

The Alabama Baptist

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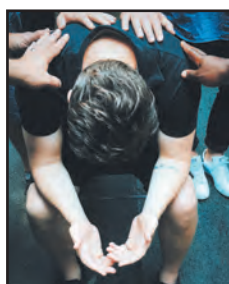
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20-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF 9/11



Photo courtesy of Panama City News Herald

Above: During the September 2017 stair climb at Edgewater Beach & Golf Resort, Zack Barrett, a firefighter from Hattiesburg, Mississippi, carries a fire hose with the names of all the firefighters who died responding to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. **Right:** Jonathan Jenkins participates in last year's 9/11 climb in Panama City.



Photo courtesy of Jonathan Jenkins

Sacrificial service

Alabama pastor to serve as chaplain of 9/11 memorial stair climb

By Grace Thornton
TAB Media

Jonathan Jenkins says the generation that's coming along today will mark time by the COVID-19 pandemic.

But for his generation, it was Sept. 11, 2001, that was defining.

"I was a college freshman in 2001, and so I was just starting to pay attention to the world," he said. "It gave me a sense of what was at stake."

It gave Jenkins a sense of something else too. Two decades ago, as he watched two commercial jets fly into the Twin Towers in New York City — and then watched first responders risk their lives to

save as many people as they could — the experience instilled in him a deep appreciation for that kind of sacrifice.

'In the name of Christ'

"It's the kind of sacrifice Christians would do well to embody in all different areas of life — that willingness to be sacrificial in their service in the name of Christ for their fellow man," he said.

Four years later, Jenkins

became a pastor so he could preach every Sunday about Christ's ultimate sacrifice. And five years after that, when he was presented with the opportunity to become a volunteer firefighter, he said yes to that too.

"I started getting involved there at the station and absolutely fell in love with it," said Jenkins, pastor of First Baptist Church Kinston. "The camaraderie, the difficulty, the (See 'Jenkins,' page 14)



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Photo by Mitchell Bruce

Doug Rogers greets members at the BCA Dessert Fellowship on June 13 in Nashville, an annual event preceding the Southern Baptist Convention.

State Board's Rogers celebrates BCA milestone

As Doug Rogers — current president of the Baptist Communicators Association — works on the organization's fall forum that starts Sept. 16, he's also celebrating a milestone.

It's been 35 years since he first joined BCA, a professional organization of communicators who serve in editorial, public relations, electronic media, photography, management, marketing and graphic design positions principally within Baptist agencies and institutions.

"I became a member through the invitation of a supervisor while I was a student working in the public relations office at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary," Rogers said. "I've remained a member all these years because its value in my life, both professionally and personally, has increased every year."

Rogers, now director of the office of communications and Cooperative Program at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, has served in other roles for BCA in the past — president, 2003–04; program vice president, 2006–07, coordinating the organization's annual professional workshop held in Mobile; missions co-vice president, 2011–12; co-awards chair,

2014–15; and professional development coordinator, 2018–21.

"Most of the professional relationships I've formed can be traced to BCA, and I am certainly a better, more effective Christian communicator because of this organization," he said.

He's got a family connection to the organization this year too — his daughter, Bethany Franklin, is serving as awards chair-elect. BCA gives awards every year to encourage professional excellence among association members and to recognize members who have done exemplary work, and Franklin will be a part of that process.



FRANKLIN

She serves as media and communications director for Valley View Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa and as communications specialist for Tuscaloosa Baptist Association.

Fall forum

This month's BCA fall forum is an online event led by members for members, designed to provide both encouragement and professional development in a variety of areas.

The sessions will premiere on the BCA Facebook page Sept. 16 and feature prepared content as well as a live Q&A time with leaders. (TAB Media)

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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‘Lord, walk before us, behind us, to the left and to the right’

Flipping back through my 2001 mementos, I found a note I had written on Sept. 11: “Life freezes for Americans. No one knows what is next.”

People across the nation sat stunned, confused and scared throughout that horrific day and for weeks and months to come.

I don’t remember what the argument of the day was for Americans 20 years ago, but I remember how it was quickly forgotten and how the country united over a common enemy.

All of our perspectives changed about what was really important in life — and we all found ourselves more focused on our faith, at least for a time.

As life gradually returned to a more routine rhythm, I remember being hesitant about flying. Traveling by plane had never scared me before, but suddenly I was uneasy and knew it was connected to the four planes hijacked in the attacks.

After settling into my seat and securing my seatbelt for that first post-9/11 flight, I whispered a prayer asking for protection as we lifted off.

“Lord, fly in front of us, behind us, to the left, to the right and above and below our plane. Protect us on this flight. Lift us

up from here in Birmingham, keep us safely in the palm of your hand until you set us down smoothly in Fort Lauderdale.”

What God did with my prayer and how it played into the events of that uneventful and routine flight three months after 9/11, I can’t tell you, but I do know that reaching out to Him to share my heart and ask for His help calmed my spirit and reminded me that He was with me.

20 years later

Now, 20 years later and right around the anniversary of that day that pierced us all deeply, we find ourselves reeling in

pain again from actions by the latest version of extremist groups.

What to do and how, when and where are questions that need answering. Some days I’d love to be sitting around the table helping make the decisions, but most days I’m simply grateful I’m not responsible for making the tough calls in these situations.

However, I’m reminded that I am called to pray for those who are evaluating the intel, discerning who to trust and not trust and attempting to outline a plan.

“Lord, give our country’s military and governmental leaders clarity of mind, peace in

their spirit, trustworthy friends and allies, accurate information, extra energy and protection out in the field right now.

“Equip their families and close friends to become a source of strength for them. Remove difficult and unnecessary distractions so they can think clearly and calmly — and toward the greater good, not focused on selfish ambitions or motives.

“And, Lord, for those in leadership who know you, give them an overwhelming sense of you, an assurance that defies understanding, and the courage to let your light shine through them so that those who don’t know you will see it and be drawn toward it.

“And for our brothers and sisters sitting in the most frightening of situations in Afghanistan right now, protect them, cover them and assure them. Saturate them in your peace and let them know we are with them in spirit and are lifting them up to you, Father.

“Walk before them, behind them, to the left, to the right, above and below them.

“Thank you that you are with us through all the difficulties of this life and that we can hold tightly to you even as we journey toward our forever home with you.”



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

Your Voice



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

Witness to 9/11 attack recalls how tragedy drew her to faith

By Christina Ray Stanton
New York, N.Y.

In September 2001, my husband and I were newlyweds. We had just moved back to New York City and found a rental in the Financial District on the 24th floor of a building that featured a terrace overlooking the World Trade Center, which was just six blocks away.

On the morning of 9/11, I was awakened by Brian screaming that a bomb had gone off in the World Trade Center. We rushed onto the terrace and watched the scene before us: people running across the highway to the Hudson River, the ambulances, fire trucks and police speeding down the highway, as well as the fire that shot out from either side of the building.

That was the start of the terrible day that changed our lives forever.

[Unable to stay in our apartment in the weeks that followed,] I became worried about the mounting bills while we were displaced.

We weren't used to asking for help, but a close Christian friend encouraged me to go to Redeemer Presbyterian Church for monetary assistance. She told me people from all over the world had donated to Redeemer and that I should apply to receive aid.

Although I had attended church when I was growing up in Florida, it had been years since I had a relationship with God. I believed self-reliance and hard work would get me what I wanted. What did I need God for? My husband felt the same way.

But here we were, unemployed, suffering from PTSD, relying on the kindness of strangers. Asking for assistance is nothing I'd ever

done before, and it was challenging to accept help. My Christian friend urged me to go anyway.

