



The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

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Photos courtesy of Kathy Woods

After going to jail for selling drugs, Kathy Woods (top, center) says God gave her a second chance. That came with a new family — husband, Robert; daughter, Katlyn; and son, Michael. It also came with a lot of ministry opportunities. **Left:** Woods (center), staff member at the Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham, distributes food in inner-city Birmingham with volunteers from New Rising Star Baptist Church. **Above:** Woods at a VBS at North Valley Church, Odenville, in 2016.

SECOND CHANCE

Brook Hills staff member says God ‘restored’ her after struggles, incarceration

By Grace Thornton
TAB Media

Kathy Woods never really thought of herself as a big drug dealer.

She’d grown up in a family who had everything they needed.

She went to church. She’d gotten a brand-new car as a teenager and gone to college

after she graduated from high school.

So just a few years later, when narcotics task forces in three counties were exhausting a lot of manpower trying to catch her and put her behind bars, it was hard for her to see herself the way they did.

“At the time, I looked at it as ‘I’m just doing what I’ve got to do to survive,’” Woods said. “But the police did not see it that way.”

Neither does she, now that

she’s nearly two decades down the road, married with children and serving in a ministry role at a church. She sees a young woman who had been through some hard times but who also made some bad decisions that snowballed.

And she sees someone on a crash course to run straight into Jesus — someone who one day would know the power of God’s redemption and restoration.

It all started when Woods was 16.



WOODS

“Life was good. My dad owned his own business, and things were going well,” she said.

But spiritually their family had some fault lines. Her mom was very involved with her church’s children’s ministry, but her dad didn’t go except for Christmas and Easter, and he didn’t believe God was real. Then when Woods was 16, she found out her dad had been having an affair.

“It was this blow to our world,” she said.

Immediately, her mom said they would get a divorce, but (See ‘Redeemed,’ page 8)



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The crossword puzzle
can be found on page 15.

TAB staff members get disaster relief credentials

TAB Media Group recognizes its staff members who have completed Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief training: Cynthia Watts, executive assistant (chaplaincy and mass feeding); Carrie B. McWhorter, content editor (cleanup and recovery); Debbie Campbell, director of communications, and Amy Hacker, creative services associate (chaplaincy); and Susan Stevens, outside sales rep (mass feeding).



Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers (from left) Ron Mitchell, Laura Vante, Wanda Emfinger, Toni Long and Cynthia Watts work in the ABRD Command Center at FBC Gulf Shores. Watts is executive assistant at TAB.



Photo by Amy Hacker
TAB's Debbie Campbell (left), director of communications, and Amy Hacker, creative services associate, recently were trained in chaplaincy.



Photo by Avery McWhorter
CARRIE B. MCWHORTER



Photo by Ralph Stevens
SUSAN STEVENS

Thanks to our spring intern

We want to give a special shoutout to our spring intern Charles Bradbary who served as a marketing intern for TAB Media. Congratulations on your graduation from Queens University of Charlotte. We appreciate all you have done for us.

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



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The Alabama Baptist expands to include new national publication

Knowing God is up to something and watching it come into focus can take our awe of Him to an entirely new level.

We love the opportunity to tell stories of what God is doing in your lives and ministries week after week, and we know we've only scratched the surface of the stories that can be told.

Now our team gets to offer this same support and resource to Baptists across the nation as we expand our ministry to include a second publication called The Baptist Paper.

Can you believe it? Not only will you continue receiving this weekly paper focused on our state, but now Baptists in all states will have a similar paper arriving in their mailboxes every other week.

We launch The Baptist Paper on May 13 and will work in conjunction with our Baptist media partners across the nation to make it happen.

It was more than a decade ago I sensed God expanding our team's vision and ministry but I couldn't make sense of it then.

Recently retired team member Linda Harrison had a similar impression not long after she arrived about 10 years ago, and we chatted often about the pos-

sibilities, watching and waiting to see what God was doing.

Other team members eventually joined in the various conversations and several saw it just as clearly. Some even began outlining how it might happen.

With the loss of state Baptist paper after state Baptist paper in recent years, The Alabama Baptist remains the only weekly Baptist publication in the nation and only one of two published more frequently than monthly.

And during all the chaos of 2020, it all became clear. We were supposed to offer a similar product to Baptists across the nation as what we provide Alabama Baptists.

The Baptist Paper is not a competition piece nor meant to take away from the content currently being provided by the various media outlets. Its purpose is to make sure all Baptists receive the information they need while also enhancing and boosting our partners' efforts.

Providing connection

We will work together to bring the best of what we are tasked to do to all Baptists in an effort to ensure all who want to stay connected and resourced have an opportunity to do so.

Each state's editor and/or

communications director will still be responsible to cover his or her area, and Baptist Press remains the news service for the Southern Baptist Convention through its role as a ministry of the Executive Committee. Other online news outlets also consistently cover Baptist news and are available to everyone.

Important resource

But providing an autonomous news source is vital for the health of any group, and ensuring communication gets to all members allows everyone to remain connected to the group.

While digital communication is an absolute must to reach the masses, a trustworthy and reliable printed product with the top news and inspirational pieces captured in a consistent resource provides the connection needed to reach those who prefer receiving their Baptist news and information through the mail.

Our motto is "No Baptist left behind" and our hope is that The Baptist Paper provides the articles and resource information everyone needs in a form manageable to work through without getting distracted by the countless discussions that are not always based in fact.

The new publication is an expansion of our 178-year-old

ministry through The Alabama Baptist. In some ways, it takes us back to our early days when The Alabama Baptist expanded to become The South Western Baptist in 1850 for a time.

And now in 2021 with two publications, a robust digital and web presence, and a podcast and radio ministry, we have shifted to calling our overall effort and ministry TAB Media Group.

With the same mission, professionalism and journalism ethics that comes with The Alabama Baptist, the TAB Media Group staff will provide credible, balanced news you can trust from a Christian worldview in The Baptist Paper as well.

Our team works hard to provide uplifting, encouraging and calm information while also providing the hard, simple facts of current issues.

The Alabama Baptist and The Baptist Paper provide stories of what God is doing through His people in the state, nation and world. Engaging with our content gives you a boost of energy, shot of grace and truth with compassion.

While everything you know and love about The Alabama Baptist remains the same, you may also want to check out The Baptist Paper. To request a free trial, call 800-803-5201 or visit tabonline.org/thebaptistpaper. 🌈

Your Voice



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

Each believer called to courageous influence

By Franklin Kirksey

Robertsdale, Ala.

Courageous influence is demonstrated by those who are courageous. One such courageous influencer was Joshua.

The Lord said to Joshua, “Be strong and very courageous ...” (Josh. 1:7) as He commissioned him to lead His people to conquer the land of Canaan. The Lord concluded His commission as follows: “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Josh. 1:9).

Jesus, our heavenly Joshua, calls for His followers to demonstrate

courageous influence in His Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew 5–7. Jesus uses three familiar images to illustrate His points in Matthew 5:13–16.

► **Courageous influence is contagious.** Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men” (v. 13).

Am I helping others to develop a taste for the goodness of God?

Romans 2:4 reads, “... the goodness of God leads to repentance.”

► **Courageous influence is continuous.** Jesus said, “You are the light of the world. ... Nor do they

light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house” (Matt. 5:14–15).

Am I helping others to understand their need for the grace of God?

► **Courageous influence is conspicuous.** Jesus said, “A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. ... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (vv. 14, 16).

Am I helping others to know I live for the glory of God?

Are you conquering your Canaan? While conquering our Canaan might not be in a physical sense, it is in a spiritual sense. The Book of Ephesians is the New Testament counterpart to the Book of Joshua. There are battles to fight and victories to win.

Maybe you are thinking, if God spoke to me as He did to Joshua or if Jesus appeared to me as He did to Joshua, I would have courageous influence. In some translations Hebrews 13:5–6 reads, “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’ ”

Hebrews 13:8 reads, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.”

May each one of us as believers express courageous influence!

In practicing darkness while professing light, we sin. Often the things that enable long-term sin to continue are so much a part of the fabric of our lives that we don’t even see them anymore. That is why Jesus called the Pharisees “blind” guides.

Darkness conceals and disguises. It distorts, hides and disturbs vision so that things appear other than they really are. Darkness varnishes over blemishes. We use the darkness to hide ourselves from ourselves, from others and from God.

Diane Langberg
Psychologist for trauma survivors and clergy

The missions field is all around us: in our neighborhoods, at school, work or the grocery store and, yes, even on social media. ...

Everything we do outwardly, whether actions, words or social media posts, either points unbelievers to Christ or doesn’t.

And as Christians, we are all called to be missionaries wherever God has placed us and to continually point others to Christ.

Would you be proud to show our holy God what’s on your profile?

Spoiler: He’s already seen it.

Jessica Ingram
the ropetab.org

Thoughts on Peace

Icome from a family that worries about lots of things — weighty things like finances and the future, as well as things that are less so, like driving over high bridges or catching a cold when it’s raining.

Worrying comes naturally to me, and I think it does for most of us. But in Philippians 4:6–7, Paul encourages us to call out to God with our requests, not in one way but in three: prayer, petition and thanksgiving.

Notice that it does not say here that this will rid us of our challenges. Even in the midst of this

peace, I know that shortly I will need to rise and shine and begin the daily grind. I still lead a nonprofit that addresses serious needs that many are unaware of and some others, frankly, pretend don’t exist.

In our family we still face the daily challenges of adolescence AND toddlerhood. And every day we seek to navigate relationships and life in general in a world that is struggling and less-than-perfect.

But there is peace.
Clay Owens
Panama City, Fla.

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“There are no favorites at the Lord’s table.”

THOMAS R. SCHREINER

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary professor and author of “The Lord’s Supper”

A favorite story from my ministry was a question given by a 7-year-old. I was pastoring FBC Columbus, Mississippi. In the sermon I was laboriously explaining something or other, now long forgotten.

At that point little Holly Martin, precious and precocious, turned to her mom Lydia and said, “Mother, why does Pastor Joe think we need this information?” Every pastor ought to be stopped halfway through the sermon and made to answer that question. Why do you think they need this information?

When Lydia told me that story, I screamed, “Yes! What a great question!!” I’m forever grateful for the honest query of a 7-year-old.

Joe McKeever
via Facebook

To truly support a life, we must support the parents. That means coming alongside them and helping them make choices that will help them and the baby thrive.

Julie Masson
Director of external engagement
Ethics & Religious Liberty
Commission, SBC

Our feelings about ourselves grow out of what we believe about ourselves.

