

The Alabama Baptist

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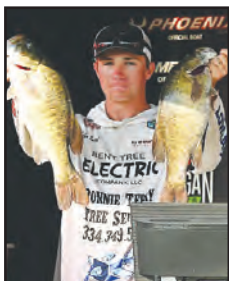
Vol. 187, No. 2
Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

INSIDE



Children's Homes launches 10-year vision plan, elects Johnson board chair

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Champion angler Tyler Smith casts future into God's hands, finds God faithful

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Greater need for family advocates if Roe goes away

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Photo courtesy of The Well Church Florence

Students participate in a worship night at The Well Church Florence, which was planted by Highland Baptist Church near the campus of the University of North Alabama in 2016 as the first church plant in The Well Network, which focuses on college students.

Future focused

Church planting network engages college students in congregational life

By Grace Thornton
TAB Media

John Brock, pastor of Highland Baptist Church in Florence, still has a screenshot of the text Allen Tate sent him in 2015. They bring it up every now and then just for a laugh.

The text says, “Think about this — The Well Church Flor-

ence, a campus of Highland Baptist Church.”

Tate, then college pastor at Highland Baptist, had been sensing God moving in his heart to take the church’s weekly college worship service — called The Well — and turn it into a church plant with a missional focus on reaching college students.

Brock said his answer was short — “Uhhh ... no.”

But Brock and Tate both knew the conversation wasn’t over — it was just beginning.

In the six years since, Highland has planted not only The Well Church Florence but also The Well Church Huntsville.

The Well Church Florence also has multiplied, planting Church at the Oaks in Tuscaloosa. The Well Church Florence now has a church-planter-in-residence who is preparing to plant Banner Church in Jacksonville in early 2023.

Looking ahead

And they’re planning to continue to train planters and start new churches near university campuses. They hope The Well Network will have 16 locations by 2026.

It all started when Brock and Tate began observing the students who were graduating from the University of North

Alabama and leaving Highland’s college ministry.

“What we realized was pretty gut-wrenching,” Tate remembered. “We had taught them to love the ministry, but we had not taught them to love the Church.”

Many students saw the college worship service as their congregation and weren’t engaging in the life of the church body, he admitted.

“And when they left us, they were not engaging in a body wherever they moved. It was almost as if we had not prepared them effectively for the next stage of life.”

(See ‘The Well,’ page 13)

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Photo courtesy of Danny Wood

Roy Isbell — shown here with his son, Sherman, and daughter, Sally — recently turned 102 and still faithfully leads services at the retirement home where he lives and reads *The Alabama Baptist*.

Reading, preaching, organizing part of 102-year-old Isbell's week

Roy Isbell has spent a lot of his life studying. He has a seminary degree, and he's written a number of books, including "The Eternal Living God," "Walking With Jesus: The Blessings of Dwelling Daily With God" and "Fall in Love With Jesus."

And today, at 102 years old, if he isn't reading the Bible or the books he already owns, he's almost certainly reading *The Alabama Baptist*.

Isbell's nephew, Danny Wood — pastor emeritus of Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills — called him "an amazing man."

Isbell spent most of his ministry working with Baptist Campus Ministries with the Missouri Baptist Convention and the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

These days, he is a resident of Elmcroft of Grayson Valley in

Clay, and when the COVID-19 pandemic prevented outside ministers from coming in to lead services there, he started leading them.

His son Sherman, who is a Presbyterian minister in Virginia, said his father would put many other preachers to shame "on Monday mornings plunging with enthusiasm into his sermon preparation for the next week's service and working away at it all week."

Isbell recites the sermon to his nursing aide on Saturday, organizes song sheets for the service, and changes out the text on his message board two times a week, using a constant turnover of Scripture verses.

Wood said he's hoping to have "a bunch of the Isbell genes." "And what is the preferred reading of 102-year-old men?" Wood asked. "None other than *The Alabama Baptist* paper!" (Grace Thornton)



Photo courtesy of Danny Wood
102-year-old Roy Isbell enjoys reading *The Alabama Baptist* each week.

The Alabama Baptist

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

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 14.



RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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

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How should people of faith describe the ‘pro-life’ stance?

When Norma McCorvey’s attorneys filed a lawsuit on her behalf (as Jane Roe) against Texas district attorney Henry Wade in late 1971, I was six months old.

And when the final decision was handed down by the U.S. Supreme Court in January 1973, I was 18 months old.

So the 7–2 Roe v. Wade ruling in favor of McCorvey — which says the due process clause of the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution provides a right to privacy allowing a pregnant woman to choose abortion — has been the only law I’ve ever known.

At the same time, I’ve watched large numbers of people of faith remain devoted to praying, petitioning and advocating for five decades not only against abortion but also for a way to overturn Roe v. Wade.

The recent Dobbs v. Jackson case, heard by the U.S. Supreme Court in December, has the best potential to achieve overturning the federal law.

As we wait on the ruling, I’ve been encouraged by the significant number of people of faith who are spending the interim period educating and advocating for the next level of adhering to a pro-life stance.

Herbie Newell of Lifeline Children’s Services, which operates out of the national Woman’s Missionary Union building in Birmingham, is one of those voices.

In an interview on a recent Priority Talk radio show on WXJC, Newell shared how some people are actually “pro-birth” rather than “pro-life” (see story, page 17).

As I read Newell’s suggestions for broadening the net related to caring for all levels of life “from the womb to the tomb” — as several authors, pastors and advocates have described it — countless ministry opportunities came to mind.

Along with opportunities

available through the services offered at Lifeline, the Alabama Baptist Children’s Homes & Family Ministries also provides ways to help at-risk children (read more on page 9).

It is actually quite exciting to think about the difference our churches could make in their communities if they truly focused on caring for all of “the least of these” as Matthew 25:40 states.

James 1:27 admonishes us to look after orphans and widows. Jeremiah 22:3 and Zechariah 7:10 share some “do not’s” such as “Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor.”

But how does caring for oth-

ers in vulnerable situations mesh with being pro-life in our advocacy stance?

I’m not sure how the labels all came to be, but in some cases those who are advocating against abortion and laws like Roe v. Wade are referred to as “anti-abortion” and that’s technically accurate.

Those who lobby for the option of choosing abortion are typically called “pro-choice.”

Somewhere along the way, we adopted “pro-life” as the label of choice for the fight against abortion — after all we are fighting for the unborn to continue living in the womb and when it’s time to be born, live outside the womb.

But how much energy are we truly putting toward each of those little lives once they are born?

How are we helping those born into extreme poverty, drug addiction or unstable situations succeed and feel as safe as Baby Dean does in his daddy’s arms (see photo)?

How are we providing for those at various seasons of life who need someone to offer a little guidance and maybe simply believe in them?

How would you describe the concept of pro-life?



**SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE
SUNDAY IS JAN. 16.**

Photo courtesy of Dave Walsh

Your Voice



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

Open letter to Southern Baptists by sexual abuse 'overcomer'

By Jane Brown
Special to TAB Media

EDITOR'S NOTE — After following the news of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee's ongoing discussions in relation to the Sexual Abuse Task Force and its investigation, Jane Brown, a retired music minister who lives in Mobile, reached out to TAB Media to share her story.

"Perhaps I have waited to tell my story 'for such a time as this,'" said Brown. "I have chosen not to let a very hurtful time in my life define who I am. Rather, I want my relationship with Jesus to be what defines my life, not as a 'survivor,' but rather an overcomer."

The following is an excerpt: I find myself writing this let-

ter with a plethora of emotions. In 2019, a friend sent me a link to the series the Houston Chronicle published on "Abuse of Faith." This friend had no knowledge of my own past experience.

As I sat reading and sobbing, the flow of tears now blurring the words, my own story began playing on the screen of my mind.

Nearly 60 years ago

The article states, "In the past 20 years, a disturbing number of Southern Baptists with formal church roles have engaged in sexual misconduct."

But my story says NO. This pattern began long before that ... when I was a 15 year old in 1962 ... at the hands of a trustee serving on one of our SBC entity boards.

My heart was crying for those 700 girls who had suffered in silence thinking the same thing. But even greater than the sorrow was the righteous indignation that if what happened to me had not been ... buried ... in the name of "protecting the testimony of the church," how many women would have been spared?

Instead, they are forever living with those memories not only to protect the church, but more importantly to leaders of the past ... and the name of ... the SBC.

