



The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

INSIDE



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Photo courtesy of Judson College

Judson College trustees on May 6 made the difficult decision to close the school in the face of low enrollment and financial shortfalls. The Baptist college in Marion is the nation's fifth oldest for women.

Exhausted all options

Judson College board of trustees votes to close school

By Jennifer Davis Rash
TAB Media

The Judson College faithful fought hard for five months trying to save the school, but in the end it just wasn't enough.

During its regularly scheduled meeting May 6, the board of trustees made the decision they had hoped to avoid — a

vote to close the 183-year-old institution.

Eighteen members of the 24-member board voted in favor of discontinuing academic operations and to move through an orderly closing through Chapter 11 bankruptcy.

'Mounting pressures'

The board appointed a committee of five executive committee members to work with school officials and bankruptcy attorneys going forward.

"New donors did not materialize, student retention is much lower than expected and mounting debt pres-

ures have increased," Judson President Mark Tew told TAB Media. "The combined effect of these three items left us no choice."

All avenues and potential large-scale donors have been explored, Tew said, as well as all options for mergers, and only about 80 students are registered for the fall, down from 145 in December. Only 12 new students had been recruited for the fall as of early May.

"The mounting debt pressure is stressing the school's cash flow and now prevents any chance of meeting the \$9.1 million deficit," Tew said. (See 'Heartbreaking,' page 17)

Gambling bill stalls, future uncertain

With just one day left in Alabama's 2021 legislative session, the fate of gambling expansion remains uncertain.

On May 6, the Alabama House failed to pass Senate Bill 319, a comprehensive bill that would create a state lottery, add new state-regulated casinos and legalize online betting in the state.

The measure passed the Senate on April 13 in a 23-9 vote, but legislators in the House could not muster enough support and thus did not bring it to a vote.

House Speaker Mac McCutcheon said he believes the outlook for the bill is "doubtful" with only one day — May 17 — remaining in the 2021 session.

Joe Godfrey, executive director of Alabama Citizens Action Program, cautioned against complacency and urged action.

"We thought gambling was 'dead' earlier in the session only to see it 'rise from the ashes,'" Godfrey said.

He encouraged people to contact their legislators and Gov. Kay Ivey to express their opposition to expanded legalized gambling in Alabama.

To find contact information for the state legislators representing your district, go to tabonline.org/contact. (Carrie Brown McWhorter)



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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.

TAB Media receives national awards

The TAB Media Group staff has brought home numerous awards for work done in 2020. Results from the Alabama Press Association will be announced in the summer.

Associated Church Press

▶ **Best in class, regional newspaper** — The Alabama Baptist by TAB Media Group staff

▶ **Best in class, website** — tabonline.org by TAB Media Group staff

▶ **Award of Merit, photography** — Wheelhouse Salon mural by Jessica Ingram

▶ **Honorable mention, personal experience** — “Fresh grief” by Debbie Campbell

Religion Communicators Council

▶ **Category winner, newspaper** — The Alabama Baptist by TAB Media Group staff

▶ **Certificate of Appreciation, magazine** — Fruitful by TAB Media Group staff

▶ **Certificate of Appreciation, blog** — “Open letter to Ahmaud Arbery’s mom” by Jennifer Davis Rash

▶ **Certificate of Appreciation, radio** — TAB News: Addiction Recovery for Women by Jennifer Davis Rash, Debbie Campbell and Hannah Muñoz

▶ **Certificate of Appreciation, video documentary** — Special report on Disaster Relief by Sam Evans

▶ **Certificate of Appreciation, podcast** — TAB Talks: Marriage in a Pandemic by Jennifer Davis Rash, Debbie Campbell and Hannah Muñoz

▶ **Certificate of Appreciation, editorial** — “Open letter to Ahmaud Arbery’s mom” by Jennifer Davis Rash

▶ **Certificate of Appreciation, news article** — “Birmingham pastor, police officer reflects” by Carrie Brown McWhorter

Baptist Communicators Association

▶ **Frank Burkhalter Award for Significant Achievement in Religious News Writing** —

COVID-19 series by TAB Media Group staff

▶ **3rd place, overall publication, newspaper** — The Alabama Baptist by TAB Media Group staff

▶ **3rd place, website** — tabonline.org by TAB Media Group staff

▶ **2nd place, photography** — Wheelhouse Salon mural by Jessica Ingram

▶ **1st place, news series** — COVID-19 series by TAB Media Group staff

▶ **2nd place, news series** — Nigeria series by TAB Media Group staff

▶ **2nd place, news writing, long** — “Arkansas Baptist News released to state convention, no longer independent news outlet” by TAB Media Group staff

▶ **2nd place, design, front page** — Vaping front page by Lauren Grim

Evangelical Press Association

▶ **Award of Merit, newspaper** — The Alabama Baptist by TAB Media Group staff

▶ **Award of Merit, online news** — tabonline.org by TAB Media Group staff

▶ **4th place, article series** — COVID-19 series by TAB Media Group staff

▶ **4th place, blog** — Rashion- al Thoughts by Jennifer Davis Rash (TAB Media)



Photo by Jessica Ingram

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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@RashionalThts

Casino gambling operations can't be the answer

Gordonville Mayor Orbuty Ross Ozier's comments continue to haunt me days after I heard her share her heart.

"How can we keep surviving in Lowndes County when superiors keep burying us deeper in the ground? We have children, too. We love our community. We need your help," she pleaded passionately to the members of the Alabama House of Representatives sitting on the House Economic Development and Tourism Committee.

During the committee's May 4 public hearing on the latest controversial gambling legislation (Senate Bill 319, see story, page 1), Ozier spoke against the bill, even though she isn't necessarily opposed to expanding legalized gambling in the state.

"Stop putting the dirt on top of Lowndes County. Help us continue to grow, continue to strive and continue to do better," she said. "Shouldn't we have the opportunity to enjoy life like everyone else?"

It's important to understand that Ozier's purpose May 4 was to ask for Lowndes County to be included in the listing of areas that would be allowed to run a casino in the state with the passage of SB 319.

But what struck me as she

shared was the tremendous opportunity for missions and ministry available to churches across the state.

Ministry efforts do exist and area churches are working to reach the area.

In fact, a new church plant is finding its footing through partnership efforts, but the need is vast and so many more of us could be finding ways to help.

Lowndes County has a population of about 12,000 and sits between Dallas and Montgomery counties and below Autauga County. About 200 of those citizens reside in Gordonville.

The area struggles economi-

cally and with that struggle has come a decade-long dependency on electronic bingo gambling, and various forms of allegedly illegal gambling.

"We would not have the little we do if it had not been for those casinos," Ozier told the committee, referencing the gambling operations in the area. "Who else is helping us? Who else is helping us keep bread on the table?"

Her statements make me wonder if public officials would be more open to opposing attempts at expanding legalized gambling and take a harder stance against illegal gambling operations in their areas if state leaders would work to develop productive

infrastructures and legitimate opportunities for people.

Focusing efforts to help citizens support themselves and be able to make their own positive mark on their community is the true winning bet.

I'm not sure I understand all the ins and outs of why some of our elected officials are consistently drawn to the lure of the gambling industry, but I do know we can make a difference in helping them understand what's most important to us.

To contact your legislator, visit tabonline.org/contact. To learn about ministry opportunities in Lowndes County, visit mgmbaptists.org.

Variety of interest groups question latest gambling legislation up for potential debate May 17 (SB 319)

"I'm not against gambling ... but this is a deeply flawed bill."
—**Gambling industry attorney**

"Casinos need to be mandated to pay a minimum no matter how much they take in, not a percentage (because profit figures can be manipulated)."
—**Rep. Reed Ingram**

"The [bill] has the government picking winners and losers. ... It takes the name of a business and

embeds it into our constitution.

"This is an amnesty bill for bad actors because of those on that list of names being embedded in our constitution, one is behind on taxes and one or two have been raided by our law enforcement."
—**Phil Williams**
Alabama Policy Institute

"Rather than open Alabama to all forms of self-regulated monopolistic gambling, would not the Legislature better serve the people of Alabama

by increasing the penalties for gambling and providing the manpower to the attorney general's office to enforce those laws? Such upgrades in our law would be done by simple statutory enactments.

"SB 319 is not about revenue or regulating gambling. It is about whether elected officials will condone an immoral and destructive activity."

—**A. Eric Johnston**
Birmingham attorney

Your Voice



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

Supporting missions through WMU Vision Fund

By **Sandy Wisdom-Martin**
Executive director-treasurer, National WMU

I am sometimes asked, “What do you envision for the future of WMU?” The landscape transitions moment by moment. I often feel unsettled by the terrain that shifts constantly beneath our feet.

In spite of the changes swirling around us at a dizzying pace, we can be confident about the future God has for us. How? By understanding our mission matters most.

Our unwavering focus is to make disciples of Jesus who live on mission. When we live with this singular conviction, clarity emerges even in the midst of chaos.

We have a long heritage of faithful

Christ followers committed to the mission:

▶ At the head of Betty’s casket was a missions offering basket, her final act to call church members to generosity for missions.

▶ Through a WMU missions discipleship group, 6-year-old Alice learned about a little boy in Nigeria who had never heard about God’s love. That story changed the trajectory of her life.

▶ Cindy’s life was turned from despair to hope when her Christian Women’s Job Corps mentor helped her see her worth in God’s eyes.

▶ Long before Andrew became a commercial pilot, he took the preschoolers of his church on weekly

adventures to learn about God’s work in the world.

▶ June learned about Literacy, her life ministry, at a WMU conference.

▶ Brooklyn is on the mission field because she was impacted by a WMU missions mentor.

▶ Bobby found God’s purpose for his life through a ministry helping a recovering alcoholic and estranged father learn to love his children.

▶ Pigtailed Judy sat on the mission leader’s floor. After the missionary from China spoke she went home to tell her mother, “God wants me to be a missionary.”

