



The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

INSIDE



Meteorologist James Spann recalls 'heavy' responsibility of destructive day

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Gambling bills pass Alabama Senate

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Heroes of the Faith

Dr. Livingstone, I presume ... or his wife Mary

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Tuscaloosa residents gather their salvageable belongings.

Not forgotten

Photo by Joni B. Hannigan

By Grace Thornton

TAB Media

Alabamians still feel impact of tornado outbreak decade later

In mid-March, Alabamians got some news they didn't take lightly — weather conditions were shaping up in a way they hadn't in a decade. The warnings said they might produce storms like the ones that hit April 27, 2011 — a day when 62 tornadoes and their aftermath left some

250 people dead across the state. It was the first time since then that warnings had been so severe. Alabamians hadn't forgotten.

Shelves of bike helmets cleared out at local stores. Disaster relief volunteers got ready. Schools let out early, and people all over the state turned on the news and piled their children into bathtubs with pillows and mattresses.

Everyone watched and waited.

But this time, things were different. This time, big tornadoes tracked through rural areas, in many cases missing

populated areas. This time, everyone made it through the night, though tragically several would lose their lives a week later when more destructive storms came.

Forever changed

But as storms continue to roll through Alabama in 2021, people keep making their preparedness plans with an eye on April 27, 2011, a day that changed the state.

Mel Johnson, who served as disaster relief strategist for Alabama Baptists in 2011, said it may be 10 years ago, but it "feels like 10 minutes ago."

"Memories like that last a lifetime," he said.

As he served Alabama Baptists in that role, his job was to rally disaster relief volunteers from all across the state and nation and coordinate a cleanup and recovery effort that would take months. (To read more about how Alabama Baptists and others responded, see story, page 8.)

In addition to killing and injuring hundreds of Alabamians, the tornadoes destroyed millions of dollars in property across the state, including damaging or (See 'As churches,' page 6)



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The crossword puzzle
can be found on page 20.

Montgomery-area churches celebrate outdoor baptisms

In last week's issue, we shared the story of St. James Holt Crossing Baptist Church, Montgomery, which has seen God work in incredible ways during the COVID-19 pandemic.

After they started holding outdoor services, God began bringing people to them, and it wasn't long before Pastor Derek Murry was asking Neal Hughes, director of missions for Montgomery Baptist Association, if he knew where they could get a portable baptismal pool.

Top of the list

The church saw so many baptized that they found themselves at the top of Alabama Baptists' list for baptism ratio on this year's Annual Church Profile report — they baptized one person for every 1.2 church members in 2020. (The full report is now available online at tabonline.org/2020ACP.)

But St. James isn't the only Montgomery-area church that's seen the blessing of outdoor baptisms this year — a number of other congregations have also celebrated new believers that way, including The Church at Pike Road, Flatline Church at Chisholm and Mixtec Church, all shown on this page.

Hughes said it's been a blessing to see.



Photo courtesy of Montgomery Baptist Association
John Halbrooks (right), pastor of Mixtec Church, Montgomery, baptizes a new member in a portable baptismal pool.

"The Bible says to 'repent and be baptized.' It is the second act of obedience for every believer," he said. "I am glad to see Montgomery Baptists discovering creative ways in this COVID season to help new Christians identify themselves as followers of Christ, even if it means taking baptism outside." (Grace Thornton)



Photo by Neal Hughes
Steve Walters, pastor of The Church at Pike Road, baptizes a young man named Hunter in an inflatable hot tub that they've been using as a baptismal pool.



Photo courtesy of Flatline Church
Dewayne Rembert (left), pastor of Flatline Church at Chisholm, and Keelan Adams (right), associate pastor, celebrate with a newly baptized believer.

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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RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

By Jennifer Davis Rash

President and Editor-in-Chief



jrash@thealabamabaptist.org
@RashionalThts

Keeping the story of Alabama Baptists' resilience alive

EDITOR'S NOTE — To pay tribute to the 10-year anniversary of April 27, 2011 — a day that shook our entire state to its core — we are rerunning the following Rashional Thoughts by Jennifer Davis Rash, which ran in the May 26, 2011, issue of The Alabama Baptist.

Tears flowed uncontrollably early one morning about two weeks in, but the rest of the time I've lived in a sort of numbness.

One side of me was tortured to rush back to my hometown to help, and the other side was convinced that as long as I don't go, I won't have to relive the pain of what I saw.

I'm not sure if it's my survival mode kicking in or just plain denial, but I do know it all relates to April 27.

Do you sense it? It's surreal, like we are existing but not really living and that maybe, just maybe, we'll wake up soon and all of this will have just been a nightmare.

So much devastation, so much pain. If you are an Alabamian or have any connection to Alabama, you have been impacted in some way by the deadly tornadoes that stomped across our state, stealing an unfair share of lives, property and possessions.

Listening to so many who heard the horrifying whistle of that "freight train" and felt the pressure and intensity of the monster storm pulling with all its might sounds like something only found in the movies.

Seeing the vicious results duplicated over and over across two-thirds of our state is overwhelming.

Understanding the true loss that families have endured just shouldn't be.

But it is and life will forever be changed.

Still amid all the tragedy, there is hope and goodness. God is being glorified, and His people are shining through all the dirt and debris.

The love and compassion are magnified. An overflowing spirit

of giving shows no sign of fatigue. And those are all good things because this is going to be a long journey.

Many will seem to forget, returning to the routines of life.

And well-meaning friends outside the state will seem shocked to learn the tornadoes are still a vivid part of your life.

There may come a time you want to stand up and shout to those bustling around you:

"Hey, don't you remember what happened? How can you go back to your normal routines and not realize the pain and sadness here?"

But some type of normalcy will develop, even if the new normal revolves around the recovery and rebuilding effort.

Our driving need to begin

each conversation by asking how the other person fared in the storms and if their family is OK will fade.

We will find new topics of conversation, and it will be acceptable to talk about things other than the tornadoes.

For now, it is still too fresh, too real. It's only been a month and there's so much healing still to do.

How that process is supposed to play out, I do not know, but I do know God is with us and will not forsake us.

I know Alabama Baptists are committed for the long haul, and I know the incredible resilience shown so far by Alabamians brings to life the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, 16, 18:

"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ... Therefore we do not lose heart. ... So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

It has truly been an honor to help tell the story of what God is doing through Alabama Baptists, and we will continue to keep that story alive.✝



The property of Mountain View Baptist Church, Phil Campbell — my hometown church — was one of 11 Alabama Baptist churches destroyed when the monster tornadoes tore ruthlessly across the state April 27, 2011.

Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

Your Voice



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

Walking faithfully without seeing the bigger picture

By **Russell Klinner**

Executive director, Shocco Springs

Psalm 84:10–12: “For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in You!”

Enough light

A few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to take my family with me on my annual trip to Ecuador to work with Hacienda El Refugio, a partner camp for Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center.

Randomly throughout life, God has used “thin places” to open my eyes to His character. By thin places I mean times where I finally get quiet enough to truly listen to Him. During that trip, I was hit with another one of those God moments.

While at El Refugio each year, Shocco’s team has a tradition of hiking their Perimeter Trail which extends around the back of their property. Although the hike is roughly three miles total, the elevation gain to the top, combined with the already high altitude of the camp, causes the trek to be much more arduous and difficult than a typical 3-mile hike here in Alabama.

We started at about 9,000 feet of elevation and over the course of 1.5 miles, gained an additional 1,500 feet of altitude. To put it into perspective, the prominence of Mount Cheaha from bottom to top is 1,444 feet. So basically, we hiked the entire height of Mount Cheaha in 1.5 miles.

This would be my family’s first time to attempt the Perimeter Trail. We started our hike at 5 a.m. so we could be back in time for breakfast at 8 a.m.

As we headed out in the dark with our headlamps, I noticed the trail seemed a lot easier than usual, but I didn’t say much about it. Our whole crew made it to the top in the dark and headed back down in the daylight.

As we approached the lower portion, which is on an old road bed, we stopped to take pictures now that the sun was up. I think it was my son, Will, who said, “Man, this is steep! If I had been able to see this whole path, I probably would have quit.” But with just a headlamp and a few feet of visibility, one step at a time as the light revealed, we all made it.

Boom — it hit me. That’s the story of how God has worked in my life — just enough light to see the next step, over and over again.

He will not withhold

I immediately began to remember Psalm 84, especially verse 11 — no good thing — nothing that is truly

good in itself and which is good for us — no good thing will He withhold ... nothing really good, nothing that a man really needs, nothing pertaining to this life, nothing necessary to prepare for the life to come.

Watch God work

Through all my life experiences, I’ve always prayed for God to reveal the path He has for me: “Show me the end.”

My prayer has been, “God show me, and I’ll do it.” But after this experience on the Ecuadorian mountain top, it began to sink in that ultimately, what God withholds, I don’t need — including my desire for a long-term vision of the road-map ahead. And what God lets me go through, I need. I know it sounds simple, but it is impacting my daily walk with God dramatically.

Why had God not shown me the path ahead completely? He knew I did not need to see it. It builds our faith to walk in what He does reveal, one step at a time, without always knowing what’s at the end of the path. All throughout the years of ups and downs in my journey with God and Shocco, coupled with our COVID-19 experience last year, God has continued to provide when I pursue and walk uprightly.

I challenge you to look back at your life history, taking inventory of all the times God used crazy events for your good. Take notice of where God has you now. Then look ahead at where God is taking you. 🙏

May the Lord give you the awareness of His presence, the guidance of His purpose and the strength of His power.

Franklin L. Kirksey
Robertsdale, Ala.

Throughout Scripture we read of individuals discovering new dimensions of God’s faithfulness and character in the midst of their trials. That doesn’t mean they never questioned “Why?”

Asking “Why?” is a normal human response to troubles, but God is not put off by that question. It may be a starting point for a dialogue with God that opens doors to a renewed understanding of His plan for your life. There is something about the hour of necessity that sharpens our wits and focuses our attention like no other. The moments in which we need God the most are the moments when our eyes and ears will be most attuned to Him.

Pastor David Jeremiah
Shadow Mountain
Community Church
El Cajon, Calif.

Abiding in Christ rooted (my parents) in God’s truth and informed the task at hand. Daily seeking the Lord taught them how to walk in wisdom and steward their time for the glory of God. And they set an example for those of us who were watching.

Susan Lafferty
IMB missionary



KLINNER

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“God writes the gospel not in the Bible alone, but on trees and flowers and clouds and stars.”

MARTIN LUTHER

Regardless of who you are or where you consider yourself to be in regard to giftedness, God has blessed you with certain gifts and talents to be invested for His kingdom and glory. Each time you invest one of your talents, you do bring God glory. Each time you invest, God is gladly preparing a “Well done ...” statement for you. According to your actions, is God preparing words of commendation or condemnation?

