



The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

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Photo courtesy of FBC Center Point



Photos courtesy of Greater Grace Missionary Baptist

STRING OF miracles

FBC Center Point to pass 'baton of ministry' on Easter

By Grace Thornton
TAB Media

When David Haynes considered the call to serve as a pastor for the first time in 2014, the finance committee chairman at his prospective church gave him this news — the church

was only going to be able to make it for about two more years.

Turning over the keys

The small, aging congregation was struggling to pay the bills for the sprawling church campus, and the group was only getting smaller.

But what has happened in the nearly seven years since can only be described as a string of miracles, Haynes said — and that includes the fact that the congregation will be turning over the keys to another church soon.

"I just have to say 'praise the Lord' for the way it's worked out," he said.

First Baptist Church, Center Point, came with a "long and rich history," said Haynes, who came there after a long career in public and private school education.

As the story goes, Mrs. Franklin — the owner of the grocery store across the street — felt a burden to build a church on the corner, so she started taking up a collection.

When she finally got enough (See 'God's Church,' page 13)

Taylor named 19th president of Samford

By Jennifer Davis Rash
TAB Media

Former Alabama Baptist and current West Coast university president Beck A. Taylor will be the next president of Samford University in Birmingham, beginning July 1.

He follows Andrew Westmoreland, who is set to retire from the presidency June 30 and become director of the university's Frances Marlin Mann Center for Ethics and Leadership.

The board of trustees unanimously elected the 51-year-old Taylor as the 19th president on March 10 in a special-called board meeting, following a day of reference panel discussions with various stakeholder groups on campus March 9.

Taylor, president of Whitworth University in Spokane, Washington, since 2010, served as dean of Samford's Brock School of Business for (See 'Committed,' page 8)



BECK & JULIE TAYLOR



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RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

By Jennifer Davis Rash

President and Editor-in-Chief



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@RashionalThts

Our concerns do matter — pray for your elected officials and share your heart

How about that state gambling legislation result from March 9? I wasn't sure Senate Bill 214 could be defeated in the Senate, but I was impressed to learn the bill's sponsor Sen. Del Marsh attributes the defeat to Baptists. Check out page 17 for the full story.

It is refreshing to hear that our elected officials do want to hear from their constituents and understand what matters most to them — that voicing our concerns makes a difference.

We all should know who represents us and let them hear from us on various issues. My preference would be to build an ongoing relationship and to have conversations along the way, but the moments right before a big vote are also vital times to contact them.

I would encourage you to write a note to at least one, maybe more, of the 13 senators who were bold enough to vote no on SB 214 last week.

It's not easy to go against a powerhouse like the gambling industry and the pressure from other legislators can be intense.

My notes to the 13 are already in the mail.

If you don't have a local address, then mail the note at his

or her attention to: Alabama Senate, 11 South Union Street, Montgomery, AL 36130.

If you need help finding your senator and/or representative, visit tabonline.org/contact.

While we applaud those who voted no, we also encourage the others to truly think about the possible consequences that come with any potential revenue gambling expansion might bring.

On page 16, read about how Alabama currently ranks near the bottom in the nation in "most gambling-addicted states." This is one time a low ranking is actually a win, and it is directly attributed to the tight restrictions on what is considered legal gambling in the state.

Yes, illegal gambling continues across the state and still baffles me after 25 years of covering the issue. How is it so hard to control when our state's laws are clear, even after multiple groups have tested them and some legislators consistently — and so far unsuccessfully — attempt to change them?

Speaking of years of covering the gambling debate, I pulled the Oct. 21, 1999, issue of The Alabama Baptist out of archives to reread the story on the state-wide lottery defeat that year.

The lede to the front-page news article — which oddly

enough has a Jennifer Davis Rash byline — says, "Alabama voters rejected a state lottery Oct. 12 following an unprecedented and aggressive move by the state's churches."

The late Dan Ireland, then executive director of Alabama Citizens Action Program, is quoted in the article noting, "The church community was the balance of power."

Ireland worked feverishly alongside Joe Bob Mizzell, then leader of the state's Christian Life Commission and a state missionary with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, and Bob Terry, then editor of The Alabama Baptist, to rally a coalition of conservative-minded citizens and evangelical Christians in the state.

Rick Lance, executive director of the State Board of Missions, also noted in the article how prayer and recognizing the value of "simply telling the truth" were critical to the effort.

Still, attempts at expanding gambling in the state continue.

From 2002 to 2006, video gambling arcades popped up around the state and kept our staff following court case after court case.

In 2009 and 2010, electronic bingo gambling casinos became all the craze, complete with star-

studded efforts to buy the local communities' support.

Those two years of coverage took our team to an entirely new level of investigative reporting.

And then in 2015, The Alabama Baptist continued its efforts by helping prove the false promises attached to Marsh's proposed gambling legislation that year — somewhat similar to the 2021 bill, but not nearly as extensive as what was in the recent version.

While many of our indepth reports on gambling have won national awards through the years, it was the 2015 Freedom of Information — First Amendment Award from Alabama Press Association that demonstrated the positive contributions we as people of faith, and specifically Baptists, are making to the state.

So even though our staff gets weary of fighting against what is described as a "lazy man's revenue generator" in the story on page 16, we work to remember we are called to be contributing citizens — and the effort is worth it.

We are to strive for excellence in all we do and that includes developing productive infrastructures for all citizens to have legitimate opportunities to support themselves and make their own positive mark on the community in which they live. 🌈

Your Voice



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

Alabama Baptist 'treasure' seeks help to continue mission

By President W. Mark Tew
Judson College

Greetings from Judson College, the only college for women in Alabama, the only college for women related to Southern Baptists and the only evangelical Christian women's college in America.

Judson is your Alabama Baptist treasure!

I first thank you for the way many of you supported Judson College during its December 2020 fund drive. Gifts and commitments exceeded \$1.5 million.

Due to your largesse, 26 seniors will graduate April 30 and commence into their God-directed "good works, which

God prepared beforehand, that [they] should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

For future generations of Judson women, I ask for your support.

First, pray that God will work mightily in their lives. One of my greatest joys is welcoming our students to campus and sharing with them the gospel of Jesus Christ. I tell them, "We don't deserve it, and we can't earn it, but we can receive the free gift of salvation."

By leading our students in a sinner's prayer, at least two things happen.

Some pray to receive Christ for the first time. Others see an adult using his career as an opportunity

to share the good news about Jesus Christ.

Second, I ask that you tithe to your local church. When we return to God a tenth of our monthly income, we acknowledge our gratitude for and dependence on God's constant provision. Tithing to an Alabama Baptist church that participates in the Cooperative Program makes possible the state convention's generous support of Judson and all your Baptist ministries.

Third, and only after you tithe to the work of God's ministry through your church, Judson asks for your eleventh percent.

The principle of sowing and reaping is presented clearly by the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 9.

► **We reap only if we sow.** "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or

under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (v. 7).

► **We reap what we sow.** "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (v. 6).

► **We reap more than we sow.** "He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness (v. 10).

Consider making or renewing your commitment to biblical tithing and ask God if you should share your eleventh percent with Judson.

I close with one final word on sowing and reaping. "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8).



Tew

I am Rose Morgan, a junior at Judson College from Brewton, Alabama. I have a double major in business and religion. My mom, Sharon Morgan, is an alumna, class of 1993.

I've always been on the campus of Judson and loved it, but I never thought I would go here until I came my senior year and fell in love.

I remember saying, "Mom, this is my home; this is where I want to be."

We had Hockey Day on March 6 and that's my favorite tradition ever, being able to meet alumae



Photo courtesy of Katie Daniel
Rose Morgan (r) with Katie Daniel in front of Judson College's Jewett Hall.

and my mom's classmates.

I have made so many friends here at Judson. I've enjoyed the experience so much.

I am influenced spiritually here. We have a student led ministry called Engage that meets on Monday nights plus other Bible studies.

We also have chapel on Tuesdays. I love chapel. I try not to miss it.

I really enjoy meeting other people and learning about their faith and helping them grow their faith. That's very important to me and why I love religion and why I am majoring in it. It's part of my testimony.

**Rose Morgan, Junior
Brewton, Ala.**

Give to Judson

To make a financial commitment for the 2021–2022 academic year, go to judson.edu/commit.

You also can mail your gift to:
**Judson College
Office of Development
302 Bibb Street
Marion, AL 36756.**

Commitments must be made by April 2.

“Up from the grave He arose,
With a mighty triumph o’er His foes.”

ROBERT LOWRY

Hymn writer, “Christ Arose! (Low in the Grave He Lay)”

The fear nots of the Bible signify one of our greatest sources of comfort. If you’re feeling worried, anxious, afraid or insecure about something today, claim one of these verses:

► Do not fear nor be dismayed, for the Lord God — my God — will be with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you (1 Chronicles 28:20).

► Do not fret — it only causes harm (Ps. 37:8).

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God (Isa. 41:10).

► Do not fear, nor be afraid; have

I not told you from that time, and declared it? You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock (Isa. 44:8).

► Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows (Matt. 10:31).

We don’t know what will happen tomorrow, but one thing is guaranteed — God’s overarching care for His children. We can be assured of His presence and His promises. In a world where nothing seems certain and unchangeable, He is our constant companion.

David Jeremiah
Pastor and author

Since the coming of Christ, racial and ethnic barriers are set aside. We can and should love our country and its distinctives and be proud of its accomplishments. But if we can be proud of its accomplishments, we must also be ashamed for its sins and failures to live up to its ideals.

Every nation — made up of sinners — will have great moral wrongdoing and evil in its past. To hide or minimize that past is to take a major step toward idolatry and to reject God’s righteous judgment on our sins.

Tim Keller
Pastor and author

From the *Twitterverse*

@sPeytonHill

“The man who attempts Christianity without the church shoots himself in the foot, shoots his children in the leg and shoots his grandchildren in the heart.”

— @RevKevDeYoung

@JackieHillPerry

There are people in our local churches that have more godliness than half of the “famous” Christians we look to. It’s observable too because we can get beyond what they say and get close to who they really are. That’s the essence of authentic discipleship and that’s what we need.

@rayortlund

“Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Rom. 5:20). God doesn’t match our sin with His grace. He over-matches

our sin with His surplus grace. Let’s stop groveling before our sins — those pathetic losers! Let’s believe Romans 5:20, get up and follow Christ today!

@richardblackaby

God always has a better version of you available. Let Him take you there! (Eph. 4:24)

@SamAllberry

When Isaiah sees a vision of God, he doesn’t cry “Wow!” but “Woe!” God doesn’t overwhelm us with how brilliantly like us he is, but with how disastrously unlike him we are.

@Rgallaty

Prayer must become the most important activity in your life.

@ricklance

Thankful for Alabama Baptists’ missional generosity in

giving through the Cooperative Program and to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering. Extraordinary faithfulness in 2020 marked our support for missions and ministries in Alabama, across the U.S. and around the world. PTL

@pastorbrady

Every Christ follower mentioned in the New Testament belonged to a church. We cannot be fully mature followers of Christ without the community of the church.

