions of faith. Because of the pandemic, usually the pastor is the one who baptizes, but it was a great opportunity to let their fathers baptize them so there wasn’t any outside risk. We had not done that

too much in the past, but now we think that’s a great way to get the family involved. It’s a great testimony for others to see fathers being involved in their children’s lives.

Working together

I don’t see myself as being very creative. I pray and ask God, “Please bring the creative people to the front and give them ideas so we can work together and think of different, new ways of reaching people.”

From the beginning of this pandemic, our association did excellent work in keeping in contact with its pastors. I never felt like I had been isolated.

Even when we were in lockdown, I knew that our director of missions, Eddy Garner, and other pastors would be doing Zoom meetings, getting together and praying online.

I also received many phone calls from state board leaders. It was an honor to me for those men to call and pray for me. That really helped me too — to know other people care and are praying for us.

EDITOR’S NOTE — As told to Margaret Colson. In Their Own Words is an oral history of Alabama Baptists during COVID-19. The interview has been edited for clarity and space. 🌿



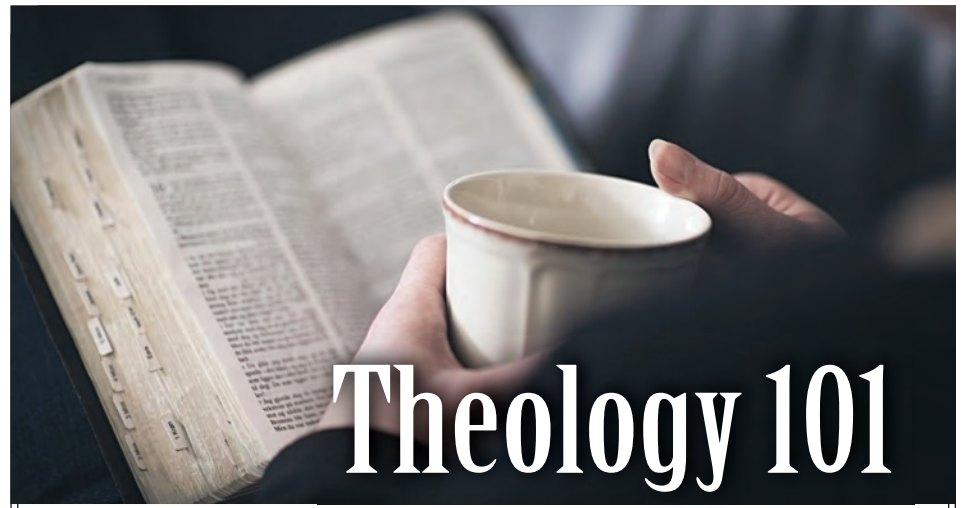
Photo courtesy of Tim Akers

Tim and Donna Akers met at UNA in Florence and served 16 years with the IMB in Ukraine before returning to Rogersville.



Photo courtesy of Tim Akers

Noah Walton (right) was one of several young people who decided to follow Christ during the pandemic. Tim Akers baptized Walton at CrossRoads Church.



BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Love Does

A Time to Love

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
TAB Media

This month brings us to Valentine’s Day. If this special day has one word that seems to stand out among all others, it is “love.”

This week, the focus of Theology 101 is the same: love. The third chapter of Ecclesiastes opens with the assertion, “To everything there is a season” (v. 1).

Later, in verse 8, we read that one of those seasons is “a time to love.” Valentine’s Day serves as an annual reminder of the reality and blessing of loving and being loved.

Essence of God

The biblical starting point for thinking about love is God. While we typically list love as one of the attributes of God, we might be more on target to think of it as the essence of God in light of the dual declaration in the fourth chapter of 1 John that “God is love” (vv. 8, 16).

How might we define love, whether it be divine love or human love?

Someone once said love is defined by what love does. The finest expression of divine love is that God so loved the world that He “gave His only begotten Son” to be the Savior (John 3:16).

Not only is love defined by what it does, it also is defined by what it doesn’t do.

If we ponder this approach in thinking of human love in terms of what it is doing and

not doing, our minds tend to go immediately to 1 Corinthians 13, the New Testament’s “love chapter.” Verse four begins to tell us what love does: it shows patience and kindness.

The seventh verse summarizes what love does in four phrases: it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things.

Revelation of truth

Not only does the Bible define love in terms of what it does, it also looks at what it does not do.

The previously referenced fourth verse tells us that love is not envious, boastful or conceited. The fifth and sixth verses continue the list of what God-like love does not do: it does not act improperly nor is it selfish, easily provoked, prone to keep a record of wrongs or take any joy in unrighteousness.

These things love does and those it doesn’t are not found in nice messages read on Valentine cards.

We find God’s revelation of truth in His word. And that Word reminds us that every season of life is a season to love. 🌿

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.



Jim Blanton, a member of FBC Birmingham, reads Scripture during 'Faith Comes by Hearing,' an effort in which church members read the entire Bible aloud Jan. 3–17. The readings were livestreamed and took a total of 72 hours during the two-week event.

'Faith comes by hearing'

FBC Birmingham members celebrate new year, renewed focus by reading entire Bible aloud

By Tracy Riggs
TAB Media

Reading through the Bible is a common New Year's resolution, and this year, members of First Baptist Church, Birmingham, approached the goal together.

From Jan. 3 to Jan. 17, church members read the Bible aloud from the church sanctuary, broadcasting the reading on Facebook Live and YouTube as well. The effort — "Faith Comes by Hearing: Two Weeks, 66 Books, One Awesome God" — took 72 hours and involved church members of all ages in a ministry effort even as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to present chal-

lenges in ministry, said Rich Hutchens, associate pastor at First, Birmingham.

"We've been working hard not to default to survival mode," Hutchens said. "We've endeavored to stay proactive by giving our people opportunities

for ministry. So, we thought, 'We focus on Scripture every Sunday morning. We have a unison reading of Scripture together that is the basis for the message on that morning.' ... We

wanted to give our congregation the opportunity to be involved in the reading of the word of God."

Bible reading marathons are common across Alabama around the National Day of Prayer observance

that happens annually on the first Thursday in May.

When a staff member proposed the idea for January 2021, Hutchens thought it had the potential to provide a sort of reset, a renewed focus coming out of a tough year.

"[I thought] it could be a great thing for us to do as a church to really declare our commitment to the word of God, to provide people sort of a reminder that this is what we are about. ... Out of that, it took a life of its own."

Logistics planning

The logistics took some working out.

Hutchens used Biblereadingplangenerator.com to figure out how long it would take to read the Bible in 15-minute increments daily — 288 days — which he divided into two weeks to figure out how many slots per day it would take.

Then readers were recruited, beginning with "anchor readers" who were willing to commit to at least 10 blocks of 15 minutes each. Next they added "support readers" who signed up for at least 5 blocks of time.

Finally, a banner went up with all of the remaining passages listed and a place for readers to claim those final slots.

A few precautions were also put in place due to



Photo by Tracy Riggs

COVID-19. The church set up two reading stations and allowed only two or three people in the sanctuary at a time.

Family, friends and community members could watch the readings, which were livestreamed on Facebook and YouTube, live or at their convenience.

One of the first readers, Kassie Smith, was nervous about reading aloud.

"I had some doubts because I don't read out loud very often," she said. "It worked out that I got some of my favorite passages, kind of by accident. I always loved the Noah story, and one of the passages I marked in my Bible years ago on a mission trip happened to be open, so I got it."

Churchwide effort

Most of the 288 time slots were filled by church members, but church staff

members took a few slots and substituted for readers as needed.

The effort made participants more appreciative of God's word, and Hutchens heard from many partici-

pants who said they had picked a time slot because it was the only time available, only to find the selected passage spoke into their specific circumstances.

Those testimonies show the power of Scripture, he said.

