

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

INSIDE



Cox wraps up historic presidency at upcoming annual meeting

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Beck A. Taylor inaugurated as Samford's 19th president

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Most churchgoers now gathering in person

◆ Page 17

'Rallying cry'

FBC Montgomery sees hard season as open door for gospel

By Grace Thornton
TAB Media

Mark Bethea said if he's allowed to bare his soul for a minute, there have been many nights lately that he's gone home and wept.

In the early morning hours of Sept. 30, he got word that someone had started a fire in the main sanctuary of First Baptist Church Montgomery, as well as in its historic Stakely Sanctuary, which the church worshipped in until 2004. The fire also destroyed the church's administrative desk area and damaged the bridal parlor.

And it almost consumed him for a minute.

As Bethea — who became FBC's pastor in August 2020 — walked around the church looking at the damage, "alarm bells in my heart are going off," he recalled. He said he prayed, "Lord, I can't do this. I'm not ready for this. I'm not prepared for this. Surely Jay (Wolf, pastor emeritus) should be back here [at] the helm. Surely he can come out of retirement because I can't do this. This is too much."

He said a spirit of fear began to creep into his heart. But the next day, he

sat down to watch the security camera footage of the arsonist setting the fire, and something caught his attention as he watched the person running away.

Shining cross

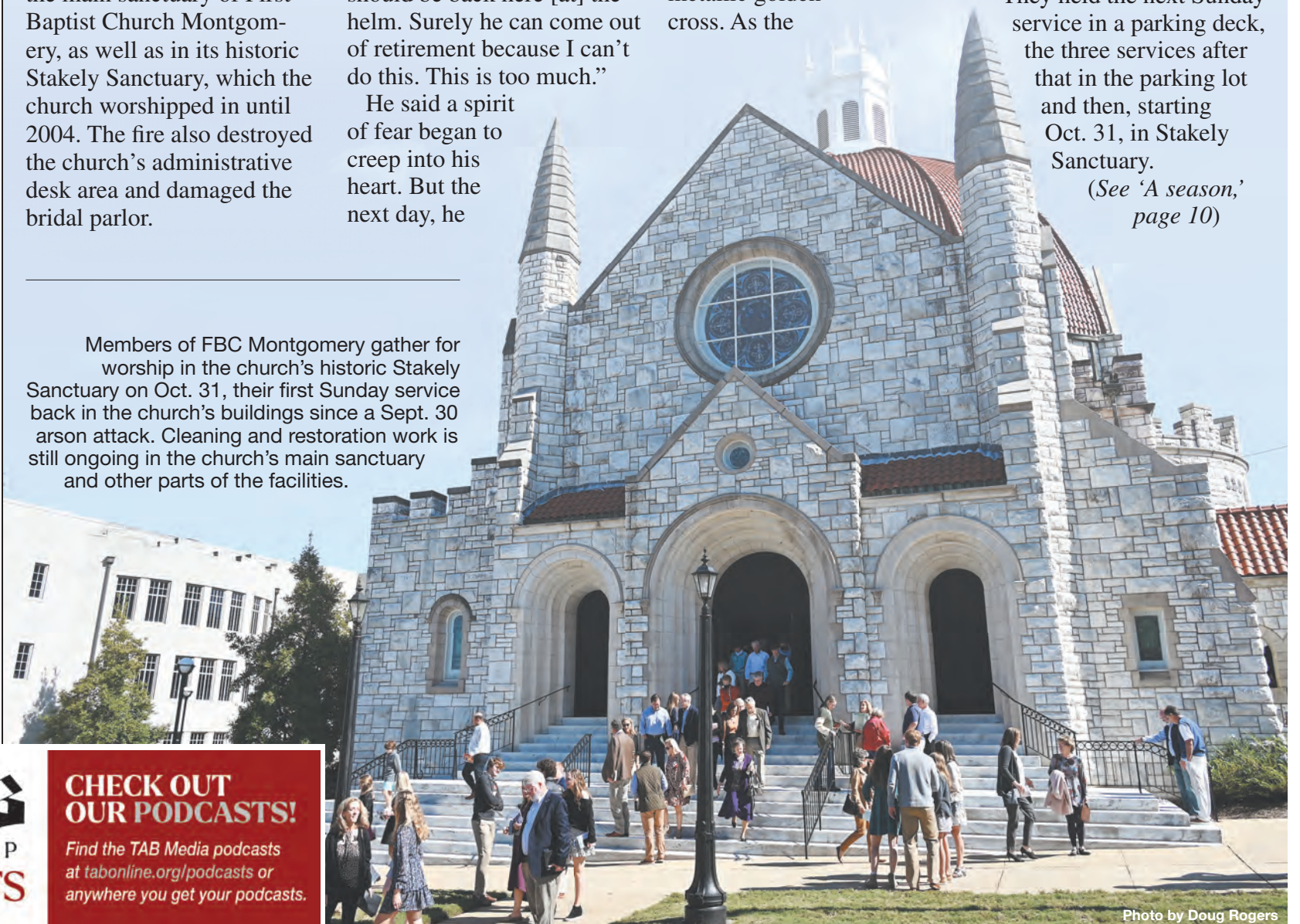
"There in the background in the center of that security footage was our pulpit cross dancing with the flames, that metallic golden cross. As the

flames are just raging up, you see that cross shining brightly in the center of the room," Bethea said. "In that moment, my heart began to change. ... It became almost a rallying cry for me that there is nothing that is going to overcome the cross of Jesus Christ."

So he rallied, and so did FBC, leaning on Jesus. They held the next Sunday service in a parking deck, the three services after that in the parking lot and then, starting Oct. 31, in Stakely Sanctuary.

(See 'A season,' page 10)

Members of FBC Montgomery gather for worship in the church's historic Stakely Sanctuary on Oct. 31, their first Sunday service back in the church's buildings since a Sept. 30 arson attack. Cleaning and restoration work is still ongoing in the church's main sanctuary and other parts of the facilities.



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Photo by Doug Rogers

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Hendricks joins TAB team as product management director

As TAB Media Group continues to broaden its offerings, Editor Jennifer Davis Rash decided a new position might be in order — someone to make sure everything going out is the best it can be.

That person is Shawn Hendricks, who joins the TAB Media team as director of product management. In that role, he will oversee the enhancement of TAB's product-related and content-related projects, with a focus on digital media. He will assist Rash and the team with overall quality control and consistency checks while monitoring the flow and syncing of content across all platforms.

"I'm excited to jump into this new role for TAB Media," Hendricks said, noting he's enjoyed the opportunity to work and partner with Rash and TAB in various ways throughout much of his journalistic career.

"TAB is a leader in Southern

Baptist journalism, and it's truly an honor to work alongside them in this role as we continue to share how God is moving through our churches in Alabama, the U.S. and beyond," Hendricks said.

Rash noted she's thankful for the 25 years of experience in Baptist communication Hendricks brings



HENDRICKS

to the team. He served two other state Baptist papers and has been a correspondent for The Alabama Baptist and The Baptist Paper for several years. He was a writer for the International Mission Board for 10 years. "Shawn and I launched our journeys in this field around the same time and

have cheered each other on along the way," Rash said. "It's an honor to add the gifts and skills he brings to our already highly capable team. His commitment to the important work of The Alabama Baptist and TAB Media Group allows me to focus on big-picture direction for the organization." (TAB Media)

The Alabama Baptist

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

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Christmas backpack collections



Photo courtesy of Howardtown Baptist Church

Howardtown Baptist Church in Tibbie collected 90 backpacks for Alabama Woman's Missionary Union's Christmas Backpacks ministry. Each year, churches fill new bags with nonperishable food items, school supplies, clothing and small toys to distribute through ministry partners in the Mississippi River Delta region. A copy of The Christmas Story is included.

Donations pouring in from across the state

Associational offices also hosted drop-off locations such as Chilton Association, which exceeded its goal of 300 with 448 backpacks, and Birmingham Metro Association, which collected 1,550. Since 2016, Alabama churches have given more than 46,000 backpacks, according to Pat Ingram of Alabama WMU. "So many will hear the gospel and feel God's love through these backpacks," she said. This year's state goal is 12,000.



The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.

RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

By Jennifer Davis Rash

President and Editor-in-Chief



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@RashionalThts

Could we face the chaos around us better with a calmer church life?

Can you pull your memory back to the surface? That time you truly sensed the Lord moving and understood a depth of worship you had never felt before.

What if you sit quietly and close your eyes? Do you remember? Where were you? What was happening?

Even though the situation surrounding the moment may have been difficult, did the tears flow freely while your heart melted into pure adoration and praise?

Mark Bethea, pastor of First Baptist Church Montgomery, shares how one of his top worship experiences was about six weeks ago in a parking garage (see story, page 1).

“The Lord was doing something in our midst,” he said. And members of the congregation are asking to re-create what they experienced outside during that difficult Sunday morning following an arson attack on their church.