@MattSmethurst

Jesus said, “All men will hate you because of me,” not “All men will hate you because of you.” Small, but significant, difference. It’s one thing if we’re rejected because we’re Christians. It’s another if we’re rejected because we’re jerks.

Perspectives on gambling

On the odds of winning:

Gamblers share an optimism about beating the odds. In reality, beating a casino’s odds falls somewhere between tough and impossible.

Taking all forms of casino gambling into account, spending \$100 an hour in the gaming house results in an average loss of \$5 per hour. ...

The odds of winning at slots are 35:2. In fact, these are the worst odds in the casino. The odds of winning the top prize are as high as 1:33,554,000.

At blackjack, gamblers lose 75% of the time. Winning bets seldom make up for the amount lost on previous bets. ...

People are more likely to sight a UFO than to win the lottery. They are also more likely to die of a flesh-eating disease, get hit by lightning or die in a car accident.

Kevin Johnston
“Who’s really winning at the slots?”
moneywise.com

On the addictiveness of casino games:

A significant portion of casino revenue now comes from a small percentage of customers, most of them likely addicts, playing machines that are designed explicitly to lull them into a trancelike state that the industry refers to as “continuous gaming productivity.”

John Rosengren
“How casinos enable gambling addicts”
The Atlantic, Dec. 2016

On false hope:

The entire idea of gambling is about the same as false advertising. The belief is that you can gamble and win more than you lose. But the truth is that most gamblers lose more than they win.

Michael Stevens
gamblingsites.org/blog

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

Addressing Nigeria's religious persecution

Reaching Nigeria involves commitment on all levels of leadership

By Dianna L. Cagle

TAB Media

Developing relationships on local, state and federal levels is critical to addressing religious persecution in Nigeria, according to several religious freedom observers.

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom recently hosted a virtual conversation — “Engaging State and Local Government in Nigeria to Protect Religious Freedom” — moderated by Dwight Bashir, USCIRF director of outreach and policy.

Panelists included Tony Perkins, USCIRF vice chair; Frederick A. Davie, USCIRF commissioner; Oge Onubogu, director of West Africa programs for the U.S. Institute of Peace; and Nnamdi Obasi, senior adviser for the International Crisis Group.

“USCIRF has been reporting on Nigeria for over 15 years, and since 2009 has recommended that the State Department designate Nigeria a “country of particular concern” for engaging in and tolerating systematic ongoing and egregious violations of international religious freedom,” Bashir said.

Country ‘of concern’

In December 2020, the U.S. State Department finally did so, making Nigeria “the first secular democracy designated as such,” he said.

Davie recounted three separate Boko Haram attacks in December: two on Christmas Eve and another the day after Christmas. A dozen people were killed and hundreds were kidnapped.

Kaduna, a state in the north central region of Nigeria, “experienced a near tripling of violent incidents in the past year with roughly 400 persons abducted for ransom and the displacement of 50,000 people,” Davie reported.

“While the drivers of this violence are many and complex, there can be no doubt that Christian communities



IMB photo

A Nigerian woman worships during an IMB celebration in 2000. Baptist work in Nigeria began 170 years ago with the arrival of the first missionary in 1850.

have borne the brunt of the violence in a state led predominantly by ... Muslim leadership,” said Davie, who referenced inequitable curfews and leadership woes.

Kano is among 12 northern states where state-sanctioned Sharia courts operate alongside secular courts.

In August 2020, Davie said two men, ages 22 and 13, were convicted of blasphemy by a Sharia court, igniting an international debate. Judges at the secular branch of the state’s high court overturned the verdicts.

Muslims and atheists are also being persecuted.

Davie said Kano State authorities collaborated with Kaduna officials to detain and arrest Mubarak Bala, an atheist and the president of Nigeria’s Humanist Association.

“For months after arrest, [Bala] was denied access to his legal team,” Davie said. “Finally, a federal court ruled detention was unconstitutional and ordered him to be released (in December), yet more than a month after that verdict, he still remains detained by Kano State Police.”

Nigeria is a complex country, said USIP’s Onubogu.

“We need to approach our un-

derstanding of Nigeria with some humility,” she said, considering how to combine top-down accountability with bottom-up innovation, learning and accountability.

“For us at USIP, we’ve seen that it’s extremely important to build or improve on both the horizontal and vertical connections that exist between community systems and key response government actors at the state level,” Onubogu said.

Better relationships at all levels mitigate violence in general and improve accountability, she said.

Leaders also need to adapt their work for short-term conflicts while also strategizing for the long term.

Young democracy

ICG’s Obasi stressed that the Nigerian constitution guarantees religious freedom for all, not just Christians. As a relatively young democracy, democratic values have not trickled down to the local level yet.

“Leaders can be central driving factors in stoking, enabling ... violations of religious freedom,” he said.

In some areas, clerics are required to obtain preaching permits and/or gathering permits. Some local gov-

ernments control these groups by withholding building permits or with zoning regulations.

“Governments are not doing enough to address the underlying economic, political, environmental causes that trigger and drive violence,” Obasi said. “They are not doing enough at the state level to secure federal government commitment to protect communities.”

Voicing concerns

More people need to be willing to voice concerns over abuses and discrimination, Obasi said, and the government needs to be pushed to ensure protection for communities.

Nigeria’s federal police force is overwhelmed by the problems facing local communities. And with so many displaced people, Obasi indicated more could be done with humanitarian efforts.

Onubogu added that improving access to education is another key, but “for it to be sustainable, it has to be owned by the local community.”

A USCIRF report released in February estimates that in northern Nigeria, conflict with groups like Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa Province has resulted in the deaths of more than 37,500 people since 2011.

“There is a reasonable basis to believe that these groups have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity,” the report said.

In December, the International Criminal Court concluded a decade-long preliminary investigation into crimes against humanity and war crimes. The investigation involves Boko Haram and Nigerian Security Forces.

Fatou Bensouda, ICC prosecutor, stated “that the statutory criteria for opening an investigation into the situation in Nigeria have been met.”

ICC indicated there might be delays, however, due to COVID-19 constraints and backlog in the court’s system.✚



What does the woman who opened the WMU Training School have in common with three executive directors of state WMU organizations?

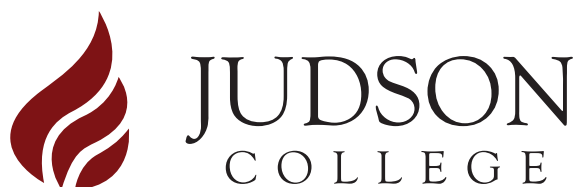
What do they have in common with 14 of the first 40 Protestant missionaries to China, or the first and 100th Baptist missionaries to Japan?

What do they have in common with a college student who spends her summer breaks investing in missions efforts in Alaska, or a woman supporting her Christian brothers and sisters in Myanmar?

These women, though separated by centuries and continents, earned an education and discerned a vocational calling at Judson College.

Equipping women to make an impact for God's Kingdom in their communities and the world – no matter their vocation – has been the mission of Judson College since 1838.

Make it possible for future generations of women to leave their mark on the world.



Alumnae and friends, we need your help.

Commit to Give at judson.edu/commit or send a check to 302 Bibb Street, Marion, AL 36756.

www.judson.edu | 800-447-9472

'COMMITTED TO'

CHRIST-CENTERED HIGHER ED

Samford president-elect 'accomplished scholar, experienced administrator'

(continued from page 1)
five years prior to accepting the presidency at Whitworth, a faith-based university connected to the Presbyterian Church.

Taylor did his undergraduate work in economics and finance at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, and his master's and Ph.D. work in economics at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana.

He returned to Baylor as an assistant professor, then professor, graduate program director and eventually associate dean for research and faculty development for the Hankamer School of Business.

In 2002, he also was appointed as a visiting scholar by Harvard University.

Beth Thorne Stukes, a member of the board of trustees and co-chair of the 23-member presidential search committee, said, "Our committee found Dr. Taylor to be an accom-

plished scholar, a recognized and experienced administrator and one who is committed to the mission of Christ-centered higher education."

Taylor surfaced as the final candidate — and was presented as the unanimous choice of the committee — following a six-month process that began with more than 80 nominations of a diverse group of individuals from all regions of the United States, Stukes explained.

"Each nominee was contacted with an invitation to allow the committee to consider them as candidates for the position," she said. "Around 40 letters of interest were received, and each nomination and application was carefully reviewed by all members of the search committee."

Committee member Danny Wood, pastor of Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills, added, "I am thrilled with the selection of Beck



Photo courtesy of Samford
Samford president-elect Beck Taylor greets a crowd of students, faculty, staff and friends gathered to welcome him to campus.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

Beck Taylor meets with Birmingham-area ministers March 9 to share about his faith journey and the opportunities and challenges confronting Christian higher education, as well as how congregations can pray for him as he transitions to Samford University as president beginning July 1.

Taylor. ... Many of his outstanding characteristics were visibly evident in both our Zoom calls and face-to-face interviews. But what impressed me the most was how in his answers he integrated his Christian faith and walk (with specific biblical references) into every aspect of his work, decision making, interaction with students and personal life.

"At his present university he has successfully confronted cultural issues that have shaken some Christian institutions off their moorings,"

Wood said. "He has led his university to stay biblically centered and Christ honoring. I am confident he will be an outstanding president for Samford University."

Profession of faith

Lifelong Baptists aside from their 11 years at Whitworth, Taylor and his wife, Julie, plan to rejoin Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Homewood, where they were members and Sunday School teachers while previously at Samford.

"He has successfully confronted cultural issues that have shaken some Christian institutions off their moorings. He has led his (present) university to stay biblically centered and Christ honoring."

Danny Wood
pastor of Shades Mountain Baptist Church



Screenshot by Jennifer Davis Rash

TAB Media's Jennifer Davis Rash interviews Beck Taylor (right) over Zoom the day after he was introduced as the president-elect of Samford (above) during a virtual press conference March 10 by board of trustee chairman Bill Stevens.



Screenshot by Jennifer Davis Rash

“Dr. Taylor has shown he truly loves the Lord Jesus Christ, Samford, his family and the work he has been called to do. ... I am thoroughly convinced he is the right person for this time.”

John King
church/community relations, Birmingham Metro Baptist Association

Taylor grew up as part of — and made his profession of faith and was baptized as a 13 year old at — Second Baptist Church, Houston, Texas, and was active as a Sunday School teacher at First Baptist Church, Woodway, while in Waco.

Gary Fenton, retired pastor of Dawson, said, “Beck, Julie and their then young family were faithful in attendance and active in the life of the congregation.

“Before Beck and Julie joined Dawson, we had a very meaningful conversation about spiritual issues and the mission engagement of the church. The questions they asked and the ensuing conversation with them revealed a rare spiritual depth.

“During their years at Dawson, I observed a real and sincere walk with the Lord and a desire to see their children develop spiritually as well,” Fenton said. “At the same time I watched as Beck led the Brock School of Business to excel and to become a growing Christian influence at the school and in the business community.”

David Eldridge, current pastor of Dawson, added, “I am delighted to hear of the choice of Dr. Beck Taylor as the 19th president of Samford University. I, along with other local Baptist pastors, had the privilege to meet with Dr. Taylor ... and hear his testimony of faith in Christ, robust commitment to historic Christian teachings and of his desire to faithfully lead Samford to equip their graduates to make a Kingdom impact in their lives and professional callings.”

