

# The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

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Siblings Max, Will, Addie Lou and Alley Ray Warbington enjoy popsicles on a summer day. The Warbington family adopted Max and Will, ages 10 and 7, from Ukraine in February 2021.

Photo courtesy of Herbie Newell/Lifeline Children's Services

## Life in waiting

### War in Ukraine, pandemic delay some families in adoption process

By Lanell Downs Smith  
The Alabama Baptist

Nearly 20 years ago, God planted the seed of adoption in Chris Mills' heart after he was personally impacted by an adoption within his extended family.

Years later, Mills shared his life's plans and heart's desires, including God's call to

adopt from China, on his first date with Brooke, who is now his wife.

Brooke embraced the calling, too, and the couple attended an adoption information meeting where they learned they didn't yet qualify. Once they met the requirements, the two began submitting the necessary paperwork and waited to begin their international adoption journey.

The Mills eventually received the file of a child with whom they instantly fell in love. Two years later, they are still waiting to bring him home.

According to Herbie Newell, president and executive director of Lifeline Children's Services, based in Birmingham, international adoption commonly takes from 18 months to two years, although it can be completed more quickly depending on the needs and age of the child.

#### Longer process

Families pursuing very young children with medical needs often experience a longer process, Newell noted, and global issues can lengthen the time frame.

COVID-19 affected adoption and created hardships

with international travel, though many countries have navigated the challenges and are operating more routinely now, Newell said.

Jana Lombardo, Lifeline senior program director of international adoption, verified March 31 that Ukraine had not closed its adoption authority offices but is not processing any paperwork. Lifeline facilitates adoptions by providing training, education and support networks for families.

"There is great concern that if Russia is successful in taking over Ukraine, they will (See 'Parents,' page 13)

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Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist

TAB Media Group's Jennifer Davis Rash (left) and Margaret Colson provided team coverage of the Feb. 21–22 SBC Executive Committee meeting.

## Colson accepts role with Florida Baptist Convention

Margaret Colson said her time as special assignments editor with TAB Media Group has “affirmed, encouraged and stretched” her.

“I have been challenged to focus not only on what is but also on what can be, to always keep my eyes and heart open to unexpected opportunities that God may put in my path,” she said.

### ‘Unexpected opportunity’

That’s exactly what happened in Colson’s life recently — an unexpected opportunity. As of April 1, she is serving in a new role with the Florida Baptist Convention — consulting communications editor.

“God presented me with this unexpected opportunity in Florida, and I am committed to honoring Him as I move forward prayerfully to serve Florida Baptists,” said Colson, who has freelanced for the convention through the years.

In her new role, she will lead Florida Baptists’ network of writers to develop stories about how God is using Florida Baptists to advance His mission. She will also report on stories related to the convention and help oversee the newsroom for the state’s annual meeting.

“I believe God has used the years of my denominational communications career and the many relationships I have developed to prepare me for this opportunity,” she said.

Colson has a bachelor’s degree in journalism from the University of Georgia and a master of divinity and doctor of ministry from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Colson’s communication roles have included serving several state Baptist publications, including a stint as interim editor of one paper.

She also serves as executive secretary of the Association of State Baptist Publications and as executive director of Baptist Communicators Association.

She worked for the then-Home Mission Board in the 1980s and 1990s.

“I have the utmost respect for Florida Baptist leaders, and I’m grateful that they are putting their confidence in me as I continue the tradition of Florida Baptist communications excellence,” she said.

### ‘Heart to mentor’

Jennifer Davis Rash, TAB’s editor-in-chief, said Colson will be a tremendous asset for Florida Baptists.

“Margaret has extensive experience in Southern Baptist journalism and communications as well as a heart to mentor and grow the next generation,” Rash said.

“She’s a hard worker and brings thoughtful and creative energy to everything she does. We are going to miss her at TAB Media but can’t help but be excited for her in this new role.” (The Alabama Baptist)

## 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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L	E	A	V	E	E	D	D	E	E	

The crossword puzzle  
can be found on page 14.



# RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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

 [jrash@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:jrash@thealabamabaptist.org)

 @RashionalThts

GUEST EDITORIAL

## Find ways to minister to waiting families, orphans

**S**peaking with Chris and Brooke Mills a few weeks ago about their adoption journey amid the COVID-19 pandemic and global conflict (see page 1) brought back a lot of memories.

In early September 2001, my husband, Owen, and I were in their shoes. A few months into the adoption process, we were eagerly anticipating a call from our agency to tell us we had been matched with a child. Every morning we woke up thinking, “This could be the day!”

That hope changed to dread the morning of Sept. 11 as news of the terrorist attacks on the U.S. spread.

Owen and I wondered if instead of a placement, we would get a call telling us the process was on hold until global events settled down a bit.

To our great surprise and joy, when the call came we learned we had been matched with a 6-month-old boy.

Less than two months after the 9/11 attacks, we were on the first of many planes that would take us from Atlanta to New York to Russia to Kazakhstan and eventually back home as new parents.

International travel does not come without risks, and in

those post-9/11 days, security was extremely tight. But we had a mission and a purpose — to bring the little boy we had hoped for, had prayed for, had loved from afar even before we knew his name, into our family.

That’s where the Mills family and so many other families are right now.

They are at various stages of the international adoption process, but the children they wait for already have a place in their hearts.

These expectant mothers and fathers have been vetted by their adoption agencies, undergoing rigorous background checks, home studies and interviews. They have been fingerprinted and vaccinated.

They have invested financially, emotionally and spiritually in a child they’ve never met, but who they already love more than words can express.

Let’s not forget them as they wait.

### Ways to encourage

Is there a family in your circle who is adopting? What can you do to encourage them this week?

Here are some suggestions: Ask them about their children and the adoption process. Allow them to share their hearts and prayer needs. Send an encouraging note. Take a meal. Offer

to sit with their children while they complete paperwork or attend adoption-related meetings or maybe just take a night to relax.

Let’s also remember these precious children too.

Lifeline Children’s Services, a Birmingham-based ministry that serves vulnerable children globally through orphan care, foster care and adoption, estimates that 10,000 children become orphans daily — losing one or both of their parents to disease, natural disaster, stigma or poverty.

By some estimates, the number of orphans has increased exponentially due to COVID-19-associated deaths.

In the U.S. alone, where some 400,000 children are already

in foster care, a study in The Journal of Pediatrics suggests more than 140,000 children under age 18 have lost a parent or secondary caregiver due to the pandemic.

Those alarming statistics should make us take notice of the children in our churches and communities grieving those who provided daily doses of love, security and care.

### Ways to help

Churches or other organizations may be helping these families, but as neighbors, friends and Christ-followers, what immediate needs of these families can we meet?

A meal or a gift card for necessities or a treat could be a simple reminder that their loss is not forgotten.

For more ways to get involved in orphan care or support for hurting children and families,

go to the websites of Lifeline ([lifelinechild.org](http://lifelinechild.org)) or Alabama Baptist Children’s Homes & Family Ministries ([alabamachild.org](http://alabamachild.org)).



**By Carrie Brown McWhorter**  
Content Editor



Photo by Carrie B. McWhorter/The Alabama Baptist  
Owen McWhorter holds his son, Avery, during their first meeting at an orphanage in Kazakhstan in 2001.

# Your Voice



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

## From the frontlines: Four ways to serve the Lord in times of war

By Daniel Fodorean

Special to the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

Ever wonder how pastors should lead in times of war, especially when the pastors are serving those directly impacted by the war?

Consider these four ways (which are developed from the current efforts by Baptists in Romania to assist Ukrainian refugees):

### 1. Share love without prejudice.

After the Second World War, Romania lost territories on the border with the Soviet Union, in the east and the north. They became part of the Soviet empire. After 1990, these territories now form the Republic of Moldova and Transnistria, and some are in Ukraine. Moreover, during the Soviet occupation (1944–1958), Russian and Ukrainian soldiers devastated Romanian cities and villages, abusing our women and killing civilians. Throughout the years, there have been ill feelings between Ukrainians and Romanians.