I write in hopes of helping you understand that because my abuse involved an SBC leader ... who served in other high-profile positions, there was no accountability, and immunity was freely given.

As my parents and I navigated the legal system behind secretive closed doors, we learned there was another victim. This same man had molested another teenage girl 17 years earlier, who was quietly relocated with her family to another state.

Meanwhile, my abuser's positions continued to grow. This man (now deceased) was the husband of my [Girls' Auxiliary] leader at the prominent church in Nashville where we were members.

He began his abuse at a GA sleepover and continued for several months, even once taking me to another state. He threatened me if I told anyone.

When my abuse came to light, my family found ourselves in a legal conference room where mediation was to be "worked out." I sat in total fear and amazement as my abuser tried to weave his story

to be my fault. However, after that meeting, he stalked my home. ... Nothing was ever reported, and the police did nothing to protect me.

Three months later I turned 16, took an early entrance exam to college and moved to Birmingham to start school. ... On several occasions ... he drove from Nashville to intimidate me. The police in Birmingham were willing to grant a restraining order against him.

As a result, he asked for forgiveness for what he called becoming a victim and secured immediate restoration at church, the same church that 17 years earlier had stood by him. He also continued in all of his SBC jobs.

Family asked to leave

My family lost our church home. My parents were never able to find a church that felt like home again, haunted by the embarrassment and heartache that accompanied our experience.

A number of years later, the pastor at the time of my abuse visited my father and apologized for siding with my abuser.

I truly want to see our great denomination be willing to confront this issue and accept the responsibility of the shame and blame put on me and all these precious young victims that have come since. I want to see us move forward to do whatever possible to protect our children and youth from the hurt and pain Satan is constantly seeking to inflict.

For the first time ... I have hope in regards to this issue. I pray God's wisdom and blessings on you as you work to solve this problem.

Trauma comes to church

One in 4 women and 1 in 5 men in America has been or will be sexually assaulted. That's just sexual assault, not including other forms of abuse and trauma.

That means that if you have more than three women or four men in your church, statistically speaking, the survivors are already there.

When someone opens up to you about abuse of any kind, your first impulse is going to be to "fix it." Please don't. ... Instead, let the first words out of your mouth be a form of gratitude for trusting you to share about their pain. They didn't have to let you in this far,

and they took a big risk doing it.

Secondly, convey that you believe them. Being seen and heard is remarkably reparative in and of itself. Finally, ask how you can support them. Everybody's in a different place in their healing journey. You don't have to fix everything. All you have to do is meet them where they're at with empathy and genuineness.

David Hughes
Licensed Christian counselor
Raleigh, North Carolina
Adapted from a blog post at sbcvoices.com. Read the full blog post at tabonline.org/hughes. Used with permission.

“You don’t need permission to do the Great Commission.”

PASTOR BILL WILKS

NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville

God does mighty things through the least likely vessel. It’s not about us; it’s about Him.

Pastor Tony Reynolds
Randolph Baptist Church

“How churches work together, how churches send together — it’s beautiful,” said **Meg Brown**, associate minister to children at Dawson Memorial Baptist Church in Birmingham.

The Christian life is a battle not a dream.

Morris Murray Jr.
Jasper, Ala.

I have learned through the years that what is important is that I worship — sometimes inspired by the music, sometimes in spite of the music. God loves music that comes from the heart.

Elizabeth Carter, organist
First Baptist Church Decatur

“We have had so many servants of God who have served through the years and laid the proper foundation so our church will be able to be a light for many years to come,” said **George Robinson**, pastor of New Haven Baptist Church in Anniston, on the church’s 75th anniversary.

“From the bottom of my heart, I have never been more proud of any graduates that I have had the joy of presiding over,” said **Danny Akin** of 24 inmates who earned a bachelor of arts diploma in pastoral ministry through a special program with Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

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.

Pastor Dewayne Rembert
Flatline Church at Chisholm

Living in the moment

By Rick Lance

Executive director
Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

As we face the challenges of 2022, we may be anxious about the prospects before us. I think that is a normal response. However, we cannot live in fear for “God has not given us a spirit of fear” (2 Tim. 1:7).

Perhaps we should resolve to live in the moment. That sounds easy enough to do, but for many of us, it is a struggle to accomplish.

Some are caught in the grip of the past. The past can enslave. Life experiences can cause you to become so fixated on what has happened in the past you cannot find the strength to see what God is doing in your life in the present.

Guilty feelings over failures and disappointments in life are a product of our sinful nature and the fact that we live in a fallen world. Seeking forgiveness from God and living a forgiving life can liberate us from the terrible effects of such guilt and shame.

Living in the future can cause you to live in exile from the present too. We all look to the future with anticipation of something new and good happening. Planning for it is wise. But being enslaved by “what’s next” can rob you of the joys of the present moment.

I must confess I have done both. Therefore, with the strength that only our Lord can give (Phil. 4:13), I am going to seek to live in each moment God gives me in 2022.

Living in the present is to be at home with Christ. With His power, we can enter the present knowing this moment can be just as significant as any past or future experience.

A past always precedes us, and the promise of a future is ever before us. Yet the present is our home. This is the moment we can most redemptively meet Christ.

From the *Twitterverse*

@bobgoff

No one leads people to Jesus; He leads people to Himself. All the pressure is off. Just go love everybody.

@nathanafinn

Others will follow you based upon your position, and they may even appreciate you based upon your gifts. But they will only respect you based upon your integrity.

@ethicist

No word from God will ever fail.

@brocraig

“We have a Friend on the throne. He will use His influence for those who entrust their affairs in His hands.” —Spurgeon

@scottdawson

We all love to be the “Daniel in the lion’s den” figure.

However, sometimes we are the “Uriah, the Hittite.” (Figuratively, not literally)

Both were faithful to their task.

Lord, make us faithful, if we see the victory or suffer the defeat. May we be found faithful!

@rcsprouljr

There’s no secret knowledge, no special insight save this — stop looking for either & rest in this — I’m a sinner. Jesus died for me. My heavenly Father loves me.

Nothing to be proud of, to debate about, to set yourself above other saved sinners. Everything to give thanks for.

@LysaTerKeurst

Learning deeper trust in God doesn’t often happen in straight lines of obedience. It’s when we cycle through trials, tripping and sometimes falling, that we realize our desperate need for Him.

Knowing our need for Him leads us to putting our trust in Him.

@Clawlessjr

Too many churches do the hard work of long-range strategizing but then shelve the report when the work is too complicated. Seldom do they do another round of planning anytime soon.

@DrKBlackwell

It should never be evangelism and then discipleship. Jesus said “make disciples” not “convert people and then teach them.” Making disciples is one holistic process, it is never bifurcated.

@dandarling

The church needs both criticism and comfort, prophets and pastors. We need warnings brought with tears. We need encouragement delivered by shepherds. We need it all.

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

3 stories you should know



AP Photo/Manish Swarup

A Myanmar refugee who fled the town of Thantlang in Chin State salutes with the common sign of resistance. At least 35 people were burned alive in Myanmar on Christmas Eve, the latest in a series of attacks on civilians by the country's military. Two staff members of Save the Children were among those killed. On Dec. 30, two churches, one Baptist, were burned by military troops. Read more at tabonline.org/myanmar-attacks. (TAB Media)

Kentucky pastor recalls deadly tornadoes

Bob Waldrige has seen God move since the tornado hit his church in December.

Waldrige is the pastor of Yahweh Baptist Church that is, or was, located next to the courthouse in Mayfield, Kentucky.

As a 10-year retired trooper with the Kentucky State Police, Waldrige has been through some bad situations, including working fatalities.

He's also seen a lot of good and bad during his 16 years of pastoring churches.

A Gofundme page currently has raised about \$93,000.

"Our people have really come together," he said. "We've not missed a Sunday meeting (since the tornado)."

To read the full story, visit tabonline.org/ky-response.

Southern Baptists respond to wildfires

Colorado Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers are serving meals and assisting families impacted by a massive wildfire in Boulder County that destroyed hundreds of homes.

CBDR said preparations to deploy a feeding unit began as the Marshall Fire raced through the cities of Louisville and Superior and the unincorporated community of Marshall, all southwest of the city of Boulder and northeast of Denver.

The fire began Dec. 30 and within 24 hours engulfed 6,200 acres.

Nearly 1,000 homes were destroyed, with over 100 more damaged, according to Boulder County Sheriff Joe Pelle. According to the latest media reports, at least two people were missing.