George Yates
Church Health Strategist
Alabama Baptist State
Board of Missions

Those who know me are aware of certain parts of my life, but I don't like to share most things.

I feel like everyone has enough drama going on that they certainly don't need to hear all of mine.

It's hard for me to understand when the Bible talks about doing life with other people — about allowing the people in your life to help you during those really tough times. Even Jesus had 12 close friends to walk with Him and share life with, so why do I think I can do it on my own?

Amy Hacker
Theropetab.com

To all my friends on social media, but especially my “Christian” friends, I'd like to give you a word of caution. Regardless of how credible something may sound or how well it fits your narrative ... do a lit-

tle homework and check your facts *before* you post it. ... The spread of misinformation is just another form of *lying*, and if you are a Christian it is hurting your witness.

“I heard” and “they said” will get you in more trouble than any other four words in the English language.

Pastor Jeff Gardner
St. Elmo FBC
St. Elmo, Ala.

Don't be so focused on the trouble that you stop walking through the trouble. As you abide in Him and His word abides in you, you will access all you need to live a life of enduring faith.

Tony Evans
via Twitter

‘Until our time is finished’

Recently, a few of our senior adults were recognized for their faithfulness of service in Pickens Baptist Association. ... They have been and continue being “good and faithful servants” to our Lord. Their faithful service started me thinking about being a senior adult. Although I may not consider myself one, I am by some who do the statistics. By others, I am not. Either way, I'm not a “spring chicken.”

There are many phrases used to describe this age of life. Unfortunately, most of the terms used feel derogatory — declining years, golden age, winter of life, retirement age, elderly. These descriptions creep into the life of the local church and even into our own minds. We senior adults begin feeling useless or “past our prime.”

But as I look at these people who were honored, they have endured and been constant, persistent and stable in their Christian life. These are the proper words we should use for those of us who are aging well.

God inspired King Solomon to write that “gray hair is a crown of splendor ... attained in the way of righteousness” (Prov. 16:31).

The Bible also teaches that seniors need to continue living their lives to the full by training younger believers. It is not a time of retirement. It is not a time to slow down. There is still much to be done in our churches and communities.

Just as these brothers and sisters of Pickens Baptist Association received recognition on earth, we are striving for a heavenly reward from Jesus Christ. In Pickens County, there are about 3,000 experienced folks who must keep going forward. May we allow God to use us until our time here is finished!

Lyle Dease
Director of missions
Pickens Baptist Association

From the *Twitterverse*

@MattSmethurst

A life without Christ is as empty as his tomb.

@rayortlund

“All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness” (Isa. 40:17). God loves this world. But He isn't nervous, intimidated, scrambling. This view of God above makes us fearless, steady, calm down here. Let's have a great day.

@PaulTripp

Like he did with Peter, your Savior doesn't leave you to wallow in your sin and guilt but meets you with forgiving, restoring and commissioning grace.

@CSLewisDaily

“The terrible thing, the almost impossible thing, is to hand over

your whole self — all your wishes and precautions — to Christ.”
—C.S. Lewis

@timkellernyc

As many have learned and later taught, you don't realize Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have.

@GKCdaily

Whatever else is true, it is emphatically not true that the ideas of Jesus of Nazareth were suitable to his time but are no longer suitable to our time. Exactly how suitable they were to his time is perhaps suggested in the end of his story.

@Tabletalk

The gospel is only good news when we understand the bad news.
—@RCSproul

@ricklance

“Discipleship is about becom-

ing who Jesus would be if He were you.” —Dallas Willard

@myarnell

The Church [is] triumphant. Why all this fear about mortal dangers to the church? Jesus said we would conquer through proclaiming the Good News: “on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.” Stop wringing your hands! Start speaking his words!

@RevKevDeYoung

We ought to be living now in the assured hope of our living later.

@SamAllberry

There is a point when being *anti* something begins to subtly eclipse being *for* the gospel and gradually reshapes and displaces it. I know people who used to talk a lot about Jesus and now only really talk about ideology.

APRIL 27, 2011 • 10-YEAR LOOK BACK

As churches, volunteers rallied to recover, they sent statement of ‘help and healing’

(continued from page 1)
 destroying 45 Alabama Baptist churches in a single day.

The devastating storms were part of a greater tornado outbreak that stretched across six Southern states April 25–28, killing more than 300 people total.

“I do believe that as difficult as that was, the resiliency of our folks and our churches basically shined in the darkest hour,” said Johnson, who now serves as lead mission strategist for Autauga Baptist Association.

“It was a chance to make a good, strong statement that there is help and healing in a world of crisis.”

Bobby Thornton said his church — Mount Hebron East Baptist, Eclectic — is definitely a statement of healing to the world. After an F4 tornado swept it away, Thornton and other church members weren’t sure they would be able to rebuild.

“It looked like it was humanly impossible,” he said.

But donations started pouring in from across the country, and with help

from others, including First Baptist Church, Montgomery, and Lakeview Baptist Church, Auburn, they were able to build a new building worth \$600,000 from around \$100,000 in insurance funds.

125th anniversary

They’re debt free, they recently celebrated new members baptized into the church and on April 25, they’re gathering to celebrate where God has brought them in the 125 years since the church was formed and the 10 years since their building was destroyed. (For more on how other churches are reflecting on the anniversary of the storms, see story, page 9).

“God wanted us here for a reason. It’s just a blessing,” Thornton said. “The only thing I can say is it’s a miracle.” (Carrie Brown McWhorter contributed)

“I do believe that as difficult as that was, the resiliency of our folks and our churches basically shined in the darkest hour.”

Mel Johnson
 disaster relief strategist in 2011



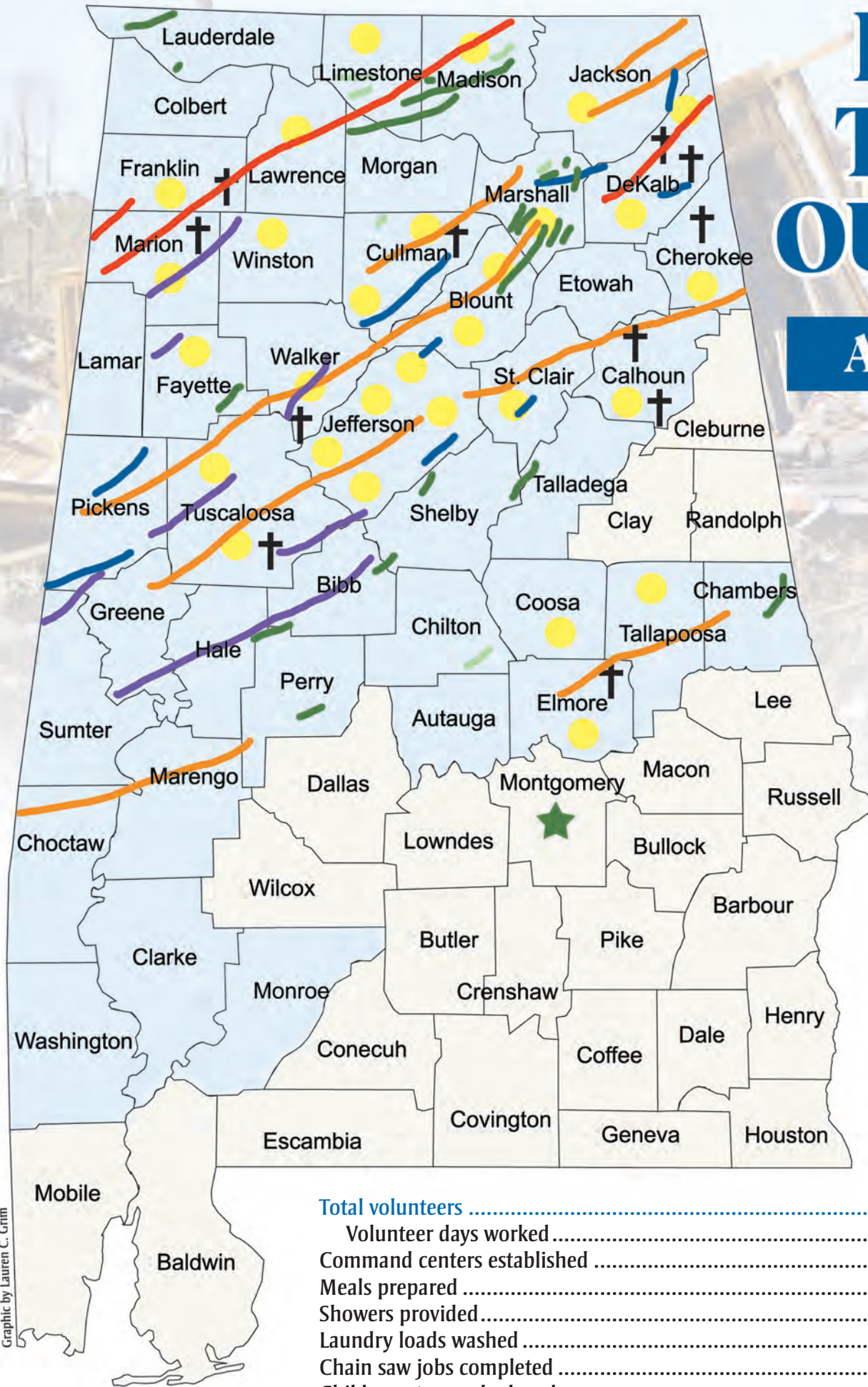
Photo by Joni B. Hannigan
 Mount Hebron East Baptist Church, Eclectic, was one of 11 Alabama Baptist churches destroyed by tornadoes that ravaged the state on April 27, 2011.



The congregation of Mount Hebron East Baptist Church, Eclectic, celebrates homecoming in the new building which was completed in 2013. They will celebrate homecoming again April 25 of this year — and mark the 10th anniversary of the tornado that hit.

HISTORIC TORNADO OUTBREAK

APRIL 27, 2011



- 42 of 67 counties declared federal disaster areas
- 29 associations where Alabama Baptist disaster relief efforts were focused
- ★ Main command center
- ✝ 11 Alabama Baptist churches destroyed
- EF-5 tornado
- EF-4 tornado
- EF-3 tornado
- EF-2 tornado
- EF-1 tornado
- EF-0 tornado



Graphic by Lauren C. Grim

BAPTIST RESPONSE

Total volunteers	more than 11,000
Volunteer days worked	10,753
Command centers established	15
Meals prepared	256,000
Showers provided	more than 5,000
Laundry loads washed	more than 1,700
Chain saw jobs completed	1,490
Child care teams deployed	2
Clients served	120
Child crisis response clients served (in schools)	350
Critical incident stress management chaplains deployed	365
Clients served	almost 6,000
Professions of faith made	53

Source: Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief, weather.gov

62 TORNADOES. AN ENTIRE STATE CHANGED FOREVER.

APRIL 27, 2011 • 10-YEAR LOOK BACK

Duane Moore (left) and Johnnie Williams of Michigan served on a chainsaw team removing fallen trees in Emily Spencer's backyard in Harvest. Baptists from Alabama's partner state came to serve tornado victims in their time of need.

