

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

INSIDE



Macedonia Baptist casts new vision for missions

◆ Page 8



Discipling an artist brings new creative outlet, gospel opportunities for pastor

◆ Page 10



See You at the Pole student prayer event to be guided over livestream

◆ Page 11



Beth Smith (left), ministry assistant to the pastor and administrator at First Baptist Church Enterprise, and Rachel Parmer, ministry assistant to the associate pastor and minister of music, work together often on various church-related projects and assignments.

Photo by Nicole Parten

A calling to serve

Baptist ministry assistants' network provides training, fellowship

By Erin Roach
TAB Media

Ministry assistants throughout the state have the opportunity to build relationships with each other and receive training through the Alabama Association of Baptist Secretaries, an organization designed to highlight their calling.

"We minister to people sometimes before the pastor can," Beth Smith, the association's president, shared with The Alabama Baptist.

"When someone is calling with a prayer request and is crying, we're able to sit there and cry with them. We're able to pray with them. Sometimes people call and everybody else is in a meeting or at lunch, and we're able to be the hands and feet of Jesus."

The association primarily gathers for an annual conference, postponed this year because of COVID-19.

Next year it is scheduled for March 6–9 at Shocco Springs

Baptist Conference Center in Talladega. Each conference offers worship, networking and training.

Financial classes

"We offer a lot of financial classes because a lot of smaller churches and associations only have one secretary, and she has to do finances as well as everything else," said Smith, ministry assistant to the pastor and the administrator at First Baptist Church Enterprise.

Classes include using specific computer programs, as well as month-end and year-end financial procedures;

others cover general office tasks and even grammar and proofreading "because we all have to proof the bulletin sometime," Smith said.

Some classes are part of a certification program the group offers to lend credibility to ministry assistants who have completed those courses, which include leadership, doctrine and administration.

Spiritual classes

"We offer spiritual classes," Smith added. "At the last conference, we had Les Hughes teach a class on how to study the Bible because a lot of

(See 'Roles,' page 21)



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Walsh to help TAB Media connect with pastors

Dave Walsh, pastor of Ariron Baptist Church, was aware of The Alabama Baptist before his daughter, Maggie, started working at the newspaper as an intern about a decade ago.

But once she spent some time on the staff of TAB Media — and then came back in a full-time role — he began to really be aware of all the resources the media and communications ministry had to offer for pastors and churches.

Now Walsh, in addition to his duties as pastor, has joined the TAB Media team in a part-time role as media and marketing consultant.

“My main focus will be working with pastors and churches to build those connections,” he said, adding that he wants to share with churches of all sizes how TAB can come alongside them as a ministry tool.

Pastor Connections

Part of his new role is coordinating an email newsletter called Pastor Connections that goes exclusively to senior pastors at least once a month.

“That’s the group that needs to be bolstered first,” Walsh said, noting the primary purpose of the newsletter is to curate informational and educational resources produced by TAB Media that will help pastors both personally and professionally.

It also provides a way to connect pastors with other Alabama Baptist ministries available through TAB Media’s sister entities and network.

Already the newsletter has drawn responses from pastors that have

allowed him to have personal conversations with them about their struggles and encourage them.

“I want to help church leaders who are struggling with the new normal,” he said. “I’m looking forward to making a little bit of difference.”

Walsh will also be joining the effort overseen by Debbie Campbell, director of communications, to share how individual church members, congregations and associations can effectively partner with TAB Media.

TAB Editor-in-Chief Jennifer Davis Rash said Walsh has already helped on a volunteer basis and she’s excited about making the role official.

“All staff members of TAB Media have close relationships with our Alabama Baptist family and we know those connections will only grow closer as we go forward, but we realized the need for a specific focus on senior pastors,” she said. “With the enhanced levels of pressure falling on church pastors, especially in recent days, we want to make it even easier for pastors to engage with the various resources we provide. The more I learned about Dave’s heart for helping other pastors and witnessed his own personal journey in discovering how TAB Media really can be a helpful partner for all aspects of life, especially for those involved in church life, I knew he would be a great fit.”

To sign up for the new Pastor Connections e-newsletter, send your name, church and email address to dwalsh@thealabamabaptist.org. (TAB Media)



WALSH

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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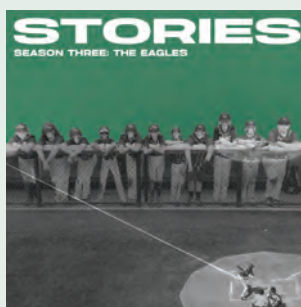
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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 19.

STORIES

SEASON THREE: THE EAGLES



Check out the trailer for season three at tabonline.org/stories.

The first episode will be released this Friday. More information will be available in next week’s issue.

Seasons one and two are currently available at tabonline.org/stories.

RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

By Jennifer Davis Rash

President and Editor-in-Chief



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Wide range of emotions surface during month of September

September sometimes shocks me with the various special emphases marked on the calendar. It's one of those months that shouldn't really seem that way, but it does.

Even more, it's the time we tend to ramp up for the sprint toward the end of the year.

Until Labor Day weekend, we don't have to think a lot about fourth quarter earnings or scheduling where we will be for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

But as soon as we wake up on that first Monday of September, wherever we are marking the Labor Day holiday, we are facing an end-of-year stare down.

Of course, football season is underway, and it basically makes everything better.

Homecomings, fall festivals and a much anticipated break from the humidity and triple-digit heat also lift our spirits.

Students are settled into a new school year (at least as best as they can be these days), and we all find a general routine.

Labor Day is when I like to sketch out an overview look at my schedule for the rest of the year and clamp down tightly on a plan for staying organized.

(Note my reference to "I like to do this," not that I actually accomplished it this year.)

After Labor Day, we marked the somber 20th anniversary of 9/11 and then got a boost with Grandparents Day on the 12th.

Jason and I have special memories of our grandparents, and I'm loving watching all the first-time grandparents around us.

(Funny note, when we selected photos for the Grandparents Day feature, I almost pulled the photo because the person in the image looked my age — until I realized, "Oh, wait, that would be accurate.")

The article below is what I wrote for Grandparents Day last year, and I wanted to share it with you again. Investing in the next generation is vital.

As we look toward the end of September, our family always adds a focus on Childhood Cancer Awareness Month in memory of my niece Belle, whose cancer was discovered in late September 2009.

And in Alabama Baptist life, September is the time we tip our hats to the Great Commission Ministries supported by the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering (see pages 12–13).

Say a special prayer for Rick Lance as he leads the team of state missionaries.

I'm always inspired by his deep commitment to the Great Commission, Cooperative Program and Alabama Baptists.

Bond between grandparents, grandchildren specific and special

Grandparents, we celebrate you this month, especially the tremendous role you play in the lives of your grandchildren.

And for the grandchildren out there, be sure to take a little time with your grandparents at least monthly, if not weekly.

The best gift you could give them at any point during the year is a phone call or visit where you focus on a real conversation.

Share what's happening with you — what's going well and where you are struggling — and let them share their memories.

You may hear some of the

same stories over and over, but I promise those are the ones you will always treasure and may end up telling your own children and grandchildren one day.

Tremendous opportunity

For the grandparents, you have a lifetime of lessons to share and have been given a tremendous opportunity to speak wisdom into the lives of these precious ones you also get to spoil.

For those without grandchildren, there are plenty of kiddos who could use someone with spiritual maturity to pour into their lives.

Pray for God to make your heart sensitive to those who need a grandparent.

And for the grandparents raising their grandchildren, know we realize your situation moves to an entirely different level.

I can't begin to understand the complexity of what that means for you, but I do know it takes you to hero status. Be willing to share with your support system how they can pray and help.

The appreciation and recognition for being a grandparent — however that is defined in your family — may not always be apparent, but be

assured your legacy will outlive you.

You may not always understand all the lingo swirling around with the grandkids, and their decisions may definitely concern you. But don't give up.

Pray diligently for each grandchild by name and situation, and pray for God to show you what to share and when to share it — and exactly how to best invest in and love each child.

TAB Media is grateful for the influence of grandparents and others in our lives.

—Jennifer Davis Rash

Your Voice



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

Trustworthy help for international needs

By Dr. Mark Randall
markrandall.com

As I read about desperate situations in the world, it is overwhelming to know how to reach out in Jesus' name.

The refugee crisis in Afghanistan and the earthquake disaster in Haiti are just two examples.

When my family went with our church to visit Children's Hope in Jacmel, Haiti, about five years ago, I thought I had already seen the worst in starvation and economic desperation after growing up in Zimbabwe.

It was shocking to see how in the Western Hemisphere there could be such a need.

As we conducted medical clinics and gave out medicines, the inability

to help Haiti was overwhelming.

There are many good organizations sending help internationally, but Send Relief (compassion ministry of SBC's North American Mission Board and International Mission Board) is the one I recommend.

Send Relief's mission

It not only sends food, but also tries to provide good drinking water by drilling wells and gives chickens, rabbits and goats so the people can continue to raise food to provide for their families.

Those who work with Send Relief know the needs of the people and how to meet them.

I appreciate trustworthy organizations after my first crazy experience

in distributing food. This came when I was a high school senior in Sanyati, Zimbabwe.

There was a drought in Zimbabwe that was especially severe in the northwest region called Tongaland, named after the tribe living there. The Tonga tribe had been living on the banks of the Zambezi and were used to fishing before the former Rhodesian government had forced them to relocate to a barren area of the country.

A grant from the Foreign Mission Board (now International Mission Board) had bought several hundred bags of mealie meal and beans for those starving in Tongaland.

[Another missionary kid] and I made the first attempt for food distribution in December 1980, using the hospital Land Rover and a 2-ton truck. The attempt was cut short by the rainy season and flooding.

About a month later we tried again. We got up early and Jeff drove the hospital ambulance with a translator up front, while I rode in the back seat. It was an experience driving this battered ambulance over the dirt roads.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Dr. Mark Randall is a physician in Winfield who grew up overseas and has served in many countries since. He is a graduate of Samford University and UAB School of Medicine. Read the full account of his food distribution effort as a teenager in Zimbabwe at markrandall.com/blog-posts.

There's not a single person in our church, not a single person in this entire community that hasn't been significantly impacted by this storm (Hurricane Ida). Our church gets to be this bridge between the hurting folks who are in our community and the help that comes through Jesus Christ.

Pastor Tim Moffett
Woodland Park Baptist Church
Hammond, La.

After seeing more devastation in Louisiana from another hurricane, I'm so thankful for the state disaster relief teams that have come in quickly to provide tens of thousands of meals for people in need. ...