To read the full story, visit tabonline.org/co-fires.

Persecuted **church**

Militants slay pastor, 10 Christians; tell churches to close or be attacked

JOS, Nigeria — Militant Muslim Fulani herdsmen killed a kidnapped pastor and 10 others in ongoing attacks upon Christians in Nigeria, Morning Star News reports.

Dauda Bature was kidnapped Nov. 8 from Ungwan Kanti village in Kaduna state, then slain around Dec. 9 after ransom was paid. His wife was kidnapped Nov. 18 when she delivered ransom money, but was released Dec. 6. She said her husband preached Christ to and prayed for repentance of his captors, which infuriated the captors.

In Plateau state, Fulani attacked Te'egbe village



Facebook photo

Nov. 26, killing 10 Christians, states Morning Star. In Zamfara state, Islamic militants warned that churches there would be attacked unless they close, says relief group Barnabas Fund.

Last year, Nigeria had the highest incidents of Christians kidnapped (990) in the world and the highest number of Christians killed for their faith (3,530), Morning Star reports. Nonetheless, the U.S. State Department recently removed Nigeria from its list of Countries of Particular Concern. Nigeria is No. 9 on Open Doors' 2021 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

Attacks on Christians rise sharply after anti-conversion law proposed

KARNATAKA, India — Attacks on Christians in Karnataka state and on their places of worship have risen sharply since a proposed anti-conver-

sion law was announced Sept. 29, reports International Christian Concern.

The government approved the law in December.

However, even before the law had passed Hindu radicals in Karnataka state were attacking Christians as if the proposal already was law. The ICC says anti-conversion laws currently in eight Indian states are widely abused to persecute Christians. Radical nationalists falsely accuse Christians of forcefully converting people to Christianity. The false accusations are used to justify harassing and assaulting Christians. Local police often overlook the attacks.

Referring to a report compiled on abuses, the ICC article says Karnataka state is India's third highest (with 32 cases this year) for attacks on Christians and their places of worship. India is No. 10 on Open Doors' 2021 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

NEWS

Alabama news

BIBB ASSOCIATION

► **Kyle Hodges** is the new lead pastor of **First Baptist Church West Blocton**. He holds a master's degree in Christian ministry and a doctor of ministry degree in ministry leadership, both from Liberty University. He and his wife, Jacqueline, have two children.



HODGES

BLOUNT COUNTY ASSOCIATION

► **Pleasant View Missionary Baptist Church, Holly Pond**, will host its regular third Sunday night singing Jan. 16 at 5 p.m. with "The Dixie Echoes" from Pensacola, Florida. Earl Harper is pastor.

FRANKLIN ASSOCIATION

► **Bert Fowler** retired in December after more than 28 years of service to **First Baptist Church Russellville**. The church hosted a reception Jan. 9 to honor him and his wife, Carole. Fowler was the associate pastor of worship and senior adults.

"Bert has been a mainstay at First Baptist Church Russellville," said Pastor Chase Dowdy to the Franklin Free Press. "He's someone who's been faithful to the Lord and faithful to the church. I can always count on Bert for answers to any questions about our members or what worked well in the church in the past or what didn't work well."



FOWLER

A graduate of the University of Alabama (bachelor's and master's in music education) and Southwestern Seminary (master of church music), Fowler was called to the ministry as a high school senior. He has previously served churches in Fort Worth, Texas, as well as Tuscaloosa and Brent.

Dowdy, who is in his second year at the church, said he looks to Fowler for guidance.

"People know his heart and see a servant and that's how I can best describe Bert — he has the heart of a servant," Dowdy added.

The Fowlers plan to retire in Tuscaloosa.

They have two children and six grandchildren.



QUATTLEBAUM

GENEVA ASSOCIATION

► **Corteland Quattlebaum** is the new associate pastor/minister of youth, college and career of **First Baptist Church Slocomb**.

He is currently pursuing a bachelor of arts in biblical stud-

ies from the Baptist College of Florida. He and his fiancée, Elizabeth, are planning a summer wedding.

MOBILE ASSOCIATION

► **Eric Sexton** is the new pastor of **First Baptist Church Semmes**.

A graduate of the University of Alabama and New Orleans Seminary, Sexton served as a summer missionary with the International Mission Board while in college and has previously served as youth minister at Gilgal Baptist Church, Duncanville, and FBC Gadsden, as well as served as MFuge video producer and NOBTS media services student assistant. Most recently, he directed collegiate/student services with Etowah Baptist Association.

He and his wife, Laura, have two children.

► **Connor Donovan** is the new pastor of **Hollinger's Island Baptist Church, Mobile**.

A graduate of Oklahoma Baptist University and Beeson Divinity School, this will be Donovan's first pastorate.

His wife, Julie, was serving North Shelby Baptist Church, Birmingham, as children's and preschool minister. They have two children.



SEXTON



DONAVAN



LOWERY

TUSCALOOSA COUNTY ASSOCIATION

► Ladies are being offered the opportunity to participate in a live video taping of a new Bible study at **First Baptist Church Tuscaloosa**. Join O'Shea Lowery Jan. 20–22 for "Entrusted Lessons for the Journey."

You can attend one session or more if available. Times available are 4 and 6 p.m. on Jan. 20; 10 a.m., 4 and 6 p.m. on Jan. 21 and 9 and 11 a.m. on Jan. 22. While the study was originally aimed at single mothers, all women can benefit from the lessons.

Contact Beth Yates, FBC Tuscaloosa women's minister at byates@fbctuscaloosa.org or 205-345-7554. Registration is required.

Thanks for your patience as we catch up on staff announcements. Send staff changes, retirements, death announcements, church anniversaries, etc., to news@thealabamabaptist.org. For events, be sure to submit at least three weeks prior to the event.



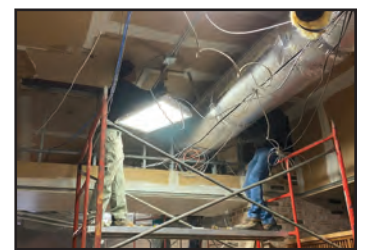
Facebook photo

Volunteers and staff members of Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center prepare the second floor of the Bagley Center for renovations.

Volunteers, staff prep Shocco's Bagley Center for renovations

Volunteers and staff members at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega spent the first week of 2022 focused on demolition of a main building's interior.

The second floor of Bagley Center, which was built in the 1970s, was the focus of the demolition. There have not been many updates other than carpet and a few minor changes.



Facebook photo

The long-time Baptist retreat center hosts many events and camps throughout each year. These updates will modernize the look of Bagley's second floor to match the first floor, which was completed a couple of years ago.

Russell Klinner is the executive director of Shocco. Volunteers can sign up at shocco.org/about/volunteer. (Dianna L. Cagle)

Headline news

from around the Southeast

FLORIDA

When David Schorejs became pastor of First Baptist Church Apopka on Easter 2014, he established one goal. “Instead of creating ministry and asking God to bless it, we decided to embrace the community around us,” he said. Located north of Orlando, the community surrounding the church was home to a large population of homeless and destitute people, the Florida Baptist Witness reported. The church soon began to host weekly dinners as a part of its Next Step Ministry. “The ministry is designed to remind the community that everyone has a next step in life,” he explained. Each week



Photo courtesy of Florida Baptist Witness

between 60 and 70 volunteers come out to serve in the ministry and as many as 60 impoverished people attend the dinners. Through the years more than 30 community residents have made

professions of faith in Jesus and have been baptized. “We love seeing what the Lord is doing,” Schorejs said.

GEORGIA

The mile-wide path of destruction left behind after an EF-4 tornado rumbled across Coweta County in March was nearly beyond imagination. Less than a year later, the trees downed by the tornado have become firewood to help needy families heat their homes this winter. With cold weather approaching, Pastor Jamie Callaway and members of Faith Baptist Church in Bowman have delivered 20 tons of tornado-ravaged firewood to the Ramah Navajo Reservation near Pine Hill, New Mexico, The Christian Index reported.

“What was a tragedy for Greg [Thompson] and his family [who lost their home in the tornado] turned out to be a blessing for our brothers and sisters in the Navajo nation,” Callaway said. Homeowner Thompson said God



Photo courtesy of The Christian Index

used the tornado to renew his faith, explaining that God brought him “to a state of repentance” because he had not been “as close to Him as I should be.”

