

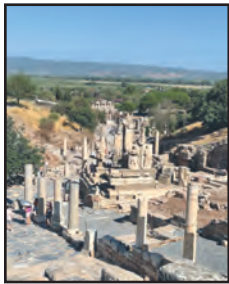
The Alabama Baptist

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January 6, 2022

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

INSIDE



Walking in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul

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VERSE OF THE YEAR FOR 2021:



Matthew 6:33, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you,” was YouVersion’s 2021 Verse of the Year, shared, bookmarked and highlighted most often. The verse also was No. 1 in the U.S.

Prioritizing God’s word

Bible app interest remains high in the U.S. and across the world

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

Interest in the Bible, even in some of the world’s most restrictive countries for Christians, remained high in 2021, confirmed perhaps by the YouVersion Bible app’s most popular verses of the year.

Matthew 6:33, “But seek first the kingdom of God and

His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you,” was YouVersion’s 2021 Verse of the Year, shared, bookmarked and highlighted most often. The verse also was No. 1 in the U.S.

Popular verses

Other popular verses spoke to God’s provision and strength, which many needed as the coronavirus surged

again in many countries, including the United States.

In several Latin American countries, including Mexico and Guatemala, Isaiah 41:10, “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand,” was the favorite verse.

In Singapore and the Netherlands, Jeremiah 29:11, “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future,’” led searches and shares.

Proverbs 16:9, “In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord (See ‘Bible,’ page 17)

HIGHLIGHTS



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Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

Maggie Evans (left) and Susan Stevens will tackle new roles in 2022 for TAB Media Group: operations manager and director of advertising.

Evans, Stevens take on new roles at TAB Media

The move into 2022 means new roles for two TAB Media Group team members.

Susan Stevens — previously an advertising contractor — will serve as director of advertising.

Maggie Evans — previously special assistant to the editor — will serve as operations manager, overseeing the general life of TAB Media as well as directing human resources.

TAB editor-in-chief Jennifer Davis Rash said it's been "fun to watch Susan and Maggie grow into their new roles here at The Alabama Baptist and TAB Media Group."

"They both bring solid skill sets and abilities, spiritual maturity, commitment to the ministry, a deep compassion for fellow team members and a willingness to continue growing and learning as we all seek to serve the Lord with excellence," Rash said.

Stevens' 10 years at TAB and Evans' five years have given them a solid foundation in the ministry's work, and they "have proven themselves many times over," she said.

"We believe the work we do is vital to connect our Baptist family across the state, nation and world

as we all seek to shine the light of Christ in a dark world," Rash said. "With our team working diligently every day to provide our readers and ministry partners a boost of energy, shots of grace and truth with compassion, it takes strong, dedicated team members, and we have an incredible group filling the various roles."

Evans said she's excited about taking on the new role.

"I love helping create systems and structures to make people's jobs smoother, and I'm so excited for this opportunity to do that for our team," she said. "I love working with this team of people, so any role where I can work

more closely with any of them is such a gift."

Stevens said she hopes to be an encouragement to the advertising team to keep doing what they're doing.

"We have such a great team in the advertising department, and I just want to encourage them," she said. "I'm excited about the opportunities I know God is going to give us to share the ministry of The Alabama Baptist and TAB Media with more people." (Grace Thornton)

"They both bring ... a willingness to continue growing and learning as we all seek to serve the Lord with excellence."

Jennifer Davis Rash
TAB editor-in-chief



The crossword puzzle can be found on page 14.

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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RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

By Jennifer Davis Rash, President and Editor-in-Chief

✉ jrash@thealabamabaptist.org 🐦 @RashionalThts

What will you develop, remove, sharpen, repair, learn or polish?

The start of a new year always brings the opportunity to begin again, turn over a new leaf and release what's behind us to stay behind us.

And if you're like me, the freshness of it all provides the exact confidence and energy needed to give it a try.

Does it mean we'll accomplish all we might dream up for the coming year? Not at all.

Is it possible something significant will derail us along the way? Likely.

But God calls us to continue growing deeper in our relationship with Him and to seek to become more and more like Jesus every day.

So with the primary goal for our new year already outlined for us, we technically can remove the pressure because if we give our primary energy to the main goal, then everything else we need to develop, remove, sharpen, repair, learn or polish will surface.

We'll have an opportunity, or maybe multiple opportunities, we could have never dreamed up for ourselves — and in some cases never wanted to experience. Either way, if we keep our focus on Jesus, we'll find our way through as we tackle some

with sparkling competence and others more diligently one difficult step at a time.

As you settle into this new year, what are the areas you already know need a little smoothing out?

Do you have a plan in place for how to get started? What resources will you need?

Will you need to find more space in your day (specific time set aside), your mind (expanded mental capacity) or physical location (less clutter)? If so, what are your first steps to find that extra space?

How can we at The Alabama Baptist better serve you or those

you love? How have we made a difference in the past years? We'd love for you to share those with us.

Not only does it provide encouragement for our team, but it also helps us know where to focus our attention as our team seeks to polish all we do through our service to the Lord by serving you.

And as you spend a few minutes reflecting on your connection to The Alabama Baptist, think about others in your life who might benefit from one of the many aspects we provide through our print publications, digital media offerings and podcasting platforms (see a quick recap below).

Also, reach out to your church staff and let them know you appreciate all they do for members and ministry efforts as well as the community at large.

The past two years required a good bit of adapting for those serving in ministry, and a kind word goes a long way toward them maintaining the strength needed going forward.

If by chance you aren't able to genuinely share appreciation, then it's also important to share those concerns as well.

Consider writing out what upset you this past year. Then, summarize the points and prioritize them to use as your guide for explaining your concerns.

A quick look back before we lunge into all 2022 has in store for us at The Alabama Baptist and TAB Media

A quick glance at 2021 for The Alabama Baptist and TAB Media Group shows an active year with the launch of new products and several rebranding opportunities.

We also surpassed 1 million website views for thealabama-baptist.org in December, our flagship website, which underwent a major update in June.

In May, we launched the new national newspaper that is mailed out every other week —

The Baptist Paper — and its online extension thebaptistpaper.org.

We continued a strong presence with our weekly edition of The Alabama Baptist newspaper, which got a fresh logo and look in 2021.

Other expansions included the popular serial-style Stories podcast that runs seasonally as well as The Weekly news recap podcast and Amplify, which showcases a conversation about life and faith every Monday.

The TAB Media Special Report

video interviews got off to a great start in 2021, as did the new young adult-focused online content provider: the-scroll.com.

Pastors have their own Pastor Connections communication piece now, and we've started discussions on how we can best serve the "Next Gen" (next generation/upcoming) audience.

It's because of your support we are able to continue growing and serving. Thank you.

—Jennifer Davis Rash

Your Voice



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

'Prone to wander': Churches susceptible to idols too

By **Chris Crain**

Executive director, Birmingham Metro Association

Unfortunately, [the church growth movement] fell victim to an idolatry as old as the Tower of Babel, the belief that we are the architects of the work of God. As a result, we have the best churches men can build, but we are still waiting for the church that only God can get credit for" (Reggie McNeal, "The Present Future").

McNeal's observation echoes the thoughts of prophetic voices like E.M. Bounds, A.W. Tozer, and Vance Havner, to name a few.

The church has trusted in idols for growth and security instead of relying on the power of God. Will Mancini, in "Church Unique," has identified four idols that replace God:

The idol of personalities

On many occasions, I have heard

pastor search committees share with me — in essence — that the church was one hire away from success.

"If we could just find a pastor who excels at ..." raising money, reaching families, redesigning ministries, connecting with the business community, visiting unchurched people or preaching like my favorite preacher. Churches are often placing their hopes in staff members who can do all of those things as well. Looking for the right personality can become an idol for the church.

The idol of place

Church buildings can become idols and give worshippers a false sense of security. For some, the building provides an "aura of prestige and entitlement" that takes focus away from God's glory.

Ascribing undue spiritual significance to a church building is a sin

that divides hearts and congregations across the Southern Baptist Convention.

After all, Jesus emphasized the imperative that "true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" and not "on this mountain nor in Jerusalem" (John 4:21–23).

The idol of place isn't just about buildings or physical geography. It can be certain rooms within the church, art on the walls, furnishings and even cemeteries.

According to The Alabama Baptist, the Chinese government confiscated the worship facility of a local church from the pastor and congregation. The governmental leaders re-fashioned the building into a "community center" by painting over the crosses and destroying the religious symbols. Our brothers and sisters in places like this remind us the church is not the building.

