

# The Alabama Baptist

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## INSIDE



**Siloam kicks off celebration year for its 200th anniversary**

◆ Page 2



**Baptists respond to crisis in Ukraine with aid, prayers, reflections**

◆ Pages 8–9



**Theology 101: The People of God — God's Building**

◆ Page 13

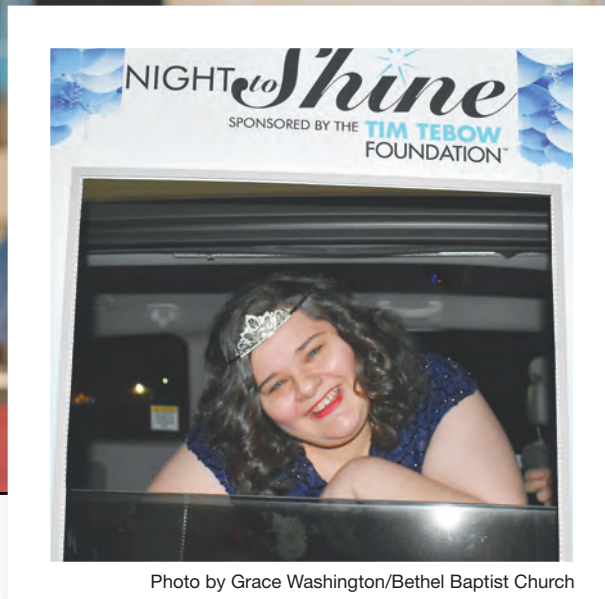


Photo by Grace Washington/Bethel Baptist Church

Photo courtesy of Thorington Road Baptist Church  
Thorington Road Baptist volunteers cheer as Night to Shine participants walk the red carpet. The event went virtual again, so churches responded with drive-thru parades and lead-outs.

## ‘Standing in the gap’

### Churches demonstrate love to communities through Shine-Thru

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

**S**tacey Courson and others at Thorington Road Baptist Church in Montgomery looked forward to seeing their guests in person at this year's Night to Shine.

Sponsored by the Tim Tebow Foundation for those

age 14 and up with special needs, Night to Shine usually is held prom-style, but in 2021 it became a drive-thru event called a Shine-Thru, followed by a virtual party guests could watch at home.

“We had started out planning this year's event with the intentions of doing it back in person, so we had a venue booked for the whole prom experience,” said Courson, Night to Shine coordinator for Thorington Road Baptist.

But TTF announced in October it would once again

be a virtual event because of COVID-19 concerns.

Courson admitted they were disappointed but understood — the special needs community includes some who are medically fragile.

#### Ramping it up

So she and others at the church started doing everything they could to take what they'd done in 2021 and ramp it up.

“Instead of driving through, we created different stations to visit,” Courson explained.

At check-in, name cards

were placed on guests' cars so volunteers could greet them by name along the way. At one stop, they got crowns or tiaras; at the next, corsages or boutonnieres.

Then they could visit a station with a DJ, drive through a crowd of cheering volunteers, have photos taken and get a hat made from twisted balloons.

Twinkle-lights and balloons were prominent, several local mascots participated and everyone got Chick-Fil-A dinners to take home

(See ‘Event,’ page 11)



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# ‘Model of faith, hope, love’

## Siloam kicks off year of celebration for its 200th anniversary

Siloam Baptist Church in Marion kicked off a year of celebration Feb. 13 as it prepares to mark its 200th anniversary this fall. Activities include a variety of special services throughout the year, culminating in January 2023.

“The moments we take to pause and look back at all that God has done inspire us to dream of just what God might do through another generation of faithful and bold followers,” said Pastor John Nicholson.

“We are proud of our continuing connection with The Alabama Baptist,” he said, noting how the paper (and now multifaceted media company) originated from four creative and entrepreneurial members of Siloam in 1843.

Because of the connection between Siloam and The Alabama Baptist, Nicholson invited Editor-in-Chief Jennifer Davis Rash to share during the Feb. 13 service.

“The Association of Brethren, as they were called — which also included a female member — started



Photos by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist  
**Above:** In 1843, members of Siloam saw the need for a unifying communication tool and started The Alabama Baptist newspaper. **Left:** Jennifer Davis Rash (left) and Debbie Campbell show off their Siloam sweatshirts.

this important communications resource for Alabama Baptists,” Rash said, pointing to a copy of the first edition of The Alabama Baptist on display in the sanctuary. “I wonder what their conversations were like and where they sat while

they dreamed of how it all would work.

“While we won’t ever know the exact details of those early moments of The Alabama Baptist and other denominational entities birthed out of Siloam, I believe your founding members exhibited an overflow of faith, hope and love,” she said, noting 1 Corinthians 13. “And looking around today, I can tell you still do.” (The Alabama Baptist)



Photos by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist  
**Above:** Jennifer Davis Rash (left), Pastor John Nicholson (center) and Vanessa Nicholson kick off a year of celebration. **Right:** Siloam Baptist Church welcomes Jennifer Davis Rash and Debbie Campbell to the Feb. 13 service.



### 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 11.



# RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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

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## Can a situation be heartwrenching and heartwarming at the same time?

**T**he scenes are sometimes more than I can take. I know to grab a tissue before turning on the news updates coming out of Ukraine.

As I watch and listen to the reporters on the ground in Kyiv, Lviv and other parts of the now war-torn country, I allow myself to attempt to feel the Ukrainians' pain — their fear and their heartbreak.

My eye catches a glimpse of the family photos hanging on the wall to the left of my TV screen, and I try to imagine my response if tomorrow morning sirens blared and news reports warned of a coming invasion.

What would I pack in the one rolling suitcase I could carry with me?

What items could I squeeze in the backpack I'm sure I would take as well?

How do I choose between basic items of necessity and those special items of comfort and sweet memories placed throughout our home?

Logistically, where would we go and how would we ensure we could regroup with our families? Who would help us if we did make it out?

Will we have food, a place to sleep, enough supplies? What if

we need medical attention? Will we have enough gas for our car? What if we must travel by foot?

Where would we go for factual and trustworthy information about next steps? What if we lose access to news reports or the ability to use our phones?

### Resilient in their fight

The new image on the TV snaps my attention back to the screen as I see the determination and resolve illuminating out of the Ukrainian people. They are resilient in their fight amid the frightful and growing catastrophe around them.

They inspire me and give me hope. The same is true with the efforts of Baptists across the region.

The sacrifices, love and outreach our brothers and sisters on the frontlines are demonstrating give me courage and remind me to keep them and the entire situation continually in my prayers.

Our team at The Alabama Baptist has been working hard to keep up with all that's happening in and around Ukraine and provide updates for how you can pray (see pages 4 and 8) and help (see pages 4 and 6).

We are talking with people every day who have personal connections to Ukraine. They count

their Ukrainian friends as family and are finding creative ways to help fund the efforts to aid those fleeing the country.

One pastor shared the response he received from his friend currently hunkered down in western Ukraine.

"You have a very big heart for Ukraine, for our family. ... I want to thank you ... for your prayers, donations, words of encouragement and care. This is the second difficult event in the life of our family, after the death of my beloved wife.

"What is happening now is like a nightmare. I want to wake up and continue my usual life, but we will never be the same again. Despite all the pain and sorrow, we ... see the extraordinary miracles of God," he continued.

"Thank you for being there in all these circumstances. The Lord has encouraged our family through you."

### United effort

He shared how everyone in Ukraine is united and working together, pitching in however they can to help.

It's also heartwarming to read about our Southern Baptist missionaries working alongside local Baptists and how the stu-

dents, faculty, staff and alumni of Ukrainian Baptist Theological Seminary are making a difference (see page 8).

And all of it reminds me of moments in years past in other countries and even our own where citizens jumped into action to help people displaced from their homes for various reasons.

In some cases, church pews and other furniture were moved out to make room for cots and makeshift housing — similar to what's happening in Ukraine, Poland and other areas.

In other places, volunteers worked around the clock collecting, sorting and distributing items for those in need — like what's taking place near where the Ukrainian people are finding safety.