KENTUCKY

After more than a decade of membership decline, Scottsville Road Baptist Church in Bowling Green voted unanimously in August 2020 to become a campus of nearby Living Hope Baptist Church, called Living Hope Scottsville Road, The Baptist Paper reported.

Photo by Pam Henderson/
The Baptist Paper

Will Burnham, pastor of the new campus, said the decision to merge has been positive for all involved. “Being part of the [Southern Baptist Convention], you are not alone.

There’s always somebody out there who’s ready to help. It’s just being willing to ask for help and to know that we are stronger together. That’s the beating heart of the SBC, isn’t it? To cooperate together, to advance the Kingdom,” Burnham said. “If there is a church out there struggling, I would encourage it to be willing to have a conversation with a sister church in its county.”

NORTH CAROLINA

Nearly eight years after arriving in the United States as a refugee, Nathan Rostampour still reaches families in Central Asia with the gospel, raising up leaders among secret house churches in the region, the Biblical Recorder reported.

On Sundays, he broadcasts worship services through Instagram, which is one platform not blocked in Iran. At the end of the service, he opens a chat box where members fellowship virtually and share prayer requests.

About 1,000 families tune in from their homes to join services and discipleship courses every week.

On Saturdays, Rostampour holds an online class through which he teaches discipleship and leadership concepts. He hosts multiple Zoom meetings and phone calls with house church leaders throughout the week to mentor, keep in touch with and pray for leaders in Iran.

The evangelical population in Iran is quickly growing, he said. “It’s an amazing opportunity for the church in general to reach Iran these days.”



ROSTAMPOUR

TENNESSEE

Leaders at Carson-Newman University are continuing to navigate through the recovery and assessment phases in the wake of a Nov. 26 fire that damaged the school’s Pedersen Nursing Building, the Baptist and Reflector reported.

Campus leaders expressed thanks to the many who donated to replenish lost supplies and training equipment.

Due to fire and water damage, nothing in the building was salvageable.



Photo courtesy of Baptist and Reflector

Because the fire occurred when students were away for Thanksgiving break, no one had been in the building for days.

“It was a hallelujah moment when we discovered that everybody was accounted for and safe. ... We can replace technology and equipment and buildings.

“But you just can’t replace a life,” said President Charles Fowler, who requested prayer for the school’s leaders and for God to work in the details as the university continues through the transition.

VIRGINIA

When 5,000 Afghan refugees were relocated to a U.S. military base on the East Coast earlier this year, Sarah Parker (name changed for security reasons) felt called to help.

A Marine wife and member of Pillar Church of Dumfries, Parker began to look for ways to minister to the families displaced by the Taliban’s takeover of Kabul.

Working with Send Relief, Parker helps coordinate numerous activities for children, including sports, games, songs, English as a Second Language classes and crafts.

“The goal is to go in and love on these kids who have been through so much trauma and transition in a short period of time,” Parker said.

“We want to set them up for success in the American education system, while reminding them that they are children who can still play and have fun despite what they’ve been through,” she said. “This is our missions field.”



Photo courtesy of Send Relief

'Enormous Compassion'

Children's Homes launches 10-year vision plan, elects Johnson board chair

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Derry Johnson says it was a divine appointment that brought her together with Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries. A nurse practitioner, lawyer and pastor's wife, Johnson has long had a heart for children and families. Her main area of law practice has been family law.

But before she got to know Rod Marshall, ABCH president, she and her husband, Morris, got acquainted with the building of the former Industrial City Baptist Church in Hueytown.

"We knew God had called us to the Hueytown area to plant a church, but we didn't have a place to worship," Johnson said, noting that they had been meeting in borrowed spaces ever since her husband, a pastor for more than 25 years, had felt God calling him to plant a new church.

"We saw this building, and we walked around, and we looked, and we prayed," she said. (Hear that story at tabonline.org/johnsons.)

They found out the church had donated the building to ABCH when it disbanded, and when they met with Marshall about it, he quickly got interested in two things — the couple's vision for Hueytown and Johnson's heart for children and families.

The church plant — Integrity Baptist Church — bought the building. And Marshall recruited Johnson for the ABCH board of trustees.

"Mrs. Johnson has an incredibly impressive resumé as a reg-

istered nurse, a pediatric nurse practitioner and an attorney," Marshall said. "She has served our board remarkably well in the last five years."

On Nov. 5, she was elected chair of the ABCH board — the first black board chair in ABCH's history.

Also during the meeting, the board

"I think [Derry Johnson] will take this board and it will soar under her leadership."

**Leah Stephens
outgoing chair**



Photo by Grace Thornton/The Alabama Baptist

Derry Johnson is the first black board chair for Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries. Johnson, an attorney, pediatric nurse practitioner and RN, brings much to the position, ABCH CEO Rod Marshall said.

elected James Bearden of Valley Grande as vice chairman and Helen Fisk of Birmingham as secretary.

Marshall said Johnson "cares deeply for the children in our care, has a keen mind for risk management, and being married to a church planter, she understands our state denomination very well."

"She is uniquely prepared professionally to work with me and our team in realizing the vision of our strategic plan," Marshall said, referring to Vision 140, a new 10-year plan the board voted to approve during its Nov. 5 meeting.

Vision 140 sets several goals, Marshall told messengers to the Alabama Baptist State Convention in November: to serve at least 1,000 children in foster care, to reunify at least 250 families, to facilitate at least 50 adoptions annually and to lead at least 50 children in ABCH care to Christ.

Johnson said she loves the fact that the vision and the purpose of the organization is to protect, nurture and foster the love of Jesus Christ with everything they do.

"We are dealing with fragile families and children who are in the middle of many, many conflicts in life. We want to have a ministry that cares, really cares, a group of people who have the vision and the love of Jesus in their heart," Johnson said.

"I came into this ministry with a willingness to follow, to do what I could do to help the ministry achieve the mission. I had no idea that I would matriculate through the ministry to become the board president. I am thankful God orders our paths."

'Christian heart'

Leah Stephens, outgoing chair, said she is "thrilled" Johnson is assuming the role.

"She has shown enormous compassion and a level of knowledge of understanding of children in foster care and children from hard places because of not only her background as a lawyer but also because of her Christian heart," Stephens said.

"I think she will take this board and it will soar under her leadership."



Photo by Grace Thornton/The Alabama Baptist

The board of directors of Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries adopted Vision 140, a new 10-year plan that looks ahead to the organization's 140th anniversary in 2031, during its November meeting.



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MONDAY MORNING
Sammy Gilbreath, Lawrence Phipps & Blake Newsom



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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



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evangelizeAL.org/sharinghope

‘It was a God thing’

Champion angler Tyler Smith casts future into God’s hands, finds God faithful

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

T Tyler Smith remembers swinging his fishing rod out for his last cast at 2:50 p.m. on Oct. 9. He had to be back for a weigh-in at 3 p.m.

And when his hook hit the water, he caught the biggest smallmouth bass of his life — a six-pounder.

It brought his three-day total of 14 bass at the Phoenix Bass Fishing League Regional Championship in Decatur to 43 pounds when he made it back to the weigh-in, enough to make Smith the winner of the championship.

“It was a God thing,” he said. “Without God, none of this would’ve been possible.”

A lot led up to this moment.

Fishing has been in Smith’s life for as long as he can remember. There are photos of him in diapers fishing for bream off a pier.

“It’s always been a part of me,” he said.

Fast forward to college, when he went to Faulkner University in Montgomery on a fishing scholarship. His freshman year, he placed high in a tournament in Kentucky and qualified for the national championship.

But in a move that surprised many, Smith decided to leave

halfway through his sophomore year.

“I felt God was calling me in a different direction,” he explained.

That direction was back home to Selma, where he

started working alongside his father in the family electrical work. His plan was to take over one day, but he also was going to continue to fish and see where it might take him.

Tim Mathis — pastor of Westwood Baptist Church in Selma, the church where Smith grew up — said he knew early on in his ministry there that fishing was a big part of Smith’s life.

“Fishing is so woven into his story,” Mathis said.

So he wasn’t surprised for fishing to come up often in the small group he led that included Smith and his girlfriend, Annagrace.

A real passion

“It fit into every part of the topics we talked about,” Mathis said, noting the group was for couples in a serious dating relationship.

When they talked about where they saw themselves in the future, Smith’s now-wife found out just how big a dream fishing was for him.

