



The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

INSIDE



Churches can raise awareness about post-incarceration problems

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(Above) Students at Dellanna West O'Brien School just outside Monrovia, Liberia, study in a classroom covered in tarps after a man in the community who was angry over a land dispute allegedly drove a bulldozer through the buildings on the school's campus, causing major destruction (right).



Photos courtesy of Eddie Gibson

PRESSING ON

Christian school in Liberia plans to rebuild after destruction

By Grace Thornton
TAB Media

It wasn't too long ago Eddie Gibson was visiting the Dellanna West O'Brien School in Liberia, ducking in and out of classrooms, talking and laughing with the teachers and students.

He remembers working hard to get some ceiling tiles

fixed so the school would be the best it could be.

But Gibson went back to a different scene March 31.

Some weeks before, a man in the community who was angry over a land dispute allegedly drove a bulldozer through the buildings on the school's campus.

"Everything is down — pillars, foundations, every-

thing," Gibson said. "To do anything else with the school, we would have to take everything down and rebuild."

Ties to Liberia

For him, it's heartbreaking and personal. A Liberia native, Gibson graduated from Liberian Baptist Theological Seminary before fleeing to

Alabama during the country's civil war in 1990. His heart stayed tied to Liberia, and he felt God had given him a vision to build schools there.

One was Marla H. Corts Mission School, a pre-K to ninth grade school in Gibson's hometown named after the widow of former Samford University President Tom (See 'School,' page 9)



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JUDSON COLLEGE trustees meet to decide future of the college.

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Photo by Tracy Riggs

Speaking at FBC Center Point in Birmingham Metro Baptist Association on March 24, David George, president of the WMU Foundation, holds up the March 18 issue of TAB featuring the church's story on page 1.

FBC Center Point gifts charter, establishes endowment

In our March 18 issue, we shared the story of First Baptist Church, Center Point, preparing to turn over its facilities to Greater Grace Missionary Baptist Church, a nearby congregation that had lost its building in a fire.

David Haynes, pastor of First, Center Point, said the process has been “one miracle after another” and that God has been bringing Psalm 118:23 to life right in front of them — “This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.”

But Michael Clay, church administrator for First, Center Point, said the miracles in that article are only the beginning.

The money from the sale of the building — which was the amount Greater Grace had from its insurance claim for the building that burned — is now earmarked to help other ministries.

Some will help their Hispanic congregation, Iglesia Bautista de Center Point, keep going in a new building.

The rest will go into a WMU Foundation endowment to benefit four ministries — Alabama Baptist Children’s Homes & Family Minis-

tries, Serving You Ministries, Gideons International and Samaritan’s Purse.

And as First, Center Point, wraps up its time as a church, the members are passing their church’s charter on to Iglesia Bautista de Center Point.



Photo by Tracy Riggs

David Haynes, pastor of FBC Center Point, says God has worked miracles in their church’s story.

David George, president of the WMU Foundation, said the church “went beyond what we have experienced in the past.”

“Other churches have sold their buildings and used the money to set up endowments or scholarships to impact the ministries they have supported for many years.

“That is an amazing thing, and we are honored that FBC Center Point chose us to ac-

complish that aspect of the mission God has given them,” George said.

“But they took it a step further when they gave their 107-year charter to the Hispanic church they helped to start,” he said.

“They ensured that not only their finances but also their legacy will continue through Iglesia Bautista de Center Point. What a powerful message this is to those who will come after us.” (Grace Thornton)

TAB Media

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

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 17.

RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

By Jennifer Davis Rash

President and Editor-in-Chief



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@RashionalThts

What if it were your brother, mother, child or even you needing a second chance?

Is it really possible for people with a past to have a productive, positive future? Are we willing to give others a second chance when they make a serious mistake?

Coming out of Holy Week and our Easter celebrations, I'm guessing our hearts are more attuned to dispensing forgiveness and grace than any other time.

But the reality of an opportunity to start fresh becomes a bit complicated when applied to those serving prison sentences.

Granted, some crimes require the person to remain behind bars for a lifetime, but for the majority of those in prison, they will find themselves outside the prison walls again. The question is, what kind of life will they find in the freedom?

Each year, billions of taxpayer dollars go into re-entry programs, but so often there is no one to walk with and mentor the returning citizen, which means much of the efforts are wasted.

Articles on pages 7 and 15 share how churches can make a difference, and how April — Second Chance Month — is the perfect time to explore options.

Working behind bars to prepare those who will eventually return to society and then walking beside them once they

do return is the key to helping men and women with a criminal record contribute positively to their community going forward.

Prison Fellowship Academy uses specific curriculum, coaches with a compassionate heart and a community focused on restoration during the course of a year to break down destructive thinking and prepare those behind bars to be good citizens after release.

The academy's effort is an intensive, Bible-based program, according to the sources for the article on page 15.

Denise George shares in her article on page 7 that the tendency of a convicted criminal

to re-offend is high, with more than 75% of returning citizens re-arrested within five years.

The obstacles they face are extremely difficult, and many times family members are not equipped to provide the necessary guidance.

Prison Fellowship leaders can't do it alone. They need church families to consider prisons as missions fields and look beyond the bars to the potential within each person who has paid his or her debt to society.

While Alabama lawmakers debate legislation — House Bill 107 — that would repeal the state's law mandating long incarceration sentences for

repeat offenders, people of faith can focus on decreasing the number of those who would fall into this category.

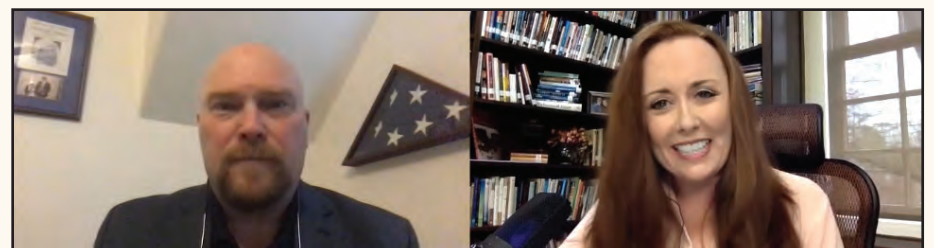
Resources are available to train volunteers for working within the prison system as well as how to mentor those who have returned to society.

With nearly 1 million names on the rolls of the more than 3,200 Alabama Baptist churches, what type of reforms would naturally take place in the correctional system if every church was intentional about making a difference? If every church decided to focus on even one specific item needed by one specific chaplain at one specific prison facility?✝

TAB Special Report: Law enforcement officer, minister shares ways people of faith can fight human trafficking

Veteran law enforcement officer and ordained minister Doug Gilmer has lots of experience in human trafficking investigations. And he is convinced the Church is needed to truly make a difference in stopping, or at least slowing, this multibillion dollar criminal industry.

In a recent TAB Media Special Report, Gilmer shares ways people of faith can get involved and the layered impact that comes from someone showing



Screenshot

Jennifer Davis Rash's interview with Doug Gilmer about human trafficking can be found on the TAB Media Group YouTube channel.

up as "the hands and feet of Jesus." Find the interview and additional resources at tabonline.org/fight-trafficking.

To invite Gilmer to share with your group or find out various ways to help, email him at douglas.gilmer@comcast.net.✝

Your Voice



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

Look at church, ministry with new eyes

By Pastor Paul Cooper

Marshall Baptist Church (Illinois)

As church leaders, it can be easy to watch all the loss from this pandemic and think we need to lower the bar of what makes for successful church ministry. But instead of lowering the bar, what if we raised it to allow for new opportunities this season has given us?

This pandemic has taken so much from us, but it also has given us all kinds of opportunities to look at church and ministry with new eyes.

How can we adjust to better reach people and make disciples? We have to redefine what success is going to look like in the near future

Here are four ideas:

► **Exit old ways that didn't work.** Often, the methods that helped our churches reach people in the past become the very obstacles that keep us from reaching people today. When I came to our church in 2007, we still made guests stand up. I'm guessing that worked at one point. But today, that practice pushes people away.

Here's a principle to consider: Do not revive what was not alive. If something we did before COVID didn't work in making disciples, don't bring it back. Why would we? Exit from old ways that didn't work.

► **Make engagement, not attendance, the goal.** None of us likes to

admit this, but attendance has long been the big success metric of ministry. Everyone asks: "So what are you running?" I'm not anti-attendance. Numbers represent people, but attendance doesn't show how many people we are truly reaching. Attendance only shows us how many people are showing up.

Anyone can attend something, but real discipleship begins when people engage. Attending is simply participating; engaging is committing.

► **Make gatherings and content about equipping.** Gathering and content are only successful when gathering and content equip people for ministry. If people aren't being equipped when we gather, we are failing them. If people aren't being equipped to serve when we put out content, we are failing our mission. Scripture says the church exists "to equip the saints for the work of ministry" (Eph. 4:11-12).

► **Return to the priority of the Great Commission.** For years, we've been focused on getting people back to evangelism, back to sharing their faith and making disciples. After all, that is what Jesus left us here to do. It's the mission of every church and every believer.

God has destroyed our church calendars filled with stuff for those already saved. Let's fill it now with reaching new people!

EDITOR'S NOTE — Adapted from an article that originally appeared at Baptist Press.

Whatever you are facing or will face, be encouraged. ... You can face it with faith and hope. Keep moving into places where God has called you.