This recovery will be a long process for the people of Louisiana. But the opportunities to show the love of Christ and share the gospel will be great when we serve others who are in the middle of this great time of need.

Bryant Wright
President, Send Relief

I am deeply moved by the spirit of cooperation that exists among our Southern Baptist family. State conventions, associations, the North American Mission Board and Send Relief all lead us to bring relief and the love of Jesus to stricken areas and hurting people.

Ed Litton
SBC president

Letters to the editor

I always enjoy reading Rational Thoughts and the one from Sept. 2 was especially encouraging and uplifting, in light of all that is going on in our nation and world.

Thank you for reminding us of this basic principle, that God knows what's going on. He wants to use us during the difficult days even more than during the restful days. I have been praying that we will see what He wants us to learn during this time. And that we will be reminded that our time on earth is short.

We should spend that time tell-

ing others about His great love and how they can receive His marvelous gift of salvation. May we be found faithful.

Pat Kines
Dothan, Ala.

Thumbs up on the Sept. 2 Rational Thoughts. I needed that bit of encouragement. You are right in that so many things are not good right now, but as mature Christians we've got to keep the faith and run the race to be the Light for so many.

Melissa Tidwell
Florence, Ala.

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“ Complaining, gossip and a self-focus are marks of spiritual immaturity. ”

DAVID JONES

associate dean for theological studies, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

Authentic servant leadership is the best leadership model for any organization. Unfortunately, not everyone has it within them to be a servant leader. This is where genuine Christian character intersects with effective leadership. If it's about you, it's not leadership.

Pastor Chris Richards
Immanuel Baptist Church
in Havre and Chief
Cornerstone Community
Church in Box Elder, on
the Rocky Boy Indian
Reservation, both in
Montana

The bravery we think we feel with our thumbs isn't actually bravery at all. It's the opposite. These tiny little screens often shrink our

empathy and courtesy to the size of our phones. And that's actually not who we are. We are actually a lot kinder than these screens and our thumbs trick us into being.

Here's a little tip. I do it almost every day as I want to respond to people online. I type out what I want to say, then I open up my camera and record myself saying it. If I can't send them the video of me saying it, I can't send the comment in the thread either.

Be kind today. Everybody is hurting in some way.

Carlos Whittaker
via Facebook

One of the primary tasks of the Church is Christian education. One of the primary avenues through

which this takes place falls under the responsibility of those gifted with teaching (Rom. 12:7).

For the purpose of helping us better understand biblical truths and revelations, God bestows the gift of teaching. This refers to one who has been endowed with insight and skills in setting forth the details and facts of God's word.

In our superficial society, the need for one who clearly explains the meaning of God's word can all too easily be overlooked or ignored.

We need proclamation, exhortation and invitation for sure. But we also must have explanation through the gift of teaching.

Morris Murray Jr.
Jasper, Ala.

A call to extraordinary prayer

We need each other now more than ever before, and we need God's power like never before in life and in ministry.

The current challenges across America and the world are extraordinary. Together, we need to respond with a commitment to extraordinary prayer and cooperation.

What is your ordinary pattern of prayer? How much time a day? How many days a week do you pray?

Whatever is normal for you needs to become extraordinary.

If you pray five minutes a day, then pray for 10 minutes a day.

If you pray an hour a day, then pray a few minutes more.

If your church prays two minutes in a worship service, then take it to five minutes.

Extraordinary prayer is praying beyond what is your ordinary practice. This could be in minutes, hours or days.

Extraordinary prayer is the greatest need as we live in and navigate through these extraordinary times.

While an avalanche of trouble is occurring, we operate through this trouble by committing to and practicing extraordinary prayer.

I believe God can do more in a moment than you can do in a lifetime. Do you believe this?

I believe God can do great things anywhere at any time with anyone. This includes you. Do you believe this?

I believe there is no great movement of God that has ever occurred that does not begin with extraordinary prayer of God's people. Do you believe this?

I plead with all of us today, we need extraordinary prayer and cooperation more than ever before.

Let's believe God together.
Ronnie Floyd
President and CEO
SBC Executive Committee

From the *Twitterverse*

@claysmith79

Though I am (weekly) tempted to do so, one of the worst things I can do in preparing sermons is to start the process by cracking open a commentary. They have a place. But only after I have sat with a text. Meditated/prayed upon it. Asked questions of it. Identified its structure.

@andrewhebert86

'We need to recover this idea that you can be both courageous and civil. You can stand strong in what you believe but also not dehumanize the people you disagree with.'
 —@dandarling

@shane_pruitt78

Besides the Holy Spirit, the greatest teacher in my life is our son, Titus. He doesn't walk but has taught me to be a better follower of Jesus! He doesn't talk but has taught me to be a better communicator of hope!

He doesn't sit up but has taught me how to stand in faith!

@ethicist

99% of the fruit of our gospel ministry remains hidden from us by God, for if we were fully aware of the effect of our Kingdom work, we'd be too prideful to be used by God.

@mhenslee

Pastor, preach the Word, point 'em to Jesus, and prompt 'em to respond. That's all you really need to do, but not in your power — it's His word, and they respond to Him. Just be faithful, and know that He is working for more than you realize. Even if you only hear crickets.

@DianeLangberg

Christlikeness is visible in character, not merely words.

@jasonkeithallen

"One requirement to be used as a leader in a movement of revival:

They must have the Spirit of God upon them." —Jonathan Edwards

@reglaurie

When someone has 20/20 vision, it means they have good eyesight. They see things with clarity. We need that kind of vision as followers of Christ because the Bible says that "where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29:18 KJV).

@Rgallaty

Theological institutions do a good job of teaching believers about God. They fall short in teaching believers how to be with God.

@richardblackaby

Take heart! The most painful lessons in life are also generally the most fruitful and long-lasting.

@drtonyevans

It always seems impossible until you pray.

An Alabama State University student helps a Tuskegee student move into her dorm at the beginning of the fall semester.

‘Missionally minded’



Photo courtesy of Zach Beasley

ASU students help campus minister start BCM at Tuskegee University

By Grace Thornton
TAB Media

When Zach Beasley took on the task of starting a Baptist Campus Ministry at Alabama State University in 2019, he started with one student who showed up for the first Bible study.

“For some reason, I wasn’t discouraged. I was like, ‘God, this means you’re about to do something amazing,’” Beasley said.

Two years later, ASU has a thriving BCM, and Beasley also started one this semester at Tuskegee University, another campus that hasn’t had a group in a while.

He did so with the help of student ministry leaders from ASU.

It’s a huge step for multiple reasons, Beasley noted. For one, ASU and Tuskegee are big rivals, so the cooperation and unity between the two schools’

students is not something he takes for granted.

Second, where ASU started with one student, Tuskegee started with 13 who committed to participate. That number quickly grew to 20.

“We’re brand new, but we’re already seeing much fruit,” Beasley said.

Growing disciples

Third, he’s seeing the growth of students at ASU to not only understand their Bibles and reach their friends but also to get a heart for missions beyond their own campus.



BEASLEY

“We want to orient our leaders with their heart bent toward leadership and the Great Commission,” Beasley said. “We’re training our students to be missionally minded as they pursue school.”

That goes for Tuskegee too, where he plans to hold Bible “boot camps” in the summer like he’s been doing at ASU. He also plans to continue involving students

from both campuses in missions work in Clarkston, Georgia, and in Kenya.

And he wants to keep disciple making going at home too, with older students mentoring younger students.

“Those who are now juniors and seniors are now investing in sophomores and freshmen. The cycle continues for the glory of the Lord,” Beasley said. “We are definitely about making disciples. Pray that the Lord will raise up more young people, freshmen and sophomores, to keep that going.”

For Beasley, starting a BCM at Tuskegee always was the plan. When his pastor — Terrence Jones at Strong Tower at Washington Park in Montgomery — first reached out to him about the campus minister role, it was to serve at both ASU and Tuskegee.

For Beasley and his wife — and Jones — planning to go to Tuskegee was like planning to go to their “Nazareth,” Beasley said — they are all Tuskegee alumni.

God’s timing

He wondered how it would go — if he would be accepted. He also felt like they were running behind on getting started — they had

planned for 2020 but had to step back because of the COVID-19 pandemic. But it’s clear God has opened the doors wide for ministry now, Beasley said.

“Pandemic-related restrictions at Tuskegee delayed us for a year, but we are already seeing students respond to the ministry there and are looking forward to fruitful ministry in the days ahead.”

**Mike Nuss
director of the office of
collegiate and student
ministries, SBOM**

Before students moved in for the fall semester, Beasley, along with Auburn University’s campus ministers Steve Thompson and Sean Thornton, prayer walked the campus. While they were walking, Beasley crossed paths with professors he knew, one of whom told him he could use her department’s auditorium for Bible studies.

Mike Nuss, director of the office of collegiate and student ministries for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said he is “excited about what

God is already doing and is going to do” through the Tuskegee BCM.

“It has long been our intention to restart ministry on this important campus, and the addition of Zach Beasley to our staff gave us the perfect opportunity to move forward with those plans,” Nuss said. “Pandemic-related restrictions at Tuskegee delayed us for a year, but we are already seeing students respond to the ministry there and are looking forward to fruitful ministry in the days ahead.”

“Those who are now juniors and seniors are now investing in sophomores and freshmen. The cycle continues for the glory of the Lord. We are definitely about making disciples. Pray that the Lord will raise up more young people, freshmen and sophomores, to keep that going.”

**Zach Beasley
BCM minister, Alabama State University and Tuskegee University**

Tangible ways to show Jesus' love

Chelsea church works to stay relevant, shine gospel light 'for as long as we can'

By Tracy Riggs
TAB Media

Despite alternating heat and pouring rain, on Aug. 7 a tiny church in Chelsea used a unique method to show their community they care. Giving away bags with a Chick-fil-A sandwich, chips, water, information about the church, a gospel tract and the pastor's business card, Mount Signal Baptist Church once again showed it isn't going down without a fight.

"This is our way of trying to better relate to the growing population around our church facility by saying, 'Hello, we want to serve you if we can,'" Pastor Leonard Irvin explained. "We are a small congregation, but our desire is to remain spiritually relevant in our community for as long as we can, as we try to share the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Regardless of whether you go to our church, some other church or to no church at all, as long as the sandwiches last, we will try to help you have a better day in Jesus' name."

Mount Signal has a history of "serving the Kingdom with what [they] have."

Reaching out

Founded in 1940, for its first year Mount Signal met in open air in a couple's backyard, not once being rained out. Two different times attendance peaked at around 125. Then from 1999 to 2001, only three faithful members kept the church going. In 2003, Irvin first preached there, later becoming pastor.