Taylor noted his commitment to continuing and nurturing the Baptist tradition and heritage of Samford as well as maintaining and expanding the relationships with other evangelical churches.

And he is committed to the Christian mission of the school while engaging and helping shape culture, he said. “I have always maintained a commitment to the essentials of orthodox faith — the centrality of

Jesus Christ and the authority of Scripture.”

Search committee member John King of Birmingham Metro Baptist Association said he is “thoroughly convinced Dr. Taylor is the right person for this time and season in the life of Samford. ... He has shown he truly loves the Lord Jesus Christ, Samford, his family and the work he has been called to do.”

Fenton also articulated what the search committee discovered in its research.

“Julie ... has the rare combination of humility and inner confidence to support Beck and to represent the university,” he said. “She has a kind and contagious Christian faith that will allow her to be easily accepted by the Samford family as well as the broader community.



Photo courtesy of Samford

Samford University president and first lady Andy and Jeanna Westmoreland (right) join the newly elected first couple Beck and Julie Taylor to celebrate the transition of leadership, which will take place July 1. Westmoreland retires June 30 after 15 years in the position.

“I not only endorse the selection of Dr. and Mrs. Taylor, but I am absolutely excited and enthusiastic about the ... choice.”

The Taylors have three children: Zachary, 25, a Nashville-based music recording artist; Lauren, 22, who is entering medical school on the West Coast; and Chloe, 14, who is returning to her birth city. 🌈

Samford Presidential Search Committee general overview

In accordance with Samford University’s bylaws, the presidential search process was guided by a group of former trustee board chairs.

The 23 members of the committee represented trustees, faculty, staff, students, alumni and Alabama Baptists.



STUKES

Co-chairs were:

Beth Thorne Stukes, community volunteer, former educator and current member of First Baptist Church, Jasper;



VINES

and **Tim Vines**, CEO of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama and member of Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills.

“We entered the process prayerfully and remained prayerful throughout the process,” Vines noted.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

Then-candidate Beck Taylor answers questions from the 23-member Samford University Presidential Search Committee as the pool narrowed in the selection process. Serving as co-chairs of the committee were Beth Thorne Stukes and Tim Vines, both former chairs of the Samford board of trustees.

Equip a Pastor effort provides books to areas without access

When Erasyll started university in his hometown in the former Soviet Union, he knew very little about Jesus.

Being from a Muslim home, he was most familiar with the Quran, but he also knew the Bible was a holy book. What he did not know was the gospel.

An IMB missionary befriended him on campus and led him to the Lord. "Through studying Scripture and reading good books on apologetics and church history, God convinced me of the truth of the Bible, and I put my trust in Jesus in 2007," Erasyll said.

Erasyll's love of books grew during a season of his life when he ministered alongside Mark Dever of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington.

Today, Erasyll is a pastor and credits much of his rapid spiritual growth to reading commentaries and Christian books about theology, ecclesiology, pastoral ministry and biblical counseling.

Back home in Central Asia, Erasyll often travels throughout the former Soviet Union and meets with other pastors. After his experience of coming to Christ and studying under godly men, he has been surprised to learn that "the privilege of having good books is a rare thing."

In fact, Erasyll said, most pastors either have books that are not theologically sound or no books at all.

Scarcity of resources

Ministers in Russia and other former Soviet countries are handicapped by a scarcity of quality theological training resources.

Because many live in isolated locations, the few available seminaries and ministry training centers are difficult to access.

Erasyll and his IMB partner, Dan Sullen, are trying to change that.

They have started a program called Equip a Pastor that aims to get new books to pastors on a monthly or

bimonthly basis — all provided in the Russian language. These books will equip pastors with the much-needed tools they need to evangelize and disciple people across the cities, towns and villages of Russia and other former Soviet countries.

Every month, for 18 months, IMB missionaries will send pastors, church planters and evangelists books that will help equip them for the task of sharing the gospel and shepherding local congregations.

In an 18-month period, the pastors will receive 25 to 30 books. To ensure accountability and wise stewardship, each minister will be required to submit one book review every three months.

More than 150 pastors have applied to take part in the program. Many of the first 50 who have been sponsored expressed gratitude for re-

sources they could not have afforded on their own. They also commented that this program has challenged them to think more deeply about their theology and ministry.

Sullen observed that another positive and unexpected outcome for the church is that the pastors' enthusiasm has overflowed to their congregations, who are also now beginning to delve more deeply into theology and biblical understanding.

One hundred pastors are waiting to take part in the program. You can help by giving to the project.

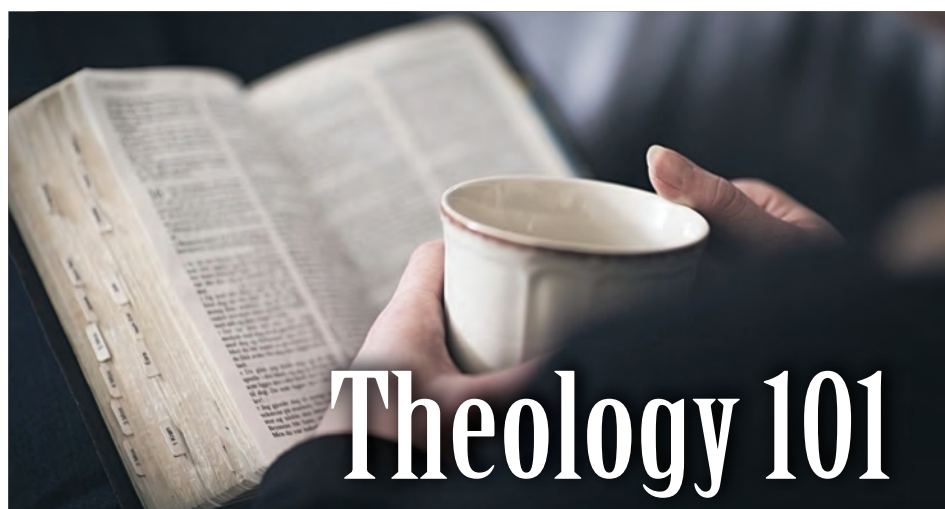
"We are hoping to equip hundreds, not dozens, of pastors in ministry," Erasyll said. "Please pray with us that God will equip His ministers for the work of ministry. Thank you, IMB, for helping us train our pastors."

If you would like to help with this ministry, visit tabonline.org/equip-a-pastor. To help with similar projects in other parts of Europe, visit tabonline.org/gospel-resources-for-europe. (IMB)

EDITOR'S NOTE — Names have been changed for security reasons.



IMB photo



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Hope Springs Eternal

For God's Church

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.

TAB Media

Last week our focus was on how for individual Christians, hope reaches into eternity, when each one will be perfected and with Christ evermore. This week, the focus explores how this hope anchors God's family collectively into an eternal future. We again keep in mind that biblical hope is confident and earnest expectation based on the truthfulness of Scripture and the faithfulness of God. Hence, our God is accurately described in Romans 15:13 as "the God of hope."

The Church, as the collective of all true believers, has etched into its faith the grand truth of Ephesians 5:25-27: "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her ... that He might present her to Himself a glorious church." While perfect churches cannot be found, the whole Church will be found in eternity to be perfected in glorious fullness. We share this expectation with all believers in all places throughout all time.

United as one

In the eternal future, the Church will appear as the one people of God united in one congregation, composed of all believers of all cultures and languages, blending their voices in singing what Revelation 5:9 describes as "a new song, saying, 'You ... have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and

nation.'"

The assured hope of the Church collectively is one of forming a grand heavenly choir to sing the praises of Christ.

In the present age, God's people who comprise the body of Christ are divided by theological and denominational distinctives, along with geography, ethnicity and worship styles.

However, the hope of the future involves being made "a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27).

Sure and steadfast

The hope of the Church in eternity has the possibility of making a significant impact on the Church in the present.

"Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:3). Furthermore, this hope serves the Church as a sure and steadfast anchor that reaches into God's very presence and assures every member of a safe arrival into His eternal presence (Heb. 6:19).

In the meanwhile, the observation of Lamentations 3:26 reminds us, "it is good that one should hope and wait quietly."

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.



‘God’s timing’

Shelby County church plant reaches community for Christ amid COVID-19

By Grace Thornton
TAB Media

Around the time God started stirring in Chase Rogers’ heart to plant a church, Rogers also started dating his now wife, Christy.

“I had gotten connected with Shelby Baptist Association and their church planting strategist,” he said. “Shelby County is one of the most unchurched counties in the state, and they kept talking about Helena and the need for a church there that was focused on reaching the community.”

Then every time Rogers would go to visit his girlfriend — who lived in Shelby County — he would drive right through Helena. God continued to work in his heart, and within a year of getting married, the couple bought a house in Helena and started getting to know the community in hopes of planting a church.

“We were getting ready to launch, we’d set the date, and our sending church was there to support us and help us,” Rogers said.

Within a month and a half of preview services, they had a group of 50 gathering for worship at the intermediate school there in the community.

And then everything came to a grinding halt.

The pastor of their sending church left, and he was their liaison to their main funding sources, which still weren’t finalized, Rogers said.

“Sitting there with people who were excited about a new church and having to stand there and say ‘we don’t know what we’re doing next’ was really hard. My wife and I were paying a lot of the bills, so we had to put things on hold.”

Making ends meet

Trying to figure out what to do next was difficult, and in the end, Rogers worked other jobs to make ends meet. He joined the preaching team at his sending church to help them get through the difficult time they were walking through too.

“Then they got a pastor who came in last February (2020), and he was on board for helping with church planting — but then COVID happened,” Rogers said.

It seemed like an endless set of roadblocks at first, but then Rogers and his wife realized something unexpected was happening — God was getting them right where they needed to be to plant the church He had in mind all along.

“COVID may have shut the doors



Photo courtesy of Chase Rogers

One way Chase Rogers (right) has gotten to know his neighbors is through events like Boo for Our Blue, a fundraiser they held in the fall for neighbor David Rollan (second from right), a police officer recovering from a tragic motorcycle accident.

of churches, but it opened up the doors to let the church out into the community,” he said. “In our cul-de-sac, people were starving for community. We were able to build more relationships with our neighbors that way and meet the needs of more members of our community.”

Throughout the past year, they’ve held neighborhood and community gatherings like a movie night in their yard. They also held a fundraiser in fall 2020 called Boo for Our Blue for a neighbor who is a Helena police officer and was recovering from a tragic motorcycle accident.

Now they’re looking at starting a community Bible study.

“We don’t have to have a building or a rented space ... to start planting a church,” Rogers said. “Not a day goes by that we aren’t talking with

our neighbors in our cul-de-sac. It just took being here longer, it took going through COVID, it took God’s timing to get it all going. Now we have more people who are excited about launching.”

Orchestrated by God

Rogers said he feels like it’s no accident God drew them to Helena, where many people have not heard the gospel or are blinded by the things of the world. He asked for prayer for people who will answer the invitation to come to a Bible study and for him and his wife to continue cultivating relationships in the community.

