

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

INSIDE



Radio host celebrates 25 years of campus ministry and return to airwaves
◆ Page 7



Proper church budgeting benefits pastor, ministries
◆ Page 8



Church sees 'miracle story' following devastating fire
◆ Page 9



Liza Leigh Brewer broke her arm playing softball back in May and had emergency surgery. She had the pins surgically removed the morning of June 10 and then headed to VBS at FBC Florence.



Photos courtesy of FBC Florence

Back in VBS

Alabama Baptists see return of beloved outreach after COVID-19 pause

By Grace Thornton
TAB Media

Kevin Johnson did a double take when he saw Liza Leigh Brewer walk through the door for Vacation Bible School on June 10.

The 7-year-old had broken her arm playing softball back in May and had emergency surgery. June 10 was the day

she was supposed to have the pins surgically removed.

"I was greeting children as they entered our opening assembly, and there stood Liza Leigh," said Johnson, pastor of First Baptist Church in Florence.

"I thought, 'Well, they must have pushed her back to the afternoon for the procedure.' But she immediately said, 'Bro. Kevin, I got my pins removed from my arm this morning.'"

She wasn't going to let surgery stop her from getting

to her church's Destination Dig-themed VBS.

"That is one tough young lady who loves God, church and VBS," Johnson said.

In a way, VBS across the state mirrored Liza Leigh's attitude this year — strong and ready to bounce back.

Patty Burns, VBS strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said it seemed like in every church she visited, everyone was excited to be back in VBS after last year when the

COVID-19 pandemic largely canceled churches' plans.

"Being able to visit churches this summer and experience their VBS worship rallies, hearing children sing, seeing all the decorations and smiles was heartwarming.

"It was like a reunion with old friends," Burns said. "Whether I was visiting a church with 16 or 400 enrolled in VBS, the energy was just the same."

Hundreds saved

Though reports are still coming in, Burns said she knows of more than 200
(See 'Presenting' page 6)



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TAB Media staff attend retreat at Shocco Springs

Staff members of TAB Media enjoyed some time together July 20 at Shocco Springs Conference Center in Talladega.

Though TAB Media is headquartered in Birmingham, many staff members work offsite, so the

retreat was a special time of fun and face-to-face fellowship.

Participants enjoyed Bazooka Ball, trivia and other team-building games, plus a book study, lunch and snacks, all while enjoying Shocco's beautiful campus and facilities.



Photo by Debbie Campbell

TAB team members prepare to discuss the book "Team Work: 13 Timeless Principles for Creating Success and Fulfillment as a Team Member."



Photo by Debbie Campbell

An exciting game of Catch Phrase closed out the TAB staff retreat.



Photo by Amy Hacker

Amy Hacker (front) grabs a selfie with TAB team members as they head to Bazooka Ball.



Photo by Amy Hacker

Bazooka Ball, in which teams compete by shooting low-impact foam balls from air cannons at each other, started off the day.



Photo by Debbie Campbell

Jessica Ingram presents Dave Walsh with a special award for his love of VBS.

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 13.

RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

By Jennifer Davis Rash

President and Editor-in-Chief



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What if we really did take it all to the Lord in prayer?

The memory is at least 40 years old, but I can still see her body crouched over the altar, bouncing in rhythm to the soul-piercing wails alternating with vocal pleas to God to save her son.

He chose an evil path rather than life with Jesus, but his sweet, humble momma never gave up on him.

Sunday after Sunday, she poured her heart out on that same altar, and my guess is much of her day every day was spent not only praying for him, but also carrying a heavy and deeply broken heart.

I never heard what ultimately happened, but I do know the opportunity to witness such a public display of commitment to prayer and the obvious brokenness for another's soul struck a chord with me.

She pops in my mind from time to time, especially when I realize how little time I'm spending in prayer or when I'm tempted to fret over a situation rather than take it to the Lord.

She also came to mind as I read a message by TAB Media board chairman Rob Jackson.

"We often attempt to serve others with our power, leading to fatigue, frustration and minimal results. Let us seek today to tap into the power of prayer."

He developed the message around the example shown by Elijah in 1 Kings 17 and how important intercession is in the life of a believer.

"Elijah's intercession was not a casual prayer but one in which he agonized," Jackson explained. "For emphasis, it is stated twice that he 'cried out.' ... Elijah didn't halfheartedly intercede."

Jackson's challenge to all of us is to be true intercessors — "men and women who will agonize and labor in prayer as we take the needs ... to God."

Who are the people in your life who need Jesus? Focus on them for a while, say their names and pour out your heart to the Father.

And while we plead on their behalf, we also should seek the Lord's direction for our own steps and the role we are to play in their lives.

Are we modeling Christ for them in our daily walk? Are we seeking opportunities to share?

And for all the random situations facing us on any given day, how should we respond? Are we seeking God first? What should we do? What should we not do?

Are we making decisions based on how the Lord is guiding us through our prayer time and reading of His word, or are we determining the best course

of action based on what we want in the moment or what we think should happen?

Where do we need courage?
Where do we need restraint?

Do we believe God can help us in those areas? Do we believe we can totally trust Him? What if we all really followed the words of the hymn "What a Friend We Have in Jesus"?

When's a time you truly took it all to the Lord? Buried your face before Him and pleaded? Spent hours, days, weeks or more in consistent prayer?

What do you remember about

that moment and how He carried you? How did it change you?

Whose path will you cross this week who needs to hear that story?

We'd love to hear the story and how God is using it in your life and the lives of others. Email us at news@thealabamabaptist.org if we can consider it for use in an upcoming issue, or email me personally if you'd like to share with just me.

At the very least, take the opportunity to remind yourself of one of those moments.

WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS
All our sins and griefs to bear!

WHAT A PRIVILEGE TO CARRY
Everything to God in prayer.

HAVE WE TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS
Is there trouble anywhere?

WE SHOULD NEVER BE DISCOURAGED
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

ARE WE WEAK AND HEAVY LADEN
Cumbered with a load of care?

PRECIOUS SAVIOR, STILL OUR REFUGE
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Excerpt from the hymn "What a Friend We Have in Jesus"

Your Voice



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

African American churches connect with missionaries

By **Richard and Karen Lee**
IMB missionaries to Tanzania

Often, when African American Southern Baptists picture missionaries, they think about the pictures of missionaries that they've seen — and few look like them.

Many of our churches don't associate International Mission Board missionaries with being African American, so they are pleasantly surprised when they meet us.

[The IMB's] Church Connections has allowed us to show African Americans they have a place and role to play in the missionary task.

'A place for you'

When our churches see missionaries who look like them, they feel more represented. And what we tell them is, "There is a place for you. God is calling you; you can be a part of reaching the world, and He wants to use you and your church."

African American Southern Baptists aren't the only people who've been surprised to meet us. When we moved into our house in Tanzania, our neighbors wanted to know where the missionary was and why Muslims moved in next door.