Morris Murray Jr.
Jasper, Ala.

After the past year, some of us may find it hard to express optimism. Indeed, I’ve been through this bleakness in my own life when I had to attend a virtual funeral for

my grandmother last year. ... But this spring, as we welcomed our third child into the world, my story shifted to one of hope when I looked into her eyes. ...

We need to take the time to tell each other our stories and listen in turn. If we can communicate what happened to us during this past year, we can better understand what we need to move toward a better future.

Joel Christensen
Associate professor
Brandeis University

Illustrations are windows that help our audience see clearly into the house of the sermon.

President Danny Akin
Southeastern Baptist
Theological Seminary

Tornado story sparks memory

Thank you so much for sharing the story “Meteorologist James Spann recalls ‘heavy’ responsibility of destructive day,” about the April 27, 2011, tornado outbreak.

I am sure you don’t always hear back how a story you share affects your readers. I just wanted to let you know this one hit home big for me.

As director of Samaritan Inn Ministry through Montgomery Baptist Association, this day will forever be etched in my mind. God used the aftermath of these storms to teach me exactly what my job was all about.

I had accepted this position about six months earlier and truly didn’t understand the extent of my responsibilities. I didn’t get any training in the field and had kind of been moving at a snail’s pace to get familiar with my job.

I remember watching Mr. Spann and his colleagues all day long. Then our first call came on April 28, 2011, concerning a family member from Tuscaloosa. By May 3, we had over 13 families from across the U.S. needing our assistance due to a family member being injured during these storms.

I basically lived at Baptist (Medical Center) South, listening, praying and crying with these families for the next months. I knew now how God was going to teach me and help me learn what SIM was all about.

I am still in contact with many of these families and am so thankful, 10 years later, I answered God’s call to this position. (I told him no for six months). So again, thank you for sharing Mr. Spann’s story.

You never know whose life you will touch. We are so grateful for all that each of you do every day.

Debbie Jones, director
Samaritan Inn Ministry
Montgomery, Ala.

From the *Twitterverse*

@BretNicholson

The great opportunity the Church has at this moment in history is to be the island of sanity in the sea of irrationality.

@macbrunson

I often wonder, is there such a thing as an unexpressed thought anymore? Not everything that pops into your mind needs to be on social media. In fact, most of it is best left as just a thought.

@tyler_eiland

We naturally commend what we cherish. If you don’t cherish Christ, no amount of training will aid you in sharing Him.

@w_strickland

Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out.
— Proverbs 10:9

@DGrantGaines

“Productivity is not about getting more things done; it’s about getting the right things done.”
—@MichaelHyatt

@CSLewisDaily

“The future is something which everyone reaches at the rate of sixty minutes an hour, whatever he does, whoever he is.” —C.S. Lewis

@ebcjackson

“The greatest fact of the past is that Jesus died for us. The greatest fact of the present is that Jesus lives within us. But the greatest fact of the future is that Jesus is coming for us.”
—@AdamBDooley

@ricklance

“You can’t go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the end.”
—author unknown

@rayortlund

“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God” (Isaiah 40:1). Not “Inform, inform.” Not “Exhort, exhort.” Not even “Teach, teach.” But “Comfort, comfort.” The sacred privilege of every faithful pastor.

@scottwagoner62

Morning Prayer: Loving God, we awaken to a world suffering from violence and illness and the pain that comes with it all. Help us to not give up hope but to believe that acts of goodness, mercy, and justice do matter and make a difference. May we not give up on hope. Amen.

@plattdavid

This is what it means to be a Christian — to live with radical abandonment for the glory of Jesus. To see the mission of Christ as the purpose of our lives.

DENOMINATIONAL DISCUSSIONS

— SBC Executive Committee leader Ronnie Floyd's Vision 2025 proposal —

ACTION 2 — ADD
5,000 CHURCH PLANTS

EDITOR'S NOTE — This is part 2 of 5 in a series of stories related to Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee President Ronnie Floyd's Vision 2025 proposal that will be voted on at the SBC annual meeting in June. To read part 1 and follow the series, visit tabonline.org/vision2025.

Bottom line for how to achieve Action Step 2, according to SBC/NAMB leaders: more churches focused on sending, supporting and praying for church planters.

By Shawn Hendricks
TAB Media

As Southern Baptists consider a new five-year initiative to reach “the world for Jesus Christ — every person, every town, every city, every state and every nation,” entity leaders are seeking to add 5,000 new churches to help turn concerning church trends around.

In February 2021, SBC Executive Committee President Ronnie Floyd — in partnership with entity leaders — announced an ambitious challenge called Vision 2025 that consists of five “strategic actions.” One of them focuses on seeing an increase of 5,000 churches in the next five years, expanding the number of Southern Baptist churches from about 47,000 to more than 50,000.

When Floyd first announced Vision 2025 in February 2020, the plan called for 6,000 new SBC congregations, rather than the 5,000 announced in February 2021. The number was changed based on projections following the pandemic, said Jonathan Howe, vice president for communications for the SBC Executive Committee.

Kevin Ezell, president of the North American Mission Board,

told Baptist Press, “I know of no better way to bring His presence into a community than with a new, evangelistically focused church. We have to stay committed and focused on planting gospel-proclamation outposts where they are needed most in North America.”

To reach the goal, NAMB leaders suggest adding 1,250 new congregations each year — 600 of those as new church plants, 200 as replants, 100 as new campuses and 350 as new affiliations.

Churches who agree with the faith, practice and mission of the SBC, intend to cooperate with the SBC and contribute financially in some way to SBC causes may affiliate with the SBC.

In 2019, NAMB reported a total of 552 new church plants, 59 new church campuses and 297 affiliations, which accounts for a total of 908 congregations.

The total number of new congregations started each year has declined since the high of 1,781 in 2004, with the exception of an uptick in 2008 (see chart, page 7).

‘Major recalibration’

Attempting to compare the numbers isn’t as easy as it once was because church plants and new affiliations were reported together prior to 2010 when NAMB went through a “major recalibration” in how they reported their church planting numbers, noted NAMB’s vice president of communications Mike Ebert.

“There was no distinction, so we don’t know how many affiliations

are reflected in the new plant count prior to 2010,” he explained.

In addition, NAMB now requires more details about a church plant before it can be counted — SBC ID number, a name of the plant, an address and name of the planter.

Previously, NAMB reported a total of church plants by adding up the numbers provided by individual state conventions, Ebert said.

“The SBC ID requirement is especially important because

prior to that, it was easy to double or triple count a church plant,” Ebert told The Alabama Baptist. “Some states reported the same plant for several years in their count because it was still in the process of being planted. Some states also had a wide latitude in what they considered a

plant — Bible study groups in some cases. This is not a criticism; it’s just the way the process worked because NAMB required so few details.”

Because of these changes and efforts to “raise the bar on our assessments,” Ebert noted, NAMB believes this has helped them see an “80% survival rate at four years right now with church plants.”

According to NAMB’s latest figures (2018), an average of 900 churches close their doors per year.

According to past studies, Ebert said, only about half of the churches reported as closures are actual closings because some churches merge with other churches or leave the SBC.

Others reported as closing are part of correcting errors in the database.

The number of churches removed from the SBC list in 2019 and 2020 hasn’t been reported yet, according to NAMB.

Calling all church planters

According to the latest NAMB figures, there are 2,218 missionary units — 2,041 being church planter units.

Ebert noted the pre-2010 numbers included both the missionary and spouse. Today, each number represents a unit, which could mean a single missionary or a married couple.

With the COVID-19 pandemic slowing things down and various missionary sending events canceled in 2020, this year’s number is down from the 3,057 NAMB reported last year.

NAMB officials also note they have 3,720 chaplains that have been endorsed by the entity, which brings the total missionary unit and chaplain count to 5,938.

“The big need is for more qualified church planters,” Ebert said.

“We have the resources to plant. As Kevin [Ezell] often says, we could plant 100 more churches this year [if we had the church planters]. It’s really a matter of calling out the called, as Dr. Floyd is trying to address as well, and bringing more church planters out of our churches.”

Ezell, NAMB’s president, told The Alabama Baptist that “for this part of Vision 2025 to become reality, we must have more churches willing to become directly involved. We need more that will become sending churches and supporting churches. We need more who will be committed to praying.”

STRATEGIC ACTION STEP 2:

Add 5,000 new SBC congregations to our Southern Baptist family, giving us more than 50,000 SBC congregations.

And NAMB has seen progress during the past 10 years in its “Send cities” throughout North America.

These are major metropolitan areas where before there may have only been one or two Southern Baptist churches.

But today, new church plants have popped up throughout these cities — like Chicago, Phoenix, Salt Lake City, Denver, New York and many others. And churches started since 2010 account for 11% of all churches in the SBC and report 18% of all SBC baptisms.

NYC planting experience

New York City church planter Chris Mills says he connects regularly with about 20 other church planters in the Manhattan area.

This network, he noted, has provided needed support in a city that has been rocked by shutdowns and

restrictions because of COVID-19.

“We’re all going through the same things at the same time and all planting,” said Mills, who was planning to launch One Community Church in Hell’s Kitchen with his wife, Sarah, in 2020. But they had to delay and are looking to officially launch in early 2022 following a year of focused community outreach.

“[The Send Network] fellowship alone has been life-giving to me,” Mills added, “just knowing I’m a quick phone call, a quick subway ride away to someone who knows all the frustrations that I’m carrying and all of the dreams that I’m carrying.”

In a neighborhood where a church building is on the market for \$20 million, finding an affordable space to meet regularly can be a little more challenging than in other parts of the country, Mills noted.

“We’re still in that space of trying to figure it out but when we do, we will more than likely find a community space here in our neighborhood,” Mills said. “Until then, we may be doing [various outreach efforts and events] in the park.”

Hoping to rebound

NAMB is hoping for a rebound in the next year as church planters like Mills are able to move forward with their plans to launch in the months or year ahead.

Ezell noted, “2020 was an incredibly difficult year in many, many ways ... but I am so proud of the way church planters responded. They saw the ministry opportunities within the crisis.

