

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

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Photo courtesy of Janet Estis

Missions partnerships

At an outreach event at Immanuel Baptist Church, Cleveland, Mississippi, volunteers from churches in Pickens and Lamar Baptist associations tell Bible stories and make “salvation bracelets,” showing children how each color represents a part of the salvation story.

Backpacks ministry lights up young lives, needs more churches to help

Wrapping up the school year and heading into the summer season means backpacks are the last thing on most people’s minds — except maybe those ready for a hiking adventure.

And definitely those partnering with Alabama Woman’s Missionary Union

to bring holiday cheer to poor families in the Mississippi River Delta.

Many residents of the area live in persistent poverty, said Pat Ingram, missions and ministry consultant for Alabama WMU. Half of them don’t earn enough to support their families — much less buy gifts for their children — and many can’t find jobs at all.

One in 4 children living in the Delta don’t know where their next meal will come from, Ingram added.

So when Alabama WMU leaders learned of the tremendous need in the area, they

partnered with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions to adopt the region in 2016.

The Alabama team works with the Mississippi River Ministry — which is coordinated by Marshall and Janell Ingle — to connect Alabama churches with specific communities.

Filled with gifts

Distributed during the Christmas holiday, backpacks provide warm clothes, non-perishable food for children to eat while out of school, and small toys and gifts to enjoy.

Alabama churches fill the majority of Mississippi River Ministry requests and have given more than 46,000 backpacks in the past five years.

Nearly 9,000 of those were donated in 2020 during the pandemic.

Janell Ingle explained that because many residents work seasonally on the region’s farms, Christmas gifts are out of their financial reach.

“That’s where backpacks come in,” she said. “Their eyes light up, and they’re proud of those little backpacks.”

(See ‘Personal,’ page 11)



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Facebook photo

A crowd gathers for worship at Flatline Church at Chisholm, a church planted in 2019 in the building of Chisholm Baptist Church, Montgomery. Hear the story of the two churches on season 2 of the Stories podcast.

Listen now to Stories podcast season 2

By Grace Thornton

TAB Media

I learned something from Dewayne Rembert this week that still has me shaken — in the first 30 days after he became a follower of Jesus, he led 30 people to make the same decision he did.

That's challenging.

So is the rest of his story — a story of a young man who grew up without a father, a young man never exposed to the true gospel of Jesus even though he attended a church as a child. The Father found him and turned his life around, and he started investing his life in pursuing young, fatherless men with the gospel. And then his story crossed paths with a small, aging church in a part of Montgomery with a lot of brokenness. Since then, the redemption story has only multiplied.

It's challenging to hear Dewayne share his story of how he grew up. It's challenging to hear how he immediately knew that the gift of the gospel was meant to be shared, and shared constantly. And it's challenging to hear the story of an older congregation who decided

to partner with him to reach their changing community.

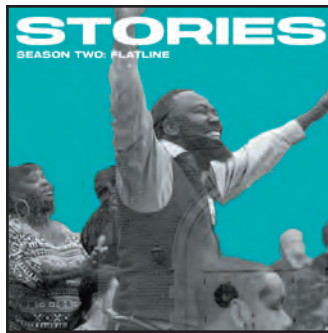
You can hear the whole thing on the Stories podcast, season 2 — The Flatline Story. Over the three episodes — told serial-style with narration and featuring the voices

of Dewayne and others — you'll hear amazing stories of how God redeemed Dewayne and restored him and then began restoring a church that thought its best days were in the past.

And if you're a church that finds itself in the same spot, or you can see that on the horizon, you'll also hear from the Alabama Baptist State Board of

Missions how your church can have a story like that of Chisholm Baptist Church, Montgomery, led by Daniel Edmonds, and Flatline Church at Chisholm, led by Dewayne.

The first two episodes of season 2 are out, with the third coming May 28. And if you haven't listened to it yet, you can also catch season 1 — The Sammy Gilbreath Story. With that one, you'll journey through the twists and turns — and risks — of the life of Sammy Gilbreath, long-time state evangelism director.



CHECK OUT STORIES AT TABONLINE.ORG/STORIES OR WHEREVER YOU GET YOUR PODCASTS.

The Alabama Baptist

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

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.

RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

By Jennifer Davis Rash

President and Editor-in-Chief



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Constant build up of frustration unhealthy; seek to moderate intake

Several friends who are pastors help keep me grounded when I let the constant swirl of debates taking place within the ranks of the Southern Baptist Convention — and all around us in society on any given day — engulf me.

A quick conversation with one of them and a few minutes scrolling on Facebook remind me of all the life moments taking place at any given time.

Some friends are celebrating, while others are walking a painful journey. Some are numb from the news they just received; others are wondering how they are going to make it another day.

It's always humbling when I realize I've gotten caught up in something that, while important and needs appropriate attention, is not the be-all and end-all of most people's worlds day in and day out.

"I'm just keeping my head down and trying to take care of my people," one pastor friend said. "There's plenty to keep my attention here. I don't have time to worry about all the back and forth arguments taking place."

"I used to spend a lot of time reading leadership books and absorbing everything I could on how to be a strong leader, but then I finally realized that what

I need to focus on is loving the people in my congregation. Everything else will work itself out," another pastor friend said.

"I don't know who to trust anymore, and I don't like all the ugliness, so I don't read or listen to any of it anymore," another friend noted.

"I purposefully don't engage in social media, and I don't watch TV news ... but I do read The Alabama Baptist each week and my family alerts me to anything else I need to know," one pastor shared. "I also can sleep peacefully at night," he added.

Another friend in ministry shared how her tender heart becomes anxious when listening

to commentators' raised voices discussing the latest happenings in the world.

Thinking on how to protect her heart and ultimately her ability to care for those around her, she developed a plan to stay informed.

She reads her news rather than listens to it, and she asks her husband to share a brief summary of what he knows of the day's top news items — just the facts with no drama tossed in.

The 24-hour news cycle allows all of us to stay informed up to the minute and provides countless benefits.

But as with any overindul-

gence, it can become detrimental if we aren't careful to learn how to moderate our intake.

Becoming obsessed with any particular debate, organization, group of people or high-profile personality distracts us from the people and situations within our reach on a daily basis.

God has granted each of us opportunities — and family and friends — for which we are responsible in some way.

He expects us to be good stewards of the assignments He has for us; and we can only fulfill our role if we allow Him to fill our hearts and souls first, rather than the unending frustrations of the world.

Tips for leading the way toward genuine engagement with each other and to help inform decision makers

Want to stay informed but not upset all the time?

Wondering how you can convince those in elected and top-level leadership positions to listen to your reasoning on a particular topic?

These may seem like questions with no reasonable answers, but I choose to believe we can find a way. The path may be a bit bumpy and much slower than we would like, but if you are up for trying, here are some tips:

- ▶ Spend time in prayer listening and seeking the Lord's guidance about which topics to prioritize.
- ▶ Settle in your heart that God may lead others to focus their efforts in different directions.
- ▶ Find a few trusted news sources and limit your intake to those.
- ▶ Take the time to fully understand an issue before responding with critical attacks or all-in support.
- ▶ Balance your media consumption with time in prayer and reading God's word. Look with anticipation

to where He is leading and what He is showing you.

- ▶ Push for transparency and be transparent and genuine yourself.
 - ▶ Accept and process the actual facts, even if they are not what you prefer them to be.
 - ▶ Be respectful and grace-filled, willing to listen to the other side first. And truly listen.
 - ▶ Share your side and concerns calmly and factually.
 - ▶ Model a life of integrity.
- Jennifer Davis Rash

Your Voice



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

Getting more of Jesus through it all

By K.J.

IMB representative, Southeast Asia

On the morning of Oct. 15, 2008, I got on an airplane in the U.S. I got out of it in another world.

What does a decade of overseas life entail? More joys and heartache than I can express in words.

Weariness that seeps into your bones and leaks out through your emotions.

Adventure that makes you wonder how you were so blessed as to be given this life.

Language blunders that are hilarious, and language blunders that lead to problems (sometimes one in the same). Language victories, even minor ones, that you celebrate!

Culture mistakes that are

graciously forgiven, and culture mistakes you can never live down.

Being truly grateful for showers and toilets and Dr. Pepper and clear communication and any number of other things I took for granted in my previous world.

Dirt. Geckos. Mosquitoes. Traveling via dump truck and canoe and motorcycle and foot (or sky train and canal boat and pickup truck and motorcycle) all in the same day.

Packing clothing in a Quechua blanket or a backpack or a suitcase with equal fervor.

Herding sheep and herding people (same, same but different).

Love and laughter and pain and dark nights of the soul. Emotional highs and lows like you haven't experienced since middle school.

And through it all, you somehow get more of Jesus.

You can understand Elijah and Paul and Moses so much better because you've lain down under your own juniper tree and have sung praises while torn and bleeding and have taken off your own shoes on the holy ground where God is.

And you are ever so slowly learning to count all of this temporariness as loss and to consistently choose the One who is better than all of it.

These last 10 years have been a gift. If, in the next 10, Jesus graciously allows me even more of Himself, I can't imagine a better way to spend a decade.

(From a 2018 blog post. Name has been changed for security reasons.)

Allow change to make us better

Why would God allow us to experience things like devastating storms, disease and isolation, or any number of other things, only to leave us as we were?