### Open arms

At the end of February, when the bombs began to drop on Ukraine, some of the refugees were skeptical about how they would be treated when they crossed into Romania. How did evangelicals respond? We wait for these guests at the border crossings with open arms.

In the name of Jesus, we provide food, water, accommodations in our homes or our churches and so forth. Designated church members transport guests to the train station,

airport or embassy. In other words, we are showing love to people that only a few months ago we didn't like very much. Christ is giving us a newfound love for our neighbor. If you are going to lead your people in times of war, you need to share love all around you without prejudice.

The Bible teaches, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him ... We must not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:20–21). Christian love is stronger than hatred. Show love in action to those around you. This means reaching out to people in love without prejudice.

### 2. Value people more than planning and projects.

War takes us out of our work routine, which can frustrate some ministers and some churches. Scheduled meetings are changed; some projects are postponed; and priorities are reversed. These days, pastors in Romania and Moldova are extremely busy leading the church in serving those in need. Many church members have jobs and cannot be involved in the work with guests from Ukraine during the day.

Our churches do not have a large staff (often only a pastor). In this situation where there are many needs, pastors must take the lead in the relief effort. For example, some of our Baptist pastors drive from one to two days without stopping to bring supplies and help those in Moldova and Ukraine.

Our programs no longer seem important. Our projects have been placed on the back burner. War has changed everything. Loving people in the name of Jesus Christ is of utmost importance.

Perhaps my brothers who are leading churches in times of peace need to reevaluate their priorities. Are our churches placing programs above our calling to serve? Are we willing to put aside our position to serve Jesus as a slave?

### 3. Look more at the needs of others than at your own.

The reaction of the churches and ministers in Romania is not to seek help across the ocean or elsewhere, but to think about what they can give. Romania is among the poorest countries in the European Union. From November 2021 to February 2022, our churches were concerned about how we could pay the heat bills.

What are we going to do? We will use the money we saved for our utilities to help in this time of need. We will sacrifice ourselves because the Ukrainians have nothing left. What a small sacrifice compared with their suffering.

I am encouraged as I see revival in the Romanian church. Believers are willing to make enormous sacrifices. As Paul says, they did not look to their interests but to those of others (Phil. 2:4). Serving means sacrifice. Lead your church to be a sacrificial church for the glory of Christ.



FODOREAN

### 4. Keep the gospel central at all times and in all situations.

Even though the work of helping those in need often seems overwhelming, we must always remember we are serving because of the gospel. We are motivated to serve because of the love we have received from the gospel.

### Remember the gospel

We are united with some Ukrainians because they also believe in the gospel. We are compelled to share the gospel because some Ukrainians are not saved. The church where I serve on the pastoral team (Bethany Church in Bucharest, the first Baptist church in Romania) will host a service in Russian every Sunday afternoon for all evangelical Ukrainians and their friends. In the midst of difficulties, we do not forget the gospel. The gospel must remain central to any ministry.

Please remember us in your prayers as we lead in times of war. And, I pray you will prepare your church with a war-time mentality.

*EDITOR'S NOTE — Daniel Fodorean is the European strategist with Romanian-American Mission and academic dean at Baptist Theological Institute of Bucharest, Romania. He is helping coordinate care for refugees coming into Romania and Moldova and is partnering with Baptists in Poland, Ukraine and throughout Europe. This column first appeared in the Ministry Moments e-newsletter, produced by the offices of leadership and church health of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. Hear more from Fodorean on the Amplify podcast, which is produced by The Alabama Baptist.*

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“Personality, pomp and all the rest is as sounding brass ... if the breath of God is not on it.”

TERRY LONG

*Choctaw Baptist Association*

“Hospitality means we treat outsiders like insiders. It’s just the opposite of saying, ‘Come in if you want to be like us.’ ... Jesus taught in the parable of the unjust steward that we who have received the Master’s grace must live His grace,” said **Scott Cormode**, Hugh De Pree professor of leadership development at **Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California**, speaking at a seminar hosted by the Center for Congregational Resources of Samford University in Birmingham.

“People want to come up with all kinds of theologies that take the pressure off us [in evangelism]. But I’m going to tell you something: it’s still on us — the pressure to

share. The pressure to be saved, that’s the job of the Holy Spirit. But if I’m not sharing, that’s on me,” said **Lawrence Phipps**, senior pastor of **First Baptist Gulf Shores**.

“I don’t want to make it appear that teaching is the easiest thing in the world. It isn’t, but it certainly enhanced my walk with the Lord, knowing every Sunday that I was going to be responsible for a lesson,” **Mary Jo Looser**, who recently was recognized by **Five Points Baptist Church in Northport**, for teaching Sunday School for 60 years.

“Marketing and evangelism are both trying to get a message out. If we can leverage the tools of mar-

keting for the church, it helps us get the message of the gospel out,” said **Joel Southerland**, lead pastor of **Peavine Baptist Church in Rock Spring, Georgia**.

“They had emptied their piggy banks into these envelopes to send to my friends who were trying to get west,” said **Erin Boswell**, a former **IMB missionary** whose daughters wanted to help. “They also said, ‘Can we open our baking business again to raise money for Ukraine?’ And they were just so earnest about it, so I put on Instagram that they were doing that and said if you’d like to combine forces with us to help some friends we know in real life, Claire will make you cookies or banana bread.”

## From the *Twitterverse*

### @jaroland74

Blessings a former coworker gave me ... It means the world to me:

“From now on, wherever you go, wherever I go, the ground is holy between us. As you leave, you stay within the hospitable solitude of my heart.” @HenriNouwen

### @AdamGreenway

“When you preach, somebody is going to be the star of your sermon — Jesus or yourself. ... Make sure your aim is that folks will walk out saying how great Jesus is rather than how great the preacher is.”

—@Matt\_Carter preaching from 1 Corinthians 2 in #SWBTSchapel @SWBTS

### @ElijahMBrown

Today as I entered into the Republic of Moldova, I was overwhelmed to learn that for the first 10 days of this war, 70% of all Ukrainian refugees to Moldova were first

welcomed and helped by a Baptist church. Would you stand with these frontline leaders at BaptistWorld.org/prayforpeace?

### @MAusberry

Sometimes life comes at you hard, sometimes life hurts, but through it all, God is with you. Whatever your circumstance, take everything to the Lord in prayer. Be encouraged today — God is with you.

### @richardblackaby

You cannot orchestrate an encounter with God. You can only prepare your heart and mind so you’re ready when He encounters you.

### @FitHog

Lots of things going on in the world over which I have no control. Here’s what I can do: pray, follow Jesus, love my neighbors, serve those in need, meditate on God’s word, draw strength from God’s

people. Worship helps me with all of this. I will be in worship today. Will you?

### @DrTomSchreiner

“The LORD your God is among you, a Warrior who saves. He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will be quiet in His love. He will delight in you with singing.” (Zeph. 3:17)

### @shane\_pruitt78

Being a “good person” doesn’t get you into Heaven. being saved by a good Savior does!

### @nathanafinn

Everyone is religious, though some deny this fact. Humans are hardwired for eternity. But true religion is found only in covenant relationship with King Jesus, which only comes by grace and through faith, on the basis of His life, death and resurrection. This we proclaim.

## Easter reminds us — Jesus did His part

Jesus did not have to die on the cross. He did not have to suffer the terrible agony.

He could have avoided returning to the capital city of Jerusalem. He could have left those desecrating the temple alone. He could have avoided confrontation with His critics. He could have gotten rid of His betrayer. He could have escaped arrest. He did not have to proclaim and reiterate He was the Son of God, Messiah. He could have kept a low profile and celebrated Passover with His friends.

He could have completely destroyed His opposition. He could have called for rescue and received an immediate overwhelming response.

He could have made all His pain stop. He could have abandoned this sin-drenched planet to die in all its evil proclivities. He didn’t have to let His death pay the penalty for all your sins. He didn’t have to do it. But He did, because He loves you. The rest is history.