The WMU Vision Fund enables us to proclaim into the future, the mission matters most. We will continue to make disciples of Jesus who live on mission.

Through WMU Compassion Ministries, Leadership Development and Missions Discipleship, we will equip, empower and enable the Betty, Alice, Cindy, Andrew, June, Brooklyn, Bobby and Judy of our generation to take their place in God’s plan.

National WMU has a Kingdom impact in every state and 39 countries. Our desire is that peoples of the earth would have the opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel.

Visit wmu.com to learn how you can be involved in the ministry of WMU.

To support the ministry of WMU, give to the Vision Fund at wmufoundation.com/vision. (Originally published at wmufoundation.org.)

Let’s face it most Americans have extra resources. ... When the extra comes to us, we either store it or we spend it. But rarely do we ask God what does He want to do with the extra. Rarely do we say, God you have blessed me. You have done so much for me. I have more than I need. What do you want me to do with the extra? When’s the last time you prayed that prayer?

Pastor Louie Heard
Second Baptist Church
Arkadelphia, Ark.

When we display the nine qualities of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23, it is a reflection of Jesus more than a reflection of us or our ability to follow rules. He produces fruit. We abide in Him. “Against such things there is no law” (v. 23).

Pastor Brooks Cail
First Baptist Church
of the Islands
Savannah, Ga.

I’m not everything I want to be ... but I’m not what I used to be. —Pastor Bruce Chesser. How many of us can say the same thing?

First Baptist Church
Hendersonville, Tenn.
via Facebook

Letters to the Editor

After having moved to Mississippi last year, The Alabama Baptist is more important than ever in keeping us abreast with news from Alabama.

The April 29 issue was superb. There were so many excellent articles, but I was particularly captured by the article about Robert Woodall and his exceptional parents on page 1 and the page 14 article telling of Anna Adcox’s amazing ministry of dress making for international missions outreach that continues at age 97.

Both of these stories detail true sacrifice and unselfish service

from totally different ends of the age spectrum.

I closed the paper feeling challenged and encouraged that there is ministry for us at all ages if we just open our heart to Jesus calling.

Well done, TAB!
Janice Pitchford
Ocean Springs, Miss.

I check the news at TAB every morning — part of my daily ritual. I love the new look of the website and the article about the launch of the national publication.

David George
WMU Foundation

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“God is never closer than when your heart is aching.”

JONI EARECKSON TADA

Author, radio host and advocate for accelerating Christian ministry in the disability community

God has a purpose for you. Above and beyond the mundane everyday life. It isn't that God wants you to leave your job or where you live. He wants to use you right there. Exactly where you are. Intentionally. Your spiritual life isn't separate from your regular life.

Brian Hatcher
Discipleship pastor
Clearview Baptist Church
Franklin, Tenn.

Wisdom is the ability to take the truth of God and apply it to your life. ... It involves application, perspective and experience.

Todd Strain
Associate Pastor
Calvary Baptist Church
Alexandria, La.

[Fasting] is not about the food, its about the Word. —Pastor Jarrod Roberts. How do we connect with Him during a fast? Get in God's word. Read it as much as you can, as often as you can.

Psalm 119:105
Joshua 1:8
Matthew 4:4
Hebrews 4:12
1 Peter 2:2
Psalm 119:9–11
Psalm 1:2
West Rome Baptist Church
Rome, Ga.
via Twitter

Two things you can do for foster families:

1. Learn how you can join a foster care community group in your area

to support families who are fostering or learn how you can foster.

2. Donate restaurant gift cards for foster families in your community.

Adapted from a Facebook post
First Baptist Church
Columbia, S.C.

Jesus radically changes every life He touches. He changes attitudes, habits, relationships, emotions and destinies. And His changes are always for the good!

Facebook post
Quail Springs Baptist Church
Oklahoma City, Okla.

Dependability is an admirable quality.

Morris Murray Jr.
Jasper, Ala.

From the *Twitterverse*

@timkellernyc

Salvation lies not in an escape... but in the transformation of this world... You will not find hope for the world in any of the religious systems or philosophies of humankind... No faith holds out a promise of eternal salvation for the world—the ordinary world... (V.Ramachandra)

@ricklance

We can and we should learn from the past, but we must not take up residence there. As Christians, we are to be good stewards of the present and the future.

@JonathanLeeman

“It was when I was happiest that I longed most. It was on happy days when when we were up there on the hills...with the wind and sunshine...And because it was so beautiful, it set me longing. Al-

ways longing. Somewhere else there must be more of it.”
—C.S. Lewis, Till We Have Faces

@brocraige

“Satan never brushes the feathers of his birds the wrong way; he generally deals with us according to our tastes and likings. He flavours his bait to his fish.”
—Spurgeon

@MattSmethurst

One of the marks of a Christian is a winsome and friendly spirit that delights in peace and harmony, not arguments and division.
—@DrTomSchreiner

@trillianewbell

A thought (for Christians): If the loudest voice in our heads is our own, it will do us well to pause before speaking. It's also one of a thousand reasons to meditate on the Scriptures. If His voice is even

a little louder, it could be a blessing to all around us.

@pjanrn_c

When you know that God is for you, that His Spirit lives within you, and that His favor and presence are upon you, you are no longer consumed with insecurity about the odds that may be stacked against you.
#ElijahBibleStudy

@MichaelCatt

One reason we aren't living in #revival is we've defined sin as “what you do, that I don't do, that I don't approve of.” That's self righteousness 101. Sin is what God says it is.

@kswhitfield

A foundational and non-negotiable pillar for biblical justice is a rigorous commitment to truth-telling.

A lesson learned

Recently, I decided my yard needed a bit of TLC, so I put on my work clothes and gloves, and I got quite a bit done — my yard is looking pretty good now.

What I didn't expect out of my busy Saturday is the poison ivy that showed up on my arm the next evening. I figured it wasn't too bad, so I took an antihistamine, put some cream on it and went to bed.

The next morning, I woke up with my arms and legs looking like something out of a horror movie with red, itchy whelps all over my skin. I realized then it wasn't going to be an easy fix.

After talking to my coworkers about what I should do, I called my doctor. Had I not listened to what my body was telling me and the advice of my coworkers, I would have ended up with a much bigger problem.

Life is a bit like that sometimes. What might seem like a small problem can end up being a bigger issue if we let it go long enough.

We should pay attention to those nagging thoughts swirling in our minds. It's easy to disregard them, but it's not always the best thing to do.

Like putting off reaching out to a friend that you know needs encouragement or joining a small group even though you think you don't have the time.

I believe if we pay attention, God will make us aware of things we should do that are important and life-changing.

James has a much more direct way of saying this: “Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it” (James 4:17).

Or as Ben Franklin said, “Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today” — you never know how much it will change your life or the lives of the people around you.

Amy Hacker
theropetab.com

Volunteers from Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Trussville, prepare the raised beds of the church's community garden for planting.

Missions at the front door



Photo courtesy of Ric Camp

Ridgecrest community garden cultivating more than one kind of harvest

By Lanell Downs Smith
TAB Media

Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Trussville, began considering ideas for a community garden a few years ago — well before the COVID-19 pandemic halted in-person ministry events and strained resources.

According to Senior Pastor Ric Camp, the timing wasn't right then, but when the pandemic hit in March 2020, the church needed a more aggressive community outreach and presence.

During his annual prayer retreat, Camp began thinking through ways to reach people in the area.

"God impressed on me this was the time," he recalled. "Through COVID, the community and the world [have] changed drastically. People are looking for different avenues. They're looking. They're not necessarily coming to the church."

And the project's timeliness was only partially due to the pandemic.

A Barna report last summer showed that one in three practicing Christians had stopped attending church during COVID-19.

A recent Gallup poll revealed declining church membership among Americans, with numbers dropping below 50% in 2020 for the first time in Gallup's eight-decade trending.

Only 47% of Americans surveyed said they belonged to a church, synagogue or mosque.

Camp said after reading those statistics, he knew Ridgecrest needed to find new ways of reaching people. At a vision-sharing luncheon in November, he proposed a strategy including a community garden. The church soon developed a team to assist with oversight and direction.



Photo courtesy of Ric Camp
A Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Trussville, volunteer works in the community garden.

The campus has minimal green space available, so volunteers constructed eight raised planting beds and trucked in garden soil.

Tomatoes, cucumbers, okra, carrots, radishes and beans were planted alongside flowers to encourage pollination.

The garden's harvest will be made available at a market-style event, where buyers will receive a "paid in full" card at

checkout. Camp said the approach is designed to encourage conversations during which volunteers will share a brief gospel story to help buyers learn how Jesus paid the debt for their sin.

"We hope to see gospel conversations that lead to gospel conversions that lead to disciple-making," he explained. "It's not just about sharing the gospel. It's about serving our community."

The project has fostered unity and a desire within church members to

meet needs and share the gospel, Camp continued.

"Several church members who have not been involved in other ministry endeavors have donated time, resources and direction," he noted. "[The garden] has generated an excitement to meet community needs for gospel conversations."

Called to help

Ridgecrest member Michael Jeely heard about the garden ministry and felt God calling him to help. As an avid gardener, he loved the idea of meeting physical needs through a project that would allow opportunities to meet spiritual needs as well.

And for Jeely, every aspect of the project has been meaningful.

"Building the beds and preparing the soil is just like going out and building relationships that show others we are genuine," he said. "Planting the seed is like talking with someone about Jesus dying for our sins. When the plants start to grow, it's like a new life in Christ that has to be nurtured and tended. And when it puts out fruit, it's the same as our lives yielding fruit that points back to Christ."

According to volunteer Allen Mattox, interest in the project has been strong.

He hopes church families can use the ministry as a teaching tool

to show children the realities of outreach. "Ridgecrest is a missions-minded church, and this is an opportunity to do missions right at our front door," he said.

The garden has helped prepare members to effectively connect with people outside the church walls, Jeely noted, and to build relationships for sharing the gospel.

"[This ministry] is about bringing believers together, teaching them about planting seeds and tending them until they produce fruit, then taking that fruit to someone in need."