Jesus wasn't intimidated by His last week in earthly ministry nor the events of the week and ultimately the cross. Why? Because He's Jesus. He knew the ultimate outcome.

We can have the same confidence in what we face. Why? Because of Jesus. ... This week remind yourself of who Jesus is. Enter sacred spaces with a newfound appreciation and confidence in Christ.

Cokiesha Bailey Robinson
via Facebook

Unless we want to be a regional group of Christians who only talk to ourselves, we'll need to redouble our efforts in evangelism and church planting to engage an increasingly secular context.

Ed Stetzer
Dean of the School
of Mission, Ministry
and Leadership at
Wheaton College

No matter where we are or where we go, we can always share the gospel. And sharing the gospel isn't always just with words, but also with our actions. ... With how we love people.

Tim Tebow
Athlete and broadcaster

Letters to the Editor

Since the Church is a fellowship of the redeemed, the basis of our common unity in Christ is grounded in our common unworthiness.

Fellowship with one another is grounded in our fellowship with God. Yet the richness of our fellowship with God depends upon, is measured by and/or reflects our fellowship with one another.

Morris Murray Jr.
Jasper, Ala.

Thanks for the review of my book, "Angels at Work: God's Providence."

It is my prayer the book will be a word of inspiration to all who serve our Lord. He goes before us by His providential care.

When those who serve our Father come to a dead end in an endeavor, He provides someone or something to help one keep on keeping on.

In 72 years of ministry, those whom I call, "God's Angels," are identified by a look back, which adds to one's praise for God, while keeping a servant on track for Him.

John "Jack" Green
Birmingham, Ala.

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“God is totally trustworthy. Human expectations are untrustworthy.”

KEVIN PARKER
Editor, *The Baptist New Mexican*

My wife and I were visiting one of our daughters when a series of tornadoes tore through their area. A few moments after the storms passed, the phone rang.

A family who lived nearby and was dear to them called to report that one of the tornadoes had struck their house.

The first questions were, “Is everyone OK? Is anyone hurt?” Back came the answer, “Our house is torn up, but we are fine. When we heard the warning to take cover we ran into the basement. We got there just as the house was hit.”

They were safe because they followed directions immediately and fully.

Jesus knows what storms are going to break over our lives and gives

clear directions to help us. How quickly and fully we follow His instructions makes all the difference.

A few of His powerful instructions are:

- ▶ “Don’t be afraid.”
- ▶ “Follow Me.”
- ▶ “Rest in My care.”

If we do not hear and obey, we will tremble from fear, follow a multitude of different voices and panic our way through storm days.

Listen up! Jesus is issuing divine instructions.

Bob Adams
Retired Southern Baptist pastor
Louisiana

By intentionally grounding your outlook in what is real and what is true rather than what you see in the

moment, you can accurately assess the relative size and importance of the things you face.

**Authors Russ Sarratt
and Rusty Chadwick**
“Team Work”

Here’s what I’ve found: When you decide to follow Jesus, you quickly discover that being conservative isn’t conservative enough and being liberal isn’t liberal enough.

The answer isn’t to find some happy middle ground but to live with such an extreme love for God and neighbor that it breaks out of the conventional system.

This world can’t categorize you when you’re the citizen of another.

Peter Assad
Poemsofgrace.com

Living a life free of idols

The Apostle John told Christians to “keep yourselves from idols.”

Surely this is not the problem today that it was in the ancient world.

We don’t have images of stone, wood or metal in our homes or businesses before which we humble ourselves, worship and pray.

But Bible teacher Bill Gothard used to insist that people, possessions and position are our modern idols.

People can be idols if we choose them over God.

The Old Testament law forbade an Israelite marrying a Canaanite, but Solomon and Ahab did, with disastrous consequences.

The New Testament also exhorts Christians not to be “unequally yoked” (in marriage) with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14–15).

Possessions can be idols if we fall into the trap of seeking more and more things to make life complete.

Scripture teaches that life isn’t made complete by what we have. We must learn contentment and learn to share what we have with others in need.

Position can be an idol if we constantly seek the praise of others above the praise of God.

Surely nothing is wrong with promotions, awards and winning elections — each of these has its place.

But Jesus counseled that we’re to seek God’s kingdom first of all; then we find everything else falling into proper place.

The old trilogy is yet valid. We seek God first, make our family second and others, including our work, third.

This is God’s way to a balanced life. This is God’s way to an idol-free life.

Pastor Michael J. Brooks
Siluria Baptist Church
Alabaster, Ala.

From the *Twitterverse*

@TheMoodyChurch

Pastor Warren Wiersbe: Jesus Christ died. He went through that experience that the Bible calls the wages of sin. He died, however, not because of His own sins, for He had none, but for the sins of the whole world.

@RogerMardis

Here’s a great reminder ... train yourself to under-react, to give a soft answer and to let some words and insults go in one ear and out the other. It might just save a situation or heal a hurt.

@MartinNewton1

You will never know the value of a moment until it becomes a memory.

@haines_matt

We aren’t to love God on the basis of some perceived recipro-

cal benefit we will get back from Him. We are to love God because of who He is and what He has already done for us.

@jackngraham

The eternal Word of God can never be canceled ... the Word of our God will stand forever.

@AdamGreenway

It really is possible to be:
— Convictional but not combative about it.
— Evangelistic but not obnoxious about it.
— Principled but not pugnacious about it.
— Cooperative but not doctrinally compromised by it.
— Engaged culturally but not politically compromised by it.
#PointToPonder

@mike_reeves

The presence of the fear of God

in a leader should be sensed by the people. It should be something — perhaps unnamable but beautifully Christlike — in the atmosphere around him. He should be clearly affected by the beauty and glory and majesty and goodness of God.

@MarcHodges3

Hallelujah! Thine the glory
Hallelujah! Amen Hallelujah!
Thine the glory, Revive us again!

@danielsangi

“God’s work done in God’s way will never lack God’s supply.” — Hudson Taylor

@JL_Wood

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10, KJV

'God's not done'

Judson College trustees vote to keep school open

By Jennifer Davis Rash
TAB Media

Campus life will continue at the 183-year-old Judson College despite recent fundraising efforts coming up more than \$3.7 million short of the \$5 million goal for March.

The decision was made during a special-called board meeting April 2.

"No decision by this board is ever taken lightly," said board chair Joan Newman. "Today's vote is the outcome of months of interviews, research, fundraising and, yes, prayer. We accept as a group God's call to boldness.

"Now, the work continues to ensure a Christian education that affords young women opportunities to learn and to lead," she said.

"God's not done," Newman said as she shared the news with the students, faculty and staff — and others who were on campus awaiting the results. "I'm really thrilled to tell you that Judson will be around for a long time."

Prior to the meeting, the board heard from President Mark Tew about "balancing the responsible with the possible."



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

Judson College board of trustees meet with President Mark Tew (right) during a special-called board meeting April 2 to determine the future of the school. Seven trustees met in person on campus while 13 joined via Zoom.

"God has given us all a great gift in positioning us to do what few ever have the chance to attempt, let alone actually accomplish; with faith and dependence upon God, it is time to balance the responsible with the possible," Tew wrote in an email to board members.

During the meeting, board members also learned about potential new donor relationships being nurtured.

Following about 90 minutes of discussion, the 24-member board voted 14 to 5 to move forward and approved the college's 2021–2022 budget. Four board members were not present for the vote and one

abstained from voting.

The board also voted unanimously to affirm the leadership and work of Judson's president and staff members and expressed support of them going forward.

The newly adopted 2021–2022 budget includes action items for selected recommendations of Fuller Higher Ed Solutions, a firm engaged in December to explore potential paths forward for the college.

Fuller's findings indicated two choices for Judson — to close "with dignity" or to "invest in turnaround."

"The board and administration are excited about the future of providing women's education from a biblically informed Christian worldview," Tew said.

Tew called the generosity of those who love and appreciate Judson's unique mission "overwhelming" and said he is excited about the renewed emphasis on Alabama Baptists' "treasure," which happens to be the only evangelical Christian women's college in America.

To read the background on Judson's current financial situation, visit tabonline.org/judson.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

Judson College alumnae and friends prayer walked the campus prior to the board of trustees meeting April 2 and then spent time in conversation and prayer in the chapel during the meeting.

Christian colleges face difficulties

In the past five years, some 65 public and private nonprofit colleges have closed, merged with other schools or announced plans to close in the coming months, according to Higher Ed Dive, a website that reports on trends in higher education.

A handful of those were faith-based, including the 75-year-old Nebraska Christian College near Omaha, which closed last May due to low enrollment (85 students), and Morthland College in West Frankfort, Illinois, which first offered classes in 2011 and closed in 2018 with approximately 300 students enrolled.

In Birmingham, Southeastern Bible College closed in 2017 due to financial challenges and merged with Piedmont International University (now Carolina University), based in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

In 2018, Concordia College Alabama in Selma, a private college affiliated with the Lutheran Church and the only historically Black institution in the Concordia University System, ceased operating, citing years of financial distress and declining enrollment.

Last year, Concordia University in Portland, Oregon, closed, and officials at Concordia College New York announced in January that it will

close this summer, working with neighboring Iona College in a "teach-out" arrangement for students. In that announcement, Concordia officials said the pandemic "accelerated" the school's financial difficulties.

In March 2019, almost a year before COVID-19 forced college campuses to send students home, shift to online classes and recruit future students via virtual tours and Zoom

sessions, U.S. News published a story with an ominous title: "The Higher Education Apocalypse."