“She saw [that] this is



Photo courtesy of Tyler Smith

Tyler Smith, who grew up at Westwood Baptist Church in Selma, says God has guided his path and shown he can use his passion for fishing as a platform to share his faith.

something he really wants to do and is passionate about,” Mathis related.

Later, when they had a conversation about finances, Annagrace said she wanted one of the couple’s financial goals to be saving up for a boat.

“It meant a lot to him,” Mathis said, noting the two demonstrated a “deep commitment to the Lord.”

Two weeks after their wedding, Smith fished in the Phoenix Bass Fishing League Regional Championship and won.

One of the prizes was \$10,000. Another was a bass boat worth around \$50,000, accomplishing his wife’s financial goal already.

Smith also qualified to fish in the Phoenix Bass Fishing League All-American Championship in Arkansas in June 2022.

Mathis said Smith is well on his way to making the career of his dreams, and believes it’s something Smith will be able to con-

tinue to use to share his faith.

Tyler and Annagrace recently started leading the youth program at No Limit Church in Valley Grande, Alabama, where Annagrace’s father is pastor. Smith also is a fishing guide on the Alabama River, Lake Mitchell and Lay Lake in addition to working with

his father’s company.

Annagrace wrote on Facebook Oct. 9 that she could “not be more proud of Tyler Smith than I am right now! I love you so much and I am so proud of you for chasing after your dreams and then seeing it all come true!”

God’s guidance

Smith said it’s been amazing to see what God has done in his life related to fishing. Winning the tournament was an “unbelievable” experience he felt God guided.

“The way it all happened, I knew I had a good bag, but I did not think I had enough to win it,” he said.



Photo courtesy of Tyler Smith
Tyler Smith says his regional bass fishing win was a “God thing.”

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Auburn University students worship at the new Baptist Campus Ministries building. Stephen Thompson, senior campus minister, says filling students up spiritually helps them as they minister outside the building.

Base of operations



Photo courtesy of Auburn BCM

Auburn BCM's new home puts ministry in 'better' position for outreach

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

After three and a half years without its own building, Baptist Campus Ministries at Auburn University is back in its own — and brand-new — site.

“We had great transitional space and are very appreciative of that,” said Stephen Thompson, senior campus minister of Auburn BCM.

For the past several years, the ministry has worked out of a bank building and rented from a nearby Methodist church.

“It was a great partnership,” he said, “but we’re glad to be in our own home.”

In November 2017, messengers to the Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting approved

a deal that sold the BCM property to the city of Auburn for use as a seven-level parking garage, but included a provision for the city to build a new place for the ministry on the bottom level.

Several renovations

Funds from the sale provided a large chunk of funding for renovations at 10 other BCM buildings around the state.

The new Auburn facility sits on the same spot as the original building, just facing a different direction. Where it originally faced College Street, it now looks onto Wright Street.

Though Thompson was initially unsure of the new placement, he said it has turned out to be “a better location and vision than we had

before” the relocation occurred.

Previously, the building had a prime spot facing merchants and restaurants, but during those years many Auburn students lived on the opposite side of campus in the dorms and had to trek to the site.

But in the past several years, the face of downtown Auburn changed significantly, and it has become home to a number of high-rise student residences.

Now the BCM is “in the shadows of those buildings, so we’re seeing students all day long walk right in front of our doors,” Thompson said.

That is significant, because not only has the face of downtown Auburn changed in recent years — the face of student ministry has too.

Students don’t seek out BCM as a place to go for worship and fellowship like they used to, he noted.

“I think if you talk to campus ministers across the board, this year following the pandemic and trying to get geared back up into the full swing of campus life, it’s just been different,” Thompson related.

“Students are a lot harder to connect with, and they’re not as interested in connecting with campus ministries. We have to go to them.”

New strategy

So with the new building has come a new strategy. Instead of a “y’all come” approach where students come to the BCM to engage, Thompson and other leadership are using the new building as a base of

operations for outreach.

It’s used for worship, discipleship groups and fellowship, but also as a place from which to go out and engage students on campus.

Mike Nuss, director of the office of collegiate and student ministries for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said it’s an example of how student ministry on college campuses as a whole is shifting.

“We really have tried to couch the use of those buildings as an evangelistic outpost on a missions field that is 95% unreached,” he said of Alabama’s college campuses.

“The day of ‘If you build it, they will come’ is long gone. It doesn’t work that way anymore on a college campus.”

‘Hub or outpost’

“The vast majority are never going to darken the doors of a building, church, anything. The facility really serves as a hub or outpost for our evangelistic outreach on campus.”

Thompson noted he’s keeping that in mind as Auburn BCM retools its vision.

“In many ways for us it’s kind of a restart,” he said. “We’re very appreciative to Alabama Baptists for their commitment and investment in the lives of college students, and commitment to providing these kinds of resources, especially now.”



Photo courtesy of Auburn BCM

Auburn’s new BCM building offers more foot traffic than the previous location, allowing for greater outreach, says Mike Nuss, director of the office of collegiate and student ministries for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

The Well Network reaches students with the gospel

(continued from page 1)

So Tate began wrestling with what to do with the ministry. It had run well since the early 2000s, but now he and Brock were both questioning whether it was really achieving its purpose. Should they revamp it? Should they tear it down and start over?

As they prayed through those questions, Tate began building relationships with leaders in other parts of the country who were planting churches focused on reaching college students.

Church planting wasn't a new concept for the Highland congregation — in the past they had taken in a declining church and replanted it as a campus of Highland.

They just hadn't planted one focused on reaching college students, and slowly Tate was gaining a heart to do just that.

Then he sent Brock that text, the one to which Brock replied "no."

"That was just sort of a first conversation," Brock



Photo courtesy of Church at the Oaks
Students attending Church at the Oaks in Tuscaloosa gather for a baptism service at Lake Nicol. Church at the Oaks was planted in January 2021 to reach students at UA.

recalled. "But over the course of some months of conversation and praying, we became convinced that God wanted more for this ministry than just a worship service that drew college students in to worship once a week and that was it."

Church plant

So in 2016, The Well Church Florence was born, not as a campus of Highland Baptist but as a full-fledged church plant. It had

a missional focus on reaching students from the University of North Alabama, though it also drew young adults from the community.

The process went well — students were discipled, baptized and sent out on mission.

Working in partnership with Mike Nuss, director of the office of collegiate and student ministries for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, Highland members began

to pray about expanding the vision to other college towns.

They began to look around the state to determine which needed the most help in reaching students with the gospel.

"Of course we've got Baptist Campus Ministries on the majority of our campuses, but in some places it's them and maybe one other church actively engaging the campus," Tate said. "That might mean that it's basically two full-time people engaging a campus of 15,000. We wanted to come alongside them and help."

In 2017 — much faster than they'd planned — they planted The Well Church Huntsville near the campus of UAH.

They had originally considered a runway of several years for that plant, but the timeline was accelerated when the city's University Baptist Church partnered with them in the effort.

Then in January 2021, The Well Church Florence planted Church at the Oaks in Tuscaloosa. In 2022, it will plant Banner Church in Jacksonville. By then, Malachi Cole will have spent 18 months as a planter-in-residence at The Well Church Florence, learning from Tate and his team.

Planter-in-residence

In January, another planter-in-residence will join the staff of The Well Church Florence in anticipation of a fifth location, still to be determined. The Well Church Huntsville will have a planter-in-residence soon

too, which will be another step in Highland's long-term vision of church multiplication.

The Well Network is expanding, and Tate now serves as executive director in addition to being lead pastor of The Well Church Florence.

"What we have seen — it's not us, it's all the Lord," he said, noting they have been "building the plane while it was in the air" as they planted one church and then started the network."

'Kingdom impact'

And baptisms have increased significantly, Tate shared.

The church plants are nearing 150 baptisms since the networks's 2016 beginning, much more than the single college ministry effort saw in 15 years.

Those numbers — and the number of students in a discipleship relationship across the three church plants — are what leaders look at more these days than attendance, Tate said.

"These are the numbers that at the end of the day are ultimately going to make a Kingdom impact. We just want to see that continue to multiply."

Brock added that it's been amazing for Highland members to get to celebrate God working, and students being baptized and discipled, in rooms they'll probably never set foot in.

"It's been fun for our church family at Highland to watch this unfold, and have buy-in ... and see this as a ministry God has given us," Brock said.