Extra produce from the garden will be channeled through benevolent ministry partnerships, Camp noted.

One example: the flowers will be cut for arrangements and delivered to the homebound and residents at a local assisted living home, Legacy Ridge at Trussville.

Reaching the community

The community garden is one of three endeavors Ridgecrest Baptist has developed to reach the Trussville community, Camp noted. Other aspects of the strategy include a homeschool "umbrella" and a dementia support ministry.

"We anticipate and hope to become a church meeting a need within a community/city and building relationships in order to have gospel conversations."✝

"We hope to see gospel conversations that lead to gospel conversions that lead to disciple making."

**Senior Pastor Ric Camp
Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Trussville**

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

ACTION 3 — CALLING OUT THE CALLED

EDITOR'S NOTE — This is part 3 of 5 in a series 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 follow the series, visit tabonline.org/vision2025.

Bottom line for how to achieve Action Step 3, according to IMB leaders: more churches and entities working with individuals to discern a ministry call and prepare for it.

By **Shawn Hendricks**
TAB Media

What does it mean to be “called” as a missionary? What does that really look like?

Scott Ray, director of assessment and deployment for the International Mission Board, shared with TAB Media how everyone's calling looks different.

Ministry callings come in many forms and include work done at home and abroad, he said.

While this article focuses on a call to serve overseas, the concept of discerning and preparing for a call can be applied across the board.

When thinking about being called internationally, some believers are “free agents,” said Ray, who served with his family in India for more than a decade. They are called to the overall task of the Great Commission but open to wherever God uses them. Others know emphatically they are called to a specific place or people group, he added.

For the Ray family, their calling focused on reaching the spiritually lost in India. But in order to know that, they went on short-term missions trips to various places.

“For me, every time, it was an affirmation that God is at work

everywhere, but His place for me was India,” Ray said. His wife, on the other hand, had more of a general call until she went on a short-term trip without him to India.

“She called me and said, ‘Yeah, you're right. It is India.’”

Assessment process

To help sort out a candidate's assignment and other questions, the IMB has a thorough missionary assessment process that includes three phases encompassing seven steps, with a key part involving the individual or family's home church, according to the IMB website.

In the first phase, the candidate works with his or her church and pastor to help determine readiness. In the second phase, the candidate goes through a comprehensive assessment with IMB staff that covers spiritual maturity, physical health and emotional wellness.

Missionary team leaders then coordinate a “final field interview” that focuses on determining the best fit for applicants and missionary teams.

It is during the assessment process that issues such as depression and addictions are discovered and addressed. Debt, family difficulties and other concerns also are worked on, and mentoring on how to prepare for spiritual warfare is provided.

But even with all that is involved in the assessment and preparation, there is no perfect formula for evaluating a calling, Ray said.

“There are aspects of it that we know exactly what we need to do

and when we need to do it, but it is very much an art rather than science.”

The focus of the missionary assessment process, which can take anywhere from six months to more than a year, isn't about questioning a candidate's calling, Ray noted.

“We work with them on [their calling] very early so the point of the process is not questioning their call,” he emphasized. “The point of the process is you are getting ready to enter into a battlefield.

“You're getting ready to go into an area where the enemy doesn't want you there.”

For that reason, Ray said, the IMB focuses on ensuring — as much as possible — that a missionary is as healthy and sustainable as they can be when an unexpected medical or spiritual issue pops up. It's the preparation on the front end, he noted, that can help avoid a

missionary needing to unexpectedly leave the field.

“[When] people have to leave the field before their time, (it) can do damage to themselves, their family, the work,” he said. “So, we try to work with them to get them as healthy and sustainable as possible.”

And with the COVID-19 pandemic came even more issues.

The number of candidates sharing about anxiety, depression and struggles with pornography rose dramatically, Ray said.

“Pornography has become rampant in our society, and that is an area we need them walking in free-

dom from for a pretty considerable amount of time,” he said. “And so we work with them, their mentors and their churches on getting to that point of freedom.”

IMB's website clearly notes that a person should have “at least one year of abstinence from pornography before starting an assignment. Other related issues of sexual purity are also considered and addressed.”

The rise of student debt has also become another top issue, especially among candidates pursuing the Journeyman program, where recent college graduates under the age of 30 commit to a two-year term.

“As they are having to take on more student debt to make it through college, it's a heavy burden that can end up delaying them a good bit before they can go to the field,” he said. “There are all of those issues that are continuing to rise.”

Sensing the call?

Ray always asks candidates to consider where they are right now. Are they going on short-term missions trips? Are they regularly sharing their faith, discipling someone and regularly spending time in prayer and studying God's word?

“You need to look at what God has you involved in right now and continue to grow in those areas,” he said. “If you're not reading your Bible, if you're not in prayer ... you need to be ... so that you will continue when you get overseas.”

For more information, visit imb.org/go.

Clarification on Action 2 reported last week: The goal is to add 5,000 new congregations in whatever form that means, not necessarily church plants.✝

**STRATEGIC
ACTION STEP 3:
Increase number of
workers in the field
through a special
emphasis and do better
at preparing them
for the work.**

More than a number

‘A perfect storm’: addicts caught between pandemic and epidemic

By Lanell Downs Smith

TAB Media

Bob is a recovering alcoholic and former drug user, living in Alabama with his young wife and their new baby boy. Bob stayed sober and free of addiction for eight years before the coronavirus hit and he lost his job.

With too much free time on his hands, he began drinking and using methamphetamines again. His wife reached out to a local addiction recovery program, and Bob received the help he needed to get back on track.

Bob is doing well for now, but every day is touch and go.

This story is all too common. In fact, the Alabama Department of Mental Health counts those who misuse substances as particularly vulnerable to relapse or overdose due to the pandemic’s disruption of daily life.

Curt Williams, founder and executive director of Youth-Reach Gulf Coast in Summerdale, an addiction ministry for young men, has seen an

uptick in addiction relapses and new addiction cases during the pandemic.

“Most [people] that struggle with addiction don’t do well with free time,” Williams said. “They need structure, they need a schedule, they need something to depend on, and COVID-19 robbed us of all of that. And if you don’t have structure around you and a big support base, the addiction [is] just calling back to you. It was a perfect storm.”

Record high

Statistics show the bigger picture of that storm.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources’ 2020 annual report disclosed a significant decrease in opioid-use disorder cases from 2018 to 2019 — the first drop in more than two decades. Late in 2019, however, overdose deaths began to climb and continued rising throughout 2020.

Last December, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported more than 81,000 drug overdose deaths nationwide between June 2019 and May 2020. Those



123rf.com

totals, the highest ever recorded in a 12-month period, suggest an acceleration of overdose deaths during the pandemic.

According to the Agency for Substance Abuse Prevention, or ASAP, based in Oxford, at least 20% more people in Alabama died from drug overdoses during the 12 months end-

ing in May 2020 than during the 12 months prior.

During that same period, overdose deaths doubled in Calhoun County, said ASAP Executive Director Seymour Selase during a recent virtual roundtable discussion on the opioid epidemic.

“We have a pandemic that is on

Churches can help stem the tide of addiction

Churches can help people dealing with addiction, those within the church as well as those in the local community.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recognizes early intervention with people at highest risk of overdose and improved detection of overdose outbreaks as critical steps toward stemming the tide of overdose deaths at the local level.

Open doors

Churches can become addiction centers by opening their doors to Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous or Celebrate Recovery groups, said Curt Williams, founder and executive director of Youth-Reach Gulf Coast, an

addiction ministry for young men, in Summerdale. Addicts without a sponsor, someone to listen and offer support, are 80% more likely to relapse than those with a sponsor, he said, and believers can offer a listening ear.

Inviting addiction recovery groups or people struggling with addictions within the congregation to share their experiences can also help, said Rick Hagans, founder of Harvest Evangelism in Opelika.

“The Bible says you overcome the enemy by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of your testimony, Revelation 12,” Hagans said. “When our

men and women tell a story, they just say: ‘Listen, I could be your son. I could be your brother. ... I could be you. But God has rescued me out of my addiction and changed me.’ Give the addicts in your church a chance to share because the addiction to drugs is not a whole lot different than addiction to business or money or your religion. It’s an addiction.”

American Character Builders, a ministry of Alabama Citizens Action Program, offers drug and alcohol awareness education and materials, along with addiction resources at alcap.com/american-character-builders.



Unsplash.com

The CDC also suggests these ways to help friends and loved ones struggling with addiction:

- ▶ Learn about the risks of opioids and other illicit drugs.

- ▶ Help people struggling with opioid-use disorder to find the right care and treatment.

- ▶ Learn about overdose prevention efforts in your community.

If you or someone you know is experiencing increased stress due to the COVID-19 pandemic and is at risk of using alcohol, opioids or other substances, resources are available to help.

Visit tabonline.org/coping-with-addiction for tips from the CDC and a list of hotlines. (Lanell Downs Smith)

top of an epidemic,” said Selase. “There’s social isolation because of the pandemic. There’s depression. A lot of people don’t have access to the resources they normally get. We know that all of those things are compounding the issues people are facing, making these numbers rise. These aren’t just numbers — they are someone’s mother, father, uncle, brother or sister. These are real people’s lives that are being lost.”

Rick Hagans, founder of Harvest Evangelism in Opelika, has seen that loss firsthand.

“We buried six [people] last year — six overdose deaths,” said Hagans, whose ministry operates faith-based residential recovery programs.

In fact, Harvest Evangelism’s residency programs for men and women are filled to capacity, and Hagans has recognized the scarcity of in-person support groups during the pandemic. Without meetings like Celebrate Recovery, Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, he said, many struggling with addictions are faced with going it alone.

Increase in applications

At the same time, Williams has seen the crisis unfold in the Gulf Coast area through his work with Youth-Reach.

His organization has received more applications for admission during the pandemic than ever before. Processing those applications takes much longer than normal due to coronavirus testing requirements, Williams noted, and lag time can be all that’s needed for a person strug-

gling with addiction to relapse — to get high again, to reconsider treatment or for someone to talk them out of getting help.