Yellow shirt army



Photo by Doug Rogers

'Staggering' number of volunteers help, set precedent for future response

By Grace Thornton
TAB Media

Mel Johnson says he can still see the scars from April 27, 2011, on the landscape when he drives up I-22 in northwest Alabama. Those will be there for years. So will the tough memories and lingering grief many have from that day.

But one thing Johnson says those deadly storms didn't touch is "the mission of reaching our world."

He saw that mission advance a lot in the aftermath of that historic tornado outbreak.

Within 72 hours, volunteers from Alabama and 11 other states had rallied to help with disaster relief efforts across the state. That included all kinds of help from chainsaw and cleanup to child care and chaplaincy.

Johnson estimates there were more than 11,000 volunteers "with boots on the ground — that's a staggering number," said Johnson, who served as disaster relief strategist for Alabama Baptists in 2011.

Those volunteers poured into the lives of people who were picking up the pieces across the 42 counties declared federal disaster areas.

Chainsaw crews completed nearly 1,500 jobs, and feeding crews served more than 256,000 meals. Disaster relief units also provided more than

5,000 showers and washed more than 1,700 loads of laundry in the month following the tornadoes.

Chaplains walked door to door and visited schools to talk with hurting people in the community. They did trauma intervention, helping people cope with the loss and trauma of the tornadoes and offering encouragement and grief mitigation. Almost 6,000 clients were served, and 53 professions of faith were reported.

Baptist churches of all sizes also

became shelters and collection sites for necessary items to help people affected by the storms. Fellowship halls and lobbies looked like supply warehouses as donations poured in, and volunteers organized items and delivered them to individuals and areas in need.

Churches also started feeding ministries in areas where there wasn't a disaster relief feeding team, offering meals to storm victims, disaster relief volunteers and

first responders. Some of these ministries continued into the summer.

Baptist associations across the state settled in for long-term ministry. Birmingham Metro Baptist Association rallied leaders from churches and organizations in their area to form a program called Restoring Hope that could link churches with people in need. The churches of Calhoun Baptist Association also came

together and pulled off major community relief efforts in their hard-hit area. They repaired and even rebuilt a number of houses.

Rebuilding homes

Sand Mountain Baptist Association's long-term recovery committee also coordinated people and funds to rebuild a number of homes in affected areas near them.

And many more Baptist associations — including Tuscaloosa, Friendship, Sipsy, Pickens, Coosa River, North Jefferson, Franklin, Montgomery, Madison and Choctaw — collected and used resources and volunteers to help their neighbors recover.

The state's Baptist colleges joined the storm relief work, too. Samford University housed about 500 workers from the American Red Cross who came to the area to help with disaster relief. The university held a benefit concert for tornado relief, and Cumberland School of Law offered space to law students from the University of Alabama. Various other student groups helped people affected by the storm all over the state.

Students from the University of Mobile went to north Alabama to assist with relief efforts, and the student government sent a donation to the state's disaster relief fund. Judson students also participated in cleanup efforts and collected bottled water and nonperishable food items.

Overall, the response after the storms was "really tremendous," Johnson said. "It gives us a vivid picture of the heartbeat of who Southern Baptists are and our commitment to the cooperative spirit of Southern Baptist efforts."



Photo by Debby Faught

Chelsea McDill, a junior at the University of Mobile, spent a day in Concord with a team from the school helping clean up debris.



Photo by Doug Rogers

Daniel Bowers (left) and Leroy Cole volunteered to wash relief workers' clothes at the Covington Baptist Association laundry unit located in Rainsville.

He said there's "obviously concern" over the ever-looming potential for another series of devastating and deadly storms to roll through the state, but after 2011, Alabama Baptists are more prepared to "respond rather than react."

Fantastic training

"Our training is excellent, and Mark Wakefield (current state disaster relief strategist) has done a fantastic job of supporting and training volunteers," he said.

Johnson, who passed the baton to Wakefield in 2016, now serves as lead mission strategist for Autauga Baptist Association, but he hasn't stopped supporting state disaster relief work. He serves as disaster relief coordinator for district 12, which includes Autauga and Chilton Baptist associations.

"It's not a matter of 'if' but 'when' the next big disaster will take place," Johnson said. "I will always be involved and help train and work and coordinate and serve." (Carrie Brown McWhorter contributed)

Churches recover

Leaders reflect on 10-year journey since storms hit their buildings

By Grace Thornton
TAB Media

For Pastor Tommy Miller, it was like a bad dream that came back around like a boomerang 10 years later.

On April 27, 2011, a “devastating” tornado took the back end off of his church — First Baptist, Wellington — and threw the steeple from the front end across the road.

“Everything in it was destroyed,” Miller said.

But the church built back.

Before the tornado, “we had been to the point we were having to set up chairs because we were growing,” he said.

After the storm hit, they built a bigger building and continued to grow. Their first building had been underinsured, Miller said — about \$166,000, and their new building cost \$1.25 million. But the church set their minds and hearts to it, and in March of this year, they had a business meeting and announced they’d chiseled their debt down to less than \$300,000.

“That’s pretty good for a church our size,” Miller said.

But two weeks after that meeting — right at a month shy of the 10th anniversary of the first tornado

— their new building got hit by another tornado.

“The devastating thing is that now we have to do it again,” Miller said. “We still have the original debt to pay, and we hope that our insurance will be enough to cover the new damages.”

As pastor, Miller said for him the days following the tornado felt tougher this time. He can’t put his finger on why, though he suspects it might have something to do with it coming right on the heels of a year dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic — not to mention the fact that he and his wife only recently recovered from a severe case of the virus themselves.

“I’ve felt more pressure and strain and stress this time than in 2011,” he said.

The area around the church also seemed harder hit this time, which brought even more emotions for church members — but it gave them more opportunities to minister too, Miller said. Church members set up grills in the parking lot of their dam-



2011

Photos by Lisa Patterson

Above: The building of FBC Wellington was destroyed by a tornado in 2011 that threw the steeple from the front end across the road. **Left:** The church was able to meet in its Family Life Center, which was untouched by the storm, until its new building was completed.



Photo by Curry Evans

Mark Wakefield (right), state disaster relief strategist, visits with Tommy Miller, pastor of FBC Wellington, after the church was hit by a tornado again in March of this year. The church was given a financial gift from Alabama Baptists to assist with repairs.

aged church and were cooking and sending out food to the community — 2,500 meals over a three-day period.

“I think the church is doing really well,” he said. “Everybody was in kind of a daze, but I was really happy about the response. We didn’t sit around and mope. We did everything we could.”

For now the church is back to meeting in its family life center and waiting to hear what engineers working on the damaged building have to say.

“If the steel frame is still intact, we’ll be able to build it back,” he said.

In God’s hands

Miller asked for prayer for their church to be able to leave the burden of the future in God’s hands.

“There’s a tendency every day to take that burden back over when it’s not really ours to start with,” he said.

It’s a sentiment all 11 churches destroyed in the 2011 tornado outbreak are familiar with. It also resonates with the 34 others damaged on April 27; Boone’s Chapel Baptist Church, Prattville, and Faith Chapel (See ‘God,’ page 10)



FBC Wellington Facebook photo

FBC Wellington dedicated its new sanctuary in 2012 following the 2011 destruction of its building, but the church faces rebuilding again because it was hit by another tornado March 25 of this year.

APRIL 27, 2011 • 10-YEAR LOOK BACK

'God provided'

Churches rebuild, see God grow congregations in years following storms

(continued from page 9)

Baptist Church, Marion, two churches damaged on April 15, 2011, two weeks before the super outbreak; and all the churches that have been damaged or destroyed in other tornadoes since then.

Fultondale First Baptist Church, which was severely damaged 10 years ago in the storms, narrowly dodged being hit by a second one in March too. Like First, Wellington, it quickly became a hub of help for the hard-hit community around it.

At Alberta Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, worship minister Jennifer Mills says the memory of helping the community from the parking lot of their damaged church building in 2011 is still fresh for her.

'God worked things out'

"I live three quarters of a mile from the church, and I had prayed, 'Lord, let our building be there so we can minister to the community,'" she said.

It was there — but it was heavily damaged. Even so, it was clear God was providing what they needed to care for the people around them, Mills said.

"We would run out of supplies and food to give people, and another truck would pull up with supplies," she said. "We have so many stories of how God worked things out. We became a hub for the community."

The situation opened the door for them to have a deeper relationship with their neighbors and forge bonds, Mills said.

"It gave us a chance to say, 'We really do care about you and we love you.'"



Photo courtesy of Jennifer Mills

After being hit hard by a tornado in 2011, Alberta Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, moved into its new building in 2014. As a bonus, they brought the congregation of Open Door Baptist Church with them. The two had been sharing a building during the rebuild and decided to merge.

The storms forged another deeper relationship too — one with nearby Open Door Baptist Church. For months, the two congregations shared Open Door Baptist's facilities, with one having Sunday School and the other having worship and then switching.

After a while, they decided to meet together for the summer. They liked it so much they extended it until the end of the year.

"Before long, we had merged, so they came with us when we moved into our new building in February 2014," Mills said.

Brian Harris, pastor of Mountain View Baptist Church, Sylvania, said his church also felt God had brought goodness out of the tor-

nado that leveled their church, even though it was "devastating."

nado that leveled their church, even though it was "devastating."

He still gets emotional when he talks about it, but he's quick to say he was never hopeless.

"God has blessed us," he said.

After the storm passed through in

'The church is gone'

"He said, 'The church is gone,'" Harris said. "I was devastated. My boss could tell my mind wasn't there, so he told me they could handle it and to go take care of my church."

He drove right past Mountain View Baptist without even realizing it.

"I asked a volunteer fireman where the church was, and he said, 'I think you passed it.' I realized then I was standing right in front of where it had been," Harris said.

When he had become pastor of Mountain View Baptist in 2006, the church had a brand-new sanctuary, a project recently completed by a Carpenters for Christ group.

That same group of men called Harris back the day after the tornado.

"They said, 'Get ready, we have canceled what we were going to do this summer, and we're coming



Photo by Eric Harrison

The steeple of Fultondale FBC was thrown 100 feet down the road by a tornado in 2011.



Photo by Rebecca Farmer

The congregation of Mountain View Baptist Church, Sylvania, met for worship in the parking lot of its destroyed building the Sunday after the April 27, 2011, tornadoes. Several joined the church that day, and they baptized three that afternoon in a deacon's pool.

back to build your church back,” he said.

The church got to work cleaning up and had their service in the parking lot that Sunday.