"The word of God is foundational to everything that we do.

It is the one thing that gives us hope in the midst of any situation. We felt that following 2020, this would be a great way to begin 2021 — herein lies the hope that we have," said Hutchens. "We know of Christ, and we know of the gospel through the written word of God."

View "Faith Comes by Hearing" on the church's Facebook page, First Baptist Church of Birmingham.

View "Faith Comes by Hearing" on the church's Facebook page, First Baptist Church of Birmingham.



Photo by Tracy Riggs
Kassie Smith read aloud the story of Noah as part of the Bible reading event held at FBC Birmingham.



Photo by Tracy Riggs

A banner at FBC Birmingham lists available time slots and Scripture passages for the church's Bible read aloud event. Volunteers covered 288 time slots during the two-week event.

Serving bivocationally

THIRD IN A SERIES — DERIC THOMAS, PASTOR OF CONCORD CHURCH, CALERA, SINCE 2020

Seeing God's faithfulness amid challenges of balancing ministry, family

EDITOR'S NOTE — *An estimated 55% of Alabama Baptist pastors serve bivocationally or covocationally. Many more serve as bivocational ministers in other church roles. In this series, TAB shares some of their stories, adapted from information provided by the Alabama Baptist Fellowship of Bivocational Ministers.*

Q: How long have you been bivocational?

A: I have served bivocationally, covocationally or full time for over 20 years now. I began pastoring my first church, First Baptist Church, Hartsville, Indiana, bivocationally at 23 years of age. I did this while I was a graduate student and worked full time at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. I was a bivocational pastor at that church for two years.

Q: Describe your work outside the church.

A: I am a pastor, professor (New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and Samford), Army chaplain and business owner. Providing for a wife and 6 young children takes a lot of resources, as you can imagine.

Q: How many people did you have to start your ministry?

A: The population of Hartsville was about 375 people. It was literally in the middle of the cornfields of Indiana. Think of scenes from

the old basketball movie "Hoosiers." The town had one red light, one gas station and three church buildings (Methodist, Church of God and First Baptist). I loved the town and the people of the church so much. When I arrived, there were about 35 people in attendance. They were sweet people, faithful people, and they were so patient with me as a young pastor. My heart still fills with thanksgiving and praise as I think about the privilege it was to be their pastor for two wonderful years.

Q: What type of facilities did you have for gathering as a church?

A: The white church building was small but beautiful. Inside there were about 30 wooden pews that could hold about 100 people. The building sat on a dead-end road about 100 yards from the town square. I was told that the Wright brothers, who invented the airplane, played a part in the church's founding.

Q: How long did it take before you started seeing growth?

A: By God's grace and power, we started seeing the church grow spiritually, numerically and financially within the first few months.

Q: What percentage would you estimate is transfer growth and evangelistic growth?

A: About 50% of the growth was evangelistic and about 30%

was transfer growth. Another 20% was growth due to people coming back to church who had not been in years.

Q: What type of outreach has been the most effective for your ministry?

A: The most effective outreach came through prayer; people inviting friends, family and co-workers; pastoral care and visitation in the community; and Christ-centered expositional preaching that the Holy Spirit used to draw people to Jesus.

Q: What has been your greatest discouragement?

A: My greatest discouragement was the fact I had to drive about 90 miles both ways to get there from my home near my full-time work. This was particularly hard because my wife, Heather, had just given birth to our first two sons, John Deric and Simon, who were 14 months apart. Living that far away from our church in that season of life came with many challenges. But we saw God's faithfulness and enjoyed eating many meals with the gracious families who would host us primarily on Sundays and Wednesdays.

Q: What has been your greatest encouragement?

A: My greatest encouragement was watching God grow the church to the point where they were ready to have a full-time pastor. With tears, I prayed through whether or not God was calling me to step into that role, but I knew at that time He was calling me into my next assignment. The pastor they

brought in after me is still faithfully serving there today, over 15 years later. I have noticed that oftentimes throughout my ministry, God has called me into challenging situations to prepare the way for the next person who would be there much longer — kind of spiritual "Special Ops," you might say. It's not always easy, but Jesus and His bride are worth it.

Q: What are the most important lessons or suggestions you would offer bivocational pastors today who also want to reach the lost and grow a local church?

A: ▶ Depend on the Father (Rom. 8:15), abide in the Son (John 15:5) and be filled and led by the Spirit (Gal. 5:25).

▶ Devote yourself to prayer and the ministry of the Word, in that order (Acts 6:4).

▶ Lead your family and your people to pray (Matt. 6:9).

▶ Train, equip and mobilize the church to live out and minister the Word (Eph. 4:12).

▶ Commit yourself to relationally making disciples of Christ among all nations, your neighbors and the next generation (Matt. 28:19).

▶ Love your wife like Jesus loves His church (Eph. 5:25).

▶ Love, teach and discipline your children (Eph. 6:4).

▶ Do all of this with the ultimate motive of God being known, loved and glorified in and through your life no matter what may come (1 Cor. 10:31).

▶ Remember Jesus is with you always (Matt. 28:20).✠



THOMAS

The Alabama Baptist Fellowship of Bivocational Ministers will hold its first Bivocational Ministers Online Conference on Feb. 20 from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

To register for the conference, go to tabonline.org/bivo-conference-21.

For additional information, contact Tim Henning at 205-613-7235.

ONE MISSION: The Great Commission ONE PROGRAM: The Cooperative Program MANY MINISTRIES: Great Commission Ministries

HUNGER OFFERING



SUNDAY FEBRUARY 21



For each dollar you give, a dollar goes out to feed the hungry. **100%** of all money collected through the Alabama Hunger Offering is used to feed hungry people around the world and share the "Bread of Life" with those who hunger for the good news of salvation and eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Hunger funds are available to Southern Baptist missionaries to meet food-related needs such as assisting people with receiving food, buying food, growing food and/or using food properly.

How is my dollar spent?

75% of each dollar contributed through the Hunger Offering

is distributed through the Global Hunger Fund. Of that, 80% goes through the International Mission Board for overseas hunger relief and 20% is sent through the North American Mission Board to feed hungry people in the United States and Canada.

The remaining **25%** is used to feed the hungry within the state of Alabama. This is distributed through the office of Associational Missions & Church Planting to assist churches and associations with food pantries and meals for hungry people.

Because personnel and volunteers are already in place and promotional expenses come through other budgets, your entire gift is used to minister to the hungry in Jesus' name.

For more information and promotional resources to assist you with collecting a Hunger Offering in your church, contact Ministry Assistant Lori Lockett at (334) 613-2304, llockett@alsbom.org, or visit alsbom.org/hunger.



Alabama **Hunger** Offering
Global Hunger
bread for life.

Volunteers teach children to share gospel

(continued from page 1)

“It was so good for the kids to see that the gesture was so far reaching,” Griggs said.

She also encouraged the children to do a chalk walk — to get out in their neighborhood and draw prayers or encouraging messages where their neighbors could see them.

“Even if they couldn’t see their neighbors, when their neighbors came out to get their mail, they would see that these children were praying for them,” Griggs said.

She also challenged children to draw pictures for nursing home residents and tape them on the outside of their windows facing inward so residents could see them.

Chalk art

Then during Twelfth Street Baptist’s week of virtual Vacation Bible School, Griggs decided it was time to do something new once again.

Usually on VBS week, they present the gospel to the children on the final day.

But in 2020, Griggs opted to get out a chalk board and teach the kids

how to share the gospel themselves using chalk art.

“It was amazing hearing kids learn how to share the gospel and hearing that they shared it with their own moms or dads,” she said. “That will always be the approach I take from now on, to equip them to share the gospel.”

Keeping children active

Marti Richardson at Eastmont Baptist Church, Montgomery, had the same burden to keep children active in outreach during the pandemic.