“One advantage church planters have is that they have already taken on a role that is exceptionally difficult,” he said. “Most people would

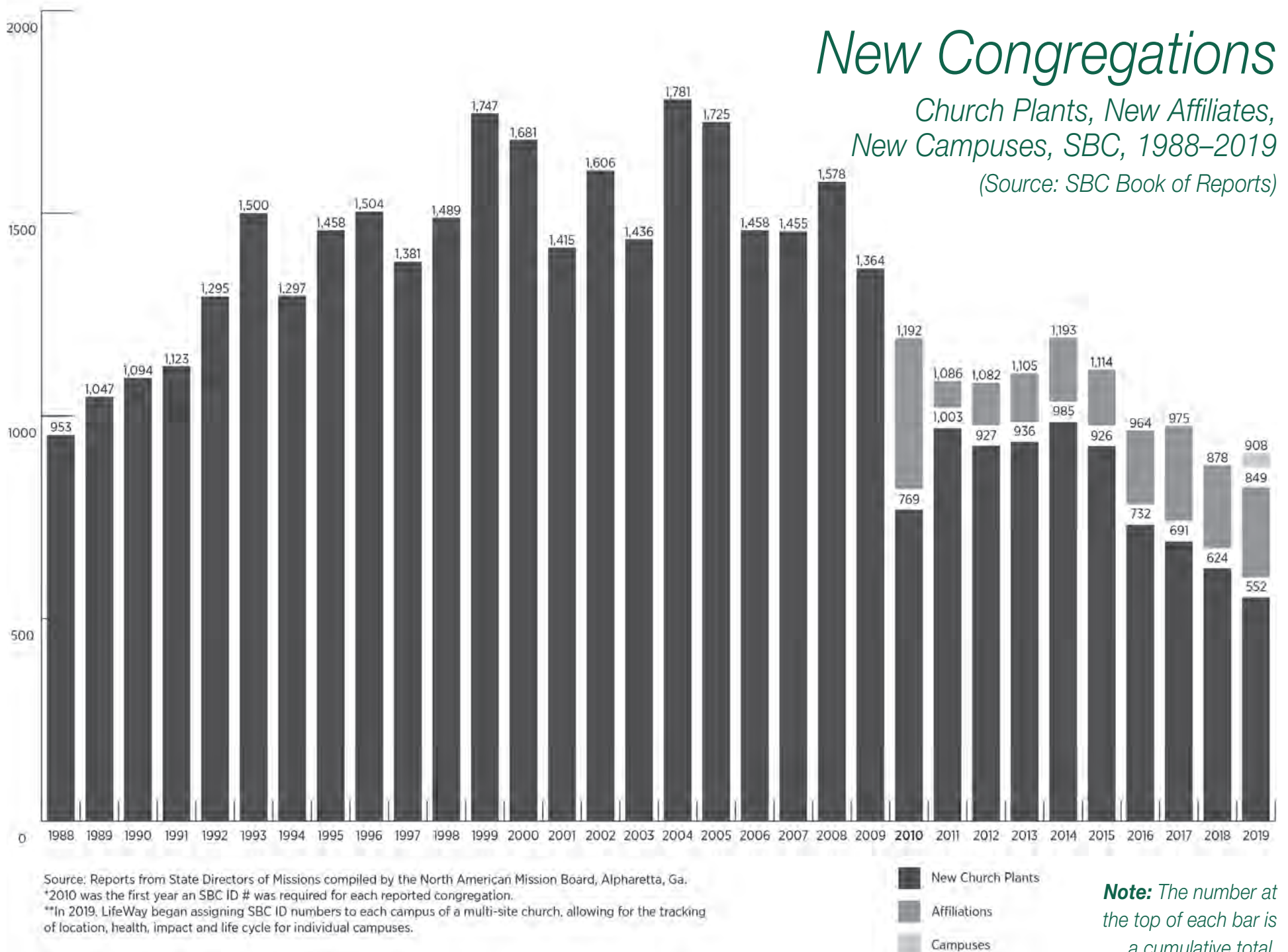
never jump into a task like starting a new church. It is filled with risks and challenges.”

Meanwhile, Floyd reported March 31 in his Advancing the Vision email that the SBC is making strides in expanding the number of non-Anglo or ethnic minority congregations.

More than 60% of new church plants in the past five years have been non-Anglo or multiethnic, he said, noting 22.3% of all SBC congregations fall in this category.

Ethnic minority congregations have grown by 7,992 congregations since 1990, an increase of 223%, Floyd added.

“Through collaborative partnerships, cooperation and generosity, our churches advance the good news of Jesus Christ to the whole world,” Floyd said. “This vision is unlimited when we focus on this global mission together.”✠



'Outrageous justice' offers inmates hope

Kathy Woods (see story, page 1) said the women who came week after week to do ministry in her jail planted the seeds that began a major life change for her.

Sammy Perez, senior manager of grassroots campaigns for Prison Fellowship, said if your church is interested in doing life-changing prison ministry like that, there's a way to get that conversation started.

"Outrageous Justice," a small-group curriculum designed by Prison Fellowship, is offered free of charge to individuals and churches interested in learning more about the crisis of crime and overincarceration and how they can respond.

Materials available

The study comes with a book, study guide and downloadable videos that take a look at the criminal justice system through a biblical lens.

"You learn God's heart for justice and go from there," Perez said. "It leads you to ask the question, 'How can I as an individual be a part of God's story?'"

Perez said more than 1,100 copies have been put to use in Alabama, but he would love to see many more.

The missions field is big. Nationwide, 2.2 million men and women are incarcerated, and each year 600,000 will be released to return to their communities. Two out of three reoffend within three years.

Prison ministry can help change that, said Perez, who himself was formerly incarcerated.

"We've found that there are a lot of Christians around the nation who are looking for a way to get involved and bring about a more restorative justice system in our country," he said. "We have also found that 'Outrageous Justice' has been a good tool for Christians around the nation to learn and also get involved."

To learn more or to request copies of "Outrageous Justice," visit prisonfellowship.org/outrageousjustice. (Grace Thornton)

REDEEMED

Woods' story 'a living example of gospel's power to change'

(continued from page 1)

over the next two years it was a roller coaster of trying to work it out and deciding they couldn't over and over again. Woods also went through a breakup with her high school sweetheart. She started going to parties, experimenting occasionally with drugs. During that time, her dad was also diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's.

He began to deteriorate rapidly. The divorce was final when Woods was 18. Then at 19, she found out she had an early form of cervical cancer, and after a procedure to remove it, doctors told her she might never have children.

"For a kid who had had no bumps in the road, it was a lot," she said. "Then I started dating a guy who was 10 years older than me."

She said she didn't really love him — he was just someone to spend time with in a season where everything was really hard. But things escalated quickly.

"We were eating dinner with my dad one night, and my dad said, 'I sure do hope you guys get married because I want to walk you down the aisle before I can't,'" Woods said. "So the guy I was dating said, 'Oh, we're going to get married aren't we? We should just go ahead and do it.'"

Woods knew she didn't want to marry him.

"But my dad was crying and saying, 'Oh, I can't wait,' and it just snowballed out of control for me," she said. "So the next thing I know, I'm 21 and getting married to a man I cared about but in no way did I love him the way I loved that high school sweetheart."

She dropped out of college, planned a wedding and got mar-



Photo courtesy of Kathy Woods

Kathy Woods (right), along with Sha Swindall (left) and Michelle Earle, serves the homeless in downtown Birmingham in 2013. The women served through Bags of Love, a local ministry Woods began at North Valley Church, Odenville.

ried — and her new husband physically assaulted her when they came home from the wedding. She was stunned. The abuse escalated until one day Woods finally asked him what had changed.

"I said, 'You're not the same person,' and he said it was because he was using drugs," she said. "He told me I was always wanting him to do things, and all he wanted to do was get high and have a good time and that everything would be better if I would just do that with him."

Woods couldn't bear the thought of going back and telling her recently

divorced mom that she was being abused and her marriage was failing. She also couldn't bear the "I told you so" comments she thought she might get from friends who had thought the relationship was a bad idea.

She felt trapped.

So she tried crystal meth.

"Pretty much immediately I was hooked," Woods said.

It alleviated the abuse at first, but then it got way worse. Eventually when her dad needed full-time care, she used that as an excuse to leave her husband. But her dad didn't have enough money to pay for full-time care and support her and her addiction.

Moving drugs

So when a friend offered Woods a chance to make money selling drugs, she took it. And once again, it escalated.

"Within three months, I was moving a good bit of drugs," she said.

Over time, officers in Jefferson, St. Clair and Shelby counties were chasing her, trying to get enough evidence to arrest the young woman who was one of the main people moving drugs into and out of the area. They eventually arrested her in Shelby County, and when they did, the narcotics officer "was so kind," Woods said.

He asked her if she wanted to go back inside and get her shoes.

"I told him no, I really want to go in and get my Bible," Woods said. "The whole time I'd been using, I



Photo courtesy of Kathy Woods

Kathy Woods with her dad at her first wedding in 2003.

really was not in a good place with the Lord. I was leaning toward my dad's view on God. But when I was hurting, I would go to my Bible, and randomly in that moment, I told him I'd rather have my Bible than my shoes."

He told her he would let her get both. And as she got into his car, God was starting something new, she said.

"They transferred me to St. Clair County, and my mama would not come get me," Woods said. "She said, 'I know you're safe, I know you're sober and I know you're not hurting anybody else.' She also told me that she had stepped in to take care of my dad. She said, 'I'm leaving you there, but I'm praying for you.'"

So now, stuck in jail, Woods started seeking solace where she could. She started going to a chapel service run by women from a local church.

"The only reason I would go is because you could color while they had chapel," she said. "So week after week after week, I went and colored while they talked. And finally at some point, the Holy Spirit started to move again and relit my heart."

Woods said God reminded her that she had never been alone and that He had protected her.

"There have been a lot of dangerous, dangerous situations I was in that looking back now, I'm lucky I'm not dead," she said. "And the Spirit just reminded me of that and said, 'God has sought you, He's called you, He's shown you favor — just come home.'"

It was her 89th night in jail, and she went back to her cell and wept.

"I told the Lord, 'I want to share the gospel, but I know I'm going to prison.' I knew I was looking at 25 years because of the charges. That was going to be my minimum," Woods said. "I said, 'God, I'm going to do what you called me to do. I'm going to share the gospel, and I realize it's going to be in prison.'"

The next day, the mother of the friend who had gotten her started selling drugs came and posted her bail bond. Woods' mom let her move home, and she stayed sober and got

involved in church. It was about a year before she finally went to court for her sentencing.

"I was so convinced I was going to prison, I had my bag of stuff to take with me," Woods said.

But the judge called her into his chambers and asked a question that surprised her — he asked her about her relationship with God. So she told him.

