

The Alabama Baptist

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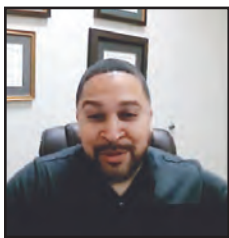
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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

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Intentional effort

Heritage Baptist makes historic move with minister of one mile missions

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

On May 22, Heritage Baptist Church in Montgomery made a historic step toward reaching their neighbors. They called Frederick L. Harris Sr. to be their minister of one mile missions.

“We want to become a church that looks more like our neighborhood, and we want to become a church that looks more like heaven,” Pastor Teman Knight told the congregation during the Sunday morning service. “To do that, there are people around us who need to be reached with the gospel. We have an opportunity today to make a statement about how serious we are about doing that.”

A while back, Heritage Baptist declared the one-mile radius around the church as its missions field. It reached out to the schools and the businesses but hadn’t made contact house to house yet.

Reflecting community

That was a goal for Knight. He and the church wanted the one-mile area to know the church loves them. They also wanted their church, which is predominantly white, to reflect their neighborhood, which is home to many African American families.

Neal Hughes, director of



Photo by Reid Foster/The Alabama Baptist

Teman Knight, pastor of Heritage Baptist Church in Montgomery, prays over Frederick L. Harris Sr., the church’s new minister of one mile missions, during the Sunday service May 22.

missions for Montgomery Baptist Association and a Heritage member, said Knight asked him if he knew anyone who could help lead that effort, and Hughes immediately thought of Harris.

“Frederick is a wonderful godly brother God brought into the Southern Baptist life some years ago,” Hughes said. “He had the desire to start a Southern Baptist church and be a part of a family that believed

in missions to serve across the street and around the world.”

Harris left Abraham Missionary Baptist Church “in good hands” after 18 years, Hughes

said, then started Bread of Life Temple in 2019. From its beginning, Bread of Life set out to love the community by providing food, clothing and COVID-19 vaccines and meeting other needs.

“In doing so, they planted gospel seeds, and he became very actively involved in our association and became a friend to Teman and the church family at large,” Hughes said.

“Frederick has a great heart and his new role is not only going to accentuate a real intentional deliberate effort to dig deeper into our one mile, but also they are going

to start an internship eventually where they will train other African American pastors to plant churches and to become associate pastors of churches who are looking to do this in a revitalizational way.”

‘Loving church’

Harris said ministry is his passion, and he did a lot of research as he considered the call to come to Heritage.

“People told me, ‘When you come here, you’re going to experience a loving church, a church that’s serious about missions, a church that’s ready to reach that one mile. You’re going to experience a church that wants to look like Christ,’” he said. “I’ve seen that since I’ve been here.”

To watch the special report on One Mile Missions at Heritage Baptist Church, visit tabonline.org/One-Mile-Missions.

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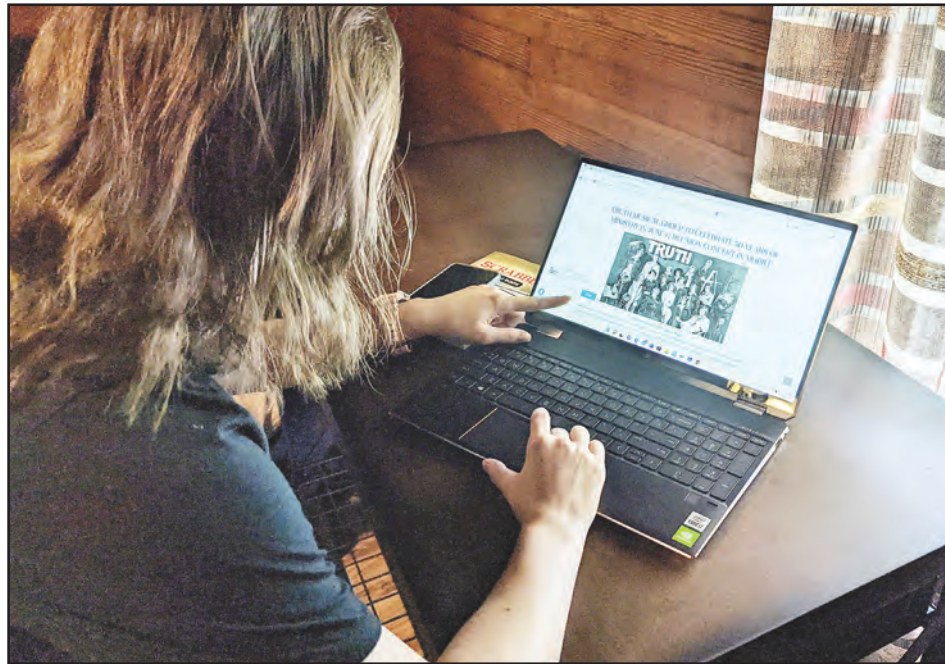


Photo by Carrie Brown McWhorter/The Alabama Baptist

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The Alabama Baptist has a new notifications feature that allows you to stay up-to-date.

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4. In most browsers, a dialog box will pop up in the top left cor-

ner. Click "Allow" there as well. That's it! You've just enabled desktop notifications for TAB.

You will see notifications occasionally appear on your screen with the latest news from The Alabama Baptist.

You can click on the bell on the website to see any notifications, mark them as read or clear all notifications.

The process is very similar on mobile devices, though no bell will pop up when you go to our homepage.

TAB notifications currently are available for Android and desktop devices and soon will be available for iOS devices.

Even after the annual meeting is over, TAB notifications will

continue, providing you with the latest news from Alabama Baptist life and other stories of interest. (James Hammack)



screenshot

When you access the site on your mobile device, you will be asked if you want to receive notifications. Choose "Allow." Need help? Give us a call at 205-870-4720.

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 15.



RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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

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We need each other's prayers and encouragement now more than ever

As you pull this week's issue out of the mailbox or click on the PDF in your inbox, our team is putting the final touches on coverage plans for the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting in Anaheim.

We anticipate having plenty of stories to share during the week and coming out of the meeting.

Be sure to follow us online at thealabamabaptist.org, thebaptistpaper.org and all our social media channels for complete coverage beginning June 12.

As for the moment, I've struggled with what to share going into the meeting.

Overwhelmed would be an understatement describing all who are attempting to process and respond to the report released by the SBC Sexual Abuse Task Force on May 22.

And when the task force released its list of suggestions and official recommendations June 1 (see story, page 12), the conversations, reviews and meetings ramped up another level.

SBC leaders, state convention executive directors, associational leaders, pastors, church staff members and national entity heads continue to release public statements and expressions of lament.

Alabama Baptist convention leaders also walked through the list of recommended steps for state conventions to consider and outlined their response June 2 (see story, page 8).

We have so many more stories to develop and explain related to the sexual abuse investigation, and we are dropping in a variety of viewpoints online and on our Your Voice spreads each week.

Do be sure to check out the stories on page 13 regarding facts being confused related to two of our Alabama Baptist churches and the alleged abuser list made public May 26.

And as we attempt to dig deeper into all that's happening

in SBC life, our team also senses the heaviness that comes with reporting tragedies like the May 14 shooting in a supermarket in Buffalo, New York, that killed 10; the May 24 school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, that killed 19 students and two teachers; and the June 1 shooting at a medical center that killed four people.

And just hours before going to press with this issue we learned of the June 2 deadly shooting in Ames, Iowa. Cornerstone Church is grieving after a gunman fatally shot two young women and then himself in the church parking lot.

"We're gathered here to pray, to try to do something in front of God that lets our hearts keep

up to something we can't quite comprehend," Cornerstone pastor Mark Vance said during a prayer gathering June 3.

The two young women killed — Eden Mariah Montag, 22, and Vivian Renee Flores, 21 — were Iowa State University students and church members. They were attending the first week of the church's summer collegiate ministry gathering.

The shooter previously had been arrested for alleged harassment of Montag and had been issued a restraining order.

Wow, does the darkness seem to be intensifying. We all need each other's prayers and encouragement now more than ever.

Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions offering 1,000 churches financial assistance with abuse training

During their May 20 quarterly board meeting, trustees of the State Board of Missions approved allocating \$200,000 to help Alabama Baptist churches with abuse training and prevention through the SBOM's partnership with MinistrySafe.

The first 1,000 churches to sign up through the website at ministrysafes.com are eligible for a \$200 scholarship, which will cover most of the first year's fee for training and resourcing. Use

the coupon code "alsbom" when signing up.

"We highly encourage churches to take this opportunity to have their people trained for the protection of the vulnerable and for the prevention of abuse," said Rick Lance, SBOM executive director. "This commitment is to pay \$200 for the first year of participation with MinistrySafe.

"The scholarship offsets the major part of the annual cost of \$250. This is one of the many tangible ways your State Board of Missions is

seeking to resource churches."

To read more about how state missionaries have been offering resources to churches for many years in the area of abuse prevention and training as well as assistance if a situation occurs, see page 8.

To access the resources available through SBOM, visit tabonline.org/safe and to access links to additional helps visit tabonline.org/trauma-help. (Jennifer Davis Rash)

Your Voice



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

How should Baptists and Christians respond to the SBC Task Force's report?

By Pastor Griffin Gulledge
Madison Baptist Church in Madison, Georgia

As a young boy growing up in Southern Baptist churches, I was taught to save my pennies to give each Christmas and Easter to missions offerings named to honor two Baptist women, Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong. Those offerings are a small testimony to the beauty of our convention.

Sixteen million Southern Baptists stand together on the inerrancy of God's word while setting aside other differences to collectively fund the largest missionary sending agency in the history of Christianity, church planting in North America and six of the largest seminaries in the world. These are all sources of pride and part of what it meant to be a Southern Baptist.

But after the long-awaited Guidepost Solutions report on the mishandling of sexual abuse by the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee, being Southern Baptist now means something different.

What now?

Today Southern Baptists are feeling many things: grief, pain, disgust, horror, shame and rage. In other words Southern Baptists are getting just a taste of what abuse victims have felt for decades as they suffered in silence, maligned and neglected by the ones who should have offered them help.