Photo courtesy of The Well Church Huntsville
Ethan McCreary, pastor of The Well Church Huntsville, baptizes Lily, the 100th person to be baptized by churches in The Well Network.



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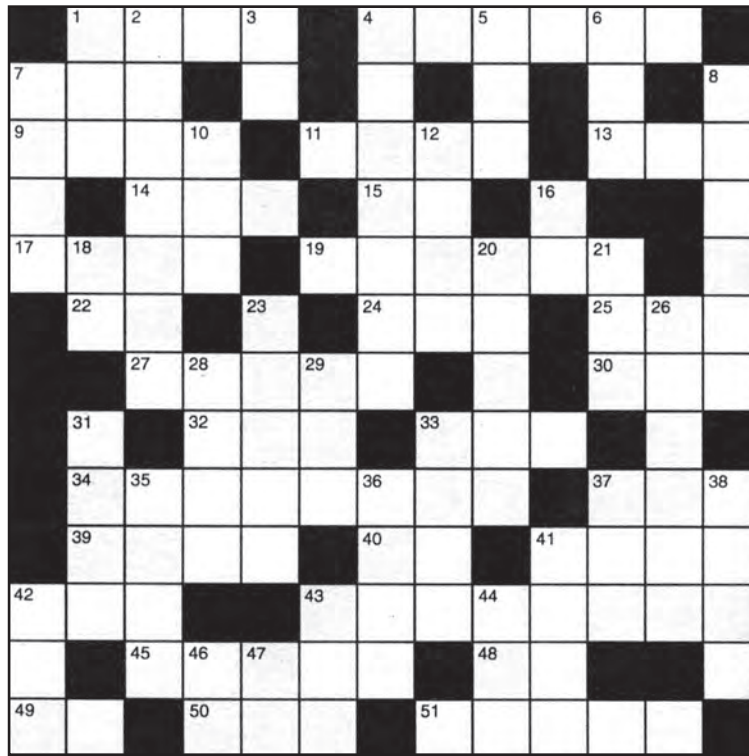


CHRISTIAN crossword

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

ACROSS

1. Woman who gleaned Boaz's fields.
4. I will ___ them from death. (Hos. 13:14)
7. Informal word for sibling.
9. A dueling sword.
11. One tenth of a dollar.
13. Organ of hearing.
14. To allow or permit.
15. Informal word for "mother."
17. The Holy Ghost shall come upon _____. (Luke 1:35)
19. Moses' father-in-law. (Ex. 18:5)
22. In the same manner.
24. To note maiden name.
25. Any monkey.
27. To walk proudly.
30. A metal of low strength.
32. Used in rowing.
33. A nephew of Abram. (Gen. 12:5)
34. Mary ... ___ the feet of Jesus. (John 12:3)
37. A chum.
39. To cast off.
40. A printing measure.
41. Second letter of Greek alphabet.
42. A mineral spring.
43. To become ragged.
45. And ___ bare Abram a son. (Gen. 16:15)
48. Introducing an alternative.
49. A negative vote.
50. Small child.



By Gladys Johnson Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

51. A heavenly messenger.
26. And delivered him to Pontius ___ the governor. (Matt. 27:2)
28. An instrument to aid in manual work.
29. A water vessel.
31. Thy word is a ___ unto my feet. (Ps. 119:105)
33. Forty days of fasting prior to Easter.
35. Captain of a floating zoo.
36. Rip or rend.
37. For each.
38. To dip a liquid.
41. A thick mass of ice.
42. Thou art my beloved _____. (Mark 1:11)
43. To make an edging.
44. Large measure of weight.
46. Position.
47. And Jethro said to Moses, ___ in peace. (Ex. 4:18)

DOWN

1. To tear.
2. Not capable of any service.
3. A male.
4. And they parted his ___, and cast lots. (Luke 23:34)
5. Female deer.
6. The first mother.
7. And he ___ forth a raven. (Gen. 8:7)
8. Jesus had ___ from the grave.
10. Large shoe size.
12. A companion.
16. Emergency Room. (abbr.)
18. A sound of triumph.
20. When ___ the king had heard these things. (Matt. 2:3)
21. A cereal grain.
23. A quality of

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](https://www.facebook.com/leatherwoodchurch).

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).

WORSHIP LEADER

Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, West Blockton, is looking for a part-time worship leader. Send resúmes to: mt.carmelbaptistchurchwb@gmail.com.

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 jgsv400@yahoo.com. We are located in West Tuscaloosa

County, 10 minutes outside of Northport, Ala.

BIVOCATIONAL CHILDREN'S MINISTER

East Highland Baptist Church, Hartselle, Ala., is prayerfully seeking God's choice for a bivocational children's minister who will lead the children's ministry program. Applicants should subscribe to the doctrinal statement of the Baptist Faith & Message. See additional information under the announcements tab at ehbc.church. Please send resumé to: cmcs@ehbc.church.

OTHER POSITIONS

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

The Biblical Recorder is seeking a full-time executive editor. The ideal candidate will have journalistic experience, a bachelor's degree in journalism or a related field, (master's degree preferred) and will display discernment in covering and disseminating North Carolina Baptist news. The ideal candidate will display an understanding of print media along with a skill set maximizing current journalistic platforms. The editor search committee is looking for a self-starter who has the courage to take appropriate risks with regard to the business model for this news outlet. Resúmes for this position will be accepted through Feb. 18. More information as well as a candidate profile can be found at BRnow.org. Interested candidates can apply by sending a resumé to: editorsearch@brnow.org.

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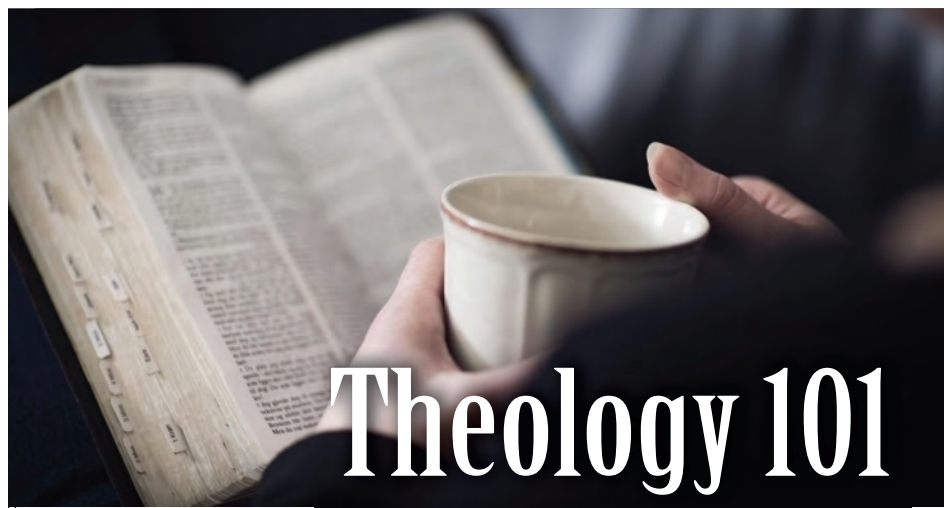
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Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Reflections on Christ's Coming

Jesus Came to Redeem Sinners

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
The Alabama Baptist

Last week our reflections on the significance of Christ's first coming emphasized that His mission during His life on earth was to reveal God. This week we note another aspect of His coming into the world: to redeem sinners.

When John the Baptist, the divinely ordained forerunner of God's incarnate Son, presented Jesus to his generation, he did so by invoking the imagery of a lamb and declaring, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

The imagery of a sacrificial lamb evoked the Old Testament practice of priests offering lambs on the temple altar, sacrifices which God accepted as atonement for people's sins. The New Covenant arrangement Jesus introduced did not call for sinners to bring their sacrificial lambs as offerings. Rather, God provided His only begotten Son as the sacrifice.

Hence, John accurately introduced Jesus as "the Lamb of God," the perfect, unrepeatable, once-for-all sacrifice for sin.

Sin separates people from God. Jesus died as a sacrificial Lamb to open once for all the way for repentant sinners to have an eternity with God, along with a life of fellowship with Him in the present. Through that redeeming death, sinners have the potential of having alienation from God replaced by acceptance into His family.

Sin brings condemnation. The most haunting and fearful words

a person could ever hear would be God declaring, "Depart from Me; I never knew you" (Matt. 25:41).

Since Christ came to redeem sinners, those who trust Him as Savior look forward to hearing God declare, "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. 25:21).