'Second chance'

And he told her something even more surprising.

"He said, 'I just really feel like the Lord is leading me to give you a second chance,'" Woods said. "He said, 'I'm struggling with it because you're a pretty big deal to catch and have charges on, and I can't imagine what I'm going to get from the other judges and the cops if I let you walk out of here. But I just can't shake that the Lord is telling me to let you go.'"

He turned to the officers in the room and asked if it would be OK with them if he gave her time served for one charge of distribution and dropped the other charges against her.

"I'm sitting there thinking, 'I know they're going to say no, why would they say yes?' And they both said 'sure,'" Woods said. "If you could understand the amount of manpower they spent trying to get me arrested and catch me, for them to turn around and say, 'Sure, let her walk away' — it's mind boggling, and there is only one explanation for it."

That explanation

was God, Woods said. She began the journey of finding out what it looked like to live as a Christian adult with a bag full of trauma and struggles.

"Those first couple of years were hard. I don't want anybody to think my story is 'the Lord intervened, and I did everything I was supposed to do,'" she said.

People began to invest in her along the way, and she started volunteering in youth ministry at a local church.

She never touched drugs again, but she also hadn't learned what it looked like to live a life fully surrendered to Christ. During that time, she



Photo courtesy of Kathy Woods

Kathy Woods (back row, center) poses with some of the high school girls she led at NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville. The students were hosting a photo booth at the church's fall festival in 2019.

became pregnant with her son.

"I was like 'I'm a disappointment; I've come back but I'm screwing it up so badly,'" Wood said. "But through the journey, people I really thought would say 'yeah, you've got too much going on' really stood in the gap for me and championed for me."

One of those was Tim Faulk, a minister who disciplined her during that time and helped her get on her feet in ministry. Another was Chris Crain and Russ Donaho, at the time pastor and worship minister respectively of North Valley Church, Oden-ville.

"Both just poured into me, loved on me and understood my passion for ministry and missions and wanting to help people who are struggling and lost," Woods said.

They told her they saw a lot of skill and talent for ministry in her, but they wanted to equip her with more depth of Bible understanding.

Education and ministry

"Chris actually paid for my first seminary class," she said.

From there, she went on to Leavell College at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and after graduation served in student ministry at Deerfoot Baptist Church, Trussville, then at Serving You Ministries in Birmingham. She now serves as administrative assistant for city ministries at the Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham.

God has done a lot of restoration work in her life. She's married now and has a stepdaughter in addition to her son. She spent five years in student ministry, pouring into

students and helping them see the life God has for them.

She prays both they and her children will know God but get to live "normal" stories and not walk the same road she did. And she recognizes the role that her mother's constant prayers played in her journey.

'Living example'

Over the years, Woods has been on missions trips across the U.S. and around the world. She's mentored students in job training programs and worked with families in a part of inner-city Birmingham that faces a lot of brokenness.

And prison ministry is dear to her heart — she encourages people all the time to get involved and not get discouraged if it seems like everyone involved is coloring and not listening.

God is at work, Woods said, and she's a testimony to that.

"I love sharing hope and the truth that you are being pursued by your Creator," she said. "He is willing to restore. It may take time, and there are consequences to our actions, but He does restore."

Crain said Woods' story is "a living example of the gospel's power to change."

When she was at North Valley, "her love for Jesus was magnetic," said Crain, who now serves as executive director of Birmingham Metro Baptist Association. "I was amazed at Kathy's ability to bring others along when she began to live on mission for Jesus. Kathy seems to operate by the philosophy that Jesus can redeem anyone and use them to impact the world. She lives that out like few I have ever observed." 🌈



Photo courtesy of Kathy Woods

Kathy Woods with a client at Serving You Ministries, where she served as ministry and volunteer coordinator.

WHY I BELIEVE IN THE COOPERATIVE PROGRAM

STRONGER TOGETHER

Having grown up in Baptist churches, most might think that I would have known a lot about how Baptists fund their work. I am sure I had heard about the Cooperative Program before, but it wasn't until I was a young man and sensed God's call to vocational ministry that the Cooperative Program came into focus for me.

When I enrolled at a Baptist college and paid tuition at a reduced rate, how Southern Baptists fuel their work around the world suddenly became very important to me. That experience was repeated several times over when I was a student at a Southern Baptist seminary where I later earned two advanced degrees.

Without the help of churches across our convention as they gave faithfully to missions through the Cooperative Program, I would never have been able to attend school, much less graduate.

My appreciation of the Cooperative Program broadened as I experienced missions firsthand in trips that took me to several places around North America and eventually around the world.

When I distributed food to earthquake victims in Turkey, befriended refugees in Rome, painted the inside of a church building in Mexico and shared the Gospel with natives living in treehouses on a riverbank on a remote Indonesian island, the Cooperative Program paved the way making those experiences possible.

The armies of Southern Baptist missionaries, planting their lives in distant places that most of us will never get to visit, are there because of the Cooperative Program.

So what is the Cooperative Program? It is nothing more than a divinely revealed way of helping advance the Gospel of Jesus in our world.

Since 1925, Southern Baptists have voluntarily pooled their financial resources to enable local churches to cooperate better in fulfilling the charge of Christ to share His good news with the whole earth.

Most people who gather for worship on any given Sunday in a neighborhood church will never have the opportunity to visit a major U.S. city or a remote country on a mission trip. But they can give their tithes and offerings faithfully through their church, and a part of those funds can be sent to fuel mission work through the Cooperative Program.

Some might protest that they believe that our mission dollars should be used locally. Did you know that in our own dear state Alabama Baptists use about 50 percent of Cooperative Program gifts within our borders?

The Alabama Baptist State Convention uses CP funds to help students obtain Christian higher education at one of our three colleges, help provide senior adult housing in one of our residential facilities and help nurture children who are displaced from their families.

Many of the funds assist in the ministries of local associations, help plant new churches throughout the state and provide relief to those in a natural disaster – and those are only a few of the ways that people are blessed locally through regular gifts through the Cooperative Program.

Several years ago, my wife and I knew it was time to make a better estate plan for the assets we would leave behind when we were gone. We contacted The Baptist Foundation of Alabama for help, which they gladly provided to enable us to honor God with our material assets.

First in our minds was how to continue our efforts to

expand God's Kingdom, even though we'd be in heaven. The Cooperative Program was the natural choice, so we drew up our wills to stipulate that ten percent of all we leave will be a designated gift to missions through the Cooperative Program.



The work of sharing Christ in Alabama, in North America and around the globe will continue long after we are gone to be with the Lord. And because we will use a charitable gift annuity, our family will receive no less in the process.

Once a woman asked me when our church was going to be able to eliminate the computer line item in our church budget. The funds were set aside each year to provide for computers, but mostly for ever-changing software and the technical expertise needed to help keep everything functioning well.

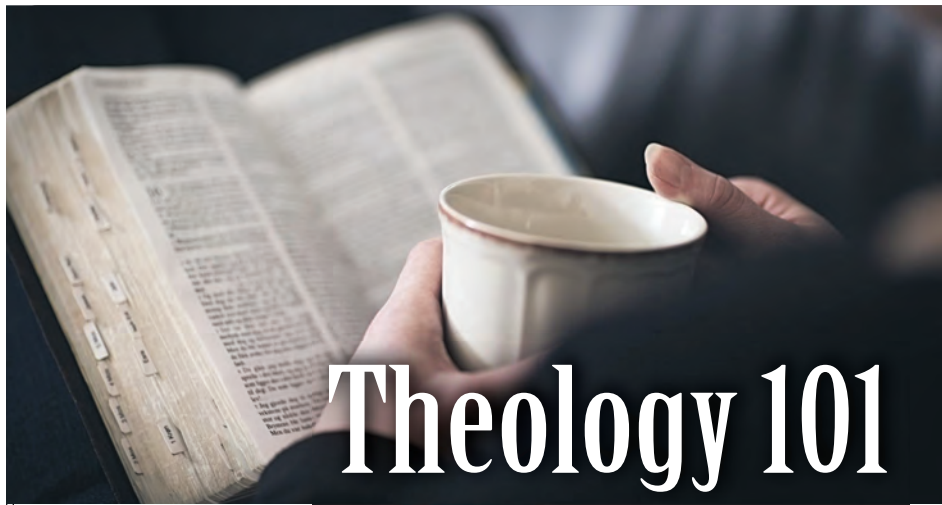
In her mind, the computer budget must have seemed like a car payment that would eventually end. The need for mission expansion around the world is a lot like that computer budget.

We will never need to stop funding missions because each generation needs to hear the Gospel. And, until Christ returns for His church, the Cooperative Program remains the single most effective and efficient way to collectively pool our resources to help people come to know Jesus. That is why I believe in the Cooperative Program!

Donnie Payne is co-pastor of Forest Lake Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa. He serves as a trustee of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.



COOPERATIVE PROGRAM



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Divine Relationship

God's Children

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
Special to The Alabama Baptist

This month Theology 101 seeks to explore answers to the question: “Who are Christians in relation to God?” We will look at some biblical ways to think about and appreciate being in a saving relationship with Him.

Several meaningful terms occur in the Bible — terms that give us encouraging answers to this simple but basic question. The beginning point is one of the frequent and treasured answers: “As Christians, we are children of God.” This truth as presented in 1 John 3:2 states, “Beloved, we are God’s children now.” This is somewhat enlarged in John 1:12: “As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.”

Legal adoption

As God’s children, Christians have a birth relation with Him. The Bible speaks of being “born of God” (1 John 4:7). Jesus’ declaration to Nicodemus stands out: “You must be born again” (John 3:7). As God’s children, Christians also have a legal relationship with God, expressed in the idea of adoption, as stated in Galatians 4:4–5: “When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” Thus, a believer can confidently declare, “I am a child of God by both

birth and adoption.” This status was made possible by the saving work of God’s only Son, as attested in Galatians 3:26: “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”

‘Joint heirs with Christ’

One of the ministries of the Holy Spirit is to give us assurance of being God’s children. Such is the truth of Romans 8:16: “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” Since believers are both begotten of God and adopted by Him, the very next verse of that passage asserts that as God’s children we are His heirs: “And if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.”

A further implication that stems from being God’s children is that all those who have God as their Father are thereby related to one another as brothers and sisters. Believers of every nation, race, gender, language and ethnic group begin their prayers with the same inclusive words given by Jesus: “Our Father.” As the hymn writer put it in the last century, “Who serves my Father as a son is surely kin to me.”

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.