“It was one of the best Sundays we ever had,” Harris said.

Four people joined the church, and they baptized three in a deacon’s pool that afternoon.

“God just moved that morning. He showed up big time,” Harris said. “And our church has continued to grow.”

Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church, Centre, also has seen God’s mercy as they walked through a deep valley, according to deacon Dennis Tierce.

The church building was destroyed on April 27, 2011, when a

tornado lifted it off of its foundation and set it down again. Then in early July of that year, their pastor, Steve Tierce — who is Dennis Tierce’s

cousin — had a car accident that left him a paraplegic.

He died from related infections in 2013.

“After the accident, he came and preached. They made him a special wheelchair,” Dennis Tierce said.

Church members salvaged wood from the damaged building to make a ramp for him to be able to get into the mobile cha-

pel provided by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

But Steve Tierce never got off the ventilator. The church took that hard.

“We didn’t have the resources, but God provided. He’s really blessed us. We’re thanking the Lord for everything He did.”

**Dennis Tierce
deacon, Pilgrim Rest
Baptist Church, Centre**



Photo courtesy of Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church

Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church, Centre, built a new sanctuary with the help of Carpenters for Christ groups and other volunteers. In June, they will celebrate their 125th anniversary and honor the 10th anniversary of the storm.



Photo courtesy of Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church
The building of Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church, Centre, was destroyed April 27, 2011, when a tornado lifted it off its foundation.

But after he died, the church began rebuilding with the help of Carpenters for Christ groups and other volunteers.

They were able to salvage some of the items from their original building, such as the pews and the large rocks that the beams were sitting on. Those rocks now sit around their new church sign as a reminder of where they’ve been.

Expanding more

And they’ve been able to expand even more since rebuilding, including starting a children’s church.

In June, they will celebrate their 125th anniversary and also honor the 10th anniversary of the storm, remembering where God has brought them.

“The Cooperative Program is a great thing — it really provided for us,” Dennis Tierce said. “We didn’t have the resources, but God provided. He’s really blessed us. We’re thanking the Lord for everything He did.” ✠

Losing house doesn’t stop man from serving

George Hamilton had just turned 89 when a tornado leveled his house in 2011.

“It was blown completely away, down to the floor,” he said.

He had left his house five minutes before to go to his son’s home.

“I just praise the Lord for sparing us,” he said.

And Hamilton didn’t let losing his house slow him down. He got to work helping his church — Bethel Baptist, Pleasant Grove, which was serving

as a care station for the storm-ravaged community.

He had his house built back right where the old one was, and before it was finished, he



HAMILTON

went on his regularly scheduled missions trip to Nicaragua. It’s a trip he took 10 times, all the way up until he was 95. Now 99, he’s not traveling internationally anymore, but he’s got teaching Vacation Bible School and helping with a golf tournament and car show on his schedule for the coming days.

“The Lord has done nothing but blessed me,” Hamilton said. “I just want to keep serving.” (TAB)

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APRIL 27, 2011 • 10-YEAR LOOK BACK

'Laser-focused'

Meteorologist James Spann recalls 'heavy' responsibility of destructive day

By Martha Simmons
TAB Media

Meteorologist James Spann is to many Alabamians the suspender-wearing sage to whom they turn when the weather gets stormy. Over his four-decade career of weather reporting, the memory of the worst of all weather days — April 27, 2011 — still haunts him.

"I went through all the phases of grief. I went through anger and depression. I was mad at God for a while," Spann, a member of Double Oak Community Church, Birmingham, said. "It's OK to be mad at God. It really is. After it's over, you've got to pray your way through all that stuff."

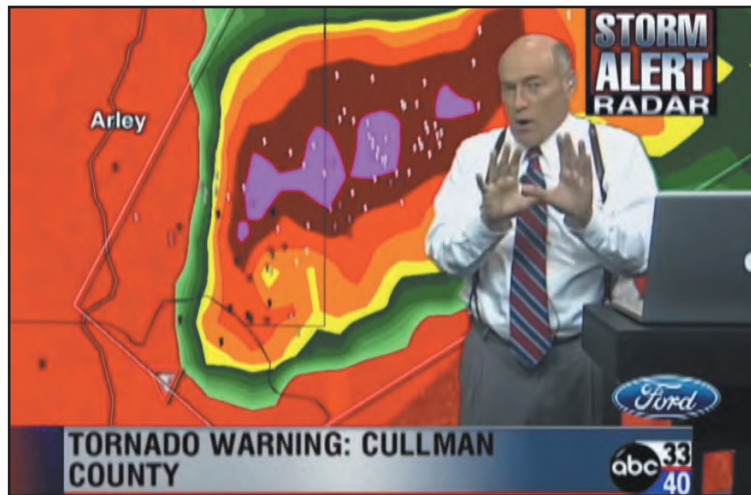
Spann's memory of what he calls a "generational" weather event remains crystal clear.

The specter of a tornado outbreak had been stalking Alabama for the better part of a week, and with each passing day the meteorologists at Birmingham's ABC affiliate issued more and more strident warnings.

On that fateful Wednesday morning, Spann began his day, like always, with a prayer seeking wisdom and "the right words" from God.

"You've got 300,000 to 400,000 people watching you, and what you say and your body language can determine if somebody makes a decision that results in them living or dying," Spann explained. "That's a heavy responsibility, so my prayer before every event is, 'Lord, give me the words to say, and wisdom.'"

During any severe weathermaker, Spann's job re-



Meteorologist James Spann and his fellow newscasters were on the air for more than 8 hours straight on April 27, 2011, warning people to take shelter as storms passed through the state.

quires laser focus and "monster" multitasking skills.

April 27 started out no differently.

"Another meteorologist is running the equipment; I'm in front of that green wall. In front of me you'll see a computer. I'm like an air traffic controller. I've got six chat sessions going with National Weather Service forecast offices, as well as chat sessions with our trained weather spotters. I've got multiple live streams from our people in the field looking at all of that.

"And then you've got to deal with social media, which is critical. ... I've got to look at all of that and make a decision on the fly of what [I'm] gonna show on television and decide what information is credible."

Shocking scale

Still, despite the state-of-the-art detection equipment and early warnings, even Spann and his team were shocked at the ultimate scale of the outbreak, particularly the morning storms.

"I didn't expect it to be that bad," he said. "We had

loss of life. We had a quarter-of-a-million people without power that morning from those storms. It was a rough ride. That in itself ... would have been a very significant day for the state."

As the weather team waited for an expected afternoon wave of twisters, station engineers dealt with crippling power outages. Engineers got a downed camera back in operation just in time to

document the first tornado of the afternoon in Cullman.

"That thing stayed live on that camera for like 20 minutes," Spann recalled. "We know that the live image of that tornado saved lives."

Historical event

During the frenetic hours of activity in the newsroom throughout that day, Spann said, "I missed the historical nature of these tornadoes. I mean, I just missed it. Which is OK. I don't need to be hung up in the emotion. You've got to be laser-focused on communicating the right message."

It was only after the last tornado tore through Alabama that Spann and his colleagues had a moment to consider the immensity of the destruction.

"But then, after it's over, that's the hard part," he said. "I'll be honest with you. I don't think I've processed that day, 10 years later."

"When 252 people die on your watch, that's pretty heavy. I'm in the process of trying to memorize all those names and their stories. These were real people at a real place and a real time."

Spann continues to learn from the 2011 experience.

"I didn't speak on the event for six months. I didn't have anything to say," he said. "But after six months, we said, 'Let's roll up our sleeves and find out what went wrong and let's fix it.'"

"I think the one thing we learned that day is, what I do is not enough," Spann noted. "I'm just part of the process in the weather warning process."

"The prayer is, what am I to learn from this? And what can I do to get better?"

Because something obviously went wrong. The warnings were really good for all 62 tornadoes, and yet all these people died."✠



SPANN

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Everyone needs a plan

NOAA weather radios, bicycle helmets, safe shelter essential during tornadoes

By Martha Simmons
TAB Media

For many in Alabama, the fateful day on which 62 tornadoes killed 252 people is the generational weather event by which they compare all other storms. Birmingham-based meteorologist James Spann considers that to be a wrong-minded view. “People often ask ... if there will be a repeat of the April 27 outbreak,” Spann said. “I don’t like that question. If there’s just one tornado in the whole state and if that thing comes down your street on that day, that’s your April 27. We have to be ready for every day like that.”

Spann should know. Just a few weeks ago, while reporting on severe weather conditions battering the state on March 25, Spann learned that a tornado had struck his own home. Spann’s wife, Karen, was safe in their in-home shelter, and the home itself was not seriously damaged, he said.

His family has a plan for weather events like this, and Spann urges everyone else to have one, too. Key elements include:

- ▶ Warnings
- ▶ A safe place
- ▶ Head protection.

Warnings

Spann said the main reason people die from tornadoes is “siren mentality,” which he said “has killed more people in this state than anything else, by far.”

“You might hear [the sirens] on a sunny day when they’re testing them at 3 in the afternoon, but what about 4 a.m. during a raging storm?”

“That’s how most people died

that day,” Spann said of the 2011 outbreak. “They never knew it was coming.

“We have to move away from that mentality and get weather radios in every home in this state,” he said.

He recommends simple NOAA radios starting at about \$30. They have battery backup in case of power failure and can be programmed to alert users to specific events and ignore others.

TV broadcasts don’t do much good if you’ve been asleep for hours when a storm approaches, Spann said.

And while cell phones do have the capacity to send out severe weather alerts, they are not as reliable as a weather radio since cell towers can be knocked out in a storm.

“Weather radio works independently of the cell network,” he said. “They will wake you up and let you know you’ve got a tornado coming, that you need to turn on the TV or go to a safe place.”

While the 2011 super-outbreak claimed lives in all kinds of structures, the great majority of deaths are mobile home dwellers.

“Mobile homes are wonderful, affordable housing,” Spann said. “But you can’t stay in a mobile home during a tornado. Mobile homes and cars are death traps during a tornado.”

People who live in mobile homes should plan ahead for a safe place to stay when tornadoes threaten — a friend or relative’s home, a business or church or a designated shelter. For homes that don’t have storm shelters, a basement or internal room or hallway with no windows is a good option.

Wearing a helmet can prevent head trauma and save lives in the

“The time to think about [a plan] is not when the tornado is two blocks away. The time to think about it is on a sunny day when you can make a plan.”

**James Spann
Birmingham-based
weatherman**

direct line of a tornado too. Following the 2011 super-outbreak, emergency room doctors told Spann that “if people would have had a simple \$5 Walmart bike helmet on, they’d be alive today.

“UAB did a great bit of research on that,” Spann said. “Everybody has to have a helmet on. That includes adults.

Churches can play a big role in keeping their members and the community safe, Spann said.