Desperate times

“Many times, these people will call us when they’re desperate,” he said. “By the time [testing is] done, maybe they’ve overdosed or we’ve lost touch with them.”

Williams witnessed two overdoses during the pandemic but said even more people are just one step from being back in the throes of their addiction.

“One young man I know got his [CARES Act] check and spent it on [illicit] drugs,” Williams said. “That [check] could have been a lifeline. But for an addict, ‘money for nothing’ just says ‘hey, go get high.’” Even so, addiction ministry leaders have seen success stories despite COVID-19.

Hagans told of a young woman who earlier this year entered Harvest Evangelism’s Hosanna Home residency program, seeking freedom from her addiction. In March, she gave birth to a healthy baby girl she named Victory. If the woman had not received help for her addiction, her baby might have been born addicted to drugs or might have even died in the womb, Hagans reflected.

“She [named] the baby Victory, and we think, ‘hey, that’s what God gives you’ — an opportunity to have victory in your life, and [for the mom], victory in her baby’s life,” Hagans said.

EDITOR’S NOTE — Name has been changed. 🙏

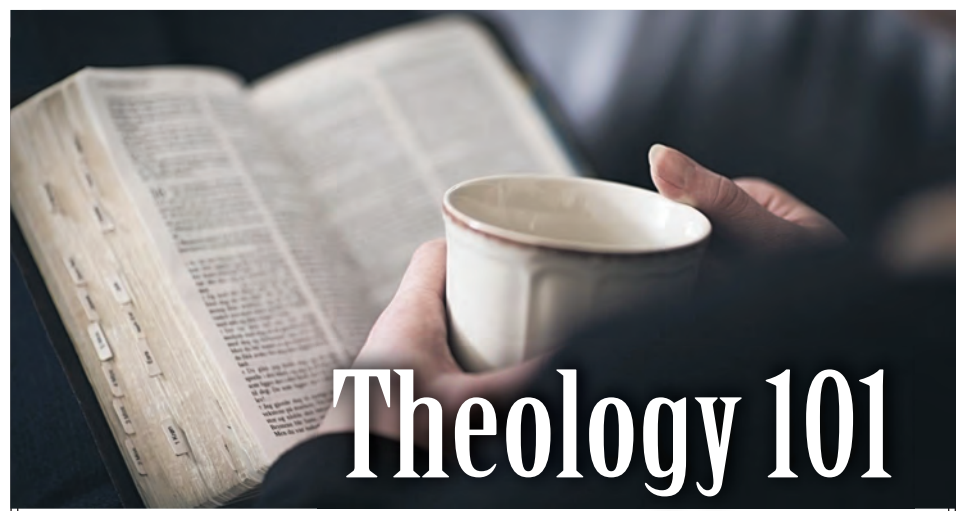
Helpful tips for people dealing with addiction

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggests these tips for people dealing with the challenges of addiction, especially during the pandemic:

- ▶ Take breaks from watching, reading or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting.
- ▶ Take deep breaths, stretch or meditate.
- ▶ Eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise regularly and get plenty of sleep.

- ▶ Avoid alcohol and drugs.
- ▶ Make time to unwind and do some activities you enjoy.
- ▶ Connect with others. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.
- ▶ Take proactive steps to safeguard your health.

Contact the Alabama Department of Mental Health helpline at 844-307-1760 for information related to substance-use disorder resources and treatment or to talk to someone who understands. (Lanell Downs Smith)



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Divine Relationship

God’s Servants

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
TAB Media

As Christians we are God’s children. We have entered that status both by birth and adoption. Thus, twice over we are securely in God’s family as His sons and daughters. This week, the Bible further describes us as God’s servants — being His children suggests certain privileges, but being His servants suggests certain responsibilities.

As God’s servants we are to serve Him by serving others, as admonished in Galatians 5:13, “Through love serve one another.”

Immediately, this responsibility is not met out of a sense of obligation but out of the higher motivation of love — love both for God and those we serve on His behalf. The Christian family, then, is a fellowship of mutual service in that we both serve others and are served by others.

Motivated by love

Motivated by love, our service for God is to be wholehearted — never halfheartedly or reluctantly — rendered. Romans 12:11–12 admonishes believers to be “not lagging in diligence” but “fervent in spirit, serving the Lord” in such practical ways as “distributing to the needs of the saints” and being “given to hospitality.”

Forever inscribed in Scripture is the testimony about early church members in the aftermath of the Spirit’s coming at Pentecost. The servant spirit demonstrated itself as they served God by serving others, described in Acts 2:44–45: “Now all who believed ... sold

their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.”

Faithful, loving service to others paves the road that leads to the honor that counts — from God, not from the world.

Jesus put it like this: “If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor” (John 12:26). What higher reward can anyone imagine than to be honored by God?

Be ready to serve

As God’s servants, we are to be always available and ready to serve by doing His will. A picturesque description of readiness is found in Psalm 32:8 where the Lord says, “I will guide you with My eye.”

Such should be our willingness and readiness to serve that we do not have to have needs pointed out or instructions verbalized — only the Master’s glance in the direction of need is sufficient for faithful servants to take notice and move immediately to help. The presence of need is all the motivation God’s people require to be His servants. 🙏

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.





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

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

FEATURED WORSHIP SPEAKERS



David Eldridge
Pastor, Dawson Memorial Baptist Church,
Birmingham



DeWayne Rembert
Pastor, Flatline Church at Chisholm,
Montgomery



BREAKOUT SESSIONS

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

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

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

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



Wytheville: Scenic destination

Small Virginia town offers charm, history, recreation or relaxation to guests

By **Connie Pearson**
TAB Media

Are you longing for a short break from your usual routine, perhaps some scenic beauty away from crowds? May I suggest the tiny but fascinating town of Wytheville, Virginia? This town of fewer than 10,000 will surprise you with its number of attractions. You can stay as busy or relaxed as you choose.

People often make their way to Wytheville because of the outdoor recreation opportunities. For hiking and biking, check out Big Walker Mountain Trail, New River State Park or Crystal Springs Recreation Area. During the right seasons, you might want to try your luck catching some of the rainbow or brown trout known to thrive in the area.

Big Walker Lookout is billed as Virginia's oldest privately owned scenic attraction. In addition to the 100-foot observation tower, you'll also find a store full of souvenirs, crafts and canned goods. The store also serves Homestead Creamery ice cream, and the lemon crunch flavor is something special.

If you visit with children, consider a few hours at Cobb Hill Alpaca Farm or Fort Chiswell Animal Park. In the spring, Beagle Ridge Herb

Farm is wonderful. The lavender farm and butterfly house are great places to learn about plants and living things of all kinds. For history buffs, check out the Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Museum, dedicated to the former first lady; the Thomas J. Boyd Museum and the Haller-Giboney Rock House Museum, all in the downtown area.

Wytheville is home to Virginia's smallest church, where the doors are always open. It is nondenominational and holds eight.

Take your time to stroll both sides of Main Street, where you can browse a wide variety of specialty shops and boutiques.

Plenty of lodging options

At the junction of interstates, you'll find several hotel chains; but my highest recommendation goes to the beautiful boutique hotel in the center of town, the Bolling Wilson Hotel. There are only 30 guest rooms, so book as early as possible.

Each room and the theme of the entire décor is a tribute to Wilson. Real orchids and paintings of orchids are throughout.

According to stories, President Woodrow Wilson sent her a bouquet of orchids every day of their courtship. Be sure to find the town's 100-



CHAUTAUQUA FESTIVAL

Photo courtesy of visitwytheville.com

foot mural depicting her entire life.

Graze on Main is the restaurant inside the Bolling Wilson Hotel. It is so named because the president and first lady kept a flock of sheep on the White House lawn during World War I so the regular groundskeepers could work elsewhere supporting the war effort.

The wool from the sheep was auctioned off, with proceeds also going to war expenses. Don't miss the carrot cake, the dessert chosen by the Wilsons for their wedding cake.

Dining options

Across the street from the hotel and next door to the Wilson Birthplace Museum, you'll find Skeeter's World Famous Hot Dogs. It has been in business since 1925, and its hot dogs made the list of "best in America" according to Rachel Ray Magazine.

"The Works," a bargain at less than \$3, comes with cheese, slaw, mustard, onions and chili.

A few blocks down Main Street you'll find 1776 Log House Restaurant. The original part of the building was indeed built in 1776 by a man who had to leave the project to fight in the Revolutionary War.

More was added in 1804, and the Civil War factors into its history too.


You'll wish the walls could tell the tales of those who occupied the rooms in the past, but even more you'll want to dive into the homemade loaf of fresh-baked bread brought to your table as a starter. Don't miss the corn fritters with honey or the stuffed squash.

Dinner Theatre

Wytheville has a generous share of chain restaurants, too, so you won't go hungry, but may I also suggest a meal and entertainment combination?

The musical productions at Wohlfahrt Haus Dinner Theatre are always popular, so be sure to book your tickets early. They have both matinee and evening performances after a four-course meal.

This summer's shows include "Under the Boardwalk" through June 27 and the gospel revue, "Oh, Happy Day!" (July 1–Aug. 29).

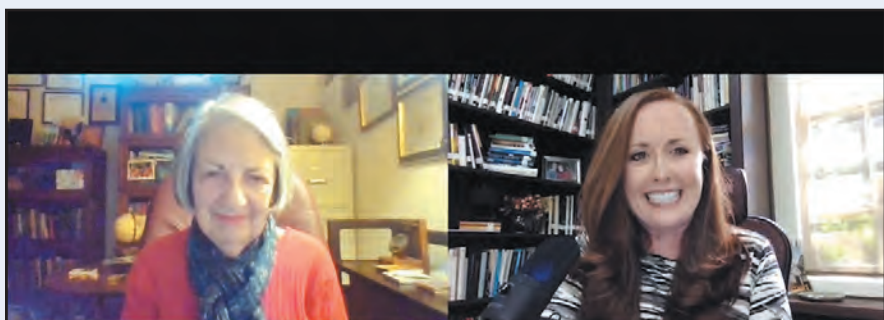
Wytheville has the distinction of being the only town in the world with that name. It embraces its uniqueness, and I found it to be a friendly and fascinating place to visit. 