Prison ministry restoring at-risk women ‘back to life’

By Shawn Hendricks
TAB Media

With hands held high, a group of more than 300 women sing praise songs as they worship together. There are plenty of tears, hugs and smiles during this time away from their daily routine. But it isn’t your typical women’s retreat or gathering at a local church — it’s being held inside the walls of a prison.

Courage For Life, a Georgia-based ministry that focuses on equipping people to apply God’s word to their lives, works with chaplains and other ministry partners to serve in prisons in Georgia, Missouri and Florida.

Under the leadership of the ministry’s founder and executive director, Ann White, Courage For Life is helping at-risk women access audio Bibles and attend classes focused on teaching how a deeper understanding of Scripture can transform their lives.

Nearly a quarter-of-a-million women and girls are incarcerated in the United States, according to The Sentencing Project, a nonprofit that advocates for fairness in the criminal justice system.

“This is a mission field,” said White, a nationally known speaker and contributor to Focus on the Family, during one of the ministry’s visits to the Chillicothe Correctional Center in Missouri.

“These women are (spiritually) hungry,” she said. “[They] are desperate for the love of Christ. They’re desperate to know that somebody cares. They’re desperate for hope ... hope changes everything.”

Courage For Life has released an app featuring the entire Bible narrated by women. In March, the ministry announced efforts to translate the entire Bible into Spanish in the New Living Translation.

The Spanish version, which also is to be narrated by women, is scheduled for release in the fall.

In a place where illiteracy can bring intimidation and shame, imprisoned women are able to listen to the Bible through tablet computers provided by donations.

The female voice, White noted, is an important part of the outreach among at-risk women who have experienced abuse.

“One thing in working with at-risk women, it’s important to use gender-

specific treatment,” White said in a news release. “You don’t put a woman who may have been traumatized by a man with a male counselor or a male-voiced program.”

Kathy Urbanick, ministry director for Courage For Life, said in an interview with TAB Media that male prisoners have also responded well to the women-narrated Bible.

“We were overwhelmed by that,” she said, noting many of those imprisoned men have been abandoned by the men in their lives or experienced abuse by other males.

Bible study courses

Working with the ministry, volunteer prison chaplains also have seen lives change through “Courage For My Life” Bible study courses for class sizes of about 20 women. The training focuses on teaching how to personally apply the Bible.

“We have been overwhelmed by the reception for the Courage For My Life class,” Urbanick noted. “They create a safe environment. And for the first time, these women can feel like they can step out of isolation.”

To learn more about Courage For Life, visit courageforlife.org. To download the audio Bible, look for Courage for Life Bible in your favorite app store.



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3 stories you should know



Photo by Armineaghayan/Creative Commons

International Christian Concern praised a White House statement issued April 24 affirming the Armenian Genocide of 1915. The statement came on Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day. Above, visitors attend a service at a genocide memorial in Vedi, Armenia, in 2017. At least 1.5 million Armenian Christians were killed or displaced from present-day Turkey when the Ottoman Empire undertook genocide against the group, forcing many Armenians to resettle elsewhere. Read more about modern day tensions in the region at tabonline.org/armenia.

Annual SBC meeting schedule released

The Southern Baptist Convention's 2021 annual meeting in Nashville will convene at the Music City Center on June 15 at 8 a.m. and conclude June 16 at 5 p.m., according to the program released April 28.

Adam W. Greenway, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and chair of the SBC's Committee on Order of Business, said the committee has worked "diligently" on the agenda for this year's annual meeting. The schedule provides opportunities for messengers to engage with SBC entities and conduct business, as well as to fellowship for the first time in 2 years.

Willy Rice, senior pastor of Calvary Church, Clearwater, Florida, will give the convention sermon.

View the full program at tabonline.org/sbc21-program. (TAB Media)

Idaho governor signs critical race theory bill

A new bill in Idaho, signed by Gov. Brad Little on April 28, allows for critical race theory to be taught at schools and universities but prohibits that belief system being forced on students.

According to the Associated Press, the legislation would prohibit teachers from forcing belief systems that claim a group of people, as defined by sex, race, ethnicity or religion, are inferior or superior to others.

"The claim that there is widespread, systemic indoctrination occurring in Idaho classrooms is a serious allegation," Little wrote in the letter to Republican House Speaker Scott Bedke. The Idaho State Board of Education, which sets policy for Idaho public education, didn't take a stance on the legislation. (TAB Media)

Headline news from around the Southeast

Arkansas

Five thousand crosses, each cross representing 10,000 abortions worldwide, dot the property of Central Baptist Church, Bald Knob, Arkansas. Jamie McAnelly, Central Baptist youth pastor, said he hopes passersby will see that, although there are 5,000 crosses set up, there was one person, Jesus Christ, who died for the estimated 50 million babies who have been aborted worldwide, Arkansas Baptist News reported. "While there are many crosses [out there], there is only one cross for many," he said.

Florida

While cars were roaring around the Sebring International Raceway in Florida during the Twelve Hours of Sebring, members of First Baptist Church, Sebring, were on a race of their own — presenting the gospel to the fans who attended the event. By the time the checkered flag was waved

concluding the March 20 race, 1,065 fans heard the gospel and 373 made professions of faith, the Florida Baptist Witness reported.

Georgia

Journalist and pastor Roger Alford is the newly named editor of The Christian Index, an online news service for the Georgia Baptist Mission Board. Alford's journalistic experience includes many years with the Associated Press, five years as communications director for the Kentucky Baptist Convention and time as vice president for communications for the International Mission Board, the Christian Index reported. He has served as pastor of South Fork Baptist Church in Kentucky for the past two years.

Louisiana

Twenty-five members of Lakeside Baptist Church, Pineville, Louisiana, distributed 400

crosses near a heavily traveled highway in mid-March. The pre-Easter evangelistic event resulted in 14 people making professions of faith, the Baptist Message reported. For some members, the event was the first time they had shared their faith. "It's a way of us getting outside the walls of the church," Pastor Lloyd Bye said.

Tennessee

Since being elected sheriff in 2014, Paul Thomas, a member of Englewood Baptist Church, Jackson, Tennessee, has implemented many ideas as he seeks to positively impact the lives of inmates at Gibson County correctional facility. Whether it's establishing a highly successful reentry program, hosting a one-night revival or feeding inmates an Easter meal, Thomas continually looks for opportunities to improve inmates' lives, and whenever possible, introduce them to Jesus, the Baptist and Reflector reported.

Alabama news

ALABAMA WMU

► This summer, instead of holding its Missions Adventure Camp, **WorldSong Missions Place** will have Travel Teams going to churches and associations all over the state to lead one-day missions camps. Under the leadership of Kaley Stephens, teams will lead children in day camps that will include high-energy worship, Bible study, a missions study focusing on a specific people and their culture, crafts, a hands-on missions project, games and activities.

WorldSong is also renting out its camp facilities this summer to groups that would like to come to campus for retreats or events.

For more information, visit worldsongretreat.org/worldsongtravelteams.

COLBERT-LAUDERDALE ASSOCIATION

► **George Henley** told his pastor in the fall of 1950 that he felt like God was calling him into the ministry, and his pastor put him to work teaching the 10-year-old boys in the church.

The following March, he preached his first sermon. And 70 years later, he's still going strong. He's preached at nearly 250 churches and served as a pastor in Mississippi for 13 years, Tennessee for six and northwest Alabama for the rest of that time.



HENLEY

Harris Chapel Baptist Church, Cherokee, where Henley and his wife, Margaret, are members, recently honored them for their ministry.

"One of the things he said very specifically was that he could not have done it all these years without his wife — she was by his side the entire time," said Scot Farris, interim pastor of Harris Chapel. "They're like heroes in our church. We're so blessed to have them. They're an unbelievable man of God and woman of God."

During Henley's years in Alabama, he served as pastor of churches in Lamar, Pickens, Fayette and Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist associations. He retired from Eutaw Baptist Church, and after that served as an interim pastor of eight churches. He's also gone on missions trips to Montana, Guatemala and Wales and served as a hospital chaplain. He still preaches regularly today.

"I'm grateful the Lord gave me the opportunity," Henley said. "My wife and I have been married more than 65 years and she's been with me every step of the way, serving in everything from the nursery to teaching older adults."

DEKALB ASSOCIATION

► **Broadway Baptist Church, Rainsville**, recently celebrated paying off the note on their worship center and fellowship hall.

To honor the occasion, the church held a note-burning ceremony, and church members gathered



Facebook photo

around the building to release colorful balloons. Kevin McCreless is pastor.

ETOWAH ASSOCIATION

► Pastor **Joey Hanner** says his

main thought when he looks back over the past decade is this — "I could've missed this."

His church, **Union #3 Baptist Church, Gadsden**, honored him for 10 years of ministry recently, and Hanner said it's been 10 "amazing" years.

"This is my first church to pastor, and it's far surpassed anything I could have ever imagined," he said.



HANNER

Hanner said he and his wife, Connie, were "lost church members" at Mount Zion Baptist Church, Alexandria, when Jesus turned their lives upside down. He served as student/missions pastor there for a number of years before he got the call to Union #3.

"I was really nervous about it," Hanner said.

But he's glad he didn't say no.

The church, which is located in a small community called Ballplay, has seen God do amazing things. Hanner went to a conference and caught a vision for discipleship, and in a six-year period, Union #3 baptized 900 people and grew to holding two services. They also became very active in overseas missions.

"What I love about our church now is the matu-

rity we have about reaching all nations," Hanner said. "It has just been phenomenal."

GENEVA ASSOCIATION

► **Devco Baptist Church, Geneva**, recently celebrated its 50th anniversary with two special services — one on Feb. 14 and one on March 28. "The Lord blessed in both services," church member Vitilia Crutchfield said.

At the first service, Ricky Hall — pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church, Hartford, who grew up at Devco Baptist — preached, and Walter Wilson provided special music.



Photo courtesy ABHC

At the second service, Pastor Ronnie Baine (right) preached, and The Devco Group (Terry Roney, Ken Ellis, Charles White, Regina Roney and Debbie Morris) provided special music. Lonette Berg (left), executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, also presented a certificate to the church.

MOBILE ASSOCIATION

► **Justin Berry** is the new minister of students at **Citronelle Memorial Baptist Church, Citronelle**. He studied at William Carey University in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and has served in ministry in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina and Tennessee. He and his wife, Amy, have one daughter. Dino Danzey is pastor.