Online, men and women from SBC churches are clearly horrified at what they've read. What can we

do? Here are four recommendations for how Southern Baptists and all Christians can respond to this report.

1. Don't look away.

In moments like these, we're all tempted to say, "This doesn't pertain to me." We're tempted to ask, "Is that my problem?" It's an echo of the excuse spoken east of Eden: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9). The answer to that question was always yes.

So much mistreatment and abuse has happened because Baptists refused to look, refused to learn and refused to listen. Undoubtedly this is painful. But as light pours into a dark place, don't shut your eyes or refuse to see. Educate yourself on the plight of the abused. Read the report. Learn to help.

2. Don't downplay.

Some will be tempted to say, "This is just a few bad apples," or, "Most of that was in the past." Humility requires us to honestly admit we have no clue how much abuse continues now. This report, limited in scope, is the first word on abuse in our convention, not the last. More will come out.

A similar scandal destroyed the witness and reputation of the Roman Catholic Church. Page 58 of

the Guidepost Solutions report documents how Father Thomas Doyle wrote to SBC leaders in March 2007. He expressed his concerns that SBC leaders could be falling into some of the same patterns as Catholic leaders in not dealing with clergy sex abuse. He urged Southern Baptists to learn from Catholic mistakes by taking early action to implement structural reforms.

Sadly his warning was dismissed by SBC leaders. The priest responded that such reactions are "standard for people in church leadership positions, who tend to place the needs of the institution before their Christian obligations."

We cannot continue to dismiss warnings. We must learn humility and stop pretending this is overblown.

3. Don't be silent.

We must listen and learn. We must also speak up. A source of clear pain throughout the report is how often abuse victims stood alone as they fought for reforms. If we read this report and cannot find our voice, how are we any different from those in James 2:16 who say, "Be warmed and filled!" and then refuse to give food and clothing?

4. Don't walk away.

This last point is directed to my

Southern Baptist brothers and sisters rather than Christians at large. Many of you are likely ready to walk away at this point. But who are you walking away from? We now know that our leaders, our money and our institutions hurt people.

Can we say with a clear conscience, "I'm done"? At this moment when justice cries out, dare we walk away? This is the hour to speak up, to refuse to yield, to fight for the justice and mercy God requires of us. To walk away from the SBC now is to walk away from victims. To walk away now is to walk away from our responsibility.

The Guidepost report closes with important recommendations, all of which will receive serious consideration as SBC messengers prepare to meet for the 2022 Southern Baptist Convention in Anaheim.

At that meeting, the Sexual Abuse Task Force will be allotted time to bring these recommendations, and perhaps others, to the convention floor. My prayer is Baptists will live up to the inerrant Word we believe in and find the resolve to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord (Col. 1:10), no matter the cost.

God help us.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This article originally appeared at thegospel-coalition.org and is republished with permission. Griffin Gulledge is originally from Alabama and grew up at NorthPark Baptist Church in Trussville. He is a graduate of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in Birmingham and currently serves as pastor of Madison Baptist Church in Madison, Georgia.



GULLEDGE

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“Peace I leave with you. ... Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

JOHN 14:27

I came to faith in Christ in a Southern Baptist church, experienced my call to ministry in a SBC church and have served SBC churches for 30 years. ... Much work remains to be done in our convention, but I will not be one of those that abandons my denomination. I will remain a committed Southern Baptist because:

1. The Baptist Faith and Message is my confessional statement and represents an unwavering fidelity to the doctrines revealed in Scripture.

2. Southern Baptists are caring and compassionate people who respond to disasters like few others. ...

3. Southern Baptists are on the front lines in offering the highest quality theological training in the world.

4. Southern Baptists are missionary people. Through the gifts of the Cooperative Program, 3,597 international missionaries and 2,218 domestic missionaries are offering the hope of Christ to unreached people.

5. While the Guidepost Solutions report is sobering and heartbreaking, 99.9% of the SBC pastors I know are faithful, committed and gospel-centered people who love Jesus, love people and live with integrity.

Kevin Blackwell
via Facebook

Jesus recounted a story about a woman denied justice by a judge (Luke 18:1–8). She persisted in filing appeals until the perturbed judge finally answered her request. She pounded. He opened.

Headlines about my church denomination rocked foundations this week. For many years victims of sexual abuse at the hands of church leaders were denied justice. The wounded persisted — phone calls, letters, emails, face to face. They were ignored, vilified, given excuses, laughed at, or told to keep quiet. Sometimes [they were] patted on the head and told to get lost.

Finally, folks paid attention to the door pounding. Prime opportunities to acknowledge the hurt, institute safeguards and enact justice are on the horizon. No one can undo the pain caused. But we've got to do better. All of us. For the victims. For the church. For the Lord.

Darryl Wood
via Facebook

From the *Twitterverse*

@SamAllberry

Always remember:

1. Your identity is in Christ
2. Discipleship is hard
3. God's word is good
4. The Church is vital
5. Your future is glorious

@shane_pruitt78

We complain about prayer being removed from schools, but we're not even praying in our own homes.

Prepare your kids at home to be missionaries at school.

@philpnation

Disunity in church and distraction from God's mission often starts with a "me-first Churchianity" instead of a Jesus-first Christianity.

@TGC

J.I. Packer says Christians should repeat these six truths to themselves daily:

1. I am a child of God.

2. God is my Father.
3. Heaven is my home.
4. Every day is one day nearer.
5. My Savior is my Brother.
6. Every Christian is my brother, too.

@DustyMcLemore

"Faith is belief with legs on it. Everything we truly believe, we obey. Everything else is just religious talk." —@_cdixon

@trey_brunson

Lamenting — It shouldn't be this way in your world, God.

Repenting — It shouldn't be this way in my heart, God.

Both are necessary rhythms for living in a fallen world.

@mhenslee

... I have grieved and lamented over the SATF report. However, the pain in reading it does not remotely compare to the pain leading to it — and for that, I mourn.

We have much work to do.
We must listen.
We must respond.
Survivors, I'm sorry.
#sbc22 #sbcpc22

@BekahStoneking

One thing (and really, the only thing) giving me any sense of hope, any anchoring, any security is the unchanging, only-good, ever-good character of God. In a week where I'm certain about nothing, including my own life, I am certain about Jesus. And I'm so thankful for that.

@claysmith79

There are many issues facing the SBC. Always have been. But in this hour, there is no more pressing issue than working through the SATF report released last week. So many victims. So much shame. It is THE singular issue that needs to capture our attention. We must get this right.

Lamenting should not be neglected

By Carrie B. McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

Growing up, Mark Clifton said church was always a pretty positive place.

"We wanted to always be upbeat, always to be happy," he said in a recent "Mondays with Mark" podcast episode on Facebook. "Even sometimes now I feel like sometimes we always want this Sunday to be better than last Sunday, and boy, next Sunday is going to be even greater."

But recent events remind us that "life hurts a lot," said Clifton, senior director of replanting at the North American Mission Board.

A way to grieve

Lamenting is a way to "grieve with those who grieve and mourn with those who mourn. To say, 'God, I don't know why this is happening.'"

Scripture understands that feeling, he said.

"Much of the psalms is lamenting. Probably the most powerful lament in all of Scripture, in all history, was when our Lord on the cross cried out and said, 'My God, My God, Why has Thou forsaken Me?'"

The weight of daily struggles can be heavy, and lament is a natural response to pain, he said. "Lamenting forces us to turn to God and to quit trusting in ourselves, to quit trusting in the affirmation of people. It causes us to look to God, to look to Christ."

In lamenting, he said, it's OK to express your heart.

"We turn to God, and we lean into Him, and we complain to Him and we express to Him our need and what we desire," Clifton said. "And then we have to trust Him.

"He will work all of this together for His good and for His glory ... We may not know that now, but we'll know it someday."

‘God is on the throne’

Alabama missions team seeks to serve Ukrainian refugees; God opens door

By Shawn Hendricks
The Alabama Baptist

After her husband died two years ago, Susan Kirkland struggled with depression and finding God’s purpose for her life. But her focus shifted to others when the war between Russia and Ukraine erupted earlier this year.

Seeing the images and hearing the stories of millions of Ukrainian refugees pouring into neighboring countries searching for help and hope ignited a passion in Kirkland to find a way to help those in need.

“People are willing to write a check if asked,” Kirkland noted, “they’re willing to help, but I just felt a calling to go over, to actually do something in person.

“When this war broke out, there was just something about it that just captured my heart and broke it, just absolutely broke my heart.”

Joining the team

Within a couple of weeks after the war began, Kirkland, who lives in Huntsville, learned that Madis-

son Baptist Association was taking a team of Alabama Baptists to Romania to help refugees fleeing Ukraine. Kirkland contacted Barbara Glenn, a member of Whitesburg Baptist Church who was going on the trip with her husband, Tommy. For the past two decades, the Glenns have been leading teams and traveling back and forth to Romania to work with various ministry partners.

Helping locals

Kirkland, a member of Mayfair Church of Christ, joined the team of six people who traveled to Romania in late April.

Other team members from the Huntsville area who went on the trip were Will Faulkenberry, pastor of Mosaic City Church; Ron Lynch, church ministries director of Madison Association; and Dwight Sisk, a member of First Baptist Church Meridianville.

On the trip the team helped local churches and ministries with a variety of tasks that included distributing food, quilts and 2,000 gospel tracts. They also worked with a



Photo courtesy of Madison Baptist Association

The Madison Baptist Association team helps refugees fleeing Ukraine. Those pictured include (from left to right) Will Faulkenberry, Dwight Sisk, Susan Kirkland, Ron Lynch, local ministry partner Mia Mihai and Barbara and Tommy Glenn.

school to encourage orphans, refugee families, weary pastors and ministry partners struggling to find their way forward in the crisis.