In 2008, Irvin decided they needed a shift in attitude from worrying over their tiny, struggling church to helping a ministry that was thriving.

As a supporter of Gardendale First Baptist Church, which was about to kick off a \$55 million building campaign, Irvin challenged Mount Signal to give its entire offering from one week's service — \$622.45 — to Gardendale FBC.



Photo by Travis Frontz

Members of Mount Signal Baptist Church in Chelsea distribute bags with a Chick-fil-A sandwich, chips, water, information about the church, a gospel tract and the pastor's business card to people in the community.

Gardendale FBC members were deeply touched. They used that sacrificial gift as part of their campaign and, in return, gave Mount Signal a love offering of \$28,157. Mount Signal used it to repave their parking lot, giving away most of the rest to needs in the community.

Though Mount Signal is a "senior citizen congregation averaging about 15 people per Sunday," Irvin continues to come up with innovative ways to be relevant.

"We have done revival services using local area ministers [some of them Pentecostal] to emphasize that no one church or denomination owns the gospel — we are all on the same team, just playing different positions on the spiritual field," Irvin

said. "In 2019, we hosted a special law enforcement memorial service in honor of slain Sgt. Wytasha Carter of the Birmingham Police Department, my department before I retired from police work."

The inspiration for the Chick-fil-A outreach came from Mark Clifton's "Mondays with Mark," in which he suggests ways to help small churches. Some at Mount Signal were concerned about the cost, but they let Irvin plan it.

Though the budget was tight, Irvin knew God controlled their finances, allotting enough for 200 sandwiches.

He talked to Daniel Wilson at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions about donating gospel tracts. Wilson also found a way to help toward the sandwiches.



Photo by Tracy Riggs

Pastor Leonard Irvin and a team of volunteers distributed Chick-fil-A to the community.

"I believe the Lord laid it on my heart to support Brother Leonard's outreach ministry because he is getting his church folk outside the walls of the building," Wilson explained.

"Brother Leonard is finding tangible ways to show Jesus' love to his community. Any time the evangelism office can help pastors and churches get into their neighborhoods to build bridges for the gospel, then we're all in."

'Seeds have been planted'

After nearly four hours, the 200 bags of food were given away. Through donations from community members who wouldn't take the food for free, and the gift of a couple not in the community who wanted to be part, the event ended up not costing the church anything.

"We ultimately don't know what will become of our effort, but seeds have been planted, and our part of the Chelsea community knows we care about them," Irvin said. "We were responsible for trying, and now it's the Lord's turn."

As long as Irvin is pastor of Mount Signal, he said, he will continue to encourage the small congregation to give what they can to reach out to the community.

"Then and now, God stepped in and multiplied our finances. We are in an equally adverse situation now as the one then, but we have learned that you can't outgive God. We may come to the point in the future that we have to consider church adoption/replanting to survive into another generation," Irvin said.

"I believe the church has bought into my thinking that if we have to cease operations at some point in the future, we would rather do that with an empty bank account than have money that was available for Kingdom service and never used. How do you explain that to God?"

Macedonia Baptist casts new vision for missions

By Grace Thornton
TAB Media

Morgan Bailey said his church is missions-minded — and in a year of change with the COVID-19 pandemic, that was something they wanted to hold onto.

The church gives 11% of its budget to the Cooperative Program, while investing a total of 20% of their budget in missions, and they wanted to keep that going. They also wanted to continue giving to special missions offerings, as well as funds for missionaries they support as a church.

Bailey said by faith, God helps churches like his do both.

And even though Macedonia Baptist Church in Ranburne — the church where he is pastor — wasn't able to schedule any group trips this year, they used it as a chance for some vision-casting.

This summer, Bailey and Kris Henderson, who serves as associate pastor for discipleship and students at Macedonia, visited Honduras and Guatemala to talk with partners about starting new works.

“Kris came out of a work there in Honduras. He was a missionary there,” Bailey said. “God worked it out where he ended up with us.”

Henderson was able to connect Macedonia with some underserved areas in Honduras, where church members can come alongside local pastors to hold Vacation Bible School, dental clinics or other events to meet needs.

While they were there, Bailey and Henderson also led a pastors conference and shared the gospel with a group of local policemen. Then in Guatemala, they met with pastors Bailey had known from his previous pastorate at Canaan Baptist Church in Bessemer.

One pastor — Oscar Lopez — has planted several churches in recent years, and Bailey

hopes Macedonia can go back next year and hold VBS at each of those.

During the trip, Bailey and Henderson also delivered portions of an offering at several points along their journey, which was collected for children's ministry during Macedonia's VBS.

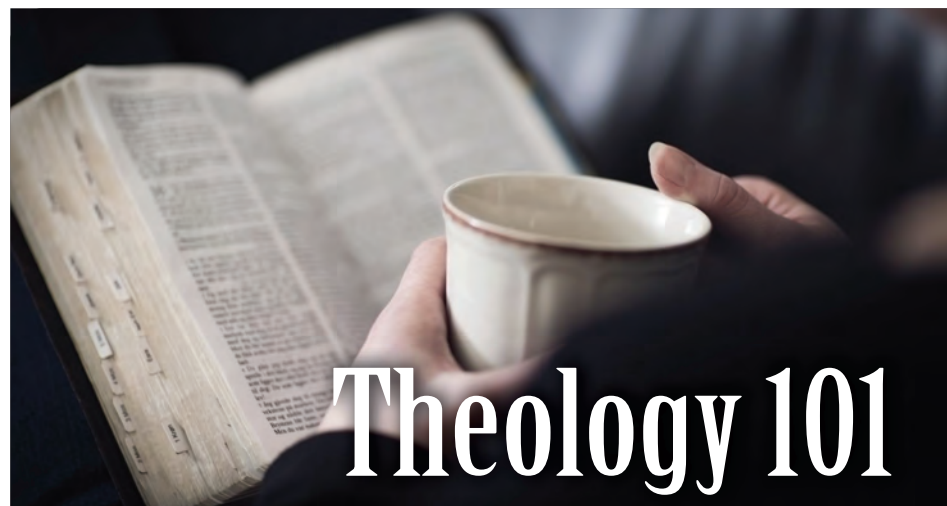
“It was from our children to their children,” Bailey said.



Photo courtesy of Morgan Bailey
Children who attended Macedonia Baptist's VBS gave money to help children in Honduras.



Photo courtesy of Morgan Bailey
Morgan Bailey (back, left), pastor of Macedonia Baptist Church in Ranburne, shares the gospel with police in Peña Blanca, Honduras, with the help of local missionary Omar Alvarado (back, right).



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

The Spirit's Ministry

Sealing and Sanctifying

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
TAB Media

Since the adjective that attaches to “Spirit” is “holy,” the result is a quality of being different from the ordinary or sinful. So sinful attitudes and actions cause grief to the indwelling Holy Spirit, and Ephesians 4:30 admonishes, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

A seal can serve a variety of purposes. It might convey the assurance of genuineness; hence, important documents may have an authenticating seal stamped or embossed on them. For example, graduation diplomas from an education institution usually bear the official seal of that school. It serves as a guarantee that authenticates an underlying authority for granting academic degrees.

The indwelling Spirit is God's provision of the guarantee of a believer's authenticity as one of His children. We read of this assurance in 2 Corinthians 1:22, which tells us God “has sealed us and given us the spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.” This truth is given a second time in 2 Corinthians 5:5, which says God “has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.”

This is a truth further established in the mouth of yet a third biblical witness, Ephesians 1:13–14, which declares, “Having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance.”

Not only a sign of authentica-

tion, seals might also serve as a means of security or protection, which was in mind when Jesus' tomb was ordered sealed. Not only a deterrent to theft, seals also sometimes serve as a guarantee against tampering, so containers of medication often carry the promise, “sealed for your protection,” along with the caution not to use it if the seal has been broken.

Believer's protection

A believer's protection against being severed from God is a comforting aspect of the Spirit's ministry.

The Bible tells us that as Christians, we are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:2). The sanctifying work of the Spirit is one of making forgiven sinners increasingly more holy.

While believers are not perfect this side of Heaven, the indwelling Spirit of God seeks continuously to enable advancement in Christlikeness with increasing evidence of holy thoughts and actions.

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.



'GOD'S TAKEN CARE OF ME'

Arley man says he's seen God's goodness through 33 years of paralysis

By Grace Thornton
TAB Media

September brings back good football memories for many people across Alabama.

But for Ron Wooten, it marks another kind of memory — this September makes 33 years since his neck was broken during a bad tackle while playing high school football.

The accident paralyzed him from the neck down.

"It was the second game of my senior year," said Wooten, who played both quarterback and linebacker for Meek High School in Arley, a small community in northwest Alabama.

They were playing at Red Bay High School when the tackle happened, and when Wooten came to, he real-

ized he couldn't move.

"And I said, 'Oh no, dear Lord — don't let this be happening to me.' And I just cried," Wooten remembered. "But when I did that — the Bible talks about a peace that passes all understanding — the most wonderful peace came over me. I quit crying. I just knew everything was going to be alright."

"God has been with us all the time, every day, every minute. We depend on Him for every single thing."

Ron Wooten

Wooten grew up at Meek Baptist Church and had a strong faith, so he asked the players nearby to pray for him. Both teams held hands and circled around him, and someone announced over the loudspeaker that the young man had asked for prayer.

From then on, Wooten said his life has been one marker after another of God's goodness.



Photo by Grace Thornton

This month marks 33 years since Ron Wooten's neck was broken during a bad tackle while playing high school football. The accident paralyzed him from the neck down.

Another man who heard Wooten share his testimony years later told him he had been mad at God for a long time, but when he heard Wooten share his testimony, he knew if Wooten could trust God's goodness, he had no reason to be angry for what had happened in his life.

'God's been good'

"I tell people to turn to God instead of getting mad at God," Wooten said. "We've had all kinds of things happen, but God's handled all of them."

Since Wooten was injured at 17, his mother, Betty, has cared for him, and his father, Don, did too until he died of pancreatic cancer eight years ago. Though they still pray Wooten will walk again, the family has seen God provide in other amazing ways even when times were hard.

"God's been good to us," Wooten said. "I've had some heartache, don't get me wrong. But God's taken care of me."

That's his message when he shares his testimony or teaches Sunday School, and a few years back when he served as pastor of Curry Christian Fellowship.

"God has been with us all the time, every day, every minute," Wooten said. "We depend on Him for every single thing."

It started with the fact that he was lying on top of a Red Bay player who never moved a muscle, even though it took three hours for a helicopter to arrive and transport Wooten to a hospital in Birmingham.