BERRY

Persecuted church

Algerian judge upholds blasphemy charges against Christian father

ORAN, Algeria — A judge has upheld the 5-year prison sentence of a Christian man convicted of reposting on Facebook a cartoon of Islam's prophet.

Also upheld was the fine of 100,000 dinars (\$750) against Hamid (surname withheld for protection). His attorney, Farid Khemisti, argued that Hamid had not created the cartoon, only reposted it.

Khemisti believes Hamid received the heavy penalty because he is a Christian.

In other matters:

► Algerian activist Yacine Mebarki, accused

of insulting Islam, was sentenced to 10 years. On Nov. 25, 2020, the sentence was reduced to one year.

► Charged with blaspheming Islam, two Christians from Muslim background were sentenced to prison — one for 6 months, the other for 3 years.

► Houses of worship, except Protestant churches, were allowed to reopen in February from pandemic closures.

Islam is the state religion in Algeria. Thousands of Muslims have become Christians since 2000. Algeria is No. 24 on Open Doors' 2021 World Watch List of places most difficult for Christians. (MS)



commons.wikimedia.org

Shocco, WorldSong look to fill open summer camp positions

Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center is set to be very busy this summer — its camps are full, and it's even picked up a few conferences and events from other venues.

There's just one vestige of the past year's COVID-19 struggles still hanging on — hiring camp staff has been a lot more difficult this year.

Shocco still needs at least 50 more part-time employees for the summer, and openings are across all departments — lifeguards, food service, housekeeping and guest relations in particular, according to Laurie Mullinax, Shocco's public relations coordinator.

"We would love it if churches would announce the hiring and ministry opportunities from their pulpits," Mullinax said.

"If local pastors will let their youth in particular know about the job openings, maybe that will help bring more people in to apply."

That especially applies to churches in the local area of Shocco, which is located in Talladega. The camp still has a few resident positions for students for the summer, but many of its positions are part-time jobs for people who live off campus and could commute to work.

"As far as restrictions are concerned, we are continuing to pay attention to the ever-changing suggestions of the CDC and will have to adjust as needed," Mullinax said.

"But our prayer is that camp will return to normal this summer, and many, many people will have wonderful experiences with the Lord at Shocco Springs this year."

She said the "overwhelming" summer staff shortage



Photo by Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center

Summer staff members at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center serve in many positions — lifeguarding, housekeeping, kitchen and recreation — during the camp season.

is something camps and other employers are experiencing industry-wide this year.

Staff shortage

Candace McIntosh, executive director of Alabama Woman's Missionary Union, agreed. Though WMU's WorldSong Missions Place is taking camp on the road this year by holding daylong missions

camps at host churches around Alabama (see story, page 13), they still need a sizable staff — and still have open positions.

To apply for a position at Shocco (age 16 and up only), visit shocco.org/employment. To apply for a position on a WorldSong traveling team, visit worldsongretreat.org/2021staff and click on "Apply Now." (Grace Thornton)



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CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR

First Baptist Church of Mount Olive, Mount Olive, Ala., is seeking God's man to serve as our senior pastor. Please submit your resumé via email to: PSC@FBCMO.org.

SENIOR PASTOR

We are prayerfully seeking God's man to be the under shepherd and spiritual leader of His church here at Farmstead Baptist Church in Jasper. We are seeking a man who loves the Lord unconditionally, is led by the Holy Spirit and has a heart for the people. Farmsteadpastorsearch@gmail.com. 265 Curry Hwy, Jasper, AL 35503. <https://farmsteadbaptist.church>.

PASTOR

Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Alexander City, AL 35010 is seeking a full-time pastor. Please email resumé to: billywatson1@charter.net or mail to church at 6577 Hwy 63S Alexander City, AL 35010.

PASTOR

Hollinger's Island Baptist Church in Mobile, Ala., is prayerfully seeking a full-time pastor to lead our congregation. Please submit a resumé to: HIBCpastorsearch@gmail.com or mail to: Pastor Search Committee, 2450 Island Rd., Mobile, AL 36605.

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.

YOUTH PASTOR

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

YOUTH PASTOR

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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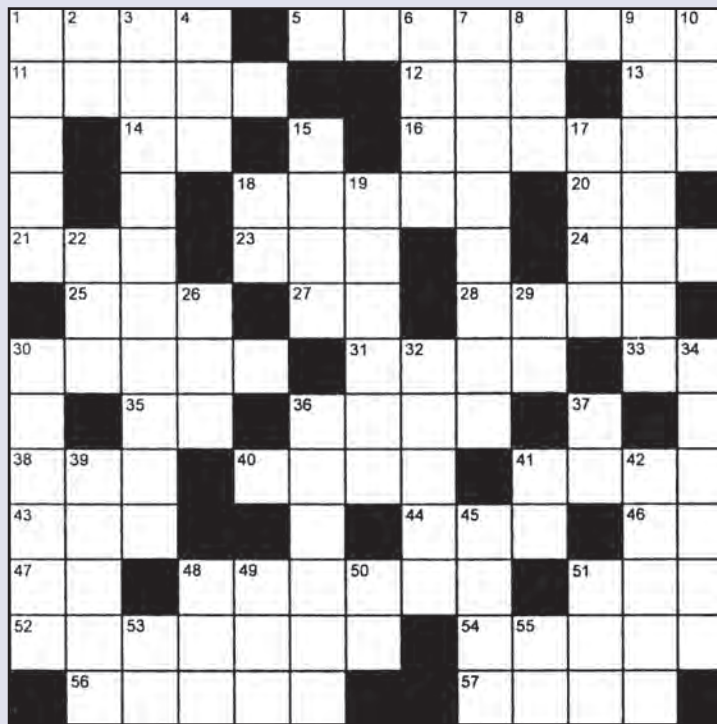
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CHRISTIAN crossword

ACROSS

1. We ought to ____ God rather than men. (Acts 5:29)
5. Son of Rachel. (Gen. 35:24)
11. Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great _____. (Luke 4:38)
12. Edible cereal grass.
13. Fa, so, ____.
14. Suffix indicating plural.
16. Odorous.
18. One of the 12 spies. (Num. 13:6)
20. And hath raised up ____ horn of salvation. (Luke 1:69)
21. Narrow beam of light.
23. Rod for billiards.
24. A time to rend, and a time to _____. (Eccles. 3:7)
25. Pig pen.
27. Los Angeles. (abbr.)
28. Large rodents.
30. Son of Jacob. (Gen. 30:13)
31. Change direction.
33. South Dakota. (abbr.)
35. Give, and ____ shall be given unto you. (Luke 6:38)
36. Simple.
38. Light brown.
40. ____ unthankful lepers healed. (Luke 17:17)
41. Then shall the lame man _____. (Isa. 35:6)
43. Or if he shall ask an ____, will he offer him a scorpion? (Luke 11:12)
44. Cardiac Care Unit. (abbr.)
46. Louisiana. (abbr.)
47. North America. (abbr.)



By Pat Horning Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

48. Put up thy sword into the _____. (John 18:11)
51. Average amount.
52. Reject.
54. Come ye yourselves ____ into a desert place. (Mark 6:31)
56. Loud.
57. Inner surface of the hand.
- (1 Cor. 5:7)
22. And the Lord opened the mouth of the _____. (Num. 22:28)
26. Nevertheless.
29. Arkansas. (abbr.)
30. ____ to the voice of my supplications. (Ps. 86:6)
32. Build.
34. To ____ from evil is understanding. (Job 28:28)
36. Remember his ____ no more. (Prov. 31:7)
37. Blessed is ____ that cometh in the name of the Lord. (Matt. 21:9)
39. Once more.
41. Halle____jah.
42. Sound an ____ in my holy mountain. (Joel 2:1)
45. Roughen and redden.
48. Science. (abbr.)
49. Owns.
50. Newspaper ____.
51. Comrade.
53. Do-re-mi-fa-____-la-ti-do.
55. Ma and ____.

DOWN

1. Let us ____ the sacrifice of praise. (Heb. 13:15)
2. ____ ye holy; for I am holy. (1 Pet. 1:16)
3. In ____ give thanks. (1 Thess. 5:18)
4. Expression of affirmation.
6. I put my hook in thy _____. (Isa. 37:29)
7. Merry gathering.
8. Already eaten.
9. Period of bad health.
10. Negative vote.
15. Pull.
17. But many that are first shall be _____. (Mark 10:31)
18. Cubic centimeter.
19. Purge out therefore the old ____.

Prepare for emergencies before they happen

By Carolyn Tomlin
TAB Media

Alabama has seen its share of natural disasters, which is why each household should be ready for an emergency situation before it happens.

Emergency officials generally recommend that each household have a kit with enough supplies to get each family member through at least three days without electricity or running water.

The American Red Cross suggests families prepare two kits: One with a two-week, stay-at-home supply of emergency items, and a second "grab-and-go" backpack with supplies for three days in case of a hasty evacuation.

Mark Wakefield, disaster relief strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, advises families to have one other important item in their emergency kits: a Bible.

"Often a family will have the necessary supplies, but one thing they forget is a Bible," he said.

Essentials

Though emergency kit items might vary from family to family, some essentials include:

- ▶ Canned goods and nonperishable foods that don't need cooking (canned meats, fish, soup, fruits, vegetables, juices, baby formula, etc.)

- ▶ Water (one gallon per person per day for several days, for drinking and sanitation)

- ▶ Prescription medicine (two-week supply)

- ▶ Disposable plates, cups and utensils

- ▶ Manual can opener
- ▶ Water purification tablets (halazone)
- ▶ Infant care items (disposable diapers, wipes)
- ▶ First-aid supplies
- ▶ Flashlights or lanterns and extra batteries
- ▶ Battery-operated or hand-crank NOAA weather radio with alert.

Documents

"It's also important to have copies of important documents in a waterproof bag or container," added Jordyn Elston, a spokesperson for the Alabama Emergency Management Agency.

Those might include copies of personal credentials (including credit cards, lists of medications, medical information, proof of address, deed to home and vehicles, passport, birth certificates and/or insurance policies).

Keeping cash on hand and maintaining family contact information also can be helpful.

"We encourage

people to take their family's specific needs into account and have any necessary medication or pet supplies packed as well," Elston said. "Once you are in the middle of a disaster, that is not the time to start gathering supplies. We encourage preparedness because it saves lives."

"After a disaster, you may need to survive on your own for a couple of days," she said. "Knowing what to do and having all the supplies that you need in an accessible place could be the first step toward your recovery."

Read more about preparing for a disaster at tabonline.org/emergency-kit.