And those not near the crisis or unable to assist physically commit to consistent prayers and financial gifts — exactly how we are banding together now.

Thank you, Alabama Baptists, for the initial \$100,000 donation to the Ukraine relief efforts and for the additional funds continuing to be received (see page 4).

"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (Gal. 6:9).

# Your Voice



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

## 10 ways to pray Scripture over Ukraine

By Rob Jackson

Prattville, Ala.

**1. As with Solomon,** I ask God to give the Ukrainian leaders (and all leaders in these difficult times) wisdom from above (1 Kings 3:5–12).

**2. As with David,** I ask God to show Himself as Ukraine faces their Goliath (1 Sam. 17). I am asking that the world will see “some trust in chariots, others in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God” (Zech. 4:6).

**3. As with Gideon,** I pray God will confuse the Russian army (like the Midianites) so they will turn on

each other, become demoralized, flee and desert (Judg. 7).

**4. As with Hezekiah,** I ask that “Sennacherib” will return in defeat to his homeland (2 Kings 19:32–37).

**5. As with Moses,** I pray the “chariots” or tanks and all vehicles will get stuck in the mud, run out of gas and break down.

Furthermore, may God so thwart the Russian army that their rockets, missiles and bombs malfunction and cause minimal damage (Ex. 14:21–29).

**6. As with Elisha,** I ask God to blind the enemies surrounding the

cities, so they are rendered ineffective (2 Kings 6:11–23).

**7. As with Daniel,** I pray God will remove the leader(s) who mocks the Lord our God. I pray Vladimir Putin will fear and see the writing on the wall (Dan. 5).

**8. As with Peter,** I pray Baptist churches (and other churches and relief organizations) will feed the Ukrainian “sheep” in the name of Jesus.

I pray the refugees who are flooding the neighboring countries seeking food, shelter, transportation, spiritual help and so forth will see Jesus in us (John 21:15–17).

**9. As with all Christians,** I pray we will be shown what each of us can do (individually and collectively) to help alleviate the suffering of our brothers and sisters in Ukraine (Matt. 25:35).

**10. Finally, I pray Ukrainians, Russians and the entire world will be amazed at what God is doing,** resulting in a worldwide revival and awakening as people repent and believe the good news of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:41). There will be no lasting peace until the world acknowledges the Prince of Peace!

*EDITOR’S NOTE — Rob Jackson is director of the office of church health for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions and president of Romanian-American Mission, an organization that works with churches across Europe.*

“Actions speak louder than words, and as I tell others about my faith in Christ, that has to be backed up by actual action,” said **Grace Carter** of **University Hills Baptist Church** in Charlotte, North Carolina. Carter was named by WMU to the **2022 National Acteens Panel**.

“We will make it through. The question is how we’ll get through it and what the SBC will be on the other side,” said **Ed Stetzer**, executive director of the **Wheaton College Billy Graham Center**, citing controversies in SBC life ranging from political divides to racial issues and sexual abuse. “A denomination perpetually at war with itself cannot survive.”

“But the more time I spent in isolation,” said **Ashley Huffstutler**, who wrote “When I Hold You” about her ongoing battle with cancer, which included contracting COVID-19 in 2021, “I realized this isn’t about me. It isn’t about COVID. It isn’t about cancer. It is about trials. It is about hardship. It is about knowing God more intimately. I pray God would continue to use these trials to grow my faith, to increase my hope and to build my confidence. I’ve asked Him to teach me more of who He is.”

## Alabama Baptists to send aid, receive gifts for Ukraine

The Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions is committing \$100,000 from Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief funds to assist with Ukrainian relief efforts through the International Mission Board.

“The IMB is already working with local Baptist partners and churches in Ukraine, Poland and other border nations,” said SBOM Executive Director Rick Lance. “This contribution comes directly from Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program, the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering and designated disaster relief gifts.”

Lance expressed appreciation for IMB President Paul Chitwood and his leadership in the massive relief effort.

“The needs of refugees displaced by war in Ukraine will doubtless be great for many weeks and months to come,” Lance said.

Any gifts received through the SBOM will be over and above the \$100,000 gift, Lance said.

Checks should be made payable to: State Board of Missions, P.O. Box 681970, Prattville 36068-1970, for IMB Ukraine Relief. Gifts by credit cards may be made at alsbom.org/ukraine. (SBOM)

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# “Once you are a Christian in Nigeria, your life is always at stake.”

M A N G A

*A believer in Nigeria, the country ranked No. 7 on Open Doors' 2022 World Watch List*

“The testimonies shared from these precious [people] whose lives have been transformed by the power and love of Jesus Christ never fail to bring tears of joy from my heart,” said **Deb Lowery**, **TAB's financial assistant**, who has volunteered at **North Jefferson Women's Center/Sav-A-Life** in Fultondale, Alabama, for the past three years. “I am thankful for all the churches and individuals whose hearts are knitted together with Christ's love for the unborn and their mothers and fathers.”

I don't need next week's grace. I know next week's grace will be there, but I don't need it right now. I just need God today. ... It breeds dependence from us. ... The mark of a mature child of God is that they

become more and more dependent. ... We have to go open handed to God and say, “I need everything from You.”

**Pastor Erik Reed**  
**The Journey Church**  
**Lebanon, Tennessee**  
**Amplify podcast excerpt**

If a home is child-centered rather than husband/wife-centered, then when the children leave, there will be two very lonely people who do not know or love each other.

**Morris Murray Jr.**  
**Jasper, Alabama**

“For me, living a missions lifestyle means constantly being on the move for God,” said **Taylor Glover**, who was named to the **2022 National**

**Acteens Panel** and is a member of **Harps Crossing Baptist Church in Fayetteville, Georgia**. “In this lifestyle, it is understood that wherever one goes, there is always an opportunity to share the word of God. Missions-minded people are quick to meet human needs while sharing the redeeming love of Christ.”

“We're all tempted some days, some weeks to give up,” said **Brian Hobbs**, editor of the **Oklahoma Baptist Messenger** and immediate past president of the **Association of State Baptist Publications**, who spoke during ASBP's recent meeting. “I just encourage us: Stay close to the Lord. ... Let's remember in everything we do that our work is ministry.”

## From the *Twitterverse*

### @daneortlund

My two greatest sermon prep tools:

1. Original language text and resources
2. Tears

Sometimes a commentary or two. Once in a while hunt for a needed illustration. But mainly just stick the original text and my tears into the blender of my heart and preach what comes out.

### @PaulTripp

Your security is not to be found in your obedience, but in the fact that the Lord hasn't just saved you, He guards you moment by moment until you are on the other side.

### @howertonjosh

When a church worships passionately:

- 1) God is glorified
- 2) You are empowered and blessed

3) Other Christians' faith is strengthened

4) Non-Christians experience the reality of God  
Win-win-win-win

### @ethicist

Remember your job is not to win theological debates, but to speak truth to those who need hope.

### @pastorrolland

Grateful for the @SBCEXec-Comm officers, members and staff. By God's grace, mercy, kindness and love, you have made me a better man. It is an honor to serve with each of you.

### @JackieHillPerry

As a new Christian, I might've assumed that I'd struggle with the same stuff over and over again. As time has gone on though, I've seen how each stage of life brings a new set of idols. Disheartening as it

might be, I know that for every new struggle, I am kept by the same God.

### @philipnation

Father: Come and defend those in danger of earthly terrors. Grant grace to all who are overwhelmed by sorrow. Break the will of evil men who terrorize the innocent. Grant peace where no earthly power can ensure safety. Show us Your glory and let us see Your power.

### @peterlinkjr

The faithful, prayerful study of the whole Bible and the proclaiming of its message remain the priorities of one who seeks the mind of God.

### @kellydking

If you want to work on your sanctification, keep 4 & 5 year olds. Preschool teachers are the unsung heroes of our churches.

## Trusting during times of waiting

By **Megan Harris**  
The-scroll.com

When I think about waiting, it always feels passive and static, like I'm stuck somewhere unable to reach whatever good things are to come.