He expects us to be changed, to come out differently than we were, to use the difficulties of our yesterdays to bring blessings into our todays and make us better witnesses for our tomorrows.

My wife read me something the other night. It was a statement she had heard from one of my sermons, and she had penciled it in the margin of her Bible.

It went something like this, "Do you know why your rearview mirror is so small compared to your windshield? It's because our main focus is to be on what's ahead, not what's behind us."

Certainly our past helps make us what we are, but we are designed to live for today while preparing for tomorrow.

As we slowly leave the difficulties of COVID-19-related isolation and separation behind us, my earnest prayer is that we use it for the good we've received.

Brad Campbell
Director of missions
Bigbee Baptist Association

'I want to be part of the change I want to see'

While I do not speak for all black pastors, I desire first and foremost to be obedient to what the Lord has called me to. I want to be a part of the change I want to see.

We face problems as a nation and as a denomination.

Our black brothers and sisters are hurting and fatigued by what we've had to endure simply because we were born black in this country.

And while I intentionally will not name specifics regarding

discord in our denomination, words have become the bricks that are building a wall.

How can we preach from Ephesians 4:1-16 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 and continue to use our platforms and voices to cause division?

Do we believe Galatians 3:28: "There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus?"

We serve the Jesus who tore down the wall of hostility to bring us to Himself — all of us

— in order for believers to be unified, to be of one mind and of one accord.

I believe our convention should be a place of refuge and rest from the fighting.

It is my heart's desire for the Holy Spirit to convict each and every one of us about our conduct and our speech.

I pray that repentance becomes the cry of our hearts.

Pastor Belafae Johnson
Purposed Church
Mascoutah, Ill.

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“Endurance is not just the ability to bear a hard thing, but to turn it into glory.”

WILLIAM BARCLAY

Scottish theologian, author and professor (1907–1978)

Prayer is powerful! It's communicating with the Creator of the universe ... an opportunity to spend time with God, developing a deeper relationship with Him. Prayer is sharing what's on your heart and mind with a God who longs to hear from you.

Matthew 7:7–8 says: “Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”

Linda Cooper
National WMU President
wmu.com

A local church without updated information online is almost

completely invisible to a majority of the community.

No one who isn't personally invited will darken your church's door if you don't have a web presence of some kind. Frankly, many won't even visit a restaurant without looking it up online first.

Likewise, make sure that your sign has accurate service times.

I advise an inwardly focused church to place an empty chair in all leadership meetings; put a sign on the chair saying: This chair represents the person in our community who isn't here yet and needs a voice at this table.

Chris Crain
Executive director
Birmingham Metro
Baptist Association

Yesterday, I got to visit two precious widows without fear of giving them COVID. That alone was worth getting the vaccine for me. Thankful to God for modern medicine and the headway we are making against the scourge of COVID-19.

Pastor Mat Alexander
First Baptist Church
Gadsden, Ala.

Telling the truth must not be couched in cruel deliveries. We must be careful not to seek ways to tell the truth when it is inappropriate to say it. The principle of honesty must be carried out in ways that are not brutal.

Morris Murray Jr.
Jasper, Ala.

From the *Twitterverse*

@BarnabasPiper

Prayer is the best response to hatred. —Charles Spurgeon

@PaulWorcester

“It is possible to move men, through God, by prayer alone.” —Hudson Taylor

@geigermuller

You can't have part-time faith and expect a full-time victory —@drtonyevans

@dandarling

80 years after the Holocaust, it's sad to see anti-Semitism still so prevalent, so acceptable, so mainstreamed. It's like we don't read history.

@jeremypierre

Suffering makes us want to give up, be passive. But when we entrust ourselves to God's faithfulness, we find strength to keep doing good.

“Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.” 1 Peter 4:19

@MattSmethurst

Wondering if there's enough forgiveness for your sin is like a child wondering if there's enough water in the ocean to fill his sippy cup. —@EricGeiger

@shane_pruitt78

Our opinions don't change the Bible. The Bible should change our opinions.

@Rgallaty

Every ministry leader needs to ask themselves: Do I want a great following or a close friendship with God?

@pastorjgkell

“There are no closed countries.

Only places where it is more difficult to preach your second sermon.” —@MarkDever. Lord, give us the courage to risk everything to reach those who do not yet know You.

@jt_english

One of the most stunning and beautiful phrases in Scripture: “Then the people of Nineveh believed God ...”

@davidjeremiah

The God who made heaven and earth knows you by name.

@ricklance

“A disciple is a person who has decided that the most important thing in their life is to learn how to do what Jesus said to do.” —Dallas Willard

@claysmith79

Jesus offers an inner joy that can be found nowhere else.

‘Thou shalt not kill’

Throughout history, killing has been a constant.

The killing of the earliest followers of Jesus and of religious reformers in the 16th century. The killing that accompanied the American Revolution and the Civil War.

Lynchings and other acts of white supremacist terror.

The genocide of 6 million Jews and 5 million others by the Nazis — and the overall loss of more than 60 million lives in World War II.

The genocide or massacre of millions in Armenia, Russia, China, Cambodia, North Korea, Rwanda, Syria and northern Nigeria.

The drug cartels' murderousness in Mexico and Central America. The escalating plague of murders in our cities.

Ponder it all for a few minutes; think of the horror felt by the person facing imminent death and the gut-wrenching sorrow of family and friends.

Governmental measures have been taken to abate our killing affliction, along with efforts by national and international agencies, institutions and organizations. ... What about our churches adding their voice?

From the pulpit, during worship, in prayer gatherings, at home Bible study groups, we can declare God's elevation of the human soul.

This redemption of our humanity happens when, in our openness to Jesus Christ, He is imparted to our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Beyond mere words, we can become Christ's presence in places of human need, suffering and tumult to reduce the loss of life.

Our churches, in fact, could lead the way, reminding our collective soul, “Thou shalt not kill,” and declaring anew the age-old adage, Jesus saves.

Art Toalston
Nashville, Tenn.

(Originally ran as an opinion piece at baptistpress.com.)

DENOMINATIONAL DISCUSSIONS

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

ACTION 5 — INCREASE CP GIVING

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

Bottom line for how to achieve Action Step 5, according to Floyd: Engage more effectively with churches and better communicate a concise and compelling Great Commission vision that will encourage them to support the Cooperative Program.

By Margaret Colson
TAB Media

As the Cooperative Program celebrates the 100th anniversary of its launch in 2025, Vision 2025 calls for reaching \$500 million in annual receipts again, like what was

happening with giving 15 years ago. “The Cooperative Program is the catalyst for our Great Commission vision,” said Ronnie Floyd, president of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee. “Without our work together through the Cooperative Program, none of this happens.”

The CP is Southern Baptists’ unified plan of giving through which cooperating Southern Baptist churches give a percentage of their undesignated receipts in support of their respective state convention and SBC missions and ministries, according to sbc.net.

CP receipts down

The CP surpassed the \$500 million goal for five consecutive years, 2005–2008, hitting \$541.9 million in 2008. But the Great Recession prefaced a decrease in CP offering receipts in 2009 to \$495.2 million — a decrease that continued

through 2020, which saw receipts of \$467 million, a decline of almost \$75 million from the high in 2008 (see “Total Cooperative Program Giving” chart, this page).

In comparing financial gifts in 2008 to those in 2020, the average inflation rate of 1.55% per year must be considered. In 2008, \$1 million would have the purchasing power of \$1,221,599 in 2020 by most estimates, thus making the decrease in receipts more costly in terms of funding for Southern Baptist missions and ministries.

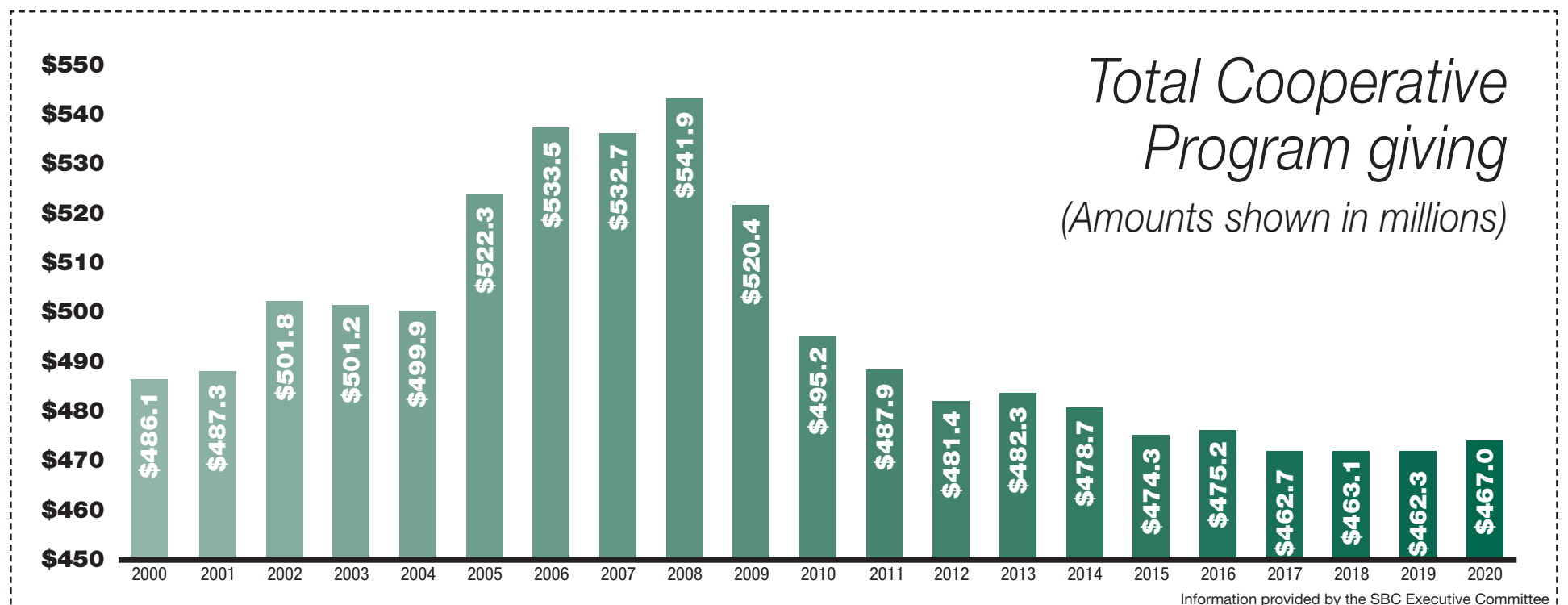
Even after the U.S. economy rebounded somewhat after the recession, CP gifts over a 10-year period, 2010–2019, continued to