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Thursday, May 20, 11 a.m.-4 p.m.
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- ♫ 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

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Event and location are followed by SBOM contact person and extension. For more information on these events, call 1-800-264-1225 or (334) 613 plus the listed extension, or visit alsbom.org/events. To register for virtual events, visit PinnacleAlabama.org.

MAY
9-16
10

17

20

24

24

27

JUNE

1
7

15-16
22

JULY

4

6

9-10

11-16

12

12-16

13

16-17

18

19

23-24

25-31

31

AUGUST

1
2

3

6-7

10

12

26

28

- Christian Home Week**
Who's Your One? District Training, First, Georgiana, Lori McGough, ext. 2245
Church Insurance: Protecting People and Property, State Board of Missions, Prattville, and ONLINE Lee Wright, ext. 2241
LIFT! Defining Worship Conference, First, Trussville, Karen Gosselin, ext. 2318
Who's Your One? District Training, New Vision, Prattville, Lori McGough, ext. 2245
Church Insurance: Protecting People and Property, First, Fultondale, Lee Wright, ext. 2241
A Night of Encouragement and Evangelism, Vineyard Christian Retreat, Ariton, Lori McGough, ext. 2245

- Church Tax Conference for Small Churches**, ONLINE
YMLink on Mission-Alabama, Birmingham, Scooter Kellum, ext. 2280
Southern Baptist Convention, Nashville
Church Administrative Guidelines, State Board of Missions, Prattville, Lee Wright, ext. 2241

- Citizenship and Religious Liberty Sunday**, Keith Hinson, ext. 2289
Financial Issues Conference, State Board of Missions, Lee Wright, ext. 2241
Children's Music Summit, Shocco Springs, Karen Gosselin, ext. 2318
Super Summer Alabama, JSU, Jacksonville, Scooter Kellum, ext. 2280
Financial Issues Conference, Heritage, Dothan, Lee Wright, ext. 2241
Mix MusiCamp@Shocco, Shocco Springs, Karen Gosselin, ext. 2318
Financial Issues Conference, Mobile Association Office, Lee Wright, ext. 2241
SPEAK, First Trussville, Scooter Kellum, ext. 2280
A Night of Encouragement and Evangelism, Southside, Fayette, Lori McGough, ext. 2245
Financial Issues Conference, Tuskegee Lee Association Office, Opelika, Lee Wright, ext. 2241
Connect (formerly Equip), Shocco Springs, Talladega, Amanda Armstrong, ext. 2223
YMLink on Mission – North America, New York City, Scooter Kellum, ext. 2280
Called Conference, First, Trussville, Larry Hyche, ext. 2268

- Social Issues Sunday**, Keith Hinson, ext. 2289
Financial Issues Conference, Calhoun Association Office, Anniston, Lee Wright, ext. 2241
Financial Issues Conference, Huffman, Birmingham, Lee Wright, ext. 2241
PinnacleAlabama @ Shocco, Shocco Springs, Talladega, Daniel Edmonds, ext. 2285
Financial Issues Conference, Woodward Avenue, Muscle Shoals, Lee Wright, ext. 2241
Uplink on the Road, First, Andalusia, Scooter Kellum, ext. 2280
Uplink on the Road, First, Trussville, Scooter Kellum, ext. 2280
Fortify, Shades Mountain, Birmingham, Larry Hyche, ext. 2268



Mozambique on World Watch List for first time

By Leigh Pritchett

TAB Media

Until recently, Mozambique did not have a reputation as a place where Christians face persecution.

But this year, for the first time, Mozambique was named to a list of the world's top 50 places where persecution of Christians is the worst. Mozambique is No. 45 on the 2021 World Watch List compiled by Open Doors USA, an organization raising awareness of the plight of persecuted Christians.

As a whole, a majority of the Mozambique population is Christian. In a dossier about the southern African nation, Open Doors noted that 17.4 million (54%) of the country's 32.3 million inhabitants profess to be Christian; 5.6 million (17.4%) are Muslim; and 9 million (28%) belong to ethnic religious groups.

Yet the country's northern region, Cabo Delgado Province, has become known as the "land of fear" because of brutal attacks by radical



IMB photo

A mother and child sit together in a village in Mozambique.

Islamists on Christians, said the Barnabas Fund, which supports oppressed and persecuted Christians.

Islamist attacks

Both Barnabas Fund and Open Doors note Muslims have a prominent presence in the region. Islamist insurgents have been attacking, kidnapping or killing Christians and damaging or destroying homes, churches, schools and businesses.

"The group's hallmark is beheading and cutting their victims into pieces," a Feb.

19 report from Barnabas Fund stated. "Their targets are Christians, moderate Muslims, the government and anyone else who rejects the jihadists' ideology."

According to the CIA World Factbook, insurgent attacks began in 2017. CIA statistics show that as of early 2021, fighting in Mozambique had left an estimated 2,500 dead and nearly 700,000 displaced.

A Barnabas Fund report added that violence reached a peak in the final months of 2020. Aid groups have docu-

mented numerous instances of violence against Christians in the northern sector, including:

- ▶ Two little boys and an adult hanged from a tree
- ▶ Fifty-two people massacred after locals refused recruitment to a militant group

▶ Women and girls kidnapped by truckloads.

Cabo Delgado Province saw 101 violent incidents that killed 285 people between Jan. 1 and April 25, 2020, Open Doors reported — a 300% increase from the same period in 2019.

Travel warning

The situation in Cabo Delgado prompted the U.S. Embassy in Mozambique to issue a travel warning.

Open Doors' extensive dossier about Mozambique details what insurgents have done to the Christian community, including those trying to help.

Fear of violence has made it difficult to gather, either inside or outside of churches. Wearing a cross, celebrating a Christian wed-

ding or holding a baptismal service are among actions that can prompt an attack.

Government response to the situation has allowed insurgency to spread, Open Doors reported.

Expanded attacks

"The country's army withdrew from important strategic locations, so a persecution phenomenon that was limited to a smaller part of the country expanded in the last year."

And government and security forces lack the ability to combat violence and insurgency effectively, according to the CIA.

A growing concern is that violence in Cabo Delgado may spread to other parts of Mozambique and beyond. In fact, Open Doors noted armed groups already have reportedly crossed Mozambique's border into Tanzania and killed people there.

Read more about the situation in Mozambique at tabonline.org/mozambique, where you also will find prayer prompts for persecuted Christians in the country. 🇲🇵

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"NOAH FOUND GRACE
IN THE EYES OF THE
LORD" [GENESIS 6:3].

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Bible Account: Genesis 6:5-12

Lesson 2
Title: Noah's Obedience
Bible Account: Genesis 6:13-22

Lesson 3
Title: Noah's Deliverance
Bible Account: Genesis 7:1-24

Lesson 4
Title: Noah's Worship
Bible Account: Genesis 8:1-3, 15-22

Lesson 5
Title: Noah's Sign
Bible Account: Genesis 9:8-17

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For May 9

Explore the Bible

By Benjamin Stubblefield, Ph.D.

Visiting Assistant Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



DENIED Luke 22:54–62

Hank Williams captured in song a sentiment all of us probably have felt at some time: “I’m so lonesome I could cry.”

When things are going awfully wrong, and we can’t sleep or eat or even think, we feel what he sings: “I’ve never seen a night so long/ When time goes crawling by./ The moon just went behind a cloud/ To hide its face and cry.” Ol’ Hank — he knew how to turn a phrase.

This week’s passage includes grief, loneliness, desperation and tears. Jesus’ final friend, Peter, fails. And as Jesus’ eyes meet Peter’s, the Savior knows He is now alone, “rejected by men” (Isa. 53:3).

We are left to consider the question, “If Peter, ‘the rock,’ quits on Jesus in trial, what will I do?”

Distance (54–55)

While John records that there was “another disciple” present during part of Jesus’ trial, Luke only mentions Peter (John 18:15).

Perhaps Luke is suggesting Peter is Jesus’ last link to those who love Him.

Luke gives us a small detail which becomes a harbinger of Peter’s eventual shame, namely, that he follows Jesus “at a distance.”

This is a time when Jesus needs advocacy and witnesses to testify to His character.

Yet Peter, who knows Him best, remains aloof when affiliation with Jesus appears difficult.

You and I have the advantage of knowing how this story works out, so we must learn from our brother’s example.

There will most certainly come seasons when loyalty to Jesus seems inopportune, maybe even dangerous.

It is in those moments when His disciples are called to follow, not at a distance, but at His heels.

Denial (56–60a)

The cover of darkness obscures

Peter’s identity for a while, but in time others among the crowd there begin to recognize him, asking, “Aren’t you one of Jesus’ disciples?”

Three times Peter denies knowing Jesus, but they see through his lies. He was too closely linked to Christ for too long to convince people otherwise.

Christian, there is a lesson here in all this.

We can’t live two lives or, as Jesus puts it, serve two masters. We’ve got to live for Christ whether it’s convenient or costly.

The crowd was not going to let Peter get away with hypocrisy. And Jesus, as we’ll see, is not going to let him get away with it either.

Likewise, the Lord calls all of His people to go all in on His side and go all the way, to decide to follow Him — no turning back, no turning back.

Defeat (60b–62)

The rooster crows, Jesus’ eyes meet Peter’s and the apostle weeps in shame and agony. No words. Just a look, and Peter knew he had failed.

I wonder what went through his mind.

He had made so many memories with Jesus, his friend and mentor. He had seen His miracles, shared His meals and been a travel companion for years now.

All that joy, faith and friendship must have come crashing down when his eyes met Christ’s.

Do you know that we will all, likewise, will be held to account?

There are no secret denials or disobedience, for there is a day when He will judge even the secrets of our hearts (Rom. 2:16).

I’m grateful to learn from my elder brother’s trial, but I’m so glad his failure wasn’t the end of his story. I’m so glad to know that, even though I will have trouble along the way, the Lord is gracious and compassionate, with patience for Peter and some for me too (Ex. 34:6). 🌈

Bible Studies for Life

By Rony Kozman, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies, Samford University



THE MESSAGE Romans 10:8b–17

The church finds its life and identity in the gospel. Before the noun gospel came to identify the type of literature that we have in the four New Testament Gospels — which are biographies of the life of Jesus — gospel meant an oral proclamation of good news. This is the sense in which Paul uses the noun gospel (Rom. 1:1–4). It is also what Jesus announced (Mark 1:14–15). The gospel is the good news that was preached by Jesus and by the apostles. But what is the message that Jesus and the apostles announced?