Later, that player and his father came to visit Wooten, and the father told him that since his son was a little boy, he had always kicked people off when he ended up in a pile. When the father asked his son why he hadn't automatically done that with Wooten, the son said something had "told him not to" this time.

Seeing God work

"I know that 'something' was God," Wooten said, noting he probably would have died if the player had kicked him off.

That night, some of Wooten's teammates asked the doctor on the field what his chances were, and he told them he didn't think Wooten would make it to the hospital alive.

But he did.

He made it through 27 days on a ventilator, during which time he lost 65 pounds. And he continued to see God work.

A changed life

When Wooten got home from the hospital months later, there was a letter waiting for him from a woman who had been in the stands the night of his accident in Red Bay. She wrote that when everyone had been asked to pray for Wooten, she knew she wasn't in a place with God where she felt like she could pray.

But that night she felt God stirring in her heart, and began a relationship with Him. "It changed my life," she said in the letter.

"I tell people to turn to God instead of getting mad at God. We've had all kinds of things happen, but God's handled all of them."

Ron Wooten

STRUGGLING TOWARD HOPE:

LIFE AFTER THE DEATH OF A SPOUSE

By Bobby S. (Bob) Terry

The sudden death of his wife launched Bob on a personal grief journey. It was more difficult and painful than he ever imagined as a Christian pastor. In this powerful story he shares his journey, as well as lessons learned as he struggled to put life back together. Bob offers insights into practical issues faced by those who lose a spouse and reflects on faith questions grieving people often ask.

AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE AT
SONCOASTPUBLISHING.COM OR [AMAZON.](http://AMAZON.COM)

PAINT, DISCIPLE, REPEAT



Photo courtesy of HGTV

Robert Mullins, pastor of Crossroads Community Church in Elmore, appeared briefly on the HGTV home makeover show Home Town Takeover, which was filmed in Wetumpka.

Discipling an artist brings new creative outlet, gospel opportunities for pastor

By Grace Thornton
TAB Media

Robert Mullins believes God can take ordinary things and make them into masterpieces. He's seen it happen in his own life and in the lives of people he's disciplined over the years.

But a while back, he saw it happen in a different way when one of those discipleship meetings turned into a painting masterclass. Mullins, pastor of Crossroads Community Church in Elmore, started discipling world-renowned artist Don Sawyer, and eventually Sawyer started a painting class on Wednesday nights at the church.

Artistic talent

Mullins joined the class, and Sawyer quickly realized his spiritual mentor had artistic talent.

Mullins was a graphic design major in college and has "always been an artist, always been doing something creative," he said.

When he was in seminary, he did freelance graphic design, marketing and advertising, and over the past 10 years he's been doing craft projects with pallet wood.

So it followed that when Sawyer wanted to take him under his wing, Mullins didn't protest.

"I started meeting up with him, hanging out with him for a couple of hours every week in his studio and painting with him," Mullins said.

The pastor started with brushes,

but quickly turned to a pallet knife. "I started painting on canvas or boards or anything I could get my hands on," he remembered.

'Home Town Takeover'

Paint, disciple, repeat. They did that for a while, then Sawyer invited him to be part of an art show in nearby Wetumpka, which was preparing to welcome the HGTV show "Home Town."

The television production usually features Ben and Erin Napier renovating homes in Laurel, Mississippi, but for "Home Town Takeover," they selected Wetumpka for a six-episode season that featured 12

major makeovers to homes, buildings and public spaces.

The city was chosen from more than 5,000 applicants, and the season was filmed from August 2020 to January 2021; it started airing May 2.

Sawyer assembled a group of creatives called The Village Artists, which includes Mullins, and started showing art.

"I painted a bunch of stuff and got some inventory for the show," Mullins said.

Then they set up easels in downtown Wetumpka during filming, and ended up with some quick appearances when it aired.

For more information, visit preachermanart.com or follow Mullins on Facebook or Instagram at [@preachermanart](https://www.instagram.com/preachermanart).



Photo courtesy of Robert Mullins

The whole experience has given Mullins a new platform to sell art both in Wetumpka and to fans of the show.

"The phone started ringing, and God just started bringing people to Preacher Man Art," which is what he now calls his painting business.

A number of people have commissioned paintings, and for fans of Home Town he's able to make the art even more special.

While at his son's wedding in Laurel, Mullins got a truckload of extra wood from Ben Napier's projects and makes it into frames for the paintings.

His signature pieces often include a night sky with the feel of Van Gogh's "The Starry Night" over a country church or the Bibb Graves Bridge in Wetumpka — or both. His art always includes a cross — something he hopes is a conversation starter both for him and the people who buy his art.

Unexpected bridge

"I hope the cross is something people ask about and that the story of Jesus comes through," he said.

Even though Mullins loves being a "preacher man" and a pastor, he said his newfound hobby has given him an unexpected bridge into the community, to build relationships with the purpose of sharing the gospel and keeping discipleship going.

"It's given me the opportunity to meet people I never would've met," he said.

See You at the Pole

Alabama teens experience God on international student day of prayer

By Hamilton Richardson

TAB Media

Some 30 years ago, a small group of Texas high school students met for prayer, which unbeknownst to them, would blossom into a movement that now surpasses 66 countries and brings hundreds of thousands of students together to do the most important thing they can — pray.

In early 1990, the group participating in a Disciple Now weekend was moved and burdened by God to begin praying for friends, schools and leaders. They drove to three local high schools, met at the flagpoles and poured their hearts out to God.

Not long afterward, the flag-pole prayer vigil spread to other students and other schools. It was dubbed “See You at the Pole,” and within the first year, 45,000 students were participating. As God grew the movement, it caught fire in other states and countries. Today, an estimated 1 million students around the world join in each year to pray for others.

First Priority

Greg Davis, president of First Priority, a nonprofit organization that works to improve the moral and spiritual well-being of students in Alabama, has been supporting See You at the Pole for many years and continues to encourage local churches and believers to participate.

“First Priority will help students anywhere in the state of Alabama (with planning),” Davis said. “We talk to youth leaders, and include [See You at the Pole information] in First Priority training.”

He noted that although there is publicity every year such as radio, television and print ads, most churches are ready for the event when it comes around in September because it has been a regular



Facebook photo

Students at Springville High School gather for last year’s See You at the Pole. “Christian students have a tremendous opportunity to influence their friends and peers for Christ,” Greg Davis, president of First Priority, says.

occurrence for so many years.

“We communicate ahead of time with the local churches to encourage their students to promote, plan, participate and pray at their campus,” Davis said. “We can provide prayer guides and other resources for those who request them. We share over social media and traditional media to remind everyone of the date. Sometimes they need a last-minute reminder.”

Davis added that because

Alabama has so many churches, the number of students participating every September is significant.

“In Alabama we see a bigger number as far as participation. We

have lots of churches, and they are pretty engaged,” Davis noted.

One important aspect of the annual prayer event is who leads it.

Student-led

“This is student-led, just as First Priority campus clubs are,” Davis explained, adding that the best thing adults, parents and church leaders can do is encourage,

support and coach students to be successful in ministry on their campus.

“Christian students have a tremendous opportunity to influence their friends and peers for Christ. They need us to let them know what and how they can actually do it,” Davis said.

School protocols

As with many aspects of life and ministry, SYATP has been affected by the reality of the coronavirus pandemic, and according to Davis, it is more complicated and difficult for students to plan this year.

“They have to make sure they follow school protocols,” he

explained. “But they are very passionate and typically deal with it all better than we adults do. We do see occasional examples of schools discouraging or not allowing SYATP or other student-led religious freedom gatherings. We remind school administrations that this is equal access, and the students must be treated just as any other group on campus.”

Other gatherings allowed

Davis said if there can be sports, band and other types of practices, there is no reason students cannot be allowed to gather and pray or worship.

As in 2020, SYATP will be livestreamed and will include a guided time of prayer beginning Sept. 22 at 7 a.m. and repeating in each time zone. Students are encouraged to share their experiences on their social media accounts and online. They also can download the Campus Prayer app, created by Claim Your Campus, in partnership with SYATP.

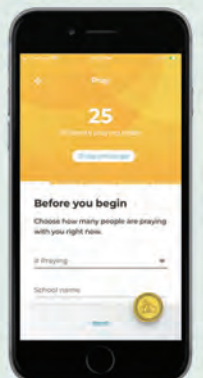
When asked about the biggest impact of SYATP, Davis said it has given students the opportunity to go public with their faith.

“They are not afraid to pray,” he said. “There’s a boldness that comes with that.”

Davis added that many students who have struggled to get through 2020 and the effects of the pandemic have been going to the event, praying and finding the Lord. “When we show up, He shows out,” Davis said.

SYATP will be livestreamed and will include a guided time of prayer beginning Sept. 22 at 7 a.m.

To support, promote or participate in this year’s See You at the Pole visit syatp.com, download the Campus Prayer app and find resources on how to pray, prepare, publicize and plan an event at your school.



Thank You

FOR PRAYING FOR STATE MISSIONS THIS WEEK!

Here are the very latest updates to the stories featured in the Week of Prayer for State Missions Prayer Guide.



Myers-Mallory
State Missions Offering
State Goal: \$1,200,000

Myers-Mallory.org



Alabama Baptist
STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS



Alabama WMU

In Spring 2020, Alabama WMU hosted its first Great Commission Conversations. Since then, 54 online gatherings have been held to date, connecting Alabama Baptists with missionaries around the world for a time of sharing, encouragement and prayer. In addition, online Ministers Wives Connections have restarted for the Fall with an expanded time length and a new evening time slot, providing much-needed support and inspiration to all involved.



Disaster Relief

Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief - The "Yellow Shirt Army" - is on the ground in Belle Chasse and Houma, Louisiana, following Hurricane Ida. They are currently providing ministry in the areas of chainsaw work, cleanup and recovery, mudout, roof tarping, shower unit, feeding and chaplaincy. The work there is expected to go on for several weeks. Your prayers and gifts are part of the fuel that keeps this army of volunteers on the job!



Church Planting

After holding worship gatherings outdoors and in various locations over the past year, Church at the Oaks began meeting at their new location, Bryant Conference Center in Tuscaloosa, on August 22 with more than 350 in attendance. It is an answer to prayer for church planter/pastor Britton Latham, as the new site helps provide the church more stability and consistency in reaching out to this university town.



Partnership Missions

At the end of this month, Jamie Baldwin will wrap up six months of volunteer ministry at Liberty Church in Craig, Alaska. During that time, around 70 Alabama Baptists from 13 churches and an associational team helped with Liberty's relaunch through Vacation Bible Schools, block parties, construction projects and community outreach. Liberty recently had 49 people in worship - the highest number during Pastor Cody Schwegel's time there - and celebrated a profession of faith as a result of a block party!