drop, going from \$495.2 million in 2010 to \$462.3 million in 2019, a decrease of \$32.9 million.

During the same time period, giving to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions increased from \$145.7 million in 2010 to \$159.5 million in 2019, an increase of \$13.8 million. The Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions increased from \$54.3 million in 2010 to \$61.6 million in 2019, an increase of \$7.3 million.

Even with the combined \$21.1 million in Southern Baptist gifts to the annual missions offerings, the net decrease in CP giving over the 10-year period of \$32.9 million was

STRATEGIC ACTION STEP 5:
Increase our annual giving in successive years to reach and surpass \$500 million given through the Cooperative Program to achieve these Great Commission goals.



not recovered in missions offering receipts.

One notable trend since the Great Recession of 2008–2009 is that the number of churches not giving through the CP has increased.

Giving trends

In 2019, more than 40% of Southern Baptists' 48,709 churches did not give, compared to 2008 when those not giving were approximately 27.5% of Southern Baptists' 45,690 churches.

While the impression for churches considered in “friendly cooperation” with the SBC may indicate that the church gives at least a modest amount through the CP, that is actually not the case.

Giving through the CP is one way to cooperate but not the only way.

For example, if a church chooses not to give through the CP but instead sends a financial contribution of any amount to any Southern Baptist entity, such as one of the missions boards or seminaries, then that church is considered to be in friendly cooperation with the SBC.

According to “SBC FAQs: A Ready Reference” by Keith Harper and Amy Whitfield, a church must meet three standards of cooperation in order to seat messengers at the SBC annual meeting each June:

1. Have a faith and practice that closely identifies with the convention's adopted statement of faith.
2. Have formally approved its intention to cooperate with the SBC.

3. Have made undesignated financial contribution(s) through the CP, and/or through the convention's Executive Committee for convention causes, and/or to any convention entity during the fiscal year preceding.

Those churches that do not give through the CP but do give in some

other way can report their financial gifts on the Annual Church Profile in a category labeled Great Commission Giving.

Messengers to the 2011 SBC annual meeting in Phoenix, Arizona, adopted a recommendation to add the category of Great Commission Giving to the ACP to include “contributions to any Baptist association, Baptist state convention and causes and entities of the Southern

Status of churches and average percentage of giving

YEAR	CHURCHES	CHURCHES GIVING THROUGH CP*	CHURCHES NOT GIVING THROUGH CP	PUBLISHED CHURCH PERCENTAGE	EXCLUDING CHURCHES WHO DID NOT GIVE THROUGH CP
2007	45,514	34,322	11,192	6.20%	6.99%
2008	45,690	33,133	12,557	6.08%	6.79%
2009	45,561	30,715	14,846	5.81%	6.85%
2010	46,640	32,743	13,897	5.56%	6.52%
2011	46,410	30,276	16,134	5.41%	6.42%
2012	46,713	30,220	16,493	5.41%	6.31%
2013	46,877	30,185	16,692	5.50%	6.14%
2014	48,147	29,472	18,675	5.47%	5.93%
2015	47,746	29,526	18,220	5.18%	5.71%
2016	48,265	30,114	18,151	5.16%	6.09%
2017	48,585	29,654	18,931	4.86%	5.61%
2018	48,494	29,498	18,996	4.82%	5.35%
2019	48,709	29,064	19,645	4.82%	5.29%

*Includes churches plus additional congregations who contributed CP dollars

Information provided by the SBC Executive Committee

Baptist Convention,” Harper and Whitfield wrote.

A second notable trend since the Great Recession is that the percentage of CP giving has decreased from an average of 6.08% of the church budget in 2008 to 4.82% in 2019. Counting only the churches

giving through the CP, the percentage decreased from 6.79% in 2008 to 5.29% in 2019, a full 1.5% decrease in giving from the churches (see “Status of Churches and Average Percentage of Giving” chart, this page).

In his February message, Floyd reported the 1.5%

decline in church giving since 2008 equates to more than \$130 million that could have been received from churches in 2019 if their percentage of giving had remained at pre-recession levels and that CP giving would have been just under \$600 million in 2019.

Also, messengers to the 2011 SBC annual meeting, in conjunction with approving the Great Commission giving category, approved a

recommendation that the “Convention respectfully request all Southern Baptist churches strive to meet a goal of increasing their Cooperative Program gifts by 2.5% of undesignated gifts by the end of the 2013 calendar year.”

In actuality, the percentage of church gifts to the CP increased from 5.41% in 2012 to 5.50% in 2013 but then dropped to 5.47% in 2014. The percentage has decreased every year since then.

To reach or surpass the \$500 million goal will require a 2.65% sustained annual growth in CP receipts, said Floyd.

Not keeping up

In reporting CP giving statistics as a part of Vision 2025, Floyd acknowledged CP giving has not recovered to its pre-recession levels as fast as other areas of philanthropy in the secular arena, noting that Southern Baptists typically lag behind the growth of the gross domestic product, philanthropic giving, individual giving and religious giving.

Floyd explained the lag reflects that Southern Baptists are not engaging and communicating with churches effectively, are not “sharing and living a consistent message of who we are with the churches

because we keep walking on our own message,” and “are not providing the churches with a concise and compelling Great Commission vision that will move them to support it (the CP).”

But “help is on the way,” he promised.

The Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability reported that donations to some small and mid-sized charitable organizations were up 7.6% in the first nine months of 2020 over 2019, and the number of donors was up by 11.7%.

For Christians, emotions motivate charity, Barna research reported in 2018. People gave, the research noted, because they believed they could make a difference (62%) or they saw or heard a moving story (45%).

Greater cause

Acknowledging the downward trends in CP giving, Floyd challenges Southern Baptists, “For the greater cause, we need to learn from this data. ... The growth of the Cooperative Program is the certain way we can participate in funding these strategic actions of Vision 2025. ... Southern Baptists cooperate together for the greater cause — the propagation of the gospel to every person in the world.”

People gave because they believed they could make a difference (62%) or they saw or heard a moving story (45%).

Barna research, 2018

Sunday workers provide churches opportunities

Do you sometimes miss out on Sunday morning worship services because you have to work? You're not alone, and the church is taking notice.

About 1 in 4 Protestant churchgoers who have a job are required to work Sunday mornings at least once a month, according to a recent Lifeway Research survey.

The study found most churchgoers have a job that allows them to gather with their church on Sunday mornings. Two in 5 (41%) say their job never requires them to work on Sunday; 36% say they do not have a job.

Of the 23% who are required to work on Sunday morning, 5% have to work that time each week; 6%, twice a month or more; 4%, once a month; 5%, a few times a year; and 2%, once a year or less.

Among churchgoers who have a job, 64% never have to work on Sunday mornings; yet more than a third (36%) are required to at least occasionally clock in during those hours. For 8%, their job requires them to work every Sunday.

Working people

While larger churches may be more likely to offer nontraditional times for worship services, those who attend smaller churches are more likely to work occasionally on Sunday mornings.

Among those surveyed who attend a church of less than 50 people, 28% said they work at least one Sunday

a month; 33% of those who attend a church of 50 to 99 people work at least one Sunday a month, as do 25% of those who attend a church of 100 to 249 people. Among those who attend a church of 500 people or more, only 12% said they work at least once a month on Sunday morning.

Offering outreach

Such statistics regarding churchgoers working on Sunday mornings offer outreach opportunities.

"When a local body of believers cannot all meet together, it is missing out on its purpose," said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research. "While a traditional Sunday morning meeting time works for most, it isn't possible for all to attend."

Joby Martin, lead pastor of The Church of Eleven22, Jacksonville, Florida, told Lifeway Research that churches have a unique opportunity to reach this demographic by offering a service on a different day of the week.