The idol of programs

Southern Baptists have been leaders in developing programs for local churches.

In decades past, people have found their value in leading programs within the church. Royal Ambassadors, Men's Ministry, Grief-share, Ladies Ensemble, Awana and GROW Outreach are examples of the hundreds of programs offered in Alabama Baptist churches.

Mancini said it well: "We need the vision to raise our sight to see the why behind the program, to begin with. Without seeing the more compelling why, we cultivate masters of how. Their hearts find more meaning in working efficiently on yesterday's methods than in working effectively into the future."

Programs are not designed to bring the vision to our church leadership or point us toward the mission. As plans come and go, only Jesus and His mission are worthy of our undying loyalty and complete obedience.

The idol of 'my' people

Do you want to upset an adult Bible study group in a typical church? Ask them to send out several members and start a new group. Or design a new worship schedule or service.

For those who detest change, the church must remain constant — right down to the people who sit in the next pew. Whatever you do, please don't challenge our "us four and no more" philosophy of relationships.

When new pastors come to a church and begin leading the church to engage new people, the existing stakeholders get nervous and undermine his leadership. Why would Christians not want to reach new people? Their relationships in the church as it exists today have become an idol. Our response to these idols must be one of introspection.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" (Ps. 139:23–24, ESV).

As the hymn writer Robert Robinson wrote, my heart is "prone to wander, Lord, I feel it — prone to leave the God I love. Here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it. Seal it for Thy courts above." May our hearts be bound to Jesus Christ and Him alone and not to any idol.

Training enhances leadership

Continued training is part of every job. Oddly enough, it is in the church where I find the strongest resistance to training.

I have heard people say things such as "I've been doing this for 20 years. I don't need more training." This type of attitude saddens me and here's why.

All jobs in the corporate world deal with the temporal — temporary things of this life. In the church, we deal with the eternal. How much greater is our need for ongoing, updated training?

Training should enhance skill-

set development, leadership ability, organizational processes, communication and any number of other forward-moving attributes.

If our learning is not improving our doing, then we must question whether our time, finances and other resources are being used fruitfully.

George Yates
Church health strategist
Alabama Baptist State Board
of Missions

Find information on SBOM training opportunities at alsbom.org/events.

“We must invest in the next generation so they can be leaders of change for good.”

GRACE PILOT

Businesswoman and namesake of Grace Pilot School of Business at the University of Mobile

The Lord never said there wouldn't be storms. He just said He would be with you through them.

**Ron Crow, director
Kentucky Baptist Disaster Relief**

Our modern addiction to busyness is a direct reflection of the original sin that occurred in the garden. Like Adam and Eve, we so often seize on the opportunity to promote our own agendas above that of God.

Our busyness has time and again proven fruitless, whereas our time spent with the Lord has always proven fruitful. It seems backward, but that's precisely how the kingdom of

God operates. Kingdom living is not lazy. But in the Kingdom, Christ offers us rest in relationship with Him that redeems our life from the fruitless efforts with which we would otherwise busy ourselves.

Christ offers greater productivity for Him when we establish a healthy rhythm of resting in Him and working out of that rest.

**Cleve Mallory, student pastor
Eastmont Baptist Church
Montgomery**

May we begin the new year convinced that Christ is still “the power of God to salvation for everyone

who believes, for the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16).

Jerry Batson, Theology 101

God has blessed Southern Baptists with some amazing pastors.

**Matt Henslee, president
2022 SBC Pastors Conference**

It's so clear, in the Bible, that we're called to pursue a kind of restorative justice, and to care for prisoners and the vulnerable. ... We're not called to perfection. We're called to make an effort.

**Libby Rau
Samford University graduate**

Reclaiming childlike joy

Several times in Scripture we see Jesus use children as an example of what the Kingdom of heaven is like. I love these examples because it reminds me ... there is a certain childlike trust and innocence that are trademarks of His people.

My desire is to figure out how to begin to reclaim the childlike joy that will be ours in the future. There are a few basic biblical principles I think we can apply.

The first thing we need to learn is how to deposit our stress and worries in the right place. You will always carry some amount of stress in your life, but the question should be what do you do with that stress? Stress doesn't belong on your shoulders alone. We are not designed to carry it quietly. We must learn to deposit our fears at the feet of Jesus.

Second, we must learn how to play again. Playing is all my kids care about. They can play because they feel safe and free. I think we forget Jesus is fun. Jesus loves to create, loves to converse and heaven will be full of play.

Make sure your day includes some kind of playtime. This can be a hobby or something as simple as putting together a puzzle with a friend. If all you think about is work, the stock market or politics, you will quickly lose focus of what is really important. The Bible tells us the joy of the Lord is our strength, but I see lots of joyless Christians these days.

Maturity isn't about getting rid of a playful attitude; it's learning to play in a way that brings those around you joy. When we trust God for our provision, when we allow ourselves to drop our cares at His feet, we become free to play again, and we capture a glimpse of what Kingdom living will look like.

**Pastor Caleb Moore
FBC Catoosa, Oklahoma**

From the *Twitterverse*

@MBChurchAL

If you find yourself in need of comfort, here are some quick tips:

Seek out the promises of God.
Mark the promises of God in your Bible.

Cling to the promises of God.

@FloridaBaptists

Faithful prayers + intentional gospel conversations = lives changed by the gospel!

@BillyGraham

“Getting to know God and being able to call on Him is the most important step in storing up for the storms.” #BillyGraham

@LifewayResearch

Reading the Bible is by far the number one thing parents can do to help their children continue to grow in their faith as adults, according to the Nothing Less study by Lifeway Research. —@jana_magruder

@shane_pruitt78

Going to church doesn't make you a Christian, but being a Christian should make [you] want to go to church.

@DerekAllen17

“Some claim the only 1% of missions dollars are spent on reaching the unreached, that claim can never be made of Southern Baptist missions dollars.” This is one of the biggest non-doctrinal reasons I'm a Southern Baptist. Thank you @DrPaulChitwood and @IMB_SBC for leading well!

@ERLC

“Our hope is that many more churches will take the Caring Well Challenge in the coming year. We must continue confronting the abuse crisis and, in doing so, make our churches safe from abuse and safe for survivors.” —@LeatherwoodTN

@cindymallin

“It's this posture of creaturely humility ... that our souls deeply long for. When we enter into prayer, we enter into a sweet relief. What solace we find as we throw off our delusions of self-reliance and acknowledge that God is God and we are not!”

@LigonDuncan

If our theology does not quicken the conscience and soften the heart, it actually hardens both; if it does not encourage the commitment of faith, it reinforces the detachment of unbelief; if it fails to promote humility, it inevitably feeds pride. —J.I. Packer

@bellevuepastor

Preacher, hurting people are ministry opportunities & they are all around you. As God gives you mercy, give it to others & stay encouraged. (2 Cor. 4:1)

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

3 stories you should know



Photo courtesy of IMB

Some 80 million people globally are displaced from their home countries due to war, violence, drought or other causes. Syria, Afghanistan and South Sudan top the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees' list of nations producing the most refugees. International Mission Board missionaries work among many displaced people groups, including those from Central Asia (pictured above). Read more about their work at tabonline.org/refugees-imb. (TAB)

Church attendance still down, but increasing

Recent polls suggest church attendance is still below pre-pandemic levels but increasing.

Polls by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research show a slight drop in attendance among mainline Protestants over the past two years. In October 2021, 14% said they attended in-person services once a week in October 2021 compared to 16% who said they did so in 2019.

Among evangelical Protestants, 37% now say they are attending services in person at least weekly, while 42% said they attended weekly in 2019.

The option of worshipping online has been embraced by many evangelical Protestants, according to the poll. About 3 in 10 said they have livestreamed services at least weekly in recent months. (AP)

24 inmates graduate from Southeastern

Twenty-four inmates at Nash Correctional Institution in Nashville, North Carolina, received college diplomas Dec. 15 as part of a partnership with Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Each of the men earned a bachelor of arts diploma in pastoral ministry, conferred by Danny Akin, president of the seminary and the undergraduate College at Southeastern. They are among the inaugural class of inmates to earn a four-year degree from an accredited school and have spent long hours studying Hebrew, Greek, theology, counseling and the history of ideas.

"From the bottom of my heart, I have never been more proud of any graduates that I have had the joy of presiding over," Akin said.

Read the full story at tabonline.org/prison-grads. (RNS)

Persecuted church

Two pastors killed; other Christians targeted by Myanmar Army

CHIN, Myanmar — Two pastors died in December in Chin State as the Myanmar Army continues its assault on Christians and churches, according to International Christian Concern.