She had been teaching Mission Friends, a preschool-age missions curriculum published by Woman’s Missionary Union, for 25 years when the pandemic hit, and she didn’t want the virus to stop the children in her church from being involved in missions.

“After we saw it was going to be a while, I started mailing them something each week in the mail,” Richardson said. “It was always something they could do, either a conversation they could have with



Photo courtesy of Tracie Griggs

Emma Grace Taylor of Twelfth Street Baptist Church, Rainbow City, packs the supplies she picked out herself for an Operation Christmas Child shoebox.

their parents or caregivers or an activity they could do related to whatever we were studying that week.”

She said she got many of her ideas from the Mission Friends at Home section of the Missions Friends Leader booklet.

She was able to adapt many other

things from the curriculum to do at home too. Sometimes she would encourage them to go outside and kick a soccer ball after learning about missionaries in parts of the world where soccer is a popular pastime.

Sometimes she would send them pipe cleaners to make a craft or told them to look up a certain kind of frog online to learn more about what frogs were like in Puerto Rico, the home of the featured missionary for that week.

Community missions

They learned a lot over those weeks, but they didn’t stop there — she got them out in the community on mission too.

One week they were encouraged to construct bookmarks and leave them at the home of senior adults in their neighborhood to show them they were remembered and cared for. Other weeks, she had them craft cards or letters to people.

Above all, Richardson just wanted to keep them engaged in missions.

“I have such a heart for it, and I believe it begins early,” she said.✝



Mending kids’ HEARTS

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About our Center

- 26 board-certified cardiologists, intensivists, anesthesiologists and surgeons
- 435 cardiac surgeries performed in 2020, including 4 heart transplants
- More than 675 cardiac catheterization and electrophysiology procedures performed in 2020

3 stories

you should know



AP Photo/Mary Altaffer

Elaine Chambers goes over a coronavirus vaccination pamphlet after receiving the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at New York's St. Luke's Episcopal church Jan. 26. In a recent editorial in USA Today, Walter Kim, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, and Rabbi Moshe Hauer, executive vice president of the Orthodox Union, urged government leaders to consider places of worship as sites for neighborhood vaccination clinics. (AP)

Pastors report spread of conspiracy rumors

A new study from LifeWay Research finds that Protestant pastors are almost evenly split when it comes to hearing congregation members repeating conspiracy theories.

Nearly half (49%) of pastors agreed or strongly agreed they frequently hear their members repeating rumors of secret plots regarding U.S. current events.

Another 47% of pastors surveyed disagree, however, including 26% who strongly disagree, saying they do not often hear church members sharing such ideas. One in 20 (5%) pastors are not sure.

Of the 1,007 pastors surveyed Sept. 2–Oct. 1, those most likely to agree were pastors of churches with more than 250 in attendance. Read more on this study at tabonline.org/conspiracies. (LifeWay)

Lifeway enters deal to sell headquarters

Lifeway Christian Resources has entered into a contract to sell its downtown Nashville building.

Ben Mandrell, president and CEO of LifeWay, said a pre-pandemic analysis showed the building was used only at 60% capacity on a daily basis. He called the decision to sell the property a “strategic one.”

Connia Nelson, Lifeway's chief human resources officer, said Lifeway was prepared for remote work when the pandemic hit. Employees reported they had a “better work-life balance and are still highly productive” working remotely, Nelson said.

Lifeway's board of trustees in October authorized a resolution for the executive team to pursue the sale of its corporate headquarters. The resolution allows entity leaders to move forward with the sale without further board approval. (BP)

Headline news

from around the Southeast

Florida

Originally from a small community in southeast Haiti, Daniel Garcon is now planting his life in southwest Florida as a church planter. In June 2019, he, along with nine others, planted Christ Center Fellowship of Lehigh Acres, a small town with a growing Haitian community. With more than 20 in attendance at the young church, Garcon is focused on encouraging and equipping his members to serve the community, the Florida Baptist Witness reported.

Georgia

The Georgia Baptist Missions and Ministry Center is officially for sale, The Christian Index reported. The \$42 million project was dedicated at Georgia Baptists' annual meeting in November 2006. In March 2015 the building and property were paid in full by a \$25 million gift from the Georgia Baptist Health Care Ministry Founda-

tion. Today the space needed by staff is about 20,000 square feet, and about 50 people work in the 142,000-square-foot building, occupying only the fifth floor.

Kentucky

Small groups are making a big impact at Coral Hills Baptist Church in Glasgow, Kentucky. When the pandemic forced church leaders to evaluate and adapt, the church, which had already been encouraging its members to connect to small groups, began to break the small group idea down into even smaller groups through one-on-one or one-on-two mentoring, Kentucky Today reported.

Louisiana

Through an effort organized by leaders in Louisiana's North Central Baptist Association, volunteers from several Southern Baptist churches have joined efforts to repair a church damaged by

Hurricane Laura in late August 2020. Union Baptist Church in Joyce, Louisiana, with an active membership of about 30, sustained massive damage in the storm. Pastor Mike Green described the volunteers as “a great Godsend when we needed a helping hand,” the Baptist Message reported. Additional work will be ongoing.

Virginia

In March 2020, CommUNITY Church of Salem, Virginia, displayed a banner on its worship center: “The Church is not closed, it's deployed.” Since then, the church has distributed facemasks; helped organize locations for day care, tutoring and weekday children's activities; and conducted rooftop worship. The church also has held “restaurant revivals,” holding outdoor worship in restaurants' parking lots, encouraging participants to order food to their cars and collecting an offering for restaurant workers, the Proclaimer reported.

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

▶ **Alfred Manly Banks** — longtime pastor of **Buhl Baptist Church** and southern gospel singer — died Oct. 6, 2020. He was 65.

Banks' love of music paved the way for him to lead music at Dunn's Creek Baptist Church, Echola, from his early 20s until he felt the call to serve as a pastor in 1994.

Banks served for two years as pastor of New Hope Baptist Church, Berry, and in 1997 became pastor of Buhl Baptist Church, where he served until his death.

Banks is survived by his wife of 39 years, Susan; daughters, Courtney and Amanda; son, Adam; and two grandchildren.

▶ **Charles E. Maples**, a longtime pastor and hospice chaplain, died Jan. 14 of COVID-19 complications. He was 86.

Maples served as a faithful minister of the gospel for more than 60 years. During his long ministry, he served as pastor of 25 churches in five states and multiple Baptist associations in Alabama. At the time of his death, he was pastor of Mountain Home Baptist Church, Moulton. He was also a hospice chaplain for 16 years.

Maples was preceded in death by his wife of 56 years, Peggy; son, Timothy; and daughter, Mary Ruth. He is survived by his daughters, Charlene and Marcia; son, Jeff; six grandchildren; two step-grandchildren; nine great-grandchildren; and one great-great-grandchild.

BETHEL ASSOCIATION

▶ **Joshua Daniels** is the new associate pastor to families and youth of **Linden Baptist Church**. He is a graduate of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

BIBB ASSOCIATION

▶ **James Murphy** is the new interim pastor of **Thomas Mill Baptist Church, Brierfield**.

CHILTON ASSOCIATION

▶ **Rex Kent** — who retired as pastor of **First Baptist Church, Jemison**, at the end of 2020 — says some of his favorite parts of serving as pastor there were the parts where they were out in the community.

"In the summer of 2019, we did some creative outreach to the Jemison community," Kent said. "We gave out water at intersections, did prayer walks through the neighborhoods and paid for people's laundry at the laundromat. Our folks really grew from that."



KENT



BANKS

They also started some new outreach to children in 2019, and that year, the church led Chilton Baptist Association in baptisms.

"It's neat to see people get excited about reaching out to people in the community," he said.