Among these opportunities the Huntsville team found ways to serve, whether that involved sweeping floors, making crafts, sharing Bible stories in creative ways, stocking an apartment with furniture and food, crying and laughing together during meals and even setting up Hot Wheels racetracks to bring joy to traumatized children.

“I think I’m always amazed at how God will bring a team together and what can be accomplished and how things do come together for good,” said Barbara Glenn, who

also has volunteered as a missions mobilizer with the North American Mission Board and helped a pro-life ministry in Romania alongside her husband.

“I’ve always said if you really ever want to see God do His thing, you need to be involved in missions. That’s really the way to go.”

Ministering with Hot Wheels

Sisk, who teamed up with Kirkland and Barbara Glenn during the trip to minister to orphans in Sighisoara, Romania, found his own unique ministry through Hot Wheels cars.

In the late 90s, Sisk began helping with pinewood derby racing events with RA ministries in Alabama and Georgia. A few years later he became involved with National Fellowship of Raceway Ministries and working with pinewood derby and Hot Wheels racing at speedways and campgrounds around the nation and later with missions trips to Moldova and



Photo courtesy of Madison Baptist Association

Dwight Sisk sets up a Hot Wheels racetrack to bring joy to kids. For more than 20 years, Sisk has been ministering through various racing outreach efforts and with RA ministries. He channeled his love for cars, racing and NASCAR to help bring hope to orphaned children from Ukraine.

Honduras. And now in Ukraine, Sisk channeled his love for racing into helping bring hope to orphaned children, handing out hundreds of Hot Wheels cars and setting up races for the children to participate.

But he quickly learned hopelessness runs deep for so many Ukrainian orphans.

“I offered everyone a car, but some [of the orphans from Ukraine] wouldn’t take them,” said Sisk, noting that some children would just look down at the floor and shake their heads.

“They weren’t in their home country anymore, and to see the sadness in their eyes, that was the part that touched me the most.”

For these refugees and orphans, their homes and families are gone.

While some refugees are trying to rebuild their lives outside of Ukraine, many others are cautiously returning with little more than the clothes on their backs and whatever can be stuffed in a few pieces of luggage.

Crossing the border

For two days during the trip, Tommy Glenn, Faulkenberry and Lynch traveled for hours across the border into Ukraine to work alongside local pastors and ministry partners to help take food to displaced families and others.

Glenn recalled how different things were once the team crossed over the border into Ukraine. Just getting through border control could take hours.

“It struck me how when you cross the border, it’s like everything changed — even in the western part where they haven’t had any combat to my knowledge,” Glenn recalled. “Every gas station we passed pretty much didn’t have any fuel. Store shelves were empty.”

Faulkenberry, who helped plant Mosaic City Church, said he was struck by the number of refugees now returning to Ukraine because they have run out of money and resources.

Many, he added, are fearful of



Photo courtesy of Madison Baptist Association

The missions team with Madison Baptist Association ministers to orphans and refugees in Romania. While some are trying to rebuild their lives outside of Ukraine, many others are cautiously returning with little more than the clothes on their backs.

what returning to a war-torn country will look like for their families.

Some were told that Russian soldiers have left deadly traps in houses, gardens and even in children’s toys.

Many pastors and ministry leaders in Romania and Ukraine have grown weary from serving refugees and are struggling to keep up with the daily grind, Faulkenberry noted.

“They have been doing this for so long, serving three hot meals a day, working tirelessly,” he said.

He added, “Resources are limited. The supply chains have been broken, so trying to get resources where they need to be is hard.” But there also are signs of “hope and joy,” Lynch said.

Lynch came away inspired by the resilience of the pastors and families he met.

Daily ministry

Many leaders are taking care of their families and going about their daily ministry responsibilities while also hosting refugee families in their homes.

But in the midst of the crisis, Lynch noted, young Ukrainian teenagers who had been helping serve their communities have been

turning their lives over to Christ.

“We were talking to pastors, and they have seen a number of Ukrainian teenagers saved during the weeks they [were] there,” he said.

“When [I] go on a missions trip, I’m blessed more than I bless them.

... That was a blessing to me to see how [churches of different denominations and ministries] are working together to share the gospel and not only feeding and housing these folks.”

Tommy Glenn recalled eating with a family who had two kids of their own serving in the military.

Meanwhile, the parents are

taking care of refugees in their homes.

“It was very humbling to see that,” said Glenn, who acknowledged the difficulty of parents serving others while also worrying about the safety of their own children.

Understanding God’s plan for the war can be a struggle, Barbara Glenn added.

‘God is always sovereign’

“I believe a lot of people are having a really tough time understanding or thinking they need to understand why this invasion is taking place,” she said. “I think all of us have probably whispered a ‘why’ to God.

“We have to remember that God is always sovereign, that God is on the throne,” she said.

“It’s not Russia, it’s not the devil. God is on the throne, and He has a plan.”

Kirkland, who was once battling depression, is now looking forward to how she can serve the people of Romania and Ukraine in the months and years ahead. The trip, she said, has changed her life.

“My friends when I came back ... they [saw] a new me,” she said.

“This has brought me out of a depression that I’ve had for a couple

years since I’ve lost Jim, and it’s just woken me back up. God has woken me back up. ... These people need us desperately.”

For more information, contact Madison Baptist Association at info@MadisonAssociation.org.



Photo courtesy of Madison Baptist Association

Tommy Glenn (right) helps distribute food during his trip across the border into Ukraine.



Photo courtesy of Madison Baptist Association

Ron Lynch (left) works with a team of pastors and ministry workers during his recent missions trip to Romania and Ukraine. Tommy Glenn and Will Faulkenberry are seated in the back of the van.

SBOM outlines existing efforts as SATF shares latest update

Alabama Baptist State Convention leaders responded June 2 to the suggestions appearing in the SBC Sexual Abuse Task Force's latest communication, released June 1.

The SATF shared wording of the motions to be presented to messengers during the SBC Annual Meeting in Anaheim (see story, page 12), requests for entities/other groups to consider and suggestions for state conventions to implement.

Alabama's team working through the suggestions for state conventions include Rick Lance, executive director of the State Board of Missions; Buddy Champion, state convention president; Greg Corbin, SBOM chair; Craig Carlisle, chair of the Alabama Baptist Sexual Abuse Task Force; and Melissa Bowen, vice chair of the Alabama task force.

They released their response in a joint statement. It reads in part:

"We are seeking diligently to do our best to assist churches in helping hurting people."

Here are the suggestions (in italics) and the Alabama responses:

1. We request state conventions consider having a designated, trained staff person or independent contractor to receive calls regarding allegations of sexual abuse and provide initial guidance. We request this person be trained in trauma to be able to assist both survivors and churches ...

Already in place:

State Missionary Mark Wakefield — a chaplain trained in trauma response and a certified trainer in Critical Incident Stress Management.

State Missionary Ken Allen — director of LeaderCare, who is the designated staff person to receive any communications from individuals and churches related to concerns about sexual abuse.

Referrals for counseling services are available through State Missionary Mike Jackson, associate executive director. These resources include Pathways Professional Counseling — a network of highly qualified counselors in partnership with associational offices throughout the state. This decades-long ministry is an arm of Alabama Baptist Chil-

dren's Homes & Family Ministries. ... Other trained counselors also are available.

2. We request state conventions, in consultation with Lifeway and the Executive Committee, add a series of questions on the Annual Church Profile regarding background checks and sexual abuse training.

SBOM partners with MinistrySafe in providing churches with sexual abuse training that encourages the use of best practices such as background checks and sexual abuse training. ... Churches (also) may want to consider other training.

We are open to any addition to the ACP which asks questions of churches related to training in sexual abuse prevention and protection.

3. We request that state conventions maintain a list of professionally trained, licensed, trauma-informed Christian counselors in their respective states for those churches who voluntarily seek assistance as they minister to survivors.

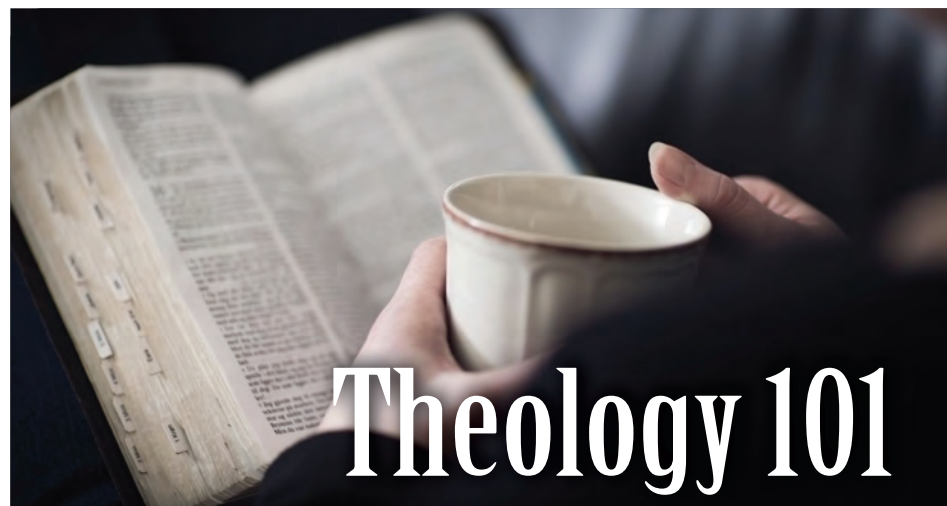
For decades, the SBOM has been facilitating counseling services through Pathways and other trained counselors as noted above.

4. We request state conventions establish a self-certification program for churches, including "best practices" in survivor care, hiring, investigatory protocols and training for prevention.

The SBOM remains committed to helping churches become safer places by encouraging best practices through background checks and sexual abuse training through MinistrySafe or other sources.

5. We request all state [convention] entities and committees provide training regarding sexual abuse prevention and survivor care to their denominational workers, as well as background checks, as part of their orientation and selection.