With all the challenges coming at us nonstop these days, what if all our churches decided to implement intentional seasons of reduced activity and simple worship services?

Would we yearn to worship together because of the refreshment rather than the activity?

I realize we were all ready to be together again as the worst of the pandemic subsided.

And according to Lifeway Research (see story, page 17), 98% of churches are meeting in person again.

But is it possible we swung our pendulums a bit too far in the eagerness to regain our previous routines? Did we jump back in and try to make up for lost time by filling up our church calendars with anything and everything we could?

Reflecting back to 2020, did you find yourself at a loss related to ministry when events could not be held? Was it hard to minister and help others grow

in their spiritual walks without an activity to plan?

Is it possible we are addicted to full calendars and prefer to spend our energy planning an activity and recruiting people to participate?

What if we took a minimalist approach to the church event calendar?

What if we communicated with other church families in our community and spread out the various events rather than several churches holding similar events during the same seasons?

We really aren't in danger of running out of people to fill our churches, so why not work to-

gether to reach the community and let individuals and families land where they feel most comfortable? The important point is to reach them for Christ and help them find a church family who will help them grow in their faith.

Think about the pressure that would come off our church staff members if they could spend more time discipling lay leaders who could in turn disciple others in the congregation.

Think about how many worship services we could have where we fill our spiritual tanks more often because we all — staff and members — are coming calmly and simply before the Lord.

Looking forward to seeing you next week in Huntsville for the annual meeting of the state convention

Our team at The Alabama Baptist is so excited to catch up with all of you who will be in Huntsville next week for the Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting.

It may be hard to focus on our coverage assignments because we will want to visit with all of you.

Stop by our booth in the exhibit halls at both the annual meeting and the Pastors Conference the day before in Decatur.

You'll see us down front in the sanctuary at the press table as well. Come by to say hello if you have an opportunity.

Daily recaps planned

And for those not able to attend, be sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter to keep up with highlights throughout the three days.

We also will post daily recaps on tabonline.org and will publish complete coverage in the Nov. 25 issue of the print edition.

Thanks to Pastor Darryl Craft and Whitesburg Baptist Church for hosting all of us for the annual meeting, and Pastor Blake Kersey and First Baptist Church Decatur for organizing and hosting the Pastors Conference.

We know the amount of work and preparation that goes into hosting these events and really appreciate all you've invested to provide a good experience for the Alabama Baptist family.

—Jennifer Davis Rash

Your Voice



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

Dunn shares testimony of how vision became partnership

By Steve Dunn

Associational mission strategist
Bethlehem and Pine Barren Baptist associations

In May 2021, Beaver Baptist Church — a Cherokee congregation in eastern Oklahoma — invited members of Bethlehem and Pine Barren Baptist associations in south Alabama to join them in building a new room and awning at their church and to be a part of revival services in both the Cherokee and English languages.

I brought some members of both associations and completed the work — adding a room and awning onto a church building — while building some forever friendships. The fellowship and construction work at Beaver Baptist could not have been better.

The Alabama and Oklahoma churches are a part of developing an intercultural partnership that has its roots in a 22-year ministry relationship between myself and Phil

Lawrence, who has served with Native American churches for the past 38 years in the Dakotas and Oklahoma.

I was a pastor in Bismarck, North Dakota, in the late 1990s when I met Phil. We partnered in working with Native American churches on various Indian reservations in the Dakotas.

In 2004, I moved from Bismarck to pastor a church near the tribal land of the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, near Atmore, Alabama, while Phil continued his work in Native American churches.

I had driven through the Poarch Creek tribal land many times, but in the fall of 2017, I sensed an urgency to get to know and work with the people there. Naturally I called Phil.

Soon after that, Phil drove to Alabama and met with me to begin this partnership between the two states.

Phil compiled a Native American testimony book titled “Jesus My Everything,” which we gave out to the Poarch Creek Counseling Center and to the residents of its assisted living facility.

At one point Phil commented, “Native American people are some of the most loving, caring and giving people I have ever known.”

A few months later in 2018, some leaders from Big Arbor Baptist Church (Muscoogie congregation close to Eufaula, Oklahoma) visited south Alabama at

my invitation to formally begin this partnership.

The pastor of Big Arbor, Roley McIntosh (Muscoogie), who is also a dentist; his wife, Debbie; and member Joe McGirt were truly a blessing as this long-term journey began.

In October 2018, I took on a new role as associational mission strategist for the two associations.

Soon after, I drove to Oklahoma at the invitation of pastor McIntosh. For that trip, I brought a team from the Bethlehem Baptist Association to Oklahoma to start building some solid relationships and also to work on the MSW (Muscoogie, Seminole, Wichita) Indian Baptist Association Assembly Grounds.

The Native American ladies fed everyone each day. The two groups worshipped together in the evenings

with English hymns and a lot of Muscoogie Creek hymns.

Over a period of two years, this two-state partnership was well on its way. In May 2020, Phil temporarily moved to South Alabama for seven months to continue to develop this partnership.

A few months later Phil’s pastor from Oklahoma, Gary Hawkins (Muscoogie and Cherokee), and his wife, Paula, came to south Alabama to visit and to preach in some of the churches.

Brother Gary is the pastor of Native Stone Baptist Church in Sapulpa, Oklahoma, and also the executive director of FoNAC (Fellowship of Native American Christians).

FoNAC’s website states that its vision is “to be an integral part of developing a network of people, places and partnerships working together to see a movement of God begin-

ning among the 574 tribes of the United States and the 634 recognized First Nations governments or bands spread across

Canada, then extending to the Indigenous people around the globe.”

Brother Gary continues to encourage the partnership from both states.

The Lord taught us the absolute necessity of building relationships first.

This partnership is being guided by Paul’s heart in Romans 1:11–12 — “For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established. That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith of you and me.” Amen!



DUNN

Fellowship of Native American Christians

► To serve as a ‘Catalyst’ for ministries connected with Native Americans ...

► Networking with individuals, churches, associations and state conventions to initiate partnerships for Native ministry.

► Develop resources relevant to Native culture while remaining true to the word of God.

► Identify and facilitate existing ministries that are working to develop Indigenous church planters and missions pastors.

► Work with national networks and SBC partners to assist in planting Native congregations in Send Cities.

fonac.org/our-mission

To learn more about the Fellowship of Native American Christians, visit fonac.org.

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“The act of love can positively impact and shape the life of the community in which we live.”

BECK A. TAYLOR
President, Samford University

Two years ago before the pandemic, most Americans thought we were bulletproof in a way. The world was stunned we could be brought to our knees so fast ... to realize that if everything I've already depended on could pull out from under me so quickly, there has to be something else.

Pastor Chris Bell
3Circle Church, Fairhope, Ala.

It's a rare thing for a church to have this many years of history to celebrate and to be able to look back and give thanks for all the Lord has done was a joy.

Pastor Clint Landry
FBC Wetumpka, Ala.
On celebrating the church's 200th anniversary

The distance to one's nearest church has changed almost overnight. A form of communication that was not even used by most churches before the pandemic has now reached almost half of Americans.

Scott McConnell
Executive director
Lifeway Research
Reflecting on surge in online worship during the pandemic

It is not practical to always whisk our child away from every anxiety-provoking or fearful experience. We want to teach our children to tolerate or cope with their anxiety. We want the child to understand that the emotion will come, peak and pass. ... As parents, we need to express confidence that they can overcome

the event when they don't have that confidence within themselves.

Sarah Ball
Licensed social worker
pathwaysprofessional.org/blog

It is important for people to realize that faith questions surface in grief. God is not put off by our wrestling with those issues or asking those questions. When we do that, it makes our faith more personal.

Bob Terry, editor emeritus
The Alabama Baptist

We can become beacons of light and love to this dark world when we remember from where we have come.

French Harmon, president
Kentucky Baptist Foundation

From the *Twitterverse*

@ricklance

Pam texted me about the worship service @montgomeryfbc — She said, “Even though we are in the parking deck, it feels like the upper room. The fire at FBC could not prevent genuine worship being experienced.” ...

@micahfries

A good pastor is one who is intimately aware of how broken the church is, and yet is relentlessly optimistic about her future.

@SISellers7170

The preacher who is more interested in advancing himself in his community and denomination may look good on the outside, but on the inside he is being eaten up by the Worm of Pride. The cure is nailing self to the cross.

@brocraige

Pastored 30+ years. Been a

DOM for 4 years. As a pastor, I was a member of the church I served, but [also] the leader. As a DOM, I'm in a different church almost every Sunday. All that to say, I love being a member of a local church that I can return to and count on. Belonging matters.

@jaredcwilson

They napped nearby while He was sweating blood. Still He proceeded to the cross. The longsuffering patience of Jesus is overwhelming to me.

@DianeLangberg

Traumas suggest we are worthless and do not matter. Talking tells the truth and gives dignity because the story matters as does its impact.