The article cited predictions, including those by the late Harvard Business School Professor Clayton Christensen and econo-

mist Nathan Grawe, that many more universities will close.

These predictions are based in part, they said, on growing questions about the overall value of a college education.

Drop in births

Prognosticators also point to the significant drop in the U.S. birthrate during the Great Recession. Between 2008 and 2013, an estimated 2.3 million fewer babies were born, and data from the National Center for Health Statistics show the birth rate continuing to trend downward, an average of 1% per year annually since 2014. (Carrie Brown McWhorter)

In the past five years, some 65 colleges have closed, merged with other schools or announced plans to close.

Higher Ed Dive

April is Second Chance Month.

123rf.com

The God of the second chance

Churches can raise awareness of post-incarceration issues, help people unlock a better future

By Denise George

TAB Media

Alabama has an incarceration crisis. In 2018, 946 out of every 100,000 residents were incarcerated, placing the state in the top five within the United States. More than half of the state's incarceration population is black.

Women and people of color constitute a frightening rise in the number of Alabama inmates over the past 40 years. Between 1978 and 2017, our state's number of female prisoners increased more than sevenfold. Black imprisonment increased 193%.

In the U.S., incarceration has increased more than fourfold since 1970. One in every three people (approximately 77 million in 2018) has a criminal record and as a result most likely suffers discrimination, as well as limited access to education, employment, housing and other opportunities.

The number of women inmates in the U.S. also has soared. Currently, almost 1 in 4 of the nation's prison admissions is female.

What do these statistics mean for the Church? Half of all Americans have a loved one who either is or has been incarcerated. Men and women in the nation's congregations have been greatly affected by crime and imprisonment, even if they don't talk about it.

Facing obstacles

After serving a prison sentence and being released back into society, a returning citizen can face seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Recidivism, the tendency of a convicted criminal to reoffend, is high, with more than 75% of returning citizens re-arrested within five years.

In 2017, Prison Fellowship, a ministry founded by the late Charles Colson, a convicted criminal who served time in an Alabama prison, launched the first Second Chance Month.

The organization designated April as the month for churches nationwide to raise aware-

ness about the problem of incarceration and to help people with criminal records unlock a better future. Second Chance Month has the potential to reach 70 million Americans who have paid their debt in prison to society.

Preparing inmates

Prison Fellowship Ministries works on the belief that "no life is beyond the reach of God's power." The organization envisions "a future in which countless prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families are redeemed, restored and reconciled through the love and truth of Jesus Christ." To that end, PFM seeks "to prepare Christian inmates to become leaders of their families, communities and churches once they are released back into the community."

It also endeavors "to support prisoners' families, helping them become reconciled to God and one another through the power of the gospel and supported by transformative relationships with local churches."

What can your church do? Here are some practical suggestions:

- ▶ Identify people in your congregation who are, or have been, in prison.

- ▶ Pray for them and their families, especially their children.

- ▶ Write regular notes assuring them your church loves and prays for them. Send cards on special occasions.

- ▶ Show acts of kindness, including them in church activities, becoming knowledgeable about and helping them with specific individual, personal and family needs.

- ▶ Invite newly released prisoners and their

families into your church. Let them know they are an important part of the congregation.

- ▶ Educate church members about the problems caused by imprisonment. Research the increasing national and state incarceration rates and the barriers faced by returning citizens as they try to integrate back into society.

- ▶ Form special groups within the church to study and discuss how to appropriately minister to prisoners and their families.

- ▶ Investigate and partner with agencies and programs in your community that actively address prisoners' needs.

- ▶ Invite speakers to your congregation to talk about the challenge incarceration brings and to provide practical ways the church can respond.

- ▶ Host a Second Chance Sunday emphasis in your church. Prison Fellowship Ministries will provide a free Second Chance toolkit, a carefully cultivated guide with material and activities that will enable your church to create a climate

where everyone feels loved, embraced, cared for and remembered in spite of painful past experiences.

PFM's free Second Chance toolkit includes:

- ▶ sermon notes
- ▶ a discussion guide for small groups
- ▶ sample bulletin inserts
- ▶ children's coloring pages.

Scripture calls and encourages Christ's followers to minister to the

imprisoned. The writer of Hebrews urges: "Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured" (Heb. 13:3).

For more information on prison ministries in Alabama, go to tabonline.org/prisons.✝

To receive the free Second Chance toolkit from Prison Fellowship Ministries, go to tabonline.org/toolkit.



prisonfellowship.org/secondchances

‘Until there is not a need’

Alabama Baptists provide recovery assistance following March 25 tornadoes

By **Dianna L. Cagle**
TAB Media

Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief responded quickly following the March 25 tornado outbreak that left five dead and carved a path of destruction through several counties.

“Alabama is no stranger to the wrath of Mother Nature,” said Gov. Kay Ivey in a March 29 press conference at Oak Bowery Baptist Church, Ohatchee. “It comes all too frequently.”

ABDR quickly set up command centers in key areas across the state, and volunteers were assessing even as the rain continued following the tornadoes.

Oak Bowery’s fellowship hall was filled with people from the community waiting out the storm.

A donation center set up at Oak Bowery provided cleaning supplies and necessities for those impacted

by the tornado. The Calhoun County EMA set up at the church to operate services for the community. Ohatchee Senior Center also used its space to provide supplies.

Five people were killed in Calhoun County: Joe Wayne Harris, 74; Barbara Harris, 69, Ebonique Harris, 38; James William Geno, 72; and Emily Myra Wilborn, 72.

A seventh-grader was injured in the Harris family home. She was taken to Children’s of Alabama.

“She had multiple injuries and is recovering,” said Jennifer Craig,

a member of Hill Crest Baptist Church, Anniston, and Ohatchee High School counselor.

Hill Crest was the command center for ABDR efforts in Calhoun County. Assessors started work March 25 and continued working with chainsaw



Photo by Cynthia Watts

An Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief chainsaw worker helps clear debris in Huffman from the March 25 tornado.

teams throughout the weekend and into the following week.

Craig spent Friday and the weekend on the phone trying to contact all the high school students — about 450 of them. She was helping fill needs through the churches and local emergency officials.

Oak Bowery has offered three meals a day since the tornado came through.

“Our ladies said, ‘We’ll feed until there is not a need,’” said Katie Fordham, wife of Oak Bowery’s pastor, Sam.

Central Alabama

Three ABDR teams were working in Helena in Shelby County on March 26, the day after the tornadoes struck there.

While volunteers were setting up a command center at Indian Springs First,



Photo courtesy of Cynthia Watts

Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief chaplain Cynthia Watts shares stories with children at the Huffman ABDR Command Center. Disaster Relief was deployed following the tornado March 25.

those teams were focused on a small neighborhood near Old Town Helena.

“We’ll be here as long as the work is needed,” said John Hayes, the ABDR white hat for the site and member of Adamsville Baptist Church.

Huffman Baptist Church,

which also served as a command center, hosted a chainsaw team from Limestone Association and cooks from Birmingham Metro Association.

Chaplains from Limestone and Birmingham Metro were on the scene as well. ✝



Photo by Dianna L. Cagle

A donation center set up at the Ohatchee Senior Center in Calhoun County provided cleaning supplies and necessities for those impacted by the March 25 tornado.

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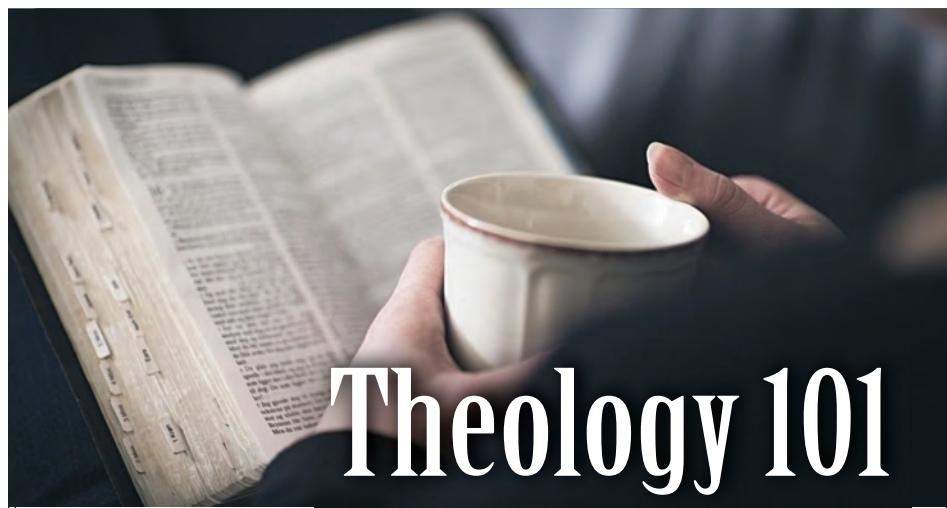
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Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Easter Reflections

Miracle Became the Message

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
TAB Media

Last week our thoughts centered on the biblical record of the real physical death Jesus experienced, which set the stage for the miracle of His bodily resurrection. We continue this week with reflections related to the first Easter.

The message of a real resurrection was first voiced by angelic messengers stationed at the empty tomb, who announced it to the women who brought spices they had expected to place on the lifeless body of Jesus. After asking the women why they sought “the living among the dead,” the heavenly messengers declared, “He is not here but is risen!”