All employees and trustees of the SBOM [and] Alabama Baptist entities (undergo) background checks. This is now a requirement for employment and to serve on trustee boards. All SBOM employees, both current and future, are required to undergo MinistrySafe training.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Spiritual Blessings

The Indwelling of Christ

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
The Alabama Baptist

As discussed last week, one way of expressing the beginning of the Christian life is to think of it as the "in-coming of Christ."

One image is a closed door being opened to admit the Savior, Who enters a believer's life by His Spirit. The entering is with a view to Him living within. The "in-coming" launches the Christian life; the "indwelling" sustains it.

The indwelling of Christ in a believer is the subject of His promise in John 14:20: "You will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you." He elaborated on the promise three verses later: "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (14:23).

Not only was the indwelling the subject of Christ's promise, it was also the truth of His picture drawn with the words of John 15:5 that describe a vineyard in which He is the Vine and we are the branches. He wants us to see ourselves abiding in Him and He in us.

Occasionally someone might protest with deep sincerity, "I cannot begin the Christian life because living it out would be too difficult for me."

That sentiment is not the whole truth. Living a Christian life is not merely difficult; it is impossible.

Think about it: Who can attain Christ's command in Matthew 5:48, "Be ye therefore perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect"?

Difficult? No, impossible! Who can consistently seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness?

Who can love their enemies and pray for those who use them? Who prays without ceasing? Who loves God with all their heart, mind and strength? Who is able to become angry and yet not sin?

Who can heed Jesus' instruction in Philippians 4:6, "Be anxious about nothing, but in everything give thanks"? Who can live up to the command, "Give no offense to anyone"? No one. It is impossible!

'I can't, but He can'

Only the indwelling of Christ makes possible that which is impossible for us. The triumphant acknowledgment of a Christian must be, "I can't, but He can."

In summary, we might declare with Holy Scripture that the indwelling of Christ is the subject of one of His great promises (John 14:20, 23), as well as the truth of His word picture in John 15:5 in which producing fruit requires us to be in Christ and Christ in us (John 15:5). This divine indwelling was the burden of Christ's prayer (John 17:22-23, 26).

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.



Alabama news

OBITUARIES

▶ **Polly Ireland** — former staff member of Alabama Citizens Action Program and wife of ALCAP’s longest-serving executive director, the late Dan Ireland — died May 31. She was 91.

The couple were also active members of Green Valley Baptist Church in Hoover and were actively involved in state Baptist life.

Ireland is preceded in death by her husband of 68 years, who died in 2019. She is survived by her daughter, Denise; son, Jeffrey; four grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.



IRELAND

AUTAUGA ASSOCIATION

▶ **Bethlehem Baptist Church, Marbury**, celebrated its 100th anniversary May 15, a year later than planned.



Photo courtesy of Lonette Berg

Pastor Chad Underwood (right) preached, and Lorette Berg (left) of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented a certificate. Congregational singing was led by Elaine Spain. Harold Spain was pianist. The Spains also shared special music, along with Ann Mansfield and sisters, Blanch Henley Nichols and Gladys Henley Watson.

Iris Dopson read a historical presentation and poem written by Melba Dennis Dopson, 99, mother of Dennis Dopson and mother-in-law of Iris. Melba’s poetry is shared each Sunday in church. The cornerstone was opened, and the contents will be shared at a later date.

Iris Dopson read a historical presentation and poem written by Melba Dennis Dopson, 99, mother of Dennis Dopson and mother-in-law of Iris. Melba’s poetry is shared each Sunday in church. The cornerstone was opened, and the contents will be shared at a later date.

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

▶ **Pleasant Valley Missionary Baptist Church, Bessemer**, celebrated its 150th anniversary May 15.

“The celebration meant so much to our church. It took us back to remembering all the saints who came before us,” said Pastor Oscar Mims (right), who preached the anniversary sermon.



Photo courtesy of Debbie Campbell

Debbie Campbell (left), a commissioner with the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented a certificate in honor of the special anniversary.

Member Tommy Dotson talked about the history of the church. Special music was provided before and after lunch by Redeemed (Jeff Gray,

Ashley Dixson, Janet Hold) from Birmingham. Guest Jeff Gray led congregational singing.

EAST LIBERTY ASSOCIATION

▶ **River View Baptist Church, Valley**, celebrated its 125th anniversary May 15. Dale Wood, East Liberty Association’s director of missions, was the guest speaker. He recounted historical facts about the church during his sermon. Former member Matthew Crowder, whose grandmother is a member, sang several songs. Calvin Milford of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented a certificate.

“It was a beautiful service,” said Pastor Lanny Sledge. “The Lord blessed and moved in our midst. We couldn’t have asked for it to be better.”

Jerry Andrews, 91, was recognized as a life-long member although he was unable to attend. Tawana Bradford’s rendering of the church is on permanent display in the church vestibule.

MORGAN ASSOCIATION

▶ **East Highland Baptist Church, Hartselle**, will offer a six-week Bible study on creation this summer. Starting June 22, the study will be held each Wednesday at 6:30 p.m. (except July 13). The study is produced by Creation Ministries International. The video discussions will be facilitated by Mike Loudiana, a retired physicist.

MUSCLE SHOALS ASSOCIATION

▶ **Old Town Creek Baptist Church, Moulton**, voted recently to construct a new family life center. This project, while serving as a gymnasium for mid-week children’s ministry, will double as a new location for Sunday services. It also will add eight new classrooms, a large area for its growing middle and high school ministries and a full-scale kitchen.

RUSSELL ASSOCIATION

▶ **Smiths Station Baptist Church** celebrated its 100th anniversary May 15. Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, was the guest speaker for the special event, which included music led by Brian Crowe, minister of music, and the SSBC praise team.

Ellen Dewberry of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission and Lance presented certificates to the church.

“It was amazing to see so many former members and individuals from all over our community coming together to help celebrate 100 years of Smiths Station Baptist Church pointing people to Jesus Christ,” said Pastor David Kees. “The celebration brought to mind the many godly men and women who have

gone before us. I am thankful for the 44 dynamic trailblazers in 1922 who had a vision to help establish a permanent place of worship.”

▶ **Crawford Road Baptist Church, Phenix City**, ordained **Mike Tyree** and **Kevin Goodson** as deacons recently. Tyree and his wife, Meg, and Goodson and his wife, Kristie, are long-time members of the church. Tyree is currently serving as youth minister.

WEST CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

▶ **The West Central Association** held its bi-monthly executive committee meeting in May. Gordon Fort, senior ambassador to the International Mission Board president, was the guest speaker.



FORT

The theme was “Leading Our People To GO!”

“It was a great meeting concerning every follower of Christ being called to play their part in taking the good news of Jesus Christ to every nation,” said Lee Tate, associational mission strategist.

Around 70 people attended and offered a \$5,393 love offering for IMB. Westwood Baptist Church, Selma, hosted.

Submit announcements and staff changes to news@thealabamabaptist.org.

Altar call



Photo courtesy of Friendship Association

Friendship Association hosted a countywide youth rally May 15 at Blountsville Baptist Church. Students came to the altar to pray, and one student was saved. Steve Sellers is interim associational missionary.

Dealing with trauma

Responding to the Texas school shooting: Helping children process tragedy

By Michael Smith
The Alabama Baptist

Parents and other adults helping children process the recent mass shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, have a difficult challenge.

It is important for adults to give age-appropriate messages when children ask questions about current events.

James Flournoy, a licensed clinical psychologist serving as Alabama Psychiatry's consulting psychologist at Brookwood Baptist Health in Birmingham, shared tips and warning signs to help parents talk to children about their concerns during a recent conversation with TAB Media.

Different approaches

With young children he recommended keeping things short and simple, while with teens he suggested taking an open-ended approach to provide lines of communication

since they may not come to parents directly.

"It's OK to say, 'I don't know. This is a very complicated social issue. You have very strong beliefs on either side, and I can't honestly tell you what to do. I can tell you how I might feel about it.

"I want to hear how you feel about it. If there are some ideas that you think you have about how we could deal with things like this in the future, what are your thoughts on that?"

Whether dealing with someone younger or a teen, be honest, Flournoy encouraged parents. Listen and try not to be judgmental when a child expresses their thoughts.

"Just listen, be compassionate and try to give them, again, an age-appropriate message."

It is important not to push too hard if the child does not want to talk, but leave the door open, Flournoy noted.

"If they're still resistant to talking, then I think at that point you just moni-



James Flournoy (left) shares tips to help parents talk to children about their concerns during a recent conversation with TAB Media's Editor-in-Chief Jennifer Davis Rash.

tor their behavior over the next several days and weeks and see if you see any changes that signal to you that they may be having a hard time coping and dealing with things."

Warning signs

Flournoy said warning signs include trouble sleeping and concentrating, increased fear and anxiety, not wanting to go to school, physical symptoms like headaches and stomachaches or a decrease in academic performance.

When is it time to get help?

"If your teenager starts expressing feelings of hopelessness and despair," Flournoy said.

"We live in the age of social media. Parents may monitor their children's social media accounts. If you see them start leaving a lot of emojis that are sad faces and they start 'liking' someone on Twitter who has different views than they normally do, that could say, 'Hey, something is going on, and we may need to have a conversa-

trouble processing and dealing with an issue.

Flournoy noted it is important for adults to "check their feelings" because children can pick up on their anxiety.

Seek a professional

Children and teens may not feel comfortable talking to family, so think about who else influences them (friends or pastors, for example) who can provide insight. If that doesn't work, seek a mental health professional.

Establishing a predictable routine is another way to help children regain composure, confidence and calmness, he said.

Flournoy recommended the Seize the Awkward website and the National Suicide Prevention Life-line (800-273-8255).

Pathways Professional Counseling offers Christ-centered services across Alabama.

It is a nonprofit sister ministry of Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries.

For more information and a list of resources from TAB Media, go to tabonline.org/trauma-help.

To watch the full TAB Media Special Report between Flournoy and Rash, visit tabonline.org/helping-children.

A definition of trauma, how believers can help

Trauma is any event, series of events or set of circumstances experienced or perceived by an individual as emotionally or physically harmful or life-threatening.