FORT CHISWELL ANIMAL PARK

Photo courtesy of visitwytheville.com

3 stories you should know



DR. REBEKAH NAYLOR
Retired Medical Missionary to India

JENNIFER RASH
TAB Media

Screenshot

Retired medical missionary to India shares how to pray, help

India, a country of 1.4 billion people, reportedly has more than 3 million active cases of COVID-19 and more than 230,000 deaths. Dr. Rebekah Naylor served as a clinical surgeon missionary at Bangalore Baptist Hospital from 1974 to 2002. During an interview with TAB Media on May 1, Naylor provides insight into the health care system in India as well as specific ways to pray and help the people of India. To hear the interview, visit tabonline.org/india. For more information about how to help, visit sendrelief.org. (TAB Media)

Can fitness clubs keep women-only areas?

The Connecticut Supreme Court heard arguments May 5 in a case involving women-only exercise areas in fitness clubs but with potentially wider implications for gender-related issues.

The case raises questions regarding sexual discrimination, differences between men and women and even the definition of gender.

Several states have changed their gender discrimination laws to exclude fitness clubs.

Connecticut's Chief Justice, Richard Robinson, told the Associated Press the case is tough because of "cultural overlays," noting there are bigger issues than "statutory interpretation" at work.

Connecticut specifically exempts bathrooms, sleeping areas and locker rooms from gender discrimination laws. (TAB Media)

Contributions to CP remain steady in April

Gifts to the Cooperative Program remained steady in April and just ahead of year-to-date budgeted projections, according to a monthly update from the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee.

April CP giving totaled \$15,836,644.38, which was \$1,670,819.45 (11.79%) more than the \$14,165,824.93 received in April 2020 and \$263,727.71 (1.69%) more than the monthly budgeted amount of \$15,572,916.67, Baptist Press reported.

The April total was just slightly higher than the March giving total of \$15,773,386.18.

As of April 30, gifts received by the EC for distribution through the CP Allocation Budget total \$111,889,383.70, 2.96% less than last year's budget contribution. (TAB Media)

Headline news from around the Southeast

Arkansas

Students at Union Valley Baptist Church, Beebe, Arkansas, missed out on a lot during the past year because of COVID-19 restrictions, and they were more than ready to reconnect not only with each other but also with God. A Disciple Now weekend in April kicked off the re-connection with 59 students, including many who were unchurched. By the end of the weekend, 13 students had made professions of faith and were baptized, the Arkansas Baptist News reported.

Florida

After a February fire destroyed the sanctuary of Morningstar Baptist Church, Fort Myers, Florida, an unexpected partnership with a nearby church emerged from the ashes. Today, Crossroads Baptist Church, "a partner in the gospel," is helping Morningstar with weekly worship services, various ministries and outreach opportunities.

The two churches also are partnering on a formal revitalization process for the congregation that lost its building but not its God-given mission, the Florida Baptist Witness reported.

Louisiana

Eighty boys learned how to rope cattle and ride a mechanical bull while hearing the gospel message at Tall Timbers Baptist Conference Center in Woodworth, Louisiana, during the recent Royal Ambassador Congress. Leaders used the example of taming an unbroken wild horse to help present the gospel. By the closing session, nine boys had made salvation decisions, the Baptist Message reported. Participants also learned how cowboy churches are helping to further the gospel.

Mississippi

Mississippi College, a Baptist college in Clinton, Mississippi, opened its on-campus Food

Pantry on April 1. Pantry volunteers offer food and hygiene products as a free service to MC students and employees. During the first few weeks, more than 55 students shopped at the Food Pantry, which relies on donations and partnerships to keep its mission going. Food insecurity is a problem on many college campuses nationwide.

South Carolina

The special needs community, often overlooked in churches, has a "safe haven" in the Sunshine Club of Spartanburg, which meets the first and third Saturday of each month in the dining hall of Spartanburg First Baptist Church. COVID meant that the ministry, which started in 2011, had to adapt to a virtual event, but even with the change, Sunshine Club continues to meet the needs of special needs individuals and their families in the community, the Baptist Courier reported.

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

► **Edwin Thomas “Tom” Cleveland** — long-time pastor and leader at Samford University — died April 26. He was 83.

Cleveland attended Georgetown College in Kentucky and graduated from Howard College (now Samford University) in Birmingham. He earned a master of divinity and doctor of divinity from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

Cleveland served as dean of admissions and director of financial aid at Samford for more than two decades. Cleveland also served as pastor of a number of churches in Alabama and Kentucky, including Valley View Baptist Church, Leeds; Woodland Hills Baptist Church, Bessemer; and Carson Road Baptist Church, Center Point, which closed in 2012.

After he retired, Cleveland served for many years as a hospice chaplain in Birmingham. He also served as the chair of Rotary District 6860’s Group Study Exchange Program, leading 26 international exchanges.

Cleveland was preceded in death by his wife, Mary Sue, and two great-grandchildren. He is survived by his wife, Margaret; two sons, Edwin “Ed” and William “Bill;” four grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

The Tom Cleveland and Mary Sue Cleveland Annual and Endowed Scholarship Fund has been created in the couple’s honor at Samford.

► **Ted Brady St. John**, pastor of Providence Baptist Church, Ragland, died May 2. He was 76. In addition to his time at Providence Baptist, he also served at a number of other churches in the area. He was a computer programmer with Hubble for 30 years before his retirement.

St. John is survived by his wife, Jane; daughter, Lori; three grandchildren; and a special niece.

BLOUNT ASSOCIATION

► **Pleasant View Missionary Baptist Church, Holly Pond**, will host a singing May 16 at 5 p.m. with Point of Honor. For more information, call 256-796-5986. Earl Harper is pastor.

CHILTON ASSOCIATION

► **Dallas Dodson** is the new family discipleship minister of **Liberty Hill Baptist Church, Clanton**. He is married to Hannah.

JUDSON ASSOCIATION

► When **Mike Wehner** recently retired as associate pastor of **First Baptist Church, Headland**, his nearly 25-year tenure made him the longest-serving ministerial staff member in the history of the church.

“I’m thankful for all of the people at First Baptist Church we’ve been able to serve. They’re a wonderful congregation,” he said. “The fact that

I’ve been able to stay so long says more about them than me.”

Wehner and his wife, Connie, accepted the call and moved from Greenwood, South Carolina, where he was serving in a similar position. Over the years, he said his position has been more “minister of miscellaneous.”

Part of that has been overseeing the church’s day care ministry alongside director Kimberly Grandstaff, who has been there the whole time. “The church has allowed me to do a lot of different things, and I’m thankful for it,” Wehner said.

The church honored him April 11 during its morning service and also held a reception. Mayor Ray Marler presented him with a proclamation by the City of Headland, and Brad Harris, personnel committee chair, reflected on Wehner’s tenure and how the church body thrived under his leadership and enjoyed lasting friendships.

MOBILE ASSOCIATION

► **Cottage Hill Baptist Church, Mobile**, will host the Encounter conference Oct. 15–16 for students age 18–25 and their leaders. Josh Hall, pastor to college and young adults at Cottage Hill Baptist, says his desire for the event is for students “to come to this conference and know that He is God and then take that good news to the nations.”

Through worship, Bible study and breakout sessions, Encounter will aim to send hundreds of students back to their cities and around the world for God’s glory. For more information, visit cottagehill.org/encounter.



WEHNER

Alabama Baptists mark Day of Prayer

Alabama Baptists were among those who gathered at local courthouses, parks and churches across the state and nation May 6 to observe the 70th annual National Day of Prayer.

In Andalusia, a gathering on the town square (right) drew about a dozen people who prayed in small groups.

In a video prayer time earlier in the day, Covington Baptist Association director of missions

Otis Corbett spoke to this year’s theme: “Lord, pour out your love, life and liberty.”

“Our nation is just a nation, [but] it is special, and ... we need to pray that our God will help us preserve those founding liberties and those founding privileges of serving Him, ... to worship Him in freedom and in truth,” he said.

Several TAB Media staff members participated in the Birmingham Bible Reading Marathon, held in conjunction with the National Day of Prayer. Staff members

read assigned Scripture passages throughout the day. TAB production manager Dianna Cagle (pictured above) read Ezekiel 47–48.

The National Day of Prayer is observed each year on the first Thursday of May. More information is available at nationaldayofprayer.org. (TAB Media)



Screenshot



TAB Media photo

Persecuted church

Nurses charged with blasphemy after removing wall decorations

FAISALABAD, Pakistan — Two Christian nurses have been charged under Pakistan’s blasphemy statutes after they followed a supervisor’s orders April 9 to remove old wall hangings and stickers inside Civil Hospital.

Some of the items nurse Mariam Lal and student nurse Navish Arooj, who are both Catholic, were told to remove bore inscriptions from the Koran.

A Muslim employee physically attacked Lal to defend Islam. Further unrest arose the next day, and a mob converged on the hospital. Police charged Lal and Arooj with “defiling the Koran.” The women’s families went into hiding.

On Jan. 28, Tabeeta Gill, a Christian nurse in a Karachi hospital, was accosted by a violent mob; she has been charged with insulting Muhammad, punishable with death.



Morning Star News photo

As of April 11, at least 24 Christians were in prison on blasphemy charges in the predominantly Muslim nation.

Pakistan is on the U.S. State

Department’s list of “Countries of Particular Concern” for serious religious freedom violations. Pakistan is No. 5 on Open Doors’ 2021 World Watch List of places where it is most difficult to be a Christian. (MS)

Prescribing medication abortions via telehealth a rising concern

By **Dianna L. Cagle**
TAB Media

Several states are moving to ban or limit medication abortions, which have risen during COVID-19 due to more “virtual care.”