Now it’s time for you to do your part. Jesus willingly died a horrible death to pay the penalty so that your many sins might be forgiven, but you must put your full trust in Him to receive this gift. You don’t have to do it, but time is short, and your eternal life is at stake.

Here is a suggested prayer: “Lord Jesus, I need You. I open the door of my heart and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Take control of my life. Forgive my sins; I turn away from them now. Make me the kind of person You want me to be. As an expression of my faith, I now thank You for coming into my life and for hearing my prayer. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

If you prayed this prayer, please share your decision with someone.

May God bless you!  
**Bob Cosby, M.D.**  
**Birmingham, Ala.**

# 3 stories you should know



Photo by Mitchell Bruce/SBOM

Mel Johnson, Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief District 12 coordinator, loads the components of an airlift kitchen onto a truck headed for Birmingham on April 1. From there, the kitchen, rated at 2,500 meals per day, will be flown to Budapest, Hungary, to feed refugees. “The components of the kitchen are custom crated for easy handling and shipping. Once assembled, everything is self-supported. All that’s needed is fuel and food,” he said.

## State Sexual Abuse Task Force completes reviews

The eight members of Alabama Baptists’ Sexual Abuse Task Force completed their review of the policies and practices of Cooperative Program-funded entities and the State Board of Missions in March.

They are now working to finalize their findings in a report to be presented during the Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting in November.

Craig Carlisle, chair of the task force, said the group will meet over the next few months to develop the report. A release date for the report has not yet been determined, he said.

“We are pleased with [the leaders’] cooperation and transparency of their policies and are pleased with the progress we are making toward the final report. ... Everything has been very positive. We did not find any major issues.” (TAB Media)

## Pilot for upcoming SpaceX mission an active Baptist

University Baptist Church in Houston, Texas, commissioned astronaut and church member Bob Hines ahead of his upcoming space flight, reported the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Hines is scheduled to launch April 19. He will spend 144 days on the International Space Station. He will be the pilot on the SpaceX Crew-4 mission, a four-person team that will launch out of Cape Canaveral.

During the March 27 commissioning service, Hines expressed his gratefulness to God that he was fulfilling a childhood dream. He spoke of his excitement at seeing the Earth from afar.

“[I] want to look at this amazing creation that God has given us and just be in awe of it,” he said. (The Baptist Paper)

## Persecuted church

### Pastor tied to post, beaten in front of large crowd in India

NEW DELHI, India — Hindu extremists tied a pastor to a post Feb. 25 and beat him in front of a large crowd, some of whom joined the attack, according to Morning Star News.

Kelom Kalyan Tete, a 35-year-old pastor, was tied to an iron post at a busy crossroads in New Delhi and beaten. More than 150 individuals surrounded, taunted and struck him. Children clad in school uniforms kicked his legs, he told Morning Star News.

The attack was a continuation of an earlier beating Tete received that day. That morning, he had been intercepted about 4 miles away, bound and beaten in front of about 30 people. The assailants accused him of forcible conversion. Then, he was taken to the crossroads and tied

to the post for another beating, he said. At some point during the second beating, the ropes binding his hands came untied and he escaped.

Since taking power in 2014, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party has displayed a hostile tone toward non-Hindus, Morning Star News reported. India is No. 10 on Open Doors’ 2022 World Watch List of countries where Christians are persecuted for their faith.

### Christian speaker beaten to death at Ugandan evangelistic event

SERERE DISTRICT, Uganda — Hard-line Muslims furious at a Christian’s preaching at an event in Uganda beat the man to death and burned his body, reported Morning Star News.

On Feb. 28 in Kadungulu village, John Michael Okero, 43, was beaten with iron bars, stones and sticks, the report stated.

Okero, who frequently was invited to speak at evangelistic events, had been quoting verses about Jesus from the Koran.



Creative Commons photo

The attackers accused Okero of blasphemy for saying Jesus is Allah’s Son, for misinterpreting the Koran, touching the Koran

without ritual cleansing and disrespecting the Koran by placing it under the Holy Bible, the report said.

Uganda’s laws and constitution allow freedom of religion, including propagating one’s faith and converting from one religion to another. No more than 14% of Uganda’s population is Muslim, according to the report.

# Alabama news

## ALABAMA-CRENSHAW ASSOCIATION

▶ **Jack Anderson**, associational missionary for **Alabama-Crenshaw**, celebrated 50 years of ministry at a March 20 reception hosted at Luverne First Baptist Church by the association's Woman's Missionary Union.

Raised in Selma, he received a bachelor's degree from the University of Mobile (then Mobile College) and a master's in religious education from New Orleans Seminary. Anderson previously was a representative for Lifeway Christian Store on EastChase Parkway in Montgomery for 10 years, starting as a clerk and becoming one of the assistant store managers.

Prior to that, he served in the accounting office of Colonial Bank, Montgomery, for 10 years. He was interim pastor of Bradleyton Baptist Church, Grady, for 3½ years and then served as bivocational pastor. He resigned his position at the church and at Lifeway to become the full-time associational missionary for the association in 2017. His ministry has included serving churches as minister of music and youth and education in Mississippi and Alabama.

Churches in Alabama include: 22 years of ministry at Southside Baptist, Montgomery, which relocated and renamed itself Bell Road Baptist and subsequently merged with Morningview Baptist; Gateway Baptist, Montgomery; West End Baptist, Selma; Pine Hill Baptist; and Sister Springs Baptist, Tyler.

"I remember while serving as music and youth minister at Sister Springs, I had to take off to go to my high school graduation," Anderson said.

"He [God] takes mud clay and makes teacups out of it," said Anderson, referring to how God has molded and shaped his own life in ministry.

Clay Crum, pastor of Luverne FBC, said of Anderson, "He is very diligent to stay connected with the pastors and the churches. He is a perfect fit for our association. He has a heart for serving others. He is very humble [and] very knowledgeable in so many areas of ministry."



ANDERSON

## DEKALB ASSOCIATION

▶ **Rainsville First Baptist Church** welcomes "The Sisters," five-time Gospel Music Female Group of the Year, in concert April 10 at 10:15 a.m. David Cofield is pastor.

## FRANKLIN ASSOCIATION

▶ **Ed Williams** is the new pastor of **Hodges Convention Baptist Church**. He previously served as interim pastor. He and his wife, Di- anne, reside in Vina.

## FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION

▶ **Friendship Association** is having an evening of evangelism training, preaching and fellowship April 24 at CrossRoads Baptist Church, Warrior. The training session begins at 5 p.m. led by Matt Burford, apologetics specialist with the State Board of Missions, followed by a meal at 5:30 p.m. Daniel Wilson, director of the office of evangelism at SBOM, will preach at 6:30. Call the association office at 205-274-2879 or email cpatfba@yahoo.com by April 13 for your meal reservation. Steve Sellers is interim associational missionary.



GAY

## CHILTON ASSOCIATION

▶ **Thomas Gay** is the new student pastor of **Collins Chapel Baptist Church, Jemison**. He is married to Jenna.

## ELMORE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Bethlehem East Baptist Church, Tallassee**, will host revival services April 10–13. Bill

King will preach each service. There will be an 11 a.m. service April 10 and nightly services at 7.

Billy Bob Bohannon (Kings' alter ego) will perform Sunday evening. John Sparks is pastor.

## OBITUARIES

▶ **Timothy Wayne Forehand**, pastor of Bassett Creek Baptist Church, Grove Hill, died March 28. He was 55.



FOREHAND

He had been pastor at Bassett Creek for less than two years. He held a bachelor's degree in biblical studies from Samford University. He previously served as youth pastor of Concord Baptist Church, Bessemer; First Baptist Church Moody; and North Clay Baptist Church, Pinson. He is survived by his wife, Karen, and three children.

Send your items and announcements to [news@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:news@thealabamabaptist.org).

## Alabama now providing extra Mission:Dignity check to its recipients

By **Roy Hayhurst**  
GuideStone Financial Resources

**M**ission:Dignity recipients in Alabama will receive an extra check — a 13th check — in 2022 and annually after, thanks to the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Alabama marks the fourth state to offer such a partnership between Mission:Dignity/GuideStone and state conventions. Similar programs are underway in neighboring Mississippi and in South Carolina and Arkansas, and Florida recently announced it will become the fifth state to offer a similar program.