“God orchestrated us being here and this happening exactly the way it did,” he said. “It was hard, but I wouldn’t have it any other way.”



Photo courtesy of Chase Rogers

Chase Rogers, his wife, Christy, and son, Trey, have planted their lives in Helena on a mission to plant a church there. Though there have been obstacles along the way, they’re seeing God move as they reach out to their community.

“Not a day goes by that we aren’t talking with our neighbors in our cul-de-sac. It just took being here longer, it took going through COVID-19, it took God’s timing to get it all going.”

Chase Rogers
Church planter



ALABAMA BAPTIST DISASTER RELIEF TRAINING

Training in all areas of disaster relief will take place throughout March and April. All statewide training events will take place at the Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief Center, 118 Jesse Samuel Hunt Blvd. in Prattville. Register and find more information at sbdr.org/events.

Here are the dates and training topics:

Administration, March 20

Communications, March 27

Shower and Laundry Unit, March 27

Chaplain, April 8-10

Cleanup and Recovery, April 9

Chainsaw, April 9-10

Mass Feeding, April 9-10



This ministry is made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program and to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering.

'God's Church is marching on' as Greater Grace

(continued from page 1)
money to start the church in 1914, she got sick and had to be brought over in a rocking chair in a wagon for the first service.

She died days later.

Decades down the road, Haynes found a group just as dedicated, passion-filled and generous.

"When I got here, I was impressed with the compassion of these people," he said. "They're so giving. We've just recorded one miracle after another."

When the church has teetered on the edge of not paying its bills, the small band of church members has given sacrificially to keep the lights on at the large campus. Checks have shown up just when they needed to.

And miracles have come in other ways too, Haynes said.

Because of their good relationship with city officials, they got connected with a business that purchased one of their lots to build a restaurant.

Rescued by God

God has continued to "rescue" them, he said. And they haven't taken that for granted — they've used their time there to reach out to the community. A thriving Hispanic congregation meets in the building too, and Haynes has been leading a Bible study at a nearby community college for a while now.

But as resources stretched thin, church leaders explored offers made to purchase the church campus.

In the end, neither of the two offers felt like the right thing to do.

And then one day Haynes got a call from a church member saying a church near them — Greater Grace Missionary Baptist Church — had burned.

God's provision

Lawrence Jackson Sr., pastor of Greater Grace, said Haynes was one of the first people to come and check on them.

"He said, 'Our church had an emergency meeting, and we want you to meet in our building,'" Jackson said.

It wasn't the first time he had seen God miraculously provide his church with a building. A couple of years back, he was serving as pastor of a church he'd planted — Transforming Lives — when Greater Grace asked him to come preach one Sunday. Then after he'd preached, they tried to call him as pastor.

But Jackson saw that God could possibly have something bigger in mind.

"Greater Grace had a building and no pastor, and my church had a pastor but no building," he said.

So in June 2019, the two came together as one church.

"I'm a mission pastor," Jackson said. "We embarked on feeding and clothing the community and saw several hundred people being blessed."

He had actually just left a Thanksgiving turkey distribution at the church in No-



Photo courtesy of FBC Center Point

The congregation of FBC Center Point gathers with Iglesia Bautista de Center Point, the Hispanic church that meets in its facilities. That church will continue to meet there after FBC Center Point transfers the buildings to Greater Grace Missionary Baptist Church.

vember 2020 when he got the call to come back because the building was on fire. God had protected him and others who could have been in the building when the fire happened, he said. But the building wasn't salvageable.

"Insurance deemed it a total loss," Jackson said.

When Haynes approached him about meeting in their building, Jackson thanked him and told him that for now they could continue meeting outside — they'd been meeting in their parking lot since March 2020 because of COVID-19 anyway.

"The third Sunday of this March will mark one year that we've been meeting outside, and in nearly 52 weeks, the Lord has not let it rain on us one Sunday," Jackson said.

And God was knitting provision together for them in other ways too when He connected Greater Grace with First, Center Point. As they talked, Jackson went to see the campus.

"It was out of our league," he said.

The insurance money they received for the building they'd lost was nowhere

near the appraised value of First Baptist's facilities, and nowhere near the offers the church had received.

But Haynes and the rest of the First Baptist congregation

"We're being entrusted with something bigger than us, and we will not let them or the Lord down."

**Pastor Lawrence Jackson Sr.
Greater Grace Missionary Baptist Church**

felt God stirring in them to accept exactly what Greater Grace had and turn their beloved buildings over to a church that could keep ministry going in the community.

"This is the heart of the people at First Baptist," Jackson said. "We came and met with them, talked to them and came to an agreement. They said, 'We've been offered more, but we want a ministry that's vibrant and can minister to this community.'"

Growing ministry

In the agreement, one large building and parking lot will be donated to the Birmingham Metro Baptist Association to store its disaster relief vehicles and equipment.

And the Hispanic congregation led by Pastor Carlos Gomez will continue to meet at the soon-to-be Greater Grace buildings. It's a ministry that continues to grow — Haynes said they planned to baptize four members of that

congregation March 28.

Then on April 4, Easter, the Greater Grace congregation will meet in the First Baptist buildings and one church will hand off the baton to another.

Family history

"For some of our members, to leave the church building is a sad thing — for many, they have a family history here, like their grandmother and mother were married here and so were they," Haynes said. "I've tried to encourage them that none of the churches the apostles founded are still here today, but God's Church is marching on."

Greater Grace has plans to carry on that legacy, Jackson said. He said the added space will give them exponentially more opportunities to reach the community with resources all the way from kids' basketball leagues to computer and vocational classes.

"This community needs compassion and a church to lead and love and lift them, and that's what we planned on doing and how we ended up here," Jackson said.

"We're being entrusted with something bigger than us, and we will not let them or the Lord down."

Haynes said for his church, the whole situation has been God bringing Psalm 118:23 to life right in front of them.

"This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes."

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TAB Media



3 stories

you should know



Photo courtesy of Eddie Gibson

The campus of the Dellanna West O'Brien School, a Christian K-12 school outside Monrovia, Liberia, was recently destroyed by an angry man in the community. The school was started and managed by Eddie Gibson International Ministries, which is headquartered in Birmingham, Alabama. It is named in honor of the former national WMU executive director, who spent many years as part of Alabama Baptist life before her death in 2008. A full story on the school is in the works and will be shared in an upcoming issue.

Beth Moore announces split with Lifeway, SBC

Popular Bible teacher and author Beth Moore is parting ways with LifeWay Christian Resources and the Southern Baptist Convention, saying she can no longer identify with the denomination.

Moore's decision was made public in a Religion News Service article published March 9.

"I don't identify with some of the things in our heritage that haven't remained in the past," Moore told RNS in a March 5 phone interview.

Lifeway will still distribute Moore's books, but it will no longer publish them or administer her live events.

Moore's first study, "A Woman's Heart: God's Dwelling Place," was published in 1995 and led to dozens of additional studies, along with stadium-style Living Proof Live events that drew thousands. (RNS)

9 in 10 churchgoers eager to gather again

A LifeWay Research study of 1,000 U.S. Protestant churchgoers found 91% said they plan to return to in-person worship when it is safe to do so.

The study conducted in February suggests churchgoers are eager to return to pre-pandemic worship practices.

In January, 51% of churchgoers said they didn't attend any in-person services, and 83% said they watched a livestream of a church service instead. With vaccines now becoming more readily available, attendance is likely to pick up soon, the study suggested.

A total of 8% of churchgoers said they have been diagnosed with COVID-19; 42% said someone in their church has been diagnosed with the disease, and 18% said a fellow church member died from it. (RNS)

Headline news

from around the Southeast

Florida

World Changers, once a national Southern Baptist ministry, is now an independently owned nonprofit ministry based in Panama City, Florida, the Florida Baptist Witness reported. World Changers was birthed in 1990 at the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission, transitioned to the North American Mission Board in 1997 and then to Lifeway Christian Resources in 2011 before being discontinued as a Southern Baptist ministry in May 2020. Since 1990, more than 400,000 teenagers have participated in the week-long World Changers experience that challenges teams of young people to repair homes, often in impoverished neighborhoods, while also sharing the gospel with community residents.

Kentucky

When Jerry Foster, bivocational pastor of Rush Chapel Baptist Church, learned the electricity

was going to be out in his church in northeastern Kentucky because of recent storms, he knew where to turn, Kentucky Today reported. Foster, a first responder and volunteer for the Norton Branch Fire Department near his church, called and asked the fire chief if his church could have its Sunday morning service in the firehouse. "We pulled two fire trucks out of the bay and set up chairs. We had a full service," Foster said.

North Carolina

One was a young church plant that was outgrowing its meeting space, and the other was an older congregation in decline. To be faithful to their mission of reaching people with the gospel, the two churches merged. "I am beyond amazed ... to watch what God has done," said Tony Ferguson, a member of the church plant, Mercy Church, before its merger with Candlewyck Baptist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. To-

day, with church planting in its DNA, according to Pastor Spence Shelton, Mercy Church plans to launch two more churches, plant two Mercy campuses and send 10 international missionaries, the Biblical Recorder reported.

South Carolina

How can a small, rural Southern Baptist church — in the middle of a pandemic — build and move into a new sanctuary debt-free? Leaders at Lowndesville Baptist Church in rural Abbeville County, South Carolina, believe that "God gave the vision [of a new building], and then God miraculously provided the resources," Pastor Fred Griggs said. God's provision came through a member's bequest and estate gift as well as the hands-on involvement of a current member who oversaw the building project, the Baptist Courier reported. "It's all been a work of God," Griggs said.

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

► **C. Bruce Hose** — former state Sunday School office director and longtime pastor — died March 5. He was 71.



HOSE

His first full-time ministry role was serving as minister of education at York Terrace Baptist Church, Sheffield. He then became director of the Sunday School office for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. After that, he spent two decades as executive pastor at First Baptist Church, Montgomery; as pastor of First Baptist Church, Union Springs; and as pastor of Glynwood Baptist Church, Prattville. He retired in 2016.

Hose attended Samford University then completed his degree at Athens State University. He earned a master's degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and served other churches while he was there.

He is survived by his wife, Mary Virginia (Gini); daughter, Robyn; son, Adam; and five grandchildren.

CHOCTAW ASSOCIATION

► **Randy Johnson** is the new pastor of **Chapell Hill Baptist Church, Gilbertown**. Johnson has served churches in Alabama and Mississippi over his more than 50 years of ministry, including as pastor of Cypress Shores Baptist Church, Mobile, for 15 years, and Friendship Baptist Church, Bon Secour, for seven years. He and his wife, Janie, also served as house parents for Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries in Mobile. He has studied at Samford University, Athens State University and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.



JOHNSON

COLBERT-LAUDERDALE ASSOCIATION

► Trustees of **Colbert-Lauderdale Association** have unanimously approved the gift of the former York Terrace Baptist Church, Sheffield, property to Greater Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church. York Terrace merged with First Baptist Church, Sheffield, in March 2020 to become York Bluff Baptist Church. Greater Fellowship became a full member of the association in October 2020. Eddy Garner is director of missions, and Dowand Malone is pastor of Greater Fellowship.