The dictionary defines waiting as: “to stay in place in expectation of,” “to remain stationary in readiness or expectation” or “to look forward or hold back expectantly.”

When we talk to friends and family about waiting, it's easy to vent and complain. We might feel like the time is wasted and our expectations will never be fulfilled.

But Scripture offers a different picture, full of meaning and trust. We don't have to merely wait alone, trying to move forward in our own strength. Instead, we are called to wait on the Lord.

I hold onto Psalm 37:4-5 when I'm trying to make sense of waiting: “Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will do it.”

This passage isn't saying God is going to give us everything we want, but I see these words as a prayer that He would shape the desires of my heart to be more like Christ.

When I'm in a time of waiting to understand His direction, I know He orders my plans, even if His answer takes time or in the end is “not yet” or simply “no.”

Overthinking, doubt and anxiety try to snare me and weaken my trust when I'm waiting to make a big decision or hear an answer. I often fall into the trap of thinking I can or should handle it by myself.

But the truth is we can't do this life in our own strength, and seasons of waiting point us back to a comforting reminder — we are safe in the True Vine.

# 3 stories you should know



Photos courtesy of Beeson Divinity School  
Beeson Divinity School at Samford University hosted Military Chaplain Day March 1. Recruiters were on campus to speak with

students about military chaplaincy and were recognized during Beeson's chapel service. The benefactor of Beeson's General James M. Hutchens Military Chaplain Scholarship was present to meet Josiah Trombley, the first recipient of the scholarship for students committed to pursuing a career as an active duty chaplain. (TAB)

## Litton will not seek second term as SBC president

Southern Baptist Convention President Ed Litton will not seek a second term and will instead focus his attention on racial reconciliation efforts at the local and national level, a cause he has been involved with for many years in the Mobile area.

Litton, pastor of Redemption Church in Saraland, made the announcement March 1 in a video posted to his church's YouTube channel.

He will complete his current term and the work already underway, he said.

Hear more from Litton in a TAB Media Special Report at [tabonline.org/ed-litton-reflections](http://tabonline.org/ed-litton-reflections). (TAB)



LITTON

## WMU Foundation sends \$50,000 to aid refugees

Woman's Missionary Union and the WMU Foundation are sending two HEART Fund grants to aid Ukrainian refugees fleeing the Russian invasion.

Turlac Mission in Moldova will receive a \$25,000 grant. Moldova shares 759 miles of border with Ukraine, and more than 25,000 refugees crossed the border in the first week of the conflict, according to Oleg Turlac, head of Turlac Mission, which ministers in Eastern Europe.

The Ukrainian Baptist Theological Seminary in Lviv, Ukraine, also will receive \$25,000 to aid in its efforts to provide food, shelter and counseling to refugees (see story, page 8). Lviv is less than 50 miles from Ukraine's border with Poland.

For more information about the HEART Fund and ways to give, go to [wmufoundation.com](http://wmufoundation.com). (TAB)

## Persecuted church

### Man beaten by Muslim relatives following conversion to Christianity

KADAMA, Uganda — A 20-year-old Ugandan man who had just put his faith in Christ was intercepted by Muslim relatives on his way home and beaten.

On Feb. 6, Sadi Bwanga, the grandson of a former Muslim sheikh, accepted Jesus during a church service in Kadama in Kibuku District. An evangelist was taking Bwanga home after the church service. Muslim relatives intercepted the two, took Bwanga to the roadside and told the evangelist to leave, according to Morning Star News.

Later, with assistance from a pastor and others, the evangelist found Bwanga, who had received serious injuries to his head and legs.

The group took Bwanga to Kadama Hospital,

where Bwanga remained until Feb. 14. After his discharge from the hospital, Bwanga was staying in an undisclosed location and a nurse was monitoring his treatment.

Uganda's laws and constitution allow freedom of religion, including the right to convert from one faith to another. Christianity is the professed faith of more than 84% of the population, with an estimated 12% to 14% of Ugandans professing Islam.

### Violence targeting Christians in Nigeria continues; 3 more killed

BORNO, Nigeria — Islamic State terrorists are suspected of attacking Borno state's Chibok area and killing three people in continued violence targeting Christians.

Mwada Bulama Wadir was identified as one of those slain in the attack on Kautikari village in

Nigeria's predominately Christian Chibok area, according to Morning Star News.

Suspected terrorists of Islamic State West Africa Province, a faction of Boko Haram that in 2016 aligned more closely with the Islamic State group, attacked the village twice in January, killing three people and kidnapping 29 women and children, the report said.

Chibok leaders say their area has been attacked more than 72 times since the rebel group Boko Haram abducted 276 school girls in 2014. Chibok Area Development Association says 110 of those girls remain captive.

Nigeria is No. 7 on Open Doors' 2022 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.



WADIR

# Alabama news

## OBITUARIES

► **Carl Edward “Ed” Lacy Jr.** died Feb. 27. He was 70.

A Mississippi native who pursued a career in music as a rock and jazz drummer, Lacy began serving as an evangelist in 1983. He preached in churches around the United States and trained pastors and church planters in Cuba, Kenya, India, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Uganda, Mozambique, Romania, Russia, Ukraine and Ecuador. He was involved in prison ministries and ongoing outreaches to Christian drug and rehab centers.

He is survived by his wife, Dianne; three children; eight grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

► **Juanita S. Tew** died Feb. 28. She was 89.

Tew held bachelor's and master's degrees in teacher education from Samford University and was an elementary school teacher. Active in church, Tew taught Sunday School and served as a consultant with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. She joined her husband in overseas ministry projects, including teaching English as a Second Language in China. She also was a contributor to Missions Mosaic for national Woman's Missionary Union.

She is survived by her husband of nearly 69 years, L. Earl Tew; three children; seven grandchildren; and 10 great-grandchildren.

► **Beverly Outlaw Shirah**, 75, died Oct. 29, and her husband, **Joe M. “Mike” Shirah**, 70, died Nov. 8.

Both of Headland, the Shirahs were serving at Bluff Springs Baptist Church, Ashford. Beverly worked as a teacher and teacher's aide. She also played piano at churches they served.

Mike held a bachelor's degree from Baptist Bible Institute and a master's degree from Troy State University and a doctoral degree from Covington Theological Seminary. He previously served Newville Baptist Church and Maple Avenue Baptist Church, Geneva.

They are survived by a son and two grandsons.



LACY



TEW



SHIRAH



SHIRAH

## BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► **Lakewood Baptist Church, Birmingham**, will host Frank Jones, gospel concert pianist, in praise and worship April 3 at 10 a.m. For more information, call 205-332-3449. Larry Wimberly is pastor.

## GENEVA ASSOCIATION

► **New Home Baptist Church, Samson**, will host revival services March 13 at 5 p.m., and March 14–16 at 6 p.m. Hosea Parker will speak. Four Calvary, a Southern gospel group, will provide music during the March 13 morning service at 11 a.m. A covered dish lunch will follow. For more information, call 334-449-1062. Allen Monarch is pastor.

## MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION

► **Dean Finch** retired as the minister of missions and senior adult pastor of **Taylor Road Baptist Church, Montgomery**, after 13 years. The church held a retirement celebration Jan. 30 and his son, Andy, brought a special message Jan. 23. Originally from Orange, Texas, Finch has served as a chaplain and associate pastor in Oklahoma, Texas, Florida and Alabama.

He studied history at Oklahoma Baptist University and received his master's degree in religious education from Southwestern Seminary. Dean and his wife, Diane, have four children.



FINCH

## MUD CREEK ASSOCIATION

► **Smithville Baptist Church, Bessemer**, will host a wild game feast March 19 at 5 p.m. This evening of fellowship includes a free dinner (various wild game, sides and desserts). Mike Simpson is pastor.

## RUSSELL ASSOCIATION

► **Philadelphia Baptist Church, Smiths Station**, will host Dixie Echoes quartet March 20 at 6 p.m. Doors open at 5 p.m. A love offering will be taken. Clay Duck is pastor.