Tatmadaw soldiers, the official armed forces of the country formerly known as Burma, arrested Salai Ngwe Kyar in Magway Region of Chin State on Dec. 6. Two days later, he died in Magway General Hospital, reports ICC. On Dec. 13, two days after Tatmadaw arrested Pastor Om Kee, his body — with a bullet



En.wikipedia

wound to his head — was found in a bush area.

Other recent incidents have targeted Christians in Chin State. United Pentecostal Church in Thantlang was among 19 structures set on fire Dec. 4. Since Sept. 9, more than 450 houses and five church buildings have been burned. About 10,000 people have fled to other areas or to India.

Chin State's population is 90% Christian, ICC reports. Myanmar is No. 19 on Open Doors' 2021 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

Judicial review of nine cases gives hope to Iranian Christians

TEHRAN, Iran — The high court in Tehran is reviewing the five-year sentences given to nine Christians arrested in 2019, a move that is seen as an important legal precedent, reports the advocacy group International Christian Concern.

The nine were arrested and convicted of "endangering state security" and "promoting Zionism." Their sentences were given in September 2019 and upheld in February 2020, the report says.



ifpnews.com

The Supreme Court judges announced Nov. 3

they did not consider proselytizing or establishing a home church to be illegal activities, the report states.

The court review could mean judges are open to rejecting long-standing practices for prosecuting Christians. Iran is No. 8 on Open Doors' 2021 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

NEWS

Alabama news

COFFEE ASSOCIATION

► **The Church on Boll Weevil Circle, Enterprise**, dedicated its new building Dec. 5.



Photo courtesy of the church

Chaplain Sonny Moore brought the dedication message. Church and community leaders were recognized by building committee chair John Logsdon and Pastor John

Granger Sr. The church praise team provided the music.

COLBERT-LAUDERDALE ASSOCIATION

► More than 1,500 sermons, 1,000 Bible studies, weddings, funerals and a church-planting network with a focus on college students — these are some of the things that have made up **John Brock's** 20 years at Highland Baptist Church, Florence.

The church honored him Dec. 5.

"I speak on behalf of this congregation, our Broadway fellowship, our Well Church fellowship and all those thousands of



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

people who sat here Sunday after Sunday to hear Brother John preach and boldly proclaim the word of God," said John Saylor, a member and incoming deacon chairman. "It has been a blessing to have you as our pastor. You have challenged us repeatedly to go, to disciple, to serve. And along the way you and your beautiful wife have led by example."

Brock expressed his gratitude to the church on behalf of himself; his wife, Charman; and their two children.

"We love you," he said. "We have just been so blessed to serve such a gracious, loving church family. ... You've been faithful, you've been kind, you've shown us the love of Christ in so many ways."

LIMESTONE ASSOCIATION



OSTRZYCKI

► **Alan Ostrzycki** is the new campus pastor of **Lindsay Lane Baptist Church North, Elkmont**. He previously served the church's Athens campus as student pastor. He holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Mobile and a master's degree from Liberty University.

Ostrzycki has served in vocational ministry for 13 years: bivocationally as youth pastor of Anchor of Hope Baptist Church, Semmes; pastoral intern at First Baptist Church Satsuma; and full-time at the Lindsay Lane Athens Campus, as the minister to children and junior high students before becoming student pastor. He and his wife, Rebecca, have three children.

MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION

► When **Gary Burton** came to Pintlala Baptist Church, Hope Hull, in January 1972, they were both just getting started in ministry. The church was 12 years old, and Burton was just finishing his seminary work at New Orleans Seminary.

Now he's looking back over 50 years of pastoral ministry at Pintlala, and he said simply this — time flies.

"It doesn't feel like it's been that long," Burton said.

"But I looked back through the church history that was published recently, and I was here for so much of it that it's hard to deny."

Burton grew up going to Berney Points Baptist Church, Birmingham, and there he felt the call to ministry. He said the church nurtured that call.

He served two churches on a part-time basis along the way — Wilkes Baptist Church, Midfield, while he was at Samford University, and McCall Creek Baptist Church, Meadville, Mississippi, while he was in seminary.

Pintlala was Burton's first full-time pastorate, and he's now baptizing some of the grandchildren of people he baptized in the 1970s.

"It's been really humbling — I've appreciated the opportunity to have those long relationships," he said.

He values the ongoing love he and the congregation have had for each other, which he says is the key to his longevity at the church.

The church will celebrate Burton's 50th anniversary with a special service Jan. 9, 10:45 a.m.

MORGAN ASSOCIATION

► **Trent Nolen** is the new student pastor at **First Baptist Church Hartselle**.

He has a master's degree from Liberty University and has served in ministry in Montgomery and Demopolis. He and his wife, Kasie, have four children.

SHELBY ASSOCIATION

► **Deric Thomas** is the new pastor of **Hope Mountain Church, Calera**. He is a professor

at Samford University and New Orleans Seminary and a captain and chaplain in the Army National Guard of Alabama. He and his wife, Heather, have six children.



THOMAS

WEST CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

► After years of running from God's call to ministry — which included selling real estate and then a stint in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (core drill) in Puerto Rico — **Tom Stacey** surrendered to serve Him.

Now — 42 years later — he is preparing to retire this month from a ministry career including 25 years as director of missions for Selma Association. Stacey first served as a church planter in Ohio, then spent seven years as director of missions of Randolph Association.

Serving as a DOM "meshed with my gifts and my undergraduate degree," said Stacey, who had earned a bachelor's in business administration and economics from Mobile College (now the University of Mobile).

"I love to preach, and I get to do that (as an associational leader)," he said. "The organizational, administration and financial aspects have been right up my alley too."

In January 1997, he moved into the DOM role at Selma. In 2016, he added to that the leadership of Cahaba Association. And as he has prepared to retire, he has helped the two associations relaunch as one — West Central Baptist Association.

Through the years, Stacey has led the churches in his associations to be strong in missions participation. He's led more than 30 volunteer construction trips across the nation, as well as 15 ministry trips to places in the U.S., Canada, Mexico and Haiti.

He also has participated in more than 50 disaster relief deployments and led ministry efforts and trained leaders in his association's churches.

"Words are insufficient to describe the personal relationships and friendships that have developed as we have worked, prayed, sweated and served alongside each other," he told those present at the West Central annual meeting in October. "I am forever grateful."

His retirement reception is Jan. 9, 2–4 p.m., at Elkdale Baptist Church, Selma.



BURTON



STACEY



NOLEN



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State Evangelism Conference

4 Locations

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On The Road

JANUARY 30-31, 2022

Dauphin Way Baptist Church, Mobile

SUNDAY EVENING
Chuck Kelley & J.J. Washington



MONDAY MORNING
Sammy Gilbreath, Lawrence Phipps & Blake Newsom



For each event, the Sunday session begins at 5:30 p.m. Monday sessions are 9-11:30 a.m.



FEBRUARY 6-7, 2022

Taylor Road Baptist Church, Montgomery

SUNDAY EVENING
Noe Garcia & Ted Traylor



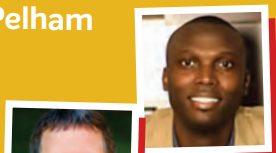
MONDAY MORNING
Dean Inserra, Lawrence Phipps & Daniel Atkins



FEBRUARY 27-28, 2022

First Baptist Church, Pelham

SUNDAY EVENING
Jarman Leatherwood & Lee Strobel



MONDAY MORNING
Lee Strobel & Daven Watkins



MARCH 13-14, 2022

First Baptist Church, Cullman

SUNDAY EVENING
Ronnie Hill & Ed Litton



MONDAY MORNING
Tim Beougher & Tom Richter



Sunday evening sessions at all locations are being livestreamed at live.alsbom.org. If you can't attend in person, consider gathering a group and participating online!

Ministers' Wives Gathering at each location, Monday 9-10:30 am
More info at alabamawmu.org/ministerswivesgathering



Alabama Baptist STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS

This event is made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.

evangelizeAL.org/sharinghope

Beeson Divinity School honors 22 graduates

God has a way of interrupting our plans," said Walter Kim, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, to Beeson Divinity School graduates during fall commencement and service of consecration Dec. 10.

The first-born son of Korean immigrant parents, Kim said his parents came to the United States so he could become a medical doctor. But God had other plans. God interrupted his parents' and his own plans and led Kim, instead, into ministry.