Church Revitalization

Since his arrival in June, State Missionary Rob Jackson has been on the road meeting with associations and pastors, helping churches become healthier. He is also developing a new reproducible model for churches to be balanced in their health and working with State Missionary Ken Allen to form cohort groups of pastors to foster encouragement and facilitate relationship building and knowledge sharing.

Remember, your gifts to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering support, in part, each of these Great Commission Ministries. Need resources for your church? Visit Myers-Mallory.org for downloadable print items, videos, social media art and more!

3 stories you should know



NAMB photo by Alexandra Toy

Southern Baptist Disaster Relief teams from 14 states are serving in Louisiana following Hurricane Ida. More than 80 churches, associational offices and ministry centers sustained damage due to the powerful storm. Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers are working out of the command center at First Baptist Church Belle Chasse, near New Orleans. Read more about relief efforts and ways to help at tabonline.org/ida-relief. (TAB Media)

Cooperative Program giving remains strong

Giving through the Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program for the 2020–2021 fiscal year remains steady as the end of the accounting year approaches.

The total amount given through the national CP Allocation Budget in August was \$16,869,720.70, which was 4.92% more than gifts in August 2020. August gifts were also 8.33% more than the monthly budgeted amount of \$15,572,916.67, according to the SBC Executive Committee. Total annual CP giving is 4.44% ahead of budget projections.

Tennessee and Alabama were the top two contributors for August with Tennessee at \$2.41 million and Alabama at \$1.58 million.

The fiscal year for CP receipts at the denominational level ends Sept. 30. (BP)

Florida Baptists launch Haiti relief efforts

Florida Baptists have launched a relief effort to help survivors and communities in Haiti following an August earthquake and flooding.

As many as 2,200 Haitians were killed when a magnitude 7.2 earthquake struck the Tiburon Peninsula in southern Haiti on Aug. 14.

Multiple communities were left without shelter, food and water.

More than 50 Haitian Baptist churches were affected by the earthquake. Tropical Storm Grace then slammed into the island Aug. 17, causing more damage and massive flooding. The 350 churches in the Florida Haitian Fellowship led by Even Jules, pastor of Bethel Evangelical Baptist Church in Delray Beach will lead the relief effort.

Go to fbaptist.org/haiti-ida-updates for more information. (TAB Media)

Headline news from around the Southeast

Arkansas

When Louie Heard, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Arkadelphia, was recently interrupted during his time of sermon preparation, he soon realized God was “at work to rescue the broken,” Arkansas Baptist News reported. Tyrene and his fiancée Bianca were seeking answers and healing for what the couple called “demon possession.” Tyrene professed faith in Christ and was baptized, releasing him from his demons. “This man was hurting and hopeless, but now he is healed,” Heard said.

Florida

When Hurricane Ida evacuees from Louisiana took refuge in hotels in Marianna, Florida, members of Trinity Baptist Church decided to help, WJHG reported. Many church members remembered their difficulties — and the kindness of others — after Hurricane Michael hit in

2018. Church members prepared and delivered a full dinner to evacuees. “We’re trying to do what we can ... and to serve the way Jesus calls us to,” Pastor Danny Mann said.

Georgia

Every day for the past month, 6:30 a.m. to 8 p.m., Brian Stephens, pastor of New Holland Baptist Church in Gainesville, has sat beneath a tent overlooking a bustling thoroughfare alongside his church — praying for the passersby, the Christian Index reported. “I’m sensing a move toward Jesus, a move toward prayer,” he said.

Louisiana

Donald Autin, deacon at Bayou Vista Baptist Church in Morgan City and a chief engineer on a supply boat that services oil rigs, credits God for protecting him and others aboard a boat during Hurricane Ida’s furious lashing in late

August, the Baptist Message reported. Pastor Steven Kelly described Autin as a “great guy who got saved in his adult years and is a very dedicated believer who loves the Lord.”

Mississippi

Earlier this year, 92-year-old Emma Stewart opened GUEST (God Using Emma Stewart’s Talents) House of Hope, a three-bedroom house in McComb that has provided shelter for 15 women and three children since its launch, The Baptist Paper reported. “You never get too old to serve God,” she said.

Tennessee

Tennessee Baptist Disaster Relief continues to aid residents of Middle Tennessee who were impacted by regional flooding Aug. 21. TBDR also has sent generators and other supplies to Louisiana after Hurricane Ida hit Aug. 29.

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

▶ **Vince Whittington**, longtime Alabama Baptist pastor, died Aug. 31. He was 79.

Whittington served as senior pastor and interim pastor of churches in Alabama, Texas and Georgia for more than 45 years. He retired from First Baptist Church Glencoe in 2007. He also served as pastor of First Baptist Church Monroeville (1981–1990); First Baptist Church Oxford (1991–1993); and Macedonia Baptist Church, Gadsden (1994–1998).



WHITTINGTON

A graduate of Campbell University in Buies Creek, North Carolina, and Southwestern Seminary, he was active in missions.

Whittington is survived by his wife of almost 59 years, Lynda; daughters, Teresa and Kristie; son, Mark; chosen son, David; seven grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

▶ **Carlos Gomez**, pastor of Iglesia Bautista de Center Point, died July 27. He was 81.

Gomez held a master's degree in accounting and a law degree, and he had a 26-year-long career in government finance before his retirement.

When he retired, he started teaching a Sunday School class for Spanish speakers at First Baptist Church Center Point. As the class grew, he was ordained, and the class developed into the church he led for more than 20 years.

Gomez' church received the original church charter for First Baptist Church Center Point, when that church officially closed April 12, 2021. Gomez was preceded in death by a grandson, James Carlos. He is survived by his wife, Daina; his sons, David and Walter; his daughters, Susan, Sharon, Angie and Sara; and 13 grandchildren.



GOMEZ

COLBERT-LAUDERDALE ASSOCIATION

▶ In August, the executive committee of Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association recognized **Eddy Garner** for 15 years as director of missions, saying they were "very thankful to the Lord for Bro. Eddy and his Christlike spirit."



GARNER

Garner said the time has "flown by." Over the years, he has gotten to help churches, encourage ministers, be involved in missions work with all the association's churches and watch the association's disaster relief ministry grow. "It's been a lot of fun, and it's been a tremendous blessing," he said.

COVINGTON ASSOCIATION

▶ About 21 years ago, **Charles Lennard** said "yes" to filling the pulpit at a church with 12 members just over the Florida line.

He was supposed to be moving to North Carolina, but he had a few months before the move and wanted to help while he could. Before the move happened, the church more than tripled in size and was still growing.

He felt God was at work, so he stayed. Fast forward about nine years, and the church was bursting at the seams, with no room to grow. Over time, God opened the door for them to combine with First Baptist Church Floral, a church with ample facilities but a small congregation. And now — 11 years after that — Lennard is retiring from First Baptist as pastor emeritus. The church thanked "Pastor Charlie" for his "time of service and faithfulness to God's cause" with a celebration Aug. 29.

He and his wife, Linda, plan to stay in the Floral area.

He has a doctorate in Christian counseling and plans to continue in personal ministry and pulpit supply where needed.

ELMORE ASSOCIATION

▶ **First Baptist Church Wetumpka** will celebrate its 200th anniversary Oct. 3. A breakfast is scheduled from 8:30 to 9:30 a.m., followed by a worship service at 9:45 a.m.

MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION

▶ **Art Long** is familiar with the first eight



LENNARD

verses of Ecclesiastes — and the truth that there is a season and a time for everything.

"The time has come for me to move on to what God has for me to do next," Long told the congregation of Eastmont Baptist Church, Montgomery, after 31 years of service.

"I may be retiring as your assistant pastor, but I cannot retire from serving our God," he said.

The church honored him and his wife, Kelly, with a reception Aug. 29 as they prepared to move to Greenville, South Carolina, to start the next chapter.

Long said the church was a special place — his children, Jacob and Katelyn, were born, grew up and were baptized while he was serving at Eastmont.

During the worship service on the day of the reception, Pastor Frank Bowling said he was grateful for the Longs' investment in the people of Eastmont.

"We all love you," Bowling said. "The testimonies are replete in this place of folks who have experienced God's grace poured out through you and through your ministry to them."



LONG

SAND MOUNTAIN ASSOCIATION

▶ The Fall Campmeeting begins Sept. 19 at 6 p.m. with services Sept. 20–22 at 6:30 p.m. at **Grace Tabernacle New Home Bible Camp, Henagar**. The featured evangelist is Tyler Blue.

Persecuted church

Christian pastor in Uganda burned to death in home by extremists

KIBUKU DISTRICT, Uganda — Islamic extremists murdered a Christian pastor June 30 in Uganda's Buseta village by burning his home with him inside it.

Local Muslims had warned Pastor Isima Kimbugwe "several times to stop sharing about Jesus, but he continued to lead Muslims to Christ, said his brother, Geoffrey Kadogo.

Kimbugwe left Islam in 2017 to become a Christian. He, his wife and two children had fled Buseta village after Muslims threatened his life for leading

five Muslims to faith in Jesus.

After fleeing, Kimbugwe worked for a Christian organization in Kampala until the pandemic caused the organization to close for lack of funding. Out of a job, Kimbugwe returned to Buseta. His wife and children, all Christians, remained with relatives in a different district where they had gone after Kimbugwe received the death threats.

Police have three suspects in the pastor's murder.

Uganda's laws and constitution provide freedom to practice one's religion and to propagate one's faith and convert others. Muslims comprise no more than 12% of the population. (MS)



Wikimedia Commons

Someone You Should Know

SHIRLEY CROWDER

By Leigh Pritchett
TAB Media

The daughter of Foreign Mission Board (now International Mission Board) missionaries, Shirley Crowder spent her first nine years in Nigeria. She learned from her parents, “Wherever you are, whatever you do, you’re making disciples.”

As vice president of The Addiction Connection, the 62-year-old Leeds resident teaches a biblical approach to addiction counseling.

The Christian author and pianist is a Sunday School and Bible study teacher at her church and also financial secretary at Crestway Baptist Church in Birmingham.

Q: Describe where you focus your greatest ministry efforts.

A: Everything I do comes

under the umbrella of disciple making. The Lord brings a myriad of opportunities across my path, including counseling, teaching Bible studies, writing and music. Much of the counseling I do is in the area of addiction. I serve as vice president of The Addiction Connection, an organization that trains and equips the body of Christ to biblically help addicts and their loved ones.