## OTHER

► **“Baptist Persecution: Living in Dangerous Places”** will be the focus of a presentation for pastors and church staff members hosted by **Samford University** on March 17 at 10 a.m.

Featured will be Elijah Brown, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, who will share updates from several of the world's hotspots including how Baptists continue to minister to those in need in the midst of war in Ukraine. The reception will be held in the Regions Room of Cooney Hall, home of the university's Brock School of Business. Light refreshments will be served prior to the program.

To RSVP or for more information, contact Bob Terry at [bterry3@samford.edu](mailto:bterry3@samford.edu).

► **The Alabama Discipleship Conference** will be April 4–5 at **Glynwood Baptist Church, Prattville**.

The conference will include keynote and roundtable breakout sessions.

This year's theme is “Faithful.” Leaders include Craig Etheredge, pastor of First Baptist Church Colleyville, Texas, and founder of DiscipleFirst Ministries; Ken Adams, lead pastor of Crossroads Church, Newnan, Georgia, and founder/director of Impact Discipleship Ministries; and Mark Gainey, lead pastor of Fultondale First Baptist Church, co-host of “Church Leadership Podcast” and lead disciple-making strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Get more details and register today at [aldiscipleshipconference.com](http://aldiscipleshipconference.com).



Photo courtesy of Shades Mountain Baptist Church

Representing 10 states and nine countries, 35 missions partners gather at Shades Mountain Baptist Church for a Global Impact Celebration Feb. 23–27. A kickoff celebration welcomed partners in a pep-rally style service. Speakers included Jimmy Scroggins, senior pastor of Family Church in West Palm Beach, Florida, and Bryant Wright, president of Send Relief. A concert with Steven Curtis Chapman closed the event.



#PRAY4UKRAINE

Unsplash.com

## Refugees: Baptists in Ukraine, Poland ‘taking care of their neighbors’

**M**illions of Ukrainians have fled to neighboring countries to escape the bombardment of their homeland by the Russian military, and Baptists in Ukraine and Poland are responding to the need.

### In Ukraine

Yaroslav Pyzh, president of the Ukrainian Baptist Theological Seminary, marshaled the people and resources of his school to help those fleeing through Lviv, which is approximately 40 miles from the shared border with Poland.

In the first week of the invasion, the seminary took in more than 700 people, offering a place to sleep, food and counseling.

“The work is non-stop

and is 24/7 because they are arriving at all times of the day,” Pyzh said.

Those who came through the first day of the war were in “fairly reasonable emotional condition,” he said. Refugees who have followed are “in very bad condition.”

“I don’t even want to know what they went through,” he said.

Pyzh said seminary leaders have used their network of 2,000 students and graduates in Ukraine and Poland to mobilize and offer aid to the displaced Ukrainians who are traveling through Lviv and need places to stay.

Churches across Ukraine are responding with prayer and collecting items to bring to the seminary.

Baptist partners in the U.S., including state conventions, local churches and the



Refugees fleeing Russia’s attack on Ukraine find help at the Ukrainian Baptist Theological Seminary in Lviv, Ukraine. The seminary is providing food, shelter and counseling to refugees.

WMU Foundation (see story, page 6) are providing refugee assistance funds.

### In Poland

Josh and Bailey Krause serve with the International Mission Board in Warsaw,

Poland, and are liaisons between the International Mission Board, Send Relief and the Polish Baptist Union as the three groups seek to assist Ukrainian refugees.

The Polish Baptist Union initially hoped to house 500 refugees. They quickly doubled that number to 1,000.

Eight centers were designated to receive refugees, but Baptists increased the number to 40 camps located across Poland, each outfitted with sheets, pillows, food and hygiene items.

First Baptist Church Gdansk, Poland, is hosting a refugee center, said IMB missionary Ken Brownd. The church picked up about two dozen refugees in the first week of the conflict.

A Baptist church in the city of Chelm posted on its

Facebook page that they sheltered 120 refugees as the war began. Church members remain on duty 24 hours to receive refugees. Hotels, businesses and individuals have joined the efforts to help the church by providing food, mattresses and bedding.

Polish Baptists have responded with enthusiasm and generosity, Brownd said.

“It’s just cool to see Polish Baptists stepping up and taking care of their neighbors. They’ve done that for a long time now, but this is a different level,” Brownd said.

Josh Krause said he’s encouraged by the cooperation and brotherhood he’s seen.

“Everyone is coming together to say that we’re with our Ukrainian brothers and sisters,” he said.

### Future hope

The Krauses said their prayer is for the Lord to work in mighty ways during this time of crisis.

“The Church in Ukraine is thriving and doing great,” said Bailey Krause. “Through this, I really hope that not only the believers and the churches in Ukraine come out even more strong and on fire, but the Polish churches, that they too would catch that and grow.

“The Lord can do great things out of destruction.” (IMB, Southwestern Seminary, TAB)

## 5 ways to pray for Baptists in and near Ukraine

**1. Pray for safe travel** for those fleeing danger within Ukraine, for God’s presence to provide them with hope and assurance and for the churches providing refuge to have enough resources to meet the growing needs.

**2. Pray humanitarian aid funds** will reach their destination, be used wisely and accomplish God’s purpose.

**3. Pray for God’s protection** for Baptists in Ukraine, for hope in suffering, for love toward their enemies and for the gospel to spread beyond the borders.

**4. Pray for God to provide** churches in Ukraine and neighboring countries with an abundance of resources and opportunities to share the gospel as they receive refugees.

**5. Pray for Baptist missionaries and others** like them to be filled with God’s spirit as they share the hope of the gospel and embody the sacrificial love of Christ.

*EDITOR’S NOTE — This prayer guide was written by members of the Texas Baptists Christian Life Commission.*

## Former missionary recounts ministry before invasion

**M**ike Ray is following developments in Ukraine with a special intensity.

The director of missions mobilization at the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board and his family served as missionaries in Dniprotrovsk, Ukraine, with the International Mission Board from 1995 to 2014.

While serving in Ukraine, the Rays — Mike and his wife, Linda, and daughters Rebekah and Hannah — worked under a religious visa at the invitation of the Baptists there, which gave them the freedom to conduct their missions activities even though they aroused suspicion with some in the country where Ukrainian Orthodox, Russian Orthodox and Greek Orthodox are the predominant Christian faith groups.

### Cultural views

“The political people didn’t really receive us well,” Ray said. “They thought Baptists were a cult, like all the other evangelical groups. If you aren’t Orthodox, you’re a cult, so people such as the

mayor, people in political office ... didn’t look favorably on you.”

In the early 1920s, Ukraine became a state in the communist Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

### Independence

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991, Ukraine declared independence but has always been a prize in the eye of Putin, the former head of the feared KGB security directorate who has publicly expressed his desire to restore the Soviet Union to its glory days.

Ray likened Putin to a chess player, “always five moves ahead.”

“There are a lot of churches we were involved in planting that if Putin takes over, those churches will be severely limited — if they stay open,” Ray said.

“I’m not saying they wouldn’t be able to meet at all, but they’d be very restricted in comparison to what they’ve been able to do all these years,” he said. “That’s discouraging. ... Ukraine might not be the same after this.” (Tony Martin, The Mississippi Baptist Record)



Photo courtesy of Mike Ray

Mike Ray (left) and his family — wife Linda and daughters Hannah and Rebekah — served as IMB missionaries in Ukraine from 1995 to 2014.

# HIGH STAKES

## Baptist work in Ukraine could be in jeopardy

**M**any religious freedom watchers fear that if Russia is successful in overthrowing Ukraine’s elected government, the nation’s evangelical community, especially Baptists, will be under increased threat of persecution.

Post-Soviet Russia was established as a secular state, but in the past two decades, Russia has begun to differentiate between “traditional” and “nontraditional” religions, with “traditional” religion meaning the Russian Orthodox Church, the National Review reported.

Many believe Russian President Vladimir Putin’s end game includes cracking down on evangelical Christians in Ukraine and empowering the Russian Orthodox Church, which has close ties to the Kremlin.