Living water

Speaking from John 7:37-44, Kim said that Jesus interrupted the Jewish Festival of the Tabernacles in order to invite people to drink living water.

"As you enter into ministry, your job is going to redirect people to respond to their true thirst," Kim said.

Twenty-two students graduated with a master of divinity or doctor of ministry degree during the December commencement. This was Beck A. Taylor's first commencement in which to confer degrees since becoming president. (Kristen Padilla/Beeson Divinity School)



Photo courtesy of Beeson Divinity School
Students line up for graduation at Beeson Divinity School at Samford University.

SAMFORD

Winter commencement first for Taylor to confer degrees

Samford University honored 322 graduates who either earned a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree during two winter commencement ceremonies Dec. 18.

Both were held in the Leslie S. Wright Fine Arts Center.

The first ceremony was held for 161 students who graduated from one of the four schools within the College of Health Sciences: the School of Health Professions, Mofett & Sanders School of Nursing, McWhorter School of Pharmacy and the School of Public Health.

The ceremony also marked the graduation of the first class of the physician assistant studies program in the School of Health Professions.

Of the inaugural class of 36 students, more than 75% have already been offered jobs.

"The graduation of our inaugural physician assistant studies cohort is a great achievement," said Paul Harrelson, physician assistant studies assistant professor, chair and program director.

"This cohort is composed of 36 young professionals who have worked incredibly hard to reach this special milestone.

"Our faculty looks forward to watching each of them fulfill their calling to provide empathetic patient care to the communities in which they will serve."

Danny Wood, a member of Samford's board of trustees and pastor emeritus of Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Vestavia Hills, gave the address for the first commencement.

He encouraged the graduates to follow four rules as they begin the next chapter of their lives: seek the Lord first, serve others, stretch yourself and savor relationships.



Photo courtesy of Samford University
More than 320 students received degrees during the Dec. 18 winter commencement ceremonies at Samford University in Birmingham. This also was the inaugural class of the physician assistant program.

"What is true of your college days will be true for the rest of your life. Savor the relationships."

**Danny Wood
member of Samford's
board of trustees**

"Savor (to delight in) every second you spend with the people you love," Wood said.

"I would wager that the best memories and the most powerful memories you will take from your college days at Samford are those that involve people ... relationships.

"What is true of your college days will be true for the rest of your life.

"Savor the relationships. Make a conscious decision as you embark on your career journey

to balance the work of the job with healthy relationships with your family and friends.

"And in the end, you will be thankful that you did."

The second ceremony honored 161 graduates from the School of the Arts, Howard College of Arts and Sciences, Brock School of Business, Orlean Beeson School of Education and Cumberland School of Law.

Gary Furr, the recently retired pastor of Vestavia Hills Baptist Church, gave the commencement address for the second ceremony. He reflected on the lessons he learned while working as a bridge builder in college, urging graduates to use the gifts and skills they learned at Samford to build bridges with those they encounter.

'Greater purposes'

"I hope you know this: the highest purposes of a life of learning are not about driving apart but bringing closer, lifting and bringing all things into great purposes," Furr said.

"Raise up good families and children.

"Lift spirits. Raise up the fallen. Build up others. Lift someone else's burden.

"Build hospitals and universities and good causes. Our world needs some bridge-builders.

"You have the gifts that could make ways for humanity to get across the rivers and ravines, and deep places and obstacles built by nature, fear and ignorance." (Samford University)

WALKING IN THE

FOOTSTEPS

I never assumed travel would become such an important part of my life when I went to serve as a Journeyman with the International Mission Board so many years ago.

Years later, my wife, Janet, and I have a great deal of travel under our belts, but we never imagined visiting Turkey until our son took a job teaching academic English at a university in Ankara in early 2021. Suddenly we realized Turkey had to be a place we visited. The more we researched, the more we realized the biblical and historical significance of this region of the world.

Asia Minor

Turkey (known as Asia Minor in Scripture) offered us the opportunity to walk the footsteps of the Apostle Paul in the Ancient City ruins of Ephesus (Acts 19) as well as hike and take a fascinating hot air balloon ride over the dwellings of early Christians in the region known as Cappadocia (Acts 2:9).

We saw countless Roman ruins in Istanbul and the ruins and artifacts of such ancient civilizations as the Phrygians and Hittites at the archaeological museum in Ankara.

The sudden reality of how old

these things were rolled over us like a wave that moved us to a place of awe and inspiration.

Of all the fascinating things I saw and experienced in Ephesus, the thing that caught and held my attention and wonder for a moment was looking over into the marketplace where Paul would have joined with Priscilla and Aquila in his trade as a tentmaker.

It's undeniable that this physical context made our study and knowledge of Scripture even richer. It's as if the Spirit were whispering in my ear, "You have known all along that these things from My word were real because of your faith. Now, see with your eyes."

The experience added to what we already know and caused us to worship the God of truth in those moments.

If you have the opportunity to travel to Turkey, Janet and I highly recommend it. Maybe you are not able to travel by stepping onto an airplane. If not, just search the words Ancient Ephesus and travel through pictures and the experiences of others who have been there. Consider adding this visual aspect to your personal Bible study in this new year.

Ephesus is known as one of the most important early Christian cities for spreading Christianity in the Roman period. Paul was the pastor of the first Christian church in Ephesus with Timothy following him. The Apostle John is said to have penned his letters from Ephesus.



Ephesus was a city of paganism and mysticism. Hadrian's Temple, built before 138 A.D., for the Emperor Hadrian is one of the most intact and beautiful structures on Curetes Street.



The Ephesus Celsus Library, one of the most impressive buildings in Asia Minor, was completed in 117 A.D. It contained 12,000 scrolls and the tomb of the governor.

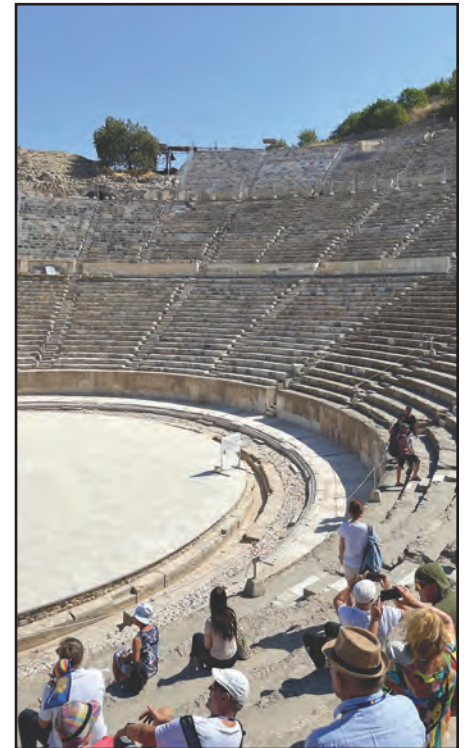
EDITOR'S NOTE

MONTE AND JANET ERWIN OF BIRMINGHAM SERVED 19 YEARS AS CAREER MISSIONARIES WITH THE INTERNATIONAL MISSION BOARD.

OF PAUL

By Monte and Janet Erwin

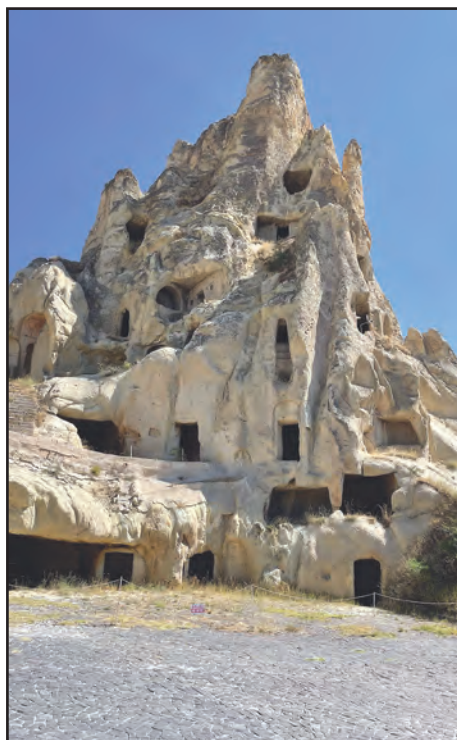
Below: The Market Square, known as the commercial agora, was the trade center of Ephesus. Paul, a tentmaker, could have used this marketplace to sell his tents along with Priscilla and Aquilla (Acts 18:18–19, 24–28) while they shared the gospel.