The gospel message is centered on the resurrection and lordship of Christ. (8b–10)

The word gospel has royal overtones. It is the announcement of the arrival of God’s kingdom, and it is about the arrival of an enthroned king — Jesus, the promised Messiah (i.e., King of Israel). The message of the gospel is that this King came down from heaven (v. 7), and that this Christ died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3). But the gospel does not end there, for the death and defeat of the King is not good news (1 Cor. 15:14). The gospel climaxes in the resurrection of the King and the enthronement of Jesus as Lord and King (vv. 7–9, see also 1:4). In the crucifixion of Christ the King is the defeat of two other kings — sin and death (8:2–3). Christ’s resurrection shows that He is the victorious King who reigns over heaven and earth.

The gospel message offers salvation to all people. (11–13)

This message that Jesus is the enthroned King is for all people — for both Jews and Gentiles. Even though Jesus is the promised descendant of David, the King of Israel, He is Lord of both Jews and Gentiles. Jesus will save everyone who confesses that “Jesus is Lord” and believes that “God raised him from the dead” (v. 9). The gospel calls all the nations to confess that Jesus is Lord, and God’s salvation has come. Paul tells us that he was

appointed as an apostle to take this message — that Jesus is the enthroned King — to the nations (Rom. 1:1, 5–6). And this gospel message requires a response. The proper response is repentance and faith.

The gospel message should be communicated to others. (14–17)

The gospel message has spread throughout the world. It has gone out to the Gentiles. Paul himself was appointed an apostle to take the gospel of Christ’s resurrection and enthronement to the Gentiles, and his apostolic call was “to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles” (Rom. 1:1, 4–5). This is also the call of the Great Commission, to take the gospel to all the nations and to instruct the nations in the Messiah’s commands (Matt. 28:18–20).

As Paul indicates, people cannot be saved unless they believe in Christ. People cannot believe in Christ unless the gospel is preached, and they cannot hear the message unless people are sent to preach the gospel.

In the context of Romans 10, Paul is discussing why the Gentiles have believed the gospel while his fellow Jews have largely rejected the message (9:2–3; 10:1–3). The problem is not that Israel has not heard the gospel. In verse 18, Paul quotes Psalm 19:4, “their voice [i.e., the voice of creation] goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.” For Paul, the voice and words that sound throughout all the earth indicates that the message of the gospel has gone out to both Jews and Gentiles, and Israel’s unbelief is not for lack of hearing the gospel of Christ.

If we want people to believe that Jesus is Lord, we have to ensure they have heard the gospel, the announcement that Jesus is the crucified, resurrected and enthroned King of Israel. All who want to enter Christ’s kingdom must turn from their sins and believe and confess that Jesus is Lord. 🌈

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Minnie Lamberth & Martha Brown

TAB Media

Podcast host shares stories; pastors reflect on experiences

That Sounds Fun: The Joys of Being an Amateur, the Power of Falling in Love, and Why You Need a Hobby

Annie F. Downs
Revell, 2021

In this latest book from Annie F. Downs, who hosts a podcast by the same name, fun is the focus. It's the chat topic for her podcast

each week, and in the book, Downs highlights for the reader that fun is just waiting to be found as an enriching part of life — not just the fun you want but the fun you need to experience a joyful and fulfilled life.

In the opening chapter of the book, she references Eden — that we have lost it, lost its peace. We can find that peace or regain it, she suggests, through what we call fun. The book not a how-to — what sounds fun will differ from person to person. Instead, each chapter is a different story in Downs' search for



her Eden. At the end of each podcast, Downs asks, "What sounds fun to you?" and shares responses from readers. In the book, she references the hundreds of responses she has received from her listeners as well. Downs writes in such a way as to make readers feel as if they are listening to her podcasts. This style may connect with some; others maybe not. (Martha Brown)

A Pastor's Path: How in the World Did I Get Here?

Hershel Owen

Christian Faith Publishing, 2020

Hershel Owen's memoir begins with a difficult childhood. "I became aware that our lives were in great danger," he wrote of his growing recognition of the violence that could be unleashed by an abusive father. "This was especially true for Mama."

Born in 1938 in the coal-mining town of Burnwell, Alabama, Owen's early years were bereft of prayer or faith but instead were filled with deep poverty and loneliness, in addition to dark thoughts of how to escape his father's abuse.

The first time his family had indoor plumbing came during a move to a cramped Tuscaloosa apartment when he was in eighth grade. There, a neighbor would invite him to join her each time she passed him as she walked to her church.

"She never quit asking me to go," he writes. Owen eventually said yes, and though he did not understand the experience, he responded

to the preacher's invitation to come forward. "When I got up from that altar, I knew I was a different person," he shares.

Owen's stories from these early years lead to what he sensed was God's call to become a preacher — a call that at the time felt like "the most absurd thing in the world." He eventually said yes to that call and served as a pastor of churches in Alabama for nearly six decades. "A Pastor's Path: How Did I Get Here?" is a brief but moving account of his experiences. (Minnie Lamberth)

My Angel Slept with Me

A. Ray Lee

Soncoast Publishing, 2021

This heartfelt and honest memoir published by retired pastor A. Ray Lee is partly a story of a happy marriage and shared life of ministry, but the book focuses largely on a difficult chapter that concluded his earthly journey with his wife, Effie.

The last years of their nearly six decades of marriage were difficult as Lee took on the role of full-time caregiver to a beloved spouse whose physical and mental symptoms were requiring his constant attention.

Effie Lee's mysterious health problems had troubled her husband for a good while, yet doctors were providing no answers. The official diagnosis, Lewy body dementia, eventually gave an explanation for the physical symptoms as well as the behavioral changes. Learning the name, however, did not make the struggle easier.

Lee's story recounts the journey to diagnosis and through full-time caregiving while openly addressing his sense of confusion and exhaustion.

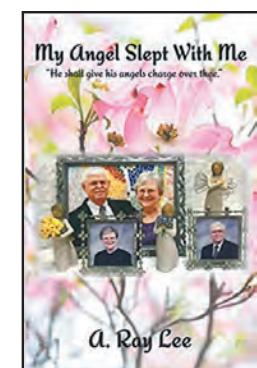
The story continues as he writes with that same honesty about his early stages of grief and mourning.

In the introduction, Lee said he began writing this memoir as a therapeutic exercise.

His intent is to share his experiences "with the hope that others who have to walk a

similar path may find encouragement."

The title, "My Angel Slept with Me," comes from a moment of hope that Effie offered as she explained to her family why the nightmares that had been troubling her were no longer a concern. (Minnie Lamberth)



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TAB Media

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.

Knowing God's love

New Beginnings Pregnancy Center offers help, hope for mothers, babies

By **Trennis Henderson**
WMU National Correspondent

New Beginnings Pregnancy Center in Benton, Arkansas, has had a few new beginnings of its own over the past several years.

Originally established in 2003 as a nonprofit ministry to pregnant teens, it has grown to serve women of any age who can benefit from the ministry's resources.

In recent years, New Beginnings has expanded to include ultrasound exams and pregnancy testing in addition to offering material resources such as diapers, wipes, baby formula and gently used clothes for babies up to 24 months old.

The center also provides confidential counseling, mentoring, parenting classes and Bible studies.

"I just think that babies are the most precious human beings in the whole wide world," said Patti Snowden, New Beginnings' assistant director.

As a mother and grandmother, "I feel grandmotherly towards the babies and motherly towards the young women," she added.

Small staff

Snowden, whose professional background includes 30 years as a speech pathologist in public schools, coordinates the ministry's resource center in a small, reno-

vated house located on a side street behind the offices of Central Baptist Association.

Executive Director Janet Dixon, a nurse with training in OB ultrasounds, supervises the pregnancy test center housed in a dedicated wing of the associational office.

"In the Central Arkansas area, there is a lot of poverty," Snowden explained. "We do have a certain [type of] young woman who tends to come into our center needing help. Typically, they have not had a good experience in their own family."

"Most of these young women do not have much financial support," she added. "Some are employed, some are not, but those who are employed typically are those who make minimum wage so there's just not a lot of extra money to go around."

Noting that "we believe that whoever comes to our door,

God brought them here for a reason," Snowden said, "Many times they have had no experience of knowing who Jesus is so we get the privilege of telling them about Jesus. That is our honor and our joy to be able to do."

Woman's Missionary Union groups, including Women on Mission at nearby First Baptist Church, Benton, partner with the ministry by donating diapers, wipes and other needed items.

A couple of area quilt guilds and



Photos by Pam Henderson

Janet Dixon, executive director of New Beginnings, and other staff members are trained to provide limited ultrasound exams for clients. Dixon said they talk to expectant parents about their growing babies as they view the images.

volunteers at a senior citizens center craft homemade quilts and afghans for the pregnancy center to distribute.

'Make much of Jesus'

As she works with volunteers and offers encouragement to the women who turn to New Beginnings for help, "my motivation is to make much of Jesus," Snowden shared. "I want these young women to know His love."

Affirming that Christ "captured my heart" at age 19, Snowden reflected, "Over the course of my lifetime, He has just drawn me so close to Him."

Longing for New Beginnings' clients to experience that same spiritual relationship, she said, "I want them to know exactly who He is and the dimensions of His love, which are higher than the heavens."

Diana Lewis, a longtime member of Central Association's Missions Development Council, recounted God's clear leadership in founding the ministry and expanding in 2015 to include the test center and ultrasound.

There were "three really big things that we had to accomplish in order to be able to do the medical part," she said the must-have list included a facility, a medical director and an ultrasound machine.

In short order, the association offered part of its facility to house the test center and Lewis discovered that her new medical director had previous experience as a pregnancy center medical director.

He readily agreed to serve in that role for New Beginnings.

The final hurdle was acquiring a \$26,000 ultrasound machine.

A local organization offered to contribute half the money if New Beginnings could raise the other half. Lewis, a retired North American missionary and avid quilter, organized a silent auction and quilt auction.

"The next day after that, our director came to my house and we counted the money," Lewis said. "And we had almost to the dollar exactly what we needed for our half of the ultrasound machine. ... God laid before us the things that we needed most to be able to make it happen." 🌈

Visit nbpregnancy.com or contact Janet Dixon at nbpregnancy@gmail.com. Also visit wmufoundation.com/vision.

Patti Snowden (left), assistant director of New Beginnings Pregnancy Center, and volunteer Tara Dennie count and sort donated diapers to distribute to clients at the ministry center.