FISCUS

MUSCLE SHOALS ASSOCIATION

► **Jim Fiscus** is the new full-time worship, education and media pastor at **Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, Moulton**. He has served the church for several

years in bivocational roles. Before that, he served on staff at Old Town Creek Baptist Church, Moulton, and First Baptist Church, Town Creek. He has also served as moderator, vice moderator and men's education leader for Muscle Shoals Baptist Association.

TUSKEGEE LEE ASSOCIATION

► **Tom Grantham's** church — Purpose Baptist Church, Opelika — recently honored him for his retirement after almost 17 years as their pastor.

But Grantham says he's not sure it's really a retirement — he says it's more like a holding pattern or a change in season. He and his wife, Cindy, recently moved to Georgia to be closer to family.



GRANTHAM

"I signed up for the long haul in ministry. If God wants me to do pulpit supply or just be a member of a church somewhere or teach Sunday School, I'm willing. And if He wants me to pastor again, I'll do whatever He wants me to do," he said.

Grantham was working in the restaurant industry in Georgia and serving as a music minister when he felt the call to serve as a pastor. In 2000, he moved to Alabama and became pastor of Concord Baptist Church, Notasulga. He served there three years, then served as interim pastor for Pepperell Baptist Church, Opelika, for nine months.

In 2004, he became pastor of Purpose Baptist. "When I went there, they had 18 members," Grantham recalled. The church grew so much it added on, and then built a new sanctuary.

"God really blessed," he said. "It was a wonderful time with wonderful people."

Alabama extends mask order through April 9

Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey on March 4 extended the state's mask mandate through April 9, emphasizing this would be the final extension of the requirement first implemented in July 2020 to help slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Ivey said she and State Health Officer Dr. Scott Harris "are both convinced that we need to get past Easter and hopefully allow more Alabamians to get their first shot before we take a step some other states have taken to lift the mask order altogether and lift other restrictions," Ivey said. "But let me be abundantly clear — after April 9, I will not keep the mask order in effect."

Ivey said businesses have a few weeks to decide what, if any, policies and restrictions they will implement after April 9.

Other changes

Other changes to the state health order include removing the seating limit of eight at tables in restaurants, allowing outdoor programs at senior centers and allowing two caregivers per patient at hospitals and nursing homes, subject to the local COVID-19 situation and other factors.

As of March 10, the Alabama Department of Public Health reports that the state has had 501,398 COVID-19 cases and 10,222 deaths related to the coronavirus. The vast majority (78.%) of deaths have occurred among those age 65 and older. Nearly 60% of decedents were white and 27.8% were black.

Three COVID-19 vaccines are now available in Alabama. As of Feb. 8, vaccine eligibility includes people 65 years and older and frontline personnel including health care workers, teachers, first responders and clergy members. More information is available at alcovidvaccine.gov. (TAB)

Persecuted church

Christians in India under pressure from new 'anti-conversion' law

NOIDA, India — A Korean Christian and three Indian nationals were arrested last year on fraudulent charges that they violated Uttar Pradesh state's new "anti-conversion" law.

The Prohibition of Unlawful Religious Conversion Ordinance went into effect Nov. 28 to quash the trend of Muslim men targeting Hindu women for conversion and marriage.

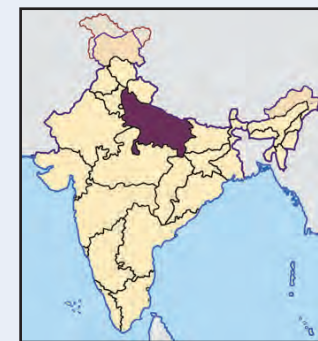
Mi Kyung Lee, 50, of South Korea had accompanied three aid workers who went to Muski Gupta's home in Noida to get a list of community people needing food.

Gupta's neighbor, Anita Sharma, later told police that the four offered Gupta and Sharma money and rations if they converted to Chris-

tianity. A relief organizer said two of the aid workers were not Christians.

He called Sharma's accusation a conspiracy by Hindu nationals. Hindu radicals and extremists praised police for arresting the four on Dec. 19. On Dec. 20, three Christian men were arrested in a separate "anti-conversion" case in Azamgarh.

India is No. 10 on Open Doors' 2021 World Watch List of places where it is most difficult to be a Christian. (MS)



Wikimedia Commons

The Alabama Senate voted down a proposal to legalize a combination of lottery, casinos and sports betting, but bills still pending in the Legislature could ask the state's voters to weigh in on one of those options.

Harmful behavior



Unsplash.com

Alabama ranked 12th 'most sinful' state; pending bills could increase struggle

By Caleb Yarbrough
TAB Media

With multiple proposals related to moral issues still in play in the state Legislature, Alabama already ranks as the 12th “most sinful” state in the union, according to a recent report by WalletHub.com.

While use of the term “sin” might be click bait — vices is perhaps the better term — the report notes major disparities in morality across America’s 50 states and calls out Alabamians on several data points.

WalletHub’s February report organized data from more than 20 sources and evaluated the data using seven categories of immorality: anger and hatred; jealousy; excesses and vices; greed; lust; and vanity and laziness.

Third for laziness

Alabama ranked third for laziness (highest percentage of adults not exercising) and 10th for anger and hatred (most violent crimes per capita) and excesses and vices (most excessive drinking).

Alabamians are not alone in their penchant for overeating and forgoing exercise. Forty percent of Americans are obese, according to Margaret Burton, professor of religion and ethics at the University of Chicago.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to increases in many vices, WalletHub found, including excessive drinking — with which many Alabamians already struggled.

Alabama ranked slightly better in activities categorized under jealousy and lust — 11th and 16th respectively. However, in highest average time spent on adult entertainment sites,

Alabama ranked 4th in the nation.

On a more positive note, Alabamians were among the top third most virtuous Americans regarding greed and vanity, ranking 34th for each.

While Alabama’s negative ranking in multiple categories may be concerning, many vices are connected to systemic issues and cannot be taken purely at face value, according to Scott Paeth, associate professor of religious studies at DePaul University in Chicago.

“Vices are habits,” he said. “The things we think of as ‘vices’ are themselves often connected to larger structural problems — inequality, racism, sexism, etc. — which themselves need criticism.”

One of the best ways to curb an undesirable habit is by swapping it for new, more desirable behavior, Paeth explained.

“These things are always easier in the community. So establishing or joining a community dedicated to helping one another in overcoming those vices would be very useful,” Paeth noted.

And while vices are “not just about the law or culture,” Paeth said, “there are elements of both law and culture that are implicated in all of these things. And while laws do not necessarily make us better or worse people, they can encourage better or worse behavior.”

In 2019, WalletHub published a report on America’s “Most Gam-

bling-Addicted States,” in which Alabama ranked 46th — likely due to the state’s lack of a lottery, legal sports betting or casinos (apart from those operated under federal law by the Poarch Band of Creek Indians).

While regulations concerning the legality of casinos have long been in flux, three years ago the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of al-

lowing states to legalize and regulate sports betting.

On March 9, Alabama senators rejected Senate Bill 214, a proposal to broadly expand gambling in the state, including legalizing a lottery, casinos and sports betting. (See story, page 17.)

These issues may not arise again in this legislative session, but most watchers believe they will surface again in the future. That begs the question: If Alabama voters were ever to OK expanded gambling in the state, would the move create a new category of vice in a state that until now has been low in comparison to nearly all the others?

Negative effects

Paeth said it is generally “a bad idea to legalize sports betting.”

He argues that the revenue gambling brings into a local economy fails to make up for the “attendant ‘vices’ — gambling addiction, crime, drug abuse” it encourages.

One of the most disturbing aspects of the gambling industry, Paeth said, is that the negative effects of these

vices “tend to fall on the more vulnerable members of society.”

Paeth calls gambling a “lazy man’s revenue generator” because instead of developing productive new businesses, “it relies on the predictability of certain kinds of behavior, and then incentivizes those behaviors, even if they are harmful,” he said.

Society’s most vulnerable

Curtis Lehmann, assistant professor of psychology at Azusa Pacific University in California, echoed Paeth’s criticism of gambling regarding its net effects on society’s most vulnerable. Instead of providing disadvantaged populations with pathways to financial stability, he fears the gambling industry could serve to further the country’s wealth gap.

“I worry about this idea from an equity perspective,” Lehmann said. “I can imagine a situation where cash-strapped individuals fantasizing about a big payday might bet with their gut against corporations that engage in ‘sabermetrics’ and other predictive analytics. It seems ripe for an upward transfer of wealth.”

Writing for WalletHub, financial writer Adam McCann notes that “the cost of state sins is something we have to share as a nation.”

While not as expensive as smoking, which costs the U.S. over \$300 billion per year, the financial impact of gambling is not cheap. Gambling costs the U.S. about \$5 billion per year, McCann writes, with an added word of caution: “Harmful behavior on the individual level can add up to staggering economic costs on a national scale.”

“Harmful behavior on the individual level can add up to staggering economic costs on a national scale.”

Adam McCann
financial writer

Gambling bill fails to pass Senate

Bill sponsor says Baptist opposition helped defeat comprehensive proposal

By **Dianna L. Cagle**
TAB Media

A sweeping proposal to create a state lottery, numerous casinos and legal sports betting failed in the Alabama Senate on March 9, due in part to pressure from Baptists across the state.

Sen. Del Marsh, R-Anniston, sponsored the measure filed as Senate Bill 214.

After the vote, Marsh told Alabama Media Group that he was “called by some of my Baptist preachers that didn’t like the bill. ... It’s amazing to me. You want to get a legislator’s attention, it only takes about six phone calls.”

SB 214 failed by a 19–13 vote (see sidebar, this page). The bill needed 21 votes to pass the 35-member Senate.

Almost immediately, six bills dealing with the establishment of a lottery and oversight of proceeds from a lottery were filed.

Marsh entered SB 309, SB 310 and SB 311; SB 318 was introduced by Sen. Garlan Gudger, R-Cullman; and Sen. Jim McClendon, R-Springville, introduced SB 319 and SB 320.

“These new bills are ‘lottery only,’ but people need to realize that if a ‘lottery only’ bill passes the Senate, is amended in the House and goes to a conference committee in order to reach a compromise, it can be changed to include casinos,” said Joe Godfrey, executive director of Alabama

Citizens Action Program, in a Facebook post March 11. “The gambling bosses are not giving up and going away quietly! We must continue to flood the phones and email boxes of Alabama senators asking them to oppose all gambling bills.”

In a March 10 statement, the Alabama Policy Institute cautioned against renewed attempts to expand gambling in the state and praised

“those senators who took the time to dig into the workings of SB 214 and voted against it.”

Phil Williams, API’s chief policy officer and general counsel, said SB 214 “died under its own weight, combined with the fact that the gambling interests turned it into a feeding frenzy.”

The debate may not be over, however. God-

frey said once a bill goes back to each house, “it will only require a simple majority vote, not 2/3 as in the original legislation.” If the people approve a “lottery only” constitutional amendment, he said, the legislators could add casinos without a vote of the people because the amendment changes the definition.

Fight goes on

“We must not give up fighting for the conservative and family values in our state,” Godfrey said.