@michealpardue

I'm not a fan of the celebrity pastor culture prevalent in our con-

vention. However, I'm even less of a fan of men who want to become famous by tearing down popular pastors simply for the sake of making a name for themselves.

@AlanLCross

Look to Jesus. Get to know Him for who He is. Stop trying to make the Bible fit a false understanding of history and culture and race so you can protect your way of life. Go to the cross and live. Jesus will receive you and renew your mind and give you a new heart.

@JackieHillPerry

I'm not sure why we are so heavy handed toward those who are struggling with their faith. Maybe somewhere in us, we still believe the law is better than grace. I don't know. What I do know is that Scripture has given us a better way: Have MERCY on those who doubt (Jude 1:22).

Helping young widows

Ministering to young widows can be a difficult journey. It can be hard to know what to do or how to reach out. Here are just a few tips to pray and think through if you know a young widow:

1. Remembrance. To be remembered is one of the most meaningful things, whether in the early days of grief or years down the road. This includes the anniversary of the hard days, the happy days, doing special things for holidays and remembering these women every single day and letting them know it.

2. Commitment. Grief is a long road. Widows need constant support and commitment they can depend on. With all the changes going on in their lives, if the church can be the one physical constant, it can provide the stability necessary for healing.

3. Safety. Church should be a safe place — physically and emotionally. Young widows need the church, but so often no longer know where they belong.

4. Physical needs. If a church can come alongside and meet as many physical needs as they possibly can, such as mowing the lawn and bringing meals, that will free the widow mentally, emotionally and physically to take care of other things that no one else can do for her.

5. Love. There are many ways to reach out and love young widows and their families, and each way shows God's special care and love.

God will use His church to care for widows; the church just needs to seek His plan for their care.

Spring Rutland
Women's ministry representative for the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (*This article originally appeared in the Southern Baptist TEXAN and is edited for space.*)

3 stories you should know



Photo courtesy of Caron Duckworth

Five-year-old Sutton Corban places American flags at the grave of his grandfather, Lt. Col. Clarence Duckworth, at the Alabama National Cemetery in Montevallo. Each year, volunteers and family members place flags at each marker in observance of Veterans Day — almost 9,000 flags at the Alabama National Cemetery alone. Alabama has five national cemeteries maintained by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Veterans Day is Nov. 11. (TAB Media)

Lifeway bank theft case doesn't affect entity

Lifeway Christian Resources officials say the entity is not affected by allegations that a former Lifeway Credit Union leader embezzled funds from the financial institution.

FOX 17 news in Nashville reported Oct. 28 that Monica Jackson, who directed Lifeway CU's operations and marketing, was charged with stealing \$242,156 from the credit union from October 2016 to February 2021. Federal investigators are involved in the case.

Lifeway CU is a separate arm of Lifeway Christian Resources and provides financial services for employees, family, retirees and other related groups.

Carol Pipes, Lifeway's director of communications, said "no Lifeway Christian Resources funds were embezzled or mismanaged." (TAB Media)

Darling to lead cultural engagement center

Daniel Darling is the new director of the Land Center for Cultural Engagement at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and will serve under presidential appointment as assistant professor of faith and culture at Texas Baptist College.

Darling most recently gained notoriety for being let go as senior vice president for communications of the National Religious Broadcasters after discussing his views on COVID vaccinations during a media interview representing NRB. Previously, Darling worked for the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. (TAB Media)



DARLING

Persecuted church

Three pastors, two other Christians attacked in incidents in India

NEW DELHI, India — Five Christians, three of them pastors, were assaulted in separate incidents in India, according to Morning Star News.

On Sept. 1, police in Uttar Pradesh state arrested three Christians on false charges of forcible conversion. One Christian was soon released, but the other two were beaten and warned to stop practicing Christianity, the report states. The following day, they were charged with breaking COVID-19 protocols and were released.

In Chhattisgarh state Sept. 5, police interrupted worship at New Life Fellowship Ministry in Raipur to summon Pastor Harish Sahu, Morning Star states. Sahu and two other local pastors — Ankush Bariyekar and Prakash Masih — reported to the police station. About 200 Hindu extremists protested outside, while some forced their way

inside. The extremists attacked the pastors and manhandled a police officer. Two other officers helped to force the assailants out of the station, the report states. Charges were filed against 10 assailants.

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

Two Pakistani Christians killed over land dispute with Muslims

OKARA DISTRICT, Pakistan — Two Christians in Pakistan were gunned down by a Muslim mob in a land disagreement that turned into a religious dispute.



Morning Star News photo

According to the human rights group International Christian Concern, Yaqoob Masih and brother Haroon Masih were shot and killed Oct. 8 in Okara District by an angry Muslim mob.

A survivor of the attack told ICC that local Muslims were upset Christians had applied to lease six acres of land for cultivation. Local authorities had granted the lease. Five people were working in the fields when two dozen or more armed men attacked, the survivor said.

Christians make up about 1.6% of Pakistan's population, ICC notes. Disputes between Christians and Muslims often turn violent because of religious intolerance and widespread discrimination of religious minorities, ICC said. Sometimes, false claims of blasphemy are leveled against Christians. Pakistan is No. 5 on Open Doors' 2021 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian. (ICC)

Alabama news

BETHEL ASSOCIATION

► Kay Evans said those present at **First Baptist Church Demopolis** “truly felt God’s presence among us” as they gathered to celebrate the church’s 150th anniversary Oct. 24.

“We were so blessed to be able to come together and offer thanks,” said Evans, anniversary committee co-chair.

The church — led by Pastor Carl Williams (left) — had originally planned to celebrate in October 2020 but postponed the gathering in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. More celebratory activities are planned for spring 2022.

During the Oct. 24 service, Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, was guest speaker. Tim Hall, minister of music, led congregational singing and directed the choir. The choir sang an original song written by Ed Rush, former minister of music.

Also during the service, Anna Speir (right) of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission and Mike Snow, director of missions for Bethel Baptist Association, presented the church with certificates. Woody Collins, mayor of Demopolis, shared his memories of growing up at FBC.

► Mike Snow (below, right) says when **Bethel Baptist Association** began in 1820, there was “no doubt that in the minds of those who anchored the (association’s) establishing — they knew they were better together.”

Two centuries later, that’s still the reason the association exists, said Snow, who serves as director of missions. “That mentality has not changed. We are still better together.”

The association honored its 200th anniversary at its annual celebration Oct. 24 at Providence Baptist Church, Gallion. The event — originally scheduled for 2020 — was pushed back a year due to COVID-19.



Photo by Debbie Campbell/
The Alabama Baptist

Evangelist Phil Waldrep was the guest speaker, and Snow shared highlights from the association’s history.

Keith Hinson, Providence Baptist’s music minister, and the church’s praise team led worship, accompanied by pianist Renee Hinson. Lonette Berg (left), executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, and Rick Barnhart of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions presented the association with certificates.



Photo courtesy of Anna Speir

BLOUNT COUNTY ASSOCIATION

► **Pleasant View Missionary Baptist Church, Holly Pond**, will host its regular third Sunday night singing Nov. 21, 6 p.m., featuring The Coffmans from Kentucky. Earl Harper is pastor.

CHILTON ASSOCIATION

► **Center Hill Baptist Church, Jemison**, will hold revival services Nov. 17–21, led by Terry Long, director of missions for Choctaw Baptist Association and state missionary in the evangelism office of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, with special music by Noah Terrell, music minister at Center Hill. Youth and Children night kicks off the revival beginning with a meal at 5:30 p.m. and service at 6:30 p.m.; Nov. 18 and 19 services begin at 7 p.m.; Nov. 20 focuses on marriage from 10 a.m. to noon, followed by lunch; Nov. 21 service begins at 11 a.m.

CLEBURNE ASSOCIATION

► **Cedar Creek Baptist Church, Heflin**, was 175 years old plus one when the church gathered to celebrate the milestone anniversary Oct. 24. The church moved the event from September 2020 in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Photo courtesy
of Sonja Adams

When they finally were able to gather for the celebration, “one word sums it up — wonderful,” said Jane Lee, descendant of the founding family and organizer of the event.

During the special anniversary-focused service, Lee spoke on the church’s history, which began in the home of her great-great grandfather, W.W. Hilton.

Pastor Donald Triplett (right) preached at the anniversary service, and the church honored him and his wife, Glenda, for their 23 years of service to the church. Cedar Creek also honored Hobart Kennedy, the church’s oldest deacon, with a plaque.

Sonja Adams (left), daughter of former pastor W.E. Jones Jr. and a representative for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented the church with a certificate.

Secretary of State John Merrill, son of former pastor Horace Merrill, also presented the church with a resolution from the State of Alabama.

Steve Dempsey, former pastor, shared memories of serving at Cedar Creek Baptist.

John Triplett, the current pastor’s son, sang an original song he composed commemorating the 175th anniversary.