Trauma events can range from one-time incidents to chronic or generational experiences.

When children witness or experience violence, they may become dis-

trustful of the people in their lives. They also have a heightened risk for conflict with others, self-destruction, suicide, post-traumatic stress and elevated aggression, not only in the short term but also into adulthood.

For more information and a list of resources from TAB Media, go to tabonline.org/trauma-help. (TAB)

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Churches can plan for crisis situations

Churches and other faith-based facilities have long been aware of possible threats to those who gather inside their walls, and recent events have refocused attention in that direction.

In 2013, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security published its “Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Houses of Worship.”

The 38-page book, available online at [dhs.gov](https://www.dhs.gov), provides specific information on how churches can work with other faith-based organizations and community partners to create an emergency operations plan.

The resource provides guidance for considering possible threats, developing a course of action to respond to each threat and training personnel and volunteers who are essential to implementing a response.

Disaster plan

Fires, tornadoes, hurricanes and earthquakes are possible crisis events. Violent situations, such as an active shooter, also happen in churches.

And Mike Everett, director of security services for Bellevue Baptist Church near Memphis, notes a situation many churches might not expect — the intrusion of an individual or group who wants to create a scene, such as happened recently when pro-abortion protestors disrupted the services of a Catholic church in Colorado over the leaked Supreme Court opinion pointing to the possible overturn of *Roe vs. Wade*.

“Your circumstances are going to dictate your tactics [in that situation],” Everett said. “Be careful that a group or individual isn’t trying to create the ‘video moment’ that can be passed around on social media. The reports will be based on your reaction, not their action that led to it.” (TAB, BP)

Not cold, just cautious

Reassess, be vigilant, church security experts advise

Churches are taking another look at their security plans after a month when 10 died in a shooting at a Buffalo, New York, grocery store; another died the next day in a shooting at a California church; and 21 died, including 19 children and two teachers, in a school shooting in Uvalde, Texas.

While variables exist from church to church in establishing or modifying security plans, the concerns and preparation are largely consistent, one expert said.

“It’s a matter of scope, of scale,” said Mike Everett, director of security services for Bellevue Baptist Church near Memphis. “With churches it’s the same way. We all face the same issues, whether it’s budgetary or congregation size or the number of people you have to serve on your security ministry.”

Everett was working with a company that had given a security assessment at Bellevue before the church approached him with a job offer he accepted in September 2021. Prior to that, he served 23 years in law enforcement in southern Illinois as a patrolman and three-term sheriff.

Bellevue already had an established security team before Everett’s arrival. In 2016, that team took action in subduing a heavily armed man who entered the sanctuary during the church’s 11 a.m. Easter service. An alert greeter noticed a pistol sticking out of the man’s jacket. Upon being interrogated by Bellevue’s then-director of security, an automatic rifle and “lots of ammo” were found in the man’s backpack.

Turning points

Both Everett and Ben O’Neal, who leads seminars and training for church security and safety through the Georgia Baptist Mission Board, point to the 2017 shooting at First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, as a turning point of consciousness on the discussion.



Photo courtesy of Ben O’Neal

Ben O’Neal, church security and safety specialist with the Georgia Baptist Mission Board, talks to a group on the issue.

“It taught us some things about layering security,” O’Neal said of the shooting that left 26 dead, including an unborn child. It’s important, he said, to have security in the parking lot as well as at the door to provide as many eyes as possible looking out.

“You need to identify potential threats as they pass through various levels,” said O’Neal, who had 23 years of active duty in the Army before retiring with the rank of major. Degrees in criminal justice and security management have helped him in security training for more than 600 Georgia Baptist churches. He also speaks to more than 200 groups a year through regional seminars.

Layering is only one part of beginning a security plan. Two of those killed at Sutherland Springs were outside the building, but most died when the shooter entered the building. Therefore, it’s important to limit the number of accessible doors going into the building, O’Neal said.

The concept applies to churches of all sizes. A small church could have a couple of volunteers in the parking lot and two more at the main en-

trance. Many churches have started locking those front doors once the service starts. But that doesn’t mean they have to be unwelcoming.

“Always have someone at the door ready to open it for those who are late,” O’Neal said.

Protecting the ministry

Such measures don’t make a church cold, just cautious. And it protects the ministry.

“If someone gets inside and causes a crisis, it’s going to hurt your ministry and outreach,” he said.

When it comes to firearms, check with your church’s insurance company and applicable laws.

“It’s an administrative decision that needs to be made through prayer,” Everett said. “Whatever your governing body is, they need to decide with the proper information.”

Central to any security ministry or team is training.

“It protects your growth and gives you credibility,” O’Neal said. “It communicates that when you bring your family to that church, they’re going to be safe. You have somebody looking out for you so you can freely worship and learn.” (BP)



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

Messengers to consider task force recommendations

The Sexual Abuse Task Force released its formal recommendations to be considered during the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting in Anaheim, June 14–15.

The SATF will give its report to messengers June 14 at 3:45 p.m. Central Time and will include two motions for messengers to consider. The report is the culmination of an independent investigation conducted by Guidepost Solutions into allegations against the SBC Executive Committee's handling of sexual abuse claims.

The SATF also has issued suggestions for state conventions (see story, page 8), SBC entities and other related bodies.

“Given the need for structural and meaningful changes in the SBC,” the SATF “recommends the following actions for approval by messengers:”

Recommendation One:

“That the messengers to the 2022 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention approve the creation of an Abuse Reform Implementation Task Force, authorized to operate for one three-year term. The ARITF is to be appointed by the president elected by the 2022 Convention, who will also appoint

its leadership. The ARITF is to be funded by the sexual abuse allocation requested by the Executive Committee, but shall operate with full independence. The ARITF will report to each annual session of the Convention, with a first report to be submitted to the Convention in 2023 and a final report in 2025.”

Recommendation Two:

“That the messengers to the 2022 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention authorizes the ARITF, in coordination with the Executive Committee, to create a ‘Ministry Check’ website and

process for maintaining a record of pastors, denominational workers, ministry employees, and volunteers who have at any time been credibly accused of sexual abuse. The website will be established and maintained through an independent firm, selected by the Credentials Committee in consultation with the ARITF, and funded by the sexual abuse allocation requested by the Executive Committee.”

Visit sbcannualmeeting.net for more about the meeting as well as all the other events and activities planned for those making the trip to California. The site also links to livestreaming options. (TAB Media)

To view the full list of suggestions and recommendations, go to tabonline.org/satf-challenges.

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

Place a classified ad for \$1 per word. For more information call 205-870-4720, ext. 102, or email ads@thealabamabaptist.org.

CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Bluff Springs Baptist Church is searching for a full-time pastor. Search questions and resumé to: bsbc@graceba.net or mail to: Bluff Springs Baptist Church, 1990 Bluff Springs Road, Ashford, AL 36312.

PASTOR

Southside Baptist Church, Andalusia, Alabama, is now accepting resúmes for the position of pastor. Anyone interested in this position please send resumé to: Southside Baptist Church, 1213 Western Bypass, Andalusia, AL 36420, ATTN: Pastor Search Committee.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Northside Baptist Church, Selma, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor. Please submit resúmes to: Northsidebaptist2021@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Paden Baptist Church, Gadsden, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a bivocational pastor. Please submit resúmes to: padenbaptistchurch@yahoo.com or to: Paden Baptist Church, 900 Padenreich Ave., Gadsden, AL 35903.

OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR

Southside Baptist Church, Andalusia, Alabama, is seeking a part-time office administrator. Work hours are Monday–Friday with 25–30 hours per week. Applicants should have a minimum of 5 years experience supervising at least 8 people, 5 years office management experience, advanced computer skills. A bachelor degree in business, accounting or related field is preferred. Inquiries or resumé should be submitted to: Southside Baptist Church, 1213 Western Bypass, Andalusia, AL 36420, ATTN: Personnel Committee.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR — WORSHIP & EDUCATION

Linden Baptist Church is now accepting resúmes for the position of associate pastor. This is a full-time position. The primary focuses of this position will be worship leadership and education, though there will be other responsibilities. For a complete job description and to apply online, visit lindenbaptist.org and click the “Assoc. Pastor Application” button. To apply by mail, send resumé and cover letter to: P.O. Box 480776 Linden, AL 36748. Applications will be received until July 15.

SEEKING

Fern Creek Baptist Church is seeking part-time and/or

full-time ministerial staff in the following areas: music, youth, children or education. According to the applicant's gifts and skills, two of these areas could be combined for a full-time position. Applicants must exemplify a growing relationship with God, spiritual maturity, responsible authority, fervent evangelism, sound theology and effective communication skills with all age groups. Applicants should have experience and education in ministry. Anyone seeking the music position must be an excellent musician, worship leader and educator. Send resúmes to: Fern Creek Baptist Church, Attention: Personnel Committee, 5920 Bardstown Road, Louisville, KY 40291, or email to linda@ferncreekbaptist.org. Resúmes will be received through June 15, 2022. Questions? Call 239-0316, ext. 103 (Linda Barnes Popham).

FAMILY PASTOR

First Baptist Church of Atmore, Alabama, is seeking a full-time family pastor. He will serve as “second-chair” to the pastor with oversight of volunteers within age-group and small-group ministries, having direct responsibility over student ministry. Resúmes may be submitted to: keving@fbcatmore.org.

BIVOCATIONAL YOUTH DIRECTOR

Southside Baptist Church, Andalusia, accepting resúmes for position of bivocational youth director. Send resúmes to: Southside Baptist Church, 1213 Western Bypass, Andalusia, AL 36420. ATTN: Youth Search Committee.