Kent had served as pastor of First, Jemison, for nearly 12 years when he retired. Before his time there, he had served as pastor of First Baptist Church, Demopolis, for 11 years; as pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Prattville, for more than 10 years; and as minister of education and youth at Coosada Baptist Church for five years.

ELMORE ASSOCIATION

▶ When **Adrian Cahill** was working in law enforcement, he had a couple of bad crashes and a couple of close calls.

He said it was a miracle, and through that "the Lord showed me my time wasn't up, and He showed me where He needed me."

So for the rest of his career as a Georgia State Trooper, Cahill also served as pastor of a number of churches in Elmore Baptist Association, including eight years at New Harmony Baptist Church, Marbury, and four and a half years at Rushenville Baptist Church, Eclectic, where he retired at the end of 2020.

"Everything worked out according to God's plan," he said.

ETOWAH ASSOCIATION

▶ **Colt Hudson** is the new pastor at **Bellevue Baptist Church, Gadsden**. He previously served as pastor at Mount Enon Baptist Church,



CAHILL

Midland City. ▶ **Coale Jordan** is the new minister to students at **First Baptist Church, Gadsden**.

HALE ASSOCIATION

▶ As **Bobby Hopper** watched the COVID-19 pandemic challenge churches throughout 2020, he couldn't shake the feeling that God was calling him back into preaching.

Since 2016, he had served as director of missions for **Hale Baptist Association**. When he started there, he was also serving as DOM for Bethel Baptist Association. He served both until the beginning of 2018, when he retired from Bethel to focus on Hale.

But now Hopper says God has called him into a different kind of "retirement" — to return home to Chilton County and serve as pastor of **Mount Carmel No. 2 Baptist Church, Maplesville**, where he started at the beginning of the year. Before becoming a director of missions, he had served in pastoral roles.

Hopper says he also will continue his writing ministry, blogging at behopper.blogspot.com and working on books.

"I say I'm retiring, but really it's just a change in ministry direction," he said.

TALLAPOOSA ASSOCIATION

▶ **Chase Clower** is the new pastor of **Hillabee Baptist Church, Alexander City**. He previously served as pastor at First, Greenville, and Henderson Baptist Church, Goshen, and was associate pastor at First Baptist Church, Brewton.

Persecuted church

Christian sisters slain in Pakistan after refusing to convert to Islam

LAHORE, Pakistan — Two Christian sisters whose supervisors tried to pressure them to convert to Islam and marry them were found slain Jan. 4.

Sajida Mushtaq, 28-year-old wife and mother of four, and her sister, Abida Qaiser, also a mother, disappeared Nov. 26, 2020. Their decomposed bodies were found in sacks in a drainage ditch.

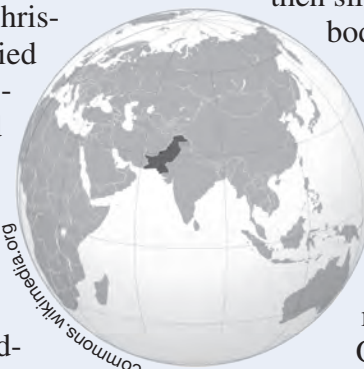
Muhammad Mumtaz and Naeem Butt, the sisters' supervisors at a pharmaceutical factory, were taken into custody and confessed.

One stated that the men held the sisters hostage a few days "for satisfying ... lust," then slit their throats and discarded their bodies.

During the previous two years, Sajida had complained to her husband about the supervisors' harassment. She also had told a relative that the supervisors were pressuring her and her sister to convert to Islam and marry them.

On Nov. 28, 2018, the U.S. added Pakistan to a blacklist of countries that violate religious freedom.

Pakistan is No. 5 on Open Doors' 2021 World Watch List of places where Christians suffer the most persecution. (MS)



'Kingdom dividends'

Chisholm, Flatline seeing 'fruit of partnership' among ministries as God remains faithful

(continued from page 1)

So in 2018, they made a big move — with help from Montgomery Baptist Association, they gave their church building to a new church plant, Flatline Church at Chisholm, led by Dewayne Rembert, an African-American pastor.

The plan was for the two congregations to become partners in ministry — the aging Chisholm Baptist would keep on meeting in the building on Sunday mornings, but Flatline would begin holding services and running their ministries out of the facilities on a regular basis.

Rodgers and other members were excited about the prospect — they wanted to see new life breathed into the church they loved. And the partnership has been “absolutely wonderful” over the past two years, Rembert said.

But in Chisholm Baptist's first meeting with Rembert, Rodgers had a question.

Rembert had shared with them all about how he had been investing in the Lee High School football team, feeding them a meal on Fridays and intentionally discipling them.

Now that his ministry had a building, he wanted to start hosting the meals there at the church.

'Give them a chance'

“I remember Mrs. Debe saying to me with tears in her eyes that she cared about the people there at the church, and because there was a shootout in the church parking lot a couple of years back, she was afraid,” Rembert said. “I told her I couldn't promise her there wouldn't be another shootout



Photo courtesy of Debe Rodgers

in the parking lot, but I told her I had been intentionally discipling these guys and asked if she would give them a chance.”

She said yes.

And now when Rodgers talks about those football players, she gets tears in her eyes for a different reason.

Not only did the arrangement work — Rodgers herself now runs those meals and invests in the players' lives. It's been

the answer to her prayer for a personal ministry.

“The same woman who said she was afraid of young African-American men is now like their team mom,” Rembert said. “She goes to all their games, and on her 64th birthday before COVID, they gave her a jersey they had all signed with the number 64. She cried like a baby.”

Rodgers has developed a close relationship with both the players and their parents, sitting with them at games

and organizing the food and volunteers for the team meal.

Rembert lines a speaker up each week, but otherwise the ministry is run entirely by Rodgers.

She says it's been such a blessing to plan the meals, plan how to plant gospel seeds and be a part of their lives. She's also gone by the school to visit with them at

Debe Rodgers (center), a member of Chisholm Baptist Church, Montgomery, says the football players at Lee High School have become like family to her as she's been a part of Flatline Church at Chisholm's weekly ministry to the team.

other times, such as when an assistant coach died recently, and when a team member also died back in the spring of 2020.

“I love those kids with a love that I don't know that some of them have ever been loved with,” Rodgers said.

And God has been “so faithful” to provide a way for her and other volunteers to feed 100 football players every week, she said. Sometimes it's felt miraculous.

“I've never experienced anything like this,” she said. “He just provides. Every pack of chips, every bottle of water, every sandwich — it feels like it has a purpose. There's no doubt this is a

Racial Reconciliation Sunday is Feb. 14.

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ministry God has called me to do.”

And it’s ever expanding. She ran into a Lee High School baseball player recently out in the community who recognized her and asked if there was a way the baseball team could become part of the ministry too.

‘Creative discipling’

“I told him I would try my best to figure out a way to make that happen,” Rodgers said.

The rest of the churches’ ministries are growing too.

Flatline is constantly finding new ways to get out in the neighborhoods to meet people and build relationships. They’re running food ministries, hosting events for police officers and televising services so that people in the neighborhood can be a part even during COVID-19.

They’ve got an album they’ve produced of hope-filled rap music ready to release.

And Rembert has been training two pastors to plant another Flatline church in Tallassee in late 2021.

“We have been seeking the Lord on creative ways to make sure people are being disciplined in the midst of

COVID,” he said. “We just give God all the glory.”

The Chisholm congregation has been thrilled to see all that ministry happening and to get to be a part of it in the ways that they’re able.

The two churches have a joint text thread and stay in touch, and members of each church often go to the homes of the other congregation for dinner. And when they’ve had ways to come alongside each other, they have.

For instance, back in the summer, Chisholm Baptist paid for a popsicle truck to drive around the community offering free popsicles to the neighbors while Rembert and others started conversations.