“Putin’s use of traditional Christianity is calculated for political effect,” noted a Feb. 22, 2019, article published by The Heritage Foundation, an American think tank based in Washington.

The Heritage Foundation warned that Putin’s “public affinity for Christianity” was likely political in nature, and “American and European observers would do well to see through the charade.”

### Church control

Putin has long used the common Orthodox character of Russia and Ukraine in his arguments for closer alignment, according to Knox Thames, former special envoy for religious minorities at the U.S. Department of State during the Obama and Trump administrations.

“Putin’s efforts to restore Russian prestige have included elevating the Russian Orthodox Church to the center of Russian identity,”



Pixabay.com

The Kiev Monastery of the Caves, an historic Eastern Orthodox Christian monastery, is located in Kyiv, Ukraine.

Thames wrote in a Feb. 24 op-ed article published by Religion News Service.

At the same time, Putin has undermined the independence of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine-Kyiv Patriarchate, using disinformation campaigns to stir conflict between the churches. Ukrainian officials have accused the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine of being a tool of Russian foreign policy.

A New York Times report published March 2 said priests in Ukraine loyal to Russia preached sermons recommended by its leadership Feb. 27, the first Sunday following the Russian invasion. Those sermons emphasized pacifist messages, even as Ukrainians sought to defend their national sovereignty.

If Russia’s military campaign is successful, “the implications for religious freedom in Ukraine would be dire,” Thames said, pointing to Russia’s treatment of Jehovah’s Witnesses, Muslims and other groups.

Brent Leatherwood, acting president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, said Putin seems to be

“consumed” with reclaiming territory and countries that formerly comprised Greater Russia. The annexation of Crimea in early 2014 was a first step. Now the entire country of Ukraine is in Putin’s sights. And freedom of religion in the region may hang in the balance.

### Putin’s endgame

“Whether it’s paranoia or an appetite for conquest, it’s clear his efforts are not just about geographic size, as they include recreating the suffocating and oppressive conditions faced by evangelicals and religious minorities in the Soviet era,” Leatherwood told The Alabama Baptist. “With restrictions on ‘missional activity,’ state opposition to the unauthorized sharing of one’s faith and burdensome requirements for ministries, Russia is making a concerted attempt to stamp out religious freedom.

“In Crimea, evangelicals have been the most targeted group as Russian influence has grown since the 2014 invasion,” he added. “This portends an ominous future for religious liberty in Ukraine should Putin succeed.” (Carrie Brown McWhorter)

# Headline news

## from around the Southeast

### GEORGIA

One Georgia ministry is combining a love of hunting with spiritual leadership training. The idea is to strengthen families by bringing them into the great outdoors.

Kyle Woodfin, a Georgia Baptist preacher, leads the Hawkinsville-based Legacy Outdoor Ministries and arranges the hunts. Depending on the season, they hunt racoons, deer, hogs, turkeys, quail, dove and squirrels.

Founded in 2000, Legacy Outdoor Ministries has two lodges in Georgia, one in Hawkinsville, the other in Alamo. The ministry also has access to a game-rich 2,400 acres of land courtesy of Stuckey Timberland Co.

These resources are a huge draw for men who grew up in the outdoors and who want to share the outdoor heritage with their children.

After each hunt, the group gathers for dinner and receives a message from Woodfin.

“We want to teach and encourage them to be men of God and leaders in their homes, churches and communities,” Woodfin told *The Christian Index*.

“We also focus on children and youth ministries with the expressed goal of passing on the legacy of the outdoors and sharing the love of Jesus Christ with the next generation.”

Woodfin is convinced that time in nature opens people’s eyes to God.

“We focus on men’s ministry,”

Woodfin said, “because we believe that when you encourage men and teach boys to follow Christ, they will, in turn, lead their families, churches and communities to Christ, as well.”



Photo courtesy of The Christian Index

### LOUISIANA

A total of 62 students made decisions to follow Christ in 2021 at Maplewood First Baptist Church Sulphur.

Twenty-five were baptized last year, 22 are awaiting baptism and the remaining 15 are being disciplined about baptism, reported the Louisiana Baptist Message.

Most of the decisions took place during summer camp and a Disciple Now weekend, but the student ministry also reaped spiritual fruit at a Wednesday night event in October that featured former American Ninja Warrior contestant Jared Greer.

Despite an unexpected storm and a loss of power, 21 of the 170 students in the crowd made a decision for Christ.

The spiritual renewal, Maplewood student minister Nathan Yates said, was reflected in the students’ newfound passion for reaching friends for Christ at school.



Photo courtesy of the Baptist Message

“One cool thing is we can trace this movement in the youth group to a couple of youth inviting their friends to a Wednesday night gathering in our student ministry,” Pastor Jeremy Blocker said.

“Their friends got saved and invited other friends. Many of them got saved and the cycle has continued to this day.”

### MISSISSIPPI

Tracey Nash understands how internationals might feel when they come to America. After moving several times during her childhood and teen years she often felt “like the new kid on the block,” said Nash, director of Crossroads International Friendship House at Mississippi State University in Starkville.

Crossroads Friendship House, which meets at Calvary Baptist Church in Starkville, is sponsored by the Golden Triangle Baptist Association, which provides volunteers, Bible studies, assistance with English as a Second Language classes and prayer for the internationals.

“Our mission is to build relationships so we may share the gospel,” Nash said.

“It is our hope that we are planting seeds that our friends will carry back to their home country in which they may share the love of God with others. We do not force our beliefs on anyone, but we do share what the Lord has done for us.”

The organization works with international students at Mississippi State, inviting them to their Welcome to USA party.

At the party, an annual “garage giveaway” provides free gently used clothing, small appliances, dishes, furniture, sheets and blankets, baby items, etc. (*The Baptist Paper*)



Photo courtesy of Tracey Nash

### NORTH CAROLINA

The recent launch of a Hispanic church plant, Mount Pleasant Baptist Church en Español, was the result of a western North Carolina church and a growing home Bible study beginning a partnership two years ago.

Its name came from the partnership with an area church, Mount Pleasant Baptist, which had a youth room that wasn’t being used on Sunday mornings and an available Sunday School room

where the Hispanic church plant could meet, reported the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.

Mount Pleasant provided the new church plant’s pastor, Carlos Perez,



Photo courtesy of Baptist State Convention of North Carolina

with an office and made him part of the church staff as director of the Hispanic ministry.

“I am excited to know that I can do the will of our Lord, knowing that it is God’s work and that He is in control, even though things seem difficult, that He has promised to be with me,” said Perez about the launch.

### TENNESSEE

Beginning in fall 2022, Union University reported it will offer its highest financial merit scholarship to all students who are dependents of missionaries through the Southern Baptist Convention’s International Mission Board or North American Mission Board.

Children of IMB missionaries or NAMB church planters will receive a Union merit scholarship of \$17,750 and will be eligible to receive any additional Union scholarships, partnerships and grants for which they are qualified.

“These families are on the missions field, sacrificing, and many times, they don’t have the financial resources to afford an educational experience at Union,” said vice president for enrollment management Dan Griffin.

“So, we created additional scholarship opportunities to assist these families in achieving their educational dreams.”