The director of the division managing those funds handled things with dignity and grace and alleviated my embarrassment over being there. The church quickly produced a check that covered our bills, and we subsequently decided to make Redeemer our home church.

A lot has changed for my husband and me since 9/11. It has caused us to reevaluate our relationship with

our careers, with each other and with God. Through that indescribable event, God provided and revealed to us a new hope and a new future.

God was a present help and refuge through one of the worst days in American history and the worst day in our lives for sure. Because of that experience, we were molded more into His image, and we enjoy a deeper relationship with Him. We have freedom to give away in increasing measure to others as a result.

For the past 20 years, we have

lived with the assurance that through faith in Christ, we don't have to fear anything and our brokenness is where He meets us in His strength.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Christina Ray Stanton is author of "Out of the Shadow of 9/11: An Inspiring Tale of Escape and Transformation." In 2017, she founded a Christian non-profit called Loving All Nations. A native of Florida, she attended the University of Montevallo. Read her full article at tabonline.org/911-story.

A lady crying in the harbor: A 9/11 reflection

By John Giles
Luverne, Ala.

Her name is Liberty, and she is a 22-story tower of strength overshadowing New York Harbor.

She symbolizes to the world the best in freedom and democracy. Through the course of time, she has greeted millions crossing onto her soil from abroad with a hearty welcome to the land of the free and home of the brave.

As she greeted the crisp freshness of the early fall morning of Sept. 11, 2001, little did she know what plans were underway to take her down.

Only time will reveal the full mission of her adversaries, but her own foundation was shaken, as innocent means of transportation were suddenly turned into well-orchestrated and efficient lethal weapons of

mass destruction only seen before animated on movie screens.

She weeps way into the night with the children whose moms and dads will not be there to kiss, embrace and tuck them in bed.

She hears the echoes of wailing from spouses and loved ones globally grieving from the depths of their souls.

Her heart aches, pierced by a gulf of unanswered questions, broken cell phone calls and clear final messages of love and farewell left on answering machines.

Although her tears will forever tarnish her copper brow and cheek, this lady stills stands.

Today her face is pointed in the wind as a flint, her shoulders are square, and she is on a providential mission to seek justice, heal and restore. She can only accomplish this insurmountable feat because this land she represents is "one nation under God, indivisible."

And so this great lady says goodbye to all of those who have fallen. She salutes, as if to signal "until we meet again."

We are reminded that one day, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away."

"God, bless America, stand beside her and guide her," for Your stabilizing hand ensures she will prevail.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This reflection, adapted for print, was written Sept. 14, 2001, three days after the 9/11 attack. TAB shares it in remembrance of the 20th anniversary of the attack to honor the thousands of lives lost and thousands more changed forever as a result. Read the full article at tabonline.org/911-reflection.

“You can’t follow Jesus and hold hands with the devil.”

SHANE PRUITT

director of next generation evangelism for North American Mission Board

[The Myers Mallory State Missions Offering] is an excellent opportunity to support many of the ministries of the [Alabama Baptist] State Board of Missions that go directly to help so many where we live.

Kenneth Baggett
director of missions
Salem-Troy Baptist Association

Faith comes alive when we apply Scripture to our daily tasks and concerns. My need for discernment is to understand the Scriptures and areas in my life where I need to apply its teachings. (Ps. 119:125:

“Give discernment to me, your servant; then I will understand your laws.”)

The Bible goes to work when we apply it to affected areas. It gives us lessons, commands and examples that we can put into practice.

Diane Smith
Oxford, Ala.

In the past month, there has been a rise of deep grief across our nation. The rise of deaths among younger Americans due to COVID-19 is becoming apparent. The pain and agony of family members losing their spouses, parents and

children is beyond words. ... Grief is real and being experienced by great numbers of people.

Losing anyone we love is difficult to put into words. In interacting with these grieving people, what becomes clear to me is the extravagant grace of God rising each time in the need of the hour.

Daily and step by step, God gives them grace to walk through dark days of deep grief and pain that is unimaginable. Even through all the grief, God is seeing people through.

Ronnie Floyd
president and CEO
SBC Executive Committee

From the *Twitterverse*

@JamieKDew

Monday [Aug. 30] 7:45PM for @NOBTS: Overwhelmed with gratitude. God protected our people. God protected our school. God’s people are rising up to help us & the city we love so much. We have some inconvenience in front of us, but I am filled with hope. #SchoolofProvidenceandPrayer

@micahfries

I’ve never seen a more painful, heartbreaking season than the one we are in now. And COVID hasn’t caused it so much as I fear COVID has revealed what was under the surface for a lot of us, myself included. I’ve never been more convinced of our collective need for God’s grace.

@terrysharpimb

“If you look at the world, you’ll be distressed. If you look within, you’ll be depressed. If you look at

God, you’ll be at rest.” —Corrie ten Boom

@DerwinLGray

People will leave a church over politics before they will leave politics for a church.

1.5 hours on Sunday vs. 20 hours a week feeding on cable news and its political partisans ranting, is shaping a lot of people’s theology for the worse.

God will not be mocked.

@EdLitton

All too often we are witnesses to who we are and not to who Jesus is. Help us Lord to be consumed with Jesus and forgetful of ourselves, so that we might bear witness of You today.

@blondeorthodoxy

If it’s real wisdom, it’ll be pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, merciful, full of the Spirit’s fruit,

impartial and free from hypocrisy. [James 3:17] It might be factually accurate, even theologically precise, but if it’s devoid of those qualities, it isn’t wisdom.

@jackngraham

It’s a very good idea not to allow our churches to be battlegrounds over vax mandates ...

@LysaTerKeurst

When I am deeply hurt by something someone has done or said, I have to give myself permission to be honest about my feelings. But I don’t have to compound the hurt by reacting out of those feelings.

I don’t want today’s reaction to become tomorrow’s regret.

@nathanafinn

“In principle the whole point of Christianity is that it offers a story which is the true story of the whole world.” —N.T. Wright

Encouraging news from the pews

Recently, a statistic from Lifeway Research Executive Director Scott McConnell caught my attention: the way church members viewed their church’s approach to handling the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Overall, church members are pleased with how their church, and as a byproduct their pastor, handled the pandemic.

[When asked to respond to the statement] “I am proud of how my church has responded during the COVID-19 pandemic,” 86% of respondents agreed with that statement either strongly or somewhat. This is encouraging news to decision-weary church leaders.

What can Southern Baptists do with this research?

1. Find a way to show appreciation to your pastors and church leaders. No one except Jesus makes the right decision all the time, but our pastors, working with deacons and other church leaders, navigated the pandemic decisions well. Find a significant way to tell them, “Thank you.”

2. Remember the squeaky wheel principle. Never let a handful of unhappy church members set the tone — or the direction — for how the Lord is leading the church forward through the church’s designated leaders.

3. Remember to be patient with one another when we are in unprecedented times. Our leaders were forced to lead through previously uncharted waters. Those of us who follow need to remember to be patient with our leaders and with one another during times like these.

May the Lord continue to bless His churches and their leaders with the wisdom they need to walk us through whatever may come our way.

Todd Gray
executive director
Kentucky Baptist Convention

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‘Catastrophic’ Ida, devastating path

Louisiana officials, Southern Baptist Disaster Relief expect lengthy response

By Carrie B. McWhorter
TAB Media

Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief teams will be part of a massive cleanup effort in Louisiana in the aftermath of Hurricane Ida, which struck the state Aug. 29 as a Category 4 storm.