OTHER POSITIONS

IL BAPTIST CHILDREN'S HOME AND FAMILY SERVICES EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

IL Baptist Children's Home and Family Services (BCHFS) is looking for an executive director. See qualifications and standards at <http://www.bchfs.com/employment>. BCHFS is a Licensed Child Welfare Agency whose mission is to “Provide Christ-centered services that protect, heal and restore.” The agency has a rich history of providing care for children and families in crisis for over 100 years. BCHFS has an annual budget of \$3.9 million and provides care for children and adults through various programs including residential care, maternity care, adoption services, counseling services and a pregnancy resource clinic. To

apply, send a letter of interest and resumé to: Eric Bramlet, Search Committee Chair, ericbramlet@kogerbramletlaw.com.

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PODCAST

STORIES SEASON 6: MUD BOGGER STORY

Terry Billings used to spend his life mud racing in his old drinking truck, until one day everything turned on a dime — in Walmart. Now he and his truck have both had a transformation — and have found a very different purpose. This season, the “Stories” podcast shares his story. TAB's Grace Thornton writes and produces the shows. Listen at tabonline.org/stories or wherever you listen to podcasts.

CLEARING UP FACTS

Retired Mobile pastor falsely tied to SBC abuser list by local news outlet

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Retired Mobile pastor Charles Brown, 79, has found himself navigating a situation he never anticipated — clearing his name for someone else's misconduct.

"In a three-minute newscast, 80 years of my life and ministry went down the tubes," Brown told *The Alabama Baptist* on May 28 as he shared about the May 27 noon news story incorrectly reported by NBC 15 in Mobile.

The correction by the station during its 5 p.m. and 10 p.m. newscasts the same day stated, "In our story we identified the names of church leaders from our area who were on the Southern Baptist Convention's alleged sex abuser list ... the names identified and their church affiliations were correct, however, the picture we showed for one of the people on that list was not."

That's where the two names were mixed up. The Charles Brown on the list is not the Charles Brown who retired from Government Street Baptist Church in Mobile earlier this year after nearly 45 years as pastor.

Names mixed up

On the SBC alleged abuser list, a Charles Brown is listed on page 26 as pastor of London Baptist Church in Evergreen, Alabama, when he was convicted in 1987 of "abusing a teenage boy in 1986."

Mobile's Charles Brown, who serves as pastor emeritus of Government Street Baptist, said the station representative apologized and acknowledged proper reporting channels were not followed.

"I don't know how many people have heard [the incorrect news report]," Brown said, "but at Government Street we have a private school and a very large day care program. My big hurt is ... the effect it has on the church, me, the congregation, just the insinuation of it ... and how parents of the children would be concerned."

Brown, his lawyer and church

members gathered at the station the afternoon of May 27 to share a comment, an excerpt of which was included with the correction that aired in both evening newscasts. "I tried to redeem as much of my morality and my character as I could."

Ministry leaders across the state also jumped into action to affirm the credibility of his name.

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said, "I've known Charles Brown for more than three decades. He is a dear friend of mine and a faithful colleague in ministry. Charles serves as a trustee on our State Board of Missions and executive committee. I believe in him as a Christian leader without equivocation."



BROWN

C. Thomas Wright, executive director of missions for Mobile Baptist Association, has known Brown for 18 years and worked with the minister's fellowship group to send out an email alert as soon as they learned of the situation May 27.

The email described what happened and concluded with "Dr. Charles Brown of Mobile ... former pastor of Government Street is innocent. Satan is alive and well and continues to try and destroy God's men and women."

Scotty Jernigan, interim pastor of Government Street Baptist, said he and another church leader addressed the issue during the May 29 Sunday morning service.

"In our normal worship time, right out of the gate, we wanted to address this upfront," he explained.

"We shared how this was in no way connected to our church, school or child development center."

Prayers for healing

"We asked the church to pray over those who had suffered abuse and ... [for the Lord to] bring to light every person who has caused the harm," he said. "Our prayer is for what David experienced in the psalms ... genuine repentance [even amid consequences from the actions] ... real healing can start there. We pray every wound can be healed completely as only our God can do."

"We also pray for those who are innocent but being attached to the situation. It is tough to establish a good name and important to protect those who do."

"Our focus was on discipleship [and] an opportunity to grow," he added. "What's done in the dark is going to be brought to light."

FBC Pelham wrongly connected to convicted pastor of Shelby County Hispanic church

When the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee made public a list of alleged sexual abusers with Baptist connections, one Birmingham-area church realized a significant error.

The report wrongly states on page 68 that Luis Federico Garcia, who was convicted in 2007 of three counts of sexual abuse in Shelby County, was "pastor of Spanish ministries" at First Baptist Church Pelham.

Though Garcia led a Hispanic congregation in Pelham that used space formerly occupied by FBC, he was never on staff at the church, said pastor emeritus Mike Shaw, who led FBC from 1979 to 2014.

"In February 2000, we moved to a new property, leaving our former



Facebook photo

FBC Pelham allowed Luis Garcia's congregation to meet in its old building, but Garcia was not on staff.

sanctuary empty," Shaw explained. "Luis Garcia came to us and asked to rent our old building for a church for Hispanics he had started in Pelham. Our staff and deacons agreed to let him use the old sanctuary."

As a precaution, Shaw conducted a background check on Garcia through

the Shelby County sheriff's office. That check showed only a traffic ticket. But then a FBC custodial staff member who attended Garcia's church confided to a FBC member that Garcia had molested her daughter.

When Shaw learned of the abuse, he confronted Garcia and ended the agreement. Shaw also filed a complaint with the Pelham Police Department that resulted in Garcia's conviction.

The EC report said Garcia later admitted to molesting 23 victims ages 5–13. The victims were in Alabama and New Jersey, Shaw said. Following his conviction, Garcia moved out of the country.

FBC Pastor Daven Watkins confirmed the details Shaw provided in a statement read to the church May 29. (TAB)

After receiving diplomas, UM's newest alumni participate in the university's Great Commission Tradition by touching the Great Commission Globe to represent going out into the world to make an impact for Christ. **To see the photo gallery, visit tabonline.org/UM-graduation.**



Photo courtesy of University of Mobile

'You are His creation'

University of Mobile Class of 2022 urged to live by God's definition of greatness

Southern Baptist Convention president and pastor of Redemption Church in Saraland Ed Litton challenged the University of Mobile Class of 2022 to pursue greatness — not as the world defines it, but as God does.

Litton delivered the commencement address at the Baptist-affiliated university May 7. More than 3,500 family and friends gathered on campus at the Lackey Great Commission Lawn to celebrate 320 bachelor's, master's and doctoral graduates.

Ted Mashburn, associate dean

of the College of Arts and Sciences and currently the university's longest-serving faculty member, carried the ceremonial mace and led the procession of faculty and graduates. The university presented its prestigious Weaver Awards to the top two graduates, Avery Wilhite and Grace Whittington.

Following tradition

After receiving diplomas, UM's newest alumni participated in the university's Great Commission Tradition by touching the Great Commission Globe on campus to represent going out into the world

to make an impact for Christ.

UM President Lonnie Burnett introduced Litton as his pastor and friend of 28 years.

"He officiated at my daughter's wedding, but also at my father's funeral. I was in Nashville when he was elected president of the SBC, and at the hospital the night his wife Tammy died," Burnett said.

"He is my friend and our speaker because I have seen this man on the mountaintop and in the valley, and he has served the same God in both places."

Litton urged graduates to live by God's definition of greatness.

"The problem comes when we desire greatness apart from God or we define greatness apart from God," he said.

'Take up your cross'

"God uses us to serve others that we might remind them, tell them or even instruct them that God loves them, and that God wants to save them," he said.

"My challenge to you today is to take up your cross and follow Christ. Greatness is before you. Live by His definition of greatness, and you will see the hand of God answer prayer." (UM)

Samford University awards degrees to 1,287 students in spring commencement exercises

Samford University awarded degrees to 1,287 students during five commencement ceremonies held on campus April 29–30.

Ceremonies for Bee-

son Divinity School, Brock School of Business, Orlean Beeson School of Education and the College of Health Sciences were held on April 29. Graduates from Cumberland School

of Law, Howard College of Arts and Sciences and the School of the Arts were honored during commencement ceremonies held April 30. President Beck A. Taylor presided over each one.

Mark Dever, pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, gave the sermon during Beeson Divinity School's Commencement and Service of Consecration.

"The cross is where any claims to our own glory end and where God's glory shines," Dever said.

"Brothers and sisters, the whole purpose of our

redemption is the eternal purpose of God — to glorify Him."

Top awards

Three awards were presented to students, including the John C. Pittman Spirit Award, the President's Cup and the Velma Wright Irons Award.

The Pittman Spirit Award recognizes graduating students who consistently exhibit Christian character in community life.

This year, three students received the award: Jacob Hopkins, marketing; Caroline Kizer, communication

sciences and disorders; and Anna Claire Noblitt, public administration.

Edward Lee Garner, a music major from the School of the Arts, received the President's Cup which is given to the graduating senior with the highest grade-point average.