"Trustees of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions were excited about participating in the 13th check for Mission:Dignity recipients," said Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. "We are gratified by this opportunity to bring an extra blessing for our people. We plan to make this an annual gift so that the 13th check can be available for the participants in Alabama. We will consider other ways to be of help in the future."

In 2022, Mission:Dignity helped more than 2,500 individuals with extra money needed for housing, food and vital medications. It also en-

ures well-deserved dignity, independence and, often, the ability to continue serving the Lord.

In Alabama, 115 recipients will receive a 13th check, which will be the same amount as their regular monthly benefit.

### 'Been blessed'

"We have been blessed to see so many state conventions come alongside our Mission:Dignity recipients to provide additional support," said GuideStone President Hance Dilbeck. "It reminds them their Southern Baptist family has not forgotten their service to the Lord and His people. These 13th checks have been an encouragement to me personally and will be a tremendous blessing to Mission:Dignity recipients."

Recipients in Alabama should have received the extra payment in March.

"We are so thankful for the leadership of Dr. Lance, the State Board of Missions trustees and the people of the churches in Alabama who have made this additional gift possible," said Aaron Meraz, director of Mission:Dignity. "These pastors and others we serve are truly deserving of a double honor, and thanks to the efforts of so many, those we are privileged to serve will be receiving this blessing."

For more information, visit [MissionDignity.org](http://MissionDignity.org).



## Senior Adult Evangelism Conference



Monday, May 2 ~ 9:30-Noon  
Glynwood Baptist Church ~ Prattville

**SPEAKERS:**  
*Jay Wolf and  
David Dykes*



**SPECIAL MUSIC:**  
*Karen Peck  
and New River*



**For more information, please visit [evangelizeAL.org/revive](http://evangelizeAL.org/revive)**

# Taking time to **listen**

## Spring break project sets up on college campuses across the state

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

Everyone's got a story, if someone will just listen. That's the idea behind the Campus Story Project, an outreach effort that starts with a tent in which refreshments like coffee, doughnuts or bottled water are offered and a sign says, "What's your story?"

A team from Baptist Campus Ministries and Dauphin Way Baptist Church in Mobile took the project on the road to campuses all over the state during spring break.

They partnered with BCMs at five other college campuses. Students were taught how to share their testimonies so they could stand at the tent and ask that simple question as students passed by, said Beth Gardner, campus minister at Metro Mobile Baptist Campus Ministries.

"Really, it was all about us taking the time to listen," she said.

As students passed, BCM members would engage them in con-

versation and ask them to share a personal story about the most incredible thing they ever experienced, a personal transformation, someone who influenced them or a major life change or transition.

Then, Gardner said, they would listen well.

"I think the key is listening to people" she explained, "that's just so important — to listen to them first and earn that right to share with them."

As the conversation moved on, the BCM students would ask if they could share a story of their own. Depending on which kind of story the student told, they would share how meeting Jesus was their most incredible experience, how He had transformed them, how He had influenced them or how He had given them a changed life. Then they would share the gospel.

Metro Mobile Baptist campus minister Jerrod Brown said he believes the Campus Story Project is "so worthwhile and beneficial to

**"[Campus Story Project] puts [students] in a setting to naturally talk about Jesus."**

**Jerrod Brown  
Metro Mobile Baptist  
campus minister**



Photo by Beth Gardner/Metro Mobile Baptist Campus Ministries

Justin LaJesse (right), a student at the University of South Alabama, talks with a student on the campus of Troy University as part of the Campus Story Project, an outreach effort led by Metro Mobile Baptist Campus Ministries and Dauphin Way Baptist Church.



Photo by Beth Gardner/Metro Mobile Baptist Campus Ministries

Baptist Campus Ministries students hand out bottles of water and engage students in conversation at the University of Alabama. BCM members asked the students to share a personal story and then listened well.

the students sharing Jesus because it puts them in a setting to naturally talk about Jesus and develop those skills."

"What they learn and practice transfers easily into their personal lives," he added. "The project is a great connection to students sharing personally [afterward]."

Brown said it is built around simple actions that connect with people — caring for them, inviting their stories, putting others first, listening well and sharing Jesus boldly.

"We developed this project because we discovered people who would be open to conversations about life and faith if Christians will simply be loving and invite them into the conversation," Brown explained.

### On the road

During the week, the team led by Brown and Gardner — which included a handful of Mobile-area college students and Jeremy Montgomery, student pastor at Dauphin Way Baptist, and some of the students from his college ministry — drove more than 1,200 miles taking the project around the state.

On Sunday, they led an evangelism training event for students at Auburn University at Montgomery, Tuskegee University and Alabama State University.

### Rewarding trip

On Monday, they were at Troy University; Tuesday at Jacksonville State University; Wednesday at University of Alabama at Huntsville; Thursday at University of North Alabama; and Friday at University of Alabama.

Gardner said it was a rewarding trip. In the past their BCM has done other types of missions trips, all of which were great, but she loves how this one put sharing the gospel at the forefront and helped encourage and equip students at other campuses.

Zach Beasley, Baptist campus minister for ASU and Tuskegee, is grateful for the investment Brown, Gardner and their team made on campuses around the state.

"It's been a blessing," Beasley said.

"I'm grateful for what they're doing. I've benefited from it, and my students have too."

# Express care & concern

## How church leaders can support and respond to survivors of sexual abuse

By Rod Campbell  
MAMFT, LPC-S  
Registered play therapist/supervisor  
Pathways Professional Counseling

Having a good plan to know how you and your church leadership would respond should an allegation of sexual abuse occur will help everyone. Waiting until the devastation has occurred to start asking questions of responsibility, legal issues, who to call, how to provide support and where to find support services will ultimately leave everyone feeling overwhelmed.

When churches are not prepared, everyone loses,

especially the survivor of the abuse who may not feel heard, seen, safe or that the abuse is addressed appropriately. Outlined below are suggestions to consider as you prepare a proper response, seek appropriate counsel and provide training that shows care for the one who has been abused and all who are affected by the events as they unfold.

### 1. Create a comprehensive plan.

It's important to review policies and procedures to make sure your church is safe for children and adults. Reach out to experts to ensure appropriate safeguards are in place to prevent any-

one from being harmed. Years of growth can cause church policies and procedures to become outdated. Without regular assessment and training, anyone can become less vigilant than is required.

### Take it seriously

If someone comes forward with allegations, take them seriously. All allegations should be handled with care and concern — every time. The initial goal is not to prove or disprove the allegations, but rather to hear what is being shared and make sure the survivor feels safe telling his or her story. It is difficult to understand how



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emotionally taxing it can be for a survivor of abuse to come forward. Many are not believed or are made to feel they must prove allegations beyond any doubt before being taken seriously.

Listen well, empathize with them and offer support. Then follow the plan your church leadership has in place in the event allegations of abuse are revealed. If allegations should be proven false later, the situation can be handled as needed at that

time. Take the initial reports seriously and respond appropriately.

### 2. Understand the legal steps.

Once an allegation is made, it is important church members and leadership understand Alabama Mandatory Reporting Law for minors.

It reads in part: "... members of the clergy as defined in Rule 505 of the Alabama Rules of Evidence, or any other person called upon to

render aid or medical assistance to any child, when the child is known or suspected to be a victim of child abuse or neglect, shall be required to report, or cause a report to be made of the same, orally, either by telephone or direct communication immediately, followed by a written report, to a duly constituted authority."

When preparing your response plan, be certain you have sought out good legal advice and follow all applicable laws in a situation involving minors and abuse. Making a report to the Alabama Department of Human Resources may seem like a difficult decision, but it is vital that churches lead out in taking this step toward justice and away from any form of secrecy. Taking the proper steps to protect anyone who has been harmed must be the top priority.

### 3. Provide training and response expectations.

Training of ministers, staff and volunteers can be a great help so everyone understands their responsibilities if they receive a report of abuse or neglect. Each person should know the role they need to fulfill when allegations of abuse are made.