“If you have a basement in your church or a long interior hallway with no windows, open it up to the community during a tornado watch and say, ‘If you need a safe place, here we are.’ That’s what the church is all about.

“Let them in there, love on them and feed them. For those kids, help calm them down,” Spann said, adding that even churches in areas where tornado shelters are available should consider opening their doors.

“The other thing might be offering transportation to the shelter. A lot of people who live in mobile homes don’t have transportation,” Spann said.

Missions project ideas

He suggested churches establish a missions project to provide weather radios and/or bicycle helmets to low-income community members.

“Weather radios cost about \$30, and we have a lot of families that just can’t afford that,” he said.

Churches shouldn’t neglect their own tornado safety measures either, he noted. “I’ve had guys say, ‘We’re not going to do that. God’s going to keep that tornado away from my church and away from my people.’

“We actually do have tornadoes on Sunday here,” he said, recalling the 1994 tornado that hit Goshen United Methodist Church in Piedmont.

“They were in the middle of an Easter drama on Palm Sunday, and that tornado killed 10 adults and 10 children in the church. There was a warning 12 minutes before that church building was destroyed, and those people died. The tornado warning was issued at 11:27. The church building was destroyed at 11:39.

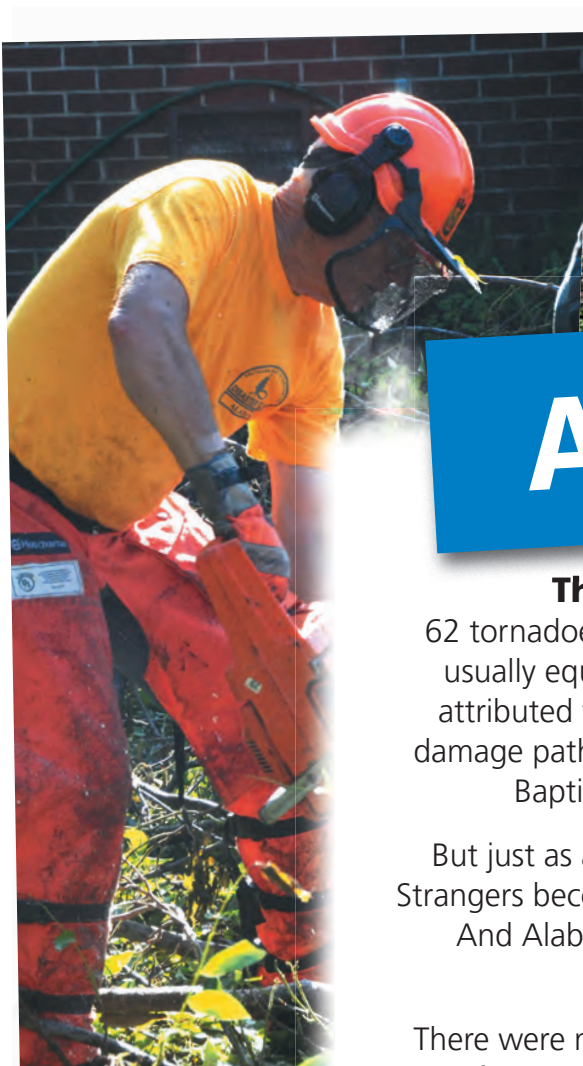
“They never heard the warning.”

That disaster is proof that every church needs a plan, a weather radio and somebody designated to monitor it when storms threaten and the church is occupied, Spann said.

And the sooner each church makes that plan, the better.

“The time to think about it is not when the tornado is two blocks away,” Spann said. “The time to think about it is on a sunny day when you can make a plan.”

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APRIL 27, 2011

The numbers are still staggering.

62 tornadoes across Alabama in one day, an amount usually equal to an entire year. 238 deaths directly attributed to the tornadoes in our state. A tornado damage path 691 miles long. 23,500 homes and 47 Alabama Baptist church buildings severely damaged or destroyed.

But just as amazing was the response. Neighbors helping neighbors. Strangers becoming friends. Homes, churches, entire towns being rebuilt. And Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers were at the heart of that response.

There were numbers that didn't make the news. Thousands of Disaster Relief volunteers deployed, collectively logging 11,540 days of ministry. 256,147 meals prepared from 9 mass feeding units. Volunteers from 12 state conventions joining Alabama in the recovery effort. 365 trained chaplains at work, who spent time with 5,946 people and recorded at least 53 professions of faith. Churches across the state serving as shelters and distribution centers.

Ten years later, there is still pain, there is still loss. But there is also healing, and hope, and restoration. God used Alabama Baptists then, and He continues to use them now, as the hands and feet of Christ in times of crisis.

Know that your giving makes a difference. Your prayers make a difference. Your going makes a difference.

We pray we won't see the likes of April 27, 2011, again in our lifetime. But when the storms do come, Alabama Baptists stand ready to respond, to give a cup of cold water in Jesus' name.



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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.

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.

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Tates Chapel Baptist Church is seeking a bivocational pastor with possible full-time pastor position. Send resumé to: Tates Chapel Baptist Church, P.O. Box 38, Centre, AL 35960. Email: tateschapelchurch@tds.net.

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BIVOCATIONAL MINISTER OF MUSIC/WORSHIP & PIANIST

Bon Air Baptist Church is accepting resumé/applications for a bivocational minister of music/worship and a pianist. Please send your resumé to: BABC, 600 Lower Bon Air Road, Sylacauga, AL 35150. If you have questions, call Pastor Jeff Thomas, 256-391-7344. BABC is located right outside Childersburg, Ala., near Central Alabama Community College.

BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC DIRECTOR

East Highland Baptist Church, Hartselle, Ala., is prayerfully seeking God's choice for a bivocational music director who will lead the comprehensive church music program. Applicants should subscribe to the doctrinal statement of the Baptist Faith & Message. Please send resumé to: search@easthighlandbaptist.com or by mail to: East Highland Baptist Church, P.O. Box 888, Hartselle, AL 35640, ATTN: Music Director Search Committee.

PART-TIME WORSHIP LEADER

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

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FBC Loxley, Alabama, is seeking a full-time youth pastor.

Please send a resumé to: youthpastorsearchfbcloxley@gmail.com.

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The First Baptist Church in Pinson, Ala., is seeking a full-time youth pastor with experience in leading and developing young people. This ministry will include middle school and high school students. Please send your resumé to: sandysuttles@fbcpinson.org.

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First Baptist Church in Greenville, Ala., is seeking a part-time children's minister. Please send resumé to: 212 Fort Dale Rd., Greenville, AL or email to: kelly@myfbcgreenville.com.

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Lottery bill amended to include casino gambling, passes Senate

A bill proposing a broad expansion of gambling in the state, including casinos, sports betting and a lottery, passed the Senate on April 13 and headed to the House for consideration.

Senate Bill 319, sponsored by Sens. Jim McClendon (R-Springville), Garlan Gudger (R-Cullman) and Del Marsh (R-Anniston), was introduced as a lottery-only bill. The bill was substituted and then amended three times on the floor to add casino gambling and sports betting.

The measure passed in a 23-9 vote.

Ongoing push

Marsh introduced a similar bill, SB 214, that failed to pass the Senate by two votes on March 9. Marsh and others continued to lobby for expanded gambling. Gov. Kay Ivey also urged state lawmakers to pass a comprehensive gambling package.

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 **TAB Media**

"Right now, gambling is going on," Ivey said on April 9. "In fact, it is rampant. Much of it is illegal, and it is done in the shadows."

But Joe Godfrey, executive director of Alabama Citizens Action Program, noted that lawmakers have not legalized other vices that are "rampant" in the state.

Prostitution, domestic violence, sex trafficking and a host of other activities are also "rampant" in Alabama, Godfrey said, "but we don't legalize and tax those activities."

Modeled on SB 214, SB 319 proposes a constitutional amendment to legalize most forms of gambling in the state, including online gambling.

Casinos would be authorized at sites in six counties: Jefferson, Mobile, Macon, Greene, Houston and either Jackson or DeKalb.

Legislators say the estimated \$510-710 million in annual revenue from gambling would go to a wide array of state health, education

and infrastructure needs.

Four senators who voted against SB 214, including Gudger, threw their support behind SB 319: Sens. Will Barfoot (R-Pike Road),

Chris Elliott (R-Daphne) and David Sessions (R-Grand Bay).

Ultimately, any proposal to amend Alabama's Constitution must go before voters, who will have the final say.

The Senate also passed three bills that would imple-

ment the provisions of SB 319 should voters ultimately approve the gambling expansion.

Godfrey urged opponents of the measure to contact their representatives and ask them to vote no on any pro-gambling bills that may come to the House.

He also encouraged concerned citizens to contact Ivey's office at 334-242-7100 and "urge her to stop pushing for pro-gambling legislation."

Read more at tabonline.org/SB319. (Carrie B. McWhorter)

To view legislation, visit legiscan.com/AL. To contact your local leader, visit sos.alabama.gov/alabama-votes/elected-official-map.

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AP photo courtesy of Cecil Richards

Baptists in the Caribbean nation of St. Vincent are working to help feed people who have been evacuated due to the eruption of the island's La Soufrière volcano. Some 16,000–20,000 people — one-fifth of the island's population — were evacuated from the region after the initial eruption on April 9, which spewed a 2-mile-high column of ash. Pastor Cecil Richards is working with members of his Kingstown Baptist Church to help feed evacuees. (AP/RNS)

SBC annual meeting location changed

The 2021 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention will move to the Music City Center in downtown Nashville June 15–16, the SBC Executive Committee announced April 15.

According to Ronnie Floyd, president and CEO of the SBC Executive Committee, the shift was made in order to allow adequate space while adhering to local COVID-19 protocols.

The 2021 Send Conference, the exhibit hall and child care will also move to the Music City Center.

Floyd said the decision was made in collaboration with the City of Nashville, the Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center (the original site) and city tourism officials.

Read more at tabonline.org/venue. (Executive Committee)

Court upholds Ohio abortion prohibition

A federal appeals court on April 13 upheld a 2017 Ohio law that prohibits doctors from knowingly performing an abortion because of a prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome.

In a 9–7 decision, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit in Cincinnati overturned an injunction against the state's Down Syndrome Non-Discrimination Act, saying the law “does not create a substantial obstacle to a woman's ability to choose or obtain an abortion.”

Currently, 17 states have enacted laws that prohibit abortion based on an unborn child's disability, race and/or sex, according to the National Right to Life Committee.

Seven of those bans are making their way through the court system, the NRLC reported. (TAB)

Headline news

from around the Southeast

Arkansas

A total of 611 students from Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, Arkansas, completed 76 projects throughout their community during the university's Tiger Serve Day on April 10. The day's projects consisted of litter pickup, yardwork outside the homes of senior adults and various tasks for local nonprofit organizations and public schools. Also Tiger Serve Day leaders delivered goodie baskets and “thank you” yard signs to medical professionals.