Above: The Great Theater was where a local mob gathered to prevent Paul from preaching so as not to bring the downfall of the worship of Artemis (Acts 19:23–41). The amphitheater, believed to be the largest in the ancient world, had a 25,000-seating capacity used for drama and gladiatorial combats. **Below:** Ephesus is the best preserved regional Roman city. Visitors can stroll through the city via roads walked on by biblical characters — Paul, the Apostle John and Jesus’ mother Mary (according to tradition).



Above: The mosaic footpath, water aqueducts and terraced houses illustrate how the wealthy Ephesians lived their lives. **Right:** Cappadocia, made from sedimentary rocks that erupted from ancient volcanos, was a land where the Hittites once lived. Houses and churches carved into the rocks and caves became a haven for early Christians escaping from the Roman soldiers. In the 3rd century it became a center for Christian education.





High school football players pray at a Flatline Movement event at Montgomery's Cramton Bowl in October.

Photo by Mat Napp

Music with a **gospel message**

Flatline Movement uses hip-hop laced with gospel lyrics to reach teenagers

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

When Dewayne Rembert was growing up, he didn't have a father around. But he did have something else — music.

"I remember music was my 'daddy,'" he said. "Hip-hop raised me. But hip-hop raised me wrong."

The lyrics played a huge role in Rembert's selfishness, petty crimes and anger, he remembered. So when Jesus turned his life around at age 26, he started thinking about how he could help take back hip-hop music for the sake of the gospel, and raise kids right.

God planted in his heart the idea for Flatline Movement — to see the hope of Jesus move through the culture he grew up in by discipling students and introducing them to Christian hip-hop.

The "flatline" represents how people are dead in their sin until

God brings them to new life.

That's the message Rembert wants music to communicate.

Linking up

More than a decade ago he started building relationships with students and discipling them. He

started linking up with Christian hip-hop artists who would come alongside him and share their music.

Over time, his team got bigger, and they were able to hold more and more events, including providing meals for students. Now officially a ministry called Flatline Movement, they were seeing dozens of lives changed.

But in 2016, when Rembert began to feel God leading him to plant a church, he knew he couldn't continue to lead both on his own.

That's when DeAndre Burns came alongside and became Flat-

"Satan can't produce anything, he just perverts what God has already produced ... so the part of rap that's being exposed to people is the part that he's perverting."

Dewayne Rembert
pastor, Flatline Church at Chisholm

“Rap is in the Bible — rap stands for rhyming poetry, and if you look in the book of Psalms, it’s a poetic book. Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Job, Ecclesiastes — all are poetic books.”

**Dewayne Rembert
founder, Flatline Movement**



Photo by Mat Napp

Dewayne Rembert says hip-hop “raised him wrong,” so now he’s trying to use hip-hop with gospel lyrics to reach teenagers for Christ.

line Movement’s general manager. Burns was introduced to Christian hip-hop while growing up in California, and it impacted his life in a big way. He said negative music can do the same, but not for good.

“That’s one of the things that nobody wants to take responsibility for is how the music is impacting and affecting communities, and that’s communities from the suburbs to the inner cities,” Burns said. “So if you’re hearing shoot, shoot, shoot, kill, kill, kill, or misogyny in lyrics, or if you’re hearing just violence and you’re hearing all of these things over and over and over again, then what are you going to end up getting in the end? Those seeds planted are going to bring forth a harvest.”

That’s why he and Rembert want to plant new seeds for a different harvest.

Everything they do is centered on sharing the gospel. In addition to bringing in artists to perform, they have raised funds for a state-of-the-art studio at Flatline Church at Chisholm, an area in Montgomery, to produce and release music.

Partnership

In recent weeks, Ryan Noble of Urban Alternative connected Rembert with well-known Texas pastor and author Tony Evans, who decided to partner with Flatline Movement, supplying hundreds of devotional books geared toward young men. And at a rally at Montgomery’s Cramton Bowl in October, several artists performed

and Rembert gave a gospel presentation. Nine people decided to follow Jesus.

Rembert said it’s amazing to see what God has done through rap music laced with gospel lyrics.

‘Rhyming poetry’

“Rap is in the Bible — rap stands for rhyming poetry, and if you look in the book of Psalms, it’s a poetic book. Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Job, Eccle-

siastes — all are poetic books,” said Rembert, who now is lead pastor of Flatline Church in addition to ministering through Flatline Movement. “Satan can’t produce anything, he just perverts what God has already produced ... so the part of rap that’s being exposed to people is the part that he’s perverting, so right now we’re being very intentional in regards to putting out God’s gospel through that kind of music.”



Hear more on the Stories podcast

Want to hear more of the Flatline Movement story? Check out Season 4, Episode 2 of TAB Media’s Stories podcast, available now. The serial-style podcast told the personal faith story of Dewayne Rembert and his church plant, Flatline Church at Chisholm, in Season 2. Season 4 continues the story.

Listen at tabonline.org/stories or wherever you get your podcasts.



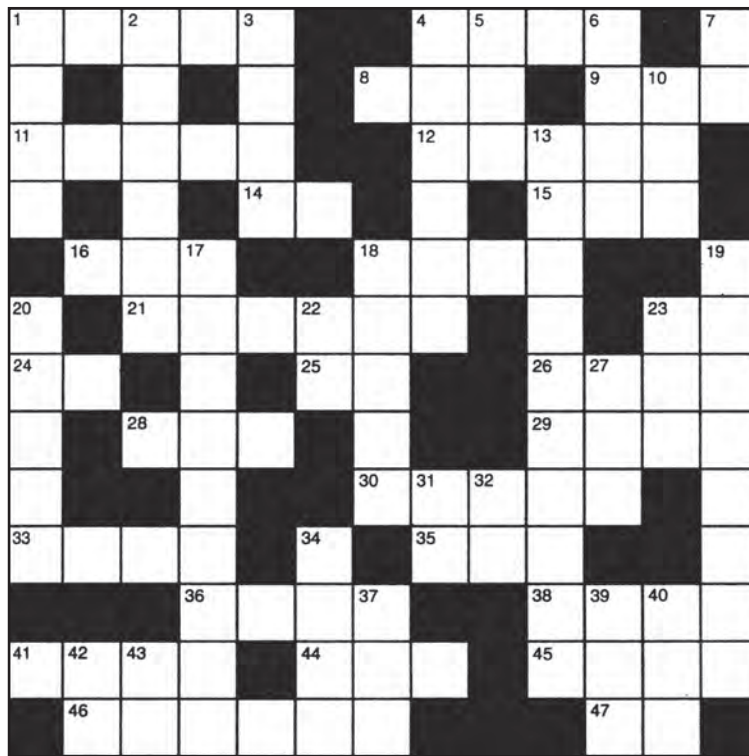
Photo by Chris Thornton

Cody McMillian, Big Yae and Rockstar Jt perform at a Flatline Movement event in 2014.

CHRISTIAN crossword

ACROSS

- 1. God's Son.
- 4. First king of Israel.
- 8. Tribe of ____.
(Num. 1:25)
- 9. Water vessel.
- 11. Shall dwell at the ____ of the sea.
(Gen. 49:13)
- 12. And thou hast magnified thy ____.
(Gen. 19:19)
- 14. Spanish for "yes."
- 15. In the twinkling of an ____.
(1 Cor. 15:52)



By Jesse and Sue Schrowang Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- 16. Jesus is God's ____.
- 18. Substance used for washing.
- 21. Jacob's first son.
(Gen. 29:32)
- 23. Each. (abbr.)
- 24. Another word for "father."
- 25. You (KJV).
- 26. Gospel or good ____.
- 28. For ____ have sinned.
(Rom. 3:23)
- 29. Jesus cursed the fig ____.
(Mark 11:14)
- 30. Used to pierce the side of Jesus.
- 33. ____ ye to the Lord.
(Ex. 15:21)
- 35. Girl's name.
- 36. Whirlpool.
- 38. ____ upon the name of the Lord.
(Zeph. 3:9)
- 41. Consider the lilies ... they toil not, neither do they ____.

- (Matt. 6:28)
- 44. Long fish.
- 45. Tree of knowledge of good and ____.
(Gen. 2:9)
- 46. Purpose.
- 47. Extraterrestrial.
(abbr.)
- 18. Son of man ____ and saves that which was lost.
(Luke 19:10)
- 19. Popular warm-weather sport.
- 20. Texas basketball team.
- 22. ____ the decree of the king.
(Jon. 3:7)
- 23. Female lamb used in sacrifices.
- 27. Do they not ____ that devise evil?
(Prov. 14:22)
- 31. State. (abbr.)
- 32. Places in Joshua: ____-dor, ____-Haddah, ____-Hazor. (one word)
- 34. Garden.
- 37. Esther spake ____ again.
(Esther 8:3)
- 39. ____ Maria. (Hail Mary)
- 40. Past tense of "light."
- 42. The 16th letter of the Greek alphabet.
- 43. Opposite of "out."