### Avoid questioning

It is imperative non-trained church staff, parents, friends, volunteers or any other well-meaning individuals avoid questioning the survivor. Without the specialized training necessary, question-

ing them is likely to result in more harm if the survivor senses they are being blamed or needing to justify the allegations. If a DHR report is necessary or if the survivor would like to talk to the police, we recommend questioning wait until those meetings occur.

### Professional help

We also recommend referring the survivor to a professional counselor who has specific training in working with survivors of abuse. Specialized training and experience uniquely equips the counselor to walk with an abuse survivor through this highly emotional and difficult journey. As church leaders and staff, you can listen, offer supportive resources, pray for them and let them know this should never have happened to them. Let the

survivor know you are there for him or her and want to provide the best help possible through local professionals, support groups and other resources.

### 4. Prepare for ongoing church support.

The church also has a vital, ongoing role to play in supporting an abuse survivor. Anyone who has been deeply wounded knows the importance of having a robust

*"Outside of reporting the situation to authorities, church members need to understand the story is not theirs to tell."*



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support system. The person will likely need tremendous amounts of acceptance and empathy.

Depending on the age and developmental stage of the person involved, a wide variety of difficult emotions or behaviors may result from the abuse. Small children often have outbursts of anger or cry easily. Older children or teenagers may harm themselves or behave in ways that seem to make the situation worse.

Other symptoms, no matter the age or stage of the survivor, can include depression, anxiety or self-harming

behaviors. Abuse survivors also are highly skilled in covering their hurt and pain. They may look fine on the outside, but this could be a coping method. Once a survivor decides to come forward, they need the support necessary to deal with any emotions or memories they have been holding secret.

Being admonished to "get it together," "get over it" or "just move on" is not helpful and can cause the person to feel victimized all over again. Messages of love and support that communicate the person is not alone and is heard, valued and cared for are vital.

Outside of reporting the situation to authorities, church members need to understand the story is not theirs to tell. If it did not happen to you, avoid any

temptation to talk about it with others.

It is important for survivors to share their story in an environment where they are comfortable and feel safe.

### Ownership

For those close to the person affected, avoid asking lots of questions. Anyone who has been through a disclosure, report, forensic interview and investigation has been asked plenty of questions. What survivors need from those closest to them is something along the lines of "I'm here for you if you want to talk." They need ownership of their story, and they need control over who they talk with about it. Knowing they are loved and supported is the most important thing to help them begin their journey toward healing.

## Health. Hope. Healing.

### Children's Hospital Intervention & Prevention Services (CHIPS Center)

promotes health and healing for those affected by suspected child abuse and neglect. Staffed by licensed professional counselors, doctors, licensed social workers and sexual assault nurse examiners, the CHIPS Center is an outpatient clinic where children who have experienced suspected abuse, and their families impacted by suspected abuse, can come for support, hope and healing.



ChildrensAL.org/chips

**"Anyone who has been DEEPLY WOUNDED knows the IMPORTANCE of having a ROBUST SUPPORT SYSTEM."**



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**FEATURING** *Gary Permenter and the Marc Lewis Band*

*Visit [YMLink.org/calendar](http://YMLink.org/calendar) for details*



Jordan and Kristi Kinard adopted 4 children from Brazil in 2020. The Kinard siblings were 10, 9, 7 and 5 at the time of their adoption.

# Not yet home



Photo courtesy of Herbie Newell/Lifeline Children's Services

## Parents, siblings pray for children, decision-makers to act on adoptions

*(continued from page 1)* shut down all intercountry adoptions from Ukraine," said Chelsea Sobolik, director of public policy for the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. "[Russia] closed adoptions from Crimea when they took over there. There are families throughout the U.S. that have been matched with their kids, families who were supposed to travel recently. "We are working with the State Department and with

Congress to ensure that intercountry adoption remains a priority for the U.S. in ongoing discussions," Sobolik said, "and that Russia will allow intercountry adoptions to continue. We are working with a lot of coalition partners toward that end."

### The vulnerable

"In times of war, the people who suffer most are vulnerable people, especially vulnerable children. It's something we are highlighting with the administration."

But in China the time frame remains unknown due to the pandemic.

China's borders are closed, prohibiting travel for families to finalize adoptions and bring home their children, Newell explained, and many families have now waited two years longer than the initial two years they were expecting.

"COVID-19 has brought us many challenges," Chris Mills reflected. "China is seeking to take the best care

they can of our children in orphan care so they have closed the country to adoption travel. In a pre-COVID world, we would have possibly traveled by the end of 2020. We have been waiting since mid-2020 to travel and are not sure when that will be."

Mills said that though the orphanage provides good care for the child who waits for them, nothing can replace the medical care and one-on-one attention and love he will receive in their home.

Overcoming emotional hurdles has been the greatest challenge, for them as parents and for their biological children who long for their sibling to join them, he said.

### 'Emotional element'

"There are constant reminders of our child not being home," Mills said. "While we find great encouragement in questions from others about updates, there's an emotional element in

knowing there's little we can do. We wait and pray knowing that we will do whatever it takes to travel, hoping that day comes soon."

### Communication

Newell said Lifeline is "encouraging families to pray for open lines of communication between the U.S. and China so that helpful, solution-minded conversations can happen regarding families being able to enter China."

"We are currently communicating with officials on both sides regarding the importance of the waiting children being allowed to join the families that are so patiently pursuing them," he said. "Our ministry is also encouraging families to share their stories, giving a voice to waiting children."

"Most importantly, we are praying for the Lord to move on the hearts of decision-makers to act in the favor of these precious, waiting children."

***"In times of war, the people who suffer most are vulnerable people, especially vulnerable children. It's something we are highlighting with the administration."***

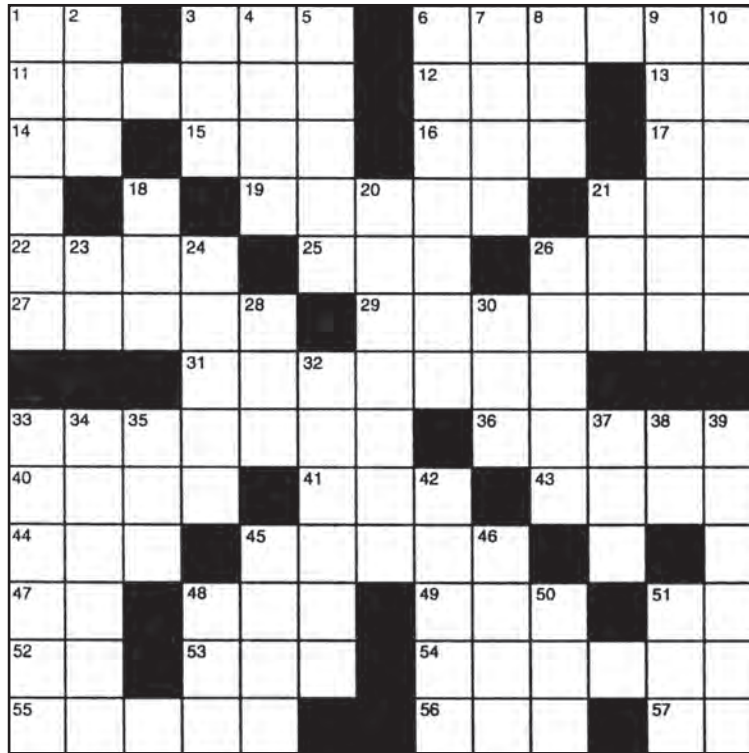
**Chelsea Sobolik**  
director of public policy  
Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

Check out the Through-the-Bible Adult Study Guide for your KJV only discipleship needs at [bogardpress.org](http://bogardpress.org)