Enslaved need

Sin not only separates and brings condemnation; it also enslaves. The enslaved need to be set free. As Redeemer, Jesus sets repentant sinners free from sin's condemnation. The moment of saving faith immediately frees sinners from sin's penalty.

Over time, He works in us by His indwelling Spirit to free us progressively from sin's power. One day He will return and redeem us from sin's presence by gathering us to Himself into the sinless perfections of heaven.

Of all the marvelous accomplishments of Jesus during His earthly ministry, not the least was His mission of redeeming sinners. That accomplishment was at the very core of why He came.

Our reflections upon the first coming of Christ include the affirmation that Jesus came both to reveal God and redeem sinners.

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.



New year: 4 critical church website changes for 2022

By Mark MacDonald
Church branding strategist and consultant

Four church website changes/updates have been released to prepare the church digitally for the new year. So why should you start with the website?

In this complex church communication world, many pastors aren't sure where to start with the plethora of channels and tools: social media, website, email campaign, bulletin, etc. We know the world relies heavily on a digital hub — where most communication points to a website — so improving your website is critical.

This can especially be helpful to a potential guest when they look at your site before deciding to attend, or to members looking for details when they forget an announcement or to anyone who wants to give a gift.

Here are four required changes to consider for 2022:

1. Update your staff/team page with critical information.

Your two audiences (congregation and community) both seek information on those pages, but for different reasons. Internally, members want to identify who's in charge of specific ministries and how to contact them directly. Be simple and clear about job titles and contact information.

Externally, when someone living nearby decides they may visit, interestingly, they often go to this same page. Their reason? To see if leadership looks like they do and if they'll fit in. This is why staff pictures matter. Ensure they're current, everyone is dressed like you'd expect people to dress each Sunday, the friendly pictures are similarly cropped and each staff person is wearing current fashion.

2. Ensure online giving is set up properly.

Anyone wanting to give should be able to do so online. This functionality exists for most content management systems. Check with yours or with your Baptist association for assistance.

Then make sure your main menu

has "Give" or "Donate" clearly available, under "About" or as its own menu option.

On the giving page, talk about security, use your church name, logo, fonts and colors (you want them to know it's legitimate). Keep it simple, without long paragraphs. Explain how you'll use the funds. Link to ministry success stories. It may also be a great place to post a one-minute video from your pastor, thanking members for their generosity.

3. Make the calendar dynamic.

Your congregation is the primary audience for your church website. They visit to discover what's for them. So events and a calendar are critical. One of your main menu items should clearly say "Events" or "Calendar," where there is information about what was discussed on Sunday or in the bulletin, and links to other events (on a calendar grid or in a list). Bonus points if someone can filter for ministries or demographics (men, women, kids, students, etc.). This simplifies the results to only those that interest them.

4. Update your copyright code.

Everyone visiting your website needs to understand it's current. That's why your Christmas announcements should be removed Dec. 26 and also why your copyright date (often in the footer at the bottom of each page) needs to be changed manually each Jan. 1.

Or even better? Talk to the person who built your site so the coding automatically changes your date with the calendar year. It's usually easy.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Mark MacDonald is a communication pastor, speaker, consultant, bestselling author, church branding strategist for BeKnownforSomething.com and executive director of the Center for Church Communication, empowering 10,000-plus churches to become known for something relevant (a communication thread) throughout their ministries, websites and social media. His book, "Be Known for Something," is available at BeKnownBook.com.

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

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SUNDAY FEBRUARY 20



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For more information and promotional resources to assist you with collecting a Hunger Offering in your church, contact Ministry Assistant Lori Lockett at (334) 613-2304, llockett@alsbom.org, or visit alsbom.org/hunger.



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Newell: Greater need for advocates if Roe goes

By Michael J. Brooks
TAB Media

If the Supreme Court overturns or weakens existing federal abortion protections, the church must be ready to help.

That was the message Herbie Newell, president and executive director of Lifeline Children's Services, brought during a Dec. 7 interview on WXJC radio's "Priority Talk."

Newell published his book, "Image Bearers: Shifting from Pro-birth to Pro-life," in 2020, in part to urge churches to become "pro-life" in the larger sense of the word rather than just "pro-birth."

"If Roe v. Wade is altered or overturned, churches must step up and help families," Newell told host Greg Davis. "There will be more babies born and greater need for adoptive and foster families."

Mississippi case

Newell and Davis discussed the Dobbs case, now before the U.S. Supreme Court, which involves a Mis-

issippi law that bans most abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy. Justices heard oral arguments in the case Dec. 1. Newell said the atmosphere outside the court during arguments was not "prototypical."

'See into the womb'

"There were 900 Students for Life outside the building. I think things have changed in the last several years now that we can actually see into the womb," he explained. "My friend, Dr. Karen Purvis, said 'science is catching up with God.' And Mississippi Solicitor General Scott Stewart said we can't go back to the idea that the fetus is just 'a clump of tissues.'"

Newell said the three more politically liberal justices on the Supreme Court didn't make arguments like justices did 50 years ago when Roe was decided.

"They didn't support the constitutionality of the law," he explained, "but rather they argued about not overturning current law."

"Stewart countered with



Herbie Newell (right), president of Lifeline Children's Services, discusses the possibility of the Supreme Court overturning Roe v. Wade with radio host Greg Davis.

the idea that the court has overturned precedent before," Newell said.

"They did so in 'Brown v. Education' [in 1954] for example. Justice [Brett] Kavanaugh made this point too and suggested abortion may not be constitutional but an issue for the states. He said, 'In hard matters our democracy takes it back to the people.'"

"If we can convince Kavanaugh, I think we have a chance to alter Roe," Newell said.

Newell believes the Supreme Court will uphold the Mississippi law but rethink Roe and Casey.

He acknowledged that if previous national abortion rulings are changed, laws would be different in every state.

"Texas has a fairly restrictive law too," he said. "An expectant mother has 24-72 hours to make an abortion decision there, and many are supporting [what's been called] 'abortion tourism' by going to Colorado for abortions. I hope we can come to the point that abortion is unthinkable, unethical and undesirable."

Newell added "the spirit of the age" and abortion marketers have convinced Americans abortion is actually "women's health care."

Davis cited a poll by the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission that found 75% of mothers who chose abortion later admitted they'd have preferred to keep their ba-

bies if circumstances were different.

"Many who choose abortion live in poverty and have other trauma," Newell said. "The clinic takes their baby, but does nothing about their poverty or trauma and gives them another problem."

Newell said a constant refrain in Scripture is care for the stranger, the widow, the orphan and the alien.

"We must see the dignity and worth of all," he insisted.

In response to Davis' question about what local churches might do, Newell noted Lifeline's program, "Families Count."

"There are some 450,000 kids in foster care in our country," he lamented.

Reuniting families

"We offer training for a six-week program helping get kids back to their birth parents," he said.

"Child-care agencies like this program and refer people to it.

"We've found 80% of children are reunited with birth parents and 80% 'stick around' the host church as their new support group when the training is done."

Lifeline Children's Services has three hotlines: pregnancy help (800-875-5595), fostering assistance (205-967-0811) and adoption (205-967-0811).

The website is lifeline-child.org.

WXJC broadcasts at 101.1 FM and 850 AM. Davis' show airs 3-5 p.m. weekdays, and podcasts are archived on Facebook.

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For January 16

Explore the Bible

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.
Dean of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



GOD VALUES ALL LIFE Ezekiel 16:20–21; 23:36–39; Psalm 139:13–16

Forty-nine years ago this week, the Supreme Court determined that U.S. citizens had a constitutional right to end the life of a fetus.

Since that decision, a shadow has been cast over our nation, with more than 60 million unborn children in various developmental stages who have been legally put to death.

The collective death of the innocents has become acceptable, in part, because few people speak against this silent holocaust.

Wrongdoing is justified. (Ezek. 16:20–21)

These words from Ezekiel are an indictment for betrayal against the Lord: “You slaughtered my children” (v. 21).

The people of Judah were sacrificing their children as acts of worship to false gods. The God of Israel had warned them before they entered the promised land not to participate in the sexual idolatry of the region.

At Sinai, God spoke through Moses to prohibit Israel from practicing the fertility rituals of the people, which included adultery, incest, homosexuality, bestiality and bearing children for the sole purpose of infant sacrifice. Those participating in these practices would be vomited out of the land (see Lev. 18).