Marsh’s bill also called for Gov. Kay Ivey to enter a compact with the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, which operates three casinos in Alabama under federal law.

Ivey has said she wants a vote on

the gambling issue before she attempts to make a compact with the Poarch Band.

Other bills under review

Three gambling-related bills similar to Marsh’s proposals were introduced in the House on Feb. 2 by Rep. John W. Rogers Jr., D-Birmingham. Those bills are now with the House Economic Development and Tourism Committee.

► House Bill 161 would legalize sports wagering.

► HB 199 would legalize a state-sponsored lottery.

► HB 200 would legalize casino gambling.

Other bills still under consideration by the Legislature include:

► SB 10, known as the Vulnerable Child Compassion and Protection Act (similar to HB 1), would prohibit gender change therapy for minors

► SB 46, which would legalize medical marijuana

► SB 287 and HB 101, which are related to alcohol sales

► HB 246, a measure to allow local boards of education to offer yoga to students in grades K–12.

Read more on all of these bills and the latest legislative updates at tabonline.org/2021-session.



Pixabay.com

How they voted

19 in favor of the gambling legislation

Greg Albritton (R)
William Beasley (D)
Donnie Chesteen (R)
Linda Coleman-Madison (D)
Vivian Figures (D)
Kirk Hatcher (D)
Jimmy Holley (R)
Andrew Jones (R)
Steve Livingston (R)
Del Marsh (R)

Jim McClendon (R)
Tim Melson (R)
Randy Price (R)
Greg Reed (R)
Bobby Singleton (D)
Rodger Smitherman (D)
Jabo Waggoner (R)
Tom Whatley (R)
Jack Williams (R)

13 against the gambling legislation

Gerald Allen (R)
Will Barfoot (R)
Tom Butler (R)
Clyde Chambliss (R)
Chris Elliott (R)
Sam Givhan (R)
Garlan Gudger (R)

Arthur Orr (R)
Dan Roberts (R)
Clay Scofield (R)
David Sessions (R)
Shay Shelnuitt (R)
Larry Stutts (R)

Did not vote: Priscilla Dunn (D); Malika Sanders-Fortier (D)

WHY I BELIEVE IN THE COOPERATIVE PROGRAM

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As a young man, I first realized the value of the Cooperative Program as a funding mechanism to help educate men and women for the ministry to which God called them.

Later, as a pastor, I found the Cooperative Program to be a non-intrusive vehicle by which my church could partner with other churches across the Convention to fund our mission endeavors.

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international to domestic missions – and that it contains built-in accountability factors that are often missing in charitable giving programs utilized by others.

Now, as an active representative on our Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, I

have a great deal of satisfaction in our collective giving through the Cooperative Program, for we are a pacesetter for other state conventions. We lead in dollar amounts given every year because the churches and leadership of our state believe in cooperation.

By Steve Loggins



As I look to the future in my role as an associational missionary, I value the partnership among Southern Baptists exemplified by the Cooperative Program – the greatest financial tool devised by man to spread the Gospel across the world. We can change the world together.

Steve Loggins serves as associational missionary for the North Jefferson Baptist Association. He is a member of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

For more information about the Cooperative Program, visit AlabamaCP.org.



UPCOMING ONLINE TRAINING

MINISTERING OUT OF THE OVERFLOW: HOW TO BE ON FIRE FOR GOD WITHOUT BURNING OUT

Tuesday, March 23, 10-11 a.m.

This season of pastoral ministry has been challenging. Many pastors and church staff are facing emotional difficulties and burnout. If you need a refreshing message then this webinar is for you. Join **Richard Blackaby**, president of Blackaby Ministries International since 2006, as he presents an encouraging message in light of the times.



MINISTERING TO MEN

Thursday, March 25, 6-8 p.m.

Join author and speaker **Randy Hemphill** for this free webinar focused on ministering to men and the importance of leading the men in your church along a practical, life-changing



path leading to a deeper and healthier relationship with God and others.

Register for these two webinars at PinnacleAlabama.org.

CHURCH LIBRARY ONLINE TRAINING THROUGHOUT APRIL

Calling all church librarians and library volunteers! A series of five webinars is being offered during April just for you. Even if you can't attend the live webinar, go ahead and register for the ones you're interested in to be sure you receive an email when the recorded version is available for viewing. For more information and to register visit alsbom.org/libraries.



THE EMERGING CHURCH LIBRARY IN TODAY'S CHURCH CULTURE

Thursday, April 8, 10-11 a.m.

Led by Morlee Maynard

CHURCH LIBRARIES MAKING THE SHIFT TO TODAY'S CHURCH CULTURES

Thursday, April 8, 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Led by Morlee Maynard

THINKING OUTSIDE THE LIBRARY PROMOTION

Thursday, April 15, 10-11 a.m.
Led by Bev League

CONCOURSE LIBRARY SOFTWARE

Thursday, April 22, 10-11 a.m.

Led by Allison Maynard and Suzanne Burton

ATRIUM: AN INTERNET-BASED LIBRARY SOFTWARE PROGRAM

Thursday, April 29, 10-11 a.m.

Led by Allison Maynard and Suzanne Burton



'Exemplified a servant attitude'

Keith Hibbs to retire from office of worship resources; Karen Gosselin to step into role

By Grace Thornton
TAB Media

Keith Hibbs was in the eighth grade when he first felt the call to music ministry.

"Everything from there to graduation from seminary in 1978 was preparation for that work," he said.

And part of that was learning what music ministry at the state level looked like.

Getting started

"I got to know a little bit about denominational work and the work of the church music office (at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions)," Hibbs said.

As a high school student, he experienced Music Week at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center, and he introduced himself to Paul

Stewart, then director of the church music office.

Later down the road, after Hibbs graduated from seminary, he and Stewart reconnected, and Stewart invited him to join the Alabama Singing Men and then be a part of the faculty. In 1983, Stewart asked Hibbs to come on staff at SBOM as a consultant.

The rest is history.

"I have loved every minute of my opportunity to serve Alabama Baptist churches through the 38 years I've been at the State Board," said Hibbs, who is retiring April 9.

Over the years, he has served in a variety of roles, most recently as director of the office of worship leader-

ship and church music.

"It's been a really interesting journey," he said.

"I am very proud of our worship leaders in our local churches."

'A blessing'

Hibbs said he can't think of any kind of ministry that's had to adapt more in the past

38 years than music ministry.

"Our worship practices are so different now than they were in the 1980s, and our tools that we use are so different," he said.

He said in recent decades, there has

also been "tremendous movement" all over the Southern Baptist Convention to offer training opportuni-

ties at colleges and seminaries for music ministers to better address the needs of churches.

"There has been such an influx of trained church musicians to serve our churches," Hibbs said.

Seeing that has been a blessing, along with the time he's gotten to spend with state honor choirs and groups over the years. He began a youth music group called One Voice that traveled, as well as a band called Rock Solid that he led on a number of domestic and international missions trips.

Hibbs has also enjoyed working with the Alabama Singing Men and Alabama Singing Women and taking missions trips with them.

"I've enjoyed every way I've gotten to support the work of Alabama Baptist churches," he said.

As Hibbs retires, Karen Gosselin, who has served in Hibbs' office since 2007, will step into the role of coordinator of the office of worship resources.

Gosselin has a bachelor of music education from Southeastern Oklahoma State University and a master of music from Southwestern

Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

"She will be a resource person just like I have been," Hibbs said. "She will coordinate how churches

are resourced in the worship ministry from now on. She's a very talented and resourceful person."

As for his time at the SBOM, Hibbs said he is "very fortunate and thankful that God led me to

the opportunity to serve in this way."

Rick Lance, SBOM executive director, says Hibbs has "exemplified a servant attitude" throughout his ministry and served in his director role "with distinction."

Dedicated

"Keith Hibbs has given his life to ministry through the State Board of Missions. He values relationships with people. He knows that ministry runs on the rails of relationships," Lance said. "He has an admirable walk with God. He has always sought to be a prayer partner with those in need. I have appreciated every aspect of his ministry with us, and we will continue to call upon him when various needs arise." 🌸



HIBBS



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Ephesians study designed for mentor/mentee use

When Barbara Kay Edwards came to faith in Jesus as a girl, someone at the church gave her a Bible and told her the red letters were the words of Jesus.

And that's all they told her. "Nobody mentored me," said Edwards, ministry assistant for Elmore Baptist Association. "My heart is for all the young Barbara Kays out there."

That's why she wrote a book recently called "Daily on My Path," a 4-week study through Ephesians. It's meant to be

done together with someone else in a discipling, mentoring relationship in what she calls the Reach, Teach, Minister Initiative.

"The Book of Ephesians is amazing," Edwards said. "The first three chapters show you who Jesus is and what He did for us, and the last three chapters show us how to apply that. I know for

myself when I read through Ephesians, it's like a heart revival."

The book walks readers through Scripture, with teaching on how to pray for God to open your eyes as you read, as well as journal what you learn.

She and other River Region partners who have been involved in using it as a

mentoring guide — such as Montgomery Baptist Association staff members Tameka Moment and Robin Crowe, along with Shannon Pierce, a member of Journey

Church, Prattville — have seen God move in a mighty way, Edwards said.

"Being able to share this with new believers and seeing their eyes light up is a wonderful thing," she said.

To get copies of "Daily on My Path," contact Edwards at bksahoot@yahoo.com or call 334-391-7723. (Grace Thornton)

To get copies of "Daily on My Path," contact Edwards at 334-391-7723 or bksahoot@yahoo.com.



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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Union Hill Baptist Church in Oneonta, Alabama, is earnestly seeking God's choice for the full-time pastor to lead our small-town congregation. Prayerfully consider mailing your resumé to: ATTN: Pastor Search Committee, 2919 County Highway 39, Oneonta, AL 35121 or email: sparks@unionhillbaptist.org.

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.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Seeking bivocational pastor for Alabama Gulf Coast Southern Baptist church. Church has about 40 members and a lot of room in the sanctuary for growth. Seeking a pastor who has a heart for people and preaches the unchanging word of God. Church is in an area that has great potential for increasing attendance. Experience preferred but not required. Please send resumé to: Bayside Baptist Church, ATTN: Pastoral Search Committee, P.O. Box 533, Lillian, AL 36549, or email to: bsbclillian@gmail.com.

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.

MUSIC MINISTER

York Bluff Baptist Church in Sheffield, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational music minister. This person should be mature in the faith, theologically sound, musically sound, organized and passionate about growing a multi-generational music ministry. Resumé and videos may be emailed to: kim@yorkbluffbaptist.com. The deadline to receive resumé is Wednesday, March 31.

STUDENT MINISTER

The Baptist Church at McAdory is seeking a full-time student minister for middle-high school grade students with experience in leading and developing young people. More information regarding the position is available upon request. Please send cover letter, resumé and questions directly to the church at: ATTN: Personnel, 4954 Eastern Valley Road, McCalla, AL 35111 or by

email to: personnel.bcm@gmail.com.

YOUTH PASTOR

FBC Loxley, Alabama, is seeking a full-time youth pastor. Please send a resumé to: youthpastorsearchfbcloxley@gmail.com.