Daniel Edmonds, pastor of Chisholm Baptist, says members are “beginning to see the impact they are having and the contribution they’re making paying Kingdom dividends.”

Next generation

It’s fun for them to see the next generation taking the gospel to the community even while they’re unable to attend church during COVID-19, he said. “We’re beginning to see the fruit of our partnership.”

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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

CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR

Buhl Baptist Church is seeking a full-time senior pastor. Please email resumé to: pinetucky06@gmail.com and mhicks3390@charter.com or mail to: P.O. Box 128, Buhl, AL 35446. Fill free to send questions as well and we will respond ASAP.

PASTOR

Shades Crest Baptist Church of Birmingham, Alabama, seeks a pastor who senses God’s call to equip our congregation to worship rightly, fulfill the Great Commission and embody the Kingdom of God in the community and beyond. The church, formed in 1954, is a multigenerational congregation of approximately 670 active members, with two Sunday morning worship services and significant infrastructure in place for growth. We are located in the Hoover area, which is a growing and vibrant suburb of Birmingham with younger families as the largest percentage of newcomers. The church endeavors to be faithful to the Bible for her beliefs and practices and affirms the classical doctrines of Christianity expressed in the Baptist Faith & Message. We seek an energetic pastor who faithfully preaches and teaches from the scriptures, while providing Godly and visionary leadership. Furthermore, the congregation strives to be a welcoming community and to share the love of Christ to all people. We contribute to multiple mission organizations on a local, state, national and global level, as well as ordain women into all levels of ministry. In late February, we will start actively considering applicants but, also, will continue to accept interested inquiries and applications. For more information, see the church’s website (shadescrest.org). Please send a cover letter, resumé and recommendations to the church’s administrative assistant, Connie Shaffer either electronically at cshaffer@shadescrest.org or by mail to: Ms. Connie Shaffer, Shades Crest Baptist Church, 452 Park Avenue, Hoover, AL 35226.

PASTOR

FBC Loxley, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a full-time pastor to lead and shepherd our congregation. Under the Lord’s leading, please send resumé to: fbcloxleypastorsearch@gmail.com.

PASTOR

Cross Baptist Church, Eufaula,

Alabama, is seeking a full-time pastor. Interested candidates may email resumé or questions to: crossbaptistpastorsearch@gmail.com or send to: 33 Early Street, Eufaula, AL 36027.

FULL-TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC AND WORSHIP LEADER

Southside Baptist Church, Andalusia, Alabama, is seeking an individual to provide worship and music leadership. Send resumé to: southside@sbcandalusia.com or Southside Baptist Church, 1213 West Bypass, Andalusia, AL 36420.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Tates Chapel Baptist Church is seeking a bivocational pastor. Send resumé to: Tates Chapel Baptist Church, P.O. Box 38, Centre, AL 35960. Email: tateschapelchurch@tds.net, ATTN: Janet.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR/ MINISTER OF MUSIC

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

CHILDREN’S MINISTER

York Bluff Baptist Church in Sheffield, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational children’s minister. This person should be a creative, organized, self motivated/disciplined young adult. This person should be team oriented and good with children. Resumé may be emailed to: kim@yorkbluffbaptist.com. The deadline to receive resumé is Feb. 28.

OTHER POSITIONS

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS

Beulah Baptist Association located in Union City, Tenn., is currently seeking resumé for a DOM. Applicants must be a man called by God who is also called specifically to the NW Tennessee area. This individual must meet the biblical leadership qualifications outlined in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and hold faithfully to the Baptist Faith & Message 2000. Resumé deadline: Feb. 28. Send resumé to: sheila@bbaol.org or Beulah Baptist Association, P.O. Box 366, Union City, TN 38281.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANT

FBC Birmingham is seeking a full-time staff member, with experience in Shelby systems preferred. Duties include accounts payable, payroll, general ledger

and processing contributions. Please send resumé and cover letter to: cjames@fbcbhm.org.

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MINISTRIES

TAB DIGITAL

In addition to the print edition The Alabama Baptist also releases a weekly digital edition of the newspaper to every subscribers’ email. To update your email address contact subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org.



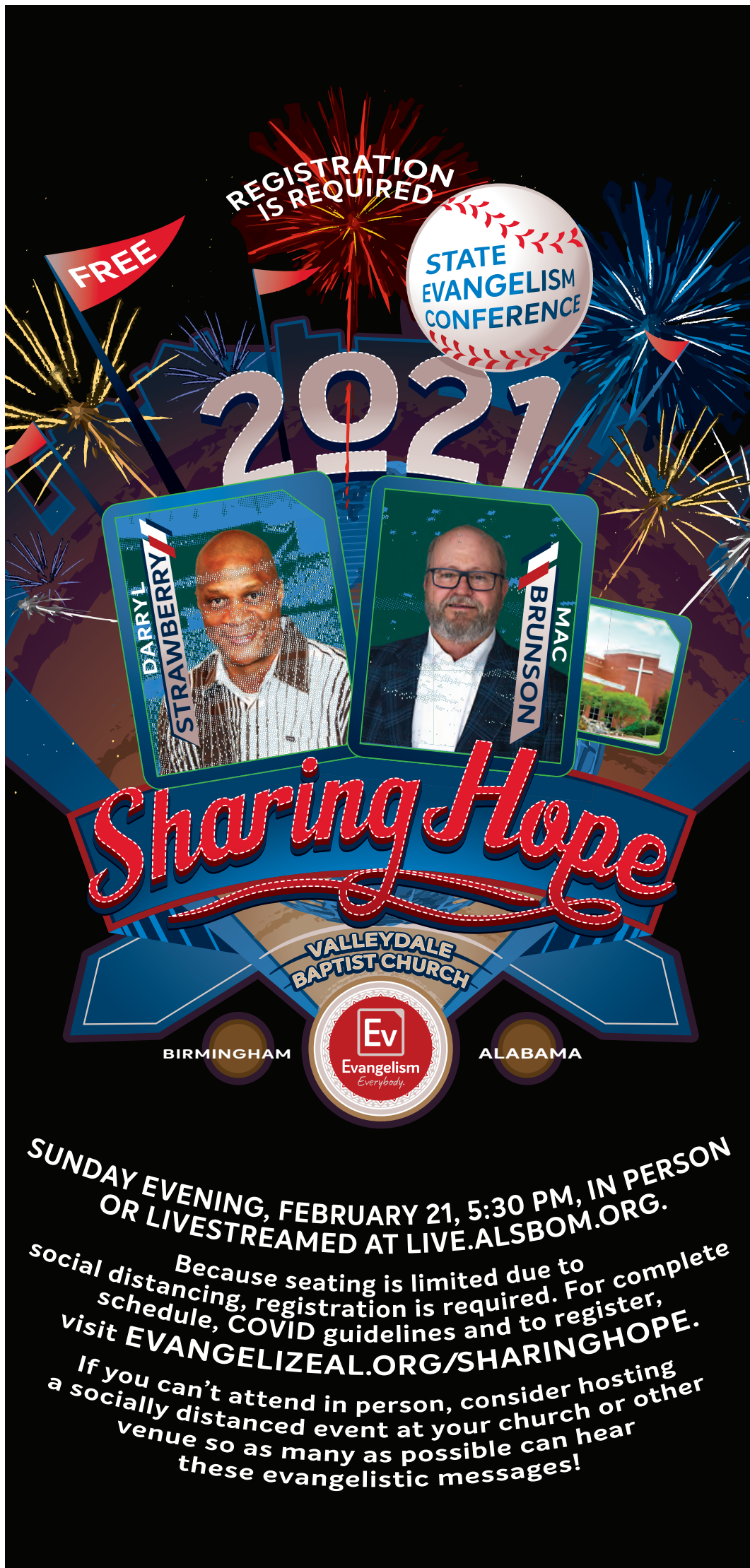
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2021

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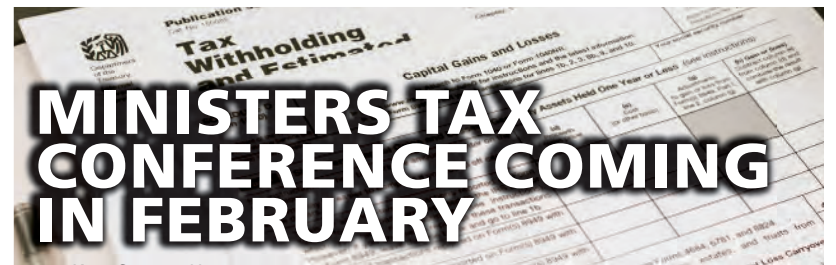
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SUNDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 21, 5:30 PM, IN PERSON OR LIVESTREAMED AT LIVE.ALSBOM.ORG.