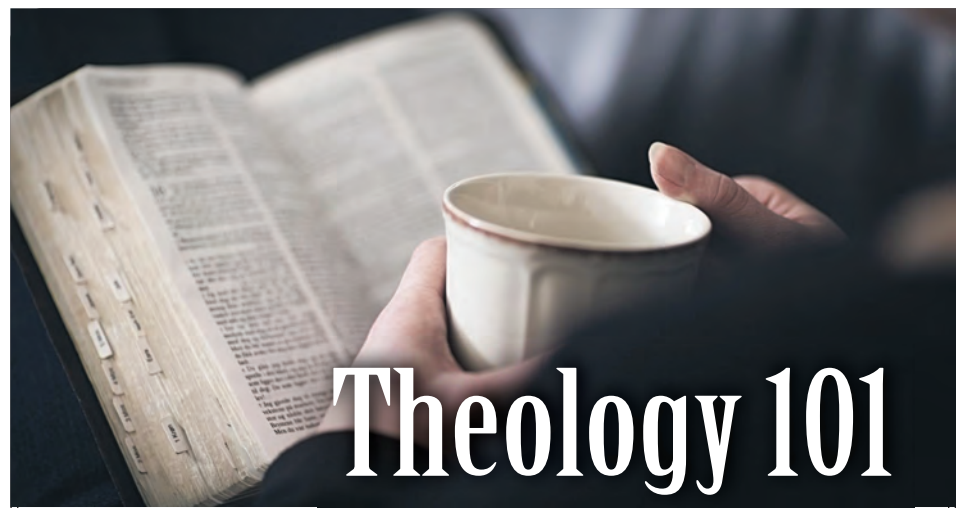
"Because of other things happening at the church at the time, Thursday night was the only option available," Martin said. "It was an accident, but God breathed on it like crazy." Members embraced the idea, he said.

The recent Lifeway poll was based on a survey of 1,002 American Protestant churchgoers. (TAB Media)



istock photo by D-Keine

More than a third (36%) of churchgoers are required to at least occasionally work on Sunday mornings, according to a Lifeway Research survey. Churches are beginning to offer services on other days to reach these workers.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Divine Relationship

God's Heirs

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
TAB Media

While God receives us as His sons and daughters, He also makes us His servants. However, we are more than God's servants — we also are His friends. This week, we add that we also are His heirs; therefore, we are joint heirs with Christ, His incarnate and now glorified Son.

Hebrews 1:2 tells us that Christ, as God's Son, has been "appointed heir of all things." When believers are joined to Christ in saving faith, we also are joined with Him in His eternal inheritance.

After asserting that Christians are children of God as attested by the witness of God's Spirit with our spirits, Romans 8:16–17 continues the thought with, "And if children then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ." As Christ's joint heirs, we stand to share in His heavenly and eternal inheritance.

An inheritance

This same truth is further attested by Ephesians 1:11: "In Him [Christ] also we have obtained an inheritance." The overflow of this fact should be gratitude to God "who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12).

This gratitude is deeply rooted in divine grace, not human deserving.

This important reminder was part of the Apostle Paul's encouragement to the leaders

of the Ephesian church recorded in Acts 20:32: "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

We are God's heirs based on His saving grace, not our merit.

Heavenly home

What is included in this inheritance? For one thing, Christians receive a heavenly home. This aspect of being heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ is mirrored or foreshadowed by the earthly counterpart in which heirs often receive the family residence as their own.

At best, this is an inadequate comparison — the earthly heir receives a residence that has been used and possibly shows age. The heavenly home that awaits God's family will be newly furnished by His Son, who has gone to prepare a place for us.

Also included in the heavenly inheritance is riches untold. To the extent it may exist, the family wealth usually passes to the legal heirs. What accountant could ever calculate the heavenly riches awaiting God's heirs?

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.



'Take up *the mantle*'

UM professor helps with, introduces students to new Bible translation

By Grace Thornton

TAB Media

Professor Doug Wilson has had many students complete his classes at the University of Mobile and become pastors, worship leaders, chaplains, missionaries and professionals who use their work to further the gospel.

He's grateful and humbled when he thinks of every single one.

But Wilson's got a specific prayer he has prayed in recent years — that God would call students in his classes to go and translate the Bible for people groups who don't have the word of God in their language.

He knows at least one student who has gone on to do that, and he's praying for more.

But he's not stopping there — he's putting Bible translation in front of his students all the time.

"I've been introducing students to biblical Hebrew and teaching Old Testament at UM since 2003, and I recently developed courses about Bible translation history and theory," said Wilson, who serves as dean of UM's Center for Christian Calling.

Wilson recently was invited to serve on the Old Testament translation committee for the New Tyndale Version, so he'll be showing them what the process looks like in real time as he works on a project himself.

Wilson will translate three books and serve as a sectional editor for a portion of the Old Testament.

500th anniversary

The idea behind the NTV is to honor the process that William Tyndale used to print the first full Bible in English in 1526.



Photo courtesy of Doug Wilson

Using original languages and new technology, Doug Wilson, dean of the University of Mobile's Center for Christian Calling, is working on translating three Old Testament books for the New Tyndale Version of the Bible.

Tyndale translated his version into English from the original Greek and Hebrew, which is what the NTV team will do too. But they will also have access to manuscripts that Tyndale did not.

"We honor Tyndale's legacy while utilizing documents which were unknown 500 years ago," he said.

"These discoveries include texts from Codex Sinaiticus (1844), Codex Leningradensis (1863), the Cairo Geniza (1896) and the Dead Sea Scrolls (1947), among others."

The publication of the multi-year project will coincide with the 500th anniversary of the Tyndale Bible.

"William Tyndale joined men like Jan Hus and Martin Luther who risked their lives to translate the Bible into the language of their people so that it could be read in their mother tongue, their heart language," Wilson said, noting that

several Ancient Near East languages, with longtime NIV Bible translator Larry Walker.

"Dr. Walker taught me translation theory and trained me how to translate Hebrew and related Semitic languages," Wilson said. "My work on this project carries on the legacy of Dr. Walker in his service to the Lord as a Bible translator."

Honoring mentors

A colleague who also studied under Walker asked Wilson to be a part of the NTV translation team.

In addition to honoring Tyndale, Wilson said his work on the team also honors his dad, who taught history for 25 years. And it builds on his own mission of exposing students to Bible translation and helping them catch a vision for that type of ministry.

"My prayer is that our experience and training on this project will be a spark to ignite the passion of other UM students to take up the mantle of Bible translation, particularly into languages in which there is no previous translation," he said.

Wilson asked for prayer for those serving on the NTV translation team. He also asked for prayer "for the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers to unreached and unengaged people groups ... for men and women who will dedicate their lives to translate the Bible into the languages of those people."

Tyndale was martyred 10 years later for his work.

Wilson's role in the NTV will be to translate his assigned portions "word by word, verse by verse and chapter by chapter."

Textual history

"We must be aware of textual history, interpretive issues and translational challenges in the Hebrew and Aramaic sections within our assigned books," said Wilson, who has taught biblical languages, biblical studies and intercultural coursework for the past 25 years.

He studied Old Testament languages and literature, including

"My prayer is that our experience and training on this project will be a spark to ignite the passion of other UM students to take up the mantle of Bible translation."

Doug Wilson, dean of Center for Christian Calling
University of Mobile



WILSON

Backpacks open doors for cooperative missions

By Lanell Downs Smith
TAB Media

In 2019, a team of volunteers from Elmore Baptist Association helped the Bruce Outreach Center in Westernport, Maryland, distribute more than 300 backpacks at a block party where more than 400 people heard the gospel.

The association's long-standing partnership with the community-based outreach center and church plant has helped church planter and pastor Steffan Carr engage with families in one of the poorest counties in the U.S., Carr said.

The partnership also has encouraged spiritual growth among the center's congregation of mostly young Christians. It was at a backpacks outreach event that some Bruce Center members shared the gospel for the first time, "probably more times than most Christians do in a lifetime," Carr said.

Encouragement

The partnership's support has helped Carr personally to remain faithful in the long term, he said.

"There is some kind of a spiritual/emotional B-12 shot that comes when you realize that you have people who are vested in you, even from a distance," Carr said. "You're

not alone. You're not by yourself."

Pastor David Jones of Prospect Baptist Church, Eclectic, agreed. He said the partnership has been a catalyst, shifting the small, rural congregation from an inward to a more outward focus. Working alongside larger association churches enables Prospect members to accomplish areas of ministry they could not do alone, he added.

"You really get buy-in when you go and put hands on," Jones said. "Our folks find great joy coming together and serving those that are in need. There's a level of excitement, and it goes beyond internal programs and facilities."

Jones has witnessed spiritual growth within the church as a result of the missions focused partnership.

"You find a transition of heart and spirit that says: 'Hey, church really isn't about me. It's about me

serving the church and serving others,'" Jones said.

Many partnerships have blossomed in the months following backpack collections. In 2018, David and Amelia Nelson were looking online for a short-term missions project for Cave Spring Baptist Church, Priceville, when they came across the Christmas backpacks website and learned they could partner directly with a ministry site.



Photo courtesy of Amelia Nelson
Kimberly Beamon received a backpack at Gulf Coast Baptist Church, Golden Meadows, Louisiana.

Meanwhile, Gulf Coast Baptist Church, Golden Meadows, Louisiana, had not yet heard about the backpacks ministry, but the small church plant needed a partner to help them connect with the predominantly Catholic residents of the Louisiana bayou.