DOWN

- 1. ____ the Baptist.
- 2. Jesus is our ____.
- 3. He was manifested to take away our ____.
(1 John 3:5)
- 4. ____ and Delilah.
- 5. Fruit drink.
- 6. "Peanuts" character.
- 7. Indefinite article.
- 10. Another spelling for a grain.
(Ex. 9:32)
- 13. ____ shall be hid from mine eyes.
(Hos. 13:14)
- 17. My sons, be not now ____.
(2 Chron. 29:11)

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR
Leatherwood Baptist Church in Anniston, Ala., is prayerfully looking for our next pastor. God has blessed our church over the last 25 years under our previous leadership and we are excited that you may be God's man for our church. We are a biblically conservative church that loves the communities that we serve. We are in the middle of construction on a new children's building for K-4th grade. We are debt free and small group/Sunday School focused. With our outreach efforts, we have new guests almost every week. Minimum qualifications: 10-15 years experience in a similar sized church 300-450+. If you feel led to be considered for this position please email your resumé to: office@leatherwood.church and look up our church online on our website leatherwood.church and facebook.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR
Hughes Memorial Baptist Church in Bradford, Ala., is prayerfully seeking a bivocational pastor. Please send resúmes to: ATTN: Pastor Search Committee, 535 Buck Ridge Road, Remlap, AL 35133, or email: hmbcpastorapps@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR
Mount Philadelphia Baptist Church, Cordova, is prayerfully seeking a bivocational pastor. Please send resúmes to: Mount Philadelphia Baptist Church, ATTN: Pastor Search Committee, 1885 Cordova-Gorgas Road, Cordova, AL 35550.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR
Liberty Baptist, Opelika, seeks bivocational pastor. Receiving resúmes: Pastoral Search Committee, Liberty Baptist Church, 2701 West Point Parkway, Opelika, AL 36804. Email: liberty_baptist_0a@protonmail.com. Text msg: (334-444-9626).

MUSIC DIRECTOR
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.

STUDENT DIRECTOR
Ezra Baptist Church (Bessemer, Ala.) is seeking a part-time student director. This position is

tasked with leading the student ministry (6th-12th grade) of the church. Please email your resumé and cover letter to: ezrabcoffice@gmail.com.

PART-TIME/BIVOCATIONAL YOUTH MINISTER
Buhl Baptist Church is seeking someone with a passion for leading youth in their walk with Christ, teaching them to be disciples. Please contact us via email: timpatrick80@gmail.com or jgs400@yahoo.com. We are located in West Tuscaloosa County, 10 minutes outside of Northport, Ala.

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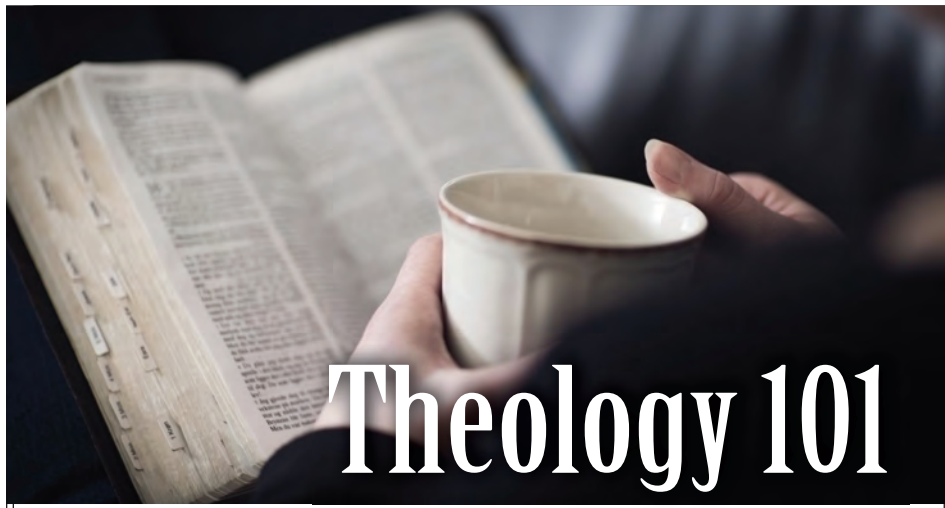
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MISCELLANEOUS

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. To sign up, email news@thealabamabaptist.org.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Reflections on Christ's Coming

Jesus Came to Reveal God

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
The Alabama Baptist

The Christmas season served once again as an occasion to remind us of the coming of Jesus into the world. Theology 101 will reflect on reasons why He came.

After referring to Jesus as “the Word,” the prologue that opens the Gospel of John declares, “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (1:18).

In short, Jesus came to reveal God. Before His earthly life had been fully lived, He was heard to declare, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

Two divine qualities were involved in Jesus’ mission of revealing God: the grace of God and the truth of God.

Divine grace

John 1:17 reads, “The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” The fact that God desired to make Himself known through sending His Son is a matter of divine grace.

No human deserved to know God because we all have sinned. God did not owe humanity another opportunity after the first human pair who knew God intimately chose disobedience instead of unbroken fellowship with Him. Only divine grace explains the offer of another option.

God making Himself known through Christ’s coming into the world also is a matter of divine truth. God wanted His human cre-

ation to know Him accurately by knowing the truth.

What better way to bring that truth from heaven to earth than to send His Son who had been with Him from all eternity.

God’s glory

The Bible gives us yet another word by which to round out our thoughts about God being revealed through His Son: glory.

If we think of divine glory as the manifest presence of God, we understand Jesus was revealing His glory.

In this early aftermath of another Christmas, we can be enriched by pondering what we read in 2 Corinthians 4:6: “God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

Hebrews 1:3 declares that Christ came as the brightness of God’s glory and the express image of His person.

Since Jesus came to reveal God and since, by personal faith, He has come to dwell in our hearts, divine grace and truth seek to give believers here and now knowledge of God, as well as the hope of sharing His glory eternally.

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.



Disciple-making training coming up in Trussville

By Lanell Downs Smith
The Alabama Baptist

Six years ago, Bill Wilks began to take a “deep dive” into the four Gospels, studying Jesus’ relationship to His 12 disciples. The study led Wilks to a realization — disciple making is not a program; it is a lifestyle.

This simple yet profound truth changed Wilks’ ministry, he said, and became the foundation for D-Life — a lifestyle approach to disciple making.

D-Life equips believers by following Jesus’ six practices of discipleship: fellowship, teaching, prayer, ministry, multiplication and accountability. The ultimate goal, Wilks said, is to see a global, grassroots, disciple-making movement.

“D-Life is a lifestyle of disciple-making that people can live anytime and anywhere,” said Wilks, pastor of NorthPark Baptist Church in Trussville. “I often say, ‘You don’t need permission to do the Great Commission.’”

Wilks eventually wrote four years of study guides that have been published and made available through D-Life Online (livethedlife.com) and D-Life Old Testament and New Testament Journals.

Four-hour boot camps

D-Life Boot Camps offer training for the disciple-making lifestyle. Participants learn a simple, biblical and reproducible process to help them make disciples who make dis-

ciples for the rest of their lives.

During the four-hour camps, believers receive intensive training, learning how to implement the process Jesus used to make disciples. The two-fold goal is every participant will leave believing they can live the disciple-making lifestyle and everyone will be equipped for disciple-making.

Equipping for life

“In a D-Life Boot Camp, we don’t just talk about disciple-making, but will equip you to be a disciple-maker for the rest of your life,” Wilks said, noting his wife, Rondie, and others assist in leading training sessions.

The team also leads D-Life Women’s Retreats, one-day D-Life Women’s Conferences and student boot camps.

Wilks’ newest book, “The Greater Work — Disciple Making. Anytime. Anywhere.” will be available in February.

It outlines the D-Life story and what God is doing in people’s lives through the effort.

“The three-fold purpose of every D-Life D-Group is: 1. to grow in spiritual maturity, 2. to serve in missional ministry and 3. to reproduce disciple makers. Through D-Life, this is what we are seeing at NorthPark and all across the country.”

On Jan. 22, NorthPark will host the Alabama Statewide D-Life Boot Camp from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. To register, go to livethedlife.com/bama.html.