Because seating is limited due to social distancing, registration is required. For complete schedule, COVID guidelines and to register, visit **EVANGELIZEAL.ORG/SHARINGHOPE**.

If you can't attend in person, consider hosting a socially distanced event at your church or other venue so as many as possible can hear these evangelistic messages!



KELLY SIKKEMA, UNSPLASH

MINISTERS TAX CONFERENCE COMING IN FEBRUARY

Three identical online tax conferences especially for ministers will be held on **February 8, 16 and 17**, from **10 a.m.-noon** each day. Just choose the one that is most convenient for you! Each session will be led by State Missionary Lee Wright and will cover these topics: **(1)** How to save money on your taxes, **(2)** Housing allowance is not what it used to be, **(3)** Can I benefit from a home office? and **(4)** Don't fear the tax bracket. Questions? Contact Lee at (334) 613-2241 or lwright@alsbom.org. Register at **PinnacleAlabama.org**.

OTHER UPCOMING WEBINARS

DEVELOPING A STRATEGY TO RECLAIM CHURCH MEMBERS, February 9, 10-11 a.m.

For most churches attendance has declined considerably during this season of COVID. With the vaccine and, hopefully, a decline in overall cases later this year, now is the time to prepare for a return revival. Join State Missionaries Ken Allen and Mark Gainey and Church Health Strategist George Yates in exploring the topic of reclaiming church members.

BETTER SUNDAYS BEGIN ON MONDAY, February 23, 10-11 a.m.

If sports teams know the value of evaluating their games to improve future effectiveness, why aren't pastors and worship teams incorporating similar evaluative practices? That's the premise behind David Manner's book, *Better Sundays Begin on Monday*. Don't miss this opportunity to hear from David as he discusses evaluation tools for effective worship services.

EVANGELISM THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA, March 10, 10-11 a.m.

During this informative hour, hear from a panel including Savannah Abney, CCO of Breezy Content, Chattanooga; Brian Harris and Lauren House, social media strategists at Dogwood Media Solutions, Montgomery; Johnny Ellison, pastor of Golden Acres Baptist Church, Phenix City; and state missionaries for evangelism Daniel Wilson and Matt Burford, as they discuss how to effectively use social media for evangelism.

Register for all webinars at PinnacleAlabama.org.

BIVOCATIONAL MINISTERS RETREAT

Saturday, February 20, 9:30 am-3:30 pm ONLINE
Speakers for the day are Tim Henning, pastor of New Beginnings Fellowship and president of the Alabama Baptist Bivocational Fellowship; Bill Wilks, pastor of NorthPark Baptist Church and author of *D-Life*; Jacky Connell, pastor of Eden Westside Baptist Church; and Kevin Blackwell, Assistant to the President for Church Relations at Samford University. There is no cost for the retreat, and the first 75 who register will receive a free copy of the book, *Turning Everyday Conversations into Gospel Conversations*, simply by requesting it. Visit **alsbom.org/bivo** for more information or to register.

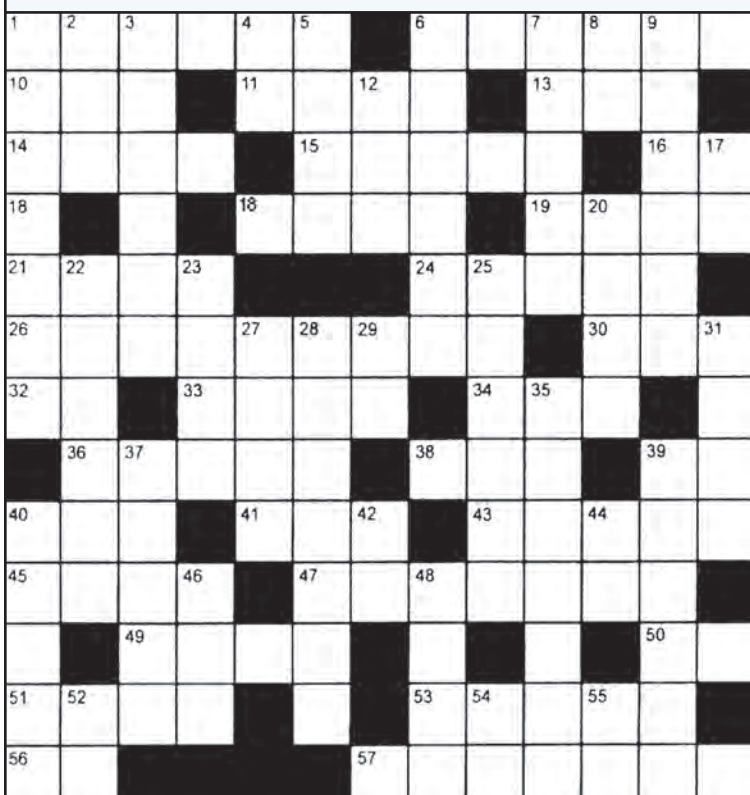
Spot the Differences



Differences: Caption; stripes on tie, coffee cup, books on shelves, hair

Christian Crossword

By Jennifer Breeding Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

1. ___ them that are rich in this world. (1 Tim. 6:17)
6. Gurgle.
10. Electrically charged atom.
11. Pungent scent.
13. Expend.
14. Temporary dwelling. (Ex. 33:10)
15. Happily.
16. Transit Authority. (abbr.)
18. They went into the ___ of swine. (Matt. 8:32)
19. What Eve does to the fruit. (Gen. 3:13)
21. Earnest enthusiasm.
24. Ye see how ___ a letter I have written unto you. (Gal. 6:11)
26. The Lord my God will ___ my darkness. (Ps. 18:28)
30. Do not ___, my beloved brethren. (James 1:16)
32. Thou shalt have ___ other gods before Me. (Ex. 20:3)
33. Spoke.

34. Leah's relationship to Rachel.
36. Whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day ___ the seventh day. (Ex. 12:15)
38. Nocturnal bird of prey.
39. Bachelor of Arts. (abbr.)
40. Long ___ and far away.
41. Tender loving care. (abbr.)
43. Rebuke not an ___, but entreat him as a father. (1 Tim. 5:1)
45. Unfreeze.
47. And the world passeth away, and the lust ___. (1 John 2:17)
49. Heavenly headpiece.
50. For anger resteth in the bosom ___ fools. (Eccles. 7:9)
51. Snoopy.
53. Rocking ___.
56. Emergency Room. (abbr.)
57. Refrigerator.