Not only did the Israelites fall to sexual temptation before they ever arrived in Canaan (Num. 25), but they also mixed their worship of Yahweh with the idolatry of Baal, Asherah and other gods once they settled in the land (see Deut. 16:21; 1 Kings 18:21).

This spiritual compromise continued for hundreds of years. In fact, King Manasseh of Judah, son of the godly Hezekiah, sacrificed some of his own children (2 Chron. 33:6) and reintroduced forbidden worship that had been outlawed by his father (2 Kings 21:9, 11, 16).

Hezekiah sought to uphold the Torah, but Manasseh rejected the

law of God until his repentance late in life (2 Chron. 33:12–16).

Callousness becomes the norm. (Ezek. 23:36–39)

Israel and Judah committed spiritual adultery against their God who redeemed them from bondage in Egypt. They committed idolatry, and they killed their unwanted infants as acts of worship to their idols. In this passage, the prophet exposes their idolatry, their adultery and their practices of child sacrifice.

They worshipped false gods, yet they also visited the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. Like their idols, they had eyes that did not see and ears that did not hear. They refused to listen to the warnings.

To those who listen, there is forgiveness in Christ. We cannot undo our past but can turn away from it. God transforms all who trust Him and who surrender to His will.

God’s truth is revealed. (Ps. 139:13–16)

Unlike the Ezekiel passages above, this psalm focuses on our righteous God. The beginning and end speak of His omniscience, His all-knowingness.

Part two speaks of His omnipresence. Part three addresses God’s compassion and care for humanity. This third part is our emphasis here.

God has been intimately aware of you and your unique characteristics since you were developing in your mother’s womb. He made you with design, with detail and with days.

You are specially designed, like a fingerprint. Your details are unique. Each one of us has an appointment with Him, so let us redeem our days — bearing His image, living for His glory and serving His people.

May we celebrate life — the unborn, the fatherless and widows, the terminally ill, the stranger and the impoverished. May we share with each of them eternal life through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Bible Studies for Life

By Jeffery M. Leonard, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Biblical & Religious Studies, Samford University



SEEKING JUSTICE IN AN UNJUST WORLD Obadiah 1–4, 10–17

Though they may not receive as much attention as Genesis, Psalms or Isaiah, the 12 “Minor Prophets” (so called because they are shorter than the works of prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel) make an important contribution to Scripture.

The prophet Amos gave us the famous line, “Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24). His fellow prophet Micah taught, “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love goodness and walk humbly with your God?” (Mic. 6:8). And Peter turned to the Minor Prophets in his famous Pentecost sermon as he quoted Joel, “I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions” (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17).

An arrogant attitude deceives us and keeps us from seeing reality. (1–4)

Obadiah’s message is to Israel’s neighbor Edom. The Edomites were the traditional descendants of Esau and lived in the desert regions southeast of Judah. Much like relations between Jacob and Esau, relations between Israel and Edom were strained. In the first few verses of Obadiah, the Edomites appear to have the upper hand over their Israelite cousins. Indeed, the Edomites have become so proud that they are said to think of themselves as eagles soaring in the heights, nesting among the stars, safe in the clefts of the rocks. Obadiah warns the Lord will soon bring the Edomites down from their lofty perch.

The sin of indifference leads to violence and oppression. (10–14)

Obadiah’s condemnation of the Edomites was rooted in one of the darkest chapters of Israel’s history. After Assyria destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C., the tribe of Judah was nearly all that remained of God’s chosen people.

The Judeans held on for more than a century, but in 605 B.C., the Babylonians conquered them too.

The first two decades of Babylonian rule were dreadful for Judah. Babylon exiled many, especially the upper classes, leaving the poor of the land to fend for themselves. Then in 587 B.C., the worst happened: Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and along with it the great temple of Solomon. It was a devastating blow.

What elicited the prophet’s ire was the fact that Edom cheered the Babylonians on as they ravaged Jerusalem. Obadiah charges the Edomites with standing aloof while Jerusalem was destroyed, gloating over their cousins’ calamity, rejoicing over their destruction and mocking their distress. Obadiah accuses the Edomites of blocking the people’s escape routes as they fled from the Babylonians and handing over the fugitives as prisoners.

God will work His justice on behalf of the oppressed. (15–17)

Psalm 137 asks God, “Remember against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem’s fall, how they said, ‘Tear it down, tear it down, down to its foundations!’” Both the prophet and the psalmist cry out for justice from God against those who have oppressed them.

Scripture charges all of God’s people to “Speak up for those who have no voice, for the justice of all who are dispossessed. Speak up, judge righteously and defend the cause of the oppressed and needy” (Prov. 31:8–9).

How many times have we been guilty of standing in the role of oppressor rather than liberator when it comes to the weak and vulnerable around us? When we have seen people treated as second-class citizens (or worse) simply because of their skin color or their sex or because they have not yet emerged from the womb? When have we “stood aloof” like the Edomites? Will they one day ask God to remember against us our own injustices?

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs
The Alabama Baptist

South Korean fictional drama becomes worldwide phenomenon

Squid Game,” a South Korean fictional drama series released in September, has become Netflix’s all-time most popular show and a worldwide phenomenon.

Reacting to the show’s plot twists and reviewing each episode have become a cash-cow for many YouTube channels and personalities. Chances are high that many Christian youth also are tuning in to the series despite the violence and questionable morals often on display.

The series indirectly addresses what some young people frequently search for on YouTube related to society, such as economic structures. But there are more significant issues that underlie the premise of “Squid Game” — the value and worth of a human being.

Plot summary

In the show, 456 individuals in deep financial debt are recruited to play a series of games. The ultimate prize: more than \$38 million. After arriving at the venue, players are given a choice — leave or sign a contract with three general rules and play the game.

All decide to stay, but none realizes what happens if they break the rules or lose a game. Only during the first one, “Red Light, Green



“SQUID GAME”

Screenshot

Light,” do players realize that being “eliminated” doesn’t just mean losing the game. It means losing your life (all fictional, of course). And thus a life-or-death battle between the players begins.

Players often make decisions that directly affect whether others live or die, frequently based on limited information, such as the age or education level of opponents, whether they have families or how they got into debt.

During the first episode, the main character appears to be a deadbeat dad and gambling addict. Loan sharks are threatening him because of his extreme debt. He can’t support his daughter, then finds out she is moving to the United States with his ex-wife’s family. He also learns his mother needs lifesaving medical treatment, which he can’t afford because he canceled their insurance.

Due to his circumstances, he feels he has no choice but to try for the money, even after he realizes he

could die if he loses. Soon we learn the other players are also in situations where they desperately need a great deal of money, so they play the game feeling they have no other option.

The main issue raised in “Squid Game” is similar to the “Lifeboat Thought Experiment,” in which a lifeboat with a capacity of 60 but only carrying 50 is surrounded by 100 swimmers who each want in. The dilemma is whether any should be saved, and if so, which ones? Which person is worth more? What exactly is a person’s worth?

This isn’t a new problem, and there is no easy answer. Humans often judge others by what they do, not who they are. Past generations tended to have a strong sense of identity, but many youth today struggle with little consistent guidance on figuring it out.

“We live in a time where our understanding what it means to be human has been completely lost,” said

John Stonestreet, president of the Colson Center for Christian Worldview and a sought-after author and speaker on areas of faith and culture, theology, worldview, education and apologetics.

“If you are talking about the various cultural waves with your kids, with your grandkids only on moral terms, you’re not having the conversation they need to have,” Stonestreet said at a recent conference. “Root the moral conversation in what it means to be human.”

That definition “in our culture is that everyone has two jobs,” Stonestreet said. “That is, first to express themselves however they want, and number two, to accept everyone’s expression of themselves no matter how crazy it is.

“That is a confused, small, shriveled-up definition of what it means to be human, and it’s unsustainable in the long run.”

Identity in Christ

The best definition of what it is to be human comes from Christianity: each person is made in the likeness of God, Stonestreet said.

“The image of God is crucial if we’re going to respond to the real undercurrents of our day,” he said.

Parents, grandparents and youth leaders may be troubled to learn that children in their sphere of influence have already watched “Squid Game.”

If that is the case, consider using what they’ve seen as a jumping-off point for discussions about identity and worth — that worth comes not from what we do or how much money we have, but who we are, our identity in Christ.

Such a discussion could lead to life-changing conversations about worth being found in what Jesus did and who He made us to be.



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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