"I have lived here for 40 years, and no one like you has ever lived in this mission house," a neighbor said.

Tanzanian Christians celebrated our arrival.

"Where are our other brothers and sisters? You're the first ones that we've seen that looked like us," Tanzanian Christians have asked us.



Richard & Karen Lee

IMB photo

We still hear that, 20 years after we arrived in the country. African American missionaries have tremendous opportunities to make deep connections on the missions field.

Through Church Connections, we have the opportunity to help churches to think about what those opportunities might look like, perhaps working with us in Dar es Salaam, the capital city, or working with the IMB in other countries.

Our churches are well-connected to one another, and forming connections with one church opens doors for connecting with other churches.

As we travel and speak at churches, we hope to lead others to follow in our footsteps. We desire to share the vision and to have more missionaries on the field so that we will see every tribe, every tongue around the throne.

We have had the joy of connecting with St. Stephens Baptist Church in La Puente, California. We talked to the pastor and offered to lead a small group through a study of Jeff

Lewis' book, "God's Heart for the Nations."

Our hope from the start of the Bible study was not only to share God's heart for the nations but also that the Lord would lead one or two people to make a long-term commitment to missions.

Every week during the study, we pray for unreached and unengaged people groups, and we've promoted the Sub-Saharan African affinity's goal of reaching 55 unengaged, unreached people groups with the gospel by the year 2025.

One woman in the group made a firm commitment to pray and asked for more information and resources. She is in her late 70s and came to Tanzania on a short-term missions trip.

She told us, "I'm learning so much, and now I'm looking at these verses and I see how they direct me to pray for the nations. I'm blessed to be a blessing to the nations, to the world, as God wants every tribe, every tongue, every people around the throne."

'Be a part'

Our message to African American Southern Baptists is, "You can be a part of reaching the world. God called us. He can use you and your church in mighty ways."

EDITOR'S NOTE — For more information about connecting with IMB missionaries through Church Connections, visit tabonline.org/church-connections.

You may think your sins have so destroyed and disqualified your life that there's no returning, but you're wrong. Never underestimate God's power to forgive, heal and restore.

J.D. Greear, pastor
The Summit Church
Durham, N.C.

I can tell how strong someone's argument [is] when they don't need ad hominem and vitriol to defend it.

Dan Darling
Senior vice president
National Religious
Broadcaster's Association

The Church that is dead or dying has no sense of conquest, vision or destiny. As has often been said, "a church that is standing still is going backward." The Church must invest herself in:

1. Optimism — God is still on the throne and the possibilities are endless, so be positive.

2. Hard work — Every obstacle is an opportunity. There is no substitute or shortcut for this mindset.

3. Faith — Without this, it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). Faith is commitment to God and His call to discipleship. We must dare to follow Him regardless of the price tag. After all, the originator of costly discipleship was not Dietrich Bonhoeffer but Jesus Christ.

Morris Murray Jr.
Jasper, Ala.

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“May we be convictional yet civil; may we give clarity and show charity.”

PRESIDENT ADAM W. GREENWAY

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas

When church members are troubled about the “risks” of making a decision to change something, they must be led to consider the greater risk of inaction. Leaders have three tasks when leading the church to make an important decision:

1. Demonstrate how taking this step honors Christ and obeys the Great Commission.

2. Appeal to the reality that the pain of the status quo is greater than the pain of change.

3. Love the people by keeping the lines of communication open.

Chris Crain, executive director Birmingham Metro Baptist Association via Facebook

Prayer appears so ubiquitous it seems to be everywhere and belongs

to everyone, and therefore it can be taken for granted. In our case, the danger is not that we don’t believe in prayer, but that we haven’t intentionally harnessed our energies.

**Pastor Kie Bowman
Hyde Park Baptist Church
and The Quarries Church
Austin, Texas**

Failure is just an opportunity to show people my hope, my joy, my peace is not in the game. ... It’s in Jesus, and to really try to show people who Jesus is and what it looks like to be a Christian.

**Outfielder Janie Reed
U.S. Olympic softball team**

When it comes to engaging the unreached, no group or denomination I know of comes close to committing

the amount of money being invested by Southern Baptists in getting the gospel to the unreached.

The work Southern Baptists are doing as they cooperate to send missionaries through the IMB is getting to the very edge of lostness.

Last year alone, IMB missionaries and their Baptist partners overseas engaged 55 formerly unengaged people groups. In some of those instances, we have seen the very first believers come to faith and the very first churches planted in the history of those people groups. We can rejoice that we will be able to look around as we stand before God’s throne — on that day when the vision of heaven is fulfilled — and see our brothers and sisters in Christ from those people groups.

IMB President Paul Chitwood

God proves faithful in pastorate

I love my calling as a pastor, and I wouldn’t trade it for anything in the world! At times being a pastor has its challenges, but God is faithful. Sometimes you wonder and ask God, “Are we making a difference in this community?”

I walked into the grocery store and saw a family that Multiply Community Church has been ministering to lately in the community. We greeted each other and I asked, “Are y’all getting groceries for dinner tonight?” She said yes, and I told her I was doing the same. As we ended our conversation she said, “I need you to pray for me.” I said, “Sure! What can I pray for?”

She told me that she had an upcoming appointment to check on a spot on her chest, and she needed me to pray. I said, “Absolutely! Let’s pray right now!” I prayed for her in the middle of the grocery store.

As I finished my prayer there was a lady whose grocery cart was right behind me.

I apologized for being in her way. She said, “You do not need to be sorry for praying!”

Folks, don’t wait to pray. People are watching and listening.

God has given me the privilege to shepherd those at Multiply Community but also is showing me I’m shepherding the community too. Church planting is worth it!

It is moments like these that I store up as Ebenezer moments.

Pastor, church planter and Christian — it’s worth it!

Will you pray for this sister in Christ that she’s cancer free? God is bigger than cancer!

**Lead pastor Quintell Hill
Multiply Community
Church
Monroe, N.C.**

From the *Twitterverse*

@ronniep

The SBC ...
▶ Equipping 20k pastors & leaders
▶ 5k+ missionaries & families
▶ 100s of churches planted annually
▶ Billions of \$ given for mission
▶ 47k churches working together
▶ All under a shared confession
▶ All for the nations to know Jesus.
Lord, guard this collaboration.

@JoWiKi

I’m telling you, it’s really hard to be a pastor right now. Nearly impossible for those without resources and quality leadership. Complaining and distracted Christians are about to wipe them out.
Pray for each other.
If you have a good pastor, tell him.

@GaryFenton07

Frequently we prefer that God forgives us rather than God transforming us.

@haines_matt

Pretty sure tomorrow (Sunday) will see some pastors preach their last sermon, some pastors preach their first, and everything in between. Whether you’re winding down or starting up, remember: “Sir, we would see Jesus.”
Give em Jesus,
Call em to respond,
and trust God with the results.