Through the partnership, the Nelsons helped with a backpack distribution event that year and witnessed firsthand the deep poverty and lostness of the region.

"We live in the Bible belt," said Amelia Nelson. "I thought everyone knew about Jesus and the Bible. My heart broke when I learned of a family there that had never been to church or heard the gospel."

Cave Spring members returned the next year to help with construction projects, including upgrading the church's kitchen.

Focused on mission

Gulf Coast pastor Shane Terrebonne said the partnership helped the young church remain focused on the mission of serving their community while building meaningful personal relationships and fellowship.

"Sometimes we're kind of isolated," Terrebonne said.

Pickens Baptist Association churches have been partnering for three years to accomplish their annual

backpacks emphasis.

Janet Estis, the association's WMU director, said the backpacks ministry builds a cooperative spirit on many levels.

"We have gotten to know others in our association better as we have worked alongside them, planning and being part of an evangelistic block party/Christmas backpacks distribution event," Estis said.

Partnerships have opened doors for missions at home, Estis added. After one trip, Pickens churches supplied backpacks and school supplies to students at Aliceville Elementary School.

"There are always areas where we can serve, both in our own communities or beyond. We just have to open our hearts and hands and be willing to go where God leads us," she said.

To learn more about partnership opportunities through Alabama WMU, contact Pat Ingram with Alabama WMU at 334-613-2292 or visit alabamawmu.org/christmasbackpacks.



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Photo courtesy of Janet Estis

Pickens Baptist Association volunteers play a football toss game at a 2019 backpack distribution and outreach event in Cleveland, Mississippi.

‘Personal and meaningful’

Gift-filled backpacks create year-round opportunities for gospel outreach

(continued from page 1)

One little girl shares in a video testimony how she likes “everything about my backpack because not too long ago, my mom told me we weren’t gonna be able to have anything for Christmas.”

A 16-year-old girl said her backpack was the first Christmas gift she had ever received.

But the backpacks represent more than gifts, the ministry leaders contend.

Distribution events organized to hand out the backpacks are sometimes the only opportunity some

families have to hear the gospel.

The seeds are planted and that may be all that happens in that moment, but sometimes the volunteers know about a new life in Christ. The gospel may reach a person or family through the presentation, but sometimes it takes root from an item found in the backpack.

“There was a child that got a backpack, ... a toddler,” Janell Ingle recalled.

“And there was a little brochure in there, a little Christmas story about Jesus.

“Of course, the child couldn’t read, but mom could. So mom read it. And mom ended up getting saved.”

Participating in the distribution of the backpacks, along with the gathering and

packing of them — takes the ministry partnership to a level most don’t want to miss, Ingle added.

Backpack partnerships allow groups to know where their packs will go and to learn about and pray for the needs of that specific area.

Seeing their faces

Missions teams get to see the joy and appreciation on the faces of children who receive the backpacks, she said, noting many get to share the love of Christ and gospel message with families who come to the outreach events.

Janet Estis, Pickens

Baptist Association WMU director who organizes a backpack ministry in her area, said, “Partnering helps make the backpacks more personal and meaningful, especially for those able to go and help distribute.”

WMU’s Ingram said more than half the backpacks Alabama donated in 2019 were handed out through direct partnerships, but many more partnerships are needed.

Though the backpacks are gifted at Christmas, gathering backpacks and items to fill them can be a year-round effort, she noted.

The process is simple. Churches, associational ministries or missions-minded groups of any type fill new backpacks with age-appropriate toys, clothing, hygiene items,

nonperishable food, school supplies and Bibles before tagging them with the age/gender bands.

Someone from the group — or several members — deliver the backpacks to one of 13 regional sites during the general collection week, which is usually the last week of October.

The backpacks are then transported to distribution hubs where they are picked up by the ministries that will hold the outreach events to hand out the backpacks.

A similar effort focuses on the poverty-stricken

areas of the Appalachian Mountains region in the eastern United States.

Partnerships are available for groups of all sizes in both regions, Ingram explained.

And while churches, associations and other groups collect the gift-filled backpacks, funds provided through the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering help purchase and mail the age/gender identification bands and a copy of “The Christmas Story” for each backpack. (Lanell Downs Smith)

For more information contact Pat Ingram at pingram@alsbom.org or 334-613-2292 or visit alabamawmu.org/christmas/backpacks.



Photo courtesy of Janet Estis
Janet Estis (right) and Dan Sandlin, pastor of Webb Baptist Church in Mississippi, unload 56 backpacks packed by churches in Pickens Baptist Association.

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3 stories

you should know



AP file photo by Rogelio V. Solis

In this 2019 photo, a woman protests outside the Jackson Women's Health Organization, an abortion clinic in Jackson, Mississippi. The U.S. Supreme Court on May 17 said it will review a state law that bans abortion in almost all cases after 15 weeks of pregnancy. Observers say the announcement could signal the court's 6-3 conservative majority is ready to roll back, if not overturn, *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 decision that legalized abortion in the U.S. (TAB Media)

Dilbeck chosen next leader of GuideStone

Hance Dilbeck Jr., executive director-treasurer of Oklahoma Baptists since 2018, was unanimously elected as GuideStone Financial Resources' president-elect during a called meeting of the board of trustees May 20.

Dilbeck will serve alongside current GuideStone President O.S.



DILBECK

Dilbeck served as a pastor for more than 30 years prior to his state convention role. (TAB Media)

Hawkins beginning this summer and culminating in the first quarter of 2022 with Hawkins becoming president emeritus and Dilbeck becoming president and CEO.

ERLC's Moore to join Christianity Today

Russell Moore, president of the RSBC Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission for the past eight years, is joining the staff of Christianity Today and begins his new role this summer.



MOORE

He will serve as public theologian and director of a new venture, the Christianity Today Public Theology Project, "which is devoted to cultivating a forward-looking, joyful, consistent gospel witness," Moore shared May 18.

Daniel Patterson, ERLC's executive vice president, will serve as acting president until a new president is named. (TAB Media)

Headline news

from around the Southeast

Florida

Lake Mystic Baptist Church, Bristol, Florida, recently held a dual revival and outreach weekend, "Love Liberty County." Service projects included a car wash, a "free" yard sale, delivery of gift baskets to widows and homebound people, landscaping at a local school and more. The weekend revival included four services, with three people making professions of faith. The event sparked a love for sharing the gospel and ministry among Lake Mystic members, the Florida Baptist Witness reported.

Georgia

With 47 nationalities in one church, First Baptist Church, Duluth, Georgia, mirrors the diverse community it serves, the Christian Index reported. To reach immigrants in the community, the church offers English as a Second Language classes, where many people hear the gospel for

the first time. A Christian Academy prepares participants to take the test to become U.S. citizens, and the church also holds celebrations each July 4 to honor new citizens.

Kentucky

As the pandemic is easing, leaders at Flatwoods First Baptist Church in Kentucky wanted to do something different to reach people with the gospel, so they went old school with a four-day tent revival. "People are just now starting to get back out after COVID. They seem to feel comfortable inside the tent," Pastor Jim Nichols said. With steady crowds, the revival resulted in at least two professions of faith and several other decisions, Kentucky Today reported.

North Carolina

Each Tuesday afternoon from April to November, the West Asheville Tailgate Market sets up

in the parking lot of Grace Baptist Church, Asheville, North Carolina. Hundreds pass through the market to buy produce, plants, local art and more. Grace Baptist hosts its own booth, the Biblical Recorder reported. "We want to ... start gospel conversations with neighbors in our community who are here to shop, but we're here to be a presence of Christ," Pastor Branton Burleson said.

Tennessee

Volunteers from Tennessee's Western District Baptist Association wouldn't miss "The World's Largest Fish Fry," held annually in Paris, Tennessee. They show up in full force, not for the catfish or rodeo or parade, but for the carnival workers, an often overlooked and even despised people group. Volunteers serve the workers breakfast and lunch during the week-long event, and they look for opportunities to share the gospel, the Baptist and Reflector reported.

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

► **Kenneth Windsor**, an Alabama Baptist pastor and minister for more than 50 years, died May 10. He was 82.

An Etowah County native, Windsor served as pastor of several churches in the Sand Mountain and Gadsden areas, including New Harmony Baptist Church, Albertville.

He was preceded in death by his daughter, Anna. He is survived by his wife, Glenda; daughters, Renee and Joy; seven grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

► **Don Graham**, an evangelist whose ministry spanned 62 years, died May 17. He was 80.

Graham earned a bachelor's degree from Howard College (now Samford University) in Birmingham and a master of divinity from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

He served 35 years as a pastor, including leading four Alabama churches — Samaria Baptist Church, Clanton (his first pastorate); Katherwood Baptist Church, Birmingham; Bellevue Baptist Church, Gadsden; and First Baptist Church, Center Point.



GRAHAM

In July 1996, he established Don Graham Revival Ministries and began full-time itinerant revival ministry. At one point, in a 10-month span, he traveled 35,000 miles and ministered in 178 churches.

Graham once said he made “a commitment to preach until the Lord comes for me,” and that’s what he did, preaching his last sermon at Crossville Baptist Church on April 11.

Graham is survived by his wife, Jean; son, John Mark; daughters, Christy and Angela; four grandchildren; and several great-grandchildren.