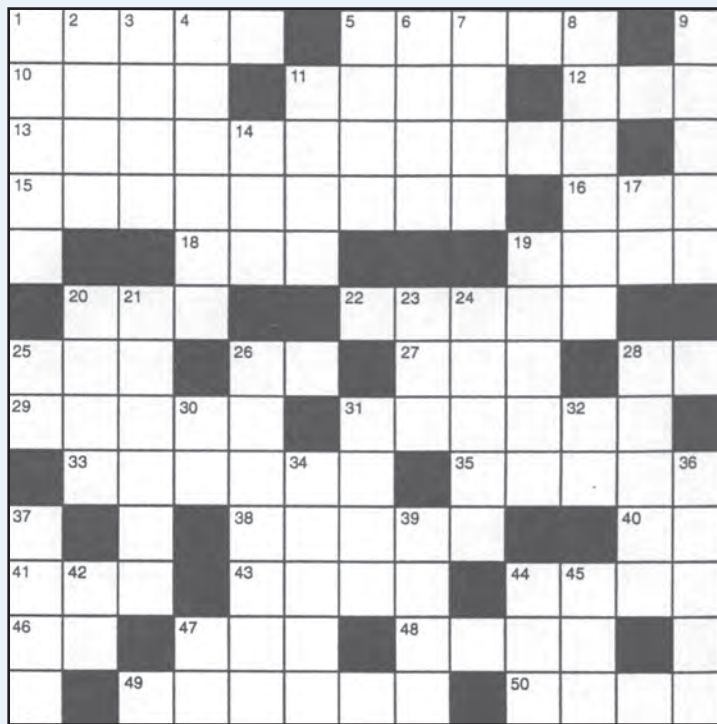


Photo courtesy of Union University

# CHRISTIAN CROSSWORD

**ACROSS**

1. He shall send His \_\_\_ before thee. (Gen. 24:7)
5. Three strands intertwined, typically hair.
10. For every head shall be \_\_\_. (Jer. 48:37)
11. A toothed wheel.
12. I and my Father are \_\_\_. (John 10:30)
13. Like a high wall in his own \_\_\_. (Prov. 18:11)
15. Children of Israel \_\_\_ the house of the Lord. (1 Kings 8:63)
16. A young person.
18. The kingdom of heaven is like unto a \_\_\_. (Matt. 13:47)
19. Plural of 18 across.
20. Shall he \_\_\_ in harvest. (Prov. 20:4)
22. Love of \_\_\_ is the root of all evil. (1 Tim. 6:10)
25. Behold, the \_\_\_ is become as one of us. (Gen. 3:22)
26. An expression of acknowledgement.
27. Abbreviation for a washroom.
28. \_\_\_ he went and took Gomer. (Hosea 1:3)
29. And \_\_\_ and Abihu. (Lev. 10:1)
31. Our fathers did eat manna in the \_\_\_. (John 6:31)
33. River in Lebanon.
35. Put on the \_\_\_ of light. (Rom. 13:12)
38. Suitable for a king.
40. \_\_\_ prophet is accepted in his own country. (Luke 4:24)
41. Even as a \_\_\_ tree casteth. (Rev. 6:13)
43. Genuine.
44. To write specifications.
46. And there appeared \_\_\_ angel. (Luke 22:43)
47. Nickname for



By Karen Bush Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- Theodore.
48. Book of the Bible following Joel.
  49. Flushes with water.
  50. Crafty.
- DOWN**
1. Who shall \_\_\_ in thy tabernacle? (Ps. 15:1)
  2. How excellent is thy \_\_\_. (Ps. 8:1)
  3. A wise son maketh a \_\_\_ father. (Prov. 10:1)
  4. Border.
  5. \_\_\_ your plowshares. (Joel 3:10)
  6. To value.
  7. Excessively dry.
  8. Immediately you will find a \_\_\_. (Matt. 21:2)
  9. Blessed is he who \_\_\_. (Rev. 1:3)
  11. Ye blind guides, which strain at a \_\_\_. (Matt. 23:24)
  14. From the breath of God \_\_\_ is made. (Job 37:10)
  17. For \_\_\_ was dry upon the fleece only. (Judg. 6:40)
  19. I \_\_\_ knew you. (Matt. 7:23)
  20. Take the prophets of \_\_\_. (1 Kings 18:40)
  21. Opposite of "beginning."

23. Bravo.
24. Of or relating to the nose.
25. Symbol for manganese.
26. Sing, \_\_\_, thou that didst not bear. (Isa. 54:1)
28. Shall not leave in thee one \_\_\_ upon another. (Luke 19:44)
30. But \_\_\_ the end it shall speak. (Hab. 2:3)
31. If a man shall \_\_\_ pit. (Ex. 21:33)
32. Ream. (abbr.)
34. God shall supply all your \_\_\_. (Phil. 4:19)
36. Other seed fell on \_\_\_ soil. (Luke 8:6)
37. From a great distance.
39. \_\_\_ master! For it was borrowed. (2 Kings 6:5)
42. When they couch \_\_\_ their dens. (Job 38:40)
44. For they neither \_\_\_ nor reap. (Luke 12:24)
45. Greek letter following chi.
47. Tone following La.

## Event shines light on special needs ministry

(continued from page 1) and eat while watching the virtual TTF party.

"It's not about Thorington Road, it's about the community," Courson asserted, noting Michael Trull, lead pastor, encouraged participation in Night to Shine several years ago hoping it would help the church begin to develop more special needs ministries.

"We stepped off in faith not really understanding the scope of what we were doing," Courson admitted, "but our first year was incredible, and it has continued to be that way. We've been so excited to be a part of it."

The Night to Shine Shine-Thru was held at hundreds of sites worldwide Feb. 11. Thorington Road was one of 10 in Alabama hosting guests for the event, in its eighth year.

Angela Washington, coordinator of Night to Shine for Bethel Baptist Church in Dora, said the mild weather that night was a gift from God as they celebrated their 150 special guests outdoors.

"We had kind of traditional stations, and then we had a section where they could pull off if they wanted to listen to music," she

said. "We had some who got out and danced."

Washington noted she was struck by the response of one particular family — the mother said in the past she felt shut out by church in general and was touched by the sight of Bethel members loving people this way.

"I told our church that if nobody else came through, it was worth it for that," Washington said.

### Showing Christ's love

Ryan Johnson, senior pastor of Agape Baptist Church in Scottsboro, said his congregation also sees Night to Shine as a way to show the love of Christ to the community.

"We talk about Christians standing in the gap — there's a gap that includes a lot of darkness where life isn't valued in the culture," Johnson said. "There's a thought that a lot of these folks don't have a quality of life."

As volunteers cheered, shook pompoms, took photos and celebrated with

guests, they shined a light on the beauty of every person, he said. "All of these individuals are made in the image of God, and seeing them celebrated affirms that to us. It's a highlight of our church and community's year."

**For details, visit [timtebowfoundation.org](http://timtebowfoundation.org).**



Photo courtesy of Agape Baptist Church

Night to Shine participants at Agape Baptist Church in Scottsboro pose for photos in their crowns and tiaras during the Feb. 11 event.



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**KEN ADAMS**

Lead Pastor,  
Crossroads Church,  
Newnan, Ga.  
Founder & Director of  
Impact Disciples



**MARK GAINEY**

State Missionary  
Author, *4 Invitations*  
Lead Pastor,  
Fultondale First  
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For a complete schedule and to register,  
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# TAB CLASSIFIEDS

For more information call 205-870-4720, ext. 102, or email [ads@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:ads@thealabamabaptist.org).

## CHURCH POSITIONS

### PASTOR

Pathway Baptist Church in Dothan, Ala., is seeking a full-time pastor. For details and qualifications, please email questions or forward resumé to: [avpbcdothan@gmail.com](mailto:avpbcdothan@gmail.com), ATTN: Pastor Search Committee, or mail to: Pathway Baptist Church, ATTN: Pastor Search Committee, 3551 Flowers Chapel Road, Dothan, AL 36305.

### PASTOR/BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Horseshoe Bend Baptist Church is prayerfully seeking a pastor/bivocational pastor. Located in Dadeville, Ala. Resúms to be mailed to: 17363 Highway 280, Dadeville, AL 36853, or [hsbbc36853@gmail.com](mailto:hsbbc36853@gmail.com).

### PASTOR

Union Baptist Church is seeking a full-time pastor. Resúms will be received through March 31 by mail at: Pastor Search Committee, Union Baptist Church, 5251 Grand Bay Wilmer Road, Grand Bay, AL 36541, or by email at: [admin@ubcgrandbay.org](mailto:admin@ubcgrandbay.org).

### BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Paden Baptist Church, Gadsden, Ala., is prayerfully seeking a bivocational pastor. Please submit resúms to: [padenbaptistchurch@yahoo.com](mailto:padenbaptistchurch@yahoo.com) or to: Paden Baptist Church, 900 Padenreich Ave., Gadsden, AL 35903.