“No woman deserves to be subjected to the gruesome process of a chemical abortion, potentially hours away from the physician who prescribed her the drugs,” Mike Gonidakis, president of Ohio Right to Life, told the Associated Press.

About 40% of all abortions in the U.S. are attributed to medication abortions, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a research organization that supports abortion rights.

Ohio Senate Bill 260, signed into law in January by Gov. Mike DeWine, was set to go in effect April 12, but currently has a preliminary injunction blocking it. That bill proposed felony charges for doctors who provided medication abortion through telemedicine.

DeWine issued an executive order April 5 allowing for the emergency adoption of the Unborn Child Dignity Act, a bill that would allow for the burial or cremation of babies that were previously being thrown in the trash.

FDA approved

The Food and Drug Administration approved medication abortion in 2000 with the introduction of mifepristone, previously referred to as RU-486. An abortion through medication consists of a two-pill protocol, mifepristone and misoprostol.

Mifepristone blocks the hormone progesterone, caus-



Unsplash.com

ing the lining of the uterus to thin, preventing the embryo from staying implanted and growing. Within 48 hours, the drug misoprostol is taken, causing the uterus to contract and expel the fetus and placenta. Medication abortion is provided up to 10 weeks' gestation.

Montana state Rep. Sharon Greef, who sponsored a bill calling for tighter regulation of medication abortions in her state, called this type of abortion “the Wild West of the abortion industry.” She stressed

that these powerful drugs should be monitored by medical professionals, “not as part of a do-it-yourself abortion far from a clinic or hospital.”

Planned Parenthood runs five of Montana's seven abortion clinics. The state has seen the number of abortions through medication rise to 75%.

On April 26, Montana Gov. Greg Gianforte signed several laws restricting abortions, including a ban on those via telemedicine. Many states have taken similar actions.

A report from Planned Parenthood indicated that since 2019, medication abor-

tions and bans have tripled; pro-life constitutional amendments have more than tripled; and 12 abortion restrictions have been enacted this year.

According to Guttmacher, 61 of the 536 total pro-life laws introduced in states across the country since January became law as of April 29.

Lighter restrictions

Federal restrictions on abortion-inducing medications were eased by the FDA under federal court order during the pandemic.

Telemedicine makes it difficult to ban medication abortions entirely, however.

“A patient in a state that does not dispense the abortion pill via telemedicine could have a virtual appointment with a doctor in another state who prescribes the pill,” said Catherine Parks in an article on the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission's website.

Studies have shown that while the number of abortions has declined since 2001, the number of medication abortions has risen steadily.

Pro-life advocates are hopeful the U.S. Supreme Court, now with a 6-3 conservative majority, will soon consider overturning *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 decision, which legalized abortion in the U.S. 🇺🇸

About 40% of all abortions in the U.S. are attributed to medication abortions.

Guttmacher Institute

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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

CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR

Enon Baptist Church, Morris, Ala., is seeking a full-time senior pastor. Seminary degree with master of divinity and 5-10 years experience as lead/senior pastor. Please email cover letter, resumé and recommendations to: ebcmorrisPSC@gmail.com.

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

Horseshoe Bend Baptist Church seeks a full-time pastor. In prayer for supply pastors also. Please send resumé to: horseshoebendbaptistchurch@gmail.com.

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 MINISTER OF MUSIC/WORSHIP & PIANIST

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

Childersburg, Ala., near Central Alabama Community College.

YOUTH DIRECTOR

Trinity Baptist Church, Roanoke, Ala., is looking for a part-time youth director. Please send resumé to: Trinity Baptist Church, 3501 US Hwy 431, Roanoke, AL 36274. Deadline: May 25.

CHILDREN'S MINISTER

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

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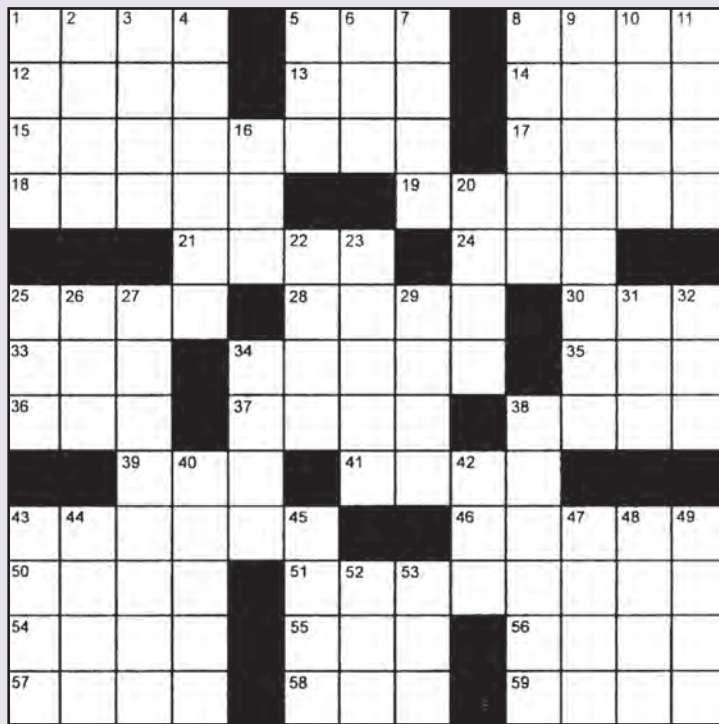
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CHRISTIAN crossword

ACROSS

1. To plop.
5. There is a ___ here, which hath five barley loaves. (John 6:9)
8. Joshua built an altar unto the Lord God of Israel on Mount ___. (Josh. 8:30)
12. Then shall the ___ man leap as a hart. (Isa. 35:6)
13. Age.
14. A solo.
15. The high and lofty One that inhabiteth ___. (Isa. 57:15)
17. They passed through the ___ ea as by dry land. (Heb. 11:29)
18. Thick.
19. Spatter.
21. Indebted to.
24. Whatsoever ye shall ___ in my name, that will I do. (John 14:13)
25. Ship's direct steering.
28. Soon.
30. From the beginning of the year even unto the ___. (Deut. 11:12)
33. Where ___ the men which came into thee this night? (Gen. 19:5)
34. Let us lay ___ every weight. (Heb. 12:1)
35. Pekoe.
36. In a place where two ways ___. (Mark 11:4)
37. In the first year of Darius the ___. (Dan. 11:1)
38. The love of God is ___ abroad in our hearts. (Rom. 5:5)
39. ___ art thou, Lord? (Acts 9:5)
41. Revise.
43. ___ you this day whom ye will serve. (Josh. 24:15)
46. What thou ___, write



By Evelyn M. Boyington Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- in a book. (Rev. 1:11)
50. Gentleman. (German)
51. Turn back thine hand as a grape ___ into the baskets. (Jer. 6:9)
54. Annoys.
55. Antelope.
56. Pro ___.
57. The smell of thy ___ like apples. (Song of Sol. 7:8)
58. Droop.
59. Break.
20. Window glass.
22. Woe to them that are at ___ in Zion. (Amos 6:1)
23. Sly.
25. Eccentric wheel.
26. Unrefined rock.
27. They that weave ___ shall be confounded. (Isa. 19:9)
29. The prophet of the Lord ... whose name was ___. (2 Chron. 28:9)

DOWN

1. They ___ before the men of Ai. (Josh. 7:4)
2. The Jews of ___ sought to stone thee. (John 11:8)
3. Sign.
4. There was not one feeble ___ among their tribes. (Ps. 105:37)
5. Hawaiian garland.
6. Where ___ thou? (Gen. 3:9)
7. All the ___ of my life. (Ps. 23:6)
8. British noblemen.
9. No man ___ it unto them. (Lam. 4:4)
10. Helps.
11. To whip.
16. I make all things ___. (Rev. 21:5)
31. Born.
32. Mom and ___.
34. Minor prophet.
38. Cattle.
40. I saw, and behold a white ___. (Rev. 6:2)
42. Adjective suffix.
43. Part of the face.
44. Champion.
45. As the partridge sitteth on ___. (Jer. 17:11)
47. Of ___, the family of the Eranites. (Num. 26:36)
48. Bristle.
49. A ___ for him in the way. (Job 18:10)
52. American Newspaper Association.
53. Pull.

WORD search

- | | |
|-----------------|------------|
| ADVICE | MEANINGS |
| CHARM | OBEY |
| CORRECTION | PARENTS |
| CROWN | PROSPEROUS |
| EVIL SCHEMES | PROTECTION |
| FAIR | PROVERBS |
| FAITHFUL | RESPECT |
| FOOL | RIDDLES |
| GLORIOUS | RIGHT |
| GOOD | SAFETY |
| HEALTH | SECURITY |
| HIDDEN TREASURE | SENSE |
| HONESTY | SILVER |
| HONEY | SOLOMON |
| HONOR | STRENGTH |
| HUMILITY | SWEET |
| JUSTICE | TEACH |
| KNOWLEDGE | UNDERSTAND |
| LAZY | USEFUL |
| LISTEN | WISDOM |



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This season of pastoral ministry has been challenging. Many pastors and church staff are facing emotional difficulties and burnout. **Richard Blackaby**, president of Blackaby Ministries International since 2006, presents an encouraging message in light of the times.

Evangelism Through Social Media

During this informative session, hear from a panel of social media experts, state missionaries and a pastor as they discuss how to effectively use social media for evangelism and provide some practical tools.

Conversations with the Expert: Mental Health in Teenagers

Dr. Al Saunders, director of Wellspring Christian Clinic, discusses common mental health issues for teenagers.

Making Membership Meaningful

God has designed the Body of Christ to function together to fulfill the Great Commission. **Robert Mullins**, pastor of Crossroads Community Church, Elmore, leads a discussion on how every believer can serve more effectively through the Body using their God-given gifts and abilities.