Then they called on the women to remember the words of Jesus uttered earlier while still in Galilee: “The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again” (Luke 24:7). His promise had been miraculously fulfilled.

Testimony of life

After Mary Magdalene encountered the risen Christ, she sought out the disciples to tell them she had seen Him and that He had spoken to her (John 20:18). Thomas was not present to hear Mary’s testimony, but those disciples who did hear her relayed it to Thomas (John 20:24–25).

After their encounter with the risen Christ, the two Emmaus visitors retraced their steps to deliver to others the message of a real resurrection. That miracle became

the topic of the message His followers began to proclaim. In time, the disciples became bearers of the message “in Jerusalem, and in Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

They were convinced that we all serve a risen Savior. That message began to spread and was heard by religious leaders, government officials and common people. But it was not a message only for that day. It has been and is the Church’s message throughout the ages and for all the world.

Message of hope

The Easter message has crossed centuries, spanned continents and crossed oceans resulting in the message reaching us and becoming our message to share with others. Those who have heard and believed now have a message of hope to be told to the nations.

The content of our message is concisely stated in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4: “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”

Before we can share this message effectively, we must believe it wholeheartedly. 🌿

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.



School has provided jobs, led people to faith, Gibson says

(continued from page 1)

Corts. Another was the Dellanna West O’Brien School, named after the late national Woman’s Missionary Union executive director. That school is located outside Monrovia, Liberia, and serves preschool through high school age students.

Gibson wanted the children to have a school within walking distance where they could learn life skills and, most importantly, grow as disciples of Jesus.

“We wanted to prepare people for life,” he said.

He bought the land for the Dellanna West O’Brien School in 2003 using funds raised through Eddie Gibson International Ministries, which is based in Birmingham. During his years in Alabama, he had served as a pastor of Baptist churches and earned a master of divinity from Beeson Divinity School.

He also became close to a number of Southern Baptist missions advocates, including Corts and O’Brien.

O’Brien “listened to my heart to come back to Liberia and serve,” Gibson said, noting that she became like a “missions auntie” to him.

And after she, her husband, Bill, and others accompanied Gibson on a vision trip there and encouraged him to keep going, he named the school after her.

The Dellanna West O’Brien

School kept growing without incident until 2015, when the controversy over the land began. For the past six years, Gibson said he’s been trying to resolve it in court.

But since the situation escalated, he’s now focused on helping the school decide what to do next and how to keep going.

“The students, the community, our ministry supporters — everyone wants us to rebuild to the glory of God,” said Gibson, who also currently serves as pastor of Brewster Road Community Church in Birmingham. “We’re praying for wisdom, praying to make the right decisions.”

He said the people around the school love the school so much that they named the community surrounding it Dellanna. The impact has been broad. The school has provided jobs for some in the community and taught needed job skills to others. And Gibson himself has baptized both students and teachers who have decided to follow Jesus.

Despite everything that’s happened to the school’s facilities, the approximately 300 students haven’t stopped meeting. They’ve done lessons outside under trees and sat under tarps when it’s rained.

“I came here (on this recent trip) to thank them for not giving up on the school,” Gibson said. “My heart is aching, but I’m trusting God.” 🌿

For more information, visit brccbham.org/dellanna-west-o-brien-school.

O’Brien’s first name has a second ‘n’ but one ‘n’ in the website address is correct.



Photo courtesy of Eddie Gibson

A teacher writes on the chalkboard in a tarp-covered classroom. Classes have continued at Dellanna West O’Brien School in Liberia, even though the buildings have been destroyed. School leaders are planning to rebuild.



MEN'S MINISTRY Swap Shop



When it comes to ministering to and through men there are a lot of tools available, and we know it can be overwhelming to wade through all the resources. We want to help! Join us for a meal and a time to swap ideas on the tools that are effectively helping men to grow into spiritual maturity in your area. We want to hear what tools you've found useful and explore some that you may not have heard about yet.



There is no cost and each Swap Shop starts at 6:30 pm and ends at 8. If you help with men's ministry in any way – lay leader, pastor, education/discipleship minister, men's Sunday School teacher, men's ministry director – this opportunity is for you! Here are the dates and locations:

- April 15**, Westmeade Baptist Church, Decatur
- April 22**, Taylor Road Baptist Church, Montgomery
- April 29**, Cottage Hill Baptist Church, Mobile

For more information or to register, visit alabamamen.org/events or contact Larry Hyche, lhyche@alsbom.org, (334) 613-2268.



Shocco Springs team returns to Ecuador

By Grace Thornton
TAB Media

Matt Cowart said a team from Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega, was the last to visit Hacienda el Refugio — a partner camp in Calacali, Ecuador — in early 2020 before travel got shut down because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

And in March 2021, they were the camp's first team to come back.

"It was definitely a blessing to get to be there," said Cowart, missions team leader and IT director at Shocco. "We had an amazing trip."

As expected, they had some COVID-19 related issues to deal with along the way — the main one being how to get tested before they came back home.

The current CDC guidelines require a negative COVID-19 test within three days of return travel to the U.S. (or proof that the traveler has recently recovered from COVID-19) in order for a traveler to be allowed back into the country.



Photo courtesy of Matt Cowart

A team from Shocco Springs works on a ropes course during a recent trip to Hacienda el Refugio in Ecuador. The two camps have partnered in different ways for the past five years.

"It took a lot of communication between us and the camp we were going to," Cowart said.

And it came with some changes along the way too. The way they'd originally planned to get tested before returning fell through, so they had to arrange new plans.

They also had to get tested before they went to Ecuador and had one team member drop out because of a positive test.

But the travel itself wasn't a problem once the remaining nine team members got in the air and had solid plans for how to get tested before they returned.

Easing concern

"It was still pretty light with not as many people traveling unless they need to," Cowart said. "In Atlanta, the airport wasn't as busy as it normally would be, and that helped ease some concerns."

The camp also had taken extra safety precautions while the team was there to keep both camp staffs healthy, he said.

"All of the hurdles cleared up nicely, and we felt like God intended for us to be able to be there and serve with them," Cowart said.

While there, the Shocco team continued projects they've worked on in the past, like expanding Hacienda el Refugio's ropes courses. They worked on a low ropes course called a Whale Watch, started clearing the ground and building a trail for another ropes course and helped construct a gazebo.

Russell Klinner, Shocco's executive director, said he loves the way the partnership between the two camps has strengthened.

"It has grown over the past five years into a fruitful reciprocal relationship — not one where we use each other for gain, but one where the

true desire is to serve each other," he said. "Our staff and theirs have seen relationships with each other grow to see that we are truly brothers and sisters in Christ working together in service for Christ."

Klinner took his wife and two teenage children with him this year for the first time, and that was an impactful experience, he said.

"This year they were able to experience firsthand what I had been trying to convey

with words," he said. "The love of the people, the culture, the food, the language, the architecture, the work ethic and the life outside

the U.S. came to life for them."

It could've easily been a trip that got canceled this year for a variety of reasons, Klinner said. "On more than one occasion as a team we contemplated canceling but knew God had a plan for the trip." ✝

To learn more about current CDC travel restrictions and guidelines, visit tabonline.org/cdc-travel.



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Swedenburg continues leading CP efforts as consultant

Jim Swedenburg says he loves talking with people and seeing it click. “My favorite part is seeing people come to understand something about finance or tax law,” he said.

For years as director of the office of Cooperative Program and stewardship development at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, Swedenburg’s role was to help people understand why the financial part of church life is so important though it’s often underemphasized or ignored.

“One of the things I teach is internal controls. A lot of churches don’t have them, and they need them,” he said. “They can protect a church from embezzlement or theft and make it hard for people to fall into those things when they are having a hard time.”

Good stewardship is important — in the New Testament, Jesus talks about finances and possessions more than heaven, Swedenburg said.

‘A biblical thing’

“It’s a biblical thing to talk about,” he said.

Though Swedenburg is passionate about the subject, he didn’t start out in that role. He came on board at the SBOM in 1987 as youth/adult associate and events coordinator in the Sunday School office. In the years since then, he’s served in five different offices and had his chair parked in 12 spots in the

SBOM’s two buildings.

One of his roles was to serve as associate to the associate executive secretary for a few years, then as coordinator of annuity and insurance services.

“When I began moving in this direction, I had to do some studying after I already had the job,” he said.

Now investments, annuities and 403Bs are his second language.

Eventually he became director of the CP and stewardship development office, then in November 2020 that office merged with another to become the communications and Cooperative Program office.

And April 1, Swedenburg retired from full-time work. He’s now serving in a part-time consultant capacity.

“I’ve enjoyed the work, I’ve loved the people and I’ve enjoyed all three executive directors I’ve worked with,” he said. “It’s been a good trip. I’m glad I get to keep working a little bit longer and help people a little longer. I just won’t be here all day every day.”

Rick Lance, SBOM executive director, said Swedenburg “served so faithfully” as a state missionary for 33 years.

“He has given service to several areas of ministry,” Lance said. “We look forward to him continuing to give guidance to our promotion of the Cooperative Program. We are grateful to God for his time with us at the State Board of Missions.” (Grace Thornton)



SWEDENBURG

“I’ve enjoyed the work, I’ve loved the people and I’ve enjoyed all three executive directors I’ve worked with. It’s been a good trip.”