STUDENT MINISTER

Parkway Baptist Church in Creve Coeur, Mo., is now accepting resumé for a part-time student minister. The student minister would be responsible for leadership and vision-casting for an established middle/high school student ministry. The position has a competitive compensation package including benefit options. Interested applicants may send a letter of interest, resumé, references and statement of faith to: student-search@parkwaybaptist.net or by mail to: Student Search Committee, Parkway Baptist Church, 12465 Olive Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63141-6499.

OTHER POSITIONS

CAMP ADMINISTRATOR

Excellent opportunity for someone with a passion for camping ministry to give leadership to a small, beautiful and growing camp. Alabama WMU is seeking a camp administrator that has strong relational skills with the ability to communicate the vision and goals of WorldSong Missions Place effectively and passionately. To learn more visit WorldSongRetreat.org. For a detailed position description or to submit your resumé email Cindy Wilson at cwilson@alsbom.org.

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TAB DIGITAL

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TAB PREVIEW

TAB Preview provides a sneak preview of the weekly stories featured in The Alabama Baptist to the church leadership of 2,000 churches across the state. To sign up email news@thealabamabaptist.org.

Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

2021 marks 400th anniversary of ‘True Christianity’ author’s death

Johann Arndt (1555–1621) was a German Lutheran pastor and theologian who wrote “True Christianity,” a significant book on devotional Christianity.

This year is the 400th anniversary of his death.

He was born on Dec. 27, 1555, at Ballenstedt in Anhalt, Germany. His parents, Jakob and Anna Sochtings Arndt, had Johann and his two younger siblings.

Johann’s father was ordained in Wittenberg in 1553 and served as a minister at an Evangelical Lutheran congregation. He died in 1565.

Arndt’s parents educated him at home. In his early years his favorite writers were Martin Luther and Thomas á Kempis.

In 1575 he attended a new

Lutheran university at Helmstadt, Germany, which was founded to combat Calvinism. He studied Christian doctrine, Latin and Greek grammar, astronomy, geometry, rhetoric, history and physics his first year.

While in school, he became extremely ill with a painful disease. His doctors gave him no hope for recovery. He vowed to God that if He would heal him, he would devote his life to God’s work. He recovered and kept his word.

In addition to studying at Helmstadt, he attended universities in Strasbourg, France, and Basel, Switzerland.

He returned to Ballenstedt in 1581. Two years later he accepted a pastorate at Badeborn. His Lu-

theran rituals angered Calvinist authorities. After Arndt refused to end the practice of exorcism, he was forced to leave. He then accepted a pastorate in Quedlinburg in 1590.

He became unpopular with the townspeople and left nine years later to become a pastor in Brunswick. He later was an administrator in Eisleben, the hometown of Luther.

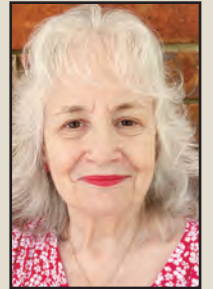
Arndt believed that too many Reformation theologians of his day emphasized the death of Christ on the cross but neglected people’s need of a Savior. In order to become a Christian, he preached, people must have a practical Christianity — a change of the heart — and realize they are sinful and need Christ as their Savior.



ARNDT

By Joanne Sloan

Joanne Sloan, a member of First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, has been a published writer of articles and books for 30 years. She has a bachelor’s degree double majoring in history and English from East Texas State University (now Texas A&M–Commerce) and a master’s degree specializing in English from the University of Arkansas (1978).



“True Christianity,” his influential large devotional book divided into four parts, dwells on the mysterious union between the believer and Christ. The foundation of many books of devotion, both Protestant and Catholic, it has been translated into many languages. Mennonites used the book, and his writings influenced John Wesley.

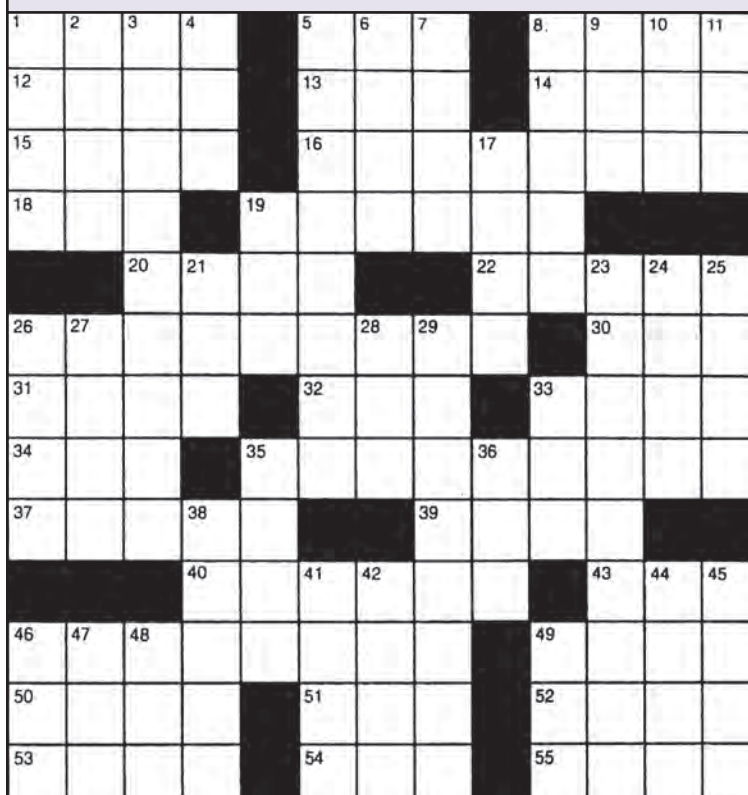
Forerunner of Pietism

Arndt is seen as a forerunner of Pietism, a movement within Lutheranism, which was founded by Philipp Jakob Spener. Pietism stressed simple Christian living.

From 1611 until his death, Arndt lived in Celle, Germany. He died on May 11, 1621. His last words were “Now I have overcome all.”✚

Christian Crossword

By Lee Esch Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

1. Mount _____. Moses died here. (Deut. 34:1)
5. He hath spread a _____ for my feet. (Lam. 1:13)
8. Mine entrance.
12. Above the top.
13. Boat paddle.
14. He _____ witness unto the truth. (John 5:33)
15. Gentle.
16. First one.
18. Samuel’s mentor. (1 Sam. 3:1)
19. Still on the market.
20. We have seen His star in the _____. (Matt. 2:2)
22. Ancient Greek storyteller.
26. Returned to.
30. Time period.
31. Affirm.
32. Optimum. (for short)
33. There shall come a _____ out of Jacob.

- (Num. 24:17)
34. Company top dog. (abbr.)
35. Arguable.
37. _____ Oakley.
39. Why beholdest thou the _____ that is in thy brother’s eye? (Matt. 7:3)
40. _____ yourselves therefore to God. (James 4:7)
43. When thou wast under the _____ tree, I saw thee. (John 1:48)
46. From the beginning of the _____ God made them male and female. (Mark 10:6)
49. I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a _____. (John 1:32)
50. Gasoline.
51. Digit.
52. To stuff.
53. Jail unit.
54. For Christ is the

- _____ of the law. (Rom. 10:4)
55. Part of the eye.

Down

1. Alaska city.
2. Why, what _____ hath he done? (Matt. 27:23)
3. _____ the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. (Acts 16:31)
4. Fort _____; California army base.
5. Midday.
6. He that hath _____ to hear, let him hear. (Matt. 11:15)
7. Three.
8. _____ in Me, and I in you. (John 15:4)
9. One of the 12 tribes of Israel.
10. Private old age fund. (abbr.)
11. Far. (prefix)
17. I will be _____ in the Lord. (Ps. 104:34)
19. Navy sailing vessel
21. Atmosphere.
23. I have _____ thee an open door. (Rev. 3:8)
24. Spoken.
25. Peel.
26. A term of contempt. (Matt. 5:22)
27. Level.
28. Bill or check.
29. Tested.
33. I _____ daily with you teaching in the temple. (Matt. 26:55)
35. Written by Moses. (abbr.)
36. Little fellow.
38. But Christ _____, and in all. (Col. 3:11)
41. Mouthful.
42. Night-light.
44. _____ the Terrible.
45. Precious stones.
46. Chlorofluorocarbon. (abbr.)
47. Feel regret.
48. Slippery fish.
49. 650. (Roman numeral).

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For March 21

Explore the Bible

By Benjamin Stubblefield, Ph.D.

Visiting Assistant Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



WORTHY? Luke 18:9–17

Imagine the Book of Daniel gives us a glimpse of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego sitting around the dinner table, reminiscing about being in the fire of Nebuchadnezzar.

Shadrach chimes in: “Well, you know, I never told anybody this. But the reason we came through the fire is because I sprayed some fire retardant on our clothes that morning.” Then Meshach responds, “You know what else? I never told you guys that I’m pretty sure that fourth guy in there with us was my brother Youshach; he trained with the Babylonian Emergency Rescue Squad. I think he was hosing us down with a fire extinguisher the whole time!”

Of course, that would be silly and disappointing because what the Hebrew children would be doing is taking credit for what God had clearly done. Coming through the fire was not a motive for vanity but an occasion to rejoice in the power of God. That’s what Jesus is getting at in Luke 18. He addresses the tendency within all of us to think we are good enough to accomplish for ourselves what only God can do.

Religious Pride (9–12)

Notice the Pharisee’s position, prayer and performance. Judging by the location of the tax collector (“some distance away” v. 13), we can assume the Pharisee positions himself in the temple’s inner court. He prays aloud, which is unusual in the inner court and would be considered rude. He prays, in essence, “I am so glad, God, that I’m such a great guy.” Finally, he performs above and beyond the call of normal religious duty. He’s proud of the way in which he’s excelled. To sum up, this guy’s autobiography might as well be titled “Humility and How I Achieved It.”

The character Jesus creates here, even though it’s an exaggerated caricature of pride, illustrates a familiar attitude. We can easily slip into the mistake of believing that we get more love from God when we do more things for God. We may never say what the Pharisee says, but the

sin of pride, even unvoiced, does the same damage to Christian living.

Godly Humility (13–14)

The foil to the Pharisee is the picture of brokenness. The publican is not in the inner court but on the edges of the court of the Gentiles. He is not confident in his own worth, but he strikes his chest in reaction to his sinfulness. His prayer is not a résumé but instead a plea.

The Lord vindicates that humility, Jesus concludes. In Christian life, God does not take applications. He’s looking for the broken and contrite, the poor in spirit. The divine irony to holy living is the sooner we acknowledge our humiliation, the sooner He begins our exaltation. His grace is made perfect in our weakness. Amen and Hallelujah.

Childlike Faith (15–17)

The parable connects to and informs the next scene. The disciples have the same kind of problem the onlookers have in verse 9: They think our Lord should give His time, attention and blessing to those who are capable. After all, what could a child understand or do for Jesus?

Jesus flips the script. Not only should children be permitted to come to Jesus, but they are our example of the only kind of person who will be allowed to come to Jesus. Like children and the publican, those who are honest, trusting, full of faith and reliant are the proper recipients of the kingdom of God.