Photo courtesy of Rondie Wilks

Pastors discuss the disciple-making lifestyle at an Alabama Statewide D-Life Boot Camp hosted by NorthPark Baptist Church in Trussville.



ONEMISSION: The Great Commission ONEPROGRAM: The Cooperative Program MANYMINISTRIES: Great Commission Ministries

Happy New Year
from the
State Board of Missions

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (2 Corinthians 5:17)

As 2022 begins, we are so grateful for Alabama Baptists' generous support of missions and ministry through the Cooperative Program. What a great time this is for each of us to renew our commitment to Great Commission Ministries!

To learn more about the Cooperative Program, visit AlabamaCP.org.

COOPERATIVE PROGRAM

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Event and location are followed by SBOM contact person and extension. For more information on these events, call

1-800-264-1225 or (334) 613 plus the listed extension, or visit alsbom.org/events. To register for virtual events, visit PinnacleAlabama.org.

JANUARY 2022

- **2-9** **January Bible Study**, Daniel Edmonds, ext. 2285
- **8** **Clamor Estatal 2022**, Vaughn Forest, Montgomery, Kimberly Sandoval, ext. 2244
- **10** **Church Tax Conference**, Tennessee River Association, Scottsboro, Lee Wright, ext. 2210
- **11** **Church Tax Conference**, CrossPoint, Trussville, Lee Wright, ext. 2210
- **11** **Ministers Wives' Connection**, Online, Amanda Armstrong, ext. 2223
- **14-15** **English as a Second Language Workshop**, Colbert Lauderdale Association, Sheffield, Kristy Kennedy, ext. 2311
- **16** **Sanctity of Human Life Sunday**, Keith Hinson, ext. 2289
- **18** **Great Commission Conversations-Morning**, Online, Amanda Armstrong, ext. 2223
- **18** **Great Commission Conversations-Evening**, Online, Amanda Armstrong, ext. 2223
- **20-22** **Southeast Youth Conclave**, Chattanooga Convention Center, Tennessee, Scooter Kellum, ext. 2280
- **24** **Church Tax Conference**, Mobile Association, Mobile, Lee Wright, ext. 2210
- **25** **Church Tax Conference**, SBOM, Prattville, Lee Wright, ext. 2210
- **27-28** **Discipleship Network of Alabama**, First, Athens, Steve Layton, ext. 2221
- **28-29** **Living and Leading on God's Agenda**, Heritage, Montgomery, Ken Allen, ext. 2210
- **28-29** **Alabama Bible Skills and Drills Retreat**, Shocco Springs, Talladega, Belinda Stroud, ext. 2271
- **30-31** **Sharing Hope Conference**, Dauphin Way, Mobile, Lori McGough, ext. 2245
- **31** **Ministers' Wives Gathering**, Dauphin Way, Mobile, Trish Jackson, ext. 2224

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- **6-7** **Sharing Hope Conference**, Taylor Road, Montgomery, Lori McGough, ext. 2245
- **7** **Ministers Tax Conference**, Tennessee River Association, Scottsboro, Lee Wright, ext. 2210
- **7** **Ministers' Wives Gathering**, Taylor Road, Montgomery, Trish Jackson, ext. 2224
- **8** **Ministers Tax Conference**, CrossPoint, Trussville, Lee Wright, ext. 2210
- **13** **Racial Reconciliation Sunday**, Keith Hinson, ext. 2289
- **18-19** **Bivocational Minister/Spouse Retreat**, Shocco Springs, Talladega, Ken Allen, ext. 2210
- **20** **World Hunger Sunday**, Jim Swedenburg, ext. 2283
- **21** **Ministers Tax Conference**, Mobile Association, Mobile, Lee Wright, ext. 2210
- **22** **Ministers Tax Conference**, Southeast Alabama Association, Dothan, Lee Wright, ext. 2210
- **24** **Child Safety Workshop**, First, Decatur, Lee Wright, ext. 2210
- **25-26** **Pursue**, First, Opelika, Mike Nuss, ext. 2276
- **27** **Korean Evangelism Conference**, First, Pelham, Kimberly Sandoval, ext. 2244
- **27-28** **La Toma de Alabama**, First, Pelham, Kimberly Sandoval, ext. 2244
- **27-28** **Sharing Hope Conference**, First, Pelham, Lori McGough, ext. 2245
- **28** **Ministers Tax Conference**, SBOM, Prattville, Lee Wright, ext. 2241
- **28** **Ministers' Wives Gathering**, First, Pelham, Trish Jackson, ext. 2224

Bible engagement

Many continue daily Bible reading habits created last year during the pandemic

(continued from page 1) establishes their steps,” was No. 1 in South Korea, and Hebrews 4:12, “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart,” was the favorite verse in Ghana.

Encouraging stats

Worldwide, YouVersion Bible app users read 55.8 billion chapters, played 8.2 billion audio chapters and created 2.4 billion highlights, bookmarks and notes.

Users also played 500 million videos and completed 1.4 billion Bible plan days. Young users completed 5.6 million Kids Bible Experience stories.

YouVersion founder Bobby Gruenewald said his team is encouraged to see

high levels of Bible engagement in 2021 after a record-breaking 2020.

“It means people are turning to God and the Bible for answers to their questions,” Gruenewald asserted. “Even our Verse of the Year points to the heart of the YouVersion community to seek God and know Him more.”

Prior to the start of the global coronavirus pandemic in early 2020, YouVersion saw spikes in Bible engagement every Sunday, typically 20% higher than the rest of the week.

However, there has been a noticeable shift in patterns over the past two years, creators said.

In March 2020, when people weren’t able to attend church in person, weekday Bible engagement increased by 10% and continued to rise in the following weeks.



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Find out more about 2021 YouVersion Bible app user habits at blog.youversion.com/2021/12/youversion-bible-app-2021-year-in-review/.

As churches began to reopen, Bible engagement spikes on Sundays returned, but not at the expense of daily engagement habits. In 2021, Monday-through-Saturday engagement was still up by 24% compared to pre-pandemic levels.

“Coming off of a record

year in 2020, we’re excited to see that so many people are continuing the daily Bible engagement habits they created last year,” Gruenewald said.

The fastest-growing geographical areas for both app installs and daily Scripture engagement were Central Africa and Southern Asia.

Specifically, Pakistan, an overwhelmingly majority Muslim country that ranks No. 5 on Open Doors’ 2021 World Watch List of countries where persecution of Christians is highest, saw a 106% jump in Bible engagement in 2021.

High persecution

Other countries where persecution is high saw increases in engagement as well. In Vietnam (No. 19 on Open Doors’ list) and Laos (No. 22), where communist governments often crack down on Christians, engagement increased 43% and 53%, respectively.

In Burkina Faso (No. 32) and Democratic Republic

of the Congo (No. 40), where Islamic extremists pose a great threat to Christians, engagement increased by 55% and 60%, respectively.

User reactions

Users reacted positively to the report of increased global engagement with the app.

One in Ghana wrote, “It’s been [an] awesome year. Glory to the Father!”

A user in India wrote, “What a beautiful experience I had reading the YouVersion in 2021 [on] a daily basis. The word of God shaped my day and helped me to face the day with [the] hope, joy and love of our Lord in my heart.”

Gruenewald said it encouraged him to hear stories from those who are using the app on a daily basis because it means they “are engaging past that initial moment of need, and digging deeper to strengthen their relationship with God.”


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Explore the Bible

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.

Dean of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



EZEKIEL HOPES Ezekiel 37:1-14

Following a series of judgment oracles against the nations, Ezekiel prophesies about the restoration of Israel. Unlike most of the writing prophets who distinguish between Israel in the north and Judah in the south, Ezekiel uses the name Israel for the entire rebellious but eventually restored nation who will walk in covenant with God.

The prophecy in this passage anticipates resurrection. Restoration of sinew, muscle and skin on sun-dried bones laying uncovered in an arid desert serve as a spiritual object lesson for the restoration of covenant life. God is promising to bring new life to His people.

The Potential (1-6)

Ezekiel has a conversation with the Sovereign Lord. By the Spirit of God, the prophet is led to the valley of dry bones. "Can these bones live?" In the history of humanity, has anyone else seen dry bones take on flesh and be animated to life? Surely not, since we have been affected by the fall, we are constantly moving from life to death, from conception to the grave. In the natural world, it would be impossible for these dry bones to live.

The prophet responds with "only You know" (v. 3). By the time God explains His plan, Ezekiel will know the answer. In fact, God repeats the same phrase that He uttered multiple times to the nations: "Then you will know that I am the Lord" (v. 6).