Jim Swedenburg

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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Purpose Baptist Church of Opelika is prayerfully seeking God’s choice for our next full-time pastor. Please send resumé to: purposebaptist@gmail.com. Visit our website: www.purposebaptist.churchspring.org.

PASTOR

Talladega Creek Baptist Church, Talladega, Ala., is prayerfully seeking a full-time pastor. Upon the Lord’s guidance, please submit resumé to: slocke@crba.org.

PASTOR

First Baptist Church, Flomaton, Ala., is seeking a full-time pastor. Please email resumé to: Flomatonfbc@gmail.com or mail to: P.O. Box 765, Flomaton, AL 36441.

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

Paden Baptist Church is seeking resumé for bivocational pastor. Please send resumé to: Paden Baptist Church, 900 Padenreich Avenue, Gadsden, AL 35903. padenbaptistchurch@yahoo.com.

WORSHIP LEADER

Grace Church, Bessemer, is looking for a worship leader for their Sunday AM service. Send resumé and video demo link to: churchoffice@gracechurchbessemer.com.

PART-TIME WORSHIP LEADER

First Baptist Church of Guin, Ala. Receiving resumé and videos at church@fbcguin.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 ac-

cepting 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: studentsearch@parkwaybaptist.net or by mail to: Student Search Committee, Parkway Baptist Church, 12465 Olive Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63141-6499.

OTHER POSITIONS

FINANCIAL MINISTRY ASSISTANT

Glynwood Baptist Church, Prattville, Ala. This is a full-time job, Monday-Friday, with salary and BCBS health insurance and retirement benefits, as well as paid vacation and sick leave. Applicants need experience with QuickBooks Pro or Non-profit, using payroll, accounts payable, credit card and deposit functions; also experienced with Microsoft 365 Office. Experience with online giving/receipts a plus. Glynwood Baptist is a member of the Autauga Baptist Association and cooperates with the Alabama Baptist Convention and SBC. For an application and more information contact the church office at 334-361-9180 or email to: glynwoodbc@knology.net.

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MINISTRIES

NEW: STORIES PODCAST

Have you checked out TAB Media’s new Stories serial podcast yet? If not, then you’ll want to catch the first season featuring Sammy Gilbreath, state missionary in evangelism with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. And if you have listened to season one, then be on the lookout for season two. It’s coming soon. TAB’s Grace Thornton writes and produces the shows. Listen to the Stories podcast anywhere you get your podcasts or at thealabamabaptist.org/explore/stories.

TAB DIGITAL

In addition to the print edition The Alabama Baptist also releases a weekly digital edition of the newspaper to every subscribers’ email. The digital edition comes in pdf form as well as part of an app and is included with all subscriptions. To update your email address, contact subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org.

TAB HIGHLIGHTS

TAB Highlights is an email newsletter delivered every Monday-Wednesday-Friday with the day’s top stories from the world of faith-based news. Headlines come from international, national and Southern Baptist coverage as well as one trending story from the week. TAB Highlights also provides a link to the latest podcast from the TAB Media team. To sign up, email news@thealabamabaptist.org.

Alabama couple prepares to plant church in Denver

By **Grace Thornton**
TAB Media

When Justin McKay got married, he and his wife, Lacy, headed to Denver for their honeymoon.

And on their first day there, God did something surprising — He started showing them His call on their life as a married couple.

“On our first day, we were driving around, and we’re in awe of the Rocky Mountains,” said McKay, who grew up at Bluff Park Baptist Church, Hoover (now the Church on the Bluff). “Within minutes of that, we were driving around this small town called Golden, and we said to each other, ‘Where are all the churches?’ In Alabama there are churches everywhere.’”

Before that trip, he’d never realized that the West is a pre-Christian place, he said. “We came back just stunned from that.”

McKay had been a worship pastor up until that point in Alabama, and he began to think that maybe one day he should look for a job like that out in Colorado.

But it wasn’t long before he began to sense God impressing on his heart that he should make the transition to lead pastor and plant a church.

It took several years to get equipped and ready, but they started a church planting residency in early 2020, got affirmed in the summer and started in 2021 growing their launch team.

“We’re in the first stage of church planting, where we engage the city,” McKay said. “We’re meeting as many people as we can, getting to know local business owners and praying for the Lord of the harvest to bring people to us.”

They’re finding as many ways to engage with the community as they can, from playing disc golf to joining the Chamber of Commerce. The idea is to invest in the people of the community, make disciples and then from

those disciples plant the church.

Already they have 12 people on their launch team, with a goal of having 50 by the end of the year to plant The Local Church in the Arvada area of Denver.

“Please pray that our launch team continues to grow — that’s a huge thing for us,” McKay said. “We really need people who want to join our launch team, specifically people who have a missional mindset.”

He said their heart-beat is to change the world by reaching their local area.

McKay also asked for prayer that he and his wife would

have favor with the people of Arvada, that they would love people well while holding fast to the word of God. Their hope is that people would see their love and trust them when it comes to matters of truth.

“Our vision is to help orient people

not around creation but the Creator,” he said. “People move here to be near the mountains and the beautiful landscapes. We want to help them worship the Creator behind those mountains they recreate in and love.”

He said his team is actively looking for more partners in Alabama who can come alongside them in their mission to reach the local community there in Arvada. He said the churches he’s done ministry with — like Bluff Park Baptist and Capstone Church, his sending church in Tuscaloosa — have made a big impact on their mission already.

Next generation

“I’m a product of a small Southern Baptist church, and I want our churches of all sizes in Alabama to know they are raising up a generation of ministers,” McKay said. “What they do matters.”

For more information, visit thelocalchurchco.org or follow them at [@thelocalchurchco](https://www.instagram.com/thelocalchurchco). To learn more about partnering with the McKays’ work in Denver, email justin@thelocalchurchco.org.



Photo courtesy of Justin McKay

JUSTIN & LACY MCKAY

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3 stories you should know



Photo by Doug Rogers

SBOM Executive Director Rick Lance (right) and disaster relief strategist Mark Wakefield (left) pray with Shannon Allen, pastor of Ashby Baptist Church, Brierfield, in Bibb Association, during a March 30 visit. Lance presented Allen with a check on behalf of Alabama Baptists to assist with repairs after damage from a March 25 tornado. Funds also were provided to Wellington First Baptist, Calhoun Association, and Rainbow City First Baptist, Etowah Association, which also sustained damage. Read more on page 8. (Doug Rogers)

US church members in minority, poll finds

Church members are in the minority for the first time in at least eight decades, with just 47% identifying with a congregation, Gallup said in a poll released March 29. The number was 70% in 1999.

A growth in adults with no religious preference, especially those in younger generations, and lower rates of church membership among people who do have a religion are major trends driving the decline, Gallup said. The data could also reflect generational differences regarding how church membership is valued and changes stemming from how people engage with churches today, said New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary apologist Bob Stewart.

A summary of the findings is available at news.gallup.com. Read more at tabonline.org/church-members. (BP)

Funeral benefit scams on the rise, FEMA says

Families of COVID-19 victims should beware of scammers seeking to register them for funeral assistance, warns the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

FEMA announced a new benefit on March 19 that will reimburse family members of people who died of COVID-19 for funeral costs.

On its website, FEMA reports an uptick in scammers contacting family members offering to help them get assistance.

FEMA said it does not contact people prior to them registering for assistance and has not sent any notifications out about the benefit.

FEMA reimburses up to \$9,000 per funeral for COVID-related funeral costs incurred after Jan. 20, 2020, with some restrictions.

To learn more, go to tabonline.org/covid-funerals. (TAB)

Headline news from around the Southeast

Florida

Coming to Christ was difficult for Jamaican Michael Chin Quee — not because he lacked the desire but because no one shared the gospel with him. Since finally hearing the gospel and becoming a Christian, Quee witnesses to anyone and everyone he can. An active member and deacon chairperson at Parkridge Baptist Church, Coral Springs, Florida, Quee urges others, “Be bold and step out and share the gospel with love,” the Florida Baptist Witness reported.

Georgia

Worship center renovations at Pickett’s Mill Baptist Church, Dallas, Georgia, led to the rare find of a used pulpit with deep Christian roots. After finding an antique pulpit on eBay, Pastor Johnny Nix talked with the antique dealer and discovered Fanny Crosby, who wrote more than 8,000 well-loved hymns, had stood behind that

pulpit three times to sing. Among other hymns, Crosby wrote “To God Be the Glory,” “All the Way My Savior Leads Me” and “Tell Me the Story of Jesus,” The Christian Index reported.

Kentucky

Baptist Campus Ministry students at Kentucky’s Morehead State didn’t go on their typical weeklong missions trip during Spring Break this year, but they packed a lot of missions work into one Saturday. Twenty-one students partnered with four churches in the Gospel to Every Home initiative of the Kentucky Baptist Convention. Students knocked on doors, shared the gospel, invited people to church, visited shut-ins and more, Kentucky Today reported.

Tennessee

In June 2020, Betty Cress of Beulah Baptist Church, Kingsport, Tennessee, was shocked to

learn about a church in Puerto Rico that had been without water for a week. Moved by the need, Cress and her church’s Women on Mission group of about 10 raised more than \$20,000 — with help from partnerships with other churches and individuals — to dig a well for a church 1,600 miles away, the Baptist and Reflector reported. “This project renewed our hope,” Cress said.