Q: Who was or is one of the most influential people in your faith life? Why?

A: My parents, Jeannie and Ray Crowder, who taught me to love God and His word, to obey God’s word, to love others and to express my worship of God through music.

Q: Tell about a turning

point in your life and how God was involved.

A: I left my family and friends and moved to a new city for a new ministry. After only eight months, it became clear that I needed to leave that ministry. God used my moving away to untether me from so many things.

When I returned to Birmingham, the Lord opened a myriad of ministry opportunities for me: a radio/television program (reruns still airing), biblical counseling, writing and publishing, teaching and much more. I’m not sure I would have untethered from the things that allowed me to jump in and minister in all these other ways, had I not moved away for a season.

Q: What has God been teaching you lately?

MINISTRY: Disciple-maker

CHURCH NAME: Valley View Baptist Church, Leeds, in Birmingham Metro Baptist Association

LIFE VERSE: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:1–2).



A: It’s more of a reminder to pay close attention to those around me — to listen and observe well. To act upon the prompting of the Holy Spirit when He brings people to mind and to pray for and contact them.

To not try to avoid people and hear about their prob-

lems because I need to study or have a writing deadline.

Q: If there were one thing you could tell your younger self about faith, what would it be?

A: Every “no” from God is an outpouring of His mercy, grace, love and protection.

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Alpharetta, Ga.



DR. JUNIOR HILL
Pastor, evangelist
Hartselle, Ala.



DR. ROBERT SMITH
Charles T. Carter Baptist
Chair of Divinity,
Beeson Divinity School
Birmingham, Ala.

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Photo courtesy of Barbara Cross

Barbara Cross stands with the statues of the girls killed in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing in 1963.

‘Father, forgive them’

Barbara Cross shares testimony of love after surviving historic bombing

By Tracy Riggs
TAB Media

One September day in 1963, a bullhorn, a forgiving heart and a well-known Scripture helped prevent a riot.

The place: Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham — then often called “Bombingham” because of the frequency of racially motivated bombings in the city’s black neighborhoods.

The time: between Sunday School and the worship service. The speaker: John Cross. The words: Psalm 23.

The minister’s daughter, Barbara, was one of the children concluding Sunday School classes in the church basement when the bomb went off. Though she is now over the fear associated with that day, she still remembers it vividly.

“That was the most devastating day of my life. To this day, if I hear loud noises, it bothers me, because I remember that sound, the boom! I’ll never forget it. It’s like the building shook,” she remembered.

Young Barbara was excited when her father accepted the call to serve as pastor of Sixteenth Street Baptist in June 1962.

But the family had no idea how different it would be there than Richmond, Virginia.

When John Cross got to Bir-

mingham, he tried to catch a cab.

“A driver said to him, ‘We do not haul your kind.’ My dad said, ‘Before I leave Birmingham, you will haul whoever wants to catch your cab,’” Barbara Cross recalled.

“He couldn’t stay in hotels or motels because they were segregated. We had a member of Sixteenth Street who allowed my dad to stay with him. Then we moved into the parsonage until they found us a place to stay.”

MLK connection

During his first year in Birmingham, John Cross opened up the church to be not only a place to hear the gospel, but also a meeting place to propel the Civil Rights cause. Martin Luther King Jr. was

among those using the church.

On the morning of Sept. 15, 1963, Cross was upstairs in the choir loft when he heard the explosion. His wife wasn’t feeling well that day, so she was home.

Approximately 40 children, including 14-year-old Barbara, were downstairs getting ready for the annual youth day when they would lead

the worship service.

Barbara’s first thought when she heard the bomb was that it was a nuclear attack, having heard about the Cuban missile crisis while participating in civil defense drills at school.

Neither she nor her siblings were

aware of the previous bomb threats.

But when John Cross smelled the fumes, he knew exactly what had happened. He tried to get people out, but the steps on the side of the building had been blown away.

“When he came around to the side of the church, that’s when he saw the gaping hole. It was so wide you could almost drive a Hummer through it,” Barbara recalled.

“When he went through the rubble, he said, ‘Oh Lord, I hope there’s nobody under that rubble.’ That’s when they found the four girls.”

Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, Addie Mae Collins (all 14) and Carol Denise McNair (11) died under that rubble. About 20 other members of the congregation were injured — and angry.

‘We just need to pray’

One member wanted to lash out, but John Cross calmed her down. “We don’t answer violence with violence,” he said in that moment. “We just need to pray.”

Barbara said her father, with tears streaming down his face, found a bullhorn and quoted Psalm 23. The crowd eventually calmed down too.

“Years later schoolchildren would innocently ask, ‘Ms. Cross, do you hate the bomber that killed your friends?’

“I said, ‘No. We weren’t taught to hate. But I dislike what they did.’”

One of her favorite Scriptures is Luke 23:34: “Father, forgive them. For they know not what they do.”

The principle has helped her to live a life of thankfulness, even though she still mourns the losses.

“In fact, the Sunday School lesson that day was, ‘The Love that Forgives.’”

“How ironic and appropriate that we would have to draw on the strength of that lesson based on what happened at Sixteenth Street,” she said.

“It was a horrific event

but has turned the tragedy into the triumph, with the blessings for those who survived — because it could have been a whole lot worse,” Barbara said. “Thank God it didn’t flatten the church and more people weren’t killed. So that’s the blessing.”

“If I had to do this all over again and know the outcome, for the children, I wouldn’t want that to happen, no,” Barbara said.

“But I thank God that He spared me. I don’t know why He spared me because I was in the basement. I’m just blessed that I can share the history and share the story, especially about the lesson of that day, ‘the love that forgives.’”



Photo courtesy of Barbara Cross

Barbara Cross stands with a memorial at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham that includes 2 Corinthians 5:20.

Investing in the people God 'places around me'

Minister to young adults uses gift of writing to expand ways to engage others

By Tracy Riggs

TAB Media

Author Ashley Chesnut has had a love for God's word since she became a Christian at six, and heard God's call into ministry during elementary school.

Because her goal is to teach people about Jesus, she got a degree in middle school education because, as she said, "If you can teach middle schoolers, you can teach anyone."

Chesnut went on to get a master of divinity degree from Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in Birmingham, and holds a certificate in biblical counseling from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. After watching her parents live out relational ministry, she chose to pattern hers similarly.

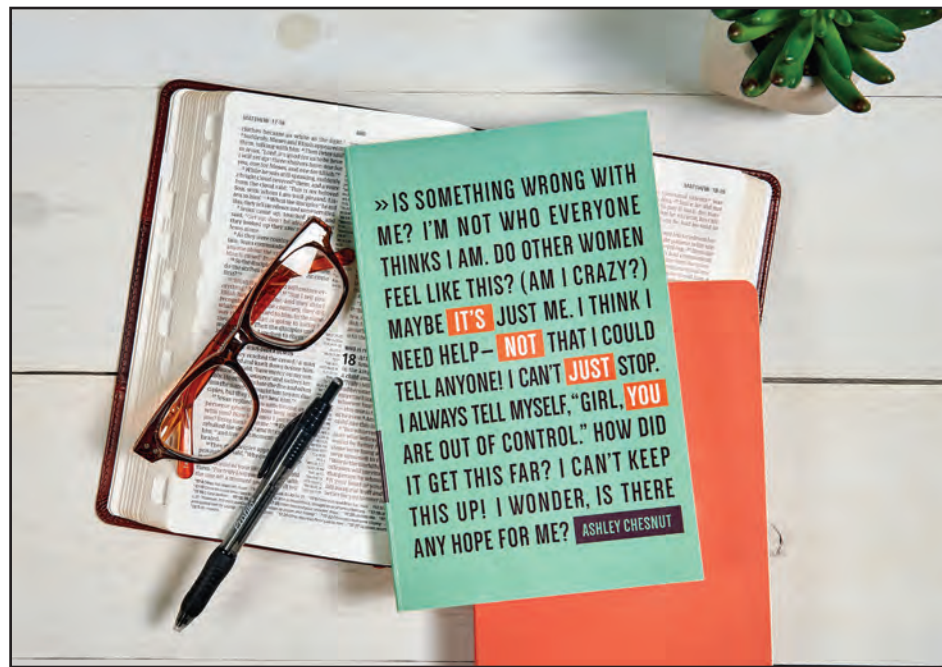
"I look at Jesus and how Jesus made disciples and that influenced how I do ministry. Jesus had the 12 and within that, the three, and I want to spend my life investing in the people that God has placed around me," Chesnut said.

This relational ministry emanates both through her work with young adults at The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham and her work as an author.

Writing came naturally to Chesnut. It's a craft she enjoys and knows she's good at. While in 3rd grade at her Christian school, she placed 3rd in a writing contest for grades 3-6. She also wrote the school play several years later.

Serving the city

Her first book came out of a love for families in Birmingham. Wanting to serve, she volunteered at Sav-A-Life Vestavia, but she felt God impress on her that she could also serve through the writing she enjoyed so much. God even used that volunteer opportunity to aid her



Photos courtesy of Ashley Chesnut

Ashley Chesnut is author of "Down in the Ham: A Child's Guide to Downtown Birmingham" and "It's Not Just You." She also is the associate young adult minister at The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham.

writing — she met the illustrator for her book at Sav-A-Life.

"'Down in the Ham' came out of a prayer of how God would want me to plug in and serve God in our city. ... When I went downtown, I



CHESNUT

found a lot of young adults and young professionals and not a lot of families that were going downtown," Chesnut explained.

She said the book became "a way to promote downtown by giving families an activity to do while they're there so they would know what to see. So there's a scavenger hunt element."

There is an accompanying coloring book.

Chesnut's next effort, "It's Not Just You: Freeing Women to Talk about Sexual Sin," is a different book for a different audience.

"I wrote the book that I wish someone could have given me when I was first starting out doing college ministry and young adult ministry at Brook Hills," Chesnut explained. "I was leading a college small

group and had a majority of the girls I disciplined at the time share with me about their sexual sin. It opened up a journey of how do I walk alongside young women who are struggling sexually."

God provided contacts

As with "Down in the Ham," God provided contacts through Chesnut's ministry that helped get the book going.

She worked as a camp staffer at CentriKid, a Lifeway ministry, for seven years. That led to becoming a women's trainer with Lifeway Women, focused on connecting women to God's word and each other. Staff at Lifeway helped her with an initial book proposal.

"I saw that the things that I was encountering with the young adult women at Brook Hills wasn't just a local thing — it was common experiences, stories and struggles with women across the nation, from Iowa to California to Georgia,"

Chesnut said. "And it wasn't just young adult women. It was women of all ages in the Church. So, the book's title is 'It's Not Just You.' That's what I want women to know — that you're not the only woman that struggles with your particular genre of sexual sin."