Down

1. And he went and joined himself to a ___ of that country. (Luke 15:15)
2. Weeder.
3. Yearly.
4. Let my people ___. (Ex. 5:1)
5. He does not whet the ___. (Eccles. 10:10)
6. Harness for guiding a horse.
7. Let not the ___ rejoice, nor the seller mourn. (Ezek. 7:12)
8. Bachelor of Science. (abbr.)
9. Serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the ___. (Rom. 7:6)
12. Paddle.
17. But as many ___ received him, to them gave he power. (John 1:12)
20. "Rock of ___, Cleft for Me."
22. Lest there be not ___ for us.
23. Itemize.
25. A soft ___ turneth away wrath. (Prov. 15:1)
27. The stride of a horse.
28. A small mountain peak.
29. Touchdown. (abbr.)
31. To raise a child.
35. Against the law.
37. Belonging to the world's most famous boat builder.
39. ___ the mountains were brought forth. (Ps. 90:2)
40. Pay the penalty.
42. Chapter. (abbr.)
44. Who by him ___ believe in God. (1 Pet. 1:21)
46. I am the ___, the Truth, and the Life. (John 14:6)
48. Every one.
52. ___ what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matt. 16:26)
54. Greeting.
55. Illinois. (abbr.)

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For February 7

Explore the Bible

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



FORGIVES Luke 5:17–26

Forgiveness is the work of God. When the Lord revealed Himself to Moses at Mount Sinai, He spoke of His many attributes, including forgiveness (Ex. 34:6–7). When Solomon prayed during the dedication festivities of the temple, God answered by saying He would forgive their sins and heal their land (2 Chron. 7:14). When Isaiah confessed the sinfulness of his lips, God sent an angel who offered forgiveness and cleansing (Isa. 6:7).

In this week's passage, Jesus offers forgiveness. Religious leaders who were watching His every move and listening to His every word had a problem with Jesus extending forgiveness to a paralyzed man. By contrast, the forgiven and healed man gave praise to God for what He had done.

Hope Demonstrated (17–19)

Men well-versed in the Scriptures were gathered from north and south to listen to the teaching of Jesus. Evidently, Jesus' powerful teaching throughout the villages of Judea and in Galilee had captured their attention (4:44; 5:1).

Not only was Jesus teaching, but He was also healing, just as He had announced in Nazareth (4:18).

An unnamed man had friends who supported him, both literally and figuratively. When they heard that Jesus was healing people in Capernaum (see Mark 2:1), they carried their paralyzed friend to the Master to be healed. Since they were unable to reach Jesus directly, the friends determined to make a way by lowering him down through the ceiling.

They demonstrated their hope in Jesus as Healer, and they would not be deterred from that hope.

Forgiveness Granted (20–24)

Jesus saw "their" faith. This is worthy to underscore. This scenario is in sharp contrast to Job's four friends who accused and cross-examined him. In the midst of Job's suffering, his companions — Bildad, Zophar, Eliphaz and Elihu — brought charges against him. The

paralyzed man in Luke's passage had four supporters who carried their friend to the Lord.

Jesus offered forgiveness. The Teacher was offering something that only God gives — forgiveness for sins. Pharisees in the crowd began to charge Him with blasphemy. How can a mere man forgive sins?

The answer is that Jesus is not a mere man. Jesus reveals Himself to be the Son of Man, who has both the authority to forgive and the power to heal.

Praise Offered (25–26)

The man was healed. He obeyed the Master's command to get up and go home. On his way home, the healed man praised God for his encounter with Jesus. Others in the crowd also praised God for what they had seen and heard. They were "astounded." They gave "glory to God." They were "filled with awe." They said: "We have seen incredible things today." May we learn to praise God in amazement for His works.

God still forgives sin. This joyous reality is also problematic. For people living within a Christian milieu, we may be tempted to presume on the mercy and forgiveness of God. A common thought in Christian circles is: "It's easier to ask forgiveness than permission." This is presumption on God's grace.

The Apostle Paul warned believers not to assume God's grace. In Romans 6:1–3, he writes: "Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply? Absolutely not!"

Baptists affirm soul competency and the priesthood of all believers, maintaining that we each have access to the Father through the Son. Jesus is our priest, our advocate and our intermediary. We need no other priesthood.

While we may confess our sins to one another (James 5:16) for personal accountability and continued discipleship toward spiritual maturity, we must ultimately confess our sins to God. Our sins are against God (Ps. 51:4), and God alone cleanses us from our sin (1 John 1:9).✠

Bible Studies for Life

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



INTIMACY WITH GOD John 17:1–5, 21–26

One of the obstacles to intimacy with God is the limitations of our imagination. What would that even look like? The Gospels offer us two primary examples of how to experience this intimacy through prayer.

The first is the "Lord's Prayer," which Jesus gives His disciples as an example for how they should pray (Matt. 6:9–13).

The second is Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer," in which He performs the role of the high priest by interceding on behalf of those who will believe in Him (John 17).

Whereas the Lord's Prayer gives us an explicit model to follow, word-for-word if we'd like, we cannot adopt all of the content of the High Priestly Prayer into our prayers, given the distinct role Jesus takes on in the prayer.

We can emulate the intimacy it demonstrates with God and allow it to mold our desires toward greater unity with God and among His people.

Pray for God's glory to be seen. (1–5)

Like the Lord's Prayer, Jesus begins by addressing God as "Father," which is a radical claim to an intimate relationship with the Almighty. He then expresses the major theme of the prayer and of His existence: to glorify His Father. Jesus prays that all that God has given His Son — glory, authority, followers, work to do — would redound to God's glory. We should pray the same prayer — that all the gifts, responsibilities and opportunities God has given us would contribute to His glory.

In these verses, Jesus defines eternal life as knowing God (v. 3). Our experience of heaven will not be oriented toward our pleasure or seeing lost loved ones, but the enjoyment of intimate relationship with God.

Pray for unity with God and among believers. (21–23)

Jesus' prayer turns to His followers. As He prays for all those the

Father has given Him, including "those who will believe in Me through their message" (vv. 9, 20), His prayer incorporates those who read His words today.

He petitions for their protection, in light of the opposition they will face from a world in which they will not belong (vv. 11–19).

He also prays for their unity, which reflects the unity between the Father and the Son (v. 21). How Christians love one another is intended to testify to this trinitarian relationship (v. 23). Like the teenager whose father reminds him that they share the same last name, the church's failure in this regard does not merely reflect poorly on us. God's reputation is at stake.

Pray for God's love to be known and experienced. (24–26)

Jesus concludes His prayer where it began, with the end to which He lived, died and rose again, that people may know the Father and thereby bring Him glory. God had previously revealed Himself through prophets but has now "spoken to us by His Son," who is "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being" (Heb. 1:2–3). In so doing, He made available to us the love the Father has for the Son (v. 26).

We cannot even conceive how immense that statement is because the perfect love within the Trinity is beyond our comprehension. And yet, in Christ, it is offered to us. Digging deeply into God's word will shape our imagination to begin to grasp the enormity of this love. That is something to pray for!✠

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VIRTUAL

SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN BOOK EXPO

The 2021 Southern Christian Book Expo will be held virtually on Feb. 6 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The expo may be viewed via Facebook Live on the Facebook pages of

either The Alabama Baptist newspaper or Southern Christian Writers Conference. The virtual expo will feature spotlights on books and other presentations, including the

Notable Book Awards ceremony at 3 p.m. An asterisk (*) indicates a SCWC Notable Book Award Finalist. Books being featured in the expo does not indicate endorsement by TAB.