BETHEL ASSOCIATION

► **Carl Williams** said he and his wife, Ashleigh, loved where they were serving when **First Baptist Church, Demopolis**, called him and asked if he would consider being a candidate for the pastorate.

As they prayed about it, they sensed God might be leading them to Demopolis.

That was 10 years ago, and “it has flown by,” Williams said. His oldest daughter was 8 when they arrived, and now she’s heading into her senior year of high school.

It’s been an answer to prayer, he said.

“I prayed God would give me a long tenured ministry, and He has — He’s done that,” Williams said. “He’s enabled me to have stabili-



WINDSOR

ty, and this has become home for my daughters.”

Having a long tenure at a church comes with “a lot of blessings,” Williams added. “In the church you get to see people come and go and grow and develop.”

It’s been a church that has continued a legacy of missions and that “really gets that cooperative spirit, that we can do more by partnering with others,” he said. “Our people have such a passion for ministering to needs.”

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► **Buddy Gray** knew when he was 16 that God was calling him to the ministry. He started preaching at rural churches and working on his theological education, and along the way he served as youth pastor at **Hunter Street Baptist Church, Birmingham**, in the late 1970s.

He had no idea that in 1986, the church would call him back as pastor — and he would stay there long enough to see generations grow up in the faith.



GRAY

On June 1, Gray marks 35 years as pastor of Hunter Street, a congregation he calls “gracious and kind.”

During his career, Gray also has served in a variety of roles at the state and national level, including two one-year terms as Alabama Baptist State Convention president starting in 1998 and more recently as a member of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission’s 2018 Leadership Council.

► **First Baptist Church, Trussville**, will hold the Second Annual Leland Dockery Tribute Cruise-In on June 5, 9 a.m. to 2:30

p.m., at the church. The event will feature more than 150 vehicles along with music and food trucks. For more information or to preregister, visit fbctrussville.org/event-registration or call 205-655-2403. Onsite registration for show vehicles is also available.

ELMORE ASSOCIATION

► A cross hangs in the foyer of **Mount Hebron East Baptist Church, Eclectic**, that not only reminds them of the reason they exist but also where God’s brought them.

It’s made of hand-hewn heart pine salvaged from the church building that was destroyed during the April 2011 tornado outbreak.

And on April 25 — almost 10 years to the day of the storm — the congregation gathered to celebrate its 125th anniversary and the faithfulness of God.

“It was a celebration of how blessed we were to rebuild without debt,” church member Bobby Thornton said. “People from around the state and country gave so the building could be built debt free.”

Ralph Foster, a commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented the church with a certificate during the anniversary celebration, and Bob Williamson, pastor during the tornado and the rebuilding of the church, led in a special prayer during the service. Holy Trinity, a trio from Clanton, provided special music. Jeff Finklea is pastor.



Photo courtesy of Ralph Foster

Persecuted church

Extremist Hindu mob attacks house church; pastor, wife charged

RANGWASA, India — A pastor and his wife, who were put into protective custody April 4 after a Hindu mob attacked a worship service in Rangwasa village, were subsequently charged with forcible conversion.

The mob of 300 Hindu extremists attacked a worship service of five families in a Rangwasa home. Pastor Manu Damor and his wife, Asha, were put into protective custody and their three young children were placed with a Christian family following the attack.

But instead of being released from protective custody the next day as promised, the Damors were charged under the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Ordinance,

2020, which prohibits “unlawful conversion from one religion to other religions,” and under Indian Penal Code Section 294 for “obscene act/song in public place.”

Asha Damor was released on bail April 12.



Morning Star News photo

A judge refused bail for Manu Damor.

Rangwasa residents have harassed three Christian families in the village and threatened to

burn the Damors and other believers alive.

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

Birmingham Metro staff wants 'gospel-centered culture' focus

Birmingham Metro Baptist Association celebrated its new building with an open house May 16.

The 16,000-square-foot building was a gift from Baptist Health System, BHS announced in December. It also came with an additional gift — \$350,000 to put toward renovations.

Chris Crain, BMBA executive director, said the “gracious gift” provides churches “with a sound investment in a redeveloping part of the city.”

Until BMBA moved into the new building in mid-March, it was leasing a smaller building from BHS at the rate of \$1 per year.

Longtime partners

That arrangement was the fruit of a long partnership — BMBA created BHS in 1922, and the association approves all of the members of the BHS board of trustees and has three members on the board.

BMBA’s former and current buildings are located on Montclair Road directly across Medical Park Drive NE from each other. The new building nearly doubles BMBA’s capacity.

“Within the walls (of the new building) we are creating a gospel-centered culture of partnership with several biblically faithful ministries,” Crain said. “These ministries can work together and make an impact for Jesus Christ in the Birmingham area as never before.”

Metro Changers, Discovery Clubs of Alabama, WorkFaith Birmingham, Birmingham Woman’s Missionary Union and Pathways Professional Counseling are all serving alongside BMBA in the new facility, and “more partners will come,” Crain said. “Together we can serve to advance the gospel and make



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash
Chris Crain, executive director of Birmingham Metro Baptist Association, greets guests attending the May 16 open house at BMBA’s new building, a gift from Baptist Health System.

disciples. We are grateful for Baptist Health System and CEO Amy Allen for their foresight for ministry and desire to bless the 180 churches of the BMBA.”

Michael Ethridge, BMBA director of operations, said the move has been “a very pleasant, smooth process.”

Ethridge was in charge of overseeing the contractors while Toni Wall, BMBA’s marketing specialist, helped

with building design, and Josh Cook, church revitalization specialist, coordinated the move. Marisa Taylor, church resource specialist, kept things running, Ethridge said.

The renovations include new ceilings, roof, HVAC system, flooring and paint.

“We’re just extremely pleased,” Ethridge said. “Everything has gone really well.” (Grace Thornton)



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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 seeking a full-time pastor. In prayer for supply pastors also. Please send resumé to: horseshoebendbaptistchurch@gmail.com.

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 PASTOR

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

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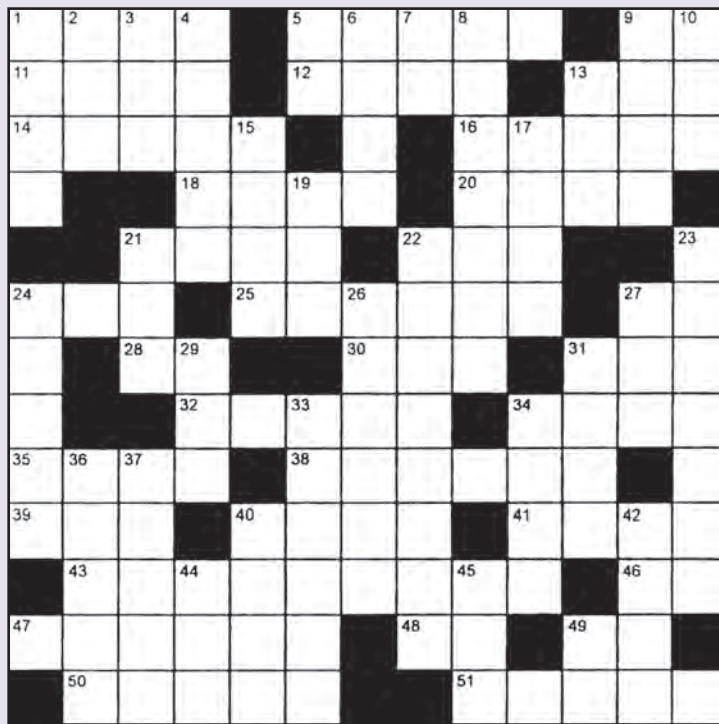
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CHRISTIAN crossword

ACROSS

1. Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' _____. (Matt. 23:2)
5. Opposite of "thin."
9. ____ that cometh from above is above all. (John 3:31)
11. Window glass.
12. God had sworn with an ____ to him. (Acts 2:30)
13. Uncooked.
14. After the ____ of Melchizedek. (Ps. 110:4)
16. Seek things which are _____. (Col. 3:1)
18. Rip or pull apart.
20. The Lord is on my _____. (Ps. 118:6)
21. ____ shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matt. 16:26)
22. Did eat.
24. Tree of the olive family.
25. ____ than hell. (Job 11:8)
27. Spanish for "yes."
28. Word ____ God abideth in you. (1 John 2:14)
30. A male child.
31. To gain a victory.
32. Abstain from fleshly _____. (1 Pet. 2:11)
34. Sung in praise of God.
35. To kill.
38. How large a ____ I have written. (Gal. 6:11)
39. As a ____ doth gather her brood under her wings. (Luke 13:34)
40. Part of foot.
41. Let it be so.
43. A contract.
46. Agriculture. (abbr.)
47. When he returned, he found them _____. (Mark 14:40)
48. God ____ loved the



By Joann Horn Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

49. My yoke ____ easy, and my burden is light. (Matt. 11:30)
 50. Type of bear.
 51. Dwellings.
- DOWN**
1. Be found ... without ____, and blameless. (2 Pet. 3:14)
 2. Used for hearing.
 3. To sit on my right hand ____ on my left. (Mark 10:40)
 4. Plural of "tooth."
 5. I go ____ prepare a place for you. (John 14:2)
 6. Covering for head.
 7. Baptism of John, was ____ from heaven? (Mark 11:30)
 8. Discipline by punishment.
 9. Thou shalt ____ treasure in heaven. (Mark 10:21)
 10. Female sheep.
 13. A staff or scepter.
 15. Philip ... heard him ____ the prophet Isaiah. (Acts 8:30)
 17. A coffin.
 19. Took the little book and ____ it up.
 21. And Jesus said, ____ touched me? (Luke 8:45)
 22. Sent to preach the gospel.
 23. ____ with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Col. 3:16)
 24. Tossed about by waves.
 26. Let each ____ other better than themselves. (Phil. 2:3)
 27. Transgression.
 29. They ____ away as an eagle toward heaven. (Prov. 23:5)
 31. For their ____ shall not die. (Isa. 66:24)
 33. Drowsy.
 34. Chair, bench or stool.
 36. He that is ____ in ... heaven is greater. (Matt. 11:11)
 37. To fish with a hook.
 40. Take ye ____, watch and pray. (Mark 13:33)
 42. Sun rises here.
 44. Primary color.
 45. No way.
 49. Opposite of "out."