# CHRISTIAN CROSSWORD

## ACROSS

1. Yes. (Spanish)
3. Hit sharply.
6. The promise made of none \_\_\_\_\_. (Rom. 4:14)
11. I \_\_\_\_ Thee by God, that Thou torment me not. (Mark 5:7)
12. Chinese pagoda.
13. Howl, O Heshbon, for \_\_\_\_\_ is spoiled. (Jer. 49:3)
14. French article.
15. With. (German)
16. 60 minutes. (pl.; abbr.)
17. Sierra Leone. (abbr.)
19. The angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a \_\_\_\_\_. (Matt. 1:20)
21. Ga. capital. (abbr.)
22. Frog's kin.
25. No room for them in the \_\_\_\_\_. (Luke 2:7)
26. Heap.
27. A woman that hath a familiar spirit at \_\_\_\_\_. (1 Sam. 28:7)
29. Who made Me a judge or a \_\_\_\_\_ over you? (Luke 12:14)
31. In the \_\_\_\_\_ (pl.) of the book it is written of Me. (Heb. 10:7)
33. Dip thy morsel in the \_\_\_\_\_. (Ruth 2:14)
36. The name of the Lord is a strong \_\_\_\_\_. (Prov. 18:10)
40. \_\_\_\_\_, which was the son of Seth. (Luke 3:38)
41. The 13th letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
43. If ye shall ask any thing in My \_\_\_\_\_, I will do it. (John 14:14)
44. Serving. (abbr.)
45. So Hiram gave Solomon \_\_\_\_\_ trees. (1 Kings 5:10)
47. Continent. (abbr.)
48. Light brown.
49. God, which hath not turned away my prayer, \_\_\_\_\_ His mercy from me. (Ps. 66:20)
51. Symbol for gold.
52. The children of Gad called the altar \_\_\_\_\_.



By Janet W. Adkins Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

53. How terrible \_\_\_\_\_ Thou in Thy works! (Ps. 66:3)
  54. Watching thereunto with all ... supplication for all \_\_\_\_\_. (Eph. 6:18)
  55. So he that getteth riches ... shall \_\_\_\_\_ them. (Jer. 17:11)
  56. \_\_\_\_\_ (Kookie) Byrnes.
  57. Shoe width.
- ## DOWN
1. All the saints \_\_\_\_\_ you. (2 Cor. 13:13)
  2. Chemical suffix.
  3. Alcoholic drink.
  4. Dry.
  5. Lab culture dish.
  6. The month \_\_\_\_\_, which is the seventh month. (1 Kings 8:2)
  7. They ... went their ways, one to his \_\_\_\_\_, another to his merchandise. (Matt. 22:5)
  8. Foreign Agricultural Service. (abbr.)
  9. He ... entered into the \_\_\_\_\_, and told Paul. (Acts 23:16)
  10. Cain was a \_\_\_\_\_ of the ground. (Gen. 4:2)
  18. He feigned himself \_\_\_\_\_ in their hands. (1 Sam. 21:13)
  20. Who for the joy that \_\_\_\_\_ was set before Him \_\_\_\_\_ the cross. (Heb. 12:2)
  21. \_\_\_\_\_ and abet.
  23. Poti-pherah priest of \_\_\_\_\_. (Gen. 41:45)
  24. The fourth part of a cab of \_\_\_\_\_ dung. (2 Kings 6:25)
  28. Receipt of goods. (abbr.)
  30. Animal doctor.
  32. That ye shall weep and \_\_\_\_\_. (John 16:20)
  33. Giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker \_\_\_\_\_. (1 Pet. 3:7)
  34. Whom Thou wouldst not let Israel \_\_\_\_\_. (2 Chron. 20:10)
  35. Egg drink.
  37. And My wrath shall \_\_\_\_\_ hot. (Ex. 22:24)
  38. Printer's measure.
  39. Because they \_\_\_\_\_ to do judgment. (Prov. 21:7)
  42. Minister's residence.
  45. Lord dost Thou not \_\_\_\_\_? (Luke 10:40)
  46. Whither have ye made a \_\_\_\_\_ today? (1 Sam. 27:10)
  48. The 23rd letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
  50. I will \_\_\_\_\_ evil beasts out of the land. (Lev. 26:6)
  51. Did eat.

# TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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## CHURCH POSITIONS

### SENIOR PASTOR

Shiloh Baptist Church, Hartford, Ala., is searching for a full-time pastor. Please mail resumés to: Shiloh Baptist Church, P.O. Box 326, Hartford, AL 36344 or by email to: SBCHSearch@gmail.com.

### PASTOR

First Baptist Church of Florala, Ala., is seeking a full-time pastor. Send resumés to: 23593 Fifth Avenue, Florala, AL 36442 or email resumés to: fbcfloralapsc@yahoo.com.

### MISSIONS/DISCIPLESHIP 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 to submit resumés by April 15.

### MINISTER OF MUSIC

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

### STUDENT PASTOR

Siluria Baptist Church is seeking a part-time student minister responsible for Bible teaching on Wednesday nights, worship participation on Sunday mornings and planning and execution of student activities in concert with the student ministry team. Send resumé to: 10696 Highway 119 South, Alabaster, AL 35007. Church website is Siluriabaptist.com.

### CHILDREN'S MINISTRY DIRECTOR & BIVOCATIONAL YOUTH MINISTER

Macedonia Baptist Church in the Coats Bend community of Gadsden, Ala., is prayerfully seeking a children's ministry director and a bivocational youth minister. Please send resumés and/or questions to: Ken Blakney at ktblakney@yahoo.com.

### BIVOCATIONAL CHILDREN'S MINISTER

Government Street Baptist Church, Mobile, Ala., is prayerfully seeking a bivocational children's minister.

Applicants should subscribe to the Baptist Faith & Message. Please send resumé to: governmentstreetbaptist@gmail.com.

### 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: cmcsc@ehbc.church.

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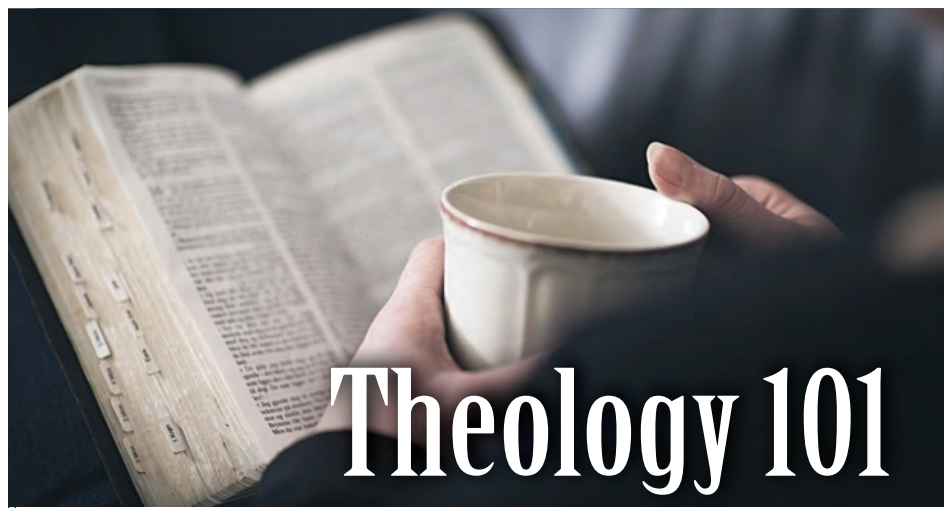
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# Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

## The People of God

### God's Field

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.  
The Alabama Baptist

For several weeks, Theology 101 has been considering the Church as God's people by pondering some of the images or analogies in the Bible. Among those already explored have been the Church as the bride of Christ and the Church as God's building.

This week we take up yet another — the Church as God's field, as declared in 1 Corinthians 3:9: "You are God's field." This declaration is a reminder the Church belongs to God.

Church was, and is, God's idea for His children to experience fellowship with one another on earth as preparation for an eternity of fellowship in heaven.

Since the Church, both universally and locally, belongs to God, those who work in His field are His servants. Church workers do not all possess the same gifts, talents or functions. Paul termed himself a planter and called Apollos a waterer (1 Cor. 3:6). Both were necessary for the growth of God's field.