COFFEE COUNTY ASSOCIATION

► **The Church on Boll Weevil Circle, Enterprise**, will host “Thanksgiving with the Ma-Chis

Indians” on Nov. 13, 2–5 p.m. with a worship celebration at 3 p.m. The event will feature wagon rides, roasted corn and chestnuts, Native American exhibits and vendors and a celebration of friendship, heritage and worship. John Granger is pastor.

COVINGTON ASSOCIATION

► Betty Johnson worked at **Fairmount Baptist Church, Red Level**, for nearly a quarter of the church’s existence. That isn’t a small thing, considering that the church just celebrated its 200th anniversary.

Everyone celebrated the church’s bicentennial Oct. 10. “Everyone thoroughly enjoyed it,” said Johnson, who recently retired after 46 years as church clerk.

Terry Liles, who grew up in the church, was the guest speaker, and Steve Bailey, who serves as minister to youth and students, presented the church’s history. The family of Pastor John Bell sang, and his son Caleb, who serves as minister of music, led congregational singing.

Ellen Dewberry of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented the church with a certificate. A photo album and scrapbook of special events compiled by Johnson was on display during the event.

MUSCLE SHOALS ASSOCIATION

► **Mount View Baptist Church, Trinity**, burned its \$400,000 mortgage note in its Oct. 24 service.

Wesley Rutherford lights the note with other church members (from left) — Mark Hall, John Hitt, Barry White, Linda White, Becky Eades, Joyce Engle, Roger Engle, Elaine Boyett and James Wallace. The original 15-year note was paid off early. Construction included expanding the fellowship hall and additional educational space. Mark S. Milwee is pastor.



Photo courtesy of MVBC

WEST CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

► **Ryan Skiebe** has been called as the senior pastor of **Summerfield Baptist Church, Selma**. He previously served as an assistant pastor in West Virginia and as a missionary school teacher in Saipan in the Northern Mariana Islands. He holds degrees from Pensacola Theological Seminary and is pursuing a doctorate from Carolina University. He and his wife, Meghan, have three children.



SKIEBE

Motion planned for review of sex abuse policies

Retired attorney Melissa Bowen, a member of First Baptist Church Prattville, plans to propose a motion calling for a Sexual Abuse Task Force during the upcoming annual meeting of Alabama Baptists. The task force's purpose will be to review policies and practices, not to investigate any alleged cases, she said.

Bowen, who spent a decade representing domestic violence victims through Legal Services Alabama before she retired in 2017, said she sees the motion as an opportunity to help in an area she cares deeply about.

"Domestic violence isn't always about childhood sexual abuse, but it came up very often," Bowen told The Alabama Baptist. "Victims of domestic violence who were sexually abused as children said they felt like they were worthless, so when they ended up in situations where there was physical violence, emotional abuse or ongoing sexual abuse, they would put up with it because they felt they deserved it because of feeling worthless."

Now that more and more groups across the nation are working to improve their policies and practices, "I see this as an opportunity to help Alabama Baptist churches

with their own reviews."

When FBC Prattville reviewed its policies and procedures in 2019, Bowen served on the committee alongside other professionals who work with children.

Ongoing concern

"We found we were doing a lot of things right," she said. "We had some good policies and practices, ... but we also learned about some things we had not thought of and were able to implement."

"And we realized that this should be an ongoing concern and we should stay diligent about these reviews in an ongoing way," Bowen noted. "I think we are all aware of our need for our churches to be proactive."

Because there's always a need for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions to assist churches with resources, especially related to policies and practices, Bowen said, "That's the reason for the motion."

"In its role, the State Board resources, assists, trains and does all the things to help churches do a good job, so we want to ensure its policies and practices are carefully reviewed," she said. "And we want to do the same for all partner entities and auxiliaries which are funded by the Cooperative Program."

Proposed motion

"I move that the newly elected president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention name a Sexual Abuse Task Force of at least seven members with the newly elected president being an ex-officio member. The purpose of this task force would be to review the policies and practices of our Cooperative Program-funded state convention entities and auxiliaries, including the

State Board of Missions, related to sex abuse. Reviewing members of the task force will not include paid staff of the entities, auxiliaries or State Board and will report back to the 2022 Convention. The executive director of the State Board of Missions will serve as a resource for the task force. Expenses of the task force will be covered by the State Board of Missions."

The CP-funded entities and auxiliaries which partner with the State Board of Missions include: Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries, Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, Alabama Baptist Retirement Centers, Alabama Citizens Action Program, Alabama WMU, Shocco Springs Conference Center, The Alabama Baptist, The Baptist Foundation of

Alabama and University of Mobile.

Leaders of each of the groups mentioned indicated to The Alabama Baptist they support the proposal.

Rick Lance, executive director of the State Board of Missions, said, "We at the State Board of Missions welcome an opportunity to have our policies and practices reviewed by the task force. We affirm the process

and pledge to cooperate with them. We desire any input that will help us assist churches."

Rod Marshall, president of the Children's Homes, also noted an "utmost concern for the well-being of the children in our care."

"We support this motion and look forward to the opportunity to meet with concerned Baptists to examine our policies and practices to ensure we are exercising due diligence to continue to protect, nurture and restore children and families through Christ-centered services at a level that is beyond reproach and will protect our children and our ministries for many decades into the future," he said.

Bowen, who recently wrapped up her second two-year term as president of Alabama WMU (a volunteer position), served on the WMU staff from 2000 to 2006 before becoming managing attorney of the Montgomery office for Legal Services Alabama from 2007 to 2017. (TAB Media)



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Tim Cox has served as president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention for three years.

'GREAT JOY'



Photo by Tracy Riggs/The Alabama Baptist

Cox wraps up historic presidency, says it's been a 'joy' to see Alabama Baptists serve faithfully

By Grace Thornton
TAB Media

When Tim Cox was elected president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention in 2018, he didn't know it was going to be a historic presidency.

Many times, ABSC presidents serve one year and are reelected for a second. But Cox served three, and a president hasn't served that long since the early years of the convention. For Cox's term to be extended by a global pandemic also is a landmark.

"Looking back, it feels like I've been in this position my whole ministry," he joked. "But I look back on it with great joy."

'Anointed leadership'

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said Alabama Baptists can be proud of Cox's service.

"He has been faithful in leading Alabama Baptists during the most difficult days of the historic pandemic period," Lance said, adding

Alabama Baptists benefited from Cox's "godly wisdom and anointed leadership."

For Cox, pastor of Liberty Baptist Church in Chelsea, even though the pandemic was his presidency's greatest challenge, he said it also was a joy to see God's people remain faithful when life was turned upside down.

"I've experienced the great joy of seeing faithful men and women of God seek the Lord and seek to fulfill the mission God has given us," he said.

"One of the joys is to see the faithfulness of Alabama Baptists in Cooperative Program giving in the very tough year of 2020 when we didn't know what was going to happen.

"One thing that remained strong was the fuel of giving through the Cooperative Program to advance the mission of the gospel."

Cox said deciding not to have an in-person convention annual meeting last year was difficult, and he's thankful to be meeting face-to-face again this year.

"The number of decisions we've had to make has been off the chart, and it's new kind of decisions we've never been faced with before," Cox said, noting that goes for pastors as well as leaders at every level.

The truth he has encouraged other leaders to cling to is that God is still on His throne, and the meeting's theme of "ChristCentered" feels especially poignant in light of the past year-and-a-half, he said.

"Our contentment is in Jesus, and He is our sufficiency, and this season of ministry and convention life has not caught Him off guard," Cox affirmed.

"I pray we will steward well this

season of ministry He has given us."

That was Cox's prayer three years ago, and he has watched it happen in Alabama Baptist life.

'Diverse group'

"Even though we have a diverse group of people called Alabama Baptists, from the local church to our entities and our State Board of Missions, we're all pulling in the same direction to make Christ known and disciple believers to be more like Jesus and live life on mission," Cox said.

That goes for everyone from state missionaries to disaster relief volunteers, Alabama Baptist Children's Homes to Alabama Baptist Retirement Centers, he added.

"I've wanted to be an encourager and a cheerleader for the right things that were going on," he said. "In the face of these challenging times, I believe and pray this could truly be the time we could see some of the most fruitful days of ministry."

"I believe and pray this could truly be the time we could see some of the most fruitful days of ministry."

Tim Cox
president, Alabama Baptist State Convention

A season of 'sacred stewardship'

Arson attack provides opportunity for church members to share story with community

(continued from page 1)

Bethea said it was meaningful for him because along with being ordained in Stakely, he also proposed to his wife and got married there. He's heard many people making similar comments about their salvations, baptisms, weddings and ordinations in that sanctuary.

Gospel conversation

And he heard other things too. "I keep hearing these comments from our church members of family members who have not had a church conversation or religious conversation in years asking what's going on — they're very interested in our season," Bethea said.

He believes the church has entered a "sacred stewardship," an opportunity to use a season of hardship to share the gospel. But he doesn't deny that it's been a difficult time. "I've gone home many a night and wept, been overwhelmed, not known what to do, been scared that I would steward this season poorly," he said.