Ansley Burnette, an English major, received the Velma Wright Irons Award which is presented to the graduating senior with the second highest cumulative grade-point average. (SU)

Samford University President Beck A. Taylor presents diplomas during five commencement ceremonies held April 29–30. **To see the photo gallery, visit tabonline.org/SU-graduation.**

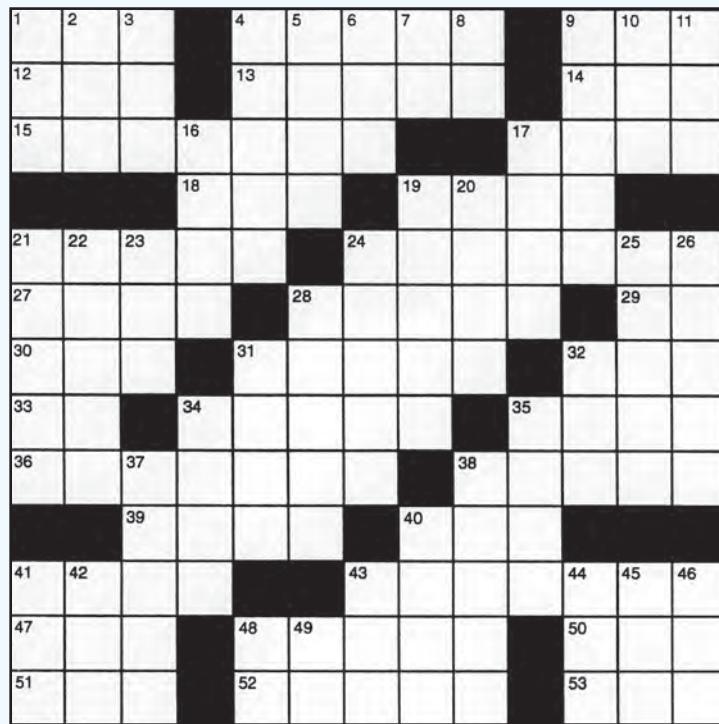


Photo courtesy of Samford University

CHRISTIAN CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1. Whether it be ___ or ewe, ye shall not kill it. (Lev. 22:28)
4. A strong ___ from the enemy. (Ps. 61:3)
9. Thy God, O ___, liveth. (Amos 8:14)
12. Stand in ___, and sin not. (Ps. 4:4)
13. Representative.
14. The wheat and the ___ were not smitten. (Ex. 9:32)
15. ___ is the man that trusteth in Him. (Ps. 34:8)
17. No man ___d for my soul. (Ps. 142:4)
18. Scrape out a living.
19. Led Him unto the ___ of the hill. (Luke 4:29)
21. Jonah was gone down into the ___ of the ship. (Jonah 1:5)
24. I sat down and wept, and ___. (Neh. 1:4)
27. In the beginning was the ___. (John 1:1)
28. And Jacob ___ a vow. (Gen. 28:20)
29. Thy servants are ___ spies. (Gen. 42:11)
30. Not willing that ___ should perish. (2 Pet. 3:9)
31. All thy house shall be ___. (Acts 11:14)
32. I took the little book ... and ___ it up. (Rev. 10:10)
33. Greek letter.
34. What ___ thee, O thou sea? (Ps. 114:5)
35. Poems.
36. The whirlwind shall ___ them. (Isa. 41:16)
38. Sound of contempt.
39. Bring forth the ___ robe. (Luke 15:22)
40. Given to hospitality, ___ to teach. (1 Tim. 3:2)
41. When Thou wentest out of ___. (Judg. 5:4)
43. Fed.
47. Giants dwelt therein in ___ time. (Deut. 2:20)
48. Cast him into ___ darkness. (Matt. 22:13)



By Evelyn Boyington Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

50. Unrefined mineral.
 51. A time to be born, and a time to ___. (Eccles. 3:2)
 52. If I come again, I will not ___. (2 Cor. 13:2)
 53. And I saw a ___ heaven. (Rev. 21:1)
- ## DOWN
1. The fourth part of a ___. (2 Kings 6:25)
 2. I am like an ___ of the desert. (Ps. 102:6)
 3. Tiny.
 4. Fulfil your works, your daily ___. (Ex. 5:13)
 5. Molding.
 6. Married.
 7. ___ passant. (French)
 8. Direction. (abbr.)
 9. He is ___ away of his own lust. (James 1:14)
 10. The birds of the ___ have nests. (Matt. 8:20)
 11. Born.
 16. Thy ___ shall be great. (Job 5:25)
 17. Ever the silver ___ be loosed. (Eccles. 12:6)
 19. They ___ the knee before Him. (Matt. 27:29)
 20. Regretted.
 21. Trades.
 22. Pertaining to a charged particle.
 23. I will ___ up thy rivers. (Isa. 44:27)
 24. A pestilient fellow, and a ___ of sedition. (Acts 24:5)
 25. ___ into His gates with thanksgiving. (Ps. 100:4)
 26. What ___ thou here, Elijah? (1 Kings 19:9)
 28. Manservant.
 31. Perches.
 32. Why make ye this ___, and weep? (Mark 5:39)
 34. The children of ___ of Hezekiah. (Neh. 7:21)
 35. He goeth ___ meet the armed men. (Job 39:21; 2 words)
 37. Who can ___ in the fierceness of His anger? (Nah. 1:6)
 38. Seed.
 40. Clown.
 41. And Jacob ___ pottage. (Gen. 25:29)
 42. Samuel ministered unto the Lord before ___. (1 Sam. 3:1)
 43. Depot. (abbr.)
 44. Not. (prefix)
 45. How long will it be ___ thou be quiet? (Jer. 47:6)
 46. Like a cloud of ___ in the heat of harvest. (Isa. 18:4)
 48. Bone. (prefix)
 49. The thorns grew ___, and choked it. (Mark 4:7)

Longtime campus minister 'blessed,' reflects on role

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Steve Thompson said it wasn't his plan to go into college ministry — it was a fluke. As a student at Mobile College (now the University of Mobile), he did summer missions one year and got connected with a campus minister at Oklahoma State University.

That campus minister asked him to be his associate the following year.

"I did, and that turned me on to college ministry," Thompson said.

And now he is retiring at the end of June after 11 years in Baptist campus

ministry at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and 26 years at Auburn University, where he currently is senior campus minister.

Along the way Thompson also served as minister of youth, students and young single adults at Southside Baptist Church in Birmingham, and as a campus minister intern at the University of Louisville Medical/Dental School while working on a master of divinity degree at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

'A great journey'

"It's been a great journey," Thompson said. "I've been really blessed to be involved in the lives of college students as long as I have been."

He noted college campuses are a "great missions

field," when students are "at a vulnerable age and are most open to learning about themselves and the world."

Some of the most joyful times have been watching students come in as freshmen, wrestling with their faith and discovering what faith in Jesus is to them personally, Thompson said.

Spreading the gospel

"It's also been fascinating to see students come to grips with, 'How can I harness this vocational calling — teaching, medicine, whatever it might be — how can I leverage that for spreading the gospel?'"



THOMPSON

Thompson said he and his wife, Renee, enjoyed hosting groups of students in their home and counseling pre-engaged and newly engaged couples.

"We have loved being involved in so many marriages and watching them grow and develop over the years," he said.

Mike Nuss, director of the office of collegiate & student ministries at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, noted Thompson's ministry "has been marked by a deep love for students and for the local church."

"His legacy is literally hundreds of students who have not only heard the gospel but have seen it lived out in his life," Nuss said. "Steve is not only a ministry colleague but a dear friend. His quiet influence will be greatly missed."

"His legacy is literally hundreds of students who have not only heard the gospel but have seen it lived out in his life."

Mike Nuss
director of the office of collegiate & student ministries, SBOM

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Alabamians among spring seminary graduates

Alabama Baptists graduated with degrees at the master's level or higher from Southern Baptist seminaries and divinity schools in spring 2022.

The Alabama Baptist was provided the following list of graduates and information by the schools.

Beeson Divinity School

▶ *Master of Arts in Theological Studies* — Rebecca Lankford, Mountain Brook; James Robinson, Birmingham

▶ *Master of Divinity* — Hannah Attaway, McCalla; Teal Cuellar, Hoover; Heath Harrelson, Decatur; Jacob May, Hueytown; Corey Savage, Tuscaloosa

Gateway Seminary

None

Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

▶ *Master of Divinity* —

Noah R. Hicks, Zachary L. Huhn, Whitney Kayla Hunt

▶ *Master of Theological Studies* — Justin Edward Schaff

▶ *Master of Theological Studies, Missions* — Mackenzie Brock, Lee Harrison Brock

▶ *Master of Theology* — Andrew Charles Ball, Dustin J. Coleman

▶ *Master of Theology, Applied Theology* — Josip Debeljuh

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

▶ *Master of Divinity* — Jake Kersh, Adamsville; Chad Kitchens, Decatur; Riley Lynch, Troy; William L. Potts, Huntsville

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

▶ *Doctor of Ministry* — David Tait Windham, Trussville

▶ *Master of Arts in Christian Studies* — Ste-



Photo courtesy of Beeson Divinity School

phen Ernest Awtrey, Birmingham

▶ *Master of Divinity, Christian Ministry* — Cameron Harper Adams, Samson; Chandler Martin Donegan, Birmingham; Patrick C. Sawyer, Birmingham; Austin James Marcum, Birmingham; Matthew Tyler McGinnis, Helena, AL

▶ *Master of Divinity, Missiology* — Phillip D. Shelley, Eufaula

▶ *Master of Divinity, Preaching and Pastoral Ministry* — Jason Seth Stafford, Dothan; James

Colby Wheeler, Troy; Joshua David Woodcock, Dothan

▶ *Master of Theological Studies* — James Hunter Snell, Birmingham

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

▶ *Doctor of Educational Ministry* — Robert Lee Burgess

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

▶ *Doctor of Ministry, Church Revitalization* — James Adams, Wetumpka; John Taylor, Pleasant Grove

▶ *Doctor of Ministry, Cross-Cultural Missions* — Zane Brents, Mobile

▶ *Doctor of Ministry, Educational Ministry Leadership* — Robert

Dockery, Ralph
▶ *Doctor of Ministry, Strategic Leadership* — John Taylor, Pleasant Grove

▶ *Doctor of Musical Arts* — Dale Jemison, Jackson

▶ *Doctor of Philosophy, Counselor Education and Supervision* — Jamie Klemashevich, Birmingham

▶ *Doctor of Philosophy, Great Commission Studies* — Brantley Scott, Dothan

▶ *Master of Arts, Biblical Studies* — Shelly Cooper, Hackleburg

▶ *Master of Arts in Christian Apologetics* — John-Robert Phillips, Gadsden; Tucker Landon, Moody

▶ *Master of Arts in Christian Education, Children's Ministry Leadership Concentration* — Sophie Day, Fairhope

▶ *Master of Arts in Christian Education* — Matt Burkhardt, Montgomery

▶ *Master of Arts in Discipleship* — Anthony Deese, Daleville; Robert Dockery, Ralph; Bryan Howard, Vestavia Hills

▶ *Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry* — Michael Speakman, Opelika

▶ *Master of Divinity* — Christian Caldwell, Huntsville; Joseph Friman, Fairhope; Nicholas Gandy, Springville; David Nelson, Huntsville

▶ *Master of Divinity in Christian Apologetics* — Johnathon Partin, Tuscaloosa

▶ *Master of Divinity in Christian Leadership* — Caleb Winningham, Prattville

▶ *Master of Divinity, Mentoring Track* — Alexander Cowan, Northport

▶ *Master of Theological Studies* — Ryan Ayala, Slocomb

▶ *Master of Theology* — Jennifer Foster, Montgomery; Joshua Lay, Bri-

erfield

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For June 12

Explore the Bible

By Jay T. Robertson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Theology, University of Mobile



REPENTANCE 1 Kings 8:46–60

The Ark of the Covenant had arrived in the temple (8:1–13), and Solomon had spoken to the people about the meaning of the event (8:14–21). Solomon then addressed God, reflecting on the nature of God's "dwelling" in the temple and offering a sevenfold petitionary prayer for those who would approach Him in the temple.