@DGrantGaines

Sometimes Jesus got angry. But it was never at the world. It was always at “religious” people.

@philpnation

I love the beautiful moment in

worship services when we collectively turn in our Bibles to a particular passage and God’s self-revelation is read aloud. May the name of the Lord be blessed and His message proclaimed boldly.

@michaelcatt

I’m firmly convinced some Southern Baptists think God needs us. I’m not as convinced that we understand how desperately we need Him.

@jasonkeithallen

“What do you possess if you possess not God?” —Augustine of Hippo

@allantaylor54

The question before me today: Will I live with a spirit of entitlement or gratefulness? Service or selfishness?

Presenting the gospel message

Churches think outside the box, choose creative schedules to make VBS happen

(continued from page 1)
churches that held VBS events in June, with 107 of those in the first two weeks of June. Many directors who have reported say their numbers were down by 10 to 15% over recent years, but that decline was less than expected in a season when everyone was trying to figure out the new normal.

And Burns said there were so many blessings this year, like this number — as of July 7, there were 520 salvation decisions reported.

But more are still coming in. At Mount Philadelphia Baptist Church in Cordova, for instance, three teens decided to follow Christ during youth VBS in late July.

Jeff Allred — who wrapped up his time as pastor there at the end of July and now serves at Eastside Baptist Church in Jasper — said Garrett Merchant, one of the youth directors, presented the gospel one

night, and Allred did another night, as some teens had missed the first opportunity to hear it.

“On Friday, July 23, cards were handed out by the youth teacher [who] gave the youth time to fill out — Do you have questions? Have you received Christ? Are you ready to receive Christ?, etc.,” Allred said. “Three of the youth put down they were ready to receive Christ.”

One of the youth attended another church, but the two who attended Mount Philadelphia wanted to follow through with baptism. VBS “was a busy and tiring week, but it was worth it,”

Allred said.

For both youth and children’s VBS, Mount Philadelphia offered its programming at night.

That has been a more common choice this year, Burns said, as well as other alternative VBS formats, such as weekends, one-



Facebook photo
Kids play cornhole during VBS at Crossroads Community Church in Elmore.



Facebook photo
Volunteers at Hill Crest Baptist Church in Anniston, lead the pledge to the Bible during their church’s VBS in July.

day events or Wednesday or Sunday sessions. Those seemed to be “very popular” in 2021, she said.

“I believe this might be due to difficulties enlisting volunteers,” Burns said. “But with that said, I’m thrilled that churches were willing to think out of the box and find ways to make Vacation Bible School happen in their churches and communities.”

She said she expected she might see a number of churches choosing to offer a hybrid format this year — both virtual and in person options — but not many did.

‘VBS as usual’

“We have seen many churches go back to VBS as usual with an in-house, five-day program for all ages,” she said. “Most of those had some COVID safety measures

still in place. Sanitizing stations and social distancing signs could be found in most of the churches I visited.”

If a church hasn’t submitted a report yet for their VBS, Burns said the process is quick and easy — and all online. Directors can visit tabonline.org/vbs-report to submit.

“I would encourage our churches to send in their report a week or two after VBS,” Burns said. “These reports aren’t just about collecting numbers for numbers’ sake. These reports give us information about where and when VBS is taking place all over Alabama, and what type of format churches are using. Most importantly we learn about decisions that are being made — salvation decisions as well as decisions for vocational ministry.”



Facebook photo
Jay Wolf, retired pastor of FBC Montgomery, speaks to a group of kids during the church’s Destination Dig-themed VBS in June.

“I’m thrilled that churches were willing to think out of the box and find ways to make Vacation Bible School happen.”

Patty Burns
VBS strategist, State Board of Missions



TAB Media photo by Dianna L. Cagle

Greg Davis (left) hosts Priority Talk, a Christian worldview talk show on WXJC with regular guests like Rabbi Eric E. Walker, a Messianic Jew who is the executive director of Igniting a Nation.

Priority Talk

Radio host celebrates 25 years of campus ministry and return to airwaves

By **Dianna L. Cagle**
TAB Media

It was only 2 1/2 years, but Greg Davis said it was just a “vacation” from the air when he returned to the airwaves in April for Priority Talk.

“It feels like I went on vacation and now I’m back,” said Davis, president of First Priority Greater Birmingham.

The show, which was on the air for more than seven years, had taken a break but returned to the airwaves April 5. The show airs 3–5 p.m. each weekday on WXJC 101.1 FM and AM 850 and focuses on positive news with a Christian perspective.

Raising awareness

“The radio has just been a great way to share good news with the community at large and pass along Christian values,” Davis said. “It’s really about collaboration and just telling the stories of what God’s doing through people in churches and ministries all across our state. It helps us raise awareness for good causes.”

Davis said it’s a way to let people know “what they can do and how they can be involved.”

Davis credits Crawford Broadcasting with the biggest “signal to broadcast the preaching and teaching of God’s word and daily talk from a Christian perspective.”

“I just think that it’s pretty awesome that they do that because they could do anything with this station,” and they choose to broadcast with a Christian worldview, he said.

Between the two signals, the show reaches from below Mont-

gomery up into Tennessee and into neighboring states Georgia and Mississippi.

“They’ve chosen to use this to be Alabama’s gospel voice,” said Davis, who also praised WDJC, which is one of the first stations to exclusively feature Christian programming and is also owned by Crawford Broadcasting.

“I’m not really a radio person,” Davis said. “I’m a minister doing a radio show. Our subject is related to Jesus. If we can relate it to that, we’ll talk about it.”

Davis and his wife, Sandi, have two children: Trent, 20, is a student at the University of Alabama at Birmingham; Meagan, 18, just graduated from Corner High School and starts at the University of North Alabama soon.

Sandi, a speech pathologist at Corner Middle and High schools, is a First Priority faculty sponsor.

Davis graduated from UAB with a bachelor’s in secondary education and a master of divinity from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. They are members of HighPoint Community Church in Corner.

History

First Priority was founded in Birmingham 30 years ago by Benny Proffitt. What started in a handful of schools in central Alabama has spread to all 50 states and other parts of the world as well.

First Priority meets in middle and high schools led by students.

“We help the local churches connect to their local schools to set up legal Christian clubs for outreach,” Davis said.

Priority Kids is aimed at elementary children and needs a leader from within the school or community. Davis has been on staff 25 years and was involved as a volunteer before that time.

Partnering with churches

“We provide strategy and resources and training,” Davis said. “We will work with a community of churches who want to implement something in their schools. It’s a campus ministry for the local church.”

The students follow the Equal Access Act of 1984 to ask for clubs in their school. First Priority helps show what is legal or what works.

Davis said the groups vary in

size, but the older the students, the smaller the groups. Priority Kids groups average 75 to 100 students, while middle schools tend to average anywhere from 25 to 75. High schools average below 50 students.

“Kids get busy,” he said. “What goes on on the campus, we see reflects what’s going on in the churches.”