We do well to express gratitude to church leaders and workers who demonstrate faithfulness and effectiveness. While appropriate praise for workers in God's field has its place, comparisons between church leaders does not. However prominent or visible one's service in the church, all will be judged according to faithfulness rather than visible fruitfulness. Whatever our abilities or functions, we are all God's

field hands, whether clergy or layperson.

Furthermore, when every member has made his or her contribution to the work by using their gifts and seizing their opportunities, we all do well to remember only God causes the growth.

Church growth in all its aspects is due to God's presence through His Spirit gifting, enabling and working through His servants. All praise and exaltation rightfully belong to the Giver of the increase, not to the servants who tend the field.

#### Only God can gauge

When the day is done or the harvest is completed, the owner of the field disburses wages to the field hands. God alone can accurately gauge how faithfully each worker has labored in light of that worker's giftedness to serve in the Church. "Each will receive his wages according to his labor" (1 Cor. 3:8).

The most important issue is not the particular task each of us performs. Rather, the important concern is the degree of faithfulness with which we labor at whatever we do in God's field in relation to our opportunities or assignments.

*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.*



# ROTC cadet considers Army his 'missions field'

By Molly Grace Watkins  
University of Mobile

I see the military as my missions field," says Michael Wenzel, a senior at the University of Mobile and recipient of the prestigious national ROTC George C. Marshall Award.

A kinesiology major in the School of Health and Sports Science with a minor in military science, Wenzel will be commissioned upon graduation in May with the rank of second lieutenant in the U.S. Army. Wenzel begins his 10-year commitment in the aviation branch, where he will train to fly Army helicopters.

The George C. Marshall Award, first given in 1978, goes to the top cadet of the 273 ROTC programs across the nation.

According to his professor of military science, Lt. Col. Jared Sundahl, Wenzel received this award "not only because of how he excels as a scholar, athlete and leader, but also because he has extreme dedication, which goes a long way for a cadet."

#### Incredible honor

Wenzel is also a Distinguished Military Graduate, an honor given to the Top 10% of the 5,000 senior cadets across the nation.

The George C. Marshall Award is an incredible honor for any cadet to receive.

"This award culminates all of the

aspects of what the cadet has done throughout his four years. During that time, they train you and test you in the attributes and competencies of what an officer should look like in the army," Wenzel said.

#### 'A different plan'

As a freshman in college, Wenzel came to the University of Mobile focused solely on playing soccer, remaining close to home and being involved in ROTC.

However, the Lord had a very different plan.

Looking back, Wenzel said that even though he was not saved when he arrived on campus, "the Lord was definitely working in my life in so many ways through all of the opportunities that were given to me."

Through the church community around UM and friends who were invested in his spiritual walk with the Lord, Wenzel came to faith in Jesus during his first semester.

"The faculty and my friends were openly spreading the gospel with me, and my curiosity and interests shifted into wanting to understand more about this life-changing decision," he said.

In the coming years, Wenzel is looking forward to being a light and a leader to everyone he encounters, in the Army aviation branch and beyond.

"I want to make the most of that in every way that I can."



Photo courtesy of University of Mobile  
University of Mobile senior Michael Wenzel is the recipient of the prestigious national ROTC George C. Marshall Award, which is given to the top cadet from the 273 ROTC programs across the nation.



## Thursday, April 28, 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. First Baptist Church, Trussville

**LIFT!** is designed to help us learn more about creative worship through both participation and “how-to” sessions focused on the planning and implementation of worship. This will be a great team-building opportunity for church staffs and worship teams to attend together.

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Pastor, First Baptist Church,  
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State Missionary, State Board of Missions  
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- ♪ Instrument and Vocal Mixing 101

For more information and to register, visit [alsbom.org/lift](http://alsbom.org/lift). Lunch will be provided. Questions? Contact Karen Gosselin, [kgosselin@alsbom.org](mailto:kgosselin@alsbom.org), (334) 613-2318.



# Worship Resources

Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

“Delight yourself in the Almighty and lift up your face to God.” Job 22:26 (CSB)

# Staff build lasting connections, spiritual life

By **Carrie B. McWhorter**  
The Alabama Baptist

Each summer, dozens of high school and college students join Resident Summer Staff at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega, but one couple found a lasting connection while working there.

Michael and Kelsey (O’Neal) Kulick met while serving as Resident Summer Staff in 2018. Both were working as lifeguards and began dating before the summer ended.

Engagement and wedding planning followed, and Kelsey added a surprise.

Because Michael’s family includes several hearing-impaired individuals, Kelsey learned her vows in American Sign Language and signed them as

she spoke them to Michael at the wedding.

Kelsey worked with Michael’s aunt, who recorded herself signing Kelsey’s vows. Kelsey used the videos to practice in the weeks leading up to the wedding.

“Nobody knew about it except me, [Michael’s] aunt, the pastor and the videographer,” Kelsey said.

Michael said his parents thought the gesture was “super sweet.”

“They kept going on and on and on about how special

Kelsey is and how special that moment was for them,” he said.

Other people were moved by the moment as well. The video

of Kelsey signing her vows went viral, getting more than 10 million views and more than 2 million likes on social media, which led to the



Photo by Blaire Butler/Shocco Springs

Resident Summer Staff at Shocco Springs enjoy recreation, Bible study and other activities in addition to their work in food, lodging and recreation services on campus.

couple appearing on Good Morning America.

“We never thought it would blow up like that, but we think it’s so great that we get to be a part of the ‘feel good’ news being shared,” Kelsey said.

The couple credits their time at Shocco for more than just the beginning of

their relationship.

“The motto that summer was to ‘build the foundation,’” Kelsey said.

## A solid foundation

“That meant we needed to take that time to build up a friendship and build up a good foundation for a future relationship. We got to

experience Christ through the loving relationships we saw in full-time staff members and through the nature of Shocco itself. We made lifelong friends who we still hang out with every chance we get.”

The Kulicks’ story is one of hundreds shared by students who have had life-changing experiences and formed lasting friendships as part of Resident Summer Staff at Shocco.

Summer staff members serve a critical role as Shocco hosts more than 20,000 people each summer for camps, church retreats and nonprofit corporate events.

Summer staffers work in food and lodging services, recreation and guest relations.

They receive a salary for their work, as well as free lodging and meals. Staff also have an opportunity to go to Ecuador on a missions trip.

**More information on Resident Summer Staff at Shocco is available at [shocco.org/summerstaff](http://shocco.org/summerstaff).**



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# SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For April 10

## Explore the Bible

By Ben Stubblefield

Visiting assistant professor of Christian studies, University of Mobile



### PROMISED 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

Morticians can only do so much. I don't blame them for it, but I've yet to see a body that looks in death just like it did in life.

This highlights the mixed emotions I have every time I preside over a funeral service, and it captures the struggle over what the Christian sees and what the Christian knows. That is our friend in the casket, but it's not really the person we knew.

When the deceased is a Christian, he or she will be buried, and a headstone will list a name, a date of death and perhaps other information, but the person is really not resting there.

The Christian is more alive in death than he or she ever has been. We who are left behind are sad, crushed and lonely, but we are also jubilant, triumphant and hopeful.

Paul wades into the theology of death and resurrection in our passage this week because his friends are sad and confused about it. They're burying their church family members, believing these deceased loved ones have been excluded from the coming Kingdom.

### Hope (13–14)

Scholars debate the exact nature of the errant theology bothering the Thessalonians, but it's clear they have come to think dead Christians will be left out of the new heavens and the new earth.

Paul informs them that God has not forgotten the dead in Christ. In fact, they are "with Him" and have "fallen asleep in Jesus."

I'm so glad our hope doesn't die with us, aren't you? The place we will one day belong isn't a few square feet in a cemetery. Instead, we have a place in glory, so Paul can say: "to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).

### Return (15–16)

Not only has God not forgotten about the dead in Christ, He's going to raise them in their order of importance.

All those who've gone through

the crucible of death get up-graded to priority seating — they are the first ones on the Lord's agenda.

It's worth pointing out that the sounds associated with the Lord's coming are familiar to many passages in the Old Testament.