Better Sundays Begin on Monday

If sports teams know the value of evaluating their games to improve future effectiveness, why aren't pastors and worship teams incorporating similar evaluative practices? Author and worship leader **David Manner** provides insights into this helpful topic.

Post-COVID Worship Practices and Streaming

COVID has rapidly changed our culture and our churches in the past months. What does that mean for worship in the coming years? In this conference, **Kenny Lamm**, senior consultant in worship and music at the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, explores the various aspects of in-person and online worship and how they can complement each other.

Church Library Helps

Choose from topics including "Church Libraries Making the Shift to Today's Church Cultures," "The Emerging Church Library in Today's Church Culture" and "Thinking Outside the Library Promotion," plus demonstrations of the Concourse and Atrium library software systems.

AND DON'T FORGET THESE UPCOMING LIVE ONLINE OPPORTUNITIES!

CHURCH INSURANCE: PROTECTING PEOPLE AND PROPERTY

Monday, May 17, 9 a.m.-Noon

Church insurance is necessary, but it is also helpful. Join Steven Riggins of Guidestone and State Missionary Lee Wright as they help you understand insurance beyond just knowing you need to have it. This discussion will cover topics including property and casualty; workman's compensation; transportation; liability, medical, dental, life and disability; safety and security; and a checklist of what to ask your agent.

CHURCH TAX CONFERENCE FOR SMALL CHURCHES

Tuesday, June 1, 10 a.m.-Noon

Do you need a W-2 if the pastor is the only paid employee? Do you have to complete the form 941? Can the minister take 100% of his income as housing? How does a small church of 100 or less differ from the large church in tax issues? Join State Missionary Lee Wright for answers to these tax questions and more!

Register for these webinars at **PinnacleAlabama.org**.

These training opportunities are free and made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.

'Heartbreaking' decision affects entire community

(continued from page 1)
million budget for the 2021–2022 academic year that begins June 1.”

The board's April 2 decision to forge ahead despite coming up \$3.7 million shy of the needed \$5 million in pledges stimulated the Judson students, faculty, staff, board and alumnae toward the possibility of finding a path forward for the school.

Along with its historic tie to Alabama Baptist life, Judson also serves an important role for the economy of Perry County and the town of Marion.

People across the county, state and nation desperately worked to save the school, Tew said.

“I really thought we could do it. I share the heartbreak of this decision that is felt by generations of Judson students, faculty and friends,” he shared.

“While I have no doubt this is the right decision, my heart still sank as each affirmative vote was cast. At that moment my mind was drawn to Isaiah 46:10,

where God declared, ‘I will accomplish all my purposes.’”

Board chairperson Joan Newman acknowledged the difficulty of the decision as well.

“Today's vote is the outcome of months of interviews, research, fundraising, and yes, prayer. Acknowledging the incredible legacy of Judson, acknowledging the thousands of lives that were changed through a Judson experience and grateful for my own personal journey at Judson, it is with a broken heart that I accept the board's vote to suspend instruction,” she said.

Next steps

Next steps include completing the summer-related terms and then discontinuing academic operation after July 31, closing residence halls May 31 and moving immediately into an orderly shutdown with a phased workforce reduction, Tew explained.

College officials will assist each student with

transfer plans, taking into consideration their majors, remaining hours to graduation and institutional preference, and will work to help employees transition successfully as well.

Judson also will complete its corporate transition according to closure regulations of the Southern Association of Colleges & Schools and the U.S. Department of Education, Tew added.

Alumnae and friends who made statements of future financial support for the 2021–2022 academic year will not be obligated to complete their gifts.

“Judson has served the cause of Christ through Christian higher education for young women with uninterrupted dignity,” Tew said. “It now falls to the current trustees and administration to transition to Judson's final days with equal dignity.”

Financial journey

Tew has been working to obtain a clear picture of the college's financial situation and opportunity to avoid a crisis since coming to the role in March 2019, but it wasn't until early December 2020 that he had to deliver an urgent appeal for help.

On Dec. 15, Tew explained that in order to open in January 2021, Judson would need \$500,000 in unrestricted cash donations and another \$1 million in unrestricted commitments of gifts to complete the spring semester.

Just 13 days after the



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

Judson College trustees meet on campus May 6 (with some joining via Zoom) for a regularly scheduled board meeting. The three-hour meeting was described as “heartbreaking.”

announcement and five days before the Dec. 31 deadline, the Judson community, alumnae and friends mobilized quickly to provide the needed funds.

The school had secured \$500,000 in cash donations and was halfway to the commitment goal of an additional \$1 million. The board convened Dec. 31, 2020, and approved moving forward with the spring 2021 semester.

Of the total \$1.5 million given or pledged, almost half came from alumnae.

In recent years, Judson has operated on a roughly \$9 million annual budget with 76 employees. Most expenses go to academics followed closely by care of the campus.

While Judson does have a board-operated endowment of \$9.8 million, and another more than \$6 million in perpetual trusts held by others, including The Baptist Foundation of Alabama, almost all of these funds are

donor-restricted for scholarships.

Judson does use earnings from the endowments as part of its annual income, along with students' tuition and fees, about \$1 million provided from gifts through the Cooperative Program, and \$500,000 to \$800,000 from donations.

Judson also received more than \$2.4 million through the pandemic-related federal and state relief.

Without those funds, the school would have had to close in fall 2020, Tew reported.

Rising costs

Expenses were trimmed going into the spring semester by eliminating the associate in nursing program, restructuring the Summer Term, reducing personnel and delaying campus repairs/upgrades, but the \$8.5 million budget remains out of balance.

According to a report by Fuller Higher Ed Solutions, an organization engaged to research the college's changing markets and future potential, Judson would have needed a windfall of \$40 million to truly turn things around, even if that amount came in at \$8 million a year for the next five years.

(Mary Amelia Taylor contributed)



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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For May 16

Explore the Bible

By Benjamin Stubblefield, Ph.D.

Visiting Assistant Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



SACRIFICED Luke 23:33–46

Mark Twain wrote: “The proper office of a friend is to side with you when you are in the wrong. Nearly anybody will side with you when you are in the right.”

People have told me I’m argumentative. But I don’t think I am. I like to be right. And I like to know that people around me think I’m right. My guess is that I’m not alone in this. The danger for people like us is that when we are wrong, we can’t see it, won’t admit it and are unwilling to repent from it.

In our passage this week, we witness people who are so committed to doing what they think is righteous that they are blind to the fact that they are committing humanity’s greatest evil.

Intensifying the heinous nature of their conduct is that they’re persecuting the pure and blameless Son of God. In this one scene, we get the most extreme juxtaposition: the depth of mankind’s unrighteousness and the height of Christ’s holiness.

Focused (33–34)

Jesus’ accusers brought Him to “the place of the skull,” a public locale mentioned in Matthew and Mark. They crucified Him between two criminals, but not before He could pray for their forgiveness. He refuses to revile or curse, threaten or abuse. Betrayal, abandonment, humiliation, slander and torture elicit only sympathy from the Savior, and He stays focused on His mission to rescue and redeem. He is unyielding in His righteous pursuit to bring forgiveness for the fallen. Friends, if that’s not love, I’m not sure what is.

Mocked (35–39)

Bystanders, rulers, soldiers and one of His fellow “crucifixees” jeer at the Lord, pouring on the insults and sarcasm. The irony of their taunts is not lost on the reader. Not only has “He saved others,” but He will be delivered, and He will save them as well.

It is important to note here that even today, as it was then, some people are very antagonistic to the

claim that Christ is King. Some may be exceptionally persuasive. But the truth of who Jesus is remains unchanged. He was Lord of His enemies at His trial, at His scourging and at His crucifixion. And He is Lord of all, even still.

Trusted (40–43)

While one criminal blasphemes along with the crowd, the other realizes that Jesus is more than a Roman convict. He petitions the Lord to “remember me.” The Friend of Sinners uses some of His final breaths to guarantee the criminal’s presence in glory.

What is striking about this moment is that the man isn’t pleading for clemency from Caesar; he’s trusting in Jesus for salvation. He comes to know the truth: This bloodied Nazarene is the only way, truth and life — the only one in the world who can ever actually rescue the perishing and in no way cast him out (John 6:37).

Sacrificed (44–46)

As Jesus entrusts Himself to the Father, the sun is darkened and the temple veil is torn in two — both signs of judgment and hope. Astronomical signs are often associated with the Day of the Lord foretold in prophetic literature. This was a long-awaited day in which God would bring justice to the earth and initiate His rule. So the darkness in the middle of the day is not just a phenomenon linked to wrath but also to the hope of the kingdom of God.

Furthermore, the rent veil signifies God’s judgment of the temple. More precisely, God nullifies the chief role of the temple, namely, to be the only house in which the presence of God would dwell. Moreover, the rent veil illustrates that in the work of a new High Priest and sufficient sacrifice, anyone can “draw near” to the presence of God through Him (Heb. 4:16; Eph. 3:12). Because of the finished work of Christ, whoever whenever can come before the throne of grace. The curtain that had for so long denied access to God’s presence has been split.✠

Bible Studies for Life

By Rony Kozman, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies, Samford University



LIVE THE MESSAGE Colossians 3:1–3, 12–17

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul makes known the mystery that was hidden in past ages and that God has now revealed — Christ (1:26–27).

God commissioned Paul to serve the church by proclaiming Christ (1:25). Paul proclaims Christ so that all may be instructed in the Messiah’s wisdom and become mature (1:28).

The goal of Paul’s gospel preaching is not simply to rescue people from judgment. It is this and more. Paul proclaims Christ so that those who are instructed in the mystery of Christ grow in wisdom and maturity.

It is crucial that we get this. The gospel is not simply a ticket that gets you into heaven. This way of thinking about the gospel misses that the gospel is also very much about maturing us — making us complete in Christ.

It is about conforming us to the Messiah. It is about making us wise in the ways and the character of Christ. The gospel not only raises us to heaven, the gospel also demands we live our lives worthy of heaven.