This prayer is important for understanding 1 and 2 Kings as a whole. The temple was an important building, but God cannot be confined by a building, nor is He dependent on a building.

God will survive the temple's destruction, and He will hear the prayers of His people when they go into exile. Similarly, obedience to the law is very important, but Solomon held on to hope for restoration, even when the people failed to obey.

In Exile (46–48)

In the seventh and last petition, Solomon returned to an idea he mentioned in verse 34. He referred to the ultimate punishment God could use against Israel, expulsion from the land He promised to give His people as a sign of their favored status.

The seventh petition was given the longest treatment since it was most relevant to the original readers in exile. Remember, 1 and 2 Kings were written for people who lost the land in the very manner Solomon described. For them, this seventh petition was a call to repentance and prayer. It also provided hope the exile was not God's final word for Israel. They could return to the promised land if they would return to the Lord Who gave them the land.

God Hears (49–53)

Solomon appealed to God to forgive His people of their sins and to cause their captors to show compassion. He concluded his prayer as he had begun, with hope for the present and the future based on the Lord's covenant loyalty to Israel.

Solomon prayed the Lord would pay careful attention to his requests because God had "set them apart from all the peoples of the earth" and sealed the relationship through Moses' teachings and the exodus. Solomon believed Israel's past was a testimony of God's amazing grace, and any future benefits the people would receive must also come from their merciful Lord.

In this prayer, we learn many truths about God and His people. First, God was not surprised by the sin of His people. Second, God did not take sin lightly. Third, God prearranged the solution for His people's sin problem. The temple was a witness to the provision God made in advance. Fourth, confession of sin must never be superficial. Repentance involved not only acknowledging sin, but also turning from it. Fifth, the situation would never be hopeless because God was a God who heard His people when they called out to Him. The Lord would not only hear, but He would also forgive and restore.

Blessing Offered (54–60)

Solomon began the prayer standing before the altar of the Lord. Apparently under the weightiness of his petitions, he bowed down on his knees. At the conclusion of his prayer, Solomon stood, turned his attention to the people and blessed them.

He reminded them of God's faithfulness. God promised He would give His people rest in their own land. This was a special promise for a people whose entire history was marked by pilgrimage, captivity, wandering and war. The rest meant they would live at peace in their own land. This promise was realized in the days of Solomon.

Solomon concluded by asking God to dwell with His people so His people would live obediently before Him. He also requested the Lord to hear his prayer so Israel's lifestyle of worship and obedience would lead other nations to know the Lord is God.

Bible Studies for Life

By Roy E. Ciampa, Ph.D.

Armstrong Chair of Religion, Samford University



BORN AGAIN BY THE SPIRIT John 3:1–8, 14–17

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a highly regarded Jewish teacher. He went to see Jesus at night, perhaps because his peers did not approve of Jesus, and he didn't want them to see him with Jesus.

Or perhaps it was harder to have an extended private conversation with Jesus during the day when He was surrounded by His disciples. John may also want us to see symbolic significance in Nicodemus having a nighttime visit that reflected his spiritual darkness at the time.

New birth is required to enter the kingdom of God. (1–3)

Everyone could see the Holy Spirit was at work in Jesus' ministry.

Nicodemus and his peers recognized Jesus' miracles could only be done by the power of God. Since Nicodemus broached the subject of things that were impossible apart from God's direct work, Jesus took the opportunity to turn the conversation to something else that could not be done without God's direct work in a person's life: entering the kingdom of God.

The expression translated "born again" could mean born again or born from above.

Both ideas may be intended: One is born again by being born from above (from God), as the rest of Jesus' explanation makes clear.

To see the kingdom of God is to enter into it, to experience the fullness of eternal life. Jesus makes it clear one must be born again to enter into God's kingdom.

The Holy Spirit brings about the new birth. (4–8)

Although the concept of being born again is very familiar to most of us, it was new to Nicodemus. He did not understand it referred to being made alive spiritually by the Holy Spirit, so he asks what seems like comical questions about getting back into the womb of one's mother and being born when one is already old.

Jesus indicates Nicodemus should have recognized the idea, as it is certainly found in the Old Testament in passages like Ezekiel 36–37, especially 36:25–27.

There God promises He would one day redeem His people by cleansing them from spiritual impurities through the sprinkling of water, giving us new hearts and putting His Holy Spirit within us.

To understand the relationship between verse 8 and the rest of the passage, it is helpful to know that the Greek word for spirit, "pneuma," is also the word for wind and breath. Jesus points out similarities between our experience of wind and our experience of the Spirit.

We can recognize the presence of the Spirit or the wind by their effects, but they remain otherwise invisible to us.

The Holy Spirit's presence in us can be recognized as the new birth brings about a new desire and ability to honor and obey the Lord. But we cannot predict all the ways the Spirit will lead us.

We experience the new birth as we trust in Jesus. (14–17)

Having compared the work of the Spirit to our experience of the wind, Jesus now compares His mission to what God did through Moses in Numbers 21: The people of Israel were saved from God's judgment after the Lord had Moses raise up a bronze serpent on a pole.

All those who looked at the serpent lived, instead of dying from their snakebites.

We are all like those condemned Israelites — people who would die under God's judgment if God hadn't provided a way of redemption.

Looking at the serpent is analogous to believing in God's Son, and surviving the poisonous threat is analogous to receiving eternal life.

When we look to Jesus Who was raised up on the cross for our salvation, we find eternal life in Him. Look and live!

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs
The Alabama Baptist

Comedian Tim Hawkins enjoying life as an ‘under-the-radar celebrity’

A self-described “under-the-radar celebrity,” Tim Hawkins admitted he cries when he hears Diana Ross sing, and if he wasn’t a comedian he would own a French pastry shop.

Hawkins has spent the last 25 years or so “giving laughter” to crowds who need it.

Going to one of his performances means different things to different people.

“The takeaway could be whatever you need it for,” Hawkins explained. “It could be just a release — you haven’t laughed for a while. It could be that you’re going through stuff and need a break.

“It’s fun to be together in a live setting. It’s entertaining, and it’s kind of cool to see a guy who’s learned how to make a living from being a complete moron.”

Career choice

Hawkins had a passion for entertaining most of his life but wavered about making it his career. His wife is the one who encouraged him to make the leap and go into full-time comedy.

“The good thing about it was that I wasn’t leaving a six-figure job,” Hawkins said.



TIM HAWKINS

Facebook photo

“The joke is I was making six figures, but there was a decimal. It wasn’t a big jump financially.

“I didn’t have a plan,” he admitted. “I didn’t know what the future held. I simply wanted to pay our bills.

“You just go where your gut takes you and where you think you have some skill,” Hawkins concluded.

“I knew I had the ability. It was just the great unknown — going out there and finding your way. It was more desperation than anything that got me into comedy — I didn’t have many other options.”

The first time Hawkins got a laugh, he knew he was hooked. It’s similar to an addiction, filling a deeper need, a deeper longing, he said.

“There’s no real school for this. You kind of have to find groups of people and have them face towards you and do your best to get them to listen to what you have to say.

“Ignorance is bliss,” he acknowledged.

“If I knew how bad I was at the beginning, I would’ve quit a long time ago, but I think that the passion to do it was so strong that even when I failed at it, I would want to keep doing it.”

Recognizing his growth as a performer, Hawkins said it was mostly in the details. Becoming a professional meant finding small things that add up to quality.

“They say that the devil’s in the details, but I think it’s more that God is detailed, like in creation. ... I think of G.K. Chesterton who talks about the mundane and [asks] ‘Why does God make so many things?’” Hawkins explained.

‘An emotional cost’

“It’s because they’re great. It’s like ... He made a great blade of grass.

“It’s almost like a little child. [It’s like God is saying] ‘Do it

again! Do it again! Make another one!’

“We’ve seen a million sunsets. God says, ‘I know. Aren’t they awesome? Do it again; do it again!’”

Stories of those impacted by his comedy greatly affect Hawkins, especially fans who are going through a difficult time.

“It’s hard to process. There’s such an emotional cost to this, which is why it’s so important to not only get in touch with the Lord as much as you can on a daily basis to give you strength, but to also refresh you and fill you back up.”

Hawkins primarily performs in churches to Christian audiences.

“It’s a great place to do comedy,” he said.

Sprinkled through all the jokes, Hawkins has a serious side.

“Have you read the Bible? You don’t have to be crass, but let’s call it what it is and not make the Bible into something we’re comfortable with,” Hawkins said.

‘We don’t get it’

“I don’t think that’s who God is. He is Someone we don’t understand. And that’s the joke to me — that we try to fit an infinite God to our finite brain and make it work. It doesn’t. We don’t get it — and that’s the point. God ... isn’t afraid of your questions,” Hawkins declared. “The human mindset is, ‘Boy, God better live up to my standards’ ... like we’re the final say.

“The gospel is not a self-improvement program. God’s not a supplement to a better life. The gospel is: You need to die; you need to become less. The less there is of you, the better it’s gonna be. You need to know there’s something bigger than you.”

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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