Davis is happy to share with others how to start a group. For more information about groups for older children and teens, visit firstpriorityal.com or send an email to info@firstpriorityal.com. For elementary level, visit prioritykids.com. Davis also takes suggestions and questions about the radio show at greg@prioritytalkradio.com.

Praying for schools

A new school year means a fresh start for many, including nonprofits like First Priority of Alabama.

The organization helps middle and high school students start clubs at their local school and teachers or parents begin Priority Kids clubs at elementary schools.

August 6–8, First Priority is organizing Weekend of Prayer Over Alabama Students and is providing resources for local churches and individuals to organize, host and facilitate prayer walks for schools.

There are many ways to be involved:

► **Pray** as you drive through a

school zone, or purposefully turn into the school and drive through the entrance and around the building praying for all involved.

► **Plan** a prayer walk around your local schools.

► **Encourage** students, teachers and administrators. Send a note, call or text to let them know they are in your prayers.

► **Send** out students before they return to school. Take time in a church service to pray over and commission students to go and be disciples in their schools.

List your event with First Priority at info@firstpriorityal.com. For resources, visit firstpriorityal.com/thelatest/week-end-of-prayer. (Dianna L. Cagle)

Proper church budgeting benefits pastor, ministries

By Michael J. Brooks
TAB Media

As churches approach budget planning, there are a number of ways financial and personnel teams can help their pastors.

One component is an accountable business reimbursement plan, according to Lee Wright, church compensation specialist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, who hosted a church financial issues conference July 6 in Prattville.

The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 “raised the standard deduction for federal taxes,”

Wright explained, but it also eliminated deductions for unreimbursed business expenses.

Churches can help by allowing the minister to “submit receipts for expenses, such as books or conferences and travel records for mileage,” he said.

The result is the minister “is reimbursed without losing salary to legitimate expenses.”

Wright noted the IRS established 56 cents per mile as business travel expense this year and recommended churches use that guideline.

“The biggest part of this cost-per-mile is depreciation on a vehicle,” he said. “The cost of owning a car is more than the gasoline we buy.”

Other costs

Another tax-free benefit now allowed is the cost of a cell phone used mainly for business.

“Much of church business is done now by cell phone, and the church can provide its cost for the minister,” Wright said.

Another helpful idea is to offer a self-employment tax offset, Wright said. A minister is self-employed

for Social Security purposes and pays the full 15.3% tax, unlike an employee whose employer pays half the tax, Wright noted.

“Offering a SECA offset is considered additional and taxable income, but it is a good benefit for the pastor,” he said.

Ordained ministers and other church employees who work more than 20 hours per week can receive extra benefits by enrolling in GuideStone Financial Resources’ church retirement plan.

“The minimum contribution is \$50 per month,” Wright said, “and this can be a church contribution or a salary deduction.”

“GuideStone also includes a survivor benefit (life insurance) and disability coverage, so it’s a great program,” he added.

Also available through GuideStone is health cover-

age that can be treated as a tax-free benefit.

Wright cautioned that bonuses, gift cards or love offerings given to ministers are taxable benefits as far as the IRS is concerned.

Accountability

Wright also urged accountability in handling church offerings and suggested internal controls such as the “two-person rule” — requiring two signatures on disbursement checks, or having notices of electronic payments automatically emailed to someone in the church other than the one who issued the check. Churches should verify expenses and ensure any contracted work was actually performed, he said.

A number of helpful documents and videos are available free to churches at alsbom.org/ministries/church-compensation. Wright can be reached at lwright@alsbom.org or 800.264.1225, ext. 2241.



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Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, Moundville, Ala., has position available for bivocational pastor. Send resumé to: jbshaw@mound.net or mail to: PHBC, P.O. Box 339, Moundville, AL 35474-0339.

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York Bluff Baptist Church in Sheffield, Ala., is seeking a full-time minister of music and media interested in growing a multigenerational, blended music ministry and overseeing a plan to maximize the church's web presence. Resumés may be mailed to: Search Committee, York Bluff Baptist Church, 301 N. Atlanta Ave., Sheffield, AL 35660 or emailed to: kim@yorkbluffbaptist.com.

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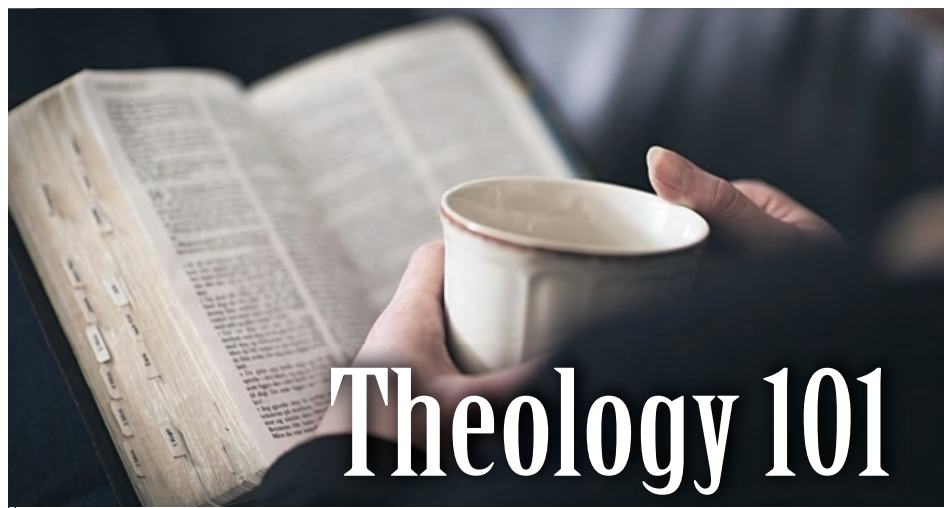
Have you checked out TAB Media's new Stories serial podcast yet? If not, then you'll want to catch Season 2, the Flatline story. The full first season is also available featuring Sammy Gilbreath, state missionary in evangelism with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. TAB Media's Grace Thornton writes and produces the shows. Listen to the Stories podcast at tabonline.org/stories or anywhere you get your podcasts.

TAB DIGITAL

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

TAB HIGHLIGHTS

TAB Highlights is an email newsletter delivered to your inbox every Monday–Wednesday–Friday with the day's top stories from the world of faith-based news. The complimentary service is managed by the TAB Media team. Headlines come from international, national and Southern Baptist coverage, as well as one story that has been trending during the week. TAB Highlights also provides a link to the latest podcast released from the TAB Media team. To sign up, email news@thealabamabaptist.org.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Christ's Power

Protecting Power

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
TAB Media

In His well-known discourse about being the Good Shepherd, Jesus gave a powerful promise when He declared, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand” (John 10:27–29). Included in the “all power” given to Christ is that of protecting all who belong to Him.

Common expressions for Christ’s protecting power are “the eternal security of believers” or “once saved, always saved.” Of course, the operative part of this assertion is its first phrase, “Once saved.”