God's theophany at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19), the summons for the exiles to come back to Jerusalem (Isa. 27:13) and the days of final salvation (Zech. 9:14) all include the same sounds mentioned here. Most likely, Paul has those passages in mind and also Jesus' teaching that the Son of Man will send his angels with a "loud trumpet call" (Matt. 24:31).

"The Lord Himself will descend from heaven" — no ambassador, no apostle, no angel. Paul wants the church to know that the Lord, Who has promised victory over death, is coming Himself to make sure that all of His own receive it. What a day of rejoicing that will be!

### Reunion (17–18)

Paul's words bring tremendous comfort throughout verses 13–16, but two of the most encouraging points he makes are in verse 17. First, we, the dead and the living in Christ, will all one day be "together."

There will be a great reunion at the appearance of our Lord. And all those who have gone before us will be with us again.

Second, Paul writes, "We shall always be with the Lord." I bet you have had people in your life that come and go. People move, die, stop calling, stop coming by. For all kinds of reasons, people are in and out of our lives. Goodbyes are just sad.

But nothing will separate us from the Lord. Death, time and distance are not obstacles for His friendship. And He guarantees it with the most extraordinary of promises: "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5).

Paul also assures readers of this truth in verse 17: "So we will always be with the Lord."

## Bible Studies for Life

By Will Kynes

Associate professor of biblical studies, Samford University



### A LIFE OF VICTORY John 16:19–22, 27–33

Delayed gratification is the willingness to endure some loss or sacrifice some benefit in the present, to receive a greater benefit in the future.

It requires self-control, foresight and, more than anything, faith. You must have a clear conception of what the future benefit will be and believe firmly that your current sacrifices will achieve it, or you will not endure those sacrifices to gain that end.

Delayed gratification is not easy because the present can feel more real than the future — that piece of cake on the plate in front of you entices in a way that a lower number on the scale and the health benefits that come with it cannot. Yet the only way to reach that ultimately greater pleasure is to resist the temptation now, to endure until the end.

But — and this is the important thing to remember if you are going to succeed — giving up smaller joys now for greater joys later is only an apparent sacrifice, not a real one. The later benefits outweigh the smaller benefits sacrificed to achieve it.

In this passage, as Jesus prepares to depart from the disciples, He encourages them to embrace delayed gratification and to have faith the struggles they endure after His departure will lead to an overcoming joy.

### Jesus' death causes us sorrow, but His resurrection brings us joy. (19–22)

To encourage the disciples to endure the grief they will experience at His death, Jesus points to childbirth as a powerful example of delayed gratification.

Just like the joy of a new child washes away the memories of the pain required to bring that life into the world, so the disciples will rejoice at seeing their Savior again. They must maintain hope to sustain them through their mourning.

Their anguish will also give birth to new life.

### Our victory rests in Jesus, the One who came from God. (27–30)

But suffering and sacrifice test hope and can weaken resolve. Even Peter struggles to persevere in his commitment after Jesus is arrested, denying Him three times (18:17, 25–27).

However, Jesus offers the disciples a firm foundation for their confidence in Him: He has come from the Father. Here, they affirm their belief in this fundamental truth.

### We can live in peace and courage because of our victory in Christ. (31–33)

Jesus, however, warns that their faith will soon be tested. They will be scattered and leave Him alone. Yet Jesus draws His own hope from the fact that, united with the Father, He is never alone (v. 32).

Jesus offers that same rock-solid hope to all who trust in Him, which can empower the endurance of any suffering.

As Paul writes, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

This hope provides a peace that can overcome the world's inevitable troubles because Jesus, through His obedience, death and resurrection, has overcome the world.

"Take heart!" Jesus says. When you are tempted to give up, to despair, to look for life elsewhere, take heart. "He who did not withhold His own Son, but gave Him up for all of us, will He not with Him also give us everything else?" (Rom. 8:32).

United with Jesus, we, as His disciples, can endure the hardships that inevitably come with the life of faith: "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword?" (Rom. 8:35). No. Through Christ's love "we are more than conquerors" (Rom. 8:37).

# MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs  
The Alabama Baptist

## Author steers readers toward biblical model of celebration

**W**hat if hope only leads to disappointment again? What if it's actually going to be OK?"

These two questions led to a life-changing quest for joy beyond circumstances for Nicole Zasowski, marriage and family therapist and author of "What If It's Wonderful? Release Your Fears, Choose Joy, and Find the Courage to Celebrate."

She asked the first question of a friend who knew of her many pregnancy tests, miscarriages and foundering hope. The second was on a plaque at the friend's home. Zasowski noticed it for the first time during the conversation.

"Tears trailed down my face, unbidden. I chewed the inside of my cheek as I thought hard about this question, as if the cute wooden sign actually expected an answer. The stories I had been telling myself — the stories that attempted to warn me that joy is dangerous and would leave me hurt — were draining the delight out of my days," Zasowski writes.

Her new book was born out of a season of change, loss, heartache and longing, Zasowski told The Alabama Baptist. Moving from Los



Photo courtesy of Meshali Mitchell

NICOLE ZASOWSKI

Angeles to Connecticut, she left the safety of familiarity, not realizing her faith had been propped up by pleasing others and her identity had revolved around success and hard work.

### Season of change

"When you go through something painful, whether it's a tangible loss such as the death of a loved one, or a betrayal or a season of waiting, there's the loss itself. But then there's the cost," Zasowski said. "The cost is the impact to your identity and sense of safety."

Due to the season of loss, joy and hope were now accompanied by fear. A positive pregnancy test was immediately followed by dread of a possible miscarriage, which led to no longer dreaming of good outcomes and no longer celebrating what God was doing.

"I did pray for miracles, but I prepared to mourn," Zasowski remembered. "I used pessimism and cynicism as my guards against disappointment. I practiced disap-

pointment and rehearsed disaster in an attempt to protect myself from what I thought was inevitable pain."

She said she awoke one day to realize not only had she been perpetually grieving her physical losses, but also the loss of hope. She decided she didn't want to miss out on her "beautiful, God-given life" because she was too "busy preparing for the worst."

Celebration often is mistakenly rooted in circumstances, Zasowski noted, adding she realized "we are not practicing a biblical model of celebration. We are not treating it as a practice; we're treating it as a reward."

"Celebration is essential to the character of Christ and central to His mission," she asserted. "Often, we think of celebration as something that takes us away from God. It's actually an avenue of connecting with Him. It's absolutely central to why He came and essential to His character. We don't often think of Jesus in the center of our joy."

Zasowski pointed to Old Testament feasts and festivals as a biblical model of celebrating Who God is and what He has done, no matter the circumstances.

"What I love about them is that they occurred in rhythm, not as a reaction," she said. "We have made our definition of celebration to be a reaction to some preferred outcome. But their celebration was practiced in rhythm."

"They didn't celebrate because they were in the mood to do so or because they had accomplished something big or all the work was done," Zasowski noted. "They celebrated because it was time to do

so. That kept their celebration anchored in remembering God's faithfulness versus simply considering it a reward for their own.

"It encourages me to make it a practice that cultivates joy rather than waiting for it to be a reward for some sort of circumstantial outcome."

### Sharing the joy

Telling others about the positives in life doubles the joy brought by gratitude alone, Zasowski asserted, though there often is a reluctance to share.

"I have realized that my hesitancy to celebrate is a sign that I've made it about me," she explained. "If I know the gifts that God has put inside me are purely from Him and He has made me in a way to serve Him through the opportunities He's given me, and if I know that it's all grace and it's all Him, I can celebrate freely. Because this is not about me — this is grace and a gift."

"I think of David coming in and bringing the Ark of Covenant in and he is just going wild with embodied celebration — just dancing all over the place," Zasowski related. "King Saul's daughter, Michal, is looking upon him with disgust — but David isn't drawing attention to himself. He understands that he has been the recipient of grace."

"Isn't that at the heart of worship — a response to God's grace in our lives?"

"What If It's Wonderful?" is available at Amazon and other book retailers. A free guide to help navigate personal "What if ...?" questions can be downloaded at nicolezasowski.com.



### 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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