Ida’s strong winds downed trees and power lines, causing what officials deemed “catastrophic transmission damage” to the region’s power infrastructure. Heavy rains caused localized flooding of several cities in the storm’s path.

Several deaths are attributed to the storm.

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

escaped major damage, according to the seminary’s president, Jamie Dew (see story, page 7).

But many churches, ministries and residents in hard-hit Louisiana communities were not so fortunate.

More than 80 Southern Baptist churches in south Louisiana suffered structural damage, according to Louisiana Baptist Convention Director of Missions John Hebert.

Across four parishes

Churches in Terrebonne, Lafourche, St. John the Baptist and Jefferson parishes were damaged, Hebert said.

First Baptist Church in Reserve received extensive damage to the interior of its



Facebook photo

The sign at FBC Reserve, Louisiana, provides a reminder of the strength of Hurricane Ida’s winds. The church’s fellowship hall roof also was damaged, flooding the interior of the building.

fellowship hall and education space when portions of the roof blew away.

Global Maritime Ministries, which works with sea-

farers and maritime workers in southeast Louisiana, reported major damage at its River Parishes Ministry Center in Reserve and roof

damage at its New Orleans Ministry Center. GMM officials said that even as they assess their own recovery needs, they have reached out to contacts in the maritime community to see what needs exist there as well.

Opportunities

“We will begin to assess the ministry opportunities and needs we can help meet,” according to Stephen McKinney, GMM assistant director.

Even before Ida made landfall, Southern Baptist Disaster Relief was planning its response. And within hours, disaster relief teams from several states had set up command centers at churches near the most affected areas.

Six mass feeding units were operating as of Sept. 2 in coordination with the Red Cross, each capable of providing thousands of meals each day for residents who were still without power, as well as for first responders and volunteers working in affected areas.

Mel Johnson, lead mission strategist for Autauga Baptist Association and



Facebook photo

Global Maritime Ministries’ River Parishes Ministry Center in Reserve was in the direct path of Hurricane Ida. The center, which serves the maritime community in southeast Louisiana, received extensive damage.



Facebook photo

Volunteers with Missouri Baptist Disaster Relief serve meals to Hurricane Ida survivors at First Baptist Church Mandeville, Louisiana. SBDR set up six feeding sites around New Orleans.

a member of the Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief task force, said admin teams, assessors, chaplains and volunteers with feeding, chain-

saw, shower/laundry and flood recovery units were all ready to deploy before Ida hit. ABDR expected to help with cleanup in Mississippi, Johnson said, but damage there was much less severe than expected.

As part of the coordina-

tion between state conventions through Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, Alabama will partner with South Carolina Baptist Disaster Relief in Louisiana, he added.

The disaster response in Louisiana is likely to last multiple weeks, he predicted, and volunteers will be needed to meet a wide range of needs, including flood recovery for homes impacted in the area.

Johnson urged Alabama Baptists to pray for disaster

relief volunteers and leaders as they plan and respond to the many needs created by the storm.

Johnson said chaplains especially need prayer, as they are, in his words, the “tip of the spear in terms of sharing the gospel to provide help, healing and hope with those who are in crisis.”

To donate to hurricane relief, go to sbdr.org/donate.

Monetary donations for hurricane-related disaster relief efforts may be sent to: Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, Attn: Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief, P.O. Box 681970, Prattville, Alabama 36068-1970. Online donations may be made at sbdr.org/donate.



Yony Matute photo

Along with debris being scattered in the parking lot of Williams Boulevard Baptist Church in Kenner, Louisiana, following Ida, the church’s education and office spaces were damaged.

New Orleans Seminary classes resume online

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary resumed classes online Sept. 7 as the city and region continues to clean up from Hurricane Ida.

The campus was without power in the days following the storm, but at press time, NOBTS president Jamie Dew expected electricity to be restored much sooner than the initial estimate of 2-3 weeks.

Officials in the city described Ida’s impact on the New Orleans power grid as “catastrophic transmission damage.”

Despite Ida’s strong winds and heavy rains, damage at the seminary was minimal, Dew said —

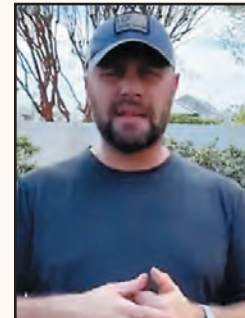
primarily trees blown over and minor roof damage to some buildings.

In a Sept. 1 update, Dew said debris was awaiting the wood chipper and roofers were on-site to make repairs.

Dew pledged the seminary’s support to students, staff and faculty displaced by Ida, promising NOBTS administrators would do what they could to help each member of the NOBTS family.

He also said donations were coming in to help displaced students and faculty.

“Let us know how we can help you,” he said. “We’re grateful for you. The Lord will get us through this.” (Carrie Brown McWhorter)



Screenshot

NOBTS president Jamie Dew speaks in a video on the seminary’s website,

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Valleydale hosts Caskey Center's 'No Restraints'

By Dianna L. Cagle
TAB Media

Mac Brunson wasted no time in challenging pastors of small and bivocational-led churches.

"We don't like to tell that to our congregation or to our people, but deep on the inside we feel incredibly inadequate to do what we're doing," Brunson, senior pastor of Valleydale Church in Birmingham, told participants of No Restraints, an event organized by New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary's Caskey Center for Church Excellence and held at Valleydale Aug. 13–14. "Every preacher struggles with this."

Teaching out of Joshua 1, Brunson referred to the new Israelite leader's fear.

"God didn't call him to be adequate," Brunson said. "He didn't call you to be adequate. He called you to be obedient."

As a pastor Brunson followed well-known pastors W.A. Criswell at First Baptist Church Dallas and Jerry Vines at First Baptist Church Jacksonville, Florida. Brunson related to Joshua's fear: Moses had led for so long, but now it was Joshua's time.

"If you will be obedient, God will take care of the adequacy," Brunson said.

Thomas Strong, dean of Leavell College at NOBTS and bivocational

pastor of Metairie Baptist Church in Louisiana, also spoke at the event.

The Caskey Center was founded in 2014, and hosted the first No Restraints in 2015. It was held for five years on the seminary campus, and this year in April traveled to two locations in Montana — Billings and Missoula.

Keep costs low

"Our intent is to make it more readily available," said Mark Tolbert, director of the center and NOBTS professor of preaching and pastoral ministry.

The center provided funds to help cover costs for students attending the event and related programs.

Donny Yarbrough, pastor of First Baptist Church Glencoe, was awarded the Steve Caskey Pathfinder Award,

given to bivocational or small church ministers who have found a way to reach people for Christ in their community.

Tolbert said Yarbrough credited the Monday morning prayer NOBTS encourages its students to pray for a gospel conversation that week.

"He prays that every day," Tolbert said. "It's been life-changing for him. It's increased his passion for evangelism."