WORD search

- | | |
|--------------|-----------|
| ACCORDING | MEDITATE |
| BLAMELESS | MOUTH |
| BLESSED | OBEYED |
| COMFORT | OPEN |
| COMMANDS | PRAISE |
| CONSIDER | PRECEPTS |
| CONSUMED | PURITY |
| DECREES | RECOUNT |
| DELIGHT | REJOICES |
| FAITHFULNESS | REMEMBER |
| FOLLOW | RICHES |
| FREEDOM | SEEK |
| FULLY | SHAME |
| HEART | STATUTES |
| HIDDEN | STEADFAST |
| HOPE | TEACH |
| KEEP | TRUTH |
| LAWS | UPRIGHT |
| LIPS | WALK |
| LONGING | WAYS |

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 N N S E N N E P O P U R I T Y W
 R U E E I I N E P T E E N C A S
 E O N T E D K W V E G C O Y W G
 B C L T G R T G M P E N S A W K
 M E U G E O C J N S S K L O T S
 E R F R M C X E S I X C L Y T P
 M L H V A C M E D H G L X P T U
 E X T G H A L E C K O N E H H P
 R Y I X S E R A D F J C O C G R
 X X A P M R E I K I E K N L I I
 R N F A R T B P C R T W Y H L G
 E B L Y R K K C P H D A A F E H
 J B D E M U S N O C E R T L D T
 O E X Y B E Q H F M J S T E K M
 I S N F E K H C T U F M R B H O
 C I D K P I T O W U L O L B E U
 E A K R D R B M R P R L R M A T
 S R D D K E Q M R X K T Y T R H
 T P E B Y Q M A D P E P O H T Z
 R N F E M K N N S E T U T A T S
 L M D S T E A D F A S T L I P S
 Q N K R B L E S S E D M K T Z T



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COOPERATIVE PROGRAM



Inmate ministers step up during COVID restrictions

Despite the elimination of most prison visitations for many months during the COVID-19 pandemic, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary has found ways to stay connected with prisoner students at the Louisiana Penitentiary in Angola.

Rick Sharkey, senior chaplain at the maximum security prison in Angola and director of the New Orleans Seminary's extension center on the prison grounds, said classes were canceled in March 2020 and started again in November, with the 2021 semester beginning in January.

Weekly visits

Since the reopening, a masked professor has visited weekly, standing in an auditorium and teaching students — also wearing masks — in classes on

subjects including church history, English composition and introduction to ministry.

The program, which dates to 1995 and has 368 graduates, currently includes 68 undergraduates and 45 graduate students.

Meeting needs

Sharkey said that even when Angola inmates couldn't be taught due to the pandemic, there were already trained ministers among them.

More than 200 inmates — mostly taught through the seminary's program — are leaders of dozens of churches among the prisoner population of about 5,100.

"The spiritual needs of the men were still being met by the inmate ministers that were all throughout the prison," he said.

"That's exactly what the



Photo courtesy of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
Inmates participate in a graduation ceremony with New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary's Leavell College at Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola, Louisiana, in 2015.

purpose of the school is all about: preparing men for ministry and strengthening the churches that are inside here."

Across the country, there are roughly 300 higher education programs in prisons, both religious and nonreligious, according to Lois Davis, a senior policy researcher at the nonprofit Rand Corp.

Each one has grappled this past year with whether to allow outside instructors

into prison facilities to hold classes as states took action to slow the spread of COVID-19, Davis said.

Some facilities ceased or substantially cut back on programming.

Some educational programs suspended classes until they can be held again in person, while others found ways to adapt, such as videoconferencing.

Lower recidivism

One study by Rand found that incarcerated

people who participated in those kinds of educational programs had 43% lower odds of returning to prison than those who did not.

Such programs have their root in religion: Clergyman William Rogers is credited with starting the U.S. correctional education movement when he taught inmates in a Philadelphia jail in 1789.

And they are something "all of higher education can embrace," Council for Christian Colleges & Universities President Shirley V. Hoogstra said.

She pointed to the positive effect such educational programs have on prisoners, their families and their communities, as well as Jesus' words in Matthew 25: "I was in prison and you came to visit me."

"An education recognizes the God-given dignity of all individuals," Hoogstra said. "It provides a fresh start. And it provides the confidence to face a new future and look candidly at the past." (Adapted from RNS reporting)



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ROMANS 10:13-15



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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For May 30

Explore the Bible

By Benjamin Stubblefield, Ph.D.

Visiting Assistant Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



COMMISSIONS

Luke 24:36–49

We've been memorizing the Ten Commandments with our church's children's ministry, so I've been thinking about them more lately.

We have been observing that the fifth commandment extends an amazing promise and blessing to encourage children to honor their parents. And why? Because the kids have told us: "It's hard to do!"

To get people to do extraordinary things they have to be extraordinarily motivated.

Jesus is about to commission His disciples for the world's most extraordinary endeavor, and so He incentivizes them properly.

They have doubts, but Jesus comes to take them away; they have confusion, but Jesus comes to clarify; they still believe themselves incapable, but Jesus promises them His power.

Assures (36–43)

Anybody would have been frightened. A man they watched die and be buried awhile has just appeared in their midst. They believed Him a ghost, which can be an ill omen (see 1 Sam. 28). They were "troubled" and had some "doubts" about what they were seeing.

What I love about what Jesus does here is that He doesn't write off His disciples. This would have been an easy time for Him to blow a fuse: "Fellas! I just rose from the dead. Y'all are the worst! I told you a hundred times ... ugh ... this whole church thing is never gonna work." But He doesn't do that.

He takes all the time, extends all the patience and provides encouragement to His friends. He assures them that what they're witnessing is true. If you need to touch my flesh and bone, do it, he says. If you need to see me eat some fish, I'll do it. Whatever it takes to help you in your faith.

Jesus provides the same encouragement for us now. How often have we been doubtful, confused or bothered, and the Lord sent a timely word to bring us along? Just a little refreshment when we're

wearily to help our unbelief.

Opens (44–46)

The Lord doesn't stop there. He demonstrates that what He has done is simply bring to fulfillment what the whole of the Old Testament anticipated.

In other words, Jesus grounds their experience with Him in the very sure authority of the Word.

He explains what they have misunderstood in the law, prophets and psalms. The Messiah would come not to rebuild the nation of Israel back to a Davidic glory. He came to redeem the whole of His creation; to suffer on behalf of those who should suffer instead; to conquer death on behalf of a world that should die; and to make room in the Kingdom for all who, like Father Abraham, would have faith in Him.

He taught His disciples that His ministry was not some trick play or change of plans but rather God's design from the beginning.

Sends (47–49)

Most Southern Baptists are familiar with the Great Commission, particularly Matthew 28:18–20. Luke's record of Jesus' commission shows up in Acts 1:8.

But Jesus prepares them for it here by promising them that they'll be empowered to keep His instruction by the Holy Spirit. And it's on this point that we would do well to consider.

Heavenly work requires heavenly power. Certainly, pre-Pentecost church planting would have been a disaster! Brothers and sisters, without Spirit-led ministry, so is ours.

Jesus, in His mercy, persuades, authenticates and empowers His disciples for Kingdom work. I know most of us believe in Jesus, but I wonder: Are we led by and filled with His Spirit?

Perhaps it's time we do a little more waiting and praying than doing and going. Perhaps when we do, we'll see more than "mercy drops 'round us," and find ourselves in the "showers of blessing we need."

Bible Studies for Life

By Rony Kozman, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies, Samford University



TRUST GOD TO WORK

Matthew 13:3–8, 18–23

Throughout Matthew 13, Jesus tells a number of parables. These parables are fictitious stories meant to illuminate the nature of the Kingdom of heaven. We hear the repeated refrain, "the Kingdom of heaven is like ..." (vv. 24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47, 52). These parables illustrate different aspects of the Kingdom of heaven such as the future judgment when Christ returns (vv. 37–43, 47–50); the great growth and diffusion of the Kingdom of heaven (vv. 31–33); and the superior value of the Kingdom of heaven (vv. 44–45). The various analogies clarify the Kingdom of heaven.

Let us look more closely at the first parable in this chapter — the parable of the sower, which explains the varied responses to the gospel of the Kingdom of heaven. Why do some receive the message, and why do others reject the gospel? Let's look more closely at this parable.