This truth is dependent on the genuineness of that initial condition of once saved. When the salvation experience is genuine, Christ’s protecting power precludes the possibility of losing that salvation.

Jesus’ promise in His discourse about the Good Shepherd clearly states that the life He gives to genuine believers is eternal. While communicating something about the quality of that eternal life, the adjective also describes its duration as life that is forever. Blessed indeed are all who share the unshakable confidence in Christ that the Apostle Paul voiced in 2 Timothy 1:12:

“I know Whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that day.”

The security of genuine believers in Christ’s protecting power finds an apt analogy in the miracle of birth. Whether animals or humans, that which is born can never become unborn.

However difficult and disappointing a physical life may turn out to be, a person can never return to the womb to experience the safety of one not yet born. Birth is an irreversible fact of physical life.

Eternal salvation

That consideration makes it all the more apt an illustration for the eternal salvation Christ brings to those who place their trust in Him. Those born again cannot ever become unborn.

Said another way, those in whose heart Christ comes to dwell will never experience His exit or loss of His protecting power. If one should ask about a person who chooses to quit believing, consider that failing faith was faulty from the first, being something less than saving faith.

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.



Church sees ‘miracle story’ following devastating fire

Pastor D.J. Smith didn’t expect to be preaching in a tent July 18, right next to the ashes of his church’s building. But he said he’s grateful because it could’ve been a different kind of service.

It could’ve been a funeral.

On the evening of July 15, lightning hit the building of Hurricane Baptist Church in Gilberttown, and it was quickly engulfed in flames.

A neighbor happened to walk outside and see it and called 911.

But not only that — he rushed over to bang on the door of the parsonage, which housed a young family who had recently moved back to town. The couple had just put their infant sons to bed in the bedroom closest to the church, having no idea the fire was already melting the siding off their home’s exterior walls.

A propane tank sat in between the church and the house.

The neighbor and the young father were able to get everyone out of the parsonage and disconnect the gas tank before things turned tragic.

“Had he not walked out of his home and seen the flames, I believe I would’ve preached a funeral the next Sunday,” Smith said. “All

glory goes to God on that. It was just His hand working, and the church really recognizes that. It’s a miracle story.”

God at work

In that tent service in the parking lot the following Sunday, the mother gave a testimony, and the church “can look back and see the hand of God working even in a bad situation,” Smith said.

That goes for the next Sunday too — a Methodist church down the road that had closed its doors in recent years offered its building to meet in until they rebuild.

The rebuilding process is “almost overwhelming” to think about, said church member Jeremy Giles, who grew up at the church and lives a half mile away.

Though the

parsonage and a storage building survived, the sanctuary, fellowship hall and classrooms were a total loss. The church — founded in 1816 — is one of the oldest in the state, though the buildings weren’t the original.

Smith believes they were built on the current spot in the 1960s and added onto in the 1980s.

“There are people in my church who grew up with that building and watched the progress being made on it,” Smith said. “There are definitely some emotional ties to that building.”

But Giles said the people of Hurricane Baptist may be “down,” but they’re “not out.”

All Smith has heard from his congregation is “peace and encouragement and looking toward what is to come.”

And churches of all denominations in the area have reached out to the church to offer help and support. “It’s encouraging when you are surrounded by people who care,” Smith said. (Grace Thornton)



Photo courtesy of Jeremy Giles
A lightning strike July 15 ignited a fire at Hurricane Baptist Church in Gilberttown.



Photo courtesy of Jeremy Giles
Hurricane Baptist Church’s sanctuary, fellowship hall and classrooms were a total loss for the congregation.

3 stories

you should know



AP photo

Armed kidnapers in Nigeria have released 28 of the more than 120 students abducted July 5 from the Bethel Baptist High School in the northern town of Damishi. Church officials handed those children over to their parents at the school July 25. But Israel Akanji, president of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, said more than 80 other children are still being held. Read more about violence in Nigeria and other countries at tabonline.org/unrest. (AP)

Evans: 'Kingdom Race Theology' could unify

Pastor and author Tony Evans outlined in a recent presentation at Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas a "Kingdom Race Theology," which he says might help Christians move forward on the issue of racial reconciliation.

Evans addressed the conflict and confusion taking place across the nation around critical race theory using Ephesians 2.

He said KRT, as he calls it, is "the reconciled recognition, affirmation and celebration of the divinely created ethnic differences through which God displays His multifaceted glory as His people justly, righteously and responsibly function personally and corporately in unity under the lordship of Jesus Christ."

To hear Evans' message on CRT and KRT, go to tabonline.org/evans-crt. (TAB Media)

Groups call on court to overturn Roe v. Wade

Pro-life organizations in Alabama and across the nation are urging the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 decision that legalized abortion in the U.S.

Earlier this year, the Supreme Court agreed to hear *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, a Mississippi case involving the state's law banning abortions after 15 weeks.

The Alabama Center for Law and Liberty, the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission and religious freedom advocate Becket are among the groups that have filed amicus briefs with the court in support of the state of Mississippi.

The court's next term begins in October. A decision is expected in the case before next summer. (TAB Media)

Headline news

from around the Southeast

Arkansas

Having just launched a building campaign, Pastor Carl Fair of Dardanelle First Baptist Church in Arkansas didn't know what to expect from his congregation when COVID-19 hit. But Dardanelle First did not disappoint, reports Arkansas Baptist News. Fair explains how the Lord provided as giving increased during the pandemic. The church is hosting a building dedication service Aug. 15. "This building is all about telling people about Jesus, being a bridge to the community," Fair said.

Florida

Scott Whetstone, the new pastor of Moore Haven's First Baptist Church in Florida, plans to embrace both the past and the future of his new congregation, reports the Florida Baptist Witness. Before Whetstone, the congregation had gone two years without a pastor, but they welcomed him

and his wife. "We desire to live with an awe of God and obedience to Him. We will cultivate that in everything we do as a church," Whetstone said.

Georgia

Youth groups are looking for ways to encourage students and provide them with community. Twenty-seven churches gathered 514 students together at Shorter University in Rome, Georgia, for Impact Camp, where 15 made a first-time decision to follow Christ and 33 felt the call to full-time ministry. Impact aims "to create an atmosphere in which students are able to grow spiritually," reports the Christian Index. The Georgia Baptist Mission Board is focusing on the next generation's spiritual health.

Kentucky

When the restaurant at the Pendleton Hills Country Club, a staple in the community, burned,

Abram Crozier, pastor of Trinity Southern Baptist Church in Butler, Kentucky, knew he had to do something, reports Kentucky Today. The restaurant partnered with Trinity during the pandemic to feed first responders and essential workers, so "now it's our turn to help them," Crozier said. He started with gift cards for the employees, but Crozier plans to adjust as he hears specific needs.