But he's seen God give him, as well as the other staff and members of FBC, an abundance of gospel opportunities.

"Over the past several weeks, I've had more people ask me as the pastor of this church, 'Hey, what's going on down there at First Baptist? What happened?' People who don't know the Lord, who have never set foot in our church, people who have turned their back on faith, they've wanted to know, and the door for the gospel has been opened wide," Bethea said.

'God can save a church arsonist'

The church is sharing with everyone it can and praying for the salvation of many — including the arsonist.

A suspect was arrested Oct. 4 and charged with the crime.

"Our church is praying and believing that if God could save sinners such as us, then He can save a church arsonist. So we're praying for this person who has done this, that the Lord would save [her], that these earthly consequences would lead to eternal repentance," Bethea said.

"We're praying for her, we're praying for our community to rise up, we're praying for revival in our church and we're seeing the Lord do a great work."

He said he has seen the church come together, experience a sweeter fellowship than ever before and do what needs to be done to keep ministry going. It's been such a sweet time, they haven't wanted to rush the process — they just want to be faithful and obedient in each step they take.

"We could say, 'Lord, we want to be back in the main sanctuary, we want to get this thing over with,' or we can say, 'This is where we

are, the Lord has brought us here. How are we going to steward every conversation, every moment to bring the Lord glory and honor and ultimately show the community where our trust is — not in buildings, not in walls, not in pews, but in what the Lord has done in our lives?'"

Long process

The cleanup and restoration process is a long one, Bethea said.

Smoke and soot got into the church's air conditioning systems and circulated to "nearly every foot" of the sprawling facilities.

"Some of the Sunday School classrooms that were on the third floor away from the sanctuary, you could actually write your name on the tables (in the soot)," he said.

So church leaders want to be cautious. Every day, a team of about 100 people from ServPro works on the facilities to ensure every toy and



Photo by Doug Rogers

After several weeks of worshipping outside, the congregation of FBC Montgomery sings together in the church's Stakely Sanctuary during its first worship service back in the church's facilities since the Sept. 30 arson attack.

For a video recap, visit tabonline.org/FBC-Montgomery.

ceiling tile is cleaned and that the organ pipes are cleaned from the inside out.

"Our teams are doing an amazing job, but it takes a lot of time," Bethea said.

He's constantly reminded the church has never been about pews — it's about people.

"Pews haven't gone out to share the gospel, people have.

"Walls don't speak up, people do."

It's about people being sent on mission and, for FBC in this season, using the story of how God is working at their church to share the gospel with the community.

"I pray to God that we steward this season in

a way that says we're not just ready to get back in the buildings, we're ready for the church to go out," Bethea said. "The greatest failure for our church is to leave this tough, tough, tough season and be unchanged by it."

'Revived, changed'

"I hope for us as a church [to] walk out of this season revived, changed, full of the gospel presence that would take us out of the church and into the world around us."



Photo courtesy of FBC Montgomery



Photo by Lori Rogers



Photo by Doug Rogers



Photo by Doug Rogers



Photo by Doug Rogers



Photo courtesy of FBC Montgomery

SEPTEMBER 30

During the early morning hours, an arsonist set several fires inside FBC Montgomery. Smoke and soot spread to "nearly every foot" of the church's facilities, Pastor Mark Bethea said.

OCTOBER 3

FBC Montgomery had originally planned to meet in the parking lot for worship the first Sunday after the fires, but rain led them to move into a parking garage.

OCTOBER 17

For the next three Sundays, FBC held services in the parking lot. It was such a blessing that members have asked if they can meet outside more often after the buildings are open again.

OCTOBER 27

Nancie McQueen, FBC's minister to preschool, teaches children during the first event held inside the church's buildings since the fire — a snack supper, children's choir and children's discipleship.

OCTOBER 31

FBC members gather in the now-cleaned historic Stakely Sanctuary for worship. This sanctuary was used for services until 2004 when they moved into the main sanctuary.

NOVEMBER 1

Carpet and ceiling tiles are being replaced and other items are being cleaned in the church parlor, one of the rooms where a fire was set and smoke damage occurred.

ABDR, others honored with Samford Medallion Awards

By Grace Thornton
TAB Media

Faithful service in action” — that’s what Beck A. Taylor, president of Samford University, said the three recipients of the inaugural Samford Medallion Awards embody.

On Nov. 1, Samford presented the honor to Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief — represented by Mark Wakefield, lead strategist for ABDR — along with Tony Cooper, former executive director of the Jimmie Hale Mission, and Frances Ford, executive director of Sowing Seeds of Hope.

The Samford Medallion Awards recognize those whose good works have made a difference in society, in community affairs, in the life of the church and in the quality of life of individuals. “I’m not sure that I would

be able to come up with better examples of how the act of love can positively impact and shape the life of the community in which we live than the examples we have heard tonight,” Taylor said at the awards ceremony.

Bringing hope

Wakefield said it was his honor to accept the award for the “hundreds and hundreds” of disaster relief volunteers who give up their time and the comforts of home to “go and be with people in what may be the worst times of their lives and bring hope to them.”

ABDR coordinates volunteers to provide food, water, child care, showers, laundry and assistance with tree and debris removal, roof tarping and flood recovery to those affected by disasters.

Wakefield said he also ac-

cepted the award on behalf of “all Alabama Baptists who through their generous contributions to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering and through Cooperative Program giving and individual giving make this possible.”

Tony Cooper, who currently serves as pastor of Pineywood Baptist Church in Gardendale, received the award for his 29 years of leading the Jimmie Hale Mission, a Christian-based nonprofit organization in central Alabama.

The ministry includes a homeless shelter for men, a shelter for women and children, recovery programs and three learning centers.

Cooper retired from that role in 2019.

Ford received the award for her work leading Sowing Seeds of Hope, a faith-based



Photo courtesy of Samford University

ABDR strategist Mark Wakefield (second from right) is joined by volunteers (l to r) Shirley Loewen, John Hayes and Mel Johnson at the inaugural Samford Medallion Awards on Nov. 1.

community development organization devoted to serving and supporting people in Perry County and across the Black Belt region.

Broad assistance

The organization helps through home repair and housing solutions, health care assistance, spiritual renewal opportunities, education resources and more.

“It has always been a joy to work with Samford

students who come and do work with us and do many things and have an opportunity to put their faith in action,” Ford said.

Sowing Seeds of Hope exists to “give hope to those who are sometimes in a hopeless situation,” she said.

At the end of the ceremony, Taylor also announced that Samford was donating \$1,000 to each nonprofit.

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New season of Leadership

Beck A. Taylor inaugurated as Samford University's 19th president

Beck A. Taylor was inaugurated as Samford University's 19th president Nov. 4 in a ceremony held in the university's Leslie Stephen Wright Fine Arts Center.

Taylor received the oath of office from Bill Stevens, chair of Samford's board of trustees. His investiture followed, during which he was conveyed the ceremonial chain of office.

The chain bears the names of those who have served as president and represents the authority and responsibility bestowed by the board of trustees. President Emeritus Andrew Westmoreland assisted with the investiture to represent continuity of the university's Christ-centered mission since 1841.

Confidence in God's plan

"The names of 18 presidents on this chain of office I now proudly wear, including the names of two Samford presidents I've known and loved, Drs. [Thomas] Corts and Westmoreland, don't just point to a line of presidential succession," Taylor said in his inaugural address.

"They also give us confidence that from one season of leadership to the next, God has important plans to accomplish in and through all of us here at Samford."

Ephesians 3:16–19 was the theme of Taylor's inaugural address with a focus on being "rooted and grounded in love."

"I challenge us to make such love the cornerstone of all we do at Samford, to make love the foundation of any vision that we might cast together in the coming months and years," Taylor said. "Some might think it too abstract, or too emotional, or too self-evident to claim as the foundation of all we do at an academic institution, at a modern university. But, if our efforts aren't rooted and grounded in love, in the love of Christ, I contend that we will fail."

Taylor said love is at the heart of Samford's mission of "For God, for learning, forever."