Florida

As the pastor of Romeo Baptist Church, Dunelton, Florida, Rob Hess is always looking for ways to engage his rural community. The church has hosted community yard sales, back-to-school bashes, a community garden and quarterly family Bible study nights, among others. Since late January, the church has been offering judo lessons to

adults and teens. The judo classes, Hess believes, is one way to draw people to the church and possibly engage them with the gospel, the Florida Baptist Witness reported.

Kentucky

Crossroads Baptist Church, Elizabethtown, Kentucky, is taking a whack at COVID-19 while raising funds for the church's short-term missions trips at the same time. For a donation to the church's missions fund, participants can take a swing with a sledgehammer on an already beat-up automobile. Past missions trips have sent teams to Croatia, Ireland, Guatemala, and Oakland, California, Kentucky Today reported.

Mississippi

Justin Lohmeier, a medical doctor and member of Hillcrest Baptist Church, New Albany, Mississippi, has been on more than 20 international

missions trips. He has traveled to countries in Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Central Asia and Central America. Not only does Lohmeier use his professional skills to minister to the medical needs of nationals in the countries he visits, but he also takes care of the medical needs of IMB missionaries on the field.

Tennessee

Since December 2020, Long Hollow Baptist Church, Hendersonville, Tennessee, has experienced a wave of baptisms that exceeded 1,000 on April 11. Senior Pastor Robby Gallaty estimates that 70–75% of those baptisms are from first-time confessions of faith and 83% are adults. While the responses have been overwhelmingly local, 20 of the baptisms were people from 15 other states. “It's been completely out of our control and an overwhelming move of God,” said Collin Wood, executive pastor.

Alabama news

ALABAMA BAPTIST CHILDREN'S HOMES & FAMILY MINISTRIES

► **Steve Sellers** wasn't planning on working for **Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries**. He just knew God was leading him to work with wounded people.

"I was praying, 'Lord, where do You want me? How can I help pastors and how can I help kids?' I had looked at property to build homes for wounded pastors," Sellers said.



SELLERS

But that door closed and another one opened — the chance to work at ABCH.

"This is how they offered me the job — they said, 'Steve, we want you to come be a part of the family of the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes,'" Sellers said.

"I myself had been a wounded pastor at one time. I felt like I was adopted into their family that day."

And until he retired earlier this year, Sellers spent his life advocating for children who also needed family — and he did his best to minister to every pastor he talked to along the way too.

"For 24 years, I have every day said, 'Lord, help me please to work hard so that kids can be helped through the ministry and help me not to miss a wounded pastor and never to leave a pastor discouraged,'" he said. "He's allowed me to do that. He's given me the best of both worlds."

Michael Smith, ABCH chief operations officer for north Alabama, called Sellers his "constant source of support and accountability."

"He has helped me carry out my vision by finding the donors to support that vision," Smith said. "As a result, the lives of many children and families have been wonderfully impacted in the present and for eternity."

Sellers served since 1996 in development with ABCH, the last three years as development officer for north Alabama.

He recently stepped into the role of interim director of missions for Friendship



Photo courtesy of ABCH
(L to r) Todd McMichen, Michael Gentry and Rick West.

Todd McMichen has joined the ABCH team as chief development officer, filling the gap left by Jay Boyd, who moved to serve in a different role in South Carolina. McMichen has served local churches in a variety of leadership positions for more than 30 years. Most recently, he served as director of generosity and digital giving at Lifeway Christian Resources.

McMichen will lead the ABCH engagement team, which is made up of the development, communications and database teams.

"Todd is already proving himself to be a very valuable contributor to one of our ministry's desires — to be known for excellence and innovation while also pursuing sustainability," said Rod Marshall, ABCH president and CEO, calling McMichen "uniquely talented and wonderfully qualified for the role."

Michael Gentry has stepped into the space left by Sellers as development officer for north Alabama. Gentry — who also has served on Alabama Baptist church staffs and as a regional representative for Lifeway — will be based in Decatur and also serve Oxford.

Rick West is now the development officer for south Alabama. He is based in Mobile and Dothan. He has spent much of his career serving on church staffs in Alabama, Florida and North Carolina and has spent the past eight years serving as regional team leader and church partner for Lifeway.



NICHOLS

BESSEMER ASSOCIATION

► **Josh Nichols** is the new student pastor of North Highlands Baptist Church, Hueytown. He grew up in Hueytown and graduated from the University of Alabama. He is married to Brittany. Michael Wallace is pastor.

ELMORE ASSOCIATION

► **Mount Hebron East Baptist Church, Eclectic**, will celebrate homecoming and its

125th anniversary April 25 at 10:30 a.m. It will also honor what God has done at the church since its building was destroyed by a tornado in 2011. Holy Destiny will provide music at the special service. Lunch is at noon. Jeff Finklea is pastor.

SARDIS ASSOCIATION

► Celebrating the Glorious Past with Great Vision for the Future — that was the theme of **Sardis Baptist Association's** 125th anniversary event March 27.

About 50 people gathered for the celebration held at the Lowery Community Center in Kinston. Games, activities and face painting were offered for children and youth.

Several of the association's 11 churches displayed their church history, and Ralph Ward, associational moderator, shared the history of the association. The gospel group Blessed provided special music.

Lonette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, and Rick Barnhart, state missionary with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, each presented a commemorative plaque to James Preachers, director of missions.

The closing message was given by Bobby DuBois, former SBOM associate executive director.

To visit the photo gallery, go to tabonline.org/sardis.



Photo by Debbie Campbell
(L to r) ABHC's Lonette Berg and DOM James Preachers celebrate Sardis Association's 125th anniversary.

Persecuted church

Uzbek Baptist fined for offering Christian magazines to neighbor

TASHKENT, Uzbekistan — An Uzbekistani court fined a Baptist woman about two weeks' wages on Jan. 18 for offering 15 Christian magazines to her neighbors at a Christmas Day celebration in her home.

On Dec. 28, police raided homes of those who received magazines from Tatyana Akhmediyeva and confiscated the publications.

A judge later ordered the magazines destroyed.

Tashkent City Criminal Court, on Feb. 12,

upheld the penalty against her.

Akhmediyeva is a member of a Baptist Council of Churches congregation.

On Jan. 6, the "Struggle with Extremism and Terrorism Department" of the police interviewed and filmed her.

She was told the magazines had been imported illegally and violated Uzbekistan's religion law.

After analyzing the magazines, Uzbekistan's Religious Affairs Committee said the publications contained nothing contrary to the law, but that the literature had been imported illegally.

Uzbekistan is No. 21 on Open Doors' 2021 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian. (Forum 18)



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BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Easter Reflections

The Risen Christ

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.

TAB Media

In the past three weeks, Theology 101 has sought to offer reflections on the miracle, message and mandate of Christ's resurrection. This week, we take note of the varied emotions people displayed in learning of that resurrection.

We saw last week that the risen Christ instructed Mary Magdalene to go tell His disciples that He was risen and that she had seen and touched Him. The reactions to this news were varied among those who first learned that a real resurrection had occurred.

The evening of that Resurrection Day showed the disciples' initial reaction when they saw the risen Christ for themselves. The inspired record puts it simply: "Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord" (John 20:20).

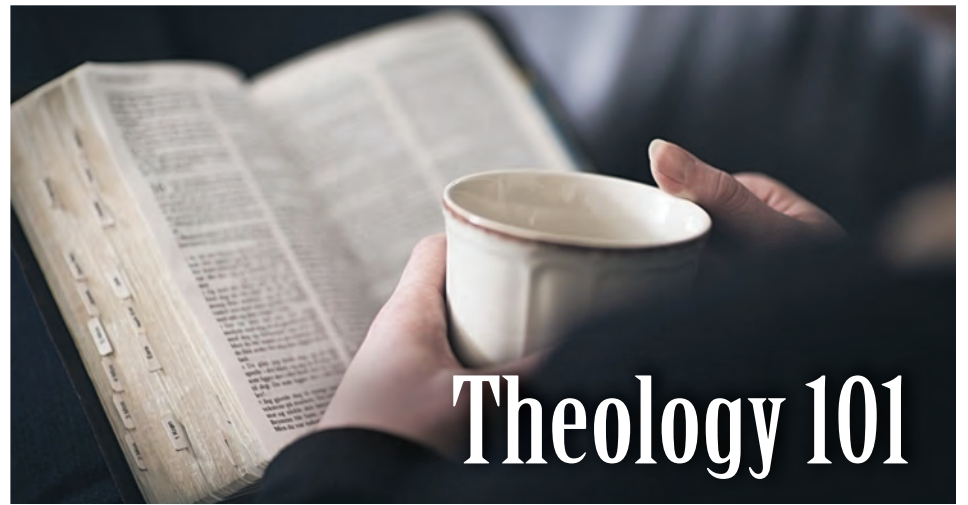
However, one disciple was absent from the joyous occasion — Thomas

was not with the others. When told of Christ's resurrection, Thomas was skeptical, or at least he wanted first-hand proof of a real, bodily resurrection by actually touching the risen Christ and seeing the nail prints in His hands. Upon Jesus' appearance a week later, Thomas' reaction was a sincere declaration about the risen Christ, simply, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

Range of emotions

Among the range of emotions attested in various Bible passages when people heard the Resurrection message or encountered the resurrected Messiah for themselves were worship (Matt. 28:9), amazement (Mark 16:8), great joy (Matt. 28:8), praise (Luke 24:53), gladness (John 20:20) and burning hearts (Luke 24:32).

Could it be that many of us have celebrated numerous Easters with the sad recognition that there is little



excitement, joy, praise or amazement igniting our spirits? Or do we annually anticipate the spiritual emotions of celebrating anew the resurrection of Christ as the aftermath of His Good Friday death as our sin-bearer?

Can we still say with an exclamation point in our words what we learned to sing as children in Sunday School? "You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart!"

Future implications

Reflecting on the implications for our life now and for our future should fill our hearts with similar emotions to those displayed by the

ones who were first to hear that the crucified Christ had become the Risen Christ. And not only so, but we also have access to the climactic truth that the Risen Christ not only became the Ascended Christ but will on a day yet to come be the Returning Christ.✠

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.



FREE ADMISSION

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WORSHIP LEADER:
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 and New River

For more information, please visit
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Ev
 Evangelism
 Everybody

Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

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 University-Commerce) and a master's degree specializing in English from the University of Arkansas (1978).



April marks 200 years since Mary Moffat Livingstone's birth

Mary Moffat Livingstone (1821–1862) was the wife of the famous Scottish Congregationalist missionary David Livingstone. Her father, Robert Moffat, was a Scottish missionary who ministered in Kuruman, South Africa.

Death of a child, sickness, loneliness, frequent absences from her husband — these were many of the hardships she endured during her heroic life. This month is the 200th anniversary of her birth.