Louisiana

First Baptist Church in Bossier City, Louisiana, is no stranger to struggles. In 2018, most of the church's facilities were destroyed in a fire, reports the Baptist Message. Pastor Brad Jurkovich said, "I believe God is giving us a season of victory at this time so that we are stronger than ever to share Jesus with our city, nation and world." The church has experienced blessing after blessing in this new season, including baptizing 35 students at camp and on campus.

Alabama news

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► For **First Baptist Church, Trussville**, their 200th anniversary was a great time to celebrate the past, but it was an even better time to do what they feel is a vital part of who they are — serve on missions.

Church members gathered July 17 to bag 38,000 pounds of sweet potatoes to be distributed to area homeless shelters and soup kitchens, hand out lemonade in the front parking lot of the church and pack 725 boxes of school supplies to give away to children in the community.



Photo courtesy of Lonette Berg

To celebrate their bicentennial, First Baptist also had a celebration during Sunday services July 1; a birthday dinner July 14, the actual date of the anniversary; and a legacy luncheon July 18 for anyone who has been a member of the church for 50 years or more.

During the Sunday services, Pastor Buddy Champion (pictured above right) brought a message called “A Challenge to the Church.”

Special guests included Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions; Buddy Choat, mayor of Trussville; and Gary Hollingsworth, pastor of First Baptist from 1996 to 2006 and current executive director for the South Carolina Baptist Convention.

Lonette Berg (pictured left), executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, and Michael Ethridge, director of operations for Birmingham Metro Baptist Association, presented the church with certificates.

“The purpose of the entire week was to celebrate what God has done over 200 years and to put feet to our mission to reach lost people,” said Lance Pate, executive pastor.

COFFEE ASSOCIATION

► **Alberton Baptist Church, Kinston**, celebrated 125 years of serving in its community July 11.

“The mighty hand of the Holy Spirit was in the service,” Pastor Harry Driggers said. “His sweet presence was felt in a powerful way. All credit goes to our mighty, holy God.”



Photo courtesy of Ellen Dewberry

Former pastor Wayne Sharpe was the guest speaker for the service. The Joe Farris Family, Billy Chamblee and The Old Country Church Choir provided special music. Ellen Dewberry of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission and John Granger, director of missions for Coffee Baptist Association, presented the church with certificates.

FRANKLIN ASSOCIATION

► June 27 was a great day of “looking back and looking forward” for **Mountain View Baptist Church, Phil Campbell**, as they celebrated their 100th anniversary.

The special service began with the baptism of five people. “God has an exciting future for Mountain View Baptist Church,” Pastor Sammy Taylor (pictured left) said. “However, for that to come to pass, we must continue to join Him in His mission to reach a lost world to Himself.



Facebook photo

I pray that those who come behind us will also be committed to the same task.”

During the celebration, members and guests reflected on that legacy as Taylor shared about church history and Venlon Bradford, pastor of Mountain View from 1973 to 1977, shared memories from his time at the church.



Facebook photo

Those present also enjoyed displays of historical memorabilia and photos and other items from the 2011 tornado that destroyed the church building.

Terry Welborn, the church’s minister of music, and the church’s praise team led the congregation in singing during the service, with special

music provided by the men’s trio — Welborn, Kyle Taylor and Jarred Pierce — and the women’s trio — Kim Whitten, Andrea Hogan and Rachel Trapp. Jimmy Austin (pictured right) of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission and Larry Dover, director of missions for Franklin Baptist Association, presented the church with certificates.

ST. CLAIR ASSOCIATION

► “The love you have for the Lord, your walk in the Spirit and your passion to help us grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ is a blessing to us all.”

These were the words on the plaque that **First Baptist Church, Pell City**, gave **John Thweatt** during a recent special service honoring his 20th anniversary as the church’s pastor.

The church showed video testimonies from church members as well as pastors and leaders from other parts of the state, including Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Lance told Thweatt and the congregation that they are “a team who have worked together for these two decades to really make an impact locally and around the world.”



THWEATT

Frank Hopson, a member of the search committee that brought Thweatt and his wife, Kim, to the church, said the couple was an answer to their prayers. “John and Kim, we just want to thank both of you for being so faithful to God’s word, for loving God’s people so much,” he said. “This far exceeds any expectation any of us ever imagined.”

Persecuted church

Ugandan Christian, Islamic boss killed in conversion dispute

KAGUMU, Uganda — A Muslim supervisor sent hit men May 22 to kill a Christian employee for not converting to Islam and was killed himself the next day by a mob.

Sources said Ashirafu Kasenyi was behind the killing of evangelist Fred Isiko on May 22. Kasenyi had sent Isiko on an errand.

While on the errand, Isiko was stopped by three men, who cut his neck with a long knife.

Francis Maka, a friend who had accompanied Isiko, fled and reported the incident to Kagumu police.

On May 23, Kasenyi was attacked by a mob of more than 50 community residents — most

of them members of churches — and killed before police could arrest him. His house, garden and livestock also were destroyed.

One suspect in Kasenyi’s killing has been arrested.



Morning Star News

A suspect arrested May 23 said Kasenyi hired him and four others to kill Isiko and seven pastors.

Kasenyi, a sheikh, had been a Christian before converting to Islam in 1992.

Uganda’s laws and constitution provide religious freedom. Muslims make up less than 12% of Uganda’s population. (MS)



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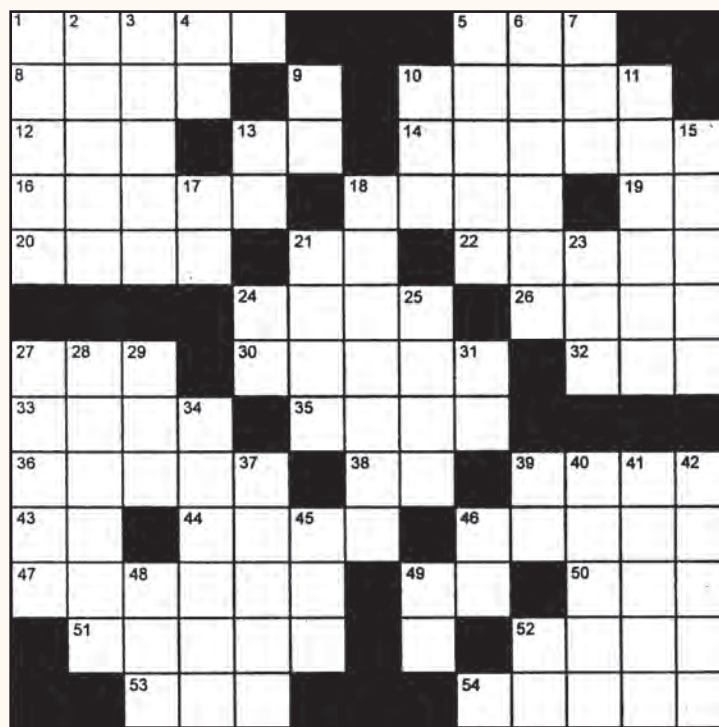
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CHRISTIAN CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1. And next unto them repaired ... ___ the Meronothite. (Neh. 3:7)
5. And in the 20th year of Jeroboam king of Israel reigned ___ over Judah. (1 Kings 15:9)
8. Israeli leader Abba ___.
10. Dropped the first atomic bomb.
12. Pale.
13. Digraph.
14. My spirit shall not always ___ with man. (Gen. 6:3)
16. Rejoice not when thine ___ falleth. (Prov. 24:17)
18. Arabian prince.
19. Plural suffix.
20. Girl.
21. Place. (abbr.)
22. Flies high.
24. He that is now called a Prophet was before time called a ___. (1 Sam. 9:9)
26. He that winneth souls is ___. (Prov. 11:30)
27. Bone. (comb. form)
30. Every wise ___ buildeth her house. (Prov. 14:1)
32. ___ virgins, or lepers.
33. Norse god of thunder.
35. Captain of the Nautilus.
36. Moses came to the mountain of God, even to ___. (Ex. 3:1)
38. Continent. (abbr.)
39. But there was none like unto ___ to work wickedness. (1 Kings 21:25)
43. Electron volt. (abbr.)
44. Abstain from eating.
46. A swelling.
47. ___ a wise man, and he will love thee. (Prov. 9:8)
49. 365 days. (abbr.)
50. The sun and the ___ were darkened.