### MISSIONS/DISCIPLSHIP MINISTER

Woodmont Baptist Church in Florence, Ala., is searching for a missions/discipleship minister. We are searching for someone to develop and grow our missions and discipleship ministry. Minimum five years ministry experience. College degree required, seminary degree preferred. Strong interpersonal and communications skills needed. Please go to [woodmontbaptist.org](http://woodmontbaptist.org) to submit resúms by April 15.

### MINISTER OF MUSIC

First Baptist Church of Birmingham is seeking someone to lead a strong, blended, Christ-centered worship ministry. The individual should have experience working with choral worship and be prepared to lead gifted instrumentalists and orchestra. The minister of music will join the pastor and ministry staff in offering comprehensive ministry to the congregation. Resúms may be sent to: [jcooley@fcbhm.org](mailto:jcooley@fcbhm.org).

### MUSIC & WORSHIP ASSISTANT

North Shelby Baptist is hiring a part-time music and worship assistant. The scope of work includes clerical, filing, music preparation and basic office duties. Music experience is preferred but not required. Interested candidates should email: [office@northshelbybaptist.org](mailto:office@northshelbybaptist.org).

### MINISTER OF YOUTH/ EDUCATION

Taylorville Baptist Church is seeking a full-time minister of youth/education. An ordained minister with a college degree preferred and at least three years of ministry experience required. Please email your resumé and cover letter to: [rpate@taylorvillebaptist.org](mailto:rpate@taylorvillebaptist.org). Resúms will be accepted until March 31.

### YOUTH MINISTER

First Baptist Church Center Star, youth minister position. Part-time (20 hours estimate). For more information about this job opportunity, contact the FBCCS church office at 256-757-1310.

### STUDENT MINISTER

First Baptist Church Stevenson is seeking a full-time student minister. Direct questions to the church office at 256-437-8530. Please send resúms to: [RMNamanny@gmail.com](mailto:RMNamanny@gmail.com).

### PART-TIME YOUTH MINISTER

First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Ala., is seeking a part-time candidate to lead our youth ministry. Please submit resúms to: [office@fbcwoodstock.org](mailto:office@fbcwoodstock.org).

### CHILDREN'S MINISTER

North Shelby Baptist is seeking a full-time children's minister. We are a church that values tradition and is conservative in theology, while seeking to be liberal in love. For more information, visit [northshelbybaptist.org/childrens-minister](http://northshelbybaptist.org/childrens-minister).

### 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](http://ehbc.church). Please send resumé to: [cmsc@ehbc.church](mailto:cmsc@ehbc.church).

### PART TIME CHILDREN'S PASTOR/DIRECTOR

Pleasant Grove Baptist Church in Moulton, Ala., is prayerfully seeking God's person to fill the part-time position of children's pastor/director. All inquiries can be sent to: [info@pgbcmoulton.com](mailto:info@pgbcmoulton.com). Resúms can be sent to the same email address or mailed to: 11450 AL Hwy 33, Moulton, AL 35650.

## OTHER POSITIONS

### EMPLOYMENT

Job opportunities. Details at [wmu.com/about-wmu/employment](http://wmu.com/about-wmu/employment).

## SIGNS

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## BUSINESS

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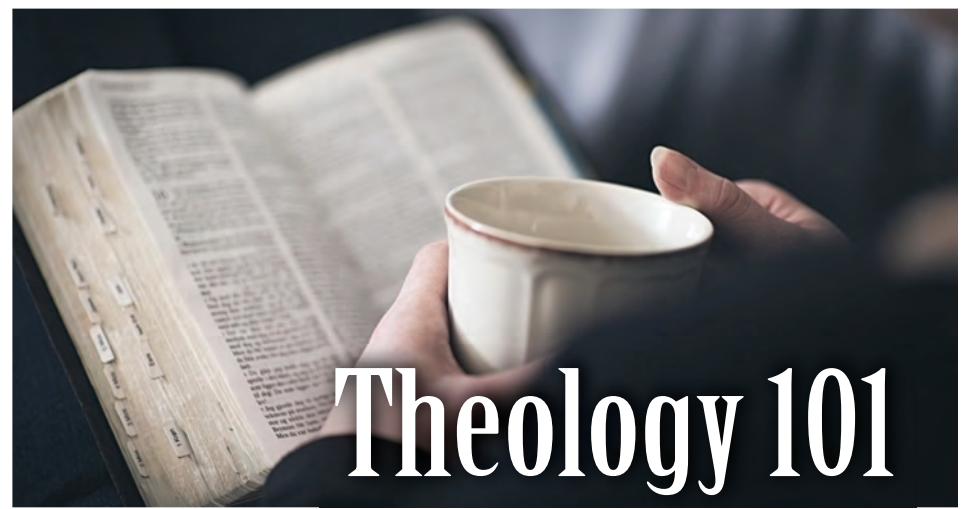
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### LOG CABIN RENTAL

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BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

*The People of God*

# God's Building

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.

The Alabama Baptist

Previously, Theology 101 has looked at the biblical imagery of the Church as the body of Christ and the bride of Christ. This week, we begin consideration of the Church as God's building.

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers he reminded them, "You are God's field, you are God's building" (1 Cor. 3:9). Previously, Jesus had declared in Matthew 16:18, "I will build My Church."

When He began to build the Church, Jesus chose 12 disciples He later termed "apostles." Ephesians 2:20 refers to the Church as having been "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets" before adding, "Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone."

## Strong foundation

While the Church is revealed in the New Testament, we cannot forget the preparatory revelation God sent through His prophets.

For example, Isaiah wrote, "Thus says the Lord God: 'Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation'" (28:16). As God's building, the Church has Christ as its cornerstone and the Old Covenant prophets and the New Covenant apostles as its foundation.

With modern building methods, typically the cornerstone is a ceremonial stone placed at the conclusion of the building process. In ancient times, the cornerstone was the first stone put in place. Rather than ceremonial, it served to square up the other foundation stones that were laid in relation to its perfect

angle. The imagery of the Church as a building leads us to understand that Christ, as the cornerstone, was the first and only totally perfect stone. God's truth, as revealed through His Son and illumined by His Spirit, furnished the essential guidelines for the foundation-laying work of His disciples.

## 'Living stones'

Across the centuries since the foundation was set in place, the superstructure has been going up. Believers are said in 1 Peter 2:5 to be "living stones." God has continued to build His church using people who have been made spiritually alive through their saving faith and the Spirit's regenerating work.

When we look around at the members of our local church's weekly gathering, we are looking at the very building material out of which God is continuing to build His Church.

Ephesians 2:21-22 declares that the building "being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."

Church membership at its best is described as "togetherness." When members are argumentative or divided, church growth is stymied.

*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.*



# SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For March 13

## Explore the Bible

By Ben Stubblefield

Visiting assistant professor of Christian studies, University of Mobile



### SHARED 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12

#### Persistent (1–2)

One of the greatest sports movies of all time is “Rudy,” the story of Rudy Ruettiger, a dyslexic, 5’6”, 165-pound kid who got into the University of Notre Dame — no easy task in itself — and then got on the Fighting Irish football team through sheer grit and persistence.

He was beaten down, undervalued, bloodied and bruised, but Rudy kept striving for his dreams. I know there are all kinds of people out there, but if you can watch that movie without shedding a tear, I don’t think we can be friends (just kidding).

We demonstrate what we prize by what we’re willing to suffer through to win it. Paul and his companions endured hostility and hardship in Thessalonica yet continued speaking the gospel there to bring people into the kingdom of God. Why? Why persist through such adversity?

Because there is no greater call upon our lives than the call to preach the gospel.

Jesus summons us to share the good news, and to do it in season and out of season, irrespective of how the message is received. The call to faithfulness isn’t conditional, which is why we’ll find Christians in a bunker in

Kyiv, in a Manhattan office space or in a gas station drinking coffee in rural Alabama letting “their light so shine.” Everywhere, every day, Christians must, like Paul, persistently share the gospel.