Early life

Mary Livingstone was born in Griquatown, South Africa, on April 12, 1821, the first of 10 children born to Robert and Mary Smith Moffat. Her father worked among the Bechuana people, translating the Bible into their language.

Mary attended the Wesleyan school near Grahamstown from 1830 to 1836. She then lived in Britain with her parents for four years. When they returned to South Africa, she taught school.

Mary met missionary/explorer David Livingstone in Kuruman. They married in January 1845. When David saw his future wife, he described her as a “plain, commonsense woman, not a romantic.” He grew to love her deeply.

David's goal in his expeditions was to bring Christianity, commerce and abolition of the slave trade to Africa. Usually Mary and the children went with him, but journeys were full of dangers and deprivations.

She traveled with him on his two

treks across the Kalahari Desert in 1849 and 1850. Their fourth child was born after Mary's first journey. The child died soon after her birth. David delivered the couple's fifth child on their second journey.

She didn't accompany Livingstone on his first expedition to the Zambezi River. She lived in Britain four years for her children's education and safety. In 1852, she and the children went to Scotland to stay with David's parents, but living with them didn't work out. After living in boarding houses with little money, she found refuge with an evangelical Quaker couple.

David returned to Britain in 1856. His book, “Missionary Travels and Researches,” sold well and

lifted his family out of poverty. He lived with his family for two years and bought a house.

Mary went back to Africa in 1858 to join David on his official Zambezi expedition, but when she became pregnant, she stayed with her parents. After the birth of her daughter, she and her baby departed yet again for Britain.

Back to Africa

Mary traveled back to Africa where she met David at the mouth of the Zambezi. After becoming ill with malaria, she died on April 27, 1862.

David Livingstone died 11 years later, a famous man. After his body was returned to Britain, he had a state funeral. He is buried in Westminster Abbey. Mary is buried under a baobab tree in Chapanga, Mozambique. 🇳🇸



LIVINGSTONE

Christian Crossword

By Diana Rowland Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

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Across

- Therefore the law ___ slacked. (Hab. 1:4)
- And ___ drove thence the three sons. (Josh. 15:14)
- Eli, ___ sabachthani. (Matt. 27:46)
- The Lord will not ___ good. (Zeph. 1:12)
- As with the taker of ___. (Isa. 24:2)
- Thither cause thy mighty ___. (Joel 3:11)
- Teman, and ___, Zephi, and Gatam. (1 Chron. 1:36)
- ___ Jones, financial company.
- Thou hast had pity ___ the gourd. (Jonah 4:10)
- Even to the ___ of them. (Jon. 3:5)
- They that observe lying vanities ___. (Jon. 2:8)
- They that ___ thy bread. (Obad. 7)
- And be thou like a ___. (Song of Sol. 2:17)
- ___ the second year of Darius. (Hag. 1:1)
- And ___ not to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely ___. (Amos 5:5)
- What shall we ___ unto thee. (Jon. 1:11)
- They shall lay hold ___ bow ... against thee, ___ daughter of Zion.

(Jer. 6:23)

- Even ___, will judge between the ___ cattle. (Ezek. 34:20)
- Unto the ___ of the earth. (Micah 5:4)
- And will ___ at all acquit the wicked. (Nah. 1:3)
- For I ___ with you. (Hag. 2:4)
- Came unto ___ unto ___ people (Judg. 18:27; reverse order)
- ___ accept thy person? (Mal. 1:8)
- Hast thou not heard long ___. (Isa. 37:26)
- ___ have laid hands on their substance. (Obad. 13)
- Who ___ not daily. (Heb. 7:27)
- He shall ___ with his teeth. (Ps. 112:10)
- Behold, I ___ against thee. (Nah. 3:5)
- Now the Lord ___ prepared a great fish. (Jon. 1:17)
- The son of Naum, which was the son of ___. (Luke 3:25)
- Call me ___. (Ruth 1:20)
- ___ was a man subject to like passions. (James 5:17)
- It hath consumed ___ of Moab. (Num. 21:28)
- As a man wipeth a ___. (2 Kings 21:13)

- Whose soever sins ye ___. (John 20:23)
- What do ___ imagine against the Lord? (Nah. 1:9)

Down

- Mine ___ hath done them. (Isa. 48:5)
- I have overthrown ___ of you. (Amos 4:11)
- He whom thou ___ is cursed. (Num. 22:6)
- For while they be folden together ___ thorns. (Nah. 1:10)
- They of Persia and of ___. (Ezek. 27:10)
- And ___, the firstborn ___ Judah. (1 Chron. 2:3)
- Yea, I am their ___. (Job 30:9)
- And now, behold, I ___ thee this day. (Jer. 40:4)
- There was one ___. (Luke 2:36)
- And so is this nation before ___. (Hag. 2:14)
- And his brightness was ___ the light. (Hab. 3:4)
- Alcoholics Anonymous. (abbr.)
- Children's game.
- Kanga's son in "Winnie the Pooh."
- And I will appoint over them four ___. (Jer. 15:3)
- Adam, Sheth, ___.
- Go up ___ the mountain. (Hag. 1:8)
- Duke Elah, duke ___. (Gen. 36:41)
- For ___ the harvest. (Isa. 18:5)
- And ___ on the east side. (Jon. 4:5)
- She called his name Ben-___. (Gen. 35:18)
- Which is the ___ of our inheritance. (Eph. 1:14)
- In his hand for very ___. (Zech. 8:4)
- Plead with your ___. (Hos. 2:2)
- This is ___ ephah that goeth forth. (Zech. 5:6)
- Take some of the ___ of oil. (Lev. 14:15)
- How shall I make thee as ___? (Hos. 11:8)
- Stopped their ___. (Zech. 7:11)
- Lest he ___ thee to the judge. (Luke 12:58)
- The land is ___ the garden of Eden. (Joel 2:3)
- Not spare continually to ___ the nations? (Hab. 1:17)
- The priests thereof teach for ___. (Mic. 3:11)
- Mine eye also is ___. (Job 17:7)
- Medical doctor. (abbr.)
- Howl, O Heshbon, for ___ is spoiled. (Jer. 49:3)
- When the king of ___ saw it. (Josh. 8:14)

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



Thursday, May 20, 11 a.m.-4 p.m., First Baptist Church, Trussville

LIFT! is designed to help us learn more about creative worship through both participation and “how-to” sessions focused on the planning and implementation of worship. This will be a great team-building opportunity for church staffs and worship teams to attend together.

FEATURED WORSHIP SPEAKERS



David Eldridge
Pastor, Dawson Memorial Baptist Church,
Birmingham



DeWayne Rembert
Pastor, Flatline Church at Chisholm,
Montgomery



BREAKOUT SESSIONS

- ♪ Creative Worship Planning
- ♪ Getting the Most from Your Worship Rehearsals
- ♪ Sermon Planning and Calendaring
- ♪ How Do We Rebuild the Church After COVID?
- ♪ How Do Pastors and Music Ministers Work Together to Plan Creative Worship?
- ♪ Creative Media...Where to Start?

For more information and to register, visit alsbom.org/lift. Lunch will be provided along with a gift to assist you in ministry and worship planning. Questions? Contact Karen Gosselin, kgosselin@alsbom.org, (334) 613-2318.

“Delight yourself in the Almighty and lift up your face to God.” Job 22:26 (CSB)

**Worship
Resources**
Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions



SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For April 25

Explore the Bible

By Benjamin Stubblefield, Ph.D.

Visiting Assistant Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



REMEMBERED Luke 22:7–20

Marcel Proust, a 20th century French novelist, took about 14 years to write a seven-volume collection of semi-autobiographical fiction. His inspiration? Hot tea and a cheap cookie. The food took him back to his childhood, and he wrote seven (ahem ... long) books to explain it to us. That might seem extreme, but we all know the experience of a smell, a taste, a touch triggering important memories. Such an instance is now known as a Proustian moment.

Our passage today describes for Christians our Proustian moment. Jesus institutes for us the Lord's Supper, or Communion, as a meal for Christians to remember — to go back to a past moment that defines our present. But it is not only for us to remember what Christ did for us at His first coming. Amazingly, the meal is also to remind us of what He will do for us in His second.

Prepared (7–13)

Jerusalem is packed. Faithful Jewish pilgrims, Jesus and His disciples included, descend on the city to keep the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. What's tough to come by are places to eat and sleep and materials for the festal meal.

That's what makes the first scene in our passage so remarkable. Jesus has a prearranged large, furnished room in which He plans to conduct the first Lord's Supper. Furthermore, He calls upon His disciples to diligently make the required meal preparations — secure the room, get a lamb slain at the temple, pick up bitter herbs, purchase unleavened bread and wine. All of this would take tremendous effort.

While our church communion services are not often that difficult to host, we ought to consider imitating the care with which Jesus and the disciples prepared appropriately for theirs. In order to take the Lord's Supper rightly, they needed a place for Jesus to sit at the table, but we are now commanded, in order to take Communion rightly, to prepare a place for Jesus to sit in our hearts (1 Cor. 11:27–28).

Looking Forward (14–18)

Jesus takes a moment during this meal to give a word about future meals. In fact, He announces His Passover abstinence until “it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”

Announcing to everyone while you're eating with them that you're planning on not eating with them for an indefinite and long time is like announcing to everyone at your birthday party that you don't like presents, people or cake, and that you're lactose intolerant. That's a party-poop.

Except in this case, Jesus is not implying He doesn't want to be with His people. Rather, He implies that He's never again going to eat this meal because He's going to prepare one that's way better.

In this way, the Lord's Supper draws us back to the moment when Jesus promises us a place and party that He is going to make ready for us. Certainly, the disciples got sad at the thought of His absence, but I imagine they were thrilled at the prospect of what is yet to come.

The announcement of the Lord's death reassures us: “until He comes” (1 Cor. 11:26). And when He comes, what a day, glorious day — and what a meal — that will be.

Looking Back (19–20)

To conclude the meal, Jesus takes the bread and a “new covenant” cup and says the words many of us have seen etched into our church altars: “This do in remembrance of Me.”

What Jesus is announcing here is nothing short of epoch-making. His death begins a new, “more excellent ministry” enacted on “better promises” by which His sacrifice “once for all” brings people to God (Heb. 8:6; 10:10). We would no longer need a Paschal lamb because the final Lamb of God has come to take away the sins of the world.

When we partake, therefore, of the Lord's Table, we are right to do so happily and sober mindedly.

Because in order to mend His people, Jesus had to be broken.✠

Bible Studies for Life

By Rony Kozman, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies, Samford University



OUR COMMISSION Matthew 28:18–20; 2 Corinthians 5:16–21

When Jesus rose from the dead, He took His throne as the Messiah — the promised King of Israel. And Jesus' dominion extends to all the nations. As Isaiah tells us, all the nations will come to Him (Isa. 11:10–12) and will be instructed by Him (Isa. 42:4). It is against this background that the risen Messiah commissions His disciples in Matthew 28.