Virginia

In January 2014, three missionaries from The Camp of Faith Church in Stephens City, Virginia, left America to meet an unreached Islamic people group in West Africa. Since then, this church of about 80 members has sent 20 teams to reach this people group with the gospel, and 20 people have made professions of faith. The church is now sending a family to serve full-time with the International Mission Board to continue the mission, the Proclaimer reported.

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

► **Sheila Smith** — wife of Scott Smith, pastor of Antioch Baptist Church, Oxford — died March 29 of COVID-19 complications. She was 62.



SMITH

She worked at Chalk Line Mill in Anniston for several years and also as the church secretary for Antioch Baptist.

Smith is survived by her husband of 43 years; sons, Shannon and Benjamin; and two grandchildren.

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► Years ago, when **Michael Adler** went to lead music ministry at a church in San Antonio, he followed a minister who had been at the church for 24 years before he retired.

“Making a culture shift in worship in a large church is like turning a battleship — you have to do it a little bit at a time,” he said.

Nine years later, he had an “amazing team,” and everything was going great — and he got a call from Danny Wood, pastor of **Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Birmingham**.

Wood wanted him to do the same thing at his church.

“My predecessor, Aubrey Edwards, had been here 24 years too,” Adler said.

Now Adler himself is the worship pastor with the long tenure — Shades recently honored him for two decades of service.

Wood called Adler’s time there “an amazing 20 years.”

“I get the opportunity every day to see the integrity of your character and the tenderness of your heart and the love you have for the Lord and for people,” Wood told Adler during the March 28 service.

Adler said through that time and the 18 years before as he and his wife, Linda, served in music ministry together, their heart has been to give away what they’ve been given. The two sang with traveling musical group Truth before starting church music ministry, and Adler said God started teaching him right away to sacrifice his own preferences for the sake of others.



ADLER

“If you give away what you’ve been given, your level of fulfillment will far exceed chasing after your art vision,” he said. “That will be our formula forever.”

BLOUNT ASSOCIATION

► **Pleasant View Church, Holly Pond**, will host a singing on April 18 at 5 p.m. Living Faith will provide special music. Earl Harper is pastor.

COVINGTON ASSOCIATION

► **Brian Smith** is the new pastor of **First Baptist Church, Opp**. He previously served as associate pastor of administration and discipleship at Heritage Baptist Church,



SMITH

Montgomery. Smith has a bachelor’s degree in religion from Huntingdon College in Montgomery; a master’s degree in biblical studies from Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky; and a doctor of ministry in theology and apologetics from Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. He and

his wife, Angela, have three children.

PICKENS ASSOCIATION

► **Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, Gordo**, has named **Hershel Owen** (center) as pastor emeritus and **Donald Latham** (second from left) as

deacon emeritus. Owen retired as pastor of the church in 2002 after 34 years of ministry there. He then served nearly 20 years at Emmanuel

Baptist Church, Gordo, before retiring again. Also pictured are (l to r) Latham’s wife, Vivian; Owen’s wife, Kaye; and Mount Pleasant pastor Geoff Elrod.



Photo courtesy of Lyle Dease

Prison Fellowship set to expand ministries

Prison Fellowship announced March 31 that the ministry is in the planning stages to start Alabama’s first Tier 2 Prison Fellowship Academy in addition to the six Tier 1 academies it already runs.

PFA’s aim is to use targeted curriculum, compassionate coaches and restorative community over a one-year period to “disrupt the cycle of destructive thinking” and prepare prisoners to be good citizens after release. It’s an intensive, Bible-based program. For a while now, Tier 1 PFA sites in Alabama have utilized Prison Fellowship staff and volunteers to lead students through about 200 program hours in 12 months.

What makes Tier 2 different is that it involves an onsite Prison Fellowship Academy program director, it offers more than double the program hours and it offers dedicated housing space for program participants. This allows participants to learn together, practice new behaviors together and change the culture of the prison.

Prison Fellowship is currently in talks with the Alabama Department of Corrections to start the first Tier 2 PFA in the state. It would join the state’s six already existing Tier 1 PFA sites — Bibb County Correctional Facility, Birmingham Community Based Facility, St. Clair Correctional Facility, William E. Donaldson Correctional Facility and Julia Tutwiler Prison for Women, which hosts two PFAs.

Nationwide, Prison Fellowship runs 129 academies in correctional facilities.

To read more about Alabama’s incarceration situation and the ministry of Prison Fellowship, see story, page 7, or visit prisonfellowship.org. (Grace Thornton)

Persecuted church

Algerian pastor, coworker convicted for ‘undermining’ faith of Muslim

ORAN, Algeria — A pastor and Christian coworker were convicted in absentia, fined and sentenced to imprisonment by an Algerian court for “undermining the faith of a Muslim.”

Rachid Seighir, pastor of Oraire Church in Oran and manager of the church’s bookstore, and Nouh Hamimi, a bookstore employee were charged under Algerian law, which criminalizes publication and distribution of materials “which aim to undermine the faith of a Muslim.”

Seighir said the charges are retaliation for

the acquittal he received upon appealing his 2008 conviction on the same charges. Oran’s governor closed the store in 2017. In 2018 and 2019, courts ruled the store could reopen, but the governor refused.

Several months ago, another Algerian Christian was fined and sentenced to five years in prison for receiving and reposting on Facebook a cartoon deemed insulting to Muhammad.

Islam is the state religion.

Since 2000, thousands of Algerians have put their faith in Jesus Christ.

Algeria is No. 24 on Open Doors’ 2021 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian. (MS)



Wikimedia



COOPERATIVE PROGRAM DAY IS SUNDAY, APRIL 25

The Cooperative Program is the lifeline of missions work in Alabama and around the world. In order to raise awareness of the Cooperative Program in your congregation, please consider implementing some of the following suggestions for Cooperative Program Day, April 25:

- Show a video clip in your service that highlights the Cooperative Program.
- Arrange to have a state missionary come to your church to speak about the Cooperative Program.
- Provide a bulletin insert or other CP information to your congregation.
- Have a special time of prayer for the ministries and missionaries supported by CP gifts.

You can learn more about the Cooperative Program at alabamaCP.org. Also, you'll find free Cooperative Program resources, including bulletin inserts, informational brochures, video clips, posters, bookmarks, DVDs, children's resources, missionary moments and other promotional materials, at cooperativeprogramresources.org.

For more information, contact Jim Swedenburg, jswedenburg@alsbom.org, (334) 613-2283.



SBOM adds staff to boost disciple-making ministry

By Grace Thornton
TAB Media

Daniel Edmonds said for his team — as with most people — the COVID-19 pandemic caused them to rethink everything.

Edmonds, who serves as director of the office of Sunday School and discipleship at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said the type of ministry he equips churches for had to change dramatically over the past year as meeting in person became difficult or even impossible.

Edmonds' office experienced a big change too — long-time staff members Jamie Baldwin and Eileen Mitchell retired.

Edmonds began to think creatively — and that brought on the hiring of new staff focused on making disciples and reproducing groups. Two of those new staff members — Steve Layton and Mark Gainey — are working with him to

produce tools called Connect316 and 4 Invitations to help churches “create a strategy that matches their mission,” Edmonds said. “We want to help them think through ‘Who are the people I’m trying to connect with? What’s the plan? And what are our steps to carry out that plan?’”

Layton is the new lead strategist for groups — Sunday School classes, life groups, connect groups, etc.

“Ultimately the goal would be to help groups strategize how to start another group. Churches start churches, groups start groups and disciples make disciples. That’s what we want to help facilitate,” Edmonds said.

Layton studied at Samford University and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and has a doctorate of ministry in leadership and administration.

Over the years, he has served in a variety of church staff roles, as well as in a

church consultant role with Lifeway. Most recently, he served as pastor of Riverchase Baptist Church, Hoover, and as discipleship minister at Brentwood Baptist Church in Tennessee. He also has served a number of churches in Alabama through the years.

Layton said he’s thrilled to be able to serve churches all over the state and help them reproduce groups.

“The foundational focus of my call to serve Alabama Baptists and the Kingdom is making disciples who are disciple makers in and through groups,” he said. “I look forward to equipping and encouraging them all.”

He said they are “dreaming big” when it comes to helping churches regather post-pandemic.

Gainey, pastor of Fultondale First Baptist Church, also has joined the team in a part-time role as lead strategist for disciple-making.

For a number of years

now, he’s been partnering with Edmonds’ office as part of the Disciple-Making Ministries of Alabama team,



GAINEY

a group of leaders and pastors who are making disciples who make disciples and equipping others to do the same.

“I’m excited about this role because it allows me to continue to fulfill my dual calling of pastoring a local church and pouring into other pastors and leaders,” Gainey said. “I believe God is doing something in our state, and I’m thrilled to be a part of it.”

His main area of responsibility will be to continue to build relationships with pastors and leaders and helping churches across Alabama “discover and implement a pathway to make disciples,” he said.

Before starting his role as pastor of Fultondale First in 2018, Gainey served as pastor of Deerfoot Baptist

Church, Trussville. He holds a bachelor’s degree from Troy University, a master’s degree from Samford University’s Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham and a doctorate from New Orleans Seminary.

Frank Jones, who for years has served as pianist for the Alabama Baptist State Convention and the Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference, will join Edmonds’ team on a contract basis, serving the state’s senior adults by coordinating events such as hymn sings and Abundant Living, a one-day event in

October with speakers and music.