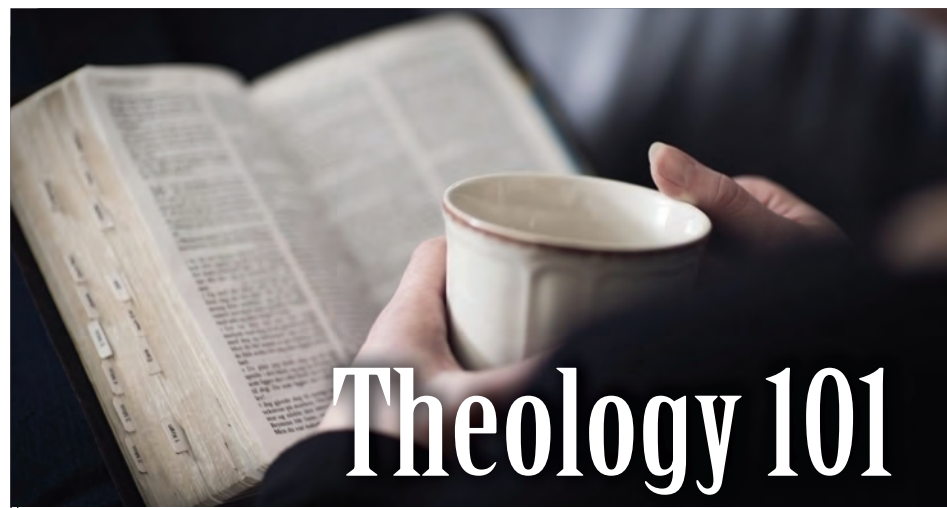
The next No Restraints is planned for April 22–23 on the NOBTS campus in New Orleans. Read more at tabonline.org/no-restraints.

For more information, visit caskeycenter.com.



Photo by Dianna L. Cagle

Mac Brunson, senior pastor of Valleydale Church in Birmingham, leads a breakout session during the No Restraints event held by NOBTS' Caskey Center for Church Excellence and hosted at Valleydale Aug. 13–14.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

The Spirit's Ministry

Filling and Controlling

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
TAB Media

Having previously considered the Spirit's work of convicting, teaching and guiding believers, as well as enabling them to live and serve in love, this week's focus is on the Spirit's important work of filling and controlling God's children.

Every genuine Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, according to Romans 8:9: "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His."

Ephesians 5:18 goes a step further with the command, "Be filled with the Spirit." Such is the testimony concerning the gathered believers on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:4: "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit."

Immeasurable

Of course, the Holy Spirit is not a substance to be measured in terms of "partially filled," but is a divine Person who is present or not present — never partially present.

Since the Holy Spirit cannot be apportioned piecemeal and is not a substance that can be measured, believers have understood that to be filled with the Spirit is to be under the Spirit's control or dominion.

The idea of "filling" as "controlling" is found in the account of Jesus healing a paralytic, a miracle said to have resulted in onlookers being "filled with fear" (Luke 5:26).

Fear was not a substance

poured into them until it filled them. Rather, fear gripped them and became the controlling emotion of the moment.

In a similar way, John 16:6 records an occasion when Jesus said to His disciples, "Because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart."

Fullness

The idea, of course, is not fear or sorrow being substances that fill people, but emotions that take control and for the moment dominate. Hence, we might say a person who is filled with the Holy Spirit is one who is allowing the Spirit to control thoughts, emotions and actions.

Stephen was one of seven men appointed to a special ministry to widows. Acts 6:5 describes him as "a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit."

Like faith, the Holy Spirit cannot be apportioned or measured in terms of partially filling someone. Again, the idea is that faith, as well as the Spirit, dominated or controlled Stephen's actions, so what others saw on the outside was evidence of what was possessing and influencing his conduct.

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.



Importance of pastoral support

Ministers learning to lean on local peers again for encouragement

By David Roach
TAB Media

A pastor in southwest Alabama's Bethel Baptist Association was feeling low. He had preached at another church but failed to receive the requisite vote to be called as pastor. Now he had to return to his church, explain what happened and hope they would take him back.

The association's monthly ministers' conference was just what he needed. The pastor shared his situation while others listened. Then they recounted their own experiences, read Scripture and prayed for him.

The discouraged minister went back to his church, and today "all is good," thanks in part to the network of pastoral support, said Mike Snow, Bethel director of missions.

That pastor's experience is representative of the way ministers receive encouragement, according to a new study from Lifeway Research. Released in July, it found most pastors feel supported by a network of local ministers. In Alabama, that stems from a variety of approaches to ministerial fellowship across the state.

If ministers aren't fellowshiping with each other, Snow said, "they're missing something."

Numbers back relationship

According to Lifeway Research, 82% of U.S. Protestant pastors agree they feel supported by peers in their region. Just 14% disagree and 4% aren't sure.

For most, support comes from a relatively small group of peers — 54% of pastors say they personally know and spend time with fewer than 10 other local pastors; 27% know 10–15; and 19% spend time with 16 or more peers.

Perceptions of support increase the more fellow pastors they know.

Pastors who strongly agree they feel supported spend time with an



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average of 17 others. Those who somewhat agree spend time with 10 peers; those who somewhat disagree with eight; and those who strongly disagree with five.

Small church pastors tend to know the fewest ministry collaborators. Among those with fewer than 50 in worship attendance, 12% of pastors say they only know one or two other local peers. That number drops to 6% among pastors with 100–249 in attendance and 5% for those with 250 or more.

Associations are seeking the means of pastor fellowship that works best for their region.

Methods vary across Alabama, said Rick Barnhart, director of the office of associational missions and church planting with the Alabama State Board of Missions. Some associations maintain a traditional pastors' conference, where pastors gather periodically for a message from one minister and discussion of ministry challenges. Other associations have moved to regional gatherings rather than one large conference.

The COVID-19 pandemic spurred others to begin online fellowships.

"Pastors having friends in their own church can be a sensitive

thing," Barnhart said. "So they need to have friends that are peers or mentors ... for accountability, for encouragement, so they don't resign every Monday morning when their adrenaline levels are low and they get a slightly depressive spirit."

In Mobile Baptist Association, approximately 15 pastors gather each Monday for a sermon and a discussion.

"It's a fellowship and then an opportunity for each one of us to share the gospel with each other" to "lead us into being better servants," said Billy Ray Robinson, associational ministers'

"The wisdom of being connected with ministry colleagues for pastoral wellbeing ... often gets pushed back."

Thomas Fuller
Beeson Divinity

conference president and pastor of Fellowship Baptist Church in Chunchula.

In Etowah Baptist Association, director of missions Craig Carlisle has organized pastor meetings by zip code to help ministers. That approach has helped bring bivocational pastors into fellowship with their peers, Carlisle said.

"Pastors tend to be loners by nature," Carlisle noted. Fellowship with a small group of peers "gives them an opportunity to be real, to be open, to share their hearts and what they're actually going through."

Thriving Pastors Initiative

Samford University's Beeson Divinity School is so convinced pastor interactions are important, it has launched a five-year Thriving Pastors Initiative, centered around small groups of pastors across the state that convene to encourage one another.

The pandemic drove those groups online, but their interactions still provided comfort for some who were "at the end of their ropes," said Thomas Fuller, director of the initiative and associate dean at Beeson.

It "aims to help pastors thrive in congregational leadership by improving the quality of relationships pastors have with one another," according to the initiative's website.

The small groups stem in part from research by Notre Dame business professor Matt Bloom indicating pastors receive more social support from other pastors.

"The wisdom of being connected with ministry colleagues for pastoral wellbeing is not a brand new idea," yet it has "been regarded as an elective or secondary matter," Fuller said. "In all the press for time" it "so often gets pushed back in our priorities. It's a good and encouraging trend that many pastors are beginning to recognize, that it is not nearly as elective as maybe they once thought it was."



Myers-Mallory

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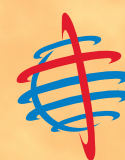
A WORD FROM OUR STATE LEADERS

"Last year was a challenging and difficult year, to say the least. But more than anything, it was a year where we could truly see the faithfulness of God. As our state missionaries reached out to pastor after pastor inquiring about how we could pray for and support them, they echoed God's heart for His flock. He was and is our Hope in difficult times. As the clouds have begun lifting this year, we are seeing a harvest of fellowship and evangelism from all those prayers. The pandemic also revealed and reminded of the great faithfulness of Alabama Baptists. Thank you for your steady giving to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering. Your giving helped our Great Commission Ministries provide hope and healing in the midst of uncertain times. Let's go forward now and fill our state with the Good News of the Gospel. I truly believe the best is yet to be."