Christ commissioned us to make disciples as we go through life. (Matt. 28:18–20)

As the risen King to whom God has now given “all authority in heaven and on earth,” Jesus commissions His disciples to announce and extend His reign throughout all the nations.

When Jesus sent out the disciples earlier in Matthew, they were only to go to “the lost sheep of Israel” (10:6). But now that He is the risen King of Israel, Jesus sends His disciples into Gentile territories.

When Jesus appeals to His all-encompassing authority, He is not doing so in order to compel otherwise fearful disciples to tell their neighbors about Jesus. (To allay their fears, He promises them His divine presence.) Rather, His appeal to His authority underscores that Jesus is the risen King of Israel who has the power to extend His reign over Jews and Gentiles. And Jesus commissions the disciples to participate in this mission of advancing the Messiah's kingdom throughout all the earth.

Jesus commissions His disciples to announce the gospel (i.e., the good news) that Jesus is the enthroned King. As His disciples

we share in this global mission by making disciples from all nations, including right where we live.

Making disciples of all nations involves “baptizing them” and teaching them to obey all the Messiah's commands and instructions (also see Isa. 42:4).

We should tell others what Christ has done in our lives. (2 Cor. 5:16–19)

In 2 Corinthians 3–5, we read of the ministry that God gave to the apostles. They are ministers of the New Covenant (3:6). When we announce the gospel and make disciples, we are extending the message and ministry of the apostles.

When we pass along the apostolic message, we announce that in Christ, God forgives our sins and is reuniting the world to Himself. The message entrusted to Paul, and that we speak, is the “message of reconciliation.”

In brief, this message is: Our sins that made us enemies of God have been dealt with in Christ so that we can now have peace with God.

Our responsibility as Christ's representatives includes calling others to repentance and faith in Christ. (2 Cor. 5:20–21)

The apostles were appointed as the Messiah's royal ambassadors. As emissaries, their message is not their own. Their words are the words of God and of the Messiah whom they represent.

The appeal entrusted to the apostles is this: “be reconciled to God.” And when we share this apostolic message, God makes His appeal through us.✠

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✠ TAB Media



MEDIA REVIEWS

By Michael Foust

TAB Media

Season 2 of 'The Chosen' leads this month's family-friendly lineup

The best new thing on television isn't on Netflix, Disney Plus or broadcast television. In fact, it isn't even on satellite or cable TV.

It's Season 2 of the Christ-centric series "The Chosen," and it launched on Easter weekend at thechosen.tv and several other platforms, including The Chosen app.

On Facebook alone, 1 million people watched the first episode.

On YouTube, 2 million people tuned in.

The series, directed by Dallas Jenkins ("The Resurrection of Gavin Stone") and released by Angel Studios, tells the story of Jesus' life as viewed by the disciples.

The first episode of Season 2 focused on James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Season 1 included episodes about Matthew, Peter and Mary Magdalene, among others.

Top-notch acting

It may be the best movie or television series — ever — about the life of Christ. The acting is top-notch, the sets and costumes appear authentic, and the storylines are gripping. The series does take some artistic license with dialogue — most Bible-based films do — but the series nevertheless stays



"The Chosen"

Photo courtesy of Angel Studios

true to Scripture by basing each episode on one or two specific biblical scenes.

The series has been streamed more than 110 million times since it debuted in 2017.

"The Chosen" is the rare Christian project that has drawn high praise from seemingly every segment of Christendom — Baptists and Methodists, Reformed and Charismatics, Protestants and Catholics. It's even united two groups that seemingly never agree about films: those who love Christian movies ... and those who hate them.

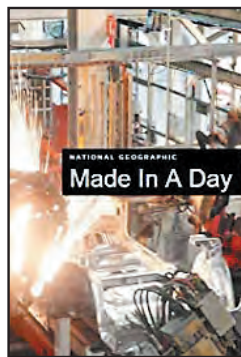
It has a 100% score from critics at Rotten Tomatoes and a 99% rating from viewers.

Why is it so popular? Perhaps it's because it's easy to identify with the characters. You, too, are a disciple who has fallen short of God's glory. You, too, were desperate for the good news. You, too, needed the touch of Christ. And in each episode, we see someone impacted by those eternal truths.

Download The Chosen app, or visit thechosen.tv.

Also worth watching this month:

▶ **"Made in a Day" (Disney Plus)** — Have you ever wondered how sneakers are made? Or helicopters? Or tractors? Or even hot sauce? If so, then this National Geographic series — now on Disney Plus — is for you. It's one of



the most educational (and family-friendly) shows on television, and is similar to the popular series "Modern Marvels." Each episode is 22 minutes. TV-PG.

▶ **"Nate Bargatze: The Greatest Average American" (Netflix)** — It's difficult to find family-friendly stand-up comedy, but Tennessee comedian Nate Bargatze provides it in this hilarious Netflix special. It was filmed outdoors during the pandemic, giving him the opportunity to tackle several timely topics. It's his second comedy special on the platform. TV-G.

▶ **"Life in Color with David Attenborough" (Netflix)** — British naturalist David Attenborough travels from the snowy Scottish Highlands to the rainforests of Costa Rica to show us how animals use the colors of nature — that is, colors we can't see — to survive. Special camera technology was used to capture the images. It's a three-part series and a celebration of God's creation.

▶ **"Star Wars" Vintage Collection (Disney Plus)** — If you're a "Star Wars" fan who grew up in the 1980s, then you likely remember the animated and live-action specials that aired on broadcast television, such as "Ewoks" and "Caravan of Courage." Those and other specials (including "Ewoks: the Battle for Endor") are now on Disney Plus. Ratings vary per show. 🌟

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.

"The Chosen" has a 100% score from critics at Rotten Tomatoes and a 99% rating from viewers."

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.

Outside church walls

Church night at hockey game provides 'common ground' for churches to invite unbelievers

By Tracy Riggs
TAB Media

A Christian radio station that has been around for 53 years and a professional ice hockey team in the Deep South have an unexpected partnership. WDJC, the longest-standing Christian radio station in Birmingham, and the Birmingham Bulls have been teaming up to host church nights since the 1990s.

This year, church night is April 30. Cherie Olivier, promotions director for Crawford Media (WDJC's

owner), said their involvement in church nights "allows us to really represent our community by being the station that lives for Jesus and likes to bring people from local churches together for fun and nice activities."

Birmingham Bulls' church nights began years ago when current Bulls' President Joe Stroud interned with the team. Stroud, a Samford University graduate, called local churches and invited them to church night.

'Major event'

"It was a major event then," Olivier noted. "When the team left [in 2001] it ceased to exist for a while. Four years ago, they brought [the Bulls] back. It's really fun because you have people who

remember the old church nights and remember doing that with their youth groups. Now they are youth pastors themselves or have children in youth groups."

Bonding experience

David Koonce, vice president of communications for the Bulls, has a special place in his heart for church nights and the Bulls, as he was one of those for whom a church night was an introduction to hockey and the team.

He found that it's one way to form bonds with those who are new to a church. Koonce grew up with many of his friends in the church but found it difficult to get to know new kids who didn't go to the same school.

"I've always thought church nights were cool," Koonce said. "It's one thing to hang out at a weeknight service, but it's different to get outside of the walls of the church and do something like a hockey game. I always felt that was where you could bond with some of those kids."

Another tie between WDJC and the Bulls is Ace McKay, part of WDJC's Roxanne & Ace morning show and music director for the team. He also has a childhood history with the Bulls.

For group ticket discounts call the box office at 205-620-6870. For more information about the Birmingham Bulls visit bullshockey.net.

In 2017, the Birmingham Bulls hockey team returned to the area after relocating in 2001. The team now plays at the Pelham Civic Center. Bulls president and Samford grad Joe Stroud was instrumental in starting church nights with the Bulls.

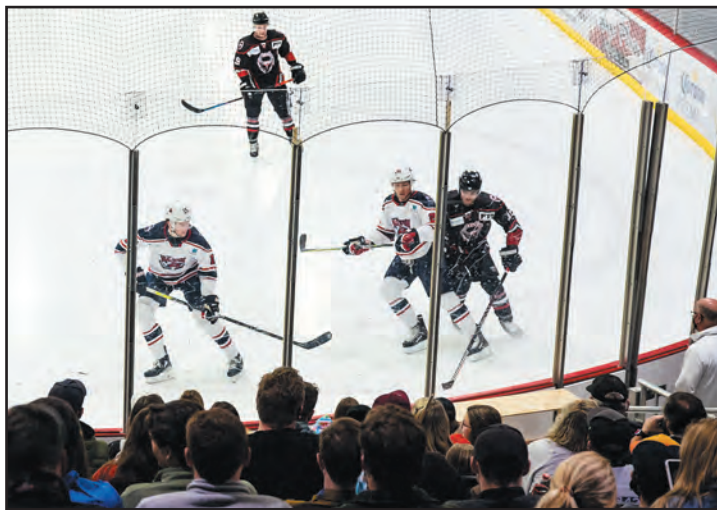


Photo by Travis Frontz



Photo by Travis Frontz

Church night at the Birmingham Bulls hockey games serves as an opportunity for church groups to fellowship with each other as well as invite unbelievers and begin to nurture gospel relationships with them.

"I grew up in Birmingham and the Bulls, like many, were a part of my childhood, so to be a part of this organization has been fantastic," McKay said. "The staff and the fans are the best anywhere. Church nights are a chance to bring families and churches together for a fun night."

A Birmingham Bulls hockey game is much more than just a sporting event — it's an experience.

"The fun thing about this sport is that what we try to do is not [just] give you a game to watch. We focus on the overall experience of your night. The game is high-speed anyway — it's nonstop — but in between whistles and TV timeouts and stuff like that, we've always got something going on. It's just fun to go to," Koonce said.

"An event like church night is something to bring the Christian community together in a safe environment, in a fun environment — something that is outside of the church walls and the sanctuary, something on common ground," Olivier said. "Last year when we did this, I obviously invited my

group to come but we were able to invite people who may not be believers. This is a common ground for everyone and people love sporting events.

"The main focus is to bring the church groups and youth groups together, but the really special part is that those people can invite their friends who may not be fully invested in a church and come out and have a great time. They can have conversations with people and you never know [what impact] that starter can have on a relationship.

Ticket info

"Those people might actually end up becoming involved in your small group, or your community group or your Bible study, just simply from the initial hanging out at this hockey game with people from your church," Olivier said.

There's still plenty of time to bring a group to the April 30 game. For group ticket discounts call the box office at 205-620-6870.

Read about Bulls' goalie Austin Lotz and his faith at tabonline.org/bulls-lotz.



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