Share the message of Christ wherever you are. (3–8)

Who is the farmer who sows the seed? The seed sown is the word or message about the Kingdom of heaven (vv. 19, 20–23). The farmer who sows the seed may refer to Jesus Himself since the disciples indicate that Jesus is the one speaking parables about the Kingdom of heaven (vv. 10–11, 37). But the farmer who sows the seed may also represent anyone who speaks the good news of the Kingdom of heaven — the gospel of Jesus.

The farmer sows the seed widely. Many different types of people hear the message of the Kingdom. The seed lands "along the path," "on rocky places," "among thorns" and "on good soil." This teaches us that as the message of the gospel goes out to different kinds of people, it will receive different responses, depending on the conditions in which the word lands.

Not everyone is transformed by the gospel. (8–22)

The parable prepares us to expect different responses to the gospel.

First is the seed that falls on the path and is eaten by the birds. This represents those who hear the gospel but do not understand it because the message was snatched by the devil. This reminds us that evil powers conspire against the gospel taking root in someone's heart.

Then there is the seed that falls on rocky ground, which sprouts a little but then is scorched and withers (vv. 5–6). This represents those who first receive the word joyfully but then fail to continue following Christ because they receive "trouble or persecution" (vv. 20–21).

Then there is the seed that fell in the thorns, which represents those who hear the word but their fixation on this world and their present life — their anxieties and concern for wealth — choke out the message (vv. 22–23).

There are many reasons why people do not receive the gospel and why they depart from the gospel — and these are not in the farmer's control. We should be ready for these negative responses to the gospel that we sow.

Those who accept the message and follow Christ experience abundance. (23)

Some of the seed the farmer sows will land on good soil. The good soil represents the person who both "hears the word and understands it."

Jesus' disciples understand the gospel because God has revealed to them "the secrets of the Kingdom of heaven" (v. 11). The result is flourishing and bounty (v. 23).

This flourishing and bounty does not mean financial and physical prosperity. Such people flourish even if they are struck by suffering and devastation.

They continue to follow Jesus, serve God and love others because they understand the Kingdom of heaven is much more valuable than the prosperity and security that they can have in the present world.

The Kingdom of heaven flourishes and prospers in and through those who receive the gospel.

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs
TAB Media

New book chronicles addiction struggle, multistate bike ride

Church is a place for the broken to be healed. But in many churches and Christian groups, there are more individuals focused on hiding their brokenness than seeking healing.

“As an addict, life is hard enough. But you throw Christian in on top of it and you double the shame,” said Sherry Hoppen, author of the book “Sober Cycle: Pedaling Through Recovery One Day at a Time,” which chronicles her battle with alcoholism while dealing with the stigma of being an addict within Christian circles.

Hoppen, an author and speaker, said Christians often feel an additional burden of shame because “not only do we have to face our loved ones, our family, our friends, but we’re trying to hide it from God too, and we know we can’t do that.”

Unusual opportunity

For years, Hoppen tried prayer, willpower, self-help and support groups — none of which cured her addiction. She felt very alone, and her shame kept her from admitting her struggle or reaching out for help. Then an unusual opportunity presented itself.

Hoppen heard that the ministry she worked for was biking from Michigan to Maryland to raise



SHERRY HOPPEN

Photo by Ashley Wierenga

money. She thought, “This is the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard of. Who would do that?”

Fast forward a year later. Hoppen was still hiding her drinking problem, but one day the head of the ministry asked if she was OK. The truth came out. In tears, Hoppen confessed her addiction. He suggested that she participate in Ride4Life.

Hoppen had expected the typical responses to this kind of admission — offering prayer, a group to attend or how a friend had dealt with it — not a grueling bike ride.

“I looked at him like, ‘You’re crazy.’ I had no intention of doing that. I didn’t own a bike. I was not in good shape at all. I was drinking a lot. I was overweight. There was nothing that made anyone look at me and go, ‘She’s a biker,’” Hoppen said.

She told him, “No, thank you,” and planned to forget it. Everything changed when her husband came home after being out of town.

She had barely gotten the words out about her boss’ outlandish idea before her husband said she should do it.

The next day she bought a bike. After only 51 days of training, during which she kept drinking, she headed out with the group while hiding a raging hangover.

After the harrowing cross-country trip and crossing the finish line, she had an entirely different marathon to tackle — living with the sobriety she had attained during the ride. Though she knew she needed help, shame kept her silent.

Hoppen describes her post-ride feelings in her book: “I desperately need someone to ask me today how I feel about staying sober tomorrow. I need to talk about this, but my fears of how it will be received are bigger than my need and, once again, I keep it to myself.”

That first Ride4Life didn’t cure her addiction. But years later, she finally surrendered.



“I said [to God], ‘Take it. I’ll do whatever You want. Just take this.’ ... I wanted Him to take it away so I could go back to who I used to be, when in reality I should have had no desire to go back to who I used to be because I don’t think she was a very nice person,” Hoppen said.

Promising God she would do His will, Hoppen had no idea then what God had in mind.

“I didn’t realize that what He was going to ask me to do was to speak and write about the very thing that I had frantically put a lot of time and effort into keeping a secret,” she said.

Occasionally Hoppen mourns the time she lost due to alcohol, but she also has determined it had to happen that way. She has learned to trust God’s timing instead of her own.

Through her experience, Hoppen recognized the need for addicts and others with stigmatized issues to speak up, especially within their faith communities.

Church can help

“Where are the people in the Church? The minister can talk about it until he’s blue in the face but until we own up to it and say, ‘Me, too,’ nothing’s going to change there,” she said. “The Church is not the safe place the Christian addict will go to seek help simply because we have been told those two words ‘Christian’ and ‘addict’ do not go together.”

Now a recovered alcoholic, Hoppen said she wears both labels — Christian and alcoholic — proudly. “I’m not a different kind of Christian because I’m an alcoholic, but I ought to be a different kind of alcoholic because I’m a Christian.”

Find “Sober Cycle” at newhope-publishers.com or at your favorite bookseller.

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.

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MEETING NEEDS

Melba Wilkerson, a charter member of Baptist Nursing Fellowship, is a retired nurse from Henderson, Texas.

WMU photo by Pam Henderson

BNF seeks to empower, educate and encourage health care professionals

By Trennis Henderson
WMU National Correspondent

Nursing is a demanding profession even in the best of times. Those demands have skyrocketed over the past year as nurses and other health care workers have selflessly served on the front lines in the war on COVID.

Where do they turn for relief, renewal and encouragement?

Among the many organizations seeking to respond to nurses' personal and professional needs, one strikes especially close to home for many Baptist nurses — Baptist Nursing Fellowship.

Opportunities

Baptist Nursing Fellowship provides missions opportunities, continuing education and fellowship for Christian nurses and allied health professionals in the U.S. and on missions fields around the world.

A longtime ministry partner with national Woman's Missionary Union, BNF's official mission is to "empower, educate and encourage nurses to fulfill Christ's mission through healing skills."

As National Nurses Week was observed May 6–12, BNF focused on its two-year theme of "Touch Twice in Jesus' Name." Highlighting both the physical and spiritual impact that Christian nurses can make, that theme has become especially meaningful amid the global pandemic.

The virus took a deeply personal toll on BNF members with the loss of BNF Executive Director Lori Spikes to COVID last fall.

A longtime Southern Baptist missionary to Chile, Spikes was a registered nurse with

more than 40 years of experience. She was elected as BNF's executive director in 2018, just two years before her death.

"We miss her greatly," said BNF

President Debby Akerman. "But we know that she's not saying, 'Gee, I wish I were back there doing BNF.' She's with the Lord."

That lifelong commitment to serving Christ by serving others is evident in the lives of nurses who have been involved in BNF over the years.

For charter member Melba Wilkerson, the opportunities to participate in missions trips and serve alongside fellow Christian nurses are key benefits of her BNF involvement over the years.

Never the same

"When you go on a missions trip, you can't ever be the same again because you see different cultures and meet different people," Wilkerson said. "I've got friends from everywhere, and I consider that a blessing that BNF has given me."

Missions is at the heart of the organization, Akerman said. Her goal is that "when people think BNF, they think missions."

BNF president-elect Deborah

Bolian, assistant professor of nursing at Mississippi College, agreed.

"My vision for BNF is to continue to empower nurses to be missionar-

ies for Christ," she said. "God gave us that as a directive, and He has given us the tools" to accomplish that goal.

"Once you [go on a missions trip], you cannot dampen the fire that lights."

BNF membership ranges from current and retired nurses and medical missionaries to allied medical professionals, student members and honorary members. Akerman said physical therapists, pharmacists, emergency medical technicians and other health care workers also are welcome to join BNF and share their expertise with the group.

And while the pandemic has impacted travel and missions opportunities, Akerman said she is encouraging members to "identify the places you will go so that when this is done, you're ready. You have put the teams together in your heart and in your mind and they're ready to go."



WMU photo by Pam Henderson
Deborah Bolian, who has taught nursing at Mississippi College for 35 years, is president-elect of Baptist Nursing Fellowship.

This year's BNF Summit will be held Nov. 4–7 at the WMU Building in Birmingham, Alabama. For more information about BNF, visit baptistnursingfellowship.com.