Rick Lance

State Missionary and Executive Director
Alabama Baptist State Board of Mission



Alabama Baptist
STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS



Candace McIntosh

Executive Director
Alabama Woman's Missionary Union

"Perseverance and faith. These are two words that have taken on new meaning during the past year. As I have dug deep into my own personal faith journey, I have been so encouraged by the way our Alabama Baptists have persevered through unprecedented times. Our pastors, state missionaries, volunteers and my staff at Alabama WMU have bent and flexed and adapted in ways we never thought possible. ...BUT GOD. With Him, all things truly are possible! I want to thank you, leaders around the state, for all you do to support the Week of Prayer for State Missions and the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering. Your prayers and support are crucial to our Great Commission Ministries as they share fresh hope during these brighter days. It is so uplifting to see the resilient growth now taking place around the state. Please stay the course, and let's work together to make this Week of Prayer the best one yet."



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3 stories you should know



AP Photo/Jose Luis Magana

Afghan refugees arrive at Washington Dulles International Airport Aug. 27. U.S. troops are out of Afghanistan for the first time in nearly 20 years, and thousands were evacuated with them. Some Baptist leaders see this as a moment where “the Lord is doing something” among the nations. In an Aug. 26 webinar, leaders expressed their concerns and their hopes in the wake of the U.S. withdrawal. Read more at tabonline.org/afghan-crisis. (TAB Media)

Lifeway in ‘new season,’ Mandrell tells trustees

Lifeway Christian Resources President and CEO Ben Mandrell said Lifeway’s next phase of ministry will be united around “one clear mission — serving local churches.”

“God is calling us to embrace a new season,” Mandrell said during a meeting of Lifeway trustees held Aug. 23–24 in Nashville. “I believe Lifeway has great days ahead as we push forward into the future with confidence.”

Trustees approved a \$217 million budget for the 2021–2022 fiscal year that includes a net operating loss of \$5 million. However, CFO Joe Walker said projections for the rest of the year are strong, with Vacation Bible School gaining strength through the summer, and sales of Bibles, short-term studies and church supplies growing. (BP)

Texas first in nation to have ‘heartbeat’ law

A Texas law that prohibits abortion when a fetal heartbeat can be detected became effective Sept. 1 in a barrier-breaking development hailed by pro-life advocates.

The U.S. Supreme Court’s refusal to block enforcement of the measure in response to a last-ditch request by abortion-rights organizations meant the law became the first heartbeat ban to take effect in the U.S.

The Texas Heartbeat Act’s prohibition on abortion when a fetal heartbeat can be detected can bar the procedure as early as five to six weeks into pregnancy.

The Supreme Court did not comment on its decision to let the law go into effect. The court has agreed to hear a case involving a Mississippi law that bans abortion after 15 weeks during its next term, though a date has not been set. (BP)

Headline news from around the Southeast

Arkansas

Over the summer due to COVID-19, Woodland Heights Baptist Church in Conway hosted backyard Vacation Bible School events, reported Arkansas Baptist News. The church decided to host backyard VBS all summer after seeing “so much fruit, especially with kids who might not normally come to the building,” said Steve Lasiter, children’s and outreach pastor.

Georgia

Having a debt of \$2 million just four years ago, members at Peavine Baptist Church in Rock Spring, Georgia, gave generously throughout the pandemic and the church retired its debt. To celebrate, Pastor Joel Southerland and the church decided to give a recent week’s offering of \$100,000 to two church planters who were struggling financially because of COVID-19 and two church plants, The Christian Index reported.

Mississippi

With humanitarian crises in both Haiti and Afghanistan, the executive committee of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board unanimously approved \$50,000 for Southern Baptists’ Send Relief ministry. Half of the \$50,000 is earmarked for Haiti, ravaged by an earthquake and a hurricane, and the other half will assist refugees from Afghanistan, The Baptist Record reported. A proposed 2022 Cooperative Program budget of \$30,231,786 also was unanimously approved by the executive committee and by the full convention board and will be considered by messengers at the MBCB annual meeting.

North Carolina

The Baptist State Convention of North Carolina is restructuring to prioritize local churches and associations, reported The Baptist Paper. The convention will be divided into five groups, with

each group having a director who will report to Todd Unzicker, the convention executive director. With these changes, the future of the Biblical Recorder, North Carolina’s 188-year-old Baptist paper, is unclear, but plans will be released after the board meeting on Sept. 13. Biblical Recorder Editor Seth Brown has been named director of convention relations for the BSCNC.

South Carolina

A group of seven young men and women served as South Carolina Baptist Convention Summer Catalysts during the 2021 summer. The group partnered with churches throughout the state to build relationships and share the gospel in the community. Activities included building digital resources, planning block parties and youth concerts, conducting apartment complex and homeless ministries, delving into rural community outreach projects and more.

NEWS

Alabama news

ALABAMA CRENSHAW ASSOCIATION

▶ **Mark Seals** is the new pastor of **New Ebenezer Baptist Church, LaPine**. Originally from Birmingham, he has served churches in Alabama, Mississippi and Florida. Seals holds an associate's degree from Leavell College of New Orleans Seminary. He and his wife, Karin, have two children and three grandchildren.



SEALS

AUTAUGA ASSOCIATION

▶ **White Pond Baptist Church, Marbury**, will hold its homecoming service Sept. 26 at 9:45 a.m. Pastor Donnie Burns will speak, and Spoken For will sing. Lunch will follow.

BALDWIN ASSOCIATION

▶ **First Baptist Church Bay Minette**, celebrated "150 years plus one" Aug. 1 after last year's celebration had to be postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Our testimony is all about God's faithfulness in this community and how He has utilized our church to be a witness for 151 years," Pastor Chip Starnes (right) said.

During the special service, those present watched a video featuring the history of the church with narration by Starnes and testimonies from former pastor Henry Cox.

"We stand on the shoulders of men and women over 150 years who had a vision for the church,"



Photo courtesy of Dalton Campbell

Starnes said in the video. "They have come, they have worked, they have served the Lord, they have done what their call in life was to do at this church. ... All we're doing is continuing to take the message that never changes to a culture that may change but their central need of the gospel never changes."

Dalton Campbell (left) of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission also presented a plaque during the service.

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

▶ **Danny Wood** was named pastor emeritus of **Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills**, on his last day as pastor (Aug. 15). George Wright is the new senior pastor and will preach his first sermon Sept. 12.

BUTLER ASSOCIATION

▶ **Fire in the Field** will be held Sept. 19–23 at 7 nightly with evangelist Ken Freeman at the YMCA Field in Greenville. Danny Dean is director of missions.

COOSA ASSOCIATION

▶ **Mountain View Baptist Church, Childers-**

burg, was "full of people" for its 75th anniversary celebration Aug. 1, according to church member Jearldine Heath (left, with Carson Heath). "It was a good day enjoyed by everybody," she said.

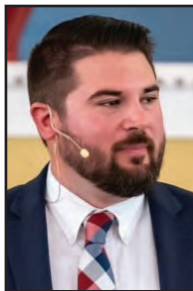
During the special service, former pastor Jimmy Wilson shared memories of his years at the church, and other visiting ministers were recognized. Music director Marie Caldwell led the choir and congregational singing. An anniversary plaque was provided by the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, and a covered-dish lunch followed the service. The celebration kicked off a weeklong revival. Roger Singleton is pastor.