"It should be no surprise to us now that Christ's commandment to us is rooted and grounded in love — a commandment to love God with all of ourselves (heart, mind, body, soul, spirit) and to love oth-

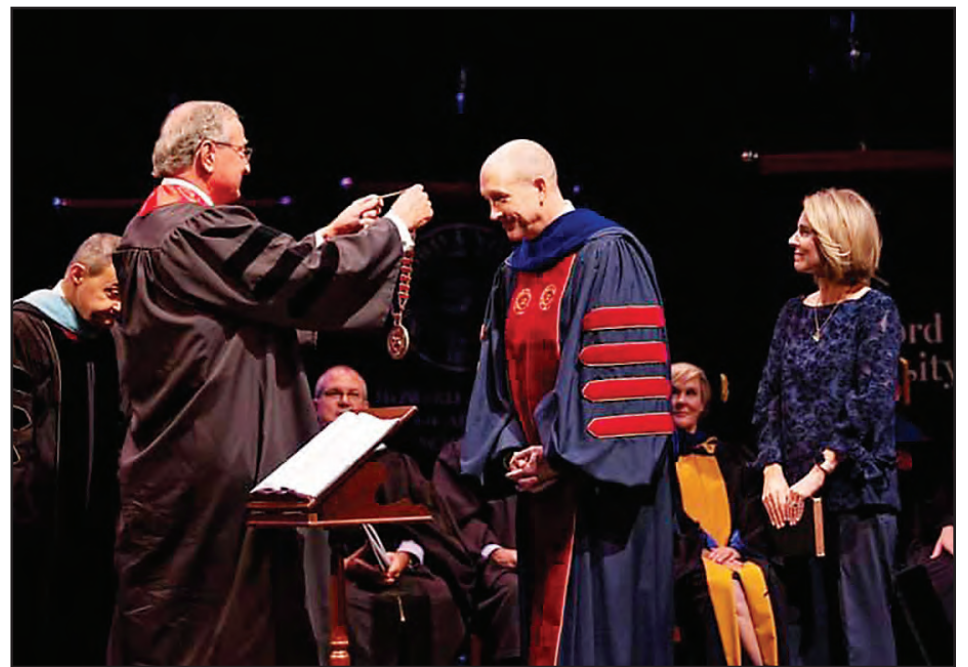


Photo courtesy of Samford University
Bill Stevens, chairman of Samford University's board of trustees, places the ceremonial chain listing all of SU's previous presidents onto Beck Taylor, the university's newest president, during Taylor's inauguration Nov. 4.

ers fiercely, devotedly, sacrificially, even as we love ourselves," Taylor said. "I'm not sure that the mission and vision of Samford could be articulated more succinctly or more inspirationally."

Looking ahead to the future, Taylor encouraged the Samford community to "complete the work the Lord has given us while carrying the solemn duty to plant new seeds of hope, healing, justice, mercy and love" through our actions.

"We will be confident that the Good Lord will protect our humble offerings, nurturing those tiny seeds — those acts of love we will produce — until great timbers of goodness, and truth and beauty are established and graciously provide their welcome shade to future generations, and generations beyond those, until the Lord comes again," Taylor said. "May some future president and Samford congregation ... remember us fondly in posterity for being faithful in this next season."

Taylor, who was president of Whitworth University from 2010 until coming to Samford in July of

this year, previously served as dean and professor of economics for Samford's Brock School of Business from 2005 to 2010.

Ahead of the inauguration service, Taylor led a procession of delegates from more than 65 higher education institutions, including University of Mobile President Lonnie Burnett.

The procession also included members of Samford's board of trustees, deans, faculty members, representatives of student organizations, administrative officers and 112 flags representing the states, territories and countries that are home to Samford's 55,000 alumni.

Week of activities

The inauguration capped off a week of activities, including the Samford Medallion Awards (see story, page 12).

A speech by historian and presidential biographer Jon Meacham on civil discourse is being rescheduled, however, following student protests over Meacham's involvement with Planned Parenthood. (Samford University, TAB Media)



Photo courtesy of Samford University
Samford University President Emeritus Andrew Westmoreland, his wife, Jeanna, and Marla Corts, widow of former Samford president Thomas Corts, join Julie and Beck Taylor for Taylor's inauguration as Samford's 19th president.

Samford, UM recognized among nation's best colleges

Samford University and University of Mobile are ranked among the leading universities in the state and nation, according to two recent lists of top colleges.

The 2022 U.S. News & World Report rankings released this fall put Samford at 37th in the country on the Best Undergraduate Teaching list, placing it among the top 1% of colleges and universities in the country. Samford, which set an enrollment record in 2021 for the 13th consecutive year, is the only university in Alabama on the list.

Samford also was included in the Best Value Schools ranking, placing 97th on the list, which ranks colleges offering the best value for students in terms of academic quality and cost after accounting for total expenses and financial aid.

Academic reputation

Overall, Samford ranks 136th on the Best Colleges list out of 391 national universities, which includes the largest and most prestigious private and public institutions in the United States. The ranking

criteria include academic reputation, graduation and retention rates, class size, faculty/student ratios and peer assessments from higher education leaders.

For veterans

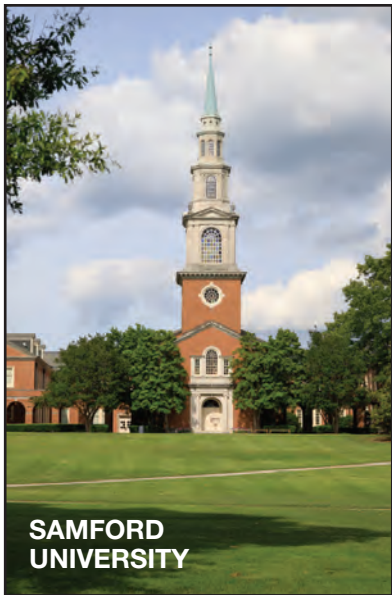
U.S. News ranks UM as the top regional college in Alabama for veterans and 9th best regional college in the South for veterans.

UM also was ranked 15th among Best Regional Colleges in the South and No. 30 on the list of Best Value Regional Colleges in the South.

University of Mobile also ranked No. 37 among the top 50 regional colleges in the South when it comes to enrolling and graduating economically disadvantaged students.

The ranking site Niche also released its 2022 ratings of public and private universities. The rankings were determined by academics, value, student life and other factors.

On Niche's list of Best College Campuses in Alabama, University of Mobile ranks No. 2 and Samford ranks No. 6. (Carrie Brown McWhorter)



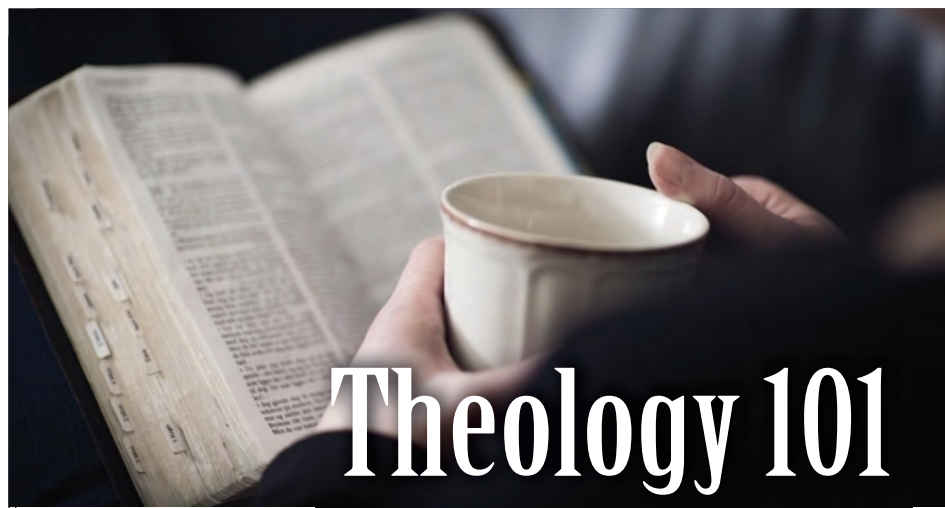
SAMFORD UNIVERSITY

Photo courtesy of Samford University



Photo courtesy of University of Mobile

UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Giving Thanks

A Christlike Thing to Do

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.

TAB Media

Giving thanks is a biblical thing to do, but even more pointedly, it is the Christlike thing to do.

When Christ miraculously fed the 5,000 from a young lad's lunch, the description says, "Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks, He distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down, and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted" (John 6:11). He also gave thanks when He fed a crowd of 4,000 (Matt. 15:36).

Christ's example of giving thanks before feeding the multitudes made an impression on the disciples, at least upon John. Writing his Gospel years later, he used Jesus' example of giving thanks as a way of identifying the place where the feeding happened, saying, "Other boats came from Tiberias, near the place where they ate bread after the Lord had given thanks" (6:23).

At the Last Supper when Christ transitioned from the historic Passover celebration to the new covenant's memorial supper, the record says, "He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you'" (Luke 22:19).

Years later when Paul gave the Corinthian believers instructions about observing the Lord's Supper, he included Jesus' giving thanks, saying it was after "He had given thanks" that He broke the bread and distributed it to His

disciples (1 Cor. 11:24).

In Luke 10 when the 70 He sent out returned, Christ rejoiced, praying, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes" (v. 21).

Are we not left with the impression that Christ was regularly thankful?

If we are to be Christlike at prayer, we also must be thankful. In fact, the Bible exhorts us to make giving thanks part of all our praying by admonishing, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6).

God's saving grace

Thankfulness may focus on the common grace of God by which He "makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). In addition, Christians are recipients of God's saving grace that "came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

Who has greater reasons for giving thanks than the redeemed of the Lord?

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.