By Janet Adkins Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- (Rev. 9:2)
21. A drudge, menial.
23. Island.
24. Compass point.
25. Incarnation of Vishnu.
27. He will hate the one and love the ___. (Matt. 6:24)
28. Pusher.
29. Craggy hill.
31. I will punish the multitude of ___. (Jer. 46:25)
34. Thou hast been my defense and ___. (Ps. 59:16)
37. His ___ had offended the king of Egypt. (Gen. 40:1)
39. Commercial.
40. Thy prayer is ___. (Luke 1:13)
41. Acid component of protein.
42. So ___ went down from mount Tabor. (Judg. 4:14)
45. Sediment. (abbr.)
46. And she bare a son; and he called his name ___. (Gen. 38:3)
48. They were so ___. (Jer. 24:2)
49. Hear this, all ___ people. (Ps. 49:1)
52. Digraph.

DOWN

1. As a ___ of gold in a swine's snout. (Prov. 11:22)
2. Are not ___ and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better? (2 Kings 5:12)
3. People of Denmark.
4. Poti-pherah priest of ___. (Gen. 41:45)
5. Those opposed. (Rev. 21:4)
7. Mohammad ___.
9. Interjection.
10. Samantha Stevens' Aunt ___erelda.
11. Reluctant.
13. ___ Cobb of baseball fame.
15. German city.
17. Woman's title of address.
18. A fundamental part.

Alabama WMU meets for annual conference

Alabama WMU celebrated ongoing ministry efforts and elected new officers during the Connect conference and biennial business meeting July 23-24.

Candace McIntosh, executive director of Alabama WMU, commended the 200 or so gathered at Shocco Springs Conference Center in Talladega for learning how to adapt missions and ministry during the COVID-19 pandemic.

During a year of constant challenge, McIntosh said, "I told our staff we would watch to see where Jesus was working, ... and He was working."

McIntosh noted successes in several efforts, including strong giving to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering, finding temporary housing for missionaries displaced during the pandemic, Christmas backpack collections, WorldSong virtual camp and travel teams, Great Commission

Conversations and Ministers' Wives Connection webinars.

Christian speaker and humorist Debbie Childers led Bible study for Connect, and author and retired missionary Rosalie Hall Hunt spoke about her memoir, "Six Yellow Balloons," which chronicles her family's missions experiences in China.

New officers

During the biennial business meeting held July 24, new officers were elected.

Those who will serve are: president, Shirley Smith, Covington Baptist Association; vice president, Lanell Smith, Montgomery Baptist Association; and recording secretary, Melanie Veazey, Tallapoosa Baptist Association.

Those elected to serve as WMU representatives are Whitney Exline, Debra Pierce, Jennifer Scott and Ines Velez. Judy Gay was elected trustee-at-large. (Carrie Brown McWhorter)

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For August 8

Explore the Bible

By Jay T. Robertson, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



WHY LISTEN? Ecclesiastes 4:13–5:7

Solomon recognized that having a teachable spirit was necessary for living a meaningful life. In this Genesis 3 sinful world we live in, valuing and receiving instruction from wise counselors is crucial if we are to live wisely. The wise welcome wisdom while the fool despises wisdom and instruction.

When Leading (4:13–16)

The king in the story had at one time paid attention to the advice of his counselors and ruled wisely, but when he got old, he refused to listen to them. The hero in the story was a youth who had been in prison, was released and then became king. The young man had been born poor, but he became rich. The old king was rich, but it did not make him any wiser. He might just as well have been poor. The young man was in prison, but he got out and ascended to the throne. The old king was imprisoned by his foolishness and lost his throne.

We learn that wealth and position are no guarantee of success, and poverty and seeming failure are not barriers to achievement. The key is wisdom. The best conditions for learning wisdom do not guarantee it, and the worst conditions cannot in and of themselves keep a person from receiving it.

The story continued. The young man got out of prison and took the throne because of popular demand. It looked like the new king had it made, but his popularity did not last. The new crowd deposed him and appointed a second youth. The first youth's reign came to an end just as the foolish king's reign did before him. And the cycle continued. Solomon concluded that this was futile and a pursuit of the wind.

When Worshipping (5:1–3)

When we enter into God's presence, we are not to be dull-minded or insensitive, but we are to stay alert and attentive. We should draw near and listen well because God is communicating. We must think

carefully before taking action when we go to the house of God.

Solomon was telling us to close our mouths and open our ears as we prepare for worship. God speaks to us through the music, prayer and sermon. But we will not hear Him if we are hasty and impulsive with our speaking.

We should be quiet and stay calm because God hears the inaudible and sees the invisible. We need to focus and think. We need to let go of our concerns and anxieties. We need to set our mind's attention and heart's affection on God and praise Him for Who He is and for what He has done for us in and through the work of Jesus Christ.

We are commanded to do this not simply so we can hear God and know Him better but also because He hears our inner thoughts as well as our spoken words. His perspective enables Him to penetrate and expose all that we think, say and do. So we need to guard our thoughts, words and actions and listen attentively to what God has to say to us.

When Promising (5:4–7)

We should make a commitment and keep it because God accepts it and does not forget it. In our day of empty promises and shallow commitments, we need to heed these words. We should never make a vow to God that we have no intention of keeping. And when we do make a vow to God, we should carry it out fully because He takes our vows seriously.

Do not back out of a vow you have made to God. Such an act will lead to sin and God's discipline (Deut. 23:21). God expects His people to honor their commitments. We dishonor God whenever we fail to keep our word.