Photo courtesy of Lonette Berg

ETOWAH ASSOCIATION

▶ **Andrew Brock** is the new pastor of **Kyuka Baptist Church, Attalla**. He previously served six years as associate pastor of Victory Baptist Church, Guntersville, and prior to that as youth minister at Bethany Baptist Church, Horton, and Walnut Grove Baptist Church. Brock holds a bachelor's degree from Auburn University, a master's degree in pastoral leadership from



BROCK

Covington Theological Seminary and a master's in instructional leadership from the University of West Alabama. He and his wife, Jennifer, have one child.

JUDSON ASSOCIATION

▶ **Union Springs Baptist Church, Newville**, will celebrate homecoming and its 125th anniversary Sept. 26 at 10:30 a.m. Special music will be provided by the Byrd Family. There will be gifts and door prizes, and the contents of a 25-year-old time capsule will be displayed. Jim Cordes is pastor.

NORTH JEFFERSON ASSOCIATION

▶ **Zac Reno** is the new pastor of **Enon Baptist Church, Morris**. He previously planted the Saline County campus of The Summit Church, Benton, Arkansas — the third campus of the now-four-campus church. Before that, he served as senior pastor of Arley First Baptist Church. He did his undergraduate and graduate studies at New Orleans Seminary and graduate work at Union University, Jackson, Tennessee. He earned his doctor of ministry from Beeson Divinity School. Morris is Reno's hometown. He and his wife, Kimberly, have three children.



RENO

SAND MOUNTAIN ASSOCIATION

▶ **Manna on the Mountain 2021** will be Sept. 13–15 at Grace Tabernacle New Home Bible Camp, Henagar. Nightly services begin at 6:30 p.m. and Tuesday and Wednesday morning services begin at 10 a.m. Featured speakers are Jeff Laborg, Garret Fitch and Kevin Hamm. The Mark Trammell Quartet will provide music. The event is sponsored by the Sand Mountain Baptist Association, the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions and individuals.

Persecuted church

Christian couple's acquittal sparks calls for beheadings in Pakistan

LAHORE, Pakistan — After a Pakistani court overturned the blasphemy conviction of a Christian couple on June 3, Islamic extremists called for the pair, an attorney and two judges to be beheaded.

Lahore High Court overturned the 2014 conviction of Shagufta Kausar, mother of four, and her husband Shafqat Emmanuel, a paraplegic. The couple were accused of sending text messages allegedly disrespectful of Islam's Prophet Muhammad. Supreme Court attorney Saif Ul Malook said extremists are calling for the beheading of him, the couple and the two judges who ordered the couple's release.

For six years, the high court had repeatedly

adjourned the couple's appeal of their death sentences. The European Union Parliament passed a resolution in April to review Pakistan's GSP+ status and mentioned the couple's case.



MS photo

The U.S. Department of State's 2020 International Religious Freedom Report reveals that at least 35 people received death sentences last year under Pakistan's blasphemy laws.

Pakistan is No. 5 on Open Doors' 2021 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian. (MS)

Jenkins uses opportunity to point others to Jesus

(continued from page 1) ability to be able to help and see somebody's bad day go from horrible to a little bit better because of our efforts — it's a blessing."

'In the crucible'

And it provides opportunities to share the love and truth of Christ. He says when his fellow firefight-

ers "know you're in the truck with them, you're in the crucible with them and you're there for them, it provides a lot of opportunities to share with them."

He's now the chaplain of the Kinston Volunteer Fire Department too.

And last year, Jenkins got to be a part of sharing that truth with an even bigger

crowd while they honored the men who gave their lives on that defining moment 20 years ago.

As part of the 9/11 Memorial Stair Climbs, he and nearly 400 others across 11 states climbed 110 flights of stairs to commemorate the climb of the first responders who went up into Twin Towers on Sept. 11, 2001.

Jenkins took part in the event held at a resort in Panama City that had 11 flights of stairs. He and other firefighters — some in full turnout gear, others in workout clothes — along with other first responders and volunteers climbed the 11 flights of stairs 10 times.

The event honored those who gave their lives and also raised money for the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation and Emerald

Coast First Responders Association.

"I did this climb specifically as a firefighter to help commemorate the service

of those who lost their lives and to point those around me to the value of sacrificial service," Jenkins said.

When he reached out to organizers before the event, they asked him to serve as event chaplain.

As part of the opening ceremony he led the bless-

ing of the helmets and patches. He will do that again this year as he and others remember the 20-year anniversary of the attacks.

"I took this opportunity to point everyone in attendance to the earthly example of the 343 firefighters who lost their lives on 9/11," Jenkins said, "but most importantly to the eternal example of Jesus surrendering His life on Calvary so that others may live and have life eternal, abundant and free."

For more information, visit firehero.org.



Photo courtesy of Panama City News Herald
Firefighters and community members walk the stairs during the 2017 stair climb to commemorate the climb of the first responders to the Twin Towers on Sept. 11, 2001.

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Alpharetta, Ga.



DR. JUNIOR HILL
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West Side Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Ala., is seeking a full-time pastor. The pastor should possess a conviction to preach from the holy Bible. He must provide pastoral care for our congregation and provide visionary leadership for the future of our church. West Side Baptist is a Southern Baptist church located at 713 Mountain Street, Jacksonville, AL 36265. To submit your resumé or recommend a candidate for this position, please use wbsbcjax36265@gmail.com, ATTN: Pastor Search Committee or mail resúmes to: West Side Baptist Church, ATTN: Pastor Search Committee, 713 Mountain Street, Jacksonville, AL 36265.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

First Baptist Church, Uriah, is prayerfully seeking a bivocational pastor. Please mail resumé to: First Baptist Church, ATTN: Pastor Search Committee, P.O. Box 337, Uriah, AL 36480.

MINISTER OF MUSIC

First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Ala., is seeking a full-time or part-time candidate to lead our worship ministry. Please submit resúmes to: office@fbcwoodstock.org.

BIVOCATIONAL WORSHIP LEADER

FBC Gallant in Gallant, Ala., is prayerfully seeking a bivocational worship leader. Please email resúmes to: fbcgallant@gmail.com.

TWO POSITIONS

We are in need of a bivocational student director and a music director. Ezra Baptist Church, 1512 Toadvine Rd., Bessemer, AL 35023. Please send any resúmes to: Michael_cwbc@yahoo.com.