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Purpose Baptist Church, Opelika, Ala., is looking for a bivocational worship leader. Please send resumé to: PurposeBaptist@gmail.com.

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Ezra Baptist Church (Bessemer, Ala.) is seeking a part-time music director. This position is tasked with leading the music ministry of the church. Please email your resumé and cover letter to: ezrabcoffice@gmail.com.

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TAB DIGITAL

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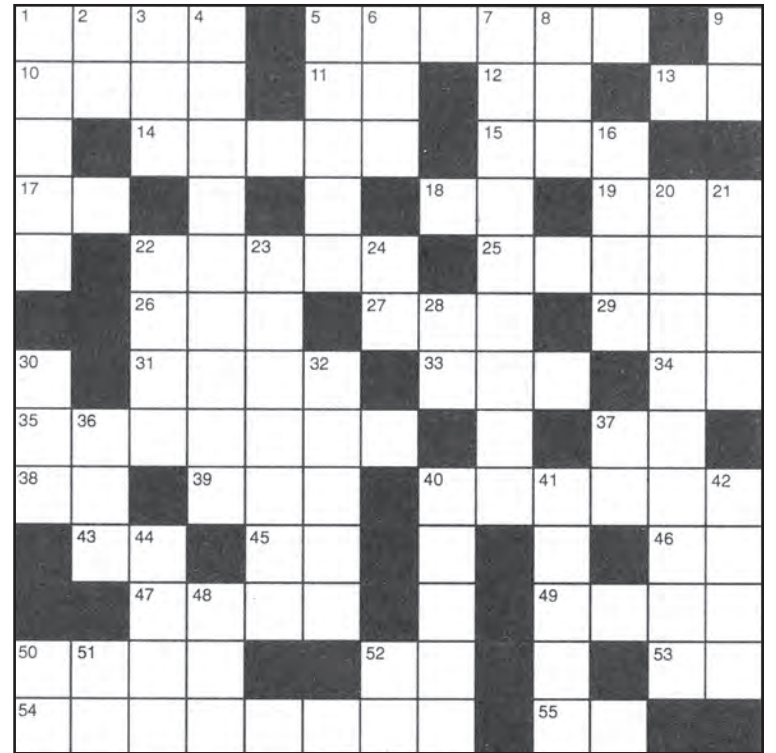
TAB HIGHLIGHTS

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

CHRISTIAN crossword

ACROSS

- Strive to enter in at the strait _____. (Luke 13:24)
- A crown.
- A Christmas carol.
- He leadeth me _____ the paths of righteousness. (Ps. 23:3)
- Hesitating sound.
- _____ whose stripes ye were healed. (1 Pet. 2:24)
- The seventh month of the Jewish year.
- Variety. (abbr.)
- Room. (abbr.)
- Train up a child in the way he should _____. (Prov. 22:6)
- United States Mail. (abbr.)
- Sarai's maid.
- One tenth of one's income.
- Blood classification system.
- The children of _____. (Ezra 2:57)
- To cut.
- Clan.
- Digit of the foot.
- Place. (abbr.)
- Where the Beatitudes are found.
- _____ save me for thy mercies' sake. (Ps. 6:4)
- Between Bethel and _____, on the west side of the city. (Josh. 8:12)
- _____ children arise up and call her blessed. (Prov. 31:28)
- Queen who risked her life to save her people.
- Nova Scotia. (abbr.)
- Right side. (abbr.)
- Second tone of a scale.
- He that winneth souls is _____. (Prov. 11:30)
- This is the day which the Lord hath _____.



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- Whimper or whine.
- Sell whatsoever thou _____, and give to the poor. (Mark 10:21)
- Burrowing animals with pouched cheeks.
- Symbol for element radium.
- Mountain. (abbr.)
- Doctors group. (abbr.)
- Concise.
- A landmark on eastern boundary of Canaan. (Num. 34:11)
- _____ how great is thy goodness. (Ps. 31:19)
- A son of Gad. (Gen. 46:16)
- Ye shall not _____ the Lord your God. (Deut. 6:16)
- A bruised _____ shall he not break. (Matt. 12:20)
- The little owl, and the great owl and the _____. (Deut. 14:16)
- A retirement plan.
- Billie Jo, Bobby Joe. (abbr.)
- A prefix meaning "early."
- Symbol for the element tantalum.
- The cow and the _____ shall feed. (Isa. 11:7)
- The Lord is good _____ all. (Ps. 145:9)
- South Dakota. (abbr.)
- David's close friend.
- And _____ him that knocketh it shall be opened. (Matt. 7:8)
- A knot on the trunk of a tree.
- Account of. (abbr.)
- The days of our years are threescore years and _____. (Ps. 90:10)
- The cousin of Mary.
- Roman goddess. (Acts 19:27)
- No room for them in the _____. (Luke 2:7)
- Prayers, especially in private.
- Equal Rights Amendment. (abbr.)
- But as for me and _____ house, we will serve the Lord. (Josh. 24:15)
- Naomi's daughter-in-law.
- They were told of the birth of Christ.

ONE MISSION: The Great Commission ONE PROGRAM: The Cooperative Program MANY MINISTRIES: Great Commission Ministries

CHRIST CENTERED

Colossians 1:17-18



ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ALABAMA BAPTIST STATE CONVENTION NOVEMBER 16-17, 2021

WHITESBURG BAPTIST CHURCH • HUNTSVILLE

FEATURING MESSAGES BY:

TUESDAY MORNING
Tim Cox • Pastor, Liberty Baptist Church, Chelsea

TUESDAY EVENING
Jamie Dew • President, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

WEDNESDAY MORNING
Jeff Meyers • Pastor, First Baptist Church, Opelika



Tim Cox



Jamie Dew



Jeff Meyers

CHRIST CENTERED testimonies by

Colossians 1:17-18

Joshua del Risco
Hispanic Pastor, Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham

Dewayne Rembert
Pastor, Flatline Church, Montgomery

Zachary Beasley
Campus Minister, Alabama State University and Tuskegee University



Joshua del Risco

Dewayne Rembert



Zachary Beasley



MINI-CONCERT, Tuesday Evening
by Contemporary Christian Singer Christy Nockels,



Events Surrounding the Annual Meeting

CHURCH PLANTER NETWORK DINNER

November 14, 4 p.m. • House of Hope and Restoration Church, Huntsville
Register at PlantAlabama.org/events

ALABAMA BAPTIST PASTORS CONFERENCE

November 15, 10 a.m. • First Baptist Church, Decatur
More info at albaptistpc.com

UNITE, A GATHERING OF ALABAMA BAPTIST COLLEGE MINISTRY LEADERS

November 15, 4 p.m. • The Well Church, Huntsville
Register at BCMLink.org/events

CONVERSATIONS WITH IMB

November 16 and 17 during the convention • Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville
Learn more and sign up for your 30-minute slot at alsbom.org/events

Visit alsbom.org/convention for complete schedule and hotel information or contact Amy Nelson, anelson@alsbom.org, (334) 613-2231.

Returning to church

Most churches and churchgoers are now gathering in person, according to recent study

More U.S. Protestant churches are gathering in person since the COVID-19 pandemic began, and pastors say most churchgoers have returned as well.

Almost all U.S. Protestant pastors (98%) say their church met in person in August, according to a new

Lifeway Research study. This marks the highest percentage of churches holding in-person services since March 2020, when COVID-19 became a national health issue.

Majority of churches

During the first week of March last year, 99% of Protestant churches met in

person. By the end of the month, only 7% did so, according to a previous Lifeway Research study.

A majority of churches didn't start holding in-person services again until June 2020. By September 2020, 87% met physically, but that dropped to 76% in January 2021, according to Lifeway Research studies conducted at the time.

In August 2021, however, only 2% of churches did not meet in person at all.

"Every church's path has been different during the pandemic, and each stage of resuming specific aspects of ministry is significant," said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research. "Worshipping together as a physical as-



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"Every church's path has been different during the pandemic, and each stage of resuming specific aspects of ministry is significant."

Scott McConnell
executive director, Lifeway Research

sembly of believers in Jesus Christ is an important element of the Christian faith. For almost all Protestant churches, this stage of ministry is now active again,

though other aspects of ministry may not be." To read more and view the complete report, visit lifewayresearch.com. (Lifeway Research)

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For November 14

Explore the Bible

By Robert Olsen, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



THE GOSPEL LIVED Colossians 3:1-17

A New Life (1-4)

When Paul says the Colossians had died, he meant Christians have died to sin (see Romans 6); therefore, we are now able to live for Christ, being able to overcome sin through the power of the Holy Spirit. This has great ramifications for us.

Because we live for Christ, we are able to live lives that focus on eternity because we know this world is not our home

It has been said Christians can be too heavenly minded to be any earthly good. This is not possible.

If Christians truly have their minds on things above, then they will be of supreme earthly good. When Christians do not focus on heavenly things, they lose their value.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told Christians to be salt and light. In fact, if Christians do not act as salt and light, they are worthless (see Matthew 5).