Ezekiel and his people are about to experience the creativity and restorative power of God, who can supernaturally reverse the effects of death and the grave in the natural realm.

This passage is reminiscent of Genesis 18, after Abraham and Sarah responded with incredulity about having a baby at their advanced ages. God asked: "Is anything impossible for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:14).

These bones represent Israel. The northern kingdom had fallen in

722 B.C. to the Assyrians. Judah, the southern kingdom, was crumbling from within and would soon be led to Babylon. Idolatry was commonplace throughout Jerusalem, and even the priesthood had been so corrupted, little hope for restoration remained.

The Presentation (7-10)

Ezekiel speaks aloud the words of God, and God performs the impossible. The bones reconnect with tendons, with flesh and with skin. Now they are corpses. Prophecy again. These inanimate bodies are not only breathing, but now they stand as a "vast army."

This series of prophetic statements remind believers of our ancient past, as well as our new life in Christ. The breathless bodies in the desert remind us of the moment in which God "breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and the man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7). They also remind us we were dead in sin, "but God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!" (Eph. 2:4-5).

The Promise (11-14)

This broken people, whose families are scattered and whose hope is fleeting, see no future for themselves. But God speaks of a future with a restored people, a restored land and a restored faith. Once again, God's purpose is underscored: "Then you will know that I am the Lord" (v. 14). To know Him is to experience His overwhelming presence, power and peace.

What will precede the opening of the graves and the placement of God's Spirit within believers?

The return of the Messiah occurs before this prophecy is completely fulfilled. The future resurrection of the saints is only possible because of the resurrection of Christ: "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way ... God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep" (1 Thess. 4:14).

Bible Studies for Life

By Jeffery M. Leonard, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Biblical & Religious Studies, Samford University



THE RULER WHO CARES FOR HIS PEOPLE Micah 5:2-5a; Matthew 2:1-6, 9-11

It had been many long years since the heady days of King David's monarchy. In David's day and in the reign of his son and successor Solomon, the nation of Israel had achieved a sort of political success one would hardly expect from such a tiny country. Though sandwiched between the great empires of Egypt and Mesopotamia, Israel's borders had expanded, prosperity had increased and the nation experienced a time of unprecedented independence and security.

Now, some two centuries after the time of David and Solomon, the prophet Micah spoke to a nation that had seen nearly all those blessings fade away. In the reigns of David and Solomon, "Israel" meant all 12 tribes who had first formed the nation. After the death of Solomon, 10 of those tribes broke away, leaving David's descendants as rulers over a much smaller territory called Judah.

In 722 B.C., Assyria destroyed the breakaway kingdom of Israel. There seemed to be very little Judah could do to avoid the same fate. Sharply reduced in territory, in power and in prestige, the nation was in need of a new king, a new David who could lead the nation back to its former glory.

Micah prophesied the coming King who would shepherd His people. (Micah 5:2-5a)

Micah believed Israel's new Davidic king would come from the same town where the first David had come from: Bethlehem. As was the case with the original King David, Bethlehem was an unlikely hometown for a king. Many cities were larger than Bethlehem in David's day, and after David no city could compare with great Jerusalem. Yet, Micah insisted this new king would be from the little town of Bethlehem. Though his origins would be humble, this new king was destined for far greater things. He would call the lost tribes back to Israel and shepherd over them in the name of the

Lord. This would be a king who would give peace to his people and see his greatness extend to the very ends of the earth.

The wise men were led to seek out the messianic King of the Jews. (Matt. 2:1-6)

The kingdom of Judah experienced a variety of rulers in the days after Micah's oracle. Some, like Hezekiah and Josiah, were good; others, like Manasseh and Amon, were awful. None lived up to the high calling of Micah's expectations. Eventually, Judah fell to the Babylonians, and the Davidic dynasty came to an ignoble end. Micah's prophecy seemed destined to remain unfulfilled.

Then the most unexpected turn of events took place. Centuries later, Jerusalem was astir with the news that a new king had been born. Wise men from the east had arrived unexpectedly at the palace, asking to see this new king. They had seen the king's star in the east and had come to pay homage to him. This was news to the present king, Herod, who had no interest in seeing new rivals appear on the scene.

When the religious leaders of the day were called in for consultation, it was to Micah they turned to find out where this new king, this Messiah, would be born. Bethlehem of Judea was the answer.

A recognition of who Jesus is should lead us to worship Him. (Matt. 2:9-11)

If it was Bethlehem where the new king was to be born, then to Bethlehem the wise men would go. Entering the house where the holy family was staying, these ambassadors from the east bowed down before the Christ child and offered treasures fit for a king: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah had foretold centuries before that the nations would one day stream to Judah, bearing gifts and honoring the God of Israel. The wise men represented the first of the nations to do so; they would by no means be the last.

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs
The Alabama Baptist

Holderness family competes in 'Amazing Race' season airing in January

Eight years ago, Penn and Kim Holderness could not have imagined a life that would take them digitally and literally around the world, but that's just what has happened, as fans of "The Amazing Race" will see this season.

In 2013, the couple and their two children made a funny video Christmas card for their families and put it on YouTube. It went viral overnight, and Penn and Kim eventually quit their media jobs and now make funny and inspirational videos and podcasts full-time, with more than 4.5 million followers.

Their popularity landed them on the reality TV show *The Amazing Race*, part of which filmed during the global coronavirus pandemic.

Kim Holderness said being on the show has been a long-time dream.

Bucket list opportunity

"We've been fans of the show since the very beginning," she said on the Dec. 14 episode of the couple's podcast. "We've always watched it. ... It's always one of those things that's been on our bucket list. But it never occurred to me that we'd actually be on it."

In each season of *The Amazing Race*, 11 teams of two race around the world, completing challenging



Photo by ViacomCBS

Penn and Kim Holderness tackle a challenge for "The Amazing Race."

mental and physical tasks in an effort to win \$1 million.

"It's a famously grueling, very hard show," Kim Holderness said.

The couple went to Europe in February 2020 to start filming but soon had to return to the U.S. as the coronavirus pandemic spread globally. They thought that was the end of their experience, but show producers made a way for the contestants to finish the race in early 2021.

CBS will air the two-hour premiere of season 33 on Jan. 5. Beginning Jan. 7, the couple will talk about each episode each week in special Friday editions of their podcast.

Fans of the podcast can expect they will bring their same brand of humor, seriousness and faith-based perspective to their reflections on their race experience. Listeners may even learn more about their marriage, the subject of their book

"Everybody Fights, So Why Not Get Good at It?"

Those who have enjoyed the funny, family-friendly videos the couple posts to YouTube might imagine the couple gets along well — and they do. But it's not always easy.

"Not one single marriage in the history of marriages has run perfectly all the time," Penn Holderness writes. "Disagreements are inevitable when you spend that much time with someone ... So we've made it a priority to put in the work required for a healthy marriage."

In the book, the couple shares advice from their pastor and marriage coach, Christopher Edmonston, who leads White Memorial Presbyterian Church in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Weaving humor into the serious topic of marriage, each chapter offers a specific example of a fight they have undergone and relates

both Penn's and Kim's perspectives on it. They then share the practical advice Edmonston gave them.

Discussing fights

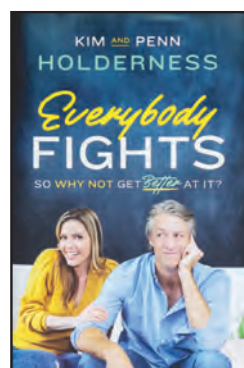
The first tip was the idea of meta-communication — the practice of looking at how one communicates. Edmonston encouraged the couple to regularly discuss fights and figure out what went right and wrong and what could be done better.

The book explains, "When we sit down to review a fight, we have a cup of coffee and try to get to the bottom of what we were trying to convey in the heat of the moment."

Honest and frank, the book seeks to help readers become more successful communicators within a relationship.

"Our marriage is a living, breathing, unfinished, imperfect, constantly changing part of our lives, and no matter how deeply and completely we love each other, fighting will always be part of it. With every argument, we learn a little bit more about each other," they write in the final chapter.

"We've been using these techniques for almost a decade now. While we still mess up every single day, knowing that we have the tools to clean up the mess has made us a lot steadier when we do get into it with each other. We say what we mean and trust the other person will love us anyway — and we think that's worth fighting for." (Carrie B. McWhorter contributed)



EDITOR'S NOTE

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

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