Seek the things of Christ, not the things of the world. (1–3)

The death and resurrection of Christ are not events outside of which believers stand. Rather, we join Christ in His death and resurrection.

Paul reminds us of this reality. We are not passive observers of Jesus’ death and resurrection. We have died with Him, and we have risen with Him (2:12, 20; 3:1).

Even though Paul speaks of us as having already died and risen with Christ, Paul also presses us to live now in light of that reality.

When Christ was raised, He ascended into the heavenly places. And since we were raised with Christ, we need to set our attention — our hearts and our minds — on this heavenly reality.

We need to live in this reality, which means that we put behind

that which is earthly in us (v. 5).

Heaven is our new home. So we should no longer live as though we are still at home on earth where the flesh, sin and evil powers reigned (2:13–15).

Put on and wear the character of Christ. (12–15)

Even though we have been raised with Christ, we still need to “put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to [our] earthly nature.” We must put away the vices that characterized our earthly nature (vv. 5–8).

Another way to put this is that we are to take off the old humanity. Sinful behavior characterizes the old humanity as a garment that we must now take off (v. 9).

Instead, we must put on the clothing of the new humanity which we do by knowing Christ who is the image of God (v. 10).

As we are instructed in the mystery of Christ, in the gospel, we must conform our whole lives to Christ and so put on the new humanity.

This looks like clothing ourselves with specific pieces of clothing (i.e., virtues) including “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience” and forgiveness. And above all these we must put on love, which ties all the other virtues together.

Let everything in your life point to Christ with gratitude and thanks. (16–17)

If the gospel lives with us, then we must live virtuous lives.

The gospel reorients our existence. It raises us to heaven and gives us the clothes of the new humanity, the clothes of Christ, which are Christ’s virtues.

Paul proclaims Christ to present every person wise and mature in Christ (1:28), and we also must preach the gospel to each other which means that we teach each other with all wisdom so that we all become mature in Christ, embodying the Messiah’s wisdom in the way that we live.✠

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tess Schoonhoven

Baptist Press

Multiplatform 'Faithful Project' depicts stories of Bible women

With contributions from Amy Grant, Ellie Holcomb, Ann Voskamp, Trillia Newbell, Christy Nockels, Sandra McCracken and others, a new multiplatform collaboration tells the stories of women throughout the Bible and the moments where God met with them and showed them His love and faithfulness.

Called "The Faithful Project," the effort includes an album, book, collection of art, photos and events designed to celebrate God's kindness to women. It is a beautiful depiction of faith-based unity, contributors say.

"This project was the brainchild of many people, and two that I knew well were Andrew Osenga, with Integrity Music, and Keely Scott with Compassion International," Christian songstress Amy Grant told Baptist Press.

Building community

"I'd talked to Andrew, asking him to include me in something that builds community. My experience of touring, my orbit, my age, all of those things had left me feeling a bit untethered from an artistic community," Grant said.

"So when Andrew called to say



'The Faithful Project' participants

Baptist Press photo

he and a team of folks were putting together a writing retreat and asked if I would like to be a part of it, what seemed as a quick invitation to something wound up becoming a project that has really become a great source of community and friendship and creativity."

The group gathered multiple times to write the songs for the record "Faithful: Go and Speak," which released April 30.

Authors and songwriters worked together to find the best ways to represent the stories of women straight from Scripture.

"I loved meeting together with other women to actually study the women from the Bible. I've never concentrated so much on the story of one woman for an entire day, to really bring her to life," Grant said.

"I feel like we gave our full attention to these women and we saw them differently and in a much more expansive way, and in seeing them, we all felt seen. Many of their stories were clearly tragic but they mattered. It made us look at

the question, 'What makes an important life?' It helps you recalibrate what really matters."

The writing groups simply sat down, Bibles open, and tried to capture the story before them, said Trillia Newbell, author of one chapter in the "Faithful" book, released May 1.

For the entire group of contributors, one key motivating factor was to display the unity of the church, specifically women within the church, and give a focused, intentional piece of art to express scriptural truth, connecting women of God to each other.

'The body of Christ'

"It displays, really, the body of Christ — all of our gifts, and all of the different things that we bring together," Newbell said.

"It's a display of what Paul says, that we are a body of many parts, and I don't know of anything like this where you get songwriters and authors together to write about the stories of women in the Bible in hopes to shine a light on God and glorify Jesus."

By focusing on who Jesus is, specifically His faithfulness, the experience and understanding of God grows even more personal, Newbell said.

"For women in particular, we have seen so much unfaithfulness, whether it's from leaders, or abuse — there's just so much that we have endured, or that we have seen friends endure," she said. "We want to be reminded that God is faithful, He is always faithful, He is enduring, He is persevering and nothing will ever separate us from the love of Christ Jesus."

Each song on the album tells a story, like "A Woman," recorded by Ellie Holcomb and Amy Grant, which tells the story of Mary Magdalene from the Gospel accounts.

Real accounts

And the book's chapters, such as Newbell's about Naomi from the book of Ruth, remind audiences that the accounts are real and give a bold picture of God meeting women right where they are, all throughout history.

"Really, it's about an encounter with God and that He's so merciful and mighty, but that He is willing to meet us in the mundane," said Christy Nockels, songwriter and singer for the project. "I hope that women will be able to hear these stories and say 'Oh, that's right where I am, these lines are what I'm living right now.' I hope it will cause these stories to come alive."

The first single from the album and more information on the book, a planned tour and tickets for a special livestream event are all available at faithfulproject.com.

EDITOR'S NOTE

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

EDITOR'S NOTE — This article is reprinted from Baptist Press (baptistpress.com).

'Beautiful *spirit*'

Ghana native reaches across racial barriers to lead mostly white church

By Scott Barkley
Baptist Press

Winford Smith remembers when, as chairman of the pastor search team for First Baptist Church, he realized the group needed to make a change.

The team had agreed beforehand that whoever served as interim pastor would not be a candidate. However, the man who had been preaching each Sunday stood out from others in consideration.

"It was his consistency in the Word, how he preached Scripture from cover to cover," said Smith, who is also chairman of the church's deacons. "He supported his sermon from references throughout the Bible. He loved the church and loved doing God's work. It was obvious."

"Our team had been meeting for about a year and a half, but no one jumped out at us," said Carol Clark, a longtime church member also serving on the search team. "But when we heard him preach, his face was just shining with the love of Christ. We'd fallen in love with him and how he presented God's word. There was something there our congregation had never heard."

Distinctly different

Yes, depending on your point of view, Emmanuel Ofori-Atta stood out at First Baptist Church in Stockbridge, a city of 30,000 south of Atlanta. First Baptist's congregation — traditional and aging — was undeniably white.

Ofori-Atta — a native of Ghana — was undeniably black.

Yet those were not the details that stood out for the search team.

Ofori-Atta's background prepared him for working within a large group. His late father, Emmanuel Adu, was a king in the west African nation's Eastern Region, which contains more than 500,000 people. King Emmanuel had 44 children among six wives, 12 of them with Ofori-Atta's mother.

Large family

"We grew up in a 66-bedroom house," he told the Henry County Times after being called as First Baptist's pastor Aug. 2 of last year. "We had a lot of maidservants. Because we were such a large family, my dad didn't shop from a regular store. He ordered his food from the store in large quantities. For example, he would buy a whole cow and hire someone to prepare it, and divide the meat among the wives for their children."

The day Ofori-Atta was born began with his mother unaware she was pregnant and complaining of a stomachache. It took seven hours after Emmanuel's birth and another round of heavy stomach pain to realize there was another baby boy. By virtue of being a twin, "Atta" would accompany his name as well as the recognition that he was the "senior" twin. Ofori is the name of the doctor who delivered them both.

Madam Hannah Padiki, who died in 2016 at 103 years old, would dedicate her twin boys to the Lord.

"It was so we could be a blessing to the world, to serve God and God's people," Ofori-Atta said. "She was a very disciplined woman of prayer. My discipleship came from her."

Ofori-Atta credits his mother's godly influence in leading him



BP photo
Pastor Emmanuel Ofori-Atta sits with his wife Rebecca, son Samuel, 21, and daughter Emmanuella, 14, prior to his ordination service Jan. 17.

to become a pastor and his twin brother's leadership in the music ministry of an evangelistic church in London.

Path to U.S.

After living with his brother in London, Ofori-Atta moved to the United States to work at a Wells Fargo Bank in Charlotte, North Carolina. He later transferred to another branch in Stockbridge and eventually become pastor of International Bible Church, which met on First Baptist's campus.

International Bible Church is a majority Filipino church that had never had an African pastor. Nevertheless, Ofori-Atta built a strong relationship with the congregation, and when First Baptist's pastor of 24 years, Steve Murrell, retired, Ofori-Atta was asked to serve as the interim pastor. He accepted, and a mentoring relationship developed between him and Murrell.

"First Baptist knew Emmanuel fairly well because of joint services they would have with IBC," said Ray Gentry, associational missions strategist for Southside Baptist Network. "Steve would meet with Em-

manuel about once a month. It was a good connection."

Gentry and others took part in Ofori-Atta's ordination service Jan. 17. "He's a very good preacher and doing a wonderful job," Gentry said. "After that ordination council meeting, the deacons were unanimously impressed with their pastor."

Ofori-Atta was slated to be voted in as the church's pastor last spring. Due to COVID-19, however, the vote was postponed until summer.

"There's a beautiful spirit among our members from his leadership," Clark said. "We can't wait to get back together each week to hear his message."

"The wonderful people of First Baptist have experienced what the Lord can do when the church begins to look at the heart of God," said Ofori-Atta. "It's allowed me to be part of such a wonderful, historic church that has been part of this community for centuries."

Like many areas, Stockbridge is changing, Smith, the deacon chairman, said.

"Our neighborhood, city and county are becoming more diverse," he said. 🙏

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Pastor Emmanuel Ofori-Atta, FBC Stockbridge, Georgia