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New Hinson Baptist Church in Slocomb, Ala., is seeking a worship and/or youth pastor to lead a blended worship service

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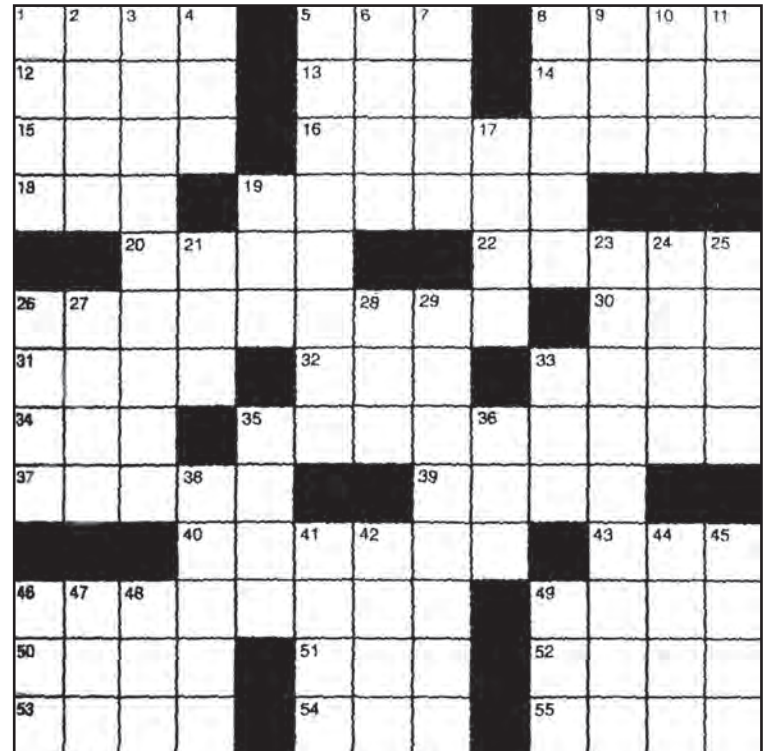
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CHRISTIAN crossword

ACROSS

1. He that soweth the good ___ is the Son of man. (Matt. 13:37)
5. A woman's short haircut.
8. Abound.
12. I looked, and behold a ___ horse. (Rev. 6:8)
13. Before. (poetic)
14. Tear apart.
15. For ___ the days that were before the flood. (Matt. 24:38)
16. Not Jews.
18. Aves.
19. There shall be ___ death. (Rev. 21:4)
20. Mine entrance. (Mark 14:32)
22. Decree.
26. Prepares for war.
30. Symbionese Liberation Army. (for short)
31. Ye shall find a colt ___, whereon never man sat. (Mark 11:2)
32. And in those days he did ___ nothing. (Luke 4:2)
33. Pull along the ground.
34. ___ "King" Cole.
35. Provides insufficient wages.
37. Pale.
39. Evaluate.
40. Pacing with the clock.
43. Let the brother of ___ degree rejoice in that he is exalted. (James 1:9)
46. Jacob's son by Rachel's maid. (Gen. 30:8)
49. Word with "ebb" or "neap."
50. Fabled monster.
51. ___ ye here, while I shall pray.



By Lee Esch Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

19. Insect egg.
21. Mom's other half.
23. One of Moses' charges.
24. Hath not the potter power over the ___. (Rom. 9:21)
25. Labels.
26. Italian mountain.
27. Soldiers unaccounted for.
28. There is a ___ here, which hath five barley loaves. (John 6:9)
29. Endless time.
33. Station. (abbr.)
35. Part of a whole.
36. Tattered cloth.
38. Anesthetic.
41. Conceal.
42. I say the truth in Christ, ___ not. (Rom. 9:1)
44. Fragrance.
45. Jesus ___. (John 11:35)
46. And Cain ... dwelt in the land of ___. (Gen. 4:16)
47. Four days ___ I was fasting until this hour. (Acts 10:30)
48. Expert.
49. Strike gently.

DOWN

1. Health resorts.
2. For we have seen his star in the ___. (Matt. 2:2)
3. John the Baptist's mother.
4. He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his ___. (Ps. 10:9)
5. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only ___ Son. (John 3:16)
6. Utah city.
7. For there shall ___ night there. (Rev. 21:25)
8. Attempted.
9. Electric fish.
10. Compass direction.
11. Physicians. (for short)
17. Three. (Spanish)

Join with churches across the nation on November 7 to

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for children in foster care in Alabama.

Whether meeting in person or online, you and your church can raise awareness and support for even more children in foster care on **Stand Sunday**, in connection with Orphan Sunday! Here are some ideas:

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alabamachild.org/standsunday

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alabamachild.org/needslist



Alabama Baptist
CHILDREN'S HOMES
& Family Ministries

stand
sunday



Bell wins Inspirational CMA's Comedian of the Year

By Tracy Riggs
TAB Media

Only a few days after he recorded a live DVD at Stardome Comedy Club in Birmingham, Mickey Bell was named Comedian of the Year by the Inspirational

Country Music Association. The award was announced Aug. 26 and comes just a few years into Bell's decision to do stand-up comedy for a living. Comedy has always been part of Bell's life, a strategy he used as a defense mechanism during

childhood but now uses to share hope. "I had a lot of insecurities, so I reverted to comedy so that I could take away the possibility of getting hurt or picked on," Bell recalled. "I would go ahead and pick on myself to deflect what I thought would be coming from others."

"It was almost like I was trying to take away their power from hurting me." Becoming a stand-up comedian wasn't Bell's goal though. He has been on stage in various capacities since he was 10. He began by doing a short comedy set along with music — he also is an accomplished pianist.

Stumbled into it

Out of the blue, he started getting calls to perform his act at various events.

At first, Bell's wife was cautious, taking vacation days to support him on the



Photo by Tracy Riggs

Mickey Bell records a live DVD at Stardome Comedy Club in Birmingham on Aug. 24.

road. After seeing his packed schedule, she decided to quit her job, saying, "You may have stumbled onto something here. Let's do this!"

Bell also deals with clinical depression and shares the struggle during performances. Audiences respond to his honesty.

"I am who I am, mistakes, scars and all. I guess I've

come full circle with this," Bell said.

This month through October, he'll join Unspoken and Josh Wilson on tour and is releasing a new comedy CD with parody songs.

Both the CD and his DVD will be available on streaming services and at concerts. Visit themickeybell.com for more information.

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For September 12

Explore the Bible

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JOY OF ADVERSITY Philippians 1:12–26

Open Doors (12–14)

We naturally think of prison as a place where criminals are placed in order to be punished. Paul was a criminal, not for any violent offense, but for preaching the gospel.

In the first century, it was illegal to create or take part in a new religion unless it was approved by the Roman Empire.

Judaism was an approved religion and therefore, was not a criminal offense to practice. Christianity, however, was not given the same benefit, and so Paul was in trouble.

Typically, people avoid behavior that would send them to prison, but Paul's imprisonment had the opposite effect. Christians who heard of Paul's trials were emboldened to share the gospel.

Mission Accomplished (15–18)

While Paul was in prison, some other Christians preached the gospel trying to take advantage of Paul's absence, trying to undermine his ministry. Maybe they were seeking to become more well-known than Paul or to dishearten him.

Even though these people were trying to hurt Paul, he focused on the fact that the gospel was being shared and people were coming to know Jesus. Paul serves as a great example for us to look past personal slights and focus instead upon the expansion of the kingdom of God.

God Honored (19–20)

Paul was confident the prayers of the Philippians would bring him encouragement to continue to press on in service to the Lord.

Christian ministry can be lonely and a struggle. When we face opposition, it is easy to get down and focus on our plight. However, when we see other Christians living out their faith and when we know they are praying for us, it shows our solidarity with all believers everywhere and it brings encouragement.

Therefore, we need to be praying for our persecuted brethren all over the world. We need to pray they will

remain faithful in the midst of persecution and represent Christ well, sharing a clear presentation of the gospel to those who persecute them, prayerfully leading to their salvation.

Even if the persecution leads to their death, God is glorified as Paul points out. God is able to use our tragedies to bring Himself glory.

A great example of this is seen in the death of Jim Elliot, missionary to the Auca Indians in South America. His desire was to see the gospel shared with this violent tribe. In attempting to do this, Elliot and four other missionaries were killed by this tribe.

While this seems like a major setback, this event is what God ultimately used to bring salvation to this tribe. These missionaries honored God in their life and death and, just like Paul, are a great example for us today to likewise honor God in life and in death.