Foundation for women

Part One of the book is, "How We Got Here: Why Our Sexuality is Broken;" Part Two is, "God's Design for Sex;" and Part Three is, "How to Fight Against Sexual Sin." Chesnut's goal for writing the book is to give a foundation for women to understand sexual sin and realize they aren't alone in the struggle.

"It's important to realize that every person's story has nuance, and a book cannot address every nuance of every person's story," Chesnut noted.

"I would say I am giving someone tools and a framework to get started, but it's helpful to have people to walk alongside you. There might be nuances of your story that you might need a counselor to help you work through, a recovery group to help you work through or just friends who can love you well and listen well.

"I think it's just important to realize that a book is not going to be able to answer all your questions or give you every little step that you should take.

"[Writing this book] has reaffirmed that no matter how much brokenness is in the

world or is in your story or in the story or the people that you are ministering to, we serve a God of hope. He is victorious and we fight from a position of victory as His children if we are Christ-followers. You're not stuck.

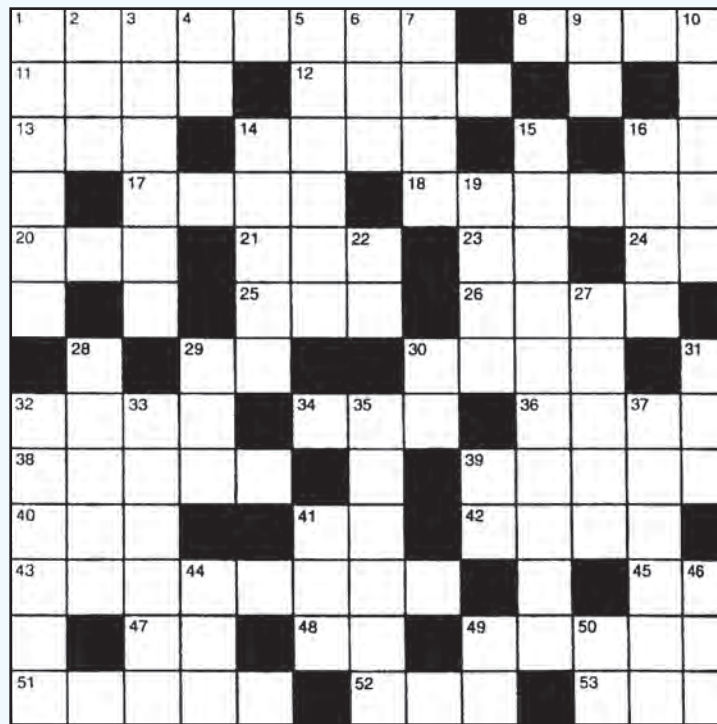
"That doesn't mean it's easy. ... But there is hope."

"Down in the Ham — A Child's Guide to Downtown Birmingham" and "It's Not Just You" are sold at Amazon and other major book retailers.

CHRISTIAN crossword

ACROSS

1. The only ___ Son.
(John 1:18)
8. According to my ___est expectation and my hope. (Phil. 1:20)
11. Let the sea ____.
(1 Chron. 16:32)
12. And the ___ was upon the earth 40 days.
(Gen. 7:12)
13. There was no room for them in the ____.
(Luke 2:7)
14. Not boy.
16. Four in Roman numerals.
17. Dull; gray; not colorful.
18. If a man for conscience toward God ___ grief.
(1 Pet. 2:19)
20. The highways ___ waste (Isa. 33:8)
21. The Boston ___ party.
23. I ___, he is.
24. Either/___.
25. Eastern Standard Time. (abbr.)
26. Behold even to the ___, and it shineth not. (Job 25:5)
29. Even ___ Christ forgave you. (Col. 3:13)
30. The 40 days before Easter.
32. Hath not the potter power over the ____.
(Rom. 9:21)
34. "Much ___ About Nothing."
36. " ___ beautiful day in the neighborhood."
38. So he bringeth them unto their desired ____.
(Ps.107:30)
39. Swine ran violently down a ___ place into the sea. (Matt. 8:32)
40. " ___ Maria."
41. United States. (abbr.)
42. I did cast them out as the ___ in the streets.
(Ps. 18:42)
43. But we had the ___ of death in ourselves.
(2 Cor. 1:9)



By Danny Carpenter Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

45. ___ each his own.
47. Let us ___ over unto the other side of the lake. (Luke 8:22)
48. Choose one ___ the other.
49. And as ___ lion; who shall rouse him up?
(Gen. 49:9)
51. Foe.
52. But the end is not ____.
(Matt. 24:6)
53. Money paid to a doctor or lawyer.

DOWN

1. Able also to ___ the whole body.
(James 3:2)
2. Long period of time.
3. A male goose.
4. We shall live, and do this, ___ that.
(James 4:15)
5. Abiding in his tents according to their ____.
(Num. 24:2)
6. The ___ of the wise.
(Prov. 18:15)
7. Large river in Africa.
9. ___ he thinketh in his heart, so is he.
(Prov. 23:7)
10. Shall ___ hunger.
(John 6:35)
14. The ___ of hell shall

15. They are written for our ____.
(1 Cor. 10:11)
16. If the ___ be blunt.
(Eccles. 10:10)
19. This is my ___ for ever
(Ex. 3:15)
22. "One Day ___ a Time."
27. A furry mammal.
28. They ___ to their brethren. (Neh. 10:29)
29. An affirmative vote.
30. ___, I am with you always. (Matt. 28:20)
31. The trees ... are full of ____.
(Ps. 104:16)
32. To be discreet, ___, keepers at home.
(Titus 2:5)
33. He will ___ the blood.
(Deut. 32:43)
35. The house of Joseph sent to ___ Bethel.
(Judg. 1:23)
37. ___ it therefore in your hearts. (Luke 21:14)
39. South Dakota. (abbr.)
41. One. (Sp.)
44. Arnold or Jones, for example.
46. A lyric poem.
49. Summer is now nigh ___ hand. (Luke 21:30)
50. The kingdom ___ his dear Son. (Col. 1:13)

WORD search

- | | |
|-------------|----------------|
| ANDREW | JOHN |
| APOSTLES | JUDAS ISCARIOT |
| BARTHOLOMEW | LAST SUPPER |
| BETRAYAL | LORD |
| BLOOD | MATTHEW |
| BODY | PASSOVER |
| BREAK BREAD | PETER |
| CELEBRATE | PHILIP |
| COMMUNION | PRAYER |
| COVENANT | PROCLAIM |
| CUP | RECEIVED |
| DISCIPLES | REMEMBER |
| DRINK | SIMON |
| ENCOURAGING | THADDEUS |
| FATHER | THANKS |
| FELLOWSHIP | THOMAS |
| FRUIT | TOGETHER |
| JAMES | UPPER |
| JERUSALEM | ROOM |
| JESUS | WINE |



Local college students see ministry to Birmingham's homeless 'evolve'

By Michael Brooks
TAB Media

Three 19-year-olds who met at Thompson High School in Alabaster, found their hearts touched by the plight of Birmingham's homeless population, and now, two years later, they see their ministry expanding.

"Hope to Homeless or H2H, is changing and we're changing with it," says Kayla Haller of Calera.

The three primary leaders are still Haller, who will graduate in December from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, with a degree in psychology; Tyger Quarles, a human and organizational development major at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee; and Graisi Smith, an early education major at UAB.

Finding appreciation

Haller "discovered"

homeless people when she enrolled at UAB and moved to Birmingham. She began to build relationships with some she saw

regularly. She said she has never been afraid and only found appreciation from them in return.

Haller noted there are an estimated 6,000 people are homeless in Alabama.

"Our homeless are located primarily in Mobile, Montgomery and Birmingham, and some believe as many as 4,000 are in Birmingham," she said. "You might not see them on the busiest of streets, since they seek out areas without as much traf-



Photo courtesy of Kayla Haller

Kayla Haller of Calera "discovered" homeless people when she enrolled at UAB and moved to Birmingham. She began to build relationships with some she saw regularly.

fic. They seek shelter under overpasses and bridges and use trees to dry their clothes after it rains."

Haller said during COVID-19 H2H volunteers have been distributing packed drawstring bags from their car windows to minimize contact.

"Our bags look different in summer and winter," she explained. "We collect non-perishable items such

as snacks, soap, socks and Bibles, but include coats and blankets in the winter [which] is especially hard for the homeless. The

[Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex] in downtown Birmingham offers winter shelter at night when temperatures drop to a certain level."

All three students have found support from their churches with collecting needed items.

Haller is a member of Siluria Baptist Church in Alabaster.

Smith is a member of Hunter Street Baptist in Hoover, and Quarles is a member of Christian Life

Church, also in Hoover.

Haller said another new thing for H2H is a custom gift list on Amazon under "Hope to Homeless."

The group partnered recently with Firehouse Ministries, an organization that provides shelters for men, women and children (firehouseshelter.com).

Haller said they hope to involve more ministries under the H2H umbrella due to Birmingham's size and its great need.

She plans to attend law school there or in Tuscaloosa and dreams of expanding H2H to Tuscaloosa if she chooses it.

"Long term I'd love for us to open a job resource center in Birmingham," she said. "The homeless need help in completing job applications and resumés, and this is important in order to transition from homeless to employment."

Churches can help

Haller noted she and her friends are happy to talk with local churches about the vision for H2H and the urgency of additional ministry, adding, "What we need is more hygiene and food items, more workers and more storage between our packing parties and distributions."

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BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

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

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

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Roles vary but include promoting the Kingdom

(continued from page 1) people assume that if a person works in the church office she's studying her Bible, but we all come from different backgrounds." Fun classes are thrown in too, Smith said. In the past,

they've offered group painting and cookie decorating "so ladies can laugh and have fun." "We just try to have a gamut," Smith noted. "We have giveaways, and we have a banquet every year

on Tuesday night with entertainment." Networking is emphasized because "sometimes you feel lonely, especially in smaller churches or associations," Smith said.

"A lot of our ladies are the only secretary, and it's good to see that you're not alone, that everybody has the same struggles, and they have someone they can call and ask questions and share prayer requests."

The theme of the 59th annual conference will be "Created on Purpose," based on Psalm 139:14: "I praise You for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

"We are all created on purpose for a purpose," Smith said.

Sara Bible, a graduate of Judson College and former officer of the association, will be guest speaker, and Zach Clark, assistant minister to students at FBC Enter-

prise, will lead worship.