It cannot be taken, bought, deserved or gained. The kingdom of Christ is a gift, from Father to child. It is given to those who weep, for “they shall be comforted.” As wonderful as our brothers were in Babylon, the Lord rescued them from the furnace because He is worthy to be praised, not because they were.

We start to turn into Nebuchadnezzars — out of our right minds (see Dan. 4) — when we forget the truth: “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast” (Eph. 2:8–9).✚

Bible Studies for Life

By Rony Kozman, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies, Samford University



THE NATURE OF SIN Isaiah 59:1–13

Sin is not just the deeds that we do. It is not simply an incident that we can isolate. It is not “less than” deeds that violate God’s justice and wisdom. It is more. Sin is a powerful ruler who enslaves and dominates all people.

Sin entered the world through Adam and became the ruler of the world. Death ruled with sin (Rom. 5:12, 17, 21). Sin is a powerful ruler that has enslaved all people and that has subjugated the whole person to its dominion.

All people are separated from God because of sin. (1–5)

Isaiah tells us that the reason Israel was in exile was not because God was too weak or powerless to rescue them; rather, God had hidden His face from Israel because of their sins. Because of their sins, God’s rescue was far off. God had hidden His face.

Why did God hide His face? He expected His people to be full of justice and goodness. Instead, they corrupted justice and they oppressed the lowly of society — the poor and the widows (Isa. 3:14–15; 5:7, 23; 10:1–2).

God did not find in His people the justice He desired (vv. 4, 15). Instead, God looked upon Israel and saw a body of injustice. He saw hands full of violence, fingers of guilt, lips of false witness, and feet that run to sin and to innocent blood (vv. 3, 6–7).

In Romans 3:10–18, Paul gives us a similar portrait of human beings whose throats, tongues, lips, mouths, feet and eyes are full of sin. In verses 15–17 Paul quotes Isaiah 59:7–8: “their feet are swift to shed blood, ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know.”

Like Isaiah, Paul’s portrait of the human being shows us a person whose whole body is ruled by sin. And this portrait is not only a likeness of Israel, it is a portrait of both Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews). As Paul tells us, “Jews and

Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin” (Rom. 3:9).

We cannot cover our sin with good works. (6–8)

Isaiah and Paul give us bleak portraits of ourselves. The problem of sin is radical and total. Sin consumes and engulfs us so that we cannot do the good that God requires of us. We know the good that God requires of us and the evil that we ought not do. But sin enslaved us into its service and keeps us from doing what is good and pleasing to God.

We cannot solve this problem ourselves (Rom. 7:14–20). We need God to intervene (7:25). We need a more powerful king to intervene and rescue us from the rule of sin and death, so that we can be the kings that God created us to be (Rom. 5:17; Gen. 1:26–28).

Unless God intervenes, we are without peace, hope and salvation. (9–13)

We are enslaved and ruled by sin. We have served sin as our master rather than the Lord. Because of our sin and our injustice, we cannot expect God’s justice and salvation to be on our side. God’s deliverance is far away from us (vv. 9, 11).

Our problem is not simply the commission of some sins. Isaiah tells us, “our offenses are many in your sight, and our sins testify against us” (v. 12). When God returns to make all things right, if He finds us as workers of injustice, oppression and deceit, we will not find God’s deliverance, but His vengeance (vv. 17–18). But to those who turn from their sins, the Lord is the Redeemer (v. 20).✚

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MEDIA REVIEWS

By Michael Foust

TAB Media

Discovery Plus' 'Resurrection' tells the hope-filled story of Easter

Sometimes, you watch an Easter television special and wish it had never been made.

Other times though, you watch an Easter television special and are so moved by it that you encourage others to watch it too. The latter is the case with Discovery Plus' upcoming special "Resurrection," a feature-length motion picture that debuts on the streaming platform March 27.

The film tells the story of Christ's latter days on Earth, through His resurrection and ascension. "Resurrection" captures the emotions of His disciples following His death and then after His resurrection as they're hunted and persecuted.

The film was produced by Roma Downey and Mark Burnett, the team that also made "The Bible," "Son of God" and "A.D.: The Bible Continues."

Affirms the Bible

I can't say too much about this new film, but if you enjoyed those earlier projects by Downey and Burnett, then you'll likely enjoy this one too. "Resurrection" is a film that Christians who affirm the Bible as God's word can embrace.

As John says in the film (and in



"Resurrection"

Photo courtesy of Discovery Plus

the Bible): "Jesus has risen!"

"Resurrection" was compiled from the "vast library" of footage Downey and Burnett already had filmed, according to a press release. (In other words, it wasn't filmed during the pandemic.)

"Faithful audiences crave content that speaks to their faith and values, and we can think of no better home for this film than Discovery Plus," Downey and Burnett said in a statement. "... We look forward to sharing [this] ultimate story of hope with the Discovery Plus viewers and are grateful to be able to share this epic story with families just in time for the Easter season."

David Zaslav, president and CEO of Discovery, Inc., said the film "is emblematic of our ambition" to "provide a subscription service for everyone, including premium storytelling for the entire family."

"We are thrilled to partner with Mark and Roma on this powerful film," Zaslav said.

Discovery Plus remains one of the best streaming options for families with its vast catalog of home improvement, nature-themed and educational programming. "Resurrection" only adds to the list of reasons to give it a try.

Also worth watching this month:

► "Flora & Ulysses" (Disney Plus)

A cynical 10-year-old girl takes in an injured squirrel, only to learn it has

superhero-like powers (it can write — using a typewriter — and fly too). She names it Ulysses, and the squirrel helps her rediscover the wonders of the world. More importantly, it helps her mom and dad reunite. This box office movie is based on a book and is one of the best family films thus far of 2021. Rated PG for some mild action and thematic elements.



► **"The Muppet Show" (Disney Plus)** — At long last, the original series starring Kermit the Frog and Miss Piggy lands on Disney Plus. Created by Jim Henson, "The Muppet Show" ran from 1976 to 1981 and followed the Muppets cast — backstage and on stage — as they took part in hilarious skits for a variety show. They also welcomed such guests as Steve Martin, Diana Ross and Mark Hamill. TV-PG.

► **"The Snoopy Show" (Apple TV)** — America's favorite beagle gets his own show in this hilarious new series that stays true to the original Peanuts classics. In the first episode, we learn the backstory of how Charlie Brown met Snoopy and how Snoopy befriended Woodstock. Apple TV is home to multiple Charlie Brown titles, including classic holiday specials and a few movies. TV-G.

► **"Bobbi Jo: Under the Influence" (VOD)** — It's the powerful story of Bobbi Jo Reed, a former drug addict and alcoholic who has rescued thousands of individuals from following her path. She does that by sharing her own personal story of how Christ saved her life and her soul. Due to mature themes of abuse — Reed was raped — this documentary is best for older children and teens. She's been sober more than two decades. Visit TheBobbiJoMovie.com. 🌈

EDITOR'S NOTE

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

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.

LIVING THE FAITH

Former Spring Hill College pitcher found baseball to be invitation to share Jesus

By Bill Sorrell
TAB Media

Hunter D'Armond has gotten more hits than any baseball player in Spring Hill College (Mobile) history.

A right-handed pitcher, D'Armond hit 16 batters during the 2017 season, including six in one game against the University of Alabama, Huntsville, both school records.

In that UAH game, D'Armond pitched four innings in relief. He hit six batters and walked two more — but he also struck out three and did not allow a hit or a run.

"The stat line for that day is one of my favorite statistics of all time," said D'Armond, a Louisiana native who was named Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference Player of the Week for the win against UAH.

Unselfish and caring

Conner Harrison, who played outfield at Spring Hill and was his roommate, said one of D'Armond's greatest strengths is his unselfishness and how much he cares about the people around him.

"Through his actions, whether we were on the field or hanging out, he was living his faith. You could see the love he spread. He talks about praying and faith."

Harrison, who graduated from Spring Hill in 2018, noted D'Armond "always brought out the best of people. People looked up to him as a leader, especially a lot of the younger players. He was always open and welcoming to new guys on



HUNTER D'ARMOND

Photo courtesy of Spring Hill College

the team. He tried to make a positive impact."

Of D'Armond's baseball skills, Harrison said he had "a really good glove, was a solid fielder and athletic. When he was in a situation at the plate, on the mound, a ball hit to him in the field, you trusted that he was going to make whatever play was in front of him. He didn't have a shortcoming in his game."

"He brought a ton of energy. He always brought a certain intensity that not everybody could bring."

While 2017 was his only season to pitch at Spring Hill, D'Armond said of his school record, "I am very proud of it. I did not have enough time to build a reputation for hitting people. The funny part — I was a closing pitcher. I had only 30 innings pitched that season."

He said his "dream" after college graduation was to return to his high school to teach theology and coach baseball — but God changed those plans when D'Armond felt led to become a Jesuit priest.

After leaving Spring Hill his junior year, he spent two years in the Novitiate in Grand Coteau, Louisiana, where he took "time to develop a relationship with Jesus."

Chaplain ministry

D'Armond graduated from Loyola University in Chicago in May 2020 and this year will earn a master's degree in theology. He also is chaplain for the women's basketball team.

"It's beautiful being chaplain," D'Armond said. "I missed playing baseball and competing [but] I am able to use my experience as a college athlete to walk with them and hopefully lead them toward God."

D'Armond's best friend Eric Couto, whom he met at Novitiate, is a former manager of the men's basketball team at Clemson University, where he graduated in 2017.

"Hunter's passion to love other people and to bring God to other people is exactly what Jesus did on Earth," Couto said. "Hunter does

that in many ways, mostly by being his authentic self. He uses his gifts and talents to love people so they are loved by God. His fidelity and faithfulness as a friend remind me of Jesus' fidelity to each of us."

Calling and mission

D'Armond was a junior in high school when he said he first "started to fall in love with the teaching of Jesus, the morality of Jesus, the care for one's neighbors. Not until my sophomore year of college did I begin to fall in love, not just with the teaching of Jesus but with Jesus Christ Himself."

A Spring Hill theology teacher, Matthew Baugh, now a Jesuit priest, pointed out Christ in a way he had not seen before, D'Armond said. Now he wants others to see his joy.

"We are all given gifts in individual and practical ways. God has blessed me and given me a calling and a mission to spread the joy of the gospel, and that this Christian life we live is one full of joy, one that is full of laughter, full of hope," he said.

"I realized that my life and the value of my life would be found in service of others," he added, quoting Matthew 16:25: "For whoever seeks to save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life because of me will find it."

"I found that to be true, whenever I lost my life for Christ, Christ gave me back my life. That is when I truly found my meaning and self-worth."

D'Armond found baseball to be "a great invitation to bring Jesus right in that space."

"I have given up a lot," D'Armond admitted. "My vows are essentially [that] I have given up a family. I have given up having any material possession. I don't own anything and won't the rest of my life. Even where I go on mission I have given up. It is part of obedience, but I have given that up joyfully. I want to praise, reverence and serve Him. That is why I was created."✝

"Hunter's passion to love other people and to bring God to other people is exactly what Jesus did on earth. Hunter does that in many ways, mostly by being his authentic self."

Eric Couto
Hunter D'Armond's best friend