Christ Alone (21–26)

These verses reveal the confidence of Paul's salvation. In the midst of trials, it is easy for us to get discouraged and long for heaven. This world is not our home (John 15:19).

For many Christians in the U.S., the main desire in life is to get a job, make money, perhaps get married and die in peace. Persecution and suffering are things to be avoided because God surely would not bring suffering on us.

However, we need to remember our inheritance is in heaven, not here on earth, and we strive to store up treasure there, not here (Matt. 6:19–21). Paul knew this well. But while he realized it would be better for him to be in the presence of Jesus, God had work for him to do here on earth. We are to be salt and light here on earth as well as an aroma, both of life to the believer and death to the unbeliever (2 Cor. 2:16).

God has work for us here on earth, and until He calls us home, we need to encourage others to fulfill the calling of God in their life, to see God honored and the gospel shared.

Bible Studies for Life

By James Riley Strange, Ph.D.

Professor of New Testament, Samford University



SURE OF A RELATIONSHIP 1 John 2:3–11, 15–17

Today is our second study in First John. The book deals with a split: False prophets have left John's congregations, but their doctrines have remained.

The key false teaching was that Jesus Christ did not "come in the flesh" (4:2; 2 John 7), a common heresy in the second to fifth centuries A.D. Last week we saw John dispels this notion when he says, "The blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1:7) and "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (2:2). John is referring to the Greek translation of Old Testament passages where an atoning sacrifice restores the divine-human relationship (see Lev. 25:9; Num. 5:8).

Jesus would not be a sin offering had He neither bled nor suffered bodily death. For John, what Christ's followers do with our bodies also matters.

Last week we noted that John talks about walking either away from God or with God: "in darkness" or "in the light" (1:6–7). He is combining two other biblical ideas: Light refers to knowing what God desires and to "walk with God" and "before God" refers to doing that desire (see Gen. 5:22; 17:1; Mic. 6:8). Walking requires a body: eyes for seeing and limbs for doing.

Walk in obedience to God's commands. (3–6)

In verse 3, John clarifies the metaphor of walking: We must obey Jesus' commandments.

The false prophets might have claimed to possess special knowledge about Jesus Christ.

John says, the one who knows Him will obey Him. And what commandments are we to obey? Of the many things Jesus said to do, John focuses on the command to love our fellow Christ-followers.

The clause, "the love of God is perfected," is vague in both Greek and English. Who is doing the loving, God or us? I think the ambiguity is deliberate: John means both God's love and how we work out that love.

The NIV's "made complete" is helpful, for John is speaking of God's love reaching maturity in us. Jesus Christ, in whose body God's love was fully expressed, is our model.

Walk in the light so that you don't go blind. (7–11)

John expands the idea introduced in 1:5–6. He begins by referring to John 13:34–35, where Jesus gives the disciples "a new commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." Hence, John's commandment is not new.

Indeed, as John's gospel places the Word "with God in the beginning," this is "an old commandment that you have had from the beginning."

If God's love was fully expressed in Jesus, then it was fully expressed at creation. What is new is that God's love has become fully visible in Christ's atoning sacrifice.

If "the true light is already shining" yet we "walk in the darkness," then we have chosen blindness rather than sight. This willful ignorance leads to willful wrongdoing, in particular, hatred of our fellow Christ-followers.

Walk in the will of God, not the ways of the world. (15–17)

John uses "the world" to speak of everyone in the world, whom God loves and for whose sins Jesus died (John 3:16; 1 John 2:2), and, as here, to refer to attitudes and actions that are opposed to God.

Of these, John mentions only "the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches" (literally "in life"). Desire need not be sexual; craving anything — including happiness, peace of mind and security — can take God's place.

We can become fixated on these goods to the point that searching for them, or clinging to them, pushes aside pursuing the love of God.

It is easier to walk in darkness than we think, for darkness can seem like the light.

Thanks be to God that the true Light is always shining for us to see.

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs
TAB Media

Goodwin 'open to what God wants to do' through his stand-up comedy

Serious comic" would normally be regarded as an oxymoron. But that's exactly what you get when you listen to the relatable, funny and clean comedy of bow tie-sporting Mike Goodwin.

Over the summer, Goodwin competed for Season 16 of America's Got Talent. He did not make the cut of the Top 36 acts but was chosen to compete in the Wild Card show. Ultimately, he did not receive enough votes to advance.

"I want people to know that I'm out here and I'm an excellent choice for their events. I'm an excellent choice to spotlight as a role model," Goodwin said. "My wife and I just celebrated 21 years of marriage; I'm a father; I'm a brother; I'm a son. I want to be excellent in my craft, and I want to walk righteously before my God."

Goodwin started working at age 13, served in the U.S. Army and Army Reserves 12 years and then held positions like student orientation leader and resident assistant in college. He planned to be a higher education mentor for students who don't have many resources or opportunities.

Stand-up comedy changed everything. "I guess [it was] similar to my



MIKE GOODWIN

Photo courtesy of Mike Goodwin

salvation," Goodwin said. "When I found Christ, it filled a gap that I was trying to fill in other ways. Comedy and being on stage gave me the creative outlet for these thoughts and ideas that didn't have anywhere to go."

Big decision

In his early days of performing, Goodwin understood how challenging the field could be. He was cautious and patient, doing comedy part time while working other jobs to provide for his family.

During the 2013–2014 Christmas break, Goodwin was looking for an entry-level admissions counselor position when his wife, Rozalynn, suggested he pursue comedy full time. He discussed it with his pastor, Herbert Bailey, and with his blessing and his wife's support, it was "pretty much a done deal."

The pressure of performing in front of a live audience, millions of TV viewers and four critical judges could be a lot to handle for a husband and father of two — but one of Goodwin's favorite Scriptures is,

"Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them" (Ps. 119:165).

"It's so easy to be swayed by the opinions of others," Goodwin admitted. "I love the word of God, and it says I have great peace. So regardless of what happens around me and sometimes internally, I can have peace."

The comedian has opened for Tim Hawkins, participated in a USO Air Force and Army tour, worked a K-LOVE cruise, recorded a DryBar comedy special, performed at church and corporate events and more.

In his early years of performing Goodwin realized the focus of his comedy was on himself. Over time he has matured in his faith and shifted focus to ministering and blessing his audience.

"I don't come to the stage knowing everything," Goodwin stressed. "I come open to what God wants to do. I come open to what needs to happen. I'm prepared. I've done my

work to have a routine ... but I still stay open.

"I'm far more patient with myself and my life than I was as a younger man. ... I'm gonna walk this path. Wherever the path leads me, that's where I'm going."

Lessons learned

When Goodwin toured with Up Standing Comedy, organized by Timmy Boyle, the comedians performed in small venues like churches and coffee houses. The last show was at a firehouse.

"There might have been nine people in there. It was going to be the last time [the tour] would go to that particular city because the numbers weren't growing. ... So, it was like the farewell show. ... That was one of the best nights of my life — performing comedy with those nine people in a random fire department."

Goodwin tries to record all his shows on his phone. But this time, he just wanted to get it over with and leave.

"It was the most amazing thing, with nine people. It taught me a powerful lesson: You perform for the

people who are there, not for the people who are not."

Goodwin was inspired to try out for America's Got Talent during the pandemic. Before the shutdown, he didn't have time to explore other opportunities, but after slowing down, he recognized what he wanted to do. He now knows a lot of preparation goes into a major contest.

"You have to get your material approved. ... You submit it and it goes through legal. But before that you have to take a set that you've been doing ... and figure out which jokes you extract to do on national television for two minutes."

EDITOR'S NOTE

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