Put Off (5-11)

One way we live heavenly minded is to emulate Christ and strive to die to ourselves and fleshly desires and put on the new self by the power of the Holy Spirit.

For example, we glorify God by living out our faith which results in things such as caring for the poor, the orphan, the widow, the sick, etc., and this is what Christians have done throughout the centuries.

Even when the world turns against us, we are to continue to love those who persecute us, continuing to perform acts of love to those around us.

Paul emphasizes the equality of all people before God. This section is not saying no distinction exists between people — when Paul wrote this, there were still Jews and Gentiles, slaves and freemen in the church together.

Paul is stating that before God, all are equal. Christianity is a religion that does not discriminate based on position in society, race or national identity. Christianity moves across

all lines that divide.

Because the salvation from Christ is equally available to all, Christians have no basis for discrimination.

The only difference between people today is between those who belong to Christ and are saved and those who do not belong to Christ and are unsaved.

Since salvation is available to all people, one way we bring glory to God is by witnessing to others.

We do this verbally, but it is helped by our actions. One who claims to be a Christian but does not show love to his neighbor represents Christ poorly.

Put On (12-17)

So instead of living with envy, anger, malice, etc., Christians are to be humble, gentle and patient. Think about how different this is in today's culture.

Many people in our culture have been so influenced by social media that the purpose of life is to get recognition on Facebook or Twitter.

People today speak ill of one another just to get people to like their posts. Christians need to find their security in Christ, not in the culture around them.

When the rest of the culture tells us to believe something or act a certain way that is unchristian, we need to stand our ground, and if it means we get ridiculed or lose our job, so be it.

The final verse in this section is one with massive worldview implications. As Christians, we are not to complain, but work cheerfully for the Lord. Since we are to live for Christ, we need to act and work in a way that pleases Him.

This means when we are cursed, we bless. When others slack at work, we work to the best of our ability because how we work represents Jesus.

We need to take a stand with Christ against the world, showing the world what it means to be a disciple of Christ and represent Him well so others can see what a Jesus follower looks like.

Bible Studies for Life

By James Riley Strange, Ph.D.

Professor of New Testament, Samford University



CONFIDENCE AFTER WE FAIL Genesis 16:1-5; 17:1-9

At this point in his long story, Abram has established a pattern of behavior: When he becomes dissatisfied with God's timing, he tries to solve a problem despite God's promise.

In 15:2-3, Abram chose an heir unrelated to him, perhaps a slave of his household. Before that, having received a promise of protection, to save his own neck Abram allowed Sarai to be taken into the harem of Egypt's Pharaoh — and profited from the arrangement (12:10-20).

In today's passage, Sarai takes matters into her own hands, apparently learning little from her husband's failures and her own suffering. The consequences are nearly calamitous for a woman and her child.

Read all of chapters 16 and 17.

Don't take matters into your own hands. (16:1-5)

Surely when Abram said in Egypt, "Say you are my sister, so that ... my life may be spared on your account" (12:13), Sarai was as powerless as Hagar is now.

The story records no protest from either woman, implying their helplessness.

Despite her exploitation in Egypt and in anticipation of taking Hagar's children as her own, Sarai "took Hagar ... and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife."

For his part, Abram has either forgotten God's promises or ignores them. When she conceives, having no choice over what happens to her body or to her offspring, Hagar wields one of the few weapons available to her: her mindset. But neither Sarai nor Abram is moved by Hagar's humiliation.

Both enforce the system of masters and enslaved human beings, and both will banish Hagar and Ishmael, not knowing whether mother and child will live or starve (21:8-14).

Do what God expects of you. (17:1-3)

It is now 24 years after Abram's

call, and God's promises of offspring remain unfulfilled for this 99-year-old. Yet again God promises.

The second covenant (see 15:7-21 for the first), marked by circumcision of males, is not with Abram alone but with his descendants.

God seeks a covenant relationship with us. (4-9)

Note that God speaks as if childless Abram already is a father, implying the security of the promise.

"Abraham" is a variation of "Abram," both meaning something like "exalted father," but the narrator understands Abraham to mean "father of a multitude."

Abraham's wife also will receive a new name, Sarah ("princess"), itself a variant of Sarai (v. 15).

New names signify new status, a heightened intimacy with God that often results from struggle (Gen. 32:28; Matt. 16:18).

As we shall see, neither new status nor a new name erases the struggle, for within a covenant relationship, familiarity brings human and divine wills more frequently and more closely into contact.

Hence, more opportunities exist for people to flounder in the gap between submission and rebellion.

This potential is implied when it becomes clear both parties have a role in this covenant.

Abraham, Sarah and their offspring are not passive recipients of divine favor. Rather, they are charged to obey God.

This responsibility will be explicit when Moses receives God's Torah in the wilderness (Ex. 20; Deut. 5) and remains when Christ reveals "a new covenant in my blood" (1 Cor. 11:25).

If we learn anything from our ancestors in the faith, it is that God calls people without regard for their character.

For their part, they are to obey God, which they do both well and poorly, and sometimes not at all. In response, God never relents, still evoking His children's trust and obedience.

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Michael Foust

TAB Media

Minno angles for Christian households with its content

I deleted Disney+ from my television the other day — much to the consternation of my 9-year-old daughter.

She enjoys shows about ponies and princesses. Unfortunately, though, her eyes (and thumb) recently stumbled upon a program that boasted kid-friendly cover artwork but included unbiblical, adult-centric themes.

“So ... what can I watch?” she asked in a tone that assumed there was no reasonable answer.

“Minno,” I replied.

A week later, she hadn’t complained.

Minno is a relatively new streaming service, launched in 2019, that includes something the major mainstream streaming platforms can’t offer: 100% family-friendly content informed by a biblical worldview. There’s no coarse language and no violence or sexuality. Since it was created by Christians, the content also includes positive messages.

With a targeted age of preschool through elementary, it’s one of the best family-friendly streaming platforms on the market — especially for Christian households.

It’s like a Bible-centric Disney+ and includes a mixture of classic and original content, like “Veg-



MINNO

Photo courtesy of gominno.com

gieTales,” “What’s in the Bible,” “Friends and Heroes,” “Micah’s Super Vlog,” “Cocoa Talk” and “Jungle Beat.”

Minno CEO and co-founder Erick Goss — a former Amazon executive — said his goal in launching the platform was to give parents streaming tools to facilitate discipleship and Bible-focused conversation.

“Most of the time you feel compromised when someone’s watching a subscription service like Netflix or Disney+,” Goss told me. “And Minno is a place where you can feel at home. ... We really want to look

at ourselves as a partner for Christian parents.”

Before a program enters the Minno lineup, it passes a 32-point checklist, Goss said.

Every title must be “theologically appropriate,” offer “good production values” and be entertaining.

This means the “cheesy” factor on Minno is — thankfully — low.

“Our perspective is: Everything that’s Christian isn’t good,” Goss said.

Also worth watching this month:

► *Journey with Jesus* (theaters)

— Tony Evans and his two daughters

— Chrystal Evans Hurst and Priscilla Shirer — retrace the earthly steps of Jesus while visiting historical sites throughout Israel. It’s a gripping film that’s educational and inspiring. It will be in theaters for three nights: Nov. 15–17. Visit JourneyWithJesus-Movie.com to learn more.

► *Sabina* — A dramatic retelling of the story of Sabina Wurmbrand, who converted from Judaism to Christianity and risked her life to share the gospel throughout Germany — including with Nazi soldiers.

It’s rated PG-13 for thematic content, some disturbing images and violence. Visit SabinaMovie.com for more information on the film and viewing options.

► *Among the Stars* (Disney+) — A six-part series that follows NASA astronaut Chris Cassidy as he embarks on a trip to the International Space Station. The documentary was filmed over two years and is capped by Cassidy’s trip to space, which took place in March 2020 at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Rated TV-PG.

► *Paw Patrol: The Movie* (DVD, on-demand) — A young boy named Ryder leads his team of search-and-rescue dogs to save Adventure City from their nemesis, Humdinger, who is now the mayor. It’s one of the most kid-friendly movies you’ll ever watch and is already streaming on-demand. It releases on DVD Nov. 2. Rated G.

EDITOR’S NOTE

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

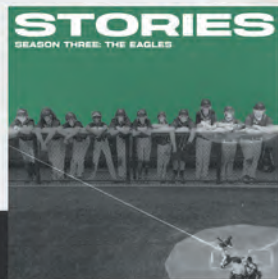
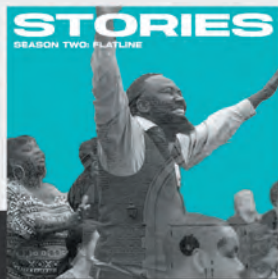
“Minno is a place where you can feel at home. ... We really want to look at ourselves as a partner for Christian parents.”

Erick Goss
CEO and co-founder, Minno

MEET THE REVIEWER

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

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