Anyone who serves as a ministry assistant in a Southern Baptist church, association or denominational agency is invited to attend, Smith said, adding that anyone considering a calling to serve in

such a role is welcome too. Registration is through Shocco's website at shocco.org/events/alabama-association-of-baptist-secretaries/.

Opportunities

The Alabama Association of Baptist Secretaries has a booth at the state convention meeting each November.

The group is also on Facebook for networking opportunities throughout the year and online at

alabamabaptistsecretaries.com.

"This isn't just a job. This is a calling," Smith said, noting her goal Monday through Friday is "to make sure as much of the background work can be done so that

when my pastor gets in the pulpit on Sunday he can be focused on preaching. He's not worried about, 'Oh, I forgot to call Sally back,' when he sees her walk in the door.

"I'm there to help him promote the Kingdom by helping him take care of the day-to-day things that come up — making sure purchase orders are put in and that church members are called back and meetings are set up. ... That's an important job," Smith said.

For more information about the Alabama Association of Baptist Secretaries, visit their Facebook page or alabamabaptistsecretaries.com.

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For September 19

Explore the Bible

By Robert Olsen, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



JOY THROUGH HUMILITY Philippians 2:1–15

In Relationships (1–4)

In the beginning of Philippians 2, Paul highlights the need for humble service toward one another, which is the calling card of the Christian.

Paul says, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others.” What a powerful and convicting verse!

Human nature tainted by sin is incredibly selfish. Since the fall of mankind in Genesis 3, it is the default position of humanity. It also fits with a secular worldview — if all I am is a product of time and chance, why shouldn’t I look out for myself and put myself above others?

But this is not how Christians are supposed to behave. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians are able to overcome selfishness and instead be concerned for others.

We see this in missionaries, social advocates, orphanages, hospitals, etc. History shows that Christians, when putting others first, have had a profound impact on those around them. This is seen most of all in Jesus Christ.

By Example (5–11)

Speaking of Christ, Paul goes on to show the perfect example of what it means to put others first.

The Son of God has always existed — He has no beginning (John 1:1). But at the manger in Bethlehem Jesus was born, the Son of God taking on human flesh to become one of us.

The Son of God, the God of the universe, became human to identify with us, show true servanthood and ultimately bring salvation to a people in need. In doing so, Jesus laid aside His grandeur to become a lowly human, experiencing all of what it means to be human.

This did not mean Jesus laid aside His divinity — He was always truly God and truly human. But He laid aside rights and privileges as God to subject Himself to humanity. It

is impossible for us to understand this completely — our finite, human minds are not able to grasp what it means to be God — but the Bible relays clearly that Jesus, while human, was still God.

Why did Jesus do this? Out of love for us Jesus came to Earth and took on the form of a servant.

Throughout His life He emphasized the need for service, which is a true demonstration of love. Paul stresses that Christians are to love and serve one another, and Christ is the greatest example of this, shown ultimately in dying on a cross for us (John 15:13).

This is the example Christ has demonstrated for us to follow.

In Lifestyle (12–15)

What does it look like to put others’ desires first? Paul says we are to work out our salvation. Does this mean we can earn our salvation? No, not at all! That is counter to the gospel, which is and always has been a salvation based upon grace through faith (Eph. 2:8–9).

Paul is telling us to live out our salvation, not “hide it under a bushel,” as Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount.

Christians are to be active in living out their faith, loving their neighbor and seeking to put others over themselves. We are to do this with a cheerful heart and attitude, knowing our reward is eternal, not temporal.

We are to serve others without complaining or arguing, but with a cheerful spirit. If we serve others begrudgingly, what does that say about our attitude? It means we are doing it out of obligation.

We are to choose to serve others because this is a way to show how much we love God for loving us.

Sometimes it is difficult to serve and sometimes we get run down. We need to be in prayer that God would renew our hearts and give us the right attitude, continuing to refocus on Christ and His love for us so we can love others — not for recognition, but so God gets glory and people are pointed to Jesus.

Bible Studies for Life

By James Riley Strange, Ph.D.

Professor of New Testament, Samford University



SURE OF THE TRUTH 1 John 2:18–29

Today’s passage continues with what John’s readers already know (read 2:3–4, 12–14). Last week we noted that “antichrists” might have claimed special knowledge about Jesus (2:4). John reminds his readers they “have knowledge.”

We also find the urgency of “the last hour.” Because of the centuries that separate us and John, we can become jaded about this expectation. John taught in light of this urgency, and that should color how we read his words.

What if we lived as if we thought that everything to which we give our time and emotional capital could be gone tomorrow? What if we behaved each moment as if we expected to meet Jesus Christ the next?

Truth keeps us anchored in the faith. (18–21)

John calls his readers “children” about seven times, which suggests that he is writing to new converts. Remember, in the early decades of the Church, most people became Christians rather than being born to Christian parents. Nevertheless, schisms arose quickly.

John calls false teachers “antichrists” (in the New Testament, the word appears only here and in 2 John 7). The prefix “anti-” means “against” while “christ” means “anointed” or “Messiah.” The implication is that antichrists teach things that are opposed both to Christ’s teachings and to what the Church teaches about the Messiah.

We do not know everything they taught, but we get a glimpse from today’s passage and 2 John 7: They must have taught that Jesus did not have a body. Hence, he was neither the Jewish Messiah nor God’s Son.

Note the play on words in verses 18, 20 and 22: John’s readers have been anointed (they are christs with a lowercase “c”) by the very Christ whom antichrists deny.

Truth is grounded in who Jesus is. (22–26)

Antichrists are not merely wrong about doctrine. They also do not

“have the Father” because their teachings deny what the Father accomplished through the blood of the Son. They deny the need for Christ’s sacrifice, which means they deny both the problem of sin (read 1:8–2:2) and God’s solution.

Recalling 2:10, John again uses the image of “living” (NIV) or “abiding” (ESV). He tells readers to “live in the Son and Father,” but also, “Let what you heard from the beginning live among you” (the second person pronouns in verses 24 and 27 are plural).

This is not an admonition to memorize doctrine, although John might have thought it was fine to do so. Rather, this is a metaphor of symbiosis: What we have learned lives among us as a congregation, helping us to evaluate what befalls us and to do God’s will in response (2:17). That is what will guard against the antichrists who would deceive us.

Following the truth leads to righteous living. (27–29)

As what we learned should live among us, so should our anointing: our cleansing by the blood of Jesus and the promise of eternal life.

John says this anointing teaches us “about all things.” This is the power of God’s mercy, for it demonstrates the depths and heights of God’s love for us and for the world (2:2), and it removes the barriers we build to loving others, even our fellow Christians.

John uses “if” with a twist of irony (see 2:1). His readers do “know that He is righteous,” so they “also know that everyone who does right has been born of him.” This is another way for John to remind them of what they have learned, and through them, to remind us.

As we grow in faith, God often teaches us, not by giving what is new, but by reminding us of what we know. By God’s grace, we already know how we must live in order to “do right.” And by God’s grace, we can do it.

Thanks be to God.

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs
TAB Media

Christian rock band Needtobreathe goes on first tour in two years

Josh Lovelace, keyboardist and vocalist for Needtobreathe, a Christian Southern rock band, started in music as a toddler. At three years old he was standing on boxes, singing to his mother's officemates. He started writing songs in elementary school and took his craft seriously.

"I really wanted to make it, and now I look back on it and I actually did," Lovelace recalled. "For me, it's like a full circle thing — to be able to still do it at 36 years old. I have videos of singing on stage when I was two years old, so I've been singing on stage for 34 years. It's pretty crazy if you think of it that way."

After a two-year break, Needtobreathe — along with Switchfoot and The New Respect — is preparing for an "Into the Mystery Tour," which began earlier this month in St. Louis, Missouri, and will end in Atlanta, Georgia, at the end of October.

'Bigger and better'

"Our band's been touring for a very long time and are pulling from seven or eight records of materials to condense into an hour-45-to-two-hour show," Lovelace said.

"In March or April of this year we kinda started figuring out what we're gonna do. We pick which songs we



NEEDTOBREATHE

Photo by Brett Warren

want to play and which songs we know the fans will be mad if we don't play."

The band consists of Lovelace, lead singer Bear Rinehart and drummer Seth Bolt.

"Most of us are dads and so we're like, 'Oh no, now we've got to get in shape because we've got to run around on stage for our 40 shows,'" Lovelace laughed. "We're really excited to finally get back out there. When the pandemic hit ... you kind of wonder if we would get to do this part of our job ever again.

Every night we're going to give more energy than we ever have. This tour is going to be pretty epic."

"Into the Mystery," Needtobreathe's latest album, opens with a statement about quarantining together, "something we can truly say we've never done before."

The solution to the mystery? The entire album was recorded during the quarantine.

"Instead of sitting around waiting for the world to open back up, we decided that we would all quarantine together for three weeks and make a record. We've never done anything like that," Lovelace said. "It was a little bit of a crazy undertaking for us to come in and feel confident about the songs we were bringing in.

"Our band always takes a long time to make records. For us to get it done in three weeks, that was the goal. The goal was never to make a polished masterpiece. It was, 'Let's time-

capsule this moment ... right now.'

"It ended up being something we're really as proud of as any other record that we've ever done," Lovelace added, "because we all were on the same page, we worked hard together, and I feel that we made something that is one of our most beautiful collections of songs that we've ever done."

The name "Needtobreathe" comes

from a story attributed to Socrates, quoted on a T-shirt the band sells: "When you desire wisdom and insight as badly as you need to breathe, it is then you shall have it."

'Most rewarding thing'

Lovelace's solo career reflects his role as a father. Writing songs so his children could hear his voice while touring, he later released them on his album "Young Folk," winner of a Parents' Choice Gold Award. This was followed by, "Growing Up."

"It has been one of the most rewarding things I've ever been a part of because my kids love it and still sing some of the songs," Lovelace said.

"There are kids and families all over the world who are sending me messages that say, 'I actually like it. I don't hate it. I'm not annoyed by your kids record. We can listen to it together.'

"That's as important as anything I'll ever do in the band — bringing families together and hopefully [making] families smile and love each other a little bit deeper."

Lovelace feels fortunate that he gets to balance being a father, husband and band member who is constantly getting better at his craft.

"Our band has always been about honesty. I don't have it all together and I don't know all that I'm doing, but it's good to ask the question. We never set out to teach anybody anything. But we definitely want to inspire and offer hope and an escape from a crazy world.

"It's the best job in the world and an honor for us that we get to carry that to a world that's really scary and hard to understand sometimes."

For more information visit joshlovelacemusic.com or needtobreathe.com.

EDITOR'S NOTE

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