#### Gentle (3–7)

I understand the value of networking. But there are times — in ministry life particularly — when the whole notion feels icky.

Ever had the feeling the only reason someone wanted to be friends was because you were a means to an end? It’s understandable, but

it’s a little slimy because it’s not love. Paul reminds the Thessalonians that his ministry was legitimate because he didn’t come to them with ulterior motives.

No, he came to give as a mother gives to her child: without thought of recompense or remuneration.

Most of the time people can smell selfishness. It’s sulfuric. But they can also smell sincerity, kindness and love. I bet a lot of folks received Jesus because the church practiced loving instead of yelling at them, serving instead of using — because, like Paul, they had “so fond an affection” for their neighbors, lost and ruined by the fall.

#### Blameless (8–12)

Paul then shifts to remind the Thessalonians of the way he lived while serving the church as further evidence of his trustworthy character. He didn’t come to Thessalonica to mooch.

He cared for them as a mother and labored for them as a father.

While I do not think Paul is giving a theology of parenting, I do think he is implying he understands his responsibility to this young church the same way parents understand their responsibility to their children.

All the time, night and day, through toil and trial, Paul endeavored to raise them up to Christian maturity.

Isn’t it right that people trust you when they know you have their best interests at heart?

People often say: “Folks don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

God didn’t just give us the law, as wonderful as it is. He also sent His Son, for He so loved the world.

If we’re going to make an impact in our time, it seems paramount to love like Paul, Silvanus and Timothy, and, most importantly, like our Lord.

## Bible Studies for Life

By Will Kynes

Associate professor of biblical studies, Samford University



### A LIFE OF LOYALTY John 13:21–27; 31–35

What is your highest allegiance? You may know how you want to answer that question, but you won’t really know until that allegiance is tested. Until you must sacrifice other loves in your loyalty to that higher end, you will not know what is supreme in your heart.

Stories of followers of Christ making the ultimate sacrifice sparkle like diamonds mined from the crushing pressure of darkness throughout Church history. Young women fed to lions; old men burned at the stake. Each forces us to ask, “Would I do the same?”

Shusaku Endo’s novel “Silence” is a powerful extended meditation on that question, set in the 17th century persecution of Christians in Japan. John 13 provides another opportunity to reflect on this most important of questions.

#### Look for betrayal in your own life. (21–27)

When Jesus tells His disciples that one of them will betray Him, they “stared at one another [allelous], at a loss to know which of them He meant” (v. 22, NIV). We all live in that moment. Could we betray our loyalty to Jesus?

The disciples’ concern here, and their behavior later as they all abandoned their Savior at His moment of greatest need, suggests we all have some Judas in us.

#### Live for God’s glory even as Jesus did. (31–33)

And yet, through the Father’s love, Christ’s accomplishment and the Spirit’s work within us, we all can have even more Jesus.

In another surprising turn in John’s narrative, when Judas leaves to betray Jesus to the authorities — at the moment He concretely begins His inexorable march toward humiliating crucifixion — Jesus declares, “Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in Him.”

The “Christ hymn” in Philipians 2 helps us understand this paradoxical passage. Paul writes, “He humbled Himself by becoming

obedient to death — even death on a cross!” (v. 8). But as a result “God exalted Him to the highest place” (v. 9).

Paul calls followers of Christ to “have the same mindset as Christ Jesus” (v. 5), to humble themselves as He did by setting aside their benefits, even their lives, to glorify the Father.

#### Love for others puts your loyalty to God on display. (34–35)

Paul encourages believers to follow Christ’s example by having “the same love” to “in humility value others [allelous] above yourselves” (Phil. 2:2–3). Our love for one another is a vital means for emulating Jesus, not Judas.

As Jesus heads to the cross, He gives His disciples a new command: “Love one another [allelous]” (v. 34). When they love as He has loved them, they will demonstrate their loyalty as His disciples.

An unremarkable cross design on the stones of Oxford’s [England] Broad Street marks the spot where two former bishops, 70-year-old Hugh Latimer and the significantly younger Nicholas Ridley, were burned at the stake in 1555 for their Protestant beliefs. As the flames were kindled, Latimer purportedly said to his fellow martyr, “Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day light such a candle by God’s grace in England as I trust shall never be put out.”

Courageously facing death, Latimer demonstrated ultimate loyalty to his Savior. At the same time, he lovingly encouraged a fellow disciple. When we face challenges to our faith, we need others who can do the same. This is the great gift of the Church — the primary place in which we obey and profit from the “one another” commands in Scripture.

In Latimer and Ridley’s devoted self-sacrifice, God’s glory blazed in that Oxford street. How can you fan that flame?

# MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs  
The Alabama Baptist

## Author shares how son with Down syndrome defied the odds

In Little League it's cute for a 4-year-old to sit in the outfield, oblivious to the T-ball game being played around him.

But expectations change as athletes become more skilled. At the level of the Olympics, World Games or pro teams, "cute" changes to "amazing" when watching how God made humans with the ability to function beyond typical expectations.

And while low athletic expectations are often the norm for those born with Down syndrome, Chris Nikic exceeded everyone's expectations at the age of 21 when he became the first person with Down syndrome to complete a full Ironman triathlon in 2020 in Panama City Beach, Florida. His father, Nik, chronicled his journey in the book, "1% Better: Reaching My Full Potential and How You Can Too."

### Inspiration to others

"My hope was that Chris' story would inspire other parents and members of the community to look at our kids differently and realize they can succeed and be more independent," Nik explained. "We just needed to show them a system that works better for them and helps them achieve their potential."

### 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.



CHRIS NIKIC

Photo courtesy of the Nikic family

In "1% Better," Nik shared what the doctor told him and his wife, Patty: "We would be able to call ourselves very fortunate if Chris could learn to tie his shoes. Chris would always be dependent on us for everything. He could never hold down a job or live anywhere by himself. If we could afford this option, we'd probably want to consider institutionalizing him at some point."

"Whatever dreams we had formulated for our child should be abandoned. Why torture ourselves with hopes that could never come true?"

### God has a plan

However, from the time he and Patty started dating, God was in their relationship, Nik said, and even when hearing the discouraging news they knew He had a plan. Abortion was never an option; neither was giving up on Chris.

"I believe God was planting seeds and providing a path for us to

follow, that He had a bigger vision and we had to trust it especially when everyone else kept saying I was crazy," Nik said. "The more I heard that, the more I believed God has something big planned for Chris."

Nik himself had a difficult childhood, spending his early years in a communist culture. When he was 10, his family escaped to the U.S.

College was only possible through a basketball scholarship he earned, despite not being athletic.

His determination to succeed against all odds prepared him to raise a child with "supposed limitations," Nik said. In fact, he and Patty didn't see limitations.

"You could argue that our belief was misplaced, but both Patty and I had high expectations for Chris in terms of what he would be able to learn and how independent he could one day become," Nik said.

As soon as Chris came home from the hospital, his days were

filled with therapy. When it was time to start school, his parents tried different educational environments until landing on a small private school that focused on each student's learning style.

While Patty was involved with academics and care, Nik concentrated on athletics, getting Chris into Special Olympics golf, track and basketball and developing a love for sports.

"He could finish dead last but still be ecstatic, walking up to people and high-fiving them and saying, 'Nice job,'" Nik related. "I wished I could be a little more like him. I would look at him after a race and think, 'With all of your disadvantages, how can you be so happy?'"

"1% Better" not only tells Chris' story, but also shares the principles Nik used for triathlon training. Each day he would have Chris do "one more." If he did five situps on Monday, Tuesday six were expected. Discouragement was lessened by making small changes. Chris became stronger and more skilled each day.

### 'An amazing journey'

"I have one verse framed at home: Galatians 6:9-10: 'And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up,'" Nik said.

"Life is an amazing journey and with God anything is possible," he added. "He has taught me that our potential as humans is so much greater than anything we believe. He has also taught me to enjoy every moment and be thankful for my gifts."

"1% Better" can be found wherever books are sold. For more information, visit [chrisnikic.com](http://chrisnikic.com).





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