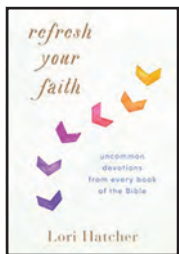
CHILDREN'S/JUVENILE

- ▶ **Toby's Adventures: Meet Toby**
By Cindy Criswell Ducker
- ▶ **The Edge of Everywhen***
By A.S. Mackey
(Fiction/Juvenile)
- ▶ **Can't Never Could!**
By Pat Sabiston
- ▶ **I Love my Happy Hair**
By Linda J.M. Holloway



DEVOTIONAL

- ▶ **Mornings with God: My Daily Prayer Journal***
By Emily Biggers and Vickie Phelps
- ▶ **Glimpses of God: A Winter Devotional for Women**
By Shirley Crowder and Harriet Michael
- ▶ **Bama Believer***
By Del Dedit
- ▶ **Refresh Your Faith: Uncommon Devotions from Every Book of the Bible***
By Lori Hatcher
- ▶ **Christmas Matters**
By Anna Nash and Katy Shelton
- ▶ **Walking with Grace: A 2021 Devotional Planner**
By Vernet Clemons Nettles



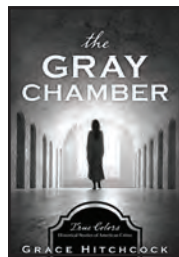
- ▶ **Hope and Help for Homeschooling Parents**
By Stephanie Rodda and Cheryl Wray
- ▶ **Survivor Chicks: Fighting Back with Faith Hope and Love**
By Kimberly Jones Verneti
(Devotional/Nonfiction)

FICTION

- ▶ **A Bargain to Die For**
By Judy Woodward Bates
- ▶ **On Cue**
By Bettie Boswell
- ▶ **A Broken Place**
By Fran Driscoll
- ▶ **The Vanishing of Olivia Beck***
By Sara L. Foust
- ▶ **Swiftmain**
By C.R. Fulton



- ▶ **No Time for Traditions**
By Kaci Lane
- ▶ **The Gray Chamber***
By Grace Hitchcock
- ▶ **A Cross to Kill**
By Andrew Huff



- ▶ **Wrought of Silver and Ravens**
By E.J. Kitchens
- ▶ **A Christmas by Any Other Name**
By Linda Lyle
- ▶ **Tree of Life***
By Ellen C. Maze



- ▶ **In High Cotton***
By Ane Mulligan
- ▶ **Off-Script and Over-Caffeinated**
By Rhonda and Kaley Rhea
- ▶ **The Widows' Tea Challenge**
By Joanne Sloan
- ▶ **The Elijah Mandate**
By Lisa Worthey Smith

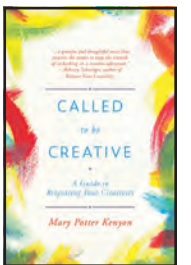


NONFICTION

- ▶ **Wheels of Wisdom: Life Lessons for the Restless Spirit**
By Tim and Debbie Bishop
- ▶ **The Most Wonderful News You Will Hear***
By David L. Chancey
- ▶ **Enjoy Today, Own Tomorrow***
By Laine Lawson Craft
- ▶ **Reflections of a Southern Boy**
By Jack Cunningham
- ▶ **A Woman God Can Bless***
By Sharon Norris Elliott
- ▶ **One Foot in Heaven**
By Sheila Preston Fitzgerald
- ▶ **No Plan B: Discovering God's Blueprint for Your Life**
By Nelson Hannah



- ▶ **Women Warriors: What do Your Battle Shoes Look Like?**
By Veronna Keen
- ▶ **Called to be Creative***
By Mary Potter Kenyon



- ▶ **100 Days at the Cross***
By Terry Long
- ▶ **Blooming in Broken Places**
By Deborah Malone

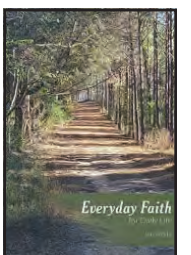


- ▶ **Inmillennialism: Redefining the Last Days***
By Michael A. Rogers



- ▶ **Prayers: From the Past, for the Present, to the Eternal**
By David Sloan

- ▶ **Embracing this Special Life**
By Jenn Soehnlín



- ▶ **Everyday Faith for Daily Life***
By Jan White

- ▶ **Speak for Your Servant is Listening**
By Jo Ann Wilbanks

- ▶ **Rise Up: Keys to Overcoming**
By Cassandra Woods

- ▶ **Notes from a Quarantine**
By Cheryl Wray

Mataaa *and me*

Text message deepens understanding of the plight of refugees for IMB missionary

By Gail Davis
International Mission Board

Hello.” I woke to this message on my phone. The sender didn’t give their name or any further message. I was reluctant to respond to a message from an unknown person.

I felt God saying, “Go ahead. Talk to this person.”

I replied tentatively and said, “Hello.”

Those two initial words began a growing understanding for me about the plight of refugees. I’ve been working with refugees and asylum-seekers for seven and a half years. I have heard stories, seen where they live, watched as they grew thinner with each week and regularly felt broken for them as the government refused to give them their official documents for refugee status.

The day I received this message, my eyes were opened to another kind of story.

After our initial hello, a teenager named Mataaa began telling me his story of how he became a refugee and what it is like to be a refugee in the world’s largest refugee camp, Kakuma, in Kenya.

Story of survival

Mataaa is a 19-year-old from Sudan. He thanked me for responding and said he wanted to share his story. Mataaa’s story is lengthy and sad.

“Back when I was in Sudan, we used to live a life with much happiness until war broke out in some parts of our country, which left a lot of people dead, including many

children and women,” Mataaa wrote in the message.

His parents took him to a place they thought was safe, but everything went downhill from there.

“I lost my cousins and uncle there when we were attacked in the dawn by rebels,” he said.

Under attack

Early one morning, Mataaa and others were looking after their goats when men started running toward them.

“We screamed and ran back to the village. A few minutes later they caught up with us. They began shooting guns at our village, so people started running, but most women and children did not make it. They were laying down dead,” Mataaa told me.

Later that evening, Mataaa’s father came and took him to hide in a forest with his mother. The fighting continued. Mataaa and his fellow village members ran and hid in the bush.

“While I was still in the bush, I used to hear wounded people screaming for help and screaming out the names of people

who had been killed with their bodies just lying there. That made me run deeper into the forest to go and look for whoever was alive,” Mataaa wrote.

“Days later, while I was in the forest, I found a hunter who said he would take me with him. He told me I should wait for him until he first got an animal to kill. I waited for him under that tree for four days, but he never returned.

“I used to sleep on the tree branch and drink water from the nearby water source. There was no



IMB photo

Some refugee camps have a tent like this one for sleeping and shelter.

food. The only food available was the tree leaves, which I ate. ... Five days later, I gave up and left that place,” Mataaa told me.

Meeting others

He could still hear gunfire, so he decided to go to the Nile River where he met others who were in a similar plight. Mataaa and the other refugees made their way to a village where they would later be taken to a refugee camp in Kenya.

Mataaa is a Christian and attends a church in the camp. He started attending primary school and learned some English. He would have been the first in his family to graduate, but the school began charging admission fees.

For a long time, he didn’t know where his parents and siblings were. He has learned his mother is in Sudan, and his father died in 2012.

Mataaa has experienced atrocities most people will never see or understand and with almost no adult help.

Until recently, he wore the same clothes he’d had since age 13 — he’s 19 now.

He’s learned to live with other orphaned boys in the camp, who are often violent. Mataaa sent me a

picture of a young man who had stitches across his scalp because none of the boys wanted to cook, so they fought, and the young man was injured.

Please pray for Mataaa and other orphaned refugee children living in camps. Pray for enough food, a place to live, free education and a place of safety.

Mataaa’s biggest dream is to become an ambassador for peace in his country. Mataaa told me he also wants to open an orphanage in Sudan.

Like family

Mataaa told me he now has two moms, his mother in Sudan and me. We speak almost every day. You and I don’t need to live close to someone to develop this kind of relationship. We need to be genuine in order to build relationships with refugees — relationships that feel like family involve trust.

There are refugees living in the U.S., many of whom are looking for a sympathetic ear to listen to their story. I’d challenge you to find a “Mataaa” to do life with.

EDITOR’S NOTE — Name has been changed for security reasons.



IMB photo

Mataaa is a Sudanese refugee befriended by IMB missionary Gail Davis. They speak almost daily and he considers her a second mother.