“Frank is well known and well loved around the state,” Edmonds said. “He is excited about creating a few other ministries for senior adults and senior adult leaders.”



JONES

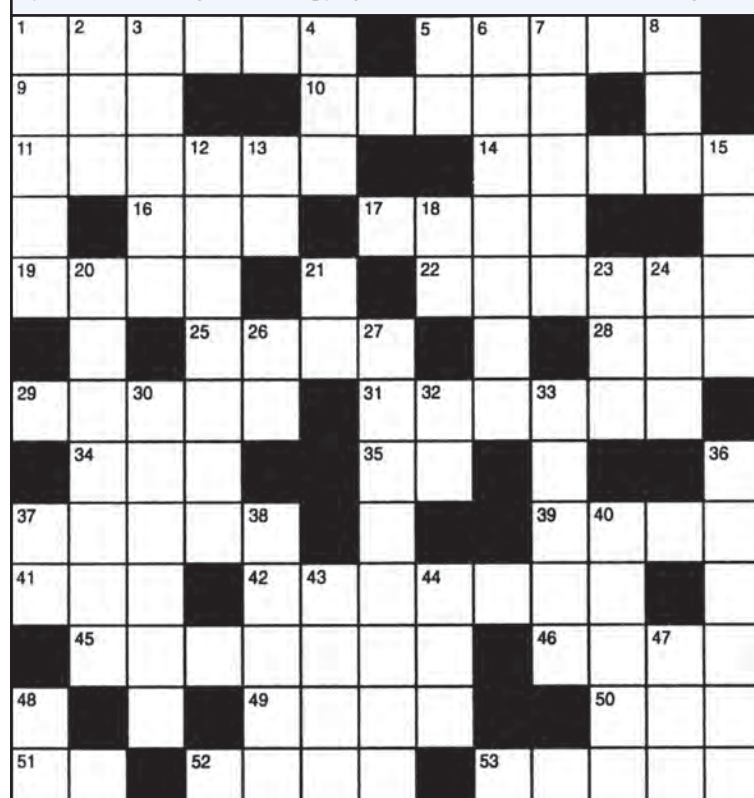
For more information about discipleship resources, contact Edmonds at 800-264-1225. 🌟



LAYTON

Christian Crossword

By Jeanne McDougall Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

- Their ___ shall continue forever. (Ps. 49:11)
- They went up into an ___ room. (Acts 1:13)
- There was no room for them in the ___. (Luke 2:7)
- He kept him as the ___ of his eye. (Deut. 32:10)
- Behold, it is a stiff ___ people. (Ex. 32:9)
- Peter, Peter, pumpkin ___.
- A cover or top.
- For we have seen His ___ in the east. (Matt. 2:2)
- The ___ is the word of God. (Luke 8:11)
- As they sailed he fell ___. (Luke 8:23)
- Thou art not a ___ of the law. (James 4:11)
- A large vessel for dying quantities of fabric.

- Sticky, yellowish sap from pine trees.
- Resurrection Day.
- Joshua, the son of ___. (Ex. 33:11)
- Frequency Modulation. (abbr.)
- Under his ___ shalt thou trust. (Ps. 91:4)
- Whosoever shall compel thee to go a ___. (Matt. 5:41)
- The beginning and the ___. (Rev. 21:6)
- ___ believed God. (Rom. 4:3)
- The angel ___ was sent. (Luke 1:26)
- Why do the heathen ___? (Ps. 2:1)
- Measurement of the surface of a closed figure.
- Precious stone.
- Before Christ. (abbr.)
- Baby goats.
- Learn first to show

Down

- He maketh my feet like ___ feet. (Ps. 18:33)
- I and my father are ___. (John 10:30)
- Your mother’s brother.
- Opposite of “happy.”
- Opposite of “down.”
- The one who ___ God shall escape. (Eccles. 7:26)
- He had found one ___ of great price. (Matt. 13:46)
- The loving hind and pleasant ___. (Prov. 5:19)
- Joking, teasing.
- Edward’s nickname.
- Attentive.
- Thank you in bank talk.
- ___ and the morning were the first day. (Gen. 1:5)
- ___ ye kind. (Eph. 4:32)
- Adam’s wife.
- Incline thine ___ unto wisdom. (Prov. 2:2)
- Opposite of “off.”
- Sports officials.
- The Lord’s Day.
- Morning. (abbr.)
- Judah’s daughter-in-law. (Gen. 38:11)
- That which was spoken by ___ the prophet. (Matt. 2:17)
- You and I.
- The name of Abram’s wife was ___. (Gen. 11:29)
- We are made in God’s ___. (Gen. 1:27)
- Flee as a ___ to your mountain. (Ps. 11:1)
- Alabama. (abbr.)
- ___ thee behind me, Satan. (Luke 4:8)
- Tuberculosis. (abbr.)

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For April 11

Explore the Bible

By Benjamin Stubblefield, Ph.D.

Visiting Assistant Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



SINNERS? Luke 19:1–10

We make some audacious claims. The Red Sea split. The sun stood still. A Nazarene rose from the dead. To some, those claims seem too impossible to believe. But perhaps what is the most difficult aspect of our faith to believe is that the eternal Son of God and Son of Man made friends with swindlers, lepers and beggars. He loved them. He enjoyed being with them. And He brings them into His family and fellowship.

Frankly, it's easier to believe that Samson killed Philistines with a donkey jaw than it is to believe that God becomes buddies with a thief. But here we have it. Jesus with Zacchaeus beggaring belief. Our Lord is willing to accept anyone who is willing to come to Him in repentance and faith.

Desperate (1–4)

Although Zacchaeus' name means "clean" or "innocent," we know from his profession and subsequent confession (v. 8) that he is anything but. Luke tells us that he was a "chief tax collector," which meant he had ample opportunity to reap an enormous profit from the tax collection system. This left him rich but marked him as a social outcast among his kinsmen.

Though curious about Jesus, he's got two problems: The crowd's too big and he's too short. But instead of simply going home, his desire to see Christ produces some innovation, and he climbs a short but strong sycamore tree to get a bird's-eye view.

Luke doesn't tell us what Zacchaeus was thinking, but it's easy to read between the lines. This man had a burden that he wanted Jesus to bear, a shame taken away. He was more than curious. He was desperate to see Jesus.

We need that desperation, don't we? Folks under the weight of their sin can find relief only in the one Way, Truth and Life if they'll seek after the Savior this way.

Friended (5–7)

We are not told how Jesus knew Zacchaeus. It could've been divine,

supernatural knowledge. But I like to think that the crowds were pointing him out. "Look at Zacchaeus up there! What do you want with us, more taxes! You thief! Get out of that tree!" And Jesus, gentle and lowly, also calls him to come down, not to scold him, but so He can be his friend.

Note the contrast: Zacchaeus gets glad, but the crowds get mad. They not only think Jesus is making a mistake, they believe this indicates poor character (5:30; 15:2). What is remarkable is that Jesus doesn't seem to care about their opinions. Like the Great Shepherd of Ezekiel 34, He has not come to rescue the sheep already in the fold but the sheep who have wandered from it. He's a friend to sinners, for it's those He came to save.

Repentant (8–10)

In response to Jesus' love and lordship, Zacchaeus repents and resolves to make right any past injustices. He must now "work out his faith with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). And, boy, does he! According to Darrell Bock, senior research professor of New Testament studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, in Judaism it was considered generous but imprudent to give away more than 20% of one's possessions.

Zacchaeus gives away half. And while legal restitution for extortion was 20%, Zacchaeus promises four times the amount if he has cheated "anyone out of anything." This is, truly, a man who's ready to use his money for the Lord.

Jesus does not cancel Zacchaeus' access to God because of his vocation, past or reputation. Rather, He came simply to reclaim that which was lost, to heal those who know they're sick. And in this way, Jesus never ceases to surprise me.

It's definitely amazing to think that the oil in Elijah's day never ran out or that people were healed when they came into Peter's shadow. But what catches me off guard more than anything is to see Jesus saving Zacchaeus — the Son of Man redeeming wretches.✝

Bible Studies for Life

By Rony Kozman, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies, Samford University



THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT John 15:26–27; 16:7–15

After His resurrection, Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father. The Messiah's resurrection from the dead is not the end of the story, but Jesus, the Son of David (i.e., the promised King of Israel) is now seated on His throne and advances God's kingdom throughout the earth. How does Jesus spread the Kingdom throughout the earth when He is not physically on the earth? Through His disciples. Through us. When Christ ascended, He gave us the Holy Spirit to enable us to advance God's kingdom with Him. The same Spirit who anointed Jesus for His ministry empowers Jesus' disciples.

The Holy Spirit empowers us to proclaim Jesus. (26–27)

Jesus told His disciples that when He departs from them — when He dies, rises and ascends — that He will send them the Holy Spirit (15:26). As the Spirit of truth, He will testify about the Son who is the truth (v. 26; 14:6). The disciples must also testify about Jesus.

A time of persecution and great difficulty is coming upon the disciples (16:1–4); and so, the disciples need the aid and empowerment of the Spirit. As followers of Jesus, if we experience trials or persecution when we testify about Jesus, we can take comfort: The Spirit of truth also testifies with us. The Spirit is on our side. We are not alone as we bear witness to the truth. Jesus told His disciples that when they receive the Holy Spirit, they will be empowered witnesses of Jesus (Acts 1:8).