Solomon ended his instruction on worship with a solemn warning: "Fear God." We should never play games with the God of the universe. We are to take God seriously. He demands our utmost respect and diligent obedience.

Bible Studies for Life

By Roy E. Ciampa, Ph.D., S. Louis and Ann W. Armstrong Professor of Religion, Samford University



SERVE THROUGH PRAYER 1 Kings 17:17–24

While we should pray at all times, it is especially challenging times in our lives or in the lives of those around us that provide particularly important opportunities to trust God and to entrust ourselves and others to God in prayer.

Hardship is an opportunity to trust God. (17–18)

Sometime after the Lord had saved the widow and her son from starvation (vv. 8–16) the son became deathly ill and died. The poor mother wondered (as people often do) if she might have brought about her calamity through some sin.

When we face particularly difficult times it is certainly appropriate to consider if God is trying to get our attention (see 1 Cor. 11:30). But it is just as important to remember that sickness and challenges are not necessarily or usually caused by our sins. They are simply a reality of this fallen world.

By referring to the prophet as "man of God" the woman raises the question of whether he really represented God's agenda and power.

Elijah encourages her to continue to trust God, even in this most difficult of circumstances.

Service to others includes interceding on their behalf. (19–21)

Elijah asks the mother to trust him (and the Lord) once again by giving him her son's body. By taking the boy and laying him down on his own bed and stretching himself over the boy three times, Elijah was symbolically pleading with the Lord to treat him as though he were Elijah himself, as essential to God's plans as the prophet was.

Elijah's prayer was clear and simple: "Please let this boy's life come into him again!" The Lord is mentioned four times in verses 20–21 to remind us that no other supposed god or deity has the power to restore life: It is only the Lord, the God of Israel, Who has the power of life and death. Only He is worthy of our worship and able to

respond to our prayers in our time of need. And by calling Him "Lord my God,"

Elijah was once again affirming his exclusive loyalty to the Lord in the midst of an idolatrous society. Through his passionate intercession, Elijah demonstrated his commitment to helping the woman in her time of desperation.

God's answers to our prayers can lead others to turn to God. (22–24)

The wording of the second half of verse 22 closely follows the precise wording of Elijah's concise prayer to stress that the Lord responded precisely as His prophet had requested, with the added note, "and he lived."

Through his intercessory intervention, Elijah established several things: The Lord, the God of Israel, is the One with ultimate power over life and death; Elijah is the Lord's prophet, one through whom the Lord is prepared to do powerful miracles; and that both the Lord and Elijah are for the woman and her son, not against them.

The widow's response shows God's answer to Elijah's prayer has confirmed her faith in the Lord and in Elijah as His prophet: He is a man of God after all.

You and I are not Elijah, but that doesn't matter. The Bible holds Elijah out to us as a model of prayer: "The prayer of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect. Elijah was a human being as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the land. Then he prayed again, and the sky gave rain and the land produced its fruit" (James 5:16–18).

Elijah's prayer was powerful because he was a righteous man who knew the power of prayer is based on the power of the God to Whom we pray, not some inherent power of the one who prays.

How different would our lives and churches be if we were known for our Elijah-like commitment to intercession?

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Michael Foust

TAB Media

Disney's 'Mysterious Benedict Society' funny, family-friendly

It's not easy finding a television series the whole family can watch, especially when the household includes children and teenagers — not to mention a mom and a dad.

It seems most TV series either are too mature for the youngsters or too childlike for the picky teens in the clan.

Still, there are a handful of programs that bridge the divide, and Disney+ has the newest entry.

Called "The Mysterious Benedict Society" (TV-PG), it debuted June 25 and tells the story of four gifted orphans who are recruited by a mysterious man named Mr. Benedict to stop a worldwide crisis called "The Emergency."

This Emergency, we are told, has led to the eradication of truth and empathy.

Based on book series

In order for the orphans to reach their goal, they must successfully penetrate the L.I.V.E. Institute, a school that resides across the bay.

"The Mysterious Benedict Society" is an eight-episode live-action series and is based on the best-selling book series by Trenton Lee Stewart.

The humor makes it cross-generational, as do the cliffhanger



'THE MYSTERIOUS BENEDICT SOCIETY'

Photo courtesy of Disney

endings and the family-friendly themes.

The comedy is similar to that in "A Series of Unfortunate Events" — quirky and original.

In the first 15 minutes of the series, an eccentric teacher tells a classroom of frightened students they'll be "executed" if they're caught cheating.

Soon, though, she corrects herself: She meant to say "excused." Seconds later, she's drinking a large jar of pickle juice. (Why? Who knows?) It's crazy enough to make adults and children alike laugh.

Each episode ends with a cliffhanger that makes you want to start the next episode.

But with Disney+ releasing the episodes weekly — a streaming strategy I like — you'll have to wait a few days to learn what happens.

The series also is family friendly. The first two episodes include no sexuality or violence and only minor language (I caught one

"OMG.") If you need anything skipped, then give the filtering service ClearPlay a try. (It works with "The Mysterious Benedict Society.")

The orphans are the smartest characters in the series. We need more television shows like it.

Other options

► **"Luca" (Disney+)** — A young boy and his friend spend a summer in a seaside Italian town with the goal of winning a triathlon as they harbor a secret: The two boys are undercover sea monsters. Luca is the latest film from Pixar, which (tragically) released the movie on Disney+ instead of in theaters due to the pandemic.

It includes a strong message about friendship and an inspiring allegory about race. Rated PG for rude humor, language, some thematic elements and brief violence.

► **"Birdie" (Pureflix)** — A single father recently released from prison tries to reconnect with

the 8-year-old daughter he barely knew. Unfortunately for him, she's being raised by grandparents who don't want him near her. It's an uplifting story about redemption, forgiveness and the gospel. LaRonn Marzett is stellar in the lead role.

► **"Summer of Soul" (Theaters and Hulu)** — best for teens and above) — It's a documentary about the 1969 Harlem Cultural Festival, a series of concerts that drew well-known names and hundreds of thousands of fans but were largely forgotten — until now.

Sly and the Family Stone, Stevie Wonder and Fifth Dimension all sang. Gospel music also played a major role in the festival and is spotlighted in the film (led by the Edwin Hawkins Singers' "Oh Happy Day").

I caught only one coarse word (a "GD," said when musician Ray Barretto is performing.) Rated PG-13 for some disturbing images, smoking and brief drug material.

► **"Capital One College Bowl Game Show" (NBC, Peacock TV)** — Peyton Manning and his brother, Cooper, host this trivia game show that features students from rival colleges going head to head. (Students from Alabama and Auburn faced off in one of the first episodes.)

It is a revival of a game show that first aired in 1959. The first season includes 10 episodes and airs each Tuesday. Rated TV-PG.

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.

MEET THE REVIEWER

Michael Foust covers the intersection of faith and entertainment as a media reviewer for The Alabama Baptist. He also is the husband of an amazing wife and the father of four young children.



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