The Holy Spirit convicts of sin. (7–11)

John's language evokes the language of a trial. We have already seen that both the Spirit and the disciples will testify to the truth about Jesus. The judicial theme continues here. The Holy Spirit "will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment." The "world" here is those who oppose Jesus and His followers.

The Holy Spirit is a more than

able witness who will demonstrate the world's error about sin. Though the world finds Jesus and His disciples culpable of sin, the Spirit will convict the world of sin — that the world did not believe in Jesus. The opposite of sin is righteousness. The world judged Jesus and the disciples guilty of sin and regarded itself as righteous in its assessment of Jesus and the disciples. The Holy Spirit will prove that Jesus was in the right and that Jesus was vindicated by His resurrection and ascension to the Father.

The world also was wrong in its judgment about Jesus and the disciples. The Holy Spirit will prove that the world's own ruler (i.e., Satan), and — by implication — the world itself "has been condemned" (see also John 12:31). It appears to the world that Jesus was condemned when He died. This is a paradox: Through Jesus' condemnation, God judged the world's ruler. And Jesus' resurrection proves the error (i.e., sin) of the world's judgment and the righteousness of God's judgment.

How does the Holy Spirit comfort the disciples in their persecution? Jesus does not promise that the Spirit will convict those who oppose the gospel of their sin so that they then believe. A different conviction brings comfort. In the end, the Spirit will prove the world wrong, and the Spirit will vindicate those whom the world condemns — Jesus and His disciples.

The Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus. (12–15)

Jesus says that when the Holy Spirit comes, He will glorify the Son. The Spirit glorifies the Son by guiding the disciples in the truth about the Son — the truth that the Son Himself received from the Father (see also John 8:26, 28, 40). The Son receives the truth and transmits it to the disciples. In the Son's absence (i.e., departure), the Spirit takes the truth from — and about — the Son and makes it known to us.

Even in Jesus' absence, we have the truth of the Son. Jesus teaches us through the Spirit.✝

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Carrie Brown McWhorter

TAB Media

Themes of miracles, hope connect songs on new MercyMe album

The uncertainties of the past year have forced most of the world to slow down and refocus on what's important, and that shift ultimately inspired the title of award-winning Christian band MercyMe's newest album, "inhale (exhale)," set for release April 30.

"One reason we're calling the album 'inhale (exhale)' is we all just want to sit back for a second and take a deep breath and be like, 'Okay this is what matters. This is what matters,'" said Bart Millard, lead vocalist for MercyMe.

The new album was a long time in coming together, Millard said.

"It was two years and one month to the day that we started writing for this new record until we finally finished," Millard said. "We would have had it done a year or so ago, but when the pandemic hit, it slowed everything down. We practically rewrote the album two or three different times."

'A rallying cry'

The first single off the new album, "Almost Home," has been out since October 2019. Millard describes the song as "kind of a rallying cry to just remind us to keep running the race ... to keep going. Heaven is just around the bend.

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.



MercyMe

Photo courtesy of MercyMe

We're almost home and now is not the time to give up or tap out."

The album also features "Hurry Up And Wait," a song released last May. Millard said the song "reminds us that those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength."

Other tracks include the buoyant "A Little Love" featuring Gary LeVox, lead vocalist for award-winning country super group Rascal Flatts. Disco legend Gloria Gaynor, who won a Grammy in 2020 for Best Roots Gospel Album for "Testimony," lends her signature vocals to "Brand New."

The album also features "Say I Won't," a powerful song inspired by the story of Gary Miracle, who worked with the band for many years on the road. Miracle contracted an infection and lost both

arms and legs in January 2020 after falling into septic shock.

The song's lyrics share Miracle's profound faith in the face of tragedy: "I'm gonna run/ No, I'm gonna fly/ I'm gonna know what it means to live/ And not just be alive. ... I can do all things/ Through Christ who gives me strength/ So keep on saying I won't/ And I'll keep proving you wrong."

Vulnerable moments

The music video for "Say I Won't" debuted in December and has more than 2 million views on YouTube so far.

The video begins with Miracle

introducing himself and continues with powerful images and videos that trace his long journey through hospitalization and intense rehab to resume life with his family.

The video captures vulnerable and victorious moments, including watching Miracle put on his prosthetic arms for the first time, re-learning to write and declaring that he will walk again.

The lyrics and images capture the depths of Miracle's suffering while shining light on God's ability to turn any tragedy into a stunning victory through perseverance, Millard said.

Overwhelming situation

"It's incredibly overwhelming to see Gary's situation," Millard told Fox News in an interview the day the video debuted on the network.

"But to watch his wife and kids ... what they're going through and standing by and supporting him is mind-blowing — it feels like it's a whole other level of love."

MercyMe released a lyric video March 26 for another song on the

album, "On Our Way," which features Millard's son Sam Wesley.

Like other songs on the album, the lyrics to "On Our Way" point to Jesus and the security and hope found in Him: "There's no fear that can bind you/ There's nowhere hope won't find you/ As long as we have hope/ We have everything we need/ We're on our way."

"I'm grateful that messages like that seem to resonate with people on a consistent basis because there is hope in that, and if they can still get fired up about what's to come then not all is lost," Millard said. 🙏



"I'm grateful that messages like that seem to resonate with people on a consistent basis because there is hope in that."

Bart Millard
lead vocalist, MercyMe

'Souls hang in the balance'

'Daunting task, but I'll persevere' says IMB missionary to Colombia

Travis Burkhalter and his wife, Beth, have served with the International Mission Board in Central and South America since 2010. In those years, their Spanish language skills have steadily improved, and they converse easily with most people in their city of Medellin, Colombia.

When God directed Travis and Beth to serve Indigenous people groups, they noticed a communication barrier. Many of these groups do not speak Spanish well, and some do not understand it at all.

"The people group we are trying to reach have fled to the city, due to violence in their home region, and live as internally displaced people," Travis explains.

"Though they share historical roots with other Indigenous peoples, this group now is culturally and linguistically unique. They do not speak Spanish or the languages of other Indigenous people groups."

Beth established a ministry called the Embera Bead Project to help the displaced families pay for rent, food, medical care and other daily needs.

By making and selling beaded jewelry, they are able to provide for their daily needs. This past year, they have relied on online sales because tourists have not been traveling to Colombia.

While the Burkhalters often spend long days helping their friends with physical needs, they understand that the greatest need the people have is a relationship with Jesus Christ. Travis spent six months sharing Bible stories with multiple Indigenous people groups in Spanish, but then

realized they were not fully understanding the gospel. Part of this was the limited Spanish that the people understood, but also the stories of the Bible are completely unknown to most of them.

"We do chronological Bible storytelling which means we start with the beginning stories and work our way through the Bible. They had never heard the creation story, never heard of Adam and Eve," Travis said.

Language learning

Travis decided to learn the language of one particular people group without any known believers. "We are convinced they need to hear the [gospel] stories in their heart language to fully understand. Learning the language is a long-term task that will take years."

The language is unwritten, and Travis has no resources to help, so he is developing his own lesson plans and training his language helper, a friend from the people group who speaks Spanish.

Each weekday, Travis travels into the organized crime-controlled neighborhood where his friends live. He usually meets with his language helper in his car — one of the safer places in a community of drug addicts, violence and fear. They spend two hours going over the daily lesson that Travis spent time planning the evening before.

Travis usually chooses a theme, like family or work, and as his friend speaks in the tribal language, Travis records the conversation into his phone and hastily writes out pronunciation keys that he can



IMB missionary Travis Burkhalter visits with friends from an Indigenous people group he serves in Medellin, Colombia.

study later. His friend shares cultural stories from his tribe to help Travis understand this people group, and Travis tells him Bible stories.

As time permits, Travis practices the language with other friends in the neighborhood. During his personal study time, he memorizes words, makes flash cards, listens and rereads to recorded conversations, and makes lesson plans for the following day.

'Extremely motivated'

"It is a daunting task," Travis says, "but I am extremely motivated because I know souls hang in the balance."

Weekly, when Travis meets with the participants in the Embera Bead Project, he shares a Bible story with them while his language helper — who has not yet accepted Christ — tells the story to the people from his tribe. Travis says his goal is to be able to tell the Bible stories in both languages effectively, but he recognizes the challenges.

"We are in a serious spiritual battle for the souls of these people," he says. "The enemy does not want me to learn the language, and he defi-

nately does not want these people to hear the truth of the gospel."

Travis says he recognizes that prayer is the most important tool — both in their humanitarian ministry with the bead project and in their evangelistic work with the Indigenous people groups. The Burkhalters are also thankful to Southern Baptists who provide for their family and support them with daily resources needed to fulfill their calling, like a vehicle, computer and phone.

"These tools provided by Baptists allow me to learn the language, and I am extremely grateful for how the Lord uses Baptists to fulfill the Great Commission," Travis says.

"As you are faithful to pray and give, I will be faithful to work hard and persevere until they all hear." (IMB)

EDITOR'S NOTE — Your giving to the Cooperative Program and to the IMB throughout the year support the work of missionaries like Travis and Beth Burkhalter. You can help meet the daily needs of the displaced people in Colombia by shopping with the Embera Bead Project at restaurantsonmission.org/embera.

"We are in a serious spiritual battle for the souls of these people. The enemy does not want me to learn the language, and he definitely does not want these people to hear the truth of the gospel."

Travis Burkhalter, IMB missionary